



THE Lady of the Night
OR
Amelia Makes a Success

CHAPTER XIII.
LONAWAY.

Mr. Hodges' procrastination in paying his rent was evidently not due to extreme poverty, for Margery proceeded to spread out a tea fit for a prince. In addition to the beverage which sometimes cheers and sometimes produces dyspepsia, there were a huge ham, a large pasty, boiled eggs, a plate of cakes, an enormous loaf, a pat of golden butter, and best of all, a bowl of clotted cream; of all of which Nora was pressed to partake. Mr. Hodges, notwithstanding the notice to quit, talked freely and light heartedly throughout the meal.

He was eager for news of the mainland. "He had heard of the war in South Africa, but knew nothing of the result, long since proclaimed. A newspaper only very occasionally reached Lonaway, and Nora was fully occupied in recounting the various occurrences which had recently started the world, of which no tidings had reached the little island.

While she was talking and Mr. Hodges listening placidly, occasionally remarking a "Lor! me! you don't say!" Margery sat beside the fire, her china-blue eyes fixed on the speaker's as if they were lost-stars.

"Dessy you've got another of them papers to serve on Shuffley down at the quarry. If so be as you'd like to step down there, it'll be a little walk afore supper."

"Supper!" exclaimed Nora, with a laugh. "I am afraid I can't eat anything else after this tea."

Hodges laughed as if this were an excellent joke. "It's plain you're strange to Lonaway, eh?" he said. "There ain't no time of the day you can't eat here, be there, Margery? Do 'e go down with the young gentleman, and show him the way to Shuffley's."

But Nora had no desire for Miss Margery's company, and declared that she could find her way alone. It was not difficult to do so. Shuffley, it appeared, was the man who rented the granite quarry, and his cottage, or hut, could be seen from a little rise near Hodges's farm.

Nora ran down the path, and found the man of the quarry sitting outside his hut. He was a thin, melancholy man, but he accepted the notice phlegmatically, remarked that dessey he could scrape the rent together, and after declining his offer of hospitality, Nora took a stroll.

There seemed to be no other habitations on the island save those she had seen. Though Jacob regarded it with prejudiced eyes, the place was fascinating to Nora. The solitude, the solitude, the atmosphere of freedom, the lack of restraint, held a charm for her young spirit, and she devoutly hoped that the two tenants would put off the payment of their rent until the last possible moment.

The seagulls, in myriads, whirled and shrieked like lost souls seeking rest; the stars came out and were reflected in the pool of the cove in which she had landed. She felt as if she were alone in a new, and yet old, strange world; she had left her past life behind her; the girl, Nora Ryall had disappeared or died, and the lad, Cyril Merton, had taken her place. The impression remained with her when she woke in her tiny bedroom under the eaves; for no one seemed to suspect her sex, and every one accepted her in her assumed one.

The weather was delightful, the air so mild and yet so bracing as it came straight from Labrador, that Nora's spirits rose, and she enjoyed herself thoroughly. The only thing that marred her perfect enjoyment was the conduct of Margery, who still stared at Nora, and watched and listened to her with an interest which increased daily.

She blushed when Nora spoke to her, and she waited upon the visitor with a shy devotion which might have been gratifying to the recipient, if Margery had belonged to the other sex; but these attentions, coming from a girl, Nora regarded as more or less of a nuisance. Accordingly, she got out of Margery's way as much as possible. Sometimes she assisted with the farm work, but most of the time she roamed about the island. She found the quarry especially fascinating, and cultivated the friendship of the taciturn Shuffley, who, morose and bearish

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though in his intercourse with other persons, soon melted under the sunshine of Nora's manner.

She frequently sat on the edge of the quarry and watched Shuffley and his couple of men blast out and manipulate the huge blocks, and it seemed to her there were immense possibilities in the apparently inexhaustible and valuable material. One day as she was sitting there she saw to her annoyance Margery coming towards her. She hoped that the girl was merely passing, and she kept her head turned away from her and gazed down into the quarry; but Margery held out towards her, and blushingly asked for a can.

"I have brought 'ee some milk," she said shyly; "it's very hot, and I thought 'ee might be thirsty."

Nora scarcely glanced at her. "It's not particularly hot," she said, ungratefully, "and I'm not at all thirsty; but I darsay the men there will be glad of a drink. I'll take it down to them. Thanks."

She took the can and went down with it at once; and there was nothing left for poor Margery to do but to turn and go homewards, which she did with an air of dejection, and a heavy sigh. Nora had hoped that this rebuff would put a stop to the unwelcome attentions, but when she returned that evening to supper Margery appeared to have forgotten the ingratitude with which her kindness had been received, and hovered about Nora, piling up her plate with superfluous food, and watching her attempt to get through it, which operation embarrassed Nora's every mouthful.

The days passed absolutely uneventfully. Neither Shuffley nor Hodges revealed the slightest intention of pay-

ing their rent, and instead of regarding Nora as a necessary evil, grew more and more friendly. To help pass the time Nora set about making a collection of eggs. At first she found the pursuit rather trying; the nests were in more-or-less inaccessible places; she had to climb the cliffs; but she had a steady brain and perfect nerves, and she was soon able to find and keep her nest on the narrow ledges.

One day she was thus engaged, and standing on a narrow projection of her precipitous hunting-ground, when she saw the Happy Lucy scudding before the wind to the cove. Her slight, slim figure pressing closely to the cliff could not have been seen from the deck of the little vessel, and, with a smile, she was about to give Captain Marks a call to so astonish him, and had actually opened her lips to do so, when she saw that he had a passenger. They were too far off for her to see the figures plainly, and presently the boat lurched and she was thrown to the ground. She climbed to the top of the cliff, and went across the downs to meet the Captain at the landing place. She had got halfway as the Happy Lucy ran alongside the quay; and she was quickening her pace to a run, when suddenly she stopped; the blood rushed to her face, then left it almost as quickly.

The second figure in the boat had risen and was standing upright. His face turned toward the island.

With a shocking sensation in her throat, Nora sank to the ground and sat there a moment, breathing painfully. Then she rose and fled, not in the direction of the farm, but away to the remotest part of the island.

CHAPTER XIV.
A MEETING WITH MR. STRIPLEY.

Elliot walked away from the picnic, scarcely knowing whither his feet were taking him. The sky seemed to have become suddenly black, the warm air chill and threatening. If Youth's capacity for joy is keen, much keener is his capacity for suffering. At that moment life seemed ended for Elliot; his love for Nora was a very deep and a very passionate one, and the blow had fallen so suddenly that he felt half-stunned and crushed by it. Mrs. Ryall's words rang in his ears, and in his heart, like the knell of all his hopes, of his life's sole desire.

It never occurred to him to doubt her statement, and he instantly found some corroboration of it in Nora's manner and speech when she had told her of his love in the plantation. She had said, "You must not!" she had put him away from her, had broken away from him as if she regretted having listened to him, having let him kiss her. Yes! it was plain enough; she had been carried away for the moment by the force of his passionate avowal, and had lacked the courage to tell him that she was engaged, or as good as engaged to marry another man.

Perhaps it was not only lack of courage, but pity for him that had kept her silent. She was so young, so innocent; he had taken her by surprise, startled her. Oh, yes, it was plain enough, easily comprehensible. He stopped and looked round; him hopelessly, helplessly. The place had suddenly grown distasteful to him; with the presence of Nora it had been an earthly Paradise; without her it was just a wild, dreary place from which he wanted to fly. Not even his beloved horses could raise his spirits, or divert his thoughts. A heart-stricken woman can remain quiescent with her wound; but a man grows restless and impatient, and wants to dash away from the spot where he has suffered.

Three of his horses were going to London for sale, and Elliot all in a moment decided that instead of sending his head man with them, he would go himself. It was not necessary to ask Sir Joseph's permission, for Sir Joseph left him a free hand.

After a sleepless night he started with the horses. He travelled with the most restive of them, and devoted himself to soothing the fretful animal; saw them into the London stables, and was wandering down one of the streets in South Lambeth in search of an hotel, his mind fixed on Nora, when he felt his sleeve twitch and, waiting suddenly from his reverie, looked round and saw Mr. Stripley. That gentleman's face was twisted into a huge smile, compounded of surprise and pleasure. Of course, he had plucked off his hat, and he waved it in one hand while he extended the other.

"Gracious me!" exclaimed Stripley, "who would have thought it? It's Mr. Elliot Graham from Devonshire! I could not believe my eyes at first; but I thought I knew the face. I am delighted to see you!" he resumed his hat with elaborate care. "And who may have brought you up from Devonshire, Mr. Graham?"

"I have come up to sell some horses," said Elliot; "I have just seen them safely housed, and I was looking for a hotel or lodging-house."
(to be continued.)

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