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1	Milton	Wm. Fenton	27	29	25	13	28	30	10 a.m.
2	Oakville	R. Palmer	11	7	9	11	12	7	10 a.m.
3	Georgetown	L. Grant	17	13	15	4	15	13	9.30 a.m
4	Acton	J. Matthews	19	15	17	"	20	15	10 a.m.
5	Campbellville	S. R. Lister	6	2	4	"	7	2	9 30 "
6	Burlington	G. C. Bastedo	10	6	8	10	11	6	11 "

General Sessions of the Peace and County Court Sittings, with or without Jury. Tuesday 12th June, and 11th December at 10 a.m.

County Court Sittings, without Jury, Tuesday, 3rd April, and 2nd October, at 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.

As Elfie proceeded in her narration, conviction slowly came to Lora that she had been made the victim of a nefarious plot, and that Ford had resorted to the means he had used to prevent Frank Nugent from discovering that his betrothed bride was the heiress to the inheritance Ford intended to appropriate to himself.

That Nugent was dead she had never for one moment believed, and a sudden rush of joy and hope filled her soul almost to the exclusion of all sense of present danger. Knowing what he now did, Frank would follow her, would rescue her, and all would yet be well.

She presently said:

"If I understand your story, the father you so strangely met is a detective, and he intended to follow up the clew he had found to the villainy of these two men—the Fords, I mean. He will not be likely to slacken his efforts now that he knows you are with them. Did you tell him about this island?"

"No. I had an idea that I must be faithful to Mr. Ford, because he had been good to me. But he has undone all that by this late treatment, and I wish, with all my heart, that I had told my father all I knew about him."

"It would have been far better for both of us if you had done so. But we will hope for the best; having found you once, your father will never leave you to the protection of such men as he knows these Fords to be. I begin to hope that he is on the lake now, trying to find the island. The New Orleans lawyer would naturally send Mr. Bligh to communicate with my friends, and Ma Julia knows that Flath Innis is in Lake Erie. Oh! I will hope—I must hope, or I shall die. I will die before I will be forced into a union with Count Rosenberg."

"My father thinks that I was treacherous to him," said Elfie, in a sombre tone, "and I do not know that he will care to find me. But I could not help myself; I could not have escaped from Mr. Silas even if I had tried. Your friends may follow you, though, and if they do, will you promise not to go away with them without me?"

"I should be very base if I did such a thing as that, when you have tried to serve me. The assurance that I am not Stephen Ford's daughter is worth half the fortune you say I am entitled to, and you shall not only go with me, but you shall be well provided for throughout all your future life."

Elfie took the hand that was extended to her in pledge of these promises and pressed it to her lips and heart with fervent gratitude. She softly said:

"I will only ask of you to secure my escape, and—and, perhaps, to aid me to get such musical instruction as will enable me to provide for myself. That is my life-long dream, and it was the promise that I should have it which tempted me to assume your identity. I know now how wrong it was, and I am glad the plot was defeated."

"It was well for me that it was," said Lora, with a faint smile. "We will talk no more of that, but settle what we are to do, and how I am to evade the authority of the man who calls himself my father. Is there no place on the island in which I could hide myself for a few days? Every hour gained increases the chances that help may come?"

Elfie shook her head.

"There's not a secret place to be found, except the vaults under the old chapel, and there the men are almost constantly at work. I have found out how to get in them, but you would not be safe there for an hour."

"Then I must try finesse. I will change my tactics, and pretend to be making up my mind to accept the fate Mr. Ford has prepared for me; but I will insist on some delay, and Count Rosenberg will not refuse that, I think. They will be glad to have my consent, without being forced to extreme measures."

After some further conversation, this course was finally agreed on, and the two separated.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

LORA'S DANGER—HELP AT THE LAST MOMENT—CONCLUSION.

When the excitement of the late interview was over, Lora retired to her bed, and fell into an easy slumber, which lasted till the sun was shining in her chamber. She arose, made a careful toilet, and waited till Ford should come for her, that she might make her own terms with him before going out to join the trio at breakfast.

The carouse of the previous night caused them to sleep late, and it was nine o'clock before he rapped on the door and cried out:

"Breakfast, Lora. If you are hungry you had better join us. If you do not, you will not get even Lenten fare."

To his surprise the door was promptly opened, and Lora looked at him with undaunted eyes.

She calmly said:

"I have been thinking over my position, and I have concluded to make the best of it on one condition. Give me three days in which to make up my mind to obey you, and by that time things may take their course. This is not much to ask, I think."

Ford regarded her suspiciously for a moment, and then burst into a loud laugh.

"So-o—the fear of starvation and the temptation to become a countess have proved too much for you. I am glad that you have come to your senses, and as to the delay, it does not signify—you are as safe here as if we were on a desert island in the wide Pacific, and I suppose I may grant you this much grace. Come out and make yourself charming, and I won't insist on the marriage taking place to-day. But mind you, you are to treat Rosen as your affianced husband."

A thrill of disgust passed over her, but she retained her self-command, and quietly said:

"Count Rosenberg shall have nothing to complain of from me, if he will treat me as respectfully as he has hitherto done. He must remember that I am only trying to like him, because you command me to do so, and not offend me by any undue familiarity."

"Oh! as to that, he will be too much afraid of losing the little ground he has gained to annoy you in any way. The poor fellow is spooney about you, Lora. I'll go and speak to him and Silas a moment, that they may understand on what terms you emerge from your retirement."

Ford found the two on the veranda, and when he repeated to them what Lora had said, Rosen hastened to say:

"I am the one most deeply concerned, and I prefer giving her time to submit gracefully to what she cannot avoid. Let it be as she wishes, Ford."

Silas more deliberately said:

"If Rosen is contented to wait, I am sure I shall not object. The parson is too ill, anyway, to officiate to-day. I have been down to see him, and the voyage with the stimulants he took, has prostrated him completely."

The three went into the house together, and Lora, after exchanging a few words with Ford, came out and joined them at the breakfast-table.

She was paler than usual, but quite self-possessed, and did the honors with graceful ease in spite of the heavy load of care which lay at her heart.

When the meal was over, much to her relief, her persecutors went away to visit the vaults beneath the chapel, and afterward to stroll around the island and lay plans for the future, which were destined never to be carried out.

Lora could never tell how the three days, for which she had stipulated, passed. The hours seemed alternately to fly, and to drag their slow length along, as dread or hope predominated.

Sister Ann, upon Bluebeard's tower, never watched more breathlessly for aid than did she throughout that dreadful crisis of her fate.

The calm surface of the lake, with no sail to break its smooth monotony, met her eyes whenever she looked out; and when the last day dawned, and no succor seemed near, she was ready to despair.

Even if it had been safe to do so, Lora could only hold intercourse with Elfie after the inmates of the two houses were buried in sleep, for Mrs. Chotean was as executing of her daughter as she had promised to be, and kept her at the most menial tasks she could find for her. Resistance was vain, and the tasks were performed with the faint hope that release from them would soon come. Every night she found her way to Lora's room without being detected by her mother; but she could bring but little comfort with her when she came.

How despondent they were—how vainly they tried to inspire hope into each other it is useless to relate.

When they parted on the last night, Lora said:

"I am getting reckless, Elfie. If help does not come to-morrow, I shall defy the worst that can happen, and tell Mr. Ford what I know. Perhaps if I offer to divide my fortune with him he will let me go, and take you with me as my friend and sister."

"I don't know—it's very dark before us. At the worst, we can walk into the lake, and get rid of our troubles that way. It would be easier to me to do that than to live on here treated as I am now," was Elfie's gloomy reply.

"Oh! we shall never be driven to such an extreme as that. God is too good to permit it, and I have prayed to him so earnestly that He must have heard me. I love my life; I mean to be happy in it, and to make others happy too if I can. I will never throw it away, because it is God's gift, and I have no right to dispose of it but as He wills. Don't despond, Elfie; even at the eleventh hour there will be room for hope."

With these trusting words the two parted; but when the morrow came, Lora began to lose hope and courage, too.

On this last day the hours seemed to fly faster than ever; as sunset drew near Lora was kneeling beside her window with her eyes fixed upon the wide expanse of water toward which it looked, but her poor tortured heart was wrestling in an agony of prayer that help might come, even at the last hour in which it could avail to save her.

The radiant sunset flooded the whole sky with crimson, and suddenly against this rosy background something white, which momentarily increased in size, was seen. It was not a filmy cloud, as she at first feared, for it sailed swiftly in the direction of the island, and starting to her feet she joyfully cried out:

"I knew it! God has heard me, and I am saved!"

Other eyes had detected the approach of the vessel, too, for there was a commotion without that indicated that the whole settlement was astir.

Every evidence that could bring suspicion upon the inhabitants was quickly hidden in the vaults beneath the chapel with the full belief that they could never be discovered by one unacquainted with the secret of their entrance.

More than once strange vessels had accidentally sailed near Flath Innis, and made a passing call on the flourishing settlement, and no evil had resulted from it. But for the presence of Lora there, and the possibility that the stranger had on board of her those who were interested in her fate, Ford would have had no apprehensions.

As it was, he felt alarmed, and regretted the delay he had granted her. He hastened to her room with a heavy frown upon his brow, and opening the door without ceremony, said:

"The priest has come up at last, and everything is ready for the ceremony. Rosen and Silas are in the front room, and Mrs. Chotean is also there. Come, Lora, the time has arrived for you to redeem the pledge you gave me."

Lora faced him, looking white as death, and trembling through all her frame, but she firmly said:

"I gave you no pledge, Mr. Ford. I only asked for a few days that my friends might have time to follow me, and rescue me from your unscrupulous hands. They are coming—in a short time they will be here, and if you wish mercy to be shown to yourself, you will not use violence toward me."

He made a step toward her, grasped her arm in his iron grip, and sternly asked:

"Are you mad that you defy and threaten me? Me! Who can interfere with my authority over you, when you are my own daughter, and have consented to the marriage I have arranged for you?"

"You are not my father—and I have never given my consent to marry Count Rosenberg. I know now why I was brought here, and who I am. Let me go quietly when that steamer lands, and I will pay you ransom—even to the half of my fortune, if needful."

"If not my daughter, who then are you?" he contemptuously asked.

"I am Cora Ross, and you are only my stepfather. I warn you that those are coming who will bring you to an account not only for abducting an heiress that you may secure possession of her fortune, but for other misdeeds which have been too long unpunished."

Ford shrank a moment, but he was not to be baffled at this hour, and his natural hardihood came to sustain him. He hoarsely said:

"There has been treachery somewhere, or you would not have known this. I can put my finger upon the traitor, and she shall be well punished. As to your threats of what may happen to myself, I despise and defy them. Let your friends come—they will find nothing here that can warrant them in interfering with me and my affairs; as to yourself, I can, and will, place you in such secure hiding that they will no more be able to find you than to find anything to criminate me. Come—"

Lora struggled to escape from him, but she was as a child in his ruthless grasp. He lifted her in his strong arms, and held her so firmly as he strode through the house and entered the sheltered pathway which led to the chapel, that she found resistance useless.

There was no one there, for the men had been summoned from their work to make ready for resistance in case the approaching sail should prove to be a hostile visitor, and the necessity for it should arise.

The door of the chapel was unfastened, as it was always left, that the few who cared to come hither and pray before its desecrated altar might find no obstruction in their way. The entrance to the vaults was also easily accessible, as nothing suspicious was allowed to remain in them. The working chambers excavated beyond, and carefully concealed, Ford believed to be inaccessible except to those who knew the means by which they could be entered.

Lora had cried out, in the forlorn hope that she might at least alarm Elfie, and warn her to provide for her own safety, if there was any possibility of her doing so. Ford's words had shown her the danger the poor girl had incurred by trying to help her, and even in her own extremity she trembled for what might happen to Elfie. Moreover, if friends were coming, on her alone could she rely to conduct them to the place of her concealment.

Ford, still holding her firmly in his arms, strode down a flight of steps and plunged into the darkness below. He went unerringly toward a niche in which a lantern and matches were kept, and placing Lora on the floor, held her arm with one hand, and with the other lighted the small piece of candle in the lantern.

The light flashed on humid walls, and imperfectly showed the extent of the vault in which they stood. Pushing her before him, they passed through a narrow entrance into one beyond, which seemed to be used to store spirit casks, and this one had a fastening on the door, which Ford sprang back.

A few steps brought them to what seemed the solid wall, but a pressure on a block of stone, in no way different in appearance from those around it, caused it to move easily on a pivot, and sink back, leaving an opening large enough to pass through.

Lora had by no means been passive while this was going on. She had made many ineffectual efforts to get away from him, but he held her with almost a death-grip, and with sickening heart she found herself helpless in his hands. He thrust her through the opening into what seemed a dark and endless cavern, in which she could see nothing till he placed the lantern upon the floor, without entering the place himself, and grimly said:

"You are safe enough now, young lady; and let you be who you may, you only come out of this gloomy prison to submit to my will as your law. My people are faithful, and your presence here can never be discovered through them. Elfie has evidently communicated with you, though I told her mother to keep a sharp eye on her. I shall take good care of her, and if you ever see her again you will understand what it is to attempt to circumvent me in any of my plans."

Terrified by the latent threat his words implied against Elfie, Lora eagerly said:

"I will give you half—two-thirds—of all I may be entitled to if you will let both of us go away with those who are coming. That is more than Carl Rosen would be willing to allow you to claim from my dower. Only listen to me and it will be better for you in the end."

Ford laughed scornfully.

"You are not of age; your promise is worth nothing, and you would not be permitted to keep it. Besides, I choose to punish Elfie for her treachery, and I mean to keep my hold on you till you are safely married to the man whose interests are bound up with my own. You are safe enough here; that piece of candle will last you a few hours, and then you will be left in darkness. You can try starvation for a while, for neither food or drink shall be brought to you till my unwelcome visitors have left the island."

While he was speaking the block of stone slowly swung itself into place again, closing with a sharp snap as the last word was uttered, and Lora found herself alone in the vaults.

She lifted the lantern and looked around to find some safe spot on which to place it, and something to sit upon herself, for she felt worn out with the useless struggle she had made against her captor while bearing her to this dreadful place.

The vault was completely fitted up for the work that was carried on in it, and she found rough seats placed against the walls. On examination she also discovered that a chandelier hung from the ceiling, holding eight large lamps, and these were more than half filled with oil.

Rejoicing that she would not be left in the dark when her candle gave out, she found means to reach the lamps and light all of them. Then throwing herself upon one of the rude seats she tried to compose herself, and think over the chances for her escape. She would not despair; she would still hope and pray for deliverance, and surely the Father of the helpless would not forsake her in this extremity.

Leaving her thus, we must return to Ford.

By the time he gained the chapel and made his way to the landing, the strange sail was within hail, and with sudden dread he saw that she was armed, and that the mouth of a cannon was turned toward the settlement, ready to deal death and destruction to it at the first word from her commander.

On his way he had stopped a moment at Chotean's house to command his wife to find her daughter, and keep her under strict surveillance till he called her into his own presence after the visitors were gone.

He then hurried on, and found Rosen and his brother watching the approach of the strangers with apprehensive looks. He gruffly said:

"There is nothing to fear; why do you look so scared? If you will only be calm and cool we can easily tide over this danger."

"Not so easy as you may think," replied Silas, "for this is a government vessel, and through my glass I have recognized Melchoir Bligh. He has twenty armed men at his back, with that cannon to batter down the houses. Our time has come at last, Stephen, and we had best escape while we can. The yacht can outrun anything on the lake, and we may be able to get safely to Canada."

"So-o—that is your advice, is it, Silas? I did not think you were such a coward," was the contemptuous retort. "Let these people land, with Bligh at their head; they will find nothing here but a band of industrious men who cultivate the soil for a living. They dare not commit any violence unless they find something to justify it. Bligh has come for his precious daughter, I suppose, and he may have her, but not until I have dealt with her after such a fashion that she will be in no condition to betray to him any more than she has already done. Lora is safe, and that young Nugent I see standing over yonder shall never know where she is to be found."

By this time the propeller was close to the shore; the hail was repeated, and the question asked:

"Is this Flath Innis, the island home of Stephen Ford?"

Ford gnashed his teeth with rage, but he stood forward and replied:

"It is, and I am here to welcome you, gentlemen, though I am at a loss to know why you have come in this warlike guise."

By the orders of Silas the yacht had slipped her mooring and lighted her fires, ready for the escape he had meditated, and she had swept down from the landing far enough to allow room for the other craft to lie to above her.

Bligh stepped forward to reply to Ford.

"I am armed with the authority of the lawful search this island for evidences of the contraband manufacture carried on upon it, and if resistance is made it is my firm intention to fire on the place and utterly destroy it. I have shells on board with which to batter down every house in sight."

A murmur arose among the people, all of whom had gathered within sight and hearing of what was going on. Ford turned to them, and sternly said:

"There is nothing to fear if you are true to yourselves;" then raising his voice he replied to Bligh: "You are welcome to search every nook on the island, and if you find anything to criminate these peaceful people, we will yield ourselves to the authority of the law. Bring your posse with you, Melchoir Bligh, and see for yourself that you have come on an idle errand."

Bligh, followed by ten men armed to the teeth, accepted the invitation given with such apparent frankness, and, accompanied by Frank Nugent, approached the three who stood awaiting them.

The latter impetuously said:

"You see me here, Mr. Ford, and you may guess the errand on which I come. Where is Lora? I must find and take her away with me."

"Softly—softly, young man," said Ford, composedly. "There are several words to be said to that. My daughter is not at Flath Innis; and if she were, she is already the wife of this gentleman standing beside me—Count Von Rosenberg, at your service, Mr. Nugent."

Frank cast a lightning glance at Rosen, and seeing that he quailed before the assertion thus boldly made, he firmly said:

"It is false that Lora, or Cora Ross, is your daughter, and it is equally false that she has permitted herself to be forced into a union with that man there. If it were true I should kill him, and take her from him at any cost to myself. Where is Lora, and what have you done with her?"

"She is in Canada, awaiting impatiently for the return of her count, who is to take her to Europe and make her a great lady. Did you think that any woman could withstand the temptation to be made a peeress?" said Ford, insolently. "As to your threats, you will find that we value them very lightly, Mr. Nugent."

Frank turned furiously toward Rosen, who was pale as death, and ready, like the coward he was, to fly from the danger that menaced him.

"Is there a grain of truth in this statement? Have you been base enough to force a helpless girl to give you her hand?"

To these furious inquiries Rosen found voice to say:

"She consented without undue pressure from me. Mr. Ford and his brother can both testify to that. I love her—I have the best right to her."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)