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## A GIRL OF THE PEOPLE

By Mrs. C. N. Williamson \*\*\*\*

I had had many things to think of during the day that was past, but I dreamt of John Bourke, and dreamt happily. For there was no Lady Feo Ringwood in the picture my sleeping mind painted; only John Bourke and I; and we loved each other.

In the vision which passed, panorama-like from scene to scene, I went to the House of Commons, and after we had had tea on the Terrace I sat in the Ladies' Gallery, listening to a speech made by John Bourke. I had typed the notes for it, and I seemed to know what words he would use almost before they had left his tips. Suddenly there was a loud noise-someone had thrown a dynamite bomb. A cloud rose before my eyes; I could see nothing, but I could hear among the shouts of excitement a man groaning in mortal agony. I tried to fight my way through the crowd, to find out if the one man I loved were hurt; but I could not, and the groaning went on, while a great pall of darkness fell. I heard my own voice calling his name, and the sound roused me.

For a moment the scene of my dream was still real for me. I was in the dark, and I heard the groans which had made the horror of the vision. But as I lay, staring into blackness and sobbing, I began slowly to realize that was in bed; that I had just awaked from sleep. Then I remembered where I was-in the mysterious house where the woman with the heart-shaped scar had brought me. Had I dreamt the

groaning, too? No, it was real. The knowledge of this sent a shock of electricity from my heart to my head, creeping with a chill to my finger ends and down the tips of my toes. sat up in bed, and there was a prickling at the roots of my hair. I had left a candle alight, but it had evidently had time to burn down, for the room was in total darkness. I would have given much if I could have remembered

where I had put the matches. Twice, thrice I had heard the groans since I had been sure that I was awake; and each time it seemed that the sound was more distinct. My heart beat like the resonant strokes of a hammer, and the blood pounded in my ears. Was I mistaken? Did it really come more clearly? Would I hear it again? I waited, and did not breathe. Suddenly the sound thrilled out once more. I had not been mistaken. It had increased in distinctness because it was nearer. Someone was groaning just outside my door.

I had thought many times during the day lately gone (even as I had thought on Waterloo Bridge) that I need be afraid of nothing, because I had nothing to lose-that I could face death with a heart no heavier than I already carried. But now I knew differently. I was as sick with horror and nameless dread, born of those ominous ounds in the darkness, as I would have been if I had possessed all that the world could give of happiness-my life a jewel to treasure.

I sat rigid and cold as ice. I could have prayed for the groaning to cease if my mind had been capable of formulating a prayer. But it came again, and something else with it; a dragging noise, as if some heavy thing were being slowly drawn along the floor.

If I had been a really brave woman no doubt I should have sprung up, rushed to the door, and looked out into the corridor. I had sometimes thought myself brave, and I had delighted, in my childish vanity, to be called so; but, after all, I was a coward, for I renained frozen; desperately, selfishly thankful that my door was locked, hor ribly afraid lest after all it should be forced.

My whole being listened; and from far away my ears, unnaturally sharpened, caught a separate sound. A door opened and shut in the distance. Muf-led footsteps came hurrying. Something brushed against the handle of my door; something fell with a soft thud and another groan. There were whisperings, followed by a struggle, with a plunge against my door that made it rattle.

I half sprang out of bed, shaking, despite the warm June night, as if in an ague fit. But suddenly stillness fell. There was not a sound. I waited again, my heart ticking the seconds. A long time-or what seemed to me a ong time-passed, and nothing more

happened. "Thank Heaven, whatever it was-is over," I panted. But as the hopeful thought formed in my mind, a word was cried shrilly-"Ermyntrude! Ermyntrude!"-once, and again. Before the last syllable had been completed for the second time, a door slammed

loudly. Ermyntrude had been my adopted nother's name. The door that shut upon the voice

was the last sound that night. By conrast, the silence of the house seemed leathly, and I slept no more until the faint, pearly dawn turned the curtained windows of the room to eyes that awoke and opened,

While they awoke, mine might close let my lids droop wearily, hardly expecting to sleep; but I knew nothing more until I was roused by a persistent tapping at the door. For an instant I was frightened, each nerve still tingling from my experience of the night, but for an instant only. I realized that the morning must be far advanced, and, springing up, I ran to the door and unlocked it, peeping out.

There stood the woman who called herself Sintra Leigh. She was still a 'woman in black," but seen by morning light without her bonnet and veil,

neatly dressed for the house, with a plain white collar fastened by a queer brooch at the neck of her alpaca gown, she appeared more like an ordinary human being.

"I have been knocking for some time," she said, as quietly as if the night had been passed in peaceful sleep. "I began to be rather alarmed when you did not answer, for it is long after ten o'clock. I thought that you would be glad of the extra rest. How are you feeling?"

"I scarcely know," I said. "I didn't leep much until after it was light. Since then I must have slept like a log. For Heaven's sake tell me what awful thing happened in the house last

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Sintra Leigh opened her great eyes at me. "Awful thing?" she echoed, as if utterly perplexed.

"Don't say that you don't know what mean!" I exclaimed, impatiently. The groans of someone in agony; the horrid dragging sound, as of a heavy body being drawn along the corridor out there; whisperings, and a fall against my door. A voice that cried my adopted mother's name. Oh, the noise was loud enough, and horrible enough, to wake the dead!"

"You must have dreamt it," said the women in black. I was standing at the door in my nightdress, she in the corridor just outside. The sunlight filtering through the

curtained window in my room, opposite the door, fell upon her face, and I searched it for the slightest change of expression; but it remained stolid, absolutely impassive. "It all happened, and you know it," I

nsisted. "If it happened, no doubt it was one of the servants either in a nightmare, or-intoxicated. I only know that I heard nothing. But to satisfy you, I will enquire in the servants' hall and et you know when I have had a re-

"Why should one of the servants in this house cry out the name of Ermyntrude?" I incredulously demanded. "Ah, there's a partial explanation of the seeming mystery! I thought it would be simple enough. The housekeeper's daughter, who is paying her a visit, is called Ermyntrude. Not a table name for a young woma of her class, perhaps; but we have nothing to do with that. I shall now know where to begin my enquiries.' She had me at a disadvantage and she knew it. I could not prove that her story was false, and that she was well aware of its falseness. If I should describe the sounds to some outsider, who had not heard them, appending

unless contradictory details should ac-"I have no doubt that your explanation will be simple enough!" I exclaimed, with meaning. "And now, unless you have anything else to say, I

Sintra Leigh's suppositions, her ex-

planation would probably be accepted,

"Your breakfast will be sent up to you in about half-an-hour." she anounced, calmly, without appearing to notice my sneer. "After that, I shall have some interesting news for you." As if desiring to avoid further questioning, she walked away, leaving me to stare after her a minute and then retreat into the room, once more bolt-

ing the door. By the time I had bathed, and brushed my hair before the mirrorwhere my eyes met other eyes, with question to question-I had to answer a second knock at the door. This time it was a servant with the promised breakfast-tray—an elderly, grim-featured woman, whose long, flat lips, shut tightly together, seemed to say that they were locked and padlocked.

If I had had the impulse to ask questions concerning any of the matters which perplexed or alarmed me, the impulse would have died at sight of that hatchet-face. I thanked the woman for bringing my breakfast, otherwise letting her depart in silence.

There was delicious coffee, which might have been made by a French chef, crisp brown toast, a delicate little omelette, and a dish piled high with strawberries, heaped on their own green leaves. John Bourke had brought me strawberries one day, carrying the little basket in his own hand, because

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Mrs. Jennett had informed me that they were forced-it was too early still for strawberries to grow out of doors in England. Somebody in this house, therefore, appeared also desirous of of-

It would have been more Spartan in me to refuse the food prepared in a house which might be that of an ene my. But I was not Spartan, and being very hungry, I haif-shamefacedly ate. I was too excited to linger over the meal, however, and as soon as I had finished I put on the black dress which I had worn last night. It was a temp-tation to fling that aside, and choose a white frock from among those which had so mysteriously made their appearance in the big wardrobe. But I resisted; and I had only just fastened the last hook when Sintra Leigh asked to be admitted.

She looked me over from head to foot. "It is fortunate that you are pretty in anything," she remarked bluntly, "for it can't be concealed that that frock is exceedingly shabby. I hoped that you would have dressed yourself in one of the charming gowns which Lady Cope gave you, and -friends of yours imported to this

"You forget that I am in mourning," I said. "And, even if I were not, why should I take particular pains to make myself attractive?"

The woman in black shrugged her shoulders. "Luckily Nature has done that for you, so we will talk no more about it. Are you anxious to hear the "If I say that I am anxious, you will

probably not tell me." "You misjudge me, my dear young lady. The news is this: that the employer whose agent I have been-the 'power behind the throne' of whom I spoke—is ready to see you if you are willing to be seen."

"At last!" I ejaculated. "You are in just the proper mood for such an occasion. I will show you the

We went downstairs as we had come up last night. From the great hall, with its ugly marble pillars and its crowding portraits, a number of doors opened out. My guide led me to one at the back, and then paused, grasping the handle. "A word of advice," she said, in a low voice; and I thought that her face showed a certain excitement. "Just a word before you go into this room alone. You are not a bad sort of girl, and you have suffered a great deal-as much in these two past months, perhaps, as many women suffer in a whole lifetime. For my part in your troubles -I admit that I have indirectly had a part-I am sorry, for I had no grudge against you-I have none now. But certain things were inevitable, and the pawns had to be swept off the board with the queen and the castles. You happened to be one of the pawns. But now you are back on the board again, and instead of being a pawn, as you were before, you are a queen-or it is in your hands to be one if you choose. I have done my work, and brought you to this place for a motive with which you yourself have nothing to do. Last evening when I met you it was absolutely without feeling either for or against. But you are a plucky girl; and I admire pluck. You are a beautiful girl; and I admire beauty. There fore, I am now more your friend than your enemy, though you may not credit it. And with an honest wish for your welfare, I advise you, when you have crossed this threshold and learnt what you will soon learn after the door has been opened and closed, to guard your tongue well. Listen, before you speak. Do nothing, say nothing, on the

hand, everything to gain on the other -and be wise. That is all." In spite of myself and my strong prejudice, amounting to repulsion, I was impressed. A feeling of solemnity fell upon me, cooling the heat of excitement. "Thank you," I said, more gent-

impulse of the moment. Reflect that

you have everything to lose on the one

ly than I had spoken yet. "I will re-She opened the door, looked me in the eyes, and I passed into the room beyond. The door was softly closed again. In speaking of her "employer," or the "power whom she served," Sintra Leigh had never used the word "he" or 'she." Nothing that she did seemed to be done carelessly, therefore I believed that the omission was by design. She did not wish me to know, until I should see for myself, whether the person unknown were man or woman. I expected, however, as I entered, to see omeone rise or come forward; but ap-

parently the room was empty. It was a handsome library, old-fashfoned, like everything else in the house, save only the room allotted to me. Two of the walls were lined with tall bookcases. A third showed a wide doorway, covered with green velvet curtains: and above and on either side were portraits. They were three in number, all strikingly well painted. The face over the door I instantly recognized as that of Sir Vincent Cope, whom I had once supposed to be my father. Evidently the picture had been painted in his early youth, before the one with which I was familiar at Arrish Mell Court. To be Continued.

Industrial Chemistry. Artificial attar of roses is in sight, Chemists have good hopes of making uinine by synthesis. With morphine ne of a dozen alkaloids of opium are experimenting in the same lirection, and a like remark applies to atropine. Artificial mustard oil is preferred by physicians to the real article on account of its greater purity. Oil of bitter almonds is another synthetic achievement. It has the same flavor as the real, though chemically different. Citric acid, which is the sour of the lemon, has been reproduced; likewise lactic acid, which is the sour principle of sour milk. Salicylic acid, so valuable as a preservation and as a remedy for rheumatism, was obtained formerly from the wintergreen plant and was very costly. Now it is cheap and manufactured by the ton from carbolic acid. In its turn artificial oil of wintergreen, derived from wood alcohol and salicylic acid, has driven the natural product out of the market entirely

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