

Secret of the Plundered Safe

By EMILE GABORIAU

CHAPTER XIX.

In 1840 lived in his ancestral castle on the banks of the Rhone the old Marquis de Clameran and his two sons, Gaston and Louis. They were the objects of his love in the same measure as for his hate he viewed his neighbor, the Countess de la Verberie. Stern, old and arrogant, she would have been the general detestation as she was this individual one, had it not been for her beautiful and gentle daughter, Valentine.

The estates were separated only by the river, here narrow but swiftly flowing. It was no barrier for love. Valentine saw Gaston, and from that moment his image filled her heart. But so many obstacles separated them! Yet they met happily, until one fatal evening, when she saw her lover swim the tide at the greatest risk, and fall at her feet, almost exhausted.

"Is it you?" she murmured, trying to lift him up. "Then heaven has heard my prayers, and had pity."

"No," was his gloomy answer, "heaven has not been pitiful, for I am forced to flee. Our love is the sport of the rusties, and to punish the insolent I have nearly killed two of the scoundrels. But what does this exile matter? You will accompany me, and share my home in the wilds."

"I cannot leave my mother, Gaston."

"But if your mother knows we are married—"

"You are poor, and she is determined I shall marry a wealthy man, that she may end her days in luxury."

"She shall have it," said Gaston, bitterly; "make her wait three years, when I shall return rich, or you will be free."

one reason to preserve her. She was soon to be the mother of Gaston's child. She had not revealed this secret to him, but her mother divined it.

She was a woman for emergencies. She escorted her daughter to England, where the child was born, and left with persons hired to adopt it, without, of course, knowing what an aristocratic scion they were fostering.

The young mother, bereft of her son and of his father, returned home with her mother in passive resignation. She sorrowed for four years without receiving any intelligence of either. Then she learned Gaston was dead. Her mother remained a marble image to her, but she was alive to her selfish interests. She was always looking about her for the means to rise from her genteel poverty, and at this period it presented itself. They made the acquaintance of the young banker, Andre Fauvel.

The first time he met Valentine he was struck by her beauty, and after looking into her large, melancholy eyes his admiration deepened into love—a love so earnest and passionate that he felt that he could never be happy without her.

Before being introduced to her his heart had surrendered itself to her charms. He was wealthy, a splendid career was open to him, and he vowed that Valentine should be his. He confided all his matrimonial plans to an old friend of Mme. de la Verberie, who had no sooner breached them to the match-making mamma than the alliance was arranged.

Eighteen months after her marriage Mme. Fauvel presented her husband with a son. But neither this child, nor a second son born a year after, could make her forget the first one of all, the poor, forsaken babe who had been thrown upon strangers, mercenary, who valued the money, but not the child for whom it was paid.

Louis de Clameran was now Marquis of Clameran; he was free, and comparatively rich. He who had never had twenty-five crowns in his pocket at once found himself the possessor of two hundred thousand francs.

This sudden, unexpected fortune so completely turned his head that he felt fettered in the country, and hastened, after disposing of nearly everything, to Paris. He plunged into the sea of dissipation until the day came when he dragged himself out on the shore, penniless, and glad to live quietly, while meditating any means to regain wealth. Forced to quit his country, he was eighteen years abroad, living from hand to mouth for the most of the time, when at a gaming resort he broke the bank and thought that he might see his home once more, where perhaps the evil he had done had not lived after his departure. He had been twenty-five years absent, but the old tenants remembered him, and warmly gave their welcome.

He, the adventurer, the bully, the base accomplice of London swindlers, delighted in these marks of respect and veneration, bestowed upon him as the representative of the house of Clameran; it seemed to make him once more feel a little self-respect, as if the future were not utterly hopeless.

One of the farmers was eager to buy a piece of land which he had rented so long that he almost felt that it was his

own; Louis disposed of it for ready money, and, already tired of rusticity, hurried again to the gay city.

Besides, he had learned the secret of Valentine; he knew of the offspring of his brother and the girl who was now the wife of one of the most opulent of Parisian bankers. Louis meant to levy blackmail on her to increase his store.

CHAPTER XX.

Time had dulled the remorse and anxiety of Valentine. In the genial atmosphere of a happy home she had found rest, and almost forgetfulness. She had suffered so much at being compelled to deceive Andre that she hoped she was now even with fate.

One rainy November day her husband had come to Provence on business. She was sitting, gazing into the bright fire, and thoughtfully meditating upon her present happiness, when the servant brought her a letter, which had been left by a stranger, who refused to give his name. Without the faintest presentiment of evil she carelessly broke the seal, and in an instant was almost petrified by the words which met her terrified eye:

"Madame: Would it be relying too much upon the memories of the past to hope for half an hour of your time? Tomorrow, between two and three, I will do myself the honor of calling upon you. 'THE MARQUIS OF CLAMERAN.'"

Ah! she had hoped and believed that the fatal past was stoned for, and buried in oblivion; and now it stood before her pitiless and threatening.

The dreaded day came, and with it the man. Her emotion was too deep not to serve his purpose, and though she preserved enough coolness not to place herself in his power by accepting his fiction of Gaston dying in his arms, and consigning him to the care of his son, she could not altogether shake him off.

On the other hand, she dared not confess to her husband, who would never have confidence in her again, and she refused the sympathy of Madeleine. The girl had divined that she was in distress, and pleaded hard to learn the cause.

The plotter gave time for the poison to work; when he communicated with her again, it was to ask her to call at his hotel. The poor woman, in the coils, dared not stay away. Here another surprise awaited her. The marquis was not in the rooms. He who received her was a cherubic youth, who announced himself in a sweet voice, which wrung her heart, as Raoul Valentine "Wilson." It was her castaway son!

This voice was so like Gaston's that she seemed once more to be listening to the lover of her almost forgotten youth. It seemed only yesterday that Gaston had pressed her to his faithful heart; she saw him still, saying, gently: "In three years, Valentine! Wait for me!"

Andre, her two sons, Madeleine—all were forgotten in this new-found affection. She imagined that Madeleine looked at her strangely on her return from the Hotel du Louvre. She must suspect something, but she did not suspect the truth.

For several days she asked embarrassing questions as to where her aunt went, and with whom she had been during these long absences from home. This disquietude and seeming curiosity changed the affection which Mme. Fauvel had hitherto felt for her adopted daughter into positive dislike.

She regretted having placed over herself a vigilant spy from whom she could not escape. She pondered what means she could take to avoid the penetrating watchfulness of a girl who was accustomed to read in her face every thought that crossed her mind. With unspoken satisfaction she solved the difficulty in a way which she thought would please all parties. She would have her married and thus removed from her path and her son's.

Clameran espoused her idea, but wanted to modify it; it was himself that he proposed for the girl's hand, undertaking to shelve Bertony, to whom she had been tacitly engaged, and he promised, as a substantial inducement for the banker's wife to consent to this change, to transfer to Raoul all the dower that came with the bride.

This time the creature in his talons presumed to rebel. He left her with fear that his plans were not working smoothly as before. Clameran had cause for fear. Mme. Fauvel's determination was not feigned. She was firm in her resolve to confess.

"Yes," she cried, with the enthusiasm of a noble resolution; "yes, I will tell Andre everything!"

She believed herself to be alone, but turned around suddenly at the sound of footsteps, and found herself face to face with Madeleine, who was pale and swell-eyed from weeping.

"You must obey this man," she quietly said. "I despise M. de Clameran, and shall always regard him as the basest of men; nevertheless, I will marry him. I will not suffer dishonor to fall upon this house, which is my home, while I have power to prevent it. Am I not indebted to you for more than life? What would I now be had you not taken pity on me? A factory girl in my native village. You warmly welcomed the poor orphan, and became a mother to her. Is it not to your husband that I owe the fortune which excites the cupid of this wicked Clameran? Are not Abel and Lucien brothers to me? And now, when the happiness of all who have been loving and generous to me is at stake, do you suppose I would hesitate? No, I will become the wife of Clameran."

Then began a struggle of self-sacrifice

between Mme. Fauvel and her niece to which should be the victim, only more sublime, because each offered her life to the other, not from any sudden impulse, but deliberately and willingly. But Madeleine carried the day, from she was by that holy enthusiasm of sacrifice which is the sustaining element of martyrs.

"Have courage; we two can fight the world and silence our enemies, and shall be saved, aunt; only trust in me!"

The Marquis of Clameran was greatly surprised that evening by receiving a letter from Mme. Fauvel, saying that she consented to everything, but that she had a little time to carry out the plan. A line from Madeleine, at the bottom of the letter assured him that she fully concurred with her aunt.

Poor girl, she did not spare herself. The next day she took Prosper and forced from him the fatal promise to shun her in the future, and to lay upon himself the responsibility of bringing their engagement.

CHAPTER XXI.

After leaving Valentine de la Verberie Gaston underwent great difficulty in effecting his escape, for his experienced and faithful co-Menoul he never would have succeeded in embarking.

Having left his mother's jewels, Valentine, his sole fortune consisted not quite a thousand francs, and with this paltry sum in his pocket, a flight from justice, and with no prospect of earning a livelihood, he took passage for Valparaiso.

Before Gaston had been on board Tom Jones forty-eight hours he saw the chance had cast him among a collection of the most depraved bandits and cutthroats. The vessel, which seemed to have recruited at all points of the compass, possessed a crew composed of every variety of thievish knaves; every country had contributed a specimen.

But Gaston's mind was undisturbed by the character of the people with whom his lot was cast for seven months. The Tom Jones set sail for Valparaiso, but certainly went in roundabout way to reach her destination. The real fact was that Captain Wat proposed visiting the Gulf of Guinea.

Gaston saw that he was serving his apprenticeship on a slaver, one of many ships which made immense fortunes by carrying on the slave trade. Though this discovery filled Gaston with indignation and shame, he was prudent enough to conceal his impressions.

When Gaston had been with Captain Warth about a year the Tom Jones stopped at Rio Janeiro for a month, to fill in supplies. He now decided to leave the ship. He possessed twelve thousand francs, as his share of the profits, which he landed at Brazil.

As a proof that the slave trade was repugnant to his nature, he left the slaver the moment he possessed a little capital with which to enter some honest business. Finally, after toil and struggle, he was worth a million in gold, besides immense tracts of land.

Arranging to return to his native land he was taken ill and died, but left a fortune and instructions to his faithful cousin Menoul. The latter came to France. An iron mill was for sale in Oloron, on the borders of the Gars; bought it with the intention of utilizing the immense quantity of wood, which for want of means of transportation, was being wasted in the mountains.

He was soon settled comfortably in his new home, and enjoying a busy, active life. One evening, as he was running over the past, a servant brought him a card, and said the gentleman was waiting to see him. He read the name on the card: Louis de Clameran, who hailed him as a friend of his brother.

"We will have to do the best we can," he said, "and keep house for ourselves. We will live together like two old bachelors, as we are, and be as happy as kings; we will lead a gay life and enjoy everything that can be enjoyed."

A few days after Menoul was taken ill. He had a sort of vertigo and was dizzy that he was forced to lie down. "I know what is the matter," he said. "I have often been ill in this way. A couple of hours' sleep will cure me. I will go to bed, and you can set some one to awaken me when dinner is ready, Louis; I shall be all right by the time."

At the same time he ordered Menoul his old Spanish servant, who had lived with him for ten years, to prepare him some lemonade.

The next day Menoul appeared to be much better. He ate his breakfast, and was about to take a walk, when the pains of the previous day suddenly returned in a more violent form.

Without consulting his cousin, Louis sent to Oloron for a physician who wonderful cures had won him a wide reputation. The doctor declared that there was no danger and merely prescribed a dose of valerian, and a blizzard with some grains of morphia sprinkled on it.

(To be continued.)

Unspoken Sympathy.

Mrs. Oldboy—You forgot to congratulate the bride, didn't you, John?

Oldboy—No, I didn't forget it—may be wrong, and I hope I am, but didn't feel as if I could congratulate her without posing as a hypocrite.

Mrs. Oldboy—Why, John! what is the name of common sense do you mean?

Oldboy—She's married to a young man who not only smokes cigarettes and parts his hair in the middle, but he also plays a mouth organ.

As Explained.

Irate Customer—I thought you said that parrot I bought of you last week was an educated bird.

Dealer—So I did, sir.

Irate Customer—But he can't speak a word.

Dealer—Of course not. He was educated in a deaf and dumb asylum.

Tenant Paints the House.

A man recently took a house upon a lease in a certain crescent in London without examining the terms of his agreement as closely as he should. After a time the landlord called upon him and pointed out that he was bound to do all the outside painting at certain intervals. He protested, but it was "so nominated in the bond," and there was no help for him. After a good deal of thought he hired the painters and directed them to paint the whole of the front of the house red, white and blue—in stripes.

When it was finished the neighborhood—it was rather a fashionable part—was up in arms and the landlord was frantic. The tenant politely explained to him that there was nothing in the agreement about the color and that red, white and blue, in stripes was his favorite combination, but he thought he might, perhaps, be better pleased with the painting of the back, which he proposed to color green, with yellow spots.

The landlord, who well knew that not another house could be let in the crescent if he carried out his threat, nearly had a fit at the idea, and within a week the tenant had a new lease.

Ayer's

Give nature three helps, and nearly every case of consumption will recover. Fresh air, most important of all.

Cherry Pectoral

Nourishing food comes next. Then, a medicine to control the cough and heal the lungs. Ask any good doctor.

I first used Ayer's Cherry Pectoral 35 years ago. I have seen terrible cases of lung disease cured by it. I am never without it. ALBERT H. HAMILTON, Marietta, Ohio.

Consumption

Health demands daily action of the bowels. Aid nature with Ayer's Pills.

A New Definition. "Say, pa," queried little Johnny Rumpnickle, "what is a high church?" "A high church," replied the old man, "is one in which the right hand of fellowship is extended on a level with the chin."

Unbiased Criticism. "What would you do, Nora," asked the young lady of the housemaid, "if you could play the piano the same as I do?" "Sure, an' Oi wouldn't be after gettin' discouraged at all, at all," replied Nora. "Oid kape right on larin' till Oi could play decently."



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ried for several years and no children had a complication of female troubles less I could be cured. He tried to cure several months, my husband became dead a testimonial of a woman who had the use of Lydia E. Pinkham's and bought a bottle for me. I used months, improving steadily in health. I cannot fully express the joy and it home is a different place now, as we credit is due to Lydia E. Pinkham's sincerely, Mrs. L. C. Groves, 614 Grove, Milwaukee Business Woman's Ass'n.

ift by the experience of these two were cured of the troubles enumerated will Lydia E. Pinkham's who suffer from womb troubles, any troubles, nervous excitability, number that it is Lydia E. Pinkham's is curing women, and don't allow else in its place.

DEAR MRS. PINKHAM: It is a pleasure to write and tell what your wonderful medicine has done for me. I was sick for years with change of life, and my physician thought a cancerous condition of womb. During these three years I red untold agony. I cannot find words in which to express my bad feelings. I did not expect to see another well day. I read some of the testimonials recommending your medicine and led to write to you and give your treatment a trial. Before I had taken half a bottle of Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, I began to sleep. I have taken now bottles and am so well I can do all kinds of work.—MRS. LIZZIE HICKLE, Salem, Ind.

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ith produce the original letters and signatures of our true absolute genuineness. Lydia E. Pinkham Med. Co., Lynn, Mass.