

Happiness, C. O. D.

By OREN ARNOLD

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SYNOPSIS
THE CHARACTERS:
BENJAMIN MERRIFIELD, aged capitalist, hires **GAYLE DIXON** to make love to his grandson, **JEREMY TUCKER**, a shy student of archeology, while **BILL BAILEY** and six pretty girls are employed to help bring life and youth to the Merrifield mansion.

YESTERDAY: At the height of the big Merrifield party the butler announces a jewel robbery.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"Something was bound to happen! Gayle murmured that more to herself than to the others as they hurried back to the house. 'It was all too perfect.'"

Bill squeezed her elbow, comfortingly.

"Take it easy," he counseled. Graham took them to distracted guests named Tway, young marrieds who had been invited by Bill himself.

"Dick!" Bill exclaimed in guard-tone. "What is it?"

"Margie's bracelet—some body lifted it! Match bracelet!"

"The one daddy gave me for a wedding present Bill!" Mrs. Tways face was a study in misery.

"We'll find it if—tell us everything!" Gayle demanded that. The four, plus Graham, were alone in the entryway of the mansion.

"I left it in the bathroom," Margie Tway said. "I remember taking it off to wash my hands—they got smudged on our car door—and all at once a moment ago I looked to see the time. I didn't have it on, and—"

Her young husband picked up the conversation, nervously. "She ran to look for it, but it was gone. She asked the maid, but the maid hadn't seen it. And the butler here."

"That east bath, Miss Gayle, ma'am, was reserved for the young ladies as you ordered, miss," Graham put in. "It is all most distressing!"

"Yes, Graham. Oh, dear!"

Nobody had entered the large blue-tiled bath in the east wing, second floor, save the women. The new maid Maudie had been told by Graham to keep tactful watch on it, guiding feminine guests there seeing that pins and lipsticks and rouge and powder and any other little necessities were supplied. If Mrs. Tway had left her bracelet-watch there at 9 p.m. and remembered it after 11, any one of 50 or more girls might have picked it up.

"Mr. Merrifield has retired," Graham stated to the group now in conference, "but if you think best, Miss Gayle—"

"No, Oh, no, don't disturb him with it until we have to, Graham!"

"It was insured," Mrs. Tway said. "But naturally I hate to—"

"Of course, dear," Gayle turned to her. "And it spoils your enjoyment of the party, too, as well as our own, to think that a thief—I am all confused by it."

Bill Bailey spoke then.

"Goyle, lets interview that maid. She's new. The Maudie person."

Maudie was brought quietly into the conference. Dance music was playing in the big rooms and gaiety reigned there still, but these few heard none of it. Maudie surprised them by speaking first.

"It is best that I introduce myself again, Miss Dixon," she said. "I knew you would call me. My name is not Maudie, really. I am not a professional maid."

"But—but—"

"I know. I'm sorry about it all, but the truth is I'm a police-woman. My name is Holmquist, and the city detective bureau put me here."

"I SAY!" Graham exclaimed that. The others were just staring.

"Naturally you won't understand here. We know the setup here at Miss Dixon, and Mr. Bailey, but—well, the department knew you had a criminal in The Oaks. This is a millionaire's home. The portable silver alone is worth a fortune. And there is jewelry, and excellent possibilities of money theft. We quietly arranged for your maid Celeste, to get a better job somewhere else and I took over. We hoped to avoid disturbing you. The thief moved quicker than we anticipated though."

"Christopher!" breathed Bill Bailey.

"I suggest now that you telephone headquarters," the maid went on. "Captain Bayne and another will come out to verify what I say it might be as well to ask them to come to the service entrance—if you want to avoid disturbing your other guests. A hullabaloo would not help us at all."

"That's true. That's very true!" Bill put in.

Bill did the telephoning, and within 20 minutes everything the maid-detective had said was proved true. That is, the men from headquarters identified her.

"But whoever did you see here in the mansion?" Gayle demanded, still appalled at that thought.

"Who would be a thief?"

"Matter of fact, we know nothing, Miss," the detective captain explained. "It's a protective move. We'd rather not mention to you until we are sure. What happened tonight bears out the hunch, all right, but we still don't know who took the bracelet."

"For Pete's sake, couldn't you walk up to the thief and accuse him? If he has a criminal record and the bracelet in his possession—"

The captain smiled.

"Not without some sort of proof, mister. He wouldn't have any bracelet in his possession now. Too smart for that. Anyway—he's not a he. It's a female."

"Oh, dear!" Gayle was distressed anew.

"Now, miss, you're in charge."

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