

HEARTS AND DIAMONDS.
BY HILDA NEWMAN.

CHAPTER I.

The big diamond sparkled on Elsa's finger. She looked down upon it admiringly, then with one of her swift, shy glances into John's face. "May I wear it for a little while?" she asked.

"You shall have it for good some day, and 20 better ones," he said, confidently. "Meanwhile wear it as long as you like, that is, till my old dad comes to town, which will not be for some time yet."

"It was very good of him to give it to you."

"Yes, because he prized it, and always wore it himself. But I wanted to reward for passing an ordinary evening, that keeps of other fellows go through as a matter of course; besides, I don't care for jewelry. I'd just as soon have had a haug engraved with 'A present for a good boy.' I shall only wear it to please him, and you shall wear it to please me."

Elsa hardly heard what he said—she was deep in thought and spoke dreamily. "I think it is the cruellest thing in fate—to have expensive tastes and no means to gratify them."

"That's something that can be conquered," said John, cheerfully; "there's always a second best, you know."

"Ah, if I could only realize it—but I can't," Elsa answered, despondently. "And here is a case in point: Mrs. Ponder gave me an awful brooch on my birthday—bogus jewels mounted in brass. I never give a mean present, she said, and anyone would take this to be worth at least \$40. I thanked her, but I have never had the courage to wear it. And I only been able to see it with her eyes I should have been delighted with it."

"She meant well," said John, softly. "O, John, she ought not to have had me so well educated—we have not a taste in common. She would have been happier with her niece, the grocer's daughter."

"You must take more exercise, Elsa; that typewriting is too much for you."

"No, it is not that; besides I have the daily walk, and I'm better away from home. Then I must have some money of my own—I can't come to Mrs. Ponder for it, feeling as I do—and I pay her as much as I can, and try to make things last, but I am so tired of it all!"

John's healthy mind could not gauge these fits of despondence. He saw no reason for them. Why could not Elsa work on sanguinely toward the future as he did? She must have little faith in him.

He gently pointed this out to her, but she only shook her head, and leaned back, closing her eyes. They sat in silence for awhile until the mood passed; then Elsa rose, slowly drawing her shabby little glove over the beautiful ring.

John rose and drew her arm through his in his bourgeois fashion. "It is rather impossible, when you come to think of it," he said, laughing, "to wear a big diamond when you're hard up. I couldn't stand the temptation, you know. I'm glad you've got it."

Mrs. Ponder prided herself on being very outspoken, but here was the candor of vulgarity that spares no one's feelings, least of all those of dependents. She also demanded, and could digest, an unstinted amount of praise, and as long as this was bestowed, was a fairly amiable person to live with. If Elsa could have borne with this most irritating of foibles she would have had a comfortable home; for, though Mrs. Ponder mourned over her want of tenderness and sympathy, she cherished a secret pride in Elsa's beauty and nice manners, which she attributed to her own influence in the girl's training.

But Elsa had not the tact of hypocrisy that helps so many wails to claim luxurious lives; she had the impatience of intellect, and the stress of uncongenial companionship told on her and caused constant bickerings.

When John called late one afternoon to reclaim his ring, he found Mrs. Ponder much aggrieved. An altercation had taken place in the morning in reference to some chintz draperies she had chosen that did not meet with Elsa's approval.

"She's not home yet," snapped Mrs. Ponder, in answer to his diffident inquiry, "and the longer she stays away the better. She grumbles at this—she grumbles at that—she says she'll look her door, because I want her to have a pretty, clean room—and I'm not to interfere with her things. Her things! Why, she hadn't a rag to her back when I took her in! Look what I've done for her! The paltry sum she insists on giving me doesn't pay for her breakfast. But I don't mind that; she hasn't a bit of sense, and she won't listen—that's what annoys me."

John endeavored unsuccessfully to stem the wrathful recital of woes. In his desire to soothe her he said exactly the wrong things. "All girls are the same, I suppose; they like to be independent. I shouldn't worry about it, if I were you; perhaps she's right, you see. And of course she knows all she owes you."

"She doesn't—that's just what she doesn't," exclaimed Mrs. Ponder, angrily. Suddenly she lowered her voice in a mysterious whisper. "No one knows the truth—no one would have done what I did."

Elsa was not present to deny or defend them.

"Well, it's no good thinking of what I just said, particularly anything disagreeable, is it, Mrs. Ponder?" he said, gently. "I don't say Elsa will repay you some day."

"Ah! but I must speak of this, if Elsa hasn't already," said Mrs. Ponder, shaking her head and assuming her most tragic and important air. "I think you ought to know, if you're going to marry her."

"What is it?" asked John, rather anxiously.

"Elsa's father was a thief—he died in prison, and Mr. Ponder let me take the child and bring her up as my own. If it hadn't been for me she'd have gone to the workhouse, for she hadn't a relation in the world."

But he met Mrs. Ponder's curious glance calmly. "I expect Elsa forgot to mention it," he said quietly, "and it does not make the slightest difference. People can't be responsible for their parents."

To his inexpressible relief Elsa entered as Mrs. Ponder was about to pour into his unwilling ears the story of the great jewel robbery that had led to her father's arrest and imprisonment. She had apparently walked off her ill humor. Her cheeks were flushed, her lips smiling, as she laid her hands in John's outstretched ones.

"And what made you come to-day?" she asked, taking a small bunch of violets from her waist belt and fastening them in his coat.

"My dad's in town. I have to meet him at six, so I called for the ring."

He seized Elsa's busy little hand. Why, what have you done with it?"

Elsa hesitated, glanced round, and looked rather alarmed. "I—I must have left it upstairs," she said, doubtfully. John was growing impatient, when she returned with the ring in her hand.

"I have found it," she said, "but you will be very cross with me. The stone is not quite secure. I must have loosened it when I cleaned it. Don't wear it till the diamond is fastened in tightly; but you needn't trouble to take it to a jeweler. You can pinch it with some of those horrid little forceps."

"Why, Elsa, you look as white as a sheet! I'm not a bit vexed about it," said John, as he took the ring from her shaking hand. Elsa put her arms around his neck and laid her face on his shoulder. He could feel the rapid beating of her heart.

"I felt so frightened," she murmured. "I thought it was lost."

"And even if it were," said John, smiling, "it is not worth the roses in your cheeks."

CHAPTER II.

One afternoon in early summer, three years later, John stood at the window of his trim, professional-looking house, and looked out on the green garden of the square in which the trees nodded and rustled in the breeze and reminded him of Elsa.

As he stood there, looking out over the past, he saw Mrs. Ponder labor slowly up the street, her dotted veil pushed up on her forehead, her face red and shiny with exertion or excitement. Being admitted, she entered his room and sat down without ceremony.

"I know I look a guy, but I couldn't wait a minute," she panted. "I had to come to tell you. O, dear, the diamond has been found. Poor Elsa—poor, poor, dear, innocent lamb!"

John turned pale and grasped the back of his chair. "Go on," he said, hoarsely.

"I'm so bewildered, I don't know where to begin. A friend of mine came to see me about the little upholstery I had recommended to her. She said she had missed things and traced them to the woman's lodgings, and then the place was searched, and among other stolen things a diamond was found. She broke down and confessed that she had taken it, but was too frightened to offer it for sale, and was waiting for her husband—a well-known thief—to come out of prison and get rid of it for her. It appears that when she came to measure for the chintz-covers for Elsa's bedroom (dear, dear, how the poor girl went on about them!) she saw the ring on the dressing-table, and, turning it about while I was out of the room for a minute, the diamond fell out on the floor. She had just time to drop the setting into a half-opened drawer when I came in, but having, as she said, no opportunity to replace the diamond, she was tempted to keep it."

"What about the false diamond?" asked John.

"Ah! I have only just discovered that," said Mrs. Ponder, opening the shabby bag in which she carried her purse and handkerchief. "The wretched thief swore she knew nothing about it, and that is quite likely, since I have found this in the same drawer where Elsa found the ring. I left her things just as they were when she went away, thinking she might come back some day." She held up the brooch she had given Elsa for a birthday present—one of the bogus stones was missing.

"It was tangled in an old veil—I'm sure I don't know why Elsa wouldn't wear it—no wonder she thought the stone she picked up was the diamond, they're just as good as real," added Mrs. Ponder, eying the brooch with admiration.

"A mere coincidence! What fools we have been!" said John, savagely striding up and down in his agitation. "I wish to heaven you had not told me about her father that day!"

"Why?" ejaculated Mrs. Ponder, indignantly. "You said it made no difference, and when I told Elsa she said she had meant to tell you herself."

John stopped short, seizing the astonished woman by the wrists.

"You let Miss Elsa know that you had told me that afternoon?"

"Let me go. How dare you? Yes, of course I did. We had a few words after you had gone, and that cropped up among other things."

There is no day so lonely as a birthday, if it is not spent with those one

cares for best—or, failing the loved presence, with the memory of some tender message to haunt one through the day. John missed both bitterly, and determined to seek in "moral" peace of mind, since forgetfulness was impossible.

He paid extravagantly for his seat in St. James' hall, and took possession of it just as some one began the "Moonlight Sonata." Dreamily he enjoyed the wonderful meandering melody; listening, with closed eyes, he heard its tender human voice tell of Elsa, of their betrothal and the storminess of their parting. As it ended, he awoke, sighing, from his reverie, to a consciousness of Elsa's presence. He could not account for it—it seemed part of the dream—yet there she sat, next to him, studying the programme, her sweet, oval face shaded by a large black hat that cunningly revealed the waves and coils of her chestnut hair. She was dressed faultlessly and looked at ease with the world and herself. John had pictured their meeting so differently—he had had visions of need and distress bringing her back to him, of love conquering pride, and he missed the pathetic, downward curve of her red lips.

Unconscious of his scrutiny, she read on to the end of the page, when she looked up and their eyes met. "She started a little, then held out her hand with a gracious movement."

"How do you do? You are the last person in the world I expected to find here! I hoped to be in time for the sonata, but I see I have just missed it."

He did not hear a word of the song that followed—he was wondering what to say to this strange, cold, but ever fascinating Elsa. She turned to him in the interval and said:

"My conscience has often pricked me about not writing to Mrs. Ponder. Have you seen her lately?"

"Yes, I saw her last week," he answered, hurriedly, "and she told me something you have a right to know."

Elsa held up her little gloved hand with a deprecating gesture.

"Oh, please—please—nothing about that unfortunate diamond! I suppose it has turned up somewhere. I meant to save up and send you another, but afterwards I thought it would be better to forget it all."

"And me? Well, perhaps you are right," said John, slowly.

"I am not always right," said Elsa, frankly, smiling on his melancholy face; "for instance, I should have told you I put it off because I like pleasant topics, and that always made me cry."

"For God's sake, Elsa, be merciful. You don't think I love you less because of that? And, Elsa, dear, I have searched for you for three years to try and undo what I said in a moment of madness. Can't you forgive me?"

Elsa's manner baffled him, but when she spoke her voice was low and tremulous.

"I forgive you long ago, and don't think of it any more. Everything is in the past and buried."

"Everything but our promises and plans for the future, you mean?"

"Please don't speak of them, they were childish. The perfect love and trust we spoke of so glibly were myths. But I shall always be grateful to you."

"I don't understand. You talk in riddles. Why should you be grateful to me?"

"You told me once that there is always a second best. I have learned to find it."

"What do you mean? Where have you been all this time? Don't keep me in such suspense—I can bear it!"

"I suppose I owe you an explanation. When I ran away I madame desperate resolutions. They came to nothing, for when I went to my work in the morning, determined to give it and bury myself where no one would find me, Mr. Scarpley was so kind that, in answer to his inquiries, was tempted to tell him the whole story! Elsa stopped and stared at the emp platform for a moment.

"If I had only kne!" murmured John, frowning. "I sit there, but he would give me no clue."

"He is the best and dearest of men," returned Elsa, warm. "I made him promise. And though had only my word, he believed me, and—loved me. Desolate, ir-broken and friendless as I was, he offered me the truest heart that ever beat, and unworthy as I was, I accepted it, and have learnt to value it."

"You married that man!" gasped John, hardly knowing what he said.

Elsa gently bent her head. "That honor was mine," said, proudly. "He is not young—may call him plain. I think he is the best and handsomest man in the w and he thinks I am the most perfect man that ever lived. So now you see why I am grateful."

The long-haired he again took his place at the platform and applauded with the. It was clear she had no pity for his heartache, and he hoped she noticed his distress.

When he rose at the end of the solo she looked up bright.

"Must you go?" husband will be here in a moment, and I would like you to know him. But just come and see us."

Mechanically he heard she tendered.

"Thanks; but—"

"But if you don't know I have spilt your after persisted Elsa sweetly."

He did not trust himself to reply, but bade her a brief adieu and good-by.

On the dreary to his northern suburb he ponder what she had said till his head as well as his heart; yet he could blame nor reproach her for her vows since she was so happy he tried to be glad for her sake a burning jealousy consumed the read the unfamiliar name and he knew he should never see her again.—Chicago Tribune

England's Largest Orchard.

The largest orchard in Great Britain is at Tottington, in the county of Gloucester. It is 500 acres in extent, and in some seasons yields its owner, Lord Sudley, a profit of \$50,000. The trees are chiefly apples and plums.

Names of the Bill-poster.

Theatrical reputation is the most important of all glories of life," said observed the old actor, drawing his last summer's overcoat around him a little tighter, according to the New York Herald.

"That's so," responded the agent, "and nothing reminds one of this more than an acquaintance with the bill-rooms of the old theaters about the country. You know they have a way of posting up bills and lithographs in the bill-rooms—that part of the theater in which the bills are laid out, and which is the lounging place of the traveling agents, the billposters, advertising men, etc., and preserving a sort of record of the celebrated actors, companies and scenes that have been at that particular house. Sometimes this is done systematically, with an idea for general pictorial effect, and then looks very pretty. But more often it is the freak of some billposter, who slaps up

full length figure, or a lithograph head, or something grotesque, the whole collection forming a curious and sometimes nightmarish jumble.

"In the older bill-rooms will be seen pictures of bygone favorites of the American stage—of many persons who were famous the other day and who today are quite forgotten. They are usually represented in their favorite costume and part. Some of these were the rag, but a few years ago—drew big salaries and had everything their own way. They are women who actually queened it over the whole country—made thousands, and drank champagne and wore a princess' diamonds. Why, their very names are forgotten! I am not an old-timer, though I'm familiar with the stage, and I'll you I've been actually startled suddenly to come across these pictures on the bill-room walls, and to be thus reminded what they had been, and to be set to stinking what had become of them!"

Glad They Weren't Clerical.

A well-known Worcester clergyman tells a story at his own expense. In

president could not go—so that she never sees the inside of a diplomatic house as long as she presides at the executive mansion. The president dines only at cabinet houses, and his wife cannot dine anywhere without him. President Arthur dined with judges of the supreme court and with senators—but as he had no wife the whole system was very much simplified for him. The president's wife may, if she chooses, go to luncheons where there are no gentlemen, or to teas, both being regarded as strictly informal; but the danger of giving offense by accepting one invitation and declining another is so great that it is seldom or never risked.

IMPORTED FLIES.

Insects Caught in the Swamps of Mexico Brought Here.

The report made from Laredo to the treasury department at Washington make constant reference to one of the queerest articles of import brought into this country. These are dried Mexican flies, which are brought to the United

States in large quantities to be used as food for pet singing birds.

These flies live in the swamps in various sections in Mexico, where they are caught by men who devote their lives to the work. The fly catchers use a silted net, and make a large haul at every cast. The individual fly is called mosca. It is small and delicate, and its whole body has the appearance of having been gilded.

The flies when alive are beautiful and harmless. There is a duty on these Mexican flies, doubtless to encourage the home fly industry, but up to the present time the mosca business has not flourished in this country to any marked extent. The imported flies are packed in barrels, and they sell for a high price.

WHITE HOUSE ETIQUETTE.

Rules That Are Strictly Observed by the President's Family.

When the president and his wife drive out, the president sits on the right-hand seat and his wife on the left, says the Illustrated American.

If there are others in the carriage, whether ladies or gentlemen, they must sit with their backs to the horses. When Mrs. Cleveland was first married she tried the experiment of placing her mother opposite the president and herself in the presidential landau, but the people laughed at it so immoderately and professed to think Mrs. Folsom (as she was then) to be the maid, that it was speedily dropped. When the president's wife drives alone, she sits in the right-hand corner—the place of honor.

The lady of the white house cannot set foot within those splendid houses in Washington whose flagstaffs mark the foreign embassy or legation. She could not go without the president, and as an embassy or legation is technically a part of the country it represents, the



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