

# Miss Minerva and William Green Hill

BY  
FRANCES BOYD CALHOUN



Illustrated by  
ANGUS MACDONALL

The Reilly & Britton Co.  
CHICAGO

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**First Edition published February 6, 1909.**  
**Second Edition published February 16, 1909.**  
**Third Edition published March 16, 1909.**  
**Fourth Edition published July 15, 1909.**  
**Fifth Edition published December 1, 1909.**  
**Sixth Edition published February 5, 1910.**  
**Seventh Edition published June 27, 1910.**  
**Eighth Edition published September 1, 1910.**  
**Ninth Edition published October 1, 1910.**  
**Tenth Edition published November 15, 1910.**  
**Eleventh Edition published January 16, 1911.**  
**Twelfth Edition published March 31, 1911.**  
**Thirteenth Edition published September 5, 1911.**  
**Fourteenth Edition published July 1, 1912.**  
**Fifteenth Edition published October 1, 1912.**

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# MISS MINERVA and WILLIAM GREEN HILL

## CHAPTER I

### A SCANDALIZED VIRGIN

 HE bus drove up to the gate and stopped under the electric street-light. Perched on the box by the big, black negro driver sat a little boy whose slender figure was swathed in a huge rain coat.

Miss Minerva was on the porch waiting to receive him.

"Mercy on me, child," she said, "what on earth made you ride up there? Why didn't you get inside?"

"I jest wanted to ride by Sam Lamb," replied the child as he was lifted down. "An' I see a nice fat little man name' Major ——"

"He jes' would n' ride inside, Miss Minerva," interrupted the driver, quickly, to pass over the blush that rose to the spinster's thin cheek at mention of the Major.

"T wan't no use fer ter try ter make him ride nowhars but jes' up by me. He jes' 'fused an' 'fused an' 'sputed an' 'sputed; he jes' tuck ter me f'om de minute he got off 'm de train an' sot eyes on me; he am one easy chile ter git 'quainted wid; so, I jes' h'isted him up by me. Here am his verlise, ma'am."

"Good-bye, Sam Lamb," said the child as the negro got back on the box and gathered up the reins. "I 'll see you to-morrer."

Miss Minerva imprinted a thin, old-maid kiss on the sweet, childish mouth. "I am your Aunt Minerva," she said, as she picked up his satchel.

The little boy carelessly drew the back of his hand across his mouth.

"What are you doing?" she asked. "Are you wiping my kiss off?"

"Naw 'm," he replied, "I 's jest a — I 's a-rubbin' it in, I reckon."

"Come in, William," and his aunt led the way through the wide hall into a big bedroom.

"Billy, ma'am," corrected her nephew.

"William," firmly repeated Miss Minerva. "You may have been called Billy on that plantation where you were allowed to run wild with the negroes, but your name is

William Green Hill and I shall insist upon your being called by it."

She stooped to help him off with his coat, remarking as she did so, "What a big overcoat; it is several sizes too large for you."

"Darned if 't ain't," agreed the child promptly.

"Who taught you such a naughty word?" she asked in a horrified voice. "Don't you know it is wrong to curse?"

"You call that cussin'?" came in scornful tones from the little boy. "You don't know cussin' when you see it; you jest oughter hear ole Uncle Jimmy-Jawed Jup'ter, Aunt Cindy's husban'; he 'll show you somer the pretties' cussin' you ever did hear."

"Who is Aunt Cindy?"

"She 's the colored 'oman what 'tends to me ever sence me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln 's born, an' Uncle Jup'ter is her husban' an' he sho' is a stingeree on cussin'. Is yo' husban' much of a cusser?" he inquired.

A pale pink dyed Miss Minerva's thin, sallow face.

"I am not a married woman," she replied, curtly, "and I most assuredly would not permit any oaths to be used on my premises."

"Well, Uncle Jimmy-Jawed Jup'ter is jest



nach'elly boun' to cuss,— he 's got a repertation to keep up," said Billy.

He sat down in a chair in front of his aunt, crossed his legs and smiled confidentially up into her face.

"Hell an' damn is jest easy ev'yday words to that nigger. I wish you could hear him cuss on a Sunday jest one time, Aunt Minerva; he'd sho' make you open yo' eyes an' take in yo' sign. But Aunt Cindy don't 'low me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln to say nothin' 't all only jest 'darn' tell we gits grown mens, an' puts on long pants."

"Wilkes Booth Lincoln?" questioned his aunt.

"Ain't you never hear teller him?" asked the child. "He 's ole Aunt Blue-Gum Tempy's Peruny Pearline's boy; an' Peruny Pearline," he continued enthusiastically, "she ain't no ord'nary nigger, her hair ain't got nare kink an' she's got the grandes' clo'es. They ain't nothin' snide 'bout her. She got ten chillens an' ev'y single one of 'em 's got a diff'unt pappy, she been married so much. They do say she got Injun blood in her, too."

Miss Minerva, who had been standing prim, erect, and stiff, fell limply into a con-

venient rocking chair, and looked closely at this orphaned nephew who had come to live with her.

She saw a beautiful, bright, attractive, little face out of which big, saucy, grey eyes shaded by long curling black lashes looked



winningly at her; she saw a sweet, childish, red mouth, a mass of short, yellow curls, and a thin but graceful little figure.

"I knows the names of aller ole Aunt Blue-Gum Tempy's Peruny Pearline's chil-lens," he was saying proudly: "Admiral Farragut Moses the Prophet Esquire, he 's the bigges'; an' Alice Ann Maria Dan Step-

an'-Go-Fetch-It, she had to nuss all the res'; she say fas' as she git th'oo nussin' one an' 'low she goin' to have a breathin' spell, here come another one an' she got to nuss it. An' the nex' is Mount Sinai Tabernicle; he name fer the church where ol' Aunt Blue-Gum Tempy's Peruny Pearline takes her sackerment; an' the nex' is First Thessalonians; Second Thessalonians; he 's dead an' gone to the Bad Place 'cause he skunt a cat,— I don't mean skin the cat on a actin' pole like me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln does, — he skunt a sho' 'nough cat what was a black cat, what was a ole witch, an' she come back an' ha'nt him an' he growed thinner an' thinner an' weasler an' weasler, tell finely he wan't nothin' 't all but a skel'ton, an' the Bad Man won't 'low nobody 't all to give his parch' tongue no water, an' he got to, ever after amen, be toast on a pitchfork. An' Oleander Magnolia Althea is the nex'," he continued, enumerating Peruny Pearline's offspring on his thin, well molded fingers, "she got the seven-year itch; an' Gettysburg, an' Biddle-&-Brothers-Mercantile-Co.; he name fer the sto' where ole Aunt Blue-Gum Tempy's Peruny Pearline gits credit so she can pay when she fetches in

her cotton in the fall; an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln, him an' me 's twins; we was borned the same day only I 's borned to my mama an' he's borned to hisn an' Doctor Jenkins fetched me an' Doctor Shacklefoot fetched him. An' Decimus Ultimus,"—the little boy triumphantly put his right forefinger on his left little one, thus making the tenth,—“she 's the baby an' she 's got the colic an' cries loud 'nough to wake up Israel; Wilkes Booth Lincoln say he wish the little devil would die. Peruny Pearline firs' name her 'Doctor Shacklefoot' 'cause he fetches all her chillens, but the doctor he say that ain't no name fer a girl, so he name her Decimus Ultimus.”

Miss Minerva, sober, proper, dignified, religious old maid unused to children, listened in frozen amazement and paralyzed silence. She decided to put the child to bed at once that she might collect her thoughts, and lay some plans for the rearing of this sadly neglected little orphaned nephew.

“William,” she said, “it is bedtime, and I know you must be sleepy after your long ride on the cars. Would you like something to eat before I put you to bed? I saved you some supper.”

"Naw 'm, I ain't hongry; the Major man what I talk to on the train tuck me in the dinin'-room an' gimme all I could hol'; I jest eat an' eat tell they wa'n't a wrinkle in me," was the reply. "He axed me 'bout you, too. Is he name' Major Minerva?"

She opened a door in considerable confusion, and they entered a small, neat room adjoining.

"This is your own little room, William," said she, "you see it opens into mine. Have you a night-shirt?"

"Naw 'm, I don' need no night-shirt. I jest sleeps in my unions and sometimes in my overalls."

"Well, you may sleep in your union suit to-night," said his scandalized relative, "and I 'll see what I can do for you to-morrow. Can you undress yourself?"

Her small nephew wrinkled his nose, disdainfully. "Well, I reckon so," he scornfully made answer. "Me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln been undressin' usself ever since we 's born."

"I 'll come in here after a while and turn off the light. Good night, William."

"Good night, Aunt Minerva," responded the little boy.

## CHAPTER II

## THE RABBIT'S LEFT HIND FOOT



FEW minutes later, as Miss Minerva sat rocking and thinking, the door opened and a lean, graceful, little figure, clad in a skinny, grey union suit, came hesitantly into the room.

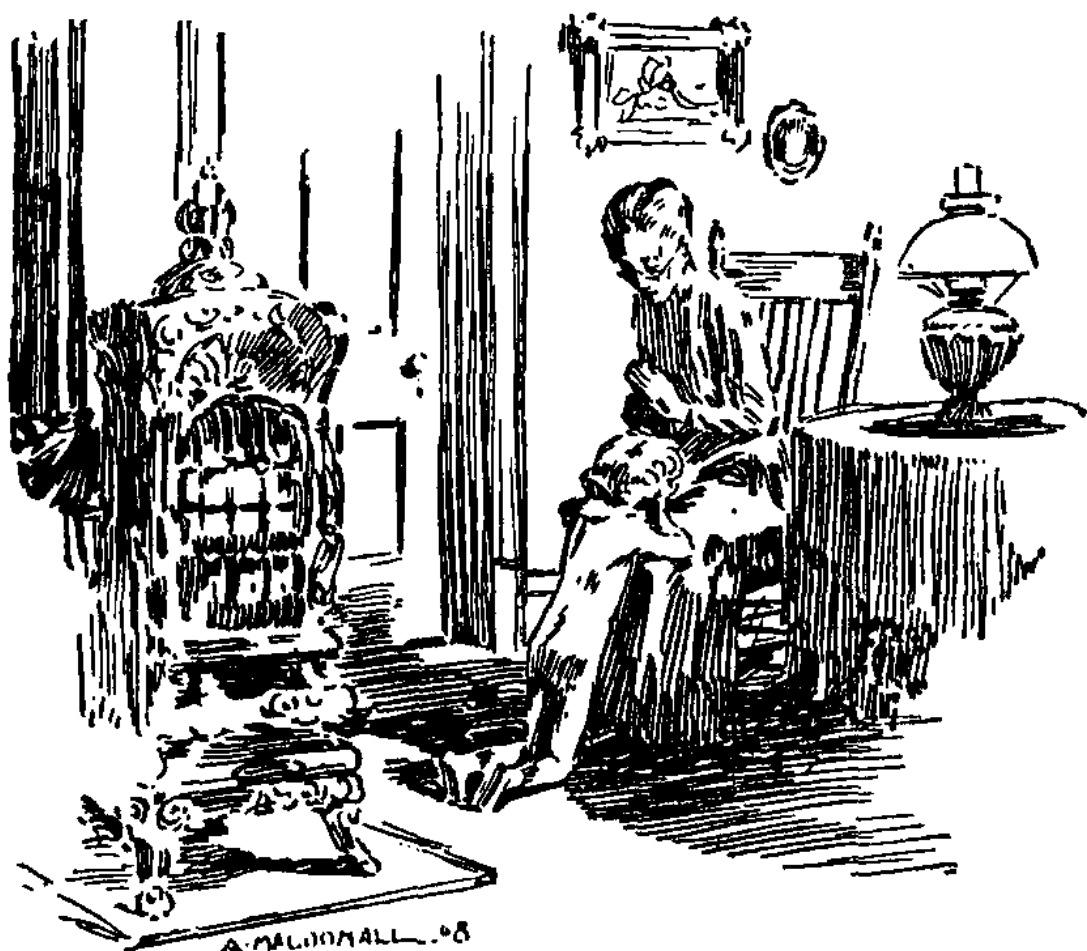
"Ain't I a-goin' to say no prayers?" demanded a sweet, childish voice. "Aunt Cindy hear me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln say us prayers ev'y night sence we 's born."

"Why, of course you must say your prayers," said his aunt, blushing at having to be reminded of her duty by this young heathen; "kneel down here by me."

Billy looked at his aunt's bony frame and thought of Aunt Cindy's soft, fat, ample lap. A wistful look crossed his childish face as he dropped down in front of her and laid his head against her knee, then the bright, beautiful little face took on an angelic ex-

pression as he closed his eyes and softly chanted:

“ ‘Now I lays me down to sleep,  
I prays the Lord my soul to keep,  
If I should die befo’ I wake,  
I prays the Lord my soul to take.



“ ‘Keep way f’om me hoodoo an’ witch,  
Lead my paf f’om the po’-house gate,  
I pines fer the golden harps an’ sich,  
Oh, Lord, I’ll set an’ pray an’ wait.’

“Oh, Lord, bless ev’ybody; bless me an’  
Aunt Cindy, an’ Wilkes Booth Lincoln, an’

Aunt Blue-Gum Tempy's Peruny Pearline, an' Uncle Jimmy-Jawed Jup'ter, an' ev'y-body, an' Sam Lamb, an' Aunt Minerva, an' aller Aunt Blue-Gum Tempy's Peruny Pearline's chillens, an' give Aunt Minerva a billy goat or a little nanny if she 'd ruther, an' bless Major Minerva, an' make me a good boy like Sanctified Sophy, fer Jesus' sake. Amen."

"What is that you have tied around your neck, William?" she asked, as the little boy rose to his feet.

"That 's my rabbit foot; you won't never have no 'sease 't all an' nobody can't never conjure you if you wears a rabbit foot. This here one is the lef' hin' foot; it was ketched by a red-headed nigger with cross-eyes, in a graveyard at twelve er'clock on a Friday night, when they 's a full moon. He give it to Aunt Cindy to tie 'roun' my nake when I 's a baby. Ain't you got no rabbit foot?" he anxiously inquired.

"No," she answered. "I have never had one and I have never been conjured either. Give it to me, William; I can not allow you to be so superstitious," and she held out her hand.

"Please, Aunt Minerva, jest lemme wear



it to-night," he pleaded. "Me an' Wilkes Booth Lincoln 's been wearin' us rabbit foots ever sence we 's born."

"No," she said firmly; "I 'll put a stop to such nonsense at once. Give it to me, William."

Billy looked at his aunt's austere countenance and lovingly fingered his charm; he opened his mouth to say something, but hesitated; slowly he untied the string around his neck and laid his treasure on her lap; then without looking up, he ran into his own little room, closing the door behind him.

Soon afterward Miss Minerva, hearing a sound like a stifled sob coming from the adjoining room, opened the door softly and looked into a sad little face with big, wide, open eyes shining with tears.

"What is the matter, William?" she coldly asked.

"I ain't never slep' by myself," he sobbed. "Wilkes Booth Lincoln always sleep on a pallet by my bed ever sence we 's born an'—an' I wants Aunt Cindy to tell me 'bout Uncle Piljerk Peter."

His aunt sat down on the bed by his side. She was not versed in the ways of childhood