

for if you have fever I shall at once leave you and go to Brighton. I have such a dread of fever."

Mr. Skidmore not being stricken with fever, Mrs. Skidmore was not obliged to quit London in the midst of the season. Twice a week she appeared at the opera decorated with nearly all her costly jewels. Among the constant visitors to the Skidmore box were Captain Kiddell and his friend Count Van de Hoeven.

Mrs. Skidmore went to Brighton for a fortnight because she did not feel quite so well as usual. Whenever she visited Brighton her principal jewels, including the diamond necklace, the diamond bracelets, and the superb diamond cluster that decorated her hair, were taken to the bank. She put the jewels into the jewel box and locked it. Her husband locked the jewel-box in an iron box, and attended his wife to deposit the treasure at the bank. No one could charge Mrs. Skidmore with the carelessness that encourages robbery. When she was in town the jewels were kept in an iron safe fixed in her bedroom, that was warranted fire-proof and thief-proof.

If an irresistible force encountered an immovable mass, what would be the result? The answer to this school-boy catch problem is that there cannot be an irresistible force if there is an immovable mass, and *vice versa*. Final or supreme physical force is at present undiscovered. There is no absolute security for property against those who are resolved to break through and steal. That was the bitter experience of Mrs. Skidmore.

The sojourn at Brighton terminated on Friday afternoon. On Saturday afternoon Mrs. Skidmore, attended by her husband, went to the bank and brought home the iron box that contained the jewel case. The lady unlocked the jewel case, glanced at her jewels, re-locked the case, put it into the iron safe, and with her own fair hand locked the iron safe. Could fondest mother be more careful of her children than Mrs. Skidmore of her jewels?

Having been operated upon by her lady's-maid for a full hour, Mrs. Skidmore departed with her husband for Richmond, having been invited by Capt. Kiddell to an early, that is, a five o'clock dinner.

"Now Hengist, be sure to leave

instantly after the dinner, for I am determined to be at the opera to-night."

There was a mistake as to the dinner hour. The early repast was for six, not five o'clock. Captain Kiddell's party included Count Van de Hoeven, who proposed a promenade in the grounds.

Mrs. Skidmore was walking with the Count. The Captain took Mr. Skidmore aside.

"Let us light a cigar."

The Captain handed the case to Mr. Skidmore, and then took a cigar himself.

"Look at that little document before we light our cigars."

The document was the promissory note that had been given to Mr. Chapeau. The Captain ignited a wax match and burnt the promissory note.

"There is an end to the perilous bit of paper. Now my boy, let us have a peaceful smoke, whilst the Count amuses Mrs. Skidmore. As for your being in town in time for the opera, that is almost impossible. Punctuality is not one of the virtues of this pleasing place."

It was nearly seven o'clock before the dinner was served, and it was within an hour of midnight when Mrs. Skidmore arrived at her residence.

"I am vexed about the opera, but I am not sorry to go to bed. I am so drowsy that I cannot keep my eyes open. I suppose the Richmond air is of the sleepy sort."

Mrs. Skidmore had been dosing during the ride home, and she slept whilst being undressed by her maid. Next day she complained of headache, and remained in her room, but about six o'clock felt better and able to be dressed.

"I am glad that I can go down to dinner, for our guests would be dreadfully dull if I were not present. Norah, I may as well air my jewels to-night."

Mrs. Skidmore took a neat leather case from her pocket, and out of the case a key.

She could not get the key into the lock of the iron safe.

"There is something in the lock. Or else the key is at fault. Norah, ask the master to come to me."

When the maid returned with the master, Mrs. Skidmore was still at the iron safe.

"Is it not strange, Hengist, I cannot get the key into the lock? You try."

Mr. Skidmore was as unsuccessful as his wife.

"How provoking Hengist. I suppose one of the bolts has slipped, and we shall have to send for the locksmith."

So saying she put her hand on the handle, and behold the door opened.

"I swear I looked it when I went out yesterday. I must have unlocked it without knowing that I did so."

Mrs. Skidmore looked into the safe and screamed. Pulling out some papers, and the iron box used for conveying the jewels to the bank, she yelled with horror.

"My dear, what is the matter?"

"My jewels, my jewels, my jewels!"

Mr. Skidmore looked into the safe.

"My jewels! Fool, why don't you do something?"

"My dear I am so upset that I don't know what to do."

"Go for the police. Go to Scotland Yard. Oh, what shall I do? Oh, my jewels!"

The rage and the terror of Mrs. Skidmore cannot be described. Her magnificent diamond, worth at least £20,000 were gone. The detectives came and examined the safe, and minutely questioned all the servants. Presently they looked at the windows. There was a balcony to the side window, and to one of the girders of the balcony a rope was tied. That indicated the way in which the thief had got in and out of the room. How the thief-proof safe was opened could not be explained. The burglary must have been committed whilst Mrs. Skidmore was at Richmond.

A large reward was offered, and the investigation was directed by Mr. James Burrow, one of our cleverest detectives. After a fortnight there appeared to be a chance of a clue. The pendant to the necklace was a diamond of rather peculiar colour, of large size, and it had a slight flaw. Burrow ascertained that such a diamond was in the hands of a London dealer. The jeweler who had sold the necklace to Mrs. Skidmore identified the stone. Burrow tracked the movements of the stone and found that it had been sent to Holland by a person named Van de Hoeven. But the clue that seemed so promising completely failed. It was proved that the diamond had been in the hands of the dealer and had been offered by him to two leading firms three weeks before the robbery, and Mrs. Skidmore had seen her jewels the very day that they were stolen.