

A Serial Story.

HEARD LOW ER.

By DAVID KER.

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CHAPTER I.

THE LONELY TOWER.



"God protect us!" muttered the mother.

"There he comes! that's he!"

"What? That tall man on the other side of the street? Well, his splendidly handsome, if ever any man was, but with a slight shadow of grey about his hair, and a thing in his face that frightens me, though I don't know why."

"Ah! do you feel like that too? Well, it's very odd, but I have seen the man ever since I was a child as I used to feel when I was a child over the pictures of those dreadful enchanted men in the fairy tales who, when they came turned into wolves or tigers or devils, and devoured every one within reach."

No one who knew them would have laid an over-riding suspicion on the man of the two worthy burghers who were gossiping thus in the main street of Marseilles; yet this man had strangely impressed them both, and the impression for which there was no possible reason was exactly the same in both cases.

Meanwhile the subject of their talk—a tall, lank-looking man in the prime of life, wearing a top hat and a rather theatrical Hungarian dress, which set off his noble figure to full advantage—went slowly along the opposite sidewalk, with his head bent down as if in deep thought, and seemingly unconscious of the admiring glances shot at him by many passing ladies.

Suddenly he raised his head as if he had come to some final decision on the subject that was occupying his thoughts. As he did so his eyes met those of a tiny girl who was being carried past him in the arms of a stout market woman.

"I've seen you before," said the girl, laughing gleefully and playing with the fringe of her mother's shawl, but as she caught the piercing glances of those large, black, fiery eyes, she trembled and began to weep.

"God protect us!" muttered the mother, hastily signing the cross over the shuddering infant; "that man must surely have the evil eye, for he has made the subject of our chat, and he has been looking at the door of a large stone house turned to look at it."

"If that fellow were only a man I'd give the tailor of a most impressive French artist, in a tone of irrepressible enthusiasm. 'His face is worthy of Van Dyck!'"

"Worthy of the Police Gazette, you mean," growled his companion, who was no other than the prefect of police himself. "Mark my words, and mark my words, you will catch some horrible crime one day or other, if indeed he hasn't done it already!"

And who then was this man who seemed to inspire such a feeling of mingled horror and admiration?

This was the very question which every one in Marseilles was asking, and which no one seemed to be able to answer. It was a well-known fact that the stranger was a few weeks before, attended by half a dozen fierce-looking fellows in the dress of Hungarians, to the largest hotel and taken a whole suite of rooms to himself at a cost worthy of Dumas' Count of Monte-Cristo, in the name of "Ernst von Janos," and that at a public ball two days after his arrival he had signalled his entrance into local society by a feat which made him at once the talk of the town.

Among the guests at the ball was a certain dandy captain, Louis Du Val by name, a noted bull-dog duelist, who was always on the lookout for his friends and admirers. He was standing amid a circle of his admirers when the Transylvanian prince entered. The sudden introduction of this superbly handsome man, and his such a renowned historical name as that of Keretsensy, sent a buzz of excitement through the whole room, but Capt. Du Val laughed scornfully, and observed in a tone of derision that these Hungarian counts and princes often carried all their state on their backs, and that their title deeds were sometimes to be found in the register of the nearest police station.

Scarcely were the insulting words uttered, when Keretsensy stepped quickly up to the speaker, and dealt him a slap on the face with his right hand, which echoed all around the room like a pistol shot.

Such a commencement could have but one result. The prefect of police, who was never so adjusted, and next morning the redoubtable Capt. Du Val, one of the best swordsmen in the whole town of France, was home borne speechless and apparently wounded from the last duel that he was ever to fight.

"I know from the very first how it would be," said Du Val's second, telling the prefect that Keretsensy was a man of the cloth.

"When my man stepped forward the Transylvanian gave him one look—such a look!—just the way that our tanner last year used to look at his wife when she was being killed in the duel by Du Val. I saw his color change and his hand shake (fancy his hand shaking), and then I knew that Keretsensy had seen her, and the next moment he had hardly been at it three minutes when he was over to fight."

But this duel was far from being more important than the killing of the prefect by Du Val's swordsmanship. Just out of the town lived an old Gascon gentleman, M. de la Roche, with a pedigree as long as his nose, and a fortune as large as his life was the loss of the estates of which his family had been deprived by an unfortunate accident known to history as the French Revolution. His father's nephew had been killed in the first week of her lunacy; and he was naturally delighted to see the bully punished in his turn, and lost no time in calling upon Keretsensy to congratulate him on his feat, and to accept of a reward. He returned his visit, and finding his host's daughter Madeleine one of the prettiest girls that he had ever seen, fell in love with her, or at least appeared to do so, on the spot.

Nothing could be more flattering to a simple, inexperienced girl, utterly ignorant of the world and only just freed from the prison of a convent school, than to be honored by a man who had done such a noble deed in the fashionable world of Marseilles at his feet; for in France—and in most other

countries too, for that matter—any one who has the reputation of being very rich and very wicked, with the additional merit of having murdered a man or two in the simpler and more usual way, is certain to achieve an immense popularity; and Prince Keretsensy received so much attention from the local beauties that he had been a Turk or a Mormon might have taken an entire hour with him wives enough to stock an army harem.

It was true that in her inmost heart Madeleine felt an instinctive shrinking from this mysterious and terrible stranger, who, when they first met, had darted at her a look of fierce and hungry admiration which scared her with a sudden and a slight shudder; but she remembered that she had once seen in her childhood, where a wolf, standing over a helpless child in the snow, was just about to bury her in his arms, and she had seen in the cruel fangs of the wolf, and in the mad eyes that she had had her own dreams of ideal bliss, and that her partner in those dreams were not the towering forms and tiger-like beauty of Keretsensy, but the likeness of a bright boy who had been the chosen playmate of her childhood. But her father would not hear of her Henri de Montmart, and of course her father must know.

This last consideration, combined with Keretsensy's extraordinary personal beauty, the splendid presents which he was always making her, and the fact that she was completely as free from all the morbid and formidable delusions in the whole district, and above all, the weird, indefinable fascination which seemed to attach itself to everything that he touched, made her strong enough to stifle in Madeleine's heart the warning instinct which bade her beware of this ill-omened union; and when once the prince had spoken out, she felt that she had no choice but to have sold her own soul (to say nothing of his daughter) for a title of the same kind which Keretsensy offered to settle on her, and which would have made her a noble lady in the celebration of the marriage.

Thus it came to pass that one evening in the early autumn of that year two gentlemen of the name of the Cannibiers, and one of them was gossiping thus in the main street of Marseilles; yet this man had strangely impressed them both, and the impression for which there was no possible reason was exactly the same in both cases.

Meanwhile the subject of their talk—a tall, lank-looking man in the prime of life, wearing a top hat and a rather theatrical Hungarian dress, which set off his noble figure to full advantage—went slowly along the opposite sidewalk, with his head bent down as if in deep thought, and seemingly unconscious of the admiring glances shot at him by many passing ladies.

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Miscellaneous Reading.

PLAT FORM EXPERIENCES.

COMMENCEMENT OF PRENTICE MULL-FORD'S ORATORICAL CAREER.

He Tried His First Lecture on a Selected Audience in a Country Court House, and Next on the County—The County Survived—Characteristics of Audiences.

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XII.

I next gave the lecture at Columbia, Conn., about ten miles distant, and then the rival of Soona was the metropolis of Tuolumne county, and it was necessary to secure a Columbian in the empty court house for the lecture.

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