



# FATHER'S VICTIM

## A Story of Western Life

BY THOMAS P. MONTFORT.

"We'll have to take that money, Mr. Scrapps," John said.

"So you've concluded to accept the accommodation, eh?" Scrapps replied as he again brought forth the papers.

"No," John said, "we have only concluded to get robbed."

"Well, call it what you please, Mr. Green," said Scrapps, "but it is an accommodation, just the same. If we didn't let you have the money you suffer, for you can't get it anywhere else on any terms."

John had no inclination to argue the matter, so he made no reply, and Scrapps proceeded to draw up the papers. In a few minutes the writings were completed, signed and delivered, and John received his money. He and Mary immediately left the office, and with sorrowful hearts walked down the street, and after making some purchases at the store drove home.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE BLATCHFORDS.

When old Farmer Green announced to the world that he had disowned and disinherited his son he felt he had put the finishing stroke to his duty. When he thundered forth the awful edict he ended his connection with this story, so we gently drop him out of its pages fearing that his absence can well be spared.

Blatchford, however, cannot so readily be disposed of, since he figures in the narrative to the end, therefore it is necessary to go back and give a little further account of him.

At the time John and Mary married, Hiram Blatchford had been a widower for two years, and he remained so until after his daughter removed to Kansas. Soon after that event, though, he met Miss Sarah Spickler, an elderly spinster, and asked her to share his home. Miss Spickler having been on the matrimonial market for a good many years with no bidders for her hand, was desperate enough to accept any sort of offer, and accordingly she snapped Blatchford up on short order.

Miss Spickler was anything but pretty, and her temper was soured and her intellect none of the strongest, yet she had not been in the Blatchford home a week, as Mrs. Blatchford, before she had her husband under her thumb, and held complete sway over everything and everybody about the place.

Blatchford was her slave from the first, and with him her word was law. Whatever she wished she had, and whatever she commanded to be done was done without delay. She married Blatchford for his money, and she was determined from the first to have it.

A month or so after his marriage Blatchford began to study about his daughter, and the more he thought of her the more he became convinced that he had ill-treated her. In short, after so long a time he came to the conclusion that he was as much to blame as Mary, and knowing that she must be suffering privations, he decided to extend to her the hand of friendship and offer to her and John some pecuniary assistance. Having come to this conclusion, he hastened to mention the matter to his wife for her sanction. Sarah listened until he had unfolded his plans, then with uplifted hands and staring eyes exclaimed:

"Well, did I ever hear of such a thing as that? Hiram Blatchford, have you lost all your sensess?"

"Why, Sarah," Hiram replied, taken back, "what's the matter?"

"Matter?" Sarah repeated. "Well, I'd never believed it, never."

"Never believed what?" Hiram asked.

"Why, that you could ever have been taken with such fool notions, Hiram. Who ever heard of the like of it?"

"Why, I—" Hiram stammered and stopped.

"Why, you," Sarah put in, "want to be a fool, Hiram Blatchford, a regular out and out fool, you do. That's all there is of it. The idea of you making the first step towards reconciliation between you and your daughter, when she threw you away for the sake of John Green. Yes, if I was you I would. I'd go and get down on my knees to her, and own that I was in the wrong. Yes, I'd do all that, and beg her with tears in my eyes to come back to my arms."

"Sarah, I—" Hiram stammered and stopped.

"Yes, I know what you thought, Hiram. I know that your soft, silly heart prompts you to make a fool of yourself. But before you do it, ask yourself if it would be right. Wasn't you always kind and indulgent to Mary, and didn't you do everything for her that a father could do?"

"Yes, that's true," Hiram replied with no little inward satisfaction, and with a growing feeling that he was a much abused parent.

"Then you have done your duty, Hiram, more than your duty, and if anybody is to bind the knee let it be the who has done wrong. I don't believe in a father being made a slave to the whim and wishes of an ungrateful child. If I had ever had such a father as you, and had ever crossed him in one wish even, I never would have forgiven myself. I couldn't ever look the world in the face after being so heartless and ungrateful. Oh! Hiram, what a noble, loving, forgiving nature you have, and how unfeeling must have been the child who could so ruthlessly trample upon it."

At this point the good Sarah, who all along had shown strong symptoms of weeping, was so overcome that she could restrain her tears no longer, and broke down and poured forth in a perfect flood on her husband's shoulder. Hiram was deeply touched, and he was forced to exert himself to keep back the tears of self pity that welled up in his own eyes. He had never before realized how deeply he had been wronged, and never before had he understood how much he had been martyred. His heart went out to himself, and he pitied himself from the bottom of his soul.

"There, there, Sarah," he said, "don't let the tenderness of your heart cause you to grieve too sorely for what I have been made to suffer. I promise you that I shall not forget my wrongs again soon, since the weakness that possessed me for a short time is gone. No, I'll never make any advances to a child who so far forgot her duty to me and treated me with such cruelty, and I am

glad that you recalled me to myself in time to save me from taking the step I had anticipated."

Sarah checked her tears and by degrees her sobbing ceased. The effort she had made had been a great one, and her soul was terribly sore from the effects of it, but she had saved her husband from abusing himself and sinking his dignity, and she was satisfied. Of course she had saved him from all expense on Mary's account and kept that much more money for herself, but that would not count for anything with such a noble soul as that of the angelic Sarah.

"Hiram," she said when she had got her feelings sufficiently under control to be able to cease her tears and sob, "I hope I have not said too much. I am sorry that your daughter cannot occupy the place in your heart that a child should occupy in the heart of a parent, and I know I would be the last person to aid in estranging you from her. Perhaps I have said too much, but I have your good so deeply at heart that I couldn't help saying what I did. It was all for the sake of your loving, generous self."

"I know that, Sarah. I do not misunderstand you. I know how it pains you to have to say such things, but you feel it to be your duty, and you do it. I thank you, my dear wife, with all my

"Louise," Mary said after awhile, "you know how old Markham talked to you that night you went to the store, and you know we have had nothing to do with them since, and you know that we can't accept any favors from Paul."

Louise arose and going to the window stood for a minute or so looking out into the snow-covered prairie. Unconsciously she let a sigh escape her, and though it was soft and low, the quick ears of her mother caught it.

"Louise," Mary called, "don't fret about the books, for we shall try to get them soon."

"It is not the books, mother," Louise replied as she came and put her arms about her mother's neck and laid her face on her bosom. "I can wait for them."

"Then what makes you sad, my child?" Mary stroked her daughter's hair and tried to lift the bowed head.

"What is it you sight for?"

"I—I'm afraid you and pa do not like Paul," and Louise buried her face deeper on her mother's breast. "He is so good and generous, and is all the friend I have in the world aside from you two, and I'm afraid you do not like him."

"Why, I'm sure I have nothing against him, child. He is a quiet, honest, industrious young man, and if it wasn't that he is a Markham I couldn't say a word against him."

"He is a Markham, mother, but he is not like his father. He is as generous and kind as he can be, and I do wish you and pa would be friendly with him."

Mary began to have a suspicion of something underlying this uncommon interest felt by Louise in Paul, and for several minutes she was undecided how to proceed. Finally she took the girl's head in her hands and lifted it up until the face was opposite her own, and if she had wanted any further evidence to confirm the truth of her surmises, she would have found it in the telltale blushes that swept over the fair young cheeks.

"Louise," she said, "don't keep any secrets from me, but tell me why you take such a deep interest in Paul."

"Because—don't think me silly, mother, for I can't help it. I love him."

These last words were spoken in a faint whisper, but Mary understood them, and drawing her child to her, pressed her close to her bosom, and thus they remained for a long time. Mary was the first to break the silence.

"Paul shall never receive anything but the kindest treatment from me," she said, "and I know John will treat him as a gentleman. Paul is a good man, and if you love him he shall have my love, too."

"Thank you, mamma, I do, and I am willing to do as you say, and I know Paul will, too. I will never have any secrets from you, and never go contrary to your wishes. Paul and I will wait, and neither of us will think it hard, since you wish it, but nothing, mother, can part us. Nothing, nothing."

Alas that Louisa's fond hope was doomed to be blasted, and that one undreamed of should come between her and Paul—come in a way, too, to bring her the trying ordeal of her life.

## CHAPTER VI.

PAUL AND LOUISE.

Louise accepted Paul's books now and with her mother's aid she studied them well and faithfully. She had attended school sufficiently back east to lay the foundation for a fair education, and being bright-minded and quick to learn, she made excellent progress with her studies and bid fair to gain a good education even under such unfavorable circumstances.

Mary was a good scholar and well adapted to the duties of teaching, and she never tired of aiding Louise. Then Paul came over quite frequently of evenings and he was not by any means averse to giving such assistance as lay in his power. In fact he was so anxious to teach Louise and pursued the task with such diligence and earnestness that it was apparent that he derived fully as much pleasure, if not profit, from it as Louise did. Paul was a most exemplary teacher, and nothing was too difficult or too hard for his efforts so long as it was for Louise's good. He never wearied of explaining dry, tough arithmetical problems or of conjugating juiceless verbs. But it must be remembered that Paul's pupil was a select one, and it is more than probable that almost any young man, feeling as he did, would have done equally well, or at least labored with my much as he did.

Louise not only progressed in her studies, but she spent some very happy evenings, and the remaining months of winter passed off much more pleasantly than she had anticipated. John and Mary always welcomed Paul to their home, and as they came to be better acquainted with him they grew to like him more and more. He was of a happy disposition, and he had a way of making people forget their sorrows and troubles, and often he chirked John up out of a fit of downheartedness and brought a smile to his lips and a twinkle of pleasure to his eyes. Paul made it a point to take the cheerfullest view of the future, and sometimes he went off into the wildest flights of fancy in speaking of what he contemplated as accomplishing for himself. His dreams were extravagant, but dreaming them was better than repining.

Paul had studies of his own. He was reading medical works and was going to be a doctor. He had taken one at a medical college and hoped to return the next fall to take another if he was fortunate enough to raise a crop on his claim and get money to pay his way. His sole possession was the claim, and he could mortgage that as Green had his, "on long time and easy terms," but he hoped to have a home long for himself and Louise, so he hesitated to raise money in that way. Old Markham had money, but he was

known little enough of such in your life. You like and esteem Paul above all others, but perhaps you may not love him. Love is a broad and a deep thing, and you are too young to understand what it really is. Go on thinking of him as you do, if you wish, and always treat him with the kindest consideration, but do not go beyond that. If he speaks to you of love do not encourage him, and make him no promises. Tell him that you are young and that I wish you to wait a year or two longer before you enter into any compact affecting your whole future life.

But perhaps this is all unnecessary precaution. He has said nothing, and perhaps he may not say anything for a long time. It may be—you are he loves you, Louise!"

"I know he does, mamma. I—I can't tell you how I know it, but I do know he loves me; and some day he means to ask me to be his wife. I am sixteen now, and in a year or two I shall be a woman, and then he will speak and you will not object. Will you?"

"No, not unless I have better reasons than I know at present. But a year or two is a long time, Louise, and we need not consider now what we will do then. It may not be necessary for me to say aye or nay to Paul, for you may see some one else that may supersede him in your heart."

"Oh, mother, that is impossible! No one can be to me what Paul is. I could not be so ungrateful as to give him a second place in my heart, when he has been so good to me."

The mother smiled again. She was assured from these last words of her daughter, that Louise had mistaken her heart, and that what she felt to be love

can be managed. If we had the books I could help you with your studies, but we haven't the money to buy books."

"I know that, mother, but I was thinking that I might borrow some."

"I don't know who you could borrow them from, Louise. I don't suppose anyone about here has them."

"I know who has them," Louise replied, "but I don't know whether you would want me to get them of him. Paul has lots of books that he brought from school with him, and he has often offered to let me have them."

"Paul Markham?" Mary asked.

"Yes," Louise said, "he has the books I need, and he has begged me to take them."

"Louise," Mary said after awhile, "you know how old Markham talked to you that night you went to the store, and you know we have had nothing to do with them since, and you know that we can't accept any favors from Paul."

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"It is not the books, mother," Louise replied as she came and put her arms about her mother's neck and laid her face on her bosom. "I can wait for them."

Such thoughts as these ran through the mother's mind, and she trembled for the safety of her child. Then she recalled all she knew of Paul. He was a man of perfect character, and in all the years she had known him he had not been guilty of an ungentlemanly act. This review of the young man's past somewhat reassured her, and she felt thankful that it was Paul who held such an influence over her daughter. She was far safer with him than with most men.

So after considering the matter well, Mary decided to say no do nothing to antagonize her daughter's sentiments. She remembered only too vividly what the result of such action had been in her own case, and she knew that young lovers could not be driven. She realized that harsh measures would only bring the lovers closer together, and result in the very thing she was anxious to avert—premature marriage. So at last, taking Louise's hand in her own, she said:

"Do as I have told you, Louise; treat Paul as kindly as you can, and remember him as your best friend, but do not make him any promises. He knows you are too young to think of marriage, and he will not think it hard to leave you free for a year or two longer. You are free to keep company with him and to love him, and when you are year older, if you want to promise to be his, you can do so with my consent. I think I have offered fair terms, Louise, and I hope you will consider them such."

"I do, mamma, I do, and I am willing to do as you say, and I know Paul will be, too. I will never have any secrets from you, and never go contrary to your wishes. Paul and I will wait, and neither of us will think it hard, since you wish it, but nothing, mother, can part us. Nothing, nothing."

"It is a long lane, Mary," he sometimes said, "that has no turn, and I believe in our case the turn is near at hand. We have had a long siege of misfortunes, but I think we have about reached the end of the list. The prospects are flattering for an abundant crop, and with the amount of stuff I have in cultivation we only want a yield to enable us to pay off the mortgage and have plenty left to tide us over the year. We'll come out all right yet, and within a short time be comfortably fixed with a good home and plenty of everything to live on. Why, what's a little hard times, anyhow? It don't amount to anything and is soon over, and it don't hurt us any, but only makes us appreciate our good fortunes all the more when they do come. Inside of two years we can look back on the past few months and laugh over our privations and wonder what it was we fretted about. We'll come out all right."

And John went off to his work singing as happy as a king, and Mary looked after him smilingly, equally as confident as he.

Paul, too, applied himself to his work, and as he plodded after the plow he dreamed of the future, of the time when he should be a doctor and have a cozy little home with Louise for his mistress. Ambition or love ought either to be sufficient to urge a man on to his best endeavors; but when they combine, as they did in Paul's case, there is no telling what strength they will put into a man's arm nor what determination to his heart.

Thus it was that among all the settlers on that great level plain there were none that devoted themselves more sedulously to work than John and Paul, and as the season advanced and the spring months gave place to those of summer, there were no fields in all the settlement that looked more flourishing or promising than theirs. And each of these men, sanguine natured as they were, counted the victory won, and each in his way made his plans for the future and constructed innumerable castles in the air.

Every Sunday now Paul came to John Green's house, for it was distinctly understood all around that Paul and Louise were to marry by and by, though not a word relative to the matter had passed between their parents. Often the young people read from the same book, as they sat on a bench outside the house, and on such occasions they seemed to have a vast amount of difficulty in making out the words, for they brought their eyes close down to the page, their faces almost touching, and the words they sometimes pronounced were not printed on the page at all. But every person who has counted knows that is.

One day Paul and Louise went for a stroll on the prairie. It was a clear, calm Sabbath, such as summer Sabbaths usually are, and a misty haze danced about near the green earth. They walked on and on, mile after mile, and at last coming to the road that ran over toward Paradise Park, they turned into that and went on to the east.

"About the 1st of September," Paul was saying, "I shall be ready to go back to school. There will be a year of separation, and it will seem long, but when it is passed I will come back and build up a home, and then we will marry and settle down in it to live as happily as we can."

Louise gave a little start, and after casting a hurried glance at Paul, looked down and blushed. Paul noticed her manner, and thinking it due to embarrassment went on:

"I have not forgotten, Louise, what you told me your mother said, and I do not ask you to promise me anything—not until the year is out. I am quite satisfied without it, for I know that you love me, and it requires no words to reveal your heart to me, and no promise to make me understand that you will be my wife."

"I do love you, Paul," Louise said, "with all the fervor of my heart, and I will never love you less. You are so good and noble. But, Paul, you—" "What is it, Louise?" Paul asked.

"I don't know," Louise replied.

"I suppose I am foolish, Paul, but I can't help it. I am so common and insignificant, and you will be thrown among so many women who are beautiful and accomplished."

For a moment Paul was unable to understand the girl's words, but after a time a light began to break on his mind, and with a light, cheerful laugh he drew her closer to him and said:

"And so you think I will be so blinded and dazzled by the beauty and accomplishments of other women that I shall forget my little girl away off out here on the plains?" Is that the brilliant idea that has edged its way into your mind?"

Louise walked on some distance before she replied, half vexed at herself for uttering words that showed she doubted Paul's constancy, and half glad that she had uttered them, as it gave him an opportunity of reasserting his love.

THEY READ FROM THE SAME BOOK.

opposed to Paul's plans, and he refused to let him have a dollar on