

discovered for myself the weapon you would not have refused me) I thank you. You can recover it in the morning.

"My friend Bates, hail and farewell!"

He read the letter through again and approved it; he would have been hurt if anyone had told him he was enjoying himself. The last time he had decided on self-destruction, Lucille had dissuaded him, with tears and entreaties, most satisfactorily. If anything now chilled at all his pleasure in the situation, it was the dim inward sense, persistent through all his attitudinising, that this time there was no one to interfere with him.

He folded the letter, and, passing into the adjoining bedroom, pinned it to the turnover of the sheet. Then, pocketing the big revolver—it went with difficulty into his jacket pocket under the black cloak—he turned out the lights and departed.

The concierge, still knitting, glauced at him from her box as he passed out. To her indignant surprise he gave her a gentle, a comprehending, almost a tender smile of good-bye.

That dim inward sense of apprehension was stilled as he passed upon his way through the easy evening traffic of the streets; it was swamped and drowned out of his consciousness by a new impression. The folk who passed him unregarding, the big prosperous men who jostled him and the women whose eyes passed him over indifferently, how they would have stopped and turned and stared, how their voices would have ceased while he went by to break out behind him in a cackle of excitement and wonder, if they had known the truth! The big revolver was under his elbow as he went; the weight and the touch of it gave him a sense of vast superiority over these people who were content to go on living. They were the laity of the intellect; he was the initiate.

At the door of the café he was wont to frequent—one of the cafés, that is—he paused and reconnoitred. He saw that several of his acquaintances were there, and among them—yes!—the lean figure and long, shaven, horse-face of Bates! His new humour was irresistible; he must pass a final five minutes with these good people. Afterwards, they would remember it and be humble. He swung his cloak into position and entered.

At a near-by table two men looked up and nodded, and went on with their talk. Bates was one of a group of three, and Guiscard went across to them. Bates, a leathery cosmopolitan of thirty, nodded carelessly likewise, till something in the little poet's gait and manner, a complacency that was almost pompous, took his eye, and he broke into a slow grin.

"See who arrives," he said to his companions.

The poet stood over them. He, too, was smiling, with something of banter and condescension in his manner. "Good evening, messieurs," he greeted them. "You permit that I share your table for the brief time I have—which I have to spare?"

It was incense to him, their non-comprehension of his inner, his secret meaning; he shared it like a confidence with the big iron means of death that knocked

against his elbow as he held his cloak about him.

Bates was obtuse; he did not see that exquisite shade which the poet conveyed, that shade of one on the brink of the here and the hereafter.

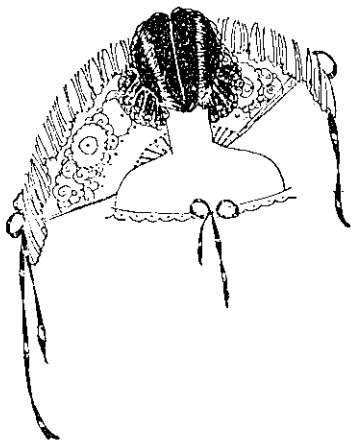
"Naturally," he said, his long man-of-the-earth's face widening in another infuriating grin. "Sit here for ten years, if you like, Gaston. We're leaving pretty soon."

The poet smiled again. "Me, too!" he said, as he chose a chair. "Sooner, perhaps, than you!"

He sat. "Have a drink?" invited Bates.

"A drink—why not? A stirrup-cup," replied Guiscard enthusiastically, his eyes rapt upon his host's face. "Me—I will pour out this libation to your friendship, dear Bates. I will drink—yes. An absinthe, then."

Bates gazed at him doubtfully. "You've had one or two already, haven't you?" he remarked. He beckoned the large blond waiter and gave the order.



THE poet sat above the apparatus of the drink, blissful, magnificent of spirit, superb in his secret knowledge of the brief future. It was charming to exhibit for the last time his proficiency in the exquisite art of the mixture—the arrangement of the filter-spoon above the tumbler with the flat tabloid of beetroot sugar in it, and then the drip-drip-drip of the cold water from the carafe, changing the cold stone-green of the absinthe below to shimmering hues of opalescence. In this art, too, there is scope for the soul of a poet, and he did it supremely conscious that they watched him.

"They will remember!" he boasted inwardly.

Bates, his long face dimly lit with the humour and kindness within, had to speak.

"You strike me, Guiscard," he said, his French failing a little as he translated literally the idioms of his thought, "you strike me, when you fix your drink, like a man practising the grip of the thirty-third degree. Why in hell don't you just dump the water in or else drink the dope straight, or else drink something that gives you less trouble?"

The poet concluded his alchemy and smiled again. Smiles came easily to him just then—wan, remote smiles whereof the suggestion found a repercussion in his vanity.

"Henceforth," he said complaisantly, "what I do will give me less trouble."

But Bates had the gross immediate mind. "What's the matter with you tonight?" he inquired crudely. "Grinning

an' giggling like a girl! Have you got a job, or what?"

His two companions, a sculptor of sorts and a decorative painter, laughed. Guiscard laughed also, and sipped from his now completed glass.

"I have an employment, it is true," he answered. Their eyes were on him, curious and amused; he was like a man who has prepared a deft practical joke. He relished their puzzlement, their doubt; the dim, inward sense was stilled. "I am provided for—yes, you will see!"

He drank again. The jewel-bued poison ran like rich blood through his arteries. The sculptor of sorts—he was really an architect of tombstones with a salary from the administration of Père-la-Chaise—turned to Bates.

"The animal has written a play," he said.

The eyes of the three of them turned with new interest on the poet. He, lifting his glass hither and thither, delighting in the play of lights through the swimming opal tints of the liquor, was aware of their regard.

"You been doing anything like that, Guiscard?" demanded Bates coarsely.

Guiscard made a motion with his glass equivalent to a hand which one waves. Everything was coming his way.

"Something like that," he replied in gentle, equable tones, and with the unusual smile which his companions found unbearable.

"There is—yes, there is a drama in question, it is true. But do not question me now, my friends, for I must not speak. You will hear of it in the morning. You will assuredly hear!"

HE was no longer aware of the big iron gun upon his hip, for his elbows were on the table. He had his mood and all about him was propitious to it; and the absinthe stood minister to his pose.

"Gosh!" said Bates, in the tongue of his native Massachusetts; and added, in French: "The pig is too proud for us already. Look at him snirking there!"

The poet had finished his drink; he rose and collected the slack of his cloak with a flourish.

"Proud!" He laughed—a strange, unfamiliar laugh. "I am proud, yes; but I am pitiful, too. I leave you, my friends; I leave you here, slaves to those small and ephemeral matters which engage and enchain you. But as for me, I go from your petty and squalid world. I renounce it."

He delivered himself of a gesture, wide, sweeping in its character, which should wipe their world away. They misunderstood it.

"Tiens!" exclaimed Bates disgustedly. "They've advanced him money. He's going to live on the Right Bank!"

The others were of the same opinion. "C'est évident! Cochon!"

Guiscard declined to reply. There was a large mirror upon the wall opposite to him, and he caught sight of himself, cloak-wrapped, hat slouched over one eye, a faint, indulgent smile upon his pale curved lips.

"Good luck to you!" he said tenderly.

"Oh, go to blazes!" replied Bates, sincerely.

Guiscard passed to the door, pacing soberly. He was very happy, though he did not know it. He was happy as a