

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 justify a criminal.

"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 act 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 Cavallion, 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 from 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 impersonate 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!"

"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 Oloron. He would go there and work upon "public opinion," so that, to satisfy the townspeople, the authorities would order a post-mortem examination of Meaul. But this mode of proceeding required time 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 lounging 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. Fauvel 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 Fauvel, 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, paf! my criminal must go and fizzle! A regular case of bankruptcy!"

"Then it is Clameran who—"

"Of course it is. When the rascal saw 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 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 Fauvel 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 Fauvel:

"Mme. Fauvel is saved!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

Four days had passed since the events just narrated, when, one morning, M. Lecocq—the official Lecocq, who resembled the dignified head of a bureau—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 Janquette opened the door, and ushered in Mme. Nina and Prosper Bertomy.

"Ah," said M. Lecocq, "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 hapless of men. Intoxicated 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 Lecocq.

"Caldas!" cried Nina.

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

M. Lecocq 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 Mlle. Madeleine Fauvel.

The banking house is still in the Rue de Province, 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.)

FARMS AND FARMERS



Lighting the Barn Safely.

One cannot be too careful using lights of any kind in barns, but there is little danger if a lantern is used and some way provided so that it may be securely hung beyond the reach of danger. The illustration shows a simple way of doing this. If there are several places in the barn where light is likely to be needed stretch a strand of smooth fence wire so that it will hang taut over these places first sliding on another strip of wire with a ring and with a snap at the other end. When the lantern is to be put in place simply snap over the bale of the lantern as shown in the illustration.

If the lantern is to be placed where there is little chance of any one running against it, a long hoop may be made of one end of the wire, instead of the snap, and the bale of the lantern slipped over it. By making the hoop long and pinching the upper end so that there will be just room enough



THE BARN LANTERN.

to slip the handle of the lantern between, the danger of knocking it off is much lessened, although this plan is not as safe as the snap.

Small Yards for Poultry.

When it is not possible to supply a range of considerable size for the fowls and they must be practically kept in yards, an excellent plan is to divide the yard into two or three sections, according to its size, and treat them in the following manner: Plow or spade each yard, and in one or two, if divided into three spaces, plant some early vegetables that will require some cultivation—radishes, for example. When the crop is taken out, turn the fowls into this yard and plant the others in the same way. When the yards are divided into three, one of them may be prepared thoroughly and grass seeds or oats or millet sown in it, with the vegetables in the second yard, while the fowls occupy the third. When the grass or small grain gets two or three inches high, turn the fowls in this yard and sow the soil in the yard they occupied, in a like manner. By the time they have cleaned out the grass lot, the one in which the vegetables are grown will be ready for them to scratch over. It is surprising how well the fowls will do under this plan, even though each yard is very small.

Good Pig Trough.

O. C. Burch, of Nebraska, sends Iowa Homestead a plan for making a pig trough to prevent the hogs getting in it. "I have mine," says Mr.



GOOD PIG TROUGH.

Burch, "with a number of holes in the uprights at the ends of the trough so it can be adjusted to suit different sized hogs. The top piece or rail can be taken out in cleaning out the trough. A trough of this kind is almost always clean and such a thing as mud is unknown about a trough of this kind."

The Perennial Plants.

More and more people who love flowers are getting into the way of growing the old-fashioned flowers such as the sweet william, hollyhock, larkspur and others familiar to most people who have reached middle life. This class of plants are among the easiest to grow and are particularly useful on the farm grounds where it is not always easiest to care for tender plants over winter. The one complaint about hardy perennials is that they are not so profuse in blooming the second season of flowering. With many of the classes this may be remedied by planting the seeds as soon as they ripen, in the late summer, in the places where you want the plants to grow and bloom.

The Vinegar Process.

Cider turns to vinegar, first, by the sugar being converted into alcohol, and next by taking more oxygen, when it becomes vinegar. The process is a chemical one and cannot be prevented, as long as the least quantity of oxygen (in the air) reaches the cider. Bacterial agents, however, have something to do with the changes that occur. Salicylic acid is used for keeping vinegar, but it does harm. Boiling the cider also retards changes. A method used in Canada with good results is

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One Hundred Years Ago.

The greater part of the Russian army was concentrated upon the frontiers of Turkey, contemplating a serious move against that country.

The French general at Naples ordered the seizure of all vessels suspected of carrying provisions to Malta or the English squadron.

The Russian and British ministers were received in private audience by the King of Prussia.

War was declared between England and Spain.

Six cardinals were named by the Pope to accompany his holiness to France for the coronation of Napoleon.

M. Henri, a Frenchman, was in Washington, engaged in translating into French the life of George Washington, from papers in the possession of Bushrod Washington.

Emmet, the Irish patriot, arrived in America.

Seventy-five Years Ago.

Trafalgar Square, London, was begun.

The Emperor of Austria presented a magnificent service of porcelain to the Pasha of Egypt.

Francis Scott Key, made an eloquent address before the African Colonization Society, which met in Philadelphia.

Two large mirrors arrived at Philadelphia from France for the east room of the White House at Washington.

A steam vessel made its first voyage from Dublin to Bordeaux at the rate of ten miles per hour.

Provision was made for the free navigation of the River Rhine, Germany.

Angola, a Portuguese settlement in Africa, revolted against Don Miguel.

Fifty Years Ago.

The royal Danish railroad was opened by the King.

Two additional asteroids were discovered by M. M. Goldschmidt and Chacerman in Paris and named Polymonia and Pomana.

The famous "charge of the light brigade" took place at Balaclava.

The American clipper Lightning arrived at Liverpool, sixty-three days from Melbourne, Australia.

Several detachments of British guards left London for the Crimea to fill up casualties caused by the battle of Alma.

The remains of the English exploring party under Sir John Franklin were discovered near Great Fish River, Buck, in the Arctic Ocean.

Pierre Soule, American minister to Spain, on landing at Calais from England, was stopped by the French police and obliged to return to London.

Forty Years Ago.

Delegates from the Canadian colonies at a meeting at Quebec agreed upon the basis of representation in the Canadian confederation.

Gold in the New York market dropped from 218 1/4 to 213, and wheat from \$1.73 to \$1.63, in eight hours.

The United States internal revenue report showed an income from that source of \$500,000 a day.

Confederate forces under Price were routed in an all day battle near Kansas City, Mo., and were driven southward.

President Lincoln answered a protest by the opponents of Governor Johnson, in Tennessee, declining to interfere in the State fight.

Petroleum discoveries were made at Dundee, Monroe County, Mich.

Thirty Years Ago.

General Frederick Dent Grant and Ida Marie Honore were married in Chicago.

A gale swept the northern coast of England, doing great damage to shipping and costing many lives.

The Presbyterian synod of Illinois, north, sustained an appeal from the decision of the Chicago presbytery, which had acquitted Professor David Swing, and directed that the noted preacher's name be erased from the roll of members.

The Porte denied the joint request of Austria, Germany and Russia to make commercial treaties with Roumania.

Twenty Years Ago.

Seventy acres area in Carthage, N. Y., was burned with a property loss of nearly \$1,000,000.

Paris dispatches declared that France had declined a proposition from England to mediate in the Franco-Chinese difficulty.

The dry goods house of T. A. Chapman & Co. and the carpet house of Stark Bros., Milwaukee, Wis., burned, with loss of \$750,000.