The Diamond Bracelet

By MRS. HENRY WOOD,

Author of East Lynne, Etc.

CHAPTER I.

The aft noon of a hot June day was drawing towards evening, and the great world of London for it was the height of the season—was beginning to think of dinner. In a well furnished dressing room the sun was being sorely fair air, the blinds drawn down to exclude the sun, stood a lady whose maid was giving the touch to her rich attire. It was Lady Sarah Hope.

"What bracelets, my lady?" asked the maid, taking a small bunch of keys from her pocket.

"Not those, I am sure," she added hastily, as she, turning to a young lady who was lying back on the sofa, "have them ready disposed for me when I come up, and I will decide then."

"I have them ready, Lady Sarah," replied Mrs. Hughes.

"I know you have, Mrs. Hughes, give the keys to Miss Alice."

Lady Sarah left the room, and then the maid, Hughes, began taking one of the small keys off the ring. I have not leave to go out, miss," she explained, and also my daughter Eliza. My mother is very poorly, and wants to see me. This is the key, miss."

"Mr. Miss Sarah took it. Lady Sarah reappeared at the door. Alice, you may as well bring the jewel box down to the breakfast room. I shall not dine in my bedroom this evening. We shall be late as it is."

"What shall I do with it?" cried the girl, as she ran to the door.

"Give it to Hughes," was the reply, and the maid was off with it before the lady of the house had left the room.

"Lady Sarah left the room, and then the maid, Hughes, began taking one of the small keys off the ring. I have not leave to go out, miss," she explained, "and also my daughter Eliza. My mother is very poorly, and wants to see me. This is the key, miss."

"Mr. Miss Sarah took it. Lady Sarah reappeared at the door. Alice, you may as well bring the jewel box down to the breakfast room. I shall not dine in my bedroom this evening. We shall be late as it is."

"What shall I do with it?" cried the girl, as she ran to the door.

"Give it to Hughes," was the reply, and the maid was off with it before the lady of the house had left the room.

"Have you come to dinner?" inquired Alice, speaking at random, and angry at her own agitation.

"I come to dinner!" repeated Mr. Hope. "Why, you know they did as soon sit down with the lackman."

"Indeed! I know nothing about it. I was in hopes you and the Colonel might be reconciled. Why did you come in?" Thomas will tell."

"No, he won't. I told him not. Allow the idea of your never coming up till June." Some whim of Lady Sarah's I suppose. I was off the Colonel a week for the last month in fact. I been marching past the house, and wondering when it was going to show some of life." Francis here stay?"

"Oh yes, she is to stay till much later, some time."

"To make up for—A—What's her name? Some whim in it."

"I was curious to know, for what happened Mr. Hope, but I know nothing of the details. Lady Sarah said you had displeased the Colonel, and after that she never mentioned your name."

"What a show of smart things you have got here, Alice." Are you going to set up a bazaar?"

"They are Lady Sarah's bracelets."

"So they are. I see." This is a gem," added Mr. Hope, taking up the blue diamond bracelet already mentioned. I didn't remember the stone."

"It is new. The bracelets are given it to her."

"What did it cost?"

"Do you think I am likely to know? I question if Lady Sarah heard it, herself."

"Is it true, Alice, that Sarah's brother is to be the drawing room, that the marchioness wished to put on? It was from her the tale came."

"I believe it is coming to dinner to day, Alice."

"No. I walked out, and it has tired me, as usual. I have had some tea instead."

"I would not be you for all the world, Alice." To possess so little capability for enjoying life. No, not even for you, Alice."

"Yet if you were as I am, weak in health and strength, your lot would have been so smoothed to you that you would not repine at or regret it."

"You mean I should be content," laughed the young lady." Well, there is nothing like contentment the sages tell us. One of my dear pupils, in her room copies used to be "Contentment is happiness."

"I can hear the dinner being taken in," said Alice, "you will be late in the drawing room."

As Lady Frances Chenevix turned away to the room the sunshine bright tended to her, her elastic step and well ing of health and enjoyment presented a marked contrast to that of Alice Sea ton. Alice's face was indeed strangely beautiful, almost too refined and delicate for the wear and tear of common life; but her figure was weak and shapeless and her gait feeble. Of a wealthy, good family, she had suddenly been thrown from her natural position of wealth and comfort to comparative poverty and had found refuge as "Companion" to Lady Sarah Hope.

Colonel Hope was a thin, spare man, with sharp brown eyes and sharp features, looking so shrunk and short that he must have been smuggled into the army under weight, unless he had since been growing downwards. A stranger could have believed him at ease in his circumstances, any more than they could have believed him a soldier who had seen hard service in India for his cloth was free from all threadbare. A black ribbon supplied the place of gold chain as guard to his watch, and a large, ugly looking thing of a galvanized ring did duty for another ring on his finger. Yet he was rich, of fabulous riches, people said, but he was of a close disposition, especially as regarded his personal outlay. In his home and to his wife he was liberal. They had been married several years, but had no children, and his large property was not entailed; it was believed that his nephew, Gerard Hope, would inherit it, but some dispute had recently occurred, and Gerard had been turned from the house. Lady Francis Chenevix, the sister of Lady Sarah, but considerably younger, had been paying them an eight months' visit in the country, and had now come up to town with them.

Alice Seaton lay on the sofa for half an hour, and then, taking the bracelet box in her hands, descended to the drawing room. It was intensely hot, a sultry, breathless heat, and Alice threw open the back windows, which, in truth made it hotter, for the sun gleamed right thwart the leads which stretched themselves beyond the window, over the out buildings at the back of the row of houses.

She sat down near the back window and began to put out some of the bracelets on the table before it. They were rare and rich, of plain gold, of silver, of pearl, of precious stones. One of them was of gold links studded with diamonds. It was very valuable, and had been the present of Colonel Hope to his wife on her recent birthday. Another diamond bracelet was there, but it was not so beautiful or so costly as this. When her task was done, Miss Seaton passed into the front drawing room, and threw up one of its large windows. Still there was no air in the room. As she stood at it, a hand one young man, tall and powerful, who was walking on the opposite side of the street, caught her eye. He nodded, hesitated, and then crossed the street as if to enter.

"It is Gerard!" uttered Alice, under her breath. "Can he be coming here?" She walked away from the window hastily, and sat down by the bedecked table in the other room.

"Just as I supposed!" exclaimed Gerard Hope, entering, and advancing to Alice with stealthy steps. "When I saw you at the window, the thought struck me that you were alone here, and they at dinner. Thomas happened to be alring himself at the door, so I crossed and asked him, and came up. How are you, Alice?"

"And get you to need out as well as myself! No! no! If I can help it, Alice!" suddenly laying his hands upon her shoulders, and gazing down into her eyes—do you know who it was I had learned to love, instead of of the other?"

She gasped for breath, and her color went and came.

"No—no, do not tell me. Gerard—"

"Why, no, I had better not under present circumstances, but when the proper time comes for me to have the injured indignation must and will know over them I will," and hence the pledge of it." He kept his hold, took one long earnest kiss from her lips, and was gone.

Agitated almost to sickness trembling and confused Alice stood as he left after him. Could he be truly have escape unseen. She crept partly down stairs, so as to obtain a sight of the hall door and make sure that he had out in safety. Instead of the door, she saw the Colonel standing in the hall. She said something to him and he waited till he heard the stranger. Alice was in the drawing room when a lady and gentleman passed the window and took leave in the hall door. Alice and took leave in the hall door.

"I make no secret of my visit to my nephew," he said, "I wish to marry Alice Seaton, and I wish to marry Alice Seaton, and I wish to have his consent. Nephew, I wish to have Alice Seaton as my wife. I wish to have Alice Seaton as my wife. I wish to have Alice Seaton as my wife.