

## ESMERALDA

which had been stuck into a corner of the mirror. At once I recognized the firm handwriting—the signature was not necessary. She had written:

“Good-by, all! Sorry we don’t part better friends. I have taken only what I brought.

ESMERALDA.”

For a long moment I stood gazing fixedly at the note, something within me going very queer; I can scarcely describe the sensation, except to say that it was as if something within me awoke. Also something died. I cannot say just what. Hardly conscious of what I did I raised her handkerchief to my lips for an instant, before secreting it in an inner pocket of my coat. Then I took up the note, switched off the light, and descended to face my patroness.

I had scarcely reached the foot of the stairs when Mrs. Langdon brushed past, in a great state of excitement, and reached the drawing-room just ahead of me. There stood Mrs. De Wynt, who had evidently finished the meal without