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known him to indulge in during our short acquaintance.

"By Jove!" he cried, "you've got me there. I'd forgotten entirely about that pound on the mantel-piece, which belongs to you."

"To me? Impossible!"

"It does, and cannot interfere in the least with our hundred pound calculation. That is the sovereign you gave to my man Hopper, who, believing me hard pressed, took it, that I might have the enjoyment of it. Hopper belongs to our family, or the family belongs to him. I am never sure which. You must have missed in him the deferential bearing of a manservant in Paris, yet he is true gold like the sovereign you bestowed upon him and he bestowed upon me. Now here, Monsieur, is the evidence of the theft, together with the rubber band and two pieces of cardboard. Ask my friend Gibbes to examine them minutely. They are all at your disposition, Monsieur, and you will learn how much easier it is to deal with the master than with the servant when you wish information. All the gold you possess would not have wrung these incriminating documents from old Hopper. I had to send him away today to the West-end, fearing that in his brutal British way he might have assaulted you if he got an inkling of your mission."

"Mr. Dacre," said I slowly, "you have thoroughly convinced me—"

"I thought I should," he interrupted with a laugh.

"—that you did not take the money."

"Oho! this is a change of wind, surely. Many a man has been hanged through a chain of circumstantial evidence much weaker than this that I have exhibited to you. Don't you see the subtlety of my action? Ninety-nine persons in a hundred would say, 'No man would be such a fool as to put Valmont on his track, and then place in Valmont's hands such striking evidence.' But, there comes in my craftiness. Of course, the rock you run up against will be Gibbes' incredulity. The first question he will ask you may be this: 'Why did not Dacre come and borrow the money from me?' Now there you have a certain weakness in your chain of evidence. I knew perfectly well that Gibbes would lend me the money, and he knew perfectly well that if I were pressed to the wall I should ask him."

"Mr. Dacre," said I, "you have been playing with me. I should resent that with most men, but whether it is your own genial manner or the effect of this excellent champagne, or both together, I forgive you. But I am convinced of another thing. You know who took the money."

"I don't know, but I suspect."

"Will you tell me whom you suspect?"

"That would not be fair, but I shall now take the liberty of filling your glass with champagne."

"I am your guest, Mr. Dacre."

"Admirably answered, Monsieur," he replied, pouring out the wine, "and now I shall give you the clew. Find out all about the story of the silver spoons."

"The story of the silver spoons? What silver spoons?"

"Ah, that is the point. You step out of the Temple into Fleet Street, seize by the shoulder the first man you meet, and ask him to tell you about the silver spoons. There are but two men and two spoons concerned. When you learn who those two men are you will know that one of them did not take the money, and I give you my assurance that the other did."

"You speak in mystery, Mr. Dacre."

"But certainly, for I am speaking to Monsieur Eugene Valmont."

"I echo your words, sir. Admirably answered. You put me on my mettle, and I flatter myself that I see your kindly drift. You wish me to solve the mystery of this stolen money. Sir, you do me honor, and I drink to your health."

"To yours, Monsieur," said Lionel Dacre, "and here is a further piece of information which my friend Gibbes would never have given you. When he told me the money was gone I cried in the anguish of impending bankruptcy, 'I wish to goodness I had it!' whereupon he immediately compelled me to accept his check for a hundred pounds, of which, as I have shown you, alas, only six

pounds twelve and eightpence remains."

On leaving Mr. Dacre I took a hansom to a cafe on Regent Street which is a passable imitation of similar places of refreshment in Paris. There, calling for a cup of black coffee, I sat down to think. The clew of the silver spoons! He had laughingly suggested that I should take by the shoulders the first man I met and ask him what the story of the silver spoons was. This course naturally struck me as absurd, and he doubtless intended it to seem absurd. Nevertheless it contained a hint. I must ask somebody, and that the right person, to tell the tale of the silver spoons.

Under the influence of the black coffee I reasoned it out in this way: On the night of the twenty-third some one of the six guests there present stole a hundred pounds, but Dacre had said that one of the actors in the silver spoon incident was the actual thief. That person, then, must have been one of Mr. Gibbes' guests at the dinner of the twenty-third. Probably two of the guests were the participants in the silver spoon comedy, but, be that as it may, it followed that one, at least, of the men around Mr. Gibbes' table knew the episode of the silver spoons. Perhaps Benham Gibbes himself was cognizant of it. It followed, therefore, that the easiest plan was to question each of the men who partook of that dinner. Yet if only one knew about the spoons that one must also have some idea that these spoons formed the clew which attached him to the crime of the twenty-third, in which case he was little likely to divulge what he knew, and that to an entire stranger. Of course, I might go to Dacre himself and demand the story of the silver spoons, but this would be a confession of failure on my part, and I rather dreaded Lionel Dacre's hearty laughter when I admitted that the mystery was too much for me. Besides this, I was very well aware of the young man's kindly intentions toward me. He wished me to unravel the coil myself, and so I determined not to go to him except as a last resource.

I resolved to begin with Mr. Gibbes, and, finishing my coffee, got again into a hansom and drove back to the Temple. I found Mr. Gibbes in his room, and, after greeting me, his first inquiry was about the case.

"How are you getting on?" he asked.

"I think I'm getting on fairly well," I replied, "and expect to finish in a day or two if you will kindly tell me the story of the silver spoons."

"The silver spoons?" he echoed, quite evidently not understanding me.

"There happened an incident in which two men were engaged, and this incident related to a pair of silver spoons. I want to get the particulars of that."

"I haven't the slightest idea what you are talking about," replied Gibbes, thoroughly bewildered. "You will have to be more definite, I fear, if you are to get any help from me."

"I cannot be more definite, because I have already told you all I know."

"What bearing has all this on our own case?"

"I was informed that if I got hold of the clew of the silver spoons I should be in a fair way of settling our case."

"Who told you that?"

"Mr. Lionel Dacre."

"Oh, does Dacre refer to his own conjuring?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. What was his conjuring?"

"A very clever trick he did one night at dinner here about two months ago."

"Had it anything to do with silver spoons?"

"Well, it was silver spoons or silver forks, or something of that kind. I had entirely forgotten the incident. So far as I recollect at the moment there was a sleight-of-hand man of great expertness in one of the music halls, and the talk turned upon him. Then Dacre said the tricks he did were easy, and, holding up a spoon or a fork, I don't remember which, he asserted his ability to make it disappear before our eyes, to be found afterward in the clothing of someone there present. Several offered to make him a bet that he could do nothing of the kind, but he said he would bet with no one but Innes, who sat opposite him. Innes, with some reluctance, accepted



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