

The Diamond Coterie.

Constance laughed. "So far as I am concerned," she replied. "Mr. Belknap is a detective; let him find out things as you seem to do."

"I don't find out anything, more's the pity," she replied; then hesitating slightly over the question, "May I rely on your aunt?"

"I think you will. Now there is one thing more I want to say, for reasons which no doubt you will know in good time, to see or hear the report of Mr. Jerry Belknap, private detective. This I will do for you, if you wish."

"Constance looked perplexed, and hesitated in her answer. "You distrust Mr. Belknap," she said finally. "I thought—"

"You jump at conclusions," he interrupted; "a detective's motives must be taken for granted. It is not distrust that causes me to ask this favor; it is not that I tell you my reason without unravelling a long web, and it is not time to begin the process, I am sure, in the realm of conjecture. So you won't help me to the result of Mr. Belknap's investigation, Miss Wardour? I am sorry; it would save time for me, for I am only intended to find it out for you."

"Constance smiled in spite of her fear; she admired this man's cool way of mastering the situation; she felt that it would be policy to let him have his way, since he would take it whether she would or no. But the imp of caprice had not quite deserted her, and now he looked at her with a certain defiance. Looking up, suddenly, she asked: "Mr. Belknap, why did you ask me if I suspected who stole my diamonds?"

"I didn't," smiling oddly. "Constance started. "I asked if you guessed who the robbers were?"

"But—," she began; but the detective drawing a step nearer, and speaking in a guarded tone, interrupts her, "I am satisfied that you were robbed on Saturday night, Miss Wardour; I am sure that you have no clue to the burglars; no suspicion as to their identity; but I am not so sure that you do not know precisely where to look for the Wardour diamonds at this moment."

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