A Bit of Amateur Detective Work

By a Young Girl Who Used Feminine Instinct

By EDITH D. MARTIN

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A gay winter house party was assembled in the country home of Edward Giddings. A couple of dozen young people spent their time there during the day, some sleighing—for there was snow on the ground—some skating, while others in the house were flitting before the great open fireplaces, of which there were several. In the evening there was bridge whist and "five hundred" and dancing.

There were three young persons present whose relations were naturally somewhat strained—George Chace, Edna Hilliard and Sarah Tucker. Chace had been engaged to Sarah Tucker, but had broken with her to engage himself to Edna Hilliard. Miss Tucker did not appear to be much troubled over her jilting and was carrying on a mild affair with Evan Walker. Some of our party—for I was a guest—thought it was George who had been jilted instead of Sarah. At any rate, of the three concerned in the transition from one girl to another, he seemed the most uneasy. I had known him from boyhood, he often having carried my books for me to and from school, and had shown me other attentions. Edna Hilliard I knew slightly and thought very well of her. As to Sarah Tucker I disliked her.

It seemed to me that George was between two fires. He was just one of those fellows to get into trouble with girls and very likely to make a misalliance—good natured, impulsive reckless. There had been times when I could have drawn a proposal from him, but I was not sure but that he would be sorry the next day for what he had done. Nevertheless despite his faults, I admit that I was very fond of him.

One evening we were playing a romping game in the drawing room—blind man's buff—and one of the girls, Cecile Stanford, who was blindfolded, caught George Chace, and the handkerchief was transferred from her eyes to his. I noticed soon after this that his old flame, Sarah Tucker, was capering about in front of him, occasionally, by sounds permitting him to know her location. In this way he followed her, or she drew him—I didn't know which—into a corner formed by a projecting fireplace, where for a moment they disappeared from our view. Sarah was caught, and they reappeared, George pulling the handkerchief from his eyes.

While Sarah was blindfolded Cecile Stanford noticed that her watch that had been clasped to her corsage was missing. The game was stopped, and we all proceeded to hunt for the lost timepiece. It was not found. Giddings looked very much put out. He shut the doors and said:

"Something is wrong here. I would gladly buy Miss Stanford another watch if it would obliterate the matter, but it wouldn't. That I have a thief among my friends is painfully evident. Some one in this room has the watch. Garner and Miss Ellsworth are in the billiard room playing a game and consequently cannot be suspected. I propose that they be brought in and asked to search every one of us."

The plan was carried out. The watch was not found, but a valuable scarfpin belonging to one of the men was discovered in George Chace's coat pocket. This fixed the identity of the thief to the satisfaction of most of those concerned. George acted as any one would act under the circumstances. He turned pale.

"Do you intend to arrest me?" he asked of the host.

"Certainly not. This affair is bad enough without making it a subject for the newspapers."

Without another word George turned and walked out of the room. His fiancee did not follow him. In half an hour he came down stairs with his overcoat on his arm and his hat in his hand. I was the only person who went out to say goodby to him. Even Miss Hilliard failed to do so.

"Keep up your courage, George," I said. "You've been made a victim of a plot. I shall remain here and see if I can get hold of a clew."

The momentary light of gratitude that came into his eye amply repaid me for my words. Then his face fell back to its former expression as he said:

"In my opinion there will never be an explanation."

I had been unwise in joining George at the door, for it was an announcement that I was his advocate, and it put those in the conspiracy on their guard. After his departure, instead of going back to where the others were, I went to my room, and as soon as I could compose myself began to think. I had observed the circumstances which had occurred shortly before the watch was missed. Cecile was doubtless blindfolded when it was taken. Then I remembered Sarah Tucker drawing George off to a corner, where for a moment they were not seen.

This latter circumstance only confirmed by woman's instinct that she was the arch plotter in the case. I believed she had stolen the watch from Cecile, or picked it up and kept it, or hidden it temporarily. And I believed she had also stolen the scarfpin, and when she and George were out of sight, had slipped it in his pocket. But as I have said, all this was built up on a feeling that, having lost George, she had laid a plot for vengeance.

I have never claimed any detective talent, but as I look back on my reasoning, whether it was right or wrong, I am disposed to approve of myself in that one respect. However, I showed more detective intuition in realizing at once that the only clew to unraveling the plot lay in the watch. I had found the woman, but the finding was useless without the watch.

The rest of my stay with the house party was devoted to a search for the missing article. I did not believe that it could be easily sent or taken away, but I took the precaution to go to the express office and secure a promise from the agent to inform me if any of the guests—a list of whom I gave him—left with him a package for transmission. My chief object was to remain at home when the others were out enjoying their winter sports. With this in view, I was constantly assuming one indisposition or another for an excuse to carry out my plan.

I had little doubt that if I found the watch I should discover it in Sarah Tucker's possession. I did not see how she could well hide it anywhere but in her room. I was obliged to take great risks in going there, for if caught I should be considered a thief myself. I thought of communicating my design as a protection to our host, but he was too headstrong to trust with so delicate a matter, and I preferred to work without a single confederate.

The first chance I got to remain indoors when the others were out I waited in the hall till it was deserted, then went into Miss Tucker's room for a search. I expected to find certain receptacles where she might have placed the watch locked, but to my surprise everything—her trunk, bureau drawers, suitcase, alligator skin bag, glove and jewel boxes—all were open. At first this induced me to believe that I was on the wrong track, but a moment's reflection told me that I was on the right one. If the watch was in her possession and her room was searched during her absence to lock her receptacles would avail nothing and might indicate that she had something to hide.

However, I searched every nook and corner, looked into the toes of her shoes and felt of her clothes. No watch did I find. Hearing some one in the hall, I stood for a moment with my hand on the doorknob. The footsteps passed down the staircase, and there was perfect stillness.

I heard the faint ticking of a watch.

But where? Had I not searched everywhere and found no watch, not even one rightfully belonging to Sarah Tucker? I walked toward the center of the room and stood listening. I had lost the ticking, and it was some time before I could pick it up again, and when I did I failed to locate it. There is no direction to sound, though the nearer one approaches it the louder it is. I moved toward the door where I had first heard the ticking, but if there was any increase or diminution I failed to detect it. At the other end of the room was an open fireplace with a grate between the two windows. I moved toward one of the windows and stood by it. I fancied the ticking to be more distinct. I moved slowly to the other window, stopping to listen after every step, and when I was before the fireplace the ticking seemed louder than at any other time.

I realized that, as the children say in their hiding games, I was getting "warm." I put my ear to the fireplace, and the ticking was louder. I thrust my hand up the chimney and felt its side. Presently I clutched a watch. It was hanging to a nail. I took it out from its hiding place and saw that it was a lady's watch, and I did not doubt that it was Cecile's.

Hurrying to my room, I washed the soot off my hand and changed my dress, for the sleeve was blackened, then walked the floor to calm myself that I might form a plan for turning the obloquy of the theft from innocent George Chace to the real thief, Sarah Tucker. The stolen article now being in my hands, if discovered with it the charge would fall upon me. It flashed upon me to put the watch back in the chimney. Fortunately none of the guests had come in and I had plenty of time to do so. Then I wrote in a disguised hand on a bit of paper, "Listen at the fireplace in Miss Tucker's room," and, slipping into our host's chamber, left it on his dresser, where he would not fail to see it as soon as he went there. He had taken a party out in an automobile and came in before the other groups. As soon as he entered he went to his room to dress for dinner. I was on watch, and in a few minutes after his arrival I heard him go to Miss Tucker's room. When he came out I saw that he grasped something in his hand. At dinner I saw by his face that something momentous was on his mind. But he controlled its repression so successfully that I alone noticed it. When he arose from the table he announced that he would like to see us all in the drawing room. After we had assembled there he said:

"A great injustice has been done to George Chace. The stolen watch has come to light under circumstances to indicate that he was made the victim of a conspiracy. I need not accuse the real culprit. W[illegible] my guest, to exonerate Chace."

Then he went to Cecile and handed her her watch.

When I met George he threw his arms around me in his impulsive way, saying:

"What a dolt I've been to get mixed up with either of these girls! You're worth a thousand of them."

I forgave him.

Captain Dan Went Some.

A vivid picture of the burdens which British policies and wars laid upon our infantile commerce is supplied by the experience of Captain Daniel Driver of the schooner Three Brothers, sailing to the West Indies in 1759 with a cargo valued at £550. First the Three Brothers was seized by an English privateer, the King of Russia, nine guns, Captain James Inclieto, and carried into Antigua, and that was the last of her. Sailing again in the schooner Betsey for Guadeloupe, a French frigate captured and carried him into that port, where he had to ransom his vessel for 4,000 livres ($800) and leave three hostages for payment. Returning with the schooner Mary under a flag of truce, he was sent into New Providence by the English privateer Revenge, Captain James McDonald, which, however, had to release him. He reached Guadeloupe, paid the ransom, released his hostages and was bound for home when a Captain Blanche in a French frigate arrested the whole outfit and detained him until midwinter, when, penniless and worn out with undeserved persecution, he managed to get home.—National Magazine.

Easy to Make Space.

"Old Colonel Ruffenreddy was night editor of a morning paper," said the major, "and I was night city editor. The paper was small, and there was always more than enough to fill, even when the ads. were at the lowest point. When the ads. were up it was a fight to get anything into the sheet.

"But the colonel had a rule that always met the situation. In the early part of the evening, just as the crush was beginning, he would come into the news room and declare that everything must be cut to a paragraph. 'Any story can be told in a paragraph.'

"Then he would slash into everything and as far as possible get things into paragraphs, even if they required scare heads. When makeup time came and there was a flood of ads. the colonel would throw out the paragraphs with the remark, 'If it isn't worth more than a paragraph it isn't worth using.'

"No; he never had any trouble in making space for the ads.—New York Herald.

The Lydd of Lyddite.

Lyddite, the powder that has such enormous explosive force and that can be fired from a gun which is easily carried about, does not, as has been widely supposed, take its name from a man, but from an ancient town near the coast of Kent, in England—the town of Lydd, where there is a government artillery range. Here the tests were made that resulted in the preparation of this explosive, and the name of the peaceful Kentish village is now associated with a substance that has dealt out death to thousands. It has other odious qualities besides its explosive force, since its fumes are so suffocating as sometimes to be intolerable. Lydd shares the notoriety which attaches to the name of Dumdum, that other peaceful city, in distant Bengal, where are manufactured the expanding bullets that Great Britain has used from time to time.—Harper's Weekly.

A Snail's Tongue.

A snail eats by rasping off small particles with the tongue. This tongue is a narrow band or ribbon with pointed teeth set in rows across it. The common slug, often found in damp places, has more than 25,000 teeth on the tongue, which act like the ridges on a file and scrape the food into the mouth. I once watched with a magnifying lens a small water snail feeding as it slowly crawled up the side of an aquarium, and, although I made no very accurate count, the tongue seemed to be pressed against the glass about forty times a minute.—Exchange.

Reciprocity.

"Sure," said Patrick, rubbing his head with delight at the prospect of a present, "I always mane to do me duty."

"I believe you," replied his employer, "and therefore I shall make you a present of all you have stolen from me during the year."

"Thank yer honor," replied Pat, "and may all your friends and acquaintances trate you as liberally."—London Telegraph.

The Matrimonial League.

The baseball player gazed softly at her.

"Would you sign with me for the game of life?" he whispered tenderly.

"That will depend somewhat on your batting average and your capacity for making home runs," she replied.—Harper's Weekly.

You Never Can Tell.

Crawford—You spoke of opening a bank account in your wife's name in order to teach her the value of money. How did it turn out? Crabshaw—She used it up to pay a lot of bills I could have staved off for six months.—Lippincott's.

Her Sort.

Alice—What kind of girl has Jack engaged himself to? Rose—Oh, she's the sort of woman you never dare ask to luncheon for fear she'll stay to dinner.—Harper's Bazar.

Little Choice.

"Is there any choice in speculation between the bulls and bears?"

"Well, it is the choice between a tight squeeze and a toss up."—Baltimore American.

If we had no failings ourselves we should not take so much pleasure in finding out those of others.—Rochefoucauld.

Single File.

When the Indians traveled together they seldom walked or rode two or more abreast, but followed one another in single file. It has been thought by some that this practice resulted from the lack of roads, which compelled them to make their way through woods and around rocks by narrow paths. If this were the real reason for the practice, then we should expect to find that the tribes who lived in open countries traveled in company, as do whites. The true reason for journeying as the Indians did in single file seems to be a feeling of caste. This feeling was at the bottom of other customs of the Indians. It made their women slaves and rendered the men silent and unsocial. This peculiarity is Asiatic. How it has warped and disfigured Hindu life is well known. Home is scarcely possible where it prevails. To the women and children domestic life is bondage. The women of a Chinese household are seldom seen in the street. The children, when accompanying their father, follow him at a respectful distance, in single file and in the order of their ages.—Harper's Weekly.

Don't Be a Chatterer.

Do you chatter? If you feel you do, don't! Get rid of the habit as quickly as maybe. There is nothing so irritating or more dangerous. His chief asks the clerk a question which requires a brief answer. Instead of replying in a word, he irritates his superior by inconsequent meanderings, and he is surprised and hurt to be curtly cut short. His astonishment, however, would be greater could he but overhear a subsequent conversation. "Shall we send Jones on this special commission?" asks the head clerk. "No," replies the chief; "he chatters too much."

It has always been so. Famous generals have ever intrusted important messages to the man who would rather be shot than speak. Then, too, a chatterer has few friends, whether business or otherwise. Who can feel at ease with a man who babbles all you tell him in confidence to the next comer?—Pearson's Weekly.

Try a Single Rose.

"We read," said Lucinda, "about how Adolphus brought to Luella a great bunch of roses, and we can imagine their beauty. We are left to guess at their cost. But do you know it isn't really necessary in order to make home beautiful to have a bunch of roses as big around as a barrel; that a single lovely rose will do?

"Try this: If you have spent all your money for hats and gloves and Adolphus hasn't come—my brother Claude would say hasn't come to the bat—stop at the florist's and buy a single rose—it will cost very little—and take that home and set it in the proper vase, its red petals and green leaves to please the eye and its fragrance to fill the room, an individual flower of grace and beauty and joy. If you can't have a bunch try a single rose."—New York Sun.

The Everglades.

The region known as the Everglades of Florida is about sixty miles long by some fifty-fifive miles broad and is one vast swamp, studded with islands of from a quarter of an acre to hundreds of acres in extent. These islands are generally covered with dense thickets of shrubbery or vines and occasionally with lofty pines and palmettos. The water is from one to six feet deep, the bottom, as a rule, covered with a growth of rank grass. During the rainy season, from July to October, the district comprised in the Everglades is practically impenetrable. The vegetable deposit of the Everglades is considered well adapted to the growth of the banana and other fruits, and when properly drained the region will undoubtedly be one of the most fertile on earth.—New York American.

Struggle of the Rivers.

The discovery that there is a kind of struggle for existence and survival of the fittest among rivers is one of the most interesting results of the modern study of physiography. A notable example of this contest is exhibited by England's two biggest rivers, the Thames and the Severn. Between their valleys lie the Cotswold hills, and exploration shows that the Severn by eating backward among these hills where softer strata underlie them has diverted to itself some of the headwaters which formerly flowed into the Thames.

She Made a Mistake.

Two girls, the story ran, were drinking tea and eating scones at a fashionable New York restaurant. The first girl said:

"Maud is so sorry she took Reggie's ring back to Dymon's to be valued."

"Why?" asked the other girl as she opened a fresh scone.

"Dymon kept it. He said Reggie hadn't been in to settle for it, according to his promise."

Not In Condition.

Professional Beggar (in Hardupp's office)—I've been out o' work for over a year, mister, and ain't got the price o' a night's lodgin'. Can yer do anything to help me out? Hardupp (sardonically)—I'd like to, but I sprained my foot on a collector yesterday.

Too Sane.

"I don't believe this novel of yours will hit the popular fancy."

"What's wrong with it?"

"Your heroine acts at times as if she had sense."—Washington Herald.

Friendly Advice.

"We surprised all our friends by getting married."

"Good enough. Now surprise 'em by staying married."—Kansas City Journal.

Her New Year's Caller

He Brought Her an Acceptable Gift

By CLARISSA MACKIE

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The old fashioned custom of paying calls on New Year's day still existed in Lanelea. The housekeepers of that prim and lovely village were always plentifully supplied with loaves of frosted plum cake, pitchers of sweet cider and pots of fragrant, steaming coffee and, after an early and consequently hastily prepared dinner, were dressed and ready to receive callers of both sexes, for such was the Lanelea custom. The ladies of the village took much thought in planning their reception hours so that all might have time to pay calls as well as to receive them. These calling hours were usually announced in the columns of the Lanelea Weekly Times.

"I wonder if Estelle Freeman will receive calls tomorrow?" remarked Mrs. Eddy Skinner to a neighbor on the last day of the old year.

"I don't know why she shouldn't," protested Mrs. Smith. "She always has done it and has had real cream in her coffee instead of condensed milk—like some folks."

They were passing the old Freeman place, and there had been a brief glimpse of Estelle's pink shawl in the leafless garden.

Once the handsomest house in Lanelea, the Freeman place still bore indications of its past grandeur.

It was a huge old house, much too large for Estelle's slender form. In summer, when the coolness of its large rooms was welcome, it was the most comfortable house in the village. In winter its rooms were of arctic temperature, except on New Year's day, when somehow Estelle managed to have great fires in the fireplaces in the double parlors and dining room. The rest of the winter Estelle spent in four rooms of the west wing, and the library became her sitting room.

"Do you see any signs of New Year's calls?" pursued Mrs. Eddy Skinner as they paused beyond earshot of the Freeman place.

Mrs. Smith cast a backward troubled glance at the old house. "No, I don't," she admitted. "Of course Estelle always airs the parlor curtains the day before."

"And opens all the windows and draws up the shades," added Mrs. Skinner. "Did you see all the shades were pulled tight, same as every day?"

"Yes, but maybe she hasn't got at it yet. Folks can't do everything like clockwork!" Mrs. Smith's good humored face wore a resentful look now.

"Freemans always do things by clockwork; you know that."

"That's so, but folks change sometimes."

"Freemans never change their minds or their ways, but I guess Estelle will have to do both now." Mrs. Eddy Skinner pursed her mouth mysteriously.

"Don't be so secretive, Hannah," said Mrs. Smith angrily. "If you've got anything to say about Estelle Freeman, for the land's sake say it and get it over with!"

"Well, Estelle's going to lose the place tomorrow," said Mrs. Skinner triumphantly. She was not a hard hearted woman, but merely one who placed a high value upon her ability to be the first one to impart matters of gossip, whether good or bad.

"No!" ejaculated Mrs. Smith sharply.

"Yes. It seems she was possessed to keep the house after her father died, and, contrary to Lawyer Allen's advice, she has paid the interest on the mortgage out of her little principal in the bank until it's all gone. She has not paid any interest for two years, and they're going to foreclose. I'm sure I don't know what Estelle will do."

"She will stay with me till she knows what to do," said Mrs. Smith quietly. And for awhile the other woman was silenced. Presently she spoke again:

"Knowing about the foreclosure, of course I was sure Estelle wouldn't feel as though she could afford to receive tomorrow."

"And so you took it upon yourself to leave her name out of the paper and to tell Tom, Dick and Harry that they needn't call on Estelle Freeman tomorrow because she can't afford to entertain. Humph! I guess Freemans can hold their own with anybody in Lanelea," averred Mrs. Smith loyally.

"Well, I declare!" cried Mrs. Skinner angrily, and without further parley she whisked around a corner and went toward her own neat, white painted glaringly furnished, unmortgaged home.

Mrs. Smith stared after her for an instant and then appeared to forget the existence of Mrs. Eddy Skinner. Her kindly eyes were turned backward over the way they had come, where the line of neatly painted picket fences was broken by a length of overgrown, unkempt privet hedge that surrounded the Freeman place.

Suddenly she wheeled about and retraced her steps until she came to the ragged hedge, where she pushed her bulky form through the narrow gateway. Instead of going around to the side door that Estelle always used in winter, Ellen Smith marched up the broad front steps and rang a peal through the empty rooms.

Estelle opened the door, her fair, sweet face [illegible] surprise at the sight of Ellen Smith at her front door. Ellen Smith was an old friend who was privileged to enter the Freeman house at any intimate door without knocking.

"Well, Estelle, can I come in?" Ellen was inside the great, cold hall as she asked the question.

"Come into the library. I've got a nice fire there," said Estelle, leading the way down the hall to a door in the south wing.

Mrs. Smith sank heavily into the rocker and loosened the veil tied over her head. She cast a quick glance around the room and noted that Estelle was mending a linen pillowcase. There was a lack of evidence of the usual preparations for the first day of the new year.

"Of course you're going to open the house tomorrow as usual," said Mrs. Smith abruptly.

Estelle flushed and bent closer over the pillowcase she was darning. "No," was her reply. "The house doesn't belong to me any longer."

"Who owns it?" demanded Ellen sternly.

"The man who owns the mortgage. Haskins Bros. are his agents."

"And a pretty pair of rascals they are!" cried Ellen Smith, suddenly bursting into tears over Estelle's troubles. "I'm not going to ask you how it happened. I dare say you couldn't keep it—not with Haskins Bros. in the deal—only you know I shall expect you to come and keep me company until you decide what to do."

Estelle laughed and cried all at once as she took Ellen's toil worn hands in her own. "Keep you company, indeed! As if you could be lonesome with five children! But I understand, and I will come, Ellen. I am to settle the matter day after tomorrow, and after that they will give me three months to vacate. The place really does not belong to me after tonight."

"You will have to sell off some of the furniture, I expect," muttered Ellen diffidently.

"Yes," admitted Estelle sadly. "You know when father died, Ellen, he begged me to hold on to the place at any cost. He—he thought I might marry some day, but, of course, that is all nonsense." Estelle blushed and turned her head away; then, with a proud shake of her shoulders, she resumed: "There was a tiny sum left in the bank, so I mortgaged the house and have been living on that. I know it is thriftless, but there was no work for me in Lanelea, and I promised father to stay and always keep the house open, but it will have to go now!"

"And, of course, Henry Haskins willingly let you have the money and was nice about waiting for the interest because this is the finest property in Lanelea and worth waiting for!" cried Ellen Smith bitterly. "If I had only known before I might have helped you."

With an ill framed excuse she hastened away, first exacting a promise from Estelle to come to her house and help receive. Although it was drawing near mealtime and her hungry brood would be watching for her momentary arrival, Ellen Smith made her way toward the courthouse, where she was fortunate enough to find Judge Mason still in his office.

Her interview with the rather stern faced judge lasted for an hour, and when she left the office her countenance beamed with delight at a satisfactorily accomplished duty. "I always knew there was somebody Estelle might have married, and from his face when I mentioned her name I know!"

New Year's day dawned cold and cloudy. There was not much inclination to leave warm stoves and go a-calling, but still there was an incentive in the form of alluring refreshments as well as alluring daughters in many households.

Estelle shed bitter tears as she wandered through the lonely rooms, repeopling them with beloved forms, reliving old days when happiness had been such a drug in her youthful market that she had carelessly flung some of it aside. Afterward she came to realize that it was a precious part of the delicate fabric of bliss that is woven into every one's life. Evan Mason had left Lanelea and returned only a year ago, gray haired and with legal honors thrust upon him. She had avoided a meeting with him, and so they had not met.

Estelle had thought perhaps some one might come, but the storm was excuse enough, and there were no paths dug around the Freeman place.

Just as dusk fell there came a resounding peal at the doorbell. Estelle lighted the lamp in the library, where she had been sitting in the twilight, and lighted the red shaded lamp in the hall. As she opened the door a man came in as though driven before the storm.

It was Evan Mason.

When they faced each other in the library the judge held out a hand to the woman he had so hopelessly loved in the past.

"I came to bring you a New Year's gift, Estelle," he said gravely. "The mortgage on your house has been paid. Nay, do not refuse me. You must know I owe my career and everything I have and am today to your father's generosity. I only dare wish you might give me a New Year's gift in return."

"If I only could"— began Estelle impulsively, and then her eyes drooped beneath the meaning in his faithful ones. "If"— she faltered.

"If you only loved me you could easily make me happier than I could ever hope to make you," he said, smiling sadly.

"Ah—but I did—I do now," stammered Estelle, feeling the pressure of the long deferred lips upon her own.

As their eyes met each saw a vision of the new year, and there was no sadness in it.