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

CHAPTER XXVII.

The prince stood regarding him in silence for a moment; then he drew the curtain over the picture and turned to Blair.

"My lord, you will understand why I showed you that picture. There need be not one word spoken between us in reference to it. Your face has told me all I want to know; my actions will explain my motives. Lord Ferrers will understand that if I treat him with discourtesy, when we return to the company, that I do it to provide an excuse for our meeting to-morrow morning."

"Our meeting?" said Blair, who had scarcely listened to, and certainly had not understood, the prince's words.

Prince Rivani's face grew black.

"Lord Ferrers prefers to ruin women rather than fight with men! Ah, yes!"

Blair rose at once.

"I don't understand you," he said, quietly; "but if you wish to challenge me you need not be afraid that I shall decline. Why you should want to shoot me I scarcely know—"

"It is a lie!" hissed the prince, driven almost mad by what he considered Blair's prevarication.

"Thanks," said Blair, with a short nod. "At any rate, Prince Rivani, you have made it clear why I should shoot you!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Prince Rivani opened the door with a low bow, and the two men went back to the salon. The prince was pale but perfectly self-possessed, and Blair very grave and quiet. The picture still floated before his eyes; the great black rock and the white, wan figure still stretched upon it, almost in the grasp of the cruel waves. His Margaret! Who could have painted it? And the prince had said that the picture had made the artist famous! He must find out that artist and get at the bottom of the mystery.

The salon was fuller than when he had left it, and he went and sat down in a quiet part of the room to wait until the prince had made some excuse for openly giving a reason for the duel of the morrow.

Presently Blair saw a tall, patrician man, with long hair and a beard, and the unmistakable air of an artist, enter the room, and absently noticed that he was instantly surrounded. He caught the name—it was Signor Alfiero, the great artist; and scraps of the conversation floated to Blair's corner.

Suddenly he started. They were talking of the picture; he leaned forward and listened intently.

"What have you done with the masterpiece, prince?" Blair heard him ask.

"It is in my writing-room," said Prince Rivani.

"Oh, that is a pity! You should not deprive the world of a sight of its great treasures, mon prince."

"You still think as highly of Miss

Leslie's picture, then, signor?" asked a gentleman.

"As highly?—more!" said the old man, turning promptly. "The more I see of it, the greater my astonishment grows that a woman so young could have painted a picture so old."

"So old?"

"Yes. We measure the age of a picture by the age of the thought it contains. There is a lifetime of suffering and love, and despair in the face of the girl on that rock. Miss Leslie must have felt all that—ay, every heart-pang of it—before she could have painted it. It is—I repeat my verdict—a marvelous picture! She will, I trust, live to paint many other great ones; but never one that will go straighter to the heart than this."

"Where is Miss Leslie now?" asked another gentleman. "One sees and hears nothing of her."

"Because you do not go where she goes, signor. Miss Leslie is never seen in the promenade; you may drink your afternoon tea in all the places of Naples and not meet with her. But I venture to prophesy that if you will penetrate the slums of the city, the fever haunts, in which our poorest of the poor are awaiting the peace-bringer—Death, you will find the great artist in their midst."

There was silence for a moment.

"Miss Leslie is a philanthropist, then?" said the gentleman.

"She is a ministering angel," responded Signor Alfiero, simply. The prince stood by, white to the lips.

"What time she can spare from her

work—and she works as hard as any seamstress in the city!—she spends amongst the poor. There is not a beggar in our streets who does not know her; not a blind man whose ears do not eagerly greet her footfall; not a sick child whose face does not 'lighten' at the sight of her smile. She is an artist—and an angel!" and the old man's lips quivered.

As if he could bear it no longer, the prince stood upright and approached Blair, his face white and set with the effort to suppress his thirst for vengeance.

"Referring to our discussion, Lord Ferrers," he said significantly, "are you still of opinion that we Italians have taken but a low place in the scale of nations?"

Blair started and looked up at him in surprise, then, understanding that the prince was going to make pretence of a quarrel, he replied:

"I cannot alter my opinion, even for so distinguished an Italian as Prince Rivani."

"That means that, as an Englishman, you regard us with contempt, my lord?"

Blair shrugged his shoulders.

"Your highness is at liberty to place any construction upon my words you please," he said.

"Thanks, my lord. Even if I assume that you charge us with cowardice?"

"Choose your own signification, prince," said Blair, beginning to grow warm, though it was only pretence.

"A nation of cowards!" said Prince Rivani, his eyes glittering at the success of the play. "That is a brave assertion; has the Earl of Ferrers courage to maintain it by the only consistent and appropriate argument?"

"I can maintain it at the sword's point, if necessary," said Blair, rising to his full height, and meeting the prince's deadly gaze with a steady calm regard.

WOMAN WEAK, DIZZY, NERVOUS

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catch in her breath. "Don't speak a kind word to me; I don't deserve it! Oh, Blair, if you knew all I've done—I've done—"

"Never mind, Lottie," he said, gently; "I'm afraid we have all done rather badly. But I'm sorry to see you looking so ill. Where are you staying? What made you come here? Come, tell me all about it."

"I can't! I can't!" she said, with a shudder and a fearful glance at his grave face. "I came here with a theatrical company—I got ill, and left behind. I wrote to him and asked for help, and he only threatened me—"

"Him! Who?" demanded Blair, soothingly, for he began to think that illness and privation had turned poor Lottie's reason.

She shuddered and caught her breath.

"Austin Am—" she said, then stopped and looked up at him in sudden terror.

"Austin!" he exclaimed. "You wrote to Austin, and he—Oh, come, Lottie; that can't be true! But why didn't you write to me?"

"To you?" she breathed; "to you? Oh, Blair, Blair; if you only knew, you'd kill me where I stand!"

"Nonsense!" he said, with gentle reproof. "Don't be silly, Lottie. Look here, you are weak and upset, and not in a fit state to tell me your story. Come to the palace, where I live, to-morrow, and let me hear all about it. Here is the address, and he tore a page from his pocket-book and wrote on it: "There it is. Now, mind you come; I shall be in all the morning—"

Then he stopped, for it suddenly flashed upon him that probably he should be where Lottie could not follow him. "Stay!" he said; "tell me where to find you, and I will come to-morrow—if possible."

"No!" she said with a shudder; "I will not! Go on and leave me, now."

"No, I won't," he said, and his voice sounded like the old Blair's in its hearty good nature; "I shall stay here till you do tell me; and I warn you that we are keeping my wife up—"

She started and sprung back.

"Your wife!" she gasped. "Has she—has she come back?"

(To be continued.)

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War News.

Messages Received Previous to 9 A.M.

WOMEN AND THE WAR.

LONDON, May 7. Addressing a constituency in North Wales, this afternoon Lloyd George, Minister of Munition, defended the demands for compulsory military service for women, which he said, at the last September. Compulsion, the Minister said, simply meant the country organizing itself in an order consistent and resolute manner for war which could not be run as a Sunday school treat. It never had been said that Britain could raise as many men in proportion to the population as could France. This, he said, was impossible. Britain supplied France and her other allies with steel, coal, material and munitions, and maintained the greatest navy in the world. There was still considerable material available for war, if need arose for increasing the army. Women, more and more were coming to the rescue. There were nearly 300,000 women, he said, engaged upon tasks which before the war one never would have dreamed capable of doing. As a result of this the country has increased enormously its merely the output, but its capacity to furnish munitions of war.

LUSITANIA ANNIVERSARY.
LONDON, May 7. The anniversary of the sinking of the Lusitania, was commemorated to-day by a procession from Westminster to Hyde Park, where a meeting was held. A large model of the Lusitania figured prominently, with a banner inscribed: "Remember Lusitania, 7th May, 1915. May the crime be forgiven by heaven, but not forgotten on earth." Several speakers of the disaster marched with delegations of Red Cross, wounded soldiers, Canadian nurses, and representatives of the Entente Allies wearing national costumes.

PENAL SERVITUDE.
DUBLIN, May 7. Countess Georgina Markovitch, who was sentenced to penal servitude for life, has been granted a reprieve for three months.

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