

HER LADYSHIP

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Her Ladyship by Robert McDonald

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ROBERT MCDONALD

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1897

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FRANK A. MUNSEY.



HER LADYSHIP.

I.

THE road which wound along the edge of Lake Michigan was like a band of silver by the side of the vivid blue of the inland sea, sparkling under the October sunshine.

Walking along its edge were just the two figures that a clever landscape painter would have wanted there. Their backs were turned to the sun, which made a halo around the girl's golden brown hair and glorified the edges of her large brown hat. Hair and hat just matched her brown eyes, which always had golden flecks in them, sunshine or not. Her white serge dress was too light for the crisp, cold day, and she had put around her shoulders a sealskin cape which huddled her neck, and threw out all the brilliant beauty of her sparkling face. She was a typical Yankee maiden, frank and free, full of the joy of life.

The young man with her was perhaps ten years older, but they were years you were glad he had had, for every one seemed to have printed

upon his face a new intelligence. He was slender, not with the slenderness of the stripling, but with the slimness of the working man who has cast aside all that is superfluous in his body. At thirty he was fairly started on the great race of life, and he would have impressed even the most casual observer, at the moment, as having left his place in the pushing throng to try to persuade this charming girl to go with him. And she was full of the knowledge of his errand, and, like every real woman before her, was determined to make the task as difficult as possible. It is only when she means to capitulate in the end that a woman takes that trouble.

"Of course mamma was entirely happy at the success of the ball," she was saying.

"And you?"

"Oh, of course I was, I have an orderly soul; I like everything to go off well, and mamma——"

"Always mamma's social aspirations! How about your own? Are you going to be a society butterfly?"

"Out of the chrysalis of a Lodge City environment?" she asked quickly. "I suppose you think that I am like that girl in Bret Harte's poem, who went from Poverty Flat."

"And longed to get back to it. I am afraid, Alice——" his voice lingered on her name. The edges of her ears burned at the obviousness of

what was coming, and she rushed in to push it aside.

"If you are going to say that you are afraid I haven't any such gay memories as dancing 'down the middle with the man that shot Sandy McGee,' you are right. Lodge City, or what we saw of it, was not gay. Mamma kept us beautifully and exclusively apart from all that sort of thing. We never knew anybody there but you."

"I confess to being far from gay at times, but I did my best. Gaiety never was my strong point, exactly."

"It is mine. I love to be gay. I love to have a grand new house, and lots of parties, and tee-to-tum—for a while."

For an instant Batterman hesitated, and thought himself a selfish brute. He was going to ask her to give up the parties and the tee-to-tumming, and go away with him. He believed that she would do it. He was a clever man, shrewd at reading faces, and he would have been a stick or a stone if he had not seen how this girl's countenance changed and glowed at his approach. But he loved her with a tenderness which had grown with the years. He had first known her as a little girl living on the hill above the dump of the Gray Colt mine, while her father was taking out the millions which had made him, for the moment at least, the richest man in Chicago.