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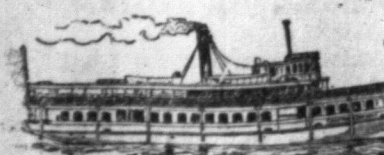
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## A GIRL OF THE PEOPLE

By Mrs. C. N. Williamson.

### CHAPTER I.

In Which I See a Purple Scar.

Down came the curtain on the first act of "The Bell" at the Lyceum. I had sat spellbound, for never before had I seen Sir Henry Irving, never before had I been inside a London theatre.

"Isn't he glorious?" I said to my mother, with an ecstatic sigh.

She did not answer, and, glancing quickly into her face, I saw that she had not heard me. There was a strange blank look in her great dark eyes—eyes that, when I was a child, I used to say were "like wells of ink, with stars at the bottom"—as if her spirit had strayed from her body and forgotten the way back again.

I touched her in a scared, hesitating way, as one wakes a person who has cried out in a dream. "Mother—mother dear!" I whispered.

"What's the matter, Sheila?" she asked, dazedly.

"Oh, nothing, dear," I hastened to say. "I was afraid that something was the matter with you. You—you looked so odd. Are you quite well?"

"Yes," she answered. "Sir Henry Irving's face, in his make-up for Macbeth, reminded me of a man I used to know, and haven't seen for a very long time, that's all. And thoughts came up out of the past."

"A man you'd rather not think of?" I ventured, encouraged that she should answer my first question; for she did not always answer questions.

Her lips tightened. "For a moment she did not speak. Then she said, 'I wish you had chosen some other play for your birthday night.'"

"I wanted to see this one, 'eh'?" I exclaimed. "And I thought you wanted it, too. But if you'd rather go home—"

"No, no," she broke in, with a note of impatience in her voice. "It is nothing at all—a mere fancy. Please forget about it, Sheila, and be as happy as you can. Your very first visit to a London theatre, child! Remember, there can never be another first time."

Everything that was happening to me lately was happening for the first time. I had just come to London; I had just been presented; I had just found out that I was a pretty girl, and that people rather liked to talk to me. To-night it appeared that the box between the draperies of the box and curtain was down, and there was nothing better to do—for as I peeped out, I saw the faces of two women, a grey-haired opera glasses were lifted.

My first impulse was to draw back, self-consciously; but it was my ambition to seem quite a woman of the world (it usually is when one is eighteen), and I decided to appear oblivious to the fact that I was a centre of attraction. In a moment I actually became so; for two persons who were gazing up at the box caught my attention, and caused me to forget my important little self.

One was a young man in the pit—a young man neither well dressed nor remarkably handsome, yet, as I glanced at him, under cover of my lashes, I felt that his was a face to pick out in a crowd. If there were a fire in the theatre, and he said that he would save me, I would unhesitatingly trust him to do it. He was not at all the sort of young man I had ever known, or was ever likely to know. Yet, as my eyes met for an instant, a thought came into my mind, a thought that I usually dismiss as a fancy, but which I could not shake off.

It was a sensation; I can describe it by no other word. But I knew that if I had been born in his sphere, or had been in mine, we must have meant something in one another's lives. I wondered if the same impression was in his mind, and my eyes said yes; and, with the blood rushing hotly to my cheeks, I looked away, feeling somehow guilty and ashamed, as if I had spoken to a stranger.

Turning from him, I encountered other eyes fixed upon me with a very different expression. A woman had come in late, and had just taken a seat in the stalls, in such a position as to command an excellent view of our box. She was dressed in black satin, glittering with great deal of jewels, and a large diamond comb gleamed like a crescent moon in her black hair, streaked with grey. The light shone full upon her aquiline features, as she stared fixedly up at our box, and her eyes, enormously large, though deep-set, looked yellow-grey, and luminous as a cat's, in contrast with the thick, short black lashes and olive skin.

The woman fastened these curious, pale eyes upon me for a long moment, with an extraordinary, almost greedy, interest, then they travelled from me to mother, who was leaning back in her chair, listlessly reading the satirist on the programme.

If it had not been ridiculous to imagine such a thing, I should have fancied deliberate malice in the look fixed upon that beautiful, sad face.

I drew my chair a little further back, and began asking mother questions about the various actors and actresses. Until the curtain went up on the next act I kept her attention concentrated upon me; but when the lights were down throughout the house, except on the stage, I could not resist the un-

pleasant fascination that the dark face with the pale cat-like eyes had already begun to exercise over my spirit.

I glanced once more at the shabby young man in the pit, but this time he was absorbed in the play, and I experienced a slight, indefinable sense of resentment that he no longer thought of me. I, too, turned to the stage, and speedily forgot the impatient grey-face in the stalls, until the curtain fell, and I remembered her with a start. I think it must have been that her eyes had intentionally drawn mine, as if with all her force she had willed me to think of her again; for she was watching me, and slowly, very slowly, drawing off a long black suede glove that was like a column of marble on the black satin of her gown. At last she turned her arm so that the under part, with the palm of the hand, lay uppermost. Half-way between the elbow and the wrist was a purple patch, about the size of a common pansy, but of a different shape, and a horrid thrill went through my nerves as I sharply realized that the woman's action was wholly for me. She was taking off her gloves that I might see the scar.

"For this she did not care. The silent message was for our box, and nowhere else."

In any circumstances there must have been something uncannily disagreeable about this, but I knew, and the woman knew (I felt sure) that which made it worse than disagreeable.

The mark on her arm to which she wished to attract my attention was shaped like a heart, and it was not the first of the kind which I had seen. Such a scar had made, for years, all of mystery that my life had ever known. I had thought of it by day, and I had thought of it by night; I had once been severely punished for asking questions concerning it, for there was such a purple, heart-shaped scar—the story of which I must tell you—on the same position on the arm of my mother.

As I looked down, with dilated eyes, my hands tensely grasping the ledge of the box, I heard my mother utter a faint sound, between a gasp and a sigh. I would have given much if I could have taken it back; but it was too late. Mother had heard, and was asking, in her quick, nervous way, what was the matter.

"Oh—nothing, nothing!" I exclaimed, as she had said to me a short time before. But I could not make my voice sound natural, and she leant out from the box to see for herself what had drawn from me that one tell-tale exclamation.

The white arm still lay on the black satin lap down below, and I saw my mother's wrist, grasping the seat and pushed up the little door in the roof of the box.

"Don't take me to the hotel yet," I stammered, guiltily. "I'll give you three times your fare to go after the lady I have just left—the lady in the yellow brocade cloak. Don't lose sight of her, but don't let her see that she is being followed."

"All right, miss," returned the man, and a whiff of spirituous fumes came down to me with the answer. His voice was slightly thick, as if he had had cotton wool under his tongue; but I scarcely thought of this at the time; I was only to remember later that I had noticed it.

The moment I had acted upon my impulse, and reversed my mother's orders, I was deeply ashamed of myself, yet I would not undo what I had done.

I do not think that there was the slightest arrière-pensée of vulgar curiosity in my motive. My feeling was to point out to that man, and as far as I knew myself, my one desire was somehow to make sure that no harm befell my mother. I could not quietly go back to the hotel, where we were stopping for the season, leaving her alone to face—I knew not what. I could not let her disappear behind a veil of mystery and night-darkness, and at all risk I would be near her. I would at least know where she was going.

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"I beg you to come with me," I pleaded, "or else—to let me go with you, whatever you may mean to do. I am frightened. It is all so strange and miserable. I can't help being anxious. I can't leave you like this, mother."

"Obey me at once, and don't let us have a scene here in the street," she whispered harshly.

Her gaze compelled mine, and there was no yielding in its light, only anger and determination. Years sprang to my eyes, and there was a sickly coldness at my heart; but I said not a word, and climbed meekly into the hansom, as I had been bidden.

"To the Coburg Hotel, Carlos place," my mother directed the cabman.

I leant out to say "good-bye," but she was moving away with a look on her clear-cut profile which seemed to say that already I was forgotten.

My cabman was turning. In an instant more I should lose sight of my mother. The dark, malicious face of the woman in black rose before me as clearly as when the great eyes had goggled up at the box. A vague premonition lay coldly on my breast. I knew that, somehow, a turning-point in my happy, quiet life had been reached. Nothing could ever be the same again.

With a curious feeling, as if a hand grasped my throat and constricted my breathing, on a sudden desperate impulse, I turned round, and the seat and pushed up the little door in the roof of the hansom.

"Don't take me to the hotel yet," I stammered, guiltily. "I'll give you three times your fare to go after the lady I have just left—the lady in the yellow brocade cloak. Don't lose sight of her, but don't let her see that she is being followed."

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To be Continued.

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## District Dashes

Miss Langan of St. Joseph's Hospital, Chatham, is nursing Mrs. Riddell—Florence Quill.

Mr. and Mrs. Lambert, of Chatham, were the guests of Mrs. Jno. E. Elliott last week—Comber Herald.

John Cooper raised the frame of his new mill at Tupperville this week, and will push it to completion as rapidly as possible.

When a rich man of 80 asks a girl of 18 to share his lot, she is thinking of the cemetery lot, and he isn't.—Comber Herald.

Mrs. J. O'Brien has returned to Chatham after spending a couple of weeks with her sister, Mrs. Walter Spence—Ridgeway Dominion.

The Tibury Times has just celebrated its 19th birthday. It is one of the newest and most up-to-date papers on our county exchange list.

Mrs. Mary Rebecca Bury, widow of the late Richard Bury, died at her residence, South Talbot Road, Orford on Friday July 11, in her 56th year.—Ridgeway Dominion.

Probate of the will of the late John Crawford, of Orford, has been granted to the widow, Nancy Crawford, and Francis Johnston. The estate is valued at \$1,870.—Ridgeway Dominion.

The town of Essex has passed a by-law providing for the sale of water by meter. The price was fixed at 18 cents per thousand gallons, the rate to be met, payable quarterly, and ten days' grace allowed for payment.

A wide circle of friends and acquaintances, especially among the older people, learned with sincere regret of the death on Sunday evening of Mrs. Mary Schindler, widow of the late F. X. Schindler.—Ridgeway Dominion.

John E. Rush, son of Postmaster Rush, Essex, committed suicide by hanging himself at Briscoe, B. C. He was a bright fellow of 23 years. It is said that disappointment in love affairs was the cause of the rash act.—Comber Herald.

Mrs. Wm. Beeson left on Tuesday for Chatham. She will accompany Mr. Beeson and family, of Chatham to Lake St. Clair, for a few weeks' camping before returning home, and expects to be gone about a month.—Blenheim Tribune.

Detective Heenan, who has been at Cambridge Springs, has returned to duty. He appears about fifty years, but has the vigor of a young man on the toughs, and his sweetest smiles for the widows and maidens.—Amherstburg Echo.

Miss Ruby Gordon, is receiving the hearty congratulations of her numerous friends on the excellent showing made by her at the recent examinations held by the Toronto Conservatory of Music. For the highest prize, a gold medal, three were of equal proficiency. Miss Gordon being one of the three.—Wallaceburg Herald-Record.

Kent is the best farming county in Canada. Such was the opinion of Prof. Harcourt of the Guelph Experimental college and farm. Mr. Smyth of Toronto, and C. W. Rokowski, of Dresden, all of whom drove through the township of Dover and Raleigh, inspecting the farm lands as to their adaptability for the production of sugar beets.—Ridgeway Dominion.

Rev. A. H. Drumm, formerly publisher of the Herald, and who has accepted a call to the Presbyterian churches in Belleville, left on Friday for Toronto, en route to his new field of labor. He will be joined at Toronto by Mrs. Drumm and son, who left a few days previous. On next week Mr. Drumm's induction will take place.—Thamesville Herald.

On Sunday next Rev. Mr. Colles will conduct service in Trinity church, at 11 a.m., and 7 p.m., and at Ours at 3 p.m. Subject—Morning, Balshazzar's Feast, or the Handwriting of the Word; evening, The Burden of the Night. "The Morning Cometh, also the night." Miss Ida St. C. Colles has consented to sing at both services in Trinity church.—Blenheim News.

On Monday evening Rev. W. H. Butt received word of the sudden death of a nephew, of his, Oliver McIlwain, of Watford, a bright, promising lad of 18 years. He was trying his examination on Part II. Junior Leaving, when on Wednesday last, a peculiarly trying day to meet candidates, he was stricken with faintness and gradually sank till Saturday, when he passed away. The family physician pronounced the cause of death heart failure, possibly induced by the oppressive heat and anxiety over his examinations.—Comber Herald.

Notwithstanding the discouraging outlook a short time ago when it rained every day, the crop prospects to-day are most promising. Wheat, barley and oats, though down and tangled in some localities, are on the average very promising. Corn, however, in many places, has suffered severely by reason of the heavy rains and cool weather. Not only has the lack of sunshine retarded growth but the moist state of the land has prevented proper cultivation and keeping down of the weeds. At present corn on the whole is not very promising. Potatoes have suffered very materially from the rains. Sugar beets in general, are making a good showing, especially where they have been properly blocked, thinned and cultivated.—Dresden Times.

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