

Cherchez La Femme

By O. HENRY

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ROBBINS, reporter for the Picayune, and Dumars, of L'Abelle—the old French newspaper that has buzzed for nearly a century—were good friends, well proven by years of ups and downs together. They were seated where they had a habit of meeting—in the little, Creole-haunted cafe of Madame Tibault, in Dumaine street. If you know the place, you will experience a thrill of pleasure in recalling it to mind. It is small and dark, with six little polished tables, at which you may sit and drink the best coffee in New Orleans, and concoctions of absinthe equal to Sazerac's best. Madame Tibault, fat and indulgent, presides at the desk, and takes your money. Nicolette and Meme, madame's neices, in charming bib aprons, bring the desirable beverages.

Dumars, with true Creole luxury, was sipping his absinthe, with half-closed eyes, in a swirl of cigarette smoke. Robbins was looking over the morning Pic, detecting, as young reporters will, the gross blunders in the make-up, and the envious blue-penciling his own stuff had received. This item, in the advertising columns, caught his eye, and with an exclamation of sudden interest he read it aloud to his friend:

"PUBLIC AUCTION—At 3 o'clock this afternoon there will be sold to the highest bidder all the common property of the Little Sisters of Samaria, at the home of the Sisterhood, in Bonhomme street. The sale will dispose of the building, ground and the complete furnishings of the house and chapel, without reserve."

This notice stirred the two friends to a reminiscent talk concerning an episode in their journalistic career that had occurred about two years before. They recalled the incidents, went over the old theories, and discussed it anew, from the different perspective time had brought.

There were no other customers in the cafe. Madame's fine ear had caught the line of their talk, and she came over to their table—for had it not been her lost money—her vanished twenty thousand dollars—that had set the whole matter going?

The three took up the long-abandoned mystery, thrashing over the old, dry chaff of it. It was in the chapel of this house of the Little Sisters of Samaria that Robbins and Dumars had stood during that eager, fruitless news search of theirs, and looked upon the gilded statue of the Virgin.

"Thass so, boys," said madame, summing up. "Thass ver' wicked man, M'sieur Morin. Everybody shall be cert' he steal those money I plaze in his hand for keep safe. Yes, he's boum' spend that money, somehow." Madame turned a broad and comprehensive smile upon Dumars. "I ond-stand you, M'sieur Dumars, those day you come ask me fo' tell ev'ying I know 'bout M'sieur Morin. Ah! yes, I know most time when those men lose money you say, 'Cherchez la femme'—there is somewhere the woman. But not for M'sieur Morin. No, boys. Before he shall die, he is like one saint. You might's well, M'sieur Dumars, go try find those money in those statue of Virgin Mary that M'sieur Morin present at those p'tite seours, as try find one femme."

At Madame Tibault's last words, Robbins started slightly and cast a keen, sidelong glance at Dumars. The Creole sat, unmoved, dreamily watching the spirals of his cigarette smoke.

It was then 9 o'clock in the morning, and, a few minutes later, the two friends separated, going different ways to their day's duties. And now follows the brief story of Madame Tibault's vanished thousands.

New Orleans will readily recall to mind the circumstances attendant upon the death of Mr. Gaspard Morin, in that city. Mr. Morin was an artistic goldsmith and jeweler, in the old French quarter, and a man held in the highest esteem. He belonged to one of the oldest French families, and was of some distinction as an antiquary and historian. He was a bachelor, about fifty years of age. He lived in quiet comfort, at one of those rare old hostleries in Royal street. He was found in his rooms one morning, dead from unknown causes.

When his affairs came to be looked into, it was found that he was practically insolvent, his stock of goods and personal property barely—but nearly enough to free him from censure—covering his liabilities. Following, came the disclosure that he had been entrusted with the sum of twenty thousand dollars by a former servant in the Morin family, one Madame Tibault, which she had received as a legacy from relatives in France.

The most searching scrutiny by friends and the legal authorities failed to reveal the disposition of the money. It had vanished, and left no trace. Some weeks before his death, Mr. Morin had drawn the entire amount, in gold coin, from the bank where it had been placed while he looked about (he told Madame Tibault) for a safe investment. Therefore, Mr. Morin's memory seemed doomed to bear the cloud of dishon-

esty, while Madame was, of course, disconsolate.

Then it was that Robbins and Dumars, representing their respective journals, began one of those pertinacious private investigations which, of late years, the press has adopted as a means to glory and the satisfaction of public curiosity.

"Cherchez la femme," said Dumars. "That's the ticket!" agreed Robbins. "All roads lead to the eternal feminine. We will find the woman."

They exhausted the knowledge of the staff of Mr. Morin's hotel, from the bell-boy down to the proprietor. They gently, but inflexibly, pumped the family of the deceased as far as his cousins twice removed. They artfully sounded the employees of the late jeweler, and dogged his customers for information concerning his habits. Like bloodhounds, they traced every step of the supposed defaulter, as nearly as might be, for years along the limited and monotonous paths he had trodden.

At the end of their labors, Mr. Morin stood, an immaculate man. Not one weakness that might be served up as a criminal tendency, not one deviation from the path of rectitude, not even a hint of a predilection for the opposite sex, was found to be placed to his debit. His life had been as regular and austere as a monk's; his habits, simple and unceasing. Generous, charitable, and a model in propriety, was the verdict of all who knew him.

"What now?" asked Robbins, fingering his empty notebook.

"Cherchez la femme," said Dumars, lighting a cigarette. "Try Lady Bellairs."

This piece of femininity was the racetrack favorite of the season. Being feminine, she was erratic in her gait, and there were a few heavy losers about town who had believed she could be true. The reporters applied for information.

Mr. Morin? Certainly not. He was never been a spectator at the races. Not that kind of a man. Surprised the gentlemen should ask.

"Shall we throw it up?" suggested Robbins, "and let the puzzle department have a try?"

"Cherchez la femme," hummed Dumars, reaching for a match. "Try the Little Sisters of What-d'you-call-'em." It had developed, during the investigation, that Mr. Morin had held this benevolent order in particular favor. He had contributed liberally toward its support, and had chosen its chapel as his favorite place of private worship. It was said that he went there daily to make his devotions at the altar. Indeed, toward the last of his life his whole mind seemed to have fixed itself upon religious matters, perhaps to the detriment of his worldly affairs.

Thither went Robbins and Dumars, and were admitted through the narrow doorway in the blank stone wall that frowned upon Bonhomme street. An old woman was sweeping the chapel. She told them that Sister Felicite, the head of the order, was then at prayer at the altar in the alcove. In a few moments she would emerge. Heavy, black curtains screened the alcove. They waited.

Soon the curtains were disturbed, and Sister Felicite came forth. She was tall, tragic, bony and plain-featured, dressed in the black gown and severe bonnet of the sisterhood.

Robbins, a good rough-and-tumble reporter, but lacking the delicate touch, began to speak.

They represented the press. The lady had, no doubt, heard of the Morin affair. It was necessary, in justice to that gentleman's memory, to probe the mystery of the lost money. It was known that he had come often to this chapel. Any information, now, concerning Mr. Morin's habits, tastes, the friends he had, and so on, would be of value in doing him posthumous justice.

Sister Felicite had heard. Whatever she knew would be willingly told, but it was very little. Monsieur Morin had been a good friend to the order, sometimes contributing as much as a hundred dollars. The sisterhood was an independent one, depending entirely upon private contributions for the means to carry on its charitable work. Mr. Morin had presented the chapel with silver candlesticks and an altar cloth. He came every day to worship in the chapel, sometimes remaining for an hour. He was a devout Catholic, consecrated to holiness. Yes, and also in the alcove was a statue of the Virgin that he had, himself, modeled, cast, and presented to the order. Oh, it was cruel to cast a doubt upon so good a man!

Robbins was also profoundly grieved at the imputation. But, until it was found what Mr. Morin had done with Madame Tibault's money, he feared the tongue of slander would not be stilled. Sometimes—in fact, very often—in affairs of this kind there was—as the saying goes—er—a lady in the case. In absolute confidence, now—if—perhaps—

Sister Felicite's large eyes regarded him solemnly.

"There was one woman," she said, slowly, "to whom he bowed—to whom he gave his heart."

Robbins fumbled rapturously for his pencil.

"Behold the woman!" said Sister Felicite, suddenly, in deep tones.

She reached a long arm and swept aside the curtain of the alcove. In there was a shrine, lit to a glow of soft color by the light pouring through a stained glass window. Within a deep niche in the bare stone wall stood an image of the Virgin Mary, the color of pure gold.

Dumars, a conventional Catholic, succumbed to the dramatic in the act. He knelt for an instant upon the stone flags, and made the sign of the cross. The somewhat abashed Robbins, murmuring an indistinct apology, backed awkwardly away. Sister Felicite drew back the curtain, and the reporters departed.

On the narrow stone sidewalk of Bonhomme street, Robbins turned to Dumars, with unworthy sarcasm.

"Well, what next? Churchly law fer?"

"Absinthe," said Dumars.

With the history of the missing money thus partially related, some conjecture may be formed of the sudden idea that Madame Tibault's words seemed to have suggested to Robbins' brain.

Was it so wild a surmise—that the religious fanatic had offered up his wealth—or, rather, Madame Tibault's—in the shape of a material symbol of his consuming devotion? Stranger things have been done in the name of worship. Was it not possible that the lost thousands were molded into that lustrous image? That the goldsmith had formed it of the pure and precious metal, and set it there, through some hope of a perhaps dis-

can stand half. What you come bidding against me for?"

"I thought I was the only fool in the crowd," explained Robbins.

No one else bidding, the statue was knocked down to the syndicate at their last offer. Dumars remained with the prize, while Robbins hurried forth to wring from the resources and credit of both the price. He soon returned with the money, and the two musketeers loaded their precious package into a carriage and drove with it to Dumars' room, in old Charles street, nearby. They lugged it, covered with a cloth, up the stairs, and deposited it on a table. A hundred pounds it weighed, if an ounce, and at that estimate, according to their calculation, if their daring theory was correct, it stood there, worth twenty thousand golden dollars.

Robbins removed the covering, and opened his pocketknife.

"Sacre!" muttered Dumars, shuddering. "It is the Mother of Christ. What would you do?"

"Shut up, Judas!" said Robbins, coldly. "It's too late for you to be saved now."

With a firm hand, he chipped a slice from the shoulder of the image. The cut showed a dull, grayish metal, with a thin coating of gold leaf.

"Lead!" announced Robbins, hurling his knife to the floor—"gilded!"

"To the devil with it!" said Dumars, forgetting his scruples. "I must have a drink."

Together they walked moodily to the cafe of Madame Tibault, two squares away.

It seemed that madame's mind had been stirred that day to fresh recol-

lection. United States four per cent. gold bond? Tell me—is this a Grimm's fair tale, or should I consult an oculist?"

At his words, Madame Tibault and Dumars approached.

"H'what you say?" said madame, cheerily. "H'what you say, M'sieur Robbins? Bon? Ah! those nize M' peezes paper! One tam I think those w'at you call calendair, wiz M' day of mont' below. But, no. Those wall is broke in those plaze, M'sieur Robbins, and I plaze those M' peezes paper to conceal ze crack. I did think the couleur harm'nize so well with the wall paper. Where I get them from? Ah, yes, I remem' ver' well. One day M'sieur Morin, he come at my house—thass 'bout one mont' before he shall die—thass 'long 'bout tam he promise fo' invest those money fo' me. M'sieur Morin, he leave those M' peezes paper in those thass, and say ver' much 'bout money thass hard for me to ond-staa. Mais I never see those money again. Thass ver' wicked man. M'sieur Morin. H'what you call those peezes paper, M'sieur Robbins—bon?"

Robbins explained.

"There's your twenty thousand dollars, with coupons attached," he said, running his thumb around the edge of the four bonds. "Better get an expert to peel them off for you. Mister Morin was all right. I'm going out to get my ears trimmed."

He dragged Dumars by the arm into the outer room. Madame was screaming for Nicolette and Meme to come observe the fortune returned to her by M'sieur Morin, that best of men, that saint in glory.

"Marsy," said Robbins, "I'm going



"Is This a Grimm's Fairy Tale, or Should I Consult an Oculist?"

ordered brain to propitiate the saints, and pave the way to his own selfish glory?

That afternoon, at five minutes to three, Robbins entered the chapel door of the Little Sisters of Samaria. He saw, in the dim light, a crowd of perhaps a hundred people gathered to attend the sale. Most of them were members of various religious orders, priests and churchmen, come to purchase the paraphernalia of the chapel, lest they fall into desecrating hands. Others were business men and agents come to bid upon the reality. A clerical-looking brother had volunteered to wield the hammer, bringing to the office of auctioneer the anomaly of choice diction and dignity of manner.

A few of the minor articles were sold, and then two assistants brought forward the image of the Virgin.

Robbins started the bidding at ten dollars. A stout man, in an ecclesiastical garb, went to fifteen. A voice from another part of the crowd raised to twenty. The three bid alternately, raising by bids of five, until the offer was fifty dollars. Then the stout man dropped out, and Robbins, as a sort of coup de main, went to a hundred.

"One hundred and fifty," said the other voice.

"Two hundred," bid Robbins, boldly.

"Two-fifty," called his competitor, promptly.

The reporter hesitated for the space of a lightning flash, estimating how much he could borrow from the boys in the office, and screw from the business manager from his next month's salary.

"Three hundred," he offered.

"Three-fifty," spoke up the other, in a louder voice—a voice that sent Robbins diving suddenly through the crowd in its direction, to catch Dumars, its owner, ferociously by the collar.

"You unconverted idiot!" hissed Robbins, close to his ear—"poor!"

"Agreed!" said Dumars, coolly. "I couldn't raise three hundred and fifty dollars with a search warrant, but I

tions of the past services of the two young men in her behalf.

"You must sit by those table," she interposed, as they were about to drop into their accustomed seats. "Thass so, boys. But, no. I mek you come at this room, like my tres bons amis. Yes, I goin' mek for you myself one ansette and one cafe royale ver' fine. Ah! I lak treat my fen' nize. Yes. Plis come in this way."

Madame led them into the little back room, into which she sometimes invited the especially favored of her customers. In two comfortable armchairs, by a big window that opened upon the courtyard, she placed them, with a low table between. Bustling hospitably about, she began to prepare the promised refreshments.

It was the first time the reporters had been honored with admission to the sacred precincts. The room was in dusky twilight, flecked with gleams of the polished, fine woods and burnished glass and metal that the Creoles love. From the little courtyard a tiny fountain sent in an insinuating sound of trickling waters, to which a banana plant by the window kept time with its tremulous leaves.

Robbins, an investigator by nature, sent a curious glance roving about the room. From some barbaric ancestor, madame had inherited a penchant for the crude in decoration.

The walls were adorned with cheap lithographs—florid labels upon nature, addressed to the taste of the bourgeoisie—birthday cards, garnish newspaper supplements and specimens of art-advertising calculated to reduce the optic nerve to stunned submission. A patch of something unintelligible in the midst of the more candid display puzzled Robbins and he rose and took a step nearer, to interrogate it at closer range. Then he leaned weakly against the wall, and called out:

"Madame Tibault! O, madame! Since when—oh! since when—have you been in the habit of papering your walls with five thousand dollar

on a jamboree. For three days the esteemed Pic will have to get along without my valuable services. I advise you to join me. Now, that green stuff you drink is no good. It stimulates thought. What we want to do is to forget to remember. I'll introduce you to the only lady in this case that is guaranteed to produce the desired results. Her name is Belle of Kentucky, twelve-year-old Bourbon. In quarts. How does the idea strike you?"

"Allons!" said Dumars. "Cherchez la femme."

ELECTRIC LIGHTS ON FARMS

Morning Chores Are Done in Kansas by the Aid of Electricity—An Up-to-Date Sod House.

Within ten years electricity will light a majority of the farm homes and country schools and churches of Kansas, it is predicted. Farm homes lighted with electricity are now numbered by hundreds.

With the general use of the gasoline engine this has been made possible. Electric light and power companies in several of the cities are also making plans by which they can supply farmers with current from their trunk lines.

A notable case of this sort is found at Manhattan, where the power for electric generation is furnished by a dam on the Big Blue river, four miles from the city.

The current generated is used for electric lighting and street car purposes in the city of Manhattan, and farmers living near the trunk line are using it in their residences, barns and feed lots. In the early morning hours, when the farmers feed and care for their stock and do the milking, electric lights are found to be very useful.

In a rich farming community ten miles north of Atchison the farmers have decided to have an electric light plant of their own. They will build a

small power house where current will be generated and from which it will be carried into their homes. Fifteen families will share in this modern system of lighting.

Several farmers living ten miles west of Atchison have small dynamo on their farms providing electric light for their homes, barns and dairy buildings.

Recently the town of Troy, forty miles north of Atchison, contracted for light from the Atchison plant. A trunk line wire was stretched between the two places, and now twenty-five farmers along the route are connecting their homes with this trunk line.

Near Garden City, which a few years ago was in the center of the great American desert, there are farms where all the buildings are made of cement concrete and each is lighted with electricity generated by a gasoline engine on the place.

The early pioneer way of living and the modern system are blended on one farm. A farmer is still living in a sod house built a quarter of a century ago. He is constructing a new and up-to-date home in which he has installed a gasoline engine with which to generate electricity for lighting.

He will not move out of the old sod house until March next because of its warmth and comfort in winter, but he is enjoying electric lights in that primitive dwelling. It is believed this is the only instance in which a sod house has been lighted by electricity.

In the natural gas regions of south-eastern Kansas the electric light is cheaper than gas.—New York Sun.

IN THE MATTER OF DREAMS

Writer Rebels Against Universal Dictum That They Must Never Be Related.

In the house in which I was brought up, there was a rule that dreams should not be told at the breakfast table—a rule which, to my mind, robbed the meal of its only possible interest. I still remember an impression of the lawn matted with yellow lions which I desired particularly to share. The table was a large one, seating three generations, and I gained the idea that was on account of the prophetic character of the dreams of a certain great-aunt that the prohibition was so rigorously enforced. But I know better now. We were forbidden to tell our dreams because dreams—even more than the love of William Blake—"never may be told." They are among the incommunicable experiences. Just as a young painter is taught not to portray a luminary on canvas, so a child must be taught not to describe its dreams. Better relate the dulllest true story than the most thrilling dream. Is it that our audiences are so in love with reality? Is it that the isolation of a dream, which may never be shared nor re-acted, leaves the listener's egotism cold? I do not know, but at the mere words "I dream," you may see your auditor's attention dissolve—neither at his will nor your own—like mist before the sun.

Now, is not this strange, when you consider how deeply dreams color the days of even the sanest of us; how it dreams we commune with the dead, love strangers, marry our enemies, fight and die; have, in short, all the adventures of life in its most poignant moods? Yet not even our nearest and dearest will lend us their ears.

Do we merely need more art? Must we seek only some method to hold that dissolving attention until the full radiance of the vision can be sketched out? Or must we all improve in a sort of psychological imagination? Or is it, as I am inclined to think, that something inherent in the experience itself makes it remote, and that as we must die alone, so we must dream alone too?—From "Point of View," in Scribner's.

Killed Limit of Deer on One Shot.

In the recent deer hunting season in Michigan at least three Upper Peninsula men were successful in filling their licenses as the result of a single shot. Sheriff Turnbull of Lucon county was one of these. Two deer were standing together. The sheriff fired at one, the ball passing through its body and killing the other animal also.

Paul Laabs, Sagola, Dickinson county, found two bucks engaged in a battle. A shot from Laab's rifle killed the spikehorn and the other was so weak from the loss of blood that it expired as soon as released.

Professor Hill, superintendent of schools at Crystal Falls, is the third man who bagged two deer with one shot. One of his trophies was a dead deer, however. The animals had been engaged in a battle, during which their antlers had become interlocked, and one of the combatants was dead. Professor Hill shot the living animal.—St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

Rather Good to Have Around.

Any kind of a woman in the office would be a nuisance, but a young woman who kept a powder box, a cold cream jar and a bottle of violet water on her desk among the typewriter supplies and copying ink was an utter impossibility that ought to be encouraged to look for a more congenial job. said the baker's dozen of men who have had their own way in that office for five years; but when, with the first freezing of the steam pipes corks stuck like glue to ink and mullage bottles every time they happened to be corked up and the young woman came to the rescue by simply smearing some of her cold cream over every cork so it would stand in the bottle for a month without sticking, the men said maybe a woman who knew practical little hints like that wasn't such a bad person to have around after all.