

## *The Missing Jewels*

“It has a plan, but no plot. Life hath none”

—Festus

Anne Bardulph was not very youthful, nor was she particularly handsome; and she was housekeeper for the ailing Mrs. Dorman.

This invalid lady resided in a fine wooden house of many rooms through which ran a wide hall with walls of Pompeian red, and a gilt-edged ceiling that was painted in some curious and uncertain tint of paly, pinkish brown. The floor was tessellated in brown and red, and the dark carved doors opened upon a columnar portico with broad brown steps leading down upon a great lawn flanked with thick trees of beech and pine.

Across the greening lawn in the sweet yellow April sunshine walked Anne Bardulph—a slim, straight woman with regular and severe features, and wonderfully large eyes of darkest gray. She had an abundance of neatly arranged dark hair, and she was neatly attired in a serviceable suit of some clinging, dull blue fabric, with collar and cuffs of linen—white, prim and immaculate.

Two young men coming upon the portico saw her—an interesting and not unlovely figure moving under the grim, whispering pines.

“The new housekeeper of madame pleases you—her you admire perhaps,” one remarked, rather quizzingly.

“Would you suggest that Miss Bardulph may not merit admiration?” returned the other, evasively and with some perceptible irritation.

“I now do nothing suggest,” was the protesting sharp foreign accent. “I here am come to see much, to much think; but I nothing say until the—how say you it?—till the one exposure grand.”

Tony Dorman smoked thoughtfully for several silent minutes. Finally he tossed away his cigar and turned toward his company.

“D’Razelly,” he began, pleasantly; “you are here ostensibly only as my guest and intimate friend—”

“On the what do you call, the ostensible, I impose not,” interrupted Louis D’Razelly, quickly and proudly. “I but the detective am—the servitor hired of madame to her diamonds of value find, and the thief to discover.”

“Yes, I know,” interposed the young gentleman; “but I have become aware of your worth as a man, and I really regard you as a friend. No friend will ever be more warmly welcomed to my home than you. If I did not feel like this I should not be likely to confess to you that I have been refused by Miss Bardulph—for whom—” he supplemented gently and with hesitation—“I fancy you, too, have a tender preference, even though you would appear to disparage her.”

The young Frenchman winced, and in his bright black eyes was an expression of trouble and distrust, as he gazed steadily toward the stately pines that loomed in sharp spires against the sweet blue April sky.

“It is so,” he acknowledged, presently, a hot color reddening his swarthy face. “For her I have the one liking that is very tender; but also have I the doubt that it is much and not good. What of this do you think?”

D’Razelly—who had become a detective only because he had an odd and inborn fondness for what he considered an exciting and most delectable vocation— opened what one would presume to be, from its exterior appearance, a quaintly bound book, and nothing more. It was, however, a “detective camera,” by which he had shortly before obtained, and without her knowledge, several striking photographs of the woman of whom he had been speaking so dubiously.

“What of this do you think?” he iterated, exhibiting a picture of Miss Bardulph as she was standing in a curious attitude of eager and fearful interest beneath one of the great beech trees beyond the lawn. At her feet, beside a pile of moss and stones, opened a small cavity, over which she was bending, while holding low in a loosening grasp, what was quite surely a number of jeweled ornaments.

“I do not know what to think,” enunciated Mr. Dorman, in tones of dismay. “It would seem that my mother’s jewels have been secreted in that place; and I should say that Anne has accidentally discovered the depository.”

“If that is so, why to you or to the madame honored, she comes not—all so glad, so animate—and tell the one discovery so happy and so not to be understood?” D’Razelly demanded, with emphasis.

“But—good heavens, Louis! do you mean that you suspect Miss Bardulph of any wrong-doing?” was the pained exclamation. “I must absolutely refuse to believe that Anne—that ingenuous and serious girl, with her pure eyes and innocent brow—is a thief! Although there may be something indefinable and mysterious about her, I could never associate with the mystery of crime anything she might do.”

She was but his mother’s housekeeper; she had refused his love, and the name and station he would have given her; yet was he a right loyal friend, and would not listen unmoved or acquiescent to any accusations made against her.

While D’Razelly, who professed for her a tender liking, although he doubted her much, shrugged his spruce shoulders, sighed and looked vastly consequential and melancholy, albeit he was not a sentimentalist, and had determined to be austere practical, as befits a professional of his kind.

“I nothing know of the mystery, not evil, that you do men,” he said impatiently. “And to me it does seem that the diamonds of much value must now to the madame so disconsolate be restored, and the ways that so puzzling are, must to the custody go.”

“But she never entered this house until days after the diamonds were missed,” remonstrated Tony Dorman, shuddering; “I am decidedly mystified. What is your explanation of it all?”

“She the accomplice of one other is, I do think,” announced the detective, with grandiloquence of manner. “She no longer here will stay. She will an illness feign, as it may be, and then to the other, she will so away, the diamonds with her taking, if her we not could prevent.”

“That is all very plausible,” returned her defender, unconvinced. “But we will at once secure my mother’s precious ornaments, and then I really must have positive and irrefutable evidence against Miss Bardulph before I shall allow you to denounce her.”

The early dusk had already suffused the lawn with a purple haze. The cool air was delicious with the fresh odors of violets and hyacinths and sweet young grasses. The new, rosy moon and a great golden star glittered in the blue western sky, and out among the gloomy, complaining pines the night birds were tunefully calling.

The two young men crossed the lawn and entered the dim grove, full of resinous scents, strange, dreamy noises, and uneasy and fantastic shadows. Mutely and with soundless steps, they followed the grassy, winding walk that led to the umbrageous beach of D’Razelly’s singular photograph.

Suddenly both started, and simultaneously retreated around a curve of the path where they stood as silent and motionless as the shade in which they were hidden. Beyond, in the pearly effulgence of starlight and moonlight, they saw the suspected young woman bending over that odd repository from which she removed the moss and pebbles until her intent watchers beheld the cold, inextinguishable fire of the precious gems gleaming within the dark, black mold.

“What think you now?” whispered D’Razelly, excitedly. “The diamonds she will take. See! is it not so?”

And before the other could silence or restrain him, he leaped forward and confronted Anne, who stood quite still, and only lifted her comely head fearlessly, smiling with calm defiance and some unassumed amusement.

“Hush!” she murmured, imperiously, as he began to speak. “In another moment the mystery of what you have presumed to be a robbery will be elucidated and precisely as I believed it would be. Look!”

Down the path, with an unsteady and unnatural gait, came a surprising apparition—the figure of a lady. Bare were her feet, and her gray, drooping head was uncovered, and her thin white robes glistened with the damp night dews.

“Mother!” gasped Tony Dorman, amazed, and glad for the accused Anne, who was so curiously exonerated.

Straight on came the somnambulist. Pausing at length before the treasures she had secreted in her abnormal sleep, and gazing with unseeing eyes upon the priceless, sparkling things that she touched lovingly with her withered hands, and carefully again covered with the thick, silky moss. Then she smiled faintly, sighed with satisfaction, turned, and slowly moved away.

The countenance of Louis D'Razelly at that moment was not that of an individual conscious of superior discernment, and the glance he ventured to vouchsafe Anne was deprecatory.

"What I should say I know not," he stammered. "What I did think—what I did do—so very stupid was. Ah, if the kind mademoiselle would me but pardon," he continued, with gallant entreaty.

Very demurely she assured him that his suspicions were quite pardonable, and perhaps creditable to his zeal as a detector and denouncer of the unrighteous.

Some time later, coming through the handsome, brilliantly lighted hall, Anne met the young master of the house.

"The tempting reward offered for the recovery of Mrs. Dorman's diamonds induced me to come here as her housekeeper," she explained. "I had an inexplicable feeling that I might find the missing jewels. I consulted no one—no one advised me. I was really ashamed of my project, that I know was quixotic, if not impracticable, and a failure would have made me ridiculous. Shortly after coming to Mrs. Dorman, I learned that she had latterly been haunted by an excessive and increasing fear of being robbed; I learned, too, that she had only recently manifested somnambulant symptoms. The truth came to me as an inspiration, but only by merest accident; and only this morning while I was exploring for gentian that I did not land, did I espy the tiny, suggestive mound of loose, dying moss, through which I saw a single spark of something shining like a glow-worm. So I waited and watched, hoping she would visit her buried treasure just as she did. The discovery was very simple, and is now clear to you all."

"And now you have won the reward, you will leave us, I suppose," he observed soberly.

"Yes," she gravely assented.

"O, Anne, if I could only persuade you to stay?" he responded quickly and imploringly. "Do you fear I cannot make you a happy wife?"

"It is not that," she said, with a frank, serious manner that had always so pleased him. "It is that I could not make you a happy husband. Do be reasonable, Mr. Dorman, for you must be well aware that I am not at all the sort of person whom you ought to marry. And beside," she added, with a quaint little laugh, "I have a profession now, and I must not wed one who knows nothing of the instincts and requirements of my calling."

The handsome young fellow was somewhat agitated by her speech which he considered daring

and significant.

“Surely, my dear Anne,” he faltered; “you would not wish to become a professional detective? nor would you intimate that you have an affection for Louis D’Razelly who so unjustly accused you, and who would willingly have placed you in custody?”

“My friend,” she replied, sweetly, a tear sparkling in each large eye, and a lovely new color on each soft cheek—“we have just now had an understanding—Mr. D’Razelly and I. He regrets his mistake; and he certainly is not so blamable when he would only have acted conscientiously.”

“Yours is the logic of love, Annie,” the young man answered, dryly. “And who may understand the heart of a woman. You will be Louis’ wife one of these days.”

His prediction was verified. And so it happened that a very happy and satisfactory marriage was effected by the incident of Mrs. Dorman’s missing jewels.

*The Columbus Post* [NE], September 6, 1882