

THE ACTON FREE PRESS.

ACTON, ONT., THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 1876.

(\$1.00 per annum in Advance)

DOMINION HARNESS SHOP.

The subscriber begs to announce to the inhabitants of Acton and vicinity that he has commenced the harness business in the

Old Post Office Building, MILL STREET, ACTON.

where he is prepared to turn out work second to none in the Dominion, as cheap as the cheapest, and with the shortest possible notice. I have on hand a large and well selected stock of

Horse Blankets, Whips, Brushes, Combs, Trunks, etc.

Repairing promptly attended to. Give me a call and be convinced.

J. F. DEMPSEY
Acton, Nov. 25, 1875.

ACTON BAKERY.

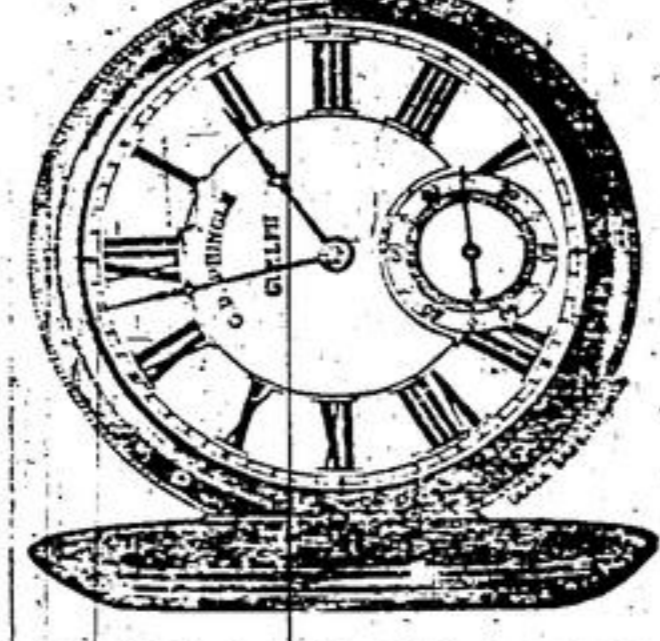
The subscriber begs to inform the inhabitants of Acton and vicinity that he has commenced the

First-class Bread, Buns, Cakes, Biscuits, etc.

Fresh every day—delivered at their houses.

WEDDING CAKES
Made to order in the latest styles and at reasonable charges.

Highest price in Cash paid for Eggs.
DUGALLAWAY.
Acton, July 1, 1875.



PRINGLE,

Watchmaker, Guelph.

Has a good stock of "RUSSELL" AND "AMERICAN" WATCHES

Always on hand.

He attends to repairing of fine watches.

Mr. H. H. Pringle, of the Free Press, will kindly call on Guelph when requested.

Guelph, Sept. 2, 1875.

ACTON PLANING MILLS

Pump, Sash, Door and Blind Factory.

EBBAGE & CAMPBELL,
Manufacturers of

Window Sash, Doors,

Venetian Blinds, Mouldings,

And other Building Requisites

Also Makers of IMPROVED SUCTION PUMPS

Lumber Planed and Dressed to order in the best manner.

All work guaranteed.
Acton, July 1, 1875.

PURE MILK.

The undersigned begs to thank his customers for the liberal patronage received during the past summer, and would say that he is now prepared to supply an additional number of customers with good, pure, fresh milk delivered every morning and twice a day on Saturdays. Parties who keep cows will find it much cheaper and less trouble to get milk delivered at their doors, and they would do well to call their cows and buy their milk. Twenty-one quart tickets for \$1, paid in advance, or twenty-one pint tickets for 50 cents.

H. S. ARMSTRONG.
Acton, Nov. 10th, 1875.

DON'T TAKE IT TO HEART.

There's many a trouble Would break like a bullet, And into the course of Letho depart, Did not we release it.

There's many a sorrow Would vanish to-morrow, Were we not unwilling to furnish the

So sadly intruding, It hatches out all sorts of horrible things.

How welcome the seeming Of looks that are beaming, Whether one's wealthy or whether one's

Eyes bright as a berry, Checks red as a cherry, The green and the blue and the heart-ache can cure.

Resolved to be merry, All wrong to ferry Across the channel waters that bid us

And no longer tearful, But happy and cheerful, We feel life has much that's worth living for yet.

THE BEAUTIFUL GIRL: Or, Margery Clare's Story.

Concluded from last week.

"You are getting pale and thin," she said to me, one day. "What is the matter?"

My eyes fell beneath her searching gaze. How could I tell her the truth—all that I was suffering!

"You need not speak, Margery," she went on in considerable excitement. "I am not blind if people are."

It is all that Miss Wilmer's doings. "O, how I hate her!"

"Perhaps she is not to blame," I faltered.

"But I know better. She's a designing piece, and the sooner we are rid of her the better it will be for all of us. And I shall speak my mind about it, one of these days."

Aunt Polly "flounced off," and I turned into a path that led into the shrubbery, for we had been standing on the steps while talking.

To be candid, my eyes were somewhat humid after what Aunt Polly had said, and I wish to avoid being seen until composure was restored.

But destiny was against me. After walking on a few steps, I suddenly came face to face with Noel, who seemed to be taking a little turn in the shrubbery too.

He started, came to a dead halt, and looked at me more keenly than Aunt Polly had done.

"I'm afraid you are ill, Margery, or, hesitating, 'unhappy.'"

It was the older tender tone in which he had to address me before our household had known aught of estrangement. It made the task of keeping back my tears doubly hard.

"I do not feel very well," I answered. "These hot days seem to oppress me."

I would have passed on with that, but he held out his hand to me. "There was some struggle going on within her, for his lips quivered, and he looked flushed and excited."

His manner was like that of a man who has suddenly made up his mind to break away from some agonizing spell.

"Margery, dear Margery," he whispered, "I hope—I trust—"

He did not finish the sentence. His name was suddenly called in that low voice I had learned to dislike so much. "Both returned."

There stood Miss Wilmer in the path, not a dozen yards from us!

Noel dropped my hand and swung on his heel. Then she called to him again:

"I have lost my ring, Mr. Alton. Will you help me look for it?"

He strode towards her. I saw them kneel together on the path, her supple hands almost touching his as they guided serpent-like over the grasses. My heart grew sick within me. I felt a sudden, overpowering sense of loss. This serene untroubled woman was sure to triumph over me, no matter how bravely I might struggle against her.

I crept back to the house utterly dependent. There seemed no place in which I might hide my misery.

Three days later than this I sat in one of the deep window embrasures listless and despondent, though the delicious morning breeze was blowing in coolly upon me, and the whole garden seemed flooded with melody, and bright with beauty.

Suddenly there came the sound of familiar voices, that made me start and shrink further into the recesses. The next instant Noel and Miss Wilmer came into the parlor and sat down at a little distance.

The curtains of rose silk had fallen about me, so that they did not suspect my presence in the room.

I had no wish to play the part of eavesdropper, but a weakness and trembling seized suddenly upon me, so that I could not stir for a minute or two. Then Miss Wilmer spoke in a subdued, half-fearful tone:

"This is a cold, cruel world, Mr. Alton. It has been doubly cruel to me. I have no real true friend in the whole universe save you."

Her words must have touched him deeply. He drew her towards him, a gentle pity shining in his face. I saw the movement plainly enough, for the curtains lacked an eighth of an inch of meeting in the centre and nearly one half of the parlor was visible. But I had no power to stir from my hiding place.

"Are you not happy here?" "Are you not happy here?" he asked. She lifted her eyes to his face, and let them fall again instantly.

"I ought to be, perhaps," she murmured. "You are here, and you are—good to me. But none of the others, even Bertha, have quite gotten over their distrust. And it is killing me, killing me, Noel!"

He flushed a little at the sound of his name and the impetuous tone in which she spoke. Her lip quivered, she hid her face like a grievous child, and seemed to shun his gaze.

His resolution vanished, then, and he took her two hands firmly into his own.

"Why need you care, Edith?" he whispered. "I love you. I will stand between you and every breath of reproach."

"You!" she repeated incredulously. "You?"

She looked up at him now. He met her gaze without flinching.

"Why not? How could I help loving you?"

"But—but—Margery Clare!" she ejaculated, brokenly. "She loves you, and I thought you were going to marry her."

She overrode her part when she said this. Noel looked shocked and hurt. As for me, the bonds in which I had been held were broken asunder all at once. I rose up from my seat and moved with a firm step into the parlor.

"If you please, Miss Wilmer, I claim the privilege of making my own confession," I said haughtily.

I quitted the room before either had recovered from the amazement caused by my sudden appearance.

As I flew up the stairs, a tall figure came breaking up my career. I had gone so far. It is time for me to go to work in earnest, and I shall do it!"

Sure enough she did. Later in the day, I heard her making particular inquiries of Noel concerning Will Macgregor, that address which she was careful to take time when Miss Wilmer was not by to hear. Her reason for this I learned afterwards.

I kept my room for the most part, that I might see Noel as little as possible. He, also, seemed anxious to avoid me, but when circumstances compelled us to meet I surprised one or two questioning, half-sorrowful looks which he fixed upon my face.

It was afternoon of the next day. I sat in my chamber attempting to read, when Aunt Polly rushed into the room in a state of intense excitement. She held an open newspaper in her hand.

"See here!" she cried. "What do you think of that?" and she held her finger on a paragraph of the paper with an air of ill-concealed triumph.

The paragraph read as follows: "Escaped—A convict woman named Betty Hague is twenty years old, of medium height, handsome, hair a light brown, eyes blue, has a prominent mole upon the right ear. Was convicted of murder in the second degree."

Then followed some unimportant particulars. I read to the end, and felt failing to comprehend Aunt Polly's self-congratulation.

"You don't understand," she said, "and no wonder. Listen. That runaway woman is in the house! Miss Wilmer and Betty Hague the murderers are one and the same person!"

I could not repress a cry of horror. "Impossible!"

"I told you I was on that woman's track. You know now to what purpose I have watched her. Look at the date of this paper. It is nearly a year old. Miss Wilmer's desk was unlocked when I stole into her room a few minutes since, and this paper was the first thing I saw, folded carefully away among some old letters. I know it must be valuable for some reason. I unfolded it, and found that paragraph. You will see that the paper is creased, directly about it, and bears finger marks. It was those that called my attention to it, and directly I had read it I comprehended the truth."

"You must be mistaken," I said, earnestly. "It would do no good. He loves her."

"Bah! I don't believe it. She has bewitched him until he thinks himself in love. Besides, he is sorry for her lonely condition. Men take naturally to the role of champions and protectors you know. That is the long and short of Noel's interest in Miss Wilmer."

I was so sure, and this declaration did not comfort me very much.

I was late at breakfast the next morning. There was nobody in the dining room except Aunt Polly and Bertha. The latter glanced over the rim of her coffee-cup at me rather curiously.

"Margery," said she suddenly, "I have some news to disclose."

"I knew what was coming, and preserved my composure by a determined effort. 'What is it?' I asked, though not very bravely."

"It's about Noel and Miss Wilmer," and she looked at me harder than ever. "He has asked her to marry him."

"No."

My composure puzzled her. She could not know the hours of bitter anguish through which I had passed to gain it. Her lip began to quiver presently. She leaned forward and kissed me.

"I was afraid you would take this more to heart," she said, wistfully. "That is why I determined to break the news myself."

Of course it could hardly be termed a surprise, since I had witnessed the previous day. But I did not say so.

"I am sorry," she answered, "but do not feel called upon to interfere. Noel will be happy, of course, though I did hope the bride would be somebody else. But my real or pretended, no doubt. Despite the half estrangement which had arisen between us during the weeks that had passed since the coming of Miss Wilmer, I regarded her as a tender yearning towards me still."

Aunt Polly had looked grim and silent. When I arose from the table and left the room, presently she followed me into the hall.

"You are a regular little Spartan, Margery," she said bluntly. "I don't see how you kept your face so unconcerned while Bertha was weeping. But I have no doubt, she will be a good wife to you."

"I had no idea that she would be so far. It is time for me to go to work in earnest, and I shall do it!"

Sure enough she did. Later in the day, I heard her making particular inquiries of Noel concerning Will Macgregor, that address which she was careful to take time when Miss Wilmer was not by to hear. Her reason for this I learned afterwards.

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it, accidentally, only a few days since."

I began to waver in my judgment of the lady in question. Before I could say one word in return, Miss Wilmer came abruptly into the room, without taking the trouble to knock. Her eyes, blazing upon Aunt Polly in a vindictive way that fairly made me shudder.

But her voice was calm and cool enough when she spoke.

"That paper is mine, I believe," and she quietly took possession of it. "Hereafter I shall be careful that my boxes are kept locked, since it seems necessary."

With these cutting words she vanished. I looked at Aunt Polly. "What will you do?"

"Keep silent for the present. Noel might not be inclined to believe my story, should I tell it to him. But I have an idea that Mr. Will Macgregor can give us additional lights on the subject of Miss Wilmer. I shall write to him to-night, asking him to come here."

She chuckled audibly. Observing my surprised look, she bent over me suddenly and whispered:

"That last remark was for Miss Wilmer's benefit. She is listening at the door. I have written already. But she must not know it."

Sure enough, on opening the door, I saw the lady's dress which had suddenly round a turn in the passage. Going back to Aunt Polly, I asked, in increasing surprise:

"Why did you mention the subject at all in her hearing?"

"I wish to give the wretched creature a chance to save herself by flight, if she feels so disposed. I have no idea that she will, however. No matter. Let her suffer the consequences of her crimes if she so elects."

It was a terrible time to me. I felt sick and helpless. All our lives seemed to be endangered while that convict woman was in the house. Most of all did I tremble for chivalrous, impetuous Noel. Would he suffer very deeply on learning the true character of the woman he loved?

I could not sleep that night for thinking of it. A sense of coming evil weighed more and more heavily upon my spirits as the hours crept on. I had been down without undressing. Wide awake, I stared into the darkness, wondering what calamity threatened now.

The old house was very still. Presently I heard a slight creaking of my door and entered Aunt Polly's room which was next to mine. Very soon it came back again, soft, cat-like, barely audible. Had not all my senses been preternaturally acute I should not have noticed it.

All was silent for a few minutes. Then I heard the same stealthy step again, and this time I was sure it came from Miss Wilmer's bedroom. It advanced as before, to Aunt Polly's chamber, remained a minute or two; and then retreated. Finally I heard the click of a key in Miss Wilmer's lock.

Something was wrong! I lay thinking these words over and over to myself until they seemed burned into my brain. Something was wrong! When the suspense became unendurable, I jumped from the couch and rushed along the passage to Aunt Polly's room. The door resisted my first efforts to open it, but burst open at a faint light gleam, pervaded the apartment. Something hot, suffocating, seemed to strike me in the face.

The windows were all down, and Aunt Polly lay in the bed in a deep sluggish sleep. A pan of burning charcoal stood at the foot of the bed. I comprehended the truth almost intuitively. Miss Wilmer had been there, and she meant to murder the woman! Aunt Polly knew too much—there was no choice save to give up her scheme of marrying Noel or put this relentless enemy out of the way. She had chosen the latter alternative. She could easily rid herself of me, she thought, when once my champion was disposed of.

These thoughts came and went like a flash. I rushed into the room, tore open the nearest window, and threw the pan of charcoal, with all the strength I could command, into the garden below. Then I roused the house with my shrieks.

My memory of what followed is very uncertain. I know that the whole house was soon in an uproar, and persons came flocking into the chamber—Miss Wilmer among the rest, pale, eager, solicitous, her face expressing well simulated bewilderment. Aunt Polly was dashed with cold water, and her hands and feet rubbed vigorously, but it was some time before she became fully conscious of what was going on about her. Perhaps the use of some powerful narcotic had produced the trance-like sleep which had assisted the deadly gas in its work.

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"Margery, my darling," he whispered, "this is dreadful. You must tell me all you know about it, to-morrow."

His voice sounded hoarse and strange. He went away without saying anything more. I knew that he and others were puzzling their brains to account for what had happened. But only Miss Wilmer and myself could solve the mystery, and she was not likely to speak.

Day dawned at last. I must have looked strangely haggard and worn, for Aunt Polly put up her arms suddenly, after having watched me for some minutes from under her half-closed lids. "Poor child," she murmured—her old form of address. She was much better, almost herself again. At last she looked up at me. "Lock the door," she said. "I'm going to get up, and want you to help me dress."

"I expect a visitor," she said, smiling grimly. "I may be disappointed, but I think he will come."

"Who?"

"Will Macgregor."

She saw the start I gave, and laughed aloud. "The drama is nearly played out, my little Margery," and her lips touched mine. "Your sad face will brighten after to-day. I asked Macgregor to be present at the grand finale, and I think he will come this morning."

Afterwards she did not speak until her toilet was nearly completed. Then she turned to me: "Miss Wilmer intended to suffocate me, I know that. Will you tell me the particulars."

I told everything I knew. She listened quietly to the end.

"That woman is desperate," she said, then. "And no wonder. She did not know I had already sent that letter to Macgregor—the thought I would write it last night, or perhaps the first thing this morning. But she didn't intend to give me the opportunity; and that confirms my suspicion that Macgregor is able to expose her more fully. Otherwise, she would not be afraid to face him."

We went down stairs, presently, walking slowly, for Aunt Polly was very weak. The drawing-room door stood on the swing, and we heard voices within—Noel's, Bertha's, and Miss Wilmer's. Aunt Polly grasped my arm:

"Wait," she whispered. "Listen."

Miss Wilmer was speaking. "Did you never hear of criminal's repenting of their crimes? In the act of commission, and seeking to undo them?" she asked in her sweetest tone.

It was Bertha who replied to her. "We were speaking of Aunt Polly, and wondering who put that pan of charcoal in her chamber."

"To be sure," Bertha answered, "my aunt may not be so foreign to the subject as you may imagine. Your aunt is a wealthy woman, I understand. Has she willed her money to anybody?"

"Most of it goes to Margery Clare. Margery is a favorite with her, you know."

"Ah!"

There was no mistaking the terrible significance of her tone in uttering this little exclamation. Aunt Polly heard it and her face grew suddenly stern. "The Jewel," she muttered and between her teeth. "How dare she accuse you? She shall pay dearly for this!"

She strode along the hall with a firm step. At this instant the doorbell rung. After standing irresolute for a moment, she motioned away the servant who appeared, and herself answered the summons. A young man, handsome, bright-looking, stood on the steps. She scanned him from head to foot, and then asked abruptly, "In this Mr. Macgregor?"

He bowed, lifting his hat.

"I wrote that letter asking you to come here. Follow me and you shall learn why it was written."

He seemed puzzled, but obeyed in silence. She led the way directly to the drawing-room, pushed open the door and entered.

"Mr. Will Macgregor," she announced.

Noel rose up with a surprised exclamation to meet his friend. I looked beyond him—at Miss Wilmer. She grew ashy pale, and attempted to shrink away with a frightened, halfed look in her face.

Mr. Macgregor saw her. He started forward a few steps.

"Good heavens!" he cried, and stood still again.

Noel looked at him in amazement; then he glanced at Miss Wilmer. She was covering against the wall, frightened and trembling.

"Speak," said Aunt Polly. "Tell us what you know of that guilty woman yonder."

Macgregor broke into an odd laugh. "To be frank," he said, "I know no good of her. Has she been imposing on anybody? My mother employed her for some time, but dismissed her, because she thought I wanted to marry her. Faith! I never thought of such a thing. She is not fit to be the wife of an honest man."

"She is a convict woman!" cried Aunt Polly, vindictively. "Her true name is Betty Hague!"

Let me drop a curtain on the scene that ensued. I cannot describe it.

The beautiful Gires, who had darkened our household for so many weeks, fled from it in shame and disgrace. A year has passed since then, and we know nothing of her movements from that day. I pray God that we may never see her or hear of her again.

I am Noel's wife now, and know that his best and truest love never wandered from me. Bertha and Aunt Polly are my staunch friends. What more