

Secret of the Plundered Safe

By EMILE GABORIAU

CHAPTER XXIV.

An hour later Mme. Fauvel ordered her carriage, and went out. M. Fauvel jumped into a hackney coach and followed her.

"Heaven grant that M. Verduret may reach there in time!" cried Nina to herself, "otherwise Mme. Fauvel and Raoul are lost."

Mme. Fauvel hastened to Vesinet, convinced that some new misfortune was in store for her. Her alarm was groundless. She found Raoul more tender and affectionate than he had ever been. He saw the necessity of reassuring her, and winning his old place in her forgiving heart, before making his disclosures. He succeeded. The poor lady had a smiling and happy air as she sat in an armchair, with Raoul kneeling before her.

"I have distressed you too long, my dear mother," he said, in his softest tones, "but I repent sincerely; now listen to me—"

He had not time to say more; the door was violently thrown open, and Raoul, springing to his feet, was confronted by M. Fauvel. The banker had a revolver in his hand, and was deadly pale. It was evident that he was making superhuman efforts to remain calm, like a judge whose duty it is to justly punish crime.

"Ah," he said, with a horrible laugh, "you look surprised. You did not expect me? You thought that my imbecile credulity insured your safety?"

Raoul had the courage to place himself before Mme. Fauvel, and to stand prepared to receive the expected bullet.

"I assure you, uncle—" he began.

"Enough!" interrupted the banker, with an angry gesture, "let me hear no more infamous falsehoods! End this acting, of which I am no longer the dupe."

"I swear to you—"

"Spare yourself the trouble of denying anything. I know all. I know who pawned my wife's diamonds. I know who committed the robbery for which an innocent man was arrested and imprisoned."

Mme. Fauvel, white with terror, fell upon her knees. At last it had come—the dreadful day had come. Vainly had she added falsehood to falsehood, vainly had she sacrificed herself and others; all was discovered. She saw that all was lost, and wringing her hands, she tearfully moaned:

"Pardon, Andre! I beg you, forgive me!"

At these heart-broken tones the banker shook like a leaf. The memory of his lost happiness was too much for the stricken man. He forgot the present in the past, and was almost melted to forgiveness.

"Unhappy woman!" he murmured, "unhappy woman!"

For some moments nothing was heard but the sobs of Mme. Fauvel.

"I came here," continued the banker, "with the intention of killing you both. But I cannot kill a woman, and I will not kill an unarmed man. Defend yourself!" cried the banker, raising his arm, "if you do not—"

But the horror of the scene was too much for Mme. Fauvel to witness any longer without interposing. She understood but one thing—her son and her husband were about to kill each other before her very eyes. Rushing up to Raoul, she threw her arms around him, and said to her husband:

"Kill me, and me alone!"

At these words M. Fauvel glared at the guilty pair, and deliberately taking aim fired. Neither Raoul nor Mme. Fauvel moved. The banker fired a second time, then a third.

He cocked the pistol for a fourth shot, when a man rushed into the room, snatched the pistol from the banker's hand, and, throwing him on the sofa, ran toward Mme. Fauvel. This man was M. Verduret, who had been warned by Cavillon, but did not know that Mme. Gypsy had extracted the balls from M. Fauvel's revolver.

"Thank heaven!" he cried, "she is unhurt."

"How dare you interfere?" cried the banker, who by this time had joined the group. "The villain shall die!"

M. Verduret seized the banker's wrists in a vise-like grasp, and whispered in his ear:

"Thank heaven, you are saved from committing a terrible crime; the anonymous letter deceived you. Do you know who that man is that you attempted to kill? Her son!"

The words of this stranger, showing his intimate knowledge of the private affairs of all present, seemed to confound and frighten Raoul more than M. Fauvel's threats had done. Yet he had sufficient presence of mind to say:

"It is the truth!"

The banker looked wildly from Raoul to M. Verduret; then, fastening his haggard eyes on his wife, exclaimed:

"It is false! You are all conspiring to deceive me! Proofs!"

"You shall have proofs," replied M. Verduret, "but first listen."

And rapidly, with his wonderful talent for explanation, he related the principal points of the plot he had discovered. The true state of the case was terribly distressing to M. Fauvel, but nothing compared with what he had suspected.

His throbbing, yearning heart told him that he still loved his wife. Why should he punish a mistake committed so many years ago and atoned for by twenty years of devotion and suffering? For some moments after M. Verduret had finished his explanation M. Fauvel remained silent.

So many strange events had happened, rapidly following each other in succession, and culminating in the shocking

scene which had just taken place, that M. Fauvel seemed to be too bewildered to think clearly. But the sight of Raoul froze the words upon his lips.

"So this is your son," he said to his wife—"this man, who has plundered you and robbed me?"

Mme. Fauvel was unable to utter a word in reply to these reproachful words.

"Oh!" said M. Verduret, "madam will tell you that this young man is the son of Gaston de Clameran; she has never doubted it. But the truth is—"

"What?"

"That in order to swindle her he has perpetrated a gross imposture."

CHAPTER XXV.

Raoul had been quietly creeping toward the door, hoping to escape while no one was thinking of him. But M. Verduret was watching him out of the corner of one eye, and stopped him just as he was about leaving the room.

"Not so fast, my pretty youth," he said, dragging him into the middle of the room; "it is not polite to leave us so unceremoniously. Let us finish the story. Clameran hastened to London. He had no difficulty in finding the farmer's wife to whom the old countess had intrusted Gaston's son. But here an unexpected disappointment greeted him. He learned that the child, whose name was registered on the parish books as Raoul Valentine Wilson, had died of the croup when eighteen months old."

"Did any one state such a fact as that?" interrupted Raoul; "it is false!"

"It was not only stated, but proved, my pretty youth," replied M. Verduret. "You don't suppose I am a man to trust to oral testimony, do you?"

He drew from his pocket several officially stamped documents, with red seals attached, and laid them on the table.

"These are the declarations of the nurse, her husband, and four witnesses. Here is an extract from the register of births; this is a certificate of registry of his death; and all these are authenticated at the French embassy. Now are you satisfied, young man?"

"What next?" inquired M. Fauvel.

"The next step was this," replied M. Verduret. "Clameran, finding that the child was dead, supposed that he could, in spite of this disappointment, obtain money from Mme. Fauvel; he was mistaken. His first attempt failed. Having an inventive turn of mind, he determined that the child should come to life. Among his large circle of rascally acquaintances he selected a young fellow to personate Raoul Valentine Wilson; and the chosen one stands before you."

Mme. Fauvel was in a pitiable state. And yet she began to feel a ray of hope; her acute anxiety had so long tortured her that the truth was a relief; she would thank heaven if this wicked man was proved to be no son of hers.

"Can this be possible?" she murmured; "can it be?"

Raoul saw that the game was up. "You are a detective!" he ejaculated. The fat man smiled grimly.

"At present," he replied, "I am merely a friend of Prosper Bertomy. It depends entirely upon your behavior which character I appear in while settling up this little affair."

"What do you expect me to do?"

"Restore the three hundred and fifty thousand francs which you have stolen."

"The money is in this room."

"Very good. This frankness is creditable, and will benefit you. I know that the money is in this room, and also exactly where it is to be found. Be kind enough to look behind that cupboard, and you will find the three hundred and fifty thousand francs."

Raoul tremblingly went to the cupboard, and pulled out several bundles of bank notes, and an enormous package of pawnbrokers' tickets.

"Very well done," said M. Verduret, as he carefully examined the money and papers; "this is the most sensible step you ever took."

Raoul relied on this moment, when everybody's attention would be absorbed by the money, to make his escape. He slid toward the door, gently opened it, slipped out, and locked it on the outside; the key being still in the lock.

"He has escaped!" cried M. Fauvel.

"Naturally," replied M. Verduret, without even looking up; "I thought he would have sense enough to do that."

"But is he to go unpunished?"

"My dear sir, would you have this affair become a public scandal? Do you wish your wife's name to be brought into a case of this nature before the police court?"

"Oh, monsieur!"

"Then the best thing you can do is to let the rascal go scot free. Here are receipts for all the articles which he has pawned, so that we should consider ourselves fortunate. He has kept fifty thousand francs, but that is all the better for you. This sum will enable him to leave France, and we shall never see him again."

So saying, the fat man took up his hat and quietly left the room, and jumping into his cab, ordered the driver to return to Paris, and drive to the Hotel du Louvre as rapidly as possible.

His mind was filled with anxiety about Clameran. He knew that Raoul would give him no more trouble; the young rogue was probably taking his passage for some foreign land at that moment. But Clameran should not escape unpunished; and how this punishment could be brought about without compromising Mme. Fauvel was a problem to be solved.

After long thought he decided that an accusation of poisoning must come from

Oléron. He would go there and work upon "public opinion," so that, to satisfy the townspeople, the authorities would order a post-mortem examination of Me-noul. But this mode of proceeding required time, and Clameran would certainly escape before another day passed over his head. He was too experienced a knave to remain on slippery ground, now that his eyes were open to the danger which menaced him. It was almost dark when the carriage stopped in front of the Hotel du Louvre. M. Verduret noticed a crowd of people collected in groups, eagerly discussing some exciting event which seemed to have just taken place.

"What has happened?" he demanded of a loungee near by.

"The strangest thing you ever heard of," replied the man. "Yes, I saw him with my own eyes. He first appeared at that seventh story window; he was only half dressed. Some men tried to seize him, but with the agility of a squirrel he jumped out upon the roof, shrieking 'Murder! murder!' The recklessness of his conduct led me to suppose—"

The gossip stopped short in his narrative, very much surprised and vexed; his questioner had vanished.

"If it should be Clameran!" thought M. Verduret; "if terror has deranged that brain, so capable of working out great crimes! Fate must have interposed—"

While thus talking to himself he elbowed his way through the crowded court yard of the hotel. At the foot of the staircase he found M. Fanterlot and three peculiar looking individuals, standing together, as if waiting for some one.

"Well," cried M. Verduret, "what is the matter?"

With laudable emulation the four men rushed forward to report to their superior officer.

"The matter is this, patron," said Fanterlot, dejectedly. "I am doomed to ill luck. You see how it is; this is the only chance I ever had of working out a beautiful case, and, pat! my criminal must go and fizzle! A regular case of bankruptcy!"

"Then it is Clameran who—"

"Of course it is. When the rascal saw me this morning he scampered off like a hare. You should have seen him run; I thought he would never stop this side of Ivory; but not at all. On reaching the Boulevard des Ecoles a sudden idea seemed to strike him, and he made a bee line for his hotel; I suppose to get his pile of money. Directly he gets there what does he see? These three friends of mine. The sight of these gentlemen had the effect of a sunstroke upon him; he went raving mad on the spot. The idea of serving me such a low trick at the very moment I was sure of success!"

"Where is he now?"

"At the prefecture, I suppose. Some policeman handcuffed him, and drove off with him in a cab."

"Come with me."

M. Verduret and Fanterlot found Clameran in one of the private cells reserved for dangerous prisoners. He had on a strait-jacket, and was struggling violently against three men, who were striving to hold him, while a physician tried to force him to swallow a potion.

"Help!" he shrieked; "help! Do you not see my cousin coming after me? Look! he wants to poison me!"

M. Verduret took the physician aside, and questioned him about the maniac.

"The wretched man is in a hopeless state," replied the doctor; "this species of insanity is incurable. He thinks some one is trying to poison him, and nothing will persuade him to eat or drink anything; and, as it is impossible to force anything down his throat he will die of starvation, after having suffered all the tortures of poison."

M. Verduret, with a shudder, turned to leave the prefecture, saying to Fanterlot:

"Mme. Fauvel is saved!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

Four days had passed since the events just narrated, when, one morning, M. Lecoq—the official Lecoq, who resembled the dignified head of a bureaucrat—was walking up and down his private office, at each turn nervously looking at the clock, which slowly ticked on the mantel, as if it had no intention of striking any sooner than usual, to gratify the man so anxiously watching its placid face.

At last, however, the clock did strike, and just then the faithful Janquille opened the door, and ushered in Mme. Nina and Prosper Bertomy.

"Ah," said M. Lecoq, "you are punctual."

"M. Verduret gave us express orders to meet here in your office this morning, and we have obeyed," said Madame Gypsy.

"Very good," said the celebrated detective. "Then be kind enough to wait a few minutes; I will tell him you are here."

During the quarter of an hour that Nina and Prosper remained alone together they did not exchange a word. Finally a door opened and M. Verduret appeared.

Nina and Prosper eagerly started toward him, but he checked them by one of those peculiar looks which no one ever dared resist.

"You have come," he said, severely, "to hear the secret of my conduct. I have promised, and will keep my word, however painful it may be to my feelings. Listen then. My best friend is a loyal, honest man, named Caldas. Eighteen months ago this friend was the happiest of men. Infatuated by a woman, he lived for her alone, and, fool that he was, imagined that she felt the same love for him."

"She did!" cried Gypsy; "yes, she always loved him."

"She showed her love in a peculiar way. She loved him so much that one fine day she discarded him. In his first moments of despair Caldas wished to kill himself. Then he reflected that it would be wiser to live and avenge himself."

"And then?" faltered Prosper.

"Then Caldas avenged himself in his own way. He made the woman who deserted him recognize his immense superiority. Weak, timid and helpless, her cousin was disgraced, and was falling over the verge of a precipice, when the powerful hand of Caldas reached forth and saved him. You understand all now, do you not? The woman is Nina, the cousin is yourself, and Caldas is—"

With a quick, dextrous movement he threw off his wig and whiskers, and stood before them the real, intelligent, proud Lecoq.

"Caldas!" cried Nina.

"No, not Caldas, nor Verduret any longer; but Lecoq, the detective."

M. Lecoq broke the stupefied silence of his listeners by saying to Prosper:

"It is not to me alone that you owe your salvation. A noble girl confided to me the difficult task of clearing your reputation. I promised her that M. Fauvel should never know the secrets concerning his domestic happiness. Your letter thwarted all my plans, and made it impossible for me to keep my promise. I have nothing more to say."

He turned to leave the room, but Nina barred his exit.

"Caldas," she murmured, "I implore you to have pity on me! I am so miserable! Ah, if you only knew! Be forgiving to one who has always loved you. Caldas! Listen!"

One month later was celebrated at the church of Notre Dame the marriage of M. Prosper Bertomy and Mile. Madeleine Fauvel.

The banking house is still in the Rue de Provence, but as M. Fauvel has decided to retire from business and live in the country, the name of the firm has been changed, and is now:

PROSPER BERTOMY & CO.
(The end.)

HAVE ODD IDEA OF ANATOMY.

Chinese Have Outlandish Notions Regarding Human Frame.

No Chinese representative of the healing art has ever dissected any portion of the human frame. According to their ideas of anatomy and physiology are matters of faith—confirmed by images which have been reproduced during untold centuries. Their osteology teaches that the skull is formed of one bone; so is the pelvis; the number of ribs varies with the individual, and at the junction of the arm with the forearm is placed a cubital patella. According to Chinese splanchnology the small intestine communicates with the cavity of the heart, while the colon, after describing sixteen circumvolutions, terminates by opening into the lung. The heart governs the vital processes—in co-operation with the cavity of the stomach it supplies all ideas and all pleasurable sensations. The liver is the habitat of the soul, and it is from this gland that all noble and generous sentiments emanate.

The gall bladder is the receptacle of courage, its ascent in the body is the cause of a fit of anger. They have an idea of the continuous motion of the blood, but it seems to be the product of an imagination more riotously Oriental than even that which created the other items of their physiology knowledge. They do not know the pulmonary circulation; they, naturally, know nothing of the valves in the veins; they do not even appear to have quite grasped the motor function of the heart itself; but they nevertheless profess to differentiate no less than seventy-four varieties of pulse—simultaneously recognizable on the person of a single individual. In its ultimate structure the body is composed of five elements: Fire, water, earth, wood, and metal. Each of these elements is in a harmonious rapport with the corresponding members of the series of five planets, five metals, five solid viscera, five colors, and five tastes. All diseases originate from disturbances of the primary and essential quintic harmonies of these correlations.—Shanghai Times.

Beauties of Architecture.

A dusky couple, evidently on their honeymoon, were heard discussing the beauties of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition.

"Ah," said M. Lecoq, "you are punctual."

"Dese heah," said he, with a lofty wave of the hand, "aim what dey calls de fine Art Buildin'."

"Don't look so turrrible fine to me," objected the bride. "De Libble Art Building looks finer."

"It do that," asserted the groom.

"What is libble art, anyway?" she inquired sweetly.

He drew himself up and gave her an impressive look. "Libble art," he began, and then pondered a moment—"I don't know as I can give a correct idea of libble art, honey. I know what it is, but I disremember. But it's a mighty fine buildin'. All dese heah buildin's, you know, am in de style de French Reminiscence."

Ways of Two Husbands.

His First: Jenkins—By the way, Jones, how old is that baby of yours? Jones (promptly)—One year two months and eight days.

His Sixth: Jones—By the way, how old is that youngest baby of yours? Jenkins—Oh, hanged if I know. A year or two. Ask my wife.—Pittsburg Bulletin.

Cattle Raising Profitable.

Cattle raising is at present the only profitable business in the African region where the Germans are at war with the Hereros.



An entirely new mammal in the British Isles is the astonishing discovery of J. G. Millais. It is a vole—*Microtus orcadensis*—and it is totally distinct from the common short-tailed fieldmouse and all other known forms.

A singular method of protecting rolls of butter from deterioration due to outside influences is practised in Germany. It consists simply in coating the butter with a glaze of melted sugar laid on with a soft brush. The surface of the butter is slightly melted and a protective varnish is formed. The process has recently been employed on a large scale in England.

Protective mimicry has a curious illustration in an insect of British East Africa described by Professor Gregory. Some individuals of each sex are bright pink and others are bright green, and as they sit motionless for hours sucking sap, the pink ones collect on the lower part of the stem, where they look like drooping flowers, while the green ones take a place further out and are mistaken for foliage.

The gripe and excessive meat eating are the causes to which Lucas Champlonnere attributes appendicitis. He has found that cases not preceded by an attack of gripe are very rare, and that they are practically unknown in the vegetarian districts of France and other countries. The few cases he has known among vegetarians have been insignificant, recovery taking place in a few days without operation.

The world's greatest geyser seems to be that of Rotorua, in New Zealand. A recent visitor, J. A. Warnock, states that it plays about twenty-two times each month, the "shots" often reaching a height of nine hundred to 1,200 feet, and the basin covers about 2½ acres. One theory is that loose stones fall into the neck of a tunnel filled with hot water, closing the passage until the rising steam pressure forcibly ejects them.

The latest report to the British Home Office on the mineral production of the world shows that the United States stands second to the British empire in the production of gold, but far ahead in the production of silver, copper and lead. In copper our superiority is the greatest, more than one-half of the world's entire supply coming from mines in the United States. This country also stands first in the amount of coal produced, and Great Britain is second in the list. The British coal, however, is sold for a considerably larger aggregate price. In the production of zinc Germany stands first and the United States second.

After the failure of many inventors to carry out a similar idea, it is claimed that a French electro-motion company has produced an electric carriage in which the use of pinions, chains and gearing for transmitting motion to the driving-wheels is entirely dispensed with. In this new machine the motors and the wheels are described as being one and the same thing. The axes receive their motive power directly from the accumulators. The weight of the carriage is thus reduced, and it is asserted that these "live-axle" machines can travel twenty to thirty per cent farther than those of ordinary construction because of the saving of energy. The appearance of the new carriages is improved, except that the wheels have a clumier look.

How Far Did He Ride?

"Pop" and Edward watched two laughing girls and "grown-ups" too, as they swung round and round, perched on the backs of mettlesome horses, fierce lions and awe-inspiring, long-legged giraffes, on the merry-go-round.

"Pop," turning to comment upon a small-sized youngster astride a huge tiger, noticed the serious look on his heir's usually smiling countenance, and said to him: "Son, what makes you look so thoughtful?"

"I was just wonderin'," replied Edward, who had just enjoyed a ride on the merry-go-round, and having a ticket in his pocket entitling him to another ride was anxious to use it to the best advantage, "whether I would get a longer ride than I had on that horse in the inner circle if I rode one of the lions on the outside row."

Location of the Bee.

Ah! What delicious honey we had for luncheon to-day!" chirped the fluffy girl from the city, who was enjoying the hospitality of Farmer Summerboard's brown old home. "I presume you have your own bee here on the farm?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied the horny-handed hired man, who was a pronounced pessimist during fifteen and one-half hours out of every twenty-four. "It's in the old man's hat. He wants to go to the legislature."

What are you called oftener behind your back? Smart Aleck, do you suppose?