

Tight Binding

POO

Poetry

Arri and I. Down on the slope the cow-bells tinkled; Up in the trees the robins sung;

We were children then, they called us so; And we sat there under the summer noon;

A fair soft tress has slept on my heart, This many and many a day;

She gave it to me one night in May, Walking under the full May moon;

Moons have passed unnumbered away, Since then—their lustrous coils Have wound around the smiling earth,

Across the path is a grave-yard now; I can hear the church bells ring, And white stones part the drifted snow.

We are both here under the moonlight Where we walked so long ago;

Dust on the forehead, pure and white— Dust on my heart so heavy and cold!

Passed with its sheltering wings of night We were left on a bleak barbarian shore;

Select Story

AUNT JANET'S DIAMONDS.

IN TWO CHAPTERS.—CHAPTER I.

"I am glad you like the style of the setting, my love; it certainly is old-fashioned; but the taste is very good, and the stones are particularly beautiful.

"You wonder I should like to part with them at my time of life! The truth is, for all their beauty, they afford me very little pleasure; their sparkling brilliancy recalls the saddest events of my life.

"These diamonds were a gift from my Aunt Janet, my mother's sister. I was left an orphan at an early age, and went to live with Aunt Janet. She had a very pleasant house on Clapham Common, with a large garden; and she possessed an excellent income, arising from various sources.

"The truth came out next morning.—After I had read to my aunt, as was our custom, the lessons for the day, she spoke to me in a serious tone. She felt she was growing old, she said; in the event of her death, I should be left without a protector; it was the dearest wish of her heart to see me Josiah's wife.

I trembled at her words, for I knew, with all her kindness, that my aunt was of a very determined disposition; that she could never bear to be thwarted.

tor, I was always forced to give way to his whims and fancies, and let him be first in everything. Even at that early age, I am sorry to say, I began to dislike my cousin; and my dislike was increased to positive hatred by his being constantly held up to me as a pattern-child. I believe that Josiah was naturally better behaved than I was; but, even at that early age, I could perceive that he was particularly shy, and always took care to put off his best behaviour in my aunt's presence. I can recollect too, I was constantly punished for his faults; he used stoutly to deny everything; it was useless for me to speak; he was always believed, and I received the punishment.

"When my aunt purchased these diamonds, Josiah and myself were taken as a great treat to the shop—a very old-established jeweller's in town. I was too young at the time to know anything about the value of diamonds, but I perfectly recollect seeing the man in the shop show this very set to my aunt for her approval. After some demur at the price, she gave a cheque for the money, and took the diamonds home with her in the carriage.

"It happened on that day my aunt was in excellent humour with me; and while Josiah and myself were playing in her dressing-room, she called me to her, and put the diamond necklace on my neck, in order, as she said, to see how it looked on another person. I was delighted at the glitter, and ran off to survey myself in the glass. My aunt promised me, in reply to my expressions of admiration, that if I grew up a good girl, those diamonds one day would be mine. Thereupon, Josiah began to cry furiously; and he declared, with childish vehemence, that he would have the diamonds.

"I suppose this early recollection would never have come to mind, but for its connection with subsequent events.

"As we grew older, Josiah was sent to school, and we only met during his holidays. At these periods, he was always spoiled by my aunt, and his chief amusement was plaguing and teasing me; and appeal to my aunt was useless, for she always took his part. When Josiah's education was finished, he was placed in a stock-broker's office to learn the business; and to my dismay, it was arranged that he should reside with us.

"However matters did not turn out so unpleasantly as I had anticipated. Josiah whenever we were thrown together, was civil and courteous; and though I could never tolerate his sly manner, and the false way in which he always treated my aunt, yet we contrived, on the whole, to live harmoniously together.

"At last, Josiah came of age. I recollect how surprised I was, on the morning of that day, when he presented me, in the presence of my aunt, with a very handsome bracelet. As he was my cousin, and as we had been so much together, I never dreamed for a moment that there could be any significance in the gift, and I saw from my aunt's manner that she would have been hurt had I refused it. My aunt gave a grand party in honour of the birthday, and I was still more surprised to find that Josiah's attentions were paid to me, although there were several very pretty girls present, who, I knew, would have been nothing loath to receive the addresses of Mrs. Wilson's favourite nephew.

"This most unexpected conduct greatly embarrassed me; independently of my positive dislike for Josiah Wilson, my feelings were already set in a particular direction. I was dreadfully distressed lest Mr. Huntley should fancy that I was gratified by my cousin's attention; and then I found that my aunt had been whispering here and there mysteriously that my new bracelet was Josiah's present. I would have given anything to tear it from my arm, and strove as much as possible to bury it in my dress.

"The truth came out next morning.—After I had read to my aunt, as was our custom, the lessons for the day, she spoke to me in a serious tone. She felt she was growing old, she said; in the event of her death, I should be left without a protector; it was the dearest wish of her heart to see me Josiah's wife.

I trembled at her words, for I knew, with all her kindness, that my aunt was of a very determined disposition; that she could never bear to be thwarted.

"I replied that Josiah's conduct had never led me to suppose that he regarded me other than in the light of a sister.—"Ay," replied my aunt, "I have been talking the matter over with your cousin, and he confessed that he has liked you very much for years past, but that your manner towards him has always checked any demonstration of his true feeling; I then told him," continued my aunt, "that it was for him to take the initiative in a courtship."

"I was sick at heart, and escaped, as soon as possible, from the room, on some household excuse. I understood the matter clearly enough; Josiah saw how deeply my aunt had set her heart on our marriage, and he had resolved, for his own interest, not to be the person to thwart her.

"My persecution began from that day. I was to be taught to like Josiah Wilson. My aunt devised all sorts of plans for forcing us together: he used constantly to bring me home presents from the city—jewellery, bouquets, and the like, which I was forced to accept. My aunt frequently told her friends that we were very much attached to one another, and that she supposed, one day or other, we should ask her consent to our union. My greatest distress was to see how piqued and angry Edward, Mr. Huntley, was at the attentions I received from my cousin; he evidently thought I was on the point of being engaged. My lips were sealed; it was impossible for me to give him any indication of my real feelings. Josiah was always at my side, paying me the most assiduous court.

"After a short time, Josiah made me an offer, and I refused him without hesitation. I was certainly astonished by the warmth with which he pressed his suit, for I had fancied he was only acting out of compliance with my aunt's wishes. He begged and prayed that I would not pronounce an ultimate decision: he had perhaps been rather premature in his declaration; he only asked further time to prove the sincerity of his love. He would take no refusal, and we parted.

"As might be imagined, my aunt was very angry at my conduct; she expostulated earnestly with me; and in order to show how deeply she had the matter at heart, she detailed to me the plans she had formed for our future mode of life. We were to live with her; at her death, she would bequeath us all her property; and on the day of our engagement, she intended to present us each with five thousand pounds.

"I was placed in a most delicate position; I was wholly dependent on my aunt; I had not a single relation in the world who could help me; Mr. Huntley, as was natural under the circumstances, had ceased to pay me any attention.

"Things took the course I feared; my aunt finding that her arguments in Josiah's favour were unavailing, had recourse to threats; she reminded me that the disobedience was wholly on my side; she declared that it would be the worse for me if I persisted in my refusal; and she concluded a very painful conversation by desiring me to give her my final decision after the dinner-party to which we were going on the following evening; in the meanwhile, I was to think over the matter well.

"When she had ceased speaking, my aunt recollected she had left the book she was reading in the summer-house, near the end of the garden: she was about to ring for the servant to fetch it; I said I would go instead of her. It was a lovely summer night, and the cold air was very refreshing after the excitement I had gone through.

"I found the book in the summer-house, but I did not return immediately, the intense calm of night was so delightful. I was in a strange condition, half musing, half crying, when I heard voices behind the summer-house. I felt frightened, and drew back, into the shade. Listening very intently, I could distinguish my cousin's voice, then another voice—a woman's—my aunt's maid, Lucy! To my utter amazement, I heard him ask the girl to meet him on that spot on the following evening, after we returned home from the party. It was my cousin's voice—I was certain of that. They passed away. This was the excellent man my aunt wanted me

to marry! I was quite overcome with anger and indignation. I would denounce his conduct at once! When I had sufficiently recovered myself, I hurried back to the house; my aunt was not in the drawing-room; I had time for reflection. How did matters stand? Why, only one word against his! Of course, the girl would deny everything; his word from childhood had always been preferred to mine; my aunt, at most, would believe I had mistaken the voice.

"I resolved to hold my peace till the following evening. What a night and day of agitation I passed! Not one word did my aunt say about Josiah during the next day, but her manner was all kindness towards me.

"The dinner-party was to be a very grand affair; and my aunt, as was usual on such occasions, wore her diamonds. "You may imagine how little I enjoyed myself seated next my cousin, Mrs. Huntley, Edward's mother, was at a party, and I could see she watched me very intently.

"It happened after dinner, before the gentlemen came up, that Mrs. Huntley and myself were left alone together in one of the drawing-rooms. She addressed me, and laughingly said she supposed she would soon have the pleasure of congratulating me on my engagement with my cousin. I longed to speak out to her, to tell her how I disliked my cousin, and loved her son, but I dared not. I strove to say something; my tongue was powerless; I burst into a flood of tears. Fortunately, I recovered myself before my aunt caught sight of me.

"We left the party about eleven o'clock. As soon as we got home, my aunt bade Josiah good night, retired to her dressing-room, and sent for her maid. When my aunt wore her diamonds, it was the custom for me to take them from her dressing-room, and put them away, and they were kept in a room opening into the dressing-room, which was used as a boudoir. In this room was a large fire-proof safe, which on the outside had the appearance of an ordinary chiffoniere. I was in such a state of nervous agitation when I entered my aunt's room and obtained the diamonds, that at moments I seemed to lose my head. Lucy was assisting my aunt to undress; the diamonds lay on the dressing-table; I placed them in the box and took them into the room without saying a word. To my dismay, I found Josiah in the boudoir. There was always some difficulty about the lock of the safe, which was very elaborate: he took the keys out of my hand and opened the door for me, and almost before I had placed the diamonds in their place, he renewed his hateful offer. It was on my lips to tell him that I knew of his baseness; luckily, as events will show, I restrained myself; but I did solemnly declare that, come what might, I would never be his wife. He tried to frighten me with my aunt's displeasure. In the midst of our discussion, in came Lucy from the dressing-room with a message that her mistress wished to see me immediately.

"It was a relief, at all costs, to be out of Josiah's presence.

"My aunt was sitting in her easy-chair, wrapped in her dressing-gown. Her manner was all kindness towards me—she made me sit close by her. To my surprise she did not say one word about the marriage; she began talking, accidentally as it were, about the alterations she intended to make in the house; she asked my opinion of her different plans. I replied incoherently enough, I'm sure, but she took no notice of my manner.

"As we lived in the neighborhood of London, it was Josiah's custom very frequently to discharge a pistol out of his bedroom window. Hearing the report recalled to my mind that I had left the keys of the safe with him. My aunt kept these keys in a secret place in her room, and was always very careful to see that they were safely deposited before she went to bed. I was puzzling my head how to get these keys from Josiah, for I had not courage to go for them myself, when there came a tap at the door, and Lucy brought in the keys, saying that Mr. Josiah had told her to give them to my aunt.

"The conversation about the improvements was resumed, and I soon found that all this had really reference to our marriage—my aunt choosing to assume, by implication, that I had consented to the

"It was a warm sultry night, and, in pretence of wanting air, I went to the window. How my heart beat! Looking out I could just perceive, in the breaks of light on the path, a figure hurrying down the garden; I strained my sight hard to be assured of the fact. The time had come to tell my aunt of my cousins conduct.

"I turned abruptly from the window, and threw myself at her feet. "Aunt, I cannot marry my cousin! At that moment, my utter astonishment and dismay, there was a knock outside the door: it was Josiah; he had come to ask whether I had delivered the keys.

"My aunt answered Josiah's question and he went away; then turning to me she asked, in a severe voice, what I had to say.

"I knew it was in vain for me to speak without proof. I was silent through painful helplessness. My aunt waiting a while for me to speak, sternly declared I had wilfully thrown away my best chance in life; henceforth she should never refer to the subject, and she bade me good night. I reminded her that this was my first act of disobedience to her wishes; I declared I would never marry without her consent. It was all in vain: not withstanding my tears and protestations, I could not move her to forgiveness.

"But however great my distress of mind, it was for the time lost in bewilderment at Josiah's conduct. It could not have been more than five minutes after he had inquired about the keys, he hurried into my aunt's dressing-room, without so much as knocking at the door, and told me, in going the rounds of the house, he had found one of the dining-room windows, which opened on the garden, unbarred, and the window open. He was certain there was some collusion with people outside; thieves might even now be secreted in the house. He rang the alarm-bell which was connected with the room. His manner seemed so perfectly natural, that I began to believe I must have mistaken the voice. The woman-servants, dreadfully frightened, came huddling into the room, all but Lucy? Where was Lucy? Nobody knew; she was not up stairs.—Josiah and the two men were to search the house. The butler declared he had himself shut and barred the dining-room windows. Presently, we heard voices outside in the garden, and Josiah came back to my aunt's room, laughing; he said it was all a false alarm. The butler and footman had pounced upon Lucy just as she was coming in at the window. The wretched girl was hurried into my aunt's presence, and cross-questioned, Josiah standing by quite unconcerned. What had she been doing? she was so scared and frightened. All we could gain from her was, she had gone to meet her sweetheart.

"My aunt gave her warning on the spot, and declared she should leave the house next day.

"I was far too excited to sleep that night. Josiah's voice—was it Josiah's voice! I could think of nothing else. Early in the morning, Lucy came into my room, crying bitterly. She begged and prayed I would intercede for her with my aunt.

"Tell me, Lucy, whom did you really go to meet?"

"Why miss, only my young man," she replied.

"What an hour to choose, Lucy!"

"Yes, miss; but he's at work in London all day long.

"I was determined to solve the mystery about Josiah.

"Listen to me, Lucy." I watched her closely as I spoke. "The night before last about half-past ten, I went to fetch a book from the summer-house." She blushed scarlet at my words. "I heard the meeting between you and that man arranged; I knew your voice, Lucy, and I knew his too!"

"She turned deadly pale, and sank to the floor.

"Oh, miss," she said, in a low tone, "you can never forgive me. It was very, very wrong; but if you knew all you would pity me. Mr. Josiah promised to get my brother let off being a soldier—he did indeed! Mother's broken-hearted about poor James."

"Have you any proof to give of Mr. Josiah's promise?" I asked.

"Only my word; but that's worth nothing now," she replied, in accents of despair. "I've told one lie; nobody will believe me."

"The girl's confession, which was greatly to her detriment, left no doubt in my mind respecting my cousin; but the motive for his extraordinary conduct was still hidden in mystery. I cautioned the girl not to say a word about the affair with Mr. Josiah, which, unsupported as it was by any sufficient evidence, would only render my case worse with my aunt.

"My aunt, of her own accord, after very serious admonition, awarded to Lucy the grace of a month's warning.

Never again did my aunt allude to my marriage with Josiah; but she treated me with the utmost coldness and distance.

"It appeared that Mrs. Huntley had perfectly comprehended the reason of my silence and tears, when she addressed me at the dinner. In a few days I received a letter from her son making me an offer.

"Rejoiced as I was at this evidence of Mr. Huntley's love, I could have given anything that his avowal should have been postponed till my aunt had been reconciled more to my rejection of Josiah.

"I placed the letter in my aunt's hand, telling her that I held myself fully bound by my promise never to marry without her consent. She read the letter without making any remark on its contents, to me to acknowledge its receipt, and that the subject should be fully answered in a few days. I little imagined the answer that letter was destined to receive.

"One morning, about ten days after dinner-party, I was summoned to my aunt's room: of course I believed I wished to see me respecting Mr. Huntley's offer. When I entered the room I could see she was much agitated; she motioned me to sit on the sofa.

"Where did you put my diamonds the night of the dinner?" she enquired.

"In their usual place, at the top of the drawer," I replied.

"Find them, then!"

"I knelt down, and looked into the drawers; the diamonds were not in their place, I felt dreadfully alarmed; it was my fault for letting the keys go out of my hands. I pulled out all the contents of the drawers, parchments, legal documents, dusty bundles of letters, bills, plate—the diamonds were gone!

"I have had the keys in my possession from the time Lucy brought them to the night of the dinner; I can swear to it!" exclaimed my aunt. "Why, it was the night the girl was found in the garden."

"You do not suspect Lucy, aunt!"

"I do!" she replied with decision.

"I protested it was impossible that Lucy could have been guilty of such a crime. "Well," rejoined my aunt, "we won't are not fit judges in such a matter. send for Mr. Chapman."

This gentleman was a solicitor, and always been a great friend and chief adviser to my aunt.