

Marian Mayfield

Or, The Strange Disappearance

CHAPTER XI.

It should have been an enchanting home to which Thurston Willcoxon returned after his long sojourn in Europe. The place, Dell-Delight, might once have deserved its euphonious and charming name; now, however, its delightfulness was as purely traditional as the royal lineage claimed by its owners.

Mr. Willcoxon was one of those whose god is Mammon. He had inherited money, married a half-sister of Commodore Waugh for money, and made money. Year by year, from youth to age, adding thousands to thousands, acres to acres; until now, at the age of ninety-five, he was the master of incalculable riches.

He had outlived his wife and their three children; and his nearest of kin were Thurston Willcoxon, the son of his eldest son; Cloudesley Mornington, the son of his eldest daughter, and poor Fanny Laurie, the child of his youngest daughter.

Thurston and Fanny had each inherited a small property independent of their grandfather.

But poor Cloudy had been left an orphan in the worst sense of the word—destitute and dependent on the "cold charity of the world," or the colder and bitterer aims of unloving rich relatives.

The oldest and nearest kinsman and natural guardian of the boys—old Mr. Willcoxon—had, of course, received them into his house to be reared and educated; but no education would he afford the lads beyond that dispensed by the village schoolmaster, who could very well teach them that ten dimes make a dollar, and ten dollars an eagle; and who could also instruct them how to write their own names—for instance, at the foot of receipts of so many hundred dollars for so many hogsheads of tobacco; or to read other men's signatures, to wit, upon the backs of notes of hand, payable at such a time, or on such a day. This was just knowledge enough, he said, to teach the boys how to make and save money, yet not enough to tempt them to spend it foolishly in travel, libraries, pictures, statues, arbors, fountains, and such costly trumpery and expensive tumfoolery.

To Thurston, who was his favorite, probably because he bore the family name and inherited some independent property, Mr. Willcoxon would, however, have afforded a more liberal and gentlemanly education, could he have done so and at the same time decently withheld from going to some expense in giving his penniless grandson, Cloudy, the same privilege. As it was, he sought to veil his parsimony by conservative principle.

It was a great humiliation to the boys to see that, while all the youths of their own rank and neighborhood were entered pensioners at the local college, they two alone were taken from the little day-school to be put to agricultural labor—a thing unprecedented in that locality at that time.

When this matter was brought to the knowledge of Commodore Waugh, as he strode up and down his hall, the indignant old sailor thumped his heavy stick upon the ground, thrust forward his great head, and swore furiously by the whole Pandemonial Hierarchy that his grandnephews should not be brought up like clodhoppers.

And straightway he ordered his carriage, threw himself into it, and rode over to Charlotte Hall, where he entered the name of his two young relatives as pensioners at his own proper cost.

This done, he ordered his coachman to take the road to Dell-Delight, where he had an interview with Mr. Willcoxon.

And as he met little opposition from the old man, who seemed to think that it was no more than fair that the boys' uncle should share the expense of educating them, he sought out the youths, whom he found in the field, and bade them leave the plough, and go and prepare themselves to go to C—and get educated, as befit the grandnephews of a gentleman!

The lads were at that time far too simple-minded and too clamish to feel their pride piqued at this offer, or to take offense at the rude manner in which it was made. Commodore Waugh was their granduncle, and therefore had a right to educate them, and to be short with them, too, if he pleased. That was the way in which they both looked at the matter. And very much delighted and very grateful they were for the opening for education thus made for them.

And very zealously they entered upon their academical studies. They boarded at the college and roomed together. But their vacations were spent apart, Thurston spending his at Dell-Delight, and Cloudy his at Luckenough.

When the academical course was completed, Commodore Waugh, as has been seen, was at some pains to give Cloudy a fair start in life, and for the first time condescended to use his influence with "the Department" to procure a favor in the shape of a midshipman's warrant for Cloudesley Mornington.

In the meantime old Mr. Willcoxon was very gradually sinking into the imbecility natural to his advanced age; and his fascinating grandson was gaining some ascendancy over his mind. Year by year this influence increased, though it must be admitted that Thurston's conquest over his grandfather's whims was as slow as that of the Hollanders in winning the land from the sea.

However, the old man—now that Cloudy was provided for and off his hands—lent a more willing ear to the petition of Thurston to be permitted to continue his education by a course of studies at a German university, and afterward by a tour of the Eastern continent.

Thurston's absence was prolonged much beyond the original intention, as has been related; he spent two years at the university, two in travel, and nearly two in the city of Paris.

His grandfather would certainly never have consented to this prolonged absence, had it been at his own cost; but the expenses were met by advances upon Thurston's own small patrimony.

And, in fact, when at last the young gentleman returned to his native country, it was because his property was nearly exhausted, and his remittances were small, few and far between, grudgingly sent, and about to be stopped. Therefore nearly penniless, but perfectly free from the smallest debt or degradation—elegant, accomplished, fastidious, yet truthful, generous, gallant and aspiring—Thurston left the elegant salons and exciting scenes of Paris for the comparative dullness and dreariness of his native place and his grandfather's house.

He had reached his legal majority just before leaving Paris, and soon after his arrival at home he was appointed trustee of poor Fanny Laurie's property.

His first act was to visit Fanny in the distant asylum in which she was confined, and ascertain her real condition. And having heard her pronounced incurable, though perfectly harmless, he determined to release her from the confinement of the asylum, and to bring her home to her native county, where, among the woods and hills and streams, she might find at once that freedom, space and solitude so desired by the heart-sick or brain-sick, and where also his own care might avail her.

Old Mr. Willcoxon, far from offering opposition to this plan, actually favored it—though from the less worthy motive of economy. What was the use of spending money to pay board, and nursing, and medical attendance, in the asylum, when she might be boarded and nursed and doctored so much cheaper at home? For the old man confidently looked forward to the time when the poor, fragile, failing creature would sink into the grave, and Thurston would become her heir. And he calculated that every dollar they could save of her income would be so much added to the inheritance when Thurston should come into it.

Very soon after Thurston's return home his grandfather gave him to understand the conditions upon which he intended to make him his heir. They were two in number, viz., that Thurston should never leave him again while he lived; and, secondly, that he should never marry without his consent. "For I don't wish to be left alone in my old age, my dear boy; nor do I wish to see you throw yourself away upon any girl whose fortune is less than the estate I intend to bequeath entire to yourself."

CHAPTER XII.

It was not fortunate for old Mr. Willcoxon's plans that his grandson should have met Marian Mayfield. For, on the morning of Thurston's first meeting with the charming girl, when he turned his horse's head from the arched gateway of Old Field Cottage and galloped off, "a haunting shape and image gay" attended him.

It was that of beautiful Marian, with her blooming face and sunny hair, and rounded roscate neck and bosom and arms, all softly, delicately flushed with the pure glow of rich, luxuriant vitality, as she stood in the sunlight, under the arch of azure morning-gloves, with her graceful arms raised in the act of binding up the vines.

At first this "image fair" was almost unthought of; he was scarcely conscious of the haunting presence, or the life and light it gradually diffused through his whole being. And when the revelation dawned upon his intellect, he smiled to himself and wondered if, for the first time, he was falling in love; and then he grew grave, and tried to banish the dangerous thought. But when, day after day, amid all the business and the pleasures of his life, the "shape" still pursued him, instead of getting angry with it or growing weary of it, he opened his heart and took it in, and made it at home, and set it upon a throne, where it reigned supreme, diffusing delight over all his nature. But soon, too soon, this bosom's sovereign became the despot, and stung, goaded and urged him to

see again this living, breathing, glowing, most beautiful original. To seek her? For what? He did not even try to answer the question.

Thus passed one week. And then, had he been disposed to forget the beautiful girl, he could not have done so. For everywhere where the business of his grandfather took him—around among the neighboring planters, to the villages of B—or of C—, everywhere he heard of Marian, and frequently he saw her, though at a distance, or under circumstances that made it impossible for him, without rudeness, to address her. He both saw and heard of her in scenes and society where he could hardly have expected to find a young girl of her insignificant position.

Marian was a regular attendant of the Protestant church at Benedict, where, before the morning service, she taught in the Sunday-school, and before the afternoon service she received a class of colored children.

And Thurston, who had been a very careless and desultory attendant, sometimes upon the Catholic chapel, sometimes upon the Protestant church, now became a very regular frequenter of the latter place of worship; he object of his worship being not the Creator, but the creature, whom, if he missed from her accustomed seat, the singing, and praying, and preaching for him lost all of its meaning, power and spirituality. In the churchyard he sometimes tried to catch her eye and bow to her; but he was always completely baffled in his aspirations after a nearer communion. She was always attended from the church and assisted into her saddle by Judge Provost, Colonel Thornton, or some other "potent, grave and reverend seignors," who "hedged her about with a divinity" that it was impossible, without rudeness and intrusion, to break through. The more he was baffled and perplexed, the more eager became his desire to cultivate her acquaintance. Had his course been clear to woo her for his wife, it would have been easy to ask permission of Edith to visit her at her house; but such was not the case, and Thurston, tampering with his own integrity of purpose, rather wished that this much coveted acquaintance should be incidental, and their interviews seem accidental, so that he should not commit himself, or in any way lead her to form expectations which he had no surety of being able to meet. How long this cool and cautious foresight might avail him, if once he were brought in close companionship with Marian, remains to be seen. It happened one Sunday afternoon in October that he saw Marian take leave of her venerable escort, Colonel Thornton, at the churchyard gate, and gayly and alone turn into the forest road that led to her own home. He immediately threw himself into his saddle and followed her, with the assumed air of an indifferent gentleman pursuing his own path. He overtook her near one of those gates that frequently intersect the road. Bowing, he passed her, opened the gate, and held it open for her passage. Marian smiled, and nodded with a pleasant:

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Willcoxon," as she went through.

Thurston closed the gate and rode on after her.

"This is glorious weather, Miss Mayfield."

"Glorious, indeed!" replied Marian.

"And the country, too, is perfectly beautiful at this season. I never could sympathize with the poets who call autumnal days 'the melancholy days—the saddest of the year.'"

"Nor I," said Marian; "for to me, autumn, with its refulgent skies, and gorgeous woods, and rich harvest, and its prospect of Christmas cheer and wintry repose has ever seemed a gay and festive season. The year's great work is done, the harvest is gathered, enjoyment is present, and repose at hand."

"In the world of society," said Thurston, "it is in the evening, after the labor or the business of the day is over, that the gayest scenes of festivity occur, just preceding the repose of sleep. So I receive your thought of the autumn—the evening of the year, preceding the rest of winter. Nature's year's work is done she puts on her most gorgeous robes, and holds a festival before she sinks to her winter's sleep."

Marian smiled brightly upon him.

"Yes; my meaning, I believe, only more pointedly expressed."

That smile—that smile! It lightened through all his nature with electric, life-giving, spirit-realizing power, elevating and inspiring his whole being. His face, too, was radiant with life as he answered the maiden's smile.

But something in his eyes caused Marian's glances to fall, and the rosy clouds to roll up over her cheeks and brow.

Then Thurston governed his countenance—let no ardent or admiring glance escape, and when he spoke again his manner and words were more deferential.

"We spoke of the world of nature, Miss Mayfield, but how is it with the world of man? To many—nay, to most of the human race—autumn is the herald of a season not of festivity and repose, but of continued labor, and increased want and privation and suffering."

"That is because society is not in harmony with nature; man has wandered as far from nature as from God," said Marian.

"And as much needs a Saviour to lead him back to the one as to the other," replied Thurston.

"You know that—you feel it?" asked Marian, turning upon him one of her soul-thrilling glances.

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About the Farm

SHEEP NOTES.

It is very difficult to fatten a poor sheep in cold weather.

Get the sheep in good condition before winter sets in.

If you value the wool product, an even condition must be kept up.

A poor sheep will eat as much and require as much labor in securing its fleece as a good one.

Horsemen who divide their stock up into small flocks are recognized as the most successful shepherds and have the healthiest and best developed sheep.

It is a mistake to ignore the mutton side of flock returns when the outcome of the business is being estimated.

The shepherd who has a lot of good fat sheep each winter, will find his feeding pays quite as well as the average.

Only the very best sheep, animals which are true to their specific varieties of breeds and full of promise, should be selected for breeding purposes.

In a majority of cases size is only a secondary consideration, provided only that the animal is fat, smooth and trim.

Not only does it cost less to make a pound of young flesh, but the former is worth more in market.

The man who makes his sheep as good as he can before sending to market, need have no fear of his place in market.

A thrifty animal, full of robust health and vigorous strength, is more capable of resisting the poison of contagious diseases successfully than the unthrifty animal.

If there are any sick or unthrifty sheep in the flock, separate them and if possible, market them in some way. It will not pay to win them.

In buying sheep to feed this winter, buy good ones. The value of the feed is the same whether fed to good sheep or poor ones; the difference in the profits will be with the former.

With the sheep selected for breeding, the natural growth and character of the wool of the animals to be mated should be a matter of first class importance.

The best interests of sheep husbandry does not so much call for extraordinary weights as they do for the production of muttons of moderate weight and choice quality.

Valuable as blood is in breeding it has a very necessary adjunct and that is, individual merit. Pedigree is of little value in itself unless backed by individual merit.

However well grounded the position of the wool grower may be at any time, he is short-sighted if he neglects to look after the mutton side of his business. But at the same time, he should neglect the quality of wool and the interests of wool production.

Sheep increases so rapidly and mature at such an early age and their flesh is so wholesome for food that on the majority of farms a flock can readily be made profitable.

It is claimed that one sheep for each cow can be kept with very little if any additional expense as the sheep consumes much that the cow will refuse.

Lambs intended as next year's ewes should not be bred at this season as it is better to give them plenty of time to mature well.

Wool is a product from feeding just the same as fat or flesh, and the flock should be fed and managed with a view to wool growth and that of fine quality.

REMARKABLE GRAVEYARD.

The Red Indians of Pala, in California, were converted to the Catholic faith in the eighteenth century, and remain Catholics to-day. Though some superstitions prevail, their belief in the resurrection is strong. Believing that the dead must remain for some time in the grave, they observe exactly the hour at which the spirit departs, and the rude wooden cross over each grave in the cemetery states the exact hour, minute, and day on which the person died. Suspended from the arms of the cross is an alarm clock, with the hands set at the particular hour. The alarm at the back of the clock has been set at the same moment. The person who placed the clock there believes that at the proper moment the alarm will sound and will awaken the sleeping spirit.