BARR ROBERT

JENNIE BAXTER, JOURNALIST

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I. JENNIE MAKES HER TOILETTE AND THE ACQUAINTANCE OF A PORTER

Miss Jennie Baxter, with several final and dainty touches that put to rights her hat and dress—a little pull here and a pat there—regarded herself with some complacency in the large mirror that was set before her, as indeed she had every right to do, for she was an exceedingly pretty girl. It is natural that handsome young women should attire themselves with extra care, and although Jennie would have been beautiful under any conceivable condition of dress, she nevertheless did not neglect the arraying of herself becomingly on that account. All that was remarkable on this occasion consisted in the fact that she took more than usual pains to make herself presentable, and it must be admitted that the effect was as attractive as anyone could wish to have it. Her appearance was enough to send a friend into ecstasies, or drive an enemy to despair.

Jennie's voluminous hair, without being exactly golden, was—as the poets might term it—the colour of ripe corn,

and was distractingly fluffy at the temples. Her eyes were liquidly, bewitchingly black, of melting tenderness, and yet, upon occasion, they would harden into piercing orbs that could look right through a man, and seem to fathom his innermost thoughts. A smooth, creamy complexion, with a touch of red in the cheeks, helped to give this combination of blonde and brunette an appearance so charmingly striking that it may be easily understood she was not a girl to be passed by with a single glance. Being so favoured by nature, Jennie did not neglect the aid of art, and it must be admitted that most of her income was expended in seeing that her wardrobe contained the best that Paris could supply; and the best in this instance was not necessarily the most expensive—at least not as expensive as such supplementing might have been to an ordinary woman, for Jennie wrote those very readable articles on the latest fashionable gowns which have appeared in some of the ladies' weeklies, and it was generally supposed that this fact did not cause her own replenishing from the *modistes* she so casually mentioned in her writings to be more expensive than her purse could afford. Be that as it may, Miss Baxter was always most becomingly attired, and her whole effect was so entrancing that men have been known to turn in the street as she passed, and murmur, "By Jove!" a phrase that, when you take into account the tone in which it is said, represents the furthermost point of admiration which the limited vocabulary of a man about town permits him to utter; and it says something for the honesty of Jennie's black eyes, and

the straightforwardness of her energetic walk, that none of these momentary admirers ever turned and followed her.

On this occasion Miss Jennie had paid more than usual attention to her toilette, for she was about to set out to capture a man, and the man was no other than Radnor Hardwick, the capable editor of the *Daily Bugle*, which was considered at that moment to be the most enterprising morning journal in the great metropolis. Miss Baxter had done work for some of the evening papers, several of the weeklies, and a number of the monthlies, and the income she made was reasonably good, but hazardously fitful. There was an uncertainty about her mode of life which was displeasing to her, and she resolved, if possible, to capture an editor on one of the morning papers, and get a salary that was fixed and secure. That it should be large was a matter of course, and pretty Miss Jennie had quite enough confidence in herself to believe she would earn every penny of it. Quite sensibly, she depended upon her skill and her industry as her ultimate recommendation to a large salary, but she was woman enough to know that an attractive appearance might be of some assistance to her in getting a hearing from the editor, even though he should prove on acquaintance to be a man of iron, which was tolerably unlikely. She glanced at the dainty little watch attached to her wristlet, and saw that it lacked a few minutes of five. She knew the editor came to his office shortly after three, and remained there until six or half-past, when he went out to dine, returning at ten o'clock, or earlier, when the serious work of arranging next

day's issue began. She had not sent a note to him, for she knew if she got a reply it would be merely a request for particulars as to the proposed interview, and she had a strong faith in the spoken word, as against that which is written. At five o'clock the editor would have read his letters, and would probably have seen most of those who were waiting for him, and Miss Baxter quite rightly conjectured that this hour would be more appropriate for a short conversation than when he was busy with his correspondence, or immersed in the hard work of the day, as he would be after ten o'clock at night. She had enough experience of the world to know that great matters often depend for their success on apparent trivialities, and the young woman had set her mind on becoming a member of the *Daily Bugle* staff.

She stepped lightly into the hansom that was waiting for her, and said to the cabman, "Office of the *Daily Bugle*, please; side entrance."

The careful toilette made its first impression upon the surly-looking Irish porter, who, like a gruff and faithful watch-dog, guarded the entrance to the editorial rooms of the *Bugle*. He was enclosed in a kind of glass-framed sentry-box, with a door at the side, and a small arched aperture that was on a level with his face as he sat on a high stool. He saw to it, not too politely, that no one went up those stairs unless he had undoubted right to do so. When he caught a glimpse of Miss Baxter, he slid off the stool and came out of the door to her, which was an extraordinary concession to a visitor, for Pat Ryan contented himself, as a usual

thing, by saying curtly that the editor was busy, and could see no one.

"What did you wish, miss? To see the editor? That's Mr. Hardwick. Have ye an appointment with him? Ye haven't; then I very much doubt if ye'll see him this day, mum. It's far better to write to him, thin ye can state what ye want, an' if he makes an appointment there'll be no throuble at all, at all."

"But why should there be any trouble now?" asked Miss Baxter. "The editor is here to transact business, just as you are at the door to do the same. I have come on business, and I want to see him. Couldn't you send up my name to Mr. Hardwick, and tell him I will keep him but a few moments?"

"Ah, miss, that's what they all say; they ask for a few moments an' they shtay an hour. Not that there'd be any blame to an editor if he kept you as long as he could. An' it's willing I'd be to take up your name, but I'm afraid that it's little good it 'ud be after doin' ye. There's more than a dozen men in the waitin'-room now, an' they've been there for the last half-hour. Not a single one I've sent up has come down again."

"But surely," said Miss Jennie, in her most coaxing tone, "there must be some way to see even such a great man as the editor, and if there is, you know the way."

"Indade, miss, an' I'm not so sure there is a way, unless you met him in the strate, which is unlikely. As I've told ye, there's twelve men now waitin' for him in the big room. Beyont that room there's another one, an' beyont that again is Mr. Hardwick's

office. Now, it's as much as my place is worth, mum, to put ye in that room beyont the one where the men are waitin'; but, to tell you the truth, miss," said the Irishman, lowering his voice, as if he were divulging office secrets, "Mr. Hardwick, who is a difficult man to deal with, sometimes comes through the shmall room, and out into the passage whin he doesn't want to see anyone at all, at all, and goes out into the strate, leavin' everybody waitin' for him. Now I'll put ye into this room, and if the editor tries to slip out, then ye can speak with him; but if he asks ye how ye got there, for the sake of hiven don't tell him I sint ye, because that's not my duty at all, at all."

"Indeed, I won't tell him how I got there; or, rather, I'll say I came there by myself; so all you need to do is to show me the door, and there won't need to be any lies told.

"True for ye, an' a very good idea. Well, miss, then will ye just come up the stairs with me? It's the fourth door down the passage."

Miss Jennie beamed upon the susceptible Irishman a look of such melting gratitude that the man, whom bribery had often attempted to corrupt in vain, was her slave for ever after. They went up the stairs together, at the head of which the porter stood while Miss Baxter went down the long passage and stopped at the right door; Ryan nodded and disappeared.

Miss Baxter opened the door softly and entered. She found the room not too brilliantly lighted, containing a table and several chairs. The door to the right hand, which doubtless led into the

waiting-room, where the dozen men were patiently sitting, was closed. The opposite door, which led into Mr. Hardwick's office, was partly open. Miss Baxter sat down near the third door, the one by which she had entered from the passage, ready to intercept the flying editor, should he attempt to escape.

In the editor's room someone was walking up and down with heavy footfall, and growling in a deep voice that was plainly audible where Miss Jennie sat. "You see, Alder, it's like this," said the voice. "Any paper may have a sensation every day, if it wishes; but what I want is accuracy, otherwise our sheet has no real influence. When an article appears in the *Bugle*, I want our readers to understand that that article is true from beginning to end. I want not only sensation, but definiteness and not only definiteness, but absolute truth."

"Well, Mr. Hardwick," interrupted another voice—the owner of which was either standing still or sitting in a chair, so far as Miss Baxter could judge by the tone, while the editor uneasily paced to and fro—"what Hazel is afraid of is that when this blows over he will lose his situation—"

"But," interjected the editor, "no one can be sure that he gave the information. No one knows anything about this but you and I, and we will certainly keep our mouths shut."

"What Hazel fears is that the moment we print the account, the Board of Public Construction will know he gave away the figures, because of their accuracy. He says that if we permit him to make one or two blunders, which will not matter in the least in

so far as the general account goes, it will turn suspicion from him. It will be supposed that someone had access to the books, and in the hurry of transcribing figures had made the blunders, which they know he would not do, for he has a reputation for accuracy."

"Quite so," said the editor; "and it is just that reputation—for accuracy—that I want to gain for the *Daily Bugle*. Don't you think the truth of it is that the man wants more money?"

"Who? Hazel?"

"Certainly. Does he imagine that he could get more than fifty pounds elsewhere?"

"Oh, no; I'm sure the money doesn't come into the matter at all. Of course he wants the fifty pounds, but he doesn't want to lose his situation on the Board of Public Construction in the getting of it."

"Where do you meet this man, at his own house, or in his office at the Board?"

"Oh, in his own house, of course."

"You haven't seen the books, then?"

"No; but he has the accounts all made out, tabulated beautifully, and has written a very clear statement of the whole transaction. You understand, of course, that there has been no defalcation, no embezzlement, or anything of that sort. The accounts as a whole balance perfectly, and there isn't a penny of the public funds wrongly appropriated. All the Board has done is to juggle with figures so that each department seems to have come out all right, whereas the truth is that some departments

have been carried on at a great profit, while with others there has been a loss. The object obviously has been to deceive the public and make it think that all the departments are economically conducted."

"I am sorry money hasn't been stolen," said the editor generously, "then we would have had them on the hip; but, even as it is, the *Bugle* will make a great sensation. What I fear is that the opposition press will seize on those very inaccuracies, and thus try to throw doubt on the whole affair. Don't you think that you can persuade this person to let us have the information intact, without the inclusion of those blunders he seems to insist on? I wouldn't mind paying him a little more money, if that is what he is after."

"I don't think that is his object. The truth is, the man is frightened, and grows more and more so as the day for publication approaches. He is so anxious about his position that he insisted he was not to be paid by cheque, but that I should collect the money and hand it over to him in sovereigns."

"Well, I'll tell you what to do, Alder. We mustn't seem too eager. Let the matter rest where it is until Monday. I suppose he expects you to call upon him again to-day?"

"Yes; I told him I should be there at seven."

"Don't go, and don't write any explanation. Let him transfer a little of his anxiety to the fear of losing his fifty pounds. I want, if possible, to publish this information with absolute accuracy."

"Is there any danger, Mr. Hardwick, that some of the other

papers may get on the track of this?"

"No, I don't think so; not for three days, anyway. If we appear too eager, this man Hazel may refuse us altogether."

"Very good, sir."

Miss Baxter heard the editor stop in his walk, and she heard the rustling of paper, as if the subordinate were gathering up some documents on which he had been consulting his chief. She was panic-stricken to think that either of the men might come out and find her in the position of an eavesdropper, so with great quietness she opened the door and slipped out into the hall, going from there to the entrance of the ordinary waiting-room, in which she found, not the twelve men that the porter had expatiated upon, but five. Evidently the other seven had existed only in the porter's imagination, or had become tired of waiting and had withdrawn. The five looked up at her as she entered and sat down on a chair near the door. A moment later the door communicating with the room she had quitted opened, and a clerk came in. He held two or three slips of paper in his hand, and calling out a name, one of the men rose.

"Mr. Hardwick says," spoke up the clerk, "that this matter is in Mr. Alder's department; would you mind seeing him? Room number five."

So that man was thus got rid of. The clerk mentioned another name, and again a man rose.

"Mr. Hardwick," the clerk said, "has the matter under consideration. Call again to-morrow at this hour, then he will give

you his decision."

That got rid of number two. The third man was asked to leave his name and address; the editor would write to him. Number four was told that if he would set down his proposition in writing, and send it in to Mr. Hardwick, it would have that gentleman's serious consideration. The fifth man was not so easily disposed of. He insisted upon seeing the editor, and presently disappeared inside with the clerk. Miss Baxter smiled at the rapid dispersion of the group, for it reminded her of the rhyme about the one little, two little, three little nigger-boys. But all the time there kept running through her mind the phrase, "Board of Public Construction," and the name, "Hazel."

After a few minutes, the persistent man who had insisted upon seeing the editor came through the general waiting-room, the secretary, or clerk, or whoever he was, following him.

"Has your name been sent in, madam?" the young man asked Miss Baxter, as she rose. "I think not," answered the girl. "Would you take my card to Mr. Hardwick, and tell him I will detain him but a few moments?"

In a short time the secretary reappeared, and held the door open for her.

CHAPTER II. JENNIE HAS IMPORTANT CONFERENCES WITH TWO IMPORTANT EDITORS

Mr. Hardwick was a determined-looking young man of about thirty-five, with a bullet head and closely-cropped black hair. He looked like a stubborn, strong-willed person, and Miss Baxter's summing up of him was that he had not the appearance of one who could be coaxed or driven into doing anything he did not wish to do. He held her card between his fingers, and glanced from it to her, then down to the card again.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Hardwick," began Miss Baxter. "I don't know that you have seen any of my work, but I have written a good deal for some of the evening papers and for several of the magazines."

"Yes," said Hardwick, who was standing up preparatory to leaving his office, and who had not asked the young woman to sit down; "your name is familiar to me. You wrote, some months since, an account of a personal visit to the German Emperor; I forget now where it appeared."

"Oh, yes," said Miss Baxter; "that was written for the *Summer Magazine*, and was illustrated by photographs."

"It struck me," continued Hardwick, without looking at her, "that it was an article written by a person who had never seen

the German Emperor, but who had collected and assimilated material from whatever source presented itself."

The young woman, in nowise abashed, laughed; but still the editor did not look up.

"Yes," she admitted, "that is precisely how it was written. I never have had the pleasure of meeting William II. myself."

"What I have always insisted upon in work submitted to me," growled the editor in a deep voice, "is absolute accuracy. I take it that you have called to see me because you wish to do some work for this paper."

"You are quite right in that surmise also," answered Miss Jennie. "Still, if I may say so, there was nothing inaccurate in my article about the German Emperor. My compilation was from thoroughly authentic sources, so I maintain it was as truthfully exact as anything that has ever appeared in the *Bugle*."

"Perhaps our definitions of truth might not quite coincide. However, if you will write your address on this card I will wire you if I have any work—that is, any outside work—which I think a woman can do. The woman's column of the *Bugle*, as you are probably aware, is already in good hands."

Miss Jennie seemed annoyed that all her elaborate preparations were thrown away on this man, who never raised his eyes nor glanced at her, except once, during their conversation.

"I do not aspire," she said, rather shortly, "to the position of editor of a woman's column. I never read a woman's column myself, and, unlike Mr. Grant Allen, I never met a woman who

did."

She succeeded in making the editor lift his eyes towards her for the second time.

"Neither do I intend to leave you my address so that you may send a wire to me if you have anything that you think I can do. What I wish is a salaried position on your staff."

"My good woman," said the editor brusquely, "that is utterly impossible. I may tell you frankly that I don't believe in women journalists. The articles we publish by women are sent to this office from their own homes. Anything that a woman can do for a newspaper I have men who will do quite as well, if not better; and there are many things that women can't do at all which men must do. I am perfectly satisfied with my staff as it stands, Miss Baxter."

"I think it is generally admitted," said the young woman, "that your staff is an exceptionally good one, and is most capably led. Still, I should imagine that there are many things happening in London, society functions, for instance, where a woman would describe more accurately what she saw than any man you could send. You have no idea how full of blunders a man's account of women's dress is as a general rule, and if you admire accuracy as much as you say, I should think you would not care to have your paper made a laughing-stock among society ladies, who never take the trouble to write you a letter and show you where you are wrong, as men usually do when some mistake regarding their affairs is made."

"There is probably something in what you say," replied the editor, with an air of bringing the discussion to a close. "I don't insist that I am right, but these are my ideas, and while I am editor of this paper I shall stand by them, so it is useless for us to discuss the matter any further, Miss Baxter. I will not have a woman as a member of the permanent staff of the *Bugle*."

For the third time he looked up at her, and there was dismissal in his glance.

Miss Baxter said indignantly to herself, "This brute of a man hasn't the slightest idea that I am one of the best dressed women he has ever met."

But there was no trace of indignation in her voice when she said to him sweetly, "We will take that as settled. But if upon some other paper, Mr. Hardwick, I should show evidence of being as good a newspaper reporter as any member of your staff, may I come up here, and, without being kept waiting too long, tell you of my triumph?"

"You would not shake my decision," he said.

"Oh, don't say that," she murmured, with a smile. "I am sure you wouldn't like it if anyone called you a fool."

"Called me a fool?" said the editor sharply, drawing down his dark brows. "I shouldn't mind it in the least."

"What, not if it were true? You know it would be true, if I could do something that all your clever men hadn't accomplished. An editor may be a very talented man, but, after all, his mission is to see that his paper is an interesting one, and that it contains,

as often as possible, something which no other sheet does."

"Oh, I'll see to that," Mr. Hardwick assured her with resolute confidence.

"I am certain you will," said Miss Baxter very sweetly; "but now you won't refuse to let me in whenever I send up my card? I promise you that I shall not send it until I have done something which will make the whole staff of the *Daily Bugle* feel very doleful indeed."

For the first time Mr. Hardwick gave utterance to a somewhat harsh and mirthless laugh.

"Oh, very well," he said, "I'll promise that."

"Thank you! And good afternoon, Mr. Hardwick. I am *so* much obliged to you for consenting to see me. I shall call upon you at this hour to-morrow afternoon."

There was something of triumph in her smiling bow to him, and as she left she heard a long whistle of astonishment in Mr. Hardwick's room. She hurried down the stairs, threw a bewitching glance at the Irish porter, who came out of his den and whispered to her,—

"It's all right, is it, mum?"

"More than all right," she answered. "Thank you very much indeed for your kindness."

The porter preceded her out to the waiting hansom and held his arm so that her skirt would not touch the wheel.

"Drive quickly to the Cafe Royal," she said to the cabman.

When the hansom drew up in front of the Cafe Royal, Miss

Jennie Baxter did not step put of it, but waited until the stalwart servitor in gold lace, who ornamented the entrance, hurried from the door to the vehicle. “Do you know Mr. Stoneham?” she asked with suppressed excitement, “the editor of the *Evening Graphite*? He is usually here playing dominoes with somebody about this hour.”

“Oh yes, I know him,” was the reply. “I think he is inside at this moment, but I will make certain.”

In a short time Mr. Stoneham himself appeared, looking perhaps a trifle disconcerted at having his whereabouts so accurately ascertained.

“What a blessing it is,” said Miss Jennie, with a laugh, “that we poor reporters know where to find our editors in a case of emergency.”

“This is no case of emergency, Miss Baxter,” grumbled Stoneham. “If it’s news, you ought to know that it is too late to be of any use for us to-day.”

“Ah, yes,” was the quick reply, “but what excellent time I am in with news for to-morrow!”

“If a man is to live a long life,” growled the disturbed editor, “he must allow to-morrow’s news to look after itself. Sufficient for the day are the worries thereof.”

“As a general rule that is true,” assented the girl, “but I have a most important piece of information for you that wouldn’t wait, and in half an hour from now you will be writing your to-morrow’s leader, showing forth in terse and forcible language the

many iniquities of the Board of Public Construction."

"Oh," cried the editor, brightening, "if it is anything to the discredit of the Board of Public Construction, I am glad you came."

"Well, that's not a bit complimentary to me. You should be glad in any case; but I'll forgive your bad manners, as I wish you to help me. Please step into this hansom, because I have most startling intelligence to impart—news that must not be overheard; and there is no place so safe for a confidential conference as in a hansom driving through the streets of London. Drive slowly towards the *Evening Graphite* office," she said to the cabman, pushing up the trap-door in the roof of the vehicle. Mr. Stoneham took his place beside her, and the cabman turned his horse in the direction indicated.

"There is little use in going to the office of the paper," said Stoneham; "there won't be anybody there but the watchman."

"I know, but we must go in some direction. We can't talk in front of the Café Royal, you know. Now, Mr. Stoneham, in the first place, I want fifty golden sovereigns. How am I to get them within half an hour?"

"Good gracious! I don't know; the banks are all closed, but there is a man at Charing Cross who would perhaps change a cheque for me; there is a cheque-book at the office."

"Then that's all right and settled. Mr. Stoneham, there's been some juggling with the accounts in the office of the Board of Public Construction."

"What! a defalcation?" cried Stoneham eagerly.

"No; merely a shifting round."

"Ah," said the editor, in a disappointed tone.

"Oh, you needn't say 'Ah.' It's very serious; it is indeed. The accounts are calculated to deceive the dear and confiding public, to whose interests all the daily papers, morning and evening, pretend to be devoted. The very fact of such deception being attempted, Mr. Stoneham, ought to call forth the anger of any virtuous editor."

"Oh, it does, it does; but then it would be a difficult matter to prove. If some money were gone, now–"

"My dear sir, the matter is already proved, and quite ripe for your energetic handling of it; that's what the fifty pounds are for. This sum will secure for you—to-night, mind, not to-morrow—a statement bristling with figures which the Board of Construction cannot deny. You will be able, in a stirring leading article, to express the horror you undoubtedly feel at the falsification of the figures, and your stern delight in doing so will probably not be mitigated by the fact that no other paper in London will have the news, while the matter will be so important that next day all your beloved contemporaries will be compelled to allude to it in some shape or other."

"I see," said the editor, his eyes glistening as the magnitude of the idea began to appeal more strongly to his imagination. "Who makes this statement, and how are we to know that it is absolutely correct?"

"Well, there is a point on which I wish to inform you before going any further. The statement is not to be absolutely correct; two or three errors have been purposely put in, the object being to throw investigators off the track if they try to discover who gave the news to the Press; for the man who will sell me this document is a clerk in the office of the Board of Public Construction. So, you see, you are getting the facts from the inside."

"Is he so accustomed to falsifying accounts that he cannot get over the habit even when preparing an article for the truthful Press?"

"He wants to save his own situation, and quite rightly too, so he has put a number of errors in the figures of the department over which he has direct control. He has a reputation for such accuracy that he imagines the Board will never think he did it, if the figures pertaining to his department are wrong even in the slightest degree."

"Quite so. Then we cannot have the pleasure of mentioning his name, and saying that this honest man has been corrupted by his association with the scoundrels who form the Board of Public Construction?"

"Oh, dear, no; his name must not be mentioned in any circumstances, and that is why payment is to be made in sovereigns rather than by bank cheque or notes."

"Well, the traitor seems to be covering up his tracks rather effectually. How did you come to know him?"

"I don't know him. I've never met him in my life; but it came

to my knowledge that one of the morning papers had already made all its plans for getting this information. The clerk was to receive fifty pounds for the document, but the editor and he are at present negotiating, because the editor insists upon absolute accuracy, while, as I said, the man wishes to protect himself, to cover his tracks, as you remarked."

"Good gracious!" cried Stoneham, "I didn't think the editor of any morning paper in London was so particular about the accuracy of what he printed. The pages of the morning sheets do not seem to reflect that anxiety."

"So, you see," continued Miss Jennie, unheeding his satirical comment, "there is no time to be lost; in fact, I should be on my way now to where this man lives."

"Here we are at the office, and I shall just run in and write a cheque for fifty pounds, which we can perhaps get cashed somewhere," cried the editor, calling the hansom to a halt and stepping out.

"Tell the watchman to bring me a London Directory," said the girl, and presently that useful guardian came out with the huge red volume, which Miss Baxter placed on her knees, and, with a celerity that comes of long practice, turned over the leaves rapidly, running her finger quickly down the H column, in which the name "Hazel" was to be found. At last she came to one designated as being a clerk in the office of the Board of Public Construction, and his residence was 17, Rupert Square, Brixton. She put this address down in her notebook and handed back the

volume to the waiting watchman, as the editor came out with the cheque in his hand.

The shrewd and energetic dealer in coins, whose little office stands at the exit from Charing Cross Station, proved quite willing to oblige the editor of the *Evening Graphite* with fifty sovereigns in exchange for the bit of paper, and the editor, handing to Miss Jennie the envelope containing the gold, saw her drive off for Brixton, while he turned, not to resume his game of dominoes at the café, but to his office, to write the leader which would express in good set terms the horror he felt at the action of the Board of Public Construction.

CHAPTER III. JENNIE INTERVIEWS A FRIGHTENED OFFICIAL

It was a little past seven o'clock when Miss Baxter's hansom drove up to the two-storeyed house in Rupert Square numbered 17. She knocked at the door, and it was speedily opened by a man with some trace of anxiety on his clouded face, who proved to be Hazel himself, the clerk at the Board of Public Construction. "You are Mr. Hazel?" she ventured, on entering.

"Yes," replied the man, quite evidently surprised at seeing a lady instead of the man he was expecting at that hour; "but I am afraid I shall have to ask you to excuse me; I am waiting for a visitor who is a few minutes late, and who may be here at any moment."

"You are waiting for Mr. Alder, are you not?"

"Yes," stammered the man, his expression of surprise giving place to one of consternation.

"Oh, well, that is all right," said Miss Jennie, reassuringly. "I have just driven from the office of the *Daily Bugle*. Mr. Alder cannot come to-night."

"Ah," said Hazel, closing the door. "Then are you here in his place?"

"I am here instead of him. Mr. Alder is on other business that

he had to attend to at the editor's request. Now, Mr. Hardwick —that's the editor, you know–"

"Yes, I know," answered Hazel.

They were by this time seated in the front parlour.

"Well, Mr. Hardwick is very anxious that the figures should be given with absolute accuracy."

"Of course, that would be much better," cried the man; "but, you see, I have gone thoroughly into the question with Mr. Alder already. He said he would mention what I told him to the editor —put my position before him, in fact."

"Oh, he has done so," said Miss Baxter, "and did it very effectively indeed; in fact, your reasons are quite unanswerable. You fear, of course, that you will lose your situation, and that is very important, and no one in the *Bugle* office wishes you to suffer for what you have done. Of course, it is all in the public interest."

"Of course, of course," murmured Hazel, looking down on the table.

"Well, have you all the documents ready, so that they can be published at any time?"

"Quite ready," answered the man.

"Very well," said the girl, with decision; "here are your fifty pounds. Just count the money, and see that it is correct. I took the envelope as it was handed to me, and have not examined the amount myself."

She poured the sovereigns out on the table, and Hazel, with

trembling fingers, counted them out two by two.

"That is quite right," he said, rising. He went to a drawer, unlocked it, and took out a long blue envelope.

"There," he said, with a sigh that was almost a gasp. "There are the figures, and a full explanation of them. You will be very careful that my name does not slip out in any way."

"Certainly," said Miss Jennie, coolly drawing forth the papers from their covering. "No one knows your name except Mr. Alder, Mr. Hardwick, and myself; and I can assure you that I shall not mention it to anyone."

She glanced rapidly over the documents.

"I shall just read what you have written," she said, looking up at him; "and if there is anything here I do not understand you will, perhaps, be good enough to explain it now,—and then I won't need to come here again."

"Very well," said Hazel. The man had no suspicion that his visitor was not a member of the staff of the paper he had been negotiating with. She was so thoroughly self-possessed, and showed herself so familiar with all details which had been discussed by Alder and himself that not the slightest doubt had entered the clerk's mind.

Jennie read the documents with great haste, for she knew she was running a risk in remaining there after seven o'clock. It might be that Alder would come to Brixton to let the man know the result of his talk with the editor, or Mr. Hardwick himself might have changed his mind, and instructed his subordinate to secure

the papers. Nevertheless, there was no sign of hurry in Miss Jennie's demeanour as she placed the papers back in their blue envelope and bade the anxious Hazel good-bye.

Once more in the hansom, she ordered the man to drive her to Charing Cross, and when she was ten minutes away from Rupert Square she changed her direction and desired him to take her to the office of the *Evening Graphite*, where she knew Mr. Stoneham would be busy with his leading article, and probably impatiently awaiting further details of the conspiracy he was to lay open before the public. A light was burning in the editorial rooms of the office of the *Evening Graphite*, always a suspicious thing in such an establishment, and well calculated to cause the editor of any rival evening paper to tremble, should he catch a glimpse of burning gas in a spot where the work of the day should be finished at latest by five o'clock. Light in the room of the evening journalist usually indicates that something important is on hand.

A glance at the papers Miss Baxter brought to him showed Mr. Stoneham that he had at least got the worth of his fifty pounds. There would be a fluttering in high places next day. He made arrangements before he left to have the paper issued a little earlier than was customary, calculating his time with exactitude, so that rival sheets could not have the news in their first edition, cribbed from the *Graphite*, and yet the paper would be on the street, with the newsboys shouting, "'Orrible scandal," before any other evening journal was visible. And this was accomplished the

following day with a precision truly admirable.

Mr. Stoneham, with a craft worthy of all commendation, kept back from the early issue a small fraction of the figures that were in his possession, so that he might print them in the so-called fourth edition, and thus put upon the second lot of contents—bills sent out, in huge, startling black type, "Further Revelations of the Board of Construction Scandal;" and his scathing leading article, in which he indignantly demanded a Parliamentary inquiry into the conduct of the Board, was recognized, even by the friends of that public body, as having seriously shaken confidence in it. The reception of the news by the other evening papers was most flattering. One or two ignored it altogether, others alluded to it as a rumour, that it "alleged" so and so, and threw doubt on its truth, which was precisely what Mr. Stoneham wished them to do, as he was in a position to prove the accuracy of his statement.

Promptly, at five o'clock that afternoon a hansom containing Miss Jennie Baxter drove up to the side entrance of the *Daily Bugle* office, and the young woman once more accosted the Irish porter, who again came out of his den to receive her.

"Miss Baxter?" said the Irishman, half by way of salutation, and half by way of inquiry. "Yes," said the girl.

"Well, Mr. Hardwick left strict orders with me that if ye came, or, rather, that *whin* ye came, I was to conduct ye right up to his room at once."

"Oh, that is very satisfactory," cried Miss Jennie, "and

somewhat different from the state of things yesterday."

"Indeed, and that's very true," said the porter, his voice sinking. "To-day is not like yesterday at all, at all. There's been great ructions in this office, mum; although what it's about, fly away with me if I know. There's been ruunin' back and forrad, an' a plentiful deal of language used. The proprietor himself has been here, an' he's here now, an' Mr. Alder came out a minute ago with his face as white as a sheet of paper. They do be sayin'," added the porter, still further lowering his voice, and pausing on the stairway, "that Mr. Hardwick is not goin' to be the editor any more, but that Mr. Alder is to take his place. Anyway, as far as I can tell, Mr. Hardwick an' Mr. Alder have had a fine fall out, an' one or other of them is likely to leave the paper."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" said Miss Jennie, also pausing on the stairs. "Is it so serious as all that?"

"Indeed it is, mum, an' we none of us know where we're standin', at all, at all."

The porter led the way to Mr. Hardwick's room, and announced the visitor.

"Ask her to come in," she heard the editor say, and the next instant the porter left them alone together.

"Won't you sit down, Miss Baxter?" said Mr. Hardwick, with no trace of that anger in his voice which she had expected. "I have been waiting for you. You said you would be here at five, and I like punctuality. Without beating round the bush, I suppose I may take it for granted that the *Evening Graphite* is indebted to

you for what it is pleased to call the Board of Public Construction scandal?"

"Yes," said the young woman, seating herself; "I came up to tell you that I procured for the *Graphite* that interesting bit of information."

"So I supposed. My colleague, Henry Alder, saw Hazel this afternoon at the offices of the Board. The good man Hazel is panic-stricken at the explosion he has caused, and is in a very nervous state of mind, more especially when he learned that his documents had gone to an unexpected quarter. Fortunately for him, the offices of the Board are thronged with journalists who want to get statements from this man or the other regarding the exposure, and so the visit of Alder to Hazel was not likely to be noticed or commented upon. Hazel gave a graphic description of the handsome young woman who had so cleverly wheedled the documents from him, and who paid him the exact sum agreed upon in the exact way that it was to have been paid. Alder had not seen you, and has not the slightest idea how the important news slipped through his fingers; but when he told me what had happened, I knew at once you were the goddess of the machine, therefore I have been waiting for you. May I be permitted to express the opinion that you didn't play your cards at all well, Miss Baxter?"

"No? I think I played my cards very much better than you played yours, you know."

"Oh, I am not instituting any comparison, and am not at all

setting myself up as a model of strategy. I admit that, having the right cards in my hands, I played them exceedingly badly; but then, you understand, I thought I was sure of an exclusive bit of news."

"No news is exclusive, Mr. Hardwick, until it is printed, and out in the streets, and the other papers haven't got it."

"That is very true, and has all the conciseness of an adage. I would like to ask, Miss Baxter, how much the *Graphite* paid you for that article over and above the fifty pounds you gave to Hazel?"

"Oh! it wasn't a question of money with me; the subject hasn't even been discussed. Mr. Stoneham is not a generous paymaster, and that is why I desire to get on a paper which does not count the cost too closely. What I wished to do was to convince you that I would be a valuable addition to the *Bugle* staff; for you seemed to be of opinion that the staff was already sufficient and complete."

"Oh, my staff is not to blame in this matter; I alone am to blame in being too sure of my ground, and not realizing the danger of delay in such a case. But if you had brought the document to me, you would have found me by far your best customer. You would have convinced me quite as effectually as you have done now that you are a very alert young woman, and I certainly would have been willing to give you four or five times as much as the *Graphite* will be able to pay."

"To tell the truth, I thought of that as I stood here yesterday, but I saw you were a very difficult man to deal with or to

convince, and I dared not take the risk of letting you know I had the news. You might very easily have called in Mr. Alder, told him that Hazel had given up the documents, and sent him flying to Brixton, where very likely the clerk has a duplicate set. It would have been too late to get the sensation into any other morning paper, and, even if it were not too late, you would have had something about the sensation in the *Bugle*, and so the victory would not have been as complete as it is now. No, I could not take such a risk. I thought it all out very carefully."

"You credit us with more energy, Miss Baxter, than we possess. I can assure you that if you had come here at ten or eleven o'clock with the documents, I should have been compelled to purchase them from you. However, that is all past and done with, and there is no use in our saying anything more about it. I am willing to take all the blame for our defeat on my shoulders, but there are some other things I am not willing to do, and perhaps you are in a position to clear up a little misunderstanding that has arisen in this office. I suppose I may take it for granted that you overheard the conversation which took place between Mr. Alder and myself in this room yesterday afternoon?"

"Well," said Miss Baxter, for the first time in some confusion, "I can assure you that I did not come here with the intention of listening to anything. I came into the next room by myself for the purpose of getting to see you as soon as possible. While not exactly a member of the staff of the *Evening Graphite*, that paper nevertheless takes about all the work I am able to do, and so

I consider myself bound to keep my eyes and ears open on its behalf wherever I am."

"Oh, I don't want to censure you at all," said Hardwick; "I merely wish to be certain how the thing was done. As I said, I am willing to take the blame entirely on my own shoulders. I don't think I should have made use of information obtained in that way myself; still, I am not venturing to find fault with you for doing so."

"To find fault with me!" cried Miss Jennie somewhat warmly, "that would be the pot calling the kettle black indeed. Why, what better were you? You were bribing a poor man to furnish you with statistics, which he was very reluctant to let you have; yet you overcame his scruples with money, quite willing that he should risk his livelihood, so long as you got the news. If you ask me, I don't see very much difference in our positions, and I must say that if two men take the risk of talking aloud about a secret, with a door open leading to another room, which may be empty or may be not, then they are two very foolish persons."

"Oh, quite so, quite so," answered Hardwick soothingly. "I have already disclaimed the critical attitude. The point I wish to be sure of is this—you overheard the conversation between Alder and myself?"

"Yes, I did."

"Would you be able to repeat it?"

"I don't know that I could repeat it word for word, but I could certainly give the gist of it."

"Would you have any objection to telling a gentleman whom I shall call in a moment, as nearly as possible what Alder said and what I said? I may add that the gentleman I speak of is Mr. Hempstead, and he is practically the proprietor of this paper. There has arisen between Mr. Alder and myself a slight divergence of memory, if I may call it so, and it seems that you are the only person who can settle the dispute."

"I am perfectly willing to tell what I heard to anybody."

"Thank you."

Mr. Hardwick pressed an electric button, and his secretary came in from another room.

"Would you ask Mr. Hempstead to step this way, if he is in his room?"

In a few minutes Mr. Hempstead entered, bowed somewhat stiffly towards the lady, but froze up instantly when he heard that she was the person who had given the Board of Public Construction scandal to the *Evening Graphite*.

"I have just this moment learned, Mr. Hempstead, that Miss Baxter was in the adjoining room when Alder and I were talking over this matter. She heard the conversation. I have not asked her to repeat it, but sent for you at once, and she says she is willing to answer any questions you may ask."

"In that case, Mr. Hardwick, wouldn't it be well to have Henry Alder here?"

"Certainly, if he is on the premises." Then, turning to his secretary, he said, "Would you find out if Mr. Alder is in his

room? Tell him Mr. Hempstead wishes to see him here."

When Henry Alder came in, and the secretary had disappeared, Miss Baxter saw at once that she was in an unenviable situation, for it was quite evident the three men were scarcely on speaking terms with each other. Nothing causes such a state of tension in a newspaper office as the missing of a piece of news that is important.

"Perhaps it would be better," suggested Hardwick, "if Miss Baxter would repeat the conversation as she heard it."

"I don't see the use of that," said Mr. Hempstead. "There is only one point at issue. Did Mr. Alder warn Mr. Hardwick that by delay he would lose the publication of this report?"

"Hardly that," answered the girl. "As I remember it, he said, 'Isn't there a danger that some other paper may get this?' Mr. Hardwick replied, 'I don't think so. Not for three days, at least'; and then Mr. Alder said, 'Very good,' or 'Very well,' or something like that."

"That quite tallies with my own remembrance," assented Hardwick. "I admit I am to blame, but I decidedly say that I was not definitely warned by Mr. Alder that the matter would be lost to us."

"I told you it would be lost if you delayed," cried Alder, with the emphasis of an angry man, "and it *has* been lost. I have been on the track of this for two weeks, and it is very galling to have missed it at the last moment through no fault of my own."

"Still," said Mr. Hempstead coldly, "your version of the

conversation does not quite agree with what Miss Baxter says."

"Oh, well," said Alder, "I never pretended to give the exact words. I warned him, and he did not heed the warning."

"You admit, then, that Miss Baxter's remembrance of the conversation is correct?"

"It is practically correct. I do not 'stickle' about words."

"But you did stickle about words an hour ago," said Mr. Hempstead, with some severity. "There is a difference in positively stating that the item would be lost and in merely suggesting that it might be lost."

"Oh, have it as you wish," said Alder truculently. "It doesn't matter in the least to me. It is very provoking to work hard for two weeks, and then have everything nullified by a foolish decision from the editor. However, as I have said, it doesn't matter to me. I have taken service on the *Daily Trumpet*, and you may consider my place on the *Bugle* vacant"—saying which, the irate Mr. Alder put his hat on his head and left the room.

Mr. Hempstead seemed distressed by the discussion, but, for the first time, Mr. Hardwick smiled grimly.

"I always insist on accuracy," he said, "and lack of it is one of Alder's failings."

"Nevertheless, Mr. Hardwick, you have lost one of your best men. How are you going to replace him?" inquired the proprietor anxiously.

"There is little difficulty in replacing even the best man on any staff in London," replied Hardwick, with a glance at Miss

Baxter. "As this young lady seems to keep her wits about her when the welfare of her paper is concerned, I shall, if you have no objection, fill Henry Alder's place with Miss Baxter?"

Mr. Hempstead arched his eyebrows a trifle, and looked at the girl in some doubt.

"I thought you didn't believe in women journalists, Mr. Hardwick," he murmured at last.

"I didn't up till to-day, but since the evening papers came out I have had reason to change my mind. I should much rather have Miss Baxter for me than against me."

"Do you think you can fill the position, Miss Baxter?" asked the proprietor, doubtingly.

"Oh, I, am sure of it," answered the girl. "I have long wanted a place on a well-edited paper like the *Bugle*." Again Mr. Hardwick smiled grimly. The proprietor turned to him, and said, "I don't quite see, Mr. Hardwick, what a lady can do on this paper outside of the regular departments."

"I hardly think there will be any trouble about that, Mr. Hempstead. For example, who could be better equipped to attempt the solution of that knotty question about the Princess von Steinheimer's diamonds?"

"By Jove!" cried Hempstead, his eyes glittering with excitement. "That is an inspiration. I imagine that if anyone can unravel the mystery, it is Miss Baxter."

CHAPTER IV. JENNIE LEARNS ABOUT THE DIAMONDS OF THE PRINCESS

"What about the diamonds of the Princess?" asked Miss Baxter, her curiosity piqued by the remark of the editor.

"That is rather a long story," replied Mr. Hardwick, "and before I begin it, I would like to ask you one or two questions. Can you manipulate a typewriter?"

"That depends on what make it is. The ordinary typewriter I understand very thoroughly."

"Good. Have you any knowledge of shorthand?"

"A workable knowledge; I can write about one hundred words a minute."

"Admirable! admirable! Your coming to this office was indeed an inspiration, as Mr. Hempstead remarked. You are just the person I have been looking for."

"You didn't seem to think so yesterday, Mr. Hardwick," said the girl with a sly glance at him.

"Well, many things have happened since yesterday. We are now dealing with to-day, and with the Princess von Steinheimer."

"She is a German princess, of course?"

"An Austrian princess, but an American woman. She was a Miss Briggs of Chicago; a daughter of Briggs, the railway

millionaire, worth somewhere between twenty and twenty-five millions—dollars, of course. A year or two ago she married Prince Konrad von Steinheimer; you may remember having read about it in the papers?"

"Oh, yes; the usual international match—the girl after the title, he after the money."

"I suppose so; but be that as it may, she is the only daughter of old Briggs, and had spent a good deal of her time in Europe, but she spent more than time; she spent the old man's money as well, so during her stay in Europe she accumulated a vast stock of diamonds, some of them very notable stones. I don't know what the whole collection is worth, some say a million dollars, while others say double that amount. However that may be, Miss Briggs became the Princess von Steinheimer, and brought to Austria with her a million dollars in gold and the diamonds, which her father gave as dowry; but, of course, being an only child, she will come in for the rest of his money when the railway magnate dies."

"Is he likely to die soon? I don't suppose the Prince gave himself away for a mere million."

"Oh, you forget the diamonds. As to the likelihood of old Briggs's death, it didn't strike me as imminent when I had a conversation with him yesterday."

"Yesterday? Is he here in London, then?"

"Yes; he has come over to disentangle the mystery about the diamonds."

"And what is the mystery? You take a dreadful long time to

tell a story, Mr. Hardwick."

"The story is important, and it must be told in detail, otherwise you may go on a long journey for nothing. Are you taking down what I say in shorthand? That is right, and if you are wise you will not transcribe your notes so that anyone can read them; they are safer in that form. The von Steinheimer family have two residences, a house in Vienna and an ancient castle in the Tyrol, situated on the heights above Meran, a most picturesque place, I understand; but very shortly you will know more about it than I do, because the *Bugle* expects you to go there as its special correspondent. Here the diamond robbery took place something like two months ago, and the affair is still as great a mystery as ever. The Princess was to open the season at Meran, which is a fashionable resort, by giving a fancy dress ball in Schloss Steinheimer, to which all the Austrian and foreign notables were invited. It was just before the ball began that the diamonds were first missed—in fact, the Princess was about to put them on, she representing some gorgeously decorated character from the Arabian Nights, when the discovery was made that the diamonds were gone. She was naturally very much upset over her loss, and sent at once for the Prince, her husband, insisting that the police should be notified immediately and detectives called in, as was perfectly natural. Now here comes a strange feature of the affair, and this is that the Prince positively forbade any publicity, refusing his sanction when she demanded that the police should be informed, and yet the Prince knew better than anyone else the

very considerable value of the stones."

"What reason did he give for his refusal?" asked Miss Baxter, looking up from her notes.

"I am not quite certain about that; but I think he said it was *infra dig.* for the Steinheimers to call in the police. Anyhow, it was an excuse which did not satisfy the Princess; but as guests were arriving, and as it was desirable that there should be no commotion to mar the occasion, the Princess temporarily yielded to the wish of her husband, and nothing was said publicly about the robbery. The great ball was the talk of Meran for several days, and no one suspected the private trouble that was going on underneath this notable event. During these several days the Princess insisted that the aid of the police should be invoked, and the Prince was equally strenuous that nothing should be said or done about the matter. Then, quite unexpectedly, the Prince veered completely round, and proclaimed that he would engage the best detectives in Europe. Strange to say, when he announced this decision to his wife, she had veered round also, and opposed the calling in of the detectives as strenuously as he had done heretofore."

"What reason did she give for her change of front?" asked Miss Jennie.

"She said, I believe, that it was now too late; that the thieves, whoever they were, had had time to make away with their plunder, and there would merely be a fuss and worry for nothing."

"Do you know, I am inclined to agree with her," asserted the

girl.

"Are you? Then tell me what you think of the case as far as you have got."

"What do *you* think?"

"I sha'n't tell you at this stage, because I know of further particulars which I will give you later on. I merely want your opinion now, so that I may see whether what I have to tell you afterwards modifies it in any way."

"Well, to me the case looks decidedly dark against the Prince."

"That is what Mr. Briggs thinks. He imagines his Highness has the jewels."

"Where did you get all these particulars?"

"From Mr. Briggs, who, of course, got them by letter from his daughter."

"Then we have, as it were, a one-sided statement."

"Oh, quite so; but still you must remember the Princess does not in the least suspect her husband of the theft."

"Well, please go on. What are the further particulars?"

"The further particulars are that the Prince made some quiet investigations among the servants, and he found that there was a man who, although he was a friend of his own, was much more the friend of the Princess, and this man had, on the day the ball was given, the entire freedom of the castle. He is a young officer and nobleman. Lieutenant von Schaumberg, and the Prince knew that this young man was being hard pressed for some debts of honour which he did not appear to be in a position to liquidate.

The young man went unexpectedly to Vienna the day after the ball, and on his return settled his obligations. The Princess, from one of her women, got word of her husband's suspicion. She went to the Prince at once, and told him she had come to his own opinion with regard to the lost diamonds. She would, in no circumstances, have detectives about the place. Then he told her that he had also changed his mind, and resolved to engage detectives. So here they were at a deadlock again. She wrote to her father with great indignation about the Prince's unjust suspicions, saying von Schaumberg was a gentleman in every sense of the word. I gather that relations between herself and her husband are somewhat strained, so I imagine there is much more in this matter than the lost diamonds."

"You imagine, then, that she is shielding the Lieutenant?"

"Candidly, I do."

"And you are of opinion he stole the diamonds?"

"Yes, I am."

"I don't agree with you. I still think it was the Prince, and I think besides this, that he dexterously managed to throw suspicion on the Lieutenant. Have they called in the detectives yet?"

"No, they are at a deadlock, as I remarked before."

"Well, what am I expected to do?"

"Mr. Briggs cabled to his daughter—he never writes a letter—that he would come over and straighten out the tangle in fifteen minutes. He is certain the Prince stole the diamonds, but he did

not tell his daughter so. He informed her he was bringing her a present of a new typewriting machine, and also a young woman from Chicago who could write shorthand and would look after the Princess's correspondence—act as secretary, in fact; for it seems the Princess has a larger correspondence than she can reasonably attend to, and she appears therefore to yearn for a typewriter. The old man tells me she is very careless about her letters, never being able to find anything she wants, and leaving them about a good deal, so he thinks she needs someone to look after her affairs; and I have a suspicion that her father fears she may leave some compromising letter about, so he wishes to ward off a divorce case."

"No, I fancy you are mistaken there. The father hasn't the slightest idea that there can be anything wrong with his daughter. It is probable the Princess has written some libellous statements about her husband, and it is quite likely the Prince is a brute and that young von Schaumberg is a most charming person."

"Well, as I was saying," continued Hardwick, "the old man cabled his daughter that he is bringing her a secretary and a typewriter. He engaged a female Pinkerton detective to enter the castle as secretary to the Princess and, if possible, to solve the diamond mystery. She is a young woman who, when she left Chicago, was very anti-English, but she became acquainted on the steamer with a young Englishman who was tremendously taken with her, and so at Liverpool she quite calmly broke her engagement with the old man and fulfilled a new engagement

she had made with the young man by promptly marrying him —special license, I am told. Old Briggs has therefore a new typewriting machine on his hands, and so I was going to propose to you that you take the place of the Chicago Pinkerton person. Briggs has become so disgusted with all these detective women that he abandoned the idea of sending a female detective with the machine, and doesn't imagine that whoever is sent will be either a detective or a newspaper woman. I was introduced to him the other day by one of those lucky chances which sometimes put interesting items of news in our way, and he told me the whole story, requesting me to recommend someone who wrote shorthand and understood the typewriter. I am to dine with him this evening, and I shall cordially recommend you. I may say that Briggs has gone to that celebrated London detective Mr. Cadbury Taylor, and has engaged him to solve the diamond mystery. So you see you will have a clear field. If you can leave for the castle to-morrow night, you may have the pleasure of Mr. Cadbury Taylor's company. He isn't visiting the castle, but goes straight to Vienna; so if you work your cards rightly, you can be in the same carriage with him as far as Munich, and during that time you may find out perhaps what he thinks about the case. I know only this much about his theory, and that is he thinks the right place to begin is in Vienna, where some, at least, of the stones are supposed to have been pawned."

"Oh, this is a delightful case, and I shall enjoy it. Has there been anything published yet with reference to the robbery?"

“Not a word; nobody knows anything about it, except the Prince and Princess, Briggs, myself and yourself, and perhaps one or two of the servants in the castle—oh, yes, and Cadbury Taylor.”

CHAPTER V. JENNIE MEETS A GREAT DETECTIVE

Miss Baxter was early at the station before the Continental train left. She walked up and down the platform, hoping to see Mr. Cadbury Taylor, with whose face and form she was familiar. She secured a porter who spoke French, and pretended to him that she knew no English.

"I desire," she said, "to get into a first-class compartment with a gentleman whom I shall point out to you. I shall give you five shillings, so you must let me have your whole attention. My luggage has been labelled and registered, therefore you will not need to bother about it, but keep your eye on me and follow me into whatever carriage I enter, bringing with you the hand-bag and this heavy package."

The heavy package was a typewriter in its case. Shortly before the train departed, there sauntered into the station the tall, thin, well-known form of the celebrated detective. He wore a light ulster that reached almost to his heels, and his keen, alert face was entirely without beard or moustache. As he came up the platform, a short, stout man accosted him.

"I was afraid you were going to be late," said the detective's friend, "but I see you are just in time as usual."

"A railway station," said Mr. Cadbury Taylor, "is not the most

inspiring place in London for the spending of a spare half hour; besides, I had some facts to get together, which are now tabulated in my note-book, and I'm quite ready to go, if the train is."

"I have secured a smoking compartment here where we shall be alone."

"That's right, Smith," said Cadbury Taylor. "You are always so thoughtful," and the two men entered the compartment together.

Just as the guards were shouting, "Take your seats, please," Miss Baxter made a bolt for the compartment in which the detective and his friend sat together in opposite corners.

"I beg your pardon," said Smith, "this is a smoking compartment." The lady replied to him volubly in French, and next instant the porter heaved the typewriter and hand-bag on the seat beside her. Smith seemed to resent the intrusion, and appeared about to blame the porter, but the man answered rapidly as he banged the door shut, "The lady doesn't speak any English," and the next moment the train moved out of the station.

"There was no need," said the detective, "my dear Smith, to depend upon the porter for the information that the lady could not speak English. She is the secretary to a very rich employer in Chicago, and came from that city to New York, where she sailed on the *Servia* alone, coming to England to transact some special business, of which I could here give you full particulars, if it were worth while. She came from Liverpool to London over the Great Western Railway, and is now on her way to Paris. All this, of course, is obvious to the most casual observer, and so,

my dear Smith, we may discuss our case with as much security as though we were entirely alone."

"But, good heavens, Cadbury!" cried Smith in amazement, "how can you tell all that?"

"My dear fellow," said the detective wearily, "no one travels with a typewriting machine unless that person is a typewriter. The girl, if you will notice, is now engaged in filling the leaves of her book with shorthand, therefore that proves her occupation. That she is secretary to a rich man is evidenced by the fact that she crossed in the *Servia* first cabin, as you may see by glancing at the label on the case; that she came alone, which is to say her employer was not with her, is indicated by the typewriter being marked 'Not Wanted,' so it was put down into the hold. If a Chicago business man had been travelling with his secretary, the typewriter case would have been labelled instead, 'Cabin, wanted,' for a Chicago man of business would have to write some hundreds of letters, even on the ocean, to be ready for posting the moment he came ashore. The typewriter case is evidently new, and is stamped with the name and address of its sellers in Chicago. That she came by the Great Western is shown by the fact that 'Chester' appears on still another label. That she has special business in England we may well believe, otherwise she would have crossed on the French line direct from New York to Havre. So you see, my dear boy, these are all matters of observation, and quite patent to anyone who cares to use his eyes."

"Yes, it all seems very simple now that you have explained it," growled Smith.

"I should be a much more mysterious person than I am," remarked the detective complacently, "if I did not explain so much. This explanation habit is becoming a vice with me, and I fear I must abandon it."

"I hope for my sake you won't," said Smith more good-naturedly, "for if left to myself I never could find out how you arrive at your wonderful conclusions. Do you expect the Austrian diamond mystery to prove difficult?"

"Difficult? Oh, dear no! To tell the truth, I have solved it already, but in order to give the American a run for his money —and surely he ought not to object to that, because he is a millionaire who has made his fortune by giving other people runs for their money, being a railway man—I am now on my way to Vienna. If I solved the problem off-hand for him in London, he would have no more appreciation of my talent than you had a moment ago when I explained why I knew this French girl came from Chicago."

"You mustn't mind that, Cadbury," said Smith contritely. "I confess I was irritated for a moment because it all seemed so simple."

"My dear fellow, every puzzle in this world is simple except one, and that is to find any problem which is difficult."

"Then who stole the diamonds? The lieutenant?"

The detective smiled and gazed upwards for a few tantalizing

moments at the roof of the carriage.

"Here we have," he said at last, "an impecunious prince who marries an American heiress, as so many of them do. The girl begins life in Austria on one million dollars, say two hundred thousand pounds, and a case of diamonds said to be worth another two hundred thousand at least—probably more. Not much danger of running through that very speedily, is there, Smith?"

"No, I should think not."

"So the average man would think," continued the detective. "However, I have long since got out of the habit of thinking; therefore I make sure. The first problem I set to myself is this: How much money have the Prince and Princess spent since they were married? I find that the repairs on the Schloss Steinheimer, situated in the Tyrol, cost something like forty thousand pounds. It is a huge place, and the Steinheimers have not had an heiress in the family for many centuries. The Prince owed a good deal of money when he was married, and it took something like sixty thousand pounds to settle those debts; rather expensive as Continental princes go, but if one must have luxuries, one cannot save money. Not to weary you with details, I found that the two hundred thousand pounds were exhausted somewhat more than two months ago; in fact, just before the alleged robbery. The Prince is, of course, without money, otherwise he would not have married a Chicago heiress, and the Princess being without money, what does she naturally do?"

"Pawns her own diamonds!" cried Smith enthusiastically.

The detective smiled.

"I thought it much more probable she would apply to her father for money. I asked him if this was the case, giving him the date, roughly speaking, when such a letter had been sent. The old man opened his eyes at this, and told me he had received such a letter. 'But you did not send the money?' I ventured, 'No,' he said, 'I did not. The fact is, money is very tight in Chicago just now, and so I cabled her to run on her debts for a while.' This exactly bore out the conclusion at which I had already arrived. So now, having failed to get money from her father, the lady turns to her diamonds, the only security she possesses. The chances are that she did so before her father's cable message came, and that was the reason she so confidently wished information to be given to the police. She expected to have money to redeem her jewels, and being a bright woman, she knew the traditional stupidity of the official police, and so thought there was no danger of her little ruse being discovered. But when the cable message came saying no money would be sent her, a different complexion was put upon the whole affair, for she did not know but if the police were given plenty of time they might stumble on the diamonds."

"But, my dear Cadbury, why should she not have taken the diamonds openly and raised money on them?"

"My dear fellow, there are a dozen reasons, any one of which will suffice where a woman is in the case. In the first place, she might fear to offend the family pride of the von Steinheimers;

in the second place, we cannot tell what her relations with her husband were. She may not have wished him to know that she was short of money. But that she has stolen her own diamonds there is not the slightest question in my mind. All that is necessary for me to do now is to find out how many persons there are in Vienna who would lend large sums of money on valuable jewels. The second is to find with which one of those the Princess pawned her diamonds."

"But, my dear Cadbury, the lady is in Meran, and Vienna is some hundreds of miles away. How could a lady in the Tyrol pawn diamonds in Vienna without her absence being commented on? or do you think she had an agent to do it for her?" Again the detective smiled indulgently.

"No, she had no agent. The diamonds never left Vienna. You see, the ball had been announced, and immediate money was urgently needed. She pawned the diamonds before she left the capital of Austria, and the chances are she did not intend anyone to know they were missing; but on the eve of the ball her husband insisted that she should wear her diamonds, and therefore, being a quick-witted woman, she announced they had been stolen. After having made such a statement, she, of course, had to stick to it; and now, failing to get the money from America, she is exceedingly anxious that no real detective shall be employed in investigation."

At Dover Miss Baxter, having notes of this interesting conversation in shorthand, witnessed the detective bid good-bye

to his friend Smith, who returned to London by a later train. After that she saw no more of Mr. Cadbury Taylor, and reached the Schloss Steinheimer at Meran without further adventure.

CHAPTER VI. JENNIE SOLVES THE DIAMOND MYSTERY

Miss Baxter found life at the Schloss much different from what she had expected. The Princess was a young and charming lady, very handsome, but in a state of constant depression. Once or twice Miss Baxter came upon her with apparent traces of weeping on her face. The Prince was not an old man, as she had imagined, but young and of a manly, stalwart appearance. He evidently possessed a fiendish temper, and moped about the castle with a constant frown upon his brow.

The correspondence of the Princess was in the utmost disorder. There were hundreds upon hundreds of letters, and Miss Baxter set to work tabulating and arranging them. Meanwhile the young newspaper woman kept her eyes open. She wandered about the castle unmolested, poked into odd corners, talked with the servants, and, in fact, with everyone, but never did she come upon a clue which promised to lead to a solution of the diamond difficulty. Once she penetrated into a turret room, and came unexpectedly upon the Prince, who was sitting on the window-ledge, looking absently out on the broad and smiling valley that lay for miles below the castle. He sprang to his feet and stared so fiercely at the intruder that the girl's heart failed her, and she had not even the presence of mind to turn and run.

"What do you want?" he said to her shortly, for he spoke English perfectly. "You are the young woman from Chicago, I suppose?"

"No," answered Miss Baxter, forgetting for the moment the *role* she was playing; "I am from London."

"Well, it doesn't matter; you are the young woman who is arranging my wife's correspondence?"

"Yes." The Prince strode rapidly forward and grasped her by the wrist, his brow dark with a forbidding frown. He spoke in a hoarse whisper:

"Listen, my good girl! Do you want to get more money from me than you will get from the Princess in ten years' service? Hearken, then, to what I tell you. If there are any letters from—from—men, will you bring them to me?"

Miss Baxter was thoroughly frightened, but she said to the Prince sharply,—

"If you do not let go my wrist, I'll scream. How dare you lay your hand on me?"

The Prince released her wrist and stepped back.

"Forgive me," he said; "I'm a very miserable man. Forget what I have said."

"How can I forget it?" cried the girl, gathering courage as she saw him quail before her blazing eyes. "What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to bring to me any letters written by—by–"

"Written by von Schaumberg," cried the girl, noticing his

hesitation and filling in the blank.

A red wave of anger surged up in the Prince's face.

"Yes," he cried; "bring me a letter to her from von Schaumberg, and I'll pay you what you ask."

The girl laughed.

"Prince," she said, "you will excuse me if I call you a fool. There are no letters from von Schaumberg, and I have gone through the whole of the correspondence."

"What, then, suggested the name von Schaumberg to you? Where did you ever hear it before?"

"I heard that you suspected him of stealing the diamonds."

"And so he did, the cowardly thief. If it were not for mixing the Princess's name with such carrion as he, I would—"

But the Prince in his rage stamped up and down the room without saying what he would do. Miss Baxter quickly brought him to a standstill.

"It is contrary to my duty to the Princess," she began, hesitatingly, when he stopped and turned fiercely upon her.

"What is contrary to your duty?"

"There are letters, tied very daintily with a blue ribbon, and they are from a man. The Princess did not allow me to read them, but locked them away in a secret drawer in her dressing-room, but she is so careless with her keys and everything else, that I am sure I can get them for you, if you want them."

"Yes, yes, I want them," said the Prince, "and will pay you handsomely for them."

"Very well," replied Miss Baxter, "you shall have them. If you will wait here ten minutes, I shall return with them."

"But," hesitated the Prince, "say nothing to the Princess."

"Oh, no, I shall not need to; the keys are sure to be on her dressing-table."

Miss Baxter ran down to the room of the Princess, and had little difficulty in obtaining the keys. She unlocked the secret drawer into which she had seen the Princess place the packet of letters, and taking them out, she drew another sheet of paper along with them, which she read with wide-opening eyes, then with her pretty lips pursed, she actually whistled, which unmaidenly performance merely gave sibilant expression to her astonishment. Taking both the packet of letters and the sheet of paper with her, she ran swiftly up the stair and along the corridor to the room where the Prince was impatiently awaiting her.

"Give them to me," he snapped, rudely snatching the bundle of documents from her hand. She still clung to the separate piece of paper and said nothing. The Prince stood by the window and undid the packet with trembling hands. He examined one and then another of the letters, turning at last towards the girl with renewed anger in his face.

"You are trifling with me, my girl," he cried.

"No, I am not," she said stoutly.

"These are my own letters, written by me to my wife before we were married!"

"Of course they are. What others did you expect? These are

the only letters, so far as I have learned, that any man has written to her, and the only letters she cares for of all the thousands she has ever received. Why, you foolish, blind man, I had not been in this castle a day before I saw how matters stood. The Princess is breaking her poor heart because you are unkind to her, and she cares for nobody on earth but you, great stupid dunce that you are."

"Is it true? Will you swear it's true?" cried the Prince, dropping the packet and going hastily toward the girl. Miss Jennie stood with her back to the wall, and putting her hands behind her, she said,—

"No, no; you are not going to touch me again. Of course it's true, and if you had the sense of a six-year-old child, you would have seen it long ago; and she paid sixty thousand pounds of your gambling debts, too."

"What are you talking about? The Princess has never given me a penny of her money; I don't need it. Goodness knows, I have money enough of my own."

"Well, Cadbury Taylor said that you—Oh, I'll warrant you, it is like all the rest of his statements, pure moonshine."

"Of whom are you speaking? And why did my wife protect that wretch whom she knows has stolen her diamonds?"

"You mean von Schaumberg?"

"Yes."

"I believe the Princess does think he stole them, and the reason the Princess protects him is to prevent you from challenging him,

for she fears that he, being a military man, will kill you, although I fancy she would be well rid of you."

"But he stole the diamonds—there was nobody else."

"He did nothing of the kind. Read that!"

The Prince, bewildered, took the sheet that she handed to him and read it, a wrinkle of bewilderment corrugating his brow.

"I don't understand what this has to do with the case," he said at last. "It seems to be an order on the bank at Vienna for the diamonds, written by the Princess herself."

"Of course it is. Well, if the diamonds had been delivered, that paper would now be in the possession of the bank instead of in your hands."

"Perhaps she mislaid this order and wrote another."

"Perhaps. Still it might be worth while finding out."

"Take this, then, to the Princess and ask her."

"It is not likely she would remember. The better plan is to telegraph at once to the Vienna bank, asking them to send the diamonds to Meran by special messenger. No one there knows that the diamonds are missing."

"I will do so at once," cried the Prince, with more animation in his voice than Miss Baxter had previously noticed. His Highness was becoming interested in the game.

After luncheon the Princess came to Miss Baxter, who was seated at her desk, and handed her a letter.

"There is an invitation from the Duchess of Chiselhurst for a grand ball she is shortly to give in her London house. It is to be

a very swell affair, but I don't care enough for such things to go all the way to England to enjoy them. Would you therefore send her Grace my regrets?"

"I will do so at once."

At that moment there came a messenger from the Prince asking Miss Baxter to meet him in the library. The girl glanced up at the Princess.

"Have I your permission to go?" she said.

The Princess looked at her steadily for a moment, just the faintest suspicion of a frown on her fair brow.

"I do not suppose you need my permission." Her Highness spoke with slow deliberation. "My husband condescends to take considerable interest in you. Passing along the corridor this morning, I heard your voices in most animated conversation."

"Had you sufficient interest in our discussion to stop and listen to what we said, Princess von Steinheimer?"

"Ah, now you are becoming insolent, and I must ask you to consider your engagement with me at an end."

"Surely you will not dismiss me in this heartless way, Princess. I think I am entitled to a month's notice, or is it only a week's?"

"I will pay you a year's salary, or two years' if that will content you. I have no wish to deal harshly with you, but I desire you to leave at once," said the Princess, who had little sense of humour, and thus thought the girl was in earnest when she asked for notice.

Miss Baxter laughed merrily, and replied when she was able to control her mirth, "I do hate to leave the castle just when things

are becoming interesting. Still, I don't suppose I shall really need to go away in spite of your dismissal, for the Prince this morning offered me ten times the amount of money you are paying."

"Did he?"

"Be assured he did; if you don't believe me, ask him. I told him he was a fool, but, alas, we live in a cynical age, and few men believe all they hear, so I fear my expression of opinion made little impression on him."

"I shall not keep you longer from his Highness," said the Princess with freezing dignity.

"Thank you so much. I am just dying to meet him, for I know he has something most interesting to tell me. Don't you think yourself, Princess, that a man acts rather like a fool when he is deeply in love?"

To this there was no reply, and the Princess left the room.

Miss Jennie jumped to her feet and almost ran to the library. She found the Prince walking up and down the long room with a telegraph message in his hand. "You are a most wonderful young woman," he said; "read that."

"I have been told so by more observing men than you, Prince von Steinheimer," said the girl, taking the telegram. It was from the manager of the bank in Vienna, and it ran: "Special messenger leaves with package by the Meran express to-night."

"Just as I thought," said Miss Jennie; "the diamonds never left the bank. I suppose those idiots of servants which the Princess has round her didn't know what they took away from Vienna

and what they left. Then, when the diamonds were missing, they completely lost their heads—not that anyone in the castle has much wit to spare. I never saw such an incompetent lot."

The Prince laughed.

"You think, perhaps, I have not wit enough to see that my wife cares for me, is that it? Is that why you gave me my own letters?"

"Oh, you are well mated! The Princess now does me the honour of being jealous. Think of that! As if it were possible that I should take any interest in you, for I have seen real men in my time."

The Prince regarded her with his most severe expression.

"Are you not flattering yourself somewhat, young lady?"

"Oh, dear no! I take it as the reverse of flattering to be supposed that I have any liking for such a ninny as you are. Flattering, indeed! And she has haughtily dismissed me, if you please."

"The Princess has? What have you been saying to her?"

"Oh, I made the most innocent remark, and it was the truth too, which shows that honesty is not always the best policy. I merely told her that you had offered me ten times the amount of money she is paying me. You needn't jump as if somebody had shot off a gun at your ear. You know you did make such an offer."

"You confounded little mischief-maker," cried the Prince in anger. "Did you tell her what it was for?"

"No. She did not ask."

"I will thank you to apply the cleverness you seem to possess

to the undoing of the harm you have so light-heartedly caused."

"How can I? I am ordered to leave to-night, when I did *so* wish to stay and see the diamond *dénouement*."

"You are not going to-night. I shall speak to the Princess about it if that should be necessary. Your mention of the diamonds reminds me that my respected father-in-law, Mr. Briggs, informs me that a celebrated detective, whom it seems he has engaged—Taylor, I think the name is—will be here to-morrow to explain the diamond mystery, so you see you have a competitor."

"Oh, is Cadbury coming? That is too jolly for anything. I simply *must* stay and hear his explanation, for he is a very famous detective, and the conclusions he has arrived at must be most interesting."

"I think some explanations are due to me as well. My worthy father-in-law seems to have commissioned this person without thinking it necessary to consult me in the least; in fact, Mr. Briggs goes about the castle looking so dark and lowering when he meets me, that I sometimes doubt whether this is my own house or not."

"And is it?"

"Is it what?"

"Is it your own house? I was told it was mortgaged up to the tallest turret. Still, you can't blame Mr. Briggs for being anxious about the diamonds; they belong to his daughter."

"They belong to my wife."

"True. That complicates matters a bit, and gives both Chicago and Vienna a right to look black. And now, your Highness, I

must take my leave of you; and if the diamonds come safely in the morning, remember I intend to claim salvage on them. Meanwhile, I am going to write a nice little story about them."

In the morning the diamonds arrived by special messenger, who first took a formal receipt for them, and then most obsequiously took his departure. By the same train came Mr. Cadbury Taylor, as modest as ever, but giving some indication in his bearing of the importance of the discovery his wonderful system had aided him in making. He blandly evaded the curiosity of Mr. Briggs, and said it would perhaps be better to reveal the secret in the presence of the Prince and Princess, as his investigations had led him to conclusions that might be unpleasant for one of them to hear, yet were not to be divulged in their absence.

"Just what I suspected," muttered Mr. Briggs, who had long been convinced that the Prince was the actual culprit.

The important gathering took place in the library, the Prince, with the diamonds in his coat pocket, seated at the head of the long table, while the Princess sat at the foot, as far from her husband as she could conveniently get without attracting notice. Miss Baxter stood near a window, reading an important letter from London which had reached her that morning. The tall, thin detective and the portly Mr. Briggs came in together, the London man bowing gravely to the Prince and Princess. Mr. Briggs took a seat at the side of the table, but the detective remained standing, looking questioningly at Miss Baxter, but evidently not

recognizing her as the lady who had come in upon him and his friend when they had entered the train.

"I beg the pardon of your Highness, but what I have to say had better be said with as few hearers as possible. I should be much obliged if this young person would read her correspondence in another room."

"The young woman," said the Prince coldly, "is secretary to her Highness, and is entirely in her confidence."

The Princess said nothing, but sat with her eyes upon the table, apparently taking no note of what was going on. Rich colour came into her face, and, as the keen detective cast a swift glance at her, he saw before him a woman conscious of her guilt, fearing exposure, yet not knowing how to avert it.

"If your Highness will excuse my persistence," began Mr. Taylor blandly.

"But I will not," interrupted the Prince gruffly. "Go on with your story without so much circumlocution."

The detective, apparently unruffled by the discourtesy he met, bowed profoundly towards the Prince, cleared his throat, and began.

"May I ask your Highness," he said, addressing himself to the Princess, "how much money you possessed just before you left Vienna?"

The lady looked up at him in surprise, but did not answer.

"In Heaven's name, what has that to do with the loss of the diamonds?" rapped out the Prince, his hot temper getting once

more the better of him. Cadbury Taylor spread out his hands and shrugged his shoulders in protest at the interruption. He spoke with deference, but nevertheless there was a touch of reproach in his tone.

"I am accustomed to being listened to with patience, and am generally allowed to tell my story my own way, your Highness."

"What I complain of is that you are not telling any story at all, but are asking instead a very impertinent question."

"Questions which seem to you irrelevant may be to a trained mind most—"

"Bosh! Trained donkeys! Do you know where the diamonds are?"

"Yes, I do," answered Cadbury Taylor, still imperturbable, in spite of the provocation he was receiving.

"Well, where are they?"

"They are in the vaults of your bank in Vienna."

"I don't believe it. Who stole them then?"

"They were put there by her Highness the Princess von Steinheimer, doubtless in security for money—"

"What!" roared the Prince, springing to his feet, his stentorian voice ringing to the ceiling. "Do you mean to insinuate, you villain, that my wife stole her own diamonds?"

"If your Highness would allow me to proceed in my own—"

"Enough of this fooling. There are the diamonds," cried the Prince, jerking the box from his pocket and flinging it on the table.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.