

## *Madame Dubois*

---

“How do you like these photographs, Carl?”

“They’re lovely! But there’s an old look about the hair that I don’t understand. What is it?”

“Why, that’s powder. You certainly have seen me with my hair so.”

“But never before in a photograph. I like the effect, however. You’ll give me one of these, darling?”

“Oh, yes. Take one for yourself and another for your sister. I promised her one long ago, and I would rather you sent it.”

Acting on this permission, I took two photographs, laying one between the leaves of my notebook and slipping the other into my breast pocket, to be transferred to my album on the first opportunity.

“By the way, Carl,” said Maude, “has Mrs. Ellis heard anything more of her diamond ring?”

“No, nothing satisfactory; but it was undoubtedly stolen, and I am going to place the matter in the hands of the police, for she is in great trouble about it, as the ring was her husband’s last gift before his death.”

“I do hope she may recover it.”

“I hope so, too; but I was forgetting to tell you, Maude, that Mrs. Ellis is going to [Wildbad] tomorrow, and I have promised to accompany her there and see her comfortably installed in a good hotel.”

“What time will you return?”

“The same evening, but quite late.”

“Then you will not be here in time to go with us to the concert tomorrow evening. I’m sorry for that.”

“I’m heartily sorry, too, Maude. If there was any way of giving up this trip to Wildbad—”

“Oh, I would not have you change your plans. I’m sure we shall do very well—though of course, as we are strangers here, it would be more pleasant to have your escort. Go with Mrs. Ellis, and make your mind quite easy about us. She has been such a kind friend to your mother that you cannot show her too much attention.”

In case it has not been already been surmised, it will be well to say that the above mentioned young people—Maude Armitage and your humble servant, Carleton French—were, at the date of this narrative, affianced lovers. We had been engaged about a year, and were looking forward to the return of Maude’s father from Russia, when our marriage would be celebrated.

Upon leaving Maude, I went directly to the office of the chief of police in order to lay before that functionary the case of the missing ring. The story was as follows: Mrs. Ellis had lost a very valuable diamond ring. The loss occurred in this way. Some time previous, she had occasion to advertise for a French governess for her children.

One morning, soon after this notice was published, Mrs. Ellis was engaged in rearranging her jewel case. While the various ornaments were scattered over her dressing table, a lady visitor was announced “Madame Dubois.”

“I do not know the lady,” said Mrs. Ellis to the servant. “But show her up here, as I am afraid to leave all my jewelry unguarded.”

Shortly after a lady, remarkably handsome, and very well dressed, entered the rooms. She had all the finished manner of a French woman, and her easy flow of conversation and perfect self-possession charmed my friend.

After an exchange of politeness Mrs. Ellis was astonished to discover that this fascinating young woman had come to apply for a situation as governess to her children. Though greatly pleased with her, she did not like to engage her without further consideration, but agreed to let her know her final decision on the following day.

A few moments after Madame Dubois’s departure, Mrs. Ellis missed her ring. She remembers distinctly her taking it off her finger as Madame Dubois entered the room, and she was forced to the conclusion that her refined and lady-like visitor was the thief.

As I concluded this statement, I asked the officer’s opinion of the case.

“Did your friend give any description of this Madame Dubois?” said he.

“Yes; she describes her as being a tall, handsome woman, with dark eyes and light hair. Do you know anything of her?”

“If she is the person whom I suppose her to be,” replied the officer, “adventuress and swindler,” are the mildest terms which can be applied to her. Here in Baden-Baden she is notorious. For weeks I have been hearing complaints against her from merchants and others, whom she has robbed of quantities of lace, jewels, &c; but she has such consummate tact that it is impossible to trace her. Here is her photograph, which you can show to your friend. If she identifies it as the likeness of her suspicious visitor, you can hand it over to the detective, whom I will send to you in the morning, if you desire it.”

I took the photograph and placed it in my notebook. If Madame Dubois in the least resembled it, she was a most strikingly handsome woman. After a little more conversation I left the officer, and proceeded to Mrs. Ellis' hotel. I found her absorbed in the mysteries and miseries of packing preparatory to her next day's journey.

"Can you stop long enough to look at a photograph?" said I.

"Yes, indeed, I shall be glad of an excuse to rest for awhile. Who is it? Maude, I suppose. Why Carl! That's my mythical governess, Madame Dubois! How did you come by her likeness?"

"Thereby hangs a tale my friend," said I. "As you identify this photograph, I am going to put a detective on the track of your slippery visitor, and if possible, recover your ring."

"Oh, how kind of you, Carl, to take all this trouble! I shall be always grateful to you, whether you succeed or not."

"We will succeed, unless the woman has cleared out altogether from this part of the country," said I, as I replaced the photograph in my notebook.

Early the following morning a detective appeared for orders. As I was still in my bed, he was shown to my room, and I hastily gave him his instructions. To save trouble, I told him to take Madame Dubois's photograph from my notebook on the writing desk.

"It's lying loosely between the leaves and is the only one there, so you can't mistake," said I. "And now go. Spare no trouble or expense in this matter. What is your name?"

"Muller, sir," answered the man.

He then left the room, and I turned over for another nap, feeling then profoundly indifferent as to his success or failure.

\* \* \* \* \*

"It is an extra concert at the Kursall this evening, mamma, and the people will dress more than usual for it. What shall I wear? I'm so tired of those everlasting three best dresses."

"I suggest Maude, that you wear your white embroidered muslin, with that black lace shawl draped over it. Then remedy the lack of color by some of these red camellias in your hair."

"Oh, yes, that is the dress I wore when those last photographs were taken which Carl admires so much. I will powder my hair, too, as it was then."

Maude followed her mother's advice in the matter of her toilet, and as the two ladies mingled with the brilliant throng in the concert room that evening, many were the whispered words of admiration called forth by her grace and loveliness.

“It is a great pity that Carleton could not come with us this evening,” remarked Miss Armitage, during a pause in the music. “When do you think he will return?”

“Tonight, but too late to join us here, I’m afraid. Mamma,” continued Maude, a moment after, “do you see that queer little man over by the window, who is watching us so closely? He has a card of some sort, which he looks at when his eyes are not fixed on us. I do wish he would stop; it is very disagreeable to be stared at so, especially by an ugly little creature like him.”

“Yes, he is certainly a very impertinent fellow; but don’t take any notice of him, and perhaps he will stop.”

“Oh, mamma! The little horror is leveling his opera glasses at us now.”

Just then the appearance of the universal favorite, Marle Monbelli, attracted the two ladies now, and Maude forgot the existence of her apparent admirer. As they were leaving the concert-room, however, she whispered uneasily:

“Mamma that horrid little man is close beside us, and is going to speak to us, I do believe. Do let us hurry on and escape him.”

This plan was frustrated, however, by the said obnoxious person laying his hand on Maude’s arm, and saying:

“Madame, you will please step into this anteroom. I must have a word with you in private.”

The two ladies were much frightened but to avoid a scene in public, went into the room specified.

Muller, the detective (for it was he), closed the door, and produced a photograph, saying to Maude:

“Madame, is that a photograph of yourself?”

“It certainly is, but I beg to know how you became possessed of it?” said she angrily.

“This is not the point, madame. You are my prisoner, and here is the warrant for your arrest.”

“Man, are you crazy that you dare to address my daughter in that way?” cried Mrs. Armitage.

“Not at all, madame. I am only fulfilling my duty. May I request you to come this way?”

In spite of tears, prayers, and protestations, the ladies were led to a cab by a policeman and the detective. They met no one on the way to whom they could appeal, and in a state of hopeless bewilderment were imprisoned without any idea of their crime, their only consolation being that they were not separated.

The morning after my return from Wildbad, the detective met me in the street, and calmly remarked:

“The bird is caught, sir—two of them, in fact, as there is an old party with the prisoner who claims to be her mother. Will you come and identify her?”

Feeling a great deal of curiosity to see this Madame Dubois, as well as anxiety concerning the ring, I willingly accompanied the detective.

We soon found ourselves before a heavy door, which, with an air of great importance, my companion proceeded to unlock and throw open the door.

But what was my horror and consternation when Maude—my own darling Maude—rushed into my arms with a scream of delight!

“You nefarious rascal!” roared I to the now bewildered Muller—“what have you done?”

“Followed your orders, sir,” answered he, laconically. “The lady herself declared this to be her photograph, and one can see that it is a perfect likeness.”

In a storm of rage, I snatched the photograph from his hand. By Jove! It was none other than Maude’s sweet face that looked up at me.

“But how did this fellow get hold of this? I can swear, by all that is holy, Maude, that the photograph you gave me is at home, in my album, at this moment!”

“But the other photograph, Carl, dear—the one I gave you for your sister?” asked Maude.

“I see it now!” groaned I, covering my face with my hands. “What an unpardonable idiot I have been! I forgot totally the existence of that second photograph, and this is the result. By ill-luck the man found yours first, in my notebook, and as I told him there was no other there, of course he did not look farther. Mrs. Armitage—Maude—can you ever forgive me for the suffering my carelessness had caused you?”

Undeserving wretch that I was, I was nevertheless forgiven.

All that now remained was to soothe the wounded feelings of the crest-fallen Muller, who had been much elated over the idea of having done a remarkably clever thing, and was now feeling correspondingly depressed, but the assurance of his complete exoneration from all blame, together with a liberal *douceur*, soon raised his fallen spirits, and with the genuine photograph he recommenced the search for Madame Dubois—a search, however, which was never successful, as from that day to this nothing further has been heard of this accomplished scoundrel.

*The Indiana [PA] Progress*, October 26, 1876