

The Lady of Lancaster;

Or, Leonora West's Love.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The last exclamation was wrung from him by seeing Leonora lift her hand as she walked across the field.

Something bright and shining flashed in the air a moment, then fell into the grass.

"She has thrown my gold piece away like so much dross! What does she mean?" he asked himself.

But the question was not one easily answered, so he returned to his friends, who were chattering like so many magpies among the ruins.

"We thought you had gone back home, you were so long away," said Lady Adelaide, looking rather cross.

"Now I shall have to invent some fiction to account for my long absence," he thought, pulling vexedly at his long mustache. "Deuce take the women! They put one this way and that way, until one is out of patience."

And while he was hastily concocting an excuse, Leonora was walking rapidly through the lanes and fields with little Johnnie, on her way back to the Hall.

"I'm glad you came back so soon," Mrs. West said; "for some of the young people have gone over to the ruins, I hear, and I was afraid they would see you."

"They did see me; but I came away soon after," the girl answered, carelessly. "They are going to have a picnic at the ruins to-morrow, it seems," pursued her aunt. "Lady Lancaster and all of them are going. So the house will be empty, and I can take you all over it to-morrow, if you like."

"Thank you, I shall like it very much," said Leonora, rather apathetically.

"And your picture of the ruins—did you get it, my dear?" pursued Mrs. West, suddenly remembering the sketch.

"Oh, yes; I finished it."

"Aren't you going to let me see it?" "I'm sorry, aunt, but I sold it as soon as I finished it. I'll go back some day and make another for you."

"You sold it! To whom, my dear?" exclaimed the good soul, surprised.

"Why, to Lord Lancaster," Leonora answered, indifferently.

But Mrs. West was delighted. She thought that her niece must be very accomplished, indeed, if she could make a picture that Lord Lancaster would be willing to buy.

"He was very kind, especially after the way she behaved the other night. It was quite silly. I did not think Leonora would be so easily frightened. It is a wonder that Lord Lancaster is not offended," she thought.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The next day dawned as fair and lovely as any picnic-party could desire. The party from Lancaster set out as early as twelve o'clock, and left the coast clear for Leonora's explorations of the great house.

Mrs. West, with her basket full of keys upon her arm, undertook the office of guide. We do not propose to accompany them, you and I, reader. Descriptions of rooms are wearisome alike to reader and writer. Most people skip over these prolix inventories of furniture and bric-a-brac, and hasten on to more interesting matters. We will too, reader.

Mrs. West had reckoned without her host when she supposed that the house was empty, and that the lady of Lancaster had gone to the Abbey ruins on fun and frolic intent. It was quite true that she had intended doing so, but there is a partial old adage to the effect that "man proposes, but God disposes."

That prosaic affliction, rheumatism, which is no respecter of persons, and to which old age is peculiarly liable, laid its grim hand upon the great lady that morning, and reminded her of a fact that she was sometimes prone to forget, in the arrogance of her greatness and worldly prosperity—namely that, in spite of her wealth and power, she was but mortal, after all, and that although she could order other things, she had no control over her own frail body and soul.

So, groaning under the hand of her relentless enemy, Lady Lancaster was fain to relinquish her design of superintending the loves of her nephew and the earl's daughter for that day at least. She made arrangements for the party to proceed without her, and surrendered herself to the good offices of her maid for the day.

And a doleful day Miss Elise had of it, too, for her lady's temper, never sweet, was sharp as vinegar under the stress of her affliction. In vain did Elise apply the hot fomentations and the vaunted liniments, in vain darken the room and with the kindled ministrations endeavor to woo quiet and repose to the couch of the afflicted one. Lady Lancaster being full of selfishness and venom always, vented it with even more than usual rigor upon the head of her unoffending handmaid, and keeping up a series of groans, hysterics, and revilings, made hideous the gloom of her curtained chamber.

So, groaning and lamenting and scolding, Lady Lancaster passed the hours of her penance, and toward high noon the devoted maid had the satisfaction of hearing her acknowledge that she felt a little better, and that if the sharp twinges of pain did not come back into her shoulder, she might perhaps fall into a little doze.

"Thank goodness," said Elise to herself, and she smoothed and patted the lace-fringed pillows, and sat down to watch her mistress's slumbers, feeling intensely relieved, and praying within herself that the shrewish dowager might not open her keen black eyes again for at least twenty-four hours.

"For I do not believe that her shoulder can hurt any worse than mine, with the rubbing I have given her," said the French woman, ruefully, to herself; and she was afraid to breathe lest those wrinkled lids should open again, and the querulous voice demand some further service from her weary and impatient handmaid.

"And if the pay wasn't so good, I would not stay in her service another day, said the woman to herself. She grows harder and more vixenish every day of her life. As old as she is, she does not seem to be making any preparations for dying. I dare say she expects to live forever. Ugh! how yellow, and wrinkled, and ugly she is, with the paint and powder off, and her wig of gray curls in the box. I should want to die if I were as ugly and witch-looking as she is."

And the maid settled her coquettish little cap a little more rakishly upon her befrizzled hair, and made a grimace expressive of intense satisfaction with her own young and pretty face. For Elise, in common with many of her sex, believed that beauty was a great power in the world, and had vague dreams of making capital out of hers as soon as she had saved up a little money, enough to start a thread and needle and ribbon shop for herself in London, where she expected to captivate some handsome and flourishing young tradesman with her pretty face and gay attire.

But while Elise, gazing into the long

mirror opposite, indulged in these Alaschar visions of the future, the beady black orbs of her mistress had flared wide open again, and she exclaimed, in such sharp, sudden accents that the maid gave a start of terror:

"Elise, who is that playing upon the drawing-room piano?"

"Oh, my lady, I thought you were asleep!" cried poor Elise, ruefully.

"So should have been if some fool had not commenced to play on the grand piano in the drawing-room. Who is it, I say?" demanded Lady Lancaster, iracably.

"Oh, my lady, you must be mistaken!" Elise began to say; but then she stopped in confusion. Some one was playing the piano, and the strong, full, melodious notes, struck by a practiced hand, echoed melodiously through the house.

"I'm not deaf, Mamselle Elise," said her mistress, scornfully. "Some one is playing the piano. Hark, it is the grand march from 'Norma.' I thought all of the people had gone to the picnic."

"So they have, my lady—every soul of them."

"Then who is that playing in the drawing-room—tell me that!" snapped the peevish old lady.

"Indeed I don't know, Lady Lancaster," answered the maid truthfully.

"Then make it your business to find out—go and see," was the peremptory command; and Elise without any more ado obeyed it.

It did not seem to her that there was a woman in the house who could wake the soul in the piano like that, said Lady Lancaster to herself, when the girl was gone. "What a touch! What grand notes! Who is it that has been hiding her talents in a napkin? Not Lady Adelaide! She is fast enough to show all the accomplishments she possesses. So are all the other women, for that matter. Modesty is not one of their failings."

And she waited most impatiently for Elise to return. She was both curious and angry. She was angry because her nap had been brought to an untimely end, and she was curious to know who had done it.

It seemed to her that the maid stayed a long time. The march from "Norma" was finished, and the unknown musician had struck into another piece—a melancholy fugue—before the girl came flying back with upraised hands and dilated eyes, exclaiming:

"Oh, my lady, I never was so astonished in all my life!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

"You fool!" cried Lady Lancaster, in a rage. "Who cares whether you are astonished or not? Why don't you tell me what I sent you to find out?"

"What a spiteful old cat!" Elise said to herself, indignantly; but she answered, meekly enough:

"So I am going to tell you, my lady, directly. It's that girl from America—the housekeeper's niece."

Lady Lancaster bounded erect in her bed and regarded the maid for a moment in unfeigned dismay. She had utterly forgotten the existence of Mrs. West's niece, and it took several minutes of bewildered thought to recall her to her mind. When her memory had fully come back, she gasped out feebly:

"Do you say that that child—West's niece—is down in the drawing-room playing on the piano?"

"Yes, my lady, that was what I said," said Elise, who was almost as much astonished as her mistress.

"The impertinent little monkey! Wherever did she learn to play like that? Did you tell her to go away, Elise?" angrily.

"No, my lady. I only went and peeped in at the door. When I saw who it was, I came quietly away."

"Hold me out of head, Elise," cried her mistress, imperiously.

"Oh, my lady, and bring back all the pain in your shoulder again!" Elise cried, aghast.

"Do as I bid you, girl," sharply.

The maid took the thin, bony little figure into her strong young arms, and lifted it out upon the floor.

"Now bring my dressing-gown, my slippers, and my wig. Put them on me—quickly," commanded my lady.

Elise knew that there was no use in expostulating. She quietly did as she was told. She powdered the yellow face, adjusted the curly wig and youthful cap, put on the velvet slippers and the gorgeous brocaded dressing-gown that made Lady Lancaster look like the Queen of Sheba in all her glory.

"Now give me your arm," she said, turning toward the door.

"But, my lady, where are you going?" cried Elise.

"To the drawing-room," curtly.

"You'll catch your death of cold," whimpered the maid.

"What is that to you?" flashed the dowager, sharply. "Come along, and cling to the arm of Elise, and groaning at every step with the reawakened pain in her shoulder, Lady Lancaster took up her march to the drawing-room, her flowing gown trailing majestically behind her, going forth as one goes to conquer, for she was intent on the instant and utter annihilation, metaphorically speaking, of the daring plebeian child who had so coolly transgressed her command."

Leonora had never got beyond the picture-gallery and the drawing-room. The great, black, ebony piano had fascinated her. She could not tear herself away.

"Oh, Aunt West, my fingers ache to touch the keys!"

"Can you play, dear?" asked her aunt, with one of her kind, indulgent smiles.

"Only let me show you," said the girl. "There is no one to hear, is there, aunt?"

"No, there is no one," said Mrs. West, reflectively. "The maids are all in the other wing. This part of the house is empty. I dare say it will be no harm for you to amuse yourself a little while."

She threw back the magnificent embroidered cover, and raised the lid herself. Leonora's eyes beamed under their long lashes at sight of the gleaming pearl keys.

"Oh!" she said, under her breath, and sat down. She ran her fingers lightly along the keys. A shower of melody seemed to fall from them. The silver-sweet notes fell soft and swift as rain-drops from the flying fingers, and full of subtle harmony and delicious sound. She played on and on, and when the exquisite aria came to a close Mrs. West gazed at her in amazement.

"Oh, my dear, what music!" she cried. "I do not believe that any of the ladies who come here can play as well as that."

"Can not Lady Adelaide?"

"No, I am sure she can not," Mrs. West answered, decidedly. "But shall we go now?"

"Presently, Aunt West. I may stay just a little longer, may I not?"

"If you like to stay alone. I have just thought of some duties I have to perform. I will go back and leave you here. If I come in half an hour, will you be ready?"

"Oh, yes, thank you, aunt," she answered, and ran her fingers lovingly over

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the keys, little thinking that the strong, full, joyous notes were awakening Nemesis from her nap upstairs.

CHAPTER XXX.

While Lady Lancaster was finishing her toilet upstairs, Leonora finished her fugue in the drawing-room. Then she played a little more from Bach. Then she began to sing. The dowager, coming along the corridor outside with stealthy, cat-like steps, was amazed to catch the passionate words of a little gem from "Iolanthe," sung in a voice as sweet and clear and well trained as many a professional could boast.

"An opera song! Upon my word! What sort of a girl is it, anyhow?" ejaculated the dowager, in astonishment; and in spite of her haste and anger, she could not help pausing to hear the words of the tender love song.

"None shall part us from each other, All in all to each we are; All in all to one another, I to thee, and thou to me!

Thou the tree, and I the flower— Thou the idol, I the throng— Thou the day, and I the hour— Thou the singer, I the song! Thou the stream, and I the willow— Thou the sculptor, I the clay— Thou the ocean, I the billow— Thou the sunrise, I the day!"

"Upon my word, that must be a remarkable child," Lady Lancaster said to herself; and, like Elise, she peeped around the door to get a secret view of the darling transgressor.

After she had looked she stepped back a pace in amazement. She was more astonished than she had ever been in her life.

The child she had come to see was nowhere. She had come down the stairs with a distinct intention of "boxing the little brat's ears for her temerity." She stared in amazement at what she saw.

And yet it was not a wonderful sight, but only a very pleasing one—unless my lady had been hard to please—only a graceful, girlish figure in deep black, with a line of white at the slender throat, where the narrow linen collar was fastened with a neat bar of jet—only a fair face, with its profile turned toward the door, and two small white hands, guileless of rings or other adorning, save their own dimpled beauty, straying over the keys with a loving touch, as if all her soul was in her song.

Lady Lancaster caught her breath with a gasp as if some one had thrown cold water over her. She turned to the maid, exclaiming, in a shrill whisper:

"Elise, that is not West's American niece. You are trying to deceive me!"

"No, my lady, I am not. It is Miss West. Is she not a pretty girl?"

"But I thought," said my lady, ignoring the question, "that West's niece was a child. I am sure she told me so."

"I do not know what she told you; but this is certainly Leonora West. I iterated the maid for her mistress stepped over the threshold into the room long train of her stiff brocade rustling behind her as she walked with an air of withering majesty upon her wrinkled face.

Leonora, hearing the ominous sound, glanced around with a startled air, her hands fell from the keys, and she sprang to her feet, and stood waiting the lady's approach—not humbly, not nervously, but with calm dignity and self-possession that seemed characteristic of her, and that seemed to belong peculiarly to her as fragrance belongs to a flower.

Lady Lancaster was not propitiated by that peculiar air. To her angry eyes it savored of defiance.

She walked on across the thick, soft pile of the velvet carpet until she was directly in front of the waiting girl, and then Leonora lifted her eyes with an air of gentle curiosity, and dropped her a graceful courtesy.

"Impertinent! I have a great mind to slap her, anyhow!" the old lady said, irately, to herself; but she kept down her spleen with a great effort of will, and said, with notable politeness:

"You are Leonora West, the housekeeper's niece, I presume?"

"Yes, madame, that is my name," Leonora answered, with another graceful bow. "And you are—Mrs. Lancaster?"

"Lady Lancaster, if you please," flashed the dowager, haughtily.

"Ah?" smoothly. "Lady Lancaster, I beg your pardon. You see we have no titles in America. A plain Mrs. is a title of honor in itself, and when one comes to England one is apt to forget the requirements of rank."

A graceful, simple explanation enough; but Elise, who kept close beside her mistress, saw a roguish gleam in the blue-gray eyes shaded by the drooping black lashes.

"She is laughing in her sleeve at my lady," thought the astute maid; but she did not resent the girlish impertinence in her mind. Lady Lancaster snubbed her handmaid so often that Elise rather enjoyed seeing her crubbed in her turn.

Lady Lancaster dimly felt something in the suave, silver-sweet tones that vaguely angered her.

"You are very excusable, Miss West," she said, tartly and insultingly. "One has to pardon much to American impudence and ignorance."

Leonora looked at her with the full gaze of her clear orbs.

"I hardly think I understand you, Lady Lancaster," said she, calmly.

"I fail to make my meaning clear, do I?" cried the dowager, furious. "Tell me this, how dared you come into my drawing-room and play on the piano?"

"Your drawing-room?" the girl lifted her eyes in gentle, courteous inquiry.

"Lord Lancaster's, then; and just as good as mine, since he is too poor to live at home. But that is no concern of yours. I repeat—how dared you play on the piano?"

Leonora looked very innocent and wondering and candid.

"I assure you I have not injured the piano one bit," she said. "It is a very nice one; but I understand how to use it, and my touch is very soft."

"Who cares about your touch? I was not talking about that. No one cares for that," contemptuously. "I referred to your impertinence in coming out of your proper place in the housekeeper's rooms and entering the drawing-room."

"Oh!" intelligently.

"Well, what do you mean by 'oh'?" inquired the angry dowager.

"I mean that there was no harm done by my entrance here. I have not hurt anything. I was very curious to know what great people's houses looked like, so I persuaded my aunt to let me come and see; but I really can not understand what terrible offense I have committed against your ladyship," said Leonora, with her gentle, candid air.

"You are poor and lowly born, and your place is in the rooms of the servants, and—and—I thought you were a child," sputtered Lady Lancaster, unable to fence with the polished tools of her fair opponent, and continuing, incoherently: "What did you mean, anyway, by—"

"By being a tall, grown-up girl instead of a child?" interposed Leonora, allowing a soft little smile to flicker over her rosy lips. "Oh, Lady Lancaster, pray be reasonable! Could I help it, really? Can one turn back the hands of Time? If that were possible, surely you would have availed yourself long ago of that wondrous art; and with a graceful little bow, Leonora walked deliberately out of the room, having fired the Parthian shot of delicate feminine spite into the camp of the astounded enemy.

(To be continued.)

MUST WASTE SHELLS.

Accounts For Heavy Expenditure of Ammunition.

Lieut.-Col. Boissonet, of the French Army, explains in the Temps some of the many reasons which make spendthrift artillery one of the necessary factors of victory.

The French "75" is a weapon of marvellous precision, but even with a new gun and the shells in perfect condition, after a great number of shots from a distance of 3,000 meters the shells will be found to have fallen within a radius of ninety-six meters and half the shells will have fallen in a strip of about twenty-four meters. The gunner, therefore, has to regulate his fire so that the object aimed at will be in the centre of this most thickly covered strip, a task which against trenches, even after aeroplane reconnaissance, requires a considerable expenditure of ammunition, and when it is remembered that the trench itself is not much more than a yard or so wide it will be realized that for every three or four shells which burst in the trench there are a vast number which explode before it or behind it.

The need for heavy shell expenditure against trenches is already great, but it will become more urgent still after the siege period is over and real field fighting again becomes possible, when the artillery will have not the fixed target of the trench line but the thin mobile ranks of skirmishers as its objective.

Against moving infantry, unless it is advancing in close formation, regulated fire is a matter of some difficulty. Infantry which finds itself between the first shell which has burst behind them and the short shell which has burst in front of them do not await the avalanche which is to follow, but rush rapidly forward beyond the first short shell, where they fling themselves to the ground under what cover they can find. The artillerymen know that they are somewhere in the neighborhood, and to begin again the tire de reglage would only be a loss of time, so that the only thing for the artillery to do is to shorten its range by 100 yards or so and sweep with shrapnel the whole of the zone where they imagine the enemy's infantry to be.

A battery of "75" guns fires no less than eighty shells a minute, and it is only with rapid, intense fire that the shrapnel fragments can sweep a whole countryside and

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break the enemy's attack. The same thing applies when the artillery is taking part in an offensive. They have to cover the whole zone of the enemy's front with a shower of shells, forcing the gunners to take shelter and pinning the infantry to the ground while their own troops are advancing to the attack.

WOMEN AT WORK.

Kingsley's line, "For men must work and women must weep," contains only a half truth. In the countries now at war the women are so busy doing most of the work that they have little time for weeping. Even in England, where the drain on the male population has been less severe than in France or Germany, many industries that formerly employed men are now of necessity finding places for women. For example, women are now employed for the first time in the accounting and other clerical departments of the railways and the banks. The number of women who drive motor cars has increased tremendously. The Association for Women's Employment is training women to be shop assistants in the grocery business. As the Shop Assistants' Union has sent fully a third of its members to the front, there are many vacancies of the kind to be filled. A firm at Rugby is engaging girls to make electric light bulbs—a craft hitherto followed exclusively by men. Instances might be multiplied of occupations in which, since the beginning of the war, the bars have been let down for women.

Yet even after all the men's places have been filled, there are many women, widowed by the war, to be provided for; the effort is now being made to start enterprises that shall give these unfortunate persons employment. Toy-making, which has been almost exclusively a German industry, is being encouraged in England as an occupation especially suited to women. The Woman's Emergency Corps has turned the Chapel of the Annunciation into a factory where young girls learn to make wooden toys; they soon become skillful enough to get three dollars a week. In Scotland artificial flower-making has been promoted, and suitable workrooms and teachers have been provided. The theatrical world offers a good market for the products of that industry. Glasgow is employing hundreds of women as tram-car conductors.

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