

## *Unraveling A Plot*

---

In the village of Gensac, France, on the afternoon of May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1854, might have been heard the chiming of bells, indicating that a wedding was in progress. Three months before, Justin Bertrand, a young man, having obtained a leave of absence from the regiment, had returned to the village where he had first seen the light of day. At a large mansion bordering on the outskirts of Gensac, Susanne Gillette, a young English woman, had for some time been employed as governess.

On their first meeting Justin had fallen madly in love with the beautiful Susanne, and she, not being opposed to his attentions, after a short, but to Justin a blissful courtship, gave her hand to her ardent lover.

The marriage ceremonies were performed amid the usual village rejoicing. The newly wedded pair took a bridal trip to Paris. The country girl had never seen the capital before, and her wonder and amazement may well be imagined. The perverse instincts slumbering within her were awakened by the luxury and gayety of the immense city, and Susanne swore to herself that she would be rich some day.

A few months after their return home, and after they had settled down to the monotony of domestic life, Susanne gave birth to a son.

The joy of the father was unbounded, but this joy, strange to say, was not shared by the mother.

“He shall be called Philip, after my dear father,” exclaimed Justin, in ecstasies.

Things went on at the Bertrand home in an indifferent manner until the end of the month of June, 1856, when Susanne desired to go to Havre, under the pretext that the sea air was necessary for her health. In this her husband did not oppose her. Taking her child, she departed and was never seen by her husband again. Before leaving, however, she had promised to send her husband word of her safe arrival. After waiting a sufficient length of time and receiving no missive, Justin determined to hasten after and ascertain the cause. At the moment he was about to start, a note was handed to him. With trembling hand he broke the seal. It contained these words:

“I have left you—forget me.”

The distracted husband, crazed with anxiety and grief, started for Paris, whither he was sure his faithless wife had flown, and determined that if Susanne refused to return, at least to obtain possession of his son, whom he dearly loved. He scoured the great city in vain.

No trace of the missing woman could be found. A small fortune had been left him by his father, and this being nearly expended in the search, he was obliged to gain a livelihood.

After thoroughly discussing the matter in his mind, he determined to follow the detective profession, inasmuch as in this pursuit he would be most likely to obtain some information relative to his child.

He had already despaired of regaining the love of the woman who was his wife. So it was only for his son for whom he looked now.

Years rolled on, and still the unhappy man did not give up the search.

Often was he reprimanded by his superiors for not following more closely the case to which he was assigned. It was because he had been in pursuit of some phantom clue that he imagined would restore to him his son. Case after case, notwithstanding, he had worked up with remarkable sagacity. The name Bertrand had become a terror to the evil-doers of Paris.

So it was on the morning of March 15, 1875, that the prefecture of police was thrown into commotion concerning a supposed murder that had been committed in the Rue des Invalides. Madame de Brahal had been found in her bed cold in death, with a poniard still embedded in her heart.

Bertrand thought that he would be assigned to this case and accordingly made preparations. But in this he was mistaken; for as soon as the examining magistrate returned from the scene of the murder he informed Bertrand that his services would not at all be necessary; as the murderer had been found. This worthy personage was no other than the groom of the unfortunate lady.

“And to think that the wretch could be so ungrateful!” exclaimed the magistrate – “Madame de Brahal has been so [good] to him. But how could he be such a fool as to leave the poniard, with the initials on, in the bosom of his victim? However, we have him safe in his cell. Monsieur le judge will see how swift justice was in the case.”

So saying, the examining magistrate departed for his private office to make out his report of the case.

Left alone, Bertrand pondered to himself: “Why will these people do wrong? Why commit crime? They must know sooner or later their dark deeds will be brought to light. I would really like to see this groom, who would leave the implement of his crime, with his initials on, in the bosom of his victim.”

It was but the effort of a moment to have his wish gratified. Arrived at the cell in which the young man lay, Bertrand who expected to find some stupid, lumbering fellow, was astonished to find a young man whose countenance and actions showed him to be possessed of considerable intelligence and rankness.

“That is not the face of a brutal butcher,” muttered Bertrand. “Why did you commit so terrible a deed?” asked he.

A shrug of the shoulders was the answer.

Looking at the prisoner straight in the eyes, Bertrand said:

“I do not believe that you murdered Madame de Brahal!”

The young man started toward the detective eagerly, then stopped, and casting his eyes to the ground, said:

“Was not my dagger found sticking in Madame’s bosom?”

“How did it get there?” inquired Bertrand.

“My God! I – I stabbed her.”

The detective, withdrawing, muttering to himself:

“Strange indeed. I cannot believe in the guilt of this young man. He is sacrificing himself to save some one. Perhaps he has a mistress among the maids of madame, and her he wants to protect. I will find out. I will go to the house of the murdered woman and find out all I can.”

So saying, he went to his private room, and donning a complete disguise, he preceded to the Rue des Invalides. Arriving at the mansion, he asked the porter who answered the bell for Monsieur de Brahal, stating that with monsieur he had important business. He was informed that monsieur was not at home—in fact, monsieur was not in Paris.

“Then,” said Bertrand, “monsieur is not aware of the terrible misfortune that has befallen him in the death of his wife.”

“No, monsieur,” answered the porter, “Monsieur Brahal left Paris the day before the murder [for] Havre and has not returned, although Madame Rhodes, the housekeeper, has sent him word.”

“Ah! perhaps from this English housekeeper I can learn something,” muttered the detective to himself. Then to the porter. “Madame Rhodes, perhaps, can give the information I desire.”

Bertrand was now shown into the reception room of the mansion. Presently the rustling of a woman’s dress was heard, and the form of a woman was before him.

“What does monsieur desire of me?” asked Madam Rhodes.

The voice made the detective start as if he had been struck by an electric shock, and, taking a step forward, he approached almost near enough to touch the woman’s face. Then, starting back, uttering a cry of mingled surprise and rage, he faltered:

“Susanne!”

The woman shrank back as if she had trod upon a serpent. She did not recognize him.

“I have found you at last,” muttered Bertrand.

“I never saw you before, and I am not at all anxious to clear up this ridiculous mistake,” said she.

“I will recall your recollections.”

Like a flash he tore off his disguise.

“Justin,” she murmured; “the dead come to life! What do you want of me?” she said haughtily.

“What do I want?” he asked, with a tinge of sorrow in his voice. “I want my son.”

“What if I should refuse to give him up?”

“Then, woman, I will tear the secret from your heart.” And advancing menacingly toward her, as if to execute his threat, he stopped, and as though touched by a sweet recollection of happy days gone by, he murmured: “Susanne, give me back my son and I will forgive all the evil you have done me.”

“I do not want your pardon. All I ask is that you leave this house and never molest me more; for if you do—”

“I will not move until I have my son. You base woman, I now believe you to be an accomplice of a mur—”

An infernal smile contracted Susanne’s pallid lips.

“Your son,” she said in a harsh voice. “You want to know him?”

“Tell me where he is, and I swear I will leave you forever.”

“Your son Philip is at the prefecture with the blood of Madame de Brahal on his head. He was her groom.”

Bertrand’s lips trembled, and he had not strength to answer. Then gathering sufficient strength together, he left the wretched scene and hastened to the prefecture. It was the work of an instant for him to reach the cell where his boy was. Bursting in upon him to the amazement of the keepers, Bertrand clasped the young man about the neck and broke out in sobs of joy.

“Philip, my boy—my son! I have found you at last!”

The young man was dumbfounded.

“What does all this mean?” he asked.

“It means that they shall never take you from me again. My boy, do you not know your father?” faltered Bertrand.

“My God! Are you my father?” asked the youth, with an apparent tremor in his voice.

“Swear to me that you did not murder Madame de Brahal, and that it was that base woman, Madame Rhodes.”

“Sir,” said the young man raising himself to his full height, “she is my mother.”

A sob only escaped the wretched man.

“My boy! My son! I will prove your innocence in spite of yourself. You are the victim of some plot. My boy Philip could not commit murder.”

“Do not, father. Let me die. My mother! My mother!”

But the detective was gone. Straightway he hastened to the office of Monsieur le Prefect. To him he told his doubts, neglecting, however, to disclose his relationship in the matter. He received permission to work up the case. In the guise of a tradesman, he obtained admission to the house of M. de Brahal. As he approached the house he was met by a young maid, apparently the maid of the late madame. Her eyes were red from weeping, and to her the pseudo tradesman said:

“You seem troubled, my dear mademoiselle. What has happened?”

“Monsieur, if I only dared,” she said, glancing suspiciously around.

“Speak, child. I am not an officer of the law, and you need not fear.”

“They have arrested Philip. I know he is innocent. That night he did not—he did not—pardon me, monsieur—he did not leave me,” said the girl, blushing crimson.

A smile flitted across the face of the detective.

“Then who has done the deed?” asked Bertrand.

“They have. Monsieur de Brahal did not leave Paris. I saw him pass through the low dark hall on the other side of the house, on the night of the murder. As he neared the door of madame I saw something flash in his hand.”

“My God, child, why did you not speak before?”

“Monsieur,” said the trembling girl, “I was afraid they would kill me, too. But, monsieur, you will save him—save my Philip.”

“Be brave, child and trust me,” said the detective.

Hastening to the prefecture, he obtained a warrant for the arrest of M. de Brahal. Officers were sent to arrest him. When he arrived at the prefecture his indignation was unbounded.

“Who dares charge me with the murder of my wife?”

“I do,” said Bertrand, stepping forward. “It is useless for you to deny. My wife, Susanne Gillette, your accomplice, has confessed all.”

This was a risky game, but the blow went home. M. de Brahal falteringly muttered:

“So much for trusting a woman.”

The dreariness of solitary confinement had its effect upon the blood-stained man. It was not long before, seeing that death was inevitable, he confessed and told the story of his crimes. Had he known that Susanne had remained true to him even to the last, the world might have been deprived of this bit of criminal experience.

M. de Brahal had first seen Susanne Gillette while in Paris on her bridal trip. He had fallen madly in love with the beautiful English woman. He had followed her to her country home and had often met her clandestinely and finally persuaded her to leave her home and her husband and fly with him to Paris. At that time he was possessed of an immense fortune, with which, as he told the unsophisticated Susanne, he would purchase the whole French capital for her. When they reached Paris, M. de Brahal and Susanne lived in regal splendor and luxury for fifteen years. He gratified every whim of Susanne’s until his purse could no longer stand the constant drain.

Then, toward the end of the year 1873 an idea struck M. de Brahal. If it were successful his purse would be replenished three fold, and happiness in being able to grant all Susanne’s desires would be his.

A young widow of immense wealth was then living in the Rue des Invalides—Madame Rica by name. If he could only marry her, then bring Susanne into the house as housekeeper, between them, Madame Rica’s time on earth would be quite limited. But the young man, Susanne’s son, what was to be done with him? Presto! When the crime was committed, it should be fastened on him. Susanne did not love Philip, and M. de Brahal hated him. Being a man of fine personal appearance and elegant address, he was not long in gaining the affections of the unsuspecting widow. Things progressed rapidly, and in June, 1874, Madame Rica became Madame de Brahal. They lived apparently very happily for about six months. M. de Brahal being now urged on by Susanne, who was growing tired of being a constant witness of her lover making love to another woman, began to conjure up plots for madame’s speedy removal. An opportunity did not present itself until March.

Philip had in his possession a small poniard on which were his initials. This should be the means of murder and of throwing suspicion upon the unfortunate lad. When all was ready, Mr. de Brahal took leave of madame his wife, under the pretext that pressing business called him to Havre. He did not leave Paris, but remained in concealment until long after midnight, when,

entering the house by a door Susanne had left open for him, he, with his own hand plunged the poniard into the breast of madame, his wife. The rest is known.

*The Marshfield [WI] Times*, April 21, 1883