

Maud Percy's Secret

BY MAY AGNES FLEMING

(CONTINUED.)

"She might have had, my dear mother. She seemed so strongly attached to him already that it became quite natural to Ray to call her mother. But she would listen to none of them."

"Thank Heaven for that!" said Lady Maude, drawing a deep breath of relief. "Then her affections are still her own?"

"On that point I am not informed. Perhaps," said Ray, glancing at Ranty with a wicked look in his dark eyes, "Mr. Lawless can throw a little light on the subject. He and Erminie are very confidential friends!"

Poor Ranty reddened to the very roots of his hair under the imputation, and the look that Lord and Lady De Courcy, gave him. "Never mind, my dear boy," said Lord De Courcy, kindly, as he saw his confusion. "Erminie herself shall tell us all about it when we see her."

The journey was a very sad and silent one, despite all. The thought of him who lay dying, checked their joy at the approaching reunion; and the fear that he might be dead, hung like a dark pall over the heart of Ray.

On arriving at Judestown, they procured a conveyance from Mr. Gudge, and started at a rapid pace for the Old Barrens Cottage.

It was nearly dark when they reached it, and all around was ominously silent and still. Ray's heart sank as he pushed open the door and entered.

The first person he encountered was Pet Lawless, who uttered an exclamation of joy as she beheld him.

"O Petronilla! is he alive yet?" he asked.

"Just alive, and no more. The doctor says he has only a few hours to live."

"Thank Heaven that we find him alive at all," said Ray.

Then motioning the others to follow, he passed into the sitting room.

It was tenanted only by the dying man and his wife, Marguerite. She crouched beside him just as Ray had seen her last—just as if she had never risen a second since.

The earl and countess followed. Ranty coming last. Lady Maude trembled like an aspen, and clung to her husband's arm for support.

"Father!" said Ray, going over, and bending down.

He opened his eyes, and looked up, vacantly at first, but with brighter light when he saw who it was.

"Back at last!" he exclaimed.

"And her—have you seen her?"

"She is here beside you. Come, my dearest mother!"

He supported the trembling form of Lady Maude to the couch, and she sank down beside it on her knees and hid her face in her hands.

A light seemed to flash into the wan face, lighting up the sunken eyes of the dying man. He half-raised his hand, as if to take hers, and then it fell heavily on the quilt.

"Maude! Maude!" he cried out.

"Can you forgive me before I die?"

She looked up, lifted her pale, beautiful face to his, laid her hand on his pallid brow, and softly and sweetly murmured:

"Yes, as I hope to be forgiven. May God forgive you, Reginald, as I do."

His strong chest heaved, rose, and fell, as if the spirit within were trying to burst its bonds before its time.

"You have heard all, Maude?"

"Yes; all—"

"And you forgive me the wrong I did you, Maude?"

"Freely and fully, from my heart and soul."

"And you will acknowledge our son when I am gone? O Maude! I loved you through all. I was unworthy of you; but I loved you as none other ever loved before. Maude, where is he?"

"Who? Reginald?"

"Your—Lord De Courcy. Is he here?"

"Yes. My dear old friend, I am sorry for this," said the earl, stepping forward.

The dying rover held out his hand, and Lord De Courcy took it in his strong clasp.

"I am glad you have come—I am glad you are her protector through life. Do you remember our last parting, Lord Ernest?"

"That night? Yes."

"Ah! that night—that night! What a different man I might have lived and died but for that dark, sorrowful night! What trouble and sorrow that night caused you, too! It turned my poor mother's brain, Lord Ernest; and she stole your child!"

"I know it."

"Do you not want to see her?—have you seen her?"

"Not yet. I will see her soon."

"Where is my daughter, Raymond?" asked Lady Maude, looking wistfully round.

"Up stairs, with her grandmother, madam," said Pet, respectfully. "She

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"The Fatal Wedding"
"The Unseen Bridegroom,"
"A Terrible Secret."

does not know you are here. Shall I go and tell her?"

"Not just yet," said Lord De Courcy, "my dearest love. Subdue your impatience for a few moments—remember, you are in the presence of the dying. You have waited for her all these years—you can afford to wait a few moments longer, now."

"How is my grandmother?" asked Ray, in a low tone, of Pet.

"The same as you saw her last—in a sort of dull stupor all the time; neither sees, hears, nor feels, apparently. They brought her up-stairs this morning, and Erminie has been with her since."

"How does Erminie bear the news of her new-found parents?"

"Very quietly—with a sort of still, deep joy not to be expressed in words. She says she always knew that sweet, lovely lady with the soft, beautiful eyes was something to her, used to come to her in dreams, or something—odd, ain't it? And she's your mother, too, Ray! I declare it's all the strangest and most romantic thing I ever heard of!"

"We, too, have had our troubles," said the dying man, making a faint motion toward Marguerite. "Perhaps it was a just retribution of heaven for what you were made to suffer. We, too, lost a child; had she lived, even I might have been a different man to-day. She was lost, and all that was originally good in my nature went with her. My poor little Rita!"

"What did you say? Rita!" exclaimed Lady Maude, as she and her husband gave a simultaneous start.

"Yes. Marguerite was her; Rita we always called her—why?" he asked in surprise.

"She was lost, did you say? How did she die?" breathlessly demanded Lady Maude.

"No; she was carried off, perhaps by gypsies—she was kidnapped."

"How old was she at the time?"

"About two years old—why?" for the first time spoke the woman Marguerite, starting up.

"Was she dark, with black hair and eyes?"

"Yes, yes, yes! O Mon Dieu! why?"

"Did she wear a cross upon her neck bearing the initials, 'M.L.'?"

wildly broke in Marguerite. "A little gold cross with these letters, which was mine when I was a girl, and stood for Marguerite Isabella Landry, my maiden name, was round her neck. O madam! in Heaven's name, do you know anything of my child?"

"I do! I do! I found her, I brought her up as my own, and she lives with me now. Just Heaven! how mysterious are thy ways!" exclaimed the awe-struck Lady Maude.

"There was a wild cry, and the woman, Marguerite, fell fainting on the floor."

Ray bore her away in his arms, and Pet hastened out to attend her.

At the same moment, a change came over the face of the gipsy's son—a dark shadow from an invisible wing—the herald of coming death.

Both held their breath. Great throes shook the strong form before them, and the death-dew stood in great drops on his brow. Lady Maude wiped them off, pale with awe.

The mighty death-agony ceased at last, and there came a great calm. He opened his eyes and fixed them, with a look of unspeakable love, on the face bending over him.

"Maude," he whispered, in a voice so low that it was scarcely audible, "say once more you forgive me."

She took his cold hand in both hers, and bending down, touched her lips to his pale brow, while her tears fell fast on his face.

The hand she held grew stiff in her clasp; she lifted up her head, and her eyes for an instant, almost ceased



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to beat. Reginald Germaine, the wronged, the guilty, was dead!

"May God have mercy on his soul!" fervently exclaimed Lady Maude.

"Amen," sadly and solemnly responded her husband.

Both arose. At the same moment the door was opened and Ray appeared, holding the pale and agitated Erminie by the hand.

"Your father and mother, Erminie," he briefly said, as he again went out and closed the door.

And in the dread, chilling presence of the dead, the long-divided parent and child were re-united at last.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

All He Wanted to Know.

"My dear," he said softly.

"Well?" she returned, with some asperity.

"There is just one thing I desire to know in order to be contented with my lot."

"What is it?" she asked.

"Will you hold me up as a model to your third husband as you now hold your first husband up to me?"

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Thoughtful.

"Well, he's a very thoughtful and good hearted fellow anyway."

"I can't see it. I was at his home yesterday, and it never occurred to him to ask me to stay to dinner."

"That's just the point: his wife is taking cooking lessons."

Willie's Query.

Little Willie—Say, pa, this book says nature never wastes anything.

Pa—I guess that's right, my son.

Willie—Then what's the use of a cow having two horns when she can't even play on one?

This Monument in

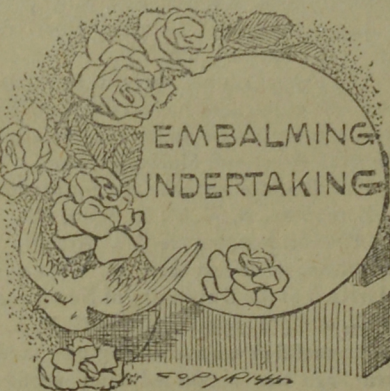
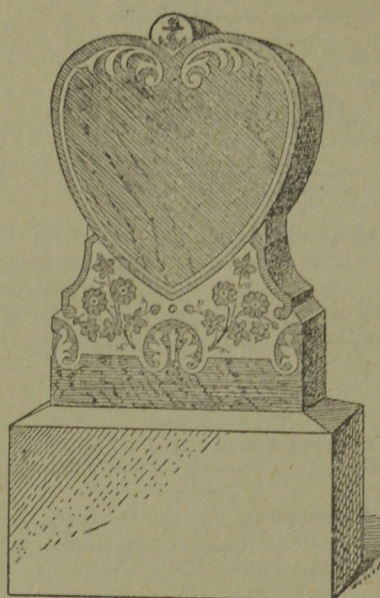
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