The Lancaster Intelligencer,

PUBLISHED EVERY WEDNESDAY BY

H. G. SMITH & CO.

H. G. SMITH. A. J. STEINMAN

TERMS—Two Dollars per annum, payable in all cases in advance.

THE LANCASTER DAILY INTELLIGENCER is published every evening, Sunday excepted, at $5 per Annum in advance.

OFFICE—SOUTHWEST CORNER OF CENTRE SQUARE.

The Lancaster Intelligencer.

VOLUME 70 LANCASTER PA. WEDNESDAY MORNING AUGUST 18 1869 NUMBER 33

RATE OF ADVERTISING.

BUSINESS ADVERTISEMENTS, $12 a year per quare of ten lines; $6 per year for each additional square.

REAL ESTATE ADVERTISING, 10 cents a line for the first, and 5 cents for each subsequent insertion.

GENERAL ADVERTISING 7 cents a line for the first, and 4 cents for each subsequent insertion.

SPECIAL NOTICES inserted in Local Column 15 cents per line.

SPECIAL NOTICES preceding marriages and deaths, 10 cents per line for first insertion and 5 cents for every subsequent insertion.

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Poetry.

THE PROBLEM.

Her life is all one neutral tint;
A cold and quiet gray;
No thunder-cloud nor sunbeam glint
Darkens or cheers her way;
No great events their shadows cast
Across her Present or her Past.

From year to year she patient sips
The tasteless cup of life;
No annals e'en escape her lips
On blighting care or strife;
And rarely from them falls one word
That would be worthy to record.

She is not old—she is not young—
She works from day to day,
Nor cares for those she dwells among;
And hers—the neighbors say—
A nature neither warm nor cold,
Too soft to cast—too hard to mould.

And yet her face has saddening power,
I seek her cause in vain—
As sometimes in the twilight hour,
A misty treeless plain
With drearier feelings fill the heart,
Than scenes of strife or storm impart.

Kingdoms might fall and empires quake,
Nations rejoice and groan,
And in her breast no interest wake;
Yet simply I have known
A sound, a scent, a trifling thing,
Search out some memory's hidden spring.

When slowly rising to her eye,
I see a faint, light glow—
And then—I know not how or why—
It must be long ago—
By that pale gleam I lead the cost
Of a life's welfare stalked and lost!

—Chambers' Journal.

Miscellaneous.

A Bold stroke for a Wife.

BY JUDGE CLARK.

It was my first visit North since I had taken up my abode and entered on the practice of my profession in New Orleans.

In the city of New York I had a very dear friend, my old chum and classmate, George Dickson; and as he was the only person I knew in the great metropolis, of course I lost no time in looking him up.

Three years had passed since our last meeting, but *ten* could scarcely have produced a change more marked than had taken place in the appearance and manner of my friend.

Our first greetings and friendly inquiries over, I longed, yet forbore, to ask the cause of my friend's melancholy. I felt sure, in due time, of being made the confidant of the secret, provided no motive of delicacy prompted its concealment.

That evening, in my room at the hotel, George told me his story. He had formed an attachment for a young lady, whose graces of mind and person he portrayed with all the fervor of a lover's eloquence. She had returned his affection, but her father had opposed his suit, having set his heart on the marriage of his daughter to a nephew of his.

This nephew was a young physician, of profligate character, my friend assured me—but that may have been prejudice—who had long but unsuccessfully wooed his cousin, to whom his proffers were as repugnant as to her father they were acceptable.

Some months since, Mr. Parsons, the young lady's father, had gone south on business, accompanied by his nephew. At New Orleans he had been seized by a sudden illness, which terminated fatally in three days.

On the day preceding his death he had executed a will, (of which had since been duly proved by the depositions of the attesting witnesses,) containing a solemn request that his daughter, to whom he left the whole of his estate, should accept the hand of his nephew in marriage, coupled with a provision that in case the latter offered, and she refused, within a specified period, to enter into the proposed union, the entire estate devised to his daughter should be forfeited to the nephew.

To sacrifice her fortune to her heart's choice would not have cost Julia Parsons a moment's hesitation; and nothing could have more delighted George Dickson, than so fair an opportunity of showing how superior his devotion was to all considerations of pecuniary advantage. But her father's dying request, in Julia's eyes, was sacred. It had surprised and stunned her, it is true, for in their many conferences on the subject, he had never gone beyond the most kindly remonstrance, and had never even hinted at anything like coercion.

Young Parsons had not the magnanimity to forego his ungenerous advantage. He *might* have been content with his cousin's fortune alone, but his right to that depended on *his* offer and *her* rejection of an alliance which she felt in conscience bound to accept. The brief season of grace, which she had been compelled to beg even with tears, had already almost passed, and a few more days would witness the condemnation of two lives to hopeless misery.

At the conclusion of my friend's narrative, in which, for reasons that may hereafter be developed, I felt a peculiar interest, I prevailed upon him to accompany me to a place of amusement to which I had previously procured tickets.

When we reached the theatre, the performance had already begun; but we succeeded in finding seats which commanded a fair view both of the stage and the audience.

In a few moments George touched my elbow.

"Observe the gentleman nearly opposite, in the front of the parquette, seated next the column, leaning his arm on his cane," he whispered.

I looked in the direction indicated, and saw a face whose striking resemblance to one I had seen before caused me to start with surprise.

"Who is it?" I asked.

"Eldridge Parsons," was the reply.

"The nephew of whom you spoke?"

"The same," my friend answered.

"Does he resemble his uncle?" I was on the point of inquiring, but just then the stranger drew the glove from his right hand, and I saw that *the first joint of the middle finger was wanting*, a circumstance which, for sufficient reason absorbed my attention.

"Do you know the exact date of Mr. Parsons' death?" I asked, when we had gained the street at the close of the performance.

"Yes," said George, "it was the twenty-third of December. His daughter received a telegram from her cousin announcing the fact the same day. But why do you ask?"

"I have a reason which may or may not prove a good one," I returned; and stating that I had business engagements for the whole of the next day, I parted with my friend, promising to meet him on the following evening.

Next afternoon found me at the office of Dr. Parsons.

"Dr. Parsons, I presume?" were the words with which I accosted the gentleman I had seen at the theatre.

"Yes, sir."

"You may not remember me, Doctor, but I believe we have met before."

"I beg pardon, sir, for not recollecting the occasion."

"You were in New Orleans last winter, were you not?"

"I was," he answered, with some embarrassment.

"I am the gentleman of whom you called to draft a will."

He turned pale, but made no reply.

"I saw a record of that will in the Surrogate's office this morning," I resumed, and——"

"You speak of my *uncle's* will," he hastily interrupted.

"And yet," I continued, "you said it was *yours* when you applied to have it written. You represented yourself as desirous of executing such a document preparatory to embarking on a perilous voyage. The paper was drawn in accordance with your instructions, leaving the date to be filled at the time of signing. Your locks were *gray* then, and you certainly *looked* old enough to have a marriageable daughter, but your disguise was not *perfect*," and I pointed to the *mutilated finger*.

"What do you mean?" he shouted in a defiant tone, springing to his feet

"Simply that your uncle's signature to that paper is a *forgery!*" I answered rising and confronting him. "He died on the *twenty third* of December. Your own telegram to that effect is in existence. It was on the *twenty fourth*, the day before Christmas, that you called on me to prepare the paper now on record as his will. The inference is plain; you undertook to manufacture this spurious testament *after* your uncle's death, and wishing to clothe your villainy in legal form, you procured from me the required draft. You, or some one at your instigation, simulated the signature of the deceased. The witnesses, who have since perjured themselves in their depositions, were procured in some manner best known to yourself—"

"Enough, sir!" he ejaculated, placing back against the door; "you have shown yourself in possession of a secret the custody of which may prove *dangerous!*"

"I am not unprepared for your threat," I replied. "In the first place, I did not come here unarmed; in the next, I have prepared a full written statement of the facts to which I have alluded, with information, besides, of my present visit to yourself. This paper will be delivered to the friend to whom it is directed, unless within an hour I reclaim it from the messenger, who has been instructed for that length of time to retain it."

His face grew livid. His frame quivered with mingled fear and rage, and his eye gleamed like that of a wild beast at bay.

"What is your purpose?" he exclaimed, in a voice hoarse with suppressed passion.

"To keep your secret while you live," I answered, "on *one* condition."

"Name it."

"That you write instantly to Julia Parsons, renouncing all pretensions to her hand, and absolutely withdrawing your proposal of marriage."

After a moment's pause he seated himself at his desk, and hastily penned a brief note, which he submitted to my inspection; it was quite satisfactory.

"Be so good as to seal and address it," I said.

He did so.

"I will see that it is delivered," I remarked, taking it up and bowing myself out.

When I met George Dickson that evening, his old college look had come back. He had great *news* to tell me. The next thing was to take me to see Julia, and it is needless to tell what a happy evening we threw spent together, and what a happy marriage followed not long after.

Eldridge Parsons, I have just learned, joined one of the late Cuban expeditions, and was killed in a recent encounter with the Spaniards.

A Great Jewel Robbery.

IN TWO CHAPTERS.—I.

Some years ago, people used to prophesy that in consequence of the Californian gold discovery the precious metal would be precious no longer, but fall to a par with, if not below, silver in value. But in spite of the golden treasures of California, supplemented by those of Australia, a sovereign is still worth its twenty shillings; and the reports of progress in Sutherlandshire are not sufficiently promising to make the favored of us mortals who indulge in such luxuries to exchange our golden ornaments for their present value before it deteriorates. But, as a dealer in these precious stones, I have very often thought of what would be the consequence should some tremendous deposit of diamonds be laid bare; for we are not bound to suppose that these precious crystals of carbon are everywhere so sparsely scattered over the earth's surface as to render the quest one of patience and difficulty. Imagine, for instance, some pebbly mountain stream, whose pebbles were all Koh-i-noors, Stars of the South, and Great Pitt Diamonds! What consternation amongst the holders of family heirlooms, whose glittering clusters have been handed down from generation to generation, and valued at so many thousands sterling—what horror to find that, by the glut in the market, those thousands sank to hundreds, to tens, to units at last, or merely the value of the cutting! That lady who described the wearing of diamonds as an exquisite pleasure, but perpetual pain, from the risks it revealed, would be then able to wear her precious jewels in peace.

There is a strange, and too often a fearful history attached to every great gem of price, many of which while flashing on the brow of beauty, or in some regal or imperial ornament, are dimmed to the thoughtful mind by the tears shed over them, or by the blood in which they have too often bathed. Robbery and murder have ever been mingled with the stories of precious gems; and as a peaceful man, living in these highly civilized times, I have more than once felt my life to be far from safe as soon as it was known that in the little black leathern case I carried, or even in a little scrap of tissue-paper in my waistcoat pocket, I held so many valuable diamonds, rubies, or sapphires.

One gets used to it in time; but at first there is a strong feeling that every person who looks at you, or says a word about the weather, is bent upon murder and robbery. You live a solitary life during your travels. You get in the farthest corners of carriages. You would not ride alone in a first coupe with some strange traveler, upon any consideration, even if that strange traveller where a feble old woman, since you would certainly suppose her to be a ruffian in disguise. Elegantly dressed ladies become your swindlers' accomplices; clerical gentlemen, the swindlers themselves; and distrust of everything and everybody becomes the bane of our existence. Your wine or tea seems to be drugged, your food poisoned; and once, at a hotel where I was staying, I had serious thoughts about giving the proprietor into custody for supplying me with a medicated soap.

I will not mention the name of the Bond Street firm which I was some years ago connected, but let it suffice that their name was well known, and that the manufacture of more than one regal diadem had been intrusted to their skilful workmen. I was with them some twelve or fourteen years, and it was during that period that the incident I am about to relate occurred. As a matter, of course, the strictest injunctions respecting care, caution, and watchfulness are issued to all the employees, especially to those whose daily business brings them into contact with the public; and being always in the show-rooms myself, I was one of those in whom the elders of the firm placed confidence. The consequence was, that being tolerably thoughtful, sharp of eye, and a good judge of gems, I rose to occupy one of the most responsible positions, and to have my services intrusted those rather delicate, critical, and caution-demanding embassies, where customers wished for jewels to be sent to their houses for inspection.

In course of time, a little feeling of jealousy sprang up; but it did not trouble me, for, either from extra care, or from good fortune, I had not in any single case been the cause of loss to my employers—a state of satisfaction hardly to be enjoyed by either of my brother assistants, so many, so ingenious, and so carefully contrived were, in those days, the plans for defrauding the great jewellers. I do not know that any very great improvement has taken place of late years; but my experience is with the past, and I relate accordingly. In fact, so many were the tricks, that when a visitor came to the show-rooms, the first question we had to ask was: "Is this a lady or a sharper?"

Very often the swindlers, or thieves, were easy to detect; for though dressed in the extreme of fashion, and arriving perhaps in a brougham, there would be some slip of the tongue, some vulgarism—which would betray them. Frequently, a misplaced *h*, or a wrongly applied verb, has raised suspicions, which defeated a carefully planned swindle, and sent the disappointed ones to lament their ill success, or often to jail. But with all care, the jewellers' enemies are so many, and their losses so heavy, that in spite of enormous profits, the balance-sheets at the end of the year are not so satisfactory as is supposed for those who follow this artistic business. Now a well-dressed couple would come and look at some rings, turn them over for half an hour, and then leave, declaring that there was nothing to suit; when perhaps before, more often after, their departure, one or two valuable gems have been missed,—taken no one could tell how. Twice over, assistants allowed jewels to be taken into the next room, at some hotel, to show a sick lady, and came back ruefully to announce the sick, as well as the sound, lady had disappeared. Times out of number, ring, chain, or bracelet has been snatched from counter or table; once such a thing happened when I was in waiting, but a presented pistol stopped the marauder before he reached the door, a door already bolted by the porter; and my friend was committed for trial, and afterwards transported. One select company of visitors purchased goods to the amount of nine hundred pounds, when the gentleman of the party wrote a check on the spot for the amount,—Drummonds of Charing cross being his bankers,—but as I objected to the jewels being taken away until the check was honored, I was courteously told to send them to Morley's Hotel, and half sorry to be compelled to show the distrust, I bowed the distinguished customers out.

"Here, Johnson," I said to one of our men, "run down at once to Drummonds, and present this check; take a cab."

In half an hour Johnson was back with the check branded with the words "No effects."

I received an invitation to dine with the head of our firm after that, and returned home at night wearing a very handsome gold watch. "A reward for your shrewdness," said the old gentleman, clapping me on the shoulder.—"You'll be in the firm yet, Willis, that you will!"

"I hope I may," I thought, as I went home that night; but the happy consummation never arrived, since I was but mortal, and, like other men, liable to be deceived; though, upon maturer consideration, I don't think I was very well used.

I was seated one day busily examining some stones which were to be reset for the Countess of Maraschino, when the principal came softly in.

"Lock those up, Willis," he said, "and go and attend to those parties in the front show-room. Thomas is with them, and I don't half like their looks."

I hurried into the show-room to relieve Mr. Thomas of his task, which he gave up with a very bad grace, and proceeded to listen to the demands of a tall lady and gentleman in black, both of whom wore respirators, and spoke in low, husky voices. The gentleman looked very pale and ill, and the lady was very closely veiled as to the upper part of her face; but upon my approach she threw up her veil, and displayed the bright bold eyes of a very handsome woman.

"Don't look suspicious," I thought, as I evaded the glance directed at me; for our rule is not to look at eyes, but hands,—or rather fingers, which sometimes turn out to be light. In this case, though, the lady's were *bien gantee*, and the gentleman's thin, white, and soft,—an invalid's hands, in fact, and I proceeded to listen to their demands.

"Well, Lilla, what's it to be?" said the gentleman.

"I thought you had decided, love," was the reply. "Something simple, and not too expensive now, whatever we may decide upon hereafter. Why not keep to what you said,—a bracelet, or a cross?"

"Well, show me some bracelets," the gentleman said. "We do not want anything of high price, but something pretty, light, and suited for a young lady of eighteen, about to be married."

I proceeded to open case after case of bracelets of all prices, from ten to five hundred guineas each; but though they were fastidious and hard to please, I was bound to confess that the lady's taste was excellent, and that the gentleman was no mean connoisseur in gems.

"I rather like that," said the gentleman at last, selecting a very pretty but slight bracelet, set with a sapphire, surrounded by pearls. "What is the price?"

"That is sixty guineas," I said.

"Yes, it's pretty enough," said the lady; "but not sufficiently good."

"You mean not valuable enough," said the gentleman: "but you know the old proverb about the gift-horse—Lucille will not study the value, depend upon it; and, besides, I don't see anything I like half so well."

"Have it then, dear," was the reply; and then, directly after, "Ah, what a sweet cross!" exclaimed the lady, looking at at enamel and gold ornament lying in a case,—and which I immediately opened, for I must confess I had almost forgotten our partial friend's suspicions.

"It is a sweet little thing!" exclaimed the lady, examining the cross; "such a fine pearl, too, in the centre. I should like it."

"What, to give Lucille?" said the gentleman, smiling.

"No; of course not. I fancied it myself."

"My dear Lilla, this is not a linen-draper's shop," said the gentleman with a shrug and then there was a smile and a whisper between them.

"What is the price of the cross?" said the gentleman at last.

"Fifty guineas," I said.

"It seems a good deal for so small an ornament," said the gentleman, turning to me, and returning the case but I explained that the size of the pearls increased its value; and after a little hesitation he decided to take it, when I saw that he was rewarded by a quiet pressure of the hand from his companion, whose eyes then met mine almost mirthfully for a moment.

"You're a nice creature, I expect," muttered I to myself; "coax him out of everything you fancy, and then laugh in your sleeve." But my eyes were wanted to guard the valuable assortment of jewelry displayed, and they were back the next instant to business.

"Where can I send these, sir?" I inquired.

"Ah! we'll take them," said the lady; "we will not trouble you to send."

I explained that it would be no trouble, but they held to their determination; and upon payment being requested, the gentlemen drew out a check book, asked for pen and ink, and wrote a check for one hundred and ten guineas upon a small city bank.

Now it was that my lips became a little tighter, and I felt that the principal had had some cause for his suspicions; and thoroughly on my guard, I took the check, and explained that it was a rule of the establishment that goods should not be delivered until after a check had been presented.

"Ah, quite right, quite right," said the gentleman quietly, and without displaying the slightest annoyance. "I can easily suppose that you are obliged to be careful."

But the lady looked angry, and returned my bow very distantly as I ushered them out, having promised to send the purchases on to the fashionable hotel—Morley's, in Brook Street—at which they were staying.

"All a farce, but well carried out," I said to the principal as he came up to me, and I showed him the check and the card given me, bearing the name "Mr. H. Elliston Ross," and in pencil, "Moore's Hotel." "But we'll save the check all the same. Here, Johnson."

The principal shrugged his shoulders; and as Johnson came up to where I was carefully running over the various items of jewelry, to see that nothing had been stolen, I gave him the check, and he went city ward.

To my great satisfaction, all was right; not a jewel missing, and the purchased cases laying by me. Suddenly, a cold chill shot through me.—Had they contrived to abstract the contents? I tore the little morocco boxes open; but, no—all was correct. Cross and bracelet lay upon their white velvet beds; and so far, everything was perfectly satisfactory. If they were swindlers, we had escaped; and I began to wonder whether I should get another invation to dinner, a chain for my watch, and be told that I was a step nearer to the junior partnership.

To our intense astonishment, though at an hour's end, Johnson returned smiling.

"All right, sir," he said.

"Why, you don't mean—"

"All right, sir," he said. "Check cashed in an instant: hundred and fifteen pounds, ten shillings."

It is almost needless to add that the two little cases were sent immediately to the hotel, and a discussion followed respecting unnecessary suspicion, and how very often it happened that swindlers passed unnoticed, while honest people were suspected.

IN TWO CHAPTERS.—II.

A month passed when one cold January day I was in the show-room, and the same lady made her appearance alone. She still wore her respirator, but looked very pale, haggard, and troubled. The bold look seemed to have gone from her eyes; and as I recalled my thoughts I felt that I had misjudged her, for she began to speak tenderly of her husband, Mr. Ross, who was lying very ill at the hotel.

"I have brought back the cross to be repaired," she said, drawing the little morocco case from her rich sable muff.

"The ring was too slight, and it broke from my necklet the second time it was worn. I had a narrow escape of losing it; but Mr. Ross found it himself upon the lawn, trodden into the grass. I thought I would leave it until we came up again. Of course you can repair it?"

I expressed my sorrow, and promised to have it seen to at once.

"You need not hurry for a few days. Mr. Ross is in town to consult Sir Ealding Dean, and I fear he will send us to Madeira. This climate is killing my poor husband."

The distant hauteur was all gone; and in a lady-like, courteous manner, our customer bowed to my few sympathetic remarks, and hints of its being an unusually trying season, &c.

"Our friend was delighted with the little bracelet, a gift which Mr. Ross wishes to supplement with something a little more valuable. Perhaps I could be allowed to select a few things for you to submit to his choice at the hotel? I know his taste now pretty well, and it will save trouble."

"Anything you like to select shall be sent, ma'am," I said; and I then proceeded to open and display to their best advantage, some very valuable bracelets, which were one and all rejected.

"Yes," she said sadly, "they are very handsome; but Mr. Ross would not like them, I am sure, and it is useless to take things on that he would not approve.

His taste was always good; and as his health fails, he seems to have acquired an indescribable tone that I cannot explain, except that it is artistic and dreamy."

I brought out some plain but good pearl and diamond ornaments in suites, one suite in particular taking her attention.

"Yes; I like that. You might send that."

"It is a suite made to order; but it could be made again in a very short time," I said.

"That would not do," she said, "unless it could be supplied in a fortnight."

"I think we could get over that difficulty," I said with a smile; and then bracelets, rings, chains, and watches—certainly the most chaste and elegant we had—were selected and put aside.

"It is only fair to say," said the lady, smiling—at least, I could see that she was smiling, in spite of her respirator, —"that Mr. Ross will not purchase many of these elegant ornaments. I know he would like a watch and chain, and a ring. Perhaps, too, if he admired them, one of those pearl suites; but I thought it better to speak, as since his illness he has become, not, irritable but —but—perhaps a little hard to please, and I should be sorry if he rejected everything you brought."

So much delicacy was displayed in these remarks, that I could only courteously assure her that we should only be too happy to attend again and again at Mr. Ross, till we had hit upon something he admired; and upon promising to send the selected goods on the next morning at eleven, our visitor rose to go.

"I would ask you to send this afternoon," said the lady on rising, "but I don't think Mr. Ross quite well enough. He saw our physician this morning, and the interviews are always very trying to his nerves."

I placed the little cross in the workmen's hands for repair; and the next morning, punctually at eleven, I was at Moore's Hotel, accompanied by a porter with a goodly assortment of jewelry.

A few words with the manager set me quite at ease, though my inquiries were a mere matter of form. Mr. Elliston Ross lived in Yorkshire, and had come up to town to visit the court physician, Sir Ealing Dean; had been there once before for the same reason; perfect gentleman; his lady quite an angel,—waited on him night and day.

I was shown into the room where Mrs. Ross was seated,—this time without her respirator. She arose with a sad smile and motioned me to a seat; while putting on her respirator, she went into the next room, remaining absent a few minutes, and then returning, requested me to bring *in my cases for Mr. Ross to see.*

I by left the porter down stairs; so, taking up the two small leathern boxes, I followed Mrs. Ross into a slightly shaded room, where, looking deathly pale, the gentleman who had visited our place of business lay upon a couch reading the *Times*. He was attired in a blue cloth dressing gown, and had a small table drawn up to his side, on which were a bottle, glass and a caraffe which seemed to contain barley water. He, too, wore a respirator: but he removed it for a few moments to take a little of the barley water, and then carefully replaced it, coughing hollowy the while.

"Sorry to bring you into a sick-room," he said, courteously. "Sorry, in fact, to bring you here at all, for I would much prefer that you chosen the article or two I wanted at your shop. I trust you have not brought many things, though?"

"Only a few that Mrs. Ross thought you—that your lady chose, sir," I said.

He nodded, and then listlessly examined first one and then another ornament, as I opened them out, but always with a dissatisfied air.

"Don't you like those, dear?" said Mrs. Ross, in rather disappointed tones, as I displayed in the best lights the pearl suite.

"No; not at all," said the invalid. "Too plain; almost vulgar."

"Might I be allowed to suggest," I said, earnestly, "that to see pearls to advantage, they must be worn. It is a well-known fact that pearls are gems which show to as great advantage upon a dark as upon a fair complexion; and if your lady—"

I paused here, and glanced towards Mrs. Ross, who smiled graciously, and then clasped the beautiful pearls round her slightly tighter, and I felt that the principal had had some cause for his suspicions; and thoroughly on my guard, I took the check, and explained that it was a rule of the establishment that goods should not be delivered until after a check had been presented.

"Ah, quite right, quite right," said the gentleman quietly, and without displaying the slightest annoyance. "I can easily suppose that you are obliged to be careful."

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"Our friend was delighted with the little bracelet, a gift which Mr. Ross wishes to supplement with something a little more valuable. Perhaps I could be allowed to select a few things for you to submit to his choice at the hotel? I know his taste now pretty well, and it will save trouble."

"Anything you like to select shall be sent, ma'am," I said; and I then proceeded to open and display to their best advantage, some very valuable bracelets, which were one and all rejected.

"Yes," she said sadly, "they are very handsome; but Mr. Ross would not like them, I am sure, and it is useless to take things on that he would not approve.

His taste was always good; and as his health fails, he seems to have acquired an indescribable tone that I cannot explain, except that it is artistic and dreamy."

I brought out some plain but good pearl and diamond ornaments in suites, one suite in particular taking her attention.

"Yes; I like that. You might send that."

"It is a suite made to order; but it could be made again in a very short time," I said.

"That would not do," she said, "unless it could be supplied in a fortnight."

"I think we could get over that difficulty," I said with a smile; and then bracelets, rings, chains, and watches—certainly the most chaste and elegant we had—were selected and put aside.

"It is only fair to say," said the lady, smiling—at least, I could see that she was smiling, in spite of her respirator, —"that Mr. Ross will not purchase many of these elegant ornaments.

I know he would like a watch and chain, and a ring. Perhaps, too, if he admired them, one of those pearl suites; but I thought it better to speak, as since his illness he has become, not, irritable but —but—perhaps a little hard to please, and I should be sorry if he rejected everything you brought."

So much delicacy was displayed in these remarks, that I could only courteously assure her that we should only be too happy to attend again and again at Mr. Ross, till we had hit upon something he admired; and upon promising to send the selected goods on the next morning at eleven, our visitor rose to go.

"I would ask you to send this afternoon," said the lady on rising, "but I don't think Mr. Ross quite well enough. He saw our physician this morning, and the interviews are always very trying to his nerves."

I placed the little cross in the workmen's hands for repair; and the next morning, punctually at eleven, I was at Moore's Hotel, accompanied by a porter with a goodly assortment of jewelry.

A few words with the manager set me quite at ease, though my inquiries were a mere matter of form. Mr. Elliston Ross lived in Yorkshire, had come up to town to visit the court physician, Sir Ealing Dean; had been there once before for the same reason; perfect gentleman; his lady quite an angel,—waited on him night and day.

I was shown into the room where Mrs. Ross was seated,—this time without her respirator. She arose with a sad smile and motioned me to a seat; while putting on her respirator, she went into the next room, remaining absent a few minutes, and then returning, requested me to bring *in my cases for Mr. Ross to see.*

I by left the porter down stairs; so, taking up the two small leathern boxes, I followed Mrs. Ross into a slightly shaded room, where, looking deathly pale, the gentleman who had visited our place of business lay upon a couch reading the *Times*. He was attired in a blue cloth dressing gown, and had a small table drawn up to his side, on which were a bottle, glass and a caraffe which seemed to contain barley water. He, too, wore a respirator: but he removed it for a few moments to take a little of the barley water, and then carefully replaced it, coughing hollowy the while.

"Sorry to bring you into a sick-room," he said, courteously. "Sorry, in fact, to bring you here at all, for I would much prefer that you chosen the article or two I wanted at your shop. I trust you have not brought many things, though?"

"Only a few that Mrs. Ross thought you—that your lady chose, sir," I said.

He nodded, and then listlessly examined first one and then another ornament, as I opened them out, but always with a dissatisfied air.

"Don't you like those, dear?" said Mrs. Ross, in rather disappointed tones, as I displayed in the best lights the pearl suite.

"No; not at all," said the invalid. "Too plain; almost vulgar."

"Might I be allowed to suggest," I said, earnestly, "that to see pearls to advantage, they must be worn. It is a well-known fact that pearls are gems which show to as great advantage upon a dark as upon a fair complexion; and if your lady—"

I paused here, and glanced towards Mrs. Ross, who smiled graciously, and then clasped the beautiful pearls round her slightly tighter, and I felt that the principal had had some cause for his suspicions; and thoroughly on my guard, I took the check, and explained that it was a rule of the establishment that goods should not be delivered until after a check had been presented.

"Ah, quite right, quite right," said the gentleman quietly, and without displaying the slightest annoyance. "I can easily suppose that you are obliged to be careful."

But the lady looked angry, and returned my bow very distantly as I ushered them out, having promised to send the purchases on to the fashionable hotel—Morley's, in Brook Street—at which they were staying.

"All a farce, but well carried out," I said to the principal as he came up to me, and I showed him the check and the card given me, bearing the name "Mr. H. Elliston Ross," and in pencil, "Moore's Hotel." "But we'll save the check all the same. Here, Johnson."

The principal shrugged his shoulders; and as Johnson came up to where I was carefully running over the various items of jewelry, to see that nothing had been stolen, I gave him the check, and he went city ward.

To my great satisfaction, all was right; not a jewel missing, and the purchased cases laying by me. Suddenly, a cold chill shot through me.—Had they contrived to abstract the contents? I tore the little morocco boxes open; but, no—all was correct. Cross and bracelet lay upon their white velvet beds; and so far, everything was perfectly satisfactory. If they were swindlers, we had escaped; and I began to wonder whether I should get another invation to dinner, a chain for my watch, and be told that I was a step nearer to the junior partnership.

To our intense astonishment, though at an hour's end, Johnson returned smiling.

"All right, sir," he said.

"Why, you don't mean—"

"All right, sir," he said. "Check cashed in an instant: hundred and fifteen pounds, ten shillings."

It is almost needless to add that the two little cases were sent immediately to the hotel, and a discussion followed respecting unnecessary suspicion, and how very often it happened that swindlers passed unnoticed, while honest people were suspected.

IN TWO CHAPTERS.—II.

A month passed when one cold January day I was in the show-room, and the same lady made her appearance alone. She still wore her respirator, but looked very pale, haggard, and troubled. The bold look seemed to have gone from her eyes; and as I recalled my thoughts I felt that I had misjudged her, for she began to speak tenderly of her husband, Mr. Ross, who was lying very ill at the hotel.

"I have brought back the cross to be repaired," she said, drawing the little morocco case from her rich sable muff.

"The ring was too slight, and it broke from my necklet the second time it was worn. I had a narrow escape of losing it; but Mr. Ross found it himself upon the lawn, trodden into the grass. I thought I would leave it until we came up again. Of course you can repair it?"

I expressed my sorrow, and promised to have it seen to at once.

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