

# The Bloomfield Times.

FRANK MORTIMER,  
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## The Bloomfield Times.

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### FRED LUDLOW'S MISTAKE.

I DON'T think there can be any mistake, Fred, old fellow. There is the lawyer's friendly letter, beginning 'My dear Ludlow,' and here is his formal letter, beginning, 'Dear sir,' and they both tell the same story.

"Videlicet, that my beloved old uncle—you needn't grin, Jack; he always was a dear old boy—has peacefully departed to a better land, and has left me his heir, Ludlow Manor and the estates thereunto appertaining, worth about one hundred thousand dollars per annum; but it can't be true, Jack, how can it?"

"Too much good luck to fall upon your undeserving shoulders; is that what you mean? 'Well, it is rather hard lines that an idle fellow like you, Fred, should turn up such a trump card suddenly. However, I congratulate you with all my heart.'"

"But I tell you, it's all a delusion; I never could have a hundred thousand a year. Give me those letters again." As he read them, the expression of his face suddenly changed, and he started up, exclaiming, "By Jove, Jack, we forgot all about the condition under which I inherit."

"I don't remember any condition; what is it?"

"A settler," answered Ludlow. "I would not do it for twice the money."

"Hang you, what is it, man? There is not anything I wouldn't do for a hundred thousand a year, except marry a woman with a squint."

"Well, I've got to marry a woman. How is it you didn't take in all old Frank's letter properly? Look here?" and Fred began to read aloud, "Dear Ludlow, I have much pleasure—hem—hem—where is it? I have it—has left you heir on condition that within twelve months you marry your cousin, Miss Magdalene Hepburne—(she is his sister's child). Should you refuse to do this, the property goes to her, house, plate, horses, and carriages, and you get a legacy of five thousand dollars." That's generous Jack, isn't it?"

"It might be worse," responded Jack, laconically.

"Worse? I tell you it's a pretty ending to a man's hopes. I knew it couldn't be true."

"But why not marry the girl? She won't say no, you may take your oath, and you don't care very much about any one else, I suppose."

"My dear fellow, it's very easy to say, marry the girl, but she's six feet if she's an inch; and as to her feet—'beetle crushers,' by Jove, as the fellow in *Punch* says."

"But think of the hundred thousand! Surely you won't be fool enough to let her have it without you, while you retire upon your modest incompetence?"

"Well, even five thousand dollars will stop a gap or two," returned Ludlow, relapsing into his usual indolent manner, as though the affair of the inheritance were quite settled; "but he might have made it ten: Miss Matilda Martha, or whatever her delightful name is, would never have missed it."

"Do you know, Ludlow, you're enough to drive a man mad. Do you mean to say that you are going to let that splendid fortune slip through your fingers, simply because a woman happens to be a good height? I wish to heaven I had the chance! I wouldn't care were she as high as St. Pauls."

"If she didn't squint? Well, you see, Jack, we all have our little prejudices. I prefer that my wife should look up to me in every sense of the word."

"Yes, you always were an ass, I know," growled Jack.

"Come, I've thought of a splendid plan. I won't marry my cousin that's settled; but why shouldn't you? You have rather a taking way with you when you like; and I'll introduce you and praise you up to the skies. Won't that do?"

"As if a girl with such a pot of money would look at a poor devil like me! No,

thank you, I don't like being snubbed. And now suppose you state your own objections to her more fully; you know her very well, of course."

"Never spoke to her in my life. Potterton—you know Potterton—showed her to me one night at the opera, with her mother. I don't know how that fellow knows every one. There was a little angel in the box with them; indeed if she were the cousin you wouldn't hear much grumbling. I was greatly surprised when Potterton told me that the elderly female was my aunt, the gigantic female my cousin, and the angel a young lady from the country, who was staying with them. Heigh-ho! what stunning eyes she had! I never called upon them. Cousins are expected to kiss, are they? and I could not have kissed the grenadier?"

"But you said you saw her feet?"

"So I did; I watched them into their carriage: the angel hopped in so fast I could see nothing but white skirts; the grenadier bungled upon the step, and disclosed a pedestal finished off by a patent leather shoe, and sandaled, and her dress was white. I went home Jack, depressed in spirit; no, it couldn't be done at any price."

"You take it deuced cool, I must say."

"What is a fellow to do? I am quite worn out with the tremendous state of excitement I was in when I first heard the news. Too much of that kind of thing does not pay; it wears a fellow to skin and bone. I can't think how I was stupid enough to forget all about the conditions. I say, old fellow, you're not going! It's ever so early."

"Long past one."

"Well, good-night, and if you think better about my offer of an introduction to the heiress, just let me know. I suppose there is no fear that she'd insist upon marrying me, is there? She'd save five thousand by it, you know. There, he's off; how selfish even one's best friends are!"

But Jack's head was in at the door again directly. "I say, Fred, you never told me what you'd do next."

Next? Let me see—Oh! I'll write to old Frank, and tell him that it's all up; and then I think it would be only civil to call upon my aunt, and tell her that I cannot marry her daughter. I must do the thing nicely; hint at pre-engaged affections—so they are, by the angel—I must ask for a private interview; I could not face the grenadier. You see, I'm a good-looking fellow, Jack, and it's just possible—gone again. Now, I'll just have one cigar, and then to bed."

About a week later, Jack—courtesy title, John Ashton, Esq.—was sitting in his office, not studying a brief, but a novel bound in yellow, when his door was unceremoniously opened, and Fred Ludlow came in. He nodded to Jack, helped himself to a cigar from a box upon the chimney-piece, and took up his position *a la* John Bull upon the hearth-rug; his hat was still on, and tilted a little down over his eyes. Presently he stretched out a long arm, and taking the book from Jack's hand, he flung it into the furthest corner of the room.

"Very well," said Jack; "I hope you are prepared to be very agreeable, for my book was specially so; the heroine had just got rid of husband No. 1 and was laying the plot for disposing of No. 2."

"And keeping poor No. 3 in blissful ignorance at the same time," interrupted Fred. "I know all about it; I don't expect to make up for such charming intellectual food as that; but still I am not wholly to be despised. Do you know, Jack," he added, thoughtfully, "that your cigars are deuced good, and that I think it's a jolly thing to live as you do here? A fellow can go about with his hat on, and all that. I think I'll cut society. One's P's and Q's are such an awful bore."

"Did you come here to tell me that?"

"No; didn't you want to know about that money affair? It's all settled; I have declined the honor of my cousin's hand; she has the property without the encumbrance of dear I, and dear I gets his five thousand; I'll just make them give me a check; it's not worth investing five thousand, and it's too little to pay my debts with, so I'll sport it at Paris; you'll come, too, old fellow, and as long as it holds out we'll have a jolly lark!"

"What an ass you are, Fred!" was Jack's grateful rejoinder. "But tell me what you did? Did you see the grenadier as you call her?"

"No, thank goodness; but I saw my aunt, and a deuced nice little woman she is; I shouldn't mind marrying her, not a bit, if she was any one else; but even if I had been inclined to relent about the gren-

adier, I made such a mess of the whole thing that I couldn't well do it now. Fancy me telling the woman that her daughter was too big and ugly! Not exactly in those words, you know, but it came to the same thing; and then I got bogged again when I began about the little girl I had seen with them at the opera. I think I ended my saying that I was over head and ears in love with her."

"But you made it plain that you gave up the property, I suppose."

"Oh! there was no doubt about that part; my aunt spoke very nicely, and said she wished for my sake that I could have liked Magdalene, but that she could not help admiring my noble and disinterested conduct. By Jove! I felt quite a hero, Jack! And she hoped, now that we had met, that we would all be good friends, and she half-promised me an introduction to the angel. Her name is—oh! not a pretty name—Cherry Micklethwaite; she would be Mrs. Ludlow, of course, if I married her; but Cherry is a desperate name. I'd rather she was a flower than a fruit."

"A vegetable would have been worse than either. But what do you mean to marry on?"

"My fifteen hundred a year, of course. I think I must keep a few tenners out of the five thousand for the honeymoon trip. And yet it would be a terrible thing to marry on fifteen hundred a year, although some one has written a little book telling how it's to be done. No, I'm afraid single-blessedness is my fate; and it's all Potterton's fault, isn't it Jack?"

"I never saw such a fellow as you are, Fred; always laying the blame upon some one or other. How is it Potterton's fault?"

"Why, don't you see if he hadn't pointed out my cousin to me that night at the opera, I'd never have known what she was like; and then, when I got this money, I could have proposed to her, and never have seen her, perhaps, until it was all settled; a fellow can do a lot of things if he doesn't know he's doing them. Don't you see?"

"Most lucidly explained, certainly; but I think I can follow you. But no matter who is to blame, you have been and gone and made a confounded fool of yourself; so you must make the best of it."

"But about Paris? you'll come, won't you, Jack?"

"Yes, if you haven't changed your mind or spent that unfortunate five thousand before June, which will be about the right time to see the city in full bloom. I suppose I shouldn't wonder if you married the heiress after all; you seem to be relenting very fast since you heard your angel's name was Cherry. You might make the grenadier wear white boots, you know, or a black dress."

"Yes, but I couldn't take a yard from her height. I say, what are you going to do to-night? It's quite early still. Come along and see Rose Eytinge; she's splendid."

"All right," said Jack, and they were presently whirling toward Wallack's in a carriage.

The following afternoon Fred Ludlow was just turning into a shop to spend some of his small patrimony upon "Jockey Club," when a neat little brougham drove up to the door, and he heard his name called.

"My dear aunt," he said, shaking hands cordially with Mrs. Hepburne, and looking beyond her to see if his cousin was in the carriage; but the second place was empty.

"I was just going to write you a little note," Mrs. Hepburne said. "I want you to come and see me; I am going back to Staten Island to-night, and you can come down the day after to-morrow, if you have no engagement."

"I shall be delighted," said Fred, unblushingly; "but—"

"I know what you are going to say; but don't be afraid; I would not have been unkind enough to ask you to meet your aversion."

"O!" stammered Fred.

"Never mind; I'm not offended, neither is Magdalene. She thinks your conduct as noble as I do; she is a dear, good, amiable girl as ever lived; still I cannot expect you to see with a mother's eyes; but perhaps I might be able to introduce you to some one whom you do admire," she added, laughing.

"To Miss Micklethwaite? Oh! if you do, you will be the best woman in the world. I'm too poor to marry, but I'd like to know her."

"Yes, you needn't fall in love with her; that is very easily managed; and now, good-by; you'll come down on Friday, and stay as long as you find us pleasant."

"I'll ask for a fortnight's leave; that will give you enough of me," answered

Fred, and then aunt and nephew shook hands and parted.

When, on the following Friday, Fred Ludlow, dressed for dinner, came into the drawing-room of his aunt's pretty little cottage on Staten Island, he found there before him the young lady of whom his thoughts had been full since the night he had seen her at the opera nearly twelve months before. He felt wonderfully shy and awkward as she rose upon his entrance, gathering up the bright-colored wools which lay scattered over her white dress.

She was a very pretty *piquante* little creature, and her eyes were literally dancing with suppressed mirth. "Micklethwaite," said Fred, bowing and hating himself for the blush which he felt rising to the very roots of his hair.

The young lady bowed in return, and then put out her hand, saying, frankly and pleasantly, "We should not be strangers, Mr. Ludlow. I have heard so much about you lately." There was a slight emphasis upon the last word, which was not lost upon Fred. In what terms had she heard him discussed? he wondered.

Miss Micklethwaite sat down to her wool-work again; and Fred sat opposite to her, thinking that even the name of Cherry was bearable when borne by her; wishing that his uncle had not attached such impossible conditions to this will—wishing that he had more than fifteen hundred a year, and that he could win that charming little creature for his wife; and while he was thus thinking, and wishing, he was talking commonplaces with Miss Micklethwaite in the most approved style, and, and, by the time Mrs. Hepburne appeared, all shyness had vanished, and the young lady and gentleman were rapidly becoming excellent friends.

Fred's fortnight in Staten Island passed but too quickly, at least to him, and indeed the impression he made upon his aunt and the fair Cherry was far from disagreeable. He was a clever young fellow enough, and had plenty to say when he chose to exert himself and shake off his indolent manner. His habits were of a domestic order—at least apparently so; for he was never tired of helping the two ladies, or the young lady rather, for Mrs. Hepburne's part was limited to looking on at intervals, to work among the flower-beds. Indeed it was a study to see Fred perched upon a garden-ladder, training roses and honey-suckles under the direction of Miss Micklethwaite, while she stood under him with the shreds and nails in her hand. And, again, he would read aloud while his companions worked, and he and Cherry would quarrel and argue over the respective merits of Tennyson and Owen Meredith. But the last day came, as last days always do come, long before they are welcome, and poor Fred was unmistakably miserable. He had during his toilet upon that last morning acknowledged to himself the pleasant and yet melancholy truth that he was in love—no idle passing fancy, but the real thing which comes, I suppose, not oftener than half-a-dozen times in a man's life; and moreover, that he would be obliged to go away without the happiness of knowing that his affection was returned. Once or twice he had fancied that if things had been different he might have hoped, she had always been so nice and kind; and just at that interesting point the breakfast-bell rang, and he went down-stairs to find her looking more bewitching than he had ever seen her. After breakfast they went out to take their last walk round the garden and shrubbery, Fred determining to keep a tight curb upon his feelings, for fear in a weak moment his secret would betray itself. Considering these good resolutions it was rather hard upon him that his pretty cousin should choose that special morning to rally him upon his dislike to his cousin.

"I think it very cowardly to run away the very day Magdalene is expected," she said. "Is she really coming this evening?"

"Really and truly; you should stay to see her, Mr. Ludlow; you cannot tell what might happen; perhaps you might find her very lovable in spite of your prejudice, and it might all end happily, like a book."

They were going at the moment very slowly along a walk secluded by high yew hedges on either side; and as the young lady finished speaking, they both suddenly stopped, and Fred had taken his companion's hand and was holding it fast in his own; he was looking eager and excited.

"And do you think," he said, "that after having known you, I could care for any one in the world? I know it's hopeless, and that I ought to have gone away without telling you I love you, but I could not do it. Will you tell me that you forgive me—that you do not hate me?"

"Forgive you? Hate you? Oh! Fred," she answered, softly. "That was enough; her hand was released, but only that she might be drawn within Fred's caressing arm, while he took his first kiss from her sweet lips."

About two hours later, Mrs. Hepburne's voice was heard calling through the garden, "Fred! Fred! where are you? I thought you were determined to go by the twelve train, and it's past one now. Eh! what has happened? she added, as the culprit issued from the yew walk, with his arm round his pretty companion's waist, and his face beaming with happiness."

"Something that will keep me here for another day," he answered; something that has made me the happiest man in the world." He quite forgot, the foolish fellow, that he had only fifteen hundred a year, and five thousand dollars."

"Now," said Mrs. Hepburne, that same evening, as they all sat together in the veranda, upon which the drawing-room windows opened, "in five minutes she will be here."

"And remember," added the owner of the little hand which Fred held clasped in his own, "that if you repent, you are at liberty—"

His answer was in a whisper; but he presently added aloud: "When we see her coming I shall retire until the greetings are over; she does not know I am here, you tell me."

As he spoke a carriage appeared at the bend of the avenue, the two ladies went in doors to meet the new arrival. From where he sat, Fred saw stepping out of the broughman a tall, large woman, who justified in every particular his nickname of grenadier. Her dress seemed somewhat scanty, too, for her size, and her bonnet was a perfect wilderness of flowers.

"How upon earth did my aunt contrive to have such a daughter?" was Ludlow's comment as he saw, first the slight figure of his aunt, and then that of his beloved, swallowed in the embrace of his alarming relative. Presently he heard voices in the room behind him, and getting up, he went forward to undergo the ordeal of introduction. He walked rather slowly into the room, his handsome face a little flushed, and his eyes scanning curiously the figure before him. "By Jove, spectacles, too!" he muttered, as he saw the new arrival looking at him, from head to foot.

"Who is he?" she asked, turning to Mrs. Hepburne. "You did not tell me you had company."

"Allow me to introduce myself," said Fred, coming forward, emboldened by the sight of the lovely face at the grenadier's shoulder. "I am your cousin, Fred Ludlow."

He held out his hand, and would have bestowed a cousinly salute, had not the lady started back in amazement, crying:

"Your cousin, sir? I am not your cousin. What do you mean? There is your cousin, and you can kiss her, if her mother has no objection. I am Miss Cherry Micklethwaite, and I am not accustomed to have liberties taken with me, allow me to tell you."

Fred retreated quite speechless with surprise. Could it be possible? Had he been under a ridiculous delusion all along? and had he, all unknown to himself, fallen in love with his cousin, being thereby enabled to fulfill the conditions of his uncle's will? But it was far more difficult to make the aggrieved Miss Cherry—who had been a governess, and was still a valued friend of Mrs. Hepburne's—understand the drift of the little comedy, the last scene of which had just been played before her; than it was to make Fred see how he had fallen into such an absurd mistake.

"It was all Potterton's fault," he said to the real Magdalene; the fellow told me distinctly that night at the opera that you were a friend of Mrs. Hepburne's and that the other creature—yes, I have no doubt she is a very good creature when you say so, darling—was my cousin."

"And now would you care to know what made me first begin to like you?" said Magdalene, softly. "It was your determination not to marry a woman you did not love, just to enable you to keep our uncle's property. How mother and I did laugh when she told me all you had said about me, and then we laid the little trap into which you fell so nicely."

"If all traps were so nicely finished," was the beginning of Fred's answer; what the middle was, history saith not, but he ended by again declaring emphatically, "that it was all Potterton's fault!"

Mr. and Mrs. Ludlow visited Paris, and Jack Ashton met them there by invitation.