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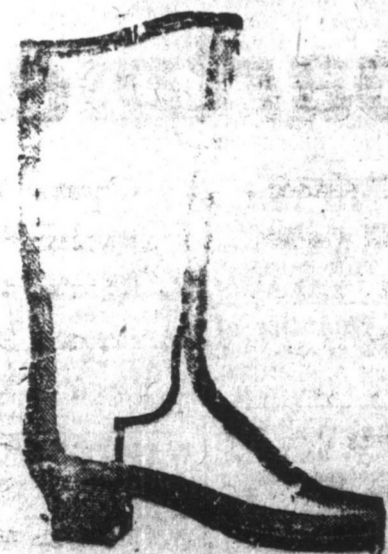
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The Countess of Landon.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"He managed to meet her outside the theatre, and—God knows whether he would have got her to marry him, for she knew no more of the world than a child, and he was a play-actor and full of deceit and pretense; but she learned that he was married already—to me," she added, with stolid misery.

Jake scowled.

"No one knew of her infatuation or his attempted villainy, and not long afterward she was married to the Earl of Landon."

Seymour struck the table.

"Lies!" he said; then he sneered: "And you let this woman stand there and utter them in your presence, madame?"

The countess did not even glance at him.

"Go on!" she said to Martha.

Martha drew a long breath.

"My husband and I wandered about for three years—three such wretched years as few of you women have to endure—and one day I met the countess. She was kind to me, she pitied me. Being wretched myself, I was quick to see that she was not happy, and after a time she told me the cause. She had been married nearly four years, and there was no child—the son—and heir—to take the great title and estates—and the earl, her husband, was unhappy about it. She cried when she told me—cried bitterly—and as I sat and looked at her, my heart aching, for trouble makes a woman tender, a thought came into our heads at the same moment. My child was lying in the cradle. There was no food in the

house. My husband had struck me a week ago, and I had left him. I looked at the poor child, and thought what a pity it was that it didn't belong to the countess, and—"

Her face had grown whiter, her breath heavier and more labored with each word, and she stopped and put up her hands before her face.

Seymour sat for a moment speechless, then he laughed—a derisive defiant laugh.

"And you sold your brat to the countess, that she might pass it off on the earl as her own?" he said. "Is that the story?"

"It is," said Martha in a low voice.

"Everything helped us. My lady was going abroad the next day for some months, alone, his lordship having to join the regiment. I took the child to her secretly. Its birth was advertised in the papers, no one suspected anything wrong, for her ladyship had planned everything, and to the day of his death the earl believed that you were his son."

Seymour started.

"Me?" he said, hoarsely. "Strange as it may seem, he had not until that moment realized that she was speaking of him. You mean me?"

She turned her head away, then held out her hand, as if imploring forgiveness and mercy.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"Yes," she panted, "you are my son—his!" and she looked at Jake with a shudder.

Seymour face went white and his lips trembled, then he laughed.

"Of all the grossly improbable lies that ever were uttered, this is the worst!" he said. "If your son? I not the Earl of Landon?" He laughed.

"It is the clumsiest lie that ever was concocted! And you sit there and listen to it!" He turned savagely upon the countess.



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She raised her eyes to his. All the while had left her face—left it looking like a stone mask.

"It is true," she said at last.

Seymour glared at her.

"You say that? You help the woman in her villainy? Do you know what you are saying—that you are admitting? I don't believe a word of it! No one would believe it! Get out of my sight, all of you!"

"Dare to breathe a word of this outside, and I will send the lot of you to jail—yes, all of you!" and he glared at the countess. "There is only one way to deal with a conspiracy of this kind, and by—"

he uttered an awful oath—"I'll do it—yes, though you are my own mother! Do you hear? Leave the room, all of you, and repeat your lies elsewhere at your peril! What? I this woman's son?" and he laughed again.

The countess looked at him for a moment in silence, then she raised her hand and pointed to the mirror that hung on the wall in front of him. "Look at her and at that!" she said, solemnly.

Seymour glanced at Martha Hooper and then at the glass.

Her face, white and drawn the pale eyes, the thin lips, the whole expression and every feature seemed reflected from his face in the glass.

It came upon him with the force of a thunder-bolt. He uttered a cry and clutched at the table, still staring at the face—his own—that glared back at him.

Jake laughed—a horrible, chuckle.

"You're right, my lady," he said; "he takes after the old woman rather than me. Bad taste on his part, I call it."

The harsh, vulgar roused Seymour from his stupor. He shuddered and sunk into the chair, holding his hand over his trembling lips.

Martha crept up to him slowly, her face working, and timidly laid her hand on his shoulder.

"I—I am sorry," she murmured, brokenly.

Seymour drew away from her with a look of horror.

"Don't—don't dare to touch me!" he said. "I don't believe a word—I know you turned to the countess—I know why you have concocted this!" he said, hoarsely. "You want to put that beast Royce, in my place! You have always hated me! You know it—I have known it! It is for Royce you have hatched this plot, but you will find yourself disappointed!"

He drew himself up. "I am the Earl of Landon! Take your vile story into a court of law, and though you may get a dozen sensible men to believe you—which is impossible—you convict yourself of a crime for which there is a heavy punishment."

"No punishment can be heavier than that I have borne since the first hour of my deception," said the countess, calmly.

Seymour was silent for a moment, then his face brightened.

"If you don't consider yourself and your own reputation, you'll think of Royce!" he said, triumphantly. "You won't care that he should know that his mother was nothing better than an impostor and a thief! Though—and he laughed—'seeing how low he has sunk, perhaps it won't matter. His wife's relations wouldn't think much of such a trifle as you say you have done. Bah!"

he laughed defiantly—"what can you do? Suppose this cook-and-bull story were true, what can you do? You can't, for shame's sake—for your dear Royce's sake—make it known to the world. So, you see, my dear madame,—he stopped and bit his lip, and glanced under his brows at Martha Hooper—"it will come to nothing. I don't think I shall have to defend my title and estate in a court of law."

They were all silent, and after a moment of enjoyment, he went on.

"Royce will never be the east, my dear madame. I shall marry Irene! Stop!" for the countess had opened her lips. "I know what you are going to say—that you will tell her this stupid story. Do so at your peril! The moment any of you opens his or her lips, I prosecute for conspiracy."

They were silent for a moment as his laugh of defiance rang through the room. Then Jake's voice broke harshly:

(To be continued.)

Embroidery in crystal beads is used on a frock of pink and white chiffon.

An informal frock of white has the apron front gathered to a band of blue lace.

Serve vanilla ice cream with caramel sauce, and sprinkle with chopped nuts.

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Oddities of Russian Army

Sneezing was once prohibited in the Russian army. A passage from the history of the coronation of Alexander II in 1855 reads as follows: "Opposite the house from which we saw the procession was drawn up a regiment called Paulovski, after the Emperor Paul, all the men having turned up noses, thus resembling him. It seems that was the fashion to compose regi-

ments of men all having the same features. The late emperor had crulls sent to him, and took their cording to looks. There is one regiment of men all marked with smallpox. This Paulovski regiment did one thing which amused me before the cortege came up that blew their noses at the word of command. This was in order that none of them might sneeze when the emperor passed, as their doing so would be him bad luck."

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