

# Lord Lockington

(Continued from page 10.)

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she stayed at Lockington Hall. She was not particularly superstitious, but she began to think of all the ghost stories she had heard, and to wonder whether any of them related to this particular mansion.

Many old country houses, as she knew, had weird tales told about them; and surely it needed some such explanation to make it comprehensible that Lady Lockington should leave her invalid husband alone in this one for so many long months together!

So argued the innocent Edna, with the feeling strong upon her that she would like to have done with the splendours of the Hall, and to be back with her aunt in their modest and jerry-built residence in the suburbs, which was haunted by nothing more spectral than the sound of the next-door piano on the one side, and of the neighbours' children on the other!

She ran back across the floor to the fire-place, and spread out her hands to the blaze, with a fancy that she must be cold.

Then the door which led, so the butler said, into the other drawing-rooms, caught her eye. He had said she might see them if she wished, so she might as well examine them too.

Summoning all her courage—for there would be no light in those unused rooms, and the visit might be rather "shuddery"—she went down the room and tried the handle.

But the door was locked, and there was no key on this side. She was troubled by this discovery. She began to feel that to see into those locked rooms was the greatest desire of her heart; and to conjure up spectres gliding about in the dark, shut-up apartments.

Aware that she was making much of a very small trouble the girl began to walk up and down the saloon, looking about for some fresh occupation to divert her.

There was a piano standing out from one corner, an instrument so handsome that she felt it was too beautiful to be touched except by special invitation. For it was painted a very light sage-green, and on this ground, amid scrolls in relief lightly touched with gold, there were dainty pictures of graceful women in hoop and powder, of dandies in sword and red-heeled shoes, surrounded by garlands of pale roses.

When she had begun to examine this handsome case she became fascinated, and presently decided to find out whether the instrument were worthy of its magnificent case.

So she opened it, and ran her fingers daintily over the keys.

Then she turned round quickly, with the feeling upon her more strongly than before that someone was present in the room besides herself.

Again, however, she saw no one. And, telling herself she was a goose, she gave herself up to the delight of playing a piano which was a revelation of power and sweetness. It was indeed an exhibition piano of great value, and a joy for any musician worthy the name.

WITH the instinct of a genuine music-lover, Edna soon forgot her fears and her fancies as she played, and then sang, and then played again.

But as she finished one of her songs, a little ballad in the modern style, childish in sentiment but rather pretty and tuneful, one she had scarcely thought important enough to sing in the great hall in the presence of the unseen and important hearer. She heard a human voice which made her start up and listen.

Outside the house, she thought, the singer must be, for the sound was muffled by distance, and seemed to come from the direction of the park between the mansion and the river.

Faint as were the sounds, Edna distinguished that they were the notes of a man's voice trying to repeat the melody of the ballad she had just been singing. Mellow they were, and deep, with nothing ghostly or uncanny about them. And she felt quite comforted and relieved to hear a human voice, and to imagine that this act of the unseen singer of trying to sing her little song established a bond of human and help-

ful friendship between her and him.

Such was the state of mind to which solitude and her strange situation had reduced her, that Edna almost felt surprised that anything so human as this voice should reach her ears, admit so much that was mysterious, perplexing, and ghostly.

The voice died away in the distance, and she sat down at the piano again, hoping that her music might bring the singer back. But if he came he came in silence, for she heard his voice no more.

Weary of playing, and disappointed in this silly little wish to hear the deep-toned voice again, Edna rose from the piano, shut it carefully, and looked at a little gilt clock, with a long-robed angel of fame flying on the top, which stood on a side-table. It was only half-past nine. Should she go to bed?

She felt as shy of leaving the room, and venturing alone into that vast hall and those echoing corridors, as she had been shy of entering it. But she was just nerving herself to make the attempt, and approaching the wall to ring the electric bell, when the door opened and Mrs. Holland came in.

THE housekeeper seemed in good humour, and Edna was delighted to welcome her. A visitor in this terrible solitude, to break up the fancies which seemed to people it, was unlooked-for joy.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come!" cried Edna. "It's dreadful to be alone so long!"

"Poor dear!" said the housekeeper, smiling benignantly, as Edna insisted upon placing her in a chair and came close to her, with relief in her young face. "You have begun to be bored already, I'm afraid. I was fearing how it would be. I told his Lordship so. I put it to him that if my Lady, with her maids and her dogs, and her horses and her motor-car, and with the people who come to visit her and those she brings with her, always complains of being bored here, what would a young lady do who has no friends here, and who is so many miles away from her own people?"

The girl sat back and looked rather disconsolate. "Perhaps it won't always be so bad!" said she, wistfully. "When does Lady Lockington come back to the Hall?"

The housekeeper, so it seemed to Edna, pursed up her lips a little. "I don't suppose she'll be here before Christmas," she said.

"Christmas! Oh, I shall be away by that time, shan't I? I mean if I were to stay here, if Lord Lockington were satisfied with my playing, I should be allowed to go home for some holidays then, shouldn't I?"

Mrs. Holland hesitated, and Edna began to look frightened, as if wondering whether she was to be looked upon as having sold her very soul for eighty pounds a year.

"By the bye," she said, "have you heard yet what Lord Lockington thinks?"

There was a pause.

"What he thinks about what?" asked Mrs. Holland then, evasively.

"Why, about my playing, of course? I'm sure he must have heard me! For there was a sort of blind drawn down in that little gallery, in front of a door that opens out upon it. I'm quite sure that Lord Lockington must have been behind it."

"Well, I believe, as a matter of fact, that his Lordship has heard you play and sing too," admitted the housekeeper, cautiously.

"Yes, I was sure of it; and now tell me, is he satisfied? Does he think I play well enough and sing, or shall I be sent away?"

A faint smile, instantly suppressed, appeared on the housekeeper's face.

"Do you wish to stay?" she asked, evading the question.

"Why, yes, of course I do."

"In spite of the dullness? And I warn you it will be no livelier!"

The housekeeper looked at her with a frown, not of anger, but of earnest and serious discussion.

She seemed to have some anxiety in

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