

hoped to indulge in a little duck shooting and go down into a coal mine. The trip to Rotorua has been an amazing success, and he is going to write you an account of it. But the sportsmen were so numerous on and after the first that the ducks had been frightened away for the time being, and the weather breaking, his holiday has been curtailed by several days, and I may add, our chance of eating duck that would appear to have been the victim of an anarchist explosion. Hoping and believing that the shoals of letters you prophesy will soon fill the space allotted to the older cousins, and with love to yourself and all the cousins, old and young, I remain, your loving cousin, HILDA. N.B.—Isn't it time we had a letter from Cousin Alison?

[Dear Cousin Hilda,—I scarcely think there has been time for Cousin Alison to learn that there really is an "Older Cousins' Page." You know her mother and sister are visiting New Zealand, and I have not heard where Cousin Alison is staying during their absence. Probably with her sister, who lives inland, and very likely "Graphics" are not to be had there. However, I am sure we shall hear from her shortly. We have been very lucky this season, and had a regular bag of game sent us early in the week, and are expecting more next week. I am sorry that Lyn's holiday had to be curtailed. You will keep him up to the mark re his Rotorua trip, won't you? "Anarchist duck" should be a rare luxury, there would be so little of it left.—Cousin Kate.]

Margery Redford's Portrait.

By Mrs. M. H. Spielmann.

(Concluded from last week.)

Sir John and the family dined with the Major the next evening, and after the meal the admiral was uncovered.

"Bless my soul!" said Sir John, with a little groan, when he looked at it.

"My eyes!" exclaimed Rupert.

Lady Redford gave a little start, and said nothing.

"Isn't he a dear?" asked Margery.

Nobody answered.

"She says it's a portrait of her," explained the Major. "If it was, I'd prefer to marry a dragon."

"Now you've all shown your approval of my choice," said Margery gaily. "I'll tell you that I have taken upon myself to ask Mr. Horley, the famous picture-cleaner, of Ellis-street, to come here at nine o'clock, and you shall hear what he says. He's due now."

In a few minutes the bell rang. The picture doctor had arrived, carrying a little bag. He was shown the picture.

"Manley's work," said he, at a glance, taking off the glass and touching the paint with his finger-nail. "Done about yesterday, apparently. You've never got into that fellow's hands, sir?" he asked, turning to Sir John.

"It's mine, Mr. Horley," interposed Margery. "You've heard of my portrait by Mr. Fleming, R.A., being stolen? Well, I believe my portrait's underneath—I'm sure it is. Would you mind cleaning the admiral off?"

"You really do mean your portrait, Margery?" asked the Major, beginning to see what she meant.

"There evidently is another picture underneath," said Mr. Horley, getting his bottles of spirits of wine and turpentine, and his bits of rag and cotton-wool out of his bag.

And he sat down to work.

"It must be a very weak solution," he explained, "for the picture underneath is rather new, too; and we don't want to take all of it off."

He proceeded to rub slowly at a corner, and to the surprise of them all, of Margery most of all, as the bright blue sky behind the officer disappeared, a green patch of a tree branch came into view. Margery stared. She looked blank, as the new development proceeded; and when a large landscape was disclosed, she had to meet the laughing, chaffing look of the Major, who gazed from her to the landscape and back again from the landscape to her.

"Not a bit like you," he said.

"Also Manley's work," pronounced Mr.

Horley. "That fellow forges Constable pretty well—imitates" he usually say. And he's varnished it, too; very artful. That's to allow him to take the paint off, as I've done, without hurting the picture underneath. It wasn't much to cover up either," he went on, packing up his bag again, and wiping his sticky fingers on one of his rags; "but there's always a sale for Constable, especially when it's supposed to be a newly discovered picture. He had that idea in his head you may be sure. Good-evening. I'm always at your service if you want me again."

"I think I may," replied Margery, adding wistfully, "but—but isn't there another picture under the landscape, don't you think?"

"No," replied Mr. Horley, after a careful scrutiny; "no, there's nothing under the paint but the canvas. Good evening."

"Good evening," returned Margery. She was trying to put a good face on the matter; but she was evidently greatly puzzled as she examined closely her new acquisition.

Returning to Heatherfields with her parents and the Major the following day, taking the picture with them—as she said she wanted to think it over—she determined to get at the bottom of the mystery of Dick and his concertina. So she visited the Wells's and asked if Dick was in.

"I'll fetch him down, miss, if he's there," said old Mrs. Wells, "for I'm not sure."

"No, no; don't, please, with your rheumatism. You never go upstairs—I'll just run up and give my message." And without waiting for the half-hearted protest of the old lady, who was certainly rather stiff in the back, she ran lightly from the room and up the stairs. She knocked. There was no answer, so she opened the door and peeped in. There was nobody there; so after a moment she tripped downstairs again.

"I'll send on word," she said; "he's not in."

And as she wished Mrs. Wells good evening and started on her way home, a heightened colour illumined her pretty features. She quickened her pace, and as soon as she got home, wrote to Dick requesting him to call on the following evening.

"Father will be home at that time," she said to herself.

The next day Dick came, and was much surprised on being told that it was Miss Redford and not Elizabeth whom he was to see. So he entered the room and confronted Sir John and his daughter. As Margery glanced at him she felt ashamed of her suspicion, especially when she saw his eyes wander to the picture on the chair and show not the slightest concern.

"Dick," she said, "I want to ask you a question or two. It may help us—about my stolen picture, you know."

Dick looked sympathetic at the mention of the loss. "Anything I can do to help, I'm sure I should be very glad, Miss Redford. I was very distressed to hear of the loss—very distressed."

"You play the concertina very well, Dick," she said.

"Glad you think so, miss," replied Dick, evidently gratified; "it's what you might call an expressive instrument. That is to say, if you've got the hands, and got the soul."

"Yes. But how do you manage to play it at the village," she went on, slowly, "when—when you are here, at the Manor?"

"I—I don't understand what you mean, Miss Redford. And he turned a startled look from her to Sir John. Instantly, she felt herself on firm ground. Sir John looked at his daughter and slowly nodded his head.

"Yes, you do, Dick. Who is playing your concertina in your room when you are out?"

The white face of the young man brought no pity into Margery's, which for once was played.

"No one's ever played it unless I'm in. Grandmother says that's how she always knows if I'm there."

"So if the sound of your concertina is heard there, it is always you who plays it?"

"Always, Miss Redford."

"Is that your best word?"

Dick waited a second or two, and then replied jerkily, "Of course."

"Then I must tell you, that it's not only you, but your big phonograph as well, that gives out your concertina music and your own voice, too. You have even been to the house here while your phonograph was playing in your room; and deceiving your grandmother

into thinking you were at home for reasons best known to yourself. I've proved it, Dick, more than once; and last evening I went into your room, and with my own eyes I saw your phonograph and got a few notes out of it."

Dick turned whiter than before, if that were possible. "What of it?" he said.

"This of it!" replied Margery. "It was you, Dick, who called in at Major Grey's to see Elizabeth, who was waiting there for me the foggy night we went to the pantomime. Dick, it was the night the picture was stolen. Shall I say more?"

She said that at a venture, for in truth she had nothing more to say—at least, nothing that could connect him with the theft. But she had not miscalculated. Her shaft hit the bull's-eye in the centre. Dick opened his mouth to reply, but he seemed unable to speak. At that moment the Major entered, and looked with astonishment at the group. Before he had time to utter a word, Margery turned to him and said:—

"Edward, will you please take that little pair of pincers from the table? I intended to ask Dick, but he doesn't seem sufficiently himself."

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to bring the picture here. And now with the pincers please take out all those tacks that nail it to the stretcher."

"What do you want to take poor old Constable off his stretcher for?"

"It's very serious, Edward. Please do as I ask."

"Very well; here goes."

He went at it, first along the top, and then down the right side. Dick, relieved somewhat at the turn of events, watched him with unfeigned interest. As the Major took hold of the freed corner and pulled it back, he exclaimed:

"Why, there's another picture underneath!—Margery, Margery, it's your portrait!"

Sir John started up, and Dick staggered back, as Margery said quietly:

"Of course, Edward, dear, what else did you expect?"

Then she turned to Dick, whose wretchedness betrayed his guilt.

"Shall I tell you what you did—as you won't tell me? You decided to steal the picture—I'm not sure why, unless it was to get some money to begin your house-keeping on. That's why you called at Major Grey's, and you took it away under cover of the fog. Isn't it true?"

Dick, looking shamefacedly from one to the other, and then dropping his eyes, hesitated a moment, and then nodded, and said:

"You're right, Miss Redford; if it hadn't been foggy I mightn't have taken it. But I was told Liz was waiting there, so I went in, and after our chat I said that I'd see myself out, and so I had the field clear, and knowing it was foggy, and that I shouldn't be seen, decided me."

"And the phonograph was all part of your plan—intending that you could show you were in and could prove an alibi, when you had planned stealing the picture not in London but from Heatherfields."

"That's right again, Miss Redford," said Dick, in a low voice, after a long pause. "Being in London, I thought it would save me the trouble of getting it to London. But the idea wasn't mine, Sir John. I was put up to it by a friend, who offered me £20 towards my getting married—and then he never paid me anything. He told me that a portrait by Mr Fleming could be sold for a big sum, and that as Miss Redford's picture hadn't been exhibited in public yet, it wouldn't be identified if it was sold as a fancy picture up North, through a friend, who would be on the look-out for it."

"That man in Soho, with the screwed-up eyes?" asked the Major.

"No, sir. A man in Clerkenwell. Oh, what a fool I've been—what a fool I've been!"

"Go out into the garden, and wait till I call you," said Sir John; and Dick did as he was told.

Then they arranged that Dick should be dismissed from the bank, and packed off to Australia to enable him to win back his good name, so that his grandparents should never know of his disgrace, and that Margery's wedding should not be under the cloud of sorrow and punishment. It was his first offence, and in the future he might prove himself an honest man once more; and after all, said Sir John, he'd done it out of love for Elizabeth, who might, perhaps in time find it possible to forgive him; and his grandfather was an old and valued retainer.

"But what beats me," said the Major, "is how you found out it was your portrait, Margery. When did you first know positively it was the picture?"

"From the beginning—from the time the men were carrying it into the shop."

"Oh, come now. But how?"

"Why, you dear old silly; you don't think I could sit six weeks for my portrait without noticing the lack of the canvas that was turned towards me all that time, with all its peculiar little markings?"

"But if you were so sure, why did you examine it so persistently so closely?"

"Only to confirm my belief. I could then see that the canvas on the front wasn't of the same texture or material as the canvas on the back. So that proved that the landscape wasn't painted over my portrait, but was another picture nailed over. That's why I had the pincers ready, Edward."

"Then, why the dickens didn't you say so at once?"

"Because there was the mystery of the concertina to clear up. But, I forgot, you don't know about that."


"Go, both of you, into the garden and she'll tell you there," advised Sir John; and sent Dick to me. I'm so happy about Margery's portrait. I don't feel I can be very hard on him. Not so hard as he deserves."

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