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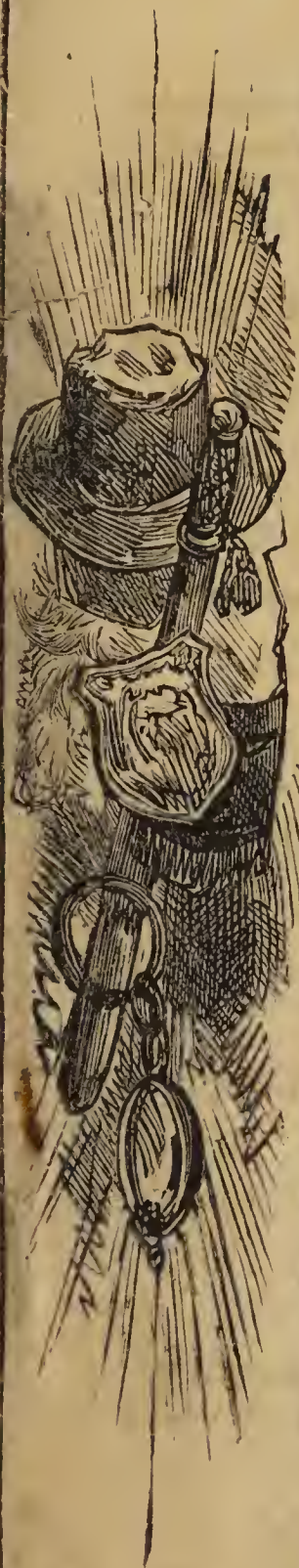
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Vol. 1

The Silver Watch Chain

By OLD CAP LEE.



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THE SILVER WATCH CHAIN

OR,

THE FRENCH DETECTIVE'S BLUNDER.

By OLD CAP LEE,

Author of "The Forged Checks," "The Bent Key," "The Lost Number," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

"My God, I am killed!"

The exclamation rang out sharp and clear.

Thud! crash!

A dull, crunching blow had preceded the above agonized remark.

The great clock of the Madeline had pealed the hour of midnight over all Paris.

The scene was in a dark portion of the Faubourg St. Honore.

A man had been walking along the pavements.

His appearance did not differ from other pedestrians on the street.

He had been walking along quite rapidly.

The assault was sudden, quick, and swift.

He was unprepared for it.

A man, dark muffled, had stepped forth from a dark alley.

Too late the victim raised his arm.

Thud!

With terrible force the blow descended.

Only the exclamation escaped his lips.

After that he never moved.

He never spoke in life again.

One instant the murderer bent over his victim.

Then he arose.

A moment later he had vanished.

The victim lay inanimate upon the sidewalk.

A man across the street had seen the tragedy.

He had sprang across with a cry of alarm.

But he was too late to prevent it.

He bent over the murdered man.

He white face upturned, ghastly in the night air, gave him a great start.

One moment he bent over him and made a swift examination of the wound.

It was just above the right temple.

The blow had been delivered with terrible force, and evidently with some blunt instrument.

"What, ho!" he cried, leaping to his feet. "Help! help! murder has been done!"

A gendarme came rushing up.

Also at the same moment an ambulance dashed by.

It was quickly hailed, and the guards sprang out.

The inanimate form of the man was lifted and placed in the ambulance.

"The man is dead," said the gendarme.

"I shall take him to the morgue," said the guard.

"His life was quickly ended."

"Aye; were you a witness?"

"I was."

"Who was the assassin?"

"A dark, muffled man."

"You do not know who he was?"

"No. I arrived too late, unfortunately, to prevent the foul deed."

"You do not know this man?"

"I never saw him before."

"He is well dressed?"

"Yes, he is a gentleman."

"I shall take him to the Morgue," said the guard. "Somebody will come and claim him."

The ambulance-driver lifted his whip.

But the blow never descended.

A man came hurriedly up to the spot.

"Hold!" he cried.

"Well," said the ambulance-driver, "what is it?"

"A murder has been done here."

"Yes."

"Where is the victim?"

"He is within."

"Let me see him."

"By what right?"

The ambulance-driver scrutinized the other closely.

He was of medium stature, but had a certain commanding air which was impressive.

He threw aside his cloak.

This revealed his features in the dim light.

Also a silver star upon his breast.

"Do you recognize me now?" he said.

"Jules Renaud," gasped the ambulance-driver.

"The Versailles detective," said the gendarme.

Then a moment of silence ensued.

It could be seen that Jules Renaud, the celebrated Versailles detective, was no ordinary personage, in the eyes of those present.

"Will you come to the Morgue?" said the ambulance-driver.

"No; I will see the victim here."

"But——"

"No prevarication, Pierre Gillot; he must not be taken to the Morgue."

Without ado the driver descended from his box.

The door of the ambulance was thrown open.

Jules Renaud made a hasty examination of the murdered man.

"You know his name?" said the ambulance-driver.

"Certainly; do you not recognize him? At one time he was king of the Bourse. His name is Victor Roumaine."

"Victor Roumaine."

"Aye."

"At one time the richest man in Paris."

Jules Renaud's examination furnished him two distinct clues.

He examined the wound.

"It was delivered with a hammer," he said, "and from the right, with a sidelong motion as a carpenter strikes a nail. The man who delivered it is conversant with the use of a hammer."

The detective examined the man's body next.

And this resulted in a discovery.

To the waistcoat was attached the small part of a silver watch chain.

The other part, with the watch to which it had probably been fastened, was gone.

"This would indicate plunder as the motive for the crime, but I cannot understand it so," said the detective.

The affair was a mystery to him.

He stood for some moments in thought.

Then clanged the door of the ambulance shut.

"Drive to this man's house," he said.

He mounted the box beside the driver.

The ambulance dashed away.

It did not go far before it turned into the Faubourg St. Germaine.

And halted before a rich residence.

The detective sprang up the marble steps.

The concierge with pale face met him at the door.

"Monsieur Renaud;" he said.

"Yes," said the detective. "Prepare the way immediately; be careful how you break the news to Madame. Monsieur Roumaine has been murdered."

The concierge gave a loud wail.

He was an old and faithful servant.

He had been in the family many years, and was now naturally much distressed at the news of his master's death.

But he did not waste time.

He called a couple of the hall-porters to assist in bringing his master's body into the house.

The corpse was laid out upon a divan in the main saloon.

Madame was in the upper part of the house.

When summoned, Renaud broke the news to her as easily as possible.

Madame Roumaine was a Frenchwoman of the aristocratic

type. A matron in years, but still possessed of much of her maidenly beauty.

"Oh, my husband," she moaned. "Oh, my Victor, I shall never know you in life again. Ah, this is more than I can bear."

Then she arose to her feet.

She turned to Renaud.

"Who is his assassin?" she queried.

"I know not, Madame."

"Have you no suspicion?"

"I have a clew."

"What?"

"This."

The detective held up to view the remaining bit of a silver watch chain.

Madame gazed at it, and then flung herself at the detective's feet.

"Oh, Monsieur Renaud," she sobbed. "If you can track down his murderer leave no stone unturned. I will reward you."

"Madame," said the detective, his voice choking with emotion, "I am both shocked and horrified at this terrible tragedy. I will consecrate my best efforts to tracking down the assassin. When I shall have found the other part of this watch-chain, I shall have brought the murderer to justice."

At this moment the arras which formed the portiere was lifted.

A young girl, fair and graceful as the Goddess of Love, appeared upon the threshold.

"Andree," cried Madame.

A terrible deathly pallor was upon the young girl's face.

CHAPTER II.

JULES RENAUD, the great French detective, was an old acquaintance and friend of the Roumaine family.

He had known them before Victor Roumaine had attained his great wealth.

The young girl who entered was Madame Roumaine's daughter.

Andree Roumaine was beautiful in every sense of the word.

Gentle, winsome, and loving in her manners, she was beloved by all who knew her.

As she advanced into the chamber now, her face was fearfully pale and anguish-stricken.

"Mother," she ejaculated; "I have heard fearful news; is it true?"

Madame Roumaine gave a moan of anguish.

"Oh, God! It cannot be," cried the young girl, fixing a supplicating gaze upon Renaud. "Oh, tell me, good Monsieur Renaud, tell me it is not so."

At this moment and before the detective could speak, Andree caught sight of the form of her father lying upon the divan.

In an instant she had sprang over to it.

She flung herself in wild abandonment upon his inanimate form.

"Oh, father, father," she sobbed. "Look up and speak to me."

But Victor Roumaine could not respond to this supplication.

The good man's spirit had fled to that higher life.

Renaud advanced and put his arm around Andree.

He lifted her tenderly.

"This will not do," he said. "You must not give way thus; remember it is the will of the Higher Power."

The young girl suffered herself to be led away.

It was a sorrowing household that day.

And Jules Renaud left it with a firm determination uppermost in his mind.

"I will hunt down the assassin," he said, firmly. "I will never rest until I have tracked him down."

Instantly he drew forth the bit of watch chain.

It was his only clew.

Little he realized then through what thrilling vicissitudes it was to lead him.

He left the Roumaine mansion.

He descended the steps.

A cab was passing.

He hailed it.

"Drive me to the Prefecture de St. Jean," he said.

The cab-driver whipped up his horse and dashed away.

A half hour later Renaud was in the office of the Inspector of Detectives.

As he entered, a short, dried up little old man arose from a desk.

"Ah, Renaud; is it you?"

"It is," replied the detective.

"You have returned?"

"I have, Monsieur Picard."

"I am glad of it."

"Why?"

"Because I wanted to see you."

"On business, I presume?"

"Of course. I never allow my mind to be troubled with aught else," said Picard, the brisk little inspector of Parisian detectives.

"What is the business?"

"The Marquis D'Aldaney has been robbed."

"Ah, the marquis is unfortunate."

"Yes, he was born that way, I guess," said Picard.

"You are right. It is always his misfortune to be robbed."

"But this robbery I guess in *bona fide*."

"Indeed."

"I have reason to believe so."

"What is the nature of the theft?"

"A secret drawer was opened in his desk and bonds were stolen."

"To what amount?"

"Twenty thousand francs."

"Not a small loss."

"You are right."

"Who is suspected?"

"His private secretary."

"What! Anson Nicolard?"

"Even so."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Renaud. "I know Nicolard very well, and do not believe that he would be guilty of such a thing."

"A detective should have faith in no one," said Picard, reprovingly.

"Surely," said Renaud. "But I know Nicolard so well."

"You will go to the marquis at once."

"I will."

Renaud bowed himself out.

He descended the steps of the prefecture.

"Marquis d'Aldaney!" he exclaimed. "I will go to the

marquis, though I dislike to give up the Roumaine case; but then, the latter I can do nothing on at present."

He hailed a victoria.

Entering it, he was soon deposited at the door of a massive marble-front house on a fashionable faubourg.

He was admitted by the concierge.

"Master has been looking for you," said the man.

Renaud gave his card to a porter, who escorted him to the marquis' room.

A moment later Renaud was in the presence of that dignitary.

The marquis was a man of middle age, with blonde hair and mustache.

He was reclining in an easy-chair as Renaud entered.

He partly arose.

And then with an imperious wave of his hand motioned the French detective to a seat.

"You have come," he said.

"In response to your summons," said Renaud.

"I am glad to see you."

"You have been robbed?"

"Yes."

"What was the nature of the theft?"

"I have lost twenty thousand francs in bonds from a private drawer of my desk."

"A serious loss," said Renaud.

"Aye."

"Was it your private desk?"

"It was."

"You wish me to look the matter up?"

"I do."

"Then you must pardon me for asking you a few questions, and also for a few liberties."

"Detectives are always accorded that privilege."

Renaud became much reassured.

The Marquis d'Aldaney was not such an uncongenial personage after all.

"I would like to see this desk."

"You shall."

The marquis led his visitor into an inner chamber.

It was a small study.

And evidently the private room of the nobleman.

A richly-carved inlaid desk stood against the wall.

It had been pulled partly out into the center of the room.

A scene of confusion was presented.

The drawers had all been removed, and their contents scattered about the floor.

Evidently the thief had been in great haste.

Renaud took in this at a glance.

Then he advanced, and bent over the drawers.

He examined the lock on each critically.

Each one had been pried.

Then he arose to his feet.

He swept a critical glance about the apartment.

There was only one door and a window.

The window opened upon a court thirty feet below.

There was no means of ascent.

The detective examined the lock on the door.

It was unimpaired.

Then he turned to the Marquis.

There was a troubled expression upon his brow.

"Who beside yourself has admittance to this room," he queried.

"No one but my private secretary," replied the Marquis.

"Anson Nicolard?"

"That is his name."

The detective remained thoughtful for a moment.

Could it be possible that Nicolard was the thief.

"The theft cannot have been committed by an outsider," he said. "The thief is evidently some one familiar with the ways of the house."

"I have suspected Nicolard," said the Marquis.

"Where is he?" queried Renaud.

"He has gone to the Bourse with a message."

The detective turned towards the door.

The Marquis followed him.

"Is this all, Monsieur Renaud?" he said.

"All," replied the detective.

"When shall I hear from you again?"

"When I shall have captured the thief."

The marquis followed the detective into the outer room.

Then he clutched his arm.

"Come with me," he said.

Renaud was drawn into an inner room, a small dining-hall.

The marquis seated himself at a table loaded with wines and fruits, and motioned Renaud to a seat opposite.

The detective complied, and the Marquis poured out a glass of wine.

"What do you think of Nicolard as the thief?" he queried.

"Nicolard is not the thief."

The marquis set down his goblet and his eyes distended, while his lips puckered in a prolonged whistle.

CHAPTER III.

It was a glittering night upon the boulevards.

A thousand colored lights in the shop windows flashed forth.

Illuminating with an intense radiance the vast thoroughfare adown which, with glittering flash, gay equipages passed and repassed.

A dense crowd thronged the sidewalks.

All Paris seemed to have turned out in appreciation of the beautiful June night.

And avoiding the rush and crush of the dense throng a couple of young men, of aristocratic manners and dress, strolled along the opposite side of the thoroughfare.

Both were of about the same height.

One was light and the other dark.

One was a Parisian, the other unmistakably a German.

"Well, Carl, my friend," said the dark-featured young man, "what do you think of Paris?"

The other leisurely cast away a half-smoked cigar.

"I would rather not express my opinion," he said.

"Come, now, tell the truth; does it not compare with your boasted Berlin?"

"Very favorably, in point of beauty and wealth."

The Parisian halted.

"Come, now, Carl Frankstein, what are you driving at?"

"Surely not an argument," said the German, sleepily.

And here it may be as well, for the enlightenment of the reader, to give the names and occupations of both.

Carl Frankstein was a native of Berlin.

He was just from a military school.

It was in the above city that he had first met and become acquainted with Henri D'Aldaney.

Henri was the only son of the Marquis.

And consequently his father's pride.

"You have not answered my question," said Henri.

The young scion of the D'Aldaney family was tall, dark-featured and handsome.

But there was a glitter in his keen, black eye which did not betoken the best kind of a disposition.

Frankstein was, on the other hand, his exact opposite.

He was of a phlegmatic turn of mind, yet, when aroused, possessed of a lion's spirit.

His beauty was of a mobile type, and there was an honest, steady gleam in his blue eyes, which impressed one favorably.

"I do not care to answer your question directly," said Carl.

"Why not?"

"I am afraid that it would not reflect favorably upon your native city.

"No matter; I shall not be offended."

"I should class it with some of the imaginations of Dante's."

"Ah! you call it a gilded hell, no doubt, but you have seen only the immoral side of Parisian society; there is an upper and virtuous circle which you have yet to see."

"Let us, then, commingle with that circle," said Carl. "I, for one, am tired of this empty, vapid life of dissipation.

D'Aldaney laughed.

"You shall see it later," he said.

"I trust before long."

D'Aldaney plucked his friend by the sleeve.

"Come over to the Green Dragon," he said.

"What is that?"

"The richest card-house in Paris."

"A gambling-hell?"

"As you call it," laughed Henri D'Aldaney.

The German's face assumed a troubled expression.

"I pray you do not go," he said. "Let us return home. I have an engagement to sup with the marquis at nine."

Henri laughed.

There was a sort of feverish light dancing in his eyes.

"No," he said, "I cannot go home now. I lost five thousand at the Marble Fawn; I must win it back at the Green Dragon."

"You will lose five thousand more," said Carl.

"Do not predict me such ill fortune."

"I do not like to see you pursue such a course."

"Why should you feel compunction?"

"Why should I not, you are my friend."

Henri D'Aldaney hesitated.

But the alluring sign of the Green Dragon on the opposite side of the Boulevard decided him.

He dragged his friend across the street.

Pushing open a set of green baize doors, he entered the great gambling-house.

Its interior presented a bewildering aspect to Carl.

Long lines of card and roulette-tables were extended down a long salon.

At these were seated the players.

In many cases some of them were the rich men of Paris.

In some cases whole fortunes are won and lost.

And oftentimes the very souls of men themselves.

Henri D'Aldaney dropped down at one of the tables.

In a moment he was engaged in playing.

Carl Frankstein stood at his back.

There was a troubled expression on the German's face.

D'Aldaney played recklessly.

At first he won.

This spurred him on.
 Higher and higher he made the stakes.
 Until of a sudden the wheel of fortune turned.
 His all was swept from the table.
 He arose in a dazed manner.
 For a moment he stood half in hesitation, watching his opponent sweeping his checks from the table.
 Carl seized him by the arm.
 "Come, let us go home," he said.
 The words seemed to break the spell.
 A fierce, mad light leaped in D'Aldaney's eyes.
 His whole person became transformed.
 Foam appeared upon his lips.
 His whole form quivered.
 And with an unrestrained madness he broke from Carl's grasp.
 "I will kill him," he cried.
 With this he sprang at his opponent.
 Murder at that moment was in Henri d'Aldaney's breast.
 Wrought to a fearful frenzy by his defeat, his only thought was one of revenge.
 A knife flashed in his right hand.
 A tragedy at that moment was imminent.
 But Carl Frankstein, cool and calm and quick to act, prevented it.
 With a quick leap forward, he threw both arms around his friend.
 Every one in the house was upon his feet.
 The maddened cry of d'Aldaney had attracted the attention of all.
 His opponent at the card-table had sprang back out of reach of the knife.
 He was just in season.
 After the first burst of rage, d'Aldaney cooled down.
 A revulsion came over him.
 He trembled and seemed upon the point of going into a spasm.
 And at this moment a man advanced from the throng.
 He had but just entered the door.
 He was tall and well-formed, and had evidently been looking for d'Aldaney.
 "Nicolard," said Carl Frankstein. "Thank Heaven you have come."
 It was indeed Anson Nicolard.
 The private secretary of the Marquis d'Aldaney was a man of remarkably fine appearance. His face was open, frank and honest in its expression.
 There was a troubled look in his eyes as he now appeared.
 "Monsieur Henri," he said, "your father wishes to see you immediately; we have just returned from Havre to find that a thief has entered his chamber and stolen a package of twenty thousand franc bonds."
 Henri D'Aldaney came out of the spasm with a gasp.
 The words seemed to have a curious effect upon him.
 "A robbery," he gasped. "My father robbed?"
 "Yes," said Carl Frankstein. "And it is essential that you return immediately home; will you go?"
 Between them Carl and Nicolard managed to get the young profligate out of the place and into a carriage.
 Then they drove home.
 Before arriving there, young D'Aldaney had regained his composure.

The marquis' private secretary had from the first regarded him with a troubled expression.
 "How much has my father lost," queried the young scion.
 "Twenty thousand francs in bonds."
 "What does he want to see me for?"
 "I cannot tell you," said Nicolard, quietly.
 "Does he think that I stole them," said the young profligate. "Or does he want to borrow that paltry sum from me."
 "I cannot tell you," said Nicolard. "He sent me for you."
 At this juncture the carriage stopped before the door of the D'Aldaney mansion.
 The trio sprang out and ascended the steps.
 In the vestibule Carl parted from his young host.
 "I trust you will extend my regrets to your father for his loss," he said.
 Henri did not reply.
 He ascended the staircase with Nicolard to his father's apartments above.
 A few moments later the private secretary lifted the portiere to the marquis' room.
 The marquis looked up as his son entered, and there was a dark, angry expression on his face.

CHAPTER IV.

HENRI D'ALDANEY, as he entered his father's apartment, did not look his parent straight in the face.
 The Marquis regarded him a moment.
 There was a stern expression on his face.
 An expression which the son had never seen there before.
 "Well," said the Marquis. "You have come, will you be seated?"
 Henri sank into a chair.
 "I am here in response to your summons, my father," he said.
 "Ah. It is a source of wonder to me how you accomplished resolution enough to leave your cards."
 Henri D'Aldaney started.
 His face turned livid.
 How had his father learned of his gambling propensities.
 It was evident that he did know of them.
 The Marquis arose.
 Nicolard stood by the door.
 He motioned him to withdraw.
 Then he turned to his son.
 Henri had also arisen.
 His brow was knit and his gaze was bent upon the floor as he paced moodily up and down the apartment.
 Dark and handsome as an Apollo was Henri D'Aldaney.
 The Marquis regarded him a moment.
 Then his breast swelled with a powerful inward emotion.
 "My son," he gasped in an undertone, "before Heaven I cannot believe him a thief."
 Then he spoke aloud.
 "Henri, my son," he said, "I have called you here to acquaint you with the fact, that I have been robbed of a sum of money."
 "Nicolard so informed me."
 Henri D'Aldaney spoke in a measured voice.
 He did not raise his eyes.
 "So Nicolard told you."
 "Yes."

"How did he act?"

"He faltered."

"Ah," exclaimed the marquis. "Do you know I have had a suspicion?"

"What was the suspicion?"

"That Nicolard is the thief."

"Your trusted secretary?" sneered Henri.

"Yes, I had believed him trusty."

"Which shows your indiscretion."

"Yet," said D'Aldaney, slowly. "I do not understand how he accomplished the deed. He was with me all day yesterday in Havre."

"That does not signify anything," said Henri quickly.

"It proves an *alibi* on his part."

"True, but he probably had accomplices."

The marquis did not speak.

A painful silence followed.

Then he advanced across the apartment.

"Henri," he said; "look up."

The command was obeyed.

"I was riding in the Bois with Carl, after that we went down on the quays, later we were at the Hotel de Lombardiere."

The Marquis D'Aldenay drew a long breath of relief.

His son's gaze was an unflinching one.

A horrible suspicion which had half asserted itself was dispelled from his mind.

"Thank God," he ejaculated as he sank into a chair.

Then Henri D'Aldenay advanced across the apartment.

"My father," he said, "I have read your mind. You have been assailed with an unwarranted suspicion that it was your son who stole from you the twenty thousand-franc bonds."

The marquis groaned.

He covered his face with his hands.

"My son," he said, "you have guessed the truth, but it was an unwarranted suspicion, and is forever excluded from my mind. You will pardon me?"

Ah! that was a marvelous bit of acting on the part of Henri D'Aldenay.

Such an aggrieved expression as had taken possession of his face.

"Of course I will forgive you, my father," he said. "And you have my sympathy in your loss."

"I shall put a detective upon the case to-morrow," said the marquis.

"I think then that you will find that rascal Nicolard is the thief."

"Quite likely."

Henri D'Aldernay turned and strode toward the door.

"Is this all that you have to say to me, father?"

"It is, my son."

"Then I will wish you good day, for I have an appointment at half-past three with Mademoiselle Roumaine."

And with this the profligate son passed from the apartment. He descended to the street.

He had given an order meanwhile to one of the attendants for his carriage, which was in waiting for him.

Springing into it, he directed the driver to drive him to the Roumaine mansion.

And here the reader will pardon this slight digression, and the intimation to them that the incident just chronicled had

transpired on the afternoon preceding Monsieur Victor Roumaine's murder.

So that when Henri D'Aldenay's carriage halted at the door of the Roumaine mansion, it did not wear the funereal aspect which it was so shortly fated to assume.

Henri placed his card upon the silver salver, and was ushered into the elegant reception-rooms.

"I wish to see Mademoiselle Andree," he said.

The servant bowed and withdrew.

The moments of waiting seemed hours to the young man.

Then Andree appeared.

Beautiful and bewitching as ever.

But her greeting of the young man was not a particularly warm one.

Henri arose.

He advanced across the apartment.

"I have the honor," he said, stooping and touching her hand with his lips.

Andree's face flushed.

And she drew her hand back after the somewhat over-familiar salutation.

"I trust you are well to-day," she said quietly.

"I am, and how is Mademoiselle?"

"As usual, thank you."

One thing struck the young man unpleasantly.

Andree was exceedingly formal and distant.

This he did not like.

His passion for her was of a fervid, maddening type.

But he composed himself.

He seated himself as near her as he dared upon a *fauteuil*.

He endeavored a conversation.

But the topic was dry.

He was little acquainted with the subjects dear to a feminine mind.

He could comment with some accuracy upon the latest prima donna, but could offer no eulogy upon the latest acquisition of art in the Louvre.

Finally he became desperate.

With characteristic rashness he resolved to break the ice.

Edging nearer to her he began to stammer, and finally framed an articulate sentence.

"Andree—Mademoiselle Roumaine, I should say—pardon me, but I have a subject on my mind which I have long desired to broach to you."

Andree's eyes dilated.

With feminine shrewdness she foresaw the contingency.

She did not speak.

D'Aldernay's face turned very red.

It was a moment of embarrassment.

Then his courage returned to him.

"You will pardon me for speaking so abruptly, mademoiselle," he said.

"Certainly," said Andree, stiffly.

"But I have acquired a great liking for you. In fact I have come to the conclusion that life is nothing without you."

"Indeed!"

It was only a cold monosyllable.

Andree had drawn instinctively back.

"The object of my visit to-day," said D'Aldenay, desperately, "was to ask you to marry me. Will you be my wife?"

Mademoiselle Andree arose.

Her face was very pale, there was a determined light in her eyes.

"This is the second time, Monsieur d'Aldenay," she said, coldly, "that you have presented this matter to me. I have given you my answer once, and will now give it to you for the last time. I can never be your wife."

A black cloud came over D'Aldenay's face.

"I can understand it," he sneered. "My family are in every respect as patrician as yours, but your father has acquired a prejudice against me."

"My father's will is mine," said Andree, turning away. "You will excuse me, Monsieur D'Aldenay, I have an engagement at this hour which I cannot break."

A few moments later, in a maddened, baffled state of mind, the young profligate was upon the street.

"I can see it all," he gritted, hoarsely. "Victor Roumaine is set against me. If he were out of the way then I could win her."

He reeled down the street more like a drunken man than a sane person.

For some distance he kept on in a dazed state of mind, and then of a sudden halted in the shadow of a building.

"I could win her," he said; "I know it, if Victor Roumaine were once put out of the way."

With this he turned, and vanished in the recess of a dark alley.

CHAPTER V.

Now let us return to the Marquis D'Aldenay and Jules Renaud where we left them at the former's table.

The marquis had been thrown into a state of much excitement by a remark of the detective's.

"Nicolard is not the thief?"

The marquis sat a moment in amazement.

His hand was tremulous.

The glass of wine he should have carried to his lips was spilled upon the table.

His lips puckered.

Involuntarily the exclamation came from them.

"Not Nicolard?"

The detective sat back in his chair.

"That is my belief," he said.

"Are you not mistaken?"

"I seldom make mistakes."

"But Nicolard is the only one that has admittance to my room."

"The only person?"

"Yes," began the marquis, and then his face changed color.

The detective's face lighted up.

He saw that he had struck a scent.

"Yes," continued the marquis. "Save Henri, my son, and I would never suspect him."

The detective remained silent a moment.

Then he arose from his chair.

"My lord," he said, "I would rather not undertake this case."

The expression of surprise upon the marquis' face increased.

"What is this?" he queried.

"I would rather not undertake this case."

"Why?"

"For good reasons."

"What are they?"

"I would rather not state."

"But I insist."

The detective turned to the door.

"You will excuse me, my lord," he said. "But I have another appointment. Good-afternoon."

The marquis sprang up from his chair.

He was terribly pale.

But his features were set and rigid.

"Hold!" he cried.

"Well?" said the detective, turning.

"I demand an explanation."

"What for?"

"This unceremonious action of yours."

"I have given an explanation."

"An insufficient one."

"What more can I yield?"

"I demand your reasons for refusing to undertake this case?"

"I cannot give them."

"But you must."

"I cannot."

The marquis by this time was wrought up to a fearful pitch of excitement.

"Jules Renaud," he said "you are a detective?"

"I am."

"It is one of the duties of your profession to assume any case which may be placed before you?"

"It is."

"Listen. I can tell you why you will not assume this case."

The detective's eyes widened.

"Why?"

The marquis gave a spasmodic gasp of pain.

Then he spoke in a changed tone of voice.

"You suspect my son."

The detective did not reply.

He avoided the marquis' gaze.

"I can read it in your face," said D'Aldenay, "and you can never understand what pain it gives me. You suspect my son; but listen, it only strengthens my desire to have you undertake this case."

The detective raised his head.

The eyes of the two men met.

In that one swift instant more passed between them than could be expressed in words.

"Marquis D'Aldenay," said Renaud, calmly, "you have guessed the truth."

"Then you will undertake the case?"

"What," said Renaud, "would you put a detective upon the track of your own son?"

"He may not be the guilty party."

"True; but if he should be proven guilty?"

The marquis' face assumed a terrible expression.

His hands clenched until the nails sank deep into the palm.

"Then," he said, "though he were ten times nearer and dearer to me than a son, I would bring him out."

"I would not advise you to pursue this course," said Renaud, quietly.

"What would you do?" said the marquis, angrily. "Allow him to continue in his profligate ways?"

"On the contrary," said Renaud, "I would take him aside and talk with him."

"It would be of no avail."

"Do you think so?"

"I know it."

"Very well, then, I will undertake the case, and do my utmost to track down the criminal."

With this, the detective lifted his hat and vanished beyond the portierre.

For a moment the marquis stood in one spot after he had gone. Then his face assumed a terrible deathly pallor.

He sank into a chair.

For a moment he seemed about to faint, then reaching forward he took a goblet of wine from the table.

He gulped this down.

It had a stimulating effect.

He regained in part his composure.

Then his lips parted in speech.

"My God," he gasped. "Henri, my son, once the sweet babe that I dandled upon my knee, that it should ever come to this, that he should ever be branded a thief."

Then a fearful revulsion of feeling came over the marquis.

He sprang up from his seat.

His countenance blazed, and his words were hissed through his set teeth.

"Ungrateful ingrate," he exclaimed, "I will disinherit him. I will order him from my house, never again to return."

He strode rapidly across the apartment.

He pulled the bell savagely.

A servant appeared at the door.

"Is Henri in his chamber?" queried the marquis.

"He is not, my lord."

"Where has he gone?"

"I know not, sir."

"When did he go out?"

"He has not returned since last night."

"Send Nicolard hither."

The servant vanished.

The marquis paced the floor moodily.

Five, ten minutes elapsed.

Then his faithful private secretary entered the chamber.

"My faithful Nicolard," he said. "You have come?"

"I have, my master."

"Sit down here by my side. I would talk with you."

The secretary complied.

The marquis placed one arm upon his shoulder.

"Nicolard, you have been in my employ long."

"Yes, monsieur."

"And I have found you ever a faithful and willing servant."

"I have endeavored to do my duty."

"Nicolard, you will tell me the truth?"

The private secretary looked up in surprise.

"Have I not always done that, monsieur?"

"Pardon me, you have. Tell me, do you know aught of this robbery?"

"I do not, monsieur."

"Do you know where Henri is now?"

"No."

"His conduct has not been commendable of late."

Nicolard did not reply.

Had he been so disposed, he could there and then have divulged facts to the marquis which would have startled him.

But Nicolard was never one to create mischief.

So he remained silent.

"Do you know aught of Henri's doings of late?"

The secretary started.

It was a moment of hesitation.

He did not want to betray Henri.

So he replied evasively:

"I have not seen much of Henri lately."

The marquis arose to his feet.

He paced up and down the floor.

He did not question the secretary further.

He was too well assured now as to who was guilty of the robbery of the bonds.

And it was while thus wrapped in painful meditation that the partierre was suddenly lifted, and a porter appeared upon the threshold.

He held a silver salver toward the marquis.

A sealed note lay upon it.

Seizing it the marquis broke the seal and read:

"Victor Roumaine murdered by an assassin last night."

The marquis reeled back with pallid face. This was the first appraisal he had received of the fearful tragedy.

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER leaving Marquis D'Aldenay's apartment, Jules Renaud halted a moment upon the pavements.

His mind was now turned to the murder of Victor Roumaine.

With only the single clew—the bit of silver watch-chain—his chances of tracking down the murderer were slight.

He was undecided as to what course to pursue.

In what quarter should he look for the murderer?

He believed the crime to have been committed for theft.

The murderer was undoubtedly a ruffian.

And more likely to be found in the slums of the city.

Accordingly the detective turned his attention thither.

He turned his steps toward the Seine.

All of that day he spent in his search.

Vainly he looked for a clew.

Along its banks he pursued his quest.

Among the grisettes and washerwomen.

Then he visited the pawn-shops.

It was near dusk when he turned his footsteps homeward.

So far his search had proved fruitless.

But as he was walking rapidly along, he was suddenly brought to halt by a startling sound.

From an alley near, between dilapidated buildings, there came forth a wild, terrified shriek of a female.

It was a cry of distress.

An appeal for aid.

The detective was possessed of a chivalrous spirit.

He did not pause to think of the risk he incurred.

But sprang into the alley.

A thrilling scene was presented to him.

A young girl was struggling in the arms of a ruffian.

Despite the fact that her dress was ragged and betokened poverty, she was possessed of marvelous beauty.

With a single blow Renaud felled her assailant.

He went to the ground like a log.

"Oh, sir, thank heaven," she cried. "You have saved me from that awful man, you are a friend."

The young girl clung to his arm.

"Yes, I am your friend," said Renaud, assuringly.

"Oh, I was never so frightened in my life."

"Do you know the monster?"

"I do not, sir."

"You never saw him before?"

"No, sir."

"How did he happen to attack you?"

"Indeed, sir, I do not know. I was passing this way and he sprang upon me."

The detective gazed keenly at the young girl.

At first he had been naturally in doubt as to her character.

For at that hour of the night, and in that locality, one would scarce expect to find other than some fallen creature, one of the lower class of *demi-monde*.

But the next moment the detective experienced a start of compunction at this suspicion.

It required but a brief glance to show him that this young girl was pure and chaste.

"You live near here?" he queried.

"I do."

"Where?"

"In this building."

"Who do you live with?"

"My father and mother."

"Then you have parents?"

"I have, sir."

"What is your father's occupation?"

"He is a sea captain."

"Ah, why is he not off upon a voyage?"

"Failing eyesight has kept him at home."

"Then he is growing blind?"

"I much fear it, sir."

"What is your name?" queried the detective.

Renaud had taken a sudden interest in the young girl.

"Victorine Breault," she replied.

"Your father's name?"

"Jacques Breault."

"Is your father well to do?"

The young girl's face assumed a pained expression.

"Oh, no, sir, he was once, but now we are very poor."

"Where were you going to-night?"

"To procure some bread for mother. And do you know, sir, it will be all that we have had to eat to-day."

"You are then destitute?"

"Alas, yes, sir," said the young girl, breaking into sobs.

"Where did you get this money with which you were going to buy the loaf?"

"I earned it, to-day, selling flowers upon the Boulevard."

"What will you do to-morrow?"

"Heaven alone knows."

"Why, poor child," said the detective, placing a sheltering arm about her trembling form, "you are, indeed, in bad circumstances, but I can be of assistance to you. You will lead me to your parents."

"Ah, sir, I will with pleasure," said the young girl, drying her tears.

At this moment her assailant, the ruffian, had regained his senses, and had risen to his feet.

His eyes blazed with fury as they were fixed upon the detective.

"Curse you," he growled, hoarsely. "What right had you to meddle with me?"

"The right which every man should exercise in the protection of helpless females," said the detective, sternly.

"You will never meddle with me again."

With these words the ruffian sprang for the detective.

A knife flashed in his hand.

It was a moment of thrilling peril.

But Renaud was quick to act.

He placed himself before Victorine Breault.

The attack of the ruffian was sudden.

The next moment he was upon the detective.

Jules Renaud was a man of wonderful muscular powers.

The man he was to contend with was much heavier.

But less scientific and less supple.

The detective received his attack upon his left arm.

The knife was raised high.

But it descended upon air.

With a quick movement aside, the detective avoided the cowardly thrust.

Then, with a lightning-like movement, he grappled with his adversary.

He had need to be quick.

The next moment a terrible struggle was in progress in the alley.

Victorine, with pale face and half-parted lips, shrank back against the wall.

It was a terrible struggle.

The young girl never forgot it.

She prayed as she had never before for the success of her champion.

But this seemed doubtful.

Back and forth they swayed.

The ruffian fought madly.

He filled the air with yells and frightful curses.

It chanced at that late hour that nobody was passing.

And this fact avoided the gathering of a crowd, which might otherwise have been the case.

But the struggle was soon ended.

With an adroit movement the detective displaced his adversary's feet and brought him down.

He fell with a crash.

And at the same moment around the corner came a couple of gendarmes.

The sequel was brief.

The detective held his man firmly, while the officers manacled and took him in charge.

Renaud easily accomplished this by showing his badge.

The ruffian was marched off between the gendarmes.

Then the detective turned to Victorine.

The young girl, with a glad cry, sprang to the detective's side.

"Oh, sir," she said fervently, "I cannot thank you too deeply for your kind succor."

"I pray you, do not mention it," said the detective.

"Nevertheless, I shall never forget it."

"I am glad to be of service to you."

"You have proved yourself my friend."

"Now if you will lead me, I will visit your home."

"I will with pleasure," said Victorine. "And mother and father will be only too glad to make your acquaintance."

The detective followed the young girl's lead.

Down the alley for some distance.

And then up a creaking flight of steps.

Through a dark corridor.

Then Victorine opened the door to an inner apartment, and the detective entered.

The chamber struck him as much for its appearance of neatness as the poverty of its furnishings.

As Renaud and Victorine entered, Jacques Breault and his wife had turned questioningly toward the door.

CHAPTER VII.

THE detective's first glance had been about the apartment. Then his gaze encountered and rested upon Jacques Breault. He had given Victorine's mother a brief scrutiny. It revealed her to him as an ordinary Frenchwoman of the middle class.

But Breault claimed his attention.

The ex-sea-captain, was a man of powerful stature and frame.

Six foot clear he was in height.

With shoulders in proportion.

His complexion was extremely dark.

A long, coarse, black beard concealed the lower part of his features, and there was a livid scar across his head.

His voice was like low thunder as he spoke.

"Well, Victorine, you have returned?"

"Yes, father."

"What does this mean? Who is this stranger?"

"A champion and a friend, my father."

"His name?"

"I do not know, but he has done me a great favor."

"A favor?"

"Yes, father, I will tell you. As I was coming through the alley, I was attacked by a ruffian. This gentleman interposed in my behalf."

At this moment, Renaud stepped forward.

"Your pardon, sir," he said, politely, "for this intrusion. But I was enabled to do your daughter a service, and she, by my request too, brought me hither. I am Jules Renaud, detective."

"Jules Renaud!"

Jacques Breault started back as he spoke.

"That is my name."

Then the ex-sea-captain advanced.

"I am glad to meet you," he said. "I have heard very much of your feats as a detective."

"I thank you," said Renaud, modestly.

"You are welcome to my humble home."

"Again thanks."

"Though now a home of poverty," said Breault, bitterly, "owing to misfortune. But there was a time, sir, when I could have entertained you passing well."

"I doubt it not," said the detective. "From your daughter I understand that you have been unfortunate."

"Aye! very much so."

"You have my sympathy."

"I thank you."

"And that is partly the object of my visit here to-night," said Renaud: "to offer you what humble aid lies in my power."

Jacques Breault started up from his chair.

"Nay!" he cried; "it would not be right to avail ourselves of your generosity."

"I shall insist."

"You are too kind. But some day I may be able to repay the debt."

Renaud received a glance at that moment from Victorine which amply repaid him.

It thrilled him through and through.

There was something about the young girl which had deeply impressed the detective.

He did not understand the emotion then.

But he did in after years.

"You are very destitute," he said.

"We have nothing," said Mrs. Breault at this moment.

"Victorine and I have sought employment without avail."

"Victorine shall accompany me to-morrow," said Renaud, "and I will find her occupation in a *modiste* establishment."

Victorine gave a cry of joy.

"Oh, that will be so nice," she cried. "I can earn lots of money."

"You are very kind," said Jacques Breault. "I have been striving very hard to obtain employment myself. My eyesight is very dim in daylight, but remarkably good at night. I play upon the violin, and have had a pupil on the Faubourg St. Honore, but he has gone away, and I have been unable to obtain any occupation since."

"Oh, I tell you it is very hard," said Victorine, the tears coming into her beautiful eyes. "This franc piece is all we have in the world, that I was just going to buy a loaf of bread with."

The detective's hand went down in his pocket.

It came up with a handful of silver.

Throwing this upon the table, he said:

"Here is money: it will last you for a few days; buy with it whatever you may desire, and when you want more come to me."

But Jacques Breault shook his head.

"We cannot take your money," he said, tersely.

"You misunderstand me," said the detective. "It is a loan. When you get able, you may pay it back."

But still the old man hesitated.

"I do not feel right in taking the money," he said.

"Have no scruples," said Renaud. "Depend upon it, you may trust me as a friend."

"Under those circumstances, as a loan we will accept your kind favor."

"You are welcome. Meanwhile," he said, turning to Victorine, "prepare yourself, and to-morrow I will call for you, and will visit the *modiste* establishment."

With this he departed.

Threading his way through the darkened streets, Renaud came out upon the main thoroughfare.

Arrived there he hailed a caleche.

Entering it he said:

"Drive me to the Prefecture de St. Jean."

A half hour later he was in his private office.

He seated himself at his desk, and tipping his chair back lit a cigar.

For an hour he reclined, thus filling the apartment with clouds of blue smoke.

All the while he was wrapped in deep reverie.

Through all he was haunted with a vision of Victorine's beautiful face.

He was to see her upon the morrow.

This afforded him a keen sense of gratification.

He could not understand the deep interest that he had acquired for the young girl.

His acquaintance with her had been brief.

But in that short spell, though he did not realize it at the moment, he had learned to love her.

The next morning his first duty was to proceed to Le Rue de Croisetaire.

As he neared that dingy quarter of the city, he suddenly caught sight of the tall form of Jacques Breault.

The detective's first impulse was to cross the street and speak to him.

But a strange fact prevented.

This was, that the ex-sea-captain had emerged from the door of a pawn-shop.

The fact struck the detective curiously.

Thinking that perhaps Breault would think that he had seen him come from the place, and feel sensitive about it, the detective did not make himself known.

So he strolled leisurely down upon the opposite side of the street.

Breault disappeared around a corner.

He was evidently returning home.

The detective would have followed him.

But a sudden thought struck him.

It deterred him in his purpose.

He halted.

His sympathies were deeply enlisted with the Breault family.

Instinctively he received an impression.

The query flashed through his brain.

"What was Breault doing in the pawn-shop?"

Possibly he might have visited the place in the hopes of procuring a loan upon some article.

Or perhaps to redeem the same.

A strange curiosity seized the detective.

An unexplainable desire had come over him to know what that article was.

What better deed could he do than to visit the pawn-shop and ascertain if this was the case.

And if so leave money there for the redemption of the same.

No sooner had the thought flashed across his mind than he made haste to put it into execution.

He approached the pawn-shop.

He opened the door and entered.

The proprietor, a little hooked-nosed Jew, was behind the counter.

He bobbed his head with a patronizing grin, as the detective entered.

The detective made known his business in a few words.

"A big man, was it?" said the Jew.

"Yes."

"With black beard?"

"The same."

"Then this is what he left."

The little Jew lifted from a jewelry-case, and held aloft an object, the sight of which caused every vestige of color to leave the detective's face.

It was a silver watch-chain.

The links in which corresponded exactly with the bit he had in his pocket. It was without doubt the remainder.

"How had Jacques Breault come into its possession," the detective queried, a faint sickness coming over him.

"Was Jacques Breault the murderer?"

CHAPTER VIII.

It was an agonizing reflection to Jules Renaud.

Jacques Breault, the father of Victorine, the murderer?

He stood for a moment as though dazed.

It could not be possible.

He would not believe it.

There was some horrible mistake somewhere.

Yet there before him was evidence of the ghastly truth.

There was the silver watch-chain as it had been torn asunder by the assassin.

If Jacques Breault was not the murderer how had he got the chain?

Circumstantial evidence would indicate that he was the assassin.

Yet it might not be.

The detective grasped at the thought as a drowning man at a straw.

"Pray Heaven it may be so," he said. "But whichever way it is I must do my duty. I must ascertain at once whether he be the murderer or not."

To make the matter doubly sure he compared the bar and bit of chain which he had to the other, and found it was indeed a part of it.

"You are sure of the man?" he said to the little Jew.

"Very sure."

"He was a big man?"

"The same."

"And wore a black beard?"

"Yes."

"He was once a sailor?"

"I don't know about that," said the little Jew.

"Did you get his name?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

The detective bent eagerly forward;

"It is here."

The Jew placed a card upon the counter.

The name was:

"Jacques Breault."

"When did he propose to redeem this?"

"Never."

"He sold it to you, then?"

"Yes."

"What did you pay him for it?"

"A big price."

The little Jew was not disposed to tell this.

The detective could understand his reasons.

"What will you take for it?" he said.

"Four francs."

The detective threw the silver upon the counter.

He placed the watch-chain in his pocket.

Then he turned to the door.

"Remember, you are not to speak of this," he said.

"All right, sir."

The little Jew bowed politely.

The detective went out.

Arrived upon the street he paused a moment in doubt.

What should he do?

Should he arrest Breault?

Then he thought of Victorine.

The young girl's face arose before him pale and beautiful.

He believed her chaste and good.

What would be her emotions when she learned that her father was a murderer.

The detective was between two fires.

Never in his life had he been so sorely tried.

There was no doubt but that Breault was the murderer.

If not, how had he come into possession of the chain?

In a whirl of perplexity and doubt Renaud strode down the street.

Then an idea suddenly flashed over him.

Why need he show his hand?

It was hard for him to believe the ease as it stood.

If Breault was guilty he could the better establish his guilt by working on the quiet.

As the case stood he had no concise proof.

The more he thought of this idea the more favorably impressed he became with it.

"I will do it," he said. "Murder will out, and, if Jacques Breault be the murderer, the crime will come out. I will watch and wait."

With this he turned into the alley leading to the home of the Breaults.

A moment more and he was ascending the rickety staircase.

He tapped upon the door lightly.

The confused murmur of voices and a noise like sobbing came from within.

The next moment the door opened.

Jacques Breault stood upon the threshold.

His face was pale and agitated.

"Who is it?" he queried.

He was unable to see the detective in the dim light.

"It is I," said Renaud, entering. "What is the trouble?"

With a wild cry Madame Breault sprang across the apartment.

"Oh, Monsieur Renaud," she cried. "We are in great distress; the ruffian, Le Crozier, has abducted our daughter."

The detective started as though shot.

He reeled back against the door.

Forgotten now was everything.

He thought now only of Victorine.

"Le Crozier," he gasped. "I will hunt the scoundrel down. When did this terrible thing happen?"

"At an early hour this morning," said Jacques Breault.

"How did she fall into his clutches?"

"The neighbors say that with accomplices he laid in wait for her in the alley, and that he forced her into a carriage and drove away."

"But," cried the detective, "did no one interfere?"

"Ah, yes, but it was all done so quickly that they had not time to prevent it."

"Furies," cried the detective. "The next time I get hands upon that ruffian I'll not spare him. Which way did he go?"

"That we do not know."

Renaud waited to hear no more.

Acting as he did upon the impulse of the moment, Jacques Breault's probable connection with the Roumaine murder left his mind.

Only one thought occupied it.

And that was a dampening, chilling one.

Victorine was in the power of Jean Le Crozier, one of the most desperate ruffians in Paris.

It was a kind of an insane impulse.

He must rescue her at all hazards.

Making inquiries he tracked the caleche to the outskirts of the town, and out upon a highway which led to Versailles.

He lavished money upon the driver of his own carriage, and exhorted him to drive faster.

He hardly hoped to overtake the fugitive ere reaching Versailles.

But every moment was precious.

On dashed the caleche over the road.

The distance was accomplished in a marvelously short time.

Arrived in Versailles, Renaud found it impossible to track the caleche further.

It had mysteriously disappeared.

In vain he made inquiries.

No one had seen it, no one had heard of it.

The detective scoured the town thoroughly.

He visited the detective agencies, and enlisted their co-operation.

He watched the railroad stations.

But all in vain.

Not a trace of the fugitives could be found.

All that day Renaud scoured Versailles.

And at night he was forced to return to Paris.

Then and there only did a startling suspicion strike him.

What if he were the victim of a conspiracy?

If Jacques Breault was, as circumstantial evidence indicated, the murderer of Victor Roumaine, might he not have adopted this as a subterfuge.

The thought impressed the detective.

Upon his arrival in Paris he was resolved to visit the Breaults.

He would learn, if possible, if this was the truth.

But a startling incident deterred him in this purpose.

As he alighted at the Paris station he was almost instantly confronted by the very ruffian he had been looking for, Jean Le Crozier.

It was purely an accidental meeting.

This was evident.

The station was thronged.

And as the detective met with his bird in this unexpected manner he received a great start.

But he was quick to act.

He gripped the ruffian by the shoulder.

"Scoundrel," he cried, "I have got you!"

"Curse you," cried Le Crozier, "take your hands off me!"

"What did you do with Victorine?"

"That is for you to find out," sneered the ruffian.

"Jean Le Crozier," said Renaud, sternly, "you shall tell me where she is, and tell me now, or it will be the worse for you!"

"What would you do?" sneered Le Crozier.

"I will show you!" cried the detective.

He made a motion to spring upon Le Crozier.

The villain sprang back.

He eluded the detective's grasp.

But Renaud was lightning-like in his movement, and would undoubtedly have accomplished his purpose had it not been for a startling and unexpected interposition.

At that moment the detective received from behind a crashing blow, and sank to the ground in a senseless heap.

CHAPTER IX.

THE death of Victor Roumaine was a blow to his family in more ways than one.

Aside from the bereavement of a dear husband and father, the widow and her daughter were otherwise involved in trouble.

Victor Roumaine was a heavy speculator upon the Bourse.

As has before been intimated, he was at one time one of the richest men in Paris.

But he met with misfortune.

His good luck deserted him.

He met with a financial crash.

A great scheme in which he had been interested tumbled through.

In a single day all his money was swept from him.

It was a terrible blow to him.

But nothing daunted, he again began work.

A second time fortune favored him.

He struck a new scheme—that of opening up a new Russian fur trade.

Stock was put upon the market, and for a time the new venture was prosperous.

But Victor Roumaine was the head, heart and soul of the enterprise, and with his death one short month sufficed to explode the whole thing.

The widow Roumaine and her lovely daughter were from necessity thrown back upon a paltry income of fifteen thousand francs a year.

It was a terrible blow.

But Andree, brave to the last, buoyed her mother up through it all.

She spoke naught but words of cheer.

All of the vast estate which remained to them was a simple country-house.

It was two weeks after Victor Roumaine's funeral.

The house was yet draped in mourning, and mother and daughter went about with tear-wet faces.

One afternoon a carriage drove up to the door.

Andree, who had been looking out of the window, recognized it at once.

It was the equipage of the D'Aldenays.

Henri D'Aldenay himself occupied it in company with a friend.

The friend was an open-faced, flaxen-haired German.

It was Carl Frankstein.

Although Andree had never seen him before, she was much impressed with his general appearance.

Henri D'Aldenay sprang up the steps, and lifted the knocker, while Frankstein remained in the carriage.

A moment later Andree received young D'Aldenay's card.

It would be rudeness to seek to avoid an interview.

Accordingly Andree went down.

Henri D'Aldenay advanced to meet her as she entered, and took her hand in his.

"I will not attempt the expression of my sympathy for you in your affliction," said young D'Aldenay, with an assumption of courteousness. "For I know that words are an inadequate balm for the wound."

"I thank you," said Andree, simply.

"The object of my visit was not only to express my sympathy, but to offer you any aid within my power."

"We appreciate your kind notions."

"Andree, Mademoiselle Roumaine, I have a proposition to make to you."

Then followed a pause.

"Yes."

Andree lifted her eyes slightly in half inquiry.

"You have rejected my suit," said D'Aldenay in a changed voice. "But I have a desire to prove myself your friend. Will you accept me as such?"

"Certainly," said Andree, in surprise.

"Then I will prove myself such. My father and I are both of the opinion that Monsieur Roumaine's affairs can yet be carried out; we will be glad to use our experience in furthering its success."

"Ah, I fear not," said Andree. "I appreciate your kindness much, but I would not advise you to attempt such a thing. I fear very much that you would not meet with success."

"But you—what will become of you?"

"We are not entirely penniless; my mother's inheritance yet remains intact."

"Yet it cannot be much."

"Still it is sufficient to live in a simple way."

"After your present manner of living the change will not suit you."

"Necessity will compel that."

"By no means. Have I not offered you my aid?"

"You are very kind."

"And what is more," said d'Aldenay, boastfully, "I will put capital into your father's scheme and prove it a success, with your kind permission."

"But what if you lost your capital?" said Andree, quietly.

"There is no possible chance of loss, and with my experience in management, it will be doubly a triumph."

Andree could not help a smile at this display of arrogance.

"You shall see," said d'Aldenay, as he moved toward the door. "I will consecrate my best efforts to it, and remember this is all for you."

The next moment he was descending the steps of the mansion.

As he climbed into the carriage beside Frankstein, he was much in doubt as to whether he had made the impression he had intended.

"Once a friend of the family," he thought "by getting the old lady interested in my behalf, I can easily work her over."

"Well, what success," said Frankstein. "Did you succeed in expressing your sympathy in a suitable manner?"

"Yes," said d'Aldenay, shortly.

He had not imparted to Frankstein his real purpose in visiting the Roumaines.

Carl had never met with Andree Roumaine.

Neither had he heard of her.

Meanwhile Andree had returned to her chamber, to find her mother there awaiting her.

"To-morrow," said Madame Roumaine, "we will make arrangements to remove to the country."

"But are we not to drive there this afternoon?" said Andree.

"If you wish."

"I have never seen the place."

"Very well; at three o'clock we will order the coach and drive out."

Andree had some curiosity to know what the new abode was like.

She was rather pleased at the idea of going into the country.

She had become intensely weary of the glitter and flash of her present life.

She longed for a change.

She longed for the pure country air and the freedom which a life there would gain her.

Henry D'Aldenay, with his friend, Carl Frankstein, had driven back to the D'Aldenay mansion.

There D'Aldenay was summoned to the presence of his father, and Carl was left to his own pleasure.

After dinner the young German donned his walking-costume and went out.

The gay city of Paris held many interesting sights for him. In his own staid birth-place—Berlin—social life was conducted on an entirely different principle.

The young German's footsteps were turned toward the Bois.

It was a sort of carnival day with a certain part of the populace.

Bands of music were playing.

The military was out.

Booths and swings were erected upon the vast park.

Dancing pavilions, and side shows were also among the attractions.

The young German wandered idly along through the crowd.

He watched a clown execute fantastic figures upon the green, the dancing of a Hungarian girl, and listened to the songs of an Italian chorus.

The scene was an enlivening one.

For some while he amused himself thus.

The young German was an ardent student of human nature.

And he found plenty of material about him.

The afternoon had half passed, and he had partly concluded to return home, when a startling incident occurred.

Of a sudden, far down the boulevards there came a distant uproar.

Louder and louder it swelled.

Nearer and nearer it came.

Everybody rushed for the scene of excitement.

The young German as well.

The cause of it became soon apparent.

Down the avenue with fearful, frightful speed came a pair of horses.

The reins were beneath their feet.

They were frightened and running away.

They were attached to a light caeeche, in which sat a young girl, fair as a flower, though pale and terrified.

It was Andree Roumaine, and by her side was her mother, closely veiled.

Carl Frankstein did not know either, but he was conscious of only the one fact that human life was in danger.

And accordingly, without hesitation, sprang at the peril of his life in front of the maddened steeds.

CHAPTER X.

It was a terrible blow which Jules Renaud received.

It was delivered from behind.

The person who delivered it sprang back into the crowd.

Ere any one could interpose he had vanished.

Le Crozier also made himself scarce.

So that when Renaud came to himself neither of his assailants were in sight.

Both had cleverly made their escape.

The detective was baffled.

His head rang like a chime of bells.

Gradually his faculties came back to him.

He essayed to make his way through the crowd.

But a dizziness came over him.

He was powerless.

Again he sank down upon the station platform.

By this time a surgeon had arrived upon the spot.

The surgeon, a brisk little man, made a hasty examination.

"Remove him to the hospital," he said. "It is a severe concussion."

The detective was placed in a carriage.

The blow had been a savage one.

Evidently it was meant to be fatal.

But it did not prove so.

Thanks to good care and skillful nursing, the detective recovered.

But it was three weeks ere he was again enabled to get out.

When he did he proceeded immediately to his headquarters in the Prefecture.

Arrived there he found a note upon his desk.

"SIR: You are looking for Victorine Breault, who was abducted from her home by Jean Le Crozier. If you will come to Number —, Rue St. Cyr, you will learn of much to your advantage. Do not fail to come upon receipt of this. If you will come to-night at eight, I will be in waiting for you."

"A FRIEND."

The detective pondered over this note for some while.

He read it carefully.

Then placed it in his pocket.

"To-night at eight," he said. "All right, I will be there."

But again he thought:

"Who is this friend?"

He knew that Rue St. Cyr was in a questionable part of the city.

Then a thought flashed over him.

Might this not be a trap, a cunning device to put him out of the way?

This put him in a deep study.

He read and re-read the note.

There was something familiar in the handwriting.

"Yes, I will take the chances," he said finally, "I will be there at eight."

It was now late in the afternoon.

He occupied himself until eight o'clock in writing at his desk.

Then at that hour he sallied forth from the Prefecture.

He hailed a cab, ordering the driver to drive to Rue St. Cyr.

In a side street not far from the place of appointment he called the carriage to a halt.

Alighting, he paid the driver.

Then he muffled his coat about his ears.

It was exceedingly dark.

He strode along the street slowly.

Several times he passed and re-passed Rue St. Cyr.

Then of a sudden he noticed a man, muffled in a like manner to himself, approaching.

The man was walking leisurely.

Something in his gait struck the detective as familiar.

The man did not alter his walk until within a few feet of the detective.

Then he allowed his face to become unmuffled.

The detective gave a cry.

He started forward.

"Nicalard," he cried. "It is you!"

It was indeed the private secretary of the Marquis D'Alde-nay.

He gripped hands with Renaud.

"We meet again," he said.

"Aye. It was you who wrote the note?"

"The same."

"I am here."

"I hardly knew whether to expect you or not."

"I always keep my appointments."

"I am glad that you have come."

"Which is the house?"

"Directly opposite."

The detective looked across the street.

The house indicated was a large five-story structure with stone front.

"You think the girl is there?"

"I know it."

"Ah, that is good."

"She is there a captive."

The detective now broached a subject which had been a matter of much mystery to him.

He gazed keenly at Nieolard.

"By the way," he queried. "It has been somewhat of a mystery to me how you have become implicated in this case."

Nieolard laughed lightly.

"Simple enough," he replied. "I am a nephew of Jacques Breault."

"A nephew?"

"Yes."

"But," said the detective, "you must have known of the destitute circumstances of the Breault family, and yet offered them no pecuniary assistance."

"Ah!" said Nieolard, "that is where you are wrong. I had never known of their presence in Paris until a week ago. Jacques came to the house and informed me of the abduction of his daughter Victorine; since then I have rendered them much aid, and they are now living comfortably."

"I crave your pardon," said the detective. "Good Nieolard, I have misjudged you. Now let us to business."

"I am ready."

"You are sure that Victorine is in that house?"

"I am."

"How did you learn of her presence there?"

"I traced Le Crozier hither."

It was now intense darkness in the street.

The nearest street-lamp was fifty yards distant, and they were beyond its rays.

Renaud began operations by first making an examination of the exterior of the house.

He was undecided as to what move it was now best to make.

He wavered between the resolution to go openly up and demand an entrance, or effect one on the quiet.

He finally decided in favor of the last.

"If they learn of my presence at the door," he thought, "it will give them an opportunity to escape."

But how was he to gain an entrance?

Adjuring Nieolard to watch the rear of the building, he ascended the front steps and placed his hand upon the door-knob.

No light came from the transom overhead.

This was an indication that the hallway beyond was dark.

He turned the door-knob easily.

To his surprise, the door yielded.

He pushed it gently back.

It creaked slightly.

He paused in listening.

But no sound following, he stepped boldly into the hallway.

To the right was a door, through the key-hole of which there gleamed a ray of light.

Beyond this door he could hear voices.

He applied his eye to the key-hole.

This revealed an apartment scantily furnished and containing three occupants.

But none of them were familiar to the detective.

One was a man clad in the garments of a laborer.

The other two were women—evidently his wife and daughter.

The detective arrived at once at the true character of the place.

It was a simple lodging-house.

He passed on down the corridor.

Then a sudden idea struck him.

He turned back.

With an impulse he rapped upon the door of the room from whence the light came.

The man with the red shirt opened it.

He stood upon the threshold a moment regarding the detective suspiciously.

"I beg your pardon," said Renaud, "for this intrusion, but I would see you upon an urgent matter."

"What is it?" queried the man.

"You live in this house?"

"I do."

"Your name——"

"Is Jean Frochard."

"Well, my good man. Jean," said the detective, "I have a question to ask you. I am looking for one whose name is Jean Le Crozier. Also a young girl who is with him. I am informed that they have taken up quarters in this house."

"I know Le Crozier," said Frochard; "and I know him to be a ruffian, but he is not in this building."

Renaud looked into the man's open countenance, and knew that he was telling the truth.

CHAPTER XI.

It was a great risk which Carl Frankstein incurred in springing into the path of the runaway horses.

They came on with fearful speed.

The light carriage swayed and reeled violently.

A pathway was cleared for them.

Cab-drivers and all drove frantically into the gutter.

In his mad attempt to stop the horses Carl had not given a thought to himself.

He had neither a clear idea as to how he was to accomplish the feat.

Only the one realization occupied his mind.

And this was, that human life was in danger.

A moment and the horses were upon him.

For an instant he seemed to be beneath their hoofs.

The crowd were breathless, spell-bound.

Then the hoarse cry went up:

"He is killed!"

Then the horses were seen to falter.

It was a powerful hand which had gripped their bridles.

With an agile movement the young German had flung himself across the path.

"Hurrah! he has them!" the cry went up.

The horses had truly slackened their gait.

It was truly a powerful arm that held them.

Now they were at a gentle gallop.

And a dozen men sprang from the crowd to render assistance.

All in the space of fifty yards the runaways had been halted. Carl was the hero of the hour.

The ladies leaned from their carriage and repeatedly expressed their gratitude.

"Pray do not mention it," said Carl, tipping his hat. "I am only too glad to render you a favor."

Andree had recognized the young German.

She knew him to be the young man whom she had seen in the victoria with Henri D'Aldenay.

Her face flushed vividly.

But Carl of course never having seen her before, did not recognize her.

"I cannot thank you sufficiently," said Madame Roumaine. "We owe you our lives."

"I pray you, do not mention it," said Carl, gallantly. "I am glad to be of service to you."

"Our driver was thrown from the box."

"It was unfortunate; was he injured?"

"I fear so."

"May I volunteer to act as your driver until you reach your home?" said Carl, politely.

"We would not trouble you."

"I assure you it is no trouble."

Carl mounted the box.

With the reins in his hands he easily controlled the frightened steeds.

He drove mother and daughter safely home.

By this time the driver, who was more frightened than hurt, had reached there before them.

He took charge of the horses, and Carl assisted the ladies out of the carriage.

Madame Roumaine turned to him graciously.

"It is but meet," she said, "that we ask the name of one to whom we are so deeply indebted."

"With pleasure," said Carl courteously.

He handed Madame Roumaine a card.

Andree read the name upon it.

"Carl Frankstein."

"You are not a Parisian," said Madame, quickly.

"No, nor even a Frenchman."

"You are stopping in Paris?"

"I am the guest of Henri D'Aldenay. Do you not know him? I believe I was in the carriage when he called here a short while ago."

"Ah!" said Madame, "we know the D'Aldenays very well."

"Yes, Henri was my school-companion," said Carl.

"You have no doubt heard of our misfortune?"

"I have; and you have my sympathy."

"Our circumstances," said Madame, "are somewhat changed. To-morrow we shall remove to our country-house, but we should be pleased, if you should feel so disposed, to have you come and call upon us."

Carl made a profound bow.

A secret thrill pervaded his breast.

He had caught a glance from Andree's beautiful eyes.

Some hours later, when he had returned to the D'Aldenay mansion, he thought over the circumstances just narrated.

A sudden thought struck him.

"Ah! I can see it all," he said. "Henri is in love with this Mademoiselle Roumaine."

The thought occasioned a pang.

"She is a beautiful girl," he said to himself, "and I know she is noble, pure, and good."

Then he strove to banish the subject from his mind.

But in vain.

The pure, sweet face of Andree continually rose before him.

Ere the week was out, he found himself making his way to the home of the Roumaines.

At first his visits consisted of a ceremonious afternoon call.

Carl was a beautiful tenor singer.

His voice had received cultivation in a celebrated Berlin school of music.

Andree was ardently fond of music.

She played sweetly upon the guitar.

The two spent many happy moments in each other's society, gradually becoming better acquainted, until a strong tie of friendship was established.

They sang together, walked out in each others company, and one night Carl obtained permission from Madame to take Andree to the opera.

Thus matters were when Henri D'Aldenay awoke to a startling realization.

He had not learned of Carl's acquaintance with Andree until a week later.

Thus one day, in the act of making a call upon the Roumaines, he met Carl just coming away from the gate.

"What is this?" he ejaculated, almost rudely. "Where have you been?"

"Ah, is it you?" said Carl. "I have just made a call upon Mademoiselle Roumaine."

Henri turned black.

"You are acquainted with her?" he ejaculated.

"I am."

"How is that?"

"I believe I stated that I was acquainted with the lady."

"How long has this been?"

"About three weeks. I stopped her team upon the Boulevard, and saved her from an accident."

"You are rather apt at making acquaintances," sneered Henri. "And particularly in keeping the fact from me."

Carl's face flushed.

But he replied quietly.

"I did not think it would interest you."

"Ah, you did not," said Henri, jeeringly. "Perhaps you do not understand my relations with Mademoiselle Andree."

Carl's face broadened with surprise.

"I must confess that I do not," he said.

"Well, know this now, that Mademoiselle Andree is my promised wife, and I do not care to have you meddle with her."

Carl started back with pale face.

A quick, sharp pang shot through his breast.

Was Henri D'Aldenay telling the truth?

Was Andree, the pure and sweet, indeed the promised wife of such a profligate as Henri D'Aldenay.

He could scarcely credit the statement.

"Mademoiselle has led me to believe nothing of the sort," he said.

"I care not what you have been led to believe," said D'Aldenay, angrily; "you now understand it, and I warn you in future to keep away from this place. Do you hear?"

Carl Frankstein's handsome face flushed hotly.

"Yes, I hear. Henri D'Aldenay," he said; "but until I have the truth from Mademoiselle Andree's own lips, I shall not heed your insulting command."

Henri D'Aldenay was now in a paroxysm of rage.

All the black, vindictive passions of his nature were now thoroughly aroused.

Somewhat singularly he restrained pouring them forth.

He turned upon his heel and strode away.

Carl returned to the D'Aldenay mansion in a peculiar frame of mind.

He did not exactly like the idea of remaining under further obligations to Henri D'Aldenay as his guest or otherwise.

He was resolved to return at once to Berlin.

He gave orders to his valet to prepare for immediate departure.

But a strong desire came over him to see Mademoiselle Andree once again.

And while in a state of indecision he received a curt and comprehensive note.

Thus it read:

"Under the relations now existing, Monsieur Carl Frankstein having forfeited the friendship of Henri D'Aldenay, is requested to leave his roof."

Carl did not waste time in acting upon this polite suggestion.

An hour after its receipt he was quartered at the Hotel de Vendome.

Under the circumstances he was not inclined to regret the rupture of friendship between himself and D'Aldenay."

He was not the friend he had been at school.

Within a year a great change had come over Henri D'Aldenay, which none saw more clearly than the young German, who foresaw what was so sure to be his end—dissipation, ruin and death.

CHAPTER XII.

It was with a thrill of dismay that Renaud listened to the declaration of Jean Frochard.

"What, not in this house?" he ejaculated. "Impossible."

"No, they are not," said Frochard, positively.

"Are you sure?"

"I am very sure."

"Who has the renting of the rooms?"

"I do."

The detective was mystified.

He did not know what to say.

He was about to return to Nicolard when an idea occurred to him.

Might not the private secretary be mistaken in the house.

As a last resort he queried.

"Have you seen aught of such persons in the neighborhood?"

"What did they look like?"

"You say you know Le Crozier?"

"I do."

"Well, he is one."

"Ah!" exclaimed Frochard. "Now that I call to mind, I remember seeing Le Crozier in this street not two days past."

The detective grasped the other arm.

"Was he alone?" he queried eagerly.

"He was."

Nevertheless this afforded Renaud a clue.

If Le Crozier had been seen in the vicinity, without doubt Nicolard had made a mistake in the house.

"What is the next building?" he queried.

Frochard assumed a mysterious air.

"Ah," he ejaculated. "It may be."

And then he shut the door, and was alone with the detective in the hall.

The detective was upon the tiptoe of expectation.

"Have you no objection to telling me your business?"

"Why do you wish to know?"

"I have a curiosity; perhaps I can help you."

"I am a detective."

"Your name?"

"Jules Renaud."

"I have heard of you."

"Well, what have you to say?" said the detective, impatiently.

"Have patience," continued Frochard. "I can tell you about the next house. It is a secret gambling hell."

The detective started.

"What is more," continued Frochard "it is a resort of Le Crozier. I have never before betrayed the place."

"A gambling hell!" ejaculated Renaud.

"The same."

"Where is its entrance?"

"I will show you."

Renaud followed the lead of Frochard up a rickety flight of stairs.

Out upon a long surface of roof.

Several of these roofs were crossed.

Then Frochard came to a halt.

He lifted a skylight in the roof.

Light blazed up through it as he did so.

And Renaud gazed down upon a scene which gave him a great start.

Fifty feet below was the floor space of a large apartment.

The scene was an enlivened one.

The apartment, which was circular in shape, with a dome-like ceiling, was occupied with a varied crowd of men, gamblers and blacklegs, who were engaged in playing card at tables.

Renaud had seen the interior of many such establishments.

But none that could compare in glittering elegance with the present one.

He gazed upon the scene for some moments.

Then Frochard clutched his arm.

"Look!" he cried. "Do you see that man?"

The detective looked in the direction indicated.

An ejaculation escaped his lips.

A heavy, coarse-built man met his gaze.

He was familiar to the detective.

It was Le Crozier.

The ruffian was drinking at the bar.

Renaud's eyes kindled.

Had it not been such a distance to the floor beneath he would no doubt, upon the impulse of the moment, have leaped down and confronted the villain.

But this move was now out of the question.

He turned to Frochard.

"Is there no way to gain admittance to this hole?" he inquired.

"Certainly," replied the mechanic.

"How?"

"By the street."

"Let us go there at once, then," said Renaud, turning.

"Hold!"

Frochard clutched him by the arm.

"You cannot gain admittance that way."

The detective turned in surprise.

"Why?"

"For a good reason."

"What reason?"

"You do not know the pass-word."

"Is it necessary?"

"Of course."

"Then it is a private house?"

"The same."

The detective paused a moment in indecision.

What should he do?

"Great Heaven!" he ejaculated; "I must gain an entrance to this place in some manner."

But how should he do this?

This was a problem.

But Jules Renaud was not a man to be baffled.

He began to devise some means of gaining entrance to the gambling-hell.

And in the midst of his dilemma Frochard came to his relief.

"There is a way," he said.

The detective turned upon him.

"What is it?" he queried.

"There is a fire-escape on this side of the building."

"Well?"

"By descending it a ways you come to a window."

"What of that?"

"By opening the window you gain admittance to a hallway."

"What then?"

"Follow this hallway and it will bring you eventually into the place."

The detective gripped Frochard's hand.

"You shall be well rewarded for this," he said.

"I ask no reward."

"Where is this fire-escape?"

"Here, to the right."

"Will you go first?"

The mechanic drew back.

"No; I will remain here," he said.

The detective gripped the iron ladder.

He dropped over the edge of the roof.

Down—down, hand over hand, he went.

Soon he came to the window.

The fire-escape was right even with its ledge.

It required some moments to pry open the sash.

But he accomplished this successfully.

All beyond was pitchy darkness.

But the detective had a small pocket-lantern.

This he lighted.

It revealed the fact true to Frochard's declaration that he was in a corridor.

Following this a ways he came to a spiral staircase.

Descending this, he threaded other corridors.

So far he had met with no one.

But of a sudden turning an angle, his gaze was rewarded with the distant glimmer of light.

Also from a distance came the sound of voices.

Instantly he extinguished his lantern.

He realized the fact that he was approaching the gambling den.

He knew that it was necessary to use the utmost caution.

A thought struck him.

If he entered the place in his present guise, Le Crozier and others present would recognize him.

It did not take a moment to effect a change.

His coat was turned inside out.

A wig and false whiskers, which he ever carried about his person, was donned.

It made a marvelous change in his appearance.

He did not delay further.

He drew nearer to the open door through which the light streamed.

He stood in the blaze of the light.

Then passing through, he commingled with the crowd.

No one gave him special notice, no one recognized him.

He looked about for Le Crozier.

The villain had at that moment turned away from the bar.

He was having an altercation with a tall, distinguished-looking young man.

It was Henri D'Aldenay.

Renaud recognized him readily.

And also the fact that the young scion of the D'Aldenay family was beastly intoxicated.

There was every indication of serious trouble between the two.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE detective drew nearer to the two men.

He had acquired a sudden interest in their conversation.

Both were intensely excited.

"I deny it," Le Crozier said.

"What?"

"Your declaration?"

"You do not mean to say I lie?"

"You may take it whichever way you like," said Le Crozier.

D'Aldenay's form quivered.

His passion was intense.

He seemed upon the point of striking Le Crozier.

The ruffians gave him a peculiar glance.

"Be careful, Henri D'Aldenay."

"Your impudence deserves chastisement," said D'Aldenay, angrily.

"But you must not attempt it."

"I have half a mind to."

"I warn you not to."

"Why?"

"I will break you in halves."

"This is too much," cried D'Aldenay, furiously drawing a knife.

A tragedy seemed imminent.

The detective drew his breath quickly.

But the knife did not descend.

Le Crozier caught the young profligate's arm.

"Easy, Henri D'Aldenay."

But the young scion foamed at the mouth.

"You have proved yourself a traitor," he said. "No one can cross a D'Aldenay and live."

"Hold," cried the ruffian. "Listen to reason, Henri D'Aldenay; you accuse me of being false, may I ask in what?"

"You have betrayed me."

"In what?"

"In the matter of the twenty thousand franc bonds."

Le Crozier's face turned black.

"You lie," he cried, curtly.

"This was too much for D'Aldenay.
Again he made a spring forward.
But Le Crozier put up his hand.
"Back!" he cried. "Back, or all Paris shall know of your infamy."

D'Aldenay halted as though shot.
The knife dropped from his nerveless grasp.
His eyes dilated, his teeth chattered.
"What do you mean?" he half whispered.
There was a significance in Le Crozier's tone which had impressed him.

The ruffian bent forward.
He hissed into his ear a word audible only to him.
D'Aldenay reeled back.
His face was ghastly pale.
"You will not betray me," he gasped.
Le Crozier laughed jeeringly.
"Why should I not?" he queried.
"But you will not."
"I am under no obligation to you."
"You will not betray me?"
"I have not said."
"You will not for money?"
"Ah, that is a different matter."
"What is your price?"

This moment the two villains passed out of a doorway, and beyond the detective's hearing.

But what he had heard furnished him food for reflection.
"A precious pair of villains," he muttered.
He waited a moment.
Then unobserved followed the two villains.
One thing mystified him.
What hold had Le Crozier upon Henri D'Aldenay?
Then he thought of Victorine.
He must not waste further time.
He must ascertain at once if she were in the place.
How he was to accomplish this was a question.
After passing out through the door-way he found himself in a long corridor.

He followed this for some distance.
Then he encountered a long flight of stairs.
Ascending them he entered another corridor.
Upon either side of this passage were doors at regular intervals leading presumably into chambers beyond.
At each one of these the detective paused and listened.
His thought was to find one in which he believed Victorine to be imprisoned.

He tried the knob of each.
And listened intently.
But each door was fastened.
No sound from beyond rewarded his hearing.
He tried a dozen different apartments in this manner.
Then of a sudden he approached one through the key-hole of which a dim light was streaming.
Bending down he applied his eye to the key-hole.
He beheld a sight which gave him a thrill like an electric shock.

Almost the first object which his gaze encountered was the graceful form of Victorine.

The young girl was reclining upon a fauteuil within the chamber.

The apartment was elegantly furnished.
The detective's heart gave a great leap.

Victorine was alone in the room.
The detective applied his lips to the key-hole.
"Victorine."

He pronounced the name in a half-audible whisper.
But it reached the young girl's ears.
Without a moment's delay, she arose and approached the key-hole.

"Who is it?" she murmured.
"It is I, Renaud."
"Thank Heaven!"
"You are safe?"
"I am, and you have come to rescue me?"
"I have!"

"But how will you gain admittance?"
"I will in some manner."
"Oh, if they should find you here."
"They will not."
"I pray Heaven, they may not."
The detective arose to his feet.
He made a hasty examination of the lock upon the door.
Then an exclamation of satisfaction escaped his lips.
He drew from his pocket a small piece of wire.
In a skillful manner he metamorphosed this into a skeleton-key.

He fitted this to the lock after some trials.
He turned the bolt.
The door swung back.
Victorine was the next moment clasped in his arms.
The young girl's manner was one of intense excitement.
"We must not linger here," she said. "If those villains should return all would be lost."
"We will not," said the detective. "Come this way with me."

Upon first entering it, he had recognized the corridor.
It was the one by which he had entered.
It led to the fire-escape.
It was a clear avenue of escape.
The detective led the way.
Victorine clung to his arm.
They reached the fire-escape in safety.
But as the detective swung out upon it, the flash of lights, and the sound of voices and shuffling feet, came from the distance down the corridor.

Their escape had been discovered.
The enemy were in pursuit.
No time was to be lost.
The detective took Victorine in his arms.
Up the fire-escape he went hand over hand.
A moment later he arrived at the top, and was assisted upon the roof by Jean Frochard, who was awaiting them.

"You are safe," said the mechanic.
"Yes."
"You have the girl?"
"She is here."
"Good; follow me."
Frochard sprang across the roof.
The detective followed him rapidly.
A moment later and they had regained Frochard's house.
Descending to the lower floor, the mechanic led the detective into a rear passage.

"They will be waiting for you upon the front street," he said, "but you can easily escape by this back way."
A moment later and they were upon the back street.

There they found Nicolard.

Foreseeing the emergency, the private secretary had held a cab in waiting.

Thanking Frochard for his co-operation, all three sprang within it.

Orders were given to the driver to proceed to Nicolard's house, a small house in the rear of the Rue St. Honore.

Arrived there, they were met at the door by Madame Breault.

The good woman was overcome as Victorine sprang into her arms.

"Where is Papa Jacques?" queried Victorine.

With a despairing wail Madame Breault sank into a chair.

"Alas, my child," she said, "the gendarmes were here not an hour since, and arrested him upon a charge of murder."

CHAPTER XIV.

It had been Carl Frankstein's intention to return to Berlin. But some motive which he could not understand impelled him to remain in Paris.

He remained at the Hotel de Vendome.

In spite of D'Aldenay's threats he was not deterred from paying Andree regular visits.

He was a welcome visitor at the Roumaine house.

Thus matters were, when one day Carl received visitors.

They were a couple of young German friends, from a military school at Dresden.

As old and dear friends, Carl was bound to show them Paris.

He took them to the Tuileries, and to a drive upon the Bois de Boulogne.

Being countrymen of his they were naturally congenial company to him.

And Carl remained in Paris a greater length of time than he intended to.

One evening he was entertaining his friends at the Cafe du Helder.

The courses had been served, the dinner was over, and they had risen to leave.

When of a sudden some one jostled rudely against Carl.

The young German looked up quickly.

As he did so he recognized Henri D'Aldenay.

The young Parisian was regarding him with a sneer upon his dark face.

Carl affected not to notice the rudeness.

D'Aldenay walked down the saloon a ways.

The matter did not end here.

As though not satisfied with his rudeness, he walked straight up to the young German.

Ere any one in the crowd could guess his intent, he had drawn his glove and struck Carl a ringing blow across the face.

The act was witnessed by a hundred persons.

It was a startling movement.

It created intense excitement.

In a moment a crowd gathered about the party.

"Carl Frankstein, you are a liar and a coward."

The young German's form quivered for a moment.

It was a terrible restraint which he put upon himself.

If he had followed the prompting of his temper he would have struck the giver of the insult to the ground at his feet.

But he did not.

With wonderful self-control, he stood there like a statue.

The gaze which he fixed upon D'Aldenay was a calm, unflinching one.

"Henri D'Aldenay, what does this mean?"

A sneer curved the lips of D'Aldenay.

"Ah!" he said, "you are what I thought—a coward and a cur. You do not resent the insult."

"My dealings are always with gentlemen," said Carl, quietly.

"Would you insinuate that I am not a gentleman?" blustered D'Aldenay.

"Your conduct would not indicate such a fact."

"I accept the challenge," said D'Aldenay, quickly. "You have declared me no gentleman; it is an insult; name your weapons."

Carl's face turned very pale.

But it was not with fear.

He knew that trouble was imminent.

He thought not of himself.

Nor, for that matter, of D'Aldenay.

But of Andree.

What would she think of him if she learned of his being led into such a disgraceful affair?

He stifled back a sense of wounded pride and honor, which came over him.

"Come, what say you?" cried D'Aldenay.

For a moment Carl lost control of himself.

He walked straight up to the young profligate.

His eyes looked straight into D'Aldenay's.

"Henri D'Aldenay, you do not know me. Fear is something which I have never known. Do not seek to intimidate me. You are a cur, a coward, and a detestable puppy!"

Even D'Aldenay betrayed surprise.

It was like a thunderbolt from a clear sky.

Carl Frankstein had never before been known to display such spirit.

But the next moment a revulsion came over him.

He staggered back.

"My God! what have I done?" he gasped. "It is not so. I retract it; I cannot fight you. No—I apologize."

Henri D'Aldenay's eyes flashed.

A sneer broadened upon his face.

He mistook the emotion which influenced his rival.

"Ah!" he said, jeeringly; "a remarkable display, I must confess. What, you are not going to back down? You will surely accept my challenge?"

"No," said Carl, firmly; "I can accept no challenge."

"You retract?"

"I have nothing to retract."

"And you will not fight me?"

"I cannot."

"Get down upon your knees, then."

Carl did not reply to this remark.

But D'Aldenay was not satisfied.

With shrewd intuition, he had guessed Carl's reasons for not caring to fight.

"I say you shall fight," he said. "I will add injury to injury, insult to insult, until you are glad to meet me."

With this he deliberately spat in the young German's face.

The saliva struck Carl just below the eye, and trickled down his cheek.

It was the crowning act.

It was literally the straw which broke the camel's back.

Carl's whole form quivered.

His was a spirit not easily aroused, but when once roused, swift and sure in its vengeance.

Forgotten was everything in that one heated moment.

Though Carl regretted it afterwards, he could not at the moment have helped the action which he made.

With trembling hand he drew forth his card.

"My second will be at the Hotel de Vendome to-morrow," he said.

"Very well," said D'Aldenay.

"Yours is the choice of weapons."

"Swords."

"The distance?"

"Close combat."

"The place?"

"The Bois de Boulogne, at eleven to-morrow night."

"So be it."

"You will be there?" queried D'Aldenay.

"In an affair of honor I never fail."

Carl spoke these words quietly, but there was a determination in his accent which impressed those who heard it.

A few moments later, in company with his friends, he had left the Cafe du Helder.

He drove immediately back to the Hotel de Vendome.

He was in a painful frame of mind.

"Oh! it is horrible!" he thought. "I shall have his blood upon my hands."

He never once thought of himself.

It never occurred to him that he might himself get killed.

He turned to one of his friends, by name Max Waldtenfel.

"Max, you will stand by me in this emergency?"

His friend gripped his hand.

"I will," he said.

"You will never let the folks at home know of it?"

"Never!"

"And if I am killed, you will tell them it was an accident?"

"I will heed your request," replied Max.

This seemed to ease Carl's mind.

He sank back among the cushions of the carriage.

The Hotel de Vendome was soon reached.

Promptly D'Aldenay's second met Max Waldtenfel next day.

The affair was quickly arranged.

At the appointed hour a carriage containing Carl, his second, and a surgeon, entered the Bois de Boulogne.

At that late hour the great Public Gardens were deserted.

The meeting had been arranged in the shadow of a small grove of trees.

D'Aldenay, with his man, was already in waiting.

The contestants stripped to the waist in the moonlight.

They advanced into the glade.

The seconds took their places.

The blades were bared and given to the duelists.

"Gentlemen, are you ready?" said Max Waldtenfel.

The reply was a crossing of the blades.

Now the play began.

It was a thrilling sight.

D'Aldenay led with confidence.

But Carl fought calm, determinedly, and soon proved himself the best swordsman.

At an unguarded moment D'Aldenay made a lunge.

It was his intent to kill Frankstein.

But the young German with lightning quickness caught his blade.

A moment the two blades wavered in mid-air.

Then the German's sword went home and passed completely through D'Aldenay's shoulder.

This ended the duel.

Disabled, D'Aldenay was obliged to retire to his home.

Carl had been victorious; but in his enemy's breast there had been engendered a deadly hatred.

From that moment a black resolve was uppermost in his mind.

CHAPTER XV.

It was a quiet little house in which the Roumaines lived in the suburbs of Paris.

It was all that had been left to them of Victor Roumaine's vast estate.

Thought it was rather a sudden change from the fashionable life which they had been leading, Andree rather enjoyed it.

The occasional visits of Carl Frankstein gave her much pleasure.

She had conceived for the young German a liking which was of more than an ordinary sort.

Henri D'Aldenay had fallen into disfavor.

At his last visit it had been intimated to him that his company was not agreeable.

One day Andree received a caller.

It was a young lady acquaintance of hers.

A Mademoiselle Renier, a pleasant enough lady, but a confirmed gossip.

Her calls were generally a bore to Andree.

But for the sake of courtesy she felt bound to endure them.

"Have you heard the latest scandal?" prattled Mademoiselle Renier.

Andree admitted that she had not.

"All Paris is wild over it."

"Indeed," said Andree, with idle interest.

"Yes, and do you know they have had the audacity to mention your name in connection with it."

This was lightning from the clear sky.

The shock was so sudden that it took Andree by surprise.

She sat as though dazed.

A scandal in Paris?

Her name implicated.

What did it all mean?

She gazed a moment steadily at Mademoiselle Renier.

Was the gossip-monger speaking the truth?

Or was this but one of her fabrications?

"I fail to understand you," she said, stiffly.

"I never was so indignant in all my life."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; for you know you have always been an intimate friend of mine," went on the gossip. "I have denied the imputation from the first."

Andree drew a quick breath.

She gazed steadily at the other.

"Will you please explain yourself?"

"What! is it possible you have not heard of it?"

"I must confess that I have not."

"Have not heard of the duel?"

"What duel?"

"Dear me," said Mademoiselle Renier. "This is very queer. Did you not know that Henri D'Aldenay has fought a duel over you?"

Andree sprang to her feet.

A sudden choking sensation had come into her throat.

"Who—who did he fight with?" she queried.

"With a young German."

"Carl Frankstien. My God!"

The exclamation burst from Andree's lips.

She turned deadly pale.

She reeled back, while a deadly faintness came over her.

But a resolution which she could not understand endowed her with new strength.

She found strength to again query:

"How did it all happen; tell me all?"

"Gracious me," said Renier, "I do not know myself. I have heard that Monsieur Frankstein said something in calumny of your character for which Monsieur D'Aldenay challenged him."

"Calumny!" echoed Andree. "Monsieur Frankstien? It is impossible; I will not believe it."

Then the question flashed over her.

"How had Frankstein, gentleman that she had always believed him, allowed himself to be drawn into such a disgraceful affair?"

It was a fearful reflection.

It did not increase her estimation of Frankstein.

Yet she was in doubt.

She hesitated ere condemning him.

Until she had learned the circumstances more fully, she would give him the benefit of the doubt.

"You are very sure there is no mistake in the name," she said.

"I am very sure," said Renier.

"Was any one injured?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

Andree's heart came into her mouth.

It seemed an age ere the answer came.

"Monsieur D'Aldenay."

A long breath of relief rolled up from Andree's bosom.

"Was he killed?"

"No."

"Thank Heaven!"

"He received a sword-thrust through the shoulder. It was purely an affair of honor, and received but little comment, had not some evil-disposed person connected your name with it."

Andree retired to her room after Mademoiselle Renier had left.

She had hitherto believed Carl Frankstein noble and good.

Was this faith to be shaken?

"I cannot believe him in the wrong," she said. "Which ever way it is, I am sure that he is innocent."

A day passed.

Carl did not come to the Ronmaines.

His visits had hitherto been very regular.

Andree was in a painful state of mind, when one day she received a sealed note.

The handwriting looked familiar.

Retiring to her room she broke the seal.

With eager gaze she read its contents:

"MY DEAR FRIEND ANDREE.—I cannot come to your house. I am about to leave Paris, perhaps forever; this may be the last time that we shall meet. Believe me, I am all that I have professed to you. I have something to say to you. Will you

meet me at seven to-night at the old trysting-place in the oak grove.

Yours,

"CARL FRANKSTEIN."

Andree read and re-read this epistle with curious emotions.

Never had she been the victim of such painful doubts.

"It may be all right," she thought. "He is no doubt ashamed to come to the house."

Then this question arose in her mind:

"Would it be becoming in me to make this appointment?"

Never was she in such a whirl of perplexity.

She had never before kept a secret from her mother.

She longed for her sound advice, but dared not lay this letter before her.

She was afraid that Madame Roumaine would condemn Carl.

And this she was not disposed to accept.

Acting upon an impulse, she said:

"I will keep the appointment; come what may I will believe him good."

Accordingly when the evening shades had settled down she made her way to the place of appointment.

It was beneath a large oak in the forest.

She had been accustomed to wander thither with Carl.

The moments sped swiftly by.

The darkness grew thicker every moment.

She was beginning to get impatient, when of a sudden footsteps came to her hearing.

Then from the gloom there emerged a tall, dark, muffled form.

"You have come," said the new-comer, in a hoarse whisper.

Andree sprang forward with an exclamation.

"Is it you, Carl?"

Then an indefinable dread seized her.

The tall, dark form had drawn nearer—a pair of muscular arms were thrown about her.

"Oh, Heaven, I am lost! It is not Carl!"

A wild, thrilling scream pealed from her lips.

She struggled, but in vain.

The strong arms held her.

A gag was placed in her mouth.

A sickening odor filled her nostrils, and she became insensible.

How long she remained in that state she never knew.

When she came to she was reeling in a small berth.

By the motion she knew she was on board a vessel.

As the realization flashed over her she opened her eyes.

A man was standing over her.

She recognized him.

It was her enemy, Henri D'Aldenay.

The villain's face was lit up with a smile of triumph.

Andree placed both hands over her eyes and shrank back in loathing.

"Oh, Heaven help me!" she gasped. "Am I in your power?"

"Is it such a terrible infliction?" sneered D'Aldenay.

"Where are you taking me?"

"You will presently learn."

"Villain!"

"Your remarks are very endearing to one who is so soon to be your husband."

"Never!" said Andree, fiercely.

"What! you refuse?"

"I would rather die."

"You will change your mind," said the young villain, jeer-

ingly. "It would be better for you to make a virtue of necessity, and submit yourself to my wishes."

"I will never submit!"

"That remains to be seen," said D'Aldenay. "If you do not consent, you will never return to Paris."

CHAPTER XVI.

MEANWHILE, what of Carl?

The young man had been prey to a variety of emotions.

The duel had turned out to his satisfaction.

He was glad not to have killed D'Aldenay.

The affair would have weighed upon his conscience most sorely.

Since the duel his thoughts had been continually of Andree.

It was truly a fear of her condemnation which had kept him aloof.

He did not venture upon a visit for some days.

Then he mustered up courage.

His friend, Max Waldtenfel, had returned to Berlin.

But Carl did not accompany him.

He remained in Paris.

Though from what motive, he could not tell.

One day he made his way to the Roumaines.

It chanced to be the fatal day upon which Andree had received the treacherous note.

Madame Roumaine received him graciously.

He asked for Andree.

A servant was dispatched for her.

But he shortly returned.

She was not to be found.

Where was she?

All that could be learned was, that she had gone into the forest and had not come back.

A search was at once made.

Madame Roumaine was fearfully alarmed.

The woods were scoured.

No trace was found of her until finally, beneath an oak-tree, a familiar spot to him, Carl picked up a crumpled note.

It read to him comprehensively.

The whole truth burst upon him.

He realized the fact that Andree had been made the victim of a diabolical scheme.

"My God!" he gasped, "it is a diabolical scheme of the enemy."

He was sure that D'Aldenay was at the bottom of it all.

Then a powerful wave of emotion surged over him.

He became endowed with a terrible resolution.

"By Heaven and earth," he ejaculated forcibly, "I will not rest until I have rescued her."

He lost no time.

He flew back to the Roumaine house.

"I have learned the truth," he said in reply to Madame Roumaine's excited queries.

"What! tell me all, I implore you," said the frantic mother.

"Andree has been abducted."

"My God, by whom?"

"I believe by D'Aldenay."

"Oh, my child!"

"Fear not," said the young German. "Believe me, Madame Roumaine, I will rescue her or die in the attempt."

With this he left the house.

A thousand questions were surging through his mind.

He was not the least in doubt as to D'Aldenay's complicity in the matter.

"It is he," he said, "I am sure of it. But where has he taken her?"

That was a question to him.

He did not believe that D'Aldenay would remain in Paris.

He would not take her to Germany.

No; nor to Austria.

Then a thought struck him.

Would he not go to England?

No sooner had the idea become impressed upon his mind, than he at once set about sifting its probability.

He flew to the Prefecture de St. Jean.

He inquired for Renaud.

He wanted his co-operation.

But the detective was not there.

He had not returned for a week.

This was the reply he received from the inspector, Monsieur Picord.

But Carl never lost courage.

If the fugitives had gone to London he could ascertain at the steamer-office.

He took the cars for Calais.

Arrived there he entered the shipping-office.

With a liberal fee he obtained an examination of the books.

But D'Aldenay's name did not occur.

Then a thought struck him.

At first his heart had sank.

Then he turned to the clerk.

"You have not seen a man answering to his description within two days?"

"Give his description," said the clerk.

"Tall and dark."

"With a black mustache?"

"Yes."

"Was he very dark?"

"Yes."

"And always appears in an excited or irritable mood?"

"The same," cried Carl.

"He dresses well?"

"Exceedingly well."

"Has a military air?"

"Yes."

The clerk remained in doubt a moment.

"Well," said Carl, impatiently. "What of it?"

"I have seen this man."

"You have?"

"Yes."

"You are very sure?" said Carl, eagerly.

"I am, but he was not alone."

"No—who was with him?"

"A lady."

"Was—was she young?"

"Yes, and very good-looking."

"Very beautiful?"

"Yes, but closely veiled."

"Ah!"

"Yes, and apparently ill. She had to be carried on board by attendants."

Carl's heart gave a leap.

He was no longer in doubt.

He was upon the right track.

"When did they sail?" he queried.

"Night before last."

"On what steamer?"

"The *Victoria*."

Carl asked no more questions.

He flung the clerk a gold piece.

Then he sprang aboard the boat.

It was just leaving.

A few hours later he was speeding from Dover to London on a railway train.

At the Dover landing he gained a clew.

"The gentleman's baggage was checked to the Royal Hotel, St. James Court," said a porter, whom he had questioned.

Carl was rapidly acquiring the perception and indefatigability of purpose of a detective.

He at once proceeded to London.

And to the St. James Hotel.

He had learned one fact.

And that was that in England, it was the same as across the channel.

It was necessary to see every porter or clerk, in order to elicit information.

And this the young German did not fail to do.

He lavished money upon these individuals.

He applied at the desk of the St. James.

At the register he found the names.

"Count Lombard and wife."

"What sort of looking man was this Count Lombard?" he made inquiry of the clerk.

A description was given him.

It tallied exactly with d'Aldenay.

"And his wife?"

The description was correct.

It was no doubt d'Aldenay and Andree.

"His wife was ill."

The hotel clerk had made the same statement as the steamer clerk.

Unless it was a remarkable coincidence, it was the party for whom he was looking.

"Are they stopping here now?" queried Carl, guardedly.

"No sir."

"What!"

The young German started as though shot.

"They are not, sir."

"But ——" stammered Carl. "When did they leave?"

"Last night."

The young German turned away.

"One day too late," he groaned. But he did not by any means give up hope.

CHAPTER XVII.

HAD a thunderbolt fallen at his feet, Renaud, the detective, could not have been more astounded than at the declaration of Madame Breault.

Jacques Breault arrested!

He could not credit his senses.

What did it mean?

With the declaration, Victorine had given a wild, thrilling scream, and fell in a faint.

Renaud had always entertained a suspicion this Breault was the murderer.

But one thing mystified him.

How had the murder come out?

He had believed himself the only person conversant with the fact.

Who else could have unearthed it?

But for the moment he put the matter by.

He sprang to Victorine's assistance.

The young girl was in a dead faint.

He called for water.

This was brought, and he dashed it in her face.

Slowly Victorine came back to her senses.

When she recovered sufficiently to regain her feet, she queried:

"My father arrested? Oh, how did it happen?"

Madame Breault was in a paroxysm of anguish.

"Ah! I do not know, my daughter," she said.

"Tell me of it."

"The gendarmes came and took him away."

Victorine turned almost fiercely.

"They had no right to do that," she cried. "He is not guilty. He is innocent as an unborn babe."

Renaud felt a thrill of despair.

A terrible sense of anguish came over him.

"Ah. If she but knew the truth," he thought.

He believed that he did.

In his mind there was no doubt but that Jacques Breault was the murderer.

He was forced to this belief by the remembrance of the silver watch-chain.

If Breault were not guilty, how had he come into possession of the chain.

"Poor child!" he thought, as he gazed pityingly upon Victorine. "She naturally believes her father innocent. Had I been the only one possessed of the secret, for her sake, I would not have divulged it."

But Jules Renaud was a detective.

He was not the one to give way to weakness.

He knew that the emergency called for decision.

All might not be lost.

Jacques Breault might yet be saved.

An alibi might be proved.

In that case he would be cleared.

There was yet hope.

He turned to Madame Breault.

"Tell me all," he said. "Tell me how this happened."

"A detective," said madame, "Monsieur Picard, came here with the gendarmes, they found a watch-chain upon Jacques which they said belonged to a murdered man."

The detective drew a quick breath.

"What man?" he queried.

"Victor Roumaine."

"And they arrested him for the murder of Victor Roumaine."

"Yes."

"They took him away."

"Yes."

"One moment," said the detective, quietly. "What sort of a watch was it?"

"It was a valuable gold watch, with a black ebony dial."

"Where did Jacques get the watch?"

"I do not know."

The detective knew that Madame Breault spoke the truth.

He did not question her further.

He turned to Nicolard.

"My good friend," he said, "you will remain and comfort this family in their affliction."

The secretary bowed his head.

"I will," he said.

"And I," said the detective, quietly, "will go to the relief of Jacques. Perhaps I may yet save him."

Victorine sprang forward, and clasped the detective's shoulder.

"Oh, sir," she cried, "you will save him, I know you will!"

"Believe me," said Renaud, chokingly, "I will try."

Then he bent and kissed her.

The next moment he had gone.

He did not waste time.

He proceeded at once to the prefecture.

He burst unceremoniously in upon Monsieur Picard.

The inspector of detectives was at a desk.

He looked up as the detective entered.

"Ah! you have come?" he said.

"I have," said Renaud. "And——"

"Not a word," said Monsieur Picard. "I have defeated you."

"Defeated me?"

"Aye."

"What do you mean?"

"I have found the murderer of Victor Roumaine."

"Are you sure?"

"I am."

"What is his name?"

"Jacques Breault."

Renaud's face was very pale as he put a hand upon Picard's arm.

"Before Heaven!" he said, in a constrained voice, "I believe you have arrested an innocent man."

"But," stammered Monsieur Picard, "I have proof."

"Proof?"

"Aye."

"What is it?"

"Do you remember," said Monsieur Picard, deliberately, "the fact that no watch was found on Monsieur Roumaine's body?"

"I do."

"Well and good. We have found this watch in Jacques Breault's possession."

"My God!"

Renaud thought of the silver watch-chain.

The evidence was damning against Breault.

Was there any possibility of his innocence?

He turned away sick at heart.

What would be Victorine's emotions?

There was no doubt, but that her father would be convicted.

It was a terrible thought.

But Renaud was a man of a peculiar turn of mind.

He was not one to easily give up.

There was a chance yet to prove Breault's innocence.

He would leave no stone unturned to solve the doubt.

It was necessary to gain time.

Exerting his best influence he obtained a deferment of Breault's trial.

He worked hard.

But his efforts were unrewarded by anything of an encouraging nature.

At length in despair he saw the day of trial approaching,

and as yet no evidence of a material character in his possession.

The day finally came.

Jacques Breault was summoned to court.

That was a sad day for the Breault family.

Victorine, haggard-faced, and eyes swollen with weeping, sat with her mother in the audience.

All the witnesses had been procured.

Monsieur Picard was most zealous in the prosecution, for it was his firm belief that Breault was the guilty man.

And a terrible conviction to the same effect which he could not dispel rested upon Renaud's mind.

He could not bear to look at Victorine.

He avoided her.

Though he longed to offer her sympathy, he was deterred by the fear of a betrayal of his emotion.

When Jacques Breault was brought into court he was placed in the criminals' stand.

All eyes were turned upon him.

A large crowd was present.

All Paris had been thrown into a state of excitement over the murder of Victor Roumaine.

Accordingly, when the report was circulated that the murderer was found, every one crowded to the court-room.

The *Figaro* had published a glowing account in the morning.

Jacques' appearance in the court-room did not enlist the sympathy of the company present.

For his aspect was not prepossessing.

His heavy black beard and heavy frame gave him a fierce appearance.

So that the crowd began to murmur:

"A brute! a brute! He looks like a murderer."

The wave of public opinion was turned against him.

Back of the criminals' stand sat the Justice himself.

To the right were the witnesses.

The court was opened with formal proceeding.

The witnesses were sworn, and then the trial began.

The first witness to be examined was the driver of the ambulance.

"Your name?" queried the Justice.

"Pierre Gillott."

"You drive an ambulance?"

"I do."

"You were present at the murder?"

"I was there immediately afterward."

"You saw the murdered man?"

"I did."

"Who was present when you arrived there?"

"No one but Monsieur Renaud."

All eyes were turned upon the detective.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AFTER a moment, Gillott was again questioned.

"Did Monsieur Renaud hail you?"

"He did."

"Yourself and Monsieur Renaud were the first upon the spot?"

"No, there were others there."

"They arrived before you did?"

"About the same time."

"Who were the others?"

"I could not tell."

"What did you do after arriving at the scene?"

"I placed Monsieur Roumaine in the ambulance and was going to take him to the morgue."

"Did you recognize Monsieur Roumaine?"

"I did not; I never saw him before."

"Why did you not take him to the morgue?"

"Monsieur Renaud interposed."

"Then you took him home?"

"We did."

"Is this all that you know about the affair?"

"It is."

This finished the examination, and Pierre Gillott returned to his seat.

The next one put upon the stand was Madame Roumaine.

"You are the wife of Victor Roumaine?"

"I am," replied madame, in an unsteady voice.

She reeled and seemed about to faint.

"What do you know about the tragedy?"

"Nothing, except that my husband was brought home to me dead."

Madame reeled against the railing.

Renaud sprang and caught her, else she surely would have fallen.

"I object," cried the detective, "to this lady being subjected to an examination. Her nerves will not bear it; let her evidence be waived."

"One question," interposed the court. "Did madame know of any enemies which monsieur had?"

"No, not one," returned madame.

"That is sufficient."

Madame was led back to her seat by Renaud.

The next witness was Anson Nicolard.

"You are a relative of the Breaults?"

"Jacques Breault is my uncle."

"You know the Breault family very well?"

"I do."

"What has their reputation been heretofore?"

"As unsullied as could well be."

"Do you believe Jacques Breault guilty of this murder?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know of any proof that he is not guilty?"

"Except the fact that he has been a God-fearing and estimable man."

"That will do."

Some moments of silence ensued.

Then the summons was given.

"Monsieur Picard may take the stand."

The order was complied with.

The Inspector took his position.

"You are Inspector of detectives?"

"I am."

"You believe Jacques Breault guilty of this murder?"

"I do."

"What are your reasons?"

"I have full and substantial proof."

"What does your proof consist of?"

"If it please the Justice," said Monsieur Picard, "when Monsieur Roumaine's body was found, it was discovered that his watch was missing. The supposition was that plunder had been the motive of the crime; this has been proved correct; the watch has been found in the possession of Monsieur Breault."

"How did you know that the watch was in Breault's possession?"

"A former servant of Roumaine, who lives near the Breaults, saw it in his possession."

"The servant brought the fact to you?"

"Yes."

"What did you do when you learned the truth?"

"I went immediately and arrested Breault."

"Where did you find the watch?"

"In his pocket."

"Where is the watch?"

"It is here."

Picard held the watch up in sight.

It was passed to Madame Roumaine, who identified it.

Jacques Breault next took the stand.

The half blind ex-sea-captain was in a most pitiable state of mind.

"I assure you, gentlemen," he said, desperately, "that I am not guilty of this crime."

"Your name?" queried the court, brusquely.

"Jacques Breault."

"What is your occupation?"

"At present I have none; I was formerly a sea-captain."

"Where did you get the watch which was found in your possession?"

"I found it."

"Where did you find it?"

"Upon the Rue St. Honore."

"Ah, were you upon the Rue St. Honore upon the night of the murder?"

"I do not know. It was the night of the seventeenth."

It was the night that Victor Roumaine was murdered.

"And you found the watch?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Upon the curb-stone."

"What did you do with it?"

"I picked it up, examined it, and put it in my pocket."

"Did you attempt to find the owner?"

"I had no means of finding the owner."

"Wait a moment," cried Renaud, springing forward. "I would like to ask one question."

"Proceed," said the court.

"Was there anything attached to the watch when you found it?"

"There was."

"What?"

"A silver chain."

Jacques Breault turned his gaze upon the detective.

Renaud fumbled in his pocket a moment.

Then he drew forth the silver watch-chain.

He held it up to the view of all.

"Do you recognize this?" he said.

Jacques Breault's manner betrayed trepidation.

"I do," he replied.

"Do you know where I got it?"

"In the shop of the pawnbroker."

"Why did you not pawn the watch?"

"Because I wanted to find an owner to it. The chain was of little value, and I thought I would use it as a means of borrowing money."

"What!" exclaimed the detective, in surprise; "did you not sell the chain to the Jew?"

"I did not."

All was now evident to the detective.

The pawnbroker had lied to him.

"Are you through, Monsieur Renaud?" asked the court.

"I am," replied the detective.

"Perhaps, then, you can give us some information upon this matter. What do you know about it?"

"Very little, I can assure you."

"You were present upon the night of the murder?"

"I was."

"You are acquainted with the accused?"

"I am."

"Do you believe him guilty?"

"I do not."

As the detective spoke these words he gazed straight at Victorine.

The young girl's gaze was turned full upon him.

It was evidently her full belief that the detective held the means of proving her father's innocence.

"Why do you not believe him guilty?"

"The evidence is not at all conclusive."

At this juncture Monsieur Picard sprang excitedly to his feet.

"What does all this mean?" he cried impatiently. "Why should not the prisoner be adjudged guilty, why is not the evidence conclusive?"

"What is there substantial in your evidence?"

"Is it not evidence enough to find the stolen property in the criminal's possession?"

"But the theft is denied, the prisoner claims that he found the watch."

"Oh, of course he would," sneered Monsieur Picard. "I am surprised, Monsieur Renaud, that you should allow yourself to be led away by such a subterfuge."

But here the court was called to order.

The controversy was brought to an end.

A few other minor witnesses were examined.

Then the evidence was reviewed, and the jury impaneled.

Victorine and Madame Breault left the court-room upon the arm of Renaud.

As the detective placed them in a carriage, he said:

"Have good cheer, all is not yet lost. I am assured of Monsieur Breault's innocence, and will do my best to prove an alibi."

"We are deeply indebted to you," said Victorine. "Monsieur Renaud, this obligation shall never be forgotten."

"I am only too glad to be of service to you," said the detective, gallantly.

"We assure you it is a great service."

The carriage then rolled away.

Jules Renaud stood and watched it out of sight, while a keen pang shot through his breast.

CHAPTER XIX.

MEANWHILE what of Henri D'Aldenay and Andree Roumaine, our heroine.

Carl Frankstein had traced them to the Royal Hotel, London.

D'Aldenay had played his cards sharp.

After leaving the Royal Hotel he left no trace behind him.

It was impossible for Carl to track him thereafter.

And it was by merely an accident that he did stumble upon a clue.

It happened in a curious way.

He searched London thoroughly, when of a sudden when driving down the Strand one day, he came upon a man whose appearance at once struck him as familiar.

Upon a closer look he remembered that it was Henri D'Aldenay's valet.

A shrewd, but susceptible rascal whom he knew could be easily influenced by money.

He did not lose time in stopping his carriage.

He sprang out and confronted the valet.

"Ah! Du Bois, how are you, my fine fellow?" he ejaculated.

The valet gave a start of recognition.

He remembered Carl very well from having seen him at the mansion of the D'Aldenays.

Du Bois doffed his hat with courtesy.

"I am glad to see you, Monsieur Frankstein," he said.

"What do you in London?"

"You know very well what I am doing here."

Carl spoke sternly.

"Monsieur should not get angry," said Du Bois, with a sycophant smile.

"I am not mad but very much in earnest. I want you to tell me the truth."

"Do I not always tell the truth?"

"Enough of that; you know that you are the prince of liars," said Carl, vehemently.

"What does monsieur wish to know?"

"Where is your master?"

"I do not know."

"That is a lie."

"Monsieur Frankstein is complimentary," said Du Bois.

"Du Bois, I will stand no trifling. I want you to tell me what D'Aldenay has done with Mademoiselle Roumaine."

"I do not know where Monsieur D'Aldenay is," said the valet. "I was discharged from his employ while he was at the Royal Hotel."

"Are you telling me the truth?" said Carl, sternly.

"I swear it."

"How shall I know it?"

"Try me, and see."

"I will try you," said Carl, with a sudden impulse. "I will give you a chance. If you will help me to find D'Aldenay, I will pay you well."

"I am your servant," said Du Bois. "I have severed my connection with Henri D'Aldenay, and am glad to enter your employ."

Carl shoved a five-pound note into his hand.

"Tell me all you know about this affair," he said.

Du Bois narrated the escapade from Paris to the Hotel du Royal. Where Monsieur D'Aldenay was now he did not know, but believed that he had gone to Liverpool with the intention of taking an American steamer.

A sudden thought struck Carl.

"Get into this carriage with me," he said.

Du Bois obeyed.

"Drive us to the Liverpool station," he ordered the cabman.

A short while later the cab drew up at the great railway-station.

And there by inquiry learned that a certain Count Lombard had checked baggage to the Victoria Hotel, Liverpool.

"That's the name," said Du Bois. "That is him, surely."

A train was just leaving the station for Liverpool.

They boarded it.

Upon reaching Liverpool later in the day, Carl lost no time in proceeding at once to the Victoria Hotel.

The young German wondered at the action of D'Aldenay.

He had not been over shrewd in his manner of flight.

He had covered his tracks up in a very unskillful manner, and indeed, had not seemed to have made any effort to conceal his identity.

He had registered at the principal hotel, and had made no attempt to avoid making himself conspicuous.

The Victoria Hotel was at that time the principal hotel in Liverpool.

Arriving there Carl proceeded at once to the clerk's desk.

"I wish to see the register," he said.

It was handed him.

He turned the leaves over.

There was the name of Count Lombard.

"Is the count here now?" he said.

"Yes, sir."

"What is his room?"

"Forty-nine, and his wife, who is ill, has forty-eight."

"I wish to see him."

The clerk regarded Carl a moment suspiciously.

Then he said:

"Count Lombard has given orders not to be disturbed."

"Yet he will see me," said the young German, authoritatively.

"We will send up your card."

"No," said Carl. "I will go in person."

"We cannot do it; we cannot permit the count to be disturbed."

"But I have authority," said Carl, half angrily.

"What authority—are you a detective?"

Carl turned to the door.

A couple of officers were passing.

The Liverpool and London police had been notified by the Parisian detective agency, and when Carl explained his business they at once comprehended it.

The clerk could not dispute this authority.

And Carl, accompanied by Du Bois and the officers, were shown to the rooms of D'Aldenay.

They had scarcely arrived at the door when it opened, and a man appeared upon the threshold in the act of coming out.

It was Jean De Crozier.

Carl recognized him at a glance.

De Crozier halted as he observed the officers.

With an exclamation he sprang back into the apartment.

"Quick!" cried Carl. "Don't let them escape!"

The officers threw their weight against the door.

It burst open with their weight.

Crack!

Crack!

Two pistol shots rang out sharp and clear.

One of the officers sank down with a groan.

A bullet had plowed its way through his shoulder.

It was Le Crozier who had fired the shots.

Henri D'Aldenay had sprang through a door leading to an adjoining apartment.

Carl sprang after him, and the scene which met his gaze gave him a great start.

Upon a couch reclined the insensible form of Andree Roumaine.

By her side were a couple of D'Aldenay's personal attendants.

D'Aldenay had halted in the middle of the room.

What motive prompted him to make the action which he did was never known.

His arm was uplifted and a pistol muzzle was pressed to his breast.

Too late, Carl sprang forward.

Crack!

A long quivering moan escaped the doomed man's lips.

He staggered back and fell to the floor.

By this time Le Crozier had been secured.

Carl sprang forward and bent over D'Aldenay.

But only a moment.

Then he arose with the exclamation:

"He is gone!"

He turned to the bed upon which Andree lay.

It did not require but a brief examination for him to perceive that she was under the influence of a powerful drug.

He turned to one of the attendants.

"This case must be attended to at once," he said. "Send for a physician."

The servant was not gone many moments ere he returned with a physician.

But the drug had evidently exhausted itself, for Andree was speedily brought to.

She looked up into Carl's face and ejaculated:

"Thank Heaven you have come."

The physician turned his attention to D'Aldenay.

He bent over him and made the discovery that his pulse was yet beating.

A few drops of brandy brought the young profligate back to his senses.

He opened his eyes and looked about him; then his lips began to move.

The physician turned and touched Carl upon the arm.

"He wishes to speak with you. Be quick."

The young German knelt over the dying man.

His lips moved in almost inaudible speech.

"Is it you, Carl?"

"It is."

"Oh, God! that my life should have come to this! Yet"—almost fiercely—"I do not regret it. I have much to say to you. I have a confession to make: be quick, before my breath stops. It is necessary that you should hear it. It will save the life of an innocent man."

Carl bent closer.

"What is it?" he queried.

"Go at once to Paris. Jacques Breault is innocent. I am the murderer of Victor Roumaine!"

CHAPTER XX.

In spite of his plea of not guilty and the eloquent arguments of his counsel, Jacques Breault was adjudged guilty, and convicted of the murder of Victor Roumaine.

He received his sentence the following day.

All Paris was in a state of excitement.

Breault had been unfortunate in one thing.

He had not gained the sympathy of the people.

His execution was fixed for a certain day of the following week.

It had a terrible effect upon the ex-sea captain.

With its arrival he had given way to violent paroxysms of emotion.

"Before Heaven, they will execute an innocent man," he cried. "And my family, what will become of them, Victorine, poor girl?"

Jules Renaud, who had brought the message, bowed his head upon his breast in silence.

In spite of a conviction to the contrary, the detective was yet inclined to believe Breault guilty.

Though the convicted man had told a plausible story of his picking up the unfortunate silver watch-chain upon the sidewalk so soon after the murder.

Was he guilty?

It was a painful question to Renaud.

Evidence was strong against him.

The detective had done his best to unearth proof to the contrary.

But in vain.

"My God, if I were only sure," he muttered. "Never was there such doubt in my mind before."

This was true.

"If Jacques Breault were not guilty——"

The detective paused with this exclamation.

"What then?"

If the guilty man should turn up after the execution?

It would then be too late.

Such a development would prove a fatal blunder on the part of Jules Renaud.

A human life would have been needlessly sacrificed.

If Breault were indeed the murderer, no one would be more disposed to see him hang, in spite of the fact that he was Victorine's father, than Renaud.

He visited Breault.

He found the convicted man sitting disconsolately in a corner of his cell.

"It is God's will," was all the ex-sea-captain could say.

"I have used every effort," said Renaud.

"I know it. You have been a good friend to me," said Breault, with choking voice. "But believe me, Monsieur Renaud, I do not think of myself."

"I can understand you," said the detective.

"I think only of my family."

"They are to be sympathized with."

Jacques Breault paced his cell.

Then of a sudden he turned.

He clutched the detective's arm.

"Monsieur Renaud," he said, in a peculiar tone of voice, "you have been a friend to me in the past, can I ask of you a favor after I am dead?"

"You may."

"Then, Monsieur Renaud," said the old man, chokingly, "I would ask of you that you watch over Victorine. Be a friend and adviser to her. Protect her from the wicked snares and wiles of this Parisian life——"

"Enough, Jacques Breault," he cried, in a tone of fearful earnestness. "Remember your request shall be obeyed. Listen—Victorine loves me, and I love her. She will be my wife, and as my wife I will swear to cherish and protect her with all effort until death."

Tears coursed adown Jacques Breault's face.

"As you would be rightly judged in Heaven," he said, "watch over my child. Be true to her, and Jacques Breault's dying blessing will rest upon your head."

The old man staggered back and fell upon the couch.

Renaud would have sprang forward to support him, but at that moment there came a quick, sharp rap at the cell door.

It opened with a creak.

A squad of gendarmes appeared.

It was the death guard.

Renaud shivered.

"We have come for the criminal," said the leader, touching his hat respectfully. "Is he ready?"

Jacques Breault arose with tottering tread.

"I am ready," he said.

Supported by Renaud and an officer he was led forth.

Down a long corridor and then into a court-yard thronged with people.

Out upon the death scaffold.

It was an impressive scene.

A man was walking to his death.

There was a hush upon the crowd.

With even step Jacques Breault walked out upon the scaffold.

Prayer was said by the prison chaplain.

Then the black drop was put over his head, and the death noose adjusted.

The seconds seemed hours to the suspense-stricken crowd.

But the word which was to launch an innocent man into eternity, was trembling upon the warden's lips when——

Crash!

A door burst open.

A loud cry went up which swelled louder and louder.

"A reprieve—a reprieve!"

* * * * *

It is needless to state that Carl Frankstein lost no time in telegraphing to Paris to delay Jacques Breault's execution.

And the telegram arrived just in the nick of time.

Jacques Breault was saved.

Henri D'Aldenay's dying statement was duly subscribed and sworn.

The ex-sea captain was cleared.

No happier family was there in Paris that night than the Breaults.

The Marquis D'Aldenay was overwhelmed with sorrow at the fate of his son, and retired at once from public life.

And now, gentle reader, a few words are closing this story.

Happiness and peace now became the portion of those characters whom we have followed to a propitious point.

Andree Roumaine was restored to her mother, only later to become the happy life companion of her true lover, Carl Frankstein, and remove to Berlin.

Jules Renaud became a member of the Breault family a short while after.

Victorine became his happy bride.

The indomitable little French detective is yet in possession of the silver watch-chain, which had formed the nucleus of the greatest ease of his life, and which made him famous, so that it became but a step for him to honor and riches.

Jean Le Crozier expiated his crimes upon the scaffold.

Madame Roumaine is living with her son-in-law, Carl Frankstein, in Berlin, and now having arrived at the end of the chapter, with promise to again some time present Monsieur Jules Renaud, the celebrated French detective, in new and thrilling adventures, the writer will say to his indulgent readers *Au Revoir*.