The Roupell Mystery

By Austyn Granville

CHAPTER V.—(Continued.)

The magistrate paused, and bit his lips. An ominous hum of voices filled the room and the clerk laid down his pen, seized his gavel and rapped for silence, gazing indignantly around him in the universal manner of court functionaries, as if a sacrilege had been committed.

"Have you any statement which you wish to make?" resumed the magistrate.

"Yes, I have. I was not in the room at the time of the commission of the murder. I was not even the first to enter the room. I entered the room almost simultaneously with another person. Monsieur Jules Chabot."

"Take this diagram in your hands. There is Madame Roupell's chamber. This is her sitting room. Where were you at the time the shot was fired?"

"I was just about to enter the sitting room from the room beyond, which had been my own apartment during my former visits to the chateau. It still contained some things of mine which I had not sent for. I recollect a case of pistols particularly, which was lying on the toilette table."

"Look at the pistol shown you, and say if it is your pistol?"

"It is. It is one I brought from America. I used this pistol for gallery practice, of which I am fond."

"When did you last see it?"

"About six weeks ago. It was then in the pistol case already referred to."

"Monsieur Jules Chabot, you say, was already in Madame Roupell's apartment when you entered. Where was he standing?"

"We entered simultaneously. He was over by the other door."

"Would it have been possible for Monsieur Chabot to have taken that pistol from your case without your knowledge?"

"I cannot tell. It depends. He may have done so, but he would have had to enter the apartment by way of Madame Roupell's sitting room, because the other door was locked."

"Who locked it?"

Van Lith hesitated for a barely perceptible instant of time ere he replied:

"I locked it myself, so as to be secure from interruption."

"Why did you wish to be secure from interruption?"

"Because I did not wish it known that I was in the chateau."

"Why did you not wish it known?"

"That is one of the questions I must decline to answer."

The prefect and the judge exchanged significant glances. The latter had noticed the prisoner's hesitation when stating that it was he himself who had locked the door. "That is the first lie he has told," thought M. Bertrand, "and it is told to shield someone. He has an accomplice, evidently." Then he said out loud:

"I have no more questions to ask. The examination of the prisoner is concluded. You will retain him in the closest custody, and allow no one but his counsel or physician to see him under any pretext whatsoever."

Jules Chabot was the next witness to be examined. His testimony was substantially the same as contained in the prefect's report. He swore positively enough to finding Van Lith in Mme. Roupell's chamber immediately after hearing the report of the pistol. He also swore that Mme. Roupell and Van Lith were on bad terms, and gave, though with a well-assumed show of reluctance, a pretty full recapitulation of the facts which had brought about the final quarrel between them.

At this stage of the examination, the prefect was seen to whisper something to the judge, and the latter then asked:

"You testify that nearly an hour elapsed between the time when you were shown to your room and the firing of the pistol. The condition of your bed proves that you had not slept in it, and when you reached Madame Roupell's chamber you were fully dressed. Why did you not retire to rest?"

"Simply because I was not sleepy," replied M. Chabot, coloring somewhat, and fingering his long mustache nervously. "I was busy writing."

"What were you writing?"

M. Chabot hesitated and stammered.

"If you do not immediately answer my question, I shall have no alternative but to commit you, monsieur," said the judge, in a stern voice.

Jules Chabot hesitated no longer. Drawing a letter from his pocket, he handed it up to the bench.

"It is a confidential communication addressed to a lady," he said, "and I trust you will respect it."

M. Bertrand could but with difficulty repress a smile as he ran his eyes rapidly over the letter, which was nothing less than the draft of a written proposition of marriage to Miss Harriet Weldon. It had evidently been the subject of much care, as the frequent erasures and interlineations showed. It was couched in flowery and high-flown language, and full of the most extravagant expressions of adoration. The most peculiar thing about it was the writer had evidently been uncertain as to which of the two young ladies he should ask for, as the words "Mlle. Harriet Weldon" had been first written and then scratched out, as if he thought there was no hope for him in that direction, and "Mlle. Emily Weldon" put in their stead. Victor Lablanche here again whispered in the ear of the judge of instruction and the latter said:

"I would ask you if you were occupied during all the interval which elapsed between the time of your retiring and hearing the report of the pistol, in writing this letter?"

"I was not so engaged during the entire time; the point of my pencil broke, and I had no penknife with which to resharpen it."

"You were right, monsieur le prefect," exclaimed the judge, with a meaning glance at the official. "How long a time elapsed between the breaking of your pencil and the report of the pistol?"

"About five minutes, I should say. Probably longer. It might have been more and it may have been less. I could not say for certain."

"The letter you have shown me," said the judge, "I think sufficiently explains why you did not retire to sleep. You were the invited guest of Madame Roupell, and occupied the room shown you. By the by, at which door did you go into Madame Roupell's room? The one which led to it from your chamber?"

"Oh, no, monsieur, that was locked. I had first to go into the corridor."

"That will do, Monsieur Chabot, you can go," said the judge, and the Frenchman, considerably relieved, bowed and retired.

The servants were then called, and they swore positively that none of them had admitted Van Lith into the chateau, and had no knowledge of his being there until they saw him in Mme. Roupell's chamber. The prefect here stated his discovery of the bruised vine leaves, and the open window, and gave it as his opinion that the entry had been there effected.

The examination of the local physician and Dr. Paul Mason then followed. They both testified that Mme. Roupell had died from the effects of a pistol bullet entering the base of the brain. This concluding the proceedings, the judge of instruction then committed Van Lith to the prison of La Mazas.

"Shall I keep Monsieur Jules Chabot under surveillance?" asked the prefect, when all had retired.

"I see no occasion for it," replied M. Bertrand. "He may be a fool; but he doesn't look like a murderer."

But Victor Lablanche still adhered obstinately to the opinion that M. Chabot would bear watching. Slipping from the room he instructed one of his most reliable secret agents to keep him in sight until further orders. He had said nothing about his discovery of the open door. He would keep that to himself. It might lead perhaps to one of those grand coups for which he was so famous.

Another thing the prefect was dissatisfied with. Upon the certificate of the physicians that the Miles. Weldon were prostrated by the death of their aunt, they had not been summoned before the tribunal—though later they would probably be called upon to testify. The prefect considered this as ill-timed leniency, but there was no help for it. The certificate of so famous a physician as Dr. Paul Mason had its weight with the judge of instruction.

CHAPTER VI.

Dr. Paul Mason found opportunity to whisper in Charles Van Lith's ear, as he was led away:

"Do not despair. I will leave no stone unturned to establish your innocence." Then, as he wrung his hand, he added, "Oh, if you would but speak."

Van Lith said nothing in reply. He was so overcome with the horror of his situation that he could barely stammer out his thanks for the doctor's kindness. Overwhelmed by the magnitude of the misfortune which had overtaken him, he suffered himself to be conducted unresistingly to that sombre vehicle, in which, closely barred and huddled together like sheep, prisoners are carried to the dark and gloomy cells of La Mazas. Paul Mason immediately took a cab to the Rue de Reverdy, where he ate, though sparingly, of the breakfast which his housekeeper, Louise, had long ago prepared against his coming.

"Well, Madame Roupell was murdered this morning at the Chateau Villeneuve," he said at last.

The old servant started violently. She set down the pot from which she was about to pour a fresh cup of coffee for the doctor, and trembled from head to foot.

"Is it possible?" she ejaculated.

"It is not only possible, but, alas, it is a fact," repeated the doctor; "and as if that was not trouble enough in one day, my friend Monsieur Charles Van Lith has been arrested, charged with the commission of the crime."

At this additional intelligence the old woman's eyes nearly started out of her head.

"Monsieur Charles! How can he be guilty of such a thing? He, so gay, so cheerful, so polite to everybody! I will never believe it."

"He was in the chateau last night, and positively refuses to tell even me how he came to be there. But there is a report of the whole affair in the morning paper. You can read it for yourself."

The old lady put on her glasses, and simply devoured the paper which the doctor handed her. Suddenly she exclaimed:

"Monsieur Van Lith's silence has something to do with one of the young ladies, you may depend upon it."

Louise pointed to a certain paragraph in the report of the tragedy, which had already, in the shape of an "extra," found its way thus early into print:

"It has transpired that a light was burning in the chamber of Mlle. Harriet Weldon, a niece of the murdered woman, at a late hour. It would not surprise us to learn that this young lady ultimately proved to be the "woman in the case."

"You give me credit for too much sharpness, you see," said Louise. "It is the idea of the reporter, not mine."

"Ah," replied the doctor, "those reporters are very sharp fellows. Some of them are as good as trained detectives."

"They are good enough in their way," remarked the old housekeeper, as she began to clear away the breakfast dishes, "but could they begin to compete with such men as Marmaud, Bassaud or Alfred Cassagne—especially Cassagne? Oh, he is as sharp as a needle; nothing escapes him."

"Tell us something more about this Alfred Cassagne. Why do you mention him, particularly?"

"First, because he has a good reputation, and secondly, because I happen to know something about him, monsieur," replied the housekeeper, highly gratified at being thus interrogated. "He is one of the most famous detectives in Paris, and he has no need to be a detective at all, or anything else, for that matter, as he has plenty of money to live upon. Ah, he is grand. It is a passion with him. When anyone else fails to get to the bottom of a mystery, they call in Monsieur Cassagne, and he always succeeds."

"Always?"

"If he does not it is because the case is hopeless, has no bottom. He is very shrewd. He adopts a hundred disguises. An Englishman stops you on the street at nine o'clock and asks you the way. It is Monsieur Cassagne. At ten, a German shoemaker, leathern apron and all, inquires what time it is. It is Monsieur Cassagne. A little further on a crossing sweeper begs for a few sous. It is Cassagne again. Finally, you see him outside one of the cafes, sipping his chocolate, only you don't recognise him, for he is a merchant or perhaps a swell of the boulevards. Ah, but he is a wonderful man, is this Alfred Cassagne."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"Certainly, a cousin of mine once worked for him. I have been in his house. It is the Rue de Petits Champs. Thirty-six is the number."

"I intend to employ a detective on this matter," said the doctor, presently, "and as I don't know one from another, I am inclined to say, 'Why not your friend, Alfred Cassagne?' Slip on your bonnet and shawl, Louise. I want you to take a message to the telegraph office."

The doctor took a blank from a drawer and wrote his dispatch.

"Take that," he said, handing it to the housekeeper. "It is a message to your wonderful Cassagne, asking him to meet me to-morrow morning at the Chateau Villeneuve. We shall be on the ground there, and he will have a chance to show what he is made of."

The old lady's face wore a beaming expression. She put the telegram in her pocket as if it were some precious jewel.

"You will not regret it, monsieur, for, as I have assured you, you will find Monsieur Cassagne a very clever person."

Already in her simple mind, the gloomy gates of La Mazas had swung back upon their massive hinges, and the young friend of her kind master stepped forth, a free and happy man.

* * * * * * *

It was a beautiful morning; the birds sang melodiously in the trees which surrounded the Chateau Villeneuve. Dr. Mason had arrived from Paris on an early train, and was now pacing impatiently to and fro on the broad terrace in front of the house. In his hand he held a telegram which he had received from M. Cassagne, the detective. He was glancing at it for perhaps the twentieth time, when one of the windows of the morning room, which was on a level with the ground, suddenly opened, and Emily Weldon stepped out upon the terrace. She was pale even to ghastliness. Notwithstanding the fatigues of the previous day, she had passed a sleepless night.

The upper chambers of the chateau had all been placed under seal. Under the inexorable criminal laws of France, she had ben denied even the consolation of watching by the body of her benefactress; and her excited condition of mind precluded her from taking that repose of which she was no much in need.

Harriet, on the contrary, to whose softer nature the relief of tears had not been denied, had, toward daybreak, fallen asleep on a sofa. Utterly worn out by the events of the last twenty-four hours, she now slumbered as peacefully as an infant, which, excited by some childish tribulation, sinks at last to rest in its mother's arms.

Emily advanced a few steps along the terrace toward Dr. Mason, who hastened to meet her. Her first question was as to whether M. Cassagne, the detective, had yet arrived, for the doctor had telegraphed her that they would both be there in the morning.

"I am expecting him every minute," replied Mason. "This telegram reached me late last night at my house in Paris. I should gather from it that he is a very peculiar personage indeed. Just look at that, and tell me what you make of it."

She took the telegram and read it, a faint smile upon her lips.

"It certainly is a curious production. He seems to put more stress on how he shall be fed than anything else."

"Will be at villeneuve at nine morning please have omelette au rhum and truffles breakfast will bring my own coffee.

"ALFRED CASSAGNE."

"I am told he is an odd creature," observed the doctor, "but also that he is one of the most remarkable men in his line that has been known since the days of Fouche. It is very strange that he does not come. It is now nearly half past nine."

(To be continued.)

A Difference.

An Irish priest had labored hard with one of his flock to induce him to give up whisky.

"I tell you, Michael," said the priest, "whisky is your worst enemy, and you should keep as far away from it as you can."

"Me enemy, is it, father?" responded Michael, "and it was your riverence's self that was tellin' us in the pulpit only last Sunday to love our enemies!"

"So it was, Michael," rejoined the priest, "but I didn't tell you to swallow them."—Kansas City Independent.

His Loss.

"June is me favorite month," said the poetical hobo, as he scribbled an ode on the back of a tomato can label.

"'Tain't mine," sighed Sandy Pikes, lugubriously. "I always have to go barefooted troo dat month."

"Barefooted? Why, how is that, pal?"

"Why, you see, people throw all deir old shoes at de June brides."

Dead Broke.

The Count—Yes, I was almost positive ze fair girl was thinking of me.

The Duke—Then why didn't you walk up and say: "A penny for your thoughts?"

The Count—Too risky, monsieur; far too risky. I didn't have a penny.

Always Together.

"Yes," announced the guide, "there goes Rain-in-the-Face. Quite a celebrated Indian."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the tourist. "And who is that other Indian with him?"

"Oh, that is Chief Big Umbrella."

Elevated.

Foote Lighte—What's become of that company your brother formed for the purpose of elevating the stage?

Miss Sue Brette—Gone up!—Yonkers Statesman.

EXCEEDS AUTHORITY

Federal Court Sets Aside Joint Rate Order.

RULING IS BY JUDGE HANFORD

Finds That Washington Board Is Encroaching on Power of Interstate Commerce Law.

Seattle, Nov. 30.—Federal Judge C. H. Hanford yesterday enjoined the Washington State Railway commission, represented by Harry Fairchild, John C. Lawrence and Jesse J. Jones, from compelling the railroads to obey the joint rate order on wheat shipped from Eastern Washington points to Puget sound points.

The decision is based on Judge Hanford's opinion that it is the obvious intention of the commission to divert the wheat traffic of that part of the state east and south of Spokane from Portland to Puget sound. The action, the court holds, is an attempt on the part of the commission to encroach upon the power to regulate interstate commerce vested in congress by the constitution of the United States.

The particular portion of the commission's order to which the railroads took exception was that prescribing that the freight charges paid by the shippers in gross was to be divided between the several carriers participating in the service. The hands of the commission, however, are not absolutely tied, for Judge Hanford says no injury will be inflicted by the making of the supplemental order apportioning the joint rates.

From Judge Hanford's opinion it would appear that the commission is entitled to prescribe a joint rate in the future provided that the objectionable features of the present order are obviated.

"The injunction to be issued," says the court, "will not restrain the railway commission from making such an order. This court will not set aside a joint rate by interlocutory decree or provisional injunction, nor at all, unless upon final hearing it shall be proved to be insufficient and unreasonable."

The jurisdiction of the United States District court, which was questioned by the railroads, is maintained by Judge Hanford.

ASHES COVER THE GROUND.

Nome and Vicinity Buried in Volcanic Eruptive Matter.

Seattle, Nov. 30.—A special to the Morning Times from Nome says Nome and probably the entire Seward peninsula is shrouded in an ashy haze and the ground for miles is covered several inches deep with a fine gritty powder, which is believed to be volcanic ash.

The storm began several days ago, the dust blowing in from the ocean, but at first little attention was paid to the freak of nature, as it was expected that it would soon cease. Instead, however, the fall continued, and after a day became so dense as to seriously interfere with outdoor pursuits. Miners coming into town reported that for miles the snow was so impregnated with the ashes that sledding was almost impossible. Further, the air is so full of ashes that breathing is difficult and the fine powder has sifted into houses and business places to such an extent that it is thick on the floors and on everything in the way of goods and household furniture. It is believed that some of the numerous volcanic islands, either between this coast and Siberia, or more probably those islands in the Alaska peninsula, or the Aleutian islands, is again eruption, and that the ashy downpour is the result. No serious results are anticipated, but much inconvenience is being caused by the peculiar storm.

Penalty of Wrecking Czar's Yacht

St. Petersburg, Nov. 30.—The commission appointed to investigate the stranding of the imperial yacht Standard, September 11, which ran on the rocks off Horzo while the emperor and the members of his family were on board, has handed in its findings. Rear Admiral Niloff and Captain Tschagin are repremanded, Lieutenant Colonel Konnoekow is dismissed from the service and Lieutenant Sultanoff is placed under arrest for one week. General Schemann, director of the pilotage system on the Finnish coast, is acquitted.

Meat Growing Cheaper.

New York, Nov. 30.—Prices of nearly all grades of meat were reported by local dealers yesterday to be dropping rapidly in this market, consequent upon the decrease in the cost of cattle at Western packing house centers. Except for the very best grades, beef is 3 to 5 cents a pound less than a month ago. Mutton and lamb are from 2 to 4 cents lower. Pork, corned beef and similar products are 3 cents lower than a short time ago.

Court to Enforce Order.

Montgomery, Ala., Nov. 30.—The only development of the day in the injunction suits of the railroad lines against the state laws is the constinual swearing in of deputies by the United States marshal. It is given out that the court is determined that there shall be most absolute observance of its orders. It is anticipated here that the writ will be disobeyed, as a test case.

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