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

**CHAPTER IX.**  
**SIR JOSEPH MEETS WITH A CHECK**

"The wife is dead," said Trunton. "We should have to deal with the girl."

Sir Joseph swore under his breath. "That complicates matters," he said. "She's under age."

"Yes," said Mr. Trunton. "But under the will, this property comes into her possession when she reaches the age of eighteen; in these parts we consider girls have reached legal womanhood at that age. This piece of land will be hers in a few weeks. She is a sharp girl. She would want managings. Anyway, we can't do anything without her. It's a pity."

Sir Joseph turned on him with an impatient snarl. "A pity! I should think it was! This is a big thing, a tremendous thing! And we are at the mercy of a girl! But something will have to be done; we shall have to take it over. Better come up to the house now."

To Nora's immense relief they moved away. She had listened mechanically, without taking any interest in what they were saying, and the moment they were gone the subject of their conversation slipped from her mind. If it had never occurred to her, and if it had done, she was not in the state of mind to attach any importance to it, much less to act upon it. Her one great desire was to get away from the granite, to place herself beyond capture.

She was stealing along the plantation when she saw two or three people coming through the lodge gate. They were people from the Hill, who had walked down the road, with its recently planted trees. A little ahead of the group was the girl, Florence. They passed Nora, and she thought that they had not seen her; but Florence lingered behind the others to pick some flowers, and Nora was watching her impatiently when suddenly Florence passed, over the narrow path and came straight towards her. The faint of not having seen her, the sudden approach, took Nora by surprise, and she stood gazing at the beautiful girl in speechless amazement.

"Oh, it's you," said Florence in a low tone, and with a little movement of the hand, as if to suppress a cry from Nora. "I thought I caught sight of a bit of a woman's dress. What are you doing here, may she ask? Of course!"—she smiled, and her lips curled with a kind of amused contempt.—"You have come to meet your sweetheart."

The attack was so sudden as the speaker's approach, and Nora met it with silence, her bosom heaving, her face suddenly pale, so pale that the marks stood out plainly in red bars.

"Or you have met already?" said Florence. "What's that on your face? You have had a blow, haven't you? Ah, I see—a lover's quarrel—Wait!"

But Nora turned and fled. This fresh indignity almost stupefied her. Once or twice since she had left the house she had thought of Eliot Graham, a vague desire to see him once more, to wish him good-bye, had come to her, but she had thrust it aside, for she could not have borne his eyes upon her face. And now the other girl, this fairly-dressed lady, had taunted her, accused her.

Half-mad with humiliation she reached the fence, got over it, and gained the road. At first she thought of turning towards the station; but the last train had gone. Besides, it would be easy to track her along the line, so she turned aside in the direction of the seaport town. The night had no terrors for her; the restlessness in her veins urged her on to flight, and she walked along the by-ways, avoiding the small hamlets where she might have been seen and recognized. For hours she kept on her way, unable to think, though she tried hard to do so. Her life seemed to have been caught up into a phantasmagoria, in which only one thing was real and palpable, the burning bars across her cheek.

The dawn arose, and gave place to the fresh glory of a Spring morning. A feeling of faintness was beginning to creep over her and she knew that she must have food; but yet she dared not go to one of the farmhouses and ask for a glass of milk, for if there were any and she cried, any description of her published, she would be easily identified in a country where strangers are rare, and any incident out of the common attracted attention. She got a drink of water from a brook, and bathed her face, and, after resting a while, went on her way. Somewhere about six o'clock she climbed a hill, and looked down upon the little seaport town of Porlish, lying in the hollow of the bay. She thought that she could buy food there, and perhaps find some means of proceeding by coach or carrier to one of the larger towns, and she was going down the hill, encouraged by a definite purpose, when she saw a boy seated by the wayside.

He was a boy about her own size and age, dressed like a farm hand, and a bundle lay beside him. With surprise Nora saw, as he got near to him, that he was playing with a dirty, much-used pack of cards, and he was so absorbed in his occupation, that he did not hear her until she was almost close upon him. Then he looked up with an awful squint, gathered up the cards with a rustic deftness, and scowling at her, said—

"You might be a cat for the way you walk! What do 'ee come sneaking on people for?"

Nora stopped and looked down at him absently.

"Can you tell me how far it is to Porlish?" she asked.

"Ees 'ee 'ere?" said the youth. "What do 'ee want to know for?"

"Because I am going there," said Nora wearily.

"What be you going there for? Situation?" he asked. "Ee looks as if you'm come a long way." He nodded in the direction of right angles to that from which Nora had come. "I am out of a situation, and be going to try my luck at sea—Talking of luck, try 'ee ever play with these'm?" He jerked his head at the cards, and eyed Nora with a cunningly suppressed eagerness. The question was so irrelevant to the subject of Nora's thoughts that she stared silently at him.

"Fast-pate things," he said, "no-thing like 'em for passing the time! 'ee 'eard 'em and have a hand do 'ee squat down and have a hand w' me; 'ee'll play beagar my neighbour. Oh, you needn't be afraid; there's nobody about, and if 'ee went straight to Porlish 'ee'd find all the shops shut. Do 'ee, now! I'll play 'ee for a shilling."

Nora shook her head, and smiled unconsciously at his eagerness.

"I don't want to play cards with you," she said. "Besides, I haven't any money to lose." "Ee added, to soothe the disappointment with which his face was overcast.

"But 'ee might 'e lose," he said, "and if you be afraid of your money, play me for some else. I do love cards so, and I'd rather play for love than not at all. It's because of them that I lost my situation. Tell 'ee what," his eyes had been roaming over her. "I'll play 'ee for that little brooch on your dress. It beant gold, I reckon, and I can match it."

He took out a few shillings and some coppers from his pocket, and stooped them alluringly.

"It is gold," said Nora. "You are very young to be so fond of cards. They will lead you into trouble."

"Now, do 'ee stop that!" he broke in impatiently and reproachfully. "Don't 'ee begin to breach to me; I've had enough of 'ee! 'Twas 'ee that was preeshin' from morning to night where I've come from. You see it's gold, and I'll take your word for it, 'ee 'ee looks a truthful young oman. Well, I can match it; there's a new suit of clothes in that bundle, and I'll set them agen your brooch. I reckon they do cost as much or more than 't did. Oh, 'ee needn't be afraid of deprivin' me of clothing, I don't want 'em. I shall get another suit when I get aboard a ship."

Nora shook her head and passed on. But she had not gone many yards when she stopped, her back turned towards the boy, who was calling after her in angry contempt and derision.

A thought, an idea, had struck her, which sent the blood to her face, and made her heart leap. She was going to match it! She was going to fight for existence; disadvantages to fight for existence; she was thick in her path. All her life she had wished to be a boy; now the desire was intensified by cruel circumstance. In that bundle were the means of not only concealing her identity, but her sex. It would be easy to face the world, to obtain employment, to reach safety, if that bundle were in her possession.

At another time the temptation however great, would have assailed her in vain; the wildness of the idea would have occurred to her and deterred her; but she was overwrought, dominated by one purpose, that of flight, of escape—was ready to catch at any straw blown by any eccentric wind.

Stilling the fierce beating of her heart, and assuming a careless manner, she went back to the grotesque boy, and taking the brooch from her bosom, held it out to him.

"Do 'ee mean as 'ee'll play?" he exclaimed, with keen satisfaction.

"No," she said. "I won't play cards with you, but I will give you the brooch—for that bundle."

His face fell.

"Well, do 'ee let's cut for it anyhow," he said.

"No," she said decisively. "I don't want to play cards. I will buy it with this brooch, or not at all."

"You'm a contrary and cantankerous female. You'm afraid of losing your brooch, that's what you be. You'm as poor-spirited as a mouse.—Hill here!" he cried. "Nora, already half-ashamed of her purpose, had turned away. I'll swoop with 'ee, though I'd much sooner have played for 'in. Here you be!" He pushed the bundle towards her, and almost snatched the brooch from her hand. Sell 'em at Porlish, or give 'em to your little brother!"

Nora took up the bundle, turning her crimson face away from him.

"Yes—I don't know. Good-morning."

"Hi! I'll toss 'ee for a penny agen this tick to carry it w'!" he gapped after her; but Nora went on her way with swift but unsteady steps.

A little further down the road she saw a half-ruined shed standing at the end of a long field. She looked round quickly. The boy had fallen to his rights again; there was no one in sight. She went through the gate into the field, keeping out of sight behind the hedge, and entered the shed.

**CHAPTER X.**  
**AMELIA MAKES A SUCCESS.**

Ryall had gone back to the house in response to his wife's call. She was standing in the passage, her fury not yet burnt out, her face flushed, her thin lips working.

"I've just been out to find Nora," he stammered. "You—you were rather hard on her, Amelia. You see Nora is rather—rather a high-spirited girl, and she hasn't been used—"

"No; that's just it!" broke in Mrs. Ryall. "She's 'ad no one to look after 'er and keep 'er in order. She's been mistress here too long; but I'm mistress now, and I'll let 'er know it. I'm not the woman to 'ave the life given to her. I've put up with 'er impudence quite long enough. She showed it the first night I come, and she's turned up'er hose at me ever since—though goodness knows why," she exclaimed with a scornful snort. "I'm as good as she is, at any rate. My father was—"

Ryall looked over his shoulder to the dark square of the open door, and shuffled uneasily.

"I don't like her to be out all alone there. She must be swiftly cut up. She's never been struck before, and—er—er—I wish you had not done it, Amelia."

"Oh, you'd have 'ad me stand 'er impudence and said nothing? Not me! Not from a bit of a girl like that. I wouldn't stand it if she was my own child. It's done 'er good, and I'll do 'er good to stop out there and think it over a bit. She'll realize who's mistress 'ere; and the sooner she does so the better. It's had enough for me to find I've married a poor man, and that I've sentenced myself for life to the most Gawd-forsaken place I ever dreamt of. A pretty market I've brought by pig-to, and me standing so high in 'the profession,' and so much sought after! Me that might have married a title! You just let her stop out there and come to 'er senses. She'll be all right in the morning. You come in, I'm going to bed, and you'd better do the same; we don't want any more scenes to-night."

(To be continued)

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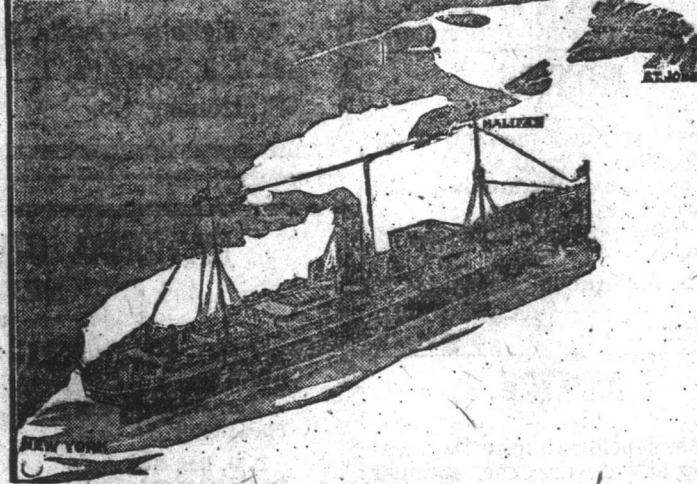
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