

# The Bloomfield Times.

FRANK MORTIMER,  
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## The Bloomfield Times.

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### Phebe's Mystery.

BY ELIZABETH BIGELOW.

CONCLUDED.

"AS YOU choose," he replied, "but think a moment! What will Gilbert Drew say when he hears this story? The Drews have always borne an honest, honorable name; they pride themselves upon it."

"I am not afraid of what Gilbert Drew will say," returned he girl, proudly. "It is only for Joe that I care? How can you, that good will it do you to betray him?—Will nothing move you to keep our secret?" she cried desperately.

"Yes, one thing. You will do that, Phebe? Nothing else can move me, not even your tears. Is it yes?"

"O, I don't know, I can't tell! Give me until to-morrow to think."

"Until to-morrow morning. I will come then for my answer."

He walked beside her to the house, but Phebe left him at the door without a word of adieu. But there was a smile of triumph on his face as he went down the lane. And he was not deceived.

Early the next morning Captain Gilbert Drew, who was superintending some arrangements on the Lapwing, was surprised to receive a note from Phebe, sent by the little boy whom she usually employed as a messenger. As he opened it the ring he had given her—a little, golden circle with blue forget-me-not—rolled out. This is what he read, in Phebe's handwriting, but a wavering, unsteady lines, and with stains on the paper that looked like traces of tears:

"I write to ask you to release me from my engagement to you. I can never be your wife. You must not ask me why, nor ever try to see me. But God bless you always, Gilbert! PHEBE."

Captain Drew crammed the note into his pocket, and seized his hat. He would go to Phebe, at once, and discover the meaning of this strange freak. But, then suddenly, the memory of that scene which he had witnessed the night before, and which Phebe had refused to explain, rushed over him. This was the result. Phebe had cast him off because her old lover had come back!

He went back as hastily as he had come—this impulsive young sailor, set his heel upon the little ring that still lay upon the cabin floor where it had fallen, and crushed it to atoms.

The workmen were hurried and driven that day as they had never been before, for the captain had decided that he must sail in a fortnight, at least.

Aunt Jane received the news with the greatest amazement. That Phebe had broken her engagement with Gilbert and was going to marry Gerald Bayne, of her own accord was too much to be believed.

"I can't say that I am not pleased," she said, when Phebe told her the simple facts, refusing all explanation, "but it doesn't seem as if you were treating Gilbert just right, since you haven't any reason."

"I have a reason," answered Phebe, quietly. But she went about the house with a pale face, and eyes whose old, glad look was quenched forever.

In spite of herself she was disappointed

that Gilbert should have obeyed her injunction; to see him only once more would have been such a great comfort. But then it might have made her lot even harder yet to bear.

Gerald Bayne was constant and open in his devotion, and before a week the change in Phebe's prospects was known all over the village. Of course, everybody pitied Gilbert and blamed Phebe, except a few ambitious young ladies who did not see how any body could be expected to resist the temptation of being mistress of Gerald Bayne's fine house, and being considered the grandest lady in Rockport.

Two weeks passed and Phebe had not seen Gilbert except once at church, when his stern, set face, and the cold, contemptuous glance he gave her made her shrink.—The Lapwing was to sail on the next day, and as it happened the Winged Rover was to be ready then to proceed on her voyage, and Rockport lads and lassies, eager to improve every opportunity to have a good time, determined to give them a little party by way of farewell. It was to be in the town hall, and the Rockport band had been practicing vigorously for a week past in preparation for the event.

Gerald Bayne was very anxious that Phebe should go, it would be such a fine opportunity to parade his triumph before Gilbert Drew's eyes; but Phebe at first refused, decidedly. But as the time drew near, such an impatient longing grew over her to see Gilbert's face once more, that she consented to go. It would be more pain than pleasure to see him under such circumstances, she said to herself over and over again, but the longing remained too strong to be resisted.

And if she went she must be the gayest of the gay; she must not wear her heart upon her sleeve. There were two who would be there who must never know how great her pain was; Gilbert Drew, because if he knew it he would insist upon an explanation which she could not give him, and because he would forget her more easily and so suffer less pain himself if he believed her fickle and heartless, and Captain Matthews for another reason.

Aunt Jane brought out the white India muslin that was to have been her bridal dress, and insisted strongly upon her wearing that.

You will have a finer wedding dress than that, now of course, and it will be just the thing exactly to wear to the great party."

"No, no, I can't wear that! I never will wear that!" and a great sob shook her voice. Aunt Jane looked at her in wonder and perplexity, then put the dress away without a word.

A week before the party Gerald Bayne sent as a present to his betrothed a dress of pink Canton crepe, the loveliest thing that ever was seen, which he had bought out of a shop that had just come into port. There never was a prettier picture than Phebe made in that dress; the bright pink was just what she needed to brighten her pale cheek and in the making of the dress, Miss Simpkins, the village dressmaker, had achieved a wonder, having gone to the city to get patterns; it was be-bowed and be-puffed and be-panned like any city belle's; and Aunt Jane, surveying Phebe with admiring eyes, after she was dressed for the party, said to herself that in the whole State Mr. Gerald Bayne could not have found a fairer or a sweeter bride. And for her was it not better that her beauty should be splendidly set off, than that it should be half hidden by its commonplace surroundings as the wife of Gilbert Drew.

When Phebe entered the hall that night leaning on Gerald Bayne's arm, the first eyes she met were Gilbert's, neither stern nor reproachful, but merely coldly contemptuous.

He had driven her out of his heart utterly, she thought, with a numb pain at her heart that was like despair. After that she was gay with scarcely an effort, so wildly, recklessly gay that everybody stared at her

in surprise, and wondered what had changed shy, modest Phebe Hanson so suddenly into something like a brilliant, dashing belle.

Only once Gilbert asked her to dance.—She felt as if she had hardly strength sufficient to do it, but there were so many eyes upon her, and it would look so strange to refuse! It was a waltz and at the first notes of the band Phebe remembered the music. They had danced to it before, she and Gilbert, on the night when they had first met, in that very hall. Gilbert looked her steadily in the eyes at those first notes.

"You have heard that music before," he said.

"Have I? I do not remember," she answered, carelessly, blushing scarlet the next moment at the falsehood that she had told.

"Some people forget very easily," said Gilbert bitterly. And after that he said nothing.

Captain Matthews was quite a favorite, especially among the young ladies, yet Gilbert Drew, watching him furtively saw that it was Phebe whom his eyes followed, and it was at her side that he lingered longest. And Gilbert fairly ground his teeth with anger. Not even for Gerald Bayne had he so great a dislike as for this gallant young captain; for he could not help fancying him in some way the cause of Phebe's faithlessness. Captain Matthews was evidently desirous of being friendly with him, but his replies to all his advances had been so curt that he had at last given up the vain attempt. But as the gay company separated that night he followed Gilbert down the street.

"Good bye, Captain," he said, heartily, holding out his hand. "Our tracks divide again tomorrow; you will go in the morning I suppose, and I shall not be ready till in the afternoon, but unexpected things are always happening in this world—which is a queer craft to sail in, any way—and maybe in some port or other, we two'll meet again."

"I hope not, sir!" said Gilbert Drew sharply, and strode on disregarding the proffered hand.

It was very rude certainly, and it was very unlike the brave young sailor who was wont to have a kind courteous word for everybody. But just before he had left the hall he had witnessed a scene, the remembrance of which was ranking in his mind at this moment. Captain Matthews was saying good-bye to Phebe; they were alone in the little ante-room, and Gilbert Drew, pressing by the door, had seen his arm round her waist, her head resting on his shoulder, while her tears were dropping like rain over her face; and he saw captain Matthews bend his head and press his lips warmly to hers. Who could blame him for not feeling disposed to be friendly with him?

A flush mounted to the Captain's brow as he watched him striding off in the darkness.

"A queer fellow, that," he said to himself. None too amiable. I guess Phebe is well rid of him. I wish she would tell me why she threw him over."

Early the next morning the Lapwing, with a favoring wind and the sunshine glittering on her sails, was leaving Rockport far behind her; could he ever get so far away that the echo of Phebe's wedding-bells could not reach him? Gilbert Drew wondered. And Phebe, in a sea-ward window, was straining her eyes to catch a gleam of those sails which were bearing her heart away.

Six months have passed, and this morning there is no sunshine glittering on the Lapwing's sails. A darkness like night hangs over the sea, a fierce gale is blowing, and thunderbolts crashing about the brave little ship as she struggles bravely in the black, raging waves. She bears herself gallantly, though her masts have snapped like strings and at every gust she strains, and grinds,

and groans, but there is no hope. Gilbert Drew knows it. The Lapwing was a sound vessel and she had borne much; all her outward voyage was unprosperous, they were vexed by calms one day and tormented by tempests the next. And now the Lapwing will never see the end of the homeward voyage on which she has started, and there is little doubt but that before this tempest has spent itself, captain and crew will have gone on that longer voyage from which there is no home-coming. The hold was filling rapidly.

"We must take the boats; it is our only hope, though no boat can live long in such a sea as this," the captain said hoarsely.—He was no coward, but this looking forward to certain death was terrible to him. Life was so strong and fresh in all his veins and though Fate had been very unkind to him, and all his dearest hopes had been ruthlessly dashed, it was still precious to him, for

"Whatever crazy sorrow saith No life that breathes with human breath Has ever truly longed for death."

"It is certain death to take the boats," the mate said. "Let us fire the gun once more. There might be some other ship near."

"If there were, who would run to certain death for the chance of helping us?" said Gilbert Drew.

But the gun went booming out over the waters, and there they waited for what seemed an eternity, and then, far off and faint, an answer came,—or was it only a distant peal of thunder? But there was no time to wait longer. The boats were lowered and quickly filled—more than filled.—Gilbert Drew leaped over the vessel's side, after they were all in the boats but him, and looked at the little crowded boat that waited him.

"The boat is full already; there is no chance for so many. I shall stand by the ship," he said.

Prayers were of no avail, and they went, at last, and left, knowing that the Lapwing when she sunk, would draw them in also. Gilbert Drew stood alone on the vessel's deck, waiting for death.

But suddenly in a pause of the wind, he heard a shout; with a sudden thrill of hope he answered. A moment after, a boat that rode the waves gallantly, was beside the Lapwing. There were five or six men in it; one of them was standing up straight and tall and a sudden flash of lightning revealed his face to Gilbert—it was Captain Matthews. Just as Gilbert Drew swung himself into the boat a flying spar struck Captain Matthews on the head and knocked him—thank God, not into the sea—but into the boat, white and senseless. Without a word Gilbert took his oar, and they rowed away for life toward the Winged Rover, that Gilbert had last seen in the quiet little harbor of Rockport. It was but a short distance, and two boats from his own ship had already reached it, the crews faint and exhausted but without one man missing. They lifted Captain Matthews over the vessel's side, and laid him on the deck. A stream of blood was flowing from his mouth, but he opened his eyes and looked upward into Gilbert's face as he bent over him.

"I told you we might meet again," he said faintly.

"You are too weak to talk," said Gilbert.

In spite of himself he still had a feeling of enmity against this man who had saved his life. That life was scarcely a precious gift, when coming from his hands, he thought.

"No, I am not too weak, but I think I am dying. No matter; your life is worth more than mine. But I had something to do; you must do it for me. You must stop Phebe from marrying that man! Why you don't know who he is! He is what I am, an escaped convict—only he is a thousand times worse than ever I was," he added, looking up eagerly as if to see whether

he was believed; "he was the one who led me into evil, if it had not been for him I should never have broken my mother's heart, nor brought disgrace upon poor little Phebe. And it is so strange that I should not have known him. But we parted company that night when we got out of jail together, and I had never seen him since. How was I to think that Mr. Gerald Bayne, the richest and most respectable man in Rockport, was Bill Eckley? I should never have known him—a wig and false whiskers changed him even more than they did me—if I hadn't met John Harrison. He was another of my old comrades in Havana, and he told me where Bill was and what a fine show he made. And now I shall never get there to tell poor little Phebe, and if you should be too late! Promise me that nothing shall hinder you, that you'll see her as soon as possible;" and he caught Gilbert's hand, gasping painfully in his eagerness.

"What is she, what is Phebe to you?"—cried Gilbert, almost fiercely.

"To me? she is my sister. Better for her, poor child, if she never had been," he said.

Gilbert remembered vaguely that he had heard stories from the village gossips of Joe Hanson, who had been a black sheep, a thorn in his mother's side, but he thought he was dead long ago.

"They think in Rockport that I am dead," he said, seeing Gilbert's bewilderment.—"You have heard so, I suppose. The jailer got up the story that we had committed suicide, because he was to blame for us getting off so easily, and we were willing enough never to contradict it. I had a chance to begin the world anew if I could disguise myself so that nobody would recognize me, and I broke away from my old comrade and tried hard to live a better life. I never meant to go back to Rockport at all after my mother died. I had brought disgrace on my family. But chance, or fate, or Providence, whatever you please, sent me there, and I couldn't resist the temptation to tell little Phebe who I was and see if she would turn against me. Nobody knew me there, unless Bill Eckley did. I think sometimes that he did, from glances that he gave me. I think, too, that he may have persuaded Phebe to marry him by threatening to give me up. She acted so strangely; she seemed to think so much of you at first, and she would not tell me why she threw you over. A light broke upon Gilbert's bewildered mind—a light by which all the dark past was made clear.

"I understand now, and I know you are right. I know she loved me," he said.—"But I—I—you don't know how much I have wronged you! And to think that it is to you that I owe my life!"

"That was nothing. I should have done it for anybody. When that first boat reached the vessel, and the men said they had left their captain on board the sinking ship, I resolved to save him or die in the attempt, for, very likely, I said to myself, he is an honest man, whose life is worth much more than mine. But when I heard that the vessel was the Lapwing, and knew that it must be you, I was more eager to go for Phebe's sake, for I thought if what I fancied was true, my saving her lover's life might atone in some measure for the trouble I had brought upon her. If you are only in time to save her! if she is not married to that man!"

"But you may live to tell her, yourself," said Gilbert, hopefully.

He shook his head, slowly.

"No, no, I shall never see her again. And it is just as well; I should only bring disgrace upon her. Something or somebody would be sure to betray me, sooner or later. My life has not been so pleasant that I should prize it highly. It is hard to know that you have no right to breathe the air, and that every man you meet may be a spy sent to watch you. And it is hard to get to going right when you have begun all wrong. But God knows I've tried and—I'll be all right where I'm going," he said wearily.

Gilbert watched over him unceasingly, but all efforts to save his life were unavailing. He had given it to save Phebe's lover.

CONCLUDED ON SECOND PAGE.