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## The Rajah's Heirloom

By FLORENCE MARRYAT,  
Author of "Her Lord and Master," etc.

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I suppose nobody has forgotten the great Manchester swindle, when Jonas Mears and Theodore Alcock managed to abscond with twenty thousand pounds of their employers' and bolted clean across the Atlantic before we could get on their trail. It took me six weeks of my time and a regular chase and no mistake before I ran the two scoundrels to earth in Chicago, where they were giving themselves out as English lords. However, I succeeded in catching them, and I didn't care how much trouble it had cost me. I had brought Messrs. Mears and Alcock back safe to their native country and delivered them over to the proper authorities, and I thought I had earned a few days' rest. We had had a wretched passage across, with head winds against us eight days of the ten, and, my duty done, I thought with keen satisfaction of my little place at Fulham and my own comfortable feather bed and my wife waiting to welcome me home with a tasty little supper.

"Lo! Jark! he'd never be sending after you so soon as this, and you just off board ship! You go to sleep and think no more of such foolishness!" "Nancy," I replied, "the business of the state must be attended to, at any cost. I don't expect anything of the sort, but if a wire should arrive I must have it without delay."

"Drat the state!" cried Nancy, "it don't pay you over and above so much that it has any call to rob you of your natural rest. Go to sleep, John Busby, do—or you will be fit for nothing tomorrow morning!" "I find it difficult to convince my wife of the enormous importance of my of-

ice, and the dignity of my employers. She is always 'drating' the government, and 'blowing' the superintendent of police, in a manner which would cost me my appointment if overheard, but she is a good wife to me and she means well. I suppose it is hard on a woman to have her husband called away at all manner of times, and never to know when to expect him back again. But I had no inclination to argue the matter then. I crawled up stairs to my bedroom and was soon between the blankets, sunk in a profound slumber—so profound that I became utterly unconscious to all external things, and had not even the power to dream. It seemed as if I had been sleeping for hours, or days, when I was roused by the sound of an uncertain tapping on my bedroom door, and an apologetic voice, calling in a loud whisper: "Jark!" As soon as I became sufficiently conscious to recognize the voice, I was sure of something of importance must have occurred, and was on the alert in a moment, for we detectives learn to sleep with our ears open.

"What is it, Nancy?" I exclaimed, hurrying to open the door. My wife was half-crying outside it, with a yellow envelope in her hand. "O, Jark!" she said, "there's a nasty telegram come for you, and I wouldn't have let you see it for ever so, only I was afraid you might be angry with me, but however they can have the 'art to do it—"

"Here! give me the message at once," I said, and she handed it to me. I tore the envelope open—it fluttered the pink paper, on which was written: "Important robbery at The Gables, Manningford. Travel down by mail train."

"What time is it, Nancy?" I asked, and I hurried on my clothes again. "Just gone ten. But, O, Jark! you're never going to start off again when I haven't no more than seen your face!" said the poor woman, crying. "Well, it looks like it. Nan, but it isn't my fault, as you well know. I'd be glad enough to spend a few quiet days with you, but business is business, my dear, and the state claims my first attention."

"O! dang the state!" exclaimed Nancy, angrily. "Why can't it keep more detective officers, I should like to know, instead of working them as it has to skin and bone?" "Yes! yes! but never mind just now; but get me out my other suit. Nancy, for the last day I was aboard the Atlanta, she shipped a sea over such this one, and it must go to the cleaner's. The Gables is a big place, I've heard, and I must dress accordingly."

"And how long will you be gone, Jark?" "That I can't say! It must be a serious robbery, or the chief wouldn't have ordered me to travel by the night mail. No time to be lost, I guess! Now, get me a hansom, there's a good lass; I must call at the yard for my instructions before I catch the mail from Paddington."

who is no flatterer as a rule, pleased me very much, and I felt the strength of a lion rise in me at his words. I fancy I got a bit red, as I answered: "Thank you kindly, sir. I suppose the business is of importance?" "Every importance! Property to the amount of thirty thousand pounds missing, under circumstances which seem to point to—however, I shall leave you to find out that for yourself! You may be detained some days in The Gables; indeed, you are sure to be. Are you prepared for it?" "I can write to Mrs. Busby for what I may require, sir," I replied. "May I ask on whose information we are acting?"

"O, yes! No secrecy about the matter! The person who has written for—"

"I was sorry to have you up again so soon, Busby," said the inspector. "There's no help for it! Just had information from Manningford to send down the sharpest detective we have, and you know who that is, when you're at home!" This compliment from our inspector, your attendance is Sir Charles Ellesmere, the master of the house. His father died only last week—was buried yesterday—the jewels found missing after the reading of the will. He says they are of fabulous value, and a family heirloom.

"All the better," I said, "they will be the more easily traced. They won't give me so much trouble as Messrs. Mears and Alcock's gold and silver did. Stones can't be melted down into lumps of ore!" "Ah! Busby," the inspector was good enough to say for the second time, "that was a sharp piece of work and it won't be forgotten! You'll reach Manningford about five o'clock, so you had better put up at a hotel till you've had your breakfast, then off to The Gables as soon as may be!" "Very good, sir! I'll start at once, and wire you all particulars as soon as I've heard them. And if I require assistance, I'll have Crews, if you're willing. He has the coolest head, I know!" "After your own, Busby!" said the inspector, laughing, and I thanked him again, and started on my journey. It was November, and the nights were bitterly cold. I wrapped myself up well in my rug, and leaning back in a corner of the railway carriage, tried to resume my broken slumbers, but it was useless. I had been too thoroughly roused. When I arrived at the Manningford hotel, I sat in one corner of the office room till it was light enough to have my breakfast. By that time several customers, chiefly travelers, were down also, and two or three outsiders had stayed in to warm themselves with a cup of tea or coffee before they started on their day's work. I soon found that the mysterious robbery at The Gables was the general topic of conversation.

"Ah! them undertakers!" exclaimed another man. "I wouldn't trust them any further than I could see 'em! Why! I remember when my mother died, and they was left in the room to lay her in her coffin, there wasn't a pin left in the cushion the next morning, and the very soap was took out of the soapdish, for 'twas found my sister say so a score o' times!" "Them jewels was worth a power of money," interposed a third. "The old gentleman he got them from the king of the angles, and they was valued at a million pounds!" "He stole them, most likely," said the first speaker. "It was in the days of old John Company, when the Britishers stole right and left; 'boot,' they called it, but it came to the same thing! And now, you see, this is what they calls a Nemesis! They've lost them again! It won't be for long, sir. Charles he have telegraphed for a detective from London, and all the servants are forbid to leave the house till he comes. He'll find 'em, never fear! They can't have walked off by themselves, nor they can't be very far, neither! All I know is, that I wouldn't like to be the man as has got 'em. The officer he'll sniff 'em out soon enough!" "The man!" repeated his companion, contentiously. "Taint no man as has those jewels. He'd better shake out my lady's skirts, instead. That's where the jewels is gone. She was always mad to get 'em, and mad against the young baronet, and she has 'em, you may take my word for it! Ah! there's no artfulness to beat the artfulness of a woman!" sighed, rather than said, the other man, as though he had cause to know.

(To be continued.)

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