

His Own Detective

Count d'O—— was one of the gay sons of Paris. He originally possessed a large fortune; dissolute habits—the vortex of wealth and title—had expanded the better part of the princely independence. He was famous as the wildest, the most daring, and yet most generous of profligates. However, repeated losses at *ecarte* had somewhat drained his purse. Unlike the better part of the licentious, he had the wisdom to dispense with many follies; yet he still kept up a small whit of dissipation among a few boon companions, the choicest of whom was the Marquis D——.

However, a few days before our tale commences, a rich relation dying, left him a considerable sum of money, and once more he was reinstated in his pleasure, while his boon companions, like vultures scenting their prey, began flocking round his open purse.

One evening Count d'O—— and the Marquis D—— were sitting in a richly-adorned apartment belonging to the former, when the conversation turned upon his late good fortune. The Marquis D—— listened to the count's remarks with a seeming nonchalance. He was whiffing a finely-scented cigar, and deeply employed in the philosophy of smoke. He was a tall exactly built man, and a thorough gentleman in manners and conversation, yet there was something in the glitter of the calm dark eye, something in the proudly curled smile which spoke of the man of emergency and talent. He was dissolute, had squandered a fortune; but was more renowned for his skill in dueling, quiet recklessness, than as a debauchee.

"Yes, the old buck did it well, and—*sacre!*—deserves my thanks, I mustn't be an utter villain. Rather wild; but I would not care for *tout le monde*, to call me *mauvais*. *Le diable!* even he is not an utter rake," and the count threw himself at length on his beautiful sofa, while his countenance beamed a generous good humor.

"Yes, most decidedly; but you are not going to be a confirmed grandam?" and the marquis laughed slightly. It was a clear laugh, but pregnant with sneer, which the count could not bear.

Springing up from the sofa, rather indignant, and seating himself on a chair—"A grandam! There, you cut and back again. My dear fellow, I was reasonable, surely, not to ruin myself; but I've something now."

"Are you certain, monsieur?" said the marquis; and he smiled very foolishly—almost pityingly.

"Do you mean to doubt it! cried the count, in astonishment.

"Well—dreams are dreams, but—substance is substance," drawled the marquis.

"Well, then, there's substance," said the count, producing from his pocketbook a 50,000 franc note.

A basilisk could not have darted a keener, more fascinating look than the marquis at the note. It vanished—the dream was momentary.

“Ah! now you are a prince, indeed. Well, come, that's better than I expected,” exclaimed the marquis with generous ardor.

“Yes, don't you imagine 'tis a dream. That's one, and I've more of the little fairies,” the count said with great satisfaction, replacing it in his pocketbook, alongside of what seemed to be another one.

The conversation thus went on, but a keen observer might have noticed that the marquis now and then overstepped the bounds of his nonchalance. In fact, he became unusually pleasing and charming in his talk. Cigar after cigar was smoked, glass after glass emptied, and the count grew more open and noisy, the marquis more fascinating and sparkling—a continuous stream of quiet accomplished question and answer. The count was delighted, and praised the marquis for a talent which he knew before was radiant with charms. When D—— had brought d'O—— up to the fire of enthusiasm, he adroitly asked him to play *ecarte*. He accepted, and sat down to play. The winnings were nearly equal, Count d'O—— having the advantage. Hour after hour sped by, and the lonely hour of midnight saw those two men earnestly playing, but with what different thoughts!

Next morning, the marquis, dressed in the most brilliant manner, came rather hurriedly to the count's hotel. When he entered the room, he expressed surprise to see the count speaking rather anxiously with a gendarme. The count was angry and restless. The marquis, after a good stare at the officer, turned to the count, saying—“Excuse me, monsieur, but I'm sorry to disturb you, and really you must put it down to my impatience. I have called for you to accompany me to the reception of the Russian Prince. They say it will be brilliant, and the emperor expects a first-class levee,” and the marquis looked the most unconcerned and happiest of men. The count was regarding him with almost a rude fixedness. The marquis returned it without the least show of anger or jealousy.

The count turned away, muttering—“No, it cannot be!”

“Can I have your answer, monsieur,” continued the marquis.

“Really, my dear marquis, you must excuse me,” said the count.

“Monsieur, I hope you will not consider me impertinent, but——” continued the marquis, with a bland smile.

“Pardon, marquis, but a misfortune has happened.”

“Ah! monsieur, hasten to tell me,” said the marquis with an air of sympathy.

“Well, then, I have been robbed! Robbed,” continued the count with a fierce voice “by some villain—some devil! Basely robbed—and but last night!”

"Robbed!" echoed the Marquis.

"Do you know the thief?" the count said, fiercely peering into his face.

"Me! how should I, dear count?" said the marquis, not taking the rudeness of the count's manner.

"No!" muttered the count turning away.

"I hope it is no great loss," chimed the marquis.

"No great loss!" thundered the count, "Is 100,000 francs nothing?"

"Good heavens! what's that—what do you say—what?"

"Yes, marquis, 100,000 francs. I know they've been stolen. Villain!—hell-born rascal, whoever he be!" shouted the count, striding irregularly over the apartment.

"Why, you thunder-strike me!" said the marquis, dropping into a seat.

"Officer, away, and obey my orders," said the count authoritatively.

The detective bowed and retired, casting a suspicious look at the marquis, who was sitting "thunderstruck," as he said, in the chair.

"Now, Marquis, do you know anything about this?" said the count, standing with his arms folded.

"Me!" and the marquis sprang from his chair, while indignation flashed from his eye. "Count, what do you mean? That is the second time you've asked me that!"

"Yes it is," and the count looked narrowly at the marquis.

"Good heavens!—Why count, surely—My dear sir, you've got a better respect for me—than—than to imagine that I would—" cried the marquis, incredulously.

"Steal 100,000 francs," coolly said the count.

The marquis gave him a dignified, haughty look, and casting his body into a martial attitude—"Sir count, you throw opprobrium on my name—for what reason I know not; but there are certain justifications to be made in such cases, and I hope you will give me those same said satisfactions." With this he caught up his hat and stick and was stalking from the room, when the count threw himself in his path.

"Forgive me, marquis—forgive me!—vexation has angered me—I know not what I do; and really I am sorry I said so to you; but—but—passion overcame me," said the generous count.

"Sir, allow me to pass. To-morrow your anger may be quenched, and you will know how to treat a friend."

The marquis opened the door and went out. The count was really sorry to cast aspersions on his friend, but he—he—

The news spread rapidly through Paris that Count d'O—— had been robbed of two banknotes of 50,000 francs each. Like all stories floating about large cities, they grow into terrific dimensions; certain sundry adjectives and facts are affixed by glowing eloquence of a narrator, and before the next night had fallen over the city it was the topic of conversation. Who the daring thief had been of course puzzled all when even the police, with all their active agency, were baffled. Of course the notes would be of no advantage to the delinquent, for the banks had received preliminary warning. If he had dared to show them at the counter, there would have been but too many hands to seize him.

Those who were suspected first belonged to the count's hotel, but search, threat, bribe produced not a vestige of a note. The count, in his fierce anger, vowed death to the villain who had dared to rob him of his legacy; for no loss grieves the spirit so as that which was already in our grasp—that which he had tasted with exultation. Again and again the prefect of police had a private interview with the count

"Who was the last person with you on that unfortunate night?" said the prefect.

"The Marquis D——. But—" replied the count.

"Ah!" echoed the cunningest of men.

"You start! What is it?" interrogated the count.

"Is he rich—well off?"

"No, he's rather down "

The prefect took his hat. "Good morning, monsieur."

"Sir—sir—what are you going to do?"

"A little business. Au revoir, monsieur le count."

"Mind you do not—stay—stay!"

But the detective was gone. He thought he had seized the silken clue which led from the labyrinth of Minos. Alas he was no Theseus.

When the Marquis D—— came home at night he was seized and searched. Nothing was found on him. To the oaths and curses he uttered the prefect only replied—"Excuse me, monsieur, but law is imperative."

"You villain! I'll see the Emperor about this. Have I to be ruthlessly handled—cuffed—gagged—"

In short the marquis displayed an astonishing amount of indignation and words.

His house was probed and ransacked with that particular care and acuteness which Parisian detectives exhibit in a remarkable degree. They searched the walls and floors. They entered cabinets, escritoirs, and drawers; they probed beds and chairs; they examined furniture with the microscope; in fact, so complete was their art that nothing could escape their extreme care, not even a line. But all to no avail; the marquis had thus proved himself guiltless.

When they had all departed, the marquis restored his equanimity of countenance, and, smiling, cast his eyes upon a large retriever dog of glossy blackness, of raven beauty.

"Come, Fidele!—come, good dog!"

The dog came up wagging his tail, looking very wise; a brass chain was round his neck, to which hung a large lock, or seemed one. His master opened this lock, and smiled again in his ironical manner.

Next morning the marquis might be seen going to the count's hotel, and there was anger on his face. Now his physiognomy was suited to that expression. It was easier for him to adopt passion than pleasure. The stern lines of his countenance reposed well in rigid anger: they appeared distorted when he assumed masked laughter, and the lacqueys at the door bowed before that keen eye and commanding presence, and acknowledged that he was a magnificent noble. Servants are in awe of those who display a calm fixedness of haughtiness instead of a smoking fume.

"Good morning, marquis. I hope—" said the count generously holding out his hand.

"Sir, preserve the purity of your hand, for you are going to touch one convicted of felony—one condemned by his friend—one whose house is made the sport of police!" exclaimed the marquis, in his most sarcastic manner.

"You don't mean to say that—" shouted the astonished count.

"Sir count, don't add a lie to my catalogue of crimes," said the marquis, bowing.

"Come—come—marquis, let us drop this! It is all a blunder—a confounded mistake."

"I am much obliged to hear so; but how about my honor?"

"Oh, wait till we catch the villain; then we shall be all right."

"Till then I am a felon."

"Come, dear marquis, drop that sarcasm. Let us have a little friendly talk—as before this devilish business commenced; let us see how we have to get back this money? I know you're a sharp fellow; let me hear what you have to say about it?"

"Willingly."

Hereupon they sat down, rolled their chairs near the fire, lighted their cigars, and began to think and talk. There is something in the Virginian weed which seems to stimulate thought and bind friendship, for, to all appearance, these two sketched out plans of detection, and were the very best friends possible.

The conversation lasted a long time, at the end of which the marquis rose extremely thoughtful, and bade the count a most sweet good-night.

As he was driving home he buried his head in his hands thinking over what the count had told him—that detectives were abroad, the bank was on the alert, that the bills were useless to the thief, and that a reward had been offered to be paid by the count's banker.

A few days after, as the marquis was walking near this particular bank, he accidentally met the banker.

"Well, sir, anything more about that affair of Count d'O——'s?" asked the marquis.

"No, sir; it is quite a mystery. But the thief appears to be a foolish fellow, for the robbery can bring him no return."

"Indeed! a—a—foolish fellow."

"Yes, he must be, for—"

"What is the reward you offer?"

"Ten thousand francs."

"Well, now, I shouldn't care to get that," said the marquis, laughingly.

"Oh, a pretty good sum—pretty large."

"Well, I'll think seriously about it—I'll try. The affair seems to be difficult because of its simplicity. I doubt we are baffled by the openness of the thing."

After a few more words they parted.

The marquis was in frequent company with the count, and appeared to be extremely diligent in the search. He also met the banker, to whom he reported his ill-success. So passed a few days.

Finally, one morning he met the banker with a smiling face.

"Success at last monsieur!" said the marquis, smiling.

"What? Success!" echoed the banker.

"Yes; come, sign the check, and I'll give you the notes." And the marquis hurried him toward the bank.

The banker was impatient to know the daring thief.

"I can get them and deliver them only on conditions of secrecy. The fellow has made me swear this, and I'm bound by oath. He wants to evade the law—poor rascal!—so I promised him faithfully. He has to receive 5,000 francs."

The banker regarded him with an incredulous look, but the marquis flinched not in his honest mask.

The check was sealed. He got his 10,000 francs. Being a nobleman, no further search was made. The unsuspecting count continued his friendship, till one night, in an inebriated state, the marquis divulged his secret. When tasked in his sober mood, he replied in his laughing manner:

"What's a fellow to do when he's hard up?"

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