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JOS. TILT

CASE
=113=

By...
**Emile
Gaboriau**

This formal affirmation of a man whom he knew to be skillful ended the hesitation of the commissary.

"That being the case," he replied, "I must request a few moments' conversation with M. Fauvel."

"I am at your service," said the banker.

Prosper foresaw the result. He quietly placed his hat on the table to show that he had no intention of attempting to escape and passed into the adjoining office. Fanferlot also went out, but not before the commissary had made him a sign and received a response. The sign signified, "You are responsible for this man." The detective needed no admonition to make him keep an attentive watch. His suspicions were too vague, his desire for success was too ardent, for him to lose sight of Prosper an instant. Therefore following the cashier into the office he seated himself in a dark corner of the room, and, pretending to be sleepy, he fixed himself in a comfortable position for taking a nap, gaped until his jawbone seemed about to be dislocated and finally closed his eyes. Prosper seated himself at the desk of an absent clerk. The others were burning to know the result of the inquiry. Their eyes shone with curiosity, but they dared not ask a question. Unable to restrain himself any longer, little Cavallion, Prosper's defender, ventured:

"Well, who is the robber?"

Prosper shrugged his shoulders.

"Nobody knows," he replied.

Was this conscious innocence or hardened recklessness? The clerks observed with surprise that Prosper had resumed his usual manner, that sort of icy haughtiness that kept people at a distance and made him enemies in the bank. Never would a stranger entering the room have supposed that this young man, idly lounging in a chair and playing with a pencil, was resting under an accusation of robbery and was about to be arrested. He soon stopped playing with his pencil and drew toward him a sheet of paper, upon which he hastily wrote a few lines.

"Ah, ha!" thought Fanferlot the Squirrel, whose hearing and sight were wonderfully good in spite of his profound sleep. "Eh, eh! He makes his little confidences on paper, I see. Now we will discover something positive."

Having written his note, Prosper folded it carefully in the smallest possible size and, after furtively glancing toward the detective, motionless in his corner, threw it to little Cavallion with a simple word:

"Gipsy!"

Fanferlot was confounded and began to feel a little uneasy.

"The young man has more pluck and nerve than many of my oldest customers. This, however, shows the result of education."

Yes, innocent or guilty, Prosper must have been endowed with great self control and power of dissimulation to affect this imperturbable calmness and presence of mind at a time when his honor, his future happiness, all that he held dear in life, were at stake. And he was only thirty years old. Either from natural deference or from the hope of gaining some ray of light by a private conversation the commissary determined to speak to the banker.

"There is no doubt, monsieur," he said as soon as they were alone, "this young man has robbed you. It would be a gross neglect of duty if I did not secure his person."

This declaration seemed to distress the banker. "Poor Prosper!" he said. Prosper was now called in with Fanferlot, whom they had much trouble to awaken, and with the most complete indifference listened to the announcement of his arrest.

In response he calmly said:

"I swear that I am innocent."

M. Fauvel, much more disturbed and excited than his cashier, made a last attempt.

"There is still time, poor boy," he said. "In the name of heaven, reflect!"

Prosper did not appear to hear him. He drew from his pocket a small key, which he laid on the mantel, and said:

"Here is the key of your safe, monsieur. I hope for your sake that you will some day be convinced of my innocence, and I hope for your sake that it will not come too late." Then, as every one was silent, he added:

"Before leaving, here are the books, papers and accounts necessary for my successor. I must at the same time inform you that, without speaking of the stolen three hundred and fifty thousand francs, I leave a deficit in cash. There is a deficit of three thousand five hundred francs on my cash account, which has been disposed of in the following manner: Two thousand taken by myself in advance of my salary and fifteen hundred advanced to my fellow clerks. This is the last day of the month. Tomorrow the salaries will be paid, consequently—"

The commissary interrupted him.

"Were you authorized," he demanded, "to draw money whenever you wished to make advances?"

"No, but I knew that M. Fauvel would not have refused me permission to oblige my friends. What I did is done everywhere. I have simply followed my predecessor's example."

The banker made a sign of assent. "As regards that spent by myself," continued the cashier, "I had a sort of right to it, all of my savings being deposited in this bank—about fifteen thousand francs."

"That is true," said M. Fauvel. "M. Bertomy has at least that amount on deposit."

This last question settled, the commissary's errand was ended, and his report might now be made. He announced his intention of leaving and ordered the cashier to prepare to follow him. Usually this moment, when stern reality stares us in the face, when our individuality is lost and we feel that we are being deprived of our liberty—this moment is terrible. At this fatal command, "Follow me," which brings before our eyes the yawning prison gates, the most hardened sinner weeps and begs for mercy. But Prosper lost none of that studied phlegm which the commissary secretly pronounced consummate impudence. Slowly, with as much careless ease as if going to breakfast, he drew on his overcoat and gloves and said politely:

"I am ready to accompany you, monsieur."

The commissary folded up his pocketbook and bowed to M. Fauvel, saying to Prosper:

"Let us go."

They left the room, and, with a distressed face and eyes filled with tears that he could not restrain, the banker watched their departure.

"Good heaven!" he exclaimed. "Gladly would I give double the sum stolen to regain my old confidence in poor Prosper and be able to keep him with me!"

Fanferlot had resolved to obtain possession of Prosper's note, which he knew to be in Cavallion's pocket. To obtain this written proof, which must be an important one, appeared the easiest thing in the world. He had simply to arrest Cavallion, frighten him, demand the letter and, if necessary, take it by force.

Fanferlot began talking with an office boy and, after a few apparently idle questions, had discovered that the Fauvel bank had no outlet on Victory street and that consequently all the clerks were obliged to pass in and out through the main entrance on Province street. From this moment the task he had undertaken no longer presented a shadow of difficulty. He rapidly crossed the street and took up his position under a carriage gate.

After awhile Cavallion appeared at the door of the bank, but before stepping on the pavement he looked up and down the street hesitatingly. He soon decided, entered the Faubourg Montmartre and walked up Notre Dame street so rapidly, utterly regardless of the grumbling passersby, whom he elbowed out of his way, that Fanferlot found it difficult to keep him in sight. Reaching Chaptal street, Cavallion suddenly stopped and entered the house numbered 39. He had scarcely taken three steps in the narrow corridor when he felt a touch on his shoulder and, turning abruptly, found himself face to face with Fanferlot.

He recognized him at once, and, turning very pale, he shrank back and looked around for means of escape. But the detective, anticipating the attempt, barred the passageway. Cavallion saw that he was caught.

"What do you want with me?" he asked in a voice tremulous with fear.

"You will be kind enough, my dear monsieur," said Fanferlot, "to excuse the great liberty I take. It is only about a trifling matter, and you will overwhelm me with obligations if you will do me the honor to accept my arm and step outside for a moment."

What could Cavallion do? He took Fanferlot's arm and went out with him.

"What I wished to say is, my dear monsieur," began the detective, "that M. Prosper Bertomy threw you a note this morning. I am sure you will be kind enough to give it to me. Believe me, nothing but the most absolute necessity!"

"Never!" exclaimed Cavallion. And, believing the moment favorable, he suddenly attempted to jerk his arm from under Fanferlot's and escape.

But his efforts were vain. The detective's strength was equal to his suavity.

"Don't hurt yourself, young man," he said, "but take my advice and quietly give up the letter."

"I am in your power," said Cavallion, then suddenly drew from his pocketbook the unlucky note and gave it to the detective. Fanferlot's hand trembled with pleasure as he unfolded the paper. Yet, faithful to his habits of fastidious politeness, before reading it he bowed to Cavallion and said, "With your permission." Then he read:

Dear Nina—On the receipt of this note take everything you have in the house, absolutely everything, and establish yourself somewhere at the other end of Paris. Do not appear in public, but conceal yourself as much as possible. My life is in imminent danger and I am about to be arrested. You will find 500 francs in the secretary. Leave your address with Cavallion, who will explain what I cannot say. Be hopeful, whatever happens. Goodbye.

Had Cavallion been less bewildered he would have seen blank disappointment depicted on the detective's face

after the perusal of the note. Fanferlot had cherished the hope that he was about to possess a very important document, and who knows but that it would clearly prove the guilt or innocence of Prosper. Whereas he had only seized a love letter written by a man who was evidently more anxious about the welfare of the woman he loved than about his own. Vainly did he puzzle over the letter, hoping to discover some hidden meaning. It proved nothing for or against the writer. The two words "absolutely everything" were underscored. It is true, but they could be interpreted in so many ways. Fanferlot folded up the note and slipped it into his pocket.

"A thousand thanks, monsieur, for the information, and in return, if you please, I will relieve you of the trouble of executing your commission. I will myself take this note to Mme. Nina Gipsy. I will also give you a piece of advice. If I were in your place, I would return quietly to business and have nothing more to do with this affair."

To Be Continued.

Smith—How old is your son, Jones?

Jones—He'll be twenty-one to-morrow.

Smith—He's certainly a credit to you.

Jones—Well, he ought to be. I fifteen years in bringing him up and six more in calling him down.

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