

STOLEN JEWELS

"I'm certain I know the thief," said Fenton quietly. "I told you that the man Villiers was seen about the place on the night of the robbery."

"By whom?"

"Myself and Caprice."

"Who saw him last?"

"Caprice."

"Oh, said Naball imperturbably, then she's the best person to see on the subject."

"He's a bad lot," said Fenton; "he was mixed up in that poisoning case eight years ago."

"The Midas case?"

"Yes, Caprice, on rather Kitty March, was concerned in it also."

"So I believe," replied Naball; "every one was innocent except Jasper and Vandeloup—one was hanged, the other committed suicide. I don't see what it has to do with the present case."

"Simply this," said Fenton sharply, annoyed at the other's tone, "Villiers is a scoundrel, and wouldn't stop at robbery if he could make some money over it."

"He knew Caprice had diamonds worth five thousand?"

"Of course; every one in Melbourne knew that."

"Did he know where they were kept?"

"There's a safe in the room, and a thief, of course, would look there."

"Would go there first—precisely—would you forget the diamonds were taken out of the drawer of her looking-glass—a most unlikely place for a thief to examine. The man who stole the jewels must have known where they were kept."

"Oh, said Fenton, and looked astonished, as he was quite unable to explain. He was about to reply, when the train having arrived at its destination, they got out, and walked to Kitty's house."

"She was in the drawing-room writing letters and looking pale and haggard, her eyes having dark circles beneath them, which told of a sleepless night. When the two men entered the room she welcomed them gracefully, and then resumed her seat as they began to talk."

"I have brought you Mr. Naball to look after this affair," said Fenton, looking at her.

"You are very kind," she replied coldly; "but the fact is I have not yet decided about placing it in the hands of the police."

"But the diamonds?" began Fenton, in amazement.

"Were mine," finished Kitty, coolly; "and as the loss is mine, not yours, I will act as I think fit in the matter."

Then, turning her back on the discomfited Fenton, she addressed herself to the detective.

"I should like your opinion on the subject," she said, graciously, "and then I will see if the case can be gone on with."

Naball, who had been keeping his keen eyes on her face the whole time, bowed.

"Tell me all the details of the robbery," he observed, cautiously.

"They are simple enough," replied Kitty, folding her hands. "I bring them home from the theatre every night, and usually put them in the safe, which is in my room. On Saturday night, however, I was tired, and I must confess, rather careless, and as the case was on my dressing table, I placed it in the drawer of my looking-glass, to save me the trouble of going to the safe. I gave a supper party on Sunday night, and when every one of the party had gone away, I went upstairs to bed, and found the window open; recollecting where I had put the diamonds I opened the drawer and found them gone. My servants examined the ground beneath the window and found foot-marks in the mould of the flower-bed, so I suppose the thief must have entered by the window, stolen the jewels, and made off with them."

When she had finished, Naball remained silent for a minute, but just as Fenton was about to speak, he interposed.

"I will ask you a few questions, madame," he said, thoughtfully. "When did you see the diamonds last?"

"About six o'clock on Sunday night. I opened the drawer to get something, and saw the case."

"Not the diamonds?"

"They were in the case."

"Are you sure?"

"Where else would they be?"

"Some one might have stolen them previously and left the case there to avert suspicion."

Kitty shook her head.

"Impossible. The case is also gone, besides, I locked the case on Saturday night, and had the key with me. No other key could have opened it, and had the case been forced, I would have seen it at once. See, lifting up her arm, 'I always wear this bracelet and the key is attached to it by a chain.'"

Naball glanced at it, and went on with his questions.

"You generally kept the diamonds in the safe?"

"Yes."

"And it was quite an oversight not placing them in there on Saturday?"

"Quite."

"No one knew they were in the drawer of your looking-glass on that particular night?"

"No one."

Here Fenton interposed.

"You get along too fast," he said quickly. "Everyone at the supper table knew you kept them there; you said it to them yourself."

Naball glanced sharply at Kitty; "I know I did," she replied quietly; "but I spoke as if the diamonds were always kept there, which they were not. I did not say they were in the drawer on that particular night."

"You mentioned it generally?" said Naball, tranquilly.

"Yes. All the people present were my guests, and I hardly think any of them would rob me of my diamonds."

"Were any of the servants in the room when you made the remark?"

"No, none; and the other was closed."

Naball paused a moment.

"I tell you what," he said slowly, "the diamonds were stolen between six o'clock and the time you went to bed."

"About three o'clock," said Kitty.

"Precisely. You saw the diamonds last at six, they were gone by three; you mentioned where you kept them."

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