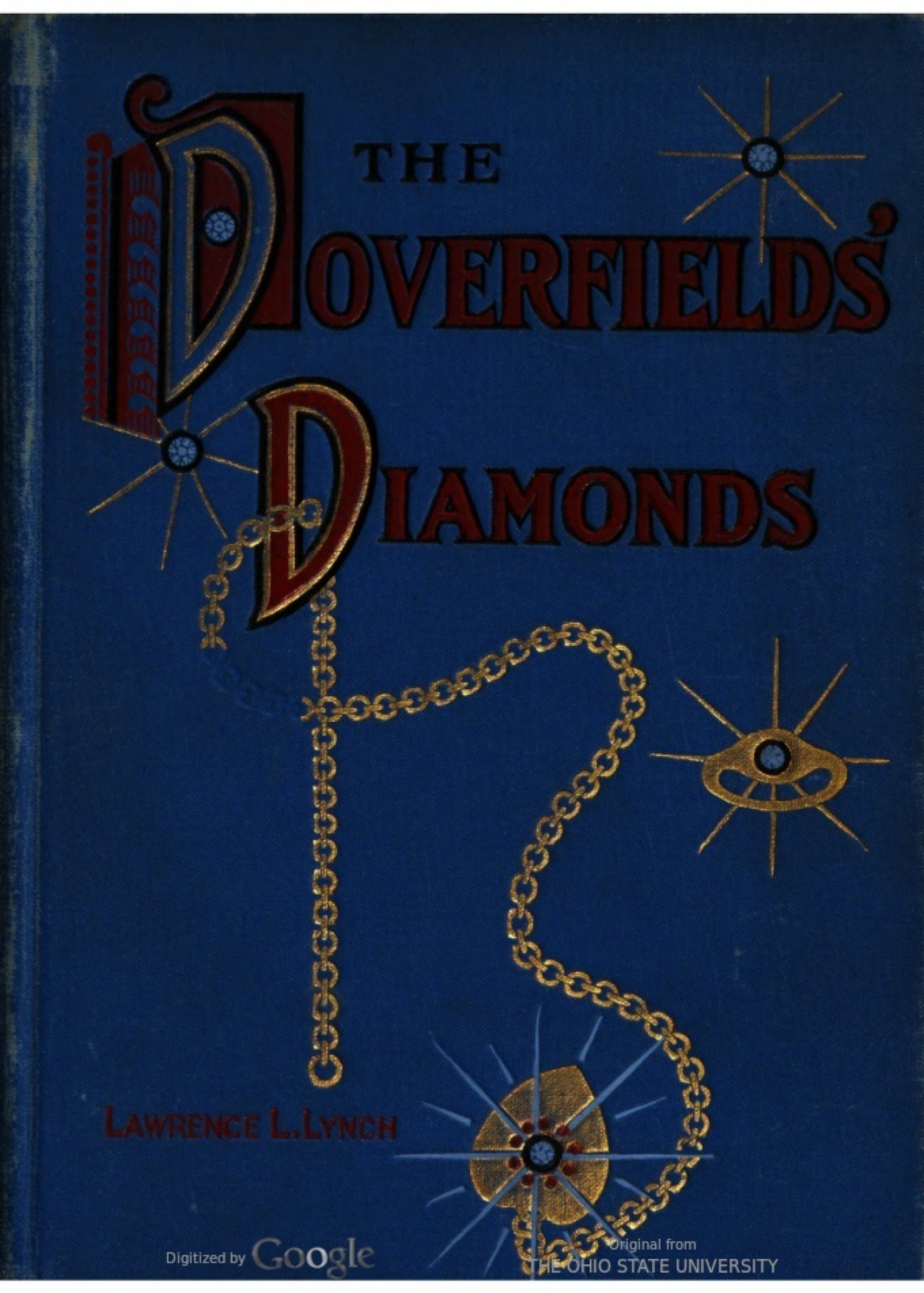
THE DOVERFIELDS' DIAMONDS



LAWRENCE L. LYNCH

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NEVER WAS EVIDENCE STRONGER.

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THE DOVERFIELDS' DIAMONDS

The Great Gem Mystery

BY

E. M. VAN DEVENTER

"LAWRENCE L. LYNCH"

Author of "The Danger Line," "The Woman Who Dared," "Under Fate's Wheel," "High Stakes," "The Unseen Hand," "Dangerous Ground," "A Slender Clue," "The Lost Witness," "Shadowed by Three," "The Last Stroke," "Madeline Payne," "The Diamond Coterie," "Out of a Labyrinth," "Romance of a Bomb Thrower," "A Mountain Mystery."

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CHICAGO

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The Doverfields' Diamonds

CHAPTER I.

ANCIENT HISTORY.

As the years, thirty of them, have added to my store of knowledge, they have lessened somewhat a formidable list of "convictions," changing some of them into modest, even humble, opinions, and some to mere ideas; but leaving to me, still, those vital beliefs and resolutions, lacking which no man has quite reached his manhood's full stature.

Six years had passed since the June morning when I sat in my Aunt Jem's cool living room, fresh from the greatest effort of my life, and horribly dissatisfied with it; for, having passed the Rubicon of preparatory study and final admission at the Bar, I had become suddenly stricken with a panic, fearing that the law was not my ordained field of usefulness, and utterly unable to put my uncertain fingers upon the thing, profession, business or trade, for which I was born.

I was a callow youth that rare June day when I sat and moodily recalled the biting words of my guardian; his first sharp words to me, and, I believe, his last.

"It is useless, Jeanette!" he said, addressing my stately and always indulgent aunt, "If the boy,"—I was 24—"between his overworked pate, and that New England conscience, had not got his nerves and wits worn to a 'frazzle,' as old Hec' says, I should prescribe a straight-jacket! As it is, I merely suggest a visit to Aunt Jem, down in Wraylands. Lay in a stock of light reading, Ken; lock up Blackstone, and stay all summer. You want to vegetate; that's what you want!"

"And to eat!" added my dear aunt. "You 'll have to eat at Aunt Jem's table." And, truth to tell, it was the thought of Aunt Jem's rare cookery that gave me my most pleasant anticipation, as I journeyed to quiet, prosaic Wraylands, with its eight

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hundred claimed inhabitants, its four churches, and—what else?

What indeed! Before I had partaken of my first breakfast in my aunt's cozy cottage, I had been aroused, forced out of myself, and into an abnormal activity; and, before the end of that first day, I felt as confident of my mission, one mission at least, as though I had never considered, doubted, or hesitated, for the morning I arrived in Wraylands beautiful Daphne Meyrick, a bride of three weeks, was found dead in her bridal robes.

For many long days the community talked, wondered, guessed and grieved; while the officers, Captain Wrayland, who was her guardian, and mine, and I, her cousin and life-long comrade, sought for the clue which should tell us whether the deed that had cut short that bright life had been by her own hand, or that of an assassin.

That was a summer of strange activities, and yet more strange discoveries; and by the time it was over, and the mystery of Daphne Meyrick's sad death was made clear to the eyes of the few who had loved her, I had lessened my burden of "convictions," eased my mind of various doubts, and while striving to solve quite another problem, I had found myself at last.

The story of Daphne Meyrick's strange fate has already been told, and the mystery of her death was buried with her, never to be revealed to the world at large. Only we, who had solved the strange riddle, knew the truth, and it was hidden in our hearts from the curious outside world. But often, as I look back upon that summer of strange new effort and self-development, I ask myself the question, "Is it an unseen power that 'shapes our ends,' or, do we weave our own destinies?"

It was Nancy Banks, the maid of long residence in the Wrayland household, who while "redding up" the attic brought down a pyramid of neatly piled up carpet-rag balls, and with it a heavy object, which struck with force just under the little square window in the roof, where the afternoon sunshine was streaming. She screamed at sound of the clatter, and sight of the flash and glitter of the spilled contents. It was a worn black leather bag, looking as if it had been much used, and often distended almost to the point of bursting, which might have accounted for the sudden snapping of the long-tried lock, for the bag had been full to its utmost capacity.

The maid's shrill outcry was heard by Daphne Meyrick on the floor below; and, a moment later, a sudden and more woeful, if

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lower, cry sent the maid flying down to the front veranda in search of the Wraylands, who were taking their afternoon ease there, and then to the storeroom for camphor and ice water.

When Mrs. Wraylands, trembling, and the Captain, flushed and puffing, reached the attic they found Daphne lying senseless beneath the little west window, her pallid face bathed in the broad streak of sunshine, and her garments quite concealing the contents of the black bag, though not the bag itself. For a brief time Captain Wrayland stood gazing, while Mrs. Wrayland and the maid were bending over the prostrate girl. Then, as Daphne opened her eyes, he moved toward the stairway. At the same moment, a cloud hid the sun's face, leaving the attic dimly lighted.

"I 'm going to call up the doctor," the Captain said from his place at the stairway, but Daphne cried feebly, "No, uncle, don't."

Suddenly, Mrs. Wrayland released the small hand she had been holding and hastened to the head of the stairs.

"One moment, Henry!" she called.

The Captain, who was already at the fifth downward step, halted. His wife, who had followed him, almost breathlessly whispered: Don't send for Marston, Henry. He—I think it will embarrass Daphne; get Doctor Grey."

"But, my dear, why——"

"Stupid! when you know what a blow her marriage was to Tom Marston!" And then, as her husband nodded his understanding of her meaning, she added, "I may as well go on down now, and get the poor child some wine."

"I wonder what startled her," he said, as they went on together.

"She 'll tell us when she has recovered a bit," the lady replied. But in this she was mistaken; Daphne never told them.

As her aunt turned away Daphne Meyrick stirred a little, and slowly lifted her head. Then, as the woman kneeling beside her was about to speak, she made a sudden movement toward her and whispered in her ear, "Nancy, help me!"

On more than one occasion Nancy Banks had been heard to say that she "would have bled an' died for her little Missy," for Nancy, in her teens, had been Daphne's nurse, and she often declared that it was "just to be near her Miss Daphne that she had accepted the place of an outgoing housekeeper when the

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little girl became a boarding-school Miss, and Mrs. Wrayland an invalid.

The two understood each other, for the true meaning, and full horror of the situation, had flashed instantly into Nancy's mind when she heard the moaning, half-smothered cry of the poor young bride, and saw her fall senseless, and before the Captain and his wife had reached the lower stairway a sharp face was peering cautiously out from the attic entrance, to be swiftly withdrawn the next instant.

When Mrs. Wrayland, after scarcely two minutes' absence, reentered the attic, with a glass of wine in her hand, Daphne was sitting upon an old chest at some distance from the little window, and Nancy was busily rebuilding the pyramid of carpet rags, some of which she was nonchalantly stuffing into the yawning mouth of the black leather bag, which she held almost at arm's length, remarking, with sniffing nostrils, as her "old mistress" came toward them, "I always did hate old smelly, musty leather!" and, dropping the bag, she caught the wine glass from the lady's hand and hastily placed herself directly before Daphne.

"Here, child," she said, almost crossly, "drink this. The very idea of you runnin' full tilt up them stairs, and bumpin' your head on a beam, jest 'cause you heard me yell when them pesky rag balls tumbled over onto me," and Mrs. Wrayland smiled as she recognized the anxiety behind Nancy's seeming crossness, and bent to examine the bag.

"Why, what a queer old bag!" she exclaimed. "It 's of foreign make, I 'm sure! Yes, it is! Is it yours, Nancy? I never saw it before?"

The woman was busily tucking up some stray locks of her young Missy's pale brown hair, and she did not answer for a moment.

"Yes 'm," she replied, "it 's mine all right! Had it when I came here. You must a seen it an' forgot, I guess. Bought the thing at second hand, and it 's been all wore out this ever so long. Feel all right now, don't ye, honey?" letting her hand rest with warning pressure on Daphne's shoulder. Then, striding over to her mistress, "Guess it 's good enough yet to hold carpet rags!" taking the bag from the lady with the cool assurance of an old and humored servant. "'T won't hurt them, I reckon!" Nancy "guessed" and "reckoned" much.

* * * * * *

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When Daphne Meyrick drove to the village, late that afternoon, looking somewhat pallid beneath her veil of thickly-dotted net, no one wondered or questioned. Did she not drive her spotted ponies almost every day? But when, next morning, she did not appear as usual, and Nancy found her, fully dressed in black, sitting before an empty grate where evidently much paper had been burned, quite dead, though still warm and looking very peaceful, this, her last drive, was remembered and understood.

And then, I was called for by the Captain, because I was not a detective, but a friend and relative who could be relied upon to keep a secret. When elderly Doctor Grey had been called in on the previous day, it was the argus-eyed Nancy who met him at the door, having watched for him from the vestibule. "Well, Nancy," chirped the friendly soul, "how 's the little bride by this time?"

"Why, doin' pretty well, Doctor. It was just her foolishness, runnin' upstairs, an' settin' her heart a-goin' a bit. I s'pose you know her ma had a weak heart, sir?" Nancy's face looked careless, almost amiable, as she led the way upstairs, but it set itself in grim lines once her back was toward him. At the stair-top she spoke again, with her head turned a little over her shoulder. "She said, ye know, that her heart sort of hurt after it; and there 's the bump, too! Good thing her thick hair was all a-top of her head; might have made it sore else."

"Oh, ho!" ejaculated Doctor Grey, "she said that, did she? These weak hearts! M—m! they make a lot of trouble for poor women. Running upstairs, too!"

Nancy's ruse, rather her deception, in what she considered a good cause, was successful; and the Wraylands later, when they knew the truth, had reason to thank her for it. The Doctor had pronounced the case "a little flutter of the heart," and had gone his way, after advising quiet, and light foods.

Next morning the Captain, because of the shock and his need of a friend's advice, sent for me, strange as it may seem, before summoning the Doctor; but there was a reason for this. Tightly clasped in Daphne Meyrick's hand was a brief note addressed to her uncle, and running thus:

"Dear Uncle and Aunt:—

"Something has broken inside me, and I think I must be going—if I am not already—mad. I could not stay! Please accept the Doctor's assurance of yesterday, for my sake and your own!

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If ever one died from 'heart failure,' it is—or soon will be—I. Loving you to the last, and praying your forgiveness.

"DAPHNE.

"P. S. Believe me, it is the only way for me, and the best for you: *there is no one else.*"

A strange letter truly, to be written by a bride of a few weeks; and, because of it, I advised my friend to call in Doctor Grey as before. When he came, I went with him into the room of death, and, standing with him beside the body, I put into his hand that pathetic last letter.

Needless to quote what passed between us. When I came out from that room, leaving him alone to his sad task, I knew what we were to tell the people of the town. All, in fact, who were not, of necessity, already in the secret,—Captain and Mrs. Wrayland, Nancy, the Doctor, myself, and—perhaps—Daphne's husband, to whom I had at once sent a wire; acting, as I was bound to do, for my father's old friend and mine.

Daphne Wrayland had wedded an electrician, employed first in one city, and then in another, as expert authority in numerous mechanical complications. Sometimes a letter, bearing the business card of some great manufacturing house, would come, and Ralph Meyrick would leave in haste by the first train; prompt, swift, and always, as the Captain affirmed, "setting out in excited eagerness; an enthusiast in his profession."

It was because of these swift and frequent flittings that Meyrick's young wife, after their short honeymoon, had returned to her old home, from which her friends had been so loath to spare her, to remain for a time, which, as Meyrick declared, should not be long. He was doing well, he said, and would soon cease his flittings and establish himself. He had gone away, only three days previous to his bride's sudden death, to answer a call from a house in St. Louis, but, he had said, his New York address would be safest, it being on his way both going and coming.

In the hurry of his setting out, he had given neither his St. Louis hotel, nor his club address to the Captain, and Daphne's lips were sealed. So, with some anxiety, and in fear of a too long delay, I sent to his New York address a message that, it seemed to me, must have roused a dead man; a message that demanded an instant reply.

The city and country papers gave graphic, if brief, accounts of "The sudden death of Mrs. Ralph Meyrick, nee Daphne Wray-

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land, of Wrayland Bluffs," etc., the cause being given as "heart failure, a lighter attack having preceded the fatal one, on the previous day," and so on. But the day passed, and then the night, and no word came from Ralph Meyrick.

Meanwhile, at Wrayland Bluff, I had promptly begun my search for some clue to the cause of so tragic a death; for the Captain and I were agreed, that to introduce a detective then, would be too great a risk to secrecy. Besides, my friend was so good as to assure me that he remembered my ability to find out things, and solve puzzles, when, as a mere lad, Daphne and I had been school mates and good comrades. And this being his wish, I began my search in the room in which she died, alone, and so pitifully, despite the painlessness of death by the morphia route.

I myself had placed the blower before the cold grate, while Doctor Grey bent over the sleeper upon her white bed; for I had noted the condition of the dead embers, and desired to examine them more closely and at my leisure.

The clouds that yesterday had darkened the afternoon sky toward midnight had brought in their train light gusts of wind, and then an April shower; which, coming as it did from the south, must have crept down the chimney in quantities sufficient to choke a fire, evidently built with whatever first came to hand. Looking upon the charred paper fragments, some of which retained their shape, I almost could see the last scene in the life of my beautiful one-time schoolmate and friend.

Having kindled a blaze, she had placed upon it an unloosened bundle of letters; then, having watched until they began to flame up, she had swallowed the fatal drug, and, as the wind and rain began their work, had sunk into her last sleep; and there, unheeding the dying fire, the gusts of wind and the dashes of rain, she had slept on, finally drifting out upon the unknown sea of eternity.

Slowly, I searched among the blackened fragments, but there was nothing legible, nothing even decipherable, and I began to rake them together, before replacing the blower, when I heard the clink of iron against glass, and, from the farthest corner, where it must have been placed with much care, I drew forth a little bottle, short, squat and broad of mouth.

Its cork was missing, and, as it lay almost upside down, its contents, if any, had gone up in smoke. The label, too, of course was gone, but I knew only too well what this empty vehicle of a

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world-wide curse had contained. Still I sought diligently. The room was in the daintiest order. The little writing-desk was empty of all save pens, ink and blank stationery; and, as no other clue was to be found, I put the ugly little bottle in my pocket and took my way to the attic.

Nancy was coming from Mrs. Wrayland's room, as I passed down the hall; and, when I glanced back from the top of the attic stairs, she stood below, staring up at me with a singular look on her plain face. There was no one in the hall, and I said, speaking softly: "Nancy, I would like to speak with you, privately, after a little; when will you be at liberty?"

I saw an eager look light up her face as she replied, "I 'm at liberty now, sir! Shall I come right up?" But I shook my head.

"Not now," I said; "presently, or, when I call you; if you are still at leisure."

She nodded, looking rather disappointed, I thought, and I entered the attic. Here again I searched diligently. I demolished the newly-built-up heap of rag balls; and I found, by exploring upon my hands and knees, that, while yesterday they had been stored in the opposite, or northwest corner, now they were piled in the northeast end of the room. The little window was in the middle of the western wall, and it was while upon my knees in that corner that my exploring eyes caught at something, a shred of dark cloth, perhaps, lying close in the shadow of the low, sloping roof.

It was a grey day, and I already had lighted several parlor matches to aid in my search. Now, dragging myself, snakewise, close under the low eaves, I struck another match, and then turned suddenly from the small dark object just beyond me, to examine the flooring close to the western side of the low angle, where the dust, filtering, doubtless, through the loosely-placed balls, showed me the outward limits of Nancy's pyramid, and, close in where the roof hung lowest, a clean space of at least fourteen by eight inches, where something other than the small round balls had rested.

I could make nothing of it, then; and, after a careful measurement, I turned to the other side, and put out my hand, taking up, not a fragment of anything, but a little implement, sometimes used in well regulated households, but not often bestowed close under the garret eaves. This was a small pair of pliers, of finest, firmest steel; seemingly, quite new. I put them in my pocket,

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made a final tour of the place, but with no further results, and then sought the head of the stairway.

Nancy was sitting on a Morris chair near the door of her mistress' chamber, and I beckoned her to join me. I had known Nancy Banks for many years. I knew her obstinate disposition, and her devotion to her dead mistress. Our talk was brief; for, after the first question or two, and having heard again her story of the attic episode, very curtly related, I was convinced that she had not told me all she knew, or guessed at, and that she had no intention of doing so. Then this useless endeavor was followed by a short talk with Mrs. Wrayland, who, for years a semi-invalid, was now quite prostrated, and unable to leave her own private sitting room. She was not reserved; she was simply filled with wonder and grief, and she could neither suggest a reason for Daphne's desperate deed, nor give a clue to guide our search. Then I talked long with the Captain, but, while he was now quite calm and clear headed, he did not help me; and, that he could not, if he would, I was fully convinced.

That night, at a late hour, I was pacing the lawn, and keeping my eye upon the road townward, for it was nearly time for the night express from New York, and I had been picketed there by the soft hearted Captain, to meet Meyrick, when he should arrive, and, to "break" the terrible news to him.

"He must surely come tonight!" said the Captain. "Someone of our messages must have reached him!" and I felt the same, and believed that Ralph Meyrick, if he came at all, must come by that midnight express.

At the front of the house was a long sloping lawn, dotted here and there with clumps of low growing plants and shrubs, while, at either side, the house was guarded by rows of taller shrubbery, close set, and long since grown almost to a thicket, with convenient overarched openings, where gravelled and grass bordered paths passed between, and underneath.

Even as a youth I had loved these shaded walks and screen-like masses of lilacs, syringas, bush clematis, and the like; and when I heard the scream of the whistle, far to the north, I was loitering upon the townward, and northward, side of the wide sloping lawn. I was growing nervous, for Mrs. Wrayland's windows faced this way, and, once or twice, as I moved silently under the dense shade, I fancied that I heard a rustle a little beyond me, and toward the rear.

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It had been a gloomy day, and the night was cloudy; but at wide intervals the moon peeped out for a moment, and, in one of these intervals, having neared the break in the shrubbery, where the carriage road swept around from the stables to the porte-cochere at the northeast house front, I was almost sure I saw a shadowy figure flit across the open space.

Who could it be? A servant possibly; or perhaps a curious villager. As the moon withdrew her face, I slipped around the corner very stealthily. There was no sound, no movement that I could detect. Not far away loomed the big stables; and a giant might have lost himself in their shadows. I pondered a moment. and then the swift rumble and throb of a train gliding across the meadows, westward, recalled to me the object of my vigil. Meyrick, if he had arrived, must already be near! The carriage had been sent, and the distance was only a short mile and a half.

I much disliked to turn back, so in silence, avoiding the gravel, I strode quite rapidly around the southern front of the house, where the shrubbery fairly hugged the broad piazza, and swept, in more widely scattered groups, down the slope; which, like the front lawn, sank downward to the highroad. There were no lights on this side, save in the room where Daphne Meyrick slept and was no longer troubled.

Here I paused for a moment, looking up at this dim light; and then, passing around a great Japan quince, I stood still an instant for very amazement, and then crept closer in.

What strange strangled sound was that? Did it, could it have come from the figure just visible against the white walls of the house, and climbing, could it be, toward that room?

Waiting only long enough to transfer something from my hip, to my sidecoat pocket, I moved close to the piazza rail, sprang and gripped the intruder.

As my hand touched him he muttered a startled curse, and I grasped his legs and jerked again. As I dragged him down I heard once more the queer, low, gutteral sound, close beside me, as it seemed. At the same moment the fellow gathered himself for a leap, and we both floundered and fell. We struggled up, and he had almost escaped me, when he seemed to stumble against something, and again fell, headlong, and with a force that tore him from my grasp.

I sprang forward, reaching out eager hands, as he again attempted to rise, and then—what was it? What soft, moving,

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yielding thing, had I, too, fallen over, almost treading upon it, as I went down? The next instant, and with that smothered sound again in our ears, we were both up and away; he scarce two paces ahead, and running as only a practiced athlete can, taking the shortest and straightest way down the southern slope.

We were half way down, and I felt myself gaining a little. There was now less than a man's length between us, when, from behind a tiny pavilion, I saw a man dart out, seize the fleeing scamp with one hand, and menace him, with a pistol held in the other. They were both in the open here, while the lowest clump of althæas sheltered me. Evidently I had not been seen by the captor.

I thought swiftly. The burglar, as undoubtedly he was, I hoped was in safe hands, and, if possible, the sorrowing people in the house beyond must not be disturbed, nor alarmed, now. For Mrs. Wrayland's sake all must be silent, if possible. Still the fellow might escape, though under cover of the pistol, he was going very meekly; too meekly, as it seemed to me, and I followed them, still unnoticed.

As they went, they talked; low, and, evidently, not harmoniously. When they were a few feet from the low hedge at the road side, a horse neighed softly, and a voice from beyond called cautiously, "That you, Tomkins?"

"Yes, and also your friend Johnnie."

I felt relieved now, and halting awaited developments. Then, seeing the prisoner suddenly turn upon his captor, I sprang forward, calling out, "Don't shoot, officer! I have him covered!"

By some sudden maneuver, the fellow, who was powerfully built, had contrived to knock the pistol from the officer's grasp, and was striking at him fiercely, as I came up. I did not hesitate, but with my clubbed weapon, struck the rascal a blow upon the uplifted arm, that caused it to drop limply. At the same moment the invisible other man sprang across the hedge, and the prisoner was dexterously handcuffed before a word was spoken.

The next moment I heard a voice from above us, evidently from the upper balcony, calling my name; and I turned to the officer nearest me, "Do you know this fellow?"

"Know him for a burglar, sir! Nickname, with the push, is 'Handsome John,' John Doe, he calls himself.

"And—can I be of further assistance?"

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They were evidently out of town officers, and the latest comer uttered a low, chuckling laugh.

"Well, I guess not! We 're takin' him back to N' York. Followed him down here in same train, but wanted to spot his little game! He was actin' mortal queer! When he took a rig, back there," meaning in the village, "we took another, fastest team in the stable, and a driver, too. When he tied his horse, here, we just sent our team and man back to town; knew we could take him, or else shoot him; either would fetch the reward ye see. How did you come into this?"

I explained, as much as was needful; and while they were forcing their strangely silent prisoner into his own carriage, I added —"Gentlemen I am grateful to you both. To have had a disturbance here, just now, would have been most unfortunate. There is illness in that house." I did not add, "death also."

Just here the Captain's voice called again, querulously almost; and I called back, "Coming Captain," gave the men my village address, and hastened back up the slope, as the carriage swung about and drove townward.

I had not forgotten the soft something over which I had so lately stumbled, but some instinct had urged me not to speak of this to these strange officers. I must look into it; but, first, I paused under the east balcony.

"Captain," I whispered.

It was the ever watchful Nancy who replied.

"He 's gone in, sir. Mrs. Wrayland called him, just now."

As I hurried thankfully to the south front, I remembered for the first time, Tonto, the big collie that had been so gentle and affectionate under the petting of Daphne Meyrick, and so alert and fierce, as a night watchman. Why had not Tonto been heard from? So questioning and wondering I reached the spot beside the piazza where I had found my climbing burglar; and here I paused, listened, started, and struck a match.

"What did it mean? Before me, on the ground, lay poor Tonto, trussed up like a fowl! A gag, actually a gag, tied in and across his mouth and held in place by cords running under the chin, and around the neck; while his feet were tied, two and two, with similar cords.

He looked at me pleadingly, pitifully, and I was quick to cut his bonds, regretting that I had not found him earlier. Then I started; my thoughts were, surely wool gathering!

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Why! after all, the greatest wonder of the past half hour was not the finding of the burglar, "Handsome John Doe," but that he, or any stranger, any one, in fact, could approach Tonto, and keep him silent; much less bind him, head and foot. Could there be a confederate in the Captain's household? With a hand upon the dog's collar I sat down and stroked his silky ears while I pondered. Then, suddenly, my mind was illuminated. It was a strange thought, but I fully believed that I had found a clue, a real clue.

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CHAPTER II.

RALPH MEYRICK.

Ralph Meyrick did not arrive that night, or any night thereafter. His young wife's body, after days of waiting, was put in a vault with fitting and touching ceremonies, and then for a week, I staid on, as the Captain's friend and guest. And I was the Captain's guest, but, by night and by day, almost, I was also Nancy's shadow.

She had been directed by Mrs. Wrayland, who was quite ill, to arrange and pack away all of the dead girl's belongings, and, hearing this, I asked Mrs. Wrayland, through the Captain, to first send the woman out upon some errand, if only for an hour. She was sent to town; and I at once procured the necessary keys and entered the dead girl's rooms. Presently I called Captain Wrayland.

"Observe!" I said to him. "In various proper places I have found articles of jewelry, carefully, even lovingly bestowed: But, look here!" I produced from underneath a dresser a long slim pasteboard box. "What do you make of this?" and I whipped off the cover, carelessly emptying the contents of the box upon the dresser.

He examined them closely, his hands trembling as he held one after another up to view. "Good heavens!" he ejaculated, "what can it mean? They are Meyrick's gifts! All of them, I verily believe! Yes, all of his, and no others!"

It was a rare and costly collection of jewels and dainty enamels, carelessly bestowed in a common shoe box. We put them back, replaced the box, and silently left the room. I saw my course quite clearly now—or thought I did—and as we left those still darkened rooms, I put a hand upon my companion's arm.

"Captain," I said, "will you suggest to your wife that it will be best not to discuss with Nancy, the possibilities behind Mrs. Meyrick's death; at least, not for the present? The sooner she is made to think that the theory of death, as publicly announced,

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is accepted here without question, the sooner this mystery may be solved."

"But—Nancy——"

"One moment, please! Don't think of questioning the good soul! If she has the secret, she is holding it loyally for the sake of her dead mistress. If she has given a promise—" then, seeing the question in his eyes, I added, speaking with decision, "Pray don't question me now, Captain; believe me, it is best for all concerned, that you and Mrs. Wrayland, be, or seem, quite unaware of what I may do for the next few days.

The Captain and Mrs. Wrayland aided me, in the one way possible to them, by seeming to accept the popular belief, and, for Nancy's benefit, I occupied myself during the next three days by rummaging in the library, in search of "medical statistics upon heart diseases." But this, while it seemed to abate Nancy's vigilance in one direction, did not lessen it in another. The good soul still restlessly haunted Daphne Meyrick's room, and I, from my covert near the head of the attic stairway, kept vigil, snatching an occasional nap by day, and sometimes sleeping a bit late of a morning; and, just six days from the date of Daphne Meyrick's death, my opportunity came.

Late that night, from my lair above, and by the dim hall lamp, which, because of Mrs. Wrayland's illness, Nancy dare not extinguish, I saw her come stealthily from the rear hall, listen for a moment at my door, and then at the door of Mrs. Wrayland's bedroom; and then—ah! I had thought so from the first.

One of the bedroom keys, the one used by the late occupant, had disappeared; lost in the confusion, so Nancy had "guessed". But, in spite of the fact that, at my request, all the keys of Mrs. Meyrick's rooms had been demanded, and received—all but the lost one—here was Nancy, after a final sharp glance about her, opening the door of the closed and forbidden room, with the lost key, and as stealthily as a burglar.

I saw her enter, and then, armed with the key of the adjoining door, I slipped down the attic stairs.

The woman carried no light; and I was quite sure she would not dare to use one of the lamps within. I carried a small dark lantern—my first,—and while Nancy stealthily moved about in the sleeping room, I entered the little sitting room. The two rooms were connected by an open arch, and the curtains across

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this were drawn close. I shut the outer door softly, and crept towards this convenient curtain.

Nancy had drawn back the window draperies on the south side, and evidently she had no need to search for the thing she desired; for, going straight to the smallest trunk, the oldest in appearance, she took something from her neck, and, by the light of a noiseless match, applied it to the lock of the little trunk. Then, while she began to lift out piles of something white, kneeling, with her back toward me, I slipped past the portière, and stood close behind her, lantern in hand.

She was lifting something heavy from the bottom of the trunk, when I bent above her and putting a hand upon her shoulder, spoke in her ear.—"Don't cry out, Nancy! I 'm a friend! Let me lift that—bag, for you; it seems heavy." My lantern was turned directly upon her and the trunk, and I saw plainly the black leather bag, which for two or three days after the tragedy, had been left in the attic, conspicuously stuffed with carpet rags, at the top of the heap of balls. Then it had disappeared; and, I think I was the only one who had missed it from its place.

Needless to detail what followed. Nancy was stanch. I had expected it. She dared not vent her anger as she would have liked, but she raged in silence, refused and denied, and, for a time, claimed the bag for her own as before, while I argued in half whispers.

I was quite frank with her, telling her how I had suspected her from the first and had noted her every moment. I closed my argument thus: "You should know, Nancy, that I am as eager to guard the honor—the good name, of Daphne Wrayland as you can be, but the Captain, and his wife, have the right to know all that you and I know about this sad affair. Do you suppose we think, any of us, that she died of heart failure only?" Here I sprang my little trap, "Nancy, why are you shielding, or trying to shield and befriend, Ralph Meyrick?"

The woman's pale face went red with her wrath. "How *dare* you? she hissed. *I* befriend him! I help him—!"

I pointed to the bag, which she had dropped back inside the trunk. "Do you deny this is his bag?" I bent closer. "But you will not be able to deliver it! Did you know that Ralph Meyrick was here the night after his wife's death? That he tied and gagged Tonto, and tried to climb to Daphne's room by way of the piazza roof?"

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She had remained crouching, until that moment, beside the open trunk, but now she sprang to her feet. Her eyes were blazing, her nostrils quivering. "The brute! The *beast*! And--you let him go! What—what—!" She fairly choked with rage.

"I let him go—yes, after pulling him down from the piazza rail. You see there were others who had a first claim." And I told her the story. "You can see," I said, "how things will look for you, Nancy, if you do not help your master to protect himself and guard Daphne's good name and memory. For Meyrick, being in trouble, will no doubt call upon the Captain for aid, and claim a share, at least, in his wife's estate. Besides—you must explain matters, in order to prove to all of us, that you are not. and have not been, befriending this man! That you believe yourself serving your young mistress, I feel sure; but it is only by telling the truth, and at once, that you can aid us in keeping all this horror from becoming generally known! For, unless you can help us to a way by which Meyrick's mouth may be closed, and he be forced to drop his claims, it cannot remain a secret."

She turned swiftly, and caught up the black bag.

"Take it!" she said, holding it at arm's length. "It 'll tell you all I know,—all *she* knew! When she came up the attic stairs that day, she was a happy woman! When she saw that black bag, which she knew, the spilled contents told their own story; and, I dare say, it helped her, all to once, to understand! Poor lamb!" and suddenly her eyes were wet. "As for that man," she added, "if he 's been caught, I s'pose it 'll have to come out. Ugh! I allus hated the creature!"

Then, as I took the bag from her hand, she moved toward the door. "We mus' n't stay here," she whispered, "An' I reckon you 'll not need me to explain, when you open that!" pointing to the bag.

But I put out my hand. "One word more. Mrs. Meyrick—Daphne, made a will, before her marriage, leaving all she possessed to her aunt. Do you know if she made a later one?"

She stood silent a moment, and it seemed to me that her face flushed. "She wrote something, once, after him and her had been havin' a long talk, an' he 'd gone away. But, there ain't no other will now, it 's—it 's been bu—destroyed."

For a moment our eyes met, and her look was almost defiant. Then I turned away. "I 'm glad there is no other will," I said,

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carelessly. "It might complicate things, you know." I carried the bag to my room, locked it in my closet, and went to bed.

After breakfast next morning, I signaled to the Captain, and he soon followed me. I had thought the privacy of my own room safest for our talk. And here, in the fewest and simplest words possible, I told him all I had learned, all that I knew, and guessed, and then, I drew the bag from my closet.

"I have gone thus far alone," I said, "hoping to spare you a little, and waiting for more certain proof. I do not know what this bag contains; for I did not question Nancy. It is heavy," here I put it into his hands. "It is this, she tells me, that caused —the tragedy." He looked at the bag, sighed, and at once, without words, pressed the hasp,—the bag was not locked, strange as it may seem; and, later, when I had found time to examine it. I learned the reason. In its tumble among the surrounding balls. being overfull, and much strained by wear and tear, the lock had been so wrenched that only the hasps, or catches, could be relied upon. The lock was useless.

With a quick turn of the wrist the Captain emptied the bag upon the white covering of my bed, and we stared long and in silence. Then Captain Wrayland dropped into the nearest chair, and bowed his white head. But why recite the story of his horror, and sorrow, and shame. We talked long, and then I went in search of Nancy. When at last we left my room, it was nearing noonday, and to both of us the secret of Ralph Meyrick's life, and Daphne's tragic death, was clear.

Never was evidence stronger, or more damning! Scattered about, upon the white bed, were the latest and most complete burglar's tools of iron and steel, a pair of magazine revolvers, two smaller pistols, tiny but dangerous, and three knives, two slender and stiletto like, and one, a bowie, broad and heavy; and all—spotted,—toward the points, with—rust, perhaps. Among these, gleaming and glistening, lay, jewels! such jewels! Pearls, diamonds, rubies, sapphires, with much finely wrought gold, from which the settings had been hastily wrenched. In the midst of this mass was one emerald upon which both our eyes became fixed; and, as the Captain's finger pointed, my lips involuntarily uttered the words—"The Creighton emerald!"

Who had not heard of that daring robbery! The theft of much rare plate, many jewels, and, most valuable of all, that great emerald, matched only among the crown jewels of kings

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and princes royal. The Creighton emerald! So much advertised! so long sought for! It was now quite four months since the home of Elias Creighton had been entered, so stealthily, so mysteriously, and not a clue to the robbers had been found, not a jewel traced. And so, Ralph Meyrick, the expert engineer, the husband of Daphne Wrayland, was a thief and burglar! A murderer, too, it might be.

And Daphne—it was at the first mention of her name that I left the room in search of Nancy. In search, do I say? She was pacing the corridor, between her mistress' door and mine, with pale lips, gleaming black eyes, and clenched hands. I can never forget the picture she drew of that attic tragedy! The words, low uttered, and, at times, fairly hissed from between lips that even then quivered with love and sorrow, for her "little missy."

"I hated him from the first minute," she declared savagely, "hated him, and feared for her! I think he knew it, too; but after I hurt her feelings once by refusing to take his money, for some little service, I tried hard not to show my dislike. But I always watched him, and I saw many a little thing that made me doubt and shudder. But she was so confident, so happy! And what did I know!" Here she set her lips fiercely, and wrung her hands; then, with a sudden outward gesture with both palms, she plunged into the story.

"I was in the little attic the morning he went away. I was puttin' the curtain stretchers in their usual place, against the south wall, when in came Meyrick. I rememeber now, plain enough, how he started, when he saw me there in the far corner. And then he came tords me, in his easy smiling way, and I see he had a leather bag in his hand, sort o' swingin' it, careless like! 'Hello, Nancy Lee!' he says, 'glad you 're here. I take it you 're queen in this court, eh?' and he begun gazin' round. 'My first appearance in your realm, eh?' he kept on. 'I say now, this looks like old times! kid times, you know. Rainy days for garret plays, eh?' an' he began walkin' round again, an' lookin'. 'I 'm just lookin' for a handy hook to hang my old bag of traps on to,' he goes on, 'bolts an' screws an' electrical fixin's I 've no use for at present;' an' then he stops, all of a sudden, facin' that pile o' carpet rag balls. 'Hello, cannon balls, eh?' an' he takes up one an' tosses it on his hand. 'Say, I never expected to see a carpet rag again, Nancy,' he laughs. 'My good old auntie used to make 'em. Yours, Nancy Lee?' I said 'yes,' and started to go down

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stairs. 'I say!' he calls, 'I 'd like to see a real home made carpet once more; when 's it to be made up, eh?'

"I was out of patience, an' I says, kind o' short, 'Never, I guess, them rags 's been a pilin' up there for years! I reckon I 've sewed up all Miss Wrayland's scraps an' old close, for the pile ain't growed any of late; an' I 'm keepin' 'em now, for Miss Daphne's second wedding,' I says, acrost my shoulder, an' then I went on down stairs, leavin' him a lookin' at some hooks in the middle beam." She paused here, for a moment; then——

"It was that trip to the attic that set me to reddin' things up there, after he was gone. I 'd noticed cobwebs an' things, an' it was just meant, I s'pose, for I'm sure I'd never a thought of disturbin' them rag balls, more 'n to just cover 'em up maybe, but my broom it got caught, up in that near corner, an' when I tried to loose it, why, it come down on top o' that pile, an' set 'em all rollin'. Of course I screeched, like a fool! an' then—she come! She seen the things as quick as I did! Of course I recognized the bag, an'—*we both knew!*"

* * * * * *

I went to the city next day, and I saw Ralph Meyrick in his cell, unseen by him. I had only met him once, on the day of his marriage to Daphne, and I scarcely thought he would recognize me, still, I had no wish to be known by him, and I soon passed on with the guard who was my escort.

Meyrick had not seen the newspapers, and on the day after his arrest he sent a message to Wrayland Bluffs. It was addressed to his wife, and ran thus:

"My Dear: Come to the city at once. Say nothing. In trouble here; cause, mistaken identity. RALPH M."

The prison address followed, and, on learning that it had been sent, I wired the Captain, and he read the message. Meyrick had been arrested under the only name he was known by in the under world, wherein he was a leader and a man of mark, and as "Handsome Johnny Briggs," he was tried for robbing a jewelry store. That he might venture to call upon the Captain for aid, was, we knew, quite possible; and so, one day, I sought and obtained permission to see him in his cell.

Before making my visit, I had called upon Ronan Brooke, one of the most versatile of young actors, and a friend of my college days. Making my needs known, I readily obtained his help, and when I called upon Ralph Meyrick, I was so changed that I

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had no fear of recognition. I looked middle-aged, ruddy of face, and portly of mien, and I announced myself as the city agent of Mr. Wrayland. I told him the full truth regarding the death of his wife, and then I made my demand.

One of his "gang" had been trapped with him, but, as it proved, not one among them knew him in his character of electrical expert or by the name of Meyrick. My demand was that he should guard the secret of his dual identity, and, in no emergency, call upon the Captain, or reveal the episode of his marriage to Daphne Wrayland. Furthermore, they should give me a full list of the owners of the jewels in our possession, and in the manner we thought wisest and most discreet we would endeavor to restore the stolen property to their various owners. Or, he would refuse, and have a dozen charges, instead of two, brought against him, with the jewels produced as proof.

I had looked for resistance, for at least a show of bluff, and I was surprised at the readiness with which he accepted my ultimatum. Another thing greatly puzzled me, and this was, that, save for his comrades in crime, the fellow had, or seemed to have, no friends, and assuredly, he had no money. After all, his choice was that of wisdom. The jewels were out of his reach in any case, and, when he was assured of this, the rest was easy. And still the man's ready acceptance of the inevitable puzzled me! Years after I understood it only too well.

After the trial, and the prison sentence, I saw Meyrick again. This time I bore a message of different nature. The sentence was for four years, and, in view of his evident lack of funds, the Captain made him an offer. If he would sign an agreement, whereby, for the consideration of a certain sum of money, he would leave the country at the expiration of his sentence, not to return, on pain of instant exposure, Captain Wrayland would agree to have this sum—Ten Thousand Dollars—at his disposal in the Warden's office, on the day he left the jail, and America, for all time. And to this, also, Meyrick tamely agreed; and, for four years, we heard of him no more.

These years brought about many changes. Soon after the events here chronicled, I, having abandoned for good my fitful pursuit of the law, found myself established in the city in an occupation of my choosing; and two years later Mrs. Wrayland joined poor Daphne in the better world: after which, the Captain leaving the country house for the greater portion of the year, followed me to the city, where we found a warm wel-

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come and a cheery home with his only living sister, Mrs. Leroy Devereaux, a charming and brilliant woman of society, and a no less delightful home maker, sister, and friend, as, soon after the Captain's coming, I learned to know. And so, very pleasantly we drifted on, during the time of Meyrick's imprisonment, and then, one day, the Captain sent an agent, not myself, to meet the ticket of leave man, in the office of the prison warden, and to hand to him the price of his exile.

That evening brought us a surprise, and a new mystery. The Captain's agent returned, they were to meet at my office, and hid before the surprised sender his draft for Ten Thousand Dollars and a letter which was brief and to the point.

"My Dear Captain:—

"As I am leaving the country to-day, and am now in a position to avail myself of a modest little fortune awaiting me in a safe place, I return to you the draft so kindly sent, with the assurance that, having performed honorably your part of our agreement, I will still abide by mine. I sail for Europe tomorrow under a new name, and there shall become a citizen of the world. Believe me, and fear nothing, for you have looked your last look upon,

RALPH MEYRICK."

"What does it mean?" gasped the Captain.

Now in four years one gains wisdom, a little at least, and also knowledge of many things; and, after a moment, I answered, "Meyrick—if that ever was his name—was, you have told me, twenty-seven when he married your niece. *Ergo,* he is now thirty-one and, doubtless, he has been engaged in his dual profession, of burglary and expert electrician combined, for a period of years. Not all robbers are spendthrifts, and he talked much, you have said, of 'soon settling down.' It it quite possible that he has been a wise rascal and out of various rich hauls has been able to secure to himself a nest egg. Which nest egg I think would, for its safe keeping, presuppose a confederate of some sort, and a loyal one."

It was only a guess, but the Captain accepted it as an explanation. Soon after this I placed two pictures of Ralph Meyrick in a private rogues' gallery I had of late set up, and also filed away my numerous notes and papers concerning his case. And then, for many moons, I almost forgot the affairs and the existence of Ralph Meyrick, in the press of things, to me, more interesting, and more recent.

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CHAPTER III.

MRS. DOVERFIELDS' DIAMONDS.

"There 's a letter for you on the desk, sir!" said my office boy.

"A letter!" I turned from the window at which I had been standing for a moment, having just entered my office after a two hours' absence. Has our postman changed his time, or—?"

"T'was a lef' letter, sir. A gentleman wrote it and lef' it. a hour ago."

"Lef'?" I criticised.

"Left—sir!"

"And how long ago? Be careful now!"

"A—an—a nour ago; I mean hour."

"Right! only we did not need the emphasis." I was struggling manfully to make an up-to-date office boy out of this small lump of raw material. "What did you tell the gentleman, Jem?" I never encouraged his curiosity by asking what my visitor said.

"Tole—told him you—would—be—back—at seven—o'clock—sure."

"Very good, Jem." I sat down before my desk and took up the "letter," which proved to be a few lines, written upon a leaf, evidently torn from a note book, by a hasty hand, and I smiled as I read it.

"Kenneth Jasper, Att'y!"

"Unless your engagements are very urgent, be so kind as to give me an hour or two of your valuable time this afternoon, at four P. M. I will call again at that hour.

Yours,

A. E. DOVERFIELDS."

"Cool!" I muttered, "and peremptory, very! That man would be immensely surprised at finding my door closed to him at four—and bless me, its almost noon at this moment!"

It was true enough. I had returned a little behind my self appointed time, and it now wanted only fifteen minutes of twelve.

"A. E. Doverfields," I mused.. "Who *is* A. E. Doverfields? It

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seems to me—" I got up, and brought from its shelf a volume of the city directory, and began a search for the name.

Yes, there it was! "A. E. Doverfields!" Why, to be sure! This must be the man who not long ago "plunged so disastrously," in Wall street, losing half his fortune, but still able to live in the fine mansion, built by himself, on one of the aristocratic up-town streets, which street, and what number of that street, I must not name here, for the story of the Doverfields' Diamonds, that is the entire story, has never yet appeared in print, and probably never will by permission of Austin Doverfields and his petite, fair haired wife, unless, it may be, as I am writing it now, to give it to the public at some future time, perhaps, under the disguise of fictitious dates and names, but with no event or act added thereunto, and nothing taken away.

But to return to my story; "I had scarcely assured myself that my prospective visitor was—must be, the Doverfields, so well known to Wall street, and in society, when the door opened, and I saw over the head of my small factotum, an unexpected visitor. But I was not kept, for a moment, in doubt of his identity, for he strode in, quite regardless of my small usher, and announced himself.

"This is Mr. Jasper, I take it?" and then as I nodded, and before I could reply, "Of course you found my note? My name? Doverfields. Can we speak quite privately? My business is important! I saw your return just now and came back for a few words."

I could not complain of any want of courtesy in manner or tone. On the contrary, he was icily, loftily courteous, and for this very reason, I experienced a feeling of the most perverse dislike.

I had just read the man's brief, curt note, and now, hearing his crisp, cold tones, I was minded to respond in kind. "My business is *urgent*," he said, and I at once arose.

"And my *time*," I replied, my tone matching his own, "is valuable! If you will be seated, and kindly inform me—" I checked myself to proffer a stiff, businesslike chair, which I kept conveniently near my desk, and which he took without a word; then, taking an envelop from his pocket he placed it before me upon the desk.

"It is from Doctor Bird," he said, with quiet dignity, and as I slowly read it, I knew that he was studying my face.

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"My Friend:—" wrote the doctor.

"This will introduce to you Austin Doverfields, who is my friend, and worthy to be any man's friend. He needs such help as you can give. Of this part I have fully assured him. I hope nothing will prevent you from coming to his aid.

Yours,

Bird."

N. B. I think, *sub rosa*, that there is more than money value in this case, for my friend D—"

Doctor Bird was a wise and kindly man. I respected him and his opinions. His brief note softened my mental attitude, and I laid it down and said, quite amiably, "Will you let me hear your difficulty, Mr. Doverfields?"

"My difficulty;" he looked at me fixedly for a moment, "my difficulty seems to be—" here he smiled faintly, "that I can't find my wife's diamonds. I hope most earnestly that you can!"

"Ah! your wife has lost some diamonds, then?"

"My wife has lost all her diamonds; in fact, all of her jewels, of any value. The diamonds were really a fine lot. Old family jewels, hers and mine, for the most part, together with some good stones which I gave her on our wedding day."

"Tell me how they were lost?"

"I wish I could! But I can tell you nothing, and because I cannot I wish you would go home with me, so that you can talk with my wife. Not that she can *tell* you much, only that they went out of her possession mysteriously, almost; but she can tell you the little to be told far better than I. Besides—" here again he paused an instant and smiled faintly, "she desires to see you."

"I am sorry, I wish she had accompanied you; I really ought not to be seen in your house now—if I am to serve you."

"You mean—because of the servants?"

"I mean—because of many things. Can you not arrange it otherwise?"

"I fear not." His face at once was grave again. "I think Mrs. Doverfields would object. Really Mr. Jasper, you would oblige me greatly if you would come with me. This affair is so strange!"

"I will go then. But—" I said with decision, "I must not be known, in your house, as an investigator. I must work in my own way, if at all. And I cannot be put at a disadvantage in the beginning! Drive home, Mr. Doverfields, and this afternoon, at

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a perfectly proper hour—a little late, to avoid possible loiterers, I, or a Mr. Preston, Lucius Preston, Esq., will be announced. Do not display any surprise should you notice a slight change in my appearance, and above all, do not mention to your wife my intended disguise. Doubtless she will see me as I am later. You may leave your address, I do not happen to know it—and—I shall appear as an afternoon caller; you understand?"

Mr. Doverfields arose, and stood looking at me fixedly. He was a tall man, and handsome, in a dark stately way. He was graceful too; somewhat haughty of carriage; and restraint, self repression, and self reliance, were among his visable characteristics. He seemed to be considering. "Very good," he said finally. "It shall be as you wish." He laid a card before me. "Here is my address," he bowed, turned, and was gone.

After all I liked his direct speech, and the swift, but not hurried manner of his coming and going; and I crossed to my partner's office, and, finding him alone, within, entered and closed the door.

"Who is A. E. Doverfields?" I questioned.

Craig took a half smoked cigar from between his lips.

"Austin Eaton Doverfields, my friend? You amaze me! Really you——"

"Bother!" I interjected. "Of course I know of him! Wall street magnate,—lost a little fortune, not long since——"

"And still retains another! Not to mention his wife, she 's the heiress of a few millions, and one of the really beautiful women of the most exclusive of our city's social circles. They, or she has been abroad much, during the past year, and has not been long at home in her Fifth avenue mansion. If you were not such a hermit——"

"Oh don't bother! Do you know Doverfields?"

"A little—in a business way only. He 's a man, every inch of him; a gentleman; cultured and handsome."

"I have observed that," I assented.

"Oh—then you 've seen him?"

"He has just left my office."

"Oh—ho! No new trouble, I hope?"

"His wife has lost her diamonds."

"What! The Doverfields' diamonds! Why they 're the envy of half the belles of New York! Am I to know—" he paused, for I was dragging a chair close to his own; and, seating myself,

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I began at once to tell him the very little I knew, as yet, of the loss, theft, or whatever it might prove.

"Kenneth," began Craig, when I had finished, "I congratulate you! Of course I condole with the lady, if she has really lost her diamonds, and, mind, they are the last people to resort to any manner of vulger sensationalism! But something unusual has happened to drive Austin Doverfields to you, to any one, for this sort of help; and, that cautious, slow going old Bird, is advising you both, is proof to me, that it 's not a case of imagination or nerves. Unless I 'm much at fault Ken you 've got your hand on a case after your own heart.

"According to what you have just said," I objected "it should be a very easy case. Such diamonds as you picture, old family gems, set or unset, should be very easy to trace—anywhere."

"Umph!" grumbled Craig with a queer look, directed just above my head, "that—depends! Come, let 's go out and strengthen our wits by lunching heartily! A good feed always settles my nerves. It may yours," and we both laughed.

But a call from my office boy took me back to my own quarters, and, although my visitor detained me for only a little while, Craig, as was our custom in such cases, went on his way, and lunched without me, while I, being left to myself, wandered away from my usual noonday haunts, and so fell upon a second adventure, where, again,—to quote Craig's after comments,—"Diamonds were trumps."

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CHAPTER IV.

A SANDWICH MAN.

During my first days of young unrest, after my return to the city upon the termination of the Meyrick tragedy, I had scattered my legal library and abandoned my first office; and, later, I had sought my life long friend, Royston Craig, and proposed to him a partnership upon somewhat unusual lines.

He seemed to like my proposition, and for five years we had been established as partners. His suite of offices was directly opposite mine. Though no longer in any sense a lawyer, and as disconnected as was our actual work, we often worked in harmony, and won our points by playing into each others hands; and while, in some instances, he carried on cases of which I knew little, and took less interest; in others I wove the web, built up the case, and left him to prepare the briefs; and if any man could move a jury by sheer force of wit, and eloquence, that man was "Roy" Craig, a born orator.

As for me, I was well content to take in hand quite another class of work; cases, some of which never came into court; while, in such as required other than forensic labor, cases involved, mysterious, or lacking in some important element of proof, I was Craig's right hand; and, because we sometimes worked together, and my real labors were carried on behind our screen of legal partnership, only the initiated few knew that Jasper, of "Craig and Jasper, Attorneys at Law," was less a lawyer than an investigator, a searcher of records, an inquirer into puzzles peculiar or strange, a filterer of purposes.

In short, while I was well known to the official police, to the rank and file, I was less known, and in my legal character only, and it was my work, as private inquirer, that had kept some of the complications and secrets of "upper-ten-dom" out of the newspapers and the hands of this same police.

Many of these quietly conducted cases came to me by way of my partner, Craig; for, while the middle classes and the "submerged tenth," are quick to cry out for the police in time of trouble, the artistocracy, and the "smart set," turn first, as a rule, to

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the family lawyer; or, lacking this appendage, to the shrewdest and safest of their own circle, who, being one of themselves, sometimes adds to his professional value that of a friend, more or less.

I had passed the earlier part of the morning in my private office. Having completed my task I had gone for a brief walk in the soft Spring air, in company with my cigar, returning to find Austin Doverfields' letter, and to receive him, a few moments later instead of at the hour his missive had named. It was nearing one o'clock when I set out in search of luncheon and knowing Craig to have gained upon my appetite by a good half hour, I made no effort to join him. In truth, my appetite was not, as I soon discovered, what it had been at an earlier hour. I sauntered forth, now, with thoughts of my luncheon growing less, almost to the vanishing point, and the tall image of Doverfields foremost in my mind. As I went I was asking myself why,—if Austin Doverfields was as calmly undisturbed by the loss of his wife's jewels as his manner seemed to indicate,—did he return, so hastily, and so promptly, after his first visit, instead of waiting for the hour he himself had set? Indeed why did he come at all and bearing with him, as he must, that letter, previously prepared on the chance of my absence?

The more I studied the matter the more peculiar seemed the attitude of my latest client. He had visited me, I saw it clearly now, in haste that could not brook a delay of his own making; and having found me, had made known his errand with the calm and reserve of the original sphinx; declaring his utter lack of knowledge, and referring me—shades of all the Doverfields—to his wife.

His wife! what, if anything, had I heard of Mrs. Austin Doverfields? A beauty—oh, yes! exclusive, popular, wealthy; a veritable autocrat and,—what else?

Why could the husband tell me nothing? The wife all—that could be told? Was she—I had heard of such things—the actual, and he merely the nominal, head of the house? Recalling the man as he had stood before me scarcely an hour before, I could only scoff at my own mental query. Austin Doverfields might be many things. He was not, I felt very sure, a figure head, a second, or background, for anyone! Reserved, doubtless; a silent man, I could well believe, but clear headed, strong willed, a power in his own place; of this I felt assured. And yet——

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Someone brushed sharply against me, and looking up I found myself exactly opposite the entrance to a snug little Italian cafè patronized by theater goers, and always busy at this hour.

I had walked thus far mechanically, as city bred men, on business bent, will so often do, dodging and turning, as by instinct; but my "subconsciousness" had not reckoned with *The Italia*, and the consequence was a sudden awakening to my surroundings, to the hour, and to the claims of the inner man.

Apologizing, by a nod and a mumble, to a fat man, who had bumped into me, I threaded my way through the crowd, resolutely putting the Doverfields from my mind, in the interest of the luncheon, which I was about to enjoy.

I lunched slowly and at my ease, and, presently I began to feel a distaste for my office which might be expected to last until nearly four o'clock. The chatter all about me was of the new comic opera, and the new singer, just a few doors way; and as I was tossing off a last tiny glass of good Italian wine, I realized, from the general stir and pushing back of chairs, that the matinee was soon to begin. Already the street was filling with daintily attired women, picturesquely dressed children, and, here and there, a man, young or old, convoying, from one to half a dozen of the other sex. I paused for a moment to watch them, and then passed out, half tempted to try for a seat.

I had slipped through the crowd, and found standing room between the granite wall and one of the supporting pillars of the entrance, the better to consider, and to finish a very good cigar. For a moment I quite forgot either purpose. From my point of vantage a step above the pavement, I watched the hurrying crowd as it overflowed the vestibule, and wound in and out of the line about the ticket seller's window.

The animated play of expression, upon unknown features, the stray word or phrase, dropped and caught up in the passing crowd, has, at all times, an interest for me, and here, in the May sunshine, the prevailing mood was that of cheer, even of gayety. I was smiling broadly, and settling more comfortably close to my protecting pillar, when, very near me, I heard one word, in a tone so tense, so different, that it drew my gaze to the person just below me, who, having also flattened his back against the wall, seemed waiting with an anxious and weary air for the crowd to open, and give him passage onward.

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"My God!" It was a sibilant half whisper; but, uttered, as it was, so near me, so sharply, and so full of feeling,—that might have meant intense surprise, fear, hate or anger, but which I knew well, did not mean pleasure,—that it drew my eyes to the man's face, and then, swiftly, in the the direction of his eager, fascinated gaze.

He was watching, or so it seemed to me, the tall figure of a woman luxuriously clad, and, seemingly, alone. She was moving, in stately fashion and apparently quite unconcerned by the hurry all about her, toward the chief entrance. Her dark head was held haughtily erect, and she seemed almost oblivious of surroundings, until she was just outside the bronze barrier at the inner vestibule, and opposite the long mirrors on either side. Then, suddenly, she seemed to sway toward one of these mirrors, and I saw a white gloved hand go swiftly to the side of her face, which was turned quite away from me.

Glancing again at the shabby man by my side, I saw that his face was bloodless, while his eyes were riveted upon the tall, slim figure; but, with her first movement toward the mirror, he pulled his soft old hat low over his eyes, and let his chin sink between his shoulders.

As I wonderingly followed this movement, I let my own eyes drop for an instant to the pavement, and saw there, at his feet, the cause for his delay and hesitancy. Pressed against the wall behind him was a doubled up frame, with its straps dangling between his feet, and I knew him for one of those unfortunates, a "sandwich man," doomed to traverse the streets between two half concealing boards, that advertised—what?

The man seemed past middle age, and his face was lined and seamed, while out of his eyes gleamed a look, desperate, eager, and growing with every passing instant more and more excited, fierce, and wolfish, while he craned forward, and drew back, with, it seemed to me, alternating thrills of hate, fear, and—hope. The tall woman had swung herself about, seeming to scatter those nearest her with the mere glance from her haughty, splendid eyes, and to clear a way through the opposing crowd by the sheer force of a strong personality.

She had a rare coloring; and a free grace of movement, and as she made her way streetward with her eyes cast down, as if seeking something beneath the feet of the crowd, I had time to note the classic regularity of her features, the royal bloom

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upon lip and cheek, the strong chin, full red mouth, and long lashes, that veiled so splendidly the downward seeking eyes. And then, suddenly, when almost opposite me, she looked up, and out beyond the pavement, with a swift direct gaze that held neither doubt nor hesitancy, and, seeing a fine open Victoria circling slowly away from the curb, she lifted a hand, and in a clear mellow voice strong with command, called, "Hixon!" And now her splendid eyes swept the crowd, while again her voice arose, just a note more insistent, "*Hixon!*"

"Madam—pardon me,—shall I call your carriage?"

The speaker was a young man, tall, slender, and with a handsome boyish face, that was frank rather than strong.

She seemed to read him from foot to head, in one glance, and then, even as her lips framed the word "yes," his voice rang out over the heads of the hurrying crowd.—"Hixon—this way!"

"And now, as the two moved toward the street, side by side, they passed close to my pillar, and I heard her say,—"If you will kindly remain here, and watch the people going in, until I have spoken with my coachman—" she paused and again glanced about her—"To let my loss be known before we have made an effort, might be to lose the diamond," she then added.

As she left him, and moved across the pavement, I turned to cast a glance toward my sandwich man, but he had apparently discovered an opening in the crowd. He was stopping to secure the straps of his burden, and while the lady stood beside her carriage and conversed in low crisp sentences with the man Hixon, he slunk into the throng, and across the pavement, to the outer side; seeing which I now turned toward the handsome young fellow who stood glancing about him, now here, now there, and leaned forward to catch his eye.

"Landis, may I ask if anything serious has happened? Can I be of use to you, or to your friend?"

Hal Landis, known to the seasoned New Yorker as the son and heir of one of the city's newest multimillionaires, and as unspoiled as a lad so hampered well could be, looked up, frowned, and then smiled.

"Why Jasper! You're the very chap! The lady, she's a stranger to me, has just lost a valuable diamond; mate to the one in the ear turned toward us now. She wore it, she is sure, when they drove into this street, at the corner there. Gad!" He stopped short, for the lady was coming swiftly toward us.

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"Madam," began Landis, as she paused before us. "This is Mr. Jasper, of Craig and Jasper, Attorneys." Was I mistaken, or did the dark eyes dilate, just a little, and was the start she gave caused by the utterance of the firm name?

"Pardon," she said, looking beyond us, "I—I thought that woman was about to pick up something—er—Mr.—will you kindly repeat the name, sir?"

"Jasper," I said, "and this is Mr. Landis."

"Thanks, gentlemen! I fancy I have heard that name. Land—is, and mine,—I am a new comer here, an utter stranger,—I am Mrs. Devinne Barthelme, late of London, and living just now at the Astoria Waldorf. Gentlemen, tell me, how must I proceed to make a search in this thronged place? My solitaire was a family jewel, and I prize it far beyond its actual value! It was lost, I am sure, between that corner," pointing across the way, "and this vestibule entrance. I took my little mirror from the pocket of the Victoria," she smiled charmingly now, for the first time, and Landis forgot to watch the entering crowd, "and it was in its setting, and, as I thought, secure, when we drove diagonally across the street, and before this entrance."

"If I might suggest," said I, "it would seem to me useless to spread the fact of your loss here, now. It is time, or soon will be, for the curtain to go up. Ah!" as the first notes of the orchestra were heard through the swinging doors. "The crowd will soon have thinned, then with a couple of officers on the spot"—here I touched Landis upon the shoulder, "see," I said, "just behind you, and going toward the box office is one of the house detectives; won't you call him?"

Landis went swiftly, but the lady, after a single glance, turned again so that she could keep in view the moveless figure upon the box of the Victoria. She had noted the direction of my glance, and again that dazzling smile stirred the red lips.

"I told Hixon not to leave his seat until I was ready to make a personal search among the cushions," she said, as in explanation.

"You were very tactful."

"And—may I—dare I ask you to direct the police officers when they come?"

"Assuredly."

"I have ordered Hixon to drive to the exact spot where the carriage first stood, as soon as the way is clear," and she pointed

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toward a carriage that was being slowly backed from between a pair of long bodied, space filling landaus.

"Those carriages," she commented, "Hixon tells me they are not quite modern. I—I fancy I have seen the one drawn by the brown cobs in the park, once or twice; it is—?" She glanced at me and paused. "You know it, I see!" she commented.

I smiled. "It is the Landis carriage," I said, and Madam elevated her eyebrows, threw an amused glance in the direction of young Landis, and turned her superb shoulders upon the vehicle and its occupants, the dowager Madam Landis, and her elder son's widow. They had just left their carriage and were now entering the vestibule without having observed young Hal, still in earnest talk with the house detective, and with his back toward them.

As I shifted my position, the better to note the thinning of the crowd, my eye fell once more upon the half-bent figure of the sandwich man, who was backing awkwardly to the extreme edge of the pavement, with a wary eye, as it seemed, for approaching officers. And then, just as the Landis carriage succeeded in getting free of the two landaus, and pulling into the street, Madam Devinne Barthelme lifted a hand to signal her driver; and, at the same moment, I saw the sandwich man make a sudden backward step, stumble, and fall, his canvas covered boards clattering and dropping from his shoulders; evidently the rotten straps that held them to their place had parted.

I started forward, fearing an injury to the man, but he drew himself together and put out his hand, making two or three futile efforts to rise, and then, slowly, he drew the fallen boards toward him, and, aided by a good natured street gamin, struggled to his feet, hobbled across the street, and took up his station there, half hidden from our view by a projecting awning, and some waiting carriages.

And now the search for the lost diamond began.

Two officers were found, and these clearing away the remainder of the crowd, and keeping them back, went over the ground where the carriage had stood, and the pavement and vestibule between it and the entrance to the theater, closely watched the while by Madam and young Landis, not to mention myself. Meantime, the lady, unaided, and from choice, searched her carriage with minute scrutiny.

Evidently the loss of the big diamond was a blow to her, and

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the fire in her eyes, and the crimson of her cheeks deepened, as her anxiety and excitement increased. And, certainly, the lost gem was a fine one, matching, as it must, the one still remaining in the pink ear of Madam.

For some time I stood beside Madam's carriage where, having given up all personal effort, she sat, still eagerly watching and directing the officers and young Landis, who, most active of all, was peering here, there and everywhere, returning often to the side of the carriage to be encouraged to renewed effort by the lady's glowing eyes, and the words of praise and thanks. Finally the dignified house detective came to the carriage side.

"Lady," he said, "It is certain that your diamond is not here! If you lost it so near the entrance, it has been found by some one in the crowd. That is sure! Possibly an advertisement—a reward—might help you."

She bent toward us as we stood grouped near the Victoria.

"That I lost the diamond just here," with a comprehensive wave of her hand, "is certain, sir. And—oh, must I call in the police to aid me?"

"Not if you will trust it to me, Madam," said young Landis, pressing eagerly nearer. "If you will give me your address and —a little more by way of description I will do all I can, all that can be done!" He was flushed and eager, and the admiration in his handsome boyish face was but too clearly read. While she seemed to hesitate the officers drew back.

"I must think," she said. "This is most unpleasant. I think I should consult my legal adviser, Mr. Birdsall, of the firm of that name. He is the only man I know in your city," she was looking at me, and I hastened to say.

"Messrs. Birdsall and Birdsall are in themselves a tower of strength. They will know how to advise you." And finding here my cue for an easy exit, I uttered all the courtesies and took my leave of the handsome brunette, walking away, not in the direction whence I came, but onward, noting as I went, how young Landis still hovered near the Victoria, and how reluctantly he drew back, when she gave the order to Hixon to move on.

I had lost all desire to enter the theater by this time, and as I moved on, slowly, I chanced to come within sight of my friend of the sandwich boards once more. He was peering between two close standing vehicles, after the retreating carriage, and, when

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it was well under way, he too turned and began to move in the direction he had taken upon leaving the theater front, and in which I also was moving. He was on the opposite side of the street, and a few paces in advance of me, and as he shuffled away I was seized with a desire to follow him, for a time at least, and, if possible, to get another sight of his face. He had been so intent upon the movements of the beautiful brunette that he had not, I felt sure, so much as glanced in my direction, and I felt quite safe in stalking him openly from the opposite pavement.

We had not gone far, however, when my vague interest was changed to a lively curiosity, and I made a sudden dash across the way and sprinted to gain a position closer in the rear of my quarry, for, after worming his way, with some difficulty, through a crowd, gathered about some loud-voiced street fakir, the man had turned sharply, glanced back, and all about him, and then, straightening his shoulders, and his bent limbs, and lifting his drooping head, he suddenly moved off at a brisk pace.

With the crook gone from his legs, and the curve from his back, he showed himself a man above the medium height, erect, slender, and certainly far from being the enfeebled unfortunate he had seemed a moment before; so I fell into step behind him, and assured myself that I was upon the trail of something unusual. And now my friend of the sandwich boards left the better streets, and turned his steps riverward. Then, after a long walk, he began to lag, and finally paused, as if glad to rest, at a point where a station of the elevated railway overshadowed a congested street corner, where the surface cars of several lines swung around a loop, and the hurrying people stopped and started, and watched their chance to cross in all directions.

Here the man halted, close to the curb, but withou lowering his boards, and I, feeling quite secure in my ability to dodge, drew back with my shoulders against a wall and contented myself with noting the slow shifting about, as if weary and uncertain, of the bearer of the advertising boards. And then there was an outcry and a forward rush, as a woman with two little children was wrested from before the wheels of an oncoming surface car, and I craned forward and then drew a long relieved breath with the others. It had been but a moment, but when I looked toward the place where the canvas covered boards had loomed conspicuously, they were gone, and when, the next moment, I saw them close beside the stair leading up to the platform of the

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L road, I went boldly toward them, determined to run no more risks of defeat.

And then—my pride received a fall. There, to be sure, were the boards, with the name of a Broadway oculist, in big letters, sprawled across them, but they were held over the shoulder by a big dirty hand, gripped upon the hanging straps, and their bearer was a husky hobo looking fellow, who stood with his face to the street, in rapt contemplation of a "nickle" held in the palm of his left hand.

I promptly produced a second "nickle" and holding it temptingly above the open palm asked gruffly, "where's the feller that got you to hold the boards, eh?" He grinned, and I let the nickle drop.

"Wisht I knowed, jist ter be 'commodatin'; the bloke said to me, 'Friend, will you just hold these boards for two minutes? I want a beer, and here's fer yours when I come back.' I jest grabbed on, cap, an' that 's all I know." Here a shrill voice at my knees, as it seemed, said—"I'll tell yer, boss, ef yer cross me parm!" And a small boy shifted a bundle of newspapers and held out a small, grimy "parm," I produced a second five-cent piece. "Tell us," I demanded.

"Sure! Well, sir, he hiked up them stairs like he was after a train; an' if he ain 't took one afore this I 'm a goat!"

"Is that a fact, boy? I'll pay for the truth, mind." And I shook some bits of silver inside my closed hand.

"It 's true, boss! Huh! s'pose he 'd a come way out here with his old boards, if 'twas jist a beer he was after? Not on yer life!"

"Gee!" ejaculated the holder of the "sandwich," setting it down with emphasis. "This kid 's got it straight! We've been done, boss!" And so it proved; whether with intent or no. A look about the upper platform revealed many faces, but not the face of the sandwich man.

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CHAPTER V.

A FAIR ENIGMA.

At precisely five minutes after four o'clock that afternoon I stepped from a cab at the door of Austin Doverfields' stately home facing Central Park. I no longer had need to call upon my actor friend for small pointers of make-up. Indeed, I seldom used the "deep disguise" of the conventional man of mystery. But to-day I was, in appearance, a thought more dignified, a few years older than the Kenneth Jasper of the morning; and my "get up" was that of the tailor-made society man; trim, and just a bit of a swell in a quiet way.

I dismissed my carriage at the door—and in the hearing of the stiff servant who admitted me, and whose face I studied while slowly producing the visiting cards of Lucian Preston. There was a moment of delay, during which I fancied I could hear, from my place near the door of the sumptuously simple reception room, the swish of skirts, the tap of boot heels on the polished floor above, and then I was conducted to the next floor, where "Madam would be glad to receive Mr. Preston in her own morning room."

At the door I was met by my host, who, for the benefit of the servant, greeted me with extended hand—and the next moment I was bowing before a dainty blonde beauty, small almost to fragility, and with a face that was a singular but charming mixture of childlike sweetness and womanly dignity. I was not long in discovering that this lady adored and looked up to her tall, grave husband, and that she also stood a little in awe of his dignity and seriousness.

One could not look at this flower-like youthful face, without feeling sure that it belonged to a bright and sunny nature, and yet it was the opposite of this at the moment. Evidently the loss of her diamond weighed heavily upon the mind of Mrs. Doverfields. I could have sworn, too, that the lady could be a bright and ready talker; but, in spite of this, she bore almost no voluntary part in our conversation; speaking only when directly addressed, and looking as if she wished it all well over.

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I took no advantage of my borrowed social footing, but taking the seat indicated by the lady, not far from her own, I suggested that one of them give me, at once, a complete account of the affair of the diamonds, adding, "You are, of course, convinced that it *is* a robbery?"

"Why, certainly!" replied the gentleman, but the lady only started slightly, opened her lips as if to speak, and then closed them with a decision I would not have credited to her character.

"The story," began the master of the house, "is soon told. Last night my wife—" he stopped and turned to the lady, saying, "Perhaps, after all, Ara, you would better tell it." But she shook her head.

"No!" she answered quickly. "Go on, please; you know it—all!"

"Very well." He turned again to me, and I said to myself, "evidently with him, her word is law." "Last night," he recommenced, "my wife attended a ball, which, because of an important business meeting, I was obliged to miss. As a consequence I was at home earlier than she, and, no doubt, was sleeping soundly when she arrived. It being a very grand, after Lent affair, she wore all her diamonds; or nearly all. Going to her dressing room she removed these without arousing her maid, placed them in their cases, which were temporarily kept in a drawer of her dressing table, and turned the key upon them.

"Now, my wife is always interested beyond the common in her servants, and the cook, who is an especial favorite with her, had been ailing for a day or two, and so, remembering that she had promised to look in upon cook on her return, she closed her dressing-room door, and went below. Our basement, as you may have noted, is not underground, in the sense of being either dark or damp, and the cook, two maids, and one of the men sleep there.

This man had admitted Mrs. Doverfields, by previous arrangement, and, in passing the basement entrance, she caught, or thought she caught a glimpse of him, looking to the door fastenings for the second time; a thing Sadler often does, by the way, he being a very cautious man, but one of the soundest sleepers I ever knew!" He glanced at his wife, half smiling, but she was tapping her foot upon the rug nervously, and looking down with an expression one could almost call moody.

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She did not look up, and he went on. "Of course, Mrs, Doverfields thought nothing of this extra care, but went on, and, finding cook asleep, came back at once and quickly retired. She is certain about having locked the drawer containing the jewels, but not so certain that she removed the key; as to the chamber door, that she locked. She is positive of so much."

"That would scarcely trouble a professional burglar," I commented.

"I suppose not! It certainly did not trouble this one! My wife has a vague memory of seeing a man's figure cross the room, and of thinking, in a drowsy, unreasoning way, that it was myself tiptoeing from the room, as I sometimes do, in the early morning, when I enter and find her sleeping. The diamonds had just been brought from the safety vault, where they had been placed before she sailed for Europe, last Autumn. She has only been back four weeks,—and, meaning to leave town again soon, we, or I, was about to return them to the vault today. It was not until after a late breakfast that the loss was discovered. My wife's maid, in putting the dressing room in order, picked up the key of the jewel drawer from the floor close to the front of the case; almost beneath it in fact. This of course led to an examination of the drawer, and the loss was discovered."

Mr. Doverfields paused a moment, then, as I made no comment, he resumed. "I suppose, as a beginning, you will wish,—it is customary, is it not—to look at the rooms?"

Somewhat to my surprise, Mrs. Doverfields arose hastily, and took a step toward the bell.

"You can go at once!" she said, almost with eagerness.

Now I had not gone so far as this in my own mental processes, but I arose at once.

As we went toward the door the lady turned back, after touching the bell, and when she reseated herself, as her husband passed out of the room ahead of me, I paused.

"Mrs. Doverfields," I said. "Is there not in your private apartment, some work of art, some picture, which we are going to see? I must not abandon my role, and your presence is important. You rang, I think, for your maid?"

"I did," coldly.

"Then be kind enough, please, to instruct her to open your rooms that we may see—what you will, only, we shall need you there!"

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She arose slowly and with evident hesitation; then, suddenly, she swept forward, passed us, and met her maid in the hall.

"Lucy," she said lightly and with perfect composure. "Go and draw the curtains in my rooms, please. I want Mr. Preston to see the place where the burglary was committed! This way Mr. Preston, to see how badly I keep my diamonds, and what a poor thing the modern lock is."

"You see," said Mr. Doverfields, as we entered the room. "The burglar must have passed through my wife's room in order to reach the dressing room beyond. And she must have slept very heavily, or the man trod upon 'velvet feet—' "

"I was very tired," his wife broke in, cutting short his last words. "I was quite busy all day, you know, Austin and I—I suppose he did rouse me—partially."

"You might have slumbered lightly and still not have heard one of our expert housebreakers," I interposed. "Is this the drawer, Mrs. Doverfields?"

"Yes."

"And the key? May I see the key?"

She brought it and placed it upon the dressing case before me, and standing close beside the table I held it in my hand, looked at it a moment, fitted it in the lock, and then, as if by accident, let it fall to the floor. It struck the surface of the thick Turkish rug before the dressing case without a sound, and taking it up, I turned again to the lady.

"Precisely where was this key when found?" I questioned carelessly.

"Really—" began the lady.

"Call Lucy," spoke her husband quickly, and the maid was called, looking her wonder as she came. I gave her the key, and told her to place it precisely as she had found it that morning; which she did with scarcely a moment's hesitation.

"Are you not mistaken?" I asked her, somewhat sternly. "The key could not have fallen there!"

But the girl respectfully but firmly maintained her position. It was there, just beneath the edge of the dressing case, that the key lay when she first saw it. "I had dressed my mistress' hair in this room," she declared, "just a little earlier. If the key had not been so nearly out of sight I must have seen it before!"

I laughed and put the key down carelessly. "Well," I said, turning to her master, "I don't see but that this clear-headed

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young woman has settled our wager. The key could fall in that way, of course, you will want to tell that to the officers—when they come. Mrs. Doverfields, I congratulate you on not waking up! It would have been a terrible fright for you, if nothing worse."

"It would, indeed," she replied in the same light manner, and then she dismissed the maid and I took a long, slow look about the beautiful apartment, which was a picture; a poem in blue and silver and creamy white.

The sleeping room opened directly upon the main hall, and the dainty octagonal boudoir occupied the tower room upon that floor, and opened, at its further side, upon the landing of the tower stairs, and a lesser hall beyond. This tower, which spread out into a porte-cochère below, was the only break in the colonial straightness and simplicity of the big dwelling. The only access to the dressing room and bath, was through the chamber, and, having assured myself of this, I was ready to ask questions.

"Mrs. Doverfields, you saw, or fancied that you saw, some one near the basement entrance, whom you took to be a servant; was it the servant?"

Again the lady turned upon me one of those slow, hesitating reluctant glances, and her husband, seeing this, promptly took up the word. "No, Mr. Jasper. I asked Sadler if he were up at that hour, and he was greatly surprised and said 'No,' most emphatically."

"And—you trust him?"

"He is certainly an honest man."

"Do you think, then, that your wife really did see some one in the basement?"

"I am quite convinced of it. How else did the burglar enter the house?"

"Collusion?" I suggested, but he shook his head.

"Our servants are all to be trusted. I am sure of it! In my opinion the fellow must have entered by picking the lock, with a skeleton or wire key, and lurking near the entrance until he found a chance to conceal himself. He could not have entered in that manner after the bolts and chains that we use at night were put up! It 's the simplest explanation," he added rather lamely.

"And the right one, it is more than probable! A skeleton

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key, a hiding place in a convenient closet,—is there a convenient closet, by the by?"

"Yes, under the basement stairs, and quite near the door. Will you look at it?"

"Not unless you can get all the servants out of the way. Have you made a search there for traces, clues?"

"Yes. There's nothing to be seen. Burglars do not leave convenient clues behind them, often; except in novels, I fancy.

"Austin," said Mrs. Doverfields suddenly, "do you think you and Mr. —Preston could dispense with me now? I am greatly fatigued and so nervous over all this that I feel—unfit to follow up the subject. I have told you all, I think." She had grown paler, and her voice was almost pleading.

"By all means!" I exclaimed. "There is really little more to be said! Of course you can describe the lost jewels, Mr. Doverfields."

"Certainly—that is—I think so."

"And—there is one other question, Mrs. Doverfields! Can you describe that figure which you fancied might be your husband's?"

"I—I fear not. It was all a dream, so I sometimes think. It is all so vague; but a glance, at best, you see; and in a half darkened room."

Her husband turned toward her quickly. "Do you mean—was your light burning?"

She shrank back, and her voice faltered, as she said, "That is what Lucy told me this morning! Do—do you you think he could have lighted it? I—I cannot recall anything!"

"It is possible," I said carelessly. Then, "you could tell, at least, of the man's outlines, his height, for instance?"

"Only—why yes, he was, I seem to remember, rather tall, quite tall! I suppose that is why he suggested my husband, and did not startle me into fuller wakefulness," she made a step toward the door. "Am I excused, now?"

"Assuredly," I replied.

"By all means. Try and rest, Ara," added her husband kindly.

As she was about to go from the room I started forward. "Mrs. Doverfields, it is for us to go, not you! Surely you can rest better here than—elsewhere!"

She turned back. "But," she said, "You do not wish to look more closely, to assure yourself—"

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"I am satisfied for the present," I assured her. "Shall we go down to the library once more, sir?" and I went to the door, turning and bowing at the threshold. As I did so I fancied that her pale face wore a look of absolute relief. She nodded, and then turned to her husband, moving to his side, and looking up into his face. It was a strange look. A look I did not soon forget.

"Thank you—Austin," she almost whispered, turning away from us both.

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CHAPTER VI.

AT ANY COST.

When we were comfortably seated again in the library, with the door safely shut, my host turned toward me with a new look upon his face; a look both businesslike and keen.

"Now," he said. "Tell me, Mr. —Preston, what do you make of this case?"

"Nothing as yet. It is a queer case—certainly."

"How, queer?"

"Well, to begin with, it's an odd coincidence, that on the very night, when, for the first time in months, the diamonds were in your house, and so easily accessible, that they should be stolen. It would almost seem that there is a special providence—for thieves!"

I saw the sudden flash that lit his eye for an instant, and expected an indignant retort; but I did not yet know this man. He only turned toward me, as if with renewed interest, and, after a moment, said in a tone of cold inquiry. "Well?"

"There is another thing," I went on. "That key! If the maid really found it, as she said—"

"How, as she said?"

"In the place where, she declared, it was found. That key never fell from any one's hand to that spot."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that, if the key was really lying just beneath the lower edge of the dressing case, it was put there! It could, by no possibility, have fallen from anyone's hand to that position. The outward curve of the dresser's heavy moulding, so close to the floor, must have caught it before it could strike the rug, and have sent it away from, not underneath, the dresser."

"But why should a robber do so foolish a thing? I can see that you may be right, Mr. Preston."

"Thank you! A robber would not do so foolish a thing! A professional robber would not trouble himself so needlessly! Or delay his escape so carelessly." Austin Doverfields gazed at me in silence, and with a set look, that I learned to interpret

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later. I began to feel uncomfortable. His face grew paler and paler, and then he arose, walked across the long library, and stood for a moment at one of the windows, with his back toward me. At last he turned, and came back.

"Mr. Jasper," he began, standing erect before me, and still pale, "I have the greatest confidence in my friend, Bird. My first thought, upon learning of our loss this morning, was for the effect upon my wife's health. She seemed so shaken, so unnerved, and almost prostrated, that informing her that I must report to the police, I went, first, to the Doctor, telling him, of course, just what had happened. He said that he would go to her at once, and then he advised me to apply, not to the police, but to you, for assistance; and he told me that about you which made me very anxious to secure your help. 'Report your loss,' he said, 'to the Chief of Police, it might be a wise thing to do; and I am sure that if you tell him that you mean to secure young Jasper, he will tell you that you could not do better.' "I did call upon the Chief, and he did assure me, not that I could not do better; but that, elsewhere, I could not do so well! 'Jasper seldom makes a mistake,' the chief said. But sir, I must hope that, in this thing, you are mistaken! What you have said about that key would imply—so much!"

"Not necessarily;" I replied, rising also. "But it may imply a confederate within the house; and I must question your servants, of course. Do they all know of your loss?"

"Yes, I fear—I am sure, that they do."

I moved a step toward him. Mr. Doverfields, do you wish to follow up this affair, whatever comes of it?"

"Yes!" The answer came promptly. "At any cost!—*now!* I must know—the truth!—At any cost!" he repeated, with set lips.

"And you still wish me to assist you?"

"I wish you, in this matter, to command me!" he replied with firmness.

"Then I must leave you, now, at once. I have already tarried too long. Treat this matter lightly, especially before your servants, and, in your wife's present state of nervous strain, it might be well not to put too much stress upon your own anxiety, or the hope of finding the diamonds. You will pardon me for, perhaps, exceeding my privilege, but—have you thought that, possibly, she may be blaming herself, unduly, as the cause

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of this loss? Sensitive women sometimes feel these things too keenly, and are too ready to hold themselves blamable. That Mrs. Doverfields values your opinion highly is very evident."

The man's face actually flushed with pleasure.

"Tomorrow morning early, I shall come back, in another guise of course and in my character of detective; I must then see your servants; all of them. I am growing interested, Mr. Doverfields, and I shall make every effort to restore your diamonds.

From the Doverfields' house, I drove at once to the home of Doctor Bird, not far distant, at the risk of finding him at dinner, for it was now growing late. Fortunately for me he was at home, and could give me half an hour. I, too, was in haste, with my own dinner still in perspective, so I began at once, for we were well known to each other.

"Doctor, I am told that I have you to thank for my share in this Doverfields' diamond affair; and I have come to you, without remorse, to question you about—various things! For instance, is Mrs. Doverfields subject to sudden nervous attacks? What can you tell me of her—and of her family? And, what can you tell me of the diamonds? In short I want information!"

"In the name of common sense!" he broke in, "why did n't you ask all this of him? Doverfields?"

"Doverfields is the very man I do not want to catechise about his wife,—just now! A detective must harbor and sift numerous doubts and queer ideas, with which it would be absolutely cruel to burden the shoulders of the anxious persons most interested; and—"

"And *so I* must be the sieve through which these 'doubts and queer ideas' are to be sifted, eh? Well then, Mrs. Doverfields is not subject to nerves! This business seems to have shaken her, to—I was about to say, a surprising degree;—and, really, it did surprise me, for, usually she is a very cheerful and sweet natured, little person, a charming sunshiny little lady, a trifle spoiled, perhaps, by that grave, long limbed husband, but bearing it well."

"And yet, when Doverfields called upon me, he insisted upon my going home with him, at once, to hear the particulars of the robbery from his wife; and when I followed him, quite promptly, it was to meet a nervous, silent little personage, who only spoke when appealed to, allowing him to tell me everything, even of her own experience; and who seemed only anxious to end the interview!" And I described, as nearly as I could, our meeting.

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"It is strange!" mused the Doctor. "And not at all like Ara Danton! You see I knew her as a girl; her father was an old friend." He looked at me keenly for a moment, then—"What do you argue from all this?" he asked slowly, and, seeing my hesitation, added, "You may trust me! I am deeply interested in this case and, it is possible that even an old fogy Doctor could help you—in someways."

"Ah! I do not fear to trust you, Doctor Bird! I only fear—"

"What?" he demanded, when I hesitated over the word upon my lips.

"To antagonize you—then!"

"You won't do that;" he said with slow gravity. "I know you too well, Jasper." At present then I explained, "while I only see a very little way into the case, and my inferences may be all wrong, I do see this; there is something connected with the robbery which Mrs. Doverfields suspects, believes, or knows—"

"Imposible!"

"And," I went on resolutely,—"having begun, let me say it all;—she is not anxious to see the search for the diamonds, or the thief prosecuted with vigor—and success."

"Good heavens! And—your reasons for this belief?"

"Herself! Her face, voice, and manner, first! And, last, your own words!"

"My words!"

"You have described her, if I have understood your meaning aright, as ingenuous, honest, simple, and sincere."

"And so she is!"

"Then—of course—she is not acting today."

The doctor shook his head. "I can't follow you," he said. "You are puzzling me woefully."

"We talked until his dinner grew cold, and mine was lost altogether, but the puzzle grew no less, and we parted in mutual doubt and anxiety.

When I left Doctor Bird, I drove away in a state of indecision unusual to me. It was plain that, in the case of the Doverfields, the usual visitation of the police was to be omitted, or made perfunctory, at our pleasure; and, after giving my office address, I recalled the order, and went to see the Chief of Police, with whom I had long been in most amiable accord.

Here we discussed the pros and cons of the robbery, without arriving at any definite conclusion; but the chief was able to give

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me some fresh food for thought. "I suppose," said he, after a brisk exchange of ideas, and some professional chaff—"I suppose that, at least, you have decided, yourself and Mr. Doverfields, when, if at all, my men may pay this professional visit to the premises?"

"Um!—n—o," I murmured.

"Even a millionaire," he smiled, "may not have his own private and exclusive little burglary—not after it becomes known to the police. Robberies, like suicides and murders, belong to the Dear People, and the Dear People will not give them up! Talk of your aristocracy! The coroner, and the policeman have the entrée everywhere—given the proper occasion. But, Mr. Doverfields' wishes have been very clearly set forth to me."

"Indeed;" I hazarded. "He is very solicitous for his wife's welfare; she seems much shocked and broken up by the loss of her jewels."

"Naturally! What is the queen without her crown? He is very anxious, for her sake—to keep this matter quiet as long as possible. It can't be hushed up long, of course. But—" and he leaned toward me, his face suddenly grave. "Jasper, do you fall in with this policy of delay?"

I started. "What would you advise?" I questioned.

"Oh, no, my son," he grinned. "I'm not fishing for a chance to advise! And—you don't need it. Only—"

"Listen," I interrupted. "I'm quite sincere, and I mean to be frank, it 's your due! I have told you of my visit to that house; comments are needless. I am convinced that there 's a mystery behind this amazing burglary, and, as I view it, haste would not help us, and it might hinder! I am honestly puzzled! Really in doubt!"

"Gee! So am I, since hearing your story! But after hearing Doverfields I thought it just a plain case of outside and in!"

"I'm not so sure of that! At all events my voice, now, is for delay. They have kept the matter off the street all day. The servants seem most discreet and devoted. Besides, they have been very carefully 'observed' all day, by the sage old family butler."

"So Doverfields said."

"If there is collusion, if any of the servants are in the business, I think it will be wisdom to assume the attitude of Mr. Doverfields, and not treat the case too seriously. Look upon it as a loss, but not as a calamity. A loss, of course, a serious

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loss, but not a hopeless one, and to be remedied, in part at least, by a liberal expenditure for more jewels."

"Ah—ha! Is that your suggestion, or his?"

"Mine first, and his by adoption. I think he really looks upon the case as I do, as being even more serious than it seems." The Chief nodded.

"But," I went on, "I very much want the lady, and the servants —"

"And friends?"

"Yes, and friends, to take the more superficial view. No one must take the alarm! Tomorrow let your men make their conventional call. Later I will reappear, and gently question the servants,—a mere formality of course."

"Of course!"

"Then we will take the reporters into our confidence. Not treating the case too seriously, you know."

"I see."

"I wish I did,—a little farther! However, having given our sop to the dear public, I can go to work, with your help."

"How mine?"

"What a question. I shall look to your men to keep tab on any gentlemen of the push who may appear suddenly flush, or suddenly disappear."

"And—you?"

"Will then have leisure to study my case, and my people. For the rest, I have had two men watching since three o'clock."

"I see! I think you are taking the right course. But—I say—Jasper—may I give you one hint?"

"Any number. Don't be so modest, captain." I bent forward eagerly. The hints of the Chief were worth much.

"I am not prejudiced. I have no suspicions. But diamonds, you know, have helped more than one business man to weather a storm; and—you know—Austin Doverfields lost a fair fortune in speculation, not long ago." I nodded thoughtfully.

"You must take this for what it is worth," he said, as our eyes met, very gravely now. Then, as I arose, he added with a lighter tone and manner, "I 'll send my men 'round at eight-thirty, A. M. prompt."

"And I will follow them closely."

As I drove home pondering this case, I would have given much to have felt free to lay all its pros and cons before my

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friend Craig. But I knew what was expected of me—at least, for the present. And, in any case, I could not feel that the time was ripe for seeking Craig's counsel. I knew too little. The probabilities and possibilities were, as yet, too many and too vague. As I left my cab at my office number, I resolved that for a time, I would throw off this burden of wonder and doubt, and upon the mirror of my mind the face of Madam Devinne Barthelme, and the single gleaming diamond in her shell-like give my morning thoughts fresh impetus by turning them for the present upon something else.

And then something, my subconscious self, perhaps, produced ear.

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CHAPTER VII.

AN ABSENT MAID.

Promptly at the appointed hour the police paid a formal and dignified visit to the stately house on Fifth Avenue, where, owing to the hour, and her indisposition,—as the master of the house explained,—Mrs. Doverfields was not visible. Only Austin Doverfields appeared to greet them and repeat the story of the lost jewels, heading a dignified and almost silent march through the stately rooms.

The servants were shut up in the servants' dining room below stairs, and there was no one to observe the perfunctory methods of the slow march about the house, nor the shortness of the delay in my lady's dressing room and chamber; they all stood very erect and solemn, when, finally the three uniformed men were led into the dining-room by their master.

Gravely they gave their full names, ages, and "parental homes," and even dignified Austin Doverfields lowered his eyes and suppressed a smile when the question, "married or single" was gravely propounded, and the answer recorded.

Then followed a catechism of each servant.

"Were you in the house all of the time between the hours of 6 P. M. and 3 A. M., on the night of May 19th?"

"If out, where?"

"At what hour did you retire?"

"Where do you sleep?"

"Did you leave your room during the night?"

"Did you wake?"

"Did you hear any unusual sounds? *Any* sounds? etc., etc."

In short, strictly obeying the instructions of their chief, the officer in charge of this "inquiry," left with his men as they came, all grave, all seemingly full of interest in their list of harmless queries.

At the door of the vestibule they tarried to exchange a few low words with the master of the house, and just as Sadler turned to open the street door something slipped from his hand into each palm.

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"I WILL LOOK FOR THEM," SHE FALTERED.

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Half an hour later I was again in the big mansion, no longer the dapper Mr. Preston, but looking a very kindly and rather slow moving, elderly and spectacled "Private Enquirer," as was duly set forth upon the neat card I sent up, bearing the interesting legend, "Ammi C. Mowalt, Private Enquirer," upon its unfashionably smooth and shining pasteboard surface. For I had excellent reasons for not wishing to appear as an "up-to-date" official.

Somewhat to my surprise, I was promptly conducted to Mrs. Doverfields' boudoir, where the lady reclined upon a cushioned couch, while her husband sat near; both evidently awaiting me.

It was Mrs. Doverfields whom I addressed in asking for a more accurate and complete description of the lost jewels, but again she appealed to her husband, and when he failed her, not from unwillingness, but from sheer lack of knowledge, she evidently was so distressed that when at last she began, haltingly, and in the fewest possible words, I said, in one of her frequent pauses, "Of course an exact description of the diamonds is necessary; and it is useless to attempt anything without it. In putting away the gems, was there not a written description, and have they never been photographed?"

Mr. Doverfields arose, took a sudden step toward the door, and then turned to his wife. "Where are they, Ara?"

The lady started up. "I—I will look for them," she faltered.

But I was quick to interpose "Not now, Madam! There is time enough. And you look too ill! We will get back to the jewels later. Now, if you please, Mr. Doverfields, we will go down to the library and examine the servants."

"Can they not come up here?" the lady interposed.

"It is better not," I persisted. "It might seem to them a too serious affair. I prefer to go about the house, and to come upon them, as if by chance, where that is possible." And then, before either could speak again, the thing I had planned, and was anxiously waiting for, happened. Doctor Bird was announced and entered the room at the same moment. He had called to look after his patient, he declared, and he ordered us both out.

I had suddenly decided that it would hasten matters to question the servants first and look about later.

Once in the library, we began to question the servants briskly;

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I had seen and dismissed cook and coachman, footman and maid, when the Doctor put his head in at the library door.

"Doverfields," the Doctor said hurriedly, "I want to tell you that the less your wife talks about this diamond business, just now, and the less you talk of it, in her presence, the better! Health goes before diamonds! You must use tact, man!"

"But Doctor, she is so eager!—so troubled!"

"That's it! make light of it. Better let her think it is a hopeless case. Keep her, and this fellow," nodding toward me, "apart! Her nerves won't stand this sort of strain."

We had carefully planned this, or a similar scene, yet I wondered a little at the force and earnestness of the Doctor's words, until I learned later, that there had been no need for feigning.

"I found her," he declared, "in such a state of nervousness, so unnatural a condition, that I at once felt that you must be right. The mere loss of money or jewels never brought Ara Doverfields to such a state as I found her in this morning! She has a mental trouble preying upon her and I want you to find out what it is, for mark me, whoever else may be at fault, she will have nothing to blush for. She may be a martyr but she is not, and never will be a — sinner!"

"I will not dispute you," I said. "And I certainly shall find out what her trouble is if I can, granting, of course, that it concerns the loss of the diamonds."

The Doctor's warning made it easy for me to return to the subject of the diamonds themselves, and, while we waited for the coming of the parlor maid, after the physician had left us, I spoke of them again, adding, "If this description could be got at without disturbing your wife, it might be best for her."

"I will try and manage it," he replied; and just then the parlor maid entered, and we returned to our catechism. It was fruitless, so far as the girl was concerned, but when she was about to go, and her master told her to send Josephine Bryce to the library we received a surprise. Josephine Bryce was not in the house.

"She left last night, sir," the girl said, somewhat timidly. "Mrs. Doverfields sent her away."

While the words were on her lips, the door opened slowly and her mistress entered. There were bright red spots upon each cheek, and her eyes were shining with excitement and fever combined.

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"You may go, Harriet," she said, with more decision in her voice than I had heard before. As the girl left the room she crossed to her husband's side. "I heard you ask for Josephine just now, Austin," she said, "and I quite forgot to tell you that I had dismissed her, for carelessness and impertinence. I had warned her—before, and she left me last night. I—ought to have kept her—of course! I should have remembered!"

"It 's not important," I said, cheerfully. "Your servants seem above suspicion. You have no reason to think this girl dishonest, I suppose?"

"Oh, no! Quite the contrary!" her tone was one of absolute relief. "Only ill bred, and untrained for such service. These village girls, it would seem, cannot be taught when to speak and when to be silent."

"She is from the country, then?"

"I—I think so—yes." She sank into a seat near a shaded window. "Have you fixed upon your method of conducting this search, Mr. Jasper?"

"My dear," interposed her husband, "there is really almost nothing to begin on! I suppose our best chance for recovering the gems is to wait until they are offered to some diamond dealer, and then try and get them back; eh, Mr. Jasper?"

"If the diamonds are broken up and sold singly," I said, "even that may fail. It 's a difficult case! I don't advise you to be too hopeful, Mrs. Doverfields."

There were two other servants to be seen and we got the business over very soon, it being, at the best, but an empty form, owing, in part, to the presence of the mistress of the house. I then took a look at the basement entrance, more in the hope of thus getting a word with my client than in expectation of seeing anything that would aid me.

As I hoped, the lady did not choose to accompany us below stairs, and I found my chance. "If it is possible, Mr. Doverfields, we must find the description of the jewels, and after this we must meet at my office! I will send to you here, now and then, a written report which, you understand, shall be so tame as to cause no anxiety. Your wife's health is of importance."

"It is of paramount importance!" he answered with emphasis.

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CHAPTER VIII.

WHERE IS JOSEPHINE BRYCE?

"I must find this Josephine Bryce," I had said to myself as I left the house of the Doverfields after my second visit. But I did not say it to the master of that house, when he came in upon me quite unexpectedly one afternoon. Neither did I lay any stress upon what was now a fixed belief, the necessity for finding this girl.

"I have found the original copy of that jewel list and description," he began hurriedly. "I think I must be growing daft, for I did not recall, until late last night, that, when these jewels were reset, only three years ago, my wife herself, made out the list very carefully, and I copied it to provide an extra list for our use as a precaution against loss when we took the jewels to the vault."

"Of course."

"My wife's copy I put away in a private drawer of my own desk, and last night remembering it, I got up and looked for the paper. It is fortunate, too, for Mrs. Doverfields fears that the other paper and the photographs which she brought away from the vault, with the jewels, are lost."

"Cannot the photograph be replaced?" I asked quickly.

"Unfortunately, neither of us can remember the name of the photographer. The jewels were reset in London. Some of them were my wife's family jewels, others were mine, family jewels also, and then there were a number of fine new stones." He had told me this before.

"If this paper is accurate," I said, taking it from his hand, "It may serve very well."

"It is!" he assured me. "I verified every item; I do not trust to my memory, and I am careful in these things." We went over the list together, and I was amazed at the number and value of the diamonds.

"It is no wonder," I exclaimed, glancing at him quickly as he bent over the list, "that your wife is distressed at the loss of such

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jewels, and the fact of their being family gems, adds to their value, in her eyes, of course!"

"True!" he answered thoughtfully. "And yet, she has never seemed enthusiastic over them; and the fact that they were so long in the safety vault proves how little they were worn by her."

"I made no comment, put passed on to the other matters, and when he was about to go, I said, "I hope, Mr. Doverfields, that you will not look for a frequent report from me—"

"How—frequent?"

"You see," I went on, "it is not my custom to take my patrons much into my confidence. I have found it best for all concerned, not to do so. I think you can see how that may be."

"I can! I want to know the truth about our lost property, and to reclaim it if possble. I am told, by those who should know, that you can do the latter, and find out the former for me! As to your methods, that is your affair. Let me hear from you when you have something definite to report. That is all I ask."

"And—your wife?"

"I shall take the Doctor's advice. I have thought it over and I am sure that it is better to let her believe the case almost hopeless than to keep her anxious and enduring the suspense of hopes and fears. If your work ends in success, so much the better!"

"You are right!" I said with emphasis. "This will be best for her, I am sure of it, and best for us all. And now, will you send me that florid faced young man of yours as soon as you return home? Give him a letter to carry, and tell him he must deliver it in person. He is your footman, I think."

"He opens the door, and waits at table when needed. I believe it is English to call him a footman. Yes, I will send him, of course." He paused and looked at me questioningly.

"And no questions asked," I quoted. He smiled slightly, bowed, and went his way.

John Thomson, the footman, came in due time. I had chosen him from among the rest, because he looked good natured, and, as I already knew, loved the sound of his own voice. I received him in the character I had assumed upon my last visit at his master's house, and I soon won his confidence; for, though an honest fellow, and clever in a way, he was easily amenable to flattery, judiciously applied. My main object in sending for Thomson was to find out, if possible, the whereabouts of Josephine Bryce, and in this I succeeded.

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"She's a highty-tighty uppitty thing, sir, if you want to know my opinion, sir," he said. "And I 'd never a had no use for her address, but I seen her a givin' it to Maggie Givins, and without any askin', too, and when Maggie throwed it down, afterwards, and said as she hadn 't got no use for it, I jist picked it up an' pocketed it."

"What for, Thomson?"

"Well, sir, between you and me, we 'd jist lost some vallyble diamonds, and 'twas my opinion that her address might be wanted by somebody, jist as it is, you see!"

"And why?"

"Well, sir, you see I more 'n half believe that the girl was sassy to Mrs. Doverfields,—who is the best and sweetest lady in the land, if I do say it,—jist a purpose to be turned off without warnin'."

"Without warning! Why that is not customary, is it? You must be mistaken there."

"No sir. I know what I 'm saying."

"You know?"

"You see, sir, 'twas like this. I had stepped into the little closet under the basement stairs,—we hang up our coats there mostly,—and I was steppin' out when I heard Mrs. Doverfields' voice, so close to me that I stopped short. She was standin' at the foot of the stairs with her back to me, and she was sayin' to Josephine Bryce,—'No, Josephine, I shall give you no recommendation! I cannot; and as for not giving you warnin' you are not entitled to one! I have made your pert answer this morning, my reason for sending you away, but *I will give you the true one!* I can 't bear to ruin a girl's chance for living an honest life; and I want you to do better! There—I will say no more. I was robbed last night, Josephine, and—you must go!' There sir," he added, "was there ever such a soft, good hearted mistress as that?"

Long after the man had gone, I sat pondering his words, "A good hearted, a soft hearted mistress!" Soft hearted, indeed! And, if I must believe Thomson's testimony, and the evidence of my own senses, this good hearted lady feared me and what I might discover. What else could her reluctance, her silence, her want of candor mean? If her actions meant anything,—*she did not want the diamonds recovered!* Else why had she, who herself had written that accurate list and description of the jewels,—

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feigned forgetfulness and failed to produce either the list or photograph? Why did she persist in being present, in hearing every word, when we discussed the matter? And, more than all else, why did she first warn the girl, Josephine, and then let her go? "I will know," I said to myself, "and I will begin with Josephine Bryce." I did not expect to find her with ease, and the fact that she had left her address with one of the servants was proof that, if guilty of complicity in the robbery, she would not be found at the place named.

It was yet mid-afternoon, and, after some consideration, I arrayed myself like a Forsyth street dandy, for Josephine had gone from an uptown mansion to Forsyth street, and made my way to the house designated to Maggie Givins, as "my boarding place."

"No, she ain't here!" replied the acid faced woman who opened the door six inches, in answer to my knock. "She 's gone, an' I wish 't her things 'uz gone, too."

She was about to close the door when I hastily put my foot in the opening, and said affably, "Gosh! I 'm dead sorry! I didn't jist have no date with her, mum, but her an' me 's good—say, you couldn 't jist give me her 'dress, could ye?"

"Naw, I couldn't! Cos' she told me not to give no dreckshuns! Reck'n she wa'nt lookin' for you." And, from considerations for my feelings, I removed my foot from the aperture, just as the door was shut, hard and fast, as I knew from the sound of the turning key.

I went away rebuffed but not defeated. By a lucky and by no means frequent chance, I espied an officer within sight of the house and was easily able to secure for it, his close attention, until I should return. And, within the hour, with the help of a good cab horse, I was back.

This time, having first exchanged a word with the officer, I rattled up to the door in a newly painted express wagon, with a companion by my side, and the reins in my hands. This time, too, I was respectable, common, and bewhiskered in appearance, and I loudly demanded "that there baggage."

"Wot baggig?" snapped the woman.

"The young woman's ma—am, Miss Jo—Josy—feen Bruce? No—Br—Brace, I guess, ain't it?"

"No it ain 't! It 's Bryce, an'—"

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"Well, she 's sent for her things, an' I 'm in a great hurry ma—am. It 's out of my beat, this is."

The woman opened the door for me, after a few words, and as she was about to mount the stairs, she asked, over her shoulder, and with an assumption of carelessness—

"Wot kind of a place is Josy at?"

"Why ma—am, I can 't tell ye, for sure! They come round to my stand, mostly, ye see, but I 've got it all writ' down, street and number, an' name, on a card here."

But when I sought to produce the card it was not to be found, though I slapped my pockets and searched them again and again, and bewailed my misfortune in fluent though decorous language.

"Look here," the woman broke in upon my lamentation. "You need n't think you 're goin' to take them things away 'thout that ere card, nohow!"

I drew myself up with the dignity of an aggrieved but self-respecting person, and assured her that "such were not my intentions." That I knew my business too well.. I was sorry that young Miss must be kept waiting when she seemed in such a mortal hurry, but unless she happened to know Miss Bruce's address etc., etc., I must go on back to get another order from her!" And then my companion upon the wagon box called out to remind me of "them trunks for the evenin' train," and it ended in my getting the address, then positively refusing to carry away even a part of the baggage, and clinging to my injured dignity to the last, we drove away.

Josephine Bryce had put half the width of the city between her old lodging place and her new, but I appeared before her, that evening; only halting, in my way across the city, to doff my wagoner's garb, setting forth once more wearing my dudish outfit, and my every day face.

The dudish garments were worn out of regard for Miss Josephine's supposed coquettish tastes and tendencies, as described by John Thomson, and the natural countenance, as being the only safe one for an attack at close quarters.

John Thomson's description of Miss Bryce had impressed upon my mental vision the picture of a young woman at once crafty and knowing, coquettish and vain; and I thought I knew how to approach this personage; but the Josephine Bryce who came to her door, upon being told that "some one wished to see

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her about her trunk," was as great a surprise to me as I evidently was to her.

At sight of the round, open countenance, prepossessing, though not pretty, the strong chin, the direct grey eye, and the trim, simply dressed little figure, I promptly abandoned the role I had planned for myself, and addressed her directly, respectfully, and with inward disappointment. For this girl was no thief, nor accomplice of thieves; instantly I was sure of it almost.

"Miss Bryce," I said, "I have come to ask you a few questions about the family you have lately left, the Doverfields family. I do not wish to alarm you, and you have nothing to fear, but one of the servants overheard what Mrs. Doverfields said in dismissing you, and, for your own sake, as well as to help others, you will do well to tell me just what you know about this matter. I am an officer, and I do not believe you are mixed up in the affair! I cannot tell you why—just now. Will you allow me to step inside your room for a moment? This hall is too public; we are too subject to interruptions."

Josephine Bryce was an honest girl, with high courage and a hot temper. She had not been in the city long enough to know it thoroughly, and her one weakness was a too ready belief in any one who smiled upon, or spoke kindly to her. She had been quicker to observe and copy the manner, speech and, in a measure, the dress of the ladies she had known than to learn how to distinguish the scamp from his betters. It was not difficult to win her confidence, and this was her story, much condensed.

She had obtained her place in the Doverfields household through the aid of a friend, who two years before had been a summer boarder next door to the girl's own home in her native village. About three months before, while out walking early one evening, she had been respectfully accosted by a young man who held out a purse and asked her if she had not dropped it. Of course she had not, and then he had told her that he was a stranger in the city, where he had come to go into business as a builder, and that he did not know what to do with the purse. Finally, he urged her to take it, and to leave it at the Police Station, which, she told him, she could find easily.

He was so very respectful that she had allowed him to escort her to the Doverfields' area door, and, of course, that was only the beginning. He came, next, to ask about the purse, which had contained only a few dollars, and if it had found an owner. He

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declared her "the only person he knew in all New York." He came, and came again. They used to stroll about together, and "he got into a way of lingering to chat a few moments at the front basement door."

Once or twice he had even ventured inside, for just a moment, and on this particular night, he had taken her to the theatre, "for the very first time," and afterwards they had supped "somewhere a good ways from home," which caused them to reach the basement entrance rather late. It was Thomson who opened the door for her, and, just as she stepped in the upper bell rang, and asking her to lock the door, he rushed off up stairs.

He had left her thus before, to say a last word to "George," at the door, but never so late as then, and she "was a bit startled," when, on turning to close and lock the door, George caught at her hand to draw her outside again. Then, when she resisted, he went in with her, and they stood for a few moments, he "with his hand on the door, like to keep it from going shut, and locking itself."

While they stood thus, they had heard the rustle of silk, and she started, "at which," here the girl blushed furiously. "He caught me, and pushed my face down close on his shoulder, and I could see nothing. But I heard her pass, and then he whispered that he had feared I would cry out. That maddened me, and I jerked myself half 'round and—" here her voice sank to an awe stricken whisper, "I could a' most have sworn that a man brushed past me and up the stairs; a smallish man, with a stoop to his shoulders."

I started and then closed my lips tightly to keep back the words, "small man?" for Mrs. Doverfields had described the robber as tall! When, I wondered, would I get at the truth.

"When I told George," the girl went on, "he laughed, and said it was my nerves, that no one had passed us except the mistress, and that she had never glanced toward us, and could not have seen us there in the shadow, if she had."

"And—you believed this?"

"I tried to make myself believe it until next morning, and then I saw it all! The thief had passed us, and had hidden in Mrs. Doverfield's dressing room, or somewhere near, until she went to sleep, and "George had let him in! Oh!—" she cried tearfully, "lots of things came to me then! Things he had said! Questions he had asked! He had made a fool of me, for that!"

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"And your leaving—how was that?"

"It was just about as John Thomson told you. I had made up my mind I must leave, but was mortally afraid of being arrested before I could get away! I felt more guilty, I guess, than the real thief. Then I thought of a way. I had lost one good place, for being saucy, talking back, that is, but I didn't know, then, that a servant must always take, and never give! So I said to myself that I would try and be saucy to some use. Well," with a little toss of her head, "I soon had my chance. Mrs. Doverfields met me on the basement stairs. I never knew her up so early before, and she spoke very sharply for her, about my getting into bad habits, and keeping bad hours. 'Well mam;' I said, shaking in my shoes at the same time, 'If you don't like my habits I can quit!' And then she told me I must quit and at once, and I did, and was very glad to go! Yes sir, she told me it was because of the robbery."

"And—why did you not tell her, or some one, about those two men?"

"As if they would have believed me! They would have locked me up quick!"

She was now full of resentment against the treacherous "George," and avowed her readiness to identify and testify against him at any moment. And when I had questioned her at some length and had established a satisfactory understanding with her, I went my way, well pleased with the result of this visit, somewhat encouraged, but surprised and puzzled as well. And now, it seemed to me that the Doverfields' diamond case was really moving. I had found a foothold now, and I meant to work on as rapidly as possible toward a solution of what I fully believed to be more than one mystery.

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CHAPTER IX.

FAIR FACES AND DARK DEEDS.

Craig and I dined together that night, for, after leaving the girl Josephine, I had retired at once to my inner office, to readjust my thoughts and make various entries in a most useful notebook. I was weary of the subject; and feeling that, in this condition, I could no longer do my best thinking and planning, I resolved to put the Doverfields and their troubles out of my mind until morning, so seeking Craig I entreated him to dine with me at the little Italian Café.

This recalled me to the adventure of the theatre; and, being lured from the subject of greatest interest to myself, I told the Madam Devinne Barthelme adventure to Royston Craig. In spite of the fact that, as a rule, he took scant interest in mysteries, and only tolerated adventures in a novel, he listened intently, and even demanded a detailed description of the stately Devinne Barthelme, while he mused long over that portion which concerned the sandwich man.

"A handsome brunette," he said, after a long silence, "is worth seeing. I admire brunettes! But still, the most perfect dark beauty I ever saw, figured in a scandal; a tragedy in fact. It was in Paris, four years ago, when I spent my last year abroad, before settling down you know. She was a perfect brunette beauty, and she—" We had returned from the Café, and were seated in my office, and Craig's speech was broken into by the appearance of my office boy, who slept upon the premises, and looked upon himself as the real head of the firm. Behind him stalked Hal Landis, looking the pink of form, in his smart evening clothes, and with one rich red carnation in his coat lapel.

He was a trifle embarrassed just at first, for, while he knew me, as a club man, and we met in society at rare intervals, he knew Craig only as my partner, and as a popular and fast rising lawyer. But the good looking boyish chap was too frank and sunny to be long embarrassed, and he was soon telling us how Madam Barthelme had graciously permitted him to call and ask after the

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latest news of her diamond solitaire, and the result of her meeting and consultation with the Messrs. Birdsall.

"It occurred to me," he naively concluded, "that it would be the right thing to ask you to go with me this evening. You were of more real service to her than I, and she feels most grateful, most kindly toward you."

And then it gradually came out that the already fascinated lad had spent two long hours at the great hotel, where all were but too ready to serve him, and, with considerable tact, he had learned all that was known there about the dark eyed lady.

She was a widow, and had brought from abroad the best of introductions, and had deposited in the bank large sums of money and securities; and, in the hotel strong room, jewels of great value.

"It is business, concerning the settlement of her husband's estate, that has brought her to America," declared Landis, "and her stay, of course, is indefinite. She has no friends here," he added, "and I shall ask the 'mater' to call upon her."

"In that case," remarked Craig, "the lady, if she so wills it, has before her an assured social career," and he smiled.

I was hardly in the mood for ceremonious calling, and so I told Landis, who went away disappointed, but amiable as always, and frankly sounding the praises of Madam Barthelme.

Craig looked after him until the door had closed upon his shapely shoulders, and then resumed the cigar he had put down, when Landis, after seating himself, had refused to smoke. He knew the lad in a way and he smiled indulgently at his departing back, and became sober and serious only after some moments of seemingly intent thinking. Then he drew himself erect and turned to me. "There is a chap," he began, "who turns as naturally toward a fine woman, as toward flowers and sunshine; a lad who can be made or marred by the woman he loves."

I nodded.

"It looks," Craig went on, "as if he were quite prepared, even now, to become the slave of this handsome Madam Barthelme, who is a widow, and—" he paused.

"And therefore dangerous, eh?"

"Even so. I'd give a little to know whether she has any other business in New York other than that of her husband's estate. I hope for this boy's sake, that she is the right sort, but, 'Samivel'

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should 'beware of the vidders,' you know, and Landis is too young for his age, and—for them."

I laughed, as I took up a fresh cigar. "Upon my word, Roy," I said, "one would think you had a grudge against 'vidders' and this one in particular! And you've not so much as seen her."

"But you have."

"Well—?"

"And—you may not be aware of it, my son,"—Craig was just two years my senior, "but my opinion of this lady is based upon two things."

"And they are—?"

"First, the circumstances of your meeting, and, last, your manner of describing her. The loss of the solitaire in such a place was almost too dramatic. And then—you may not know it, Ken, but you tell a story very graphically,—and, I saw Madam through your eyes."

But I was no longer interested in Madam Barthelme's lost solitaire, and I could no longer enthuse over her statuesque yet brilliant brunette beauty. A sudden weariness had seized me, and after a few more words and as many yawns, my friend said good-night and I sought my pillow.

I slept soundly and rose next morning with my mind so full of the Doverfields robbery, that had not Madam Barthelme blazed suddenly forth as a great social success, and so brought herself again prominently to my notice, I might almost have forgotten both the lady and her lost solitaire,—if Fate, and Hal Landis, had permitted.

The Doverfields' diamonds was a case after my own heart, first because of the people most concerned, and, next, because it was a puzzle that grew more strange the longer I pondered over it.

I breakfasted in solitude,—as was my habit when studying a case,—but in some haste, for before setting out for what I meant should be a busy day, I wanted to review my case and my clients; and to formulate an opinion—of the one,—if not of the other. That night I again sat in my office, with my few items of knowledge concerning this case strung together rather loosely in my notebook, and,—omitting a very bald account of my first visit to the Doverfields' home,—much like this:

"Mr. A. Doverfields—(here followed a minute description of this gentleman.) "He is apparently straightforward in all things. A man of honor, by the best evidence. His face, his friends,

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even his foes, all bear witness to this, and, he is fully and sincerely determined to recover the lost diamonds. Apparently apathetic, he still has at commanad a great reserve of strength, force and determination,—staying power, in short.

"We are all subject to errors of judgment, but I fully believe that whatever the outcome, I will know at all times, where to find Austin Doverfields.

"As to the lost diamonds, I believe, fully, that all he knows, believes or even guesses, has already been confided to me. The case to him as to me is a mystery.

"Mrs. Doverfields is by nature a candid and almost impulsively frank woman. Her beautiful face has never learned to simulate, to deceive; at least this is how I read her, and this is why she, while struggling gallantly, has not been able to quite conceal, from me at least, her present embarrassment. That she has a secret, concerning this affair, or that there is some one whom she suspects, or connects with it, I feel assured! How this can be I cannot even dimly guess—. But, I mean to know."

Here followed a brief description of the diamonds, obtained as has been seen, with some difficulty, and then followed this last item.

"The servants. They are old and trusted servants; doubtless honest too, though this is not to be taken for granted. That is, all but one. That one, Josephine Bryce, also has a secret, which I must learn.

On an opposite page I had written thus.

"Queries—Why did Mrs. D— omit a part of the list of lost jewels?—Why did she, though quite ill, insist upon coming to the library, while I questioned the servants? Why did she dismiss Josephine Bryce?"

I put aside my half reviewed notes, to ponder. What a strange situation! Here was a kindly mistress, patient, never hasty in her judgment, a woman whose life had been throughout, a fair white page. One who was gentle and just; so the people of her household had all declared, with affection and respect in eye and voice. And yet, scarce an hour after discovering the loss of her rare and costly jewels, she had summarily dismissed, without question, and seemingly, for a trivial cause, one of her household. And this one,—I felt almost certain, while poor, uneducated, and unsophisticated, was gifted with some of the sterling qualities of her charming mistress, candor, frankness, and faith in her

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kind. A young woman only a few months a dweller in the city, and with no knowledge of the world and its wiles, coming from a rural home where all were equals, where social superiority was unknown, and where speech was free, untrammelled, and bold, where assurance was born of innocence and ignorance.

This, I more than half believed, was Josephine Bryce, who, for too much speaking had been dismissed, by a mistress, who, because of the shock of the morning, had lost her fine poise, her nerve, and self control, and so had acted and spoken in haste.

How simple it all looked—by daylight! And then I laughed, with a hint of self contempt in the laughter, and, taking down what I had named my "book of beauty," I began to glance from page to page.

Here were pictures of rare beauty, appealing eyes, Madonna faces, smiles almost angelic, and sadness that spoke of martyrdom, and yet—all this loveliness was as of whited sepulchres, sinners all! criminals all! The long list of their misdoings ranging all the way from petty theft to cold blooded murder.

"Kenneth," I admonished my inner self, "don't try to play the child again, act! A beautiful woman is as much a riddle as the sphinx, even when you think you know her well! even a raw country girl!—well, if you must bet, try the 'tiger'—it 's safer." And then I started and turned about in haste. I had heard the voice of an old friend through the slowly opening office door.

I had not lost touch with Captain Wrayland, since the days that had lent so strong a shaping force to my life, for, while my hours were growing fuller, both of work and thought, his, I fancied, were not quite "pressed down and running over," since the wife, who had been so much to him,—and to all who knew her, had passed behind the veil.

Always socially inclined, he had almost imperceptibly drifted into the pleasant circle in which his sister was both prominent and popular. He had developed, also, a liking for a whizzing Manton motor, which he had mastered with ease, and now chauffeured with judgment and circumspection.

When leaving the country he had retained certain business interests which now and then required his presence upon various "boards," and at certain conferences. He was a liberal patron of the opera and a faithful member of his club, but he always found time to look in upon me now and then.

The Captain had been absent from the city for the past two

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months, his duty and his pleasure taking him across the continent in the wake of Mrs. Devereaux, who was given to frequent short flittings. For the plump and still charming little lady, at the age of fifty-two, was brisk and alert, as curious, and full of interest in the externals, as strong and electric with the pure joy of life, as if she were still seventeen.

Certainly "Sister Aggie," as the Captain liked to call her, was a well of comfort and content to this otherwise lonely man, and they were the best of comrades, and confidants.

Since Captain Wrayland's return, we had met but once, and that for only a brief exchange of greetings, and I was heartily glad in spite of a most interesting occupation to see him cross my threshold once more.

Still this was an unusual hour for the Captain to call, and I was thinking as much as we repeated the usual conventionalities, producing in the meantime the inevitable cigars, for Captain Wrayland was a smoker of the frequent, and slow puffing variety, and he enjoyed his weed best when smoked in conjunction with a comfortable sleepy hollow chair, and a companion, equally comfortable and content, opposite him.

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CHAPTER X.

"PUT YOURSELF IN HIS PLACE."

As the Captain sank back in his soft seat, and turned his eyes first toward the door and then upon myself, I noted, anew, the alert and half expectant look in his face.

"What is it, Captain?" and then, as he hesitated, "No more matrimonial tricks, eh?" smiling reminiscently. "Never fear! I'll stand between you and the parson."

His eyes twinkled, but only for a moment. "I almost wish it was," he declared. "No, it's—it's news!"

"News? But from whom?"

Producing two envelopes he silently laid them between us on my study table. I saw that one was a telegram and that the other was a letter bearing a foreign postmark; but I did not touch them, or question further. I knew the Captain's slow methods. For a moment he eyed them in silence.

"Ken,—let me see—how long has it been since Ralph Meyrick was sent up?" he asked, his face becoming gloomy.

"Five years, lacking just six weeks. You remember he played his last game in the very face of the grand jury, and court followed close, owing to those strikes, and the political situation."

"H—m! Yes! And he came out?"

"Little more than ten months ago," here I let my eyes linger over the documents upon the table near my elbow. I thought one of them looked like Meyrick's fine flowing penmanship.

He nodded vigorously. "That's what it is, the letter,—read it, boy!"

I watched his face for a moment, and then, without comment, I took up the letter in the blue envelope. "Hello! Paris postmark eh?" With a quick movement I had the missive out of its wrapper.

"Read it aloud!" he commanded, and I opened the small sheet and began.

"Captain A. O. Wrayland.

My Dear Sir:—

When I hastily refused your generous gift, less than a

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year ago, I was quite sincere in meaning never to trouble you more. But Fate, or misfortune, has kept close to my heels. I have been robbed twice. Poetic judgment, you might say, and I have been, and am now, very ill.

It is the fact, that five years ago, you proffered me aid, that gives me courage now to ask you to help me. The crisis is past and they now tell me that I may recover—in time. I must remain here for at least a month longer, the Doctors say. Then, if possible I wish to go out to Australia, with a party of poor devils like myself.

Can you help me a little? And will you? I hope I may never live to be in worse need than at present. Awaiting your reply, I am, Very respectfully yours,

R. D. Meyrick."

The letter contained neither street nor number, and the fact that any reply sent would be held *poste restante*, was added in a footnote. I read this missive once and again, and slowly replaced it upon the table.

"Now read the cable message!" he said between two puffs at his cigar.

The cable, apparently, was quite disconnected from the letter I had just read. It was signed "D. C. T." and was sent from Liverpool. It ran:

"Y'r man left for N. Y. by St. Urania just now. Face slightly disguised, dress of an English mechanic, poor, diffident—but ill. Lame, with thick heel and sole on left foot."

As I placed it beside the letter, I questioned, while covering the two with my outspread palm, "Are they—connected?"

The Captain nodded.

"And this?" my forefinger dropped upon the letter,—"is Meyrick's handwriting? You are sure?"

"Doubtless."

"This?" indicating the message.

"Is from the same man."

"You mean—" The Captain removed his cigar, and I knew that, at last, he was ready to talk.

"I mean the man Soames, the Scotland Yard spy! Yes, I have kept him in my pay from the first! I had meant to keep it up, and to follow Meyrick until I knew his game. I never was satisfied."

"Nor I."

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"And now,—confound it! I wonder if Soames thinks he has turned our man over to me—to us!"

"Oh, to us?"

"Assuredly—us! Why, man are you trying to go back on me?"

I smiled. "Not the hop of a tomtit, Captain! I 'm just waiting for—information. Also—for instruction."

"O, that 's it! Then here you are," putting a finger upon the two messages, "figure out what it means! I 'm blessed if I can!"

I pondered, and there was silence between us for a few moments. "What has been reported to you of late from Soames?"

"Why, very little that you do not already know. Meyrick has been living well. Paris, Rome in the season; Monte Carlo, and Southern France, in their turn. Twice, as you know, he has disappeared. Soames lost all trace of him, for a time. I'll have a letter from Soames in a day or two, no doubt. And—oh, hang it man! I want your theory! What's the fellow up to?"

I picked up the envelopes and glanced at the date on each.

"This," I held up the letter from Meyrick, "is dated twelve days in advance of the telegram. The man may have risen from a bed of sickness, reaching London in time to take the Urania."

"In this case," I continued, like the philosopher I had begun to consider myself, "what may be the explanation of this letter, from the point of view of the deck of the Urania?"

"Or," the Captain supplemented, "to reverse the inquiry, what, from the point of view of that hospital sick bed in Paris, are we to think of this Urania passenger, eh?" And then we both laughed.

"Precisely. Now, since you are ready, almost, to vouch for the authenticity of this Paris letter—" he nodded with vigor, "let 's consider the cablegram. Are you equally sure of your friend Soames? May he possibly have mistaken his man?"

"Well, you know their methods, those Scotland Yard specialists, they 're trained to it! The man who sailed on the Urania is the same man Soames has been shadowing, the man whom he has followed from Paris to the Liverpool docks, I am sure of it! Now, our query, I think, can be narrowed down to this, 'what's his game?' "

"Meaning—?"

Captain Wrayland caught the cigar from between his lips, and flung himself erect in his chair, and then half way across the table. All his calm mask, as I knew it to have been, was gone,

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and a roused man, enraged and ready to strike was now before me.

"Meaning that it 's our Ralph Meyrick!" he declared. "Kenneth, are we to be victimized by that young thief and assassin again?"

"Not for long, I trust. As I see it the matter stands thus: When Meyrick declined your sop of dollars, in so lordly a manner, and set out, not for Australia, but for the continent, as we easily learned, you invested a considerable portion of the money that might have been his, in having him pretty closely looked after. London sleuths come high, the good ones, and yours seem to have been not only good, but clever as well. A man of tact."

"How—of tact?"

"Simply in his ability to read, not only 'what is writ,' but what is not 'writ.' For example, you were not interested in the personal history of our traveller beyond a certain point, that is, the description you cabled over in advance of the young man's arrival, merely described his physical traits very accurately. You gave his record here, as a crook of parts and asked that you be told where he was to be found, from time to time, and if he was, so far as could be discerned, living in the semblance of honesty. Should he commit depredations, and fall into the hands of the police, you desired to be notified at once, and if at any time he should turn his face westward, a cable must inform you forthwith. Am I right, thus far?"

"I hope so. It was you who 'writ' the descriptive message, and I who was bled for it in three figures! Well?"

"Well—your Mr. Soames has followed your instructions to the letter; but he has never exceeded them. Consequently, while we know that Mr. Meyrick has sojourned in various Continental cities, living at his ease at various good hotels, and seemingly leading a rather quiet life,—all we know beyond this is, that he is believed to have set sail for the land of his birth,—yesterday."

"Well," impatiently.

"Well, I am almost tempted to say, that we have taken too little interest in the career of Mr. Meyrick! It might facilitate our guessing, if we knew just a little more about the man's daily doings; his friends,—he was sure to make such—"

"Woman friends!" bitterly.

"Yes, and his occupations."

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"Then why, in the name of all wisdom, did you not suggest this before?"

"My dear sir! Don't force me to repeat that old chestnut about foresight and hindsight! Frankly, it did not seem good to me, then. I did not imagine the chap would prove so interesting."

My old friend was smiling now. He seemed to ponder for a moment, and he let himself sink back into his usual position of lounging comfort.

"I won't try to do any more guessing, Ken!" he said, taking up a fresh cigar and nipping off its tip. Go ahead, boy, and give us your theories, your full of them already, I'll wager."

"Then you'll lose your money. But, seriously, do you think it 's worth while to theorize much without more data? There 'll surely be a letter from Soames soon; and—I have a notion that you'll hear again from Meyrick."

"Umph! At least you must have a thought as to his motive."

"Oh, several, and quite plausible ones, they seem."

"Out with them! I want something to chew on."

"First then, his fund may have grown too rapidly less, and the trip on the Urania is merely to risk a little, while bluffing you for hush money. He 's equal to it, don't you think?"

"He 's equal to anything in the line of villainy! Yes, that may be it. I don't fancy he knows how sure I was to hear in advance of his coming. What else?"

"Again, he may have no thought of troubling you. Indeed I think this the most plausible idea. Why may he not be simply coming back to take up his old trade where he laid it down? 'Jimmy, crow,' and the rest?"

"By jove! I believe that's the right idea, Ken!"

"I 'm not so sure! Would it not be quite as plausible to surmise that he has been practicing his old tricks over there, and is crossing the ocean to escape the French police? Hence the mechanic's costume, the slight disguise and the limp."

"By Jove!" The Captain stopped short and laughed in self derision. "Hear me, repeating myself like an old parrot, at every fresh suggestion! Better send me home, Kenneth, before I lose the remnant of my wits."

I smiled, and was slow to answer. The next move, like the initial one, must come from the other side; and that, as I suggested to him, might come in the form of the arrival of the Urania with a second class passenger, slightly lame, dressed like a mechanic.

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"Of course, we must keep an eye on the steamship arrivals," I said, "and some one must meet the Urania."

"Of course, too, this becomes your bear hunt, Ken, from this moment, and I wish you joy of it!" Then as I did not answer promptly, his genial face became serious. "Look here Ken, am I becoming an old nuisance, tumbling in upon you at all hours with my conundrums? Meyrick conundrums at that? Damn the brute! I wish you—no, I—had shot him that night." And his kindly eyes grew sombre.

I laughed with more of mirth than I felt. "Behold the prehistoric man, the old Adam, peeping out from behind a most correct veneer of culture!" I cried. "Captain Wrayland, I 'd thank you sir, not to go beating about the bush, when you want to invest, yet more recklessly, in Scotland Yard! Or is it Paris this time? If you think I 'm getting along in years too rapidly to grapple with this 'conundrum' our friend Meyrick has hurled into Camp, say the word! Or—no, you need not say it, for it won't do you any good; the proverbial wild horses could not keep me from that water front when the Urania disgorges there! Oh, you 'll not coax me to pass up my claim on Mr. Meyrick, once I clap my eyes on him again; and when he 's been punished for wife murder and robbery, I 've still another crow to pick with him."

The Captain was smiling now. "And what may that be," he asked, quite mildly.

"It 's his inhuman treatment of my faithful friend Tonto! To bind, gag, and half murder, with his brutal cords and knots, that loyal guardian of his home and friends! Captain, I 've never quite forgiven you for not letting me have that dog for my own."

His smile faded. "I suppose I was a two footed old hog, my boy, but somehow—"

"By the way," I hurried on. "I don't think Meyrick's case would ever need judge or jury, if it should come before my stanch friend Tonto. That dog has a long memory for insults, or I am much mistaken."

He eyed me questioningly. "I can't quite give you the old dog, Ken," he said slowly, as if the words were uttered to a running mental accompaniment, but I 'll loan him, if you like, indefinitely; and—even for the city—"

"Tonto would not like city life, and you 're right in leaving him at Wraylands, Captain."

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"And," he went on as if I had not spoken, "you know he 's yours in my will, along with Daphne's huntress and my grey roadster. Ken, you may as well hear it, for I see through all your bluff; you 're standing by me like—like a son! And I 'm leaning upon you more and more as the years pass on! Oh, I 'm mighty glad to have your keen brain and young strength, to rely upon at need. And I know you 're willing to stand by me, but, all the same, I can see how much of your time this may take, and I know that you 've no lack of other problems. Come! honest now, isn 't there something else, some other case that may need you first, when—"

"When the Urania rings 'all hands ashore?'" I broke in, and then, I hastily began to tell him, not, at first, of the Doverfields case, but of my adventure at the theatre entrance, and of Madam Barthelme's solitaire. As I had hoped, it took him away from himself, and, presently, he was chatting in his usual cheery strain, leaving me, at last, with these words:

"Well, Ken, we will divide this work, according to our respective ages; I 'll watch the mails and you the steamboats. I 've a notion that we 've more of this to learn, and, mark me, one of your theories will be the right one! Personally, I favor the last. I believe he 's dodging the Paris police! Good-night, old man! God bless you!" He pressed my hand after his usual fashion when trying to express himself and whisked away.

And now, being left alone, I sat down to think seriously of this matter, for in giving out my three theories, I had not mentioned the one that had lain in my hand from the first; one which I fancied and feared, might prove to be the right one.

To begin, I believed this Ralph Meyrick to be a much more astute villain than he seemed. I believed him capable of loftier flights of the imagination, more skillfully laid plans, and shrewder methods of executing them, than either his friends or his foes had given him credit for, and I feared trouble for the Captain. If Meyrick had written his letter as a decoy, and if Soames, of Scotland Yard, was not mistaken in his man, it meant that Meyrick was surely coming to deal for blackmail, or for other vile purpose, with Captain Wrayland. But how? And, if simply for blackmail, why this needless sham illness and cool appeal for aid? Why stir up expectations, when, to appear before his victim suddenly and without warning, was obviously the wiser and more promising course? No, the method in this case did not [illegible]e with the theory!

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Again, was he, for a reason, coming back to resume his old life? Then, clearly, he would be too clever to write this misleading letter to Captain Wrayland. And last, if fleeing in disguise from the scene of some fresh crime, his letter was again a useless piece of folly, and fitted ill with the assumed fact that, twelve days later, he was to set sail for America.

True, this flitting might have been unpremeditated; suddenly enforced, as it were, and the letter written carelessly, in the hope of reaping some small reward. And, if this were the case, perhaps a cable message to the right parties would bring us information. But, might not my friend the Captain have been too hasty in his conclusion that Meyrick was not aware of the shadow at his heels?

Since the tragedy at Wraylands and my establishment in the city, quite unknown to the Captain I had made a study of the man who called himself Ralph Meyrick. My research had convinced me that, with all his seeming recklessness and daring, Meyrick possessed the other requisites that go to make our most successful and difficult criminals: caution, foresight, an eye always to windward, and a knowledge of men.

This being the case, Meyrick knew Captain Wrayland. He had had ample opportunity to know him; and why should he not suspect the Captain of doing precisely what he had done? Such men are always on guard, and if Meyrick suspected that his movements were watched, would he not take precautions to baffle the watcher or, at least, to complicate the clues? More especially if he wished to be in New York and be thought to be in Europe.

It was a habit of mine, when studying a difficult case, to try to put myself in the place of the person studied, and by this process, together with my knowledge of the man, I was soon able to answer the above query. I believed that he would try so to mislead. But why was it necessary, in endeavoring to return to New York incognito, to befool the Captain?

I had little doubt that the report of the man Soames was correct, and that Ralph Meyrick, while feigning illness in Paris, was in reality at that moment, *en route* for American shores. And if this were the fact—wherefore?

Again I assumed the identity of Mr. Meyrick. Would I, if I were he and desiring to return to New York to resume my old burglarious profession, think it needful to avoid possible spies

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by assuming a disguise? Undoubtedly, yes; given the belief in the spies. And, would I think it a safeguard to write to the Captain, professing illness, almost in face of the fact that an inquiry might follow? Decidedly, no!

Again, would I, having made myself *persona non grata* with the French police, and seeking to return to the scenes of former crimes—would I set out in disguise? Again, yes!

But then, would I write to the Captain as he had written? No!

And lastly, if I wished to levy blackmail, at much personal risk, would I antagonize more than was needful the man I desired to loot, by lying to him in advance? What folly! I was not a fool! Neither, to my thinking, was Meyrick. No! the three theories, or possibilities, I had propounded for the Captain's benefit, were not tenable. They did not fit what I believed to be the facts in the case.

What then was the man's reason for returning to this city, where he was known to the police, and where he assuredly was not wanted? I did not weigh his promise to the Captain not to return, for such promise, I felt assured, would not tip the scale against a feather's weight.

That his coming meant mischief I felt assured. I could hardly believe that Meyrick had actually discovered the identity of the watch upon his movements. Indeed, to me, the fact that Soames still watched, was proof of this; but that he felt a suspicion, strong enough to be worth acting upon, I believed.

The question with me, then, was not as to Meyrick's reason for coming; but, as to his reason for wishing or needing, to mislead the Captain; and that this was his purpose, appeared clear to me.

Of two things I was already assured. First, we must watch for the arrival of the disguised Meyrick; not as for the ordinary traveller, who would disembark in the open; but closely, keenly, as for one who will elude, if possible, all chance of being closely observed, and after the arrival of the Urania, I must watch over the Captain; for, clearly, the coming of Meyrick, in some manner, concerned him. That a blow of some sort was aimed at Captain Wrayland, or some person connected with him, I felt sure.

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CHAPTER XI.

NEXT MORNING.

I had risen early the next morning to put my plans in order, so that nothing might conflict with what I meant should be a hard day's work, possibly an eventful one. I was on the point of closing my desk before leaving the office, when Mr. Doverfields came in, pushing past the boy, Jim, with scant ceremony, waving him back, and almost closing the door in his face.

"Mr. Jasper," he exclaimed, "thank goodness you are here!" He checked himself and sat down in the nearest chair, drawing his breath quickly and evidently controlling himself with an effort. It was not until he was outwardly calm, though still white to the lips, that he spoke, leaning forward to put something before me upon my desk as he did so.

"Look at that," said he, "and guess, if you can, where I found it."

I took up the bit of folded paper, opened it wonderingly, and found within a fragment of cardboard, angular in shape and charred at its inner edge. "A photograph" I exclaimed. Yes, it was the corner of a photograph, snatched, evidently, from the flames, or ashes. "What is it?" I asked. But I did not look up. I already knew, but I made no effort to guess where it was found; I fancied,—I almost feared, that I knew but too well.

"It is a corner, torn or burned, or perhaps both, from the picture we wanted to find! The picture of my—of Mrs. Doverfields' jewels."

"And you found it—"

"Last evening, late! I went into my wife's boudoir, and noted at once, that she had a tiny fire in the grate. I asked if she was chilly, and she said 'a little,' and that the fire looked cheery. Besides, she added, she had been burning old letters; her desk was overflowing. The fire was smouldering, and I don 't know what possessed me to walk to the fireplace and give a thrust at one of the sticks with the toe of my boot. I saw that fragment, as the charred stick fell back, and when, a moment later, my wife turned to say something to her maid, who had been busy in

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the next room, I picked it up quickly, hid it in my handkerchief, and soon left the room. Evidently, my wife had burned it! Can you guess why?"

I shook my head.

"I 'd give the value of those diamonds to know!" he said hoarsely.

"Did you speak with her? Does she know what you have found?"

"No. And she will not,—until I know more! Know all there is to learn! For now, and he looked at me fixedly, "I must know all, Mr. Jasper!"

"Mr. Doverfields," I returned his look in kind. "I have already formed my plans. Do you wish them carried out?"

"Man!" he exclaimed, "the diamonds are nothing compared to my—" he stopped at a gesture from me.

"Before you say more," I suggested, "allow me to say that, in my opinion, the one mystery contains the other!"

"Ah!" he sighed, "since last night I have imagined so many things!"

"Then, pray allow me to advise you in this. Bridle your imagination, and hold your judgment in abeyance. I will do my best, meantime, to serve you."

Little more was said. He left the fragment of burnt cardboard in my keeping and soon went his way, and I turned to my memoranda of "next things" to be done, wondering, in view of the Captain's visit, if it would not be well to change the order of it. It ran thus:

1st. At 10 A. M. call for J. B. Go to Police Headquarters.
2nd. Bank, noon.
3rd. Round of pawnbrokers, in afternoon and evening.
4th. Visit the "queers," late evening.

I looked at my watch as I laid down the little book. "At least," I said to myself "we will keep engagement number one!"

At twelve minutes before ten o'clock, I drove to the "residence" of Josephine Bryce in a modest cab and found her waiting: expectant and even a bit eager. Clearly I had already, in some measure, gained her confidence. Not because of my especial charm, assumed or real, but because of the nature of the girl, who, herself without guile, was slow to suspect it; and, because she was fearless, with the courage of innocence and ignorance,—which, alas! go together more often than the philanthropic like to

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think; besides she had pondered over the matter, and, evidently, had fully "made up her mind," as she calmly informed me, while we drove to the office of the chief of police.

"I confess I was some scared," she said, "when you first came in upon me; it s'prised me so. And I was some worried, too, about the way I left the Doverfields' place. My first place, and all, and me a stranger in town, and with no city ref'rences! An' then, I thought over what you 'd said, after you 'd gone away, an' I says to myself, 'truth's truth! an' right's right,' every time, an' I'm goin to tell the one and do the other, and jest let Rome howl!" Here I suppressed a smile with some difficulty, for the climax was as lofty as it was unexpected, and was borrowed, no doubt, from some long remembered lecture.

"I ain 't done a thing to be ashamed of! Though I was a kind of a fool, to be took in so by that young man. But I will say 't he was just as honest an' open an' pleasant lookin' an' talkin' as—as you be, sir! I—I don 't know your name?" and she looked an inquiry, in full faith that she had just uttered a compliment.

The girl's honesty was contagious. "I won't give you a fictitious name, Miss Bryce," I said, "at least not yet, so you may just call me officer, for the present. When you have fully decided that I 'm a real friend to you, as I hope you will, then you shall have my card."

"Thank 'ee sir," she answered, and then turning slightly she looked me over, with open criticism shading into approval, I fancied, but finished by dealing my vanity a blow from which it has never yet recovered—"I 'd kind o' like to see your wife!" she said musingly.

"So would I!" I responded, and she joined in the laughter I no longer tried to suppress.

"Well, I must say!" she announced. "Puttin' my foot in it again! I guess I 'll let you do the talkin' now."

I took her at her word and at once began to question her, concerning the fellow she had called George; telling her frankly, whom I believed him to be, and finally asking her if she would recognize his photograph.

"I couldn 't forget it!" she declared. "Not if I tried ever so! He had n't no namby-pamby face; that feller had n't, and I 'd know it sure!" And then the stronger side of the girl's nature flashed into view.

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"I 'll do anything I can, sir, to help you and the Police Captain." I was letting him figure as the power of which I was only an agent. "I 'm pretty ignorant," she continued, "but I know they have to keep witnesses for days, sometimes, shut up in the jail. Well, I hope there 'll be a woman or two there, for I 'd have to stay there if I 'm out of a place long. But I 'll do all I can, sir! An' I 'll think a lot more of myself when that 'smart Alec' with the honest face is caught, that is, if you 're sure he 's the burglar."

"I believe he is one of them," I assured her, and I mentally resolved that this girl should come to no ill while in the hands of the law, or after, if I could help it.

We had now arrived at police headquarters, where the chief received my companion with gravest courtesy,—nodding his approval to me, across her shoulder. Soon we were closely scrutinizing hundreds of pictures of criminals, of all grades and sorts; for we chose to let her come upon the face of which we were in search, the counterpart of the wily George, without too much assistance, and by selection. I had much confidence in this attempt, for all that the girl had told me, as well as the *modus operandi* of the robbery, led me to believe that "George" was an old timer, a professional crook, and there were few of these, at least of the calibre to do such daring and successful work as that of the Doverfields robbery, who had not at some time posed none too willingly, for his portrait, and I was right, as the result proved.

I was beginning to lose faith in my own predictions, and we had almost reached the last of the lot when the girl exclaimed sharply: "There—there he is!" And she put her forefinger upon the picture of a rather good looking young man, with a face so open eyed, so honest, so "green," that it was small wonder poor Josephine Bryce had been deceived in him.

"That 's him!" she reiterated; and I laughed aloud. I need not have come here to find that face. It was that of "Keen Johnny," keen Johnny Deegan, the ablest, most daringly reckless of crooks and house-breakers; and the most difficult to find. I had his picture in my own small, but select collection; and I was not the only one who would be glad to know where to put a hand upon keen Johnny, slipperiest of crooks.

"If it 's him you 're after," said the officer in attendance, "I wish you joy of him! He 's the old un himself, when it comes to a hide out!"

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THERE! THERE HE IS!

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"Remember the fox's tail," I warned him; and, after a long series of questions, all satisfactorily answered, I took my companion away, well pleased, on the whole, assuring her that she had advanced my search at least one full step.

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CHAPTER XII.

CRAIG BECOMES A BUTTERFLY.

I had taken Josephine Bryce to investigate the rogues' gallery and in turn be investigated by the Chief of Police. Evidently she distrusted her present landlady, and desiring to shun her landlady's sons, one of whom was "real silly," and the other "impudent."

"I almost hoped they 'd ask me to stay in the jail," she declared, "for I can 't feel that I 'm in a quite respectable place. I don 't care how cheap it is so it 's decent. I 'd be willin' to work for my board, till this case is settled. No sir, thank you! I don't want you or any one to pay for my keep, but if you would speak a good word to some respectable lady that wants a girl, I 'd be awfully relieved."

Instantly a thought occurred to me. I had determined to call upon the Captain's sister that day or evening. We were very good friends, and I felt that now I must take this clever lady a little way into my confidence.

I saw that the hour was late for a Saturday call at the bank where the Doverfields diamonds had been deposited, so decided to call upon Mrs. Devereaux. With this in mind I hurried back to my rooms, a suite which I shared with my friend and partner, Craig.

I made my afternoon toilet, and had sallied out upon the street in search of a carnation for my buttonhole, when, a little to my surprise, I came upon Royston Craig sauntering slowly along, cigar in mouth.

He was standing before a florist's window, and as I came upon him I fully expected to see him start, and possibly, betray the flush of the business man caught playing truant during business hours.

"All hail, Sir lily of the field!" I said, close at his shoulder. "What is it to be, a violet, or a whole basket of roses?"

Craig turned upon me with utmost *sang froid*, and actually beamed a welcome. "Hello, Kenneth! I was sort of wishing

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some dude with a high society air would dawn upon my vision; lunched yet?"

"Yet? I should think so! And you—of course?"

"Not yet. Fact is, I had thought of lunching at the 'W. A.' all by my lonesome, but now that I 've struck you—"

"Thanks, but I 've lost my appetite. Never lunch twice on the same day anyhow, and—"

"Never mind the rest. You 're going to lunch with me, that is if you have no appointment of importance." And he took my arm in a firm grasp. Now, I knew my friend too well to quiz him overmuch, or to ask questions. He was not to be drawn out by question or criticism. He would tell his purpose, if he really had one, as I believed, so I merely swung into step and drew him toward the door of the florist's bower.

"Let 's get our boutonnieres," I suggested. "I know you were thinking of one, and then, *en avant!* It 's a bit late now, to witness the swell *entrèe* into the palm room, or, is it to be—" but he checked my speech by a brisk entrance into the place of blossoms, nodding palms, ferns and swaying vines. Craig led the way, as we entered the splendid room well filled with fashionable late lunchers, and I observed that he glanced critically about before he signified to the obsequious attendant that part of it where he would choose to sit.

Now, Craig, while not a society man in the strictest sense, was still far from being unknown in the best circles.

While too rugged to be strictly handsome, Craig was no less a striking figure, upright, and of athletic build, and we were greeted here and there, with nods and smiles, as we followed our conductor half across the big room to our chosen places.

We had scarcely given our preliminary order for what was to me, an almost untasted luncheon, when I began to understand, or to believe that I did, my friend's motive in coming so far, and at such an hour, for his midday meal. He was calmly studying the faces about him, and I was soon assured that he had come to look for some one and that he did not attempt nor intend to conceal the fact. He glanced from right to left, so slowly that I could not know whether he found what he sought.

Finally with, as I fancied, a look of disappointment upon his face, he ceased to glance about him.

As our waiter turned away, having taken Craig's second order, I let my napkin slip from my knee, and bent quickly, catching it

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as it fell. As I drew myself erect I was conscious that Craig was looking directly into the space where my head had been, and, as I returned to my place, for a moment, he seemed to be staring straight through me.

"Would you mind shifting your position just a little, Ken?" he asked, "to the right, please."

Then, almost instantly, as I once more bent down as if scrutinizing the floor, he added. "All right, old man! No, don 't move your chair!—I very much prefer that—that you do—not!" and he began to take lively interest in the savory dishes before him.

In the language of New England's "Mary Ann," I "knew my dooty," and when we arose I waited meekly while Craig passed me and slowly took the lead toward the entrance; nor was I surprised when he led the way around to the right, passing a stately group of palms, and coming out directly behind a table at which our young friend Hal Landis, sat facing us, and, before I, in my surprise, could identify the two ladies on his either hand, Craig had stopped, and Landis, with boyish effusiveness, had half risen.

"Why Craig—hello!"

"Ah Landis," Craig was speaking with sudden joviality. "Glad to see you so well occupied!" And then, as I came into view, he veered suddenly, and I saw Mrs. Landis holding out a delicate hand to him. The next moment I was being presented, and Madam Landis was introducing us both to Madam Devinne Barthelme, who received my friend with a smile, faint but gracious, and myself with frank recognition.

Landis was his usual cordial self, and his mother was really sincere in her desire to detain us; extra chairs were procured, and taking my cue with some inward surprise, from Craig, I demurred feebly, and then accepted the chair indicated by the nod of the elder lady, quite close at her side. They had almost finished their dessert, and Landis called for more wine, while Madam Barthelme, with charming candor, related, for the benefit of Craig and the lady, my small part in the little encounter at the entrance to the uptown theatre.

"And—do I understand that you have found no trace of the jewels?" asked Craig with much sympathetic interest.

"None! Not the slightest," replied the lady. "Still—how can I repine! I have lost my diamond, it may be, for all time, but—" and she threw out her slim, jewelled hands in a gesture unmistakably French, "I have been, in another way, most fortunate!

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I have found most kind friends. Such friends! And I so much a stranger in your city."

Was I mistaken, or, as I glanced up at the face of Mrs. Landis, did I see, even while the lips wore a conventional smile, a look of dissent or distaste gleam out and swiftly disappear behind her pale drooping lids? Then, while the talk became general, I learned that young Landis had prevailed upon his mother to call upon the beautiful stranger who bore, as Hal could assure this conventional mother, a most satisfactory letter of introduction from our own minister in Paris.

"It really seemed like obliging our own ambassador! An old acquaintance of mine, you know, and a real friend of my husband." murmured Mrs. Landis, in a gentle aside. Here she leaned toward the lady opposite. "Madam, pardon me; we, Mr. Jasper and myself, were speaking of our minister. Did you meet Mrs. Braveur, his sister, who is with him in Paris?"

"Alas, no!" Madam lifted her fine eyebrows. "Pray, do not misunderstand, dear Mrs. Landis: I know your ambassador but very slightly, and I fear it was to oblige some of my very good friends, mine and Monsieur Barthelme's, that he sent me the letter. I have been very little in the gay society of Paris, since the death of my husband," her fine face saddening, "and for two years before we traveled much, seeking the dry, sunny countries for his health. No, I never even saw this lady of whom you speak."

Mrs. Landis was known as a proud and most exclusive woman, but it was soon quite evident to me, that while the lady deprecated a too warm friendship between her son and this handsome stranger, she nevertheless admired her beauty and style.

Another thing I noted, was that Craig seemed frankly pleased and attracted by the handsome brunette, while she, on her part, bestowed upon him a full share of her smiling attention. Also, it was quite evident that Hal Landis grew slightly ill at ease, while his lady mother looked on with quiet approval. We all left the palm room together, and, before separating, Craig and I had accepted an invitation to dine with Mrs. Landis on the evening of the following Monday.

"It will be quite informal," the lady said, "and you, Mr. Jasper, will meet some friends there,—Captain Wrayland and his wife. I have heard them speak of you more than once."

She had invited Madam Devinne Barthelme to drive with her

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in the park, her son, of course, accompanying them. We put the ladies in their carriage and turned away to retrace our steps officeward. There was the usual throng upon the streets and we made our way slowly, both somewhat preoccupied and disinclined to talk. At the corner I pulled myself up suddenly.

"Upon my word, Roy, I must leave you here! I had quite forgotten for the moment, that I had written a note to Mrs. Devereaux asking her to receive me this afternoon. I will take a cab at the nearest stand, and you?"

"I shall go back to the office for an hour or two. A little matter of research, the same that took me to the Waldorf. Our agreeable friends almost put the matter out of my head; so I won't criticise you, my son. Only, take a friend's advice, Ken, and don 't lose any sleep over that charming Madam Barthelme. I 'm interested in that quarter somewhat."

He favored me with a smile at once whimsical, mocking, and enigmatic, and turning plunged into the crowd. As he crossed the street, seeing a cab making its way toward the side entrance to the hotel, I turned to watch it. Then seeing that it was about to discharge its fare I lifted my hand and started toward it, catching the cabman's eye as I went. I had reached the cab, and was about to step in, when I observed that the Landis carriage was drawn up just in front of me, and that Hal Landis was standing beside it.

"Here yet, are you?" he called on seeing me. "Something caught in the confounded harness, but we are off now. Ta, ta." And he sprang to his place upon the front seat.

I lifted my hat to the ladies as the carriage drew out of the line and bade my own cabman follow in its wake. As we swung out into the street, I heard an oath from the driver, and looking back saw a man dart out seemingly from between my own and the Landis vehicle. As he dodged my horse and the driver's oaths, I had just the glimpse of a pale, haggard face, hair grey and unkempt, and a figure that I recognized at once. "Gad!" I muttered. "It 's the sandwich man! and it looks as if he was watching the Landis carriage! Or else—upon—my—word!"

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CHAPTER XIII.

A DEFENSIVE ALLIANCE.

Mrs. Agnes Devereaux was a widow with a moderate fortune, was popular with the young, and beloved of the old, and to her daughter, a fair and stately girl of eighteen, she was, and ever had been, the ideal comrade, "guide, philosopher and friend." She was capable in matters of business, having lost her husband in a disastrous railroad accident while her daughter, Enid, was still a child. With all her charm she had not been caught again by matrimonial lures, and had welcomed her brother into her family, making him its nominal head. It was an ideal home for Captain Wraylands, and he seemed to grow younger in its genial atmosphere.

Mrs. Devereaux's house was on one of the quiet and aristocratic streets that radiate from Fifth avenue and the park, and it was not far from the somewhat more pretentious dwelling of the Landis family. Enid Devereaux and Hal Landis had been playmates and friends through childhood and youth, and the families had ever been on a cordial, almost intimate footing.

Captain Wrayland, upon his arrival in the city, had lost no time in introducing me into this little family circle, and I had long since acquired the footing of a friend of the family, always welcome, and seldom omitted from a pleasure program of Mrs. Devereaux's arranging. I had said, in my note, that I desired to consult her "upon a little private puzzle," and, as I fully expected, she was awaiting me in her snug little morning room, and alone.

"We shall be quite *tête-à-tête*," she said, as she welcomed me. "Enid has been rather moping lately, I fancy, and I have persuaded her uncle that it was his duty to take her up the river drive this lovely afternoon. They have just now driven away."

"Thank goodness!" I ejaculated, as I dropped into a cozy seat near her favorite window.

After turning to assure herself that the door was closed, and that we were quite alone, she said: "Kenneth, I am very anxious! And your note has increased that anxiety. Something has happened! Something serious; I am sure of it. Tell me

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the worst, and at once! No—wait! First tell me, does it concern Enid?"

The look in her eyes brought from me a prompt answer. "No. Assuredly not!"

She breathed a quick sigh of relief and then smiled faintly. "See how selfish we mothers can be. Then it does concern my brother? I knew he was troubled about something more than business. But—my other anxiety—" she checked herself, and turning, dropped into the nearest seat. "There," she said, more quietly. "I must not begin by mixing up things! Tell me, please, what has happened?"

I had meant to do this promptly, without loss of time, or waste of words, but now I hesitated, while I studied her face. "You know that I am the Captain's friend?" I began. "And that all I may do or say is in his interest!"

"Assuredly! we have ample proof of that!"

"Thanks! Before we go further, will you kindly tell me just what has caused you to think your brother has anything unpleasant upon his mind? Please think carefully, and do not omit anything that you may have observed since—yesterday."

Mrs. Devereaux was clever and tactful, and as direct upon occasion as the most accurate business man. She studied my face a moment, then replied:

"Yesterday I entered the library hastily, unaware that Albert was in the house. He was sitting near a small table, with an open letter in his hand, and before he could cover it, as he did a moment later, I saw that a cablegram lay upon the table. I recognized the business wrapper at once, and noted, with the same glance, that it had been opened, and, doubtless, read. I was in search of Enid and in some anxiety lest she had gone out without my seeing her; but even then, while I excused myself, and turned to go, I noted a look upon his face such as I have not seen there since that strange letter from Ralph Meyrick came on the day he left the prison." She paused long enough to dart toward me a quick look of inquiry; then, as I still sat silent, and apparently waiting, she resumed: "I found Enid, and, my anxiety being allayed, my mind went back to my brother, and the look of mingled vexation and doubt which I had seen upon his face. Of course when I found him not at all inclined to go out for the afternoon, I gave him ample opportunity to confide in me, and presently he did, in part."

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"In part?"

"Yes. He let me see a letter, posted in Paris, and written by Ralph Meyrick. You know what it contained?" I nodded. "But he neither showed me the cablegram, nor spoke of it; and yet somehow, I feel sure that message either came from Ralph Meyrick, or, in some way, concerned him! Now, don't suppose, Jasper, that I would have told you even this much if I did not happen to know that my brother visited you at a late hour last evening about this same letter. Am I not right?"

"Yes. And now, before I 'confess,' will you tell me, as nearly as you can, all that the Captain said to you, pertinent to that matter? Please understand me. Your brother has asked for my help, and I, in my turn, am here to ask for yours; for your confidence, and co-operation. I intend to be quite frank on my part."

"And—" with womanly quickness, "you are anxious yourself! You see something between the lines of this Paris letter?"

Again I bowed my head.

"You know," she said, with a more assured manner, "how the mere mention of poor Daphne's death excites and almost unnerves him. Of course he ran on in his usual way, for a few moments, denouncing Meyrick, and voicing his detestation of him, and I saw clearly that he put no faith in the statements in the letter. 'It 's my opinion,' he declared, hotly, 'that the villain means blackmail, or some manner of extortion; and that he 's counting on our strong desire for secrecy, in the matter of poor Daphne's death! He means to make that his lever, his crowbar!' And then he declared, with a preface of adjectives that I won't repeat, that, secrecy, or no secrecy, Ralph Meyrick would never finger another dollar of his money; and that, rather than this, he would spend every penny he possessed in putting the wretch back in prison, or on the scaffold. 'He 's planning a *coup* of some sort!' he declared, 'but he will find I am not so ignorant—' here he stopped, clapped his hand to the pocket, where, I felt sure, lay the cablegram and the letter, and suddenly shut up like a clam. He pooh-poohed when I mentioned the subject and soon went to see you. Now, that letter was written more than twelve days ago and it made me very anxious, for I do not believe that Meyrick is either ill or in want of money. If he were really ill and in need, he would have specified the amount he required; it would not have been small, and he would have sent on his physician's certificate! I know Ralph Meyrick's methods, I think."

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"You never approved of the marriage, I am told."

"Never! I detested the fellow from the first and he knew it."

"Doubtless. Tell me, Mrs. Devereaux, what, in your opinion, does this letter signify? What is his game?"

She drew her small figure erect and clasped her hands tightly in her lap.

"Ken Jasper, you men may laugh at 'woman's guesses.'"

"Intuitions," I interrupted. "I think they are often Heaven sent, my dear lady! Please be quite explicit."

"Well, I believe that Ralph Meyrick is planning mischief of some sort and that it menaces my brother! If he is not ill, he desires us to think he is, and that he means to go, eventually, to the Southwest in pursuit of fortune. But he is coming back; coming here, and if he does!" She paused. I was looking my surprise and admiration quite too plainly. "What is it?" she asked.

"Talk about woman's guesses!" I cried. "My dear lady, you, in a flash of intuitive vision have seen what I only arrived at by slow stages of what I have called reasoning; and, with the help of the cablegram, too, of which you know nothing, save that it has been received." And, before she could reply or question, I launched into the story of her brother's visit to me, and told her all I knew and surmised. To all of which she listened without comment until I had concluded, by saying, "I have been more frank with you than the Captain has been, and from a much more selfish motive. Your brother, knowing your hatred and distrust of this man, wished to spare you uneasiness, and he took no thought for himself. I, recognizing in you the nature that will suffer less from knowledge than from suspense, have made this my excuse for appealing to you for help."

"Mine?"

"Yours! I want your aid, your counsel; and I want, most of all, your tactful, watchful guardianship of the Captain, who could never be persuaded, by me, to be either cautious or suspicious of the 'little foxes.' If Meyrick arrives in the city and evades us, I believe his presence here will mean a menace to Captain Wrayland."

"And his purpose?"

"That, it is impossible to guess at or to reason out, now. If your woman's intuition can help me—" I paused, for there was a sound in the adjoining room and a hand upon the door. We

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were in Mrs. Devereaux's private sitting room, and no one in that household, uninvited, ever passed its closed door. Then we heard a quick call.

It was Enid's voice, and the face of her mother suddenly underwent a change. She leaned forward and put a swift hand upon my arm.

"Kenneth!" her low voice was strong with earnest appeal, "may I admit Enid and tell her all? She is devoted to her uncle; she is brave and keen witted; she can help me more than you think! She has great influence over my brother. And we can trust her in any emergency!"

I knew Enid Devereaux, and I believed in her, almost as did her mother. I nodded, and felt that all was going well.

With those two clever and devoted women to guard his coming and going, the Captain could not get far afield without my knowledge.

As Enid entered at her mother's bidding I saw, in both faces, what gave me cause for thought; and I knew that, not only did Mrs. Devereaux desire an ally, a confederate in her own home, but she also desired for her daughter an occupation; something absorbing beyond the ordinary, something that would arouse her, and take her out of herself; and, looking at the fair, girlish face, I felt that there was need of such occupation and mental arousing.

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CHAPTER XIV.

AT THE DEVEREAUX'S.

Enid Devereaux was tall, lithe, delicate and yet strong.

Slender, but not from the lack of development, quick, easy of movement, with eyes that shone with kindliness, Enid Devereaux had been guided by a wise and clever mother, and taught in a school as modern, scientific, and practical, as nineteenth century wisdom could compass. This young girl had early learned the folly of the merely fashionable and artistic cultivation. Through her language work she had gained rare powers of expression; through the science course, a keen appreciation of nature in all her moods and phases; while art and literature had broadened the aesthetic side of her being and trained her natural instinct for feeling and expression, beyond the common usages of the average schools.

It was a grave-faced, serious-eyed girl who advanced to meet me, with a sure and easy step that was as far from self-consciousness, as was her manner from vanity or affectation. But I looked in vain for the winning smile, the bright, quick word of greeting, and the humorous query and jest; for Enid Devereaux possessed a happy and bright nature, as kind and warming as was the sunshine and soft Spring breezes. But the sunshine was absent today; and there was a pathetic droop of the perfect lips.

As I held her hand a moment I felt the wisdom of ignoring all that was unusual in her manner, and as I glanced toward the door I spoke bluntly, endeavoring to rouse, and draw her out of herself.

"Is—is your uncle in the morning room, Enid?" I questioned.

"No, Mr. Ken, uncle went at once to his room. I—"

"But your drive, my child! Why so soon home?" queried her mother.

"It was not a success—our drive, 'mutter.' Uncle, as I readily saw, was preoccupied, and—I suppose I was dull. We did not go up the river, but drove round the park. And—neither of us cared for it. 'Mutter'—something is worrying Uncle Alf'! He was not himself, and,—I think he was glad to come back!"

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"And well that you did," I declared. "Miss Enid Devereaux, are you ready to join a conspiracy? An alliance, defensive and—possibly—offensive? Oh," as she looked from one to the other, "This is sober, earnest, Missy, and it concerns this same preoccupation that you have observed in your uncle."

"Yes, dear, it 's serious enough, I fear," declared Mrs. Devereaux. "We are most anxious—troubled. The situation is delicate. It may become dangerous; and—we need your help."

"You need me? There is really something to do?" Already a new look was dawning in the young face; eagerness and interest was speaking in her deep, brown eyes. I nodded silently.

"And—it concerns uncle? Tell me about it, Kenneth, don't hesitate, please!"

And sitting before me, with her hands in her mother's, and her eyes fixed upon mine, glowing with a new purpose as the tale proceeded, I told her all there was to tell. And after, for a long moment, there was utter silence in the room.

"Oh!" said the girl with fervor. "I thank you, both of you, for telling me this! If—if you had shut me out,—now—I could not have forgiven you! And I am sure I can help, a little. Jasper, that man is coming back for some evil purpose!"

"I fear so."

"And—oh, I do hope uncle will not allow him to levy blackmail! You will advise him against this, surely! Let the man tell his story—if he dare! Auntie is gone—Daphne is gone; let us all defy this wretch! Mother,"—There was life, animation, in her face now, and strength and courage in her voice—"What have you two been planning?"

"My dear child, do you not see that we can do little more than wait and watch for the present? Until the Urania arrives and the man begins to show his hand, what can we do?"

"True!" The girl sat straight and motionless before us. There was no excitement, no nervousness, in her look or manner, only eagerness and resolution, and utter self-forgetfulness. Suddenly she leaned toward me. "Kenneth, do you think uncle will be likely to take mamma or myself into his confidence? Any further, that is? Because," she hurried on, "if we are to be of any use, you must prevent this! You must advise him against it! He would understand all our little tricks, and we could not aid you. You must not allow him to frighten us, see?" and, for the first time, a gleam of mischief crossed her face.

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And so for an hour, we sat and talked of possibilities and risks, and all were united in the hope and belief that the Captain would be as good as his word, and would fling broadcast the story of Ralph Meyrick, and his identity as that of an ex-convict and burglar, rather than submit to blackmail in the smallest degree.

And then as I was about to go, Enid turned an eager face toward her mother, "'Mutterchen,' why can't we have an officer in plain clothes in the house? We are two lone women and uncle is not so young! Besides, there are burglars all about; and—" smiling across at me, "I almost fancy there may be suspicious persons about the place soon. Think how poor Ara Doverfields was robbed, and so boldly, too! To think of those splendid jewels, taken from under her very eyes almost." And then she swung about and came close to me. "Kenneth, what do you think of that case?"

I laughed, while I wondered if this keen-eyed young woman was trying to quiz me, and replied, "I 'll tell you my opinion when I know more about the affair. It 's certainly very interesting." And then the face of Josephine Bryce arose before my mind, and I dropped back into the chair I had lately vacated.

"By the way, ladies, I want you to help me place a young woman who is in want of a home," and I told them of Josephine, stating only that she had once been with Mrs. Doverfields, that she was needed as a witness in the Doverfields case, and that I had undertaken to find her a home, out of pure charity, of course. I told my story lamely, and feeling confident that they must guess my connection with the case, but, after a quick exchange of amazed glances, they met me with a cordial proffer of help, which ended in an offer to go with me to see the girl at once, and bring her home with them.

"She must be unique!" declared Enid. "'Mutter,' may I have her for my maid? Dear me, how dramatic and interesting things are growing! Shall I call the carriage? Why, mother, we—at least you ought to call upon Mrs. Doverfields, had you not?"

"Not too soon, my child; we will let the 'nine days' wonder die away a little first!"

"Wise 'mutter!'" murmured the girl, clasping her hands, "and foolish me!"

As we drove out upon the avenue, we met the Landis carriage

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returning from their drive. They had evidently just left the park, and Hal and Madam Barthelme were chatting and laughing in the best of spirits. I was about to speak of Madam when I caught a look, two looks. A single swift, tragic, sorrowful glance of the eyes from Enid, showing her soul and its trouble, and one from her mother, betraying her knowledge, her compassion and anxiety. Both glances passed instantly, and Mrs. Devereaux was bowing with a charming smile, while Enid's face was glowing, as she bowed smilingly and cordially, as the Landis party came opposite and passed.

"Oh, mamma, how funny,—and—what a shame!" A look of indignation replaced her laughing glance, and, looking across the space just vacated by the receding carriage, with our eyes following hers, we saw a poorly dressed man, scampering away from a tall policeman, who held aloft in his hands a pair of advertising boards.

"What—?" I questioned, and Enid broke in, unsmiling now.

"That poor creature! He seemed to pop up, boards and all, just behind the group of young people near that gate," nodding toward it, "and he pressed forward as if anxious to see—the beautiful lady with Mrs. Landis, probably—and then—suddenly—the policeman had him," here she laughed again, "then it was presto, change; the boards remained in the officer's hands, and the man, see! He is running toward that thicket of shrubbery! Dear me!" Sinking back into her place as if suddenly weary of her subject, "How great it is to be a tall policeman and how unlucky to be a poor sandwich man, with an eye for brunette beauty; and near Central Park, too! Well, he showed good taste, she is—very handsome."

"And—I think she bowed to you, Kenneth," observed Mrs. Devereaux, slightly smiling.

"Why, 'mutterchen!' Have you forgotten Mrs. Landis' note and the P. S., that Messrs. Craig and Jasper would meet us at dinner on Monday eve?"

"Quite so," the elder lady did not seem anxious to follow up the subject. But, while I am not given to confidences, I nevertheless knew when they were politic, as well as safe. So, turning toward Mrs. Devereaux I related the story of my little encounter with Madam Devinne Barthelme and of her lost solitaire.

Mrs. Devereaux listened with marked interest. "And this,"

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she said musingly, "happened—?" she glanced across at me with an outspoken inquiry in her eyes.

"A few days since—only." I replied, and then for a moment there was silence between us. It was Enid who next spoke.

"Diamonds and diamonds and diamonds! They are woman's glory and her bane. Mamma, dear, sell yours, and found—a school of domestic science. We can begin with the new girl—what—"

"Josephine Bryce," I replied. Enid had her mother's trick of asking half spoken questions.

"Josephine Bryce," she repeated. "At all events this sparkling and glowing new friend of the Landis family, is fitted by nature for the wearing of diamonds; Mrs. Doverfields now, is not, in my opinion. She has the soft, fine delicate loveliness that can carry off pearls and not be cheapened by them. Is this the street? 'Mutterchen,' will you let me go in after our young woman? I—I think I should like to."

Of course she had her way; and while she waited within, Mrs. Devereaux dropped her mask of indifference, and turned a questioning and troubled face to me. "Kenneth," she said, under her breath, as if the street were full of listeners. "Did you—notice—anything?"

I nodded gravely.

"And—can there really be cause for this? You must know! Enid and I chanced to call at the Waldorf—it must have been the day after the two met—at the theatre and—we met them at the entrance—they were going out together. He was so absorbed that he only saw us after Enid had passed beyond them both. He flushed, like a guilty school boy, and Enid made a jest of his seeming embarrassment, but she,—both of us—had seen his look of rapt devotion. I was not sure until then,—that she cared."

"It won't last," I said lightly, "When Craig enters the field."

"Royston Craig! Why, Kenneth———"

"Careful!" Enid had just appeared at the top of the short flight of steps, with Josephine close behind, and the light laugh that drew an answering giggle from the new maid, had the right ring in it.

"Strange," I murmured, "how the trials and perplexities of one half of the world seem needful to the welfare and comfort of the other half. I am going to leave you here, Mrs. Devereaux,

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after I have duly presented you to Josephine, and reassured her as to your character."

And this I did. Not far away lived a man whom I wished to see and converse with at some length, and the time seemed favorable, for he was seldom found abroad after his luncheon hour and it was now mid-afternoon.

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CHAPTER XV.

A COIL INDEED!

I knew that it was neither needful nor required that I should set out, single handed, to capture—when I had found him—Keen Johnny Deegan.

There would be plenty of help offered for this search; for Keen Johnny was wanted on all sides. That he was in hiding, by day, I felt sure, and now, after this last big robbery, he would be doubly discreet. Perhaps, when the Doverfield's robbery had been put in the background by some later sensation in high life, I might begin to look for him, but it was too soon, as yet. Having assured myself of this, I went next day to the bank where the jewels had been deposited, asked boldly for the Cashier, and frankly told him my business. Imagine my surprise when he said,—"Yes, we have rather wondered why we did not hear from some one concerned with that affair, Doverfields, or his lawyer, or—"

"Mrs. Doverfields' health," I began, "has concerned her husband, I fancy, quite as much as has this loss!"

"The loss! There it is! How could they have been so singularly negligent, and after our warning, that very morning! One would suppose they would have had, at least a brace of officers in the house!"

Here was a facer! As soon as I could get my breath, I said with an appearance of coolness I was far from feeling, "That warning—yes! I want you to tell me about that, Mr. Fell! Somehow, among so many details, you know, I don't seem to get all clear. Give me, if you please, the facts, from your point of view."

"Why, the facts are simple enough! We found in the mail an anonymous letter telling us that the withdrawal of Mrs. Doverfields' diamonds was known already. She had drawn them in person, only the day before, you must know, saying that her husband desired to see them, and to have her wear them at the Charity Ball. The letter was anonymous or, rather, it was merely signed, 'A woman who knows,' but the matter was so

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serious that we wrote at once, quoting the letter in full and advising Doverfields to be on his guard."

"And you sent it—when?"

"That morning at eleven a. m., or thereabouts."

"Directed—how?"

"Knowing Mr. Doverfields to be absent often for the day, and the matter being important, it was addressed to Mr. or Mrs. Doverfields, at their residence."

Here was a coil indeed! Of course I quite understood, though I did not so express myself, that the warning had fallen into the hands of the wife, and had never been seen by the husband. But her motive? I could not even guess it. That Mrs. Arabel Doverfields should be in collusion with Keen Johnny Deegan, and should permit him to steal her own, and her husband's jewels, was an incredibility worthy of a "penny dreadful," and to go to my client with the knowledge I now possessed, and no more, would be a barbarity. On the other hand, would I not risk defeat by going to her with what I knew? I pondered the question late that night, and came to the conclusion that it behooved me to go deeper into the Doverfield family history.

"There will be little use in looking among the dealers and pawn shops for your diamonds, for some time," I said to Mr. Doverfields, when we next met. "Keen Johnny and his confederate will not have the hardihood to offer them to anyone for some time to come, and the most crooked 'fence' in the city would hesitate to take them while the affair is so new. They would wait until the hunt among their kind had been made, and they know themselves closely watched at present. We must have patience."

"Is there no chance but that of waiting their time?"

"Yes, but an improbable one. If Keen Johnny should happen to be arrested, for some other offense, I might get something out of him, but, that would be too good to be true."

Nevertheless, that is precisely what occurred early on Sunday morning; the fellow was taken, red handed, in an assault of the most daring order, and with "intent to kill." The proof seemed positive—I was notified at once of his capture—and his chance appeared so hopeless that I felt quite certain of securing from him a confession, and went at once to investigate.

I need not chronicle our interview in full, which I obtained

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without difficulty, and without the ceremony of asking his consent.

After describing to him in the fewest and boldest words just how I had traced the deed to him, I said—"Now, I give you credit for doing your own planning, and if you also did the 'guying,' it was simply because the other fellow couldn't. I 'm ready to wager he was paid by the job and had no handling of the booty. More than likely he is wanted for something and is in your power."

Johnny's broad grin eloquently confirmed this tentative statement. "You know," I went on "where the jewels are! Now, I need not tell you how slim your chances are this time!" Johnny grunted and shrugged his shoulders. "And I need not tell you how much this diamond business, if put before a jury, would lengthen your sentence. I 'm here to compromise. Tell me where the diamonds are, and how we can best get them back, and, if we do get them, this thing shall be dropped, so far as you are concerned, and your name left out of it."

Keen Johnny threw back his head and laughed a good humored, hilarious laugh. He was the best natured and jolliest thief it was ever my lot to come across, and while this was my first actual encounter and acquaintance with this expert burglar, it was not my last.

"If I knew where to look for the Doverfields' diamonds," he finally said, when he finished laughing, "and if I had n't,—as you see, a previous and pressing engagement, I 'd set out to hunt them up instanter! But—while I fully believe there are some diamonds in the family, I have never set eyes on them!"

"I did not come here to jest, Deegan!" I began with dignity.

"No more did I! I 'd much rather do my jesting somewhere else! But this is on the square, boss! I 've never seen the Doverfields' diamonds, worse luck!"

"Do you deny—"

"Deny nothing! I 'm your man, right enough! But—there wasn't a real stone among the whole blamed lot, and the settings, even, were plate! I call that a low down trick to play on an honest fellow like me, after all the sweetness I 'd wasted on that gullible little Josey, too!"

When he had exhausted his chaff, Keen Johnny told his story. "Yes, we got the swag all right: the door was not even locked! The bedroom door, I mean, and the key was in the inner

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side. I 'd a mind to lock the little woman in, just for fun, but she had slept so accommodatingly, I thought better of it. The key was stuck in the drawer, too, and I left it as I found it."

"In the drawer?" I asked quickly.

"Yep! that 's what I said. I took a few of the pieces, they were a handsome lot, to a friend,—he 's not so much my friend since, by the by—to get some money on,"—Johnny, as I learned later, seldom descended to thieves argot,—"meaning to go over the big pond on that, and to dispose of the rest in Paris or Vienna—"

"Why not London?" I asked.

"Made in London, the real ones. Oh, I know my biz! And I didn't mean to do another stroke of work here. I 've grown too—blamed—popular lately! But when I went 'round for my cash I couldn't find my man, and next day—well, he knew always where a letter could be left for me, and there it was. Whoo! but he laid it on! I couldn't believe his yarn! thought 'twas some rig of his; so I ventured out, and was followed and spotted quick. Curse the luck! If the diamonds had been anything but paste I 'd be on the blue water right now!"

"This was too much," I said, as I went home from my interview with Keen Johnny, and, after long deliberation, I repeated it. "It was too much!" and then I added, "Now it is time to see Mrs. Doverfields!" But again second thought held me back.

I knew where to find, in the city, a man whose specialty was the making and selling of sham jewels. Not the poor shams bought by servant and shop girls, but stones that were sought after by actresses, and by some society women, and which would deceive the very elect. "If these imitations were made in this city," I assured myself, "they were made by Gensenberg." On my way to see Gensenberg, I called again at the bank to ask one question. That question was,—

"Since the Doverfields' diamonds were first put into the vault here, were they ever taken out, previous to this last time? and the answer was, "Yes."

They had been called for, it appeared, by Mrs. Doverfields, during the past winter. She wanted to wear them, she had said, at a "Bachelor's" ball, and it was found, by reference to the books, that she had kept them two weeks. I did not know Gensenberg, but he seemed to have heard of me, and when he was assured that I was acting for Mr. Austin Doverfields, he willingly answered my questions.

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"Yes, he had copied the Doverfields' diamonds; at first the lady had not given her name, but when she learned that he knew some of the pieces, through having read of them, and had once seen her at the opera, wearing a certain spray of unique pattern, she confided to him, that she was Mrs. Doverfields, a fact which the cunning dealer in paste already knew. Having so many valuable jewels in the house, she had grown fearful and, having learned that some ladies wore imitations made by him, and so cleverly as to defy detection by any save an expert, she had called upon him for counterfeits to take with her upon her frequent journeys.

"He had made them, of course; and—she had paid him a liberal sum. He had 'wondered much,' he added, on hearing of the burglary, if it were the real or the sham jewels which had been stolen.

I informed him that "the jewels" had been taken from the vault only a day or two before the theft.

I had heard quite enough for the present, and after requesting him to treat our interview as confidential, and declaring that I must see him again, I left him. And now, yes now, I assured myself, I would see Mrs. Doverfields.

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CHAPTER XVI.

A WOMAN AT BAY.

It took me half the evening to reconcile what I had heard, at the bank, and at the jail, with my preconceived ideas concerning the Doverfields case, and, for the time, all other things of outside interest, seemed blotted from my mind. That Mrs. Doverfields was playing a part, that she suspected, and was attempting to shield someone, I could quite readily believe. Her indifference concerning the jewel list, the destruction of the photograph, her dismissal of the girl, Josephine; above all her manner, her looks, and her evident anxiety, amounting—as it seemed to me, at moments, almost to fear,— all gave proof of this. But the sham jewels! What a situation! And the real ones! where then, were these? Clearly the Doverfields case was taking on an entirely new aspect, and a most strange one.

I studied the situation until far into the night, and I wished mightily that I could take Craig into my confidence. Then, as I reviewed my talk with Keen Johnny, I began to doubt. Might he not be tracking me, after all? Being a prisoner, would it not be quite like him to claim a failure, and might not the real jewels be safely concealed somewhere? But after much thought, and examination of the pros and cons, I could hardly believe Keen Johnny had lied to me. If he had secured the real diamonds would not his knowledge of their place of concealment have been a weapon in his hands?

After all, I found it hardest to believe Mrs. Doverfields capable of playing a double part—of plotting against her husband, perhaps. It was useless to call on Mrs. Doverfields on Sunday, for her husband would be with her on that day, and I had no desire to see him, then.

As I set forth on Monday morning to confront Mrs. Doverfields, I felt quite secure of finding her husband out when I rang at the door, but I asked for him, in order to be assured that he was absent, before sending up my name to her. Nearly a week had passed since the robbery, and I knew, from Doctor Bird,

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that the lady had almost entirely recovered from her nervous attack; reassured, doubtless, I thought, by the meagerness of my reports, and by my repeated assertions to her husband, that the case was a very difficult one, and that I had small hope of soon reclaiming the diamonds. I had meant, of course, the real ones.

I had written upon the card which I had sent up to Mrs. Doverfields, "My business is with you, and is important," and I was not surprised when asked to go up to her sitting room. As I entered the room, the maid was drawing down the softly tinted window shades, and loosening over them the thin rosehued outer draperies, which, thus adjusted, threw over the room a rosy gray shadow, and softened the pallor of the woman, who, at that moment, entered by way of the curtained door, opposite the one near which I stood.

I had determined to make the interview as brief as possible, and, having returned, respectfully, her rather haughty bow, as soon as the maid had gone out by the door leading to the corridor, and had closed it softly, I began.

"My errand, Mrs. Doverfields, is to me an unpleasant one. I have made some surprising discoveries, and, before I go further, or make them known to others, I wish you to know their nature. Will you listen to a brief report of my investigations, thus far,—and—to my conclusions?"

She bowed again, seated herself, motioned me to a chair, which I did not take, and with her eyes upon my face, direct and disconcerting, she said coldly, "Go on."

"I have taught myself to be a close observer," I said, "and while here for the first time, I could not help noting, first, that you were much disturbed by this robbery; next, that you did not follow it up with enthusiasm; and, finally, that you seemed actually to be endeavoring to keep back helpful evidence, or what might prove such."

"Sir!"

"If I am wrong, madam, I apologize most humbly. I must give you my impressions, in order that you may follow me. I speak, for instance, of your hesitancy, and seeming inability to describe accurately your own jewels—"

"They were—so many!"

"In spite—" I went on, "of the fact that you wrote, with your own hand, the list and description. I do not want to make a mystery of my part in this business, and I must tell you that Mr.

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Doverfields found and brought me this very comprehensive list; and, also, that, later, he found, in your grate, proof that you had destroyed the photograph of these jewels,—all save a fragment, which he brought to me."

She was sitting very erect now, her hands clasping the arms of her cushioned chair, her lips white and set. All of the child look was gone from her delicate, blanched face, but she did not tremble, and her eyes met mine straight, firm, and clear. Somehow, they disconcerted me, and, manlike, I hardened my heart in consequence, as I went on.

"Your discharge of Josephine Bryce, at such a time, and for any reason, surprised me most of all, and puzzled me greatly. I sought for this girl at once, and—I found her!"

"Ah!"

"From her, and from another, I learned that you sent her away knowing, or believing, that she was concerned in the robbery."

"Was she not?" quickly.

"As an innocent tool, no more. When it was over she guessed that her so called lover was a burglar, and that the man who had slipped past her in the darkness, and who, she was led to believe, was only a shadow born of her imagination, was another thief, and she left this place in mortal terror of arrest. She did not guess that he was, like herself, only a tool who entered only that she might hear him go out the next moment, leaving her lover inside."

"And yet—you found her—it seems—readily."

"It is my business to find people, Mrs. Doverfields! I have also found the man who stole your—property—" she started, and her eyes questioned mine, but she did not speak. "And he has found, to his cost, that instead of stealing jewels of value, he has risked a prison for the sake of a beautiful collection of paste, set in imitation of the Doverfields jewels. Shall I give you the details, Mrs. Doverfields?"

She shook her head and slowly arose. Now that the crisis had come, this small, pale, delicate woman was self controlled, and, seemingly strong. "So," she said, "you have, it seems, stumbled upon the robber, or one of them—or is it only some cheap thief who, having nothing to lose sits in his cell and seeks to manufacture for himself a bit of notoriety as a diamond robber. And you, sir, presume to come to me with this—tale of false jewels! False—paste! And do you think me a woman

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who would wear, or mourn over paste jewels? The Doverfields diamonds are too well known to be thus copied—parodied."

She swung herself about until, with her back squarely toward me, she was moving toward the door, her head haughtily erect, her hand extended to reach the bell.

"Madam," I suggested, mildly, "are you willing to confront this man? I am personally convinced that he was in your room on last Tuesday night."

"I!" she faced me again with scorn upon her lip. She seemed to grow taller while she looked me straight in the eye. "You ask me to meet this jail bird? This weaver of melodrama? Assuredly, I will not!"

For a moment our eyes met, and while I think mine did not falter, or show the growing indecision that was fast entering my mind, neither did hers waver or express doubt. But—after a moment's thought, the haughtiness gradually changed to cold courtesy, she let the half upraised hand fall, and moved a step away from the door.

"Mr. Jasper," and now her tone and look was that of a queen, who, while aware of her subject's offense was yet minded to be loftily and indifferently lenient, "I know that you are looked upon as a man of unerring judgment, in affairs of doubt and mystery. My husband believes in you fully, and I also know that your social position is unassailable. I have allowed myself, for the moment, to forget that you are here with my consent, and at my desire, to help solve this strange robbery. But you can scarcely wonder that what you have just said has aroused feelings I should have held in control, and I must beg you to consider! Put yourself, if possible, for a moment, in my place! I am not fond of publicity and vulgar gossip, and yet I am, and have been for days, suffering the humiliation, not alone of being the subject of gossip, both in the newspapers and in society, but of feeling that because of my own heedlessness, I have exposed myself to danger, and my own and my husband's property to theft and utter loss."

"Not utter loss, let us hope!"

She waved her hand impatiently. "I have no such hope, and the fact that the robbers have taken this course, in order to secure for themselves a lighter sentence, and would add insult to injury by declaring to the world that the jewels they have robbed me of are paste, shows how helpless is our effort to regain them."

"Pardon me—just a word—there is no desire,—on my own

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part, nor on that of Keen Johnny Deegan, to make this statement public. Quite the contrary. The man shows actual chagrin, and quite dreads the possibility of his 'mis-hit,' as he calls it, becoming known! These people have their standards,—rather peculiar ones, 'tis true,—and he would be loath to lose his title, a title of honor, as viewed by the under world."

"Keen Johnny! Mr. Jasper, this man is keen! He knows that, as between what you call his 'mis-hit,' and the theft of many and valuable diamonds, the former will receive the lesser punishment; and, when this fellow emerges from a year or two of seclusion, and the jewels are in his hands once more, whose then will be the blunder?" She looked into my eyes long and earnestly, and all the anger had gone from her as she said, almost plaintively, "Mr. Jasper, how could you—a man of your acknowledged acumen—be deceived by this truly 'keen' criminal? Great heavens! His word against mine! And I—" her face growing cold again, "I am permitting you to accuse me! To bring the unsupported word of a criminal against that of a loyal wife, a woman with an unspotted name!" Suddenly she stiffened and stood erect before me. "Mr. Jasper, allow me to terminate this interview. In listening to you, I am wronging myself, and, still more my husband, who would never allow you to—"

"Madam," I came so close that I could have touched her hand, and my own face must have hardened, for I was almost certain that a slight tremor passed over her, but her look did not change, and her eyes still met mine coldly, indifferently. It seemed to me then, and after, that never from any pair of eyes had I met a more open, a more direct and fearless gaze. "For your own sake, madam, allow me to make a further statement."

She stirred impatiently,—then, as if holding back a haughty impulse, by a strong mental effort, she bowed slightly. "Begin," she said, as glancing behind her she took a backward step, and, sweeping aside her trailing draperies with one slender hand, sank into the chair that was nearest her. "I must not forget that you are trying to do a duty—" she said, with a touch of forbearance in voice and movement. "Take that chair, Mr. Jasper."

I bowed, but did not seat myself. Instead, I again placed myself opposite her, still standing, and in the moment of silence that followed, a hundred thoughts, doubts, possibilities, flitted through my mind. For a moment, I doubted myself, and distrusted my most carefully thought out reasonings and deductions,

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CHAPTER XVII.

I knew the danger of circumstantial evidence; and could see the possibilities on both sides. Looking into Ara Doverfields' pale, beautiful face, and in her clear eyes, that never hesitated to meet my own, I asked myself how it could be possible! Could it be possible that this fair woman of untarnished fame had been deceiving and tricking her husband and conniving with criminals? And yet— the pages of my "beauty book," arose before my mind's eye and I stiffened and threw back my head.

"If I have been over zealous, and it is proved that I am doing you an injustice, Madam, I shall suffer more from such a mistake then can you; and I ask you to consider, however this affair may end, that while striving to serve your husband, I have come to you in his absence that you may hear what I have done and discovered. And—it may rest with you in the end to say how much, if any, further—this that I am about to tell you, —shall go. Believe me, I shall wish to stand between yourself and all publicity, when possible."

With her fine eyes still fixed upon my face, and with just the least scornful curl of the short curved upper lip, she said, "Go on, if you please."

"I happen to know, what many do not. That there is in this city at least one artist in sham jewels. His name is Gensenberg—" I paused to note the effect of my words, but she did not stir so much as an eyelid. "If this woman is acting," I assured myself, "she is a royal actress." I rapidly described to her my visit to the maker of paste jewels, and again paused.

"Have you done?" She asked in the clearest of icy tones.

Was she trying to exasperate me? If so, she had almost succeeded. "Not quite," I replied. "On the morning of the day before the robbery, your bankers received a note warning them that said robbery was in contemplation; and, after some consultation, they sent Mr. Doverfields a letter of warning, ad-

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dressing it to this house. That warning, I have reason to believe, never reached your husband."

"Ah!" Suddenly her tense attitude and her icy tone relaxed, and a look of actual relief overspread her face. "At last," she said, "you are saying something that I can comprehend, can reply to! And, Mr. Jasper, pray be assured that wherein I am able to explain, I will—and most gladly. After all, it is very simple! Understand, pray, that I do not seek to defend my course; I see most clearly, now, how weak I have been in my desire to spare Mr. Doverfields any needless annoyance."

"Needless?"

"I thought it so then. Try to see it as I did! I had withdrawn the jewels to wear that night, and the letter came after he had gone for the day. He came home late,—we had guests at dinner, and I had scarcely a moment alone with him. Besides, I knew how uneasy this letter would make him, not so much because of the jewels, as about me. It is less than a year since one of our young society women was attacked in her own carriage while returning from the theatre—you remember it."

"You refer to the Unwin robbery?"

"Yes. I felt sure that this letter, if shown him, would spoil his evening. I felt that the jewels would be quite safe upon my person, and next day they would be returned to the vault. I was wrong, Mr. Jasper, I admit it. But I could not bear to have my husband spend a long evening standing guard over me and those jewels. He is so kind and so easily made anxious," here her voice sank to a gentle, trembling cadence, that was full of pathos. "To be quite frank," she went on, "I thought less of the jewels and their safety, and more, much more, of my husband's ease of mind! He has had so many business worries, of late; and I have been made most anxious because of his anxiety. "Next morning," she went on, an early message from his secretary called him down town before I was awake. He left me a note of explanation, and he did not return at the luncheon hour, although I sent the carriage for him. I knew by this that he was still troubled by those western land difficulties, and so, saying to myself that I would only add to his annoyance by giving him this silly note from the bank, I flung it into the grate." She sighed softly, and resumed; "Then came the robbery, and I was horror stricken at what I had done. All that day he had been preoccupied, and so therefore was I. I scarcely gave a

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thought to the case of jewels lying locked in the double drawer of my dressing case. I am considered, I believe, a normally sane and sensible creature, but here I behaved like a frightened child. I had retired that night, leaving my door unlocked, as I often did when he was out late, in the hope that he might drop in for a few moment's talk, a good night word, at least, and when my maid aroused me next morning to tell me of the robbery, a dozen things rose up to terrify and condemn me. I recalled how I had gone down to see the cook and had passed someone lurking near the stairway, and close to the area door. I was quite certain that it was the girl Josephine, and, in my selfish preoccupation, had paid no heed, although it was against the rules of the servant's hall to loiter thus so late. But when the alarm was given, I thought of her, and found by inquiry, that it was not one of our own people, but a stranger, who was with her, near the area door, so I went, in a flash of anger, and dismissed the girl, as if by that means I was condoning, or trying to repair my other blunders! I dare say that my anxiety and qualms of conscience made me seem to you a worthy object of suspicion, but—to be accused of even worse, of actual guilt—conspiracy—to be accused upon the false witness of a thief and burglar!" She turned her face away for the first time.

Rising, she exclaimed with new spirit, "Mr. Jasper, do you not see how this man's story must work in his favor—to mitigate his sentence—to steal sham jewels is surely a lesser crime, than to rob one of many costly real ones. And this man, this maker of paste diamonds, it is not more than likely that he is in the plot a—a fence, as you call it? The receiver, perhaps of my precious jewels, and the sharer to be, in the final division of the spoils? You must do your duty, of course, whatever the outcome, and you are trying to do it now! I believe this, still—I do find it hard, Mr. Jasper, to forgive what you have said this morning!"

She was standing very erect once more, but I could see that her hands were trembling. I looked—and hesitated. Whether this were sincerity, or splendid acting, I felt myself worsted; and turning, took my hat. As I moved toward the door, I saw her eyes widen, and she came a step after me.

"What," she asked, almost too quietly, "do you intend to do —now?"

"I intend to say nothing to your husband, of all this, until I

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am sure of my ground! And—I intend to find your gems, sham or real, wherever they may be." And then, for the first time I saw doubt,—uncertainty, anxiety, look out from her beautiful eyes and quiver across her face. She drew back step by step, and her hand went out with a groping movement until she touched the tall chair she had so lately occupied, like a queen judging her subject.

"It is very—complicated—" she said hesitatingly. "I shall wish to be—to seem frank—" she caught herself, and shot me an eager, questioning glance; her face crimsoned, her lip quivering, but I was earnestly consulting my watch, and as I replaced it with a preoccupied air, I saw for an instant, the mask fall from her face—. And I knew! She had fought splendidly, but she was a woman, delicate, with nerves overtaxed doubtless, to the point of breaking.

But how she played with me! and how much she had already wrung from me, by way of concession. Well, the honors were hers, but she should not be self deceived for this reason. As she now sat before me the stately and defiant calm was gone, replaced by little nervous movements of the hands and head and roving eye no longer strong, and direct of gaze.

Again I lifted my hat from the chair beside me, as I said, lowering my voice almost to a whisper, "I have given you my promise—in a way, and I shall abide by it, Mrs Doverfields, nothing could induce me to tell your husband the things I know—now—without the explanation you only can give. There was no crime in duplicating your own jewels. But, until I know—from you or by a more laborious method, why you suppressed that warning from the bank, why you permitted Keen Johnny to steal your sham jewels—"

"Per—mitted!"

"Mrs. Doverfields, after my first visit to this house, I called upon Dr. Bird, and from him learned—several things; among them, that you were at all times a light sleeper; I also discovered, during that first visit, that to open the jewel drawer without a sound was an impossibility, even though the metal and the inner edges of the wood had been recently oiled. Again—the key to that drawer—as I have before stated, was put where it was found next morning. These are strong statements, but, such as they are, I intend to keep them before me while I, silently, pursue my search."

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"You say—silently?"

"I do. I should like to tell your husband the story, Keen Johnny's story, at least, but I have promised you silence for the present. When I have solved the riddle, then—"

"You will speak—" she whispered. "But,—you have far to go."

"Possibly, still as far as I have gone every link seems to fit. I lack one thing, however; one thing of importance."

"And that is—"

"A motive. On your part."

"Ah indeed," she smiled a little frosty smile, as if in a last effort at defiance; and then—she came close to me, and again looked me firmly in the face.

"You were right in saying that there must be a strong motive to induce a woman to do, as in your opinion, I have done. And for her to tell you or any other, that motive would render all her trickery, deceit, and self-contempt, of no avail! I have nothing to tell you! I repent of nothing that I have done!"

"But—have you thought of your husband, and the future!"

"Have I?" How her eyes glowed. "Be sure that I think of no one else," she cried. When do I not think of him! And yet, before I would open my lips I would let you tell him all and I would go out of his home, and never see him again! Let us end this conversation, Mr. Jasper. My husband may return at any moment."

I looked at her in wonder, and doubt. She was drawn to her fullest height, her head was again thrown back, and once more, her eyes met mine in scornful defiance.

"Mrs. Doverfields," I exclaimed, "I beg that you will confide in me! I am not, I do not wish to seem, an enemy! If your secret is one that should be kept, guarded, I will help you. I—"

"It is not my secret," she cried, as if goaded out of herself. "If there is a secret, it is another's! and—" I threw up my hand to stop her wild words, but they came, clear, distinct, and firm, in spite of my gesture, and my warning look, "and I will keep it, guard it, if it costs me my home and —my husband!"

"Ara!" She turned swiftly at the word, and there in the doorway, holding back the light silken draperies, stood Austin Doverfields.

For a moment she stood gazing at him, statue like, then, with the cry, "Austin!" falling brokenly from her lips, she reeled,

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clutched at the empty air, and was caught in her husband's arms.

Early that evening, I received a note from Mr. Doverfields.

"My wife," it said, "is very ill, and is muttering and saying strange things, which no one can understand. God forgive me, if now that the first shock and terror is over, my mind reverts to those last words from her lips, and that strange warning gesture of yours. Will you, can you explain? And so silence the hateful thoughts that torment me? My wife, the Doctor says, must have absolute quiet; her life depends upon it."

To this I replied, like a hypocrite; for I could not accuse a woman not yet proven guilty, and who was, perhaps dying.

"Dear Sir:" I wrote,

"This morning I asked at the door for you, and in your absence sent my card to Mrs. Doverfields. I tried to review a few points of your case as they appeared to me, and she seemed not quite as usual. In fact was very strange from the first. Then something I said was taken by her as an accusation; her eyes flashed and I saw that she was much excited. I suppose her illness was working upon her then, for when I tried to reason mildly she began, as you heard, and my efforts to check her wild words seemed to make her talk the more. I deeply regret that my call was made at such an inopportune time, and until I hear from you that all is well, will pursue my investigation without a report.

Yours,

JASPER"

It was a lame effort, but my wits seemed to have forsaken me, and I could pen no more facile subterfuge.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

KEEN JOHNNY REVIEWS MATTERS.

To say that my morning's experience with Mrs. Doverfields was unsatisfactory, would be to put the situation very mildly, for I walked away from that stately home of mystery almost dazed by the interview, and its results. I had looked for a very different issue.

While I might have doubted Keen Johnny's unsupported declarations as to the quality of the stolen jewels, I knew the man Gensenberg to be an honest artisan, in spite of the rather doubtful quality of his manufactures; for, while he dealt in shams, he sold them as such. As for Mrs. Doverfields' suggestion that he was in collusion with Keen Johnny Deegan, I knew that to be absurd. The man sold shams, and he sometimes did a little business as an aside, in the way of loaning money, but as for Herr Gensenberg in the character of receiver of stolen goods, or one who traffics with double characters, I smiled at the thought. I had good reason to smile.

At the beginning of our interview, it had seemed impossible to doubt, or question, with that clear, direct beautiful gaze fixed fully upon me, but I had trained myself to study, not alone the face, but every movement of body, to note the signals of nervousness, and at what stage of the discussion, or inquiry, these appeared.

I had called upon the lady prepared to make due allowance for circumstantial evidence; as for Deegan's admission that he had entered the Doverfields' house through the ignorance and gullibility of Josephine Bryce, I had her corroborative evidence; and his statement as to the jewels, would have had little weight without the additional testimony of the old artist in paste. But while I could not wholly exonerate Mrs. Doverfields, I was quite willing, even anxious, to believe that the paste copies had been prepared as a matter of protection; and that there might be some reason—financial probably—for allowing the theft of the paste jewels to seem more serious than it was in reality. The lady had property of her own, controlled, as I learned, by her own

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man of business. Might not the real gems have been hypothecated for—a little flutter in the street,—perhaps?

This was the brighter of the two possibilities I had been considering. Then, there was the circumstantial evidence; and that wore a more gloomy aspect, as Mrs. Doverfields had certainly had the paste duplicates prepared, and she had, after removing them—if it were the duplicates that had been stored in the bank—received a letter stating that their removal was known, and that a plot was afoot to rob her.

This letter, according to her own assertion, she had destroyed, without making its contents known to her husband; and she had made no effort to keep the suppressed jewels as safely as possible in her possession.

Indeed she had left her door unlocked, and the key of the jewel drawer in it. On the morning after the robbery, she had hastened to dismiss a servant, who, on the previous evening she had not seemed to observe, as being worthy of suspicion. Was ever a stranger case? And this was not all.

When I had attempted to investigate she had hampered my work. Having sent for me, according to her husband's statement, she could give only vague answers to pertinent questions; she could give no full description of the lost diamonds, and no clue to the list of them, and she knew nothing of the photograph, supposed to have been taken as a precaution against loss like the present. All of this I knew, and it had been written in my note book hours before I had visited Mrs. Doverfields.

And yet—I assured myself, with the smart of self-contempt,—at the beginning of that morning's interview, I was ready to admit extenuating circumstances. I looked for, hoped for them. A little later I was wavering between doubt—and sympathy, and quite lost in admiration. It was only when at the last, she had lost her splendid nerve and let the mask fall, that I came to my senses, *after* I had committed myself to silence. She had been an actress indeed! A magnificent actress, but it would required the strength of an Amazon, to endure the nervous strain she had labored under and not go to pieces, sooner or later.

She had tricked me, at first. She had broken down and given up at the last. For me this unequal battle of words and wits, had been a veritable Waterloo!

But there had been no acting at the last. The hauteur, scorn, and hurt dignity, all had been acting.—But that last passionate outbreak, half appeal, half defiance; that had been the real woman. And when she had fallen, deathly pale, and with that look as of

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one mortally stricken, to be caught in her husband's arms, I knew that, for a time, there could be no more acting. And I feared, as in leaving the house I heard the shrill telephone call for Doctor Bird, that now the case lay for its settlement, between life and death.

And yet, so strong is the ruling passion, that after driving half way to my office, I called up to my cabman, and instructed him to drive to the jail, where without delay I was admitted to the cell of Keen Johnny Deegan.

It had only now occured to me that something, of importance as I looked at it now, had been omitted from his story by Johnny, and overlooked, by myself. I was in no mood for parley, and came at once to the point.

"Deegan, I was preoccupied on Saturday, and there 's a question or two I think you won't mind answering. That is, if you really had no confederate inside the Doverfields' house, but the girl Josephine."

"Lord save a man! How could I have another among that straight-laced crew? Had n't we sounded the servants, one after another, and watched 'em for two months, before we finally pulled off the job?"

"Did it ever occur to you that the lady herself might be suspected—by some?"

"What rot!" Then, with sudden change of tone. "By Jove! —you mean if it comes out that the stuff was all paste. Mm—m —I—see!"

"Kindly enlarge my vision then."

"By—! Ye see, boss, I have figured it all along that that handsome lady never guessed she had been wearing paste; and that the old gent had needed the real stones some day, and when Madam was out at a pink tea, or a gabble party, had just swapped the shams for the real. Diamonds, ye know, would often be as good as gold in his business. Wish't it had been so in mine! But I guess I can see through a rat-hole now!"

"Well?"

"Say—what was yer question, boss? Don't let me git ye off the track." And Johnny grinned amiably.

"I won't. Johnny you did not tell me whether or no you waked the lady when you opened that drawer. I need not tell you that it could not be opened without a little noise?"

Johnny's grin widened. "Did ye also take note," he ques-

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tioned, "that the machinery, even to the woodwork, had been sort of slicked up, as it were?"

I nodded, "Come," I said insistently. "Did you waken the lady?"

"I 'm afraid I did—a little. Ye see I had been fearin' somethin' might spring loose on me, an' when that little drawer let out a real squeak I looked, swift like, over my shoulder. Gee! but it was a startler for me! Her eyes were wide open an' lookin' straight at me, and then, while I still kept starin' she quietly closed 'em agin without a move, or a sound. My soul, Mr. Jasper, that little thorobred must a knowed about the paste deal, and prob'ly was laughin' in her sleeve all the time. Gosh! but that was nerve!"

"Did you ever think that she might have been expecting you?"

"Huh!" Evidently, I had awakened some new thought in his mind, or memory, and I added, "Did you know that someone was good enough to warn the bank that the withdrawal of the Doverfields' diamonds was known, and that this letter was sent to Mrs. D—?"

"No—when?"

"The day the deed was done."

"Before?"

"Before."

"I—see!" he whistled softly. "How things do come out! You see I wrote that note as a bit of brag, meaning to post it the minute the job was pulled off, and I thought I had it in a safe pocket, ready to drop into the first handy letter-box. But when I looked for it, the thing was gone, and I at once jumped to the conclusion that it had been dragged from my pocket when I was takin' out somethin' else—those things will happen sometimes—and as the job went off so smartly I said to myself, 'anyway, it was lost too late to help the other party and will be received at the bank too late, if found by any honest person, just as I had meant it.'"

Johnny was now in his most amiable mood, and I felt hopeful for the success of my next effort. I pulled my chair, the only one in the cell, close to the cot where he lounged, and spoke in subdued tones, "Deegan, I want to talk business with you."

"Business?" he grinned amiably, and awaited my lead.

"Strict business. I won't waste my time—and yours—"

"Crinkly Moses! but that 's good of you! You can't think

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how I hate to have my time wasted. It 's that that 's botherin' me, right now!"

I smiled to humor his mood. "Will you answer a few more questions, Johnny?" I asked.

"Depends! Sometimes questions are compromisin'."

"You mean answers."

"Huh! I clean forgot you was double barrelled—a lawyer 's well as sleuth! It 's the same thing, anyhow."

"Deegan, if you call me sleuth, I shall cut your acquaintance."

"M—yah! Well, would n't that jar you! Cruel too, an' me so lonesome! All right, Cap' I 'll consider you a lawyer. Wish 't you was my lawyer!"

"It 's not impossible that I might be your adviser, Johnny. I want a favor of you, and I know you 're not the man to throw away favors."

" 'Specially to your sort hey?" It was wonderful to see the change that suddenly blotted out the carelessly seeming, chaffing person of a moment since, leaving in its stead, a sedate firm lipped, sphinx faced individual, looking ten years older, and, in spite of a slight and boyish figure, quite formidable. With two keen blue eyes fixed upon my face he waited, then after a moment, "I 'm listenin'!" he almost snapped.

I pushed back my chair a trifle, and put my hand in the side pocket of my sack coat,—Deegan was as strong and agile as a Jap, and I was about to probe him in a very tender spot.

"I presume you have not forgotten the Frieble case, eh?"

He frowned. "I remember it all right," he said coldly, "but —'t aint interestin'."

"I think I can make it so, Deegan."

No answer. "It 's been a decided puzzle to the police."

"So?"

"But, somehow, I fancy they have lost interest in it."

"Frieble was n't a man to feel much interest in! A wife beater, so I 've heard," commented Johnny.

"Yes, and a man willing to sell his own daughter—for money."

Deegan ground an oath between his teeth.

"Even the search for the missing daughter has ceased, I hear, in spite of Frieble's offered reward." Silence. "Still, of course, if found she must be restored to her parents. She 's under age, you know."

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Suddenly the tiger in the fellow broke its leash. He sprang up and stood before me with fury in his eyes.

"Curse you! What in Hell you drivin' at?"

"Don't excite yourself, Deegan! I wonder if you know that she 's been found."

"G-r-r!"

"And can easily be restored to her fond parents?"

"You—cursed—cur!"

I had expected it, and the hand in my pocket came out in a flash; a little pistol lay in the palm. "Sit down, Deegan," I said calmly. "Oh, you need n't look that way; I shall not call a jailor! I 'm here to deal with you!" The fellow knew when he was beaten. He dropped back upon the cot, but his frown was still black.

"Any man that would take that girl back to that big beast—no matter where he found her, 's a worse man than I 've ever dared be! I 'm likely to die with my boots on, but I can hold up my head an' say with my last gasp, that I 've never hurt a woman, nor done wrong by one that trusted me! You 'd better get on," he added sourly. "I s'pose you 've sleuthed her out in order to put the crimp on me, in this cussed false jewel deal! What the h— d' ye want, anyhow?"

"I want you to get back into your senses, first of all," I declared, "and then I want you to listen to me. No, I did not 'sleuth' the young woman. I came upon her by purest accident, weeks ago, while I was looking for 'a gentleman friend' in an alley at the rear end of a certain tenement in Avenue A. I had seen her picture—you know her father had them rather freely displayed in the yellow journals at the time of her disappearance."

"D—m him!"

"With all my heart; and I think it will doubtless come to pass."

"What! Ain't you in his pay, then?"

"Deegan, you are a fool! I quite agree with you when you declare yourself a better man than that canting, wife bruising, child selling Dutchman. And I would n't help him to find his daughter any more than you would."

"Gee!" Deegan's face was slowly relaxing.

"Because—I think she is in good and safe hands." Again I drew toward him, and assumed a milder tone. "Deegan, in this matter of the girl, I 'm your friend—until I find myself mistaken

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in you. And I 'm telling you this to prove it. Wait," as he seemed about to speak. "Let me tell you the circumstances. When I saw the girl, and thought I recognized her, I tested the matter by calling her name, 'Lizzie.' She looked out, and up and down—she could only see my shoulders, as I stood—and presently she called, just above her breath, 'Johnny!' And then, in an eager, tremulous tone, 'Oh, Mrs. Deegan!' I did n't think much of the matter then, only to be glad the girl seemed to be in decent hands—"

"She is that."

"But later," glancing at him with a significant smile, "I had reason to recall these things."

"After you 'd found me hoppled!"

"Just so. And now we come to the point. Johnny, I think you must know, the man in you must tell you, that this young girl will never come to harm or trouble through me! No matter how this talk of ours turns out. But—I want from you, now, as man to man, favor for favor."

"All right! I 'm right in position to grant big favors. Name yours and—if it won't let me in—"

"It won't! I simply want those paste diamonds you took from Mrs. Doverfields." I was careful not to qualify his statement of the robbery by a doubtful "you say." But Deegan's face clouded again.

"Have n't got 'em," he declared.

"Strange! What I want to know is, who has?"

"Huh! Anything else?"

"Yes, I want your written order for those shams."

Deegan shook his head, and I got upon my feet. "I 'm rather sorry, Deegan," I said, with all the indifference I could feign. You might have saved me a little trouble, such as getting out a search warrant, for instance. And—I was even prepared to pay a little for the lot,—their value, say."

"Value! Huh!"

"I know it, to a penny."

"Who 's the search warrant to bluff?"

"The premises of Mrs. Deegan, and Miss Lizzie Frieble."

He swore softly, and I set my hat firmly upon my head and drew back a pace, then putting just the right touch of contempt into my voice, I delivered myself of my well studied climax; for I had guessed pretty accurately the outcome of my interview.

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