

Henty George Alfred

Dorothy's Double. Volume 2

of 3



George Henty

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Содержание

CHAPTER IX	5
CHAPTER X	14
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	20

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CHAPTER IX

Just before twelve o'clock on the following day Mr. Hawtrey's carriage drew up at Charles Levine's office. In the waiting room they found Danvers, who had arrived shortly before them.

'Thank you for coming,' Mr. Hawtrey said, as he shook hands with him; 'I think I am rather afraid of Levine by himself. Of course I know that he is the best adviser one can have in a business of this sort, but that way he has of lifting his eyebrows makes me nervous. I feel as David Copperfield did with that man-servant of Steerforth's; he thought him very young indeed. It does not make me feel young, but rather that he is considering me to be an old fool. I don't suppose he means exactly that, but that is the impression I get from those eyebrows of his.'

'I am sure he does not mean that, Mr. Hawtrey,' Danvers laughed, 'though it may be that the action is expressive of a passing doubt in his mind, or rather of his perceiving some point that is unfavourable to the cause he is retained to defend. I hope you have come here to say that you agree with our view in the matter.'

'You will hear presently, Danvers. I came to that conclusion yesterday, but the position is somewhat changed.'

At this moment the door opened, and a clerk asked them to follow him, as Mr. Levine was now disengaged.

'This is your client – my daughter Dorothy,' Mr. Hawtrey said, as he introduced her to the lawyer; 'this is Mr. Singleton, an old friend and neighbour of ours.'

Mr. Levine shook hands with Dorothy, looking at her scrutinisingly as he did so; she looked as frankly at him.

'So you thought I was guilty, Mr. Levine?'

'I am sure that your father will do me the justice to say that I said nothing that could in any way be construed into such an opinion, Miss Hawtrey,' he replied, courteously.

'Perhaps not, but you thought so all the same. I am learning to be a thought reader. I saw that, and also I think that a slight feeling of doubt came into your mind as you shook hands.'

'I must be careful, I see,' he said, smiling; 'however, without either admitting or denying anything, I may say that I am glad that Mr. Hawtrey brought you with him.'

'And now, Mr. Levine,' Mr. Hawtrey said, 'I will tell you what we have come about. Yesterday we had quite made up our minds to take your advice, although my daughter assented to it only with the greatest reluctance. A fresh complication has occurred which I will leave Mr. Singleton to tell for himself.'

Mr. Levine took up a pen and prepared to take notes, as Mr. Singleton began the story with his conversation with Dorothy at Mrs. Dean's. At the point when Dorothy called her father, Mr. Levine interposed.

'Pardon me for interrupting you, but it is very important that I should understand the position exactly before you go farther. Whatever this matter may be of which you are about to tell me, do I understand that it was one entirely between Miss Hawtrey and yourself?'

'Entirely.'

'It was one of which you never intended to have spoken, and of which Miss Hawtrey felt perfectly confident that under no circumstances whatever would you have revealed it?'

'Certainly, I have known her from a child, and nothing whatever would have induced me to have mentioned it to any one, and Miss Hawtrey had, I am certain, an absolute confidence that I would not do so.'

'It was then, therefore, a wholly spontaneous action on the part of Miss Hawtrey in summoning her father to her side, and asking him to take you home with him.'

'Entirely so; I was myself absolutely bewildered at what appeared to me her determination to make her father acquainted with the particulars of the painful scenes of which I will now tell you.'

And he then related the particulars of the interview in his chambers.

'At the time,' he concluded, 'no doubt whatever entered my mind, that the person who called upon me was Miss Hawtrey. Thinking it over now, and having an absolute confidence in her, I see that I may have been mistaken; she was veiled when she entered, and in all the years I have known Miss Hawtrey I have never seen her wear a veil. A veil certainly alters the appearance of a face, and for an instant when she entered I did not recognise her, but the likeness must be very great, for my hesitation was only momentary. Afterwards she had a handkerchief up to her face during the greater part of the interview, and during the whole time she spoke in a low voice broken by sobs. No doubt there must be some similarity between the voices, but heard in that way it was so different from her usual outspoken tones, that I should be sorry to be called upon to swear whether at other times it would resemble her voice or not.'

'I may add, Mr. Levine,' Mr. Hawtrey said, when he had finished, 'that I have this morning received a bill from Allerton's, where my daughter usually gets things, for four silk dresses and two mantles which were ordered on the same day and at about the same hour at which the jewels were stolen and this interview with Mr. Singleton took place. I drove down there after breakfast, and found that the goods were taken out and placed in a cab that was waiting at the door, my daughter saying that she wished to take them at once to her dressmaker. I also called in at Gilliat's, and found that there, as well as at Allerton's, the woman was veiled when she gave the orders.'

Mr. Levine had listened with close attention to Mr. Singleton, glancing keenly at times towards Dorothy, who was sitting with her side-face to him, absorbed in the repetition of the story.

When Mr. Hawtrey ceased speaking, he was silent for a minute, and then said —

'In the first place, Miss Hawtrey, I have to make an apology to you. You were right. I see so much of the bad side of human nature that I own that, until I saw you, I did not entertain a shadow of a doubt that you, driven by some pressure, had resorted to this desperate expedient of raising money. The whole story appeared to be consistent only with your guilt, providing that you were possessed of an extraordinary amount of self-possession and audacity. I admit and apologise for the mistake, now that I hear the same thing has been done in two other cases, and that within an hour or two of the first; it is to me conclusive that your father's theory is the correct one, and that you were personated by some clever woman who must bear an extraordinary likeness to you. That a young lady of your age, driven into a corner, should commit a barefaced robbery is a matter that my experience has taught me to believe to be very possible, but that she should a few minutes afterwards proceed to raise money from a friend, and still more, to commit the petty crime of swindling a tradesman of four silk dresses, or rather the materials, of the value perhaps of thirty or forty pounds, seems to me incredible. For once I have been entirely at fault.'

'Now as to paying this money for the jewels, Mr. Levine,' Mr. Hawtrey said, 'do you still advise it?'

'I must think that over. It is an extremely difficult matter on which to give an opinion, and I shall be glad, in the first place, to have Mr. Danvers' opinion about it. Perhaps he will be good enough to come and see you after we have talked it over; but I will not give a final opinion until I have turned it over in my mind for a day or two. Perhaps I may ask you to come and see me again.'

Danvers went out to the carriage with them. 'I congratulate you most heartily, Miss Hawtrey,' he said. 'There is no doubt that this will immensely strengthen your position. It has had, at any rate,

a great effect on the mind of Levine. It is not often he has to own that his first impressions are entirely erroneous. I will come round this evening if you will be at home.'

'We will be at home, Danvers,' Mr. Hawtrey said, 'and I particularly want to see you about another matter. Come to dinner. Half-past seven. Can you come too, Singleton?' he went on as the carriage drove off. 'You are in the thick of it now, and are indeed one of the parties interested, for of course I shall see that you are not a loser by your intended kindness to Dorothy.'

'If I hear any nonsense of that sort,' Mr. Singleton said, hotly, 'I will get out of the carriage at once and have nothing more to do with the affair. Dorothy is my god-daughter, and if I choose to give her one thousand or ten I have a perfect right to do so. So let us hear no more about it.'

Mr. Hawtrey shook his old friend warmly by the hand. 'You always were an obstinate fellow,' he said 'and I suppose I must let you have your own way. Dorothy, I think I will get out at the top of St. James's Street, and if Ned Hampton is not in leave my card with a line, asking him to join us at dinner. He has worked most nobly for us, Singleton, as I told you last night, and ought certainly to be told of this new development. It will make us an odd number, for my cousin, Mary Daintree, has – I was going to remark I am glad to say, but I suppose I oughtn't – not yet recovered from the shock given her by Dorothy breaking off her engagement, and is keeping to her bed. However, it does not matter about there being an odd number.'

'Of course you can ask Captain Hampton if you like, father,' Dorothy said, coldly, 'but at any rate for my part I would rather that he did not meddle any more in my affairs.'

'Hulloa! hulloa!' Mr. Singleton exclaimed, 'what is in the wind now, Dorothy? I thought you and Ned Hampton were sworn friends, and next to yourself, Ned has always stood very high in my regard. A nicer lad than he was I have not come across; I only wish he was master of the old place down there instead of his brother, who is by no means a popular character in the county; although, perhaps, that is his wife's fault rather than his own. What have you been quarrelling with him about? I should have thought that for a young fellow, after being six years from England, to give up everything for a month, and spend it in your service, was in itself a strong claim to your regard.'

'There has been no quarrel between Captain Hampton and myself,' Dorothy said, as coldly as before. 'I do not say that it was not kind of him to take the pains he did about my affairs; but he acknowledged that he had doubted me, and after that I do not wish him to trouble himself any further in the matter.'

'What nonsense, Dorothy,' her father said, warmly. 'Who could have helped doubting you under the circumstances? Why, without half the excuse, even I was inclined to doubt you for a moment. Levine doubted you; Danvers, though he has not said as much, no doubt took the same view; and even Singleton here, when he gave you, as he believed, that money, thought that you had got into some horrible scrape. Singleton could not disbelieve the evidence of his eyes, and you are not angry with him for it. Why should you be so with Hampton, who also believed the evidence of his eyes?'

'What was that, if I may ask?' Mr. Singleton said. 'I have heard nothing about that, and I am quite sure that Ned Hampton would not have doubted Dorothy without what he believed to be very strong evidence.'

'Well, Singleton, I will tell you, though I should not tell either Levine or Danvers, for it is undoubtedly the strongest piece of evidence against Dorothy. He went up to Islington late in the afternoon of the day when all this took place, to see if he could light upon that scoundrel Truscott, and he saw Truscott in close confabulation in a quiet street with the woman who came to your chambers, and whom he, like you, of course, took to be Dorothy. At that time neither he nor any one else knew of the jewel robbery, but naturally it struck him, as, of course, it would have struck every one, that Dorothy had got into some scrape, and that she had met that man to endeavour to persuade or bribe him to give up the letters, or, at any rate, to move, and so escape from the search we were making for him. Ned went out of town at once, and came back just about the time

we heard of the jewel robbery. By that time he had, on thinking it over, concluded that his first idea was altogether erroneous, and when, at my wits' end, I told him of the jewel affair, he said at once it was absolutely impossible that Dorothy could have done such a thing, and that indeed it seemed to him a confirmation of the theory he had formed that some adventuress having a singular likeness to Dorothy was personating her. The idea had never occurred to me, and I was delighted on finding a possible explanation of what seemed to me a blank and absolute mystery. I consider that Dorothy is even more indebted to him for that suggestion than for the pains he took in trying to discover Truscott.'

'I certainly think you are wrong, Dorothy,' Mr. Singleton said, gravely, seeing that the girl listened with cold indifference to her father's explanation. 'He did no more than I did, namely, believe the evidence of his eyes, and on that evidence both of us were forced to believe that you had got into a scrape of some sort, and were under the thumb of a rascal.'

'I cannot argue about it, Mr. Singleton. I only know that I believed Captain Hampton would trust me implicitly, as I should have trusted him, and it is a great disappointment to me to find that I was mistaken. I do not defend myself; I admit that it may be silly and wrong on my part. I only say that I am disappointed in Captain Hampton, and that I would much rather he did not interfere in any way in my affairs.'

Mr. Hawtrey shrugged his shoulders. Mr. Singleton lifted his eyebrows slightly and then glanced with a furtive smile, which it was well that Dorothy did not detect, at her father, who looked somewhat surprised at this unexpected demonstration.

'At any rate, Dorothy,' the latter said, 'I must ask him to dinner; there will be no occasion for him to interfere farther in the matter, so far as I can see, and I should think that after your manner to him he will not be inclined to do so; still, it is impossible, after the pains he has taken in the matter, not to acquaint him with what has occurred here. We are at the top of St. James's Street,' and he pulled the check string. 'I suppose you will get out here too, Singleton?'

'Certainly, it is my lunch time; I will walk round with you to Ned Hampton's, and you had better lunch with me at the Travellers'. I will take him round there too, if we find him in.'

'Tell James we shall be five to dinner, Dorothy, as soon as you get back.'

As the carriage drove away Mr. Singleton indulged in a quiet laugh.

'What is it, Singleton? I could not make out that glance you gave me in the carriage. I own I see nothing at all laughable in it; to my mind this fancy of Dorothy's is at once utterly unreasonable and confoundedly annoying, and is, I may say, altogether unlike her.'

'My dear Hawtrey, I would ask you a question. Has it ever entered your mind that you would like Ned Hampton as a son-in-law?'

'As a son-in-law!' Mr. Hawtrey repeated in astonishment. 'What do you mean, Singleton? No such idea ever occurred to me – how should it? There was a boy and girl friendship of a certain kind between them before he went away, but at that time Dorothy was a mere child of twelve years old, and of course no idea about her future marriage to him or any one else had entered my mind. When he came home the other day she was on the verge of being engaged to Halliburn, and was so engaged a week later. So again the idea could not have occurred to me. He is the son of an old friend and was constantly in and out of our house as a boy, and I have a very great regard and liking for him, but I certainly should not regard him as a very eligible match for Dorothy.'

'I should think, Hawtrey, you have had enough of eligible marriages,' Mr. Singleton said, sarcastically, 'and I should think Dorothy has, too. Next time I hope her heart will have something to say in the matter. I don't see why Ned Hampton should not be eligible. He is a younger son 'tis true, and has, I believe, only about four hundred a year in addition to his pay. Dorothy has, I know, some twenty thousand pounds from her mother's settlements, and some land that brings in about two hundred more, and she will some day have what you can leave her besides, which, as you have told me, would be something like fifteen thousand more; so with her money and his, it would come

some day to not very far short of two thousand a year. As I told you, I have put her down in my will for five thousand. I should have put her down for more had I thought she wanted it, but as it seemed likely that she would make a good match, I did not think it would be of any use to leave her more. I have put him down for a like sum, and certainly if those two were to come together, I should considerably increase it. I have no children of my own. My relations, as far as I know of them, are well-to-do people, and therefore I am perfectly free to do what I like with my money and estate. That being so, I think you may dismiss from your mind any idea that Dorothy is likely to come to poverty if she marries Ned Hampton.'

'Well, old friend, that certainly alters the case. However, as you see, there is no probability whatever of the young people taking that view of the case. Ned Hampton has always been like an elder brother or, if you like, a favourite cousin of Dorothy's, and since he came home I have never seen the slightest change in his manner towards her. As to her, you have just heard what she has said.'

'I know nothing of his ideas on the subject, Hawtrey, but as Dorothy was and is, so far as he knows, engaged to the Earl of Halliburn, Ned, whatever he might think, would scarcely embark in a flirtation with her. As to Dorothy, as you say, she showed pretty clearly the state of her mind just now.'

'Yes, she has evidently taken a strong prejudice against him, Singleton. It is a pity, too, for I like him exceedingly, and I don't know any one to whom personally I would more willingly entrust Dorothy's happiness.'

'I don't know,' Mr. Singleton remarked meditatively, 'why fathers should be so much more blind about their daughters than other people are. You don't suppose that if Dorothy had been quite indifferent as to Ned Hampton's opinion of her she would have been so exceedingly sore at his having doubted her. I do not say she loves him. I do not even suppose that she has the remotest idea of such a thing. I only say that she evidently attaches a very great weight to his good opinion, and is proportionately grieved at what she considers his want of confidence in herself.'

'She makes light of having broken off her engagement to Halliburn, but we know she must feel it a great deal more than she pretends to do. No girl in her position in society would break off such a match without feeling sore about it – however convinced she might be that it was the best thing to do – and in that temper the defection, as she considers it, of a faithful ally would naturally be keenly felt. Of course, there is nothing to do but to let the matter rest; only, please do not attempt to argue the point with her, but let her have her own way, without comment. She is far more likely to come round in time if left alone than if constantly put upon the defence. But, bless me! here we are at Waterloo Place, and have forgotten altogether the business in hand, which is to call at Ned Hampton's lodgings. Well, they are about half-way along Jermyn Street, so that we may as well turn up here. Now – to continue our conversation for another minute or two – I should say we had best put all this out of our minds for the present, and leave matters to right themselves. There are more urgent things to think of, for I am afraid, Hawtrey, there is a good deal of trouble ahead for her and for you, whatever course you may decide to take about Gilliat's matter. We who know and love Dorothy may be absolutely certain of her innocence in these matters, but you must remember that unless we can produce the woman, it will be uphill work indeed to get the world to see matters in the same light, if it comes to a trial and all the facts come out. On the other hand, if you compromise, it is morally certain these things will go on. You will be absolutely driven to fight one of these claims, and every claim you pay you will make it harder to resist the next, so that either way there is trouble, I am afraid great trouble, ahead, and the only way out of it that I can see is to find this man and woman, who may for aught I know at the present moment be on the other side of the Atlantic. There does not seem to be a shadow of a clue which we can follow up, and a wild-goose chase is a joke to it.'

'I agree with you entirely, Singleton. Of course, in an affair like this money is nothing, and I shall employ the best detectives I can get. Levine will be able to tell me of good men. If I find Ned Hampton in I will tell him the whole story at once, which will save explanations this evening.'

'You mean you will tell him while we are at lunch, Hawtrey, for it is past two o'clock now, and at my age one cannot afford to neglect the inner man in this way.'

They met Captain Hampton half way along the street.

'We were just coming for you, Ned,' Mr. Hawtrey said. 'Singleton wants you to come and lunch with him. He and I want to have a talk with you.'

'I have only just finished my lunch, but I am perfectly ready for the talk, Mr. Hawtrey.'

'Where were you going now?'

'I think I was principally going to smoke a cigar. I have been in all the morning, and on a day like this one gets restless after a time.'

'Then you shall take a turn for twenty minutes, Ned. There is nothing more unpleasant than looking on at people eating, unless it is eating with people looking on; besides, we could not begin our talk now. What do you say, Hawtrey? Shall we join him, say, at the foot of the Duke of York's steps, turn in to St. James's Park and sit down, if we can find a bench free of nursemaids? as I daresay we shall, as they won't come out till later. At any rate, we don't want to be overheard, and we can never make sure of that in a club smoking-room.'

'That will suit me very well, Mr. Singleton, but don't hurry over your lunch; you will see me somewhere about when you are coming down the steps. I have just time to stroll down the Mall and back by Birdcage Walk.'

'Well, we will say in half-an-hour from the time you leave us.'

'This is another proof, Mr. Hawtrey, that our suspicion that Truscott is at the bottom of it all is well founded,' Captain Hampton said, when he had heard the story. 'It must have been somebody who was accurately acquainted with your affairs; some one who knew that Mr. Singleton was an intimate friend; so intimate that your daughter would be likely to go to him were she in any trouble, and that he would be likely to assist her.'

'It is certainly another link in the chain,' Mr. Hawtrey agreed.

'I would give a thousand pounds if we could lay our hands on the fellow,' Mr. Singleton exclaimed fiercely.

'But if we could find him, Singleton, we could not touch him; you and I, Ned, may be morally certain that he is at the bottom of all this, but we have not the remotest shadow of evidence on which a magistrate would grant a warrant for his arrest. If we found him, he would snap his fingers in our face.'

'You forget, Mr. Hawtrey,' said Ned, 'if we find him we are pretty sure of being able to find this woman. I do not say we are certain to find her, because we know nothing of their relations to each other; perhaps they are only united to carry out this piece of swindling. Truscott is shrewd enough to see that it would be better for them to part; perhaps they kept together until they went over to Hamburg, and sold the diamonds; then she might go over to Paris, and he to America, or they may have gone to any other two widely separated places in the world. If they have kept together, and are still in England, I should say they are most likely to be at present in some quiet and respectable lodgings at some large watering-place, where they pass as father and daughter. I quite agree with you in what you say that the fact of these two fresh robberies altogether alters the case, and that you can never calculate upon being free of annoyance, still I should say that you are safe for some little time. They ought to be satisfied with what they have got, and will naturally wait to see whether there is any stir made, and what comes of it, before repeating the same game. Have you seen Levine again?'

'Yes, we were there an hour and a half ago, and I am glad to say these last occurrences have completely changed his opinion of the case. We left him going into the matter with Danvers, who is coming to dine with us this evening, and will tell us what they think as to fighting Gilliat.'

'What does Halliburn think of it?' Captain Hampton asked, suddenly. 'After all, everything will depend, I should think, upon his opinion.'

'On that point, fortunately, we have not got to consult him, Ned – Dorothy has definitely broken off the engagement. As soon as we heard from Gilliat of the robbery, she declared that it was positively impossible that the matter should go on, and I quite agreed with her decision.'

Captain Hampton made no remark for a minute or two.

Mr. Hawtrey presently went on. 'I want you to come round to dinner too, Ned. There will only be Singleton and Danvers, and it will be a sort of family council.'

'Thank you, Mr. Hawtrey,' Captain Hampton replied, after a pause, 'I think I would rather not come. I have been unfortunate enough to offend Miss Hawtrey deeply already, and I don't think that my presence at such a council would be in any way agreeable to her, and that being so, I need hardly say that it would not be pleasant to me.'

'Tut, tut, lad, that is all nonsense. For a moment I was inclined to doubt her myself; those fellows' story seemed so terribly straight-forward that I was completely taken aback. Singleton let himself be led to believe that she had got into some terrible scrape, and how could you disbelieve your eyes more than he could? She will soon get over her little touchiness.'

'I rather doubt it, Mr. Hawtrey. I think it natural that she should feel very much hurt. Just at present my taking any part in the affair would, I feel sure, be very distasteful to her. But when you say to me, "Dorothy has quite got over her indignation and wants you to come and have a chat with her," I shall be delighted to come. In the meantime I would rather give no opinion whatever as to the matter, but I shall, nevertheless, work quietly in my own way and do my best to discover some clue as to the movements of this man. I have the great advantage of knowing him by sight, which no detective would do. I am certain I am not likely to make any mistake as to the woman. Please don't mention to Dorothy that I am taking any further part in the affair. Levine will, I should think, advise you to put the matter into the hands of detectives, and I shall be glad to know from time to time what their opinion is and whether they have gained any clue as to their whereabouts. I would suggest that you should get from Allerton two or three small pieces of each of the silks that were taken; should there be anything at all peculiar in colour or pattern, it might be an aid to the detectives.'

'You are right there, Ned,' Mr. Singleton said; 'an adventuress of that kind, having got hold of some handsome silks, would not be able to forego the pleasure of having them made up and showing off in them. Do you mean to pay Allerton, Hawtrey?'

'I gave him a cheque at once. I told him that this was one of several robberies that had been committed by some woman personating my daughter, but that it would be so unpleasant to go into the matter, and so difficult to find the thief, that I would rather pay the money at once. In addition to the patterns of the dresses I will get him to have some sketches made of the mantles. They will probably have some others like them, but if not they are sure to know the exact particulars of them. There may be some slight peculiarity about the fashion of the things that would help a detective.'

'I think you would do even better than that,' Captain Hampton said, 'if you got a dozen of your daughter's daguerreotypes; they would assist detectives much more than anything else in making inquiries; they would only have to show them to a waiter in any hotel where this woman stopped, and they could hardly fail to be recognised at once, for she would certainly attract attention wherever she went. Dorothy gave me one a few days after I came back, but as I should be very sorry to have that knocked about I should be glad if you would let me have another.'

'That is an excellent idea, Ned. I will order a couple of dozen of her photos this afternoon from Watson, who took the last she had done. Well, I am sorry you won't come and dine with us; though I don't know but that it is better for you to leave her to herself for a short time. I admit

that she has not quite got over it yet, but I expect that she will come round before long. Which way are you going?"

'I think I shall sit where I am for a bit, Mr. Hawtrey; it is very pleasant here in the shade, and I want to think over all that you have been saying. I must try and see what I had best do next.'

He got up, however, half an hour later with an impatient exclamation.

'What is the use of my wasting my time here? I was three weeks looking for the fellow before, and Slippen found him a few hours after taking the matter in hand. I will take his advice anyhow. He is more likely to have an idea as to what a fellow like this would do under the circumstances than I could have.'

'I have been doing nothing more about that case, Captain Hampton,' the detective said, when the caller was shown in by a boy who reminded him strongly of Jacob; 'I wrote to Mr. Hawtrey that the man had altogether disappeared, but that I would have the racecourses watched, and that if he turned up at any of them we would let him know. That is three weeks ago, and he certainly has not shown up at any racecourse, and my men have ascertained beyond much doubt, that none of his usual pals have seen or heard anything of him from the day he left his quarters at Islington. I am glad you have come, as I was going to write to Mr. Hawtrey, to ask if he considered it worth while keeping up the search. Certainly it seems to me that if a man like that, who has been a constant attendant at the races for the last twenty years, and makes his living out of them, doesn't go near them for three weeks, it must be because he has either gone away or is very ill, or has taken to some new life altogether.'

'That is just the opinion that I have formed, Mr. Slippen, and I wanted to ask your opinion about it. We have a very strong idea that there is a woman acting in concert with him, and between them they have victimised a friend of Mr. Hawtrey's out of a considerable sum of money. We may take it then for granted that they have means sufficient to live on for some little time, or to take them wherever they may want to go. I fancy myself that they must have left London; a man like that could hardly keep away from racecourses altogether; therefore I agree with you, that nothing but severe illness or absence can be the cause of his staying away from racecourses and from all his own intimates for three weeks.'

'That is just how I reasoned it, Captain Hampton; and now that you tell me that he has got hold of some money, I have not the least doubt that he has sloped.'

'Well, from your experience in such matters, Mr. Slippen, where do you think that a man like that would be likely to go?'

'There is no saying at all. He might go down to some quiet place in the country, but Lor' bless you, a man like that could never stand three weeks of it. It is very likely that if he is in funds and has got a clever woman with him they may have got themselves up and be staying at some swell hotel at one of the seaside places, or at Harrogate or Buxton, and be carrying on some little swindle there. Then again, after this job you say they have managed, they may think it best to make themselves scarce altogether, and may be at some foreign watering-place. A clever sharp can always make his living at those sort of places, especially with a woman to help him. I suppose she is young and pretty?'

Captain Hampton nodded.

'Bound to be,' the detective went on. 'Well, a sharp fellow with a girl like that, if she is shrewd and clever, can just turn over money at places of that kind. They are full of young fools, most of whom have got money in their pockets. Well then, again, they may have gone across the water somewhere – more likely the States than anywhere else; it is a big place for hiding in, and when a fellow has done a bit of clever sharpening here and knows that he is wanted, he somehow always makes for the States, just as naturally as a duck takes to water.'

'Have you agents who would be of any use at these places?'

'No, I will acknowledge frankly that I have not, Captain Hampton. It would be no use taking Mr. Hawtrey's money for a job of that sort; it is too big for me. If there was any one place to which you could track them I could send out a man there well enough. But I could not work either the Continent or the States. If you have got proof of a bad piece of swindling against this man, your best plan will be to go to Scotland Yard and get them to put a man at your service. The foreign police would not move a finger if I were to write to them, but they would be willing enough to move if Scotland Yard had the thing in hand.'

'Mr. Hawtrey has put himself in Charles Levine's hands, and in these matters he will have to act as he suggests; but I am taking the matter up on my own account. I have spent a good deal of time over it, and don't like to be beaten, and if you could have undertaken it, and it would have been at all within my means, I would have arranged with you. As it is, I shall come to you again for advice and assistance if I require them. I think you had better send in your account to Mr. Hawtrey for the work done so far, with a letter asking for instructions. He may like to have the racecourses watched for a bit longer. If you see him do not mention this talk with me. By the way, I found that boy you had, on my door-step a few days ago. He told me he had left you, and as he seemed a sharp little fellow I have taken him on to run errands and that sort of thing.'

'He is not a bad boy, as that sort of boy goes. They are all young scamps, but he took it into his head to be cheeky, and I had to kick him out. I am glad to hear he has not gone on the streets again. You will have to look pretty sharp after him, but you may find him useful, if, as you say, you are going to try to unearth this fellow we have been in search of.'

CHAPTER X

'We shall be only four at dinner, Dorothy,' Mr. Hawtrey said, when he returned. 'I could not get Hampton to come.'

'Engaged, I suppose,' Dorothy said indifferently.

'No, dear, he simply said that as he had had the misfortune to displease you – I think those were his very words – he thought it would be better to stay away. I could not say that I did not agree with him and so the matter dropped. Of course I am sorry, for I have always liked the lad. Naturally the interest he has shown in us in this trouble and the pains he has taken about it have quite renewed the old feeling. I have turned to him for advice and talked matters over with him almost as if he had been a son, and, of course, I shall miss him a good deal now – but it cannot be helped.'

'I am sure I don't want him to stay away from the house, father,' Dorothy said, in an aggrieved tone.

'I don't know whether you want it or not, Dorothy; but naturally that has been the effect. You do not suppose that a man who has been on so friendly a footing with us for the last twenty years is going to put up with being called Captain Hampton, and addressed as if he were a stranger, and treated with a sort of freezing politeness by a girl whom, almost from the day when he arrived in England, he has been giving up his time to assist. I think he is perfectly right to keep away from the house, and I think any man of spirit would do the same.'

'Did he say that he resented it, father?'

'Well, no, he didn't. He seemed to think that while it was reasonable that I, your father, should have had doubts, and that your old friend, Singleton, should have readily accepted the evidence of his senses and have believed that you had got into some sort of bad scrape, that you should feel hurt because he did so. Singleton and I both said that it was preposterous. However, he stuck to his own opinion just as you do to yours. However, there is an end of the matter. I am heartily sorry. I don't think one makes so many real friends as he has of late shown himself to be, that one can afford to throw even one away, especially just at a time like this. Well, it is of no use talking about it any more.'

Danvers' report of the consultation between himself and Charles Levine left matters pretty nearly as they were before. It was greatly desirable for the purpose of preventing any further personation that the jeweller's claim should be contested, but upon the other hand it was equally certain that it would be an extremely unpleasant thing for Mr. and Miss Hawtrey. The chances of obtaining a verdict were very slight, as they had merely an hypothesis to oppose to the direct evidence of the jeweller and his assistants. It was a case that the principals must decide for themselves. In case they were willing to meet the inevitable unpleasantness of a trial, it would be incumbent on them to use every possible effort to obtain some evidence in confirmation of their hypothesis. Scotland Yard should be communicated with and detectives set to work; a reward, say of 100*l.*, might be offered in the papers for information that would lead to the arrest of the female who had been personating Miss Hawtrey and in her name obtaining goods under false pretences, a description of the woman's appearance being given. Even if no evidence was forthcoming from the advertisement it would serve as a preparation for the trial, and the defence to the claim would not come as a surprise. Moreover, the appearance of the advertisement would deter the woman from attempting for some time to repeat her operations. Mr. Levine also recommended that a letter should be sent to all the shops where they dealt, to warn them that it was possible that a person very closely resembling Miss Hawtrey might attempt to obtain goods, and that everything ordered should be sent to the house, and not delivered personally; and it would be desirable, if possible, that they should be told that in future Miss Hawtrey, when giving an order, would give her visiting card, and that of Mr. Hawtrey; and that any person purporting to be her, and being unable when

asked to give her card, should be detained, and given in charge of the police. This, at least, was the line which they recommended should be adopted; but, of course, the matter would be further considered and gone into later on, if Mr. Hawtrey decided to contest the claim.

'Levine considers it one of the most difficult cases he has ever been engaged in,' said Danvers. 'He says frankly he does not think you have the remotest chance of getting a verdict, unless before the trial comes on you can lay your hand on this woman, and he suggests that you and he together should see Gilliat – who, of course, has no personal feeling in the matter, and would naturally be most averse to taking anything like hostile action against you – and inform him of the exact position of the case, and your desire that they should not send in their account to you for another three or four months. This would give at least six months before the trial would come on, and in that time, if ever, we ought to be able to lay our hands on this woman, and you would still have the option of paying, if before the case comes on you can obtain no evidence. Lastly, he says that, unpleasant as it is to contemplate the possibility of such a thing, it must not be forgotten that in the event of the trial coming on, and the verdict being an adverse one, it is quite upon the cards that if public opinion is strongly aroused on the subject, the Treasury may feel compelled to order a prosecution of Miss Hawtrey for perjury – if not for obtaining goods under false pretences – or possibly for theft.'

'Would it be possible to trace the jewels in any way?' Mr. Hawtrey asked, after a long pause.

'Quite possible, if they were pawned or sold to a jeweller in this country, but that is hardly likely to be the case. Very few jewellers would purchase such goods without making enquiries as to the vendor, and the same may be said of the class of pawnbrokers who would be in a position to advance so large a sum. It is much more probable that the tiaras were broken up an hour after they were stolen and the setting put in a melting pot and the diamonds taken over to Hamburg, and as they have not been advertised there would be little or no trouble in disposing of them to a diamond merchant there. Enquiries can be made in that direction, only we must obtain from Gilliat the technical description of the size, number, and weight of the gems.'

'Do I understand that your opinion completely agrees with that of Charles Levine, Danvers?'

'Precisely; those are the two courses, Mr. Hawtrey; and it is a matter entirely for you and Miss Hawtrey to decide upon. The easiest, the most pleasant, and, I may say, the cheapest – for costs will follow the verdict – would be to pay the money; the other course would involve immense trouble and annoyance, the payment of detectives, public scandal, and, I am afraid, an adverse verdict from the public as well as from the jury.'

'I should say, Hawtrey,' Mr. Singleton put in, 'you had better take a sort of middle course; tell Gilliat that the thing is a swindle, but that if you cannot obtain proof that it is so within six months you will pay him, and in the meantime move heaven and earth to discover these people. If you succeed, well and good. If you don't, pay the money; it seems to me that anything would be better than going into court and being beaten.'

'I think that is very sound advice,' Danvers said, eagerly. 'Gain time, fight if you can fight with a chance of success, but if not, pay him; in that way you will save all legal expenses, for you can arrange with Gilliat to take no steps until you give him a decided answer six months hence, and you will avoid all the terrible scandal the trial would entail. The detectives will, of course, cost money, but I do not see how that is to be helped.'

'I think that would be the best plan,' Mr. Hawtrey said. 'I hope you agree with me, Dorothy. I own that the prospect of a trial terrifies me, and I would do anything to avoid it.'

'Just as you like, father; it seems to me that I would rather fight than be robbed; but as everyone seems to think that we should be certainly beaten I am willing to agree to anything you wish.'

'Then we will consider that matter settled, Danvers,' Mr. Hawtrey said, in a tone of relief, 'and the decision has taken a tremendous load off my mind. Will you kindly see Levine? Tell him I put myself entirely in his hands as to the employment of detectives. I got samples after I left you, Singleton, of the silks that hussy took, and I am bound to say that they are handsome and do credit

to her taste. I am to have sketches of the mantles to-morrow. Will you ask Levine, Danvers, whether he advises I should still put in the advertisement you spoke of, and write to the tradesmen? You can mention that we shall go abroad next week, and on our return go down into Lincolnshire, so that perhaps it would be well not to stop these people, for of course if they were to repeat the trick when we were in a position to prove that we were hundreds of miles away at the time, it would be a pretty conclusive defence if we fought Gilliat's claim.'

'It would be so conclusive a defence, sir, that Gilliat would never bring the case into court. The moment he saw that there really was an impostor going about as Miss Hawtrey, he would see that he had been victimised, and that his only course was to apologise to Miss Hawtrey for having doubted her word, and to withdraw his claim. Yes, there is no doubt it would be the wisest plan to do nothing whatever in the way of advertising or warning the tradespeople.'

A week later the authorities at Scotland Yard had notified the French, Belgian, and German police that a man and woman whose description was accurately given, and a likeness of the latter sent, would be probably passing themselves off under an assumed name, and that should they show themselves they were to be arrested as swindlers. Small samples of four pieces of silk and drawings of the mantles were also enclosed to aid in the identification of the female prisoner, who would probably have these clothes with her.

Similar letters were also sent off to the police authorities in all large towns and watering-places in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hawtrey called twice in Jermyn Street, but found that Captain Hampton was away. He wrote him, however, a full account of all that had been decided upon, and asked him, should he return before they started for the Continent, to call and see them. He came in on the last evening before they left town.

'I only returned an hour ago,' he said. 'I was delighted to get your letter, and to find the decision you had arrived at.' He had shaken hands cordially with Mr. Hawtrey, formally with Mrs. Daintree and Dorothy. Mr. Hawtrey glanced at the former and shook his head, to intimate that that lady had not been taken into the family council.

'Mary knows nothing about it,' he took occasion afterwards to say, in a low voice; 'the whole thing has been kept a secret from her. She kept her bed for four days after that Halliburn affair, and had she known that Dorothy was accused of stealing, she would have had a fit.'

'You mean as to going away before the season is quite over, Captain Hampton,' Mrs. Daintree said, in reference to his remark on entering. 'Yes, I think it is very wise. Dorothy has been looking far from well for the last month, and the excitement and late hours have been too much for her. I shall be very glad myself to be back again in my quiet home. The season has been a very trying one.'

'I am sorry to hear you have been poorly, Mrs. Daintree. London seems pleasant enough to me, though there have been two or three very hot days.'

'What are you going to do, Ned?' Mr. Hawtrey asked. 'I suppose you are not going to stay after every one else has gone? I have heard nothing more about that yacht you talked of.'

'I have given up the idea. I daresay I should have enjoyed it very much, but one wants a pleasant party, and it does not seem to me that I can get one together, so I have abandoned it and intend taking a run across the Atlantic for two or three months. I did Switzerland and Italy before I went away, and should not care about doing Switzerland again at the time when every hotel is crowded; and as for Italy it would be too hot. I have always thought that I should like a run through the States, and I am never likely to have a better opportunity than this.'

'I suppose you will be back by Christmas, Ned? I need not say how glad I shall be if you come down and spend it with us; it would be like old times, lad.'

'Thank you, Mr. Hawtrey, I should like it greatly, but I will make no promises.'

'Well, suppose you come down to my den and smoke a cigar, Ned. There are several matters I want to chat with you about.'

'Why I want to get off in a hurry,' he went on, when they were seated in the library, 'I saw Halliburn on the day after the affair was broken off, and I suggested to him that the matter should not be made public for a week or two. The House will separate next week, and I thought it would be pleasanter to both parties if nothing was said about it till after that, when both will be away, and society scattered, so that all gossip or annoying questions would be avoided. He agreed with me thoroughly, as he evidently objected quite as much as I did to there being any talk on the subject; so I wrote a paragraph with his approval. It will be sent round to half-a-dozen of these gossip papers the day after Parliament goes down. This is it: "We are authorised to state that the match arranged between the Earl of Halliburn and Miss Hawtrey will not take place. We understand that the initiative in the matter was taken by the lady, who, in view of the malicious reports concerning her that have appeared in some of the papers, has decided to withdraw from the engagement, much, we believe, to the regret of the noble Earl.'"

'That will do excellently,' Captain Hampton agreed. 'I may tell you frankly, Mr. Hawtrey, that the idea of going to the States only occurred to me after reading your letter. For the last week I have been working along the south coast watering-places, giving a day to each. I began at Hastings and went to Eastbourne, Brighton, Worthing, Southsea, and Southampton, and took a run to Ryde and Cowes. I went to every hotel of any size at each of those towns, saw the manager and two or three of the waiters, and showed them the photograph and the scraps of silk, but none of them had had any lady at all answering to that description, or resembling the likeness, staying there. I intended to have made the entire tour of the seaports, but now that instructions have been sent to all the local police officers I need spend no more time over it. They will do it infinitely better than I could, for whereas I could only see to the hotels, they will naturally keep an eye upon all visitors, and it is as likely that they may be in lodgings as at an hotel; more likely, indeed, for at present they are flush of cash, and would not want to make the acquaintance of people, especially at hotels, where there would be the risk of running up against somebody who knew Miss Hawtrey. So with England and the Continent both provided for I am free to try the States. I should not have said anything to you about it, but I want you to write to me if the police find any trace of them. I will go to the Metropolitan Hotel at New York, and when I leave will keep them posted as to my whereabouts, so that they can forward any letter to me.'

'My dear Ned,' Mr. Hawtrey said, feelingly, 'you are indeed a good friend. I do not know how to thank you enough, but I really do not like you to be wasting your holiday in this fashion.'

'Don't worry about that; if it hadn't been for this I should have been hanging about with no particular object, and should have been heartily sick of doing nothing long before my year was out. This will give an interest and an object in travelling about, and it is always a pleasure to be working for one's dearest friends. There are but few people in England now for whom I really care. I never got on with my brothers, and beyond yourself and kind old Mr. Singleton, I have really no friends except Army men or school chums, like Danvers, and every time I come home their number will diminish. You must remember I am a police officer, and I suppose the instinct of thief-catching is strong in me. Certainty I shall not feel happy until I have got at the root of this mystery. You must remember the hypothesis as to this woman is my own, and I feel that my honour is concerned to prove its correctness; but, mind, Mr. Hawtrey, I particularly request that Dorothy shall know nothing of the matter.'

'Why not, Ned?'

'I have not been successful so far, and in fact have done more harm than good, and the betting is very strongly against my succeeding. They may not have gone to America. I simply choose it because the other ground is occupied, and also because there is an undoubted tendency among criminals to make for the States. In the next place, even if they are in America, it is almost like looking for a needle in a cart-load of hay. Still, if fortune favours me, I may possibly succeed; but if I do not, I certainly do not wish to let Dorothy know that I have been trying. I have wronged her

by having doubted her for a moment, and I do not wish to compel her to feel under an obligation to me merely because I have united amusement with a little work on her behalf.'

'Well, I think you are wrong, Ned – wrong altogether; but of course you must do as you like in the matter. Have you sketched out any plan for yourself?'

'I have not thought it over yet, but it will be similar to that I have been just working. If they have gone to America, New York is, of course, their most probable destination. I suppose there are not above five or six hotels that are usually frequented by people coming from England. I shall try them first, then go down rather lower in the grade, and if I do not succeed there I shall try Boston; then I must take the other ports to which liners run, until I have exhausted them. I have at least one advantage there. There will be no question as to their going direct into lodgings. They will be certain to put up at an hotel at first. There is no saying as to where they will go afterwards. My movements will depend entirely on whether I can pick up a clue. If I cannot get one at any of the seaports there is an end of it, for it would be mere folly to search at random in the interior. Of course, before starting I shall go to all the steamship offices in London, and find what vessels sailed between the 17th and 24th of last month. That will give me a margin of a week. If they did not go within a week after the robbery they won't have gone at all.'

'Perhaps we had better join the ladies again or they may be suspecting us of arranging some plan or other.'

'I will just go up and say good-bye and go. I hope I shall find Dorothy looking better on my return. The troubles of the last eight weeks have told their tale on her, but I hope that two months' change and then a time of rest and quiet will soon set her up again.'

'Well, God bless you, Ned. I hope that your search will be successful; but I shall not build upon it at all, and pray do not worry yourself if you do not succeed.'

They went upstairs again. Mrs. Daintree had already gone to bed.

Dorothy was sitting with the tea-tray before her when her father and Ned Hampton entered.

'I was just going to send down to you, father; I thought that you must have nearly finished your cigars.'

'Thank you, I won't take any tea, Miss Hawtrey,' Captain Hampton said, as she was about to pour out two cups. 'I only came up to say good-bye and to wish you a pleasant time abroad. As I only came back half an hour before I came across to you, I have a pile of notes to open and answer, and as I shall sail in a day or two, I shall have my hands full.'

Dorothy stood up and shook hands.

'Good-bye, Captain Hampton; thank you for your good wishes; I hope that you too will enjoy your trip.' It was said in the tone of voice in which she might have said good-bye to the most ordinary acquaintance.

Captain Hampton dropped her hand abruptly, and shook hands heartily with Mr. Hawtrey, who said, 'Good-bye, Ned; don't get yourself into any scrapes with Indians, or grizzly bears, or anything of that sort.'

'I will try not to, sir,' and Captain Hampton turned and left the room. Mr. Hawtrey turned as the door closed, and was about to say something sharply, when he saw that there were tears in Dorothy's eyes. He gulped down his irritation, took his cup of tea off the tray, and stirred it with unnecessary violence. Then he abruptly asked Dorothy if her packing was all finished.

'We must breakfast at seven sharp,' he said, 'so as to catch the boat with a quarter of an hour to spare. The exodus has begun and there is sure to be a crowd.'

'Ten minutes in the morning will finish everything,' Dorothy said. 'I will be down at a quarter to seven. Mildred can put the rest of the things in while we are at breakfast. All the boxes are packed and corded but one, and can be brought down as soon as I am out of the room. Is Captain Hampton going to shoot bears and that sort of thing, that you gave him warning?'

'He does not seem to have any fixed plan, Dorothy, but I fancy from what he said that he is more likely to wander about and look at the towns, and such places as Niagara and the other places tourists go to as a matter of course. He certainly did not say a word about shooting, and my warning was in no way given seriously. If we were not going away ourselves I should miss him amazingly, for a better fellow never trod in shoe leather. Now, it's half-past ten, dear, and the sooner we are both in bed the better, for we are to be called at six.'

While Ned Hampton had been away Jacob had spent his whole time in wandering in the suburbs in the vain hope of catching sight of the man and woman of whom he was in search. Ned had shown him the portrait, and the boy had examined it closely.

'I shall know her when I see her, Captain; one doesn't see gals like that every day. I seem to have seen some one like her, but I can't think where. I am sure she was not so pretty as that, not by a long way; but there is something in the picture that I seem to know.'

He was in when his master returned from the Hawtreys.

'No luck, Captain,' he said, apologetically, 'and it ain't been from want of tramping about, for I have walked about every day from eight in the morning and got home at evening that tired I could hardly get upstairs to bed.'

'By the way, Jacob, have you ever thought of whom the likeness reminded you? I told you to try and think who it was.'

'Yes, I know who it was now, but it ain't in our way at all. Four or five years ago I lived up a court at Chelsea, not far from that big hospital where they put the old soldiers. Well, there was a gal about two years older than me lived up in the attic of one of the houses in the court along with a woman. I don't remember what the old one's name was now, but she used to drink awful. She was about fifteen – the gal I mean – and I was about twelve. That gal had something of the look of the lady in the picture, except that the picture is smiling, and she used in general to look cross. I don't know what there was in her face that comes back to me as being like the picture, but there must have been something, else it would not have made me think of her.'

'Was the woman her mother?'

'I don't know, sir.'

'Well, you go down to that court to-morrow, Jacob, the first thing, and find out if that woman is there still, and whether the girl is with her; and if they have moved, try to find out where they have gone to. I don't suppose there can be the slightest connection between that girl and the woman that I am in search of, for the woman must have been educated to a certain extent, or she would have been detected by the jeweller or Mr. Singleton directly she spoke; still, as there is nothing else for you to do, it would be just as well for you to make inquiries.'

'There is something else I want to speak to you about, Jacob. In a day or two I shall leave for America, and may be away some months – I only settled the matter an hour ago – and I don't see what I am to do with you; I don't know what sort of place you are fit for here, and if I did know I don't see how I could get it for you.'

'Take me with you, Captain,' Jacob said promptly. 'Couldn't I be of use to you there, sir, as well as here? I knows as I haven't done no good yet; but it ain't been for want of trying, I will take my davy on that.'

'I don't say that you would not be of use Jacob, but you would add very heavily to my expenses; the distances there are very great, and the extra train fares would come to quite a large sum. You would not cost much besides; not more perhaps than here.'

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