

LORD LOCKINGTON

BY FLORENCE WARDEN

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN luncheon was over, Edna, knowing that she would not be wanted at the organ in the hall until after the cup of tea which she had been promised at four o'clock, went back to her own sitting-room for another practice. But she had scarcely sat down to the piano when the door opened, and Revesby came in with an

enormous silver salver, on which was a parcel of considerable size done up loosely and amateurishly in sheets of crumpled and discoloured tissue paper.

"His Lordship, ma'am, desired me to bring you this," he said, as he offered Edna the parcel and at the same time looked at a letter which lay beside it on the salver. "And the letter, ma'am, from his Lordship will tell you all about it."

"Oh, thank you—thank you very much," said Edna, in a great flutter of excitement over this, the very first personal communication which Lord Lockington had made to her.

With a trembling hand she took the letter, and placed the parcel on a little table. The paper coverings came off on one side as she did so, and she saw that it contained a piece of cream-coloured satin, richly adorned with raised embroidery in pale tints of cream and green and pink and blue, and with gold thread.

A cry broke from her at the beauty of the material, and, as she dived further into the parcel, after the departure of the butler, she discovered that the whole consisted of an unmade gown with bodice pieces all complete, rich and handsome and soft to the touch beyond anything of the kind she had ever seen. With a little trouble and perplexity she examined the magnificent folds of the satin, and then opened the letter. It was written in a hand which seemed like that of an old man, and it consisted of the following words:

"Lord Lockington is very deeply obliged to Miss Bellamy for the kindness she showed him in playing and singing for him immediately after her arrival, at a time when she must have been fatigued after her journey. He is further grateful for the trouble Miss Bellamy took in singing to him this morning in the bad light of the lower room in the old wing."

"In consideration of this graceful indulgence of his caprices, Lord Lockington desires to make some return to Miss Bellamy, and will be obliged if she will accept a small present which he is having prepared for her, and which he hopes to send her in the course of a few days."

"Lord Lockington hopes that Miss Bellamy will be indulgent in granting another small request of his, and that she will accept, have 'made up' (he believes it is called) and wear while playing and singing, the gown which he sends her herewith. It was purchased by him at an exhibition, and is supposed to be a fine example of modern Italian embroidery."

"Miss Bellamy would further oblige Lord Lockington if she would consent to have it made in the style of the dress worn by the lady in the picture that hangs in the Blue Saloon, which Revesby will show Miss Bellamy if she wishes."

"The housekeeper will, if Miss Bellamy grants Lord Lockington's request, have a dressmaker sent for, who will take Miss Bellamy's measure, and have the gown made up for her at his expense."

Edna put down the letter with a slight feeling of uneasiness.

She did not at all like the idea of being what she called "dressed up," neither did she like having to wear clothes of so magnificent a sort, provided by a stranger. She was looking at the rich satin with doubtful eyes when Mrs. Holland came in and smiled, seeing how she was engaged.

"Oh, Mrs. Holland, good-morning. I'm so glad to see you. I want to speak to you. Come and sit here, and look at this. Or have you seen it before?"

The housekeeper shook her head as she looked with admiration at the rich stuff.

"Ah!" she said, "I know by the look of it that is one of those things his Lordship used to be so fond of bringing back with him when he went abroad, or to London on a shopping expedition. Drawers and chests full of beautiful things, he has,

that are never opened or looked at. It does seem a pity, though one can't say anything, of course. Has his Lordship made you a present of this?"

"Yes, and he wants me to have it made up and to wear it," replied Edna, in a troubled tone. "I shall have to, I suppose. But I don't like to have to do it, and I wish Lord Lockington would excuse me. But I suppose it is of no use to ask him?"

The housekeeper smiled with conviction. "Not the least in the world," she said. "When his Lordship takes anything into his head, if it's only the smallest fancy or fad, the thing has to be looked upon as law. It is because you were so submissive, and so ready to comply with his whim of making you play and sing before you had time to take your hat off, that he is so pleased with you. I strongly advise you to do as he wishes, and to have the dress made up and to wear it."

Edna looked down at the letter with a sigh. "And he says he's having a present prepared," said she, dolefully. "I would much rather not have any presents."

"There's no need to worry your head about that," she said. "Whatever he sends you will come, just as this dress has done, with a letter and without your having to see or to thank him. Believe me, I've known his Lordship these many years, and I know his odd ways. And I believe it is just his way of expressing real pleasure with you, for having satisfied him with your pretty playing and your pleasant voice, after all the trouble he's had to get a musician to suit him."

EDNA heaved a great sigh. "I shall look a peacock!" she said, with a distasteful glance at the beautiful material that lay spread out upon the table.

"Oh, I daresay you won't look as bad as you think," said Mrs. Holland, rather stiffly, for she considered that the young lady was probably "fishing" for a compliment. "Anyhow, I'm glad you've decided to do as he wishes. You see, ma'am, I have to look upon myself as in some sort responsible for having brought you here, and therefore I am anxious that you shall please his Lordship, as well as for your happiness and comfort here."

"Thank you," said Edna, rather reassured by the housekeeper's words, though still unwilling to wear the too handsome dress.

Then, as Mrs. Holland assured her that there was no need to send any answer to the note she had received, that her obedience was all his Lordship desired, she sighed, put away the satin, and taking her hat and jacket went out for another walk in the ever delightful park.

This time she explored in the direction of the back of the mansion, and passed long rows of handsome stables, some new, some old, in which, as she was able to see by the life and bustle there was about the place, some horses were still kept.

Going further in the same direction, she reached the outskirts of the park, and came to an odd little square building of massive stone, with a heavy wooded door studded and barred with iron. The door was fastened, but there was no padlock and no lock visible on the outer side; only a rough key-hole without any key in it.

She supposed that this was a water-conduit, and strolled past in the direction of the wall of the park, beyond which, at this point, she saw the gables of a very pretty old house, with barns and outbuildings, sheds and sheep-pens behind it, which she knew must be the home farm, where the eccentric and dissipated Mr. Thomas Kage lived.

There were people moving about in the house, which Edna could see well from the knoll, inside the park-wall, on which she stood.

It looked, she thought, as if the master of the house had returned suddenly, for she saw much bustle and movement in and about the house, and a boy was carrying a small portmanteau up to the front door which was open, showing people moving about in the narrow hall and running up and down stairs.

Edna, after having taken a long look at the house, which was singularly picturesque, and which compared favourably in her mind with the too vast and therefore somewhat dreary Lockington Hall, retreated towards the mansion, and got indoors just in time to be served with her cup of tea and a dainty little savoury sandwich and piece of cake which, with the vigorous appetite of nineteen, of which

she was somewhat ashamed, she partook hungrily.

Then, subdued and very much frightened as to the result of her amateurish efforts, she went downstairs and seated herself at the organ, the key of which hung on a little ornamental peg close at hand.

The lights were full on in the hall, and a glance showed her that the blind of the smaller gallery had not yet been pulled down.

Timorously she began her task, not playing from sight, but from some simple organ music which she had brought down with her.

She was fully conscious that she was by no means strong in this accomplishment, but she knew it was vain to expect to receive spoken praise or blame for her efforts. When, however, she contrived, while searching for some more music, to look round, she saw that the blind had been pulled down, and she guessed that Lord Lockington was behind it, listening to her.

This knowledge gave her confidence. Surely, if he had been much disgusted, he would have gone away, especially if it was he whom she had heard playing the smaller organ so well that morning!

When she had played for some time, the butler appeared, with the compliments of Lord Lockington, and the request that Miss Bellamy would exchange the organ for the piano, and would sing to him.

"And his Lordship said I was to tell you, ma'am, to sing anything you liked, either old songs or new, and that you were not to sing any more after you'd begun to feel tired."

"Will you tell his Lordship," returned Edna, trying to speak very clearly, in the belief that she was heard by the person for whom her message was intended, "that I am very much ashamed to have had to play the organ in his hearing, after the much better playing I heard this morning. But that I will find a way of getting some practice, and that I hope to improve and to play much better soon."

The words were uttered so simply, so earnestly and with so much modesty, that even the wooden, sulien face of the butler softened a little as he received the message, and said he would take it to his Lordship.

Then Edna went to the piano, and, sitting down with her own songs beside her, poured out her very heart in melody, every note showing, unconsciously, that effect which the kindness and the mysterious generosity of her unseen benefactor had had upon her.

And presently, whether it was fancy or not she could not be quite sure—but there seemed to come to her the faint sound of a subdued and dainty clapping of the hands.

Flushed with the possibility that she had succeeded in pleasing Lord Lockington to the extent of winning from him some slight applause, the girl turned her lovely young face towards the drawn blind in the gallery, and smiled her unspoken thanks for the encouragement.

And then, quite certainly, she did hear a quiet little clapping of hands from behind the drawn blind.

She did not quite know whether she was to sing again after that, but her uncertainty was put an end to by the appearance of the butler, who appeared to be miraculously inspired when to intervene. He informed her that his Lordship was afraid of tiring her, and that he was much obliged by her readiness to do whatever she was asked to do. As before, Edna answered in a very clear voice:

"Please tell his Lordship that it is a great pleasure to me to do anything to please him, and that I am very proud of being able to do so."

CHAPTER X.

THE rest of the day and the evening passed much as before, with one exception.

Mrs. Holland came into the White Saloon, after dinner, and producing a key, asked Miss Bellamy if she would come and see the portrait concerning which Lord Lockington had written to her. Edna was delighted to satisfy her curiosity about one of the unseen rooms, and when she followed the housekeeper into the Blue Saloon, which was the locked-up room next to the White one, she looked with much interest at the portrait of the lovely Venetian lady, with a rich dress, a stomacher and many jewels, which the housekeeper showed her, raising for her inspection the heavy baize curtain which hung over it.

Edna glanced round her at the apartment, and saw that, unlike the White Saloon, it had been left in its early nineteenth century state, with crystal chandeliers, white and gold walls, console tables, and gilded girandoles on the walls.

The furniture was invisible, being stacked up in the centre and swathed in brown holland. But there was something so ghostly in the effect of the

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