

THE VARILLOS DIAMONDS.

A Story of Hypnotism.

[By A. C. Townsend, in The Independent.]

CHAPTER I.

One afternoon between four and five o'clock, the cosy boudoir of a well-to-do house in New York, was occupied by two persons—Madame Varillos, its owner, and her visitor, Paul Methuen. For personal description, place aux dames.

Madame Varillos is an exceptionally handsome woman still on the right side of 35. In spite of her foreign sounding name it is clear at the first glance that she is of American or English birth, and to the former nationality she actually belongs. Her complexion is fair, a perfectly featured face and large bluish gray eyes, being framed by a wealth of golden hair, her figure, that of a woman of rather more than the medium height, is still perfect in its symmetry, though verging slightly toward the plumpness and maturity of the trévine. Her every pose and expression denote the woman to whom care or anxiety are strangers, one for whom wealth with all its comforts has always been an accustomed condition and who, though practically alone in the world, is fully able to appreciate and enjoy the many good things of this life.

Madame Varillos is a widow, the relict of an abnormally wealthy South American planter, to whom she was married when quite a girl, more to please her parents than to gratify any love or passion of her own. With him she lived for over a dozen years, in perfect happiness and content, and at his death, found herself the sole possessor of the Varillos estates and their enormous wealth. Not the least item of the legacy was the famous collection of diamonds and other gems, a collection comprising a fortune in itself and of almost unequalled beauty even in these days.

Shortly after her husband's death Madame Varillos migrated from her tropical home to her own native State, taking up her residence in the house her personal property, into which we have already gained an introduction.

In disposition, the fortunate widow is of perfect temper amiable, easily pleased, but by no means easily deterred. If she harbors any idea of re-entering the martial ranks, it is safe to say that, so far, no single one of her many suitors has made the least impression upon that supposedly impregnable fortress—her widow's heart. A woman of somewhat changeable moods and fancies, she is wont, from time to time, to devote her mind and leisure moments to the study of some one of the more interesting subjects of the passing hour. At present her attention is engrossed by the much discussed science of hypnotism. It is this whim case may be—of hypnotism. It is this whim on her part which has brought about a certain intimacy between herself and her present visitor, who, in his turn, is now entitled to a few words of introduction.

Paul Methuen is a man of short stature and somewhat slim figure; his dark, bushy hair surmounts a pale, smooth-shaven face, which has for its most striking feature a pair of large, black, piercing eyes. Perhaps it is to these latter that he owes much of his reputation as mesmerist, hypnotist—what you will—and there can be no doubt that, even to a superficial or sceptic observer, his eyes contain some uncanny and strange influence.

Of Methuen's antecedents little or nothing is known. He is one of the band of mysterious specialists who periodically appear above the horizon of the city of New York; the apostles of some strange and novel creed, coming, heaven knows whence, living, heaven only knows how, and ultimately, when the craze for their special cult has subsided, disappearing as mysteriously as they arose.

It is through the introduction of a friend—also a captive of the new science—that Madame Varillos has met and become in a measure familiar with one who professes to contain within himself the strange influence and power of hypnotism. Great as the widow's interest in the subject and all appertaining to it is, it is not entirely through her own enthusiasm that the intimacy between them has advanced so far. Methuen, himself, almost from their first meeting, has singled her out for his special attention. Always ready to attend the receptions and gatherings formed in his honor, and there to propound his theories about the latest and most abstruse of "isms," he has, nevertheless, shown a marked and open preference for the society of Madame Varillos, and, during his frequent visits, has labored indefatigably upon a lucid explanation of his experiences and belief. On no occasion as yet, however, had he laid the slightest hint or suggestion to attempt the exercise of his innate influence with her as subject. Even at this moment, when, carried on to the latest privacy, their conversation is of a general order, and, strangely enough, has turned upon the widow's own affairs.

An accident has brought this about. Lying upon the small writing table close to her chair is an open letter. It is a communication from one of the large safe deposit companies in New York, and refers, in a business way, to a small private safe which she has rented in the cellars of this particular establishment. Apologizing to her visitor for reading the letter in his presence, she has merely glanced through it, and then thrown it aside.

The interruption, however, has given Methuen the opportunity, and by a series of adroitly put, though careless seeming questions, he has drawn from her a fact that he has long been striving to ascertain—that nearly the whole of her famous diamonds, as well as certain documents and bonds of extreme value, are stored within the vault.

Where Madame Varillos at this moment looking into his face, she could not fail to observe strange and sudden gleam in those dark, mysterious eyes. She, however, is more intent upon a description of certain antique gems which are among her carefully guarded jewelry, and which she seems to value more highly than most of her priceless diamonds.

A newspaper is lying upon the small sofa where Methuen sits. He carelessly picks it up, and glances in its absent way down its columns, letting it be seen that his attention is still devoted to his hostess's words! His eye at last catches what it has been seeking for; the shipping list, and he reads:

"Due to sail to-morrow—Wednesday, Steamer Teutonic—for Queenstown—at 12 noon."

He lays down the paper, and, abruptly rising from the sofa, seats himself in a chair immediately facing his hostess.

"Madame Varillos," he says, "grant me your attention, I have something of importance to say to you."

With a slight expression of astonishment, she raises herself to a more erect position in her chair, turns her face directly toward him, and meets the full stare of those glittering, fathomless eyes.

A slight tremor passes through her and her face grows visibly pale, but her gaze is not withdrawn. For some moments not a word is said; the silence in the little boudoir is only broken by the ticking of a little fancy clock.

With eyes still holding her in thrall, Methuen slowly raises his two hands, holding them between his own face and that of his victim in the chair. He moves them gently to and fro for a full minute, half whispering once or twice the word, "Sleep!" until at last he sees the widow's eyelids droop and close, her lips lose all rigidity and slightly open, and her body fall listlessly against the chair's support.

For another interval he continues the rhythmic movement of his hands, never once instant withdrawing his eyes from the white face. Then, at last, he speaks:

"Madame Varillos, are you asleep?"

No answer.

In a louder tone: "Are you asleep, I say?"

"Yes," comes from the pale lips.

"Can you distinguish what I say?"

"Can."

"Tell me about your jewelry and papers, lying in the vault. In what are they contained?"

In a small iron box.

"Write out such an order. Here is pen and paper. If particulars are necessary, state that Mr. Carvalho, one of the executors of your late husband's estate, wishes, with your consent, to obtain access to the vault at half-past eleven to-morrow morning. Now write!"

Again she turns to the desk and, taking up the pen, writes laboriously and slowly, but legibly and in her natural manner. Having written the last word, she takes up blotting-paper to dry the ink; but the wily Methuen is on the alert and snatches it from her hand, as she again falls back into her chair. Having dried the paper at the open fire, he folds it in two and thrusts it into an inner pocket. Then having carefully arranged the pen and paper on the writing desk in their former places and seen that the secret drawer is firmly closed, he once more seats himself upon the sofa.

Raising one hand before the sleeper's face, he makes a rapid movement, exclaiming in a sharp, decisive tone, "Awake!" and even as the word leaves his lips, has again picked up the newspapers and is scanning its contents.

As her eyes open, Madame Varillos raises herself with a little start and stares around her, as if awakening from a strange dream.

"So you see, Madame Varillos," breaks in Methuen's voice, judging from the article I have just read to you, this paper, at least, is not altogether skeptical. But now, laying down the sheet, "with your permission, I will take my leave. I must endeavor on my homeward way to pay my respects to our friend Mrs. —, and I see it is already nearly five o'clock."

Without allowing his now thoroughly awakened hostess time to frame an apology for what she considers her sudden and unaccountable sleep or absence, he rises, the apostle of hypnotism hastens from the room and house.

With a little smile, whether at her own reminiscence or the impetuous leave-taking of her visitor, it is impossible to say, Madame Varillos sinks into an easy chair, and, taking up a novel, is soon lost in its contents.

As for Methuen, for reasons best known to himself, his promised call upon their mutual friend is not made or, in any case, is delayed. As he gains the street he hears a passing hansom, in which, it is supposed, is the shipping office in the lower part of the city, and within a few minutes has booked and paid for a passage for himself on the next day's steamer under the prosaic but sheltering name of "Mr. Smith."

At the very moment, on the following day that the hands of the large clock in the central hall of the Safe Deposit Company pointed to the half-hour after eleven, a cab drove up to the door of the massive stone building. From it there stepped a man, evidently of foreign birth, of dark complexion, with long flowing black hair, his face almost covered by a thick beard, mustache, and heavy eyebrows. Entering the main office he inquired for the manager, into whose office he was ushered with a moment's delay. Though speaking English, his manner was perfectly cool and collected, as he explained the business upon which he had come and his wish to gain admittance to the client, Madame Varillos' private safe.

Producing the necessary order he laid it upon the desk in front of the official and left it to substantiate his request. The manager carefully examined the communication, verified, so far as could be seen, a portion of its contents by reference to a small private ledger, and then, after a short, searching glance at the visitor, touched a small bell which lay in front of him.

"Mr. Parker," he said to the clerk who answered the summons, "will you take this gentleman to Madame Varillos' safe. I presume Mr. —, glancing at the written order—'Mr. Carvalho, you know the number.'"

"I do, sir. One thousand and seven. I have also the key."

"That is right," said the manager. "Mr. Parker will attend to you. Good day, sir," and the stranger and clerk left the room.

After traversing a short subterranean passage, the door of the main vault was opened to them by an attendant in charge. Walking slightly in advance the clerk led the way to the spot where, on one of the small iron lockers, the figures 1007 were painted.

"This is the Varillos safe, sir."

The clerk walked away and returned to the upper floor, while the stranger, with shaking fingers in spite of his effort to remain calm, proceeded to open the door of the small safe.

It was done. In another moment he had grasped the handle of an iron strong-box, removed it from its resting place, and slammed to the numbered door.

At last he held the treasure in his hands; a treasure large enough to make him rich for the balance of his life, and of which he had been dreaming for days and nights together.

The thought flashed through his mind: "The diamonds! I know the bonds and securities which I know are nearly all negotiable. Ah! Madame, that short sleep was an expensive one!"

Nerving himself, he scaled the broad steps leading to the office, bowed carefully to the uniformed keeper at the door, and in another moment was in the open air with the Varillos diamonds underneath his arm.

Entering the cab he ordered the man to drive to the — hotel, and there dismissed him. Once inside the hotel, he rapidly passed through the corridor, made his exit by a side door to the another cab and was on his way toward the wharf from which, within a few minutes' time, the great Atlantic liner would sail. Such baggage as was absolutely necessary, he had already sent down to the steamer and now, on reaching the dock, had nothing more to do than walk aboard; nothing, but to safely guard the widow's strong-box.

All was bustle and confusion on board. The last bell warning visitors to leave had already rung, and the late-coming passenger had no little difficulty in pushing his way toward the staircase leading to his stateroom.

At last he gained the longed-for haven—stateroom in which he could count upon absolute privacy, for he had had the fore-sight, when booking his passage to engage the entire room.

Still grasping the precious box, he looked and boiled the cabin door and then, with almost a sob of relief, flung his burden upon the velvet-covered couch.

He looked at his watch; it wanted but five minutes to the hour of noon. "A very good half-hour's work," he muttered, and then sat down in feverish impatience for the steamer to leave the wharf. Until then he had been determined to abstain from examining his spoil.

Would the ship never move! Surely something special must have happened to her! The police! Every footstep hurrying past his cabin caused him a horrible sensation of nervous fear. He could almost fancy the hands of his watch had stopped, so slowly did they move.

At last! At last! The hoarse howl of the steam-whistle, and looking through the port-hole he could see that the vessel was moving slowly, slowly from the pier; the moment for realization had come. Scarcely ing up a valise, he unlocked it with fingers still trembling, and taking out a strong, steel chisel, prepared for his onslaught on the box. "And to think," he said, between his teeth, as he wrenched the lock, "that apart from what you contain, I have barely twenty dollars in the world!"

The lock gave, and the box was open. Inside lay a leather jewel-case, of exceptionally large size. Even in his frantic haste and excitement he could notice the initials of its late owner, stamped in plain gilt letters, R. V.—Rosale Varillos! Touching the spring he opened the case. On the topmost tray lay an envelope with some supererogation which he did not even glance at. Throwing the latter aside, he raised the tray. There was nothing underneath it but the velvet surface of its under-neighbor. He lifted that—nothing under that! The tray—nothing. The jewel-case was empty!

With a hoarse cry—driven by the tramping of busy feet upon the deck above—he fell forward upon the velvet couch, and lay there motionless like a log.

CHAPTER III.

The good ship was rushing on its eastward way, with Sandy Hook miles and miles behind, before his consciousness returned. For a full minute he sat half dazed, before the truth came back to him. His eyes fell upon the envelope, which in his greedy haste he had thrown aside. He listlessly picked it up and examined the address. It ran:

"PAUL METHUEN CARVALHO-SMITH, ESQ., Passenger, Str. 'Teutonic'."

With a wondering curse he tore it open. This is what he read:

"WEDNESDAY MORNING.

"Dear Mr. Methuen: Pardon my not using your full name, but our friendship should dispose of all such ceremonious details.

I am really angry with you for leaving New York in such a hasty manner, and without even allowing me an opportunity of bidding you good-by, and offering you my sincerest wishes for a pleasant voyage across the Atlantic. Late last night my business agent told me that you had selected, so that I am at least able to send you these lines embodying what I missed saying by word of mouth.

"I was fully expecting, as I may add, hoping to have seen you to-day, if only to express to you my deep regret at the failure I made yesterday afternoon in the character of subject. I hear that for a perfect illustration of the mystery of hypnotism, some more impressionable and more commonplace a personage than my poor self is required. Honestly, I tried my best to submit to the wonderful influence, but could not; so I did what I thought was my best—pretended to. To-day, I am in sackcloth and ashes for my deception, and must ease my mind by a most humble apology.

"By the way, as business called me early this morning to the place where my few belongings are safe keeping, I mentioned your intended visit to the manager, and trust you found him all that was courteous and obliging.

"Again heartily wishing you bon voyage. Faithfully yours, Rosale Varillos.

"P. S.—As Captain — of your steamer is an old friend of mine (I have crossed with him several times), I have sent him a hurried note, asking him to be so good as to look after my baggage, and I am sure he will make you comfortable."

R. V."

AT A LADIES' LUNCHEON.

It will be expected that we gossiped, and it must be confessed that we did. There several women are gathered together, you know they simply will prattle about people. It's the nature of them. First we gossiped about the trials, and of what was of interest, study it would be to discover how much of the evil they had done in the world was due to bad cooking. And then we gossiped about different characters in books we had read. And then—let me see—what did we gossip about? Oh, yes! the town council. We said (but don't repeat it, please) that they did not seem to show much eagerness about improving our asphalt sidewalks, and that if women were on the council there would be an improvement in that and several other directions. Another piece of gossip related to our fellow-beings in general—how far it was our duty to believe in them. When they disappoint us—when what we supposed to be gold turns out to be clay—it seems impossible not to distrust them. And yet there is no surer method of helping our fallen brother than by believing, in the face of repeated failures, in his power to do good. The forgiveness of others we do not need—ten to one we never committed the fault for which we are so loftily and petronizingly forgiven—but we do need that they should make a practice of seeing the best in us, and believing in the best of us.—[Bel Thistlethwaite in *Wives and Daughters* for July.]

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