AS IN A LOOKING GLASS.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER XVI.—(Continued.)

I give one shriek, which brings Algy to my side in a second. He seizes hold of my assailant and holds him by the collar; like a vice, asking him in French—which, if not very correct, has, at any rate, been rendered fluent by his excitement—asking him, I say, what he means by insulting a lady. The man struggles violently, and mutters some incomprehensible oaths. Thereupon his companion, in a weak moment, is foolish enough to strike Algy with his cane. The latter drops his man, and then goes for the pair of them in genuine British style, the result being that in about half a minute both of them are knocked down, and when they get up, are knocked down again. They then appear to realize the fact that they have caught a Tartar, and commence howling for mercy. Algy bestows a parting kick on the one nearest to him, and, making me take his arm, contemptuously leaves them.

"How can I ever thank you?" I say.

"Good Heavens! there is nothing to thank me for. I could have killed the brutes for insulting you."

"What should I have done if I had not had you to protect me?"

"Let me protect you always, darling," he replies; "I love you with all my heart. Be my wife.

"My dear love," is all I say.

And so, at last, it is settled, and my great strike is landed—or rather is on the eve of being landed, for, until the marriage has absolutely taken place, I am never safe. A woman with a past like mine may, at any moment, have her prospect marred by one of the enemies that she must necessarily have made; or, still more probably, by "some damned good-natured friend."

It is New Year's Day, and I have risen early, after a naturally sleepless night. I am sitting at the open window, and looking at the Alpes Maritimes and the tideless Mediterranean. I am congratulating myself upon my extraordinary good fortune, when suddenly my eyes wander to the table, and there I see a letter which escaped my notice on the previous evening. I take it up, and see that it is from Jack Fortinbras. Imagine my feelings on reading it.

"ALBANY, December 29th.

"DEAR LENA,—As you never write, I suppose that you have got on some good game of your own, and wish you think it advisable to keep to yourself. I am afraid, however, that I cannot gratify your natural, but, at the same time, lamentably selfish, propensity for monopolizing all the good things of this world. I have just returned to town from Downton Park. I find that I can make no impression upon the little Vyse, so I have made up our mind so much the more time in that direction. And, as there was no money to be got hold of in that country, I determined to come back to London, and so here I am. Here I am, dear Lena, but not for long. You don't seem likely to come here, and so I have determined to come to you. You may expect me about the 4th or 5th. I shall stop at the Hôtel de Paris, as I hate all the rest. Ask them to keep a room. I will take it from the 4th. I dare say Monte Carlo is full, and I don't want to be running from one hotel to another on my arrival.

"Good bye, my dear. I hope you have got hold of something really good.

"Yours always, JACK."

Merciful heavens! Jack coming here to spoil all my chances and hopes for a happy future. There is only one thing to be done, and there is not a moment to be lost Algy and I must at once leave Monte Carlo.

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To be continued.