

Secret of the Plundered Safe

By EMILE GABORIAU

CHAPTER VI.

Prosper was triumphant; he had almost convinced his father of his innocence. But he had not time to rejoice over this victory. The cell door opened and the jailer's gruff voice called out:

"It is time for you to appear before the court."

He instantly obeyed the order. As he was passing through the room full of policemen he again met the man with the gold spectacles who had watched him so intently the day he was searched. "Courage, M. Bertomy," he said: "if you are innocent there are those who will help you."

"Who is that gentleman?" he asked of the policeman.

"Is it possible that you don't know him?" replied the policeman with surprise. "Why, it is M. Lecocq, of the detective service," and the constable would have gone into a long disquisition on M. Lecocq's detective abilities had they not arrived at the door of the judge's room, which they entered.

The judge, M. Patrigent, was waiting to receive them, and at once began Prosper's preliminary examination. We need not give it here in detail. When it came to Madame Gypsy, the judge said:

"Who is this woman?"

"Madame Gypsy was a governess and is my cousin," replied Prosper. "She was born at Oporto, and came to France with a Portuguese family."

"Have you ever heard of this Caldas?"

"Never, monsieur."

"The unfortunate man loved Gypsy. There is reason to believe that he has since committed suicide." The judge paused for a minute, as if to give Prosper time for reflection, and then added, impressively, "Such is the woman for whose sake you have committed a robbery."

M. Patrigent had hoped to extort a cry of suffering from Prosper, wounded to the quick. But Prosper remained impassive. Of all that the judge had said he only remembered the name of Caldas.

"Why did you no longer visit a house where you had apparently been paying your addresses to a young lady whose hand would not have been refused to you, so I am informed by M. Fauvel, and you were aware of the fact, as is shown by your own letter to your father?"

"I had reasons for my conduct which I cannot explain."

"Did Mademoiselle send you away? Speak! I am bound to tell you that this is a point of great importance to the prosecution."

M. Patrigent waited in vain for an answer. Prosper seemed to reflect deeply.

"Monsieur," said he, "there is one circumstance which, in my trouble, I had forgotten, and which may help me to prove my innocence. When the messenger went to fetch the money from the Bank of France I only waited for his return to leave the office. I am sure I locked up the bank notes in his presence. Oh! if he should have happened to have noticed the fact! At all events, I left the office before he did."

"Very well," said M. Patrigent; "we will take that man's evidence. Now you will be taken back to prison, and I would advise you to reflect seriously over the line of defense you are adopting."

M. Patrigent dismissed the accused rather abruptly, because he felt puzzled by the new fact just brought to his notice, which gave great importance to the evidence of the office messenger. As soon as Prosper had left he turned to the greffier and said:

"Tell me, Sigault, is this messenger spoken of by the accused the man excused from giving evidence in consequence of a medical certificate?"

"Yes, monsieur," answered Sigault; "he sustained so grave an injury by a fall that it has been found necessary to convey him to the Dubois hospital."

"Well, I will go there at once to take his deposition. Get ready all that you require, and send for a hack."

It is a long distance from the Palais de Justice to the Dubois hospital, but M. Patrigent's coachman, stimulated by a promise, sent his sorry steeds along at a racing pace. Would Antonio, the messenger, be in a condition to give his evidence? That was the question. The director of the hospital soon reassured the judge on this point. The unfortunate messenger had injured his knee cap. He suffered great pain, but his intellect was perfectly clear. On seeing the judge enter, accompanied by his clerk with writing materials, Antonio guessed his object.

"Ah!" said he: "I suppose monsieur is come about M. Bertomy's affairs?"

"Exactly. Now, my friend, it was you who went to the Bank of France on the 27th of February for the sum that was stolen? At what hour did you return with the money?"

"It must have been five o'clock when I got back."

"Do you remember what M. Bertomy did when you handed him the notes? Now, do not be in a hurry; think before you answer."

"Let me see; first he counted the notes, and made them into four packages; then he put them in the safe; and then—it seems to me—and then he locked the safe; and, yes, I am not mistaken, he went out!"

When they retired M. Patrigent said to Sigault:

"This is a very important piece of evidence."

CHAPTER VII.

The Great Archangel Hotel, Mme. Gypsy's asylum, was the most stylish building on the Quai St. Michel. A person who pays her fortnight's board in

advance is treated with consideration at this hotel.

Mme. Alexandra, who had been a handsome woman, was now stout, laced till she could scarcely breathe, always overdressed, and fond of wearing a number of flashy gold chains around her fat neck.

She had bright eyes and white teeth; but, alas, a red nose. She loved a good dinner. She also loved her husband, and about the time M. Patrigent was leaving the capital she began to be worried that her "little man" had not returned to dinner. She was about to sit down without him when the hotel waiter cried out:

"Here is master."

"Why, how late you are, my little man!" she exclaimed, as she dropped her knife and fork, and rushed forward to embrace him.

"My back is broken," he said. "I have been the whole day playing billiards with Evariste, M. Fauvel's valet, and allowed him to win as often as he wished. I became acquainted with him yesterday, and now I am his best friend. If I wish to enter M. Fauvel's service in Antonin's place, I can rely upon M. Evariste's good word. And now, what does the girl say?"

"She is still upstairs," answered Mme. Alexandra. "She suspects nothing; but to keep her in her present ignorance becomes daily more difficult. I don't know what the judge told her, but she came home quite beside herself with anger. She wanted to go and make a fuss at M. Fauvel's; then she wrote a letter which she told Jean to mail for her, but I kept it to show you."

"What?" interrupted Fanferlot, "you have a letter, and it did not tell me before? Perhaps it contains the clue to the mystery. Give it to me, quick."

Obediently her husband, Mme. Alexandra opened a little cupboard and took out a letter, which she handed to him. It bore the following address, written in a free, flowing hand:

"In haste!

M. RAOUL DE LAGORS,

Care of M. L. de Clameran,

Hotel du Louvre, Ironmaster."

Mme. Alexandra leaned over her husband's shoulder, and they both read the following letter:

"M. Raoul—Prosper is in prison, accused of a robbery which he never committed. I wrote to you three days ago, and have no reply. Who will help Prosper if his best friends desert him? If you don't answer this letter, I shall consider myself released from a certain promise, and without scruple will tell Prosper of the conversation I overheard between you and Monsieur de Clameran. But I can count on you, can I not? I shall expect you at the Archangel day after to-morrow, between twelve and four."

NINA GYPSY."

The letter read, Fanferlot at once proceeded to copy it. He was delicately releasing it when the door of the hotel office was abruptly opened, and the boy twice whispered:

"Hut!"

Fanferlot rapidly disappeared into a dark closet. He had barely time to close the door before Mme. Gypsy entered the room. The poor girl was sadly changed. She was pale and hollow cheeked, and her eyes were red with weeping. On seeing her, Mme. Alexandra could not conceal her surprise.

"Why, my child, you are not going out?"

"I am obliged to do so, madam, and I came to ask you to tell any one that may call during my absence to wait until I return. You are so kind that I am tempted to confide in you; read this note which a messenger just now brought to me."

In a tone loud enough to be heard in the closet Mme. Alexandra read the note:

"A friend of Prosper, who can neither receive you, nor present himself at your house, is very anxious to speak to you. He is in the stage-coach office, opposite the Saint Jacques Tower, to-night at nine precisely, and the writer will approach and tell you what he has to say."

"And you are going to this rendezvous?"

"Certainly, madam."

And, without waiting to hear any more she went out. The door had scarcely closed upon Mme. Gypsy before Fanferlot bounced out of the closet. The mild detective was white with rage.

"What is the meaning of this?" he cried. "Am I to stand by and have people walking over the Archangel, as if it were a public street? Come, make haste and help me, so that she won't recognize me."

In a few minutes Fanferlot was completely disguised by a thick beard, a wig, and a workman's blouse. Mme. Gypsy had ten minutes' start of him; but he ran up the street he knew she must have taken, and overtook her. At Chatelet place she strolled up and down several times, read the theater bills, and finally took a seat on a bench. One minute before a quarter of 9 she entered the stage-coach office and sat down.

A moment after Fanferlot entered, but as he feared that Mme. Gypsy might recognize him in spite of his heavy beard, he took a seat at the opposite end of the room in a dark corner. As the City Hall clock was striking nine a man entered and without going to the ticket window, walked directly up to Gypsy, bowed and took a seat beside her.

He was a medium-sized man, rather stout, with a ruddy face and fiery red whiskers. His dress was that of a well-to-do storekeeper, and there was nothing in his manner or appearance to excite attention. Fanferlot watched him eagerly.

"Well, my friend," he said to himself, "in future I shall recognize you, no

matter where we meet, and this very evening I will find out who you are."

Despite his intent listening, he could not hear a word spoken by the stranger or Gypsy. When the stout man bowed and spoke to her the girl looked so surprised that it was evident she had never seen him before. When he sat down by her and said a few words she jumped up with a frightened look. A single word and look made her resume her seat. Then, as the stout man went on talking Gypsy's attitude betrayed great apprehension. She positively refused to do something; then suddenly she seemed to consent when he stated a good reason for her doing so.

"What can all that mean?" said Fanferlot to himself, as he sat in his dark corner biting his nails. "What an idiot I am to have stationed myself so far off!"

He was thinking how he could manage to approach nearer without arousing their suspicions when the stout man arose, offered his arm to Gypsy, who accepted it without hesitation, and together they walked toward the door.

They were so engrossed with each other that Fanferlot thought he could without risk follow them, and it was well he did, for the crowd was dense outside, and he would soon have lost them. Reaching the door, he saw the fat man and Gypsy cross the pavement, approach a hack and enter it.

"Very good," muttered Fanferlot, "I've nailed them now. There is no use of hurrying any more."

While the coachman was gathering up his reins Fanferlot prepared his legs, and when the hack started he followed at a brisk trot, determined upon following it to the end of the earth. After chasing the hack for some time it finally halted. He dashed up, opened the door, only to find the vehicle empty. "Tricked!" he ejaculated. After the defeat he determined to go and see M. Lecocq the next morning.

CHAPTER VIII.

At 6 o'clock Fanferlot was up—it was necessary to rise very early if he wished to catch M. Lecocq at home—and, refreshed by a cup of strong coffee, he directed his steps toward the dwelling of the celebrated detective. The door was opened by Janouille, M. Lecocq's old servant, who had the manner and appearance of a grenadier.

"Well, M. Fanferlot," she said, "you come in time for once in your life. Your governor wants to see you."

In the middle of a large room curiously furnished, half library and half green room, was seated at a desk the same person with gold spectacles, who had said to Prosper at the police office: "Have courage."

This was M. Lecocq in his official character. Upon Fanferlot's entrance, as he advanced respectfully, bowing till his backbone was a perfect curve, M. Lecocq laid down his pen, and said, looking sharply at him:

"Ah, here you are, young man. Well, it seems you haven't made much progress in the Bertomy case. I know that you have muddled everything until you can't see your way out, so that you are ready to give up."

"You are right, patron," said Fanferlot. "But how could I go about an affair like this, where there was not even a trace or sign to start from?"

"Why, don't you know that on the very day you were sent for with the commissary to verify the robbery, you held in your great stupid hands the means of knowing which key had been used when the money was stolen?"

"How? What?"

"You want to know, do you? I will tell you. Do you remember the scratch you discovered on the safe door? You thought that this scratch was made at the time of the theft. Now, with what was it made? Evidently with a key. That being the case, you should have asked for the keys both of the banker and the cashier. One of them would have had some particles of the hard green paint sticking to it."

"Idiot!"

"You have rightly named yourself," said M. Lecocq. "This proof stares you right in the face, and you don't see it! This scratch is the sole and only clue to work the case upon, and you must go and lose the traces of it. If I find the guilty party it will be by means of this scratch; and I am determined that I will find him."

"You must have been working up this case, patron?"

"Probably I have, but I am not infallible, and may have overlooked some important evidence. Take a seat, and tell me all you know."

M. Lecocq was not the man to be hoodwinked, so Fanferlot told the exact truth—a rare thing for him to do.

"It seems to me, Master Squirrel, that you have forgotten something. How far did you follow the empty coach?"

Fanferlot blushed, and hung his head like a guilty schoolboy.

"Oh!" he cried, "and you know about that, too! How could you have—?" But a sudden idea flashed across his brain; he stopped short, bounded off his chair, and cried: "Oh, I know now! You were the stout gentleman with red whiskers." His surprise gave so singular an expression to his face that M. Lecocq could not restrain a smile.

"Then," said Fanferlot, clinging to his idea, "you have been more successful than Madame Alexandre; you have made the girl confess? You know why she leaves the Archangel, and why she does not wait for M. de Clameran?"

"She is following my advice."

"Do you know who the thief is, patron?"

"I know no more than you do, Fanferlot. I am certain of but one thing, and that is, that a scratch was on the safe door. We start from the scratch, see?" (To be continued.)

The naive Sandwich Islander has a queer idea of female beauty. He admires bulk and plumpness. A woman weighing 250 pounds is considered twice as beautiful as one of 125 pounds.

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Recommends Pe-ru-na—Other Prominent Men Testify.



Rear Admiral Philip Hichborn, of the United States navy, in a recent letter from Washington, D. C., gives Peruna the following endorsement:

"After using Peruna for a short time period, I can now cheerfully recommend your valuable remedy to any one who is in need of an invigorating tonic."—Philip Hichborn.

Rear Admiral J. A. Howell, U. S. navy, writes from Washington, D. C. as follows:

"I have used your Peruna with satisfaction, and can cheerfully recommend the remedy as an effective cure for coughs and colds."—J. A. Howell.

The highest men in our nation have given Peruna a strong endorsement. Men representing all classes and stations are equally represented. Peruna is a Preventative and Curative Medicine for Catarrh.

Hon. E. H. Fitch, formerly special United States attorney, state of Virginia,

Isn't that Thoughtful?

Teas—She used to say she didn't care how homely a man might be if he were only thoughtful.

Jess—Well, that's the kind she got for a husband.

Teas—Why, I heard he was anything but thoughtful.

Jess—He's full of thought for himself.—Philadelphia Ledger.

STATE OF OHIO, CITY OF TOLEDO, ss.

FRANK J. CHENEY makes oath that he is senior partner of the firm of F. J. CHENEY & Co., doing business in the City of Toledo, County and State aforesaid, and that said firm will pay the sum of ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS for each and every case of CATARRH that cannot be cured by the use of HALL'S CATARRH CURE.

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Sworn to before me and subscribed in my presence, this 6th day of December, A. D. 1886.

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Author—Truly, this is an unappreciative world. Why, if I had written what McFadd has written I wouldn't be famous like he is.

Criticus—I guess that's right. And if McFadd had written the stuff you grind out he wouldn't be famous, either.

Quite Unnecessary.

"Jane," said the boarding-house landlady, "pass Mr. Newman the salt for his egg."

"Never mind the salt, thank you," rejoined the latest acquisition to the fold, "this egg is gone too fresh as it is."

In the Wrong Places.

An angry woman walked into a grocer's shop in an Ayrshire village and banged a piece of some yellow substance on the counter. She spoke Scotch, of course, as Tit-Bits reports, but Americans will understand the words she used, since many an advertisement has made the kind familiar.

"This," she said, "is the soap that does the washin' o' itself; the soap that makes every washin' day a kin' o' glorified feast; the soap that gets a' the linen white as snow an' as sweet as a hazelnut, and lets the delighted housewife play w' the children; an' here I've been scrubbin' three mortal hours w' that lump an' got her mair lather out o' it than I could get out o' a brick."

"I beg your pardon," said the grocer calmly, "but that isn't soap. Your little boy was here yesterday for half a pound of cheese and half a pound of soap. That's the cheese."

"The cheese!" exclaimed the woman.

"Then that accounts for the lather thing."

"What other thing?"

"I lay awaak the hale night winnerin' w' whit made the Welsh rabbit we had fur oor supper taste see queer."

Those Loving Girls.

Amy—One can dress very nicely without spending much if one only has a little taste.

May—Then you ought to dress a good deal better than you do.

Amy—Why, pray?

May—Well, you don't spend much, and I'm sure you have but little taste.

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