

From Bentley's Miscellany

*The Diamond Bracelet*

THE afternoon of a hot June day was drawing towards evening, and the great world of London—for it was the height of the season—were [sic] beginning to think of dinner. In a well-furnished dressing room, the windows being open for air, and the blinds drawn down to exclude the sun, stood a lady, whose maid was giving the last touch to her rich attire. It was Lady Sarah Hope.

“What bracelets, my lady?” asked the maid, taking a small bunch of keys from her pocket.

“None now: it is so very hot. Alice,” added Lady Sarah, turning to a young lady, who was leaning back on a sofa, “have them ready displayed for me when I come up, and I will decide then.”

“I have them ready, Lady Sarah?” returned Miss Seaton.

“If you will be so kind. Hughes, give the key to Miss Seaton.”

Lady Sarah left the room, and the maid, Hughes, began taking one of the small keys off the ring. “I have got leave to go out, miss, [”] she explained, “and am going directly. My mother is not well, and wants to see me. This is the key, miss.”

As Miss Seaton took it, Lady Sarah reappeared at the door. “Alice, you may as well bring the jewel box down to the back drawing room. I shall not care to come up here after dinner: we shall be late, as it is.”

“What’s that about a jewel box?” inquired a pretty-looking girl, who had come from another apartment.

“Lady Sarah wishes me to bring her bracelets down to the drawing room, that she may choose which to put on. It was too hot to dine in them, she said.”

“Are you not coming in to dinner today, Alice?”

“No. I walked out, and it has tired me, as usual. I have had some tea instead.”

“I would not be you for all the world, Alice! To possess so little capability of enjoying life.”

“Yet if you were as I am, weak in health and strength, your lot would have been so soothed to you, that you would not repine at or regret it.”

“You mean I should be content,” laughed the young lady. “Well, there is nothing like contentment, the sages tell us. One of my detestable schoolroom copies used to be, ‘Contentment is happiness.’”

“I can hear the dinner being taken in,” said Alice: “you will be late in the drawing room.”

Lady Frances Chenevix turned away to fly down the stairs; her light, rounded form, her elastic step, all telling of health and enjoyment, presented a marked contrast to that of Alice Seaton. Alice’s face was indeed strangely beautiful, almost too refined and delicate for the wear and tear of common life, but her figure was weak and stooping, and her gait feeble. Of exceedingly good family, she had been suddenly thrown from her natural position of wealth and comfort to comparative poverty, and had found refuge as “companion” to Lady Sarah Hope.

Colonel Hope was a thin, spare man, with sharp brown eyes and sharp features; looking so shrunk and short, that he must have been smuggled into the army under height; unless he had since been growing downwards. No stranger could have believed him at ease in his circumstances, any more than they would have believed him a colonel who had seen hard service in India, for his clothes were frequently threadbare. A black ribbon supplied the place of a gold chain, as guard to his watch, and a blue tin-looking thing of a galvanized ring did duty for any other ring on his finger. Yet he was rich; of fabulous riches, people said; but he was of a close disposition, especially as regarded his personal outlay. In his home and to his wife he was liberal. They had been married several years, but had no children, and his large property was not entailed: it was believed that his nephew, Gerard Hope, would inherit it, but some dispute had recently occurred, and Gerard had been turned from the house. Lady Frances Chenevix, the sister of Lady Sarah, but considerably younger, had been paying them an eight months’ visit in the country, and had now come up to town with them.

Alice Seaton lay on the sofa for half an hour, and then, taking the bracelet box in her hands, descended to the drawing rooms. It was intensely hot, a sultry, breathless heat, and Alice threw open the back window, which in truth made it hotter, for the sun gleamed right athwart the leads which stretched themselves beyond the window, over the out-buildings at the back of the row of houses.

She sat down near this back window, and began to put out some of the bracelets on the table before it. They were rare and rich: of plain gold, of silver, of pearl, of precious stones. One of them was of gold links studded with diamonds; it was very valuable, and had been the present of Colonel Hope to his wife on her recent birthday. Another diamond bracelet was there, but it was not so beautiful or so costly as this. When her task was done, Miss Seaton passed into the front drawing room, and threw up one of its large windows. Still there was no air in the room.

As she stood at it, a handsome young man, tall and powerful, who was walking on the opposite side of the street, caught her eye. He nodded, hesitated, and then crossed the street as if to enter.

“It is Gerard!” uttered Alice, under her breath. “Can he be coming here?” She walked away from the window hastily, and sat down by the bedecked table in the other room.

“Just as I supposed!” exclaimed Gerard Hope, entering, and advancing to Alice with stealthy steps. “When I saw you at the window, the thought struck me that you were alone here, and they at dinner. Thomas happened to be airing himself at the door, so I crossed, and asked him, and came up. How are you, Alice?”

“Have you come to dinner?” inquired Alice, speaking at random, and angry at her own agitation.

“I come to dinner?” repeated Mr. Hope. “Why, you know they’d as soon sit down with the hangman.”

“Indeed, I know nothing about it. I was in hopes you and the Colonel might be reconciled. Why did you come in? Thomas will tell.”

“No, he won’t. I told him not. Alice, the idea of your never coming up till June! Some whim of Lady Sarah’s, I suppose. Two or three times a week for the last month have I been marching past this house, wondering when it was going to show signs of life. Is Frances here still?”

“Oh! yes; she is going to remain some time.”

“To make up for——Alice, was it not a shame to turn me out?”

“I was extremely sorry for what happened, Mr. Hope, but I knew nothing of the details. Lady Sarah said you had displeased the Colonel, and after that she never mentioned your name.”

“What a show of smart things you have got here, Alice! Are you going to set up a bazaar?”

“They are Lady Sarah’s bracelets.”

“So they are, I see! This is a gem,” added Mr. Hope, taking up the fine diamond bracelet already mentioned. “I don’t remember this one.”

“It is new. The Colonel has just given it to her.”

“What did it cost?”

Alice Seaton laughed. “Do you think I am likely to know? I question if Lady Sarah heard, herself.”

“It never cost a farthing less than two hundred guineas,” mused Mr. Hope, turning the bracelet in various directions that its rich diamonds might give out their gleaming light. “I wish it was mine.”

“What should you do with it?” laughed Alice.

“Spout it.”

“I do not understand,” returned Alice. She really did not.

“I beg your pardon, Alice. I was thinking of the colloquial lingo familiarly applied to such transactions, instead of to whom I was talking. I meant to raise money upon it.”

“O Mr. Hope!”

“Alice, that’s twice you have called me ‘Mr. Hope.’ I thought I was ‘Gerard’ to you before I went away.”

“Time has elapsed since, and you seem like a stranger again,” returned Alice, a flush rising to her sensitive face. “But you spoke of raising money: I hope you are not in temporary embarrassment.”

“A jolly good thing for me if it turns out only temporary,” he rejoined. “Look at my position! Debts hanging over my head—for you may be sure, Alice, all young men, with a limited allowance and large expectations, contract them—and thrust out of my uncle’s home with the loose cash I had in my pockets, and my clothes sent after me.”

“Has the Colonel stopped your allowance?”

Mr. Hope laid down the bracelet from whence he had taken it, before he replied.

“He stopped it then: and I have not had a shilling since, except from my own resources. I first went upon tick; then I disposed of my watch and chain and all my other little matters of value; and now I am upon tick again.”

“Upon what?” uttered Alice.

“You don’t understand these free terms, Alice,” he said, looking fondly at her, “and I hope you may never have occasion. Frances would: she has lived in their atmosphere.”

“Yes, I know what an embarrassed man the Earl is, if you allude to that. But I am grieved to hear about yourself. Is the Colonel implacable? What was the cause of the quarrel?”

“You know I was to be his heir. Even if children had come to him, he had undertaken amply to provide for me. Last Christmas he suddenly sent for me, and told me it was his pleasure and Lady Sarah’s that I should take up my abode with them. So I did, glad to get into such good quarters, and stopped there, like an innocent, unsuspecting lamb, till—when was it, Alice?—April. Then the plot came out. They had fixed upon a wife for me, and I was to hold myself in readiness to marry her at any given moment.”

“Who was it?” inquired Alice, in a low tone, as she bent her head over the bracelets.

“Never mind,” laughed Mr. Hope; “it wasn’t you. I said I would not have her, and they both, he and Lady Sarah, pulled me and my want of taste to pieces, and assured me I was a monster of ingratitude. It provoked me into confessing that I liked somebody else better, and the Colonel turned me out.”

Alice looked her sorrow, but she did not express it.

“And since then I have been having a fight with my creditors, putting them off with fair words and promises. But they have grown incredulous, and it has come to dodging. In favor of my uncle, and his acknowledged heir, they would have given me unlimited time and credit, but the breach is known, and it makes all the difference. With the value of that at my disposal”—nodding at the bracelet—“I should stop some pressing personal trifles and go on again for a while. So you see, Alice, a diamond bracelet may be of use even to a gentleman, should some genial fortune drop such into his hands.”

“I sympathize with you very much,” said Alice, “and I wish I had it in my power to aid you.”

“Thank you for your kind wishes; I know they are genuine. When my uncle sees the name of Gerard Hope figuring in the insolvent list, or amongst the outlaws, he—— Hark! can they be coming up from dinner?”

“Scarcely yet,” said Alice, starting up simultaneously with himself, and listening.

“But they will not sit long today, because they are going to the opera. Gerard, they must not find you here.”

“And get you turned out as well as myself! No, not if I can help it. Alice!”—suddenly laying his hands upon her shoulders, and gazing down into her eyes—“do you know who it was I had learnt to love, instead of—of the other?”

She gasped for breath, and her color went and came. “No—no; do not tell me, Gerard.”

“Why no, I had better not, under present circumstances, but when the good time comes—for all their high-roped indignation must and will blow over—*then I will*; and here’s the pledge of it.” He bent his head, took one long earnest kiss from her lips, and was gone.

Agitated almost to sickness, trembling and confused, Alice stole to look after him, terrified lest he might not escape unseen. She crept partly down the stairs, so as to obtain sight of the hall door, and make sure that he got out in safety. As he drew it open, there stood a lady just about to knock. She said something to him, and he waved his hand towards the staircase. Alice saw that the visitor was her sister, a lady well married and moving in the fashionable world. She met her, and took her into the front drawing room.

“I cannot stay to sit down, Alice; I must make haste back to dress, for I am engaged to three or four places tonight. Neither do I wish to horrify Lady Sarah with a visit at this untoward hour. I had a request to make to you, and thought to catch you before you went in to dinner.”

“They are alone, and are dining earlier than usual. I was too tired to appear. What can I do for you?”

“In one word—I am in pressing need for a little money. Can you lend it me?”

“I wish I could,” returned Alice; “I am so very sorry. I sent all I had to poor mamma the day before we came to town. It was only twenty-five pounds.”

“That would have been of no use to me: I want more. I thought if you had been misering up your salary, you might have had a hundred pounds, or so, by you.”

Alice shook her head. “I should be a long while saving up a hundred pounds, even if dear mamma had no wants. But I send to her what I can spare. Do not be in such a hurry,” continued Alice, as her sister was moving to the door. “At least, wait one minute while I fetch you a letter I received from mamma this morning, in answer to mine. You will like to read it, for it is full of news about the old place. You can take it home with you.”

Alice left her sister standing in the room, and went upstairs. But she was more than one minute away, she was three or four, for she could not at first lay her hand upon the letter. When she returned, her sister advanced to her from the back drawing room, the folding doors between the two rooms being, as before, wide open.

“What a fine collection of bracelets, Alice!” she exclaimed, as she took the letter. “Are they spread out for show?”

“No,” laughed Alice; “Lady Sarah is going to the opera, and will be in a hurry when she comes up from dinner. She asked me to bring them all down, as she had not decided which to wear.”

“I like to dress before dinner on my opera nights.”

“Oh! so of course does Lady Sarah,” returned Alice, as her sister descended the stairs, “but she said it was too hot to dine in bracelets.”

“It is fearfully hot. Good-by, Alice. Don’t ring; I will let myself out.”

Alice returned to the front room and looked from the window, wondering whether her sister had come in her carriage. No. A trifling evening breeze was arising and beginning to move the curtains about. Gentle as it was, it was grateful, and Alice sat down in it. In a very few minutes the ladies came up from dinner.

“Have you the bracelets, Alice? Oh! I see.”

Lady Sarah went into the back room as she spoke, and stood before the table, looking at the bracelets. Alice rose to follow her, when Lady Frances Chenevix caught her by the arm, and began to speak in a covert whisper.

“Who was that at the door just now? It was a visitor’s knock. Do you know, Alice, every hour, since we came to town, I have fancied Gerard might be calling. In the country he could not get to us, but here—— Was it Gerard?”

“It—it was my sister,” carelessly answered Alice. It was not a true answer, for her sister had not knocked, and she did not know who had. But it was the readiest that rose to her lips, and she wished to escape the questioning.

“Only your sister,” sighed Frances, turning to the window with a gesture of disappointment.

“Which have you put on?” inquired Alice, going towards Lady Sarah.

“These loose fancy things; they are the coolest. I really am so hot: the soup was that favorite soup of the Colonel’s, all capsicums and cayenne, and the wine was hot; there had been a mistake about the ice. Hill trusted to the new man, and he did not understand it; it was all hot together. What the house will be tonight, I dread to think of.”

Lady Sarah, whilst she spoke, had been putting the bracelets into the jewel box, with very little care.

“I had better put them straight,” remarked Alice, when she reached the table.

“Do not trouble,” returned Lady Sarah, shutting down the lid. “You are looking flushed and feverish, Alice; you were wrong to walk so far today; Hughes will set them to rights tomorrow morning; they will do till then. Lock them up, and take possession of the key.”

Alice did as she was bid. She locked the case and put the key in her pocket. “Here is the carriage,” exclaimed Lady Frances. “Are we to wait for coffee?”

“Coffee in this heat!” retorted Lady Sarah, “it would be adding fuel to fire. We will have some tea when we return. Alice, you must make tea for the Colonel; he will not come out without it. He thinks this weather just what it ought to be: rather cold, if anything.”

Alice had taken the bracelet box in her hands as Lady Sarah spoke, and when they departed carried it upstairs to its place in Lady Sarah’s bedroom. The Colonel speedily rose from table, for his wife had laid her commands on him to join them early. Alice helped him to his tea, and as soon as he was gone she went upstairs to bed.

To bed, but not to sleep. Tired as she was, and exhausted in frame, sleep would not come to her. She was living over again her interview with Gerard Hope. She could not, in her conscious heart, affect to misunderstand his implied meaning—that *she* had been the cause of his rejecting the union proposed to him. It diffused a strange rapture within her, and though she had not perhaps been wholly blind and unconscious during the period of Gerard’s stay with them, she now kept repeating the words, “Can it be? can it be?”

It certainly was so. Love plays strange pranks. There was Gerard Hope, heir to the fabulous wealth, consciously proud of his handsome person, his herculean strength, his towering form, called home and planted down by the side of a pretty and noble lady, on purpose that he might fall in love with her—Lady Frances Chenevix. And yet, the well-laid project failed: failed because there happened to be another at that young lady’s side, a sad, quiet feeble-framed girl,

whose very weakness may have seemed to others to place her beyond the pale of man's love. But love thrives by contrasts, and it was the feeble girl who won the love of the strong man.

Yes; the knowledge diffused a strange rapture within her, as she lay there that night, and she may be excused if, for a brief period, she gave range to the sweet fantasies it conjured up. For a brief period only: too soon the depressing consciousness returned to her, that these thoughts of earthly happiness must be subdued, for she, with her confirmed ailments and conspicuous weakness, must never hope to marry, as did other women. She had long known—her mother had prepared her for it—that one so afflicted and frail as she, whose tenure of existence was likely to be short, ought not to become a wife, and it had been her earnest hope to pass through life unloving and unloved. She had striven to arm herself against the danger, against being thrown into the perils of temptation. Alas! it had come insidiously upon her: all her care had been set at naught; and she knew that she loved Gerard Hope with a deep and fervent love. "It is but another cross," she sighed, "another burden to surmount and subdue, and I will set myself, from this night, to the task. I have been a coward, shrinking from self-examination; but now that Gerard has spoken out, I can deceive myself no longer. I wish he had spoken more freely, that I might have told him it was useless."

It was only towards morning that Alice dropped asleep: the consequence was, that long after her usual hour for rising, she was still sleeping. The opening of her door, by someone, awoke her: it was Lady Sarah's maid.

"Why, miss! are you not up! Well, I never! I wanted the key of the jewel box, but I'd have waited if I had known."

"What do you say you want?" returned Alice, whose ideas were confused, as is often the case on being suddenly awakened.

"The key of the bracelet box, if you please."

"The key?" repeated Alice. "Oh! I remember," she added, her recollection returning to her. "Be at the trouble, will you, Hughes, to take it out of my pocket: it is on that chair, under my clothes."

The servant came to the pocket, and speedily found the key. "Are you worse than usual, miss, this morning," asked she, "or have you overslept yourself?"

"I have overslept myself. Is it late?"

"Between nine and ten. My lady is up, and at breakfast with master and Lady Frances."

Alice rose the instant the maid had left the room, and made haste to dress, vexed with herself for sleeping so long. She was nearly ready when Hughes came in again.



“If ever I saw such a confusion as that jewel case was in!” cried she, in as pert and grumbling a tone as she dared to use. “The bracelets were thrown together without law or order—just as if they had been so much glass and tinsel from the Lowther Arcade.”

“It was [L]ady Sarah did it,” replied Alice. “I would have put them straight, but she said leave it for you. I thought she might prefer that you should do it, so did not press it.”

“Of course her ladyship is aware there’s nobody but myself knows how they are placed in it,” returned Hughes, consequentially. “I could go to that, or to the other jewel box, in the dark, miss, and take out any one thing my lady wanted, without disturbing the rest.”

“I have observed that you have the gift of order,” remarked Alice, with a smile. “It is very useful to those who possess it, and saves them from trouble and confusion.”

“So it do, miss,” said Hughes. “But I came to ask you for the diamond bracelet.”

“The diamond bracelet!” echoed Alice. “What diamond bracelet? What do you mean?”

“It’s not in the box, miss.”

“The diamond bracelets are both in the box,” rejoined Alice.

“The old one is there; not the new one. I thought you might have taken it out to show someone, or to look at, yourself, miss, for I’m sure it’s a sight for pleasant eyes.”

“I can assure you that it is in the case,” said Alice. “All are there, except what Lady Sarah had on. You must have overlooked it.”

“I must be a great donkey if I have,” grumbled the girl. “It must be at the very bottom, amongst the cotton,” she soliloquized, as she returned to Lady Sarah’s apartments, “and I have just got to take every individual article out, to get to it. This comes of giving up one’s keys to other folks.”

Alice hastened down, begging pardon for her late appearance. It was readily accorded. Alice’s office in the house was nearly a sinecure: when she had first entered upon it, Lady Sarah was ill, and required someone to sit with and read to her, but now that she was well again, Alice had little to do.

Breakfast was scarcely over when Alice was called from the room. Hughes stood outside.

“Miss,” said she, with a long face, “the diamond bracelet is not in the box. I thought I could not be mistaken.”

“But it must be in the box,” said Alice.

“But it’s *not*,” persisted Hughes, emphasizing the negative; [“]can’t you believe me, miss? What’s gone with it?”

Alice Seaton looked at Hughes with a puzzled, dreamy look. She was thinking matters over. It soon cleared again.

“Then Lady Sarah must have kept it out when she put in the rest. It was she who returned them to the case; I did not. Perhaps she wore it last night.”

“No miss, that she didn’t. She wore only those two——”

“I saw what she had on,” interrupted Alice. “But she might also have put on the other, without my noticing. Then she must have kept it out for some other purpose. I will ask her. Wait here an instant, Hughes; for of course you will like to be at a certainty.”

“That’s cool,” thought Hughes, as Alice went into the breakfast room, and the Colonel came out of it with his newspaper. “I should have said it was somebody else would like to be at a certainty, instead of me. Thank goodness it wasn’t in my charge, last night, if anything dreadful has come to pass. My lady don’t keep out her bracelets for sport. Miss Seaton has left the key about, that’s what she has done, and it’s hard to say who hasn’t been at it: I knew the box had been ransacked over.”

“Lady Sarah,” said Alice, “did you wear your new diamond bracelet last night?”

“No.”

“Then did you put it into the box with the others?”

“No,” languidly repeated Lady Sarah, attaching no importance to the question.

“After you had chosen the bracelets you wished to wear, you put the others into the box yourself,” explained Alice. “Did you put in the new one, the diamond, or keep it out?”

“The diamond was not there.”

Alice stood confounded. “It was on the table at the back of all, Lady Sarah,” she presently said. “Next the window.”

“I tell you, Alice, it was not there. I don’t know that I should have worn it, if it had been, but I certainly looked for it. Not seeing it, I supposed you had not put it out, and did not care sufficiently to ask for it.”

Alice felt in a mesh of perplexity; curious thoughts, and very unpleasing ones, were beginning to come over her. “But, Lady Sarah, the bracelet was indeed there when you went to the table,” she urged. “I put it there.”

“I can assure you that you labor under a mistake, as to its being there when I came up from dinner,” answered Lady Sarah. “Why do you ask?”

“Hughes has come to say it is not in the case. She is outside, waiting.”

“Outside, now? Hughes,” called out her ladyship: and Hughes came in.

“What’s this about my bracelet?”

“I don’t know, my lady. The bracelet is not in its place, so I asked Miss Seaton. She thought your ladyship might have kept it out yesterday evening.”

“I neither touched it nor saw it,” said Lady Sarah.

“Then we have had thieves at work,” decided Hughes.

“It must be in the box, Hughes,” spoke up Alice. “I laid it out on the table, and it is impossible that thieves—as you phrase it—could have come there.”

“Oh! yes, it is in the box, no doubt,” said her ladyship, somewhat crossly, for she disliked to be troubled, especially in hot weather. “You have not searched properly, Hughes.”

“My lady,” answered Hughes, “I can trust my hands and I can trust my eyes, and they have all four been into every hole and crevice of the box.”

Lady Frances Chenevix laid down the *Morning Post*, and advanced. “Is the bracelet really lost?[]”

“It cannot be lost,” returned Lady Sarah. “You are sure you put it out, Alice?”

“I am quite sure of that. It was lying first in the case, and——”

“Yes, it was,” interrupted Hughes. “That was its place.”

“And was consequently the first that I took out,” continued Alice. “I put it on the table; and the others round it, nearer to me. Why, as a proof that it lay there——”

What was Alice going to add? Was she going to adduce as a proof that Gerard Hope had taken it up, and it had been a subject of conversation between them? If so, recollection came to her in time, and she faltered, and abruptly broke off. But a faint, horrible dread, to which she would not give a shape, came stealing over her, and her face turned white, and she sank on a chair, trembling visibly.

“Now look at Alice!” uttered Frances Chenevix: “she is going into one of her agitation fits.”

“Do not allow yourself to be agitated, Alice,” cried Lady Sarah; “that will do no good. Besides, I feel sure the bracelet is all safe in the case: where else can it be? Fetch the case, Hughes, and I will look for it myself.”

Hughes whisked out of the room, inwardly resenting the doubt cast on her eyesight.

“It is so strange,” mused Alice, “that you did not see the bracelet when you came up.”

“It was certainly not there,” returned Lady Sarah.

“Perhaps you’ll look for yourself now, my lady,” cried Hughes, returning with the jewel box in her hands.

The box was well searched. The bracelet was not there.

“This is very strange, Hughes,” uttered Lady Sarah.

“It’s very ugly as well, my lady,” answered Hughes, in a lofty tone, “and I’m thankful to the presiding genuses which rules such things, that I was not in charge when it happened. Though maybe, if I had been, it never would have took place, for I can give a guess how it was.”

“Then you had better,” said her ladyship curtly.

“If I do,” returned Hughes, “I shall offend Miss Seaton.”

“No you will not, Hughes,” cried Alice. “Say what you please: I have need to wish this cleared up.”

“Then, miss, if I may speak my thoughts, I think you must have left the key about. And there are strange servants in the house, you know, my lady; there’s that kitchen maid only came in it when we did, and there’s the new underbutler.”

“Hughes, you are wrong,” interrupted Alice. “The servants could not have touched the box, for the key never was out of my possession, and you know the lock is a Bramah. I locked the box last night in Lady Sarah’s presence, and the key was not out of my pocket afterwards, until you took it from thence this morning.”

“The key seems to have had nothing to do with it,” interposed Frances Chenevix. “Alice says she put the diamond bracelet on the table with the rest; Lady Sarah says when she went to the table, after dinner, it was not there: so it must have been in the intervening period that the—the—disappearance took place.”

“And only a few minutes to do it in!” ejaculated Lady Sarah. “What a mystery!”

“It beats conjuring, my lady,” said Hughes. “Could any visitor have come upstairs?”

“I did hear a visitor’s knock while we were at dinner,” said Lady Sarah. “Don’t you remember, Fanny? You looked up, as if you noticed it.”

“Did I?” answered Lady Frances, in a careless tone.

At that moment, Thomas happened to enter with a letter, and the question was put to him. Who knocked? His answer was ready.

“Sir George Danvers, my lady. When I said the Colonel was at dinner, Sir George began to apologize for calling, but I explained that you were dining earlier than usual, because of the opera.”

“Nobody else called?”

“Nobody knocked but Sir George, my lady.”

“A covert answer,” thought Alice; “but I am glad he is true to Gerard.”

“What an untruth!” thought Lady Frances, as she remembered the visit of Alice’s sister. “Thomas’s memory must be short.”

All the talk—and it was much prolonged—did not tend to throw any light upon the matter, and Alice, unhappy and ill, retired to her own room. The agitation had brought on a nervous and violent headache, and she sat down in a low chair, and bent her forehead onto her hands. One belief alone possessed her: that the unfortunate Gerard Hope had stolen the bracelet. Do as she would, she could not put it from her: she kept repeating that he was a gentleman, that he was honorable, that he would never place her in so painful a position. Common sense replied that the temptation was laid before him, and he had confessed his pecuniary difficulties to be great: nay, had he not wished for this very bracelet, that he might make money——

A knock at the door. Alice lifted her sickly countenance, and bade the intruder enter. It was Lady Frances Chenevix.

“I came to——Alice, how wretched you look! You will torment yourself into a fever.”

“Can you wonder at my looking wretched?” returned Alice. “Place yourself in my position, Frances: it must appear to Lady Sarah as if I—I—had made away with the bracelet. I am sure Hughes thinks so.”

“Don’t say unorthodox things, Alice. They would rather think that I had done it, of the two, for I have more use for diamond bracelets than you.”

“It is kind of you to try to cheer me,” sighed Alice.

“Just the thing I came to do. And to have a bit of chat with you as well. If you will let me.”

“Of course I will let you.”

“I wish to tell you I will not mention that your sister was here last evening. I promise you I will not.”

Alice did not immediately reply. The words and their hushed tone caused a new trouble to arise within her, one which she had not glanced at. Was it possible that Lady Frances could imagine her sister to be the——

“Lady Frances Chenevix!” burst forth Alice, “you cannot think it! She! my sister—guilty of a despicable theft! Have you forgotten that she moves in your own position in the world? that our family is scarcely inferior to yours?”

“Alice, I forgive your so misjudging me, because you are not yourself just now. Of course your sister cannot be suspected; I know that. But as you did not mention her when they were talking of who had been here, I supposed you did not wish her name dragged into so unpleasant an affair, and I hastened up to say there was no danger from me that it would be.”

“Believe me, she is not the guilty party,” returned Alice, “and I have more cause to say so than you think for.”

“What do you mean by that,” briskly cried Lady Frances. “You surely have no clue?”

Alice shook her head, and her companion’s eagerness was lulled again. “It is well that Thomas was forgetful,” remarked Lady Frances. “Was it really forgetfulness, Alice, or did you contrive to telegraph him to be silent?”

“Thomas only spoke truth. At least, as regards my sister,” she hastily added, “for he did not let her in.”

“Then it is all quite easy; and you and I can keep our own counsel.”

Quite easy, possibly, to the mind of Frances Chenevix, but anything but easy to Alice; for the words of Lady Frances had introduced an idea more repulsive, and terrifying even, than the one which cast the guilt to the door of Gerard Hope. Her sister acknowledged that she was in need of money, “a hundred pounds, or so,” and Alice had seen her coming from the back room where the jewels lay. Still—*she* take a bracelet! it was preposterous.

Preposterous or not, Alice’s torment was doubled. Which of the two had been the black sheep? One of them it must have been. Instinct, sisterly relationship, reason, and common sense, all combined to turn the scale against Gerard. But that there should be a doubt at all, was not pleasant, and Alice started up impulsively and put her bonnet on.

“Where now?” cried Lady Frances.

“I will go to my sister’s and ask her—and ask her—if—she saw any stranger here—any suspicious person in the hall or on the stairs,” stammered Alice, making the best excuse she could.

“But you know you were in the drawing rooms all the time, and no one came in to them, suspicious or unsuspecting; so how will that aid you?”

“True,” murmured Alice, “but it will be a relief to go somewhere or do something.”

Alice found her sister at home. The latter instantly detected that something was wrong, for the suspense, illness, and agitation had taken every vestige of color from her cheeks and lips.

“Whatever is the matter, Alice?” was her greeting; “you look just like a walking ghost.”

“I felt that I did,” breathed poor Alice, “and I kept my veil down in the street, lest I might be taken for one, and scare the people. A great misfortune has fallen upon me. You saw those bracelets last night, spread out on the table?”

“Yes.”

“They were in my charge, and one of them has been abstracted. It was of great value; gold links, holding diamonds.”

“Abstracted!” uttered the elder sister, in both concern and surprise, but certainly without the smallest indications of a guilty knowledge. “How?”

“It is a mystery. I only left the room when I met you on the staircase, and when I went upstairs to fetch the letter for you. Directly after you left, Lady Sarah came up from dinner, and the bracelet was not there.”

“It is incredible, Alice. And no one else entered the room at all, you say? No servant? no——”

“Not anyone,” interrupted Alice, determined not to speak of Gerard Hope.

“Then, child, it is simply impossible,” was the calm rejoinder. “It must have fallen on the ground, or been mislaid in some way.”

“It is hopelessly gone. Do you remember seeing it?”

“I do remember seeing, amidst the rest, a bracelet set with diamonds, but only on the clasp, I think. It——”

“That was another; that is all safe. This was of fine gold links interspersed with brilliants. Did you see it?”

“Not that I remember. I was there scarcely a minute, for I had only strolled into the back room just before you came down. To tell you the truth, Alice, my mind was too fully occupied with other things, to take much notice even of jewels. Do not look so perplexed: it will be all right. Only you and I were in the room, you say, and we could not take it.”

“Oh!” exclaimed Alice, clasping her hands, and lifting up her white beseeching face to her sister’s, “did you take it? In—in sport; or in—— Oh! surely you were not tempted to take it for anything else? You said you had need of money.”

“Alice, are we going to have one of your old scenes of excitement? Strive for calmness. I am sure you do not know what you are implying. My poor child, I would rather help you to jewels than take them from you.”

“But look at the mystery.”

“It does appear to be a mystery, but it will no doubt be cleared up. Alice, what could you have been dreaming of, to suspect me? Have we not grown up together in our honorable home? You ought to know me, if anyone does.”

“And you really know nothing of it?” moaned Alice, with a sobbing catching of the breath.

“Indeed I do not. In truth I do not. If I could help you out of your perplexity I would thankfully do it. Shall I return with you and assist you to search for the bracelet?”

“No, thank you. Every search had been made.”

Not only was the denial of her sister fervent and calm, but her manner and countenance conveyed the impression of truth. Alice left her, inexpressibly relieved; but the conviction, that it must have been Gerard, returned to her in full force. “I wish I could see him!” was her mental exclamation.

And for once fortune favored her wish. As she was dragging her weary limbs along, he came right upon her at the corner of a street. In her eagerness, she clasped his arm with both her hands.

“I am so thankful,” she uttered. “I wanted to see you.”

“I think you most want to see a doctor, Alice. How ill you look!”

“I have cause,” she returned. “That bracelet, the diamond, that you were admiring last evening, it has been stolen; it was taken from the room.”

“Taken—when?” echoed Mr. Hope, looking her full in the face—as a guilty man would scarcely dare to look.

“Then, or within a few minutes. When Lady Sarah came up from dinner, it was not there.”

“Who took it?” he repeated, not yet recovering his surprise.

“I don’t know,” she faintly said. “It was under my charge. No one else was there.”



“You do not wish me to understand that *you* are suspected?” he burst forth, with genuine feeling. “Their unjust meanness cannot have gone to that length!”

“I trust not, but I am very unhappy. Who could have done it? How could it have gone? I left the room when you did, but I only lingered outside on the stairs, watching—if I may tell the truth—whether you got out safely, and then I returned to it. Yet when Lady Sarah came up from dinner, it was gone.”

“And did no one else go into the room?” he repeated. “I met a lady at the door, who asked for you; I sent her upstairs.”

“She went in for a minute. It was my sister, Gerard.”

“Oh! indeed, was that your sister? Then she counts as we do, for nobody, in this. It is strange. The bracelet was in the room when I left it——”

“You are sure of it?” interrupted Alice, drawing a long breath of suspense.

“I am. When I reached the door, I turned round to take a last look at you, and the diamonds of that particular bracelet gleamed at me from its place on the table.”

“O Gerard! is this the truth?”

“It is the truth, on my scared word of honor,” he replied, looking at her agitated face and wondering at her words. “Why else should I say it? Good-by, Alice, I can’t stay another moment, for there’s somebody coming I don’t want to meet.”

He was off like a shot, but his words and manner, like her sister’s, had conveyed their conviction of innocence to the mind of Alice. She stood still, looking after him in her dreamy wonderment, and was jostled by the passersby. *Which* of the two was the real delinquent? one of them it must have been.

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