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Cynthia Stockley

"Pink Gods and Blue Demons"

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### Chapter One.

Kimberley was once the most famous diamond diggings in the world. Rhodes founded his fortunes there, and the friendships that backed him throughout his career. In the tented camps, hundreds of men became millionaires, and hundreds of others went to jail for the crime of I.D.B. (illicit diamond buying). Later, stately buildings and comfortable homes took the place of tent and tin hut, and later still, the town, like a good many other mining towns in South Africa, became G.I. A mine is G.I. (meaning "gone in") when there is no longer any output. This was hardly true of Kimberley. It continues until this day to put out diamonds, and still may be found there "the largest hole in the world." But Kimberley's day was over when gold was found in the Transvaal, and the adventuring crowd left it, never to return.

At the present time, it is chiefly remarkable for its scandals, dust, heat, and the best hotel in South Africa, which is not so much a hotel as a palatial country house started by the De Beers magnates for the entertainment of their friends or for their own use when they are bored with home life. Notabilities are often entertained there as guests of the famous company, but, even if not a guest of De Beers', a traveller may stay at the Belgrove for about a pound a day and be silent and cool as in an ice-house while all the rest of Kimberley is a raging furnace. Mr Rhodes entertained General French at dinner here after the relief of Kimberley. There is a picture over the dining-room mantelpiece of the two men meeting on the famous occasion of the relief of Kimberley.

Loree Temple, seated at a table just below it, looked often at this picture and then contemplatively at her own image in a mirror on the wall. It seemed a pity that Rhodes was dead, the Boer War over and all the mining adventurers gone away. She would have liked to live and love among such men instead of being married to Pat Temple. None but the brave deserve the fair, and she imagined her beauty adorning a scene of "triumph and roses and wine" when gallantry returned to white arms and the soft rewards of victory. She had often dreamed herself back in ancient Rome, seated in a chariot beside some blood-stained general, with pearls strung in her hair and immense uncut rubies and emeralds against her dazzling whiteness. Or perhaps led into the banquet as a slave, with chains upon her wrists, part of the spoils of war, proud and sad and exquisite in her doom. At other hours, she remembered the words of Arthur, bitter and tender, to his queen:

—With beauty such as never woman wore  
Until it came a kingdom's curse with thee.

No doubt she took an exaggerated view of her own case. At any rate, her women friends would have found much pleasure in telling her so. It was only natural she should think herself a great deal more beautiful than she was. All pretty women do. But there is no denying that the sight of her, as she sat there, would have spoiled many a woman's sleep and gladdened the heart of any man—a girl with red hair and a redder rose in it, the milky skin such hair ensures, a sweet ensnaring mouth, eyes with a plaintive expression in them, a string of small but perfect pearls round her young throat, and a black georgette gown by Viola. Pat always liked her to wear black while he was away. The simple soul had an idea that in black she would not be looked at so much.

Needless to say, Pat Temple was neither a blood-stained general nor a mining adventurer. He made his income honestly enough out of a cold-storage plant, and though indirectly he dealt with corpses, they were legitimate corpses of beef and mutton. This was hard on Loraine Loree (as her mother had romantically named her after Kingsley's poem), with her secret thirst for glamour and glory and strange jewels. But husbands often know nothing of their wives' secret thirsts. Pat Temple knew that he had found the girl he wanted growing like a flower in a Channel Island garden—a "Jersey lily," with French blood in her veins—and that was enough for him. He meant to get her the best the world can give before he had finished, but he never mentioned his intentions. At the moment, he was up North trying to persuade Rhodesians to install cold-storage plants in all their big towns. That was why Loree was alone in the luxurious Kimberley hotel. He had told her it was better for her to keep cool and comfortable there than

be bucketing about all over Rhodesia.

So there she sat in her black gown, reflecting and drawing the string of little pearls softly back and forth across her fresh lips. The difference between real pearls and false is that you can play with the real ones in this manner or twist them perpetually between your fingers; artificial ones should be more discreetly used and are best worn unassumingly under chiffon or only allowed to peep with modesty from the V of your gown.

Loree had always adored jewels, but never owned any until she married. This string of three hundred and sixty-five little pearls, one for each day in the year, was more precious to her than bread. Which was only right, for its purchase had made a considerable dent in Pat's capital (though he had never mentioned that, either). She also had two rather fine single pearls in her ears, and some pearl rings. For a dealer in carcasses, Pat Temple's taste in jewellery was curiously eclectic. She had never possessed a diamond. Nor had she particularly wished to do so, though, like most women, she sometimes lingered to gaze at a display of them in a shop window, wondering if they would become her. But it was only since she came to Kimberley that the romance of them had taken hold of her imagination. It was seeing "the biggest hole in the world" that started it. She had gone by herself, and gazed, long into the vast excavation delved by the hands of men in the search for those strange little *cadres* of imprisoned light, each with a mysterious past behind it and an almost eternal future before it. She wondered what became of diamonds. They seem indestructible, yet where were all the millions of them that had been taken from this one great hole alone—that, down *there*, out of the light, were still being dug and groped and sweated for?

And it was all for women! That gave her a thrill she had never felt before. Men slaved and wore out their lives and were killed down there, so that women might wear diamonds. Those little sparkling stones were tokens of love between men and women—imperishable counters of passion!

It began to stir her uneasily from that moment to think she had never possessed a diamond. Why had Pat only given her tristful white pearls? Perhaps she was missing something. Perhaps the great things of life were passing her by.

Her eyes wandered round the dining-room. There were not many women, but every one of them had a glimmer of light somewhere—in her ears, at the bosom, or on her fingers. One woman, who, like Loree, was dining alone, wore a single stone slung round her neck on an almost invisible chain, and at every movement it sent long pin-rays of light darting across the room to where Loree sat. Every time a ray reached her, it seemed to give her a prick, increasing her uneasy sense that she was missing something in life. There seemed a magical power in the thing. She determined that after dinner she would, speak to the wearer and examine the jewel more closely.

The lady was a Mrs Cork, a dark woman who did her hair in a classical knot at the back of her head and looked as if she had a past. She was a widow from Johannesburg, not beautiful, but the kind of woman who would be looked at in a room before all the pretty women. Her brilliant, weary eyes wore an expression of having seen everything in the world worth seeing, and finding that nothing was worth having. Loree admired and intensely envied her air of "having lived," and the cynical flavour of her speech. They had already exchanged smiles and fragments of conversation when meeting in the lounge and drawing-room, and Mrs Cork had told her that she was in Kimberley to consult a noted pedicurist about some trouble with her left foot.

Another person who interested Mrs Temple now entered the dining-room and sat down at a table a few yards away, with his chair so placed that there was nothing between him and an uninterrupted view of Loree except the little delicately shaded electric lamp. Very unobtrusively, he moved the light slightly aside. Immediately Loree experienced the same odd pricking in her blood as the rays of the diamond seemed to cause her. Only, she no longer felt that she was missing something, or that life was passing her by on the other side.

For three days he had deliberately courted her with a pair of fine, golden-brown eyes that contained melancholy, power, a whimsical reflective expression, and a whole world of admiration for Loree Temple. He was a dark, gracefully-built man with thick dark hair brushed back smoothly on his well-shaped head. Everything about him was right, from his hair to his shoes. He was the kind of man who could not make any mistake about dress, and gave distinction to anything he wore. His name was Quelch, and Loree was aware that he was a power in the hotel and in Kimberley.

The first day at lunch, when the heat was sizzling outside among the fernlike leaves of the pepper-trees and coming through the windows in almost visible waves—Mrs Temple's red head had drooped rather like a poppy overtired by the sun, and she had fanned herself a little wearily with the menu-card. A low-spoken word at Quelch's table and a shade of the outside verandah was moved by swift hands so that it darkened the window behind her without shutting off the air. A moment later, a huge block of ice standing in a deep tray of greenery miraculously appeared on the window-sill, and a fan daintily composed of lace and ivory lay at her elbow. In the evening, she found that beside her table a wooden tree had sprung up through the floor and blossomed into an electric fan whose zephyrs were for her exclusive refreshment. There were lovely flowers everywhere, but a silver bowl of deep-red roses distinguished her table from the others. There are some things you know for certain without knowing them for sure, as the saying is. Without any evidence, Loree was aware of Quelch's responsibility for these delicate miracles. He was a power. He spoke, and things happened.

The roses were there again to-night, deep and red and dewy, as if they had been plucked in a misty valley and were still wet with the dawn.

As she left the table, she took one from the bowl and stuck it into the V of her gown. It was carelessly done, but her hands trembled a little and her veins thrilled again as if in answer to some magnetic current which, whether it came from a magic stone or from a man's eyes, made her feel curiously alive and daring. There is no thrill like the thrill of playing with fire that *may* blaze out and consume you (but you won't let it), or standing on the edge of a precipice where you *might* fall over (but you are not going to).

Betaking herself to the cool gloom of the verandah, where coffee was served, she sat down by Mrs Cork. Out in the garden spectral figures were drenching the trees and flowers with water after the cruel heat of the day, and the place was full of the scent of wet earth. Said Mrs Cork:

"I have been so dull all day. Not a thought but to lie *perdue* under my mosquito-curtains until the sun went down."

"Do you dislike the heat?" said Loree. "I find it stimulating."

The other woman considered her with heavily shadowed eyes.

"It flattens me out like a glass of spilled milk. You haven't been here long enough for it to take toll of you, but it will—body, soul, and spirit."

Loree laughed, secure in her fresh beauty. Besides, it felt very safe to be Pat Temple's wife.

"I should be inclined to challenge that if I had come to stay. We are only out here on a trip."

"You're lucky. Africa is all right as long as you can get away from her. But you should not challenge her. Like Fate, you never know what she has up her sleeve."

She sipped her coffee, looking moodily into the dark garden. Loree snatched this opportunity to scrutinise the diamond. It winked at her like a little demon with bluish-green eyes.

"Will you think me very inquisitive if I ask whether your diamond came out of the Kimberley mine?" she said.

Mrs Cork smiled indifferently.

"No: it is a Brazilian. Are you interested in diamonds?"

"They exercise a sort of fascination over me," said Loree slowly. "Though I never thought about them much before."

The other woman examined her thoughtfully.

"Yes: one does begin to think about them here. Kimberley is a wicked place."

The statement gave Loree a sensation—not altogether disagreeable.

"It seems so quiet and peaceful."

The other smiled cryptically.

"There is a *mot* current in South Africa with regard to the degree of wickedness to be found in different towns. It runs: 'Kimberley, first prize; Cradock, second; Hell, highly recommended.'"

Loree could not help laughing, and at that moment Quelch sauntered out from the hall and stood in the light close beside them. Mrs Cork, lifting her voice slightly, addressed him.

"Mr Quelch, come here and help me convince Mrs Temple that the wickedness of Babylon was as nothing compared to the wickedness of this sweet and tranquil town."

He laughed: they all laughed, and a moment or two later they were sitting together, discussing the matter. Quelch repudiated the libel on Kimberley. If "wickedness" was in question, he thought that Johannesburg ought, at any rate, to receive an honourable mention.

"There are no diamonds in Johannesburg," said Mrs Cork.

"Diamonds!" Quelch looked musingly at Loree. "'The most exquisite of gems, known only to kings.' Pliny wrote that of them in the year 100 *Anno Domini*."

His voice held a melancholy cadence; the dark beauty of his face suggested the East where women are addressed with a musical, caressing softness. Loree was susceptible to voices and she listened fascinated. It appeared that the Tintara, a mine outside Kimberley which had produced some remarkable diamonds, belonged to him, but he spoke of it carelessly, as if it were a broken-kneed horse he owned. He showed them a stone that had been discovered that day. It was rather like a piece of washing soda, with no glitter or spangle at all. Difficult to believe that it could be cut and polished into dazzling beauty. It must go to Europe for that though. There are no lapidaries in Africa.

Loree heard for the first time of the theory that diamonds come from the skies, and of the possibility that the mines in various parts of the world are meteorites so immense that in falling they penetrated the earth's crust and became part of it. This theory is backed by the curious fact that meteorites which fell in Arizona, Russia and Chile all contained small diamonds. As to the destructibility of diamonds she learned that they can be converted by the action of heat or electricity into that most banal substance—black lead! Entranced by these strange tales by Quelch's wonderful voice, she sat spellbound while he told of the famous diamonds of the world. The *Star of South Africa* bought by Lord Dudley for 25,000 pounds; the *Great Mogul*, "a rose-cut stone tall on one side"; the *Orloff* stolen by a French soldier from the eye of a Brahmin idol, and stolen again and again until it was bought for 90,000 pounds for Catherine the Second and kept among the Russian crown jewels ever after; the blue-white *Koh-i-noor* shaped like an egg; the lovely pale rose pear-shaped *Taj-e-mah* belonging to the Shah of Persia; the *Nassak*, a beautiful stone in the possession of the Duke of Westminster; the brilliant blue Hope diamond lost and found so often, and reputed to bring bad luck; the *Tiffany*, a magnificent orange-yellow stone of 125.5 carats; the *Dresden*, part of the Saxon crown jewels, only 40 carats in weight but of a unique apple-green colour. Then there were the lovely little stones to be

gathered like dewdrops in a forest in Rhodesia—the Somabula. Most of the best South African diamonds it seemed were of a flawless clearness and water-white. It was wonderful to head Quelch speak of them. It seemed to Loraine that his words were like the gems themselves sparkling and rippling and tumbling in cascades.

Before they parted that night, he invited them to go next day and see the diamonds at the De Beers offices. They accepted with fervour, and he said he would have a car waiting for them.

“He is not a De Beers man himself,” Mrs Cork told Loree as they went upstairs, “but immensely rich and hand in glove with the diamond crowd here. He can do anything he likes in Kimberley. Fascinating brute, isn’t he?”

“Why brute?” asked Loree, surprised. It was not a word she would have thought of applying to him.

“He has such a gentle voice,” Mrs Cork said, and seemed to think that answer enough. “He had a wife once—a lovely woman, they say. He is mad about beauty. She died in childbirth about fifteen years ago, leaving him a son whom he adores. He has the reputation of being extreme in his loves and hates. Extreme people are always dangerous.”

Smiling her weary enigmatic smile, Mrs Cork bade her good night.

A beautifully appointed car fetched them the next day in the cool of the afternoon, and Quelch met them at the door of the famous Diamond Office, a substantial stone building with no hint in its squat face of the romance it housed. Quelch trod its corridors as if he owned them. Because of being his guests, they were not constrained, like other visitors, to stand behind a rail, but invited to approach the counter where men and women sat pushing innumerable little objects that looked like dull bits of broken glass into cone-shaped heaps. It was difficult to believe in the concealed splendour of those dingy heaps. The two women lingered, plunging their fingers into hidden glory and speculating on the possible future of each stone. Some were for the engagement rings of little shop-girls, some might gleam in a crown, and be dyed with a queen’s blood, as were the diamonds of poor Draga of Serbia. The past of each was silence, a secret buried in the earth’s bowels; its future endless, almost eternal, like the hills. *Tout passe, tout lasse, tout casse*—only the hills remain—and diamonds!

Among the exhibits specially shown to the guests of Heseltine Quelch was a macabresque souvenir of the swift and sharp death that sometimes descends upon those who work in the depths of a diamond mine. It was a strange cleft object, floating in a jar of spirits-of-wine. Mrs Cork gave one quick glance and looked away with a shiver, but Loree stared in great curiosity.

“What can it be?” she exclaimed.

“A thing often spoken of but seldom seen,” said the young De Beers man. “A broken heart.”

It was indeed a human heart that had once beaten in a man’s breast, and it was cleft apart from top to point almost as if divided by a sharp knife or hatchet. But no weapon had performed this grim piece of artistry. It was the fantastic result of a great fall of reef upon the head of a native. Death must of course have been instantaneous, for though when the body was recovered it was not so crushed as might have been expected, a medical investigation revealed the strange phenomena of the broken heart which is kept to this day by De Beers, as one of the wonders of the world.

There were freakish stones, too. Curiosities kept just as they had been dug from the mine. One had the face of a clock clearly marked on it, though by no human agency; another showed a church window, another a perfectly shaped capital V. One was like the bead of a rosary, with all its points pushed in instead of projecting. Mrs Cork exclaimed much over these, but what moved Loree most was the sight of the cut and polished gems which a clerk set out before them. These were the show-stones kept for the glory of De Beers and the ravishment of visitors, row upon row of them nesting in cases upon such delicate shades of velvet as best became their beauty.

Loree’s breath came in little gasps as she gazed upon them—rose-red, amber-coloured, silvery, sherry-brown, smoky blue and water-white. It seemed to her that she was drinking some magic draught in an enchanted garden full of roses, dancing daffodils, and frozen dewdrops imprisoning a thousand spurts of flame.

Quelch stepped into the garden, too. The slow music of his voice as he gathered up the stones and let them fall from his fingers to hers was for her alone, and became part of the glamour and the dream. One exquisite thing, the colour of a dog-rose and radiating a thousand minute roses of fire, fell into the pearly pinkness of her palm and nestled there.

“As if it wishes to stay,” said Quelch. “As if it knows that for such hands diamonds are sought and found.”

The words were spoken musingly and very low. Loree heard them, but they did not disturb her. The spell of diamonds was on her. The garden had turned into enchanted woods, and Pan was fluting there.

When they were leaving the building some minutes later, they met a man who stopped Quelch and showed him something he had picked up. Loree recognised it, for already her eye had learned to discern a diamond in the rough. Quelch gave a glance and handed it back.

“Worth about a hundred and seventy,” he said carelessly.

“What was it? Where did he find it?” asked Mrs Cork eagerly, as they passed on.

“A seven-carat diamond. He found it in the street close by, and is going to hand it in.”

“But may one not keep a diamond if one finds it?” asked Loree wistfully. He smiled at her ignorance.

"I'm afraid not, Mrs Temple. Findings are not keepings here. Every stone within a large radius is the property of the De Beers Company."

"How strange!" she sighed. "One would think that what is lying loose in the world would be every one's property?"

"On the contrary, if that fellow had kept it, he might have got from five to ten years in jail for illegal possession."

"And for being honest—what will he get?" inquired Mrs Cork.

"Nothing. He is a company's man. De Beers employés are not expected to pick up seven-carat diamonds in the street. If encouraged such accidents might develop into habits."

"And if I had found it?" she pursued.

"Ah! You, as an innocent stranger, would be paid a reward of twenty per cent on its value."

"It seems worth while to keep one's eyes open," she laughed, and began to shuffle with the toe of her shoe in the dusty street.

"I should hardly advise that course," smiled Quelch. "There are detectives all about us, as well as in the office. The innocence of strangers is only presumed as long as they keep a roving look out of their eyes and do not stoop down to pick interesting things from the dust."

Both women looked startled. Mrs Cork, indeed, was rather indignant.

"How horrible! Do you mean to say that even *we* might be suspected? That we were being watched in there?"

"I'm afraid so," admitted Quelch apologetically. "As you said yourself, this is a wicked place."

They got into the car, and he asked permission to accompany them, suggesting a drive round the open mine. Loree did not mention that she had already been there. She longed to see it again. Mrs Cork sulkily declared that, though she did not mind prolonging the drive, she wanted no more to do with mines. When they reached the big hole, she closed her eyes, tucked herself under her mauve sunshade and said they could inspect it if they liked, but that her interest in the diamond industry was damped for ever.

"I believe she is really upset," said Loree to Quelch, as they walked away.

"She need not be. The rule of watching is never relaxed. Every one is suspect while in contact with diamonds, and no one trusted. Even the watchers are watched."

"How curious—and how terrible!"

"In spite of it, many thousands of pounds' worth are stolen every year."

They looked down into the mine. The pit's colourings ranged from surface red and yellowish clay to the famous "blue ground" in which the gems are found. Far below, amid the jutting blocks of rusty rocks that are the barren "reef," tiny figures moved busily, pushing infinitesimal trucks. But Quelch explained that surface work had practically ceased. The real labour took place out of sight.

"It is down in the bowels of the earth that the work goes on," he said. "Thousands of natives groping and toiling in the gloom—for women." He had only put her own thoughts into words, but, somehow, spoken in his arresting tones, the fact became more potent. "I was going to say for women like you, but that would have been foolish. There is no other woman in the world like you."

His habit of looking abstractedly into distance while he talked lent an impersonal note to his remarks that was strangely contradicted by his voice. Young as she was, Loree Temple had tasted the sweets of homage before now, and learned when it is fitting to lightly accept or coldly pass them by. But this man's homage, both bold and subtle, was outside of her experience. She was a little frightened—disturbed yet held in thrall. She had an instinct that he was dangerous, but wild horses could not have dragged her away. In the meantime, she used such women's gifts as the good God had given her. She gave a little careless laugh.

"Oh—there are lots of women like me in the world. But diamonds are not for all of us."

He looked steadily across the mine.

"If I believed there was another—"

Perhaps he saw the fleeting glance she cast toward the car, for he broke off abruptly, and she did not hear what would happen if he believed there was another woman like her in the world. But her pulses were beating furiously. If some one had tried to push her into the mine and she had escaped by a hair's breadth, she could not have been more inwardly perturbed. Yet there was no outward and visible occasion for it. He was talking calmly and interestingly as he had done the night before, about diamonds. They were *not* for everybody, he said, but for beauty only. From Cleopatra down to Cleo de Merode it had been the same. The advent of a lovely woman, duchess or actress, into the world affects the diamond market as the sensitive plant is affected by the approach of a human hand. A thousand waves and wheels are set in motion. Dealers, designers, skilled workmen, and common cutter—all feel the magnetic thrill. Even the thieves in the underworld become busier and greater quantities of raw diamonds are stolen. Buyers make hurried journeys to Amsterdam and Antwerp.

Parcels of rare stones change hands. Immense sums are expended on pure chance—as in the case of the famous necklace commenced in France immediately on the advent of Dubarry into Royal favour and afterwards bought by Rohan for Marie Antoinette, becoming the *clou* of the great Court Scandal. In modern time such beautiful women as Mrs Langtry, Cora Brown-Potter, Gaby Deslys, Pavlova and Edna May had all had their influence on the diamond market and set it moving. Beauty was the pivot round which the diamond market revolved, he said. The jewels that fill shop windows are, it seems, only for ordinary women. For the extraordinary ones, something special must be made. For them the combination of flawless stones, exquisite enamels, and rare design.

It was strangely interesting to hear these things. Loree did not know why they should move her so profoundly, and become all mixed up with the sparkling joys of the flowers in her enchanted garden. Perhaps the fluting of Pan had something to do with it.

When they returned to the car, Mrs Cork had recovered her good humour. Quelch proposed a drive to Alexandersfontein (a sort of Southern Coney Island) and dismissing the chauffeur, took the wheel himself. Loree had the sensation of tasting life very sweet between the lips as they flew along through the cooling air into the heart of a blazing sunset. She knew that the strangely attractive man beside her was more than a little in love with her—and when will such knowledge cease to exhilarate a woman's blood? The only crumpled rose-leaf in her happy cup was an accident that happened as they dismounted from the car for tea. Quelch stepped on her frock and tore it from its gathers, necessitating her retreat to a dressing-room and the assistance of a maid, who took some time to fix it up. Mrs Cork's temper appeared to be of uncertain quality and unable to bear strain of any kind, for she looked very sulky at being kept waiting for her tea, and all Loree's apologies (on her return) and Quelch's civilities, surmounted by a heavenly tea, could not disperse her gloom. She said that the drive had made her eyes ache, and the sight of strawberries and cream made her sick. For the homeward drive Loree offered her the front seat, but she preferred silence and solitude in the body of the car, and the others did not deny her. When two people are on the brink of an entrancing flirtation, they cannot truthfully "grieve as them that have no hope," if they are left to themselves. In the warm rushing darkness of the night no word was exchanged between Quelch and Loree, but they advanced quite a long way on the perilous path of forbidden primroses. Arrived at the hotel, Mrs Cork said abruptly:

"You won't see me again to-night. I've got one of my awful headaches and shall go straight to bed!"

They breathed sad sympathy over her, smiling in their hearts. It was plain to see that the poor woman was suffering. Her attractiveness had quite gone, and her skin taken a yellowish pallor with heavy lines about her eyes. Loree was really sorry, but the heart of youth is light, and the troubles of other people do not unduly depress it. Moreover, she was in the throes of the first interesting thing that had happened to her since she married Pat Temple a year ago. She was sure that she was very strong and clever and well able to look after herself, and keep Quelch where he ought to be kept—outside of Pat Temple's garden of happiness. But it was fascinating to philander over the gate, and would hurt no one *who ought not to be hurt*.

"I don't want to make him unhappy, of course," she murmured virtuously, as she hurried out of her afternoon things and splashed herself with cooling waters. "But if men will go looking for scalps, they must expect a few scars."

It was past the dinner-hour. She flung on the little black gown and fastened Pat's pearls in her ears and about her neck. They seemed extraordinary unimaginative ornaments, somehow—not a sparkle or glimmer about them anywhere. More virtuous indignation moved her—this time against the giver of the pearls.

"If I flirt a little it is his fault for leaving me behind in this dull place—while he is enjoying himself."

Even her own cheek blushed at this casuistry, and a photograph of Pat on the mantelpiece gave her a reproachful glance. She remembered that she had not written to him that day.

"I will after dinner," she murmured. "Not that he deserves it. If he really cared for me he would not neglect me in this manner."

Another blush brightened her cheek. But it rally served to enhance the violet of her eyes.

Needless to say, she did not write after dinner. It was so very pleasant sitting in the verandah, smelling the drenched roses out in the gloom of the garden and listening to Quelch's voice. He no longer talked about diamonds, but about life. Of its loneliness. Of its irony. Of chance that comes too late. Of being rich and going empty. Of suffering thirst and knowing the torment of mirage. Of the desolation of being on the wrong side of the gate of the one "blue garden" in all the wide desert of the world. Among the things that she learned was that it is not right for any woman's hair to have the rich red browns of the back of an old violin—a priceless Stradivarius—and that when a man sees a certain plaintive *priez-pour-moi* look in a woman's eyes, he is ready to throw his immortal soul under her feet.

She felt extremely elated when she went up to bed at somewhere about eleven o'clock. It had been a charming evening, and the morrow held a further prospect. Quelch was to fetch her in his racing car at five and take her to see the Rhodes Memorial.

Her garments of the afternoon still lay in confusion about the room. The servants had turned down the bed and arranged the mosquito-net, but everything else was as she had left it. She began to pick up things and put them away, but her mind was preoccupied. She stopped to examine the colour of her hair in the glass as though she had never seen it before. And she looked long at her eyes. Had they really a *priez-pour-moi* expression? At last she hung up her gown and prepared leisurely for bed. Her gloves lay flung on the dressing-table, and she took them up and put them into a drawer. Then she stood still staring. Where the gloves had lain something glittered. Something was lying there like a fallen star.

At first she hardly dared touch it. But at length she lifted it tremulously and gazed into its scintillating heart. It was the lovely dog-rose diamond that had nestled in her palm that afternoon. The touch of it warmed her all through,

then slowly froze her into fright. How had it come there? The only possible explanation seemed to be that, after playing with and handling the diamonds, this one had slipped into some fold of her clothes and been brought home by her. The alternative was that some one had brought it and placed it on her dressing-table. But that seemed too fantastic. The one person connected in her mind with this stone was Quelch. Yet she had found him in the dining-room when she went down and had been with him ever since. Who on earth would have any object in leaving a valuable diamond on her dressing-table? She *must* have brought it herself. But how terrible! The watching detectives must know that it was missing. Even now she might be under suspicion of stealing it! A wild impulse came to her to fly and tell Quelch. But he had gone to bed, and she did not know where his room was. Besides, she realised in a moment that was an impossible idea. Quelch was the last person she could go to. Mrs Cork, then? But her room was also unknown. And she was so bad-tempered and would be furious at being disturbed. It was late, too. Midnight. She had been dawdling and dreaming longer than she supposed. Impossible to do anything about it until morning. With the decision came relief. There was poignant pleasure in the thought that she could spend the night alone with the rose-coloured diamond!

For another hour or more she stood turning the smiling thing in her hand, twisting it, flashing it this way and that. It was the size of a good-shaped pea, only flatter and exquisitely cut. Its rays seemed to mesmerise her eyes and paralyse her will. At last she finished undressing and approached the bed. Kneeling down, she murmured her prayers as usual, but mechanically, her eyes fixed all the time on the heart of rose-pink fire lying before her. An unrequested phrase thrust itself into her mind:

Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

She could not remember where such an odd injunction came from. It sounded like the Bible and reminded her of her childhood, so she thrust it out of her mind again quickly. Neither the Bible nor her childhood harmonised with the rose-red diamond. She got into bed, taking the stone with her, and lay awake a long time watching it. At length, when her eyes grew heavy, she slid it under her pillow just beneath her head. But even in her sleep her hand jealously guarded the treasure.

As soon as she woke, her first thought was how lovely it would look in the morning light. Eagerly she drew it forth and plunged her gaze once more into its mysterious depths. Hitherto, her happy custom had been to rise and seek the breakfast-table with healthy interest. But to-day she broke her habit and stayed long abed with her fascinating companion. She felt no hunger or thirst but for its beauty. Besides, it was safer in her room. She had an idea that if she once opened her door, the delicious thing might be ravished from her grasp. Who knew? Perhaps a hateful detective waited in the corridor! A plan must be formulated by which she could thwart any evil-intentioned person and keep the diamond in her possession. After all, it was hers. Plainly it was hers. Was there not a sort of magic predestination about the whole affair? Quelch had said, when the diamond lay in her palm, that it seemed as if it wished to be there—as if it knew it had been sought and found *for her*. And lo!—she had found it. It had come to her—followed of its own accord! If that was not lawful possession, she would like to know what was. Surely a natural preference on the part of the diamond should rank higher than any mere stupid diamond law!

The question next arose as to where to keep it out of the range of vulgar and prying eyes yet in her close and constant company. The answer was:—a tiny bag to be slung round her neck and hidden in her bosom. Diligently she hunted for a scrap of silk and a needle and cotton. Then as the air in her room was close, and the be-blinded balcony, which ran all round the square-built hotel, seemed steeped in silence and solitude, she stepped out of the French window and seated herself in a basket chair. The diamond lay in her lap and blinked at her lazily while she sewed. She felt like a happy young mother making a dainty garment for her baby.

So peaceful and preoccupied was she that Mrs Cork, coming suddenly round a corner, was upon her before she was aware. She caught the treasure up in her clenched hand, but not before the shrewd eye of the other had spied it out.

“But how lovely!” she cried. “What is it?”

“Only a little pink topaz of mine,” said Loree calmly, and held it fast and hidden. But her heart beat wildly and her cheek was pinker than any topaz ever found on an island in the Red Sea.

“Ah,” said Valeria Cork, “I’ve never seen a pink topaz close enough to really examine it.”

This was a plain hint, but Loree sewed furiously, her left hand clutching both stone and silk.

“And what is the little bag for?”

Without hesitation Loree answered firmly.

“To wear a piece of camphor in round my neck.”

“But there is no epidemic about, is there?”

“No: it’s just a superstition of mine.”

Brusquely she rose, stuffing sewing and stone into her pocket. She glanced at her inquisitor coldly. We usually dislike people to whom we are obliged to lie.

“How dreadfully ill you look!” she remarked, with an accent on the “dreadfully.” A faint colour came into the elder woman’s cheek. She had looked upon the face of forty, and to-day the fact was painfully revealed. The contrast between herself and the girl in all the bloom and heyday of youth was striking.

“Bad heads take time to get over,” she said curtly, “and it is stuffy in one’s room.”

"Ah yes. Where is your room?" asked Loree eagerly. Anything to get away from the subject of topazes and camphor-bags.

"On the hot side of the hotel," said Mrs Cork dryly. "We can't all afford the best side, like you."

This was the first time Loree had heard of a best or worst side but not the first time it had been brought home to her that, where she was concerned, Pat never considered the best too good.

"I should have come round to you last night if I had known where your room was," she said thoughtlessly.

Valeria Cork looked surprised.

"Why? Did you need anything?"

"Only to borrow an aspirin tablet," said Loree, looking sweet and pure and good, and as though she had never told a lie in her life. And, in fact, until this morning, lying had not been among her accomplishments.

"You had better come round now; then you will know where I am if you want me any time," suggested the other, and they strolled idly round the balcony. There was no one about except a negro flicking dust from chairs and glancing with sleepy black eyes into the open bedrooms as he passed.

Mrs Cork's room was indeed tiny, and not to be compared with Loree's for comfort. She proffered cigarettes and gave her visitor the most comfortable chair. There were beautiful ivory articles on the dressing-table, but they were yellow from use and the monograms faded. The silk wrapper she was wearing had a faded loveliness, too. All her possessions wore an air of yesterday, as of things bought in prosperity and never renewed. The only up-to-date object was a photograph of a hopeful-looking boy in his teens. On inquiry, Loree discovered that this was her only son, and was vaguely surprised to hear the name of the public school he was at—one of the most expensive in England. He had his mother's handsome eyes, but not their haggard glance.

The two women gossiped awhile, then Loree rose, saying she must dress for luncheon. Mrs Cork announced her intentions of lying down again, as her headache was returning.

In her bedroom, Loree hastened to finish the little bag and place her treasure in it. When it lay in her warm bosom, she felt excited yet curiously content. The prickle of it against her skin was as pleasing to her as the rasp of his hair shirt to the saintly hermit. She went down to lunch in a kind of dream of joy. Quelch was not there. He always lunched at his club. There were but few people about, and those casual and uninteresting. No one looked like a detective. Loree felt secure, but not calm. Her feverish desire was to be alone with her twinkling treasure once more, and she wasted no time in getting back to her room.

Late in the afternoon she dressed hurriedly in a delightful frock of transparent blue muslin the colour of asphodels, and prepared for her drive with Quelch. When she glanced into the mirror just before leaving, she saw that, like Bathsheba, she was fair to look upon. But it was a new and glittering beauty that she had. Her cheek glowed; her eyes burned. Pat Temple would hardly have known his wife.

Quelch's eyes told her even more than the mirror. As she came down the main stairway, she saw him standing in the hall, reading a letter which had just been handed to him from the office. Its perusal seemed to afford him pleasure, but nothing like the unfeigned gladness with which he looked up at her. Neither he nor any one else could have guessed from outward and visible signs that the sweet vision in diaphanous draperies of Madonna blue carried a canker at her heart—a canker in a little silk bag.

The racing car was at the door—a keen-nosed silvery affair, with no seats, only flat cushions of sleek grey silk. They had to climb over the sides and sit cheek by jowl on the floor, and there was a great sheaf of scarlet roses for Loree's lap. It is no use denying that these charming attentions touch women deeply. Only stupid men underrate the magic influence of gifts, especially the fragrant gift of flowers. Those roses scented all the afternoon.

Quelch had the art of communicating himself without words. Loree was acutely aware of his insolent pride in her beauty as they drove through the streets. Men possess a curious degree this scratch-brant delight in the lust of the eye and pride of life. In Africa, perhaps they indulge it more than in most places. Climate may have something to do with it, but it is a dull affair to be a plain woman there, and to be a pretty one singularly intoxicating. There was something barbaric in the warm, bold satisfaction of Quelch's eyes as they rested on her. She had the sense once more of living life to the full, and that old dream of hers of driving triumphant through the streets of Rome seemed curiously fulfilled. It was not strange to hear him say, very low:

"Don't you feel that we have been together before somewhere?"

She did not answer, only smiled. A blue ripple of her gown resting on his grey-clad knee acted like an electric current between them.

The Rhodes Memorial stands a little way out of the town—a rather enchanted-looking Asian Temple, built of sandstone from the Matoppo Hills. They climbed its steep stairs and stood gazing from marble-pillared openings at a great vista of empty veld and a far line of hills. The Boers occupied those hills during the siege, and peppered Kimberley with fifteen hundred shells from their Long Tom, being blithely answered by Long Cecil, the big gun made in the De Beers workshops. Quelch recounted the tragic fate of Labran, the maker of this gun, who was killed by the second response from Long Tom.

Afterward, he fell into silence. It was Loree who talked lightly and incessantly. She had become aware of the danger of silence. When you are loitering on the perilous precipices, where the fire-flowers blow, words are little ropes and

holds by which you keep your footing. But Quelch smiled like a man who has his feet on firm ground, and enfolded her always with his bold yet subtle glance.

She was vaguely thankful for the presence of a man reading on a bench, and when Quelch wanted to drive her out into the empty veld, which the sinking sun had flooded with blood-red light, she resisted the adventure, murmuring that she must return and write a letter to catch the night post for Rhodesia.

His face darkened at the words. Pat Temple had never been mentioned between them, but Loree felt no doubt that he knew where her husband was and all about him. One of the first things you learn in Africa is that every one knows your private affairs nearly as well as you do yourself.

So the drive into the veld was renounced, but home was reached only by a route both long and obvious. Loree missed the post for Rhodesia by just ten minutes. There was time for nothing before dinner except a few moments' secret genuflection at the shrine of a rose-pink idol. And after dinner-time flew past in the same astonishing fashion of the previous evening. Mrs Cork's headache had evidently persisted, for she did not appear, and they neither missed nor mourned her. Instead of sitting in the verandah, where the rest of the world was liable to note the silence that now held between them, they walked in the garden among the wet roses and languorously scented night-flowers. Playing with danger is fascinating anywhere, but in Africa the *mise en scène* is always specially arranged for this pastime.

Next morning, by the early post there was news from Pat. He had been down with a touch of malaria, and the Wingates were looking after him. Ethel Wingate was a remote cousin and her husband an old school-friend. They had not much money, Pat wrote, but it was wonderful to see their happiness. They had been married ten years and never parted a day, weathering storms and sunshine together.

"It has made me think a bit (the letter ran) and realise that while one is busy hustling about the earth, piling up a fortune for the future, one may be missing something more important in the present. What do you think, darling mine?"

Loree was disturbed by the question, as a happy dreamer might be disturbed by a shout in the ear. She had closed the door of her thinking mind for the time being, and did not wish to open it, for fear of what was crouching there—a little drab-faced thing called conscience. She desired no communication with that thing, nor with her soul, which was a soul obsessed. The best way to forget Pat's query was to get out the little idol that lay in her bosom, and lose herself in its sparkling loveliness. But, somehow, it did not look quite so beautiful as before. Its lustre seemed dimmed. Its fires had paled a little. This annoyed her. She felt as if she were being cheated in the value of something for which she had paid a heavy price.

Discontent seized her, and she went down to lunch feverishly anxious for any excitement that would revive the delicious spell under which she had lain for forty-eight hours and which now appeared to be dying off. Quelch was sitting in the hall, gossiping idly with Mrs Cork and watching the staircase. His habit of lunching at the club, for reasons of his own not far to seek, had been renounced. If ever a man took a woman into his arms with his eyes, he did it as Loree came toward him. The excitement she sought was supplied. Hot colour surged in her cheek and glowed to her hair.

Valeria Cork's cynical eye computed the situation, and she smiled somewhat dryly behind her cigarette. She was looking better, but still proclaimed her inability for dissipation of any kind, and refused Quelch's invitation to the theatre that night. He had a box for *The Gay Lord Quex*. Loree hesitated to accept alone. But they both seemed to think it surprisingly simple of her to suppose that there were any conventions of outrage in South Africa, also that, as a married woman, she did not do as she pleased. Put on her pride in this manner of course she decided to go. Something fluttered like a frightened bird behind that door of her mind (or heart, or soul) which she had so carefully closed. It might have been the little drab-faced conscience. However, a fascinating champagne cocktail drugged it into silence, and they enjoyed a merry lunch together.

The afternoon was spent about as busily as the lilies of the field spend their afternoons. She rested a good deal, shook out her best gown for the evening, tried a new way of doing her hair, and brooded over the diamond in an effort to recapture the first fine early magic of possession. In this she was not altogether successful, but, at any rate, she managed to obliterate from her memory Pat's query and the general wistfulness of his letter. That, at least, was something accomplished, something done to earn a night's amusement.

Certainly the lilies of the field could not have been fairer than she, descending at eight "clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful," and wearing Pat's rope of three hundred and sixty-five pearls. The only colour about her was her radiant hair, but hiding under her heart a little pink god soiled and sparkled in secret.

She looked *ravissante*. No wonder every man in the hotel found a good and proper reason for being in the hall while Quelch put on her wraps and conducted her to the car. Many a glance of admiration came her way, mingled with undisguised envy of her companion. Afterward, some grinned with joy at the prospect of the indomitable Quelch riding to a fall; some derided the absent husband, and some pitied the woman. But the two in the car recked nothing. Quelch's philosophy was that if you are strong enough, will pay high enough, and play a waiting game skilfully enough, you can get most things for yourself, even unto your heart's desire. Loree's experience of waiting games and players who compute the value of every gambit was absolutely nil, and her philosophy, such as it was, took no account of the disintegrating influences of climate, flattery, sparkling things, and the pits that vanity digs for the feet. She was entirely occupied with being beautiful and desirable and admired of all men, especially the one at her side. It seemed as if the earth was for her and the fulness thereof. It is a delusion many women have while walking on the edge of the ravine where the fire-flowers blow.

If Quelch's methods had been less fine, she might have been safer. Because he was so very quiet and gentle,

refraining even from touching her hand, she inclined to believe herself very wise and secure. Yet, in the closed and silent car, there was a certain breathlessness. Once she had a sensation of drowning in the scent of roses. Arrival at the theatre was almost like a rescue.

Surrounded by people and lights and noise, she became very brilliant and gay. Her remarks sparkled like the jewels on the white shoulders of the women in the audience. All eyes were turned to the lovely red-haired girl alone in a box with Quelch. She got more attention than Pinero's play. But on the return drive she was less sure of herself. Quelch's eyes, as he had watched and listened to her all the evening, made her afraid, and the intimate silence of the car was a fresh plunge into the sea of roses that had power to suffocate. Her gaiety became a little forced. She sat apart in her corner as if attempting to isolate herself. In her companion, there was no departure from the gentleness he always used; but half-way home, in his tender, velvety voice, he asked a question:

"Do you remember saying there were other women like you in the world?"

"Of course." She essayed to laugh lightly, but the silence that followed had nothing reassuring in it. The car drew up at the hotel entrance before he spoke again.

"If I thought there was another, I would seek her day and night, and never rest until she was in my arms—*mine!*"

The chauffeur opened the door. Quelch helped her to descend, and they entered the dim hall. Without meeting his glance, she bade him good night and passed swiftly upstairs, well aware that he remained standing there, following her with his eyes. Breathlessly she closed and locked the door upon herself. But she could not shut out the agitation of her veins or the wild beating of her heart. Fright had come into the room with her. The thing had gone too far—grown too big for the manipulation of the little hands she had thought so clever. She sat staring at them, and at the white reflection of herself in the glass. Flirtation had overswept the neat confines laid down by her, and come washing over in a big wave that had nearly overwhelmed her. This would never do. She must get back to where she was before, on the safe and unassailable rock where she had always dwelt as Pat Temple's wife. It was incomprehensible that she had ever lost her footing from that rock, and she could not quite remember how or when it had occurred. Somehow, the little pink idol was mysteriously connected with the event. It occurred to her now to calm her troubled musings by a sight of it. Gazing into its deep-pink fire-lit heart, her agitation passed; at last she rose and began to take off her gown. But in the middle of undressing, her movements and her glance became fixed. On a small writing-table at the foot of her bed something was glittering with the emerald eyes of a hundred serpents. For a moment she stood rigid, then flew to it, as a foolish bird flies to the snare. All the stars in heaven seemed to have come down to lie there linked together by a silvery thread.

It was a chain of diamonds, flexible and long as her chain of pearls and of a loveliness and brilliancy indescribable. Tenderly, adoringly, she gathered it up. It ran like fire and water through her fingers, flashing laughing, winking. When she held it altogether in her two palms, it was as though the sun had set in a pool of crystal dew. When it slipped down over her red-brown hair to her throat and shoulders and the shadow of her bosom, her beauty seemed enhanced to unearthliness. She gave a long sigh, and something went fluttering out of her. It might have been the little pale-faced conscience. Perhaps it was her soul taking wing. Whatever it was, she neither recked nor reasoned. The work begun by the rose-red idol had been accomplished by the chain of stars. She was lost.

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## Chapter Two.

The sea hath its pearls,  
But none more rare  
Than the soul of a woman  
Sweet and fair.

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I found that in a book, darling mine, and it made me think of you. All pearls make me think of you, with their lovely inner light shining and glowing through the faint pink bodies of them.

It is your birthday to-day, and I cannot be with you or get you anything here that you would care for. So I am sending you a fifty-pound note. Buy yourself a pearl. Or anything you like. There should be some good jewellers in Kimberley. And send me a pound of Hankey's, like an angel. Can't get any here, and haven't had a decent smoke for a week—

Thus Pat Temple, writing to his wife from some far spot on the borders of the Congo. She lay reading the letter among her pillows, and drinking her morning tea. Quotations and tag-ends of verses were not unusual in Pat's letters. He may not have been what is called a deeply read man. His favourite books were *The Tower of London*, *Marcus Aurelius*, *Buffon*, *Pickwick Papers*, *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, and *The Cloister and the Hearth*. Life kept him too busy to make many new friends in the book line, but his mind had a way of seizing on to phrases and verses, and he never forgot anything he had once read that dealt with woman's purity or men's chivalry. Not that he quoted to the world. It was only in letters to his wife that these things sometimes slipped out from the deeps of his heart and mingled themselves with demands for his favourite brands of tobacco.

But his little verse this morning did not please Loree. A frown curled her brows. She knew she was not like a pearl. Neither did she want one. She was sick of pearls. They said nothing to her. Only the radiant fire of diamonds could charm her heart and ravish her imagination. She drew her treasures from beneath the pillow and kissed them. For two days and three nights she had owned them now, worn them hidden under her gowns, felt their soft scrape and rustle of them against her skin, drowned her senses in the secret joy of their possession. She was like a creature living under a spell that grew more and more potent every hour. The doors of her heart were closed against every other feeling and emotion. Her mind refused to remember anything she did not want to remember, and her conscience gave her no further trouble. It was either dead or fled.

She never asked herself where the diamonds had come from. It was the last thing she wished to know. Enough that they were hers by nine points of the law, and that no living soul had given sign or signal of knowing of their existence. The only fear she felt was that some one might steal them from her, ravish them from her grasp as suddenly and mysteriously as they had come. The peril of Quelch and his burning glances paled before that awful prospect. Besides, she had regained confidence in her power to keep him in hand. Having so far contrived to avoid being alone with him since the night of the theatre, she meant to continue to do so.

The morning after she had found the necklace, she feigned illness and stayed in bed all day. Before one o'clock, Quelch had heard of her indisposition and roses began to arrive. The room was almost filled with them—bales of colour, dew, and perfume. Mrs Cork, who walked in on the heels of a maid with a tray, said that they scented the whole hotel and made it smell like the rose garden of Persia.

Morning a thousand roses brings, you say?  
Yes; but where blows the rose of yesterday?

she misquoted drily, standing by the bedside. Loree mentally and uncharitably applied the last phrase to her visitor, though in her own roselike beauty, as yet untouched by time, she could have afforded to be generous. But she was cross with Mrs Cork, and wanted her to go away. She knew of more alluring occupations than listening to that lady's arid remarks. But Valeria had after all something interesting to propound.

"You know the Duke of Carrington is out here, don't you, with the Duchess and their daughter Princess Evelyn?"

"Yes. They're up in Rhodesia now. My husband met them at a reception in Buluwayo."

"Well, they're passing through Kimberley in three days' time, and as they are anxious to see the diamonds and the diamond magnates and their wives are anxious to see *them*, a ball is to be given in the Royal honour. So every one will be pleased, let us hope."

"But how exciting!" cried Loree ignoring the irony that tinged all Mrs Cork's remarks. "When is it to be, and where?"

"In three nights' time, here at the Belgrove. The Club will be too small to hold the crush. The invitations are being rushed out, as of course it's rather sudden and impromptu. I can get you one if you care to come."

"I'd simply love it. I've always wanted to see Princess Evelyn. They say she's perfectly lovely."

"All right. I'll arrange about it then."

A short silence ensued. Loree's mind was busily engaged in turning over her evening gowns, putting them on and discarding them one after the other, all except one she had never yet worn—delicious thing, pale and sweet as primroses growing in a field that the Lord had blessed. She gave a sigh of pleasure at the thought of wearing it. Valeria in the meantime gazed wearily around the room as though she hated everything in it, and in the world. Suddenly her gaze fell upon Pat Temple's photograph.

"Ah! So that's the husband!" said she, and took it up to scrutinise closely. "One of those big, sanguine men, born under Jupiter."

"What does that imply?" asked Loree.

"Luck in most things, especially in his own disposition."

"Yes; Pat has a lovely disposition," agreed his wife carelessly. "He is so awfully good-tempered. I have never known him cross with any one."

"They're the worst when roused," commented Mrs Cork.

Loree was already bored with the subject. She put up a hand and passed it delicately over her eyes, sighing as if in pain. Valeria Cork recognised a hint when it was handed to her—even on a silver salver. The moment she had gone, Loree hopped out of bed and locked the door. Then she closed the balcony shutters and set both electric fans going.

It was one of those torrid days when clothes seem an outrage. She did not feel inclined to dress. Instead, she took from a trunk a roll of filmy powder-blue ninon bought for making blouses. In the dim room filled with fragrance and the rustling breezes of the fans, she swathed herself as with some soft blue mist, and her body glimmered through it like a living statue. Delicious hours she spent then, alone with her roses and diamonds, and the reflection of herself in the mirror, silent and lovely, less like a woman than some figure from the Elgin marbles come to life. But when the maid brought dinner, she was back in bed, white and languid and very still beneath her quilt.

The second day, she had ventured downstairs, but only for lunch, and leaning upon the arm of Mrs Cork, whom she had first gone to seek. Quelch was kept at bay by her frail air of languor. His eyes consumed her, but she would not meet them, and to his urgent declaration that a drive in the cool of the day would do her good and blow all her ills away, she only smiled mournfully and kept tight hold of Mrs Cork's arm. She did not intend to have her ills blown away.

And now, on the third morning, with a frown between her brows, she pondered the continuation of her programme. It was certain that she could not be indisposed for ever and stay shut up in her room. For one thing, she was a healthy creature, and liked air and light and sunshine. But the fear of Quelch and the fires she knew she had set blazing in him worried her. Why could he not behave himself, she thought resentfully. Life would be so pleasant and delicious but for him. She no longer required the thrill of his passionate admiration. The diamonds gave her thrill enough.

Valeria Cork, too, she felt, could not always be relied upon to stand by, lending the protection of her presence. That lady had interests and affairs of her own, and sometimes there was that in her manner which signified, very politely, that she did not care to be made use of. She was a card-woman, too, and would sit for hours playing with permanent guests at the hotel. Loree did not care for cards, and she could find no refuge in bridge. However she cared very much for dancing and was looking forward with immense pleasure to the ball that evening. She and Valeria were going together, and the latter had been so far accommodating as to promise to introduce plenty of dancing partners. In this way Loree hoped to evade the too close society of Quelch. In the meantime it was rather tiresome that the only place of real security seemed to be her own room. Because of this she lingered there all morning and had her lunch brought up. But it was a lovely day, and she longed for a walk. Rain in the night had cooled the air, and it was a shame to remain indoors. At about four o'clock, therefore, she ventured down. There was no one about except two stout ladies with dominant noses playing picquet. So she had tea in the drawing-room, and looked at the papers, and set out in search of a tobacconist's.

The main street was a good way off, but she reached it at last and bought and dispatched Pat's tobacco. Then she looked into the window of the shop next door, a fascinating window full of old silver, unusual jewellery, and snuff-boxes. Now, she collected little boxes and there was one that particularly caught her fancy—a lovely little Louis Seize in pale blue enamel with Cupids and forget-me-nots festooning the tender legend:

*Pour toute ma vie  
J'aime ma mie.*

She determined to buy it for herself as a birthday present, though the price would not make much of a hole in Pat's fifty-pound note. In fact, it was marked at such a low figure that its genuineness seemed doubtful. But a suave person in the dim and dingy interior reassured her.

"These are all pledged goods, *madame*, so we can afford to sell them cheaply."

"Pledged? What is that?"

"Well—pawned, *madame*."

"Do you mean that this is a pawnshop?"

"Yes, *madame*. We advance money on jewellery and valuables of all kinds." With an eloquent hand he indicated a door marked "Private" in the shadow at the back of the shop. "Transactions are conducted with privacy and dispatch."

Loree was horrified, pawnshops being vaguely connected in her mind with crime and police-court notices in the Sunday papers. She had sat down before the counter, but she now rose hurriedly.

"I don't think I will bother about the box to-day."

As she gathered up her gloves and sunshade, the door marked "Private" opened, and Valeria Cork emerged. She was so busily occupied stuffing a bundle of banknotes into her bag that she walked past and left the shop without observing Loree. The latter, flushed and embarrassed by what seemed to her a dreadful *contretemps*, lingered in the shop, buying the snuff box as a means of delaying herself from catching up with Mrs Cork in the street.

Of course it was no affair of hers, but she could not help wondering what business had been transacted behind the "Private" door that had resulted in Valeria Cork's acquiring a bundle of banknotes. Was she dreadfully in need of money and obliged to pawn something? Perhaps she could not even pay her hotel-bill! These were awful ideas to Loree, who had never known need of money in her life. She felt sorry as well as curious, for she liked Valeria Cork in spite of her dry tongue and uncertain temper. Besides, Loree Temple, when uncorrupted by diamonds, was of an exceedingly kind and generous disposition, with an instinct always to help people in trouble. For a time now she even forgot the diamonds, so absorbed was she by the thought of Mrs Cork's embarrassments. But only for a time. The ball was to take place that night, and planning her toilette required undivided attention. Early in the day she had put everything ready. The gown she was to wear lay like a drift of primroses over a chair, the electric fan fluttering it softly, and driving away every tiny crease acquired in travel. Long yellow silk stockings and little yellow satin slippers with sparkling buckles lay on another chair, and on the bed all sorts of soft and slight and slinky garments to go on underneath. She sat down and commenced to do her hair. That took an hour or so, for like all hair it was obstinate and behaved badly when it was wanted to look its best. She almost wished she had gone to a hairdresser. After pulling it down at least forty times and at last getting very nervous, she vowed that the forty-first time would have to do. It was the kind of hair that did not really need doing at all, being perfectly charming when just pushed up carelessly into little clusters of spraying waves and curls. She stuck her usual red rose into it from a great bunch that had been delivered that afternoon with the compliments of Heseltine Quelch. It was dinner-time long before she had finished so she rang for something on a tray and ate it sitting at her dressing-table studying herself in the mirror. In her vain little heart she decided that it was the better plan not to go downstairs where numbers of people were giving smart dinner parties. She did not want to be examined by scores of eyes before the hour when they would all file past Royalty. She wanted to dawn in all her glory upon the ball. To step like a fairy princess into the centre of the stage. Secretly she had an idea of outrivalling the renowned beauty of Princess Evelyn. However she was not very sure of herself in this ambition, being aware that Royalty has an air of its own, and that when said air is allied to beauty it becomes almost irresistible. Also, the Princess was older than she, had acquired the sophistication of Courts, and travelled in many lands. These things count, and Loree knew it. Still, she was not too discontented with the results of her subtle toiling and weaving when she stood at last ready to go downstairs. The only fault she could find was that she looked *too innocent*. That, she felt sure was a grave defect in a woman of the world. *Be innocent, yes*, thought Lorraine Loree, but don't look it, or people will think you are just out of the schoolroom. An abominable thing for a married woman of one year to have thought about her.

She wondered what on earth she could do to give herself the right note of sophistication and *awareness* that there was wickedness in the world? She was wearing Pat's pearls; on her fingers, in her ears, round her throat: and they made her look more innocent than ever. For once she had locked the diamond necklace, precious and adored, up in her jewel box, for worn with a gown like this it could not possibly have been concealed. But suddenly a mad and daring idea darted into her mind. Suppose she should wear it? Would anything in the world give such a *note*? In the twinkling of an eye the pearls were off and replaced by the chain of glimmering gems. Just to see!

Yes. They gave the note. She looked like an angel who had been down to hell on an errand, and got back safely. For it was on an errand only, be it understood. She had not lingered to talk to the Devil. Only given a glance beyond the bars to see what was going on there among the bright flames. Then fled. But the adventure had left its mark. Or so the diamonds seemed to relate in their brilliant language and the haunting echoes they gave to the eyes.

But dared she do this thing? Dared she go down into the crowd wearing the marvellous chain of stones that had come so mysteriously into her possession? She dallied long with the temptation, turning over the pros and cons in her mind. And after all what were the cons? Whoever it was that had been so kind and delightful as to present her with this jewel had surely meant her to wear it? Not keep it forever hidden? She did not linger too long over that phase of the story, however, because she did not wish to think too intently of the giver. Certainly she had no idea who it was, but she liked to think vaguely that the gods had something to do with it. Not any mere human being. The rose-pink idol rustling in its silken nest was a different thing altogether. Unfortunately she knew that belonged to De Beers, and she dared not openly wear it. But surely this chain...

Well! if you dally with temptation long enough, temptation always wins, especially when aided and abetted by a thousand little lovely, glittering, dancing, scintillating spirits of light and colour.

Needless to say Loree went downstairs with the chain round her neck: and though her heart was trembling with its own audacity she walked like a queen.

It was nearly nine o'clock, the hour set for the reception to begin. The lounge was crowded and carriages were every moment setting down fresh parties of people at the door. All the wealth of Ind as well as Afric seemed to be arriving. The place absolutely glittered with jewels. Even at that Loraine Loree created something of a sensation as she came down the broad stairway. At first men thought she was some lissom sprite of spring arriving, decorated with the dewdrops of dawn. Then it was seen as she came among them that they had made a mistake. This was a beautiful woman of the world, wearing a Paris gown and diamonds so sumptuous that they put every one else's into the shade.

Valeria Cork was one of the few people who appeared undisturbed by the glory of Mrs Temple, though she, like every one else, saw the vision and made a signal to it, to indicate her whereabouts: and Loree, a little nervous in all that crowd of staring strangers, yet moving proudly, with elation in her veins found her way to her friend's side. Valeria introduced two men with whom she was talking. Loree was much relieved to see no sign of Quelch. One of the first things she noticed was that Mrs Cork had not got on her Brazilian diamond. This might be accidental of course, but it was strange upon an occasion when every one else was bedecked. Valeria on her part gave only a passing glance at Loree's diamonds.

"How beautiful your jewels are!" she said carelessly, "and your gown too. You are creating quite a stir." Then she went on talking to one of the men, leaving the other to entertain Loree, which he certainly did, being a young South African who knew everybody and revered nobody... especially Kimberley Nobodies. He himself was Kimberley born, but Harrow and Cambridge had bred in him a fine intolerance for the men who were merely millionaires. As for the millionaires' wives—

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"Isn't it amazing," he said looking at Loree with frankly admiring eyes, "that one hardly ever sees the right women with jewels? Why should a little blue-faced monkey of a woman go about with a thousand pounds glittering in each ear and a few more thousand pounds' worth drawing attention to her accordion-pleated throat? I tell you it makes me lose my reverence for age."

Loree doubted whether he had ever possessed any, but she laughed, because she was young and so was he; in fact he was still at Cambridge undergrad, being only out on a visit to his people during the long Vac.

"As for a fat woman wearing diamonds—" continued this hopeful youth, "I'd rather see a beautiful medallion stuck in a porker's back."

These wise and witty reflections were interrupted by a stir in the crowd and a general movement in the direction of the two great doors which were now flung open. The Royal party had arrived by a private way and taken up their position in the ballroom. The file through, to be announced and presented, now began, and Loree and Mrs Cork detached themselves from their friends with a promise to meet them later when the dancing commenced.

A rather magnificent arrangement of scarlet and gold—half platform, half dais—had been set up at one end of the ballroom. But the Duke and Duchess were standing well away from it and chatting and shaking hands with their guests and behaving exactly like ordinary mortals. They did not interest Loree very much—just an elderly well-bred looking English gentleman and his pleasant-faced wife—but she looked eagerly as she drew near, at the Princess Evelyn. Yes, she was certainly lovely. A fine clear English skin and delicately curved patrician features. She wore a wonderful gown of faint mauve draperies, and her eyes which had a singularly pure expression appeared to be of the same haunting colour. People said she might have been a queen if she had chosen, and that more than one monarch had begged for her hand. But she had simple ideals, this royal girl—simple yet very high. She would only marry where she loved. And the world was amazed, and speculated a good deal as to what would happen if she fell in love with a mere commoner. In the meantime there seemed to be a little sadness in the sweet mauve eyes. Loree Temple thought so at least as she made her curtsey and passed on.

There was still no sign of Quelch, and Loree felt alternately relieved and elated by the fact. She knew she was looking her best and it seemed a pity he should miss a sight that would give him so much pleasure. On the other hand it was undeniably safer, not to say cooler, without him hovering like a hawk over her every movement. Mrs Cork had introduced several pleasant people and she did not find time hanging on her hands at all. Only one thing worried her a little. A very striking-looking woman was paying her a good deal of attention and seemed to be constantly striving to approach her. As the room was crowded this was rather difficult, and Loree made it even more so for she had a feminine reason for not wishing the lady to approach too closely.

The latter was a large woman, very handsome, with bold bright eyes, and a genial and courageous look to her, that was attractive. With such a face she might have been a Jezebel, or a Roman matron above suspicion. There perhaps was a little of both in her composition. Her gown of cloth of gold shone like a blaze of daffodils. Diamonds shone all over her too; in the buckles of her shoes, on her large able hands, on her plump but not shapeless arms. Youth had gone, and fat had come, but beauty had not entirely deserted her. She had one of those corsetted figures that make men wonder at the endurance of women, but her sufferings did not dim the brilliance of her smile nor the resonance of her hearty laughter which occasionally rang through the room. She was evidently a personality. She smiled at every one and every one smiled back and seemed to know her. It was only at Mrs Temple that she stared continually without smiling, seeming determined to edge nearer. But Mrs Temple was just as determined that she should do nothing of the sort, the reason being that beside that gown of blazing yellow Loree knew her own delicate primrose gown would be absolutely killed. Naturally she did not care to have her lustre dimmed and her subtle draperies made to look like faded nothings by the neighbourhood of this bird of brilliant plumage. Therefore very gently but cleverly she kept slipping a little further away.

"Who is that lady in bright yellow?" she asked the Kimberley boy who was once at her side begging for a dance. The Royal party was leaving and dancing would very shortly begin.

"Oh, you mean the famous Mrs Solano."

"Is she famous? What has she done?"

"Ah! what hasn't she done?" said young Dalkeith smiling. "There are many strange tales about her. Would you like to meet her?"

"No, indeed," answered Loree. "I don't want her to come near me. Her gown simply kills mine."

Just then she looked up to discover that the lady in question having made a *détour* was close upon her. Only a few people intervened. The two women's eyes met and there was such searching astonishment in those bold black orbs, and such determination, that Loree became suddenly frightened. It occurred to her with a sudden shock that the look had something to do with her chain, of diamonds. The thought sent a thrill of alarm through her. Her treasure was in danger!

"Please take me out to some cool dark place," she said quickly to her companion. "I want air."

Nothing could please young Dalkeith better. He thought her the prettiest woman he had ever seen, and was only too delighted to lose himself with her in the deepest depths of the faintly-lit conservatory. But to his disappointment she wished to continue talking about Mrs Solano.

"Do tell me about her. Why do you say she is famous?"

"Well, when I say famous, I mean she is a sort of historical character in these parts. Her husband was one of the great diamond kings here in the old days and she was very much queen, I can tell you. They say she was extremely beautiful."

"She is still," said Loree slowly, "in a way."

"Oh no, quite *passée*," said he, with the calm and cruelty of youth. "Everything's in the past tense with her, poor old thing. Over and done with before you were born I expect. But she had a good run for her money, and so did old Micky Solano."

"Isn't he a diamond king still?"

"Well, I believe he *thinks* he is, but as a matter of fact he's in a lunatic asylum somewhere down in the Colony. He lost nearly all his money in speculations, and it sent him off his head."

"How sad! and how strange that she should still go out!"

"Oh, it was all a long time ago and she's had an exciting life and can't let go. Did you notice that big golden diamond on her forehead?"

"Yes, I did," said Loree. "And I don't think she can be very poor for she is covered with diamonds."

"Well, comparatively poor, you know. They used to eat off gold plates and build palaces wherever they went, that sort of thing. Now she lives in a small house with a couple of servants, and I believe all her most important jewels have been sold one by one to pay the bills at Micky's asylum. For *he* still lives sumptuously. She's sport enough for that."

"I could tell she had big qualities," said Loree. "I felt she could either be a great saint or a great sinner."

"Well, I should say sport rather than saint," laughed the boy. "She certainly was a bit of a sinner from all accounts—"

not morally, you know, but against the law.”

“I don’t understand—”

“The Diamond Law, I mean. In the days when old Micky Solano made his money diamonds could be found lying about the streets here in Kimberley, or bought at every street corner from the niggers who stole them.”

“But how could the niggers steal them?”

“Well, you see, nowadays, De Beers have the system of watching and searching brought to a fine art; boys who are working in the mines are absolutely isolated from the rest of the world in Compounds for six months or so at a time; at the end of their contracts and before leaving they are watched day and night and gone over internally as well as externally, so that they haven’t a hope of getting away with anything as big as a pin’s head. But in those early days there were no Compounds. They worked out in the open with nothing round them but wire fences, and opportunities for stealing were endless. There were watching overseers, but John nigger is a wily fellow and soon discovered means of hiding some of his finds. At the end of a day’s work among the blue ground he would hand over a dozen diamonds and probably have three or four fine ones concealed upon his person. The next step was to get into touch with illicit diamond buyers who would give him perhaps two pounds for a stone worth a hundred. This of course paid the nigger who had got the stone for nothing, while the man who made the purchase soon developed into a millionaire. A severe law was made to combat this traffic but people still did it, in spite of the risk of being sent to jail for ten or twenty years. The Breakwater at Cape Town was almost entirely built by men sentenced for I.D.B. People never talked of being sent to jail, but to the Breakwater. Nevertheless illicit buying of diamonds continued, and many well known men founded their fortunes in that way. Micky Solano was one of them. Not only Micky. His wife was in it too. She did it for love of the game, people say. Others say that diamonds had cast a glamour over her soul, and she couldn’t help herself. Anyway it was quite well known that Micky who kept a sort of wayside hotel got hold of the stones by hook or by crook, and she ran them across the border into the Orange Free State. Once you were in Dutch territory the Diamond Law could not touch you, and from there you could easily smuggle the stones down to the Cape and away by mail boat to the big buyers in Holland. You can imagine that heaps of people were constantly backwards and forwards to the border pretending to be travellers and traders. Scores of them were trapped at it and sent to the Breakwater. But Micky and his wife were never trapped. She was too clever. No one ever found the diamonds she hid though she was often searched. The detectives knew that she got away with thousands of pounds’ worth every month, but they were never able to catch her out. Then, one journey she had her baby with her. It was the only child they ever had, and for the first time she took it with her on the rough coach journey. There were no trains then, you know. People either had their own wagons and trekked across the veld, rode horses, or drove a four-in-hand. Mrs Solano used all these modes of getting about but upon this occasion she was travelling by the ordinary mail cart. As usual they were all searched by detectives and nothing found, but just after they got across the border and were free of the police a fellow passenger called her attention to the stillness of the child which usually was a very lively little thing. The mother looked, and found it dead. It was black in the face and had apparently died of strangulation. Mrs Solano nearly went mad. Some one took charge of her while the child was examined by a doctor who found a magnificent rough diamond stuck in its throat. It had been sucking one of those sugar bag arrangements that mothers sometimes make for their children. Apparently the stone had been placed inside the sugar bag for concealment and I wonder it never occurred to the mother that the baby might suck a hole in the bag and swallow the stone. Pretty awful Nemesis to descend upon her, wasn’t it?”

“Terrible!” murmured Loree.

“That was the last I.D.B. adventure she undertook anyhow. They were pretty rich by then and she must just have been doing it for the love of the risk. But she never did it again. Micky invested the beans—and they became fabulously rich. But isn’t it a curious idea of hers to wear the stone that choked the baby?”

“Wear it?”

“Well, they say that’s the one—the big golden stone she always wears on her forehead. They say she hates diamonds now and wears them as a sort of punishment and reparation, especially that one. I don’t know how much truth there is in it. People say anything in Africa. Awful country! Hulloo! there’s the band. Do let’s go in and have this dance.”

Loree felt very uneasy, but the music was irresistible and she let herself be beguiled. As soon as she got back into the ballroom she saw that Quelch had arrived. He was on the other side of the room staring about everywhere, but to her relief he passed out of a door without having caught sight of her. In a few seconds she had forgotten him and everything else in the joyous response of her whole being to the rhythm of the music. Young Dalkeith in common with most Colonials was an accomplished dancer and it was like being wrenched brutally out of a dream when the music stopped. They strolled in silence to one of the doors leading to the verandahs. As they reached the darkness Loree realised that she had run right into that which she had tried to avoid. A resonant and determined voice was saying:

“It is mine, I tell you. I left it with Freddy Huffe. I am quite certain. I should know it anywhere.”

She found herself facing Mrs Solano and another woman. They had been standing just outside the door, apparently watching the dancing. Loree saw at once that the *rencontre* could no longer be avoided. Mrs Solano addressed herself directly to young Dalkeith.

“Will you introduce me to this lady, George,” she said pleasantly. Dalkeith, rather taken aback and annoyed, could hardly do otherwise than her bidding, but he performed the ceremony without wasting much grace.

“Mrs Temple, this is Mrs Solano,” he said, adding crisply—“of whom I have been telling you.”

“Oh, *have* you, George?” remarked Mrs Solano with a good-natured laugh. “That’s very kind of you, I’m sure. Well,

you can run away now and play.”

George walked off, very cross, and Loree felt desperately alone and frightened, for Mrs Solano’s friend remained, and she felt somehow that they were two to one. Whatever she felt within, however, she managed to show no outward trace of discomposure. There was a tinge of haughtiness in the glance of enquiry she levelled at Mrs Solano.

“I hope you won’t be offended with me, Mrs Temple,” said that lady courteously enough. “But I’ve been all the evening admiring the necklace you are wearing. Would you mind telling me how it came into your possession?”

Loree’s heart was ice, but so in terrified self-defence was her manner.

“It is a little curious of you to ask me such a question,” she said coldly. “Perhaps you will explain—”

“Ah! I see you *are* offended,” answered the other with the utmost good nature, but behind her pleasant manner was still that strong determination Loree had recognised from the first. “Really you mustn’t be. It is only that the necklace reminds me very much of one I once possessed.” Suddenly she darted out a question: “Was it a gift?” Loree stepped away slightly and got her back to the wall in body as well as in spirit. People were dancing again. The verandah was deserted except for the little group of three and another woman, approaching in the distance.

“Most jewels are gifts,” said Mrs Temple with the utmost composure, but wondering whether she was going to die or only faint. The other woman looked at her now with open hostility in her eyes. And then, to her relief, Loree recognised that the approaching woman was Valeria Cork. She came up to them swiftly.

“Is anything the matter?” she asked in surprise, staring at the silent group of three. “How do you do, Mrs Solano?”

Perhaps it was by accident that she ranged herself at Loree’s side, facing the other two women. In the darkness she felt Loree’s hand clutch her arm as if in fear, but Loree’s voice said very calmly:

“This lady is under sane delusion about the necklace I am wearing.”

“No, I am not under any delusion,” said Mrs Solano and her voice, no longer pleasantly resonant, clanged like iron. “If you will take off that necklace I will prove to you that it is mine.”

Loree’s breath shortened. Mrs Cork laughed.

“But how fantastic, Mrs Solano! You must really realise that this is rather a wild statement to make.”

“It may sound so,” said Mrs Solano doggedly, “but, as I say, I am ready to prove it. *My* necklace has a blue diamond on each side of the clasp, and one of these diamonds has three dots or defects in it, that held in a certain light, give the impression of a tiny Death’s head grinning at you.”

“More fantastic still!” cried Valeria Cork still laughing. Loree had never known her so hilarious. “Does *your* necklace possess this sinister distinction also, Mrs Temple?”

“I have never noticed it,” was the stony answer.

“Of course you haven’t.” Valeria became grave. “And of course Mrs Solano is making a mistake—”

“I am not making a mistake. I am certain that the necklace is mine, and I insist upon examining it.” Mrs Solano spoke with the firmness of a woman who is accustomed to know what she means to do, and to do it.

Valeria, speaking very gravely, said:

“I think you are acting in a very strange manner, Mrs Solano, and later you will probably regret it very much.” She was standing in the doorway, and she now turned her head and looked into the ballroom. Immediately she added: “But as you have gone so far, I, as a friend of Mrs Temple’s, must insist that the matter be put right. Some responsible person must be called in to see the necklace with you, and relieve my poor little friend of any further unpleasantness. Mr Quelch is just the man to do this, and I see him over there in the ballroom. Please all remain here while I fetch him.”

She was only two or three seconds away, and during her absence the three women stood still as though turned to stone. Quelch and Mrs Cork made their way across the ballroom, their heads bent in conversation. Presently they emerged through the door by which the three awaited.

“I have explained everything to Mr Quelch,” said Mrs Cork quietly. “Mrs Temple, will you please hand him the necklace and he and Mrs Solano can go and look at it quietly in his sitting-room.”

“This is all very mysterious,” said Quelch in his charming voice. “But I’ve no doubt we can clear it up immediately.”

Valeria Cork had lifted the necklace quietly over Loree’s head.

“It will be perfectly safe with Mr Quelch,” she said in a low voice. A minute after she put her arm through Loree’s. “I hear the ‘cup’ is delicious and I am so thirsty,” she said. “Let’s go and have some.”

She drew Loree away in one direction and Quelch and Mrs Solano went in another. Mrs Solano’s friend, who throughout the proceedings had never spoken a word, remained standing like a pillar of salt, in the verandah.

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Loree plunged once more into the gay pool of melody and movement. With a little champagne in her head, and her

heels as light as air, she managed to throw off the memory of the disagreeable incident that had ruffled the pleasant surface of the evening... but at the back of her mind fright was lurking still, and every now and then it would clutch at her heart with an icy hand that almost stilled its beating. Then, shivering, she would wonder what was taking place in Quelch's sitting-room and why he and Mrs Solano did not reappear.

Time went on. It had been somewhere about half past midnight when they went away, and at two o'clock there was still no sign of them. Mrs Temple was thankful for the distraction offered by the company of a delightful man of about forty-five whom young Dalkeith had introduced. He was a late-comer having arrived only in time for the ball, and at once with unerring instinct made a bee line for the prettiest woman in the room. His tongue had a witty twist and his eye under a black-ribbed eye-glass was blue and merry as a boy's. He seemed not to have a care in the world and kept Loree so amused that she almost forgot all cares of her own. Moreover his step suited hers to perfection and while she was dancing with him she thought of nothing. Her mind was a blank except for the delicious feeling of bliss in rhythmical movement.

She was resting after a dance with this man whose name she did not know when one of the hotel servants came up and addressed him in a low voice.

"Mr Quelch would like to speak to you, Sir, in his private sitting-room."

A shade of annoyance crossed the face of Mrs Temple's companion.

"Very well," he answered brusquely, then turned to her, "I wish people would not want to talk business out of business hours!" he remarked with a tinge of impatience. "However, I shall be back in ten minutes or so, Mrs Temple. You won't give the ninth waltz to any one else, will you? And please don't forget that I am to have that 'third extra,' if there is one. It's a promise, isn't it?"

"Very well, we'll look upon it as a promise," she smiled. But when the ninth waltz started he had not returned to claim it, and she did not know with whom to be most vexed—Quelch, or her missing partner. Beautiful Loree was not accustomed to bloom unsought in the *rôle* of wall-flower, and even though she was soon descried and besieged for the remainder of the waltz her vanity was hurt by the incident. She put a small rod in pickle for the defaulting partner when he *should* turn up, and the promise of the 'third extra' was promptly bestowed elsewhere. But the dance went gaily on and the recalcitrant one did not return to receive his punishment. She thought it very strange of him. Also her vexation with Heseltine Quelch increased. Surely if the latter had finished his interview with Mrs Solano he ought at least to come back to report and return the necklace, instead of sending for a business acquaintance and launching into some other affair... incidentally robbing her of the best dancing partner she had ever had! It really was too tiresome of him. She resolved to treat him pretty coolly for his sins.

But up to the last note of the last "extra" there was no sign of him, and unease began, once more, to creep into her mind. What had happened? She was standing near the verandah door when the final bar of God Save the King crashed out. In the second of silence that followed a sharp report was heard from the garden—a strange, unusual sound that made women jump and men run hurriedly through the doors. The garden was dimly luminant with the promise of was that men discovered out there among dawn, yet not light enough to show what it the roses. One or two women devoured by curiosity began to push forward, but returning men barred the way. There were murmurs of an accident. People with good eyesight imagined they saw a slow procession moving through the grounds. Suddenly Quelch appearing from the gloom of trees and shrubs walked into the brightly-lit verandah. Loree forgot her grievances against him and ran to meet him.

"What has happened? Do tell me, Mr Quelch. I feel so frightened."

"Nothing," he murmured reassuringly—"at least nothing you can help. An unfortunate accident. A fellow fooling with a revolver, out there, has wounded himself rather badly."

"Oh, poor fellow—"

"Who is it?—"

"What a strange thing to be playing with a revolver at this hour!"

"Where is he hurt?—"

The women were all speaking at once, in great excitement and curiosity, but Quelch's calm manner began to reassure them. Though not able to tell them much, he disclosed the belief that the wound was not fatal, and gently advised every one to go to bed. Loree was one of the first to follow his good counsel. As she moved away he stepped beside her for an instant.

"Oh! Mrs Temple, it was quite all right about the necklace of course. Mrs Solano is immensely sorry to have made such a mistake, and is writing to you in the morning."

"Oh... thank you," stammered Loree, turning very pink.

"Mrs Cork has it, and will return it to you," added Quelch, then turned back to the few still questioning women who lingered, and Loree hastened to her room.

Valeria Cork was not awaiting her as she had hoped. The last seen of that lady—who did not dance—was at a bridge table in the lounge, brooding (to judge by her looks) over a bad hand and a bad partner. Well, no doubt she would arrive presently. In the meantime Loree stood waiting in a state of almost painful relief. It had been a glorious evening. As a woman she had achieved *un succès fou* by her beauty and her clothes. She had lit many little fires in

the eyes of men—hungry little fires of longing and desire and admiration such as most women think it no shame to light and leave burning. But through it all she had felt a consuming fear about the diamonds. That horrible incident had shaken her through and through, and come near to spoiling her pleasure in the rest of life. And now since Quelch had spoken the words that put an end to her suspense she allowed herself for a moment to realise the terror of what might have been if Mrs Solano had been able to make good her claim. What a frightful scandal might have ensued! ... a scandal that would surely have reached Pat's ears—her Pat so dear and trusting! He seemed to grow suddenly very dear as she sat there waiting and wondering: dear as things departed for ever out of reach are dear: dear as the dead!

A soft tap came on the door and a softer whisper.

"Are you asleep, Mrs Temple?"

She rushed to open it. Mrs Cork stood there.

"I thought you were in bed and asleep!"

"No," stammered Loree. "I was just going to undress."

"I only wanted to bring you this," said Mrs Cork lightly, and handed something to her in a glittering heap. "Of course it was all a mistake of that silly Mrs Solano's. Mr Quelch was very angry with her, but she is extremely penitent, I believe, and going to write you a letter of abject apology in the morning."

Loree took the necklace without a word. Mrs Cork gave her a strange look, then she said "Good-night" abruptly and went swiftly down the corridor.

Loree locked the door and returned to her dressing-table. Very slowly she let the necklace ripple out of her hands through her slim fingers on to the white cloth. It lay a heap of glory, winking at her. At first she hated it. It had given her some terrible moments. She had a mind to fling it through the windows into the garden below and let who would find it and keep it. But she looked at it too long, and once more it wove its magic round her heart, round her mind, round her senses and her conscience. At last she took it up and kissed it.

"Oh, my darling!" she cried. "If I had lost you!"

Suddenly it occurred to her to look at the clasp.

Then her face grew very pale, for strange to say there *were* two blue diamonds on either side of it... two stones of a livid brilliance sending out piercing rays of azure light and seeming to guard that little gate of platinum which held the chain together. It seemed an extraordinary coincidence! What was it that Mrs Solano had said about "defects" and a "Death's head"? She raised the chain high to the light and gazed intently into the heart of each. And then her own heart gave a beat and seemed to wait a little. For in one of those blue diamonds there were three tiny dots that gave back the curious illusion of a squinting, grinning Death's head.

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Yet, in the morning, even as Valeria had predicted, on her tray lay the letter of apology from Mrs Solano. It was not abject, however. That high-spirited and adventurous Jewess knew not, it seemed, the paths of humility. But she was not without courtesy in her *amende honourable*.

*Dear Mrs Temple:*

I am sure that you received your necklace back safely from the trusted hands of our mutual friend, Mr Quelch. I have to tell you how extremely sorry I am for the foolish mistake I made. I am afraid that it caused you much pain and vexation and can only ask you very sincerely to forgive me and forget all about the unfortunate incident.

Very faithfully yours,

Rachel Solano.

Oh, yes, Mrs Temple forgave. She was only too thankful to do so. A great weight seemed lifted off her shoulders. But the shock she had received from the "unfortunate mistake" together with the fatigue of dancing and the excitement generally had left her very weary. She decided to rest for a great part of the day, and lay abed, gently dreaming. With her lunch came copies of the two daily papers. Like all local newspapers they were not very interesting to visitors. But to-day there was, naturally, a long account of the Royal reception and Ball of the night before. Loree glanced down the printed columns to find herself famous as "the lovely Mrs Temple." Far more room was given to her in the news than to the famous Princess Evelyn. Every item of her toilette was described, every shade of her gown, every leaf almost in the sheaf of roses she had carried. The journalists dwelt upon her glorious hair, its maze of bronze curls above her face of ivory and roses, they spoke of the grace of her walk, her exquisite dancing. It was only natural she should glow a little, lying there reading those panegyrics of praise. She had never before seen herself in print.

She could not, however, help being struck by a fact which seemed very curious. Not a word had been written about her diamond chain. What made the omission conspicuous was that almost every other woman's jewels were mentioned in detail, their diamonds counted, and catalogued. There were:

"Mrs Ikey Mosenthal's famous tiara—"

"Mrs Solly Moses' wreath of Jagersfontein roses—"

“Miss Rebecca Isaac’s magnificent necklace and pendant of water-white stones—”

“Lady von Guggenheim’s priceless plaque of black diamonds—”

Only Mrs Temple’s exquisite chain was unhonoured and unsung. It was passing strange and gave her furiously to think. But at last she hit upon what might be the correct solution of the mystery. The journalists had probably not been able to set about the business of examining and describing clothes and jewels until after the Royal Party’s departure. As it was soon after that time that the Solano incident had occurred, followed by the temporary departure of the diamond chain from Mrs Temple’s neck, she reasoned that the journalists had not described it because they had not seen it. Which was, after all, a great piece of luck for her, for she could not help realising that the newspaper accounts might easily come to her husband’s eyes, and how very difficult it would be for her to explain to him how she came to be wearing a priceless necklace of which he had no knowledge. As it was she could cut out the paragraphs and send them to him.

She gave a deep sigh of relief, then read the description of herself all over again, browsing delicately upon the praise of her beauty. Just as she was laying down the papers a name caught her eye—a name she had heard before though she could not remember where. It was heavily leaded at the top of a long column, and composed a startling phrase.

*Suicide of Mr Frederick Huffe.*

It was the story of sane unfortunate man—a Banker-solicitor—who had betrayed his trusts and blown out his brains. Loree glanced cursorily at it, at first. Her tastes were not morbid and it really gave her pain to read of people in distress. She was not one of those who, as Masefield puts it, find intoxication in another’s suffering, excitement in another’s hell. But the words “in the garden of the Belgrove Hotel” arrested her attention and she read on. When she had finished she knew that the revolver shot they had heard at the end of the ball was the sharp crack of doom that had sent Frederick, Huffe out of the world.

“Many men rushed to the spot at once,” ran the story, “but Frederick Huffe, brilliant man of the world, past-master of every sport and accomplishment to which he turned his hand, was also a sure and certain gun-man, and had made no mistake. Death must have been instantaneous.”

So Quelch’s reassuring words were untrue! They were only spoken to get the women away quietly! It was comprehensible of course. One could not blame him for it, thought Loree. In fact she rather admired him for it, reflecting once more upon his worldly wisdom and capability. How cool and gentle and helpful he had shown himself in the matter of the necklace. He had been a real friend. Perhaps if the unfortunate Frederick Huffe had possessed such a friend he would never have come to his desperate end! What a strange thing, though, that he should choose to do it out there in the Belgrove garden, after the ball where he had been dancing and apparently enjoying life to the end! However she would not let her thoughts linger further on the tragedy. Besides, the phrase “Mr Huffe had financial worries” suddenly reminded her of something else, something that in the press of events she had almost forgotten—the financial worries of Mrs Cork. As she dressed for dinner she determined she would go into matters and try and find a way of helping her friend. Never, never would she forget how staunch Valeria had been in the terrifying ordeal with the Solano woman, and she resolved that *coûte que coûte* she would repay that staunch friendship.

At dinner-time she went boldly to the other woman’s table and asked if she might dine there, as she was tired of her own table. But Valeria Cork had lost her friendly air of the evening before and relapsed into her dry and cynical self. As the table where she sat was invariably laid for four persons she could not very well refuse, but she looked bored by the request, and, if eyes can speak, hers said plainly that she thought Loree a nuisance. Loree, however, had reasons both selfish and altruistic for being thick-skinned, and she meant to cleave closer than a brother to Valeria. She observed that again the Brazilian diamond was again absent from the widow’s throat, and she felt certain now, that accident could no longer be accountable for this. The conviction grew in her that the diamond had been left in the horrible little pawnshop. No wonder Mrs Cork’s eyes were arid and her tongue bitter! A few minutes later Quelch came in. Instantly his eyes found the two women, and he came over.

“Why should I be left out in the cold?” he plaintively demanded.

Mrs Cork assumed an even more bored air.

“Oh, you can come. If I have one, I may as well have half a dozen.”

He took no notice of her disagreeables, sitting down and making himself pleasant to them both, though both knew full well for whom were his gentle words and bold, enfolding gaze. Sometimes Loree had the sensation that they were scorching through her gown and searing her very flesh. More than ever she resolved to cling to the society of Valeria Cork. The latter remained distraught and contemptuous, and when Quelch asked them to go to the theatre after dinner, curtly replied that she had a bridge engagement. Loree also refused, but in more dulcet fashion. She said she feared the night air. No one mentioned the affair of the diamond necklace, nor was the subject of the suicide referred to. Loree was grateful for both of these things.

After coffee and idle gossip in the lounge, Mrs Cork rose to join the two dominant-nosed ladies and a nosier man. Loree also rose. She had suddenly developed a *migraine*. This was indicated by the use of a minute gold bottle of smelling-salts and a delicate gesture of her hand across her forehead and hair, as if brushing away pain. Quelch looked on with troubled eyes, but it was vain for him to plead that five minutes in the garden would do her all the good in the world.

“Not when I have a *migraine* like this,” she dolefully replied, and repeated the lovely gesture, pushing pain back into her emotional hair, which bronzed and winged above her brows like fine threads of metal.

“When I have a headache like this, nothing cures it but bed,” she averred, and cast her *priez-pour-moi* look at him.

With a barricade of protecting people about, she was enjoying herself immensely. It was a pity to go away from anything so rousing and exciting as his sultry glances. But it was safer than to stay. You never knew what a lawless man like that might do. She offered her hand in good night, and he was obliged to take it with the best grace he could muster. But he held it very closely, and did not release it until the red colour in her face responded to his pressure. Then, careless of what any one thought, he stood perfectly still, watching her out of sight. She tripped up the stairs, not at all like a woman suffering from *migraine*. Her sprightly movements brought a cold, resolute look into his dark face.

Her mind was full of both business and pleasure. First, and always, there were the diamonds wherewith to console solitude. Secondly, she had come by an inspiration during dinner, and was anxious to carry it into effect. It was an inspiration to repay "whatever gods may be" for the felicity of her diamonds by doing a good action which would also bring pleasure to another. She had determined to solace the financial troubles of Valeria Cork by secretly presenting her with Pat's fifty-pound note. Such noble and pleasant intentions lend wings to the feet. She flew to her room and obtained the note. But a black boy was tidying out a bathroom next door to Mrs Cork's bedroom, and she could not enter without being seen by him. Trying the balcony, she found a maid flirting there with some one's valet.

Obliged to possess her soul in patience till the coast was clear, she returned to the contemplation of her diamonds. It was nearly an hour before absolute solitude prevailed and she was able to steal to Mrs Cork's door—only to find it locked! The door leading from the balcony proved to be in like case. This was a contingency that had not occurred to her. She constantly left her own door unlocked, and supposed that other people did the same. However, her mind was nimble, and never left her long without an idea. She went to her room and placed the banknote flat, in a large white envelope. For a moment, she toyed with the temptation to write, "From a friend," upon the covering, but decided not to. Mrs Cork might know her writing, and that would never do. She wished the gift to be as anonymous as her own gift from the gods. Returning to the locked door, she knelt down, and, with great difficulty, worked the envelope underneath, computing that, as soon as the door opened, there it would lie, obvious and inviting. When, at last, she rose from her knees flushed and hot, but rather pleased with herself, it was to find Valeria Cork had come soft-footed down the corridor and was leaning against the opposite wall watching the proceedings. She had an unlighted cigarette between her lips and something very like a sneer in her sardonic eyes.

"If you've quite finished operations," she said, "I'll go in and make the discovery."

Loree, caught red-handed at her good works, confused and *agacée*, stood like a convicted thief. For a moment, she thought of explaining. It seemed the only thing to do. But the other woman's manner was so extraordinarily hostile that she was both alarmed and resentful. In silence and with great dignity, she walked away. But behind her own closed door she stood palpitating with apprehension for what would happen next. She had not long to wait. A sharp knock came on the door, and, without waiting for it to be opened, Valeria Cork marched in, holding the note and envelope as if they were something infectious.

"What is the meaning of this? How dare you?"

Loree, scarlet, stood clinging to the brass, rail of her bed. There did not seem to be any words adequate to the occasion. Impossible to inform this coldly furious woman that she had appeared to an onlooker as a fit recipient for charity. There was a brief silence, Mrs Cork obviously trying to control her temper.

"I should like an explanation of this—this *kindness*." She bit off the last word with the utmost irony.

"There is no explanation," said Loree lamely.

"But this is your banknote?" Silence.

"I saw you pushing it under my door." Silence.

"I insist upon an explanation."

Still Loree kept silence. There was absolutely nothing to say. "I can only suppose," said Valeria Cork, at last, "that it is some kind of conscience-money you were trying to foist off on me."

"No, no!" murmured Mrs Temple, her colour growing brighter.

"Then," said the other slowly, "you were trying to buy me. For some reason or other, you think I am to be bought." For a moment, she looked at Loree piercingly. "That is my answer." She flung the note in its owner's face and swept from the room.

A sad ending to a noble deed! Loree collapsed on to her bed and wept miserably. For a time, at least, even diamonds were powerless to assuage her humiliation.

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### Chapter Three.

Mrs Cork would not even look at her the next day. She was thrown abruptly upon her own society, for Quelch, too, without hail or farewell, disappeared from the horizon. This was a relief in a way, though it could not be denied that she missed him as one misses the glow of a fire from a Town. But something had gone wrong with life altogether, somehow, and the flavour of it was dry on her tongue. She began to weary of Kimberley and the monotonous existence in the luxurious hotel. More than ever she was obsessed by the diamonds. Yet the pink god often seemed to mock her when she took it from its shrine, and she began to realise that though it is sweet to look upon the image of yourself suitably decked with jewels, it is sweeter still to let the world look upon you and admire. In fact, there did not seem to be much object in jewels that you had to wear hidden. Something, too, was missing from the diamonds—

some quality or spirit that Pat's pearls possessed, sad as they were compared with the stones. She could not think what it was, and did not try very hard to discover, for the pearls had a reproach for her. Time was when she could linger over them daily, looking into their little lustrous faces, almost knowing each one of the three hundred and sixty-five singly. Now she locked them away, and with them the beautiful pearl rings Pat had given her. She longed to have the rose-pink diamond set in a ring and to wear it blazing alone on her hand. But greatly daring as she was, she did not dare that, in this hotel and town which belonged to De Beers, to whom the stone also belonged, though they did not know it was in her possession.

At about eleven o'clock that morning she was in the lounge taking tea after the pleasant and refreshing custom of the country. Mrs Cork and some gambling cronies were bridging as usual at another table, and there were various people scattered about, reading and gossiping. Only Loree Temple was alone and a little lonely. It was with pleasure that she saw young Dalkeith walk in. He had brought her a book they had been discussing at the ball, but to her disappointment could not stay, as he had a business engagement. She poured him out a cup of tea and he lingered a few moments, gossiping. Then, for the first time since the ball, she heard spoken reference to the tragedy of Frederick Huffe.

"I have just come from the inquest," said Dalkeith. "Awful, wasn't it?"

"Terrible." Loree closed her eyes and shivered a little. She did not like sad things.

"And I don't care what any one says," went on the boy. "He was one of the best. Even if his finances *did* go a bit astray in the stress of life he was one of the best. Didn't you think so, Mrs Temple?"

"I?" said Loree opening her eyes in surprise. "I did not know him."

"No, of course you didn't know him *well*, but you were dancing with him a lot after I introduced him to you, and I thought you seemed to like him. Everyone liked old Freddy and found him charming."

Loree, who had turned very white, sat staring at him, her lips slightly apart.

"Was *that* Frederick Huffe?" she whispered at last. "That nice man who went away and never came back for the dance I had promised him?"

"My God! didn't you know?" exclaimed Dalkeith. "I *am* sorry."

After he had gone she sat there a long time, very white and still. She was remembering acutely the lines of that pleasant, charming face, the satirical yet boyish blue eye behind the eye-glass, his gay and witty remarks, his zest for dancing. Yet all the while he was weary of life! Death was at his elbow!

While she sat there meditating on the strangeness of men, and on the masks they wear, concealing their true selves from the world, she saw an attendant approach the table where Mrs Cork was playing cards and hand her a telegram.

On reading it, Mrs Cork put down her cards and asked to be excused from the game. The words: "Bad News" were spoken in a calm voice, but as she passed, Loree saw that her face was of a deadly pallor, haggard and wintry, with sombre eyes. No more was seen of her that day or the next. The maids reported that her news seemed bad indeed and that she was prostrate, but no details transpired.

Loree longed miserably to go and condole, but dared not intrude upon one so bitterly offended with her. The next best thing seemed to be to try and explain and to ask for forgiveness. She spent the whole of an afternoon composing a penitent letter.

*Dear Mrs Cork:—*

I am so deeply sorry that you are offended with me. Please do not be. It *was* an impertinence on my part to put that note in your room, and I beg your pardon. But I did not do it out of any feeling except of pure friendliness and liking for you. Also, I had a reason for supposing that you were in need of money, and I thought it would be a nice way of spending the fifty pounds my husband had sent me for a birthday present by giving another woman a helping hand, just as I hope a woman would help me if ever I were in trouble.

Yours sincerely, Loraine Loree Temple.

She gave it to the maid for delivery and went down to dinner, though without the light heart a decent action should have ensured.

The fact that she had known the man who shot himself—danced, laughed, talked with him within half an hour of his desperate exit from the world obsessed her poignantly. She longed for something or some one to distract her from the sad memory, and with what relief did she find that Heseltine Quelch had returned, reappearing from nowhere as suddenly as he had gone. As she came down the stairs he, too, faultlessly groomed and debonair, crossed the hall. He was taking a pile of letters and telegrams from the hands of his man, but at sight of Loree he handed them back with the brief comment: "Put them in my room. I'll go through them later," and came straight to her, as the bee to the honey-flower. As for her, after two dull, lonely days, the fire was lit once more, and she warmed herself and smiled in the glow of it. A certain recklessness entered into her, and she let his eyes enfold and caress her without the rebuke a woman knows so well how to introduce into her manner. After all, she said to herself, if he was so determined to hurt himself, why should she worry for him? People who go looking for scalps must expect scars. If she felt herself in danger, she could draw back and escape, as she had done that other night. What could he do but acquiesce? She was not in his power in any way. She had never given him encouragement to make a fool of himself. If he now mistook her very natural pleasure at having boredom relieved for any warmer feeling on her part, well

—*tant pis* for him! His blood was on his own head, and hers not the fault.

Thus she reasoned, justifying herself for once more plunging into the fascinating game, walking on the wild precipice, fluttering near the live wire on which *some* women might meet disaster but to which she intended to remain invulnerable. The cruelty which so often comes with consciousness of power stirred her. She knew now that, though she felt the charm of Quelch, it would give her pleasure to punish him through his passion for her. If she had seen that cold and resolute look on his face two evenings before, when he watched her tripping upstairs, she might not have been so sure of her power to punish.

They dined together. A gay and light-hearted pair of friends, so far as the world could see. Only they knew what secret currents were flashing and sparkling between them, fed by her alluring smiles and graces. After coffee, he suggested the garden. It was very lovely out there amid the trees and wet roses. Loree resisted a little, yet it seemed safe enough within sound, almost within sight of the verandah, where several people loitered, smoking and gossiping.

But she kept to the clear, open paths, and it seemed politic now to infuse into her manner a tinge of coldness. Instantly, that grim resolute expression passed over his face, but he said nothing, only bided his time, and when presently they came near a vine-laden pergola, he thrust an arm through hers and, with a suddenness that took her unawares, guided her into obscurity. Haughtily she disengaged herself, but, he remained facing her, standing between her and the hotel, and his words were arresting.

"You must stop fooling me, Loree. My love is too great to be blown hot upon one minute and cold the next."

"I don't think I understand—"

"Oh, beloved, you do! You know that I love you." His voice was of a tenderness indescribable. It played across her taut nerves like the bow on a violin.

"You must—be mad!" she faltered.

He smiled.

"Yes; a divine madness. You are touched with it, too."

"No! No!" she protested. He gave a short laugh and caught her in his arms, holding her close and kissing her rapidly and fiercely. She resisted, but he held her closer; she protested, but he drank the words off her lips. He swept her from her feet, holding her to his heart and taking his fill of her mouth, her eyes, her throat, her hair. It was as though a great wave of the sea had broken over her. She lost her voice, almost her senses, in the madness of the moment, but her heart knew fear and an agony of shame. At last he released her, and she leaned, like a flower broken in a storm, against the side of the pergola.

"How dare you! How dare you!" she breathed, white with anger.

"How dare I?" he said gently. "Oh, beloved one—lovely one—surely you have given the right!"

"Never! Never!" she denied passionately.

He made a gesture to her breast, where something sparkled and shone. In her struggle to loose herself from his arms, the chain of diamonds had torn its way through the filmy tissue of her gown.

"Why, then, do you wear my jewels, Loree?"

There was a long silence after that. He stood looking at her with pleading eyes. She was like something carved and riven out of pallid marble.

"*Your* jewels?" she whispered at last. "*Your* jewels?"

He shrugged a little. His eyes did not lose their tenderness, but his smile was a little disdainful of the flashing chain.

"They are unworthy of your beauty, but you have done me the great honour to wear them."

Slowly her fingers felt for the stones and clasped them, her glance still in his.

"They are yours?" she murmured, still dazed and bewildered under the shock.

"No; yours, Loree, as all I have is yours. Only an earnest of things to come. You shall wreath yourself in diamonds, the most beautiful the world has ever seen—as you yourself are and shall be the fairest jewel the world has ever seen, and mine."

"Your words are madness!" she stammered. "How can I be yours? I am a married woman."

"Oh, *that!*"—with a gesture and a scornful smile he brushed away marriage and every obstacle that stood between them.

"You are insane!" she insisted. "I never dreamed of such a thing. And how could I know that these were yours?" With a spurt of anger she added, "How dared you put them in my room?"

He only smiled tolerantly.

"You accepted them—and wore them."

"But—I did not know they were yours."

"Who then, loved one, did you think was showering almost priceless stones upon you?" he inquired with gentle irony.

"I—I don't know. I never thought about it at all. I just found them there—and though—" She broke down. It was true, but it sounded too puerile and childish.

"You thought that findings were keepings?" He laughed. "So they are, darling, as far as you are concerned. And for me, too, I have found you, and,"—his voice changed from laughter and became strong and soft and fierce—"by God, I mean to keep you!" As suddenly as before, he caught her to his breast. "You are mine, Loree, and I will hold you against the world. You are something I have been looking for all my life. Your beauty makes me—your eyes—your hair—it is wound round my heart. Ah—you don't know—women don't know—"

He was incoherent in his fierce passion, and all the time he tore kisses from her lips, her hair. The fires she had played with and carelessly fed were loosed indeed, and raging to consume. Loraine Loree was getting all the thrills she had asked from life—and more! Powerless in his strong arms, hypnotised by the force of one who had always had his will of life, gone where he listed, taken what he wished, she knew now she could never save herself. There was no answering power in her to resist his. She was a frail branch in a whirlpool of strong currents, and the strength to survive was not in herself. She must be rescued. But who would rescue her? She was alone, alone—and lost! At last, the white, forlorn stillness of her quieted his fierce heart and he loosed her gently.

"Forgive me, darling! Forgive me! Your loveliness, the sweetness of you drives me beyond myself. When will you come to me?"

"Come to you?" She looked dazed and strange, clinging to the pergola, staring at him.

"Come *with* me. We will go away from here at once—to Europe—all over the world."

"But I—" she began. He interrupted her gently.

"There is a mail for the Cape to-morrow night. I cannot wait a moment longer, Loree."

"I will not come!" She drew herself up in a last effort at resistance.

"There must be no 'will not.'" His eyes grew colder, his jaw resolute. He put out a light finger and touched the diamonds. "Don't you understand that, by this chain, you have bound yourself to me? And do you think I will ever let you go? Never! I will pull down the temple of your reputation into the dust first, and perish myself in the ruins. Oh, darling, do not force me to say such things!"

"You could not touch my reputation," she said, but her heart trembled.

"Would you wish it to be thought that you could be bought with diamonds, Loree? I understand; but would the world understand the love of beauty in you that made you take that rose diamond from the De Beers office?"

She gave a wild cry.

"I did not! I did not! Oh, you know I did not!"

He shrugged carelessly.

"At any rate, you acquired it, and kept it, and the De Beers people—well, they are not very understanding, either; but I have power—I explained, defended you, paid for the diamond and for silence."

"My God! You think I stole it? *They think so?*" She swayed as if she had been struck, almost fainting from this worst blow of all.

"What does it matter what they think?" he said soothingly. "They will be silent because I will it. As for me, I love you, and nothing you do could make any difference."

The girl stared before her, distraught, frantic.

"And the necklace?" she stammered.

"The necklace was different. That was my gift to you, and you have graced it by wearing it. I have traced its outline often round your lovely shoulders—and longed for the day when I could kiss it there."

His eyes grew dark again with the great passion he felt for her. He put out his arms entreatingly. But she drew back, shuddering. Her lips were dumb; her hair was in turmoil; her heart seemed turned to ice, but her feet still knew their uses. She dashed past him and ran.

Even in her room, with the door locked and barricaded, she did not feel safe. Panting, she threw herself down and sobbed—dry sobs of fear and anger and despair. What had she done? Where would it end?

"Am I mad?" she whispered. "Have I been walking in madness all these days, believing myself happy with these accursed stones, betraying my husband's love for me—his honour and upright name?"

She wept, she trembled; she cursed the day she had ever seen diamonds, and cast them from her on the floor. At

last, she flung herself on her knees with the broken and bitter cry of a contrite heart.

“O God, help me!”

To her door came a soft knock. She raised her dreary, emotion-racked face and listened, trembling, for a while before she dared respond with an inquiry.

“Who is there?”

It was Valeria Cork’s voice that answered.

“May I come in for a moment?”

Loree’s first impulse was to deny her. All her inclinations were opposed to being seen in such a state of misery and disarray. Yet—had she not called on God for help? And was not here one stronger and abler than herself? Of instinct, she knew that Valeria Cork, for good or evil, had more force of will than she herself possessed. She opened the door.

Mrs Cork, with her ravaged face and burnt-out eyes, came in, carrying the note Loree had written that afternoon. “Will you tell me,” she said, in a cold, far-off voice in which there was no life, “what your reason was for supposing I stood in need of money?”

The whole thing seemed of small consequence to Loree now. Graver issues than another woman’s displeasure faced her.

“I saw you in the pawnshop, and I noticed afterwards that your pendant was gone,” she answered drearily. That was conclusive enough, and so was the flush that stained the older woman’s cheek.

“Oh!” she jerked out, and for a moment stood staring at the distraught face of the girl. “Then I have to thank you, Mrs Temple, and take back my words. I see now that it was not impertinence on your part, but a rare generosity. I am ashamed.”

“It doesn’t matter,” said Loree. “Nothing matters.”

“What is wrong?” asked Valeria Cork dully, and sat down. She seemed unprepared for Loree’s action in flinging her arms round her and bursting into tears, but she remained stonily calm.

“Oh, I am in such trouble!” sobbed Loree. “Such terrible trouble!”

“Tell me about it.”

She did not comfortingly pat the girl in her arms, or kiss her, as most women would have done, either sincerely or insincerely. She simply sat there, holding her quietly, staring before her. On a table, the photograph of Pat Temple stared back with his large, frank gaze.

Loree did not tell the full tale, but only what seemed essential to make the other woman understand her distress and peril. She recounted her finding of the necklace and Quelch’s threats and bold wooing in the garden. But she did not begin at the beginning of the trouble, which was when the little pink god cast its spell over her. There seemed no sense in dragging forth that pagan idol from its grove wherein she had so abandonedly worshipped. In the end, she sat wiping her tear-distorted face and gazing hopelessly at the other’s grave eyes. Said Valeria Cork, at last:

“He has us both in his power.”

“You? What can he do to hurt you?”

“Much. I stole a rough diamond that day we went to the De Beers office. It was only by grace of him that I was not arrested.”

Loree shrank back, horrified.

“O God—how dreadful!”

“Dreadful, yes,” agreed Valeria tonelessly. “But you? Did you not steal, too?”

“I?”

Mrs Cork’s speech assumed its usual biting flavour.

“Did you know that the rose diamond you found on your table was not yours? Or did you suppose that an angel had come down from heaven to present you with it?”

“The rose diamond?” faltered Loree.

“Yes—your ‘pink topaz.’”

“How did you know?” whispered the girl, deeply shamed.

“I put it there, of course. It was the price Quelch demanded for saving me from arrest. You remember the incident at Alexandersfontein when he trod on your frock and you were obliged to go and mend it, leaving us together? That was the time he chose to blackmail me into being his tool. Both the rose diamond and the necklace were placed in your

room by me.”

“Then it has all been a plan from the beginning!” cried Loree, in bitter indignation. “A plan to corrupt and ensnare me!”

“But you were so very willing to be corrupted and ensnared,” retorted Valeria Cork. “If you had been honest and come to me that night, as was evidently your first intention, we might have stood together and fought him. But you did not. And in the morning, when I came round, still wretchedly hoping for some way out for us both—you were there, happy and smiling, making a silk bag for your *pink topaz!*” The red blood of shame rushed through Loree Temple’s face, but the elder woman spared her nothing. “You lied to me and told me how old and ugly I looked. I must say your attitude did not invite sacrifice, and the burning of my own hands. I read you—empty, vain, faithless, utterly despicable.”

Loree was now white as death, but the other woman’s scorn brought a blaze to her eyes.

“It does not come too well from you—that indictment,” she retorted bitterly.

“Perhaps not. I am a thief, too. But I stole for a keener need, and a greater cause, if that can be any excuse for crime. I wanted money, not for myself but to ensure the continuation of my boy’s education. In a moment of terrible temptation to steal a stone and realise a few hundred pounds, I succumbed. Within a few moments I repented and would have put it back, but it was too late to do so without being observed, and my next idea, to return it anonymously, was thwarted by the fact that Quelch and the detectives had all seen. You, on the other hand, had time to think temptation over and reason with your own soul. And what was *your* pressing need that made you ready and willing to barter away the honour of a man like that,”—she pointed to the photograph on the table—“for—diamonds?”

That blanched Loraine Loree, and withered and crushed her.

“Oh, no—no!” she moaned brokenly. “Not Pat’s honour! Don’t think that! I love my husband with all my heart and soul. But I never gave a thought to what I was doing. From the moment I saw diamonds, they seemed to put a spell on me, something that blotted out my mind and conscience. I can’t explain to you—but *now* I see what I have done—destroyed his happiness, his pride in life—everything! O God, what shall I do?”

It was clear that at last she was at grips with something greater than self love and vanity, had forgotten, in the suffering she must inflict on her husband, the danger that menaced herself. Even Valeria Cork’s tormented soul, wrung dry by its own sorrow, felt compassion for the weeping, desolate girl, so young and so foolish.

“You must pick up the pieces and begin again,” she said sombrely, “and consider yourself lucky if you are able to. A second chance does not come to us all.”

“What second chance am I likely to have?” said Loree tragically. “None. He has me in a trap that I cannot escape from without shame.”

“I could help you if you were worth it,” said Mrs Cork cryptically.

The girl could only look at her with agonised eyes. She knew she had proved herself unworthy of help on this woman’s part, but she thought of Pat, and her glance was entreating.

“No woman has ever helped me,” stated Valeria Cork. “A woman stole my husband and destroyed my happiness. In all my goings up and down, and struggles to live uprightly, women have kicked me and wiped their boots on me.” What gleam of hope she had felt left Loree’s heart, but came back at Valeria’s next words: “That is no reason why I should be as base as they. And, at the last, you have shown me that a woman *can* be kind to another. I will tell you truthfully that your action in bringing that fifty pound note is the first disinterestedly generous thing a woman has ever done for me.”

Poor Loree’s face drooped in shame.

“It was not altogether disinterested,” she confessed. “I—I did think, as you divined, that it might also be a way of getting even with my conscience for keeping the diamonds—”

“Ah!”

“Still, I *did* want to give you a helping hand if you would let me. I liked you awfully, and was so dreadfully sorry—”

“*So* you said in your letter.”

“You can believe or not—I don’t care. What does anything matter if he does what he swears—that rather than let me go, he will bring my reputation to the dust? That means publishing to the world that I—Pat Temple’s wife—took the De Beers diamond!”

“But you did not.”

“Well, I kept it when I found it. That is as bad—and worse—as you have shown me.”

“Only that it didn’t happen to belong to De Beers,” said Valeria Cork. She picked it up from where it lay in its silk bag, discarded in company with the now despised and rejected necklace. “This diamond is an almost exact facsimile of the rose diamond you so much admired at De Beers’, but it happens to have come, years ago, from the Tintara mine and to be Heseltine Quelch’s own property. He took advantage of the likeness to make you believe that it was the De Beers stone you had, when it was simply his own that he wished you to keep.”

"Then—then," cried Loree, "I am *not* a public criminal? De Beers cannot arrest me? No one but Heseltine Quelch can threaten me with disgrace?"

"No," answered Valeria calmly; "it is rally I who can be arrested and disgraced, and I don't suppose he will spare me when he finds you have slipped his clutches."

Loree gave a long sigh.

"I cannot slip his clutches—at your expense," she said at last.

"You have your husband to think of."

The girl shook her head.

"You don't know Pat. He would never let himself be saved anything at the expense of another, especially a woman."

"He must never know that part of the story," said Valeria firmly.

"But, Mrs Cork, I cannot! I feel it in my bones that Quelch will wreak vengeance on some one, and I cannot let you be sacrificed. You have got to think of yourself. Your boy, too—for whom—"

"For whom I stole," supplemented Valeria. "Ah, my dear, *you* tell me to think of him! For the last two days I have thought of nothing else. He has lain in my arms, a little chubby baby once more, with his curly head against my breast."

"He shall never be sacrificed!" cried Loree.

"He is sacrificed already," said Valeria Cork softly, "by a more just fate than you or I control. He was drowned two days ago while trying to save the life of a friend."

"O dear God!" whispered Loree pitifully. Now she knew the reason of the other's sombre, tearless gaze. Nothing could ever hurt more deeply or comfort again that soul bereft.

"So you see," said Valeria, voicing her thought, "nothing matters."

She talked down Loree's protests. She was bent on sacrifice as her just punishment. Almost it seemed as if she craved some other pain as anodyne for that which already ate like a rat at her heart. They talked into the small hours of the morning, formulating plans by which to defeat Quelch, who, they knew, would stick at nothing.

"He told me frankly," said Valeria, "that there were only two things in the world he cared about—the future of his son and the possession of you. That was in the small hours after the ball when he had just paid down 50,000 pounds to keep scandal from touching you."

"50,000 pounds! What can you mean?"

"Ah yes, I had forgotten for the moment. That was the price he paid Mrs Solano for the necklace. It was hers as she rightly claimed. As soon as she got it into her hands in Quelch's sitting-room she was able to prove that to him."

"Hers? But how then had he got it to give to me?"

"It is a complicated story, and full of dark by-ways. God knows what evil magic lies in diamonds that they can make people do such terrible things! It appears that Mrs Solano had given the chain into the care of her banker. She wanted him to sell it, but she set a very high price on it and he had never been able to find a purchaser. However, one day recently when Quelch was with him at the bank he produced it, and Quelch, with you in his mind, and recognising it as a most exquisite collection of stones, offered twenty-five thousand pounds for it. The Banker closed at once without disclosing to Quelch the name of the client for whom he was selling. And in fact he never disclosed the transaction to Mrs Solano herself. His bank was in deep waters and he used the money to tide over his own financial difficulties, no doubt intending and hoping to repay the money before she should find out about the sale of the chain. Unfortunately you wore it that night. She saw it and the moment she and Quelch were alone and compared notes they realised what had happened."

At the words "financial difficulties" a dreadful suspicion that had been lurking in Loree Temple's brain, found words.

"What was the Banker's name?" she asked hoarsely, and even as she feared the answer was:

"Frederick Huffe."

"O God!" with a moan the girl covered her eyes. "I felt sure it was. I had a horrible feeling that there was some connection between the diamonds and his death, for I remember that it was to speak to Mr Quelch that he was called away from dancing with me."

"Yes, Quelch sent for him, and there in the sitting-room they questioned him point blank, and he calmly admitted what he had done and that he had used the money. Nothing more was said. Quelch had told me since that neither he nor Mrs Solano would have dreamed of prosecuting. They both liked the man too much and appreciated that his difficulties had not been his own but of the bank's making. Probably Quelch would have helped him out. But poor Freddy Huffe's pride was broken. He went straight from them into the garden and shot himself with a revolver he always carried."

Loree shuddered.

"It was my fault," she muttered. "His blood is on my head!"

"That is a morbid thought," pronounced Valeria firmly, "and one you must not allow to stay in your mind. The fate of every man is bound about his neck. Frederick Huffer was fated to die by his own hand, and no action of yours could have prevented it."

But Loree shook her head, and tears streamed down her face.

"How little I dreamed that it had anything to do with me when I read it in the papers next day!—and how heartlessly I passed it over. All that moved me was thankfulness that no journalist had mentioned anything about my diamonds. I thought at the time that it was accident, but now I suppose that too can be traced back to Heseltine Quelch's power?"

"Yes. He has power in this place. I think there can be no doubt that he used it to prevent the journalists from saying anything about the chain you were wearing."

"And what about Mrs Solano? How did he account to her for giving me the jewels? Oh! what can *she* think of me?"

"You need not worry about that. Mrs Solano is under many obligations to Heseltine Quelch, I believe, but he did not follow that line. He told her the whole story and threw himself on her mercy. She is a strange woman and in some ways a very fine one. She understood both Quelch's passion for you, and your passion for the gems, and she consented to sell the chain to him and to keep her lips sealed forever. He at once wrote her out a cheque for 50,000 pounds—double what she had asked. They can do big things these Jews, as well as small ones."

"But she makes another who knows!"

"I tell you Rachel Solano is a great woman, for all her sins. You need never fear her."

"I fear him," cried the desolate, shivering girl. "I shall never be able to escape him. Every one in this hotel is his tool."

"They must be deceived as well as he. Listen: start packing in the morning, saying to the servants that you are leaving for England. The news will soon reach him."

"But he expects me to go with him to-morrow night."

"You must delay that. Write him a note saying that you are ill and can't be ready until the night after."

"And then."

"In reality, you will slip away to-morrow night by the mail-train for Rhodesia."

"Rhodesia?" said Loree faintly.

"Yes—to your husband. And never leave him again. Women like you are not safe away from their rightful owners. Beauty is not such a boon as plain women suppose."

There was pity as well as a certain amount of scorn in Valeria Cork's voice, but Loree was in no mood to resent either.

"How can I ever explain to him—turning up suddenly like that?" she murmured.

"That is your affair," said Valeria. "Mine is to get you away. So to bed now, and rest as much as you can. You will need all your wits and nerves. Good-night."

She rose, and they stood looking at each other for an instant.

"I don't suppose you would care to shake hands with a woman like me," said Mrs Cork slowly. Her mournful eyes had something shamed and beaten in their depths, something of the longing of a punished child for a kind word. Loree suddenly flung her arms about her and held her close, and then, at last, the other woman's agonised heart found relief in the tears that had been denied her since she received the news of her loss. Amidst her bitter weeping, broken incoherent phrases came gasping from her lips.

"He was so beautiful, so gay! I wanted only to be good for his dear sake. It was enough—just to be his mother. But when I suddenly lost all my little fortune in a mining smash, there seemed no way to get money to keep him among the right people. He was so brilliant—I dreamed of his being one of the great men of England, some day. I thought, 'What does *my* poor soul matter so long as *he* rises from the ruins of it?' I would have lied, stolen, murdered, done *anything*, so that all might have been well with him—and see how the God of Equity intervenes! *He* knew that no man could ever be great who had a shameful mother—and He had pity on my son. Oh, Loree, Loree—if ever you have a son, starve with him in a garret, scratch with him in the gutter, but never imperil for him your immortal soul. 'What you give of gold and silver stands nothing; only as much as you have of soul avails.' Some great man said that, and it is true. Only what you give of the soul avails."

In the morning, to a wretched Loree, weary-eyed from haunted dreams, came a letter from Quelch. It was restrained and tender, almost gentle, but it sounded the note of one who held the winning cards. Below the bold signature was appended the hour of the mail-train's departure, and an added word like a cry:

"I have received a blow that only you can comfort me for, my beautiful Loraine Loree."

She shivered, then burned. The thought that she must carry the memory of his illicit caresses all her life made her

sick. Frantically she began to pack, then, remembering Valeria's instructions, went to bed again. It was a dreadful day of pretence and subterfuge and lying. It seemed to her that she could never again erase from her soul the black marks of all the lies she told that day, that they would tarnish for ever all her future life with Pat. But then, had she not tarnished it already by her own wicked folly?

Under the counsels of Valeria Cork, a subtly evasive answer was written to Quelch's letter. It told that she was too ill to leave her room that day, and gave no bond to be at the station on the next; it sent no word of love, and was a document that all the world might have read, yet a premise, elusive and fragile as the scent of spring, haunted the simple lines. Valeria's lips were grim as she invented each delicate phrase.

"Skilled weapons against an unscrupulous fighter," she contended. "When you are safely gone, he shall know who composed the letter. It is one of his punishments for what he has done to you—and me."

She moved sombrely about the room, like one walking behind the bier of her dead. Nothing seemed alive in her except her smouldering eyes. At lunch-time, she went down stairs and sat before food she could not eat for the sake of spying out the land of the enemy. But he did not appear. There was nothing to report to Loree except that it was known in the hotel that his going to the Cape had been postponed until the following evening. Afterwards, she wrote a note to him and left it at the office. The office-girl mentioned to her that Mr Quelch was looking terribly ill, and she wondered what the bad news could be he had mentioned to Loree; but she was not a woman to waste time on idle curiosity. Having gone through Loree Temple's trunks that morning, she had selected therefrom a pair of tan-cloth riding-breeches, a long habit-coat, and top-boots. All the rest of the lovely Viola clothes were stored away in the trunks labelled loudly for Cape Town—except one simple frock and such feminine necessities as would fill a small suitcase. Now she sallied forth to do some shopping, taking the suitcase with her.

"To get it mended," she told the hall porter, and placed it herself in the taxi. But its true destination was the station cloakroom.

Returning at tea-time, she brought with her a first-class ticket to Mafeking, and another from Mafeking to Buluwayo, a strong rope, a second-hand tweed ulster suitable for a slender youth of medium height, and a slouch hat. These last, with the breeches and top-boots, were to constitute Loree's travelling-kit.

They "dressed the part" and gravely rehearsed it. Mrs Temple's mirror, that had once given back lovely visions in diaphanous draperies and sparkling jewels, now reflected something uncommonly like a seedy youth of the type that relations get rid of to South Africa and hope they'll never see again. What could be seen of the face beneath the slouch hat was not prepossessing when Valeria had finished with it. The complexion was sallow and distinctly spotty, the eyes slightly inflamed. A darkness on the upper lip might have been the promise of a moustache or merely dirt. What the hand of Mrs Cork found to do, she did well.

Loree gazed with disgust at the odious person in the glass. It seemed impossible she could ever be herself again. But Valeria coached her in the art of getting rid of facial disguise in ten minutes. That was the secret contained in the two railway tickets. The lightning change had to occur in a lavatory dressing-room sometime in the early morning before the train reached Mafeking. During the short wait at the famous little Bechuanaland town, no one was likely to note the disappearance of a bleary-eyed youth or connect it with the advent of a veiled lady who would continue the journey to Buluwayo as Mrs Temple.

Getting away from the hotel without being seen and reported to Quelch was a more difficult matter, but Valeria had laid careful plans. It would be dusk—the hour when people were dressing for dinner. No one would be likely to be near the corner of the balcony opposite Valeria's room or in the obscure fernery on the stoop below. The corner had a strong post to the ground, against which Loree could support herself when being let down. That was what the rope was for.

"And if you meet any one who wants to know your business, give them this note for me, and then make tracks," said Valeria. "You will easily get a cab to the station."

She had thought of everything. Her only regret was that she could not be at the station, too. But it had seemed wiser to make an appointment with Quelch for that hour. To that end, she had written the note at midday, underlining the words: "particularly personal matter." She desired that he would realise the matter to be connected with Loree Temple, and, even as she anticipated, a prompt reply came, and hoped she would "honour him by an interview in his private sitting-room" at the hour she mentioned, if such an arrangement suited her. She grimaced at the courteous words which seemed to her unnecessary irony, but the plan indeed suited her—perfectly.

At the hour in which she knocked upon Heseltine Quelch's door the work was done. She had kissed Loraine Loree upon her darkened lips and bade her Godspeed, had launched her from the balcony, and seen the boyish silhouette disappear through the garden. Even as she listened for an answer from the room within, she heard the harsh scream and "chug-chug" of a departing train, and knew that, if all was well, Mrs Temple was passing out of Kimberley and out of *her* life for ever.

Quelch was sitting at a table, holding his hands before him as though clutching something. But the moment she entered, he rose abruptly and came towards her with a sort of violence. She saw that his hands were empty, and thought, by his strange face, that he meant to kill her. Brave as she was, she recoiled from him. That pulled him up sharp. He stood stammering, almost gibbering incoherent words at her. She was certain now that he knew. There was something horribly moving in the desolation of his eyes. It was the expression of a fierce creature of the wilds wounded to the death. She noticed suddenly that he was no longer young. His shoulders stooped; there was silver in his hair.

"Did he care so much?" she thought amazed, and almost her heart felt pity for him. She knew what it was to love and be robbed. In a moment, he succeeded in getting control of himself and spoke clearly. Then she realised that though

he was no longer incoherent, she did not understand him. What he said was:

“It is no wonder you recoil from me—hate me. I can only say to you that I grieve for you with all that is left of my heart—and—I thank you.”

She stared at him. They stood looking at each other—two people scarred and marred by the passionate lawlessness of their own natures—in her eyes amazement, in his that devastating mournfulness. What was he speaking of? He seemed to know of her sorrow, to share it.

“A son,” he said softly, “to lose one’s son! The being one wound one’s dreams about—who was to be so infinitely greater than oneself—to compensate with the shining splendour of his soul for all the darkness of one’s own.” Valeria gloomed at him with bitter eyes. How did he know so well wherewith to mock her, this strange Eastern man with his gentle, un-English voice? “You should not hate me. It is unworthy of the mother of a son who gave his life for a friend.”

While she stood considering him—how un-English he was to have tears running down his cheeks like that; that he *must* be a Jew (as she had often supposed) to be so emotional, so unreserved, so piercingly sapient—the truth came to her like an arrow. It was *his* son that hers had died to save and died for in vain! They were both sonless!

Nothing but the bare news of her loss had come to her, no names but that of her son. Quelch with his wealth had commanded every detail of the tragedy, and been receiving news down to that very hour. The table was littered with cablegrams.

She stood *very* still and white and weary until he had finished telling her all, thanking her for the nobleness of her son’s effort, assuring her that if in all the wide world there was anything that could represent his gratitude, any act of his that would help to ease her wound, she had only to speak. Then from her pocket she produced a little parcel of sparkling stones wrapped in a silken handkerchief and laid it on the table.

“A little foolish girl returns you these,” she said, and her voice, too, had grown very gentle. “She left to-night to join her husband. This you can do for me: Forget her, and let her forget you.”

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The End.

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