

'Did you hear me?' cried the Colonel. 'I must do my duty,' said the police-officer, approaching Gerard. 'And for authority—you need not suppose I should act, if without it.'

'Allow me to understand first,' remarked Gerard, haughtily eluding the officer. 'Which is it for? What is the sum total?' 'Two hundred and fifty pounds,' growled the Colonel. 'But if you are thinking to compromise it in that way, young sir, you will find yourself mistaken.'

'Oh! no fear,' retorted Gerard; 'I have not two hundred and fifty pence. Let me see: it must be Dobbs's. A hundred and sixty—how on earth do they slide the expenses up? I did it, sir, to oblige a friend.'

'The deuce you did!' echoed the Colonel, who but little understood the speech, except the last sentence. 'If ever I saw such a cool villain in all my experience!'

'He was awfully hard up,' went on Gerard, 'as bad as I am now; and I did it. I don't deny having done such things on my own account, but from this particular one I did not benefit a shilling.'

His cool assurance and his words, struck them with consternation.

'Dobbs said he'd take care I should be put to no inconvenience—and this comes of it! That's trusting your friends. He vowed to me, this very week, that he had provided for the bill.'

'He thinks it is only an affair of debt!' screamed Lady Frances Chenevix. 'O Gerard! what a relief! we thought you were confessing.'

'You are not arrested for debt, sir,' cried the officer, 'but for felony.'

'For felony!' uttered Gerard Hope. 'Oh! indeed! Could you not make it murder?' he added, sarcastically.

'Off with him to Marlborough street, officer,' cried the exasperated Colonel, 'and I'll come with you and prefer the charge. He scoffs at it, does he?'

'Yes, that I do,' answered Gerard; 'for whatever pitfalls I may have got into, in the way of carelessness, I have not gone into crime.'

'You are accused, sir, said the officer, 'of stealing a diamond bracelet.'

'Hey!' uttered Gerard, a flash of intelligence rising to his face, as he glanced at Alice. 'I might have guessed it was the bracelet affair, if I had had my recollection about me.'

'Oh! ho,' triumphed the Colonel, in sneering jocularly, 'so you expected it was the bracelet, did you? We shall have it all out presently.'

'I heard of the bracelet's disappearance,' said Mr. Hope. 'I met Miss Seaton when she was out this morning, and she told me it was gone.'

'Better make no admissions,' whispered the officer in his ear. 'They may be used against you.'

'Whatever admissions I may make, you are at liberty to use them, for they are truth,' haughtily returned Gerard. 'Is it possible that you do suspect me of taking the bracelet, or is this a joke?'

'Allow me to explain,' panted Alice, stepping forward. 'I—I—did not accuse you, Mr. Hope; I would not have mentioned your name in connection with it, because I am sure you are innocent; but when it was discovered that you had been here, I could not deny it.'

'The charging me with having taken it is absurdly preposterous,' exclaimed Gerard, looking first at his uncle, and then at the officer. 'Who accuses me?'

'I do,' said the Colonel.

'Then I am very sorry it is not somebody else, instead of you sir.'

'Explain. Why?'

'Because they should get a kindly horse-whipping.'

'Gerard,' interrupted Lady Sarah, 'do not treat it in that light way. If you did take it, say so, and you shall be forgiven. I am sure you must have been put to it terribly hard; only confess it, and the matter shall be hushed up.'

'No it shan't, my lady,' cried the Colonel. 'I will not have him encouraged—I mean, felony compounded.'

'It shall,' returned Lady Sarah, 'it shall indeed. The bracelet was mine, and I have a right to do as I please. Believe me, Gerard, I will put up with the loss without a murmur; only confess, and let the worry be done with.'

Gerard Hope looked at her: little trace of shame was there in his countenance. 'Lady Sarah,' he asked in a deep tone, 'can

you indeed deem me capable of taking your bracelet?'

'The bracelet was there, sir, and it went; and you can't deny it,' uttered the Colonel.

'It was there, fast enough,' answered Gerard. 'I held it in my hand two or three minutes, and was talking to Miss Seaton about it. I was wishing it was mine, and saying what I should do with it.'

'O Mr. Hope! pray say no more,' involuntarily interrupted Alice. 'You will make appearances worse.'

'What do you want to screen him for?' impetuously broke forth the Colonel, turning upon Alice. 'Let him say what he was going to say.'

'I do not know why I should not say it,' Gerard Hope answered, in, it must be thought, a spirit of bravado or recklessness, which he disdained to check. 'I said I should spout it.'

'You'll send off to every pawnshop in the metropolis, before the night's over, Mr. Officer,' cried the choking Colonel, breathless with rage. 'This beats brass.'

'But I did not take it any the more for having said that,' put in Gerard, in a graver tone. 'The remark might have been made by any one from a duke downwards, if reduced to his last shifts, as I am. I said if it were mine: I did not say I would steal to do it. Nor did I.'

'I saw him put it down again,' said Alice Seaton, in a calm, steady voice.

'Allow me to speak a word, Colonel,' resumed Lady Sarah, interrupting something her husband was about to say. 'Gerard—I cannot believe you guilty; but consider the circumstances. The bracelet was there: you acknowledge it; Miss Seaton left the apartment when you did, and went into the front-room: yet when I came up from dinner, it was there no longer.'

The Colonel would speak. 'So it lies between you and Miss Seaton,' he put in. 'Perhaps you would like to make believe she appropriated it.'

'No,' answered Gerard, with a flashing eye. 'She can not be doubted. I would rather take the guilt upon myself, than allow her to be suspected. Believe me, Lady Sarah, we are both innocent.'

'The bracelet could not have gone without hands to take it, Gerard,' replied Lady Sarah. 'How else do you account for its disappearance?'

'I believe there must be some misapprehension, some great mistake in the affair altogether, Lady Sarah. It appears incomprehensible now, but it will be unravelled.'

'Ay, and in double-quick time,' wrathfully exclaimed the Colonel. 'You must think you are talking to a pack of idiots, Master Gerard. Here the bracelet was spread temptingly out on a table, you went into the room, being hard up for money, fingered it, wished for it, and both you and the bracelet disappeared. Sir, turning sharply round to the officer—'did a clearer case ever go before a jury?'

Gerard Hope bit his lip. 'Be more just, Colonel,' said he. 'Your own brother's son steal a bracelet!'

'And I am happy my brother's not alive to know it,' rejoined the Colonel, in an obstinate tone. 'Take him in hand, Mr. Officer: we'll go to Marlborough street. I'll just change my coat and—'

'No, no, you will not,' cried Lady Sarah, laying hold of the dressing-gown and the Colonel in it; 'you shall not go nor Gerard either. Whether he is guilty or not, it must not be brought against him publicly. He bears your name, Colonel, and so do I, and it would reflect disgrace on us all.'

'Perhaps you are made of money, my lady. If so, you may put up with the loss of a two-hundred-and-fifty-guinea bracelet. I don't choose to do so.'

'Then, Colonel, you will; and you must. 'Sir,' added Lady Sarah to the detective, 'we are obliged to you for your attendance and advice, but it turns out to be a family affair, as you perceive, and we must decline to prosecute. Besides, Mr. Hope may not be guilty.'

Alice rose and stood before Colonel Hope. 'Sir, if this charge were preferred against your nephew; if it came to trial, I think it would kill me. You know my unfortunate state of health; the agitation, the excitement of appearing to give evidence would be—I—I cannot continue; I cannot speak of it without terror; I pray you, for my sake, do not prosecute Mr. Hope.'

The Colonel was about to storm forth an answer, but her white face, her heaving throat, had some effect even on him. 'He is so doggedly obstinate, Miss Seaton. If he would but confess, and tell where it is, perhaps I'd let him off.'

Alice thought somebody else was obstinate. 'I do not believe he has anything to confess,' she deliberately said; 'I truly believe that he has not. He could not have taken it, unseen by me; and when we quitted the room, I feel sure the bracelet was left in it.'

'It was left in it, so help me Heaven!' uttered Gerard.

'And now I have got to speak,' added Frances Chenevix. 'Colonel, if you wish to press the charge against Gerard, I would go before the magistrates, and proclaim myself the thief. I vow and protest I would, just to save him; and you and Lady Sarah could not prosecute me you know.'

'You do well to stand up for him!' retorted the Colonel. 'You would not be quite so ready to do it, though, my Lady Fanny, if you know something I could tell you.'

'Oh! yes I should,' returned the young lady, with a vivid blush.

The Colonel, beset on all sides, had no choice but to submit; but he did so with an ill-grace, and dashed out of the room with the officer, as fiercely as if he had been charging an enemy at full tilt. 'The sentimental apes these women make of themselves!' cried he, in his polite way, when he had got him in private. 'Is it not a clear case of guilt?'

'In my private opinion, it certainly is,' was the reply; though he carries it off with a high hand. I suppose, Colonel, you still wish the bracelet to be searched for?'

'Search in and out, and high and low; search everywhere. The rascal! to dare even to enter my house in secret!'

'May I inquire if the previous breach, with your nephew, had to do with money affairs?'

'No,' said the Colonel, turning more crusty at the thoughts called up. 'I fixed upon a wife for him, and he wouldn't have her; so I turned him out of doors and stopped his allowance.'

'Oh!' was the only comment of the police-officer.

It was in the following week, and Saturday night. Thomas, without his hat, was standing at Colonel Hope's door, chatting to an acquaintance, when he perceived Gerard come tearing up the street. Thomas's friend backed against the rails and the spikes, and Thomas himself stood with the door in his hand, ready to touch his hair to Mr. Gerard, as he passed. Instead of passing, however, Gerard cleared the steps at a bound, pulled Thomas with himself inside, shut the door, and double-locked it.

Thomas was surprised in all ways. Not only at Mr. Hope's coming in at all, for the Colonel had again harshly forbidden the house to him and the servants to admit him, but at the suddenness and strangeness of the action.

'Cleverly done,' quoth Gerard, when he could get his breath. 'I saw a shark after me, Thomas, and had to make a bolt for it. Your having been at the door saved me.'

Thomas turned pale. 'Mr. Gerard, you have locked it, and I'll put up the chain, if you order me, but I'm afraid it's going again the law to keep out them detectives by force of arms.'

'What's the man's head running on now?' returned Gerard. 'There are no detectives after me; it was only a seedy sheriff's officer. Psha, Thomas! there's no worse crime attaching to me than a suspicion of a slight debt.'

'I'm sure I trust not, sir; only master will have his own way.'

'Is he at home?'

'He is gone to the opera with my lady.—The young ladies are up stairs alone. Miss Seaton has been ill, sir, ever since the bother, and Lady Frances is staying at home with her.'

'I'll go up and see them. If they are at the opera, we shall be snug and safe.'

'O Mr. Gerard! had you better go up, do you think?' the man ventured to remark.—'If the Colonel should come to hear of it—'

'How can he? You are not going to tell him, and I am sure they will not. Besides, there's no help for it; I can't go out again, for hours. And Thomas, if any demon should knock and ask for me, I am gone to—'an evening party up at Putney; went out, you know, by the side door.'

Thomas watched him run up the stairs, and shook his head. 'One can't help liking him, with it all; though where could the bracelet have gone to, if he did not take it?'

they were: Alice buried in the pillows of an invalid chair, and Lady Frances careering about the room, apparently practicing some new dancing step. She did not see him.—Gerard danced up to her, and took her hand, and joined in it.

'Oh! she cried, with a little scream of surprise, 'you! Well I have staid at home to some purpose. But how could you think of entering within these sacred and forbidden walls? Do you forget that the Colonel threatens us with the terrors of the law, if we suffer it? You are a bold man, Gerard.'

'When the cat's away, the mice can play,' cried Gerard, treating them to a *pas seul*.

'Mr. Hope!' remonstrated Alice, lifting her feeble voice, 'how can you indulge these spirits, while things are so miserable?'

'Sighing and groaning won't make them light,' he answered, sitting down on a sofa near to Alice. 'Here's a seat for you, Fanny; come along,' he added, pulling Frances to his side. 'First and foremost, has anything come to light about that mysterious bracelet?'

'Not yet,' sighed Alice. 'But I have no rest; I am in hourly fear of it.'

'Fear!' uttered Gerard in astonishment.

Alice winced, and leaned her head upon her hand: she spoke in a low tone.

'You must understand what I mean, Mr. Hope. The affair has been productive of so much pain and annoyance to me, that I wish it could be ignored forever.'

'Though it left me under a cloud,' said Gerard. 'You must pardon me if I cannot agree with you. My constant hope is, that it may all come to daylight; I assure you I have especially mentioned it in my prayers.'

'Pray don't, Mr. Hope!' reproved Alice.

'I'm sure I have cause to mention it, for it is sending me into exile; that, and other things.'

'It is the guilty only who flee, not the innocent,' said Frances. 'You don't mean what you say, Gerard.'

'Don't! There's a certain boat advertised to steam from London-bridge wharf to-morrow, wind and weather permitting, and it steams me with it. I am compelled to fly my country.'

'Be serious, and say what you mean.'

'Seriously, then, I am over head and ears in debt. You know my uncle stopped my allowance in the spring, and sent me—metaphorically—to the dogs. It got wind; ill-news always does; I had a few liabilities, and they have all come down upon me. But for this confounded bracelet affair, there's no doubt the Colonel would have settled them; rather than let the name of Hope be daintily banded by the public, he would have expended his ire in growls, and then gone and done it. But that is over now; and I go to take up my abode in some renowned colony for desolate English, beyond the pale of British lock-ups. Boulogne, or Calais, or Dippe, or Brussels; I shall see: and there I may be kept for years.'

Neither of the young ladies answered immediately; they saw the facts were serious, and that Gerard was only making light of it before them.

'How shall you live?' questioned Alice. 'You must live there as well as here: you can not starve.'

'I shall just escape the starving. I have got a trifle; enough to swear by, and keep me on potatoes and salt. Don't you envy me my prospects?'

'When do you suppose you may return?' inquired Lady Frances. 'I ask it seriously, Gerard.'

'I know no more than you, Fanny. I have no expectations but from the Colonel. Should he never relent, I am caged there for good.'

'And so you have ventured here to tell us this, and bid us good-by?'

'No! I never thought of venturing here: how could I tell that the bashaw would be at the opera? A shark set on me in the street, and I had to run for my life. Thomas happened to be conveniently at the door, and I rushed in and saved myself.'

'A shark!' uttered Alice, in dismay, who in her experience had taken the words literally—'a shark in the street!' Lady Frances Chenevix laughed.

'One with sharp eyes and a hooked nose, Alice, speeding after me on two legs, with a polite invitation from one of the law lords. He is watching outside now.'

'How shall you get away?' exclaimed Frances.

TO BE CONTINUED.