The Diamond Bracelet

By MRS. HENRY WOOD,

Author of East Lynne, Etc.

CHAPTER III.

Alice left her sister standing in the room and went upstairs. But she was more than one minute away; she was three or four, for she could not at first lay her hand upon the letter. When she returned her sister advanced to her from the back drawing room, the folding doors between the two rooms being as before, wide open.

"What a fine collection of bracelets, Alice!" she exclaimed, as she took the letter. "Are they spread out for show?"

"No," laughed Alice. "Lady Sarah is going to the opera and will be in a hurry when she comes up from dinner. She asked me to bring them all down, as she had not decided which to wear."

"I like to dress before dinner on my opera nights."

"Oh, so of course does Lady Sarah," returned Alice, as her sister descended the stairs, "but she said it was too hot to dine in bracelets."

"It is fearfully hot. Good by, Alice. Don't ring. I will let myself out."

Alice returned to the front room and looked from the window, wondering whether her sister had come in her carriage. No. A trifling evening breeze was arising and beginning to move the curtains about. Gentle as it was, it was grateful and Alice sat down in it. In a very few minutes the ladies came up from dinner.

"Have you the bracelets, Alice? Oh, I see."

Lady Sarah went to the back room as she spoke and stood before the table looking at the bracelets. Alice rose to follow her, when Lady Frances Chenevix caught her by the arm and began to speak in a covert whisper.

"Who was that at the door just now? It was a visitor's knock. Do you know, Alice, every hour since we came to town I have fancied Gerard might be calling. In the country he could not get to us but here. Was it Gerard?"

"It—it was my sister," carelessly answered Alice. It was not a true answer, for her sister had not knocked, but it was the readiest that rose to her lips and she wished to escape the questioning.

"Only your sister," sighed Frances, turning to the window with a gesture of disappointment.

"Which have you put on?" inquired Alice, going toward Lady Sarah.

"These loose fancy things; they are the coolest. I really am so hot, the soup was that favorite soup of the colonel's, all capsicums and cayenne and the wine was hot; there had been some mistake about the ice. Hill trusted the new man and he did not understand it; it was all hot together. What the house will be tonight I dread to think of."

Lady Sarah whilst she spoke had been putting the bracelets into the jewel box with very little care.

"I had better put them straight," remarked Alice, when she reached the table.

"Do not trouble," returned Lady Sarah, shutting down the lid. "You are looking flushed and feverish, Alice; you were wrong to walk so far today. Hughes will set them to rights tomorrow morning; they will do till then. Lock them up and take possession of the key."

Alice did as she was bid. She locked the case and put the key into her pocket.

"Here is the carriage," exclaimed Lady Frances. "Are we to wait for coffee?"

"Coffee in this heat," retorted Lady Sarah. "It would be adding fuel to fire. We will have some tea when we return. Alice, you must make tea for the colonel; he will not come out without it. He thinks this weather just what it ought to be, rather cold, if anything."

Alice had taken the bracelet box in her hands as Lady Sarah spoke, and when they departed carried it upstairs to its place in Lady Sarah's bedroom. The colonel speedily rose from the table, for his wife had laid her commands on him to join them early. Alice helped him to his tea, and as soon as he was gone, she went upstairs to bed.

To bed, but not to sleep. Tired as she was and exhausted in frame, sleep would not come to her. She was living over again her interview with Gerard Hope. She could not in her conscious heart affect to misunderstand his implied meaning—that she had been the cause of his rejecting the union proposed to him. It diffused a strange rapture within her, and though she had not perhaps been wholly blind and unconscious during the period of Gerard's stay with them, she now kept repeating the words, "Can it be? can it be?"

It certainly was so. Love plays strange pranks. Thus was Gerard Hope, heir to fabulous wealth, consciously proud of his handsome person, his herculean strength, his towering form, called home and planted down by the side of a pretty and noble lady, on purpose that he might fall in love with her—Lady Frances Chenevix. And yet the well-laid project failed; failed because there happened to be another at that young lady's side, a sad, quiet, feeble-framed girl, whose very weakness may have seemed to place her beyond the pale of man's love. But love thrives by contrasts and it was the feeble girl who won the love of the strong man.

Yes, the knowledge diffused a strange rapture within her as she lay there at night, and she may be excused if, for a brief period, she gave range to the sweet fantasies it conjured up. For a brief period only; too soon the depressing consciousness returned to her that these thoughts of earthly happiness must be subdued, for she, with her confirmed ailments and conspicuous weakness, must never hope to marry as did other women. She had long known—her mother had prepared her for it—that one so afflicted and frail as she, whose tenure of existence was likely to be short, ought not to become a wife, and it had been her earnest hope to pass through life unloving and unloved. She had striven to arm herself against the danger, against being thrown into the perils of temptation. Alas! it had come insidiously upon her, all her care had been set at naught, and she knew that she loved Gerard Hope with a deep and fervent love. "It is but another cross," she sighed, "another burden to surmount and subdue, and I will set myself, from this night, to the task. I have been a coward, shrinking from self-examination, but now that Gerard has spoken out, I can deceive myself no longer. I wish he had spoken more freely that I might have told him it was useless."

CHAPTER IV.

It was only towards morning that Alice dropped asleep; the consequence was that long after her usual hour for rising she was still sleeping. The opening of her door by some one awoke her. It was Lady Sarah's maid.

"Why, miss! are you not up? Well, I never! I wanted the key of the jewel box, but I'd have waited if I had known."

"What do you say you want?" returned Alice, whose ideas were confused, as is often the case on being suddenly awakened.

"The key of the bracelet box, if you please."

"The key," repeated Alice. "Oh, I remember," she added, her recollection returning to her. "Be at the trouble, will you, Hughes, to take it out of my pocket; it is on that chair under my clothes."

The servant came to the pocket and speedily found the key. "Are you worse than usual, miss, this morning?" asked she, "or have you overslept yourself?"

"I have overslept myself. Is it late?"

"Between nine and ten. My lady is up, and at breakfast with master and Lady Frances."

Alice rose the instant the maid had left the room, and made haste to dress, vexed with herself for sleeping so long. She was nearly ready when Hughes came in again.

"If ever I saw such a confusion as that jewel box was in!" cried she, in as pert and grumbling a tone as she dared to use. "The bracelets were thrown together without law or order, just as if they had been so much glass and tinsel from the Lowther Arcade."

"It was Lady Sarah did it," replied Alice. "I would have put them straight, but she said leave it for you. I thought she might prefer that you should do it, so did not press it."

"Of course her ladyship is aware there's nobody but myself knows how they are placed in it," returned Hughes, consequently. "I could go to that or to the other jewel box in the dark, and take out any one thing my lady wanted without disturbing the rest."

"I have observed that you have a gift of order," remarked Alice, with a smile. "It is very useful to those who possess it and saves them from trouble and confusion."

"So it do, miss," said Hughes. "But I came to ask you for the diamond bracelet."

"The diamond bracelet!" echoed Alice. "What diamond bracelet? What do you mean?"

"It is not in the box, miss."

"The diamond bracelets are both in the box," rejoined Alice.

"The old one is there, not the new one. I thought you might have taken it out to show some one, or to look at yourself, miss, for I'm sure it's a sight for pleasant eyes."

"I can assure you it is in the case," said Alice. "All are there except what Lady Sarah had on. You must have overlooked it."

"I must be a great donkey if I have," grumbled the girl. "It must be at the very bottom, amongst the cotton," she soliloquized, as she returned to Lady Sarah's apartments, "and I have just got to take every individual article out to get at it. This comes of giving up one's keys to other folks."

Alice hastened down, begging pardon for her late appearance. It was readily accorded. Alice's office in the house was nearly a sinecure; when she had first entered upon it Lady Sarah was ill, and required some one to sit with and read to her, but now that she was well again Alice had little to do.

Breakfast was scarcely over when Alice was called into the room. Hughes stood outside.

"Miss," said she, with a long face, "the diamond bracelet is not in the box. I thought I could not be mistaken."

"But it must be in the box," said Alice.

"But it is NOT," persisted Hughes, emphasizing the negative; "can't you believe me, miss? What's gone with it?"

Alice Seaton looked at Hughes with a puzzled look. She was thinking matters over. It sooned cleared again.

"Then Lady Sarah must have kept it out when she put in the rest. It was she who returned them to the case, I did not. Perhaps she wore it last night."

"No, miss, that she didn't. She wore only those two."

"I saw what she had on," interrupted Alice. "But she might also have put on the other without my noticing. Then she must have kept it out for some purpose. I will ask her. Wait here an instant, Hughes, for, of course, you will like to be at a certainty."

"That's cool," thought Hughes, as Alice went into the breakfast room, and the colonel came out of it with the newspaper. "I should have said it was somebody else who would like to be at a certainty instead of me. Thank goodness it wasn't in my charge last night, if anything dreadful has came to pass. My lady don't keep out her bracelets for sport. Miss Seaton has left the key about, that's what she has done, and it's hard to say who hasn't been at it; I knew the box had been ransacked over."

"Lady Sarah," said Alice, "did you wear your new diamond bracelet last night?"

"No."

"Then did you put it into the box with the others?"

"No," languidly repeated Lady Sarah, attaching no importance to the question.

"After you had chosen the bracelets you wished to wear, you put the others into the box yourself," exclaimed Alice. "Did you put in the new one, the diamond, or keep it out?"

"The diamond was not there."

Alice stood confounded. "It was on the table at the back of all, Lady Sarah," she presently said, "next the window."

"I tell you, Alice, it was not there. I don't know that I should have worn it if it had been, but I certainly looked for it. Not seeing it, I supposed you had not put it out, and did not care sufficiently to ask for it."

Alice felt in a mesh of perplexity; curious thoughts, and very unpleasing ones, were beginning to come over her. "But, Lady Sarah, the bracelet was indeed there when you went to the table," she urged. "I put it there."

"I can assure you that you labor under a mistake as to its being there when I came up from dinner," answered Lady Sarah. "Why do you ask?"

"Hughes has come to say it is not in the case. She is outside, waiting."

"Outside now? Hughes," called out her ladyship; and Hughes came in.

"What's this about my bracelet?"

"I don't know, my lady. The bracelet is not in its place, so I asked Miss Seaton. She thought your ladyship might have kept it out yesterday evening."

"I have neither touched it nor seen it," said Lady Sarah.

"Then we have had thieves at work."

"It must be in the box, Hughes," spoke up Alice. "I laid it out on the table, and it is impossible that thieves, as you phrase it, could have come there."

"Oh, yes, it is in the box, no doubt," said her ladyship, somewhat crossly, for she disliked to be troubled especially in hot weather. "You have not searched properly, Hughes."

"My lady," answered Hughes, "I can trust my hands, and I can trust my eyes, and they have all four been into every hole and crevice of the box."

Lady Frances Chenevix laid down the Morning Post and advanced. "Is the bracelet really lost?"

(To be continued.)

NAPLES BREAKFAST VENDORS.

They Make the Morning Air Vocal with Their Calls.

The air of Naples becomes vocal with the characteristic calls of the breakfast vendors. "Hot, hot, and big as apples!" shout the sellers of peeled chestnuts. These are boiled in huge caldrons in a reddish broth of their own making, which is further seasoned with laurel leaves and caraway seed. A cent's worth of the steaming kernels, each of which is as big as a large English walnut, is a nourishing diet that warms the fingers and comforts the stomach of troops of children on their way to school, or rather to the co-operative creches, or nurseries, where one poor woman, for a cent a day each, takes care of the babies of a score of others who must leave them behind to earn the day's living.

Meantime dignified cows pass by, "with measured tread and slow," shaking their heavy bells and followed by their beguiled offspring, whose business it is to make them "give down" their milk at the opportune moment, and to let the milkman take it. Nothing can be funnier than this struggle between the legitimate owner, the calf, and the wily subtractor of the lacteal treasure. Although tied to his mother's horns with a rope long enough to reach, and even lick her bag, but not to get satisfaction out of it, his bovine wit is often sharp enough to give the slip to the noose and elude the vigilance of the keeper, occupied, perhaps, for the moment, in quarreling with some saucy maid servant over the quantity of milk to be paid for. The scene which ensues is worthy of the cinematograph. As a sequel calfy's tail is nearly pulled off, but he has spoiled the oppressor's game for one day, anyhow.—The Century.

DAVID H. MOFFATT.

One of the Few Men Who Have Paid in Cash for Their Lives.

Mr. David H. Moffatt, president of the First National bank of Denver, Col., solved to his own satisfaction the question of whether a man should give up money to an assassin or not. Several years ago a man came into the First National bank and went into Mr. Moffatt's private office. In his hand was a bottle containing a light-colored viscous fluid.

"Mr. Moffatt," he said, "I am a desperate man. This bottle contains two ounces of nitro-glycerin. If I explode it, you and I and the bank building will be blown to smithereens. I want $22,000. I want you to write out a check for that amount, take it to the cashier, get the currency and give it to me."

"I don't believe," said Mr. Moffatt, "that the man had nitro-glycerin in the bottle. I didn't believe that he would have used it if he had. But at the same time there was a chance that he did, there was a chance that he was a fanatic, there was a chance that he would have killed us both. I figured the thing out in my mind quickly, a man's mind acts readily under such circumstances, and I came to the conclusion that it was better to give him the $22,000 than to run the risk of my life, for $22,000 was only a couple of weeks' income. Death was eternity. I went to the cashier's desk, wrote the check, got the currency, gave it to the man, and he walked out with it and has never been seen since."

Most women who angle for compliments depend upon their curves.

The oldest inhabitant never boasts of how lazy he was when a boy.

Call a man a donkey and he is apt to kick.

Home of the Oyster.

Oysters are widely distributed throughout the world. Their chief habitats are in the United States and in France, with scattering colonies in England, Holland and other places. But the whole number in other parts of the world is inconsiderable as compared with that of the United States. Maryland alone produces twice as many oysters as all the rest of the world put together. Oysters and poverty, Dickens says, go together, but it is not so in this country. Baltimore cans an immense number for both foreign and domestic consumption, the revenue from which is enormous. The Indians of the coast, before the discovery of America, used them in great quantities. Near the mouth of St. John's river, Florida, there is a forest-clad mound of over 50 feet in height extending over many acres of ground consisting entirely of old oyster shells.

Paderewski a Lover of Billiards.

M. Paderewski, like other mortals of less note, has his hobby, namely, billiards. He plays nearly every day when he can spare time from practicing and composing, and is a very fair one. "I think I like billiards," he says, "because it not only exercises my eye and hand, and keeps them in training even when I am amusing myself, but it also produces in me the delicate and refined artistic feelings which I have so often to express on the piano, as when, for instance, I play my favorite Chopin."

Mohammed was an epileptic, and his visions were those of a diseased mind.

Swinburne, who writes very little, makes $5,000 a year by his poems.

Will Extradite to Austria.

Jliet, Ill., dispatch: Chancellor Tavaszy of the Austrian consulate at Chicago was in Joliet looking after the government case against Franz Francic, alias Gresfelder, a prisoner here, who is wanted in Austria for the alleged murder of his wife. Extradition papers will probably be issued. Francic denies the crime, but says he will go back. The evidence is only circumstantial. For this reason Chancellor Tavaszy says the extreme penalty cannot be given.

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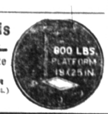

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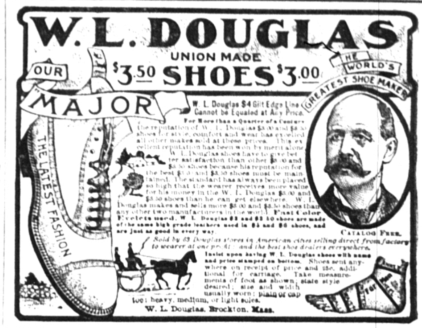
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