The Bloomfield Times.

FRANK MORTIMER, Editor and Proprietor.

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The Missing Letter.

BY F. D.

THE sun was shining coyly down upon a little brown house, situated on the outskirts of a New England village, that appeared to be battling for a place among the grand old mountains by which it was surrounded.

In this little brown house, almost hidden by tall lilacs and sweet briar, a mother and her daughter were conversing sadly of the present and future.

"It's no use, mother. This is the third time I have been repulsed. I was so sure of this situation, and now the principal sends me word that Judge Whitcomb has recommended an old and experienced teacher, and the place is secured for her. He seems to have had something to do with every failure I have had as yet. I cannot understand it."

"I am afraid I do, Lucy. Judge Whitcomb is wealthy and purse-proud, and knowing the attachment between you and Morton, he wishes to keep you from a place as teacher in the village, thinking, perhaps, it will force you to find employment farther away."

The rich color flushed into the beautiful girl's cheeks, and a bright lustre to her dark eyes.

"And you think that, too, is the reason he sent Morton away to pursue studies that are taught in our schools?"

"I do; and furthermore, that he will continue to place every obstacle in your path that he possibly can. It is his boast that he never undertakes a thing in earnest, and is foiled; and it is true, or nearly so, I believe, for I have known him for over twenty years."

Lucy's father had been dead several years, and she had always resided in the village where she was born, and was an only child. When the father died, he left them the little dwelling with its five acres of ground, and a few thousands in the bank (though this was not generally known).

Mrs. Merryman wisely thought that a part of this surplus could not be better invested than in giving her daughter a superior education, so that if left alone she might be able to support herself. The village boasted an excellent school—as what New England village does not?—and at this she was kept until she had acquired all that is usually taught to young ladies in the institution. She had been educated to teach, and her sort of regal carriage and easy manners well fitted her for the office.

Among the boys at school was the son of Judge Whitcomb, a fine, noble fellow, of about her own age, or a year older, perhaps. When they were fourteen, they were pointed out by the older scholars as the "young lovers." It was amusing to observe the attention he paid her. He gathered the first spring flowers for her—carried her books and parcels—pulled off her muddy overshoes to spare her dainty fingers—produced an umbrella if it rained; and seemed by his actions generally to consider her as his peculiar charge. When teased by the older boys, as he often was, he would reply:

"She has no father or brother, and I am sure somebody ought to care for and be kind to her."

And as they grew older they were assigned to each other, by a sort of tacit consent, in all the little merry-makings incident to a New England village.

Judge Whitcomb, the father of Morton, was a grave taciturn man, loving his children dearly, (they were all girls but Morton,) but in his own peculiar manner.

One day, as he sat reading, his attention was arrested by a conversation between Morton and one of his sisters, and in which the latter was teasing him about his fondness for Lucy Merryman. Some words given back by the brother startled him, and he raised his eyes, and through the open door, (for he was in an adjoining room,) looked upon his son, a boy no longer.

"He is a fine, manly-looking youth, certainly, he thought, as he gazed more earnestly. "What if that poor widow's interesting daughter should try to captivate him? I have heard—yes, known of such things! I must watch! Why, it would ruin him!"

And he did watch, and became convinced there was danger.

"My son," said he, a few days afterwards, "when does this term of school close?"

"In three weeks, sir."

"How far have you progressed in your Latin?"

"I shall commence my second book in Virgil, next term."

"Very well, I propose sending you from home to school, a term or two, before you enter college."

The son looked up in surprise; "May I ask why, sir?"

"Certainly. I think it will be an advantage to you. Your studies will proceed the same, and contact with strangers will give you more confidence in your own powers, and better fit you for the collegiate course. I will speak to your mother to have all your clothing prepared, and will go with you at the proper time, to the principal in Boston, who is a personal friend, and in whom I have much confidence."

The son had nothing to offer against this reasonable proposition, and at the time named by his father, said "good-bye" to his village class-mates, lingered very long at parting with Lucy Merryman, and then left his father's house for his first sojourn from it."

Judge Whitcomb was the nominal postmaster for the village, but the business was attended to by an efficient deputy.

Morton and Lucy had promised, in that last parting, to correspond, and every week pretty little missives passed back and forth between them. The father had made no provision for this, and in fact, knew nothing of it. He had sent his son away as he once would have shut him in a closet to keep him out of mischief: and he had no more thought of his writing to a young lady, without his leave, than he would have had of his climbing from a window to escape the confinement.

But one day being in the office, in the absence of his clerk, Lucy Merryman came and dropped a letter in the box. When she was gone he took it up to prepare it for its destination, and saw, to his surprise, the name and address of his son. He turned it over and over, and read again and again the address. Yes, it was to his son. And he would give much to know what it contained. Morton was a minor and should be under his control in everything. Perhaps this thing had gone farther than he had feared.

The letter looked like it certainly. And he must never be allowed to entangle himself with this girl, to blight all his future prospects. He examined the wafer, it was hardly dry yet, and the self-willed man, who would as soon have thought of committing murder as opening any other letter, reasoned himself into the belief that he had a perfect right to read his son's letters., and his knife slid under the wafer and the open letter was before him.

It contained nothing to alarm, but something to gratify him. For in it Lucy told her friend of their proposed removal to Illinois, and gave him her future address,—care of James Leonard.

When Judge Whitcomb opened the letter he intended to re-close it, and send it to its address. But now, if he could suppress it,—as he told himself he had a right to do—a point would be gained; yes, two, for he would blame her for not writing to him before she went away, and would lose all clue to her address, for the present, at least.—Judge Whitcomb was not a bad man, and hidden in his heart under a strong crust of pride and self-esteem, was a warm love for his children. Morton was his darling, and around him gathered the choicest emotions of his nature, and had he suspected of the sorrow he would subject him to by the act he contemplated, it would never have been committed. That the girl would fret some he did not doubt. But what right had she to think of him, the only son of Judge Whitcomb? Her presumption ought to be punished. This last thought decided him; and with a steady hand he consigned it to the flames on that bright spring morning; and Morton Whitcomb recited poor lessons from wondering why no letters came, and Lucy Merryman wept bitter tears in her far Western home for the answer that could not come.

As soon as Mrs. Merryman was gone, Judge Whitcomb wrote a long letter to his son; and in a postscript conveyed the intelligence that the widow Merryman had sold her little place, and had gone West, for some advantage to her daughter, he had been told.

And thus the thread that had connected their lives so long and so closely was severed, and they went their several ways with their first bitter lesson in distrust and suspicion. * * * *

The father had never been quite satisfied with Morton. He had not made the man his boyhood promised. The gay, light-hearted youth had become sarcastic and cynical. He was not fond of female society and sometimes spoke sneeringly of affection between the sexes. Coldly polite to all, the inner temple of his heart seemed closed, and distrust guarded the portal.

"Morton, why do you say that? Did you ever care for her?"

It was so unlike his father to ask such a question that he started an instant before replying:

"Yes, as I shall never care for another. But she threw me away as an impediment in her path, in her mad career to position and wealth. If she has gained the first, the latter will surely come; and if she is gratified, her friends ought not to complain, and I will not."

"You were so young when she went away Morton, that you ought to have forgotten that boyish fancy, and long ere this, have found one on whom to bestow your heart and name."

"Perhaps! But you see I have not, and with my present estimate of female constancy, you will not be troubled to set up a separate establishment very soon."

That proud man looked upon his son for a moment, irresolute; but his love was stronger than his pride. The destroying of that letter he had ever regarded as but the removal of a dangerous plaything from his child: but this outraging the feelings of a man was a crime; and at last he had come to see it as such, and bowed his head for an instant on his hands. The son rose to go.

"Come back, Morton," he said. "Did I ever wrong you as a child?"

"Never," he answered, in tones of surprise.

"Then I will not longer as a man, I thought I was doing right! thought I was taking a step to eventually embrace your happiness; and if I erred, as I now fear I did, it was from my jealous care of you. I did not think you would suffer much, or for long. But I find I was mistaken and regret the act. I broke up your correspondence with Lucy Merryman."

"You, father."

"Yes, I kept back the letter in which she would have informed you of their contemplated removal, and gave her future address."

"And then she has been left, through all these years to suppose that the neglect was mine."

"Yes, but I did not think—"

"Enough! She shall know now. I will write—no I will go."

And the next train that went whirling through among the mountains westward, numbered Morton Whitcomb among its passengers.

Before leaving, the father had placed a sealed note in his hands, addressed to Miss Lucy Merryman; and with the words:

"You will not have to humble yourself and accuse your father. The note explains all." * * * *

Miss Merryman had not taken her place in the school since the death of her mother, and was that day wandering listless and sad about the beautiful grounds surrounding her uncle's residence.

She had succeeded in all things beyond her most sanguine expectations. As a teacher she was unrivalled; and she had a host of warm friends, and was treated as a beloved daughter in her uncle's house, that now boasted a second mistress. In fact, she had become all she had said so firmly, "I will rise—I will succeed, and the future must take care of itself!" in that little old house, on that long ago spring morning.—But was she happy? Her dear mother was asleep under sods yet green; and hid away in the secret chamber of Memory was that early love that had promised so much and given so little.

She stooped to gather a flower, and as she turned on rising, Morton Whitcomb stood before her.

"Why had he come if he could not explain his unaccountable silence?" thought she, asking that which she most wished to believe.

"Will you come in," she said, her eyes dropping before his earnest gaze.

"Not now, Lucy; sit with me in this garden chair, for a little while, please. I have much to say to you and would say it here."

He spoke in his old loving tones, and she suffered him to retain her hand and lead her to the seat.

"I have a letter for you, Lucy," and he handed her the note.

"At last," she said, raising her eyes to his.

"Spare me," he replied, "until you read it."

She did read all the humiliating confession of the proud man, who had humbled himself from love for his son.

"How dared he tamper with my letter?" she said, her eyes flashing with indignation.

"He is my father, Lucy."

"Yes; and as your father, I forgive him."

"Thank you," and drawing her closer to him, he said, "one more boon; may he be yours in name? Will you be my wife, Lucy, and be to me as you ever have been, the dearest object on earth?"

The angry spot faded from her cheeks, and the love-light came softly to her eyes as she answered gently:

"I will be your wife, dearest Morton; and Oh, love me always, for there are but few to do so now:" Six weeks later Lucy returned a bride to the home of her childhood. No one but the regretful father knew of the long estrangement.

The ten thousand dollars in her own right was a nine day's wonder to the gossips, but to no one was it more of a surprise than to her husband and Judge Whitcomb.

"And so my consummate folly came near cheating you out of a fortune, as well as a wife!" he said to his son when informed of the fact. "Well, old heads are poor caterers for young hearts."

A DUTCH MRS. CAUDLE.

IN Holland there lived Myneer Van Flam, who every morning said, "I am the drunkenest fellow in Rotterdam," all to the horror of his old dame, who cursed the day which made her Van Flam. Whenever he returned home drunk, (which was every night), she would scold him with the utmost severity, and commonly ended her philippic by menacing him with death. A few days since she attempted to carry her threats into execution. Their house consists of a ground floor and a loft. She went into the loft, made a hole in the floor, dropped a rope through it, fastened one end of the rope to a beam in the garret, and made a slip-knot to the end which dangled in the room on ground floor. All these preparations completed, she waited patiently until her husband came home. He reached it later and more intoxicated than usual, but was so surprised upon opening the door to face no tempest of words, that he became immediately sobered. You have seen drunken men sobered by danger? He said to himself "there is something wrong; be on your guard, old boy!" The chamber was fireless, and as no lamp was burning, complete obscurity reigned. He fell upon a chair and pretended to be asleep, snoring sonorously as was his wont. Presently he felt a noose slipped over his head. He instantly saw the design of his wife, but he did not budge until he heard her steps on the stairs as she went to his loft. He instantly rid himself of the noose and slipped it around the stove. In a few seconds he saw the stove rise to the ceiling with an infernal clatter caused by the fall of the various tin vessels which were upon it. The wife thought the noise was made by the fall of objects her husband had snatched at as he felt himself drawn up or had kicked over in convulsive struggles. She waited until the noise ended, and then, sure he was dead, ran to the nearest police station to say she had on her return home found her husband had committed suicide. The police came around at once with their lamps, What was their surprise to see the stove swinging in mid air, and the husband seated on a chair quietly smoking his pipe! Inquiry was instituted which resulted in the wife's arrest for attempting to commit homicide.

☞ Professor Blackie says some good things, and it is curious to know what he would say about women. Here is what he has recently told the world at a lecture: "A woman is naturally as different from a man as a flower from a tree: she has more beauty and more fragrance, but less strength. She will be fitted for the rough and thorny walk of the masculine professions when she has got a rough beard, a brazen front, and a hard skin, but no sooner."

☞ "Why does the operation of hanging kill a man?" inquired Dr. Whately.

A physiologist replied:

"Because inspiration is stopped, circulation checked, and blood diffuses and congests the brain."

"Bosh!" replied his grace. "It is because the rope is not long enough to let his feet touch the ground."

☞ A Michigan man and his wife, having grown weary of each other, recently signed an agreement to dissolve the contract; and the former sent it to the county clerk, with this explanatory note: "This agreement has been maid and draud up betwixt my Self and Wife and I doant know wether it is a corden to law or Knot and i want you Shud reCord it if it is lawful and if it is knot draw one that is."