

TRUTH ABOUT THE CASE
The Experiences of M. F. Goron, Ex-Chief
of the Paris Detective Police
Edited by Albert Keyzer
A HOTEL MYSTERY

(Copyright by J. B. Lippincott Co.)

HURRIED meals, taken at impossible hours, are apt to cause dyspepsia. This I found out; and Dr. Thibaut, my medical adviser and friend, fearing I might not obey his injunctions, took the trouble to escort me to a small watering-place in the Dauphine, whence, he assured me, I should emerge perfectly cured.

I did not at all relish the idea of becoming—even for a short time—a fashionable idler. But afterward I had reason to be thankful, for the adventure I met with added a curious chapter to my experiences.

I went to that little place a few weeks after the execution of Eyraud, the murderer of the luckless Gouffe, a most sensational crime, which for several months kept the whole European press at fever heat. And, in order to escape interviewers and kogak hounds, I decided to travel incognito, enjoining myself in the hotel books as M. Gullibert, a wise precaution, as I soon discovered.

The most important guests in our hotel were Count M., a Russian, a fine-looking man of about sixty-five, and his wife, a pretty woman quite forty years his junior. The countess, a restless young creature, was constantly organizing excursions in the mountains, leaving her husband at home to amuse himself.

Two days after my arrival I noticed a newcomer at our table d'hôte, Mlle. Eugénie Arco, an attractive young woman with dark eyes and jet-black hair. Her hands were small and aristocratic, and her appearance would have been in every way refined but for her ears. These were too large and stood stovt rather far from her head. The girl fascinated, yet at the same time repelled, me.

It had been raining all the morning, and I was in the reading-room glancing at an illustrated paper, when a voice near said, "Pardon me, monsieur, I see you are a Russian."

"Yes, I am," I replied, "I am not."

"I thought you were," she continued, "because I saw you reading a Russian periodical."

"I was only reading it," I retorted, "I was only looking at the pictures."

"Oh, I see!" she exclaimed. But the look she gave me said she did not believe me.

I did not care to continue the conversation, and she soon left the room. From that moment, however, I noticed she never ceased to observe me, and many a time when I pretended to be asleep in one of the armchairs in the hall her large black eyes were fastened on me as if they were trying to pierce my thoughts.

With the officials in the hotel Mlle. Arco was a persona grata, for, unlike most women, who in money matters are inclined to be niggardly, she tipped the waiters and chambermaids most liberally. The manager of the hotel and his wife had also taken a great fancy to her, and she was always warmly welcomed by them in their sanctum, where she would sit and smoke cigarette after cigarette.

Feeling myself closely watched by her, I returned the compliment, and noticed that she would repair to the office at those hours when the post came in, and look over the clerk's shoulder at the letters he sorted. And then it struck me that no missive ever came addressed to her, although one afternoon, happening to pass her room at the moment the maid opened her door, I saw her deeply engaged in correspondence, with several letters in front of her.

vent straight to his wife's dressing-room.

"Look at that!" he exclaimed, pointing to a dressing-bag on the floor, its lock forced open, and many of the things it had contained scattered around.

"The countess," he continued, "kept her jewelry locked in that. The thief or thieves must have sneaked in after she left. What do you advise me to do?"

"I think you had better wait for the countess' return before taking any steps; she will not be long. In the meantime you might question the maid."

But Marfa had obtained her mistress's permission to go for a donkey-ride to the monastery a few miles distant. So we waited till she came in. When the count told her of the robbery she looked thunderstruck.

"I swear," she cried, "that when madame went out the bag was safely locked. I did not go into her room after she left."

A loud noise down-stairs announced the cavalcade had returned from their excursion. The countess entered the hotel and her husband went quickly up to her. I strolled down the road leading to the station, when a carriage drove up and a man jumped out, shouting:

"Goron, Goron! How are you, old chap?"

It was Dr. Thibaut.

"Hold your tongue, you stupid!" I said. "What do you mean by bawling out my name? Have you forgotten that I am M. Gullibert? I hope the driver has not heard you."

"That's all right," he rejoined; "he's as deaf as a post. I have taken a week's holiday. I want to spend it with you here, after which we will return to Paris together. What do you say to this arrangement?"

"You have come at a good moment," I remarked; "there is plenty of excitement at the hotel; and I related to him the story of the robbery."

His eyes sparkled with delight.

"That will be glorious sport to witness," he laughed.

"For you, perhaps, you heartless

knock at my door. To my surprise the count entered.

"Pardon my intruding upon you," he sighed. "I am very much annoyed. This police commissary is not making any headway. He clings to the idea that the maid committed the deed, or that she is an accomplice; and he thinks he is on the right trail. M. Gullibert, I must discover the culprit, and am willing to offer a reward that may tempt any one to help me in my search. The hotel proprietor suggested me writing to M. Goron, asking him to come to our assistance, as these local detectives seem unable to clear up the mystery."

"It is useless to write to M. Goron," I replied. "Remember that this is beyond his sphere of action; and that with the work on his hands in Paris you cannot expect him to attend to crimes committed in the provinces."

"I dare say you are right," groaned the old gentleman, "besides—"

He stopped, and moved uneasily in his chair.

"M. Gullibert," he burst out rather suddenly, "I repeat, I am particularly anxious to lay my hands on the robber. Yet, at the same time, I dread disclosures that might—might—possibly cause annoyance to the countess. My wife is young, very young, and inexperienced; and only too inclined to give her friendship to people of whom she knows very little. Look at that noisy crowd who follow her on her long rides or drives. Who are they? She made their acquaintance only since we came here. Some of the women of that set are as bad as the men. There is that Soudier always dangling after her. What is he? Who is he? Can one find that out? I have my reasons for asking you this."

"I do not know the man any more than you do, but it will be easy to find out all about him through my Paris friends."

"Please, M. Gullibert, do this for me. I shall be deeply grateful."

"Frankly, do you think of him in connection with the robbery?"

"I suspect that whole fat gang, and feel certain one of them is the thief

her husband says, I gather she is convinced that a stranger to the place committed the deed."

"I have a theory," said Thibaut. "That the countess knows the thief, whom she does not want to compromise because—"

"Because she loves him?"

"Yes."

"These things do occur."

"What about the man with the shaven upper lip? I have not seen him within the last few days."

"No; but I have."

Thibaut gazed at me intently for a few moments.

"Goron," he cried eagerly, "you've discovered something. You have a clue. What is it?"

"My dear Thibaut, you have half-guessed the truth. Yes, I scent a mystery, and I wish to clear it up; but not from professional pride. It is from a sense of duty, for unless I step in, I foresee a disaster."

"Is it as serious as that?"

"It may become so. That is what I want to avoid."

"Can I help you?"

"Yes, by not asking me any questions, even when I absent myself. Understand me well, Thibaut, I must remain M. Gullibert to the end. Nobody, including M. Julien, must know I am Goron. An indiscreet word from you would defeat all my plans."

"You can rely on me."

"I know I can. When, as I hope, I shall have brought my task to a satisfactory ending you shall know all the details of the case. This much I will tell you. The necklace has mysteriously disappeared; I shall try to have it spirited back in the same mysterious way."

A week after the foregoing conversation a cab drove up at the door of the hotel. Thibaut's and my luggage was hoisted on the top; and we shook hands with some of the guests, including the count, who witnessed our departure for Paris.

Half-way to the station we met the countess on her bicycle, some 50 yards ahead of her party.

"Bon voyage, M. Gullibert!" she shouted, her face beaming with joy.

and threw a rose into our carriage. I placed it in my buttonhole and gave a sigh of relief.

"I suppose that sigh has something to do with the case," said my observant friend.

We had the compartment to ourselves, and the train was scarcely out of the station when Thibaut called out:

"And now please tell me all that occurred. You, too, must be anxious to unobscure yourself," he added with a mischievous smile.

"Oh, I shall conceal nothing. But, although I did not act in an official capacity, the story is of a delicate nature and I must request you not to divulge it."

"I give you my word."

"It is a strange business, and was even deeper than I conjectured. The first thing that struck me as odd, when the count took me to his wife's dressing-room, was that forced lock of the dressing-bag; I wondered who the lunatic thief could be who lost precious time over that lock, when, with an ordinary penknife, he could have cut the leather in less than a minute.

"You will, however, understand my difficulty, not having had charge of the case, and not having been—like the police commissary—able to investigate closely and question those likely to throw light upon the matter. I had to be guided partly by reasoning, partly by intuition; and the inferences I drew were that the necklace had not been stolen, and that either the count or the countess—possibly both—had reasons for spreading that story of the robbery."

"I assure you I never for an instant suspected Soudier; and the count's

suspect of him and his desire to saddle him with the robbery rather told against the former, and gave rise to ugly presumptions. I am, however, as you know, a pretty good reader of character, and I did not believe the count capable of a villainy. There remained the countess, with whom during my stay at the hotel I had not exchanged half a dozen words. Do you remember my three days' absence?"

"Yes, I guessed you had gone to Paris."

"You guessed right. I arrived there in the early morning, and two hours later I knew that the countess' father, a broken-down absinth-drinker, was clerk to a money-changer and money-lender in the Boulevard St. Martin, who was once seriously compromised in a case of stolen bonds. I took a cab, and slowly drove past the place, when I saw our friend with the shaven upper lip emerge from the office, a small traveling-bag in his hand, and jump on a bus. His name, I was told at the hotel, is Ballu. I did not hesitate a second. I had seen through the window that the principal's private room at the back was empty, and that in the office were only a young man behind a desk and a girl at a typewriter. I went in and asked for M. S.—, the countess' father."

"He has left us," said the clerk.

"Returning to the station, I saw Ballu on the platform, and, unseen by him, we both arrived at the hotel at the same time."

"I had already noticed that although Ballu and the countess never exchanged a word when others were present, their eyes often met, and when on the night of my return we sat down at the table d'hôte a hardly perceptible sign passed between them. Keeping them both well in sight, I saw Ballu at 9 o'clock stroll toward the end of the garden. He disappeared in the darkness, but I felt sure he had gone to the little summer-house facing the tennis-lawn."

"I soon arrived at the back of the little wooden structure, and felt relieved when I heard some one move inside. Half an hour later there came a light step. It was the countess. Their conversation, carried on in whispers, did not last many minutes. Ballu's voice sounded hard, almost threatening, while that of the countess was imploring. Although I could not catch every word they said, I heard quite enough to be able to reconstruct the whole case. The moment to act had arrived."

"The following morning as the countess crossed the hall I walked up to her and said:

"Please go to the library. I want to speak to you at once."

"She gave me a look of surprise and fear, and entered the room."

"Madame," I said, "to you and you alone I will divulge who I am. I am M. Goron, chief of the Paris detective force. My object is to help you. I know your father has appropriated—or is accused of having done so—money belonging to his employer, M. H—, I know you wanted to save him, and, not having the ready cash, you handed to M. H—, through his understudy, M. Ballu, your pearl necklace as security. In order to do this you have—probably at this man's suggestion—made it appear you had been robbed. M. H—, being afraid to dispose of the pearls, is now pressing you to redeem them, and for a larger sum than your father owes him. Am I right?"

"The poor lady sat motionless. Her very lips had turned white.

"Fear nothing," I continued; "I am here to save you. But you must promise to follow my instructions implicitly. Will you?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"Very well. Can you invent a reason that will satisfy your husband why you should go to Paris, returning the following day?"

"She nodded.

"Then leave tomorrow early by the express, having first wired to M. H— to make an appointment at his office. Go there straight. Tell him you have seen me—letting him, of course, think I am in Paris—and that you have come to me for advice. Explain that you know from me that his attitude toward you places him in a serious position, from which he can extricate himself in one way only. Having agreed to let you refund him the money due to him by your father—always supposing that story to be true—he must at once return you the necklace, on your promise to pay him a fixed sum on account every month. You can manage that, can you not?"

"Yes, M. Goron," she said, putting her hand on mine, "I will."

"Hush! Don't pronounce my name. Should that fellow H— make any fuss, you can tell him he will soon hear from me."

"She went, and returned the following evening. I purposely stood at the door as she passed out of the dining-room, when she slipped a note into my hand. Here it is:

"H— accepts. Promise to return thing tomorrow by E—. God bless you."

"Before we left I had the satisfaction of knowing that Ballu had returned the necklace, and that it was once more in her possession."

"When she threw that rose?"

"Yes."

"And the count? How will his wife explain the reappearance of the necklace?"

"She will manage that. Women have inventive brains."

"And the great Julien?"

"Ah! The great Julien will, till the end of his days, believe it was Marfa who stole and returned the pearls; while the count will think the same thing of Soudier. But Julien cannot now arrest innocent people in connection with that case. And it was that, my dear Thibaut, I wanted to avoid."



The poor lady sat motionless Her very lips turned white.

man, but not for the count and countess."

Having dressed for dinner, we found the guests in the hall eagerly discussing the affair, trying to extract particulars from the waiters and chambermaids. All at once there was a hush, for the door of the manager's room opened, and out came the count and his wife followed by a stout, red-faced, short man with gray whiskers.

"That's M. Julien, the police commissary," some one said behind me.

"I wonder," whispered Thibaut, "how that M. Julien will set to work?"

"So do I. With your permission, however, I shall remain in the background. M. Julien, fortunately, does not know me, but one of his subordinates might; and I do not want to depart from my position of spectator. This is M. Julien's domain. I also see new faces. Look at that close-shaven youth with the flower in his button-hole. Do you notice anything particular about him?"

"No, I don't."

"Look again."

"I see nothing except that he gives me the impression of being a cad."

"Watch his mouth."

"Well, he seems to want with his teeth to catch something on his upper lip."

"Yes, his moustache. It must have been there quite recently, and he is not yet accustomed to its absence."

"It seems strange."

"This may not be of any importance, but if I were M. Julien I should take note of it."

For two days I heard no news about the robbery, and was wondering how things were progressing, when I was aroused in the morning by a loud

knock at my door. To my surprise the count entered.

"Pardon my intruding upon you," he sighed. "I am very much annoyed. This police commissary is not making any headway. He clings to the idea that the maid committed the deed, or that she is an accomplice; and he thinks he is on the right trail. M. Gullibert, I must discover the culprit, and am willing to offer a reward that may tempt any one to help me in my search. The hotel proprietor suggested me writing to M. Goron, asking him to come to our assistance, as these local detectives seem unable to clear up the mystery."

"It is useless to write to M. Goron," I replied. "Remember that this is beyond his sphere of action; and that with the work on his hands in Paris you cannot expect him to attend to crimes committed in the provinces."

"I dare say you are right," groaned the old gentleman, "besides—"

her husband says, I gather she is convinced that a stranger to the place committed the deed."

"I have a theory," said Thibaut. "That the countess knows the thief, whom she does not want to compromise because—"

"Because she loves him?"

"Yes."

"These things do occur."

"What about the man with the shaven upper lip? I have not seen him within the last few days."

"No; but I have."

Thibaut gazed at me intently for a few moments.

"Goron," he cried eagerly, "you've discovered something. You have a clue. What is it?"

"My dear Thibaut, you have half-guessed the truth. Yes, I scent a mystery, and I wish to clear it up; but not from professional pride. It is from a sense of duty, for unless I step in, I foresee a disaster."

"Is it as serious as that?"

"It may become so. That is what I want to avoid."

"Can I help you?"

"Yes, by not asking me any questions, even when I absent myself. Understand me well, Thibaut, I must remain M. Gullibert to the end. Nobody, including M. Julien, must know I am Goron. An indiscreet word from you would defeat all my plans."

"You can rely on me."

"I know I can. When, as I hope, I shall have brought my task to a satisfactory ending you shall know all the details of the case. This much I will tell you. The necklace has mysteriously disappeared; I shall try to have it spirited back in the same mysterious way."

A week after the foregoing conversation a cab drove up at the door of the hotel. Thibaut's and my luggage was hoisted on the top; and we shook hands with some of the guests, including the count, who witnessed our departure for Paris.

Half-way to the station we met the countess on her bicycle, some 50 yards ahead of her party.

"Bon voyage, M. Gullibert!" she shouted, her face beaming with joy.