



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

CHAPTER V.

"Much worse!" assented Margaret, severely.

He looked at her rather curiously. "How strangely you said that," he remarked. "Meant for me from the shoulder, I expect; now wasn't it?"

Margaret was silent. She had meant it as a rebuke, but she would not have admitted it for the world.

He regarded her silently for a second, then he said:

"Miss Hale, they have been telling you something about me. They have, haven't they?"

A faint flush rose to her face.

"Would that matter in the slightest, my lord?"

"By George, yes!" he said. "Look here! there is an old proverb that says: 'Don't believe more than half you see, and less than half you hear.' I should like to know what they have been telling you about me."

"What should 'they' say, my lord?" said Margaret. "Except that you are a very high-principled and serious-minded gentleman, doing all the good you could find to do, and setting a high example to your friends and companions?"

He leaned forward so that he might see her face, then broke into the musical and contagious laugh.

"It's too bad," he said. "Miss Hale, I give you as my word that the devil, that nobody is quite as bad as he is painted—"

"It is to be hoped not, or, judging from the portraits one sees at the Academy, there must be a great many ugly people in the world," she said, quietly.

Lord Blair stared at her with unconcealed delight.

Pretty women he had met by the hundred, but a girl who was lovely as a flower, and witty as well, was a rarity that set his heart throbbing.

"All right!" he said. "I see you have made up your mind about me, and that you won't let me say a word in my own defence. But every poor beggar of a convict is allowed to say something before they pass sentence, don't you know, and you'll let me say my word before you send me away, painted black right through. Miss Hale, I'm in one of my unlucky months! Everything I've touched this June has gone wrong! My horse—but I don't want to trouble you about that—and to put the finishing touch to the catalogue, I had the bad luck to have you looking on while I'm having a set-to with a country yokel. Of course, you think the worst of me, and yet—" He stopped. "Well, I'm had enough, I dare say," he said, with

a sort of groan; "but I haven't had much chance; I haven't, indeed. They don't make many saints out of the kind of life that has fallen to me. What can you expect of a fellow who is thrown upon the world at nineteen without a friend to keep him straight or say a word of warning? And that was just the way of it with me; my father died when I was nineteen, and I was let loose, with plenty of money, and not a soul to show me the right road."

"Your mother?" said Margaret, and the next instant regretted it, for across his handsome face came a spasm, as if she had touched a wound across his heart.

"My mother died two years before my father; her death killed him. I wish that it had killed me. Don't let's speak of her."

"I am very sorry, my lord," murmured Margaret.

"All right," he said cheerfully. "If she had been living—but then! Well, I had no one. My uncle—the earl, here—would have nothing to say to me; I reminded him too much that he had lost his own boy, and that I must come into the property. As if I would not rather have died instead of the lad! He was as nice a boy as ever you saw—poor little chap! Well, where was I? Oh, on the road to ruin as my uncle said this afternoon, and by George, he was right!" and he laughed. "But there—once you make the first false step, the rest is easy; it's all down hill, you see, and nobody to put the skid on—nobody! But never mind any more about me; I can see you've passed sentence. Are you living here altogether, Miss Hale?"

"No," said Margaret with a little start, and very quietly. She was thinking of the wasted life, the friendless, godless youth which his wild, incoherent statement revealed, and something like pity for him was creeping into her heart.

"Pity! It is a dangerous sentiment for one like Margaret to harbor for one like Blair Leyton."

"No; I am here on a visit, my lord."

"How jolly," he said. "I hope you are enjoying yourself. But perhaps you always live in the country?"

"I am enjoying myself very much. No, I live in London, my lord."

"In London!" he said, quickly. "But I say—" he broke off appealingly, "I wish you wouldn't 'my lord' me, you know."

Margaret laughed.

"My circle of acquaintances does not include any noblemen, Lord Leyton, and I am not quite sure of the way to address one of your rank," she said, faltering a little.

"How well she said that!" he thought. "Most girls would have giggled and blushed, but she took it as quietly as a duchess would have done."

Then aloud he said: "Well, it's usual to address us by our surname; I wish you would call me Leyton."

Margaret was silent a moment,

while he scanned her face with suppressed eagerness.

"It is quite usual," she said in her blissful ignorance. "It sounds rather abrupt."

"Why, of course!" he said. "Abrupt, not a bit. And you live in London! Now, shall I guess what part? Let me see. You are an artist. Yes. Well, Chelsea—"

"Wrong; but Kensington is not so far away," she said, with a smile.

"Kensington," he said. "The Art School, of course. How jolly! I've got rooms not very far from there. Perhaps we shall—" he hesitated and watched her rather fearfully—"we might meet, you know."

"I should say that there was nothing more improbable my—Lord Leyton. We don't know the same people, and never shall, and—" she stopped, her own words had recalled Mrs. Hale's warning. "I must go now," she said, rising suddenly.

"Oh, it's not ten," he pleaded. "You feel chilly? Let me put your shawl on. It has slipped down. Why, what a funny shawl it is!"

"It's an antimacassar," she said, laughing.

"So it is!" he said. "And look here, it has got entangled in my watch chain; but they are built to get entangled in things, aren't they?" he added, fumbling with all a man's awkwardness at the tangled threads.

"Oh, you'll never get it off like that," said Margaret impatiently, and innocently enough her small supple fingers flew at it.

His own hand and hers touched, and with a feeling of surprise he felt the blood tingling at her touch. He looked at the lovely face so close to his own, so gravely, unconsciously beautiful, and a wild desire to lift the hand to his lips seized him, but with a mighty effort he forced it down.

"There it is!" he said. "And now to reward me for—not getting it undone, will you let me give you this flower?" and he stooped and picked a red rose.

Margaret stared slightly and looked at him; but the handsome face wore its frankest, "godsbest" look, and with a laugh she held out her hand. He drew it back with an answering laugh.

"Before, I give it to you, will you tell me one thing, Miss Hale?"

"That depends," she said, "upon what the thing is."

"It's not much," he said. "Only this: will you tell me that you don't think I am quite the savage you accused me of being yesterday?"

She looked up at him with a faint color in her face.

"Yes, I will do that," she said. "But I think you should keep the rose, Lord Leyton."

"No," he said, laughing, but with an intent look in his eyes, fixed upon her. "No, I've got a fancy for leaving something behind me that you may remember me by. I'm going to-morrow, you know."

"I did not know," said Margaret.

"Yes," with a sigh. "My welcome to the Court is soon outworn, and I'm back to London and the old road," with a laugh.

Margaret stood with averted face. "Is—it is so inevitable, that same road? Is there no other, my lord?" she said.

"No, I'm afraid not, my lady," he said, smiling, but rather gravely.

"I think there must be, that there might be if you cared to take it," she said, gravely.

"If you cared that I should take it—I mean—he broke off quickly, for she had looked alarmed at his words and their tone—"I mean that it's very good of you to care what becomes of a useless fellow like me, and—"

"Margaret!" called Mrs. Hale's voice from the open window.

Margaret smiled. "Good-night, my lord," she said, hurriedly, and yet with simple dignity.

"Stop!" he said, in a low voice. "You have forgotten your rose," and, following her a step or two, he touched her arm. "It is not a very grand one; there was a bowl of beauties to my room; some good soul had picked it; she stopped, for the color rose to Margaret's face. "You put them there!" he exclaimed, his eyes lighting up. "You!"

CHAPTER VI.

Margaret ran into the house, her heart beating fast, the color coming and going in her cheeks. To her amazement and annoyance, she felt that she was actually trembling!

Well, if not trembling, quivering, as a leaf quivers when the summer wind

passes over its bosom.

What was this that she had done? Notwithstanding her grandmother's warning and her own good resolutions, she had spent—how long!—nearly an hour talking alone with Lord Blair Leyton. And he had given her a rose! Not only given it to her, but fastened it in the antimacassar.

She could feel his fingers touching her still, as it seemed to her. She looked down at the rose, gleaming like a spot of blood on the white cotton of the antimacassar, then, with a sudden gesture, she went to pull it out, and fling it through the window; but she averted her hand as it touched the velvet leaves. Yes, she had done wrong; she ought not to have spoken to him, ought not to have remained with him, and most certainly ought not to have taken the rose from him.

She saw now how wrong she had been. They used to call her "Wild Margaret," "Mad Madge," when she was a child, but she had been trying to become quiet, and dignified, and discreet, and, as it seemed to her, had succeeded, until this wicked young man had tempted her into flirting—was it flirting?—in the starlight.

"You look flushed, my dear," said Mrs. Hale. "Are you tired?"

"I think I am, a little," said Margaret, longing to get to the solitude of her own room.

"It's the country air," said the old lady, nodding. "It always makes people from London sleepy. Was it pleasant in the garden?" she added, innocently.

Margaret's face flushed.

"Y—es, very," she replied; then she was going on to tell the old lady of her meeting with Lord Blair, but she stopped short.

"I think I will go up to bed now," she said, and giving the old lady a kiss, she went up stairs to her own room. There she thought over every word that the young lord said, and that she herself had spoken. There had been no harm in any of it, surely! He had spoken respectfully, almost reverentially, and even when he had given her the rose he had done it with as much diffidence and high bred courtesy as if she had been a countess. Surely there had been no harm in it.

(To be Continued.)

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"Oh, don't destroy my pleasure by explaining that you did not mean them for me!" he pleaded. "You put them there at any rate. Will you let me, in return, fix this rose in your shawl? We shall be more than quits then on my side!"

Oh, Margaret, put back the proffered flower! Red stands in the language of magic for all that is evil, for a passion that will burn into ashes of pain; put back the hand that offers it to you!

But he was too quick. Gently, reverently he fixed the rose in the meshes of the antimacassar, and, as he put it straight with a caressing touch, he murmured:

"Good-night! Try and remember me, Miss—Margaret, at any rate as long as the rose lives!"

Red as the flower itself, trembling with a feeling that was painfully like the stab of conscience, Margaret glanced up at him, and without a word, sped from his side.

Lord Leyton stood looking after her, as strange an expression in his face as her own had worn.

Then with a long sigh he went back to the seat and threw himself down in it, in the place where she had sat.

Half an hour passed; the nightingale for which Margaret had been waiting came out and sang for him; but the song gave him no delight, for in his whirling brain its notes seemed to take the shape of words; words of such sad, strange import! "Spare her!—spare her!" the bird seemed to sing; and as if he could not endure the appeal any longer, he rose impatiently and walked toward the terrace. As he did so, a tall, skulking figure moved snake-like after him.

Lord Blair stopped at the bottom of the steps, and the shadow pursuing him stopped also, and raised a heavy stick.

For a moment it hovered, evilly over Lord Blair's head, then as if smitten by a sudden remorse or a desire for a still deeper revenge, Pyke let the stick fall, and, slinking back, disappeared amongst the shrubs.

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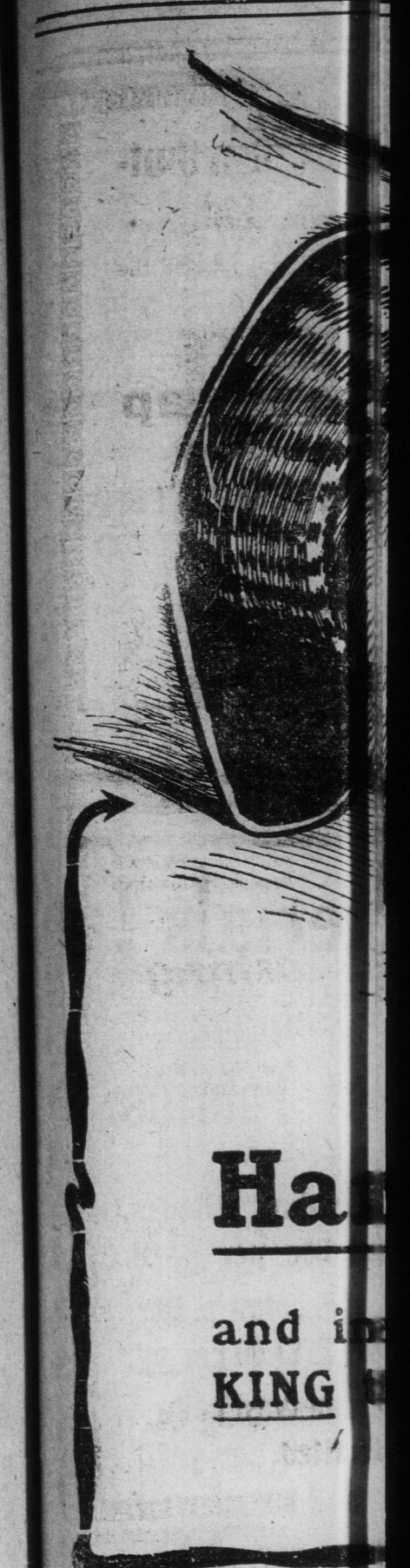
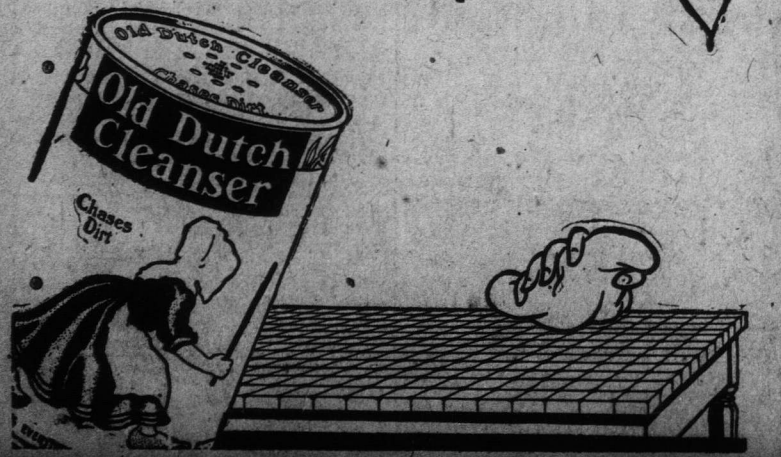
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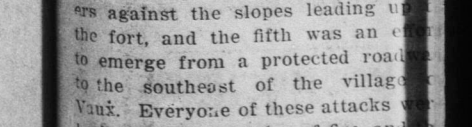
Messages Received Previous to 9 A.M.

HUN ATTACKS REPULSED.  
PARIS, March 17.  
The official this afternoon says that the west of the Meuse the bombardment diminished last night in the region of Bethincourt and Cumines. After a bloody check to the attack yesterday, the enemy has not resumed his movement on Mort Homme. In the east of the Meuse a recrudescence of the bombardment was followed at 5 o'clock last night by a series of violent offensive actions, directed against our positions at the village of Vaux. Five successive attacks in large numbers were defeated by the Germans in this region, without success. Two of them were against the village of Vaux, two others against the slopes leading up to the fort, and the fifth was an effort to emerge from a protected road to the southeast of the village of Vaux. Everyone of these attacks was broken by our curtains of fire, and the fire of our machine guns cost the enemy heavily.

COMMONS ADJOURNS AFTER 10 DEBATE.  
LONDON, March 17.  
At one o'clock this morning Commons adjourned, after a prolonged debate, nominally on army estimates, but really covering a wide range of topics. There were in

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