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THE Lady of the Night OR Amelia Makes a Success

CHAPTER XXI.
A WOMAN'S COURAGE.

When Nora saw that it was Elliot lying there, apparently dead, her heart gave one great leap, then seemed to cease beating. Her eyes closed; she was overwhelmed by a grief and a despair that almost deprived her of consciousness. But this only lasted for a moment or two. Hope crept back to her chilled heart, to raise a flame which warmed her spirit into courage and resolve.

She knew the place where Elliot was stretched out; there was a small kind of clay or cover there, the inside of which were not covered by the sea excepting at high tide; the tide was coming up now, had already reached the projecting ends of the cliff at either side of the little bay. It was impossible for her to make her way round to the beach and reach him before the tide rose and covered the spot upon which he lay. And yet he must be reached, and carried beyond high-water mark.

She looked down and round about her with an eager anxiety which ran like fever through her veins. There was not a moment to be lost. At first she thought of climbing down, but she knew the place too well to deem that possible. It was there that she had seen the Great Skua go into its nest; for half-way down the descent was fairly easy, but just above the nest the cliff drove inward, and there was a sheer fall to the beach below. Elliot had lost his footing on the slippery surface, and had fallen—to his death? No, she

could not descend the whole way; indeed, it was doubtful whether she could get as far as the ledge, for it needed cool and steady nerves, slow and deliberate movements; and her nerves were strained to the utmost tension, and she knew that she would not be able to compel herself to go slowly.

What she wanted was a rope, and something to fasten it to. She ran to the quarry, to call for assistance; but she could not find her voice, could not make it carry. She reached the quarry to find it empty, and she remembered that Shuffley had said that he and the men were going down to the quarry to fetch some tools which they had left there. She dashed into the hut where the dynamite charges and other materials and appliances were stored; and, with a gasp of relief, she found a coil of rope. She caught it up and hung it over her shoulder, and running to the place where the men had been working, seized a short crow-bar and a mallet.

She was now carrying a weight quite sufficient for a strong man, but she was quite unconscious of it until she had quite half-way up the cliff; then she had to stop to get her breath. Panting, and streaming with perspiration, she reached the edge of the cliff where Elliot had descended, drove in the bar, and secured the rope. The rope was by no means thick, but she knew that it would bear her weight; she would have risked it in any case.

Rapidly letting the rope down, she tried it, and began to descend; at first it eyed horribly, and she felt less secure than she would have done if she had been climbing down in the usual way; but she steadied it with her foot against the rock, and descended as swiftly as she could, but cautiously.

She reached the ledge, and rested for a moment, still holding the rope, and looked down. From this point the cliff caved inward, but she saw that about half-way between her and the beach a piece of the cliff projected; there were two or three tufts of shrubs growing on this ledge, and she knew that Elliot must have struck it and so broken his fall.

With renewed hope she began to descend again, and reached the projecting ledge; but the brittle, sandy soil broke as her feet touched it, and she had to pause. Presently she looked down again, and saw Elliot; the tide was within a few feet of him. She saw something else; she had nearly reached the end of her rope. Her heart sank, and a sob of despair broke from her white lips. It was a sheer fall now, for there was no place on which she could rest, no way, however perilous, of climbing down. Very slowly and cautiously she let herself down until she had come to within a couple of feet of the end of the rope. There was not time to think, to consider; she would not have strength to draw herself up again, and, if she could have done so, the time she had lost and would lose would be fatal to Elliot; the tide would reach him and wash him out to sea. There was nothing for it but to drop. The bravest of men might well have quailed before such a risk; and even

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and yet is unfortunately not able to rear him in Nature's way cannot go wrong if she follows the advice of doctors and mothers, based on a century's experience, and feeds him on "Nevae's Food," which ensures baby being properly nourished. Being richly assimilated and digested, it feeds him on "Nevae's Food," which ensures baby being properly nourished. Being richly assimilated and digested, it feeds him on "Nevae's Food," which ensures baby being properly nourished.

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Nora, who was a woman, and strung up to a point when a woman's courage will exceed that of a man, shuddered and grew cold. Her hands clung to the rope as if she could not let it go; but her hesitation was only momentary. Holding her breath and shutting her eyes, she let go, and, half-swooning, felt herself falling through space.

She fell on the loose sand which had not been submerged since the last spring-tide, fell with such force that she was half-buried in the light stuff. For a while she lay incapable of movement, but presently she raised herself and dashed the sand from her face and eyes; she was wondering whether she had broken a limb, whether, even now, she would be able to save him; but with a mute thanksgiving she realised that she had no pain, and rose to her feet, still shaking and weak, but able to stand, to move her limbs. She would have run to the prone figure, but she could only drag herself towards it, and half-fall, half-kneel beside him.

His eyes were closed, his face very white; a thin stream of blood oozed from a wound above his temple; his clothes were torn, the shirt, ripped from his arm, which was cut and scratched by his beard; and she uttered a cry of joy and gratitude as she felt it beating feebly.

Taking up some water from a pool, she threw it over her head and face, and moistened his forehead; but she could not carry enough to be of any service; and she at once set to work to drag him out of the reach of the tide. Her exertions had weakened her; he was a full-grown man, and heavy, and she could only drag him a few inches before her strength failed, and she was compelled to rest. At the moment it seemed to her that she would not be able to convey him to safety; that they would both be drowned—for, of course, she would not leave him.

The water was now within a few inches of them; the sea was coming up rapidly, like an insidious, taunting foe. She set her teeth, put her arms round him, and drew him still farther up the sandy ridge. So the fight went on, between this girl and the incoming sea.

At last she dragged him to the edge of the weed which marked the limit of the tide, and sank beside him, breathless and panting, his head upon her lap, her hands clasping one of his. She caught sight now of his cap, which had fallen at some little distance; she ran to it, filled it with water, and bathed his head. Suddenly, when she was well-nigh hopeless, she felt him stir, and presently he opened his eyes.

With a low cry of joy she dropped beside him, took his head on her lap again, and called to him in tones which might well have wakened him from the sleep of death. He gazed at her confusedly for a moment or two, then he spoke her name.

"Nora!"

For a second she did not realise that he had addressed her by her real name; then she shrank back slightly, and the blood surged hotly over her whole body. She had been a boy a moment before; she was a woman now, trembling and affrighted.

Still gazing at her, he frowned and sighed.

"No; it's you, Cyril," he said, as if disappointed. "What are you doing here?"

He raised himself on his elbow, and looked round. He saw the sea close beside them, looked up at the cliff, and remembered.

"Yes, I slipped and fell," he said. "I must have come an awful cropper. Have I broken any bones?"

"I—I don't know," she said in a low voice. "Can you stand? Oh, try!"

He rose with difficulty, and sank down again immediately, but with a sigh of relief.

"I appear to be all right, only stiff and weak," he said. "I must have broken my fall and fallen on the sand, luckily for me. Where is the boat? How did you know I was here?"

"I happened to go to the cliff where you went down," she said. "I saw your footmarks."

"By George! What a piece of luck!" he exclaimed. "That was a happy duke for me, boy. But I don't see the boat. You must have found it precious difficult to land here; you must have got in round the bend, and you came alone? How was that?"

"There is no boat," said Nora.

"Then how on earth did you get here?"

She glanced up at the cliff; but even then he did not understand.

"What!" he said.

"Don't talk," she admonished him. "You are still weak and ought to rest. Lie down, and try and sleep for a little while; lie quiet at any rate."

"That's not bad advice," he said. "I feel awfully shaky; but I don't know about sleep. Here's the skua's egg. I managed to get it for you," he added simply. "It's a wonder it isn't broken!"

She took it and was about to throw the hateful thing away, but she thrust it in her pocket with a shudder.

He stretched himself full length, and laid his head on her lap. She trembled, and her hands closed on each side of her in the soft sand.

"Why, you're all of a shake, boy," he said. "I s'pose you thought I was done for? And I precious nearly was."

She gazed out to sea for a while, then her eyes drew towards him and rested on his face with the maternal look which a woman bends on the man whose life she has saved. Presently he opened his eyes, and said, frowning perplexedly—

"I can't make it out yet. I'm just beginning to realise that you've saved my life, boy; but for the very life of me I can't see how you worked it; and I've been thinking it over. You couldn't have come round by the beach, because the tide was up at both sides, and there was only this dry spot; and you say you didn't bring a boat. How on earth did you manage it? You could have come down the cliff—"

He looked upwards as he spoke, and saw the end of the rope swaying in the wind. He sprang to his feet and stared at it, as if fascinated; then he looked down at her. She was still very pale; she hung her head guiltily; her hand clutched at the sand. He stood looking at her while one could count twenty, his face white and red by turns, his lips twitching. As a matter of fact he found it almost impossible to realise the thing she had done. He strode to her, and, gripping her by the shoulder, pointing upwards.

"Do you mean to say—do you mean to say," he said thickly, "that you came down that cliff by that rope, and dropped and dropped when you came to the end of it?"

She was silent; she tried to smile, but the reaction was upon her; the smile would not come, and her eyes filled with tears.

He held his breath, his grasp on her shoulder relaxed, and he drew his hand across his brow. Words were far too feeble to express the emotion which throbbled at his heart.

"My God!" he said at last. "Why—why, it was almost certain death! And you risked it for me!"

(To be continued)

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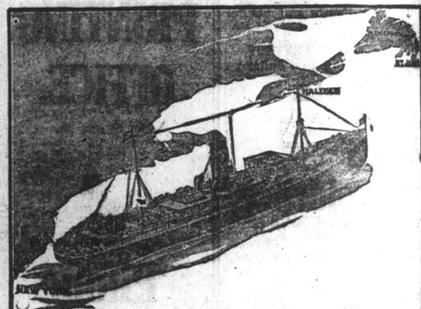
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