

HIS MOTHER'S DIAMOND.

I was lying lazily in my hammock, which swung in the cool breeze, hung from the giant limb of one of the great trees in the compound. I was realizing, somewhat uncomfortably, the condition of my finances, and forcing myself to look the situation squarely in the face. I was slow to believe that pleasure is a more costly thing than labor, and its products far from being as satisfactory. When I left England I assured my father that 500 a year and my pay would be more than enough to cover all reasonable wants and wishes, and now, after nine or ten months in Boreilly, I was so straitened "for lack of gear" that I must either overdraw, borrow or live an exceedingly retired life for the next three months. The privilege of playing guinea pool in Ashton's rooms with much better players than myself, and the not very heavy book on half a dozen sporting events, had combined toward this rapid result, as I could not help ruefully acknowledging.

As I mused I became suddenly aware of a laughing face looking down into my hammock. Rankelior, the captain of my company, had swung himself noiselessly into the tree, and perched astride a rough limb that swung alongside of mine. "Well, Campbell," he said, "you are enjoying the dolce far niente in the shade. I am just released from duty."

"You are mistaken about the dolce," I replied. "I am tasting the bitter, not the sweet do-nothing, and shall have to taste it for some time to come."

"I have been a bit remorseful over you, lad," he said, "speaking more gravely than was his wont, and without looking at me, scraping down gray fragments of lichen from the trunk of the old tree. I have not forgotten that it was I who first introduced you into Ashton's rooms and to his fact set. I have been foolish enough myself; but I had no right to drag you into a like scrape."

"Nonsense, Rankelior," I said hastily. "I was just charging myself with moral supineness when you came upon me suddenly—resolving to pull myself together, and resist even six-penny Nap in future!"

He smiled his bright sunny smile. "All right, lad. I'll back you up—I am afraid I need not say what I came to say—to ask, rather. You could not lead me a tinner for two days?"

I shook my head regretfully. "I am completely cleaned out, Rankelior—not a rupee left. And, what is worse, Ashton holds one or two IOUs, which he must hold till next pay."

"Ashton holds them," he repeated, a quick impatient frown crossing his features. "Then you positively have not a single coin to throw at a fellow, Campbell?"

"Not one, Rankelior. I am awfully sorry; but—"

"Oh, never mind," he interrupted, with ready kindness. "I shall have plenty in a day or two, and may be able to give you a lift—who knows?" He reached up to the limb above, to steady himself for an elastic spring downward.

"The 'What's come of your big rose diamond?" I asked, looking at the empty setting of the ring he always wore on the little finger of his left hand.

"He, too, looked at the empty ring, and although he laughed, I saw that he had changed color, and his laugh, to my ear, who knew all his mores, bore an inflection of pain or vexation. "I shall have it reset in two days."

heedlessly, to lounge away a few of the fifteen minutes that would intervene before the bell sounded for tiffin. Suddenly I heard the man calling me by name.

"Mr. Campbell, sir, won't you please come here just for a moment?" I jumped up and went to the mouth of the hole, into which man and rabbit had both disappeared. Peterson was emerging from it feet foremost, dragging something after him.

"This is a queer place, sir," he said; "it goes in ever so far. It's a regular tunnel, it is; and I found them things inside!"

He held up a trowel and pickaxe—a very small one—both of which bore evidence of having been recently used for excavating purposes in the half-dried, freshly-turned earth adhering to them.

"Where do you suppose it leads to?" I asked, taking the trowel in my hand.

"Well, sir, I didn't go in very far; but it goes off that way a good bit." He described a sweep with his arm, passing the officers' quarters to the left.

"And that leads?"—only for an instant did I stand with bent brows; then, as if a "brain wave" had floated across to the other, we both exclaimed at once, "Good gracious! The fort—the fort, with all the money!"

"It must be that," I said, in consternation. "Peterson, you go in again and penetrate to the very end. I shall walk above, as your voice directs. Mind, you must shout well. We must look into this."

The man obeyed at once, and crept back into the hole.

As soon as he completely vanished I threw down the trowel and prepared to follow above ground, when a single dazzling point of light glittered like a star from amid the displaced earth, and fell from the trowel, where I had thrown it down. With a strange, sinking feeling of genuine dismay at my heart I stooped and picked up—Rankelior's diamond! I had not the time then, however, to speculate.

Peterson was already shouting, his voice muffled and indistinct, as from a distance. I rolled the precious stone in a corner of my handkerchief, and sprang away to follow the man's progress. I replied to every shout by stamping violently on the ground. As we had feared, we were led directly to the fort, where all the moneys of the garrison were packed and stocked from floor to ceiling. What was worse, before the faint muffled voice had ceased to lead me forward I stood within two or three yards of the back wall of the fort. Evidently the tunnel was quite near completion; a single night's hard work, a brick or two removed from the wall, and the excavators would be richly rewarded!

I turned and quickly retraced my steps to the mouth of the tunnel. A group of men, among whom I distinguished Captains Ashton and Fordyce, stood by the entrance. Plainly they had been watching our movements, and must have thought them suspicious.

Obeying a swift impulse I lifted my handkerchief and slipped the jewel into my mouth, where it lay, "rolled like a sweet morsel under my tongue. I saw that Captain Fordyce held the trowel in his hand, and Captain Ashton had just laid down the pickaxe.

"Campbell! You, Campbell! It can't be possible?" exclaimed Ashton, in amazed crescendo. "Who would have thought or believed it! I should sooner have named any other man in the garrison had I been asked to pick out the delinquent!"

what a relation Rankelior bore to this strange discovery of the secret tunnel. I had abundance of time to pursue my reflections, for with the solitary exception of the orderly who brought my luncheon, no one came near me for several hours. Over and over, round and round again, spun and whirled in my brain the events of the day and my strange discovery. The conclusion I came to was startling; and the instant I found myself being driven towards it, like a horse swerving from a desperate leap, I turned away and began my summary all over again. One or two things I was quite sure of: Rankelior's diamond had sparked and scintillated on his finger last evening at the late mass dinner. Ashton and Fordyce had both declared that they had watched the tunnel since yesterday afternoon; Rankelior must therefore have lost the jewel in the tunnel while it was being watched, and at night, or very early in the morning. What could that possibly mean except?

"I always stopped there, and began all over again. I remembered with a strange feeling of disloyalty to one who had been the kindest of friends to me how Rankelior had two or three times told me that he would have 'plenty of money' within a day or two at the furthest, and would even be able to help me out of my tight places. One thing I was decided upon, in the slow crystallization of repulsive ideas forming in my brain against my will—that was, that so far as I was concerned in the matter I would shield no friend's name. I would preserve utter silence on the subject of his lost diamond, for the present at least, no matter what the penalty might be.

A quick footstep in the corridor caught my ear; my door was thrown open and Rankelior walked in, his face suffused with a fiery glow of indignation. "What a thundering shame, Campbell!" was his impulsive exclamation, holding out both hands to me. "Ashton and Fordyce knew just as I do they would laugh at the thought of bringing such a charge against you."

"As you do," I said, forcing a smile. "I mean—as you laugh at it!"

He looked at me attentively, as if something in my manner had struck him as unusual.

"Tell me all about it, Campbell," he said, speaking with authority and kindness, both. "Let me hear your version of the affair."

"Mine is very simple. I was at my rope drill, as the men can testify. I had dismissed the men, all but Peterson, whose duty it was to see to the ropes, when I saw him fling his cap at a rabbit just darting into his hole, as we thought. Cap and rabbit both disappeared, and Peterson crawled in after, and found—what made him forget the rabbit. We had just finished exploring the tunnel, in fact; I have not yet had Peterson's report. Ashton and Fordyce, with one or two men, seized and arrested us, and scoffed at my explanations."

Rankelior looked grave.

"May I hear their account of it?" I asked, after a pause.

"Yes. It seems that they discovered this tunnel yesterday, and without exploring it very thoroughly suspected it might lead to the fort, and watched it, from that time until night, by turns. No one approached the hole for an hour or two, when they both—Ashton and Fordyce—saw you and your man near the entrance. Then, as they suppose, with a view to discovering how far the tunnel had yet to penetrate before reaching the fort, the man crept inside, and you walked toward the fort until within a few yards. Then they called up their men and arrested you both on the spot. Is that correct, Campbell?"

"Before I could reply a knock at the door was followed by the entrance of an orderly, who informed me that Colonel Pryor desired my presence in the ante room. I went at once, followed by Rankelior. There were only two men—my accusers—present in the ante room with Colonel Pryor when I entered. It was quite an informal inquiry; but I saw that the old 'chief' noted keenly my every word and look; I told the plain unvarnished truth, with simple directness, to Colonel Pryor, and he listened with courtesy. When I had ended he looked toward Ashton and Fordyce.

"You found this tunnel yesterday afternoon, you say, gentlemen?" "We did, sir; and we watched all night and all day; to day, one or the other of us kept near it."

The chief mused for a moment, his stern old face masked and inscrutable as that of the sphinx. "Did you leave anyone on guard at the tunnel when you came to me first to report? Who is there now?"

The two officers looked a little foolish. "We did not post a sentry there after discovering the tunnel," said Ashton, somewhat sadly. "It will be time enough in the evening."

"I shall post sentries there tonight. I think you had better confine yourselves to barracks till tomorrow afternoon—you three discoverers, I mean—and let me deal alone with this henceforward."

He left the room, and I never saw darker, angrier faces than were those of Ashton and Fordyce on hearing the colonel's ultimatum.

Without speaking to any of them, I returned to my own room, again followed by Rankelior, who, in his friendliest manner, laid his hand on my shoulder.

"Campbell, old fellow, I don't mean to leave you alone till you make a clean breast of it! I see clearly that you suspect me of some complicity in this business, and I shall haunt you until you confess. Come, out with it!"

"I don't suspect—I know, Rankelior!" I said, looking earnestly at him. "I found your diamond—where you lost it, in the very mouth of that tunnel, among the freshly-turned earth on the trowel!"

A series of rapid, startling changes crossed his features, leaving him as pale as death; but his eyes never flinched from their steady gaze into mine, only his hand dropped from my shoulder.

"You found my diamond there?—my mother's gift?" he said, stertorously. "Yes; I found it there. I have it safely, and no eye has seen it but mine, nor shall any one hear of it from me. Rankelior!"

His face flushed again, and he replaced his hand on my shoulder with a smile. He had but opened his lips to speak when a hideous sound, or rather a babel of sounds, arose from the opposite room in the same corridor—a rain of heavy blows, mingled with howls and loud protestations and groans of "Oh, shah! I not steal anything! Oh—sh, shah!"

We both walked unconsciously into Ashton's room, whence the sounds proceeded. It was not quite an unheard-of thing to find an officer beating his Hindu servant, with his braces or anything that came handy; but Ashton was in a furious passion, and was kicking savagely as well. With out a moment's hesitation Rankelior sprang forward and wrenched the man's arm out of Ashton's angry grip.

"Go—run!" he said, and the poor wretch needed no second bidding. Ashton turned directly on Rankelior. "How dare you interfere? The dog has been stealing! I have lost—!" He stepped short, looking blacker than a thunder cloud.

"I know," said Rankelior, quietly. "You have lost my rose diamond, which you took from me last night at baccarat, knowing well that it represented more than five times the value of the amount I owed you. Ashton, you shall send in your papers to-morrow. Fordyce, too, I have felt for some time that 'monkeys' and 'ponies' had gone quite far enough in your quarters; but when it comes to tunnelling through to the fort for money to supply your table it must stop! I give you your choice, either send in your papers at once, or the whole story of where the diamond was found, among the fresh earth adhering to the trowel—shall be told openly and freely."

"Bah! Say no more!" said Ashton, with face and voice of exceeding disgust. "I did not mean to stay long in any case in a corps of cadets and tradesmen. I shall exchange into a horse regiment."

"You were glad enough to win the money of the cadets and tradesmen," said Rankelior, coldly. "However, so long as you and Fordyce retire at once, you can go where you please. Come along, Campbell. He took me by the arm, and we crossed again into my room.

"Is it all square now, lad?" he asked, with his winning smile. "And will you restore me my mother's diamond? You say you found it."

suspecting me of—duce knows what; but I refused utterly and indignantly to suspect you of the least approach to complicity in this—crime! Give me the full credit I deserve." He laughed in his quiet, cordial way; but I saw that he was a little hurt, too. "And let's make a compact firm and sure to help each other, and these young fogdoggles in our corps, to escape from the snares of such fowlers as Ashton and Fordyce. Shall we?"

"I shall never play for money again while I live," I said firmly. "And I don't think I can ever distrust you again, Rankelior."

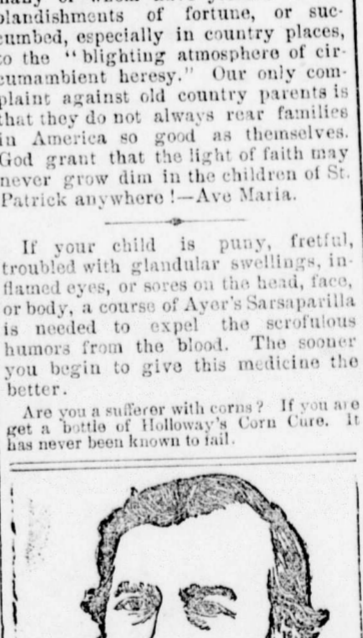
It was impossible for anyone to guess whether Colonel Pryor suspected anything unusual in receiving the resignations of two officers on the same day. He could keep his own counsel—none better. The tunnel was safely blocked up, and the fort closely guarded. It was in 1860 that the incident occurred, and Rankelior and I are still fast friends after thirty years. The snows of winter are beginning to besprinkle our heads, and our faces are tanned and weather-beaten; but our hearts are fresh and firmly knit as in early manhood. His mother's diamond still shines on his finger though she has long ago fallen asleep.—Chamber's Journal.

Cardinal Manning on Children. I have sometimes thought, when looking on a church full of children, there is nothing more beautiful in the sight of God. A beautiful garden of roses, lilies and lovely flowers is sweet and beautiful to the eye. The hand of man guards and watches over it so that no harm can enter. Sometimes a storm of wind or hail breaks the lilies, destroys the roses and makes ruin where before all was sweet and orderly. The wicked and malicious man comes in to wreck and ruin his neighbor's garden and when he sees this, everybody is touched to the heart. Everything lovely and sweet, trampled down and wrecked, makes the people grieved; but, in the sight of God, not the most beautiful garden fashioned by the hand of man, not even the garden of Eden with all its glory and beauty of flowers and fruits, was so bright and glorious as are the souls of little children, in whom the Holy Ghost dwells. Such a scene is sweeter and brighter in the sight of God than any garden man ever formed.

Irish Faith. In an interview with Mr. Stead not long ago, Archbishop Croke, of Cashel, said: "I do not believe that from the days of St. Patrick till now there has ever been a time when the Irish people were so devoted to practising their religion as they are to-day. This should be a subject of legitimate pride to the Irish people, and of gratification to Catholics everywhere. It is doubtful, however, if this beautiful ecology could be applied so unrestrictedly to the children of St. Patrick in America, most of whom preserve the lustre of faith untarnished, but too many of whom have yielded to the blighting atmosphere of fortune, or succumbed, especially in country places, to the blighting atmosphere of circumscribed heresy." Our only complaint against old country parents is that they do not always rear families in America so good as themselves. God grant that the light of faith may never grow dim in the children of St. Patrick anywhere!—Ave Maria.

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