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Written for THE QUEEN.

HER CHOICE.

A ROMANCE OF TO-DAY.

By JESSIE K. LAWSON.

PART I.

“**S**PEAK the speech, I pray you, trippingly upon the tongue.’ Now that’s what I mean, the very word, *trippingly*. Oh Hamlet! how we would have understood each other! ‘And be not too tame neither, but let your own discretion be tutor, suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance that you o’erstep not the modesty of Nature; for anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing.’ I have always felt so, and said so; but this exactly expresses what I want to say. Oh! when I heard that white faced, nervous girl at our school examination, utter that grand death-shout of Marmion ‘Charge, Chester! charge! On Stanley! on!’ in a shrill affected little quaver, it made my blood boil. I just wanted to get up and ring out like a clarion, that last wild cry of the dying warrior. Oh it is glorious! one feels possessed for the moment with all the fire of these immortal creations, by the mere utterance of the words they spoke.”

The speaker was young and very enthusiastic. She was a dreamy-faced and dark-eyed brunette, and at present she was standing by a table with an open volume of Shakespeare before her. The apartment she stood in was richly and aesthetically furnished, indeed the whole house and its appointments denoted a wealthy possessor. The girl herself, though attired quietly, had that air of well-bred ease and self-possession which distinguishes those who have never been compelled to beg for leave to toil. She was tall and straight as a young oak, her eyes were like clear deep pools, reflecting every passing thought. At present they were flashing with enthusiasm, for in reading Hamlet she had come upon that wonderful lesson in elocution which the Prince of Denmark gives the players. Elocution, the power of rendering speech so as to breathe a living soul into words uttered or written by another, was a mania, a passion with her. At all hours, the servants as they tidied about, heard the young musical voice declaiming aloud, now with a deep passion, now with touching entreaty, and now with the most laughter provoking imitations. Her father infinitely amused, let her indulge the craze as he termed it; her mother characterized her enthusiasm as absurd; her friends said she was stage-struck.

“Papa, can’t I do with my pocket money just exactly what I please?”

“Certainly so long as you don’t burn the house down over our heads.”

“Then I shall take lessons in elocution. Oh! I would just *love* to be able to read Shakespeare properly.”

“I see no reason why you shouldn’t—go ahead,” said the practical business like papa, but Mrs. Westerton sharply interfered.

“Really Fred, you ought to know better than to encourage Helen in these silly common place crazes of hers. One would think she had been brought up middle class and looked forward to earning her living on the stage. Good gracious! elocution of all things! why not go declaiming in public at once.”

“Well mamma, why not? I’d as lief as not.”

“Now what’s the use of talking like that? You know it’s not fashionable for young ladies in society even to play on the piano as formerly. What do you take up such vulgar fads for? What more do you want than you already have:—an elegant home, servants to wait on you, your own horses and carriages, and all the dress and money you want. Many a girl who holds her head high in society to-day would be glad to have half the spending money you get.”

Helen shrugged her shoulders, and with an air of dissatisfaction amounting to weariness walked over to the window and looked out. The delicate elegantly dressed mother watched her with some annoyance. Mr. Westerton had subsided into his daily paper as he generally did when his wife spoke more than usual.

“Give up this elocution nonsense Helen,” she continued “if you want more pin money—”

“Money” broke out the young lady, facing round swiftly, “I’m sick of money, money, money! What is money! any imbecile can have money. Certainly it means comfort, ease, plenty to eat and drink and everything else the flesh cries out for. But—”

“Helen!” exclaimed the mother in horror, “I beg you will not use such horrible words as *flesh*. That’s one result of your Shakespeare studies.”