

A STRANGE COINCIDENCE.

"Come into the garden Maude, For the black cat, right, bath frow; Come into the garden, Maude."

The young fellow who was merrily whistling this well-known air broke off suddenly just as he came near a high wall bounding some enclosure. It was night (10 o'clock had just struck from a steeple near); moreover, it was moonlight, the cold, clear moonlight of a clear evening in early spring. No violet had yet opened its sweet leaves to perfume the air—the year was still too young for that; but one or two primroses had unfolded their pale yellow heads in sheltered nooks, and sanguine folk were beginning to hope that warmer days were at hand. Was it the presage of spring or the light-hearted joy of youth which made our hero, Frank Conyer, whistle so cheerily as he paced along the high road between the village of Dornton (where he had been dining with an old college chum) and his uncle's house, which bore the name of Forest Grove, and to which he had returned after a long absence. Perhaps the influence of both youth and coming spring impelled him to enliven the still air as he stepped so quickly, free and heed, unburdened by care.

He had turned out of the high road now, and got on to the turf-soft, springy turf, which ran under the wall acrossed, and as he ceased his whistling he was passing a door in the wall. What it made him pause so suddenly and look round? His action was involuntary, unpremeditated, as a grating of a key in the lock of this door, and next, the opening of the door itself, naturally caused him to turn round. In so doing he came face to face with a girl, a very young girl, who could hardly be termed "grown up."

"What followed? happened so quickly that Frank was fairly bewildered, and was left standing in amazement under the garden wall. "I have been listening for you ever so long!" said the girl, "oh, so long! and I have been so frightened! But you promised to come for the letter, and here you are! Now I must fly! Don't lose a moment in telling Margery how it is! Here! here it is!"

And in agitated haste she finished by thrusting a note into the astonished Frank's hand, and then vanished behind the garden wall, turned the key in the lock, leaving Frank more puzzled and bewildered than he had ever been during the three-and-twenty years of his life. "Good heavens! what am I to do with this?" said he to himself, as he stood in the shadow of the wall, grasping tight the missive which had been thrust between his fingers. "That can't be! Who is 'Margery'? What am I to do?"

"Read the address!" shot the following instant through his mind. But this was not immediately possible, for the shadow where he stood was deep, so he struck across the path into the moonlight, but clearly as the cold rays flooded the open space, the address on the envelope was written in so faint and running a character that it was not easy to decipher. "Miss Margery Hood!" So much he could make out, but the two or three words beneath he could not read. "By Jove, this is an adventure!" broke from Frank's lips. "I must make for the nearest cottage."

Away he went through bracken and briar and fern, over the cold, damp grass, till he struck into the high road again, when, turning down a lane, he saw a light glimmering at a short distance. Frank quickened his steps, soon coming to an humble tenement, whose thatched roof and latticed window looked picturesque enough in the moonlight. "Who is there?" said a quavering voice in reply to Frank's summons. "Let me have a light please, and here is sixpence for you," rejoined the young man. "A light? You welcome, young sir," said the old woman. "Will you please to walk in?"

And then Frank read by the glare of a tallow candle the address: "MISS MARGARET HOOD, 'The Silver Birchess,' Thornby."

fair Margery, in a voice so musical that it accorded well with the lips from whence the sweet sounds issued. "I did," replied Frank, his face flushing like that of any girl; "but may I explain that it is through a curious and unexplained circumstance that I became the bearer of your letter."

"Certainly," interrupted the young lady, with dignity; "but do not let me keep you standing here. And she pushed open the door of a room and entered, followed by Frank. To his surprise, no sooner was she relieved of the mail's presence than she clasped her hands and turned to him with a look of entreaty in her liquid eyes. "My cousin sends me this by you, therefore I may trust you!" she cried. "She asks me, in a most urgent manner, to send her twenty pounds, and she is such a child that I feel sure some one is imposing on her! Oh! it is possible that you can counsel her? Is it possible?"

But here Frank interrupted her. "Do not go on. Miss Hood, I ought not to let you give me your confidence, for I am utterly unknown to your cousin. It was by a strange chance that I became the bearer of that letter. May I explain?—will you listen whilst I explain?"

And then Frank, with eager voice, shortly detailed the odd adventure in which he had figured. The fairy Margery, meanwhile, listened with hanging face to his brief recital. He noted that she suppressed a start of uneasiness—that a flush rose to her brow when she realized the fact that it was not a treated friend of her youthful cousin whom she was speaking, but to a mere stranger.

Frank's face flushed also. He was intensely anxious to reassure this sweet girl, to be of some use to her in this difficulty. To go away and see her no more was already a pain to him; besides, he had the curiosity of youth, and wished to know the termination of the affair. "Miss Hood," said he, with a good deal of evident emotion, "I should desire the privilege to aid you in any manner possible. Although I myself am a stranger to you, I think you must know my uncle, Sir Andrew Conyer's name. Let that be my guarantee, and honor me with your commands."

"Sir Andrew Conyer!" exclaimed Margery. "Oh! mamma and I frequently go to Forest Grove. And you are his nephew? May I ask how it is that you have not had the pleasure of meeting you there?" "Because for the past three years I have been traveling with an invalid brother; how no more," concluded Frank, in a softened voice. "Ah!" exclaimed Margery, "then indeed I may trust you! I know—Sir Andrew has told us of your sad loss—and how he looked forward to your return. Oh! how strange a thing it is that we should become acquainted in this manner! Mr. Conyer, this young cousin of mine, who implored me to send her on once twenty pounds, will some day be very rich, and—and I fear there may be a design to get possession of her wealth, and that she has fallen into the trap. Her father is a severe disciplinarian, for, for so many excuses. Oh! what am I to do! If I speak out she will be subjected to endless persecutions! If I am silent she will rush on her own ruin."

"And for what does she need this money?" asked Frank, softly. "She has not confided to me anything," said Margery, "but she has given me bits of the truth, and I fear everything from her folly, her inexperience. I believe she has promised her hand to her old music master, who has doted egregiously. Who knows but that she intends to arrange for her secret marriage! For more than once she has told me lately that before the violets are in bloom she shall be a bride."

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The invasion army held forth every night in the Oldfield's hall, Streeterville, to you, I think you must know my uncle, Sir Andrew Conyer's name. Let that be my guarantee, and honor me with your commands.

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