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## THE Lady of the Night

### Amelia Makes a Success

#### CHAPTER XVIII. "DON'T BEAT ME!"

For the whole of the next day, and several others, indeed, she avoided Elliot. He tried to get hold of her, but she was like an eel; she managed to take her meals either before or after he came in, and she carefully watched his movements so that she could evade him. Elliot felt the loss of her companionship keenly, as was very natural, and, as was also very natural, she saw more of Miss Margery. She had a knack of throwing herself in his way, if the expression is not too active a one, took his lunch to the quarry, and accepted his assistance with the cattle, assistance which Nora had grudgingly yielded. Margery had very little or nothing to say for herself, but she was seemingly quite content to follow Elliot about and listen when he spoke.

Elliot regarded her as just a pretty child, and treated her as one; and often, when she was walking beside him, or standing watching him at some odd job about the farm, he was self-consciously in her presence. It is needless to say that Nora was aware of this new companionship. From a distance she saw them together, and the sight of them, the expression on Margery's ingenuous countenance, filled Nora with impatience, contempt, and—was it jealousy?

One day, entering the sitting-room suddenly, she saw Margery sitting over the fire with her head bent, regarding something in her hand. She started as Nora came behind her; she held closed over the object, and she blushed furiously.

"What have you got there?" Nora demanded.

"Nothing," faltered Margery, moving away.

"Yes, you have," insisted Nora. "You were mooning over something, in the silly way you girls—some of you—have. Let me see what it is."

She took hold of Margery's arm, none too gently, and the girl uttered a little squeak.

"Take care, you'll break it!" she exclaimed. "There! if you must see."

She held out her hand, and Nora exclaimed angrily—

"Why, it's a blue gull's egg; one of my eggs! Where did you steal it from?"

"I didn't steal it," said Margery, with mild indignation. "Mr. Graham gave it to me."

"Then where did he steal it?" demanded Nora, still more angrily. "He got it himself, went down the cliff for it."

Nora bit her lip.

"And you asked him to get it for you, of course?"

"I said I should like some," admitted Margery.

"I thought so," said Nora scornfully. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. He might have fallen, broken his neck or his leg, or something. If you wanted any eggs, why didn't you ask me? I can get them easily enough."

"You are always so unkind, Master Cyril," whimpered Margery. "You'd have put me off, or said 'No' right out. And Mr. Graham is always kind, and does what I ask him."

"Oh, does he?" retorted Nora, with suppressed fury. "Yes, I suppose he does; he's idiot enough for anything. Oh, for goodness' sake do stop crying! What's the use of it? He's not here to see you and comfort you. How I hate girls!"

With this last stab Nora flung herself out of the house. She was angry with Margery, she was angry with herself, but most angry with Elliot, and in this charming mood, forgetting her resolution to avoid him, she went straight to the quarry. Elliot saw her in a moment. He ceased working and called up to her, with just a note of uncertainty and anxiety in his voice—

"Hullo, boy! there you are."

Presently he came up to her, and looked down at her smilingly.

"Haven't seen you for days," he remarked. "What have you been doing? Thought I had offended you."

"Why? Because I 'don't' trot about after you like a pet lamb?" retorted Nora. "I don't suppose you'd miss me. I daresay you have been able to find a companion."

"Yes," assented Elliot, with sublime innocence. "Miss Margery and I have been about together a good deal."

Nora glared, her lip curled with lofty contempt.

"Then I'm sure you haven't missed me," she said. "She's just the kind of pet lamb a man likes, trotting and bawling at his side. I suppose she's got you to do all sorts of odd jobs for her, as she used to get me."

"I daresay," said Elliot. "She's a nice little girl; reminds me of a little wayside flower."

"Oh, she does, does she?" commented Nora. "I know that kind of wayside flower—so simple, so innocent! Wayside flower! How blind you men are! Just because a girl's got a head of hair like a mop of tow, and eyes like a saucer, and can't say Roo to a goose—I suppose she talks to you sometimes, though—you think she's like a daisy or a buttercup! That girl is as artful as a cat!"

"And I'm hanged if you're not as spiteful as one," he said, evidently much amused. "What's the girl done to you that you should be so rough on her, eh, boy?"

"Nothing," snapped Nora; "she hasn't even got me to go down the cliff after eggs for her."

Elliot laughed again. "Oh, I see. That's the trouble, is it? You're jealous, Cyril?"

Nora's face flamed, then grew suddenly pale.

"And you are stupid and foolish," she said.

"That's true enough," he assented, with so simple a gravity that Nora's anger melted.

"That's just it," she said. "You'd better let Margery alone—"

Elliot regarded her with a deeper gravity and with a sternness which was unusual with him.

"Look here, my boy," he said; "don't you talk nonsense of that sort. But there, you didn't mean it, I know. I'll show you the plans of the cutting down to the beach, and the new quay."

He drew the papers from his pocket, and they bent over them. Their heads were so close together that they almost touched, and Nora breathed a little hard.

"I think I shall run over to Nelsworthy and show these to Mr. Trunton," said Elliot thoughtfully. "He might not understand them unless I explained them."

"Oh, yes, he would," said Nora quickly; "they are plain enough for anyone to understand; but they are very dirty. Why didn't you wash your hands before you drew them?"

"I did," he replied innocently; "but

somehow they got dirty all the same. My huge fist wasn't made for this kind of thing."

"Look here," said Nora, "I'll copy them for you neatly, if—"

"If what?" he asked.

"If you'll promise not to go after any more eggs for Margery," said Nora. "Oh, don't fancy I'm jealous—how absurd! But I don't want you to break your neck—before you've finished this business."

"I see," he said. "I'll promise not to get any more eggs—for Margery. What a queer lad you are!"

Nora did not notice the pause before "for Margery," and was satisfied. She took the plans and went off with them, resolving to take some time over the copying. The prospect of his leaving the island had caused her a sudden sinking of the heart; it would be horrible without him. Day after day he asked for those plans, and day after day she put him off with one excuse or another. Elliot did not worry about it overmuch; he was growing strangely contented with his life; the lines were disappearing from his face, the harassed expression from his eyes.

The time was approaching when Hodges and Shuffley would stomp up their rent, and Nora herself would have to leave the island. It was she who began to look anxious and preoccupied. She now again joined Elliot in his rambles, and hovered about him at the quarry, and it was evident that Elliot was much relieved and gratified by this renewal of their friendship. He not only kept his promise and made no further presentation of eggs to Margery, but he took little or no notice of her. These days were happy ones for Nora—would have been perfectly happy if she had not known that they were rapidly drawing to a close.

One evening she brought down her eggs to the sitting-room, and began sorting them and wrapping them in some wool. He sat on the other side of the table, watching her with interest.

"Not a bad collection, Cyril," he said. "No; it's nearly complete," said Nora. "There only one egg I want—the Great Kkita. I saw a couple of the birds the other day off the Long Cliff, but they've nested rather far down. It has been raining, and the cliff was too soft for me to get at them. They're beautiful birds, and they're rather rare here. I should like to have had one of the eggs. I am going to give them to Miss Ralton when I go back."

"That won't be for some time, I suppose," said Elliot easily.

"Oh, yes, it will," replied Nora. "I shall be gone before the 25th."

Elliot looked up sharply.

"So soon as that?" he said gravely. He thought for a moment, then he added, "No, I can't go with you. I've decided that I must wait and see Shuffley through that new cutting. The 25th."

He sighed and frowned. "I'll be precious lonely here without you, boy. By George, I shall miss you!"

"Oh, you'll get on all right," remarked Nora carelessly, and shooting a glance at Margery, who at that moment came in.

Elliot got up, lit his pipe, and with a short "Good-night" went off. Nora came down to breakfast at the usual time next morning, but Elliot had not arrived. They waited for a little while, and then they went on with their breakfast. Hodges remarking that no doubt Mr. Graham was kept at the quarry. Nora hung about after the meal, expecting Elliot to turn up every moment, but he did not come, and about ten o'clock she sauntered down to the quarry, with a huge slice of saffron cake in her pocket, in case he should have been foolish enough to have gone without any breakfast.

He was not at the quarry, and Shuffley informed her that Mr. Graham had got up early and gone off somewhere, and that he, Shuffley, had not set eyes on him since.

"He said as he'd give me a hand with the blasting this morning," he remarked complacently, "but it bain't like him to break his word."

"Which way did he go?" inquired Nora.

"I donno," said Shuffley. "On the cliffs, most like."

Nora went up to the heights, looked round, and coo-ed to him; but no response came to the clear notes that thrilled on the still air. She was perplexed, but certainly not anxious, and she walked along the edge of the cliff expecting to find him lounging on the grass and smoking his pipe, having forgotten his promise to help Shuffley.

Suddenly she stopped, her preoccupation vanished, and she was all on the alert; for she saw, at the extreme edge of the cliff, a couple of footmarks, which from their size she knew must be Elliot's. Her eyes traced them inland on the short, wet grass, but they stopped at the edge of the cliff, and with a sharp sting of fear, she threw herself down and looked over. The cliff, after a slight slope, was extremely precipitous. She saw the footmarks descending the slope, then they disappeared. She knew that he had gone down, and she knew that he had not returned, for the footmarks pointed one way only. At that moment she suffered as Elliot had suffered the day he had watched her balanced on the treacherous ledge. With a sick feeling at her heart, she peered into the depths below.

A sea mist hung above the beach, and she could distinguish nothing. She coo-ed quaveringly, but no answer came, no sound save the breaking of



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the waves on the rocks and the mournful skirl of the seabirds. She tried to assure herself that it was all right; but she still lay there, staring apprehensively into the mist below. Presently a puff of wind came; the mist rose somewhat and dispersed, for a moment or two only, but long enough for her to see a form stretched out on a strip of sand between two boulders. It was Elliot.

CHAPTER XIX. THE SILLY CRIMINAL.

Mrs. Ryall was enjoying herself exceedingly in London. It was like old times, only "fatter," as she would have put it; for there is a great deal of spending in a hundred pounds, especially, as she would have put it again, when you know the ropes.

In Company with "Monty Gert" and other stars of the "masse" stage, she went about from shop to shop, not only buying what she fancied, but driving the assistants to the verge of distraction by insisting upon examining others she had not the slightest intention of purchasing. To women of Mrs. Ryall's nature there are few joys more keen than that of being surrounded by articles of feminine attire, which they cause to be displayed for the mere pleasure of looking at them.

Then how delightful, after the shopping, were the little dinners at the would-be fashionable Boho restaurant, where you can obtain six courses, including wine, for half a crown. That the courses all tasted alike, and the wine was sometimes manufactured by an ingenious chemist somewhere in the vicinity of Whitechapel, did not matter to Mrs. Ryall and her companions, who grew noisy and hilarious over the feast, and carried their good spirits to a neighbouring music-hall, finishing up at a similar restaurant with similar food. It was delightful to pose as one of the "landed gentry" and to display ostentatiously her wealth; and Mrs. Ryall was in the seventh heaven of gratified vanity and self-importance; and only at times did the skeleton at the banquet present itself in the shape of a reflection that the glorious "high old time" was passing rapidly, that the money was flying quite as swiftly, and that she would have to return to Byeworthy, to confess that she had spent her bribe and had done nothing to earn it.

She had paid the thousand pounds into a bank, and had not yet touched it, had not even intended to do so; but one morning she discovered that her hundred pounds had nearly run out, and, of course, she drew a small cheque on the purchase money. Then she began to consider the situation, and she grew exasperated by the thought that Nora was the cause of the trouble which she had now seriously to face.

Where could the stupid girl be hiding herself? It was possible that Nora had gone abroad, as she had reported, if so, it might be impossible to trace her. She might have taken another name—have resolved never to return. And even if she did come back, it might not be for years. By that time it was very likely that Sir Joseph would have changed his mind about the land, and Nora would lose a large sum of money. Really, it was her duty to guard against such a calamity.

(To be continued)

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