

# Marian Mayfield

## Or, The Strange Disappearance

CHAPTER XXII.—(Continued.)

With a half-stifed shriek, Miriam recognized the distinct picture of the man she had seen twice before with Marian.

"What is the matter, love? Were you near falling? Give me your arm, Miriam—you need us both to help you through this storm," said Thurston, approaching her.

But with a shiver that ran through all her frame, Miriam shrank closer to Paul, who, with affectionate pride, renewed his care, and promised that she should not slip again.

So link after link of the fearful evidence wound itself around her consciousness, which struggled against it, like Laocoon in the fatal folds of the serpent.

Now cold as if the blood were turned to ice in her veins, now burning as if they ran fire, she was hurried on into the house.

They were expected home, and old Jenny had fires in all the occupied rooms, and supper ready to go on the table, that was prepared in the parlor.

But Miriam refused all refreshment, and hurried to her room. It was warmed and lighted by old Jenny's care, and the good creature followed her young mistress with affectionate proffers of aid.

"Wouldn't she have a strong cup of tea? Wouldn't she have a hot bath? Wouldn't she have her bed warmed? Wouldn't she have a bowl of nice hot mulled wine? Dear, dear! she was so sorry, but it would have frightened herself to death if the carriage had upset with her, and no wonder Miss Marian was knocked up entirely."

"No, no, no!" Miriam would have nothing, and old Jenny reluctantly left her—to repose? Ah, not with fever in her veins, to walk up and down and up and down the floor of her room with fearful unrest.

Up and down, until the candle burned low, and sunk down in its socket; until the fire on the hearth smouldered and went out; until the stars in the sky waned with the coming day; until the rising sun kindled all the eastern horizon; and then, attired as she was, she sank upon the outside of her bed and fell into a heavy sleep of exhaustion.

She arose unrefreshed, and after a hasty toilet descended to the breakfast parlor, where she knew the little family awaited her.

"The journey and the fright have been too much for you, love; you look very weary; you should have rested longer this morning," said Mr. Wilcoxon, affectionately, as he arose and met her and led her to the most comfortable seat near the fire.

His fine countenance, elevated, grave, and gentle in expression, his kind and loving manner, smote all the tender chords of Miriam's heart.

Could that man be guilty of the crime she had dared to suspect him of? Oh, no, no, no never! Every lineament of his face, every inflection of his voice, as well as every act of his life, and every trait of his character, forbade the dreadful imputation!

But then the evidence—the damning evidence! Her brain reeled with the doubt as she sank into the seat he offered her.

"Ring for breakfast, Paul! Our little housekeeper will feel better when she gets a cup of coffee."

suspicion! they may point to another probability," she said, incoherently.

"Just get me those letters, dear Miriam," he urged, gently.

She arose, tottering, and left the room, and after an absence of fifteen minutes returned with the packet in her hand.

"These seals have not been broken since my mother closed them," said Miriam, as she proceeded to open the parcel.

The first she came to was the bit of a note, without date or signature, making the fatal appointment.

"This, Paul," she said, mournfully, "was found in the pocket of the dress Marian wore at Luckenough, but changed at home before she went out to walk the evening of her death. Mother always believed that she went out to meet the appointment made in that note."

"Paul took the paper with eager curiosity to examine it. He looked at it, started slightly, turned pale, shuddered, passed his hand once or twice across his eyes, as if to clear his vision, looked again, and then his cheeks blanched, his lips gradually whitened and separated, his eyes started, and his whole countenance betrayed consternation and horror."

Miriam gazed upon him in a sort of hushed terror—then exclaimed: "Paul! Paul! what is the matter? You look as if you had been turned to stone by gazing on the Gorgon's head; Paul! Paul!"

"Miriam, did your mother know this handwriting?" he asked, in a husky, almost inaudible voice.

"No!" "Did she suspect it?" "No!" "Did you know or suspect it?" "No! I was a child when I received it, remember, I have never seen it since."

"Not when you put it in my hand, just now?" "No, I never looked at the writing!" "That was most strange that you should not have glanced at the handwriting when you handed it to me. Why didn't you? Where you afraid to look at it? Miriam! why do you turn away your head? Miriam! answer me—do you know the handwriting?"

"No, Paul, I do not know it—do you?" "No! no! how should I? But Miriam, your head is still averted. Your very voice is changed. Miriam! what mean you? Tell me once for all. Do you suspect the handwriting?"

"How should I? Do you, Paul?" "No, no! I don't suspect it." They seemed afraid to look each other in the face; and well they might be, for the written agony on either brow; they seemed afraid to hear the sound of each other's words; and well they might be, for the hollow, unnatural sound of either voice.

"It cannot be! I am crazy, I believe. Let me clear my—oh, Heaven! Miriam! did—do you know whether there was any one in particular on familiar terms with Miss Mayfield?"

"No one out of the family, except Miss Thornton."

"Out of the family—out of what family?" "Ours, at the cottage."

"Was—did—I wonder if my brother knew her intimately?" "I do not know; I never saw them in each other's company but twice in my life."

an act of forethought, oh! never, never, never!"

"Paul! Paul! speak to me, Paul. Tell me what you think. I have had fore-shadowings long. I can bear silence and uncertainty no longer. What find you in those letters? Oh, speak, or my heart will burst, Paul!"

He gave no heed to her or her words, but remained like one impaled; still, fixed, yet writhing, his features, his whole form and expression discolored, distorted with inward agony.

"Paul! Paul!" cried Miriam, starting up, standing before him, gazing on him. "Paul! speak to me. Your looks kill me. Speak, Paul! even though you can tell me little now. I know it all, Paul; or nearly all. Weeks ago I received the shock it overwhelmed me for the time; but I survived it! But you, Paul—you! Oh! how you look! Speak to your sister, Paul! Speak to your promised wife."

But he gave no heed to her. She was not strong or assured—she felt herself tottering on the very verge of death or madness. But she could not bear to see him looking so. Once more she essayed to engage his attention.

"Give me those letters, Paul—I can perhaps make out the meaning."

As he did not reply, she gently sought to take them from his hand. But at her touch he suddenly started up and threw the packet into the fire. With a quick spring, Miriam darted forward, thrust her hand into the fire and rescued the packet, scorched and burning, but not destroyed.

She began to put it out, regardless of the pain to her hands. He looked as if he were tempted to snatch it from her, but she exclaimed:

"No, Paul! no! You will not use force to deprive me of this that I must guard as a sacred trust."

Still Paul hesitated, and eyed the packet with a gloomy glance.

"Remember honor, Paul, even in this trying moment," said Miriam; "let honor be saved, if all else be lost."

"What do you mean to do with that parcel?" he asked in a hollow voice.

"Keep them securely for the present." "And afterward?" "I know not."

"Miriam, you evade my questions. Will you promise me one thing?" "What is that?"

"Promise me to do nothing with those letters until you have further evidence." "I promise you that."

Then Paul took up a candle and left the room, as if to go to his sleeping apartment; but on reaching the hall, he threw down and extinguished the light and rushed as if for breath out into the open air.

The night was keen and frosty, the cold, slaty sky was thickly studded with sparkling stars, the snow was crusted over—it was a fine, fresh, clear, wintry night; at another time it would have invigorated and inspired him; now the air seemed stifling, the scene hateful.

The horrible suspicion of his brother's criminality had entered his heart for the first time, and it had come with the shock of certainty. The sudden recognition of the handwriting, the strange revelations of the foreign letters, had not only in themselves been a terrible disclosure, but had struck the whole "electric chain" of memory and association, and called up in living force many an incident and circumstance heretofore strange and incomprehensible; but now only too plain and indicative. The whole of Thurston's manner the fatal day of the assassination—his abstraction, his anxious haste to get away on the plea of most urgent business in Baltimore—

Business that never was afterward heard of; his mysterious absence of the whole night from his grandfather's deathbed—provoking conjecture at the time, and unaccounted for to this day; his haggard and distracted looks upon returning late the next morning; his incurable sorrow; his habit of secluding himself upon the anniversary of that crime—and now the damning evidence in these letters! Among them, and the first he looked at, was the letter Thurston had written Marian to persuade her to accompany him to France, in the course of which his marriage with her was repeatedly acknowledged, being incidentally introduced as an argument in favor of her compliance with his wishes.

Yet Paul could not believe the crime ever premeditated—it was sudden, unintentional, consummated in a lover's quarrel, in a fit of jealousy, rage, disappointment, madness! Stumbling upon half the truth, he said to himself: "Perhaps failing to persuade her to fly with him to France, he had attempted to carry her off, and being foiled, had temporarily lost his self-control, his very sanity. That would account for all that had seemed so strange in his conduct the day and night of the assassination and the morning after."

There was agony—there was madness in the pursuit of the investigation. Oh, plying Heaven! how thought and grief surged and seethed in aching heart and burning brain!

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FIFTY-FIFTH ANNUAL STATEMENT.

31st December, 1905.

ASSETS.		LIABILITIES.	
United States and State Bonds	157,118.00	Capital Stock	\$1,500,000.00
Domestic Canadian Stocks	65,350.00	Losses under Adjustment	175,359.88
Bank Loan Company and other	110,000.00	Dividend payable Jan. 5th, 1906	48,097.50
Stocks	425,698.05	Reserve Fund	1,742,020.42
Company's Buildings	110,000.00		
Municipal Bonds and Debentures	1,128,949.32		
Railroad Bonds	485,533.64		
Cash on Hand and on Deposit	329,379.92		
Bills Receivable	98,483.89		
Mortgages	20,193.00		
Duo from other Companies (E-assurances)	150,840.35		
Interest Due and Accrued	21,788.95		
Office Furniture, Maps, Plans, etc.	34,125.47		
Agents' Balances and Sundry Accounts	515,714.93		
	\$3,461,077.28		\$3,461,077.28

Capital \$1,500,000.00 Reserve Fund 1,742,020.42 Security to Policyholders 3,242,020.42 Losses paid from the organization of the Company to date \$43,012,687.45

DIRECTORATE:  
Hon. Geo. A. Cox, President; J. J. Kenny, Vice-President and Managing Director; Hon. S. C. Wood, H. N. Baird, Geo. R. R. Cockburn, W. R. Brock, Geo. McMurrich, J. K. Osborne, E. R. Wood.

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her vow." She will! she will! responded the deliberate conscience.

And so he walked up and down; vainly the fresh wind fanned his fevered brow; vainly the sparkling stars glanced down from holy heights upon him; he found no coolness for his fever in the air, no sedative for his anxiety in the stillness, no comfort for his soul in the heavens; he knew not whether he were indoors or out, whether it were night or day, summer or winter, he knew not, wrapped as he was in the mantle of his own sad thoughts, suffering as he was in the purgatory of his inner life.

While Paul walked up and down, like a maniac, Miriam returned to her room to pace the floor until nearly morning, when she threw herself exhausted, upon the bed, fell into a heavy sleep, and a third time, doubtless from nervous excitement or prostration, suffered a repetition of her singular vision, and awoke late in the morning, with the words, "perform thy vow," ringing in her ears.

(To be continued.)

#### WESTERN ASSURANCE REPORT.

Annual Statement Shows Company to be Enjoying Prosperity.

The annual statement of the Western Assurance Company will be found in another part of to-day's issue, and will be seen to be one that does much credit to this progressive company. The year's transactions resulted in \$86,340.12 being devoted to dividends, and \$133,254.69 added to the reserve fund, which now amounts to \$1,742,020.42. The liability for unearned premiums on unexpired risks is estimated at \$1,322,183.46. By deducting this sum from the reserve it is seen that there is a surplus over capital and all liabilities amounting to \$419,836.96. The fire premium during the year amounted to \$2,888,590.34, and the marine premiums to \$705,764. The fire losses were \$1,547,906.20, and the marine losses \$665,157.57. The excellent list of assets which is published in the annual statement shows that almost one-third of them consist of municipal bonds and debentures.

THE 13 SUPERSTITION.  
"What's the matter, my man?" asked Mr. Williams.

"Notin' much," the convict said, "only I'm a victim."

"Victim of what?"  
"I'm a victim of the figger 13—a judge and 12 jurymen."

#### AN EXTRAORDINARY PRIZE COMPETITION.

In the usual run of prize competitions only two or three lucky persons get anything for their efforts. The best feature about the prize competition which the Maclean Publishing Company have inaugurated in connection with THE BUSY MAN'S MAGAZINE, is that everybody gets a reward for his or her work. To him or her will be offered one of three unique prizes,—a four years' course at any Canadian university or educational institution with all expenses paid, a free trip around the world, or one thousand dollars in gold. In addition, there will be a great many more prizes, which can easily be won by any competitor. These are over and above a reward, in the shape of money payment, to everybody who enters the competition. The Maclean Publishing Company, through whose enterprise THE BUSY MAN'S MAGAZINE is being pushed rapidly to the front among present-day periodicals, are perhaps better known to the public as the publishers of Canadian trade newspapers. All interested in this competition should write for particulars to the nearest office of the Maclean Publishing Co., Limited.

A Most Attractive and Patriotic Policy.

We published in another section of this paper the advertisement of the Union Trust Company. This Company has large holdings of land along the line of the Grand Trunk Pacific in our Northwest.

The Union Trust Company has secured for the management of its Lands Department the exceptionally able services of Mr. F. W. Hodson, formerly live stock commissioner of Canada and organizer of farmers' institutes.

The Union Trust Company is to be congratulated on securing Mr. Hodson for this position, as his mere connection with their land business will undoubtedly secure the confidence of the entire farming community of the country.

The plans of the Union Trust Company for sale of lands, colonization, settlement, etc., are most unusually helpful especially to the settler with small capital. Their scheme is a general and far-reaching one and it will certainly pay anyone contemplating taking lands up in the Northwest to communicate with them.

Too many men pray for the things they are too lazy to work for.