

Maud Percy's Secret

BY MAY AGNES FLEMING

(CONTINUED.)

"Now you'll catch it, Pet," retorted Ranty, with a malicious chuckle.

"Will I? Wait till you see," retorted Pet, as gathering up her riding-habit in her hand, she prepared to follow the servant up-stairs.

With his face contracted into an awful frown, destined to strike terror into the flinty heart of his self-willed little heiress, the judge sat, awaiting her coming. In she came, her hat cocked jauntily on one side of her saucy little head; her round, polished boyish forehead laughing out from between clusters of short, crispy, jetty curls; her black eyes all a-blaze with anticipated defiance; her rosy mouth puckered up, ready to vindicate what she considered her legitimate rights. Not the least daunted was Pet by her father's look, as swinging her riding-whip in one hand, she stood erect and fearless before him.

"Well, Miss Petronilla Lawless," began the judge, in a measured sarcastic tone: "no doubt you are very proud of last night's achievement, think you have done something excessively clever now—don't you?"

"Yes, I do," said Pet: "and so would you and everybody else—if I had only shot a real nigger, instead of Ray Germaine. It wasn't my fault. I'd just as lief shoot one as t'other."

"No doubt. The race of Joan D'Arc is not quite extinct, I see. How will you like to have your name banded from lip to lip till it becomes a common by-word in every low tavern and hovel in Judes-town?"

"Well, I shouldn't mind. I like to be talked about; and it isn't the first time I have given them something to talk about, either."

"No; but it shall be the last," said the judge, rising sternly. "I command you, now, to go no more to that cottage. If you dare to disobey me, it will be at your peril."

"Why, where's the harm of going, I want to know?" demanded Pet, indignantly.

"I am not in the habit of giving reasons for my conduct, Miss Lawless," said the judge, severely; "but in this instance I will say, it is exceedingly unbecoming in a young lady to nurse a youth who is a stranger to her. No other young lady would think for a moment of such a thing."

"Well, I ain't a young lady," said Pet, "no more than Ray is a stranger. And if I was a young lady, I ought to help to nurse him well again, I should think."

"What you think, Miss Lawless, is of very little consequence, allow me to tell you. Your duty is to do as I say, without presuming to ask questions. I have hitherto excused your wild, rude conduct, and made every allowance for your want of proper female training; but really your conduct is getting so outrageous there is no telling where it will end. My intention is, therefore, to put a stop to it at once."

Pet's eyes flashed open defiance, and her face assumed a look of resolute determination; but she said nothing.

"I have resolved therefore, Miss Lawless," said the judge, re-seating himself, with a look of haughty inflexibility quite overpowering: "to send you immediately to school. I wrote some time ago to a lady who keeps a private boarding-school for young girls, and she has promised to take charge of you at any time. It is an exceedingly strict establishment, and the severe discipline there maintained will have the good effect, I hope, of taming down your glaring improprieties. As I feel that keeping you here any longer is like holding a keg of gunpowder over a blazing furnace, I intend setting out with you this very afternoon. You need dresses and various other things I know, which I am not altogether qualified to procure; I will, therefore, leave a sum of money in the hands of Mrs. Moodie, sufficient to purchase you a complete outfit, and such other things as you may want. It is useless for you to remonstrate, Miss Lawless," said the judge, with a wave of his jeweled hand; "for nothing you can say will move me from my purpose. I anticipated violent opposition on your part, and am quite prepared for it. Go I have said, this afternoon, and go you shall. If you attempt to oppose my will, you shall receive the severe punishment you have already merited."

"Very well, sir," said Pet, meekly; "I suppose I can't help it, and have got to put up with it. I don't know as I should mind going to school, either, for a change. Many't call and see Erminie before I go, papa?"

"Hem-m-m! ah—I'll see about it," said the judge, rather perplexed by this unusual submissiveness, and intensely relieved, too, if the truth must be told; for in his secret heart he dreaded a "scene" with his stormy little daughter. "You may call in, for a moment, as we go past,

and say good-bye; but once in school, you will form new acquaintances among your own standing in society, and drop all the low connections you have formed around here. The daughter of Judge Lawless," said that gentleman, drawing himself up, "is qualified, by birth and social position, to take her place among the highest and most exclusive in the land, and must forget she ever associated with—paupers!"

A streak of fiery red flared across the dark face of Pet, and her black eyes flew up, blazing indignantly at this insult to her friends. But the next moment she remembered her role, and down fell the long lashes again; and Pet stood as meek and demure before him as a kitten on the eve of scratching.

"This is all, I believe, Miss Lawless," said the judge resuming his customary, suave blandness, and feeling intensely proud of his own achievement in having awed into submission the hitherto dauntless Pet. "You may go now, and if you have any trifling preparations to make before starting, you will have sufficient time before dinner to accomplish them. I shall expect, when we reach Mrs. Moodie's, you will try to behave yourself like a young lady, as my daughter will be expected to behave."

"Yes, sir," murmured Pet. "Very well, I hope you do. Go now."

With her long lashes still drooping over her wickedly-scintillating eyes, her finger still stuck in her mouth, Pet meekly walked out of the august "presence," and closed the library door; but no sooner was she safely outside, than a change most wonderful to behold came over the spirit of her dream. Up flew the long eyelashes, revealing the dancing eyes, all ablaze with the anticipation of fun and frolic; erect towered the little form, as she turned; and facing the door, applied her thumb to her nose, flourished her four fingers in a gesture more expressive than elegant, and exclaimed:

"Oh! won't I be good, though! won't I be, lady-like! won't I forget my friends! won't I be so quiet, and gentle, and good, that they'll make a saint out of me pretty soon! won't I be a pocket-edition of 'St. Rose of Lima!' Maybe I won't; that's all!"

Pet was as busy as a nailer until dinner was announced, packing up such things as she wished to take with her to school.

Great was the amazement of Ranty, when at the dinner table his father, in pompous tones, announced his immediate departure with Pet. Ranty glanced at her, as she sat quietly looking in her plate, and being somewhat wider awake in respect to her than his father, inwardly muttered:

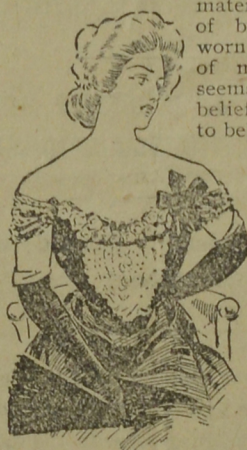
"Pet's up to something, I can tell that; whenever she looks particularly quiet and saintly, like she does now, there's always 'breakers ahead,' as uncle would say. Mrs. Moodie will find her hands full when she gets our Pet. She'll discover she's caught a tartar, I'll be bound!"

Immediately after dinner, black Debby was ordered to dress Miss Pet for her journey, while the judge went to his own apartment to make himself as irresistible as possible. In half an hour both were ready. Pet was handed into the carriage by her father, and waved a smiling adieu to Ranty. The judge took his seat beside her, and the two superb carriage horses, flashing with silver mounted harness, started off at a rapid pace.

As they came within sight of the cottage, Pet, who had been lying back silently among the cushions, started up, exclaiming:

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Women often astonish new acquaintances, who are introduced to a large family of strong boys and healthy girls, who call this young looking woman mother. It is popularly supposed that maternity is the foe of beauty, and the worn and faded face of many a mother seems to warrant the belief. But it is hard to believe that nature should compel a woman to sacrifice the rightful dower of her beauty in order to carry out a natural function of her being. And nature does not. The pains and sufferings incident to motherhood are, to a large extent, unnatural.



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"Stop at the cottage, John; I'm going in there for a moment."

The coachman drew up, and Pet sprang out.

"I will give you just five minutes to make your adieux," said the judge, drawing out his watch, "if you are not back in that time, I shall go after you."

Pet's eyes again defiantly flashed, but without deigning to reply, she ran into the cottage.

Erminie met her at the door, and looked her surprise at seeing the stately equipage of Judge Lawless stop at the cottage, and Miss Lawless herself all arrayed for a journey.

"How is Ray?" was Pet's first question.

"Just as he was this morning. Where are you going, Pet?"

"He is no worse?"

"No. Are you going away?"

"Has the doctor been here since?"

"Yes, he has just gone. Where are you going, Pet?"

"Oh—to school!"

"To school! going away!" echoed Erminie in dismay.

"Yes; going to a dismal old boarding-school, where I am to walk, talk, eat, pray, and sneeze by rule. Ain't it nice?"

"Oh, Pet, I am so sorry!"

"Well, I'm not! I expect to have a real nice time. Everybody mightn't see the fun of it; but I do! I intend to finish my education, and be back in a week!"

"Oh Pet! I don't know what I shall do when you are gone; I will be so lonesome," said Erminie, her sweet blue eyes filling with tears.

"Why, didn't I tell you I'd be back in a week? I will, too. There's an old dragon there, Mrs. Moodie—I've heard of her before—and she's to hammer learning into me. Oh, I'll dose her!"

"Won't you write me a letter, Pet?" said Erminie, who was sobbing, now, and clinging to her friend's neck.

"To be sure I will, and I'll bring it myself, to save postage. Don't be afraid, Minnie. I can take care of Pet Lawless, and won't let her be put down by no one. Good-bye, now; I've only got five minutes, and I guess they're up by this time. Now don't cry and take on, Minnie, you'll see I'll learn so fast that I'll be sent home finished in a week!"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

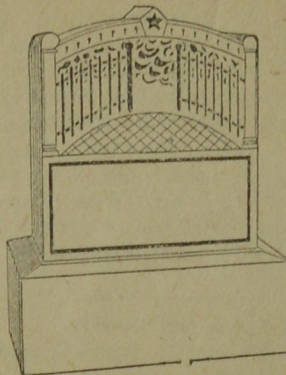
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