

The Lady of the Emeralds

A Study in Criminology

By EDITH G. BAYNE



MAYHEW paused in the act of lifting the razor to his chin. His eye had just caught the date on his dresser calendar. Three days old! With his left hand he tore off the three top leaves, exposing a large number eleven. Then a slow smile spread over his face and from the recesses of his throat as he swiftly plied the razor about his well-developed jaw, came a sound which might have been interpreted as expressing part skepticism, part amusement. The magic number, eleven, had called it forth.

It was the eleventh of the month and in the ordinary sense this meant nothing special to Professor Mayhew. It was also Tuesday, thesis day, and he had no lectures until one-thirty. But—the evening before, his married sister had succeeded in dragging him out to a social affair, termed a “tea-fight,” and he had there been wheedled into having his palm read by a gipsy fortune-teller. Of course she hadn’t been a real gipsy, and he had listened with a polite and somewhat bored attention to her prognostications. For fifty cents she had conjured up some very pleasant but highly improbable future events for him. He was to be married—ah very soon! His fate was rapidly approaching. It was breaking all the speed laws and cutting corners on two wheels as it were, to reach him! The lady of his choice would be a person of high character, much intelligence and no little beauty. Also he was due for a legacy soon and his lucky number was eleven. Everybody had a lucky number, whether they knew it or not.

“Think back and see if everything fortunate that has occurred in your life hasn’t taken place either at eleven of the clock or on the eleventh day of the month,” she had advised him.

He had obeyed her. But the result of his cogitations was disappointing. He had had a serious illness at the age of eleven. One night at eleven the house had caught fire. Eleven years ago to a day he had been “plucked” in his exams.

“No, no, madam! I am unable to accept your dictum,” he had told her, rising ere she could request another half-dollar for a recounting of his past. “Still I thank you kindly. You are a true optimist. The bare idea of that legacy has bucked me up wonderfully.”

HIS boarding-house breakfast bell sent out its last clarion summons, and Mayhew hurriedly dressed.

Disposing of the meal in his usual rapid manner, he took a car for the downtown district. Most of the forenoon was spent in the transaction of various matters of business, and not again did he have occasion to think of the talismanic numeral which was supposed to be the guiding star of his destiny.

An hour before noon found him at the jewelry counter in a large apartment store. He was choosing a pair of gold cuff-links for a birthday present for a fellow member of the Faculty.

The store was thronged. Next to him, and at times so close that he could discern the faint aroma of Parma violet that emanated from her vanity-bag, stood a young woman in a fashionable blue jersey-cloth costume. She was looking at some expensive necklaces, languidly lifting them up in her slim white fingers and laying them aside, seemingly unable to come to a decision in the matter of a purchase.

Mayhew found himself unable to refrain from little sidelong glances of furtive admiration. She was undoubtedly a charming sort of person, though not strictly beautiful. She had a clear-cut piquant profile, soft dark hair and a pair of shadowy hazel eyes. It was this latter feature of the girl that drew the young professor’s attention irresistibly to her. They were strange eyes. Something of regret lay in their depths. They were the sort of eyes that invariably accompany a good brain. He could see that she was a sensible, perhaps an economical person. She was evidently regretting the high prices of—

Then an involuntary gasp of horror escaped Professor Mayhew. For even as he continued to watch her in his unobtrusive way, he saw her do a very odd thing.

She glanced swiftly to right and left and quickly slipped an emerald necklace up her sleeve!

ALL this while he had been standing beside a shop-lifter! Mayhew’s heart, which had almost ceased operations, now commenced to pound. A cold sweat broke

out all over him. The shock of what he had just witnessed left him staring at her in unqualified amazement.

She looked up, caught his expression and a queer, pleading look came into her eyes. Then they dropped swiftly, she drew her lips together, bravely assumed an air of indifference and turned to leave the counter.

But Nemesis was on her trail! From behind a marble pillar stepped one of the great store’s watchdogs—a man in plain attire but clothed with official authority.

Blandly and in very quiet tones he invited the young woman to accompany him to the office of the store superintendent.

MAYHEW saw the girl’s face whiten. His heart contracted with pity as he heard her essay a laugh. So young, so lovely—and so hardened! The young man whose days were spent in the seclusion of college halls was face to face for the first time with an actuality of real life, a sub-strata, demi-monde, occurrence. In all his learned, scholarly helplessness he stood gazing at the lovely thief but unable to aid her in the slightest degree.

“You were witness of this?”

The words, though quiet, cut into his consciousness like the chill chipping of steel on ice.

“I—I really would prefer not to appear in this matter at all—” he began, backing away. But we must have you. You won’t be detained long. Come,” insisted the detective.

Reluctantly Mayhew followed the speaker and the girl into an elevator. All the way up to the sixth floor he watched the girl’s hands—fair hands that clasped her alligator handbag firmly—not the ordinary hands of the professional shop-lifter, he imagined. These fingers did not look predatory. Still you never could tell. The appearance of immunity they had was likely their best professional asset!

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DURING the next ten minutes Mayhew lost all sense of time. Afterwards he told himself that an hour must have passed. The usual formula was put to the girl who gave her name as Clare Wilkins. She was searched in an adjoining room by the matron. But apparently the emerald necklace was all of the booty. A price tag was on it.

“One hundred and eighty-five dollars!” exclaimed the superintendent. “Whew! You didn’t do this from necessity, young woman! You are evidently not in want. Is it your first offence?”

“I prefer not to say,” said Miss Wilkins.

“Ah! Then your record will have to be looked up. Call a closed cab, Mr. Maxwell, please. And this young man?”

“He witnessed the removal of the necklace.”

“Then he will go along.”

“Where to?” demanded Mayhew. “You’re not sending her to—can’t the fine be paid here? I—will gladly pay it if you will let her off.”

The superintendent shook his head.

“We’ve let too many off. It happens too often. Last month we made a new rule. Right over to number six station they go now!”

Miss Wilkins had been standing with downcast eyes. At Mayhew’s offer to aid her she flashed him a grateful look, but at the same time shook her head.

“What made you do it?” he asked, as they filed out again.

“I—I just love emeralds!” she answered, and it seemed to him that her tone sounded irrelevant.

At number six station Miss Wilkins was given “ten days” without the option of a fine, until her record could be looked into.

Mayhew, though loath to admit it, was compelled to believe, from all absence of an hysterical manner on her part that Miss Wilkins was an old offender, or else she had great self control!

“My dear girl, why do you lead a life of this sort?” he asked, impulsively, as he prepared to leave her.

Without realizing it he had taken one of her hands into his strong clasp. Looking earnestly down at her he suddenly remembered that his young sister and she must be about of an age.

At his sympathetic tone Miss Wilkins displayed her first sign of emotion. She gulped once or twice and then sobbed convulsively into her handkerchief. He left her thus, promising to call upon her the next day.

THE young don was only half present in the spirit at classes that afternoon. In the evening he chanced to read a disquieting editorial in one of the papers. Ordinarily the topic would scarcely have interested him sufficiently to make him wade through the first sentence. It was about prison reform. The *Evening Echo* had been championing the cause for some time.

“Why it should be necessary to keep the public in the dark in regard to conditions in our prisons, we cannot understand, unless it is a case of palpable, patent mismanagement,” *The Echo* said. “And as for the state of affairs in the women’s sections—particularly in numbers six, nine and eleven—how, in a city like ours such woeful neglect of the ordinary decencies can be tolerated, passes comprehension.”

Mayhew shuddered as he pictured the possible plight of Clare Wilkins. Owing to lack of proper food the girl would emerge at the end of her incarceration a mere shadow!

So the next day he smuggled in to her a box of candy and some fruit. She did not extend her hand but he took it and spoke to her in a big-brotherly manner. She sat on her hard little bed, he on the plain wooden bench.

“I admire your altruistic motives in coming here, Professor Mayhew,” said the girl at the end of his first half dozen halting remarks. “But really you can do me no good. You—you don’t understand the temptations I am subjected to. I—”

As she looked at him with the light from the one barred window falling across his earnest young face she broke off, her lips twitching. Then she buried her face in her hands and sobs shook her slender shoulders. But when she looked up he saw that her eyes were dry and bright. Fell despair had had her so long in its clutches that even the refreshing boon of tears was denied her! Mayhew sighed.

“But a girl like you—why I can see soul shining in your face—surely surely you can pull yourself up to the level of honest living again! What do you do with your time here?”

“I tried to write—some letters. But they took away my—” (CONTINUED ON PAGE 31)