

1. THE GREEN DIAMOND

Introduction: A Visit to Ethel King

During my penultimate trip to America, whilst having lunch with Nick Carter the famous detective of whom I have the honor to be a friend, I talked to him about Ethel King. I had learned of her name and of the great deeds associated with it through her fame, as have all those who, by profession, or by taste, are interested in the career of great detectives.

“Why don’t you go see her?” he said to me. “I’ll give you a note of introduction to her. She would certainly be pleased to make her files available to you and to tell you a thousand interesting stories about herself and her adventures. Although she works in a masculine profession, and one which requires precisely the most masculine virtues, she’s a charming woman. You won’t regret having met her.”

I caught, as they say, the ball on the bounce, and eagerly took advantage of this unexpected opportunity. So it was that two days later I rang the doorbell of a pleasant cottage, 77 Garden Street, the “street of gardens,” one of the nicest in Philadelphia.

I waited a long minute and then rang a second time. I was beginning to lose patience when I noticed a young man who was watching me from a half-opened window on the second floor.

I don’t stand on ceremony very much, and as I don’t like to wait, I called out to the unknown person loudly.

“Sir,” I said to him, “I’d like to see Miss Ethel King. I come with an introduction from Mr. Nick Carter of New York.”

I didn’t get an answer, but the window closed and half a minute later I heard a shambling footstep in the hallway. The door opened and I found myself facing a middle-aged maid, tall and proportionately large, with big feet, strong hands, a mulish forehead and unwelcoming expression.

She looked me up and down with an irritating insistence.

“What do you want, sir?”

“Give this letter to your mistress,” I answered, annoyed, “and ask her if I may see her.”

She had me go into a small sitting room where I again waited some minutes. I know a lot of detectives in a lot of countries, and I’m not unaware that they are obliged to take great precautions to be on guard against the undertakings of criminals. But I am, I admit, rather sensitive and when I’m the one who’s the object of such formalities, I tolerate it badly.

So, when I was finally introduced into the detectives’ office, I couldn’t help remarking in a partly acid tone:

“I see that your door is well defended, Miss. No one can get in to see you without getting thoroughly checked out.”

Ethel King smiled and my bad humor disappeared immediately.

“In fact, sir, I’m forced to defend my door,” she answered. “That precaution is indispensable in my line of work. If I hadn’t observed it right up to the present day, I wouldn’t have the pleasure of greeting you; I would have been sleeping under six feet of earth a long time ago. But believe me, it’s as much a burden to me as it is to my visitors.”

I was already conquered, because, believe me, Ethel King possesses extraordinary charm. But if you were to examine her photograph, you would find her forehead too high, her nose too long, and her lips too thin.

Still, a halo of thought floats around that wide forehead; the nostrils of that aquiline nose vibrate, controlled by the thousand sentiments which agitate a noble soul; all kinds of smiles move across those lips, turn by turn ironic, menacing, tender, seductive, or simply pleasant, but never indifferent. And what about the eyes! Ethel King’s eyes! The entire universe seems to be reflected in her deep pupils. You couldn’t tell if they were blue or brown, their shade varies so much according to the mood and the

impressions of their owner. Her expression is bright, open and loyal, and, even so, enigmatic. Even when she's looking at you kindly, you have the feeling that you're undergoing a serious test, as if none of your most secret thoughts must escape her; but if you have some misdeed on your conscience, then you tremble and have the fearful conviction that Ethel King can guess your ignominy under all the masks that you've decked yourself with to hide it from her. All that makes up something more than beauty; it's the imprint of genius that gives those traits, not recognized by photography, a sublime grace that you cannot tire of contemplating.

Seated across from Ethel King, I looked at her without trying to hide my admiration, which didn't seem to bother her, but rather amused her.

"You've already met my two bodyguards," she said to me. "The young man that you saw at the window is Charley Lux, a cousin, made an orphan very young, who was brought up by my father, and later by me, and for who I'm like a big sister. He's brave, intelligent, and strong. He has taken up the same profession as I have and acts as my assistant. His help, and most of all, his protection, are invaluable to me. The woman who met you at the door, that's Mrs. Sara Cramp, my housekeeper or my companion—treating her as a maid would annoy her. You've seen that she's solidly built; she has a good fist and a man doesn't scare her; she's proved it more than once."

I listened to these details with interest. However, since I was in the presence of Ethel King, a question was burning my lips. At the risk of offending the one I was questioning, I couldn't resist any longer the desire to ask it.

"Excuse me, Miss," I began, hesitatingly, "but could you explain to me by what bizarre chain of circumstances a woman like you, attractive, charming—oh! I'm not a man to reel off insipid compliments to you; don't insult me by believing it—I'm telling the truth: a woman like you, gifted to please, created in fact for love, by what strange destiny has she come to adopt an essentially masculine profession which requires her to renounce the prerogatives of her sex?"

Ethel King didn't answer immediately. Her look, fixed on me, wandered however very far from my person. I understood it. For her, the present was effaced and the sad world of memories appeared before her eyes. She was completely woman then in the dreamy and gentle expression on her face. A wrinkle of bitterness formed at the corner of her mouth and she finally answered.

"It's a sad story and I don't like to talk about it, even though I keep the memory of the past like a cult. I can tell you that I am, like Nick Carter, the child of a detective. My father, who perhaps didn't have the reputation that he deserved in Philadelphia in his lifetime, had as his assistant, a high-minded young man. Herbert, that was the first name of that young man, asked for my hand when I was old enough to be married, and I gladly became engaged to him because I loved him. I had lost my mother at an early age. Brought up by my father, I had taken a taste for the profession he followed. He often let me go along on the operations against criminals that he undertook with my fiancé. That was how I served my apprenticeship in my profession. I expected that, once I was married, the duties of a wife wouldn't keep me from contributing to Herbert's success as a detective. The beautiful dream of my youth had in store for me, alas, a terrible awakening."

The detective was silent a few moments as if to hold back the emotion overcoming her, then she continued:

"Don't expect a story full of exciting ups and downs. The drama was brief...striking like lightning. One day, when my father and fiancé had gone out in a car, a criminal who had sworn a mortal hatred against them threw a bomb. The unfortunate men were literally torn to shreds. I didn't even have the sad consolation of looking at their dear features and kissing them after having closed their eyes. The murderer, I must say, was himself a victim of his attack. He was killed by a piece of shrapnel."

After another silence, which I didn't dare interrupt, Ethel King added:

"Do you understand now why I have consecrated my life to fighting crime? In your country, perhaps, a young girl, tested as I have been, would have entered a convent, but it isn't in my character to abandon myself to passive despair. My disposition is too combative. I'm devoured by too great a need for activity to shut myself away in a cloister, or, as a nurse in a hospital."

She made a gesture as if to chase away the sad thoughts and smiled at me with her limpid eyes, where I thought I still saw sadness trembling, ever alive.

“You may,” she told me, “go through my notes. They’re all open to you. They are most often simple notes, but if I may believe Nick Carter,” she added, motioning to my letter of introduction, “you have enough imagination to supply details for that lack.”

I bowed at the praise.

“And, sir, I’m very ready to supply you with information you may ask me for. You perhaps intend to write an article about me for a French newspaper?”

“Better than that, Miss. With your consent, I would like to publish the story of the ‘sensational cases’ which you have been involved in. My editor, I’m sure, would jump at the proposition.”

Ethel King nodded.

“The idea doesn’t displease me,” she said, smiling. “Since, as you say, I’ve renounced the prerogatives of my sex, it’s just that I at least take advantage of that renunciation. I’m not, I admit it to you, insensitive to fame...Let’s admit that’s a weakness, but who doesn’t have one? Publish then my notes, or rather the stories you will compose using them. However, I add one condition: that you respect the anonymity of the persons who, directly, or indirectly, found themselves involved in my police activities.”

“Nothing is easier, Miss. I’ll change the names and, when necessary, the places. Aside from that conventional alteration of reality, I will set myself, if you don’t see any reason I shouldn’t, to re-creating the facts and their consequences as exactly as possible. That is to say that I won’t always methodically follow the ‘professional’ order of your files. I’m going to present the public with dramas in which you are the main character. In order to give them life, I will re-establish, when necessary, scenes where you were not present, but which it may be logically concluded that they are circumstances you related. I will be scrupulously careful of the truth, nevertheless. Conjecture, but never invention, will be a part of ‘our’ stories. To sum it up, I want to do the work of an historian who doesn’t limit himself to coldly compiling texts.”

“I applaud your intentions, sir, and I will do everything in my power to help you carry them out.”

With these words, Ethel King stood up and showed me the numerous file cabinets where her dossiers were arranged in meticulous order. Her supple movements, her stances, revealed the harmonious vigor of a being used to all bodily exercises. That woman, to judge by the ease with which she, while chatting, moved about the heavy volumes placed on her desk, had the strength of an athlete.

“Here are my files, sir. Go through them at your convenience,” she continued. “My house is open to you. Come back whenever you like, and as often as it pleases you. I must excuse myself and leave you. An urgent matter requires my attention.”

This is how I have come to present to readers this publication which will, I hope, make them appreciate at her just value, Ethel King, the great detective. I went to the great detective’s house almost every day for five months, going through and copying her notes. Since then, aided by what I learned, I’ve spent almost two years composing the stories of the “sensational cases” of Ethel King and bringing them out. If I have succeeded in interesting the public, I won’t regret the trouble I went to.

The Legend of the Green Diamond

Sara Cramp knocked discreetly at the office door and handed her mistress a calling card.

Ethel King read:

John Light

Private Detective

“John Light, I know that name. Have him come in, Sara.”

A few minutes later the visitor bowed before Ethel King.

“Please sit down, Mr. Light,” she said, motioning the detective to a chair. “Your name is not unknown to me. What brings you here?”

“A serious motive, Miss King. I’ve come to propose a business affair to you, a very interesting case.”

The young woman considered, not without surprise, the man speaking; a man about 30 years of age with an open and attractive face.

“You will allow me to express my astonishment, Mr. Light,” she observed. “We are in some ways competitors.”

“That doesn’t keep me from having esteem and respect for you, Miss King. Besides, your fame places you too far above me for my modest person to overshadow you.”

“Celebrity aside, Mr. Light, it would be doing me an injury to attribute to me a feeling of mean jealousy...But let’s get to the point. My time is valuable...and yours also, undoubtedly.”

“Here it is, Miss King. I’m charged by a third party to watch over the security of a young girl. This girl must not be aware of my intervention, which makes my mission very delicate, you understand. A man cannot, without inconvenience, get himself easily admitted into the personal life of a young girl, nor as a consequence ward off the dangers she’s threatened with.”

“In general, no, I agree...But if the girl you’re protecting is ignorant of your mission and perhaps of your existence? By whom were you hired, Mr. Light?”

“By Mr. Isaac Loewenmaul, a jeweler. I’m going to explain the situation to you as succinctly as possible; however, afterwards, if you consent to lend me your valuable collaboration, I would ask you to go with me to visit Mr. Loewenmaul.”

“Six months ago my client acquired a seven-carat diamond known as the Green Diamond, even more famous for the perfection of its cut and its unusual coloration than for its weight. In addition, that stone, of a very beautiful shade, is tinted in green by metallic oxides picked up in its formation. This jewel, if its weight, its beauty and its rarity are considered, is of inestimable value. But it is considerably depreciated by a bizarre legend that has grown up around it. In fact, they claim that it brings bad luck to those who acquire it. The curse spares only those who buy and sell as jewelers, who buy it to resell with the intention of making money, and are actually only trustees. Except for these businessmen, everyone who has owned the green diamond has been the victim of some kind of catastrophe within a week after they have gained possession of the stone. One was murdered; another burned to death; another was ruined or changed, struck by blindness or deafness; another committed suicide.

“If what they recount is true, this would naturally be seen only as a series of bad luck, or of the man who committed suicide, of autosuggestion. For a century and a half the diamond has belonged successively to ten persons having no tie of relationship to each other, excepting, naturally, the list of jewelers. Of this number four died a violent death; five were victims of various accidents and quickly got rid of the diamond. Only one, that was a woman, remained unscathed and kept the stone for 50 years, but she was almost killed three days after acquiring the diamond by the collapse of a ceiling. She was only saved by the heroic intervention of her brother, who saved her life by sacrificing his own for her. The fatality that has successively struck the owners of the green diamond has made the jewel almost unsellable. Thus, in the last 150 years, the stone has passed almost 100 of them to jewelers from whom, from time to time, a strong character has taken it, to his great loss. Now, Mr. Isaac Loewenmaul is about to sell the stone to Miss Eva Newborn, whom you undoubtedly know by name. The sale is supposed to be settled today. Miss Newborn is buying the jewel for \$200,000 on the condition that nothing happen to her during the next week, beginning today. She reserves the right to return the stone and to take back her money if a misfortune strikes her or reaches a person associated with her. The jeweler, persuaded that it’s a matter of chance or a suggestion, has commissioned me to watch out for Miss Newborn so that nothing happens to her during the fixed time.”

“Well, Mr. Light,” the female detective said, “I have a feeling you won’t have any trouble earning your honorarium. Eva Newborn is reputed to be an active young girl, not given to superstition. I don’t see what my role would be...”

“Pardon me, Miss King. I have two reasons for coming to you. First of all, however firm Miss Newborn’s character may be, the danger of autosuggestion remains; let me tell you that in fact the stakes for the young girl have been particularly increased by another legendary virtue of the diamond, not more ill-fated than this one. The green diamond confers on its owner the gift of unmasking lies and impostures.”

“Mr. Light, you are, I believe, about to tell me the prologue of a story from *A Thousand and One Nights*. But you have given me only one of your reasons. Let’s hear the second.”

“Miss King, when I took up the profession of detective, I was still a bachelor. I have since married a charming woman whom I love dearly, and who has just given me a child. Maud—that’s her name—is urging me to give up my profession. Each time I undertake a new case, she goes through all the frights of worry. I had finally promised her to find another profession, when Isaac Loewenmaul contacted me. The jeweler, for whom it was important to conclude his sale, didn’t hold back. He offered me \$20,000 if I successfully completed my mission. My word, that tempted me! With half of that sum I could buy a farm in Virginia and live there happily with my wife and child. Maud has one weakness. She is superstitious. When I spoke to her about the green diamond, she raised her arms to heaven and begged me not to take up that case. After trying for a long time to quiet her fears, I mentioned your name. My wife, Miss King, worships you as a kind of superior being. She thinks your presence would be enough to conjure the worst spells, to turn away an imminent catastrophe.”

“There she attributes to me a power I don’t have,” exclaimed Ethel King, laughing.

“Let’s say instead, Miss, that she sees a supernatural power in what is the purely natural effect of your genius.”

“You flatter me, Mr. Light.”

“No, Miss... To sum it up, Maud and I have agreed that if you agree to collaborate on this case, I will accept it; if not, I’ll ask Mr. Loewenmaul to find someone else. I’m offering you half of the fee, Miss King, \$10,000. By agreeing, you will make both me and my wife happy.”

“That last consideration is enough to make me decide, Mr. Light. I accept.”

A gleam of joy lit the eyes of the visitor.

“Thanks! Oh! Thanks, Miss King... My gratitude...”

Smiling, Ethel interrupted him.

“Let’s not waste our time, Mr. Light. Do you have a plan?”

“Yes, Miss. It just so happens that Miss Newborn is looking for a female companion. Couldn’t you get that position?”

“Eva Newborn knows me. I’ve met her two or three times in society. But I’ll disguise myself... So, oh, yes, I can apply for that position with the best chances of getting it. I’ll arrange for the highest recommendations. My friend, Mr. Golding, the Chief of Police, won’t refuse to give me a good letter of introduction, eulogistic as fits the situation.”

“Good... Good, Miss King, marvelous! I’ll tell Maud the good news. In an hour, if that’s convenient for you, I’ll pick you up to take you to see Loewenmaul, who will tell us about his last meeting with Miss Eva Newborn. We can start our operations tomorrow morning.”

“It’s agreed, Mr. Light. I’ll expect you in an hour.”

Eva Newborn

“That’s good, Miss Briar; I’ll engage you at \$100 a month. That letter of Mr. Golding, the Chief of Police, helped me make up my mind. I had almost settled on someone already, but I didn’t find that person very likeable and her references were not nearly as good as yours.”

Ethel King, who, for the situation, had taken the pseudonym Ethel Briar, bowed silently as if she was very pleased with the praise of the young millionaire.

“Could you start immediately, Miss Briar?” Miss Newborn asked.

“Whenever you like, Miss. But as I haven’t been in Philadelphia very long and I have some business to take care of, I’ll ask your permission to be absent for an hour or two each day during the first week.”

“Please yourself. If you would like to keep your liberty two or three days more...”

“No, no, Miss Newborn. That would slow me down in getting settled here.”

“Frankly, I prefer this, Miss Briar,” declared the girl, giving the visitor a pretty smile from her sweet mouth and her clear eyes. A ray of sunlight glinted in her soft tawny hair.

“Since things are arranged,” she continued, “I’m going to have my maid show you to your apartment. Take off your hat and jacket and come join me here. You’ll spend the morning and lunch with me. Then you are free to spend the afternoon to have your baggage delivered and get moved in here. Is that all right with you?”

“Completely, Miss. I’ll be down in five minutes.”

A quarter of an hour later, the rich orphan and Ethel King were the best friends in the world. Miss Newborn had at first examined her new ladies’ companion closely. She wondered where she had seen that head before. But, since the detective had hidden her brown hair under a blonde wig, modified the color of her eyebrows, whitened her complexion, brightened the rose of her cheeks with make-up, and changed the shape of her nose by putting little tubes of invisible celluloid into her nostrils, the girl didn’t recognize Ethel King.

“I like you a lot, Miss Briar,” she said after a minute. “If it’s all right with you, since we’re destined to live in constant intimacy, we can leave all formality aside and call each other by our first name, can’t we, Ethel?”

“Gladly, Eva.”

Miss Newton clapped her hands like a child.

“Oh! How happy I am. I feel I’m going to like you a great deal!” she exclaimed.

She thought a moment and then gave Ethel King a questioning look.

“What are we going to do while we’re waiting for lunch?” she asked. “Let’s see. I have a great number of letters to write... You could help me with that... Just think, I have to announce my engagement to my friends... and to my acquaintances. What a chore! No, we won’t do that this morning; it’s too boring. Tomorrow will be time to think about that.”

The girl made a mocking gesture to show how little she thought of social obligations.

“Don’t you find absurd, Ethel, that custom of keeping other people up on the ‘great events’ in one’s life?”

“No, Eva,” the detective replied gently. “Don’t we live a little for our friends?”

“For our friends, the real ones, agreed! But there are so few of them,” Miss Newborn said, making a face of disdain. “Do you believe that my ‘good friends’ will spare me their criticism when they learn of my official engagement to Mr. Jack Hawfinch? I can hear them now: ‘What a choice, my dear! What nest did that bird fall out of? A man hardly off the boat from England. No one even knows his family!’ ”

Ethel King, amused, smiled.

“Speaking of that, Ethel, you don’t yet know that I’m engaged, or almost,” the girl continued.

She made a bow with comic gravity to add:

“Well, Miss Briar, I officially announce to you that I have given my hand to Mr. Jack Hawfinch, a man of independent means, born an Englishman and a recently naturalized American.”

Ethel King, joining in the game, bowed ceremoniously and answered:

“Allow me to congratulate you, Miss Newborn.”

The orphan burst out laughing.

“Good, good, that’s exactly right. That’s the way all my friends will congratulate me. But then what, I ask you? What they’ll say when my back is turned, is basically true. They don’t know my fiancé. Can they know if I’ll be happy with him? How can they congratulate me on what is perhaps foolish. I would prefer that they had the courage to give me their opinion to my face. But there isn’t one who would dare to, not one.”

The girl stopped for a moment, looked at her companion with a strange expression and observed:

“You must find me silly, Ethel... or badly brought up.”

“Neither one nor the other, Eva, but I’m afraid that you’re a little confused.”

Miss Newborn looked at Ethel King with astonishment.

“Well! You’re certainly frank, you are!”

“I force myself to be so,” the great detective answered, without taking offense at that somewhat brutal reply.

“You’re astonishing,” the girl exclaimed. “You’re poor, since you’ve tied down your freedom to earn your livelihood, and you dare to tell truths straightforwardly to the woman on whom your situation at this moment depends?”

“Poverty is a harsh test, Eva. It kills a great number of souls, but those who survive are better tempered by it than by wealth.”

“You’re decidedly the companion that I need, Ethel. I see Mr. Golding didn’t exaggerate in being lavish with his praise.”

The girl sat down beside Ethel and took her hand confidentially. Her playfulness had given way to gentle gravity.

“If you knew, Ethel, how hard it is to learn the truth when you’re as rich as I am. Nobody tells it to you. Everybody around you lies or dissimulates. Everybody. Even my fiancé, I’ve noticed.”

“He does that, Eva? He lies to you, and you love him?”

The orphan shook her head sadly.

“They’re all alike, Ethel! He at least doesn’t need my fortune to live. If he makes love to me, it isn’t in self-interest...like the others.”

“Ah! He’s rich?”

“He once showed me proof of income which guaranteed him \$80,000 revenue.”

The comments Miss Newborn had just made about her fiancé greatly intrigued Ethel King and made her suspicious of Jack Hawfinch.

“Don’t you find it strange, Eva, that the man who wants to marry you, has in this way spread out proof of his fortune for you to see?”

“Oh! Yes I did. Jack showed me his proofs one day when he had them on him by chance. They were English papers and, as I had never seen any, Jack asked me if I wanted to look at them...Since then I’ve thought that Jack had acted out a little comedy for me.”

“It seems so!”

“Yes. He wanted to prove to me that he was rich and that he wasn’t courting me for my fortune. Can I blame him? No, but that was really one of the principal reasons that decided me to look at him favorably.”

These words were followed by a silence during which Ethel King carefully observed Miss Newborn, who finally said:

“What pleases me more in Jack is that he’s alone in the world, an orphan like me, free from all ties. He talked to me little of his past and I guess he must have had some terrible trials in his life. He only loves me better because of them. At least he doesn’t have behind him a procession of relatives, each one more churlish than the others, or abominably mealy-mouthed, who have to be pleased before the husband is pleased.”

Ethel King was struck by the tone of fatigue in which the girl confided in her. Such melancholy wasn’t in Eva’s character. How could she have given in to it if she had really loved Jack Hawfinch? She gave the impression of having resolved to make a marriage of reason because she despaired of ever finding a sincere lover.

Miss Newborn suddenly got up and ran to a secretary with that kind of child-like grace which was a characteristic of her beauty. She took a jewel case from a drawer and showed it, the cover open, to Ethel King, who immediately recognized the famous green diamond.

“So, Ethel, look at what I bought yesterday.”

The detective manifested admiration which, moreover, wasn’t feigned.

“I’ll have it mounted on a headband,” the young girl said. “It’s a unique piece...incomparable. They also claim that it’s a talisman.”

“A talisman?” Ethel King repeated, pretending to be surprised.

“Yes, it lets its owner unmask lies and impostures,” Miss Newton explained.

And she added in a slower and graver voice, as if speaking to herself rather than to her companion:

“For example, if my fiancé is lying to me, this green diamond will let me find it out.”

The detective didn’t appear to understand the implication of those last words.

“Is that its only virtue, Eva?”

The young millionaire began to laugh. A casual observer might have believed that her gaiety had suddenly returned, but Ethel King had too much good judgment and understanding not to discern a disturbing nervousness in that burst of laughter.

“They say—it’s naturally a legend—they say the green diamond brings bad luck. Its owner doesn’t possess it a week without being the victim of a horrible catastrophe, unless another person sacrifices himself to break the charm.”

Two Men

In the afternoon, Ethel King went by her pretty cottage on Garden Street to confer with John Light. She had set up a meeting at her house with him and Charley Lux.

They saw immediately by her expression that the case was more serious than they had at first supposed. Ethel repeated to her cousin and to Light the conversation she had had with Eva and added:

“Miss Newborn is 22 years old, but she’s a child. She’s absolutely left to herself, without a protector, without an advisor. She gives the impression of having foolishly gotten engaged to a man she doesn’t know well and with whom she is not truly in love. I hope to meet this Jack Hawfinch soon and to have the opportunity to judge him. While waiting, I ask you to follow him, Mr. Light.”

Ethel handed a paper to the detective and continued:

“Here’s his address. I got it skillfully from Miss Newborn. This fellow is too mysterious for my taste. It’s possible that Mr. Hawfinch is not what he wishes to appear. The young girl realizes that instinctively and I’m persuaded that the mistrust she has in regard to her fiancé isn’t without some relationship with the purchase of the green diamond.”

“And me, Ethel, what mission will you give me?” Charley asked his cousin.

“Stay here until you get further instructions. I’ll telephone you if I need you. In case I risk being overheard by someone, when I speak to you on the telephone, I will only say some commonplace sentences or something having nothing to do with the case. But that doesn’t matter. You’ll go hang around Miss Newborn’s town house, and I’ll arrange to communicate my instructions to you, by throwing a bill out of a window, for example. My bedroom window is on the third floor, in the front. It’s the last one on the right.”

When Ethel King went back to her “mistress’s” house at about 5 p.m. and joined Eva in the drawing room, she found her talking to a young man with a loyal, likeable, and remarkably intelligent face.

The detective breathed a sigh of relief. She was wrong to be upset. If this was the orphan’s fiancé, she hadn’t made a bad choice. But Eva had already begun the introductions.

“Mr. Edward Outburn, Chief Engineer of my steel works.”

That was a disappointment for Ethel King. The man she had at first taken to be Eva’s fiancé was the Director of the metallurgic establishments which made up the principal source of revenue of the young orphan. Miss Newborn’s father had been the owner of ironworks. He had contributed truly remarkable progress to his industry. Before his death he had advised his daughter to trust the direction of the factories to Edward Outburn, a poor, young engineer, whose great abilities he had appreciated. Perhaps Newborn had even conceived more than esteem for Outburn and would have hoped to call him his son-in-law one day. If the industrialist had conceived that project, death had prevented his seeing it come to pass. When he died, Eva had just begun her 16th year. Since then, the young girl had lived in complete independence. Her guardian had taken care of managing her fortune until she was of age, but Eva’s upbringing had remained the least of his worries.

Miss Newborn finished the sentences interrupted by Ethel King’s arrival.

“That’s good, Mr. Outburn, build the new constructions that you judge necessary. I rely entirely on you...How much do you need? \$500,000?”

“I think \$200,000 would be more than enough, Miss Newborn. That’s still a great expense, but the changes I have in mind will almost double the production of the steel mills.”

“Then do it. You’ll have dinner with us, Mr. Outburn. We’re having Mr. Hawfinch, who will be delighted to see you.”

An expression of sadness suddenly spread over the young man’s face. Then his expression froze. His look became hard.

“I thank you, Miss. I would accept with the greatest pleasure if business...”

Eva interrupted him, saying in a playful tone:

“Come, come. You accept, Mr. Outburn. There’s no more business this evening.”

“Excuse me, Miss, but...”

“There’s no but. If you don’t stay...I’ll take your refusal for an offense, I warn you.”

The young engineer gave the young girl a look of entreaty that she didn’t seem to understand, and submitted, resigned.

That little scene, very significant in Ethel King’s eyes, had scarcely finished when a maid came to announce Mr. Jack Hawfinch.

When her fiancé appeared at the door, Eva ran to the door with an eagerness that the detective didn’t find very natural.

Jack Hawfinch was the perfect ladies’ man, a gigolo with jade black hair parted impeccably in the middle, a part going right down to the neck, lifted symmetrically over the temples and slicked down with a great deal of pomade. His clean-shaven face was more tanned than his English origin would seem to indicate. He had regular features in the photographic fashion, melting almond eyes whose languor was compensated for by an insupportable haughtiness. He wore a perfectly cut riding coat, but the elegance of his attire was unfortunately spoiled by a scarlet tie with an enormous solitaire stick pin. His fingers were loaded with rings. A square monocle that he pinched, grimacing, between his eyebrow and his cheek, made up the character.

Hawfinch bowed before Miss Newborn and kissed her hand with an affected gallantry. He scarcely deigned to notice Ethel, even though Eva had introduced him to her. He held out his hand to Outburn, who shook it with manifest repugnance.

“Let me tell you what just happened to me, my dear,” he said as soon as he was seated. “I’m still shocked and indignant.”

He was speaking loudly and striking an affected pose.

“Really? What was that?” Miss Newborn asked.

“Can you imagine, my dear, that this afternoon, being at my club, I heard three worthless young men saying bad things about you. My blood boiled; I jumped into the middle of the trio. I gave a resounding slap to the most impertinent. I shook up the others. I demanded apologies.”

The girl had frowned. She gestured with bad humor.

“You were wrong, Jack,” she observed. “I worry very little about what two or three hare brains can say about me. Their gossip doesn’t risk compromising me. It’s not the same with your getting mixed up in it.”

“I’m completely of Miss Newborn’s opinion,” Outburn declared.

Hawfinch glanced at the engineer, then turned toward the young girl and protested:

“I agree that I acted too quickly. But you are everything to me, Eva. My love places you so high you are in my eyes of an essence so superior to ordinary humanity...”

“Please, Jack, you must know that I don’t like stuff and nonsense.”

“After all, how could my intervention compromise you, since we’re engaged?”

“We aren’t officially so, Jack, remember that. But finish your story. I suppose there was a scandal at your club.”

“Yes, I confess it. One of the rogues wisely slipped away, but the two others stayed and I had a violent altercation with them. Everyone came running at the noise, of course. I admit,” Hawfinch added, lowering his head with a contrite air, overcome by anger, “I talked more than I should have. Facing these boors, I declared that I was your fiancé and I considered any reflection directed at you as a personal offense. As a beginning, although it’s not the custom at the club, I challenged two of the disparagers to a duel.”

Hearing this story, Eva turned alternately red and pale. Outburn moved about in his chair as if he were tempted to strike Hawfinch. Ethel King didn't take her eyes off the narrator, but her impassive expression did not betray her sentiments.

"You have acted in an unbelievably inconsiderate manner, Jack," Miss Newborn declared with irritation. "I haven't yet authorized you to say we're engaged. I'm angry, very angry! I want you to stifle this scandal immediately. I don't want the duels to take place."

"But, my dear, to draw back now, that would be to expose myself to ridicule, to shame!"

"Too bad for you, Jack. My reputation is well worth the sacrifice of your ego."

Hawfinch bowed. Ethel King thought she saw a mocking smile on his lips.

"Your wishes are commands for me, Eva. I'll take care of that business, whatever it may cost my pride."