

The Lady of Lyons

The Lady of Lyons by Edward Bulwer-Lytton is a romantic melodrama that explores the emotional and social conflicts of a young woman caught between two suitors, set against the backdrop of love, honor, and societal expectations.

PREFACE.

In the preface to "The Lady of Lyons; Or, Love and Pride," the author shares the inspiration and objectives behind the creation of the drama. Originating from a faint memory of the story "The Bellows-Mender," the drama takes a different turn with significantly altered incidents and completely reimagined characters. The selection of the French Republic era as the backdrop serves to anchor the narrative's plausibility, highlighting a time of societal upheaval and blurring of class distinctions. This period magnifies the protagonist, Claude's, tumultuous journey characterized by his lofty aspirations, emotional intensity, and moral conflicts, reflecting the larger spirit of the era.

The creation of the play also responds to a dual purpose. Firstly, it represents the author's act of solidarity with Mr. Macready's risky yet noble endeavor as the Manager of Covent Garden, aiming to contribute to the artistic community and the revival of the Drama's higher aspirations. This commitment reflects a shared kinship within the realm of artistic pursuits, motivating the author to support Macready's initiative. Secondly, the author seeks to challenge previous criticisms regarding his dramatic capabilities, especially after the lukewarm reception of "The Duchess de la Valliere." Emphasizing the essentials of dramatic construction and theatrical effect, the author aspires to demonstrate his growth and adeptness in these areas, focusing on the meticulous crafting of the plot and the strategic unfolding of events. This preface not only sets the stage for the drama but also offers insight into the author's aspirations and the contextual framework that shapes the narrative's development.

SCENE IX -The Lady of Lyons

In the opening act of "The Lady of Lyons; Or, Love and Pride," we are introduced to a setting rich in the opulence and social dynamics of Lyons. The scene is set in the household of M. Deschappelles, where we encounter Pauline, reclining on a sofa, attended to by her maid, Marian, in a room adorned with flowers and notes symbolizing her allure and popularity. Madame Deschappelles, overseeing the scene, engages in a conversation that underscores the theme of beauty and marriageability as assets in the societal market of alliances and social standing. As Pauline wonders about the sender of her daily floral tributes, the arrival of Monsieur Beauseant is announced, introducing a potential suitor eager to win Pauline's hand.

Beauseant's entrance and proposal to Pauline, juxtaposed with his internal acknowledgment of the sacrifice he believes he is making by marrying into a trade family, sets the stage for the conflict between love, pride, and social status. Pauline's rejection of Beauseant, despite his wealth and indirectly offered social elevation, reflects her disdain for his presumptuousness and the societal pressures to marry for status over affection. The dialogue cleverly reveals the characters' motivations, desires, and the societal norms that govern their actions.

Madame Deschappelles' interaction with Beauseant, subtly emphasizing the preference for a suitor of noble status despite the egalitarian facade post-Revolution, and her guidance to Pauline on how to refuse a proposal

with "proper condescension and disdain," encapsulate the societal dynamics at play. This act sets the groundwork for exploring themes of love, pride, societal expectation, and the pursuit of happiness against the backdrop of social hierarchy and familial aspirations.

As Beauseant departs, rebuffed and contemplating a reclusive retreat into philosophy and misogyny, the scene closes on Madame Deschappelles and Pauline, satisfied with maintaining their dignity and societal standards in the face of an unwelcome matrimonial proposition. This chapter sets a tone of elegance, wit, and the undercurrents of social maneuvering, leaving the audience to anticipate the unfolding of Pauline's story in a society where love and pride are in constant negotiation.

SCENE VIII -The Lady of Lyons

In "The Lady of Lyons; Or, Love and Pride," the narrative opens with reflections on love and pride's interplay within rural French society, focusing on Pauline's lofty aspirations, contrasted against the local men's frustrations, particularly those of Beauseant. Beauseant, a wealthy but spurned suitor of Pauline, reveals his anguish over being rejected due to his lack of a noble title, a prerequisite for Pauline who dreams of marrying nobility, despite the social upheavals of the Revolution that have ostensibly rendered all Frenchmen equals. This personal rejection becomes the catalyst for Beauseant and his friend Glavis, who also faced rejection from Pauline, to contemplate revenge against her lofty pride.

As the scene shifts to the exterior of a village inn, the discussion continues between Beauseant and Glavis, delving deeper into their wounded egos and plotting retribution. Their dialogue is interrupted by the arrival of a landlord who mentions Claude Melnotte, a village youth celebrated for his recent accomplishments. Melnotte, the son of a gardener who has inherited a comfortable position, is praised not for any practical skills but for being a "genius" in his way, creating a stir among the locals and arousing Beauseant's curiosity.

Through this narrative, the author sets the stage for themes of love, pride, and social status, juxtaposing Pauline's aspirations against the village men's schemes. The character of Claude Melnotte is introduced as a significant figure in the village, hinting at his impending role in the unfolding drama. The chapter establishes the social dynamics and tensions that will drive the story forward, showcasing the varying degrees of pride and love that define the characters' relationships and actions.

SCENE VII -The Lady of Lyons

In this chapter of "The Lady of Lyons; Or, Love and Pride," we delve into the scheming minds of Beauseant and Glavis, who hatch a plan for revenge by exploiting Claude Melnotte's love for Pauline. Finding delight in the potential humiliation of Melnotte and the ensnaring of Pauline, they contemplate the financial logistics of their plan, deciding to employ Beauseant's valet to manage the fictitious elevation of Melnotte to princely status. Their conversation is briefly interrupted by their concern for dinner, but soon refocuses on their malicious intent as they exit to set their plan in motion.

The scene transitions to the humble but aspirationally refined cottage of Claude Melnotte, greeted by the adulation of his friends for an unspecified prize won, symbolized by a new rifle—an emblem of his marksmanship and honor. Melnotte's mother, the Widow Melnotte, expresses skepticism about the practicalities of his accomplishments and his fixation on Pauline, highlighting the gap between his ambitions and their modest reality. Claude's talents and aspirations are laid bare: Latin, music, painting, fencing, each a testament to his yearning for a life beyond his status, all fueled by his love for Pauline. Despite his mother's doubts, Claude's romantic aspirations soar—emboldened by his secret offerings of poetry and flowers to Pauline.

Melnotte's dreams are crushed when his emissary, Gaspar, returns not with a response to his poetic overtures but with the physical and symbolic contempt of Pauline's household—his letter and personage rebuffed harshly. The harsh reality of their societal disparities is laid bare: Melnotte, a gardener's son, dared to reach above his station to Pauline, a merchant's daughter, inviting scorn.

The chapter closes with Melnotte's devastation—his gestures of love returned with disdain and physical insult. Yet amid his turmoil and reeling from the rejection and humiliation, an unexpected letter arrives, hinting at yet unseen developments. Melnotte's response to the scorn reflects a turbulent mix of shock, outrage, and a catalyst for a potential reckoning, suggesting a pivot towards confronting the rigid class distinctions and the personal vendettas set against him.

SCENE VI -The Lady of Lyons

Act II of "The Lady of Lyons" deepens the web of deceit woven by Beauseant and Glavis, exploiting the aspirations of Pauline and her family for nobility. Beauseant's plot harnesses the allure of a fabricated Prince of Como to entrap Pauline, luring her and her family with the grandeur of aristocracy. Convincing them of the prince's incognito status to evade political persecution, they readily accept the suitor, unaware of the truth behind his identity. The impersonator, Melnotte, a gardener's son, driven by love and vengeance, participates in the charade, garnering the affection and admiration of Pauline and her family with ostentatious displays of wealth and nobility, utilizing Beauseant and Glavis's assets.

Colonel Damas, cousin to Madame Deschappelles and a figure of skepticism and practical wisdom, remains unconvinced of Melnotte's royal guise. His doubts and subsequent probing act as a catalyst, hastening the culmination of the scheme. Amidst this, Melnotte's interior conflict escalates; he is torn between his oath to Beauseant, his love for Pauline, and his conscience. The plot reaches its zenith when an urgent escape due to a feigned political threat coerces a swift marriage between Melnotte and Pauline.

Complications arise with Damas's challenge to Melnotte's honor through a duel, testing the latter's integrity and valor—qualities unrelated to birthright but intrinsic to his character. Melnotte's victory in the duel subtly shifts perceptions, aligning honor with individual merit rather than noble lineage.

Inner turmoil torments Melnotte as he grapples with the impending doom of the charade's unraveling. The promise of love, clouded by duplicity, beckons a tragic precipice. The chapter climaxes with the hurried arrangement of marriage, spurred by the concocted urgency of Melnotte's flight, leaving a trail of moral ambiguity and imminent downfall. Through sophisticated language and intricate character interactions, the narrative delves into themes of love, pride, deception, and the societal valorization of nobility, orchestrating a mirage of nobility that sets the stage for tragic revelations.

SCENE IV -The Lady of Lyons

In this chapter, we find ourselves in a poignant moment at Claude Melnotte's modest cottage, where his mother, filled with anticipation and pride, prepares to warmly welcome her son and Pauline. As they arrive, the disparities between Pauline's expectations and reality begin to unfold. Mistaking Melnotte's mother's familiarity for appreciation of a past kindness, Pauline's confusion escalates. The equilibrium of pride and love that brought them to this threshold crumbles as Melnotte's deceit becomes evident; he is not a prince, but the son of the woman before them, rooted in modesty rather than nobility.

This revelation triggers a maelstrom of emotions in Pauline, oscillating between disbelief, shock, and a desperate search for any sign of jest in Melnotte's admission. The cottage, once meant to be a symbol of new beginnings, becomes the arena for the unraveling of Melnotte's artifice and Pauline's consequent desolation.

Her dreams, painted with visions of grandeur and romance, clash catastrophically with the stark reality of Melnotte's humble origins and the deception that led her there. This juxtaposition not only symbolizes the chasm between their social standings but also mirrors the internal conflict between Melnotte's genuine affection for Pauline and his morally dubious methods of winning her love.

Melnotte's confession and plea for forgiveness are met with a tempest of rage and despair from Pauline, who struggles to reconcile her feelings of betrayal with the remnants of love she harbors for him. The romantic ideals that once fueled their love affront the harshness of deceit, leading Pauline to the brink of madness as she grapples with the reality of her situation. Melnotte, now a figure marred by shame, reflects on his journey from an ambitious dreamer, inspired by love, to a man ensnared by his own illusions and pride.

The chapter culminates in a raw and heartbreaking dialogue, where both Melnotte and Pauline confront the consequences of their pride and the illusions they cherished. Their union, once a beacon of hope and love, stands as a testament to the destructive power of deception and the painful awakening from dreams built on falsehoods. Amidst the turmoil, the underlying tragedy of Melnotte's misguided attempt to transcend his social status for love, and Pauline's crushing realization of her folly, reveal the complex interplay of love, pride, and societal constraints that define their relationship.

SCENE V -The Lady of Lyons

In Act III, Scene I of "The Lady of Lyons; Or, Love and Pride," the story unfolds outside the Golden Leon at twilight, transitioning to moonlight. The landlord and his daughter, Janet, exit the inn, amused by Claude Melnotte's sudden elevation to nobility due to his carriage breaking down at their establishment. Their conversation hints at an air of superiority assumed by guests, particularly a young lady, likely Pauline, who inquires about the quality of their best room with disdain.

Shortly after, Beauseant and Glavis enter, mocking the situation and foreseeing an unfortunate end to Pauline's journey, fantasizing about a beautiful palace at the foot of the Alps. Their conversation drips with sarcasm about the accommodations provided by the Golden Leon and the overall deceit they have spun.

Claude Melnotte then emerges from the inn, confronting Beauseant and Glavis. He speaks of his disgrace in deceiving Pauline and declares his protection over her, warning them against any disrespect. His change from a betrayer to a protector is driven by remorse, urging Beauseant and Glavis to leave with threats of retribution for any insult towards Pauline.

Beauseant mockingly refers to Melnotte's nobility and offers him a purse of money as a wedding gift, which Melnotte vehemently rejects, equating Beauseant's actions to those of Judas. Despite this, Beauseant nonchalantly plans to return the next day to see how Pauline has adjusted to her "new dignity," leaving with a sarcastic farewell.

Melnotte, filled with anger and self-loathing, fears the public discovery of their situation. Determined to protect Pauline's honor, he plans to remove her from the public eye, contemplating refuge at his mother's house. However, as he resolves to call for her, Pauline steps out from the inn, lamenting the rudeness of the people within, unaware of the unfolding drama and Melnotte's internal turmoil.

This scene captures the pivotal moment where Melnotte's façade of nobility starts to crumble, propelling him towards repentance and the defense of the woman he has wronged, setting the stage for the consequences of his and Beauseant's deceptive schemes.

SCENE II.-The Lady of Lyons

In "The Lady of Lyons; Or, Love and Pride," despair and duty collide as Pauline faces a harrowing choice to save her father, M. Deschappelles, from bankruptcy through a loveless marriage to Beauseant. Desperate, she grapples with the loss of her true love and the weight of her father's salvation, resigning herself to her fate with a poignant farewell to the prospect of genuine love.

On the day meant to seal Pauline's grim pact, a mix of anticipation and sorrow pervades. Mme. Deschappelles naïvely comforts Pauline, emphasizing Beauseant's nobility and wealth as ample consolation, a view Pauline rejects, equating the marriage to a soulless transaction that mocks the essence of true love.

Unexpectedly, the scene shifts as Colonel Morier, a figure of admiration and mystery, is introduced, unveiling layers of intrigue and unspoken connections. Pauline, entrapped by circumstance and cloaked in despair, finds a glimmer of hope in Morier's presence, clueless to his veiled identity and deep links to her plight.

The story crescenditates as Pauline's stoic acceptance of her fate is challenged by Morier's (Melnotte's) sudden, dramatic declaration of love and honor, overturning the mercenary transaction with a grand gesture of redemption. Tensions peak as Melnotte, revealing his true identity and sacrifices, reclaims his honor and Pauline's heart, transforming the narrative from a tale of forced choices to one of triumphant love and vindication.

In juxtaposing the hollowness of societal expectations against the depth of personal integrity and love, the chapter masterfully navigates the complexities of duty, sacrifice, and the indomitable spirit of love. Melnotte's transformation from a despised gardener's son to a heroic figure, mirroring Pauline's transition from a victim of circumstances to an emblem of fidelity, encapsulates the essence of love's redemptive power, leaving a lingering promise of hope, forgiveness, and rebirth amidst the ruins of pride and prejudice.

SCENE III -The Lady of Lyons

The fourth act of "The Lady of Lyons; Or, Love and Pride" begins with Melnotte at his cottage, reflecting on his remorse for deceiving Pauline and resolving to arrange a divorce. His mother, the Widow, consoles him, emphasizing that his intentions to repent and atone for his actions will ultimately restore his pride and honor. Despite her heartbreak, Pauline struggles with her feelings towards Melnotte, torn between anger and the vestiges of her affection for him.

The narrative unfolds as Melnotte plans to leave for the army after securing Pauline's freedom, showing his determination to redeem his honor. Pauline, despite her disdain for the deception she suffered, is visibly moved by evidences of Melnotte's deep love for her, revealing her internal conflict.

Beauseant's intrusion into the cottage, with intentions to exploit Pauline's vulnerability and coerce her into leaving with him, intensifies the drama. Melnotte's timely return and defense of Pauline highlight his enduring love and commitment, despite the consequences of his prior deception. This act of valor convinces Pauline of Melnotte's genuine love, overshadowing his deceit.

The arrival of Pauline's parents and Colonel Damas catalyzes the climax, as they confront Melnotte about his deceit. Despite offering a confession and agreement to a divorce, indicating his willingness to suffer the consequences of his actions, Melnotte is met with harsh rebuke and disownment. However, in a moment of profound emotional revelation, Pauline declares her unwavering loyalty to Melnotte, choosing love and forgiveness over wealth and social standing. Her decision showcases the depth of her love and the strength of her character, willing to endure hardship alongside Melnotte.

This act poignantly explores themes of redemption, the transformative power of love, and the societal constraints of pride and prejudice. It reflects on the human capacity for forgiveness and the enduring struggle

for personal and collective integrity amidst societal and personal downfall.

SCENE I -The Lady of Lyons

In Act V of "The Lady of Lyons; Or, Love and Pride," the scene unfolds two and a half years after the events of Act IV, in the streets of Lyons. The scene begins with officers greeting Damas, now a General, and expressing their curiosity about the enigmatic Morier, a colonel and hero of Lodi, admired for his rapid rise in the French army. Morier, revealed to be in Lyons with Damas, is on a personal quest regarding a love interest, seeking a "constant woman."

Amidst the officers' departure, Damas encounters Monsieur Beuseant, who intends to marry Pauline Deschappelles by having her current marriage, implied to be with Morier (alias for Melnotte), annulled. Beuseant, unaware of Damas's financial situation, mistakenly believes Damas to possess great wealth from the Italian campaign, which could potentially thwart his plans with Pauline. However, Damas clarifies he has not gained significant wealth from his military service.

Beuseant reveals Pauline has finally consented to marry him, prompting a shocked response from Damas, who is aware that Pauline is already married and believes in the sanctity of marriage. Damas's reaction highlights the complexities of love, pride, and societal pressures faced by the characters.

Monsieur Deschappelles enters, eagerly moving forward with Beuseant's plan to marry his daughter. Damas is taken aback by the willingness of the Deschappelles family to annul Pauline's marriage, reflecting on the change in their attitudes and values over time. The play critiques societal norms, the pursuit of wealth and status over genuine love, and the fickle nature of human emotions.

As Damas reluctantly agrees to witness the signing of the new marriage contract, the scene ends with his melancholic soliloquy on the transformative and often destructive influence of love on a person's character and wellbeing. The unexpected appearance of a pale and agitated Melnotte, who overhears the discussion, intensifies the drama, setting the stage for the ensuing conflict over love, pride, and redemption.