

# CHRISTABEL'S CRYSTAL

"Sherlock Holmes" Tactics as Practised by a Young Woman With the "Detective Instinct"

By CAROLYN WELLS

OF all the unexpected pleasures that have come into my life, I think perhaps the greatest was when Christabel Farland asked me to be bridesmaid at her wedding.

I always had liked Christabel at college, and though we hadn't seen much of each other since we were graduated, I still had a strong feeling of friendship for her, and besides that I was glad to be one of the merry house party gathered at Farland Hall for the wedding festivities.

I arrived the afternoon before the wedding-day, and found the family and guests drinking tea in the library. Two other bridesmaids were there, Alice Fordham and Janet White, with both of whom I was slightly acquainted. The men, however, except Christabel's brother Fred, were strangers to me, and were introduced as Mr. Richmond, who was to be an usher; Herbert Gay, a neighbor, who chanced to be calling; and Mr. Wayne, the tutor of Christabel's younger brother Harold. Mrs. Farland was there too, and her welcoming words to me were as sweet and cordial as Christabel's.

The party was in frivolous mood, and as the jests and laughter grew more hilarious, Mrs. Farland declared that she would take the bride-elect away to her room for a quiet rest, lest she should not appear at her best the next day.

"Come with me, Elinor," said Christabel to me, "and I will show you my wedding-gifts."

Together we went to the room set apart for the purpose, and on many white-draped tables I saw displayed the gorgeous profusion of silver, glass and bric-à-brac that are one of the chief component parts of a wedding of to-day.

I had gone entirely through my vocabulary of ecstatic adjectives and was beginning over again, when we came to a small table which held only one wedding-gift.

"That is the gem of the whole collection," said Christabel, with a happy smile, "not only because Laurence gave it to me, but because of its intrinsic perfection and rarity."

I looked at the bridegroom's gift in some surprise. Instead of the conventional diamond sunburst or heart-shaped brooch, I saw a crystal ball as large as a fair-sized orange.

I knew of Christabel's fondness for Japanese crystals and that she had a number of small ones of varying qualities; but this magnificent specimen fairly took my breath away. It was poised on the top of one of those wave-crests, which the artisans seem to think appropriately interpreted in wrought-iron. Now, I haven't the same subtle sympathy with crystals that Christabel always has had; but still this great, perfect, limpid sphere affected me strangely. I glanced at it at first with a calm interest; but as I continued to look I became fascinated, and soon found myself obliged (if I may use the expression) to tear my eyes away.

Christabel watched me curiously. "Do you love it too?" she said, and then she turned her eyes to the crystal with a rapt and rapturous gaze that made her appear lovelier than ever. "Wasn't it dear of Laurence?" she said. "He wanted to give me jewels of course; but I told him that I would rather have this big crystal than the Koh-i-nur.



I have six others, you know; but the largest of them hasn't one-third the diameter of this."

"It is wonderful," I said, "and I am glad you have it. I must own it frightens me a little."

"That is because of its perfection," said Christabel simply. "Absolute flawless perfection always is awesome. And when it is combined with perfect, faultless beauty, it is the ultimate perfection of a material thing."

"But I thought you liked crystals because of their weird supernatural influence over you," I said.

"That is an effect, not a cause," Christabel replied. "Ultimate perfection is so rare in our experiences that its existence perforce produces consequences so rare as to be dubbed weird and supernatural. But I must not gaze at my crystal longer now, or I shall forget that it is my wedding-day. I'm not going to look at it again until after I return from my wedding-trip; and then, as I tell Laurence, he will have to share my affection with his wedding-gift to me."

Christabel gave the crystal a long parting look, and then ran away to don her wedding-gown. "Elinor," she called over her shoulder, as she neared her own door, "I'll leave my crystal in your special care. See that nothing happens to it while I'm away."

"Trust me!" I called back gaily, and then went in search of my sister bridesmaids.

The morning after the wedding began rather later than most mornings. But at last we all were seated at the breakfast-table and enthusiastically discussing the events of the night before. It seemed strange to be there without Christabel, and Mrs.

on her face said: "Mrs. Farland, do you know anything about Miss Christabel's glass ball? It isn't in the present-room."

"No," said Mrs. Farland; "but I suppose Mr. Haley put it in the safe with the silver and jewelry."

"I don't think so, ma'am; for he asked me was he to take any of the cut glass, and I told him you had said only the silver and gold, ma'am."

"But that crystal isn't cut glass, Katy; and it's more valuable than all Miss Christabel's silver gifts put together."

"Oh, my! is it, ma'am? Well, then, won't you please see if it's all right, for I'm worried about it."

I wish I could describe my feelings at this moment. Have you ever been in imminent danger of a fearful catastrophe of any kind, and while with all your heart and soul you hoped it might be averted, yet there was one little, tiny, hidden impulse of your mind that craved the excitement of the disaster? Perhaps it is only an ignoble nature that can have this experience, or there may be a partial excuse for me in the fact that I am afflicted with what sometimes is called the "detective instinct." I say afflicted, for I well know that anyone else who has this particular mental bias will agree with me that it causes far more annoyance than satisfaction.

Why, one morning when I met Mrs. Van Allen in the market, I said: "It's too bad your waitress had to go out of town to attend the funeral of a near relative, when you were expecting company to luncheon." And she was as angry as could be, and called me an impertinent busybody.

But I just had deduced it all from her glove. You see, she had on one brand-new black-kid glove, and the other, though crumpled up in her hand, I could see never had been on at all. So I knew that she wouldn't start to market early in the morning with such gloves if she had any sort of half-worn black ones at all.

And I knew that she had given away her next-best pair recently—it must have been the night before, or she would have tried them on sooner; and as her cook is an enormous woman, I was sure that she had given them to her waitress. And why would she, unless the maid was going away in great haste? And what would require such a condition of things except a sudden call to a funeral? And it must have been out of town, or she would have waited until morning, and then she could have bought black gloves for herself. And it must have been a near relative, to make the case so urgent. And I knew that Mrs. Van Allen expected luncheon guests, because her fingers were stained from paring apples; and why would she pare her own apples so early in the morning except to assist the cook in some hurried prepara-



Christabel Gave the Crystal a Long Parting Look