

"Then why on earth did you come? You know that no one wanted you here?"

"My wife is dead, and you are my father's sister, Aunt Nesbitt, and I thought—in fact —" he broke off with that hollow cough which is the knell of many a hope and aspiration.

"What's good-for-nothing never comes to harm," said the old lady grimly, "You have always had this sort of a story to tell ever since I knew you!"

"I went to the hospital in Liverpool as I came through, and the doctor there said the same thing. He advised me to stay, but I wanted to see you, Aunt Nesbitt."

"You had better have stayed."

John James took up the shabby grey felt hat which lay near him on the yellow satin sofa, and twisted it round in his trembling hands. His tired eyes wandered about the richly-decorated walls from picture to mirror, from mirror to curtain, and at last rested languidly on the figure of a younger woman, in a plain grey gown, who sat at a little distance from the others, her head bent over her work.

"Jenny," he said suddenly, "tell Aunt Nesbitt it is all true this time. You can see that I am dying—can't you?"

Jenny raised her pitiful eyes, and looked sadly at her ne'er-do-well cousin. Then she got up, and moved towards the old lady.

"He is very ill, Aunt Nesbitt. He is hardly fit to go anywhere."

Aunt Nesbitt nodded, and Jenny hurried away. When she returned the old lady had put down her knitting, and was sitting bolt upright, listening.

John James was turning over, and holding up to the light one of her rings.

"Yes. This is a good stone, but not equal in value to the smaller of my two," he said, handing it back to Aunt Nesbitt.

We all have a vulnerable spot, and John James had discovered Aunt Nesbitt's. She had a passion for fine gems.

Her eyes were eager as she turned to Jenny.

"He says that he has two jewels—much finer than these—coming by the next steamer. He says he worked his passage over by sailing-ship, and left his jewels in the care of some one he knew who was coming in the *Dunster Castle*. Do you think it is true, Jenny?" She did not see the furtive, appealing look which the man threw at Jenny.

"There is no reason why it should not be true, Aunt," said Jenny, quietly, and she avoided his grateful eyes. "Besides, if it were not, you would know when the steamer is in."

She was certain that the man had made up the story on the spur of the moment. But she was certain, too, that he was dying. It would be horrible to turn him out to die in the workhouse, while Aunt Nesbitt would not miss it, though his illness should cost her a hundred pounds. Jenny had always been sorry for John James, since, as a boy, she used to shield him from punishments and try to get him out of scrapes. Perhaps even the old maid's heart had been touched by something warmer than pity for the poor weak man who had always needed some one to take care of him. Who can tell?

"But I don't understand why you didn't bring such valuable stones with you," said Aunt Nesbitt. "They would have been safe enough in your pocket."

He shook his head. "Nothing is safe in my pocket—when the fit seizes me. I dare not trust myself. So I addressed them to your care, and I thought that if I got better they could be sold here for more than in South Africa; and if I die—why then they

will compensate you for any trouble I have been to you. I have left them to you, Aunt Nesbitt."

A faint flush, and a little softening of the lines of the lips showed that the old lady was touched, but she did not speak.

"I am not altogether bad," the poor creature went on, his nerves somewhat strengthened, "and I always meant well. If I had not been driven away that first time—if my poor mother had lived—if anyone had kept a bit of hold on me, I believe I might have turned out as well as most men. I used to think once I should have made a good parson. But—everything was against me. Even my name. No one could expect much from a John James?"

"Rubbish!" said Aunt Nesbitt. "You were called after your two uncles, and better and more highly respected men never breathed. Jenny, go and give orders for the south room to be prepared. And when it is you had better go to bed till you've got something decent to wear, John James. I don't want a Nesbitt to be seen in rags!"

Her nephew was willing enough to go to bed, and far from anxious to get up—even when the new clothes arrived.

"It is my opinion that he needs nothing but good food and rest," said Aunt Nesbitt after she had seen him the next morning.

"From what he says about the diamonds, I should think they would look best set as ear-drops. What do you think, Jenny?"

"I think he is very ill, and ought to see the doctor, aunt," said Jenny, firmly.

So the doctor was sent for; and his verdict was that John James's days were numbered. A week or two would end his ill-spent life.

The patient was very grateful to his aunt, and even cheerful. For a few days he was able to come downstairs, and to crawl about the sunny garden. He gave as little trouble as he could, and said over and over again that he had not deserved such kindness.

"You need not think I am doing it out of kindness," Aunt Nesbitt would reply, sharply. "I shall be repaid for everything out of the price of your jewels."

He grew rapidly worse, and was soon not able to leave his bed. He seemed to have only one anxiety—to live till the arrival of the *Dunster Castle* with his jewels.

As death drew near Aunt Nesbitt was glad that her nephew was under her roof. Jenny nursed him tenderly, and he could not have been more gently helped through the Valley of the Shadow. One day the longed for news came. Jenny read to the dying man the "shipping news" each morning. When she came to the arrival of the *Dunster Castle* he gave a low cry of relief. "That will do, Jenny," he said, "I don't want any more."

He lay quite still, but his eyes filled with tears.

She put down the paper, and looked at him pitifully. "Wouldn't it make you happier to tell Aunt Nesbitt the truth?" she said gently, putting her hand on his. "Tell her that there are no jewels—that it was only a trick to get her to take you in . . . She will forgive you now. She is sorry for you. And she will soon know!"

A quiver passed over the weak, irresolute face, but he smiled as he met Jenny's pleading eyes. "But there are jewels—my jewels, my only treasures on earth! Pray God I may live to see them once more, Jenny."

Two hours later, as Jenny was raising him to give him a change of posture, there was a sound of wheels in the drive. The bedroom window was wide open; and John James heard it and started. "They have come—they are here, in time! . . . Now, promise

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me, Jenny—promise me faithfully—that you will take care of my jewels! And let me see them! Will you promise?" He clutched her eagerly. She pressed his hand, but the words of assurance died upon her lips. As she spoke he sighed, and slipped from her arms back to the pillow. He was at rest.

As Jenny ran downstairs she saw Aunt Nesbitt standing in the middle of the hall, and two little girls, in black clothes, hand in hand, looking up at her with half-frightened, half-confident faces.

"But tell me—who in the name of goodness are you?" asked the old lady.

"We are Sylvia and Nora Nesbitt—Daddy's Jewels—he always called us! And he told us to come here to meet him, and we have come!"

It was the elder of the two who spoke, in a calm little voice. They were both so pretty, so winsome, so trusting, that Jenny longed to take them in her arms. But there was something else to do first.

A wave of anger came to Aunt Nesbitt's face. "He has deceived me again," she exclaimed. "He shall be turned out to die in the street! He shall."

Jenny put her hand softly on her Aunt's arm.

"Hush!" she said. "It is too late? go and see!"

But when Aunt Nesbitt came downstairs, her wrath was gone, and tears were in her eyes. It was plain that poor John James had made his peace with Aunt Nesbitt at last and that she would accept the legacy of his jewels.—*Christian World*.

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