

SWEET IS REVENGE.

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CHAPTER XV.—A STRANGE ROBBERY.

Breakfast at the abbey was somewhat later than usual next morning. Sir Danvers, hale and rosy-cheeked, was the first to enter the room, in his hands a packet of letters he had just taken from the mail bag. Meg and Ethel came next, the latter looking pale and tired, as if from the effects of a sleepless night; the former bright and buoyant and filled with hope for the future. The poor relation followed, and they were presently joined by Lord Hector, who had been walking in the park, and by the captain, bland and smiling; whilst finally Mrs. Crayworth, her complexion toned down to suit the morning light came tripping in with apologetic speeches on her lips for her tardy arrival.

"Must you really leave us today?" Ethel asked, turning to Lord Hector.

"I fear so. I want to catch the mid-day train."

"Lady Fothergille is not the only one who will regret you," remarked the widow with a glance under her eyes at Sir Danvers, "we shall all miss you."

"I will drive you over to the station," said the captain, his eyes fixed on the tablecloth.

"You are very kind, but don't let me trouble you unless you are coming in that direction."

"I think you said you would return soon," Meg remarked.

"Yes," replied Lord Hector, addressing himself to his hostess, "I shall have to pay another visit to the mines in the course of a week, and if I might return here for a day or two it would give me great pleasure."

"We shall be delighted if you will," she replied, looking to her husband for corroboration.

"Of course, of course you will come here," said Sir Danvers, thinking that when the time came Lord Hector would find his host and hostess absent.

"Thanks. I shall have something to look forward to," Maynes answered glancing at Ethel. Sir Danvers followed his gaze and winced.

At that moment a footman entered and approached his mistress. "If you please, my lady—that is it she may, my lady—beg pardon—"

"What is it?" she asked, noticing the man's agitation.

"Beg your ladyship's pardon, but your maid wants to see you particular—very particular."

"Has anything happened?" she asked in surprise.

"No, my lady—that is, yes, my lady, she wishes to see your ladyship."

"Send her here," she said, some sense of trouble falling on her.

With evident relief the man departed, and a moment later Lady Fothergille's maid appeared at the door, her face agitated, traces of tears in her eyes.

"What is it, Clegg?" Ethel asked.

"Oh, please, my lady, I've got such a fright. I beg pardon for disturbing you, but have you taken your diamonds?"

"My diamonds—no."

"Then they are gone," said the girl, bursting into tears, "and the cases are empty."

"Gone," said Sir Danvers. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, please, Sir Danvers," cried Clegg, trembling with fright, "I don't know where they are. When her ladyship took them off last night I put them in their cases, and left them on the dressing table ready to be locked up this morning. Today, when I took them up they seemed so light I opened them and saw the diamonds were gone!"

"Good heavens! Can it be possible they are stolen? Why, they are worth forty thousand pounds!"

"Another jewel robbery," remarked the captain. "The burglars have made a decent haul."

"They cannot have been stolen by burglars, or you would have heard them enter your rooms, Ethel."

"They might have taken them in my absence," she replied.

"Your absence?" her husband cried out, the color fading from his cheeks.

"Yes. When I dismissed Clegg last night, I felt restless and sleepless. I therefore wrapped myself in a dressing gown and came down to the library in search of a book, but remained there because I could not decide which I should carry back with me."

"How long were you away from your rooms?" Sir Danvers asked in a trembling voice, his eyes turned on her.

"For over an hour. On my return I saw the jewel cases on the dressing-table, but didn't open them."

Sir Danvers covered his face with one hand. A wild sea of troubled thoughts was raging in his mind; despair and hope, doubt and trust, rose to the surface continually. For awhile the disappearance of the family diamonds was forgotten in the terrible fear that he had lost what was dearer to him than all wealth.

"Do you remember if the windows of your rooms were open or shut?" the captain asked.

"One of them was open. I supposed Clegg wished to admit the cool air; the night was close."

"Please, my lady, I didn't open it," replied the maid.

"Then someone did," remarked Capt. Fothergille, "and for the purpose of effecting this robbery. Danvers, you must send for the police at once."

"Of course," answered the baronet dreamily. "You may go," he said to the maid, "and tell Jones to drive over to Hayton and bring the sergeant and the constable back with him."

"Yes, Sir Danvers," the girl answered with a frightened air as she left the room.

"Under the circumstances I shall postpone my departure until late in the afternoon," said Lord Hector.

"Why should you?" asked Ethel. "You cannot throw any light on the robbery."

"No, but I may be able to make some suggestions; and my presence may be desirable in case the police wish to ask questions."

"Meanwhile we are losing time," remarked the captain. "Let us examine Lady Fothergille's rooms, and the ground

underneath her windows; we may be able to find evidence that will place us on the proper track."

"It's just as I expected, Danvers," the captain said, as they examined the garden, where they found traces of footmarks and a ladder half hidden by some laurel bushes, "the burglars have been here, and carried off their booty. It's my opinion they are a well organized gang, who carefully lay their plans and sweep in their prizes with as much assurance as I might draw in my stakes at the table. Why there's scarce a county family in England with anything to lose that hasn't suffered from their visits."

"It's strange," remarked Maynes, "they should come here the night Lady Fothergille wore the family jewels."

"Pooh, not at all strange. The fellows have agents all over the country; they heard Sir Danvers was giving a dinner party, and naturally concluded Lady Fothergille would wear the well-known diamonds. It's as clear as daylight."

"But how did they know her rooms, or come to the knowledge that she was absent from them?" Maynes persisted.

"Bah. They don't do their work by halves. Their first step would be to find which suite she occupied. The fact of her going away and leaving the jewels on the dressing table was merely a bit of that devil's luck which always helps such fellows. If she hadn't absented herself they would have waited until she was in bed, and taken them all the same. What do you say, Danvers?"

"I suppose so," replied the baronet, who was tortured by the suspicions that had risen in his mind and would not be quieted. He would gladly have given all he possessed in return for the knowledge that his wife was honest still. A sense of impending misery dulled his brain, clogged his activity, and freighted him with weary thoughts.

"If I may make a suggestion, Sir Danvers," said Lord Hector, "I should say send a telegram to Scotland Yard and have a first-class detective down. These men are used to the business, and will go right to a point at once, whilst others doubt, hesitate and blunder."

"Thanks. I shall wire immediately," said the baronet.

"I doubt that a Scotland Yard man will be of service. After what we have discovered there cannot be any further doubt that burglars made an entrance to the house, and the case being reduced to burglars, it only remains for the police to track and capture them," remarked the captain, lighting a cigar with a placid air as if a weight had been removed from his mind.

"I shall have one down all the same," answered Sir Danvers. "The loss is too great to neglect any means that may lead to recovery."

"Suppose we examine the dressing-room," suggested Lord Hector, gazing up at the windows of that apartment.

"We have seen that it was entered," replied the captain.

"We'll look at it when I have sent a wire to Scotland Yard," said the baronet, returning to the abbey.

When he had despatched one of his men with the telegram they three went to Lady Fothergille's rooms. Nothing had been changed since the previous night; the empty jewel cases stood upon the toilet table; Clegg, with tearful eyes and disarranged cap, wandered aimlessly about the apartment, making vain searches in the most impossible places for the missing diamonds. Sir Danvers bade her leave and went to inspect the windows; the glass was unbroken, not a scratch was visible on the frames.

"It puzzles me to see how they got in," said the baronet.

"Why, Danvers, the windows must have been open," answered his cousin.

"Clegg says she closed them when my wife came up from the drawing-room, and is quite certain she didn't open them again."

"She would say so to ward off suspicion from herself. I don't hint at connivance, though the most trustworthy maids have before now played into burglars' hands; but all I can say is that if she closed the windows she neglected wilfully or unconsciously, to secure the fastenings."

"Clegg is one of my tenants' daughters. I can't for a moment imagine her helping these scoundrels to rob me!" said Sir Danvers.

"These fellows have a knack of getting round girls—there is no knowing who one may trust nowadays," his cousin replied.

At this point a servant entered to announce that Sergeant Ready and two of his men had arrived.

"Ask them to come here," said the baronet.

A moment later and the sergeant, a red haired man with shrewd grey eyes, high cheek bones, and a pale complexion, entered followed by two of his men. He had already heard of the jewel robbery, the news of which had suddenly spread like fire, and had given orders to have the country searched and all tramps arrested on suspicion.

"I don't let the grass grow under my feet, Sir Danvers," he said with a self congratulatory twinkle in his grey eyes. "I suppose you've already sent for a Scotland Yard man?"

"I have."

"Then I have only one thing more to request, Sir Danvers, the belongings of every one of your servants, from the butler to the scullery maid, be overhauled at once."

"Really," replied the baronet, "it's a thing I don't like to suggest. I suspect none of them; I trust them all."

"We must take precautions, Sir Danvers."

"Most of them have been with me for years; some of them have been here in my father's time; I am unwilling they should think I doubted their honesty."

"This is no time for sentiment, Danvers," remarked the captain. "Remember the amount of your loss."

It is at sea and at the mines that the full value of Kerr Evaporated Vegetables is shown. Delicious soup all seasons, 10 quarts for a trifle.

"I insist on it, Sir Danvers; it must be done," added the sergeant, "and at once if you please."

"Then if it must be the sooner it is over the better. Follow me," he said, leading the way to the housekeeper's room.

Here he found that lady, a stately dame clad in sombre hues, who suppressed her surprise at seeing Sir Danvers in her room, and at hearing his request that all the servants without exception might be summoned immediately. Hastening to obey him she caused a great bell to be rung, and sent scouts all through the house to gather her subjects together. In a few seconds they came trooping into the servants' hall, chattering and laughing as they approached, but subsiding into silence and gravity on beholding their master. The housekeeper counted them as they entered, and when they had assembled in full number told Sir Danvers all his domestics were present. The baronet had no idea they made such a goodly muster, and regarded them with some surprise; then rising from his chair he addressed them.

"You are all aware," he said, "of the jewel robbery which took place in the abbey last night or early this morning. I don't for a moment imagine one of you has been in any way concerned in it. I have implicit trust in your honesty and in your faithfulness, but it is necessary that an investigation should be made, and it must begin by an examination into your belongings. As I believe you had no part in the robbery, so I'm sure you will have no objection to this search, and I shall feel obliged if you deliver up the keys of your boxes and drawers to Sergeant Ready. No exceptions can be made. Those who have been longest in my service, I'm certain, will set the example of willingness to those who have more recently become members of the household."

This appeal, rather than command, was answered without a demur; the upper butler and under butler, Sir Danvers' valet, footmen, housemaids, cook, groom, men servants and maids, one by one delivered up the keys of their possessions with a ready air to the sergeant, who took them with stoic indifference. The housekeeper undertook to conduct him to the servants' apartments, and then left him and his two assistants to pursue their search.

All through the day they worked hard, opening, sifting, and examining boxes, portmanteaus, and cases; upturning the women's finery, tossing out the men's clothes, until evening came and found their labor had been in vain, when Sergt. Ready and his constables withdrew, feeling they had not got upon the track of the missing diamonds.

The family circle had not recovered from the shock it received that morning; Sir Danvers was depressed and uneasy; Ethel pale and frightened; the poor relation more obviously nervous than before; Mrs. Crayworth full of sympathy; Meg and the captain abstracted and thoughtful. Lord Hector Maynes had left for town in the afternoon and his presence seemed missed. The meals were eaten almost in silence, it seemed a relief when they came to an end, and each one was at liberty to go his or her own way.

Next morning, soon after breakfast, the London detective presented himself at the abbey. He was shown into the baronet's study, and Sir Danvers, entering, saw a well-built young man of gentlemanly appearance, with dark, watchful eyes, a ruddy complexion, and bright brown beard and moustache concealing a strong, well marked mouth and chin.

He rose as Sir Danvers entered and bowed. "My name is Felton; I have been sent from Scotland Yard to investigate the jewel robbery," he said, speaking with the voice of an educated man.

"I'm glad you have come. Will you not sit down. Have you had breakfast?"

"Yes, thank you, Sir Danvers. I arrived last night at the village and slept and breakfasted at the inn, made enquiries, and walked over to the abbey," he replied in a business-like tone.

The baronet was impressed by the coolness of his manner. "Excuse me," he said, "but you seem very young, you cannot have had much experience in cases like this."

"I am comparatively young, but in experience I am somewhat old."

"Have you been long in the detective department?"

"Only a few years. I began life as a solicitor. And now Sir Danvers will you tell me the particulars of this case; the sooner I set to work the better."

Thereon the baronet told him all he knew of the robbery; referred to the ladder and the tramped grass underneath my lady's window, of the search Sergeant Ready and his men had made, of the few facts Clegg had stated.

"May I see her," the detective asked.

Sir Danvers rang the bell and sent for her, and presently the maid entered, looking white and anxious. Felton fixed his eyes on her, cross-examined her about the windows, and then asked:

"What hour did her ladyship come to her room on the night of the dinner party?"

"Soon after twelve, sir."

"Tell me what happened."

"She sat down whilst I took the diamonds from her hair and neck, and put them in their cases. I then brushed her hair, and helped her to undress, after which she dismissed me."

"Did you hear any noise inside or outside the house, a whisper, a footstep, a movement of any kind?"

"I heard nothing," replied Clegg.

The detective dismissed her, saying that would do for the present, and on her disappearance expressed his belief that she had spoken the truth. He next asked to see Lady Fothergille, and was taken by Sir Danvers to the morning room where Ethel was writing some letters. Her statements were simple. On dismissing the maid she felt restless, and knowing she would be unable to sleep went to the library for a book.

"How long was your ladyship absent?" Felton asked.

"About an hour," she answered without hesitation.

"From the time you left till you returned did your ladyship see anyone?"

"Yes," she replied after a slight pause.

"May I ask who it was?"

"You needn't answer any question unless

The poor man's friend is Kerr Evaporated Vegetables for soup because he gets 10 quarts soup for a trifle: is convenient and delicious. All grocers.

you please," remarked her husband, whose blood had turned to ice.

"I have no objection to reply," she said.

"Just as I left the corridor on my way to the library I heard a step. As I was in my dressing gown I extinguished the light and drew back into an alcove; the lamp in the passage being out, I couldn't be seen. Almost immediately a man's figure passed."

"Do you know who it was?" queried the detective.

"I believe it was one of the gentlemen staying in the house."

"At the time you had probably an impression which of them it was?"

"I had," she answered, after a slight pause.

"May I ask your ladyship what it was?"

"I believe it was Lord Hector Maynes."

"Was he coming from his own room?"

"I cannot say," she replied.

"Does his room open on the corridor?"

"No."

"Was he coming from the direction of your ladyship's dressing-room?"

"He was," she replied, after a second's hesitation.

"May I see him?"

"He left the abbey yesterday afternoon."

A silence followed. Sir Danvers turned away, the detective made notes in his pocket book.

"I have nothing more to ask your ladyship at present," he said after awhile, and turning to the baronet requested that he might be taken to the garden where the ladder had been found.

He carefully examined the ground; the footprints were not distinctly marked, but the grass and clay were well trampled. He looked up at the window and down at the ladder, seizing which he placed it against the wall. It did not reach within five feet of the window sill.

"It would be rather difficult by means of this ladder to get at the window and open it from without," he remarked drily.

"Now, Sir Danvers, we'll go inside and have a look at her ladyship's rooms."

He examined them carefully, inspected the corridor, and counted the time it took to walk from Lady Fothergille's rooms to the library, scribbling words and sentences in his pocket book, and keeping his mind to himself.

At one o'clock lunch was served for him in the housekeeper's room, the honors being done by that worthy woman. Nothing could have pleased Mr. Felton better; he had but to put a question and a whole stream of information flowed. He therefore gathered that Sir Danvers had fallen in love with and married a governess whose antecedents were unknown; that Captain Fothergille had been and was yet the heir presumptive, and was paying attention to his fair cousin, a young lady with £30,000 fortune. That Lord Hector Maynes, a handsome young gentleman, a friend of my lady's, had stayed at the abbey, and was devoted to her ladyship, it being the fashion now for young men to admire married women. It was believed he had come from Australia, but there was no knowing; he had led an adventurous life, and was striving to make a living by working as a civil engineer.

"Then he is not rich?"

"I should think not. They say his father, the Duke of Rodsea, is as poor as a church mouse—for a duke," the housekeeper hastened to add—"and Lord Hector hasn't much to spare."

"Lives on his wits, perhaps, like many of his class now-a-days?"

"Well, I can't say. He is a pleasant-spoken gentleman."

The detective nodded his head, and had a second helping of venison pie. "The ladies at present staying in the abbey are neighbors I believe?"

"Only one of them Mrs. Crayworth, who lives in the villa just as you enter Hayton; the other—Miss Gaultrey—is a relation, and is, I fancy, staying here for good."

In this way the housekeeper gossiped freely, revealing to her hearer various items of information regarding the family circle at the abbey, he making an enquiry now and then, in order to complete the conclusions at which he had already arrived. Having finished a substantial lunch, he slowly took his way to the baronet's study; but before he arrived there, he encountered Capt. Fothergille, whom he had seen on his arrival.

"Well, how is your enquiry progressing. Think you have gained any clue?" he asked in a confidential tone.

"I can't say, sir," the detective answered guardedly.

"I hear you don't set much value by the discovery of the ladder, I didn't myself; though I said nothing at the time."

"You don't believe the house was entered by that window?"

"I don't," replied the captain, with a knowing look at his questioner.

"Why?" inquired Felton.

"Well, it's merely a surmise—a suspicion on my part—nothing more. Fact is, I don't like to follow the direction to which my thoughts point; it's not fair to the absent."

"Who was the first to discover the ladder underneath the window?"

"Lord Hector Maynes," the captain answered with a hesitating manner, as if unwilling to reveal the name. "You must find the thief," he continued. "I'm not only a member of the family, but her presumptive to Sir Danvers, and the loss of forty thousand pounds touches me closely."

"I understand, sir."

"You are going to Sir Danvers. He's in his study, I'll show you where it is."

Opening the door, he allowed the detective to enter and then turned away, a smile upon his lips.

"Have you come to any conclusion?" asked the baronet, as Felton stood before him.

"Yes, Sir Danvers. I'm satisfied that the thief never entered by her ladyship's window."

"How did he get into the abbey?"

"He was there already."

"You mean one of the servants is the thief?"

"No, Sir Danvers; I think he's to be found in your family circle."

"Good heavens! What do you mean?" asked the baronet, lying back in his chair.

"That we are all human nature, all liable

Extract from letter from Hon. Atty. General Longley.

"I have derived great satisfaction and benefit from the barrel of Wilmot Spa Water. I now drink it every day of my life, and am only troubled to know how I am to get on without it."

to temptation. Do you know, Sir Danvers, if any of your friends or relatives are in need of cash?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Have you any knowledge of Lord Hector Maynes' circumstance?"

"No; but surely you don't suspect him?"

"I do. Did you miss him any time after the party broke up on the night of the robbery?"

"I remember he went to change his coat before joining us in the smoking-room."

"Just the point I want," Sir Danvers.

"Either by accident or design he knew of her ladyship's absence from her room and seized the opportunity to take the jewels."

"I can't believe it. Lord Hector is a man of—of—"

He would have added honor, but he remembered Maynes' attentions to Lady Fothergille, and the word died on his lips.

"What do you know of his antecedents?"

"Nothing, but I'm ready to stake my life he's not a thief," said the baronet, not allowing his wrongs to rob him of his generosity.

"Then, Sir Danvers, there's but one other explanation to this mysterious business," the detective said in a clear, firm voice.

"And that?" asked the baronet eagerly.

"You will pardon me if I speak plainly. In my experience of the world I have known some odd things happen. Now I once heard of a lady stealing her own jewels to relieve a passing need; and I've known another who had her family diamonds taken out and the places supplied with paste."

"Well?" said the baronet knitting his brows.

"I hope you'll excuse me, Sir Danvers, when I inquire if her ladyship was in want of a lump sum."

"Lady Fothergille has but to ask me for anything she desires, and it is hers," he answered severely.

"But there are times when a lady wants money either for herself or for others, which she does not wish to ask or account for to her husband."

"For others?" he said to himself.

"Do you know if she had any pressing want for cash?"

"I'm sure she had not," he replied, pushing back his chair, an angry light dawning in his eyes.

"Or it she was anxious to obtain some for another?"

"Good heavens, man! Do you dare to insinuate—"</