

Maud Percy's Secret

BY MAY AGNES FLEMING

(CONTINUED.)

The clock struck twelve, at last; the silence was so profound, that the low soft breathing of the young sleeper around her could be plainly heard. In her long, flowing night-wrapper, Pet got up and tip-toed softly across the room to the bed where the cross she-dragon lay.

Now, our Pet never thought there could be the slightest danger in what she was about to do, or, wild as she was, she would most assuredly not have done it. She merely wished to frighten Miss Sharpe for her obstinacy, unbelief in ghosts and crossness, and never gave the matter another thought. Therefore, though it was altogether an inexcusable trick, still, Pet was not so very much to blame as may at first appear.

Now she paused for a moment to contemplate the sour, grim-looking sleeper—thinking her even more repulsive in sleep than when awake; and then laying one hand on her face, she uttered a low, hollow groan, destined for her ears alone.

Miss Sharpe, awakened from a deep sleep by the disagreeable and startling consciousness of an icy-cold hand on her face, started up in affright, and then she beheld an awful vision! A white spectre by her bedside, all in fire, with flames encircling face and hands, and sparks of fire seemingly darting from eyes and mouth!

For one terrible moment she was unable to utter a sound for utter unspeakable horror. Then with one wild, piercing shriek, she buried her head under the clothes, to shut out the awful spectre. Such a shriek as it was! No hyena, no screech-owl, no peacock ever uttered so ear-splitting, throat-rending a scream as that. No word or words in the whole English language can give the faintest idea of that terrible shriek. Before its last vibration had died away on the air, every sleeper in the establishment, including madame herself, had sprung out of bed, and stood pale and trembling, listening for a repetition of that awful cry. From twenty beds in the dormitory, twenty little sleepers sprung, and immediately began to make night hideous with small editions of Miss Sharpe's shriek. Gathering strength from numbers, the twenty voices rose an octave higher at every scream, and yell after yell, in the shrillest soprano, pierced the air, although not one of them had the remotest idea of what it was all about.

At the first alarm, Firefly had fitted swiftly and fleetly across the room, jumped into bed, and seizing the sponge, gave her face and hands a vigorous rubbing; and now stood screaming with the rest, not to say considerably louder than any of them.

"O Miss Sharpe, get up! the house is afire! we're all murdered in our beds!" yelled Pet, catching that lady by the shoulder with a vigorous shake.

And "O Miss Sharpe! O Miss Sharpe! Get up! Oh-oh-oh!" shrieked the terrified children.

Miss Sharpe was induced to remove her head from under the clothes, and cast a quick, terrified glance around. But the coast was clear—the awful spectre was gone.

And now another noise met her ears—the coming footsteps of everyone within the walls of the establishment, from Mrs. Moodie down to the little maid-of-all-work in the kitchen. In they rushed, armed with bed room candlesticks, rulers, ink-bottles, slate-frames, and various other warlike weapons, prepared to do battle to the last gasp.

And then it was: "Oh, what on earth is the matter? What is the matter?" from every lip.

Miss Sharpe sprang out of bed and fled in terror to the side of Mrs. Moodie.

"Oh, Mrs. Moodie, it was awful! Oh, it was dreadful! With flames of fire coming out of its mouth, and dressed in white. Oh, it was terrible! Ten feet high, and all in flames!" shrieked Miss Sharpe, like one demented.

"Miss Sharpe, what in the name of Heaven is all this about?" asked the startled Mrs. Moodie, while the sixty "young ladies" clung together, white with mortal fear.

"O Mrs. Moodie, I've seen it! It was frightful! all in flames of fire!" screamed the terrified Miss Sharpe.

"Seen it! seen what! Explain yourself, Miss Sharpe."

"Oh, it was a ghost! a spirit! a demon! a fiend! I felt its blazing hands cold as ice on my face. O good Heaven!" And again Miss Sharpe's shriek at the recollection resounded through the room.

"Blazing hands cold as ice! Miss Sharpe, you are crazy! Calm yourself, I command you, and explain why we are all roused out of our beds at this hour of the night by your shrieks," said Mrs. Moodie.

"Oh, I saw a ghost, Mrs. Moodie; an awful ghost!"

"A ghost! nonsense, Miss Sharpe!" broke out the now thoroughly enraged Mrs. Moodie, as she caught Miss Sharpe by the shoulder, and shook

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

SNAKE CHARMING

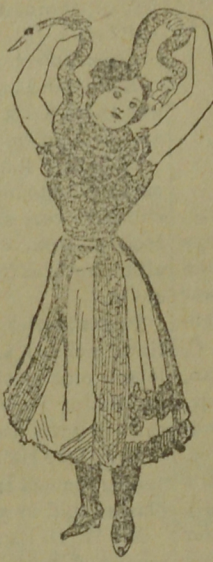
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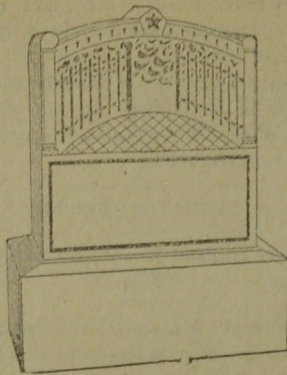
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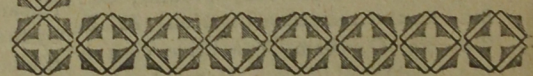
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"You have been dreaming; you have had the nightmare; you are crazy! A pretty thing, indeed! that the whole house is to be aroused and terrified in this way. I am ashamed of you, Miss Sharpe, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself to terrify those little children committed to your charge in this manner."

"Oh, indeed, indeed I saw it. Oh, indeed, indeed I did," protested Miss Sharpe, wringing her hands.

"Silence, Miss Sharpe, don't make a fool of yourself! I'm surprised at you! a woman of your years giving way to such fancies. You saw it, indeed! A nice teacher you are to watch young children. Return to your beds, young ladies; and, do you, Miss Sharpe, return to yours; and don't let me hear anything more about ghosts, or I shall instantly dismiss you."

But even the threat of dismissal could not totally overcome Miss Sharpe's fears now, and catching hold of Mrs. Moodie's night-robe as she was turning away, she wildly exclaimed:

"O Mrs. Moodie, let us have a light in the room for this night at least! I cannot sleep a wink unless you do."

"Miss Sharpe, hold your tongue! Do you see how you have frightened these children? Go to bed and mind your business. Young ladies, I think I told you before to go to your rooms—did I not?" said Mrs. Moodie, with still increasing anger.

Trembling and terrified, the girls scampered like frightened doves back to their nest; and Mrs. Moodie, outraged and indignant, tramped her way to the bed she had so lately vacated, inwardly vowing to discharge Miss Sharpe as soon as ever she could get another to take her place.

And then the children in the dormitory crept shivering into bed, and wrapped their heads up in the bed-clothes, trembling at every sound. And Miss Sharpe, quivering in dread, shrunk into the smallest possible space in hers, and having twisted herself into a round ball under the quilts, tightly shut her eyes, and firmly resolved that nothing in the earth or in the waters under the earth, should make her open those eyes again that night. And our wicked Firefly, chuckled inwardly over the success of her plot, jumped into hers thinking of the fun yet to come.

An hour passed. One o'clock struck; then two, before sleep began to visit the drowsy eye-lids of the roused slumberers again. Having assured herself that they had really fallen asleep at last, Pet sat up in bed softly, opened the window an inch or two, screened from view—had any one been watching her, which there was not—by the white curtains of the bed.

Then lying composedly back on her pillow, she took hold of her string and began pulling away.

Knock! knock! knock! Rap! rap! rap! rap! rap!

The clamor was deafening; the music was awful at that silent hour of the night. Up and down the huge brass knocker thundered, making a peal of echoes that rang and rang through the house.

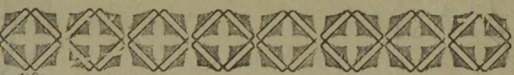
Once again the house was aroused; once again every sleeper sprang out of bed, in terror, wonder, and consternation.

"O Holy Saints! what is that? O Good Heavens! who can that be at this time?" came simultaneously from every lip.

Knock! knock! knock! Rap! rap! rap!

Every girl fitted from her room, and a universal rush was made for the apartment of Mrs. Moodie—all

[TO BE CONTINUED.]



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