

Maud Percy's Secret

BY MAY AGNES FLEMING

(CONTINUED.)

He came over, and laid his small, delicate hand on hers, hard, coarse and black, with sun, wind and toil. "Listen to me, my mother!" And his low, calm, soothing tones were in strong contrast to her impassioned voice. "I am not tired of you—you wrong me by thinking so; but I have letters to write, and many matters to arrange before to-morrow's sun rises. I am tired, too, and want to rest; for it is a long time since sleep has visited my eyes, mother."

"Sleep," she bitterly echoed, "and when do you think I have slept? Look at these sunken eyes, this ghastly face, this haggard form, and ask when I slept. Think of the mighty wrong I have suffered, and ask when I shall sleep again."

"My poor, unhappy mother!" "He can sleep," she broke out with a low, wild laugh. "Oh, yes! in his bed of down, with his princely son under the same roof, with menials to come at his beck, he can sleep. Yes, he sleeps now! but the hour comes when that sleep shall last forever! Then my eyes may close, but never before!"

"You are delirious, mother; this blow has turned your brain."

"Delirious, am I?" she said, in her deep bell-like tones, that echoed strangely in the silent cell. "If undying hate, if unrelenting vengeance, if revenge that will never be satiated but by his misery, be delirium, then I am mad. I leave you now, Reginald, since such is your command; and remember, when far away, you leave one behind you who will wreak fearful vengeance for all we have both suffered."

"Mother, Lord De Courcy is not so much to blame after all, since he believes me guilty. I am not alarmed by your wild threats; for I know, in the course of time, this mad hate will grow less."

"Never—never!" she fiercely hissed through her clenched teeth. "May God forget me if I ever forget my vow! Reginald, if I thought that man could go to Heaven, and I by some impossibility could be saved too, I would take a dagger and send my soul to perdition, sooner than go there with him."

Upturned in the red light of the lamp, her face, as she spoke, was lamp, her face, as she spoke, was the face of a demon.

"Strong hate, stronger than death!" he said half to himself, as he gazed on that fiendish face. "Farewell then, mother. Will you fulfill my last request?"

"About your child?—yes."

"Thank you, dearest mother. If so lost a wretch as I am, dared invoke Heaven, I would ask its blessings on you."

"Ask no blessing for me!" she fiercely broke in, "I would hurl it back in the face of the angels, did they offer it."

Folding her mantle around her, she knotted the handkerchief, that had fallen off, under her chin, and stood ready to depart. The young man went to the door, and knocked loudly. A moment after, the tramp of heavy feet was heard in the corridor approaching the door.

"It is the jailer to let you out, Once more, good-bye."

Without one word she pressed one hot, burning kiss on his handsome brow; and then the door opened, and she fitted out in the darkness like an evil shadow. The heavy door again swung to; the key turned in the lock.

CHAPTER VII.

Away through the driving storm—through the deepening darkness of coming morn—through the long, bleak, gusty streets—through alleys, and courts, and lanes; whirled on like a leaf in the blast that knows not, cares not, whether it goes, sped the gipsy queen, Ketura. There were not many abroad at that hour; but those she passed, paused in terror, and gazed after the towering form, with the wild face and wilder eyes, that flew past like a lost soul returning to Hades. She stood on London bridge, and, leaning over, looked down on the black, sluggish waters beneath. One plunge, she thought, as she looked over, and all this gnawing misery that seems eating her very vitals might be ended forever. One hand was laid on the rail—the next moment she might have been in eternity; but with the rebound of a roused tigress she sprang back.

"No; I will live till I have wrung from his heart a tithe of the misery mine has felt," she thought; and then, a dark, lowering glance on the black, troubled waters below, filled up the hiatus.

Dusky forms, like shadows from the grave, were flitting to and fro, brushing past her as they went. She knew who they were—the scum, the off-casts, the street walkers of London. While she stood there, clutching the parapet, a female form, in light, flowing garments, was borne on, as

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"A Terrible Secret."

as the night-wind, and stood gazing down into the gloomy waters beside her. One fleeting glimpse she caught of a pale, young face, beautiful still, despite its look of unutterable woe; and then, with a light rustle, something went down, far down, into the waves beneath. There was a sullen plunge, and the gipsy queen leaned over to see. By the light of one of the large lamps she saw a

darker shadow rise through the darkness to the surface. For an instant that white, wild face, glared above the black bosom of the Thames, and then disappeared forever; and with a hard, bitter smile, terrible to see, the dark, dread woman turned away.

Away, again through the labyrinth of the city, leaving that "Bridge of Sighs" far behind—away from the dark dens and filthy purlieus to the wider and more fashionable part of the town, sped the gipsy queen. Clutching her breast fiercely at intervals,

vals, with her dark, horny fingers, as if she would tear thence the anguish that was driving her mad, she flew on, until once again she found herself before the brilliantly lighted mansion of Earl De Courcy. Swelling on the night air, came borne to her ear strains of softest music, as if to mock her misery. Gay forms were flitting past the windows and, at intervals, soft, musical peals of laughter mingled with the louder sounds of gaiety. Folding her arms over her breast, the gipsy queen leaned against a lamp post, and looked, with a steady smile, up at the illuminated "marble hall" before her. Her commanding form, made more commanding by her free, fiery costume, stood out in bold relief, in the light of the street lamp. Her dark face was set with a look fairly terrific in its intensity of hate. And that smile curling her thin, colorless lips—Satan himself might have envied her that demonic smile of unquenchable malignity.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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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	1,278,649.27	1,665,430.85
1899	1,444,862.27	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

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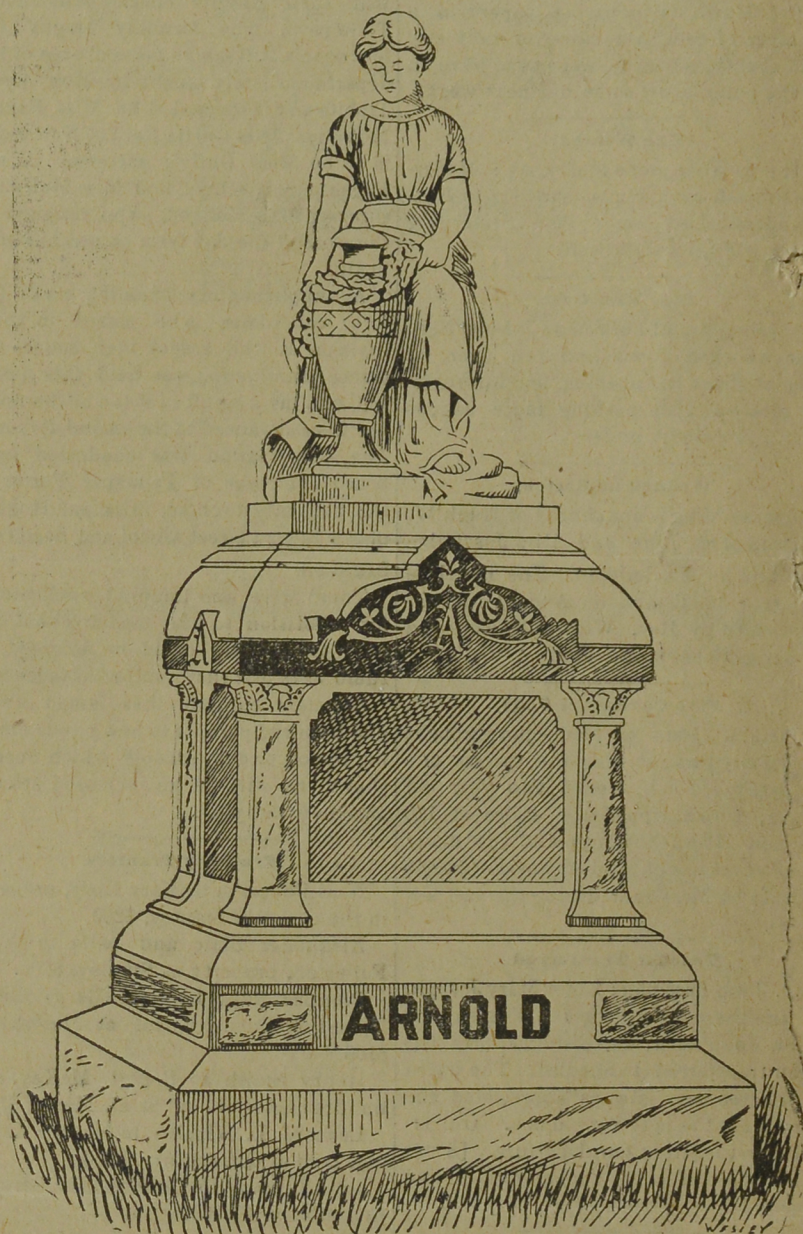
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