

Maud Percy's Secret

BY MAY AGNES FLEMING

(CONTINUED.)

"If I thought she could stoop to sue for me," exclaimed the youth, "but no, my mother was too proud to do it. My poor, poor mother! How was she looking, Villiers?"

"Very haggard, very thin, very wretched, in a word—though that was to be expected."

"Poor mother!" murmured the youth, with quivering lips.

"My dear fellow," said Lord Villiers, "your mother shall never want while I live."

The prisoner wrung his hand in silence.

"If you like, I will try to discover her, and send her to you before you—"

His voice choked, and he stopped.

"My dear Villiers, you have, indeed, proven yourself my friend," said the convict, "if you could see her and send her to me before I leave England, you would be conferring the greatest favor on me. There are things of which I wish to speak to her, which I cannot reveal to any one else—not even to you."

"Then I will instantly go in search of her," said Lord Villiers, rising. "My dear Germaine, goodbye."

"Farewell, Ernest. God bless you!"

And so they parted. Did either dream how strangely they were destined to meet again? With his face shaded by his hand, the prisoner sat; when a noise as of persons in altercation met his ears. He raised his head to listen, and recognized the gruff voice of his jailer; then the sharp voice of a woman; and lastly, the calm, clear tones of Lord Ernest Villiers. His words seemed to decide the matter; for the heavy door swung back, the tall form of gipsy Ketura passed into the cell.

"Mother!" The prisoner started to his feet, and with a passionate cry: "O my son! my son!" he was clasped in the arms of his mother.

"Thank Heaven, mother! that I see you again!"

"Heaven!" she broke out, with passionate fierceness, "never mention it again! What is Heaven, and God, and mercy, and happiness? All a mockery, and worse than a mockery!"

"My poor mother!"

"What have I done that I should lose you?" she cried. "What crime have I committed, that I should be doomed to a hell upon earth? But I will have revenge," she added, while her fierce eyes blazed, and her long, bony hand clenched—"yes, fearful revenge!"

"Mother! mother! Do not talk so! Be calm!"

"Calm! With these flames, like eternal fires, raging in my heart and brain?"

"Mother, you are going mad! Unless you are calm we must part."

"Oh yes! We will part to-morrow. You will go over the boundless sea with all the thieves, and murders, and scum of London, and I—I will live for revenge. By-and-by you will kill yourself, and I will be hung for his murder."

"Poor mother!" said the youth sadly. "Try and bear up for my sake. Did you see Lord De Courcy to-night?"

"I did. May Heaven's heaviest curses light on him!" exclaimed the woman, passionately. "Oh! to

think that he should hold my son's life in his hand, while I am here powerless to avert the blow! May God's vengeance light on him, here and hereafter!"

"Mother, did you stoop to sue for pardon for me to-night?" said the young man, while his brow contracted with a dark frown.

"Oh, I did! I did! I groveled at his feet. I cried, I shrieked, I adjured him to pardon you—and he refused! I kissed the dust at his feet, and he replied by a cold refusal. But woe to thee, Earl De Courcy!" she cried, bounding to her feet. "Woe to thee, and all thy house! for it were safer to tamper with the lightning's chain than with the aroused Ketura!"

"Mother, nothing is gained by working yourself up to such a pitch of passion; you only beat the air with your breath. I am calm."

"Yes, calm as a volcano on the verge of eruption," she said, looking in his gleaming eyes and icy smile.

"And I am submissive, forbearing and forgiving."

"Yes, submissive as a crouching lion—forgiving as a tiger robbed of its young—forbearing as a serpent preparing to spring."

He had aved her—even her, that raving maniac—into calm, by the cold, steely glitter of his dark eyes; by the quiet, chilling smile on his lip.

"We understand each other, I think," he said quietly. "You perceive, mother, how utterly idle these mad threats and curses of yours are. They will effect nothing but to have you imprisoned as a dangerous lunatic; and it is necessary you should be free to fulfill my last request."

Another mood had come over the

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

dark, fierce woman, while he spoke. The demonic look of passion that had hitherto convulsed her face gave way to one of despairing sorrow, and stretching out her arms, she passionately cried:

"O my son! my only one! the darling of my old age! my sole earthly pride and hope! O Reginald! would to God we had both died ere we had lived to see this day!"

"My poor mother—my poor mother!" said the youth, with tears in his black eyes, "do not give way to this wild grief. Who knows what the future may bring forth?"

She made no reply; but sat with both arms clasped round her knees—her dry, burning, tearless eyes glaring before her on vacancy.

"Do not despair, mother; we may yet meet again. Who knows?" he said, musingly, after a pause.

She turned her red, inflamed eyeballs on him in voiceless inquiry.

"There are such things as breaking

chains and escaping, mother. And I, if it be in the power of man, I shall escape—I shall return, and then—"

He paused, but his eyes finished the sentence.

"You may come, but I will never live to see you," said the gipsy, in a voice so deep, hollow, and unnatural that it seemed issuing from a tomb.

"You will—you must, mother. I have a sacred trust to leave you, for which you must live," he said.

"A trust, my son!"

"Yes. One that will demand all your care for many years. You will hear my story, mother. I would not trust any living being but you."

"You have only to name your wishes, Reginald. Though I should have to wade through blood to fulfill them, fear not."

"Nothing so desperate will be required, mother. The less blood you have on your hands the better. My advice to you is, to return to Yetholm, and wait with patience for my return—for return I will, in spite of everything."

Her bloodshot eyes kindled fiercely with invincible determination as he spoke, but she said nothing.

"My story is a somewhat long one," he said, after a pause, "but I suppose it is necessary I should tell you all. I thought never to reveal it to any human being; but I did not dream then of ever being a convicted felon, as I am now."

[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
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	1,444,862.21	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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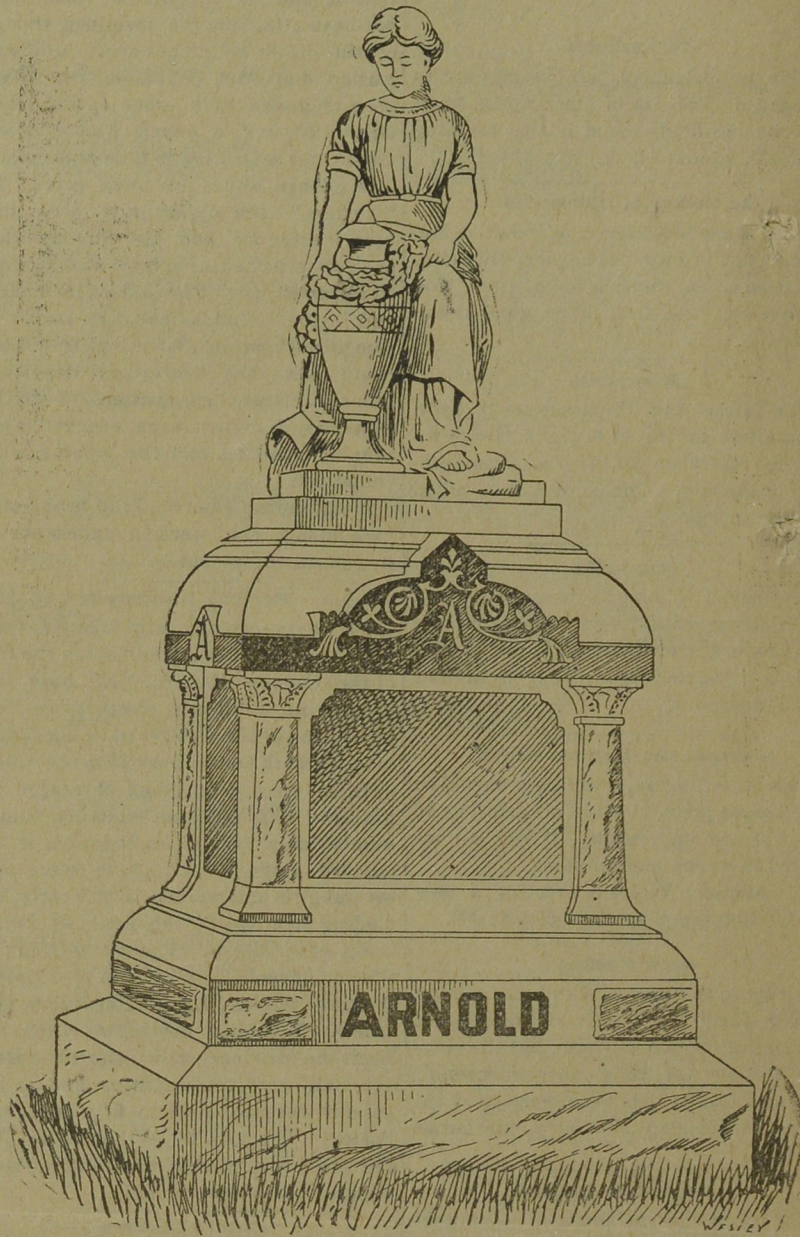
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