

A Set of Diamonds

The central figure of this brief sketch is a jewel-case—a case of magnificent diamonds, which came nigh costing me dear. You see I was vastly proud of these diamonds, having bought them in Paris during the great International Exposition, and, at the time my little adventure occurred, it would have required strong evidence to convince me that the country held anything so fine in their way. But never mind about that; they were a suburb set. Of this there was no sort of doubt, and so there was no sort of doubt, and so thought my jeweler, to whom I carried them one day, and who handled them with a good deal of affection, pointing out to me beauties which evinced his good taste and experience. He closed the case with what sounded to me like a sigh, and I left the shop with increased appreciation of my prize.

And here commenced my adventure.

A gentleman accosted me, a few paces from my friend's door.

“Sir,” said he, with a look of profound enthusiasm, which was lit up by an almost imperceptible smile of courteous blandness, “I feel so much under obligations for even the hasty glance at your incomparable jewelry which I have just enjoyed, that I must so far presume to thank you here and now for the privilege.”

If there was anything about this admiring gentleman's manner just then which would have revealed him to an accomplished detective as something different from what he seemed, I did not see it. So spontaneous and enthusiastic a tribute to my splendid diamonds from one who certainly at that moment presented the aspect of an accomplished gentleman, quite won my heart, and I responded in a manner which seemed to me appropriate.

Being thus encouraged, my new acquaintance soon had my attention absorbed by stories of the wonderful works of the jeweler's art which he had seen during his travels through Europe.

“But,” said he, at the close of his glowing narrations, “I must confess that for uniqueness, combined with beauty and brilliancy, I think that set, of which you are the fortunate possessor, must certainly, in some important respects, take the palm. I have seen more costly sets and many which, at first sight, might take the eye for elaborateness; but for artistic merit— ah, sir!” exclaimed this enthusiast, interrupting himself, “you must think me some light hearted simpleton to go on in this way about a few jewels; yet, if you had been over the world as I have, you would perhaps be carried away just as I am this moment.”

I assured him that I thoroughly appreciated his sentiments, and, far from accounting him a light-headed simpleton, I had already learned to esteem him as a person of highly cultivated taste.

Finding me thus inclined to honor the drafts he was disposed to draw on my vanity, he proceeded to inform me that he had at his jeweler's a set which, while he would not pretend to compare it with mine, yet if I were to see it, I would readily acknowledge it to be of a very rare and curious workmanship.

I expressed a desire to see these jewels, which, I assured him, I had already prejudged to be of marked excellence.

“Nothing would give me greater pleasure,” he responded. “If you have the time, we will go immediately.”

I assured him it would be very agreeable.

“I am compelled to take you to somewhat humble quarters,” he said, with a deprecatory but winning smile. “But the truth is, Roshong is a marvelous genius in this business, and I know of no one with whom I could trust my jewels after having once tested his skill. I have often told him that he could make his fortune in Regent Street, but, like the odd genius that he is, he sticks to his old stand because, as he says, he grew up there from a little stupid boy.”

Thus entertaining me with his colloquial powers, my companion conducted me to a low shop in Chatham Row, where a tolerable variety of jewelry was displayed. I was duly introduced to the proprietor, Mr. Roshong, who appeared very much like a German Jew.

“I have brought this gentleman to examine my diamonds,” he said.

Roshong looked a little dubious.

My new acquaintance smiled.

“Do not fear,” he said. “You may bring them out and exhibit them with perfect freedom; and I do not doubt that he will be pleased to show you in return a set of diamonds as it has not heretofore been my fortune to behold.”

“Py all means, my tear sir! If you have der fine shewels, I moost see dem. Der exshelent shewels; dey turn my poor head.”

I drew my prize from my pocket with a heart palpitation with pleasure, for thus will things which one’s vanity reduces to mere baubles make an arrant fool of him.

“Ah, mein herr! I will no more ply mein profession! For what can poor Roshong do after beholding der sight like dat? But hold! I vill show der admirable shewels of mein friend, in von case so like der von dat is so happy as to contain your marvelous diamonds, dat you no dell der difference between dem.”

Whereupon he went to the rear of his shop, and soon returned with a case exactly like my own, and laying it upon the counter beside mine, he opened it, displaying what appeared to be a superior set of diamonds.

I was free in my expressions of admiration, determined not to be outdone in generous recognition of the merits of another’s jewels, which he evidently cherished as much as I did mine.

But presently an incident occurred which caused the scales of vanity and stupidity to drop from my eyes.

After having indulged very freely in mutual admiration of the sets, placed side by side, we fell into an interesting conversation on the various phases of the jeweler's art, until, almost unconsciously to myself, the dusk began to settle in.

Suddenly, while we were in the midst of a discourse on the marvelous performances of a certain European jeweler, whose name I do not at this moment recall, Roshong started forward, and, staring out of the window he cried:

“Vat vas dat striking mein window?”

I turned to follow in the direction of the German's stare; but my eye was instantly caught by a movement which was of much more interest to me, at least. It was not so dark but that I could see objects reflected in the glass side of a countercase, which occupied a separate and somewhat prominent position between us and the window.

Now, as I looked toward the window, I saw reflected in this side the quick and truly lightning-like movement of the admirer of my diamonds, who was in my rear. This movement was to shift the position of the jewel-cases, which had been closed just before, our examination being finished.

As I before remarked, the scales dropped from my eyes. My urbane friend was revealed to me in his true character.

I was now as rash as I had heretofore been foolish. Turning upon the man, I seized my exchanged case in one hand, and clinching the other, I shook it in his face, and exclaimed:

“I see it, you scoundrel!— I see it! You have got me in here to rob me! I see it all. You may laugh at me for being a fool, but not with my diamonds in your pocket! You're a gang! I know you— you're a gang!”

The scoundrel, seeing his game was up, uttered an oath, and cried out, “Roshong, close the door!” Then leaping upon me, he made a grab for the diamonds with his right hand, at the same time dealing me a powerful blow with his left.

I staggered back, still clinging to the case, and my assailant followed me up.

He was about delivering another blow, which I saw was to be a wicked one, when the jeweler, by some happy miss proved that two may be weaker than one; for, rushing up behind me, he made such a bungling attempt to assist his accomplice, that the next instant found us all lying on the floor together.

By good fortune I rolled out almost instantly from the other two, and being myself a man of much vigor and quickness, I leaped to my feet, and still grasping the diamonds in my left hand,

seized a stool with my right, and springing to the show-window, smashed it into a thousand pieces; then, leaping through, I cried out for the police.

You will readily believe me when I tell you that there was a rush for that shop such as had never been made for it before. My urbane friend and the discursive German picked themselves up and made for the rear, but the latter who was an unwieldy sort of fellow, was almost immediately caught; and the other, after a hard chase, suffered the same fate. They both found quarters at Chatham, which, for poor Roshong, who was so attached to his time-honored shop, must have been the cause of much homesickness. As for myself, I still keep my diamonds, but with due restraint of spirit.

The Long Islander [NY], May 22, 1874