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"IT WAS BUT A GLIMPSE . . . BUT IT WAS ENOUGH FOR ME TO RECOGNIZE HIM."

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THE VAN SUYDEN SAPPHIRES

BY CHARLES CAREY

NEW YORK
DODD MEAD AND COMPANY
1905

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BOOK I

THE AFFAIR AT ONYX COURT

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"California is no Pandora's box of unmixed blessings. It is also the birthplace of Elida Yeats."—**From the dinner-table conversations of Gwendolen Bramblestone.**

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CHAPTER I

THE ACTRESS AND THE RUBIES

THE singular jewel robbery which occurred last Fall at Onyx Court, Mrs. Hermann Van Suyden's country place, near Wheaton-on-the-Hudson, has continued such an absorbing topic of interest, and so wildly imaginative have been the theories advanced concerning it by the press and others, that I have decided to give a true and unvarnished recital of the entire affair.

It is a task I would willingly forego; but the unjustifiable manner in which the names of several totally innocent persons have been connected with the "Mystery," renders an authoritative statement an obvious duty, and Mrs. Van Suyden and the others concerned have agreed that I,—who more than any other was directly involved in the perplexing tangle,—am the one best qualified to present it.

To begin, then. It was a foggy, rainy afternoon in November when I arrived at

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Onyx Court to remain from Friday until Monday. The skies hung low, and an unintermittent drizzle washed all the landscape into one dull monochrome.

Yet, seen even under such circumstances, the fine old estate, situated high on a bluff which commands a magnificent view of the river for miles, could not fail to impress one with the beauty of its environment. My spirits, drooping in sympathy with the gray, autumnal day, rose in spite of myself, as we swept up the avenue toward the imposing, Colonial entrance.

I had timed my arrival so nicely that I was just in season for a cup of hot tea, and the opportunity of scanning, "off parade," as it were, the companions of my week's end.

Really, it was a delightful change from the cold and mists without to enter the wide, glowing hall with its great fire of logs flickering over the panelled walls, and casting dancing lights and shadows on the men and women scattered about, chattering and drinking tea.

I was greeted cordially, although for a moment mistakenly, by dear near-sighted Mrs. Van Suyden, the most impracticable Philistine who ever dreamed of an Arcadian and impossible Bohemia.

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The effort of her life has been to realise a millennial salon, where Society and Art (both capitalized) shall lie down in harmony and she shall lead them. So far she has only succeeded in filling her house with incongruous groups of the gifted and ungrateful; yet with the perseverance and enthusiasm of those who espouse a lost cause, she still pursues her dream.

Having corrected the error of her faulty vision, and made clear my identity, I nodded to one or two men near me, accepted a cup of tea, and was about to sink into a chair, when across the wide hall, trailing yards of chiffon and lace tea-gown behind her, rushed Elida Yeats, the California actress who made such a furore in London last season. I have known her since she was a child; but I recognise quite philosophically that she only makes much of me in order to emphasise on this side of the water her acquaintance with my cousin, Lady Southsea.

My English connections, I may remark in passing, are very grand, indeed. It is by virtue of my blue blood that I am able to maintain my position as a "Little Sister to the Rich," and earn a precarious living by painting fans, for I haven't a trace of an income.

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But, to return to Elida Yeats. Say what you will about her acting,—and I might pass a criticism or so upon that score, if I were minded,—her prettiness is undeniable; of that uncompromising, obvious variety which admits of neither cavil nor faint praise. She has, too, an engaging, caressing way with her, which makes it almost impossible to refuse her anything upon which she has set her heart.

It struck me now that her welcome was unusually cooing; and my suspicions were confirmed when, an hour or so later, as I was dressing for dinner, there came a low tap on my door and Elida entered, effusive and smiling.

"You dear thing," she gushed, brushing her cheek against mine, "I was never quite so glad to see any one in all my life. The Lord has certainly sent you in answer to my prayers."

Then, without waiting for comment or reply, she began impressively: "Were you aware, my dear, that this is the opportunity of a lifetime, the tide in my affairs which taken at the flood will lead to my everlasting fortune? And if you will just lend me a helping hand, Gwendolen Eustacia Bramblestone, it shall mean a lot to you, too. Promise me that you will, there's a dear, benevolent, old girl."

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She threw her arms about me. "It's such a chance," she pleaded in tones of eager entreaty; "one doesn't get invited to an Onyx Court every day in the week!"

"Perhaps it is just as well," I interpolated drily; "since a single visit seems to have been enough to turn your head." I was tugging at a refractory hook at the time, and there may have been a touch of asperity in my voice.

"Oh, you don't understand," pouted Elida; "you can get a bid to these places any time, because, if you are as poor as Job's turkey, and not radiantly beautiful,"—the impudence of her!—"nevertheless, you've got a lot of swell relations, and you're considered the cleverest talker in all New York. You amuse them," she continued shrewdly, "and they don't care a tinker's dam that you have graced all their dinners for the past ten years in that same rusty, tattered, old black lace gown you're dragging at. But it's different with me. Occasions of this sort are as scarce as hens' teeth in my calendar, and I've got to make hay while the sun shines. Why, the very fact that Mrs. 'Van' has taken me up ought to be good for a month added to my Broadway engagement, when I decide to give it

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Then, glancing cautiously about, she drew from her bosom a small, flat parcel, which I rightly took to be a jewel-box.

"Look at this!" with an exultant thrill in her tone. She pressed a spring, the lid flew open, and there against a velvet background sparkled the most magnificent ruby necklace I have ever seen.

Elida lifted it lightly, and clasped it about her white throat, while I stood gasping in astonishment and blinking my dazzled eyes. Such stones! Great, flashing, gleaming drops of blood, held in an oddly fashioned, Eastern setting of dull gold! They enthralled and fascinated me, mesmerised me by the spell of their beauty!

Elida smiled complacently at my moon-struck admiration. "Rented them from Sonnenthal, the jeweller," she explained, "at the cost of a month's salary; but they will earn it back for me, and more too, before I am done with them," with a decided nod.

"Elida," I sternly broke in, suddenly finding enlightenment, "surely, you are not going to attempt that threadbare old game of having your jewels stolen? Why, even in the most provincial

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and credulous mind it arouses nothing but derisive mirth. My child! My child! I thought you cleverer than that!"

The actress cocked her eyes at me. "Teach your grandmother to suck eggs," she remarked vulgarly. "What you say is all very true; but there is another side to the question. The great public is very conservative, you must remember, and it likes to have the jewels of its favourite actresses stolen. That is what it expects—nay, almost demands. And if one can only add a spice of novelty to the story, it will be swallowed as readily as it was in the days before the Ark.

"Now, in this little affair of mine," she went on enthusiastically, "I propose to offer several new and interesting features. In the first place, these rubies are worth a king's ransom.—Oh, they are real," intercepting a sceptical gleam in my eye; "I took no chances of detection on that score.—And in addition to that, every stone of them has a delicious history—Indian intrigue, and plunder, and loot, and all that sort of thing, you know. Sonnenthal has the facts, and at the proper time he stands ready to divulge them in the way that will be most effective. Then, too, the very thing of having them stolen here, while I

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am the guest of Mrs. Van Suyden, will give an aristocratic flavour of reality which is entirely lacking in the ordinary dressing room or hotel episode.

"Above all, though," with a soft chuckle of delight, "since I have been here, Fate has played directly into my hands. The first night I came, I wore the stones in order to make a good entrance, hold the center of the stage, don't you know; and of course every one went wild over them. Well, later in the evening, Mrs. 'Van' herself came to me, and asked me where I kept them at night? I told her I hid them around in my bedroom in any old place; and she shivered, and shuddered, and said it made her terribly nervous to think of them lying about loose like that. And then she said that her own collection of jewels was very good, and that in order to ensure security for them, she had had a safe built into her sitting-room, just off her bed chamber; so, when I was ready to retire, to bring the necklace to her, and she would lock it up for me until I wanted to wear it again.

"There was nothing for me to do but accept, for that night anyway; so at bedtime I dutifully carried the necklace to her, and she showed me the

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safe. But,—and this is something that she does not know,—while she was fooling with the knob to open it, I crept up softly behind her, and read over her shoulder every figure of the combination. Now,—and here is where you come in, Gwen,—I propose—"

At this moment a maid tapped on the door to ask if she could assist me with my toilet and to inform me that the dinner hour was at hand.

I welcomed the distraction. "Yes," I cried eagerly; "you can help me very much. Fix this aigrette in my hair." I turned my back squarely on Elida; but she was not to be snubbed.

"I will see you again at bedtime," she whispered, affectionately squeezing my arm.

"You need not bother; I am not at all interested," I replied shortly; but my heart sank, for in spite of my icy resolutions, some sure intuition warned me that in the end Elida would have her way.

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CHAPTER II

A DAUGHTER OF EVE

If my serenity was a bit ruffled by Elida Yeats's evident intention to involve me in one of her tricky schemes for self-advertisement, I flatter myself that I allowed no trace of it to appear in my manner. I sparkled quite as was expected of me at the table, better than usual in fact, and certainly more spontaneously; for on my right was one of the best, the most appreciative and attentive listeners, it has ever been my good fortune to meet.

He was a British officer just down from Canada, a Scotchman, Captain McCracken by name. There was nothing particularly striking about him either in looks or manner; he was just a delightful, silent, middle-aged man with a charming voice, and kind, pleasant eyes behind his glasses.

On my left was an entirely different type,—a raw, assertive troglodyte with bristling, red hair, cold, shrewd eyes, a tawny moustache like a

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brigand's, and big, hairy hands. I addressed a word or two to him, as in duty bound; but his reception of my advances was so cavalier that I quickly turned my shoulder on him, and thereafter devoted myself exclusively to the Captain.

Not that the other man appeared in the least cast down by this evidence of my disapproval. On the contrary, he was manifestly content to confine his attentions to Elida, who sat just beyond him, and with whom he seemed to have no difficulty in discovering congenial topics.

How she endured him for a moment I could not comprehend; but she apparently found him even interesting. Occasionally, in the pauses of my own conversation, I could catch snatches of theirs; and it struck me as surprisingly personal and intimate,—mutual confidences, interspersed with rough chaff and a smoking-room quality of repartee.

I will confess I was puzzled by this latest caprice on the part of the actress. She always has a lot of men around her; but she usually prefers them nicely veneered and polished. However, I had neither the time nor inclination to bother my head over her vagaries. I was too thoroughly enjoying myself in the stimulating companionship

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of the Captain, while he gave me very definitely to understand that he was no less agreeably entertained.

After dinner, he sought me out in the drawing-room for a continuation of our chat; and when he finally bade me good-night, he plainly intimated that, so far as he was concerned, he meant our future acquaintance to be a protracted serial, rather than a brief and episodical storiette.

As a consequence of this pleasing interlude, perhaps, I did not promptly send Elida Yeats about her business, as I should have done, when at midnight she again presented herself at my door. Indeed, I shall have to admit that I was more pleased than annoyed by her good-natured teasing.

"Talk about love at first sight," she exclaimed boisterously. "Why, Gwendolen Eustacia, you have simply captured that old fossil, body, soul and breeches. He followed you about all evening like a cat asking for cream. And they tell me he's rich as Crœsus, too. Got an ancestral castle somewhere in the Highlands, and all that sort of thing."

"If you are referring to Captain McCracken, Elida," I cried indignantly, my cheeks flushing

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scarlet, "let me inform you that he is anything but a fossil. Or, even so, I prefer a gentleman fossil to such a specimen as that unspeakable Baggerly whom you encouraged to such an extent at dinner and after."

"Poor, old 'Baggy,'" laughed the girl indulgently. "He isn't very much to look at, is he? And he isn't exactly stamped with the caste of Vere-de-Vere, I'll admit; but, take him all around, he's a pretty decent sort, and then, too," with a little, self-conscious laugh, "he's made up his mind that there's only one girl in the world for him."

"Elida!" I cried, horrified. "You would surely never dream of—"

"Well, I don't know," reflectively. "Sometimes, I think I might go farther and fare a good deal worse."

"I suppose the man has money, then?" I rejoined grimly. "That is the only recommendation I can imagine which would induce you even to consider him."

"No, I don't think so," thoughtfully. "At times, he seems flush enough, it is true; but again there are seasons when I am satisfied he has scarcely a cent to his name. It is hard to say,

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though. If you notice, he talks a lot, but he never seems really to tell you anything; although he is awfully clever at drawing you out." She added this last a bit ruefully. "But nobody knows for sure what he does, or who he is, or where he comes from. It is the very mystery about him which fascinates me, a sort of a Blue-beard's-closet idea, don't you know?"

"Yes; and you will remember the fate of the unfortunate ladies who took it on themselves to pry into that closet. You would do well to avoid this man, Elida. Instinct, intuition, whatever one may call it, warned me against him the minute I saw him. I felt as if there was some-thing sinister about him, and what you have told me only confirms my impression. Where on earth did Mrs. Van Suyden pick him up?"

"Oh, we both got to know him on the other side," carelessly. "He came back to England with a lot of the officers from the Boer War; had been fight-ing down there with them, and had performed prodigies of valour, I believe. That of course gave him an entrée, and afterward his very gaucheries made him a sort of a fad. They thought him deliciously 'American.'"

"A soldier of fortune, eh?" I commented; "and,

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like all the rest of them, scamps and scalawags when they are not in the field."

"He claims to be a Californian," continued Elida; "but when I asked him about people and things out there, he shied off with the excuse that he had not been back for nearly fifteen years. Said he left the country when he was scarcely more than a mere boy."

"Probably left it for the country's good," I hinted darkly. "The fellow is evidently a thoroughly bad lot." Then, because in spite of all her silliness and affectations I really have a very warm spot in my heart for Elida, I began to point out to her the folly and the danger of becoming entangled with a person of that sort.

I actually waxed eloquent over the enormous mistake she was making in giving encouragement to such a man; but she rather petulantly interrupted me in the midst of my counsels.

"Oh, drop Baggerly," frowning. "I did not steal this half hour from my beauty sleep to discuss men with you like a couple of schoogirls after their first ball, nor to listen to any old-maid-auntie advice from you, either. I guess when it comes to the pinch that little Elida can be trusted to look out for herself; and, besides, if all

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you imagine about the poor fellow should turn out to be true, just think what a sensation would be created by my marriage to him.

"Now," flinging out her hands as if to dismiss the subject, and adopting a business-like tone, "let's get down to practicalities." She had thrown herself into an easy chair with her feet stretched out to the fire, and was looking up at me with eager eyes. "What I want to know is can I depend upon you to help me out with this affair of the rubies?"

"You certainly cannot," I returned decidedly; "and if you are wise, you will give up the idea yourself. Nobody will be deceived for a moment; you will simply turn yourself into a laughing stock."

"I will risk that part of it," she averred confidently; "and, as for you, I would advise you not to make up your mind too quickly. It is not much I shall ask of you; but, between ourselves, I am willing to pay high for the accommodation. That may be putting it a bit bluntly; but you understand? We might as well be frank about it. You need the money; and although, as I say, it's nothing but the merest trifle I want of you, I am ready to show a very substantial appreciation."

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She named a figure which, steel myself against her as I would, could scarcely fail to shake my resolution.

Unconsciously I found myself calculating the cost of a decent Winter wardrobe, and mentally debating the respective merits of a cloth or velvet gown.

"No, I could never consider it," I repeated, less firmly, however. "Such a thing is simply out of the question."—Yet, some way, I knew that I was destined to see more, much more of the Captain, and the thought of appearing constantly before him in my rusty black lace was decidedly painful. "What is your plan, Elida?" I faltered.

"Why, a very simple one," eagerly; "and, as far as your part of it is concerned, absolutely free from risk. You will be leaving here about three o'clock Monday afternoon, will you not? Yes? Well, just after luncheon, when no one is around, I shall creep into Mrs. 'Van's' room, open the safe, take out the rubies, and hand them over to you. All that I shall then ask, dearest Gwendolen Eustacia, is that you put the box in your bag, and turn it over to Sonnenthal on Tuesday morning. That is the whole scheme in a nutshell; not

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so terribly hazardous, nor such a very extreme test of friendship after all, is it?"

Yet apparently simple as the plan was, and slight as was to be my connection with it, I felt a strong repugnance to the whole enterprise.

"I do not like it, Elida," I protested. "I do not like it at all. I do not wish to be mixed up in any such queer business."

But the girl had slipped to the floor, thrown her arms about me, and was rubbing her peachy cheek against my sleeve.

"Ah, think of the Captain, Gwen," she besought with wily entreaty. "He'll be asking you to dine, or to do a play with him on every occasion; and I assure you that the black lace and that faded blue rag of yours will not stand the pace. They deserve honourable retirement; and you know that a charming woman like you cannot go about with a stunning man and enjoy herself, if she looks like a scarecrow."

"Perfectly true," I admitted with a slightly hollow laugh at her vehement presentation of the case. But it decided me. It seemed after all a small enough service, and—well, I planned out the velvet gown before I slept.

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CHAPTER III

"THE ROBBERY OF ME JEWELS"

NEVERTHELESS, my distaste for the project suffered no abatement. When I awoke in the morning after an uneasy slumber, it was to find my premonitions of evil as strong, or stronger than before.

It was not of course that I objected to assisting in the exploitation of Elida, although a bit less notice would do her no harm; but when to do so I was called upon to abet the commission of a felony,—even though only a make-believe one,—I was quite willing to see her star sink into darkness and oblivion.

When I thought of what I might be letting myself in for, I positively wondered at my weakness in ever consenting to countenance such a crazy scheme; still,—the velvet gown loomed enticingly ahead, and I had given a definite promise. One might as well be philosophical, I reflected, and at any rate hope for the best. So, with this

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decision I put the matter from my mind and turned my thoughts to more pleasant channels.

And, really, I do not believe I ever enjoyed two single days in all my life so much as that Saturday and Sunday. The sun shone with the mild, hazy radiance of the late Fall; and the Captain and I walked, and drove, and talked, and discovered a thousand tastes and inclinations in common to cement and strengthen our friendship.

He lost no time, I may observe, in winning from me my far from reluctant consent to allow him to call at my apartment within the week.

I remember we had been roaming across the grounds, and halted for a moment in the centre of a little clump of beeches, where the afternoon sunlight, streaming through the bare branches, rested warm and mellow upon a carpet of dead, brown leaves, and opening burrs.

I pointed out to my companion a circular orifice about half way up the smooth, mottled trunk of a big tree beside which we stood.

"Look," I cried, "a woodpecker's nest," and added jestingly: "Now you can see for yourself how restricted your welcome must be when you come to visit me. My quarters are scarcely any larger than that."

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While I was speaking he had thrown aside his hat, and with the instinct of a boy had swarmed up the tree to investigate our discovery.

"Well, I trust I shall at least have better luck when I come to visit you," he laughed down at me from his perch. "There is nobody at home."

"Yes," I explained; "the woodpecker has gone South for the Winter; but," with a sigh, "I am afraid there is no such flitting for me. After this little holiday I shall have to settle down in New York and drudge harder than ever."

He had rejoined me on the ground by this time, and was dusting off his hands from the climb. At my words of discontent, however, he glanced up with quick sympathy, and a declaration of some kind seemed to be trembling on his lips. But he restrained the impulse, whatever it was, and merely suggested that we continue our stroll.

Soon he was chatting away to me in his usual friendly, impersonal fashion; but I noticed there was a set to his lips, a gleam of quiet determination in his eye, which bespoke his having reached a decision upon some point he had been revolving in his mind.

Ah, what a visit was that week's end at Onyx Court, and what a charming comrade the Cap-

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tain proved himself! Indeed, the only cloud which flecked my skies on those perfect days was a brief, whispered communication from Elida, who drew me aside just before dinner on Sunday evening to inform me that she had seen Sonnenthal, and that all the arrangements for her *coup* were completed.

"Sonnenthal is so nervous about those bloomin' old rubies of his," she explained, "that he took a special run up here in his 'bubble' this morning, and sent word for me to meet him down the road. He seemed much better satisfied when I let him know that they were in Mrs. 'Van's' safe and described how securely it was guarded. But after that he chose to get cranky about you; and I had to read your full pedigree, and let him know who you were, and where you lived, and all the rest of it before I could bring him to regard you as a trustworthy messenger. Finally, however, I smoothed him out, and now," with a gleeful laugh, "it is all arranged. He is to call in person at your rooms on Tuesday morning and give you a receipt for the stones, which will relieve you of all further responsibility."

"I tell you I don't like it, Elida," I muttered. "Suppose some one should break into my apart-

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ment on Monday night and rob me of the necklace?"

"Nonsense," she scoffed lightly. "Who would ever suspect that you had anything worth stealing?"

At luncheon on Monday, Elida made an especial request to drive me to the station; but it was not until we had whirled out of sight of the house that she permitted herself to give vent to her evident exultation. Then she burst into peal after peal of delighted laughter.

When she had finally checked her mirth somewhat, she drew from her jacket a flat, carefully tied box, and unfastening the catches of my travelling bag, thrust the parcel within.

"There," she cried gaily, "the 'robbery of me jewels' is successfully accomplished, and no one the wiser. To-morrow, my press agent will have every newspaper in New York blazing with it."

"Are you quite sure that no one saw you?" I questioned anxiously, "that no officious servant is going to come forward to explode the fiction and render us all ridiculous?"

"Positive," she confidently averred. "Estelle, Mrs. 'Van's' maid you know, was sewing in the lady's dressing-room, when I first made the

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attempt, so I went on unconcernedly down into the billiard-room; but on the second try she nor any one else was in sight. I met her away around on the far side of the corridor after the stunt was all over. But, anyway, she is too stupid to catch on to what I was doing, even if she had been right in the room."

"Well, perhaps," I granted doubtfully. Then, another disquieting reflection coming to me, as I thought of Elida's unruly tongue: "Of course, you have told no one of this project of yours?"

She laughed a trifle uneasily. "I have told you and I have told Sonnenthal," she said; "that makes two."

The evasion was too palpable, and a feeling of quick apprehension swept over me. "Elida," I said sternly, "do you mean that you have been idiot enough to confide in that odious Baggerly man?"

Her averted eyes, the wave of guilty colour which suffused her face, was sufficient answer.

"For Heaven's sake!" I ejaculated. "What ever induced you?"

"Well," excusingly, "he came upon me talking to Sonnenthal down the road yesterday, and he kept bothering me to know what it was about,

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and then he's always blowing so over his own clever exploits that I thought I'd show him I wasn't so slow myself.—But," hastening to add virtuously, "he is really the only one I have told. Not a word have I breathed to another living soul."

I made no reply, save to lift the travelling bag to my lap, and start to unfasten the clasps. Elida saw my intention in the firm set of my lips.

"Oh, don't do that," she besought, heedlessly dropping the reins, and casting herself tempestuously upon me in an effort to withhold my hands from their purpose. A storm of expostulation and entreaty followed, and I finally yielded once more, and consented to carry the thing through, even if Baggerly were in the secret.

I could not forbear, however, letting her see how annoyed I was by her indiscretion, and I gave her plainly to understand that if harm resulted from it, she would have to extricate herself as best she might. For my part, I should simply deny any complicity in the transaction, and assert my ignorance of the character of the parcel she had entrusted to me.

But now that her point was gained, she smiled

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with easy assurance at my forebodings. "Oh, 'Baggy' is safe as a church," she declared. "He would never dare get himself in my bad books by peaching."

"H'm," I sniffed. "Perhaps so; but if he does not, I'm willing to wager that he makes you pay well for his silence. He's just the sort that would attempt blackmail," with dark distrust.

Elida laughed outright in her amusement. "Don't be silly, Gwendolen, simply because you happen to have conceived a prejudice against the man. I will admit," with a show of frankness, "that perhaps it would have been better not to have told him; but the mischief's done, and there's an 'end on't.'

"Everything will go like clockwork," she added light-heartedly; "you see if it don't? You will turn the necklace over to Sonnenthal, and in a week or so he will have it discovered in some weird, out-of-the-way place, with the settings broken and the fastenings wrenched off, but with the stones intact. Then there will be a big ado, and all sorts of false clues will be sprung, until the nine days' wonder wears out, and the only thing that will be remembered is that Elida Yeats is the greatest actress in America!"

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I still felt very much like throwing up the whole thing once and for ever; but the promise I had given and the prospect of my velvet gown constrained me, and I did no more than express my scorn for this optimistic presentment by an eloquent curl of my lip.

Elida went into fits of senseless laughter every time she looked at my gloomy face, and christened me the "Mask of Tragedy" on the spot.

When we finally arrived at the station, we found of course that the train was half an hour late; and as my young friend with her customary selfishness declined to wait with me on the plea that she objected to driving back alone over the country roads at so late an hour, I had to sit an interminable time in that dreary, draughty place with no other companionship than a few gaping yokels and a party of maids and footmen, brought down as extra servants to Onyx Court, and now, since the house party was thinning out, on their way back to the city.

At last, however, the belated train steamed in. There was no chair car; so I had consequently to huddle myself and my bags into one of the ordinary coaches and prepare to endure as best I might the close, over-heated atmosphere, reek-

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ing with the stench of kerosene from the grimy, feebly gleaming lamps in the ceiling.

The worn and dingy red plush seats were arranged in pairs facing each other, and the one opposite me was immediately pre-empted by two young fellows, evidently of the farmer class, who had followed into the car closely at my heels.

I drew my furs about my face, and sat gazing listlessly out at the frosty fields, my ears filled with the hoarse panting of the waiting engine. A great wave of depression swept over me. I felt so alone in the world, so desolate.

But suddenly my moody contemplations were interrupted. Just as the train was about to start, was indeed already in motion, a man rushed down the platform, clutched wildly at the rail, and with a mighty leap drew himself aboard.

He flung open the door and strode quickly down the aisle, casting rapid glances to right and left. My heart gave a tumultuous bound. It was Captain McCracken.

"I beg your pardon," he said uncertainly, peering into my muffled countenance; and then I heard him give a quick sigh of relief. "Ah, Miss Bramblestone. I am glad I caught you,

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even if I did almost kill one of Van Suyden's best horses getting here. But I felt that at any hazard I must overtake you and acquaint you with a knowledge of the unfortunate affair at Onyx Court which transpired immediately after your departure."

"What is that?" I cried, endeavouring to appear surprised, although, as may be inferred, I felt that I could very accurately predict what was coming.

"You could scarcely have left the house"—his manner showed evident excitement—"when Mrs. Van Suyden, having occasion to go to her private sitting-room, was astonished to find wide open a window she herself had closed only a short time before."

"Clever Elida!" I commented in a mental parenthesis. "Not a detail overlooked!"

"Her maid was unable to account for it," continued the Captain; "and Mrs. Van Suyden thereupon becoming alarmed, rushed to a secret safe which, it seems, is concealed in the room, and opened it to find missing—"

"The rubies!" I cried, forgetting myself.

"No, no, not rubies; but a necklace and tiara of sapphires!"

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"Sapphires?" I gasped incredulously. "Not the Van Suyden sapphires?"

He bowed a grave assent.

"And they were considered the finest in America!" I groaned. "But it is all a mistake; they are not really gone—" I broke off quickly, realising how much I might be revealing.

"Gone, beyond peradventure," he insisted. "The safe was thoroughly searched!"

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CHAPTER IV

FACING A CRISIS

My heart absolutely stopped beating. My head fell back nervelessly upon the cushions. How, how could Elida have made such a stupid blunder? With sickening clearness, I foresaw the explanations which would have to be made. The cynical whispers which would circulate concerning my share in the transaction buzzed in my ears; the big, black headlines of the newspapers danced before my eyes!

In a sort of daze I heard Captain McCracken proceeding with his story. If he noted my agitation, he evidently ascribed it to the natural consequence of his tidings.

"I was not at the house at the time of the discovery," he was saying in his calm, English tones; "but, according to accounts, the place must at once have been thrown into a panic. Finally, however, order of a sort was restored and the local police were summoned. They natu-

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rally, and no doubt rightly, concluded that one of the extra servants must have been the thief, and advised that the entire lot be detained until a thorough investigation could be made. But it was then after train time, and, as every one supposed, impossible to overtake them,—the telephone went on a strike this morning, you will remember;—so it was decided to have them held and searched on their arrival in New York.

"Baggerly, it seems, volunteered to ride over to the village with the message, and it was from him I learned these facts. I had taken some letters to the post office, and was riding slowly back, when we met. He gave me a hurried account of the robbery, and showed me the telegram he was sending to the New York 'Bobbies.' In it he asked them to detain and investigate every passenger who had taken the train at Wheaton.

"I tried," continued the Captain with a slight embarrassment in his manner, "to explain to the chap that it would never do to send a wire of that sort, that you were on the train. But,—but—" he stammered angrily under stress of an evident unwillingness to tell me just what had happened.

"He refused to change his message," I quietly supplied.

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The Captain's eyes gave me a glance of admiring relief for my quick perceptions.

"Ye-es," he admitted, "that was about it. He said,—but I will not repeat what he said, Miss Bramblestone. Only," his face growing dark, while he tugged vigorously at his moustache, "if there had been time, don't you know, I should have fetched the bounder here by the scruff of his neck, and made him get down on his knees to beg your pardon, by Jove!"

I laughed in the midst of my woe. I couldn't help it.

"I have a shrewd suspicion that Miss Yeats may have repeated some rather unflattering comments I recently passed upon Mr. Baggerly," I said: "and perhaps he cherishes a spice of malice. That may explain his manifest eagerness to have me included among the suspected maids and footmen."

Why, I wonder, does Mrs. Grundy,—or rather, Mrs. Grundy's husband,—frown upon the use of profanity in the presence of ladies? A thousand pretty speeches could not have so tickled my ears as that one explosive "Damned cad!" which broke from my companion's close-pressed lips at my elucidating statement. It was

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"grateful and comforting," like the sympathetic clasp of a strong hand to one who walks in darkness.

He looked so sheepish and distressed over his involuntary lapse, however, that I hurriedly interposed to question him how the idea of playing Paul Revere to my unlucky plight had suggested itself to him?

"Why," he said simply, "there was nothing else to do. You had to be saved some way from running into such an ordeal unprepared. I had learned in the village, by good fortune, that the train was a bit late; and, unless Van Suyden's 'Sultan' came a bad cropper, I thought there was a chance that I could make it. If not, I had determined to charter a special engine and overhaul you at one of the intermediate stations. A wire, I fancied, would only needlessly alarm and disconcert you."

Dear, kind, noble gentleman! What consideration! What chivalry! My heart glowed at his thought for me, and my eyes filled with sudden tears.

And then, as full realisation of my situation came to me, sheer terror seized me in its grip. I strove to throw it off. Of course, Elida would

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fully explain the circumstance, I assured myself. There was no other course open to her.—But would she?

Elida was a delightful, merry, light-hearted, impulsive creature;—Yes. But did she possess the moral backbone to admit the questionable methods by which she had chosen to advertise herself?

A full confession would put her in a ridiculous, if not criminal, position; and only an actress can realise how Elida would shrink from the thought of appearing before the "world's low footlights" in such a pose. To me, with my knowledge of her character, it seemed extremely probable that she would temporise in the hope that my readiness of resource and natural desire to earn her cheque would lead me in some way, without implicating her, to extricate myself from the trap, and restore the missing sapphires.

"Well," I decided bitterly, "she is mistaken. So far as I can see, we are both in for it."

Elida's bad half hour, however, was an affair of the future; the present crisis affected me alone. I was undoubtedly one of the passengers who had gotten on at Wheaton! On my arrival in New York the sapphires would be

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found in my bag! I would be charged with the theft! And what then?

Imprisonment? My heart stopped beating again. Absurd; and yet I could not deny the sapphires. They were there in my bag.—Suppose the Van Suydens chose to be nasty, as rich people sometimes will, averring that they do it for the sake of principle; and suppose Elida, rather than pillory herself for the mocking gibes of the public, should deny any part in the transaction,—? "Oh, suppose—? Suppose a hundred things?" I cried impatiently, almost aloud.

A wild suggestion came to me of leaving the train at one of its stopping places; but I dismissed it almost as soon as formed. Such a proceeding on my part, being without shadow of excuse, would be reported by the conductor, and would only result in directing suspicion toward me. Captain McCracken could scarcely doubt that I had acted in consequence of his tidings.

No, I must remain on the train; but I must concoct some feasible plan for concealing those damning stones. And how? My shoes? My hair? The hem of my skirt? I ruefully shook my head.

Oh, how I longed to confess the whole thing to

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my companion! And yet I shrank instinctively from the very idea. He would be kindness and consideration itself; but our friendship was so brief and so delightful, that I could not bear to destroy the steadily growing regard in which he plainly showed he held me. All other questions aside, would he not, to himself at least, condemn my flagrant breach of the laws of hospitality? Was it not natural to suppose that he would view the matter from the Van Suydens' standpoint rather than from mine? Being rich himself, how could he be expected to sympathise with the temptations of my poverty?

I dare say that he fancied my protracted silence meant a disinclination for conversation; for he presently made an excuse of going to the smoking-car, and left me to my thoughts.

Alone! I leaned back in a corner of the seat and tried to think. My head was in a whirl; it felt on fire, and my hands were like ice. What was to be done? We were drawing nearer the Grand Central Station every minute. Time was flying fast. Oh, I must, must, discover some way out of the predicament!

I might open the window, and drop the jewels out?—But how could I dare do that with such

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valuable property as Mrs. Van Suyden's sapphires? Beside, would not the young men opposite, when they saw me in the clutches of the law, remember the circumstance and comment upon it?

Still, cast about as I would, I could formulate no better plan. This was the one solution which seemed to offer itself. Dallying with temptation, I told myself that by choosing an unfrequented spot, and marking the place where the discarded gems fell, I might reasonably expect to return later and recover them.

Of course, it was the project of absolute desperation; but, on looking back, I realise that I was so appalled by the way things had turned out, I was probably not quite myself. I glanced at the two young men across from me. They were sitting with their hats pulled down over their eyes, apparently lost in a bucolic slumber. The rest of the people in the coach were manifestly absorbed in their own affairs.

Acting on my first impulse, I slipped Elida's parcel from my bag, rolled it securely in the newspaper which lay in my lap, and turned to the window.

But the sash stuck. Tug and push at it as I

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would, the thing refused to budge; and the noise I made over it was enough to attract the attention of the entire car. I was almost in tears, as I stubbornly continued my futile effort to raise it.

One of the young farmers opposite had opened his eyes, and leaning forward had watched with keen interest my unavailing struggles. Then, with awkward courtesy, he arose to help me.

As he bent over me, he muttered quickly under his breath: "Don't do it, ma'am. It ain't safe. Try the gent's fur coat."

For a moment I was paralysed. Who was this man and what did he know? Then a tremendous wave of relief swept over me. Here was assistance, no matter from what quarter; and coming too at the moment of despair! Why I followed his suggestion, I cannot tell. Perhaps it was the note of decision in his voice, or the impelling glance of his bold, keen eyes? Perhaps I felt instinctively the sincerity of his desire to aid me.

Beside me on the seat lay Captain McCracken's great fur overcoat, a reminder of his recent stay in Canada. Hastily I thrust my hand into its folds, and discovered that it had innumerable pockets.

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"Why not?" I asked myself. "He will not be searched. Afterward I can demand my parcel from him and pass the matter off with a jest."

"Better try it, ma'am," again came the tense whisper of my unknown counsellor. "It's your last chance."

There was indeed need for haste, if anything was to be done. The train was rattling through the tunnel, and the passengers were gathering up their wraps and bundles. I looked up; the tall form of the Captain blocked the door, he was making his way toward me.

Now or never was the time for action. The two countrymen rose to their feet, shielding me from the view of the others in the car; and with a quick motion I slipped the jewel-box into one of the most obscure pockets of the furry coat. A moment later I was smiling gaily, if a bit hysterically, into the face of its owner.

There was time for a few indifferent remarks, the sort of banalities people exchange when in the immediate presence of a crisis; and then the train drew into the station and stopped.

The Captain threw his coat over his arm. "And now for our ordeal," he cried. Keep up your

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courage. It will probably not be very dreadful." He smiled cheerily down upon me.

"Our ordeal?" I faltered, recoiling with a shock of sickening comprehension. "Do you mean to say that they will search you?"

"Of course," he laughed. "I also took the train at Wheaton. Are you not glad to have a companion in misery?"

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CHAPTER V

ON THE KNEES OF THE GODS

I SHALL never forget my sensations as I followed the Captain from that car. My faculties could not have been more numbed had some one dealt me a stunning blow across the temples. I suffered as one in a nightmare, longing to cry out, to protest, and yet unable to utter a sound.

I knew dully that I must demand the parcel from him, regain it at any hazard; but how in the brief moment allowed me could I bring him to comprehend, how explain the legerdemain by which it had passed from my keeping into his.

While my tongue was still struggling vainly to find the words I wanted, I felt a sharp tug at my skirt, and the low, commanding voice of the mysterious unknown again sounded in my ear.

"Keep cool," he adjured. "Don't worry. I tell you it'll turn out all right!"

Whoever this singular person might be, he possessed in some subtle manner the gift of carrying assurance. His quick, whispered message braced

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me now like a draught of some invigorating cordial. He had helped me before; he would again. At least, that was the thought which sprang to my brain. I stopped not to question nor debate; but with a childlike trust confided my destiny to his hands. With no further effort to attract Captain McCracken's attention I quietly made my way from the car.

The scene rises before me, vivid as ever,—the crowded station, the puffing trains, the white flare of the electric lights. At the steps stood the conductor, flanked on either side by two burly, moustachioed individuals, whom I rightly judged to be "plain clothes men." As we emerged and were pointed out by the conductor, one of these would step forward, and with quiet authority direct us to stand to one side.

The contingent of footmen and maids, alarm and bewilderment written on their faces, had already been segregated in a huddled group, and the man who accosted us curtly motioned the Captain and myself to join them.

We were submitting readily enough; but the two rustics just behind us showed a disposition to argue the point. Their voices rose high and disputatious, and the departing passengers

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turned back curiously to learn the cause of the altercation.

The detectives, however, were in no mood to brook objections, and one of them, seizing the more truculent of the two countrymen, started to shove him back into the waiting line. The fellow instantly resisted, pouring out a flood of indignant "I swans," and "By Goshes;" and the craning crowd surged forward and back with the struggling combatants. The Captain had quickly drawn me to the edge of our group; but in the height of the confusion I felt him suddenly let go the protecting grip with which he held my arm.

"Hi, there!" he called excitedly. "Where are you going with that coat? It's mine! Stop thief! Stop thief!"

I caught one fleeting glimpse of a small, wiry individual worming his way swiftly through the crowd with the Captain's fur coat thrown over his shoulder, and of its excited owner pushing one of the detectives aside to start in hot pursuit.

But the next moment the officer had recovered himself, and bounding toward the Captain dragged him violently back.

"No, you don't," he declared threateningly.

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"You're pretty foxy all right; but you don't get away as easy as that."

"But,—but," stuttered the Englishman, very red-faced, and indignantly trying to explain, "my coat has been stolen. I must catch the chap who took it. After him, before he gets away!"

"Oh, yes," scoffed the other cynically, "I've heard that gag before. But it don't go now. You'll have plenty of time to look up your coat later on," with a wink. "Just now, you'll be good, and pay attention to us."

All the time he was talking he was steadily pushing his prisoner back; and the Captain, fume and protest as he might, was perforce compelled to yield.

Meanwhile, the other two rebels had also been overpowered, and with torn and dishevelled garments were now sullenly taking their places in the group under surveillance.

The one who had acted as my counsellor was especially loud in his complaints. "Wa'al, ef this is the way they treat folks 't come to Noo York," he asserted, "I'm a-goin' to take the next 'commodation back to Wheaton."

I glanced covertly toward him. His cheek was scratched, and one eye was half-closed as a result

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of his altercation with the officers; but under the swelling I fancied I could detect a faint and significant flutter of the lid, and, if I was not mistaken, the corners of his mouth were upcurved in the suspicion of a smile.

The conductor rapidly checked us off, and we were then marshalled under guard to another part of the station to be interrogated and searched. It was a humiliating experience, that march through the gaping crowds, encountering on every side curious eyes, and hearing comments startlingly frank; but this was soon over, and the succeeding ordeal was not so difficult as I had feared.

A brusque, business-like police sergeant began to question me rather sharply; but when I had satisfied him as to who I was, and upon what footing I had visited Onyx Court, he became markedly more deferential, and even apologised for the inconvenience to which I had been put.

"It is of course unnecessary in your case," he said; "but merely as a matter of form, and indeed for your own protection, I hope you will not object to being searched?"

I assured him that I had not the faintest objection; in fact, since the matter had gone so far,

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insisted upon it. He, therefore, turned me over to a brisk, motherly woman, who performed the duty, commiserating and petting me all the time she was at work.

When I was at last released, Captain McCracken was waiting for me; but he, poor man, had gone through quite a different experience, and was correspondingly vehement in his denunciations of American police methods, for he had been badgered and hectored almost beyond the limit of endurance.

"They could not have handled me worse if I had been a convicted pickpocket," he asseverated. "I told them about my fur coat, and they simply laughed in my face. I shall lay the matter before the British consul the first thing in the morning."

But he calmed down somewhat when he learned that my treatment had been reasonably courteous, and reconsidered his intention to make the matter an international affair. By the time he had escorted me to a cab he was almost himself again.

"May I not stop in after dinner and see how you are?" he asked eagerly, holding my hand in a firm clasp.

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"Not to-night, I beg," I replied. "I am utterly done up by all this excitement, and I shall try to get a long night's rest. But," seeing his look of disappointment, "will you not come some time to-morrow, either in the morning or afternoon? There are many things about this affair I wish to discuss, and I shall be so glad to see you."

"How stupid of me to think of intruding," he returned compunctiously. "I might have known you would be awfully upset by all this. But you will surely see me to-morrow, will you not?" There was almost a note of pleading in his voice.

My smile must have reassured him, however, for he added half-shyly but in a tone of intense admiration: "I think you are the bravest, as well as the most charming woman I have ever known!"

I drew back in a sudden confusion at the ardour in his manner; but as he closed the door of the cab, I leaned forward again to nod good-by. And there, beside him on the curb, listening intently to the directions given to the cabby, I saw once more the figure of my rustic acquaintance of the train.

Our eyes met for but a second, and then I was being whirled across Forty-second Street, and

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up the avenue; but there was a something in the man's attitude, a hint of mutual understanding in his glance, which told me that he had not stationed himself there without a definite purpose, and that I had by no means seen the last of him.

Did it mean that he was seeking my address in order to restore the sapphires? For I had no doubt but that the theft of the coat was merely a ruse planned and directed by him to pass the jewels beyond the reach of the police.

My brain had been in such a whirl; the swift transitions from abject, grovelling fear to a reawakened hope so dizzying; so intense had been my relief at the final outcome, that—can it be believed?—I had for the time actually forgotten the original cause of my predicament.

The sapphires! Where were they? By mistake or not, yet had they been entrusted to my keeping; and I had proven an unfaithful steward!

With the force of a sudden revelation, I grasped at last the true significance of all that had occurred. The men aboard the train had of course overheard the Captain's story of the robbery, and noting my subsequent anxiety to rid myself of the parcel in my bag, had been

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shrewd enough to put two and two together, and guess pretty closely at the contents of that flat, carefully tied box.

No wonder my mentor of the car had been so ready in his suggestions. He probably knew that a confederate was to meet him at the station, and that a wink or nod would be all sufficient to convey the purport of his scheme.

Risky? Yes; but the prize was the finest set of sapphires in America. And I had shown myself so pitifully easy. Why, I had fairly hurled myself into the trap they laid for me.

The men were thieves; that was plain to me now upon the face of it. By sheer ill-luck, and through the force of an overwhelming terror, I had blundered into an association with a band of clever criminals, the disguised farmer whose advice I had accepted with such fatuous docility, in all likelihood the leader of their gang. The sequence of events,—his emphatic assurances to me, followed by his struggle with the officers, so manifestly a diversion to permit the coup on the part of his waiting accomplice, all pointed to this as the only solution.

Dared I then harbour any optimistic belief in the return of the jewels from such a source?

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Hardly. And yet why had the man followed me from the station, placed himself in a position to overhear my address? Did he fancy I might be of further use to him?

It was an uncomfortable and disturbing thought, and served effectually to dispel the happy glow which the Captain's last words had kindled in my heart.

My mind became engrossed once more with the hideous tangle in which I had become involved. Above all, I reproached myself for my lack of courage and common-sense in not acquainting Captain McCracken with the true facts when he first informed me of the loss of the sapphires. An explanation would have been so easy then, so obvious; the only burden some consequent ridicule and gossip.

But now, look to what my temporising, my efforts at evasion, had brought me. In order to save myself some trifling annoyance, I had voluntarily relinquished the almost priceless possession of another to the guardianship of outlaws.—Good Heavens! I was guilty of a felony!

That drive home through the city streets seemed interminable. The ways were alight, the car-

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riages were rolling up and down. New York was putting on her diamonds. All was life and gayety; and I felt like a blot of gloom on the brightness. For hours I had been keyed up by the excitement, the strain; and consequently I but gave way the more completely in the moment of inevitable reaction.

I am free to admit, too, that just then neither the abstract question of my measure of responsibility for the loss nor even the distress accruing from it to Mrs. Van Suyden weighed so heavily upon my spirit as did the possible consequences to myself.

On that score, a thousand doubts and apprehensions thronged my mind. Would not Elida, seeing the anxiety of her hostess, and believing of course that the sapphires were in my possession, attempt to repair the wrong by explaining the mistake which had been made, and assure the easy recovery of the stones? Cheering thought! What could I say, if Mrs. Van Suyden, backed by the actress, should appear before me the following morning, and demand the restitution of her property?

Or, even though I escaped that contingency, and Elida held her peace, was it not a likely

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thing that the police would capture the thief who had stolen Captain McCracken's coat and with it the jewels? A hundred people, more or less, must have observed the man as he made his way out of the crowded station; surely, it was fair to suppose that some one had recognised him.

The Captain too had left a fairly accurate description of the fellow with the authorities; and, beyond all that, any attempt to dispose of the sapphires must certainly betray him.

Yes; it seemed inconceivable that he could escape arrest. And under arrest, would he not in all probability divulge the method by which the jewels had fallen into his hands? In that event, could Captain McCracken, could any reasonable man, credit another theory than that I had designedly attempted to make him my scapegoat? Oh, what a miserable sneak I would appear to him,—a thief and a coward!

When we finally drew up before the apartment house where I lived, I was so shaken and unnerved by my reflections I could scarcely totter from the cab to the door, and in the elevator my knees trembled so that I thought they would give way under me; but once within my own rooms, and

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surrounded by all my familiar lares and penates, I was able to regain some slight hold upon myself.

It was a relief, for one thing, to throw off my jacket and travelling dress and slip into a warm, loose gown. Then I ordered my dinner sent up, drew an arm-chair in front of the fire-place, and lighted the gas-log.

An unpardonable extravagance, this lighting of the gas-log when the radiator over by the window was chirping and buzzing away so valiantly; but I was cold and depressed, and longed for the radiance of the actual flames.

And, indeed, the cheer of the firelight, together with an excellent dinner, did serve to restore much of my shattered poise. When I finally pushed my plate away and renewed my speculations, I was able to bring a far more rational logic to bear upon them.

True, I could not disguise from myself that the facts against me constituted a telling indictment; but surely they were not absolutely damning. With all the strength at my command, I determined to look only on the rather hypothetical bright side of the affair.

Yet, despite all my courageous effort, the sinis-

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ter misgivings to which I had earlier fallen prey would still occasionally obtrude themselves. My mind insisted on reverting to the young farmer of the train and to the vexing question: What further use or employment could he possibly have for me?

Did he fancy perchance that I might be a likely subject for blackmail? I smiled at the idea. That at least was one peril from which I was immune. Or perhaps, he—?

But all my guesses seemed so wildly improbable and fantastic, that I could not but dismiss them. Nevertheless, the recollection of his peculiar actions filled me with a vague foreboding of evil. Involuntarily I shivered; and once more a dark tide of doubts and apprehensions rolled down upon my spirit like an engulfing flood.

And then the Captain's last words recurred to me: "You are the bravest as well as the most charming woman I have ever known!"

It was like the inspiration of a trumpet call. I straightened up in my chair and threw back my head with a gesture of defiance.

"I will not weakly yield," I cried. "There must be some way out of this labyrinth into which I have strayed. There must be some way, and I

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will find it!" Half unconsciously, Henley's stirring lines sprang to my lips:

"Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods there be
For my unconquerable soul.

"In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud;
Under the bludgeonings of chance,
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

"It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll;
I am the master of my fate—
I am the captain of my soul."

In some way the ringing phrases soothed and comforted me. "'I am the master of my fate,'" I repeated aloud. "'I am the captain of my soul.' I will fret myself no further, give way no more to my coward imaginings. In intention at least I am innocent of any wrongdoing, and there is no reason why I should scourge myself with these vain regrets. I shall do my best to recover Mrs. Van Suyden's sapphires for her; but if I fail, I shall not let myself sink into the slough of despond."

Fortified by my resolution, I straightway sought my bed, for I must confess that by this

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time I was completely exhausted; but my rest was broken by a strange and troubled dream.

The early part of the night I slept heavily; and then it seemed to me that all at once I awoke with the consciousness that there was some one in the room!

My bed-chamber was perfectly dark; but in my sitting-room there shone a dim light from the electric lamp on the street corner below, and by this faint reflection I could see the curtains at the door between the two rooms shaking as though some one had just passed through.

I lay there in agonised suspense, straining my eyes and ears, my heart beating so tumultuously that I could not have screamed even had I dared.

There was no further manifestation to my great relief, and I was just about to relax my tense vigilance, when the form of a man outlined itself distinctly at my bedside. At the same moment a cloth was pressed down over my face, and the sweet, pungent odour of chloroform assailed my nostrils. I struggled and fought, but in vain. The hand which held me down was strong, the influence of the drug potent. Weaker and weaker became my purpose, fainter and fainter my struggles, and then—I knew no more!

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CHAPTER VI

A STARTLING DÉNOUEMENT

I SLEPT late the next morning; but when I at last awoke, the memory of my dream was still so vivid, so startling, that upon opening my eyes I looked fearfully around, and then cowered down under the covers, trembling with terror.

Reassured at length by the stillness of the apartment, and by the broad bars of sunlight which lay across the floor, I finally ventured to sit up in bed and more boldly glance about me. But now a sudden dizziness as of vertigo assailed me. I felt strangely sluggish and heavy, disinclined to stir from my comfortable couch.

This so revived my waning belief in the reality of my dream, that, shaking off my languor, I sprang up resolutely and made a complete investigation of my chambers.

Everything was in perfect order; not even the position of a chair was changed. The closets and shelves were exactly as I had left them. I

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was at last forced to admit that the apparent evidence of my senses was not to be relied upon; and that my midnight visitation had been merely a sleeping fantasy, arising from a brain over-excited by the events of the afternoon.

While completing my tour of inspection, a long box was brought up to me, which I opened to find full of the dewyest, most fragrant roses. The Captain's card lay among them with a line pencilled on it to the effect that he trusted I had passed a restful night, and that he would do himself the pleasure of calling during the morning.

I buried my face in the velvety petals; they smelled of June and of summer. I hummed a gay little song as I filled my vases with them and placed them about the rooms. The Captain would soon be here bringing me good news, I felt sure. Yesterday's tangle would be easily unravelled. Oh, the world was far from being the vale of tears it had seemed a few hours before, but was instead a glad, joyous world,—the best of all possible worlds!

I made a very careful toilet, and was sipping my morning coffee when a card was brought up to me. I took it with a smile, thinking that the Captain had indeed followed hard upon his

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flowers, when, glancing at it, I saw the name of Sonnenthal, the jeweller.

Frowning, I stood a moment, tapping the card irresolutely with my fingers. It was decidedly embarrassing, to say the least, to go into the details of my dilemma with this man. And why was he here? It seemed incredible that Elida had not wired him of her mistake.—Still, there was nothing to do but see him.

"Show Mr. Sonnenthal up," I said shortly; and then began to move restlessly about the room, striving to decide just what attitude to take, how much or how little to let him know of the real circumstances. Our subsequent interview proved that I might have spared myself the trouble.

A few moments later he entered, unctuous, smiling. He was of the second generation,—it was his father and uncle who had established the famous jewellery house;—and I somehow gained the impression that what in them was far-sighted business acumen had in him degenerated to trickery and craft. He was of the dark Teuton type with a smooth-shaven, rather heavy face, and very light eyes, shifty and evasive, under the thick, opaque lids he held habitually half-closed.

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I had heard his name linked with that of one of the new stars of musical comedy, and involuntarily I felt a pang of pity for her. It was said that he was wasting his patrimony on her caprices; but if she had to consult the ugly moods and humours of such a man, she paid dear for the reckless extravagance accredited to her.

"Miss Bramblestone?" he said, advancing with a smile which he evidently designed to be engaging.

I merely bowed.

"I believe we are neighbours," he observed, disregarding the formality of my greeting. "I have the apartment just above yours."

Ah! I recognised him now. From the moment he entered the door I had known that his face was familiar to me; but I had not been able to place him. With his explanation, however, I remembered that I had often passed him in the halls, and I murmured something to that effect.

"That must be my excuse for such an early call," he went on; "I thought I might as well drop in on my way down town. Although," with a significant lift to his eyebrows, "I will not deny that I am anxious enough to have the

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transaction between us closed up. I don't care for this sort of business as a rule, you know," in an explanatory tone; "and if it hadn't been in the way of obliging Miss Yeats, I should never have considered it. Wouldn't have listened to such a suggestion from any one else; but that little Elida," with odious familiarity, "has a way with her, don't you know? I often say that girl could coax the very birds off the trees. — But, to get back to business," briskly, "if it doesn't inconvenience you, I'll trouble you for the rubies now. It may be foolish; but I'll swear I won't feel really easy in my mind until they are back in my safe. And you, no doubt," with another ingratiating smile, "will be just as pleased to be relieved of their responsibility."

So, after all, Elida had not notified him of her blunder; and he was here in accordance with our original understanding? I became possessed of a wicked little desire to mystify him.

"But I have had no responsibility," I rejoined coolly; "for I have never had your rubies."

He gazed at me steadily a moment, his eyes slowly narrowing. Then he burst out laughing.

"That is probably a very good joke, Miss Bramblestone; I have always heard of you as a witty

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woman. But this morning I have no time to jest. The rubies, if you please."

I shrank instinctively from letting Sonnenthal know any more than was absolutely necessary. The one thing I most desired to avoid was publicity; and this dealer, like Elida, might easily regard the affair simply as an excellent advertisement. His rubies were safe; why, then, was it necessary to acquaint him with the loss of the sapphires? Still an explanation of some sort was due him.

"But, I assure you, it is no joke," I replied earnestly. "The rubies are not in my possession."

"Not in your possession?" he cried incredulously. "Where are they, then? Who has them? You were the person selected by Miss Yeats to bring them to me?"

In his quick alarm and excitement he fired his questions at me with the rapidity of a magazine rifle.

"I do not know where they are," I affirmed stubbornly; "you will have to ask Miss Yeats in regard to that."

He looked at me with a puzzled scowl, his hands thrust deep into his pockets.

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"Was it not the arrangement," he queried "that you should return the stones?"

"Yes," non-committally, "I believe there was originally some plan of the kind."

"Then what is the meaning of this?" he demanded. "Look here," almost threateningly, "I want a straight answer to my question. Where are those stones?"

"And again I tell you that you will have to ask Miss Yeats," I replied haughtily. "As I have already indicated, I have not now, nor, to the best of my belief, have I at any time had your rubies in my charge.—That is your only business with me, I believe. Good-morning."

At my cool dismissal his manner changed at once and he became almost suppliant.

"But, Miss Bramblestone," he expostulated, rubbing his hands together nervously, "it is not fair of you to take such an attitude. I may have been a little emphatic in expressing myself; but remember this is a serious matter to me. I was solemnly promised that my necklace should be returned to me by you; yet, when I come after it, I find that you neither have it, nor will give me any information in regard to it. And here," dragging a morning paper from his pocket, and

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pointing to the headlines, "is an account of a big jewel robbery at Onyx Court. 'The Loss of Elida Yeats's Rubies!' That's all right; that was on the card. But here is: 'Mrs. Van Suyden's Sapphires Gone!' If that is on the level, how do I know that some professional crook didn't beat Elida to the safe and bag the whole haul?"

His fingers shook, the beads of sweat were standing out upon his brow. The man's distress was so genuine that I could not restrain a feeling of pity.

"I would not allow myself to worry over that, Mr. Sonnenthal," I returned, unbending slightly. "I am very certain that your rubies have not been stolen; in fact, that nothing has been stolen at Onyx Court. Miss Yeats simply made a mistake, that was all; and I think you will find your missing necklace safe in her hands."

His face relaxed and he gave a quick sigh of relief. "Ah, only a mistake?" he cried. "Well, I am glad; but," with a sudden qualm of anxiety, "I've got to make sure of those stones. I am going to send a telegram to Miss Yeats at once."

He seized his hat, and was starting pell-mell for the door, when suddenly a burst of familiar

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laughter floated in from the hallway; and a second later Elida herself appeared.

She looked as bright as the morning, untroubled and unharassed by the events which it seemed to me had piled years upon my head. Her velvet dress and the rich furs about her shoulders were fitting accessories to her lovely face, as fresh and glowing as the roses which bloomed about my room.

She stopped short in surprise when she saw my visitor, and then went off into ringing peals of mirth.

"Oh, Louis," she cried banteringly to Sonnenthal. "My, but you are in a rush to get those precious rubies back into your clutches. It is a wonder you did not come after them before daylight."

He smiled perfunctorily; but his eyes were still anxious. "You brought them back with you?" eagerly, stretching out long, curving fingers as if to seize them.

"I brought them back?" The laughter faded suddenly from Elida's face, leaving only astonishment. "I brought them? Why, what do you mean? Hasn't Miss Bramblestone given them to you yet?" turning to me with quick inquiry.

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Sonnenthal grew actually livid at her words, and I hope never again to see such an expression in a human eye. He glanced from one to the other of us, striving to speak; but the very intensity of his feelings choked him.

Elida caught nervously at my hand. "Don't carry the joke any farther, Gwendolen. He doesn't understand that kind of thing. Give him his necklace and let him go."

What on earth did she mean? "I am not joking as you very well know, Elida," I cried, jerking my hand away. "I have not got his rubies, and never had them!"

Elida's cheek paled; but it was more from bewilderment than fright. "Gwendolen? Are you mad? I gave them to you myself!"

"It is you who are mad," I retorted, tired of her play-acting. "You gave me Mrs. Van Suyden's sapphires."

"Nothing of the sort," in quick protest. "The sapphires were still in the safe when I took the rubies out. I saw them with my own eyes; and after the robbery thanked my lucky stars that I had been ahead of the thief. Had I waited only a little longer, the rubies might have been stolen too. Then, just before I tied up the package,

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preparatory to giving it to you, Gwendolen, I looked at them again. Even a color-blind person can tell rubies from sapphires."

I felt as though I were turning to stone. There I stood, staring at Elida, who in turn stared back at me with wide, frightened eyes, while Sonnenthal, shaking and tremulous, gazed wildly from one to the other.

"Oh!" I cried. "Oh! I never dreamed of this! You cannot—"

I suppose I must have staggered, for Elida pushed me into a chair and then poured a glass of water which she held to my stiffened lips.

"What is it, Gwendolen?" she begged. "What has happened? For Heaven's sake explain yourself."

"Captain McCracken got on the train," I faltered. "He told me of the robbery, and that I was to be searched the moment we arrived in New York. I thought you had made a mistake, and taken the sapphires, and that they would be found on me. I thrust the parcel into a pocket of the Captain's fur coat, and—and—" involuntarily I bowed my head, "it was stolen in the station."

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"Ah!" There was a world of meaning in the syllable which Sonnenthal breathed.

It stung me like a whip-lash. "How dare you do that?" I cried, springing to my feet and facing him. "If you employed a messenger so unfortunate as to lose the package entrusted to her, you and," including Elida in my glance, "you too have only yourselves to blame!"

"And do you think you can get out of it by choking any such cock-and-bull story as that down my throat?" broke in Sonnenthal menacingly.

I turned proudly from him with a gesture of contempt; but he did not seem to observe my action. He was plainly pondering the situation, and there was a moment of silence, while he gnawed at a finger nail and glanced questioningly from Elida to myself. The colour had not yet returned to his face, and his light eyes still held a baleful fire; but he was manifestly struggling to control the vehemence of his spleen. When he finally spoke, his voice was husky, but he had managed to reduce its pitch to the tone of his normal conversation.

"See here, young ladies," he said sharply, "this is not the first time I have been called on to deal

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with this sort of thing in my experience. We jewellers are well aware of the peculiar propensity which rented goods have for disappearing in such mysterious fashion, and we have learned to take small stock in the more or less flimsy explanations tendered us. People of a certain position in society seem to imagine that we will accept any kind of a fairy tale, and calmly pocket the accruing loss; but," grimly, "they usually discover their mistake before we get through with them.

"Still," he went on, "I do not believe it will be necessary to resort to extreme measures in this case. Both of you are too sharp-witted, I am sure, to permit the matter to go any farther than just between us three. Let there be no misunderstanding, though," he added quickly, bringing his heavy fist down on the table: "I propose to have those rubies of mine back, and I propose to have them back da— almighty quick.

"Now, as I see it," concentrating his malevolent gaze upon me, "the thing is up to you. You admit that you got a package of jewels from Miss Yeats here, which she says was rubies, but you claim was Mrs. Van Suyden's sapphires. The only way to prove which of you is telling

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the truth,—if either of you," he interpolated cynically, "is to get the package. If you can show me the sapphires, it lets you out and places the responsibility on her. If you can't—?" He stopped short, but the hiatus was more significant than words.

"But how can I show you the parcel?" I cried. "I have already told you that it was stolen from me."

Sonnenthal threw back his head with a gesture of angry impatience. "Good Lord, woman, can't you see that the game is up? I've tried to give you a chance, and to straighten the affair out without fuss or notoriety; but if you will have it the other way, you can thank your own fool obstinacy for it."

Then the last shred of his self-restraint seemed to give way. "Now you can understand, once and for all," stepping forward, and viciously grasping my wrist, "that I'm not here to be bamboozled. By God, I want those rubies, and you'll get them for me, or—"

"Drop her arm this instant!" ordered a sharp, imperative voice behind him, and a firm hand, seizing the jeweller by the collar, jerked him back and flung him to the other side of the room.

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"You will pardon my intrusion, Miss Bramble-stone," said the Captain, turning to me; "but I seemed unable to make any of you hear my ring, and the sound of the dispute within caused me to enter unannounced, fearing that my presence might be needed.

"Shall I throw this person out?" with a grim jerk of his head in the direction of Sonnenthal; "or would you rather have me withdraw until you have finished your conference?—on the understanding, of course, that I shall be within call, should he attempt any more demonstrations."

Sonnenthal had by this time recovered from his surprise at the Captain's unexpected interference; and, feeling double cause for rage, now stood glaring at us and muttering imprecations.

"Throw me out, will you?" he blustered. "You just lay a finger on me, and I'll put you where your fine lady friends are going. I've given them a chance to dig up those rubies, and now I'm going to see what a warrant will do for both of them!"

He gave a short nod, full of vindictive triumph, first at me and then at Elida; and, seizing his hat and gloves, started for the door.

"Wait, Louis," cried Elida in frantic appeal;

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but Sonnenthal paid no heed to her, and was half across the room, when Captain McCracken's broad shoulders barred the way.

"Stop!" he commanded, and so peremptory was his tone that Sonnenthal involuntarily halted.

The Captain looked over his head, and into my eyes. "Miss Bramblestone," he said in his usual, even voice, although I fancied I could detect a note of anxiety in it, "I can see that you are in serious trouble, and that this man has it in his power to annoy you. I do not wish to pry into your affairs; but I do ask the privilege of aiding and protecting you."

"Oh, Gwendolen," implored Elida in a whisper, as she dragged at my sleeve, "do tell him. Perhaps he can help us."

There was nothing else to do. The bitter moment had arrived when I must make my confession; not as I had hoped,—oh, not as I had hoped. I had dreamed that he would sit in my little, sunshiny parlour among the roses he had sent, and that I could set forth in detail the various steps which had led to my various actions; but now, without warning, in the presence of the two who had already convicted me upon the evidence, I must rehearse to him the circumstances

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under which I had lost the rubies. Shamefacedly, with lowered eyes, plucking nervously at my handkerchief, I stammered out my story.

The Captain merely bowed when I had finished. Then he addressed Sonnenthal.

"What value do you put on this necklace?" he asked curtly.

"It was practically priceless," muttered Sonnenthal sullenly. "At the lowest estimate, those stones were worth $50,000."

"Very well," the Captain's tone was brusquely business-like. He had drawn a note-book from his pocket, and was jotting down some rapid memoranda. "There, Mr.—er—Sonnenthal," he said, tearing out the pencilled leaf, and tossing it across the table, "is the address of my lawyers, and also of my bankers, Messrs. Schonberg & Co., of Exchange Place, who I think can fully satisfy you as to my financial standing. I may state to you that I shall put the best detective talent in New York on this case at once; but should all efforts to trace up the necklace prove unavailing, I shall instruct my attorneys, after a reasonable time has elapsed, to compensate you to whatever extent Miss Bramblestone is legally responsible for your loss.

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"Make no mistake, though," he continued sharply, as Sonnenthal showed evidence of an intention to haggle for his full pound of flesh. "I understand as well as you do the absurdity of your talk about making this a criminal charge; and although I am willing to do the decent thing by you, you might as well know that it is merely to save Miss Bramblestone from any such further scenes as that of this morning. If I hear of her suffering any future annoyance or inconvenience at your hands, you will get just nothing at all." He paused a moment, then added distinctly: "She is my affianced wife!"

Elida gave a startled exclamation, and I half rose from my chair to be pushed gently back by the Captain's firm hand on my shoulder. Sonnenthal, manifestly impressed, interposed no more objections, but merely waiting to possess himself of the memorandum, slunk toward the door.

"Wait, Louis; I am coming with you," called Miss Yeats after him, with a surprising display of tact. "There are some points about this thing I want to explain to you." The Captain and I were at last alone together.

"Oh," I cried impetuously, "you should not

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have done it. It was beautiful, noble of you, and I shall never forget it; but you must not allow your sense of chivalry to enmesh you in this miserable affair. I beg of you, rescind your offer to Sonnenthal and let events take their course. I am innocent, I do not fear publicity, only shrink from it; and I cannot accept your sacrifices on my behalf."

He smiled gravely. "There is no sacrifice," he said; "only the delight of being able to assist you. I came here this morning with the definite purpose of asking you to be my wife; it is you who must forgive my premature announcement. It seemed the only thing to do under the circumstances; but you can," with an unsteady laugh, "break the engagement, if you care to, after this jewel matter is all settled."

"And you really care for me?" I whispered.

"From the first moment I met you." He stretched out his hand and clasped mine.

Shabby "little Sister of the Rich!" Obscure painter of fans! For the first time since childhood, I knew the joy of life!

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CHAPTER VII

SURMISE AND CERTAINTY

For a season the Captain and I forgot the "yellow journal" world into which Fate seemed so ruthlessly to have pitchforked us, and journeyed hand-in-hand into a far country,—a country of bright hopes and glad dreams, the Land o' Love.

But not for long could we loiter a-down the sunny paths and over the rose-strewn pleasaunces. The claims of the present were assertive, and loth as we might be to return, they insistently recalled us to the domain of the practical and pressing.

There was a problem to be solved, and that quickly; and, as I explained to Duncan with great emphasis, we could not afford to spend time in planning a delightful to-morrow when every wasted moment of to-day counted against the recovery of the stolen jewels.

I was also very firm upon another point, and all his protestations and pleadings failed to shake

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me in this determination. There should be no formal announcement of our engagement, and no question of a marriage until I was able effectually to prove my innocence to Sonnenthal and, if need were, to the whole world.

We argued this decision long and earnestly, for the Captain, generous heart, was set upon making me a bride out of hand and at once, and was plainly vexed when I declined to put on my "bonnet," as he expressed it, and accompany him to the nearest church. He pointed out, and I will admit not without some show of reason, that such a step would stamp out more quickly than anything else any unkind gossip which might be set in circulation; but although he waxed subtle as the serpent in Eden, and his eager persuasions fairly enchanted my soul, I am glad to say I withstood the temptation and held my ground.

"No, no, no!" I cried at last, clapping my hands over my ears. "I admit the truth of all you say. I agree that it is the part of commonsense, and in addition, believe me the prospect is most alluring. But I am not a coward, Duncan; I will not weakly load my burden on your shoulders. When you know me better, dear, you will find that I am a very obstinate woman; and

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in this matter, at least, I intend to humour my pride."

"You are not only obstinate, but distinctly self-ish," broke in the Captain half-fondly, half in irritation.

"But look here, Duncan," I wheedled, "I care too much for you to saddle you with myself just now, when at any moment we may hear the news-boys calling:

" 'Wuxtray! Wuxtray! Society lady relieves her friends of a fortune in jewels! Miss Gwen-dolen Bramblestone, feminine Raffles in the great Onyx Court robbery!'

"Don't you see," following up my opportunity, for there was an appreciative twinkle in his eye, "how a newly made bride would feel at hearing such a nuptial chorus ringing in her ears? De-lightful accompaniment to the opening of a honeymoon, wouldn't it be?"

"But knowing it was lies, what would we care?" he still argued. "I can understand how a silly girl might be a bit sensitive over it; but in a woman of your age, Gwendolen, it strikes me as nothing more nor less than mawkish."

A woman of my age, indeed! And I am only twenty-eight! For a moment I was ready to say

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good-bye to him forever; then I caught sight of his sober, ingenuous face, and I went off into shrieks of laughter. I could not help it.

"Dear Duncan," I explained, as he looked up in puzzled amazement at my mirth, "you are so deliciously English. No gilded flowers of speech for you; in your lexicon, the spade remains simply and for ever a spade. But mawkish or not, you may understand once and for all that I am not going to marry you until I can read my title clear as a respectable member of society."

"Have your way then, for the present at least," he finally consented in a tone whose vivid disappointment filled me with an irrational delight; "but I give you fair warning, if that necklace doesn't turn up inside of a fortnight, I'll have you in front of a clergyman, if I have to drag you there by main force."

"If the necklace doesn't turn up inside of a fortnight?" I repeated desperately, recalled by his words to the exigencies of my position. "A fortnight? Good Heavens, why not say a century? It must turn up before that. Why, a week more of this sort of a strain would have me in a mad-house."

"Well, then, see here," he returned in the cool,

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matter-of-fact tone which was the best thing in the world to allay my nervous tremblings, "there is an old saying that two heads are better than one; and although I suppose both of us have puzzled ourselves dizzy over this muddle, perhaps by putting a united effort on it we can get somewhere near the truth.

"There is no use, either, in shooting wildly into the air, or guessing at this or that; so I propose that we take up the case from the beginning, weigh carefully every fact in our possession, and see if between us we cannot evolve some sort of a theory which will hold water.

"Here," he went on, drawing a newspaper from his pocket, and unfolding it in his lap, "is the journalistic account of the affair, which we may assume to be reasonably accurate, and which will at least give us a groundwork for our deductions."

He skipped an opening paragraph or so which detailed merely Mrs. Van Suyden's discovery of the robbery; and then commenced to read:

"The rifled safe was in Mrs. Van Suyden's bedchamber on the second floor of the extreme left wing, and was concealed behind a panel in the wainscoting which in response to pressure upon

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a hidden spring, opened, and revealed the steel door of the receptacle.

"The facts that neither this ingenious contrivance, nor the combination itself, showed any signs of having been tampered with points strongly to the thief as some one well acquainted with the modus operandi of effecting an entrance. Yet, on the other hand, there are fresh scratches on the highly lacquered inner surface of the safe door, and on the edge of the shelf where the sapphires lay, which indicate the presence of a steel tool, although of what character or how employed, the police are at a loss to determine. It seems, however, in no way to have been used for forcing the lock or prying at the door; so the authorities are disinclined to attach much importance to the existence of the scratches, arguing that they may well have been there previously, but simply remained unnoticed.

"Leaving this feature out of consideration, then, and accepting Mrs. Van Suyden's emphatic statement that no person save herself and her husband knew the combination, one is forced to the conclusion that the job was the work of some cracksman, expert enough to decipher the figures required from the click of the knob as he turned

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it around. His knowledge of the location of the safe and of the mechanism of the secret panel must in such a case have been gleaned either through personal observation, or by information acquired from the servants.

"A theory that Mrs. Van Suyden might inadvertently have left the safe open is dispelled by the testimony of herself and her husband, both of whom unhesitatingly declare that her last visit to it was about ten o'clock that morning, and that Mr. Van Suyden tried the door after she had closed and locked it, an assertion of considerable value, in that it definitely fixes the time of the robbery as between ten and four o'clock, for it was just at the latter hour that the loss of the sapphires was discovered.

"The mystery in this phase of the episode, however, is dwarfed by the total lack of any reasonable explanation as to how the robber made his entrance and exit from the room without detection.

"The only method of access to the chamber was from the hall which extends through that part of the house terminating in a flight of stairs leading down to the billiard-room below, and by passing through a small ante-room in which Estelle La-

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velle, Mrs. Van Suyden's maid, was seated sewing.

"From her position, since the doors were partially open, this girl could command a view of the hall, and also of that part of Mrs. Van Suyden's chamber containing the safe. Being deeply engrossed in her task, she had her luncheon served in the room, and asserts that she did not once leave her place during the entire period, except for a space not to exceed ten minutes and about two o'clock, when she hurried to her own apartment to procure a spool of thread.

"She furthermore avers that she is positive no one could have been in the bed-chamber while she was present, and that the only persons who passed through the hall were members of the house party on their way to and from the billiard-room. Estelle, it may be added, has been with Mrs. Van Suyden for over eight years, and is regarded as above suspicion.

"This practically leaves the window as the only mode of entrance, and suggests that the robbery must have been accomplished during the ten minutes of the maid's absence. Such a supposition would, indeed, seem amply demonstrated by

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the open sash which Mrs. Van Suyden declares she herself had closed only a short time before.

"Yet, once again insuperable obstacles present themselves. The window, a good fifteen feet from the ground, has below and above it only the smooth brick wall with no projections or cornices to afford a foothold, save only a narrow ledge of stone along which a cat could scarcely tread in safety.

"Moreover, even granting that a venturesome climber might have traversed this perilous passage, access to it must have been gained from one of the rooms in the left wing; and it is stated that none of the apartments opening upon this ledge were occupied, except only those of Mrs. Van Suyden. The doors to the others were all securely locked, and the keys in the possession of the housekeeper."

"Oh, but that is a mistake," I interrupted impulsively. "They have forgotten that they transferred me to one of those wing rooms on Sunday night. The one I had been occupying was wanted for that Mr. Gresham who arrived so unexpectedly."

The Captain shook his finger at me with mock caution. "Sh-h," he warned with portentous

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