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Wills appointing this Company are kept
in our Safety Deposit Vaults free of charge

The Crystal Goblet

(Continued from page 16)

of nights, if necessary, and shoot any intruder at sight. Then a most unexpected thing happened. The crystal goblet, case and all, was missing from the bracket one morning, though nothing else had been touched.

Mr. Markham, curiously enough, made light of the incident, declaring that he would not be bothered about the affair at present. Clare said nothing, so Antonio, after a little volubility, was forced to keep silence, though plainly uneasy of mind.

For the next night or so he lay upon the bed in his dressing-gown, with the door ajar, listening for any unusual noise without or within the house, and then his patience had its reward.

The doors of "The Belvedere" were too well hung to creak, and the carpeted corridors gave no sound of a footfall, but a thin pencil of light gradually widened on the landing, so Antonio leaped from the bed and peered through the chink of his doorway.

In another moment he could see the tall, square figure of Mr. Markham walking from his bedroom along the lobby, carrying a crystal goblet in one hand, whilst shielding it with the other.

Looking neither to the right nor left he made his way to the sitting-room, opened the door cautiously, switched on the electric light, and passed within.

In another moment there was a sharp ringing noise as of snapped glass, a crash on the parquet, and then a stifled exclamation, followed by a deep-drawn sigh.

Antonio had seen and heard enough to satisfy himself. He closed his door quietly, slipped out of dressing-gown and slippers, and slid quickly into bed.

But not to sleep. He lay there thinking and planning till the ordinary noises of the house began at early morning, and then he began to tremble slightly, and his heart beat tumultuously for a while.

He began to dress at the usual time, listening intently, but nothing out of the usual course happened. He was forced to steady his nerves with a nip of neat spirit from his pocket-flask just before the man brought hot shaving water, and when the domestic had retired without any special communication, he had recourse to the flask again, for his hand shook visibly.

But the alcohol had its effect before he was fully dressed; his spirits lifted, and he carefully rinsed away the odour of the cognac from his breath with an aromatic wash, and walked to the breakfast-room.

He entered expecting to find Clare there alone; but Mr. Markham was seated at her right, and behind him, on the bracket, was the crystal goblet, intact from its case, glinting in the sunlight.

He started palpably, and, for all his fictitious courage, could not repress a slight "Ah!"

Mr. Markham smiled. "I see you are surprised, Carl," he said, kindly. "Yes, the goblet is safe. It's a long story, and Clare will tell it better than I—after breakfast. Fall to, lad."

When the meal was over, Clare said: "Now for the tale; but you won't want to hear it again, uncle. Moreover, I've something else to say to Carl: he and I will go into the library, with your permission."

"Certainly, my dear; though the relation would not really distress me, I assure you."

"Yes, it would, dear. Come along, Carl."

The young fellow opened the door for her, and followed to the other room, with new courage and a new hope, for he thought he saw his way to a declaration of love, or at least the intimation of it, when the confidential talk was over.

"We must understand each other, Mr. Antonio," she said as she seated herself. "You'd better sit down for a few minutes, too."

"Un-der-stand each other," he stammered, sinking into a chair.

"Yes, with reference to the crystal goblet, and—other things."

He fixed dilated eyes on her, and his face went ghastly. For the next minutes he listened to her unflinching statement like one in a mesmerised trance.

"You bought that goblet with a sinister motive," said she, plainly; "because the liquid in the stem suggested possibilities. You drilled the foot, let the original liquid out, put some other in its place, doubtless, and sealed the tiny hole again, cunningly; but not so cunningly that I—who have long suspected that you had evil intentions—was deceived. You know, as well as I do, that uncle is anaemic, and has slight atrophy of the thyroid gland, which causes him to walk in his sleep occasionally. Of this you took advantage, craftily. First of all you acted on his mind by suggestions of robbery, knowing well that his sleep would be troubled, and that he would most likely get up and hide the glass. You intimated an attempt at housebreaking to aid the design, and hid the case of the goblet one night. Uncle *did* walk in his sleep and secrete the glass, and then your horrid plan was one step nearer success, for you were conscious that the cause of its disappearance would occur to him, and that he would replace it when false sleep again revealed the hiding place to his distressed mind.

"And now your unnatural—yes, fiendish plot, has almost come to a head. You put a sharp-edged bronze on the bracket, so that when he reached to replace the goblet, the glass would shatter against it, and cast the contents into his face. But I watched you throughout—two can lie awake and creep about a house in turn, you know—and saved you from crime.

"Learn that I stole the original goblet myself, putting a harmless one of similar shape in its place. Early in the morning only, after the worthless, harmless glass was broken did I put the crystal back on the bracket—for the play was played out. You have only to tell me where the case is, and find an excuse to leave the house forever. There's the tale. It has been a long one, and uncle is unaware of your part; but can you deny its truth?"

"I cannot," replied Antonio, rising quickly. "There was hydrocyanic acid in the stem and a spot, or the fumes of it, would have killed Mr. Markham. You say you have long suspected me. But you never guessed my real motive. You think me a vulgar, sordid criminal desirous to get a portion of the estate before due time. Well, that would have been a means, not an end. I was prepared to sell my very eternal soul to gain an earthly heaven—life with you. I love you as no one in your day ever will. That is my one and sole excuse before we part for ever."

The young woman looked at him with an indescribable expression. Surprise was blended with dismay, and behind both was a growing terror at the man's passion. It was a full moment before she could