

*Mrs. Gregory's Diamonds*  
by Mary Kyle Dallas

*A Letter From The Mines Of California*

Madam,

I am a miner. I have been one for years, and I have not made my fortune yet. Still, I am better off than many: better off by far than the poor fellow who died here last night. For a year or two I have often met him, unkempt and scarcely clad, wandering about, seeming to care for nothing. They say he might have been rich, that luck followed him—(we miners are apt to be superstitious)—and that he could pick nuggets up where others toiled in vain for days. But he gave or threw them away, only keeping so much as would buy food. Lodging he had none, save in the open air. He would talk with none and dwell with none, and we thought him mad. But after his death, I found a manuscript in his bosom, which I send to you. It seems to be his own story. We felt so sure of it, that one of our fellows, a carver by trade, has cut the name Frank Forrest on the board above his grave. We read this the night after his funeral, at our camp fire. Perhaps some others might also like to do so. If you think so, here it is; if not, there is no harm done.

And I am very truly yours,  
A Miner

*The Manuscript*

George Gregory, Attorney-at-law, was on the sign over the door, and everyone always called my employer George Gregory, because there were seven brothers of the name, all in the law. I was Frank Forrest, aged twenty-two, and I was articled clerk to Mr. George Gregory. He was the best friend I ever had, and the best husband and father I ever knew. At home he had a good, merry little wife, and a dozen children so near of an age and so exactly alike that strangers could never tell them apart. I would have worked very hard for Mr. Gregory, and have sacrificed my best gloves for the children, but I would have died outright for Mrs. Gregory.

George Gregory was well off, and his business was rapidly increasing, but Mrs. Gregory dressed plainly of her own choice, as she so often told me. It was not more than twice a year or so, that she fastened in her ears and at her throat the diamond rings and pin which were all her little fortune when George Gregory married her. They were not very valuable, and the setting was old-fashioned; but they were, after all, actually diamonds and solid gold, and very precious to the owner.

“I wore them on my wedding day,” she used to say, “and if I ever have a girl”—Mrs. Gregory’s tribe were all boys—“she shall wear them on hers.” The rings were very much like the drawings of Egyptian vases which I have seen. In each were five diamonds. The pin had but four; the central diamond had been lost, and a pearl set in its stead.

Mrs. Gregory kept them in a purple leathern casket, shaped like a knapsack. She was fond of opening this, to give the children a peep at her treasure. It gave her unqualified gratification; but somehow, believe me or not as you choose, they always made my blood run cold.

Still, I had no presentiments whatever, when, one bright August day, Mrs. George Gregory announced the fact that she was about to take the children into the country.

“They want fresh air,” she said, “and I’ve found the nicest place. Only I hate so to leave George alone. You’ll look after him a little, won’t you Frank?” And I promised faithfully.

That afternoon Mrs., George Gregory started for —, stopping at the office to put her dead and gone aunt’s diamonds in the safe. Mr. Gregory went with his wife to the depot and returned, looking a little blue, I thought. That night he slept on a lounge in the office, and announced his intention of doing so, and of taking his meals at a restaurant, until his wife’s return. I copied his example as to meals, but I slept in my usual place; there were no accommodations for me at the office. And so we kept on for a week and a half, quietly and regularly, nothing happening in particular, except that Mr. Gregory negotiated for a certain piece of property, which he had had in his eye for a long while, and which Mrs. Gregory thought the finest in the city.

It was to be a surprise to her on her coming home. And one afternoon, all else being settled, Mr. Gregory went to the bank and drew thence the money which he was to pay to the present owner. Something stood on the mortgage, I forget what, but the cash was thirteen thousand dollars. At ten the next day it was to be paid over. I saw Mr. Gregory count it, and lock it up in his safe before he went to tea, and thought, I remember very well, that I should like to have so much money. I was spending it, in imagination, when the office door opened and a woman came in; a very pretty woman, all of I could see of her face but for her veil. She had yellow curls, and black eyes, and bright cheeks, and a very pretty chin, with a dimple in it. She was dressed in black, a good deal of lace and many bugles about her. She came close to me, and looked down into my eyes, and smiled and said:

“Will Mr. Gregory be in again tonight, do you think?” in a very captivating manner.

I told her that he would be in soon, I supposed, and offered her a chair, which she took with another smile. Then she looked forward through the window and remarked that it was raining.

“It will rain all night, I’m sure,” she said. “How foolish of me to walk. I’m so delicate that a soaking would be my death. If you only *would* do me a favor—a great one to ask of a stranger, but—you *will*, I know.”

“If it is possible,” I replied.

“If you only would go to No. 40, — Place, and ask them to send Mrs. Contille’s carriage,” she said. “You can ride back in it, you know. It’s impertinent of me to ask it, but I’m an old friend of Mrs. Gregory’s, and you’ll oblige me, I know.”

I thought the lady rather cool, I confess, and I thought, too, of what Mr. George Gregory would say as to my desertion of the office; but the lady seemed to read my thoughts, and settled that question by saying:

“I’ll mind the office, and explain to Mr. Gregory,” and once more gave me a smile; that smile settled the affair. I seized my hat and departed. The shower was almost over already, and I laughed to myself at the lady’s fears of a wetting, but I made my way to — Place at once. The place was easy enough to find, but I searched for the number in vain. I stood upon the corner in perplexity, when a rough, unpleasant looking fellow put a hand upon my shoulder, and cried: “Hallo! Who are you lookin’ for?”

“Mrs. Contille’s house,” I said. “No. — Place.”

“Ain’t no No. 40,” he said. “You mistook; it’s 30. I’m her coachman. What’s the matter?”

“She wants you, and her coach,” I said, shortly, “at Mr. George Gregory’s. No. —, — street.”

“Yes,” said the man; “she’s always wanting something. Ladies always is, I say, sir. I’ll have the coach out in no time. You ride back in her?”

I had not had my tea yet, and time was of importance. “I’ll go with you,” I said. He became more polite still.

“She’s a lady that has a fine stable of horses as any lady I know,” he said. “I can see by your eye that you are a judge of horses. You take a look at ‘em. This way, sir, if you please.”

This, as it appeared to me, was a high compliment. I nodded, and followed the man. He led the way down an alley to a building of some sort, and opened the door.

“After you, sir,” he said.

I took a step forward; felt rude hands upon my shoulders; was flung forward some paces; heard a door locked, and was alone in a perfectly empty out-building of some sort. There, despite all my calls for aid, I remained until dawn broke, when, by its light, I espied a loose board in the side of the building, pushed it away, and squeezed through it into some poor man’s back yard, where I made a dash straight through the hallway, in which a woman was already washing, and so into the street. Thence I sped as fast as my feet would carry me toward the office; but before I reached it I saw a sight which made my blood run cold. The street was full of people half-dressed and horror-stricken. Policemen guarded the door. Something horrible had happened. I rushed forward. Those who knew me made way for me to pass, and I saw, stretched on his back in a pool of blood in the middle of the office, Mr. George Gregory, as ghastly a spectacle as human eyes might ever rest on, cold and dead beyond a doubt; and further on, the safe wide open, with its papers scattered on the floor. Then I fainted, or had a fit, and come to in jail.

They set me free in a little while; perhaps no one ever really suspected me. The wretched widow, so broken down with woe that I hardly knew her, attested to my fidelity to her husband.

My story was told over and over again, and it seemed certain that the ruffian who locked me up in the stable was the murderer. But nothing was heard of him. He had made his escape in safety, with thirteen thousand dollars and the case containing Mrs. Gregory's diamonds.

I grew worn and ill with anxiety and trouble. And at last I could bear it no more, but bade them good-by and left the town. As I parted from Mrs. Gregory, she put both her warm hands on my shoulders:

"I shan't live to see you again," she said; "but promise me that if ever you meet the man who killed my husband, you will do all you can to bring him to justice. Don't forget his face, don't forget his voice. Hang him if you see him. Hang him, Frank Forrest, or I'll curse you."

"I need no bidding to do that," I said; but she made me swear to it on the Bible, and then kissed and blessed me, as a mother might.

I went to California, and the gold fever fell upon me, and I worked for a fortune in the diggings, for five good years. I had nothing to complain of as to luck, and at last, with plenty of nuggets in my pockets, and health and heart enough for anything, I went up to San Francisco to enjoy myself.

Only one who has lived as I had, can tell what pleasure it was to me to meet women in the streets, to see them in places of amusement, to talk with those to whom I became known. No man on earth is so ready to fall in love at first sight, as one who has dwelt apart with his own sex for any length of time. And I think that it would have been hard for any one not to admire the Senora Maria. They say she was Spanish by birth, and her beautiful eyes were the eyes of sunny Spain. A man from "the diggings" is not apt to think too much of what will be said of him, or of what is said of other people. I never asked the Donna's antecedents. I loved her, I wooed her, and I won her heart. Yes, I believed she loved me. I believe it *now*. She was a wild thing, reckless and passionate. No maiden nurtured in a peaceful home could have been what she was.

I had also grown wild and reckless. I think I loved her better for it.

We were to be married very soon. The world was now divided by that lover's rule: "Where she was, and where she was not." We went to the theatre, where, in a blaze of light, her beauty drew all eyes towards her. I loaded her with presents; she gave me rich payment in that sweet promise that she should belong to me soon; should be mine, at least for life. Once I said, "In heaven also." Then she turned on me with a wild, savage gaze:

"Hush, Frank," she said. "I don't want to think of death or heaven. I may not have absolution—I—Let this world suffice us."

Our wedding day was close at hand, when one day I called to see her. She was packing certain of her possessions in a little trunk. Warm as it was, a fire burnt on the hearth. Into it, as I entered, she was casting hands full of flaxen hair, snipped from a curling wig which lay upon her lap. She gave a little scream as she saw me. Then she said:

“Ah, I did not hear you, Frank. I am burning a relic of a masquerade ball, at which I made myself a blonde.” But she was so pale as she spoke, that she frightened me.

“Are you ill?” I asked.

“The smell of burning hair has made me faint,” she said.

“I will have no more of it,” I cried. “Give the thing to a servant to make way with;” and I arose to find her smelling salts. The bottle stood upon a table. As I lifted it, my eye lighted upon a little casket, a casket I had seen before, of tarnished purple velvet, shaped like a miniature knapsack. I seized it, and tore it open. Within lay a pin and ear-rings, in out-line like an old Egyptian vase, the central diamond of the pin was replaced by a pearl; in three words: “Mrs. Gregory’s Diamonds.”

This is what I cried aloud. This is what she heard as she rushed toward me.

“Frank,” she said, “Frank, what is it? Love, tell me?” and she shook like an aspen, as she spoke.

I looked at the curled flaxen wig upon the ground. I looked at the beautiful dimple in the chin I had so often kissed, and I staggered back against the wall. I knew her now. I remembered her perfectly. She was the woman whom I had left in George Gregory’s office on that awful day, six years before. She had come there in disguise. For what?

“Senora Maria,” I said, and my own voice sounded strange to me, “have you forgotten me? Do you remember the young man of whom you rid yourself in Mr. Gregory’s office, six years ago, when you wore that wig, and—”

But she had thrown herself at my feet.

“Frank,” she said, “Frank, my beloved, I never meant to kill him—only to open the safe. But he caught me at it. He seized upon me—and I used my knife. Frank! Frank! Have mercy. I will go away. I—oh, Frank, remember that I love you!”

But she had made confession, and I remembered my oath. I remembered the widow in her anguish. I remembered the children who were fatherless on that awful night. I remembered George Gregory lying in his blood upon the floor. It may be his avenging spirit gave me power to do what I did.

I opened the door. I passed into the street.

There, by some strange chance, the first person I met was a detective from New York, with whom I had, a few days before, talked over the mystery of George Gregory’s murder.

I seized him by the arm.

“The woman who murdered George Gregory is in that room,” I said. “I have every proof, and her confession.”

“Have you gone mad?” he asked. “That is Senora Maria’s apartment.”

“Senora Maria is the murderess, and I *shall* be mad very soon,” I replied; and there followed for me merciful darkness and oblivion, as I sank upon the ground.

She died! I cannot tell you more. They proved her guilt. Nay, she never strove to hide it.

She had been one of a gang of robbers. She had never been a good woman, or in any way a worthy one—vile from her childhood, so they proved her. But once I loved her. I have never forgotten that, to that she loved me. It haunts me as I wander through the gold land, careless of its gold, seeking only to shun the very sight of woman. It will haunt me through my life, until I lie down in some far solitude to die.

I shall never forget that I gave the only woman I ever loved to death, though she was that wretched creature at whom the mob hooted, when she went out before them to die—the lost, degraded murderess, Senora Maria!

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