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The Lady of Lancaster;

Or, Leonora West's Love.

CHAPTER XXIII. (Continued).

When Leonora West said "please" in that coaxing tone there were not many people who could resist her. Mrs. West did not. She said to herself that it would be no harm to walk about the grounds a bit with her niece. She could not refuse her a breath of fresh air, certainly.

She saw Lady Lancaster sitting in a chair in the ballroom, and she did not think it likely that she would stir from her seat for at least an hour.

"So I'll run the risk," said the kind-hearted woman. "Come along, Leonora."

They went down into the beautiful grounds along the moonlighted paths, past gleaming groups of statuary, ghost-like in the weird light, past beds of rarest flowers past thickets of roses, walls of honeysuckles, with the white radiance of the moon shining over everything.

"How sweet this is!" the girl whispered. "When we were crossing the ocean I grew so tired of the water and the sky; I longed for the green grass and the flowers. How soft and fragrant the air is, and how beautiful the moonlight! I think I could stay out here all night."

"You would catch your death of cold," Mrs. West said, aghast. "The dews are very heavy."

"Oh, of course, I don't mean to; but it is so romantic. It is like an Eastern night, so soft and balmy, and—oh! Aunt West, is that the nightingale—the English nightingale papa used to love so dearly?"

She clapped her little hands. It was the nightingale, indeed, hid in some flowery covert, all alone,

"Pouring his full heart,
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art."

"Yes, it is the nightingale," said Mrs. West, delighted that Leonora had found something at last in England to grow enthusiastic over. "There are so many of them here, and it is down by the Magic Mirror you hear that one singing. It is their favorite resort."

"The Magic Mirror?" echoed Leonora.

"Yes. It is a pretty pond of water a little further on all fringed with willows and roses. It is as smooth and clear as a mirror, and there is an old tradition that the youth or maiden gazing into the Magic Mirror by moonlight, in the month of June, may see there reflected the face of his or her life companion."

"Oh, Aunt West, let us go there" cried the girl, eagerly.

"What! you don't believe in that silly tradition?" laughed the good woman.

"No, no, but to hear the nightingales" cried Leonora. "Is it far auntie?"

"No; only a short distance further on, at a little bend where two paths meet. But we have come so far already."

"And you are tired," said the girl, with generous compunction. "I ought to have remembered that." She pushed Mrs. West gently into a low rustic seat by the path, and said, kindly: "Sit here and rest while I go find it myself. The nightingale's voice shall guide me."

"You will not be long?" said Mrs. West, hesitatingly.

"No, no. May I go, Aunt West? Will you wait for me here?" pleadingly.

"Yes," answered the kind, indulgent soul; and Leonora set off at a quick pace, following the sound of the nightingale's voice, and repeating under her breath these exquisite lines to the nightingale written by Sir Walter Scott:

"Beautiful nightingale, who shall portray
All the varying turns of thy flowing lay?
And where is the lyre whose chords shall reply
To the notes of thy changeful melody?
We may linger, indeed, and listen to thee,
But the linked chain of thy harmony
Is not for mortal hands to unbind,
Nor the clew of thy mazy music to find.
Thy home is the wood on the echoing hill,
Or the verdant banks of the forest rill,
And soft as the south wind the branches among,
Thy plaintive lament goes floating along."

She went on swiftly through the beautiful night, guided by the nightingale's voice, and with a fast beating heart; for, with all a young girl's folly, she meant to look into the Magic Mirror to see, perchance, the face of her future lord and master.

Louder and nearer grew the notes of the nightingale as Leonora hastened on. She thought she had never heard anything so sweet. At first it had only been one bird, but now several had joined their notes together in a medley of intoxicating music that swelled deliciously upon the fragrant air of the night. She walked lightly, almost holding her breath as she came upon the scene, for fear of frightening them away.

She passed from the shadow of the grand oaks that had overhung her path, out into an open space, and the Magic Mirror burst upon her sight—a little limpid lake fringed with willows and sweet-brier and water-lilies, and so clear that the full, white radiance of the moon and stars was mirrored on its tranquil breast, while hid in the thicket of roses and willow, the night birds were pouring out their hearts in song.

"Oh, how sweet!" cried the girl. She clasped her hands in an ecstasy. Her heart was touched by the peaceful beauty and enchanting repose of the scene. Scarce a ripple stirred the bosom of the quiet lake, and the water-lilies, drooping to look at their fair reflections, were scarcely ruffled by the soft, light breeze that played around the enchanting spot.

Leonora moved softly forward to the verge of the Magic Mirror, and bending forward, with a slightly quickened heart-beat, gazed down into its crystal-clear depths. She saw her own face gazing back at her with all its fresh young beauty, its eager eyes and parted lips, the dark veil twisted carelessly about her head, and the loose tresses of her hair flowing beneath it. She saw all this clearly as in a mirror, and for a moment she remained intently gazing at it, wondering if the old legend were indeed true, and if the face of her future husband would indeed rise from those mysterious depths by the side of her own.

So absorbed was she in contemplation that she did not detect the faint scent of cigar smoke that suddenly filled the air; she did not hear the approaching step that was muffled also, not to frighten the birds away. She remained gazing intently into the water, half bent forward, her hand grasping the slender branch of a willow, until suddenly, in the mystic pool, a face looked over her shoulder—the face of her fate.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Something like a startled cry burst from Leonora's lips as she thus beheld that face beside her own—that fair, strong, handsome face that was as familiar as her own—the face of Clive, Lord Lancaster.

She believed for a moment that his face had indeed arisen from the depths of the enchanted pool, and after that one startled cry she was silent, watching it with dilated eyes and bated breath, expecting every moment to see it fade into the nothingness from which it had sprung.

But, instead of fading, it grew clearer to her sight; it changed its expression. At first it had a half-mischievous smile upon the lips and in the eyes; this changed to gravity tenderness, and passion. It was the face of a lover on which Leonora now gazed with rapt interest, unconscious that—

"His eyes looked love
To eyes that spake again."

It was a moment of silent happiness. The light wind stirred the lily-buds on the bosom of the lake that held those two fair faces mirrored in its breast; the nightingale's song pierced their hearts with exquisite pleasure that bordered on pain.

Leonora, wandering for one moment in the Land of Enchantment, was recalled to the present and to the actual by the man's folly.

He should have stolen away as he had come, in silence, leaving her alone with her beautiful, strange illusion, to bear its fruit in due season; but—

"Mon's heart crave tangible, close tenderness,
Love's presence, warm and near."

He yielded to a tender impulse without trying to resist it. He was close beside her; his cheek was near her own; his eyes looked into her eyes as they gazed up from the water, and those soft orbs had a look in them that made him dizzy with delight. He slid his arms around the graceful bending form and whispered in her ear:

"Leonora, is it fate?"

Alas!

"A touch, a kiss! the charm was snapt."

Like one startled from a dream, she looked up and saw him holding her in that strong clasp, gazing into her face with a passion that frightened her. She tore herself from his arms.

"How dared you? oh, how dared you?" she cried out indignantly.

Her angry words, her scornful glance, chilled the fire that burned within him. He realized his folly. Why had he touched her, frightened her, and so broken the spell of enchantment that held her? She would never forgive him, perhaps, for his temerity.

"Did you think, because you were my Lord Lancaster, forsooth, and I only the housekeeper's niece, that you could insult me thus?"

Her voice broke cold and sharp on the stillness. The nightingales had all flown away at the first sound of her angry tones.

"Insult you?" cried the culprit, agitatedly; he was too much shocked at the result of his hasty act to speak calmly. "Believe me, Miss West, I meant no insult. I did not think that you would take it so."

His words were unfortunate. They irritated Leonora even more.

"You did not think! so!" she cried, gazing reproachfully at him. "And, pray, sir, what cause had I given you to—to think that your caresses could be agreeable to me?"

He stood gazing at her in silence.

If he told her the real truth—told her that the face in the Magic Mirror had fooled him with its soft eyes and tender lips, and led him on to the commission of that impulsive act—she would be more angry than ever. She would deny that her own looks had tempted him, made a fool of him. He would not stoop to exculpate himself from the anger of one so manifestly unjust.

All the Lancaster pride flushed into his face as he stood looking down at her from his haughty height, his arms folded over his broad breast.

"What cause had I given you," she repeated, stamping her little foot angrily on the earth, "to think that your caresses were agreeable to me?"

"She is a little shrew!" he said to himself, with sudden anger. "I will never give another thought to her."

With that thought he answered, coldly: "If you were like other women, Miss West, I might exculpate myself in your eyes. But as it is, I can only say that I meant no harm, and I humbly crave your pardon."

"Like other women!" she flashed, haughtily. "What do you mean, Lord Lancaster? Does the misfortune of my poverty and lowly birth place me beyond the pale of your respectful consideration? Perhaps were I Lady Adela Eastwood it would be different."

"What the douce does she know about the earl's daughter?" he asked himself, in extreme astonishment; but he answered, eagerly:

"Yes, indeed, it would be different, Miss West. I should not look into the Magic Mirror over Lady Adela's shoulder, certainly; nor would I put my arm around her waist, but—"

He could not say another word, for she interrupted him, glowing with angry beauty.

"So you acknowledge the truth to my very face. For shame, Lord Lancaster! You throw discredit upon your name of gentleman; you make me hate and despise you for those words! No; I will never forgive you as long as I live!" sobbed Leonora, bursting into angry tears; and then she fled away from him in the moonlight, leaving him standing like one dazed by the side of the Magic Mirror.

But it was only for a moment that he remained thus motionless.

He thought apprehensively:

"It was most unwise in Mrs. West to allow her niece to go roaming about alone at this hour. Even upon my grounds she may lose her way, or it may lead to some unpleasant adventure. I will follow her at a safe distance, and see that she gets back safely to the Hall."

He set out hurriedly, and, turning the bend in the road, almost ran over two figures standing motionless under the tall trees that bordered the lane—Mrs. West, with Leonora sobbing in her arms.

The good woman, looking up, uttered a cry of relief.

"Oh, Lord Lancaster! I am so glad to see you," she exclaimed. "I am so frightened. Something must have happened to Leonora. You see how she's crying. Well, she came out for a breath of fresh air, and then she wanted to hear the nightingale's at the Magic Mirror, and so I sat down and waited for her; but she stayed so long I went to look for her; and there she came flying into my arms, and crying like some hurt thing. Did you see anything or any person, my lord?" anxiously.

He was intensely annoyed. The sight of Leonora sobbing gridvously in the woman's arms bitterly irritated him.

"Why would she misjudge him so persistently? why misunderstand him always?"

He looked at the graceful black figure with its head bowed on Mrs. West's plump shoulder, and said, curtly:

"Miss West is unnecessarily alarmed. She has seen no one or nothing but myself. It was the sight of me that alarmed her."

"Oh, hush! I did not mean to tell her!" cried Leonora through her sobs.

There was a note of warning in her voice; but in his vexation he did not heed it.

Mrs. West was looking at him anxiously.

"Of course, she would not have been frightened at the sight of you, my lord," she exclaimed.

"I was not frightened at anything—I was only angry," Leonora said, lifting her head at this moment, and hushing her low sobs into silence. "He had no right, Aunt West," she added, incoherently.

"No right!" echoed the good woman, looking from one to the other in amazement. "Why, what has he done, my dear?"

"Nothing; only looked over my shoulder into the water—and—and frightened me. Please don't think me silly, Aunt West. I think I'm nervous to-night. Let us go," said the girl, without looking at the tall handsome form standing so near her.

"Let me come to-morrow and explain," he said, humbly, coming nearer to her; but she turned her face resolutely from him.

"No," she said, icily; "it is quite unnecessary. Come, Aunt West."

She dragged the good woman away, and left him standing there in the moonlight, with a settled shadow upon his face.

"What a contretemps!" he said to himself, gloomily. "Ah! how little I thought, when I came out to-night to smoke that solitary cigar that I should meet with such an adventure! How angry she was! Every time we meet we drift further away from each other!"

He went back to Lady Adela and his guests after awhile. The earl's daughter chided him because he had left them for that odious cigar.

"It was most ungallant!" she declared. "You are mistaken, I went to consult that oracle, the Magic Mirror," he replied.

Lady Adela had heard the old legend. She smiled and bridled.

"Did you see your fate?" she asked him, and he answered, in a strange tone:

"I saw the woman I love in the Magic Mirror."

The earl's daughter was a little puzzled by his reply. She wondered if hers was the face he had seen in the water, but she dared not put the thought into words.

CHAPTER XXV.

Several days passed away very quietly after Leonora's first day and night at Lancaster Park. The girl stayed in the small rooms to which she was restricted quite as closely as the housekeeper could have desired. She did not even offer to go out seeing to have tacitly resigned herself to the situation.

She unpacked one of her trunks and showed Mrs. West the sketches she had promised to show her; she took out all her pretty, simple black dresses, and hung them on their pegs in the little dressing-closet her aunt assigned her.

When she had nothing else to do she read or embroidered. Her aunt noted with pleasure that she was seldom idle.

She did not know of the long hours Leonora spent, when alone, curled up in a big easy-chair, with her milk-white hands folded in her lap, her eyes half shut, with the dark lashes drooping against the pink cheeks, and a thoughtful, puzzled expression on the fair face.

If she had seen her, Mrs. West would have wondered much what her niece was thinking about.

In the meantime, the gay life of the great folks at Lancaster went on from day to day.

Leonora saw no more of it, steadily declining the well-meant offers of her aunt to provide her with surreptitious peeps at it.

"I do not care about it," Leonora would say, with an eloquent glance at her black dress. "Gayety only jars upon me, auntie, dear; I should like to go out in the fresh air a little; but if I can not do that, I have no desire for the rest."

But Mrs. West, however willing she was, did not dare advise her niece to go out into the grounds where the guests might be encountered at any time, or even old Lady Lancaster herself.

She knew that Leonora's pretty face, once seen by the guests, would excite remark. It had already won the admiration of the house-maids.

Those latter persons, having caught occasional glimpses of Leonora in their errands to the housekeeper's room, were disposed to be very sociable with the fair American girl; but Mrs. West put an end to their well-meant cordialities by saying, gently:

"My niece would rather not be disturbed; she is in great trouble; she has recently lost her father."

After that the maids did not court Leonora's society any more. They accepted her aunt's excuse good-naturedly and sympathetically, and contented themselves by talking about her among themselves, and praising her beauty, which they declared to each other was even greater than that of the young ladies who were sojourning at Lancaster—greater even than that of Lady Adela Eastwood, who, it was confidently whispered, was to be the next mistress of Lancaster Park.

Mrs. West grew downright sorry for her pretty prisoner, whose pink cheeks were fading in the close dark rooms where she was kept. She said to herself that this would not do. She must not have poor Dick's orphan child pining for liberty and light and the blessed sunshine that was free to all.

"I, will not do it; no, not if I have to leave Lady Lancaster's service and make a home for the girl elsewhere," she said to herself.

So one day she came into the little room where Leonora, sitting at the window gazed wistfully out at the green grass and the blue sky, with an unconscious pathos on the sweet, girlish face.

"My dear, you are tired of this stuffy little chamber, I know," she said.

"Not very," said the girl, a little drearily. "I suppose I ought to be grateful to you for giving me such a home."

"Grateful to me for hiding you away in these little, musty rooms, as if you hadn't the sweetest face the sun ever shone on!" cried the good woman, self-reproachfully. "Not a bit of it, my dear. I'm ashamed of myself for treating you so. It mustn't go on so, or your health will suffer, and so I shall tell Lady Lancaster; and if she won't allow you the liberty of the grounds I will go away from here and make us a snug little home somewhere else, where we may come and go as we please, so there!" said the good woman, with sudden independence.

Leonora rose impulsively and went and kissed the comely face of her friend.

(To be continued.)

"FROM THE RANKS."

Officers Who Started Their Military Career as Privates.

That it is quite possible for a private to rise, step by step, through the British Army, to the rank of General, we are reminded by the news of the recent death of Sir Luke O'Connor, who was one of the earliest rankers to do this.

He enlisted in one of the Welsh regiments when a young man, went through the Crimean War, was given a commission for signal bravery and ability, made a great name for himself when he was awarded the newly-created V.C. for saving the colors in action, and then rose, until at length his career was crowned by his being made a full general and a knight.

But Luke O'Connor was not actually the first of these noted rankers who rose to be celebrated generals. Probably Sir John Elley could claim that distinction.

John Elley entered the Army by enlisting as a private in the Horse Guards, and he so won the confidence and commendation of his superiors that he was given a commission. In the end he became a "Sir," and a full general.

The Duke of Wellington looked on Elley as one of his cleverest and most reliable men. Indeed, at Waterloo few of our leaders were so much trusted and consulted by Wellington as was General Elley.

Then we might mention Joseph Brome, who came into the Army as a little drummer-boy. He fought so well in battle, and displayed such early evidence of precocity as a soldier and leader, that he was given a lieutenancy, rose quickly to higher posts, and ended his military career by becoming a lieutenant-general.

Joseph Brome founded quite a family of great soldiers, for his death both his son and grandson have become generals. In our own days we had General Hector Macdonald, whose tragic career is too well known to need mention. Enough to mention here that Macdonald entered a Highland regiment; showed himself brave and able in battle that, when offered the choice of a V.C. or a commission, he chose the latter, and then rose quickly to the high rank he attained during the South African campaign.

Also we must not forget William McBean, perhaps the greatest rank-and-file "Micky O'Leary" has had among his ancestors of past days as the "most attacker" of an army. Private McBean, with his own hand killed eleven of the mutineers in single combat. After receiving a commission in due course he was promoted till he at last found himself General W. McBean.

It is characteristic of the way he had of looking at the matter in response to the congratulations of his captain at his promotion, he described, he answered—

"Not a bit, sir! Why, the rascals gave me twenty men at a time!"

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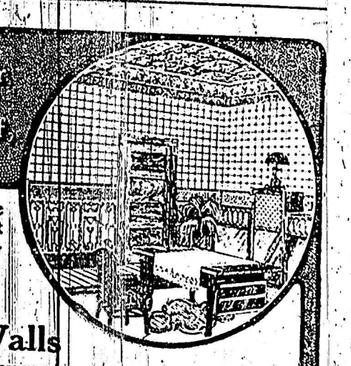

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