

The Case of the Missing Sapphire

By

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“I can’t believe I’m saying this, but I want to hire the Three Investigators!”

Pete Crenshaw stifled a grin at his mother’s indignant tone. Anyone listening would have thought she was agreeing to hire a group of serial killers instead of her son and his two friends to help find his great-grandmother’s missing sapphire necklace.

“We’d be delighted to take the case, Mrs. Crenshaw,” First Investigator Jupiter Jones told her. “Don’t worry; I assure you that confidentiality is of the utmost importance to us.”

“Of course.” Pete’s mom smoothed her already-impeccable dark hair and perched neatly on the edge of the tiny, decorative chair. She motioned for Jupiter, Pete, and their friend Bob Andrews to take a seat as well. Jupe eyed the delicate chair and considered his own bulk, and decided to remain standing.

Bob, the Records and Research man, whipped out his notebook.

Mrs. Crenshaw started at the beginning. Pete had been there since early that morning, so he didn’t really listen. Instead, he fidgeted with the shiny gold cufflinks on his tux and wished fervently that he could be dressed as comfortably as his friends.

His relatives were gathered here, at the Rocky Beach Country Club, for the wedding of Pete’s cousin Adelle to Jacob Widenour, the son of one of the town’s wealthiest families. The bride and her attendants, along with many of the women in the family, had arrived early in the morning to attend to the hair and make-up – and whatever else it was that females did to waste this much time before big events, Pete reflected. An hour ago, his aunt had reached for the family heirloom sapphire and pearl choker that had been worn by four generations of brides.

It had vanished.

“Obviously, I couldn’t call the police,” Mrs. Crenshaw explained now. “My sister Elizabeth showed us the necklace when she arrived, and no one other than the bridal party has come or gone from that room since then. That means that the thief is a member of the wedding party, and that is simply unacceptable. It must be found, immediately. The wedding is less than an hour away.”

“And we can’t let Gigi know anything is wrong,” Pete added.

“Who is Gigi?” Jupiter asked.

“My Great-Grandmother,” Pete said, shuddering elaborately. “Believe me, Jupe; you do *not* want Gigi to get mad.”

“Respect, Peter,” his mother admonished. “My grandmother feels that being called Great-Grandmother makes her sound old, so she asks that the younger ones refer to her as G.G., or Gigi.”

“She’s ninety-two, Mom. She’s going to sound old no matter what we call her.”

“The necklace was given to her for her own wedding by my grandfather,” Mrs. Crenshaw continued. “Every daughter and granddaughter has been married wearing it ever since.”

“Not every one of them,” said a woman who had walked up silently behind them. She looked remarkably like Pete’s mother, but even stiffer and more formal – if such a thing were even possible. “I believe you left out that little bit of information, Caroline.”

Mrs. Crenshaw flushed. “I didn’t feel that it was important here,” she said. “Boys, this is my sister, Elizabeth LaVelle, the bride’s mother. Elizabeth, these boys are the detectives I spoke of. They are going to find the necklace.”

Pete’s aunt sniffed disdainfully. “I said all along that this country club was the wrong place for a wedding,” she declared. “My daughter is marrying a *Widenour*, not just anyone. There would have been better security at—”

“But your daughter wanted to be married here, Elizabeth,” Pete’s mother said firmly. “She *is* the bride, and it was her choice, not yours.”

“Mrs. Crenshaw, may we see the room where the necklace was last seen?” Jupiter ventured.

“Of course, Jupiter. Elizabeth, the girls are all dressed, aren’t they?” Without waiting for an answer, Pete’s mom led them down a short hallway and into a large room that had been turned into a dressing room. Inside that room, there were three pretty girls in pale blue formal gowns. Two women in pink smocks fussed with curling irons and make-up trays, and a beautiful raven-haired woman in a white wedding dress smiled up at them.

“Petey!” the bride exclaimed. She went up on tiptoe to hug Pete and kiss his cheek. “When did you get so tall? And who are these handsome young men you brought with you? Girls, be careful or these three devils just may steal you away from my wedding!”

“Hi, Adelle,” Pete said, shooting a warning glance at his buddies. Petey, indeed!

Bob smiled at one of the bridesmaids – a petite redhead who obviously enjoyed the attention and smiled shyly back at him. He raised an eyebrow, making her giggle.

Jupiter stepped forward. To anyone else in the room, he appeared cool and businesslike, but his friends could tell that he was miserable in the presence of so many beautiful females. From the time he

had realized that he rather enjoyed the company of pretty girls, he had also lost the ability to think or speak clearly in their presence.

"I'd like to retrace the events, if I may," he said, looking anywhere but at the young ladies. "Mrs. Lavelle, you brought in the box with the necklace and showed it everyone, correct? Who was here, and what happened after that?"

"All three bridesmaids were here," Aunt Elizabeth said. "And the two stylists, Renet and Clarisse. My sister Caroline and I, and my granddaughter Janelle."

"Janelle is the flower girl," Pete explained. "She's a little . . . bit energetic," he finished lamely, withering under the sharp looks from his mother and his aunt.

"She's four," Adelle said. "She's my brother Clancy's daughter. She kept getting underfoot and trying to put on all of our make-up and jewelry, saying she wanted to play dress-up. I finally sent her down to entertain Gigi so we could finish getting ready."

"Mrs. LaVelle, where did you place the necklace at that time?"

"Right here." She pointed at a small dressing table covered with flowers.

"And then what happened?"

"Why, the girls and I all got our hair and make-up done, of course. Over there by Renet and Clarisse. And then Adelle sent Janelle away, and the girls and I put on the finishing touches. And that's when we discovered the necklace box was empty."

"I gave each of my bridesmaids a pair of sapphire earrings to match mine," Adelle explained. She gestured at the delicate, teardrop-shaped stones that dangled from her ears. "The earrings sat in their boxes on that table, too, but whoever took the necklace left the earrings alone."

"Mrs. Crenshaw," Bob spoke up. "Pardon me, but Mrs. LaVelle said something about someone who didn't wear the necklace?"

"That was me," Pete's mom said. She gave him an apologetic look. "Gigi didn't approve of my choice and refused to allow me to wear it. No, Peter, we will discuss it later."

Pete clamped his mouth shut, looking absolutely murderous.

Jupiter pinched his lower lip, a sure sign that he was in deep thought. "So," he said slowly; "the only people who left the room are Mrs. Crenshaw, Mrs. Lavelle, and the flower girl. Who, among you, would have a motive?"

"We can rule out Janelle and me," Aunt Elizabeth said. "A child wouldn't do such a thing, and I wouldn't dream of allowing my daughter to be married without it. The wedding will have to be called off."

“Oh, please, Mother,” Adelle sighed. “Nobody’s calling anything off. And Aunt Caroline wouldn’t do it either. It’s impossible. There must be some other explanation.”

“My sister wasn’t allowed to wear it, so the best revenge she could come up with was to prevent my daughter from wearing it. It’s the only possible explanation.”

Jupiter frowned and pinched his lip some more. After several minutes of silence, a smile slowly lit up his pudgy face. He beckoned to Pete and murmured something in the tall boy’s ear. Pete looked startled, but nodded and excused himself, only to return hand-in-hand with a small curly-haired child in a frivolous white lacy dress.

“Sherlock Holmes once said, ‘When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth’,” Jupiter began. “In this case, we have a family heirloom with a great deal of sentimental value, taken from a table where it was surrounded by items of similar monetary value, but less sentimental. From this, we can safely deduce that the thief targeted the necklace and was most likely not in pursuit of financial gain.”

“We also have three suspects,” he continued. “Mrs. Crenshaw, with revenge as her motive. Mrs. LaVelle, who was unhappy about having control wrested from her grasp. And of course, Janelle.”

“What motive could she possibly have?” Mrs. LaVelle scoffed.

Jupiter grinned. “Why, the best motive possible for a four year-old girl,” he told them. “Adelle, you said it yourself: she just wanted to play dress-up. Janelle, what did you do with the necklace?”

The child dimpled at Jupe, pleased to be the center of attention. “I gave it to Gigi,” she declared. “She’s happy now because she’s wearing the pretty. Gigi likes playing dress-up.”

The silence was deafening. Then Pete’s mother snickered. “The old bat,” she gasped. “We’ve been up here in a panic, and she’s been sitting down there wearing it the whole time. She had to know we’d be frantic. Adelle, please – I would be honored if you would wear these instead.” She reached up and unclasped her own simple string of pearls and held them out to the bride, saying, “My husband gave them to me for our tenth anniversary, so they can be your something old and something borrowed. Your earrings can be your something new and something blue. Don’t give that old battleaxe the satisfaction of asking for the other one.”

Adelle didn’t hesitate. “Thank you, Aunt Caroline,” she said, accepting the necklace.

“But—“

“Oh, give it up, Mother. It’s my wedding, and I never wanted to wear that great big gaudy thing anyway.”

While Elizabeth LaVelle sputtered angrily, her daughter hurried over to shake hands with Jupiter and Bob. “Thank you, boys,” she said. “Please, stay for the wedding. There’s dinner and dancing afterward, and I’m sure Petey would love to have someone to talk to.”

“Please stop calling me Petey,” Pete sighed.

“Hey, if I’ve had to go through the past twenty-two years as Adelle LaVelle, you can be Petey at a few family events!” The bride cast a quick, furtive glance over her shoulder and motioned for the Three Investigators to lean in closer. “I may have a real case for you,” she whispered. “Jake and I will call you as soon as we get back from the Honeymoon!”

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