

A GIRL OF THE PEOPLE

By Mrs. C. N. Williamson

Roger gave a smile meant to be patient and pathetic. "That would sound very well," he said, "if you were the persecuted heroine in a melodrama and the villain of the piece. But as you are actually a human girl, who has made a great many mistakes, and been at last brought into a safe haven against your obstinate little will by a man who worships you and has worked only for your good, the sentiment is florid rather than theatrical. You were all alone in the world, darling, and your poor little boat was on the rocks; I waded out into the deep water, and risked a great deal to bring it safely off again. Now, here you are in your own house, which is mine as well, and here you will stay until your name is the same as one which once was dear to you."

"What do you mean?" I stammered, between fear and anger.

"I mean, until I have the right to call you wife, the world to speak of you as Lady Cope."

I sprang up from the sofa where I had resigned myself to sit questioning the enemy.

"That will be never!" I cried. "Roger, if you want me ever to forgive you, you won't speak of that again; and you will tell me the things you have so far carefully left untold."

"You are in the mystery of the heart-shaped scar?" I went on. "I believe now that you have always known. Perhaps, though that woman, Sintra Leigh, says you did not employ her, then, you really sent her to the theater on the night when my adopted mother died. You must tell me the truth."

Roger had risen when I rose, and we stood facing each other.

"Do you think," he asked, with aggravating slowness, "that you have taken the wisest way of dealing with me, Sheila?"

When a woman of fast desires something from a man, she doesn't demand it with blazing eyes as her right; she softly begs it as a favor, showing that she may be ready with rewards.

"You certainly deserve a reward," I retorted, "but not such a one as you mean. And the truth is my right. I do demand it. I came to this house because it was promised to me."

"Not without conditions. Listen, Sheila. There is a mystery. So much I am ready to admit; and I have known of its existence for many years. If I told you all that is in my mind, you would understand very much that must otherwise remain dark and puzzling to you through your life. You would even understand why Aunt Emryn-trude left you on the night she died, and why she died—though with all that I swear to you I had nothing to do. I am ready to tell everything you wish to know—not to Sheila or Jenny Harland, but to my wife, Sheila Cope. Is it a bargain?"

"No, it is not," I said. "If you won't tell me, I must find out in some other way."

"You will not find out in any other way."

His voice was suddenly fierce, and my eyes were forced to meet his and dwell upon his menacing pupils. We looked at each other in silence. Then I spoke out my thoughts, with sudden passionate impulse. "Oh, what a fool I was to come here!" I cried. "If I had only kept my wits about me, and remembered that my father's—I mean that Sir Vincent Cope's place, which I had never seen, was in this direction, I might have suspected that you were concerned in this. But I supposed the place was still let to strangers, as it has been, I know, for years."

"I had to have a nest ready for the bird when it should flutter home," Roger broke in, smiling. "I wonder if any man since the world began ever conquered more difficulties for the woman he loved."

"I should think none ever stooped to so many meaneesses," I flung at him. Other sharp words were ready, like swords, to pierce the armor of his self-complacency, but suddenly a voice seemed to whisper in my ear. "A strange nest for a bird," it said. "Roger had another use for the house. How about those sounds outside your door last night?"

CHAPTER XXII

Which Tells How the House Was Explored.

I did not repeat to Roger what the imaginary voice had whispered, for I knew that not only would he be careful never to give me a true explanation of what I had heard, but would probably take steps to prevent my finding out for myself, as it now occurred to me that I might do.

Roger's own words about the "nest he had prepared for the bird" had put the thought into my head; for the whisperer I had fancied as an answer to this speech suggested another more subtle reason for his occupation of the house formerly let to strangers. Somebody was hidden here, perhaps, the somebody who had groaned, and cried the name of Emryntrude; somebody who might tell me more than Roger chose to tell without a bribe.

I said no more, but was trying to learn the secret in "another way," though such an idea was taking form in my mind; and so deeply was I absorbed in my own thoughts that Roger talked on for a few moments unheard. I was only conscious that he spoke, until suddenly his raised voice, evidently repeating a question that had been asked before, brought me to myself.

"Sheila, why don't you answer me?" he was saying.

I turned my eyes slowly to his face. "I was thinking," I replied.

"Were you thinking over what I have just said to you? Do you understand what it means when I tell you that by to-morrow I expect to have the special license for which I have applied?" The sooner we are married the better it will be for every reason; for, you see, it was a bold stroke, having you brought to this house, if I had not been so sure I was right, so sure that I could bring you round to my way of thinking, I wouldn't have done it. But there was no other course possible. Sheila, will you marry me to-morrow?"

"If I say no, neither to-morrow nor on any other morrow to come, what

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then?" I asked, rather with a desire for information as to Roger's intentions towards me than in open defiance.

"What then? I would rather not trust myself to tell you what then. You may ask Miss Leigh. She will explain."

"I am not sure that I care to see her again, after the way in which she tricked me," I said. "If I chose to leave this house, now, without—"

"That is the one thing I can't, for your own sake, allow you to do," Roger cut me short, "until I have at least your solemn promise that you will be my wife. Can't you see—young as you are, aren't you woman of the world, enough to see what marriage with me is the only thing left to you, Sheila? Blame me for what I have done, if you will, but it was all through love of you. And in any event it's too late to think of that now. You and I must be man and wife."

He caught my hands, but I wrenched them away from him. "I think I will talk to Miss Leigh, as you call her," I hastily said. "And I would like to see her now—this very moment—alone, without you."

Roger had offered to let me speak with "Miss Leigh," and though he did not appear well pleased at having been finally taken at his word, he did not attempt to repudiate it. "Miss Leigh shall come to you here," he said.

Crossing the room, he pulled an old-fashioned bell-rope. A far away jangling followed, and presently the grim-faced woman who had brought my breakfast knocked at the door. She was abruptly commanded to "send Miss Leigh," and it was not long before my traveling companion of last night appeared.

"I will leave you together," said Roger. "But before going, perhaps I had better make it clear that Sheila wishes you to explain why it has now become absolutely imperative that she should marry me." As he spoke he was at the door, and an instant later it had closed behind him.

"I should have thought that, to a young woman of your intelligence, such explanations were unnecessary," said the woman in black. "But I can give them in a few words. Already, it seems, you have afforded your friends and enemies great cause for gossip. Sir Roger Cope has offered you the chance of rehabilitating yourself. He was obliged to use rather strong measures to accomplish his purpose, and if you do not fall in with his way of thinking, instead of matters being improved, they will have been made far worse. You are at his house, everyone knows that it is his house; the servants and others know that you have been here since last evening—that you came willingly. What will become of you if, after all this, you refuse to marry him?"

"So this is what he preferred to have you explain!" I exclaimed. "I don't wonder that even Roger Cope hesitated to say it himself."

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For a moment I did not speak. Then I said, shortly: "Please call Sir Roger back again."

He was summoned, and presently appeared, the woman in black meanwhile asking no questions, though her gypsy face expressed curiosity as to my intentions.

"Has Miss Leigh's eloquence been more fortunate than mine, in persuading you that there's only one course open?" Roger asked.

"She has shown me that all others are difficult," I answered. "Still, if I were to decide at once, I should say: 'No, I cannot marry you.' That's my impulse now, but if you will give me your word of honor to go away from here—back to London or to Arrish Mell Court, whichever you choose—for two days, I will stop and think the matter carefully over. Miss Leigh can give me as much good advice as you wish, and I may change my mind."

Roger shrugged his shoulders. "The longer you stay here the less easy will it be for you to decide against me," he said; "so I suppose I shall be wiser to give you your own way. But we will compromise matters. I'll go and come back to-morrow—with the special license of which I told you."

"Very well, then, to-morrow," I assented. "But you must go now."

"If you look out of this window—or one in your own room—in fifteen minutes from now, you will see me driving away from the house."

"With one of the new carriages, and the new livery you have bought with Lady Cope's money," it was on the tip of my tongue to say. But I kept the words back.

For once, Roger was true to his word. Whether he meant to leave the neighborhood or not, I had no means of knowing; but at least he drove away from the house, with a small postman-teau ostentatiously placed where I would be sure to see it.

I knew that he had only not attempted to put me upon parole as a prisoner because he was sure that I should not be able to evade the guard he had doubtless set upon my movements. But I was glad that he had not tried to exact a promise, because, as soon as I had made a desperate effort to discover the secret which I had begun to believe might be hidden in this house, I intended to make an equally desperate bid for freedom.

Perhaps if I had not been taken for my interview with Roger into the room with the three portraits, no inkling of the idea which now so keenly excited me might ever have come into my head. But there had been Sir Vincent Cope, with Sintra Leigh, and the man who so marvelously resembled her. All three pictures had apparently been painted at about the same time, for certain mannerisms suggested that they were the work of the same artist, and the frames with which they were set into the wall were identical in detail. This suggested to me Sintra Leigh and her double (a twin brother, my fancy already said) were closely connected with the Cope family either by ties of blood or peculiarly intimate friendship.

To be Continued.

FALL PLANTING.

For Strawberries It Gives Good Results With Intensive Culture.

Although not to be generally recommended, the fall planting of strawberries can sometimes be used with good results, say the horticulturists of the Michigan station, but in order to succeed special pains must be taken both with the soil and plants. In the states farther south, where the seasons of growth will be considerably longer, this method of growing strawberries is preferred to planting in the spring. In seasons when the weather is moist during August and September very good results can be obtained in Michigan, but if drought prevails there is danger of a check to the plants, and this will result disastrously.

Upon soil that will not suffer seriously from drought or where water can be applied the fall setting will give good results. As the season of growth will be comparatively short at best, the soil should be thoroughly prepared and enriched. The plants should be of some strong growing variety that will furnish large crowns and that are adapted to hill culture.

Unless water for irrigation is at hand the planting should be delayed until the ground has been well moistened by rain, but if possible the planting should be done before the 1st of September. Good results, however, can be secured if the plants are set out by the middle of September. The rows should be from two to two and a half feet apart and the plants ten inches in the rows. Even though the ground has been well enriched, it will be advisable to mulch the plants by spreading decomposed manure about the base of the plants.

The ground should be occasionally worked during the fall and up to the time of freezing weather so that it will be entirely free from weeds. The ground should then be mulched, and in the spring receive a shallow cultivation. It will be desirable to replace the mulch before the blossoms have opened, and unless the winter mulch is sufficient to cover the ground so as to keep down the weeds and conserve the moisture an additional amount should be employed.

This method of strawberry culture is not recommended for the general planter, but for the amateur and for the home garden, especially where the starting of a new plantation was neglected in the spring.

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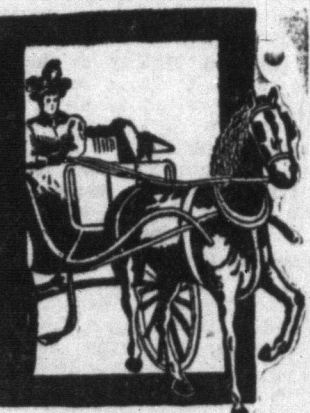
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