

tragedian is happy who totters from the stage, weeping with his feigned sorrows while the audience thunders its applause behind him. At the exit, his gait of sober dignity caused him to fumble with the swinging doors; and the big revolver in his jacket pocket hit him on the funny-bone. He came forth to the pavement reeling, with his right elbow passionately clutched in his left hand.

A couple of minutes sufficed to restore him. He hesitated, standing close to a brilliant shop window, to let the pavement-throng flow past him. His appetite was whetted by the encounter in the café; but the impact of the revolver-butt upon his sensitive elbow had re-awakened that dismal, dim, inward sense. He needed at least one more effective audience. His mind paved the air resourcefully. The idea came.

"Of course!" He nearly said it aloud—it was so obvious. "Lucille—a last, slow, significant glance; she merits that—in spite of all! A souvenir I leave her—I, who depart to—er—to the eternal harmony of the spheres!"

It heartened him like another artistically combined absinthe; he flourished his cloak again across his bosom and his shoulder, resettled his hat at a considered angle, and, with a dark and dominating look upon those human worms who shared the street with him, he strode in the direction of the abode of Lucille.

"Five minutes with her—perhaps ten—whatever she says; for to-morrow the news will shatter her. And then —"

His thought halted, brought up short by the stone wall of reality. He pondered.

"She's a good child," he reflected. "She'll see reason!" He brooded doubtfully upon that. "She *must*! Or else, damn it, I'll have to do it!"

He was a little subdued as he came to the large apartment-house, a honeycomb of tiny flats, in which Lucille had her dwelling. The front door was already shut, which made it easier, upon the Paris system, for him to gain admission. He passed the concierge's lair with a growl that might have been the name of a tenant, and ascended the long narrow stairs with the gait of a man deep in thought.

Lucille's door stood open for the width of a hand. What was strange was that no light shone through it from within. With a hand uplifted, and a thumb poised over the bell-push, Guiscard paused to listen. It seemed to him—but he could not be sure—that someone moved within. He thought he detected a sound of light feet; then came unmistakably the noise of a piece of furniture knocked against and shifting. Then silence.

The poet reflected. "She is at home," he concluded, "since the door is open. But the light is out. Is she walking in her sleep, then? Or—is it another, some usurper of my place, who awaits her in the dark? We shall see into this!"

He waited only to fling his cloak into place, to drag his hat-brim formidably over his brow, then pushing the door gently open, he entered the little hall-way. It seemed to him, as he did so, that feet moved swiftly in the little salon at the other end of it and as suddenly were still. With three strides he was across the hall; his intimate hand, reaching around the

pillar of the half-open door, touched the electric-light switch; the cluster of lamps in the ceiling blazed; and, beetling his brows, setting his mouth to the shape of tired and tolerant irony, he stepped within.

"*Sacré*—" he got no further. The showy oath upon his lips tailed off to a weak scream as the other occupant of the room hurtled toward him like a shell from a gun. He had only time to see it and recognise, in heart-stopping horror, the character and quality of it—the tight-waisted, baggy-trousered, livid-faced *Apache*, the murderous, house-robbing vermin of the city—and the knife in its lifted hand. His swiftly apprehending eyes took in the drug-bleached face, the lips red as a wound, the cold snake's eyes of the creature even while it rushed, famished for murder, with the thirsty blade fore-thrust for the plunge. All this he saw in a horrid fraction of an instant,



as a man might see the lightning-flash that blasts him; the taste of death was salt on his lips; and then—

THERE was a rug in the middle of the waxed parquet floor; the robber's second bound carried him to the centre of it; his third should have brought him to the grapple. But instead, the rug slid under him; there was a marvellous second in which he seemed to the paralysed poet to exhibit the combined qualities of a contortionist and an acrobat; he circled like a shaving planed from a board; and, with a skull-jarring thump, he landed on his back and came skidding to Guiscard's feet. The feet departed from under Guiscard and he fell—literally and quite involuntarily fell—upon the robber. The long lean knife, jarred loose from the hand that grasped it, went skating across the glass-smooth floor.

The thief uttered two quite unprintable words in tones of mild remonstrance and surprise; but there was nothing mild in the manner in which he grappled with the poet. From a living projectile he turned without a moment's interval to a human octopus, all tentacles and venom. He was as flimsy as a paper doll, as staunch as a piece of string; there was nothing to him but desperation and dope; and he fought like a pronged snake. His horrible hands, that seemed as great as shovel-blades upon his pipe-stem wrists, tore and gouged and struck; he battled with his feet like a wild cat that strikes

to eviscerate; the poet saw his blood-red lips writhe back over his teeth as he wormed in towards the neck to bite and worry. He was vile and dangerous and shuddersome as a venomous reptile.

GUISCARD, every nerve outraged and unstrung, was scarcely aware that he fought; he only knew that he screamed. He tried to decant his forces and his terror into yells, into articulate shrieks that should arouse the *Quartier* and bring help. His brain rang with the noise he thought he was making; but actually he uttered only occasional gasping yelps, while all that was instinctively resistant in him, all the atrophied battle-capacity of his body, was surging at his plunging, writhing antagonist. He had fallen squarely on top of the other, and thereby squeezed most of the wind out of him like a trodden bladder at the very onset; doubtless it was to that, in the first place, that he owed his salvation. And then, though there was not much of him, there was actually less of the thief; and as he squirmed and slapped, he chanced upon a telling blow or two.

The thief's dreadful hands, with fingers hard as claws, were for ever scratching about his neck and face. A stiff thumb jabbed about his cheeks, groping for his eyes; he knew in terror what it felt for as the cruel nail of it tore and scraped his skin. Still windmilling with all four limbs, he tried to tear away; the thumb, plunging blindly, took him squarely in the mouth.

Then, reaching down the ages with a ghostly hand, some ancestor, some remote progenitor far back in the scale of evolution, nudged into action what may—who can tell?—have been a family trait of the neolithic Guiscards. As the thumb, hard and hurtful, bit him upon the lips he opened his mouth and received it, clamped down his teeth upon it, and held on.

"Let go!" yelled the thief. He had not uttered a sound, save the two unprintable words, up till then. "Let go! Aaow! Help! Let go! H-e-e-elp!"

He, at any rate, was not uttering feeble windy yelps; he screamed like a woman. "H-E-E-ELP!" he howled in a high, piercing treble; and Guiscard, coming to himself with this encouragement to his prowess, held on the tighter. The howls bore him testimony.

Then, it seemed to him, there were other sounds—squeaks and wails. Out of a corner of one eye he was aware of Lucille, newly returned to her domesticity, staring at the arrangement on her salon floor with eyes of crazy amazement. And on the heels of her there came the help which no one desired more than the thief.

And presently, after explanations and congratulations, the police led the sobbing prisoner away. And Lucille—

"To think," she said tearfully, "that I should have reproached thee for thy weakness! Oh, Gaston!"

IT was very little after the hour of that triumphant reconciliation that Bates, having climbed into his bed, drew the sheets up around his neck and promptly threw them off again.

"Now what the—?" he began, and completed the phrase as with one hand he rubbed his neck where the poet's pin had

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