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THE SEARCH FOR THE TOPAZ

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"I dragged the resisting figure along the corridor to the great bay window which lighted it from the end. Just then the moon dipped clear of the rift of clouds, shining out bright and serene. I turned to look at my captive. 'Eloise!' I gasped."

I shall never forget that night when the topaz was brought home. It belonged to Mr. Richard Dacre, who had recently returned from the East Indies, fabulously rich. In the first place he had deposited the jewel in one of the New York banks; but feeling naturally eager to display his treasure, he finally decided to bring it to Fair Oaks.

A word of explanation just here. Fair Oaks was the country seat of Mrs. General Dacre, a blooming young widow of twenty-three. Richard Dacre was her brother-in-law. She had a step-daughter, Eloise, of about her own age. My brother Guy

and myself were guests invited to meet the East Indian and help reconcile him to his native land.

It was past seven o'clock when Mr. Dacre arrived with the topaz. After the early tea was over, he led the way to a private study to the rear of the parlors, bidding us follow.

"You shall see my precious treasure, my queen of sparklers," cried he delightedly. "Are we secure from interruption?"

Mrs. Dacre closed the door, carefully locking it.

"Yes," returned she, coming forward into the glow of the lamplight.

"The servants are not likely to come this way, in any event."

She paused beside the table, looking sweet and innocent as any saint, with her downcast eyes of the true Irish blue, her slight, petite figure, blonde complexion and profusion of yellow hair with the glint of gold upon it. Eloise stood near, darker, graver, more matured, though younger. Their faces made a charming contrast. While I was looking at the two, Guy touched my hand.

"Isn't she charming, Barton?" he whispered, in an intense tone.

"Which? Mrs. Dacre?"

"Of course. What do I care for

jewels? All the topazes in the world could not outrival the sparkle of her blue eyes, the glint of her hair."

I looked at him in puzzled amaze. He seemed feverish and excited. He had spoken with singular impetuosity. What did it mean? Had he lost his senses in admiration of our lovely hostess?

Mr. Richard's voice (Guy and I had fallen into the habit of calling him "Mr. Richard") broke in upon my meditations.

"Here is my topaz!" he exclaimed, unbuckling a leathern casket from his belt. "You shall see for yourselves if it is not a prince's ransom."