

two hundred and fifty. And I bought it. There's where I got the bracelet ma'am."

"That was just the money Colonel Hope gave for it new, at Garrard's," said Alice. "Two hundred and fifty guineas."

Sir Jasper stared at her: and then broke forth with a comical attempt at rage, for he was one of the best-tempered men in the world.

"The old wretch of a Jew! Sold it to me at second-hand price, as he called it, for the identical sum it cost new! Why, he ought to be prosecuted for usury."

"It is just as I tell you, Sir Jasper," grumbled his lady: you will go to these low, second-hand dealers, who always cheat were they can, instead of to a regular jeweler; and nine times out of ten you get taken in."

"But your having bought it of this pawnbroker does not bring me any nearer the knowing how he procured it," observed Miss Seaton.

"I shall go to him this very day and ascertain," returned Sir Jasper. "Trades-people may not sell stolen bracelets with impunity."

Easier said than done. The dealer protested his ignorance and innocence, and declared he had bought it in the regular course of business, at one of the pawnbroker's periodical sales. And the man spoke truth, and the detectives were again applied to.

II.

In an obscure room of a low and dilapidated lodging-house, in a low and dilapidated neighborhood, there sat a man one evening in the coming twilight; a towering gaunt skeleton, whose remarkably long arms and legs looked little less than skin and bone. The arms were fully exposed to view, since their owner, though he possessed and wore a waistcoat, dispensed with the use of a shirt. An article, once a coat, lay on the floor, to be donned at will—if it could be got into for the holes. The man sat on the floor in a corner, his head finding a resting-place against the wall, and he had dropped into a light sleep, but if ever famine was depicted in a face, it was in his. Unwashed, unshaven, with matted hair and feverish lips; the cheeks were hollow, the nostrils white and pinched, and the skin around the mouth had a blue tinge. Some one tried and shook the door; it aroused him, and he started up, but only to cower in a bending attitude and listen.

"I hear you," cried a voice. "How are you to-night, Joe? Open the door."

The voice was not one he knew; not one that might be responded to.

"Do you call this politeness, Joe Nicholls? If you don't open the door, I shall take the liberty of opening it for myself, which will put you to the trouble of mending the fastenings afterwards."

"Who are you?" cried Nicholls, reading determination in the voice. "I'm gone to bed, and I can't admit folks to-night."

"Gone to bed at eight o'clock?"

"Yes: I'm ill."

"I'll give you one minute, and then I come in. You will open it if you wish to save trouble."

Nicholls yielded to his fate, and opened the door. The gentleman—he looked like one—cast his keen eyes round the room. There was not a vestige of furniture in it; nothing but the bare, dirty walls, from which the mortar crumbled, and the bare, dirty boards.

"What did you mean by saying you were gone to bed, eh?"

"So I was. I was asleep there," pointing to the corner, "and that's my bed. What do you want?" added Nicholls, peering at the stranger's face in the gloom of the evening, but seeing it imperfectly, for his hat was drawn low over it.

"A little talk with you. That last sweep-stake you put into—"

The man lifted his face, and burst forth with such eagerness, that the stranger could only arrest his own words, and listen.

"It was a swindle from beginning to end. I had scraped together the ten shillings to put in it; and I drew the right horse, and was shuffled out of the gains, and I have never had my dues, not a farthing of 'em. Since then I've been ill, and I can't get about to better myself. Are you come, sir, to make it right?"

"Some—the stranger coughed—"friends of mine were in it also," said he, "and they lost their money."

"Every body lost it; the getters-up bolted with all they had drawn within their fingers. Have they been took, do you know?"

"All in good time; they have left their trail. So you have been ill, have you?"

"Ill! Just take a sight at me! There's an arm for a big man."

He stretched out his naked arm for inspection: it appeared as if a touch would snap it. The stranger laid his hand upon its fingers, and his other hand appeared to be stealing furtively towards his own pocket. "I should say this looks like starvation Joe."

"Som'at nigh akin to it."

A pause of unsuspecting, and the handcuffs were clapped on the astonished man. He started up with an oath.

"No need to make a noise, Nicholls," said the detective, with a careless air. "I have got two men waiting outside."

"I swear I wasn't in the plate robbery," passionately uttered the man. "I knew of it, but I didn't join 'em, and I never had the worth of

as much as a salt-spoon, after it was melted down. And they call me a coward, and they leave me here to starve and die! I swear I wasn't in it."

"We'll talk of the plate robbery another time," said the officer, as he raised his hat; "you have got those bracelets on, my man, for another sort of bracelet. A diamond one. Don't you remember me?"

The prisoner's mouth fell. "I thought that was over and done with, all this time—I don't know what you mean," he added, correcting himself.

"No," said the officer it's just beginning. The bracelet is found and has been traced to you. You were a clever fellow, and I had my doubts of you at the time; I thought you were too clever to go on long."

"I should be ashamed to play the sneak and catch a fellow in this way. Why couldn't you come openly, in your proper clothes? not come playing the spy in the garb of a friendly civilian!" "My men are in their proper clothes," returned the equable officer, "and you will have the pleasure of their escort presently. I came because they did not know you, and I did."

"Three officers to take a single man, and he a skeleton!" uttered Nicholls, with a vast show of indignation.

"Ay; but you were powerful once, and ferocious too. The skeleton aspect is a recent one."

"And all for nothing. I don't know about any bracelet."

"Don't trouble yourself about inventions, Nicholls. Your friend is safe in our hands, and has made a full confession."

"What friend?" asked Nicholls too eagerly.

"The lady you got to dispose of it for you to the Jew."

Nicholls was startled to inattention. "She hasn't split, has she?"

"Every particular she knew or guessed at. Split to save herself."

"Then there's no faith in woman."

"There never was yet," returned the officer.

"If they are not at the top and bottom of every mischief, Joe, they are sure to be in the middle. Is this your coat?" touching it gingerly.

"She's a disgrace to the female sex, she is," raved Nicholls, disregarding the question as to his coat. "But it's a relief, now I'm took, it's a weight off my mind; I was always a expecting of it, and I shall get food in the Old Bailey, at any rate."

"Ah!" said the officer, "you were in good service as a respectable servant; you had better have stuck to your duties."

"The temptation was so great," observed the man, who had evidently abandoned all idea of denial; and now that he had done so, was ready to be voluble with remembrances and particulars.

"Don't say anything to me," said the officer. "It will be used against you."

"It came all along of my long legs," cried Nicholls, ignoring the friendly injunction, and proceeding to enlarge on the feat he had performed. "I have never had a happy hour since; I was second footman there, and a good place I had; and I have wished thousands of times, that the bracelet had been in a sea of molten fire. Our folks had took a house in the neighbourhood of Ascot for the race week, and they had left me at home to take care of the kitchen-maid and another inferior or two, taking the rest of the servants with them. I had to clean the winders afore they returned, and I had druv it off till the Tuesday evening, and out I got on the balcony, to begin with the back drawing-room—"

"What do you say you got out on?"

"The balcony. The thing with the green rails round it, what encloses the winders. While I was a leaning over the rails afore I begun, I heered something like click—click, a going on in the fellow room at the next door, which was Colonel Hope's. It was like as if something light was being laid on a table, and presently I heered two voices begin to talk, a lady's and a gentleman's, and I listened—"

"No good ever comes of listening, Joe," interrupted the officer.

"I didn't listen for the sake of listening, but it was awful hot, a standing out there in the sun, and listening was better than working. I didn't want to hear, neither, for I was thinking of my own concerns, and what a fool I was to have idled away my time all day till the sun came on to the back winders. Bit by bit, I heered what they were talking of—that it was jewels they had got there, and that one was worth two hundred guineas. Thinks I, if that was mine, I'd do no more work. After a while, I heered them go out of their room, and I thought I'd have a look at the rich things, and I stepped over slanting-ways on to the little ledge running along the houses, holding on by our balcony, and then I passed my hands along the wall till I got hold of their balcony—but one with ordinary legs and arms couldn't have done it. You couldn't, sir."

"Perhaps not," remarked the officer.

"There wasn't fur to fall, if I had fell, only on to the kitchen leads under; but I didn't fall, and I raised myself on their balcony, and looked in. My! what a show it was! stunning jewels, all laid out there; so close that if I had put my hand inside, it must have struck all among 'em; and the fiend prompted me take one. I didn't stop to look; I didn't

stop to think; the one that twinkled the brightest and had the most stones in it was the nearest to me, and I clutched it, and slipped it into my footman's undress jacket, and stepped back again."

"And got safe into your balcony?"

"Yes; but I didn't clean the winder that night. I was upset like, by what I had done, and I think, if I could have put it back again, I should; but there was no opportunity. I wrapped it up in my winder leather, and then in a sheet of paper, and then I put it up the chimney in one of the spare bedrooms. I was up the next morning afore five, and I cleaned my winders. I'd no trouble to awake myself, for I had never slept. The same day, towards evening you called, sir, and asked me some questions—whether we had seen any one on the leads at the back, and such like. I said as master was just come home from Ascot, would you be pleased to speak to him."

"Ah!" again remarked the officer, "you were a clever fellow that day. But if my suspicions had not been strongly directed to another quarter, I might have looked you up more sharply."

"I kep' it by me for a month or two and then I gave warning to leave. I thought I'd have my fling, and I became acquainted with her—that lady—and somehow she wormed out of me that I had got it, and I let her dispose of it for me, for she said she knew how do it without danger."

"What did you get for it?"

The skeleton shook his head. "Thirty-four pound, and I had counted on a hundred and fifty. She took a oath she had not helped herself to a sixpence."

"Oaths are plentiful with the genius," remarked the detective.

"She stood to it she hadn't, and she stopped and helped me to spend it. After that was done, she went over to stop with some body else who was in luck; and I have tried to go on, and I can't: honesty or dishonesty it seems all one, nothing prospers, and I'm naked and famishing—and I wish I was dying."

"Evil courses never do prosper, Nicholls," said the officer, as he called in the policeman, and consigned the gentleman to their care.

So Gerard Grant was innocent!

"But how was it you skillful detectives could not be on this man's scent?" asked Colonel Hope of the officer, when he heard the tale.

"Colonel, I was thrown off it. Your positive belief in your nephew's guilt infected me, and appearances were very strong against him. Miss Seaton also helped to throw me off: she said, if you remember, that she did not leave the room; but it now appears that she did leave it when your nephew did, though only for a few moments. Those few moments sufficed to do the job."

"It's strange she could not tell the exact truth," growled the Colonel.

"She probably thought she was exact enough, since she only remained outside the door, and could answer for it that no one entered by it. She forgot the window. I thought of the window the instant the loss was mentioned to me, but Miss Seaton's assertion that she never had the window out of her view, prevented my dwelling on it. I did go to the next door, and saw this very fellow who committed the robbery, but his manner was sufficiently satisfactory. He talked too freely; I did not like that; but I found he had been in the same service fifteen months: and as I must repeat, I laid the guilt to another."

"It is a confoundedly unpleasant affair for me," cried the Colonel; "I have published my nephew's disgrace and guilt all over London."

"It is more unpleasant for him, Colonel," was the rejoinder of the officer.

"And I have kept him short of money, and suffered him to be sued for debt; and I have let him go and live amongst the runaway scampers over the water, and not hindered his engaging himself as a merchant's clerk: and in short, I have played up the very deuce with him."

"But reparation is doubtless in your own heart and hands, Colonel."

"I don't know that, sir," testily concluded the Colonel.

III.

Once more Gerard Hope entered his uncle's house; not as an interloper, stealing into it in secret, but as an honored guest, to whom reparation was due, and must be made. Alice Seaton leaned back in her invalid chair, a joyous flush on her wasted cheek, and a joyous happiness in her eye. Still the shadow of coming death was there, and Mr. Hope was shocked to see her—more shocked and startled than he had expected, or chose to express.

"O Alice what has done this?"

"That," she answered, pointing to the bracelet, which, returned to its true owner, lay on the table. "I should not have lived many years; of that I am convinced; but I might have lived a little longer than I now shall. It has been the cause of misery to many, and Lady Sarah says she shall never regard it but as an ill-starred trinket, or wear it with any pleasure."

"But Alice, why should you have suffered it thus to affect you?" he remonstrated. "You knew your own innocence, and you say you

believed and trusted in mine: what did you fear?"

"I will tell you Gerard," she resumed, a deeper hectic rising to her cheeks. "I could not have confessed my fear, even in dying; it was too distressing, too terrible; but now that it is all clear, I will tell it. I believed my sister had taken the bracelet."

He uttered an exclamation of amazement.

"I have believed it all along. She had called to see me that night, and was for a minute or two, in the room alone with the bracelets: I knew she, at that time, was short of money, and I feared she had been tempted to take it—just as this unfortunate servant man was tempted. O Gerard! the dread of it has been upon me night and day, preying upon my fears, weighing down my spirits, wearing away my health and my life. And I had to bear it all in silence: it is that dreadful silence which has killed me."

"Alice, this must have been a morbid fear!"

"Not so—if you knew all. But now that I have told you, let us not revert to it again: it is at an end, and I am very thankful. That it should so end, has been my prayer and hope; not quite the only hope," she added, looking up at him with a sunny smile; "I have had another."

"What is it? You look as if it were connected with me."

"So it is. Ah! Gerard! can you not guess it?"

"No," he answered, in a stifled voice, "I can only guess that you are lost to me."

"Lost to all here. Have you forgotten our brief conversation the night you went into exile? I told you then there was one far more worthy of you than I could ever have been."

"None will ever be half so worthy: or—I will say it, Alice, in spite of your warning hand—half so loved."

"Gerard," she continued, sinking her voice, "she has waited for you."

"Nonsense," he rejoined.

"She has. I have watched, and seen, and I know it; and I tell it you under secrecy: when she is your wife, not before, you may tell her that I saw it and said it. She is a lovable and attractive girl, and she does not and will not marry: you are the cause."

"My darling—"

"Stay, Gerard," she gravely interrupted; "those words of endearment are not for me. Give them to her: can you deny that you love her?"

"Perhaps I do—in a degree. Next to yourself—"

"Put me out of your thoughts while we speak. If I were—where I so soon shall be, would she not be dearer to you than any one on earth? would you not be well pleased to make her your wife?"

"Yes, I might be."

"That is enough, Gerard. Frances, come hither."

The conversation had been carried on in a whisper, and Lady Frances Chenevix came towards them from a distant window. Alice took her hand: she also held Gerard's.

"I thought you were talking secrets," said Lady Frances, "so kept away."

"As we were," answered Alice. "Frances, what can we do to keep him amongst us? Do you know what Colonel Hope has told him?"

"No. What?"

"That though he shall be reinstated in favor as to money matters, he shall not be in his affection or in the house, unless he prove sorry for his rebellion by retracting it. The rebellion, you know, at the first outbreak, when Gerard was expelled the house—before that unlucky bracelet was ever bought. I think he is sorry for it: you must help him to be more so."

"Fanny," said Gerard, while her eyelids drooped, and the damask mantled in her cheek, deeper than Alice's hectic, "will you help me?"

"As if I could make out head or tail of what you two are discussing!" cried she, by way of helping herself out of her confusion, as she attempted to turn away; but Gerard caught her to his side and detained her.

"Fanny—will you drive me again from the house?"

She lifted her eyes, twinkling with a little spice of mischief: "I did not drive you before."

"In a manner, yes," he laughed. "Do you know what did drive me?"

"She had known it at the time: and Gerard read it in her conscious face."

"I see it all," he murmured, drawing her closer to him; you have been far kinder to me than I deserved. Fanny, let me try and repay you for it."

Frances endeavoured to look dignified, but it would not do, and she was obliged to brush away the tears of happiness that struggled to her eyes. Alice caught their hands together and held them between her own, with a mental aspiration for their life's future happiness. Some time back she could not have breathed it in so fervent a spirit: but—as she had said—the present world and its hopes had closed to her.

"But you know, Gerard," cried Lady Frances, in a saucy tone, "if you ever do help yourself to a bracelet in reality, you must not expect me to go to prison with you."

"Yes I shall," answered he, far more saucily: "a wife must follow the fortunes of her husband."