THE Lady of the Night

—OR—

Amelia Makes a Success

CHAPTER XI.

NORA'S FIRST REFUGE.

The lady leant back and was soon absorbed in her book. They came to a division in the road, and Nora asked—"Which way, ma'am?"

The old lady looked up at Nora and at the two roads before them, as if in doubt; then she jerked her head to the right and returned to her book. The road wound steeply to the moors, and the way grew more remote and solitary every mile that Jacky crawled. Nora wondered whether they were ever going to reach their destination, but presently she saw some chimneys rising above the tops of a clump of fir-trees, and, coming to an old iron gateway, she pulled up, shrewdly suspecting that though the old lady might happen to live there, she would be quite capable of forgetting the fact and allowing Nora to drive on till Doomsday. It was a good guess, for, as Jacky stopped, his owner looked up from her book reluctantly, and said with an air of surprise:—

"Well, boy, why don't you drive in?"

Nora was about to whip up Jacky, but the old lady stopped her with a grip of the black-gloved hand.

"Don't touch him with the whip," she said, "or he'll bolt. Did you ever read Zimmerman on 'Solitude'?" she added, as she laid the book down.

Nora replied in the negative, and the old lady regarded her with disapprobation.

"Of course not; boys never read anything; and you are like the rest of them, I daresay. You are not fond of books?"

"Not particularly, ma'am," said Nora; "I have not had very much time for reading; I have had so much work to do."

"Boys never work," said the old lady decisively; "I know them; I have had them." She had been regarding Nora attentively, and now she inquired abruptly—

"What are those marks on your face, boy?"

Nora's face flamed, and the bars, now blue, showed still more plainly.

"I—I had an accident," she replied in her low contralto.

"That's not true, boy," said the old lady severely; "you have been fighting. And I know what about—some silly, empty-headed girl."

"No, it was not," Nora said, and in a tone that must have carried conviction for the questioner's face relaxed.

"Well, I'm glad to hear that," she said. "I hate girls—nasty, troublesome, good-for-nothing things! You won't catch me having any of them about me. I've tried them, and given them up long ago."

"I don't care for girls myself, ma'am," said Nora demurely.

The old lady was evidently pleased by this announcement.

"You must be an unusually sensible lad," she remarked.

They wound through an old avenue, and came in sight of a comfortable-looking house, half-farmhouse, half-mansion. As Nora pulled up at the door an old man came round from the back to take the horse. As he took the reins from Nora he stared at her, but without much surprise, as if he were accustomed to evidences of his mistress's eccentricity; and his surprise by no means increased when the old lady said—

"I have found a boy for you, Jacob. He startled Jacky, and nearly made him fall down, but I daresay he won't do it again. He seems rather a nice boy, and he doesn't like girls. That's something in his favour at any rate; we shan't have a trouble that way."

"What's his name?" asked Jacob, with an air of resignation, still staring at Nora.

The old lady looked as if she were trying to remember, then she said—

"I have forgotten. What is your name, boy?"

Nora had thought of everything but this, and she almost blurted out her own name, but she caught herself in time, and for a second or two sought wildly for an alias. Suddenly she remembered a name she had seen in some book, and said—

"Cyril Merton," and the next instant wished she had said "John Smith."

The old lady looked at her with a touch of disapproval.

"It's a silly name," she remarked; "but I suppose you can't help it. Take him away, Jacob, and make him useful—Stop! you don't smoke, do you?"

"No," replied Nora, colouring.

"I am glad to hear that. Eh, Jacob?" said the old lady with an air of satisfaction. "I don't allow tobacco; not because I don't like it, but because of the matches. Half the fires are caused by men, and boys especially, throwing their matches about; and we don't want to be burnt in our beds, do we Jacob?"

Jacob grunted and led the carriage away to the stables, and Nora followed.

"Can you unharness him?" asked Jacob.

"Oh, yes," replied Nora.

"Then let's see you do it," said Jacob. Whereupon he seated himself on a bucket, produced an old clay of remarkable blackness, and proceeded to fill and smoke it.

"Why, you are smoking!" said Nora, with some surprise. "I thought——"

"Don't you begin to think now!" admonished Jacob; "boys ain't no right to think, and they should go about with their eyes shut till they're told to open 'em. What Miss Deborah doesn't see she doesn't know—and she doesn't smell; and I don't throw my matches about. I'm an old man, and can't do without my pipe; but let me catch you smoking and—— Now, take him in and give him a rub down and a feed; you'll find the bin in the corner."

He looked on while Nora was engaged in the task, and he grunted with something approaching satisfaction when it was finished.

"Now, you wash your hands at the pump and come indoors, and I'll show you how to lay the lunch. I was to show you how to make yourself useful, Miss Deborah said, and we'll begin at once."

Nora followed him into the house. It was an old-fashioned but comfortable-looking place, though it had the usual appearance of a house that is untended by women. The dining-room was dusty, and looked as if it had not been swept for a week—as probably it had not been. The plate on the side board was tarnished; there was a musty smell, which no doubt proceeded from the damask curtains, which had evidently not been removed for years. Nora could not help thinking of what Martha would say if she could see the room. She helped Jacob lay the cloth, and waited with some curiosity to see the kind of meal he would produce. He appeared presently with a tinned tongue on a plate, a loaf of bread, and some tea; and as these were arranged the mistress of the house entered. She gazed at Nora with an astonishment that plainly indicated that she had already forgotten her new servant; then, remembering, she murmured—

"Oh, yes, the boy with the silly name."

She had a book in her hand, and she laid it beside her plate. Jacob went up to her, and took the book away in a matter-of-fact manner, and Miss Deborah, missing it, with a sigh turned to her lunch. Seeing that she had started, Jacob beckoned Nora out of the room. Too amazed for speech, Nora sat down in the kitchen, with Jacob, to a similar tinned tongue.

"I suppose you can eat cold meat?" said Jacob; "if not, you'll soon get used to it. We most always have it cold, because it saves cooking."

"Is there really no other servant but yourself?" asked Nora, as she looked round the untidy kitchen.

"Yes; there's you," replied Jacob laconically. "If you mean, is there any woman servant, there isn't. Miss Deborah can't abide 'em; nor can I for that matter. We get on very well. You don't notice anything amiss, do you?" he added, looking round with an air of satisfaction.

Nora pretended to be too absorbed to a slice of tongue to reply; but, as she glanced round, her fingers itched for a basin of hot water and a tea-cloth; and when Jacob had departed she set to work to "tidy up" as Martha would have called it, producing a result which startled the old man when he returned, with the intention of preparing the dinner.

But Nora had already set about that. She had found some meat in the larder, and with the addition of some of the things in the basket which they had brought from Porlash, she got together a meal which was probably better than any that had appeared on Miss Deborah's table for many years. Miss Deborah, however, sat down without any expression of surprise, so that Nora began to wonder whether her exertions had been worth while; but she was somewhat rewarded by the grunts of approval which Jacob emitted as he ate his share of the repast.

Nora was woefully tired after dinner, and Jacob, perhaps touched by his generous meal, took her to a bedroom over the stable.. It need scarcely be said that it was not luxuriously furnished, and anything but neat; but Nora knew that she could improve on its appearance and make it comfortable, and she was only too thankful for any place where she could be alone. She was almost too tired to think; but as she stretched her weary limbs on the hard bed her mind travelled back to the Grange, her father and her step-mother, and to Eliot Graham. It was he whom she saw, and of him she thought as her eyes closed heavily; she wondered what he was thinking of her, for thinking of her she knew he would be.

The scene in the plantation had not meant nearly so much to her as it had to him, for he loved her with all a strong man's passionate love, with the first love of his life, and one that would endure; whereas the passion that had absorbed him had laid its fingers but lightly on Nora's heart. She had not been brought up in the region of sentiment in which so many girls move, and she, therefore, was not prepared to meet that passion half-way. And yet, in that heart of hers, there was a vague longing for him, for a sight of the handsome boyish face, and a touch of the strong hand; and as she fell asleep she felt his kiss upon her lips and heard his voice.

She woke early, and with a start. It was a lovely morning, and the sun was pouring into the room. She got up and went out; there was nobody about, and having fed Jacky, she wandered round the place. It seemed to stand alone on the moor; there were no other houses in sight. The grounds were of some extent, but had run wild. There was a sort of farm, and Nora's heart warmed at the sight of a couple of cows in a meadow. She drove them in and milked them, and prepared the breakfast.

While she was doing it Jacob came in, looked round, grunted, and told Nora to take up some hot water to Miss Deborah. He went to the foot of the stairs and pointed out the room, and Nora went up. On the wide landing was some remarkably fine old furniture; there were also some pictures on the wall; and having knocked at Miss Deborah's door and set down the water, she stopped and looked at the pictures. Some of them were portraits, most of them old, but a few of them were modern; and as she wandered from one to the other, she stopped suddenly, with a startled feeling, before the portrait of a gentleman.

It was an extremely handsome face, that of a man in the heyday of youth; but the fact that startled North was that the face bore an extraordinary resemblance to Eliot Graham. There was the same frank, boyish expression, the same colour in the eyes, the brown wavy hair. The sight of the portrait brought Eliot before her so vividly that she lost herself, and was brought back to the present by Jacob calling up to ask if she meant to stay there all day. She went down, looking over her shoulder at the picture, and it seemed to her that its eyes followed her pityingly.

(to be continued.)

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Singular or Plural.

(From the Manchester Guardian.)

Should the word "Government" take a single or a plural verb after it? The White Paper just issued giving the "Correspondence between his Majesty's Government and the United States Ambassador respecting Economic Rights in Mandated Territories" shows a divergence in this respect between the two parties to the controversy. Mr. Davis used the singular verb throughout. In his Notes the Government of the United States "has been informed," "desires to point out," "ventures to suggest," "believes that it is entitled," "has noted the publication," and so on. He follows the same practice in his comments on the Notes he has received from the other side: "It is gratifying to learn that His Majesty's Government is in full sympathy"; "the position the British Government appears to have assumed."

Lord Curzon, on the other hand, seems to regard the Administration of which he is a member as requiring plural verbs to express its convictions: "His Majesty's Government have found it necessary," "are of the opinion," "fully agree," "are aware," and so forth. In one curiously worded sentence he says that "His Majesty's Government are pleased to observe that the United States Government appreciates." At first sight one might be tempted to read in this a subtle recognition of the fact that nowadays the British Government, in contrast to the American, no longer speaks with a single voice. The transition from the plural to the singular, however, cannot be more than accidental, for in the late sentence of his final Note Lord Curzon refers to "the absence of particulars which the United States Government were requested to furnish."

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