

## *An Adventure in Paris*

by Sylvanus Cobb, Jr.

IT HAD BEEN ARRANGED between George Barton and myself that we would visit Europe together; but when the time came a matter of important business kept me at home. George offered to wait until I could go, but as I knew that he had friends in Italy whom he was anxious to see, I urged him to I go, and he finally concluded to do so. But before he went I obtained from him a promise that he would write to me as often as he could, and be sure to give me a faithful account of all his adventures. I accompanied him to Boston, and saw him safely off in one of the Cunard steamers for Liverpool.

In due time I received a letter from my friend. He had reached London in safety. Six weeks were spent in England, and though his letters were interesting enough to me, yet they contained little calculated to interest others. At length I received a package from him, containing a letter occupying ten pages of closely written foolscap, and four newspapers. The letter was dated at Paris, and gave the particulars of an adventure so strange and startling that I have deemed it worthy of print. The first page of the document was devoted to an account of his passage from England to France, and having informed me of his safe arrival in Paris he proceeds:

“As soon as I reached the city I made my way to the *Hotel de Princes*, where I hoped to find some Americans who had been stopping there; but I was disappointed. They had left the day before, and I was the only American in the house; but I knew there were plenty of my countrymen at other places, and I resolved to hunt them upon the next day, and change my quarters. It was too late now to think of moving that day, and as I was I was a perfect stranger, and cared not to trust strangers, I concluded to remain in doors for the night, and employ my time in writing.

Accordingly I went to my room and arranged my *escritoire*, and sat down to my work. I had written an hour when someone rapped upon my door, and as I supposed it must be some servant or *attaché* of the hotel, I simply said ‘Come in,’ and upon this a boy entered, closing the door after him. He was quite young—not over fifteen or sixteen—and had a bright, intelligent look, though he evidently belonged to the lower grade of society. He glanced about the room with an easy, unconcerned look, and then approached my desk.

“Is this Mr. Barton?’ he asked in French.

I told him that was my name.—You know I can speak French almost like a native.

“Do you know Mr. Edgar Bunnell? He is a countryman of yours,’ pursued the boy.

“I did know such a man, having seen him frequently in our own city; and I furthermore knew that he had been stopping in Paris, as I had seen his name registered. So I replied that I had seen such a man.

“Well, sir,’ the youngster continued, ‘he is very anxious to see you. He was taken suddenly sick while walking alone in the Rue Saint Victor, and is now in the house of a perfect stranger. He said he had heard that there were Americans stopping here, and he hired me to come and see.’

“And what then?’ I asked.

“Why—does not monsieur see? The poor man is sick abed and he would see a friend—a countryman. I asked him if he was sure I could succeed, and he said if I found an American he would not fail to come. You are the only American I can find here. Will you go?’

“But where is the Rue Saint Victor?’

“Only a few steps from the river—it leads direct to the Halle aux Vins.’

“But how far from here?’

“Perhaps fifteen minutes’ walk, if you can walk as quickly as I can.’

“When was Mr. Bunnell taken sick?’

“This very afternoon.’

“How could I refuse to go? There was a countryman, in a strange land, suddenly stricken down, and he needed a friend. Of course I must go. I looked at the boy, and was sure he was honest. I told him I would go. Yet I would not venture out in such a city unarmed, and I went to my dressing case and took my pistol. It was one of Colt’s revolvers, and had six barrels. I knew they were all carefully charged, for I had examined them only a few hours before. I put this in my pocket, unseen by the boy, and then put on my hat and light overcoat. I had no thought of danger particularly, but I knew how many dangers might come unexpectedly in such a place. But, danger or no danger, I could not hesitate, for not on any account would I have had it said that a countryman appealed to me in his helplessness, and I would not listen.

When all was ready, I turned down the gas and bade the boy to lead the way. We were not long in reaching the river, which we crossed by the Pont Notre Dame, as I could tell by seeing the huge old cathedral looming up in the darkness above the murky gaslight. We were soon threading a labyrinth of narrow streets, and I had as much as I could do to keep my guide in sight.

“I can walk slower if monsieur wishes,’ said my companion, as he came nigh getting away from me in a crowd.

“No,’ I returned, ‘I can keep up. But how much farther have we to go?’

“Only a little way.’

“How far we had come, or what direction we were taking, was more than I could tell. All I knew was, that I was hurrying through a wilderness of houses, and that thousands of others were doing the same. Finally we entered a narrow, dark street, through which few people were moving, and when my guide stopped it was before an old building, the door of which was level with the street, and in one corner of the structure.

“‘They’ll expect me, so I won’t ring,’ he said, as he pushed the door open.

“We entered a long, vaulted hall, the only light to which came from a small lamp which stood within a niche by the stairs. The lamp the boy took, and then said, if I would follow him he would lead me at once to Mr. Bunnell’s room. We ascended the stairs, and thence passed through a narrow way which seemed to run half around the building in a circular course. I was beginning to get tired of this long travel, when the boy turned into a new channel, and commenced the descent of a flight of stairs.

“‘Hold on!’ I cried. ‘How is this?’

“‘O,’ the fellow replied, with perfect composure, ‘we had to come through the upper part because there’s other families live in the lower part of the front. It’s only a step now.’

“I confess I began to have some misgivings; but I would not turn back now, so down the stairs I went, and at the foot I found a low passage, which we followed for some dozen yards, when my guide stopped before a door, which he opened. I passed in after him, and saw him place his lamp upon a table.

“‘Mr. Bunnell is in there,’ he said, pointing to a door at the other end of the apartment. ‘You can go and see him while I go and call master.’

“Without waiting for a reply, he slipped out and closed the door after him. My first impulse was to follow him and call him back; but upon second thought I concluded to go in and see Mr. Bunnell. So I took up the lamp, and went to the door which had been pointed out. It opened easily, and I passed through, but saw no one. There was a little cot bed in one corner but no one was on it. The room was of medium size, with two doors, but not a window of any kind. The floor was of brick tiles, and the walls seemed to be of stone, or some hard cement. Where was Mr. Bunnell?

“Ah—perhaps he was in the next room, so I went to the other door, and as I approached it I saw there was a lock upon it, and that the key was in its place. I tried the latch, and the door was opened without the use of the key; but I had taken only one step beyond when I started back in horror. The place was not over eight feet square, and upon the floor lay a female form, with the face, pale and ghastly, turned towards me! The rays of my lamp fell strongly upon the marble-like, reflective features, and I saw that the eyes had started from their sockets, and that the tongue protruded from between the white lips!

“For some moments I was so horror-stricken that my senses seemed almost to forsake me; but when I did think, my first movement was to see if the girl was really dead. I stooped over the

form and touched it—and found it stiff and cold. She could not have been over seventeen, and had a face and form of considerable beauty. Her dress was rather poor, and her left forefinger bore the marks of the needle. Around her neck was a dark, livid circle, where she had been strangled! There was nothing else in the room that I could see then—no door, save the one by which I had entered, and no window.

“Of course my next object was to make my escape from this place. Whether I had been brought here to be robbed and murdered, or whether there was a plan on foot to fasten the murder of the girl upon me, I could not tell, nor did I stop long to reflect. I hurried out from the place, through the other two apartments, to the door by which I had entered the passage. I placed my hand upon the latch, but it would not give. I tried it again and again, but with no better success. The door was not only locked, but so stoutly and securely that I very soon made up my mind that I could not force it. It was made of solid oak plank, and was immovable.

“Up to this moment I had been timid and terror-stricken, but my temper became sharpened now. I felt just angry enough to desire a few moments of private interview with the party who had caused all this. Of course I knew the boy could be only an agent, or tool, and I hoped his master, or masters, would make their appearance. Do not think that I would have you believe that I was without fear: I was very fearful, for I knew my life was in danger. The very horrors of the place would have made any man fearful. But I was not tremendously so. I was calm and collected, and my little six-barreled friend gave me a vast deal of confidence.

“After listening a while, and hearing no sound, I resolved to go back and see if I could discover anything upon the person of the dead girl by which I could learn who she was. I was startled again when I saw her, for I never beheld another such ghastly sight. I have seen men killed—I have seen men shattered almost in pieces—but that pale, marble face, with the bursting eyes and protruding tongue standing out like fiend-marks to mar its beauty—and the place, and circumstances, too, conspired to render it horrible enough beneath the murky glimmer of my lamp.

“However, I stooped down and turned the body partially upon its side, and, in doing so, I hit the edge of the door, which swung into the room, and threw it almost to. At the same moment I saw a pocketbook upon the floor, which had been concealed by the flowing dress, and at once picked it up. It was well worn, and soiled, and I knew it to be the property of a man, and not of the girl who had died. It smelled rank of tobacco and garlic, and had surely seen some service. Upon opening it I found several old papers, but no money. Perhaps these papers might give me some light upon this dark subject. The first which I examined was a memorandum of some sort, but in such hieroglyphics that I could make nothing of it. The second, however, was of some import; and when I had thoroughly deciphered it I had light enough. The following is a literal translation of it:

“One body to Dr. M. de V.,	(Male)	40f.
“One body to Dr. S.,	(Female)	35f.
“One body to Dr. Z.,	(Female)	35f.

“Was it not plain enough now? The whole plot was unfolded to me as clearly as could be. I was to be made food for the dissecting knife of some studious doctor, and was already in the trap! And my body would be sold for forty francs! My soul knocked out—my wind stopped—and all for that paltry sum! My soul, what a price for a murder! But then the body-catchers might get some perquisites beside. Ah—yes—surely. I had over two hundred francs in gold in my pocket; and my clothes, and jewelry, and watch were worth over twelve hundred more. But they wouldn’t make much by the strangling of the poor girl, for her garments would hardly have paid for the trouble of getting them off. But—hark!

“I had just returned the ghostly memorandum to the wallet, and put the latter into my pocket, when I heard the outer door open. As I said before, I had nearly closed the door of the vault in which I stood when I turned the body over, and now I shut it entirely, being careful to make no noise, and placed my ear at the keyhole. In a few moments I heard the voices of two men in the adjoining apartment.

“‘Hallo—his light’s gone out,’ said one.

“‘*Hola! Hola-ho!* Monsieur, your countryman is here.’

“‘Is he on the bed?’

“‘No.’

“‘*Pardieu!* Is he gone? Didn’t the boy bring him here?’

“‘Certainly he did. Eugene could have made no such blunder.’

“‘He can’t have gone in THERE!’

“‘No—I locked the door myself.’

“‘*Peste!* There’s the key in the lock now. *Sacre!* He’ll know his fate!’

“‘Careful! Let’s see.’”

“The fellows stopped speaking, and I heard them advance toward the door of the vault. They stopped and whispered a moment, and I could make out the words, ‘*easy,*’ ‘*club,*’ ‘*rope,*’ ‘*hist!*’ and some other expressions, all of which went to prove that the two villains meant to dispatch me as quickly as possible. I held my pistol firmly and steadily, for my nerves were as immovable as were those of the dead girl at my feet. I heard a hand upon the latch—the door was pushed slowly open, and a lamp poked in.

“‘He isn’t here!’ said the man with the lamp, in a perplexed tone.

“‘Have we lost all that?’ cried the other, angrily.

“The first speaker had not entered far enough to peep into my corner when he spoke, but presently he put his head further in, and as his temple came within range, I sent a bullet through his brain, and with a single, gurgling gasp he fell forward at my feet. The second man hesitated but an instant, and leaped in with a heavy club raised ready for a blow. But he came upon a man prepared for him. My pistol was within six inches of his head as he turned, and as the cracking report of charge number two died away, he lay atop of his companion, with a bullet hole in the place of his right eye!

“I only stopped to see that both men were dead, and then, having seen that the four remaining barrels of my pistol were ready for use, I grasped it in my right hand, picked up the lamp with my left, and started from the horrid place. I found the doors open, or, at least, unlocked, and, without meeting a soul, I made my way to the street, being careful to take particular notice of the house. At the first respectable-looking shop I stopped, and hired a boy to conduct me to my hotel, which we reached a little after ten. Then I told the landlord of my adventure, and he went with me to the Prefect of Police, to which functionary I told my story over again. It was a happy discovery for him, for he told me the [sous-préfets] had been after that very trap for two weeks, having received reliable information that such a horrible den was in existence.

“I gave the name of the street, and a half-a-dozen officers conducted me thither, when I readily pointed out the house. We made our way to the vault where I had left the dead, and all three bodies were still there. But not a living soul could we find in the whole house. The boy had fled, and if others had been there, they had fled, too. The only thing to be found implicating anyone was the memorandum I had in my possession, and upon the strength of that six physicians have been arrested. The police are still upon the scent, and I think they have got a clue to the boy, as one of the sous-prefects has just been in to get a more thorough description of him from me.

“At first I wondered how the rogues could have found me so readily; but of course they could find my name upon the register, and see thereby that I was a newcomer. And from this register, too, they can easily learn all they wish. They are keen chaps. However, when the case comes to trial, I will give you all the particulars. And—you must make the most of this adventure, for I don’t mean to have any more such, if I can possibly avoid it.”

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