MRS WESTERVELDT'S DIAMONDS.

RS WESTERVELDT'S diamonds? By Jove! she was hardly treated, poor woman, at the time.'

'If you were worth anything you would tell us all about it, Fred.'

'Oh! all right; I'm agreeable.'

'It would show a more becoming modesty if you were to leave that for others to say—let alone opinions differing.'

'Oh! you shut up, Dicky, and just throw me a cigar, will you? and I'll tell you all about it.'

'The two Westerveldts could hardly be said to get on together—fought on together is a more correct word. She had all the money and he didn't even give her the quid pro quo in love. She was past her premiere jeunesse, well into her second, in fact, when he proposed to her (and to her beaux yeux). She was a widow, and she gave both love and money, till he spent the latter and half-killed the former, though it was still pretty vigorous when I knew them. She was a bit jealous of him, perhaps of his youth more than anything else, just as any wife might be, who, pretty far down the road of life herself, wants her husband to keep parallel with her. It's my opinion he was bad to the core. Yet she was awfully irritating. She was the sort of woman, you know, who waited till you had plunged yourself well back in your arm-chair, and then would say: "Oh, as you are up, do you mind giving me my work basket, it's in the next room;" or, "As you're going upstairs, would you just bring dear Fido down with you?" when you hadn't shown the least sign of stirring from where you were. Then, too, she had that maddening way of shutting her eyes with a fluttering sort of movement (you know the way some people have) while she was talking. It always made me long to skip out of the room while she was doing it, and peep round the corner to watch her surprise when she found I had melted. It might have cured her. She nursed me like anything, though, when I was down with fever once, at Twivel, so I back her all through.

'He wasn't faithful to her either. I happened to know of it, too, and it made me feel a regular snake all the time she was looking after me. But a man has such a way of sitting tight on another fellow's affairs, and so I never told her that he had flung away any amount of her coin on Lilly Morrison. She thought it all went on racing. Of course they didn't know each other so well before marriage. Matrimony is such an infallible test—it's an irrevocable one, too, worse luck. Mind you, very few outsiders knew of the cat and dog life they led. Married folks hide their matrimonial wounds with such divinity of courage. All glory to them, say I. He was fond of music; and she, like that American chap—"didn't know a symphony from a boiler explosion." She was fond of dabbing away with a brush in her hand—and he hadn't half an eye for colour, excepting when Lilly put the layers on too thick; and so it went on zig-zag fashion.

'I was stopping down at Twivel, one summer, and the house was pretty full. There was no one I particularly fancied among the guests, so I kept my attention to my hostess, who I could see was suffering a good deal of mental worry, besides I really think that the cash had begun to run short. She said to me once—awfully bitterly—"Give a man 'short measure,' Fred. Do you know what I mean? Always give him 'light weight.' If he bestows fourteen ounces avoirdupois of love on you give him only twelve ounces; it will keep him hanging on for the other two." I guessed at what she meant, and that she regretted not having acted on that principle herself.

'They were giving a big dinner on the 16th, and about three-quarters of an hour before anyone had turned up Mr and Mrs Westerveldt came into the drawing-room where we were all chatting.

'Mrs Westerveldt said, in an awfully agitated way:

'"Do you know that all my diamonds have been stolen?" And Mr Westerveldt broke in significantly with: "We'll not call them 'stolen' till we've found out more about the case."

'She had been pale enough to begin with, but she went livid at the implied insult. "Ladies' diamonds," he went on, with a sneer, "get lost in most extraordinary ways sometimes, and are found, too, in remarkable fashions as well, when the husbands make a fuss over it."

'It was infernally mean of him, considering he hadn't bought his wife's jewels, and as the loss was all hers, it was a shame to behave like a hound to her before all her guests.

'She snapped out (she had a right to be a bit worked up), "You don't suppose I'm likely to have stolen my own diamonds myself, am I?"

'He only raised his eyebrows like two great marks of interrogation—and then played the injured, patient husband for the rest of the evening—and it went down with some of the women, and he got more sympathy than he deserved.

Mrs Westerveldt's neck looked bare and rather unlovely that night; she had intended wearing her diamonds, and nothing would induce her to wear a substitute. Have you ever known a woman with a longish upper lip that you could canoodle? I haven't. Next day down came a detective, and there was an awful shindy. All the servants' boxes routed out, all the maids wearing an air of innocence an inch deep on their faces and tossing their heads at the sacrilege; and the butler getting drunk over it, to celebrate the event, and Mr Westerveldt scowling till he looked like an ugly chimpanzee, and Mrs W. aging twenty years through it all, and miserable into the bargain.

'What was the detective like? Oh! let me see. A whitey-brown sort of Johnnie. Nothing much about him that you could catch hold of by way of description. He looked what you would call a "gent"—ah! pah! how I bar the species. He looked as solemn as a sphinx, and made us all feel a jolly sight worse than we had felt before. Then on he went again as quietly and discreetly as if there had been another detective after him.

'He used to send daily bulletins on the case. It was always some rot about "a promising clue," which never fulfilled itself.

'One day Mrs Westerveldt came to me with a telegraph form in her hand.

'"Fred, I want you to do something for me. I would have asked my husband if he weren't away in town. I don't believe that the detective we've got at present is any good, do you? He wears whiskers and his hair's such a horrible colour, isn't it? I want you, please dear, to take this yourself to the Post Office. I don't think Mr Westerveldt can have stated the gravity of the case, when he telegraphed for the first man, and I'm sending off to Scotland Yard for another, in the hopes that he will be more successful. There's so much at stake, Fred"—her voice quavered a bit—"my husband thinks I know something about the diamonds," she went on in a whisper. "It's so hard, so hard," and she beat her hands on the table in a frenzied sort of way. "I love him so," she said, though I could hardly hear, her voice had all gone; "I can't bear that he should think so vile a—there, what a fool I am! Be off, like a dear fellow, and relieve my mind."

'So off I went like a "dear fellow."

'Mr Westerveldt was away two or three days. And in the meantime a new man came down. Nothing "whitey-brown" about him, I can tell you, and his hair was the right colour too. The only thing I didn't like about him was his way of popping round corners and into rooms. I used to change all sorts of colours, and I bet you anything you like he rather sniffed a full-blown burglar in me. I believe he would have driven me into it if it had gone on much longer.

'Then he, too, passed away—and peace reigned in his stead.

'One day I fell asleep in the library. Oh! you know that twaddle device novelists have of letting their heroes hear things which they've no business to, by sending them off to nod, and then waking 'em up just at the critical moment. Well, by Jove, I'll never wag a scoffing head at them again; I did the very same thing myself. I went off into a snooze in the library and when I woke up it was pitch dark, except for the fire smouldering away in the grate, and what woke me was the entrance of Mr and Mrs Westerveldt. He had just come back from town—from Lilly, most likely—and she was hanging about him and doing odd things for him, and he seemed just a shade kinder to her. You should have seen her. She seemed to expand under it and look twenty shades handsomer and younger. Presently she said:

'"Oh! Henry, dear, do you know I was not satisfied with that first detective you sent for, and so I wrote down for another, and he came here two days ago, and I told him every——"

'He sprang up with a sudden yell.

'"You sent for a detective from Scotland Yard?"

'"Why, yes—what's wrong?"

'"And you gave him all particulars, you fool! You gave all the information you knew?" and he let his hand down with a clap on her shoulder. It made her jump. She nodded her head.

'"You fool! do you know what you've done with your meddling?" And he lowered his face till it was on a level with hers. "You've only set all Scotland Yard at my heels," then he turned away with a dash of fury. She sprang up.

'"My God! Henry, what do you—what do you mean? What has it got to do with you?" and she followed him to the chair on which he had fallen, his head in his hands.

'"Oh! you may as well know," he answered, in quick, furious tones. "You've ruined me, if that's a pleasure to think of. There! I took your jewels. Oh! for God's sake now, don't go fainting and shrieking all over the place."

'She had only staggered a bit and clutched at the back of a chair.

'"You—took my diamonds! Oh, darling, what for?"—her face all drawn and grey—"I would have given you all I had," with lovely pathos.

'"I meant to get paste put in, you would never have known," he answered with brutal indifference and ignoring her last words.

'She sank down by his side and clasped her hands on his knees.

'"But, if the first detective knew, why should you mind this second one knowing as well?"

'"The first detective? He wasn't a detective at all. You don't suppose I was such a fool as to invite Scotland Yard's inspection? I just sent for a man who I knew would do the work for me. There! Do you understand at last?"

'I don't think she did, for there was a horrid look on her face. For the one moment, just that one, she could have stabbed him.

'Then she said very softly: "Tell me all about it, Henry. I'm sure I can get you out of it, but tell me first why you wanted the money."

'For a wonder the man blushed as he told her of Lilly Morrison. I tell you I had to bite the sofa cushion infernally hard to keep the words in—the way he talked would have made your hair curl. And she? Well, ever since that scene I've thought a jolly lot more of women. She behaved like a brick, though I saw her wince when he enlarged on la belle Lilly's charms; fancy cracking her up to his wife!

'"This is not the time to feel jealous," she said, very slowly, and staring into the fire as she knelt by his side. "I shall feel all that afterwards, I suppose; the thing now is to get you out of it all—only you must let me think a bit; you know I'm not at all clever, but my heart is so full of love, such love, that I think it will help me. Doesn't it seem strange, Henry, that great love can't beget love. Now you've never loved me all the time you've known me, I suppose," and she looked up wistfully, so awfully anxious was she for him to contradict her—and he put a hand on her hair and said, almost kindly:

'"You mustn't mind that; you are worthy a better man's love than mine.'

'She turned and gave him such a look, old chap. I don't know how he felt, as it was intended for him, but I know how I felt—confound the smoke, it's all in my eyes—in all my life I never saw a face so changed and transfigured by love—such pathetic tenderness. (Yes, Dick, I am getting maudlin, ain't I?) Well, thank the powers, they both went off after a bit, Mrs Westerveldt saying that she would rather talk it over in her dressing-room; just at the threshold she turned and said:

'I will save you, Henry, indeed I will, if I die for it—you believe me, dear.'

'That night after dinner (there's no good telling you how the couple looked, I wonder no one noticed it) Mrs Westerveldt kept on jumping at every sound, and great purple rings had started round her eyes. She sent off a wire to say that she wished all proceedings stopped, as she had resigned herself to the loss of her jewels. But it was too late—there were three men standing outside the drawing-room door. I happened to catch a glimpse of them, and I smelt a rat. I told her, and she whispered to her husband—upon my soul, I was sorry for her. He left the room by the conservatory. Then she went to the door and passed into the hall.

'I don't know what she told the men, but I didn't see them a quarter of an hour later, though I fancy two were lingering about the place.

She came back to say good night to us. She kissed one or two of the women as she said:

'I do hope you've enjoyed your visit here. I have liked very much having you with me.'

'Then she turned to the rest of us and said, "Good-night," but it wasn't in the usual fashion, and we all felt puzzled at her manner.

'"Yes, I believe I am behaving rather erratically to-night," she explained with a faint smile on her lips and an imploring mist in her eyes, and such a worn look on her face; "but I am so dreadfully weary—I mean tired—I'm going to take chloral, so I hope to get a good night's rest. Have you everything you want? That's right—good-night everybody—good-night!"

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'Well, she needed a good night's rest and she got it, poor soul, for next morning her maid found her sleeping heavily and she let her sleep on, and then as she didn't rouse up the woman got scared. Westerveldt wasn't to be found, so we took it upon us to send for the doctor; but it wasn't a bit of good, she slept away her last breath a little before luncheon time, and there was an open letter on the dressing-table. What do you suppose she'd written? That she'd done away with the jewels herself, with a long rigmarole of an explanation. Poor woman, she didn't know what she was about when she was writing it. There was such unconscious pathos in her patent endeavour to shield her husband, so patent, in fact, that it pointed the finger of certainty more surely than ever to his guilt. Poor soul, she couldn't even die cleverly. She wasn't over bright in the upper storey, but she had pluck in her for all that. So she died with a lie on her lips, and a stupid one, too, and half the world believed her dying words and scorned her for them. Bah! if she'd been a young and pretty woman wouldn't it have championed her, and flung the lie, unbelieving, back in her face, and dealt a bit kinder with the memory of her. I respect Mrs Westerveldt!'

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'Well done, Fred! you're coming out strong in the narrative line.'

'Thank ye, I think I will have a peg—and I don't mind another cheroot either.'

A CAUTIOUS WOOER.

HE: 'Would you object to my proposing to you?'

She (with timorous composure): 'Not the slightest.'

He: 'You would be perfectly willing that I should state in a few well-chosen words the length of the time I have worshipped and loved you, and the terrible despair which has been mine as I saw you universally adored, and perceived how little chance there was of my hopes being realised while you remained queen over the hearts of suitors far more worthy?'

She (as before): 'Perfectly willing.'

He: 'Would you prefer me to make the proposal standing or kneeling?'

She (correctly lowering her eyes): 'I think the latter way would be far better form.'

He: 'Would you prefer the declaration in language fervid, fierce, and outspoken, or intense, passionate, and contained?'

She (with considerable promptness): 'Fervid, fierce, and outspoken.'

He: 'And would you deem it indiscreet if the proposer, during the declaration, should print some kisses on the hand of the proposee?'

She (with artless candour): 'Yes, if there were anything better and more satisfying reasonably contiguous.'

He: 'If he encountered a feeble opposition merely, would you consider it unwise on the part of the proposer should he pass his arm around the proposee's waist?'

She (gently but firmly): 'It would be, I think, a matter of extreme regret if he failed to comprehend whatever possibilities the situation presented.'

He: 'And in case the proposer should, after slight resistance, realise these possibilities, would you consider such slight resistance sufficient encouragement to justify him in fondly folding the proposee to his heart?'

She (as before): 'Undoubtedly.'

He: 'Taking it for granted, then, that the last situation has been consummated, can you see any reason why the proposer should not rightfully regard himself in the light of a magnificent success as a wooer?'

She (promptly): 'I cannot.'

He: 'Or why he should not be joyful in the thought that for the nonce, at least, she is his and he hers?'

She (with some impatience): 'No.'

He: 'Now, appealing to you as belonging to that sex which intuitively sees and understands the peculiar proprieties of an emergency of this sort, are there not occasions more appropriate than others for a declaration of love?'

She (trifling nervously with her handkerchief): 'There are. The elements of time, place, and liability of interruption must, of course, be properly regarded.'

He: 'Do you believe the present contains those elements?'

She (trifling more nervously with her handkerchief): 'I have no doubt of it.'

He: 'You also believe, do you not, that tastes, inclinations—in fact—all dispositional characteristics, are found to be conspicuously similar, especially in family groups?'

She (trifling more nervously with handkerchief): 'Certainly.'

He: 'Now, for instance, you and your sister are, I fancy, vivid illustrations of this truism.'

She (elevating her eyebrows): 'Yes, Mabel and I are, so far as preferences and dislikes are concerned, singularly similar.'

He: 'Is your sister at home?'

She (slowly looking him over); 'I think she is.'

He: 'Will you tell her, please, I would like to see her—alone?'