

Marian Mayfield

Or, The Strange Disappearance

CHAPTER XIII.

This was but one of many such meetings, Thurston growing more and more infatuated each time, while Marian scarcely tried to hide the pleasure which his society gave her.

One day when riding through the forest he met Marian returning from the village and on foot. She was radiant with health and beauty, and blushing and smiling with joy as she met him. A little basket hung upon her arm. To dismount and join her, and to look in her face and declare in broken exclamations his delight at seeing her, were the words and the work of an instant.

"And whither away this morning, fairest Marian?" he inquired, when unrebuked he had pressed her hand to his lips, and drawn it through his arm.

"I have been to the village, and am now going home," said the maiden.

"It is a long walk through the forest."

"Yes; but my pony has cast a shoe and lamed himself slightly, and I fear I shall have to dispense with his services for a few days."

"Thank God!" fervently ejaculated Thurston to himself.

"But it is beautiful weather, and I enjoy walking," said the young girl.

"Marian—dearest Marian, will you let me attend you home? The walk is lonely, and it may not be quite safe for a fair woman to take it unattended."

"I have no fear of interruption," said Marian.

"Yet you will not refuse to let me attend you? Do not, Marian!" he pleaded, earnestly, fervently, clasping her hand, and pouring the whole strength of his soul in the gaze that he fastened on her face.

"I thank you; but you were riding the other way."

"It was merely an idle saunter, to help to kill the time between this and Sunday, dearest girl. Now, rest you, my queen! my queen! upon this mossy rock, as on a throne, while I ride forward and leave my horse. I will be with you again in fifteen minutes; in the meantime here is something for you to look at," he said, drawing from his pocket an elegant little volume bound in purple and gold, and laying it in her lap. He then smiled, sprang into his saddle, bowed, and galloped away, leaving Marian to examine her book. It was a London copy of Spenser's Fairy Queen, superbly illustrated, one of the rarest books to be found in the whole country at that day. On the fly-leaf the name of Marian was written, in the hand of Thurston.

Some minutes passed in the pleasing examination of the volume; and Marian was still turning the leaves with unmixed pleasure—pleasure in the gift, and pleasure in the giver—when Thurston, even before the appointed time, suddenly rejoined her.

"So absorbed in Spenser that you did not even hear or see me!" said the young man, half reproachfully.

"I was indeed far gone in Fairy Land! Oh, I thank you so much for your beautiful present! It is indeed a treasure. I shall prize it greatly," said Marian, in unfeigned delight.

"Do you know that Fairy Land is not obsolete, dearest Marian?" he said, fixing his eyes upon her charming face with an ardor and earnestness that caused hers to sink.

"Come," she said, in a low voice, and rising from the rock; "let us leave this place and go forward."

They walked on, speaking softly of many things—of the vision of Spenser, of anything except the one interest that now occupied both hearts. The fear of startling her bashful trust, and banishing those bewitching glances that sometimes lightened on his face, made him cautious, and restrained his eagerness; while excessive consciousness kept her cheeks dyed with blushes, and her nerves vibrating sweet, wild music, like the strings of some aeolian harp when swept by the swift south wind.

He determined, during the walk, to plead his love, and ascertain his fate. Ah! but how approach the subject when, at every ardent glance or tone, her face, her heart, shrank and closed up, like the leaves of the sensitive plant.

So they rambled on, discovering new beauties in nature; now it would be merely an oak leaf of rare richness of coloring; now some tiny insect with finished elegance of form; now a piece of the dried branch of a tree that Thurston picked up, to bid her note the delicately blending shades in its gray hue, or the curves and lines of grace in its twisted form—the beauty of its slow return to dust; and now perhaps it would be the mingled colors in the heaps of dried leaves, drifted at the foot of some great tree.

And then from the minute loveliness of nature's sweet, small things, their eyes would wander to the great glory of the autumnal sky, or the variegated array of the gorgeous forest.

Thurston knew a beautiful glade, not far distant, to the left of their path, from which there was a very fine view that he wished to show his companion. And he led Marian thither by a little moss-bordered, descending path.

It was a natural opening in the forest, from which, down a still, descending vista, between the trees, could be seen the distant bay, and the open country near it, all glowing under a refulgent sky, and hazy with the golden mist of Indian Summer. Before them the upper branches of the nearest trees formed a natural arch above the picture.

Marian stood and gazed upon the wondrous beauty of the scene with soft, steady eyes, with lips breathlessly severed, in perfect silence and growing emotion.

"This pleases you," said Thurston. She nodded, without removing her gaze.

"You find it charming?" She nodded again, and smiled.

"You were never here before?"

"Never."

"Marian, you are a lover of nature."

"I do not know," she said, softly, "whether it be love, or worship, or both; but some pictures spell-bind me. I stand amidst a scene like this, enchanted, until my soul has absorbed as much of its beauty and glory and wisdom as it can absorb. As the Ancient Mariner held with his 'glittering eye' the wedding guest, so such a picture holds me enthralled until I have heard the story and learned the lesson it has to tell and teach me. Did you ever, in the midst of nature's liberal ministrations, feel your spirit absorbing, assimilating, growing? Or is it only a fantastic notion of mine that beauty is the food of soul?"

She turned her eloquent eyes full upon him.

He forgot his prudence, forgot her claims, forgot everything, and caught and strained her to his bosom, pressing passionate kisses upon her lips, and the next instant he was kneeling at her feet, imploring her to forgive him—to hear him.

Marian stood with her face bowed and hidden in her hands; but above the tips of her fingers, her forehead, crimsoned, might be seen. One half her auburn hair had escaped and rippled down in glittering disorder. And so she stood a few moments. But soon, removing her hands and turning away, she said, in a troubled tone:

"Rise. Never kneel to any creature; that homage is due the Creator alone. Oh, rise!"

"First pardon me—first hear me, beloved girl."

"Oh, rise—rise, I beg you! I cannot bear to see a man on his knees, except in prayer to God!" she said, walking away.

He sprang up and followed her, took her hand, and, with gentle compulsion, made her sit down upon a bank; and then he sank beside her, exclaiming eagerly, vehemently, yet in a low, half-smothered tone:

"Marian, I love you! I never spoke these words to woman before, for I never loved before. Marian, the first moment that I saw you I loved you, without knowing what new life it was that had kindled in my nature. I have loved you more and more every day! I love you more than words can tell or heart conceive! I only live in your presence! Marian! not one word or glance for me? Oh, speak! Turn your dear face toward me," he said, putting his hand around her head. "Speak to me, Marian, for I adore—I worship you!"

"I do not deserve to be loved in that way. I do not wish it, for it is wrong—idolatrous," she said, in a low, trembling voice.

"Oh! what do you mean? Is the love upon which my life seems to hang so offensive to you? Sav, Marian! Oh! you are compassionate by nature; how can you keep me in the torture of suspense?"

"I do not keep you so."

"You will let me love you?" Marian slipped her hand in his; that was her reply.

"You will love me?" For an answer she gently pressed his fingers. He pressed her hand to his heart, to his lips, covering it with kisses.

"Yet, oh! speak to me, dearest; let me hear from your lips that you love me—a little—but better than I deserve. Will you? Say, Marian! Speak, dearest girl!"

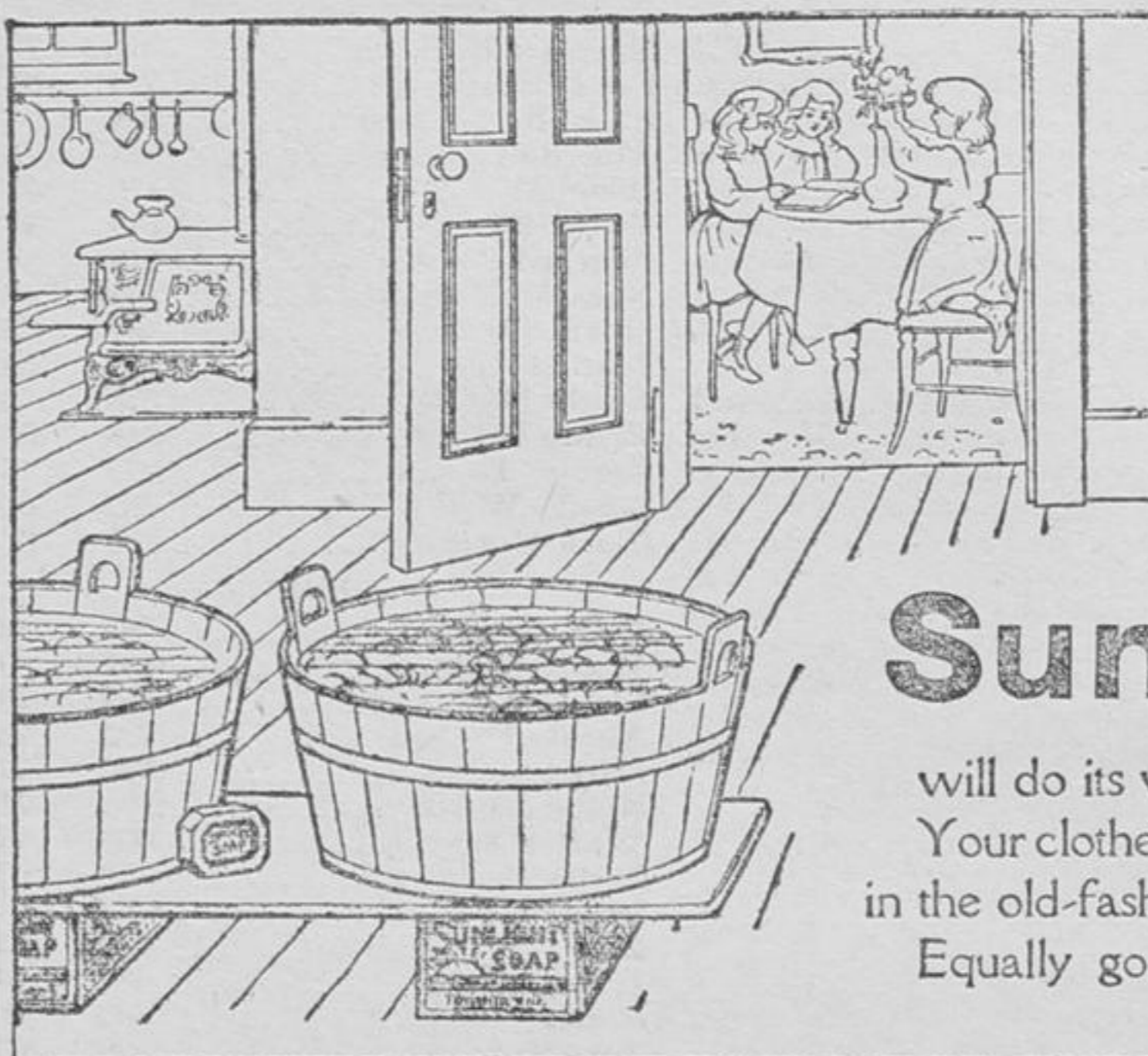
"I cannot tell you now," she said, in a low, thrilling tone. "I am disturbed; I wish to grow quiet; and I must go home. Let us return."

One more passionate kiss of the hand he clasped, and then he helped her to her feet, drew her arm within his own, and led her up the moss-covered rocks that formed the natural steps of the ascent that led to the homeward path.

They were now near the verge of the forest, which, when they reached, Marian drew her arm from his, and, extending her hand, said:

"This is the place our roads part."

"But you will let me attend you home?" ...



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"No; it would make the return walk too long."

"That can be no consideration. I beg you will let me go with you, Marian."

"No; it would not be convenient to Edith to-day," said Marian, quickly drawing her hand from his detaining grasp, waving him adieu, and walking swiftly away across the meadow.

Thurston gazed after her, strongly tempted to follow her; yet withal admitting that it was best that she had declined his escort to the cottage, and thanking Heaven that the opportunity would again be afforded to take an "incidental" stroll with her, as she should walk to church on Sunday morning; and so, forming the resolution to haunt the forest-path from seven o'clock that next Sabbath morning until he should see her, Thurston hurried home.

And how was it with Marian? She hastened to the cottage, laid off her bonnet and shawl, and set herself at work as diligently as usual; but a higher bloom glowed on her cheek, a softer, brighter light beamed in her eye, a warmer, sweeter smile hovered around her lips, a deeper, richer tone thrilled in her voice.

On Sunday morning the lovers "chanced" to meet again—for so Thurston would still have had it appear as he permitted Marian to overtake him in the forest on her way to the Sunday-school.

She was blooming and beautiful as the morning itself as she approached. He turned with a radiant smile to greet her.

"Welcome! thrice welcome, dearest one! Your coming is more joyous than that of day. Welcome, my own, dear Marian! May I now call you mine? Have I read that angel-smile aright? Is it the blessed herald of a happy answer to my prayer?" he whispered, as he took her hand and passed his arm around her head and brought it down upon his bosom.

"Speak, my Marian! Speak, my beloved! Are you my own, as I am yours?"

Her answer was so low-toned that he had to bend his head down close to her lips to hear her murmur:

"I love you dearly. But I love you too well to ruin your prospects. You must not bind yourself to me just yet, dear Thurston," and meekly and gently she sought to slip from his embrace.

But he slid his arm around her lightly, bending his head and whispering eagerly:

"What mean you, Marian? Your words are incomprehensible."

"Dear Thurston," she answered, in a tremulous and thrilling voice, "I have known your grandfather long by report, and I am well aware of his character and disposition and habits. But only yesterday I chanced to learn from one who was well informed that old Mr. Wilcoxon had sworn to make you his heir only upon condition of your finding a bride of equal or superior fortunes. If now you were to engage yourself to me, your grandfather would disinherit you. I love you too well," she murmured very low, "to ruin your fortunes. You must not bind yourself to me just now, Thurston."

And this loving, frank and generous creature was the woman, he thought, whose good name he would have periled in a clandestine courtship in preference to losing his inheritance by an open betrothal. A stab of compunction pierced his bosom; he felt that he loved her more than ever, but passion was stronger than affection, stronger than conscience, stronger than anything in nature, except pride and ambition. He lightened his clasped about her waist—he bent and whispered:

"Beloved Marian, is it to bind me only that you hesitate?"

"Only that," she answered, softly.

"Now hear me, Marian, I swear before Heaven, and in the sight—that—as I have never loved woman before you—that—as I love you only of all women—I will be faithful to you while I live upon this earth; as your husband, if you will accept me, as your exclusive one, whether you will or not. I hold myself pledged to you as long as we both shall live! There, Marian! I am bound to you as tight as vows can bind! I am pledged to you whether you accept my pledge or not. You cannot even release, for I am pledged to Heaven as well. There, Marian, you see I am bound, while you only are free. Come! be generous! You have said that you loved me! Pledge yourself to me in like manner. We are both young, dear Marian, and we can wait. Only let me have your

promise to be my wife—only let me have that blessed assurance for the future, and I can endure the present. Speak, dear Marian."

"Your grandfather—"

"He has no grudge against you, personally, sweet girl; he knows nothing, suspects nothing of my preferences—how should he? No, dearest girl—his notion that I must have a moneyed bride is the merest whim of dotage; we must forgive the whims of ninety-five. That great age also augurs for us a short engagement and a speedy union!"

"Oh! never let us dream of that! It would be sinful, and draw down upon us the displeasure of Heaven. Long may the old man yet live to prepare for a better life."

"Amen; so be it; God forbid that I should grudge the aged patriarch his few remaining days upon earth—days, too, upon which his soul's immortal welfare may depend," said Thurston.

"But, dearest girl, it is more difficult to get a reply from you than from a prime minister. Answer now, once for all, sweet girl! since I am forever bound to you; will you pledge yourself to become my own dear wife?"

"Yes," whispered Marian, very lowly.

"And will you," he asked, gathering her form closer to his bosom, "will you redeem that pledge when I demand it?"

"Yes," she murmured sweetly, "so that it is not to harm you, or bring you into trouble or poverty; for that I would not consent to do!"

"God bless you; you are an angel! Oh! Marian! I find it in my heart to sigh because I am so unworthy of you!"

And this was spoken most sincerely.

"You think too well of me. I fear—I fear for the consequences."

"Why, dearest Marian?"

"Oh, I fear that when you know me better you may love me less," she answered, in a trembling voice.

"Why should I?"

"Oh! because your love may have been attracted by ideal qualities, with which you yourself have invested me, and when your eyes are opened you may love me less."

"May my soul forever perish the day that I cease to love you!" said Thurston, passionately pressing her to his heart, and sealing his fearful oath upon her pure brow and guileless lips. "And now, beloved! this compact is sealed! Our fates are united! Henceforth nothing shall sever us!"

They were now drawing near the village.

Marian suddenly stopped.

"Dear Thurston," she said, "if you are seen waiting upon me to church do you know what the people will say? They will say that Marian has a new admirer in Mr. Wilcoxon—and that will reach your grandfather's ears, and give you trouble."

"Stay! one moment, beautiful Marian! When shall we meet again?"

"When Heaven wills."

"And when will that be, fairest?"

"I do not know; but do not visit me at the cottage, dear Thurston, it would be indiscreet."

(To be Continued.)

WORLD'S OUTPUT OF GOLD.

\$25,000,000 Gain Expected For The Present Year.

George E. Roberts, director of the United States Mint, has prepared a statement of the world's production of gold and silver for 1904, which shows total gold valued at \$347,150,700, an aggregate of \$168,493,538 fine ounces of silver, and a commercial value of silver totalling \$97,726,200, the coinage value of which is \$217,850,200.

The United States produced: Gold value, \$80,723,200; silver in fine ounces, \$57,786,100; silver in commercial value, \$33,516,000.

Canada produced: Gold value, \$16,400,000; silver in fine ounces, \$3,718,668; silver in commercial value, \$2,156,800.

Great Britain produced: Gold value \$102,400; silver in fine ounces, \$174,517; silver in commercial value, \$101,200.

Africa produced: Gold value, \$85,913,900; silver in fine ounces, \$486,408; silver in commercial value, \$282,100.

These figures show an increase of about \$22,000,000 in gold over the bureau's estimate for 1903. The United States shows a gain of about \$7,000,000, and South Africa a \$18,000,000. The director says that both of these countries are still upon a rising scale of production.

The world's output in 1905 is expected to exceed that of 1904 by \$25,000,000, with another gain probable in 1906.

The most important gold field in the world is that of the Transvaal. The total output for 1904 was \$78,150,728, produced by 74 companies. Their working profits, after paying the 10 per cent. tax on profit to the Government, are reported at \$26,402,163. The amount actually divided in dividends was \$19,114,784.70.

In the United States it is difficult to give any figures for costs and profits of general significance. The Homestake Mine, in the Black Hills, has produced \$80,000,000 and paid \$20,000,000 in dividends. The Treadwell Mine, a great producer of extremely low-grade ores, has realized about 40 per cent. of its product in profits. The Cripple Creek district has been estimated to have produced \$139,000,000 to Jan. 1, 1905. It is estimated that \$35,000,000 was paid in publicly-announced dividends by incorporated companies.

Winkle—"After all, the first year of married life is the most unhappy, don't you think?" Ted—"Oh, yes! It takes about that time for a man to learn to conceal things from his wife."



Mr. Bull—"What on earth's the use of a sign-post like this?"