Mrs. Lomax's Diamonds.

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CHAPTER L

John Thompson late (not very late) sergeant in Her Majesty's 200th, now coachman to Colonel Oxenden, also late 200th, now of the Grange, Puddleham, Hopshire, was harrying toward Thurdown Hall, residence of Squire Lomax. two miles away, with a note. He was hurrying as fast as his portliness and ice-bound roads would let him, partly to keep himself warm, and partly because it was past 12 o'clock mid-day, and upon his leaving the Grange a strident female voice had commanded him to be on no account late for the

family meal at one. John Thompson had passed the Golden Ball inn-a rare performance on his part-and had but a few hundred yards to go when he saw sauntering from the direction of Thurdow Hall a tall, good-looking man of five and forty or thereabouts, with whose figure he seemed to be familiar, and so he shifted the note from his left hand to his right, and prepared to give the military salute.

"Blessed if it ain't'-But no, it can't be. But it is' Blessed if it ain't the black capting!

The two figures met. Thompson, beng in a hurry, would have passed on with a salute, but the other stopped him with a cheery:

who'd have Why, Thompson, thought of running across you here?

What are you doing?" "Coachman to Colenel Oxenden, sir." replied the old sergeant at stiff at-

"The deuce you are! Why, I didn't know he'd come to vegetate down here. Well, how do you like it? He was considered a hard one, wasn't he?" He kep' up the name of the regl-

ment, sir," replied the sergeant.
"Yes, yes, of course. Well, now, tell me about yourself," said the captain, crossing his leg, and leaning on his stick with the air of a man ready for a long chat.

'Perhaps you'll excuse me, sir," replied the sergeant; "I've a most particular note here to deliver at the 'all, sir. The mistress is took with the influenza, sir, and they can't come to the ball at Squire Lomax's tomorrow

"Dear me' I'm sorry for that. I'm staying at the Hall for the ball, and should have tried to meet the colonel again after so many years. Any answer to the note?"

"No, sir. Leastways I hadn't orders to wait for one. But I had oughter be getting on sir, with your leave." "Give me the note. I'm going back

to lunch now, and the squire shall have it directly when he comes in." 'You're very good sir, thank you. It would save me a quarter of an

So the sergeant handed the note to the captain, saluted, and was making the rightabout turn, when the captain

"Oh. I say, Thompson, den't say you've seen me. I'll drop in and surprise the colonel-perhaps this after-

'Very well, sir, Good morning, str.' colonel and Mrs. Oxenden and party" were, of course, regularly invited, and as the colonel and the squire and their respective ladies were, although living within two miles of each other, close friends, the regret of the Colonel and Mrs. Oxenden at being disappointed at the last minute were and Mrs. Lomax that they could not

"The poor thing has evidently written the note from her sick room," remarked Mrs. Lomax. "She writes so beautifully as a rule, and this is not at all her hand. She hopes we will welcome her 'party' a great friend of her husband's, Major Clifford."
"Of course we will," said the squire;

"we have none too many men as it is, and the colonel's friends are always

good fellows." At 11 o'clock the next night the oldfashioned half at the squire's, converted into a ball room, presented a pleasant and brilliant scene. Everybody worth knowing for miles around was there, and the neighborhood was famous for pretty girls, although it deplored, in common with most rural districts, a paucity of young men. The music was good, the floor was good, the room was well-lighted, all the company danced, and the old house, with numberless nooks and corners, was admirably adapted for these between dance tete-a-tetes which are the most fatal nets for susceptible youth.

Major Clifford had arrived early, and with that ease which the social side of military life so generally teaches, was very soon as much at home in this room full of people whom he had never seen in his life before as a native of the soil. Stay-there was one person with whom he seemed to be acquainted. This was a stylich woman of between 30 and 40, whose face, which had been beautiful, bore upon it that impress of hardness and indifference which se surely comes after a life in the world. When Clifford entered the room she how him and the color fled from her checks in an instant. When he saw her, he raised his evebrows and emiled, very sligtbly, but meaningly. He was afterwards introduced to Mrs. Enderby, but he did not ask her for a dance nor did they meet again during the evening.

The principal object of his attention was the squire's eldest daughter. Hetty, a pretty girl of 18, who was evidently as much attracted by the quiet, wellbred talk and manner of the Grange representative as he was impressed by her charms.

to one of the before-alluded-to alcoves. a dainty little corner, luxuriously cushloned, screened from the vulgar gaze by artfully arranged greenery and dimlit by a quaint Japanses lantern. "You must be very fond of this old

house," he said. "I am: I love it. And indeed it is an interesting old place. I believe it is historical, but I am ashamed to say you must not examine me too closely as to this. At any rate it has a

"Good! One of the usual English country house ghosts, I suppose," said the major. "Party in white, with a pale face, sad eyes, and all the rest

No. It is a man in a long cloak, and he haunts the landing outside mother's bedroom door."

"How interesting!" "Do you think so? Well, I suppose

there's too much of the new woman in me to see the fascination of ghosts. But come and see his scene of action. So the major followed the girl up the broad staircase, at the top of which she turned to the left, and entered a dimly lighted region of nooks and orners, and sharp turns, and steps which went up, and others which went

door which she opened, saying: "This is mother's room."
"The ghost comes along the pasage," whispered the girl, with a mock air of mystery, "enters the room, walks up to the dressing table in the bow window, stands for a moment, and

down, until she stopped opposite a

walks back." She looked at her companion as she spoke, and noting that his keen dark eyes were taking in every detail of the room, said:

"Yes; it's awfully untidy. you're looking at it but we didn't finish dinner until late, and there was rather a rush to get ready for the

dance "You know Mrs. Enderby, I think "mean you have met her before this evening?" said the girl when they were seated

The major bowed affirmation. 'Who is she?'

Wife of Enderby of the P. W. D. He's on the frontier. I met them at Dundum three or four years ago. Why do you ask?

"Because she has been asking about

"And of course all I could say was that I had never met you before this evening and that you were staying at Colonel Oxenden's."

"No. She is the 'And Party' from Towers, at Crashford. That fat man and the florid woman are her introducera-Mr. and Mrs. Carnegie. We don't know much about them, but mather always asks them to one of our dances. Now. Major Clifford, don't answer this question unless you choose, and don't think me impertment for asking it. Has she any particular reason to dislike you"

The major examined his shoes, and did not reply for a moment. Then he

"She ought not to have-certainly not. But why do you ask?" "Well, there was something in the tone of her inquiries about you, not in what she actually said, which made me wonder," replied the girl. "What did she say""

"She asked who you were-who that cavalry-looking man' was, she put it, and how long you had lived in these parts, and what you were doing now that you had left the service."

"Left the service? Who told her I had left the service? Well, anyhow, there's nothing very spiteful in all

'No. But, as I said, women always judge what other women mean, not from the actual words they use, but from their way of saying them."

"Well, Miss Lomax, so far from baying a spite against me, Mrs. Enderby ought to regard me as a very great benefactor, although I say so who should not."

"Why-did you save her life, or what?"

"No-I-er-saved something which is often more precious than life.

"Will you explain, Major Clifford?" The major hesitated, as if balancing in his mind the course he should pursue. Then, with a sudden movement, he as genuine as was that of the Squire | changed his leaning-forward posture for an erect position, and facing full

his companion, said: "Miss Lomax, as Mrs. Enderby has given you the idea of being spiteful to me, and she may possibly say sofething spiteful about me, I must take you into ny confidence. Now please understand that only upon your assurance that what I say shall go no further, I will tell you what I know about Mrs. Enderby,

The girl gave the required assurance. 'Mrs. Enderby was very well known in India as a woman who thoroughly meant to enjoy life, and in India that s associated with a good deal that in England is considered fast. She preferred the society of men-of a certain style of men-to that of women, and was known as the Gay Grass Widow everywhere, and entered heart and soul into their pursuits. Well, there was a good deal of high play at the just then."

"Card play, do you mean?" The major nodded and continued, "Men can't be blamed for seeking exitement when they are exiled away in bad climate, hundreds of miles from ife; nor can women, when they keep within bounds, but Mrs. Enderby went the pace. At any rate, she was always

at the baccarat table, and she won so ensistently that I watched her, anddon't think I need say any more." "I'm afraid I'm very stupid," said the girl, "What then?"

"Well-she didn't play quite as ladies and gentlemen are usually supposed to

You don't mean to say that she cheated? "I do. But Miss Lomax, please reo her quietly about it. She renounced the cards, became another woman, and is, I believe, an excellent wife and a devoted mother. There! I'm sorry to tell such a story about a guest in your house, but in self-defense I must, for, of course, she can never forgive me for

After supper Hetty Lomax came up

Major Clifford and said: "Mrs. Enderby and her friends have gone. Their excuse was that being After Major Clifford's third waltz such a fearful night, they were afraid with Hetty Lomax he led her unstairs the roads would be blocked with snow

if they stayed later. "I'm afraid, then, that you think my resence here has something to do with their departure?" said the major. "Well, I dare say she was uncom-

ortable," replied Hetty. The major and Miss Lomax were not together until the last dances on the programme came. When they met for the final waltz, the major said;

"Strange that you should have spoken about that ghost, for, as I was taking Miss Lemarchant to a seat in the uppermost alcove during supper, I saw something very like your friend going along the passage from the direction of Mrs. Lomax's room, although if you hadn't told me it was a man, I should have called it a woman."

"Probably one of the maids." said Hetty, "transformed by your imagina-

tion into a ghost." The party broke up soon after his

departure, but the story of the even-,

ng was not quite complete. Hetty Lomax could not get Mrs. Enderby out of her mind, and, unaccountably, with her she associated the feminine ighost' seen by Major Clifford. Some impulse sent her flying up to her mother's room, whenese she presently appeared, pale as death, and said to her mother, who was seated with her father discussing the dance:

"Mother, when you changed your dress after dinner, did you leave your diamonds on the dressing table?

"Yes, dear-why?" "Because they are gene!"

CHAPTER II.

"Gone! My diamonds gone!" exclaimed Mrs. Lomax when Hetty had made her announcement. "Impossible! Who could have gone in to steal them? People have been passing up and down the stairs about the passages the whole evening. Harriet must have put them away.

"Harriet has never left the supper room the whole evening, mother," said Hetty: "Besides, you know she has strict orders never to touch your jewelry,"
"I can't believe it;" cried the dis-

tracted Mrs. Lomax; "they must be somewhere about. Oh, my beautiful diamonds which you gave me when we were married, John! If they are gone, I will never wear diamonds again." And she burst into hysterical sobs and cries.

They went upstairs and sought high and low. The servants were called up and questioned; so were the hired waiters and the cloak room man. All in vain. The diamonds were not to be found, and nobody could throw a ray of light upon the fact of their disappear-

What was to be done? It was nearly o'clock in the morning. The snow was lying in heavy drifts all about the house and was still falling, so that no traces of footsteps could be utilize L. l'seless to telegraph, even if a telegraph office could be found open, and the only train for anywhere at this -had left Crashford statien an hour previously.

Hetty Lomax had given her word to ing in the house at the time. Major Clifford that she would not repeat what he had told her about Mrs. Enderby, but, putting two and two togeter-the fact that Mrs. Enderby was already branded as a thief, that she abnormally early hour and the coincidence that this very night Major Clifin the neighborhood of her mother's room, created such a feeling of suspicion in the girl's mind that she felt absolved from her promise and hinted her opinion. Her father and mother, of course, laughed at it, but Hetty persisted, and in reply to their questions upon what ground she suspected a lady who had been brought by such wellknown people as the Carnegies, said: "Recause she has a past, and I know

'But, my dear girl," sold her father, even if we grant that Mrs. Enderby is quite capable of committing such an act, and I am very far from conceding it, is it at all likely that she would choose such an occasion for committing it " What possible opportunity could a lady, very much in request for her dancing and liveliness generally, have for getting unnoticed

"The very fact of its unlikeliness ould protect her," replied Hetty. 'And as for her opportunity-well, I'm | called the Black Captain-" not a practical thief, but I would soon wanted to if such diamends as mother's my object

In due course Mr. and Mrs. Loman went over to call upon Colonel Oxenden and to inquire about Mrs. Ovenden, but the house was closed, and they were informed that Mrs. Oxenden | hour, so I give it him." had been ordered to Egypt for the remainder of the winter.

been well-nigh forgotten by all but the sufferers, was recalled to public notice

Crashford-the market town and conter of this part of Hopshire-boasted the colonel. "This fellow Mercer was that it moved with the times. It did not, by a long way, but it persuaded itself that it did, and that was enough for the contentment of all. So, as every other town of any pretensions had a golf club, it was necessary for Crashford to have one, and a commites of public-spirited men was formed o select a site for links.

Blue Breezes Common, a wild tract of land, lying between Thurdown Hall he'd gone regularly in for the swindling and Crashford, was finally selected -a good nine-hole course, come very sporting bunkers and easy of access to the town. At a certain point of the course a foot path, known to very few leading from the hall into Crashford town, but across, and just here the open expanse of common was broken by a "spinnery," a collection of trees growing closely together in a circle out of a deepish exeavation which had in past times been a gravel

Of course, the links had to be formilly opened, and the occasion was to be celebrated by a match between two well-known professionals, a members' handleap and a dinner at the temporary club house.

The day fixed was ideally April like and an Ideal April day on an English common is not easily surpassed. All Crashfordshire and neighborhood worthy of consideration was present, and the bright spring contumes of the tadies, the red coats of the players, cloud-dappled sky, the sunshine sember-she had her lesson. I spoke and the beauty of the common and its surroundings made up a healthy, cheery picture, which would have inspired the veriest misanthrope for the once to think well of the world and

The professionals played their metch with a solemn and silent crowd tramping behind them, and cleared the "Corhaving found her out. Let us change ker" with an ease and indifference which convinced every amateur duffer present that he could do the same. The members' handicap followed, and the 'Corker" received a goodly tribute of balls. In the gloaming a general adjournment to the club house was made and there was a grand rush of caddies the "Corker" for the purpose of picking up the balls in the spinney, to be sold at a cheap rate to the club 'pro," who would doctor them up a bit and reself them to members at eight shillings the dozen. Suddenly an who had penetrated farther into the spinney than his fellows came rushing up, breathless and scared, cry-

"There's a skelinton in the Danes

Of course, the rest of the youngsters left their quest for lost balls to view the discovery, and there, at the bottom of the excavation, they saw a heavilycoated figure lying in an easy posture of sleep, the hands thrust into the deep pockets, and, as the urchin had said, in the place of an ordinary head.

a ghastly skull. "Some poor fellow who must have

lost his way during the winter storms and have fallen into a snow drift, which here would be twenty feet deep,"

observed one man. Upon undoing the ulster they found that the man was in evening dress, that he had a gold watch and chain, so that the skeleton was clearly that of no ordinary night wanderer. Upon withdrawing the hands from the pockets, each was found to be tightly clasped over a jewel case.

"Mrs. Lomax's diamonds," exclaimed bystander, a doctor. "I remember them; they were lost upon the night of the December dance. It was a terrible night, for I was nearly snowed

up myself. The question which now naturally suggested itself was, Who was the man?

There was a pocket-book in the coat; there was nothing in it to identify the owner, but there was distinct evidence that he was the thief, in the shape of a plan of Thrudown Hall approaches, and a map of the immediate neighborhood upon which the short cut to Crashford across the common was strongly marked. In another pocket was a dance programme, the writing on which was

barely decipherable, although the initials H. L. appeared more than once. "Then the thief was either a guest at the dance or some fellow who had rigged himself up as a guest and who had, by virtue of his rig, got into the house unnoticed," said the doctor. Just about the time of this discovery colonel Oxenden and his wife returned

to the Grange from Egypt, and the first people to welcome them home were their old friends, the Lomaxes, Conversation naturally turned upon the loss and recovery of Mrs. Lomax's diamonds, and in the course of chat Hetty recounted what Major Clifford

had said about the figure he had seen moving in the neighborhood of Mrs. Lomax's bed room. "Major Clifford! Who's he?" asked Colonel Oxenden.

"Why," replied the squire, "your guest here, who came to our dance as the representative of your 'party.'" the only train for anywhere at this "Major Clifford-our guest-repre-time of morning-the up-London mail sentative of our party!" exclaimed the colonel. "Why, I don't know anybody of the name, and we had nobody stay-

Mr. and Mrs. Lomax and Hetty exchanged looks of astonishment. "But, dear," said Mrs. Lomax to Mrs. Oxenden, "in your note of regretwhich, by the way, I remember observhad left the house suddenly and at an ing was not written at all in your usual hand-you said that as our card of invitation was marked 'And party. ford should have seen a female figure you hoped we would receive as your representative an old service friend of your husband's, Major Clifford."

"My dear," replied Mrs. Oxenden, "I ould not have done so, for, as my husband says, we know no one of the name, and there was no one in the house but ourselves." "Well," said the colonel, "there's a

funny misunderstanding somewhere Let's send for John. He took the note." So John Thompson was rung for and dy appeared. "John," said his master, "you re-

member taking a note over to Thrudown Hall on the day when your misess was first taken ill?" "Yes, sir," replied the conchman.

Leastways, 1-1 didn't take the not all the way myself." "Didn't take the note all the way ourself! What do you mean?" "Why, sir, it was this way. A few

undred yards from the 'all I met Captain Mercer-you remember him, sir, what used to be of ours; he were "Mercer, that blackguard: I see it find an opportunity for doing what I all now!" exclaimed the colonel, "Well, disgracing myself by according her of

Well, sir, he said as how he were stayin' at 'Squire Lomax's and offer d to take the note in himself, and as I were in a bit of a 'urry, I didn't see an 'arm in savin' myself a quarter of a till the next morning."-Chambers'

"All right; that will do. Don't be insuch a hurry another time," said the Five months later, that is, in the colonel, "If you hadn't given up the nonth of April, the affair, which had note, Mrs. Lomax wouldn't have lost her diamonds.

one of the biggest scoundrels who ever were uniform. He had to send in his papers at last for a lot of shady operations in which he had been concernedone he carried off on Mrs. Enderby, wife of Bill Enderby, of the P. W. D., about a horse, and another, which burg. wasn't brought straight home to him. about the imitation of a signature. I'v never seen him since, but I heard that and robbing business and that he'd

served two or three terms for it." "Oh, what a wicked man!" exclaimed Hetty Lomax. "He paid me such attention, and I thought him quite the nicest man at the dance. Then it but't true what he told me about Mrs. Enderby-that he'd found her out cheating at cards?"

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"The Cay Grass Widow cheating it cards! Ha! ha! That's too bad. bughed the colonel. "Mes. Enderby liked a bit of fun as well as anyhody, and went the pace in a ladylike way.

but cheat at cards, not she! "Oh, how relieved I am," said Hetty. and what a marrow escape I had if saving taken mother's diamonds "Then this rascal must have kept my wife's note," said the colonel, "re written it with his own embellishmen and posted it, for we didn't get it un-

Journal. NO LET UP POSSIBLE.

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