The Canadian Champion

AND COUNTY OF HALTON INTELLIGENCER.

VOLUME 27. MILTON, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 1887. NO. 14.

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3 Georgetown	L. Grant	18	15	10	12	13	8	9.30 a.m
4 Acton	J. Matthews	20	17	12	"	15	10	10 a.m.
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ADOPTED DAUGHTER

BY ELIZA A. DUPUY,

AUTHOR OF "TRUE LOVE NE'ER FORGETS," "PASSION AND PRIDE," ETC., ETC.

"Lora is ready to welcome you, sir; and here she comes," said Mrs. Grafton, coldly; for there was something in the bland insincerity of his manner which repelled and offended her.

Lora entered the room with Grafton, who had gone in search of her, and she came forward with the graceful self-possession which showed her power of controlling her emotions even under such trying circumstances as those in which she found herself placed at this moment.

The unusual excitement of the last hour had brought colour to her cheeks, and brightness to the eyes which had wept so bitterly that night, though faint traces were still visible of the storm that had swept over her.

"I am here, papa," she said, in her soft, clear voice; and Ford started and changed colour as its tones fell on his ear. They seemed the echo of one which had once spoken to him in affection, and later, in reproach—sometimes in bitter anger.

The simple words produced an unpleasant shock, which he, however, shook off immediately, and bending towards the fair face lifted to his, he lightly kissed Lora's brow; then, holding her off from him, he gazed keenly yet smilingly upon the charms the letters of Grafton had taught him to expect to find embodied in his daughter.

She frowned and slightly bit her lips at this scrutiny, and again that unpleasant thrill came to him; but he calmly said:

"You are like your mother in more ways than one, for I see that you have her impatient spirit, as well as her beauty of person. I am glad to make your acquaintance, my daughter, and I hope that we shall get on together comfortably, now that the time has come for me to do a father's part by you."

"You have been a long time making up your mind to do it," said Lora, recklessly; "and if it is all the same to you, I shall prefer to be left with those who have had the care of me so long. I cannot be of much consequence to you, but I am a very important personage to Ma Julia."

Ford looked at her more in sorrow than in anger, and gravely said:

"Is this the greeting from my only child?—the sole daughter of my house and heart? It is hard—but I have deserved it. Can you not pardon me for my seeming neglect, Lora, when you learn that I could not bear to look on you because you brought back to me the one sweet dream of my life? A few years of happiness, a home blighted by death, a helpless little child with no mother to caress her, no tender lips to teach her the many lessons needed by one of her sex—can you wonder that I gave you to this dear friend who has been a faithful maternal friend to you? That is the secret of my long neglect of you my child. I could not bear to look upon you, because you brought back the past so vividly before me."

He seemed deeply moved, and Lora impulsively drew near him, though Mrs. Grafton looked coldly on, believing him to be a mere actor, and convinced in her own mind that the paradise he depicted had been infested by an evil spirit as subtle and difficult to deal with as he who had laid waste the fair promise of the first Eden.

"Dear papa, did you really suffer so much in losing my mother?" asked Lora, almost with tears in her voice "Am I, indeed, so much like her?"

"Her living image. Even the tones of your voice are hers. Did I suffer, you ask? Ah! do not seek to probe a wound that has never healed. In my heart of heart I hold her image sacred, and no other woman has been found worthy to assume her place in my house and heart. My home has been desolate, but now I hope to install in it one worthy to succeed her, who will try to make it glad and bright for me in the future. Shall it not be so, Lora?"

The young girl was deeply touched, but she was not prepared to answer that question in the affirmative, so she turned appealingly to her strongest ally, who promptly said:

"We can settle nothing to-night, Mr. Ford. Your intention to take Lora from me has been so suddenly announced that you must give us time to reconcile our hearts to the separation which seems so hard to both of us. It is growing very late. You must be tired; and I think we had better separate for the night. Will you take any refreshment before going to your room? It is already laid in the dining-room, if you wish it."

"Thank you, no; nothing at this late hour, save a glass of wine. Some of your own vintage I suppose you have. Your suggestion is a good one, Mrs. Grafton, and I accept it. Early to bed, et cetera. You know the old refrain, though I must say that I never gained my wealth nor my wisdom by early rising. I never breakfast before ten o'clock."

Grafton, who had stood glowering on him with a clouded brow and firm-set teeth, hastened to the adjoining room, and brought out a decanter filled with sparkling amber wine in one hand, and a small glass goblet in the other. He curtly said:

"I will take this to your room and leave it there. It is sparkling Catawba, made by our neighbours across the river, and is of the purest vintage. I do not cultivate the grape myself, except for eating. I think we shall all take a fashionable breakfast to-morrow morning. It must be past the witching hour of night."

"Good night, then, fair dames. My queen of lovely women, I salute you and wish you sweetest dreams." This is to Lora, as he kissed his hand to her, and bowed his host from the room.

The ladies turned with questions to each other, and Lora

"It is fairly enough, mother. Papa has overdressed him too much, Per after

Mrs. Grafton clenched her small hands with nervous force, and almost grimly said:

"It is just as I expected, Lora. Your father always makes a favourable first impression on those who are not skilled in judging character. He has won on you already, and the end will be that you will go with him with your own consent. It is better so, perhaps, for he means to take you with him when he leaves us. Such claims as you have given Frank Nugent to-night will be whistled down to the wind as idle nonsense, for he, with his small independence, will be regarded by Mr. Ford as no fitting match for you."

After a slight pause, during which Mrs. Grafton watched her young companion with almost feverish interest, Lora said:

"I do not know but it will be better for me to see something of the outside world with papa than to have effected my escape with Frank to-night. I like him dearly, for I know how truly good he is, and how much he loves me, but I do not wish to be married yet, Ma Julia. It seems only the other day that I was playing with buttercups in the fields and chasing humming-birds from the flowers. Your vehemence frightened me to-night, and I consented to what you seemed to wish so much; but I really think it is best as it is."

Almost with a groan, her friend said:

"It is just as I knew it would be if you were brought into contact with Stephen Ford. I once believed in him, too, till he slipped aside his mask and gave me a glimpse of the real man beneath it. Yet I am cruel to say even this much to you, Lora, for your father's hand is now upon your fate, and he will mould it to suit himself. Trust him, if you can, and try to make him love you so well that he will shrink from wronging you in any way. Poor Frank! his hopes are already dashed to the earth."

"Why should you say that when you know that I love him?" asked Lora, almost resentfully. "I have promised to marry him, and I mean to do it after I have gained such influence over papa as will enable me to win his consent to our union. If he has so much money himself, he will hardly care about a great fortune with the son I may choose for him."

"You know very little of Stephen Ford if you think that. If he possessed millions, he would still stretch out his grasping hands to add other millions to them. His greed for money is insatiate, and if necessary to his plans, you will find that you will be as recklessly sacrificed to win it as if you were not his child. Oh, Lora! Lora! if I could only guard you from the evils upon your path which I dimly perceive—so dimly, that I dare not warn you in words which could point out to you exactly the danger to be avoided. If I could only see clearly before me—if I only could?"

Her voice sank to a husky whisper as she uttered the last words, and Lora listened with some dread, but more scepticism as to the results to be feared from her exodus with her father. The impression he had made on her was far from unfavourable, and the new vista of life opened to her young eyes was brilliant with promise of all that is brightest and sweetest to the untried heart.

With the confidence of youth, she believed that she could win her way to all she desired, and after a few months of splendor and gayety, she could come back to the friends she loved, and as a well-dowered bride, bestow her hand upon the lover who had chosen her in her days of comparative obscurity.

With this agreeable issue out of their difficulties deluding her mind, Lora put her arms tenderly around her protectress, and softly said:

"Do not make yourself so miserable, Ma Julia, about what cannot be now helped. I can't believe my father so hard as you think him, and if he is, I will use my best efforts to soften him. I am sure that he has to love, and surely he will not be unkind to me. You heard how tenderly he spoke of my mother; for her sake he will do the best part he can by me. Dearest friend, cease to torment yourself with phantoms which may only exist in your own imagination."

"Would to God they were phantoms evoked by my own fears for your safety," said Mrs. Grafton, drearily. "I hope they may prove such, my love, but I have so many doubts—so many fears to contend with, that on your account I am becoming almost morbid. It is better for you that you shall believe in your father, and I ask your pardon for trying to shake your confidence in him. Let us retire, dear. I feel so worn out and exhausted after all I have passed through in the last few hours, that I think I shall sleep in spite of the weight upon my mind."

Lora readily assented to this proposal, and the two parted at the foot of the staircase. In the mind of the young girl chaos reigned for a season. The sudden and startling change in her life affected her deeply, and she scarcely understood what she wished with reference to her future. But gradually excitement subsided and Lora slept the sleep of youth, health, and innocence.

CHAPTER V.

BITTER WORDS—THE WIFE'S APPEAL—A LOVER'S FATE DISCUSSED.

When Grafton conducted his guest to the room prepared for him, he placed the decanter and goblet on the table, and briefly said:

"We cannot discuss our affairs to-night, so I must leave you to the repose you must need. Good night."

"Not so fast, if you please, George. I have something to ask you first. Who was that person I certainly saw lurking in the grounds as I came toward the house? You have been careful to allow no flirting or love-making of any kind so far as Lora is concerned?"

After momentary hesitation Grafton replied:

"The person you saw may have been young Nugent, from Vine Hill on the opposite side of the river. He plays well on the flute, and he may have been serenading Lora, as he is rather a romantic young fellow, and, I dare say, susceptible to the influence of youthful beauty."

"Umph! You take it very coolly, I think, considering that I have always warned you against allowing my daughter to form any attachment which might interfere with my plans for her. Serenading on moonlit nights means spooning after a girl, and I am surprised that such a thing has been tolerated, as far as my heiress is concerned. Who is this young man, and how did he come to make Lora's acquaintance?"

"That is easily explained. He is the son of an old friend of mine who moved to the West, and purchased a vineyard, with a small farm attached to it. Mr. Nugent was induced to settle near us because he wished to be our neighbour. In her childhood Lora knew Frank Nugent, and when he came back from college, three years ago, he visited our house as he had always done. Julia asked his assistance in teaching Latin and French to her adopted daughter, and that is all there is of it. A girl is not apt to take a fancy to a young man who plays the part of a pedagogue toward her."

"That is all you know about it," said Ford, with sarcastic emphasis. "Many a girl has eloped with her music or language master, and if such a thing had happened with my daughter, just think what *your* position would have been. I would have made you my slave for the rest of your days, and have forced you to take an active part in the mysterious business which supplies me with means to carry on all my various enterprises. You risked a great deal, Grafton, when you permitted this young man to visit your house so unceremoniously."

"I did not think of the risk, nor do I believe there was any. Lora is too young to dream of lovers. She is a mere child in thought and feeling. As to your threat concerning myself, I tell you this, that if things had gone wrong with her, sooner than accept the penalty you so smugingly set forth, I would have gained freedom in the only way left me—by committing suicide. I have sometimes thought that I shall be driven to that resource yet."

"Ta! ta! No fear of that, when your good name would still be in my power, and your wife be left at my mercy," said Ford, contemptuously. "No one save a cowardly fool would rush out of life when it has so much in it that is worth grasping after. *You* would never be guilty of so false a step as that, George Grafton, because you have too great love for that fair woman over yonder to strike a deadly blow to her heart."

He pointed in the direction of the parlour as he spoke, and the expression of gloom on the face of his companion deepened.

"But for her sake," he hissed, "and that of the poor girl about to be delivered over to you, I would have parted from my wretched life long ago. For years it has been a living lie, and when men treat me with the respect due to my seemingly blameless life, I often feel like proclaiming aloud what a cheat I am—like telling them that I am made to pander to your lust for gain in the basest and most underhand manner. The robber, with pistol in hand, who cries, 'Your money or your life!' is respectable in comparison to what you and I are, Stephen Ford."

"Softly, softly, my friend," remonstrated Ford, in a tone which had both alarm and anger in it. "There is no need to arouse the house by your vehement denunciation of yourself, not to mention the share I have in your objurgations. This conduct is supremely foolish just as you are on the verge of perfect freedom from me and my exactions."

"Freedom purchased at what a price!" cried Grafton in a tone of anguish. "I have done your bidding. I have prepared another to perform for you the services I have so long rendered; but I warn you that if she discovers the use to which her work is to be put, she will refuse to do it."

"Ah, bah! Such heroics are unendurable. Do you suppose because I require a certain accomplishment to be taught to my daughter that I am going to make *her* my slave in her turn? By no means. I intend to show her something of the world, and then marry her off to the man I have selected for her husband. Her lot shall be a brilliant one, be sure of that, so you need have no twinges of remorse on her account. You have worked yourself into a most uncomfortable state of feeling, George, and my advice to you is, to sleep off your irritation, and try to get into such a frame of mind as will enable you to transact our business to-morrow without rushing off at a tangent and playing the part of a poor actor at a third-rate theatre."

His manner was so coolly contemptuous that Grafton, though stung to the quick, was quelled by it. He quietly said:

"I think I will take your advice; but if I have been injurious, it is because I feel keenly the uncertain position to which I surrender Lora. But she is your daughter, and surely your heart will relent where your own flesh and blood is concerned, and not allow you to implicate her in your lawless and dangerous—"

"That is enough," broke in Ford, imperiously. "I do not choose to listen further to denunciations of myself. My daughter is my daughter, and of course I shall do the best I can for her. I am tired of all this. Good-night."

Thus haughtily dismissed, his host left the room, closing the door behind him, and Ford turned to the table, and, pouring out a goblet of wine, drank it down at a draught.

"What an idiot that man is," he muttered, "to talk in that highfalutin way; what danger can he apprehend for Lora when she comes to me? The girl will easily fall into my plans. She is beautiful, of an uncommon and striking style, too, and she must be ambitious. Women love splendour; pretty ones especially—and she shall have it to her heart's content, till, to do without it, would be humiliation and bitterness. *Then*, my fair lady, we shall see of what metal you are made. Submission to the fate I have decreed you, or the loss of all you will have learned to prize so highly, will be the alternative offered you, and who can doubt what the decision of a young girl will be when her head has been turned by flattery and her heart corrupted by luxury?

"A lover in the way, is there? A country clodhopper, with a smattering of book-learning. I shall settle *his* presumption very summarily, and soon make Lora ashamed of having dreamed of love in a cottage, on a few hundreds a year. I do wonder, now, if these people have been playing their own game against mine, by bringing this young man in contact with her, hoping that young love will win a victory over such astuteness as mine? How little they must really know of me if they suppose for a moment that I can be moved by puling, love-sick sentimentality!"

After taking several turns about the room the tired schemer quaffed a second goblet of wine, and then retired to his couch, and in a few moments he was sleeping as soundly as a child whose innocent heart had never been moved by a thought of evil.

When Grafton went to close the house he found that his wife had returned to the parlour, and was lying on the sofa, with her face buried in the cushion. He shrank back a moment, to gain perfect control of himself before he ventured to speak to her.

Going forward at length, he tenderly said:

"Julia, dear, you should be in your bed by this time. Do you know that it is past one o'clock?"

She lifted her head, and gazed at him a moment, as if uncertain as to the meaning of his words. Then, with a slight shiver, she said:

"Yes, it must be very late, but I could not talk with you in our room without danger of being overheard in Mr. Ford's chamber, if he chooses to listen, and I hardly think he is above that; so I came back here after Lora went up stairs."

There was much bitterness in the tone with which Grafton replied:

"What good will all the talking in the world do, Julia? It isn't like you to torment me as you have for the last few hours. I am helpless; I can do nothing but fulfil the contract made with my master, when we removed to this place. If I fail in the least tittle he will destroy me. He has said it over again to-night, and—and—I could not live—no—I would not, if he had power to carry out his threat."

Mrs. Grafton wrung her hands in anguish.

"What is it—what is it that is between you? Oh, my dear husband, let me know the worst. It will be mercy to me, for now I fancy a thousand things that cannot, *cannot* be true."

After a pause, which his wife thought would never end, Grafton coldly said:

"I have suffered you to suspect too much already, Julia, but I cannot explain to you the singular position in which I find myself placed toward Stephen Ford. I should have to go back to a far distant time, and recall half-forgotten incidents in my old life before we came to Glenvale. I have no fancy for doing that; let by-gones be by-gones, and after this painful parting from Lora is over we shall be able to live our own way without fear of interference from others."

"And that is all you will say?" cried his wife, in tones of sharp suffering. "You will leave me to the tortures of doubt and dread which have torn my soul for the last few hours. Oh, George! I thought you loved me too well to keep back from me anything that I, as your wife, have the right to know."

"It is because I love you, because I value your respect, that I refuse to tell the dreary secret of my life, Julia," he said, with emotion. "If you were yourself to-night you would not ask me to betray to you what you must know would cover me with shame and humiliation before you. I have been weak and easily wrought on by a bad man, but I have never been intentionally wicked. I have derived no benefit from the service I have been forced to render him, and I never will, so help me heaven!"

Mrs. Grafton regarded him fixedly for a few moments, and then more calmly said:

"I believe that I have fathomed one portion of your secret, but I will be as reticent as you are, since you assure me that you are only an agent, not a participator in the gains made from Mr. Ford's nefarious method of amassing wealth. But how can a man of honour and good faith, have fallen into such a state of servitude to him, I cannot comprehend."

Her husband regarded her with dilating eyes, but after a breathless pause he said:

"I can only tell you this in explanation, Julia. Through fraud on his part, and carelessness on mine, I was made the scapegoat of—of—a transaction which, if known to the world, would brand me as a dishonoured man. Let that suffice. I can bring no proof of what I tell you, therefore I am at Stephen Ford's mercy; but you will believe my bare assertion, Julia. But I have won my freedom, and to-morrow it is to be ratified."

"Yes—but at what a sacrifice! My child—my poor darling—must be given to this hard man, and you, *you* have taught her the art by which she can be made useful to him, as you have been. Oh, George! why have you done this?"

"Because it was required of me," he curtly answered. "Do not fear for Lora; she will never use her art to degrade and ruin herself, for she is not in the power of her worst enemy, as I have been. Hard as Ford may be, he will be proud of his daughter, and he has assured me himself that he has no intention of making her his accomplice in the lawless business he carries on."

"But will he keep his word? He is so base, so unprincipled, that I have no faith in him. Oh! if I could have saved my darling from him I would have done it! I tried, and failed. This night I went to her room, and found her on the balcony talking with Frank Nugent. They love each other. I counseled them to fly while they could, and I meant to go with them myself; but the boat came earlier than usual, and defeated all our plans. But for that, Stephen Ford would have found an empty nest when he came to claim his daughter."

Grafton listened aghast to this revelation. He asked, in a tone that was almost menacing:

"Would you have dared to do such a thing as that without consulting me? This passed belief, Julia."

"It is true, nevertheless; and I am sorry that I failed in the object I had in view—to give Lora a protector against her, and make her another victim to his cruel greed of gold."

Grafton drew near her, and impressively asked:

"Do you know that if you had succeeded you would have destroyed me as effectually as if you had thrust a dagger through my heart? If Lora had been found missing, I should have disappeared—how or where, you would never have known—but you would have looked your last on me after accomplishing such treachery as that. I really believe Julia, that this young girl is more to you than I am—that to retain her with yourself you would sacrifice me."

With dry, pale lips she said:

"You know better than that. You know that in honour or disgrace, in life or in death, you are the one supreme object of my regard. I cling to Lora as the child of my affections, who, until to-night, never wounded my heart, never made me feel that I am not really and truly her mother. If I had wrong in counseling an elopement, I beg your pardon, George. I thought when you understood my motives you would approve of the course I had taken."

"Since the opportune arrival of the steamer saved you from such folly, we will say no more about it," replied Grafton, coldly. "Ford saw young Nugent as he was retreating towards the river, and he was questioning me sharply as to who he was, and what brought him here at that hour of the night. I never dreamed that there was anything like love-making going on between those two, or I should have put an end to Master Frank's visits here, much as I like the boy myself."

"If you were not so much occupied in that den you have fitted up for yourself under the hay-loft you must have seen what was going on," said his wife, drily. "I did not warn you because I wished Lora's fate—so far as marriage is concerned—to be settled before her father could interfere. I feared that you might think it necessary to inform Mr. Ford that his daughter had a lover, and I kept from you my own conviction that she was becoming genuinely attached to Frank Nugent. I knew that, of course, you could have no objection to him, and he is the son of the oldest and best friend you have in the world."

"What I think of Frank has nothing to do with this question," was the grave response. "I fear you have given those young people cause for many a heart-ache by your imprudent encouragement of their foolish love-dream. It can come to nothing, for Ford has other plans for his daughter. He intends her to make a brilliant match, he told me himself to-night. You may imagine with what scorn he would receive an offer from a young man who is contented to pass his life as a book-worm, and who has no ambition beyond living contentedly with his old parents on a place which does not yield over two thousand dollars a year. Why, in her own sphere, Lora will have more than double that amount allowed her for her toilet expenses alone."

"Yes," said Mrs. Grafton, with a sigh, "I see how wrong I was, but I acted for the best. Lora is already charmed by her father, and likes the idea of going with him. Her head will be turned by flattery, and her heart warped by the insidious efforts he will make to destroy all that is sweetest and purest in her nature. I am sorry for poor Frank, for he is desperately in earnest, and he will come over here to-morrow to make formal proposals for Lora's hand."

"Only to be sent adrift. It is simply absurd for him to ask Ford for his daughter. He will only subject himself to the humiliation of a refusal, and I would gladly save the young fellow's pride, if I could."

"Yet he must risk it; after what passed between him and Lora to-night he must speak to her father. She pledged herself positively to marry him, and, but for the early arrival of the steamer, she would, by this time, have been his wife."

"Don't refer again to that folly, if you please, Julia; and, above all, don't let Ford suspect that you abetted anything so contrary to his wishes. He would never forgive you and might hereafter raise objections to a visit from Lora if he thought you were in favor of such a marriage for her. Let Frank fight his own battle, and take his defeat as quietly as he can, for it is sure to come."

"For the present, perhaps; but if Lora is what I have striven to make her, a high-principled, noble specimen of her sex, she will come through the ordeal that approaches, as gold from the crucible, and, in the end, prove true to her troth in spite of all Mr. Ford's efforts to break the bond between herself and Frank."

"I can only hope it may prove so, but in the meantime things must take their course."

The two soon afterward retired, but there was not much sleep that weary night for either husband or wife.

CHAPTER VI.

DISCORDANT ELEMENTS—INCIPIENT REBELLION.

On the following morning Ford appeared at the late breakfast, looking as bland and smiling as though his career had been that of the most benevolent philanthropist on record.

He possessed that dangerous charm of manner which disarms suspicion, and wins on all, from the prince to the beggar. It was only with his tools that he showed the coarse fibre of his nature; to others he was the gracious, intelligent, and suave gentleman, who had something pleasant to say to everyone with whom he was brought in contact.

His handsome, smiling face offered a marked contrast to the stern, self-repressed expression of Grafton as they sat near each other at the table. Mrs. Grafton, looking pale and worn, sat behind the coffee-urn, glad of the partial shelter from observation it afforded her, while Lora, bright, lively, animated, sat opposite her father, evidently so occupied by him that she had few thoughts to bestow on her more familiar everyday friends.

Lora had evidently made a most careful toilet that morning, and she looked charming in a white wrapper frilled and plaited in the fashion of the day, and ornamented with a few knots of pale-blue ribbon.

Her shining wealth of hair was thrown back from her face, and loosely held together by a loop of blue ribbon laid upon her head, falling thence in rippling waves below her slender waist.

This simple style of coiffure, so trying to an ordinary face, only brought out the clearly cut features and delicate contour of her finely shaped head for the critical inspection of the connoisseur in female beauty who sat opposite to her, marvelling in his own mind that he had been so careless about her personal appearance as to be contented with the assurance given him by her guardian, that she promised to be pretty when fully grown.

Pretty! why, she was lovely as a dream! There was a fascination in her slightest movement, for she was the very incarnation of grace. Such was