

# The Hope Diamond Mystery—by May Yohe

## (Lady Francis Hope)

"The Last Chapters of My Life, in Which I Escape, I Hope and Believe, from the 'Unlucky' Gem and All

By May Yohe (Lady Francis Hope)

CHAPTER XVII.

(Continued from Last Sunday)

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TODAY I come to the last of the chapters of the story I have chronicled in these pages from week to week—the last chapter I can write, for it will bring me up to the present—up to a little cottage in Southern California, with the roses growing just outside my front door and with happiness within.

But I did not arrive at this modest, humble haven of rest without many a dramatic climax in the "last act" of the life drama which, I verily believe, the sinister Hope Diamond helped to weave for me.

Last week I told of leaving Captain Strong in Paris while I went on to London and found new successes there in my efforts to gather together money to replace that which he had squandered in Buenos Aires. I remained alone in London and through my tour of the provinces.

At the end of my tour of the provinces I returned to America. Here I found little difficulty in procuring an engagement. I preferred to play "on the road" to remaining in New York, so after a short stay in town I went with my company on tour. My health and my voice had come back to me, and I was very successful. Every place I played the people were kind to me and came in great audiences. I was saving money. I did not send quite so much to Captain Strong, because I began to realize that I was far better off, mentally and physically, by not seeing him.

While we were in the West I met a very rich man, a bachelor, who fell in love with me. He was a splendid man, one of the Western type I like so well, and his love for me was unselfish and sincere. He followed the company from town to town, always solicitous for me and urging me to follow the dictates of my better judgment, obtain a divorce from Strong and marry him.

Some telegraphic wave must have carried warning of that conclusion to the Captain, who was having such a gay time in those Parisian haunts which were flourishing in those days just as they flourish now—those same haunts of which we all have read so much quite recently in connection with the death of the beautiful motion picture star whose life was sacrificed to them. My company had booked a tour of Canada, and we began just at that time our trek eastward, arrangements having been made for us to play in Montreal. One day during the week the telephone in my apartment rang. Something gripped at my heart while the little bell still tinkled. My hands were shaking when I lifted the receiver. I knew, just as well as if someone had told me, I would hear my husband's voice at the other end of the wire. Sure enough, there it was—the same old soft, taunting, merry "Hello, old girl—how's everything?"

When he first came to the hotel in Montreal I would not see him. I had quite a struggle with myself, but my better judgment prevailed.

I told him quite coldly that I never wanted to see him again. I really was bitter. "I just had you stay here, Bradlee, so I could tell you myself I am suing for divorce. Good-by."

I heard no more of him for three days. Then one evening after the show, just after I had gone to my rooms, he telephoned me again. I was about to hang up when I heard a sound that took all the strength out of me. It was the bark—coming to me over the wire—of a little French bulldog I had had in the old days, and which I had left with Captain Strong after he had stolen my jewelry. Old Mrs. Strong liked the little dog, and I never had had the heart to take it away from her. But often I longed for it. Strong said he wanted to bring Suzette up to me, "that you and she may have a visit." I couldn't resist.

My apartments in the hotel connected with those of Dorothy Morton, the prima donna, who has just inherited several millions of dollars from a kindly old gentleman who adopted her late in his life. Miss Morton was one of the members of my company. I told her Captain Strong was coming up, and closed the door between our apartments. When the Captain came up I grabbed—not him, but Suzette. We had quite a romp on the floor. Meantime the Captain had closed the hall door. I heard its lock click, but thought nothing of it.

He had on his overcoat, and asked me, after a moment, if he might take his coat off. "Have to be very formal now, you know, since you are getting a divorce," he said, with a little smile. I consented, of course. I wanted him to stay a while, because I wanted to continue my romp with Suzette. When he pulled off his overcoat his under coat came off with it—as if by accident. He apologized quickly, and added, "I'm warm anyway, Maysie—do you care if I leave it off?"

I didn't care, and told him to be comfortable. After a moment or two he suggested we have a drink. I told him I cared for nothing, but that he might order something up for himself if he wished. He telephoned downstairs and ordered a brandy and soda.

It was several moments before the bell-boy came with the drink. Captain Strong just sat on the edge of a chair, apparently very much amused by the spectacle of me squatting and rolling on the floor, with Suzette piling all over me. My hair came down and my negligee became rumpled. Suzette was as happy as I at the reunion, and leaped and pawed all over me.

There was a knock at the door. It was the bellboy with the drink. Strong looked at me inquiringly. I nodded. "You get it," I said.

The servant came in, proffering his tray. The Captain took the two glasses and the bottle. Then to the bellboy he said:

"I want you to remember, young man, that when you came to the door it was locked; that I am alone with my wife behind it, and that I am not completely dressed." Then he waved his hand suggestively at me sitting on the floor, with my hair about my face and my negligee flowing and rumpled.

The bellboy smiled—I think the creature winked—and left us. Captain Strong turned to me and said:

"There goes your divorce, Maysie, all knocked into a cocked hat!"

And certainly it was!

Did I upbraid him? Did I stand up to him and tell him a few of the many different kinds of a scoundrel he was?

No, I did not. His audacity and suavity captivated me all over again. There was

It Has Meant for Me and Has Done to Me"



May Yohe on Her Chicken Farm in California.

"From the pampered, petted wife of one of the proudest peers of England to scrubwoman! What a descent from those old days when I was the petted idol of the stage, when money meant nothing to me except a thing to spend for my pleasure! Fortunately I have a sense of humor, and often as I knelt upon the floor rubbing off their dirt with the soapy brush, my pail beside me, I would picture myself in the Hope coronet, my jewels about me, and the sinister Blue Diamond hanging from my neck!"



On the Left a Photograph of Miss Yohe in the Hope Jewels, and on the Right a Photograph of Her Going to Work as a Scrubwoman Beside One of the Trucks of the Place Where She Was Employed.

the old smiling, cruel but gentle, masterful but affectionate, unconquerable Putnam Bradlee Strong, squire of dames and cavalier of the world, standing up like a bad boy who had stumped his teacher, waiting to be forgiven. And I forgave him and took him back—again!

My tour of Canada was spoiled, of course. The Canadians would have nothing to do with Captain Strong nor with me so long as he was along. We landed back New York broke again. After a few weeks of looking around for a new engagement I was put out of my hotel because I couldn't pay my bill.

I borrowed a few dollars here and there, begged the hotel management to let me have enough of my clothes to make a living, and went to London—took Captain Strong with me. London always had been my Mecca. Every time I have come, apparently, to the end of my rope London has risen to me and held out the hand of generous welcome. In a few weeks I had procured another engagement there—this time a humble one in a music hall, but good enough to pay my hotel bill in New

York and retrieve my wardrobe and to provide me with a little pocket money. Those were hard days for Captain Strong.

He became restless. He thought, perhaps, he could sooner succeed in attaching himself to some woman of means who would provide for his luxurious tastes if I were out of the country. He managed to have a friend in New York send me a bogus cablegram, ostensibly signed by one of the widely known theatrical agents here, offering me an immediate engagement at a liberal salary. I cancelled my engagement in London and took the first boat for New York, eager and happy in my expectations.

When I arrived the cruel hoax was made plain to me. The firm whose name had appeared at the bottom of the cablegram assured me they had not signed it and that they had nothing they could offer me.

Desperate, I went to Mr. Abe Hummel, the noted theatrical lawyer of those days, who had been my attorney in several theatrical affairs. Mr. Hummel later went to the penitentiary, but he was good to me, and lent me \$5,000.

Many a time since that day, when I have knelt by my bedside to say the prayer I have never missed reciting at bedtime since it was first taught me by my mother, I have thanked God that I was able to repay that generous loan of \$5,000 to Mr. Hummel at a time when he needed it—when the prison bars were just about to close on him. It took nearly all I had to do it, but I did not even hesitate long enough for him to ask it of me.

I went to Mr. Hammerstein, then managing many theatrical companies, and Mr. Hammerstein found a place for me. Again Captain Strong came over to join me, bringing his sweet, winning smile—and nothing else. He explained his bogus cable by saying, "Oh, I knew you'd strike better luck over here if you'd only come and try it, so I fixed up the cablegram really for your benefit."

At Mr. Hammerstein's suggestion I fixed up a vaudeville act in which Captain Strong was to play my leading man. The Captain consented readily—it was a new emotion to him. But he was a poor actor. He could pose on the drawing-room floor, but his

poses didn't "get over" the footlights. The venture was a failure, and we returned to New York and to the little flat we had hired here for mother and the rest of us.

I had \$3,000 left of the money Mr. Hummel had loaned me, but for once in my life I employed a bit of wisdom. I did not let Captain Strong know I had this nest egg. The quiet life of the flat, with home-cooked ham and eggs and cold luncheons, irked him. One day he telephoned me to bring mother and meet him downtown for lunch—a friend was going to be the host, he explained. We went, but he did not show up. When we returned to the flat we found Captain Strong had been there, had sent my Japanese maid Yori, who still remained with me, out on an errand, and had stripped the place of every one of his belongings—and some that were mine—and had skipped once more.

I did not grieve this time. I was becoming philosophical. Always my luck was better when freed of him. New engagements offered themselves and I travelled the West, making huge salaries, and even toured the Continent. I sang in French and German quite as well as in English.

On this tour I made a great deal of money. Somehow I began to see the difference between the men I met—the real, world-experienced men—and Bradlee. Many men made love to me, and I began to realize, too, what a difference there was between their love and his. I determined again to divorce Strong and free myself of him forever, and this time my resolve was final.

I returned to America and procured my divorce in Oregon City. Then I went abroad after a season of stage success in California. I played again through England and Scotland and accepted the offer of an engagement in South Africa. There I met Captain John Smuts, a cousin of the famous Boer General, Jan Smuts. It was a swift courtship on his part—a speedy realization upon mine that here at last was the man set apart for me. We were married in great state, with all the officials of Boerland in attendance.

Captain Smuts was poor. He had only his income as an officer, and now that he was invalided he had only his pension.

He tried many ventures, none very successful financially. A friend suggested that if he could get to America he might be able to get back into the service through a "back door" method here. At once he was eager to try it. Travelling was difficult in those days, with all the passenger ships taken for war purposes. It took us twelve months of constant travelling, leaving boats here and waiting for passport visas there, to reach Vancouver. From there we went to Seattle, where there was a British recruiting mission.

Captain Smuts presented himself and was royally received. But when he had been examined his hopes were dashed to the ground. They told him he never could join the army again.

We were "broke." It was no new experience for me, but my husband was not strong and was in a strange country. I kept him in Seattle and went to San Francisco to seek engagements. For a time I was successful. I might have gone East and obtained better opportunities, but I would not leave Captain Smuts, who needed the Western climate.

One day I received a letter from my husband telling me he had found his way to "do his bit." The Mayor of Seattle issued a proclamation calling upon citizens to take their places in the shipyards, that ships might be hurried along for transport. Captain Smuts went to the shipyard foreman and asked for a job. He was

inexperienced, so he was taken on as a laborer. I gave two more concerts, made a thousand dollars and hurried back home.

We settled down then to a homey life. Captain Smuts came home to me each evening, very dirty and tired, and found a hot dinner waiting for him—cooked by May Yohe, of "Little Christopher" fame, who once had owned the Hope Diamond and who might have been a duchess! And they were good dinners—and he was enthusiastic about them.

He dislocated his arm one day, and before he had fully recovered was stricken with influenza. He was ill for twelve weeks, and our savings disappeared.

What was I to do? I could not earn money on the stage and remain in Seattle taking care of my sick husband.

I put on a gingham dress and a cotton apron, tied my hair in a knot on top of my head, wrapped an old shawl about me and went to the shipyards. "Please let me help a bit," I said, "even if I have to scrub the office floors."

They asked me who I was, and I told them "Mrs. Smuts." The name meant nothing to them. They asked me if I were experienced with the mop. Once I had played the part of a slavey in a comic opera, and during one of my songs waved a mop back and forth over the stage floor. So I said I was an adept scrubwoman.

I was told to report for duty at 7 o'clock that evening—night shift—and that I was to be the office janitress at \$18 a week.

So every night for many long weeks I scrubbed the office floors. Quite often I would hum while I worked, and sometimes, if the office were quiet, I would sing snatches of my old songs—especially the one which helped me to become famous, "Honey, Mah Honey."

Mr. Erickson was the office manager and an executive. As he reads these lines perhaps he will remember one midnight, while he nibbled at a bit of lunch on his desk, too busy to go out to a restaurant, stopping to listen to the song his janitress was singing. He called me over to his desk.

"What is that you are singing?" he asked me.

"Oh, that?" I replied. "Just a song I heard May Yohe sing in London once." Many times while I swung that mop I wondered what these men about me would say if they knew their janitress was May Yohe, who had been Lady Francis Hope, and whose throat, now covered with grime and perspiration, had glistened white behind the great Hope Diamond and countless other gems men liked to hang upon it—the same May Yohe who might have become a duchess!

My husband went back to work after a while, and although he was very angry with me I kept on doing the scrubbing. Then the armistice was signed and we moved to Los Angeles, where the wondrous climate is best for his health. He is in business now, a modest little business, which just supports our little bugalow. I am up early in the mornings cooking breakfast while my husband stirs about in the garden. While he is at his little business I am sweeping and dusting and chatting with the neighbors about our chickens. Saturday nights we go to the movies and Sundays we take long walks, hand in hand, out along the boulevards—and Mrs. John Smuts, housewife, is happier than May Yohe ever was, and prouder of the good dinners she cooks than she would have been sitting at the head of the banquet table at Newcastle, with a hundred servants to call her "Your Grace."

(The End.)