

From Bentley's Miscellany

Coming out of Exile; or, The Diamond Bracelet Found

I.

THE stately rooms of one of the finest houses in London were open for the reception of evening guests. Wax-lights, looking innumerable when reflected from the mirrors, shed their rays on the gilded decorations, on the fine paintings, and on the gorgeous dresses of the ladies; the enlivening strains of the band invited to the dance, and the rare exotics emitted a sweet perfume. It was the west-end residence of a famed and wealthy City merchant of lofty standing; his young wife was an earl's daughter, and the admission to the house of Mr. and Lady Adela Netherleigh was coveted by the gay world.

"There's a mishap!" almost screamed a pretty-looking girl. She had dropped her handkerchief and stooped for it, and her partner stooped also: in his hurry, he put his foot upon her thin white dress, she rose at the same moment, and the bottom of the skirt was torn half off.

"Quite impossible that I can finish the quadrille," quoth she to him, half in amusement, half provoked at the misfortune. "You must find another partner, and I will go and get this repaired."

She went upstairs; by some neglect, the lady's-maid was not in attendance there, and, too impatient to ring and wait for her, down she flew into the housekeeper's parlour. She was quite at home in the house, for she was the sister of its mistress. She had gathered the damaged dress up, on her arm, but her white silk petticoat fell in rich folds around her.

"Just look what an object that stupid—" And there stopped the young lady; for, instead of the housekeeper and lady's-maid, whom she expected to meet, nobody was in the room but a gentleman, a tall, handsome man. She looked thunderstruck; and then slowly advanced and stared at him, as if not believing her own eyes.

"My goodness, Gerard! Well, I should just as soon have expected to meet the dead here."

"How are you, Lady Frances?" he said, holding out his hand with hesitation.

"*Lady Frances!* I am much obliged to you for your formality: Lady Frances returns her thanks to Mr. Hope for his polite inquiries," continued she, in a tone of pique, and honoring him with a swimming curtsy of ceremony.

He caught her hand. "Forgive me, Fanny, but our positions are altered; at least, mine is; and how did I know that you were not?"

"You are an ungrateful—raven," cried she, "to croak like that. After getting me to write you no end of letters, with all the news about everybody, and beginning 'My dear Gerard,' and ending 'Your affectionate Fanny,' and being as good to you as a sister, you meet me with 'My Lady Frances!' Now don't squeeze my hand to atoms. What on earth have you come to England for?"

“I could not stop there,” he returned, with emotion; “I was fretting away my heartstrings. So I took my resolution and came back—guess in what way, Frances; and what to do.”

“How should I know? To call me ‘Lady Frances,’ perhaps.”

“As a clerk; a clerk, to earn my bread. That’s what I am now. Very consistent, is it not, for one in my position to address familiarly Lady Frances Chenevix?”

“You never spoke a grain of sense in your life, Gerard,” she exclaimed, peevishly. “What do you mean?”

“Mr. Netherleigh has taken me into his counting-house.”

“Mr. Netherleigh!” she echoed, in surprise. “What, with that—that—”

“That crime hanging over me. Speak up, Frances.”

“No; I was going to say that doubt. *I don’t believe you guilty: you know that, Gerard.*”

“I am in his house, Frances, and I came up here tonight from the City to bring a note from his partner. I declined any of the reception rooms, not caring to meet old acquaintances, and the servants put me into this.”

“But you had a mountain of debts in England, Gerard, and were afraid of arrest.”

“I have managed that: they are going to let me square up by installments. Has the bracelet never been heard of?”

“Oh! that’s gone for good: melted down in a caldron, as the colonel calls it, and the diamonds reset. It remains a mystery of the past, and is never expected to be solved.”

“And they still suspect me! What is the matter with your dress?”

“Matter enough,” answered she, letting it down, and turning round for his inspection. “I came here to get it repaired. My great booby of a partner did it for me.”

“Fanny, how is Alice Seaton?”

“You have cause to ask after her. She is dying.”

“Dying!” repeated Mr. Hope, in a hushed, shocked tone.

“I do not mean actually dying this night, or going to die tomorrow; but that she is dying by slow degrees, there is no doubt. It may be weeks off yet; I can not tell.”

“Where is she?”

“Curious to say, she is where you left her—at Lady Sarah Hope’s. Alice could not bear the house after the loss of the bracelet, for she was so obstinate and foolish as to persist that the servants must suspect her, even if Lady Sarah did not. She left, and this spring Lady Sarah saw her, and was so shocked at the change in her, the extent to which she had wasted away, that she brought her to town by main force, and we and the doctors are trying to nurse her up. It seems of no use.”

“Are you also staying at Colonel Hope’s again?”

“I invited myself there a week or two ago, to be with Alice. It is pleasanter, too, than being at home.”

“I suppose the Hopes are here tonight?”

“My sister is. I do not think your uncle has come yet.”

“Does he ever speak of me less resentfully?”

“Not he: I think his storming over it has only made his suspicions stronger. Not a week passes but he begins again about that detestable bracelet. He is unalterably persuaded that you took it, and nobody must dare to put in a word in your defense.”

“And does your sister honor me with the same belief?” demanded Mr. Hope, bitterly.

“Lady Sarah is silent on the point to me; I think she scarcely knows what to believe. You see I tell you all freely, Gerard.”

Before another word could be spoken, Mr. Netherleigh entered. An aristocratic man, with a noble countenance. He bore a sealed note for Mr. Hope to deliver in the City.

“Why, Fanny!” he exclaimed to his sister-in-law, “you here!”

“Yes; look at the sight they have made me,” replied she, shaking down her dress for his benefit, as she had previously done for Mr. Hope’s. “I am waiting for some of the damsels to mend it for me; I suppose Mr. Hope’s presence has scared them away. Won’t mamma be in a fit of rage when she sees it, for it is new tonight.”

Gerard Hope shook hands with Lady Frances; and Mr. Netherleigh, who had a word of direction to give him, walked with him into the hall. As they stood there, who should enter but Colonel Hope, Gerard’s uncle. He started back when he saw Gerard.

“C—ca—can I believe my senses?” stuttered he. “Mr. Netherleigh, is *he* one of your guests?”

“He is here on business,” was the merchant’s reply. “Pass on, colonel.”

“No, sir, I will not pass on,” cried the enraged colonel, who had not rightly caught the word business. “Or if I do pass on, it will only be to warn your guests to take care of their jewelry. So, sir,” he added turning on his nephew, “you can come back, can you, when the proceeds of your theft are spent! you have been starring it in Calais, I hear; how long did the bracelet last you to live upon?”

“Sir,” answered Gerard, with a pale face, “it has been starving, rather than starring. I asserted my innocence at the time, Colonel Hope, and I repeat it now.”

“Innocence!” ironically repeated the colonel, turning to all sides of the hall, as if he took delight in parading the details of the unfortunate past. “The trinkets were spread out on a table in Lady Sarah’s own house: you came stealthily into it—after having been forbidden it for another fault—went stealthily into the room, and the next minute the diamond bracelet was missing. It was owing to my confounded folly in listening to a parcel of women, that I did not bring you to trial at the time: I have only once regretted not doing it, and that has been ever since. A little wholesome correction at the Penitentiary might have made an honest man of you. Good night, Mr. Netherleigh: if you encourage him in your house, you don’t have me.”

Now another gentleman had entered and heard this; some servants also heard it. Colonel Hope, who firmly believed in his nephew’s guilt, turned off, peppery and indignant; and Gerard, giving vent to sundry unnephew-like expletives, strode after him. The colonel made a dash into a street cab, and Gerard walked towards the City.

Lady Frances Chenevix, her dress all right again, at least to appearance, was sitting to get her breath after a whirling waltz. Next to her sat a lady who had also been whirling; Frances did not know her.

“You are quite exhausted; we kept it up too long,” said the cavalier in attendance on the stranger. “What can I get you?”

“My fan: there it is. Thank you. Nothing else.”

“What an old creature to dance herself down!” thought Frances. “She’s forty, if she’s a day.”

The lady opened her fan, and proceeding to use it, the diamonds of her rich bracelet gleamed right in the eyes of Frances Chenevix. Frances looked at it, and started: she strained her eyes and looked at it again: she bent nearer to it, and became agitated with emotion. If her recollection did not play her false, *that was the lost bracelet.*

She discerned her sister, Lady Adela Netherleigh, and glided up to her. “Adela, who is that lady?” she asked, pointing to the stranger.

“I don’t know who she is,” replied Lady Adela, carelessly, “I did not catch the name. They came with the Cadogans.”

“The idea of your having people in your house that you don’t know!” indignantly spoke Frances, who was working herself into a fever. “Where’s Sarah? do you know that?”

“In the card room, glued to the whist-table.”

Lady Sarah, however, had unglued herself, for Frances only turned from Lady Adela to encounter her. “I do believe your lost bracelet is in the room,” she whispered, in agitation; “I think I have seen it.”

“Impossible!” responded Lady Sarah Hope.

“It looks exactly the same; gold links interspersed with diamonds, and the clasp is the same; three stars. A tall, ugly woman has got it on, her black hair strained off her face.”

“The hair strained off the face is enough to make any woman look ugly,” remarked Lady Sarah. “Where is she?”

“There: she is standing up now; let us get close to her. Her dress is that beautiful maize color with blonde lace.”

Lady Sarah Hope drew near, and obtained a sight of the bracelet. The color flew into her face.

“It is mine, Fanny,” she whispered.

But the lady, at that moment, took a gentleman’s arm, and moved away. Lady Sarah followed her, with the view of obtaining another look. Frances Chenevix went to Mr. Netherleigh and told him. He was hard of belief.

“You cannot be sure at this distance of time, Fanny. And, besides, more bracelets, than one, may have been made of that pattern.”

“I am so certain, that I feel as if I could swear to the bracelet,” eagerly replied Lady Frances.

“Hush, hush! Fanny.”

“I recollect it perfectly; it struck me the moment I saw it. How singular that I should have been talking to Gerard Hope about it this night!”

Mr. Netherleigh smiled. “Imagination is very deceptive, Frances; and your having spoken to Mr. Hope of it brought it to your thoughts.”

“But it could not have brought it to my eyes,” returned Frances. “Stuff and nonsense about imagination, Mr. Netherleigh! I am positive it is the bracelet. Here comes Lady Sarah.”

“I suppose Frances has been telling you,” observed Lady Sarah Hope to her brother-in-law. “I feel convinced it is my own bracelet.”

“But—as I have just remarked to Frances—other bracelets than yours may have been made precisely similar,” he urged.

“If it is mine, the initials ‘S. H.’ are scratched on the back of the middle star. I did it one day with a penknife.”

“You never mentioned that fact before, Lady Sarah,” hastily responded the merchant.

“No. I was determined to give no clue: I was always afraid of the affair’s being traced home to Gerard, and it would have been such a disgrace to my husband’s name.”

“Did you speak to her?—did you ask where she got the bracelet?” interrupted Frances.

“How could I?” retorted Lady Sarah. “I do not know her.”

“I will,” cried Frances, in a resolute tone.

“My dear Frances!” remonstrated Mr. Netherleigh.

“I vow I will,” persisted Frances, as she moved away.

Lady Frances kept her word. She found the strange lady in the refreshment room; and, locating herself by her side, entered upon a few trifling remarks, which were civilly received. Suddenly she dashed at once to her subject.

“What a beautiful bracelet!”

“I think it is,” was the stranger’s reply, holding out her arm for its inspection, without any reservation.

“Where did you buy it?” pursued Frances.

“Garrards are my jewelers.”

This very nearly did for Frances; for it was at Garrards’ that the colonel originally purchased it: and it seemed to give a coloring to Mr. Netherleigh’s view of more bracelets having been made of the same pattern. But she was too anxious and determined to stand upon ceremony — for Gerard’s sake: and he was dearer to her than the world suspected.

“We—one of my family—lost a bracelet exactly like this, some time back. When I saw it on your arm, I thought it was the same: I hoped it was.”

The lady froze directly, and laid down her arm.

“Are you—pardon me, there are painful interests involved—are you sure you purchased this at Garrards’?”

“I have said that Messrs. Garrard are my jewelers,” replied the stranger, in a repelling voice; and the words sounded evasive to Frances. “More I cannot say: neither am I aware by what law of courtesy you thus question me, nor who you may be.”

The young lady drew herself up, proudly secure in her rank. “I am Lady Frances Chenevix”; and the other bowed, and turned to the refreshment table.

Away went Lady Frances to find the Cadogans, and inquire after the stranger.

It was a Lady Livingstone. The husband had made a mint of money at something, had been knighted, and now they were launching out into high society.

Frances’s nose went into the air. Oh law! a City knight and his wife! that was it, was it. How could Mrs. Cadogan have taken up with *them*?

The Honorable Mrs. Cadogan did not choose to say: beyond the assertion that they were extremely worthy, good kind of people. She could have said that her spendthrift of a husband had contrived to borrow money from Sir Jasper Livingstone; and to prevent being bothered for it, and keep them in good humor, they introduced the Livingstones where they could.

Frances Chenevix went home; that is, to Colonel Hope’s; and told her strange tale to Alice Seaton, not only about Gerard’s being in England, but about the bracelet. Lady Sarah had nearly determined not to move in the matter, for Mr. Netherleigh had infected her with his disbelief, especially since she heard of Lady Livingstone’s assertion that Messrs. Garrard were her jewelers. Not so Frances: she was determined to follow it up: and next morning, saying evasively that she wanted to call at her father’s, she got possession of Lady Sarah’s carriage, and down she went to the Haymarket, to Garrards’. Alice Seaton, a fragile girl, with a once lovely countenance, but so faded now that she looked, as Frances had said, dying, waited her return in a pitiable state of excitement. Frances came in, looking little less excited.

“Alice, it *is* the bracelet. I am more certain than ever. Garrards’ people say they have sold articles of jewelry to Lady Livingstone, but not a diamond bracelet; and, moreover, that they never had, of that precise pattern, but the bracelet Colonel Hope bought.”

“What is to be done?” exclaimed Alice.

“I know: I shall go to those Livingstones: Gerard shall not stay under this cloud, if I can help him out of it. Mr. Netherleigh won’t act in it—laughs at me; Lady Sarah won’t act; and we dare not tell the colonel: he is so obstinate and wrong-headed, he would be for arresting Gerard, pending the investigation.”

“Frances—”

“Now don’t you preach, Alice. When I will a thing, I *will*: I am like my lady mother for that. Lady Sarah says she scratched her initials inside the bracelet, and I shall demand to see it: if these Livingstones refuse, I’ll put the detectives on the scent. I will; as sure as my name is Frances Chenevix.”

“And if the investigation should bring the guilt home to—to—Gerard?” whispered Alice, in a hollow tone.

“And if it should bring it home to you! and if it should bring it home to me!” spoke the exasperated Frances. “For shame, Alice: it cannot bring it home to Gerard, for he was never guilty.”

Alice Seaton sighed: she saw there was no help for it, for Lady Frances was resolute. “I have a deeper stake in this than you,” she said, after a pause of consideration; “let me go to the Livingstones. You must not refuse me; I have an urgent motive for wishing it.”

“You, you weak mite of a thing! you would faint before you got half through the interview,” uttered Lady Frances, in a tone between jest and vexation.

Alice persisted. She had indeed a powerful reason for urging it, and Lady Frances allowed the point, though with much grumbling. The carriage was still at the door, for Lady Frances had desired that it should wait, and Alice hastily dressed herself and went down to it, without speaking to Lady Sarah. The footman was closing the door upon her, when out flew Frances.

“Alice, I have made up my mind to go with you, for I cannot guard my patience until you are back again. I can sit in the carriage while you go in. Lady Livingstone will be two feet higher from today — that the world should have been amazed with the spectacle of Lady Frances Chenevix waiting humbly at her door.”

Frances talked incessantly on the road, but Alice was silent: she was deliberating what she should say, and was nerving herself to the task. Lady Livingstone was at home, and Alice, sending in her card, was conducted to her presence, leaving Lady Frances in the carriage.

Lady Frances had thus described her: a woman as thin as a whipping-post, with a red nose: and Alice found Lady Livingstone answer to it very well. Sir Jasper, who was also present, was much older than his wife, and short and thick; a good-natured looking man with a bald head.

Alice, refined and sensitive, scarcely knew how she opened her subject, but she was met in a different manner from what she had expected. The knight and his wife were really worthy people, as Mrs. Cadogan had said, only she had a mania for getting into “high life and high-lived company;” a thing she would never accomplish. They listened to Alice’s tale with courtesy, and at length with interest.

“You will readily conceive the nightmare this has been to me,” panted Alice, for her emotion was great. “The bracelet was under my charge, and it disappeared in this extraordinary way. All

the trouble that it has been productive of to me, I am not at liberty to tell you, but it has certainly shortened my life.”

“You look very ill,” observed Lady Livingstone, with sympathy.

“I am worse than I look. I am going into the grave rapidly. Others, less sensitive, or with stronger bodily health, might have battled successfully with the distress and annoyance; I could not. I shall die in greater peace if this unhappy affair can be cleared. Should it prove to be the same bracelet, we may be able to trace out how it was lost.”

Lady Livingstone left the room and returned with the diamond bracelet. She held it out to Miss Seaton, and the color rushed into Alice’s poor wan face at the gleam of the diamonds: she believed she recognized them.

“But stay,” she said, drawing back her hand as she was about to touch it: “do not give it me just yet. If it be the one we lost, the letters S. H. are scratched irregularly on the back of the middle clasp. Perhaps you will first look if they are there, Lady Livingstone.”

Lady Livingstone turned the bracelet, glanced at the spot indicated, and then silently handed it to Sir Jasper. The latter smiled.

“Sure enough here’s something — I can’t see distinctly without my glasses. What is it, Lady Livingstone?”

“The letters S. H., as Miss Seaton describes: I can not deny it.”

“Deny it! no, my lady, what for should we deny it? If we are in possession of another’s bracelet, lost by fraud, and if the discovery will set this young lady’s mind at ease, I don’t think either you or I shall be the one to deny it. Examine it for yourself, ma’am,” added he, giving it to Alice.

She turned it about, she put it on her arm, her eyes lighting with the eagerness of conviction. “It is certainly the same bracelet,” she affirmed; “I could be sure of it, I think, without proof, but Lady Sarah’s initials are there, as she describes to have scratched them.”

“It is not beyond the range of possibility that initials may have been scratched on this bracelet, without its being the same,” observed Lady Livingstone.

“I think it must be the same,” mused Sir Jasper. “It looks suspicious.”

“Lady Frances Chenevix understood you to say you bought this of Messrs. Garrard,” resumed Miss Seaton.

Lady Livingstone felt rather foolish. “What I said was, that Messrs. Garrard were my jewelers. The fact is, I do not know exactly where this was bought: but I did not consider myself called upon to proclaim that fact to a young lady who was a stranger to me, and in answer to questions I thought verging on impertinence.”

“Her anxiety, scarcely less than my own, may have rendered her abrupt,” replied Alice, by way of apology for Lady Frances. “Our hope is not so much to regain the bracelet, as to penetrate the mystery of its disappearance. Can you not let me know where you did buy it?”

“I can,” interposed Sir Jasper: “there’s no disgrace in having bought it where I did. I got it at a pawnbroker’s.”

Alice’s heart beat violently. A pawnbroker’s! what dreaded discovery was at hand?

“I was one day at the east end of London, walking past, when I saw a topas-and-amethyst cross in a pawnbroker’s window. I thought it would be a pretty ornament for my wife, and I went in and asked to look at it. In talking about jewelry with the master, he reached out this diamond bracelet, and told me *that* would be a present worth making. Now I knew my lady’s head had been running on a diamond bracelet, and I was tempted to ask what was the lowest figure he would put it at. He said it was the most valuable article of the sort he had had for a long while, the diamonds of the first water, worth four hundred guineas of anybody’s money, but that being secondhand, he could part with it for two hundred and fifty. And I bought it. There’s where I got the bracelet, ma’am.”

“That was just the money Colonel Hope gave for it new, at Garrards’,” said Alice. “Two hundred and fifty guineas.”

Sir Jasper stared at her: and then broke forth with a comical attempt at rage, for he was one of the best-tempered men in the world.

“The old wretch of a Jew! Sold it to me at secondhand price, as he called it, for the identical sum it cost new! Why, he ought to be prosecuted for usury.”

“It is just as I tell you, Sir Jasper,” grumbled his lady: “you will go to these low, secondhand dealers, who always cheat where they can, instead of to a regular jeweler; and nine times out of ten you get taken in.”

“But your having bought it of this pawnbroker does not bring me any nearer the knowing how he procured it,” observed Miss Seaton.

“I shall go to him this very day and ascertain,” returned Sir Jasper. “Tradespeople may not sell stolen bracelets with impunity.”

Easier said than done. The dealer protested his ignorance and innocence, and declared he had bought it in the regular course of business, at one of the pawnbroker’s periodical sales. And the man spoke truth, and the detectives were again applied to.

II.

IN an obscure room of a low and dilapidated lodging house, in a low and dilapidated neighborhood, there sat a man one evening in the coming twilight; a towering gaunt skeleton, whose remarkably long arms and legs looked little less than skin and bone. The arms were fully exposed to view, since their owner, though he possessed and wore a waistcoat, dispensed with the use of a shirt. An article, once a coat, lay on the floor, to be donned at will—if it could be got into for the holes. The man sat on the floor in a corner, his head finding a resting place against the wall, and he had dropped into a light sleep, but if ever famine was depicted in a face, it was in his. Unwashed, unshaven, with matted hair and feverish lips; the cheeks were hollow, the nostrils white and pinched, and the skin around the mouth had a blue tinge. Some one tried and shook the door: it aroused him, and he started up, but only to cower in a bending attitude and listen.

“I hear you,” cried a voice. “How are you tonight, Joe? Open the door.”

The voice was not one he knew; not one that might be responded to.

“Do you call this politeness, Joe Nicholls? If you don’t open the door, I shall take the liberty of opening it for myself: which will put you to the trouble of mending the fastenings afterwards.”

“Who are you?” cried Nicholls, reading determination in the voice. “I’m gone to bed, and I can’t admit folks tonight.”

“Gone to bed at eight o’clock?”

“Yes: I’m ill.”

“I’ll give you one minute, and then I come in. You will open it if you wish to save trouble.”

Nicholls yielded to his fate: and opened the door.

The gentleman—he looked like one— cast his keen eyes round the room. There was not a vestige of furniture in it; nothing but the bare, dirty walls, from which the mortar crumbled, and the bare, dirty boards.

“What did you mean by saying you were gone to bed, eh?”

“So I was. I was asleep there,” pointing to the corner, “and that’s my bed. What do you want?” added Nicholls, peering at the stranger’s face in the gloom of the evening, but seeing it imperfectly, for his hat was drawn low over it.

“A little talk with you. That last sweepstake you put into—”

The man lifted his face, and burst forth with such eagerness, that the stranger could only arrest his own words, and listen.

“It was a swindle from beginning to end. I had scraped together the ten shillings to put in it; and I drew the right horse, and was shuffled out of the gains, and I have never had my dues, not a farthing of ’em. Since then I’ve been ill, and I can’t get about to better myself. Are you come, sir, to make it right?”

“Some” — the stranger coughed — “friends of mine were in it also,” said he; “and they lost their money.”

“Everybody lost it; the getters-up bolted with all they had drawn into their fingers. Have they been took, do you know?”

“All in good time; they have left their trail. So you have been ill, have you?”

“Ill! just take a sight at me! There’s an arm for a big man.”

He stretched out his naked arm for inspection: it appeared as if a touch would snap it. The stranger laid his hand upon its fingers, and his other hand appeared to be stealing furtively towards his own pocket. “I should say this looks like starvation, Joe.”

“Som’at nigh akin to it.”

A pause of unsuspection, and the handcuffs were clapped on the astonished man. He started up with an oath.

“No need to make a noise, Nicholls,” said the detective, with a careless air. “I have got two men waiting outside.”

“I swear I wasn’t in the plate robbery,” passionately uttered the man. “I knew of it, but I didn’t join ’em, and I never had the worth of as much as a salt-spoon, after it was melted down. And they call me a coward, and they leave me here to starve and die! I swear I wasn’t in it.”

“We’ll talk of the plate robbery another time,” said the officer, as he raised his hat; “you have got those bracelets on, my man, for another sort of bracelet. A diamond one. Don’t you remember me?”

The prisoner’s mouth fell. “I thought that was over and done with, all this time —I don’t know what you mean,” he added, correcting himself.

“No,” said the officer, “it’s just beginning. The bracelet is found, and has been traced to you. You were a clever fellow, and I had my doubts of you at the time: I thought you were too clever to go on long.”

“I should be ashamed to play the sneak and catch a fellow in this way. Why couldn’t you come openly, in your proper clothes? not come playing the spy in the garb of a friendly civilian!”

“My men are in their ‘proper clothes,’” returned the equable officer, “and you will have the honor of their escort presently. I came because they did not know you, and I did.”

“Three officers to take a single man, and he a skeleton!” uttered Nicholls, with a vast show of indignation.

“Ay; but you were powerful once, and ferocious too. The skeleton aspect is a recent one.”

“And all for nothing. I don’t know about any bracelet.”

“Don’t trouble yourself about inventions, Nicholls. Your friend is safe in our hands, and has made a full confession.”

“What friend?” asked Nicholls, too eagerly.

“The lady you got to dispose of it for you to the Jew.”

Nicholls was startled to incaution. “She hasn’t split, has she?”

“Every particular she knew or guessed at. Split to save herself.”

“Then there’s no faith in woman.”

“There never was yet,” returned the officer. “If they are not at the top and bottom of every mischief, Joe, they are sure to be in the middle. Is this your coat?” touching it gingerly.

“She’s a disgrace to the female sex, she is,” raved Nicholls, disregarding the question as to his coat. “But it’s a relief, now I’m took, it’s a weight off my mind; I was always expecting of it, and I shall get food in the Old Bailey, at any rate.”

“Ah,” said the officer, “you were in good service as a respectable servant; you had better have stuck to your duties.”

“The temptation was so great,” observed the man, who had evidently abandoned all idea of denial; and now that he had done so, was ready to be voluble with remembrances and particulars.

“Don’t say anything to me,” said the officer. “It will be used against you.”

“It came all along of my long legs,” cried Nicholls, ignoring the friendly injunction, and proceeding to enlarge on the feat he had performed. “I have never had a happy hour since; I was second footman there, and a good place I had; and I have wished, thousands of times, that the bracelet had been in a sea of molten fire. Our folks had took a house in the neighborhood of Ascot for the race week, and they had left me at home to take care of the kitchen-maid and another inferior or two, taking the rest of the servants with them. I had to clean the winders afore they returned, and I had druv it off till the Thursday evening, and out I got on the balqueny, to begin with the back drawing room—”

“What do you say you got out on?”

“The balqueny. The thing with the green rails round it, what encloses the winders. While I was a leaning over the rails afore I begun, I heered some thing like click—click, a going on in the fellow room at the next door, which was Colonel Hope’s. It was like as if something light was being laid on a table, and presently I heered two voices begin to talk, a lady’s and a gentleman’s, and I listened—”

“No good ever comes of listening, Joe,” interrupted the officer.

“I didn’t listen for the sake of listening, but it was awful hot, a standing outside there in the sun, and listening was better than working. I didn’t want to hear, neither, for I was thinking of my own concerns, and what a fool I was to have idled away my time all day till the sun came on to the back winders. Bit by bit, I heered what they were talking of—that it was jewels they had got there, and that one was worth two hundred guineas. Thinks I, if that was mine, I’d do no more work. After a while, I heered them go out of their room, and I thought I’d have a look at the rich things, and I stepped over slanting-ways on to the little ledge running along the houses, holding on by our balqueny, and then I passed my hands along the wall till I got hold of their balqueny—but one with ordinary legs and arms couldn’t have done it. You couldn’t, sir.”

“Perhaps not,” remarked the officer.

“There wasn’t fur to fall, if I had fell, only on to the kitchen leads under; but I didn’t fall, and I raised myself on to their balqueny, and looked in. My! what a show it was! stunning jewels, all laid out there; so close that if I had put my hand inside, it must have struck all among ’em; and the fiend prompted me to take one. I didn’t stop to look; I didn’t stop to think; the one that twinkled the brightest and had the most stones in it was the nearest to me, and I clutched it, and slipped it into my footman’s undress jacket, and stepped back again.”

“And got safe into your balcony.”

“Yes; but I didn’t clean the winder that night. I was upset, like, by what I had done, and I think, if I could have put it back again, I should; but there was no opportunity. I wrapped it up in my winder leather, and then in a sheet of paper, and then I put it up the chimbley in one of the spare bedrooms. I was up the next morning afore five, and I cleaned my winders: I’d no trouble to awake myself, for I had never slept. The same day, towards evening, you called, sir, and asked me some questions—whether we had seen any one on the leads at the back, and such like. I said as master was just come home from Ascot, would you be pleased to speak to him.”

“Ah!” again remarked the officer,” you were a clever fellow that day. But if my suspicions had not been strongly directed to another quarter, I might have looked you up more sharply.”

“I kep’ it by me for a month or two, and then I gave warning to leave. I thought I’d have my fling, and I became acquainted with her — that lady — and somehow she wormed out of me that I had got it, and I let her dispose of it for me, for she said she knew how to do it without danger.”

“What did you get for it?”

The skeleton shook his head. “Thirty-four pound, and I had counted on a hundred and fifty. She took a oath she had not helped herself to a sixpence.”

“Oaths are plentiful with the genus,” remarked the detective.

“She stood to it she hadn’t, and she stopped and helped me to spend it. After that was done, she went over to stop with some body else who was in luck; and I have tried to go on and I can’t: honesty or dishonesty it seems all one, nothing prospers, and I’m naked and famishing— and I wish I was dying.”

“Evil courses never do prosper, Nicholls,” said the officer, as he called in the policemen, and consigned the gentleman to their care.

So Gerard Hope was innocent!

“But how was it you skillful detectives could not be on this man’s scent?” asked Colonel Hope of the officer, when he heard the tale.

“Colonel, I was thrown off it. Your positive belief in your nephew’s guilt infected me, and appearances were very strong against him. Miss Seaton also helped to throw me off: she said, if you remember, that she did not leave the room; but it now appears that she did leave it when your nephew did, though only for a few moments. Those few moments sufficed to do the job.”

“It’s strange she could not tell the exact truth,” growled the colonel.

“She probably thought she was exact enough, since she only remained outside the door, and could answer for it that no one entered by it. She forgot the window. I thought of the window the instant the loss was mentioned to me, but Miss Seaton’s assertion that she never had the window out of her view, prevented my dwelling on it. I did go to the next door, and saw this very fellow who committed the robbery, but his manner was sufficiently satisfactory. He talked too freely; I did not like that; but I found he had been in the same service fifteen months: and, as I must repeat, I laid the guilt to another.”

“It is a confoundedly unpleasant affair for me,” cried the Colonel; “I have published my nephew’s disgrace and guilt all over London.”

“It is more unpleasant for him, colonel,” was the rejoinder of the officer.

“And I have kept him short of money, and suffered him to be sued for debt; and I have let him go and live amongst the runaway scamps over the water, and not hindered his engaging himself as a merchant’s clerk: and in short, I have played up the very deuce with him.”

“But reparation is doubtless in your own heart and hands, colonel.”

“I don’t know that, sir,” testily concluded the colonel.

III.

ONCE more Gerard Hope entered his uncle’s house; not as an interloper, stealing into it in secret, but as an honored guest, to whom reparation was due, and must be made. Alice Seaton leaned back in her invalid chair, a joyous flush on her wasted cheek, and a joyous happiness in her eye. Still the shadow of coming death was there, and Mr. Hope was shocked to see her—more shocked and startled than he had expected, or chose to express.

“Oh, Alice! what has done this?”

“That,” she answered, pointing to the bracelet, which, returned to its true owner, lay on the table. “I should not have lived many years; of that I am convinced; but I might have lived a little longer than I now shall. It has been the cause of misery to many, and Lady Sarah says she shall never regard it but as an ill-starred trinket, or wear it with any pleasure.”

“But, Alice, why should you have suffered it thus to affect you?” he remonstrated. “You knew your own innocence, and you say you believed and trusted in mine: what did you fear?”

“I will tell you, Gerard,” she resumed, a deeper hectic rising to her cheeks. “I could not have confessed my fear, even in dying; it was too distressing, too terrible; but now that it is all clear, I will tell it. *I believed my sister had taken the bracelet.*”

He uttered an exclamation of amazement.

“I have believed it all along. She had called to see me that night, and was, for a minute or two, in the room alone with the bracelets: I knew she, at that time, was short of money, and I feared she had been tempted to take it—just as this unfortunate servant man was tempted. Oh, Gerard! the dread of it has been upon me night and day, preying upon my fears, weighing down my spirits, wearing away my health and my life. And I had to bear it all in silence: it is that dreadful silence which has killed me.”

“Alice, this must have been a morbid fear.”

“Not so—if you knew all. But now that I have told you, let us not revert to it again: it is at an end, and I am very thankful. That it should so end, has been my prayer and hope: not quite the only hope,” she added, looking up at him with a sunny smile; “I have had another.”

“What is it? You look as if it were connected with me.”

“So it is. Ah, Gerard! can you not guess it?”

“No,” he answered, in a stifled voice, “I can only guess that you are lost to me.”

“Lost to all here. Have you forgotten our brief conversation, the night you went into exile? I told you then there was one far more worthy of you than I could have ever been.”

“None will ever be half so worthy: or—I will say it, Alice, in spite of your warning hand—half so loved.”

“Gerard,” she continued, sinking her voice, “she has waited for you.”

“Nonsense,” he rejoined.

“She has. I have watched, and seen, and I know it; and I tell it you under secrecy: when she is your wife, not before, you may tell her that I saw it and said it. She is a lovable and attractive girl, and she does not and will not marry: you are the cause.”

“My darling—”

“Stay, Gerard,” she gravely interrupted; “those words of endearment are not for me. Give them to her: can you deny that you love her?”

“Perhaps I do—in a degree. Next to yourself—”

“Put me out of your thoughts while we speak. If I were—where I so soon shall be, would she not be dearer to you than any one on earth? would you not be well pleased to make her your wife?”

“Yes, I might be.”

“That is enough, Gerard. Frances, come hither.”

The conversation had been carried on in a whisper, and Lady Frances Chenevix came towards them from a distant window. Alice took her hand; she also held Gerard’s.

“I thought you were talking secrets,” said Lady Frances, “so kept away.”

“As we were,” answered Alice. “Frances, what can we do to keep him amongst us? Do you know what Colonel Hope has told him?”

“No. What?”

“That though he shall be reinstated in favor as to money matters, he shall not be in his affection or in the house, unless he prove sorry for his rebellion by retracting it. The rebellion, you know, at the first outbreak, when Gerard was expelled the house—before that unlucky bracelet was ever bought. I think he is sorry for it: you must help him to be more so.”

“Fanny,” said Gerard, while her eyelids drooped, and the damask mantled in her cheek, deeper than Alice’s hectic, “*will* you help me?”

“As if I could make out head or tail of what you two are discussing!” cried she, by way of helping herself out of her confusion, as she attempted to turn away; but Gerard caught her to his side and detained her.

“Fanny—will you drive me again from the house?”

She lifted her eyes, twinkling with a little spice of mischief: “I did not drive you before.”

“In a manner, yes,” he laughed. “Do you know what did drive me?”

She had known it at the time: and Gerard read it in her conscious face.

“I see it all,” he murmured, drawing her closer to him; “you have been far kinder to me than I deserved. Fanny, let me try and repay you for it.”

Frances endeavored to look dignified, but it would not do, and she was obliged to brush away the tears of happiness that struggled to her eyes. Alice caught their hands together and held them between her own, with a mental aspiration for their life’s future happiness. Some time back she could not have breathed it in so fervent a spirit: but—as she had said—the present world and its hopes had closed to her.

“But you know, Gerard,” cried Lady Frances, in a saucy tone, “if you ever do help yourself to a bracelet in reality, you must not expect me to go to prison with you.”

“Yes I shall,” answered he, far more saucily: “a wife must follow the fortunes of her husband.”

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The Chicago Tribune, September 12, 1874 with the note: “By the author of ‘East Lynne’” (i.e. Mrs. Henry [Ellen] Wood)

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