

Maud Percy's Secret

BY MAY AGNES FLEMING

(CONTINUED.)

"O Lord, have mercy on me! I'm shot!" shrieked the unhappy Mr. Toosyeggs, as he dropped like a stone in the mud, and lay motionless.

"Haud me de blunderbuss—quick, Pomp! Dar's more o' dem," again whispered the chattering voice; and once more the warlike individual within blazed away, while Miss Priscilla lay kicking in the strongest hysterics, and Mr. Toosyeggs, flat on his face in the mud, lay as rigid and still as a melancholy corpse.

So completely amazed was the gipsy queen by all this, that she stood motionless, with Erminie in her arms. Now the door was slowly opened, and a negro's face, gray with terror, was protruded. His round, goggle eyes, starting from his head with fear, fell on the prostrate forms of Miss Priscilla and her unfortunate nephew.

"Two ob dem gone, bress de Lord!" piously ejaculated Kuffee. "It takes me for to do the business. Well, bress Mars'r! if I ain't had a fight for't." Then catching sight of the gipsy, he paused suddenly, and jumped back, and raised the discharged blunderbuss, but no effort could make it go off a second time.

"Are you mad, fellow?" exclaimed the deep, commanding voice of Ketura. "Would you murder your master?"

"Young mars'r hab gone; an' ef you don't clar right out' dar'll be more blood shed!" exclaimed the negro, still keeping his formidable weapon cocked.

"I tell you this is your master!" impatiently exclaimed Ketura. "He arrived to-day: and now you have shot him."

Slowly the blunderbuss was lowered, as if the conviction that she might be speaking the truth was slowly coming home to the mind of her hearer. Cautiously he left his post of danger and approached his prostrate foe. Gathering courage from his apparent lifelessness, he at last ventured to turn him over, and all smeared and clotted with mud, the pallid features of Mr. Toosyeggs were upturned to the light. His arms were stretched stiffly out by his side, as much like a corpse as possible; his eyes were tightly closed; ditto his lips, all covered with soft mud.

There was no mistaking that face. With a loud howl of distress, the negro threw himself upon the lifeless form of poor Mr. Toosyeggs.

"Ah! You've got your elbow in the pit of my stomach!" exclaimed the corpse, with a sharp yell of pain. "Can't you get out of that, and let me die in peace?"

For the first time in two years, the gipsy, Ketura, laughed. In fact, they would have been more than mortal who could have beheld that unspeakably-ludicrous scene without doing so.

Miss Priscilla stopped her hysterical kicking and plunging, and raised herself on her elbow to look.

The negro, with a whoop of joy

that might have startled a Shawnee Indian, seized Mr. Toosyeggs, who had shut his eyes and composed himself for death again, save an occasional splutter as the mud went down into his throat, and swinging him over his shoulder as if he had been a limp towel, rushed with him in triumph into the house.

"He warn't dead, then, hafter hall?" said Miss Priscilla, sharply, in a voice that seemed made of steel-springs. "Well, I never! Going and frightening respectable parties hout their wits with 'orrid black niggers; firing hof hof pistols hand cannons; lying there in the mud making believe dead; hand shooting me somewhere—for I can feel the balls hinside hof me."

And, with her usual look of sour disgust immeasurably heightened, Miss Priscilla gathered up her own muddy skirts and marched, like a loaded rifle all ready to go off, into a long, bleak, chill, littered hall.

Half a dozen frightened darkeys were crouching in the farther corner, and on these Miss Priscilla turned the muzzle of the rifle, and a sharp volley of oddly-jumbled up sentences went off in tones of keenest irony.

"Yes; you may stand there, you hugly black leeches, hafter shooting us hevery one—though looks ain't hof no consequence in this 'orrid place; hand hif you don't get 'ung for it some day, my name hain't Priscilla Toosyeggs! Perhaps you'll show me where my nevy his, which you've shot so nicely, hand make a fire, hafter keeping hus rolling hin the mud, getting our death hof cold in this 'orrid cold house, which, being a respectable female, hand not a pig, I hain't used to; hand Hamerica mud hain't the nicest thing I ever saw for to eat; so maybe you'll get hus some dinner, and show me to where my nevy is, hif you please."

The terrified servants understood enough of this singular address to know Miss Toosyeggs wished for a fire, her dinner, and her nephew. An old woman, therefore, a gaudy

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

Madras-tuffan, advanced, and led the way up a rickety flight of stairs into a comfortable looking room, with a damp, unaired odor, where on a bed, lay the mortal remains of O. C. Toosyeggs, with the darkey—whose name I may as well say at once was Cupid—giving him a most vigorous rubbing, which extorted from the dead man sundry groans and grimaces, and encouraged Cupid to still further exertions.

The loaded rifle advanced to the bedside, and a second volley went off.

"Come, Horlander Toosyeggs, get hup hout o' that, lying there in this musty hold room, face and ball plastered hover with mud, which his enough to give you the rheumatism the longest day you live, without the first spark hof a fire—so it is!"

"I'm dying, Aunt Priscilla; stay with me to the last!" in the faintest whisper, responded Mr. Toosyeggs, languidly opening his eyes, and then shutting them again.

"Dying? Wah, wah!" grunted Miss Priscilla, catching him by the shoulder and shaking him with no gentle hand. "Pretty corpse you'll make, ha! hover with mud, hand looks has much like dying has I do."

"De blunderbuss an' de pissels war only loaded wid powder—no shot in 'ein at all. 'Deed, old missus, he ain't hurted the fustest mite, only he tinks so."

"Hok!" shrieked Miss Priscilla, turning fiercely upon Cupid. "You impudent black nigger, you! to call me hold! Leave the room this very minute, hand never let me see your hugly black face again!"

"Come—you are not hurt—get up!" said Ketura, going over to the bedside, as poor Cupid, crest-fallen, slunk away. "There is not a hair of your head injured. Up with you!"

"Am I not shot?" demanded Mr. Toosyeggs, bewildered. "Did the bullet not enter my brain?"

"You never had any for it to en-

I could not rise to my feet without fainting.

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ter," said the gipsy, encouragingly. "Look yourself; there is neither wound nor blood."

"No; but it's bleeding inwardly," said Mr. Toosyeggs, with a hollow groan. "Oh, I know I'm a dead man!"

"Chut! I have no patience with you! Get up, man! you are as well as ever!" impatiently exclaimed Ke-

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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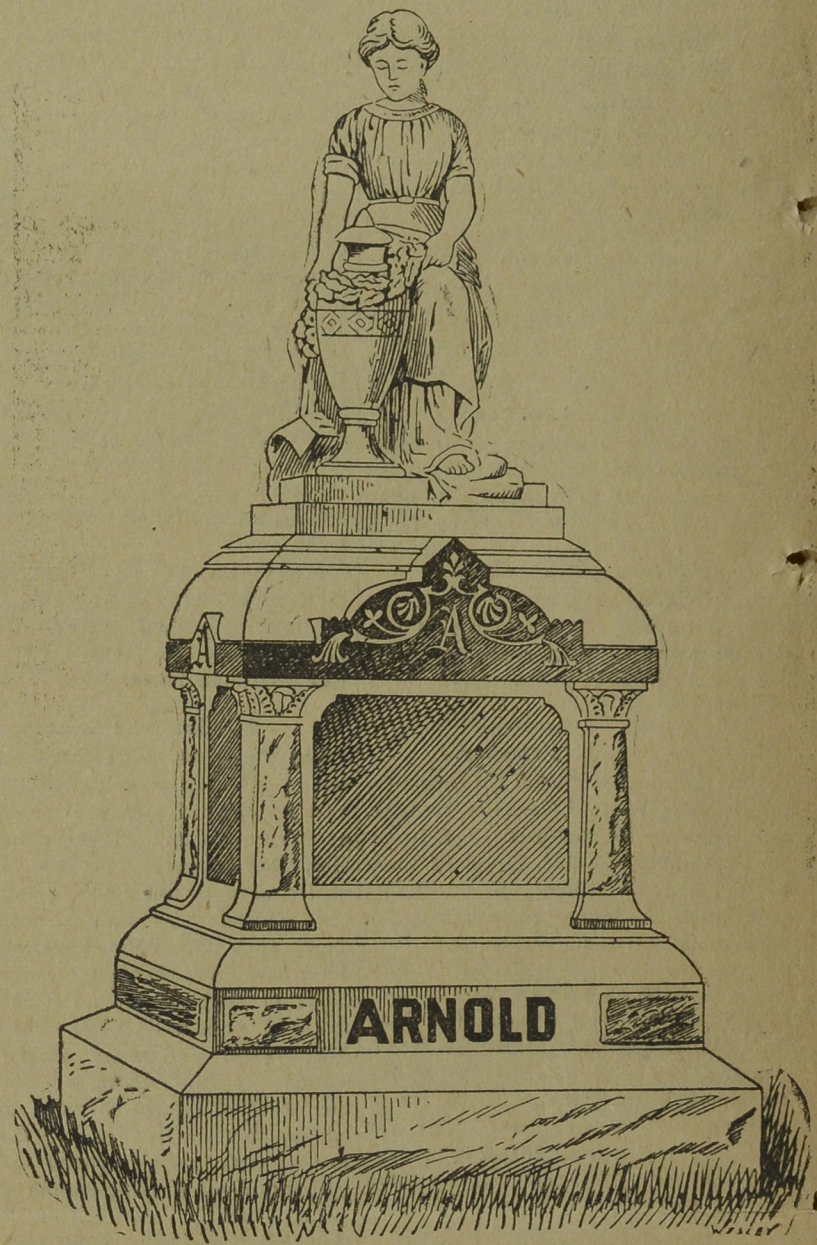
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