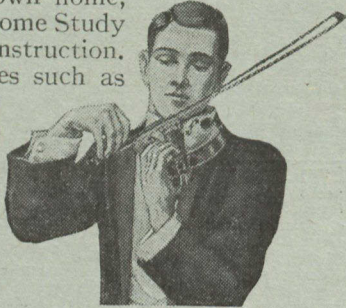


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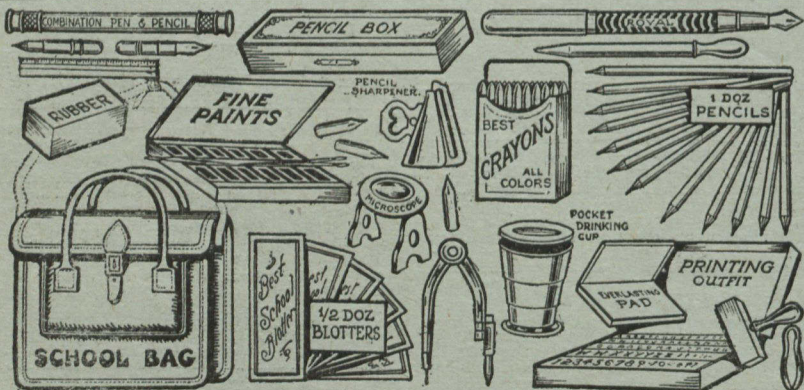
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LADY ELEANOR: LAWBREAKER

(Continued from page 51)

"Hurrah! We're the blessed audience," exclaimed Woodward.

"That's a new part for us," remarked Miss Barsanti, "and saves the bother of study."

Miles returned almost at once, ushering in Lady Eleanor, who was followed by Humble Sycamore. Acting on his master's instructions, Miles brought forward a table, placed on it pens and ink, and set a chair before it.

Woodward bowed low to Lady Eleanor. "Delighted, madam, and your most obedient servant," he said, rather thickly. "May I introduce your ladyship to most distinguished company?"

"Woodward, if you will permit me, I will do the honours of my house," announced Lord Brandon, very quietly. "Lady Eleanor—Miss Barsanti. Miss Barsanti—Lady Eleanor Beaumont, my cousin. It is no small part of the glory of Mr. Garrick, Lady Eleanor, that Miss Barsanti is one of his most capable co-workers. Lady Eleanor—Mrs. Lessingham, also of Drury Lane. My friend Woodward, you have already met. Do not think harshly of us if we seem frivolous. We play our little parts, and vanish, leaving no harm done, satisfied if our acting seems genuine while we occupy the light. I have now to sign an agreement of sale, that this good man, Sycamore, may speed upon his way. I thought it right, Lady Eleanor, that when a man signs away his patrimony his next-of-kin might properly witness the ceremony; therefore I begged the favour of your presence. Sycamore, are the papers ready?"

Sycamore spread them on the table. "Here they are, my lord. You sign along that pencilled line; the witnesses here."

Brandon seated himself and took up a pen. "Right, good scrivener."

"Lord Brandon, I ask you, for the last time, not to sign." Lady Eleanor put her request very earnestly.

"Much as it distresses me, fair cousin, to displease you, I am bound in honour to sign this document, unless there is some stronger reason to urge against it than that of sentiment."

"I have a stronger reason. Do not force me to use it. I am resolved that instrument shall not be signed, or if signed, I am determined to nullify it."

"Your reason must be powerful. Explain it, I beg of you."

Eleanor remained silent, her head bowed, and eyes shaded with one hand. Brandon, his pen poised in midair, awaited her answer.

"If ye know any just cause or im-im-pediment, I charge ye both—Gad, that's the marriage service! Let's marry the culprits!" cried the jovial Woodward, still under the influence of wine. He had received no such shock as had sobered his friend.

Mrs. Lessingham turned on him sharply with a look of stern rebuke that penetrated even his cloudy perceptions.

"Hush! We are playing at cross purposes here," she whispered.

"Well, madam?" prompted Brandon, still watching his cousin.

"Are you resolved to sign?" questioned Eleanor, her voice very low.

"Resolved!" was the decisive answer.

"Then the fate of the stubborn o'ertake you. Sophia, go to my room, get my keys, unlock the lowest drawer in my cabinet, and bring the parchment you will find there."

HURRIEDLY the maid went from the room. Brandon put down his pen, and rose, facing Lady Eleanor.

"Does the parchment you send for checkmate me?"

"Most completely, sir."

"Nothing can do that but a will, legally worded, duly signed and witnessed, leaving this property to some other than me."

"You have described the instrument, Lord Brandon."

"Good, and well played," said Brandon, still quietly, but with a grim smile on his lips. "Miles, draw back this table, and clear it of its useless paraphernalia. And Miles, pursue the flying Sophia, else you are like to miss a wife. She told me you were to marry. After her, man, and don't stand gaping there. She is at this moment footing it down the lane. Speed, or your Atalanta is lost, for your golden apples are gone."

"If gold is going, I follow it," said Miles, and was as good as his word.

"My maid is in my room, gone to do my bidding!" cried Eleanor.

"That she is not, dear cousin. She has taken flight, and you'll never see her again. Glad was she to get your order to go. She is a good servant, and forestalls her orders. What you told her to do a moment since, she did half an hour ago. Here is the will," and he produced the parchment from an inner pocket.

(Continued on page 53)

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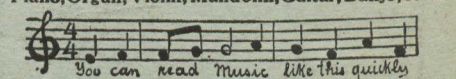
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