

The Diamonds of the Duke de B—

by M. Claude

From the Memoirs of M. Claude, Chief of the Detective Police Under the Second Empire.

IN the ancient quarter of Beaujon stands a well-known house of grim and forbidding aspect, Painted in red, its massive gates open—or, rather, do not open—upon a melancholy garden.

The illustrious duke, whose noble ancestors gave a king to England, was just as eccentric as his residence.

He was a personage at once mysterious, disagreeable and sinister. This noble duke possessed in his palace an immense iron safe, holding diamonds to the value of sixteen million francs. He was as avaricious as he was wealthy, while keeping up the gallant traditions of his ancestors. If he sought pleasure, he sought it at a low price. He never opened his immense jewel safe, which was fenced in by safeguards, like a cave of Ali Baba, but for his own pleasure.

I am now mentally looking at his singular personage, whom I have met so often at the little theatres in the stage-boxes, invariably accompanied by an actress.

Seated behind his lady, he never moved, and it was impossible to discover any expression on the impassible face, masked in powder and *cosmétiques*.

His hair is false, his mustache is false, his whiskers are false, and he moves, I really do believe, by the aid of clockwork. His face is as immovable as that of the Emperor's—can I say more?

Detectives were paid never to let him out of their sight

The Duke de B— had in his service a young Englishwoman, both honest and pretty. He discharged her without pay or warning, because she indignantly refused to permit him to treat her as he treated certain others of his female domestics, who were neither honest nor virtuous.

This young girl, outraged by the insolence and avarice of her master, resolved upon being revenged, and found a willing instrument in the *valet-de-chambre*, a man in the confidence of the duke.

This valet, named Henry Shaw, was a compatriot of the incensed chambermaid. He was twenty-six years of age, and came from Newcastle-on-Tyne.

He, also, as he stated, hungered for vengeance on the duke for his meanness and his ingratitude. He offered to share in common with her the result of the conspiracy. The girl consented, and this is how the valet proposed to revenge himself:

He would write a letter to one of the princes of the Royal Family of England, in which he would propose, for the sum of one hundred thousand francs, to restore to the Crown of England

diamonds to the value of millions which had been stolen from the regalia, and had passed into the possession of the avaricious Duke de B—; and the chambermaid consented, not without repugnance, though, to write this letter with her accomplice. The valet, once in possession of the letter, set himself to work to steal the diamonds of the duke—his dream since he entered the service.

Henry Shaw had not been in the employment a year until, by his complaisance, his civility, his scrupulous attention to the smallest wants of the old miser, he became absolutely indispensable.

If the adroit robber had studied his master, he had also studied to the minutest detail the mode of opening the celebrated safe, and the best method of avoiding the terrors of any mistake in the “Open Sesame.”

The safe—full of bells as a Chinese pagoda, or revolvers as an arsenal—was set in the wall of the duke’s sleeping apartment.

It was fitted up with an iron door that stood at the head of the duke’s bed, and covered by a silken curtain, which added beauty to the sleeping apartment.

It was simply impossible for any hand acquainted with the secret workings of the lock to open it when once closed by its owner.

On the 7th of December, 1863, the noble duke visited his jeweler's in order to have some of his many diamonds mounted, and, contrary to his usual habit, absolutely omitted to close the door of the safe.

Shaw, who had entered the service but to watch for this bright particular moment, remembered with an ecstasy of joy that the duke, in omitting to close the safe-door, had not set the complicated mechanism to go off. In fact, the duke had only shut the outer iron door, the key of which he never let out of his pocket, and of which Shaw had the exact duplicate.

Furnished with this skeleton-key, Shaw opened the first door, then threw open the second, which was now powerless to discharge its battery against the robber.

The sight that met his eyes was akin to that which dazzled the vision of Aladdin.

There, ranged on shelves before him, lay all the immense fortune of his master—diamonds, jewels of every description, decorations, bags filled with gold to the value of sixteen millions of francs.

He lost no time in filling his pockets, and as one filling did not glut his greed, he made two trips from the duke's bedchamber to his own.

After having shut the door beneath the hanging, he repaired to his chamber and filled his portmanteau with the spoil.

Without waiting for the return of his master, he took to the railway, taking care to tell his fellow-valet to go on duty in his stead, alleging that he was very much indisposed.

When the duke returned he found the other valet in attendance, and learned that Shaw was ill.

The duke felt a twinge of suspicion. He ran to the door of the safe: there—he saw that he had indeed been robbed, and of more than two millions' worth of diamonds and notes.

Shaw's chamber betrayed him further, for on the floor some diamonds were scattered, as though the bandit did not care to wait to pick them up.

The duke instantly communicated with the bureau, over which I had the honor to preside, and I set to work to catch Shaw, in which I was aided by the English police, for, his letter, sent to a prince of the Blood Royal, not only incensed the illustrious personage to whom it was addressed, but the entire court as well, and that which this brigand so cunningly hoped to save him was absolutely the cause of his destruction.

Almost at the moment at which I received the complaint of the Duke de B—, came information from London on the subject of the letter, to which he had added a postscript to the effect that he would wait for two hours at Boulogne to receive a confidential messenger from Prince Alfred, to whom he would hand over the diamonds on receipt of one hundred thousand francs.

These two hours meant just one hundred and twenty minutes, the space of time between the arrival of the train by which he traveled from Paris and the departure of the steamer for Folkestone, for Shaw had determined upon taking the boat in order to place his booty with the Safe Deposit Company in Queen Victoria Street.

The two hours which he set aside for a meeting with the agent of the prince were just sufficient for me to join my brigand before he could board the steamer.

I took the night train. I arrived at Boulogne at day-dawn. Knowing by experience the habits of a man like Shaw, I caused two of my inspectors, whom I brought with me, to visit the most "swell" hotels, and found my gentleman at the Hotel d'Angleterre, of course under an assumed name, but I had his photograph in my pocket, and identified him by description.

I presented myself at the hotel, and asked to see Shaw. I entered his room, and presented him with the letter addressed to Prince Alfred, stating that I was acting for his Royal Highness.

I never saw a man so utterly confounded. The fact was he had no thought of making restitution or of handing over the millions in his possession, and his discomfiture considerably increased when my two agents joined me, and when I exhibited the warrant for his arrest

He was condemned to hard labor for twenty years, but he had hidden away one hundred thousand francs, which he may perhaps live to enjoy.

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