

## MISADVENTURE

(Continued from page 21)

lacerated it and with the other detached the note which it held attached to the bedclothes.

He read it through twice, arose, went into his sitting-room and verified the absence of the revolver. Then he grinned and returned to bed.

At a decent hour next morning he presented himself at Guiscard's door. Lucille, clad for the street, opened to his ring.

"Hul-lo!" exclaimed Bates. "You here, Lucille? What are you doing here at this time in the morning?"

Lucille gave him the cold supercilious look of the entrenched official who replies to a mere member of the public. She was a slim, gold-hued little thing, kissable as a baby, and her manner of austerity sat on her strangely.

"Me?" she answered coldly. "I look after our poor brave one, here. I go forth to obtain fresh dressings for his wounds."

"Eh?" Bates gaped at her with astonishment. "Wounds, did you say? But—"

From within came the voice of the poet, directing that Bates should be admitted. "But at once, my heart!" called Lucille in answer, and to Bates: "You are to go in, he says. Do not excite him."

The poet was in bed, propped up on a structure of carefully-arranged pillows. A bedside table had flowers and two medicine bottles on it and a breakfast tray. The everyday disorder of the room had been violently repaired; from a den and a home, it had been transformed into

a sick-room of the most approved and sanitary bleakness. But it was not at this miracle that Bates, halting abruptly in the door, stared in amaze.

"But how—?" he began to ask.

It was as though the little face of Guiscard looked at him through an intricate lattice, so liberally was it criss-crossed with strips of sticking-plaster. A bandage crossed his forehead diagonally and blotted out one eye; the other stared at the visitor as through a peep-hole. A thumb that had been clenched in an expert fist was now secured in a hand-splint and a sling. And yet, something like a restrained but rebellious smirk seemed to trickle through the wreck of the features and play about the scaffolding of plaster that upheld them.

"You must have loaded it with a keg of nails," said Bates. "Or—did it burst, or what? You aren't dying, are you, Guiscard?"

Lucille replied with onteries. "Dying? What a thing to say! Of course he is not dying, the poor little heroic one!"

"Well," said Bates, when presently he was able to speak, "when I found your note—by the pin you made it fast with—I didn't worry. I never dreamt you'd go and load the thing. Didn't imagine you even knew how to do it. What happened, anyhow?"

"There was"—the poet struggled for fluency through the meshes of the sticking-plaster—"there was, in effect, a little change of programme. Since it appeared,

finally, that Lucille here was not wholly indifferent to me—"

"My heart—my little brave one adored!" Lucille corroborated with outcries and kisses upon the islands of face that dotted the sea of plaster.

And presently Bates, alternately agape and strangling with suppressed laughter, got the story. It was a duet, changing from narrative mumbles through the lattice on the poet's face to the voluble and inaccurate details of Lucille.

"Well," said the American at last, "you've come out of it well, Guiscard. And if Lucille's satisfied, I guess you think it was worth your while. Still—" he grinned at the grotesque wreck on the pillow.

THAT running gleam of satisfaction played again upon Guiscard's countenance.

"The man," he said as carelessly as he could, "the thief was well known to the police, it seems."

"No doubt," said Bates.

The poet heaved an invalid sigh and commenced to turn over upon his side. Lucille hastened to aid him. But his unbandaged eye continued to rest upon Bates.

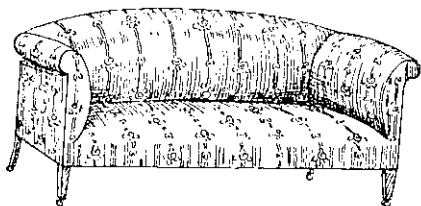
"And there was," he murmured weakly, "I am informed—this morning—there was a certain reward for his capture."

He laid his battered head upon his pillow contentedly.

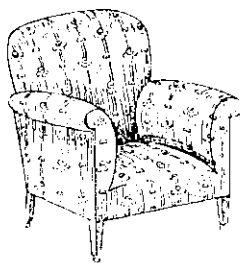
"You must go now," whispered Lucille. And Bates went.

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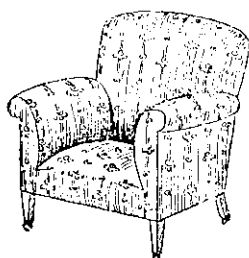
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