

The Burglary at Faustel Eversleigh

“WELL, BIGGS, what is the matter? You look important, this morning.”

Biggs swelled in majestic silence, deposited the muffin dish on the table with as near an approach to emphasis as he dared, and was in the act of retreating, when the young lady standing at one of the open windows looked up from her newspaper, to say:

“Aunt Dora, these burglaries are becoming quite alarming; they are travelling in our direction, I think, too. There was one at Woodthorpe only three nights ago—close to us, you know—”

The temptation to cap this piece of news quite overcame Mr. Biggs’ wounded dignity, and he opened his lips and spoke.

“And one, Miss Lucy, at Willow Lodge, last night, for the postman brought me the news this morning, with the letters.”

“Dear, dear!” said Mrs. Selwyn. “I hope poor Miss Jenkins and Miss Araminta came to no harm.”

“The family, ma’am, was not molested,” answered Biggs, with solemnity, “but everything the villains could lay hands on was carried off, and no traces of them hasn’t been discovered up to the present moment.”

“Really, Aunt Dora, it is serious. You know we are two lone women, as well as Miss Jenkins and her sister. Suppose they take a fancy to visit us next?”

“Well, Lucy, what can I do? Is the case urgent enough for me to write over to the barracks, and ask Colonel Patteson to send us an agreeable captain and lieutenant, with a party of soldiers warranted sober and not given to flirting, to garrison poor old Eversleigh for a while?”

“I know you are as brave as a lion, auntie dear, but still I think this is not a laughing matter. What could you or I do, or even Biggs—”

“The very first thing these rascals does, Miss Lucy, when they get into a house, is to lock the men servants, if there is any, into their rooms; so that, you see—”

“Well, well, Biggs, that would be of less consequence, as I am sure if they omitted to turn the key on you, you would do it on yourself,” said Mrs. Selwyn, with a twinkle in her eyes that merged into a laugh as Biggs retreated. “There, Lucy,” she went on, “don’t look so serious, and I will have all the plate packed up to-day and sent in a most ostentatious manner to my bankers, if that will give you peace of mind.”

Miss Lucy Gresham continued to discuss her breakfast with a very half-satisfied look on her pretty face, which Mrs. Selwyn observing, went on:

“And I’ll tell you what I can do as well, if that is not precaution enough. You remember Jack Eversleigh? He is at home now, on leave, and I’ll write him a line to come down here for a week or two, with his ‘long sword,’ revolvers, and all his ‘bold dragoon’ paraphernalia, and mount guard over two unprotected females. It will be quite in Jack’s way, or would have been, once upon a time. You have not forgotten Jack?”

“I don’t remember him very well,” answered Miss Lucy, bestowing a good deal of attention on her breakfast-cup. “Hasn’t he turned out very wild? Mary Seldon told me something of that sort, I think.”

“‘Give a dog a bad name, and hang him,’ my dear. It has always been the fashion in Jack’s family to give the lad credit for being everything he ought not to be, and so really to make him some things he would not otherwise have been. I don’t know exactly what amount, or what kind of iniquity is comprehended in the word ‘wild;’ it is certain Jack has always been called a scapegrace. It is equally certain that I believe a truer gentleman, or kinder heart, does not bear her majesty’s commission to-day.”

Mrs. Selwyn’s eyes sparkled, and her fair old cheek colored, as she spoke. Childless herself, she was very fond of her late husband’s favorite nephew, John Eversleigh, and had fought on the lad’s side in many a pitched battle with prim aunts and austere fathers. And it must be owned that Jack was one of those who always give their friends enough to do in this way. Even Mrs. Selwyn, with all her fondness for him, could not deny that, thought Lucy Gresham, as after breakfast she wended her way down the shady avenue, on one of her accustomed errands of goodwill and kindness to some of their poorer neighbors, with that invitation and the question of Jack’s acceptance of the same, a great deal more present to her mind than she would have cared to own. She would have liked to believe that Jack Eversleigh was no worse than Aunt Dora thought him; she remembered quite well seeing him come to church with the Seldens, once, when he was staying with them, last year, and she remembered, too, with a sigh, how he had certainly gone to sleep on that very occasion, when dear Mr. Lillydew’s sermon was only ever such a little over the hour. Mary Selden had said he was “wild,” and George Selden, who ought surely to know, being in the same regiment, had talked of Jack’s being “hard-up,” whatever that might mean, and so-and-so—and Lucy sighed. She would have preferred to think her old playfellow was not utterly reprobate, if she had been able.

It was very hard to look at him, and yet hold to that opinion, Lucy was thinking, a day or two afterwards, as she sat demurely silent near one of the windows, and listened to the merry talk that was going on between Mrs. Selwyn and Captain Eversleigh, newly arrived. Jack seemed mightily amused and interested on hearing in what capacity he was invited, and on the whole,

impressed Miss Gresham with the conviction that he would be rather disappointed if no burglar afforded him any means of exercising his predilection for strife and violence, during his stay.

With these thoughts in her mind, it is not wonderful that Lucy's manner towards the object of them was shy and constrained, to the last degree. Haughty or repellant she could not be, nature not having provided her with that double-edged weapon called "a spirit," but only a gentle heart that would fain have had kind and loving thoughts of all the world, and believed the best of every man, woman or child with whom she came into contact. In theory, you see, poor Lucy had shaken her head and sighed over the iniquity of the world at large; but in practice it was her feminine habit to take those with whom she came into actual contact as much as they appeared, or professed themselves to be—not seldom, indeed, in her innocent and tender imaginings, crediting them with virtues which I am afraid they had no claim to, out of that gentle region.

And the shyness and constraint did not deter Jack in the least from setting himself to restore, at the very first opportunity, something of the old familiar relations between himself and his little companion of long ago. He thought them both rather pretty than otherwise; but by that time Mr. Jack had privately arrived at the conviction, too, that Miss Gresham possessed the largest, softest, most innocent eyes, and the loveliest wild-rose complexion he had ever seen.

Fashionable girls, fast girls, flirting girls, merry, outspoken, frank girls Jack knew by scores, and had very likely waltzed, hunted, and talked nonsense by the mile, to very nearly the same number. A little tender, unsophisticated, ignorant girl, who shook her head at the opera, balls, and cigar-smoking generally, and yet who cried real, heartfelt tears over the capture of that incorrigible poacher and vagabond, Downy Dick, was something new and piquant; and accordingly, he set himself to the task of cultivating amicable relations with Lucy Gresham, with a characteristic inability to admit the idea of failure, that must needs have gone far to ensure success, even if Lucy had been other than she was.

Being what she was, it is not wonderful that after only two or three days' experience of Jack's pleasant qualities as a companion; in the quiet home-life of the old manor-house, Lucy had gone so far as to think that a gentleman might hunt and even smoke, without being utterly reprobate; and that, whatever might be comprehended in the vague term of being "hard-up," it could not be anything very bad, and yet applied with truth to John Eversleigh. Simple faith of a guileless little heart! Only it was a pity, you see, that it should have been grounded so very much on the fact of Jack's having handsome dark eyes, and a pleasant smile that was always ready.

And in that companionship the days seemed to glide away like dreams, happy dreams, all too fleet in the passing. Ah, those long, sauntering walks through bright summer days, in which Jack's sportsman-like habit of observation, and upbringing in the vigorous outdoor life of an English gentleman, made him quick to see and able to point out to the little town-bred damsel a thousand natural beauties and things of interest which she would have passed by! Those rides over breezy downs, among sweet green lanes and shadowy woodland paths, where wood-doves cooed in the happy silence, and squirrels scrambled higher among the scented pines, to look

down with bright, inquisitive eyes upon the sleek horses and their riders, as they wound along the slender pathways, with gentle footfalls all muffled and made tranquil by the last year's leaves that lay so thickly there! Ah, days happy in the coming—in the passing—and yet destined to bear such a cruel sting when memory of them was all that was left!

As to the burglars, for whose expected incursions Captain Eversleigh's visit had been a preparation, I am inclined to think that remembrance of them retreated very much into the background; though, for the first night or two, Jack diligently made tremendous and complicated arrangements for their reception, in the way of revolvers, life-preservers, etc. Stout-hearted old Mrs. Selwyn had never entertained any fears; Lucy somehow forgot hers in pleasanter things; and when, one night, just before retiring to bed, Aunt Dora produced from her pocket-book a packet of bank-notes, making an amount of nearly two hundred pounds, which she had received that day, and had delayed, for some reason or other, driving over to Marley to pay into her banker's, it was only Jack who looked somewhat grave over the imprudence.

"It's what Biggs would call a downright tempting of Providence, Aunt Dolly," he said, in concluding his remonstrance.

"Biggs is such an arrant coward, that, I declare, if I could see my way to getting up an impromptu burglary for his sole benefit, I'm perfectly sure I should not be able to resist the temptation," remarked the old lady, as she put away the notes in a little cabinet of Japanese workmanship, of which the key was duly taken out and deposited for security, with true feminine ideas of the same, under the family Bible, which lay on its carved oaken stand in a recess.

The sun was streaming brightly upon Lucy's closed eyes, the next morning, when she opened them with a start, to find Aunt Dora standing by her bedside, looking a little disturbed, and much graver than her pleasant wont.

"My coming in did not wake you, Lucy," she said, "so I suppose it is not to be expected that you should have heard anything of what took place last night, which was what I came to ask you."

"Took place last night, Aunt Dora!" repeated Lucy, starting up. "Why—but what were you going to say?"

"Only that it seems the house was really broken into last night, and the notes I left in the Japan cabinet in the tent-room, taken, after all. Jack is half wild to think that he should have played the watch-dog so inefficiently. He never heard a sound, he says, and they must have passed his door as well as yours. But Lucy, my child, don't look so terribly white and scared! No one was murdered in their beds, this time; and Biggs was not even locked into his room, except by himself."

"Are you sure the money is gone? O Aunt Dora, perhaps it's a mistake—a joke!" said Lucy, breathlessly, and with an inconsequence that made Mrs. Selwyn look a little impatient.

“I cannot perceive the joke of losing nearly two thousand pounds; and as for mistake, the money has been carried off—that’s very certain. When Biggs came upstairs this morning, he found the window in the little vestibule wide open. He told Martha, who came to me, and I went straight to the tent-room, and found the cabinet wide open and the money gone. It had been opened with the key, too, for that was in the lock. And you never heard anything, Lucy?”

“Something woke me once—but what does Captain Eversleigh say—what does he think?”

“Say—why, that I ought not to have kept the money in the house; which is only true, as I dare say these light-fingered gentlemen who have been honoring the neighborhood lately knew quite well that yesterday was rent-day; and as for his thoughts, he had ridden over to Marley post haste, to share them with the police. But I dare say nothing will come of that, for these people have not been detected in any one instance, as yet. There, Lucy, I’m sorry to have frightened the blood out of your cheeks; make haste with your toilet and come to breakfast, my dear—you look as if you wanted it, and we’ll not wait for Jack.”

But half an hour afterwards Lucy carried the same shocked white face into the breakfast-parlor with which she had listened to these tidings; and though Mrs. Selwyn laughed, and said that the occasion was not worth anything so tragic, somehow that look never faded out of Lucy’s face, but seemed to deepen as the day wore on.

Then ensued days of unwonted stir and bustle at quiet old Faustel Eversleigh; a great coming and going of members of the police force from Marley; much communing with the same on the part of Captain Eversleigh, who entered into the search for traces of the thieves with a great deal of energy and spirit, and a perfect influx of visitors to sympathize and condole. Energy and spirit were expended in vain, however, as far as the desired purpose was concerned. There was, absolutely no clue, as it seemed; and detectives had prowled and poked over every corner of the old house, inside and out, had asked numberless questions of every member of the household, without, as Lucy fancied, seeming to pay much attention to the answers (that same fancy enabled her to reply to those that fell to her share with a great deal more ease than she had thought possible beforehand), they seemed as far off as ever.

Mrs. Selwyn declared she would rather lose the same amount of money three times told, than go to the same fuss and bother to recover it; implored her nephew to let the search drop, and take no further steps in the matter; which Captain Eversleigh was, perforce, obliged to do, very unwillingly, as he said, “seeing that his leave was within a day or two of its expiry, and he must deprive his aunt of his presence, just at the very time he should have liked to think himself wanted.”

There was a soft undertone in Jack’s voice when he made this remark, and he glanced as he spoke towards that silent figure, sitting in the furthest of the deep old windows, with the gentle evening light falling softly on its bending head. Amidst all the bustle and occupation of the last few days, Jack had not forgotten to notice how pale and silent Lucy Gresham had been, nor how

the innocent brown eyes had worn a scared and bewildered look, very foreign to their usual tranquil tenderness.

“It was natural enough, that—she was a gentle, tender little thing—not a bit stout-hearted, nor strong-minded (none the less charming for the want, though), and, of course, her nerves had been shaken by what had happened.”

Captain Eversleigh was thinking something like this, as he walked over towards the window where Lucy had sat silent so long, meaning, when he reached her, to say something soothing and sympathizing, only, startled and confounded by the look that Lucy turned upon him for an instant, as he did so, that he drew back involuntarily with:

“For Heaven’s sake! What can be the matter, Lucy?”

There was no answer; she had turned her face away again still more closely to the window, so that it was quite hidden; but he saw instead the strong tension of the clasp in which the hands lying in her lap were pressed together. Jack was very much amazed, but he was very much moved, too. He threw a hasty glance over his shoulder to where Aunt Dora was reclining in her lounging-chair, her back conveniently towards them, then stooped down very nearly to that averted face, while he said, almost as tenderly as he felt at the instant:

“Tell me what is wrong, Lucy. Ah! if you knew—”

But that beginning was destined to remain uncompleted; for Lucy Gresham suddenly rose out of her seat, upright as a ghost, serene and sad as an accusing angel.

“*If I knew! I do know. And now that you know I do, never, never speak to me again—for that I cannot bear—and be silent!*” and before Captain Eversleigh could recover from his pause of petrified astonishment, Miss Gresham turned her back on him and fled from the room.

She did not appear at breakfast the next morning—the last breakfast that Jack Eversleigh would partake of for some time to come under Aunt Dora’s roof. Lucy had a headache, Mrs. Selwyn explained, and begged to be excused; which intelligence Jack heard without remark, and was altogether during the progress of the meal so absent and unlike himself that Aunt Dora was privately imagining that there was a reason why he should be more sorry to say “good-by” to Faustel Eversleigh this time than had existed on former occasions.

“Well, well,” thought the kind old lady, “and if Jack and Lucy have taken a fancy to one another, I don’t know that either could do better; and for my part, I think I would ask nothing better than that the children should marry and settle down here with me, as long as I live. I have always liked to think of Jack’s having the old place when I am gone, and Lucy would make the dearest little wife in the world. I do think that Jack is smitten—and she—well—”

And while the old lady was dreaming of love and marriage, and dark old houses growing all humanly warm and bright in the light of the sweet story that was first told in Eden, Captain Eversleigh was indignantly intent upon these two questions:

“What the deuce could Lucy Gresham mean? What the deuce does she know?”

There was no opportunity of propounding them to Miss Gresham herself, supposing that Captain Eversleigh desired it, for up to the last minute of his stay no Lucy was visible. So his farewells had only to be made to Aunt Dora when the time arrived. They were very hearty and affectionate, like the feeling that subsisted between the two, and when Mrs. Selwyn turned in again from the portico where she had stood to see Jack drive off, she felt as if the silent house had lost something that made it a pleasant home, in that cheerful, manly presence.

It had lost something else, too, as it very soon appeared; for this pale, silent Lucy of the days and weeks succeeding Captain Eversleigh’s departure was as unlike the cheerful little maiden of days gone, as anything that could well be imagined. Mrs. Selwyn’s heart misgave her when she saw the girl going listlessly about her little every-day duties with that kind of laborious patience and conscientiousness so sadly indicative of the “letter” without the “spirit,” and noticed the nervous tremor in which she was apt to be thrown by such slight things as the sudden opening of a door, a quick footstep, or an unexpected address. She saw these things with a little thrill of terror, remembering how slight a foundation that fancy that Jack Eversleigh cared for Lucy Gresham had been built upon, and devoutly wished, a dozen times a day, that she had never brought the two together, nor meddled with such a doubtful matter as match-making.

As to the lost money and the suspected burglary, that seemed a subject tabooed by both ladies with mutual consent, though not so readily allowed to drop by chance visitors, with whom a topic of conversation during the orthodox twenty minutes was too precious to be parted with lightly.

“Dear me!” said a lady, one morning, after the circumstances of the robbery had been succinctly detailed to her by Mrs. Selwyn, in answer to her questions. “Did it never occur to you to suspect any one in the house, Mrs. Selwyn?”

“Not to me, certainly,” answered Mrs. Selwyn, with a disturbed glance over at Lucy, who had moved suddenly in her chair; “for I have no servant, fortunately, whose trustworthiness has not been proved.”

“That is fortunate, indeed—for them,” returned the lady; “but really, I think I should not be very easy myself under the circumstances. Does it not strike you as suspicious, for instance, that nothing but the money should have been taken, or that the thief should have known so exactly where to put his hand upon it?”

“I don’t think I should have thought so myself,” answered the old lady, looking very fidgety, “but then I knew there was really little but the money to take. I had sent all the plate we don’t use to my banker’s sons some time before, and after my nephew came down, Biggs always carried the rest into his room every night. As for the fact of the thieves knowing where to find the money, there was nothing very wonderful about that; no doubt the house had been watched; and, as we all remembered afterwards, the windows of the room from which it was taken were wide open, and the lights burning, when I locked it into the cabinet. From that clump of rhododendrons yonder every movement of those in the room could have been seen perfectly well.”

“Ah! true—well, it is very pleasant to have such confidence in those about us. And when may we hope to see Captain Eversleigh again?”

“He writes me that there is some chance of his being quartered within a detachment at Marley for a while, a piece of very unhoped-for good news.”

The conversation changed; but when the visitor had been gone some minutes, Mrs. Selwyn broke the silence that had lasted since then by saying:

“I am sorry that you should have heard Mrs. Sandell’s charitable surmises, Lucy dear; Jack begged me not to let you know that such an idea had ever been started. He thought that, being such a timid little thing, it would only add to your uneasiness, perhaps.”

“Who first entertained such an idea?” inquired Lucy, faintly.

“The detective who came over first suggested it, I think, to Jack, who imparted it to me; but of course I could not entertain it for a moment. Biggs certainly knew I had the money in the house; but surely the fidelity of twenty years—”

Mrs. Selwyn paused a little absently, and Lucy’s voice broke passionately into the silence:

“O Aunt Dora! Don’t suspect anyone! Least of all, poor, good old Biggs. He never took the money; never, never! Captain Eversleigh must be sure of that; and O, surely he would never let you think so for one instant; it would be too cruel! Too wicked!”

“Why, Lucy,” said Mrs. Selwyn, looking at the girl’s flushed face in some wonder, “Biggs ought to be very much obliged to you for your championship, only it is a pity there should be no more call for it. As for Jack’s entertaining such a suspicion, he pooh-poohed it from the very first; so there is no occasion for all that indignation, my dear. I am not vindictive, I hope,” Mrs. Selwyn went on, after a little pause, “but I would give the money over again to have the real thief brought to light; there is something so painful in the atmosphere of doubt and suspicion that surrounds an undiscovered crime. Don’t let us talk any more of it, Lucy; we have been wise in ignoring it hitherto. Have Daisy saddled, and go for a canter over the Downs, my dear; there is a fresh wind blowing that will put all megrims to flight, I dare say.”

But instead of ordering Daisy to be saddled, Lucy put on her hat and mantle, and taking her solitary way out into the grounds, wandered to a spot at some distance from the house, where a pretty little brown river stole through banks all picturesquely broken and rugged, singing as it went, with a happy music to which the girl had unconsciously set dreams as gentle and glad, many and many a time in the bright summer days that were gone. Thoughts of them came back to her now, perhaps, all strangely and sadly mingled with the altered present; and throwing her arms forward, against the moss-grown trunk of one of the old trees bending over the little river, Lucy hid her face among them, and wept passionate, despairing tears, never known before by those gentle eyes.

“What ought I to do? What is right? What is best?” she thought, with that dreadful, agonizing struggle to reconcile duty and expediency that is apt to beset those whose conscience is so tender, and whose heart so gentle as poor Lucy’s. “It would break Aunt Dora’s heart if it came to light; and mine is breaking now, I think. What shall I do?”

But no answer came to that sad, appealing cry; the wind sighed among the trees overhead, and the leaves came shivering down at the sound, and were borne silently away on the brown water, for it was summer no longer; and never, surely, was autumn so cheerless before, Lucy thought. But joy and sadness are in the eyes which look and the ears which listen, and the fairest sunshine would have been clouded just now to Lucy Gresham’s.

In fact, Lucy’s eyes had seen nothing very clearly since that night, now many weeks ago, when the bank-notes were stolen from the Japanese cabinet in the tent-room; or, at least, everything since then was distorted in the light of the utterly confounding sight they had witnessed on that occasion.

It was all before her now, as she sat with hidden face and hands clasped before her eyes, for whether poor Lucy shut her eyes or opened them, they only seemed to serve her as long as she looked at one thing.

Yes; it was all before her now. How, on that horrible night, she had started from a light sleep and a happy dream, to listen breathlessly to a sound in the [corridor] outside her door—a quiet, muffled footfall passing stealthily along, and dying away in the distance. How, when it had quite gone—had been gone minutes indeed—she had sprung from her bed, in fear that lent her for the instant all the hardihood of courage, intending to fly into Aunt Dora’s room; and how, as she opened the door, she saw with her own eyes—ah! heaven, yes—in the broad summer moonlight that lit up all the corridor from end to end with its solemn splendor, John Eversleigh—kind Aunt Dora’s dearly-loved nephew—coming out of the tent-room, with the little fanciful ivory-clasped box that held the bank-notes in his hand! How, in the wonder, the terror, the incredulity with which she looked on this sight, she had shrunk back into the room, and had listened to that muffled footfall coming quietly back past her door, past Aunt Dora’s, till it died away again out of the corridor. Then the poor child had crept back into her bed, had turned her face down upon

the pillow so as to shut out the fair moonlight, and repeated over and over again, with a piteous persistence in the words, "I have been dreaming; it was a dream—nothing so horrible *could* be true!" trying so to stifle thought and drown conviction, till suddenly she raised her head, joyful, trembling, melted to thankful tears, in the light of the blessed inspiration that suddenly flushed upon her mind. "It was a joke!—a practical joke—this abduction of the bank-notes—done just to give Aunt Dora a little fright, and a little warning! How foolish, not to have guessed that at once! Of course the money would be restored, and confession made the next morning, when Aunt Dora had been thoroughly well frightened." In the tremulous thankfulness of this relief, Lucy sank into the sleep from which Aunt Dora had wakened her that morning.

How poor Lucy's hope that "it was all a joke" had fluctuated through the after proceedings, and had finally faded away altogether, would have been a pitiful thing to see, if any one could have had a clue by which to trace it! Now, she had almost forgotten that the cloud which had enshrouded her since that night had ever been temporarily lightened by that idea. Ah, no! everything was wretched!—the world a miserable place, people inconceivably wicked, and those happiest and best off who had been laid to rest once for all under the churchyard daisies. Poor little Lucy! This, her first practical encounter with absolute, outcrying evil, had done the work of years, as, indeed, it always does to natures so tender and innocent.

She rose up now, after a while, and walked slowly homewards; so slowly that it was dark when she reached the house, and quite dark in the drawing-room when she opened the door and entered quietly.

As she did so, the familiar tones of a rich, manly voice reached to her, that she would have known among hundreds, and that she recognized now with a great bound of the heart.

Yes; there, surely enough, standing in the full blaze of the firelight, was Jack Eversleigh, laughing and chatting with Aunt Dora as if there were no such things as care, or trouble, or wrong-doing in all this work-a-day world. He stopped short, though, as the door opened and Lucy entered, coming forward the next minute, with, perhaps, ever so little constraint in his manner as he held out his hand. Lucy half extended hers; but, ah! No, her hand must never lie in that large cordial grasp again! She drew it back, and, bowing low, Jack turned easily away to his former place, and resumed his talk, while Lucy sank down trembling into a seat where the shadows gathered most thickly, and almost hid her from view.

Aunt Dora was certainly in the best of moods and spirits (she was arguing favorably for the success of her pet plan and the happiness of Lucy, you see, in this sudden re-appearance of Jack Eversleigh), and as for her nephew, his momentary embarrassment had left no palpable traces behind.

"How can he laugh? How can he talk so lightly as he does?" thought the poor child, cowering among the shadows, with a kind of sorrowful, indignant wonder. "How dare he come here? Is it possible that he did not understand me?—that I did not speak plainly enough?"

She hid her face, and shrank down still more closely in her corner. And still the merry talk and laughter went on by the fireplace.

“*Apropos* of scrapes, Jack,” Mrs. Selwyn said, presently, “how long is it since you walked into one in your sleep?”

Jack Eversleigh laughed, and colored a little.

“O! ever so many years now—so many, that I hope that propensity and I have parted company for good and all. It used to cause me no end of bother, though, at one time. You remember the—”

And here Captain Eversleigh broke off, to stare in boundless surprise at the little figure starting from that dark corner, with clasped hands, and eager, pallid face.

“A sleep-walker! Do you walk in your sleep? O! if it were possible that—Aunt Dora—the bank-notes! —the money that was taken!” cried out poor Lucy, breathlessly, and shaking in every limb.

“The bank-notes, Lucy!—what an idea! Certainly, Jack has a queer habit of walking in his sleep, and doing strange things in a state of somnolency; but I don’t suppose—”

“But I saw him, Aunt Dora!—I saw him! O! if I had only known—only guessed! I am so happy—so very, very thankful!” And here Lucy sank down in a burst of tears, that came fresh from her very heart.

“You saw me!” repeated the young man, looking from Aunt Dora to that crouching, weeping little figure, with an expression of bewilderment; “Why did you not say so, then, and save all the bother?”

“I thought you knew what you were doing, and meant to do it. How could I know?” sobbed Lucy.

“Thought that I deliberately, and of my own will, possessed myself of money that did not belong to me!” said Jack, with involuntary haughtiness. But the next instant his sense of the ridiculous overpowered him, and he burst into a laugh so hearty and prolonged that Aunt Dora joined in it, till the tears streamed down her face; and even poor Lucy was fain to echo it, at the dire and imminent risk of becoming hysterical.

“Poor, dear Lucy,” said Mrs. Selwyn, presently, between her gasps for breath; “so you have really been thinking that Jack played the part of burglar that night. That explains so many things. My poor child! There, I will not laugh any more, if I can help it; but for Heaven’s sake! tell us all about it, for I own I don’t see the thing quite clearly yet.”

And so the whole story had to be gone over, or rather dragged into light by questions; for now, such deep, overpowering shame beset Lucy—such a keen perception of the fact that John

Eversleigh must of necessity and forevermore hold her in abhorrence—that she was well-nigh speechless.

And Jack, being really a chivalrous and generous-hearted fellow, seeing all the pain and shame in the poor little face, and desirous of sparing it to the uttermost, suppressed whatever feeling he might have had in the matter, after that one involuntary burst, and listened, with good-natured amusement, to the relation of his own exploit.

“I wish you could enlighten me as to what I did with the money, for, on my word, I have never set waking eyes on it. At least, I remember now thinking that it would be a good joke to improvise a burglary, just for Aunt Dora’s amusement (you suggested the idea yourself, ma’am, please to recollect); but what on earth became of the money? Did I go straight back into my room, I wonder?”

“No; down [the] stairs, I think,” said Lucy, faintly.

“The open window in the vestibule, Jack; how is that to be accounted for? Ah! I have it. Do you remember the little summer-house on the other side of the shrubbery? There’s a sliding panel that conceals a recess in it, and many a time you have hidden my keys and work-bag there, when you were a boy. Jack, I will wager half the money that you put it there!”

Which, on examination, turned out to be the case. There lay the little ivory-clasped box, containing the roll of bank-notes, never touched since Mrs. Selwyn’s hand had placed them in it; and so the mystery of the “Burglary at Faustel Eversleigh” was a mystery no longer; though in years to come it became a story that Aunt Dora was never tired of telling to the little bright-eyed listeners round her chair, who called the hero and heroine “papa” and “mamma.”

The Flag of our Union, October 13, 1866