

A DIAMOND ROBBERY.

"Russell, I want you to do me a favor. You know Mr. Fenton's house at Penge, close to your own immediate neighborhood? He requires some brilliant stones to set in an envelope containing samples to the value of £500, from which he will select. Can you call upon him at eight o'clock, and execute this little commission for me?"

"Certainly, sir," answered Howard Russell, readily, and his face flushed with pleasure at the unexpected confidence thus shown in him by his employer, Mr. Stanton, the well-known diamond merchant.

"Our friend Rorke is, it seems, too much occupied with some private business of his own, and is unable to go," continued Mr. Stanton, drily, by way of explanation. "But since you can—well, take care to deliver the packet personally into Mr. Fenton's own hands. Recollect, the value is considerable, and I must hold you responsible, Russell."

Promising to carry out the instructions which were then given him in detail, the young fellow left his principal's sanctum highly elated; for never before had stones to so great a value been entrusted to him.

He felt that he had this morning won a better place in the diamond merchant's establishment, and was so much the nearer to possessing Alice Heaton, the pretty typewriter close by, who, only the previous evening, had accepted an engagement ring from him. Truly, his luck was in the ascendant just now.

As he emerged into the outer room, with the diamonds secure in his pocket-book, he was too full of his own thoughts to observe the suspicious movements of Arnold Rorke, the senior assistant. Consequently, it never struck him that Rorke had contrived to overhear every word that had passed between him and Mr. Stanton.

Nothing, however, happened until mid-day, when it was customary for the two young men to go out to lunch, Howard usually being allowed to go first. But to day Rorke evidently intended to reverse the order of things, for, taking down his hat, he observed, carelessly:

"I think I'll go out first for once, Howard, and as I want to call at two or three places, I may be a little longer than usual. You can tell the governor if I'm a bit late. But I dare say I shall be back in time for you to see the angelic Miss Heaton, so you needn't open your eyes so wide," and before Howard could make any reply to this altogether unexpected, and quite uncalculated-for, sarcasm, Rorke had vanished.

"So Alice has replied to his somewhat abrupt proposal, as she promised me, and the reply has not pleased him—that is certain," murmured Howard, stifling his indignation. "Now I know what has made him so disagreeable all the morning; but after all, and in spite of his covert threats and sneers during the last few weeks, I dare say he'll get over it. Rather hard hit, though, I'm afraid; yet, if a man will court defeat—"

Meanwhile, Arnold Rorke made his way straight to a public-house, at which he was apparently well known, for as he entered several men nodded familiarly towards him. Presently he beckoned to a stout, rufianly-looking man standing alone, whose brutal, drink-sodden features were a sufficient index to his character.

"Matt," began Rorke, in a low voice, and casting a furtive glance around, "I need not wait any longer for my revenge on that soft-mouthed fool, Howard Russell, although it's not to be the sort of revenge I spoke to you about. But that won't matter to you, and what's more, the satisfaction I'm going to take will pay you a thousand times better than what I promised."

"The pay's all I trouble about. The rest is easy and certain—done in a trick. What d'yer want me to do? And who is going to pay such big damages?"

"Russell himself, if you're man enough to carry out what I have come to propose to you."

"Man enough!" exclaimed the rufian, with an oath. "Why?"

"All right, don't bluster. Listen, and keep your tongue quiet, will you? To-night young Russell is going to call upon a Mr. Fenton, at Penge. Here's the address. He will have to pass a long stretch of waste land, and it will be dark. Understand? Give him a good thrashing, and help yourself to all you find in his pockets. That's all I want you to do, and the opportunity has offered sooner than I expected. As for the rest, I shall manage that."

"I dare say," sneered the bully, Matt Skelton. "And what if I and my pal—course I ain't going along on such a job—what if we only find a miserable half-dollar or so for our trouble?"

"If you look well you'll discover an ordinary envelope, which you will find to contain diamonds to the value of least £500," answered Rorke, slowly, and with a malicious grin.

"What?" gasped Skelton, staggering backwards a little. "You are lying, Mr. Rorke?"

"If you should find I have deceived you, come up to Mr. Stanton's place tomorrow morning and split on me, then," was the quick retort. "Isn't that good enough for you? I tell you, Howard Russell will have six, perhaps seven, hundred pounds' worth of very real sparklers in his pocket, and you can have them for the taking."

"Right; I'll prove you, my prince of plotters; only if it ain't true—"

and Rorke's sallow face grew whiter than ever at the dark, sudden scowl with which he was favored by his companion.

"Perhaps I'd better explain," he said, after a slight pause. "Can't you see what I'm going to do? Nobody has told me that Russell will have diamonds of such value in his possession tonight. It's only what I found out by listening. So, tonight, I'm going to take the liberty of calling upon the governor at his private house, with a very pretty little story concerning the trusted Mr. Russell. I'm going to say that I happened to be in a certain public-house, and overheard none other than Russell himself talking with someone else in the private apartment next to mine; how I listened, and heard him telling that he was in possession of diamonds of great value, and how he proposed to his companion that he should act the part of robber, waylay him, and relieve him of the diamonds. He would roll in the dirt, tear his coat, and, pretending that he had been stopped and robbed of everything, go off to the police and complain, so as to give color to his story. No one could dispute such a tale, I will

make Russell go on to add, and although he would be sure to get the sack, it wouldn't matter, as he would get half the profits."

"Then, if Mr. Stanton does not believe me, he will have to the next morning, for see how the thing will work out, eh, Matt?" and the younger villain laughed and rubbed his hands with great satisfaction as he thus explained how he intended to ruin his unsuspecting fellow assistant.

"So that's to be your revenge upon the tall, good-looking bloke who's cut you out with missie? Well, it's a very neat scheme, I must admit; but, bad as I may be," said Skelton, bluntly, "I couldn't have planned it all like that."

"You needn't perform your part, if you object," returned Rorke, with an angry frown.

"Object! Ha, ha! That's just what I ain't going to do," was the emphatic reply. "But what share of the swag do you want out of this precious deal in sparklers?"

"None Bully Skelton. You may keep it all. It's the price of my triumph over my rival—aye, and over Alice Heaton as well," he added to himself.

"You're liberal! So liberal that we'd better say good-bye for good. Mr. Rorke," observed Matt, laconically.

"Once the diamonds are in my hands, the old country won't hold me a day. Besides, I couldn't safely exchange 'em here, so you needn't be uneasy on that score. Oh, yes, consider the job done and your enemy done for!"

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swear that what I told you last night was the truth!"

"Come forth, fellow, and confront your wretched accomplice," was the diamond merchant's stern command, and then, indeed, did Rorke turn deadly pale, and clutch at the back of a chair for support, for from behind a screen there stepped none other than the bully, Matt Skelton.

"I threatened what I'd do if I didn't get the sparklers," grinned the rufian, defiantly, "and I've carried my threat out, too, you white livered bound, if it does cost me a few months' liberty. The game's up, and that young shaver's won the girl, after all!"

"Mr. Inspector, take my assistant, Arnold Rorke, into custody, please," Mr. Stanton said, pointing to the trembling man. "I charge him with conspiring to rob me of diamonds to the value of £300. As for that man—" he turned to Skelton—"I refrain from charging him, in consideration of the information he has given us this morning. But if our young friend, Russell, here, chooses to give him in charge for highway robbery with violence, it will be his."

"Oh, no, sir! I forgive him," interrupted Howard vehemently, in tones which quivered with joyful excitement. "I'm only too happy to know that there's not the slightest suspicion against me now—thanks to my lucky act of forgetfulness. And—why, I'm only just beginning to see what a terrible plot there has been against me!"

That same day Howard Russell stepped into the vacancy caused by the unexpected and forcible retirement of Arnold Rorke; which better position amply compensated him for the rough treatment he had received.

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