

A Wife's Constancy

A Touching Romance Related
by Alice Dunning Lingard

It was in the green room of the opera house that I learned, from the lips of Alice Dunning Lingard, the thrilling history of Madame X. and her husband.

"Mrs. Lingard," said I, "judging from the little interpolation I heard you sing last evening during the play, I should judge you to be the possessor of a very fine voice. How is it that you do not exercise your voice more, and why have you not chosen the lyric instead of the dramatic stage?"

"Ah! that is easily explained," replied the charming lady. "You see, since my earliest childhood, I have been thrown among actors and actresses. In fact, I have grown up on the dramatic stage, and although I was told long ago, and repeatedly during late years, that I possessed a fine singing voice, yet I lacked the opportunity to cultivate it to the extent required to fit one for the operatic stage. Nevertheless, when an opportunity presents itself, I generally take advantage of it. During our last visit to Australia I took some lessons from the celebrated teacher, Madame X., a sister of the late Vincent Wallace, the composer of "Maritana" and "Lurline." She resides in Sydney and enjoys a very large patronage.

"Speaking of Madame X.," continued Mrs. Lingard with animation, "reminds me of a story of the most startling and thrilling nature, which will interest you, I am sure."

Flattered with the prospect of hearing something of unusual interest—for such I knew it would prove, judging from the animated expression of my fair entertainer's handsome face—I assured her of my unqualified curiosity and undoubted pleasure, whereupon she proceeded as follows:

"Madame X., you must know, was in her youth a prominent singer of the Royal Italian opera in London, and her husband was one of the leading tenors. Both not only enjoyed reputations as fine singers, but also stood very high in a certain social circle of the *haute volée* of London. One day the husband entered a renowned jewelry establishment and requested to be shown a collection of valuable brilliants, as he desired to make a purchase. The dealer, knowing the man, and aware of the high position he held, and also knowing that the celebrities of his calling will only purchase the very best articles of jewelry, produced several caskets containing a fortune in diamonds. After examining all with the care of a connoisseur, he selected several of the finest stones. The dealer placed those selected in a separate casket, and the signor requested that they be set aside until his return in the morning, as he had not his check book with him just then. This was agreed to with alacrity on the part of the dealer, who courteously bowed his distinguished customer out. During the course of the following day, a cab drew up before the jewelry establishment, and the occupant proved to be the negotiator for the diamonds. With out leaving the carriage, X. signaled to the jeweler, and, in a hurried manner asked again to look at the casket of brilliants which he had selected the day before. The request was made with the apology that he (the purchaser) was in a great hurry to meet an engagement, or he would not thus trouble the jeweler to come out of his shop. The dealer speedily brought out the casket, which the purchaser

placed on the cushion beside him and drew out a check-book from his coat to fill out a check for the amount—£20,000.

"He was in the very act of writing the check, when a stranger rushed up in a very excited manner, hurriedly excused himself to both gentlemen for interrupting them, and then whispered a few words to the occupant of the carriage. The latter, with nervous haste and every appearance of intense excitement, returned his check-book to his fob, precipitately handed back the casket to the dealer, and saying that something serious had happened which required immediate attention, he gave the driver the signal to whip up his horses. The vehicle swiftly disappeared around the corner, and there was nothing for the astonished dealer to do but return the casket to its place, and to await a call from the purchaser later in the day.

The day passed, however, with out any sign of the customer's return. A second and a third day passed by without any message from him. The disappointed dealer became curious and some what solicitous, and his anxiety was not by any means lessened when the papers announced the sudden and mysterious disappearance of Signor X., of the Royal Italian Opera.

"Up to the time of the announcement of the Signors's disappearance the diamond merchant had thought but little of the casket, and it had remained in its place unopened. Like a flash, the idea darted into his head that he ought to have examined the treasure. He now opened the casket, and judge his consternation when he found it empty! Instantly the scene which had occurred at his door three days previous, came to mind, and the truth was now quite evident: he had been robbed of twenty thousand pounds in diamonds!

"Losing not a moment, the startled jeweler communicated the affair to the police. Detectives were immediately sent out, and these tracked the fugitive to Liverpool, where he had embarked on an out-going ship bound for America. Arrangements were effected for the pursuit, and the robber was intercepted on his landing at the American port. He was brought back to London, where he was tried with his confederates, found guilty, and condemned to servitude for life in the penal colonies of Queensland.

"Of course the trial and verdict, in consequence of the high social and professional standing of the principal in the affair, caused immense excitement, not only in London, but on the continent as well.

"Some few weeks afterwards, Madame X. suddenly disappeared, and no clue to her whereabouts could be discovered, in spite of the searches of relatives and friends, and nothing was known of her for many years.

"Now," continued Mrs. Lingard, "comes the romantic part of the story. It appears that a certain law existed, and probably still exists, granting to a real estate owner in the penal colonies the right to choose a servant from among the inmates of the prison the masters becoming surety for the good behavior of servants thus obtained. Now mark what followed"—and the fair narrator's eyes sparkled with interest—"Now mark what followed—Many months, perhaps a year after Signor X. was sentenced a lady applied to the Governor General of the penal colonies, stating that she had purchased ground, upon which she had built a cottage and she now desired a man

servant to do her gardening and other work about the house. The lady was of most imposing bearing, and was so evidently in earnest in her intentions, that the permit was granted. As she proved herself a property-holder, no objections could be made. She was shown through prison after prison, but found none among the inmates who suited her, until she was suddenly confronted by the celebrated diamond robber and ex-priiuro tenore of the Royal Italian Opera in London.

"Whatever her inward emotions may have been, she stifled and suppressed it. After a moment's hesitation and apparent investigation, she intimated that this was the man she wanted. Arrangements were accordingly effected, and the lady and her servant departed. Is it necessary for me to state that Madame X. and her husband were united? They lived together for many years very happy, I understand, seeming to the world to be mistress and menial, but being in reality man and wife.

"For nearly twenty years the two unfortunate ones enjoyed each other's companionship, and who knows but they were happier by far than many men and women we meet daily with all the outward indications of happiness and contentment.

"After the death of her husband, Madame X. made herself known and reentered public life as a teacher of vocalization. Little by little her sad history became known, and it was while I was her pupil that I learned it."

Thanking Mrs. Lingard sincerely for the real pleasure though a melancholy one, which she had given me by the recital of this romance, I bade her God-speed, as her company was to leave on the early train the following day.

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