

The Borrowed Diamonds

BY ANNE TAYLOR CLARKE

“I say, Jackson, I wonder how Graham manages to dress his wife so well—he is only a book-keeper?”

“Just what I was thinking about. He is our book-keeper, so I know what his salary is, and I can’t imagine how he pays his board and keeps up such an appearance such times as these. His wife must have some means of her own.”

“Not at all. She was a poor girl, earning her own living, when Graham married her.”

“Well, my salary is the same as his, and if I thought I could dress a wife half as well as he dresses his, I would marry tomorrow. I shall ask him how he manages.”

This conversation occurred between the friends Jackson and Anderson while walking on Fifth avenue one Sunday afternoon, after meeting Graham and his pretty young wife. Mrs. Graham’s dress certainly was rich enough to excite the attention of her husband’s fellow clerks. The heavy crimson silk dress, black corded silk sack, and white tulle bonnet trimmed with real blonde, with crimson roses inside and strings of the same color, besides her parasol, gloves, lace handkerchiefs, were indeed too costly to suit the bookkeeper’s salary, had he been obliged to pay for them; but the various articles which made up this handsome costume were birthday presents from relatives of Mr. Graham’s. These relatives took a lively interest in the young couple, and knowing that Mr. Graham’s income was insufficient to dress his wife as other members of the society in which he moved, they made up the deficiency by timely presents. These relatives had not been very well pleased when Mr. Graham married Nellie Smith. She earned her own living and belonged to a family beneath the Grahams in the social scale, but they were too proud to exhibit their disappointment to the world, and withal too fond of their handsome kinsman to quarrel with him, so they determined to make the best of it, and in time Nellie’s prettiness and attractiveness won their hearts and they became really attached to her for her own sake. Nellie had good principles and a fair education, but she was vain, fond of dress and company, and the hesitation she at first felt about accepting the means to gratify her vanity from her husband’s relatives soon wore away. Neither husband nor wife would have been pleased had their fashionable friends known the truth; and so, when Jackson asked his friend Graham the next day how he managed to do so much with his income, Graham said, “Oh, we don’t fritter our money away as some people do;” but did not give the slightest intimation that his wife’s expensive clothes did not come out of his salary.

Not very long after, the Seventh Regiment ball came off, and as Graham had been a member when the regiment went to Virginia in 1861, he received a ticket. Of course, Mrs. Graham wanted to look her best, and exceedingly pretty she did look in a pink silk dress with a tulle overskirt.

Mr. Hatry, the head of the firm in which Graham was bookkeeper, was there with his wife and daughter, and what would have escaped his notice did not escape theirs. Mrs. Graham, the wife

of his bookkeeper, wore diamonds. Now, Mr. Hatry, successful merchant that he was, had never considered himself rich enough to buy diamonds for his wife, therefore his astonishment was great at first, but on reflection he concluded they were only paste, and said so to his wife and daughter. But Miss Hatry persisted that they were real. She knew by the way they sparkled.

Anderson was also at the ball, and of course noticed the diamonds, but, like Mr. Hatry, supposed they were paste.

On their way home from the ball, the principal subject of conversation between Mrs. and Miss Hatry was the extravagance of Mrs. Graham. Their remarks so far influenced Mr. Hatry that he determined to examine his affairs closely and see that all was right. The result was a discovery of fraud to the amount of several thousand dollars. Mr. Hatry went home feeling very uncomfortable indeed at the thought of Graham being dishonest, for of course his suspicions fell upon Graham at once, owing to what he had heard about Mrs. Graham's extravagance, otherwise his bookkeeper was the last person in his employment he would have suspected. He was a good man, sincerely interested in the welfare of all connected with him, and he hardly thought of his own loss in his grief about Graham's loss of integrity. While he sat at the tea table with his family, his mind was busy thinking what measures he ought to take with Graham; by the time the meal was over he had decided.

The same evening Mr. and Mrs. Graham were going out again, although it was but a few nights after the ball. This time she wore a yellow silk skirt and a black velvet bodice, with various flowers and feathers, the costume being intended to represent a Spanish lady. The young couple were going to a fancy dress party given by one of Graham's relatives. Nellie was giving the finishing touch to her toilette, when someone knocked at the door, and upon opening it Mr. Hatry walked in. Great was the surprise of the Grahams, and great also was the confirmation given to Mr. Hatry's suspicions. He had intended to be very gentle and considerate, and endeavor to lead the wanderer back with cords of love, but the sight of this fanciful costume made him indignant, and he spoke with some severity.

"I suppose, Mr. Graham, you are aware of my reason for calling on you this evening?"

Graham looked his surprise as he answered:

"Indeed I am not."

"That is surprising; I felt sure your conscience would have told you my errand."

"Mr. Hatry, what do you mean? I cannot imagine anything to cause you to come to my house and speak in such a strange manner."

"Well, as you cannot imagine, I suppose I had better tell you. I find that I have been robbed of three thousand dollars, and I thought that you might help me to discover the thief."

While speaking, Mr. Hatry fixed his eyes steadily upon Graham, who, although becoming somewhat agitated, returned his gaze boldly as he replied:

“Your manner would imply that you thought I had something to do with it; is it so?”

“I will be plain with you: suspicion has fallen upon you; but, believe me, Graham, I would give double the amount in question to be convinced of your innocence.”

“Will you tell me your grounds for supposing me a thief?” said Graham, proudly.

“Your wife’s extravagance in dress. Excuse me if I pain you; you know I believe in coming to the point at once. A few nights ago it is said that your wife wore diamonds, and her dress on that occasion, and on others, was more expensive than you could honestly afford to buy; but perhaps my first thought was the right one—that the diamonds were only paste, and her dress not so expensive as it appeared. I will not disguise from you that your wife’s appearance tonight did much to confirm suspicions. If you can explain all this, I shall be delighted to look elsewhere for the guilty one.”

“Excuse me, Mr. Hatry, but there is no man living who has a right to ask for an explanation of my domestic affairs; as your book-keeper I have tried to do my duty; and can only assure you I have never touched your money, neither will I remain where my honesty is suspected.”

“Well, Graham, I do wish you would explain. You do not know how it troubles me to think evil of *you*.”

However, Graham would not explain, and Mr. Hatry went away, feeling sad and uncertain. Graham and his wife went to the party, feeling very indignant, indeed, but put a brave face on the matter, and seemed as gay as ever, especially as Jackson was one of the guests. A few weeks passed away, and Graham and his wife began to think their prospects not very cheering. They were going in debt for board, and being unable to get employment, his pride received a shock, and he saw that he had been hasty in giving up a good situation. Meanwhile, the clerks were surprised at his absence. Mr. Hatry was careful to say nothing against Graham; but as the knowledge of the robbery could not be concealed, they were not slow in concluding that Graham was the delinquent, but that their employer refrained from prosecuting on account of the friendship existing between them. Just at this time one of the clerks received a summons to attend the death-bed of his mother, who lived in the country. The young man went away seemingly in great distress. The suspicions against Graham spread still they reached the ears of his relatives, who came at once to his wife to know what they meant. She told them what had happened, and wept bitterly as she fully realized the trouble caused by her foolish vanity. Yes, her fondness for dress and pleasure had brought ruin on her husband; and in the midst of her tears her resolution was taken to explain all and clear his character. Waiting only the departure of her visitors, she dressed herself hastily, and throwing a [veil] over her face, went to Mr. Hatry’s house. Knowing that Mr. Hatry was probably at his business, she asked for Mrs. Hatry, who came down. A sensible woman herself, Mrs. Hatry was astonished at the vanity which led Mrs. Graham to dress in borrowed finery; but she was good and kind, and pitied her while admiring the moral courage of such a confession. She gave her some kind advice, and promised to tell Mr. Hatry the whole story. Nellie went home with a lighter heart and a consciousness of having done right, which feeling was strengthened when soon after her own return her husband came in, pale

and tired, and without a word of greeting sank on a chair, covering his face with his hands. Several of his friends had passed him in the street with a cold bow and a look of contempt.

“Nellie, we have been very foolish; the only thing before us is to leave the city; looking for employment here is useless; my character is ruined.”

“Oh! no, I hope not. Mr. Hatry will know everything tonight.”

“How so; I will never humiliate myself to give him an explanation. He should have known me too well to suspect me. No, we must leave New York.”

“I have already explained everything to Mrs. Hatry. When your aunt and your cousin came to ask me what people meant by saying you had robbed your employer, I could bear it no longer. To think your good name should be lost through my folly! but I should be adding sin to sin if I allowed my pride to prevent me from acknowledging my errors. We forgot ‘to avoid even the appearance of evil.’ I felt a secret satisfaction in making people wonder how I could buy so many dresses. Hour after hour I have spent altering Aunt Graham’s old ball-dresses to make them look new. And those unlucky diamonds! Aunt did not wish to lend them to me at first; she was afraid I might lose them; but I promised to be careful of them; and I was so proud at the idea of wearing real diamonds. No! I do not wonder at Mr. Hatry’s suspicions, and I am sure he wished to act kindly by you when he came that night. If we had only explained then!

“Yes, it would have been better; but it is too late now. Perhaps Mr. Hatry will not believe your explanation; and even if he does, he will not come here again. I suppose suspicion falling on me has enabled the real defrauder to escape. Yes, Nellie, we have been very, very foolish. I felt proud of seeing you well dressed, and disregarded the fact that we were exciting the curiosity and ill-will of my fellow clerks; even when Jackson asked me how I did so much with my income, my reply was equivalent to a lie. If we had lived more for ourselves and less for society we would have been spared this mortification.

Some time after, when Graham and his wife were discussing plans for leaving the city, and finding employment elsewhere, Mr. Hatry came in.

“Graham, my friend, I could not rest without seeing you. Why did you not tell me what Mrs. Graham told my wife today? Mrs. Graham, I honor you; you have remembered the maxim, “Before honor is humility.” Graham, do you forgive me; if you do, shake hands?”

“Willingly; I see now that under the circumstances you could hardly have thought otherwise. I hope you will forgive me for not taking your intended kindness in a better spirit.”

“Certainly, I feel so happy in the thoughts of your innocence, that I almost forget the unpleasantness of our last interview. Where are you employed now?”

“I have not been able to get a situation. I intend leaving the city tomorrow. I have friends in Buffalo.”

“Nonsense; your old situation is waiting for you. It will be the best refutation of the evil reports in circulation about you.”

Graham did not like to go back, disliking to explain to the other clerks, but Mr. Hatry said he need give no explanation, only attend to his duties, and in time their words would die away. It was a hard ordeal, but Graham submitted, and in a few days was rewarded by having his innocence fully established. The young clerk, who had been summoned away did not return, neither did any message arrive from him. While talking about him one day, someone remembered that he had before said that his mother died when he was a boy. This first turned Mr. Hatry's suspicions toward the absent clerk; he caused inquiries to be made, and learned that the young man had lived a very extravagant and dissipated life for a year or so. He had been fully trusted in the store, and often went to the bank to make deposits. On comparing the account of the money sent with the account of the money received by the bank, a difference of three thousand dollars was discovered. On it being brought to their minds, several remembered that on those days when the money was taken the absent clerk was sent to the bank. Fearful of proving Graham guilty, Mr. Hatry had not investigated the matter well, else he would have discovered the real offender before.

The New York Ledger, December 8, 1866