

# A PARIS MYSTERY

By the Author of "My Deeds and My Daughter."



## CHAPTER I.

I am asked to set down, in order and detail, all that I know relative to the affair of the Passage de Marais, or, as it was commonly called at the time, the "Crime of Christmas Day." This I can do very easily, since not only are the facts fresh in my memory, but I have also before me, as I write, the various documents, newspaper extracts, etc., bearing on the case.

I begin by telling how, on the evening of Monday, the 24th of December, 186—, about 8:30 o'clock, I left Girard's lodgings in the Rue Dauphine, where I was then staying, and went to meet him by appointment at the cafe called La Source. The night was very cold, and I had been sitting without a fire, for reasons; consequently I was not sorry when the hour came for my leaving the dismal, sky-high garret which was my temporary home. In spite of the cold, I did not take my greatcoat with me, also for reasons; and I well remember how keen the wind blew, as I hurried shivering up the Boulevard St. Michel. It was a wretched Christmas eve. Snow had begun to fall, but melted as soon as it reached the pavement, covering them with a slush that made the asphalt very treacherous footing. No scene could have been more cheerless than the Boulevard that night; the dark sky above, the dripping pavement beneath, the leafless trees, the falling snow—I shiver yet to think of it. And no greater!

All the world—at least, all the world of the Latin Quarter—knew the Cafe de la Source. It is one of the features of the Boulevard St. Michel; and the Boulevard—Boulevard St. Michel, we used to call it affectionately in our student days—is one of the features of the Quarter. The cafe takes its name of "the Fountain" from a grotto fronting the entrance, with running water and little cascades that make a pleasant, bubbling, tinkling noise, not altogether drowned by the rattling of dominoes, the babble of tongues, and the shouts of waiters. It is very agreeable, in summer, to sit outside on the pavement under the awning, and drink your coffee or your glass of Strasbourg beer, and look at the people going up and down the Boulevard. But it is, perhaps, in winter that the cafe of La Source seems most cheerful. You make but a step from cold and darkness outside into warmth and light within. The brilliant windows, the air of comfort, the hum of talk and bursts of laughter that reach the ear of the passer—these are things difficult to resist. You hear the running water, and it lures you over the threshold.

The cafe was looking its gayest and brightest when I reached it that Christmas Eve. But I did not go in at once, for the same reasons that had deprived me of a fire and my greatcoat. I had not a sou in my pocket.

Girard, however, either was there or would be very soon. I therefore recommenced, and presently, the door opening, saw him sitting at a table in the corner. He caught sight of me at the same moment, smiled and beckoned me to come in. This I was only too glad to do.



He beckoned me to come in. He had on the table before him a cup of coffee and a big book; the coffee untouched, the book unopened.

"My dear Paul," he said, "you see I have waited for you. It is warmer here than at the Rue Dauphine, eh?—water, another cup of coffee and a glass of absinthe."

"Your room, Raoul," I said, "reminded me to-night of Spitzbergen. I have not been there, but I have been in your room and I know that I do not exaggerate. I think Barentz would have found your room cold."

"You languish for the Rue de Medicis—for your mirrors and damask curtains and the porcelain sofa?"

"I confess it. But I am not ungrateful to the Rue Dauphine. It is at least a roof!"

"And we may enjoy the luxury of a fogot by-and-by."

"Ah! I see you have got the book?"

Raoul gave a kind of groan as he pushed the volume toward me. "Look at that!" he said.

I looked at it. It was a bulky volume, in English, called "The Buddhist Belief"; the work of some English savant, whose name I could not pronounce then, and have forgotten now. I opened it carelessly here and there, then looked at the number on the last page.

"This is frightful!" I said, "450 pages, and the type is small! How much time, Raoul?"

"Six weeks, counting from to-day."

"Ah! how much money?"

"Two hundred francs."

"That is shameful, it is criminal! Two hundred francs for translating a book of this size—it is unheard of! Anything paid in advance?"

"Nothing. That's the worst feature of the case. M. Beauvais did not offer, and I could not bring myself to ask. I dare say, when he looked at my coat, he thought he risked enough in letting me carry the book away."

"Who is M. Beauvais?"

"A member of the Institute, very rich, apparently. He lives in the Rue d'Anjou, Faubourg St. Honoré. He knows all the eastern languages, but does not read English. So much the better for us. You must take your share of the translation, Paul; then we shall do it in half the time."

"With all my heart. But how are we to live meanwhile? Can we exist for three weeks without food—granting we can do it without fire? I have not a sou in the world, my wardrobe, my bicorne, my books—every my law-books—are all at the pawnbroker's, and my allowance is not due for eight weeks, I believe. You might as well try to bleed a stone as to extract money from my worthy parent before the precise day and hour; and borrowing becomes more arduous every day. That is my position. And yours?"

"The same exactly, my dear Paul, except that I have these two francs fifty centimes which you see, and that no allowance comes to me at the end of eight weeks!"

"Two francs fifty centimes! That will not

do us over the three weeks until this terrible translation is finished. And how are we to buy paper, pens and ink?"

Raoul did not speak for some moments; he suddenly grew thoughtful and serious. We had been talking in a half-jesting tone, but when next he spoke his voice was grave.

"It's not the prospect of a little more gold and hunger I am thinking of," he said at last; "no doubt I shall contrive to dine at least a good second day, and we can lie in bed a good deal, as we have done before. But tomorrow, my friend, is Christmas, and this day week is New Year's day."

"Well?"

"Well—don't you see what that means! On New Year's day we give gifts to those we love—"

"Ah!—Gabrielle! I did not think of that!"

"My dear Paul, you never think! That is why I love you. But just see how I am looked! You know that, if she chose—if she took back her word to me—Gabrielle might have presents—dresses—jewels—what you will! And I—I shall walk with her round the Boulevards; the windows are full of pretty things; she will scarcely look at them, for fear of vexing me; and I shall not be able to turn my eyes from them, for thinking of what I should like to buy for her. I shall see the people crowding in and out, laughing, joking, happy in giving and receiving—and for Gabrielle, nothing! Even the booths on the edge of the pavement we must pass—sven the most trifling keepsake, I cannot give her! That is what happens on New Year's day to the poor man who has a sweetheart."

"If I had only something left to send to the pawnbroker!"

The exclamation escaped me unawares, I was so moved by Raoul's evident pain of mind. It made him laugh, however; he declared that was my instinctive resource. And, indeed, there was some truth in this, I confess it.

"Let us look things in the face," I said at last; "surely there must be some resource, if we can only think of it. I shall go to Levi Jacob tomorrow; I shall demand a loan; I shall tell him—"

"That your friend Raoul Girard wants to buy a present for his affianced on New Year's day! That would soften the fint that does duty for a heart with Levi Jacob, my dear Paul! And besides you owe him too much already."

"Too true. And can you, then, think of nothing?"

"Nothing. You know that since Le Petit Monde stopped no other journal has accepted my articles. And my wretched salary as critic for Le Drame is already overdrawn; they will advance me nothing. I had some hope when the editor of The Monde gave me that letter to M. Beauvais. I thought he might have paid us something in advance. But that hope has failed."

For some time we both sipped our coffee in silence. I had never before seen Raoul thus in open rebellion against his poverty; I had never before seen that shadow on his brow which darkened it to-night.

"Our only hope now," I said at last, gloomily, "seems to be in a miracle."

"Say at once—in a letter from the director of the Odéon?"

"And why not? Only I would not call that a miracle! You know what I said of your coming at the time, Raoul—you know what Tison, of Le Drame, said of it—"

"I know, my dear Paul, that if you were director of the Odéon the rehearsals would begin to-morrow." But evidently M. Desnoettes' opinion is not ours. I wish he could send back the manuscript; I could make a short story of it."

Raoul spoke lightly, but I knew that this particular failure had bitterly disappointed him. Six months' hard work had been given to that comedy. There were scenes and situations in it that—but this is a quite needless digression.

"Have I not heard you speak of a relative of yours living in the Quarter?" I ventured to say; "an uncle, was it not, who is rich? Perhaps he—"

"Useless to think of it! He is rich—how rich nobody knows but himself. But he is a miser; he grudges himself every mouthful he eats and every fagot he burns. He must believe that there are pockets in the winding-sheet! You remember that day in the gardens of the Luxembourg last summer?"

"Quite well. We were sitting under the trees, feeding the birds with the crumbs left over from our breakfast. An old man hobbled past and frowned at us. What was it he said to you, Raoul?"

"Young man," he said, "never give away what some day you may want yourself! And that is the man! I never yet have asked anything of him for myself. Twice I went to him, when my good uncle at Provins—his own brother—was lying ill and in want. Rather than give me money—rather than part with his cherished coin, he actually gave me one or two things he had about him, articles of vertu—to sell!"

"I remember. What a singular man!"

"He is a cur; I can call him nothing else! When my poor uncle at Provins died I went to him again. It was about the costs of the funeral. 'Pay for all,' he said; 'then bring an exact account to me.' I paid for all; partly with what I could scrape together, partly by a loan from you. When I went back I found that my worthy uncle had given strict orders to the servant never on any showing to admit me again. That was a year ago, and he owes me the money to this day. It would make me rich now—if I could get it!"

"And you have not seen him since?"

"I have not tried. My interviews with him were not pleasant. He affected to believe that my story was a fiction; that I only wanted his money to spend it on my follies! He made me swear solemnly! Pah! Say no more of him. He is the one man on earth that I hate!"

Raoul said this in a tone which left no doubt as to the reality of his hatred. I noticed how his face flushed and his eyes blazed, and could imagine how badly the old miser must have treated him, since Raoul's anger was the rarest thing in the world.

Nothing more passed between us on this disagreeable subject; but I could see that Raoul had not dismissed it from his mind. He was silent and preoccupied, and the shadow rested on his face. I knew that he was thinking also of Gabrielle Duinaie, and how he could offer her no gift on New Year's day. That might seem a small thing, comparatively; but it was not so to Raoul Girard. For he was very proud.

We left the cafe of La Source unwillingly; the plash and ripple of the fountain seemed to murmur; Stay; call for another glass of absinthe, another cup of coffee. But two francs—forty sous!—and an indefinite number of dinners to expend them on! We tore ourselves away from La Source.

Arm in arm we went along the Rue Racine and across the Place de l'Odéon, on the way to our common lodging. Raoul was strangely silent, and I noticed that he walked at a much swifter pace than was usual with him.

Neither of us had overcoat or umbrella; these useful articles had drifted long since to the pawnbroker's shop. The sleet lashed in our faces, our thin garments were soon drenched, the mud and water from the puddles splashed up about us. It was an execrable night, and should have been my part to solace myself with a little mild grumbling, and Raoul's to relax me with some words of gay philosophy. But to-night I had an impression that he was making a personal grievance of this exposure to the snow and wind. He seemed strangely unlike himself. Once, after one of the fiercest

storms, I heard something like a curse escape his lips.

We scarcely exchanged a dozen words between the Boulevard and the top of the Rue Dauphine. At the corner of that street Raoul stopped abruptly. It was as if he had brought some long meditation to a close.

"What o'clock is it, Paul?" he asked me.

I laughed at the question, and reminded him that for two months I had been without a watch.

Just then the bell of St. Sulpice tolled; "Two, two, three"—I counted up to ten.

"Ten o'clock?" I heard Raoul mutter to himself; "there is time yet." I thought I knew what he meant.



"Ten o'clock; there is time yet."

"My friend," he said, "I am going to pay a visit. Oblige me by carrying home this book, and leave our door unlocked. I shall not be late, but do not wait for me if you feel at all sleepy. In the meantime, good night!"

It did not surprise me that Raoul should mean to pay a visit at that hour. I thought I knew where he was going.

We parted at the corner of the street. Raoul, still walking very fast, went back on the way we had come. As for me, I went shivering homeward, carrying with me the English book. On the way I bought two fagots for use on the morrow, when we should begin the work of translation. And I wished very much that the texture of Raoul's coat had produced a different effect on the mind of that wealthy member of the Institute.

## CHAPTER II.

When I awoke next morning it was to wonder what I could be the hour of day. I felt as if I had slept sufficiently, and yet the light in the room seemed strangely dim. It might have been early morning.

I looked across the room to the corner in which stood Raoul's trunk-bed, opposite my own. Raoul still slept, and soundly, to judge from his deep, regular breathing. I knew that he must have been late the night before; I had fallen asleep before he returned.

Presently I heard the heavy foot of Pierre, our landlord and servant in one, mounting the stair, and then his knock at the door.

"Is that you, Pierre?"

"It is I, with a letter for Monsieur, and one also for M. Girard."

I was about to rise to admit him, when I noticed that the key was not in the lock of the door. Evidently Raoul had not secured the door behind him last night, as it was his habit to do.

"Enter, then; the key is on your side, is it not?"

"Ah, it is true!" Next minute he had entered the room, and coming to my bedside, handed me the two letters.

"What o'clock is it, Pierre?"

"It is half-past eleven, Monsieur."

"How! Half-past eleven! Why, it is a veritable twilight in this room!"

"If Monsieur looks at the window he will see the reason of that."

I looked at the window in the ceiling of our attic room, and saw that it was covered with snow.

"What frightful weather! You will find two fagots in the closet, Pierre; have the goodness to light a fire, and hang these clothes before it. And make M. Girard still sleep."

"M. Girard was very late last night," remarked Pierre; "it was after two when I let him in."

"So late as that?" I said, surprised. Raoul could not then have gone to visit Mme. Duinaie and Gabrielle; he never stayed there after 11 at latest. Where had he been?

While Pierre was making up the fire, I read the letter he had brought me. It was from my father, in answer to an appeal for money—a desperate appeal, and useless, as I had expected. Unlike myself, my father was a man of principle; and one of his principles—the one I found personally most inconvenient—was this: Not a sou till quarter-day.

He made me a good allowance, which, in those days of wild and thoughtless youth, I was accustomed to spend with rapidity. Raoul was always poor; I was, at intervals, rich for a few days; then plunged into frightful poverty, owing to my parent's stern resolve never to antedate supplies. I had also numerous creditors, and had become proficient in the art of "doubling a cospé"—that is, slipping round a street corner when one of the funds began to sink, to leave my comparatively "luxurious" room in the Rue de Medicis, with the pleasant view over the Luxembourg gardens, and install myself in Raoul's garret, amid the din and squaker of the Rue Dauphine. His companionship more than made up for the discomfort, the cold, and the occasional pinch of hunger. We were fast friends, financed in common and had no secrets from each other. Raoul was very different from me—frugal, industrious, indulging in few pleasures, but always frank and gay, however empty his pockets. We were both students of law and our final examination was now not far off. I had never regretted my improvidence until now. But when I saw how a little ready money would have enabled Raoul and myself to leave aside all other work and give ourselves to our law books, I did regret it. And therefore, some days ago, I had written that letter to my father, scarcely expecting any more favorable answer than the exceedingly curt and decided one I received.

Pierre had by this time kindled the fire, and was arranging before it, on the backs of the two chairs our attic boasted, Raoul's damp clothes and mine. All at once he uttered an exclamation of surprise, which startled me from my study of the parental letter. "How! look then at the coat of M. Girard! The sleeve is ripped up right to the shoulder!"

"What! the sleeve ripped up, do you say?"

"Torn completely, Monsieur! But what is to be done! Monsieur has but one coat at present, and until it is repaired—"

"He cannot have this room, of course. It is very awkward. How can he have done it?"

"If Monsieur desires, I will take the coat downstairs to Nannette, who will sew it sufficiently well. Monsieur doubtless remembers what the tailor at the corner says—that he will do absolutely nothing more for Monsieur until his bill is paid!"

"It is true, Pierre; I recollect the words of the little wretch. By all means, take the

coat to Madame, and give her my thanks in advance."

Pierre departed, taking the coat with him. I began turning over the pages of the English book, reading a passage here and there, and trying to reckon the time it would take us to translate it. Raoul was an excellent English scholar; I could read that language fairly well. We had done this kind of work once or twice before.

Every now and then I looked across the room to see whether Raoul was not awake. But he did not stir. The heavy, regular breathing continued; he seemed to be sleeping very soundly.

By chance my eyes fell on Raoul's letter, which I had laid on the table beside me. I stretched forth my hand, took it and looked at the address; letters in those days were enough of a rarity to make one curious. The handwriting was strange to me. I was about to lay the letter down, when I noticed these words on the front of the envelope, "Odéon Theatre." Imagine my wonder, my delight! There was but one conclusion to be drawn from a letter which came unaccompanied by the manuscript. Raoul's comedy was accepted! For weeks past I had been telling myself, I had been assuring Raoul, that nothing was more certain to happen than this. But now, when it had actually happened—for the letter seemed sufficient evidence of that—I could scarcely realize at first that it was true. The comedy accepted—that would change everything! No more living in a garret for Raoul—no more dining at eight sous—no more translating dry English books—and as many presents on New Year's day as he cared to buy! In a moment I was out of bed, the letter in my hand.

"Raoul!" There was no answer. "Raoul!"—in a louder voice. Still no answer. "Heavens! how he sleeps! Raoul!"—laying my hand on his shoulder and gently shaking him. Still neither speech nor motion. "He must have been very late last night. Where the devil can he have gone! Raoul, waken, waken you! Here is a letter from—"

Just then I caught sight of his face in the feeble light of the snow-obscured window. His appearance alarmed me—almost gave me a shock. He was fever-flushed, and tinged with purple under the eyes; the lips were tense; at the corners of the mouth something like foam had gathered. The breathing was slow, deep-drawn; this did not seem to me a natural slumber. I shook him more violently; still he did not awake.

I went across the room, and looked into a drawer of the writing-table, where I knew Raoul kept a vial containing a solution of morphia. He had been troubled at one time by insomnia, resulting from overwork, and the doctor had given him this as a sleeping-draught. I found the vial; it was empty.

This at first frightened me terribly, until I remembered that there could not have been much more than one dose left in the bottle—certainly not enough to be dangerous. Still, Raoul's feverish look made me uneasy. I resolved on giving him a little time longer to awake, and meanwhile went to bed again. My clothes were still far from dry, and the cold was Siberian.

I had not lain in bed ten minutes before I was startled by Raoul moaning and restlessly moving his arms, as if in the act of climbing—a singular motion. Then he began to talk in his sleep, at first loudly; "It is the same—"

Raoul smiled and opened the letter. Though he took it more quietly, I know he was quite as anxious as myself. I watched him as he read; his glance seemed to fly along the lines; a look of satisfaction, almost ecstacy, came over his face, and I saw that the piece news had come. Raoul clasped my hand.

"You were right," he said; "the comedy is accepted! Read it!—then sink back nervously on his pillow."

This was the letter:

ODÉON THEATRE, Dec. 24, 186—.

"MONSIEUR: In the name of the administration of the Odéon Theatre, I have the honor to inform you that your comedy, 'The Gold of Toulouse,' has been accepted for early representation at the Odéon.

"In my own name, Monsieur, allow me to congratulate you on your work. It is more than amusing; it is brilliant. This is the opinion also of my colleagues who have read it. I desire, Monsieur, to make your acquaintance, and request you to favor me by a visit on an early day.

"Your comedy will be sent almost immediately to rehearsal, and will be put on the stage after the withdrawal of M. Victor's piece, 'The Hunting Party.' I shall have the honor of intimating to you ere long the day on which you will be requested to send your comedy before the artists to whom the parts will be allotted.

"I subscribe myself, Monsieur, with every assurance of esteem, your very humble, very obedient servant,

"DESNOUETTES, Manager."

I shall not try to describe our proceedings during the next quarter of an hour—or rather I should say my proceedings, for Raoul lay in bed laughing, while I waited round the room, huddled the English book into a corner, read the letter about with comments, waved it triumphantly aloft, and performed other absurdities; I was, indeed, overjoyed. Raoul was going to be a great man—he would rival Scribe, Angier, Sardou, those giants of the stage—he would make his way into the charmed circle of the Comédie Française! I said all this, which made him laugh more than ever. He begged me to sit down, before Pierre came up stairs to see which of us had gone mad.

"But you are satisfied?" I said to him, sinking at last, out of breath, into a chair.

"Does that letter not flatter you sufficiently?"

"Satisfied—I tell you, Paul, this is wonderful! It is one of those things which happen once in half a century. Now that it has happened, I begin to wonder how I could ever have imagined it possible!"

"You must go to M. Desnoettes to-morrow! You must—"

"Ask him for a loan, eh?"

"And why not? He might have advanced you a few napoleons; it is the only omission I notice in his otherwise admirable letter. Money we must have. Who, after this, could go on translating English!"

"I am not going to borrow from M. Desnoettes."

"Very good; there is another way. Give me the letter, and I will turn it into money. Times will change in the Quarter before a man with a comedy accepted by the Odéon needs to starve!"

"By all means take the letter and get the money if you can. And now, like a good fellow, give me pen and paper. I have three lines to write—you can guess to whom."

"Of course. It's a pity we can't spare her the letter, is it not?"

"I will tell her the good news. How it will rejoice her! Last night, after I left you, Paul, I saw her. We talked of this very thing of the comedy. Like you, Gabrielle never lost faith in it. She has prayed to the Virgin every night that it might be accepted."

"Well, it has been, anyhow. Here are the pen and paper. Wait one moment while I put some water in this ink; it is almost dry."

Just then there came a knock at the door. It was Pierre who entered.

"It is the coat of M. Girard," he said; "Nannette bids me say that she has done her best, though a tailor would doubtless have been more skillful."

"How, my coat?" said Raoul; "what, then, was the maker with my coat?"

"Monsieur has, then, forgotten?" said the servant; "the sleeve was torn from the wrist right up to the shoulder!"

At this moment I had my back turned to Raoul's bed, being engaged at the wash stand in dropping water into the ink bottle. A sudden cry of alarm from Pierre startled me:

"Quick, Monsieur, quick!—he has fainted! My God, he is dead!"

I flew to the bedside. Raoul's face had become of a deathly pallor; his eyes were closed; his lower jaw dropped down; his right arm hung flaccid over the bed.

"Gracious heaven!" I cried in alarm; "what is wrong with him? Quick, Pierre, dip this cloth in cold water—then run for brandy—run your fastest! Here!—oh, my God, I have not a sou!"

"Say not a word more, Monsieur! I will hasten—I will fly—I will bring the brandy! Let Monsieur be at ease—there is no need of the money"—and here this paragon of servants had rushed off and down the stairs before I could say a word. I had passed my arm under Raoul's head, and was bathing his brow with the wet cloth. Before Pierre came back he had revived, to my intense relief. He opened his eyes, and looked me wildly in the face. "I had forgotten that," he said, in a voice quite unlike his own, and with a shudder I could feel.

"Forgotten what, my dear Raoul?" but again his eyes had closed, and his head dropped back over my shoulder.

Pierre returned after a short absence with the brandy. We made Raoul drink some; presently he came out of the second fainting-fit, and looked at us curiously.

"What is wrong?" he said.

"Monsieur has fainted," said Pierre; "Monsieur feels better now, is it not so?"

"The good news has been too much for you, dear Raoul," I said; "you are certainly unwell. Shall I bring a doctor to see you?"

"On no account. I am better now—quite better." The tone in which he said this was very decided. "As you say, it is no doubt the sudden joy that has overwhelmed me. I shall sleep now, and to-morrow I shall be quite recovered."

He seemed disinclined to talk further. I sat beside him, watching, till he fell asleep. There was something in his manner and appearance that puzzled me and made me anxious, for I had never seen Raoul like this before. I began to fear lest this might be the beginning of a serious illness, and yet, on the evening before, at the cafe of La Source, he had seemed to be in his usual health. There was nothing that I knew of weighing on his mind; he had had no quarrel with Gabrielle; the comedy had been accepted. It must, I thought, be the sudden coming of good news, acting on a temperament naturally high-strung. Raoul had a splendid physique. His figure was lithe and slim, like an athlete; indeed, he had quite a reputation at the gymnasium in the Rue de la Sorbonne. But regular dining will try the best constitution; and Raoul, like many writing men, was a creature of nerves. In this way, sitting by his bedside, I explained to myself his fainting fit and random words. Soon I saw him slumbering peacefully. This reassured me, and I retired to rest.

## CHAPTER III.

The next forenoon saw me on my way to the house of Levi Jacob, the usurer, with the Odéon letter safe in my pocket. Raoul had passed a somewhat restless night, but in the

morning professed himself quite