

# The Western Girl Who is Suing the Duke of Manchester for breach of promise.



By Sarah Comstock.

THE Duke of Manchester finds himself in demand. He is being claimed by two women, which is one more than he is entitled to. Further, they are both Americans and both attractive. That isn't square by all the other nice and lonely young men in the world.

"Who is this Portia Knight?" inquired the Duchess in a high, light tone. Her natural voice is rather deep, so the Duke knew that something was the matter. It behooved him to explain as gracefully as possible.

"My dear," he replied, "it is an ordinary game of bluff. Of course, the lady is after money, and of course, I haven't any money. The only thing she can do is to join the band of hope of my other creditors."

Then the Duchess laughed in a satisfied way. He put it neatly, and she likes to hear a thing put neatly. She has an almost French appreciation of that sort of thing.

"We have had a charming trip to America, have we not?" he asked.

"Charming," she replied, wanting to be reassured.

"And wouldn't it be a pity to spoil it by a silly old girl's ridiculous charge?"

"If the charge is ridiculous," with hesitation.

"If the past months haven't proved that, what could prove it?"

"We'll go up to Ireland," she replied absently, and the merry honeymoon danced on to the jingle of Zimmerman dollars.

This little episode because, as you remember, when the Duke and Duchess landed at Liverpool in March of this year, they were met with the announcement of the legal contention to be made by Miss Portia Knight, who claimed that by right of the Duke's promise she should be the Duchess.

"A breach of promise suit is such bad form," the Duke always said.

"The breach of promise is worse form," said Miss Knight when she heard the remark.

Portia Knight is one of those uncomfortable people who always want more than they can have. Perhaps it is her misfortune not to have it, or perhaps it is her fault to want it. At any rate, she is a most restless, dissatisfied young person.

First she wanted to become "Our Portia" to American theater-goers, and she couldn't make out what they were about that they never laid claim to her. They bore up beautifully when she left and went to London.

Next she wanted to be London's darling. It was her bad luck again that London didn't have any vacancy on its list of darlings.

Finally she wanted a Duke. Not only that, but she wanted a particular Duke. She wanted the Duke of Manchester. Simultaneously Helena Zimmerman wanted him, and she was the one taken, while Portia was the one left.

It is perfectly plain that she doesn't wear a four-leaf clover in a locket and that she lost her left hind rabbit's foot found behind the third white stone at the right hand side of the graveyard's old path's second turning in the ninth quarter of the moon.

Perhaps she started out wrong by being born in Salem, Or. It never was considered an especially lucky place to be born. She may realize now that this was her first mistake, and she knows well enough that it is too late to rectify it, just as it always is with mistakes.

Seriously, though, she has had a hard fight of it, for she has often been poor and has always had no health. For the latter reason she didn't play when she was a little girl, but sat by herself and thought, whenever she could get "King's X" from sticks or tag.

"I want to grow up to be a beautiful lady and live in a castle," was what she thought in her foolish little head. Unfortunately she kept on thinking the same thing after she grew up, and that is why, at 21, she is suing the owner of a castle for breach of promise.

Physical weakness has haunted her all her life and perhaps is the cause of what some call her emotional temperament, and others call her hysterics. She is pitifully ambitious. She wants to be everything that she can't be, a duchess included.

"I'm sick of the convent," she said at the end of her first installment of education.

So she was sent to a boarding school in Portland.

"I hate boarding school life," she said.

"That's not the point," her father replied. It was up to him, as there was no mother, and a father always has to hit a wall until he knocks it down. Colonel N. P. Knight didn't know how to get around the matter.



PORTIA'S UNLUCKY FALL  
TURNS LUCKY, WHEN



THE SYMPATHETIC DUKE  
CALLS TO CHEER HER,  
AND LATER,



HIRES A MANAGER AND  
THEATRE FOR HER ESPECIAL  
BENEFIT, BUT,



SHE UNACCOUNTABLY  
DISAPPEARS



PORTIA AND THE DUKE ON A LITTLE JAUNT TO THE  
COUNTRY.



ONLY TO BE  
FOUND AGAIN,  
IN THE SECLUSION  
OF A CONVENT,  
WHENCE



THE DUKE BRINGS  
HER BACK TO WHISPER  
WORDS OF LOVE,  
THEN,



IN DESPAIR, RETURNS TO  
THE STAGE FOR CONSOLATION  
AND A LIVELIHOOD....



TO LEARN THROUGH THE  
PAPERS OF HIS MARRIAGE,  
AND THEN,



HIS HIGHNESS  
SKIPS TO PARIS  
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THE LATEST  
PORTRAIT  
OF  
PORTIA  
KNIGHT

As the stage was not looking for a young lady without training, without money, without anything but a good figure and a pair of stunning eyes, she found it necessary to study first. She entered a dramatic school, where she studied what she didn't know and taught what she did. In this school she made friends with Marie and Gertrude Elliott, who came in handy later on.

By the time she considered herself through with study she had gained just enough practicality to know the value of advertising. She attempted to give dramatic recitations for the purpose of making herself known. After a few small attempts she prepared for a big entertainment, and then her haunting illness appeared again and on the eve of the performance she gave out. The entertainment was indefinitely postponed.

She made her next start toward the professional stage and for the once she had a little show of success. Frederic Warde was playing in San Francisco in the early part of '98, and somehow he and she patched up between them that she should understudy his leading lady. This gave her some training and the chance to add an experience line to her professional card.

Her troubles now became financial. She has always had troubles. It has been fortunate that they have changed about. Her health was doing very well for it, but Warde was hearing of an engagement at the box office. It was one of those years, you will remember, when he and James split and both took pleasure in becoming poor but proud. Warde's company finally broke up, the people of it were left stranded, and Portia Knight had to telegraph to her father for fifty dollars with which to reach New York.

Once there, she had ups and downs. She has a knack of making friends and this knack shows her severer work than never developed into anything more than stunts. Mrs. Sarah Cowell Le Moyne was one of her most valuable acquaintances. Mrs. Le Moyne has a tremendous heart, and she took Portia into it. She cheered her and advised her, and she consoled with her, and better, she introduced her right and left to the right people. The upshot was that she got a chance to rehearse with the "Moth and the Flame" company, but a man whom she called a heartless wretch refused her the part she wanted and she left the company in something that looked like hysterics and that she called anxiety.

She was ill again. She was ill a great many times, and all the while she was dragging herself from one agency to another when she was able to walk. Carfare was a luxury. She kept her belongings in a dressmaker's shop, and her boarding house and she gave her address as often as she could at a friend's house and was vague about it the rest of the time.

It occurred to her to try posing. She thought up a false name, as they all do for this post-humous work, and with it she betook herself to the studios. She was turned down, sometimes politely and sometimes impudently. You can see from her photograph what was the matter. She has gorgeous eyes, storm-clouds of hair, the figure of a Venus, but her mouth and nose won't do little bit. They are rather classical. In fact, they are rather coarse. From an artistic point of view she was out of the question. So she gave up the studio canvassing.

The ups and down continued and included a small part in a barn-burning company, a metropolitan engagement as understudy in Sothern's company, more tramping among agencies, and in the end a return to Oregon.

Her father's joy at seeing her was not unmingled. During Portia's ups she had attended to some of his financial affairs, and he had reasons of his own for liking to see her prosperous.

She astounded Salem. She had learned many things since she had been gone. She set about teaching these things to the Salemites, and some were eager to learn, while others hesitated.

On the whole, they greatly enjoyed her visit, taking their enjoyment in delicious shocks. As for her, she thought they were great bores. She did what actresses all do sooner or later—she went to London.

The Elliott girls got her work. Her eyes got her a Duke. She couldn't keep either.

She was in the height of a magnificent time when she fell down stairs. And this was only the first of her downfalls. She had been dining at the Hotel Cecil when it happened. She was the last play for her for some time. Her spine was injured and she was laid up for weeks.

She must have proved an interesting invalid, for the Duke was devoted. He bought her roses in carnation season and vice versa. He named his boat Portia. He had a beautiful time sentimentalizing. Whether she really thought he meant it all can never be known, but at any rate she chose to claim that she did.

As soon as she was able to be out they went on excursions together. They went to Oxford one day, she became tired in making the rounds of the buildings and she was taken ill again. She claims that it was during this illness that she and the Duke became engaged.

Whether this was true or not, she told her friends that the engagement had happened and she called to her father for his consent. Goodness knows why he refused it, but he did. This, however, only lent charm to the tale.

The Duke, having exhausted all the flower, candy, dinner, boat-naming and excursion possibilities, had decided to star his favorite. He bought a play for her, he bought a manager for her, he bought the use of a theater for her. Just as the time for her debut was at hand, she disappeared.

There were all kinds of theories about this. Perhaps she and the Duke quarreled. Perhaps she was in the habit of advertising. Perhaps it was all a freak, a whim, without explanation. At any rate she entered a convent and was about to assume the veil when he found her. He had been hunting like a sleuth and had employed detectives. She was in a convent connected with Brompton Oratory, and he dragged her out of it. I presume that she wanted to be dragged. The Duke had very prettily written her that he would blow out the gas if she didn't come with him, and she very prettily replied that she couldn't let him waste the gas. He said to have broken into the convent by force of manly muscle. He got her.

The plan of starring her came to naught, but the love-making of the two was resumed and the affair was going nicely when the report of the Zimmerman engagement was circulated and soon followed by the Zimmerman wedding.

Miss Knight says that the plan of starring was abandoned because Manchester wanted her to marry him and give up the stage entirely. She also says that they were to be married last summer and that the arrangements had been made with Father Gordon of the Brompton Oratory. He is dead now, so he can't witness.

When she heard of the Zimmerman engagement it was just after the Duke had left for a little trip across the Channel. Portia immediately packed up and followed to Paris. There she could not see him—he disappeared as completely as she had a short time before, and she never succeeded in obtaining the interview she was after.

The next thing she heard of was the wedding in Marylebone parish church. The result of this was that she went back to a small part on the stage and that a court summons awaited the Duke at the end of his honeymoon.