

The Robbery at Forwood Chase.

CHAPTER II.—Continued.

The Major led the way in silence across the hall, up a wide, branching staircase, along a short corridor, and entered a room at the extreme end. It was a large, luxuriously furnished chamber, with two windows in it. Two doors—one on each side of the windows—opened out of it.

"This is my wife's dressing-room," said the Major, opening the door on the right-hand side. "Mine is across the corridor."

The detective walked in and looked round. It was a small, pleasant, sunny room, evidently a lady's, with nothing special about it, except an enormous ventilator in the wall above the rather small window. Mr. Hilton walked out again without making any remark. The Major looked at him somewhat grimly, and then opened the door on the left side of the window. This room was much smaller than the first. There was nothing in it but the safe, built in the recess of the wall, a writing-table with an untidy pile of account-books and papers, a gun in the corner, and two or three chairs and a table. The window, like the others, was very small, with diamond-shaped lattice panes; and above it, rather high up, was an opening of the Major's pet ventilators. It opened on the outside wall with large double valves of ornamental iron-work worked by a cord and pulleys. They were not of much use, for the fresh-air-loving Major kept his ventilator open day and night. The detective took a long and deliberate survey, and asked a number of what the Major thought very frivolous questions. There was not much to be "made" out of the room. It was too scantily furnished to hide anything.

"You seem fond of fresh air, sir," remarked Mr. Hilton, looking up at the big ventilator, through which the evening breeze was blowing in pretty freshly.

"Yes," agreed the Major cordially, "I am." And he went to the window and tried the cord. "It is a fortunate thing, too, for I broke the spring of this ventilator last week, and now I cannot shut it at all. My wife grumbles, and says we shall be blown away some day; but I will risk that."

"They left the bed-room and returned to the library."

"And now, Mr. Hilton," said the Major, "do you think you have anything to work upon?"

"I had from the first," answered the detective.

"And what are your conclusions? To what and whom do they point?"

"Pardon me, sir; the time has not yet arrived for a reply. Suspicious go for nothing. When I am able to come to you with a proof in my hands which cannot be gainsaid, then your question shall be answered."

"But how can you obtain this proof? How will you go to work?"

The detective answered by a counter-question.

"Did I understand you to say the servants' boxes had been searched?"

"Yes. In fact, they sent the housekeeper to say they wished it, directly the loss of the jewels was known. Much against my will, the police turned them out."

"Can you find an opening for a fresh servant in any capacity without exciting remark?" he asked.

Major Forwood did not answer immediately. He looked down in grave deliberation.

"Do I understand you aright?" he said at last. "You wish to place a confederate in the house—a spy, in fact?"

"Yes," replied the other. "It is a necessity indeed if you wish to find the stolen jewelry; for it is evident the robbery has been committed by some one inside the house."

The Major was silent again.

"I do not like it," he said, with evident reluctance; "but for Miss Tresham's sake the mystery must be cleared up. Of course I could take on a fresh servant without exciting remark. Indeed we have talked of getting another man-servant. We have only the butler at present."

"A footman—for I suppose that is what you want—shall apply to-morrow in due form. One word of caution, Major Forwood. It will assist my plans materially if none in the house but yourself knows who he is."

"Very well," agreed the Major. "I do not like it; but I suppose it is a necessity."

"One thing more," continued Mr. Hilton, rising and taking his hat. "I should like to see Miss Tresham and the clerk from Storr and Mortimer's before I go—accidentally, of course. Can you manage it?"

"I will see what I can do if you will come with me; though, as far as Miss Tresham is concerned, it—"

"I do not suspect Miss Tresham in the least," interposed the inscrutable detective; "I merely wish to see her."

Fortune favored him. As they were leaving the room, Simpson the clerk entered. He was a good-looking young man, rather effeminate in appearance, but with an open, honest countenance that spoke in his favor.

Major Forwood addressed him by name,

putting some trivial question to him, while the astute detective mentally took his measure.

"Weak as water," was the verdict—"not the kind to commit a robbery."

Edith was coming up the front-door steps with Archie Lorrimer as Major Forwood and the detective entered the hall. She had recovered her spirits, and was laughing merrily at some joke of Archie's.

As they mounted the steps, a young girl in a simple merino dress, and one of the pretty little piquant caps that serve for wear, appeared at the top. As she glanced up and caught sight of Archie, she thought he had never seen any one so lovely. Framed in the golden hair, way, the sun shining on her nose and pink and lighting up the delicate coloring of her lovely face, and smiling in the dreamy, dark-lashed eyes, she was like a picture.

"What a beautiful girl!" he exclaimed involuntarily.

"Yes. Is she not?" said Edith. "That is Ida's new maid."

"I have never seen such an exquisite face," said Archie, watching the girl as she came down the steps.

"Yes. Is it not? She looks like the heroine of a novel. She is rather a rōtch of mine, for, with all her beauty, she is the greatest dunce possible; and I am teaching her to read and write. What is it, Alice?"—as the girl came down the steps.

"A note for you, miss," she said, in a voice like music, handing the missive to Miss Tresham. "Is there any answer?"

Edith opened her note, while Archie stood looking at the girl. Her wonderful beauty fascinated him. Never before had he seen anything to compare with the perfection of her features and coloring, the beauty of her large dreamy eyes, the radiant golden hair, and the grace of her tall slight figure.

"There is no answer," said Edith, putting the note back into the envelope; and the girl turned quietly and went into the house.

"By Jove, what a beauty!" exclaimed Archie.

"Yes; but she is the most arrant little stupid," said Edith. "Here is George."

At that moment Major Forwood and the detective appeared in the doorway. Major Forwood came forward to meet Archie.

"A thousand welcomes, Archie!" he said heartily. "I am very glad to see you. Didn't the carriage meet you at the station?"

"Yes. But I preferred walking, and was rewarded by finding Miss Tresham in the wood," answered Archie. "She has been telling me all about this extraordinary robbery. A precious set of duffers your local police must be, George, to pitch upon her as a suspicious character!"

"One cannot expect the wisdom of Solomon under a country policeman's blue coat," said the Major laughingly.

"They had some cause for suspicion, too," put in Edith; "but now that you have come to the rescue, Mr. Lorrimer, I carry my iniquities very lightly."

While she was speaking, the quiet stranger in the background watched her keenly, taking in every word and gesture, and noticing the easy unconscious bearing, the clear, frank look of the blue eyes, and straightforward, ingenuous expression of the beautiful refined face.

"Not the sort of girl to commit a robbery," he decided in his quiet observant way. "The mystery deepens."

A few minutes afterwards he had left the house, telling Major Forwood at parting that his confederate would be on the scene the next day.

He went straight to the station, where he sent a message that considerably puzzled the telegraph clerk; after which Mr. Hilton returned to the village, strolled about leisurely till rather a late hour, then went to the pretty little inn, "The Angler's Rest," and inquired if they could accommodate him there for a few days. He had heard that there was good trout fishing in the neighborhood, he said, and wanted to try his luck. The landlord placed two pleasant rooms at his disposal, and the quiet stranger took up his abode at the inn, and gave himself up with intense devotion to the mysteries of fly-fishing.

CHAPTER III.

A week passed away. The new man-servant had come, his credentials having been found irreproachable.

He was a pleasant, merry-faced little man with bright black eyes, sharp as a needle, skilful in his duties, and respectful in his manners. Young Mrs. Forwood was loud in his praise. He was voted a great acquisition to the servants' hall, where he would chat away by the hour together with the greatest freedom, and in the most confidential and insinuating manner.

Nothing was heard of the stolen jewelry. The Chase was turned inside out. Great placards offering large rewards were distributed everywhere. The police were in a ferment, scouring the country, now on one scent, now on another, telegraphing from Yorkshire Land's End, and from Land's End to Greta Green, in the wildest manner, and all without result. Not a trace of the lost jewelry was to be found.

Things were anything but pleasant at the Chase. The house was full of mystery; suspicion seemed to lurk in every

corner; prying and listening were the order of the day. From the highest to the lowest of everyone seemed to be struck with a sort of amateur detective fever, and prying glances, as if the case steps might be found hidden round the

of jewelry.

Next Mr. Forwood and Archie Lorrimer determined efforts to ignore the mystery, and went out shooting each morning with a formidable array of guns, dogs, and gamekeepers; but the subject of the stolen jewels cropped up persistently; and the result was two pheasants one day, and three rabbits the next.

Mrs. Forwood and her sister went out for a drive in the pony-carriage; and Edith came back in a state of dreadful distress, and Mrs. Forwood furious with indignation. Passing through the village, an idle crowd of loafing lads and men recognized them. Edith was pointed out, and remarks of "That's her!" "She has stolen the diamonds!" "The Major daren't let it go no further!" reached their ears. Mrs. Forwood drove through it all in supreme contempt, but Edith's tears fell fast and thick.

One afternoon, Archie, taking a quiet stroll in the shrubbery with his cigar, came upon Mr. Hilton, sitting on a bench, apparently in deep contemplation of a yew-tree fashioned in the form of a tea-pot before him. By this time Archie was in the secret of his profession, and had come to the conclusion that he did not improve upon acquaintance.

"Good afternoon," he said pleasantly, taking his seat also on the bench. "I suppose nothing has turned up with regard to the robbery?"

Mr. Hilton transferred his gaze from the evergreen tea-pot to Archie's face, and looked at him intently for a minute or two without answering.

"What is the matter?" said Archie, laughing. "Do you think you will find the solution of the mystery in my nose or eyes?"

"I was wondering if you could keep a secret," returned the detective gravely.

"Yes; I think I can," replied Archie, opening his eyes. "Will you try me?"

"Yes, I will," answered the other. "You will understand, sir, that my aim in regard to the stolen jewelry is not only to fix upon the thief, but to bring forward such absolute proofs of guilt as no one can doubt. Suspicions, however strong, are not sufficient to go upon, or else I had finished my task long ago."

"I understand," said Archie—"you want to be absolutely sure of the culprit."

"Well, sir, the difficulty lies in this. The jewelry is taken from a room to which it seems perfectly impossible that the only two people who can have stolen it would get access."

"And those two people are—"

"Simpson the clerk and Miss Tresham."

"But I understood your suspicions did not rest upon Miss Tresham at all?" said Archie, flushing.

"They did not. I will go so far as to say that, if it were possible to fix the guilt on any one else, I should still be of the same opinion."

"Why not say the same of Simpson the clerk?"

"For the very obvious reason, that, if he had wished to steal the jewelry, he could have managed it much more easily by making off with the entire box and its contents on the journey back from here to London. He would have had plenty of time to get away before an alarm could be raised, and he would have scarcely a single impediment in the way. No; it is clear to my mind that the clerk is not the guilty party. As to Miss Tresham, the whole affair is wrapped in mystery."

"What mystery?" exclaimed Archie hotly. "She could no more have got through two locked doors than the clerk could, and I tell you it is simply ridiculous to suspect her," he added, fuming with indignation.

"And I tell you I did not suspect her at first," said Mr. Hilton with emphasis; "and for this reason. If she had stolen the jewel—"

"Archie kicked his feet about in disgust. "I say, if she had taken them, she would not have left the pearl necklace and earrings on her dressing-table for the first person who came into the room to find."

"Then what in Heaven's name do you suspect her for now?" cried Archie wrathfully.

"I said that, as regards Miss Tresham, the whole affair is wrapped in mystery," persisted Mr. Hilton calmly; "and the mystery gets more unintelligible every day. See here, sir."

While speaking the detective had drawn from his pocket a small parcel wrapped in tissue paper. He unfolded the paper, and displayed, lying on some cotton wool, a large locket set with diamonds and rubies in a very peculiar but beautiful design—a serpent lying in a ring, with a star in the centre.

"Well," said Archie, "I see it is a locket; what of that?"

"Everything. It is one of the lockets that were among the stolen jewelry. I have a full description of every article the case contained; and this locket is specially mentioned on account of the size and purity of the gems and peculiarity of its design."

"Where did you get it?" asked Archie.

"At White's—the jeweller's at Normanston. Last Tuesday, a tall lady, close-

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