

At three o'clock, one morning, he saw him leave one of those places in company with three or four others. There had been some strangers at the tables during the night, and, in consequence, the *habitués* had met with some luck. De Vernelle was unusually gay, and laughed and talked with his companions incessantly. As they were going out into the street, a handsomely dressed young woman stepped into the house. "Ah, Aspasia is come to look after me!" cried one of the group. "*Au diable!*" exclaimed Le Vernelle, stepping forward with an air of mimic bravado, and offering the female his arm; "it is for me she comes. Aspasia is a lady of discernment!" "No, no," returned the woman shrinking: "I do not like dreamers; especially when they talk all night long of bleeding throats and bark like dogs!" "Ah, ah!" laughed De Vernelle grimly; "to be sure the nightmare is a very disagreeable sort of thing; but it does not remain always with one—only at times—only at times." He spoke somewhat confusedly, and though at the moment he laughed loudly and affected great amusement at Aspasia's serious look, he soon became silent and abstracted, and walked away presently, his head drooping upon his breast. M. Perrault cautiously followed him, keeping at some distance, and on the other side of the way. All along the Boulevards, and up the avenue of the Champ Elysees, he kept him in sight. There was something in the appearance and behaviour of the strange, friendless being which excited the professional instincts of the agent of police. He still preserved the broken-down look which had settled upon him as he left the gaming-house, and walked all the way at a slow, sluggish, dreamy pace. Once or twice he stopped for a full minute, and turning his pale, haggard face this way and that, looked eagerly on all sides. Favored by the trees, however, M. Perrault managed always to keep himself concealed.

De Vernelle was not far from the house in which he lived, when he stopped in this manner for the last time. As before, he looked around him. Seeing no one, and hearing no sound, he proceeded to search about, and presently picked up a broad flat stone. Then going beneath one of the trees, where the soil was soft and damp, he commenced scooping a hole in the ground. He worked with great eagerness, aiding the stone with his foot, and in a very short time had succeeded in turning over two or three pounds of earth. He then took from his pocket a purse, apparently heavily laden, a gold watch from his fob, a ring from his finger, and a brooch from his cravat. These he put into the hole, pressing them down with all his strength, and then replaced the earth carefully, and stamped and scuffed over the place to give it as much as possible the same appearance as the rest of the walk. After this, he flung away the stone he had used, in such a direction that M. Perrault narrowly escaped receiving a heavy blow. With a long, deep gasp, like a groan of agony and desperation, he continued to walk slowly on, tearing some small pieces of paper into very minute fragments, and scattering them about as he went. Presently he took off his hat, crushed it between his hands, and flung it away into the road,—unbuttoned and threw open his coat and waistcoat—tore his cravat, so that it hung down from his neck, and broke open his shirt front—apparently endeavoring to put himself into as violent a state of disorder as possible. This done, he took a small pistol from his coat pocket, and went, with hurried and precipitate steps, into the middle of the road, where after scuffling and scraping about the dust with his feet, he stood erect,

and—it seemed with elaborate care—placed the barrel of the pistol in his mouth. It was a most singular scene, and M. Perrault was strongly excited, as a full comprehension of De Vernelle's design now flashed upon his mind. It was plain that the wretched man contemplated suicide, and was endeavoring to perpetrate the act in such a manner as to ensure a belief that he had been robbed and murdered. With a loud cry the officer rushed upon him, struck the weapon from his hand, and before the poor appalled schemer could recover presence of mind, had secured his arms with a small but strong pair of iron gyves.

"It is evident you are mad," said the officer, curtly. "I must take care of you."

"I was, I was," cried De Vernelle, in great excitement, struggling to free himself; "but only for the moment. The fit is over now, and I am all right again. Quite right, now, I say; it needed but some one to appear, to speak to me, to touch me, to drive the fit away. I am quite recovered now. Take these things off, man, and let me go on home."

"It would be as bad as murder to trust you to yourself. Come with me; I will take care of you."

De Vernelle resisted; but M. Perrault was powerful, and, assisted by the gyves, did not find great difficulty in forcing his captive along. Arrived in the city, he procured assistance, and the prisoner was temporarily placed in the Clichy gaol, charged with attempting self-destruction.

The whole circumstances of the case were laid before the Prefect, and a rigorous investigation was immediately instituted, especially with regard to the long-sealed mysteries of the Arras murders. M. Perrault being charged with the superintendence of the proceedings. In the first place, that intelligent officer immediately proceeded with Mr. Ferrers to the neighborhood of Arras, four miles from which, and about six from the country residence of De Vernelle, was situated the modest chateau of M. Grielle, the father of De Vernelle's alienated wife, who, although he lived in plain and unostentatious style, was the owner of considerable property. It was here that Madame De Vernelle now lived, having sought an asylum from a most uncongenial husband in the home of her youth, and it was with her that the visitors sought an interview. With some emotion, Ferrers met this unfortunate lady for the second time; her face was no longer blooming and bright, but it was still handsome, and the soft, sweet expression of other days was attempered into a look of mingled sadness and resignation which even the slightest knowledge of her history served to render touching and saintly. M. Perrault showed her the ring, and enquired if she remembered it as one she had presented to M. De Vernelle many years ago. She answered directly, and with much surprise, that she had never made her husband such a present, and this ring she had never seen before! and then, immediately, and as if some suspicion had rushed into her mind, became agitated, and added that perhaps her memory failed her. M. Perrault asked no more respecting the ring, but noted down the whole of this curious reply, a proceeding which much increased the lady's perturbation. He then asked her if she could remember distinctly the events attendant upon her marriage, and particularly whether M. De Vernelle was with her the whole of the night immediately following its solemnization? This question produced a distressing effect. With a slight shriek, Madame De Vernelle directed a piercing glance at her questioner, became deathly pale, and swooned away.

This occurrence produced the presence of M. and Madame Grielle, and a formal, indeed official, explanation to the former, of the object for which the strangers had visited his house. M. Grielle became very grave immediately, and had a private consultation with M. Perrault, in which he stated that from certain communications which had been made to him by his daughter, he had long been harassed by suspicions that De Vernelle was implicated in the crimes which had taken place in various parts of the Pas de Calais. It appeared that she had frequently heard him talking in his sleep in a manner which caused her infinite astonishment and alarm, and had discovered peculiarities of disposition which had possessed her with indescribable aversion and dread of him. The consequences were, a series of matrimonial disagreements and finally the return of the wife to her parents. With regard to whatever proceedings might be taken, M. Grielle declared he would do his utmost to forward the ends of justice. It would not have been safe, and would have appeared like cruelty to his daughter, if he had taken any hostile steps against his own son-in-law upon the ground of mere suspicions, but now the matter was taken up by another party, these objections vanished. As soon as Madame De Vernelle had sufficiently recovered her composure, she was again interrogated by M. Perrault, her parents earnestly advising her to afford all the information in her power as to the eccentricities of behavior and character which had caused her to feel such a horror and detestation of M. De Vernelle. The revelations were made with great pain. The principal features of their story, firstly, that M. De Vernelle on the evening of their marriage had set out for Paris with her, and that when some miles on the way he had taken a horse and ridden back to his house, stating that he had forgotten something of great importance, and telling his wife to continue her journey as far as the next post-inn, where he would overtake her in a few hours. He was absent the whole of the night, and arrived at the post-inn the next morning at about seven o'clock in a state of great exhaustion. And, secondly, that he was frequently talking in his sleep of the looks of murdered men, of bleeding throats, of the teeth of dogs, of hidden money.

In the next place, the house of De Vernelle was thoroughly searched. A wretched, deformed peasant, of most repulsive appearance, but apparently a creature of great ferocity and strength—for he was to be spoken of more as a brute than as a man—was living here, ostensibly to keep the place in order; but that he did little in this way was evident from the miserable, neglected plight of the whole of the property. He at first opposed the entry of the visitors with great stubbornness; but assistance being procured, he was overcome, fettered, and placed in custody. According to the French fashion, he was severely questioned as to his mode of life and his experience of De Vernelle; but this was completely in vain; he remained as silent and sullen as if he had been deaf and dumb. This man's name was *Roual Gault*.

The searching of the house occupied some time, and proved a labor of much difficulty, for *Roual* refused to disclose the place where the keys were kept; and, in consequence, several strong doors, firmly secured by locks and bolts, had to be forced. Nothing of any importance was found until a most minute examination discovered a secret cupboard, or "safe," in the wall of a room which appeared to have served as a *cabinet du travail*. It was large, and the unusual size of the lock, and the skillful