

Elgar turned them over with reverent fingers, yet at the same time conscious of a wonder at the back of his mind, that any one should want to treasure things of this sort, when suddenly his hand fell on an object, which even to his ignorance seemed of more worth than all the other things put together. This was a heart-shaped locket in deep Californian gold, set round with emeralds, which flashed like green fire in the light of the kerosene lamp.

"Oh, I say!" he ejaculated admiringly, and his aunt, who was sewing on the other side of the table, looked across to see what it was which had attracted his admiration.

"That was your father's, and his father's before him," she said. "The Hunts had been great people at one time, or so your poor father was always saying, but that locket with the emeralds was the only visible sign of their greatness that I ever set eyes on."

"Does it open?" asked Elgar, who was casting careful glances all round the locket to see if he could find the hinge.

"I don't know, I never saw it open. I know that once or twice your mother wanted it to be sold, but your father said no. Even when he was dying, and could only speak with difficulty, he begged her never to part with the emerald locket, and she never did."

"I am glad of that," said Elgar simply, and then was conscious that his aunt was somehow vexed, and as he hated to give her pain, because she had been so good to him, and had loved him when there was no one else to care for him, he said no more, only he did not put the emerald locket back with the other things, instead, he slipped it into a tiny wash-leather bag, and slung it round his neck by a stout string.