

Another Glimpse at My Hotel

One morning, when I arose from my little bed in No. 783, and prepared to array myself for the duties and enjoyments of the day, I discovered that a little silver comb with very fine teeth, which I used exclusively for the adornment of my whiskers, was missing. I usually put it in one place; and now, not finding it there, knew at once that it must have been stolen. Feeling particularly cross thereat, I finished dressing, looked up my friend, the bank clerk, related the circumstance to him, and said:

“Come down into the office with me, and I will see whether my room is my own or not. There have been other things about this hotel which have met my disapproval; but I have said nothing about them. Now, however, since my private property is not safe from trespassers, it is time to speak out; and I will give that clerk such a talking to, about the way things are managed in this house, as he has not heard in a long time, I reckon.”

So we went down to the office. The clerk saw us coming, put on his blandest smile, and remarked that it was a pleasant day.

“Pleasant day or not,” said I, boiling over, “that is not the question now. What business have you to admit into this hotel, men who will go into another person’s room, and take his property from him?”

“Haven’t you a notice in your room to lock your door and leave the key at the office?” said the clerk, a little sharply.

“Yes,” said I. “But still—”

“And have you done so?” said he.

“No,” said I. “But still—”

“Well, then!” said he.

“I tell you what it is!” said I. “I have boarded in this house a number of years, and—”

With that, the clerk rang his little bell, and a boy appeared. Then I began to think that he was going to raise a row about my little silver comb; that it was hardly worth while to make much fuss about it, after all; and that I would consent to let the matter drop, on condition nothing of the kind ever happened again.

“Take this shawl and lady’s ath-box up to No. 172!” said the clerk to the boy.

Then I grew angry again.

“Have boarded in this hotel for a number of years,” said I “and never—”

With that the clerk touched his little bell again and a porter appeared.

“Baggage from No. 50—in carriage for up-train!” said the clerk to the porter. And, in fact, it is a remarkable thing, that, as far as I was concerned, the clerk seemed to have lost half his faculties, and the more I talked, the more he seemed unable either to see or hear me.

Two days after that, I missed a pair of sleeve buttons, which I had carelessly left upon my washstand. They were of no great pecuniary value, being of very thin, and pretty heavily-alloyed metal; but being the gift of a friend. I naturally esteemed them far beyond their mere intrinsic worth. I became furious, therefore, and again rushed down to the office clerk, resolving not to be put off by any supercilious airs, but that I would have my say out, if I left the house the next minute.

To my surprise, as soon as I had mentioned my new grievance, the clerk made no attempt to distract his attention by ringing little bells and calling porters, but looked particularly grave and drew me off into a corner.

“See here!” he said, “I’m sorry for all this. It looks bad for the establishment, you know. What was the value of the buttons? We’ll pay for them.”

Upon which I began to feel a little mortified, protested that the articles were of no great value, but were merely precious from association; that I did not wish to be paid for them, but merely required some security that such losses would not accrue any longer.

“The fact is,” said the clerk, mournfully, “there have been other things taken from the rooms, and we can’t find out who did it. Old Mrs. Mossop has lost her pearl earrings, and Gen. Starbuckle thinks his epaulet case is gone. But we are going to have a detective officer in the house, and I hope that before long we will get at the bottom of the business. Only don’t say anything about it; for it would hurt our reputation, you see.”

Upon which, feeling relieved as I found such attentive sympathy for my losses, I promised that I would keep quiet about the whole matter, and walked away in a tolerable state of composure. The very next morning when I came down to breakfast, and, as usual, glanced around the table, in order to see what new guests had arrived at My Hotel, I was particularly struck with a tall black-clad figure, which sat at a little distance from me, at the next table. It was a thin, gentlemanly looking man, with something of a military carriage, the effect of which was greatly increased by his straight-cut coat, stiff cravat, and the peculiar curl of his whiskers. A well-shaped forehead, keen vivid eyes, and a slightly Romanized nose assisted in completing the picture of a very genteel and aristocratic person indeed. In fact, if there was any one quality which predominated over all others, it was his gentility. Even his dress assisted in producing that impression, being elegantly cut, but plain in the extreme, with no ornament except a single diamond stuck into the cravat, and a gold eyeglass fastened with a broad black ribbon. As the stranger placed his eyeglass in his right eye, and, leaning back in an easy gentlemanly attitude, cast a careless glance over the morning paper, only now and then removing it in order to sip his coffee, I naturally began to speculate upon his profession. In the army, of course: that

could be seen in an instant. But in what corps? Perhaps in the dragoons, if one could judge from an occasional tendency to press his foot firmly upon the floor so as to cause an involuntary rising of the body; perhaps in the engineers, if the peculiar glance which he occasionally cast around the tables, as though taking the angles and distances, could be any index. I decided, firmly, that he must be in the engineers; the weight of proof evidently pointed that way.

After a while, however, it struck me that there was something familiar in the countenance of the stranger, as though I had seen him before, and at some no very distant time. I recalled his singular likeness to a certain police officer, whom my assistant counsel in the great case of Jones vs. Potters, by her guardian-ad-litem, Sakon, in assumpsit, had once employed to ferret out some necessary evidence. That individual, it is true, wore a rusty suit of pepper-and-salt, had large vulgar rings upon his hand, and appeared fond of wearing too many plated watch chains; but still I could hardly be deceived in the identity of that profile, which, the longer I looked, became more and more Jewish in my eyes. And at length the mystery flashed upon me. Away fled all my speculations about dragoon and engineer officers—away fled much of that apparent fictitious gentility; and the stranger stood revealed before me as plain Detective No. 17, employed by the proprietors of My Hotel to reside within the walls for a few days in order to ferret out the late robberies, and dressed up for that purpose in the disguise of an aristocratic traveler. Thenceforth, for a few days, it became something of an amusement for me to watch the operations of the Detective, and pleasantly crow to myself over the knowledge that, perhaps, I alone of all the guests had fathomed the stratagem.

“Would you like to go through our establishment, Major Billott?” I heard our proprietor say to Detective, when breakfast had come to an end, and we had lounged out in an easy manner into the front hall. Of course Detective replied in the affirmative, that being what he had expressly come to do; and I, enjoying the joke, desired to do the same, since I had never before been beyond the public halls and saloons. And so gathering one or two other volunteers until we had a party of six or eight, we began to go on our rounds.

Proprietor first took us into the under-cellar, and showed us how he heated the house and manufactured his own gas; whereupon Detective pretended to be very much pleased with the ingenuity of the apparatus, and, in fact, expressed his approbation in loud tones in the presence of all the stokers. Proprietor then led us into the laundry, and Detective was in ecstasies about the neatness and completeness of the arrangements. And thence Proprietor went with us into the kitchen, where fifteen or twenty cooks, scullions, and waiters were collected; and there Detective redoubled his ecstasies, looked into the pans and closets, questioned the cooks as to their method of cooking this or that article, wondered how so much could be done in such a limited compass, and said that, though he had traveled in Europe, and visited all the principal hotels of the continent, he had never met any containing such a concentration of comfort, elegance, and conveniences. Upon which Proprietor pretended to be very much pleased, and inquired of Major Billott when he expected his family. Detective thereupon answered that if Mrs. Billott should come from New Orleans by way of the Mississippi, she would, probably, arrive next week; but if, out of regard for the health of the children, she should choose to come by sea, they would probably be along somewhat later. Upon which Proprietor remarked that he would make everything ready for Mrs. Billott and the children, whatever time they might come; and then, having finished the inspection, we adjourned to the main hall, from which I departed for my

office, while Detective sat down in the reading room, and, in a gentlemanly manner, picked his teeth with a walnut toothpick.

My amusement in watching the operations of Detective No. 17 was excessive for the next few days. It was pleasant to see him walk into the breakfast hall each morning, place himself in gentlemanly position, call for his toast and coffee, and then pretend to read his newspaper, though all the while peering slyly over the top, and restlessly watching both waiters and guests. It was pleasant, now and then, to hear him open the doors of private parlors into which he had just seen any of the chambermaids or waiters enter, and then, as he retreated, politely apologize for having mistaken his own apartment. And it was pleasant to see him give bright quarters to the bootblack, and condescendingly enter into conversation with him about himself and the other servants—thus encouraging an intimacy which might lead to unguarded confidences.

Sometimes it was not quite so pleasant. At different periods I could see that Detective watched me with a sly, uncertain kind of gaze, as though he suspected something. It was evident that he remembered having seen me before, though he could not recall the place; and, in such cases, a police officer is naturally suspicious. Once, when I happened to become very much embarrassed under the condescending attentions of my waiter, I accidentally caught my sleeve in the tablecloth, whereby a silver spoon fell into my lap; and, as I replaced the spoon, I saw that Detective had witnessed the operation. A sudden flush of animation passed over his face as though he had felt he detected one source of theft, and then he composed his features, with the air of a person who is resolved not to act precipitately, but prefers to await further and more certain developments. That afternoon he met me in the hall, and asked me the time of day, though there happened to be a large clock directly over his head, and I am convinced that he did so simply to ascertain whether I carried my own watch or that of someone else—and, for a time, I never could walk out of any of the halls without encountering his suspicious glance; while, whenever I came out of my room, he was sure to be watching me with a queer sort of look, as though he thought it had been another gentleman's room. All this was sufficiently disagreeable; but, after a while, I made up my mind not to regard it, and, wrapping my soul in triple folds of conscious rectitude, bore the infliction bravely. Moreover, as day after day passed on, and nothing was found out, I began to have for Detective No. 17 a contempt, which completely overpowered all my nervous dread of him. I began to look upon him as a man who very much overrated his skill—and one who, even if he could make a discovery, would not—being, probably, well contented with his free, luxurious living and easily-earned salary, and, consequently being resolved to keep up the farce, and postpone, for as long a period as possible, the inevitable day, when he must throw off the gentleman and return to his pepper-and-salt clothing, and vulgar plated jewelry.

About this time an alarming epidemic broke out in My Hotel. It attacked men and women indiscriminately, but few or no children suffered. It was attended by sundry singular symptoms, among which, the most common were sighs, loss of appetite, rolling up of the eyes, and a tendency to write bad poetry, and seek for the society of an individual of the opposite sex. In some cases, where two people of opposite sexes sought each other by some mutual attraction—which, in fact, was a very customary diagnosis of the epidemic—the pain of both was relieved, though the violence of the disease rather increased. In other cases, where it happened that the person attacked could not obtain the sympathy of the particular individual towards whom he or

she inclined, the details of suffering were often frightful—being attended with such an excess of sighing and wandering of intellect as might have moved a heart of stone. And what was most peculiar about the epidemic, was, that a physician was never called in, and the disease was generally suffered to run its course, until the last sad offices of the clergy were required.

This epidemic first attracted attention at a social ball, given by the proprietor to his guests in the house, and to a number of invited friends from without. Proprietor had argued that, if he went to some extra expense in order to make us happy, other guests would be attracted into the house, and that thus his outlay would be amply paid back to him. And, accordingly, he hired a band, turned on extra lights, provided ample refreshments, and managed to make everything very pleasant and delightful. But, unfortunately, his schemes led to a result directly the reverse of what he had anticipated—no new boarders came into the house, and so many of the old ones were directly or indirectly carried off by the epidemic, that serious loss was entailed upon him. Some, upon being attacked, immediately gave up their rooms, and undertook to gain relief by traveling and change of scene; others, principally of the male sex, surrendered high-priced apartments upon the second story, and ascended to low-priced ones in the uppermost story, whence they could look out misanthropically upon the waste of roofs, and feel abandoned by the world—while one lively and wealthy lady of an uncertain age, who had for years occupied a parlor and bedroom in the third floor front, at an enormous weekly expense, and had, moreover, been profuse in the matter of extras, was so violently attacked, that she never fully recovered; and happening to encounter sympathy in one of the opposite sex, she left the establishment altogether, and now resides in Twenty-fifth Street.

As one whose system had, by repeated shocks, been thoroughly hardened against this epidemic, I stood by, a calm and disinterested spectator; and, by dint of close observation, was soon enabled to gain a complete and accurate knowledge of the diagnosis of the disease. At first, I perceived that the epidemic manifested itself in two different ways—in what physicians would have called a true and a false one—the latter being but light in its attacks, and readily yielding to change of air, temporary absence, or even a decided inability to gain the requisite amount of sympathy, while the former kind was generally fatal. And, after a few days, I began to distinguish these varieties from each other by an unfailing sign. It happened that the windows of the parlors of My Hotel were, at that time, decorated with very elegant curtains, the right hand curtain of each recess being composed of white lace, while the left hand curtain was formed of heavy crimson brocade. Noticing that a person, when attacked by the epidemic, usually drew someone of the opposite sex behind these curtains for some private conversation, I set myself to watch; and soon ascertained, as an unfailing rule, that a temporary seclusion behind the lace or right-hand curtain always indicated a light and passing attack, while a stolen interview behind the brocade, or left-hand curtain, was invariably followed by the most disastrous results.

How great, therefore, was my surprise, when, one evening, I detected my friend the bank clerk snugly ensconced behind this left-hand curtain! Had he been on the lace side, or in company with some giant belle, laden with jewelry, I should have thought little about it; but he was not only ensconced behind the darkest folds of the thick brocade, thus indicating the fatal nature of his attack, but his partner was a lively young girl of modest, unassuming demeanor, simple attire, and hardly reaching to his shoulder. It was evident that the Cupid who had hitherto controlled the

preferences of my friend was absent or sick, and that another Cupid of different and more simple tastes had temporarily assumed the place.

As soon as I could entice my friend up into No. 783, I seated him at my table, poured out a glass of wine for him, and then demanded an explanation of what I had seen. My friend blushed up to his temples and drank his wine with an appearance of great agitation; and then, assuming an air of unwonted boldness, replied:

“Come now! I say! I don’t know what business anyone has to call for any explanations from me—but I don’t mind. It must all come out someday, I suppose. Other young fellows are always getting married all round us, and there’s no reason why my turn shouldn’t come too, you see. And the fact is, this hotel life is dreadfully lonely at times, especially just after dinner; and it would be quite the chalk to have a snug little house of my own, with someone ready to meet me when I come in, and domestic comfort, and all that sort of thing we’re always reading about. Why not for me as well as for other people, I’d like to know.”

Why not, indeed—I thought. Though my friend was not brilliant, he had very fair average abilities, and he was rather prepossessing in his appearance, bore an excellent character, and enjoyed a tolerable salary, which, in the event of his marriage, would doubtless be increased. However, his father was well off, and he had excellent expectations from a rich maiden aunt in the country. And besides all that, the young lady, though probably able to assist him somewhat through her father, was not exactly what one would call an heiress, and consequently would not be very apt to hold her head too high and spurn a respectable alliance. I began to think that my friend was making a very good move in life, and that it was my duty to help him on.

In fact, I have always had a matchmaking propensity, which I believe I have inherited. The Inklespoons were generally good matchmakers. There was my Aunt Esther, wife of the Rev. Thomas Allowby, of Carratville, for instance. She made half the matches in the place, and, as her husband was generally called in to tie the knot and she took the fees, it was commonly reported that she made a very good thing of it. Then there was my great uncle, Solon Inklespoon, who was wild upon the subject. It is said that once, learning that a certain dissolute negro had been drowned, he persuaded the man’s pretty mulatto wife to go right off and marry a promising young barber who had long admired her at a distance. By the time the ceremony had been fairly performed, some inconsiderate neighbors had brought the drowned man to life again; whence there arose considerable trouble and angry disputation as to whom she belonged. Some said that the lien of the first husband had never been lost, and that she should go back with him; others, and principally all the negroes of the town, argued, that, as he had been drowned, so, at the time of the second marriage, she had been actually a widow, and that the rights of the second husband could not be divested by the subsequent recovery of the first one. The whole matter turned upon the question whether a man is dead when he is drowned. I believe that, as the parties were too poor to go to law about it, the affair was finally compromised by the woman retaining both husbands.

Well, I concluded to assist my friend in his matrimonial plans, and thereto inquired how far the matter had advanced.

“Not very far,” said he. “That is, nothing is decided, you see, but I can tell very well that she likes me. They will not go back to Maryland till fall, so I shall have plenty of time. The only thing that bothers me is the old gentleman. It will be easy enough to speak to her when the right moment comes, but he is such a gruff old fellow that I am afraid of him. I say, when all is ready and agreed upon between her and me, will you talk it over to Mr. Sparhawk for me, and tell him what a good fellow I am, and how happy I could make his daughter, and how I can bring references, and all that, you know?”

I promised that I would do so.

“And you needn’t talk to the other fellows about it, and set them laughing at me,” he continued. “If you want to laugh at anyone, take the Head Waiter. He’s in love—he is.”

“The Head Waiter?”

“Yes—smitten with some little colored girl that works about the building. He came to me and wanted me to write a love-letter for him.”

“Which you did, of course?”

“Which I didn’t,” answered my friend. “You know I am not up to that sort of thing. But I referred him to you, and he said he would come this evening.”

“The deuce he will!”

“Yes,” answered my friend. “And I reckon here he comes now.”

In fact, at that moment there was a knock at the door, and the Head Waiter entered. A more respectable and gentlemanly looking negro could not have been found, probably, in any hotel in the city. It was a sight to watch him come in at dessert, heading a long file of subordinate waiters—to mark the elegant set of his broadcloth suit, rendered more elegant by the gracefulness of his position as he stood at the head of the table and cast his eyes around upon his well-drilled regiment—to observe the solemnity with which he signaled with the little bell that the covers should be removed. Beside the true and lustrous gentility of the Head Waiter, the gentility of my own particular waiter appeared in its real light as a base and worthless counterfeit. The latter, by a pretentious condescension, would overawe and confuse us—but the former, by an easy yet deferential familiarity, would inspire us with respect and put us at our ease from the start.

Head Waiter was a universal favorite with all. He was liked by old gentlemen because he always attended so strictly to the icing of their sherry—by old ladies, because he always saw that they had seats near the head of the table—by mothers, because he turned away his head and winked when they stole mottoes and oranges off the table to give to the children—by children, because he himself supplied them in the same manner with choice confectionery—and by young men, because he was such a gentlemanly fellow, that it was almost a distinction to be seen talking with him. In consequence of all this popularity, every festival was marked by a subscription for his

benefit: and, as his regular wages were large, it was supposed that he ought to have saved up much money. There was a difference of opinion about this, however; some averring that he spent all his income on kid gloves, while others knew for certain that he owned two houses on Long Island, and rented them at high rates to thriving clam diggers.

“You were wanting to see me about writing something for you ?” I remarked, as Head Waiter entered.

“Yes,” responded Head Waiter, without the slightest embarrassment. “I am at this moment enamored of a young lady employed about this house, and, if agreeable to you, I would like to have my affections expressed in a suitable manner upon paper. I feel that a proposal by epistle will be more genteel than verbal communication. And I am not ashamed to own that I cannot write very well myself. I think that my hand has been spoiled by lifting covers.”

“Well, sit down for a few minutes,” I said; and, drawing up my writing-case, I wrote out a very fine and deliberate proposal of marriage—such an one, in fact, as I might have written for myself. Head Waiter took it, looked it over, but did not seem very well satisfied.

“What is the matter?” said I.

“It is extremely beautiful, indeed,” said Head Waiter; “but if you could introduce a little more fire, so to speak, and flattery, and—that is—and glow of expression, I think that—”

“Certainly!” I said; “with pleasure.” And I wrote a new letter, in which I introduced every figure and conceit which affection could invent—praised each individual feature of the beloved one with the most extravagant adulation; scattered flame and passion broadcast in every line; and, finally, wound up with a most flourishing and sentimental tender of heart and hand. Even Lamartine could not have put into the mouth of his most ardent lover a more glowing and impassioned declaration. And, of course, Head Waiter was delighted, thanked me a thousand times, and declared that he could have no doubt of a successful result.

“By the way,” said I, as he moved toward the door, “any news of the late robberies?”

“None as yet,” answered Head Waiter, “though we trust to get at it before long. I have been inclined to suspect Sam, who waited at your table, and left us last week. Not that I know anything against him in particular, but you may not be aware that he comes of low blood. His father blacked boots in the street, at three cents a pair, while my father kept a respectable hairdressing saloon, and never charged less than a shilling.”

With that, Head Waiter moved majestically out of the room, while my friend, the bank clerk, remained behind, to go into convulsions. And, two days afterwards, Head Waiter informed my friend, as one who had a right to know, that the flaming love letter had accomplished its work, and that the marriage would take place that evening. The wedding, however, was to be private; since, as Head Waiter justly argued, the proprietor of My Hotel might not like married people for assistants, while, as long as they did their duty to the establishment, it should surely make no difference.

“And I have invited him up to your room, as soon as he is dressed, so as to show himself,” said my friend.

Accordingly, in order to give him a suitable reception, I invited all my friends to the muster, under promise of secrecy. The poet first came; then the editor who patronized the poet; then the professional organist; then the little German wine importer, with a wicker flask peeping out of his pocket and a merry barcarole issuing from his mouth; and then, after a slight interval, there was a knock at the door, and Head Waiter, accompanied by my particular waiter, as groomsman, entered.

I will not attempt to describe the dazzling sight which met our eyes, as the two men threw off their cloaks, and stood before us in all their elegance; the shining lustre of the broadcloth dress coats; the minute polish of the boots; the voluminous folds of the white cravats; the set of the satin vests, and the artistic arrangement of the frizzed-out hair. The pen of the Arab poet, who inventoried Aladdin’s Palace, should alone undertake the task. Suffice it to say, that, while the splendor of the groomsman eclipsed that of any white, bridegroom whom I had ever seen, the glory of the bridegroom, in turn, immeasurably surpassed him.

We shouted out our admiration with one voice; we heaped all kinds of compliments upon them; we pledged them in full cups of costly sherry; we made them drink a parting glass with us; and, finally, as their hour of departure arrived, we accompanied them to the door with new compliments, and quite a little shower of bright half dollars for wedding presents.

“And we will drink happiness to you all this evening,” I said to Head Waiter.

“Thank you very much, sir,” said Head Waiter. “And do not betray me, gentlemen. Tomorrow I will return to my duty as usual, and when our proprietor discovers that I am a married man, he will have seen that I am no less worthy of my trust than before.”

And so they left us; and we, returning to the table, prepared to honor the occasion, by making a night of it. Each brought his bottle, a pile of cigars was laid on the corner of the table, and the cards were dealt. Naturally our conversation ran on matrimony. We looked at the gleaming stars, and wondered which was Venus. We looked at the bell-tower, and wondered whether the man who lived there was married; and, if so, how he could bear to leave his wife, and accept such a lonely post. By unanimous consent, we changed the rules of the game, and made hearts a perpetual trump, and the queen the highest of the suit. And at last I could stand it no longer, but informed the assembled company, that, in a short time, we should probably be invited to the wedding of our friend, the bank clerk.

With that there was a shout, and a call for particulars; and before particulars could be given, the little German wine importer jumped up, and proposed the health of the future wife of our friend. The toast was drunk standing, and with uproarious honors.

“And now for the particulars!” said the poet.

“I assure you,” said my friend, the bank clerk, “the matter has not come to any definite conclusion. Nothing settled as yet, you see.”

“But it will be?”

“Well, yes; I think I may say it will be,” responded my friend, the bank clerk, losing all discretion, as the wine and excitement of the moment began to inflame him. “That is, I know she likes me, and I think I will speak to her about it tomorrow. Here is her ring she has lent me to wear. That’s a pretty good sign; is it not, fellows?”

“A very good sign! But, her name?”

“Well, she’s the daughter of Mr. Sparhawk; up here from Maryland for the summer. She’s about five feet, and—”

“Drink to the health of Miss Sparhawk!” cried out the German wine importer; and we drank it as before.

Hence, little by little, as my friend the bank clerk drank again and again, his remaining discretion entirely deserted him; and he began to babble forth his hopes and prospects in an uninterrupted and half incoherent train. It was in vain that I attempted to restrain him. On, on flowed the torrent of his words—the development of his plans. He would gain the consent of the lady the next morning; he would then have me go to the old gentleman, and state the case, and talk him into a good humor, and give all necessary references. That matter would, of course, be easily settled. They would be married in the fall, most probably; they would take a little cottage in Staten Island or Hoboken; perhaps the old gentleman would come down with enough, by way of dowry, to enable them to buy a house in Thirty-First Street. Wherever they lived, he would be happy to see us all every few evenings, and he would take care that we should have as good a time there as here. To which plan, unanimous approbation was instantly given by all the company. The German wine importer promised a wedding present of some of the finest Johannisberger that had ever paid duty; the poet engaged to get up an epithalamium; the professional organist said he would set it to music; and the editor insisted that the wedding announcement should be published in his paper with leaded type, and for nothing.

“And I say!” remarked my friend the bank clerk, rising and steadying himself against the table. “Come here tomorrow night, and then you can hear the result, you know. This is rather out-of-the course; but tomorrow night you can congratulate me formally about the thing as a finished piece of business,—and all that.”

“Drink once more to Miss Sparhawk!” cried the German wine importer; and, as we drank, a knock sounded at the door—I hardly know why we all started so at the noise of a simple rap. But it was a deliberate sort of a rap—not like that of any of our friends—and seemed to bring with it a premonition of evil.

The door opened, and Detective No.17 entered.

“Is this your watch?” he said to me.

I felt in my pocket, but my watch was not there. I remembered having left it on my wash-stand, but it was not there either. I looked at the watch which Detective held, and recognized it as my own.

“Where did you find it?” I said.

“The head waiter had it,” replied Detective.

“Oh!” said I, willing to shield the fault of a person whom I so much esteemed, and who, in a moment of exhilaration, might have yielded to temptation for the first time. “Yes—I must have lent it to him.”

“A strange kind of thing to lend to a hotel waiter,” remarked Detective, drily. “But are these your sleeve-buttons? And is this your silver comb?”

A perspiration started out from every pore of my body. I knew not what to say.

“You see, the way the whole thing came out, was this,” continued Detective. “Mr. Sparhawk accidentally heard that his daughter’s dressing maid whom he had brought up from Maryland, and who belonged to him, was going to run away with the head waiter. So—”

“What!” cried my friend the bank clerk, starting up, completely sobered. “You don’t mean to say that the girl belongs to Mr. Sparhawk?”

At this we, of course, laughed; and the poet said that our friend had made a very good beginning of it in helping to diminish his future wife’s hereditary prospects. Detective continued:

“So I went after the girl and found her just married to the fellow. And while scuffling with him, your watch, which I recognized, fell out of his pocket. That, of course, excited my suspicions, and I arrested him for a further search. And,” concluded Detective, “I found upon him pawn tickets for everything that has been stolen from this house for the past two months. He is now in jail.”

But the girl!” cried my friend the bank-clerk. “Did you get her again?” At which, of course, we all laughed, seeing his interest in keeping the family property together.

“The girl we did not get again,” answered Detective. “Nor do I think we shall. Some of the other darkeys spirited her away, and I do not think Mr. Sparhawk will try to recover her. It always costs more to reclaim such property in these states than it is worth, you see.”

“But Mr. Sparhawk—where is he?” I asked.

“You should only have heard him swear!” said Detective, “Mr. Sparhawk blew off steam for an hour, I should say, and then paid up his bill and was off.”

“Off?”

“Yes,” responded Detective. “He says he has lost enough already, and will not stay a single minute more in any northern state. He left with his daughter for the Jersey City ferry about an hour ago. And before he left, the head waiter confessed that there were two young men in this hotel who set him up to this scrape—I mention no names, gentlemen. And Mr. Sparhawk desired me to say,” continued Detective, “that if either of those two young men ever comes within three miles of him again, he will break every bone in his body. Good-evening, gentlemen.”

Putnam's Monthly, August 1857.