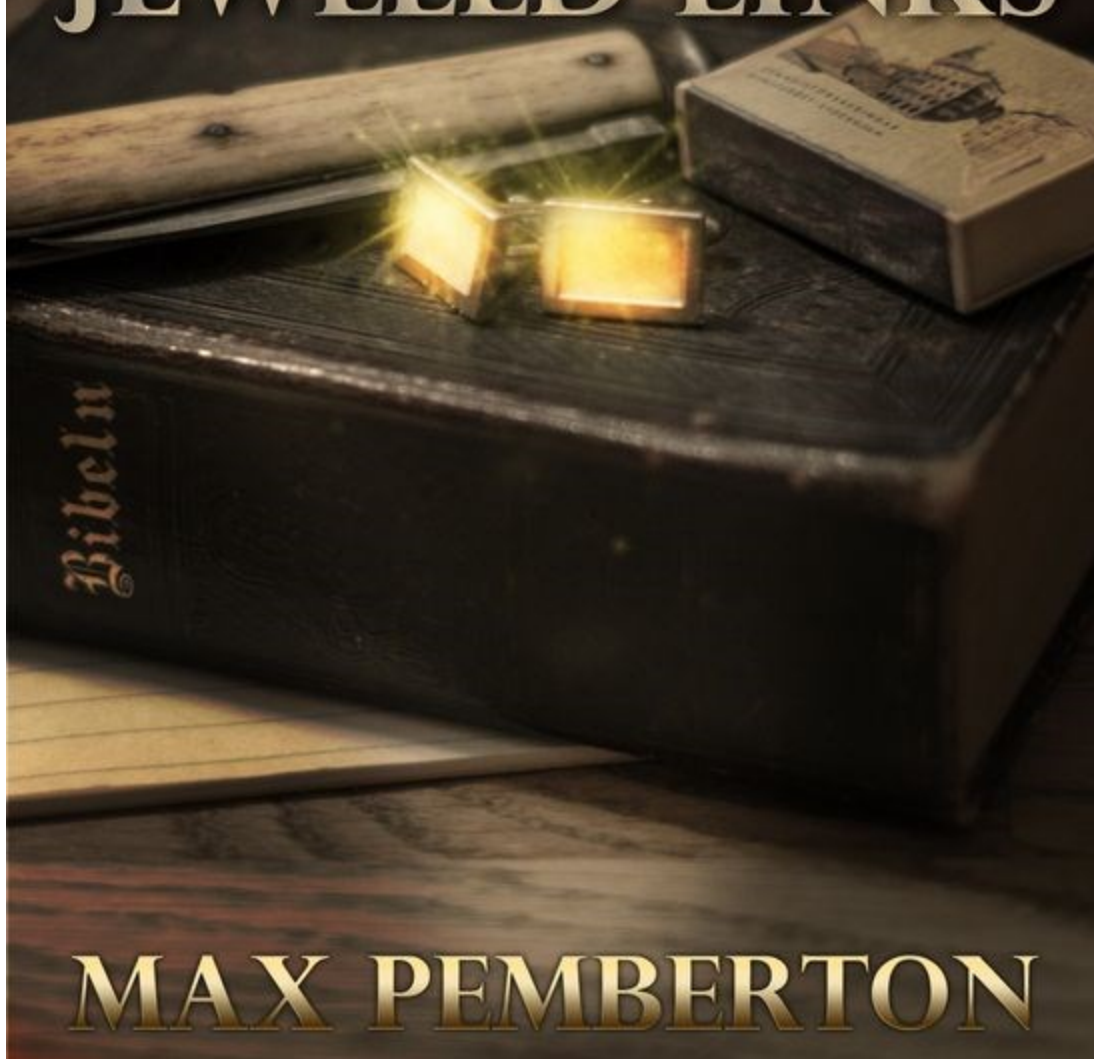


**JEWEL MYSTERIES 3**

**THE COMEDY  
OF THE  
JEWELED LINKS**



**MAX PEMBERTON**

# **JEWEL MYSTERIES 3**

*A short story*

## **THE COMEDY OF THE JEWEL LINKS**

by Max Pemberton

A set of cufflinks so beautiful as to be destined to be worn by elites alone.  
When greed becomes too tempting, murder often ensues.  
Will goodness and light win through, or will evil win the day?

PUBLISHER NOTE: Science Fiction. Short Story. 5,250 words.

# **THE COMEDY OF THE JEWELLED LINKS**

**MAX PEMBERTON**



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**JEWEL MYSTERIES 3**  
**THE COMEDY OF THE JEWELLED LINKS**  
**JULY 2021 MAX PEMBERTON**

This is a work of fiction. All characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

## THE COMEDY OF THE JEWELLED LINKS

I do not know if there be any drug in the Pharmacopœia, or any clearly defined medical treatment, which may ever hope to grapple effectively with the strange disease of jewel-hunger, but if there be not, I have much pleasure in recommending this most singular ill to the notice of a rising generation of physicians. That it is a branch of that mystery of mysteries, *la névrose*, I have no manner of doubt, for I have seen it in all its forms—a malignant growth which makes night of the lives it plays upon; and flourishes to exceeding profit down in the very heart of tragedies. For the matter of that, the flunkies, who study in the kitchen—as the great master has told us—the characters of their governing acquaintances in the boudoir above over a quart pot and the *Police News*, get no little insight into the development of the social disaster which treads often upon the heels of jewel-hunger, as they read those extravagantly ornate reports of robbery and of mystery in which a highly moral people revels. These are but gleaners in the field—to them the inner life must remain hidden. No physician hoping to cope with the affection should turn either to gossips or to slanderers for his diagnosis. Let him get down into the caves of the trade, give his ear to the truer narrative which the jewel dealer alone can write for him, and he may hope for material and for success. And if he be wise, he will study both the comedy and the tragedy which such an investigation will bring before him, and will by this means alone set himself up as a specialist.

It is to such a one that I would recommend perusal of the following case which I record here as one of the comedies of my note-book—a story of meanness, cupidity, and stupid cunning; I doubt if there be any philosophy of medicine which could make pretense of solving it. There were but two principal actors mentioned in the argument, and, indeed, it might fairly be called a one-part play. The chief person concerned, Lord Harningham, I had known for many years. He was a man of whom a biographer wrote “that his long and unblemished career was a credit to his country,” and to whom a book on the Decalogue was inscribed as to one *sans peur et sans reproche*. Yet they told you in the smoking-rooms that he had starved his first wife and left his only son as the partner of a horse-coper in Melbourne, on the princely allowance of one hundred and fifty pounds per annum. His wealth, said common report, was anything from fifty thousand to a hundred thousand pounds per annum; and in his second childhood, for he was a septuagenarian when this comedy was played, he was suckled on the nourishing food of expiring leases and forfeited improvements until he seemed to exude sovereigns from every pore in his enormous body.

A meaner man never lived. All similes in converse were based upon his exploits. “As mean as old Harningham” was a phrase you heard every day at the “Bachelors.” In the countless old stories they put upon him, telling how, at a tenants’ lunch in Bedfordshire,

he had cried, “Here’s another quart of cider, and hang the expense!” how he had been seen in Farringdon Market buying his own fish; how he haggled with cabmen innumerable; how he had been stricken with a malignant fever on the day he gave away a sovereign for a shilling—there was but the echo of the general sentiment. The society prints were hilarious at the mere mention of his name. I recollect well his anger when a wag said in one of them, “It is rumored that Lord Harningham is shortly about to give something away.” He was in my office next day—a week rarely passed but what I saw him—and he laid the journal upon my table, beating it flat with a stick, and pointing at it with his ample finger as though his very touch would wither the writer.

“Please to read that,” he said with forced calm but considerable emphasis, “and tell me if the scoundrel doesn’t deserve to be hanged. He dares to mention my name, d’ye see! To mention *me*, and speak about my concerns. Ha! but I wish I had him under this stick!”

“Of course, you don’t know who wrote it,” said I.

“How should I know?” he gabbled testily. “Do I go round to the taverns swilling gin-and-water with such gutter birds? Do I hobnob with all the half-starved limners in Fleet Street? Pshaw, you talk like a fool!”

I suffered his temper, for he was worth a couple of thousand a year to me. Presently he became calmer, and the humor of the thing dawned upon his dull mind.

“Ha!” he said, snuffing ferociously from the great diamond-studded box he always carried, “I shouldn’t wonder if that’s Master Bertie Watts—you know my nephew, eh? he owes you something, eh?—well, that’s like him, and his scoundrelly impudence—the vagabond!”

“Did not I read somewhere that he was going to be married?” I remarked at hazard; but the notion tickled him immensely, and he rolled about in his chair, shaking the snuff from his box over his fur coat, and even upon my papers.

“Yes, you read it,” he gasped at last, “a fine tale too. Why, what’s he got?—four hundred a year in Whitehall, and what he can draw out of me—not much, Mr. Sutton—not much.”

I had no doubt of that, but I kept my face while he went on to mutter and to chortle; and I showed him a bracelet of rubies, which he desired instantly to purchase. I had put a price of four hundred and twenty pounds upon it, meaning to accept three hundred, so that we haggled for two hours by the clock and had then done business. He took the rubies away with him, while I caused the further sum to be set against him in the ledger, where already there were so many unpaid items under the name. He owed me eight thousand pounds at the least, but I could not press the account, or should have lost him; and while I was often sore troubled for lack of the money, I knew that I should get it at his death, and so aided his jewel-hunger. This was prodigious. All the gems that I sold—watches, necklaces, tiaras, brooches, and breastpins, were conveyed at once to the great safe in his bedroom and there immured. No one ever saw them but himself. His wives, both of whom

were dead, had scarce enjoyed the possession of a barmaid's jewelry. The passion of the collector, of the hungerer after stones, alone consumed him. Of all his meanness, this was the most contemptible—this hiding of fair treasure from the light it lived upon—this gross hoarding of beautiful things for one man's selfish enjoyment.

When he left Bond Street that day, crying at my door, "So I'm going to give something away, am I?—but I ain't, Sutton, I ain't"—and walking off as though he had found satisfaction in the negative thus conveyed to me, I picked up the paper, and read again that young Bertie Watts was at last engaged to the Hon. Eva Benley, and that the wedding was to be celebrated in a month's time. Everyone in town said that old Harningham would do something for Watts when the time for the marriage actually came; and it was gossip in the clubs that her people had given their consent—for they were historically poor—only upon the sincere assurance from their daughter's *fiancé* that his uncle really was very fond of him, and would present him with a handsome check on the wedding day. But here was the announcement of the wedding, and the old curmudgeon had just said—being readier in speech with me, perhaps, than with any one of his few acquaintances—that he did not mean to give the young people a halfpenny. It did occur to me that possibly he might have bought the ruby bracelet for the exceedingly pretty girl to whom his nephew was engaged; but in this I was mistaken, as you shall presently see; and the interest of the whole problem deepened when I learnt later on in the smoking-room of my club that the marriage was likely to be postponed, and something of a scandal to ensue. Bertie Watts, they said, was going about like a ravenous beast, seeking what financier he could devour. His opinion of his uncle was expressed in phrases of which the chief ornament was appalling curses and maledictions. He declared he would have the whip-hand of him yet, would make him pay handsomely for all the trouble he had put people to—in short, behaved like a man who was absurdly in love, regardless of that financial prudence which is so dear to the sight of parents and of guardians. Even he, however, could not foresee the strange thing about to happen to him, or the very curious opportunity which was shortly to be his.

A week passed. There was no definite announcement of any postponement of the arrangements noted by *The Hyde Park Gazette*, nor did such part of society as is represented by the tonguesters, hear that Bertie had persuaded his uncle. The thing was a kind of deadlock in its financial aspect, until at last the world of Belgravia knew that the young lady's father, Lord Varnley, had consented to let the wedding be, and to trust to Harningham's better sense when the time of the accomplishment came. I saw Watts one day driving with his *fiancée* near the Achilles Statue, and thought that he looked glum enough; but he came to me on the following morning for a diamond aigrette, and although he couldn't pay for it, I let him have it.

"It'll be all right in a month, Sutton," said he; "you know the old chap's hard enough, but he can't let me marry on nothing a year, can he now?"

I said that the thing was possible; and for his own sake ventured to hint that it was even probable, an opinion which he took in no good part, sucking his stick silently for a while, and then laughing with a poor little chuckle that seemed to come from the very top of his head.

“Well,” he exclaimed at last, “it’s devilish rough on a fellow to have a relation of that sort, isn’t it?—a positive disgrace to the family. I wonder what the old blackguard is going to give me for a wedding present. Did he ask you to show him any American tickers, by the way? I shouldn’t wonder if he presented me with a brass clock, and Eva with a guinea set in jet—he’s mean enough.”

“He bought a ruby bracelet here some days ago,” I remarked, as in parenthesis.

“Did he now?” he exclaimed in a tone of pleasure. “I wonder if it’s for the girlie! but, of course, it couldn’t be. He’d die to give away anything that once went into his old safe. Look here, Sutton, couldn’t you charge him an extra hundred, and go halves? I feel like something desperate.”

I told him that that was impossible, and he went away with the aigrette in his pocket, and a very thoughtful expression upon his face. Before he did so, however, he had uttered the pious wish that his uncle might die of some tormenting visitation; and that he might be alive to dance on the day of the funeral. I must say that I sympathized with him, for he was a good-looking and kindly-hearted young fellow, who for many years had been led to believe that his relations would do something for him; and who was about to be grievously disappointed. Nor could I forget that he was engaged to one of the prettiest girls in town—and for her sake enjoyed a kind of reflected sympathy which was sincere enough on the part of every man who knew him.

The date of the wedding was now fixed, being the 21st of January, to be well ahead of Lent. I saw Watts very frequently during the following ten days, he coming with expectant persistency to ask me if his uncle had yet bought him anything; and remaining disappointed almost to the very eve of his marriage. In fact, the wedding was to take place on the Wednesday, and it was only on the previous Monday that Lord Harningham ascended my stairs puffing and blowing, and in a shocking temper, to make his purchase of a present.

“Sutton,” he said, “this is the greatest tomfoolery on earth—that young rascal is going to get married after all, and I suppose I’ll have to give him something.”

“You can scarce do less,” I said with a smile.

“Of course, I can do less,” he replied garrulously. “I can give him nothing at all, d’ye see; not a brass halfpenny. Look at the ass, maudlin about the first pretty face he sees over a dinner table when he might marry money twenty times for the asking of it. Did I make such a fool of myself when I was his age?”

I assured him that he did nothing of the sort.



“Then what’s he want to do it for? Thinks he’s going to get something out of me, perhaps—out of *me*, but he ain’t—not sixpence; not if they hadn’t enough to get to the station with. Ha, ha! I’m not such a spendthrift as I look.”

He talked in this strain for some while, and then fell to haggling over a gift. He told me that the custom of giving wedding presents was the insane fashion of an insane age; that he consented to follow it only in view of the fuss that society would make if his card did not lie on Lord Varnley’s table when the other presents were shown. In this bargaining he displayed a meanness which was triumphant even for him. I must have shown him quite a hundred rings, pins, and watches, of all values, from fifty pounds to five hundred, before he could in any way make up his mind, and he did not cease to rebuke me for that which he called my preposterously extravagant insinuation. “Fifty sovereigns! a hundred sovereigns!” he kept exclaiming; “Why, man alive, do you think I’m made of money? Show me something cheap, something that five pounds will buy, d’ye see? any bit of stuff’s good enough for a jackanapes like that.”

“But not for your card on Lord Varnley’s table.”

“Why, what do you mean?”

“People who are uncharitable, you know, might say that it was a curiously insufficient present.”

“D’ye think they’d say that?”

“I am sure they would.”

“Pshaw!—so am I; that comes of being thought a rich man when you’re as poor as a parson. I’m quite a poor man, you know, Sutton.”

I listened to him patiently, and in the end persuaded him to buy Watts an exquisite set of jeweled links. These had a fine diamond in each of them, but their greatest ornament was the superb enameling, worthy of Jean Toutin or Petitot, with which all the gold was covered. I asked one hundred and fifty pounds for these remarkable ornaments; and the old man, struck, like the artist he was, with the perfection of the workmanship, fixed his greedy eyes upon them, and was persuaded. He protested that they were too good, far too good, for such a worthless ingrate as his nephew, and that he ought to keep them in his own collection; but at last, he ordered me to send them, with his card, to Lord Varnley’s town house, and went away chafing at his own generosity, and, as he avowed, at his stupidity.

I saw no more of him for a week. The wedding had been celebrated, and Master Bertie Watts had conveyed away quietly to Folkestone as pretty an English girl as ever flourished in the glare of the West. Lord and Lady Varnley shut up their house during the week after the marriage, having sent the very numerous wedding presents to their bankers; and society would have forgotten the whole business if it had not paused to discuss the important question—How were the young couple to exist in the future on the paltry income of four or five hundred pounds a year? One half of the world may not know how

the other half lives, but that is not for lack of effort on its part to find out. It was a matter of club-room news that old Lord Harningham had not relented—and, beyond what his nephew called “those twopenny-half-penny sleeve links,” had not given him a penny. How then, said this same charitable world, will these silly children keep up their position in town when they return from the second-rate hotel they are now staying in at Folkestone?

Curiously enough, I was able myself to answer that question in three days’ time—though at the moment I was as ignorant as any of them. The matter came about in this way. On the very morning that Lord Varnley went to Paris, it was known through the daily papers that there had been a robbery at his house in Cork Street, of a green velvet case, containing a crescent of pearls, turquoises, and diamonds. This was a present from one of the Embassies to his daughter, and must, said the reports, have been abstracted from the house during the press and the confusion of the reception. Later in the afternoon I received an advice from Scotland Yard cautioning me against the purchase of such a gem, and inviting immediate communication if it were offered to me. The theft of wedding presents is so common that I gave little heed to the matter; and was already immersed in other business when Lord Harningham was announced. He seemed rather fidgety in his manner, I thought, and hummed and hawed considerably before he would explain his mission.

“It’s about those links I gave my nephew,” he said at last. “They’re far too good for him, Sutton—and they’re too pretty. I never saw better work in my life, and must have been a fool when I let them go out of my possession—d’ye see?”

“Well, but you can’t get them back now?” I remarked with a smile.

He took snuff vigorously at my reply, and then said—

“Man, you’re wrong, I’ve got them in my pocket.”

I must have expressed my astonishment in my look, for he went on quickly—

“Yes, here in the green case as you sold them. Do I surprise you, eh? Well, I’m going to give Master Bertie a bit of a check and to keep these things; but one of the stones is off color—I noticed it at the wedding—and I must have a new one in, d’ye see?”

“I thought that you had already handed them over,” I interrupted, quite disregarding his last request.

“So, I did, so I did; but a man can take his own back again, can’t he? Well, when I saw them at the house, I concluded it was ridiculous to give a boy like that such treasures, and so—”

“You spoke to him?”

“Hem—that is, of course, man. Pshaw! You’re too inquisitive for a jeweler: you ought to have been a lady’s maid.”

“Have you brought them with you now?”

“What should I be here for if I hadn’t?”

He laid upon my table a green velvet case, of the exact size, color, and shape of that which had contained the links; but when I opened it, I gave a start, and put it down quickly. The case held a crescent of pearls, turquoises, and diamonds, which answered exactly to the description of the one stolen from Lord Varnley's house on the day of his daughter's wedding.

"There's some mistake here," said I, "you've evidently left the links at home," with which remark I put the jewels under his very nose for him to see. He looked at them for a moment, the whole of his flabby face wrinkling and reddening; then he seemed almost to choke, and the veins in his forehead swelled until they were as blue threads upon an ashen and colorless countenance.

"Good God!" he ejaculated, "I've taken the wrong case."

"Your nephew gave it you, no doubt, but he must have forgotten it, for he's advertised the loss of this crescent at Scotland Yard, and there are detectives now trying to find it. I am cautioned not to purchase it," I said with a laugh.

The effect of these words upon him was so curious that for some moments I thought he had spasm of the heart. Starting up in the chair, with wild eyes, and hands clutching at the arms to rest upon them, he made several attempts to speak, but not a word came from his lips. I endeavored to help him with his difficulty, but it was to little purpose.

"It seems to me, Lord Harningham," I suggested, "that you have only to write a line of explanation to your nephew—and there's an end of the matter."

"You think so?" he cried eagerly.

"Why not," said I, "since he returned the jewels to you?"

"But he didn't," he interrupted, cringing in the chair at this confession of a lie; "he didn't; and he'd prosecute me; he hates me, and this is his opportunity, d'ye see?"

"Do you mean to say," I exclaimed, beginning to understand the situation, "that you took the case without his permission?"

"Yes, yes," he mumbled, "they were so beautiful, such work! You know what work they were. I saw them at the wedding, and was sure that I should not have parted with them. I meant to send him a check against them—and when no one was looking I put what I thought was the case into my pocket, but it was the wrong one. God help me, Sutton what shall I do?"

Now it seemed to me that this was one of the most delightful comedies I had ever assisted at. Technically, Lord Harningham was a thief, and undoubtedly Bertie Watts could have prosecuted him had he chosen, though the probability of his getting a conviction was small. But it was very evident to me that here was the boy's opportunity, and that in the interest of his pretty wife I should make the best of it. With this intent, I played my first card with necessary boldness.

"Undoubtedly the case is very serious for you," said I, apparently with sympathy, "and it is made the more serious from the strange relations existing between your nephew and

yourself. You know the law, I doubt not, as well as I do; and that once a prosecution has been initiated at Scotland Yard it is impossible to withdraw without a trial. Mr. Watts might get into serious trouble for compounding a felony; and I might suffer with him as one in the conspiracy. But I tell you what I will do; I'll write to him to-night and sound him. Meanwhile, let me advise you to keep out of the way, for I can't disguise the fact that you might be arrested."

He gave a great scream at this, and the perspiration rolled from him, falling in great drops upon the carpet. "Oh, Lord!" he kept muttering, "oh, that I should have been such a consummate fool!—oh, Heaven help me! To think of it—and what it will cost, I could cry, Sutton—cry like a child."

I calmed him with difficulty, and led him down the back stairs to a cab with a positive assurance that I would not communicate with Scotland Yard. Then I wrote to Folkestone a letter, the precise contents of which are immaterial, but the response to which was in the form of a telegram worded as follows—

"Am inexpressibly shocked and pained, but the law must take its course."

I put this into my pocket without any delay and went over to Harningham's house in Park Lane. He had been up all night, they told me, and the doctor had just left him; but I found him suffering only from an enervating fear, and white as the cloth on the breakfast table before him.

"Well," he said, "what is it, what does he say? Will he prosecute me?"

I handed him the telegram for answer, and I thought he would have swooned. He did not know that I had in my pocket another letter from his nephew, in which Master Bertie informed me that I was the "best chap in the world," and I saw no reason to mention this. Indeed, I listened with infinite gravity when the old man told me that he was irretrievably ruined, and that his name would stand in all the clubs as that of a common thief. Jewel-hunger plainly accounted for everything he had done; but it was not to my end to console him, and I said in a severe and sufficiently melancholy voice—

"Lord Harningham, there is only one thing to do, and for your sake I will make myself a criminal participator in the conspiracy. You must go to Folkestone with me this afternoon, and take your check book with you."

The groan he gave at this would have moved a man of iron. I saw tears standing in his eyes, and his hand shook when I left him so that he could scarce put it into mine. Yet he came to the station to meet me in the afternoon, and by six o'clock we were in Folkestone at a shabby second-rate hotel, called "The Cock and Lobster," inquiring for the bride and bridegroom. Mr. and Mrs. Watts, they said, were out on the parade; but we went to look for them, and surprised them coming from the Lees, as handsome a couple as you could look upon. She, a pretty, brown-haired English girl, her tresses tossed over her large eyes by the sharp wind that swept in from the sea, was close under the arm of her husband, who, at that stage, fearing to lose her touch, seemed engaged in the impossible attempt to

cover her entirely with one of his arms. And in this pursuit privacy came to his aid, for the breeze was fresh from the Channel at the beginning of night, banishing all loiterers but those loitering in love; and the lamps flickered and went low in the gusts as though fearing to illumine the roses upon the cheeks of a bride.

When Master Bertie saw us, he became as sedate as a Methodist minister, and commanding a solemn tone acted the part to perfection.

“Uncle,” he said, “I would never have believed it of you. But this is too serious a matter to mention here; let us go to the hotel.”

We returned in silence, but directly we were in the hall the young man called for his bill, and speaking almost in a boisterous tone, cried—

“We’re going to change our quarters, uncle, and will begin by moving to the best hotel in the place. That poor girl is moped to death here, and now you’re going to pay for our honeymoon—cost doesn’t matter, does it, old man?”

The old man concerned started at this, his mouth wide open with the surprise of it.

“What’s that?” he muttered. “What’re you going to do?” But I whispered to him to be silent, and in an hour, we were sitting down to a superb dinner—which he did not touch, by the bye—in the great saloon of the biggest hotel in the place. During the meal the bride, who scarce seemed able to do anything else than look at her husband, made few remarks, but Watts and I talked freely, quite ignoring the old man; and it was not until we were in the private room that the negotiations began.

There is no need to describe them. They lasted until midnight, at which hour the nephew of Lord Harningham had five hundred pounds in his pocket, and an allowance of five hundred a year. From the moment of assenting to these conditions until we entered the train next morning the old man never opened his lips, but he kissed the bride at the door of the hotel, and color came again to his cheeks at the warmth of her lips. When at last we were alone in the carriage he gave a great sigh of relief and said—

“Sutton, thank God that’s over!”

“Nearly over, my lord,” I replied with emphasis.

“What do you mean?” he cried. “Do you think that anyone will get to hear of it? Why, man, what have I half-ruined myself for?”

“To keep your nephew quiet,” I suggested pleasantly.

“And who else knows anything when he’s settled with?” he asked angrily.

“Why,” said I quite calmly, “you and I, perhaps.”

He looked at me as though his glance was all-consuming and would wither me, but I met him with a placid smile and continued—

“It seems to me that I want what Mr. Stevenson calls ‘a good memory for forgetting.’ Do you know, Lord Harningham, that if you paid my bill—gave me, say, eight thousand pounds on account, I believe my mind would be quite oblivious to the events of last night.”

The shot struck home—in the very center of my target. He thought over it for some while, and spoke but once between Sevenoaks and Charing Cross. His remark was more forcible than convincing, for he exclaimed suddenly, and *à propos* of nothing in particular, “Sutton to blazes with all jewels!” Then he subsided, and came with me quietly to my rooms, where he wrote a check for eight thousand pounds and signed it with considerable firmness. The ink was hardly dry, however, before he dropped heavily upon the carpet, and lay prone in a fit.

The shock of parting with so much money had been too much for him. He is now in Madeira seeking a climate.

**THE END**

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