The Troubles and the Escape of a "Perfect Young Lady"

by Andrew Forrester, Jr.

"EXCUSE ME, ma'm, but I think you have lost something."

"Lost something, sir? Lor! what do you mean?"

"Have you not lost your purse?"

"Dear me, no, sir; I've not lost any purse. I know I had it in my hand just now."

"Will you oblige me by just feeling in your pocket?"

The lady did as she was asked, and then brushing aside her flounces, cast a glance on the floor.

"It's not there, ma'm; I know where it is; be kind enough to step out of the room at once, before the next song. I will explain all about it."

The lady was too much bewildered to reply.

"Your pocket has been picked, ma'm," the gentleman observed.

Recovering her speech, the lady inquired— "Who could have done it?"

"The young woman who was just sitting next you; but pray don't let us talk about it here, and make a commotion. If you will step out, I will tell you all about it."

"Oh, that's impossible, sir! She was a very nice young person, — a perfect young lady, sir."

With a slight emphasis, not, however, inconsistent with the most delicate politeness, the gentleman then observed, "I must ask you to follow me, ma'm," and he glided through the bevy of gentlewomen nearly unnoticed, as a cantatrice advanced from the rear to the front of the orchestra, the observed of all observers.

The lady, hesitatingly and tremblingly—as if she were going to receive condemnation for a crime of her own perpetration—followed her interrogator.

This conversation took place one fine morning in the month of August, 1857, in that well-known place of amusement set apart by prescription, usage, or custom, for the upper ten thousand of the metropolis—the Hanover-square Rooms.

A peculiarly select, and withal numerous audience had been brought together by the choice and ample programme which Madame Tuyère had distributed among her aristocratic patronesses and patrons. The company was (perhaps two or three persons excepted,) composed or the fairest, gentlest, and highest ladies in the land, with a sprinkling of élite young manhood, whose possessions or expectations, whose escutcheons and whose ancestors, could be warranted.

One handsome person stood apart, or glided in and out of the assembly. He was about thirty years of age. He had been pronounced rather more than that age, but he might have passed for somewhat less than thirty. He was rather thin and delicately formed, with a pale face, grey eyes, forehead neither high nor low, eyelashes, eyebrows, whiskers, and an undergrowth of beard, which, to save time, and be intelligible, we may say might be reckoned among the great successes of Truefit. His dress was faultless. The white cravat reached Brummell's ideal of colour and symmetry. The waistcoat was so aesthetical that a Young England politician once asked the wearer for the name of his tailor. The coat and trousers must have been constructed by Stultz and Buckmaster. Those patent leather boots, with imperceptible soles, were doubtless Medwin's best material and workmanship.

This exquisite, just before he addressed our friend, Mrs. Tenderheart, had been seen, or might have been seen, with apparent listlessness, standing, Dundreary-like, near the door of the concert room—his taper fingers encased in the neatest and softest white kid gloves—playing languidly with his crushed *Gibus*.

Who could he be? The order of men to which he belonged, the trade, profession, or pursuit he followed, have been more than suggested. He was a friend of mine, and it is from him I heard the particulars of this interesting little case. I may also, at once inform the reader that he was a police officer of the detective force. His name was Slimy—Inspector Slimy— but he was commonly called "the ladies' man." The special duty allotted him by his grand masters of Scotland Yard, Whitehall, was to scent out, watch, and capture elegant thieves of the gentler sex, who plied their vocation in or about the model parish of St. James's.

While thus innocently playing with his collapsed chapeau, Inspector Slimy's grey eye had been running over the crowded scats of the concert room, and had alighted on the bonnet of the young lady who sat next to Mrs. Tenderheart. He was an expert. Something Madame Devey might not have observed, and something he could not have explained, told him that this perfect young lady's presence at Madame Tuyère's concert was obnoxious to the administrative reformer's cardinal principle. She was not an example of the right woman in the right place, or to clothe his ideas in the language of a policeman, he felt sure that she was after no good that fine morning.

With this conviction, he kept the perfect young lady under a keen scrutiny, and his suspicions were soon justified by observing an incident that led him to adopt proceedings not over pleasant to the object of his attentions. Perhaps indiscreetly, she left the concert room a few minutes after this incident occurred, and on attempting to quit the building she was arrested by a couple of stout officers. When this had been effected, Inspector Slimy returned to his post of observation. Piatti at that moment held the eyes and ears of the assembly captive by his bow. On this performer retiring, the ladies' man stepped towards Mrs. Tenderheart, and the brief conversation we have noted took place.

The lady who had lost her purse was told she must proceed with my friend the Inspector to a stationhouse hard by. She did so with reluctance, protesting there must be some mistake, that the young lady could not be a thief; that she—that is, Mrs. Tenderheart—would certainly not prosecute; that she was a mother, and had a mother's feelings; that the alleged thief was just the

same age, as nearly as could be, of a poor dear daughter, who, too good for this world, had been removed to a better, not more than a year and a half ago. At the stationhouse the generous soul reiterated her faith and her decision. A purse had been found on the interesting criminal by a female searcher. Its identity was undeniable, and Mrs. Tenderheart scorned to tell a lie by denying her property.

The peculiarity or comparative worthlessness of its contents, removed any shadow of doubt which otherwise the kindness of its real owner might have availed itself of as an escape from the ordeal of prosecution. The unlucky culprit had only extracted from the lady's pocket a few shillings and three peppermint drops.

"Do you think, as a Christian mother, I am going to transport a young woman for such a trifle?" asked Mrs. Tenderheart, and as the authorities made no answer to her inquiry, she replied to her own interrogatory by an emphatic "No!"

She was told she must sign the charge-sheet, and did so, still protesting that no merciful judge would compel her, perhaps to break a father and a mother's hearts, taint the ambition of numerous brothers, corrupt many sisters' hopes by shame. She left the receptacle of crime with a final and sorrowful declaration that she would not prosecute—no power on earth should make her do it.

Mrs. Tenderheart that afternoon went to her solicitors—the eminent firm of Tomlinson, Cute, Tape, Worm, and Tomlinson. She did not ask their advice; she gave them her instructions. They did not offer their advice; they acted upon her instructions. They did not profess to undertake "criminal business." When any highly respectable client compelled them, as it were, to institute a prosecution, they went about their work tardily, and did it unskillfully. No dream of costs, therefore, warped their sense of duty in this instance. Mr. Tomlinson the elder, and Mr. Tape were both present at the interview with their client, and complimented her benevolence. They assured her that her instructions should be carried out, if possible, to the letter, and they thought the magistrate would not compel her to prosecute against her will. She had better not attend the police-court, but authorize them to instruct some counsel learned in the law to appear on her behalf.

On the following day, the "perfect young lady" was brought up before Mr. Slingem, a vigilant stipendiary magistrate, charged with having picked Mrs. Tenderheart's pocket of a purse containing eight shillings and three peppermint drops.

On behalf of the accused, Mr. Tortuous Dodge, the London Thieves' Attorney-General, was instructed to bully the prosecutor, prattle wildly about his client's respectable character, and defy all the policemen and all the jailers of England to say that she had ever been charged, or held in custody on suspicion, before the present occasion. This was a fact, as Slimy had explained; for although he knew—but how he knew is yet a mystery I am not at liberty to explain—that she belonged to a "bad lot," she was yet, he said, "a new hand."

The prosecutor was not present, because, as Mr. Fitz Gisippus Glum (instructed by Messrs. Tomlinson, Cute, Tape, Worm, and Tomlinson) explained, she was in such a state of nervous

excitement over the matter, that her friends dreaded the effect of her appearance in court; and there was, moreover, reason to hope that this affair, if not an accident, a mystery, or "a fortuitous combination of circumstances reconcilable with a theory of innocence," it was at all events—under the worst aspect—a case of mania, and a first offence on the part of the prisoner. He was, therefore, instructed to ask that the prosecutor might be allowed to withdraw from the prosecution; and as several of the most eminent judges who had ever adorned the incorruptible bench of the Central Criminal Court had laid it down as wrong to set the law in motion for a first offence, and by branding the young criminal as a convict, impede the work of reformation, he was quite certain that the well-tempered judicial mind of a Slingem would say the course Mrs. Tenderheart had elected to pursue was one dictated by lofty Christian philanthropy, and a sincere regard for the interests of the public.

The doctrine about persecutions for the first offences had certainly been laid down in my hearing, in courts of justice and elsewhere by eminent judges and commentators, but Mr. Slingem did not admit its force in this instance. He was inexorable. He would not permit Mrs. Tenderheart to retire from the prosecution, but declared that a duty she owed to society was the conviction of the prisoner if the evidence went to prove her guilt.

So stern and uncompromising was Mr. Slingem, that upon the request of Mr. Inspector Slimy, the vigilant magistrate refused Mr. Tortuous Dodge's earnest entreaty for the liberation of his interesting client on bail. She was remanded for two days, and Mrs. Tenderheart's counsel was informed he must produce her evidence at the next examination.

At the adjourned examination of the prisoner sufficient evidence was accordingly produced to warrant Mr. Slingem in sending the accused to take her trial at the next session of the Central Criminal Court. Another urgent entreaty to admit her to bail was disregarded. The "perfect young lady" was removed in the prison van, along with less showy prisoners, and lodged in Newgate. Poor Mrs. Tenderheart was sorely grieved, but found some consolation in the reiterated assurance to all her friends that she "couldn't help it."

The day after the perfect young lady's removal to that famous prison, a rude cart, drawn by an unkempt horse, covered with dust, and bearing on one of its panels the inscription, "John Brown, Farmer, E—, Middlesex," stopped ay the door of Messrs. Tomlinson, Cute, Tape, Worm, and Tomlinson. An old man, dressed in a smock-frock, like one of the last of the farmers of an almost extinct generation, alighted from this primitive vehicle. Mr. Tortuous Dodge, true to an appointment, had arrived at this spot a few minutes earlier, and was sauntering up and down the street to kill time.

After a few words had passed, the "Thieves' Attorney-General" and the old man, his companion, sought an interview with the firm. The object of this visit was to ask them if, should an application be made to a Judge at Chambers to admit the perfect young lady to bail, the firm would consent to his lordship releasing her.

The venerable white-haired man pleaded so hard on behalf of his unfortunate child, and so vividly, in unlettered eloquence, portrayed the mother's anguish of mind—threatening a lunatic asylum, if not a grave—that the head of the house, the elder Tomlinson, was inclined to strain a

point, and see if he could not safely aid in letting the prisoner out of Newgate for a few weeks until the trial.

Mr. Tape, however, who was also present at this interview, thought the reputation of the house might suffer by any arrangement with a prisoner. The lawyers retired for a few minutes to another room, and discussed the matter.

Upon their return, Mr. Tomlinson announced to the old gentleman their inability to grant his request. The father's lamentations were exceedingly dolorous; but the firm had taken its resolution, and could not depart from it, however copious the flood of tears that domestic woe might cause.

As the farmer and the attorney drove slowly off in their creaking trap, Mr. Dodge exclaimed—"Two muffs, my boy; they don't understand criminal practice. It's all right, leave everything to me. I've done it before many times, and I will again."

Within three days of this visit by the distracted parent to Messrs. Tomlinson, Cute, Tape, Worm, and Tomlinson, an application was made to the Judge, then sitting in Chambers, to make his order for the release of the prisoner on bail. This was supported by an affidavit, setting forth, among other things, that she had never before been accused of a criminal offence. His lordship asked what the prosecuting solicitors had to say about the matter. The Thieves' Attorney-General's clerk explained that, although served with the usual notice, these gentlemen were not present. It was understood, and their absence seemed to prove, that they had no objection to the prisoner's application.

His lordship said, he must have proof that they knew of the application. Mr. Dodge's clerk said he could produce the affidavit of the person who served the notice. This was procured; and the Judge made an order that, upon finding two sureties who would enter into a bond of £100 each, with her own obligation in £200, she should be liberated until her trial. This bond was perfected behind the back of Mrs. Tenderheart's solicitors; and the perfect young lady walked out of Newgate a temporarily free woman.

In due course the sessions were held, and her name appeared in the calendar, with a statement of the offence for which she was to be tried. Mrs. Tenderheart, being placed under recognizances to prosecute, was in the motley crowd awaiting a call to give evidence. Mr. Fitz Gisippus Glum fluttered about from the New Court to the Old, and the Old Court to the New with his solitary brief—that for the prosecution of this perfect young lady. Mr. Cute had condescendingly come down from his professional standard of reticence to further instruct the learned counsel as the case proceeded. Mr. Inspector Slimy was, of course, in attendance, with other police witnesses.

Everybody regarded the conviction and punishment of the offender as accomplished facts—except Slimy. He declared before the trial that the bird had flown, and said Mr. Glum would have nothing to do but ask that her recognizances should be estreated. The elegant detective was right. No perfect young lady pickpocket surrendered to prove her innocence by the tests of criminal jurisprudence. The case was called on; no prisoner answered. Mr. Cute endeavoured to hide his mortification under a forced smile; Mr. Glum looked very glum indeed, and savagely performed

the humble lot assigned to him by the exquisite policeman; Slimy was vexed, but gave no outward sign thereof; and Mrs. Tenderheart, who asked with pathetic significance, "Who could have thought it?" felt more inclination to transport the parties concerned in the bail-trick than to prosecute for the loss of her shillings and peppermint drops. After a brief running commentary on the matter, all parties separated, and so the story would end, except for an explanation or two afterwards communicated by Mr. Slimy to the eminently legal firm of Tomlinson, Cute, Tape, Worm, and Tomlinson, and which I may now tell my reader.

One day Mr. Cute met the polite inspector on a tour of observation through Regent Street and Bond Street, and exchanged civilities with him. Mr. Slimy availed himself of this opportunity to improve the lawyer's knowledge of criminal practice.

"I've found out how it was done," he said. "When that fellow, Dodge, saw he had a respectable firm like yours to deal with, sir, he knew he could do what wouldn't have been safe with the Humphreys, Wontners, Beards, and Lewises. He just got a rascal he calls a clerk of his to swear that he had served upon you the notice of application to admit to bail, which he hadn't done, of course."

"No, that he never did," responded Cute.

"I know that," added the detective. "But what can a judge do when there's an affidavit saying that it was served? He says to himself, here's evidence that the prosecutor knows of this application, and don't oppose it—silence gives consent. I think as it's a first offence I ought to let the prisoner out on bail, and so he does. But Dodge wouldn't, I say, have tried that on with the knowing members of his profession, sir."

Cute felt humiliated, but said nothing.

"It cost them a pretty penny, though," continued Slimy. "I have found out all about it. She was, as I said, a young hand, and rather clumsy at her work. She was the sister-in-law of Joe Atkins, one of the most notorious fences in London. I caught her at her first job, and all the gang she belonged to were in an awful fright lest she should reveal their schemes. They would have spent a thousand pounds, if necessary, and I reckon that five hundred pounds would barely cover what she did cost them. First of all, it wasn't a trifle they had to give Dodge, the lawyer, for getting that bit of perjury done about the service of the notice at your office, sir; then the bail had to be squared by giving them two hundred pounds to satisfy the Crown, and something handsome for themselves; and then they had to make it right with the young woman and her husband, for she was married, and was the wife of a railway guard. They gave her husband something tidy to be quiet, and sent him and his wife over to Australia or New Zealand, I haven't learned which."

Mr. Cute had been musing, and now drily observed, "It's a pity that scoundrel, Dodge, can't be hung. He is a monstrous disgrace, Slimy, to my profession. I wouldn't mind prosecuting him at my own expense."

"Leave *that* to me, sir," said the exquisite policeman. "I'm on his track, sir; and now I know his trick, he'll not long escape me."

Slimy was as good as his word. He caught Mr. Tortuous Dodge repeating his affidavit trick, and that marvellously clever attorney got a long term of penal servitude as a public reward for his ingenuity.

The Revelations of a Private Detective by Andrew Forrester, Jr. London: Ward and Lock, 1863. 51-63.