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CASE By... Emile Gaboriau

CHAPTER VI.

But by the time Fanferlot reached Montmartre street, where M. Lecoq lived, his courage had vanished. He pulled his hat over his eyes and hung his head, as if looking for relief among the paving stones. He slowly ascended the steps, pausing several times, at last reaching the third floor, and stood before a door decorated with the arms of the famous detective—a cock, the symbol of vigilance—and his heart failed him so that he had scarcely the courage to ring the bell. Janouille, M. Lecoq's old servant, opened the door.

"Ah," she said, "you come in time for once in your life. Your patron awaits you."

Upon this announcement Fanferlot was seized with a violent desire to beat a retreat. By what chance could Lecoq want anything of him? While he thus hesitated Janouille seized him by the arm and pulled him in, saying: "Do you want to take root there? Come along. Your patron is waiting for you."

In the middle of a large room curiously furnished, half library and half greenhouse, was seated at a desk the same person with gold spectacles who had said to Prosper at the police office, "Courage." This was M. Lecoq in his official character.

Upon Fanferlot's entrance as he advanced respectfully, bowing, M. Lecoq laid down his pen and said, looking sharply at him:

"Ah, here you are, my man. Well, it seems you haven't made much progress in the Bertomy case."

"Why," murmured Fanferlot, "you know."

"I know that you have mixed everything until you can't see your way out, so that you are ready to give up."

"But it was not I!"

M. Lecoq arose and walked up and down the room. Suddenly he confronted Fanferlot.

"What would you think, Master Squirrel," he said ironically, "of a man who abuses the confidence of those who employ him, who reveals just enough to lead the prosecution on the wrong scent, who sacrifices to his own foolish vanity the cause of justice and the liberty of an unfortunate man?"

Fanferlot recoiled a step.

"I should say," he stammered—"I should say!"

"You think, Mr. Squirrel, that this man ought to be punished and dismissed from his employment, and you are right. The less a profession is honored, the more honorable should those who belong to it. Nevertheless you have been false to yours. Ah, Mr. Squirrel, we are ambitious, and we try to make the police force serve us. We let justice go her way and we go ours."

"But I swear!"

"Silence! Do you pretend to say that you did your duty in what you told the judge of instruction? While others were informing against the cashier you undertook to inform against the banker. You spied upon him. You became intimate with his valet."

Was M. Lecoq really angry? Fanferlot, who knew him well, was in doubt. He did not know what to think of this devil of a man.

"If you were only skillful," he continued, "but, no; you wish to be a master, and you are not fit to be a journeyman."

"You are right," said Fanferlot piteously, seeing that it was useless to deny anything. "But how get on with an affair like this, where there is not even a trace or sign to start from?"

M. Lecoq shrugged his shoulders.

"Poor fellow! Why, don't you know that on the very day you were sent for with the commissary to verify the robbery you held—I do not say certainly, but very probably held—in your great stupid hands the means of knowing whether the key of the cashier or the banker had been used when the robbery was committed?"

"What do you mean?"

"You want to know? I will tell you. Do you remember the scratch you discovered on the safe door? You were so struck by it that you exclaimed at seeing it. You carefully examined it and were convinced that it was a fresh scratch. You thought, and rightly, too, that this scratch was made at the time of the robbery. Now, with what was it made? Evidently with a key. That being the case, you should have demanded the keys both of the banker and the cashier. One of them would have had some particles of the hard green paint sticking to it."

upset him. How had M. Lecoq obtained them?

"Have you been long looking up this case?" he asked.

"Probably. But I am not infallible and may have overlooked some important evidence. Take a seat and tell me all you know."

One could not deceive M. Lecoq, so Fanferlot told the exact truth, a rare thing for him to do. However, as he reached the end of his statement a feeling of mortified vanity prevented his telling how he had been fooled by Gipsy and the stout man.

"It seems to me, Master Squirrel, that you have forgotten something. How far did you follow the empty coach?"

Fanferlot despite his assurance blushed and hung his head.

"Oh," he stammered, "you know about that? How did you?"

But a sudden idea entered his brain. He stopped short, bunched off his chair and cried:

"Oh, I know! You were the large man with red whiskers."

Fanferlot's surprise gave so singular an expression to his face that M. Lecoq could not restrain a smile.

"Then it was you," continued the bewildered detective. "You are the large gentleman at whom I stared so as to impress his appearance upon my mind, and I never recognized you! What an actor you would make if you would go on the stage! But I was disguised, too—very well disguised."

"Very poorly disguised. It is only just to you that I should tell you so. Do you think that a heavy beard and a blouse are unrecognizable? The eye, the eye! The art lies in being able to change the eye. That is the secret."

This explained why the lynx eyed Lecoq never appeared at the police office without his gold spectacles.

"But," said Fanferlot, following up his idea, "you have made the little girl confess, which Mme. Alexandre could not do? You know why she leaves the Archangel, why she does not wait for M. de Clameran and why she bought calico dresses?"

"She is following my advice."

"In that case," said the detective dejectedly, "there is nothing left for me to do but to acknowledge myself an ass."

"No, Squirrel," said M. Lecoq kindly, "you are not an ass. You merely did wrong in undertaking a task beyond your capacity. Have you progressed one step since you started in this affair? No. That shows that, although you are incomparable as a lieutenant, you do not possess the qualities of a general. I am going to present you with an aphorism. Remember it and let it be your guide in the future—'One may shine in the second rank who would be totally eclipsed in the first.'"

Never had Fanferlot seen his patron so talkative and good natured. Finding his deceit discovered, he had expected to be overwhelmed with a storm, whereas he had escaped with a little shower that had cooled his brain. Lecoq's anger disappeared like one of those heavy clouds which threaten in the horizon for a moment and then are suddenly swept away by a gust of wind.

But the husband of Mme. Alexandre felt uneasy. He was afraid that something might be concealed beneath this affability.

"Do you know who the thief is?" he asked.

"I know no more than you do, and you seem to have made up your mind, whereas I am still undecided. You declare that the cashier is innocent and the banker guilty. I don't know whether you are right or wrong. I started after you and have only reached my preliminaries. I am certain of but one thing, and that is that a scratch was on the safe door. That scratch is my starting point."

As he spoke M. Lecoq took from his desk and unfolded an immense sheet of drawing paper. On this paper was photographed the door of M. Fauvel's safe. Every detail was given minutely. One could see the five movable buttons with the engraved letters and the narrow, projecting brass lock. The scratch was indicated with admirable exactness.

"Now," said M. Lecoq, "here is our scratch. It runs from top to bottom, starting from the hole in the lock, diagonally and, you see, from left to right; that is to say, it terminates on the side next to the private staircase leading to the banker's apartments. Very deep at the lock, it ends off in a scarcely perceptible mark."

"Naturally you thought that this scratch was made by the person who took the money. Let us see if you were right. I have here a little iron box, painted green like M. Fauvel's safe. Take a key and try to scratch it."

Without saying through his chief's motive, the detective did as he was bid, scratching vigorously with the key.

"The demon," he said after several attempts, "this paint is awfully hard to scratch."

"Very hard, my friend, and yet that on the safe is still harder. So, you see, the scratch you discovered could not have been made by the trembling hand of a thief holding the key still."

"I never should have thought of

that. It certainly required great force to make so deep a scratch.

"Yes, but how was it done? I have been racking my brain for three days, and only yesterday I came to a conclusion. Let us examine together and see if our conjectures present enough chances of probability to establish a starting point."

M. Lecoq abandoned the photograph and, walking to the door communicating with his bedroom, took the key from the lock.

"Come here, Fanferlot, and stand by my side. There, very well. Suppose that I want to open this door and you don't want me to open it. When you see me about to put the key in the lock, what would be your first impulse?"

"To put my hands on your arm and draw it toward me quickly, so as to prevent your introducing the key."

"Precisely so. Now let us try it. Proceed."

Fanferlot obeyed, and the key held by M. Lecoq, pulled aside from the lock, slipped along the door, making an exact reproduction of the scratch in the photograph.

"Oh, oh, oh!" exclaimed Fanferlot in three different tones as he stood staring at the door.

"Do you begin to understand now?" asked M. Lecoq.

"Understand! Why, a child could understand it now. Ah, what a man you are! I see the scene as if I had been present. Two persons were at the safe. One wished to take the money; the other wished to prevent its being taken. That is certain."

Accustomed to triumphs of this sort, M. Lecoq was much amused at Fanferlot's enthusiasm.

"There you go off half cocked again," he said good humoredly. "You regard as sure proof a circumstance which may be accidental and at the most only probable."

"No, a man like you could not be mistaken. There is no doubt about it."

"That being the case, what deductions would you draw from our discovery?"

"In the first place, it proves the cashier innocent."

"How so?"

"Because, at perfect liberty to open the safe whenever he wished to do so, he would not have brought a witness when he intended to commit the theft."

"Well reasoned. But on this supposition the banker would also be innocent. Think."

Fanferlot reflected, and all of his animation vanished.

"It is so," he said in a despairing tone. "What can be done now?"

"Find the third rogue, or, rather, the real rogue—the one who opened the safe and stole the notes and who is still at large, while others are suspected."

"Impossible! M. Fauvel and his cashier only had keys, and they always kept them on their persons."

"Bardon me. On the evening of the robbery the banker left his key in the secretary."

"Yes, but the key alone was not sufficient to open the safe. The word also was necessary."

M. Lecoq shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"What was the word?" he asked.

"Gipsy."

"Which is the name of the cashier's grissette. The day you find a man sufficiently intimate with Prosper to be aware of all the circumstances connected with this name, and at the same time on a footing with the Fauvel family which would give him the privilege of entering M. Fauvel's chamber, then you will discover the real thief; then the problem will be solved."

Egotistical, like all great artists, M. Lecoq had never had a pupil and never wished to have one. He hated assistants, wishing to share neither the pleasure of success nor the pain of defeat. Thus Fanferlot, who knew his patron's character, was surprised to hear him giving advice which heretofore had only given orders.

"Chief," he ventured to say, "you seem to take a great personal interest in this affair—you have so deeply studied it."

M. Lecoq started nervously and replied, frowning:

"Don't be too curious, Master Squirrel. Be careful that you do not go too far. Do you understand?"

Fanferlot began to apologize.

will tell you to watch Prosper. You will reply that you will not lose sight of him. I myself will answer for his being in good hands."

"And if he asks me about Gipsy?"

M. Lecoq hesitated a moment.

"Tell him," he said, "that you persuaded her, in the interest of Prosper, to live in a house where she can watch some one whom you suspect."

Fanferlot rolled up the photograph and was joyously picking up his hat to go when M. Lecoq checked him with a gesture.

"I have not finished. Do you know how to drive a carriage and manage horses?"

"Why can you ask this of a man who used to be a rider in the Bouthor circus?"

"Very well. As soon as the judge dismisses you return home immediately, make yourself a wig and the complete dress of a valet, and, having dressed yourself, take this letter to the agent on Delorme street."

"But—"

"There must be no but, sir. The agent will send you to M. de Clameran, who is looking for a valet, his man having left him yesterday."

"Excuse me if I venture to suggest that you are making a mistake. This Clameran does not come into the matter. He is not the cashier's friend."

"Do what I tell you and don't disturb your mind about the rest. Clameran is not a friend of Prosper. I know, but he is the friend and protector of Raoul de Lazors. Why so? Whence the intimacy of these two men of such different ages? I must find out. I must also find out who this Raoul de Lazors is who lives in Paris and never goes to attend to his business; a high liver, who takes it into his head to live at the Hotel du Louvre in the midst of a tumultuous, ever changing crowd, where it is hard to watch him. Through you I will have an eye upon him. He has a carriage. You are to drive it, and you will soon be able to give me an account of his manner of life and of the sort of people with whom he associates."

"You shall be obeyed."

"One word more. M. de Clameran is irritable and, still more, suspicious. You will be presented to him under the name of Joseph Dubois. He will demand your certificate of good character. Here are three which state that you have lived with the Marquis de Stairmeuse and the Count de Commanin and that you have just left the Baron de Wortschen, who has gone to Germany. Be careful of your dress and manners. Watch the marquis's movements. Above all, don't overdo your part. It might arouse suspicion."

"Don't worry as to that. Where shall I report to you?"

"I will call on you every day. Until I change your orders don't step foot in this house. You might be followed. If anything important should happen, send a note to your wife, and she will inform me. Go and be prudent."

The door closed on Fanferlot as M. Lecoq passed into his bedroom.

In the twinkling of an eye he had divested himself of chief of the secret service. He took off his stiff cravat and gold spectacles and removed the close wig from his thick black hair. The official Lecoq had disappeared, leaving in his place the Lecoq whom nobody knew—a handsome man with a clear eye and resolute bearing. But he remained only for an instant. Seated before a dressing table, covered with more cosmetics, paints, perfumes, false hair and other unmentionable shams than the toilet tables of a modern belle, he began to undo the work of nature and make himself a new face. He worked slowly, handling his brushes with great care. But in an hour he had accomplished one of his daily masterpieces. When he had finished, he was no longer Lecoq. He was the large man with red whiskers whom Fanferlot failed to recognize.

"Well," he said, casting a last look in the mirror, "I have forgotten nothing. I have left nothing to chance. All my plans are fixed, and I shall make progress, provided the Squirrel does not waste time."

But Fanferlot was too happy to waste a minute. He did not run, he flew, toward the Palais de Justice. At last he was able to convince some one of his wonderful shrewdness. As to acknowledging that he was about to obtain a triumph with the ideas of another man, he never thought of it. It is generally in perfect good faith that the jackdaw struts in the peacock's feathers. His hopes were realized. If the judge was not absolutely convinced, he admired the ingenuity of the whole proceeding.

"This decides me," he said, dismissing Fanferlot. "I will file a favorable report today, and it is highly probable that the accused will be released tomorrow."

He began at once to write out one of those terrible decisions of "Not proved" which restores liberty, but not honor, to the accused man; which says that he is not guilty, but does not say he is innocent.

Whereas there do not exist sufficient charges against the accused, Prosper Bertomy, in pursuance of article 128 of the Criminal Code we hereby declare that we find no grounds for prosecution against the accused prisoner at this present time, and we order that he shall be released from the prison where he is confined and set at liberty by the jailer, etc.

When it was finished, "Well," he said to the clerk, "here is another of those crimes which justice cannot clear up—another life to be stowed away among the archives of the record office."

And his own hand wrote on the cover of the bundle of papers relating to Prosper's case the number of the package, "Case 113."

TO BE CONTINUED.

Instead of taking the opinions of other men on trust, it is well enough to do a little thinking on your own account.

If you would convince a person of his mistake, direct him not upon the subject when his spirit is ruffled.

Miscellaneous Reading.

HUCKSKIN'S LITTLE JOKE.

Cowboy's Have Their Fun, and He Has His Afterward.

The boys of the Carlisle ranch in southern Utah will never forget their introduction to Buckskin, or rather Buckskin Ike's introduction in the early '90s. Ike strolled up to a cabin of the Bar X ranch with a gunny-suck on his shoulder and a woe-begone expression on his face, and without admission. He told a hard-luck story about a sick horse that died "down in the hills yonder," and he wanted to stay a few days until he found out "where he was at."

Hospitality is one of the most pronounced features of the world, and as no wanderer's plea for shelter was ever in vain, therefore the invitation to come in was hearty and unqualified.

The man was about as long and loose-jointed a specimen of humanity as is generally given to mortal eyes and Lehold, six feet and four inches tall and weighing about 120 pounds he appeared, as he stood leaning against the door-way, to be much taller and slimmer than he really was. His hair was of a colorless, milkweed hue, rather long, and his sleepy blue eyes and general listless appearance indicated that he was not a character of much force. His long, thin neck and large ears gave one the impression that he had been carried around by the ears when a child and stood up in the corner out of the way to grow. His actions as he moved to the center of the room and cast a gunny-sack he was carrying over his shoulder, on the floor, were slow and uncertain, and he wore an apologetic air as though he felt there was some excuse necessary to offer for being late. He was dressed in a faded and worn suit of overall goods and a soft gray hat, not of the style usually worn by cowboys. The only article of apparel which was in keeping with his location and the company he was in were his high-heeled boots, which were the regulation article of the range.

"Gosh, I'm glad to get somewhere," was his exclamation as he let his pack slide to the floor and looked around with a bewildered air.

"Where'd you come from and where are ye going?" asked the boss of the ranch, Billy Madden.

"I come from Bluff City and I was goin' to the mines down on the river, but my horse took sick and died down yonder about 20 miles, an' I hoofed it all the way up here with the saddle and blanket on my back," replied the stranger, as he slowly looked around the crowd of cowboys gathered in the cabin waiting for supper. "An' I'm all-fired hungry," he added, with an appealing air, looking toward the cook, who stood, kettle in hand, listening to his story.

"Well, fall in; chuck's ready," said the cook. "It's a pretty big contract to fill you up, but you're welcome to all them big saddles."

"Where are you from," inquired the foreman, after he had watched for a time for evidence of the truth of the stranger's assertion that he was hungry.

"From Missouri," vouchsafed the busy guest, between bites, "an' my name's Ike—like Jarvis."

"Been out here long?" continued Madden.

"'bout as long as they make 'em, I guess," replied the lengthy Ike, as he glanced down at his toes.

"I guess that's a fact," replied Madden, with a grin; "but how does it come you're so short?"

"Oh, that's a long story," said Ike, as he bolted a biscuit whole and reached for another chunk of beef.

"Say, you'd make a pretty good top rope if you're tough enough," remarked one chap down at the other end of the table.

"Yes, I've held a good many nudes down in Missouri," asserted Ike, in no-wise perturbed by the intended ridicule. After supper was over, the gang gathered around the new comer to quiz him.

"What are you going to do now, since your horse is dead? You can't travel on them legs," said Jud Smith, a cross-eyed cow puncher.

"Guess I'll have to look around for a job."

"Can you ride?"

"Hide? Of course I can ride. Ever see a feller that couldn't ride?"

"Yes, I know; but what I mean can you ride wild horses, break 'em? We want a good buster here, as our string's getting thin."

"Well, I don't know about those pesky animals here, but I used to break mules and colts back in Missouri."

"How did you do it then?" asked Madden.

"Why, I'd wait till I worked a colt all day ploughing and then jump on his back and ride him to the barn. Sometimes they'd kick up and run away, but you bet I'd ride 'em."

"Well, that ain't the way we do it out here, but I'll give you a trial if you think you can ride," said Madden with a quiet grin at his head "buster," a man of considerable repute as a stayer.

"I'm your huckleberry. When can I begin?" shouted Ike, all excited over his good fortune, "and how much do you pay?"

"I pay \$50 a month and board, and you can begin in the morning," said Madden.

"Will the job be steady—how long will it last?" persisted the lengthy Missourian, with a twinkle in his eye, which indicated he was not so green or unsophisticated as he appeared.

"That depends on yourself. I'll persist as long as you can stick on," persisted the foreman with a grin.

activity and movements of gracefulness about it.

Turning-in time was now announced and a general movement took place, as the boys sought their beds.

Early the next morning all hands were called out to the corral to catch their mounts for the day, and Ike was the most active, if not the most successful, one in the gang.

"Catch that half-faced sorrel there; he's your mount for today," was the foreman's instruction as he winked at the boys, who knew what was coming and prepared to enjoy the fun of watching Ike ride old "Satan," the worst-spotted bronco in Utah. This horse was known as the bronco-buster buster and had never been conquered. He had thrown every rider who had ever got on his back and was kept for the purpose of initiating greenhorns and testing the sticking qualities of the professional horse-breakers who traveled over the country breaking horses at 80 much per head. He was a powerful, rangy horse, weighing about 1,100 pounds, was 8 years old, and "so—"

poison you could scrape strychnine off his neck," as one fellow put it. He could rag a little livelier and hump his back a little keener and faster than any horse on the range. He knew every trick and crook of the business and was just master in the art of giving aspiring bronco riders a lift in the world.

Ike put in about an hour of good, solid work in an endeavor to catch old Satan. He was an energetic, persistent "cusser" and so was old Satan, who could dodge the rope with marvelous cunning. Jarvis tried hard and had the horse about crazy with excitement before the boys came to his aid, but somehow his rope never seemed to fly straight, or it would get tangled around his legs and trip him. Several times he caught the wrong horse. Whatever he might be as a rider, he certainly was not an expert with a rope, and his antics afforded much amusement for the boys who had caught their "string" and were standing around watching him.

To a friendly offer by one of the boys to catch his horse for him, Ike replied: "Naw, I'm going to try just one more throw. I think I'll get him next time."

By some backhanded fling he did actually catch his horse the next throw and straightened up as proud as a peacock.

After breakfast, when Ike brought out his gunnysack containing his saddle, and prepared to saddle old Satan, every gallop round camp, even to the cook, had business in that immediate vicinity. When he dumped out his saddle and they saw what sort of a rig he had, some of the kinder-hearted ones took pity on him and attempted to dissuade him from using it, offering him a good saddle.

"Why, that 'henskin' of yours ain't fit to ride a mess wagon, let alone a bronk," said one.

"Nope," he replied to their kind offers. "I've rid this year old postage stamp a good many years, an' it still sticks. I'd feel kinder lost in one of them big saddles."

By dint of much coaxing and exertion he got old Satan saddled and prepared to mount. Diving into his sack he produced a wicked-looking pair of Mexican spurs, with murderous rowels an inch in diameter.

His good nature and innocent mien had by this time gained for him the good will of the camp, and one of the boys felt really sorry for him and thought that it was little short of manslaughter to allow this poor country Jake to continue further with the joke. Big Bill Williams, the biggest-hearted fellow in the crew, tried to tell him what kind of a proposition he was up against and to keep him from "crawling the man-eater."

But Ike would pay no heed and insisted that he was not going to give up a \$50 a month job without having a try.

When he tried to mount, old Satan backed off and circled round, allowing Ike to get no closer than near enough to catch the stirrup in his hand. Occasionally he got one foot up in the stirrup and hopped around like a crow after the horse, who backed away with his rolling eyes. Several times the horse gave a plunge and tried to break away, but the lanky Missourian managed to hang on, though oftentimes he was near to losing his feet. The entire crew was now gathered around in undisguised enjoyment, watching the circus.

"If you can ride as well as you can rope you are all right," was a jeering remark that brought a steely glint to Ike's eyes and caused a tightening of the lines about his mouth that bespoke a determination to do or die.

"Why don't you walk up, straddle of him and sit down?"

"Try the other side; maybe he's a left-handed horse."

"Did your Missouri horses act like that?"

"Don't you wish you were back in Missouri ploughing corn?" And kindred remarks were showered upon the poor fellow's head, as he followed the vicious animal around, sometimes hopping with one foot in the stirrup or being dragged by the bridle reins. That this man was no fool and knew how to avoid getting hurt, despite his seeming awkwardness, was evident, and that he had grit was also plainly to be seen. Paying no attention to the jeers of his comrades, who were getting impatient waiting, as they could find no further excuse for tarrying, Ike seemed suddenly to conclude that he had fooled around long enough. He caught the stirrup with one hand and made a flying leap for the plunging horse's back. There he clung, holding the horse's head up with a tight rein, so it could not get free action to buck, flopping first to one side and then to the other, sometimes back of the saddle and sometimes before it. At each time it appeared that he would go off, but by dint of mere strength, and apparently because he was so long, the horse could not jump out from under him in one leap, and he managed each time to

avoid going quite off. Old Satan was doing some pretty stiff buck-and-wing work, but he could not get the rein for free action. He could not quite make out about that long, limber thing that flopped around so awkwardly and yet was so hard to shake off.

"Stay with him, Missouri!" cried the crowd.

"Wrap your legs around him