

The Eustace Diamonds

Chapters 42 to 54

25th July 2022

Introduction

The Eustace Diamonds has sometimes been described as a 'Sensation novel' in the tradition of *The Woman in White* or even *Lady Audley's Secret* by Elizabeth Braddon. But, while the book created quite a sensation when it was written, it is not truly in the sensation genre. For a start, there are no heroes and villains and not really a heroine, it is full of humour and, while fast paced, is not a shock inducing page turner. What it is, and triumphantly, is a superb look at society and societal types, an excellent story and a delicious interruption in the more serious parliamentary stories, happening while Phineas Finn is ruralising in Ireland. It's like the gooiest, most deliciously decadent chocolate in the box.

There is a complex plot and a cliff hanger based less on who stole the diamonds than on how the plot will unravel and whether Lizzie will be able to tell enough lies to get her out of her self-induced problems. 'Oh, what a complex web we weave when first we practise to deceive. But, when we practise for a while, how vastly we improve our style', should certainly have been Lizzie's model.

By great good fortune, I have been allocated this section, which boasts not merely one but two thefts of this troublesome necklace, so, to work. I think, because this is the very heart of the story, it will be as well to go through it by chapter just to ensure that we can all agree on the sequence and impact of these stirring events. I hope to add some insights that will enliven the précis.

Chapter 42

We begin at Portray, with the irritating couple of Lucinda Roanoke and Lord Griffin quarrelling, as always: while every quarrel inflames Sir Griffin's desire, it deepens Lucinda's dislike. Trollope often writes about unhappy marriages (*He Knew He Was Right* being the outstanding example, but there are plenty of other separated couples in his books and, of course, Mrs Carbuncle does not live with her husband) and he also writes about the pressing necessity for women to marry – Arabella Trefoil springs to mind and so does poor Lady Mabel Grex – but this portrait of an 18 year old girl being pushed into marriage before her money runs out is very cruel. It seems to be in there mostly to show the sort of third rate society into which Lizzie had fallen and how she was unable to mix with the better elements of London society.

Chapter 43

I enjoyed the description of how Lucinda and Lizzie nearly ruined the hunting, so that the men had 'never seen ladies so wicked'. One can just imagine how Lizzie would feel the need to pit herself against Lucinda merely for show, even though she had no axe to grind except jealousy and a desire to shine. The friendship between Lizzie and Mrs Carbuncle is superbly described, with confidences being offered that aren't confidences at all as they are things that cannot be hidden. But the little money arrangements and the sniping over who pays for what and how much – even to the amount of the wedding present – are just delicious to read. This is real life, not sensation, it's the day to day petty mindedness of petty, grasping people and, dare one say it, is bound not to turn out well. I have to say, though, that I am staggered at how Lizzie has managed to run into debt with an income like hers. What does she do with all her wealth? Remember that Mark Robarts was a very well off vicar

with an income of £800 and was able to keep a horse as well a wife and family in comfort. Poor Lizzie really did need a husband.

Then that meddling old Mr Camperdown organises the bill in Chancery and all Lizzie's peace is destroyed. Is Mr Camperdown really the villain of this book? Or is he the hero? Certainly, if he had just been a little less busy, there wouldn't be a story to tell, so perhaps we should all be very grateful to him. I absolutely love the way in which Lizzie has latched on to Mr Dove's opinion and repeats the idea that 'pots and pans can be an heirloom but a necklace can't, everybody knows that, that knows anything'. Mrs Carbuncle keeps her thoughts to herself but we can easily see that this friendship is not forged in steel.

Chapter 44

Just four chapters over halfway through and we reach the great watershed, after which everything goes downhill, not only for Lizzie but also for her companions. The outrageously named Lord George de Bruce Carruthers (one can only marvel at how Trollope thought of that) accompanies the two ladies (without Lizzie's adored child, who is left in Scotland) on the train journey to London, involving an overnight stop at Carlisle. Lord George, who might not turn out to be quite the Corsair of Lizzie's dreams, has already spotted that she is an 'infernal liar' and the footman has a wonderful comic turn with his over dramatised carrying of the safe. Then, in the dead of night, the box is extracted from Lizzie's room by two expert thieves with, apparently, some inside knowledge. Lizzie starts her descent into the tangled web of deceit by failing to mention that the diamonds weren't in the box and, again, this is really Mr Camperdown's fault as she wants to thwart him. He really didn't ought to 'ave done it in the first place.

Chapter 45

I relish the fact that Trollope often refers to Lizzie as 'poor' Lizzie but, indeed, her dilemma over what she should do with the diamonds now that they have allegedly been stolen does show what a pickle she is in and she has no friend with whom to share the burden of this terrible secret. Lord George becomes a suspect and laughs about it at first, while Lizzie revolves how to sort out the situation, using Frank as her supporter once she gets to London. Dear old Frank, entangled in Lizzie's well spun web, utterly believes in Lizzie's stories about the gift and the theft. Perhaps his love for Lucy makes him think that all women are trustworthy.

Chapter 46

Lucy Morris reappears in a minor role and we briefly see how unpleasant is her situation with Lady Linlithgow and have another chance to enjoy the friendship between Lucy and Lady Fawn, 'who was one of the best women breathing and never happy unless she was doing good to somebody'. But the real reason for introducing these two is to hear some of the gossip that's already circulating about Lizzie having arranged the theft herself, possibly with the connivance of Lord George, and for Lady Linlithgow to share these thoughts with Lizzie, while Lizzie gets in a nice little dig to Lucy about Frank. Lady L is an unpleasant character but there's no doubt that she has the measure of London society and realises just how chancy is Lizzie's position.

Chapter 47

But wait! Lizzie has some friends! There are plenty of anti-Lizzieites but there are Lizzieites too, led by her cousin Frank, and the great diamond robbery has become the matter of general debate. We see the incredible authorial skill of Trollope here, as he brings us back to the political framework through the use of Matching Priory as the centre of gossip and a letter from Barrington Erle setting out the new theory that the diamonds weren't in the box and that Lizzie and/or Lord George may

well be at the centre of a plot. How much cleverer he is to use this device to move the story along than if he had just laid it out. That splendid personage the Duke of Omnium now enters the story. An old and diminished figure he takes an almost obsessive interest in the story and will assist us in its unfolding during the rest of the book.

Chapter 48

Poor old Lord George has a rough time with the police and is sometimes almost rough with Lizzie – who wouldn't be? He has a perhaps tarnished reputation but has kept on the right side of the law until now and it must be terrible to be suspected in this way. The police have, so far, been very kind to Lizzie and merely suggested that she might have perhaps not noticed that the diamonds weren't really in the box. I love that Andy Gowran was so pleased to see Portray searched. And now we see the first signs of the unravelling friendship with Mrs Carbuncle. An adventuress must only associate with those who will be of use to her and, if Lizzie's reputation is to be tarnished, Mrs C will need to shed the friendship quickly. Trollope shows his thorough understanding of human nature – not always at its shining best.

Chapter 49

Lizzie's faint when Bunfit asks to search her belongings confirms the suspicions of the police that the 'theft' was a plot to cheat Mr Camperdown and his team and that it is likely that Lizzie and poor Lord George were in it together. It's clear that Lizzie isn't the only one who sees Lord G as a bit of a Corsair.

Chapter 50

The talk in Hertford Street is all of the necklace and poor Lord George describes the unpleasantness of his position, even to the extent of feeling that there are spies after him at every corner and disguised as waiters at his club. 'Lizzie listened to it all with a strange fascination. If this strong man were so much upset by the bare suspicion, what must be her condition'.

Chapter 51

'Come Lizzie, you might as well tell me all about it. You know'. Lizzie does know and she does tell and the horrible idea of perjury is mentioned. Lord George even suggests that Lizzie should tell the truth to Mr Camperdown. He is not altogether sympathetic and begins to wonder whether Portray and the income are worth the risks of association with Lizzie. I think he is a bit too cruel over the possible penalty for perjury and rather enjoys frightening Lizzie. His Corsair persona is slipping a bit.

Chapter 52

I love a bit of self promotion. The Noble Jilt is, of course, a play by our man himself and, while our friends are out of the house watching it, the burglars return and are successful in taking the diamonds. Of course, Patience Crabstick was in the plot all along and proves this by having run away. Mrs Carbuncle has another step forward in her anti-Lizzie campaign because it was Lizzie's maid who is implicated, even though nothing of Mrs C's was taken. Indeed, 'all Mrs Carbuncle's possessions in the house were not sufficient to have tempted a well-bred, well-instructed thief'. Lizzie fails to mention the diamonds in the list of things missing and then starts to worry that perhaps Mr Camperdown (the ever present villain) was at the bottom of it all and would have the necklace even now. But, of course, it is in the hands of Harter and Benjamin.

Chapter 53

What do you do when you are in a hopeless dilemma? Stay crafty sick at home of course! It seems that Lord George is deserting her, as too hot to handle, but Frank stays loyal, having no doubt that the diamonds were stolen the first time. Lizzie takes the opportunity to make another salvo in her anti-Lucy war and offers herself to Frank but Frank dodges the moment and is surprised to hear that Mr Emilius is coming to read poetry to Lizzie. After all, from his point of view, even an heiress with a bad reputation for lying still has money and might be very glad to find any port in a storm, even if it's a port over 40 and with a possible wife in Bohemia.

Chapter 54

I think we can leave out the whole decimal currency issue. After all, everyone knows how it was eventually solved a mere hundred or so years later, but here we see Lady Glencora taking up Lizzie's part and actually coming to see her, which is a real feather in her hat and a great help when things hot up with Mrs Carbuncle. Lady G decides to support Lizzie and also to interfere in favour of the Fawn marriage. That leaves Lizzie in a sticky position with the police but with four possible marriage partners still in the offing: a cousin; a Corsair; a Lord and a dodgy clergyman. The field is wide open. To the Victor the spoils!

I hope this scamper through this ever thickening plot has been of use. For those who are of an operatic turn of mind, I will just mention my proposed casting:

Lizzie, although the leading figure, will actually be a mezzo (along the Carmen lines) and Lucy will take the soprano role (as does Michaela in Carmen). Frank is naturally the tenor lead; Lord George a sprightly baritone, while Mr Camperdown is a menacing bass. Mrs Carbuncle and Lady Fawn, older and more world weary, take contralto and Lucinda and Sir Griffin are a sort of second rate soprano and tenor. Naturally, Patience Crabstick, being a maid, will be a collatura soprano while Andy Gowran is a bass-baritone. You can work out the other characters yourself but many of them, such as the pestilential footman, will be chorus roles for young aspiring singers. It's a pity that Britten didn't think of making it into an opera but perhaps Brett Dean would be interested.....