

THE MISSING RING

A Dramatic Incident at a Dinner Party

By MOLLIE K. WETHERELL

At a dinner consisting of a dozen persons at a table, Miss Trover, who had recently returned from abroad with a ring she had brought from Rome, had been found in digging the foundation for a house to be erected on the Via Capoue, and, considering the depth at which it lay and its workmanship, archaeologists placed it as belonging to the time of Augustus Caesar. The ring having been noticed by some one sitting near her, she took it off her finger, and it was passed around the table for inspection.

The curiosity that had belonged to so distant a period and probably the most interesting to modern European eyes in history led to a spirited dialogue on the conditions existing at the Eternal City under Augustus, and the ring was forgotten. Later its owner, asked for it. Each person who had held it looked at some one else at the table, but no one produced the ring. Several minutes passed, during which a search was being made among the tableware, the brow of the lady who had submitted it for inspection meanwhile darkening. The host, who also looked anxious, arose and, asking the guests to push their chairs back from the table, looked carefully under it, but without success.

There had been no waiters in the room while the ring had been circulated, for the dinner was over and the coffee served. A suspicion therefore arose among those present that it had been stolen by one of their number. This suspicion showed itself to a marked degree in the expressions of those who held it. The host, who sat at one end of the table, and the hostess, who sat at the other, looked at each other in dismay. There was in the incident material for a first class scandal. Then the host, evidently much moved, said:

"It looks as though we had in our midst a thief, and yet I have perfect confidence that such is not the case. Nevertheless every person present is under suspicion. That every one may be cleared of that suspicion I propose that we each and all submit to be searched. I will call in some one who has not been in the room to do the searching, one of my own family, who will have no reason in writing me of convicting any individual. You have heard my proposition. Let those who are willing to submit to it say 'Aye.'"

Every one at the table except Miss Huxford, a young artist who had passed his nocturnal in Florence, Italy, and had returned to America for a short stay. Those present looked at the young man in astonishment.

"Mr. Huxford," said the host with dilated nostrils and flashing eyes, "do you confess yourself a thief?"

"No."

"Then why do you object to being searched?"

"I do not care to state my reasons."

Huxford sat down with the stem of a wineglass outwardly at least he was cool. He did not meet the gaze of those whose eyes were fixed upon him, some with indignation, some with surprise and some with content. There was a short silence after which the host said to the others:

"I presume we shall be obliged to take Mr. Huxford's refusal as proof of his guilt, though he virtually pleads not guilty." Then, turning to the lady who had lost the ring, he added "I cannot replace your property but I shall send to a friend in Rome, an archaeologist, to procure me the best substitute he can find that is purchasable at any price."

The lady replied that she did not hold her host responsible for her loss but he insisted that he was responsible and would make it good.

Huxford arose from the table and looking at the host said:

"Under the circumstances I must ask your permission to withdraw."

"Madame," said the host to the loser of the ring, "is it your wish to call upon the police to regain your ring?"

"Certainly not; I would not think of such a thing."

"Very well, Mr. Huxford. You may withdraw."

All eyes were fixed on Huxford, who left the room without turning his back to the company, making a slight inclination just before passing through the door. He left a roomful of persons in dejection by different emotions. Some blamed the host for permitting him to depart without attempting to secure the ring; some felt that he had acted wisely, but no one expressed an opinion. The episode was discussed in general terms by the company all taking part except Miss Louise Trover, who seemed to have been stunned by it, and Miss Kate Sheldon, who, though she made no comment, showed in her expression that she was much moved.

The question, "Do you believe him guilty?" passed around the table. Miss Trover's reply was, "I can't understand it." Miss Sheldon's was, "I have an opinion to express to the master."

Nothing else than Huxford's guilt—his motives for taking the ring, his consent to stand in the position of a thief if innocent—was discussed for the rest of the evening. One gentleman, a lawyer by profession, proposed a theory that set with more favor than any other. He suggested that Huxford, your disgraced before the world."

being an artist, poor and having lived in Rome, knowing the value of the ring, had yielded to a temptation to possess it, then had relied on the character of the company not to push the matter to a disclosure.

The next afternoon while Miss Trover was preparing to go out she was surprised to receive a card bearing the name of Marie Huxford. She was about to send an indignant "not at home" when she abruptly changed her mind and went down to receive the visitor. She walked into the room with a look on her face to indicate that Mr. Huxford under a cloud was not an acceptable acquaintance.

"Where?" she was beginning when she stopped him.

"Miss Trover, please."

Huxford's face changed. "I came here for an explanation. From your manner I infer that you consider me a thief. Such being the case, I will not attempt to remove the impression. I bid you good morning."

The composed manner that accompanied the words changed that of the lady. With a voice that trembled slightly she said:

"Heaven knows how glad I would be to hear proof of your innocence." She had not asked him to be seated, and when he spoke again he continued standing. She, too, remained on her feet.

"Do you remember when we first met in Florence, while I was copying a picture in the Pitti gallery?" he asked.

"I do."

"A young American lady had just left me. You did not make her, but she noticed me. I do not recall speaking of favors I have received from women, but in this case it is necessary that girl wished me for herself. Why I know not, for I certainly had no reciprocal desire on my part. She watched you and me during your stay in Florence and when you were gone reproached her for what she called deserting her for you. I declared that far from deserting her, I had never expressed any other except a friendly feeling for her."

"I was not aware I had a rival."

"Have I not just said that you had not? Certainly not in the woman I have mentioned."

"Go on."

"Then when I was able to draw my own correspondence, I followed you here."

He paused, seeming to debate in his mind just what to say next, then he said abruptly:

"You wish to know where that ring is?"

She looked up at him inquiringly.

"If it has not been lost on the way you will find it in one of the folds of the gown you wore at the dinner last evening."

"In my costume?"

"Yes, in yours."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I saw it dropped there."

The girl stood as if stunned for a time, then suddenly ran out of the room and upstairs. In a few minutes she returned with the ring. On her face were many thoughts, and emotions in confusion, but the one that was growing predominant was a consciousness of a sacrifice having been made to save her from a very trying position.

"What did you mean," she exclaimed almost indignantly, by admitting that you were a thief when you were what you were trying to do any way?"

There were several things for me to do. The first was to prevent your being found with the ring in your dress. You didn't know it was there. Since I saw it placed there I should have had to accuse the person who put it there, and I question if I would have been believed. At any rate, the motives of the person who sought to vent her vindictiveness upon you would have necessarily come out."

"Who was she?"

"Miss Sheldon."

"Miss Sheldon? What object had she to injure me?"

"Your dinner companion had sat between you and her, but had moved to speak to another lady. Our host was telling of an adventure he had had in the Coliseum in Rome. All eyes were turned on him. The ring was on the table near Miss Sheldon. Though I appeared to be watching the speaker, half my glance was upon her. She, too, pretended to be interested in what was said. Presently she let fall her hand on the ring, then lowered both beneath the table. When she raised her hand the ring was not in it. The dress you wore, full of folds as it was, was a convenient receptacle for stolen property."

"Who is Miss Sheldon?"

"One you have identified with the name of rival."

There were a few moments of silence between Huxford and Miss Trover. The explanation had appalled her. Two emotions struggled within her, horror at the act of the woman who had sought to ruin her and wonder and admiration for the sacrifice that had been made in her behalf. Silently she moved toward the artist, and he clasped her in his arms.

"I have heard of such women," said Miss Trover presently, "but I did not believe that they existed."

"You have proof in this that they do."

"What is the next step in the drama?"

"To return the ring without an explanation."

"Without an explanation? In that case you will not be vindicated."

"I never can be vindicated. When a man is attacked by an unscrupulous woman his only defense is silence."

Then, after a pause, she said: "One thing I am glad of, I shall partake of your dinner as you disgrace before the world."

Diamond Clearing.
The art of the lapidary is one of the most delicate employments of mechanical force known. The practical diamond cutter learns many facts about precious stones which are sealed books even to mineralogists. For instance, it is the lapidaries who have found out that diamonds come from the different districts vary remarkably in their degrees of hardness. It appears that the hardest diamonds come from New South Wales. An unfamiliar fact is that diamonds are made to assume approximately the required shape by slitting and cleaving and by "bruting," which is the rubbing of one diamond against another, before they are submitted to the polishing wheel. In cleaving the diamond is cemented on the end of a wooden stick and a steel blade is driven with a smart blow in the direction of the natural plane of cleavage. Diamonds that have come out by the lapidary's wheel lack some of the brilliance possessed by those that have simply been cleaved.—New York Press.

Good Weight.
One trick of the trade was taught to the young butcher by the marketman who gave him his first employment. The old dealer pointed to trays of beef, lamb and pork trimmings beneath the counter.

"When customers ask to have all the waste that has been cut from their own meat wrapped up with their order be sure to put in a few of these trimmings besides," he said. "Most always they want the scraps sent home so they can weigh the whole business and find out whether they are getting full weight or not. Enough extra pieces to tip the scales half an ounce beyond the supposed weight won't hurt any body and will give us a good name."

Shortly after that the new clerk heard one frugal housewife say to another "Oh why don't you trade at Blank's? He gives such good measure, often almost an ounce more than you pay for."

The clerk smiled. Washington Star.

Why Men Want West.
A hundred years ago the Rev. Timothy Dwight commented complacently on the beauties of Connecticut from the piazza of the University in the western New York of the restless spirits who chafed under the rule of the old families and the congregation of old clergy, writes Professor Edward Alworth in the Century. It never occurred to him that these insurgent spirits were carrying with them to the wilderness a precious energy and initiative. The unprosperous, the shiftless and the migratory sought the frontier to be sure, but the enterprising few were attracted by it. The timid and cautious stayed and accepted the cramped conditions of an old society, but those who were of a bolder cast, and who had the strength to "pitch a hat on them selves," were apt to catch the western fever.

Precedent Nobly Ignored.
Had no important step been taken by the leaders of the Revolution for which a precedent could not be discovered, no government established of which an exact model did not present itself to the people of the United States might at this moment have been numbered among the melancholy victims of misguided despots. The weight of some of these forms which have crumpled the shames of the rest of mankind. Happily for America, happily we trust for the whole human race, they pursued a new and more noble course. James Madison.

The Judge's Advice.
The prisoner being without an advocate and the charge being one of murder, the judge asked a junior barrister to act as his counsel. The barrister did his best and at luncheon privately asked the judge whether he should make a long speech for the defense or a short one.

"As long as you can make it," said his lordship emphatically, "for that is the only chance the prisoner has of lengthening his life."—London Opinion.

The Good Old Days Long Gone.
A well known Bostonian recently found in his trunk an old diary with this entry "Aug. 16, 1887. Went to the railroad station to see my sister off, and by some chance Harry Blank was there to see him sister off. In the rush and noise and confusion we got mixed and I hugged his sister and he hugged mine."—Boston Transcript.

More Red Taps.
New Official (at museum turnstile)—Here, sir, you must leave your umbrella at the door. Gent.—But I haven't got an umbrella. New Official—Then go back and get one. No one is allowed to pass in here unless he leaves his umbrella at the door. Orders is orders.—Exchange.

A Coincidence.
"I wonder why a man should ever wish to steal a kiss?" she remarked after they had been gazing in silence at each other for a long time.

"It's funny," he replied. "While I have been sitting here that same thought occurred to me."—Chicago Record-Herald.

New Fashion in Horse Shoes.
Hubby—I must take him to the blacksmith. He needs new shoes. Wife—Can't you have the old ones soled and heeled? The uppers look perfectly good.—Harper's Weekly.

If you bring a smile to the trembling lips of another you will soon discover that a smile is slighting on your own face.

Didn't Like Questions.
Bishop Thirlwall, an English prelate, had the greatest possible aversion to answering questions. One day a tailor said to him when he had been summoned to take the bishop's measurements, "What are your lordship's orders?" "I want a suit of clothes." "Here is a very nice cloth, my lord." "Ah!" "And this is likewise a very good one." "Yes." "Here is another of excellent quality." "Very." "Which material will your lordship decide upon?" "I want a suit of clothes." "And that was all the answer the tailor could get. When the new gardener accused him as he was walking, book in hand, in the garden to ask, "How will your lordship have this border laid out?" there was no answer. "How will your lordship be pleased to have this border laid out?" was the next attempt. Still there was no reply. But when the question was repeated for the third time the answer came, "You are the gardener, I believe, and I am the bishop!"

World's Most Valuable Garden.
The Bank of England has an old fashioned garden in its midst. In the center is a fountain, there are a couple of trees, and the paths are gravelled. This garden has a curious history. In reality it is the churchyard of the vanished Church of St. Christopher in Stock, which used to stand on the site of the Mansion House. One reason why the church was pulled down was because its tower completely overlooked the bank, and it was feared that it would be a danger to the "old lady" as the church was occupied by rioters. As the bank occupies the site of the entire parish of Christopher in Stock it is said that any freeman of the city of London can claim admission to the old garden. As a matter of fact, any one who cares to see it may do so during business hours, and it is well worth a visit. If only for the fact that it is the most valuable garden in the world. London Spectator.

Transportation In Charles II's Time.
On the best highways heavy articles were in the time of Charles II generally conveyed from place to place by stage wagons. In the straw of these vehicles nestled a crowd of passengers who could not afford to travel by coach or on horseback and who were prevented by indelicacy or by the weight of their luggage from going on foot. The expense of transmitting heavy goods in this way was enormous. From London to Birmingham the charge was 47 (\$35) a ton, from London to Exeter £12 (\$90) a ton. This was about 30 cents a ton for every mile. The cost of conveyance amounted to a prohibitory tax on many useful articles. Coal in particular was never sent out in the districts where it was produced or in the districts to which it would be carried by sea and was indeed always known in the south of England by the name of sea coal. Macaulay.

Meals In the Good Old Days.
In the sixteenth century it was considered a sign of efficiency to eat breakfast. Says Harrison in his description of Britain, published in 1596: "Of old we had breakfasts in the forenoon between six and seven after dinner, and this to recreate ourselves. Now these old customs thanked be God, have well off, and each one except here and there some young hungry stomach that cannot fast in dinner time, contenteth himself with dinner and supper only. The nobles' guests and students ordinarily go to dinner at 11 before noon and to supper at 12 at noon or 6 at night especially in London. The husbandmen also dine at 11 before noon and sup at 7 or 8, but out of terms, in our universities, the scholars dine at 10." London Chronicle.

The Old Dodge.
Brown has refused to give us an extra day's time to meet his bill. He says it's been running long enough. "Didn't you tell him we'd give him a check for the full amount the day after tomorrow?"

"I did. He said that wouldn't do. He wanted it in the morning."

"All right. Mail him a check today and forget to have it signed. There's more than one way of stretching credit if you have to." Detroit Free Press.

Useless Salutes.
"I wonder," said the man of a stational turn "I wonder how much powder is destroyed daily in useless salutes?"

"There must be a lot," said the frivolous girl, "but I suppose women will go on kissing one another just the same."

Calling Terms.
Visiting Curate—I've just been speaking to your neighbor, Mrs. Noggin. Are you on calling terms with her? Mrs. Littlepod—Yes. She called me no lady, and I called her a bottle nosed old druggie!—London Answer.

Another Form of Expression.
Tommy Pop, what do the dramatic critics mean by "spontaneous applause?" Tommy's Pop—It is merely another way of saying the ushers are earning their salaries, my son.—Exchange.

Wanted to Finish the Job.
"Now, Willie, promise me you won't fight any more."

"Can't you wait till tomorrow, mother? I've only got one more boy to lick and then I'll be through."—Life.

Interested Spectators.
"You want me to pull a tooth out for you, Hans? And what do all the others I want?"

"To watch you."—Filigende Blatter, and was happy forever afterward!

THE ROSE SCARF

A Tale of the Far East

By CLARISSA MACKIE

"I believe Mrs. Hanford has a tale to unfold," observed that lady's husband as he placed a chair for her.

"Good!" exclaimed Professor Trayle heartily. "Now, Alex, spread the carpet of truth on the deck and let Mrs. Hanford begin at once."

A little laugh ran around the group of seven friends touring the world on the steamer Neptune. Each one had had a story to relate concerning some adventure encountered in quaint streets, noisy bazaar or primitive environs of foreign cities. Every night after dinner the seven had gathered on deck and in the moonlight had told stories and exchanged opinions on many matters of mutual interest.

The carpet of truth to which the professor had referred was a precious bit of oriental carpet that Alexander Felton had brought from a remote Turkish province, and the Neptune story tellers had each told his tale sitting upon its breadth of silken richness. Now Mrs. Hanford removed her chair so that she sat upon the carpet, and the six listeners composed themselves for an hour's enjoyment.

"My story is about this rose colored scarf," began Mrs. Hanford, opening one plump hand to display a crumpled ball of pink silk and silver tissue she shook out the airy fabric, and it floated a shimmering length that seemed woven of sunset and moonbeams. The airy scarf undulated like a thing alive, leaped at Arthur Clayton's eager, interested face and clung to it with a caressing motion and then left him to brush Mr. Hanford's bronzed cheek, to tweak the golden eyeglasses from Professor Trayle's dignified nose and finally to rumple Alexander Felton's hair into untidiness. Then it settled down in Mrs. Hanford's lap and was quiet.

"The darling!" cried Arthur Clayton enthusiastically, with a dizzy look at the pink scarf.

"Why did you see her, too?" demanded the other three men in bewilderment chorus.

"Yes, you don't mean I saw Mrs. Hanford, what sort of a juggling game is this?" Young Clayton stared first at the rose silk scarf and then at Mrs. Hanford's sensible, motherly face above it.

"You ought to explain it, Mary," assured her husband with some concern.

"What is it all about?" demanded Miss Emmeline Gray, the strong minded aunt of Arthur Clayton. "What has happened to turn all of their heads?"

"The scarf," said Mrs. Hanford, "is a beautiful scarf with a pink scarf on her head, a pair left for the eyes, trousers a pink and gold scarf hanging over her forehead."

"We are missing the story, pray," began Mrs. Hanford, urged Miss Gray impatiently.

Mrs. Hanford folded her hands over the pink and silver thing in her lap and fixed her eyes on the molten silver track that led across the Mediterranean to the rising moon.

"This is the only secret I ever kept from James," she said, not looking at her surprised husband. "When we were in Cairo he was busy hunting for scamps to carry home to souvenir loving friends. I was seeking gauze scarves to take to the girls at home. The dealer in scarves had sold me several beauties, and woven in each one was some romantic story that the wily old fellow invented as he went along."

"One of the scarves had belonged to that daughter of Pharaoh who found young Moses among the bulrushes; another of apple green and seed pearls had been the gift of Antony to Cleopatra, a third one of black and gold and crimson had jealousy and murder for its setting."

"When he brought out this dream of pink and silver I was skeptical at his air of exaggerated concern in handling it, at his respectful tone when speaking of it, at the almost fear in his voice."

"Madame, this is the wedding scarf of the Princess Anem," he murmured, looking over his shoulder at the dark interior of his little shop. "She had a lover, Fedar, by name, a handsome, worthless scamp, of whom her respected father strongly disapproved. There was another lover, a prince of royal blood, who sought the hand of the Princess Anem, and it was he who brought to her this royally beautiful scarf."

"How much enhances the beauty of all who wear it, tenfold, but the Princess Anem would have none of its magic, for she was beautiful herself beyond compare, so she flung the prince's gift back in his face, and tradition says that the scarf turned to a lovely woman who became the prince's bride. As for the foolish Princess Anem—the seller of scarves turned his venerable head and inclined a listening ear toward the rear of his shop. I looked and thought I could make out a dim, shadowy whiteness, like the form of a young girl clad in a flowing robe."

"As for the foolish Princess Anem," he murmured, "she married the handsome Fedar and was happy forever afterward!"

cried a sweet, mocking voice from the rear, and then the white shadow vanished, leaving me to stare helplessly at the seller of scarves.

"She is a heartless jade," he muttered bitterly, turning the scarf in his brown fingers.

"Is that the Princess Anem?" I asked bluntly.

"He shook his head. 'Nay, that is my graceless daughter Lelia. She was promised this scarf for her marriage if she chose wisely; but, alas, she is breaking my heart and bringing my gray tuns to the grave's edge! He forgot the bargaining instinct that usually overpowers all other sentiment in the Egyptian bazaars and beat his head against the low stone table."

"I am very sorry," I murmured. "Are you quite sure your daughter has not chosen wisely? Does she love?"

"Aye, she loves the wrong man, even as did the Princess Anem, who was never a greater coquette than my saucy Lelia. Lelia believes she is in love with Fedar, the water carrier, when my neighbor here, Hashour, the silk merchant, is implicitly waiting to carry her off as his bride."

"I peeped into the next bazaar and was rewarded with a glimpse of the desirable Hashour, an enormously fat man as old as Lelia's father and very ugly of feature. He was asleep and snoring audibly."

"You want her to marry that?" I almost shrieked at him, and as I spoke I was conscious that the white shadow had returned to the shop. It peaked behind the seller of scarves as if waiting for his answer.

"The old man nodded. 'He is rich,' he said briefly. 'She could have had the scarf of the Princess Anem for a gift if she had been obedient. But she is saucy and will not wait upon her stepmother as she should, and, worst of all, she swears she will marry the water carrier or disgrace me by remaining single. I am afflicted indeed— but madame has not chosen to buy the rose scarf? It is the choicest of my stock! His voice changed magically to a bargaining whine."

"You cannot want to sell it. You better forgive your daughter, let her marry Fedar and wear the rose scarf," I blundered.

"He dashed the scarf impatiently down. 'Nay!' if madame does not buy it I will sell it to the next comer, and I will soon have a customer for it!' he ended craftily, and I lifted my head and looked behind me to see a group of American women coming post haste toward the bazaar.

"That was enough for me. I paid an absurd price for the scarf, James you shall never know. As I tucked it away with the other purchases I had made I heard a long drawn sigh from the white shadow as it vanished."

"It was in the next street that a girl came flying up to me and lightly touched my arm. A pair of dark flashing eyes shone above the gauze that veiled her face, and—well, any girl with a pair of eyes like those must have been exquisitely beautiful. I knew at once that it was the embodiment of the shadow that had lurked behind the seller of scarves, and I guessed that it was his daughter Lelia, she who loved Fedar, the water carrier."

"She addressed me in a low, musical voice, a mixture of broken French and fluent Arabic. She thanked me for the words I had spoken to her father concerning her marriage. She gazed with delight over my horror at the fatness of Hashour, the silk merchant and her dejected father. Then she made an appeal. She wanted to come with me as my maid and traveling companion, only as far as Alexandria, where her water carrier had gone to work on this new warrier as a sort of for-man."

"Mrs. Hanford stopped abruptly. The great vessel was drawing near to the Egyptian city, lying like a jeweled necklace along the blue Mediterranean. In the roadstead the great anchors rattled down into the moonlit water, myriads of little boats surrounded the ocean liner, and a steam tug bustled below on the shore. All was confusion and confusion below on the Neptune.

"Well!" inquired Mr. Hanford, breaking the silence that had fallen upon the group.

"Let us see if all is well," murmured his wife, and so the seven, half understanding the real romance they had been listening to, followed her to the ship's rail.

As they leaned over, watching a small boat whose single oarman was especially insistent in getting close to the Neptune's landing staffs, Mrs. Hanford uttered an exclamation of delight, and they all turned to see such a vision of beauty as is seldom vouchsafed to western eyes.

"It was Lelia, daughter of the seller of scarves. Her exquisite face was unveiled and shone a vision of rose and ivory and melting onyx eyes from the background of a long hooded black cloak. 'Madame, it is farewell!' she half wept, holding out little white hands to Mrs. Hanford.

Mrs. Hanford tossed the rose scarf over the lovely head and then impulsively kissed the lips of Lelia. "Go to thy Fedar, Lelia, and be happy forever after," she whispered, and, with a joyful laugh, the girl went. Later they saw her enter the boat with the single oarman, and the two disappeared down a silvery track of water.

"Yours is the only story that has had a real ending," murmured Madeline Trayle as they went back to their chairs.

"All stories have a real ending if one only waits long enough," laughed Mrs. Hanford.

"I wonder—I wonder what was in that scarf?" mused Arthur Clayton aloud.

"The spirit of the east," returned Professor Trayle promptly, and nobody contradicted him.