

The Bloomfield Times.

FRANK MORTIMER,
Editor and Proprietor.

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BY

FRANK MORTIMER.

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OLD TIMES.

BY WILLIAM WINTER.

Rosy hours of youth and fancy!
Happy hours of long ago!
Ah the playful, pictured memories—
Let us catch them as they flow.

Galaxies of blue-eyed Marys,
With a Julia or a Jane,
Or a troop of little Lauras,
Laugh and blush and romp again.

Moonlight meetings, evening rambles,
When the night was still around,
And a sweet voice, softly murmuring,
Or a kiss, the only sound.

These remember, and remember,
How the kind stars shone above,
Keeping, in their softened splendor,
Watch and ward upon our love.

Youth is as a diamond dawning—
Bold it breaks as gorgeous day;
Heavenly lights of power and beauty
Glance and gleam along its way.

Far within the mighty future
There are solemn voices heard:
Shaped to many a stately anthem,
Floats the music of a word.

But that music, in the present,
Softly droops, with sad decay,
Till its echo in the spirit,
Faints and falls and dies away.

Green be then the tender memory
Of the Past, forever sped;
That our youth may be immortal,
Though its days and dreams are dead.

A MISSING CARPET BAG:

—OR—

LOVE VERSUS LAW.

CONCLUDED.

"Splendid, splendid, Sam!" And I went out to Ann. "Run down and bring me up a pitcher of water and a couple of glasses, Ann; I want to make some lemonade," handing her a half dollar at the same time. "Here, I'll take your bag till you come back." And I relieved her of it at once, not giving her time to object.

Curse my her thanks, she tripped down the stairs, while I hurried in with the bag to Sam. There, sure enough, was the broad river of ink stripping off the flaunting tulip! Sam and I looked into each other's faces with brightening eyes. He, poor fellow, fairly capered with delight.

"Yes," said I, "it is a great thing—the first clue we have had. Now we have something to work with."

Ann returned with the glasses, and held out her hand for the bag.

"What a gay one it is," said I, as I relinquished it. "Is it yours, Ann?"

"La, no, sir," simpered she, highly flattered at the unusual notice she received; "it belongs to Miss Carlota. I'm taking it to the laundress."

I saw Sam look up in wonder at the start I gave. I could not help it. A pang like the stroke of a knife had passed through my heart.

"Then it will come back again? I've taken a fancy to it, and might like to get one like it," I said, as calmly as I could.

"O yes. The laundress brings it back when the clothes are ironed." And Ann descended to the basement in high glee over the unexpected addition to her pin money.

I sent Sam away, too, as speedily as possible, and then sat down to think. I did not like Carlota's being mixed up with it. It not only interfered with my plans, but disturbed the zest and energy with which I might otherwise have followed up the trail of circumstances. Only one course seemed right to pursue, and that was to ascertain from Carlota how the bag came into her possession and from whence. I puzzled my brain as to the best method of doing this without exciting her surprise, then de-

ecided to set a watch over the laundress, and be with Carlota when the bag came to be returned. My calculations resulted favorably. Sam came rushing to my office a few days after, saying the carpet-bag and laundress were already on the way to the boarding-house. I caught up the bouquet from my table and hurried over to—Street, sending up word to Carlota she was wanted in the parlor.

She came down, looking so like the queen of roses herself, I came near forgetting business, carpet-bag and my own wits, in the thrill of admiration. She accepted the bouquet of rosebuds with a brilliant smile, yet laid them down on the table in a few moments as if they were worthless things; and then, with jealous vexation, I noticed a cluster of scarlet geraniums nestling in the silky coils of raven hair, just like the flowers I had seen Ned Wilkins twirling in his hand that morning, when he came over to the house.

"She wears his flowers," thought I bitterly. "I will never see mine again after I give them to her hand."

How differently she treated us; with him so gay and free, and easy, but to me always so silent and reserved! I tried to forget those doleful ruminations and converse in my usual manner, but our conversation was fitful and awkward, and I was thankful when Ann appeared at the door with the bag on her arm.

"Please, Miss Carlota, give me the key of your room so that I can put away your clothes: they have come."

"Ah," said I, at once, wondering all the time if she noticed the unnatural tremor of my voice, "there's that bag again. Do you know, Miss Romez—I beg your pardon, Senorita Carlota—she disliked being called Miss Romez—that I have taken a great interest in your property from the glimpse I caught of it on the stairway the other day? I have known of just such a bag, so like it that it seems impossible to believe that this is not the identical one. Pray where did you procure it? I wonder if my friend's and yours were not sometime twins in the same maker's shop?"

She colored slightly, hesitated a moment, and then replied, evasively, "Ah yes, I dare say it might have been. I brought mine with me from home."

"Then you have always owned it?" I returned, ashamed of my pertinacity when I saw the look of distress on her ingenuous face.

Her dark lustrous eyes were fixed inquiringly on my face. She took up her fan, and waving it languidly to and fro with the true Spanish grace, attempted to answer playfully.

"Certainly, Senor C—, you are one of the Yankees my father has such a horror of. I dare not indulge your curiosity, lest you by-and-by chance on dangerous subjects. Did you know we are going home next week to stay a while, and then I am coming back to attend the seminary here and learn to be like your American ladies! My father says I must not be so ignorant."

"That is news indeed. Pray don't unlearn your own native gracefulness, senorita. I fancy most of the American ladies would like to be taught by you."

A pretty blush acknowledged the compliment, and she chatted on with more freedom than I had been favored with for a long time back. I understood the cause but the effect was no less sweet to me. She sought to engross my attention and prevent further allusion to the carpet-bag. It was not that she cared to please or entertain me. I would rather have dealt myself a sharp blow than have spoken of it again; nevertheless, just before I turned from the door, I said:

"So you will not tell me how you came to have that carpet-bag in your possession?"

I was startled at the change that swept over her face. The pretty blushes and dimples died off scared and affrighted from the soft round cheeks. The sparkles flickered out from the eye, and left the iris black and dim with some brooding sorrow and when I caught her hand, crying, "Pardon me. I meant nothing; it is but an idle jest," a shower of tears fell down upon it.

Gazing dreamily upon the crystal drops still glittering on my hand with all of a lover's foolish fancies, but none of a lover's hope, I returned along the crowded street to my office. At the door I met with Ned Wilkins. He held out his hand. I put my left into it, begrudging him the one so lately sanctified by Carlota's tears; and then, ashamed of the weakness, I laid them both in his honest friendly clasp.

"You're a good fellow, a true friend,"

said he, perceiving perhaps magnetically my momentary emotion. "Sam seemed to think you might want me for something, so I came up."

I struggled back to my client's case and my business mind.

"Yes,—no—I've no need of you. We have a slight clue. It may amount to something, and quite as likely may not. I think you had better trust us, and not meddle with it."

"Just as you say. Then I think I'll run down and see Senor Romez and Carlota. Are you sick to-day, C—? You look a little pale."

"Sick? O no?" And I laughed in a tone that reverberated dimly down my heart. "By the way, Ned, you go pretty often to see Carlota. I hope it is not merely for idle amusement. She is too sweet and pure a blossom to be dallied with carelessly. And she has a heart full of Spanish fire and vehemence, that either rejoices in happy love, or breaks at once beneath the misery of unrequited affection. I introduced you to her, and I must look out that no harm comes of it. She is full pleased enough now with your attentions. If they are meaningless, it is time they were hindered."

He looked up in my face, his clear brown eyes dancing with exultation.

"Thank you a thousand times, C—, I've hardly dared trust my own convictions that Carlota loved me. Now you have observed it, too, I shall have more assurance. I thank you, for her sake, for this remonstrance; but take the word of a sailor who honors his mother's sex too much to trifle with their pure and tender affections. I only seek to win Carlota's favor because I mean to offer her my heart, fortune and name as soon as that abominable trial is over. I only wait to know if it is a fair and unsullied name I can give my wife, to make known my hopes to Romez and Carlota. It is not honorable to do so before. Addio!"

"There goes a noble fellow, if he is my rival," said I to myself, choking down the grief that had risen like a hard ball from my heart to my throat. "A fine fellow who deserves to be a successful lover and happy husband. As for myself—well, there is my profession left me, my manhood my ambition. What though this one fair dream must prove a dreary blank? Besides, is not time a magical physician? The world has plenty yet as fair and good. Ay, another may be found as fair and guileless. Who knows?"

So I tried to reason with myself, to coax my heart to forget the smart, and be cheery and hopeful again. It would not do; the pain burned more fiercely for being smothered. A voice within, that would not be silenced, wailed sadly. "Carlota," only "Carlota."

Then—I may as well own it now—I laid my head, crowned with its thick dark locks of manhood, upon my desk, just as long years before I had rested it, when shaded by curls of childish gold, upon my mother's breast, and cried long and heartily. No, I do not blush for the weakness now. The tears were beneficial, though very painful. Their briny smart removed the feverish aching of the wound, and though the grief was not removed, its bitterness had fled.

The next day Miguel Romez came to me with an urgent invitation to join Ned Wilkins on a brief visit to the rancho, whither Carlota and he were going the next week. He was in high spirits; his crops all sold for extravagant prices, and he had received a princely offer for some land which had hitherto been of little advantage but now, from its proximity to the city, had risen to an astonishing value. So Carlota was likely to be a golden prize as well as a tender wife for Ned Wilkins.

I knew all the misery I should endure at witnessing the lover's tender attentions, and yet such was my infatuation, I could not deny myself this last chance of enjoying Carlota's society; and so quieting my conscience by the plea of following up the carpet-bag clue, I accepted the invitation.

A rare journey as it was, even for me, what must have been Ned's enjoyment! We drove leisurely along through the fresh moist luxuriance of California scenery, our pathway be sprinkled with the most vivid green, and wreathed with vines and flowers of the gayest hues. The pathway of a queen or bride could scarcely be more daintily attired. Ay, and a fit queen and bride shared our enjoyment with us. I had never seen her so gay and light-hearted. She could scarcely remain quiet a moment and enchanting us with a new pleasure, sent her rich voice trilling out as musically as the song of the birds amid the dew-spangled boughs of our morning drive. The

nameless languor and half invisible sadness had vanished from her face, and her innocent mirth and arch vivacity were extremely fascinating, even without the accompaniment of her exceeding beauty. We halted for the nights at ranches where Romez seemed well known and much respected, and on the third day arrived at his own home. The grounds were unusually well cultivated for that portion of the country, but the most prolific of all was the grapevine, which stood out from the prairie-like fields in immense clusters—perfect hills of curling tendrils and clustering leaves. The house itself was rather rude and primitive, but clean, roomy and comfortable. Romez pointed out to me a distant ravine, where I could just discern the glitter of a stream, and whispered, with a significant chuckle:

"Mark that place, senior; if I'm right, there's good digging there, for I found a fine specimen of gold just before I left, and I've been getting intimation how to go to work."

The moment we arrived, Carlota sprang from the wagon and darted away in search of her mother, but soon reappeared here and there about the grounds, shaking hands with the servants, and responding gayly to their vociferous expressions of delight. The mother, a dark but fine-looking woman, received us with kindness and a sort of native dignity that would have surprised me had I not seen Carlota before.

We passed a pleasant evening, but separated early on account of the fatigue of the journey. Yet after we reached our allotted chamber I grew restless and feverish, listening to my unsuspecting companion's joyous lover panegyrics. So, pleading a headache, I went out again into the cool evening air. I passed around the house to find a rustic seat I had noticed in the afternoon, and in doing so, glanced towards the rear door, which was open, revealing the kitchen bright with a glowing wood fire. The picture I saw there riveted me to the spot.

A slender girlish form I should have recognized at a far greater distance, stood between me and the dancing firelight.—What was Carlota doing there? How my heart leaped as I saw the round graceful arm raised to throw into the fire—not a letter, or bouquet, or love-token, as one might expect of such a girl as Carlota—but that very carpet-bag so mysteriously connected with the robbery and Ned Wilkin's forth coming trial. She watched it burn entirely away, and then came to the door and looked out into the night. I was very thankful for the hanging shrubbery and the dim light which concealed me from her sight, yet my heart beat nervously when I heard her coming toward me. She passed so near that her muslin robe brushed against my hand, but the thicket of shrubs into which I shrank hid my form from her view, and she glided on to the arbor and gave a low bird-like cry, which was immediately answered by the plaintive notes of the whippoorwill, and in a few moments I heard quick springing steps beside me, and she was joined by the tall figure of a man, plainly discerned against the open space where she stood. A long and earnest conversation ensued, but the tones were low and cautious, and no words reached me except as they parted, when approaching nearer, her flutelike voice said in Spanish:

"I tell you again the contents are safe, and you shall have the package any time you say; but you must release me from the promise."

As soon as she disappeared, I returned to my chamber, where Ned was fast wrapped in sound and refreshing slumber, leaving me to wakefulness and disquiet over his law affairs and his lady-love. I envied him his tranquil sleep, and wondered, were our situations reversed, if I should not still be wakeful over the happiness of Carlota's love. In regard to the robbery, I scarcely knew what to mistrust. The little light accidentally revealed, only served to render the darkness more dense and impenetrable. Never a doubt crossed my mind in regard to Carlota's innocence and purity, however circumstances might have entangled her in the chain of evidence. I judged it best now to acquaint my client with the new discovery I had made; so I related the whole to him the next morning, and was astonished at the consternation and grief he manifested.

"Carlota, my peerless Carlota!" ejaculated his shivering lips; "you don't tell me that she has been an accomplice in this vile robbery! Good heavens, C—, the trial and verdict of guilty were nothing in com-

parison with this. My happiness is crushed now!"

"It deserves to be!" answered I, indignantly. "What, man, you, a favored lover, ready to believe the first aspersion against the character of your charming lady love; when I, a hard, distrustful, crabbed lawyer, never dreamed of wronging her so much, though circumstances lowered around her a thousand times more darkly?"

He caught my hand impulsively, and held it so firmly I could not release it, although the warm, kindly touch seemed to blister it.

"I am a wretch, C—, not worthy your friendship or Carlota's love. Thank you, for showing me my duty."

And at the breakfast table he was more tender than ever in his attentions to Carlota, who blushed and smiled, and gave never a glance to me. After the generous repast was over, we separated in different directions; Ned followed Carlota to the garden, and I accompanied Romez over the field.

"You have no negroes on your ranche," I replied, casually. "Have you never tried their labor?"

"It is too much work for me to manage them. I prefer native Mexicans, lazy as they are. There was a tall black fellow here a month or so ago who pleaded earnestly for me to try him on."

"Ah," rejoined I, mentally ejaculating "Another link," where did he hail from?" "San Francisco," he said. "He had been disappointed about a situation he expected to obtain out this way. But I knew our hands wouldn't agree with him."

"What became of him?" "I don't know, I'm sure; I haven't heard of him. Carlota was desperately afraid I would keep him. She had a little talk with him, and didn't seem to fancy him much."

I took care to make diligent inquiry in all directions for the next three days concerning the negro, but no one seemed able to contribute anything more to my information. I was sadly disappointed at so meagre a result, for I had hoped the magic thread was already in my hand which was to unravel the whole mystery.

On the evening of the fourth day, as we all sat enjoying the coolness of twilight without the door, who should appear but Sam? I knew something of great importance had occurred, and went one side with him immediately, and half breathless with eagerness he cried:

"I've found him, Mr. C—; I've found the darky; but either he's a deceitful villain or a terribly innocent man. I pounced upon him the day after you left, and seized him by the collar and took out a pistol and informed him he had five minutes to refresh his memory, and then he must tell me about that carpet-bag or take an unwholesome portion of cold lead."

He was dreadfully scared, but for the life of me I couldn't get but one story out of him. He declares he knew nothing about stealing the bag. Says that he met two men on the wharf that day, and one of them gave him a quarter to run down to the steamer and get a carpet-bag he had just left there. He described it as they told him, and when I gave it to him he carried it to the wharf, and they took it and drove off in a carriage with it. He didn't hear anything about the robbery, because the next morning the same man came to his stand and sent him off into the country to carry a letter for him, and promised to find him plenty of work and good wages there; but after he had done his errand the man slipped away from him and he had not seen him since. He was frightened enough, and to save my life I can't help believing his story. But I left him safely locked up, and started after you to see if you could make anything more out of it, and you'll go right back with me."

"Yes, Sam, so I will. You've done nicely. I've been on the trail of the fellow here; but you've done better—you've caught him."

I whispered Sam's information to Ned, who was greatly elated thereby, and I myself felt much encouraged, and was in unusually cheerful spirits. Indeed, our whole party seemed to have inhaled some exhilarating ether. I shall never forget that merry evening. We laughed, and sang and jested, as wild and noisy as a group of gleeful children. Romez was actually uproarious, listening to the jovial stories of Sam and Ned, and laughed so much and so heartily, that Carlota and her mother begged him to laugh less heartily, assuring him something dreadful would happen if his delight was so extravagant. It was