

A French Detective Story

Between Courcelles and Nueilly, on a hot night in August, two sportsmen returning home from a day's hunt, found a woman lying in the middle of the road. She appeared to be insensible. They transported her to a wayside hostelry, where they discovered her to be a young woman of decidedly charming exterior, elegantly attired in the newest mode. When the combined efforts of everybody about the place had restored her to consciousness she exhibited great embarrassment, and plead piteously to be permitted to depart.

"But you are not well enough," expostulated one of the gallant disciples of Nimrod.

"I am, indeed. I assure you I am," persisted the fair pleader.

"Where do you want to go?"

"To Paris."

"But why not wait until morning?"

"BECAUSE I DARE NOT."

"You dare not? And why?"

"If my husband discovers that I have been out all night, without an excuse, he will murder me. Ah, monsieur, you little know the torture of a mind chained to a jealous soul which neither appreciates it himself or permits others to."

This settled it. Monsieur Jacquard was a married man. He was also a most respected one, well known on the Bourse.

"Come to my house," he said. "It is really impossible for you to return to Paris alone at this time of night. You shall spend the evening as mine and my wife's guest.—Tomorrow she shall accompany you and explain all. By the by, what is it all? What brought you into the road as we found you?"

There was more embarrassment, further hesitation, additional sobbing, and then the unfortunate lady unfolded her tale of horror.

She was the wife of a prosperous lawyer. Her husband, an ogre of sixty, hated yet was odiously jealous of her. It had been a marriage of convenience. She had sold herself to the golden calf, only to learn that that auriferous animal can kick as hard as any quadruped of vulgar hide and hair. In the three years which had elapsed since she assumed those bonds which had been paying her such heavy dividends of misery ever since she had not known a happy hour.

The nearest approach to it had been procured for her by a friend of her husband's, a young journalist. Monsieur Gribeau (how appropriate a name for such a monster) was counsel for the

newspaper of which Victor Fallot was editor. Business brought the latter frequently to the lawyer's house. He had met Madame Gribeau. He had loved her, at least she thought so. As for herself, she had experienced an interest in him. It was not love. It was rather gratitude that he brought a little light into her mournful existence. She trusted him, she confided her troubles to him. In return he sought to comfort her. Strange as it might seem, her husband was not jealous of him, so he was able to take her about among scenes which in a measure distracted her mind from its morbid broodings.

This morning he had proposed to her a visit to some lady friends of his at Courcelles. The journey had been made in an open carriage. They halted by the way at the Brazen Lion to dine, and dusk came on. He made proposals to her at which her soul revolted. She leaped from the carriage and fell insensible. The miscreant drove on, leaving her to the terror of darkness. —The rest Monsieur Jacquard knew.

These affecting confidences melted Monsieur Jacquard's natural sympathetic soul. He mingled his pitying tears with those of the unfortunate lady. He then took her to his house in a conveyance, and Madame Jacquard listened to her tale with sobs of commiseration. It was determined that Madame Jacquard should accompany Madame Gribeau home next day and give Monsieur Gribeau a piece of her mind.

But though one woman proposes, another frequently disposes. When the servant rapped at Madame Gribeau's door next morning there was no answer.

THE ROOM WAS TENANTLESS.

The bed had not been slept in. In point of fact poor Madame Gribeau had disappeared. The first inference was that, goaded by despair by the poignancy of her misery, she had committed suicide; but a more plausible explanation offered itself when Madame Jacquard dressed to go to the magistrate and make a deposition. Her jewels were gone. So was all the money in the house. So also was Monsieur Jacquard's three-thousand franc chronometer. To be brief, poor Madame Gribeau was poor no longer. She had literally cleaned out the house.

There was hardly the price, in portable property, of a cocktail left. At the first glance the detective, summoned from Paris, declared the job the work of one of the most expert thieves in the business.

The next thing was to find that thief, or rather thieves, for it was evident that a woman, unaided, could never have made so clean a sweep. This was to be a quest worthy to rank with Diogenes' search for a very different sort of person. The slums of Paris were scoured, the jails investigated, all the out-of-the-way recesses of the strange world of crime that festers under the current of life in the great city laid bare by the calcium glare of the law. In vain. Unless Madame Gribeau's ogre had devoured her, she must have vanished into smoke as thin as the tale of woe.

The investigations were dropped, and Monsieur Jacquard scored a heavy entry to the account of profit and loss.

Late in September Madame Jacquard had occasion to visit Paris in a hurry and alone. Hastening into a carriage at the railway depot, she was followed by an elegantly dressed young man, who restored to her her handkerchief which she had dropped. The young man offered her further attentions which she accepted. They drifted into conversation. Suddenly she noticed on his slender hand

A RING

of familiar aspect. It was a cat's eye, the very duplicate of one which had formed part of her vanished jewels.

"That is a curious ring you have, monsieur," she observed.

"It is, indeed. A valuable trifle, yet one I would not part with for the treasures of the Great Mogul."

"Indeed! A family relic," I suppose?"

"A gift from a dead sister."

And the young man shed a silent tear. Madame Jacquard tore a leaf from her note book and wrote on it "call an officer." —When the guard passed she slipped it in his hand. The young man, absorbed in mournful reverie, failed to notice the act. It was not until assisting Madame Jacquard out of the car and recompensing himself for the trouble by picking her pocket that he became aware of the fact that an inscrutable monument of incorruptible justice stood beside him. The young man proved to be

AN ENGLISH PICK-POCKET

who had been compelled to leave London between days, and who had been living in such model retirement in Paris that the police had not yet got on his track. He was obstinately silent in regard to himself as a [sphinx]. The cat's-eye ring proved to be Madame Jacquard's but the mystery of his possession of it and of his connection with Madame Gribeau remained unexplained. —No one seemed to know him. He had no acquaintances and his lodgings could not be traced.

Richmond Carter, as he called himself, was tried and sentenced. Some days later the portress of a house in Rue Delacour applied to the police to investigate the strange absence of one of her lodgers. A young lady, who seemed to be an actress, had rented an apartment from her, sent her two large trunks in, and after having remained some months, occasionally visited by a young man of elegant aspect, had vanished. Her door was locked. The portress feared

SUICIDE OR WORSE.

The forcing of the door revealed a room tenanted only by two trunks and the usual furniture. The trunks were crammed with a most extensive female wardrobe. From garters to blonde wigs and false eyebrows the assortment was complete and vast. —There was a well-stocked make-up box

filled with cosmetics, grease-paints, brushes, and the like. And among the lot Madame Jacquard recognized the identical dress worn on the occasion of her visit by poor Madame Gribeau.

The police again went to work, assured of tangible existence of the missing woman. It was supposed that upon her lover's arrest she had gone to England, and the authorities there had been put on the alert. Still without result.

At last a detective with a little of the argumentative in his lynx brain began to put this and that together. He found that Madame Gribeau's elegant visitor was never seen in her company. He called and left alone. He also found that Madame Gribeau frequently went out while her visitor was in the house. These facts arrived at, it did not take long to decide that Madame Gribeau and Richmond Carter were one and the same person. And so they were.

The Daily Dispatch [Richmond, VA], December 27, 1879

The Hagerstown [MD] Mail, January 16, 1880