

THE EVENING NEWS.

Thursday, February 2, 1871.

LADY LESTER'S DIAMONDS.

[Continued.]

She loved her newly-departed visitor as little as she did the poor lady upstairs, but she managed the leave-taking better. That was my first lesson in the hypocrisy of high life, and I had many opportunities of studying the subject as week after week passed away, for every Friday, as regularly as the day came round, the Countess of Tunbridge came to see me. With me, less regularly did Lady Lestegham prepare for the visit, however indisposed or occupied she might be, on Friday morning; no sooner did the time of calls approach than she was arrayed in the old black velvet and the splendid diamonds. I used to hear her groan when putting them on in her own bedroom, as a sin in old times might have been when assuming the shirt of penance; then she would come out and sit in the tattered chair till the countess arrived, when the same scene which I have described was rehearsed, with all its polite formulas and allusions, the meaning of which I could never guess, except that a thin crust of pretended friendship was spread, as on dry high-brooding could do it, over some black abyss of fear and hatred that lay between them.

It was more than could be expected of any daughter of Eve to see such unaccountable delays. Friday after Friday, and not feel curious to her finger-nails. Curious I was beyond description; my share of life in the grand drawing-room was a life of waiting with poor Lady Lestegham in those shabby back-rooms, to which the sound of a victor's knock or carriage-wheels might penetrate, but nothing more; permitted to go out when I had a letter to post, or a trifle to buy at the nearest shop; but all the rest of my time devoted to the amusements of her Ladyship, as became a salaried companion—the history of the diamonds interested me more than any one could imagine who was not similarly situated. The only person to whom I could venture an inquiry on the subject was Martha Montrose. I suppose Martha intended us all for some specialty; and Martha was undoubtedly intended for her peculiar position in the Dowager's back room. She was not lacking in either sound sense or sound principle, but a more unimpeachable character I never saw. Entirely divested of the proverbial affectations of a lady's maid, Martha took the opportunity of the diamonds, which she spoke of as the Lestegham family great Dowager and all, with as much plainness and as little reverence as if they had been her poor cousin's; and her only amusement appeared to consist in spreading old clothes. It is scarcely necessary to say that Martha showed me no particular respect; but being considerably thrown together, we struck up a kind of official intimacy, and one day when Lady Lestegham was taking a sleep, which she generally did for a couple of hours every afternoon, except on Fridays, I contrived to turn our conversation on the diamonds, by wondering how they had escaped the fate of the family mansion and estate.

"They would have gone, too, if they could have been parted with," said Martha. "I heard Lady Lestegham say so; and, poor soul! she would begin enough to part with them, too."

"How is that, Martha?" said I. "They are magnificent jewels."

"Well, I never knew the right of it, and maybe I never will, which is no great loss, for great families seldom bring people more trouble than profit; but Alphonse, my Lord's French valet, told me that it was by those very diamonds that she came to be Lady Lestegham. The family were all in Italy at the time, trying to recruit a bit, for the old Lord, who had followed the very same games that his son had played a good deal deeper, was just dead; they were at Florence, and a lot of English gentry were there besides—I suppose there always are, spending their money abroad, you see—and among them our Lady and her mother, for the father was gone. I believe he held some high post in India, so it was natural to think he had left them rich. Lady Tunbridge was there, too, with her mother, the Dowager Lady Privately. She was Lady Carolina, at the time, being unmarried, and the eldest of four sisters, but the French were known to be great gamblers, and among the titled people, and the eldest daughter, not knowing exactly how his affairs stood, set her mind on Lord Lestegham as a good match. Maybe it was not entirely for a match either—you must know my Lord is one of the handsomest men in England, or was when I saw him last, in spite of his bad ways—but Miss Fenwick (that was my Lady's maiden name) had set her mind upon him, too, and my Lady was rather divided between them; so was his mother the Dowager, of course, she wanted him to marry the richest, and could not make out which it was, till one evening, at a grand ball given by some of the Italian nobility, Miss Fenwick appeared in that very black velvet and those splendid diamonds you see her wearing every Friday. The valet was new then, you may be sure, though it is old enough now, for the thing happened twenty-two years ago; and Miss Fenwick being young and fair, looked to such advantage in my Lord's eyes, and her diamonds promised so well to his mother's, that the Indian widow's daughter became Lady Lestegham. The old Lady said she would give her for nothing but her diamonds, though she caught the old Earl of Tunbridge the very next season, and he left her a good fortune, the year after that. They say the Dowager never forgave her daughter-in-law either, when she found out, the day after the wedding, that all the fortune there was to be had was in the diamonds and those same diamonds. My Lord was not quite so much displeased with his bargain; and the young pair lived happily enough until their two children, Clementine and Sophie, in the drawing-room, remember—they are not worth calling ladies, the stunk-up things—were well-grown girls; then Lady Tunbridge came back from a long stay in Italy, and she was visiting them; and if Alphonse knew the reason, he never let it out to me, or anybody else, that I know of; but from that time my Lord and my Lady lived separately; he left to his daughter a will, and you see what has come of them. But Lady Tunbridge has held on to the visiting ever since; she was at it before I came into the service. The very first Friday ever I visited my Lady, she put on the velvet and the diamonds against her coming, exactly as she does now. Her valet never could be got to leave or touch anything in their house; and it was not for want of invitations I am told, when the friendship first began. They were long in Italy, you see, and might have learned something in the way of mixtures. I wish somebody would get her out of the way, for my Lady's sake, though maybe that's a bit; but there is something good about her diamonds, and the diamonds, and I think I shall be that's all I know about them," said Martha.

To be continued.

DISSOLUTION IN PARTNERSHIP.

"THE Partnership heretofore existing between the undersigned, in and for the County of St. Louis, in the State of Missouri, under the name of J. & W. L. Smith & Co., is hereby dissolved, and the business of the said firm is transferred to J. & W. L. Smith & Co., who are hereby authorized to receive and pay all debts due to and by the said firm, and to do all acts necessary to carry out the purposes of this dissolution. In witness whereof, we have hereunto set our hands and seals at St. Louis, this 1st day of February, 1871."

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