

## A Brilliant Story of Student Life in Paris



## MISADVENTURE

A ROMANCE OF THE LATIN QUARTER OF PARIS--WHERE ART, LOVE AND POVERTY GO HAND IN HAND. BY ONE OF THE CLEVEREST MODERN WRITERS OF SHORT STORIES: PERCIVAL GIBBONS

FROM where he watched upon the opposite side of the street, Guiseard, with his black coat folded romantically about him and his slouched hat pulled low, marked the lights at last go out in the top-floor windows where Bates had his rooms. He sighed with the patient relief of a man who sees a long vigil draw to its close; he had been watching for full a quarter of an hour. He waited yet to give Bates time to descend the five flights of stairs and stepped back to the ambush of a doorway as at length that American citizen came forth from the house and swung away down the street. Three minutes later Guiseard crossed the road and entered the building.

"Good evening, madame!" It was the concierge he addressed, knitting by candle-light in her tiny room, vast in her wooden arm-chair, and motionless as a lay figure but for her flitting fingers. "Monsieur Bates—is he at home?"

The fat, slow woman lifted her tyrannous and arrogant eyes at his cloak-draped figure and thin, conciliatory face.

"Gone out!" she replied, in tones harsh as a curse, and turned again to her knitting.

"Oh!" Guiseard "registered" disappointment; he had rehearsed this. "What a pity!" he seemed to ponder; then: "It is something I particularly wish him to receive to-night. You think, madame, I might just run up to his rooms and scribble a little note for him?"

"Please yourself!" she grated, and moved a huge shoulder in a shrug of disdainful indifference.

"Thanks, madame, thanks!" returned Guiseard, and got himself away to the stairs out of range of her scorn and hostility.

"And now," he said half-aloud, as he pushed open Bates's never-locked door, "and now the final act commences."

He was a smallish young man, meagre in the body, with a face under the wide-raked brim of his hat that flickered like a candle in the changing wind of his moods. He presented himself to himself and to all who would see with his eyes

as a poet—not merely a manufacturer of verses, but a poet on that grander, vaguer scale where genius starves and only mediocrity feeds full; and it was actually by verses, helped out by odds and ends of more prosaic journalism, that he contrived to live and maintain his posture. Outwardly he showed to the indifference of the Paris streets and cafés a cloaked and slouch-hatted figure, with a thin, self-conscious face and a promising beard, something like a reproduction in miniature of a bravo of melodrama.

He found the switch of the light, and Bates's untidy sitting-room sprang into view. The poet gazed round upon its comfortable disorder. It was all very familiar to him, for Bates was a hospitable soul; but now it merely required from him an attitude. He looked upon its details gravely, seeming to salute each one with his eyes; then lifted his head suddenly to the windows and the deepening evening beyond them. A pale star seemed to regard him with attention across the chimney-scape. He addressed it.

"Have patience!" he said. "I come!"

He had no difficulty in finding what he wanted; visitors to Bates's rooms soon learnt their way about them. The third drawer which he opened in the ramshackle bureau contained it—the big, blued-steel .45 Colt revolver which he knew Bates would not willingly have lent him.

Now, under the electric light, he had it to himself. He weighed it in his hands,

and was conscious of a curious thrill at the weight and mass of it. He lifted it so that the muzzle touched his forehead, and composed his face, for the inspection of the mirror, to a fitting intensity. Then he lowered it again.

"Not here!" he said. "Not here!"

He cleared himself a space among the books and papers on the table and sat down to gain a fresh emotion by writing the note to Bates. He threw back his cloak from his shoulders with the fine gesture of one who clears his sword arm for an encounter, thrust his hat from his forehead and sat to his writing.

"My friend Bates," he began in his minute decorative handwriting, "the hour is at hand, the hour of my release. How vain for you to mourn, since I do not mourn; rather, with clear eyes that begin to pierce already the mists that hem us in, I exult, I press on in haste; I am impatient to be one with my sisters, the stars, and my brother, the wind."

The last was a quotation from a poem of his own which had netted him twenty-one francs-foot-rule rates-only a week before.

"Briefly," he resumed, "it is that once again this life, this solitude in the peopled world which is my existence, and the home-sickness which overcomes me for Nirvana, that native land of my spirit, have prevailed. I am a stranger among you; I go. Lucille, too, recognises in me a foreigner."

He paused and reflected; Lucille, who sang at a *café chantant*, and had served to inspire much of his most esteemed work, had fallen foul of him the day before because of his failure to carry a trunk up three flights of stairs. Her manner of expressing herself had not been one that would fit into such a letter as this.

"For her, I lack the qualities that are familiar in men; those which I possess, when they do not chide her, are alien and unprofitable. I carry them back with me to my own country this night.

"For the precious loan of your revolver (not finding you at home, I

