

Aunt Janet's Diamonds

In Two Chapters

CHAPTER I

LOST

I AM glad you like the style of the setting, my love; it certainly is old-fashioned; but the taste is good, and the stones are particularly beautiful. Directly you become my son's wife, I shall give them up to you.

You wonder I should like to part with them at my time of life! The truth is, for all their beauty, they afford me very little pleasure; their sparkling brilliancy recalls the saddest events of my life. It wants half an hour to dinner. I shall just have time to tell you the story.

These diamonds were a gift from my Aunt Janet, my mother's sister. I was left an orphan at an early age, and went to live with Aunt Janet. She had a very pleasant house on Clapham Common, with a large garden; and she possessed an excellent income, arising from various sources. Aunt Janet was a widow, and her property had been left her by her husband in her sole control. She had no children, and she brought me up as her daughter; not that I was by any means spoiled; in truth, I was by no means as great a favorite as a little cousin of mine, Josiah Wilson, a child of my own age, who used to come and stay occasionally with us. On the plea of little Josiah's being a visitor, I was always forced to give way to his whims and fancies, and let him be first in everything. Even at that early age, I am sorry to say, I began to dislike my cousin; and my dislike was increased to positive hatred by his being constantly held up to me as a pattern child. I believe that Josiah was naturally better behaved than I was; but even at that early age, I could perceive that he was particularly sly, and always took care to put on his best behavior in my aunt's presence. I can recollect, too, I was constantly punished for his faults. He used stoutly to deny everything; it was useless for me to speak; he was always believed, and I received the punishment.

When my aunt purchased these diamonds, Josiah and myself were taken as a great treat to the shop—a very old established jeweler's in town. I was too young at the time to know anything about the value of diamonds, but I perfectly recollect seeing the man in the shop show this very set to my aunt for her approval. After some demur at the price, she gave a check for the money, and took the diamonds home with her in the carriage.

It happened on that day my aunt was in excellent humor with me; and while Josiah and myself were playing in her dressing room, she called me to her, and put the diamond necklace on my neck, in order, as she said, to see how it looked on another person. I was delighted at the glitter, and ran off to survey myself in the glass. My aunt promised me, in reply to my expressions of admiration, that if I grew up a good girl, those diamonds one day would be mine. Thereupon, Josiah began to cry furiously; and he declared, with childish vehemence, that he *would* have the diamonds.

I suppose this early recollection would never have come to mind, but for its connection with subsequent events.

As we grew older, Josiah was sent to school, and we only met during his holidays. At these periods, he was always spoiled by my aunt, and his chief amusement was plaguing and teasing me; any appeal to my aunt was useless, for she always took his part. When Josiah's education was finished, he was placed in a stockbroker's office to learn the business; and, to my dismay, it was arranged that he should reside with us.

However, matters did not turn out so unpleasantly as I had anticipated. Josiah, whenever we were thrown together, was civil and courteous; and though I never could tolerate his sly manner, and the false way in which he always treated my aunt, yet we contrived, on the whole, to live harmoniously together.

At last, Josiah came of age. I recollect how surprised I was, on the morning of that day, when he presented me, in the presence of my aunt, with a very handsome bracelet. As he was my cousin, and as we had been so much together, I never dreamed for a moment that there could be any significance in the gift, and I saw from my aunt's manner that she would have been hurt had I refused it. My aunt gave a grand party in honor of the birthday, and I was still more surprised to find that all Josiah's attentions were paid to me, although there were several very pretty girls present, who, I knew, would have been nothing loth to receive the addresses of Mrs. Wilson's favorite nephew.

This most unexpected conduct greatly embarrassed me; independently of my positive dislike for Josiah Wilson, my feelings were already set in a particular direction. I was dreadfully distressed lest Mr. Huntly should fancy that I was gratified by my cousin's attention; and then I found that my aunt had been whispering here and there mysteriously that my new bracelet was Josiah's present I would have given anything to tear it from my arm, and strove as much as possible to bury it in my dress.

The truth came out next morning. After I had read to my aunt, as was our custom, the lessons for the day, she spoke to me in a serious tone. She felt she was growing old, she said: in the event of her death, I should be left without a protector; it was the dearest wish of her heart to see me Josiah's wife.

I trembled at her words, for I knew, with all her kindness, that my aunt was of a very determined disposition, that she could never bear to be thwarted.

I replied that Josiah's conduct had never led me to suppose that he regarded me other than in the light of a sister. "Ay," replied my aunt, "I have talked the matter over with your cousin, and he confessed that he has liked you very much for years past, but that your manner toward him has always checked any demonstration of his true feelings. I then told him," continued my aunt, "that it was for him to take the initiative in a courtship."

I was sick at heart, and escaped, as soon as possible, from the room, on some housekeeping excuse. I understood the matter clearly enough; Josiah saw how deeply my aunt had set her heart on our marriage, and he had resolved, for his own interest, not to be the person to thwart her.

My persecution began from that day. I was to be taught to like Josiah Wilson. My aunt devised all sorts of plans for forcing us together. He used constantly to bring me home presents from the city, jewelry, bouquets, and the like, which I was forced to accept. My aunt frequently told her friends that we were very much attached to one another, and that she supposed, one day or other, we should ask her consent to our union. My greatest distress was to see how piqued and angry Edward, Mr. Huntly, was at the attentions I received from my cousin; he evidently thought I was on the point of being engaged. My lips were sealed; it was impossible for me to give him any indication of my real feelings. Josiah was always at my side, paying me the most assiduous court.

After a short time, Josiah made me an offer, and I refused him without hesitation. I was certainly astonished by the warmth with which he pressed his suit, for I had fancied he was only acting out of compliance with my aunt's wishes. He begged and prayed that I would not pronounce an ultimate decision; he had, perhaps, been rather premature in his declaration: he only asked further time to prove the sincerity of his love. He would take no refusal, and we parted.

As might be imagined, my aunt was very angry at my conduct. She expostulated earnestly with me; and in order to show how deeply she had the matter at heart, she detailed to me the plans she had formed for our future mode of life. We were to live with her; at her death, she would bequeath us all her property; and on the day of our engagement, she intended to present us each with five thousand pounds.

I was placed in a most delicate position. I was wholly dependent on my aunt; I had not a single relation in the world who could help me; Mr. Huntly, as was natural under the circumstances, had ceased to pay me any attention.

Things took the course I feared; my aunt finding that her arguments in Josiah's favor were unavailing, had recourse to threats. She reminded me that the disobedience was wholly on my side; she declared that it would be the worse for me if I persisted in my refusal; and she concluded a very painful conversation by desiring me to give her my final decision after the dinner party to which we were going on the following evening. In the meanwhile, I was to think over the matter well.

When she had ceased speaking, my aunt recollected she had left the book she was reading in the summerhouse, near the end of the garden. She was about to ring for the servant to fetch it. I said I would go instead of her. It was a lovely summer night, and the cool air was very refreshing after the excitement I had gone through.

I found the book in the summerhouse, but I did not return immediately, the intense calm of night was so delightful. I was in a strange condition, half-musing, half-crying, when I heard voices behind the summerhouse. I felt frightened and drew back into the shade. Listening very intently, I could distinguish my cousin's voice, then another voice—a woman's—my aunt's maid, Lucy!

To my utter amazement, I heard him ask the girl to meet him at that spot on the following evening, after we returned home from the party. It was my cousin's voice, I was certain of that. They passed away. This was the excellent man my aunt wanted me to marry! I was quite overcome with anger and indignation. I would denounce his conduct at once! When I had sufficiently recovered myself, I hurried back to the house. My aunt was not in the drawing room; I had time for reflection. How did matters stand? Why, only my word against his! Of course, the girl would deny everything; his word from childhood had always been preferred to mine. My aunt, at most, would believe I had mistaken the voice.

I resolved to hold my peace till the following evening. What a night and day of agitation I passed! Not one word did my aunt say about Josiah during the next day, but her manner was all kindness toward me.

The dinner party was to be a very grand affair, and my aunt, as was usual on such occasions, wore her diamonds.

You may imagine how little I enjoyed myself, seated next my cousin. Mrs. Huntly, Edward's mother, was at the party, and I could see she watched us very intently.

It happened after dinner, before the gentlemen came up, that Mrs. Huntly and myself were left alone together in one of the drawing rooms. She addressed me, and laughingly said she supposed she would soon have the pleasure of congratulating me on my engagement with my cousin. I longed to speak out to her, to tell her how I disliked my cousin, and loved her son, but I dared not. I strove to say something; my tongue was powerless; I burst into a flood of tears. Fortunately, I recovered myself before my aunt caught sight of me.

We left the party at about eleven o'clock. As soon as we got home, my aunt bade Josiah good night, retired to her dressing room, and sent for her maid. When my aunt wore her diamonds, it was the custom for me to take them from her dressing room, and put them away, and they were kept in a room opening into the dressing room, which was used as a boudoir. In this room was a large fireproof safe, which on the outside had the appearance of an ordinary chiffonier. I was in such a state of nervous agitation when I entered my aunt's room to obtain the diamonds, that at moments I seemed to lose my head. Lucy was assisting my aunt to undress; the diamonds lay on the dressing table; I placed them in their box, and took them out of the room without saying a word. To my dismay, I found Josiah in the boudoir. There was always some difficulty about the lock of the safe, which was very elaborate. He took the keys out of my hand, and opened the door for me, and almost before I had placed the diamonds in their usual place he renewed his hateful offer. It was on my lips to tell him that I knew of his baseness. Luckily, as events will show, I restrained myself; but I did solemnly declare that, come what might, I would never be his wife. He tried to frighten me with my aunt's displeasure. In the midst of our discussion, in came Lucy from the dressing room with a message that her mistress wished to see me immediately.

It was a relief, at all costs, to be out of Josiah's presence.

My aunt was sitting in her easy chair, wrapped in her dressing gown. Her manner was all kindness toward me; she made me sit close by her. To my surprise, she did not say one word

about the marriage. She began talking, accidentally as it were, about the alterations she intended to make in the house. She asked my opinion of her different plans. I replied incoherently enough, I'm sure, but she took no notice of my manner.

As we lived in the neighborhood of London, it was Josiah's custom very frequently to discharge a pistol out of his bedroom window. Hearing the report, recalled to my mind that I had left the keys of the safe with him. My aunt kept these keys in a secret place in her room, and was always very careful to see that they were safely deposited before she went to bed. I was puzzling my head how to get these keys from Josiah, for I had not the courage to go for them myself, when there came a tap at the door, and Lucy brought in the keys, saying that Mr. Josiah had told her to give them to my aunt.

The conversation about their improvements was resumed, and I soon found that all this had really reference to our marriage—my aunt choosing to assume, by implication, that I had consented to the match.

It was a warm, sultry night, and, on pretense of wanting air, I went to the window. How my heart beat! Looking out, I could just perceive, in the breaks of light on the path, a figure hurrying down the garden. I strained my sight hard to be assured of the fact. The time had come to tell my aunt of my cousin's conduct.

I turned abruptly from the window, and threw myself at her feet. "Aunt, I can not marry my cousin!" At that moment, to my utter astonishment and dismay, there was a knock outside the door. It was Josiah; he had come to ask whether Lucy had delivered the keys.

My aunt answered Josiah's question, and he went away; then, turning to me, she asked, in a severe voice, what I had to say.

I knew it was in vain for me to speak without proof. I was silent through painful helplessness. My aunt, waiting awhile for me to speak, sternly declared I had willfully thrown away my best chance in life; henceforth she should never recur to the subject, and she bade me good night. I reminded her that this was my first act of disobedience to her wishes; I declared I would never marry without her consent. It was all in vain; notwithstanding my tears and protestations, I could not move her to forgiveness.

But however great my distress of mind, it was, for the time, lost in bewilderment at Josiah's conduct. It could not have been more than five minutes after he had inquired about the keys, that he hurried into my aunt's dressing room, without so much as knocking at the door, and told us, in going the rounds of the house, he had found one of the dining room windows, which opened on the garden, unbarred, and the window open. He was certain there was some collusion with people outside; thieves might even now be secreted in the house. He rang the alarm bell, which was connected with the room. His manner seemed so perfectly natural, that I began to believe I must have mistaken the voice. The women servants, dreadfully frightened, came huddling into the room—all but Lucy! Where was Lucy? Nobody knew; she was not upstairs. Josiah and the two men were to search the house. The butler declared he had himself shut and barred the dining room windows. Presently, we heard voices outside in the garden, and Josiah came back to my

aunt's room, laughing. He said it was all a false alarm. The butler and footman had pounced upon Lucy just as she was coming in at the window. The wretched girl was hurried into my aunt's presence, and cross-questioned, Josiah standing by quite unconcerned. What had she been doing? She was so scared and frightened. All we could gain from her was, she had gone to meet her sweetheart.

My aunt gave her warning on the spot, and declared she should leave the house next day.

I was far too excited to sleep that night. Josiah's voice!—was it Josiah's voice? I could think of nothing else.

Early in the morning, Lucy came into my room, crying bitterly. She begged and prayed I would intercede for her with my aunt.

“Tell me, Lucy, whom did you really go to meet?”

“Why, miss, only my young man,” she replied.

“What an hour to choose, Lucy!”

“Yes, miss; but he's at work in London all day long.”

I was determined to solve the mystery about Josiah.

“Listen to me, Lucy.” I watched her closely as I spoke. “The night before last, about half-past ten, I went to fetch a book from the summerhouse.” She blushed scarlet at my words. “I heard the meeting between you and that man arranged! I knew your voice, Lucy, and I knew his voice, too!”

She turned deadly pale, and sank to the floor.

“O, miss,” she said, in a low tone, “you never can forgive me. It was very, very wrong; but if you knew all, you would pity me. Mr. Josiah promised to get my brother let off being a soldier—he did, indeed! Mother's brokenhearted about poor James.”

I knew it was true that Lucy's brother had enlisted.

“Have you any proof to give of Mr. Josiah's promise?” I asked.

“Only my word; but that's worth nothing now,” she replied, in accents of despair. “I've told one lie; nobody will believe me.”

The girl's confession, which was so greatly to her detriment, left no doubt in my mind respecting my cousin; but the motive for his extraordinary conduct was still hidden in mystery. I cautioned the girl not to say a word about the affair with Mr. Josiah, which, unsupported as it was by any sufficient evidence, would only render her case worse with my aunt.

My aunt, of her own accord, after very serious admonition, awarded to Lucy the grace of a month's warning.

Never again did my aunt allude to my marriage with Josiah; but she treated me with the utmost coldness and distance.

It appeared that Mrs. Huntly had perfectly comprehended the reason of my silence and tears, when she addressed me at the dinner. In a few days I received a letter from her son, making me an offer.

Rejoiced as I was at this evidence of Mr. Huntly's love, I could have given anything that his avowal should have been postponed till my aunt had become more reconciled to my rejection of Josiah.

I placed the letter in my aunt's hand, telling her that I held myself fully bound by my promise not to marry without her consent. She read the letter without making any remark on the contents, told me to acknowledge its receipt, and say that the subject should be fully answered in a few days. I little imagined the reply that letter was destined to receive.

One morning about ten days after the dinner party I was summoned to my aunt's room. Of course I believed she wished to see me respecting Mr. Huntly's offer. When I entered the room I could see she was much agitated; she motioned me to shut the door.

"Where did you put the diamonds on the night of the dinner?" she inquired.

"In their usual place, at the top of the drawer," I replied.

"Find them, then!"

I kneeled down and looked into the safe; the diamonds were not in their place. I felt dreadfully alarmed; it was my fault for letting the keys go out of my hands. I pulled out all the contents of the safe, parchments, legal documents, dusty bundles of letters, bills, plate—the diamonds were gone!

"I have had the keys in my possession from the time Lucy brought them to me the night of the dinner; I can swear to it!" exclaimed my aunt "Why, that was the night the girl was found in the garden!"

"You don't suspect Lucy, aunt?"

"I do!" she replied with decision.

I protested it was impossible Lucy could have been guilty of such a crime.

"Well," rejoined my aunt, "we women are not fit judges in such a matter. I'll send for Mr. Chapman."

This gentleman was a solicitor, and had always been a great friend and chief adviser to my aunt.

A messenger was dispatched to Mr. Chapman, and the coachman sent, post haste, to fetch Josiah home from the city.

In about two hours Mr. Chapman was with us. My aunt related to him the occurrences of that night, calling upon me to supply the particulars in which I was concerned.

He desired that Lucy should be sent for. I would have willingly escaped from the room, but my aunt ordered me to remain.

Mr. Chapman placed his chair so that the light from the window fell full on Lucy's face as she stood before him.

I was in a perfect agony; I knew the girl was innocent. There was a sickening presentiment weighing in my mind, strive against it as I would, that Josiah was involved in the affair.

Mr. Chapman stated to Lucy, that, in consequence of something which had just transpired, it was necessary for him to know the name of the person she had gone into the garden to see.

The girl looked anxiously at me; I averted my eyes, but I felt my face burn beneath her gaze.

She said it was her lover!

"His name?" demanded Mr. Chapman.

She refused to give any name, and though he pressed her on the point, she remained obstinately silent.

"Now, Lucy," said he, "this is how matters stand: your mistress's diamonds were placed in that press; the keys were last in your possession; the diamonds are gone."

"Gone!" exclaimed the girl in terror. "Not me, sir; you don't suspect me?"

Mr. Chapman made no reply. Lucy turned from him to my aunt, and vehemently protested her innocence.

"It is in your own power, Lucy," said Mr. Chapman, "to clear yourself from suspicion by telling us the name of your lover."

In sheer desperation the girl uttered some name. Mr. Chapman noted it down.

"Now, the address. Mind, I shall send a person instantly to verify what you say."

She stammered, prevaricated, and threw herself in an agony of grief on the floor.

Mr. Chapman told my aunt that a constable had better be sent for.

At this juncture Josiah entered the room; he was not himself—I could see that; he peered anxiously round.

To my amazement, Lucy started up. “I will tell you who this man is, sir,” she exclaimed to Mr. Chapman. “There he is!” and, pointing to Josiah, she looked him steadfastly in the face.

“The girl’s mad,” said Josiah, with affected coolness.

“This is a sheer loss of time,” said Mr. Chapman; “we had better send her off.”

“I’m not mad,” cried the girl; “he knows he asked me to meet him in the garden; he promised to get off my poor brother if I would.”

I saw Josiah wince at her words.

“It’s a base lie,” interposed my aunt; “Mr. Josiah never went into the garden the night you were found there.”

“Wretched creature, this falsehood won’t serve you,” exclaimed Mr. Chapman, indignantly.

“But I’ve a witness,” she retorted boldly; “we were overheard the night before.”

I saw Josiah grow pale.

“Really, aunt,” said he, “you won’t believe this nonsense.”

“Of course not,” replied my aunt; then, turning to the girl, she told her to produce her witness.

Lucy flew up to me, and, with determined energy, drew me into the middle of the room.

“Speak for me!” she exclaimed.

It was a terrible moment; to speak was to criminate Josiah.

“You must speak,” said the girl fiercely; “if you don’t, it will be on your conscience to your dying day.”

I shall never forget the terrible ordeal of questioning and cross-questioning I underwent. Lucy, now that the truth was out, had grown quite reckless and defiant, and she positively forced the words out of my mouth. My aunt, on the other hand, was strangely calm and composed, and seized with eagerness on every weak point in my narrative. I had stated that I had heard Josiah ask the girl to meet him. “Had I seen Josiah?” inquired my aunt; “that was the great point.”

“No, I had certainly not seen him.”

“Then I might, after all, have mistaken the voice.”

I was ready enough to confess that I might have done so.

“But how had Lucy discovered my knowledge of the affair?”

I related my conversation with the girl on the following morning.

“It seems to me only to amount to this,” said my aunt: “you have been all along prejudiced against your cousin. In the first place, you fancied you heard his voice; instead of openly speaking to me, and having the matter cleared up, you allowed the idea to remain in your mind. This wretched girl, cleverly enough, perceives the nature of your vile suspicions; very likely, long ere this, has been the confidant in the feelings you entertain toward your cousin; so she endeavors to gain your favor by debasing his character, and at the same time, for her own advantage, she converts you into a witness in support of the most palpable lie ever invented.”

Mr. Chapman fully assented to my aunt’s view of the matter.

I was in a perfect agony at the course things had taken. I denied, with truth, that I had ever spoken to Lucy about my cousin.

“No doubt,” said Josiah, with a sneer, “my very charitable relation believes I have stolen these diamonds!”

“No, no, Josiah,” I replied, “I know it can all be explained.”

“It *shall* be explained,” said he, sullenly. “I’ll go to town instantly, and have the best man from Bow Street to examine into the affair.”

My aunt readily assented to this, and Josiah left the room. She then ordered Lucy to go downstairs, telling her she would be strictly watched.

From the moment my aunt and Mr. Chapman began to discredit my evidence about Josiah, the girl’s boldness had ebbed away, and utter despair again took possession of her. She begged and prayed most piteously, not to be sent downstairs; they might lock her up where they liked, but she dare not face the other servants.

My aunt, without noticing me in the slightest degree, left the room with Mr. Chapman. Lucy dragged herself with effort to where I was sitting.

“O, miss,” said she, “I know you don’t think me guilty. But do say so; the words would do me good; it’s so terrible to bear!”

I assured her that I fully believed her innocent

“Ah,” she continued, “I know I’ve got you into trouble, telling, as I did, about Mr. Josiah. Any other way, they might have burnt me before I’d have told it; but to be accused of stealing those diamonds—I could not hold my tongue.”

I gave the poor girl what comfort I could, and then hurried away to my own room, for I was afraid to encounter my aunt. I heard what was going on from one of the servants, who came up to me from time to time.

Josiah returned from London after an absence of about three hours; a Bow Street officer was to follow him immediately. From my bedroom window I saw a strange, forbidding-looking man, with a slow, heavy step, come up the house walk from the common. He was admitted into the house. I listened anxiously over the staircase to hear what was going on below. I heard them all—my aunt, Mr. Chapman, and the man—go to the room where I knew Lucy was. The man’s heavy tramp went pit-pat with my heart. I felt perfectly ill with suspense. Then I heard the man’s footsteps going toward my aunt’s boudoir, tramp, tramp, down the passage; all was silent. Presently, the footsteps returned down the passage to the room where they were all assembled. There was a sudden, loud shriek—Lucy’s voice. I sank down, clinging to the banisters. I don’t know what time had elapsed when one of the servants rushed up, breathless.

“Thank God! They’re found!” she exclaimed.

“The diamonds?”

“Yes, miss; they were all the time in the safe.”

“Impossible!” I replied; “I searched it myself;” and I hurried downstairs to learn the truth.

CHAPTER II

FOUND

MY AUNT, Josiah, Mr. Chapman, and Lucy were in the room; the officer had been sent downstairs. “The diamonds were in the safe after all,” said my aunt to me the moment I entered. “The officer, on pulling the drawer right out, found them in the space behind the back of the drawer and safe. He says that as the drawer was crammed full, the case must have got hitched against the cover of the drawer, and when the drawer was pulled out, the case fell behind it, and so got pushed back by the drawer.”

I could see vindictive triumph in Josiah’s eyes. “And now,” said my aunt, “I have got to perform an act of justice toward Lucy. She has been wrongfully accused of stealing those diamonds. Under ordinary circumstances I should have felt that no reparation which I could make would be too great; but she met the accusation with an infamous story—a story which, no doubt, she had originally trumped up for the purpose of obtaining the goodwill and assistance of a person who should have been above listening to such wicked insinuations.”

My aunt's words were positive torture in my ears.

"However," continued my aunt, "if Lucy will sign a paper declaring that story utterly false, I will on my part buy her brother off from the army, give her a clear year's wages, and, as far as I dare in justice, not concealing what has occurred, give her such a character as may gain her a respectable place. Mr. Chapman will draw out the statement."

There was a dead silence while Mr. Chapman was writing; I raised my eyes to look at Lucy. The girl was evidently so entirely unhinged by what had occurred that she seemed quite unconscious that the matter on hand in any wise concerned her.

"Now, Lucy," said Mr. Chapman briskly, "sign this."

"Read it to her first," exclaimed my aunt.

"But it is not a lie, sir, indeed," said Lucy faintly, interrupting Mr. Chapman as he read.

Mr. Chapman paid no attention to her, but read on to the end.

"Now," said he, "we won't argue the question of its being a lie or not; that would be an utter loss of time, for every person of common sense must be convinced that it is. If you sign this paper, you obtain the advantages your mistress has offered; if you refuse, you leave this house a beggar, without a character. Choose;" and he offered her a pen.

"Lucy!" I cried involuntarily.

The girl turned and looked at me with unmeaning gaze.

"Silence!" said my aunt to me with a severe tone; "don't you interfere with her."

Mr. Chapman was whispering to Lucy. From what I overheard it was evident that he merely attributed her hesitation to an obstinate persistence in her story.

But I could not keep silence. I had been forced to speak against Josiah upon strong conviction. I should never have felt convinced of my mistake if I thought that the girl had signed the paper from mercenary motives.

"Lucy," said I, "listen to me. The question is, was Mr. Josiah with you in the garden that evening before the dinner or not? They say it was your interest once to declare he was; it is now clearly your interest to deny it. Lay aside this wretched question of interest and speak the truth. You will have to speak the truth one day. It is better to speak it now, though it makes you a beggar, than speak it hereafter with shame and remorse."

I could see how agitated the girl was; pain of irresolution flushed her face; she abruptly left Mr. Chapman and came to my side.

“I won’t sign it!” she exclaimed. “I did speak the truth.”

My aunt was the first to recover from the surprise which my conduct created. She rang the bell; the butler entered. “Pay that girl,” said she, “a month’s wages and turn her out of the house. Mind, she leaves this house not a thief but a liar.”

My courage had ebbed away with the words I had addressed to Lucy; I sank into a chair overwhelmed with an intense feeling of moral exhaustion; then my aunt, in the bitterest words, upbraided me for the opinion I persisted in entertaining about Josiah. She would insist upon it, notwithstanding all my assurances, that I had eagerly caught at the girl’s story in the hopes of undermining Josiah’s character; but the scheme had failed—the blow had fallen on my head. She called upon Mr. Chapman to witness her words: “Not one penny of her fortune should be mine; henceforth, I should work for my bread as a governess, and cease to be an inmate of her house.” Suddenly recollecting herself, she drew Mr. Huntly’s letter from her pocket. “There,” said she, “the sooner you answer that the better. Now! this evening! go, and say you are a beggar, and see if he will care for you.”

I was very angry—indignant at her cruel challenge. I spoke at random. “I will go,” said I, and I left the room. I was far too excited to think. I put on my bonnet, hurried downstairs and shut the hall door after me. Whither?—to Mrs. Huntly’s?—but— I began to think as I turned on the doorstep, and looked forth on the common; the old home scene so familiar, years and years I had looked out upon it from my bedroom window. The sun was beginning to set as I lingered on the doorstep; the whole scene was bright and warm, but it chilled me through and through. The feeling of home was gone—I felt I was face to face with the cold, hard world. Then doubt and desolation came upon me. If my aunt had been alone I would have returned and swallowed my words, and prayed on my knees to be taken back; but I thought of Josiah’s triumph—I dare not face that, and I turned away and left the house.

I shall never forget the cruel doubts which beset me in that short walk to Mrs. Huntly’s, the sad possibilities which thronged my brain; not that I doubted of his love, but I knew he was not rich; he might have looked for something on my part to enable us to marry. At the very least, I was throwing myself on his generosity, not only accepting, but seizing eagerly at his offer as a drowning wretch clutches at a straw. Then my circumstances were so totally changed since the offer was made that my pride revolted at the idea of forcing him out of honor to take me as his wife. The idea of going to Mrs. Huntly’s, which, on the spur of the moment, had appeared perfectly natural and proper, began to seem nothing short of utter boldness and impudence.

I am sure I must have given it up and gone back humbly to my aunt’s had he—Mr. Huntly—not overtaken me on the common; he only bowed, and would have passed on—he said afterward he thought he had no right to address me till his letter was answered. I spoke his name only very low, but he caught it and turned. I felt terribly frightened, and could scarcely speak, but this was only at first; a few words from him and doubt was over, and he took me home to his mother.

Mrs. Huntly was very kind to me; she called me from the very first her daughter, listening with a mother’s sympathy to all I had to say. I was to call their house my home, and in a very short time it really was my own home. We were married as speedily as arrangements would permit.

I did all in my power to obtain my aunt's forgiveness, but in vain. The day after I was at Mrs. Huntly's my wardrobe and everything I possessed were sent to me, but no letter or message, and, though I wrote very often, I received no reply. This was the only drawback to my happiness. Though Mr. Huntly's income was small, it was quite sufficient for every comfort. He was so thoughtfully kind, he bought Lucy's brother out of the army, and Lucy, poor girl, Mrs. Huntly took at once into her service, and she never left us till she went away to be married many years afterward.

I had been married three months, and I had never even chanced to meet my aunt in my walks, but I heard of her from time to time from mutual friends.

One day intelligence was brought me that she was seriously ill—a paralytic seizure. In the greatest anxiety I hastened to the house, the doctor's carriage was at the door. I asked how my aunt was. The butler said she was very ill. Could I see her? The man said he had strict orders to refuse me admittance. "Whose orders?" I inquired.

"Mr. Josiah's," was the reply. I was reflecting upon what I had better do when the doctor came downstairs. He had always been a very kind friend of mine.

"I'm so glad you are here," said he, "I think it might do your aunt good; she has mentioned your name several times." He begged to have a few words with me in the dining room.

"But I'm refused admittance."

"Mr. Josiah's orders, sir," said the butler, puzzled what to do.

"I'll be responsible," replied the doctor, and I followed him into the dining room.

The doctor did not disguise from me that it was a most serious attack. It was agreed that I should enter my aunt's room as if nothing had occurred between us, and busy myself with the general arrangements.

My aunt's face did brighten up when I approached her, and she smiled faintly. I was very distressed to see her in so sad a condition. I was on the point of referring to the past and begging her forgiveness, but the doctor drew me back and motioned to me to be silent.

My presence and attentions seemed to cause my aunt so much satisfaction that the doctor expressed a strong wish, if possible, that I should remain and nurse her. I could sleep on the sofa in the room. He feared that my services would not be very long required. I was so very glad to be of any comfort to my aunt that I readily agreed to the proposition; then I recollected about Josiah, and reminded the doctor of the peculiar circumstances in which I was placed. He promised me that I should have no annoyance or anxiety on that score. I was thus fully established as chief nurse. My first meeting with Josiah was not nearly as embarrassing as I had feared; he was certainly cold and distant in his manner, but he expressed himself very pleased that my aunt should have me with her; nevertheless, I heard afterward that the unfortunate butler who had admitted me was peremptorily dismissed.

At the first, when my aunt was so ill and helpless, Josiah came very little into the sickroom; but as soon as she grew better and began thoroughly to regain her consciousness and the use of her limbs, he was in and out of the room all day. On the plea that I should be overfatigued, he wanted me to let the nurse sleep in the room. I would not consent to this; I said that as my aunt was so accustomed to my nursing I knew she would never like anybody else with her. He was very reluctant to forego his proposal. The nurse slept in the boudoir, and I observed that she became far more active and attentive in the night than she had been during the worst of the illness. If I got up ever so softly to go to my aunt's bed, she was sure to be in the room, and more than that, the slightest movement always brought Josiah tapping at the door to know if we wanted anything.

My aunt was so pleased with Josiah's attentions she would call out as loud as she could, "Thank you, Josiah, you go to bed; it's nothing, Josiah."

I remember wanting to send a note home; there was no ink in my aunt's inkstand, so I asked the nurse to get some. She left the room, and Josiah presently came in with his own inkstand and placed it before me. I wrote my note, which he undertook to send, and then he carried his inkstand off with him.

Somehow I could never get any ink kept in my aunt's inkstand, and whenever I inquired for ink Josiah was sure to come into the room.

I soon discovered that every movement of mine was closely watched; but it was all done so cleverly and naturally that I had not a word to say.

One morning Josiah was sitting in the room with my aunt and myself; I had been up several times in the night and was in a sort of half-doze when I heard my aunt address Josiah in a low tone, "She has been very good to me during my illness, giving up her time so entirely. You feel that, Josiah, don't you?"

"Yes, aunt"

"Then, Josiah, forgive her for my sake."

"For your sake, aunt, I do forgive her."

"You hear that?" said my aunt to me, "Josiah forgives you."

"From the bottom of your heart, say so, Josiah,"

"From the bottom of my heart," echoed Josiah; but I could see the scowl on his face as he spoke.

"I must do something for her," continued my aunt

“O, aunt,” exclaimed Josiah, starting from his seat and coming to the bedside, “haven’t I been always affectionate, and attentive, and dutiful? Did I marry against your commands? Did I spurn your kindness?”

“You have been very good, Josiah, very good,” replied my aunt. “I only want to do some little thing for her, because she has been so attentive during this illness.”

My pride was aroused, and, but for fear of overexciting my aunt, I should at once have declined any return for doing what was merely my duty.

“I can’t give her any money, I’ve sworn not,” said my aunt, addressing Josiah.

“You did swear it,” he replied very deliberately, “Mr. Chapman was witness.”

“But there are the diamonds, Josiah.”

“The diamonds!” he exclaimed, raising his voice.

“I could give the diamonds, Josiah.”

“What! your own diamonds, aunt,” said he, “which you have always worn?”

“They’re not money, Josiah.”

“But she married out of the family. Your diamonds go to strangers!”

I could not endure this. I begged my aunt to let Josiah have the diamonds.

“She *shall* have the diamonds!” said my aunt peremptorily. “Go and get them, Josiah;” and with some difficulty she took off her neck the key of the drawer.

Josiah, much to his discontent, was forced to obey; he went to the boudoir and brought in the diamonds, which he placed on the bed.

I was so dreadfully afraid of some scene taking place, which I knew would be very prejudicial to my aunt, that I was greatly relieved at the doctor being announced.

“There,” said my aunt, pushing the case toward me with great effort, “I said they should be yours the first day I bought them if you were a good girl; you have been very good during this illness; take them and do what you like with them.”

“One word,” said Josiah, speaking to me, “never forget that those were once Aunt Janet’s diamonds which she bought years ago. They are very precious to me. If you ever desire to part with them, or even to modernize the setting, let me know. I will strive to scrape money together to give the full worth as they stand now.”

Poor Aunt Janet! she little knew what she was doing when she gave me those diamonds.

The doctor was quite right; my services were not required very long; another seizure took place, and, after lingering for a few days, my aunt died. The whole of the property was left to Josiah, with the reservation that, if he died without children, the land was to go to my eldest son.

Of course we kept up no intercourse with Josiah, but I heard quite enough of his goings-on to show that I had formed a true estimate of his character. As soon as he came into his wealth he began to lead a very wild and dissipated life.

When I placed the diamonds in my husband's hands I told him that Aunt Janet had given me the option of parting with them, which, if he thought advisable, I should be very happy to do, as I felt our circumstances would not permit of my wearing them. He would not listen to my proposal; he was not pressed for money, he said, and in a few years I might be fully entitled to wear them.

Ah, my love, I am so glad that you are not going to marry a man on that horrid Stock Exchange! I am sure the dreadful anxiety I have undergone about Mr. Huntly. In those days he was without the experience which he now possesses, and at a time when steady business was very dull, he took to speculating on his own account, and on behalf of others who were very cunning and plausible. It seemed that he was successful at first, and I used to be quite surprised at his elation of spirits. One day he came home sadly downcast; he had had very heavy losses, chiefly through the villainy of a client, whose debts my husband was bound to make good. He feared it would be necessary for me to part with the diamonds. Of course, I was only too glad to think that we yet possessed the means of setting things to rights.

According to my promise I resolved at once to write to Josiah and offer him the diamonds, and we agreed that I had better ascertain their value from an experienced jeweler, and so mention a sum in the letter.

Taking Lucy as an escort I went off the next morning to a very old-established jeweler's at the top of the Strand, where Mr. Huntly's family had dealt for many years.

I gave the case into the hands of the chief partner of the firm, who happened to be in the shop, and asked him to give me some idea of the market value of the stones.

He made a very careful examination.

"I suppose, ma'am," said he, "you are aware that these are *not* diamonds?"

I said, with great warmth, that they had belonged to an aunt of mine, that they were bought at _____'s.

"Excuse me, ma'am," he replied, "they could not have been sold for diamonds, but they are very perfect imitations; at first I was deceived by them myself."

“Why,” I replied in a state of the greatest excitement, “I was present years ago when they were bought—I know they are diamonds!”

“You have asked my opinion,” said the jeweler kindly, “and I am very sorry to be obliged to undeceive you. The proof is very simple; I shall, if you will allow me, draw a file over one of these stones, if the stone remains uninjured it is a diamond.”

“Do it!” said I with desperation; but as I spoke I felt the man was right. We were ruined—my husband compromised!

Crash went the file—the stone was starred! I looked for a moment and fainted.

When I came to myself Lucy was attending to me.

“Mr. Josiah!” she whispered in my ear.

“What?” said I, dreadfully confused.

“He took them that night, I know he did.”

The shop people were about us; I bade her be silent. We regained our coach and returned home. I felt convinced that Josiah had changed the diamonds. Ah me, it was very weary and sad waiting as that day dragged slowly on, and Mr. Huntly was so late. When he did come home he was far calmer than I had expected.

“Thank God,” said he, “I know the worst of it, a thousand pounds will set things straight You told me your aunt gave more than twelve hundred for the diamonds—”

“But—” said I in a perfect agony.

“But what?” he exclaimed impatiently

“O, Edward,” I replied, “the sooner I tell you the better. They are not diamonds, they are worth nothing!”

I recounted the events of the morning.

I shall never forget the end of that day; its utter hopelessness and despair; ay, and the bitter days that followed close upon it. How to raise that thousand pounds? Why, selling all we possessed, at the price things fetch at a sale, we knew would not realize one half; and then my husband would stand compromised for the rest, a defaulter, with his name posted up. I remember it was all so sad that I felt I was almost doing wrong to smile at baby as he laughed and crowed in my arms.

In the absence of direct proof my husband thought it was hopeless to do anything with regard to Josiah; but I was determined to have Mr. Chapman’s advice in the matter. That gentleman received me very kindly. I found that Josiah had given him serious offense with regard to some

pecuniary transaction arising out of my aunt's will. He was greatly astonished when I told him that the diamonds were false. He confessed that, on after reflection, he had been very much puzzled by Lucy's persistence in her statement; but if he had entertained any suspicions against Josiah, it was, of course, nothing beyond the supposition that Josiah, having asked the girl to meet him, and, fearing the affair had been discovered, had endeavored to shift out of it as best he might. The false diamonds had given a totally new color to the transaction. The case would stand thus: Josiah might have fallen into extravagances before my aunt's death; indeed, he, Mr. Chapman, had received pretty strong proof that such was the fact. Unwilling to confess his delinquencies, he had sought some other mode of extraction. Marriage with me would have given him the immediate command of money. That failed. Then the abstraction of the diamonds. He knew that my aunt would wear the diamonds on the night of the dinner party; Lucy is asked to meet him at the end of the garden on that night; he takes care that she has the keys of the press left for a time in her hands; the diamonds are missing; suspicion naturally falls on Lucy. Ten days have elapsed between the party and the loss of the diamonds being discovered; the diamonds are altered during that period, and at the very last moment the false stones are cleverly deposited in a place in which nineteen people out of twenty would never dream of looking for them. But all this supposition, urged Mr. Chapman, is worth nothing unless we can get hold of Josiah's accomplice in the affair.

Mr. Chapman very warmly pledged himself to assist me, though he could not hold out any strong hopes of success.

"In the first place," said he, "we must ascertain whether your aunt ever purchased diamonds or not."

We found, on application, that the jeweler's books showed that certain diamond ornaments had been sold to my aunt at the price of £1,370. Moreover, the late foreman, an old man, who had since become a partner, was prepared to swear to their being diamonds.

In order to ascertain Josiah's cognizance of the fraud, Mr. Chapman directed me to write to my cousin; and he sketched out a letter which stated that my circumstances obliged me to part with the diamonds, and, according to my promise, I gave him the first offer at the price my aunt had originally paid.

To my surprise, Josiah sent an answer almost by return of post. The letter was written in his usual hypocritical style; he deplored the necessity of my parting with the diamonds, but he was truly obliged to me for not forgetting his request. He believed that diamonds had lately risen in value, and he thought the fairest plan would be that the diamonds should be taken to his jeweler's, and he would direct them to give me the highest market price; my own jeweler had, of course, better be consulted.

"He knows all about it," said Mr. Chapman, reading the letter, "or he would not have made such a proposal."

"But," said I impatiently, "how will this avail us? The auctioneer is now in our house."

“Have faith, madam,” he replied, “I am acting under the advice of a very clever detective.”

He then directed me to write again to Josiah, and say that I had been advised that the most satisfactory mode of disposing of the diamonds would be by public competition.

Josiah did not communicate with me again, but he wrote to the auctioneer commissioning him to bid any fair sum at the sale.

I confess I had given up all hopes of success; but on the very evening of the day on which the sale took place, while we were anxiously waiting for the auctioneer’s account of the proceeds, in came Mr. Chapman, exhibiting as much glee as his dry legal face would permit

“Josiah’s bought the diamonds!” he exclaimed.

“What! the paste?”

“No. Josiah’s not such a fool as to give ten thousand pounds for paste.”

We believed that Mr. Chapman must have been suddenly bereft of his senses; but he proved his words by a check on his own banker for eight thousand pounds; and further than that, he placed in my hands a little box containing Aunt Janet’s veritable diamonds.

This was Mr. Chapman’s story: It had been arranged that the false diamonds should be on view with the rest of the effects, but they were to be placed under a glass case, and the detective, as an auctioneer’s man in charge, was to watch narrowly all the people who came to view them. It was also agreed, on any person desiring a closer inspection, that the detective was to make excuses about the key of the case having been mislaid. Several people, evidently dealers in jewelry, had grumbled a great deal at only being able to see the diamonds through the glass, but nobody had expressed a doubt as to their being real. At last two men came in together, and while the one was complaining about the key, the other, at a glance, told his companion that it did not matter; he knew they were only paste.

How could that man be certain at a glance that the stones were paste?

The detective motioned to Mr. Chapman, who was standing near. Mr. Chapman went up to the man, and drawing him aside, told him that he was quite right, the diamonds were only paste, and it would be worth money to any person who could say how they came to be paste.

By dint of clever examination and promises of reward, the man confessed that he had made those very imitation stones himself! When? Somewhere about two years before. For whom? Well, he didn’t mind saying that—the fellow was lately dead—Benson, a Jew moneylender, who often employed him for that sort of job. On whose behalf was Benson acting? Ah! Benson kept his affairs very close; but it did happen there was a great press at the end to get this work done, and when he took it home to Benson’s he hurried at once into the private office, and there was the gentleman, all impatient to get possession of the false stones. Benson was angry with him for coming into the office. He never found out the gentleman’s name, but he was certain he should

know him again. And the diamonds? Yes, he fancied he knew where the diamonds were; the set had not been broken up; they were in the hands of a man who wanted a long price—diamonds were rising in the market, the man could bide his time.

“Now,” said Mr. Chapman, “that gentleman you chanced to see is very anxious to get those diamonds back again; he will give the man his own price for them if they are brought to my office tomorrow morning, and something handsome to you in the bargain.”

The man agreed. Mr. Chapman wrote to Josiah, making an appointment for the following morning, at eleven o’clock, respecting some executor business.

The man duly arrived at the office with the diamonds, and Mr. Chapman had them inspected by an experienced jeweler, who declared that they were genuine, and that they exactly corresponded with the original setting.

Josiah kept the appointment.

I can almost see Mr. Chapman before me now as he described his interview with Josiah. His features never lost their sedate business aspect, but his small gray eyes twinkled with waggish exultation.

Josiah was very ill-tempered, rude, about some proposal of Mr. Chapman’s respecting my aunt’s affairs.

“You are an ungrateful fellow, Josiah,” said Mr. Chapman; “I’m always doing what I can for you. I heard that you were very anxious to get hold of your aunt’s diamonds.”

“Yes,” replied Josiah, “I told the auctioneer to bid for me, but he says those diamonds have turned out to be sham.”

“That’s just it, Josiah; I have given myself all the pains in the world to get the real ones for you.”

“Fiddlesticks!”

“Fact. They were in the hands of a Mr. Benson. (Josiah turned deadly pale.) I find that person is dead; but I’ve a young man in the next office who was employed by Mr. Benson; he says he once saw a gentleman in Mr. Benson’s office—”

“I am very much indebted to you for your trouble,” exclaimed Josiah, with the deepest of scowls on his countenance, “I’m only too glad to get my poor aunt’s diamonds. What am I to pay?”

“Ten thousand pounds!” replied Mr. Chapman very deliberately. (Josiah made use of very strong expressions.) “Perhaps you don’t think they are genuine,” said Mr. Chapman. “Shall we have the young man in?”

“I’ll give the money,” said Josiah hastily.

“Write a check.”

“I have not so much money at my banker’s.”

“You forget,” said Mr. Chapman, “that the money for that estate is lodged at your banker’s, pending the completion of the purchase; it will just suffice.”

Josiah wrote the check. “Curse you,” he exclaimed as he gave it to Mr. Chapman.

“You ought to say thank you, Josiah. I’m sure I’ve taken a deal of trouble for you, acting as a friend. Now, if I had acted as a lawyer—”

“Give me the diamonds,” said Josiah.

Mr. Chapman placed the box in Josiah’s hand. Josiah was about to leave the room. “You will excuse me,” said Mr. Chapman blandly, “for making the remark, but your late aunt gave her *diamonds*—not the paste-stones—to your cousin. It is, of course, for you to consider what claim your cousin has to those diamonds.”

Josiah considered for a moment, placed the box on the table, and skulked out of the room.

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