

# The Bloomfield Times.

FRANK MORTIMER,  
Editor and Proprietor.

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## The Bloomfield Times.

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IN ADVANCE.

## A MISSING CARPET BAG:

—OR—

LOVE versus LAW.

"LOCK your door, light a cigar, and be ready to give me all your attention," cried my young friend, Ned Wilkins, dashing into my office in San Francisco, one mild day in the spring of 184—.

"Why, what is the matter, Ned?" asked I, astonished at the excited flush and angry cloud on his usual genial and always handsome face.

"Matter enough," groaned he, wiping off the perspiration from his forehead. "I am ruined, my character lost, all my prospects in life blasted. I might as well put a pistol to my head and have it over with.—C—, what can you do for me?"

I saw he was in earnest, and rising from my chair secured the door against intruders, and laid my hand in kindly warmth upon his shoulder, for if there was ever a friend I thoroughly valued and appreciated, it was generous, open-hearted, gentlemanly Ned Wilkins.

"Tell me what your trouble is, Ned, and all my efforts are at your service."

"Well," said he, with a dismal laugh, "it's only this, that all San Francisco believe me a villain, and the most despicable of all villains—a thief. And the worst of it is, that circumstances are so terribly against me. I don't know how to go to work to prove anything else. O, if I had the rascal!" And he ground his teeth with rage.

"What rascal?" questioned I, trying to obtain some coherent account.

"That's what I don't know—I wish I did. There, there, light your cigar, and I will tell you the whole story. You know I am purser of the good steamer, 'Queen of the West,' and have always met the approbation of the captain and owners.—Some time ago I found, down at the wharf, a poor fellow who was at school with me in old New England. He had been sick, and was what we call 'dead ashore.' A good clever fellow, but without much tact or management. I knew he was honest and faithful as a man could be, and I took him with me on board the steamer, got him some decent clothes, and procured him a situation in my baggage-room. Well, yesterday afternoon I told Sam (that's his name) I was going to leave the steamer a little while, on an errand to the city, and he must mind my office for me, and receive any package that might come to my care. I was just stepping on to the wharf, when I met a man I had frequently seen on board the steamer as passenger to the islands, with a carpet bag on his arm.

"Hallo, Wilkins," said he, "so you're still with the boat. Well, I'm going this trip with you, and I want you to secure my berth. Here's my bag. Shall I put it in your office?"

"If you choose, you may," answered I, carelessly. "Here, Sam, take this bag to the office."

"Sam carried off the bag, and after talking a few moments I went on my way to the city. When I returned, I saw the same man on deck, and that circumstance reminding me of his property, I said to Sam the moment I entered:

"Have that carpet bag handy, Sam.—The owner is on deck, and I presume he will want it soon." Sam looked up in surprise.

"What, sir? O, that bag; he sent for it a little while after you left. I don't see why he gave it to me for so little a time.—It was pretty heavy, though, to carry about."

"Sent for it?" said I. "Why, didn't he come for it himself?"

"I don't know. It was a darkey for it."

"He brought an order for it, didn't he?" questioned I, again.

"No sir. He told me what kind of a one it was, and said the owner was waiting

on the wharf for it, and wanted something in it."

"I began to feel a little uneasy. 'Never do that again, Sam,' I said. 'I dare say it's all right this time, but you mustn't let anything go again without an order to show for it, if the owner doesn't come.'

"At that moment the same man appeared at the office window and called out:

"I'll take the bag now, if you please."

"I started—I couldn't help it. I had been a little uneasy before, but I tried to answer coolly. (He says it was my guilt and effrontery.)

"Your bag—why you sent for it, didn't you?"

"Sent for it! I haven't seen it since I gave it up. Good heavens, sir, there was six thousand dollars in gold dust in that bag!"

"Wasn't that a nice situation for me, C—?" I explained as calmly as I could

to the excited man what had happened, but there was no reasoning with him. He swore and raved like a madman, and darted away to the captain, and Sam and the captain believed us, but that didn't mend matters, and I assure you we had pretty squally weather for a time. The first thing I knew,

along came a police officer with a warrant to arrest Sam. I was angry enough, especially when I saw the fright it gave the poor fellow.

"Somehow I mistrusted the carpet bag and its owner, too. Who ever heard of such cool proceedings as handing over a carpet bag with such a sum of gold, and never explaining its contents or charging us to look to its security? I believed it was a sham, a trick to obtain money out of us, and—you know what a hasty way I have, when once aroused—when the man grew insolent and abusive, the first I knew I had him by the collar, giving him back his own words about cheating, and warning him to let Sam and me alone. It was not a very prudent course to pursue—they say it was proof positive of my guilt—but I did it, and now you see they've summoned us both to trial. A pretty situation for Wilkins, who has been foolish enough to boast, many a time, about his unimpeachable honor and unsullied name. The disgraceful charge will break my poor old father's honest heart, if it reaches New England, although he will not question his son's innocence.

"Well, well, I wish I could stop fretting. It must be ferretted out some way, and I thought you would be the best man to do it. I have obtained bail for Sam and myself, and shall keep on this trip of the steamer, as the case won't be on until some time after we arrive again. Now, then, what do you say?"

I had been listening sharply to this rambling recital, and trying to sum up the facts of the case, so I replied with another question:

"You say a negro came for the bag?—Can Sam identify him?"

"He thinks he can, although woolly heads and Ethiopian lips are a hard thing to swear to. What plan are you driving at in that cool head of yours? I began to take courage. You know you are called the sharpest Vigilance man in San Francisco. O, C—, only clear me out of this scrape, and hang me if another carpet bag goes out of my office without witnesses and a printed order. What do you think? Was the bag a sham, filled with stones to make it heavy, or has Alden actually lost the money?"

"I don't judge anything about it yet," returned I, quietly. "I should like to hear him talking about it. Alden, you say his name is? I think I can manage to get a glimpse of him. Don't mention your coming for my assistance. Go with the steamer as usual, and let people understand that Sam accompanies you. But, if you please, give him orders to stay ashore and keep out of sight, and follow my directions implicitly, even if it is to pack up for Australia or Patagonia. I'll do the best I can, and between Sam and me we'll have some trace of the negro before you return."

He was looking, already, less woebegone.

"All right. You shall have Sam, and if you can only clear it up, I won't grumble at pretty heavy expenses. We are off tonight, so I must say good-by. Do the best you can, and success to your efforts." And away he flew in the direction of the wharves.

I put on my coat and hat, took a cigar and fanciful cane, and went sauntering down the street with the air of a London exquisite. At the door of the most fashionable hotel of those days I paused, and then passed into the reading-room, which

as usual at that hour of the day, was filled with a crowd of men.

And very soon, amid the loud vociferations and subdued chat, I caught the words, "carpet-bag," "six thousand dollars in gold," "rascally purser," etc., etc. I shook off the ashes of my cigar over my coat-sleeve, and then walked up to the clothes-brush, fastened by a cord to the mirror close to the very group whose conversation I wished to hear. I think I must have passed in the crowd for a remarkably neat individual, so perseveringly was that sleeve brushed and dusted. When the operation was satisfactorily performed, I wheeled about facing the talkers, and quietly scanned their faces to see if one might prove to be Alden himself. A short thick-set man, with a hard cold face, just then flushed with some indignant or guilty emotion, struck me as the man. And I was right, for presently he said:

"The very way that Wilkins looked when I asked for the bag, stammering and hesitating, showed his guilt. He'll find his game a losing one this time, I reckon."

They talked on nearly half an hour, chiefly of the missing gold. Poor Wilkins would scarcely have remained so passive a listener had he heard the hard charge against him. I found Sam, at my office when I returned.

He was a simple, good-natured, thoroughly honest fellow, and I was not surprised Wilkins had no thought of suspecting him in regard to the affair. For although I had previously determined to test his honesty pretty severely, I concluded, after half an hour's talk with him, that uncounted gold might safely be trusted to his keeping. In regard to Alden my mind was undecided. If his indignation at the loss was affected, he proved himself a fine actor; nevertheless a glance at his head convinced me that his conscientiousness was scarcely prominent enough to interfere with pretty underhanded means of gratifying the remarkably full acquisitiveness.

For the next three weeks Sam and I, in all sorts of disguises, reconnoitered the low billiard rooms and drinking saloons of the city and its outskirts. All, however, to no purpose. Then we took a hasty glance at Sacramento and the mining districts. But never a sign or rumor of any such negro as Sam described reached us. Rather crest-fallen and dispirited, we returned to San Francisco. It was nearly time for the steamer to return, and I was grieved enough that poor Wilkins should find us still as much as ever in the dark.

One day while lounging around a public house, vainly hoping that something would "turn up" to enlighten me, I saw a traveling wagon from the country drive up to the door, and like all detectives, was too much in the habit of noting small events to refuse to examine its contents.

I was well repaid this time for my pains by the glimpse I caught of the charmingly beautiful face of the Spanish sylph who lightly brushing aside the arm of her portly sire, sprang down from the wagon and ran gracefully up the wooden steps of the hotel.

I confess to possessing my rightful share of human nature's weakness. I soon threw away my cigar, and left the porch or piazza (one should have a new name for such an odd affair, as it was erected in those days of hasty architecture), to enter the receiving room for guests. There was the Spanish girl chatting merrily with her father, over a well-stated luncheon-tray, and displaying her pearly teeth with the most enchanting smiles.

The father replied to her gay sallies with an affectionate smile, but was too much interested in the savory viands before him to waste much time in talking. I unfolded a newspaper, and taking my seat at an opposite table, called for a lunch likewise, all it must be owned, for the sake of watching that sparkling face.

So much beauty was rarity enough just then in San Francisco, but there was something more, an unusual accompaniment of that style of oriental loveliness, an artless innocence, and unconscious purity, that softened the black eyes flashing lustre, and neutralized the otherwise arch and coquettish expression of the face, so that the more I gazed, the more my first admiration deepened into respectful interest.

So I lingered over my luncheon even after the father, his own wants satisfied, had gone to the stable to see that his horses were likewise well attended to. The girl modestly lowered her veil and averted her face when left alone, and I gave my attention to the newspaper. A new-comer soon appeared; a young man, showily dressed, and with a profusion of flashy jewelry, who sauntered into the room with the air of an

emperor. A sickening simper distorted his unmeaning features, as his eye fell upon the sweet downcast face, and he was bold enough to seat himself at her table and commence a rambling, silly conversation.

She looked a little frightened, but answered his questions briefly, and then rose to leave the table. Whereupon the insolent ignoramus caught her flowing sleeve and drew her back to the table with an ill-timed jest.

A faint scream escaped her, and then she burst into tears. I think the fellow had not perceived me before, for he seemed to wither into nothingness beneath my withering glance. I gave this beautiful stranger my arm, with an assurance of safety and protection, and escorted her to the private sitting-room and returned to the parlor, thanking the stupid fellow (whoever he was) from the bottom of my heart for giving me this fine chance for serving the lady. As I anticipated when the father returned and learned what had happened, he came out at once to thank me for my assistance.

We had a long conversation, and I was soon familiar with the name and circumstances of the pair. He was an extensive land-owner from the interior, and was now for the first time in San Francisco to dispose of the farm products in loaded teams a little behind him on the road. He informed me he had at length concluded to come himself and bring his daughter with him, to see a little more of the world than she was accustomed to at the ranches, inquiring of me if I could direct him to comfortable and secure lodgings.

I was well pleased with the frank honest farmer, candidly as much for his own sake as that of his charming little daughter; so I named my own boarding-place, and agreed to speak to my landlady about preparing rooms for them.

And so it happened Miguel Romez and his daughter Carlota came in this odd way to be warm friends and fellow-boarders of mine. If I had been charmed with Carlota at first, how much more was I enchanted now that intimate acquaintance revealed to me her sweet womanly character and pure guileless heart! Even I myself marvelled at the change she had wrought in my dry uninviting life, as some cold, lifeless, quiet scene may suddenly grow brilliant and attractive through an unexpected flooding or glorifying sunset light.

Carlota's soft dark eyes shed their own sparkling lustre over all the common and trivial things she looked upon, and I, too, felt the influence. My heart bounded high and buoyant in my breast, and my foot had caught an elastic spring something akin to the gliding grace of her fairy steps. I fear Ned Wilkin's forthcoming trial did not receive so much attention as Carlota's guitar and dimpled fingers.

Poor Sam, however, was faithful to the search. He was still busily exploring around here, there and everywhere, and it had almost become a monomania with him to rush forth and scan earnestly every ebon face that showed out from the crowded thoroughfares.

The very day she was due the steamer arrived, and Ned came dashing, in his usual impetuous manner, into the office, just as I was wrapping up in tissue paper a bouquet I had purchased for Carlota. He looked at the flowers with a conical smile but was too eager about the robbery to make any comments. Poor fellow! How I grieved for the pain his voice betrayed when he had heard how unsuccessful we had been, and said:

"Then I suppose the trial must come on. I don't see how they will go to work to prove against me what I didn't do, but that's of no account; even if acquitted for want of evidence, my reputation is ruined forever."

"We can get it postponed a few weeks longer," said I, encouragingly as I could. "Who knows what may turn up by that time."

And feeling for his disappointment and down-heartedness, I proposed he should go home with me and spend the evening, to forget his troubles in the pleasant society there.

Was ever lover so misguided and shallow before? The moment I introduced him to Carlota, and saw the flash of admiration kindle on his face, and the pleased interested sparkle in her eye, I saw what mischief I had made for myself, and raled inwardly at my own stupidity. But it was too late to help it. When the match has lent its tiny flame, though only to a single wisp of the straw, who shall stay the conflagration?"

I was punished enough through the misery I endured by means of Ned's constant vis-

its to the house after that evening, all on pretence of friendship to me. Sometimes I anathematized Ned, his handsome face and winning sailor frankness, his court affair and friendly acquaintance with me; in fact, everything that had brought to his notice and admiration my beautiful Spanish flower, but more frequently I accused my my own ill-luck, and grew morose and misanthropical. But at length conscience spoke too loudly to be unnoticed.

"Rouse yourself," it said, "and be a man, and shake off these womanish humors. Deal honorably with your friend and yourself. Is it not right he who wins should receive the prize? Enter the lists openly and fairly, and if you lose, be generous enough to congratulate your successful rival."

"I will do it," answered I; "his suit at law I am bound to aid in every possible way, but as for the suit in love, I'll plead to the best of my powers on the contrary side but if the beautiful judge awards the case to him, I'll not forget my old friendship, nor let my loss make me angry with his gain."

I was happier after that decision. I was assiduous and watchful in my attentions to Carlota, and exerted all possible influence to make myself agreeable and entertaining, but I could not help often laughing secretly (though in a bitter lachrymose way, to be sure), to see how heedless and careless she would appear after my most ambitious efforts, while just a glimpse of Ned Wilkin's face, or the simple sound of the doleful sigh he indulged in, pretty often of late, would send the color drifting in crimson waves over her cheek, and brighten the lustre of her eyes, as if the most eloquent oration had stirred her heart to its inmost depths.

I have often noticed that nothing so wins upon a woman's sympathy and subsequent love, as melancholy or disaster. I believe, sometimes, the most successful candidate for a fair lady's favor is a brigand, or a felon or suspected thief even—any one clothed in the bewitching mantle of mystery and sadness. Gentle pity is the precursor of love, and I soon realized it was useless for me to cherish any hope of success since the chief recommendation to Carlota's favor I could urge, was being the friend and counsellor of Ned Wilkin's in his forthcoming trial. In regard to the trial, we were still at an utter loss for any clue to serve us in the defence.

Poor Sam was half distracted with grief at the injury he had done his generous patron and remorse for his own carelessness. He followed me from the office to my boarding place one afternoon, half crying with vexation and impatience.

"I only wish I had hold of that black-skinned villain," groaned he. "Wouldn't I make the rascal sweat!"

I could not help laughing, notwithstanding the poor fellow's distress. Just then the chambermaid passed by my open door. To my astonishment Sam sprang up as if a fire alarm had rung in his ears, screaming out:

"Stop her! stop her!

The fellow looked like a lunatic, but I stepped to the door at once.

"Wait a moment, Ann, if you please, I have an errand for you."

The girl paused on the stairs, and I went back to Sam. The perspiration was streaming down his face, and his eyes glowed as I have seen men's when wild with the delirium of fever.

"Did you see what she had in her hand?" he asked, in a voice husky with excitement.

I actually believed his wits astray, and replied, soothingly, "Nothing to hurt you, Sam; don't be alarmed."

"But it was a carpet-bag sir, the carpet-bag, I believe, as I'm a living sinner."

"Whew!" cried I, full as eager and alert as he, now that I caught the drift of his meaning. "But can you identify a common carpet-bag so easily as that?"

"Wait," said Sam, shutting his eyes tightly, the better I suppose, to recall the appearance of the fatal carpet-bag. "I didn't say anything about it before, but I'll tell you how we can make sure. The bag that girl had was just like Alden's. I shall know the looks of it fifty years from now, if I live so long. But if it is the identical bag there will be a stream of ink, down through a large yellow tulp, just about two inches below the lock. I was filling the inkstand over the shelf where the bag lay in the office that day, and overflowed it so it ran down upon the bag. I couldn't well wipe it out, so I left it just as it was hoping the owner wouldn't mind it till after he was out of my sight, at any rate. Now, sir, go and see." Concluded next week.