

# The Bloomfield Times

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## The Bloomfield Times.

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## THE UNFAITHFUL GUARDIAN.

CONCLUDED.

**H**USH, Nellie, you make me tremble; you are too young, too innocent to fathom treachery like his. He has caused my ruin, I have no proof, but I feel it!

"Why, why?"

"He hates me—long ago he swore to be avenged, because, because—oh, Nellie, I cannot tell you! I know that he has done it all—my husband's death—my own wretchedness! Come with me, Nellie, I cannot breathe in this house—he may return and I shall lose you forever."

"Be calm, Catharine, there is no danger."

"Oh, I tremble, I tremble!"

She clutched the table with such force that the casket fell upon the floor with a dull heavy sound, which made both shudder with fright.

"It is only that casket," said Nellie, after an instant, "the papers have fallen out."

She stooped and picked up the roll of manuscript. As she did so the leaves fell apart, and one fluttered to Catharine's feet. She took it up—her eye fell upon the hurriedly written lines.

"This writing," she gasped, "this writing—what is it?—whose, Nellie?"

"I don't know, I found it here!"

Catharine grasped the sheets, turned them over hastily, yet closely scanning each page, while Nellie stood frightened at the whiteness of her face.

"At last!" she murmured, "at last!"

She fell back in a chair—her eyes closed, the manuscript dropped from her hand and slid slowly to the floor.

When Robert Morris entered the room alarmed at his companion's long delay, he found Catharine still insensible, and Nellie leaning over her with passionate tears and words of wild endearment.

It was many moments, in spite of their united efforts, before Catharine recovered from that heavy swoon. She opened her eyes with a start, muttering some incoherent words like one suddenly awakened from a deep slumber.

"Sister, sister!" exclaimed Nellie, "what has happened to you—is it a new sorrow?"

Catharine's eyes fell upon the manuscript at her feet—she snatched it with a faint cry, repeating quickly,

"It is joy, joy—I am—I am—oh, I told you how innocent I was—thank God—thank God!"

"Speak, what is it?" urged Nellie and Robert, in the same breath, "do speak, Catharine."

"Hush—look—the letters—this manuscript—the words are the same—William's writing, and he, William, recognized the letters!"

Nellie looked at her in bewildered astonishment, but Robert seized the letters which she drew from her dress, and began comparing them with the pages of the manuscript to which she pointed. Catharine was shaking with a nervous tremor, unable to speak, but he understood the agonized appeal in her eyes.

"It is no deception, Catharine—you are saved! I understand it all—look here, this is an old story of William's left unfinished—that man has stolen it and copied the letters! Look look! Where was it found?"

"In that casket," answered Nellie; "I found it. What is it, Robert?—what is it?"

"The proofs, the proofs!" gasped Catharine. "Don't you hear, Nellie, I have them—I am righted at last!"

She strained Nellie to her in a long embrace, wetting her face with her tears, but very quiet in the deep thankfulness of her soul. They allowed her to weep until she could once more look up, when a second joy broke through the grief which had so long obscured the brightness of her face.

"Tell me all," repeated Nellie, "I am so bewildered."

"I told you of those letters the other day—they ruined Catharine—but she has now the proof of her innocence. Here is the original of those letters, and Sears can swear to his own writing."

"And that wretch preserved the manuscript!" ejaculated Robert; "it is strange that a villain almost always overreaches himself."

"Mr. James—my guardian—did he do that? Oh, I hope not—don't believe it, Catharine—let him go—for my sake—I loyed him so well!"

"I ask no more, Nellie, I am content."

"The scoundrel, the black-hearted scoundrel!" cried Robert. "He ought to be torn limb from limb!"

"No, Robert, no," pleaded Nellie, "he was kind to me—so very kind."

"Kind! You say that of a man who has blighted your whole life, destroyed your happiness forever!"

Those passionate words brought back the reality to every heart! A name rose simultaneously to their lips—"William! William!"

Nellie hid her face on Catharine's bosom, while Robert flung himself into a chair in a sudden paroxysm of grief and rage. Catharine raised the bowed head—extended her hand to the anguish-stricken William!

"Bear up, my children—this is sinful! God may at any moment set you free—you would repent this weakness then."

They stood up, sobered and awed; that pallid face rose before Robert's, and he bent his head in penitential silence.

"I must go to William," said Catharine, "I have left him too long—come with me, both—come!"

"But there is something yet to be done," urged Robert; "my grandfather must be summoned—it is his decision, Catharine, which must restore you to your rights."

"And they will disgrace Mr. James? Oh, Catharine, my sister, have mercy!"

"Hush, Nellie, could you think me so vindictive? The story of my shame was kept secret—"

"But against his will," broke in Robert.

"No matter—his treachery and guilt shall never be revealed—I promise it, Nellie."

"Bless you, bless you!"

"We must go," urged Robert, "Nellie, you are quite able to make a short journey—get ready while I order a carriage; you and Mrs. Lennox can start in the first train, and I will follow with my old grandfather as soon as possible."

"Oh, Nellie, is it real?" and Catharine turned again to assure herself by the clasp of those loving arms that it was no delusion. "It is indeed you—my darling is given back to me."

"Catharine—sister! Bear with me—teach me to grow like you—so grand, so resigned."

"I like you to praise me, Nellie, it is very sweet, and the strangest thing is that it seems so familiar—I cannot realize that all this dark past has been."

Robert aroused them again, for it was growing late, and they had no time to lose.

"These papers—they are safest with you, Mrs. Lennox; as for the casket, I will put it back in its place. Here is another paper," he continued, lifting up the casket, "perhaps this belongs to you also."

He opened the paper, and they saw a shadow steal over his face as he read.

"Look at this, Mrs. Lennox—poor William!"

She looked over his shoulder at the lines—it was a certificate of marriage between William James and Lucy Sears; upon the back of the paper were some lines in James' own hand, giving the name and the birth of the child William Sears.

Catharine took the document reverently. "It will be a consolation to him," she said, in a low tone, "there has been a doubt upon his soul always, and he had no courage to question that man."

There was sin somewhere—an added crime to the catalogue which darkened the soul of their foe—but the mother was innocent, a wedded wife. Doubtless the certificate had been concealed, and she had gone down to her grave unable to leave a record of her marriage to the child she left behind.

Robert put the casket away, and closed the doors of the old cabinet which had so long been the depository of that fatal secret.

"I will go now," he said, "be ready to start when I return."

He left the sisters together, and they stole up to Nellie's chamber. Catharine's hands prepared her for the journey, her

task often interrupted by a mute caress or some broken exclamation.

They soon heard Robert's voice in the hall, and hastened down to meet him.

"All right," he said, more cheerfully, "grandfather will be at the station, we can go on together."

Nellie opened the door to pass out, but started back with a faint exclamation, grasping at Catharine's dress as if for protection. Robert Morris sprang forward with a muttered curse, but Catharine pushed him gently back and moved to the door, where, mute with astonishment and wrath, stood William James.

He looked from one to another, and for a moment neither spoke.

"What is this?" he exclaimed, at length. "Nellie, what is this woman doing here?"

"Let us pass," Catharine said, with her quiet majesty, "there need be no communication between us."

"How dare you come here, woman?" he returned, in a low, hissing tone. "Nellie, let that creature this instant, and, madam, quit this house, or I will have you flung into the street, where such as you belong."

The words had hardly left his lips before Robert Morris seized him in his athletic grasp, shaking him violently with a silent rage that was terrible to witness in one so fair and honest-hearted.

"Robert, Robert!" shrieked Nellie. "Don't, don't, for my sake, don't!"

Mr. James had been so overpowered by the sudden attack, that he had been unable to free himself, and at Nellie's cry the young man dashed him back with such force, that he staggered against the opposite wall of the window. Catharine moved between them, with the same lofty calmness, saying only,

"This is needless, Mr. James, let us pass."

"Go, but this boy shall rue his act! Stop, Nellie, I command you not to stir a step! You thought to steal her away, did you, woman, but I have thwarted you again!"

"You are powerless now," Catharine replied, "my sister goes with me."

"She shall not stir! I am her guardian, she cannot leave my house."

"Even there you have no right, she is William Sears' wife!"

He glared at her in impotent rage, working his hands nervously as if he would have torn her like a wild animal.

"We shall see, we shall see! I will sue for a divorce, and she shall swear that she found you in her husband's room, his head upon your shoulder!"

Robert sprang forward again, but Catharine checked him as before.

"This is idle, Mr. James—everything is discovered—you have lost all power."

"Discovered!" he repeated, "what do you mean?—have you—"

"Yes," interrupted Robert, furiously, "we have found the manuscript—ah, ha, you are pale now!"

The wretched man shrunk back, his features so convulsed with rage that Nellie shrank away in horror.

Robert aroused them again, for it was growing late, and they had no time to lose.

Catharine motioned Nellie and Robert to go on, they obeyed in silence, the girl not once turning her head—there was no anger in her heart, but she could not look again upon the man whom she had so revered and trusted. But his iron will would not yield even then, he took a pace forward as if he would have wrench her from the young man's side.

"Come back!" he shouted; "you shall not go—you dare not!"

But she only hurried on to escape the sound of his voice, there was something in it which filled her with a dread far beyond any emotion of passion or terror.

"Mr. James, you can do nothing," Catharine said, "she leaves you forever."

He stampeded upon the floor, clutching the ruffles at his wrist, until the delicate cambric was torn to shreds, but he could not articulate a syllable.

"I know all—the proofs of your guilt are already in safe keeping. I have no wish to harm you, but go away, leave this land forever!"

The spiced foam flew from his lips, and his breast heaved with the wrath which could find no expression.

"Your name will be spared, for your son's sake—"

"Curse him!" he exclaimed, uttering the words with a great effort; "curse him forever and ever!"

When the sound of the departing wheels aroused Mr. James to the consciousness that they had really gone, he rushed into his library to pass the first hours of retribution far from any human eye.

He dashed open the doors of the cabinet—for the full fury of his madness was upon him still—wrenched asunder the lid of the casket—it was empty! He tramped it beneath his feet, giving way to a paroxysm of rage which was worse than insanity.

There was no use to struggle—all was over—his own imprudence had thwarted his ends. There was no remorse, no sorrow—he only gnashed his teeth at the thought of his own impotence to carry out his designs.

He must leave America—there was no relenting when he remembered that injured son—he howled forth his curse, and would have followed him into eternity to echo his designs.

But he went away—it is fallacy to think

that such records must always end in the death of a man like him—to live was the most terrible retribution that could have been visited upon him, and he did live, lived on to an old age of wretchedness and vice, ruined and deserted even by the powerful will which had borne him on so long.

### CHAPTER XIII.

William Sears was lying upon a low couch in his chamber, weakened by the change which had come over him within a few hours. A table had been drawn to his side, and upon it lay a mass of papers which he had insisted upon Janet's placing within his reach. He had been lying there for a long time in the solitude of that room, where during the past weeks his life had been going so tranquilly and so slowly out. He raised himself at length, struggling with his weakness and took up the manuscript. It was the last effort of his genius—the tragedy which had lain so long unfinished. As he read, the color came back to his cheek, and the old excitability broke through the feverish brightness of his eyes.

He seized the pen and began to write, at first painfully and with a great effort, but after a time an unnatural strength supported him to give voice, for the last time, to the wild thoughts which thrilled his soul with their strong utterance. Never during all those years in which his passionate poems had been going over the world, and filling it with the magic of his name, had he written with the burning eloquence which inspired him then.

Another hour, and the beautiful work would have stood out in its perfect completeness, but his strength began to fail, the lamp which had blazed up with such brilliancy flickered again, and this time there was no power to kindle it anew. The pen dropped from his nerveless fingers, and he sank upon his pillows murmuring still fragments of the glorious vision which was upon him. He tried to rouse himself, but in vain, then all his waning energies became absorbed in one mad thought—Catharine, would she never come? He should die there alone—she would return and find only his motionless form. A chill seemed to pass over his body, and he pressed his hand against it as if to keep life in the sluggish pulses and warm them into new vitality.

He would have called for Janet, but his voice had left him, and he felt himself sinking into the lethargy from which he should never waken.

It was wonderful to see the action of his strong will—he struggled up, clutching at the table for support, while the cold dew gathered over his forehead, and his very eyes seemed rending with the mighty effort, called out,

"Catharine! Catharine!"

There was a hurried step in the room beyond, and as even in answer to his prayer, Catharine appeared and was kneeling at his side. He recognized nothing more, though he heard faintly her agonized appeal.

"William! William!"

But it was not the death pang,