

Maud Percy's Secret

BY MAY AGNES FLEMING

(CONTINUED.)

"My own!—my own! never so well beloved as now! My Maude!—my bride!—my wife! blot out from the leaves of your life that dark page—that year of passion, of error, of sorrow and shame. We will never speak or think of it more, sweet Maude. Germaine has gone to answer for what he has done, if he has sinned while living, so also he has deeply suffered and sorrow-atoned for all. Fiery, passionate and impulsive, if he has wronged others, so also has he been deeply wronged. May God forgive him!"

"Amen," was the solemn response. "And now, Maude, what need of further delay? When shall this dear hand be mine?"

"Whenever you claim it, dear Ernest. I shall have no will but yours now," she answered, with all a woman's devotion in her deep eyes. "I am yours—yours through life, and beyond death, if I may."

CHAPTER X.

"Oh positively, your ladyship is looking perfectly dazzling! I never, no, never saw anybody half so beautiful in my life: O Lady Kate! isn't she charming?" And little Miss Clara Jernyngham, in an outburst of enthusiasm, earnestly clapped her little white hands, flashing with jewels, together, and went off into a look of ecstasy wonderful to behold.

Lady Kate McGregor, the proud dark-eyed daughter of an impoverished Scottish nobleman, smiled quietly as she said:

"Lady Maude is always lovely, and like all brides, looks doubly so now. How many of the gentlemen will envy Lord Villiers, to-night!"

"Yes, indeed!" exclaimed Miss Clara, earnestly. "I am quite sure if I was a man (which, thank the gods! I am not), I would be tempted to shoot him, or do something else equally dreadful, for carrying off the reigning belle! I really don't see how any man in his proper senses could help falling in love with Maude. And yet there's brother George, now, he takes it as coolly as—as I don't know what." The usual fate of Miss Clara's smiles.

"So Captain Jernyngham does not care?" said Lady Kate, in a voice not quite steady.

"No," answered Miss Clara, "no; which is a horrid proof of his insensibility. The fact is, George never was in love in his life, and never will be, as far as I can see. He will, most likely, die an old bachelor, if some rich heiress does not take pity on him, marry him, and pay his debts, before long. Did you see the Duke of B— this evening, though, Lady Kate? What a dear old creature it is! Going about shaking so, like a lot of blanc mange. I'm going to marry him some day, for the family diamonds. Worth while, eh?"

"Miss Jernyngham is herself the best judge of that," coldly replied Lady Kate, her handsome face growing proud and pale, as she listened to Miss Clara's speech about her brother.

"Really, Lady Maude, it's my duty to tell you you are looking perfectly bewildering to-night, as all brides should look. If Lord Villiers had never been in love with you before, he must certainly have fallen into that melancholy predicament this evening," said little Miss Clara, dancing off on a new tack. "This orange-wreath and bridal veil are vastly becoming. I am sure no one would think you had been ill this morning, to look at you now."

It was a pleasant scene on which the light of the rose-shaded chandelier fell. The superbly furnished dressing room of Lady Maude Percy was all ablaze with numberless little jets of flame, which the immense mirrors magnified four-fold. Priceless jewels lay carelessly strewn about on the inlaid dressing table, mingling with rare bouquets, laces, gloves, and tiny satin slippers, that would scarcely have fitted Cinderella herself. Lady Kate McGregor, proud and stately, in white satin and point lace, and pale, delicate pearls, stood leaning against the marble mantel, her handsome eyes growing cold and scornful whenever they rested on Miss Clara Jernyngham. That frivolous little lady, quite bewildering in the same snowy robes, was all unconscious of those icy glances, as she fluttered, like a butterfly over a rose, around another lady standing before a full-length mirror, while her maid arranged the mist-like bridal-veil on her head, and set the orange wreath on her dark, shining curls.

It was Lady Maude Percy; and this was her bridal eve. Peerlessly lovely she looked as she stood there, with the light of a happy heart flushing her rounded cheeks, swelling her white bosom, and flushing from her dark, Syrian eyes. The bridal dress she wore was worth a duke's ransom. It fell around her like a summer cloud, three glistening folds of richest lace, so light, so gauzy, so brilliant,

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

with their insufferable light rose and fell on her white bosom with every tumultuous throbbing of the heart beneath. Like a floating cloud, fell over all the bridal veil, and glittering above it rose the orange wreath of rarest jewels. There was a streaming light in her magnificent eyes, a living, glowing flush on her cheek, all unusual there; and little Miss Clara stood up and clasped her hands as she gazed in speechless admiration.

It was one month after the interview recorded in the last chapter. Lord Villiers, with a lover's impatience, would consent to wait no longer; and as Lady Maude had not deposed him, this day had been fixed. The marriage was to have taken place at St. George's, in the morning; but early that eventful day, the bride had been seized with so severe a headache, that she was unable to

leave her room. Therefore, the ceremony had been necessarily delayed until the evening, when the august Bishop of C—, himself, was to come and perform the nuptial rite at the Percy mansion. Some were inclined to look upon this interruption in the light of an evil omen; but Lady Maude only smiled, and inwardly thought that, as his bride, nothing on earth could ever darken her life more. How little did she dream of the bitter cup of sorrow she was destined yet to drain to the dregs!

The old earl, her father, who was somewhat old-fashioned in his notions, and liked ancient customs kept up, had determined his daughter's bridal should be celebrated by the grandest ball of the season.

"I don't like this new-fangled way young people nowadays have, of getting married in the morning, coming home for a hasty breakfast, and then tearing off, post-haste, for France, or Germany, or somewhere, as if they wanted change of scene to reconcile them to what they have done," said the old gentleman, in strict confidence, to Lord de Courcy. "It wasn't so in my time. Then we had all our friends assembled, and enjoyed ourselves together over a bottle or two of old wine until morning. Ah! those were the days."

Resolving, therefore, to keep up those halcyon days at all hazards, the great saloons of the stately hall were thrown open, and now they were filled with the elite of the city, waiting impatiently for the coming of the bride.

(To be continued.)

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	Assets.	Surplus.
1893	\$6,453,309.56	\$229,292.86
1894	6,597,336.30	359,783.12
1895	6,797,391.05	435,113.55
1896	7,039,323.43	507,348.19
1897	7,236,555.75	548,321.09
1898	7,544,227.02	574,224.75
1899	7,991,042.63	576,807.50
1900	8,482,038.00	586,040.24
1901	9,013,082.63	607,932.00

	Premium Income.	Total Income
1893	\$ 964,201.08	\$1,261,930.51
1894	989,552.73	1,296,145.86
1895	1,040,240.77	1,353,713.38
1896	1,107,779.45	1,421,686.70
1897	1,182,965.15	1,525,630.16
1898	1,278,649.29	1,665,430.85
1899	1,444,862.21	1,833,919.16
1900	1,575,176.25	1,959,882.01
1901	1,735,036.06	2,105,141.94

	Notices of Death.	Amount of Insurance in Force.
1893	\$456,000	\$35,914,417
1894	452,628	36,312,041
1895	498,969	36,932,148
1896	418,436	38,086,849
1897	604,811	39,943,575
1898	571,316	42,222,364
1899	600,206	46,054,820
1900	594,110	50,191,853
1901	685,472	52,945,044

From the foregoing tables it will be observed that more than two and one-half million dollars have been added to the Assets during the period outlined, that the Premium Income has increased seven hundred seventy thousand dollars, that the surplus to policy holders has increased nearly three-fold, and that over seventeen million dollars more insurance is now in force than at the beginning of the term designated.

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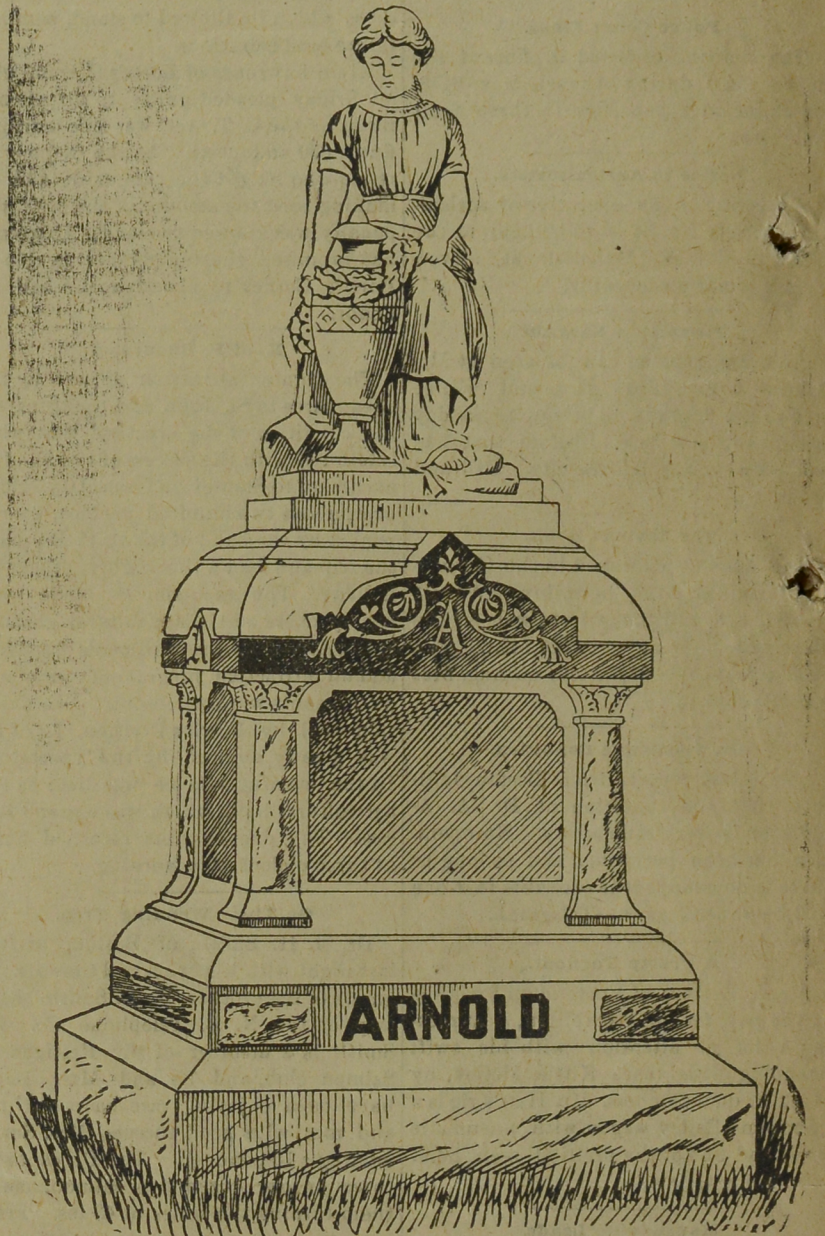
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