

A GIRL OF
THE PEOPLE

By Mrs. C. N. Williamson.

It her mind were not preoccupied with extremely serious matters, I was certain that she would not have sent me back to the hotel at this hour of the evening unaccompanied. She had always been very strict as to my comings and goings, almost unnecessarily so, I had often thought; and since she had brought me to town to be presented and experience the delight of a London season, I had not once been allowed to go into the street, even in broad daylight, unprotected by my mother or a maid. I seemed to myself now suddenly forlorn, unaided, and my heart would have ached with sheer self-pity if I had had time to dwell upon my own woes. But there was much besides this to think of.

My hansom had turned away from the pavement, and I was unable to see, without giving directions to stop again (which I dare not do), what had been my mother's next step. We went on slowly, and the idea in my mind was that she doubtless intended to call another cab for herself, in which to follow the woman with the heart-shaped scar. I supposed that my driver was waiting until her movements should guide him as to the direction he must take. But suddenly a cab went by, and a ray of light striking the nearest window showed me a thing so strange that I was near to crying out in my astonishment.

CHAPTER II.

Telling of a Thwarted Chase.
I saw that my mother and the woman in black were together, sitting side by side. The light flashed upon their faces—mother's pale as marble—then they were flitted out in darkness. Their cab was at my driver, obedient to instructions, following at a distance.

I had been in town only for a month, having come in time to be presented at the first drawing-room of the season, and I knew little of London, almost nothing of this neighborhood. Strand, passed "Fragrant square" and Phil Mall, rattling into a dingy side street, I began to lose the sense of direction. We passed a crowd of ragged-looking people, and came into a region of meaner streets, with smaller houses. I could see the four-wheeled cab about fifty feet ahead, sometimes less, sometimes more, and it began to seem as if I always had been, always would be, following on and on through the night to some mysterious goal, never to be reached. Were we going north, south, west or east? I did not know.

Suddenly the four-wheeled cab disappeared round a corner. For a few seconds it was out of sight, and when my hansom had also turned, there, in the next street, were two cabs. One had stopped in front of a house, the door of which opened and shut as we drew near. The other was jogging on at a distance.

We had never been near enough to see the number on the back of the cab, and now, when my driver huskily inquired whether I would stop to examine the first conveyance or proceed to the second, I was at a loss to decide. For an instant I hesitated, and then said that I would stop. Almost as I spoke I saw that I had made a mistake. The lamps of the hansom shone into the face of the other driver, who sat half-cowering in his box, with his vehicle drawn up beside the pavement, and I was at once assured that he was not the man I had noticed as my mother and I came out of the Lyceum. That one had been a young fellow, rather spruce and dapper, this one was white-bearded and shabby.

"Go on—go on, as quickly as you can!" I commanded, through the trap-door. "The cab we want must have been the one ahead."

The driver muttered something, which sounded angry, though the words were indistinguishable, but the trap slammed down and he gave the tired horse such a lash with his whip that the poor beast started, and flung his heels almost against the dashboard.

From a trot he broke into a wild gallop. Down came the lash once more, flogging him rear, and, frightened and angry, I called to the driver, promptly forbidding him to use the whip again. By this time the four-wheeler had turned another corner, and was out of sight. But my man went on as if he were sure of the direction, and I could only hope that he had reason for his certainty.

We also flashed round the corner, almost upsetting against a lamp-post, as one of the wheels ran on to the kerbstone. I strained my eyes through the darkness, and my heart sank as I found that the four-wheeled cab was still nowhere to be seen.

Presently we came out into a broad road. Here there were a number of vehicles, and I strove to peer into the windows of each as we tore past it, the frightened horse still plunging and throwing up his heels.

"None of these is the right one," I sharply informed my driver. "Perhaps it went to the left."

He took this as a command, and turned the horse suddenly, only just escaping another accident. I began to see that something was very wrong. From the first the cabman's voice had been odd, and now his manner was equally strange. He drove with an indifference no longer with any method. We left the broad thoroughfare, and threaded our way into narrow streets once more, bringing up at last in a new one. I had hoped against hope that, from his high perch the driver could see more than I, and that he still kept the quarry in view.

But the news was deserted, and just as the fellow was about to bring the whip down on the horse's back again—as if the animal were to blame for his failure—I raised the trap. "I told you not to whip him," I exclaimed. "You have let the cab we were following a long time ago, and you are driving at random—"

"Look 'ere, miss, 'oo's 'doin' this, you or me?" grunted the husky voice. "If you don't like the way I drive, you can pay me my fare and let me go. That's what would suit me best."

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aint no night cabman, I said. I want to get to my bed some time before mornin'."

"Stop the cab and let me get out," I said. And I am afraid that my voice trembled a little, for I was very near to tears.

The cab drew up so abruptly that the horse stumbled, and before he could recover himself I jumped out of the vehicle on to the narrow pavement.

Fortunately I had my mother's purse in the pocket of my long evening cloak. It contained a roll of notes, several sovereigns and some silver as well. Fumbling in one of its compartments I extracted two half-crowns and held them up to the man, who took the crowns but broke into invective, violently demanding more.

Frightened at the strange oaths, I well-nigh flung another coin into his extended hand, and then, his voluble complaints still following me, I turned and fairly ran.

I hurried out of the mews by the way I had been driven in, and was trying to recall the direction in which I ought next to proceed when I heard a faint patter of running footsteps behind me, then suddenly felt a violent blow on my right arm.

With my breath coming thick and fast I turned my head over my shoulder, hardly knowing what I expected to see, but with a vague impression that the cabman might have jumped from his seat and pursued me to take by force the extra payment he had demanded.

What I did see was the hideous, sodden face and form of a wretch in rags, a fluttering scarecrow of the night, who had caught a glimpse of the purse as I passed his dark lurking-place and meant to have it.

The blow on my arm had been intended to send the purse flying from my hand. When the attempt failed, the lean, black claw caught my wrist while another seized the purse and tried to wrench it out of my fingers.

"Let go—let go, I say, or I'll knife yer!" the thief hissed, panting in the struggle. For I fought with him, and would not loosen my hold on the purse. I was afraid, and the contact with so foul a creature sickened me.

While the thief held me with one hand, trying to pull the purse away with the other, he could not carry out his threat of using the knife, and I had the advantage, for my left hand was free.

In the distance I could see the lights of a cab coming down the street, and I doubted not that the thief saw them too. My object was to resist till the vehicle drew near; his, to snatch the purse and dart away before that could happen. Until this moment it had somehow not occurred to me to scream. But now I shrieked loudly the one word "Help!" and with my free hand I struck the man with all

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my force across his evil, bearded face. The attack was unexpected, and it startled him.

His grasp on my wrist loosened, and, writhing myself free, I darted from him, running towards the approaching cab.

I heard him utter an oath. I knew that he pursued, furious at losing the prize so nearly his. I felt his breath on my cheek, and a hand twisting the fluffy collar of my cloak till it choked back the cry I tried to give. The lamps of the cab that was coming dazzled and ran together into one before my eyes. I thought the hansom stopped; but I was not sure—I was sure of nothing.

Wildly I threw the purse from me as far as I could in the direction of the cab. Had I not done that I could not have saved it this time, for the thief was shaking me by the collar, and my breath and presence of mind were both gone.

Suddenly I was flung forward. I could not resist, and my one clear thought was that I should fall heavily upon my face on the stones. My head swam; for an instant I must have been half-unconscious. Then a voice brought me back to a knowledge of reality.

"What's happened?" I heard myself daily questioning of the strange voice; for so far as I knew, there was only a voice. "Did I fall? Did I faint?"

"You didn't fall because I caught you in time. That brute threw you to me when he saw me jump out of the cab, so that he might get clear off before I could follow. There's no use chasing him now. Your purse is all right, though. I haven't picked it up yet, but neither has he."

In the midst of these explanations I did lift my eyelids, despite the weight that tried to press them down. But it seemed only part of my dream that I should see a face not wholly strange—a strong, dependable face, not exactly handsome, but better than any handsome face I had ever known—better a thousand times than that of my cousin, Roger Cope, though Roger was considered one of the handsomest men in England.

He was supporting me against his shoulder, and when it suddenly dawned upon me that this was so my presence of mind came quickly back, and I promptly raised myself, standing up very straight and tall, as a tribute to my own dignity.

"I saw you in the theatre," I abruptly exclaimed. Then, as soon as the words were spoken, I wished them unsaid. "I saw you in the theatre," he unhesitatingly answered. "I did not suppose that you had noticed me in the crowd. Forgive me for following you. You will think it very strange. But I beg that you won't misjudge me. I was afraid that you and the lady you were with must be in trouble of some sort. That sounds a lame excuse, I know; but I've no better. I had the feeling that a force stronger than myself sent me after you. Perhaps I ought to have resisted. Yet I can't be sorry that I didn't. I hope you will allow me to offer you my cab. I can easily get another."

The dull, yellow light of a street lamp struck full upon his face, and he looked white as a sheet. He had been in shadow. He was flushed, and spoke rapidly, evidently in some haste to make good his escape.

"It's all very strange," I said, slowly, my eyes studying his features, confusing his words. "I don't know what to say. I must thank you, for—"

"Please don't thank me," he broke in. "I'd much rather you didn't. I don't deserve it. I know well enough, now that I begin to look at it in cold blood and from your point of view, rather than mine, that I had no right to do what I did. It was inexcusable. But don't visit my fault upon me. Please make the cab."

I hesitated. It was almost the first time in my life that the responsibility of making a "grown-up" decision had fallen upon me.

I liked this man; I believed in his sincerity and I was grateful, but I felt that probably I ought not to do any of these three things. If my mother were with me, I should have sworn away from him with a stiff bow, a haughty word of thanks, at best, and hardly have waited till his back was turned before exclaiming at his impudence. She would have said either that somehow the whole affair had been planned beforehand between this man and the cabman who had driven me, or else that the opportunity of doing him wrong was so unlooked for that the accident did not excuse his insolence in the first place.

To be Continued.

Not to Be Sat On.
During a football match in Belfast between Ireland and Scotland an enthusiastic supporter of the Irish team kept crying out, "Sit on them, Ireland!"

There was an old Scotchman beside him who endured this for a time, but at length, unable to stand it any longer, he turned round and impressively remarked:

"Ye can sit on the leek, mon, and maybe ye can sit on the rose, but I tell you, mon, ye canna sit on the thistle."

—Pearson's.

Great Water Pumps.
An acre of grass land, according to experiments, gives off not less than 6,400 quarts of water in twenty-four hours, and an acre of sunflowers would give a relatively greater quantity. In fact, swamps have been reclaimed by planting sunflowers and eucalyptus trees, which are great pumps of water, and also exert other influences counteracting baneful conditions of air, earth and water.

A Changed Opinion.
Mrs. Gunning—Oh, Harry! Surely you weren't cruel enough to shoot this poor little bird?

Mr. Gunning—Why, yes; I thought you might have it stuffed and put on a boulet.

Mrs. Gunning—Oh, how kind and thoughtful of you!

Evolution.
"This is the church where you hold your services, I suppose."

"We used to call it a church, but we have outgrown all that. It is a temple of progressive thought now."

Tribune.

It takes a very small fool to commit great folly.

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