

now, and of course has his fancies. You would think him mercenary, perhaps, and so he is; but then so, too, am I. Oh, yes, I am, monsieur, frightfully mercenary. To be mercenary, I believe, means to be fond of money. No one is fonder of money than I, except, perhaps, my uncle; but you see, monsieur, we occupy the two extremes. He is fond of money to hoard it; I am fond of money to spend it. I am fond of money for the things it will buy. I should like to scatter *largesse* as did my fair ancestress in France. I should love a manor-house in the country, and a mansion in Mayfair. I could wish to make everyone around me happy, if the expenditure of money would do it."

"That is a form of money love, Lady Alicia, that will find a multitude of admirers."

The girl shook her head and laughed merrily.

"I should so dislike to forfeit your esteem, Monsieur Valmont, and therefore I shall not reveal the depth of my cupidity. You will learn that probably from my uncle, and then you will understand my extreme anxiety for the recovery of these jewels."

"Are they very valuable?"

"Oh, yes; the necklace consists of twenty stones, no one of which weighs less than an ounce. Altogether, I believe, they amount to two thousand four hundred or two thousand five hundred carats, and their intrinsic value is twenty pounds a carat at least. So you see that means nearly fifty thousand pounds; yet even this sum is trivial compared with what it involves. There is something like a million at stake, together with my coveted manor-house in the country, and my equally coveted mansion in Mayfair. All this is within my grasp if I can but recover the emeralds."

THE girl blushed prettily as she noticed how intently I regarded her while she evolved this tantalizing mystery. I thought there was a trace of embarrassment in her laugh when she cried—

"Oh! what will you think of me when you understand the situation? Pray, pray do not judge me harshly. I assure you the position I aim at will be used for the good of others as well as for my own pleasure. If my uncle does not make a confidant of you, I must take my courage in both hands and give you all the particulars; but not to-night. Of course, if one is to unravel such a tangle as that in which we find ourselves, he must be made aware of every particular, must he not?"

"Certainly, my lady."

"Very well, Monsieur Valmont, I shall supply any deficiencies that occur in my uncle's conversation with you. There is one point on which I should like to warn you. Both my uncle and the police have made up their minds that a certain young man is the culprit. The police found various clues which apparently led in his direction, but they were unable to gather enough to justify his arrest. At first, I thought he had nothing whatever to do with the matter, but lately I am not so sure. All I ask of you, until we have another opportunity of consulting together, is to preserve an open mind, and do not let my uncle prejudice you against him."

"What is the name of this young man?"

"He is the Honourable John Haddon."

"The Honourable? Is he a person who would do so dishonourable an action?"

The young lady shook her head.

"I am almost sure he would not, and yet one never can tell. I think at the present moment there are one or two noble lords in prison, but their crimes have not been mere vulgar housebreaking."

"Am I to infer, Lady Alicia, that you are in possession of certain facts not known either to your uncle or the police?"

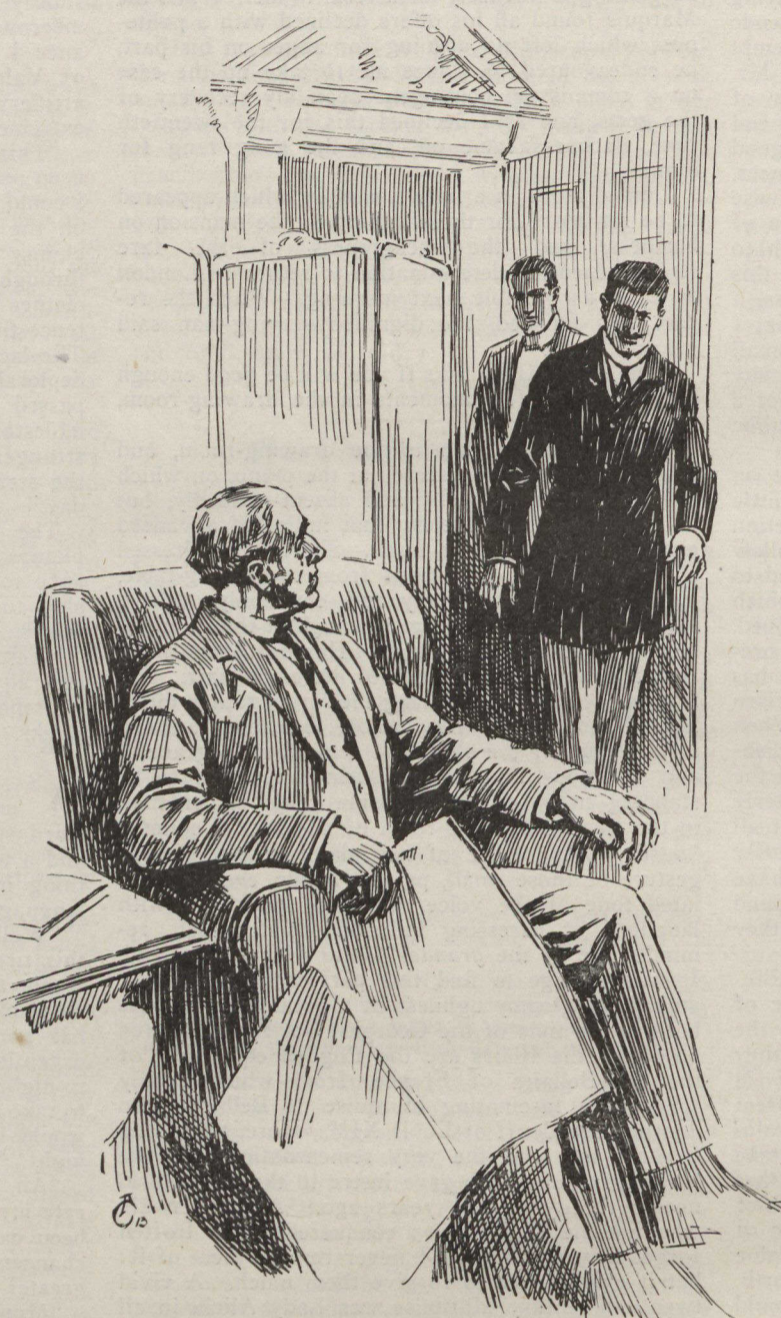
"Yes."

"Pardon me, but do these facts tend to incriminate the young man?"

Again the young lady leaned back in her chair and gazed past me, a wrinkle of perplexity on her fair brow. Then she said, very slowly—

"You will understand, Monsieur Valmont, how loth I am to speak against one who was formerly a friend. If he had been content to remain a friend, I am sure this incident which has caused us all such worry and trouble would never have happened. I do not wish to dwell on what my uncle will tell you was a very unpleasant episode, but the Honourable John Haddon is a poor man, and it is quite out of the question for one brought up as I have

been to marry into poverty. He was very headstrong and reckless about the matter, and involved my uncle in a bitter quarrel while discussing it, much to my chagrin and disappointment. It is as necessary for him to marry wealth as it is for me to make a good match, but he could not be brought to see that. Oh, he is not at all a sensible young man, and all my friendship for him has ceased. Yet I should dislike very much to take any action that



I was admitted to the study of the Marquis of Blair.

would harm him, therefore I have spoken to no one but you about the evidence that is in my hands, and this you must treat as entirely confidential, giving no hint to my uncle, who is already bitter enough against Mr. Haddon."

"Does this evidence convince you that he stole the necklace?"

"No, I do not believe yet that he actually stole it, but I am persuaded that he was accessory after the fact—is that the legal term? Now, Monsieur Valmont, we will say no more to-night. If I talk any longer about this crisis, I shall not sleep, and I wish, with your help, to attack the situation with a very clear mind to-morrow."

WHEN I retired to my room, I found that I, too, could not sleep, although I needed a clear mind to face the problem of to-morrow. It is difficult for me to describe accurately the effect this interview had upon my mind, but, to use a bodily simile, I may say that it seemed as if I had indulged too freely in a subtle champagne which appeared exceedingly excellent at first, but from which the exhilaration had now departed. No man could have been more completely under a spell than I was when Lady Alicia's eyes first spoke to me more than her lips revealed; but although I had challenged her right to the title "mercenary" when she applied it to herself, I could not but confess that her nonchalant recital regarding the friend who desired to be the lover, jarred upon me. I found my sympathy extending itself to that unknown young man, on whom it appeared the shadow of suspicion already rested. I was confident that if he had actually taken the emeralds, it was not at all from motives of cupidity. Indeed, that was

practically shown by the fact that Scotland Yard had been unable to trace the jewels, which at least they might have done if the necklace had been sold, either as a whole or dismembered. Of course, an emerald weighing an ounce is by no means unusual. The Hope emerald, for example, weighs six ounces, and the gem owned by the Duke of Devonshire measures two and a quarter inches through its greatest diameter. Nevertheless, such a constellation as the Blair emeralds was not to be disposed of very easily, and I surmised no attempt had been made either to sell them or to raise money upon them. Now that I had removed myself from the glamour of her presence, I began to suspect that the young lady, after all, although undoubtedly possessing the brilliancy of her jewels, retained also something of their hardness. There had been no expression of sympathy for the discarded friend; it was too evident, recalling what had latterly passed between us, that the young woman's sole desire, and a perfectly natural desire, was to recover her missing treasure. There was something behind all this which I could not comprehend, and I resolved in the morning to question the Marquis of Blair as shrewdly as he cared to allow. Failing him, I should cross-question the niece in a somewhat dryer light than that which had enshrouded me during this interesting evening. I care not who knows it, but I have been befooled more than once by a woman, and I determined that in clear daylight I should resist the hypnotizing influence of those glorious eyes. *Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!* how easy it is for me to make good resolutions when I am far from temptation!

IT was ten o'clock next morning when I was admitted to the study of the aged bachelor Marquis of Blair. His keen eyes looked through and through me as I seated myself before him.

"Well!" he said, shortly.

"My lord," I began, deliberately, "I know nothing more of the case than was furnished by the accounts I have read in the newspapers. Two months have elapsed since the robbery. Every day that passed made the detection of the criminal more difficult. I do not wish to waste either my time or your money on a forlorn hope. If, therefore, you will be good enough to place me in possession of the facts known to you, I shall tell you at once whether or not I can take up the case."

"Do you wish the name of the criminal?" asked his lordship.

"Do you know his name?" I asked in return.

"Yes, his name is John Haddon."

"Did you give that name to the police?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't they arrest him?"

"Because the evidence against him is so small, and the improbability of his having committed the crime is so great."

"What is the evidence against him?"

His lordship spoke with the dry deliberation of an aged solicitor.

"The robbery was committed on the night of October the 5th. All day there had been a heavy rain, and the grounds were wet. For reasons into which I do not care to go, John Haddon was familiar with this house and with our grounds. He was well known to my servants, and unfortunately popular with them, for he is an open-handed spendthrift. The estate of his elder brother, Lord Steffenham, adjoins my own to the west, and Lord Steffenham's house is three miles from where we sit. On the night of the fifth a ball was given in the mansion of Lord Steffenham, to which, of course, my niece and myself were invited, and which invitation we accepted. I have no quarrel with the elder brother. It was known to John Haddon that my niece intended to wear her necklace of emeralds. The robbery occurred at a time when most crimes of that nature are committed in country houses—namely, while we were at dinner, an hour during which the servants are almost invariably in the lower part of the house. In October the days are getting short. The night was exceptionally dark, for although the rain had ceased, not a star was visible. The thief placed a ladder against the sill of one of the upper windows, opened it, and came in. He must have been perfectly familiar with the house, for there are evidences that he went direct to the boudoir, where the jewel-case had been carelessly left on my niece's dressing-table

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