

A GIRL OF THE PEOPLE

By Mrs. C. N. Williamson

In crossing the threshold she turned and looked back, speaking to someone in the room. "I will bring it to you in less than ten minutes," she said, in an ordinary tone, without a trace of agitation. "Be patient till then."

She took a step forward, but a faint murmur from the person unseen caused her again to pause. "I could not hear the question, if question it was, but her answer reached me distinctly. 'I cannot help that. After what happened last night, it is your own fault. But though the door must be locked after this, for the next night or two at all events, when you are left alone, you are in no sense a prisoner. As soon as you are well enough, if you choose to leave this house, and there is any other place where you would rather live, you have only to say so. I came here for your sake alone. And everything I have done since coming has been for your sake. It appears to me that you are very well off here. But we will talk about it again when I have brought you the wine.'

She closed the door, and once more the corridor was dim. But I could see that she was bending down, and I could hear the fitting of a key into a lock. If I could escape her sharp eyes, in my dark, but otherwise so secure, hiding-place, after all this seeming contrivance might work out for good. Evidently the key of this door was not in Roger Cope's possession, but in Sintra Leigh's. Now, if she would only, only leave it in the lock! Was it possible that she would do so?

For an instant she appeared to hesitate. I could guess what was in her thoughts. She was wondering whether there could be the smallest imprudence in letting the key remain where it was for the few moments of her intended absence. Before I could have counted twelve she had decided that she might safely trust it there, and, turning the key round with a faint grating noise, she hurried away.

My only hope of escaping her quick eyes lay in the sheltering shadow of the big clothes-press as I stood huddled into the angle it made in the wall, and the fact that no woman had no suspicion of my presence. Probably she would have looked me into my room if she had not disliked proceeding to extreme measures by removing the key from the inside. Or perhaps she had felt confident that, after the alarm of the preceding night, I would not dream of venturing out after dark. She had reason to be secure in the knowledge that I could not leave the house, and she might have reflected that vague curiosity alone was not a strong enough motive to lure me from safety.

These thoughts dashed through my head as she came nearer, and gave me hope. Fortunately, she carried no candle, and she had just come from a room brightly lighted, so that the darkness must have appeared more dense to her than it did to me.

I was half afraid that she might hear my heart beating, or the rustle of my gown as it rose and fell with the throbbing of my bosom, for the sound was loud in my own ears. I hardly dared look at her as she approached, lest my eyes should attract hers with some subtle magnetism, yet I could not force myself to turn them from the tall, swiftly advancing figure.

It was all over, however, in less than a minute, and she had gone by without even glancing towards the clothes-press. The sense of relief was so great when she had actually passed, that I grew giddy, almost faint. But there was no time for analyzing my own sensations. Not a second was to be lost. I meant to do the daring thing which had presented itself as an allurements to my mind.

The woman in black had said that she would be away less than ten minutes. I might, then, count on at least five clear minutes in which to work.

Peering out from my hiding-place, I only waited until Sintra Leigh's head had disappeared down the well of the staircase. Then I flew to the door of the room she had left, and unlocked it. I was too much excited now to be afraid, or I might have hesitated in dread of what I should see on the other side. But I did not hesitate. I turned the key and opened the door without knocking.

What I saw was a commonplace, comfortably furnished bedroom. A large reading-lamp stood on a table near a huge, downy bed, and in the bed, supported by banked-up pillows, reclined a man.

The first glance told me that he was the original of the third portrait in the library downstairs, and I felt far less surprised at this discovery than I should have done.

He had a book in this wasted hand, but at the sound of the opening door he looked up, fixing two great pale, startled eyes, set like topazes in deep shadows, upon the unexpected visitor.

"Who are you?" he exclaimed, in a voice as like Sintra Leigh's as his face was like hers.

I gave him the answer that sprang into my mind and insisted on utterance. "Hush!" I said, with my finger to my lips. "I am Ermytrude's daughter, and I've come to you for help and justice."

The features, worn and altered by years and suffering since the portrait had been painted, changed and paled in the light of the green-shaded reading-lamp. "Ermytrude's daughter!" he echoed. "Ermytrude had no daughter."

"She adopted a daughter," I went on, hastily. "I heard you call her name last night, and I couldn't rest till I found you. I loved her dearly, and she loved me, too. There are so many things you could tell me, if you would; and perhaps I could tell you some things that you would care to hear, if only you'd listen."

"For Heaven's sake, then, tell me how she is," the man cried.

"She is dead. Didn't you know?" I answered, with awe in my heart. He fell back among the pillows, groaning, his hands, thin and yellow as claws, hiding his face.

For an instant I had forgotten that at almost any moment the woman might break in upon us; but now I remembered, with a shock. I ran to the bed and bent over the man who lay there. "There are other things I can tell you—things that have been kept from you

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"Ermytrude," I said. "Do you wish to hear them?"

"Yes, yes," he moaned.

"There isn't time to tell you now, for we are liable to be interrupted. Is Sintra Leigh your sister?"

The man looked me in the face once more and nodded, without speaking.

"She wished to keep us apart. When I asked about this room to-day she said that it was a store-place and Sir Roger Cope kept the key. When she comes back, if she finds me here, she will send me away. She is stronger than I, and she can call the servants to aid her if she chooses; I can't resist. But if you will do as I ask, I will run whatever risk there may be in displeasing her. I've shut the door, and the key is outside, where she put it a few moments ago. When she comes back, she will think that she must have failed to lock the door, or perhaps she will turn the key round and not know that it has been tampered with. If I hide in this room, so that I can talk to you when she has gone away again, will you promise to keep the secret?"

"Yes," the man answered. "She has tricked me, and she deserves to be tricked in return."

I could not be sure whether or no he would keep his word. But I determined to take the risk. At worst, Sintra Leigh would hardly dare to kill me, whatever might be her desire for revenge should she find me out.

"Hiss!" the man's voice broke into my thoughts. "I heard something in the distance. She's on her way back."

Without a word I flew to the window nearest. It was covered with heavy curtains that had been drawn together and fell in straight folds to the floor. Behind them I found that the window was partly open, so that the mild air of the June night, if the curtains moved, Sintra Leigh might think that they were stirred by the breeze. There was a deep embrasure, and, gathering my skirt closely about me, I knew that, unless the woman in black should be seized by a whim or I was betrayed by her brother, I stood in no immediate danger of discovery.

The curtains had scarcely ceased to quiver after being drawn into place by me, when I heard the door open. I half expected Sintra Leigh's first words to be an expression of surprise at finding the door unlocked, but, instead, she began quietly to speak about a bottle of port which she had fetched from downstairs. No doubt she had done what I had suggested—turned the key without becoming aware that someone had been before her.

"It was so dark in the passage to-night that I stumbled at the top of the stairs," she said, "and almost dropped the wine."

"I heard a sound," replied her brother.

"Now, you are to drink this," the woman went on, "and I am sure that you will have no return of the dreams which troubled you last night. We cannot have any more such disturbances, especially while we are guests in this house. There! You feel better already, I am certain."

"I think I do," answered the weary voice from the bed. "I hope I may sleep to-night. Thank you for bringing me the wine. You might as well go now; I shall need nothing more."

"I should be glad to stay with you longer if you cared to have me. But, of course, if you think you can sleep that will be best."

"At least I shall try. And somehow I think that to-night I shall succeed better than before—better than I have for a very long time."

"Shall I close the window?" asked

Although the medicine business should, above all, be carried on with the utmost conscientiousness and sense of responsibility, the unfortunate fact is that in no other is there so much humbug and deception. The anxieties of the sick and their relatives are traded upon in the most shameful manner; impossible cures are promised; many preparations are also utterly worthless, and some are positively dangerous to health.

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the woman in black.

I held my breath. Would the man remember that my window was the one which had been opened? And would he still be true?

"No, no," he rejoined, rather irritably. "You know that I like fresh air."

"Good-night, then. And remember that the bell beside your bed has now been made to connect with my room. You have only to ring. It would have been better if you had not forgotten that last night."

"I lost my head last night, I admit," was the reply. "It shan't happen again. I promise you. But, for Heaven's sake, don't lock me in. The thought of being unable to get out is enough to drive me mad."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Sintra Leigh. Impatiently. "You might ask that, with a better grace, if you had not lost control of yourself and alarmed the house last night. I must lock the door. But ring if your nerves get the better of you again, and I will come."

I had listened eagerly to this discussion, for I divined that the invalid's request had been as much with a view to my convenience as his own. But I was hardly disappointed that his appeal should have been in vain. When I had learnt the secret—if he could be induced to tell it—I must make the best of the situation I had created for myself. At all events, this game that I was bent on playing was more than worth the candle it would cost. And sufficient for the hour was the evil thereof!

She went out and closed the door, locking it with a certain ostentatiousness. At the sound, despite my resolution, I felt a slight sinking of the heart. For it was not pleasant to think of being shut up for an indefinite period with that ghastly-faced, hollow-eyed creature, who might be—probably was—a certain extent a madman. But I had chosen; and I must now abide by my decision.

I waited until I was sure that the woman in black was much with a view to my convenience as his own. But I was hardly disappointed that his appeal should have been in vain. When I had learnt the secret—if he could be induced to tell it—I must make the best of the situation I had created for myself. At all events, this game that I was bent on playing was more than worth the candle it would cost. And sufficient for the hour was the evil thereof!

CHAPTER XXIV.

The Secret.

"When did Ermytrude die?" the man demanded of me, abruptly, as soon as our eyes met.

I answered as concisely: "In April. One night your sister came and took her away from the theatre, where she and I had gone. When she came back to the hotel where we were staying she was very ill. She tried to tell me something, to give me some directions, which I couldn't understand. And in a few moments she was dead."

"That night!" the man whispered, beneath his breath. "It was that night! Then—I am her murderer!" His great eyes stared past me into space.

I was faintly conscious of a growing pity for him. "The doctor I called in told me that her heart must have been weak for a long time," I said, more gently.

"Her heart was weak!" he echoed. "Poor Ermytrude! Poor tortured soul! And to think that all those years, O Heaven! If I could only be sure that she knew now how I had suffered, that through it all I suffered as much as she!"

"Perhaps she does know," I said.

"You—what do you know of it all?" he demanded, almost with scorn.

"I only know," I returned, "that she was never happy—never since I can begin to remember anything. And my memory goes back to the time when I was a tiny child—seventeen years per my skirt closely about me, I knew that, unless the woman in black should be seized by a whim or I was betrayed by her brother, I stood in no immediate danger of discovery."

"That awful night!" he exclaimed, more to himself than to me.

"She loved me, I think, and was always good," I went on. "But her moods were often strange. Sometimes she used to be stern with me when I could not tell what I had done that was wrong. Sometimes she would load me with presents and kindnesses; and again, perhaps in the same hour, she would seem to feel it a sin that I should be happy."

"The child among the pillows muttered, with a sigh that was like a stifled sob."

"The boy who died?" I finished the sentence for him. "Perhaps. She never spoke of him to me, never once. But I am sure."

To be Continued.

Domestic Fowls.

Fowls are supposed to have been first domesticated in China 1400 B. C.

Japanese Drum.

In the Japanese temples there is a large drum used in worship. It is called the kagura tango. It gives a tone much like a gong and is used in devotion.

Three Great Skeletons.

The vicinity of Palermo, Italy, has yielded three remarkable human skeletons, one in 1410, one in 1516 and the last in 1550. The first was twenty-one, the second thirty and the third thirty-four feet in height.

France's Vineyards.

The vineyards of France cover 4,238,037 acres.

To Extract Oil From Wood.

To get the essential oil from wood, barks, roots, herbs, etc., place them in a bottle and pour upon them a spoonful of ether. Keep in a cool place a few hours and then fill the bottle with cold water. The essential oil will swim upon the surface and may be easily separated.

Child Insurance.

The insurance of the lives of children is forbidden in Montreal on the ground that many parents neglect their sick offspring when they know they will profit by their death.

Fat as a Food.

The great curse of modern civilization—consumption—is mainly due to insufficiency of fat in our daily food. Tea or coffee supplies none of this necessity, but cocoa and chocolate do, and that in the most appetizing and digestible form in which it is possible to obtain fat.

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