

THE DEVICE OF GIRALDO THE PAINTER.

By Anthony Hope.

Author of "The Prisoner of Zenda," "The Dolly Dialogues," Etc.
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When the first birthday of the Princess Osra approached, her brother, King Rudolf, desiring to make her a present, summoned from his home at Verona in Italy, a painter of very high fame, by name Giraldo, and commanded him to paint a portrait of the Princess, to be her brother's gift to her. This command Giraldo carried out, the Princess giving him every opportunity of studying her features and gazing at his easel, and the picture, when finished, being pronounced to be as faithful as beautiful, the reputation of Giraldo was greatly enhanced by the painting of it. Thus it followed that in many cases, when foreign princes had heard the widespread praises of Osra's beauty, they sent orders to Giraldo to execute for them and dispatch with all speed miniatures or other portraits of the Princess, that they might judge for themselves whether she were in truth as lovely as report said; and they sent Giraldo large sums of money in recompense, adding not seldom some further donation in the express term and condition that Giraldo should observe absolute fidelity in his representation and not permit himself to least flattery. For some desired themselves to court her, and others intended their sons to ask her hand; if the evidence of Giraldo's portraits satisfied their hopes. Thus Giraldo, although but two or three years above 30, grew both in fame and wealth, and was very often indebted to the Princess for the favor of a visit to his house, that he might again correct his memory of her face.

Now what several princes had done before, it chanced that the King of Glottenberg also did; and Giraldo, to all appearances much pleased, accepted the command and prayed the Princess to visit him; for, he said, this picture was to be larger and more elaborate than the rest and therefore needed more study of her. So the Princess went many times, and the portrait destined for the King of Glottenberg (who was said to be seeking a suitable alliance for his eldest son) grew before her eyes into the most perfect and beautiful representation of her which the skill of Giraldo had ever accomplished, and surpassed even that first picture which he had painted by King Rudolf's command. And the King had no doubt that, so soon as the picture had reached the Court of Glottenberg, an embassy would come from there to demand the hand of his sister for the Crown Prince, a proposal which he would have received with much pleasure and gratification.

"I do not think," said Osra, tossing her head, "that any such embassy will come, sire. For four or five pictures have been already painted by Signor Giraldo in like manner, but no embassies have come. It seems that my poor features do not find approval in the courts of Europe."

"And her tone, it must be confessed, was full of contempt. For the Princess Osra knew that she was beautiful as indeed all beautiful ladies are, by the indulgence of heaven, permitted to. How much greater mischief might they work, if such knowledge were denied them!"

"That's true enough," cried Rudolf. "And I do not understand the meaning of it. But it will not be so at Glottenberg. For my good brother the King has eyes in his head and his son sees no less well. I met them in my travels and I can speak of it. Most certainly an embassy will come from Glottenberg before we are a month older."

Yet, strange to say, the same thing followed on the despatch of the portrait (which Giraldo sent by a certain trusty messenger, whom he was accustomed to employ); as had happened before, no embassy came, and the King of Glottenberg excused himself from paying a visit to Strelsau, where he and his nephew had promised to meet, on the invitation of King Rudolf. Therefore Rudolf was very vexed and Osra also, thinking herself scorned, was sore at heart, although she bore herself more proudly than before. And, being very greatly disturbed in her mind concerning her beauty, she went herself again to Giraldo and charged him to paint her once more.

"And this picture," she said, "is for my own eyes and mine alone. Therefore, Signor, paint it faithfully and spare me not. For a woman is ugly, if it is well she should know it, and it seems that nobody in the kingdom will tell me the truth, although I get hints enough of it from abroad." And she frowned, and flushed, and was greatly out of temper, as any beautiful lady would in such a case most naturally be.

Giraldo bowed very low, seeking to hide the sudden blush that dyed his cheek and to conceal the great joy which the command of the Princess gave him. For by reason of having so often painted the Princess, of having so curiously studied her face, and of having spent so much time in her company, listening to her conversation and enjoying her wit and grace, this hopeless young man had become so hopelessly and desperately her lover that he no longer cared to use his brush in the service of any other lady or lord, and staid at Strelsau solely that he might again and again depict the face that he loved; and save when she sat before him he seemed now unable to ply his art at all and had not received so many commands for pictures of her he would have sat all day long idle, thinking of her, which indeed was what he did in the intervals between his labor on her portraits. But she, not imagining such presumption and folly on his part, thought that he was glad merely because she would pay him well; so she promised him more and more, if only he would paint her faithfully. And he gave her his word that he would paint her in every respect most faithfully.

"For I desire to know," said she, "what I am in truth like; for my mirror says one thing and the King of Glottenberg another. But here she stopped, remembering that such matters were not fit for Giraldo's ears. Yet he must have understood, for a strange cunning exultant smile came on his lips as he turned away and set himself to mix the colors on his palette. Thus he began this last picture and the Princess came every day and stayed long, so that Giraldo might be able to render her likeness in every most minute respect with perfect fidelity.

"For," she thought, resentfully, "either I have no eyes or they have none in Glottenberg."

But when she had thus, sitting Giraldo for hard upon a month and the picture was nearly finished and was at

dismissed her ladies, in order to be less restrained in talk with the painter, and she tried to cry out, that they might hear her where they were in an adjoining room, but her cry froze on her lips at the sight of Giraldo's passion. And he cried in a hoarse whisper:

"He shall not have the picture, he shall not have it." And as he spoke he moved nearer to the Princess, who still shrank away from him, being now in very great alarm, thinking that surely he had run mad. Yet she looked at him and looking, saw whence his madness came; and she felt pity for him and held out her clasped hands towards him, saying in a very soft voice and with eyes that gazed and tenderly:

"Ah, signor, Signor, am I tender to have lovers, and never a friend?"

At this the unfortunate painter was overcome with grief, his head between his hands, he gave a deep, half stifled sob, and then he cried:

"God's curse on me, for having slandered the beauty that I love!"

But the Princess wondered greatly what he meant by his strange cry, and turning her eyes again on him in bewildered questioning, saying, as she pointed to the picture:

"There is no slander here, Signor, unless too much praise be slander."

Giraldo made no answer in words, but springing towards her, caught her by the wrist, and drew her across the room, to the door behind the easel. With feverish haste he unlocked it and passed through. The Princess followed him in a sort of daze, not knowing what he meant, but when she had at the moment the princess gave a cry, half a scream, half laughter. For facing her she saw, each on its easel three, four, five, six pictures of herself, each beautiful and painted most lovingly; and the last of the six was the picture that had been painted by order of the King of Glottenberg. For she knew it by the attire, although the face had not been finished, and she had just seen it. A sudden enlightenment pierced her mind and she knew that Giraldo had not sent the pictures for which she had sat to him, but had kept them himself and sent others to his patrons. This strange conviction found its sure confirmation in a seventh easel which stood apart from the rest, on the other side of the door; for it supported what was in all respect a copy of the portrait on which Giraldo was now engaged, save that by cunning touches he had imparted to the face an alien and fearful aspect; for here although the features had their shape and perfect grace, yet it was the face of a devil that looked out; on the canvas, a face that a man would not have gazing at him from the wall on to the bed where he sought sleep.

But when Giraldo saw her eyes fixed on this picture, he cried, "That is for you—the other is mine. Are they not your features? The King of Glottenberg should not have even your features. But you shall have them, and if a devil looks upon such a fair work, is it not so with all fair women, that lead even to destruction? There is your true picture, Princess Osra!"

And he flung himself on a couch with a mad cry of rage and then a groan of despair.

The Princess Osra looked at him, and at the beautiful pictures, and then at the picture that was like her and yet like a devil. First she pitied the painter, and then marveled at his wonderful skill, that so transformed her without drawing a line that could be called untrue. This thinking, she stood for a while, grave and puzzled. But then the humor struck her, as it struck her house always in great things and small; and it seemed to her most ludicrous that the pictures should all be resting here in Giraldo's house, while the princess who had commanded portraits of her, had received nothing but distorted parodies of her face to the end that they might be disgusted and, abandoning the alliance of gentlemen and set out on horseback for the place where Giraldo lived in the street that runs from the Cathedral towards the western gate of Strelsau. To this day the house stands there.

The Princess sat and Giraldo painted. Behind the Princess was a window looking on to the street, and behind Giraldo was a second door, which led into an inner room. On Giraldo's easel stood the nearly finished picture, and Giraldo's eyes were alight both with love and with triumph as he turned from the Princess to the picture and from the picture to the Princess again; and she seeing something of his admiration, said with a blush:

"Is it indeed faithful, Signor?" For it seemed even to her a marvelously lovely picture.

"No, madame," answered he. "For my imperfect hand cannot be faithful to perfection."

"I pray you, do not flatter me. Have you indeed shown every fault of my face?"

"If there be a fault in your face, madame, there it is also in my picture," said Giraldo.

The Princess was silent for a moment, and then she said:

"It is better, is it not, than the picture you painted for the King of Glottenberg?"

Giraldo painted a roke or two before he answered, carelessly:

"Indeed, madame, it is more faithful than that which the King of Glottenberg has."

"Then less beautiful?" asked Osra with a petulant smile.

"Nay, I do not say that; not less beautiful," he answered.

"Perhaps he would like this one better, and give me his exchange; for I never saw his after it was finished. I think I will ask the King, write to him."

Giraldo had suddenly turned round as the Princess made this suggestion, which she spoke half in sport, half in continuing chagrin at the blindness shown by the court of Glottenberg. Now he stood staring at her with wide-open alarmed eyes; and he dropped his brushes on the floor.

"What ails you, Signor?" she cried. "I did but suggest exchanging the pictures."

He tried to regain his composure, as he stooped to pick up his brushes.

"The King of Glottenberg's picture is the best for him to have," said he solemnly. "This one, madame, I painted for you yourself, and for you alone."

"I pay the price and can do what I will with the picture," retorted the Princess haughtily. "And if I desire, I will give it to the King of Glottenberg."

Giraldo had now turned very pale, and, forgetting of the picture, stood gazing fixedly at the Princess. For he could no longer hold down in secrecy and silence the passion that possessed him, but it was declared in his eyes and in the trembling of his limbs, that the Princess rose from her chair and drank from him in alarm, regretting that she had

to it, as though it had been an idol he worshipped, a flood of wild passionate reproachful words, that Osra shivered to hear, and the purport of which she dared tell none, though for all her prayers, she could not herself forget one of them.

At last he came to her again, and plucked her roughly and rudely from the couch where she lay and dragged her behind him back to the door again and through it; and they stood together in front of the last picture, whose paint was still wet from his hand. The painted face smiled down on the trembling, pale girl, with its smile of careless, serene dignity so that now even to herself it seemed hardly to be her picture. For it was the true presentation of a King's daughter and she no better than a helpless frightened girl. It seemed to reproach her, and suddenly she drew herself to her full height and turned to Giraldo, saying: "You shall not touch it." And she stepped forward, so that she stood between him and the picture, raising her hand and forbidding him to approach it with his knife. And now the picture seemed more to be here, although while it smiled, she frowned.

But at this moment there came through the window that opened on the street the clatter of horses' hoofs. At the sound Giraldo arrested the motion that he had already made to fling himself at Princess—whether to kill her or only to thrust her away from the front of the picture she did not know. Returning to the window, he looked out, and called in seeming glee, "It is the King come to see my pictures!"

And he looked proud and happy, springing to the door of the room, he flung it open and stood there waiting for the King and gentlemen who attended the King. They were not long in coming, for Rudolf was full of anger, impatience and anxiety and ran swiftly up the staircase. His gentle man pressed into the room behind him and Giraldo drew back, keeping his face to the King and bowing again and again. But the King and the rest saw the knife in his hand; and raged and raged, and there on his clothes, while the Princess, pale and proud, stood guard on the picture on the easel. The King, in spite of his wonder, was not turned from the purpose which had brought him to the painter's house, but with a quick step darted up to Giraldo and thrust the letter of the Marquis de Merosailles in his hand, bidding him in a sharp peremptory tone to read it and give that explanation he could of the contents. 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