

Marie impulse and action were the same thing. Bending stealthily over the aperture, she suddenly snatched the ring from the extended finger. The hand was quickly withdrawn with a start and uncontrolled exclamation, and she availed herself of that instant to glide rapidly down the stairs.

She regained her room stealthily, having the satisfaction a moment later of hearing Uncle Sylvester's door open and the sound of his footsteps in the corridor. But he was evidently unable to discover any outer ingress to the enclosure, or believed the loss of his ring an accident, for he presently returned. Meantime, what was she to do? Tell Kitty of her discovery, and show the ring? No—not yet! Oddly enough, now that she had the ring, taken from his wicked finger in the very act, she found it as difficult as ever to believe in his burglarious design. She must wait. The mischief—if there had been mischief—was done; the breaking in of the bricked closet was, from the appearance of the ruins, a bygone act. Could it have been some youthful escapade of Uncle Sylvester's, the scene of which he was revisiting as criminals are compelled to do? And had there been anything taken from the closet—or was its destruction a part of the changes in the old house? How could she find out without asking Kitty? There was one way. She