

The Bloomfield Times.

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Editor and Proprietor.

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BY

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A Girl's Promise.

ONE of the most singular cases of which I have ever heard, came to my knowledge some years since while engaged in the practice of law, in the city of Richmond, Va.

I had been attending court in Johnstown one of the interior towns of the State and towards the latter end of the week a long and heavy rain set in which destroyed bridges and made traveling so unpleasant that I was obliged to remain a few days for the roads to become passable, and the bridges to be repaired.

The time had dragged wearily along for two days when just at dusk on the second day I received a note from an old friend, asking me to accompany him to the residence of a client who resided nearly two miles from the village, and saying he would call for me in about an hour.

I was ready when my friend, Mr. Stout, made his appearance. He told me that he had been summoned on some rather peculiar business and that he had asked me to go with him thinking he might need my advice. He then went on to say that the person who sent for him was Col. Raleigh, who was a very aristocratic man and one proud of his family pedigree as he claimed to trace his family connection back to Sir Walter Raleigh.

"But what is the matter?" I asked.
"Oh! I forgot to tell you, it is a case of larceny which seem shrouded in mystery, though from the Colonel's note, he evidently thinks the deed has been done by a member of the family."

"Well, why not get the services of some detective then?" I asked.

"The Colonel would be afraid of the matter becoming public and is anxious, if the guilt rests where I think he suspects it does, to have the affair kept secret," replied Stout, "and I am called in more as a friend than as a professional man."

"The Colonel had a brother, who wasted his fortune by wine and cards and then blew his brains out," continued my friend, "leaving a son Rolf whom the Colonel took into his family and raised with his daughter Kate, as if they were both his own children. I always thought the young folks would eventually fall in love and a match would be the result. I once hinted my ideas to the Colonel who evidently did not think well of it. Kate you see is his only child, and will some day be the richest girl in the county. Things have not been pleasant out there for quite a while past."

"Is it the result of this larceny?" I asked.

"Oh no," replied Stout, "that only happened yesterday or the day before. Rolf is a queer chap, obstinate and set in his way. You see he takes after his mother who was a Palm. He came to my office last summer and began to read law without his uncle's knowledge. I saw then there was a screw loose, but they are a family who keep their affairs to themselves, and so I asked no questions. Rolf had a few hundred dollars, which had been left after closing up his father's affairs, which sum was deposited in my hands. This he drew out a short time since, saying he was preparing to go to Kentucky. The old gentleman spoke about it to me, saying it was a boy's whim, but I saw, or thought I saw that he felt badly about his going. As a further proof that there is some trouble out there, Rolf has slept in the village for a week past, and told me that he did not look to his uncle for any pecuniary aid. But it is time we were off."

When we arrived at the Raleigh mansion the Colonel was reading to his daughter, a beautiful girl who seemed about seventeen years of age. I was introduced to the occupants of the room, and for a time the conversation was general, no allusion being made to the business upon which we came. While we were talking, a young man entered, to whom I was introduced by the Colonel as "my adopted son, Rolf Raleigh."

I noticed him particularly. He was short and thick-set and though not a handsome young fellow his countenance gave evidence that he had an iron will and great intellect. He staid but a few minutes, when he left the room.

After he had passed out, Stout spoke regarding the business on which we had come, and said, "I have brought my friend here with me as he has had considerable experience in cases of a similar nature, and his advice may be of value to us."

The Colonel thanked him for so doing and then laid the facts of the case before us. As he did so, there seemed to me to be something kept back and I felt confident that some grave secret lay beneath the affair, which was well known to the old gentleman and which he was anxious should not be discovered. The facts told us were briefly as follows:

"About two weeks previous" said the Colonel, "I received six thousand dollars from the sale of some property. I paid out a portion of it and placed the pocket book containing the balance in the cabinet in my library. Two days ago my daughter looking over the cabinet called my attention to the money which I was so careless as to leave there, and at my request counted it. After doing so she locked it up in the cabinet and gave me the key. In the evening of the same day having occasion to use some money I went for it and found it gone. Nothing else was touched. I have a dislike to having my troubles made public property and have therefore preferred to consult you rather than to send for any officers. All the servants in the house have grown old in my service and I have no reason to mistrust them."

"What amount of money and what kind was it?" asked Mr. Stout of Miss Raleigh.

"There was six hundred dollars in bank bills and the rest was in checks," she replied.

"Drafts" said the Colonel, "drafts on George Nolan of Alexandria."

This reply seemed to startle Stout, and he hastily asked if there was any one in the library when she counted the notes.

"No one but Lem the old butler; but he would no more take them than I would," said Kate.

"No one else saw them at all?" said I.

"No," she replied, "only Rolf, he was there; perhaps he can tell you better than I can what kind of notes they were. As she said this she apparently addressed herself to her cousin, who had again entered the room.

The young man made no reply but stood looking abstractedly out of the window.

"Who was in the library during the day?" asked Stout.

"No one," replied the Colonel. "I was there all day alone except while gone out to dinner."

"Do you know of any other key to the Cabinet?"

"My daughter has one," answered the Colonel.

"Oh no, I have none," replied Kate, "I gave it to Rolf a long time since."

"My son," said the Colonel, "have you a key like this?"

The young man carelessly replied that he had not, when Kate said, "why I saw it on your key ring a few days ago."

"Well it is not there now and probably you were mistaken," replied Rolf.

"As I understand it then" said I "the only time the money could have been taken was while you were at dinner?"

"Yes."

"Was the butler present in the dining room?"

"He was there all the time," quickly replied Kate.

"Who dined with you that day?" asked Stout.

"We were all alone, Kate and I, even Rolf was out gunning at the time" said the Colonel.

Stout now put his hand in his pocket and drawing out a paper presented it to the old gentleman and asked, "Is that one of the lost drafts?"

"Both the Colonel and his daughter looked at it eagerly and carefully, and then decided that it was.

"Where did you"—but before the sentence was completed Stout hastily interrupted the Colonel by asking to see that cabinet.

Accordingly we were ushered by the Colonel into the library where we were shown a curiously inlaid cabinet, the key to which he handed to Stout.

Without taking the key Stout hurriedly went on to say, "you were going to ask me Colonel where I got this, boys will be boys."

"Now sit down and keep cool," said Stout to the Colonel who began to show signs of excitement.

"I do not understand what you can mean" said the old gentleman.

Stout began to grow nervous and at last said huskily, "my nephew received that draft last night accompanied by this note."

"Read it will you Page?"

I took the note and read.

"DEAR NED—This makes us all right, the draft is on Nolan and is as good as specie. I leave town to-morrow night.

Yours in haste
ROLF RALEIGH."

I looked up as I finished reading. The old man's face was white with passion, as he said:

"Do you know whom you accuse? A Raleigh of being a thief!"

"I know it all Colonel, but you dragged me into it, or I would have said nothing. But the proof is positive. Rolf is leaving you in disgrace without money—"

"I know it," groaned the old man, "but I hoped it would the sooner bring him back."

"Without money," continued Stout, "No one but him saw the money, only he had a key to the cabinet where it was, only he was absent from dinner that day. Whether his past conduct warrants his so leaving you, or gives any clue by which to determine his guilt, you know best."

The last remark seemed to touch the Colonel to the quick and he drew in his breath as though suffering from intense pain.

"Look at the note" continued Stout "and see if it is Rolf's writing."

He took the paper and looked at with great earnestness while his hand shook violently, and then handed it back saying as though to himself "Oh! my son, my son!"

I went out of the room vexed with myself for having come and still more vexed with Stout for having brought me to see the old man's misery, and paced up and down the hall for some minutes while my friend and the Colonel remained in the library.

At last Stout called me back into the room. The Colonel was standing by the fire place, apparently having regained his composure. He thanked me in a stiff formal manner for having been kind enough to come out with Mr. Stout, and then went on hurriedly to say:

"You are an honorable man, Mr. Page? you will keep this secret until such time as the matter may be cleared up, or explained?"

I at once assured him I would, but I little thought how many weary years would pass before that time would come, and that the explanation would be so entirely different from what now seemed probable.

He grasped my hand, I gave it a shake and then turning to Stout said, "You tell Rolf; but don't let him come here, I never want to see his face again. And Kate; tell her too, I cannot."

Stout then left the room.

He had been gone but a short time, when I heard a firm step coming along the hall, and in a moment afterwards Rolf entered the library.

Was that the face of a guilty man? I could not believe it. With a firm step and rigid look he walked up to his uncle, placed his hand on his shoulder and forced him to look up. It was more the act of an accuser than of one accused.

The old man looked up, and said, "God forgive you, Rolf, but I did not wish to see you again."

Rolf looked at him steadily for a moment, and then turned away, muttering, "Impossible!"

Something in his manner and appearance touched me deeply, and hardly knowing why I did it, I seized him by the arm and said, "Young man, for your own sake, and the sake of those you love, prove your innocence, for I do not believe you guilty."

"I cannot," he replied, in a solemn manner; "I never wrote or sent that note."

"Go Rolf," said his uncle, "I forgave all that went before, but this can never be forgotten."

The young man's face grew pale, but still he did not reply. The sorrowful look of his countenance puzzled me.

Just at this moment the door opened, and Kate came hastily in. Her father at once started forward, with a motion as though intending to put her out of the room, saying "this is no place for you, my daughter."

I could hardly believe this was the shy, bashful girl that I had seen an hour before. Without regarding the remark or action of her father, she went at once to her cousin, and placing her hand on his arm said:

"Rolf, you did not think for a moment that I would believe you guilty?"

A strange look of love and trust was combined with one of terror, which Rolf

saw as he hastened to draw her too him, placing his hand on her head, and smoothing her hair as though she had been a child.

The Colonel started up with his face flushed with passion, and going to her said, "Leave him! Will you persist in your folly in the face of these circumstances? Would you wed a felon?"

Rolf gave a scornful laugh, as he replied, "Let us have no tragedy, for I am a poor actor. I will come again," he said, looking down to Kate, who was still clinging to his arm, and speaking as though no one but her was present, "when I can prove my innocence. Not until then. Will you then be my wife? Will you wait for me Kate?"

"I will wait for you though it be years," she quietly replied.

Her father called her sharply, but she did not turn toward him.

Rolf stooped and kissed her, and said, "Good bye, my darling, remember that I will come for you, even though I wait long, long years. I will come for you when I can prove my innocence."

Then as he left the room Kate turned to her father, and stood by him watching Rolf as he went down the hall.

There was no longer any use for us to remain, and we therefore took our departure for the village, I feeling as though there was a mystery in this affair which some time perhaps I should be able to unravel.

The next morning I left the village early, to go to the western part of the State, and was gone several days, stopping at Johnstown on my way back to Richmond.

The evening of my return I hastened to see Stout to ascertain if anything further had been discovered, which would throw light on the Raleigh case. After saluting him I at once asked if he had learned anything further. He replied that he had not. "But," said he, "I have been out to the Colonel's a good deal; he is fast sinking."

"What?" asked I, "is he ill?"

"Yes," said he, "he has not been well all winter, and this affair has completely upset him. He has now taken to his bed, and I doubt if he will ever get up again.—His mind seems unsettled too."

"Well, what about the young man," I asked; "has he done anything toward clearing up the mystery?"

"All that can be done, I reckon, was the reply. I glanced at him as he said this, the tone of his voice showing his feelings to be against Rolf, and at once expressed my belief in his innocence.

"Well, you can think as you please," replied Stout, "but I have no doubt of his guilt. His conduct forces that belief on me. How would an innocent man have acted? How would you? How would I? Stormed, raged, torn the whole matter up by the roots, and dragged out the truth somehow."

I laughed at his enthusiasm as I replied: "But the boy showed feeling enough that night. I look upon him as no ordinary young man."

"Oh," said Stout, "he has made a pretence of clearing it up, but with a dogged sort of a way that seemed to say he had no expectations of success. I've no faith in him. He takes after his mother, and I never did like the Palms. Thank God, that for the old man's sake, the secret is safe with us. And, beside this, I gather from the Colonel's talk that this not the first offence."

"But how about the young lady?"

"She seems entirely taken up with attention to her father since he has got so poorly. She waits on him night and day."

"If no other person has faith in Rolf," I replied, "she has."

"Yes," answered Stout, "but she has as much pride in the family name as her father. The other day when I was there I mentioned Rolf's name, and spoke of his attempts to solve the mystery, when the old man quickly replied, 'God grant he may succeed. Then after a short silence he continued, 'My little girl here,—patting Kate on the head—'thinks it all right, I know, but she has solemnly promised me never to marry the boy until he proves his entire innocence. You have promised Kate."

"Yes," she replied, "I have promised, and I will keep my word."

After she had gone out the old man said, "It has been a bitter disappointment to me. I thought to have seen Kate, Rolf's wife before I died," and then he entirely broke down.

"There is a young fellow out there now, some connection of the family, his name is Forest, and I fancy he has a warm regard for Kate. He has been there all summer

by spells. By the way, Page, here is a letter the Colonel gave me for you."

I put the letter in my pocket, and after leaving Stout, opened it. It contained a few words of thanks, and then followed the request for me to see Rolf, and inform him that his uncle had secured an appointment on the English legation for him, and urge him to accept it.

I had intended to leave for Richmond in the morning, and here was a call for further delay, as I could hardly refuse to grant the Colonel's request. But I could hardly conceive why the request was not made to Stout, who was an old friend of the family, instead of to me.

During the evening a servant came in and said, "A gentleman, Mr. Page, wants to see you; he says on private business.—I think it's somebody from the Raleigh place."

Telling him to bring him to my room, he soon returned, and ushered in young Raleigh.

"You are welcome," I said, extending my hand, "and I am really glad to see you."

He bowed, but appeared to take no notice of my offered hand. I placed him in a chair, which he accepted, and at once began to state the reason why he had called, which was to inform me that he intended to leave the place that night.

"Then," said I, interrupting him, "it is very fortunate that you called, and"—handing him the letter I received from his uncle—"this will explain why I think so."

He took the letter, read it carefully, and stood a moment in deep study, when he handed it back to me.

"You accept the appointment?" I said.

"Certainly not," replied he, "I decline it."

"What reason shall I give your uncle for your so doing?" I asked.

"No explanation will be necessary," said Rolf; "he will understand it."

"Mr. Raleigh," I said, "do not be too hasty; you are young, and without friends."

The kindness of my tone and my words touched him, and as he replied, his voice trembled with emotion:

"I know that too well, Mr. Page, but I shall succeed; I am not afraid. I am very thankful for your kindness; and now let me tell you what brought me here to-night.—I am going away. Should my innocence be proved, which I am confident will yet be the case, I shall come back; if not, never. I come to ask you to let me know when that is the case."

"Can you do nothing to clear yourself now?" I asked.

"Nothing," he replied. "I tried a little but did not expect success."

"How about that note which was sent in your name?" I asked.

"I never sent it. It is a forgery, and being sent through the post-office, I am unable to trace it to its author."

I was puzzled! "Do you think yourself the victim of some plot. Has Forrest had anything to do with it?" asked I.

"I have said nothing about any plot," replied he. "I accuse no one, but if the story was public, God only knows what I should do."

At this moment his self-control seemed to give way, and for a short time there was silence, while he seemed to break out with a cold and clammy sweat.

"No," continued he, "I can do nothing now, I came to you because I think you have faith in me. Stout has not, and it is not easy to ask a favor of a man who thinks you a thief."

I was about to speak, when he hurriedly interrupted me.

"I know what you would say. It will all come right some day, and when it does, I want you to promise to let me know."

"I promise to let you know at once."

I am obliged to you Mr. Page, it will be a trifle to you, but to me it will be much.—It may be years before it will come, but if old and gray, I will hold you to your promise."

He wrote an address on a slip of paper, and handed it to me with the remark, "That will always find me if I am living." He arose to depart, saying, "I will shake hands with you now."

I grasped his hand warmly, and we parted, I feeling a perfect trust in his honor and integrity, even though evidence was so strongly against him.

By what trifles the current of a life may be changed, and how slender the thread upon which hangs our destiny, was proven in this case; for had Rolf but deferred his departure till morning, how many years of weary waiting would have been saved to two brave hearts, and how suddenly the plans of another would have been destroyed. Concluded next week.