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ROBERT P. MILLS, *Managing Editor* JOSEPH W. FERMAN, *General Manager*
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We welcome the first appearance in EQMM of Henry Myers—with whose work you are much more familiar than you may think . . . Mr. Myers was born in Chicago, but he has been a New Yorker since the age of one. He attended Public School Number 6, Townsend Harris High School, and then Columbia University, where he studied music. He went to Berlin to continue his musical career, but out of the blue he decided to become a writer. His break from music was gradual—he began by composing words and music for opera. Then, after a hiatus as press agent for Lee and J. J. Shubert, Mr. Myers wrote a play. It became Lorenz Hart's first theatrical venture—“The First Fifty Years.”

*The rest might be said to be history. Author of nearly 50 plays and musicals (some with Oscar Hammerstein, Otto Harbach, and others), Mr. Myers has also written for television (notably for *Studio One*) and has an impressive record in Hollywood—his motion picture scripts include that fine Western, “Destry Rides Again.” And that isn't all: Mr. Myers has conquered the novel too; his book, *THE UTMOST ISLAND*, was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection for October 1951.*

And yet, despite his success in almost all phases of writing, there has been one that, in his own opinion, has baffled him. He never seemed to be able to conquer the short story—at least, he never wrote one that satisfied him. So what did Mr. Myers do? Let it beat him? No, indeed. He joined a class in short-story writing at New York University, and at one of the sessions, Mr. Hollis Alpert, the teacher, read W. Somerset Maugham's “Mr. Know-All,” which deals, you will remember, with the appraisal of a string of pearls. This reading led to a class assignment in which the students had to write a short story about a precious stone. “Nothing So Hard As a Diamond” is Henry Myers's homework, and it won a Third Prize in EQMM's Eighth Annual Contest.

NOTHING SO HARD AS A DIAMOND

by HENRY MYERS

WETHER OR NOT I OUGHT TO notify the police, there are three reasons why I am not going to:

- (1) They may not have authority

to prevent a crime, which I am not even sure is going to be committed; (2) If I am wrong, I will feel like a fool; and (3) If I am right, it was

I who put the prospective criminal up to it.

But I can't just let it happen. I'm supposed to have ethics. I'm a doctor.

Exactly a month ago I finished my internship, took an office of my own on upper West End Avenue, and set up as a fully equipped M.D.; fully equipped, that is, with everything but patients. To supply this lack, I spent a little money on engraved announcements, and mailed them everywhere I thought they might do some good.

The only answer I received, and the last I expected, was from the president of the third largest bank in the city. I had found his name, George Brinsley Belmore, in the printed list of my father's classmates, the year they were graduated from Yale, and sent him an announcement with the others, adding a handwritten notation that I was my father's son. Mr. Belmore was not even a forlorn hope; he was just one more unturned stone, so why not? He might — not too unlikely — have the traditional sentimentality of an alumnus.

He did, and it was peculiarly unpleasant. He was too cordial. He didn't just write; he telephoned. Not via his secretary; in person. Not from his office; from his home. Not for business; for dinner. And not some time; right away.

Some people tell me I'm young and impressionable, and practically pat my head. I don't know. How young is 25? By my reckoning, it's a quarter

of a century. However that may be, I didn't like his voice. It was the very voice, as I had always imagined it, of every Babbitt, slapper-on-the-back, hoo-hawing, heartiness-purveying, smug, happy-days-are-here-again jackass in the world. I was prepared to lick my share of boots in order to get along, but these particular boots were oversized and stepped too heavily on my sensibilities.

"Drop everything and come on!" he brayed into the telephone. "Your patients will live till you get back. Tell your patients — to have patience! Ha ha ha ha ha! Nobody here but just the wife and me. I've got to see old Mickey the Mule's boy. We called him that 'cause he never kicked about anything. Sarcasm, you know. Ha ha ha. Any time will do. Say ten minutes from now!" With another yell of mirth at his own wit, he hung up.

I visualized him down as an extremely fat man, inclined to apoplexy, and mentally catalogued him as a good prospect. That voice of his, high in pitch, reminded me of a dramatic tenor I had heard sing Siegfried at the Metropolitan. A lot of beef supports those resonant headtones.

And perhaps because he overdid his warmth, I had the impression that he was really cold, unfeeling, even cruel. Some psychologist — Jung, I think — said that sentimentality is merely brutality disguised. The connection was suggested, I

remember, by an ancient Assyrian frieze, showing a priest of Baal sacrificing a bullock on an altar. The expression on the stone face, perceived and perpetuated by the sculptor, was one of extreme sentimentality, and was oddly appropriate to its owner's action of cutting the bullock's throat.

Business being business, however, I dismissed my telephonic hunches as unscientific. My own throat was in no danger, whereas my host's might be — of laryngitis, at least — if he kept up that kind of vocal production. While I shaved, I felt I might even like him. When I brushed my newest suit, I was sure of it. His heartiness began to seem sincere. He was a Yale man. New Haven. New England. Traditions of hospitality. That kind of rationalizing comes easily, when you're trying to build up a clientele.

I took a taxi, just in case they should be watching from a window, though why a bank president or his wife should be that eager or that easily impressed, I don't know. But it was well for my own assurance that I did, for they lived in a genuine, honest-to-God, marble mansion, one of those remaining from the days when a million dollars was a lot of money, and whoever had it wanted you to know it.

The inside was a perfect match for the outside. There were Rembrandts and Persian rugs, neither of which I could suppose otherwise than genuine, a butler who undoubtedly was

genuine, and a marble staircase, which seemed less intended for getting down from the floor above, than to permit a regal descent into an assemblage. I admit I am not a competent judge of how wealth ought to look, not having acquired any. I may even be envious. But to me it seemed ostentatious.

Down the marble staircase came my host, royally, because the staircase would have it so, although his intention was to be affable. His appearance startled me, not because he differed from what I had expected, but because he didn't. He was fat, he might well be apoplectic, what with a puffy vein standing out from one of his temples and little, mean eyes in the middle of a moon face. I felt as if I had already dreamed him. He was, it is true, a little shorter than I had anticipated, but that somehow made him worse. Anything would have made him worse; nothing could have helped. The only thing even remotely in his favor was the fascination that a huge fortune carries about with it, and my own vague hope that I might get a little of it.

The machine-gun insistence with which he had assaulted me over the phone was absent now. Having got me there, it was presumably not needed, and had been turned off. Instead, he beamed, like a ray of light shining through a glass of jelly. He came toward me, smiled, spoke my first name, which is the same as my father's, and held out his shapeless hand. I smiled, and shook it.

He maintained his grasp for a moment, looked through me at my father, saw the resemblance, and was satisfied.

"Mrs. Belmore will be down soon," he said. "Come into the library; I want to tell you something before she joins us." He piloted me, with his arm possessively about my shoulders, assuring me on the way that it was like being with old Mickey the Mule again. There's a great kick in it, ha ha ha.

The library was of course magnificent, with chairs and lamps so arranged for comfort and lighting as to make one really want to read, and rows of books exquisitely bound. They were all classics or semi-classics, or at least books which at one time or another had been considered important. He saw me looking at the titles — I'm curious about what people read — and said: "I've been doing some first-edition collecting. Show them to you, if you like, after dinner." I replied that I would enjoy that; but my eye was on a couple of shelves of reading matter that seemed not in keeping with the rest. Detective stories — dozens of them, all in inexpensive paper editions, but, unlike the others, all undeniably fingered and read. I thought I had him: this was what he really liked.

"No," he said, answering my silent question, "Mrs. Belmore reads those. I wish she would take an interest in something good." (The snob!) He motioned me to a chair. We sat. "Here's what I want you to do."

So. He wanted me to do something. I *thought* there was a catch, back of all that cordiality.

"First of all, don't tell Mrs. Belmore you're a doctor."

Immediately, I had a lurid vision of Mrs. Belmore as a dangerous maniac, whose confidence I was to gain. But he at once took the melodrama out of it.

"There's nothing the matter with her," he explained, "except that her stomach was upset this morning. Couldn't eat her breakfast. Day before yesterday, same thing."

"Are you sure she needs a doctor? Maybe a simple laxative —"

"That could be," he conceded, and then with a, for him, strange embarrassment: "You don't think she might be — pregnant?"

This was the first question anyone had ever asked me professionally, and it gave me something of a thrill. It made me pause, too, for I wanted the answer to be right. So I thought for a moment. He must be about 60, the age my father would have been, had he lived. If Mrs. Belmore were, say, twenty years his junior — well, it could be. "Would this be Mrs. Belmore's first child?" I asked.

"Of course," he answered, with something like annoyance. "We've only been married a month."

"Oh. I beg your pardon. May I ask, then, how old is Mrs. Belmore?"

"Nineteen."

That flabbergasted me. Then, in quick succession, it filled me with anger at the outrage against Nature,

horror at this monster who had perpetrated it, contempt for what must have been a cash transaction; finally sardonic amusement, and even a little pity. I searched for something to say that would not be tactless, and at last came up with: "If she will come to my office, there are certain tests —"

"She won't do it. Positively refuses to let a doctor examine her."

"Why?"

"She gives no reason. She just won't cooperate. That's why I thought you — There might be some clever way you could question her, or symptoms you could detect, or something. She may not take you for a doctor, because you're young. People sometimes do think that way, you know. And of course you and I will consider it a professional visit, and any bill you care to send —"

Well, it was a business offer of a kind, though I could have wished that my first applicant valued my ability, not my youthful appearance. And I am frank to say I also wished that I could seize this chance to earn my first fee, and a fat one at that. But of course I couldn't.

"There is no magical way to tell, merely by looking at her," I replied. "Not for months. If there were, we wouldn't need laboratories. If she won't tell you herself —"

"She won't. You can't imagine how stubborn she is."

"Then you'll just have to wait, until it either happens or doesn't." I tried to be jocular. "What's wrong

with waiting? It may be a delightful surprise."

He did not join in my attempted levity. "I understand," he said, very soberly, "that the birth of a child does not always occur in precisely nine months."

"Sometimes it's a little more or a little less. What has that to do with it?"

"If I could only find out exactly —"

"Why?"

His geniality abruptly vanished, and he snapped at me, almost viciously: "Why do you suppose?!" He did not add "— you idiot!" but he might as well have, and I think I would have deserved it. I should have known what he was after, from what I had already seen of him and his. This great collector of every kind of treasure — antiques, *objets d'art*, marble mansions, and banks — wanted to know that his forthcoming possession, his child-to-be — if such it was — would be his and no one else's, as surely as if a bill of sale came with it.

This dawned on me three or four seconds later than it should have, because of the silent fury that followed his outburst. It was deep and frightful. Nothing less than the future of his kingdom and the legitimacy of the heir-apparent could possibly account for it. His face turned red, his temple vein swelled, and I saw that he really was the apoplectic type, probably with his blood pressure already at a dangerous point.

He got control of himself, calmed

down, and apologized. "I'm under a strain," he said, "and this has been preying on my mind. Tell you what we'll do. I'll ask you for nothing definite, and I'll expect nothing at all, so whatever you find out will be that much to the good. I'll have you over here more than once, and manage to leave you alone with her; then you just put two and two together if you can. In return, I'll get you started. I know lots of people. We'll let it go at that. It's evidently all you can do, and God knows it's all I can do. It's driving me crazy."

I agreed, on those terms, to start my sleuthing that evening, if he would leave Mrs. Belmore and me alone after dinner. The next moment I was glad I had agreed, because she came into the library.

It would be dishonest for me to say she is beautiful. I can say, more accurately, that she will soon be ugly, as a flower grows ever more beautiful until its very excess of splendor somehow repels. I don't mean that she has quite reached the point where the transition to ugliness begins, but — Wait a minute. Let me stop this nonsense and tell the truth. She is the loveliest creature I ever saw, and I am trying to find fault with her only because she isn't mine. Same as everything in that dreadful house.

Her eyes are violet and her hair is black. She is delicate. She is gentle. She is graceful. She is a little timid, too; after all, she has been a woman for only a very few years, and can scarcely yet be used to it. Her

figure — I think I'd rather not go on describing her.

He saw the effect she had on me, and it pleased him, just as when I admired his handsome books. He went to her, put his jelly-fish of a hand on her arm, and introduced us. He called me neither "Doctor" nor "Mister," just "Mickey, the son of my old college-pal."

My mouth acknowledged the introduction, but my insides were trying to shout: "How did this happen? How did this terrible thing ever happen?"

In turn, she murmured her pleasure at having me with them, smiled, and offered me her hand. The habits of my century restrained me from kissing it.

Then the perfect, understanding, old-world butler brought in cocktails, just when I needed one. The gin and vermouth carried me down to their own humbler level of exhilaration.

It was evident to me at once that her husband — I hate to call him that, but I suppose that's what he is — is entirely bewitched. Despite his greater age, inevitably vaster experience, and power as a financial figure, he took second place to her; he did this immediately upon her entrance, and without question, as the natural thing to do. After introducing us, he stopped speaking and contented himself with watching her, rapt, as if he had never seen her before, his lips moving in silent imitation of whatever she was saying. He, the lord of the manor and the

keeper of the seals! You wouldn't have thought it possible that a spider could be caught by a butterfly.

She presently led the way in to dinner, this lovely child who had to be the lady of the house. Her husband fell behind for an instant, so that he might look appealingly at me, unperceived by her. It was as if he said, "Please! Please! You are an expert, and this is the most valuable of all my treasures! Appraise it, and reassure me!" I did not respond to his worm-like supplication. He had no right to be there. Neither God nor magistrate had really joined them, and I would gladly have put them asunder.

The dinner was peculiarly pleasant, with no one there but the three of us, if you count him. As we sat around their museum-piece of a dining-room table, the evening moved smoothly and gracefully, because it all flowed on the gentle stream of music that was her speech. Her voice was not, as one might suppose from looking at her, either warm or contralto, but cool, refreshing, lyric-soprano, almost Arcadian, like a flute-solo by Gluck. And she showed such kindness in its use! Yes, kindness. She knows that her sweet tones contrast with her vivid beauty, and are, as it were, an antidote to it. So whenever she saw me looking at her too long and fixedly, she spoke, relaxed the tension, and put me at ease.

My part in the conversation was drawn from me, literally, by my hostess's intermittent silences. I found

myself asking small, leading questions, about herself and her interests, that I might have the pleasure of her responses.

Even the third member of the party began to speak up. I think it was partly due to his enjoyment in seeing his wife make, what must have been, yet one more easy conquest. It verified his own judgment and taste, and so restored his self-confidence. By the time the end of the dinner was reached, he was riding with us, in high spirits, full of the galloping bombast I had first heard from him.

He saw me admiring a great bluish diamond, set in a ring which she wore beside her wedding ring. It was a gorgeous stone, fit to surmount a king's sceptre, and I shouldn't be surprised if once it had. I was about to compliment her on it, during one of those conversational pauses which it had become my role to terminate, but he broke in blatantly and upset the procedure.

"Show Mickey your engagement ring, honey!" he cried. "He's got his eye on it." Turning to me, he added: "Not many like it, outside of collections."

"Oh, please don't bother!" I protested, seeing her removing it from her finger.

"No trouble," she replied, and handed it across the table to me. It almost seemed that she placed no value on it, for she paid no attention to my reactions to it, but unconcernedly began sipping her coffee

and thinking of Heaven knows what.

The diamond was most extraordinary. One did not have to be an expert to know it, and I said so, with many adjectives, to Belmore's evident gratification. My mind, though, was not entirely on what I was examining. I had seen another diamond, in another ring, on her finger.

It was a very small diamond, this other one — a mere chip, a splinter, scarcely worthy to be called a diamond at all, beside the monster I was inspecting. The ring in which it was set, narrow and inconspicuous as its jewel, had nestled close beside the opulent one, and so had been obscured until its majestic companion was removed. I wondered what it was doing there, the little upstart, between those two rich pledges of troth and consummation.

I returned the engagement ring to its owner. As she replaced it on her finger, I caught another glimpse of that second little diamond with the modest setting, before it was again overshadowed.

Very likely, I should have kept my mouth shut. I couldn't.

"That's an odd little ring," I said. "It looks so lost, between those two." I thought I was saying it amusingly, at least.

Belmore chose to take it that way. "It's a silly little gewgaw," he said, "but Mrs. Belmore likes it, and when a woman likes something, that's that. Have a cigar."

"I do like it," she assented. "My husband thinks it's fun to call it a

silly little gewgaw but after all I —"

He broke in, contritely, with, "Now honey!"

But she continued: "It is little, but it is wrong to call it silly. I'm very fond of it."

With the subtlety of a rhinoceros, Belmore abruptly changed the subject. "Why don't we go into the library?" he suggested. "Mickey wants to see our first editions."

"Would you and he mind going on ahead? I'll join you in a moment."

We did. It was obvious she wanted to cry.

"I'm afraid I put my foot in it somehow," I said, as he and I reached the library. "I'm terribly sorry."

"That's all right; you couldn't know. Perhaps I should have told you. It may have something to do with — that other business. Psychological, you know. Don't you think so?"

"I'll know better if you tell me."

It clearly did have something to do with "that other business" — in his opinion, at any rate — and he had a wretched time making himself begin. For fully a minute he scowled in silence, and I could see he was considering the pros and cons of confiding in me. At last he turned on me, almost defiantly, with: "Some of our friends know about it, anyway!" Then he poured it out without a pause, as if fearful that, once he stopped, he could not bring himself to begin again.

"The fact is, she was engaged to be married, but broke it off to marry

me instead. She was right. She was smart. I admire her for it. What was she giving up? He was just a young kid, with blond hair and a good physique, but that's all. He was broke. Absolutely broke and always will be. It couldn't have worked. Six months of starving together, and they'd have hated each other. I pointed that out to her, and made her see it. And suppose they'd have kids? It would be worse, and I made her see that too. It's to her credit that she faced reality, instead of going on dreaming. Well, she's not ever going to lose by it. All this —" he indicated the house, with a comprehensive sweep — "everything I have will be hers."

He stopped, hoping for my approval as well as, I think, his own. But it was only his last three words that stuck with me — "will be hers." Will be? Only will be? Then hadn't he given her anything, settled anything on her? Was he afraid, perhaps, that if he did — ?

She rejoined us then, pretending she had been giving some instructions to the servants. The butler followed a moment later, with coffee and liqueurs; and a little after that Belmore excused himself, as he had arranged with me that he would, saying he had to put in a phone call to London.

Passing behind her chair on his way out, he did something that I think was despicable. He cast a meaning glance over her head at me, and then at the tray of liqueurs, indicating as clearly as if he had said

it that I should try to get her to drink, and thereby perhaps loosen her tongue. Fortunately, she did not see him do it, since he was behind her, though for a moment I was afraid she had noticed the shocked expression that must have been on my face and the involuntary way I looked from the bottles to her. However, she gave no sign, so either she had seen nothing or did not understand, being too guileless herself to believe such perfidy of her husband.

Then I was alone with her, and it made no difference what he had wanted me to do, because I couldn't have done it. Not that it wouldn't have been easy enough to follow his suggestion, for she instantly began to speak about one of the cordials and to tell me, with child-like pleasure, what a nice taste it has.

"My husband keeps it in the house because I like it," she said. "It comes from the Italian part of Switzerland, and it's called *Fior d'Alpi*. That means *Flower of the Alps*. You can see why. There's a sort of little plant growing in it." She held the bottle up for my inspection, and there was, as she said, a plant-like formation in the midst of the fluid, with leaves and stems, all of pure white.

"That's not a plant," I said, trying to impress her with my knowledge. "It's a crystalline structure, produced by the sugar in the alcohol."

"Oh, do you understand chemistry?"

"A little," I replied, hoping I had

not revealed that I was a doctor. "I took it at college."

She filled my glass and then her own, and we both drank a little. The liqueur had an extremely pleasant taste and induced an equally pleasant glow.

"This could become a vice with me," she said. "If I drink even a second glass, my head feels giddy, in a most agreeable way, and I feel that I haven't a care in the world."

"Then I advise you never to take a second glass," I said, again sounding more like a doctor than I wished, and tried to cover it up by adding: "I mean, that with someone who isn't used to drinking, one drink goes as far as two or three with someone who is."

"You're right," she said, "I mustn't take more than is good for me. But there is no reason why you shouldn't have some more. Oh, please!" she urged, as I started to decline. "My husband will think I haven't been entertaining you properly, and he is so attached to his old friends."

I let her fill my glass. After all, a cordial glass is very small. A few moments later she filled it again, but I observed with satisfaction that she took my advice and had no more.

That *Fior d'Alpi* had an enormous kick, although it was slow in delivering it. I don't know precisely when, but I was presently conscious of the very symptoms she had described: that is, my head felt giddy, in a most agreeable way, and I hadn't a care in the world. Everything became

rosy and delightful, and I expressed my feelings by beaming and grinning, in what must have been a rather foolish manner, though at the time it seemed appropriate.

She gave no indication that she knew what had happened to me, and I don't know now whether she was aware of it. She was the perfect hostess. Under her guidance the conversation at last came around to something like this:

"You're a doctor, aren't you?" she was asking.

As I recall it, there seemed no reason for me to deny my profession, since she evidently knew it anyway; so I simply answered, "Yes. How did you know?"

"I know my husband, and I took it for granted. I think you'll feel better, not having to go on pretending."

"Thanks. You're very considerate."

"Not at all. And we'll say nothing about what he wants you to find out. You can just tell him you couldn't learn anything."

"Yes, that's what I'll do." It seemed at the time like a wonderful solution.

"That will be so much better." Having disposed of that point, she went on to the next, in a way that in a more worldly person I would call business-like and efficient. "Let me see. I was to show you the first editions. I don't think any of them are about medicine." She was looking through the shelves now, for something that might appeal to me.

"I'm more interested in *those*," I said, indicating the rows of paper-

bound detective stories on the shelves.

"So am I. I get them as fast as they come out, but I've never found a perfect one."

"Perfect in what way?" I asked, trying to sound profound. "As an escape from reality?"

"Why should I look for that? I believe in facing reality. I mean, not one of these books has presented a perfect murder. The murderer always gets caught."

"Perhaps there is no perfect murder."

"There must be. Some of these stories come very close to it. It may be that they're not allowed to be completely clear about such a thing. But even I could imagine how it could be done. Almost, that is."

"Ah! Almost."

"I lack certain technical knowledge."

"Such as?" I asked, amused by the incongruity of this lovely girl and her bloodthirsty little hobby.

"Knowledge of chemistry, for example. Now, you're a doctor. You know all about that." I nodded sagely, and prepared to consider the next point by drinking a little more of the *Fior d'Alpi*. I don't know how my glass remained as full as it did — whether she was filling it or I was doing so myself. I wish I knew. But even more, I wish I could be sure about what came next, because that is what has kept me from sleeping ever since.

"Tell me," I think I heard her ask, "isn't there such a thing as a poison

which would kill someone and then evaporate, so that death would look as if it had happened naturally?"

"If I knew of such a poison, I'd be in the same boat with those authors. I couldn't tell it. And even such a poison could be traced. Records are kept by druggists, you know — of what they sell and to whom."

"Oh, I didn't know that. How clever of you to think of it!"

The combination of alcohol and praise is a powerful drug in itself. And she was looking at me steadily, more steadily than I have ever been looked at, by anyone.

"If I wanted to commit a perfect murder," is what came out of me, "I wouldn't go about it like that."

"How then?"

"I would study my victim. If I found, let us say, that he was inclined to apoplexy, and probably had high blood pressure, I would look into a medical book — not consult a doctor, mind you, because he might remember and tell — and find out what diet relieves the condition, and what aggravates it. Then I would get him to eat the wrong things, and goad him into fits of temper."

"How long would that take?"

"It depends on how regularly you could get him to do what you wanted."

"I see."

My recollections of our tête-à-tête, which are vague enough about here, black out entirely at this point and leave only a gap. The next thing I remember, I was delivering a sort of

lecture to her, on the subject of apoplexy, and was saying: "A characteristic attack presents the following phenomena. The patient —" I stopped short, in embarrassment, and said, "I must apologize. I'm talking too much."

"Why do you apologize? You have been very entertaining." With that, she put down a pencil which she had been holding, and laid it beside a pad. I realized the meaning of this: she had been writing down everything I said. Charmed by her though I was, this disturbed me, but when I looked closer at the pad, I was greatly surprised.

"You write shorthand!" I exclaimed.

"Yes. Didn't Mr. Belmore tell you? I was his secretary."

"No," I replied, "but he did tell me some things." I pointed to the tiny diamond and its narrow golden band. "That's an engagement ring too, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is. Did he tell you that I and the boy who gave me this ring were both working for him?"

"No, he didn't."

"Or that he fired him, and would have fired me?"

"Why?"

"To make sure we couldn't afford to marry."

"No, he didn't tell me that either."

Into that lovely, limpid voice of hers crept a note of incredible hardness, startling and unsuspected as the little diamond had been when its existence was revealed. "When Mr.

Belmore asked me to marry him," she said, with all the blood gone out of her tones, "he made something clear to me — something I had not understood before. Very likely I should be grateful to him for it, because it is absolutely true. Before two young people get married, and have a family, the first thing they must do — the very first — is to get money."

At that moment Mr. Belmore returned. Waiting until his wife opportunely turned her head away, I managed to signal "No" to him, and soon after thanked both of them for a pleasant evening, and went home.

All of which leaves me in a quandary. If everything I suspect is true — But it can't be. If I am even remembering correctly, if she really gave me too much to drink, in order to — But that can't be, either. Not she.

Above all, can she really mean to — to — Because, if she does, why then I suppose I will have to dissuade her, or warn him — or do something. But can such an exquisite girl be capable of that? Can it actually have been her purpose from the start, and is that why she married him?

As a first step, before I can do anything else, I'll have to make sure. Luckily, there is that arrangement with her husband by which she and I are frequently to be left by ourselves.

Meanwhile, all I know is this: the wearing of an engagement ring signifies an intention to wed.