

Marian Mayfield

Or, The Strange Disappearance

CHAPTER XXXV.

Great was the consternation caused by the arrest of a gentleman so high in social rank and scholastic and theological reputation as the Rev. Thurston Willcoxon, and upon a charge, too, so awful as that for which he stood committed! It was the one all-absorbing subject of thought and conversation. People neglected their business, forgetting to work, to bargain, buy or sell. Village shopkeepers, instead of vamping their wares, leaned eagerly over their counters, and with great dilated eyes and dogmatic forefingers, discussed with customers the merits or demerits of the great case. Village mechanics, occupied solely with the subject of the pastor's guilt or innocence, disappointed with impunity customers who were themselves too deeply interested and too highly excited by the same subject, to remember, far less to rebuke them, for unfulfilled engagements. Even women totally neglected, or badly fulfilled, their domestic avocations; for who in the parish could sit down quietly to the construction of a garment or a pudding while their beloved pastor, the "all-praised" Thurston Willcoxon, lay in prison awaiting his trial for a capital crime?

As usual in such cases, there was very little cool reasoning, and very much passionate declamation. The first astonishment had given place to conjecture, which yielded in turn to dogmatic judgments—acquiescing or condemning, as the self-constituted judges happened to be favorable or adverse to the cause of the minister.

When the first Sabbath after the arrest came, and the church was closed because the pulpit was unoccupied, the dispersed congregation, haunted by the vision of the absent pastor in his cell, discussed the matter anew, and differed and disputed, and fell out worse than ever. Parties formed for and against the minister, and party feuds raged high.

Upon the second Sabbath—being the day before the county court should sit—a substitute filled the pulpit of Mr. Willcoxon, and his congregation resembled to hear an edifying discourse from the text: "I myself have seen the ungodly in great power, and flourishing like a green bay-tree. I went by, and lo! he was gone; I sought him, but his place was nowhere to be found."

This sermon bore rather hard (by pointed allusions) upon the great elevation and sudden downfall of the celebrated minister, and, in consequence, delighted one portion of the audience and enraged the other. The last-mentioned charged the new preacher with envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness, besides the wish to rise on the ruin of his unfortunate predecessor, and they went home in high indignation, resolved not to set foot within the parish church again until the honorable acquittal of their own beloved pastor should put all his enemies, persecutors and slanderers to shame.

The excitement spread and gained force and fire with space. The press took it up, and went to war as the people had done. And as far as the name of Thurston Willcoxon had been wafted by the breath of fame, it was now blown by the "Blatant Beast." Ay, and farther, too for those who had never even heard of his great talents, his learning, his eloquence, his zeal and charity, were made familiar with his imputed crime and shuddered while they denounced. And this was natural and well, so far as it went to prove that great excellence is so much less rare than great evil, as to excite less attention. The news of this signal event spread like wildfire all over the country, from Maine to Louisiana, and from Missouri to Florida, producing everywhere great excitement, but falling in three places with the crushing force of a thunder-bolt.

First by Marian's fireside. In a private parlor of a quiet hotel, in one of the Eastern cities, sat the lady, now nearly thirty years of age, yet still in the bloom of her womanly beauty.

She had lately arrived from Europe, charged with one of those benevolent missions which it was the business and the consolation of her life to fulfill.

It was late in the afternoon, and the low descending sun threw its golden gleam across the round table at which she sat, busily engaged with reading reports, making notes, and writing letters connected with the affair upon which she had come.

Seven years had not changed Marian much—a little less vivid, perhaps, the bloom on cheeks and lips, a shade paler the angel brow, a shade darker the rich and lustrous auburn tresses, softer and calmer, fuller of thought and love the clear blue eyes—sweeter her tones, and gentler all her motions—that was all. Her dress was insignificant in material, make and color, yet the wearer unconsciously imparted a classic and regal grace to every fold and fall of the drapery. No splendor of apparel could have given such effect to her individual beauty as this quiet costume; I would I were an artist that I might reproduce her image as she was—the glorious face and head, the queenly form, in its plain but graceful robe of I know not what-grey serge, perhaps.

Her whole presence—her countenance,

manner and tone revealed the richness, strength and serenity of a faithful, loving, self-denying, God-reliant soul—one who could recall the past, endure the present, and anticipate the future without regret, complaint or fear.

Sometimes the lady's soft eyes would lift themselves from her work to rest with tenderness upon the form of a little child, so small and still that you would not have noticed her presence but in following the lady's loving glance. She sat in a tiny rocking chair, nursing a little white rabbit on her lap. She was not a beautiful child—she was too diminutive and pale, with hazy blue eyes and faded yellow hair; yet her little face was so demure and sweet, so meek and loving, that it would haunt and soften you more than that of a beautiful child could. The child had been orphaned from her birth, and when but a few days old had been received into the "Children's Home."

Marian never had a favorite among her children, but this little waif was so completely orphaned, so desolate and destitute, and withal so puny, fragile and lifeless that Marian took her to her own heart day and night, imparting from her own fine vital temperament the warmth and vigor that nourished the perishing little human blossom to life and health. If ever a mother's heart lived in a maiden's bosom, it was in Marian's. As she had cherished Miriam, she now cherished Angel, and she was as fondly loved by the one as she had been by the other. And so for five years past Angel had been Marian's inseparable companion. She sat with her little lesson, or her sewing, or her pet rabbit, at Marian's feet while she worked; held her hand when she walked out, sat by her side at the table or in the carriage, and slept nestled in her arms at night. She was the one earthly blossom that bloomed in Marian's solitary path.

Angel now sat with her rabbit on her knees, waiting demurely till Marian should have time to notice her.

And the lady still worked on, stopping once in a while to smile upon the child. There was a file of the evening papers lying near at hand upon the table where she wrote, but Marian had not yet had time to look at them. Soon, however, she had occasion to refer to one of them for the names of the members of the Committee on Public Lands. In casting her eyes over the paper, her glance suddenly lighted upon a paragraph that sent all the blood from her cheeks to her heart. She dropped the paper, sank back in her chair, and covered her blanched face with both hands, and strove for self-control.

Angel softly put down the rabbit and gently stole to her side and looked up with her little face full of wondering sympathy.

Presently Marian began passing her hands slowly over her forehead, with a sort of unconscious self-mesmerism, and then she dropped them wearily upon her lap, and Angel saw how pallid was her face, how ashen and tremulous her lip, how quivering her hands. But after a few seconds Marian stooped and picked up the paper and read the long wonder-mongering affair, in which all that had been and all that had seemed, as well as many things that could neither be nor seem, were related at length, or conjectured or suggested. It began by announcing the arrest of the Rev. Thurston Willcoxon upon the charge of murder, and then went back to the beginning and related the whole story, from the first disappearance of Marian Mayfield to the late discoveries that had led to the apprehension of the supposed murderer, with many additions and improvements gathered in the rolling of the ball of falsehood. Among the rest, that the body of the unhappy young lady had been washed ashore several miles below the scene of her dreadful fate, and had been charitably interred by some poor fisherman. The article concluded by describing the calm demeanor of the accused and the contemptuous manner in which he treated a charge so grave, scoring even to deny it.

"Oh, I do not wonder at the horror and consternation the matter has caused. When the deed was attempted, more than the intended death wound didn't overcome me. And nothing, nothing in the universe but the evidence of my own senses could have convinced me of his purposed guilt! And still I cannot realize it! He must have been insane! But he treats the discovery of his intended and supposed crime with scorn and contempt! Alas! Alas! is this the end of years of suffering and probation? Is this the fruit of that long remorse, from which I had hoped so much for his redemption—a remorse without repentance, and barren of reformation! Yet I must save him!"

She arose and rang the bell, and gave orders to have two seats secured for her in the coach that would leave in the morning for Baltimore. And then she began to walk up and down the floor, to try and walk off the excitement that was fast gaining upon her.

Before this night and this discovery, not for the world would Marian have made her existence known to him, far less would she have sought his presence. Nay, deeming such a meeting improper as it was impossible, her mind had never contemplated it for an instant. She had watched his course, sent anonymous donations to his charities, hoped much

WOULD OVERLOOK HIM.



Tall Recruit—Have I always to keep my head like this.
Non-Com.—Certainly.
Tall Recruit—Well, good-bye, then. I'll never see you again.

for his repentance and good works, but never hoped in any regard to herself. But now it was absolutely necessary that she should make her existence known to him. She would go to him! She must save him! She should see him, and speak to him—him whom she had never hoped to meet again in life! She would see him again in three days! The thought was too exciting even for her strong heart and frame and calm, self-governing nature! And in defiance of reason and of will, her long-buried youthful love, her pure, earnest, single-hearted love, burst its secret sepulchre, and rejoiced through all her nature. The darkness of the past, was, for the time, forgotten. Memory recalled no picture of unkindness, injustice or inconstancy. Even the scene upon the beach was faded, gone, lost! But the light of the past glowed around her—their seaside strolls and woodland wanderings—

"The still, green places where they met, The moonlit branches dewy wet, The greeting and the parting word, The smile, the embrace, the tone that made An Eden of the forest shade—"

kindling a pure rapture from memory, and a wild longing from hope, that her full heart could scarce contain.

But soon came on another current of thought and feeling opposed to the first—doubt and fear of the meeting. For herself she felt that she could forget all the sorrows of the past; aye! and with fervent glowing soul, and flushed cheeks, and tearful eyes, and clasped hands, she adored the Father in Heaven that He had put no limit to forgiveness—no! in that blessed path of light all space was open to the human will, and the heart might forgive infinitely—and to its own measureless extent.

But how would Thurston meet her? He had suffered such tortures from remorse that doubtless he would rejoice "with exceeding great joy" to find that the deed attempted in some fit of madness had really not been effected. But his sufferings had sprung from remorse of conscience, not from remorse of love. Not except as his deliverer, he would probably not be pleased to see her. As soon as this thought had seized her mind, then, indeed, all the bitter scenes in the past started up to life, and broke down the defenses reared by love, and faith, and hope, and let in the tide of anguish and despair that rolled over her soul, shaking it as it had been shaken for many years. And her head fell upon her bosom, and her hands were clasped convulsively, as she walked up

and down the floor—striving with herself—striving to subdue the rebel passions of her heart—striving to attain her wonted calmness, and strength, and self-possession, and at last praying earnestly: "Oh, Father! the rains descend, and the floods come, and the winds blow and beat upon my soul; let not its strength fall as if built upon the sand." And so she walked up and down, striving and praying; nor was the struggle in vain—once more she "conquered a peace" in her own bosom. She turned her eyes upon little Angel. The infant was drooping over one arm of her rocking-chair like a fading lily, but her soft, hazy eyes, full of vague sympathy, followed the lady wherever she went.

Marian's heart smote her for her temporary forgetfulness of the child's wants. It was now twilight, and Marian rang for lights, and Angel's milk and bread, which were soon brought.

And then with her usual quiet tenderness she undressed the little one, heard her prayers, took her up, and as she rocked, sang a sweet, low evening hymn, that soothed the child to sleep and her own heart to perfect rest. And early the next morning Marian and little Angel set out by the first coach for Baltimore, on their way to St. Mary's County.

(To be continued.)

CURING THE DISH-WASHER.

An English Householder's Experience in India.

The experience of an English householder in India are declared, by the author of "An Indian Garden," to be sometimes trying and often amusing. An instance of one of the amusing experiences is given:

The old gray-bearded butler announced to me at luncheon one day that the dish-washer was ill with fever, but if the mistress would give some medicine he would soon be able to resume his work. I happened to have none by me, but as the matter was urgent, clean dishes being important, I asked:

"Can he go to the chemist's, do you think, for some physic if I give him a letter? I don't know what to write for."

"Oh, yes," he said, "he is quite able to go that short distance."

"I thought that was much the best way, and then the chemist could give him what was proper. So I wrote:

"Please give the bearer a dose of medicine. He says he has fever."

I forgot to inquire about him till two days after. Then I said:

"How is the dish-washer?"

"He is much better, your honor."

"And then he took the physic?"

"No, your highness, the bazaar coolie took the physic by mistake."

"The bazaar coolie!" I exclaimed.

"What for?"

"The dish-washer said, 'Work is, therefore cannot go myself; bazaar coolie goes errands; he may fetch me the physic.' So bazaar coolie took letter. Shop master prepared physic, then told bazaar coolie to drink it."

"Coolie said, 'Not for me is the medicine, but for another man. I take it to him.'"

"Not so," said the shop master. "The mistress has written, 'Give to bearer,' and she means you must drink it here."

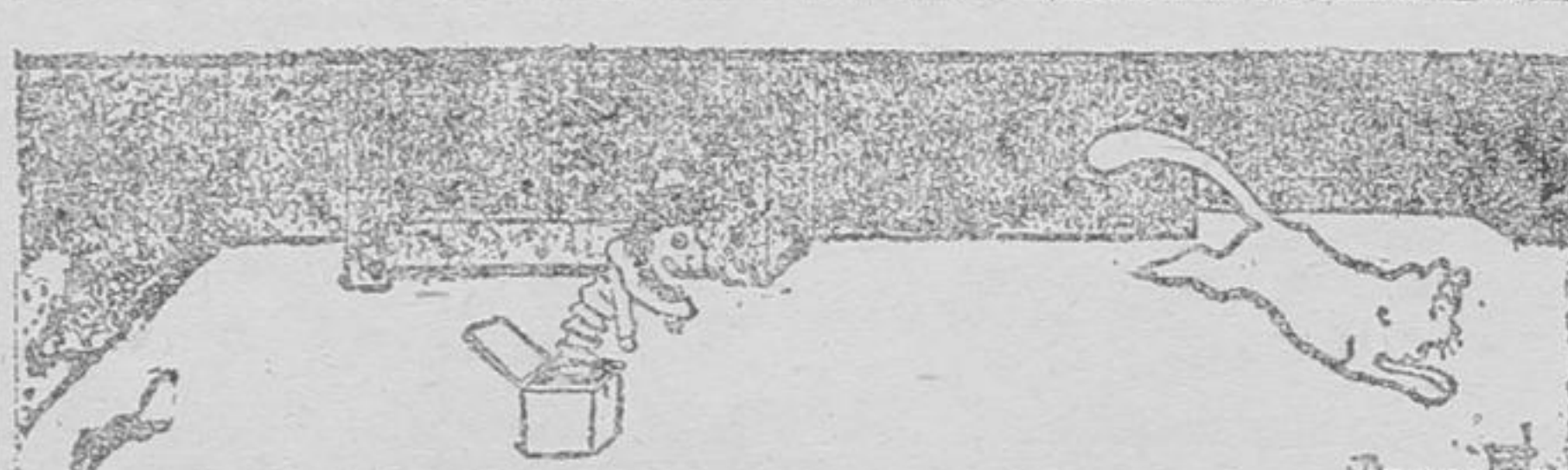
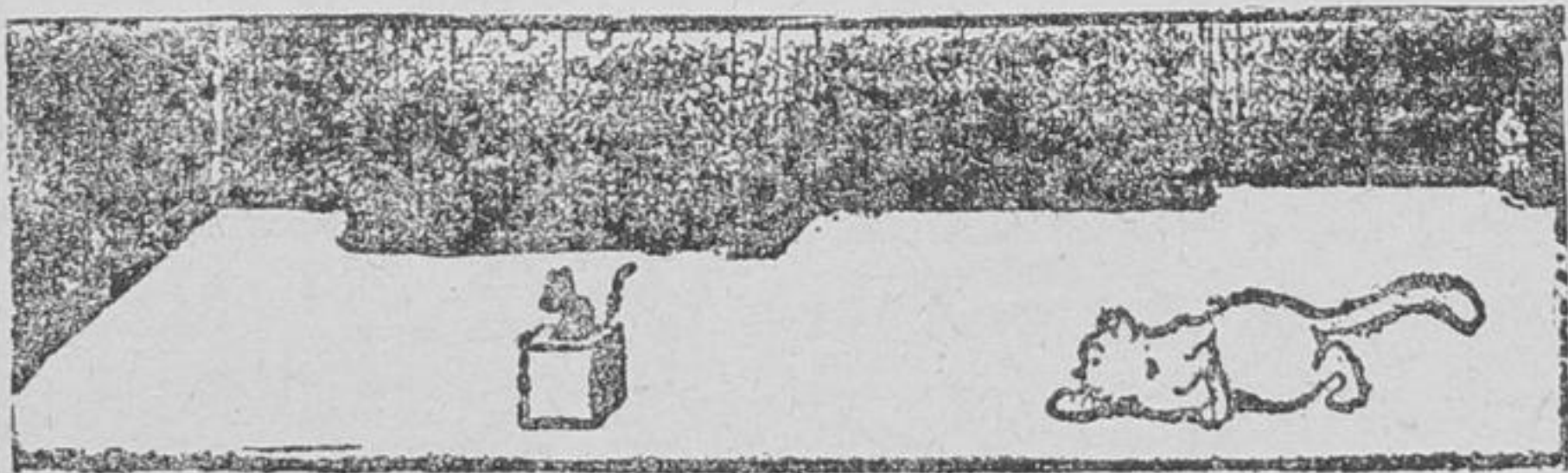
"Many times coolie said he was not the man, but they would not listen, and they made him drink it."

"HIS REVERENCE" BEST MAN.

Jukes — "Who was the best man at the wedding?"

Jenkins — "Well, I'm not sure. The bride's father got all the bills to pay, the bridegroom had to buy diamond brooches for the bridesmaids, the guests had to give handsome presents; upon my word, I think the best man was the clergyman—he was the only one who made anything out of it."

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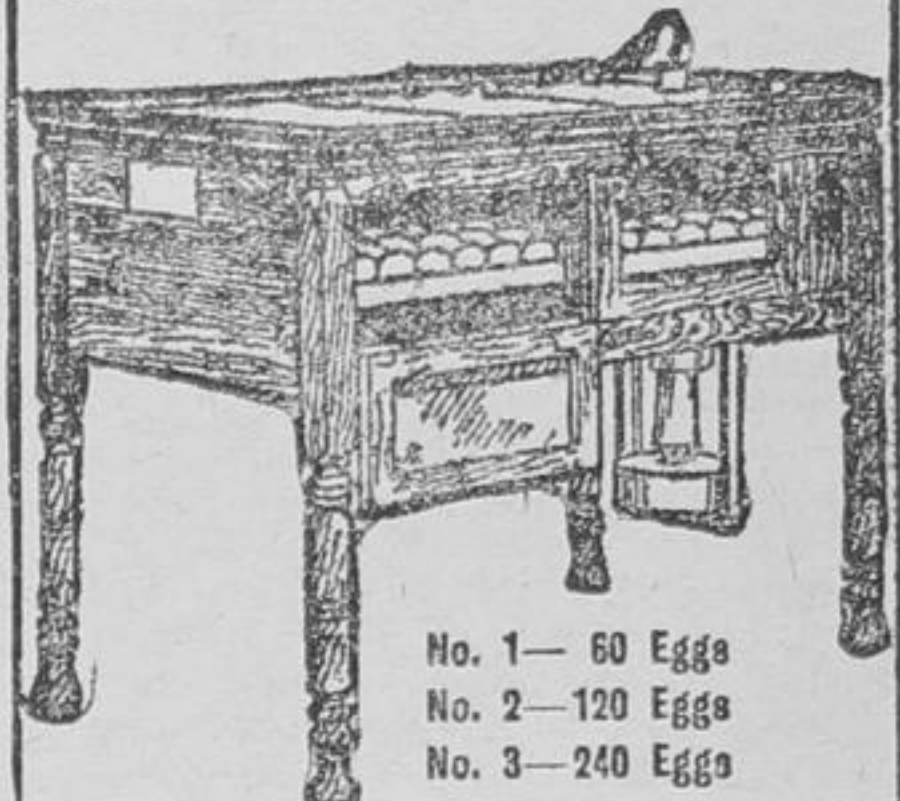
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TWO OLD TIME LOVE-LETTERS.

They Both Show an Admirable Play Upon Words.

In an old book, dated 1820 there is the following curious love epistles.

Madame: Most worthy of admiration! After long consideration and much meditation on the great reputation you possess in the nation, I have a strong inclination to become your relation. On your approbation of the declaration, I shall make preparation to remove my situation to a more convenient station, to profess my admiration; and if such oblation is worthy of observation, and can obtain consideration, it will be aggrandizement beyond all calculation of the joy and exultation of yours, "Sans Dissimulation."

The following is still a more curious answer

Sir: I perused your oration with much deliberation of the great infatuation of your imagination to show such veneration on so slight a foundation. But after examination and much serious contemplation, I supposed your animation was the fruit of recreation, or had sprung from ostentation to display your education by an odd enumeration, or rather multiplication, of words of the same termination though of great variation in each respective signification. Now, without dispute, your laborious application in so tedious an occupation deserves commendation, and thinking imitation a sufficient gratification, I am, without hesitation, yours,

"Mary Moderation."

GETTING AT THE FACTS.

Maude—"Did young Sapphish get down on his knees when he proposed to you?"
Clara—"Really, I can't say—but he at ready had down on his upper lip."