

# The Bloomfield Times.

FRANK MORTIMER,  
Editor and Proprietor.

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## The Bloomfield Times.

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BY

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## Chigson's Plot.

A MYSTERY IN THE FAMILY.

WHILE enjoying myself one September at the Springs, I was surprised by a telegram from my niece, saying, "If you love us, come to Hawthorn Villa at once."

I felt certain that something serious must have caused the summons, and determined to obey it at once. The two friends who were with me on this trip had gone a few miles up the lake on a fishing excursion, and not wishing to leave without telling them about my intended departure, I mounted my horse and started for the place where I expected to find them. But luck was decidedly against me, for a sudden shaking of the animal threw me off, and as I lighted among the stones, I remained insensible until some persons passing found me, and took me back to the hotel.

My friends carefully attended me, and when after two weeks' confinement, I thought best to attempt the journey, one of them, Charlie Hartz, insisted on accompanying me, to see that I stood the fatigues of travel.

I bore the journey better than I expected, and after a supper at the hotel, hastened out to Hawthorn Villa, which was the residence of my two nieces, Edith and Isla Cathard. It was a relief to see that outside, everything looked as usual. A servant let me in. I asked for Edith, and went on to the drawing-room. She came in presently, a tall lithe girl, with a superb face. She had grown paler since I saw her last, and her eyes looked unnaturally large. They were so beautiful, however, that there could scarcely be too much of them.

"I have come, Edith," I said, "but not so soon as I meant to."

"You have been sick, Uncle Lemuel," she observed, swiftly noting a toning down in my physique.

"Yes, or I should have been here a fortnight ago."

Her hands, which were fast locked together, seemed to clutch each other a little more closely; but she answered with perfect composure:

"I am sorry to have troubled you. You had probably started before my second telegram was sent, or you would have known that the matter had been arranged, and that you were no longer needed."

So this is what I had come for. Yet I could not quite declare to myself that it was just as I expected. There certainly was a visible change in Edith. Something of her old buoyancy I missed, which Bohemian as I was, and intolerant of girlish trivialities, I would gladly have seen restored.

"Where is Isla?" I asked.

"In town, spending the evening with Grace Harleigh. You do not know, I suppose, that Isla is engaged? You will remember Alston Harleigh, probably."

"Yes, an excellent match, I should say if he is the other party."

"He is; and, as you say, it will be an excellent match. The Harleighs are a proud family, but they are all pleased with Isla. They are always sending for her, though Alston is away now for a few weeks. O, if you please, uncle, do not mention to Isla that I sent for you to come."

The request was carelessly made, but I noticed that Edith's small hands again tightened their grasp upon each other, at this casual reference to that "matter" that had been arranged without my assistance. I hate a mystery of all things, (next to a miss!) Yet I began to fear that we were going to have one in the family.

A mystery it might be or a mere sentimental misery. Whether the one or the other, it was evident that Edith had no intention of making me acquainted with it, nor had I any authority to demand an explanation. Nominally I had been guardian to these girls, though I had mainly shirked the responsibilities of that position upon

my lawyer, and now they were both of age, and quite their own mistresses.

All through the evening that followed, my perceptive faculties were upon the strain, without arriving at any conclusion. Just as I was taking leave, Isla came in.—She was full of vivacity, giving one the impression of never being serious long enough to have a sober thought. She took me to task saucily for my reduced bodily state, and rallied me soundly upon being so bad a horseman, after hearing the mishap that had befallen me.

"But who are those heroes, who cared for you, and what are their names?" asked she.

"What's in a name? But theirs are Hartz and Delamere. Hartz came to Daleport with me. By your leave I shall bring him to Hawthorn Villa to-morrow."

Edith had grown deathly pale, but Isla answered eagerly:

"Yes, bring him by all means. For to Mr. Hartz, as one of the preservers of my uncle, I must always feel grateful."

So the merry girl rattled on, and when I was leaving warned me not to forget to bring Hartz on the morrow.

I had never mentioned my nieces by name to him, but tried the sound of Edith Cathard on my friend that night, and was surprised by the sudden grip given to my hand.

"Edith Cathard, your niece! And here in Daleport! Have the goodness to get sick again, and I'll keep you in bed three months instead of weeks, to prove my gratitude by diligent nursing."

"Perhaps you'll begin by bathing my hand in arnica," I said, taking a bottle from my valise. I believe your grip has dislocated some of its joints."

Hartz laughed, but looked rather red in the face, as he left for his room.

I saw no more of Hartz that night, but the next day he accompanied me to Hawthorn Villa. My nieces were walking together under the maples that shaded the avenue. Just as we came in sight, Isla espied a bright-winged butterfly, a straggler left from the summer hordes, and ran off in pursuit. She had not seen us, nor had Edith, but the latter discovered us a moment afterward, and stopped like one paralyzed. Hartz, on the instant, left me without ceremony and bounded toward the spot where she stood.

"Found at last, my Edith," I heard him say, a triumphant ring in his voice; but his next words were spoken with less assurance. "Miss Cathard, I fear this meeting affords you less pleasure than it does me."

"My uncle's friends are always welcomed here with pleasure," returned Edith, in the quiet tones that had impressed me the previous night; tones so subdued and subdued, that I believe they would have restrained a wild Ojibwah, with the warwhoop at his tongue's end.

Hartz instinctively fell into the utterance of commonplace, remarks at which, on coming up with them, I assisted. But Isla soon ruffled the surface of our conventionalisms. She had caught her butterfly, and returning back displayed her prize in triumph.—I presented her to Hartz, who walked on beside her, while I followed with Edith, whom an utter weariness seemed to have overcome. Her motion was so languid, indeed that I feared she must be ill, and offered the support of my arm.

"It is not needed, thank you. I am quite well," she answered, exerting herself to walk more briskly. "Are you and your friend going to stay long in Daleport?"

"Some weeks, perhaps."

A gasping sigh escaped her showing that my answer had added to her secret uneasiness. I began to feel heartily concerned. Recollections of my bright, gay sister Miriam, the mother of these early-orphaned girls, came crowding into my mind, and impressed me strongly with a sense of duty unperformed toward her children. I determined now to gain their confidence, if possible, and so retrieve, as well as I could, my previous neglect. Busy with such thoughts, I walked on in silence, Edith probably had on grossing reflections of her own, and was as little inclined to conversation as myself. But from ahead, the sound of Isla's mellow mirthful voice came back to us, with frequent intervals of merry laughter.

"She, at least, is happy," broke at length from Edith's lips, spoken not to me, but in utter forgetfulness of me.

"And you are not?" I said.

"I? O, yes," with a quick accession of color, which, however, faded rapidly.

"I feared that you were not."

She walked on yet a yard or two, then said:

"I believe I will take your arm, Uncle

Lemuel, since you were kind enough to offer it. I feel a friend's support is pleasant sometimes, even though it be not actually needed."

"Never fear to ask support from me.—I'm afraid I have been recreant to my trust but I have not meant to neglect you."

I looked into her face to make the words the more impressive, and saw a momentary quivering of her lashes. But she answered steadily:

"You have always been very good to us, Uncle Lemuel. There is nothing for which you need reproach yourself."

And then, from a side path, a new actor came upon the scene. This was a lean, wiry figure of a man; his head like a coffee pot, with some necessary adaptations to the human form divine; his feet and hands three sizes too large, according to the rule of proportion; his entire self, in fact, a discrepancy, as it seemed to me. I felt Edith's hand tremble upon my arm, as with a series of rabbit-like hops, he came up with us, and actually indulged in the familiarity of tweaking her ear. To my surprise Edith expressed no resentment, but in quiet even tones presented "Mr. Chickson."

"So this is uncle Lem," squeaked the newcomer, his tones about as musical as those from a cracked riddle. "Bless my life! the old man isn't half such a bear as I expected. Edith, old girl, who is that just going into the house with Isla?"

"It is a friend of Uncle Lemuel," said Edith, very faintly.

"A friend! Oh! Mr. Anonymous, I suppose."

"His name is Hartz."

"Hartz? I go you one, now, that he's your Saratoga top-knot. The old love you were, or maybe weren't, off with, before getting on with the new. Give us a kiss, old girl."

"Edith, shall I kick this fellow off the grounds?" I demanded straightening myself, and feeling as belligerent in spirit as an unadulterated Irishman.

"No, uncle Lemuel," she said, submitting to be kissed by Mr. Chickson, but looking as white as the dead. "I was thinking of telling you before he came. We are engaged."

There are situations in life when words cannot do justice to the occasion; and this was one. My first feeling was of anger; my next of unbounded pity for my niece. If her manner had been happier, I might have concluded that Mr. Chickson, repulsive as he seemed, was possessed of redeeming qualities. As it was, I could not believe that she had accepted this man's address from choice. Why then?

In marriages of convenience, money is usually the compelling power, but Edith was herself a wealthy heiress. Whatever her motive, however, I could read in her white inflexible face, that she would adhere to her purpose, at any cost. Could nothing be done then to rescue her from Mr. Chickson? I would watch and wait, but her manner left me little hope.

I allowed my hand to be shaken in a congratulatory manner by Mr. Chickson, as if I were the engaged party instead of myself, and saw a look of relief come into Edith's face, when it appeared that I would accept the situation quietly.

We were at the house door by this time. Hartz and Isla had already gone in.—Edith, when upon the threshold, gave one despairing look out into the grounds, which I interpreted into reluctance to face a meeting between Hartz and her betrothed.

"It is pleasanter outside, Edith," I said.

"Would you not prefer to go in?"

But if the reluctance I conjectured had existed it was already conquered.

"That, I fear, would be rude to your friend," she said, leading on to the parlor with a resolute air, and when we were within, introducing Hartz and Chickson as if both were everyday acquaintances.

Isla, too, was plainly intolerant of her sister's lover, and cast now and then a disgusted, yet searching look upon Edith, when some familiarity from the irrepressible Chickson was allowed to go unrebuked. From all that passed I inferred that Isla was, as yet, in ignorance of this previous engagement, which I thought as strange as all the rest, knowing that in former days the most perfect confidence had existed between these girls. At any rate it would not remain a secret long, I judged, for Mr. Chickson was much too well satisfied with his position to let it go unproclaimed.

With elements so discordant, it may be supposed that we were not a very social party. Isla's vivacity, indeed, redeemed us from absolute dullness. Yet I could see that her light spirit felt itself trammelled, as mine did, by an invisible network of re-

straint. Hartz strove to support Isla's efforts, but not with his usual spirit. Chickson talked at everybody in a jargon peculiar to himself. Edith seemed intent only upon her duties as mistress of a hospitable mansion. A generous lunch was served by her direction—an event of consequence to at least one of the party. The titillation of his palate was certainly a matter of prime importance to Mr. Chickson. When fed, he became quiet for a little while, as is the nature of animals. If Edith knew his propensities and had counted upon freeing herself so, from his impertinences, hers was a signal success. Not long after lunch was over, Isla said to Edith:

"You ought to show Uncle Lem your collection. It may shake his belief in the incapacity of girls."

Edith rose at once, a movement imitated by all but Mr. Chickson. He was stretched at full length upon a sofa, and seemed much too comfortable to be disturbed, I thought. Edith, however, asked him if he would go with us.

"I guess I can trust you with the old man, can't I, uncle Lem?" was his ingenuous and confiding answer.

For Edith's sake, I took no notice of his impertinence, but followed the others up stairs. The collection was ornithological, occupying a cabinet in an upper hall. The display of birds was very fine, and these had all been stuffed by Edith, as Isla assured us, with evident pride in her sister's skill. There was also a goodly sprinkling of bright plumaged foreign birds, procured in exchange from various correspondents. With most of the native specimens, eggs and nest were shown. They were arranged according to their classes, exhibiting a skill and intelligence highly creditable to a girl like Edith.

"I must show you my collection now, Uncle Lem," said Isla. "No, Mr. Hartz, not you. It is only a few butterflies and a caterpillar or two, not at all worth your inspection."

She opened the door of a small room connected with the hall, shut it carefully when we were within, and said with suppressed impetuosity:

"No matter about the caterpillars and that rubbish. What does it mean, Uncle Lem? Did you see him—that boa constrictor, Chickson—put his arms across Edith's chair-back? And once the vampire leaned upon her lap. And she let him! Before Mr. Hartz, too, and you. Has the snake gone crazy, and is she afraid of offending him, or what is it that makes him so outrageously bold?"

"Do you not know? Has she told you nothing?"

"Not a word."

"How long has Mr. Chickson been coming here so familiarly?"

"I have never seen him so insultingly familiar before, but it is about a month since he first began coming here. It was just after Edith came home from Saratoga. I did not go with her to the Springs. The Harleighs were going to their country seat, and wanted me with them, but Edith had promised the Pentons to join their party, and they would not let her off. It was the first time we were ever separated, and it seems as if we are never coming together again as before."

"Had you ever known Chickson at all, previous to the time you speak of?"

"A very little. He was an understrapper of some sort in Mr. Dodson's law office. I believe he claims to have been a partner, but that is too preposterous. We met him once or twice at public receptions, and he pushed his way to an introduction. I don't know, I am sure, but he was never at all troublesome until about a month ago. Before to-day he has not been here for four or five days, and I was beginning to hope that we had got rid of that thorn in the flesh, but it seems that it was only driven in a little deeper."

"Have you talked with Edith about him?"

"I have tried, but she always puts me down with the calm unassailable way she has got lately. So I have given that up.—I believe now that I shall never speak his name to her again, though with my tow-and-fire temperament I can't be sure. I suppose I would be frank and open with her, if she would let me; but there's little comfort in taking a block of marble into one's confidence."

"What if she were intending to marry him?"

Isla stiffened into stateliness, and answered with an offended air:

"What can you think of Edith, Uncle Lem? My sister will marry a gentleman,

at least, or carry her own family name to her tombstone."

Against this spirited declaration I had nothing to oppose, since I did not think it right to divulge what Edith, it seemed, had confided to me alone. We went back to the hall directly, where, behold a tableau! Hartz was clinging to Edith's hand, uttering an impassioned remonstrance, and Mr. Chickson standing upon the stairs, his head from the eyes up, above the upper floor, glaring furiously upon the pair. Edith saw neither him nor us, as she replied, in tones that trembled slightly despite her strong will, to Mr. Hartz's appeal.

"You must allow me, Mr. Hartz," she said, "to be my own judge of what is best and right for me to do. You say 'consider,' as if it were probable that I have not considered. I have, and my mind is fully made up. I expect opposition, and am prepared for it. People will look upon the outside and condemn, forgetting what One has said, 'Judge not.' Forgive me if I cause you pain, and pray leave me."

"Why don't you pitch into him?" came in squeaking angry tones from the stairs.—"Dang it, old girl! why don't you go for him? Look here, now, Mr. Half-a-dozen Hartz, more or less, as the case may be—"

A blue pallor overspread Edith's face, but she moved quickly toward the stairs, and said, in her peculiar tranquilizing tone:

"Mr. Chickson, shall we go down now?—Take care, Mr. Hartz, that gun is loaded." Concluded next week.

## A Dutchman's Letter.

MY FAMILY vast ferry mooch droubles mit him. My son Fritz was taken mit de droubles in dar trout. Ven I hears dat I tells der olt voman vat shall I to? She tells me I vill go for Dr. Vite. I goes. He comes in ter hours un tells ter poy he shall steek out ter tung.—Ven he sees dat, he says isth ferry pat mit te hiproteria defectiony. He give me den apout four quarts of bills, an ses I give him twelve affry five minutes until he git better. But de more bills I gif 'im te worsen he kit so I go fur anuder Doctor. He squees his arm a little vile in te rist, and ses te poy got te digestion of dar lungs ferry pat, unt he can't lif more as an hour; but if I giv 'm fifty tollars he makes him all right. I dells him I don't cares for te money, put hurry up an make im well. He puts dar monish in his ferry fat bocket-pook. Den he give me som powders vat look like sawdust grout up, and says I shall giv im so much as I can, but on der pint of der nife, voice in effry seconds. I pitch in an gif der bowders so fast as I can, but he kits no petter ferry fast, unt I don't know vat I shall to. Den I hears a man vot makes him vell mit some litening in a box. I runs right away an kit him, an he comes in an says vy for you gif der poy der bills an der powders? vast enough to make der well horse seek. I say can I make im vell mit litenin. I says holt on you make im vell like de udder feller for fifty tollor. He says he try first, see vat he do. Ten he dakes some dings in der hants un put der fingers on der poy, an ter pox make some noises like der pees in der schwarm, un der poy, he kit right away unnd says isth tinner reaty, vor I vant to go vishing dist afternoon; and he is smart as I was now. I tell te doctor how mooch I shall pay him. He say tree tollor. I say all right, dat ish koot, ven I half some vokes vat is seek I cum right away for you.

I don't get dimes to rite some more now, and hobe dis fines you de same as I was.

GOETLEB SWINNUMER.

Near the little town of Wormin, in Lethuania, there used to be a lake 8 versta long (3,501 ft) by 5 wide. It was famous for its fish, and was worth, from this source, 1,500 roubles a year. Four or five weeks ago, during a perfect atmospheric calm, the waters of the lake became violently perturbed. Waves rose high in the air and dashed furiously to and fro, while a poignant odor of sulphur pervaded the whole neighborhood. For three days this went on, and by that time the surface of the lake was covered with fish, that had been killed by the sulphur. Fearing a pestilence from the great numbers of dead fish, the inhabitants of the neighboring villages began to collect and cover them with lime. Meanwhile, the lake began to sink, the sulphurous smell increasing daily, and at latest accounts the bed of the lake was almost quite dry.

The theory is that the limestone and chalk bottom of the lake has given way, and that the waters have made their path into subterranean canals.