

Marian Mayfield

Or, The Strange Disappearance

CHAPTER XXX.

Six years had passed away. Thurston Willcoxon was the most beloved and honored man, as well as the most distinguished clergyman of his day and state. His church was always crowded, except when he changed with some brother minister, whose pulpit was within reach—in which case, a great portion of his congregation followed him. Many flattering "calls" had the gifted and eloquent country parson received to metropolitan parishes; but he remained the faithful shepherd of his own flock as long as they would hear his voice.

As Miriam grew up into womanhood prudence kept her silent on the subject of her strange vow. She, however, preserved in her memory the slight indexes that she already had in possession—namely, beginning with Marian's return after her visit to Washington—her changed manner, her fits of reverie, her melancholy when she returned empty-handed from the post-office, her joy when she received letters, which she would read in secret and in silence, or when questioned concerning them, would gently but firmly decline to tell from whom or whence they came; the housewarming at Luckenough, where Marian suddenly became so bright and gay, and the evening succeeding, when she returned home through night and storm, and in such anguish of mind, that she wept all night; and the weeks of unexplained, unaccountable distress that followed this! All these things Miriam recalled, and studied if by any means they might direct her in the discovery of the guilty.

And her faithful study had ended in her assurance of one or two facts—or one or two links, perhaps, we should say, in the chain of evidence. The first was, that Marian's mysterious lover had been present in the neighborhood, and perhaps, in the mansion at the time of the housewarming at Luckenough—that he had met her once or more, and that his name was not Thomas Truman—that the latter was an assumed name, for, with all her observation and astute investigation, she had not been able to find that any one of the name of Truman had ever been seen or heard of in the county.

She was sure, also, that she had seen the man twice, both times in night and storm, when she had wandered forth in search of Marian.

She remembered well the strange figure of that man—the tall form shrouded in the black cloak—the hat drawn over the eyes—the faint spectral gleam of the clear-cut profile—the peculiar fall of light and shade, the decided individuality of air and gait—all was distinct as a picture in her memory, and she felt sure that she would be able to identify that man again.

Up to this time, the thought of her secret vow, and her life's mission, had afforded only a romantic and heroic excitement; but the day was fast approaching when these indexes she retained, should point to a clue that should lead through a train of damning circumstantial evidence destined to test her soul by an unexampled trial.

Paul Douglass had grown up to be a tall and handsome youth, of a very noble, frank, attractive countenance and manners. To say that he loved Miriam is only to say that he loved himself. She mingled with every thought, and feeling, and purpose of his heart.

And when, at last, the time came that Paul had to leave home for Baltimore, to remain absent all winter, for the purpose of attending the course of lectures at the medical college, Miriam learned the pain of parting, and understood how impossible happiness would be for her, with Paul away, on naval or military duty, more than half their lives, and for periods of two, three, or five years; and after that she never said another word in favor of his wearing Uncle Sam's livery, although she had often expressed a wish that he should enter the army.

Miriam's affection for Paul was so profound and quiet, that she did not know its depth or strength. As she had not believed that parting from him would be painful until the event had taught her, so even now she did not know how intertwined with every chord and fibre of her heart, and how identical with her life, was her love for Paul. She was occupied by a more enthusiastic devotion to her "brother," as she called her guardian.

The mysterious sorrow, the incurable melancholy of a man like Thurston Willcoxon, could not but invest him with peculiar interest and even strange fascination for one of Miriam's enthusiastic, earnest temperament. She loved him with more than a daughter's love; she loved him with all the impassioned earnestness of her nature; her heart yearned as it would break with its wild, intense longing to do him some good, to cure his sorrow, to make him happy. There were moments when but for the sweet shyness that is ever the attendant and conservator of such pure feeling, this wild desire was strong enough to cast her at his feet, to embrace his knees, and with tears beseech him to let her into that dark, sorrowful bosom, to see if she could make any light and joy there. She feared that he had sinned, that his incurable sorrow was the gnawing tooth of that worm that never dieth, preying on his heart; but she doubted, too, for what could he have done to plunge his soul in such a hell of remorse? He commit a crime? Impossible! The thought was treason; a sin to be repented of and expiated. His fame was fairest of the fair, his name most honored among

the honorable. If not remorse, what then was the nature of his life-long sorrow? Many, many times she revolved this question in her mind. And as she matured in thought and affection, the question grew more earnest and important. Oh, that he would unburden his heart to her; oh! that she might share and alleviate his griefs. If "all earnest desires are prayers," then prayer was Miriam's "vital breath and native air"; indeed; her soul earnestly desired, prayed, to be able to give her sorrowing brother peace.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Winter waned. Mrs. Waugh had attended the commodore to the south, for the benefit of his health, and they had not yet returned.

Mrs. Morris and Alice were absent on a long visit to a relative in Washington City, and were not expected back for a month. Paul remained in Baltimore, attending the medical lectures.

The house at Dell-Deight was very sad and lonely. The family consisted of only Thurston, Fanny and Miriam.

A change had also passed over poor Fanny's malady. She was no longer the quaint, fantastical creature, half-lunatic, half-seeress, singing snatches of wild songs through the house—now here, now there—now everywhere, awaking smiles and merriment in spite of pity, and keeping every one alive about her. Her bodily health had failed, her animal spirits departed; she never sang nor smiled, but sat all day in her eryic chamber, lost in deep and concentrated study, her face having the careworn look of one striving to recall the past, to gather up and reunite the broken links of thought, memory and understanding.

At last, one day, Miriam received a letter from Paul, announcing the termination of the winter's course of lectures, the conclusion of the examination of medical candidates, the successful issue of his own trial, in the acquisition of his diploma, and finally his speedy return home.

Miriam's impulsive nature rebounded from all depressing thoughts, and she looked forward with gladness to the arrival of Paul.

He came toward the last of the week. Mr. Willcoxon, roused for a moment from his sad abstraction, gave the youth a warm welcome.

Miriam received him with a bashful, blushing joy.

He had passed through Washington City on his way home, and had spent a day with Mrs. Morris and her friends, and he had brought away strange news of them.

Alice, he said, had an accepted suitor, and would probably be a bride soon.

A few days after his return, Paul found Miriam in the old wainscoted parlor seated by the fire. She appeared to be in deep and painful thought. Her elbow rested on the circular work-table, her head was bowed upon her hand, and her face was concealed by the drooping black ringlets.

"What is the matter, dear sister?" he asked, in that tender, familiar tone, with which he sometimes spoke to her.

"Oh, Paul, I am thinking of our brother! Can nothing soothe or cheer him, Paul? Can nothing help him? Can we do him no good at all? Oh, Paul! I brood so much over his trouble! I long so much to comfort him, that I do believe it is beginning to affect my reason, and make me see visions and dream dreams. Tell me—do you think anything can be done for him?"

"Ah, I do not know! I have just left his study, dear Miriam, where I have had a long and serious conversation with him."

"And what was it about? May I know?"

"You must know, dearest Miriam, it concerned yourself and me!" said Paul, and he took a seat by her side, and told her how much he loved her, and that he had Thurston's consent to asking her hand in marriage.

Miriam replied:

"Paul, there is one secret that I have never imparted to you—not that I wished to keep it from you, but that nothing has occurred to call it out—"

She paused, while Paul regarded her in much curiosity.

"What is it, Miriam?" he at last inquired.

"I promised my dying mother, and sealed the promise with an oath, never to be a bride until I shall have seen—"

"What, Miriam?"

"An avenger of blood!"

"Miriam?"

It was all he said, and then he remained gazing at her, as if he doubted her perfect sanity.

that I have been erratic ever since. She was more than a mother to me, Paul; and if I had been born hers, I could not have loved her better—I loved her beyond all things in life. In my dispassionate, reflective moments, I am inclined to believe that I have never been quite right since the loss of Marian. Not but that I am reconciled to it—knowing that she must be happy—only, Paul, I often feel that something is wrong here and here," said Miriam, placing her hand upon her forehead and upon her heart.

"But your promise, Miriam—your promise," questioned Paul, with increased anxiety.

"Ay, true! Well, Paul, I promised to devote my whole life to the pursuit and apprehension of her murderer; and never to give room in my bosom to any thought of love or marriage until that murderer should hang from a gallows; and I sealed that promise with a solemn oath."

"That was all very strange, dear Miriam."

"Paul, yes it was—and it weighs upon me like lead. Paul, if two things could be lifted off my heart, I should be happy. I should be happy as a freed bird."

"And what are they, dear Miriam? What weights are they that I have not power to lift from your heart?"

"Surely you may surmise—the first is our brother's sadness that oppresses my spirits all the time; the second is the memory of that unaccomplished vow; so equally do these two anxieties divide my thoughts, that they seem connected—seem to be parts of the same responsibility—and I even dreamed that the one could be accomplished only with the other."

"Dearest Miriam, let me assure you, that such dreams and visions are but the effect of your isolated life—they come from an over-heated brain and over-strained nerves. And you must consent to throw off those self-imposed weights, and be happy and joyous as a young creature should."

"Alas, how can I throw them off, dear Paul?"

"In this way—first, for my brother's life-long sorrow, since you can neither cure nor alleviate it, turn your thoughts away from it. As for your vow, two circumstances combine to absolve you from it; the first is this—that you were an irresponsible infant, when you were required to make it—the second is, that it is impossible to perform it; these two considerations fairly release you from its obligations. Look upon these matters in this rational light, and all your dark and morbid dreams and visions will disappear; and we shall have you joyous as any young bird, sure enough. And I assure you that your cheerfulness will be one of the very best medicines for your brother. Will you follow my advice?"

"No, no, Paul! I cannot follow it in either instance! I cannot, Paul! It is impossible! I cannot steel my heart against sympathy with his sorrows, nor can I so ignore the requirements of my solemn vow. I do not by any means think its accomplishment an impossibility, nor was it in ignorance of its nature that I made it. No, Paul! I knew what I promised, and I know that its performance is possible. Therefore I cannot feel absolved! I must accomplish my work; and you, Paul, if you love me, must help me to do it."

"I would serve you with my life, Miriam, in anything reasonable and possible. But how can I help you? How can you discharge such an obligation? You have not even a clue!"

"Yes, I have a clue, Paul."

"You have? What is it? Why have you never spoken of it before?"

"Because of its seeming unimportance. The clue is so slight, that it would be considered none at all, by others less interested than myself."

"What is it, then? At least allow me the privilege of knowing, and judging of its importance."

"I am about to do so," said Miriam, and she commenced and told him all she knew, and also all she suspected of the circumstances that preceded the assassination on the beach. In conclusion, she informed him of the letters in her possession.

"And where are now those letters, Miriam? What are they like? What is their purport? It seems to me that they would not only give a hint, but afford direct evidence against that demonic assassin. And it seems strange to me that they were not examined, with a view to that end."

"Paul, they were; but they did not point out the writer, even. There was a note among them—a note soliciting a meeting with Marian, upon the very evening, and upon the very spot when and where the murder was committed! But that note contains nothing to indicate the identity of its author. There are, besides, a number of foreign letters written in French, and signed 'Thomas Truman,' no French name, by-the-by, a circumstance which leads me to believe that it must have been an assumed one."

"And those French letters give no indication of the writer, either?"

"I am not sufficiently acquainted with that language to read it in manuscript, which, you know, is much more difficult than print. But I presume they point to nothing definitely, for my dear mother showed them to Mr. Willcoxon, who took the greatest interest in the discovery of the murderer, and he told her that those letters afforded not the slightest clue to the perpetrator of the crime, and that whoever might have been the assassin, it certainly could not have been the author of those letters. He wished to take them with him, but mother declined to give them up; she thought it would be disrespectful to Marian's memory to give her private correspondence up to a stranger, and so she told him. He then said that of all men, certainly he had the least right to claim them, and so the matter rested. But mother always believed they held the key to the discovery of the guilty party; and afterward she left them to me, with the charge that I should never suffer them to pass from my possession until they had fulfilled their destiny of witnessing against the murderer—for whatever Mr. Willcoxon might think, mother felt convinced that

About the Farm

A GOOD INVESTMENT.

Last winter I decided to try an incubator, believing that even with my flock of only 25 hens it would pay, writes Annie Hoffarth. It was rather difficult to decide on what make to purchase as I had but little money and none at all to waste on experimenting with unreliable machines. Advertisements and catalogues galore were studied and a machine to suit my purse and my requirements was found.

The mistake was made with filling it with eggs that had been chilled and consequently I got a very poor hatch. Counting the eggs at market price, and the cost of the oil used in hatching, the chicks cost as much to hatch as they could be sold for when two months old. The neighbors chaffed me good naturedly over the attempt, and asked to be shown where the profit was to come in. My success in raising fine chicks with hens made me feel sure I could do as well with the good incubator purchased.

The next hatch was good enough to please the most exacting, but a considerable per cent. of the chicks were lost from over-crowding in the brooder. The third hatch came off April 24. The thriest, finest Barred Plymouth Rock chicks from farm raised pure bred stock. Out of 74 one became puny and died, and although I had to keep them in a small yard of less than 100 square feet until six weeks old, they grew astonishingly. This yard was moved twice, and when my other chicks were sold off these were given their freedom; they were fine, large and healthy.

By July 4 the cockerels averaged two pounds each and by August 5, 31 of them weighed 83 pounds and were said to be the finest put on the local market that season. I had no means of separating them from the pullets, and all were fed alike or they could have been easily made to tip the scales at 100 pounds with a more fattening food. They were never fed any sloppy food, but had a variety. Stale bread moistened, cooked potatoes, rolled oats, millet, kafir corn, wheat, curds, ground peanuts mixed with the bread or potatoes and all the

writer of those letters and the murderer of Marian was the same person."

"Tell me more about those letters."

"Dear Paul, I know nothing more about them; I told you that I was not sufficiently familiar with the French language to read them."

"But it is strange that you never made yourself acquainted with their contents by getting some one else to read them for you."

"Dear Paul, you know that I was a mere child when they first came into my possession, accompanied by the charge that I should never part with them until they had done their office. I felt bound by my promise, I was afraid of losing them, and of those persons that I could trust none knew French, except our brother, and he had already pronounced them irrelevant to the question. Besides, for many reasons, I was shy of intruding upon brother."

"Does he know that you have the packet?"

"I suppose that he does not even know that."

"I confess," said Paul, "that if Thurston believed them to have no connection with the murder, I have so much confidence in his excellent judgment, that I am inclined to reverse my hasty opinion, and to think as he does, at least until I see the letters. I remember, too, that the universal opinion at the time was that the poor young lady had fallen a victim to some marauding waterman—the most likely thing to have happened. But, to satisfy you, Miriam, if you will trust me with those letters, I will give them a thorough and impartial study, and then, if I find no clue to the perpetrator of that diabolical deed, I hope, Miriam, that you will feel yourself free from the responsibility of pursuing the unknown demon—a pursuit which I consider worse than a wild-goose chase."

They were interrupted by the entrance of the boy with the mail bag. Paul emptied the contents of it upon the table. There were letters for Mr. Willcoxon, for Miriam, and for Paul himself. Those for Mr. Willcoxon were sent up to him by the boy. Miriam's letter was from Alice Morris, announcing her approaching marriage with Olive Murray, a young lawyer of Washington, and inviting and entreating Miriam to come to the city and be her bridesmaid. Paul's letters were from some of his medical classmates. By the time they had read and discussed the contents of their epistles, a servant came in to replenish the fire and lay the cloth for tea.

When Mr. Willcoxon joined them at supper, he laid a letter on Miriam's lap, informing her that it was from Mrs. Morris, who advised them of her daughter's intended marriage, and prayed them to be present at the ceremony. Miriam replied that she had received a communication to the same effect.

"Then, my dear, we will go up to Washington and pass a few weeks, and attend this wedding, and see the inauguration of Gen. —. You lead too lonely a life for one of your years, love. I see it affects your health and spirits. I have been to selfish and oblivious of you, in my abstraction, dear child; but it shall be so no longer. You shall enter upon the life better suited to your age."

Miriam's eyes thanked his care. For many a day Thurston had not come thus far out of himself, and his doing so now was hailed as a happy omen by the young people.

Their few preparations were soon completed, and on the first of March they went to Washington City.

(To be continued.)

buttermilk and water they would drink. They would eat coarse sand the first thing in the morning and would consume a surprising amount of it during the entire day. Peanuts and milk seemed to take the place of meat for them judging by the way they grew and thrived. The pullets began laying by the middle of October. To sum up the summer's work, I consider my incubator and brooder the best investment I have made for many years.

REARING CALVES ON SKIM MILK.

A great many people think a good calf cannot be raised on skim milk, says a correspondent. For many years our calves were such long-haired, stunted little things we were ashamed of them. But we kept on trying until we had something to be proud of. After much reading and experimenting we mastered the subject, and now raise fine, thrifty calves. After letting the calf suck for three days we put it in a pen by itself and let it get hungry. Then with three pints of its mother's milk we teach it to drink; this may necessitate two or three trials. A total of only four quarts and a pint is given at first in three feeds. If the calf does not seem to be very strong we give four feeds, the last at bed time. It always gets new milk warm from the cow until it has a good start and is drinking well. This practice continues for two weeks.

At two weeks we begin to feed skim milk. A teaspoonful of flaxseed meal is mixed with half a teacupful of warm water and placed on the back of the stove a few minutes. This is mixed with one quart skim milk and one quart new milk, and fed three times a day, always at a temperature equal to blood heat. Now we have the calf taking two quarts three times a day. The new milk is then gradually reduced, the skim milk increased until at one month the calf is getting three quarts skim milk and one tablespoonful flaxseed meal three times a day. The milk must always be sweet. We never overfeed; if the calf does not drink its milk up clean at once we take away what is left and give less next time until it has an appetite for three quarts three times a day; never any more. Overfeeding on skim milk always stunts a calf. Each calf is kept in a pen by itself. Since no two calves are alike we are very particular to give each his own ration according to his age. When each is a month old we begin to feed a little hay and a few oats or a little meal, thus keeping it growing thriftily. This method involves some trouble at times, but it pays.

RATIONS FOR SWINE.

The time of greatest fatality among hogs is when they are compelled to subsist for any length of time on the dry and most concentrated foods. When the hogs are turned into the autumn stubble fields to glean the dry concentrated food there obtained, if ever hog cholera or any other disease occurs, that is the time. It is not so much because the germs of the disease are more prevalent then, as because the hog is forced into a condition which makes him more susceptible to the germs of disease.

No animal was ever intended to subsist alone on dry, concentrated foods. What the hog needs along with concentrated foods is an occasional succulent ration, with the opportunity to provide him with clover, rape, beets, artichokes and silage, etc. There is no reason why he should be abandoned to the conditions which invite disease and death.

There is not a month of the year when an occasional succulent ration could not be provided for the hog. This with pure water would enable him to resist and throw off the germs and disease always prevalent and sufficiently frequent to kill when subjected to conditions inviting death.

LIVE STOCK NOTES.

When the team is not taken from the stable for several days, the grain portion of the ration should be reduced one-third, and the usual ration not be given until work or exercise demands it.

Give the poor fodder in the early part of the winter. Some straw, corn fodder and pea vines can be fed at this time. When you come to the bright, early-cut clover hay the grain ration may be lessened if the sheep are in good flesh, otherwise it should be continued.

Those who arrange in advance for the comfort of their poultry gain profitable egg returns during the winter. That people do secure a profitable egg yield in some localities is an absolute certainty. The supply of fresh laid eggs in the city markets every winter has more than doubled in the last two years, and yet there are not one-fourth enough to supply the demand at good prices.

As a rule, horses have done better in a cold stable well ventilated than in a finer looking building not so well aired. Indeed, a building may be made so tight with lumber, lath and plaster that in winter time, after a period of several days of zero weather, it becomes very cold—in fact, colder than one simply boarded up with a single thickness of matched lumber. Beyond a certain limit, the more tight we make a building to keep the outside air out, the colder we make the building.

"Lord Newtown-Butler," was the reply. "Oh, Lord Newtown's butler, are you? Come along, old chap, and have a drop of something in the housekeeper's room. They've got a job lot upstairs to-night, and your master ain't come yet, if you're looking for him." "With pleasure," said his lordship, who spent a chatty five minutes with the butler over a glass of Burton ale. "Much obliged to you, I'm sure; and now I think I'll go and have a look at the 'job lot' in the drawing-room." And, to the butler's horror, his new acquaintance strode up the stairs and was soon warmly shaking the hand of his hostess.