

Maud Percy's Secret

BY MAY AGNES FLEMING

(CONTINUED.)

"You had better let me go with you," said Ray.

"No; you sha'n't," said Pet, "I'll go myself. You ride with me, indeed! Why, I'd leave you out of sight in ten minutes."

Ray's dark cheek flushed, and he turned angrily away.

"Well, be sure to come home before dark—won't you, Pet?" said Erminie.

"No, I sha'n't leave Dismal Hollow till nine o'clock," said Pet, looking defiantly at the boys. "I'm just going to show them that if two great boys, like they are, are afraid, little Pet Lawless ain't. I'll ride through the woods after dark, in spite of all the runaway niggers this side of Baltimore."

"All right," said Ranty. "I'd rather they'd eat you, though, than me; for you're like the Starved Apothecary—all skin and bones. They'll have hard crunching of it, I'll be bound! Luckily, though, darkeys have good teeth."

"O Pet! what will you do, if the niggers should see you?" said Erminie, clasping her hands.

Pet touched her pistols significantly.

"Two years ago, Ranty taught me to shoot, you little pinch of cotton-wool! and I haven't forgotten the way for want of practice since, I can tell you. I can see by the light of a nigger's eye, in the dark, how to take aim as well as any one."

"You shoot!" said Ranty, contemptuously; "you're nothing but a little boaster, and a coward at that; all boasters are. You'd fall into fits at the first glimpse of a woolly head."

"I wouldn't! and I ain't a coward!" cried Pet, stamping her foot passionately, while her fierce black eyes seemed fairly to scintillate sparks of fire. "I hate you, Ranty Lawless, and I'll do just as I like, in spite of you all!" And flushed with passion, Pet sped out, sprang on her fleet Arabian, as wild and fiery as herself, and striking him with her whip, he bounded away as if mad.

And, looking deeply troubled and anxious, gentle little Erminie returned to the house.

"Whew! what a little tempest! what a tornado! what a bomb-shell she is! Now, who in the world but her would fire up in that way for a trifle? This getting up steam for nothing is all a humbug! Girls always are a humbug, though, anyway," said the polite and gallant Mr. Lawless. "Luckily there's one sensible individual in the family."

"Yourself, I suppose," said Erminie.

"Yes," said Ranty; "all the good sense and good looks too, of the family have fallen to my share, except what Uncle Harry Havenful has got."

"You seem to have a great idea of your own beauty," said Ray, turning from the window.

"To be sure I have," said Master Ranty, stretching out his legs, and glancing complacently in the mirror. "Nobody can see my perfections but myself; so I lose no chance of impressing them on the minds of the community in general. But I say, Ray, come out, down to the trout-streams. I've got a plan in my head that promises good fun, which I'll tell you while we're catching something for Minnie's dinner-table."

"All right," said Ray, as he turned and went out with him, little dreaming how dearly he was destined to pay for Ranty's "fun."

"Now, I know they're going to torment somebody, and it's such a shame," said Erminie to herself, as she took the pocket-handkerchief she was hemming, and sat down by the window.

A shadow fell suddenly across the sunshine streaming through the open door; and looking up, Erminie saw, to her great surprise, the tall, lank figure, and pallid freckles of Mr. O. C. Toosyeps.

"Why, Mr. Toosyeps, I thought you had gone," she said, in wonder.

"No, Miss Minnie, I ain't gone, I'm very much obliged to you," said Mr. Toosyeps, mournfully, seating himself. "I didn't like to go home; for when Miss Priscilla ain't well, she ain't always as pleasant as she might be, you know. She means well, I'm sure; but then its distressing sometimes to be always scolded. I ain't got long to live, either, you know," said Mr. Toosyeps, with increasing mournfulness; "and there is no use in me suffering more than is necessary—is there, Miss Minnie? I always thought I was to have troubles, but I never knew before they were to be so dreadful. I intend going to Judestown right after dinner, and having my will made out, in case anything might—well, might happen, you know. I'm going to leave half to Aunt Priscilla, and t'other half to your grandmother. She's been real good to me, and I'm very much obliged to her, I'm sure."

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

The Dog Knows

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Afterwards I staid. I don't like to hear it though, and I always try not to listen, but to think of something else all the time."

"I suppose young Germaine don't mind," observed Mr. Toosyeps.

"No, Ray gets fierce, and looks so dark and dreadful that I feel afraid of him then," said Erminie, sadly. "He always says, when he is a man he will go to England and do dreadful things to them all, because they killed his father. I don't think they killed him, do you, Mr. Toosyeps? They couldn't help his being drowned, I think."

"Well, you know, Miss Minnie," said Mr. Toosyeps, with the air of a man entering upon an abstruse subject, "if they hadn't made him go on board that ship, and he hadn't took anything else, and died, he would have been living yet. He didn't care about going, but they insisted, so he went, and the ship struck a—no, it wasn't a mermaid—the ship struck a coral reef—yes, that was it. The ship struck that, and all hands were lost. Now, where the fault was, I can't say, but it was somewhere, Miss Minnie! That's a clear case."

"You're his daughter—ain't you, Miss Minnie?" said Mr. Toosyeps, briskly, after a short pause.

"Whose, Mr. Toosyeps?" asked Minnie.

"Why him, you know; him that was drowned."

"No, I guess not," said Erminie, thoughtfully; "Ray called me his little sister, one day, before grandmother, and she told him to hush, that I wasn't his sister. I guess I'm his cousin, or something; but I don't think I'm his sister."

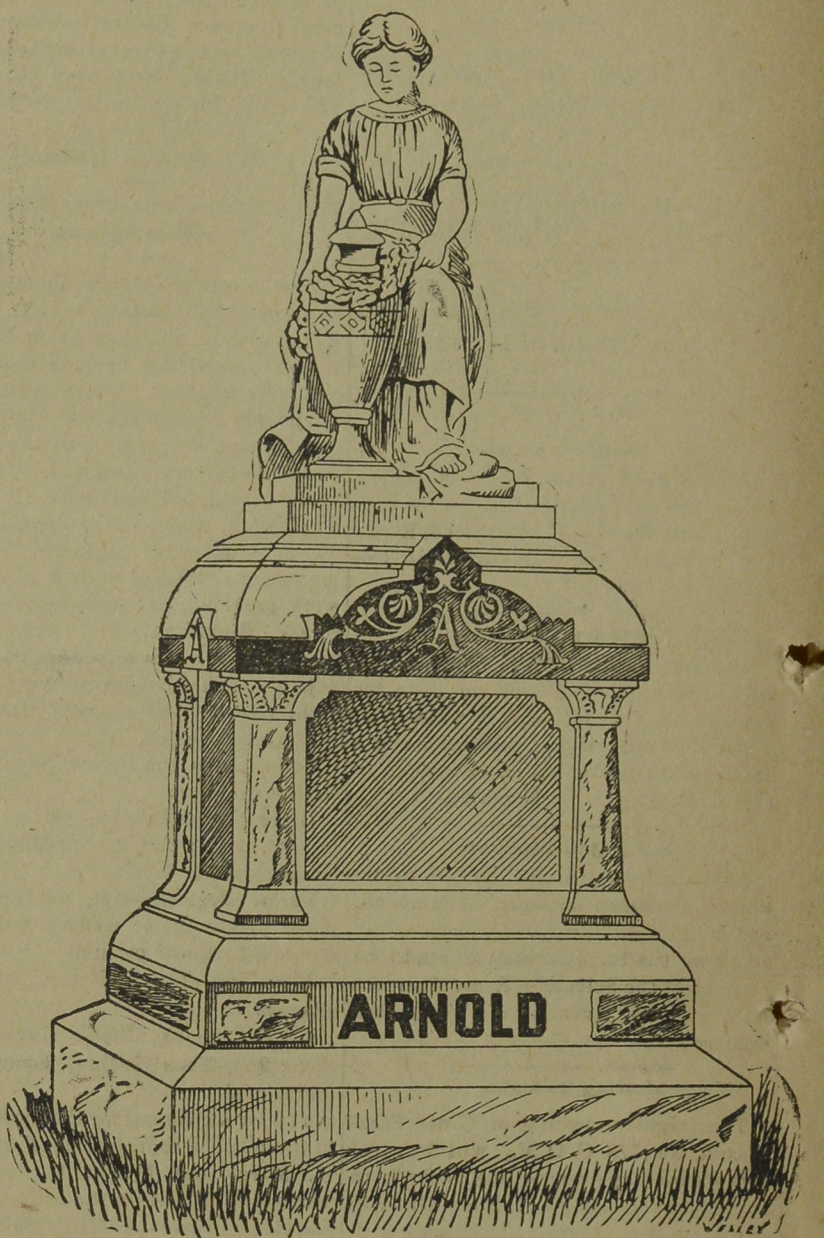
"Your father and mother are dead, I reckon," said Mr. Toosyeps.

"Yes, I suppose so; but I dare say you'll laugh, Mr. Toosyeps, but it never seems so. I dream sometimes of the strangest things."

"Good gracious! what do you dream, Miss Minnie? I'm sure I haven't the least notion of laughing at all. I feel as serious as anything," said Mr. Toosyeps, in all sincerity.

But Erminie, child as she was, shrunk from telling any one of the sweet, beautiful face of the lady who came to her so often in her dreams; and so, blushing slightly, she bent over her work in silence.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]



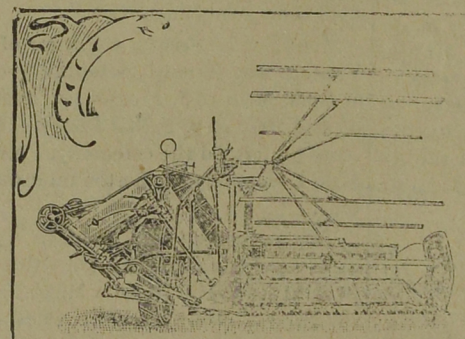
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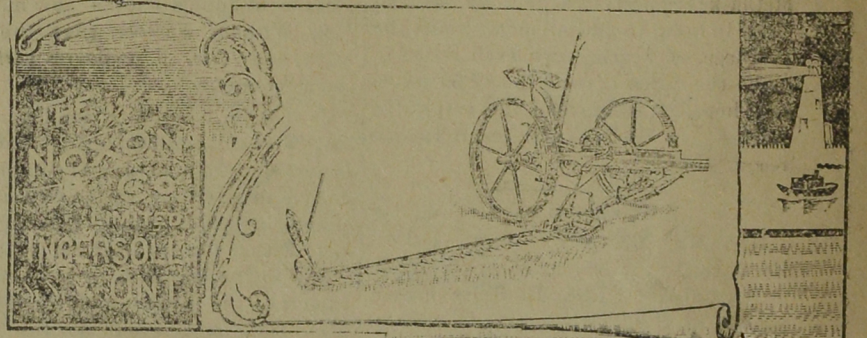
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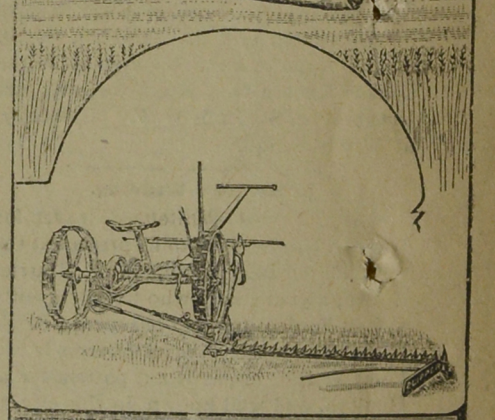
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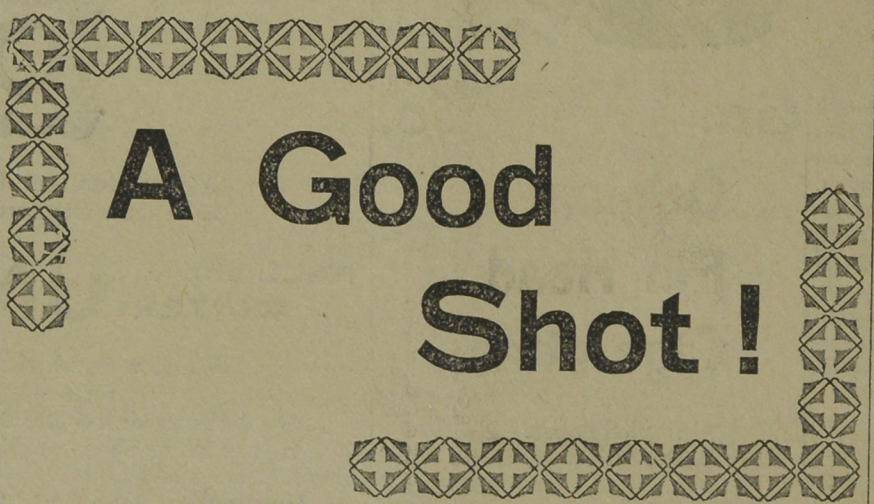
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