

AS HIGH AS HIS HEART.

A STORY IN WHICH THE UNUSUAL HAPPENED.

By PROFESSOR CLARENCE MILES BOUTELLE.

(Continued.)

"The campaign was to be short. My candidacy was to be announced only a week before election. Five or six rousing speeches were to be made by myself. Some of my more eloquent friends were to make as many each in my favor. Everything was to go with a rush and a hurrah. I was to be elected on a wave of popular enthusiasm."

"A good plan," commented John, "and an unwise decision."

"Meantime I was to disappear. If no one knew where to find me, no one could ask me for support or opinion. The proposition struck me favorably. I made a random selection of as lovely and remote a locality as I could find. I went there for quiet and study—for leisure in which to do the necessary literary work."

"And found—a Woman," exulted John.

"And found the one great romance of my life," assented Valentine, "as every man finds his, sometime, unless he finds life so prosaic as to be unworth living."

"I shall always remember the time I first saw Miriam Manton. I could take canvas and colors now, were I sure my stepping aside into the paths of politics had not robbed me of something of my cunning, and paint her as I saw her—the glorious centre of the grandest scene I had ever looked upon—the crown of a scene that was perfection. Paul Manton, her father, was a widower. Miriam's mother had died as long as to have left in her child's brain only a faint and vague and shadowy memory of her; and yet, so good had she been, in her humble way—so good, to speak nearer to the truth and to the soul of things, that her memory did more in their daily life for father and daughter than the bodily presence of many another woman could have done. Indeed, when I grew to know the girl better, I frequently wondered if her dead mother did not often stand, unseen and unheard, at the side of her loved ones, her hand touching theirs, her lips lying close to the threshold of their deafened ears, hinting and helping them, though their human senses were so weak and so far beneath the needs of her purer and higher world that they knew it not—guessed it not."

"There! there!" interrupted John, "I've caught on to a new clew. Commercial traveller for business; artist for recreation; politician for—Heaven only knows what. And, now—now, an escaped poet; a raving writer actually at large. The woman must be a peculiar creature, indeed, if she's responsible for all that. But you were telling of the first time you saw her. Would it be unkind to ask you to finish that?—unfair to bring you back to a time when you had never met?"

"Mr. Manton and his daughter lived alone, in a little farm house, in one of the loveliest and loneliest places I had ever seen. The man met me at the railroad station, five miles from his home, late one June afternoon. I rode home with him behind a slow and angular horse, in a rickety and uncouth vehicle, as day died out. It took long, long. We rode up one hill, down on the farther side, then up and down, up and down, again, and again, and again. The way was rough—very rough."

"At last, we reached the top of the last hill. To the right there was a lake, seeming to be at our very feet, with a winding river running from it, and with the impenetrable forest stretching to the north as far as the eye could reach. To the left—to the south—the rugged land was scored and furrowed, and clothed here and there with dense growth of trees, but many of the fertile valleys had been subdued by the hardy farmer frontiersmen. And the greenest valley, the most beautiful valley, lay just in front of and below us, with the house of the host I had bargained with, through the medium of correspondence, standing at the edge of the green just where the hillside grew bleak, as though modestly undecided whether to choose the happy green of the grass or the hard gray of the stone. To the west were the mountains; and through a notch in the far-off crest of one of them, the low sun smote in splendor. I shall never forget the scene, never; not even in my grave. For, in the centre of the sun-lighted space, in front of the old house, stood the most beautiful woman I had ever seen—a waiting woman, though she did not know for what; she did not guess she was waiting for more than the mere making of the acquaintance of the only man who had ever answered their pathetic little advertisement for summer boarders—the man whose money would serve to enlighten, for a little, the poverty in which they lived. But I—I knew more. Looking at her in that first instant, I saw something of what my future should be—something of what hers must be. I knew what she was waiting for, though to have hinted it then, even in a look, would have sent her frightened away. I knew that her presence, her words, her smiles, would add to my speeches something of an eloquence and beauty one don't find in the question of the tariff and the free coinage of silver, even if they robbed me of some of the time I should so surely and so sorely need for the completion of them all."

"I cannot describe Miriam Manton—"

"But excuse you. You needn't try," said John.

"But she seemed to me the most beautiful of any land—any storied age. And riper acquaintance—more intimate intercourse has only confirmed me in that opinion. I think so still."

"Miriam Manton was twenty. She had seen little of life. She knew

little of books. She did all the work in her father's house during the most of the year; in harvest time, sometimes, when hired men assisted him, she had the girl of a neighbor to help her in her work; but the one summer boarder made no difference in her existence—none at all. She milked the cows, churned the butter, cooked, swept, and I should tire at the list, she did all—all. I understand the money I was to pay had been promised her, personally, by her father. With it she meant to satisfy the longings of her cramped mind—educate—develop—broaden! Bah, what a curious and contradictory farce our artificial life is! The idea of using such words as I have spoken in connection with one so near perfection!"

"But modern civilization makes its demands, establishes its standards," suggested John.

"Yes," assented Valentine, shortly, "and society must not rebel. And I cannot deny that Miriam's education, using the word in any proper and modern sense, had been sadly neglected. She had never, in all her life, been five miles from home; she had never been beyond that lonely maze of hills and valleys which was close around her home. She had never even visited the railroad station. To her the outside world was a *terra incognita*. Reading a weekly newspaper, and a weekly magazine, had not helped her much. She realized the outside world—the world in which we live and move—no more, if as much, as we realize the world of ancient Greece and Rome."

"She had attended school, I believe, over in the next valley, until she was twelve or thirteen years of age. She could read fairly well—had perhaps a taste for literature, possibly a thirst for it, and no means for its gratification beyond those afforded by a paper, a magazine, and a few second-rate and questionable books."

"She knew the geography of this land; this land in which we journey so easily and carelessly; this land in which we speak so familiarly of trips to New York, San Francisco, New Orleans, St. Paul—knew it as we know the geography of Africa. Its history was as real to her as the myths of ancient Egypt are to us."

"She knew nothing of the power of paint, though some pencil sketches of hers had much of grace and strength. She had never laid her flexible fingers on the ivory keys of piano or organ, though she sang sweetly, and with a voice that had much of promise in it."

"A fact," said John, "that you doubtless took care she should never so much as suspect?"

"A fact I certainly never told her," admitted Valentine.

"She was a woman of great possibilities—few actualities. All she had was herself—her womanliness. She would have had as much—no more—no less, if God had kept her soul for a later birth, a later taste of the experiences of life in the grand ages a million years down the future, or if His wisdom had given her her life by the shores of mystic Nile thousands of years ago!"

"A woman one might love?" suggested John.

"Most certainly."

"But one I could never bring myself to marry?"

"Most certainly not," said Valentine.

"On Sunday, as Mr. Manton was not well, I went to church with his daughter. Services were held in the old school-house, the school-house in which she had learned all she knew, outside of those instinctive knowledge that God grants to the wise and the unlettered alike; the house in which she had gotten those aspirations that were leading her higher, and that always will as long as the universe endures."

"I don't know whether the sermon was eloquent, or the opposite. I cannot say whether the minister was suited to his position, or foreordained to speedily rise above it. I do not think I heard a word he said. The face of Miriam Manton was my sermon; the sweet soul that made her what she was, was its good and sufficient text."

"The music—the singing. Rough, rude, uncouth, I doubt not, for the most part. But I heard only one voice. I shall never hear a sweeter, until I hear the song of the angels in the highest heavens, close by the throne of God!"

"We came out when evening services were over, and walked slowly home together. I gave her my arm. Perhaps it was not in accordance with usual country custom. At any rate, something about us, in our looks or our actions, excited adverse criticism."

"A pretty couple, ain't they?" sneered one of a number of evil-looking fellows, and hatred and jealousy sounded and thrilled in his tones."

"I should think so," said another, "She's just as high as his heart!"

"Maybe she thinks so," snarled the first, "and maybe she'll find herself mistaken. Such fellows as he ain't raising no girls up to their level, you can rest assured of that?"

"I glanced down at her, down at the sunny head that was, as the fellow had suggested, as high as my heart. But I could not see her eyes. She kept them resolutely down. Her steps, though, were quickened a little, and a hot blush burned along cheek and neck. She had heard every cruel and insulting word. And, for a little time, since the powers of the world she had known had dared couple our names together, she did not dare raise her pure and innocent glances to mine. The walk home was mostly in silence, and more rapid than I uneasily felt I desired. But when the house was almost reached, though neither one said a word, I led her away for a half hour or more, slowly walking to and fro until the moon came up and flooded the scene with its silver glory, and then—then—"

"I don't know why. I cannot explain it. Perhaps moonshine has a tendency to make all men more or less insane. I—I kissed her! Just

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