

The Borrowed Diamond Ring

The Detective Officer's Chief "Incubus"—At Winter Garden Theatre—"Harry Dubois"—An Expert Rogue Examines His Prospective Victims—Some Southerners—Harry "Introduces" Himself In His Own Peculiar And Adroit Way—Harry And His Friend Are Invited To The Southerners' Private Box—Harry "Borrows" Mr. Clemens' Diamond Ring, And Adroitly Escapes—My Dilemma—Visit To Harry's Old Boarding Mistress—His Whereabouts Discovered—Active Work—A Rapid Drive To Pine Street—A Fortunate Light In The Office Of The Late Hon. Simeon Draper—A Sudden Visit For A "Sick Man" To Harry's Room—How Entrance Was Effected—The Ring Secured—Hunt For Mr. Clemens—A Slightly Mysterious Letter—A Happy Interview.

JUST before the late war broke out, and the Winter Garden Theatre being in its prime, my friend, Henry C. P., of New Haven, Conn., being in town, urged me to accompany him there one night to see the play. The house was quite crowded with a more than usually fashionable set of play-goers, many being from different parts of the land, visitors for a time in New York. No matter where I go, to theatre, court, or church, along Broadway crowded with its vast moving tides of humanity, or through the streets of some half-deserted hamlet, my mind is ever on my business; rather, ever pondering on the craft and crime of society, symbols of which, in more or less emphatic shape, I am ever liable to see. It is one of the greatest vexations which the detective suffers, that the nature of his business is such that he can never fully liberate his thoughts from dwelling upon the frailties, the follies, and particularly the crimes, petty and felonious, of which so many of his fellow-men are constantly being guilty. Like an incubus of dread and darkness, these thoughts are ever weighing on his mind. He has no peace; and the only approximate peace he can win, is to let his thoughts drift on in the usual current, without attempting to direct them by his will. Consequently, that night, though for a while I enjoyed the play, studying its representations of human nature with some delight, and being not a little pleased with the beauty of sundry of the female *dramatis personae*, who were rather above the average in personal graces, my eye was wandering over the parquet, family circle, etc., considerably. Hearing a slight noise in a part of the gallery, I observed that three young men, probably having a "prior engagement" to fill somewhere, were leaving the theatre,—a thing of no moment in itself, and which I should have forgotten on the instant, only that the vacancy they left enabled me to cast my eye a little farther on, when I discovered a, character of much interest to me—a man elegantly apparelled, and having every outward semblance of a gentleman. At the moment my eye first rested on him there, he was peering into one of the boxes, and I saw him soon in the act of whispering some mystery, apparently, into the ear of the comrade who sat by his side. The latter person I did not know; but knowing the company he was in, I divined that some mischief was up, for the former person was no other than a man whom, in my detective career, I had several times encountered—an elegant, scheming fellow, who sometimes operated on Wall Street, kept an office at 34 Pine Street, as a real estate broker and money lender, etc., though he was seldom there, and was as skilful a juggler and pickpocket as any of whom New York could at that time boast. I could not, from my then position, well see into the boxes, so I changed my seat—through the courtesy of an old friend, who gave me his in exchange for mine—to a point where I could watch the boxes and the two elegant

gentlemen, of whom I have spoken, without the latter's knowing the fact. As I have intimated, the season was gay. In one of the boxes sat two gentlemen and two ladies, the former evidently Southerners I judged, and so I thought the ladies to be also. They were quite richly dressed, and "sporting" a large amount of richest jewelry. I was not at a loss, as soon as I had enjoyed a good view of them, as to the nature of the special concern which they had evidently awakened in the minds of the two worthies whom I was watching. I felt very sure that some plan was being devised by the latter two to make the acquaintance of the gentlemen, and, perhaps, the ladies in the box, with an eye to relieving them of some of their jewelry or money.

"Harry Dubois" was one of the aliases of the elegant rogue; his friend's name I knew not, and have never learned it. I was not surprised then, when, after a little polite leave-taking at the end of an act, and the gentlemen left their ladies in the box, to see Harry and friend leave their seats, and saunter out. Divining that the gentlemen had gone into the refreshment-room, I followed, disguising myself as I went out, by the assumption of a pair of spectacle bows, to which was attached a false nose quite unlike my own, in order that Harry might by no means discover me. I arrived in the refreshment-room, and had selected out my friends of the box before Harry and his friend, or "pal," came in. I had prepared my mind to expect some peculiarly stealthy, circumlocutory proceeding upon the part of Harry. Perhaps he would come only to "watch and wait" still longer; perhaps he would find there somebody, also, who knew the gentlemen of the box, and get a formal introduction. Indeed, I had conceived a half dozen modes of operation on his part, when, to my astonishment, Harry, having first cast a searching glance over the room, and giving his "pal" a knowing touch on the elbow, rushed, with all smiles upon his face, up to the apparently elder of the gentlemen of the box, who were at this moment lifting glasses of wine to their lips, and exclaimed, "Pardon me, Mr. Le Franc; but how *do* you do? I am exceedingly glad to see you! How long have you been on from New Orleans, my dear sir?"

The gentleman addressed looked with astonishment upon the elegantly attired Harry, whose face was the symbol of the frankest honesty and most certain refinement, and evidently "taken" by Harry's manner, replied, "My dear sir, there's a mistake here, for my name is not Le Franc; and truly, sir, I can never have known you, for I surely do not now, and if I had I should never have forgotten you."

"Upon my honor," said Harry, "I thought you were a Mr. Le Franc, of New Orleans. You look just like him, with whom, and others, I went on an excursion up to Donaldsonville, three years ago, at the invitation and expense of Bob McDonald."

"Bob McDonald? Why, he's my cousin, sir. If you know him, give me your hand. My name, sir, is William Hale, of Savannah, and this is my cousin, Mr. Clemens, of Mobile" (turning to his friend), "Mr.—Ah! excuse me, but you have not given me your name, sir, I forgot."

Fully pleased, Harry pulled out a card case from his vest pocket, and presented to Mr. Hale a neat card, inscribed:—

HENRY CLARKSON DUBOIS,

ATTORNEY AT LAW.

Specialty — Dealing in Real Estate, Effecting Loans, and Securing Advances on Cotton.

Office, 84 Pine Street, N. Y. City.

“Pardon me that I give you my business card; I find I have no other about me.”

“Ah, Mr. Dubois! I am sure I am very glad to know you as Bob McDonald’s friend. Tell me when you last saw him. How was he? Jolly fellow—isn’t he? Take some wine with us? and your friend, too; he’ll join us?”

Harry was nothing loth to accept the wine. He was making splendid progress, he doubtless thought; and joining in the wine, he said, “You asked when I last saw Bob. Well, when he was here in New York, three months ago, on his way to Hamilton, Canada, he was my guest for a week, at the Metropolitan, where I board.”

“Just so,” said Mr. Hale. “Bob wrote us at that time from Canada. I am sorry I did not go on there when he was there. He was well as usual then, I suppose, and just as full of the ‘Old McDonald’“ (for his father was a great old sport) “as ever, eh?”

I saw that Harry was making smooth inroad into the affections of these gentlemen, and wondered what would be the result. Mr. Hale treated to cigars. Harry refused, saying, that with permission he would smoke a cigarette,—pulling a box from his pocket,—commented on the habit which he had learned in Cuba, when he was attached, as he said, to the United States legation there, and quite took the Savannah gentleman aback with his delicate manipulation of the dainty cigarette. Harry’s mastery of good manners seemed to completely win the Southern gentlemen, and Harry’s friend, too, though less elegant than he, was no “slouch” of a fellow in appearance.

The next act of the play had begun before the gentlemen had finished their cigars and chat, and Mr. Hale said to his friend Clemens, “Wouldn’t Mary be delighted to meet so intimate a friend of her cousin Bob? Mr. Dubois, I spoke of McDonald as my cousin; so he is by marriage; but he is cousin by blood to my wife, and she likes him above all her kin. Wouldn’t you and your friend do us the honor to accompany us to our box, where our wives now are?”

“With the greatest pleasure,” said Harry, suiting the action to the word, and away they started for the box. I lost no time in getting back to my seat, on the way depositing my spectacles and false nose in a side pocket.

From what I afterwards learned from Mr. Hale, he delightedly presented Harry to his wife, as an intimate friend of her cousin Bob; and it was evident to me that Harry was making as sure victory of the esteem of Mrs. Hale, and the other lady, Mrs. Clemens, as

he had of their husbands. He laughed and chatted with the ladies to their evident delight. They could not have heard much of the second act, so busily were they engaged with him—gentlemen and ladies both. I noticed that Harry was not lacking, on that occasion, in a good degree of effrontery, mingled with his polite manners, which fact was assurance to me that he had formed some plan of operations already, but what it would be I could not conjecture. I saw more or less display of jewelry, Harry taking a splendid solitaire diamond from his finger, and evidently telling some story about it. But eventually, as the act was drawing to a close, I discovered that Mr. Clemens had taken from his finger a very costly ring, which, as the sequel proved, he had bought at Anthony's the day before, for fifteen hundred dollars, to take as a present to his brother, then studying medicine in Harvard College, whither Mr. Clemens and his lady were about going. All was very jubilant in the box as the act drew to a close, and there was a clatter in the box—the gentlemen laughing, and the ladies shaking their fans at them, as if half menacingly forbidding them to go out, evidently begging them to stay, and so forth. But Harry, according to the story I learned afterwards, kindly assured the ladies that he would return with his new "charge" all duly and "soundly," which the ladies interpreted to mean soberly, and they let them go.

Harry left the box, the last of the gentlemen, and as he did so, foolishly waved his hand in parting, at the ladies; and the mystery was at once unravelled to me, for on his finger was what I took to be, knew to be, that new, flashing ring of Mr. Clemens'.

I hastened to the refreshment-room. I saw at once the flush of victory on Harry's face, and watched him intently.

He was very brilliant in conversation, and very generous; insisted on "treating" all the while himself. Wouldn't allow Mr. Hale or his friend to call for anything, etc.

The time for the next act coming on, the gentlemen, not a little "warmed up" with the numerous glasses of wine they had taken, returned to their box, and I to my place, replacing my spectacles in my side pocket.

I had been a little delayed in getting back to my place by a crowd gathered around a lady who had fainted, and when I resumed my seat, and looked into the box, what was my astonishment at not finding Harry there. I saw that Mrs. Clemens was very serious about something, while the rest seemed very much excited; meanwhile, Harry's friend seemed engaged in some sort of wonder-looking protestations, for he *looked* astonished, and was putting one hand very emphatically upon the palm of the other. The whole thing flashed upon me. I saw that there was no time to lose; and I left my seat, and proceeded directly to the refreshment-room, in time to find Mr. Hale and his friend there, eagerly inquiring of the bar-keeper if "Mr. Dubois" had returned there; if he had seen him since they went up last time to the box, and sundry other hurried queries. The bar-keeper had not seen him; no clew could they get to him; and Mr. Hale said, "Clemens, you are 'done for,' sure. That's one of those arch scamps we read of. He's borrowed that ring, and we'll never see it again."

“Let’s find a policeman, and put him on the track,” said Clemens.

“Foolishness,” said Mr. Hale; “no policeman can track that fellow. He’s too keen; besides, who knows but he’ll take the train for Philadelphia or somewhere. I don’t believe he lives here. Here’s his card, to be sure, but who knows that it’s not a fraud? Let’s hunt the directory,” and the bar-keeper brought forward the desired directory. No “Harry Clarkson Dubois” was to be found in it.

The gentlemen looked confounded and dejected, and Hale said, “Well, Clemens, let’s go back to the ladies. They’ve more wit than we. You know what your wife said. If we’d taken her advice perhaps we should have got out from here in time to catch the villain,” and so they sauntered back.

I did not feel like making myself known to them. They might take me, perhaps, as Harry’s cooperator, and so I silently watched them leave. Turning the matter over in my mind a moment, I resolved upon the best course to pursue. Harry must be come upon that night if I were to succeed with him, I saw. I had known his lodging-room three months before, but had heard he had changed quarters; where to hunt him was the point. I bethought me of a boarding-house keeper in West 13th Street, with whom Harry once boarded, and who, not knowing his real character, had great respect for him, and whom, too, Harry evidently really respected, for I had been told that he always spoke of her in terms of admiration. I fancied she would be as apt as any one to know where were his quarters, and I took a carriage, and drove immediately to her house. Fortunately she was at home; and on inquiring of her if she could tell me where I could find Mr. Dubois the next morning, for I did not let her know my haste, she said that she guessed I’d be most apt to find him in his office in Pine Street, No. 34; that he had applied to her for board two days before, with which she could not accommodate him for a week or so to come; so he said he would sleep on a lounge in his office, and take his meals out till she could give him quarters, and that the day before he sent up for blankets, with which she had supplied him.

My plan was complete. Hurrying away from her house, I ordered the driver to push straight for my rooms, where, arming myself completely, I drove on as far as the post office, when, ordering the driver to await my return, I alighted, and proceeded to 34 Pine Street. As it chanced, next door was the office of my friend, the late Simeon Draper, and, I was not a little pleased to find a light there, and one of his clerks and another man looking over some papers, as I saw through the window. Tapping on the door, it was readily unlocked, and I said to the clerk, who recognized me, “No questions asked; but let *me* inquire if you are going to be here for fifteen minutes longer?”

“Yes, for an hour, perhaps.”

“Well, I may call again.”

“Do so—are you after a ‘bird’?” asked the clerk, with a knowing wink in his eye; for he very quickly divined that I was on some detective mission; for Mr. Draper had been a frequent patron of mine, and often sent this clerk to me on business.

I closed the door, and ran up two flights of stairs to “Dubois’s” room, and immediately rapped upon the door.

No noise within—all silence! Had the bird flown? I thought not. I believed he was there. Again I rapped.

“Who’s there?” asked a half-sleepy voice.

I replied, “O! you’re asleep, Mr. Dubois—are you? Well, no matter. It’s a case of exigency. I knew you were here; saw you as you came in; and there’s a man fainted away in Draper’s office, and I’m alone with him, and want you, if you will, to watch him while I run for a doctor. Don’t mind to dress yourself more than half—come quickly,” and I started away rapidly down stairs, and returned as rapidly, and rapping on the door again, exclaimed, “Get ready, and run down as quick as you can, while I go for a doctor. The door’s unlocked; but see here, he may revive, and want some stimulus. Here’s the key to the back closet. There’s a bottle of brandy there. Here, take it.”

The unsuspecting Harry opened the door slightly to take the key, when I pushed in. On his finger gleamed that very ring. He was but half dressed, coat off, a muscular fellow, and just in trim for fighting. I saw the situation, and pulling out a pistol, clapped it to his face, and extending my left hand, said, “It’s no use, Harry; give me Mr. Clemens’ ring without any noise, or I’ll call the officers at the door below.”

Harry was never before so confounded; protested he had no ring but his own.

“We’ll see,” said I. “Mr. Hale will be here in a moment. If he comes, it’s all day with you. He can identify the ring, and—so—can—I. Give it to me at once!” I exclaimed, with a stern voice.

Harry saw that I knew all about it, and yielded, begging me to not expose him. I assured him I had no care to do so; but should exact of him the expenses I had incurred for the carriage, which, at that time of night, would be about fifteen dollars; which he quickly took from out a large sized roll of bills from his inner vest pocket. The gas he had lighted when he rose to dress, was turned on at full head, and gleamed like a spectre through the room. I examined the money to see that it was not counterfeit, put it in my pocket, and bade Harry “good night,” telling him I guessed the man in Draper’s had recovered by this time, and that he needn’t trouble himself to go down.

I drove to my rooms, paid the driver, and having deposited the ring in my little safe, went to bed, and pondered on the next step—the finding of Mr. Clemens next day. I arose rather early next morning, and went in search. I expected to find him and his friends at some of the prominent hotels; but they were not there to be found, but had left the St.

Nicholas some three days before, and where gone nobody knew. But the coachman would know where he took them. After waiting hours to find the coachman, I at last learned that they had all gone to a house in Madison Square, to which I proceeded, and found it the private residence of one of our prominent citizens. The parties, therefore, were evidently of the *elite*, and were to be approached delicately. Perhaps they hadn't told their friends of their loss, and from pride might not want it known. How should I proceed? Well, I rung the bell, and inquired of the servant if a Mr. Clemens was stopping there; and learned that he was, but that he and his wife had gone out, and would not be back till evening. "Was a Mr. Hale there?" "Yes; but he, too, and his wife have gone with Mr. and Mrs. Clemens." I didn't want the ring about me. I had pressing work to do that day and that evening; in fact, I hardly knew whether I should have time to call that evening or not. So I asked the servant if he could provide me envelope and paper, for I would leave a note for *my* friends. I was ushered into the library, and given the due materials; and addressing a note to Mr. Hale, which ran much as follows:—

"SIR: I have not the pleasure of your personal acquaintance, but the fact that I am the *true* friend of your cousin, Mr. Robert McDonald, of New Orleans, will be all the assurance, I presume, that you will want of my being entitled to an audience with you. I have called to see you upon interesting and important business, and finding that you are not to return till evening, I beg to ask you to expect me at half past eight o'clock. Do not, if you please, by any means fail to be at home. I would also be pleased to meet Mr. Clemens; and I trust you will not consider me impertinent (and you will not when you come to learn my errand), if I ask also to meet Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Clemens at the same time.

"I would prefer to meet none of the family residing here, but yourselves alone.

"Yours, very respectfully,

"— —."

I hurried through my business for the remainder of the day, and a little before half past eight was duly at the house on Madison Square.

Being admitted, I called for Mr. Hale. He came to see me in the hall; looked at me mysteriously; was very civil and polite, but coldly so. I said, "I left a note here today for you."

"Yes, sir, I received a curious note, and don't know what to make of it. Please explain your business. We are strangers, and you will excuse me that I am always cautious with strangers, whoever they may be."

He had evidently taken the lesson of the night before to heart.

"But," asked I, "are Mr. and Mrs. Clemens ready to receive me, as I requested in my note?"

“Yes, and Mrs. Hale too.”

“Can I see them all immediately, for I’ve but little time to spare?”

“Yes, sir,” said he, quite rigidly; “follow me, sir.”

I followed him to a small side parlor, where sat Mr. Clemens and the two ladies.

“This is the gentleman who left the note here to-day, and says he knows Bob McDonald,” said Mr. Hale, as he bowed me to a chair, and cast a furtive glance at his friends as he spoke McDonald’s name.

“Pardon me, sir,” I broke in. “I did not say that I *knew* Mr. McDonald, but that I was a ‘true friend’ of him, as you’ll observe on looking at the note, if you have it, and as I guess I shall prove.”

“O, then you don’t know my cousin, Mr. McDonald?” asked Mrs. Hale. “I am glad you do not, sir, for I was beginning to fear you if you did. We’ve seen one of cousin’s friends here of late to our regret.”

“Well, ladies and gentlemen,” said I, “I’ll make my story short. You have, indeed, had occasion to regret meeting one of Mr. McDonald’s pretended friends. Perhaps he does know him too, personally. But I do not; and I am a ‘true friend’ to Mr. McDonald, in that I would serve his friends as he would desire to have me, if he knew your late loss.”

There were glances from the eyes of each into those of the others—a momentary silence and wonder-looking—when Mrs. Clemens tremulously exclaimed, “Why, sir, do you know all about it? Have you found the ring?”

“Foolish woman!” said Mr. Clemens. “How do you suppose anybody could find what wasn’t lost—only stolen?”

“But I have something here for you, sir,” said I, as I took the ring from my pocket, and held it up in the light.

“The same!” “That’s it!” “Where did you get it?” “Did he lose it, and you find it?” “How glad I am!” etc., burst from their excited lips.

“Be calm, and I’ll tell you all about it,” said I; and taking their seats, for all had risen to their feet, they listened attentively to my story. I told them my business; how I came to notice them; all that I did—all except what transpired in Pine Street, making a short tale of that.

I had handed the ring, as I commenced my story, to Mr. Clemens, who placed it upon a book lying on the table, where it lay throughout our discourse, which was carried on for nearly an hour. Near the conclusion, Mr. Clemens said, “But after all this I do not feel

that the ring is yet justly mine. You have earned a part of it, at least, and I wish you to tell me how much I shall pay you for your trouble. I should have lost the ring wholly but for you, and I am willing to pay you half its value, seven hundred and fifty dollars.”

“O, no,” said I, “I could not for a moment consent to take so much. In fact, I would have no right to.”

“Well, name the price.”

“If you give me fifty dollars I shall be satisfied.”

“No such paltry sum, sir,” said the generous Southerner. “You shall take double, yes, four times that, at least.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Hale, “and I’ll gladly pay half of it, or the whole of it, or double it, and make it four hundred.”

But I insisted upon only one hundred; and paying me that, Mr. Clemens restored the ring to his finger, saying, “The next time I allow a stranger, no matter whose friend he is, to trifle with my property, I shall *know* it, I reckon. It’s been a good lesson, cheaply bought, for me.”

Business over, these cheerful people insisted upon entertaining me till a late hour, and I recited to them some quaint instances in the detective’s life; but they could not but think that their adventure in New York had been the most remarkable of all.

I dare say that the lesson they learned that night will serve them through life; and although their loss was so stupidly occasioned that I presume they keep it secret as to themselves, I’ve no doubt they sometimes tell it, in the third person, as a warning to their friends who may be “going abroad, travelling.”

It is a trite saying, that “‘tis not all gold that glitters.” Everybody has heard it, and repeated it, but few only profit by it.

McWatters, George. *Knots Untied; or, Ways and By-Ways in the Hidden Life of American Detectives*. Hartford: J. B. Burr & Hyde, 1871.