

Maud Percy's Secret

BY MAY AGNES FLEMING

(CONTINUED.)

"What did you hear about me, mother?" said Ray, laughing, as he shook his curly black locks.

"Well, I heard you was a noisy, disagreeable, fightin' character; allus a kickin' up a row with somebody, and forever a tormentin' of that nice young gentleman, Master Ranty Lawless, who is a brother of that little yeller gal over there, and worth a dozen like her!" said the little old woman, with asperity.

"Well, upon my word, if that ain't polite, not to say complimentary," said Pet, drawing a long breath. "Little yeller gal! Good gracious!"

"Well, you ain't white, you know," said the old woman—who, whatever her other infirmities might be, was certainly not deaf. "You're rayther of the tawniest, as everybody what's got eyes can see for themselves. It's a pity you ain't good-looking, like your brother Ranty. I don't think I ever saw a prettier young man nor he is, in my life."

"Why, you hateful old thing!" burst out Pet, indignantly; losing all her customary respect for old age in these unflattering remarks. "I ain't tawny; and I am pretty—I just am! and I'm not going to believe anybody that says anything else. If you and everybody else thinks I'm ugly, it's all your bad taste! Ranty prettier than me! Likely story!" said Pet, between contempt and indignation.

"Well, look what a nice white skin he has!" said the old woman, with whom Master Ranty appeared to be an immense favorite.

"White skin! bleached saffron more like!" exclaimed Pet; "if our Ranty's good looking, I guess he keeps his beauty in his pocket; for nobody but you ever discovered it. Humph! 'Little yeller gal!' I vow it's enough to provoke a saint!" exclaimed Pet, in a higher key, at the remembrance of this insult.

"May we ask the name of the lady who has favored us with her company this morning?" said Ray, at this point, bowing to the old woman with most ceremonious politeness.

"Yes, you may, young man," said the old lady, with a sharp asperity, that seemed rather unbecomingly; "it's a name I ain't never ashamed of, and that's more'n some folks can say. I'm Goody-Two-Shoes; and if you don't like it, you may lump it."

"A mighty pretty name," remarked Pet.

"And we like it, exceedingly," said Ray; "though, if we didn't, what awful meaning lies hidden under the mysterious phrase of 'lumping it'?" I confess, it passes my comprehension. Perhaps, my dear madam, you would be good enough to translate it from the original Greek, to which language I should judge it belongs, and let us know its import in the vulgar tongue, commonly called plain English."

"Young man!" exclaimed the bel-dame, facing sharply round; "I dare say you think it mighty amusing to keep poking fun at me—which shows all the broughten up ever you had, to go showing no respect to people what's in their old ages of life. But if you think such enchristian conduct—here the sharp voice rose to the shrillest possible treble—"will go on punished on this earth, or in the air to come, you're very much deceived young man; let me tell you that! I have power, though you mayn't think so, and could turn you into a cracked jug, or a mustard pot, just as easy as not."

"I wish to mercy you would, then, old Goody Two Shoes! Lor! what a showy appearance you'd make, Ray, as a mustard pot!" said Pet, bursting into a fit of laughter.

"Why, my dear madam, I hadn't the slightest idea of 'poking fun' at you, as you elegantly expressed it," said Ray, looking deeply persecuted and patient; "and as to being turned into a cracked jug, or a mustard pot, I think I would rather retain my present shape, if it's all the same to you."

"Take care, then, how you rouse my wrath," said the old woman, with a scowl, I'm a patient woman; but I can't stand everything. I'm used to be treated with respect. Where I came from, no such conduct was ever heard tell of."

"It's a warm climate there—ain't it?" insinuated Pet, meekly.

"Humph! there's some inference in that, if a body only could make it out," grunted the old woman; "anyways, I was always treated with respect, there, young 'oman; which I'd advise you to remember, for you need it."

"Now, who would think that, the little demons would treat the old one with respect?" said Pet, musingly, "I never knew they were so polite down there, before."

"Young woman," began Goody, with kindling eyes, when Pet interrupted her impatiently with:

"Look here, now, old Goody Two-Shoes, I ain't a young woman, and I never intend to be, and I'd thank

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

you not to keep calling me cat or my name. I'm Miss Petronilla Lawless, and if it's not too much trouble I'd feel grateful to you if you'd call me so. There!"

"Good gracious! Miss Pet, take care!" whispered Mr. Toosyeggs, who, gray with terror, had been all this time crouching out of sight in a corner; "it's real dangerous to rouse her; she might bring the roof down about our heads, and kill us all, if you angered her."

"Who is that young man?" said the old woman, in an appalling voice, as she slowly raised her finger, and pointed it, like a pistol, at the trembling head of Mr. O. C. Toosyeggs.

"I—I—I'm Orlando C. Toosyeggs. I—I'm very much obliged to you," stammered Mr. Toosyeggs, dodging behind Pet, in evident alarm.

"Young man, come over here," solemnly said the bel-dame, keeping her long finger pointed, as if about to take aim, and never removing her chain lightning eyes from the pallid physiognomy of the unhappy Mr. Toosyeggs.

"Go, Horlander," said Pat, giving him an encouraging push. "Bear it like a man; which means, hold up your head, and take your finger out of your mouth, like a good boy. I'll stick to you to the last."

With chattering teeth, trembling limbs, bristling hair, and terror-stricken face, Mr. Toosyeggs found himself standing before the ancient sybil, by dint of a series of pushes from the encouraging hand of Pet.

"Young man, wouldst thou know the future?" began the old woman, in a deep, stern, impressive voice.

"I—I—I—I'm very much obliged to you, Mrs. Two-Shoes," replied Mr. Toosyeggs. "It's real kind of you I'm sure, and—"

"Vain mortal, spare thy superfluous thanks," interrupted the mysterious one, with a wave of her hand. "Dark and terrific is the doom that Fate has in store for thee—a doom so dreadful that dogs will cease to bark, the stars in the firmament hold their breath, and even the poultry in the barn-yard turn pale to hear it."

Woe to thee, unhappy man! Better for thee somebody else had a millstone tied round his neck, and were plunged into the middle of frog-pond, than that thou shouldst live to see that day."

"Good gracious!" ejaculated the horror-stricken Mr. Toosyeggs, wiping the cold drops of perspiration off his face, as the sybil flourished her snuff-box in the air, as if invoking kindred spirits to come to her aid.

"Sublime peroration!" exclaimed Ray, laughing.

"Live to see that day?" inquired Pet, whose curiosity was aroused.

"The day he gets married, maybe."

"Awful will be the results that will follow that day," went on the seeress, scowling darkly at the irreverent Pet. "Tremendous clouds will flash vividly through the sky, the blinding thunder will show itself in all the colors of a dying dolphin, and a severe rainstorm will probably be the result. On thyself, O unhappiest of mortals, terrific will be the effects it will produce! These beautiful snuff-colored freckles will shake to their very centre; these magnificent whiskers, which, I perceive, in two or three places show symptoms of sprouting, will wither away in dread, like the grass which perisheth. This courageous form, brave as a lion, which has never yet quailed before man or ghost, will be rent in twain like a mountain in a gale of wind; and an attack of influenza in your great toe will mercifully put an end to all your earthly agonies and troubles at

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once: unhappy mortal, go! Thou hast heard thy doom."

A more wretched and weebegone face than Mr. Toosyeggs displayed as he turned round, no earthly eye ever fell on before. Ray had turned to the window in convulsions of laughter.

"I ain't well," said Mr. Toosyeggs, mournfully, as he took up his hat. "I've got a pain somewhere, and I guess I'll go home. Good morning, Mrs. Two-Shoes. I'm very much obliged to you, I'm sure."

"And slowly and dejectedly Mr. Toosyeggs crushed his hat over his eyes, and turned his steps in the direction of Dismal Hollow."

"Poor Horlander!" said Pat: "If he isn't scared out of his wits, if he ever had any. Say, Goody, won't you tell my fortune, too?"

"Come hither, scoffer," said the sybil, with solemn sternness. "Appear, and learn the dark doom Destiny has in store for thee."

"O Hamlet! what a falling off was there!" quoted Ray.

"Peace, irreverent mortal!" said Goody Two-Shoes. "peace, while I foretell the future fate of this tawny little mortal before me!"

"Well, if you ain't the politest old lady!" ejaculated Pet. "But go on; I don't mind being called ugly, now. I'm getting used to it, and rather like it."

"You'll never be drowned," began the sybil, looking down prophetically into Pet's little, dark palm.

"Well, that's pleasant, anyway," said Pet.

"Because you were born to be hanged," went on the old woman, unheeding the interruption.

"Whew!" whistled Pet.

"Your days are numbered—"

"Well, I never saw a number on one of 'em yet," interrupted the incorrigible Petronilla.

"Peace, scoffer!" exclaimed the bel-dame, fiercely. "The fates disclose a speedy change in thy destiny."

"I expect they do," said Pet; "for I'm going to be sent to school soon."

"Some dark torture is in store for you, an agony that nothing can alleviate, a nameless secret misery—"

"Perhaps it's the colic," suggested Pet. "If it is, I ain't afraid; 'cause gin and water will cure it."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

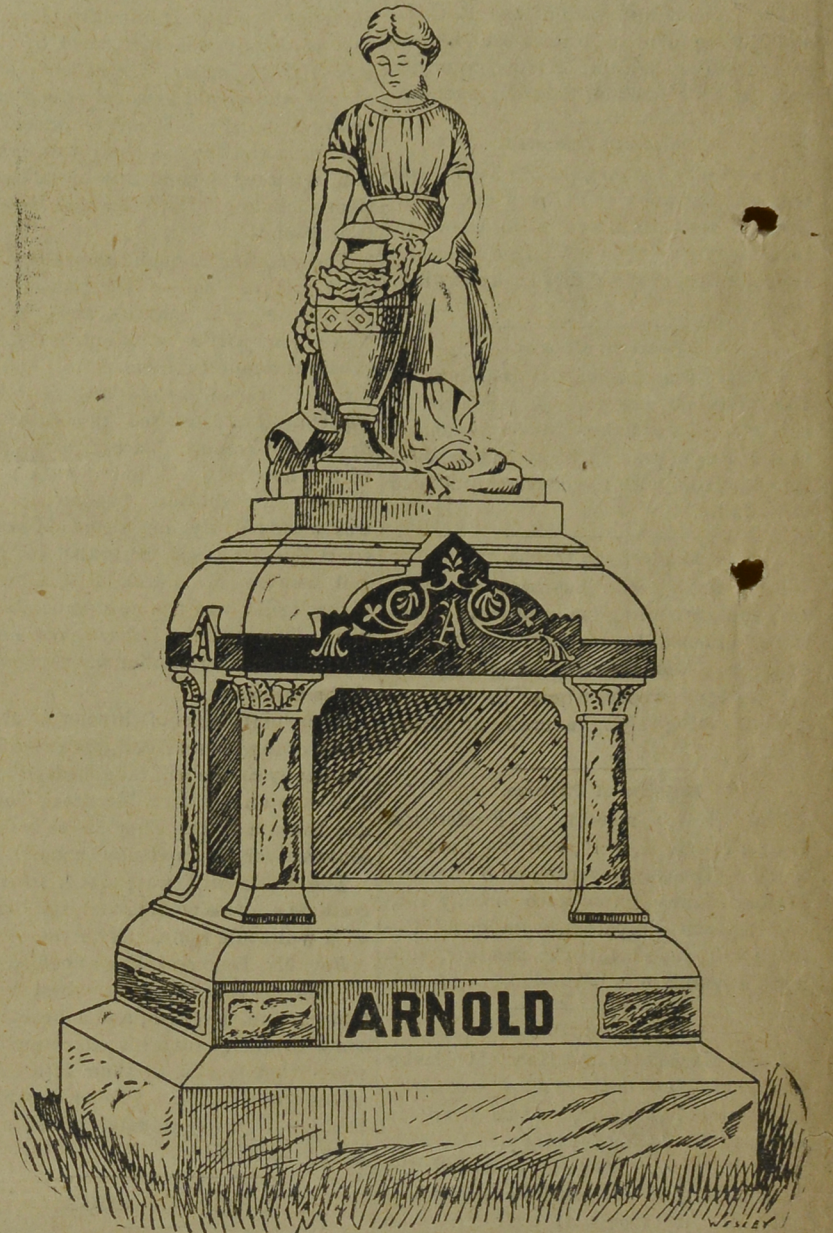
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