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A TERRIBLE MISTAKE.

From Happy Hours.

CHAPTER I.

Selford Court was a beautiful place, savoring of ancient ownership, and very proud was Mr. Selford of his handsome country house. Nor did he fail, on every available occasion, to impress on his son Roger, his duty of keeping up the family residence in the same style, when, as years passed on, he should succeed his father.

Roger was a high spirited, generous-hearted lad of fifteen, on whom all the neighborhood looked kindly; but, unfortunately, he spent his allowance a little too freely, a grave fault in the eyes of Mr. Selford.

One evening, when the latter was in an unusually genial humor, he called his son into his study, saying that he had a secret to tell him.

"I've often thought, Roger," began he, "that I would show you a thing I got in India twenty years ago, and which no one, but my bankers and my lawyers know that I possess. I am going to remove it from my safe, and deposit it with my bankers till you marry, when I hope to see it adorn your bride upon her wedding day. And Indian Prince bestowed it on me in a fit of gratitude, as he was pleased to say that I saved his life during a tiger hunt. It is a rare jewel, my boy, or rather, a collection of gems, formed into a costly ornament, and I shall have the pleasure of showing it to you in a minute or two. But mind, not a word to any one of this, or we might have the house robbed."

Roger easily promised silence, and his father, going to a piece of furniture on one side of the room, which had the appearance of a bookcase, and which was, in reality, a safe, unlocked it, and brought out a casket, which he opened disclosing a magnificent ornament, glittering with precious stones.

"Oh, father!" cried the boy, breathlessly, "do let me have it in my hands for a moment!"

"Yes, to be sure! Have a good look at it before I put it back again."

"Yes, to be sure! Have a good look at it before I put it back again. And guess the worth of it, Roger! I had it valued once."

"Two or three hundred pounds, perhaps, father," said the lad, absorbed in admiration of the jewels, which he turned on every side, in order to catch the light emitted from the brilliants, set among sapphire and rubies.

"Hundreds!" rejoined Mr. Selford, with a triumphant laugh, "it is worth four or five thousand pounds! It is a fortune itself!"

A good deal of talk followed after this, about the circumstances which had led Mr. Selford to become possessed of the gems, Roger seeming much absorbed and lost in wonder at their beauty.

A sudden knock at the door was followed by the entrance of the butler, Biggs, and Mr. Selford hastily took the jewel from Roger, concealing it from view as the man entered.

"Mr. Hinds is waiting to see you, sir," said the servant.

"On, ah, yes! the saddler. Tell him to wait a few moments, Biggs."

"He has to catch a train, if you please, sir," said Biggs.

"Then I will come at once. Go and say so."

"Very well, sir." And the man retired.

"Stay here, Roger. Mind that you do not leave the room till I return," said his father, hastily. "I will leave the jewel on the table."

"Shall I put it in the case, father?"

"No, I'll fit it in when I return," answered Mr. Selford, opening a drawer in haste, in which he had some measurements he wished to give the saddler; Roger, meanwhile getting up, and going over to the fire-place, where he stood, musing on the joys his father must have had in India; until, having despatched his business with Hinds, Mr. Selford re-entered the study.

"You have not left the room, I hope, Roger?" said the latter, anxiously.

"Not for an instant, father: and no one has been in. Oh, the jewel is all right; I would not even look at it again, much as I wished to do so, for I was afraid I might let it fall, or that it might slip off the polished table if I moved the cloth you had thrown over it."

"That's right, Roger; and now we will lock it securely into the safe, till it is removed to still more reliable quarters. I would not have left it unsecured, even with you here to guard it, but that I feared poor Hinds would miss his train; and the case is small, and there is a knack in making the ornament fit into it."

All this time Mr. Selford was uttering these remarks he was fidgeting at his watch chain, which had got hitched up by a small gold key which hung to the chain, and he had but just succeeded in disentangling it.

"How tiresome! but I have done it at last!" exclaimed he, as the small key resumed its proper place on the chain. "Now, let me look up this precious bauble!"

Carefully he removed the cloth which he had thrown over it before the butler's entrance, but its sparkling beauty did not meet his eye, for, in fact, it was no longer there.

"Why, where is it, Roger?" exclaimed he, casting a hurried glance on the carpeted floor.

"It must be there, father!" cried Roger, not in any alarm, for he knew he had not moved from the rug since his father's absence from the room, and that no one had entered.

"But it is not here," gasped Mr. Selford. "See," [shaking the cloth] "it is not here!"

"Then it must have slid on to the floor," remarked Roger.

"In that case we should easily discover it, and it would show clearly on this dark carpet," exclaimed Mr. Selford.

"Of course it would. Where can it be, father? But don't be uneasy, it cannot have got out of the room."

"Not without hands, certainly," said his father, who had turned pale and was decidedly uneasy.

"No one has come into the room—of that I am certain," insisted Roger.

"But you perceive that it is no where I left it. Here is the case"—pushing it aside—"but where is the jewel?"

"I never really moved, father—never went near the table. You went to the drawer—is it not in there among your papers?"

"Most certainly not! I should not have put it in the drawer," said Mr. Selford, hurriedly. "Still, I will turn out my papers." And he suited the action to the word.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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