THE DANVERS JEWELS

BY

MARY CHOLMONDELEY,

AUTHOR OF 'DIANA TEMPEST,' 'SIR CHARLES DANVERS, ETC.

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TO MY SISTER

'DI'

I AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATE THE STORY

WHICH SHE HELPED ME

TO WRITE.

PART I.

THE DANVERS JEWELS

CHAPTER I.

I WAS on the point of leaving India and returning to England when he sent for me. At least, to be accurate—and I am always accurate—I was not quite on the point, but nearly, for I was going to start by the mail on the following day. I had been up to Government House to take my leave a few days before, but Sir John had been too ill to see me, or at least he had said he was. And now he was much worse—dying, it seemed, from all accounts ; and he had sent down a native servant in the noonday heat with a note, written in his shaky old hand, begging

me to come up as soon as it became cooler. He said he had a commission which he was anxious I should do for him in England.

Of course I went. It was not very convenient, because I had to borrow one of our fellows' traps, as I had sold my own, and none of them had the confidence in my driving which I had myself. I was also obliged to leave the packing of my collection of Malay *krises* and Indian *kookeries* to my bearer.

I wondered as I drove along why Sir John had sent for me. Worse, was he? Dying? And without a friend. Poor old man! He had done pretty well in this world, but I was afraid he would not be up to much once he was out of it; and now it seemed he was going. I felt sorry for him. I felt more sorry when I saw him—when the tall, long-faced A.D.C. took me into his room and left us. Yes, Sir John was certainly going. There was no mistake about it. It was written in every line of his drawn fever-worn

face, and in his wide fever-lit eyes, and in the clutch of his long yellow hands upon his tussore silk dressing-gown. He looked a very sick, bad old man as he lay there on his low couch, placed so as to court the air from without, cooled by its passage through damped grass screens, and to receive the full strength of the punkah, pulled by an invisible hand outside.

'You go to England to-morrow?' he asked sharply.

It was written even in the change of his voice, which was harsh, as of old, but with all the strength gone out of it.

'By to-morrow's mail,' I said. I should have liked to say something more—something sympathetic about his being ill and not likely to get better; but he had always treated me discourteously when he was well, and I could not open out all at once now that he was ill.

'Look here, Middleton,' he went on; 'I am dying, and I know it. I don't suppose you imagined I had sent for you to bid you

a last farewell before departing to my long home. I am not in such a hurry to depart as all that, I can tell you ; but there is something I want done—that I want you to do for me. I meant to have done it myself, but I am down now, and I must trust somebody. I know better than to trust a clever man. An honest fool—but I am digressing from the case in point. I have never trusted anybody all my life, so you may feel honoured. I have a small parcel which I want you to take to England for me. Here it is.'

His long lean hands went searching in his dressing-gown, and presently produced an old brown bag held together at the neck by a string.

'See here!' he said ; and he pushed the glasses and papers aside from the table near him and undid the string. Then he craned forward to look about him, laying a spasmodic clutch on the bag. 'I'm watched! I know I'm watched!' he said in a whisper, his pale eyes turning slowly in their sockets. 'I shall

be killed for them if I keep them much longer, and I won't be hurried into my grave. I'll take my own time.'

'There is no one here,' I said, 'and no one in sight except Cathcart smoking in the veranda, and I can only see his legs, so he can't see us.'

He seemed to recover himself, and laughed. I had never liked his laugh, especially when, as had often happened, it had been directed against myself; but I liked it still less now.

'See here!' he repeated, chuckling; and he turned the bag inside out upon the table.

Such jewels I had never seen. They fell like cut flame upon the marble table—green and red and burning white. A large diamond rolled and fell upon the floor. I picked it up and put it back among the confused blaze of precious stones, too much astonished for a moment to speak.

'Beautiful! aren't they?' the old man chuckled, passing his wasted hands over them. 'You won't match that necklace in

any jeweller's in England. I tore it off an old she-devil of a Rhanee's neck after the Mutiny, and got a bite in the arm for my trouble. But she'll tell no tales. He! he! he! I don't mind saying now how I got them. I am a humble Christian, now I am so near heaven—eh, Middleton? He! he! You don't like to contradict me. Look at those emeralds. The hasp is broken, but it makes a pretty bracelet. I don't think I'll tell you how the hasp got broken—little accident as the lady who wore it gave it to me. Rather brown, isn't it, on one side; but it will come off. No, you need not be afraid of touching it, it isn't wet. He! he! And this crescent. Look at those diamonds. A duchess would be proud of them. I had them from a private soldier. I gave him two rupees for them. Dear me! how the sight of them brings back old times! But I won't leave them out any longer. We must put them away—put them away.' And the glittering mass was gathered up and shovelled

back into the old brown bag. He looked into it once with hungry eyes, and then he pulled the string and pushed it over to me. 'Take it,' he said. 'Put it away now. Put it away,' he repeated, as I hesitated.

I put the bag into my pocket. He gave a long sigh as he watched it disappear.

'Now what you have got to do with that bag,' he said, a moment afterwards, 'is to take it to Ralph Danvers, the second son of Sir George Danvers of Stoke Moreton in D——shire. Sir George has got two sons. I have never seen him or his sons, but I don't mean the eldest to have them. He is a spendthrift. They are all for Ralph, who is a steady fellow, and going to marry a nice girl—at least, I suppose she is a nice girl. Girls who are going to be married always *are* nice. Those jewels will sweeten matrimony for Mr. Ralph, and if she is like other women it will need sweetening. There, now you have got them, and that is what you have got to do with them. There is the address,

written on this card. With my compliments, you perceive. He! he! I don't suppose they will remember who I am.'

'Have you no relations?' I asked; for I am always strongly of opinion that property should be bequeathed to relatives, especially near relatives, rather than to entire strangers.

'None,' he replied, 'not even poor relations. I have no deserving nephew or Scotch cousin. If I had, they would be here at this moment, smoothing the pillow of the departing saint, and wondering how much they would get. You may make your mind easy on that score.'

'Then who is this Ralph whom you have never seen, and to whom you are leaving so much?' I asked, with my usual desire for information.

He glared at me for a moment, and then he turned his face away.

'D—n it! What does it matter, now I'm dying?' he said. And then he added, hoarsely, 'I knew his mother.'

I could not speak, but involuntarily I put out my hand and took his leaden one and held it. He scowled at me, and then the words came out, as if in spite of himself:

'She—if she had married me, who knows what might—— But she married Danvers. She called her second son Ralph. My first name is Ralph.' Then, with a sudden change of tone, pulling away his hand, 'There! now you know all about it! Edifying, isn't it? These death-bed scenes always have an element of interest, haven't they? *Good*-evening'—ringing the bell at his elbow—'I can't say I hope we shall meet again: it would be impolite. No, don't let me keep you. Good-bye again.'

'Good-bye, Sir John,' I said, taking his impatient hand and shaking it gently. 'God bless you.'

'Thankee,' grinned the old man, with a sardonic chuckle; 'if anything could do me good that will, I'm sure. Good-bye.'

As I breakfasted next morning previously to my departure, I could not help reflecting on the different position in which I was now returning to England, as a Colonel on long leave, to that in which I had left it many—I do not care to think how many—years ago, the youngest ensign in the regiment.

It was curious to remember that in my youth I had always been considered the fool of the family; most unjustly so considered, when I look back at my quick promotion, owing to casualties, and at my long and prosperous career in India, which I cannot but regard as the result of high principles and abilities, to say the least of it, of not the meanest order. On the point of returning to England, the trust Sir John had with his usual shrewdness reposed in me was an additional proof, if proof were needed, of the confidence I had inspired in him—a confidence which seemed to have ripened suddenly at the end of his life, after many years of hardly concealed mockery and derision. Just

as I was finishing my reflections and my breakfast, Dickson, one of the last joined subalterns, came in.

'This is very awful,' he said, so gravely that I turned to look at him.

'What is awful?'

'Don't you know?' he replied. 'Haven't you heard about—Sir John—last night?'

'Dead?' I asked.

He nodded, and then he said:

'Murdered in the night. Cathcart heard a noise, and went in, and stumbled over him on the floor. As he came in he saw the lamp knocked over, and a figure rush out through the veranda. The moon was bright, and he saw a man run across a clear space in the moonlight—a tall, slightly-built man in native dress, but not a native, Cathcart said; that he would take his oath on, by his build. He roused the house, but the man got clean off, of course.'

'And Sir John?'

'Sir John was quite dead when Cathcart

got back to him. He found him lying on his face. His arms were spread out, and his dressing-gown was torn as if he had struggled hard. His pockets had been turned inside out, his writing-table drawers forced open; the whole room had been ransacked. Yet the old man's gold watch had not been touched, and some money in one of the drawers had not been taken. What on earth is the meaning of it all?' said young Dickson below his breath. 'What was the thief after?'

In a moment the truth flashed across my brain. I put two and two together as quickly as most men, I fancy. *The jewels!* Someone had got wind of the jewels, which, at that moment, were reposing on my own person in their old brown bag. Sir John had been only just in time.

'What was he looking for?' continued Dickson, walking up and down. 'The old man must have had some paper or other about him that he wanted to get hold of. But what? Cathcart says that nothing what-

ever has been taken, as far as he can see at present.'

I was perfectly silent. It is not every man who would have been so in my place, but I was. I know when to hold my tongue, thank Heaven!

Presently the others came in, all full of the same subject; and then suddenly I remembered that it was getting late, and there was a bustle and a leave-taking, and I had to post off before I could hear more. Not, however, that there was much more to hear, for everything seemed to be in the greatest confusion, and every species of conjecture was afloat as to the real criminal, and the motive for the crime. I had not much time to think of anything during the first day on board; yet, busy as I was in arranging and re-arranging my things, poor old Sir John never seemed quite absent from my mind. His image, as I had last seen him, constantly rose before me, and the hoarse whisper was for ever sounding in my ears, 'I'm watched! I know I'm watched!'

I could not get him out of my head. I was unable to sleep the first night I was on board, and as the long hours wore on I always seemed to see the pale, searching eyes of the dead man; and above the manifold noises of the steamer and the perpetual lapping of the calm water against my ear came the whisper, 'I'm watched! I know I'm watched!'

CHAPTER II.

I was all right next day. I suppose I had had what women call 'nerves.' I never knew what nerves meant before, because no two women I ever met seemed to have the same kind. If it is slamming a door that upsets one woman's nerves, it may be coming in on tiptoe that will upset another's. You never can tell. But I am sure it was nerves with me that first night; I know I have never felt so queer since. Oh yes, I have, though—once! I was forgetting; but I have not come to that yet.

We had a splendid passage home. Most of the passengers were in good spirits at the thought of seeing England again, and even the children were not so troublesome as I have known them. I soon made friends

with some of the nicest people, for I generally make friends easily. I do not know how I do it, but I always seem to know what people really are at first sight. I always was rather a judge of character.

There was one man on board whom I took a great fancy to from the first. He was a young American, travelling about, as Americans do, to see the world. I forget where he had come from—though I believe he told me—or why he was going to London; but a nicer young fellow I never met. He was rather simple and unsophisticated, and with less knowledge of the world than any man I ever knew; but he did not mind owning to it, and was as grateful as possible for any little hints which, as an older man who had not gone through life with his eyes shut, I was of course able to give him. He was of a shy disposition, I could see, and wanted drawing out; but he soon took to me, and in a surprisingly short time we became friends. He was in the next cabin to mine, and evidently

wished so much to have been with me, that I tried to get another man to exchange; but he was grumpy about it, and I had to give it up, much to young Carr's disappointment. Indeed, he was quite silent and morose for a whole day about it, poor fellow. He was a tall, handsome young man, slightly built, with the kind of sallow complexion that women admire, and I wondered at his preferring my company to that of the womankind on board, who were certainly very civil to him.

One evening when I was rallying him on the subject, as we were leaning over the side (for, though it was December, it was hot enough in the Red Sea to lounge on deck), he told me that he was engaged to be married to a beautiful young American girl. I forget her name, but I remember he told it me—Dulcima Something—but it is of no consequence. I quite understood then. I always can enter into the feelings of others so entirely. I know when I was engaged myself once, long ago, I did not seem to care

to talk to anyone but her. She did not feel the same about it, which, perhaps, accounted for her marrying someone else, which was quite a blow to me at the time, But still, I could fully enter into young Carr's feelings, especially when he went on to expatiate on her perfections. Nothing, he averred, was too good for her. At last he dropped his voice, and after looking about him in the dusk to make sure he was not overheard, he said:

'I have picked up a few stones for her on my travels—a few sapphires of considerable value. I don't care to have it generally known that I have jewels about me, but I don't mind telling *you*.'

'My dear fellow,' I replied, laying my hand on his shoulder, and sinking my voice to a whisper, 'not a soul on board this vessel suspects it, but so have I.'

It was too dark for me to see his face, but I felt that he was much impressed by what I had told him.

'Then *you* will know where I had better

keep mine,' he said a moment later, with his impulsive boyish confidence. 'How fortunate I told you about them! Some are of considerable value, and—and I don't know where to put them that they will be absolutely safe. I never carried jewels about with me before, and I am nervous about *losing* them, you understand'—and he nodded significantly at me. 'Now where would you advise me to keep them?'

'On you,' I said significantly.

'But where?'

He was simpler than even I could have believed.

'My dear boy,' I said, hardly able to refrain from laughing, 'do as I do: put them in a bag with a string to it. Put the string round your neck, and wear that bag under your clothes night and day.'

'At night as well?' he asked anxiously.

'Of course. You are just as likely to *lose* them, as you call it, in the night as in the day.'

'I'm very much obliged to you,' he replied. 'I will take your advice this very night. I say,' he added suddenly, 'you would not care to see them, would you? I would not have anyone else catch sight of them for a good deal, but I would show them you in a moment. Everyone else is on deck just now, if you would like to come down into my cabin.'

I hardly know one stone from another, and never could tell a diamond from paste; but he seemed so anxious to show me what he had that I did not like to refuse.

'By all means,' I said; and we went below.

It was very dark in Carr's cabin, and after he had let me in, he locked the door carefully before he struck a light. He looked quite pale in the light of the lamp after the red dusk of the warm evening on deck.

'I don't want to have other fellows coming in,' he said in a whisper, nodding at the door.

He stood looking at me for a moment as if irresolute, and then he suddenly seemed to arrive at some decision, for he pulled a small parcel out of his pocket and began to open it.

They really were not much to look at, though I would not have told him so for worlds. There were a few sapphires—one of a considerable size, but uncut—and some handsome turquoises, but not of perfect colour. He turned them over with evident admiration.

'They will look lovely, set in gold, as a bracelet on *her* arm,' he said softly. He was very much in love, poor fellow. And then he added humbly: 'But I dare say they are nothing to yours.'

I chuckled to myself at the thought of his astonishment when he should actually behold them; but I only said:

'Would you like to see them, and judge for yourself?'

'Oh, if it is not giving you too much trouble!' he exclaimed gratefully, with shining

eyes. 'It's very kind of you. I did not like to ask. Have you got them with you?'

I nodded, and proceeded to unbutton my coat.

At that moment a voice was heard shouting down the companion-ladder: 'Carr! I say, Carr, you are wanted!' and in another moment someone was hammering on the door.

Carr sprang to his feet looking positively savage.

'Carr!' shouted the voice again. 'Come out, I say; you are wanted!'

'Button up your coat,' he whispered, scowling suddenly; and, with an oath, he opened the door.

Poor Carr! He was quite put out, I could see, though he recovered himself in a moment, and went off laughing with the man who had been sent for him to take his part in a rehearsal which had been suddenly resolved on; for theatricals had been brewing for some time, and he had promised to act in them. I had not been asked to join, so I

saw no more of him that night. The following morning as I was taking an early turn on deck he joined me, and said with a smile, as he linked his arm in mine :

'I was put out last night, wasn't I ?'

'But you got over it in a moment,' I replied. 'I quite admired you ; and, after all, you know—some other time.'

'No,' he said, smiling still, 'not some other time. I don't think I will see them—thanks all the same. They might put me out of conceit with what I have picked up for my little girl, which are the best I can afford.'

He seemed to have lost all interest in the subject, for he began to talk of England and of London, about which he appeared to have that kind of vague half-and-half knowledge which so often proves misleading to young men newly launched into town life. When he found out, as he soon did, that I was to a certain extent familiar with the Metropolis, he began to question me minutely, and ended by making me promise to dine with him at

the Criterion, of which he had actually never heard, and go with him afterwards to the best of the theatres the day after we arrived in London.

He wanted me to go with him the very evening we arrived, but on that point I was firm. My sister Jane, who was living with a hen canary (called Bob, after me, before its sex was known) in a small house in Kensington, would naturally be hurt if I did not spend my first evening in England with her, after an absence of so many years.

Carr was much interested to hear that I had a sister, and asked innumerable questions about her. Was she young and lovely, or was she getting on? Did she live all by herself, and was I going to stay with her for long? Was not Kensington—was that the name of the street?—rather out of the world, etc.

I was pleased with the interest he took in any particulars about myself and my relations. People so seldom care to hear about the

concerns of others. Indeed, I have noticed as I advance in life, such a general want of interest on the part of my acquaintance in the minutiæ of my personal affairs, that of late I have almost ceased to speak of them at any length. Carr, however, who was of what I should call a truly domestic turn of character, showed such genuine pleasure in hearing about myself and my relations, that I asked him to call in London in order to make Jane's acquaintance, and accordingly gave him her address, which he took down at once in his note-book with evident satisfaction.

Our passage was long, but it proved most uneventful; and except for an occasional dance, and the theatricals before mentioned, it would have been dull in the extreme. The theatricals certainly were a great success, mainly owing to the splendid acting of young Carr, who became afterwards a more special object of favour even than he was before. It was bitterly cold when we landed early in January at Southampton, and my native land

seemed to have retired from view behind a thick veil of fog. We had a wretched journey up to London, packed as tight as sardines in a tin, much to the disgust of Carr, who accompanied me to town, and who, with his usual thoughtfulness, had in vain endeavoured to keep the carriage to ourselves, by liberal tips to guards and porters. When we at last arrived in London, he insisted on getting me a cab and seeing my luggage on to it, before he looked after his own at all. It was only when I had given the cabman my sister's address that he finally took his leave and disappeared among the throng of people who were jostling each other near the luggage-vans.

Curiously enough when I arrived at my destination an odd thing happened. I got out at the green door of 23, Suburban Residences, and when the maid opened it walked straight past her into the little drawing-room.

'Well, Jane!' I cried.

A pale, middle-aged woman rose as I came in, and I stood aghast. It was not my sister. It was soon explained. She was a little pettish about it, poor woman. It seemed my sister had quite recently changed her house, and the present occupant had been put to some slight inconvenience before by people calling and leaving parcels after her departure. She gave me Jane's new address, which was only in the next street, and I apologized and made my bow at once. My going to the wrong house was such a slight occurrence that I almost forgot it at the time, until I was reminded of it by a very sad event which happened afterwards.

Jane was delighted to see me. It seemed she had written to inform me of her change of address, but the letter did not reach me before I started for England with the Danvers Jewels, about which I have been asked to write this account. Considering this *is* an account of the jewels, it is wonderful how seldom I have had occasion

to mention them so far; but you may rest assured that all this time they were safe in their bag under my waistcoat; and knowing I had them there all right, I did not trouble my head much about them. I never was a person to worry about things.

Still, I had no wish to be inconvenienced by a hard packet of little knobs against my chest any longer than was necessary, and I wrote the same evening to Sir George Danvers, stating the bare facts of the case, and asking what steps he or his second son wished me to take to put the legacy in the possession of its owner. I had no notion of trusting a packet of such immense value to the newly-organized Parcels Post. With jewels I consider you cannot be too cautious; indeed, I told Jane so at the time, and she quite agreed with me.

CHAPTER III.

I DID not much like the arrangement of Jane's new house when I came to stay in it. The way the two bedrooms, hers and mine, were shut off from the rest of the house by a door, barred and locked at night for fear of burglars, was, I thought, unpleasant, especially as, once in my room for the night, there was no possibility of getting out of it, the key of the door of the passage not being even allowed to remain in the lock, but retiring with Jane, the canary cage, and other valuables, into her own apartment. I remonstrated, but I soon found that Jane had not remained unmarried for nothing. She was decided on the point. The outer door would be locked as usual, and the key would

be deposited under the pin-cushion in her room as usual; and it was so.

The next morning, as Jane and I went out for a stroll before luncheon, we had to pass the house to which I had driven by mistake the day before. To our astonishment, there was a crowd before the door, and a policeman with his back to it was guarding the entrance. The blinds were all drawn down. The image of the pale, lonely woman sitting by her little fire whom I had disturbed the day before came suddenly back to me with a strange qualm.

'What is it?' I hurriedly asked a baker's boy, who was standing at an area railing, rubbing his chin against the loaf he was waiting to deliver. The boy grinned.

'It's murder!' he said, with relish. 'Burgilars in the night. I've supplied her reg'lar these two months. One quartern best white, one half-quartern brown, every morning, French rolls occasional; but it's all up now.'

And he went off whistling a tune which all bakers' boys whistled about that time, called 'My Grandfather's Timepiece,' or something similar.

A second policeman came up the street at this moment, and from him I learned the little there was to know. The poor lady had not been murdered, it seemed, but, being subject to heart complaint, had died in the night of an acute attack, evidently brought on by fright. The maid, the only other person in the house, sleeping as maids-of-all-work only can, had heard nothing, and awoke in the morning to find her mistress dead in her bed, with the window and door open. Strangely enough, the policeman added, although nothing in the house had been touched, the lock of an unused bedroom had been forced, and the room evidently searched.

Poor Jane was quite overcome. She seemed convinced that it was only by a special intervention of Providence that she

had changed her house, and that her successor had been sacrificed instead of herself.

'It might have been me!' she said over and over again that afternoon.

Wishing to give a turn to her thoughts, I began to talk about Sir John's legacy, in which she had evinced the greatest interest the night before, and, greatly to her delight, showed her the jewels. I had not looked at them since Sir John had given them to me, and I was myself astonished at their magnificence as I spread them out on the table under the gas-lamp. Jane exhausted herself in admiration; but as I was putting them away again, saying it was time for me to be dressing and going to meet Carr, who was to join me at the Criterion, she begged me on no account to take them with me, affirming that it would be much safer to leave them at home. I was firm, but she was firmer; and in the end I allowed her to lock them up in the tea-caddy, where her small stock of ready-money reposed.

I met Carr as we had arranged, and we had a very pleasant evening. Poor Carr, who had seen the papers, had hardly expected that I should turn up, knowing the catastrophe of the previous night had taken place at the house I was going to, and was much relieved to hear that my sister had moved, and had thus been spared all the horror of the event.

The dinner was good, the play better. I should have come home feeling that I had enjoyed myself thoroughly, if it had not been for a little adventure with our cab-driver that very nearly proved serious. We got a hansom directly we came out of the theatre, but instead of taking us to the direction we gave him, after we had driven for some distance I began to make out that the cabman was going wrong, and Carr shouted to him to stop; but thereupon he lashed up his horse, and away we went like the winds, up one street, and down another, till I had lost all idea where we were. Carr, who was

young and active, did all he could; but the cabman, who, I am afraid, must have been intoxicated, took not the slightest notice, and continued driving madly, Heaven knows where.

At last, after getting into a very dingy neighbourhood, we turned up a crooked dark street unlit by any lamp—a street so narrow that I thought every moment the cab would be overturned. In another moment I saw two men rush out of a doorway. One seized the horse, which was much blown by this time, and brought it violently to a standstill, while the other flew at the cab, and, catching Carr by the collar, proceeded to drag him out by main force. I suppose Carr did his best, but, being only an American, he certainly made a very poor fight of it; and while I was laying into the man who had got hold of him, I was suddenly caught by the legs myself from the other side of the cab. I turned on my assailant, saw a heavy stick levelled at me, caught at

it, missed it, beheld a series of fireworks, and remembered nothing more.

The first thing I heard on beginning to come to myself was a series of subdued but evidently heartfelt oaths; and I became sensible of an airy feeling unpleasant in the extreme, proceeding from an open condition of coat and waistcoat quite unsuited to the time of year. A low chorus of muffled whispering was going on round me. As I groaned involuntarily it stopped.

'He's coming to,' I heard Carr say. 'Go and fetch some brandy.'

And I felt myself turned right side uppermost, and my hands were rubbed, while Carr, in a voice of the greatest anxiety, asked me how I felt. I was soon able to sit up, and to become aware that I had a splitting headache, and was staring at a tallow candle stuck in a bottle. Having got so far, I got a little further, and on looking round found myself reclining on a sack in a corner of a

disreputable-looking room, dingy with dirt, and faithful to the memory of bad tobacco. Then I suddenly remembered what had occurred. Carr saw that I did so, and instantly poured forth an account of how we had been rescued from a condition of great peril by the man to whom the house we were in belonged, to whom he hardly knew how to express his gratitude, and who was now gone for some brandy for me. He told me a great deal about it, but I was so dizzy that I forget most of what he said, and it was not until our deliverer returned with the brandy that I became thoroughly aware of what was going forward. I could not help thinking, as I thanked the honest fellow who had come to our assistance, how easily one may be deceived by appearances, for a more forbidding-looking face under its fur cap I never saw. That of his son, who presently returned with a four-wheeler which Carr had sent for, was not more prepossessing. In fact, they were two as villainous-looking men

as I had ever seen. After recompensing both with all our spare cash, we got ourselves hoisted stiffly into the cab, and Carr good-naturedly insisted on seeing me home, though he owned to feeling, as he put it, 'rather knocked up by his knocking down.' We were both far too exhausted to speak much, until Carr gave a start and a gasp, and said, 'By Jove!'

'What?' I inquired.

'They are gone,' he said tremulously—'my sapphires! They are gone—stolen! I had them in a bag round my neck, as you told me. They must have been taken from me when I was knocked down. I say,' he added quickly, 'how about yours? Have you got them all right?'

Involuntarily I raised my hand to my throat. A horrid qualm passed over me.

'Thank Heaven!' I replied, with a sigh of relief, 'they are safe at home with Jane. What a mercy! I might have lost them.'

'*Might!*' said Carr. 'You would have

lost them to a dead certainty ; and mine *are* gone!' And he stamped and clenched his fists, and looked positively furious.

Poor Carr! I felt for him. He took the loss of his stones so to heart, and I am sure it was only natural. I parted from him at my own door, and was glad on going in to find Jane had stayed up for me. I soon figured in her eyes as the hero of a thrilling adventure, while her clever hands applied sticking-plaster *ad libitum*. We were both so full of the event of the evening, and the letter which I was to write to the *Times* about it the next day, that it never entered the head of either of us on retiring to bed to remove Sir John's jewels from the tea-caddy into which they had been temporarily popped in the afternoon.

CHAPTER IV.

I REALLY think adventures, like misfortunes, never come singly. Would you believe it? Our house was broken into that very night. Nothing serious came of it, wonderful to relate, owing to Jane's extraordinary presence of mind. She had been unable to sleep after my thrilling account of the cab accident, and had consoled herself by reading Baxter's 'Saint's Rest' by her night-light, for the canary became restless and liable to sudden bursts of song if a candle were lighted. While so engaged she became aware of a subdued grating sound, which had continued for some time before she began to speculate upon it. While she was speculating it ceased, and after a short interval she distinctly heard a stealthy step upon the stair, and the handle

of the passage door before mentioned was gently, very gently, turned.

Jane has some of that quickness of perception which has been of such use to myself through life. In a moment she had grasped the situation. Someone was in the house. In another moment she was hanging out of her bedroom window, springing the policeman's rattle which she had had by her for years with a view to an emergency of this kind, and at the same time—for she was a capable woman—blowing a piercing strain on a cabman's whistle.

To make a long story short, her extraordinary presence of mind was the saving of us. With her own eyes she saw two dark figures fly up our area steps and disappear round the corner, and when a policeman appeared on the scene, half an hour later, he confirmed the fact that the house had been broken into, by showing us how an entrance had been effected through the kitchen window.

There was, of course, no more sleep for us that night, and the remainder of it was passed by Jane in examining the house from top to bottom every half-hour or so, owing to a rooted conviction on her part that a burglar might still be lurking on the premises, concealed in the cellarette, or the jam cupboard, or behind the drawing-room curtains.

By that morning's post I heard, as I expected I should do, from Sir George Danvers, but the contents of the letter surprised me. He wrote most cordially, thanking me for my kindness in undertaking such a heavy responsibility (I am sure I never felt it to be so) for an entire stranger, and ended by sending me a pressing invitation to come down to Stoke Moreton that very day, that he and his son, whose future wife was also staying with them, might have the pleasure of making the acquaintance of one to whom they were so much indebted. He added that his eldest son Charles was also going down from London by a certain train that

day, and that he had told him to be on the look-out for me at the station in case I was able to come at such short notice. I made up my mind to go, sent Sir George a telegram to that effect, and proceeded to fish up the jewels out of the tea-caddy.

Jane, who had never ceased for one instant to comment on the event of the night, positively shrieked when she saw me shaking the bag free from tea-leaves.

'Good gracious, the burglars!' she exclaimed. 'Why, they might have taken them if they had only known.'

Of course they had *not* known, as I had been particularly secret about them; but I wished all the same that I had not left them there all night, as Jane would insist, and continued insisting, that they had been exposed to great danger. I argued the matter with her at first; but women, I find, are impervious as a rule to masculine argument, and it is a mistake to reason with them. It is, in fact, putting the sexes for the moment

on an equality to which the weaker one is unaccustomed, and consequently unsuited.

A few hours later I was rolling swiftly towards Stoke Moreton in a comfortable smoking-carriage, only occupied by myself and Mr. Charles Danvers, a handsome young fellow with a pale face, and that peculiar tired manner which (though, as I soon found, natural to him) is so often affected by the young men of the day.

'And so Ralph has come in for a legacy in diamonds,' he said listlessly, when we had exchanged the usual civilities, and had become to a certain degree acquainted. 'Dear me! how these good, steady young men prosper in the world. When last I heard from him he had prevailed upon the one perfect woman in the universe to consent to marry him, and his aunt (by the way, you will meet her there, too—Lady Mary Cunningham) had murmured something vague, but gratifying, about testamentary intentions. A week later Providence fills his brimming

cup with a legacy of jewels, estimated at——?' Charles opened his light sleepy eyes wide and looked inquiringly at me. 'What are they estimated at?' he asked, as I did not answer.

I really had no idea, but I shrugged my shoulders and looked wise.

'Estimated at a fabulous sum,' he said, closing his eyes again. 'Ah! had they been mine, with what joyful alacrity should I have ascertained their exact money value. And mine they ought to have been, if the sacred law of primogeniture (that special Providence which watches over the interests of eldest sons) had been duly observed. Sir John had not the pleasure of my acquaintance, but I fear he must have heard some reports —no doubt entirely without foundation— respecting my career, which induced him to pass me over in this manner. What a moral! My father and my Aunt Mary are always delicately pointing out the difference between Ralph and myself. I wish I were

a good young man, like Ralph. It seems to pay best in the long run; but I may as well inform you, Colonel Middleton, of the painful fact that I am the black sheep of the family.'

'Oh, come, come!' I remarked uneasily.

'I should not have alluded to the subject if you were not likely to become fully aware of it on your arrival, so I will be beforehand with my relations. I was brought up in the way I should go,' he continued, with the utmost unconcern, as if commenting on something that did not affect him in the least; 'but I did not walk in it, partly owing to the uncongenial companionship that it involved, especially that of my Aunt Mary, who took up so much room herself in the narrow path that she effectually kept me out of it. From my earliest youth also I took extreme interest in the parable of the Prodigal, and as soon as it became possible I exemplified it myself. I may even say that I acted the part in a manner that did credit to a be-

ginner; but the wind-up was ruined by the lamentable inability of others, who shall be nameless, to throw themselves into the spirit of the piece. At various intervals,' he continued, always as if speaking of someone else; 'I have returned home, but I regret to say that on each occasion my reception was not in any way what I could have wished. The flavour of a fatted calf is absolutely unknown to me; and so far from meeting me half-way, I have in extreme cases, when impelled homewards by urgent pecuniary considerations, found myself obliged to walk up from the station.'

'Dear me! I hope it is not far?' I said.

'A mere matter of three miles or so uphill,' he resumed; 'nothing to a healthy Christian, though trying to the trembling legs of the ungodly after a long course of husks. There, now I think you are quite *au fait* as to our family history. I always pity a stranger who comes to a house

ignorant of little domestic details of this kind; he is apt to make mistakes. Oh! pray don't mention it'—as I murmured some words of thanks—'no trouble, I assure you; trouble is a thing I don't take. By the way, are you aware we are going straight into a nest of private theatricals at Stoke Moreton? To-night is the last rehearsal; perhaps I had better look over my part. I took it once years ago, but I don't remember a word of it.'

And after much rummaging in a magnificent silver-mounted travelling bag, the Prodigal pulled out a paper-covered book and carelessly turned over the leaves.

I did not interrupt his studies, save by a few passing comments on the weather, the state of the country, and my own health, which I am sorry to say is not what it was; but as I only received monosyllabic answers, we had no more conversation worth mentioning till we reached Stoke Moreton.

CHAPTER V.

STOKE MORETON is a fine old Elizabethan house standing on rising ground. As we drove up the straight wide approach between two rows of ancient, fantastically-clipped hollies, I was impressed by the stately dignity of the place, which was not lessened as we drew up before a great arched doorway, and were ushered into a long hall supported by massive pillars of carved white stone. A roaring log fire in the immense fireplace threw a ruddy glow over the long array of armour and gleaming weapons which lined the walls, and made the pale winter twilight outside look bleak indeed. Charles, emerging slim and graceful out of an exquisite ulster, sauntered up to the fire and asked where Sir George Danvers was. As

he stood inside the wide fireplace, leaning against one of the pillars which supported the towering white stone chimneypiece covered with heraldic designs and coats of arms, he looked a worthier representative of an ancient race than I fear he really was.

'So they have put the stage at that end, in front of the pillars,' he remarked, nodding at a wooden erection. 'Quite right. I could not have placed it better myself. What, Brown? Sir George is in the drawing-room, is he? and tea, as I perceive, is going in at this moment. Come, Middleton.'

And we followed the butler to the drawing-room.

I am not a person who easily becomes confused, but I must own I did get confused with the large party into the midst of which we were now ushered. I soon made out Sir George Danvers, a delicate, but irascible-looking old gentleman, who received me with dignified cordiality, but returned Charles's greeting with a certain formality and cold-

ness which I was pained to see, family affection being in my opinion the chief blessing of a truly happy home. Charles I already knew, and with the second son, Ralph, a ruddy, smiling young man with any amount of white teeth, I had no difficulty; but after that I became hopelessly involved. I was introduced to an elderly lady whom I addressed for the rest of the evening as Lady Danvers, until Charles casually mentioned that his mother was dead, and that until the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill was passed he did not anticipate that his aunt Mary would take upon herself the position of step-mother to her orphaned nephews. The severe elderly lady, then, who beamed so sweetly upon Ralph, and regarded Charles with such manifest coldness, was their aunt, Lady Mary Cunningham. She had known Sir John slightly in her youth, she said, as she graciously made room for me on her sofa, and she expressed a very proper degree of regret at his sudden death, considering

that he had not been a personal friend in any way.

'We all have our faults, Colonel Middleton,' said Lady Mary, with a gentle sigh which dislodged a little colony of crumbs from the front of her dress. 'Sir John, like the rest of us, was not exempt, though I have no doubt the softening influence of age would have done much, since I knew him, to smooth acerbities of character which were unfortunately strongly marked in his early life.'

She had evidently not known Sir John in his later years.

As she continued to talk in this strain I endeavoured to make out which of the young ladies present was the one to whom Ralph was engaged. I was undecided as to which it was of the two to whom I had already been introduced. Girls always seem to me so very much alike, especially pretty girls, and these were both of them pretty. I do not mean that they resembled each other in the least, for one was dark and one was fair;

but which was Miss Aurelia Grant, Ralph's fiancée, and which was Miss Evelyn Derrick, a cousin of the family, I could not make out until later in the evening, when I distinctly saw Ralph kiss the fair one in the picture-gallery, and I instantly came to the conclusion that she was the one to whom he was engaged.

I asked Charles if I were not right, as we stood in front of the hall fire before the rest of the party had assembled for dinner, and he told me that I had indeed hit the nail on the head in this instance, though for his own part he never laid much stress himself on such an occurrence, having found it misleading in the extreme to draw any conclusion from it. He further informed me that Miss Derrick was the young lady with dark hair who had poured out tea, and whom he had favoured with some of his conversation afterwards.

I admired Ralph's taste, as did Charles, who had never seen his future sister-in-law

before. Aurelia Grant was a charming little creature, with a curly head and a dimple, and a pink and white complexion, and a suspicion of an Irish accent when she became excited.

Charles said he admired her complexion most because it was so thoroughly well done, and the colouring was so true to nature.

I did not quite catch his meaning, but it certainly was a beautiful complexion, and then she was so bright and lively, and showed such pretty little teeth when she smiled. She was quite delightful. I did not wonder at Ralph's being so much in love with her, and Charles agreed with me.

'There is nothing like a good complexion,' he remarked gravely. 'One may be led away to like a pale girl with a mind for a time, but for permanent domestic happiness give me a good complexion, and—a dimple,' he added, as if it were an afterthought. 'I feel I could not bestow my best affections on a woman without a dimple. Yes, indeed, Ralph has chosen well.'

Now I do not agree with Charles there, as I have always considered that a woman *should* have a certain amount of mind; just enough, in fact, to enable her to appreciate a superior one. I said as much to Charles, but he only laughed, and said it was a subject on which opinion had always varied.

'How did he meet her?' I inquired.

'On the Rigi last summer,' said Charles. 'I am thinking of going there myself next year. Lovely orphan sat by Lady Mary at *table d'hôte*. Read tracts presented by Lady Mary. Made acquaintance. Lovely orphan's travelling companion or governess discovered to be live sister of defunct travelling companion or governess of Lady Mary. Result, warm friendship. Ralph, like a dutiful nephew, appears on the scene. Fortnight of fine weather. Interesting expeditions. Romantic attachment, cemented by diamond and pearl ring from Hunt and Roskell's. There is the whole story for you.'

Evelyn Derrick joined us as he finished speaking. She was a tall, graceful girl, gentle and dignified in manner, with a pale, refined face. She was pretty in a way, but not to compare to Aurelia. Evelyn had an anxious look about her, too. Now I do not approve of a girl looking grave ; she ought to be bright and happy, with a smile for everyone. It is all very well for us men, who have the work of the world to do, to look grave at times, but with women it is different, and a woman always looks her best when she smiles—at least, I think so.

First, Aurelia came down, perfectly dazzling in white satin ; then George, then Ralph, giving an arm to Lady Mary, who suffered from rheumatism in her foot. Then came the gong, and afterwards a rustle down of more people, young and old, friends of the family who had come to act, or to see their sons and daughters ; but as I never could get even their names right I shall not attempt to give any account of them,

especially as they are not of importance in any way.

After dinner, on entering the drawing-room, I found that great excitement prevailed among the ladies respecting Sir John's death. About his sad fate and costly legacy they all seemed well informed. I had myself almost forgotten the reason of my taking any interest in my new surroundings, not having even as yet given up the jewels to Sir George Danvers or Ralph; but at the urgent request of all the ladies at once, Ralph begged me to bring them down to be seen and admired then and there, before the rehearsal began.

'They will all be yours, you know,' Ralph said to Aurelia. 'You shall wear them on your wedding-day.'

'You are always talking about being married,' said Aurelia, with a little pout. 'I wish you would try and think of something else to say. I was quite looking forward to it myself until I came here, and

now I am quite, *quite* tired of it beforehand.'

Ralph laughed delightedly, and Sir George reminding me that everyone was dying of anxiety, himself included, I ran upstairs to take the brown bag from around my neck, and in a few minutes returned with it in my hand. They were all waiting for me—Lady Mary drawn up in an armchair beside an ebony table, on which a small space near her had been cleared, Charles alone holding rather aloof, sipping his coffee with his back to the fire.

'Don't jostle,' he said, as they all crowded round me. 'Evelyn, let me beg of you not to elbow forward in that unbecoming manner. Observe how Aunt Mary restrains herself. Take time, Middleton! your coffee is getting cold. Won't you drink it first?'

As he finished speaking I turned the contents of the bag upon the table. The jewels, in the bright lamplight, seemed to blaze and burn into the ebony of the

table. There was a general gasp, a silence, and then a chorus of admiration. Charles came up behind me and looked over my shoulder.

'Good gracious!' said Lady Mary solemnly. 'Ralph, you are a rich man. Why, mine are nothing to them!' and she touched a diamond and emerald necklace on her own neck. 'I never knew poor Sir John had so much good in him.'

'Oh, Ralph, Ralph!' cried Aurelia, clasping her little hands with a deep sigh. 'And will they really be my very own?'

Ralph assured her that they would, and that she should act in them the following night if she liked.

I think there was not a woman present who did not envy Aurelia as Ralph took up a flashing diamond crescent and held it against her fair hair. I saw Evelyn turn away and begin to tear up a small piece of paper in her hand. Women are very jealous of each other, especially the nice, by which I

mean the pretty, ones. I was sorry to see jealousy so plainly marked in such a charming-looking girl as Evelyn ; but women are all the same about jewels. Aurelia blushed and sparkled and pouted when the clasp caught in her hair, and shook her little head impatiently, and was altogether enchanting.

After the first burst of admiration had subsided, General Marston, an old Indian officer, who had been somewhat in the rear, came up, and looked long at the glittering mass upon the table.

'Are you aware,' he said at last to Ralph, pointing to the crescent, 'that those diamonds are of enormous value? I have not seen such stones in any shop in London. I dare not say what that one crescent alone is worth, or that emerald bracelet. Jewels of such value as this are a grave responsibility.' He stood, shaking his head a little, and turning the crescent in his hand. 'Wonderful!' he said. 'Wonderful! Do not tear up that piece of rice-paper, Miss Derrick,' he added,

taking it from her. 'The crescent was wrapped in it, and I will put it round it again. All these stones want polishing, and many of them resetting. They ought not to be tumbled together in this way in a bag, with nothing to prevent them scratching each other. See, Ralph, here is a clasp broken, and here are some loose stones, and this star has no clasp at all. You must take them up to some trustworthy jeweller, and have them thoroughly looked over.'

'I suppose the second son was specially mentioned, Middleton?' said Charles, as I drew back to let the rest handle and admire.

'Of course,' said Lady Mary sharply, 'and a very fortunate thing, too.'

'Very—for Ralph,' he replied. 'It is really providential that I am what I am. Why, I might have ruined the dear boy's prospects if I had paid my tailor's bill, and lived in the country among the buttercups and daisies. Ah! my dear aunt, as I see you are about

to remark, how all things here below work together for good!'

'I was not going to remark anything of the kind,' retorted Lady Mary, drawing herself up; 'but,' she added spitefully, 'I do not feel the less rejoiced at Ralph's good fortune and prosperity, when I see, as I so often do, the ungodly flourishing like a green bay-tree.'

'Of course,' said Charles, shaking his head, 'if that is your own experience, I bow before it. But for my own part, I must confess I have not found it so. Flourish like a green bay-tree! No, Aunt Mary, it is a fallacy. They don't. I am sure I only wish they did. But I see the rehearsal is beginning. May I give you an arm to the hall?'

The offer was entirely disregarded, and it was with the help of mine that Lady Mary retired from an unequal combat, which she never seemed able to resist provoking anew, and in which she was invariably worsted, causing her, as I could see, to regard Charles

with the concentrated bitterness of which a severely good woman alone is capable.

I soon perceived that Charles was on the same amicable terms with his father; that they rarely spoke, and that it was evidently only with a view to keeping up appearances that he was ever invited to the paternal roof at all. Between the brothers, however, in spite of so much to estrange them, a certain kindliness of feeling seemed to exist, which was hardly to have been expected under the circumstances.

The rehearsal now began, and Sir George Danvers, who had remained behind to put by the jewels and lock them up in his strong-box among his papers, came and sat down by me, again thanking me for taking charge of them, though I assured him it had been very little trouble.

'Not much trouble, perhaps, but a great responsibility,' he said courteously.

'A soldier, Sir George,' I replied, with a slight smile, 'becomes early inured to the

gravest responsibility. It is the air we breathe; it is taken as a matter of course.'

He looked keenly at me, and was silent, as if considering something—perhaps what I had said.

I was delighted to find the play was one of those which I had seen acted during our passage home. There is nothing I like so much as knowing a play beforehand, because then one can always whisper to one's companion what is coming next. The stage, with all its adjustments, had been carefully arranged, the foot-lights were lighted, the piece began. All went well till nearly the end of the first act, when there was a cry behind the scenes of 'Mr. Denis!' Mr. Denis should have rushed on, but Mr. Denis did not rush on. The play stopped. Mr. Denis was not in the library, the improvised green-room; Mr. Denis did not appear when his name was called in stentorian tones by Ralph, or in pathetic falsetto by Charles. In short, Mr. Denis was not forthcoming. A

rush upstairs on the part of most of the young men brought to light the awful fact that Mr. Denis had retired to his chamber, a prey to sudden and acute indisposition.

'Dear me!' said Charles to Lady Mary, with a dismal shake of his head, 'how precarious is life! Here to-day, and in bed to-morrow. Support your Aunt Mary, my dear Evelyn; she wishes to retire to rest. Indeed, we may as well all go to bed, for there will be no more acting to-night without poor Denis. I only trust he may be spared to us till to-morrow, and that he may be well enough to die by my hand to-morrow evening.'

We all dispersed for the night in some anxiety. The play could not proceed without Mr. Denis, who took an important part; and Sir. George ruefully informed me that all the neighbouring houses had been filled for these theatricals, and that great numbers of people were expected. There was to be dancing afterwards, but the principal feature of the

entertainment was the play. We all retired to rest fervently hoping that the health of Mr. Denis might be restored by the following morning.

CHAPTER VI.

But far from being better the following morning, Denis was much worse. Charles, who had sat up most of the night with him, and who came down to breakfast more cool and indifferent than ever, at once extinguished any hope that still remained that he would be able to take his part that night.

Great was the consternation of the whole party. A vague feeling of resentment against Denis prevailed among the womankind, who, having all preserved their own healths intact for the occasion (and each by her own account was a chronic invalid), felt it was extremely inconsiderate, not to say indelicate, of 'a great man like him' to spoil everything by being laid up at the wrong moment.

But what was to be done? Denis was ill,

and without Denis the play could not proceed. Must the whole thing be given up? There was a general chorus of lamentation.

'I see no alternative,' said Charles, 'unless some Curtius will leap into the gulf, and go through the piece, reading the part; and that is always a failure at the best of times.'

At that moment I had an idea. It broke upon me like a flash of lightning. *Valentine Carr!* I had seen him act the very part Denis was to have taken, in the theatricals on the steamer. How wonderfully fortunate that it should have occurred to me.

I told Charles that I had a friend who had acted that part only the week before.

'*You!*' cried Charles, losing all his customary apathy. 'You don't say so! Great heavens, where is he? Out with him! Where is he at this moment? England, Ireland, Scotland, or Wales? Where is this treasure concealed?'

'Oh, Colonel Middleton! Oh, how delightful!' cried a number of gentle voices;

and I was instantly surrounded, and all manner of questions put to me. Would he come? Was he tall? And oh! *had* he a beard? He had not a beard, had he? because it would not do for the part. Did he act well? When had he acted? Where had he acted?

Sir George interrupted the torrent of interrogation.

'Do you think he would come?' he asked.

'I am almost sure he would,' I said; 'he is a great friend of mine.'

'It would be an exceedingly good-natured and friendly act,' said Sir George. 'Charles —no, I mean Ralph—bring a telegraph form; and if you will write a telegram at once, Middleton, I will send it to the station directly. We shall have an answer by twelve o'clock, and, until then, we will not give up all hope, though, of course, we must not count on your friend being able to come at such short notice.'

The telegram was written and despatched,

Carr having given me an address where letters would find him, though he said he did not put up there. I sincerely hoped he would not be out of the way on this occasion, and I was not a little pleased when, a few hours later, I received a telegram in reply, saying that he could come, and should arrive by the afternoon train which had brought me the day before.

The spirits of the whole party revived. I (as is often the case) was in high favour with all. Even poor Denis, who had been very much depressed, was sufficiently relieved by the news, so Charles said, to smile over his beef-tea. Lady Mary, who appeared at luncheon time, treated me with marked consideration. I had already laid them under an obligation, she said graciously, by undertaking the care of the jewels, and now they were indebted to me a second time. Was Mr. Carr one of Lord Barrantyne's sons, or was he one of the Crampshire Carrs? She had known Lady Caroline Carr in her youth,

but had not met her of late years. She seemed surprised when I told her that Carr was an American, and he sank, I could see, at once in her estimation ; but she was kind enough to say that she was not a person who was prejudiced in any way by a man's nationality, and that she believed that very respectable people might be found among the Americans.

The day passed in the usual preparations for an entertainment. If I went into the hall, I was sure to run against gardeners carrying in quantities of hothouse plants, with which the front of the stage was being hidden from the footlights to the floor ; if I wandered into the library, I interrupted Aurelia and Ralph rehearsing their parts alone, with their heads very close together ; if I hastily withdrew into the morning-room, it was only to find Charles upon his knees, luring Evelyn to immediate flight, in soul-stirring accents, before an admiring audience of not unenvious young-ladyhood.

'Now, Evelyn, I ask you as a favour,' said Charles, as I came in, moving towards her on his knees, 'will you come a little closer when I am down? I don't mind wearing out my knees the least in a good cause; but I owe it to myself, as a wicked baron in hired tights, not to cross the stage in that position. Any impression I make will be quite lost if I do; and unless you keep closer, I shall never be able to reach your hand and clasp it to a heart at least two yards away. Now'—rising, and crossing over to the other side—'I shall begin again. "Ah! but my soul's adored——"'

'Is Middleton here?' asked a voice in the doorway. It was Sir George who had put his head into the room, and I went to him.

'I say, Middleton,' he began, twirling his stick, and looking rather annoyed, 'it is excessively provoking. I never thought of it before, but I find there is not a bed in the house. Every cranny has been filled. It never occurred to me that we had not a

room for your friend, now that he is kind enough to come. And it looks so rude, when it is so exceedingly good-natured of him to come at all.'

'Oh, dear; anywhere will do!' I said.

'There is not even room for Ralph in the house,' continued Sir George. 'I have put him up at the lodge'—pointing to a small house at the end of the drive, near the great entrance gates. 'There is another nice little room leading out of his,' he added, hesitating, 'but, really, I don't like to suggest——'

'Oh, that will do perfectly!' I broke in. 'Carr is not the sort of fellow to care a straw how he is put up. He will be quite content anywhere.'

'Come and see it,' he said, leading the way out of doors. 'I would have turned out Charles in a moment, and given Carr his room; but Denis is really rather ill, and Charles sees to him, as he is next door.'

I could not help saying how much I liked Charles.

'Strangers always do,' he replied coldly, as we walked towards the lodge. 'I constantly hear him spoken of as a most agreeable young man.'

'And he is so handsome.'

'Yes,' replied Sir George, in the same hard tone, 'handsome and agreeable. I have no doubt he appears so to others; but I, who have had to pay the debts and hush up the scandals of my handsome and agreeable son, find Ralph, who has not a feature in his face, the best-looking of the two. I know Charles is head over ears in debt at this moment, but'—with sudden acrimony—'he will not get another farthing from me. It is pouring water into a sieve.'

'Ralph is marrying a sweetly pretty creature,' I said with warmth, desirous of changing the subject.

'Yes, she is very pretty,' said Sir George without enthusiasm. 'But I wish she had belonged to one of our county families. It is nothing in the way of connection. She

has no relations to speak of—one uncle living in Australia, and another, whom she goes to on Saturday, in Ireland. There seems to be no money either. It is Lady Mary's doing. She took a fancy to her abroad; and, to say the truth, I did not wish to object, for, at one time, there seemed to be an attraction between himself and his cousin, Evelyn Derrick, which his aunt and I were both glad to think had passed over. I do not approve of marriages between cousins.'

We had reached the lodge by this time. and I was shown a tidy little room leading out of the one Ralph was occupying, in which I assured Sir George that Carr would be perfectly comfortable, much to the courteous old gentleman's relief, though I could see that he was evidently annoyed at not being able to put him up in the house.

In the afternoon, towards five o'clock, Carr arrived. I went into the hall to meet him, and to bring him into the drawing-room myself. Just as we came in, and while I

was introducing him to Sir George, Ralph and Aurelia, who were sitting together as usual, started a lovers' squabble.

'Oh *my!*' said Ralph suddenly.

'It is all your fault. You jogged my elbow,' came Aurelia's quick rejoinder.

'My dearest love, I did *not*,' returned Ralph on his knees, pocket-handkerchief in hand.

It appeared that, between them, they had managed to transfer Aurelia's tea from her cup to the front of her dress.

'You did; you know you did!' she said, evidently ready to cry with vexation. 'I was just going to drink, and you had your arm round the back of my——'

'Hush, Aurelia, I beg!' expostulated Charles. 'Aunt Mary and I are becoming embarrassed. It is not necessary to enter into particulars as to the exact locality of Ralph's arm.'

'Round the back of my chair,' pouted Aurelia.

'It is all right, Aunt Mary,' called Charles cheerfully to that lady. 'Only the back of her *chair*. We took alarm unnecessarily. Just as it should be. I have done the same myself with—a different chair.'

'He is *always* doing it,' continued Aurelia, unmollified. 'I have told him about it before. He made me drop a piece of bread-and-butter on the carpet only yesterday.'

'I ate it afterwards,' humbly suggested Ralph, still on his knees, 'and there were hairs in it. There were indeed, Aurelia.'

'And now it is my tea-gown,' continued Aurelia, giving way to the prettiest little outburst of temper imaginable. 'I wish you would get up and go away, Ralph, and not come back. You are only making it worse by rubbing it in that silly way with your wet handkerchief.'

'Here is another,' said Charles, snatching up Lady Mary's delicate cambric one, which was lying on her work-table, while I was in the act of introducing Carr to her; and before

that lady's politeness to Carr would allow her to turn from him to expostulate, Charles was on his knees beside Ralph, wiping the offending stain.

'"Out, damned spot!" or rather, series of spots. What, Aurelia? you don't wish it rubbed any more? Good; I will turn my attention to the Aubusson carpet. Ha! triumph! Here, at least, I am successful. Aunt Mary, you have no conception how useful your handkerchief is. The amount of tea, or dirt, or both, which is leaving the carpet and taking refuge in your little square of cambric, will surprise you when you see it. Ah!'—rising from his knees as I brought up Carr, having, by this time, presented him to Sir George—'very happy to see you, Mr. Carr. Most kind of you to come. Evelyn, are you pouring out some tea for Mr. Carr? Nature requires support before a last rehearsal. May I introduce you to my cousin, Miss Derrick?'

After Carr had also been introduced to

Aurelia, who, however, was still too much absorbed in her tea-gown to take much notice of him, he seemed glad to retreat to a chair by Evelyn, who gave him his tea, and talked pleasantly to him. He was very shy at first, but he soon got used to us, and many were the curious glances shot at him by the rest of the party as tea went on. There was to be a last rehearsal immediately afterwards, so that he might take part in it; and there was a general unacknowledged anxiety on the part of all the actors as to how he would bear that crucial test on which so much depended. I was becoming anxious myself, being in a manner responsible for him.

'You're not nervous, are you?' I said, taking him aside when tea was over. 'Only act half as well as you did on the steamer, and you will do capitally.'

'Yes, I am nervous,' he replied, with a short, uneasy laugh. 'It is enough to make a fellow nervous to be set down among a lot

of people whom he has never seen before—to act a principal part, too. I had no idea it was going to be such a grand affair, or I would not have come. I only did it to please you.'

Of course, I knew that, and I tried to reassure him, reminding him that the audience would not be critical, and how grateful every one was to him for coming.

'Tell me who some of the people are, will you?' he went on. 'Who is that tall man with the fair moustache? He is looking at us now.'

'That is Charles, the eldest son,' I replied; 'and the shorter one, with the pleasant face, near the window, is Ralph, his younger brother.'

'That is a very good-looking girl he is talking to,' he remarked. 'I did not catch her name.'

'Hush!' I said. 'That is Miss Grant, to whom he is engaged. They have just had a little tiff, and are making it up. He

does talk to her a good deal ; I have noticed it myself. Such a sweet creature!'

'Is she going to act?'

'Yes,' I replied. 'They are going to begin at once. You need not dress ; it is not a dress rehearsal.'

'I think I will go and get my boots off, though,' said Carr. 'Can you show me where I am?'

'I am afraid you are not in the house at all,' I said. 'The fact is—did not Sir George tell you?'

And then I explained.

For a moment his face fell, but it cleared instantly, though not before I had noticed it.

'You don't mind!' I said, astonished. 'You quite understand——'

'Of course, of course,' he interrupted. 'It is all right. I have a cold, that is all ; and I have to sing next week. I shall do very well. Pray don't tell your friends I have a cold. I am sure Sir George is kind-

ness itself, and it might make him uneasy to think I was not in the house.'

The rehearsal now began, and in much trepidation I waited to see Carr come on. The moment he appeared all anxiety vanished; the other actors were reassured, and acted their best. A few passages had to be repeated, a few positions altered, but it was obvious that Carr could act, and act well, though, curiously enough, he looked less gentlemanlike and well-bred when acting with Charles than he had done when he was the best among a very mixed set on the steamer.

'You act beautifully, Mr. Carr,' said Aurelia when it was over. 'Doesn't he, Ralph?'

'Doesn't he?' replied Ralph, hot, but good-humoured. 'I am sure, Carr, we are most grateful to you.'

'So am I,' said Charles. 'Your death agonies, Carr, are a credit to human nature. No great vulgar writhings with legs all over

the stage, like Denis, but a chaste, refined wriggle, and all was over. It is a pleasure to kill a man who dies in such a gentleman-like manner. If only Evelyn will keep a little closer to me when I am on my wicked baronial knees, I shall be quite happy. You hear, Evelyn?'

'How you can joke at this moment,' said Evelyn, who looked pale and nervous, 'I cannot think. I don't believe I shall be able to remember a word when it comes to the point.'

'Stage-fever coming on already,' said Charles, in a different tone. 'Ah, it is your first appearance, is it not? Go and rest now, and you will be all right when the time comes. I have a vision of a great success, and a call before the curtain, and bouquets, and other delights. Only go and rest now.'

And he went to light a candle for her. He seemed very thoughtful for Evelyn.

It was the signal for all of us to disperse—

the ladies to their rooms, the men to the only retreat left to them, the smoking-room. As Aurelia went upstairs, I saw her beckon Ralph and whisper to him :

'Am I really to wear them?'

'Wear what, my angel? The jewels? Why, good gracious! I had quite forgotten them. Of course, I want you to wear them.'

'So do I, dreadfully,' she replied, with a killing glance over the banisters. 'Only, if I am, you must bring them down in good time, and put them on in the green-room. I hope you have got them somewhere safe.'

'Safe as a church,' replied Ralph, forgetting that in these days the simile is not a good one. 'Father has them in his strong-box. I will ask him to get them out —at least, all that can be worn—and I will give them a rub up before you wear them.'

'Ah,' said Charles sadly, as we walked upstairs, 'if only I had known Sir John!'

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

It was nearly eight o'clock when I came down. The play was to begin at eight. The hall, which was brilliantly lighted, was one moving mass of black coats, with here and there a red one, and evening dresses many coloured, the people in them chatting, bowing, laughing, being ushered to their places. Lady Mary and Sir George Danvers side by side received their guests at the foot of the grand staircase, Lady Mary resplendent in diamond tiara and rivière, smiling as if she could never frown; Sir George upright, courteous, a trifle stiff, as most English country gentlemen feel it incumbent on themselves to be on such occasions.

Presently the continual roll of the carriages outside ceased, the lamps were toned down,

the orchestra struck up, and Sir George and Lady Mary took their seats, looking round with anxious satisfaction at the hall crowded with people. People lined the walls; chairs were being lifted over the heads of the sitting for some who were still standing; cushions were being arranged on the billiard-table at the back for a covey of white waistcoats who arrived late; the staircase was already crowded with servants; the whole place was crammed.

I wondered how they were getting on behind the scenes, and, slipping out of the hall, I traversed the great gold and white drawing-room, prepared for dancing, and peeped into the morning-room, which, with the adjoining library, had been given up to the actors. They were all assembled in the morning-room, however, waiting for one of the elder ladies who had not come down. The prompter was getting fidgety, and walking about. The two scene-shifters — pale, weary-looking men who had come down with the scenery — were sitting in the wings,

perfectly apathetic amid the general excitement. Charles and several other actors were standing round a footman who was opening champagne bottles at a surprising rate. I saw Charles take a glass to Evelyn, who was shivering with a sharp attack of stage-fever in an arm-chair, looking over her part. She smiled gratefully, but as she did so her eyes wandered to the other side of the room, where Ralph, on his knees before Aurelia, was fastening a diamond star in her dress. Diamonds, rubies, and emeralds flashed in her hair and on her white neck and arms. Ralph was fixing the last ornament on to her shoulder with wire off a champagne bottle, there being no clasp to hold it in its place. I saw Evelyn turn away again, and Charles, who was watching her, suddenly went off to the fire, and began to complain of the cold and of the thinness of his silk stockings.

The elder lady—'the heavy mother,' as Charles irreverently called her—now arrived; the orchestra, which was giving a final

flourish, was begged in a hoarse whisper to keep going a few minutes longer; eyes were applied to the hole in the curtain, and then, everyone being assembled, it was felt by all that the awful moment had come at last. A more miserable-looking set of people I never saw. I always imagined that the actors behind the scenes were as gay off the stage as on it; but I found, to my astonishment, that they were all suffering more or less from severe mental depression. Ralph and Aurelia were now sitting ruefully together on an ottoman beside the painting-table, littered with its various rouges and creams and stage appliances. Even Charles, who had established Evelyn on a chair in the wings at the side she had to come on from, and was now drinking champagne with due regard to his paint—even Charles owned to being nervous.

'I wish to goodness Mrs. Wright would begin!' he said. 'Ah, there she goes'—as she ascended the stage steps. 'There goes the bell. We are in for it now. She starts,

and I come on next. Up goes the curtain. Where the devil has my book got to?'

In another moment he was in the wings, intent on his part; then I saw him throw down his book and go jauntily forward. A moment more, and there was a thunder of applause. All the actors looked at each other and smiled a feeble smile.

'He will do,' said General Marston, the Indian officer, who, now in the dress of an old-fashioned livery servant, proceeded to mount the steps. It dawned upon me that I was missing the play, and I hurried back, to find Charles convulsing the audience with the utmost coolness, and evidently enjoying himself exceedingly. Then Evelyn came on—— But who cares to read a description of a play? It is sufficient to say that Aurelia looked charming, and many were the whispered comments on her magnificent jewels; but on the stage Evelyn surpassed her, as much as Aurelia surpassed Evelyn off it.

Ralph and Carr did well, but Charles

was the favourite with everyone, from the Duchess of Crushington in the front seat to the scullery-maid on the staircase. He was so bold, so wicked, so insinuating, in his plumed cap and short cloak, so elegantly refined when he wiped his sword upon his second's handkerchief. He took everyone's heart by storm. Ralph, who represented all the virtues, with rather thick ankles and a false moustache, was nowhere. When the curtain fell for the last time, amid great and continued applause, the 'heavy mother,' Ralph, Aurelia, all were well received as they passed before it; but Charles, who appeared last, was the hero of the evening.

'He is engaged to his cousin, Miss Derrick, isn't he?' said a lady near me in a loud whisper to a friend.

'Hush! no. Charles can't marry. Head over ears in debt. They say *she* is attached to one of her cousins, but I forget which. I am not sure it was not the other one.'

'Then it is the second son who is going

to be married, is it? I know I heard something about one of them being engaged.'

'Yes, the second son is engaged to that good-looking girl in diamonds, who acted Florence Mordaunt. A lot of money, I believe, but not much in the way of family. Grandfather sold mousetraps in Birmingham, so people say.'

'She looks like it!' replied the other, who had daughters out, and could not afford to let any praise of other girls pass. 'No breeding or refinement; and she will be stout later, you will see.'

The play being over, a general movement now set in towards the drawing-room, where the band was already installed, and making its presence known by an inspiriting valse tune. In a few moments twenty, thirty, forty couples were swaying to the music; Aurelia, in her acting costume, was dancing away with Ralph in his red stockings, Carr with the 'heavy mother,' and Charles in prosaic evening-dress was flying past with

Evelyn, who, now that she had effaced her beautiful stage complexion, looked pale and grave as ever.

I suppose it was a capital ball. Everyone seemed to enjoy it. I did not dance myself, but I liked watching the others; and after a time Charles, who had been dancing indefatigably with two schoolroom girls with pigtails, came and flung himself down on the other half of the ottoman on which I was sitting.

'Three times with each!' he said, in a voice of extreme exhaustion. 'No favouritism. I have done for to-night now.'

'What! Are you not going to dance any more?'

'No, not unless Evelyn will give me another turn later, which she probably won't. There she goes with Lord Breakwater again. How I do dislike that young man! And look at Carr, valsing with Aurelia! He seems to be leaping on her feet a good deal, and she looks as if she were telling him so,

does not she? There! they have subsided into the bay window. I thought she would not stand it long. He does not dance as well as he acts. Heigh-ho! Come in to supper with me, Middleton. The supper-room will be emptier now, and I am dying of hunger. You must be the same, for you had no regular dinner any more than we had. Come along. We will get a certain little table for two that I know of in the bay window, where I took the fair pigtail just now, to the evident anxiety of the parental chignon, who was at the large table. We will have a good feed in peace and quietness.'

In a few minutes we were established in a quiet nook in the supper-room, which was now half empty, and were making short work of everything before us.

'How well Carr acted!' said Charles at last, leaning back, and leisurely sipping his champagne. 'I can think of something besides food now. Did not you think he acted well?'

'Yes,' I said; 'but you cut him out.'

'Did I?' said Charles absently, beckoning to some lobster salad which was passing. 'Have some? Do, Middleton. We can but die once. You won't? Well, I will! Have you often seen Carr act before?'

'Never,' I said. 'I never met him till he came on board the *Bosphorus* at——'

'Indeed! Oh, I fancied you were quite old friends!'

'We made great friends on the steamer.'

'Did you see much of him in London?' he asked, filling up his glass and mine.

'Not much, naturally,' I said, laughing. 'I was only in London two nights.'

'Ah! I forgot. Very good of you, I am sure, to come down here so soon after your arrival. You would hardly have seen him at all since you landed, then?'

'Carr? Yes,' I replied, thinking Charles's talk was becoming very vague; though when I rallied him about it next day he assured me it had been very much to the point

indeed. 'We dined and went to the play together, and had rather a nasty accident into the bargain on our way home.'

'What kind of accident?'

I told him the particulars, which seemed to interest him very much.

'And you had all those jewels of poor Sir John's with you, no doubt,' continued Charles. 'You said you had them on you day and night. I wonder you were not relieved of them.'

'That is just what Carr said,' I went on; 'for he lost something of his, poor fellow. However, I had left them with Jane in a—in a safe place.'

I did not think it necessary to mention the tea-caddy.

'Oh! so Carr knew you had charge of them, did he?' said Charles. 'Have some of these grapes, Middleton; the white ones are the best.'

'Yes,' I said; 'he was the only person who had any idea of such a thing. I am very careful, I can tell you; and I did not

mean to have half the ship's company know that I had valuables to such an amount upon me. When I told Jane about them——'

'Oh! then Jane—I beg her pardon, Miss Middleton—was aware you had them with you?'

'Of course!' I replied; 'and she was quite astonished at them when I showed them to her.'

'I hope,' continued Charles, with his charming smile—all the more charming because it was so rare—'that Miss Middleton will add me to the number of her friends some day. I live in London, you know; but I wonder at ladies caring to live there. No poultry or garden, to which the female mind usually clings.'

'Jane seems to like it,' I said.

'Yes,' replied Charles meditatively. 'I dare say she is very wise. A woman who lives alone is much safer in town than in an isolated house in the country, in case of fire, or thieves, or——'

'Well, I don't know that,' I said. 'I don't see that they are so very safe. Why, only the night before I came down here——'

I stopped. I had looked up to catch a sudden glimpse of Carr's face, pale and uneasy, watching us in a mirror opposite. In a moment I saw his face turn smiling to another—Evelyn's, I think—and both were gone.

Charles's light steel eyes were fixed full upon me.

'"Only the night before you came down here," you were saying,' he remarked, leaning back and half shutting them, as usual.

'Yes, only the night before I came down here our house was broken into;' and I gave him a short account of what had happened. 'And only the night before *that*,' I added; 'a poor woman was murdered in Jane's old house. I remember it especially, because I went to the house by mistake, not knowing Jane had moved, and I saw her, poor thing, sitting by the fire. I don't see

that living in town *is* so much safer for life and property, after all.'

'Dear me! no. You are right, perfectly right,' said Charles dreamily. 'Your sister's experience proves it. And that other poor creature—only the night before—and in Miss Middleton's former house, too. Well, Middleton,' with a start, 'I suppose we ought to be going back now. I have got all I want, if you have. I wonder what time it is? I'm dog tired.'

We re-entered the ball-room to find the last valse being played, and a crowd of people taking leave of Lady Mary.

'Where's father?' asked Charles, as Ralph came up. 'He ought to be here to say good-night.'

'He's gone to bed,' said Ralph. 'Aunt Mary sent him. He was quite done up. He has been on his legs all day. I expect he will be laid up to-morrow.'

In a quarter of an hour the ball-room was empty, and Lady Mary, who was dragging

herself wearily towards the hall as the last carriage rolled away, felt that she might safely restore the balance of her mind by a sudden lapse from the gracious and benevolent to the acid and severe.

'To bed! to bed!' she kept repeating. 'Where is Evelyn? I want her arm. General Marston, Colonel Middleton, will you have the goodness to go and glean up these young people? Mrs. Marston and Lady Delmour, you must both be tired to death. Let us go on, and they can follow.'

General Marston and I found a whole flock of the said young people in the library, candle in hand, laughing and talking, thinking they were going that moment, but not doing it, and all, in fact, listening to Charles, who was expounding a theory of his own respecting ball-dresses, which seemed to meet with the greatest feminine derision.

'First take your silk slip,' he was saying as we came in. 'There is nothing indiscreet in mentioning a slip, is there, Evelyn?

I trust not; for I heard Lady Delmour telling Mrs. Wright that all well-brought-up young ladies had silk slips. Then——'

'He exposes his ignorance more entirely every moment,' said Evelyn. 'Let us all go to bed, and leave him to hold forth to men who know as little as himself.'

'Oh, Ralph,' said Aurelia, pointing to the jewels on her neck and arms; 'before we go I want you to take back these. I don't like keeping them myself; I am afraid of them.'

And she began to take them off and lay them on the table.

'Nonsense, my pet! keep them yourself, and lock them up in your dressing-case.' And Ralph held them towards her.

'I haven't got a dressing-case,' said Aurelia, pouting; 'and my hat-box won't lock. I don't like having them. I wish you would keep them yourself.'

'Bother!' said Ralph; 'and father has gone to bed. He can't put them back into

his safe, and he keeps the key himself. Where is the bag they go in?'

Aurelia said that she had seen him put it behind a certain jar on the chimney-piece in the morning-room, and Carr went for it, she following him with a candle, as all the lamps had been put out. They presently returned with it, and Ralph, who had been collecting all the jewels spread over the table, shovelled them in with little ceremony.

'Bother!' he said, again looking round and swinging the bag; 'what on earth am I to do with them? Ah, well, here goes!' and he opened a side drawer in a massive writing-table and shoved the bag in.

'There!' he said, locking it, and putting the key in his pocket; 'they will do very well there till to-morrow. Are you content now, Aurelia?'

'Oh yes,' she said; 'I am, if you are.' And she bade us good-night and followed in the wake of the others, who were really under way at last.

As we all tramped wearily upstairs to the smoking-room, I saw Charles draw Ralph aside and whisper something to him.

'Nonsense!' I heard Ralph say. 'Safe enough. Besides, who would suspect their being there? Just as safe as in the strong-box. Brahma lock. Won't be bothered any more about them.'

Charles shrugged his shoulders and marched off to bed. Ralph and Carr likewise went off shortly afterwards to their rooms in the lodge. Carr looked tired to death. I went down with them, at Ralph's request, to lock the door behind them, as all the servants had gone to bed.

It was a fine night, still and cold, with a bright moon. It had evidently been snowing afresh, for there was not a trace of wheels upon the ground; but it had ceased now.

'Good-night!' called Ralph and Carr, as they went down the steps together. I watched the two figures for a moment in

the moonlight, their footsteps making a double track in the untrodden snow. The cold was intense. I drew back shivering, and locked and bolted the door.

CHAPTER II.

It is very seldom I cannot sleep, but I could not that night. There was something in the intense quiet and repose of the great house, after all the excitement of the last few hours, that oppressed me. Everything seemed, as I lay awake, so unnaturally silent. There was not a sound in the wide grate, where the last ashes of the fire were silently giving up the ghost, not a rumble of wind in the old chimney, which had had so much to say the night before. I tossed and turned, and vainly sought for sleep, now on this side, now on that. At last I gave up trying, half in the hope that it might steal upon me unawares. I thought of the play and the ball, of poor Charles and his debts—of anything and everything, but it was no good.

In the midst of a jumble of disconnected ideas I suddenly found myself listening again to the silence, listening as if it had been broken by a sound which I had not heard. My watch ticked loud and louder on the dressing-table, and presently I gave quite a start as the distant stable clock tolled out the hour—one—two—three—four. I had gone to bed before three. Had I only been awake an hour? It seemed incredible. Getting up on tip-toe, vaguely afraid myself of breaking the silence, I noiselessly pushed aside the heavy curtains and looked out.

The moon had set, but by the frosty starlight the outline of the great snow-laden trees and the wide sweep of white drive were still dimly visible. All was silent without as within. Not a branch moved or let fall its freight of snow. There was not a breath of wind stirring. I was on the point of getting back into bed, when I thought in the distance I heard a sound. I listened intently. No! I must have been mistaken. Ah! again, and

nearer. I held my breath. I could distinctly hear a stealthy step coming up the stairs. My room was the nearest to the staircase end of the corridor, and anyone coming up the stairs must pass my door. With a presence of mind which I am glad to say rarely deserts me, I blew out my candle, slipped to the door, and noiselessly opened it a chink.

Someone was coming down the corridor with the lightness of a cat, candle in hand, as a faint light showed me. Another moment and I saw Charles, pale and haggard, still in evening dress, coming towards me. He was without his shoes. He passed my door and went noiselessly into his own room, a little further down the passage. There was the faintest suspicion of a sound, as of a key being gently turned in the lock, and then all was still again—stiller than ever.

'What could Charles have been after?' I wondered. He could not have been returning from seeing Denis, who was not only much better, but was in the room beyond his

own. And why had he still got on his evening clothes at four o'clock in the morning? I determined to ask him about it next day as I got back into bed again, and then, while wondering about it and trying to get warm, I fell fast asleep. I was only roused, after being twice called, to find that it was broad daylight, and to hear the boxes being carried down of many of the guests who were leaving by an early train.

I was late, but not so late as some. Breakfast was still going on. Evelyn and Ralph had been up to see their friends off, but General and Mrs. Marston and Carr, who were staying on, came in after I did. Lady Mary and Aurelia were having breakfast in their own rooms. I think nothing is more dreary than a long breakfast-table, laid for large numbers, with half a dozen picnicing at it among the débris left by earlier ravages. Evelyn behind the great silver urn looked pale and preoccupied, and had very little to say for herself when I journeyed up to her

end of the table and sat down by her. She asked me twice if I took sugar, and was not bright and alert and ready in conversation, as I think girls should be. Carr, too, was eating his breakfast in silence beside Mrs. Marston.

It was not cheerful. And then Charles came in, listless and tired, and without an appetite. He sat down wearily on the other side of Evelyn, and watched her pour out his coffee without a word.

'The Carews and Edmonts and Lady Delmour and her daughters have just gone,' said Evelyn, 'and Mr. Denis.'

'Yes,' replied Charles, seeming to pull himself together; 'Denis came to my room before he went. He looked a wreck, poor fellow, but not worse than some of us. These late hours, these friskings with energetic young creatures in the schoolroom, these midnight revels, are too much for me. I feel a perfect wreck this morning, too.'

He certainly looked it.

'Have you had bad letters?' said Evelyn, in a low voice.

He laughed a little—a grim laugh—and shook his head. 'But I had yesterday,' he added presently, in a low tone. 'I shall have to try change of air again soon, I am afraid.'

I was just going to ask Charles what he had been doing walking about in his socks the night before when the door opened, and Ralph, whose absence I had not noticed, came in. He looked much perturbed. It seemed his father had been taken suddenly and alarmingly ill, while dressing. In a moment all was confusion. Evelyn precipitately left the room to go to him, while Charles rushed round to the stables to send a groom on horseback for the nearest doctor. Ralph followed him, and the remainder of the party gathered in a little knot round the fire, Mrs. Marston expressing the sentiment of each of us when she said that she thought visitors were very much in the way when

there was illness in the house, and that she regretted that she and her husband had arranged to stay over Sunday, to-day being Friday.

'So have I,' said Carr; 'but I am sure I had better have refused. A stranger in a sick house is a positive nuisance. I think I shall go to town by an afternoon train, if there is one.'

'Upon my word I think we had better do the same,' said Mrs. Marston. 'What do you say, Arthur?' And she turned to her husband.

'I must go to-day, anyhow—on business,' said General Marston.

'I hope no one is talking of leaving,' said Charles, who had returned suddenly, rather out of breath.

As he spoke his eyes were fixed on Carr.

'Yes, that is exactly what we were doing,' said Mrs. Marston. 'Nothing is so tiresome as having visitors on one's hands when there is illness in the house. Mr. Carr was think-

ing of going up to London by the afternoon train; and I have a very good mind to go away with Arthur, instead of staying on, and letting him come back here for me to-morrow, as we had intended.'

'Pray do not think of such a thing!' said Charles, really with unnecessary earnestness. 'Mrs. Marston, pray do not alter your plans. Carr!' in a much sterner tone, 'I must beg that you will not think of leaving us to-day. Your friend, Colonel Middleton, is staying on, and we cannot allow you to desert us so suddenly.'

It was more like a command than an invitation; but Carr, usually so quick to take a slight, did not seem to notice it, and merely said that he should be happy to go or stay, whichever was most in accordance with the wishes of others, and took up the newspaper. He and Charles did not seem to get on well. I could see that Charles had not seemed to take to him from the very first; and Carr certainly did not appear at ease in

the house. Perhaps Charles felt that he had rather failed in courtesy to him, for during the remainder of the morning he hardly let him out of his sight. He took him to see the stables, though Carr openly declared that he did not understand horses; he showed him his collection of Zulu weapons in the vestibule; he even started a game of billiards with him till the arrival of the doctor. I did not think Carr took his attentions in very good part, though he was too well-mannered to show it; but he looked relieved when Charles went upstairs with the doctor, and pitched his cue into the rack at once, and came to the hall fire where I was sitting, and where Aurelia presently joined us, fresh and smiling, in the prettiest of morning gowns. Everyone met in the hall. It was in the centre of the house, and every one coming up or down had to pass through it. Just now it was not so tempting an abode as usual, for the flowers and part of the stage had already been removed, and the bare boards with their

wooden supports gave an air of discomfort to the whole place.

Aurelia opened wide eyes of horror at hearing Sir George was ill. She even got out a tiny laced pocket-handkerchief; but before she had had time to weep much into it and spoil her pretty eyes the doctor reappeared, accompanied by Charles and Ralph, and we all learned to our great relief that Sir George, though undoubtedly ill, was not dangerously so at present, though the greatest care would be necessary. Lady Mary had undertaken the nursing of her brother-in-law, and in her the doctor expressed the same confidence which parents are wont to feel in a stern schoolmaster. In the meantime, the patient was to be kept very quiet, and on no account to be disturbed.

When the doctor had left, Ralph and Aurelia, who had actually seen nothing of each other that morning, sauntered away together towards the library. Charles challenged Carr to finish his game of

billiards; and Marston and I retired upstairs to the smoking-room, where we could talk over our Indian experiences, and perhaps doze undisturbed. We might have been so occupied for half an hour or more when a flying step came up the stairs, the door was thrown open, and Ralph rushed into the room.

'General Marston! Colonel Middleton!' he gasped out, breathing hard, 'will you both of you come to my father's room at once? He has sent for you.'

'Good gracious! Is he worse?' I exclaimed.

'No. Hush! Don't ask anything, but just come,' and he turned and led the way to Sir George Danvers' room.

We followed in wondering silence, and, after passing along numerous passages, were ushered into a large, oak-panelled room with a great carved bed in it, in the middle of which, bolt upright, sat Sir George Danvers, pale as ivory, his light steel eyes (so like

Charles's) seeming to be the only living thing about him. As we came in, he looked at each of us in turn.

'Where is Charles?' he said, speaking in a hoarse whisper.

'Dear me! Sir George,' I said sympathetically, 'how you *have* lost your voice!'

He looked at me for a moment, and then turned to Ralph again.

'Where is Charles?' he asked a second time, in the same tone.

'Here!' said a quiet voice. And Charles came in, and shut the door.

CHAPTER III.

THE two pairs of steel eyes met and looked fixedly at each other.

A tap came to the door. Sir George winced and made a sign to Ralph, who rushed to it and bolted it.

'I am coming in, George,' said Lady Mary's voice.

'Send her away,' came a whisper from the bed.

This was easier said than done. But it *was* done after a sufficiently long parley; and Lady Mary retired under the impression that Ralph was sitting alone with his father, who thought he might get a little sleep.

'Now,' whispered Sir George, motioning to Ralph.

'The fact is,' said Ralph, 'the jewels

are gone. They have been stolen in the night.'

He blurted out with this one sentence, and then was silent. Marston and I stared at him aghast.

'Is there no mistake?' said Marston at last.

'None,' replied Ralph. 'I put them in a drawer in the great inlaid writing-table in the library last night, before everybody. I went for them this morning, half an hour ago, at father's request. The lock was broken, and they were gone.'

There was another long silence.

'I was a fool, of course, to put them there,' resumed Ralph. 'Charles told me so; but I thought they were as safe there as anywhere, if no one knew—and no one did, except the house party.'

'Were any of the servants about?' asked Marston.

'Not one. They had all gone to bed except one of the footmen, who was putting

out the lamps in the supper-room, miles away.'

Another silence.

'That is the dreadful part of it,' burst out Ralph. 'They must have been taken by someone staying in the house—someone who saw me put them there. The first thing I did was to send for the housemaids, and they assured me that they had found every shutter shut, and every door locked, this morning, as usual. Anyone with time and wits *might* have got in through one of the library windows by taking out a pane and forcing the shutter. I suppose a practised hand might have done such a thing; but I went outside, and there was not a footstep in the snow anywhere near the library windows, or, for that matter, anywhere near the house at all, except at the side and front doors, which are impracticable for anyone to force an entrance by.'

'When did it leave off snowing?' asked Marston.

'About three o'clock,' replied Ralph. 'It must have snowed heavily till then, for there was not a trace of all the carriage-wheels on the drive when we went out last night, but our footprints down to the lodge are clear in the snow now. There has been no snow since three o'clock this morning.'

'It all points to the same thing,' said Charles quietly, speaking for the first time. 'The jewels were taken by someone staying in the house.'

'One of the servants——' began Marston.

'No,' said Charles, cutting him short, 'not one of the servants.'

'It is impossible it should have been one of them,' said Ralph, after some thought. 'First of all, none of them saw the jewels put into that drawer, and secondly, how could they suspect me of hiding them in a place where I had never thought of putting them myself till that moment? Besides, that one drawer only was broken open—the centre drawer in the left-hand set of drawers. All the others

were untouched, though they were all locked. No one who had not *seen* the jewels put in would have found them so easily. That is the frightful part of it.'

For a few minutes no one spoke. At last Marston raised his head from his hands.

'There is no way out of it,' he said very gravely. 'The robbery was committed by one of the visitors staying in the house.'

'Yes,' said Charles.

'Yes,' echoed a whisper from the bed.

Charles looked up slowly and deliberately, and the eyes of father and son met again.

'We do not often agree, father,' he said in a measured voice. 'I mark this exception to the rule with pleasure.'

'When I had made out as much as this,' continued Ralph, 'father told me to call both of you and Charles, to consider what ought to be done before we make any move.'

'Have you an inventory of the jewels?' asked Marston at length.

'None,' said Sir George, 'unless Middleton had one from Sir John.'

I thereupon recapitulated in full all the circumstances of the bequest, finally adding that Sir John had never so much as mentioned an inventory.

'So much the better for the thief,' said Marston, his chin in his hands. 'It is not a case for a detective,' he added.

'I think not,' said Charles.

A kind of hoarse ghostly laugh came from the bed.

'Charles is always right,' whispered the sick man. 'Quite unnecessary, I am sure.'

'Oh, I don't know,' I said, feeling I had not yet been of as much assistance as I could have wished. 'Now *I* think detectives are of use—really useful, you know, in finding out things. There was a detective, I remember, trying to trace the people who murdered that poor lady at Jane's old house since my return.'

'But who could it have been?—who could

it have been?' burst out Ralph, unheeding. 'They were all friends. It is frightful to suspect one of them. One could as easily suspect one's self. Which of them all could have done a thing like that? Out of them all, which was it?'

'Carr!' replied Charles quietly, looking full at his father.

If a bombshell had fallen among us at that moment it could not have produced a greater effect than that one word, uttered so deliberately. Sir George started in his bed, and clutched at the bedclothes with both hands. My brain positively reeled. Carr!—my friend Carr!—introduced into the family by myself, was being accused by Charles. I was speechless with indignation.

'I am sorry, Middleton,' continued Charles. 'I know he is your friend, but I can't help that. Carr took the jewels. I distrusted him from the moment he set foot in the house.'

'Where is he at this instant?' said Marston, getting up. 'Is no one with him?'

'There is no reason to be anxious on his account,' replied Charles. 'I took him up to the smoking-room before I came here, and I turned the key in the door. The key is here.' And he laid it on the table.

Marston sat down again.

'What are your grounds for suspecting Carr?' he asked. 'Remember, this is a very serious thing, Charles, that you have done in locking him up if you have not adequate reason for it.'

'You had better leave Carr alone, Charles,' said Ralph significantly.

'Let him go on,' said Sir George.

'I have no proof,' continued Charles; 'I did not see him take them, but I am as certain of it as if I had seen it with my own eyes. The jewels could only have been stolen by someone staying in the house. That is certain. Who, excepting Carr, was a stranger among us? Who, excepting Carr——'

'Stop, Charles!' said Ralph again. 'Don't

you know that Carr slept with me down at the lodge?'

Charles turned on his brother and gripped his shoulder.

'Do you mean to say,' he said sharply, 'that Carr did not sleep in the house last night?'

'Dear me, Charles, that was an oversight on your part,' came Sir George's whisper.

'No,' replied Ralph, 'he did not. The house was full, and we had to put him in that second small room through mine in the lodge. If Carr had been dying to take them he had not the opportunity. He could not have left his room without passing through mine, and I never went to sleep at all. I had a sharp touch of neuralgia from the cold, which kept me awake all night.'

'He got out through the window,' said Charles.

'Nonsense!' said Ralph, getting visibly angry; 'you are only making matters worse by trying to put it on him. Remember the

size of the window. Besides, you know how the lodge stands, built against the garden wall. When I came out this morning there was not a single footstep in the snow, except those we had made as we went there the night before. I noticed our footmarks particularly, because I had been afraid there would be more snow. No one could by any possibility have left the house during the night. Even Jones himself had not been out, for there was a little eddy of snow before the back door, and I remember calling to him that he would want his broom.'

'The snow clinches the matter, Charles,' said Marston gravely. 'You have made a mistake.'

'Quite unintentional, I'm sure,' whispered Sir George.

There was something I did not like about that whisper. It seemed to imply more than met the ear.

Charles did not appear to hear him. He was looking fixedly before him, his hand had

dropped from Ralph's shoulder; his face was quite gray.

'Then,' he said slowly, as if waking out of a dream, 'it was *not* Carr.'

'No,' said Sir George; 'I never thought it was.'

'Good God!' ejaculated Charles, sinking into a low chair by the fire, and shading his face with his hand. 'Not Carr, after all!'

But my indignation could not be restrained a moment longer. I had only been kept silent by repeated signs from Marston, and now I broke out.

'And so, sir, you suspect my friend,' I said, 'and insult him in your father's house by turning the key on him. You endeavour to throw suspicion on a man who never injured you in the slightest degree. You insult *me* in insulting my friend, sir. Suspicion is not always such an easy thing to shake off as it has been in this instance. I, on my side, might ask what *you* were doing,

walking about the passages in your socks at four o'clock this morning? In your socks, sir, still in your evening clothes——'

I had spoken in anger, not thinking much what I was saying, and I stopped short, alarmed at the effect of my own words.

'I knew it! I knew it!' screamed Sir George, in a sort of suffocated whistle, and he fell back gasping among his pillows.

Charles took his hand from his face, and looked hard at me with a strange kind of smile.

'At any rate, we are quits, Middleton,' he said. 'You have done it now, and no mistake.'

I did not quite see what I had done, but it soon became apparent.

'I knew it!' gasped out the sick man again. 'I knew it from the first moment that he tried to throw suspicion on Carr.'

'Sir George,' said Marston gravely, 'Charles made a mistake just now. Do not you on your side make another. Come,

Charles,' turning to the latter, who was now sitting erect with flashing eyes, 'tell us about it. What were you doing when Middleton saw you?'

'I was coming upstairs,' said Charles haughtily.

'From the library?' asked Sir George.

Charles bit his lip and remained silent.

I would not have spoken to him for a good deal at that moment. He looked positively dangerous.

'From the library, of course,' he said at last, controlling himself, and speaking with something of his old careless manner, 'laden with the spoils of my midnight depredations. Parental fondness will supply all minor details, no doubt; so, as the subject is a delicate one for me, I will withdraw, that it may be discussed more fully in my absence.'

'Stop, Charles,' said Marston; 'the case is too serious for banter of this kind. My dear boy,' he added kindly, 'I am glad to see you angry, but nevertheless you must

condescend to explain. The longer you allow suspicion to rest on yourself, the longer it will be before it falls on the right person. Come, what were you doing in the passage at that time of night?'

Charles was touched, I could see. A very little kindness was too much for him.

'It is no good, Marston,' he said, in quite a different voice; 'I am not believed in this house.'

He turned away and leant against the mantelpiece, looking into the fire. Ralph cleared his throat once or twice, and then suddenly went up to him, and laid his hand affectionately on his shoulder.

'Fire away, old boy!' he said in a constrained tone, and he choked again.

Charles turned round and faced his brother with the saddest smile I ever saw.

'Well, Ralph!' he said, 'I will tell you everything; and then you can believe me or not, as you like. I have never told you a lie, have I?'

'Not often,' replied Ralph unwillingly.

'You at least are truth itself,' said Charles, reddening; 'and if you are biassed in your opinion of me, perhaps it is more the fault of that exemplary Christian, Aunt Mary, than your own. According to her, I have told lies enough to float a company or carry an election, and I never like to disappoint her expectations of me in that respect; but you I have never to my knowledge deceived, and I am not going to begin now.'

'You will be a clergyman yet,' whispered the sick parent. 'There is a good living in the family, Charles. I shall live to see the Reverend Charles Danvers in a surplice, preaching his first sermon on the ninth commandment.'

'At any rate he is practising the fifth under difficulties at this moment,' said Marston, as Charles winced and turned his back on the parental sick-bed. 'Come, my boy, we are losing time.'

'Will somebody have the goodness to

restrain Middleton if he gets excited,' said Charles. 'I am afraid he won't like part of what I have got to say.'

'Nonsense, sir!' I replied with warmth. 'I hope I can restrain myself as well as any man, even under such provocation as I have lately received. You may depend on me, sir, that——'

'We lose time,' said Marston, seating himself by me, and cutting short what I was saying in an exceedingly brusque manner. 'Come, Charles, you shall not be interrupted.'

But he was. I interrupted him the whole time, in spite of continual efforts on the part of Marston to make me keep silence. I am not the man calmly to let pass black insinuations against the character of a friend. No, I stood up for him. I am glad to think how I stood up for him, not only metaphorically, but in the most literal sense of the term; for I found myself continually getting up, and Marston as often pulling me down again into my chair.

'Am I to speak, or is Middleton?' said Charles at last, in despair. 'I will do a solo, or I will keep silence; but really I am unequal to a duet.'

'Sir George,' said Marston, 'will you have the goodness to desire Colonel Middleton to be silent, or to leave the room till Charles has finished his story.'

I was justly annoyed at Marston's manner of speaking of me, but as I had no intention to leave the room and miss what was going on, I merely bowed in answer to a civil request from Sir George, and took up an attitude of dignified silence. I felt that I had done my part in vindicating my friend, and after all no one evidently was accustomed to believe what Charles said.

'As I was saying,' he continued, 'I suspected Carr from the first. I did not like the look of him, and I purposely pumped Middleton about him last night at supper.'

I nearly burst out at the bare idea of Charles daring to say he had pumped me;

but, as will be seen, he could twist anything that was said to such an extent that it was perfectly useless to contradict him any longer. I said not a single word, and he went on :

'All Middleton told me confirmed me in my suspicions. Sir John had been murdered the night before Middleton sailed for England, a whisper of the jewels having no doubt gone abroad. Carr came on board next day, and made friends with Middleton. Whether he had anything to do with the murder or not, God knows! but he found out —nay, Middleton openly told him that he had jewels of great value in his possession, which he carried about on his person. Carr was the only person aware of that fact. What follows? Carr has Middleton's address in London. Middleton goes to the house, and finds that his sister has moved to the next street. The house to which he first went is broken into, and the poor woman in it is murdered, or dies of fright, that same night. I mention this as coincidence number

one. The following evening Middleton, having by chance left the jewels at home, dines and goes to the theatre by appointment with Carr. Unique cab accident occurs, in which Middleton is knocked on the head and rendered unconscious. Coincidence number two. Miss Middleton's house is broken into that same night on Middleton's return to it. Coincidence number three. When I put all this together last night, remembering that Carr, by Middleton's own account, was the only person aware that he had jewels of great value in his keeping, I felt absolutely certain (as I feel still) that he had accepted the invitation and come down from London solely for the purpose of stealing them. It was pure conjecture on my part, and I dared say nothing beyond begging Ralph not to leave the jewels in the library—which, however, he did. I went straight off to my room when the others went to smoke, but I did not go to bed. The more I thought it over, the more certain I felt that Carr would not let

slip such an opportunity, the more convinced that an attempt would be made that very night. I did not know that he was not sleeping in the house, but I knew Ralph was at the lodge, so I could not go and consult with him as I should otherwise have done. I thought of going to Middleton, whose room was close to mine, but on second thoughts I gave up the idea. I am glad I did. At last I determined I would wait till the house was quiet, and that then I would go down alone, and watch in the library in the dark. I lay down on my bed in my clothes to wait, and then—I had been up most of the night before with Denis, and was dead beat with acting and dancing—by ill luck I fell asleep. When I woke up, I found to my horror that it was close on four o'clock. I instantly slipped off my shoes, and crept out of my room and down the stairs. I could not get to the library from the hall, as the stage blocked the way, and I had to go all the way round by the drawing-room and morning-

room. As I went I thought how easy it would be for Carr to force the lock of the drawer; and so, it flashed across me, could I. Oh! Ralph,' said Charles, 'I went down solely to look after your property for you, but I *did* think of it. I hope I should not have done it, but I suddenly remembered how hard pressed I was for money, and I did think of the crescent, and how you would hardly miss it, and how—but what does it matter now? When I got to the library I found I was too late. The lock of the drawer had been forced, and it was empty. There was nothing for it but to go back to my room. I felt as certain that Carr had done it as that I am standing here; but I dared say nothing this morning, for fear of drawing an ever-ready parental suspicion on myself—which, however, Middleton did for me. All I could do was to keep Carr well in sight until the theft was found out, to prevent any possibility of his escaping, and then to accuse him. There!' said Charles, 'that

is the whole truth. Carr did not take the jewels. That is absolutely proved, and the sooner he is let out the better. Who took them, Heaven only knows! I don't. But I know who meant to, and that was Carr.'

'Charles,' said Ralph, with glistening eyes, 'if ever I get them back, you shall have the crescent.'

'A very neat little story altogether,' said Sir George, 'and the episode of temptation very effectively thrown in. It does you credit, my son, and is a great relief to your old father's mind.'

'Thank you, Charles,' said Marston, getting up. 'Sir George, it is close on luncheon time, and Carr must be let out at once. Now that Charles has so completely cleared himself, I don't see that anything more can be done for the moment; and of one thing I am certain—namely, that you are making yourself much worse, and must keep absolutely quiet for the rest of the day. If I may advise, I should suggest that Carr

should be allowed to leave, as he wishes to do, by the afternoon train, and should not be pressed to stay. There is nothing more to be got out of him, and, considering the circumstances, I should say the sooner he is out of the house the better. As he has been wrongly suspected, I think the robbery had better not be mentioned to anyone, even the ladies in the house, until after he has left.'

'Aurelia knows,' said Ralph. 'She was with me in the library. I left her crying bitterly about them.'

'Let her cry, if she will only hold her tongue,' said Sir George, making a last effort to speak, but evidently at the extreme point of exhaustion. 'And you, Marston, you are right about Carr. See that he goes this afternoon. There is nothing more to be done at present. Charles, you will remain here, though I have no doubt you have an engagement in London. I cannot spare you just yet.'

Charles bowed, and he and Marston went

out. I remained a second behind with Ralph.

'I see it quite clearly,' said Sir George. 'I know Charles. He is sharp enough. He saw Carr meant mischief, and he was beforehand with him; and *he* took what Carr meant to take. It was not badly imagined, but he should have made certain Carr was sleeping in the house. It all turned on that. He never reckoned on the possibility of Carr being cleared.'

'Middleton is still here,' said Ralph, who was pouring out something for his father, significantly.

'Is he? I thought he was gone!' said Sir George, so sharply that I considered it advisable to retire at once.

Charles and Marston were talking together earnestly in the passage.

'He does not believe a word I say,' said Charles, as I joined them; 'and, what is more, I could see he had told Ralph he suspected me before we came in. Did not you

see how Ralph tried to stop me when he thought I was committing myself by accusing Carr, who, it seems, was quite out of the question? I am glad you cut it short, Marston. He was making himself worse every moment.'

'Come on with that key of yours, and let us go and let Carr,' out replied Marston, patting Charles kindly on the back, 'or he will be kicking all the paint off the door.'

'Not he,' said Charles. 'An honest man would have rung up the whole household and nearly battered the door down by this time, thinking it had been locked by mistake. Carr knows better.'

We had reached the smoking-room by this time, just as the gong was beginning to sound for luncheon, and, under cover of the noise, Charles fitted the key into the keyhole and unlocked the door. He and Marston went slowly in, talking on some indifferent subject, and I followed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE room seemed strangely quiet after the stormy interview in the sick-chamber which we had just left. The pale winter sunlight was stealing in aslant through the low windows. The fire had sunk to a deep-red glow, and in an armchair drawn up in front of it, newspaper in hand, was Carr, evidently fast asleep.

'"Oh, my prophetic soul!"' whispered Charles, nudging Marston; and then he went forward and shouted 'Luncheon!' in a voice that would have waked the dead.

Carr started up, and rubbed his eyes.

'Why, I believe you have been here ever since I left you hours ago,' said Charles in a surprised tone, though, really, under the circumstances, it did not require a great

stretch of the imagination to suppose any such thing.

'Yes,' said Carr, still rubbing his eyes. 'Have you been gone long? I expect I fell asleep.'

'I rather thought you were inclined for a nap when I left you,' replied Charles airily; 'and now let us go to luncheon.'

It was a very dismal meal. Lady Mary did not come down to it, and Aurelia sat with red eyes, tearful and silent. Ralph was evidently out of favour, for she hardly spoke to him, and snubbed him decidedly when he humbly tendered a peace-offering in the form of a potato. Evelyn, too, was silent, or made spasmodic attempts at conversation with Mrs. Marston, the only unconstrained person of the party. Evelyn and Aurelia had appeared together, and it was evident from Evelyn's expression that Aurelia had told her. What conversation there was turned upon Sir George's illness.

'We must go by the afternoon train, my

dear,' said Marston down the table to his wife. 'In Sir George's present state *all* visitors are an incubus.'

Carr looked up. 'I think I ought to go too,' he said. 'I wished to arrange to do so this morning, but Mr. Danvers'—glancing at Charles—'would not hear of it. I am sure when there is illness in a house, strangers are always in the way.'

'I have seen my father since then,' replied Charles, 'and I fear his illness is much more serious than I had any idea of. That being the case, I feel it would be wrong to press anyone, even Middleton, to stay, and share the tedium of a sick house.'

After a few more civil speeches it was arranged that Carr should, after all, leave by the train which he had proposed in the morning. It was found that there was still time for him to do so, but that was all. He was evidently as anxious to be off as the Danvers were that he should go. The dog-cart was ordered, a servant despatched to the lodge in hot

haste to pack his portmanteau, and in half an hour he was bidding us good-bye, evidently glad to say it. Poor fellow! he little guessed, as he shook hands with us, how shamefully he had been suspected, how villainously he had been traduced behind his back. Somehow or other I had not had a moment of conversation with him since the morning, or a single chance of telling him how I had stood up for him in his absence. Either Charles or Marston was always at hand, and when he took leave of me I could only shake his hand warmly, and tell him to come and see me again in town. I watched him spinning down the drive in the dog-cart, little thinking how soon I should see him again, and in what circumstances.

'We shall have more snow,' said Ralph, coming indoors. 'I feel it in the air.'

General and Mrs. Marston were the next to leave, starting an hour later, and going in the opposite direction. I saw Marston turn aside when his wife was taking leave of the

others, and go up to Charles. The young hand and the old one met, and were locked tight.

'Good-bye, my dear boy,' said Marston.

'Don't go,' said Charles, without looking up.

'I must!' said Marston. 'I am due at Kemberley to-night, on business; but'—in a lower tone—'I shall come back to-morrow in case I can be of any use.'

They were gone, and I was the only one remaining. It has occurred to me since that perhaps they expected me to go too, but I never thought of it at the time. I had been asked for a week, and to go before the end of it never so much as entered my head.

There was no chance of going out. The early winter afternoon was already closing in, and a few flakes of snow were drifting like feathers in the heavy air, promising more to come. Everyone seemed to have dispersed, Ralph upstairs to his father, Charles out-of-doors somewhere, in spite

of the weather. I remembered that I had not written to Jane since I left London, and went into the library to do so. As I came in I saw Evelyn sitting in a low chair by the fire, gazing abstractedly into it. She started when she saw me, and on my saying I wished to write some letters, showed me a writing-table near the fire, with pens, ink and paper.

'You will find it very cold at the big table in the window,' she said, looking at it with its broken drawer, a chink open, with a visible shudder.

I installed myself near the fire, talking cheerfully the while, for it struck me she was a little low in her spirits. She did not make much response, and I was settling down to my letters when she suddenly said:

'Colonel Middleton!'

'Yes, Miss Derrick.'

'I am afraid I am interrupting your writing, but——'

I looked round. She was standing up, nervously playing with her rings.

'But—I know I am not supposed to—but I know what happened last night. Aurelia told me.'

'It is very sad, isn't it?' I said. 'But cheer up. I dare say we may get them back yet.' And I nodded confidentially at her. 'In the meantime, you know, you must not talk of it to anyone.'

'Do you suspect anyone in particular?' she asked very earnestly, coming a step nearer.

I hardly knew what to say. Carr, I need hardly mention, I had never suspected for a moment; but Charles—— Marston had evidently believed what Charles had said, but I am by nature more cautious and less credulous than Marston. Besides, I had not forgiven Charles yet for trying to incriminate Carr. Not knowing what to say, I shrugged my shoulders and smiled.

'You do suspect someone, then?'

'My dear young lady,' I replied, 'when jewels are stolen one naturally suspects someone has taken them.'

'So I should imagine. Whom do you naturally suspect?'

I could not tell her that I more than suspected Charles.

'I know nothing for certain,' I said.

'But you have a suspicion?'

'I have a suspicion.'

She went to the door to see if it were shut, and then came back and said in a whisper:

'So have I.'

'Perhaps we suspect the same person?' I said.

She did not answer, but fixed her dark eyes keenly on mine. I had never noticed before how dark they were.

I saw then that she knew, and that she suspected Charles just as Sir George had done.

I nodded.

'Nothing is proved,' I said.

'I dared not say even so much as this before,' she continued hurriedly. 'It is only the wildest, vaguest suspicion. I have nothing to take hold of. It is so horrible to suspect anyone; but——'

She stopped suddenly. Her quick ear had caught the sound of a distant step coming across the hall. In another moment Aurelia came in.

'Are you there, Evelyn?' she said. 'I was looking for you, to ask where the time-table is. I want to look out my journey for to-morrow. Ralph ought to do it, but he is upstairs,' with a little pout.

'You ought not to have quarrelled with him until he had made it out for you,' said Evelyn, smiling. 'It is a very cross journey, isn't it? Let me see, you are going to your uncle in Dublin, are not you? You had better go to London, and start from there. It will be the shortest way in the end.'

The two girls laid their heads together over the Bradshaw, Evelyn's dark soft hair

making a charming contrast to Aurelia's yellow curls. At last the journey was made out and duly written down, and a postcard despatched to her uncle in Dublin.

'Have you seen Ralph anywhere?' asked Aurelia when she had finished it. 'I am afraid I was a little tiny wee bit cross to him this morning, and I am so sorry.'

Evelyn always seemed to stiffen when Aurelia talked about Ralph, and, under pretext of putting her postcard in the letter-bag for her, she presently left the room and did not return.

Aurelia sat down on the hearthrug, and held two plump little hands to the fire. It was quite impossible to go on writing to Jane while she was there, and I gave it up accordingly.

'I am glad Evelyn is gone,' she said confidentially. 'Do you know why I am glad?'

I said I could not imagine.

'Because,' continued Aurelia, nodding gravely at me, 'I want to have a very,

very, *very* serious conversation with you, Colonel Middleton.'

I said I should be charmed, inwardly wondering what that little curly head would consider to be serious conversation.

'Really serious, you know,' continued Aurelia, 'not pretence. About that!' pointing with a pink finger at the inlaid writing-table. 'You know I was with Ralph when he found it out, and I am afraid I was a little cross to him, only really it was so hard, and they were so lovely, and it *was* partly his fault, now, wasn't it, for leaving them there? He ought to have been more careful.'

'Of course he ought,' I said. I would not have contradicted her for worlds.

'And you know I am to be married next month, and Aunt Alice in Dublin, who is getting my things, says as it is to be a winter wedding, I am to be married in a white *frisé* velvet, and I did think the diamonds would have looked so lovely with it. Wouldn't they?'

I agreed, of course.

'But I shall never be married in them now,' she said with a deep sigh. 'And I was looking forward to the wedding so much, though I dare say I did tell a naughty little story when I said I was *not* to Ralph the other night. Of course, Ralph is still left,' she added as an afterthought; 'but it won't be so perfect, will it?'

I was morally certain Charles would have to give them up, so I said reassuringly:

'Perhaps you may be married in them after all.'

'Oh,' she said, clasping her hands together, 'do you really think so? Do you know anything? I have not seen Ralph since to ask him about it. Do you think we shall really get them back?'

'I should not wonder.'

'Oh, Colonel Middleton, I see you know. You are a clever, wise man, and you have found out something. Who is it? Do tell me.'

'Will you promise not to tell anyone?'

'Mayn't I tell Ralph? I tell him everything.'

'Well, you may tell Ralph, because he knows already; but no one else, remember. The truth is, we are afraid it is Charles.'

There was a long pause.

'I know Evelyn thinks so,' said Aurelia in a whisper, 'though she tries not to show it, because—because——'

'Because what?'

'Well, of course, you can't have helped seeing, can you, that she and Charles——'

I had not seen it. Indeed, I had fancied at times that Evelyn had a leaning towards Ralph; but I never care to seem slower than others in noticing these things, so I nodded.

'And then, you know, people can't be married that haven't any money, and Charles and Evelyn have none,' said Aurelia. 'Oh! I am glad Ralph is well off.'

A light was breaking in on me. Perhaps it was not Charles after all Perhaps——

'I am afraid Evelyn is very unhappy,' continued Aurelia. 'Her room is next to mine, and she walks up and down, and up and down, in the night. I hear her when I am in bed. Last night I heard her so late, so late that I had been to sleep and had waked up again. Do you know'—and she crept close up to me with wide, awe-struck eyes—'I am going away to-morrow, and I don't like to say anything to anyone but you; but I think Evelyn knows something.'

'Miss Derrick!' I said, beginning to suspect that she possibly knew a good deal more than any of us, and then suddenly remembering that she had been on the point of telling me something and had been interrupted. I was getting quite confused. She certainly would not have wished to confide in me if my new suspicion were correct. Considering there was a mystery, it was curious how everyone seemed to know something very particular about it.

'Yes,' replied Aurelia, nodding once or

twice. 'I am sure she knows something. I went into her room before luncheon, and she was sitting with her head down on the dressing-table, and when she looked up I saw she had been crying. I don't know what to say about it to Ralph; but you know' —with a shake of the curls—'though people may think me only a silly little thing, yet I do notice things, Colonel Middleton. Aunt Alice in Dublin often says how quickly I notice things. And I thought, as you were staying on, and seemed to be a friend, I would tell you this before I went away, as you would know best what to do about it.'

Aurelia had more insight into character than I had given her credit for. She had hit upon the most likely person to follow out a clue, however slight, in a case that seemed becoming more and more complicated. I inwardly resolved that I would have it out with Miss Derrick that very evening. Lady Mary now came in, and servants followed shortly afterwards with lamps. The dreary

twilight, with its dim whirlwinds of driving snow, was shut out, the curtains were drawn, and tea made its appearance. Evelyn presently returned, and Charles also, who civilly wished Lady Mary good-morning, not having seen her till then. She handed him his tea without a word in reply. It was evident that she also was aware of the robbery, and it is hardly necessary to add that she suspected Charles.

'How is my father?' he asked, taking no notice of the frigidity of her manner.

'He is asleep at this moment,' she replied. 'Ralph is remaining with him.'

'He is better, then, I hope?'

'He is in a very critical state, and is likely to remain in it. His illness was quite serious enough, without having it increased by one of his own household.'

'Ah, I was afraid that had been the case,' returned Charles. 'I knew you had been doctoring him when he was out of sorts yesterday. But you must not reproach

yourself, Aunt Mary. We are none of us infallible. No doubt you acted for the best at the time, and I dare say what you gave him may not do him any permanent injury.'

'If that is intended to be amusing,' said Lady Mary, her teacup trembling in her hand, 'I can only say that, in my opinion, wilfully misunderstanding a simple statement is a very cheap form of wit.'

'I am so glad to hear you say so,' said Charles, rising, 'as it was at your expense.'

With which Parthian shot he withdrew.

I endeavoured in vain to waylay Evelyn after tea, but she slipped away almost before it was over, and did not appear again till dinner-time. In the meanwhile my brain, fertile in expedients on most occasions, could devise no means by which I could speak to her alone and without Charles's knowledge. I felt I must trust to chance.

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

When I came down before dinner, I found Ralph and Charles talking earnestly by the hall fire, Ralph's hand on his brother's shoulder.

'You see, we are no farther forward than we were,' he was saying.

'We shall have Marston back to-morrow,' said Charles, as the gong began to sound. 'We cannot take any step till then, especially if we don't want to put our foot in it. I have been racking my brains all the afternoon without the vestige of a result. We must just hold our hands for the moment.'

Dinner was announced, and we waited patiently for a few minutes, and impatiently for a good many more, until Evelyn hurried down, apologizing for being late, and with a

message from Lady Mary that we were not to wait for her, as she was dining upstairs in her own room—a practice to which she seemed rather addicted.

'And where is Aurelia?' asked Ralph.

'She is not coming down to dinner either,' said Evelyn. 'She has a bad headache again, and is lying down. She asked me to tell you that she wishes particularly to see you this evening, as she is going away to-morrow, and if she is well enough she will come down to the morning-room at nine; indeed, she said she would come down anyhow.'

After Ralph's natural anxiety respecting his lady-love had been relieved, and he had been repeatedly assured that nothing much was amiss, we went in to dinner, and a more lugubrious repast I never remember being present at. The meals of the day might have been classified thus: Breakfast, *dismal;* luncheon, *dismaller* (or more dismal); dinner *dismallest* (or most dismal). There really

was no conversation. Even I, who, without going very deep (which I consider is not in good taste), have something to say on almost every subject—even I felt myself nonplussed for the time being. Each of us in turn got out a few constrained words, and then relapsed into silence.

Evelyn ate nothing, and her hand trembled so much when she poured out a glass of water that she spilt some on the cloth. I saw Charles was watching her furtively, and I became more and more certain that Aurelia was right, and that Evelyn knew something about the mystery of the night before. I must and would speak to her that very evening.

'Bitterly cold,' said Ralph, when at last we had reached the dessert stage. 'It is snowing still, and the wind is getting up.'

In truth, the wind was moaning round the house like an uneasy spirit.

'That sound in the wind always means snow,' said Charles, evidently for the sake

of saying something. 'It is easterly, I should think. Yes'—after a pause, when another silence seemed imminent—'there goes the eight o'clock train. It must be quite a quarter of an hour late, though, for it has struck eight some time. I can hear it distinctly. The station is three miles away, and you never hear the train unless the wind is in the east.'

'Come, Charles, not three miles—two and a half,' put in Ralph.

'Well, two and a half from here down to the station, but certainly three from the station up here,' replied Charles.

And so silence was laboriously avoided by diligent small-talk until we returned to the drawing-room, thankful that there at least we could take up a book and be silent if we wished. We all did wish it, apparently. Evelyn was sitting by a lamp when we came in, with a book before her, her elbow on the table, shading her face with a slender, delicate hand. She remained motionless, her eyes

fixed upon the page, but I noticed after some time that she had not turned it over. Charles may have read his newspaper, but if he did, it was with one eye upon Evelyn all the time. Between watching them both I did not, as may be imagined, make much progress myself. How was I to manage to speak to Evelyn alone, and without Charles's knowledge?

At last Ralph, who had gone into the morning-room, opened the drawing-room door and put his head in.

'Aurelia has not come down yet, and it is a quarter past nine. I wish you would run up, Evelyn, and see if she is coming.'

'She is sure to come,' replied Evelyn, without raising her eyes. 'She said she *must* see you.'

Ralph disappeared again, and the books and papers were studied anew with unswerving devotion. At the end of another ten minutes, however, the impatient lover reappeared.

'It is half-past nine,' he said in an injured tone. 'Do pray run up, Evelyn. I don't think she can be coming at all. I am afraid she is worse.'

Evelyn laid down her book and left the room. Ralph sauntered back into the morning-room, where we heard him beguiling his solitude with a few chords on the piano.

Presently Evelyn returned. She was pale even to the lips, and her voice faltered as she said:

'She has not gone to bed, for there is a light in her room; but she would not answer when I knocked, and the door is locked.'

'All of which circumstances are not sufficient to make you as white as a ghost,' said Charles. 'I think even if Aurelia has a headache, you would bear the occurrence with fortitude. My dear child, you do not act so well off the stage as on it. There is something on your mind. People don't upset water at dinner, and refuse all food

except pellets of pinched bread, for nothing. What is it?'

Evelyn sank into a chair, and covered her face with her trembling hands.

'Yes, I thought so,' said Charles, kneeling down by her, and gently withdrawing her hands. 'Come, Evelyn, what is it?'

'I dare not say.' And she turned away her face, and tried to disengage her hands, but Charles held them firmly.

'Is it about what happened last night?' he asked, in a tone that was kind, but that evidently intended to have an answer.

'Yes.'

'And do you know that I am suspected?'

'You, Charles? Never!' she cried, starting up.

'Yes, I. Suspected by my own father. So if you know anything, Evelyn—which I see you do—it is your duty to tell us, and to help us in every way you can.'

He had let go her hands now, and had risen.

'I don't know anything for certain,' she said, 'but—but we soon shall. Aurelia knows, and she is going to tell Ralph.'

'Miss Grant! I exclaimed. 'She knew nothing at tea-time. She was asking me about it.'

'It is since then,' continued Evelyn. 'I went up to her room before dinner to ask her for a fan that I had lent her. She was packing some of her things, and the floor was strewn with packing paper and parcels. She gave me my fan, and was going on putting her things together, talking all the time, when she asked me to hand her a glove-box on the dressing-table. As I did so, my eye fell on a piece of paper lying together with others, and I instantly recognized it as the same that had been wrapped round the diamond crescent when Colonel Middleton first showed us the jewels. I should never have noticed it—for though it was rice paper, it looked just like the other pieces strewn about—if I had not seen two little angular

tears, which I suddenly remembered making in it myself when General Marston asked me not to pull it to pieces, which I suppose I had been absently doing. I made some sort of exclamation of surprise, and Aurelia turned round sharply and asked me what was the matter. As I did not answer, she left her packing and came to the table. She saw in a moment what I was looking at. I had turned as red as fire, and she was quite white. "I did not mean you to see that," she said at last, quietly taking up the paper. "I meant no one to know until I had shown it to Ralph. *Do you know where I found it?*" and she looked hard at me. I could only shake my head. I was too much ashamed of a suspicion I had had to be able to get out a word. "I am very sorry," continued Aurelia, "but I am afraid it will be my duty to tell Ralph, whatever the consequences may be. I have been thinking it over, and I think he ought to know. I am going to show it him to-night after dinner,' and she

put it in her pocket and then began to cry. I did not know what to say or do, I was so frightened at the thought of what was coming; and, as the dressing-bell rang at that moment, I was just leaving the room when she called me back.

'"I can't come down to dinner," she said. "I hate Ralph to see me with red eyes. Tell him I shall come down afterwards at nine o'clock, and that I want to see him particularly; only don't tell him what it is about, or mention it to any one else. I did not mean anyone to know till he did."

'She began to cry afresh, and I made her lie down and put a shawl over her, and then left her, as I had still to dress, and I knew that Aunt Mary was not coming down. I was late as it was.'

'Is that all?' said Charles, who had been listening intently.

'All,' replied Evelyn. 'We shall soon know the worst now.'

'Very soon,' said Charles. 'Ralph may

come in here at any moment. Evelyn and Middleton, will you have the goodness to come with me?' And he led the way into the hall.

We could hear Ralph in the next room, humming over an old Irish melody, with an improvised accompaniment.

'Now show me her room!' said Charles, 'and be quick about it.'

Evelyn looked at him astonished, and then led the way upstairs, along the picture-gallery to another wing of the house. She stopped at last before a door at the end of a passage, dimly lighted by a lamp at the further end. There was a light under the door, and a bright chink in the keyhole, but though we listened intently we could hear nothing stirring within.

'Knock again,' said Charles to Evelyn. 'Louder!' as her hand failed her.

There was no answer. As we listened the light within disappeared.

'Bring that lamp from the end of the

passage,' said Charles to Evelyn, and she brought it.

'Hold it there!' he said; 'and you, Middleton, stand aside.'

He took a few steps backward, and then flung himself against the door with his whole force. It cracked and groaned, but resisted.

'The lock is old. It is bound to go,' he said, panting a little.

'Really, Charles,' I remonstrated — 'a lady's private apartment! Miss Derrick, I wonder you allow this.'

Charles retreated again, and then made a fresh and even fiercer onslaught on the door. There was a sound of splintering wood and of bursting screws, and in another moment the door flew open inwards, and Charles was precipitated head foremost into the room, his evening pumps flourishing wildly in the air. In an instant he was on his feet again, gasping hard, and had seized the lamp out of Evelyn's hand. Before I had had time to remonstrate on the liberty

that he was taking, we were all three in the room.

It was empty!

In one corner stood a box half-packed, with various articles of clothing lying by it. On the dressing-table was a whole medley of little feminine knick-knacks, with a candlestick in the midst, the dead wick still smoking in the socket, and accounting for the disappearance of the light a few minutes before. The fire had gone out, but on a chair by it was laid a little black lace evening-gown, evidently put out to be worn; while over the fender a dainty pair of silk stockings had been hung, and two diminutive black satin shoes were waiting on the hearthrug. The whole aspect of the room spoke of a sudden and precipitate flight.

'Bolted!' said Charles, when he had recovered his breath. 'And so the mystery is out at last! I might have known there was a woman at the bottom of it. Unpremeditated, though,' he continued, looking

round. 'She meant to have gone to-morrow; but your recognition of that paper frightened her, though she turned it off well to gain time. No fool that. She only had an hour, and she made the most of it, and got off, no doubt, while we were at dinner, by the 8.2 London train, which is the last to-night; and after the telegraph-office was closed, too! She knew nothing could be done till to-morrow. She has more wit than I gave her credit for.'

'I distrusted her before, though I had no reason for it, but I never thought she was gone,' said Evelyn, trembling violently, and still looking round the room.

'I knew it,' said Charles, 'from the moment I saw the light through the key-hole. A keyhole with a key in it would not have shown half the amount of light through it; and a locked door without a key in it is safe to have been locked *from the outside.* Had she a maid with her?'

'No,' replied Evelyn, 'she used to come

to me, next door, when she wanted help—but not often—because I think she knew I did not like her, though I tried not to show it.'

'Well, we have seen the last of her, or I am much mistaken,' said Charles. 'And now,' he added, compressing his lips; 'I suppose I must go and tell Ralph.'

'Oh, Ralph! Ralph!' gasped Evelyn, with a sudden sob; 'and he was so fond of her!'

'And so you distrusted her before, Evelyn? And why did you not mention that fact a little sooner?'

'Without any reason for it? And when Ralph—— Oh, I couldn't! I couldn't!' said the girl, crimsoning.

Charles gazed intently at her as she turned away, pressing her hands tightly together, and evidently struggling with some sudden emotion for which there really was no apparent reason. She was overwrought, I suppose; and indeed, the exertion of breaking in the door had been rather too

much for Charles too; for, now that the excitement was over, his hand shook so much that he had to put down the lamp, and even his voice trembled a little as he said:

'I don't think Ralph is very much to be pitied. He has had a narrow escape.'

'Don't come down again, either of you,' he continued a moment later, in his usual voice. 'I had better go and get it over at once. He will be wondering what has become of us if I wait much longer. Evelyn, good-night. Good-night, Middleton. If it is too early for you to go to bed, you will find a fire in the smoking-room.'

I bade Evelyn good-night, and followed Charles down the corridor. He replaced the lamp with a hand that was steady enough now, and went slowly across the picture-gallery. The way to my room led me through it also. Involuntarily I stopped at the head of the great carved staircase which led into the hall, and watched him going

down, step by step, with lagging tread. From the morning-room came the distant sound of a piano, and a man's voice singing to it, singing softly as though no Nemesis were approaching; singing slowly, as if there were time enough and to spare. But Nemesis had reached the bottom of the staircase; Nemesis with a heavy step was going across the silent hall—was even now opening the door of the morning-room. The door was gently closed again, and then, in the middle of a bar the music stopped.

CHAPTER II.

I PASSED an uneasy night. The wind moaned wearily round the house, at one moment seeming to die away altogether, at another returning with redoubled fury, roaring down the wide chimney, shaking the whole building. It dropped completely towards dawn, and after hours of fitful slumber I slept heavily.

In the gray of the early morning I was awakened by someone coming into my room, and started up to find Charles standing by my bedside, dressed, and with a candle in his hand. His face was worn and haggard from want of sleep.

'I have come to speak to you before I go, Middleton,' he said, when I was thoroughly awake. 'Ralph and I are off by the early

train. Will you tell my father that we may not be able to return till to-morrow—if then; and may I count upon you to keep all you saw and heard secret, till after our return?'

'Where are you going?'

'To London. We start in twenty minutes. I don't think it is the least use, but Ralph insists on going, and I cannot let him go alone.'

'My dear Charles,' I said (all my anger had vanished at the sight of his worn face); 'I will accompany you.'

'Not for worlds!' he replied hastily. 'It would be no good. Indeed, I should not wish it.'

But I knew better.

'An old head is often of use,' I replied, rapidly getting into my clothes. 'You may count on me, Charles. I shall be ready in ten minutes.'

Charles made some pretence at annoyance, but I was not to be dissuaded. I knew very

well how invaluable the judgment of an elder man of experience could be on critical occasions; and besides, I always make a point of seeing everything I can, on all occasions. In ten minutes I was down in the dining-room, where, beside a spluttering fire, the brothers, both heavily booted and ulstered, were drinking coffee by candle-light. A hastily laid breakfast was on the table, but it had not been touched. The gray morning light was turning the flame of the candles to a rusty yellow, and outside, upon the wide stone sills, the snow lay high against the panes.

Ralph was sitting with bent head by the fire, stick and cap in hand, his heavy boot beating the floor impatiently. He looked up as I came in, but did not speak. The ruddy colour in his cheeks was faded, his face was drawn and set. He looked ten years older.

'We ought to be off,' he said at last, in a low voice.

'No hurry,' replied Charles; 'finish your coffee.'

I hastily drank some also, and told Charles that I was coming with them.

'No!' said Charles.

'Yes!' I replied. 'You are going to London, and so am I. I have decided to curtail my visit by a few days, under the circumstances. I shall travel up with you. My luggage can follow.'

As soon as Charles grasped the idea that I was not going to return to Stoke Moreton, his opposition melted away. He even seemed to hail my departure with a certain sense of relief.

'As you like,' he said. 'You can leave at this unearthly hour, if you wish, and travel with us as far as Paddington.'

I nodded, and went after my great-coat. Of course I had not the slightest intention of leaving them at Paddington; but I felt that the time had not arrived to say so.

'Here comes the dog-cart,' said Charles, as I returned.

Ralph was already on his feet. But the dog-cart, with its great bay horse, could not be brought up to the door. The snow had drifted heavily before the steps, and right up into the archway, and the cart had to go round to the back again before we could get in and start. Charles took the reins, and his brother got up beside him. The groom and I squeezed ourselves into the back seat. I could see that I was only allowed to come on sufferance, and that at the last moment they would have been willing to dispense with my presence. However, I felt that I should never have forgiven myself if I had let them go alone. Charles was not thirty, and Ralph several years younger. An experienced man of fifty to consult in case of need might be of the greatest assistance in an emergency.

'Quicker!' said Ralph; 'we shall miss the train.'

'No quicker, if we mean to catch it,' said Charles. 'I allowed ten minutes extra for the snow. We shall do it if we go quietly, but not if I let him go. An upset would clinch the matter.'

We drove noiselessly through the great gates with their stone lions on either side, rampant in wreaths of snow, and up the village street, where life was hardly stirring yet.

The sun was rising large and red, a ball of dull fire in the heavy sky. It seemed to be rising on a dead world. Before us (only to be seen on my part by craning round) stretched the long white road. At intervals, here and there among the shrouded fields, lay cottages half hidden by a white network of trees. Groups of yellow sheep stood clustered together under hedgerows, motionless in the low mist, and making no sound. A lonely colt, with tail erect, ran beside us on the other side of the hedge as far as his field would allow him, his heavy

hoofs falling noiseless in the snow. The cold was intense.

'There will be a drift at the bottom of Farrow Hill,' said Ralph; 'we shall be late for the train.'

And, in truth, as we came cautiously down the hill, on turning a corner we beheld a smooth sheet of snow lapping over the top of the hedge on one side, like iced sugar on a cake, and sloping downwards to the ditch on the other side of the road.

'Hold on!' cried Charles, as I stood up to look; and in another moment we were pushing our way through the snow, keeping as near the ditch as possible—too near, as it turned out.

But it was not to be. A few yards in front of us lay the road—snowy, but practicable; but we could not reach it. We swayed backwards and forwards; we tilted up and down. Charles whistled, and made divers consolatory and encouraging sounds to the bay horse; but the bay horse began

to plunge; he made a side movement; one wheel crunched down through the ice in the ditch, and all was over—at least, all in the cart were. We fell soft, I most providentially alighting on the groom, who was young and inclined to be plump, and thus breaking a fall which to a heavy man of my age might have been serious. Charles and Ralph were up in a moment.

'I thought I could not do it. But it was worth a trial,' said Charles, shaking himself. 'George, look after the horse and cart, and take them straight back. Now, Ralph, we must run for it, if we mean to catch the train. Middleton, you had better go back in the cart.'

And off they set, plunging through the snow without further ceremony. I watched the two dark figures disappearing, aghast with astonishment. They were positively leaving me behind! In a moment my mind was made up, and leaving the gasping young groom to look after the horse and cart, I set

off to run too. It was only a chance, of course, but in this weather the train might be late. It was all the way downhill. I thought I could do it, and I did. My feet were balled with snow; I was hotter than I had been for years; I was completely out of breath; but when I puffed into the little roadside station, five minutes after the train was due, I could see that it was not yet in, and that Ralph and Charles were waiting on the platform.

'My word, Middleton!' said Charles, coming to meet me. 'I thought I had seen the last of you when I left you reclining on George in the drift. I do believe you have got yourself into this state of fever-heat purely to be of use to us two; and I treated you very cavalierly, I am sure. Let bygones be bygones, and let us shake hands while you are in this melting mood.'

I could not speak, but we shook hands cordially, and I hurried off to get my ticket.

'You can only book to Tarborough,' he

called after me, 'where we change, and catch the London express.'

The station-master gave me my ticket, and then approached Charles, and touched his cap.

'Might any of you gentlemen be going to London, sir?' he inquired.

'All three of us.'

'I don't think you will get on, sir. The news came down this morning that the evening express from Tarborough last night was thrown off the rails by a drift and got knocked about, and I don't expect the line is clear yet. There will be no trains running till later in the day, I am afraid.'

'The night express!' said Ralph suddenly. 'Do you mean the 9 train, which you can catch by the 8.2 from here?'

'Yes, sir.'

'She was in it!' said Ralph in a hoarse voice, as the man walked away.

'How late the train is!' said Charles. 'Quarter of an hour already. I say, Jervis'

—calling after him—'any particulars about the accident? Serious?'

'Oh dear no, sir, not to my knowledge. Never heard of anything but that the train had been upset and had stopped the traffic.'

'Not many people travelling in such weather, at any rate. I dare say there was not a creature who went from here by the last train last night.'

'Only two, sir. One of the young gentlemen from the Rectory, and a young lady, who was very near late, poor thing, and all wet with snow. Ah, there she is, at last!' as the train came in sight; and he went through the ceremony of ringing the bell, although we were the only travellers on the platform.

It was only an hour's run to Tarborough, where we were to join the main line.

'What are we to do now?' said Charles, as the chimneys of Tarborough hove in sight and the train slackened. 'Ten to one we shall not be able to get on to London.'

'Nor she either!' said Ralph. 'I shall see her! I shall see her here!'

There was an air of excitement about the whole station as we drew up before the platform. Groups of railway officials were clustered together, talking eagerly; the barmaids were all looking out of the refreshment-room door; policemen were stationed here and there; and outside the iron gates of the station a little crowd of people were waiting in the trodden yellow snow, peering through the bars.

We got out, and Charles went up to a respectable-looking man in black, evidently an official of some consequence, and asked what was the matter. The man informed him that a special had been sent down the line with workmen to clear the rails, and that its return with the passengers in the ill-fated express was expected at any moment.

'You don't mean to say the wretched passengers have been there all night?' exclaimed Charles.

From the man's account it appeared that the travellers had taken refuge in a farm near the scene of the accident, and, the snowstorm continuing very heavily, it had not been thought expedient to send a train down the line to bring them away till after daybreak. 'It has been gone an hour,' he said, looking at the clock; 'and it is hardly nine yet. Considering how late we received notice of the accident—for the news had to travel by night, and on foot for a considerable distance—I don't think there has been much delay.'

'Will all the passengers come back by this train?' asked Ralph.

'Yes, sir.'

'We will wait!' said Ralph; and he went and paced up and down the most deserted part of the platform. The man followed him with his eyes.

'Anxious about friends, sir?' he asked Charles.

'Yes,' I heard Charles say as I went off to warm myself by the waiting-room fire,

keeping a sharp look-out for the arrival of the train. When I came out some time later, wondering if it were ever going to arrive at all, I found Charles and the man in black walking up and down together, evidently in earnest conversation. When I joined them they ceased talking (I never can imagine why people generally do when I come up), and the latter said that he would make inquiry at the booking-office, and left us.

'Who is that man?' I asked.

'How should I know?' said Charles absently. 'He says he has been a London detective till just lately, but he is an inspector of police now. Well?' as the man returned.

'Booking-clerk can't remember, sir; but the clerk at the telegraph office remembers a young lady leaving a telegram last night, to be sent on first thing this morning.'

'Has it been sent yet?'

'Yes, sir; some time.'

'Where was it sent to?'

'That is against rules, sir. The clerk has no right to give information. Anyhow, it is as good as certain from what you say that the party was in the train, and at all events you will not be kept in doubt much longer;' and he pointed to the long-expected puff of white smoke in the direction in which all eyes had been so anxiously turned. The train came slowly round a broad curve, and crawled into the station. Ralph had come up, and his eyes were fixed intently upon it. The hand he laid on Charles's arm shook a little as he whispered in a hoarse voice:

'I must speak to her alone before anything is said.'

'You shall,' replied Charles; and he moved forward a little, and waited for the passengers to alight. I felt that any chance of escape which lay in eluding those keen light eyes would be small indeed.

Then ensued a scene of confusion, a Babel of tongues, as the passengers poured out upon the platform. 'What was the meaning

of it all?' hotly demanded an infuriated little man before he was well out of the carriage. Why had a train been allowed to start if it was to be overturned by a snow-drift? What had the company been about not to make itself aware of the state of the line? What did the railway officials mean by, etc., etc.? But he was not going to put up with such scandalous treatment. He should cause an inquiry to be made; he should write to the *Times*, he should—in short, he behaved like a true Englishman in adverse circumstances, and poured forth abuse like water. Others followed—some angry, some silent, all cold and miserable. A stout woman in black, who had been sent for to a dying child, was weeping aloud; a dazed man with bound-up head and a terrified wife was pounced upon immediately by expectant friends, and borne off with voluble sympathy. One or two people slightly hurt were helped out after the others. The train was emptied at last. Aurelia was not there. Charles went down

the length of the train, looking into each carriage, and then came back, answering Ralph's glance with a shake of the head. The man in black, who seemed to have been watching him, came up.

'Have *all* come back by this train?' Charles asked.

'All, sir, except'—and he hesitated—'except a few. The doctor who went has not returned; and the guard says there were some of the passengers badly hurt that he would not allow to be moved from the farm when the train came for them. The engine-driver and one or two others were——'

Charles made a sign to him to be silent.

'How far is it?' he asked.

'Twenty miles, sir.'

'Are the roads practicable?'

'No, sir. At least, they would be very uncertain once you got into the lanes.'

'We can walk along the line,' said Ralph. 'That must be clear. Let us start at once.'

'Could not the station-master send us down on an engine?' asked Charles. 'We would pay well for it.'

The police-inspector shook his head, but Charles went off to inquire nevertheless, and he followed him. I thought him a very pushing, inquisitive kind of person. I have always had a great dislike to the idle curiosity which is continually prying into the concerns of others. Ralph and I walked up and down, up and down the now deserted platform. I spoke to him once or twice, but he hardly answered; and after a time I gave it up, and we paced in silence.

At last Charles returned. His request for an engine had been refused, but a further relay of workmen was being sent down the line in a couple of hours' time, and he had obtained leave for himself and us to go with them. After two long interminable hours of that everlasting pacing we found ourselves in an open truck full of workmen steaming slowly out of the station. At the last

moment the man in black jumped in and accompanied us.

The pace may have been great, but to us it seemed exasperatingly slow, and in the open truck the cold was piercing. The workmen, who laughed and talked among themselves, appeared to take no notice of it; but I saw that Charles was shivering, and presently he made his brother light his pipe, and began to smoke hard himself.

Ralph's pipe, however, went out unheeded in his fingers. He sat quite still, with his back against the side of the truck, his eyes fixed upon the gray horizon. Once he turned suddenly to his brother, and said, as if unable to keep silence on what was in his mind:

'What was her object?'

Charles shook his head.

'They were hers already,' he went on. 'She would have had them all. If she had had debts, I would have paid them. What could her object have been?' And seem-

ingly without expecting reply, he relapsed into silence.

We had left the suburbs now, and were passing through a lonely country. Here and there a village of straggling cottages met the eye, clustering round their little church. In places the hedgerows alone marked the lie of the hidden lanes; in others men were digging out the roads through drifts of snow, and carts and horses were struggling painfully along. In one place a little walking funeral was labouring across the fields from a lonely cottage in the direction of the church high on the hill, the bell of which was tolling through the quiet air. The sound reached us as we passed, and seemed to accompany us on our way. I heard the men talking among themselves that there had been no snow-storm like this for thirty years; and as they spoke some of them began shading their eyes, and trying to look in the direction in which we were going.

We had now reached a low waste of unen-

closed land, with sedge and gorse pricking up everywhere through the snow, and with long lines of pollards marking the bed of a frozen stream. Near the line was a deserted brick-kiln surrounded by long uneven mounds and ridges of ice, with three poplars mounting guard over it. Flights of rooks hung over the barren ground, and wheeled in the air with discordant clamour as we passed—the only living moving things in the utter desolation of the scene. As I looked there was an exclamation from one of the workmen, and the engine began to slacken. We were there at last.

CHAPTER III.

THE engine and trucks stopped, the men shouldered their tools and tumbled out, and we followed them. A few hundred paces in front of us was a railway bridge, over which a road passed, and under which the rail went at a sharp curve. The snow had drifted heavily against the bridge with its high earth embankment, making manifest at a glance the cause of the disaster.

The bridge was crowded with human figures, and on the line below men were working in the drift, amid piles of *débris* and splintered wood. The wrecked train had all been slightly draped in snow; the engine alone, barely cold, lying black and grim, like some mighty giant, formidable in death. A sheet of glassy ice near it showed how the

boiler had burst. Some of the hindermost carriages were still standing, or had fallen comparatively uninjured; but others seemed to have leaped upon their fellows, and ploughed right through them into the drift. It was well that it began to snow as we reached the spot. There were traces of dismal smears on the white ground, which it would be seemly to hide.

Our friend in black went forward and asked a few questions of the man in charge, and presently returned.

'The remainder of the passengers are at the farm,' he said, pointing to a house at a little distance; and, without further delay, we began to scramble up the steep embankment, and clamber over the stone wall of the bridge into the road.

My mind was full of other things, but I remember still the number of people assembled on the bridge, and how a man was standing up in his donkey-cart to view the scene. It was Saturday, and there were

quantities of village schoolboys sitting astride on the low wall, or perched on adjacent hurdles, evidently enjoying the spectacle, jostling, bawling, eating oranges, and throwing the peel at the engine. Some older people touched their hats sympathetically, and one went and opened a gate for us into a field, through which many feet seemed to have come and gone; but, for the greater number, the event was evidently regarded as an interesting variation in the dull routine of everyday life, and to the schoolboys it was an undoubted treat.

Ralph and Charles walked on in front, following the track across the field. It was not particularly heavy walking after what we had had earlier in the day, but Ralph stumbled perpetually, and presently Charles drew his arm through his own, and the two went on together, the police-inspector following with me.

In a few minutes we reached the farm, and entered the farmyard, which was the nearest

way to the house. A little knot of calves, entrenched on a mound of straw in the centre of the yard, lowered their heads, and looked askance at us as we came in, and a party of ducks retreated hastily from our path with a chorus of exclamations, while a thin collie dog burst out of a barrel at the back door and made a series of gymnastics at the end of a chain, barking hoarsely, as if he had not spared himself of late.

An elderly woman with red arms met us at the door, and, on a whisper from the police-inspector, first shook her head, and then, in answer to a further whisper, nodded at another door, and, a voice calling her from within, hastily disappeared.

The inspector opened the door she had indicated, and went in, I with him. Charles, who had grown very grave, hung back with Ralph, who seemed too much dazed to notice anything in heaven above or the earth beneath. The door opened into an outhouse, roughly paved with round stones, where

barrels, staves, and divers lumber had been put away. There was straw in the further end of it, out of which a yellow cat raised two gleaming eyes, and then flew up a ladder against the wall, and disappeared among the rafters. In the middle of the floor, lying a little apart, were three figures with sheets over them. Instinctively we felt that we were in the presence of death. I looked back at Charles and Ralph, who were still standing outside in the falling snow. Charles was bareheaded, but Ralph was looking absently in front of him, seemingly conscious of nothing. The inspector made me a sign. He had raised one of the sheets, and now withdrew it altogether. My heart seemed to stand still. *It was Aurelia!*—Aurelia, changed in the last great change of all, but still Aurelia.

The fixed artificial colour in the cheek consorted ill with the bloodless pallor of the rest of the face, which was set in a look of surprise and terror. She was altered beyond

what should have been. She looked several years older. But it was still Aurelia. Those little gloved hands, tightly clenched, were the same which she had held to the library fire as we talked the day before; even the dress was the same. Alas! she had been in too great a hurry to change it before she left, or her thin shoes. Poor little Aurelia! And then —I don't know how it was, but in another moment Ralph was kneeling by her, bending over her, taking the stiffened hands in his trembling clasp, imploring the deaf ears to hear him, calling wildly to the pale lips, which had done with human speech, to speak to him. I could not bear it, and I turned away and looked out through the open door at the snow falling. The inspector came and stood beside me.

In the silence which followed we could hear Charles speaking gently from time to time; and when at last we both turned towards them again, Ralph had flung himself down on an old bench at the further end of

the outhouse, with his back turned towards us, his arms resting on a barrel, and his head bowed down upon them. He neither spoke nor moved.

Charles left him and came towards us, and he and the inspector spoke apart for a moment; and then the latter dropped on his knees beside the dead woman, and after looking carefully at a dark stain on one of the wrists, turned back the sleeve. Crushed deep into the round, white arm gleamed something bright. It was an emerald bracelet, which we both knew. Charles cast a hasty glance at Ralph; but he had not moved, and he drew me beside him, so as to interpose our two figures between him and the inspector. The latter quietly turned down the sleeve, and recomposed the arm.

'I knew she would have them on her, if she had them at all,' he said, in a low voice. 'We need look no further at present. Not one will be missing. They are all there.'

He gazed long and earnestly at the dead

face, and then to my horror he suddenly unfastened the little hat. I made an involuntary movement as if to stop him, but Charles laid an iron grip upon me and motioned me to be still. The stealthy hand quietly pushed back the fair curls upon the forehead, and in another moment they fell still further back, showing a few short locks of dark hair beneath them, which so completely altered the dead face that I could hardly recognize it as belonging to the same person. The inspector raised his head and looked significantly at Charles. Then he quietly drew forward the yellow hair over the forehead again, replaced the hat, and rose to his feet. Charles and I glanced apprehensively at Ralph, but he had not stirred. As we looked, a hurried step came across the yard, a hand raised the latch of the door, and someone entered abruptly. It was Carr. For one moment he stood in the doorway, for one moment his eyes rested, horror-struck, or the dead woman, then

darted at us, from us to the inspector, who was coolly watching him, and—he was gone! gone as suddenly as he had come, gone swiftly out again into the falling snow, followed by the wild barking of the dog.

Charles, who had had his back to the door, turned in time to see him, and he made a rush for the door, but the inspector flung himself in his way and held him forcibly.

'Let me go! Let me get at him!' panted Charles, struggling furiously.

'I shall do no such thing, sir. It can do no good, and might do harm. He is armed and you are not; and he would not be over-scrupulous if he were pushed. Besides, what can you accuse him of? Intent to rob? For he did not do it. If you have lost anything, remember you have found it again. If you caught him a hundred times, you have no hold on him. I know him of old.'

'You!' exclaimed Charles.

'Yes; I have known him by sight long enough. He is not a new hand by any

means—nor she either, as to that, poor thing.'

'But what on earth brought him here?'

'He was waiting for news of her in London most likely, and he knew she would have the jewels on her, and came down when he got wind of the accident.'

'Knew she would have the jewels! Then do you mean to say there was collusion between the two?'

The inspector glanced furtively at Ralph, but he had never stirred or raised his head since he had lain it down on his clenched hands.

'They are both well known to the police,' he said at last, 'and I think it probable there was collusion between them, considering they were *man and wife!*'

CONCLUSION.

I AM told that I ought to write something in the way of a conclusion to this account of the Danvers Jewels, as if the end of the last chapter were not conclusion enough. Charles, who has just read it, says especially that his character requires what he calls 'an elegant finish,' and suggests that a slight indication of a young and lovely heiress in connection with himself would give pleasure to the thoughtful reader. But I do not mean at the last moment to depart from the exact truth and dabble in fiction just to make a suitable conclusion. If I must write something more, I must beg that it will be kept in mind that if further details concerning the robbery are now added against my own judgment, they will rest on Charles's authority,

not mine, as anything I afterwards heard was only through Charles, whose information I never consider reliable in the least degree.

* * * * *

It was not till three months later that I saw him again, on a wet April afternoon. I was still living in London, with Jane, when he came to see me, having just returned from a long tour abroad with Ralph.

Sir George, he said, was quite well again, but the coolness between himself and his father had dropped almost to freezing-point since it had come to light that he had been innocent after all. His father could not forgive his son for putting him in the wrong.

'I seldom disappoint him in matters of this kind,' he said. 'Indeed, I may say I have, as a rule, surpassed his expectations, and I must be careful never to fall short of them in this way again. But ah! Miss Middleton, I am sure you will agree with me how difficult it is to preserve an even course without relaxing a little at times.'

'My dear Mr. Charles,' said Jane, beaming at him over her knitting, but not quite taking him in the manner he intended, 'you are young yet, but don't be down-hearted. I am sure by your face that as you grow older these deviations, which you so properly regret, will grow fewer and fewer, until, as life goes on, they will gradually cease altogether.'

'I consider it not improbable myself,' said Charles, with a faint smile, and he changed the conversation. I really cannot put down here all that he proceeded to say, in the most cold-blooded manner, concerning Carr and Aurelia, or, as he *would* call them, Mr. and Mrs. Brown, alias Sinclair, alias Tibbits. I for one don't believe a word of it; and I don't see how he could have found it all out, as he said he had, through the police, and people of that kind. I don't consider it is at all respectable consorting with the police in that way; but then Charles never was respectable, as I told Jane after he left, arousing

excited feelings on her part which made me regret having mentioned it.

According to him, Carr, who had never been seen or heard of since the day after the accident, was a professional thief who had probably gone to ——, in India, with the express design of obtaining possession of Sir John's jewels, which had, till near the time of his death, been safely stowed away in a bank in Calcutta. He and his wife usually worked together, but on this occasion she had, by means of her engaging manners and youthful appearance, struck up an acquaintance abroad with Lady Mary Cunningham, who, it will be remembered, had jewels of considerable value, with a view to those jewels. Ralph she had used as her tool, and engaged herself to him in the expectation that on her return to England she might, by means of her intimacy with the family, have an opportunity of taking them, Lady Mary having left them, while abroad, with her banker in London. The opportunity came while she was at Stoke

Moreton, but in the meanwhile Sir John's priceless legacy had arrived, having eluded her husband's vigilance. (That certainly was true. The jewels were safe enough as long as I had anything to do with them.) Her husband, who followed them, saw that he was suspected, and threw the game into her hands, devoting himself entirely to putting his own innocence beyond a doubt, in which, with Ralph's assistance, he succeeded.

'I see now,' continued Charles, 'why she spilt her tea when Carr arrived. She was taken by surprise on seeing him enter the room, having had probably no idea that he was the friend whom you had telegraphed for. I suspect, too, that same evening, after the ball, when she and Carr went together to find the bag, it was to have a last word to enable them to play into each other's hands, being aware, if I remember rightly, that father had gone to bed in company with the key of the safe, and that consequently the jewels might be left within easier reach than

usual. No doubt she weighed the matter in her own mind, and decided to give up all thought of Lady Mary's jewels, and to secure those which were ten times their value. She could not have taken both without drawing suspicion upon herself. Like a wise woman, she left the smaller, and went in for the larger prize; a less clever one would have tried for both and have failed. She failed, it is true, by an oversight. She could never have noticed that the piece of paper wrapped round the crescent was peculiar in any way, or she would not have left it on the table among the others. She turned it off well when Evelyn recognized it, and made the most of her time. She was within an ace of success, but fate was against her. And Carr lost no time either, for that matter; for I have since found out that the telegram she sent was to Birmingham, where he was no doubt hiding, bidding him meet her in London earlier than had been arranged. Of course he set off for the scene of the accident directly he heard of it,

having received no further communication from her. We only arrived ten minutes before him. For my part, I admired *her* more than I ever did before, when the truth about her came out. I considered her to be a pink and white nonentity without an idea beyond a neat adjustment of pearl-powder, and then found that she possessed brains enough to outwit two minds of no mean calibre, namely, yours, Middleton, and my own. Evelyn was the only person who had the slightest suspicion of her, and that hardly amounted to more than an instinct, for she owned that she had no reason to show for it.'

'I wonder Lady Mary was so completely taken in by her to start with,' I said.

'I don't,' replied Charles. 'I have even heard of elderly men being taken in by young ones. Besides, suspicious people are always liable to distrust their own nearest relatives, especially their prepossessing nephews, and then lay themselves open to be taken in by entire stangers. She wanted to get Ralph

married, and she took a fancy to this girl, who was laying herself out to be taken a fancy to. In short, she trusted to her own judgment, and it failed her, as usual. I wrote very kindly to her from abroad, telling her how sincerely I sympathized with her in her distress at finding how entirely her judgment had been at fault, how lamentably she had been deceived from first to last, and how much trouble she had been the innocent means of bringing on the family. I have had no reply. Dear Aunt Mary! That reminds me that she is in London now; and I think a call from me, and a personal expression of sympathy, might give her pleasure.' And he rose to take his leave.

I had let Charles go without contradicting a word he had said, because, unfortunately, I was not in a position to do so. As I have said before, I am not given to suspecting a friend, even though appearances may be against him; and I still believed in Carr's

innocence, though I must own that I was sorry that he never answered any of the numerous letters I wrote to him, or ever came to see me in London, as I had particularly asked him to do. Of course, I did not believe that he was married to Aurelia, for it was only on the word of a stranger and a police-inspector, while I knew from his own lips that he was engaged to a countrywoman of his own. However, be that how it may, my own rooted conviction at the time, which has remained unshaken ever since, is that in some way he became aware that he was unjustly suspected, and being, like all Americans, of a sensitive nature, he retired to his native land. Anyhow, I have never seen or heard anything of him since. I am aware that Jane holds a different opinion, but then Charles had prejudiced her against him; so much so, that it has ended by becoming a subject on which we do not converse together.

* * * * *

I saw Charles again a few months later, on a sultry night in July. I was leaving town the next day to be present at Ralph's wedding, and Jane and I were talking it over towards ten o'clock, the first cool time in the day, when he walked in. He looked pale and jaded as he sat down wearily by us at the open window and stroked the cat, which was taking the air on the sill. He said that he felt the heat, and he certainly looked very much knocked up. I do not feel heat myself, I am glad to say.

'I am going abroad to-morrow,' he said, after a few remarks on other subjects. 'It is not merely a question of pleasure, though I shall be glad to be out of London; but I have of late become an object of such increasing interest to those who possess my autograph, that I have decided on taking change of air for a time.'

'Do you mean to say you are not going down to Stoke Moreton for Ralph's wedding?' I exclaimed. 'I thought we should have

travelled together, as we once did six months ago.'

'I can't go,' said Charles, almost sharply. 'I have told Ralph so.'

'I am sure he will be very much disappointed, and Evelyn too; and the wedding being from her uncle's house, as she has no home of her own, will make your absence all the more marked.'

'It *must* be marked, then; but the young people will survive it, and Aunt Mary will be thankful. She has not spoken to me since I made that little call upon her in the spring. When I pass her in the Row she looks the other way.'

'I am glad Ralph has consoled himself,' I said. 'A good and charming woman like Evelyn, and a nice steady fellow like Ralph, are bound to be happy together.'

'Yes,' said Charles, 'I suppose they are. She deserves to be happy. She always liked Ralph, and he *is* a good fellow. The model young men make all the running nowadays.

In novels the good woman always marries the scapegrace, but it does not seem to be the case in real life.'

'Anyhow, not in this instance,' I remarked cheerfully.

'No, not in this instance, as you so justly observe,' he replied, with a passing gleam of amusement in his restless tired eyes. 'And now,' producing a small packet, 'as I am not going myself, I want to give my wedding-present to the bride into your charge. Perhaps you will take it down to-morrow, and give it into her own hands, with my best wishes.'

'Might we see it first?' said Jane, with all a woman's curiosity, evidently scenting a jewel-case from afar.

Charles unwrapped a small morocco case, and, touching a spring, showed the diamond crescent, beautifully re-set and polished, blazing on its red satin couch.

'Ralph said I should have it, and he sent it me some time since,' he said, turning it in

his hand; 'but it seems a pity to fritter it away in paying bills; and,' in a lower tone, 'I should like to give it to Evelyn. I hear she has refused to wear any of Sir John's jewels on her wedding-day, but perhaps—if you were to ask her—she and I are old friends—she might make an exception in favour of the crescent.'

And she did.

THE END.

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