



[CONTINUED.]

CHAPTER XIII. THE STOLEN KEY.

M. Dumont, Clementine and her father stood at the gate watching the rapidly disappearing carriage and did not stir till the last sound of the horse's hoofs died away on the distant highway of St. Maurice. Then, with one accord, they turned to re-enter the house. Poor Clementine, as was natural, looked rather downcast, though she was evidently doing her best to keep a cheerful face. Still she could not help thinking a little of the ill omened whispers she had overheard and began to half regret she had consented to let Charles go. Now that she had better borne the delay if he had been with her. She would at least have known that he was safe in the house, and now who could tell what accident might befall him by the way?—then she would never forgive herself. At this thought her face grew so melancholy that it attracted M. Dumont's attention.

"Come, come, ma petite," he said, taking her arm affectionately under his own, "cheer up. We can't have your pretty face looking so triste. Charles will be back safely before you open your eyes tomorrow morning, and when you see him you will laugh at your own fears. Come, now, we will go in and amuse ourselves with a game of triquetra until bedtime and try and forget all our little troubles."

So they went in, M. Dumont telling Margot to prepare them some of her special mulled wine by bedtime, which she did was a capital specific for making one sleep soundly.

Then the triquetra board was produced, and they began their game. M. Germeuil did not join in the game, but sat down to read a Paris newspaper which the cure had lent him, and which, though 10 days old, was considered quite new in that out of the way place—and a great treat too. After awhile he folded up his paper, and saying he would go and smoke a pipe in the courtyard he took himself off, leaving M. Dumont and Clementine deep in their game, for triquetra was a favorite game with both of them.

M. Germeuil was a kind hearted man and was touched by the deep dejection of the poor wayfarer's attitude and the sad expression of her face. "Poor creature," he thought to himself as he paced up and down before the house watching her the while, "she interests me; she looks as if she had seen better days. She certainly has seen great trouble. Her face tells that and her whole appearance. I wish we could do something for her. She might be useful to me here or I would take her home with me and find her something to do. Of course it is rather a risk with a stranger one knows nothing about. But I like her looks, and I dare say she will be able to give some account of herself. I will speak to her at my rate, poor soul, and see what she has to say."

At which point of his meditations, having finished his pipe he knocked the ashes carefully out, and putting it into his pocket advanced to the woman's side. "As we have seen, she had risen from her seat with the intention of seeking her benefactors, thanking them for their goodness to her and then resuming her journey. Perceiving M. Germeuil beside her as she turned, she made him a deep courtesy.

"Well," he said kindly, "I am afraid we had forgotten you for the moment, my good woman. But you have had some dinner at my rate?"

"Innocent!" repeated M. Germeuil. "Have you then been falsely accused of some crime? Speak, Marie; you have said so much to stop there. You must explain those words."

She had risen to her feet in the excitement of speaking and now sank down again in an attitude of utter despair, saying in a dull, hopeless tone: "I cannot! I cannot!"

"You cannot?" he said in a tone of surprise. "If you are innocent, why should you fear to speak? You can at least tell me the circumstances under which you were accused and leave me to judge. You will not find me a harsh judge, Marie."

By this time she had recovered her composure and self control, and rising to her feet again she turned her pale, sad face toward him and said in a low, resolute tone: "I am grateful for your goodness, sir, but I can give no explanation."

There was a short pause, and then M. Germeuil said in a severe tone: "In that case there is nothing more to be said. But you had better go at once. We are honest people here and have no place for such a one. However," he added, "I cannot leave you to die of hunger and exposure, whatever may have been your crimes. Take this purse. It contains sufficient to keep you from present want."

She had listened to his words in silence with downcast eyes, but when he offered her the purse a red flush passed over her wan cheeks as she replied with an air of dignity: "No, sir, I thank you, but I cannot take your money. God, who knows the truth, will provide for me."

She turned away and moved slowly toward the gate, but something in the weary droop of her figure and her slow, sad walk touched M. Germeuil's heart as he looked after her. His conscience pricked him, and he began to reproach himself with having been too harsh with a poor creature who was entirely at his mercy. And after all, what harm could it do to any one to keep the poor thing one night? In the morning he might perhaps persuade her to tell him what she now persisted in concealing. So he hurried after her and insisted on her remaining, saying he had been too harsh and sudden.

She was at first unwilling to remain, but he insisted, and she finally consented, much to his relief. He then forced the purse on her, which she had refused, saying she must take it as a sign of his interest in her fate, adding that perhaps she would think better of it by morning and give him some further explanation. "La nuit porte conseil," you know."

But she shook her head at this, with the same expression of sad resolve, and while thanking him for his great goodness to her and the proof of confidence he had given her still persisted in her refusal.

He at once professed himself anxious to be of use to his dear friend M. Pierre, a galant homme, with whom he had the greatest sympathy, and who indeed must be fatigued after such a busy day. What could he and his friend do to assist M. Pierre—his friend who was also at his service?

Oh, there was really nothing to be done, explained Pierre, except to fetch the wine, and that was nothing. Well, they would at least accompany him. He would surely not refuse them that satisfaction.

Having taken his basket, Pierre was about to start, but Remond, observing no signs of the keys, suggested that his dear M. Pierre had forgotten to take them. Pierre, however, explained that the key of the cave was in the door, and that the bunch of keys which Remond referred contained the duplicates of those in use in case of any being lost. "But," he continued, "I have forgotten something, and that is the lantern. The cave will be so dark at this hour that I will not be able to find the wine without a light, and perhaps one of these messieurs will be so good as to hold it for me while I get what I want. I will go and fetch it," he added, hurrying indoors.

The word "lost" was a sufficient hint to the sharp witted Remond, and before Pierre returned with the lantern his fertile brain had devised a scheme, and in a few rapid words he explained to his confederate that he must contrive to delay Pierre for a moment so that he, Remond, should get to the cave a little in advance of the other two. He had only just time to say this when Pierre reappeared carrying a lighted lantern. Remond took it from him gayly, declaring that he would go first and light the way, and with a significant glance at Bertrand, who insisted on taking the basket, followed with Pierre.

Just as Remond turned the corner of the house, close to the door of the cave, which, as we have already said, was in a line with the house door, the other two being a few yards behind him and out of sight, he heard an exclamation, a scuffling noise and profuse apologies from Bertrand, who, in obedience to the hint given him to delay Pierre, had intentionally stumbled, letting the basket fall and sending it rolling back a little by the aid of a sly kick. Then falling against Pierre in his pretended anxiety to find it again he had overbalanced that individual, who found himself sitting on the ground in a most undignified way.

One stride of his long legs brought Remond to the door of the cave; one dexterous turn of the wrist, and the key was out of the door and transferred to his pocket, the whole transaction occupying much less time than it takes to describe it. Then turning quickly back, crying: "What is it? What's the matter?" he rejoined his companions.

When he learned what had happened, his indignation was extreme. But, cochin, imbecile, eustre, were the best names he had for the unhappy cause of the accident, on whom he lavished so much abuse that Pierre could with difficulty pacify him by declaring that it was quite as much his own fault as Bertrand's.

Peace being restored, they continued on their errand, Pierre carrying the basket himself this time. He placed it on a little table beside the door of the cave, which he proceeded to open, Remond politely holding the lantern in order to facilitate proceedings, but great was his amazement when he saw the lock was empty.

"Diable!" he cried. "What has become of the key? It was in the door an hour ago, and not a sign of it now."

wanted, with its label, No. 13, in Charles' clear writing, and his hand, concealed in his pocket, grasped the knife ready to sever the cord that attached it to the ring. One moment was all he wanted, and then the 12,000 francs were his. At the thought his eyes gleamed like a vulture's which scents its prey. He drew a long breath of relief as Pierre, taking up his basket, which lay on the ground, turned toward the door of the cave, with the single key in his hand, leaving the bunch still lying on the table beside the lantern. He opened the door and went in, but when he had got a few paces in he stopped and called to them to bring the lantern.

But that moment was enough. Quick as a flash these long supple fingers did their work, and with a smile of triumph Remond grasped the wished for key.

Then with inimitable sang froid and audacity he carried the lantern himself into the cave, saying he could not again expose M. Pierre to the awkwardness of such a maladroit as his esteemed friend. He helped to fill the basket with many a gay jest, held it while Pierre locked the door of the cave, and when the latter was going away without the bunch of keys reminded him of his forgetfulness, adding that, though M. Pierre had said there were no thieves at Les Bons Amis, still it might be dangerous to leave them there, since he, who knew what good wine was, had seen the contents of the cave, at which Pierre laughed heartily, as an excellent joke, as he put the keys in his pocket, and so they sallied back into the house, Remond singing as they went:

Ouvriers, depechons, Gagnons bien notre argent, Depechons, travailleurs, Gagnons bien notre argent.

while the first glimmer of the moon rose over the fields of ripe corn and the rows of clustering vines which surrounded Les Bons Amis.

Lachesis and Clothos had finished their task—the tangled threads were spun, their ends united—while Atroupos grimly raised her shears.

CHAPTER XIV. A DEED OF BLOOD. It was now nearly midnight, and a deep silence reigned in and about the abode of Les Bons Amis—a silence unbroken save by the hoarse croaking of the bullfrogs in the marsh away beyond the cornfields.

It was a world in miniature—a very microcosm—that peaceful village inn, for within its walls this summer night every phase of human life was represented. Faith, hope and charity dwelled there with joy and love, while beside them were shame and despair, with greed and theft and stealthily footed murder.

The moon was high in the heavens, her wan face pale with the scenes of misery and crime on which she had looked that night and of which she was to witness yet another.

cherished wish as to the marriage of their children, and planning what he would do for the poor wayfarer who had so strongly excited his interest and compassion. As he lay there he looked the very picture of an honest, healthy, happy man, a strange contrast to the villainous countenance of the man who now bent over him.

Remond had approached the bed at the side farthest from the window, but his keen eyes soon perceived the corner of the pocketbook he was in search of projecting a little from under the pillow at the side opposite to where he stood. He at once perceived that he had a somewhat difficult job before him. He dared not risk stretching across the sleeping man, who lay with his face toward the window, in order to reach it, for the bed was wide, and in such a strained attitude as he would have to assume he could not rely on the steadiness of his hand. The only alternative was to go around to the other side of the bed, where it would be within easy reach, in which case there would be the danger of a shadow in consequence of his having to pass between the sleeping man and the uncurtained window, and he knew by experience how little sometimes awakened a sleeper. Any attempt at closing the curtains was of course quite out of the question. It would be much too long and risky a process. All this passed rapidly through his mind, and he promptly decided to try the other side of the bed.

It was a large, old fashioned 4-post bed, and getting softly down on his hands and knees he crawled noiselessly round like some noxious reptile. By this device he avoided the danger of throwing his shadow on the sleeper. When he got opposite the place where the pocketbook lay, he cautiously put himself in such a position as to be able to spring at once to his feet if necessary, then raised his head till his eyes were on a level with the surface of the bed. And slowly, gently, cautiously, very cautiously, that hand with its rapacious fingers crept over the coverlet till it touched the prey it sought—first touched, then grasped, then gently, gently, drew back again.

But what was that? What unheard-of sound disturbed the sleeper? Was it perchance the grating of Atroupos' shears? Who can tell? Warned by that almost imperceptible movement, the hand lay still as though cut in marble, while a baneful gleam shot from the evil eyes which watched the sleeper. After a pause the gentle, gliding movement began again. Slowly the pocketbook was drawn from its hiding place, and success seemed certain. With a shudder—the shears must have grated more loudly than before—the sleeper opened his eyes. Those eyes which had closed on happy smiles and loving looks opened to fall on that rapacious hand and evil face.

He had no time to think, to look, to breathe! At one fell bound the robber springs upon him, and the long hands clutch his throat in a grasp of steel.

The need has come, and he looks toward his companion. "Come," he motions with his lips rather than speaks. The old man struggles hard for his dear life, and he is strong, but that avails him not. Bertrand approaches, white with fear and trembling in every limb, not at the idea of a crime, but at his own danger.

"The knife!" mutters Remond hoarsely, with a motion toward his pocket. Bertrand takes it out and opens it—a wicked knife it is, with long, curved back blade. He opens it and offers it to Remond, who, however, seems to read something in his languid face and instead of taking it mutters vaguely, while his grip tightens on the old man's throat: "Great God! how came they there?"

He had no time to think, to look, to breathe! At one fell bound the robber springs upon him, and the long hands clutch his throat in a grasp of steel.

One quick movement of the venenous curved knife, one convulsive shudder, and M. Germeuil fell back dead, his throat cut from ear to ear, while the red blood oozed slowly out of the gaping wound and saturated the snowy linen sheets.

As soon as they were safely in the room and the door locked, Remond took off his coat and sitting down proceeded to secure the notes carefully between the lining and the cloth. This he did with quite a cheerful air, as of a man contented with himself. Occasionally he paused a moment in his task and smiled to himself, as at his own thoughts—an ugly smile it was—a smile that boded ill to some one.



M. Germeuil fell back dead, his throat cut from ear to ear.

"What are you waiting time for? That can be done as well outside. There is no time to lose. The night is already far advanced, and we must be many miles from here by daybreak."

"Not at all!" replied the other. "We are much safer here under the circumstances, and here I mean to stay till morning!"

"Safer?" repeated the other. "Safer! Why, when they discover what has happened, when strangers will be the first to be suspected. They will send for the gendarmes, and then—ah!" he went on with a shudder, "it makes my blood run cold!" Then turning fiercely on his companion: "You think yourself so clever, you will listen to nobody's advice. Your infernal vanity will bring us to the gallows!"

"Tens, tens! No hard words, and as for me— Well, you know what I have no need to put it in evidence. I have rather an objection to the word. It is well for you, my friend, that I have a word on my shoulders. To fly now would be proof positive of guilt. Even across the frontier we would not be safe with the little complication that has arisen," making a significant gesture in the direction of M. Germeuil's room, "whereas for certain reasons we are tolerably safe here!"

"What reason? What do you mean?" "Just a small detail which you overlooked, mon ami. You see the advantage of a little intelligence. You spoke of suspicion attaching to us as the only strangers here. You forget the woman in No. 8."

"Oh!" said the other, taking up his meaning at once. "You are a clever chap, and no mistake!"

So, after some further arrangements as to their proceedings in the morning, these two scoundrels went to bed and slept, untroubled by any thought of the ghastly object on which the gray light of morning now began to fall through the wide, uncurtained window.

OUR KALEIDOSCOPE.

A Seaside Siren. In the swirl of the turbulent sea She bobs in a urban of white; Like a gull in her frolicsome glees, She flashes along in the light. Over the water she joyously glides In the glow of the moon's rosy beams; On the billow she gracefully glides To the shore for a pleasant day dream. On the sand by the musical sea She stretches in listless repose— She's a poem, a wild melody. From her eyes to the tips of her toes And she sighs while she looks from the rough Tossing waves over the sands far away To her boarding house up on the bluff— "Oh, I hope they'll have ice cream to-day!" —Truth.

A Hint to Rise. The grave young man in ordinary black leather shoes was reading his Bible when the summer girl in white Eton jacket entered the car. The young man's lips moved, but he did not. He pretended not to see. Presently a look of pain flitted across his face. "Excuse me," he growled, "you are standing on my feet." She smiled sweetly. "I beg your pardon," she murmured "but you did not seem to be using thy yourself." Glowering ferociously at the dainty slippers beneath the snowy skirt, he made his way to the front platform.—Detroit Tribune.

One Disadvantage. "Johnny, would you like to be a missionary to the savages?" "Sometimes I'd like to be a missionary, and sometimes I'd like to be a savage," replied the boy. "Why?" was the astonished query. "Well, you see, a missionary has to wear clothes in summer."—Washington Star.

Fully Illustrated. Her Father (coming suddenly into the room)—Eh, what is this? Her Lover—I was telling Miss Budd a story. Her Father—With your arm round her waist? Her Lover—Er—yes, sir. It was a love story.—Yankee Blade.

Epigram. [A rhymers apology for mashing a straw hat, the property of an unknown person] Oh, pray do not fret. At the sight of this mash, For the hard feels regret. For a trespass so rash. 'Twas a quibble of law He never was put in. But this hat was straw, And now it is sat in. —Harper's Bazar.

A Fine Point of Law. The ideas of the colored man in the south are somewhat confused on some subjects. An old Texas negro applied to a lawyer to bring suit against Uncle Moss for \$10 borrowed money. "You must have a witness who saw you lend him the money." "Boss," replies the colored agriculturist after a minute's pause, "if I brings two witnesses what see me loan him de \$10, kin I make him pay me back \$20?"—Texas Sittings.

At the Fair. Ellen—Do you see that woman talking so excitedly to the young lady typewriter? What do you suppose is the matter with her? John—Oh, she is the one who is going to deliver a lecture this afternoon on "Why a Woman Should Receive the Same Wages as a Man," and she is kicking about paying the young lady's price for typewriting but speech.—Boston Courier.

An Invariable Sign. "It's a shame when she was so well dressed that she lets every one know she's from the country." "Clara—What did she do?" "Thanked the gentleman for giving her his seat."—Chicago Inter Ocean.

The Way Open. Fred—The very first thing she said to me when I called on her last night gave me hope. Arthur—What was it? "She said her little brother was asleep." —Truth.

True Modesty. A very modest man thinks it a blessing that we cannot see ourselves as others see us "because," he says, "if we could I should be in danger of becoming conceited."—Youth's Companion.

A Plea. The feeling of superiority in the sterner sex is inborn. "Mamma, do you think you'll go to heaven?" said Jack, thoughtfully looking into his mother's face. "Yes, dear, if I am good," said the mother cautiously, wondering what would come next. "Then please be good, for papa and I would be lonesome without you."—Kata Field's Washington.

His Favorite. Propinquity—She (sketching)—I suppose I could get your expression better if you sat a little farther out. He—On the contrary, I was just going to quote my favorite hymn. She—What is that? He—"Draw me Nearer."—Boston Beacon.

Those Wide Brims. Willie—Say, can I have that straw hat of yours when you get through with it? Featherstone—Yes, Willie. What do you want it for? Willie—I'm going to cut off the crown and use the brim for a circus ring.—Clothier and Furnisher.

Still She Was in Favor of It. Mrs. Warts—What you don't mean to say that you do not believe in Sunday as a day of rest? Mrs. Potts—I might, if Mr. Potts was not so fond of good dinners.—Texas Sittings.

His Summer Suit. Blinks—Is that a summer weight you've got on? Chinks (in his new suit)—The tailor says it's an 18 months' wait.—Detroit Frog Press.

Head Over Heels. She—Your friend looks very much embarrassed. He—He is, poor fellow; he owes pretty nearly everybody in town.—Detroit Frog Press.

Children Cry for Pitcher's Castoria