

The One Franc Piece

By Arnold Fredericks

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CHAPTER VII The Gold Locket.

It was after ten o'clock in the evening, and Grace Duval, in her room at the hotel, was beginning to wonder what had become of M. Lefevre and her husband.

Everything that had happened since the arrival of the Richelieu had been exactly contrary to her wishes and her expectations.

She and Richard had planned to leave at once for Washington, accompanied by the prefect, who was to spend a delightful month upon their farm near that city, enjoying the rest and quiet of fate, they were suddenly whirled into a criminal investigation that bid fair to upset all their plans.

She had at first opposed the idea of M. Lefevre's taking up the case of the purser's death, but Richard had pointed out to her that its solution would occupy at most but a day or two, and she had been forced to yield as gracefully as she could.

Now both the prefect and her husband had disappeared. She had heard nothing of either of them since noon, and she was beginning to feel distinctly alarmed. Richard had not confided in her regarding his plans.

All that he had said was that he was assisting M. Lefevre, and would either return with him at ten that night or would telephone to her. So far he had done neither. She sat in restless silence, trying to read a magazine, with one eye on the clock, waiting for the telephone bell to ring.

When the booming of a bell in the distance suddenly brought her to a realization of the fact that it was eleven o'clock, she jumped up, threw down the book, and began to put on her hat with nervous haste.

Grace had too often shared in her husband's adventurous work to hesitate in the least about going out alone at this hour of the night. Something told her that things had not gone well. She left a note on the table, explaining her movements, and descended to the sidewalk.

A taxicab stood waiting before the door. She jumped in and ordered the chauffeur to drive to the Hotel Rochambeau.

The whole affair alarmed her greatly. Why had Richard not telephoned her and eased her fears? A sense of danger, of apprehension, came over her. During the brief period of their married life she and Richard had been together almost constantly.

She often said that when any danger threatened him she knew it, so closely were they in sympathy. Now she felt sure that something serious had happened to him.

Her idea in going to the Hotel Rochambeau was quite simple. She knew, from what Richard had told her of the case, that Estelle Mercier was likely to be the medium through which the man Hartmann would be traced.

Just why this was the case, just what Hartmann's reasons for keeping in touch with the young French girl were, she did not know; but she made up her mind to find her and from her obtain, if possible the facts.

Upon inquiring at the hotel desk for the maid she was informed that the girl had gone out. Grace was almost frantic upon learning this.

Where had the girl gone? The hotel people did not know. She insisted that she be permitted to go to Mlle. Mercier's room.

It was most irregular, the proprietor, a heavy-set Frenchman, assured her. His hotel had already received enough unpleasant notoriety on account of the murder of Reinhardt. He regarded Grace coldly, and intimated that he could do nothing for her.

The girl was desperate. "You shall go with me to her room," she assured the proprietor. "I am a detective engaged on the murder case. It is absolutely necessary that I should find out where Mlle. Mercier has gone. It is barely possible that there may be some letter, some paper, in her room which will tell me. Come with me, please, and see that I remove nothing. I ask it in the name of the law."

It was a bluff, certainly; but the proprietor was impressed. He was anxious to have the murder matter closed up and done with. There could be no harm in allowing this young woman to visit Mlle. Mercier's room under his watchful eye. He led the way up the stairs.

Three long flights brought them to the attic. A tiny boxlike room under the roof proved to be that of the maid. Grace entered, followed by the proprietor, and glanced about.

On the chest of drawers which served as a bureau she saw a letter lying open. She picked it up and read it. It was the letter which the man signing himself Charles Vernon had sent to the girl, offering her a thousand dollars for the franc piece. Grace hurriedly noted the address

of the apartment-house on One Hundred and Tenth Street and turned to the proprietor.

"Mlle. Mercier has gone to an address on One Hundred and Tenth Street which is given in this letter. I shall go there at once. That is all I wish here."

The proprietor read the letter in turn. "A thousand dollars!" he exclaimed, his eyes protruding. "She is a lucky girl, I should say. A thousand dollars! Mon Dieu!"

"Whether she is lucky or not," Grace remarked gravely, as she thrust the letter into her pocketbook, "remains to be seen. I only hope that no harm has come to her. I thank you for your courtesy, monsieur. It may prove the means of saving the girl, as well as others, from great danger." She climbed back into the taxicab in which she had come and directed the chauffeur to take her to the address on One Hundred and Tenth Street as quickly as he could get there.

It was close to midnight when the taxicab turned into One Hundred and Tenth Street and proceeded slowly up the block, the chauffeur searching for the number. In a few moments he had found it, and Grace, ordering him to wait for her, went up to the door. It was locked, but by the dim hall light she saw the elevator boy inside, asleep on his chair. She rapped sharply on the glass doors.

The boy awoke, rubbed his eyes sleepily, and admitted her.

"Is Mr. Charles Vernon in?" she asked nervously, referring to the letter she had secured at the Rochambeau to make sure of the name.

"No, ma'am. He's gone out."

"Are you sure?"

The boy went to the telephone desk back of the elevator and rang up the apartment. He continued his efforts for some minutes. There was no response. "He ain't in," he remarked, hanging up the receiver.

"Did a lady come here to see him during the evening—a little before nine?"

"I couldn't say, ma'am. I'm the night-boy. I don't come on till ten. I saw him go out about an hour ago. There was a lady with him then."

"You haven't any idea where they went? He didn't say anything, did he, or tell you when he would be back?"

"No, ma'am. Didn't say nothing to me. He had a big satchel in his hand. I guess he was goin' away somewhere."

Grace felt baffled. Undoubtedly, she thought, the woman was Mlle. Mercier. What should she do next? Return to the Hotel Rochambeau? Possibly the man had taken the young French girl back there. She thanked the boy for his trouble and was about to go when they both became aware of a knocking at the door, and saw standing outside a man of about forty, dressed in somber black.

The boy opened the door and the newcomer entered. Grace started at his first question. "Is Mr. Charles Vernon in?" he asked.

"No, suh. He's done gone out," replied the boy.

Grace stepped up to the man. "I, also, am looking for him," she said. The boy tells me he went away an hour ago, carrying a satchel as though about to leave the city."

The man's face fell. "Too bad. I had something for him," he said. "Are you a friend of his?"

"Yes," said Grace unblushingly. "What can I do for you?"

"Well," said the man, "you see, I'm Myers, the undertaker, down in the next block. I had charge of the funeral of Mr. Vernon's brother. He was buried to-day. To-night, when we were straightening up, we found this." He took a small package from his pocket. "One of my men removed it from the body while preparing it for burial and forgot to replace it. No excuse for his carelessness, I know; but these things sometimes happen. We only discovered it a little while ago. I hurried around with it to return it to Mr. Vernon. Thought he might like to have it."

"What is it?" asked Grace, puzzled.

The man opened the package slowly. "Of course," he said, "it's not of any great value, but I thought Mr. Vernon ought to have it. If you are a friend of his, perhaps you can tell me where he has gone, and I'll send it to him." He removed the bit of brown paper covering the package and exposed to view a small round gold locket attached to a bit of silk ribbon. "It was around his neck," the man explained.

"From Georgette. — Faithful unto death."

She turned to the man. "I do not think Mr. Vernon will return to-night," she said; "but I shall see him first thing to-morrow morning. I will give the locket to him, if you wish."

"Will you?" said Mr. Myers, relieved. "I shall be very much obliged to you, miss. He will no doubt want to keep it in memory of his brother."

"Where was Mr. Vernon buried?" inquired Grace as she slipped the locket into her purse.

"On Staten Island." He mentioned the name of the cemetery. "Nothing wrong about the matter, I hope? The certificate of death was perfectly regular."

"Nothing that I know of," Grace replied. "Good night." She went out and instructed the chauffeur of the taxicab to take her back to the Hotel Rochambeau. As they left she glanced at her watch. It was half past twelve.

On the way down-town Grace tried to figure out some solution of the mystery of the purser's death and the events which had followed it. In the first place why had he been murdered at all? The theft of the one-franc piece seemed an entirely insufficient reason. And who was the man Hartmann, who had murdered his companion, Reinhardt, and why had he done it?

And who, too, was this brother of the purser's who had so suddenly appeared on the scene? Was he no brother at all, but the man Hartmann himself? The whole affair seemed shrouded in mystery. She longed to see her husband and find out what he had learned.

The Hotel Rochambeau was dark when she reached it, but by dint of much ringing of the bell she managed to awaken the night porter, a swarthy and heavily built Gascon. He informed her gruffly that Mlle. Mercier had not returned, and shut the door in her face.

Grace was by no means satisfied. She dismissed the taxicab and walked slowly along the street, crossing to the other side to avoid attracting attention from the porter. It was dark there, and she paused in the shadow of a doorway and looked across at the hotel. A single light shone in the little office, and through the window

she could see the porter in his chair. The night was oppressively warm. As she glanced toward Sixth Avenue she saw the colored lights in the window of a drug-store. It occurred to her to telephone the hotel and ascertain if Richard had returned. A few moments sufficed to learn that he had not. She left word that she was safe and would be back later on; then, more worried than before, she retraced her steps to the shelter of the doorway. Clearly the prefect, and her husband as well, were out on the case. It seemed to her unlikely that they would not be somewhere in the vicinity of Mlle. Mercier. And the latter had left the apartment on One Hundred and Tenth Street an hour before, accompanied by the man who called himself Charles Vernon. Surely the girl would soon return to her hotel. She determined to wait a while longer.

Mechanically she glanced over to the hotel window. She could no longer see the porter. The shade of the window had been drawn. This circumstance struck her as being extremely peculiar. She crossed the street at once and peered at the window, but it told her nothing.

Had Miss Mercier returned, she wondered, while she was away telephoning? She was at the point of ringing the bell to inquire when she heard the sound of footsteps inside, coupled with a queer, muffled report that sounded like an explosion heard afar off.

She was undecided as to what to do. Clearly something was going on inside the office—she did not just know what. She waited for several minutes, but heard nothing more. Then it occurred to her that the best thing to do would be to call a policeman. She descended the steps softly and started toward the corner.

She had not gone half the distance when she heard hurried footsteps behind her, and before she realized it a man and woman passed. The woman's face she could not see. The man turned toward her inquiringly, and she got a momentary glimpse of his features. They seemed singularly familiar, yet she could not place them. For a moment she thought of the man she had followed the night before—the one who had struck her with the satchel; but he had been clean shaven, with the exception of a small mustache, while this man wore a short, curly beard.

There was a certain familiarity about the man's walk and general appearance, however, that impressed her forcibly. As the couple reached the street-lamp at the corner she saw that this man, too, carried a satchel, and then she made a discovery.

It was the same satchel. The man was undoubtedly Hartmann. She decided to follow him at once.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Box of Havana Cigars.

The faintness which overcame M. Dumas when he was struck down from behind in Mr. Vernon's apartment was but momentary. In a few seconds his consciousness returned with a rush.

He perceived at once several things. The first was that he lay partly on his face on the floor, his left arm bent under him, his left elbow touching some article of furniture. The second was that Mlle. Mercier had ceased to scream, and that the man calling himself Charles Vernon had been joined

MRS. MOONEY ON TRIAL IN 'FRISCO



Mrs. Mooney photographed in courtroom during trial.

Mrs. Mooney is on trial in San Francisco, charged with having taken part in the bomb explosion, which killed ten persons in the preparedness parade in the coast metropolis last year.

by a woman, who was engaged in tying the girl's hands behind her back with a curtain cord, while her companion fastened a handkerchief tightly across her mouth. Evidently but a few seconds had elapsed since his fall.

A third impression, and perhaps the most serious of all, crossed M. Dumas's confused mind. He had in his waistcoat-pocket the one-franc piece which he had surreptitiously taken from Mlle. Mercier in exchange for the one he knew was now lying on the table. In a few moments he would be searched and the franc discovered.

With nervous fingers he felt in his waistcoat-pocket for the coin. His left arm, doubled under him, brought his hand close to the pocket. In an instant he had drawn out the franc and held it beneath his body.

He could just see the others out of the corner of his eye. They had by this time managed to render the young French girl quite helpless, and were forcing her into a chair. There was no time to be lost.

Against his head rested some article of furniture. He turned slightly and saw that it was a small smoking-table, standing against the wall. On the lower shelf was an object that looked like a box. With the fingers of his left hand he managed to reach it, and, with the coin still in them, push up the lid.

(To be continued.)

If a man succeeds the world envies him; if he fails it openly sympathizes with him—and secretly rejoices.

Even when a leap-year girl gets turned down she can't help but admire the young man's judgment.

Any small boy knows more about his big sister in a minute than a man can find out during a year of courtship.

His first love and his first shave are two episodes in every young man's career that he never forgets.

The wise man always looks before he leaps—then instead of leaping into the fire he stays in the frying pan.

The man who marries for beauty always has to dig up some excuse if he would keep on loving her in after years.

You man have noticed that the friends who are willing to lend you money are those who have no money to lend.

The father who is always repeating the bright sayings of his children may be good-natured, but he is tedious.

One seldom sees a woman on the street without a shopping bag. This should be sufficient warning to old bachelors.

If a rich man tells you that the greatest happiness is to be found in poverty, remind him of what David said in his haste.

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