



THE LADY OF BOLTON HILL
BY AUTHOR ELIZABETH CAMDEN

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Chapter One
Baltimore Maryland, 1867

“Come on boy, your Dad needs you.”

Daniel looked up from his exam in disbelief, certain his father would never send a man to pull him out of this test. But a grim-faced Joe Manzetti stood in the doorway of the classroom, trails of perspiration streaking through the soot on his face. Being summoned to fix the aging equipment at the steel mill was a regular occurrence for Daniel, but it wasn't going to happen today.

“I'll be there in an hour,” Daniel said as he glanced around the classroom, noting the glares of resentment among the other students competing for the same scholarship. They all had the advantage of decent schools and private tutors, while Daniel's only knowledge of engineering came from tinkering with the equipment in the steel mills of Baltimore's east end.

“There's been an accident and your Dad is trapped,” Manzetti said. “You need to come right away.” The blood drained from Daniel's face. Everyone at the steel mill knew what this test meant to him, and would not have summoned him for anything short of a life or death catastrophe. He threw his pencil down and shot from his seat, not even glancing at the proctor as he bolted from the room.

“It was a boiler explosion,” Manzetti told him as they left the school and ran across Currior Street. “They’ve put out the fire, but your Dad was trapped by the tank that got blown off its base. He’s still pinned beneath it.”

Daniel broke out into a sweat. If the boiler tank was blown out of its brick encasement, there would have been tons of steam, and his father’s entire body would have been scalded. “How badly was he burned?”

“It’s not good, boy. We can’t get the canister off him until the fire-tubes are disabled, or there will be another explosion. The boiler was mangled in the blast, so we need to do some quick work before the pressure makes it blow again.”

And that was why they’d summoned Daniel. Anyone could operate those boilers under normal circumstances, but when the equipment broke down they relied on Daniel to figure out what was to be done. He was only nineteen years old, but he always had a knack for tinkering with machines to make them work better or do something different.

His legs were trembling after sprinting the two miles to the mill, a stitch clawed at his side and his lungs barely able to fill, but the workers parted as he and Manzetti entered the boiler room. Clouds of steam and soot still hung in the air, bricks were strewn everywhere, and on the concrete floor, crumpled beneath a massive copper boiler, Daniel’s father lay sprawled like a broken doll.

“Dad?”

His father’s eyelids flickered. “Fire tubes still attached,” the words rasped from his father’s throat. “Be careful, lad.”

Daniel glanced at the twisted fire tubes and the ruined boiler. Soldering the tubes closed would work, but it would take hours. He had to think of another way to disengage the tubes before they could lift the boiler from his father, or there would be another explosion.

“I need a sledge hammer and a steel pin,” Daniel said. “Get a couple of valve clamps and some leather gloves,” he said, his gaze fixed on the white-hot fire tubes. A wave of murmurs passed through the workers who circled the site of the accident, but a few of them ran to get the tools. There was no time to explain the unconventional solution that was taking shape in his head. He wasn’t even sure it would work, but trying to disable those fire tubes directly would be suicide. “And I’ll need a lot of water...just in case.” Stupid to worry about it, since he and his father would both be killed instantly if this didn’t work.

The equipment was brought to him, and the assembled workers began pulling back to a safe distance. A tremor ran through his father. “You know what you’re doing, laddie?”

Daniel didn’t meet his father’s eyes, just placed the steel pin against the first of the mangled fire tubes, the heat so fierce it penetrated his thick leather gloves. “Yup,” he said with more confidence than he felt. “Just like pricking the crust on one of Mom’s pies to let the steam out,” he said as he positioned the sledgehammer atop the pin. The first whack did nothing other than send shrill ping through the air. Neither did the second, but the third blow pierced the pipe and the escaping steam sent a high-pitched whistle through the air. Daniel reared back away from the burning steam. “Clamp down the safety valve,” he yelled over the noise. Two workers moved in, arms muscles bulging as they wrenched the equipment into place. It took a minute, but then the pipe lost pressure, lowered in pitch, and then fell silent. The fire tube was disabled.

A smattering of applause came from behind him, but Daniel didn’t tear his gaze from the ruined mass of the boiler. There was still one more pipe to disable. Sweat rolled into his eyes and he brushed it away with a grimy forearm before he set the next pin into place.

“Want you to know....proud of you, boy,” his father said.

Daniel kept his eyes fastened on the fire tube. He wished his father wouldn't talk like that, like this might be the end. "Yeah, okay," he said, keeping his gaze steady on the task before him. He struck the first blow at the remaining fire tube a good, solid blow, as was the second. On the third blow the high-pitched whine began.

An instant later the pressure burst in the tube and shot the pin free and straight into Daniel's face. He was hurled backward and crashed to the ground, blood pouring from a cut across his brow. Roars of approval from the men signaled he had succeeded in disabling the fire tube.

Daniel grinned as he pushed into sitting position, barely able to see through the sting of blood in his eyes. A dozen men were pushing bricks out of the way, lifting the copper boiler up a few feet. He couldn't see his Dad because of the cluster of workers surrounding him.

A worker with a soot-stained face walked over and squatted down to look directly at Daniel. A hand clamped him on the shoulder. "I'm sorry, boy. Your Dad is dead."

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This was probably the prettiest place I've ever seen, Daniel thought as his gaze drifted past the cemetery walls to roam over the tree-shaded lawn and a church that looked like a medieval castle. Clara's father was the minister of this church, which was the only reason Daniel's father could be buried in a nice place like Bolton Hill. Daniel did not realize how much it cost to bury a person, but he gathered it was expensive and he should be grateful that Reverend Endicott was letting his father be put to rest in such a fancy place for free.

As they lowered his father's casket into the freshly dug hole, Daniel tightened his arm around his mother's narrow shoulders and wished her weeping would stop. He and his mother shared the same black hair and gray eyes, but that was where the resemblance ended. For three days his mother had done nothing but alternate between

despondent stares and gut-wrenching sobs, whereas Daniel had been too busy taking care of the girls to let grief catch up to him. At least he could sometimes cheer up his sisters, but he had been a complete failure in trying to ease his mother's hollow-eyed pain. He would have to figure out what to do about that, although all he could concentrate on now was how badly he wanted to see Clara. Guilt tore at his insides for even thinking such a thing, but just for a blessed few hours he needed to be with Clara.

Daniel turned his head so he could see her from his one good eye. Clara was standing on the other side of his father's grave, and her heart-shaped face winced every time she looked at him. Daniel cursed the patch covered his bad eye. He might end up being blind in that eye, but the swelling was still so bad the doctor had not been able to get a good look at it yet. Anyway, he knew his face looked horrible and it bothered Clara. She was only sixteen, and this sort of thing really ripped her up.

When the ceremony came to an end, people began to wander away from the gravesite. If he didn't catch Clara, she would go back to her father's house and he wouldn't see her again for another week. Clara was his best friend, but running off to see her when his family needed him was shameful.

And the real reason he wanted to see her was even worse.

The day before the accident Clara sent him a message saying she had a new piece of sheet music by Frederic Chopin, the Polish composer they both idolized. If it weren't for their mutual love of Chopin, Daniel would never have met a person like Clara Endicott. He lived in Baltimore's grubby east side, while she came from the privileged world of Bolton Hill, an enclave of manicured lawns, clean air, and old money. They came from entirely different worlds, but they bought music at the same shop in Merchant's Square. Every Tuesday a new shipment of sheet music arrived from Paris, and he always raced to the store after his shift to see if there was anything new by Chopin. Five years ago, just after his fourteenth birthday, he arrived at the shop to learn

that an entire batch of newly delivered Chopin scores had been sold to a young lady. He finagled Clara's name out of the clerk, and paid a call to her house that very evening.

It didn't seem odd to him, seeking out a fellow enthusiast of the great Chopin. What could be more natural than wanting to meet the one other person in the entire city who shared his immense passion for Chopin? It wasn't until he saw Clara's house, an imposing mansion set an acre from the street that he realized he was stepping into a very different world. Nevertheless, he straightened his shoulders, knocked on the door, and asked to see Miss Clara Endicott. He was surprised to see that Clara was merely a girl, not even twelve years old. She was a skinny little thing with hair like spun gold and wearing a frilly dress so white it made his eyes hurt just to look at it. Still, she adored Chopin, so that meant there must be something worthwhile underneath all those ridiculous hair ribbons.

"Hello, my name is Daniel Tremain. I hear you like Frederic Chopin, and I think we should meet."

"You like Chopin, too?" The joy that lit her face was as though Santa Claus had stepped onto her front porch.

From that day they had been inseparable. Over the next five years Daniel spent every moment he was not at the steel mill beside Clara as they worked through the various Chopin ballads, etudes, and sonatas. Before meeting Clara, the only piano Daniel had access to was the out-of-tune upright in the public school. He was entirely self-taught, but Clara had the benefit of private lessons and had helped him improve his technique. Even better, Clara had access to the instruments in the Music Conservatory across the street from her father's church, and Daniel became proficient on the cello as well.

He looked across the stretch of cemetery to see Clara being pulled by her brother, Clyde, toward a waiting carriage. Daniel gritted his teeth in frustration. He

needed to see Clara and her brother could be such an annoying jerk. Ever since he became friends with Clara, Daniel had been hearing about Clyde's miraculous accomplishments. Clyde went to Harvard, Clyde won an award from the Smithsonian ...on and on it went. Clyde had the best education money could buy, while Daniel was stuck shoveling coal into a furnace.

Without a backward glance, Daniel sprinted across the lawn toward Clara, reaching her just before she stepped up into the carriage. "Clara, wait!"

She whirled around. Her face was a mask of concern and her lower lip was trembling. "Daniel, I'm so sorry about your father," she said as she laid a hand on his arm.

"Never mind that, I need to speak with you."

And he didn't need an audience. He tugged Clara a few feet away, but like a watchdog, Clyde's eyes narrowed and he raised his chin. "Not too far, Tremain," he warned.

Daniel threw an annoyed glare at Clara's brother. It should not be a surprise that Clara's family was starting to become suspicious of him. For years he had been hanging around their house so much they had practically accepted him into their family, but Clara was starting to come of age. He pulled her a few feet away from the carriage.

"Do you have sheet music for the nocturne?" he asked in a low voice. He ought to be roasted alive for even thinking about music at a time like this, but for the life of him, he just wanted to get his hands on that Chopin nocturne so he could forget about steel mills and funerals and his mother's shattered face. Music could do that, create a magical enclave where nothing else mattered except hearing the next line of the score.

Clara looked hesitant. "I've got it, but my father is hosting a political conference all week. They will be using the Music Conservatory for meeting rooms, so we won't be able to play."

Being shut away from music for another week was unacceptable. This had been the worst few days of his life and he *needed* to escape. Daniel glanced over his shoulder. His mother was waiting for him with that desperate look of anxiety. In another moment she was going to break down again.

“Meet me at the Music Conservatory tonight,” he whispered to Clara. “I’ll figure out a way to get us in and we can play there.”

Clara looked like he’d asked her to set a house on fire. “We can’t break into the Conservatory. It’s against the law!” But the way she bit her lip and clasped her hands let him know that she *wanted* to do it, even if she couldn’t screw up the courage.

“Don’t be such a rule follower,” he said. “Meet me at midnight outside the Conservatory. And don’t forget the sheet music.”

Without a backward glance he dashed back to his mother, knowing Clara would not let him down. His mother’s thin frame stood before him, and along with her came years of responsibilities. Even if he was lucky enough to someday have another shot at a college scholarship, there was no way he could leave his family without income. He’d have to figure out how to pay the crushing weight of bills that would accumulate quickly now that his father was dead, and do his best to support what was left of his family. For a while he had dreamed of a chance for college and a better future, but that was over. Now his life was going to be lived inside the stark brick walls of a steel mill.

But for a few hours tonight, he would escape into a magical world of music, and that was enough to keep him going.

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Clara clutched the sheet music to her chest, her eyes fastened on the ground before her feet as she scurried toward the Music Conservatory at the top of the hill. The glow from the moon made it easy to see as she cut through the backyards of her neighborhood. She hated to admit it, but she was still a tiny bit afraid of the dark.

Sneaking around like this was simply awful, but it would be worse to abandon Daniel when he needed her.

Daniel was her best friend. Well, her only friend, actually. None of the girls who attended her private school were people with whom she had the least thing in common. She had learned that during her first week at Miss Carlton's Academy for Young Ladies when she was only ten years old. Everyone felt sorry for her because Clara's mother had just died. The other girls were so nice that Clara was inspired to invite them all to her home for a tea party. She asked the cook to make blueberry scones and she pushed all the furniture in the parlor to one side so she could move the table near the window where the view was prettiest. On the first day of the party, Clara had personally polished the furniture and set out the cook's blueberry muffins.

No one came.

She remembered her brother Clyde's face as he helped push the furniture back into place. Normally Clyde was awful to her, but on that particular day he had actually been kind and refrained from teasing. She never did fit in with the girls at school, but it didn't really matter, because now she had Daniel and he understood her perfectly.

Clara reached the end of the street and could see the Conservatory plainly in the moonlight. The Music Conservatory belonged to the city, a rambling gothic monstrosity of a building with a few practice rooms and an oversized auditorium for performances. She and Daniel used the practice rooms every chance they got and her fondest memories were here while they played Beethoven and Chopin and sometimes even their own fledgling compositions. Normally the Conservatory was a haven for her, but tonight it loomed like a ghostly fortress in the moonlight. She had no idea how they would get into the locked Conservatory, but knew Daniel would find a way. He could do anything.

She dashed across the street, her heart was pounding and her palms sweaty. She would feel better once Daniel got here and told her to quit being such a sissy.

She heard a low chuckle behind her. “The way you’re hunched over that sheet music, you’d think an army of Pinkerton’s agents were hot on your trail.” She whirled around to see Daniel step from behind the sycamore trees, radiating with that supreme sense of confidence he seemed to effortlessly possess. A smile broke across her face. Only seconds ago she had been scared to pieces, but Daniel could always ease her pathetic worries.

“I already popped the lock on the back door,” Daniel said. “Let’s go.”

He must have been here for a while, because Daniel had already set up the cello beside the piano. “Do you want to play Chopin or try composing something,” Clara asked. For the past few months they had been writing their own music, Daniel on the cello and Clara on the piano.

“Let’s play Chopin. I don’t want to have to think too much tonight.”

She was afraid he was going to say that. “Well, there’s a problem with the cello score,” she said. “It’s written in a different key than the piano. It will sound terrible if we try to play it together.”

Daniel took the cello score from her and made quick work scanning the lines.

“Not to worry. I can transpose it to the higher key as we play.”

She’d been taking music classes for years, but could never transpose on the spot like that. Pale moonlight filtered through the French doors, providing enough illumination for Clara to see the music, but Daniel was holding it close to his face, his head cocked at an odd angle as he scanned the lines from his one good eye.

“Is there enough light for you to see?” she asked. “We can go in the back room if we need to light a lantern.”

“I can see well enough. I can certainly see that hideous bonnet on your head. It looks like a potato sack.”

Clara pulled off the offending bonnet. "I didn't want my hair to show in the moonlight. I know it's ugly. I've been told it looks like I pulled it out of a trash dumpster."

"Oh? Who said such a thing? Give me the name and I'll thrash him for you."

"Clyde said it. And no thrashing...you weren't any nicer about my poor bonnet."

"I'm allowed to say rude things to you. No one else can."

"That's true enough." Daniel did tease her mercilessly, but she never minded because he was always so good-natured and she knew he didn't mean a word of it. Daniel would slay dragons for her if she asked him. Clyde said rude things to her all the time, but she didn't want to discuss her frustrating, brilliant older brother. She knew Daniel envied her brother the opportunity to attend the best schools in the country. Now, after Daniel had to walk away from test that would have awarded him a scholarship to Yale, he would probably never get the chance.

"How is your mother doing? And your sisters....do they even understand what has happened?"

Daniel sagged a little bit. "Please Clara, not tonight. Anything but that." He straightened. "Tell me about Edmond Dantes. Last I heard he was about to convince Villefort's wife to poison him."

For the past month Clara had been recounting the story of *The Count of Monte Cristo* as she read each chapter. Daniel didn't have time for books, but he loved listening to her summarize whatever she was reading. They liked adventure stories best, and had already read most of the works by Victor Hugo and Daniel Defoe. Or rather, *she* had read them and recounted the stories scene-by-scene for Daniel. They lay on the floor of the conservatory while the moon tracked across the sky and she related the next chapter of the book.

"I would give anything if I could write like Victor Hugo," Clara said. "Did I tell you that my Aunt Helen met him when she was in Paris? Apparently she is quite the

celebrity over there.” Aunt Helen’s poetry had made her famous throughout both Europe and America, and Clara was humbled to even be related to such an extraordinary person.

“So when is she going to come home? Ever since I’ve known you, she has been traipsing around Europe like a vagabond.”

Clara shrugged. She dreaded telling Daniel that she was on the verge of being sent to live with Aunt Helen in London. Daniel had once told her that their friendship was the only ray of light in his world of coal-fired boilers and dingy tenements, but her father was determined that Clara should go to London. He wanted the Endicott family to be a force of change in the world, and had been grooming both Clara and her brother for that very purpose from the time they were old enough to walk.

“My father says Aunt Helen should keep working her way among the power circles of Europe,” she finally said. “Everywhere she goes she helps advance his causes of free education for the poor. And next month Clyde is heading off to South America to bring small pox vaccinations to the Indians. It’s all quite impressive really. Of course, I’m the big, huge howling disappointment of the family. My entire family is brilliant, and I’m like a firecracker that fizzles when lit. I can’t even transpose music on the fly.”

“Clara, you are sixteen years old. You aren’t supposed to be successful yet...it would go to your head.”

“*You’re* successful at everything you do.”

Daniel winked at her. “That’s how I know.”

She elbowed him in the ribs, but could not help noticing that Daniel was very fine-looking when he grinned at her like that. With his tousled dark hair and that eye patch, he looked dashing as any pirate from an adventure story. The girls at Miss Carlton’s Academy would fall over themselves for a boy like Daniel, but Clara tried not to think of

him that way. She forbid herself to develop a crush on Daniel because it would ruin everything. Daniel had a lot of girlfriends and she wasn't about to stand in line with the rest of them. It was much better to be his best friend.

She took a seat at the piano bench, and positioned the music so that the moonlight could illuminate the page without her shadow interfering. Daniel sat on the corner of the bench and propped his music on a stand. She pecked out a few notes to get her fingers accustomed to the keyboard, and Daniel leaned his head toward her. "Ready?" She nodded. "On three then."

Daniel counted out the numbers, then Chopin's nocturne filled the air as her fingers lifted the music from the piano. A moment later the warm tones of the cello joined the melody, dancing and weaving in between her notes. It was a lyrical piece, beautifully capturing the forlorn mood embodied in so much of Chopin's work.

It was enchanting, to be alone in this darkened room with moonlight streaming through the windows. It felt like they were the only two people in the world as the lift and fall of the haunting melody filled the empty chamber. It was always like this when they played music together.

Which was why she was so startled when Daniel hit a clumsy note. The music from the cello went off key, then skidded to a stop altogether. Daniel dropped his bow and buried his face in the crook of his elbow.

He was sobbing.

Clara flew off the bench to kneel before him, but Daniel turned further away from her. He held up a hand to shield his face. "Clara, don't. Don't look at me."

He curled over at the seat and now the sobs were coming from deep within his chest, raw sounds he tried to hold back but could not. Even his shoulders were shaking from the strength of his weeping. Clara pressed herself against his back and wrapped her arms around him. "Please don't cry," she said uselessly. Daniel was the strongest,

smartest person in the universe and seeing him like this made Clara start to cry too. Her tears spilled over and wet the back of his shirt as she clung to him, wishing she could ease the burden of his grief.

“Everything is falling apart and I don’t know what to do,” he said between his sobs. “My mother is a wreck and the girls keep crying too. I don’t know what to do.” A shudder racked his tall frame as another round of weeping overtook him. Raw, painful sounds came wrenched from deep in his chest. “I keep seeing my father crumpled on the ground,” he choked out. “I can’t get the sight out of my head. Blisters were already coming up through the burns on his face.”

She winced at the images his words conjured. “Daniel, your father was a good man and is in Heaven now. He’ll never know pain or suffering again.”

As quickly as it began, Daniel swallowed back the tears, although his breathing was still ragged as he wiped his face with his sleeve. He kept his face averted from her, and his voice was so soft she could barely hear it. “I’m not sure I believe in Heaven.”

Clara swallowed, uncertain how to respond. Her belief in God and an afterlife was absolute and she never questioned such things. She wished her father were here, he always knew the right thing to say.

“Well, I *do* believe in Heaven,” she said softly. “And your father did too, and we both know that he was smarter than a whole stack of encyclopedias, so he couldn’t be wrong.” Daniel gave a gulp of laughter and squeezed her hand. “You can trust us on this, Daniel. Your father is in Heaven and his suffering is over.”

Daniel heaved a ragged sigh, then nodded his head. “Okay, thanks for that.” He said it in that casual, off-handed manner of his and Clara figured he was probably just humoring her. He wiped his eyes and brushed back the straight black hair that had fallen down across his forehead. “Try again?” he asked as he picked up the bow of the cello.

When she hesitated, he turned to look at her, his one good eye still reddened with tears. “Please Clara, I really need this tonight.” His voice wobbled as he said the words.

There wasn’t anything on earth she wouldn’t do for Daniel, but Clara felt like a traitor. She would be leaving him soon, and now was the worst possible time for him to be alone. Where would he get access to a cello after she abandoned him to live in her Aunt’s fancy London townhouse? Would he even be able to afford sheet music? Even if he could continue to play the cello, music was not nearly so thrilling if there was no one to share it with, and nobody in Daniel’s grim world of the steel mills had ever even heard of Chopin.

She turned back to the keyboard and straightened her sheet music. “On the count of three, then.” Moments after she began playing the piano, Daniel’s cello joined her, this time solid and confident. The gentle, surging melody filled the chamber, the melancholy sonata mirroring the longing that surged inside Clara’s heart. She knew that in a perfect world Daniel would be free to pursue music, and she would pen great novels that would shake the world. Or perhaps she could be a poet like her aunt. Or maybe she could write history, or children’s books, or *something* that would let her express the passion in her soul.

Clara was not precisely sure what kind of writer she was destined to become, but of one thing she was certain. Daniel Tremain was the best friend she had ever had, and no distance of ocean or class or circumstance would ever tear them apart.

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