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## THE Lady of the Night

### Amelia Makes a Success

CHAPTER XVII.

"And they have such a tremendous advantage in this place; with a proper system of running the stone down to the quay they could ship—oh, they could go on shipping till all was blue! They could make a rough harbor in the cove, and a proper quay. I shall write to Mr. Trunton about it."

"I should," said Nora; "they'll appoint you manager, and you'll make your fortune. But perhaps you wouldn't like to be buried alive in a lonely, desolate place like this?"

"I shouldn't care," he said moodily. "I'd as lief spend my days here as anywhere else."

Nora shot a glance at him from the corner of her eye.

"You speak as if you were an old man, or as if you had had a great deal of trouble," she said with a short laugh.

"Yes; I have had some trouble," he said after a moment's silence. "You wouldn't understand if I told you what it was. You are too young."

"How do you know?" retorted Nora. "I fancy I could make a guess—young as I am."

Elliot looked at her with some surprise and curiosity on his open countenance, and after a pause Nora said shrewdly—

"Shall I guess?"

"You can if you like," he replied; "I expect you'll be very far wrong."

"And I expect not," said Nora. She knew that she was venturing on dangerous ground, but the temptation to learn the truth from his own lips was irresistible. "I have always known that the trouble that men make the most fuss over, the one that hits them hardest, is about some woman."

"The surprise on Elliot's face deepened. "You are a wonderful kind of boy," he said. "What do you know about women?"

"Nothing," she replied; "I know Nora, quickly and devoutly; but I know something about men. Now, then have I guessed right?"

"You have, boy," said Elliot moodily. "And you are right; no other trouble hits a man so hard; there's nothing so difficult for him to get over as the loss of the girl he—cares for. I hope you won't find that out some day."

"I'm perfectly certain I never shall," said Nora emphatically. "I don't like women, and I can't understand why you—men make yourselves so silly about them."

"You'd better wait a while," said Elliot. "Wait till you've met the sweetest, the dearest girl in all the world, and got to want her so badly that nothing else matters. Wait till you think you have got her, and then find that you have lost her for ever. That's my case—But we don't want to talk about it."

"Why not?" asked Nora. "Tell me all about her. I'll do you good."

"There's nothing more to tell," he said. "It's all over and done with, and I've got to live it through."

"Did you have a quarrel, or did she hit you?" inquired Nora, rather in fear and trembling, but still finding the temptation irresistible.

"Neither," said Elliot shortly. "There was a misunderstanding, a mistake. It was no fault of Nora's— He checked himself and bit his lip.

Nora turned her head away, and there was silence for a minute.

"It was my cousin, then, over at Byeworthy?" she said quietly.

Elliot nodded. "Yes," he said. "The name slipped out. But, now you know, you'll respect my confidence, Cyril?"

"Why, of course," assented Nora. "But I shouldn't take the matter too seriously. What's the use? You said she was going to marry another man, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Elliot. "I met her step-mother—did you know that her father had married again?"

"Yes," said Nora, in a dry voice.

"I met Mrs. Ryall in London—"

"In London!" exclaimed Nora unguardedly. "Why, what was she—"

"She told me," went on Elliot, paying no attention to the question, "there's no doubt about it. I have lost her, and you'd understand what I feel if you had seen her—known her. But I must try and fight through it, as you say."

He rose and shook himself, and, catching Nora by the shoulder, shook her and laughed with a forced gaiety.

"You come down into the quarry and get a little exercise, young man."

Red, as if with indignation, Nora jerked herself free from the big hand and turned away defiantly.

"I'm not going to do anything of the kind," she flung back at him. "I'm going birds'-nesting." She stopped when she had gone a few yards and called back at him—

"Mind you write that letter to Mr. Trunton to-night."

And, strangely enough, Elliot called back an obedient "I will."

CHAPTER XVIII  
"DON'T BEAT ME!"

Elliot Graham took a great liking to Cyril. The lad amused and interested him, and also puzzled him; for Cyril was a strange mixture of boyish impudence and audacity and, at times, of a reserve and aloofness far beyond his years.

Elliot worked hard at the quarry, and formulated his plans for its development; but he always found leisure for a stroll with Cyril; and the lad's companionship exerted a soothing influence on Elliot.

"Seems to me you're awfully sharp, youngster," he remarked one day, as they were strolling towards a part of the cliffs, where Nora had located a fine nest of rare seabirds. "You ought not to be wasting your time like this. You ought to be out in the world. Haven't you any father and mother?"

"No," said Nora, a lump rising in her throat.

"Anyway, you must have some friends," said Elliot, "come one who cares about your welfare."

"No, I haven't that I know of," said Nora. "Come to that, haven't you any?"

friends to look after you? You seem to want them a precious deal more than I do. What are you doing here on Lonaway? Why don't you go out into the world, and make your fortune?"

Elliot laughed his short laugh. "That's one for me," he said. "You're always ready, Cyril. But I have got this quarry to see to, while you are doing nothing."

"I beg your pardon," retorted Nora. "I am going for those eggs, and a pretty stiff bit of work it will be. Here we are, this is the place. Lie down and look just below you. See there," she continued, as Elliot obeyed, "it's just in that hollow place above the ledge. It's wonderful how artful the birds are; they build in places as difficult to get at as if the island were full of birds'-nesters with nothing else to do but rob the nests. But I think I can get this one; there's a shrub that looks as if it would hold, halfway down to the ledge. I can steady myself by that just long enough for me to reach the eggs. I only want one of them; it would be cruel to take them all. Just give me a hand, will you, till I find my footing."

Elliot, looking down into the great depths below, shuddered, and rose to his feet.

"You won't do anything of the kind," he said; "you'd slip and break your silly young neck. What do you want the eggs for? What's the use of them? Anyhow, you aren't going after this one; it's too risky. Look here, if you really want the beauty thing, I'll go down and get it for you."

Nora laughed derisively.

"You'd certainly break your silly neck," she said. "That shrub isn't strong enough to hold you for a minute, and I doubt whether the ledge is. You are too heavy for this kind of work, while I am light; and I am used to it, too."

"That may be," retorted Elliot; "but you won't go down, all the same."

"Oh, very well," said Nora, throwing herself down on the grass.

They gazed at the sea in silence for a minute or two, then suddenly Nora said—

"I fancy I hear Margery calling out; she has let one of the cattle astray, I suppose. You'd better go and help her."

He rose at once, and went in the direction in which Nora had jerked her head. But there was no Margery in sight, and he returned to the edge of the cliff to find that Nora had disappeared. He looked over and saw her standing on the narrow ledge, clutching the frail support of the shrub with one hand, and feeling in the nest with the other. She looked up at him triumphantly, and laughed defiantly. Elliot's heart grew sick, his brain whirled. Then, of course, fear gave place to anger.

"Come up, come up at once!" he cried sternly.

"All right; wait till I get the eggs," called back Nora. "There are four of them, and I'm trying to pick out the biggest. Would you like one? If so, I'll bring two."

"You come up!" he commanded her.

"Leave the eggs where they are, and come up at once, or I'll fetch you," Nora laughed again, and, with unnecessary deliberation, took a couple of eggs and put them in her pocket; then she looked round her as if she were enjoying the scene, and at last began the perilous upward climb. Elliot leant over as far as he could, and stretched out his hand; presently it grasped hers lightly, he lugged her up the last few feet, then clutching her by the collar, he said, with an outburst of anger—

"Till teach you to play tricks on me, young man! I'm going to give you a good hiding."

Nora had come up a little breathlessly, her eyes laughing and dancing at the success of her stratagem; but swiftly her expression changed, the laughter fled from her face, and it went deathly white. At first she tried to struggle out of his grasp, then suddenly her eyes closed, she put out her hands against his chest and clung to him; her eyes opened with a piteous, imploring glance, and she sobbed chokingly—

"Don't—don't beat me! No, no, don't beat me! Oh, don't, don't!"

Elliot had raised his open hand; but

the piteous eyes, the terror-stricken voice, the touch of the frail form as it clung to him, smothered his anger in a moment; his face softened, and he held her, but no longer threateningly.

"All right, all right!" he said quickly and soothingly. "I won't give you a hiding, though you deserve it. There, there! I didn't mean to frighten you like this. Why, what's the matter with the boy? Have you never had a licking before? That accounts for your impudence. For my word, it's almost my duty to give you one—but I'm not going to do it," he added hastily, for Nora was trembling violently, and her bosom was heaving with the sobs she was trying to repress. "You're a rum sort of boy," he remarked, after a pause. "One moment you are risking your life as if you didn't know what fear was, and the next you're whining, and yowling at a cuff of the head. Strikes me, Master Cyril, that for all your bounce, you are a coward at heart."

The easy, good-natured laugh with which the words were spoken hurt more than the taunt itself. Nora looked at him furiously.

"You're a coward, if you like," she said spitefully. "To strike a boy only half your size—and all for nothing!"

"Oh, nothing, you call it, do you?" said Elliot. "For young heger! you made my heart come into my mouth. I thought you were certain to fall; and you'd have killed yourself for sure. Don't you ever attempt it again! Why, I was almost sick with fright. But there! It's all over now. Let's shake hands and be friends again."

He held out his hand; but Nora scornfully ignored it, and marched away.

She had no sooner got out of his sight in one of the hollows than she flung herself down, and gave way to a fit of trembling that made her teeth chatter. It was not fear only, but a complex emotion which literally overwhelmed her. She still saw the upturned hand, heard the stern voice. It was because of a blow that she had left her home. And yet—and yet—she was conscious that if Elliot had given her the beating she knew she deserved, she could have borne it better than the blow which her step-mother had dealt her. And through all her sensations ran a subtle one of satisfaction. His anger had been aroused because of his terror on her account. If he had not been so anxious, he would have been content with scolding her; but, as she had laughed up at him from the ledge, she had seen his white, strained face above her; at that moment the strong man wore the countenance of a terror-stricken woman looking on the danger of some one she loves. Still shaky, and pale, she got up, and went to a distant part of the island.

(to be continued.)

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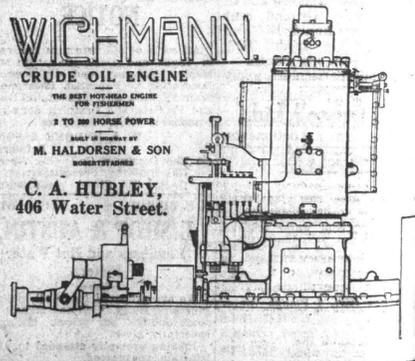
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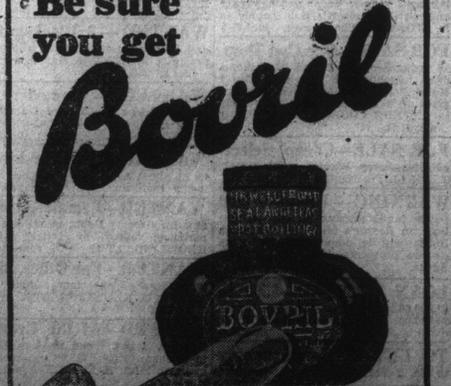
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