

The extraordinary affair at The Eucalypts, town house of Sir Charles and Lady Cunningham in South Yarra, occupied the public mind for at least three days -- testimony to the dramatic features of the case. Lady Cunningham, as everybody knows is a leader of Society, very young and very pretty; also, according to her friends, who are capable of expressing an opinion, very foolish into the bargain. On the other hand Sir Charles is a pillar of the Legislative Council, given to politics and striving to add to the million or so he made in land speculation twenty years before.

The affair is briefly told. Lady Cunningham had been dining at a house where vice-Royalty was expected -- a dull, decorous, very full-dress function -- and for the purpose she had procured the family diamonds -- Charlie preferred to invest his ill-gotten gains in "rocks" -- from the bank where they were usually kept. After the dinner party was over, her Ladyship had returned home and given her gems to her maid to be placed in the safe, being in somewhat of a hurry to go to a bridge party in Toorak Road. The maid was told that she need not wait up as her Ladyship would be very late.

At three o'clock the following morning ^{SHE} returned home. Sir Charles was away in Tasmania on some political mission, so that her Ladyship had the place to herself and, according to her story, had proceeded directly to her dressing room, where a dreadful sight awaited her. Melissa, the maid, lay on the floor unconscious, bleeding from wounds on the face and on the neck. The place was in great disorder -- evidently a severe struggle had taken place. Greatly alarmed, her Ladyship summoned two other servants, and the police were called in.

Melissa was not so badly hurt as at first appeared. Restored to consciousness, she had a queer, confused story to tell. She had put away her mistress's diamonds and had taken up a book which had interested her, and settled down to read it in the dressing room. She must have nodded off to sleep, but was suddenly aware that someone was in the room. Before she could jump up, she was grasped from behind and was conscious of two blows to her face, and then she passed out.

The natural inference was that a thief had broken in for the jewels, and the entry was made by an expert gang, who the police professed to know all about. Would her Ladyship give them a list of the missing gems? And then came an extraordinary part of the story. The jewels were not missing at all. She had gone through the cases, and they were all intact.

Hugh Guthrie had read all about it in the Pictorial-Advertiser. The popular accountant, turned novelist, smiled to himself as he read the story. Time was when it had been just on the cards that instead of becoming Lady Cunningham, the attractive woman might have been Mrs Hugh Guthrie. But that was two years ago and he had got over it by this time. They were still very good friends as they had been for years, and

she always knew where to seek advice on matters of social procedure, and the like. Hugh was just back from Cairns where he had been dallying with the idea of a novel based on the Great Barrier Reef and, having followed the Cunningham mystery as the papers called it, he was about to call on her when a short note from the little lady implored him to come around as she was in great trouble.

Lady Cunningham awaited him in the drawing room. She could do no more than press his hand in greeting before subsiding in a deep chair with a sigh of deep resignation.

"What's all the trouble about?" asked Guthrie. "Surely you've forgotten that affair by this time. Your nervous system --"

"Don't talk about nerves. I am a perfect wreck. When I think of that night --"

"But you haven't lost anything", Guthrie said. "And as for nerves, that is all nonsense. If you had lost your jewels, for instance --"

"My dear Hugh, that is exactly what has happened".

"I don't understand. You told the police that not so much as a ring was missing"

"So I did, Hugh, but it was not true, all the same. A heap of stuff was left, but they took all the diamond jewellery. I dare not say a word about the loss because Charles would be furious. He gave me the keys of the safe and told me always to lock the jewels away personally. But I was dreadfully late for the bridge party that night and I gave them to Melissa to lock away, and I went off."

"How long has Melissa been in your service?" asked Guthrie.

"My dear Hugh! How suspicious you are. She is an absolute treasure, and came to me with splendid recommendations from a first-class service agency".

"Very well; we will not pursue the investigation in that direction. What do you want me to do?"

"Really I don't know. You're a novelist and should know the workings of the human mind, so perhaps you can make something of it. Of course it's a dead secret --"

"Really! Now, how many of your bosom friends know the truth?"

Lady Cunningham admitted that she had confided the true story to about twelve bosom friends, who were deeply interested, but she now regretted that she had not been frank with the police. When one of her friends had heard the true story -- her name was Julie Clarke -- she advised her to go to one of those marvellous creatures who look into crystals and foresee the future.

"So they did in the days of Queen Anne", said Guthrie sarcastically. "You were to see this woman with a view to getting your jewels back. Sane women consulting these people, by some called charlatans --"

"But she isn't; she really is marvellous. When I saw her the day before yesterday, she --"

"She told you that there had been telepathic sympathy between you, eh?"

"My dear Hugh, how did you know that?" Lady Cunningham cried.

"In the course of my wanderings I have met some of these people", he said.

"This woman saw a chance of making money out of you. She gazed into the crystal and told you that you would get your gems back if you followed a certain course. Did she

arrange for a seance at the house of that very foolish Mrs Clarke, for instance?"

"Yes, that very same evening a seance was arranged by Julie Clarke, who knew everything about the whole business, and ten of my dearest friends were there. It was some time before the influence came, but it did come at last. Madame Legrande is a lovely woman".

"They always are," Hugh said cynically. "Otherwise they would never succeed"

"Her face was inspired as she described how she saw a certain box with gold initials in the enamel on the lid, and I knew at once she was speaking of a writing-table in my boudoir. She said she could see a drawer in this thing, and in the drawer was a case of chamois leather. Inside the case there appeared to be things which glittered like fire".

"Well?", Guthrie asked, interested in spite of himself, "and what happened?"

"Why, I came home", said Lady Cunningham, "and I opened that particular drawer in my writing table and there was the very case Madame Legrande had seen in her vision. When I looked inside it there was a family heirloom, a diamond collar".

"Do you mean to say it was the diamond collar the loss of which was known only to your close friends?"

"Absolutely the same, Hugh. Imagine my delight, and imagine how cheerfully I paid Madame Legrande's fee of two hundred dollars. In some marvellous way she had identified the thief in the crystal, and her will power had compelled the return of the collar".

"Wasn't her will power equal to getting all of the swag back?" asked Hugh, with a touch of his usual cynicism.

"No. I put that to Madame Legrande, but she said we must be patient for the influence only came to her singly. Yesterday at another seance there was another substantial result, but I must confess that those fees I'm paying are very trying, especially as I'm somewhat short of ready cash just now. It should be good for her later, for the story is sure to leak out when I have all the gems back, and she will be able to charge what she likes after the Society papers have published the story".

"The most amazing thing I have ever heard of", Guthrie murmured.

"Yes, isn't it? I only wish it didn't cost so much money. We're going to have a seance here tomorrow night, and quite a lot of people are coming, and all of them are pledged to secrecy. I hope Madame can discover my tiara then. I'm very anxious about it. I hope that you will be able to come, Hugh".

"It is just possible that I may be able to solve this strange mystery, so I shall be delighted to come along. By the way, how is your maid?"

"Melissa? Oh, she is getting along very well indeed. The wounds are more or less superficial, and she laughs at her adventure already. She was out of the house the very next day, and she has declined the assistance I thought she might need".

"She certainly is a remarkable girl", said Guthrie. "I hope that you will allow me to ask questions at the seance tomorrow night, and I hope you will allow me to dine with you here before it commences. I think I shall have a startling surprise for you then, but I don't want the whole affair spoiled at the start".

An hour later Guthrie drove to the premises of Madame Legrande who, he found, was at present disengaged. He passed into her consulting chamber with its curtained walls, a large table and a number of comfortable chairs. He saw a tall, graceful woman, sweet faced, with dark pathetic eyes, who greeted him and asked him to be seated.

"You came here out of idle curiosity, Mr Guthrie", she said.

"That's perfectly true", Guthrie said candidly, a little moved by the swiftness of the woman's intuition. "And yet my curiosity is not idle. Fact is I'm casting about for a story about the crystal ball, so when I was passing I thought I would come in and make an acquaintance with this sort of atmosphere. It is very stimulating to the imagination".

"Then you do not believe in this sort of thing?" Madame asked. "The psychological —"

"I'm ^{NOT} quite certain that I believe in anything". Guthrie laughed. "Let me smoke a cigarette and have a chat with you while I'm getting the atmosphere. Really, I feel as if I were going to get very good value for my entrance fee".

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When Lady Cunningham welcomed Guthrie to dinner early the following evening she was nervous and uneasy, but he said something soothing and appeared very calm and confident.

"I had a call from a policeman today", she said, "and I'm sure that they are aware that I'm concealing the truth, Hugh. I'm sure if they question me any more that I shall be really ill".

"By deliberately putting the police off the scent you made a difference by removing motive, and prevented them from seeking a confederate in the house. And I'm sure there must be one. Now if you follow my instructions I think you will have all your jewels returned to you tonight. Send Melissa into your boudoir on some pretext, and I shall speak to her there".

The second gong for dinner had rung as Guthrie came out of the boudoir, and rejoined Lady Cunningham, to accompany her to the dining room, where he insisted that the conversation should be of anything save the missing jewels.

The seance had been arranged for nine-thirty and there were a dozen curious friends gathered to see the manifestations when Madame Legrande was

announced and the audience fluttered respectfully to greet her. Her dark face was a little pale as she suffered herself to be led to a chair, where she was ~~XXX~~ surrounded by admiring disciples.

"Has your work been too much for you, today?" Lady Cunningham asked.

"My work is never too much for me. However, I found the heat this afternoon rather enervating and when I entered this room I felt really nervous, ^{BUT} its charm came ~~on~~ over me, and now my spirit is ~~now~~ at rest. I feel I am going to do great things tonight. Could we have the lights turned low, please?"

Madame took a crystal ball from a small satchel, ~~and~~ placed it on a small table and the manifestations had begun. For some time the gazer looked into the ball with rapt attention; she grew rigid and stiff, and did not seem to breathe. Her lips began to move, and the words came at length.

"I see a soldier dressed in the fashion of a bygone day. I see Eastern palaces and other soldiers fighting. Then I see the soldier with a large diamond cross set in gold snakes in his hand."

"Isn't it marvellous?" Lady Cunningham whispered half-hysterically. "It's our Grand Cross which was found at Delhi. Madame hasn't seen it, yet she describes it perfectly. Mush, she speaks again".

Madame saw the cross on the ground, and there it was picked up by invisible hands and conveyed to a black vase with gold figures upon it. Behind it was the picture of a child asleep.

"The Ming Vase", cried her Ladyship, "over there in the far corner, with the picture by Reubens behind it. Mr Guthrie, will you see what is in the Vase, please. I am too nervous to look. It is possible that the missing Cross --"

Guthrie crossed the room, and placed his hand in the Ming Vase. He grasped something there and withdrew it as someone turned the lights up. As he opened his hand a stream of fire, cross-shaped, caught everyone's eyes.

"It is the missing Cross surely enough. Madame has been wonderfully successful. This must be the wonderful gem I have heard so much about. Pray do another one".

But Madame Legrande, half-fainting in her chair, gently declined. The mental strain was too much for her; her poor frame could not stand two of these activities in one evening. Perhaps one day next week.

Hugh Guthrie turned away and looked into the crystal. Soon he began to mutter^R:

"Mr Guthrie, as a novelist, is feeling the influence. Do you see anything?"[^] Madame said sharply.

"I see a plant which grows seeds rapidly, and one of them bursts and turns into a bowl like that one over there on the Chippendale cabinet. If I am not mistaken it will be found to contain your diamond tiara, my Lady. Go across and see if I'm right."

In a moment her delighted scream testified that Hugh Guthrie was indeed so.

"I am getting along famously," Guthrie said. "For a mere amateur, I am doing very well indeed. I'll try again. In that antique tea-caddy on the mantelpiece you should find the pearl necklace Is that really so? Now try that ginger-jar on the

~~on the~~ little pedestal.....So that contains a breastplate of diamonds! Well! well! I shan't prolong the strain of my prognostications too far, but, I understand, there's only three more gems to appear, and they should not take long".

Guthrie was right again, and in no time at all on the table before Lady Cunningham lay all the missing property. No one spoke; they were all too surprised. Madame Legrande had risen to her feet. She was not well, she said, and must go home.

"I shall escort you to the entrance", said Guthrie, and, without saying good bye to anyone, she accompanied him downstairs.

"A wonderful manifestation, yours", he said at the front entrance. "What a pity that you will be leaving Melbourne this week for good. We shall miss you. And how good of you to return to Lady Cunningham the fees which you received from her".

Madame accepted her defeat gracefully enough, and Guthrie returned to the drawing room, where he sat down under a stream of cross-questions.

"My suspicions first started when I saw that the maid was not in the least hurt, and I felt sure it was an arranged job between her and someone else. As the result of having her watched, I learned that she often visited Madame Legrande and also that they were sisters. I was then certain of a put-up job. But when I questioned Melissa tonight I got a great surprise to learn that robbery was not the motive, but that advertising was. Melissa hid the gems in various places as you saw, ^{TOLD} tell her sister, and there you are. Gradually the gems would be discovered and Madame would stand on a higher pinnacle than ever before."

"And each time a jewel was found she would collect a fee", said Mrs Clarke.

"Yes, that made it profitable", said Guthrie. "But I thought I'd have some fun out of it also. I arranged with Melissa when I saw her this evening for her to hide the jewels in places which I described. This made my discovery work very simple, although I must confess I had you all puzzled when you saw me as a medium. As the shrewd woman she is, Madame Legrande anticipated my play, and she gave in at once. I am afraid that none of you ladies will ^{SEE} her or her sister again, for I understand they are leaving Melbourne tomorrow with no intention of returning."

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CA 274889

Maurice Walsh

37 Wales Street

West Brunswick 3055