

# *The Jewel Thief*

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A London Detective's Story  
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by Emerson Bennett  
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I received a message from the chief of police of L—, saying there was a thieving mystery to be solved in that city, which would handsomely reward the successful investigator; and if I could find time to visit that place immediately, he should be happy to confer with me, in preference to any other, as not a few of my professional exploits were already known to him.

I was flattered. I, a young man of twenty-three, to be selected by a stranger, the head of police in a distant city, in preference to all the old experienced detectives in London! It was, indeed, something to be proud of! And yet, my vanity whispered me, the man was right—for, though young in years, I was old in human nature, and, by a sort of instinct, could scent out rascality as naturally as a hound does a fox. Mystery, moreover, exactly suited my proclivities—perplexities were my delight—and I fairly reveled in the strange, hidden, complicated and wonderful. So, of course, I resolved to go to L— at once, and I went.

“My name, sir, is James Felstone, of London!” I said, on presenting myself to Mr. Broughton, chief of police in L—.

He looked somewhat surprised, but offered his hand cordially, and said he was happy to make my acquaintance, though he had expected to see a much older person bearing a name that was already becoming somewhat famous.

“Well, so you have come to help us in this matter, that has already become such a puzzle?” he continued.

“I have come, at your request,” I replied, “to see what I can do in the affair, though I am as yet entirely ignorant of the nature of it.”

“Well, it is nothing more or less than the mysterious abstraction of jewelry,” rejoined Mr. Broughton. “Not less than twenty or thirty of our first families have lost jewels of great value—rings, brooches, bracelets, pins, necklaces, and, in fact, every kind of precious ornament—which have been taken from them in an unaccountable manner, with no broken locks, and no sign of burglarious entrance.”

“The thief,” said I at once, “moves in fashionable circles, and, whether male or female, passes for one of themselves.”

“By Jove!” exclaimed Broughton, grasping the idea, with a brightened look, “I believe you are right! though not one of us have ever thought of such a thing.”

“And not a soul, except you and I and one other, must know anything of it now!” said I, positively, as the plan of operations instantly formed in my mind.

“And who, then, is to be the third?”

“No less than the mayor of the city, who, I trust, will assist us in carrying out a nice little plot I have in view.”

“He will do anything to detect the thief,” said Broughton, “for he has himself been a sufferer to the extend of over two thousand pounds—or rather, I should say, his lady has, which is about the same thing.”

“Ah, yes, his lady!” said I; “I had overlooked her—she must be in on the plot too! I hope she can keep a secret—for all will depend upon this one being kept sacred even from the faintest suspicion getting abroad.”

“And pray what is your plot?” asked the chief.

“Can you guess?”

“Not I.”

“You will laugh when I tell you. What say you to my suddenly appearing in the fashionable world as a *lady* of great distinction, with a grand soiree given at the mayor’s in my honor?”

“A *lady*?—*you*?” cried Broughton, in astonishment.

“You see I have a fair skin, and am almost as beardless as a lad of twelve; and I assure you, when properly dressed for my part, I do not make so uninteresting a *lady* as you may suppose—at least I can say that I have already more than once been honored with serious attentions of some fastidious gentlemen!”

Broughton laughed.

“But how, by even such means, will you be able to detect the thief?” he inquired.

“I shall probably be brought in contact with either him or her—who will, if my supposition be correct, be one of the select company—and my thief-intuition will do the rest.”

“Well,” he rejoined, “you seem born for your profession; and if you do catch this scoundrel, your fortune will be made.”

Mr. Broughton proceeded to assist in carrying out my plan, and we met with complete success. The mayor and his good lady readily entered into the scheme, being highly amused at the novelty of the thing, as well as anxious to see a successful result. I brought my various suits with me—for at different times I had figured as a lady, a clergyman, a naval officer, a common sailor, a

country boor, and so forth and so on—and in a private apartment, selected by Mr. Broughton, I now made the change proposed, even to my hair. When the chief of police, who was not present while the metamorphosis was in progress, came into the room, and found a fashionable young lady, with dark hair and curls, and dressed in silk, in place of the light-haired man he had left there, he seemed surprised and embarrassed, notwithstanding he had expected some such change.

“Did you wish to see Mr. Felstone?” inquired the lady, in a clear, rich falsetto, at the same time rising and bowing with dignity.

“Yes,” replied Broughton, glancing around the room, and seeming to be in some doubt.

“He bade me say, if a gentleman named Broughton called,” pursued the lady, with one of her sweetest smiles, “that he would not be able to see him under a couple of hours, as unfortunately he had left a portion of his female habiliments in London, and would have to make a purchase here, and perhaps wait for a fit.”

“Ah, indeed!” returned Broughton, clearing up; “I thought *you* could not be the individual himself, though he did boast of doing the female part to something like perfection.”

“*Me?* ha! ha! ha!” cried the lady, with a clear, ringing laugh; “did you then indeed suspect *me* of being James Felstone? No, no—he makes a very good-looking female, I admit—but then, after all, I fancy his *wife* makes a better.”

“His wife? Ah, then, you are his *wife*? I beg your pardon, madam! But if he had only mentioned to me that you were with him, I should not have made my *blunder*.”

“You are perfectly excusable, sir!” rejoined the lady, with a fascinating air: “you see, he could not dress without me! Sit down, Mr. Broughton, and we will chat till he returns.”

Mr. Broughton readily assented, and a lively and interesting conversation was kept up for half an hour; when suddenly I changed my voice, to its natural tone, and said:

“So, then, you find my disguise perfect, do you?”

I do not think I ever saw a more astonished man in my life than the chief of police was at that moment; he turned red and white about a dozen times in a minute, staring hard at me all the while; and at last, drawing his breath, and seeming to gulp something down that was hard to swallow, he exclaimed:

“In the name of all that is wonderful, what are you? a man or a woman?”

“I know I shall pass muster now!” I laughed.

In truth, I found it more difficult to convince him that I was *myself*, than that I was *my own wife*!

I was conveyed to the mayor's residence in a splendid carriage; and there, after passing a satisfactory examination, took up my quarters as his niece, Miss Mary Glencoe, from the borders of Scotland.

In due time, as soon as it could be arranged, a grand entertainment was given in my honor—the saloons were thronged with the rich and titled of both sexes—and then my work began in earnest. I was richly dressed, and wore jewels of great value, which, at my desire, had been expressly borrowed for the occasion. These I fancied would attract the special notice of the thief; and, in that event, I relied upon detecting him, or her, as the case might be, partly by intuition, and partly by some peculiar expression of the countenance, to be confirmed by what might follow the suspicion.

In so large a company, with so much fashionable ceremony and necessary crowding, the task I had allotted myself was by no means an easy one; and the evening was half gone, and a great many persons had been introduced to me without discovering anything to give me even a hope of success.

At length a French count was presented—a fop of the first water—whose dress was exquisite, and whose whiskers, moustache and imperial were perfect—and at once I became very much interested. He saw it and felt flattered, for already I was quite a belle; and soon we were on the best of terms, chatting away in a manner that made some of the others, of both sexes, envious, if not jealous. In something like ten minutes he was telling me of his ancestry and estates in France, and I was boasting of my blood and riches in the north of England. He might have thought me rather forward and bold, perhaps; but what did I care for that? It was only a *flirtation*—I did not intend to *marry* him. I told him I was very singular and eccentric, that I either liked or disliked at first sight, and that for those I did like (and I accompanied this with a meaning smile) I could never do enough. Here I suddenly looked down and tried to blush, and, as it were unconsciously, played with a magnificent diamond ring on one of my fingers. When I looked up again, as I did suddenly also, I saw his eye fixed admiringly upon the jewel.

“A present!” said I, taking it off and handing it to him for inspection; “what do you suppose it worth, count?”

“I should say a thousand pounds at least, for the centre stone is a very large one,” he replied, weighing it with his gloved fingers.

“Oh, then,” laughed I, “I am far richer than I thought; for I have ever so many jewels, with stones much larger than this!”

“I hope you did not venture to bring them with you?” he said,

“Why not?” I innocently inquired.

“Oh, nothing, only you might run some risk of their being stolen.”

“The same as aunt’s were, and others I have heard of in the city. Yes; but, Count, you must yourself admit they are safe here, under this roof, from the old axiom that lightning does not strike twice in the same place!”

“Ha! ha!” he laughed; “very good!”

We conversed some time longer on the same topic; and by being very anxious for the safety of my precious jewels, and by hoping I kept them locked up in a secure place, he finally *drew* from me the assurance that I put them in my bureau drawer every night, and never failed to turn the key on them. The subject was then dropped, and soon after the Count gave way for somebody else.

When alone with the mayor and his good lady that night, after the departure of all the company, both congratulated me on the manner of playing my part, said the deception was perfect, and inquired what success I had met with.

“The French count is the thief!” said I. I suspected him almost at the first glance, and proved it to my satisfaction afterward!”

Gracious Heaven! it could not be! I must be mistaken! He was of one of the first houses of France, and was a warm personal friend besides! I inquired how long they had known him. They told. Had he been in the city ever since? He had. Had not all the jewel robberies been committed since his first appearance? Strange coincidence! they had. Did he not converse with the lady about her jewels before she lost them? Startling recollection! he did. Could the house be entered by a night-key? It could; though the lock was a particular patent, and could not be picked, nor be turned by the key of any other lock. Had his honor, the mayor, ever permitted the count to see and handle the key? Astounding remembrance! he had.

“And I will stake my reputation,” said I, in conclusion, “that he is not only the thief, but that I will prove him to be so within a month!”

The next night two policemen were smuggled into the house, unknown to any of the servants. Nothing came of it. The second night the same. The third—ah! that was different. On that night, between the hours of two and three, his countship came in, and found his way to my apartment as readily as if he had been an inmate. It subsequently came out that he had learned from one of the servants which was my sleeping-chamber, on the night of the soiree. He entered so softly that, though awake, I was not *disturbed*. He was an adept at his business, and, in less than a minute, my dressing bureau was searched, and he was stealing out of the room, with quite a handful of paste jewels in his possession. But like a rat in a trap, he now met with an obstruction. This was in the shape of two police officers, who took him into custody. A search of his baggage, at his hotel, disclosed many of the missing jewels. He was tried in due time, convicted on several counts, (no pun meant,) and transported for life.

A large purse was made up for me, and my stratagem was considered not only a remarkable one, but, in its whole length, breadth and result, a very laughable practical joke. I returned to London a proud and happy man, with my reputation widely on the increase.

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