

Jasper Street
by August Bell

Chapter I

When one lives for years upon years in the same neighborhood, and in the same house, there is no need of finding it monotonous; there are always changes occurring, events developing, and incidents happening in this little world of one street, always interesting, and sometimes absorbing. Our family have lived on Jasper street for twenty-five years, and the most of our neighbors have been long residents. All the dwellings on our side of the street are in a solid block, planned and built alike, and consisting of twelve houses; fine old houses with stone fronts, glass plots before them, themselves five stories high, and each has an observatory or cupola on the top. This block was built some thirty years ago by an ambitious man, as a speculation; it ruined him, but his successor has made money enough since then, renting these houses to wealthy families who pay high prices, are perfectly contented, and seldom care to remove. There are the Leroy's next to us, then the Haliburton's, the Davies, and so on, all fine old families, as a general thing, to the end of the block, though there are a few among us whose merit lies only in their wealth, and not at all in their genealogical trees. The other side of the street is very much the same, and our neighborhood is quite a social one, we all visit each other, flatter each other, talk gossip in a dignified way, and can make up a delightful party at any time without sending a single invitation beyond Jasper street.

My Uncle Harvey has always lived four doors from us on the left, but a year ago he concluded to take his family to Europe for an indefinite period, to educate his boys there, and learn foreign manners and customs more thoroughly than the guide-books teach. At his departure he left his house in the hands of an agent to be let all furnished, if any unexceptionable family without small children applied. So the obnoxious words "To Let," were placarded in the parlor window, and an advertisement put in the paper. Applications were many, and we were all on the *qui vice*, wondering who our new neighbors were to be; but the agent seemed suited with none for a long time. A day came, however, when the card was taken from the window, and we heard that an aristocratic family from the South, wishing to pass some time in our city, had hired the house for a year. All that could be learned about them was from the agent, and he could only tell that their name was Dufour, that the family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Dufour, their daughter and niece, and a son. The agent had called on the family to [make] some personal inquiries which should prove them the unexceptionable tenants he was in search of, but the ladies had so charmed him by their wit and beauty, that he went away perfectly satisfied, ashamed of himself for his first hesitation. This was all we could discover, and we were in a state of flutter and expectancy, hoping the young people might be an addition to our society.

They came at last, came very quietly, one evening, in a carriage, and took possession. We saw the curtains drawn, the gleaming lights, and once more our handsome block seemed complete. My mother and sister, and their lady coadjutors on the street, all hastened to call on the new family, to welcome them heartily, and criticise them mentally. One and all came away Dufour devotees; the mother, they said, was so youthful and entertaining, with quite a French ease and gaiety of manner. And Miss Dufour was so queenly and elegant, and had such a fascinating way of lifting her long eyelashes, very slowly from her beautiful eyes, before she spoke to you. And

the niece, Miss Lucy Dufour, was such a fragile, interesting, sweet little creature. Then, the ladies being done with, our clique reviewed the gentlemen, and decided that no one could surpass Mr. Dufour in courtly grace and high breeding of the old school; and, as for his son Mortimer, ah! there was a chance, indeed, for our young ladies to set their caps, or their Derby hats, if they chose—he was so handsome, so well-informed, and his manner so unexceptionable, an Apollo, in short, with all the arts and sciences of an Apollo at command.

The ladies having gone ahead and surveyed the field, the gentlemen naturally became anxious to follow. Three or four of us managed to get acquainted with Mortimer Dufour, and found him a capital hand at billiards and whist, with a fund of good stories and worldly knowledge which he dispensed liberally, in an off-hand, “Steerforth” fashion that won us over completely. Decidedly, the star of Dufour was in the ascendant.

A few days after the house was taken, I met the two young ladies coming from their door, one tall and fair, haughtily lovely, and holding her parasol with a decidedly aristocratic hand; the other had a delicate, pure face, shaded by dark hair; she was not as tall, nor as queenly, but there was something inexpressibly pleasing in her whole appearance. This last was the niece, an orphan, probably, as she wore deep mourning.

So great was the favor with which the new comers were received, that it was soon proposed by some of the leaders in Jasper street, that it would be only proper to give a little series of parties in their honor, and Mrs. Haliburton claimed the privilege of the first. Great was the delight among the sons and daughters of the patriarchs of Jasper street, at the prospect, and we soon heard that the Dufours were equally pleased, and seemed inclined to be very sociable.

My sister Nell, who always loved a party dearly, to use her own words, asked me, as a brother of good taste, what her dress should be.

“For I want to make a good impression, you know, John, and Miss Dufour will look elegantly, I am certain.”

“Wear something pale blue and filmy, Nell, and your pearls, then I shall be satisfied with you.”

“I will,” said Nell, dutifully. “What do you suppose Miss Dufour will wear?”

“Some becoming color and precious stones,” I answered, oracularly.

“And what will Miss Lucy wear?” Nell asked, laughing.

“White or black, of course, as she is in mourning, and no ornaments, at all.”

“O John, John, for a great heroic-looking man like you, you have a wonderful knowledge of the properties of dress!”

I bore my honors meekly, being more intent on my cigar and the rings of smoke which I sent circling through each other, than on my little sister’s inquiring mind. Meanwhile, I pursued

certain bachelor reveries of my own, such as come and go with no pain, and no regret, faint and fleeting as smoke-wreaths, with small care for the coming gayety, unless, indeed, it might be worth while to catch a glimpse of the graceful form of that orphan niece.

Mrs. Haliburton sent in to borrow some of our silver for her supper-table, and my mother brought from her private closet her baskets and spoons, marked with the crest of our old English ancestors.

“They will hardly match Mrs. Haliburton’s magnificent service,” said my mother, complacently, “but I think they carry an air of their own.” And she wrapped them and packed them in the basket for the servant to carry.

I was standing at the window, and, as he went down the steps, I saw him peep under the basket cover; the next instant our own man Jacob, called after him to “be off, for a prying fellow,” and to “mind his own business.”

At about nine o’clock, of the eventful evening, the guests began to arrive at the Haliburtons’ door, and a line of carriages formed outside, a goodly share of them belonging to Jasper street. Ours joined them, in due time, for my sister never could have walked to a party, albeit only two doors distant.

When I met Nell, as she came from the dressing-room, I gave her a pinch of approval, for she was looking very bright and very pretty, but she did not notice it in her eagerness to tell me that the Dufours could not yet have arrived, as she had recognized every cloud and cloak in the room.

In a moment more we were treading our way toward our stately hostess, and that first duty over, I lost Nell, almost directly, at the claim of some gallant promenader, and was, myself, glancing covertly about in search of Miss Leroy, or some other favorite, when Gus Milne, who lived nearly opposite us on Jasper street, came up and laid his hand on my shoulder.

“Looking for the new stars, old fellow? They’re not risen yet,” he said.

“Anything for an excitement, our society was getting stagnant. Do you know them, Milne?”

“Slightly; that is to say, I have met them once or twice. I am very much interested in Miss Dufour; she has a style of beauty and character worth studying. Is your sister here?”

“Yes, in the giddy throng somewhere. How well Miss Leroy looks to-night.”

“She always does. Life’s a bubble, John.”

“Why? Because Miss Leroy looks well?”

“No, but because that’s the best you think of saying of her. Ah! there are the Dufours.”

At that very moment they were entering the parlors. The stately father, the pretty and vivacious mother; and then Mortimer with his sister and cousin. Presently, these latter came our way, and Gus bowed very low to the ladies, who stopped because Mortimer did, and then I had my introduction to the new stars. Miss Dufour raised her magnificent eyes, full of charms and spells, slowly to mine, and I might have adored her at once, but the pure, sweet face at her side saved me. Miss Lucy Dufour seemed a little anxious and constrained, as she addressed us, and Gus Milne was unkind enough to notice it.

“I am afraid you are not enjoying yourself,” he said, to her.

“Lucy has met with a little mishap this evening, that’s all,” said her cousin, answering for her.

“What’s that? Lucy met a mishap?” asked Mortimer, instantly.

“O no!” said Lucy.

“Yes, my dear, you have, and I confess I feel a little annoyed about it, myself,” exclaimed Miss Dufour, with earnestness and a clouding brow.

“I am curious. Can I help you?” asked Gus Milne, looking from one face to the other.

“Shall I tell him, Lucy?”

“O no, you make me so ashamed,” I heard Lucy whisper, to her cousin.

“Nonsense, Lucy! What is it, Estelle? I am curious, too,” interrupted young Dufour.

“Why, Mortimer, don’t you see that Lucy does not wear her pearl pin to-night?”

Three pairs of eyes were immediately directed towards Miss Lucy’s slender, white neck, where her black dress was relieved only by an edge of dainty lace, with no ornaments. She was confused, and wished to change the subject, but Mortimer exclaimed:

“Have you lost your pin? Never mind, you shall have another.”

“But this her mother gave her,” said Miss Dufour, softly; “It is really very annoying. There were so many in the dressing-room with us that some one may have swept it down from the table. I called Lucy to put the flowers in my hair, and when she turned again the pin was gone. It is a disagreeable thing to mention, and I don’t like to tell Mrs. Haliburton. She might think I suspected unfair play.”

Lucy Dufour blushed painfully.

“Were any of the servants near?” asked Gus Milne, quietly.

“One or two of the maids were helping the ladies. I saw one of them an instant after at the door, speaking to that odd footman who brought us to our invitations. But, pray, don’t mention it—this is a singular conversation for a party, and *our* first, Mr. Harvey.” And the queenly girl flavored me with another thrilling glance.

“You will probably find it again,” said Gus; “meanwhile, Miss Darfur, won’t you substitute me for your brother, and allow me to escort you through the rooms?”

At that moment, Mr. Davies, coming up, paused to speak to Mortimer Dufour, and I profited by this diversion, to ask Miss Lucy to promenade with me. So Gus and I walked off with our prizes, quite conscious that all our friends envied us. However, when the dancing began, our monopoly was broken up, and I, presently, saw the queenly Stella swept off in the “*deux temps*,” away from Gus, while I lost Miss Lucy to a young exquisite introduced by her uncle.

Presently, my little sister Nell came softly up to me, and slipped her hand in my arm. She had just finished a waltz with Mortimer Dufour, and looked a little flushed and weary.

“Don’t you want to rest, little one?” I said. “I can find some sofa corner for you.”

But Nell said no, she would rather walk about with me awhile. By-and-by, we came into the neighborhood of Miss Dufour who was holding sway over a little court of her own in an interval of her dancing. Admiration seemed to be her native air, and she, certainly, looked every inch a belle in her gold-colored silk and diamonds. She ought to have been at one of Alexandra’s receptions, instead of in even a Jasper street parlor.

“How lovely she is!” whispered Nell, who was always rather apt to be dazzled.

“Not half so lovely, as the little cousin in black,” I answered.

“O John! But don’t you think Gus Milne admires her very much?” Nell asked, with a troubled look in her eyes which puzzled me.

“I don’t know, Nell, he seems very much interested in her. See, he is watching her now. I don’t think she quite likes it.”

For certainly Miss Dufour frowned, though almost imperceptibly, when she met his steady glance, but, the next instant she summoned him gayly to her side, and Nell led me off into another quarter. Up and down the bright pageant of silk and tulle swayed and fluttered, and the loud hum of conversation, the music of the band, and the perfume of flowers made it a true gala evening. When the supper hour arrived, the table under the superintendence of “Jenkins” was certainly a fine affair, and there was such a profusion of massive plate with the Haliburton’s impress, that I wondered what necessity there had been for borrowing any of ours. Miss Dufour and her cousin were at the further end of the table from me, but I had the pleasure of helping *madame* to pickled oysters, and received a very gracious smile in return. I lingered near her a little while, for she was certainly more fascinating than many a younger lady of my

acquaintance, and besides, it is always pleasant to find one's self agreeable to the heads of the family, where one would like to call now and then.

The Dufours ordered their carriage very soon after supper, though some of our gayer neighbors prolonged the festivities to a much later hour. But Nell looked tired, and I was uninterested, so, with a few words of farewell to our most intimate friends, we, also, came away, and for us the party was over.

Chapter II

Next morning the window blinds were closed to a late hour, all along Jasper street; mine were open, however, and I sat at my window with the newspaper and a cigar, now and then looking out as I heard some door close to see what neighbor was starting down town to business. And I amused myself by wondering at just what a moment Miss Dufour, with her languid stateliness, would ring for her first cup of coffee, and whether her cousin had the sea-shell pink in her cheeks, yet. Suddenly a carriage drove up to the Haliburtons' door, and Mr. Haliburton himself sprang from it, followed by a quiet, unimpressive gentleman, who I happened to know was the chief of police. Mortimer Dufour who was just coming down his steps, lightly swinging his slender, dog-headed cane, stopped, as if surprised. Mr. Haliburton spoke to him hurriedly, and all three went into the house. I began to be decidedly interested, and watched for their re-appearance with a good deal of curiosity, but, when next the door opened it was Mrs. Haliburton who came out, with a shawl wrapped carelessly about her, and in a moment she was hurriedly mounting our steps. I ran down to the door myself and admitted her. There was trouble and perplexity in her face.

"Good morning, Mrs. Haliburton," I said.

"O Mr. Harvey, is it you? Will you tell your mother I would like to see her for a moment."

"Certainly. Walk in, Mrs. Haliburton." And as she entered the parlor my mother came down the stairs.

"O Mrs. Harvey!" exclaimed our neighbor. "How can I tell you. But I hope we may yet get them back. Your beautiful baskets!"

I admired my mother for her well-bred composure at that moment, for I knew that in spirit she turned pale and trembled for her silver, but outwardly she showed no sign.

"Why, what is it, Mrs. Haliburton?" she asked, quietly.

"We are robbed! robbed! Such a thing has never happened before on Jasper street! The butler confesses he was so sleepy last night that he may have forgotten to lock the safe. It was almost morning when we retired, and too late to see to things, of course; but, as soon as I came down to breakfast, I ordered the maids to bring out all the silver, count it, and polish it with the chamois-skin, and then I mean to return your baskets at once. In a moment I heard Julie scream, and, then, the butler came in as white as a sheet, to say that every piece was gone. Some thief chose last

night, because of the party, no doubt, and all my beautiful plate is gone, all my wedding presents, and the service my dear father gave me!" And she almost sobbed, but managed to add, "And O, Mrs. Harvey, I am so distressed about your baskets!"

"My loss is nothing to yours," said my mother, "and, perhaps, the thief can be found. Have you done anything about it?"

"Yes, the chief of the police is there now, examining everything; the servants are all in confusion. Mr. Haliburton is giving him a list of articles, and wouldn't you like to go back with me, Mrs. Harvey, to describe your baskets particularly to him? He wants every possible clue. You come, too, John—young Dufour is there. I'm afraid he will think he has stumbled into a dangerous neighborhood!"

At that moment Nell glided in, in her blue morning-dress, looking very sweet and pretty despite last night's dissipation. Nell, though a little spoiled by society, was naturally one of those darlings who are made for home delights. She looked amazed at sight of Mrs. Haliburton, but when she had heard the whole story her wonder and excitement knew no bounds.

"Let's go right over!" she exclaimed. "May we all go, Mrs. Haliburton? I never was so close to a tragedy in my life, and maybe we can discover something."

So we all went from our house to the Haliburtons', and there in a closet opening from the dining-room stood the rifled safe, with the chief of police and two or three gentlemen standing around. Mr. Dufour came at once to Nell's side.

"Bad affair, this," he said, indolently. "How did you enjoy the party last night? You look ten times better than Stella, she's yellow and white to-day."

"The party was splendid," replied Nell; "but isn't it dreadful to think of this robber! Why, he may have crept in and hid himself away somewhere, while we were here, for all we know!"

Mr. Kennedy, of the police, glanced towards her when she said that. "No doubt he did, miss, for, as yet, we have found no lock tampered with, no window broken, no evidence of house-breaking at all, except the loss of the silver."

"How did he get out, then?" asked Nell.

"O, he could easily do that, by quietly opening one of the windows leading to the veranda, and lowering it again after he was out. One of the windows, I notice, is left unfastened at the top."

"Why," said Mrs. Haliburton, "I thought I turned the fastening over each one. I certainly meant to do it, at the same time I put out the lights. Can it be that I left one unsecured?"

"Perhaps," said Mr. Kennedy; "or, perhaps, the thief was already inside, and took that way to get out. Or, perhaps," he added, slowly, "he may be still in the house."

Mrs. Haliburton and Nell shrieked, and Mortimer Dufour snapped his cane in two by some sudden movement.

“ ‘Pon honor, Kennedy, you startle us. Suppose we institute a search. I’ll go get my revolver.”

“No occasion,” said Mr. Kennedy, “I prefer to go accompanied by Mr. Haliburton alone.”

So they left us all in the dining-room, and were gone twenty minutes, while we talked and conjectured, and tried to make brilliant suggestions. I tried to remember all the detective stories I had ever read, to sharpen my perceptive faculties, and I looked all about for finger-mark or foot-print, or sign of any kind, but all in vain.

“O,” exclaimed Nell, “what’s under my feet? A bit of cigar, as true as you live! Could that be the robber’s?”

Young Dufour laughed, and took it from her hand. “That’s no clue,” he said, “one of the guests may have dropped it, and anyway, what’s a cigar?” So he twirled it carelessly in his fingers, and in an absent-minded way at last put it in his pocket.

When Mr. Haliburton and Kennedy came back, they had nothing to report. Mr. Kennedy stated that he should notify all his police force to be on top watch for suspicious persons, and he should give notice to all pawnbrokers and silversmiths, of the description of the plate, and, also, set two or three regular detectives on the look-out.

“My ambition is aroused,” he said, laughing, “the harder the case the more it stimulates me; we’ll have ‘em yet, as sure as my name’s Kennedy, though it may be six months first. The thieves will lie low a little while, I fancy, now.”

“I found a bit of cigar, sir,” said Nell, boldly; “is that of any use?”

“Will you let me see it, miss?” asked the chief, respectfully.

“Where is it? O, Mr. Dufour, I saw you drop it in your pocket. Give it to him, please.”

So Mr. Dufour handed it over to Kennedy, who looked at it slightly.

“It *is* a pretty good cigar, I judge, one of the square pressed kind, but it won’t help us about the thief, as far as I can see.” And, rather than throw it on the floor, he put it in his pocket.

“Harvey,” whispered Dufour to me, hurriedly, “would you mention Lucy’s pearl pin? You heard her say she lost it here last evening.”

“What’s that about a pearl pin?” asked Mr. Haliburton.

So Dufour told him, and I confirmed the story. Miss Lucy had lost her pin in the dressing-room—it was one she valued for her mother’s sake.

“Why didn’t she tell me?” exclaimed Mrs. Haliburton, in a vexed tone. “I wouldn’t have had it happen for the world. We might have found it. Perhaps it is on the floor, now.” So she and Nell went up to search for it, but in vain.

“Were there any suspicious circumstances about it?” asked Kennedy, of Mortimer Dufour.

“Well, I hardly know. Young ladies are so fanciful; but she mentioned seeing one of the maids talking with the butler at the door, an instant after.”

Now it was Stella, not Lucy, who mentioned that, but it hardly deserved correction, only, as Lucy had been so delicately reserved about the whole affair, it seemed too bad to quote her as the accusing one.

“I suppose you trust your servants?” said Kennedy, to Mr. Haliburton.

“Why, yes, I think so. We never have had reason to doubt them. The butler has not been with us long.”

“He’s a curious fellow,” I said, laughing; “our Jacob rated him soundly, for peeping into the basket, when he came for our silver, yesterday.”

“Peeped into the basket, did he?” said Kennedy; “what a naughty fellow!”

“I don’t like his eyes,” remarked Dufour.

“Keep watch of him,” said Kennedy. “All of you keep your eyes open, and report to me if anything is observed.”

And, then, taking his hat and bidding us good-morning, this king of detectives left us, more impressed by his reputation than by his personal presence.

By this time all Jasper street was in excitement, for the story had spread, and neighbor after neighbor came in to condole, and wonder, and suggest. So I gave my arm to my mother, and beckoned to Nell, and we went home again. But, before we reached the door, we met Miss Lucy Dufour on the pavement, with a pale, terror-stricken look in her face, which went straight to my heart.

“What is it? Has there, really, been a robbery?” she inquired, as soon as we had exchanged greetings.

Nell told her the story in the most impressive manner, finishing with, “*Isn’t* it dreadful! And we don’t know but the same robber has your pin. Your Cousin Mortimer says he shouldn’t wonder.”

“O, I hope not, I hope not!” she said, in an anxious way. “I am so sorry about the Haliburtons.”

“Lucy, Lucy!” called Mortimer Dufour, and Lucy left us, hurriedly.

“That is a remarkably graceful and pleasing young lady,” said my mother, “though she hasn’t quite the manner of her cousin.”

But, since then, I have thought that the charm of the family was principally the charm of novelty, for upon acquaintance, Mortimer Dufour did not seem to me half so sensible, or of so fine a character as Gus Milne, and in no wise superior to the rest of our young gentlemen. As for Miss Stella she was beautiful, exceedingly, but, consider, of what a “rose-bud garden of girls” every town can boast! Miss Lucy—ah! *she* was lovely, indeed, and when I thought of her up went the Dufour star in the ascendant again. Commend me for an inconsistent bachelor!

Chapter III

Jasper street was horror-stricken to find that robbers dared invade its patrician precincts. In every house the affair was talked over, day after day, and locks repaired, and new bolts added, and careful householders went the rounds nightly, at burglarious hours, to see if the windows were fastened down. Mr. Dufour announced that his revolvers were always ready under his pillow, and he took occasion to tell of it at all times and places, for he said, “There’s no knowing when these fellows may be around us, making errands to us, and talking with us, without our suspecting them, so I’ll let every one understand where to come to be shot!”

Meanwhile, officer Kennedy reported nothing, but told us he was at work. Many suspected some of the servants, and thought that the evil-eyed butler of the Haliburtons should be taken in custody, but officer Kennedy said, “No, not yet.”

In the impossibility of doing anything, and in the growing security we felt as the weeks went by, the great robbery gradually dropped out of conversation, and society went its wonted ways once more. The Davies began to talk of taking their turn in giving the Dufours a party, and Nell was urging our mother to promise the next, when the Dufours took us all by surprise by issuing invitations themselves. Their party was a magnificent affair, but, before giving an account of it I should mention a few circumstances which occurred in the same week, previous to it.

The latest bit of gossip had been the very devoted attention of Gus Milne to Stella Dufour; he was soon far ahead of all the many who dared admire her, he became her escort to places of amusement, he might be seen promenading with her along shady avenues, and Miss Dufour for her part often invited him to a seat in her pretty pony-carriage, and grew more and more captivating as she gradually laid aside a little of her dignity, till, at last, the Milne and Dufour friendship passed into a proverb among us. I sometimes thought that Mr. and Mrs. Dufour disapproved of this intimacy, certainly they threw a shade of reserve and coldness into their manner whenever they met Gus, while to me and to others they were most gracious. I called at the house pretty frequently, and had usually an hour’s chat with madame, and, perhaps, one of five minutes with Lucy, and considered the latter privilege cheaply purchased.

The party was to be on Friday evening. The Wednesday previous, as I came home early from business, I saw Gus Milne at his window smoking his afternoon cigar. He threw down his door-

key to me for an invitation, which I took and ran up stairs to his room where we joined in a friendly smoke. Between the whiffs, I asked him what he was going to do in the evening.

“Take Miss Dufour to the concert,” he said.

“Have you found your ideal in her, Gus?”

“Well,” he answered, carelessly, “I don’t mind telling *you*, Jack, that I have *not* found my ideal, at least, in Miss Dufour.”

“But the world says—”

“My dear boy,” he interrupted, “you and I know the world of old.”

I was silent for the space of three puffs, and then said:

“All right, Gus, only I didn’t know you were a flirt, and I don’t see what makes you monopolize our new beauty so.”

“No, Jack, I’m not a flirt, though, I suppose, every one thinks so. I have my motives. As I told you, once, I find a great deal to study in Miss Dufour.”

“Her dark eyes certainly have impenetrable depths, but isn’t that a fashion that a belle’s eyes often learn?”

“I mean to find out. Jack, help yourself to another cigar.”

“No, thank you,” said I, rising, “I must be off, now. Glad you’re not in love, Gus. Nell said she thought you must be almost engaged, but girls are always fancying.”

“Your sister! Has *she* spoken of it? Then the farce shall end before long. Good-by, Jack,” he called after me, as I was closing the door.

Since Miss Dufour would be at the concert, I determined to call on her Cousin Lucy that evening, hoping I might see her alone. And so I did. My heart leaped at the sound of her light step on the stairs, and her sweet, timid smile made me happier than a king. Besides the inexpressible charm of her manner, there was always a touch of sadness in her voice, in the curve of her lips, and sometimes her eyes wore a look of actual terror which troubled me, and I longed for the right to take her to my heart, and defend her from every possible unhappiness.

This evening she was in a gayer mood than I had ever seen her, perhaps, because no aunt or cousin was there to keep her in the background. We wandered up and down the parlors looking at my uncle’s choice paintings which were still hanging on the walls. We passed before one old English picture of “*ye fayre Rossamonde*,” which Lucy said reminded her of her mother. It reminded me of Lucy herself, the same sweet, timid, half-bewildered face.

“How long is it since your mother died?” I asked.

“My father and mother were lost at sea, a year ago,” she said, with the pathos of utter loneliness in her voice.

I had not realized her bereavement was so recent.

“How fortunate that you could find a home at once with your uncle,” I said, hardly knowing what to say.

“I have been with my uncle eight months,” she replied, ignoring the fortune of it. “He is my legal guardian. In two months I shall leave him, for I shall be of age, then.”

“You will leave him?” I inquired, surprised.

“Yes, I want to be independent, I want a life of my own, I want to leave this place.”

She said these words with a gentle vigor that showed determination.

“Don’t go, dear Lucy,” I began, but the pleas I would have urged were, for that hour, silenced by the untimely entrance of Madame Dufour, who had just returned from an evening call.

That was a wonderful lady, plump, petite with a keen, bright eye and a smiling lip—she did not look a day over thirty. She always seemed to consider the calls of gentlemen at the house, as intended for herself, a fallacy which her daughter scorned, but to which Lucy submitted.

“Why, Mr. Harvey! how sorry I am not to have been here when you first came, but, really, Mrs. Davies was so very agreeable, and she was showing me the new arrangement of her rooms up stairs, always a temptation to ladies, you know. Lucy, *cherie*, do take this hat of mine up to my room.”

The shawl she did not send with the hat; it was of black lace, and looked very Spanish and effective, held in place by her little white hand. Lucy quietly took her aunt’s hat, and left the room.

“I’m afraid you’ve had a dull time, with only Lucy, Mr. Harvey. No? You found her interesting, then? I am so glad the poor girl does find a friend now and then, for, really, sometimes I feel quite anxious about her. So morbid, so fanciful. I am sometimes afraid she inherits a tendency to insanity from her mother’s family.”

“I should never suspect such a thing!” I exclaimed, warmly. “Just think how recent, and how dreadful the loss of her parents is. I feel a great sympathy for her, Mrs. Dufour.”

“Ah?” she said, with one of her keen, smiling glances, “so Lucy has been telling you her history? Was it very exciting?”

“Hardly that,” I answered, coldly. “I only know that she is a sorrowful orphan.”

Lucy returned to the parlor then, and the conversation went on in the usual style of my previous calls. I left soon after, with an *au revoir* till the party.

It proved, however, that I met them again before that time, for, the next morning, a letter arrived to us from my uncle, in Europe, requesting certain articles to be carefully boxed up and forwarded to him. He had thought before going that he might, possibly, want these things sent to him, and, with that view, had collected them all in one room in his house to which he directed us. It was a back room on the third floor. As we were to send the things by Saturday’s steamer, my father thought we had better get them at once, to have them boxed, and, besides, on Friday the Dufours would be busy with the preparations for the party. So he and I called there Thursday forenoon on this business. Just as we reached the foot of the steps, Mr. Davies rushed up to us excitedly, exclaiming:

“We’re not quit of those burglars, yet! If you’ll believe it, all our silver is gone this morning, and my wife’s watch and jewelry-case. It is abominable. It must be stopped.”

We stood almost aghast.

“Have you seen the police?” asked my father.

“Yes, and Kennedy’s coming up in an hour, but what good is Kennedy? He hasn’t found out the first thing about the Haliburtons’ affair. He shakes his head and says, ‘wait,’ but it’s fine telling a man to wait when his property is going, and he may be killed himself, next thing!”

We agreed that it must be stopped, but what could be done? As before, no trace could be found of entrance or out-going, except that the fastening above one of the lower windows was not secured. Mr. Davies said he remembered perfectly well securing it the night before. It certainly seemed as if the robbers must have entered the house during the day, secreting himself till night, and then, collecting his booty, have been met by accomplices outside, and so have got off between the policeman’s rounds. The policeman passed through our street every twenty minutes.

“Yes, the villain must have been in the house!” exclaimed Mr. Davies, “and I’m mistaken if Haliburton’s butler doesn’t know more than we about it. I don’t like that man’s face.”

At that moment Gus Milne joined us, and after hearing the story, said, with decision:

“That is too outrageous. I shall speak to Kennedy about it myself; perhaps he won’t object to a little help from a lawyer’s brain. We’ll find them out yet, Mr. Davies.”

“I hope so,” said Davies, with very little hope in his voice.

“There’s Kennedy, now. Come, let’s go in with him,” said Gus. But father and I, remembering our errand, told them we would join them as soon as possible.

So we went up the steps to Mr. Dufour's house, and asked to see him or his wife. Madame came down to us, and my father told her the contents of the letter, and said if she had no objection we would go up at once to that room for the articles my uncle wished.

"Certainly, certainly," she said, with vivacity; "I will go up with you myself."

And so we ascended the broad stairway. I ventured to ask her how the young ladies were this morning, and she graciously told me that Stella was very well, and bright as the day, but Lucy was "very miserable—almost sick, poor thing!" When we reached the back room on the third floor, she stepped ahead of us to open the door, but it was locked.

"How vexatious!" she exclaimed. "Who has done this? Mortimer, Mortimer!"

At the call, the young gentleman appeared from his room, bade us a pleasant good-morning, and then asked madame what he could do for her.

"Why, Mortimer," said his mother, glancing at him, "here are Mr. Harvey and his son, come to get some things from this room for the Mr. Harvey who is in Europe, and here I find the door locked. Do you know where the key is?"

"No, mamma, unless the governor has it. You know he has been putting some articles in there, that he got yesterday for Cousin Harold, and he said he did not want them touched by any one. So I think *he* must have the key."

"I should not be surprised," said Mrs. Dufour, turning to us. "My husband has been getting a number of articles for a cousin of ours, a professor of chemistry in W--, and he intends packing them this afternoon, and taking them as far as Vernon, where Professor Dufour will meet him, and receive the trunk. There are some chemicals among them, which might be dangerous if meddled with, and so my husband has locked the door, and he has gone away down in the city. Could you wait till his return, Mr. Harvey?"

"O, certainly," said my father, politely; "I am quite willing to wait until your husband has removed his troublesome charge from the room. The steamer does not sail until Saturday, but I thought I would come in to-day, as to-morrow you might be so much occupied."

"O, that makes no difference. Come in to-morrow morning, if that is agreeable, by all means. I am so vexed to cause you the delay, however."

But we assured her it made no difference, and asked her if we were to lose the pleasure of meeting her husband the next evening.

"O no," she said; "he will return by noon. If he could not, I should never let him go."

So we made our adieux, and left the house. From there, we proceeded to Davies's, where a company of neighbors were already assembled. Kennedy, with twinkling eyes, and very grave

manner, was examining everything, as he did at the Haliburtons, but would give no opinion at all.

“Only wait a little, gentlemen,” he said.

When he went at last, Gus Milne made some laughing excuse to accompany him, and they walked away together. Jasper street was evidently becoming an unsafe locality; our haughty people must evidently put their heads together, to invent some way to baffle these mysterious robbers, whom locks and bolts did not keep away.

That afternoon, as Gus Milne and I sat at our respective windows, saluting each other with clouds of smoke, we saw a carriage drive up to the Dufours’ door, and presently his servants, with great apparent effort, lifted a trunk down the steps, and began to raise it up behind the carriage. Mr. Dufour stood on the pavement, waving a smiling farewell to his wife and daughter. Suddenly one of the men let his hand slip, and the corner of the trunk fell heavily on the flagstone. Mr. Dufour sprang forward with an exclamation, and reproved the man for his carelessness. He should have told them beforehand, that there were explosive chemicals in it. At length all was ready, and he entered the carriage and drove away. Soon after, I went over to his house, and obtained very readily the articles for which Uncle Harvey had sent.

The next evening, the Dufours had their party, and all Jasper street was in attendance. There is not such another night in my memory—so full of luxury, charm, and magnificence. The chandeliers seemed to shed a softer light than elsewhere; the air was laden with the perfume of flowers, which were lavished in every corner of the house; everywhere one turned, there lurked some subtle enchantment. Small pages, fancifully dressed, led the way to the dressing-rooms, in which mimic fountains of cologne were playing, and great mirrors reduplicated the brilliant guests on every side. Our hostess looked as if she had drunk the elixir of life, and the waters of the fountain of youth, whiel her haughty daughter, in imperial defiance of perfect taste, fairly blazed with diamonds on neck and brow, and charmed with gracious courtesy all who would have criticized her. Mortimer was breaking brittle hearts innumerable, by his marked devotion to Miss Leroy, though now and then his mother sent a messenger to bring him to her side, and seemed to try to persuade him to be more imperial in his own house. I looked everywhere for my own particular star of the evening, gentle Lucy Dufour, and found her at last in the exquisite little library. She was standing by the window, looking out into the night. Simply dressed as ever, but distinguished to me from every one, by the pure sweetness of her presence. There was still that clinging sadness about her, but I thought it vanished for a moment, as I spoke to her.

“Lucy,” I said, after a few moments, “I have come to tell you why I cannot bear the thought of your going away.”

“Don’t tell me!” she said, shrinking back.

“O Lucy, I *must* tell you! Don’t you know, dear, that I love you—that I long to claim you for my own?”

She drew herself away from me, with sudden oddness, but yet her eyes were full of tender light.

“Do not tell me of it—*do not* tell me, Mr. Harvey. I cannot let you love me; it is not right!”

“Not right!” I exclaimed. “I *will* love you, Lucy, in spite of every one. Nothing can change that; but if you cannot care for me, what shall I do?”

Lucy has since told me that she did care; but she paused a moment in thought, then said, earnestly:

“Mr. Harvey, you *must* not say anything more of this to me now. You know that very soon I shall be of age, and then I shall leave my uncle’s house. I shall go to a much humbler home. *Then* if you can come to me, and say truly what you say this evening, it may be different; but now, please do not ask me now—not in this house!”

I trusted her, as I would trust an angel. I felt that this enforced silence was an ordeal which I must pass through triumphantly, if I would win her. It would not be so long to wait, and I was almost sure she cared for me a little in her heart. But now she looked so troubled, so alarmed, that I could not urge her to a decision against her will.

“Lucy,” I said, “I trust you, and I will wait, because you wish it. But the very day you are twenty-one, I am going to claim you, my darling!”

Half the trouble vanished out of her face at this, and she willingly took my arm, a moment after, for a promenade. Though my heart was put to silence, I did not feel at all like a discarded lover.

Chapter IV

Shortly after, as we stood near a door, waiting a chance to pass through, a voice whispered lightly in my ear:

“Don’t make love in this house, and don’t drink any wine here!”

This sounded tragic. I looked over my shoulder, and there was Gus Milne, with a quiet, schoolboy-looking young fellow, whom he directly introduced to Lucy and me as his friend Harry Archer.

“Harry has just come to make us a visit, Miss Lucy,” said Gus; “so I have been telling your aunt I trusted to her kindness to allow me to bring him here this evening. Harvey, you must come in and smoke with us to-morrow, won’t you?”

“What did you mean by your whisper, Gus?” I asked.

“Just what I said. *Au revoir*, Miss Lucy.” And the two disappeared in the crowd.

A little way off, I heard Mr. Dufour conversing with one of his guests.

“I feel a little tired,” he said. “I travelled a hundred miles yesterday in the cars, and returned to-day, in order to meet you all.”

I tried to wonder at his unwearied hospitality; I tried to admire Miss Stella’s diamonds which at that moment I saw flashing; but still Gus Milne’s whispered words kept repeating themselves to me, and I felt as if I must talk about him.

“Gus Milne seems very devoted to your cousin, lately,” I said.

“Yes,” Lucy replied.

“I wonder if she cares anything about him?”

“She never tells me any of her secrets,” said Lucy, with some reserve.

When we went out to the supper-table, I glanced at Gus Milne, as I took my wine from Mortimer Dufour, and I drank it defiantly. Lucy refused wine; she never took it, she said. The supper-room was a brilliant and gay scene; the Dufours were perfect in the art of entertaining, and every one was laughing and talking, in the very height of party enjoyment.

“It reminds me of one evening at our house,” said Mrs. Haliburton to me. “I hope our friends won’t find themselves robbed, when they wake up to-morrow morning! I suppose, Miss Lucy, you have never heard of your pin?”

Lucy blushed, and said she had long ceased to expect to find it.

I must hasten over the events of the party, as I begin to feel anew the thrill of the excitement which followed in the next few days, and it makes me impatient of delay. The company broke up at about one o’clock, and when our family were all safe at home, I stood for a few minutes in our door, to enjoy the cool night air, when Gus Milne ran down his steps, and crossed over the street to me.

“Don’t you want me to come and camp with you to-night, John?” he asked. “Harry Archer has my room; he’s tired, and I am restless, and feel like visiting. Don’t you want me?”

“All right,” I said; “you’re just in time, for I’m going to lock up now. Come in.”

So he came, and we went up to my room together, smoked a cigar apiece, and then Gus proposed retiring. I felt very sleepy myself—unusually so, and was quite willing. Just as he was turning off the gas, I remembered his whisper to me in the Dufours’ parlor, and asked him what he meant.

“I’ll tell you to-morrow,” he said; “it’s a long story. Where do you keep your matches, John?”

“In the bronze vase, just under the burner. Goodnight, Gus.” And in an instant I was asleep.

I must have slept nearly three hours, when my dreams began to grow confused and terrible. I dreamed of a battle, of being in a besieged fort, and sent to fire a cannon. The cannon burst, with a hideous crash of explosion, and I was all in the dark, lying bewildered, half struggling, while some one was shaking me violently.

It was Gus Milne. He left me a moment, and lit the gas, then returned to the bedside. I saw that he was dressed, but did not think to wonder at it.

“Get up, old fellow!” he exclaimed. “Come and see some sport. We’ve caught the robber! Come!”

When the idea once made its way to my brain, I sprang up quickly enough, and began to ask questions, as I pulled on my boots.

“I told you not to drink that wine,” said Gus; “I knew it would make you sleepy. If you had been wide awake, I should have told you the secret last night. I came over here to stay with you on purpose. Come, are you ready?”

“Where *is* the robber?”

“Down in the library, with Harry Archer, *alias* Detective Baker, mounting guard; and your father’s there, and your mother and sister have locked themselves up, and you’ve missed it all by drinking wine when I told you not to! Didn’t you hear a pistol-shot?”

By this time we reached the library door. The gas was burning brightly, and there, in an arm-chair, pinioned, with two strangers at his side, sat *Mortimer Dufour!*

“Dufour!” I exclaimed; “what does it mean?”

“Mr. Dufour is arrested for burglary,” said Archer, *alias* Baker, respectfully.

My father stood by the table, grave and astonished.

“It is stupendous villainy, my son,” he said. “I cannot understand it yet. How came you here so opportunely, Mr. Milne?”

“O,” said Gus, “I was in the plot with Kennedy. Together we fell upon a clue. After Davies’s house was robbed, he stationed a man there, and another at Haliburton’s, all very quietly, and I took this detective home with me. They have not slept at all these last two nights. Baker, here, was the first to give the alarm to me, and to the rest. I know Baker was in the right place. It is just as I thought. The thief here has been coming down through your housetops. Don’t you see, Mr. Harvey? He goes up out of his observatory, runs lightly over the roofs, enters your observatory, comes down, and is just looking over your silver, when he is caught.”

Mortimer Dufour sat quiet but watchful. He did not look overwhelmed. Doubtless he had lived in the constant thought that this might happen at any time.

“How did you give the alarm, Mr. Archer?” I asked.

Mr. Archer smiled.

“After I saw him disappear into your observatory, I waited a few moments, and then struck a match in Mr. Milne’s window. Only one. My men were watching for it, and answered in the same way. I saw them for an instant after, coming out of the observatories on Mr. Davies’s and Mr. Haliburton’s roofs; and they entered yours, walked softly down your stairs, sprang upon this robber in the dining-room, and, the moment that was done, Mr. Milne alarmed Mr. Harvey, and let me in at the front door. Kennedy’ll be pleased in the morning.”

Dufour compressed his lips tightly at that.

“Well,” said my father, “I little knew what was going on in my own house! It seems to me I never slept more soundly in my life.”

“How’s that, Dufour?” asked Gus. But Dufour would not answer.

“I think there was a drowsy potion in the wine for this family,” said Gus, “I overheard the words, ‘Harvey wine,’ in a whisper, last evening.”

What a whirl of thought kept my brain giddy! How many of the Dufours were guilty?

“Let’s leave him here with the guards, Gus,” I said. “I want to ask some more questions.”

At that moment, the bell rang, and I opened the front door. Mr. Davies and Mr. Haliburton were there. We all adjourned into the dining-room, where stood our unsafe safe, with the silver disturbed.

“Where’s the robber?” asked the latest comers, eagerly.

“In the library,” said my father, excitedly. “We’ve been nourishing a nest of vipers! It’s those Dufours! I cannot believe it myself; but there is Mortimer caught in the act!”

Our neighbors were breathless with surprise and dismay. Such ejaculations, such wonderings, while Gus explained the whole over and over again.

“How came you to think of such a thing?” asked Davies.

“I sat at my window, after the first robbery, puzzling about it, and looking over at your windows, Mr. Haliburton. I looked at the basement, then the first floor, then the next, and so on, till my eyes reached the roof, and I saw twelve observatories rearing themselves in the air. The thought struck me in an instant, how easy it would be, if one could only get on the roof, to enter the house from above; but how could the robber get there? I told Kennedy, and he seized the idea at once. He did not suspect the Dufours at that time; I should not have done so myself, but Stella

Dufour's face had been haunting me. It seemed as if I had known her before. I sought her, talked with her, tried in every way to recall the association, but did not succeed, till one day last week, when, in walking with her down town, we were caught in a shower, and took an omnibus. Then it came to me with a flash—how, one day, years ago, I sat in an omnibus, and a beautiful young girl took a seat next to me. When she got out, I pulled the strap for her, and assisted her. A moment after, I missed my purse. Sitting in an omnibus again, with Miss Dufour, at last I recognized her. She was that young girl!"

A murmur of horror passed through our little audience. All this while, I did not speak; my heart was rent with a thousand dreadful apprehensions. Lucy, my Lucy! How had they ever got possession of my darling! How much she must have suffered! But had she known? What did it mean?

"Where's all the silver they have stolen?" asked Davies and Haliburton, suddenly awakening to their own interests.

"Kennedy has seen to that!" said Gus, laughing. "It took a trip to Vernon, the other day, but a detective had his eye on it. He let Mr. Dufour go home again, without his suspecting anything, and he himself followed the parties who took the trunk, aroused the police in Vernon, and it is the means of breaking up a regular nest of thieves. The silver is safe. You'll have it in a day or two."

Great relief and brightening of countenance could be seen at this announcement.

"Won't the rest of the family escape, when they find Mortimer does not return?" asked my father.

"The house is watched," said Gus; "we shall be informed at once, if there is any movement."

"Well, Gus," said Mr. Davies, looking at him admiringly, "if you carry so much shrewdness into your law-cases, you'll be a great man!"

Now and then, I looked at my watch impatiently. When would it be morning? When could I rush to Lucy, and snatch her from these guilty people? We all sat there, talking and waiting. Now and then, my father went up stairs, to report to mother and Nell; and once, Gus went out, to send a man down to Kennedy.

"Think of those diamonds on Stella Dufour!" exclaimed Mr. Haliburton. "Somebody suffered before these were bought! They shall all be sent to State's Prison, every one. That madame is as bad as any, with her airs and graces."

Sooner than we could have thought, after the sending of the messenger, Kennedy came up, in a glow of delight and excitement. He went at once to the library, and satisfied his eyes with a long, long look at Mortimer Dufour.

"Caught at last!" he said. "I know you now, you scamp!"

Mortimer never vouchsafed a word to his captors, unless compelled to answer some question.

At six o'clock in the morning, Gus and I went over to the Dufours' house, and rang the bell. A sleepy servant came to the door, and Gus asked for Mortimer. He wanted to see if the family had taken the alarm. The girl said Mr. Mortimer was not up yet.

"Have any of the family risen?" he asked.

"No," she said; "except Miss Lucy. I saw her door open when I came down. Miss Stella gave orders not to be disturbed till ten o'clock; and I have not heard the master and mistress stirring yet."

"Very well," said Gus; "we will call again." And he turned to go down the steps; but I did not follow.

"Can I see Miss Lucy?" I asked, eagerly. "Will you ask if Mr. Harvey can see her a few moments?"

The girl looked surprised, but said she would inquire.

"Don't be a fool, John!" said Gus, pulling my arm. But I paid no attention to him, and when the girl came to invite me in, he left me, and went down the steps.

I passed into the parlor, which looked forlorn and ghastly, the furniture not having been replaced, and the carpet all covered with white cloth. In a moment, Lucy glided in like a shadow, and I caught her to my heart.

"Come with me, Lucy," I said; "you shall not stay in this house another hour! Everything is found out, and I am going to save you."

"Everything found out!" she uttered, with wide, horror-stricken eyes. "What is it, then? What is this terrible guilt and mystery?"

"Mortimer is arrested for robbery; the police are watching this house, and will enter soon. Have you suspected this, Lucy?"

She trembled like a leaf.

"I have not known what to think or do," she said, despairingly. "They kept it all a secret from me; but I heard things and saw things that almost killed me. But I knew nothing certainly, only these horrid suspicions kept coming; and, John, I did not know what to do. I wanted to leave the house; but my uncle threatened to prosecute me in the courts, and so I had to wait to be of age."

"Why are they all so quiet?" I asked. "Don't they know Mortimer is not in the house?"

“No,” she replied. “The last thing I heard, last night, was uncle telling Mortimer not to leave the house till morning. I heard that. I was not able to sleep; I have been afraid of the least sound. I felt as if something dreadful would happen. O, why could I not get away before? If my poor father had known!”

“You shall go with me now, darling,” I said. “I will take you right home to my sister.”

“No, no!” she exclaimed; “I shall never see you again. I knew you ought not to love me! You never shall love a Dufour! O John, shall *I* be arrested, too?”

Here she completely broke down, and sobbed upon my shoulder, I rang for the servant, and told her to bring a hat and shawl. When they came, I managed to get Lucy to put them on, and then I took her home.

Would I give up the best, purest, truest heart in the world, because it had been forced into company it abhorred? When the tragedy was over; when the Dufours were consigned to shameful oblivion; when the excitement had passed away, I claimed Lucy for my own before the world. Jasper street, when it had learned her story by heart, became reconciled at length.

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