

Mistaken Identity

One evening while in the billiard room of a Dieppe hotel, a young man invited me to join him. I consented, and we played for an hour or so, after which we went up to his room, smoked and played piquet.— He remarked while playing that we looked so much alike we might be taken for brothers. I had not especially remarked the likeness between us till now, but it was not very great. The similitude merely consisted in both of us wearing a rather long red beard, and hair the same color; but, then, his eyes were blue, mine gray, and he had a scar over his left eye. Still, one of us might have been taken for the other at a distance.

We played till midnight, and I left him, going to my room; but an indescribable feeling came over me, and I could not sleep. I tossed about in my bed, then got up, lit a cigar, and sat at my window, looking down on the “Quai Henri Quatre,” smoking.

It had just struck two from the church of St. Jacques, when I saw a carriage drive up to the door, and three men got out and entered the hotel. I wondered where they could have come from in a carriage at that time of night. I sat smoking and thinking, when a light tap came to my door; I unlocked it; it was my friend with whom I had been playing billiards. He had a valise in his hand, and appeared in a hurry, but not the least excited.

“They have just sent a carriage for me; my father is not expected to live till morning; take care of this for me until to-morrow,” he said, leaving the valise in my room.

All this passed so quickly I had not time to think, and he passed down stairs, and I did not dream of following him, being undressed, I went back to the window and saw the carriage drive off rapidly. Then I said to myself, “Why did he not take the valise with him, and as he had a carriage?” but then, I thought he had needs to travel quickly, and did not wish to be bothered with luggage. I was not long smoking and thinking, when another rap was at my door.

I opened it, and a tall, military-looking personage walked in, while another had come in my windows from the balcony. I was handcuffed almost before I had time to speak; then another gentleman walked in. The tall gentleman said: “Sir, you are arrested on the charge of murder, so please keep as quiet as you can.”

I nearly fainted. The idea of my being arrested as a murderer! I sank into a chair while one of them said to me: “I’m glad you fetched your luggage with you, sir; much obliged to you; for you’ve saved us a heap of trouble. Why, we’ve been following that leather valise at the door for the last few days; but we always come up with our game.”

“That is not my valise,” I said; “that belongs to a gentleman down stairs.”

“See here, young man,” said the tall detective, “the less about that the better. You may tell what you like now, but you’ll be contradicting yourself by-and-by.”

“But I tell you it is not mine; I am not a murderer, and I protest against this arrest and outrage upon my liberty,” I said. The other detective interrupted me.

“Young man,” said he, “it’s a pity you were not brought up to the law business; you would have made a first class shyster. We’ll give you a chance to talk to the judge when we get back to Paris, but you can’t talk to us.”

In the meantime the tall detective had forced open the valise, and after some searching found three diamond studs, very like those I had seen on the young man in the gambling saloon. I felt myself growing pale.

“I say, Henri, I thought we were on the right track,” he said. “Let us search him now.”

They then commenced to search my clothes, took out everything from my pockets, and at last came to the watch.

“Young man, I’m afraid it will go hard with you,” he said.

[I] tried to explain, but it was of no use. They made me dress myself, took every thing they could find belonging to me in the room, and I was marched down stairs between them. They brought me into the parlor of the hotel, and two of them stayed with me, while the other went out to see if the carriage was all right as he said. A sudden thought struck me, I said that was the young man’s carriage—he who had left me the valise. The detective only smiled. I told him what had passed, and how I had seen the carriage driven away. A thought seemed also to have struck him. The detective who went after the carriage now came in; the other whispered something hurriedly to him, and he went quickly out again.

After this I was brought up stairs to my room. They bolted the windows and locked the door. All this had been done so quietly, and in such a short space of time that no one but the hotel-keeper and a few waiters, knew anything was passing.

They then procured paper and ink and the tall agent said: “Now if we are mistaken, or if it should happen that you are only an accomplice, tell us all you know truthfully and you may get off much easier. I have my opinion about that valise,” he added, “but tell me truly, how did you come in possession of the watch?”

I told him all. He smiled significantly, and when I had finished said: “Well, you may be innocent, but I suppose you are aware that the young man who was found with his throat cut, is the same who pledged you that watch, and whose diamond studs, which you must have remarked that night, have been found in your valise, or that of your friend as you call it. Now, why did you not make it known that you had the watch, when you must have guessed it belonged to Marietta Gaudin, the former mistress of the murdered man, to whom he had made it a present, but who returned it?”

I told him, I had thought of doing so; but I had seen by the papers that she had been arrested as an accomplice, and I had no particular wish to get myself mixed up in the affair.

The truth now flashed across my mind. The man who had left me the valise sought to shift the

murder upon my shoulders, and he was the murderer.

I shuddered.

The agent now told me he had sent after the other man, and that he would no doubt be arrested before morning. I asked him how he would know which way the carriage went. He replied: “Why, you see, it is a frosty night; my agent will get on a horse, follow the tracks of the carriage, and will probably overtake it before two hours, if he has left the town, as there is but one road leading to Rouen, and no trains leave here before 8 o’clock to-morrow morning, at which hour you and I will start for Paris; so if you have an inclination to sleep you can do so.”

I slept but little that night. The next morning we left for Paris. I was allowed the privilege of a newspaper, and could not help smiling as I looked over the news, rumors, and facts of the great murder, which editors had hashed up for their morning readers. After reading I slept most of the way, dreaming of diamond studs, prisons, hotels, valises, and *agents de police*, and wondered at the reality when I awoke, only to find the gray eyes of the agent fixed upon me—these eyes that looked so bright, though they had not closed in sleep for perhaps two nights before he had arrested me.

We arrived in Paris at last, and I was at once conveyed to prison.

That very day a young lady came into my cell, accompanied by an *agent de police*, in whom I recognized the one with the golden hair, whom I had seen in the gambling saloon in the Rue des Petits Champs.

The agent said, pointing to me, “Do you recognize that man?” She replied without hesitation that she did.

“Well, we are ready to take your deposition, mademoiselle,” the agent added, “Henri come and witness this.” A turnkey entered. The young lady commenced in a silver voice as follows: “I first saw this man in a *maison de jeu* in the Rue des Petits Champs; he was playing at the same table as the murdered man, whom I have also recognized at the morgue. Sometimes they would leave the table and take their refreshments together in the saloon. They drank in company several times, and had some private conversation. The prisoner left the house before the murdered man, who did not leave until two hours later, and had not won much that night.”

This deposition she signed with her name, Eugene Domont.

Here the interview ended, and I was left alone to reflect.

I heard the next day from one of the keepers that the friend who had left his valise with me, had been captured at La Forge, near Rouen, where he had made a desperate resistance, but had been overpowered.

I spoke to the tall agent and asked him to recommend me a good lawyer. He did so, and I sent for him. In the meantime the agent said the other prisoner was much like me, with the exception that

he wore a moustache, while I wore a beard. I remarked: "He had a beard, too, when I saw him last."

"Oh, we know all that," said the agent. "When he entered the hotel he saw that his game was up, so he put his valise in your room, cut off his beard, trimmed his moustache, went straight to our carriage which was waiting, and told the driver coolly to drive him to another hotel, then paid and discharged him. Of course the driver never suspected anything, as he thought the murderer was one in my party. But the coolest part of the business was that he came on as far as Rouen on the same train with ourselves, at least so he himself says. In his room at the hotel we found a large clasp-knife, with the blood dried in the interstices; also the hair he had cut off."

The agent then told me the prisoner had confessed; and in his confession had stated that he had followed me from Rouen to Dieppe, to shift the murder on me, as I looked so much like him, and as he had seen me leave the gambling-house, while he lay in wait for the murdered man, and as he knew the detectives were on his track.

Next day, through the kindness of the agent and the efforts of my lawyer, I was released on bail. I appeared at the trial, which was very long, and was called several times to the stand.

The clue the detectives discovered the murderer by, was the fact that they had found two letters on the murdered man from Marietta Gaudoin to Claude Belm.— By means of these they found Marietta, and from her obtained information that Claude had been in the habit of gambling. Then they found he had been in the house at which I met him. I was at once suspected, and the agent started after me, having my description, which coincided exactly with the murderer, were it not that he had a scar over his right eye.

The detective then got on my track; and it so happened the murderer saw me at Rouen, where his keen eyes soon recognized me, and determined to throw his guilt over me, thinking no doubt that any personal resemblance to him would help to that end. Little thought he, however, that the *agents de police* were following so closely in my footsteps, and that he was making his own capture the more easy.

The trial was at length over, and as I stood there while the Judge sentenced him to death, I shuddered when I thought of the quiet game of cards he and I played together, at the dead hour of midnight in his own room, where he might easily have murdered me, had he felt so inclined, as I never carried my arms. I shuddered again hoping he would be forgiven.

He saw me and a bitter smile flitted across his face. He beckoned me to come to him. I went over and he whispered hoarsely in my ear: "Do you forgive me? I played my last hand with you and did not cheat. Adieu."

I felt his cold hand in mine; he pressed it and said, "Gambling has brought me here! Beware! Farewell!"

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