

## The Robbery at Forwood Chase.

### CHAPTER III.—Continued.

"Then you may dismiss it at once as simply ridiculous," declared Archie in great wrath; and then there was some minutes' silence.

The detective took to studying the evergreen tea-pot again, while Archie fumed with righteous indignation. Presently the detective spoke again, his voice grave, but persistent as ever.

"I have had this matter placed in my hands to elucidate," he said, "and I mean to do it if possible. I never suggest a thing without some motive. In my own mind there are already formed the links of a chain to which I have just given you the clue. I hope my suspicions may be found to be erroneous."

"Of course they will!" retorted Archie. "Why, I would not believe it if she told me so herself!"

"I suppose you have heard of such a thing as kleptomania?" said the detective drily.

"Heard of a fiddlestick!" ejaculated Archie, in huge contempt. "Yes I have."

"That is what I meant," explained Mr. Hilton calmly, "and I think I am not mistaken."

Archie took his way back to the house. The idea of Edith Tresham being a victim of kleptomania amused him immensely. He could not forget it, and during the afternoon and evening started Major Forwood several times by suddenly breaking into a peal of laughter without any apparent cause.

### CHAPTER IV.

Mr. Archie Lorrimer was always incorrigibly late in going to bed. On this night he sat even longer than usual, and, when the clock struck the half hour after twelve, was still chatting and smoking his cigar with the most leisurely deliberation. At last the Major, in sheer despair, seized him by the shoulders and marched him upstairs *volens volens*. But Archie was too wide awake to dream of bed. Arrived in his own room, he merely changed his coat for a dressing-gown, turned down the gas, drew up the blind, sat down near the window, and began to think of Edith's fair face and sweet eyes, recalling the soft blush that rose so often in her cheeks under his glance, and wondering if it were possible for a man to marry on eight hundred a year and expectations.

"She is such an awfully jolly girl!" he murmured with a sigh. What a pity she cannot do without gowns and bonnets, and the other rubbish that milliners make bills of! I don't know whether she has any money, and I don't care. She is quite enough of herself. Little darling! It seems preposterous of me to think of marrying, but— Hang it all," he concluded, as, for the fifteenth time, he calculated his income, "I can't afford it, but I shall ask her? Perhaps something may turn up; who knows?"

"By Jove, how late it is!" he exclaimed, standing up with a yawn, and stretching his arms over his head. "How the time steals on when one is thinking!"

He was on the point of turning up the gas, when a low whistle, which seemed to proceed from the shrubs under his window, caught his ear, and, in half a second, a window on the ground floor was cautiously opened. Silently stepping on to the balcony outside his own window, Archie looked out. A man stood among the shrubs, below the window-sill.

"How late you are!" said the man. "I have been waiting this two hours."

"I dared not come before," returned a woman's voice inside the room. "They never went to bed till half-past twelve; and I had to wait till all fear of danger was over."

"Where are the jewels?" asked the man.

"Hush!" whispered the woman, so low that, strain his ears as he would, Archie could barely catch what she said. "I could not get them—I could not get them indeed. There has not been a chance."

"Confound you! Haven't you brought them after all?"

"No; I could not," said the woman earnestly. "There is such prying and suspicion in the house, I have had no opportunity; besides, the master and mistress have gone to sleep in another room since the robbery, and—"

"Why, then it is all the easier for you to get the jewelry," grumbled the man, in his louder tones. "Don't tell me you cannot; you have both keys; you've nothing to do but choose your own time and go into the room and bring the jewelry away."

"But I tell you I dare not." And the woman's voice was full of entreaty and fear. "In the day-time it is impossible; and it is not so easy to get away undiscovered from a room where another person is sleeping in the same bed with you. Eliza awoke to-night just as I opened the door, and I had to tell her my face was aching again, and I had left the bottle of laudanum in the kitchen, and was going to fetch it. Besides, there's a new manservant come, and I can't make him out; he seems to be always where one least expects him. He nearly caught me on Tuesday."

"Well, it's your own look-out when you do it; but, if you haven't the swag here

all ready on Thursday night, it will be all the worse for you, my girl!" And the man swore a fearful oath.

"Oh, hush—lo hush, father!" cried the girl. "Suppose we are overheard?"

"Rubbish! Who's to hear when the whole house is as dark and silent as the grave?" returned the man. "Where is the money you got for the locket on Tuesday? My, you did look a swell in that rig-out! When I saw you coming along the street, I thought it was Miss Tresham herself. Suppose you had met her?"

"I did," said the woman's voice quietly, "but she did not see me. Here is the money, father—ten pounds."

"Ten pounds! Is that all? Why, the locket's worth fifty pounds! What a thief that White must be!"

"'Twas all he would give," said the woman. "He looked very suspicious as it was. Are you sure you have not been seen or recognised, father? That London detective is still at 'The Angler's Rest.'"

"Yes; I met him yesterday;" and the man began to laugh. "It was a rare lark. He did not know me from Adam. He little thought the country bumpkin in the smock-frock and carter's hat was his old friend Dodging Dick!"

"I wish you would be more cautious, father," urged the girl.

"Nonsense. I'm safe enough. But it's time to be off. And now you just mind. You be all ready to fly on Thursday night, or look to yourself."

"Very well. I'll do my best. But I dare not get the jewelry away till just before the time, for fear they search our boxes again; and, if I cannot leave the bed-room without exciting suspicion—"

"Can't you have the toothache again?" interrupted the man roughly. "You be all ready, or—" And the man again swore a terrific oath.

In another minute the window was shut down softly; and Archie, stretching himself over the balcony railing, saw the shadow of a man stealing slowly away along the wall of the house.

"He is off safe enough, but I shall just have time to intercept the woman as she comes up-stairs," thought Archie, as he went back to his own room; and, opening the door quietly, he passed out on to the silent landing, and took up his station at the head of the stairs.

But to no purpose. The woman did not come, and Archie had forgotten the back stairs. After waiting a quarter of an hour in the silence and darkness, he went back to his room.

"What is to be done now?" he thought, in some disgust. "It is of no use arousing the whole household, for the woman, is, of course, in bed by this time. I could not tell who it is, and she is not likely to convict herself. I must wait till to-morrow." And Archie, giving a tremendous yawn, began to divest himself of his coat and waistcoat. "Where the deuce can the jewels be hid?" he ejaculated, stopping short, with his arms half in and half out of his waistcoat. "The Major's dressing-room has all been turned out till nothing but the four bare walls remain; and yet the woman distinctly said they were there. Where can they be?"

### CHAPTER V., AND LAST.

"Where can they be?" It was the morning of the next day. Archie and Major Forwood were standing in the book-room, gazing rather helplessly at the four walls, the green-and-black painted doors of the safe, the table, two chairs, and a large empty book-rack, which formed the only articles of furniture in the little room.

"You must have been mistaken, Archie, in what the woman said; there is absolutely nothing in the room but the chairs, the table, and the book-rack."

"I am sure I was not," said Archie positively. "The woman distinctly said the jewels were still in the book-room, and she would have to come here to get them. But it is queer. They are certainly not visible to mortal eyes."

"Are you sure you were not dreaming?" inquired the Major sceptically.

"No, of course not," retorted Archie crossly. "It is likely I should be such an idiot!"

There was a short silence.

"I do not see anything for it, then, but to wait till to-morrow night," said Major Forwood at length. "I must tell Hilton, and have a watch set on the room."

"I wish," began Archie, and then paused a moment.

"Well?" asked the Major.

"I wish you would not tell Hilton at all," replied Archie. "I wish you would let us manage by ourselves alone."

"But why?" exclaimed Major Forwood, lifting his eyebrows. "It would be much safer to tell Hilton."

"I do not see it. Surely you and I are sufficient for one man and woman?"

"But why should he not be told?"

"I want to give him a lesson, and to send him back to London with his confounded cool impudence and self-sufficiency taken down a peg or two," said Archie, with a vision of Edith and the detective's theory of kleptomania in his eyes.

"It would be a joke, after all," returned the Major, laughing in huge delight, "to steal a march on the sharpest detective in the service, and not only discover the thief who stole the jewels, but get the jewels themselves. It would be a feather in our caps. And, as you say, surely we

two are a match for one woman and a man.

"Will you agree to it then?" said Archie eagerly. "We will not reveal what we know to any one, and make our own plans. How I shall enjoy the discomfiture of the astute Mr. Hilton when the game is won under his very nose!"

"Yes, yes; I agree," cried the Major, as delighted as any schoolboy at the prospect of a piece of mischief. "What a joke it will be!"

The next half hour was spent in arranging their plans and providing against any chance of failure.

When all was quiet, about eleven o'clock the next night, Archie took up his station in the book-room. He had put on an old shooting-coat and a pair of carpet slippers, and had provided himself with pistols in case of need.

He lighted the gas, but turned it down to the lowest possible speck, put a dark shade over the globe, left the room door slightly ajar, and sat down in a position to command a full view of both it and the bed-room.

The hours passed. Twelve o'clock, one, two, rang out from the clock in the hall, the chimes sounding eerie and dismal in the large silent house. Archie began to get tired. Though in nowise given to superstition, holding ghosts and ghost-seers in the most sublime contempt, it was not a very pleasant sensation to be seated alone at the stillest hours of the night waiting for he knew not what.

Three o'clock struck—a quarter-past. Archie was beginning to get impatient.

"I will just wait till the half hour strikes," he muttered, "though it is evidently of no use, for it will be daylight in half an hour. I wonder if the woman suspected, and has been beforehand with us."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when a slight sound of a door-handle clicking struck his ear. It was very slight. Then came a pause, so long that Archie thought he must have been mistaken as to the sound.

In spite of his courage, his heart beat faster. Was he going to find out something at last? Would it be his fate to solve the mystery of the stolen jewels? With breathless eagerness he waited. He seemed to hear his heart beating. His senses felt strung to the highest pitch.

Again the door-handle clicked, this time louder and more sharply, then it was turned very slowly and cautiously; and a moment or two after a dark shadow appeared in the doorway. Archie waited till the figure had come fairly into the room; then, half closing the door, he stood with his back to it in the shade. Through the darkness of the room he could dimly see a woman's figure clad in dark clothes.

Without any pause or hesitation, she went to the table, which stood near to the small window of the room, gave it a push, till it was quite close underneath, and, by the help of a chair, climbed on to the top of it.

Archie watched this curious proceeding with breathless astonishment, which did not abate when the woman put up her hand to the ventilator above the window, and, giving a vigorous tug, caused the large door of ornamental iron-work to swing forward, disclosing the box-like aperture in the wall. She put her hand into the recess and drew something out, which she stooped to place on the table.

Without waiting for any more, Archie sprang across the room, tore the shade away from the globe, and turned the gas full on, flooding the room with a blaze of light. With a sudden cry, the woman sprang from the table, and, before him her lovely face blanched to startled whiteness, her violet eyes wild and terrified, Archie saw Mrs. Forwood's maid, the beautiful young girl he had seen and noticed on the first day of his arrival at the Chase.

In another moment she had fallen on her knees before him.

"Do not betray me—do not betray me!" she gasped, rather than spoke, raising her hands in supplication. "I will give up the jewels—I will!"

"So you are the thief!" interrupted Archie, sternly. "Get up. Do not kneel to me."

She did not move.

"Sir, promise me you will not betray me," she implored in an agony of terror. "For the love of Heaven, do not betray me!"

"I promise nothing," he said, heartily wishing it had not been his fate to discover the thief. "Get up from you knees and—"

"Have you captured the thief?" interrupted a voice; and the Major, who had been posted on guard in the corridor, pushed open the door and came in. "I saw some one go softly past me and enter this room. 'Good Heavens! It is not you, Alice?' as he took in the tableau before him. 'You are not the thief?'"

The girl stood before them, shamefaced, stricken with an agony of guilt and fear.

"She is indeed," said Archie. "I took her in the act. The jewels are hidden inside the ventilator. See;" and he climbed upon the table and brought down one of the small jewel-trays, with a costly set of opals lying on the cotton wool.

"Oh, Alice, I am sorry!" was all the Major said, looking reproachfully at the girl.

Her eyes filled with tears; she threw herself down again before them.

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