

# The Strange Adventures of Christopher Poe

Series of Strange Cases Solved in Secret by a Banker-Detective  
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## The DUCHESS DIAMOND

Quite a part of the mellow Venetian night was the short, wiry, deep-chested figure standing by a pillar in front of San Marco. It was a night to linger and listen, to expand and glow in the moonlight. From the Grand canal came quavery foreign cries, the soft dip of oars, glints of lights, and wisps of melody. It was a night to win one from bed, a night dimming all day; a Whistlerian nocturne.

The old San Marco clock boomed ominously twenty-one times, proclaiming the hour of nine after the oldest fashion giving each hour of the twenty-four its rightful count. And with the last re-echoing boom the piazzi band burst into a rousing military strain, standing in the center of the square, surrounded by a throng of night-pleasers; for the Venetian season was on, and the city throated.

The lonely-looking figure in front of San Marco stirred, stepped out, and strolled toward the music, slipping into a chair before a table in an outdoor cafe.

"Cafe noir!" he ordered from an obsequious waiter, and sat musing between the music and a hilarious party of Americans drinking champagne at the next table.

"You can tell an American wherever he is," cried the modestly dressed young fellow who was buying the bottles, flushed with excitement and wine. "And a man from Manhattan you can recognize by the cut of his coat, his cravat, smooth face, and keen eyes."

"That is the American eye for money and business, I presume," drawled an Englishman in the party.

"We have to earn ours," answered the flushed youth. "The majority of our families aren't old enough to inherit from. The aggressive American spirit leaves its print on all of us. Do you think you could mistake one of us for a whiskered Frenchman, an oily Italian, a stolid German, or a tight-tongued Englishman?"

"I can recognize you because this is your independence day, I presume," smiled the Englishman.

"Fourth of July ought to make a man think of his country. You people have bank holidays, Christmas and New Year; that's all. Did you ever see a regular Fourth of July celebration?"

"Oh I know; beastly vulgar, charmingly Chinese; fireworks, songs, speeches—"

"Wait! We'll show you a Fourth of July celebration." As the band stopped, the young American jumped to his chair and waved his hat.

"Hurrah for Fourth of July!" he cried. "Americans! Americans! We're about to jolt old Venice with a real Fourth of July celebration. Anybody who can sing 'Yankee Doodle' or 'Dixie,' come over here and help. United we stand! This is our day, gather around, and we may even find somebody who knows the words to 'America.'"

He sat down amid reproving glances from the conservative members of his party and pardonable patriotic grins from the others.

"Hurrah for Fourth of July! We're coming!" came a cry from the other side of the square, and a minute later four young college fellows burst upon the table of Americans.

"Welcome to our city; my name's Bowen, Belasco Bowen. Glad to see you on this auspicious day; sit down and quaff the sizzling fireworks drink, pyrotechnical champagne. Forward, Americans!" He beckoned to the crowd about the band, and a number of recruits came.

"There's a New Yorker!" cried Belasco Bowen, spying the wiry little man sitting at the next table sipping his cafe noir a little excitedly. "I can tell him by his derby. Come on in; the watered wine is fine."

The lonely-looking man picked up his cup, and joined the party, introducing himself as Mr. Hardy—none other than Christopher Poe.

"Now all together!" cried Bowen, "we'll sing 'Yankee Doodle' and surprise the natives. One, two, three! 'Yankee Doodle came to town, a riding—'" He picked up an empty bottle and waved it as a baton in time to the lively song led by the college men supported by a dozen others. Passing Europeans smiled indulgently at the mad Americans, and quite a crowd gathered to enjoy the refreshing novelty.

"Come on!" cried Bowen, as the song came to an abrupt finish. "We'll make a raid on all the stores around here, and see what we can scrape up in the way of fireworks. Then we'll hire a launch and take a trip on the canal."

His enthusiasm was contagious; of the score of Americans only three wished to drop out, and while the collegians rushed off to find a Chinese store which might furnish fireworks, Bowen banteringly persuaded Mr. and Mrs. Van Wendt, the chief dissenters, that their daughter Constance would enjoy the spectacle and that it was their duty as Americans to go along.

By the time the scouts had returned loaded with Roman candles, nigger-chasers, good old-fashioned fire-crackers, candles and lanterns, the number had swelled to thirty. A launch and a polygot cafe orchestra were hired, and amid shouts of "Three Cheers for

Uncle Sam," snatches of "Dixie," and other evidences of patriotism, the gay party wound up the Grand canal, setting off fireworks, making speeches, singing and doing a hundred mad pranks that shocked the staid respectable Venetians plying back and forth in their somber gondolas, and made matter for ambitious reporters and correspondents.

The canal rang with uncorked patriotism, and those who had been longest from home were wildest in their demonstrations.

As the gay ride drew to an end, Belasco Bowen gathered up the remaining Roman candles, and, picking his way to the bow, steadied himself in the rocking boat, grasped a stick of punk from M. Van Wendt's hand, and touched off all the candles in a bunch.

He lurched awkwardly with a dip of the boat, and a shower of sparks scattered over Constance Van Wendt.

"My dress!" she cried, frantically fighting off the sparks.

A dozen hands flew to her aid, and the sparks were instantly extinguished. Belasco Bowen apologized sincerely, and no harm being done, returned to waving his candles over the water out of harm's way.

Constance Van Wendt was excitedly arranging her attire with the help of her solicitous mother.

"Your diamond? The Duchess Diamond!" cried Mrs. Van Wendt suddenly. "Where is it?"

Miss Van Wendt's hand went to her throat, groping for the chain on which the famous stone had swung. "Why, it's gone!" She felt among the frills of her dress, her face anxiously lined and ghastly white in the glare of Bowen's falling rockets.

The deck was searched, Miss Van Wendt's clothes were shaken out, and when the launch was finally moored at San Marco the whole party felt to examining the floor-planks for crevices.

But nothing came to light, until Belasco Bowen, beside himself with anxiety for having indirectly caused the loss, caught a glint of gold on the gunwale, and found the chain hanging down, on the outside, almost touching the water.

Van Wendt grasped the thin chain and jerked it off.

"The stone slid into the water, Constance!" he cried, holding up the finely linked chain. "It's gone down to the bottom of the Grand canal!"

"I must replace it!" cried Belasco Bowen anxiously. "It was my stupid awkwardness that caused it all. In fighting the fire some one must have accidentally torn it from her throat."

"The chain was specially made, there is a platinum wire running through it," explained Van Wendt, holding it up. "I thought it was safe." He passed it into the hand of Christopher Poe. "See! it must have caught on something. An awful wrench. Didn't you feel it, Constance?"

In the excitement and everything," she murmured. "I don't know what I felt."

The party, already having dwindled to a dozen, fled sadly into a cafe for supper.

"I've heard of the stone," whispered one of the college youths, as the patriotic party took seats. "It's worth a cool hundred thousand. Van Wendt is the Chicago grain operator, you know."

All the madness of celebration had flickered out, and the remaining tourists sat hovering over Venetian waters, hanging on the words of Van Wendt.

"There is just a chance that somebody might have picked up the stone," suggested Bowen, glancing about the table thoughtfully.

"No, there is no chance, the chain was trailing in the water; I should have had the stone fastened to it, but the jeweler said it must slide, and I let him have his way. But, come, don't let this put a damper on us. Let's all have a nightcap and break up."

Half an hour later they remained at the table only Belasco Bowen and Christopher Poe.

"Mr. Hardy, what would you do in a position like mine?" asked Bowen, earnestly addressing the New York banker, whose affected simplicity and sincerity had won his confidence.

"You see, I am morally to blame for the loss, but the stone could not be duplicated. I might send them another anonymously to make up for it."

"Mr. Van Wendt seemed satisfied that it was only an unavoidable accident; I am sure he can stand the loss," replied Christopher Poe.

"You don't think he'll harbor any resentment toward me?"

"Why, no. It was all in the game. He came along with us, and the accident happened, that's all. You are no more responsible than I am."

"But I urged the Van Wendts to join us," said Bowen ruefully.

"It's mighty unfortunate, but I'd forget it if I were you. You started a good time, and we all enjoyed it; let's think of that instead of the unfortunate climax."

gone, let the dead rest. Let's change the subject. Tell me something to see in Venice; it's all new to me, and you seem quite at home."

"The galleries and castles of course you've seen?"

"Yes, but isn't there some slumming or something to do in this city of bridges? I've been looking for somebody who could show me an exciting place or two. Something different, that's what I want."

"I'll take you to the fish-markets tomorrow, if you like. It's quite a sight," offered Bowen.

"Bully! Would you? I like that sort of thing, and it isn't often one meets a kindred spirit."

"That's right," replied Bowen heartily.

"Now forget all about that stone," advised Poe in parting. "You are blameless, and don't let it worry you. We will meet here at ten tomorrow."

They went to their separate hotels, and before going to bed Christopher Poe sent a cable to his friend Burns.

Was the name of the suspect in the Farmers' National burglary Belasco Bowen? I remember he posed as a society chap. When did he sail from New York?

On returning from an interesting excursion with Bowen to the fish-market next day, Christopher Poe found the following cipher message awaiting him.

Right. Saw a newspaper notice last month that after a house party at Van Wendt's he went aboard the same boat with them.

Having torn up the reassuring note, Christopher Poe went to his room and sat for an hour concentrating on the missing Duchess Diamond. Then he sent word to Bowen inviting him to dinner that night.

Poe turned the talk to a glowing appreciation of Naples after the meal, and before he and Bowen parted it had been decided that they would take the trip together.

At Naples Christopher Poe managed so that he occupied a room adjoining Bowen's and, making his interests conform with the younger man's, he was soon on an intimate footing with him.

If Bowen had the Duchess Diamond, which Poe believed he had, surely the possession of it seemed to bother him little. He went about the business of enjoying himself as thoroughly as any American tourist and never showed the slightest degree of nervousness, always seeking Poe's company and ever ready for diversion.

They had spent an interesting exciting week at Naples, when one night

So far he had nothing tangible against Bowen except his record, as affirmed by Burns, his interest in urging the Van Wendts to go on the wild Fourth of July excursion, and his awkward movement which showered Miss Van Wendt with sparks. Since then Poe had seen nothing to substantiate his suspicion, and he was surprised that Bowen could act innocently so perfectly. If he really had the diamond, how did he figure to get it past the Customs in New York? In Bowen's manner he found no confession of guilt; the young fellow acted naturally and confidently.

Placing the wine-bottles in the bottom of his steamer trunk, Christopher Poe went to bed. Next day both were occupied in making preparations for sailing, and it was only at dinner-time that they met. After dinner, as they were sitting opposite each other in the quaint, cool lobby of their little Italian hotel, Christopher Poe suddenly glided down at his left hand.

"How'd I get that?" he cried, lifting his little finger, to show the ragged nail, torn jaggedly across, exposing the quick.

He fumbled in his pocket with his other hand.

"Got a knife?" he asked abruptly, glancing at Bowen.

"No, not here. What's the matter?"

"I've torn my nail. I used to carry one of those nail-clippers. They're handy. You don't happen to have a pair?"

"No," answered Bowen, absently, then he leaned forward with interest. "Why, yes, by George, I guess I have!" he cried. "I seldom use them. I've slipped his fingers into an upper waistcoat-pocket and produced a compact steel nail-clipper."

"Thanks, very much," replied Poe, wincing a bit from the irritation as he worked at his nail.

"There, it's all right now. Those are handy things to have." He examined the heavy, sharp blades.

"I find them useful, but I usually forget I'm carrying them," replied Bowen quickly, reaching out, and dropping the nail-clippers into his pocket nonchalantly.

Next day they sailed early on a gigantic, fast boat for New York, both evidently glad to bid goodbye to vacation and get back to real work.

Belasco Bowen seemed particularly elated, but in the afternoon, as the ship struck into the sea and a pronounced rolling motion was felt, he retired to his stateroom, which he occupied alone. Christopher Poe remained sitting in the smoking-room.

thinking over the disappearance of the Duchess Diamond, and piecing together bits of circumstantial evidence against Bowen.

Half an hour later he strolled up to the wireless room on the promenade deck, and to his surprise, as he entered, found Belasco Bowen just handing over a message to the operator.

Bowen glanced up sharply at Poe's entrance, then smiled easily, remarking: "I was afraid I'd be a bit sea-sick, but I couldn't stand it in my berth, so I strolled up on deck."

Poe had a fleeting glimpse of the wireless message, the operator counted the words, and he was thrilled to find it written in cipher.

For the remainder of the day he strolled about on deck with Bowen, and just before bedtime drank with him one of the interesting black bottles of Barbera, finding it excellent.

"Do we stop at Quarantine to pick up the doctor?" asked Poe idly, as like all travelers they anticipantly discussed their arrival.

"No," answered Bowen quickly. "But we stop down to pick him up, and usually the Customs men come aboard there."

"Oh, yes, they row alongside in a boat and climb up a pilot's ladder, I remember."

"Usually just opposite the little Quarantine rock," added Bowen. "We run slow for about fifteen minutes, coasting just past Quarantine."

The New York banker was pleased to find that his companion had such exact information, and as a result, he began going to bed. Poe wrote a long message to his friend Burns in New York. The message was in cipher, and he slipped into the wireless office with it early next morning before many passengers were on deck.

The trip was pleasant, and Poe and Bowen were continually together except when Bowen stayed alone in his stateroom during periods of sea-sickness. Each night they drank together a bottle of the pleasant Italian wine, and those on board who noticed them wondered why they were inseparable.

The night before arriving in New York Belasco Bowen was particularly gay; all evidence of sea-sickness had passed, and he gave up the evening to cementing his friendship with Christopher Poe, and suggesting delightful little excursions they could make in New York.

Poe, too, was in good spirits, for he had received an answer to his elaborate instructions to Burns.

They met again after lunch next day, and New York was already in sight.

"We're getting in," beamed Bowen, sharing the bustling anticipation of the whole ship. "See?" he pointed to a far-off speck. "There's Quarantine, and it's only half an hour to dock from there."

"Land certainly looks good after all this time. Are you packed up?" queried Poe.

"No. Going down to finish now, it won't be difficult. Only a steamer-trunk and two grips. I guess I can squeeze everything into them."

He excused himself and went below, while Poe leaned over the rail thoughtfully, watching the little rock island gradually growing bigger against the horizon.

Ten minutes later Belasco Bowen rejoined him.

"Finished so soon?" queried Poe.

"Yes, got everything in but the last confounded bottle of that Barbera. We should have drunk two last night."

"But I had to get rid of mine," smiled Poe. "There's no fun in being delayed by having to pay duty on a little bottle of wine."

"By George, you're right. They'd be sure to stick me for it, and it would take an hour to go through all the red tape. Let's finish that bottle now. What do you say?" asked Bowen evenly.

"Why not? There's the old Statue of Liberty looming up, let's drink to her," offered Christopher Poe promptly.

Belasco Bowen whisked through the saloon and down to his berth, returning instantly with the bottle and a corkscrew.

"Steward," he called to a passing greyhound, "get me a couple of glasses, will you?"

The boat was already slowing up for Quarantine, and those of the passengers who had finished their packing were crowding to the port-rail to see the doctor and Customs men come aboard by the narrow rope-ladder.

"Let's get over on the other side, out of this crush," suggested Bowen. They sauntered to the deserted side of the ship, where the great Statue of Liberty stood in full view.

Belasco Bowen gazed off across the water, pointing out several small sailing-craft dotting the waves and bobbing about like corks.

"Isn't it beautiful?" he cried.

"Yes, but that life looks more romantic than it is. See those two fellows down there, alone in the big dory, handling those heavy oars; do you think they enjoy the jolly fishermen's life you read about?" queried Poe.

The boat in question was headed out to sea, and the two fishermen jerked frantically at their oars to avoid a possible collision with the great vessel.

Before Belasco Bowen could reply, the servile steward stepped up with the glasses.

Bowen ripped off the tin-foil cap on his bottle, slowly twisted the screw into the cork, pulled it out with an accustomed jerk and filled brimming glasses for Poe and himself. He placed the half-empty bottle in the scuppers where it would not tip over, and idly removed the cork from the screw as he smiled at Poe and proposed:

"We'll drink to the dangers of the sea and the pleasure of safe home-coming."

He slipped the corkscrew into his pocket, absently tossed the cork over the rail, and raised his glass to touch the rim of Poe's.

They drank, and Bowen refilled the glasses.

"And here's to the Goddess of Liberty," cried Poe, turning toward the gold glittering statue dimly outlined in the harbor. "May every man who deserves liberty have it."

"That's a funny toast," said Bowen awkwardly, glancing in slight confusion down into the water, where the two fishermen were drifting astern.

"I wonder how that figure of Liberty strikes a petty little smuggler bringing in valuable goods to defraud his country," mused Poe, staring ahead into the dim harbor.

Bowen glanced at him nervously. "What's come over you?" he asked haltingly.

"Why, nothing," replied the New York banker, turning to gaze ingenuously into the shifting eyes of his companion. "I was just wondering how you felt smuggling that Duchess Diamond."

"How I feel!" Bowen's eyebrows drew down narrowly. His face suddenly cleared, he glanced nervously into the water, and then laughed fully in Poe's face.

"And I've been wondering all along how it would feel to be an amateur detective who thinks he's worked up

a case and wins a fellow's friendship just to betray him at the finish. His upper lip curled contemptuously; no glance nervously back into the water.

"Oh, I knew you recognized me," said Poe. "Some of my baggage is marked with C. P., and I knew that wouldn't escape your sharp eyes. You've called me Hardy with rather elaborate exactness, thinking you had a joke on me. I didn't miss it, nor did I miss noticing your eagerness to have the Van Wendts join that wild party; I saw you were quick-handed, too, when you spilled the sparks over Miss Van Wendt, and nipped off the platinum wire with your little nail-clippers, on which I found the nick made in cutting the chain. The hand is quicker than the eye, but not quicker than the imagination."

"What the devil do you mean?" cried Bowen, putting down his glass, and turning with his back to the rail. "Do you accuse me of stealing the Duchess Diamond?"

"Yes, and with attempting to smuggle it into New York."

"Where have I got it concealed then?" cried Bowen, his hand sneaking toward his hip-pocket.

"Oh, don't trouble to find that little pearl-handled gun. I've seen it bulging out beneath your coat before. Look over there. Do you see that officer in white and those three in blue?" Poe pointed to a crowd of customs officers who had just climbed up to the ship's deck from the doctor's boat, and were already coming toward them.

Bowen's expression changed to one of terror.

"I cabled a friend of mine in New York to send customs-house officers on board at quarantine, and take you before you succeeded in smuggling in the Duchess Diamond."

"But I haven't got it; I never did have it. You can't prove a thing," cried Bowen excitedly, leaning threateningly toward Poe.

Poe turned, and signaled to the customs-house men, who hurried up. He replied evenly to Bowen:

"Of course you haven't it now; but I suspected your interest in those thick-necked wine-bottles. I noticed the corks were unusually large, and I experimented with one in my room. One of those corks would nicely conceal a big stone like the Duchess."

"But I have thrown all the corks away!" cried Bowen desperately, as the customs-house officers quietly surrounded him.

"Yes, you just threw the one containing the stone into the water, and your fishermen accomplices have picked it up by now and are making for shore this minute. Look!" He put his hand on Bowen's shoulder, and pointed toward the fishermen's boat, making for shore. At that moment a trim gray launch flying the police flag leaped out from behind the stern of the great ocean liner, and in a minute's time overhauled the big dory with the two dazed pseudo fishermen.

Bowen trembled as he saw the police board the boat and search his accomplices. He saw them, remove, after a struggle, a small object from the coat-pocket of the larger fisherman. Then Bowen turned to his captors, and his arms slack and limp, his lips quivering, said, "You've got me." His shifting eyes sought Poe's. "But how the devil did you know I planned to throw the cork overboard right here at quarantine?"

"That was easy," smiled the banker, as the officials in white slipped handcuffs over Bowen's wrists. "After I surprised you sending long code messages I questioned you about the boat, and found that you knew we slowed down at quarantine. I felt that was the most logical place for you to throw over the little cork. Your fishermen could row close while the doctor was being picked up, and if you threw the cork carefully it might land right in the boat, or at least near enough so it would float until they could pick it up unseen because the crowd would be watching the officials boarding on the other side. That is all. I just took a chance, same as you did when you pulled off that carefully planned little party of yours on the Grand canal."

On landing at the dock in New York, Christopher Poe looked for his friend Burns, anxious to clasp his hand after the lengthy parting, and thank him for his assistance in capturing Bowen.

Finding no trace of Burns, Poe went to a telephone booth on the dock board, and called his friend's office.

"Hello, that you, Poe?" came a cheery voice from the other end.

"Yes," exclaimed Poe. "I missed you at the dock. Couldn't you make it?"

"No. Mitchell called me away just half an hour before you were due. Everything all right?"

"Yes, fine. They got him at quarantine all right, thanks to your long-distance work."

"Oh, that wasn't anything," answered Burns. "But tell me, did you get any rest at all on the trip? I'm mighty glad you're back safe."

"No rest to speak of," said Poe quickly. "Two or three other jobs turned up. But I got a rest. I swear I'll never tackle another mystery. This chap Bowen turned on me, and called me an amateur detective. In spite of all the care I've taken, I'm afraid I'm becoming known. I'm going to give it up. It's a thankless job."

"Wait!" cut in Burns anxiously. "Mitchell has a job for us. I've just got the details. There's a clever band of scoundrels forging drafts in Chicago. I've got reservations on the eighteen-hour train. Can you make it?"

"Yes," answered Poe eagerly. "My grip is through the customs already. Volume H is in it. I won't need anything else. I can get to a taxi in two minutes. What time does the flyer leave?"

## ANOTHER VIEWPOINT



"Single blessedness" beats matrimony every time."  
"Oh! I don't know. Matrimony has its advantages."  
"You'll have to show me."  
"Well, for example, a bachelor has to pay to attend lectures, while a married man gets his at home for nothing."

## A FAIR CHANCE



"You look happy. Has Gwendolyn accepted you?"  
"Not exactly, but I'm her second choice in case her father refuses to buy her a duke."

## A CARELESS CANINE



Gentle Willie—Why dost thou weep? The dog bit took a piece out of your pantaloons.  
Wearie Walker—When he grabbed pard, he caught hold of more than the pants!

## RETALIATION



The Scholar—My folks is dead set on me gettin' a education, but, by gum! I'm goin' to make it cost 'em somepin'.

## EXTREMES



Old Toper—My doctor says that drinking beer will make me fat!  
Mrs. Toper—That may be, but it's more liable to make you lean.