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'Margaret,'
The GIRL ARTIST,
OR,
The Countess of Ferrers
Court.

CHAPTER XII.

"Very, deliciously so!" said Austin, laughing. "And that is why I like it. Lovers should always be unwise and reckless. It is, as Doctor Watts observed, 'their nature to!' Miss Hale, I have one weak spot, amongst many, and you will discover it presently, I dare say. I am foolishly romantic. Anything in the shape of sentiment conquers me directly. I assure you that when Blair came and told me that he had met and lost his heart to the most beautiful young lady in the world, I felt as if I had lost mine, and I was as anxious—well, nearly as anxious, as you have added respect to my admiration!" and he bowed.

"Well!" exclaimed Blair, half amused, half annoyed. "You two are beyond me! Why, half an hour ago, Madge, you were agast at our keeping our engagement secret, and now—"

"Miss Hale had not considered the matter in all its bearings," broke in Austin Ambrose, gently and smoothly. "Trust me, Blair, she has more sense in her little finger than you have in all your great, hulking body." "I know that," said Blair, with a good-humored laugh. "You've found it out already, have you? Didn't I tell you that she was as clever as she was beautiful? My Margaret!"

"Your Margaret is far too clever to let you say such silly things!" murmured Margaret, blushing.

Austin Ambrose rose and smiled down upon them, and his cold eyes seemed to grow really benevolent, as if he were blessing them. "I will go now," he said. "Miss Hale, this has been a happy day for me, as well as for Blair. He has found a sweetheart, and I have found, I trust, a friend. May I say that?" he asked, as he held out his hand. "Yes," said Margaret, trying to speak heartily. He took her hand and raised it to his lips. "Then you must let me prove myself one. You are both young, and perfectly imprudent. You must promise to do nothing without coming to me first. This is all I ask. Is it too much?"

"Not a bit, old fellow!" said Blair, promptly, showing his delight at the impression Margaret had made upon the wise and critical Austin Ambrose. "We are a couple of spoons, you know, and not fit to be trusted to act alone, eh?"

"Honestly, I don't think you are," said Austin Ambrose, smilingly. "All right!" said Blair. "We've taken your advice—at least Margaret has—and the least you can do, having accepted the responsibility, is to see us squarely through, eh?"

Austin Ambrose nodded. "Yes," he said, simply. "I'll go and see if the dog-cart is ready, and drive it to the end of the lane. You will find me there. You have no idea the precautions we have taken, Miss Margaret," he added, with a smile. "We just drew the line at coming down in disguise! Good-bye!" and with a wave of his hand he pushed

her that by marrying Lord Blair she would deprive him of his uncle's fortune.

The color came and went in her face, her eyes grew downcast, while both men looked at her; Blair with loving adoration, Austin Ambrose with a covert and concealed intention.

At last she looked up—at Blair, not at Austin Ambrose.

"It must not be known," she said in a low voice.

"Margaret!" exclaimed Blair, astonished; but Austin Ambrose, watching her eyes, gave a slight, a very slight, nod of approval.

"No," she said. "Mr. Ambrose is—right! You shall not make such a sacrifice for me, Blair." Her face flushed, her eyes shone with the fire of a woman's resolution to sacrifice herself rather than injure the man she loves. "We—we will not tell any one!"

Austin Ambrose raised his hat, and looked at her with a fine assumption of admiration.

"That was nobly spoken, Miss Hale," he said gravely, "nobly and wisely. I am too much Blair's friend, and yours, if you will permit me, to conceal my anxiety on your account. You would sacrifice not his future alone, but yours, for by doing anything rash. The earl is an eccentric old gentleman, and easily offended. It would be worse than folly to do so. You have made a wise decision, Miss Hale, and you have added respect to my admiration!" and he bowed.

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through the underwood and left them.

He stopped at a distance of a hundred yards to get a cigarette, and was putting it to his mouth with a smile of cynical satisfaction, as he thought of the way in which he had gained his point, when his quick eyes saw something moving at a little distance between him and the spot where he had left the lovers.

He thought it was a rabbit at first, but looking intently he saw it was a man's fur cap.

"A cap doesn't move without a head in it," he murmured, and putting his cigarette in his pocket, he made a detour round some trees and crept close to the object.

As he did so he saw a man was lying full length in the long bracken, through which he had made a clearing just before his face, so that he could watch Blair and Margaret. Austin Ambrose grew interested, and crept a little nearer.

Poachers do not work in the daytime, and besides, this man had no gun, but a thick stick lay near his hand. Austin Ambrose watched him thoughtfully, then a look of intelligence flashed into his face. Blair had described the man he had thrashed on Leyton Green; this was he, this was Jem Pyke! Amongst Austin Ambrose's great gifts was a faculty of never forgetting a face or a name.

Lowering himself noiselessly, he sat down just behind the man, and after waiting a minute or two, coughed slightly.

The man looked round with a start, then sprang to his feet and grasped his stick.

Mr. Ambrose looked him squarely in the face. "Don't speak a word, my friend, or I shall call," he said.

Pyke looked uncertain, and then made ready for a spring; but the cold eyes—and they were like glittering steel now—held him fascinated.

"Not a word," said Austin, in a low, distinct voice, "unless you want another thrashing, Mr. Pyke."

Jem Pyke started, and he lowered his stick.

For a moment the two men looked into each other's faces, then, with a smile, Austin got up leisurely and sauntered off, beckoning him to follow.

Austin Ambrose led the way until they had gone out of hearing of Blair and Margaret, then he sat down on a fallen tree, and lighting a cigarette, coolly and critically surveyed the captive.

"I'm rather curious to know what you were doing just now, my man," he said, when he had finished his examination.

"I was watching for a rabbit," replied Pyke, promptly but sullenly, and without looking up.

Austin Ambrose smiled. "Oblige me by looking at me," he said.

Pyke raised his eyes slowly. "Thanks. Do I look like a fool?" demanded Austin Ambrose, politely.

"No," replied Pyke, reluctantly, and with an oath.

"Thanks again, though your language is unnecessarily emphatic. There, not being a fool, how do you expect me to believe you? Shall I tell you what you were doing?"

No reply, but Pyke shifted one leg uneasily.

"You were watching my friend Lord Blair. I am right, I think? Silence denotes assent. Thanks, snavely; and why were you watching him?"

Pyke tortured as much by the tone as the question, growled out an imprecation under his breath.

"Shall I tell you? Because you are anxious to get a little revenge for that beating he gave you. Am I right? Thanks again. I am good at guessing, you see. And as you can't pay him back in a fair stand-up fight, you are hoping later for an opportunity to give him one in the back. Y—es," slowly and snavely, "I think that is the whole case in a nutshell. Now, my friend, you are a fool."

Pyke raised his eyes and scowled evilly, and Austin Ambrose shook his head and smiled.

"No use scowling, my friend. I know what you are feeling, and I can sympathise with you; I can, indeed. It is so unpleasant to be caught, isn't it?"



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it? And it is so tempting to see me sitting here without even a stick, and to know that you could dispose of me so easily, if my friend with the big fists that you felt so lately were not within call."

Pyke's face grew livid, and he grasped his stick till the veins started out like strings in his wiry sun-burnt hands.

"Curse you!" he snarled at last. "Who are you, and what do you want?"

"Gently," said his tormentor. "One question at a time, and though you don't put them politely, I'll give you a true answer. My name is Ambrose—Austin Ambrose. Say it over to yourself once or twice, and you won't forget it. And what do I want? Well, I want a strong, active young ruffian like you, a man who has pluck enough to remember an injury and burns to pay it back. And that's your case again, isn't it?"

He lit his cigarette, and blew a ring in the air, and watched it until it had faded away.

"And now I'll explain why you are a fool. You are a fool because you lay in wait with a big stick to bang your enemy about the head. No one but a fool would do that, my dear Pyke; firstly, because he might not hurt his enemy—"

Jem Pyke scowled fearfully. "Well, yes, you might hurt him, but—and that brings me to my second—you couldn't do it without its being traced to you. There might be a struggle, there would be blood and other unpleasant traces, and, all Lombard Street to a china orange, the police would have you by the heels before an hour was passed, and then—!"

The speaker wound up the sentence by a playful gesture indicative of strangulation.

Pyke's face was a study. At first, from hate and the desire to crush his tormentor it displayed the emotion of murder, and then a reluctant admiration; and at last he stood, the stick hanging loosely in his hand, his small, evil eyes fixed with a fascinated stare on his companion's face.

"I am right, you see," said Austin Ambrose. "Now, if I owed a man a grudge—I don't, I am happy to say, for I have not an enemy in the world, my dear Pyke—but if I owed a man a grudge, I shouldn't dog him and knock him about the head just outside my own door, because I should feel assured that the police would track me down. No; I should wait until he had got some distance off—to London, for instance, or another part of the country—and then, some dull evening, I should bring him down with a gun or a pistol from a safe distance, and then quietly—he blew a cloud of smoke into the air, and pointed to it—"vanish!"

The man stood and listened with every sense on the alert, absorbed and rapt.

Then he drew a long breath. "That's what you'd do, guv'nor, is it?" he said at last, hoarsely.

Austin Ambrose nodded. "Yes. And if I had a friend who could point out to me the best way of doing it, and help me to choose the time and place, why, I should feel very grateful to that friend."

Pyke looked somewhat mystified for a moment, then he started, and a look of cunning flashed from his eyes.

"Why, you hate him, too, guv'nor!" he exclaimed, hoarsely, with an oath, and Austin Ambrose looked at him and smiled.

(To be continued.)

Your Boys and Girls.

When my baby was small it was such a task for me to bathe him on my lap, that my husband made me a small table about four and a half feet high four feet long and three wide. This we padded and covered with rubber sheeting and put a heavy Turkish towel on top of this. It was a great help.

Little linen suits with bloomers to match make cool, neat travelling clothes for little people, and suits of this kind will keep their freshness much longer than finer, prettier dresses.

When travelling with the baby it is a good idea to have a brown linen case which will hold two small pillows in clean white slips. This case can be strapped to the outside of a suit case.

Save the tea from the tea pot. When you have a good quantity, pour boiling water over it and after the water cools use it for wiping up the hardwood floors. This is an old English idea.

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LONDON

LONDON, March 6th, 1916.

THE PRINCE OF WALES AND FREEMASONRY.

An absolute contradiction can be given to a report which has appeared in various shapes during the past two days to the effect that the Prince of Wales has been initiated into Freemasonry. The error is understood to have arisen from a misapprehension as to what young Royal Prince was who not long ago became a member of the craft. Prince Arthur of Connaught, the only son of the Grand Master of English Freemasons, being the one who was meant. It would be surprising if in the near future the Prince of Wales joined, following the example of not only his grandfather, the late King Edward VII, but George IV, when each was Heir-Apparent. The close connection between Prince of Wales and Freemasonry goes, indeed, much further back than either, for one of the earliest official publications of the Grand Lodge of England was dedicated in 1738 to Frederick, Prince of Wales, eldest son of George II, "a Master Mason and Master of a Lodge," and a direct ancestor of our present Sovereign, George V.

NORTH SEA REMOIRS.

Regarding the rumours of naval encounters, which are abroad nearly every week just now, I may mention that many wagers have been laid to the effect that the German ships will come out and fight before the 22nd of March. The basis for the belief is an approaching sea fight in the reports from the Swedish shipping trade.

ST. DAVID'S DAY.

On March 1st London realized St. David's Day more thoroughly than at any time since the Battle of Agincourt, after which the then Archbishop of Canterbury constituted St. David's a public holiday in the whole province of Canterbury. The result of the war has been to draw together Welshmen of all political views, and on the night of March 1st Lord Hailey, each, head of one of the Welsh Town Houses, presided at a patriotic rally of Welshmen who are mainly Liberals and Nonconformists. The great religious service held for 'so many years at St. Paul's was this year being held at St. Bride's. The Welsh flag—the dragon in the streets was a big success. The Welsh women wore their traditional dress—long red coats and tapering all hats. Mainly they sold Welsh wares but occasionally photographs of Welsh regiments took the place of these. Observers who had been much about the streets told me that of all

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