

**VIZETELLY'S SIXPENNY
SERIES OF AMUSING AND
ENTERTAINING BOOKS. XIII:
THE RED LOTTERY TICKET**

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Vizetelly's Sixpenny Series of Amusing and Entertaining Books. XIII: The Red Lottery Ticket by Fortuné Du Boisgobey

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FORTUNÉ DU BOISGOBEY

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ENTERTAINING BOOKS.*

XIII.

THE RED LOTTERY TICKET.

By FORTUNÉ DU BOISGOBEY.

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1887.

HENRY MORSE STEPHENS

BY
MRS. MARY
STEPHENS

THE RED LOTTERY TICKET.

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ONE day early in April, the month when the lilacs flower and when women begin to display light apparel, a cab could be seen crossing the bridge which spans the Seine between the Faubourg St. Germain and the Louvre, and which is known to the Parisians as the Pont des Saints Pères. The vehicle was going at a quiet trot, and it was driven by a jovial jehu, who hummed a song as he cracked his whip and jerked his reins. Both windows were down, and from each of them came a cloud of bluish smoke—the smoke of the cigars of two young fellows who were gaily chatting inside, and who, although they came from the so-called “Latin Quarter” of Paris, were quite unlike the students immortalised by Gavarni’s pencil. They were, indeed, dressed with careful taste, and displayed none of the questionable manners which may be acquired in the drinking dens of the Boulevard St. Michel. One of them, a fair-haired young fellow with soft blue eyes, was named George Caumont, and was the son of a Norman cattle breeder, who lived on his land, saving up his cash, and making his only child an allowance of three thousand francs a year, so that he might complete, in Paris, the study of law which he had commenced at Caen. The other, a dark young man with curly moustaches and a bold expression of face, was the son of a petty nobleman of Périgord, who had left him a heavily mortgaged estate with a somewhat high-sounding name. He was called Adhémar de Puymirol, and lived upon a small allowance made him by an aunt who wished him to become a doctor.

He and George Caumont had met shortly after their arrival in Paris, and their acquaintance had speedily become intimacy, for they had the same ambition and much the same tastes. They both regarded their present situation as a probationary one, hoping sooner or later to contract a brilliant marriage; and they governed themselves accordingly, merely attending the courts and the clinical lectures when they had nothing better to do, and just occasionally passing an examination in order not to discourage Papa Caumont and Aunt Bességes. But everything comes to an end, and with their relatives grumbling and their creditors barking loudly, there

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were days when the thought of the future filled them with dismay. Still, on this beautiful spring morning, everything seemed tinged with a roseate hue, and they even laughed at the enforced departure for the provinces apparently so near at hand. "Leave Paris!" said Adhémar, gazing at the scene around him. "Never, George; I would rather give lessons in anatomy to freshmen than go and bury myself in Périgord to doctor my aunt's farmers."

"And I," sighed George, "would rather act as a college tutor than devote the rest of my life to cattle breeding. We are at the end of our tether, unfortunately, and if we don't meet two rich girls before the close of the term, we shall be obliged to decamp, for Paris will be too hot for us."

"Ah, well, we will go to one of the watering-places where heiresses are met."

"You are always so confident!"

"That is the only way to succeed. If our friend Pierre Dargental had become discouraged, we shouldn't now be going to celebrate the close of his bachelor life at lunch. Dargental is no better than we are, and yet he has found a widow of title worth more than a million francs."

"And all he brings her on his side will be his debts—some three hundred thousand francs."

"Oh! in this part of the world, a man shrewd enough to obtain credit to that amount can aspire to anything—"

"Except to the hand of an honest woman," replied George. "There are some pretty hard stories about this Countess de Lescombat's behaviour after her first husband's death."

"Well, they say she accepted Dargental's offer of marriage before her period of mourning expired. She consoled herself a little too soon, perhaps, but that is a matter of no consequence, after all."

"All the same, I should much prefer a less wealthy and more innocent girl to a rich lady of rank, with a very doubtful reputation."

"But one can't always have one's choice in such matters. Dargental is about to enter a very wealthy set. He will introduce us to it, and we ought to succeed in finding what we want there. So it does not become us to find fault with him."

"Will any of his old flames be at lunch to-day?" inquired George.

"I believe that Blanche Pornic, the actress, is the only favoured one."

"She is very amusing."

"Yes; and thoroughly good-hearted."

The vehicle had crossed over the Place du Carrousel, and was now behind five or six others, which had formed into a line to pass through the narrow passage conducting into the Rue de Rivoli. "Five minutes to twelve!" exclaimed Puymirol, glancing at his watch. "They will be at table by the time we reach the Lion d'Or. Why doesn't this idiot of a cabman drive faster?"

"It isn't his fault. The block prevents him from doing so. There are at least half a dozen traps ahead of us."

As George spoke, he put his head out of the window, and saw that the passage would not be free for several minutes. Three or four pedestrians, tired of waiting, had turned to retrace their steps; and among them Caumont noticed a man wearing a broad-brimmed hat, pulled down over his eyes, and a full black beard concealing the lower part of his face. At a distance of ten paces behind him came two unprepossessing individuals, who seemed anxious not to lose sight of this bearded individual. Caumont rather lightly concluded that they were detectives watching the fellow, but as he had no personal interest in the matter he again ensconced himself in his corner and said to his friend: "Have a little patience. We shall soon move on." As he spoke, he turned, and failed to see that the bearded man rested his hand for an instant on the door of the vehicle, and then without glancing at the occupants, dropped something that fell upon Puymirol's boot.

"What is that?" cried Adhémar, "what scoundrel ventures to bombard us in this style?"

"I have no idea," replied George, and on hastily turning again, he caught a fresh glimpse of the bearded man, whose back only was now visible, for he had passed them, and was slowing proceeding across the Place du Carrousel. Just then the cab moved on, and in an instant the pedestrians were left far behind. "Whatever the article is it must have been thrown in by a man who just passed us," resumed George; "and he must have done so with extraordinary swiftness and dexterity, for his movement escaped my notice entirely."

Meanwhile Puymirol had picked up from the bottom of the cab a handsome pocket-book, which, with his friend's assent, he now began to open. "The man who threw that in here," said George, "must be a thief, who in his anxiety to escape arrest, and to get rid of the stolen article, dropped it into our cab. When pick-pockets find themselves in danger of capture, they very often resort to that device."

"Well," rejoined Puymirol, "at least there isn't the slightest vestige of a bank-note inside, as you can see for yourself. Nor are there any visiting-cards, nothing but papers, and not many of them. In this compartment there are some lottery tickets, just look: The Tunisian Lottery, the Amiens Lottery, and the Lottery of the Decorative Art Society. And here on the other side there are some letters."

"Letters!" repeated George. "So much the better. We shall perhaps find in them some clue that will enable us to discover the person from whom the pocket-book was stolen."

"You don't know whether it was stolen," remarked Adhémar. "Besides, who would think of stealing lottery tickets?"

"True, but it perhaps contained money, which the thief extracted before throwing away; besides, a letter is sometimes of great value to its writer."

"Hum, these ones were written by women. There are three of them—each in a different handwriting, and, strange to say, not one of them signed, not even with a Christian name. The owner of the pocket-book must have had uncommonly prudent sweethearts. I wonder why he kept these notes in this case?"

"Because he intended to make use of them at some future time."

"You think he was a blackmailer, eh? That's quite possible."

"That theory would at least explain the robbery. If the women in question knew that these specimens of their handwriting had fallen into our hands, they would be more easy in mind, for we don't know them, and it is not likely that we ever shall."

"We are not sure of that. Stranger things than that happen in Paris. But do you think it advisable for us to take the pocket-book to the lost property office at the Prefecture of Police?"

"No, I think it would be better to burn it with its contents."

"Why? I feel strongly inclined to preserve it. One never knows what may happen, and it would afford me infinite satisfaction to discover one of these unknown correspondents."

"Do so if you like, but I don't want to mix myself up in any such affair. I shall forget the matter, and I beg that you will never remind me of it."

"Agreed, on conditions that you say nothing about it to any one at lunch. There will be a parcel of chatterers present."

"You need have no fears of that. I will be as silent as a fish."

"All right, then. Here we are! I must put these letters out of sight," said Puymirol, and he stowed the Russian leather-case away in his coat pocket.

The cab had drawn up in front of the Lion d'Or restaurant in the Rue du Helder, and the two friends alighted, and asked for the room reserved for M. Dargental's party. The head-waiter replied that the gentleman referred to had not yet arrived, though he had ordered lunch to be served at twelve o'clock precisely; and he then led the friends to an apartment where they found two people waiting. One of them was a pale young man, about twenty-eight years of age, as phlegmatic as a Scandinavian, and as dissipated as a Russian. Although always ready to drink, to play cards, and to spend his nights in bad company, he never laughed and rarely smiled. A good-hearted fellow, however, and popular in the set he mingled with. His name was Charles Balmer, and he was afflicted with the belief that he was dying from consumption. Beside him in the private room sat Blanche Pornic, the actress, Dargental's old flame. Tall, and lithe of form to a degree that had won her the surname of the Reed, she was very charming, with her pale golden hair, her brown eyes, sparkling with mischief, her regular features, her graceful movements, and her silvery voice—a voice that went straight to one's heart. When Puymirol and Caumont arrived she and Balmer were complaining of Dargental's non-arrival, and after some comments had been exchanged concerning his delay, Blanche exclaimed:

"We have given him quite enough grace. Come, Balmer, ring, and tell them to serve us."

"Nothing would please me better," exclaimed Balmer. "I am as hungry as a dog."

"That is a good sign for a sick man," remarked Puymirol.

"By no means. What, can it be that you, a medical man, are ignorant of the fact that consumptives eat like ogres?"

"That is all bosh; besides, you are no more a consumptive than I am."

"I haven't more than two years to live, as I know perfectly well. If you wish to satisfy yourself on the point, you only have to examine my lungs."

"No, no," cried Blanche. "This is no hospital, and you disgust me with your medical talk. To table, gentlemen! I will sit opposite Dargental. He isn't here, but I will imagine that he is. Caumont may take a seat on my right, and Puymirol on my left. And now let us partake of the funereal repast."

"Funereal is the very word," said Adhémar. "The invitations we received had mourning borders."

"And the bill of fare also," chimed in George.

"Pierre made a great mistake," remarked Blanche; "such jokes always bring bad luck."

"The fact that he hasn't come is sufficient proof of that. I wonder if he has broken a leg."

"No, indeed! Dargental is too lucky to meet with any such accident. His noble betrothed must have got wind of this breakfast, and have forbidden him to attend it."

"In that case, he would, at least, have warned you."

"Do you regret his absence?" asked Blanche, with a glance at Puymirol.

"How can I when I am near you?"

"Nonsense! you always will be a provincial. Confine your attention to these oysters. They are delicious, and this Sauterne is of the best quality."

This preliminary chat was soon interrupted by the lively clatter of knives and forks, and the tinkling of glasses. All the gentlemen of the party ate and drank heartily, but Blanche, despite her commendatory words, did not seem inclined to finish her oysters, and only just moistened her lips in the Château Yquem. "What is the matter with you, Blanche?" cried Balmer, between two mouthfuls.

"I have seen you eat with a much better appetite. Is Pierre's marriage the cause of this falling off? You must have been expecting it for several months, however."

"I was so well prepared for it that I myself urged him to take the step. And as for being angry, that can hardly be, as I came expressly to lunch with him. He no longer cares for me; well, no matter, I can only rely on his wife to avenge me. She has already given conclusive proofs of her ability in that direction."

"Indeed?" inquired Balmer, with an air of pretended innocence.