

## *The Diamond Necklace*

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“He’s a very agreeable, peaceable-behaved young gentleman,” said Mrs. Peepandpry, rubbing her hands with the motion peculiar to stout, middle-aged boarding-house keepers. “Not a bit particular as to what he eats, and as regular with his week’s board as the Wednesday afternoon comes around.”

“But who is he?” said Mr. Majilton, who, having no special business of his own, was so good as to identify himself with that of his neighbors, and formed, in his sole individuality, the star chamber and the judge, jury and executioner of the vicinity, speaking from a social standpoint. “That’s the question, ma’am—who is he? Regular payments and agreeable manners are a good deal, I’m willing to allow; but what are his conventional indorsements?”

Mrs. Peepandpry looked puzzled.

“I am told,” resumed Mr. Majilton, “Mr. Eugene Aram had the polished mein of a gentleman.”

“I’m not acquainted with the person of whom you speak, sir!” said Mrs. Peepandpry. “I’ve had many a boarder in my time, but never anybody by that name.”

Mr. Majilton rubbed his nose in some irritation.

“Never mind,” said he, “never mind. Details are of no importance. It’s the general principle that we must look to.”

“Certainly, sir,” said Mrs. Peepandpry, more bewildered than ever.

“And you tell me you haven’t any idea of Mr. Guymard’s profession?”

Mrs. Peepandpry shook her head.

“What references did he bring?” pursued the querist.

“Well, sir, now you remind me of it, said the honest woman, “he didn’t mention no especial references. He merely said he would probably want the rooms all summer, and would pay in advance, and he gave me a month’s rent on the spot.”

“This looks very bad,” said Mr. Majilton—“very bad, indeed. For all you know, Mrs. Peepandpry, you may be harboring a political spy, a forger, a counterfeiter; even a mur-r-derer.”

“Good gracious, Mr. Majilton, don’t talk in that blood-curdling way!” said Mrs. Peepandpry, ringing her hands. “And him so little trouble and so regular with his pay.”

“Ah, the selfishness of this world — the selfishness of this world!” sighed Mr. Majilton, casting his gooseberry-colored eyes upward. “You seem to forget, Mrs. Peepandpry, that you owe something to your neighbors and the world in general, as well as to yourself.”

Mrs. Peepandpry got out her pocket handkerchief, and shed a few tears behind its folds. How could she tell this highminded philanthropist that the neighbors and the world in general had never helped her to gain her hard earned livelihood? What were her poor little private interests to the grand and colossal view of society taken by Mr. Majilton, who had a snug little income of his own, and needed not to track out the course of every penny with microscopic eagerness?

“What do you suppose General Gerard would say to this culpable carelessness of yours?” he resumed; “or Mrs. Dalrymple, whose fair, lovely daughters represent the beauty and talent of the neighborhood?”

“I’m sure I’m very sorry,” sniffed the poor boarding-house keeper, “but—”

“Sorry!” echoed Mr. Majilton. “But of what avail will be your sorrow when once you have introduced a serpent into these Eden bowers? No, Mrs. Peepandpry, I have no desire, believe me, to wound your feelings—I merely desire you to be a little more cautious in your dealings with the world in general. Here’s this great diamond robbery at Palace Heights—Miss Duponceau’s ancestral jewels gone like a vision. How do we know that your model boarder may not be the head and front of the adept gang who perpetrated this outrage? Good heavens, madam! I’ve locked up my collection of postage stamps and rare coins every evening since I heard of the diamond robbery at Palace Heights.”

“Oh, sir! I’m quite certain,” stammered Mrs. Peepandpry, “that Mr. Guymard isn’t one of the kind to—”

“And I read only last evening in the paper,” inexorably pursued Mr. Majilton, “of a gigantic plot to fire all the coal mines of Pennsylvania, and set the Canada woods in a blaze. Am I by any means sure that this mysterious stranger whom you have so injudiciously admitted into our midst is not the diabolical wretch whose fiendish ingenuity is responsible for all this crime?”

“Dear, dear!” said Mrs. Peepandpry.

“Suppose I see him?” said Mr. Majilton, authoritatively. “I can easily introduce myself, and—”

“But you can’t, sir,” cried the poor landlady; “for he’s just took the express to New York to be gone all day, and I’ve got the whitewasher and the carpet-beater here; and Bridget, with a pail of hot water and scouring soap—”

“Oh,” said Mr. Majilton, “it’s very unfortunate—very!”

“Perhaps you’d like to look at his room, sir?” suggested Mrs. Peepandpry.

“Well, it wouldn’t do any harm for me just to glance around a little,” said Mr. Majilton.

And with a majestic stride, he followed Mrs. Peepandpry into the apartments of the city boarder.

The whitewasher, with his ebon countenance beaming beneath a paper cap, was mixing a miniature maelstrom of white foam in his pail. Bridget, mounted upon a step-ladder, was dusting the books, which were ranged, not without artistic elegance and taste, on home-constructed shelves. At the sight of the house-cleaning phalanx every domestic impulse was roused in Mrs. Peepandpry's nature.

"Bridget," she cried, shrilly, "have you commenced on those books without cleaning this closet?"

"Please, 'm," retorted Bridget, "the closet was cram-jam full of things, as I didn't venture to take the liberty to move."

"It's only dressing-gowns, and fencing-gloves, and such like," said Mrs. Peepandpry.

"Please, 'm, there's a false-face there," argued Bridget, "and ten boxes, as I didn't know but they might be full of spirits of niter and glycerine."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Peepandpry, herself plunging into the depths of the closet, while Mr. Majilton peered cautiously over her shoulder. "Spirits of niter and glycerine, indeed! I never heard such folly in my life!"

"A mask, eh?" said Mr. Majilton. "It looks bad—very bad! And a black serge cloak with a hood! Indeed! And where's the dark-lantern and the false keys?"

"There ain't any, sir," said Mrs. Peepandpry.

"There must be!" said Mr. Majilton. "Don't tell me! In this world one thing invariably leads to another, and —eh? What is that?"

It was a little flat Japanese box, which had fallen from the folds of the suspicious serge cloak.

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs. Peepandpry, "how could I be so careless? There, the hasp is broken!"

"It is providential, ma'am, quite providential!" uttered Mr. Majilton, as he solemnly opened the box.

And out dropped a string of sparkling stones.

"The saints betwane us and all harm!" said Bridget.

"It ain't—diamonds?" cried Mrs. Peepandpry.

“Didn’t I tell you so?” said Mr. Majilton, “Let this respectable colored person be sent to Palace Heights at once. Tell Bridget, here, to make all the haste she can to the nearest constabulary force. As for you, Mrs. Peepandpry, I will trouble you to write a description of this cold-blooded ruffian. While you are thus engaged I will scribble off a telegram to the Grand Central Depot in New York, that he may be arrested the very instant that he steps off the train. This is really—ahem!—what one may call a direct interposition of Providence!”

“Oh, dear! oh, dear!” cried Mrs. Peepandpry, wringing her hands, “has it come to this? And Mr. Guymard so civil-spoken and gentlemanly, and all!”

“Pray remember, my good woman,” adjured Mr. Majilton, that time is of the first importance. Get a pencil and paper immediately. George,” to the carpet-beating youth, who was standing by, all eyes and ears, “run with this telegram to the office, and let it be charged to my account. And in the meantime, Mrs. Peepandpry, let us have a circumstantial and minute description of this wolf in sheep’s clothing who has thus entered our fold.”

But Mrs. Peepandpry’s few little wits were entirely frightened out of her, and she could not, at a moment’s notice, remember the items of Mr. Guymard’s personal appearance; and the more impatient Mr. Majilton waxed, the more bewildered she became; so that the carriage from Palace Heights, and the box wagon from the police court were both at the door before she had decided whether Mr. Guymard’s eyes were dark, or light blue, his nose aquiline or Romanesque.

Miss Duponceau, from the Heights, looked around her in amazement. The constable eyed poor Mrs. Peepandpry as if he meant to arrest her at once.

Mr. Majilton began, in four-syllabled words, to explain the situation to the gentry from Palace Heights, whose acquaintance he had long yearned for an opportunity of making; and presently the complication of affairs was rendered more hopeless still by the unexpected appearance upon the scene of—Mr. Guymard himself.

“Don’t be alarmed, Mrs. Peepandpry,” said he, cheerfully; “but I discovered at Chatham Junction that I had left some important papers behind, and—but, pray, what is the meaning of all this?”

And he looked around him in extreme amazement at the little crowd, the disorganized closets, the japanned box on the table, with its sparkling contents.

“Villain,” cried Mr. Majilton, “your machinations are discovered at last! Constable, arrest that man! Miss Duponceau, let me be the fortunate instrument of returning to you your diamond necklace, which yonder abandoned scoundrel—”

“But he isn’t an abandoned scoundrel,” said Miss Duponceau; “he’s my cousin Charles. And these things aren’t diamonds at all, but miserable glass stones, not worth a farthing!”

“Eh,” cried Mr. Majilton, his lower jaw dropping in dismay.

Mr. Guymard looked keenly around. "It seems to me, Mrs. Peepandpry," said he, "that there has been a great deal of very unnecessary meddling here."

"But what does this disguise mean?" questioned Mr. Majilton, faintly.

"It is my masquerade dress," said Guymard, carelessly, "for Miss Duponceau's ball; and the necklace of cheap stage jewelry was intended to accompany it."

"Who are you?" demanded Majilton. "In the interests of the village, I have a right to ask this question."

"A right which I don't in the least recognize," coolly returned Guymard. "But there is no reason why I should decline to state that my name is Charley Guymard, that I am a lawyer, and that I am lodging with this good woman because I want quiet and privacy while I am engaged in studying up the details of an important will case. If you want any other particulars, I can only refer you to my cousin, Miss Duponceau, who was quite aware of my residence here, as well as cognizant of its reasons."

Miss Duponceau burst into a clear, musical laugh.

"The idea of taking my cousin Charles for a burglar;" she cried out. "Really, there is no end to the absurdity of these good people. But, now that the carriage is here, Charles, I shall insist on taking you back to the Heights with me. Mrs. Peepandpry is very kind, I am sure; but, after what has happened, this place can hardly be a home for you any longer."

So Mrs. Peepandpry lost her boarder; the constable slunk away, trying to hide his handcuffs under his coat-tails as he went; Mr. Majilton departed, looking like a barn-door chanticleer who has been out in the rain, and the Palace Heights people considered the whole matter as an excellent joke.

But the detective policeman who waited at the Grand Central Depot for the down train, and didn't find his prisoner after all, did not participate in that opinion. And neither did Mr. Majilton, when the bills came in for his little bit of officiousness.

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