

furiously uproar if a stranger had trespassed upon the grounds?"

"I did not know, and went to consult Thomas, the coachman. Coming back, I answered, 'no' to the first question, and 'yes' to the second."

"Very good," said he, nodding thoughtfully to himself. "The circle of investigation is narrowing rapidly. A few more questions, and I'm done. There were two ladies in the room above. The blonde is Mrs. Dacre, I take it. Who is the other?"

"Miss Eloise Dacre—Mr. Richard's niece."

"So, so. I never saw the young lady until to-day. But, mark my words, she knows more about this matter than she is willing to acknowledge."

"I gave a violent start."

"Why should you think that?"

"She is laboring under suppressed excitement too violent in its nature to have been wholly occasioned by the mere loss of the topaz. She changed color more than once while I was in the room with her."

"What can you argue from that?" I exclaimed, showing considerable temper. "Any thoroughly sympathetic woman would have been excited in the same manner. Eloise is innocent as an angel."

"I hope so, I'm sure," he returned, giving me an odd look. "But, mark my words, Miss Dacre may fall to accusing somebody, openly or otherwise, before twenty-four hours have elapsed. If she does, you need look no further for the culprit."

He swung on his heel.

"What possible motive could—" I began, angrily, but he was already beyond reach of my voice.

His words set me to thinking. I remembered where I had encountered the girl the previous night, and how startled and unlike herself she had appeared. But I could not for one moment imagine she had taken the jewel. The very idea seemed preposterous. I determined to look much further for a solution of the mystery before believing in her guilt.

While I still loitered in the hall, the parlor door opened, and Mrs. Dacre called to me in her sweetest tones. Of course, the summons did not pass unheeded. I went in and found her seated in a chair by an open window, those floss-like curls looped back from her face, and a lovely color coming and going in her cheeks. One of her white jeweled hands was thrown carelessly over a small, richly-bound prayer-book in her lap.

"What is that?" I asked, playfully indicating the book, which had a very heavy gold clasp. "Pandora's box?"

I did not know what there was in my words to startle her so, but all the richness and brightness and color fled suddenly from her face, leaving it pale as ashes. She drew a long, gasping breath, but did not rally for many minutes.

"Pandora's box?" she echoed, with a forced laugh. "What a conceit! And it is only a harmless little prayer-book, you perceive."

She flitted the leaves before my face, as if that was really necessary to convince me of the truth of what she said. Afterward she made room for me by her side.

"This is a most distressing affair, Mr. Devonshire," said she, thoughtfully.

"You refer to the theft of the topaz, of course?"

"Yes," hitting her eloquent eyes to my face. "Who stole the jewel? I am convinced that the servants are innocent. If an outsider had entered the house, we must have found some trace of him."

"Worse and worse!" she murmured, nervously, toying with the gold clasp of the prayer-book. "The mystery is more impenetrable than ever. Of course, our brother Guy did not steal the topaz. I would not insult him with such a suspicion. And yet there is nobody else save Eloise and ourself."

"I drew a long breath, feeling that she was still steadily regarding me. One of her delicate hands fluttered in my vision."

"Eloise is very partial to jewels," he said suddenly.

"What did she intend to insinuate?" I started, my feet, nearly wild with

pain. In rising one of the bottoms of my coat became entangled in the lace shading her rounded arms. I stooped to disentangle it, and she turned at the same instant.

Guy passed along the walk under the window just then. Mrs. Dacre pushed me from her.

"Go, go," she said, in a thrilling whisper. "Guy must not see us together. Harm might come of it; harm to you, Barton!"

It was impossible to mis-understand her half-tender, half-outraging tone. I thought of what Guy had said to me the previous night. Was it possible that this woman loved me?

I left the room, feeling very much disconcerted. A fate would have it, I met Eloise in the hall, but the dear girl was looking so white and wretched that I should scarcely have recognized her. At sight of her pale face everything else was forgotten. I sprang forward and attempted to catch her in my arm.

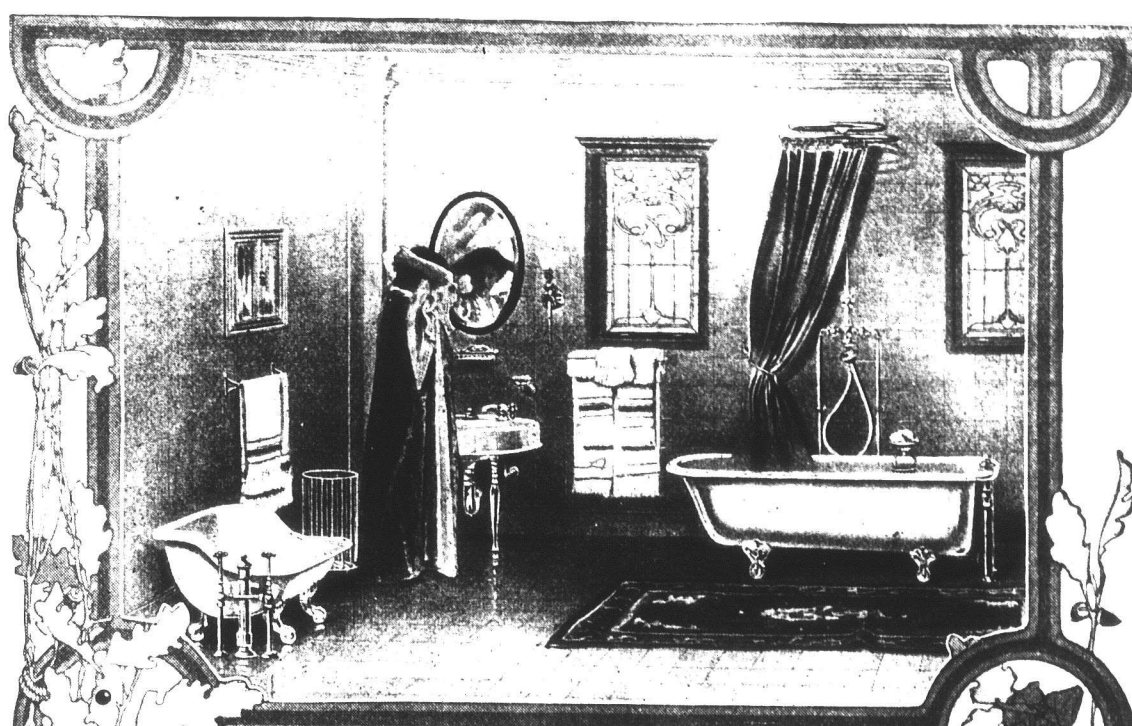
"Bad!" she cried, eluding me.

I stood frozen.

"Why should you take this matter so to heart?" I said. "Why should you lose me in a delusion?"

She did not answer. Her began to weep softly. That was more than I could endure. I ran after her, caught her in my arm.

"You shall speak to me, Eloise. You shall tell me what you have seen."



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done to deserve such treatment?" She turned at last, her fine red lip curling with scorn.

"How dare you?" she cried. "How dare you touch me? How dare you speak to me?"

For a second or two after this outbreak I was mute. Surprise had taken away my breath. But it soon came back.

"Eloise, my regard for you ought at least to insure common civility at your hands."

"Regard?" she broke out, hotly. "Never mention that word to me again. Never come in my sight—never presume to address me! I hate you!"

Her vehemence was somewhat alarming. A rich color rose to her cheeks, and her eyes flashed from her eyes. Her tone expressed intense contempt. She did not give me time to recover my self; she whirled through the nearest door. The moment it was closed between us I heard her burst into a passion of tears, on the other side.

Here was another mystery, a sudden change in my gentle Eloise. Sick and bewildered, I dragged my weary limbs out upon the verandah. The sound of voices, as I have mentioned, I saw Guy and Mrs. Dacre walking along one of the paths of the rose garden. She had probably left the garden to meet me, and I had

window, in order to join him.

Oddly enough, despite the misery I was in, I remarked that she still carried the velvet-bound prayer-book in one hand. Guy seemed to be pleading with her, while she, woman-like, was putting him off with one pretext or another. I began to fear that the woman was a coquette at heart, notwithstanding her Madonna-like face.

I sat in the cool verandah for more than an hour. Guy and our pretty hostess came back at last, apparently on the best possible terms with each other. The brown was wholly gone from my brother's face, and he looked as healthy and happy. She had evidently said or done something to encourage him.

They passed into the house without having seen me in the shaded corner where I sat. I had risen to follow them, when two persons entered the room near the open window of which I had been sitting. The next instant I stood transfixed to the spot, spell-bound by the words that came to my ear.

"Uncle Richard!" the voice was faint, though hardly a natural tone could be recognized. "Uncle Richard, the search for the topaz must be stopped! Must be, I say!"

Then Mr. Dacre replied: "That jewel is worth a thousand guineas!"

"The quest must be