

A GIRL OF THE PEOPLE

By Mrs. C. N. Williamson

She quivered, and stared at me stone-wise, her eyes flashing.

"How dare you say I love him?" "You have dared to say things to me such as no one else on earth would have uttered. Why should I not dare? And I do say it—though it is nothing to me."

For a moment she looked at me in silence, her bosom rising and falling under its soft summer laces and the bunch of purple orchids pinned in her dress. "Well," she spoke at last, more softly, "you are right. I confess it. For it may prove the touch of nature that will make us two kin for this one hour. I plead to you—I don't command. Save him—as I would save him, were I in your place—no matter how costly the sacrifice. You tell me I do you an injustice. Suppose I do. Yet would men of the world believe it—the men he has to deal with? Why, I came here in fear and trembling, praying I might do something. But I should have feared far more—always for John Bourke's future—if I'd dreamt that the girl I had heard of in this house was Sheila Cope."

"Again I don't understand," I said, miserably, my heart so cold that it seemed to freeze all flexibility from my voice. It sounded in my own ears like that of a very, very old woman.

"Now that you are quieter and gentler, I'll explain. Only, this time, you must promise to hear me through to the end without interruption. Will you do that?"

I nodded—for it was hard to speak.

CHAPTER XVI

A Letter on the Typewriter.

"Everybody has been talking about Sheila Cope and her affairs," Lady Feo went on, carefully, as if she were piling up her indictment, word by word, choosing each as a bullet might choose a stone. "You have made conversation at teas and dinners, and doubtless in club rooms; you have made paragraphs for papers, and by being a popular debutante; you became a mystery; it remains to be seen how you will end. But don't speak yet."

"It was known that, by Lady Cope's failure to make a will, or something of that sort—such stories are always vague—you were no longer an heiress. Roger Cope came into everything. He was in love with you, of course. We all thought that, those who knew him and those who didn't; and he did not make the trouble to contradict it. He, or someone—it doesn't signify—gave out that you had gone to France to live with relations. But you disappeared such a short time ago that people haven't yet lost interest. They are on the qui vive to hear the next development. What will be said of John Bourke when it comes out that instead of being in France you are in his house, calling yourself Miss Harland, and wearing lovely white satin tea-gowns?"

"I shall cause the truth to be said," I pleaded rather than protested. "I would rather die than harm should come to him through my fault, after all his goodness to me. I was penniless and almost starving. Lady Feo—so desperate that I was going to throw myself into the river, when he found me and brought me here, because I had nowhere else to go."

"All the worse for him, when the story is known. He will be called a scoundrel for taking advantage of your youth and helplessness."

"For giving me work—for leaving his house that it might be a refuge for me when I was too ill to be moved?"

"That won't be what his enemies will say."

"But if I tell all—myself?"

"Nobody would believe you. Naturally a girl caught in such a web, would make things look as well for herself as she could. It wouldn't help him—or you. Believe me, for I know the world."

"What would you have me do?" I demanded, brokenly.

"I have told you. Go away."

"And I have said I am going."

"To rooms of his taking. Oh, Sheila, I beg of you, for his sake, go far away from him, and leave no trace."

Now, indeed, I could control my tears no longer. They fell from my eyes like rain, and sobbed choked my voice.

"Oh, I can't—I can't do that!" I cried. "Go without letting him know why or where? He would believe me ungrateful—he would believe horrible things that are not true."

"If he did, you should be unselfish enough to be glad. For it would spare him pain. And it would keep him from searching for you, which he might do otherwise, out of a conviction that it was his duty to see that you were safe."

"Perhaps you are lying to me!" I stung at her. "Perhaps you only want to get me out of the way."

Lady Feo Ringwood smiled. "You don't really think that. I am not afraid of you with John Bourke, my poor child."

I looked at her, and as my pain and jealousy accentuated her beauty, I told myself bitterly that she had no need to be afraid. She was like a young queen, in her exquisite dress and the black picture hat that contrasted with her auburn hair, daughter of the gods, divinely tall, and most divinely fair."

I was a little insignificant, my poor claims to prettiness palling beside her classic perfection.

"I saw," she continued, "from that old woman's reluctance to let me into the study that the Secret was there, and so I was determined to enter, for I had come to the house with a purpose. I expected to see some ordinary girl of no importance. I found you. I said to myself: 'Sir Roger Cope will kill John Bourke for this, or John will kill him!'"

"Roger Cope!" I ejaculated. "Always Roger Cope!"

"Yes, Roger Cope. But if he were the only one with whom Mr. Bourke will have to reckon it would not be so bad. I am so far from having fled to you that certain political opponents, who would give ten years of their lives to have him under their feet, have arranged to set spies upon him. Anyone who rings at the door-bell may be a spy. Or the servants will be questioned. Proof is what they want. It is easy to get. Unless you go and hide

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yourself before it has been actually got. Are you brave enough? Do you love him enough for this?"

"I am grateful enough," I answered, haughtily.

"Then do it—quickly, before you change your mind and weaken; quickly, before it is too late. If you do this I shall believe in you and speak well of you always. Some day Jack himself shall know."

I shrank away from the gloved hand she laid on mine and shivered. I guessed the meaning cloaked by her words. She wished me to understand that some time in the future, when she was John Bourke's wife, and he was safe from all harm which I could do him, he should hear the truth about my going.

Till then I must content myself to remain under a cloud—a cloud blacker and colder to my soul than the river from which I had been saved by him. And she called him "Jack."

"I will tell Mrs. Jennett that you have brought me news which makes it necessary for me to go away," I said, as firmly as I could. "And—I will leave no message for—Mr. Bourke."

"Ah, but that would be to defeat the end you seek to gain," Lady Feo assured me, hastily. "Mr. Bourke must not know that I have had anything to do with your going—for his own sake he must not. If he took the idea into his head that you had been coerced in any way, he would certainly not stop to think of his own advantage, but would move heaven and earth till he had found you again, giving you back your position as his secretary—which perhaps you can ill afford to lose."

"I shall contrive to get on without it," I replied.

"You will let me help you, of course! It would be only fair, since by my advice you are giving up—your situation."

"I shall not need your help, thank you," I said. "For I would not have taken anything from her to save myself from starving."

"I didn't mean you to go away without leaving word for Mr. Bourke," she went on, catching up the dropped thread with animation; for her offer of assistance had been but perfunctory and absent-minded. "It would be best to satisfy his mind that you had gone because it was your own wish, because you thought that you could better yourself."

"Then, you see, his consideration would be at rest; he would be contented to let you alone; and the flame of scandal would presently die, let us hope, for lack of fuel."

"Very well, I dare say you are right," I rejoined, hopelessly. "I will write such a letter."

Lady Feo's hand rose nervously to her breast, toying with the orchid pinned among her laces. "Sheila," she said, betraying slight confusion, "would you—would not, I suppose, let me see the letter when it is written, and advise you about it?"

"I am sure that she meant to persist if I refused."

"To be Continued."

Shenanboah, Pa., Aug. 7. — The throwing of stones at the troops was repeated early this morning. The attack was made against the provost guards, stationed at the Pennsylvania railroad station, near one of the foreign colonies in the southern part of town.

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The captain immediately placed a detail of men in the vicinity of the houses from which the stones were thrown, as the offenders had escaped before the soldiers reach the top of the hill.

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