THE EVENING NEWS.

Monday, - - - - February 6, 1871.

[From Chambers' Journal.]

LADY LESINGHAM'S DIAMONDS.

[CONTINUED.]

"Then will you do an unlucky man the favor to hand this to Martha Mossrose, without letting any one else see it?" and he put into my hand a small, sealed note, made a graceful bow and darted down a passage, which I knew led away into the close and crowded quarters of Marylebone.

"Has that unpolished gem of a maid a sweetheart, and one so well worth encouragement?" thought I, as I hurried home, and put the note into Martha's hand, where she sat in the ante-room as usual, over the old clothes, at the same time telling her how it had been intrusted to me. Of course I was bent on quizzing, but the grave look of Martha's face, as she glanced at the handwriting, stopped me.

"I am thankful to you, Miss, for taking the trouble," she said, slipping the note into her pocket; "but Lady Lesingham has been fretting for you; she is not to dress till the evening to-day—it is Friday, you know. The old witch of Tunbridge has sent her word that she will pay her visit then, on her way from a select dinner to a dancing party given by some old-fashioned folks who stick in town all the year, like herself."

I found her poor Ladyship out of sorts and out of spirits to an uncommon degree; the change of her Friday performance from the afternoon to the evening, seemed to have a strangely frightening effect upon her. She sat with her strip of embroidery in her hand, but scarcely moved the needle, and started at every creak of the door or window. My endeavors to cheer her up proved all in vain; and when the evening fell, she put on the black velvet and the diamonds with more than usual unwillingness, and seated herself in the accustomed chair, to wait for the Countess.

A still, foggy night had fallen on London; there was silence without and within the great dower-house; the ladies of the kitchen had finished their domestic duties, and abandoned us to its solitude; Martha had gone down stairs to make fast the door behind them, but Martha had not returned; and I was endeavoring to amuse Lady Lesinghan with the *Adventures of a County Belle*, when I observed that she had escaped her troubles for the time, and fallen fast asleep in the easy chair, and also that the wax-candles which we always used were nearly burnt out. Being little burdened with what the plain-spoken maid called stuck-upness, I stole down stairs to ask Martha for another supply. The gas was burning brightly on the stair and in the passage below, but no Martha was to be seen; the door which she had gone to secure was on the latch; was it possible that she had slipped out to an assignation? Yet there was a step somewhere in the house, and I was about to call her, when my own name, called in a smothered tone, made me rush up-stairs. There the first sight I saw was the wild, ragged Italian, twisting and pulling at the diamond necklace round Lady Lesingham's neck; while she, with a face already black and distorted, struggled hard to defend herself. Frightened almost out of my senses, I rushed out shouting for help. That moment the outer door slammed, and the tall man who had spoken to me in the lane dashed up the stair and into the room, followed by another man of a foreign appearance, and by Martha. It does not tell to the credit of my courage, but, to save my life, I could not have moved out of an angle in the narrow stair. I heard a fierce struggle in the room above, the sound of a carriage stopping at the outer door, and then, all unconscious of what awaited her, and in a flutter of gauze and ribbons fit for a ball-room belle, Lady Tunbridge came tripping up. I had just caught sight of her, when the wild Italian, with the diamond necklace and its broken snap dangling from his bony fingers, dashed down like a whirlwind, hurled the Countess headlong down before him, and the next thing I saw was the furious wretch literally dancing upon her in the passage below, and shouting that he had got the old serpent under his feet. The next moment, the two men were down upon him; the tallest wrenched the diamonds from his grasp, the other forced him away from the serpent, as he called her; and the Countess' coachman, rushing into the rescue, gathered up the little woman, carried her to her carriage, and drove her home. I had got nerve enough by this time to venture up and see what had become of Lady Lesingham. She had escaped with life, but her face was still discolored; her clothes and hair were torn; she seemed scarcely conscious; and the immovable Martha was shedding tears while getting her into bed. I did my best to assist in doing all that could be done for the poor lady, and volunteered to go for a doctor.

"You'll go for nothing of the kind, girl," said Martha, wiping her eyes; "we can't have strangers here till it is all settled. But just step into the other room," she added, as the tall man softly entered; this gentleman has a better right to be here than any of us, and you're not one of the family."

I stepped into the other room, accordingly. The shouts of the Italian was silenced by this time, but I could hear a man speaking in a low persuasive voice down stairs; then the outer door was quietly shut, and steps moved quickly away. There was low and earnest speech in Lady Lesingham's bedroom also; it went on for some time; but at last the tall man came out wiping his eyes, and walked straight up to me where I sat, trembling like an aspen-leaf, beside the sitting-room fire.

"Miss Fenton," he said, "you have been dutiful and kind to my poor wife, who lies yonder never likely to be herself again. Yes, you may well look surprised, but I am Lord Lesingham, the last of one of the noblest lines in England, obliged to steal into my own mother's house under the cloud of night on Christmas eve, when all the servants are gone out of sight and hearing. [But I deserve it; it was all my own doing.] I am a landless man, and an outlaw. There are those who would reward you handsomely for letting them know that I am here. Don't be annoyed; I know you are far above such an action. As I said, you have been a kindly companion to my poor wife; you have seen her sore vexation; and I want to explain the whole matter to you before I go. Those cursed diamonds which you have seen her wear so often, once belonged to the Countess de Capella, an old Italian lady, the maternal grandmother of a college acquaintance of mine, Sir George Pemberton. They have a proverb in Italy, according to which an Italianized Englishman is a near approach to the prince of evil-doers: and I think it was proved true in Sir George's case. From his English father and his Italian mother he appeared to have inherited the worst qualities of both peoples, without any of their good ones. You will think me prejudiced, for Sir George and I were enemies almost from our first meeting. We got into each other's way on every possible occasion—our aims and purposes always crossed. I suppose the Fates had a hand in it; but in the long run I had little reason to like Sir George; and Sir George hated me as only people of Italian blood can hate. That amiable feeling of his rose to the highest pitch in Florence, where my mother and I resided, for family reasons, a year or two after my majority. I had always been more successful with the ladies, for he was an ill-looking man, and Miss Fenwick, to whom he chose to pay attentions, showed a preference for me. She has been my wife these twenty-two years, and had little comfort in her husband; but Sir George hated me worse for her sake.

To be continued.

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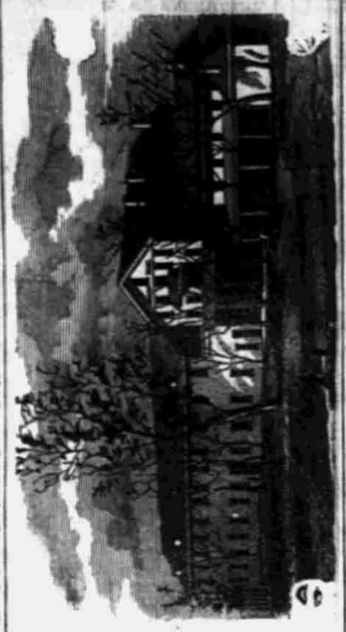

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