

The Bloomfield Times.

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Editor and Proprietor.

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BY

FRANK MORTIMER.

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ONE DOLLAR PER YEAR!
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IN ADVANCE.

THE LOST SON.

A GROUP of flashily-dressed men stood in the sitting-room of Wilson's Exchange—then (1854) the principal hotel in San Francisco—puffing their after-breakfast cigars and engaged in lively conversation, fully half of which was sustained by one of the number who, as it appeared, had just arrived from the diggings.

"Has Morrison Flat grown any since I was there last summer?" asked one of the party.

"Yes, a great deal," replied the gentleman from the interior. "A great many new buildings have been put up, most of them fire-proof—brick or stone. There are more miners, and they're doing better than ever—rich strikes till you can't rest. Dust is plenty and freely circulated, and the boys are all doing well when they attend to business."

"That's good. And how long are you going to stay with us this time, Tom?"

"A week or ten days—perhaps a fortnight. I left the house in charge of Charley Williams, and you know he's one of the most faithful men in the business."

"O, then we'll see a good deal of you. Drop in this afternoon or evening—you know the way, and will be well treated."

"Thank you, I'll do so with pleasure."

The others having taken their departure, Tom Redburn took a seat in the rear part of the room, lighted a fresh cigar, and leaned back in his chair with an air of leisurely enjoyment. He appeared to be about thirty-five years old, a little over medium height, and strongly built. His eyes were black and deep set, features pale and regular, waving hair, heavy beard and mustache of jet black. He was elegantly dressed, and sported a magnificent diamond ring and pin, and a massive fob-chain, to which was attached one of Tucker's costliest watches. His manner was easy and courteous—Tom Redburn prided himself upon his gentlemanly demeanor—but a little coarseness would occasionally crop out in his conversation, the result of his habitual association with rough and reckless characters. The expression of his countenance was pleasing; and an unsophisticated observer would have taken him for a gentleman of wealth and liberal tastes, unumbered with business cares. But there were those who, watching him as he sat there smiling through the wreaths of blue vapor that curled about his head, compared him to a tiger crouching for a fatal spring.

He had not long been seated, when a tall, elderly gentleman, of dignified but careworn aspect, approached and accosted him.

"Excuse me, sir, but I heard Morrison Flat mentioned in your conversation a few minutes ago. Do you reside there?"

"Yes, sir," replied Tom, rising and placing a chair for the old gentleman. "Be seated, sir. Can I be of any service to you up that way?"

"I wish," said the old man, "to obtain some information, which you can perhaps furnish me. Do you know a lawyer at Morrison Flat named Leighton?"

"Lawyer? Leighton?" said Tom, musingly; then as if a sudden thought had struck him, "O yes; you mean Walter Leighton?"

"Yes, Walter Leighton. What is he doing, and what are his circumstances?"

"Well, he is doing very little good, and his circumstances are what I would call rather precarious. If you have any claim against him you might as well put it in the fire, or at least lay it away for a good long spell."

"It is true, then. My poor boy! I heard that he had fallen into dissipated course, and the fact that he has not written home for more than a year, and the strangely reticent and despondent tone of the last letter we received, confirmed the report. Still I could not, and cannot yet, believe that

Walter is irretrievably fallen. You do not think he is beyond recovery?" The old man's voice quivered, and he raised his eyes appealingly to Tom's face.

"O no, no, no!" responded Tom, evidently moved by the sight of the old man's distress; "I don't mean to say that he is anything so bad as that. The fact is, Walter's been in a hard streak of luck for some time and has got discouraged; but he has good stuff in him, and brains enough to carry him through when he once gets started on the right track again. Walter's a gentleman, sir. I spoke too hastily at first—I would not have hurt your feelings for the world, sir; but I did not know you were his father." Tom's voice and manner showed that his sympathies were touched.

"O, thank you for so much encouragement," said the old man, taking Tom's hand and pressing it warmly. "I will save my boy yet. I am not, however, his father although for years he has been to me as a son, and I fondly hoped that he would stand to me in the stead of my own poor boy, whom I drove from home by my cruelty twenty-three years ago."

Tom started.

"Twenty-three years ago!" he repeated in a tone of surprise; and bending his eyes eagerly upon the old man, he seemed to await further revelations.

"Yes, twenty-three years," continued the old man, drearily. "It is a long time for a man to mourn his first-born and only son, not knowing whether he is alive or dead—not daring to conjecture what may have been his fate if dead, or what may be his condition if alive. He was a fine, handsome manly boy. I was proud of him, and his mother idolized him. In an evil hour I was led to believe him guilty of a grave offence. Without taking sufficient pains to ascertain the facts, I charged him with the crime, and, regarding his solemn protestations of innocence as signs of impenitence and depravity, I treated him with the utmost severity—even his mother's earnest entreaties failed to soften me towards him. I was then a hard, proud man; he had wounded my pride, and I was resolved to punish him. Yet God knows his punishment was light compared to what I was made to suffer."

The old gentleman paused to wipe the tears from his furrowed cheeks, and to restrain the emotions which threatened to overcome him. At length he said:

"Pardon me for wearying you with the story of an old man's sorrow. I forgot that it could have no interest for you."

"Go on, I beg of you, sir," said Tom, who seemed to be strangely affected. "Your story interests me very much—more than you can imagine."

The old gentleman proceeded.

"My poor boy bore manfully for a time the harsh discipline to which I subjected him, but always protesting against my cruelty. At length he suddenly disappeared. I was troubled at this, which I had not expected, but I kept my fears to myself and tried to comfort myself with the thought that he would soon tire of the wretched life I was sure he must lead, and return to claim his father's forgiveness and protection. My wife, however, gave way to the most violent grief, and, although she refrained from reproaching me in words her sorrow continually accused me of having robbed her of her darling."

"Not long after his flight I learned that my boy was innocent of the offence for which I had punished him. My pride and self-complacency were at one vanquished. My remorse was extreme. I would have given worlds to clasp my noble boy—for whom my former admiration was now redoubled—in my arms and ask forgiveness. But the moment I was assured of his innocence I knew he would never return to me of his own accord."

"I immediately, however, took energetic measures to bring him home. I advertised for him in the leading papers of every State in the Union. I wrote to relatives and acquaintances far and near, and to the police authorities of the principal cities, offering a large reward for his return. I made several journeys in the hope of meeting with or hearing of him; but all in vain. During all these years I have not heard any tidings of him, nor obtained the slightest clue to his fate."

"His mother's grief and mine was partly assuaged, about three years after his departure, by the birth of a daughter, who has been to us all we could have hoped or wished; and when, some years later, the widow of a dear friend in dying committed her son, Walter Leighton, to my care, I took him into my household as a substitute for the son I had lost, reared him as if he

had been my own. His conduct justified my confidence in him, and the brilliant talents which he early displayed were a source of satisfaction and pride to me. When he had completed his studies and been admitted to the bar, I was surprised and grieved to learn his determination to try his fortune in California, and only gave a reluctant consent in the hope that after a year or two of travel and adventure he would settle down more contentedly to the practice of his profession. It was not until after his departure I learned that a partial engagement existed between him and my daughter Alice, and that his migration was prompted by the romantic notion that he must achieve his own fortune before demanding the hand of an heiress in marriage."

"My wife never abandoned the hope that her own son was yet alive, and latterly she was strongly impressed with the idea that he was in California. Before her death, which occurred a few months since she exacted from me a promise that I would seek him here. It is less with the hope of finding him than of rescuing Walter Leighton that Alice and I have made the voyage hither; yet it may be God's will to restore to me my son. How it would rejoice my old heart to find him, an honorable and useful man! but whatever he might be, I would willingly give the remnant of this old life for the privilege of throwing myself at his feet, and saying 'Thomas Goldbrook, your father asks your forgiveness for the wrong he did you so many years ago!'"

The old man bowed his head and wept. As for Tom Redburn, his naturally pale cheeks became almost ghastly; his breath came in short quick gasps as if he were strangling; his hands gripped the arms of his chair until the blood almost started from his finger ends; his heavy mustache scarcely hid the tremor of his lips, and the eyes that had often looked into the muzzle of levelled pistols without blenching, were strangely clouded. Accustomed as he was to control his emotions under all circumstances of surprise or peril, he found it difficult on this occasion to resume his self-command. His strong will triumphed, however; and when Mr. Goldbrook, having overcome his outburst of grief, again looked up, he beheld Tom Redburn's face as placid as a spring morning.

"It is perhaps foolish to ask the question," pursued Mr. Goldbrook, "but it can do no harm—have you ever met or heard of a man in this State named Thomas Goldbrook? He was in his thirteenth year when he left home, and if alive must now be near twenty-six. He had black eyes and was thought to resemble me—but I am sadly changed from what I was then."

Tom Redburn had expected this question, and tried to prepare himself for it. Yet he hesitated and stammered a good deal in attempting to answer it evasively, and at length said:

"Mr. Goldbrook, I find it impossible to withhold from you the slight ground of hope I am able to offer you; neither would I raise expectations that may be disappointed; you must not, therefore, allow yourself to be excited by what I tell you, for nothing may come of it. I believe I have seen your son."

"Where? tell me where, that I may go to him instantly! O my God! where is he?" exclaimed the old man, springing to his feet, and seizing Tom Redburn by the shoulder. Tom, however, laid gentle hold of him and replaced him in his chair, saying:

"My dear sir, I warned you not to get excited. I didn't say I knew where your son was, or even that I had seen him—only that I believed I had seen him. Be calm now, sir, do."

"Pardon me," said Mr. Goldbrook, "I could not help it. For years I have believed my son to be dead, and now the faintest assurance that he yet lives excites me beyond my self-control. But can you give me no clue to his whereabouts?"

"Not at present," replied Tom, "but I may be able to do so soon. I suppose it was your intention to visit Mr. Leighton at Morrison Flat immediately?"

"Yes I had thought of going there in a day or two; but Alice will remain here for the present, with a lady friend."

"Then let me advise you also to remain here for the present—at least until you hear further from me. I shall return to Morrison Flat by this afternoon's boat and I hope before many days to send you some good news."

"I thought you would remain here a week or ten days."

"I have changed my mind. I return to-day."

"Why cannot I go with you?"

"It would prevent your meeting with

your son as early as you would if you stay here."

"I must stay then. But I have not yet learned your name. It was a strange providence that led me to speak to you."

Tom drew a card from his pocket-book wrote upon it the name "Thomas Redburn," and handed it to Mr. Goldbrook, who looked at it attentively, and exclaimed:

"Redburn! why, that was my wife's name."

"Indeed," said Tom; "a curious coincidence. We may perhaps trace a relationship."

"I should think so, only that my wife had no near relatives of that name living. However, we will inquire into it by-and-by. I must now go and give Alice the information I have gained from you. I will see you again before you leave?"

"Certainly. I will be in the hotel much of the time until I go to the boat."

When Mr. Goldbrook had left him, Tom Redburn lighted another cigar, crossed his legs, folded his arms, and stared fixedly at a dark spot in the wall opposite, as if he expected some strange thing to show itself at that precise point. He watched it until he had smoked his cigar out, but nothing unusual appeared. Then he arose to his feet, stamped twice or thrice on the floor, said to himself in an audible voice, "yes, I am right," and prepared to go out.

Just then Mr. Goldbrook returned to him and said:

"My daughter wishes to see you, Mr. Redburn. Will you accompany me to the ladies' parlor?"

Tom readily assented. He desired the interview, although he dreaded it; his habitual coolness had so well-nigh deserted him while conversing with the father, how should he maintain his self-possession in the presence of the daughter, if she was the elegant and accomplished lady he had pictured to himself? He found her all he had imagined, and more; but her self-possession was so perfect that he found less difficulty than he had feared in retaining his own.

Briefly and modestly she thanked him for the interest he had taken in the object of her and her father's quest, and then proceeded to ask him two awkward questions: "From what my father has told me, I am satisfied that your sudden return to Morrison Flat is prompted solely by what he told you of our object. It is not so?"

"It is," he replied, after some hesitation.

"Then pardon me for asking you what induces you to sacrifice your pleasure and convenience, perhaps your business concerns, to the interests of persons who are entire strangers to you? Such sacrifices are not made without a motive."

"Pardon me, Miss Goldbrook, if I do not fully answer you now. I assure you I am not altogether disinterested, but my motive is not a mean one. Trust me, and you will not regret it."

"I will trust you. How soon shall we expect news from you of Thomas—and of Walter?"

"Of Walter in ten days at furthest; of Thomas in perhaps a fortnight—perhaps longer. California is a large State to hunt over for a lost man."

She gave him her hand at parting. He could not resist the temptation to press a kiss upon it, and when he found his rudeness was not very severely rebuked he was sorry it had not been her lips. Tom Redburn was an impudent fellow.

Early in the afternoon of the second day afterwards, the stage dropped Tom Redburn at the door of his own establishment in Morrison Flat. It was a large two-story brick building, the lower part of which was occupied by a liquor saloon containing two billiard tables, and a large room in which were a number of tables laden with the devices appurtenant to faro, spanish monte rouge-et-noir, roulette, and all other diversions adapted to the elucidation of the great first principle of gaming that "The more you put down the less you take up." The upper part of the building was divided into a number of small rooms, for the accommodation of short-card players, and for dormitories.

Tom scarcely noticed the surprise occasioned by his sudden return, but hurried through the liquor saloon into the gambling room, then returned and inquired of a bar-keeper:

"Have you seen Walter Leighton to-day?"

"No," was the reply; "he has not been here for four or five days. I guess he's sick."

"I saw him a little while ago," said a

lounger, "down at Dick Sampson's cabin, where he stops. I reckon he's there now."

Tom called a boy and sent him after Leighton, who soon put in an appearance. He was quite young—not more than twenty-seven or eight—and but for the marks of dissipation noble-looking. He was clad in a seedy suit which looked all the worse because it was originally of fine texture and genteel cut; his hat was the traditional "shocking bad" one, and his naked toes protruded from his boots; his shirt had long cut the laundress's acquaintance, and it's collar was guiltless of a tie. He appeared to feel his degradation painfully, but it was unnoticed by the people he met—they were accustomed to the spectacle; he was not.

Tom Redburn greeted him cordially.

"I want too see you privately, Walter," said he. "Let us go up to my room. You look shaky and blue about the gills. Shall I mix you something?"

"Nothing, I thank you," replied Leighton, as much to Tom's satisfaction as surprise.

When the key had been turned on their privacy, Tom said:

"Walter, I've been considerably astonished within the last few days, but not more so than by your declining to drink just now. How long has this been going on?"

"For about a week," said Walter.

"And what has brought it about?"

"I will tell you if you promise not to ridicule my sentimentalism."

"Ridicule it? no indeed! Why, Walter, you don't know me, old fellow. I've hardly begun to know myself, in fact. You'd hardly believe, now, that only three days ago I was overcome with sentiment until I whimpered like a schoolgirl. Go on, if you please."

"Well, the first thing that checked me was a dream of my mother. She seemed to gaze upon me with a look of mingled pity and reproach. At last she said, 'Walter, it is time to rise.' I awoke, and lay awake till daylight thinking over my dream. 'It is time to rise,' I repeated to myself when I got up and put on my clothes; and though my stomach craved its usual stimulus I did not go after it. I suffered much from nervousness during the day; but Dick Sampson prepared me a strong decoction of Chili pepper, which soothed my nerves and stimulated my appetite so that I was able to eat a little. I had some terrible dreams that night, but I dreamed that my mother came to me again, smiling, and said, 'Walter, go on!'"

"The next was a day of torment; but my physical sufferings were trifling compared to my mental agony. I was comparatively sober. The glamour with which liquor had shrouded my senses was dispelled, and I could see myself the degraded wretched being I was and am—a miserable sot, the butt of disreputable persons, the scorn of respectable people, depending on the bounty of the coarse and illiterate miner for a shelter and a place to lay my head! I hardly know how I refrained from laying violent hands on myself; I believe Dick Sampson feared some such thing, for he staid with me all day, and watched me closely. The night brought me some refreshing slumber and in my dreams a dear friend bent over me, kissed me, and spoke words of forgiveness and encouragement. I have ever since been growing stronger in mind and body."

"I can tell you," interrupted Tom, "the name of the angel of your dreams—Alice Goldbrook."

"How do you know that?"

"I have seen her, and talked with her."

"When? where?"

"A few days ago, in San Francisco. She and her father have come to look after you, and a truant son and brother who ran away from paternal discipline many years ago."

"Good God!" exclaimed Walter, shrinking back into his chair.

"The old gentleman," continued Tom, "would have come up here immediately to visit you, but I persuaded him to remain at the Bay until he heard from me again."

"O, bless you for that, Tom!" exclaimed Walter, springing from his seat; "they must not see me. I will hide myself in some remote place, where they will not hear of me again."

"Not so fast, old fellow," replied Tom pushing him back into his seat; "I have promised that they shall see you soon, and I always keep my word. Don't interrupt me. Of course, I intend that they shall see you only under favorable circumstances. They don't know the worst perhaps, but they know enough, and they will forgive all. They will not wait long to see you. You must prepare yourself. You must practice again." Concluded next week.