

Maud Percy's Secret

BY MAY AGNES FLEMING

(CONTINUED.)

Moving through its gorgeous rooms, Earl De Courcy dreamed not of the dark, vengeful glance that would, if it could, have pierced those solid walls of stone to seek him. And yet ever before him, to mar his festivity, would arise the haunting memory of that convulsed face, those distended eyeballs, those blanched lips, those up-raised hands, pleading vainly for the mercy he could not grant. Amid all the glitter and gayety of the brilliant scene around him, he could not forget the pleadings of that strong heart in its strong agony. He thought little of her threats—of her maledictions; yet, when some hours after he missed his son from the gay scene, dark thoughts of assassination—of the unfailing, subtle poisons gypsies were so skillful in, arose before him; and he shuddered with a vague presentiment of dread. But his son had returned safe; and now the stately old nobleman stood gayly chatting with a bevy of fair ladies.

"Oh! she was positively the most delightful old thing I ever saw!" exclaimed the gay voice of gay little Miss Clara Jernyngham. "Just like 'Hecate' in 'Macbeth,' for all the world—the very beau ideal of a delightful Satanic old sorceress! I would have given anything—my diamond ring, my French poodle, every single one of my lovers, or even a perfect those, delightfully mysterious, enchanting, ugly old gypsies who come poking round, stealing and telling fortunes. What in the world did she want of you, my lord?"

A shadow fell darkly over the brow of the earl for a moment, as he recollected that dark, impassioned woman pleading for her only son; but it passed away as quickly as it came, and he answered, with a smile:

"To tell my fortune, of course, little bright-eyes. Am I not an enviable man?"

"And did she really tell it? Oh, how delightful! What did she say, my lord?"

"That I was to propose to Miss Clara Jernyngham, who was to say, 'With pleasure, my lord!—that I was to indulge her with 'loves of bonnets' and French poodles to an unlimited extent—that—"

"Now, I don't believe a word of it," said Miss Clara, pouting, while a peal of silvery laughter arose from the rest. "I wouldn't be a mere countess at any price. I'll have a ducal coronet, if I die for it! You know the old Duke of B—, my lord?" she added in a mysterious whisper. "Well, he is not quite right in his mind, poor man! and I am going to propose to him the very first chance! The family diamonds are superb, and I will become them beautifully, you know! This is strictly entre nous, though, and if you don't tell, my lord, you shall have an invitation to the wedding, and drink my health in his grace's old wine!"

And, with her pretty little face all dimpled with smiles, Miss Clara danced away to a window near, and lifting the heavy curtains, peeped out.

The earl had bowed, and, with his hand on his heart, had promised, with befitting gravity, to preserve the young lady's secret inviolate, when a sudden ejaculation from Miss Clara's rosy lips brought him again to her side.

"Oh, my lord! only look!" she cried. "There is that dark, dreadful gipsy we were talking of, herself. Only look at that awful face; it is positively enough to make one's blood run cold. Could she have heard us, do you think, my lord?"

At any other time, the gay little lady's undisguised terror would have amused the earl; but now, with that dark, stern, terrible face gleaming like a vision from the dead, in the fitful light of the street lamp, he felt his very blood curdle. It rose before him so unexpectedly, as if she had risen from the earth to confront him, that even his strong heart grew for a moment appalled. Her tall form loomed up unnaturally large in the uncertain light; her unsheltered head, on which the rain mercilessly beat; her steady, burning, unswerving gaze fixed on the very window where they stood—all combined, sent a thrill of terror to the very heart of the earl.

She saw them as they stood there; for by the brilliant jets of light, his imposing form was plainly revealed in the large window. Slowly, like an inspired sybil of the darkest gloom, she raised one skinny hand, and, while her long, flickering finger pointed upward, her ominous gaze never for a single instant wandered from his face. So wild—so threatening was her look, that the shriek she had opened her mouth to utter froze on little Miss Jernyngham's lips; and the earl, with a shudder, shaded his eyes with his hands to shut out the weird sight. One moment later, when he looked again, the dark, portentous vision was gone.

Slowly and reluctantly, as though unwilling to go, the clouds of night

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

from "Merrie England" in her, that morning—Two-by-two they came, chained together hand and foot, like oxen; and the long, gloomy procession wound its tortuous way to the vessel's side, amid the laughter, scoffs, and jeers of the crowd. Yet there were sad faces in that crowd, too—faces hard, rough, and guilt-stained—that grew sorrowful as better men's might have grown, as some friend, son, husband, or brother went by, straining their eyes to take a last look at the land they were leaving forever. Now and then some fair young face scarcely past boyhood would pass in the felon gang—faces hard to associate with the idea of guilt; but most were dark, savage, morose men, with scowling eyes and guilt-hardened looks.

At last came one who was greeted with an insulting cheer that rang to the very heavens. And "Hurrah! hurrah! for the gentleman gipsy!" "Hurrah! hurrah! for the thief from Eton!" rang out again and again, until the welkin rang.

Proudly erect, with his fine head thrown back; his full, falcon eyes flashing with a scorn that made more than one scolding gaze fall, walked the son of the grimy crew.

[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
1874	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	1,444,862.27	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

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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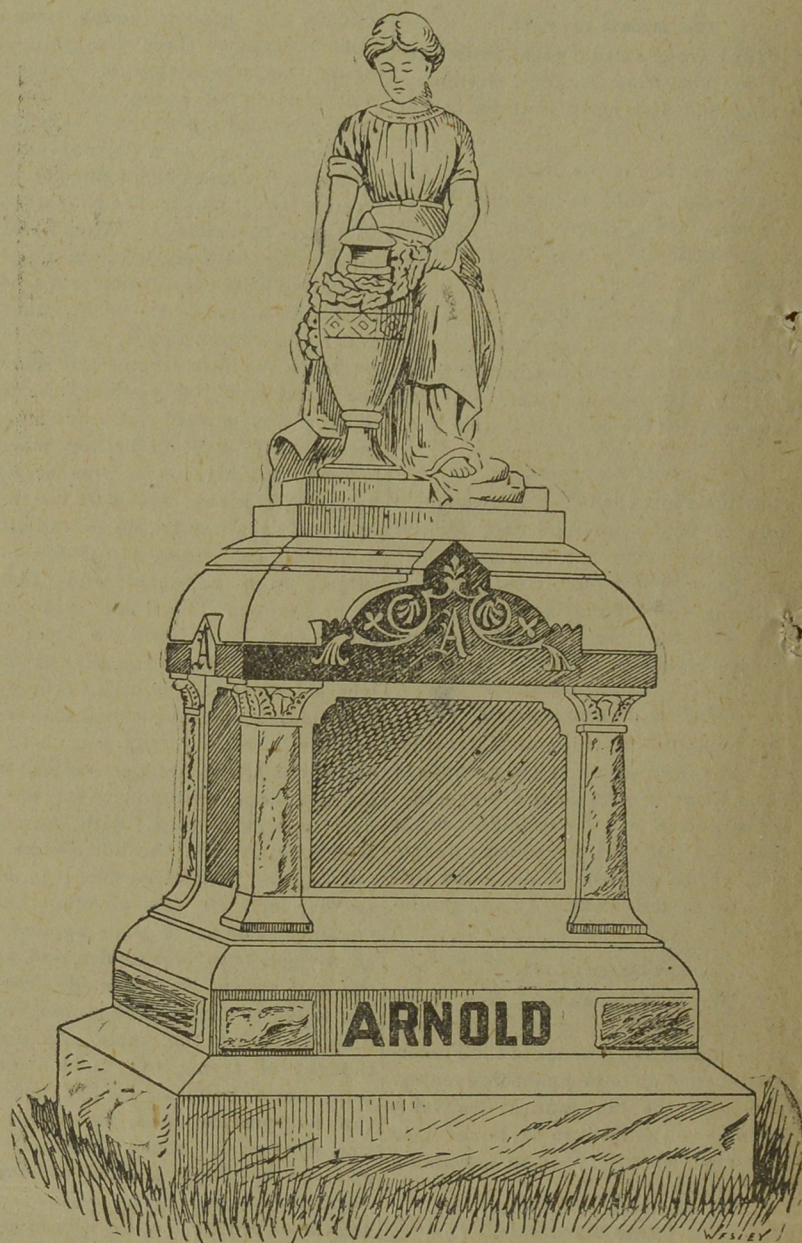
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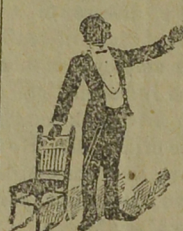
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