



**THE Lady of the Night**  
—OR—  
**Amelia Makes a Success**

CHAPTER V.  
"Is this all there is for lunch?" she inquired, looking disdainfully at the cold leg of mutton and rice pudding. "No one can say I'm faddy about my eating, but really—"  
"I—dare say Martha could cook some little thing, eh, Nora?" said Mr. Ryall nervously; "a poached egg or some little trifle—you see, Amelia has been used to—"  
"Something better than a poached egg," broke in Mrs. Ryall scornfully. "But I dare say that's the best thing that woman can manage. I never saw such a creature; she don't seem to have any idea of cooking; my coffee this morning was more like mud than coffee"—Mrs. Ryall pronounced it "corfee"—"I am sure what's the able to stand her long," she added, using Martha's own words. "I shall give her notice if she don't improve and get into my ways. What is there to drink?"  
There was only water on the table, and Mr. Ryall timidly suggested a nice glass of ale; but the lady, who, only a few short weeks ago, had been more than content to quaff a glass of honest stout at the wings of a third-rate music-hall, turned up her nose at the home-brewed October.  
"I appended to bring a bottle of whisky with me," she said, "it's on my dressing-table—no, if isn't—I remember I put it at the bottom of my wardrobe; you can't be too particular not to leave spirits about, especially with a woman like that in the house. Run up and fetch it, there's a good girl!"  
Nora went up for the whisky. The room reeked of the cheap but strong scent which Mrs. Ryall favoured, and resembled, though Nora did not know it, the dressing-room of a quick-change artiste. Clothes of various glaring colours, all in consistency had taste, had been thrown about in every direction. On the table stood a glass which, by its odour, loudly proclaimed the fact that Mrs. Ryall had already partaken of the contents of the bottle. With her heart sinking still lower, with every fibre of her being in protest and disgust, Nora fled from the room.  
Mrs. Ryall took the bottle and poured out a liberal dose of whisky, and an illiberal one of water.  
"I don't usually touch spirits in the day-time, but I feel so low—it's the journey, I suppose. And now, Reginald, dear, when we've ad our lunch, if lunch it can be called, you can show me round. I should like to see some of the other 'ouses and what the people are like. I'm fond of society, and I don't mind owning up to it; you see, I have always mixed in the very best—"  
Nora, murmuring an excuse, escaped the threatened flood, which had, no doubt, been started by the generous spirit. It seemed to her, as she saddled Tommy and rode fast across the valley, as if she were trying to ride away from the situation, that she should never be able to endure it; and yet it would have to be borne; for

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look his men into his confidence, not seldom giving them the reason which prompted the order; but woe betide the man who, through neglect or carelessness, disregarded the order. With that man Elliot had a short and easy way which nipped neglect and disobedience, in the bud, and yet somehow or other did not disturb the friendly relations between himself and Elliot. As a matter of fact, the smallest details concerning the treatment of the horses seemed to Elliot of vital importance, and he quietly insisted upon his orders being obeyed to the letter. A man who is at once gentle and firm generally gets what he wants, and Elliot was well served.  
He went round the stables, saw that the horses were comfortable for the night, held the usual little conference with Jim, a bandy-legged Irishman, and was going to his cottage, where his supper had long awaited him when he saw a figure, drawn by an Exmoor pony, coming down the narrow lane. In the jingle was a lady whom he recognized, by her mass of golden hair, as Miss Florence Bartley. She was daintily dressed, with a golf cape thrown over her shoulders; and a book lay face downwards on the seat beside her—Exmoor ponies, even when they are twenty years old, do not permit of much reading on the part of their drivers, and Miss Florence looked as if she had been too fully occupied for a perusal of the latest social-problem novel.  
Elliot, raising his cap, was passing on; but she glanced at him, her eyes grew suddenly sharp, and she pulled up and said—  
"Does this road lead to the Hall?"  
"No, it doesn't," said Elliot in his direct fashion; "you're going away from it. You must turn back till you get to the road to the left."  
"Ah, thanks," she drawled slowly; but, unseen by him, her keen eyes ran over him quickly. She was a good judge of men, this fine London lady as Elliot would have called her, and she noted the stalwart form, the grace of his bearing, and the handsome, boyish face. She remembered him in an instant, remembered the girl in whose company she had seen him, and half-unconsciously it seemed to her that such a face and figure were wasted on a farm-girl. Besides, the voice in which he had replied to her had added to the impression his personal appearance had made.  
"I have lost my way," she said with a touch of pathos and appeal which she had found very effective in her dealings with what is erroneously called the stronger sex. "I got rather bored at the Hall, and I begged them to let me have this pony and this absurd carriage—I think you call it a jingle—and to let me go for a drive by my very own self. I meant to have a thorough lase; but this little beast does not appear to be happy unless he is going full pelt. We have been half round the world, and he only consented to stop when he got into this road."  
"He knows the place—knows me," said Elliot, taking hold of the pony's diminutive head and pressing it against him affectionately. "He often runs in here when he is turned out to grass, and I have got into the habit of giving him a bit of cake." Elliot always carried some linseed cake in one of his pockets, and he produced a piece now and put it into the pony's mouth. "Yes, he knows me."  
"He has the advantage of me," said Miss Florence pleasantly. "What is your name?"  
"Elliot Graham," he said in a matter-of-fact tone. Strangely enough he felt none of the tremors, the shyness, which assailed him when he was speaking to Nora.  
"That is rather a nice name," said Miss Florence, raising her lids and then looking at him through her long lashes. "And what are you? I mean, what do you do?"  
"I am a sort of stud groom," said Elliot, "and I look after some of Sir Joseph's horses."  
"How very interesting!" she said. "I am awfully fond of horses. Dear me, how hot it is, quite like summer!"  
"It often is here in April," said Elliot.  
"Do you think you could get me something to drink?" she asked.  
"There is nothing but water," he said.  
"That will do capitally," she responded graciously.  
He went into the cottage and brought her a glass of water. He brought it on a plate, and as she took the glass she glanced up at him with evident interest and curiosity. She sipped the water—she was not in the least thirsty, it is scarcely necessary to say—and as she sipped daintily her eyes still scanned his face.  
"Thanks," she said; "I should like to see your horses; may I?"  
"Certainly," said Elliot, but with no great enthusiasm, for his supper was waiting, and he was very hungry.  
As he was hitching the pony to the railing in front of the cottage, she wondered how he, obviously a gentleman, came to be in that subordinate position. Now, Florence Bartley was not the kind to ask questions, even of herself, for mere curiosity's sake. She was a type of the numerous girls who move in smart society. Her father was an important Irish baronet, one of the men who hang about successful speculators like Sir Joseph in the hope of picking up some of the financial crumbs which fall from the

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rich man's table. Sometimes these hangers-on act as guinea-pigs; that is to say, they figure as Directors of the more or less bogus Companies promoted or financed by their patrons, receiving a fee of a guinea for each attendance at the Board, where they are supposed to transact business of which they understand little or nothing, and are expected to sign their names to any statement, however wild and improbable, and to attest balancesheets which act as bait for the simple and credulous investor.  
It is not difficult to imagine the kind of life such a girl as Florence would lead, in such a position, and in such circumstances; a life of continual struggle with what is termed general poverty; a hard-to-mouth existence, which is bad enough when one is born into it, but is almost intolerable when it falls to the lot of a person who, by birth and position, is considered to have a claim on prosperity.  
From an early age she had been compelled, so to speak, to fend for herself; and as smart Society consists of two classes, the pigeons and the rooks, by sheer necessity Florence had become a rook, and worse—a decay. Not a few of the young men, and, alas, the young girls, who had come to grief recently had been lured to the bridge or baccharat table by the apparently innocent and ingenuous Miss Florence. Sir Joseph found her almost as useful to him as his father; for, though he did not openly countenance gambling at any of his houses—he generally went to bed before the card-playing began—he relied upon her to secure guests who would be useful to him; people with titles and no money, whose names, when printed among the list of his visitors in the Morning Post, gave him a certain social prestige in the City; and other men with money, who, with fine art, could be induced to buy shares when Sir Joseph was anxious to sell them.



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