

# The Bloomfield Times.

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## The Bloomfield Times.

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## Dr. Grafton's Experiment.

A COLD, wintry day (altogether too cold for so early in the season, people sagely said it was) was drawing toward nightfall, and hurrying clouds and sharp, driving winds foretold a still more tempestuous night, when, as Dr. Grafton, having made his round of professional visits, turned into his office entry, he found awaiting him a note containing these words:

"Will Dr. Grafton call upon Mrs. Vaughn, at No. 47—Hotel as soon as convenient, and see a sick person, a stranger in the city."

The handwriting was that of a lady, and the confidence thus reposed in him by a stranger was flattering; and the tired doctor, adding a few more wraps to defend himself from the increasing cold, sallied forth, and turned wearily back upon this new mission.

It was a long walk, for the hotel indicated was at the opposite end of the city and the streets were already white with the first snow of the season.

Reaching the hotel he was shown, at his request, to No. 47, where he was met by an elegant woman of middle age, who received him with ease, and introduced herself as the writer of the note.

"We are traveling, Dr. Grafton," she said, "and my daughter having become alarmingly ill, we have had to make a longer stay here than we intended; and thinking it necessary to call in medical aid, I have been advised to send for you." The doctor bowed silently, and the lady went on:

"My daughter is, I fear, threatened with fever. She is of a nervous temperament, has met with severe family bereavements, and is very excitable; indeed, she had a brain fever some eighteen months ago, and I am sadly apprehensive of a recurrence of it. I have thought it best to tell you this in advance, as you will find her nervous system is very much unstrung. But you can form your own judgment better when you have seen her. Will you follow me, if you please?"

Crossing an intermediate passage, the lady went into the sick-room. The apartment was so dark that at first the doctor could see only that a respectable-looking sick-nurse glided from her post of duty by the invalid's pillow. But Mrs. Vaughn noiselessly approached the window, and drawing back the curtain, let a little light fall upon the bed, disclosing a young and handsome female, who, with wildly up-tossed arms, dishevelled hair, flushed cheeks, and quick, gasping breath, was sleeping the uneasy, broken slumber of fever or delirium.

"Bertha, my child," said the elderly lady, bending tenderly over the sleeper—"Bertha, my daughter!" The sleeper started up with a low moan of pain, and opened her eyes with a wild, frightened gaze upon the doctor.

"This is the doctor, dearest," said Mrs. Vaughn, soothingly. "Don't you know I promised to send for him? This is Dr. Grafton, Bertha."

"Can he do anything for me?" murmured the patient, laying her white hand, as she spoke, upon her brow, from which the loose curls had been carelessly brushed back.

"Is the pain in your head very severe?" asked the doctor soothingly.

"Torturing!" sighed the invalid, briefly.

Dr. Grafton took the seat the mother had reserved toward him, lifted the hand of the patient tenderly from her burning temples, and laid his own cool ones in its place, while he laid the fingers of his other hand lightly

upon her wrist. For a moment she was quiet, as if the steady pressure of his hand upon her brow was mesmeric. Then suddenly springing up, she dashed his hand aside, and fixing her wild eyes upon his face, "Doctor, doctor!" she said, excitedly, "can you help me? Can you give me anything to strengthen me? I must get up! I can not lie here; I have business that must be attended to, and they will not let me go. Can you give me bark, wine, opium, brandy—any thing, any thing to give me strength? I must get up; I must go to the Exhibition. I must—I will!"

"Hush, Bertha darling," said the mother, soothingly; "you shall go as soon as you are able to."

The sick woman snatched herself away from her mother's hands with the quick irritation and fictitious strength of fever.

"You have been telling me that for a week and more," she said, bitterly, "and you will not let me go. Oh! doctor, doctor!"—and she caught the doctor's hands in both her own—"you look good and kind and sensible; will you help me? Oh! if you knew how much depends upon it, you would help me if you could—I am sure you would."

"I think I can help you decidedly," said the doctor, cheerily. "But I always expect my patients to do as I say. If you want me to cure you up quick, you must lie down and take a composing draught that I shall give you, and try to sleep; that's the only way to do, and then you can go out just when you want to."

A look of gratitude and hope passed over the beautiful features of the invalid. "I will do just what you tell me to," she said, as she lay wearily back upon her pillows. "There, mother! See, the doctor says I may go out."

In a few moments the composing draught was mixed and given, a cooling wash to bathe the flushed cheeks and beating temples was prepared, and the medicine for the night, and careful directions to the nurse had been given.

"I shall look in upon you again in the morning," said the doctor, encouragingly; "and if you only mind my directions, I am sure to find you better." And the patient smiled drowsily as she held out her hand to him.

"What do you think of her, doctor?" asked the mother, eagerly, when they had returned to the sitting-room. "Is she—very ill?"

"No, I think not," said the doctor, reflectively. "She is a stranger to me, you know, and of course I can not form a correct judgment of the case as if I knew my patient better. She is, as you say, evidently laboring under strong mental excitement. I should judge that her powers of mind and body had both been overstained to a great degree. If I can reduce this excitement, I do not apprehend much from the feverishness. I think that is probably the result, not the cause of the excitement; but I can form a better opinion in the morning. Keep her very quiet. Do not let her talk if you can help it; but, above all things, do not rouse her by opposition. I have given her a strong opiate, and if she sleeps, as I think she will, I trust to find her much better in the morning;" and shaking hands with the relieved mother, Dr. Grafton bowed himself away.

Night had gathered in with storm and darkness when the doctor emerged into the street again, and, tired and cold and hungry, he decided not to return to his office, but to go directly to his home, which was a well-managed, comfortable bachelor establishment. It was dark and intensely cold; the wind was howling furiously—a fierce northeast wintry wind, that seemed to chill the very marrow to his bones; and he was half blinded by the sharp, cutting sleet, and stifling snow that drifted into his face and eyes, and almost choked his very breath, as, stumbling, plunging, floundering on, he made his slow, uncertain way through the streets.

"Thank Heaven!" he said, as he reached his own home, and panting and breathless, mounted the steps and pulled open with strong hands the outer vestibule door, already obstructed by the fast-gathering burden of drifted snow heaped against it. "I don't think I could have walked half a mile farther without losing my breath."

As, latch-key in hand, he rapidly mounted the inner steps, thankful for even the shelter thus afforded him from the grim night and lashing wind, he saw by the dim, flickering light of the wind-shaken street lamp behind him a dark, shapeless bundle lying upon one of the outer steps, and half unconsciously, in his haste to enter, the doctor gave the bundle a slight push out of

the way with his foot. Good gracious! it moved, it wriggled. It was alive!

"Oh, thunder!" said the astonished doctor; "here's a pretty do! A stray baby left at my door! There, it's come at last! I've been dreading it; I knew it would; I've been expecting it ever since I went to housekeeping. And now what's to be done? What comes next, I wonder? Turn out in all this tempest and hunt up a wet-nurse, for the 'interesting stranger,' I suppose. I'll be hanged if I do. Lord! I'm wet enough to fill the office myself, if that was all (I should say it would be hard to find a dry one to-night). And then? Well, then, come coral and bells, silver mug, and knife, fork, and spoon in prospective, I suppose; agreeable prospect for a snug, single gentleman not yet forty-five certainly! But first let us see who and what it is—be he or she, black or white. Come now, my young friend, own up, what are you?" And as he spoke the doctor stooped down and laid his hand lightly upon the bundle. Only a mass of long, loose, wet hair met his touch.

"Bless my soul! By all that's good, only a dog, after all!" said the doctor, laughing but slightly recoiling, for he did not very much fancy the canine race. And as he spoke, the doctor cautiously poked the intruder slightly with the point of his umbrella.

But instead of the bark or growl, came the unexpected response, "You get out! What you 'bout? Let a fellow alone, can't you?"

The doctor nearly jumped backward down the steps in his astonishment. Then, dextrously grasping the unknown with a firm grip in one hand, he flung open the door with the other, and springing into the entry, closed the door, and dropped his burden upon the entry mat, under the full blaze of the hall gas.

A confused mass of wet rags, of no particular shape or color and involved in them in some strange, inexplicable way, rather than clothed by them, a child—a boy of possibly eight years of age—but such a very mite, so small, so emaciated, so pinched and starved and thin and shrunken, he might have well passed for five or six at the most.

As Dr. Grafton set him down right side up on the mat, the bright gaslight seemed to awaken him at once, and thoroughly. And tossing back his wet hair, and lifting his eyebrows with strange, comic effect, he darted a quick glance at his captor from a pair of bright dark eyes, that seemed preternaturally large and sharp in his little peaked face—a glance of mingled intelligence and bravado; and placing his hand upon his hips, stood watchful, still and silent.

"Well!" said the doctor, waiting for him to speak.

"And well, sir!" retorted the unknown, with a perfect sang-froid.

"What were you doing on my doorstep, sir?" said the doctor. "What business had you to be there, and what the devil are you?" he said, hastily. The boy saw his advantage, and improved it.

"I wouldn't swear governor," he said, with a comic air of grave rebuke. "I wouldn't swear if I was you; it is not gentlemanly."

"I agree with you fully," said Dr. Grafton; "it is not. But tell me if you please, what are you?" said the doctor.

"And, pray, I don't know, sir."

"You don't? Well, that's singular, anyhow. I suppose you've got a name, have you not?"

"You have not told me what yours is yet; and it would be good manners to let you speak first."

"Oh! is that it? Very well, then; mine is Percy Grafton—Dr. Grafton. Did you ever hear it before?"

"No," said the boy, reflectively; "I don't know that I ever did."

"And now yours?"

"Oh! mine has not got any such nice handle to it as yours has; it's Franco."

"Frankie?" said the doctor—"Frankie what?"

"No, sir! not Frankie—Franco," said the boy, gravely.

"Ah, well, much the same; Franco what?"

Again the child hesitated, and then said, timidly, "Franco Sturdevant."

By this time the doctor had thrown off his great coat, many wraps, and overshoes; and, opening the door of the sitting-room, motioned the child to enter.

For a little while there was silence, Dr. Grafton stood leaning his elbow upon the mantle piece, and watching the child, with his unnaturally bright eyes fixed, as in a sort of mute worship, upon the leaping

ruddy blaze; then, as the shivers and the steam grew less and less, the boy looked up.

"What are you going to do to me, sir?" he asked, suddenly.

"Warm you and dry you first, and then give you some supper," said Dr. Grafton.

"You don't say so! That's nice!"

"Are you hungry?"

"Awful!" said the small stranger, significantly laying his little skeleton hand upon a certain concavity, which should have been a convexity. "But it seems too good to be true. Doctor! you—you!" He hesitated.

"Speak out," said the doctor; "What is it?"

"Well, then, you see, all this is very nice, you know; but I hope you do not mean to finish off by making an anatomy of me, such as you gentlemen keep in closets, do you?" And as he spoke he rose to his feet, dropped his hands with his fingers hanging loosely at his side, his head bent forward, let his under-jaw fall, and standing with loose-jointed, and knock-kneed limbs and expressionless face, with quick, effective, inimitable art, he represented a prepared skeleton.

"Lord bless you, child, no!" replied he laughing. "You are only too much like that already."

"All right," said the little mimic; springing into life and action in a moment.

"You will excuse me, sir; only I thought I would just give you a hint that that sort of thing would not be agreeable to me. And now when is that supper you were talking about likely to come off?"

"At once," said the doctor, ringing the bell as he spoke. "Tell Mrs. Jones," he said, "to send up supper for two as quickly as she can; and tell her not to spare for plenty of hot toast, bread and butter and cold meat."

"And pickles?" suggested the stranger in modest tones.

"And pickles," repeated the amused host. "Is there anything else you would like to suggest?"

"Something hot to drink would be nice; don't you think so?"

"To drink—of what sort?" apprehensively questioned the doctor, rather "taken aback" by the last proposition.

"Oh, tea—or coffee—or shells—which ever you like. I am not particular, if it is only hot," said the child, calmly, but still shivering from head to foot.

"Oh, yes; plenty of tea, of course," said the doctor, much relieved; and the servant withdrew.

"That's bully!" said the boy, drawing nearer to the fire again.

The doctor opened the door to an adjoining closet, and came back with a large, thick, tweed shawl and a woollen scarf. "Suppose," he said, "you take off the wettest of your clothes, and wrap yourself up in these."

The boy obeyed instantly. But as he drew off his miserable rags piecemeal the doctor looked and shuddered at his extreme emaciation. The hollow chest; the hatchet-like shoulder-blades; the ghastly protruding ribs and collar-bones; the skeleton arms, scarce larger than those of a new-born child, but with the joints standing out in knotty projection. Only in the dissecting room—never on any living subject—had his professional eyes rested upon such limbs before.

In a few moments the supper was sent up, and the strangely assorted pair sat down to it together. The doctor helped the guest at once and bountifully, fully expecting to see him fall upon his food like some ravenous beast of prey; but, to his astonishment the boy, though evidently famished, ate with avidity, but with perfect propriety, recognizing all the little conventionalities of the table, and eating with evident relish, but without greediness or rude haste.

"When did you dine, my boy?" asked the doctor, as the child drew back his plate, declining any further supplies.

"I had a handful of peanuts at noon," said the boy, quietly.

"And what else?"

"Nothing else to-day, sir."

"Good Heavens! Is it possible?" said the doctor. "A handful of peanuts on such a day as this?"

The boy smiled, lifted his thin shoulders in a quiet, expressive shrug, but said nothing.

"Now tell me, child," said Dr. Grafton, as they left the table and returned to the fire, the doctor lighting his cigar to dispel the not over agreeable steam from the boys wet clothing—"Oh, by the way, you don't mind a cigar, do you?"

"Not in the least," said the boy, gravely. "I never smoke myself, but I rather like it than otherwise." And again came that strange, quick contortion of lip and brow, which had already caught the observant eye of the doctor.

"I have certainly seen that look before, but where?" questioned the doctor, mentally. "I am sure I have seen it. I can not fix it, but I know he looks like some one I have seen before; but when and where, I am sure I can not tell; the likeness evades as much as it puzzles me."

"Now, then, my young man," he began again, when he had seated himself in his own especial fireside chair, and his cigar was drawing just as it should do, while his diminutive guest sat perched upon another chair, dangling his purple drumsticks of legs, and holding out his little red feet to the genial warmth—"now, then, I want to know something about you; and, in the first place, what were you going to do in my vestibule? Tell me the truth."

"Sleep there," said the boy, quietly. "That was all."

"Sleep there? What! all night, do you mean?—on those stone steps this bitter night! Why child you might have frozen to death before morning."

"Oh, no, I guess not," answered the boy, calmly; there was a mat under me, and it seemed real cozy. I did not feel so very cold."

"But why in the world did you not go home?"

The child looked wonderingly at him for a moment, as if doubtful he had heard the question rightly; then lifting his facile brows with a quick grimace, answered gravely, "I did not know the way, sir."

"Then why did you not ask a policeman to take you home?" questioned the gentleman.

"Policeman are not overfond of boys, as a general thing; and, besides," he said, with another strange facial contortion, "I couldn't give him my address; I hadn't my cards about me."

"Do you mean that you had no home to go to?"

"Something considerably like it, sir."

"And where do you sleep generally?"

"Where I can, sir; out of doors in summer, but the nights are getting rather chilly now." Another grimace and shrug of the shoulders.

"Tell me how you live. Have you no father?"

"No," said the boy; "entirely out of that article; never had any on hand that I know of."

"No mother either?"

The little fellow's bright dark eyes were suddenly filled with tears, and his mocking voice choked and grew tender, as he faltered out, "I do not know, sir."

"You do not know?" questioned the doctor, sternly.

"No, sir; I don't know, indeed. I never had a father, but I did have a mother and a home once; but I have lost them both!"

"Lost them; in what way? Tell me."

"But I can't tell you, sir, for I do not know it myself. I only know that I did have them once, but I have got nothing now."

"That is very strange, certainly," said the doctor. "Tell me about your mother, then. What was she like?"

"Oh, mamma? she was quality!" said the boy, drawing himself up proudly. "I did not know it then, but I know it now."

"And how do you know it?"

"Oh, because I see such woman get out of the carriage at Stewart's door every day, and the boys say they are quality folks;" and as he spoke the boy slipped from his chair, drew the thick shawl around him with one hand, and gathering up its long, trailing folds gracefully behind him with the other, with head erect, and dignified but gliding steps, he crossed the room in life-like imitation of the air and manner of a well-dressed, stylish woman, who "carried herself delicately," as did Queen Esther. "But mamma never comes to Stewart's," he said, sadly, as he returned to his seat with drooping head and tearful eyes; "I have watched for her there for hours and hours, but—she never comes."

"Poor little fellow!" said the kindly doctor, touched by the real pathos of the child's look and voice. "Tell me all you can remember about your mother and your home, and possibly I may help you to find them."

"Yes, sir; there was mamma and grandma, and old Ponto, and the rocking-horse, and I; there was not anybody else that I remember, but the servants."

"Yes, but how came you to leave them?"

[CONCLUDED ON SECOND PAGE.]