

“An Awkward Fix.”

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.



“WHEREVER CAN CHARLOTTE BE?”

“CONFOUND it! Wherever can Charlotte be?”

It is M. Chapoulot who speaks, and, as the words show, M. Chapoulot is out of humour. Ordinarily M. Chapoulot is as good-tempered and easy-going as one would expect in a man of sixty, who, having been, like John Gilpin in his day, a linen-draper bold, has in good time retired to enjoy a modest competency in repose. Your wealthy London tradesman, now, who has grown rich beneath the shadow of St. Paul's, if he retires at all before death or disease puts him suddenly *hors de combat*, flies off to spend his fortune at Brighton, or Bath, or Cheltenham—anywhere rather than in the great Metropolis where he has made it. But M. Chapoulot, like the true Parisian he is, will never desert his Ville Lumière, and has retired no farther than from the bustle of the

boulevards to the more peaceful Rue de la Trocadéro.

There he now lives with his only daughter Charlotte and an old faithful servant of the family, and it is the former whom he is at this moment impatiently awaiting.

It is dinner-time with the Chapoulots, who dine at six. One might see it by the snowy table-cloth, the neatly rolled serviettes with their little ivory rings, the plates, the glasses, and there, lifting its head in sovereignty over all, the tall wine-bottle with its *petit blanc vin*, which is to the Parisian what tea and coffee, and beer, and all the beverages of the day are to the average Englishman.

M. Chapoulot always begins his dinner with punctuality, but he has never begun it without Charlotte. And Charlotte comes not. Five minutes past six, and M. Chapoulot's impatience becomes annoyance; ten minutes, and it is even anger; a quarter past, and he

is furious. Hunger, they say, will tame a lion, but it will none the less ruffle the equanimity of a saint. Wherever can Charlotte be? She has gone this afternoon to take her music-lesson in the Boulevard Barbese. She goes three times a week, and always returns in ample time for dinner. Twenty past, anger begins to give way to nervousness; five-and-twenty, it is alarm; half-past six and no Charlotte, M. Chapoulot is trembling with anxiety. Hurriedly he summons the old servant, asks for his hat and boots; he will go out himself and see whatever may have happened.

But suddenly there was a merry little rap at the door, and Charlotte enters. No evil can have come, for there she stands in the doorway, smiling, radiant, in all the ease and grace of *la petite Parisienne*.

"Oh! papa—I—"

But M. Chapoulot's fear gone, his impatience again usurps supremacy, and reassured about the safety of his daughter, he begins to feel anxious for the flavour of his dinner.

"Come to table first. You can tell me while eating. I shall understand better then."

"Oh! but, papa! you don't know. I have had an adventure!"

"An adventure!" exclaims M. Chapoulot, starting from his seat, and dropping his spoon into the soup upon which he has already commenced.

"Yes, papa! an adventure in the omnibus with a young man."

"The omnibus—with a young man! *Parbleu!*"

"But with a young man *comme il faut*, papa, I can assure you."

"You ought to know, Charlotte, that a young man *comme il faut* has no adventures, above all in an omnibus. Whatever do you mean?"

"It is very simple, papa. You need not make such a cruel face. I had forgotten my

purse. That is a thing which happens often enough——"

"Yes, yes; especially to those who haven't got one. Go on."

"I never discovered it until the conductor held out his hand to take my fare. What could I do? What could I say? I should be taken for a pauper—for an adventuress, perhaps. I was crimson, I was pale, I felt that I should faint; when, happily, a young man who sat next to me gave the conductor a piece of silver, saying, 'Take for two.' This gentleman, seeing my embarrassment, had kindly paid for me."

"Well, miss, you have done a nice thing. Accept six sous from a stranger! You had better have explained to the conductor, to the driver, to all the company. But people should not forget their purses—I never do.

And now, how will you return his money? You will never think of keeping it?"

"I have his card, papa: M. Agénor Baluchet, clerk at the Ministry of——"

But papa, without hearing another word, has snatched the piece of paste-board from her hand, exclaiming:—

"What? This gentleman, not content with insolently lending his six sous, has had the impudence to force his card upon you into the bargain! He is a very scoundrel, your young man *comme il faut*."

"But, papa, I could not return his money if I did not know his address."

M. Chapoulot has not a word to answer to this ingenuous argument, but, with a gesture of the intensest irritation, throws down his serviette upon the table.

"It is written that I shall not dine this evening," he says to the old servant. "Find me a cab at once. I am going to restore to this Agénor his six sous immediately, and to tell him a few truths as well."

"But, papa, that will be ingratitude. You must remember that this young man has saved your daughter from *un faux pas*."



"AN ADVENTURE!" EXCLAIMS M. CHAPOULOT.

"*Un faux pas!* He has rather led you into one. But, silence, miss! I am not going to receive lessons, above all lessons in memory, from a silly girl who forgets her purse."

M. Chapoulot has taken his hat, and looks even more enraged than ever.

The old servant comes back. "A cabman is at the door, but he will only agree to a single journey."

"Oh! that will do. I can easily find another to return."

And M. Chapoulot goes out in furious haste, while Charlotte timidly confides to the sympathizing servant that she knows even more of the young man than she has dared to say. For a month past he has regularly travelled in the same omnibus, and she has noticed that he has noticed, etc., etc.

Agénor, in his bachelor apartment, sits thinking over his experience of the evening, and vowing he will not wash until the morning the hand that had been touched by the dainty fingers of Charlotte when she received the card.

Suddenly a sharp rap at the door, a violent opening, and a stout gentleman, out of breath, his hat upon his ears and cane in hand, breaks in upon his dreaming.

"Monsieur!" exclaims the invader, "your conduct is scandalous. You are not worthy the name of a French gentleman. An honest man would never take advantage of the embarrassment and inexperience of a young lady. To profit by the absence of a father and a purse, to offer your money—and your card into the bargain—to an unprotected girl, it may be a good investment, but it is a bad action. I have brought you your six sous again, and would have you to know, sir, that, as for my daughter and myself, we wish to have nothing to do with you."

And the stout gentleman, trembling with his vehemence, puts his hand into his pocket to get the money, when, before Agénor has time even to recover from his bewilderment, a new actor enters upon the scene. It is the cabman, all furious, with an oath upon his lips, and brandishing his whip in a threatening manner.

"Eh! you! What do you mean? You engage me for a single journey. I tell you I cannot stay. You even order me to hurry. And then you jump from my cab like a madman, and rush in here without a word. None of that for me. I have only one thing to ask. Pay me my money quickly, or——" And the whip goes round again more emphatically than before.

Agénor understands nothing of it. But the stout gentleman, who has searched vigorously in all his pockets, becomes suddenly pale, then red, then redder still, then crimson, then violet. He is silent in stupefaction a minute, and then, in answer to a more vigorous demand from the cabman, he manages to falter:—

"I have—forgot—my—purse!"

"Oh, yes! I know," cries the enraged *cocher*. "I have seen that dodge before. You needn't try it on with me. Come along! you shall tell your tale at the police-office." And he begins to drag away by the shoulders the unfortunate Chapoulot, who is ready to fall into an apoplectic fit.

But Agénor, a true providence for the family, draws from his pocket the necessary sum, and dismisses the driver.

"You will allow me, sir," he says to M. Chapoulot, who, all at once understanding that it is possible to forget one's purse, and that of all friends a friend in need is one indeed, can only reply with a smile:—

"Monsieur—M. Baluchet, I believe—thirty centimes for the omnibus and one



"MONSIEUR! YOUR CONDUCT IS SCANDALOUS."

franc seventy-five for the cab, that makes forty-one sous I owe you. If you will be good enough to dine with me this evening, we will settle our affairs at once. As an old business man, I like not outstanding debts. Besides, ready reckonings always make good friends."

A quarter of an hour later the servant puts a third plate upon the table

in the Rue de la Trocadéro. A month later there is a still larger party, when the wedding of Charlotte and Agénor is celebrated. And M. Chapoulot will often say to those who care to hear him:—

"Beware of borrowing, oh! fathers of families. *C'est un faux pas*. I made once a debt of forty-one sous, and could only repay it with a dowry of twenty thousand francs."



"YOU SHALL TELL YOUR TALE AT THE POLICE-OFFICE."