

# The Bloomfield Times.

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## The Bloomfield Times.

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## OUR STRATAGEM.

BY FLORENCE V. ROGERS.

MISS AMANDA MELBOURNE was forty—or professed to be. With a lady, veracity on that point is generally good; so we will chronicle as four times ten. Forty summers had left a wonderful bloom on her cheek—or else it was a rabbit's paw lightly touched to a mysterious pink powder, in an oval box with lid all covered with gilt and French words, and conveyed therefrom to the sallow cheek of the youthful Miss Amanda. Her teeth looked splendidly. She said it was natural to the family; her father's teeth were all sound when he died at the advanced age of seventy. So most of the people envied that natural beauty of her family—a set of splendid teeth, but I learned she paid money for them; and that they reposed in a tumbler of cold water every night, on a table near the bed. She was very precautionary to place the stand near the bed, in case of fire I suppose, for I verily believe she would have perished in the flames rather than let the world know that her strong, sound teeth decayed, and dropped out in a single night.

And then those tresses! black, glossy and heavy. She sported a waterfall, too, Miss Amada did, voluminous as any girl at seventeen; but the waterfall with its banded net, decked the aforesaid stand, each night also, and a front piece coiled itself around the aforesaid tumbler.

There was another article that mingled with the group of "make ups," on that stand, in fact there was a pair of them.

I will tell you how I learned the above. One morning I had risen early and stepped from my window to the roof of the piazza, and went around to her sleeping room window. It was very warm weather and Miss Amanda had been so indiscreet as to leave her window open and curtain up. So I opened the blinds to bid her good morning, and O horror! there lay an old lady, white headed, toothless, checkless, I might almost say, for there were two deep holes where her cheeks usually were. The sun shone full upon her shallow face and kissed her white eyebrows, and I hastily closed the blinds for fear of waking her, and hurried back to my apartments. The array of the stand had not escaped my notice, and had I not seen them, I should have been in great doubt whether that great-grandmother looking woman was Miss Melbourne, forty, or some ancient, dilapidated relation of whose arrival I had not yet learned. But I knew the teeth, graduated beads on that net, etc., but what in the name of art was that pair of things beside them.

Curiosity was strong at eighteen, so I took off my slippers I glided around to the window again and peeped through the blinds. Miss Melbourne was sitting on the edge of the bed, trying to shake off "death's counterfeit" by rubbing her eyes and giving musical little yawns—occasionally varying the performance by stroking her shoulder, as if coaxing off the rheumatism.

At this juncture my handkerchief had almost disappeared in my mouth, and both hands were clapped to my sides, to prevent explosion which might give warning to the enemy that I was in ambush; for I was bound to discover where that pair of pearl-shaped gutta-percha articles went, on Miss Melbourne.

While waiting for that denouncement, I beheld what surprised me still more. As I live, Miss Melbourne reached down and brought from under the bed an artificial leg; I always noticed a fault about her walk, but I thought it was an attempt at the "Grecian wiggle," so fashionable now—a days.

At this juncture I was abating visibly, and the handkerchief performed but half duty, for he was audible several times. Just then appeared my dear Frank in the garden below, and commenced pelting me with gravel stone. Saucy fellow to take advantage of my powerless position.

"Good morning," he shouted; but I only shook my head at him and placed my fingers upon my lips.

"What are you doing at the window? where are your slippers?" were the questions that followed when I enjoined silence.

Turning around to give him a frown, and show my displeasure in the most efficient and silent manner, I beheld him clambering up the trellis saying—

"If there's anything special to see, I'll see it."

"Now, Frank," I whispered, "if you don't get down immediately, I'll cut your fingers and clip your moustache. And as he was still rebellious, I suited the action to the word and drew blood on that dear hand, and clipped of the turning up hairs of the extremity of his moustache.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, as he wiped the wounded hand on my span clean white wrapper.

With that I gave him a gentle push which considerably accelerated his downward movement.

Once safe on the ground he looked up, his face filled with alarm.

"What ails you Kate? gone crazy? looking in people's windows, slashing off without mercy, a fellow's whiskers, and chopping up his hands! what in time is up?"

"Now Frank," I whispered, "go away, be a good boy. I am making a discovery I will tell you all about it bye and bye," and back, I tripped to the blinds.

Miss Amanda was now adding the finishing touch to her head gear, and my heart sank for fear those mysterious articles had done their duty. No, there they were, on the bureau, and Miss Amanda took them both up and slipped them into her mouth—one each side! Then I beheld a sudden plumpness in her face and the mystery was out; and I left just as the rabbit's paw descended to the oval box.

"Humph!" I ejaculated, as I entered my own window, "she stretches her cheeks over them, to paint them easily, just as an artist stretches his canvas in a frame."

But what a predicament I was in! My wrapper must be changed. My hair all in disorder where little slivers in the blinds had caught it; my pet handkerchief, with its red stripe and fluted border, very much resembled a dishcloth; but it was worth it—the discovery I had made was of inestimable value to me.

Frank was my love and a dear good one. My uncle Henry was Miss Melbourne's lover. This was my uncle's house, and Miss Melbourne was on a visit. Uncle Henry had met her at some watering place, and she had captivated his bachelor heart, and though he was fifty-five years old he appeared as foolish over her as Frank did over me.

She was very rich, and I sometimes thought her estate on the banks of the Hudson, where he had visited her several times, weighed something in the balance, with uncle's love; but if so, he didn't betray. They were soon to be married, and she had shown considerable authority in the house whose mistress I had been so long, and moreover, had turned up her nose a little higher than nature made it to turn at my Frank.

"A graceless scamp," I heard her say, one evening, to Uncle Henry, "is that boy who visits Kate?" Explanation: Frank covered her poodle with burs, and Miss Melbourne's maid was two days extracting them from her fleecy covering—and she knew the culprit. "Yes," she continued, "a graceless scamp, and Harry dear, (my dignified uncle "Harry, dear") if he is to become a member of your family, I think I shall go back to Maple Hall (her home), and resign my sweet hope."

A short argument here ensued, but uncle got the best of it. Seeing which way the wind blew she finally sided around, and concluded to look over Frank's misdemeanors, with the final burst of—

"I always did hate a West Point popinjay! there were several at Saratoga last summer; but I'll never leave one cent of property to her if she marries him. I haven't a relation in the world, but I'll found a hospital before he shall squander my money after I'm gone."

A flood of tears would have followed if she had not been afraid of the paint; as it was she carried her handkerchief to her eyes, and gave a couple of hysterical sobs that would have done justice to a first-class actress on the stage.

Hereupon my Uncle Henry stroked the wig—I wish it had dropped off—and said,—

"I'll see about it."

So we were enemies, she and I, from that moment. If I could get her out of the house and uncle disenchanted.

That evening I unfolded our prospects to Frank, and we knew, in words, many a military plan to rout the enemy, and gain our old ground with uncle, for he certainly

showed signs of going over with the old maid, in opinion. And he even called my dear Frank, Mr. Thornton, on several occasions.

Now if there was anything my uncle decried it was deception.

"Don't!" he exclaimed, once to me, when he caught me crimping my hair. "You can't add to the beauty of those heavy black braids by those frivolous crimps stuck upon your head. Be natural, girl."

And he was going to marry a woman so natural! what could he do, the first morn of the honeymoon, to find Miss Melbourne so transformed: bald-headed, one-legged, bleached eye-winkers, and without those—the—the—that pair of things!

So I thought, as I donned a fresh dress smoothed my hair, and opened my drawer for a clean handkerchief. Then I went down stairs.

There was no one about, save the servant letting the sunlight into the drawing room and dusting the furniture; so I stepped out to find Frank, and disclose.

I caught the glitter of brass buttons through the shrubbery, and ran round a turn in the walk to meet him.

"O Frank!" I began, but suddenly stopped, for that was not my Frank.

"Beg pardon," he said; bowing low, "but is Mr. Thornton in?"

Then he grabbed me, and kissed me.

I was on the point of screaming for Frank, Uncle Harry Miss Melbourne, and the whole household, as visions of murder abduction, etc., flitted through my brain, when Frank's old musical laugh rang out, and he exclaimed,—

"How do you like a kiss without a moustache?"

"Mercy!" I exclaimed, "are you really Frank Thornton? Such a homely man, my dear Frank? Oh, dear! how you look without a moustache; I've invited my cousin Madeline from New York, to visit us, and she will see you, and I've told her how much you look like Louis Napoleon! Oh, dear, what made you do it?"

"I only cut off half," he smilingly answered—it was a real sweet smile he had; I had never seen the whole of it before—"this side," and he pointed to the left side of his upper lip. "You cut the other yourself. Do you suppose that I was going about one-sided?"

"Now I got used to it, and I stopped to take a criticizing view. 'I don't mind it so much; but let it grow as soon as possible, for it was your moustache I fell in love with.'"

He knew I liked it, and cut it off to plague me I know; for I shall always declare I only clipped the ends; why didn't he trim the other side to match?"

"Never mind, now; I've got something to tell you," I said, as I sat down on the grass.

Frank sat down opposite, and commenced to rock to and fro putting out his tongue, and exclaiming, "and-er, and-er," in the imitation of the way young ladies tell a confidential story to each other.

"Well, you tell the story," I said.

"Dear Kate, I am all attention," and he leaned back nonchalantly; and stroked his—upper lip!

"Bless me, Kate!" he exclaimed, "I wish that I had a moustache; I shan't know what to do with my hands."

"Well, Miss Melbourne is not Miss Melbourne," I said.

"Who in the deuce is she then? Mrs. Henry Wayland?" And Frank started up in alarm.

"No, nor ever will be," I answered, and Frank fell back on his elbow. "She is an old woman of sixty, and she paints—"

"I always knew that," he interrupted.—"I asked her to smell the new, delicious perfume on my handkerchief, and pressing it against her cheek, to see what was what."

"No wonder, she hates you, you saucy fellow, and," I resumed, "she wears false teeth, upper and lower set, and—"

"I know that too," he interrupted.—The upper set dropped down the other day, at the table, and clicked on her tea cup while drinking."

"And I again commenced, "she wears false hair—"

"I knew that too," he exclaimed. That sort of Bandalette she wears got moved a little, and the wig slipped, and I saw a patch of shaved head here; and he pointed to that portion of his head where the parting, commenced.

"And," I said, holding my patience, for a woman always gets vexed, when she finds out that she cannot astonish in such an instance, "she wears two things in her mouth!"

I paused to witness the effect of such an announcement.

"Plumpers, by Jove!" and Frank rolled over on the grass, and roared.

"Well, if you know so much about Miss Melbourne, you may tell the rest," I exclaimed thoroughly vexed.

"Dear Kate, go on. False hair, teeth, paint and whitewash, I knew she had; but the plumpers; and he burst into another roar until I warned him to be careful, and not burst off any of those brass buttons.

"I was entirely ignorant of the plumpers, and any thing further," he answered soberly.

"Well, I said rising, "I shall not tell you the rest."

Then I just walked off into the house, and Frank, rather crest-fallen, came after. Breakfast was ready, and Uncle Wayland had already escorted Miss Melbourne to the breakfast room. A crisp good morning was all he deigned Frank and I.

Miss Melbourne could afford to smile a little, as uncle was gradually being won over to her side, so she looked over her shoulder as she passed through the door and said,—

"A beautiful morning, Mr. Thornton."

"But not more lovely than yourself, Miss Melbourne," he answered, gallantly bowing low to keep from laughing, for I pinched his elbow, and asked him if he knew how much the plumpers were a set.

A compliment told on Miss Melbourne, it almost counter-balanced the poodle burs, etc., and when he invited her and uncle to join us in a sail that afternoon, she exclaimed, that she should be very happy.

During breakfast I could not keep my eyes from her, wondering how she engineered all those things. Bless me! how could I eat toast, talk and laugh, at the same time, with thirty-two bought teeth, and those other things; all to be kept straight! I think I should sit still and decline food on the plea of sickness, and try the power of suction to its uttermost. She began to look like a woman of genius to me.

As we arose from the table I saw by various signs such as pointing your thumb over your shoulder, and jerking your head in a certain direction, that Frank wanted me to step out into the garden again instead of joining Miss Melbourne, as I usually did for an hour or so every morning.

"Now," said Frank, as we stooped down ostensibly to examine a certain flower within the border, for Uncle Henry and Miss Melbourne came out immediately behind us, the morning was so tempting.

"I've got a splendid plan, and we'll make it work to a charm."

Then he hurriedly told me the part I was to perform. I clapped my hands and exclaimed,—

"Good! good!"

"What is it that pleases you so, Miss Kate?" simpered Miss Melbourne, as she swept by on uncle's arm.

"Oh, nothing," I answered, "only Frank says you look younger than I do; and I know I am twenty-two years your junior."

Frank, sotto voce,

"If not fifty."

Miss Melbourne smiled sweetly on Frank, but uncle frowned. He knew Frank thought anything but that, and did not relish the "goak."

But the plan! let it unfold itself.

We had dined; and I was in my chamber preparing for the sail.

I should have worn my pretty laced boots and made Frank carry me over the wet places, usually, but now I put on my rubber ones. I should have worn my gipsy hat with its vine of green leaves, usually, but now I wore last summer's ancient affair, and took off my empire head dress, rings and watch, for I had a part to perform that afternoon.

I met Miss Melbourne in the drawing-room, radiant with fresh paint, a rich Indian shawl wrapped about her. My conscience smote me.

"Why do you wear that shawl madam?" I asked. "You may soil it."

Frank got behind her and shook his head disapprovingly at me.

"She is rich enough to get another," he whispered, as Miss Melbourne took a parting survey at herself before the mirror; "and if you say anything more like that you will explode the whole concern."

"You don't look near as pretty in that hat," said Miss Melbourne to me, drawing on her lavender kids.

"I don't care," I replied, "if Frank don't, I was afraid if we lingered till night-fall the dampness might take the stiffness out of the other."

So we crossed the fields and came in sight of the river. Miss Melbourne and Uncle Wayland were ahead and we out-trips brought up the rear several paces behind.

"Kate," said Frank, "you can sit with the most innocent look of any one I ever saw. See Miss Melbourne's silk and that pattern hat. How is your courage now?"

"My courage is all right, but it is kind of too bad isn't it?" and I looked rather waveringly up in his face.

"Now Kate," said he gravely, "we've planned and we must execute. We both hate her; she hates us. If we can hurry her back to Maple Hill let's do it. Once place her in a ridiculous light before Mr. Wayland, and his love will go down to zero, if not lower.

"Well," I assented, "go ahead, I will be prepared."

We were now at the boat. Miss Melbourne was handed in and seated, and I sat down demurely by her side. Frank and uncle used all their strength to push off, and soon we glided down the stream, and sailed till the pile of clouds in the west were crimson tinted by the setting sun.

Miss Melbourne hinted at return, as already the early dew began to tell on her bonnet strings, so we turned about.

We were then within a half-mile of landing. The wind seemed suddenly to get fresh and flap our sail, which was propitious for our plan.

Nearer and nearer we came to the shore, and I knew that the moment was fast approaching by the stern look that settled on Frank's face. Another flaw of wind, a mismanagement of the sail known only to Frank, and over went the boat.

A scream from Miss Melbourne, and she was splashing in the water. I was an expert swimmer, and grasped Miss Melbourne about her waist with one hand while Frank righted the boat and clambered in. Uncle came up on Miss Melbourne's other side. His sole anxiety was for her, knowing I was a perfect duck in the water.

Frank grabbed Miss Melbourne first by her waterfall, but alas! her one hundred and ten avoirdupois could not be held by a dozen hairpins; but there Frank stood in the boat, with a waterfall in his hand, minus a head. Quick as thought he threw it overboard, and grabbed Miss Melbourne's front hair. Alas! off that came, and Frank, standing in the boat, looked like an Indian chief fresh from a scalping expedition; and Miss Melbourne, looking like anything but a watersprite, threw her head back on the bosom of uncle's white coat which was already pink with the fastly disappearing bloom of Miss Melbourne's cheeks, and fainted.

Her mouth opened, and Frank, in his frantic endeavors to save her, somehow or the other got his fingers into her mouth, and extracted both sets of her teeth, and Miss Melbourne, incapable of longer suction, let the plumpers roll out upon Uncle Wayland's breast.

I guess the spark of uncle's love went out with the plumpers, for he smiled and said:

"Frank, if you can find a place that will hold, pull her in."

"Better let her drop," ventured the saucy Frank, pausing a moment as if for consent, and then he took her in his arms and laid her at the bottom of the boat.

Uncle and I were in a jiffy with the helping hand of Frank. There lay Miss Melbourne, shorn of all her glory, and I was just thinking I would tell uncle about the other artificial article when Frank exclaimed:

"For heaven's sake what is that?"

"There was Miss Melbourne's artificial leg lying two feet away from her, on the bottom of the boat and under uncle's feet. In the rush it had become unfastened.

"Good Heaven's!" exclaimed uncle, "will this woman come all to pieces before we can get her home?"

"I'll run home and bring down a bushel basket to convey her in," said the cruel Frank. "I guess there is about two pecks of her when we come to gather up the fragments."

We landed before Miss Melbourne came to herself. Uncle had gone for the carriage. I guess he did not care to be present when she revived. She partially opened her eyes and said:

"Where am I?"

"Calm yourself, my dear madam," said Frank, soothingly. "A part of you is here a part drowned, and more—"

But she heard no more, for clapping her hands on her head, and gushing her gums, she collapsed again.

Uncle came back in a few moments and we entered our carriage, and were driven rapidly homeward.

She revived, coming up the avenue, but "shanty her phelinks," as uncle lifted her to the house, to see Frank, coming along with the leg on his shoulder and saying:

"I am sorry, my dear madam, this accident occurred. That flaw of wind took me unawares. But, thank Heaven, you are safe."

It is needless to add that Miss Melbourne departed as soon as recuperated energies came, and refused to see uncle at all, of which he was heartily glad; and I don't think he has scarcely looked at a woman since.

A few days after, Frank came in and threw something on my lap. I took it up thinking it was a pretty shell, and lo! it was a glass eye.

"Where did this come from?" I exclaimed, dropping it.

"Why, I was bailing out the boat, and found that in the bottom, I guess she feigned fainting to hide the hole, this fitted," said he, placing it among the shells on the whatnot.

"As a work of art I admire that woman," he said, after a pause, "but as one of nature's beauties I admire my Kate." And he dropped on his knees at my side.

Christmas came and a wedding. We would have been married before, but I waited for a husband with a moustache. It had got back to its old proportion, and I had the felicity of hearing Cousin Madeline say:

"Oh, isn't he handsome?"