

MRS. GAINSBOROUGH'S DIAMONDS.
 JULIAN HAWTHORNE
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CHAPTER VIII.



Slurk had thrown himself toward me.

It occurred to me the next morning that, considering the nature of the work that was cut out for me, it might be prudent to depart from my usual custom by leaving the diamonds at home in Christina's charge, as she had herself suggested, and I took the earliest opportunity of mentioning this proposal to Kate. To my surprise she at once expressed a decided dissent from the arrangement, and indeed seemed so much perturbed by it that I at once relinquished the idea. But I begged her to tell me the reasons of her objection.

"Not now," she said hastily; "I hear papa coming; wait till after breakfast and then you shall know."

We were standing at the gate of the courtyard, breathing the fresh morning air. She left me and returned to the house, whence Mr. Birchmore almost immediately issued and saluted me with more than his usual cordiality. I wondered what his behavior would have been had he known of the transactions of the past night or of what was in store for us during the day. He began to talk about Kohlstein, and related several anecdotes of the bandits by whom it was said formerly to have been inhabited.

"I have been up there more than once," he remarked, "and the traces of their occupation are still visible. I remember one feature that particularly impressed me—a narrow cleft or chasm of considerable depth, into which the old fellows are said to have thrown their prisoners when they became refractory."

"Would the fall kill them?"

"I should say not; the bottom seemed full of chopped brushwood and other such rubbish. But no human being could have got out unaided, and probably a day or two's lonely sojourn there would bring the most resolute malcontent to terms. It would be a ghastly fate to fall in there nowadays, and have one's skeleton fished out again the following year perhaps, and a sensational paragraph in the newspapers. You young folks must pick your steps carefully today."

"Forewarned is forearmed!" rejoined I, with a short laugh. Further conversation was cut short by a summons to breakfast. On this occasion Slurk waited at table, and I observed him with more than usual attention and toleration, as one with whom I was soon to try desperate conclusions. He was certainly a villainous looking character, but he appeared to be, for reasons best known to himself, in excellent spirits this morning—a circumstance which stirred up an unwilling kind of compassion within me, reflecting what a speedy and final end was going to be put to all his possibilities of enjoyment. While though his life had been it was the only one he had.

Kate likewise had the semblance of unusual gaiety, but I could see that it was either feigned or the result of nervous excitement. And my judgment was justified when after breakfast she overtook me as I was on the way up stairs to my room to make my final preparations, and said, in a voice unsteady with emotion:

"Tom, dear, you asked me why you might not leave your diamonds with Christina. You do not know what danger you were in last night! On my way back to my room I heard two people talking together, and they mentioned your name, so I stopped and listened. One said, 'The bolt is all right; I had better go in and risk it; he'll be certain to be asleep by this time.' And then the other said: 'He has his revolver; leave it to me; he believes he can trust me. Tomorrow, when he goes out, I'll get him to leave them with me for safety!' and then they both laughed. My darling this house is a den of thieves!"

"Were the persons you heard—who were they?"

"Christina's and that creature she calls her father. Hush! There she comes. She must not see us together," and in a moment Kate had glided away. I went up to the stairs with a heavy heart. I would almost rather not have heard this last revelation. My confidence in my penetration had received a humiliating shock. To think that Christina's innocent face and modest, maidenly air concealed the heart of a thief, or worse still, of a decoy duck, was a blow to my vanity as well as to my faith in human nature. How artful she had been when I fancied her most ingenious and kind!

And then it all at once flashed upon me—what if Heinrich Rudolph himself were in the plot? What if he had written there to be on the outlook for me, and what if Slurk, being secretly in league with him, had contrived to get the Birchmores and me along with them into this house, intending to divide the spoil with Herr Rudolph and Christina? Many signs seemed to point to this as a

true deduction from the circumstances, and even as I was rather grimly considering the matter, a new confirmation of Kate's discovery awaited me. Christina was standing at my room door, and as I came up she courted me and said:

"I was wishing to speak a moment to Herr Gainsborough, if he would permit me."

"What do you want?" I asked somewhat roughly.

"Does the honored Herr remember what I said yesterday?"

"That you wished me to give you my diamonds for safe keeping? Yes, and I have to answer that I am not quite so trustful as you seem to think!"

The scornful and severe tone in which I spoke evidently startled her; but she still affected not to understand.

"It was for Herr Gainsborough's own sake"—she began, but I interrupted her—"Do you remember what I said yesterday—that I went almost, well, I am armed today, and whoever tries to teach me how to take care of my diamonds may happen to get a bullet instead, so let him beware. If Herr Rudolph is anxious about me, you can tell him that!"

"Herr Gainsborough will be sorry to have spoken so," said Christina, coloring deeply, and with tremulous lip.

"I am sorry to have to say it, Christina. But can you tell me how the bolt of this door came to be in this condition?" I pulled out the loose socket as I spoke and the screws fell to the floor.

"Indeed, I did not know this!" exclaimed she; but the dismay and confusion which were but too plainly visible on her face belied her words.

"You will understand, however, that a house whose fastenings are so much out of order would not be a proper place to keep treasures in. Well, goodbye, Christina. I am going to Kohlstein, and probably I shall not spend another night here. When you write to your brother in Paris you may tell him that the diamonds are quite safe, though they may have been in danger."

"Will Herr Gainsborough let me say one word?"

"It's too late—I have no time," returned I, with an emphasis all the more coldly contemptuous because of the secret inclination I felt—in view of her youth and prettiness—to be compassionate and forgiving; and perhaps I was half sorry that she attempted no further self vindication, but, obeying my gesture of dismissal, passed out of the door and down the passage, with her bare feet, and her blue eyes downcast and no backward glance. When she was gone I shut the door in no enviable mood and walked to and fro about my room like a surly bull in a pound. For the first thought not for the last time I heartily cursed the devil wherever I carried them. In the midst of my anathemas Mr. Birchmore knocked at the door and told me that everything was ready down stairs for the start.

"And, by the by, Gainsborough," he added, with one of his point blank eye glances, "I have arranged that our luggage shall be removed today, and if you leave yours here I advise you to seal it up in my presence. I found the lock of my door in rather a strange condition this morning. I have my own opinion of what our landlord may be."

"Who recommended you to this place, Mr. Birchmore?" I demanded curtly, for I was getting to feel something like contempt for my intended father-in-law. It is not easy to respect a man who under whatever stress of circumstances allows another man to make a slave of him.

"It was that fellow Slurk, and he deserves a good horsewhipping for it!" replied Birchmore, thrusting his hands resolutely into his pockets.

"I think he deserves at least that," I rejoined, with a significant laugh, "and whenever you're inclined to operate on him I'll stand by you."

Mr. Birchmore said no more, and we went down stairs in silence. Kate was already seated in the carriage. Slurk was on the box, with a large basket containing our provisions for the day beside him. Mr. Birchmore and I took our places—one of us, at least, with a heavy heart. The landlord stood at the door and nodded us a surly farewell.

"Where is Christina?" I asked him.

"She has gone to the town to sell eggs did the Herr want anything?"

"I should like to have sent for a screwdriver, but probably I can get one on my way back," was my answer and with that we drove away.

In about half an hour, proceeding by unfrequented roads, we came in sight of Kohlstein. It was a vast four sided mass of gray rock, seamed with deep clefts and fissures running horizontally and vertically, so that it appeared to have been built of gigantic blocks of stone. It was considerably over one hundred feet in sheer height, and it stood upon a rising ground of shifting sand. Slender trees grew here and there out of the crevices of its headlong sides and straggled nakedly along its level summit, outlined against the sky. It was an ideal place for a robber strong hold, impregnable, certainly, to any at tack save that of the heaviest modern artillery.

"We must get out and walk from here," remarked Mr. Birchmore. "There's only one way of getting to the top, and that's on the other side. I have got a touch of my rheumatics today and hardly think I shall be able to do the climbing. However, that needn't interfere with you young people, of course."

exchanged a covert look with Kate as I helped her to descend from the carriage, and she pressed my hand and smiled. I admired her courage as much as I lamented the apparent lack of it in her father. The horse having been unharnessed and tethered where some cool grass grew beside a stream, we struck off across the sandy upland. Slurk carrying the big basket, Mr. Birchmore walking with a rather feeble step near him, and Kate and I in front. It was an even hotter day than yesterday and the tramp was a wearisome one. By the time we arrived at the foot of the Stien, we were quite ready to rest a few minutes in the shadow of the rock, for coolness and breath.

"No, I can't do it!" said Mr. Birchmore, wiping his forehead and gleaning hopelessly up at the narrow white foot path that seemed to mount almost straight upward to the distant summit. "Just leave me here, with a few sand wiches and a bottle of hock, and I shall do very comfortably till you come back."

It was certainly very arduous work clambering up that ladderlike path and I doubt whether Kate's determination and mind would have held out had the motive which urged us been merely one of curiosity. But the top was gained at last, and we threw ourselves down on the dry grass to rest and to be fanned by the welcome breeze that blew there. Slurk placed the basket in a little nook where some bushes kept off the direct rays of the sun and stretched himself at full length beside it.

"Now let us walk about," suggested Kate, at length, in an undertone. "we must see what there is to be seen."

We had already arranged all the steps by which we were to proceed to the achievement of our purpose and we felt that the sooner it was ended, the better. The surface on which we stood, though preserving a general level was full of irregularities and unevenness; it was overgrown with low bushes and parched grass, with perhaps half a dozen starved and meager trees. Here and there the naked rock jutted forth from the thin soil, crumbling and weather worn, its surface stained in places with dry lichens. The entrance was scarcely two-thirds of an acre in area, and a more forbidding and ungenial spot it would be hard to find even in the midst of summer. The cave in which the robbers lived was somewhere lower down, we had passed its entrance on our way up, but it was here probably that an outlook was kept over the country, to spy out the approach of victims or of enemies. It struck me that it was hardly worth while to be a bandit, if one must put up with such bleak and unattractive quarters in which to carry on the business.

Kate and I wandered over this barren summit hand in hand. The moment was now very near that was to make a great change in the world for both of us. We felt, somehow, as if we were taking leave of a certain part of our lives then. At least I remember gazing out across the wide expanse of sunlight country that stretched far away on every side and wondering whether it would look the same an hour hence. Slurk all the while lay beside his basket and appeared to be asleep.

We came to the brow of a sort of shelf or shallow declivity descending which we found ourselves on a lower level by some six or seven feet, and so much of the area as lay behind us ceased to be visible. Advancing a few paces farther we paused abruptly on the edge of a dark, profound cleft, which gaped right at our feet. It was so narrow that one might easily leap across it at its widest part; but it was so deep that for all that I could see, it might descend to the very base of the Stien. Peering downward earnestly, however, my eyes becoming accustomed to the gloom, could dimly discern what seemed to be a not too at a depth of not more than twenty feet.

"It's an awful thing to do after all!" I murmured, after a long inspection, looking up at Kate.

"Are you ready?" was her answer.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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SCHOOL TAX NOTICE.

To the taxpayers of school district No. 62, of Clackamas county, Oregon:
 The school tax of the above named district for the year 1902 is now due, and must be paid to the undersigned at his office in Oregon City within sixty days from date of this notice, or the same will be returned as delinquent.

By order of the Board of Education,
 T. F. BRYAN,
 Clerk School District No. 62,
 Dated this 19th day of April, 1902. 19-22-6-17

Executor's Notice.

Notice is hereby given that the undersigned duly appointed, qualified and acting executor of the estate of John A. Comer, deceased, has filed with the clerk of the county court of Clackamas county, Oregon, their final account as such executor, and the said court has set Tuesday, June 17th, 1902, as the day for hearing objections to said account and for the settlement of said estate.

By order of Hon. J. W. Muldrow, Judge of said county court of Clackamas county, Oregon April 27, 1902.
 H. WILLIAMS,
 HENRY GASK,
 Executors.

SCHOOL TAX NOTICE.

To the taxpayers of Falls View school district No. 38, of Clackamas county, Oregon:
 The school tax of the above named district for the year 1902 is now due, and must be paid to the undersigned at his office in Falls View within sixty days from date of this notice, or the same will be returned as delinquent.

By order of the Board of Education,
 Clerk School District No. 38,
 Dated this 27th day of April, 1902. 4-29-6-3

NOTICE FOR PUBLICATION.

Land Office at Oregon City, Oregon, April 15, 1902.

Notice is hereby given that the following named settler has filed notice of his intention to make final proof in support of his claim, and that said proof will be made before the Register and Receiver of the United States land office at Oregon City, Oregon, on June 14, 1902, viz: James F. Nelson, homestead entry 572, for the lots 2 and 3 of section 28, town 4 south, range 2 east.

He names the following witnesses to prove his continuous residence upon and cultivation of said land, viz: George Hungate, Albert Pasold, F. Pasold and J. Vaughn, all of Molalla P. O., Clackamas county, Oregon.
 3-24-20 J. T. APPERSON, Register.

NOTICE FOR PUBLICATION.

Land Office at Oregon City, Oregon, May 16, 1902.

Notice is hereby given that the following named settler has filed notice of his intention to make final proof in support of his claim, and that said proof will be made before the Register and Receiver of the United States land office at Oregon City, Oregon, on July 6, 1902, viz: William B. Smith, Pre. D. S. No. 508, for the lots 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100.

He names the following witnesses to prove his continuous residence upon and cultivation of said land, viz: J. H. Hildley, John Caster, J. B. Cannon and W. J. Plank, all of Silverton P. O., Marion county, Oregon.
 5-30-6-17 J. T. APPERSON, Register.

NOTICE OF FINAL SETTLEMENT.

Notice is hereby given, that I, the undersigned, have filed my final report in the matter of the estate of John D. Charters, deceased, in the county court of Clackamas county, Oregon, and the court has appointed July 25th, 1902, at the hour of 10 a. m. as a day and time for hearing of said report and for the settlement of said estate. Parties having objections may present them at that time.

MARGARET A. CHARTERS, Adm'r of the estate of John D. Charters, dec'd.
 H. R. Cross, Atty for estate. 19-35-6-10

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FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH.—Rev. O. W. LUCAS, Pastor. Services at 11 a. m. and 7:30 p. m. Sunday school after morning service. Prayer meeting Wednesday evening at 7:30 o'clock. Prayer meeting of Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor every Sunday evening at 6:30 prompt.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH.—Rev. GILMAN PARKER, Pastor. Morning Service at 10 o'clock Sunday School at 12:15. Evening Service 6:30. Regular prayer meeting Wednesday evening. Monthly Convention Meeting every Wednesday evening preceding the first Sunday in the month. A cordial invitation to all.

ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, CATHOLIC.—Rev. A. HILGEBRAND, Pastor. On Sunday Mass at 8 and 10:30 a. m. Every second and fourth Sunday German sermon after the 9 o'clock mass. At all other masses English sermons. Sunday school at 2:30 p. m. Vespers, epistolical subjects and Benediction at 7:30 p. m.

METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH.—Rev. Roy GIVENS, Pastor. Morning service at 11; Sunday School at 12:15. Evening service at 7:30. Epworth League meeting Sunday evening at 8:30. Prayer Meeting Thursday evening at 6:30. Strangers cordially invited.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.—Rev. O. W. GIBSON, Pastor. Services at 11 a. m. and 7:30 p. m. Sabbath School at 10 a. m. Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor meets every Sunday evening at 6:30. Wednesday evening prayer meeting at 7:30. Seats free.

EVANGELICAL CHURCH—GERMAN.—Adv. Knapp, Pastor. Teaching services every alternate Sunday at 11 a. m. and 7:30 p. m. Sabbath school every Sunday at 10 a. m. John Harrisburg, Sup't. Weekly Prayer Meeting every Wednesday evening at 7:30 p. m.

UNITED BRETHREN CHURCH.—Rev. R. MILLER, pastor. Services first and third Sunday in each month at Oregon City, at 11 a. m. Second Sunday at Mountain Home at 11 a. m. Fourth Sunday at Hartney school house at 11 a. m. Prayer meeting Oregon City, Wednesday evening. Sunday school, 10 a. m.

Society Directory.

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 Meets at Court House on second Monday in each month.
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 Meets every Thursday evening at 7:30 o'clock p. m. in the Odd Fellows Hall, Main street. Members of the Order are invited to attend.
 By order of W. A. Molaison, N. G. Thos. Ryan, Secretary.

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 Meets first and third Monday in each month, at Straight's Hall. Visiting brethren welcome.
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 Meets every second and fourth Friday evening of each month in Odd Fellows' building. All sojourning brethren cordially invited to attend.
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