FATAL JEWELS

BY ALBANY DE FONBLANQUE

In the last week of the Carnival at Pera most of the European embassies give balls. You go to the French Embassy, and meet the *corps diplomatique*, the consuls, the principal bankers and merchants, and the French tag-rag and bob-tail. You pass the next night *chez* M. le Ministre des Pays Bas, and you rub skirts with the same company, *minus* the French and *plus* the Dutch tag-rag; and so on, ball after ball. The faces are the same, the music the same, the refreshments the same; the same dull way of conducting the dances prevails, the same scandals are talked. Some of the palaces, as they are called, are more spacious and better furnished than others, and the ladies are not seen twice in the same dress: that is all the difference. Still, these entertainments form a pleasant break in the monotony of life in Constantinople, and are the subject of much preparation and scheming, especially among the tag-rag and bob-tail who hope for invitations. Misseri's Hotel, usually a wilderness, at this season fills with the residents in the villages on the Bosphorus and others who come into town for the balls, locomotion at night in the city of the Sultan being difficult and dangerous. The hamals (porters) who carry people to and from the gay and festive scenes in sedan-chairs make a rich harvest; and white ties have been known to cost six shillings each in the Pera shops.

Before the last ball took place, a scandal and a new arrival gave a great impulse to conversation. The scandal was this: a young Hungarian attached to the Russian Embassy, and who had the reputation of not being so popular with the fathers and husbands of Pera society as with the fairer members of their households, was discovered to be in correspondence with sundry persons labouring under an accusation of disloyalty to his imperial master; and in the course of those perquisitions to which the children of holy Russia must submit, some sketches, in which the features and deportment of Madame l'Ambassadrice were too faithfully depicted, were found in his desk. It is true that his correspondents were old college-friends, and that the ingenuity of even a Russian police-agent could not force any political meaning out of their letters; but, viewed in the light thrown by those wicked caricatures, there was high-treason in his unpaid bootmaker's bill. So he received notice that his further services at Constantinople could be dispensed with, and that he was to take the first steamer to

Odessa, where he would be good enough to report himself to the chief military authority.

The new arrival was an English steam-yacht, having on board a lady known to the world at large as Mrs. Haywarde, to her husband as Susey, and to intimates as "the Admiral." A lady who could wear a sailor's hat with the name of her yacht on the ribbon, a blue jacket with club-buttons, and a short skirt (such as those who have much getting in and out of boats, and going up and down companion-ladders, *should* wear), and yet appear every inch a gentlewoman—not a pretty woman for all her large blue eyes and long soft brown hair, but emphatically what Percy Wylde, commanding the gunboat in the Bosphorus, said of her when, seeing her at Misseri's table, he asked, "Who is that *nice* little woman in blue?"

Being such a little fair sprite of a girl, she had, of course, married her opposite. Stewart Haywarde stood about six-feet-two in his socks—a man whose square jaw, open brow, and brawny shoulders gave you the idea that he would be a bad sort of customer to pick a quarrel with, but an excellent ally in case of need. Some kind people said that he was hard and unbending, and that they pitied his little fairy-wife; but she knew well what a tender heart beat in that big rough-looking husk, so it did not matter.

It was a great thing to have a new arrival and a new scandal to talk about; but when it became known that the hero of the new scandal and the "nice little woman in blue" were old friends, the two facts bred and multiplied, and replenished the land with talk.

Mrs. Haywarde was born and educated at Nice, and there Count Schuloff, the traitor, had been her playmate. It was such a pleasant surprise to meet him again; and she was not the sort of woman to hide her delight. I suppose that some three to four thousand pounds had been spent on her husband's education at Harrow and Christ Church, and not in vain, as we estimate the results of such a curriculum. He had taken many prizes and a fair degree, could write to a Greek boatman in faultless Attic; but, like many another well-read English gentleman, was sadly at fault when he had to speak any modern language but his own. So the Count, who had about ten tongues at command, was a useful companion, and accompanied them everywhere. Susey could chatter French and Italian at once with those she liked, only it would not do to put her forward as dragoman to bazaar-touts and caïquejis: she was afraid of them. Schuloff was a capital fellow, and most useful; at least so the new arrivals thought.

How was Susey's husband to learn in two or three days the inner life of such a man? How was Susey to guess that a renewal of friendship with the boy she had taught English ten years ago would set evil tongues wagging? Living as they did on board their yacht, and coming on shore only to see the sights, they did not even hear the common

talk of Galata—how that the Count was under sentence of deportation, and would probably be imprisoned for life in a fortress as soon as he reached his own country.

When the Haywardes visited our ambassador, to whom they had letters of introduction, they were asked if they would like an invitation to the ——— ball. Stewart, answering for Susey, said they would; and when Schuloff heard they were going, he said: "I'll have a dance with you, Susey, before we part, cost what it may."

"What do you mean, Adolph?" she asked. "Cost what it may! What can it cost?"

"O, nothing.—You will stay at Misseri's for the night, I suppose?"

"Why, yes. I could not well walk in ball-dress through the Galata streets."

"If you'd ask me to dine, I'd go with you."

"Of course we will. Do you think we are going to enter a strange house alone, when we have such a *cicerone* as you to take us under his wing?"

The Count bit his lip, but said nothing. Susey was surprised when she received a note next day saying he could not dine with them as promised. He would meet them afterwards at the ball.

The ball had scarcely been opened when a sensation began to be felt that there was something wrong. Second secretaries ran about and put their heads together in an uneasy way. The host and hostess withdrew into an antechamber, where they were joined by the male and female representative of holy Russia, the latter doing infinite justice (unwittingly) to the traitor Schuloff's cartoons, for she was very angry. The traitor had not only dared to assist at a ball to which she was invited, but had actually permitted himself to attempt to dance in the same set with her!

"My good friend and colleague, and you, madame," said the unfortunate host, "will permit me to explain. As a member of your corps, M. le Count was, of course, included in our invitations long before this never-too-much-to-be-regretted misconduct was discovered. It was only the day before yesterday that I came to be acquainted with the sad facts. What was I to do? Could I suppose that he would have the imprudence to present himself? But no! It is an infatuation, a scandal! Will you that I cause it to be intimated to this young man, wrong-headed, that he was invited as your secretary, and that, ceasing to be your secretary, he ceases also to be invited? Say, now."

Not so. Madame l'Ambassadrice, speaking for herself (which included herself and lord), would not pay him so great a compliment. He was beneath notice. Let him only be warned that he was on no account to approach her, and that would be sufficient.

"Madame is most indulgent," replied the host, greatly relieved.

"The young man cannot remain long, for the steamer that is to convey him will leave at daybreak."

Adolph Count Schuloff had the reputation of having a bad digestion of slights, and the secretary charged to inform him that, although his presence at the ball under all the circumstances would be tolerated, he was not to approach Madame l'Ambassadrice, made up his mind that he should have some practice with the small-sword before the steamer sailed. That would be a bore, as he was engaged up to the last waltz. But duty before all. What was his surprise when the traitor replied with a laugh, "Dear Jules, pray assure her excellency that the end of the room she pleases to adorn shall be the end most avoided by her slave. It is my last ball in Pera, dear Jules, and I would fain have what is fairest and pleasantest impressed on my memory. Do you understand, my friend? Ah, I see you do. Go then, dear Jules; *but don't come back again on the same subject.*"

When Susey was nearly dressed for the ball, her husband came into her room, and found her in the act of taking a pair of splendid diamond-drops out of her pretty ears.

"O Susey, ain't you going to wear them?" he said.

"I put them on, dear, and the necklace and bracelets too, but they looked so grand, and I'm such a little thing, you know. Do you want me to wear them?"

"So far as I am concerned," replied her husband, "I say no; but in these countries one is judged rather by what one has than for what one is. I should like you to be admired, my darling. Wear them to please me."

In a moment the gems were clasped around her neck and wrists, and her eyes sparkled brighter than they as she held up her head to be kissed for being a good child, as she said.

With their English ideas the Haywardes thought that, being invited for nine, they would be in good time at eleven. They found the ball in full swing, and the Schuloff fuss over, for "dear Jules" had evinced his talent for diplomacy by giving only the first part of the traitor's reply as the result of his mission.

Stewart Haywarde did not dance; Susey and Schuloff did, until people began to wonder what the Englishman was made of, that he was not jealous. He was made of sterling stuff, against which the worm jealousy may gnaw in vain. Jealous of Susey because she danced! He might as well have been jealous of a bird because it sang.

The ball came to an end; and Stewart saw Susey and all that remained of her blue dress safely packed in her sedan, and was about to follow her on foot when Schuloff stopped him.

"Good-bye, Mr. Haywarde," he said; "I need not tell *you* that I am not going to put my head in the lion's mouth. I am off to-morrow, but not for Odessa. Whatever may happen, do not think too harshly

of me. I never was a fellow to shirk temptation, and I am in for it now. God bless you!"

Haywarde wrung his hand and hastened on, anxious to follow his wife, but was again detained. The hamals who had brought him demanded payment, as he was not going to take them back to the hotel; and, as he could not understand one word they said, some time passed before they could obtain an interpreter and come to an explanation. This effected, he made the best of his way back to the hotel; and, in reply to his question, was told by the porter that madame had been in some time, and had gone to her room.

That was all right. As he passed through the hall he was hailed by some bold Britons in the waiting-room, who were indulging in sodas-and-brandy and talk of the ball. Give your bold Briton the fatness of the land where he is entertained, and he cannot resist a soda-and-brandy and a talk over the entertainment somewhere else. There are no such things as dressing-rooms at Misseri's, and Susey would be at least twenty minutes doffing her war-paint. He would join those bold Britons and smoke a cigar for twenty minutes. In that time he heard more than he liked about Count Schuloff; not the most recent scandal about him; of that, of course, they could say nothing in Haywarde's presence; but of his feats and frailties in general. Haywarde went up to his wife's room, thinking that he had been a little imprudent, and feeling glad that this dangerous fascinator, with whom no woman was safe, was perhaps even then on the sea. He opened the door, and there was darkness. Had she gone to bed? No. He touched the coverlet gently for fear he might wake her, but there was no one there. Ah, that was it! She had gone to her maid's room to wait till he came. He went to the maid's room, and there was no light, the maid asleep in her chair, but no Susey.

He could get no answer from the sleepy servant, but that she did not know where her mistress was. He rushed down to the porter's lodge and found it closed. The porter had gone to bed, the outer gates were locked; everyone had gone to bed. He roused up Misseri and his wife; and those good people—of whom much injustice has been written, but of whose kindness to strangers not one hundredth part has been recorded—did all they could for him. They woke-up the porter. What did he mean by saying that the lady had come in? Well, four ladies had come in, and he thought that one of them must be the lady of the signor. Had anyone rapped at the door after the signor returned? No, the signor was the last in.

"Then," said Misseri, "she has been taken to some other house by mistake; perhaps to the British Embassy, or to the Consul-General's—who knows? And there she will remain until the morning. Have no fear, sir; she is safe."

It was all very well to say, "She is safe; have no fear." In the four years of their married life she had scarcely ever been four hours

out of his sight. In a country like this she could not be safe at a greater distance from him than his arm could reach to enfold her. But what could he do? Dash out into the now-deserted streets, and ask in English, where was his wife? Insult her by sending messengers here and there, and supposing she could be doing wrong? No! With a heavy, aching heart he felt bound to take Misseri's explanation. She had gone home with some friends by mistake. She would turn-up in the morning.

O, the morning! Would it never come?

It came at last, and with it bad news. The lady was not at the Embassy, or the house of the Consul-General; no one knew where she was; but Percy Wylde, commanding the Stationnaire, reported, that when going down to his boat after the ball, he had passed a sedan with a lady inside, whom he recognised as Mrs. Haywarde, and that as she passed she leaned forward as though about to speak, and then fell back and passed on; that the hamals took her down a side-street leading towards Galata. Why had he not stopped her? Why should he? He thought she had changed her mind about sleeping at the hotel, and was going on board the yacht. He could say no more. The police could. They had found a glove and a fan in the street, down which the British captain had seen the lady pass, and close to the house where the Count Schuloff lodged. They knew also that the Count *and a lady* had embarked at daylight on board the French steamer for Marseilles.

Ah, poor Stewart Haywarde! Then friends (?) came out with their "My dear sir, how *could* you trust her with such a man?" &c. The Turkish authorities smiled benignly, as Turkish authorities can smile, when he passionately declared that he would venture his life that his wife was pure and true—that there must be some fearful mistake—she must be detained somewhere. They knew Adolph Count Schuloff; they had their own ideas of womankind, and they smiled. Nevertheless, for appearance sake, they arrested about forty wretched hamals, irrespective of whether they had been at the ball or not, and flung them into prison. They arrested the men, women, and children who lived near the house where the glove and fan were found, and flung them into prison, and then asked triumphantly what more could be done.

Stout, hearty Stewart Haywarde, broken down to the level of a child by his grief, could not but accept the general verdict. The farewell words of the betrayer rung the death-knell of his wife's honour. She had left him and her child, her boy, for Schuloff. She was lost, utterly lost, to them both; but he could save her from the lower depths. The Marseilles steamer had to call at the Piræus and Messina; the yacht, going straight, would arrive at Marseilles first. And so she could, all things provided; but who was to provide now that the master-mind was struck down? When she had been four days at sea the coal failed, and the rest of the voyage had to be made

under sail, so that, when they arrived at Marseilles, the steamer had been in forty-eight hours.

Yes, the Count Schuloff had been a passenger, and there was a lady with him. What was she like? Well, they could not say. She had gone to her berth directly they embarked at Constantinople, and had not left it during the voyage; she was very ill. Susey was never ill at sea; but then she might have made illness an excuse for not appearing. It became horribly clear to Stewart that his happiness of the last four years was a dream—worse, a deception, a mockery. Still he could not wholly quench the ashes of that old love, and, man of the world as he was, determined to save the mother of his child from those lower depths which he knew full well yawned for her. His child! Ah, what dagger-thrusts the poor innocent dealt him with its cries of "Mamma, mamma! Go away! I want dear mamma!"

With the British and Russian consuls at his back, he had little difficulty in tracing the fugitives. They had gone to Lyons, and thither he followed them. Hurrying to the hotel where he had been told they were staying, he had the ill-luck to meet Schuloff in the street. An ugly word and something worse passed quick as thought, and the next morning they faced each other, with the worst of arguments in their hands. They were in a country where to confess a mistake is to be a coward, where the small-sword and the pistol are the only means of explanation. A blow had been given in the public street, and only blood could wash away the stain. So blood was shed, with this (to reasoning minds) ludicrous inconsequence—the injured (by the blow) had to wipe out his own injury with his own blood. Count Schuloff fell, shot at the first discharge.

As his second raised him from the ground, he beckoned to Haywarde, and said, "Look here, Haywarde; you've been too hasty, and I too proud. I can tell you now, what I would have told you before if you had not broken-out upon me like that. I did leave Constantinople with somebody whom I had no right to take away; but it was not Susey. My God, to think such a thing of *her!* Why, the last words she spoke to me were praise and love for you—for you! And you—don't think I say so because I cannot answer for my words. Give me some brandy, and I—I'll stand—I can—I'll stand up again. I *will!* I say you are a fool, an idiot—you are" (his English failed him, and he hissed out the worst word his adopted language gave him)—"you are *un lâche* to doubt Su—Su—" But here excitement sent the blood, which had hitherto only stained his lips, surging up into his throat till it choked him; and he could say no more for many a weary day.

When Stewart Haywarde went back to Pera and renewed his quest, explaining that Count Schuloff had been wrongfully suspected, people smiled. They knew the Count. He was not the man to swallow a

camel (by running away with his friend's wife) and strain at a gnat (by hesitating to tell a lie to screen her). Where was the lady? Had Mr. Haywarde seen the person who was with the Count at Lyons? No. Ah, that was a pity! He could have wrung their necks for the contemptuous tone in which this was said; but he was too much broken, too full of miserable doubts. He had no spirit left. Kinder hearts thought it quite natural that he should fight against the public verdict for his boy's sake, and gave him comfort by assisting him in his search. Baser creatures took his money, and gave him hope. It was not the first time beautiful foreign ladies had been missed for a time. Some pashas and great men had permitted themselves to carry off beautiful ladies to their harems; but, never fear, the lady would be found, only it would cost money; and so on.

At the time whereof I write the great Eltchie reigned in the British Embassy, and the Grand Turk himself would no more have dared to harm an English lady than he would dare to breakfast off hog in Bairam. But our simple squire knew not this, and the harpies feasted on his purse, which he could refill, and on his heart, which was wasting away.

At last the place became so hateful to him, and his health so shattered, that he was obliged to leave. He sailed away for the Turkish Archipelago, and listlessly visited its beautiful islands, returning frequently to Constantinople, to hear from his agents the old story. The lady had not been found, but she would be. The money he left was spent; they must have more, &c. &c. The poor baby had ceased to call for mamma, and shrunk from the gloomy man who clasped him so passionately to his breast, or gazed at him so darkly.

Twelve months passed; carnival time came again, and perhaps some rags of the old scandal were dragged about the ballrooms, and some sneers indulged in at the poor Englishman who would not be satisfied; when the sharp ring of the night-watchmen's staves against the pavement was heard, and "*Yengeen va! Galata da!*" was shouted. There was a fire in Galata. *Only* in Galata. It did not matter, then; and so they went on dancing. The alarm-gun boomed out from the Fire Tower; breathless scouts ran along through the villages on the Bosphorus, only pausing to pant the refrain, "*Yengeen va! Galata da!*" as they passed. Hamals bustled along the streets, carrying such machines as a gentleman of small means might have to water his flowers, and which in Constantinople were called fire-engines; and police hurried to the scene, armed with more potent instruments, like Brobdingnagian boat-hooks, for pulling down the neighbouring houses and so confining the conflagration. Thieves from all quarters "assisted," and folks who had anything to lose in the street that was ablaze broke into houses in the next and took what they could, as the only means of insurance against their inevitable loss. Pull down a house with a boat-hook; break in and plunder a shop in Fleet-street because there is a fire in

Fetter-lane—impossible! Well, go to Constantinople and judge for yourself the next time "*Yengeen va!*" is bawled out.

The fire as usual burned on as long as it had anything to burn; and when the ashes were cold, the proprietors of the destroyed houses began to rebuild them of the very same bandbox materials as had just been blazing. It was the will of God, and God was great. Whose dogs were they, that they should fly in the face of Allah? Bricks, stone, iron! Inshallah! and if Allah willed it, would not they burn too?

In digging the foundations for a new house near that before which the glove and fan of the missing lady had been found, the workmen came upon something which frightened them. It will not do to find anything extraordinary in Turkey, if you are a Turk and want to keep out of trouble; so they sent for the police, who got frightened too as soon as they saw how that something (a sack) was tied, and sent for the British janizary, who, as soon as he opened it, ran off to his Consul, and begged him for the love of Allah to come.

In the sack, tied with what had been the cord of an opera-cloak, they found a female skeleton, perfect *all but the hands*, and some rags of blue. They dug and dug till they found the hands, on one of which still hung a poor little turquoise-ring, too poor to be hacked off by the murderers of the "nice little woman in blue."

Murdered she had been for her diamonds—those diamonds she had put off her pretty throat and wrists as too grand, but had worn after all to please her husband. She was doomed from the moment she entered the ballroom. The dismal story was all cleared up by the time Stewart Haywarde next returned on his hopeless quest. Three miserables—two of them the hamals who had carried her from the ball—were impaled, and it was *said* that their employer—a Greek, to whom some of the jewels had been traced—had died by his own hand in prison. It may be so, but some one bearing a strong family likeness to him was killed soon afterwards in a gambling brawl at Cairo. The diamonds were never recovered, and the Greek was a rich man when arrested. What will not one give for his life? *Some one* was poisoned in the prison, that was indubitable.

I have seldom seen a man so cut-up as was Percy Wylde when I told him the sad fate of his "nice little woman in blue."

"I should have known," he said, half crying, "that there was something wrong when I passed her chair. It was then, perhaps, that she first suspected they were taking her wrong. O, if she had only spoken! But I suppose the poor plucky little thing did not like to own she was frightened."

Of Stewart Haywarde it is best to say but little. He collected the remains of his darling, and carried them over the sea to what had been her happy home, with a sad but peaceful heart. There was no doubt now to torture him. He was not all alone: he had her child and her memory—as pure as the gems which had cost her her innocent life.