

Prize Story

No. 11.

The Dean's Watch

By John B. Williams, M.D.

The day before Christmas Day, my friend Wilfred, with his double-bass slung over his shoulder, and I, with my violin under my arm, were travelling from the Black Forest to Heidelberg. It had been snowing very hard, and as far as the eye could reach we could discover no trace of the path. The sharp cutting breeze whistled around with persistent monotony, and Wilfred, with his wallet flattened against his back, with the peak of his little cap drawn down over his face, and with his long heron-like legs extended, walked before me, humming some merry airs from the opera "Ondine." Occasionally he turned round to me and exclaimed:

"Comrade, play me the 'Robin Waltz;' I have a great desire to dance."

A peal of laughter would follow these words, and the brave lad would push forward again full of ardor. It was with great difficulty that I could follow him, for the snow reached my knees, and I felt that I was growing melancholy. Suddenly the heights of Heidelberg began to appear above the horizon, and we hoped to reach it before night, when we heard a horse galloping behind us. It was then about five o'clock in the evening, and the large flakes of snow danced about in the wind. The horseman was some about twenty paces from us. He checked his horse's speed, and glanced at us curiously from the corners of his eyes. We, on our part, also observed him.

Fancy to yourself a large man with red hair and beard, wearing a handsome three-cornered hat, and with his hands protected by gloves which almost reached to his elbows—some alderman or burgomaster with a large corporation. A handsome valise rested on the crop of his vigorous steed; in short, he was evidently a personage of some note.

"So, so, my lads," said he, drawing off one of his huge gloves, "you are in all probability going to Heidelberg, to play music?"

Wilfred cast a glance of displeasure on the traveler, and replied abruptly:

"Does it interest you sir?"

"Eh? Yes; I have good advice to give you."

"Advice?"

"Yes; if you like."

Wilfred increased his pace without making a reply. And, for my part, I noticed that the traveler had the appearance of a huge cat; the same ears widely separated, the same half-closed eyes, the same disordered moustaches, and the same tender and paternal air.

"My dear friend," he said to me, "frankly speaking, you would do well to retrace your steps."

“Why, sir?”

“The illustrious Pomenti of Novaro, has just announced in Heidelberg a great concert for Christmas. The whole town will be there, and you will not earn a kreutzer.”

But Wilfred, turning round to him, in a bad humor, replied:

“We care nothing for all the Pimentis in the world. Look at that young man; look at him well. He has not yet a particle of hair on his chin; he has never played except in the huts in the Black Forest. Well, this boy, with his long fair hair and his large brown eyes, defies all your Italian charlatan. His left hand contains all the treasures of melody, grace and suppleness. His right can wield the bow better than any living creature.”

“Really!” said the stranger.

“It is exactly as I say,” said Wilfred, beginning to run, and blowing his frozen fingers.

I thought he was only making fun of the traveler, who still continued to follow us. We continued in this manner for about half a league in silence, when the stranger, in an abrupt voice, exclaimed:

“Whatever may be your merit, return to the Black Forest. We have seen enough of vagabonds in Heidelberg without your increasing the number. I have given you good advice, especially under present circumstances. Profit by it.”

Wilfred, who was indignant, was about to reply to him, but he started his horse in a gallop, and in a few minutes was out of sight, and immense flocks of crows rose from the plain and appeared to be flowing the big man, filling the air with their clamors.

We reached Heidelberg about seven o’clock in the evening, and the first thing that struck our gaze were the magnificent posters of Pimenti on all the wall of the city, “Grand concert, solos, etc., etc.”

During the evening we met many musicians from the Black Forest, old comrades of ours, who engaged us in their troop. It was decided that we should share equally, and divide the profits after Christmas.

Wilfred hired for himself and me a chamber on the sixth floor in the little inn of the Pied-de-Mouton, situated in the center of Heidelberg, for which he agreed to pay four kreutzers a night. Properly speaking, it was nothing but a garret, but fortunately it contained a stove, and we made ourselves a fire in it for the purpose of drying ourselves.

While we were quietly drinking our wine and roasting our chestnuts, little Annette, the chambermaid belonging to the inn, with her red cheeks and rosy lips ascended the stairs, knocked at the door and threw herself in my arms, delighted to see me.

I had known this young girl for a long time, we came from the same village, and had played together when children.

“I have come to talk to you a little,” said she, seating herself on a stool. “I saw you enter the inn a little while ago, and I came the moment I was able.”

Then she began to prattle, asking me news of this and that one; in fact, of the entire village. I had scarcely time to reply to one question before she asked me another. In the midst of our conversation we heard the voice of the mistress of the inn, calling out below:

“Annette! Annette! Will you come down?”

“I am coming, madame. I am coming,” replied the poor girl, rising up in dismay. “She will strike me for staying away so long,”

she continued, advancing towards the door.

But just as she was about to leave the room she suddenly stopped.

“Oh,” she cried, turning round again. “I forgot to tell you something. Have you heard the news?”

“What news?”

“The death of the Rector of the University Zahn!”

“What is that to us?”

“Take care, take care if your papers are not in due form. Tomorrow morning at eight o’clock they will come and demand them of you. They are arresting everybody now, and have been doing so since the last fortnight. The rector was assassinated in his library yesterday evening. Last week the old Jew, Ulmet Elias, was also assassinated, some days before that the old midwife, Christiana Haas, and the jeweler, Seligman, were murdered. So, my dear Kaspar,” she continued in a tone of real friendly interest, “take care of yourself, and see that your papers are all in order.”

While she was yet speaking, the voice of her mistress was heard crying from below.

“Annette! Annette! Will you come down? Oh, you bad girl to leave me to myself.”

And the cries of the guests could also be heard calling for wine, beer, ham and sausages. Annette ran downstairs, exclaiming as she descended,

“The house must be on fire for madam to call out this way.”

Wilfred closed his door after her, and then, taking his seat again, we glanced at each other uneasily.

“This is singular news,” said he. “Your papers, I suppose, are all right?”

“Certainly.”

“So are mine. But three murders augur anything but good for us. I fear we shall do a bad business here. A great many families must be in mourning; besides, the annoyance of the police, the uncertainty—“

“Pshaw! You look upon the dark side of everything,” said I, interrupting him.

We continued to talk over these strange occurrences until past midnight. The fire in our little stove lighted up the angles of the roof, the little window with its three cracked panes of glass, the pallet, the little table and the worm-eaten floor. Every now and then a mouse, attracted by the heat, darted like an arrow along the wall. We could hear the wind roaring down the wide chimney. We both became silent.

Suddenly Wilfred, taking off his vest, cried:

“It is time to sleep. Put another log into the stove, and let us go to bed.”

“Yes, that is the best thing we can do.”

So saying, I drew off my boots. And ten minutes afterwards I was extended on the pallet, with the coverings drawn up close to my chin, with a block of wood for a pillow. Wilfred was soon asleep. The fire flickered in the stove, the wind blew with redoubled violence, and I in my turn fell asleep.

About two o’clock in the morning I was awakened by a strange sound. I thought at first that it was a cat running along the spout, but, listening attentively, my uncertainty was not long. Someone was walking on the roof!

I pushed Wilfred with my elbow in order to awaken him.

“Hush!” said he, pressing my hand.

He had hear as well as myself. The flame in the stove was just dying out, but it still cast a reflection on the decrepit walls. I was about to rise when suddenly the little window pushed open.

A pale face, with red beard and gleaming eyes, appeared at the opening, looking into the interior of the apartment. We were so startled that we had no power to utter a cry. The man first passed one leg then the other through the window, and descended into our garret with so much prudence that not a particle of sound was elicited.

This man, short, stout, with round shoulders, and with a face resembling that of a tiger of the watch for his prey, was no other than the person who had given us his advice on our way to Heidelberg. But how changed his appearance seemed to us then! In spite of the excessive cold weather he was in his shirt sleeves. He had nothing on but a pair of breeches, woolen stockings and a pair of shoes with silver buckles. A long knife, stained with blood, gleamed in his hand.

Wilfred and I thought ourselves lost. But he did not appear to see us, as our bed was in the shadow, although the flame in the stove had been reanimated by the cold wind blowing in from the window. He sat down on the stool and his teeth began to chatter in a strange manner. Suddenly his eyes were turned on me, his nostrils were dilated, and he looked at me for a whole minute. I seemed not to have a drop of blood in my veins. Then, turning towards the stove, he coughed hoarsely without a single muscle of his face moving. He then drew from his pocket a large watch and made a gesture as if he were looking what time it was, and then either from

absence of mind or some other motive, he placed it on the table. At last he rose up as if undecided what to do, looked at the open window, and then left the room by the door, leaving it wide open.

I immediately arose for the purpose of pushing the bolt, but I heard the man's footsteps creaking on the staircase two stores below. An invincible curiosity conquered my terror, and as I heard a window open which looked into the yard, I ran to the staircase window which also had the same view. The yard from this height was as deep as a well. A wall fifty or sixty feet high divided it in two. On the right of this wall were the back premises of a pork butcher, on the left those belonging to the inn. The top of this wall was covered with that rank vegetation which only grows in the shade. One end of the wall rested against the window which the assassin had just opened, and extended in a direct line to a lofty and dark-looking building which faced the Bergstrasse. As the moon was shining between some heavy clouds charged with snow, I saw all this at a single glance, and I shuddered when I saw this man escaping along the high wall, with his head bent forward and with his long knife in his hand, while the wind whistled around him in mournful cadence.

He reached the opposite roof and disappeared in a garret window.

I thought I was dreaming. I remained there a few moments, with my mouth half open, my chest bare and with my flowing hair rendered damp by the snow which drifted from the roof. At last recovering from my stupor, I reentered our apartment. I found Wilfred murmuring a prayer in a low voice, at the same time that he gazed on me with a haggard look. I put another piece of wood in the stove, and bolting the door, slipped on my clothes.

"Well?" asked my comrade, rising.

"We have escaped," I replied. "If that man did not see us, it was because God did not desire our death."

"Yes," said he, "yes! That is one of the asses sins of whom Annette spoke to us. Great Heavens! What a face! And what a knife!"

He fell back again on the pallet.

I drank at a single draught the rest of the wine which was left in the bottle, and as the fire again burned in the stove, and the chamber became warm again, and the bolt appeared to be secure, I regained my courage.

Still the watch was there. The man might return for it. The idea froze us with fear.

"What shall we do now?" Said Wilfred. "Our best plan would be to return immediately to the Black Forest.

"Why?"

"I don't intend to play the double-bass; arrange it as you please."

"But why? What obliges us to leave? Have we committed a crime?"

“Speak low—speak low,” he said; “that word crime alone, if anybody heard us, might hang us. Poor wretches like us only serve as an example to others. They would not inquire whether we had committed a crime or not. It would be sufficient that that watch is found in our possession.”

“Listen, Wilfred,” said I, “we must not lose our senses. I can easily believe that a crime has been committed in this quarter of the city during the night; it is, in fact, very probable that such is the case; but in such an event what ought an honest man to do? Instead of escaping he ought to assist justice, he ought—“

“But how? How assist it?”

“The most simple way would be to take the watch tomorrow to the chief-magistrate and relate to him all that has passed.

“Never! Never! I dare not touch that watch.”

“Very well. I will do it. Let us now go to bed and try to sleep as soon as possible.

“I have no desire to sleep.”

“Well, let us talk then. Light your pipe, and we will wait till daybreak. Perhaps there is already someone up in the inn; we will go downstairs if you like.”

“I would rather remain here.”

“With all my heart.”

And we resumed our places by the fire.

As soon as it was daylight I took the watch from the table. It was a very handsome one with a double case. Wilfred appeared to be reassured.

“Kasper,” said he, “after due reflection, I think it better that I should go and see the chief-magistrate. You are too young to attend to such a business. You would explain yourself badly.”

“Just as you like.”

“Yes, it would seem very strange that a man of my age should send a child.”

“Yes, yes, I understand Wilfred.”

He took the watch, and I was persuaded that it was his self-respect alone that urged him to such a resolution. He would have doubtless blushed before his comrades to have shown less self-respect than myself.

We left the garret in a meditative mood. When we approached the dining-room we heard the clinking of glasses and rattling of knives and forks. I distinguished the voices of some of our company.

“Suppose before we go out we take something to drink,” said I to Wilfred.

At the same time I pushed open the door to the dining-room. All our party was there; we were received with exclamations of delight, and they willingly made room for us at their table.

I saw little Annette there, as fresh and smiling as ever. The sight of her did me good. She gave me the best cuts of the ham and paid more attention to me than anyone in the room.

But in spite of the good breakfast I ate, the form of the murderer would from time to time pass before my eyes and make me tremble. I looked at Wilfred. He was quite meditative. It was eight o'clock when we were about to separate, when the door opened and three policemen entered. One of them advancing beyond the rest, exclaimed:

“Your papers gentlemen!”

Each of us hurriedly obeyed the order. But unfortunately Wilfred, who was standing near the stove, was seized with a sudden trembling. The practiced eye of the police agent, while he was pretending to read the papers, watched him attentively. Wilfred had the insane idea to try to conceal the watch in his boot, but before it reached its destination the police agent struck him on the shoulder and exclaimed in a jeering tone:

“You don't seem to be very much at your ease.”

Then Wilfred, to our great astonishment, became suddenly mute. He fell back on a chair pale as death, and Madoc, the chief of police, without any ceremony opened his clothes and drew forth the watch, with a sneering laugh; but the moment he had looked at it his face became very serious, and turning towards his agents, he exclaimed in a terrible voice:

“Let no one leave the room. We have caught the whole band. Here is the watch of the dean, Daniel Van den Berg. Quick, the handcuffs.”

We all of us felt an icy chill run through our veins. I felt that I was lost, and fell back on a bench near the wall. Whilst the police were handcuffing all my friends, I felt a little arm paused round my neck, and I seized the soft hand of Annette, which I pressed to my lip as a sign of farewell. But she seized me gently by the ear, and drew me softly to the end of the table, where I saw the cellar door open. I glided through the opening, and the door was closed after me.

I was scarcely at the bottom of the cellar when I heard the stamping of feet above, and a moment afterwards all was still, by which I knew that my poor companions had already been conveyed away. I then only heard the voice of the hostess complaining that her inn had been dishonored.

One can easily imagine my reflections during the day. Cowering under a cask, with my back bent, with my legs doubled up under me, I thought that if by chance a dog should come into the cellar—that if the hostess took a sudden fancy to draw the beer herself—if the cask should give out during that day and rendered it necessary to set up another one—in a word, that the least thing in the world would ruin me.

All these thoughts, and a thousand others, passed through my mind. In my imagination I already saw my friends hanging on gibbets and a flock of crows amusing themselves at their expense. My hair stood on an end.

Annette, not less troubled than myself, from excess of prudence, closed the door each time she ascended from the cellar. At last I heard her mistress cry out to her:

“Leave that door open! You are losing half your time opening and shutting it.”

The door was left half open, and from my hiding place I could see the tables surrounded by newcomers. I heard cries, discussions and histories without end of the famous band.

“Oh, the wretches!” cried one; “thank god they are taken! What a scourge to Heidelberg! No one dares to be in the street after ten o’clock. Trade has suffered terribly. But it is now at an end, and in a fortnight order will be fully restored again.”

“These musicians from the Black Forest are all bandits. They introduce themselves into houses under the plan of performing music; they observe the locks, chests, closets, points of entrances and exits, and then some fine morning the master is discovered with his throat cut, his wife massacred, his children strangled, the house pillaged from top to bottom, and the stable on fire, or something else of the same character. What wretches! They ought to be determined without mercy.”

“Everyone will go and see them hang,” cried the hostess. “It will be the happiest day of my life.”

“Had it not been for the dean’s watch,” said another, “they would never have been discovered. The watch disappeared last night; this morning Mr. Daniel Van den Berg notified the police of his loss. An hour afterward Madoc put his hand on the whole party. Ha! Ha! Ha!”

And everybody in the room laughed. Fear, indignation and shame made me tremble all over.

At last night came. A few drinkers alone remained at the table. I heard the hostess yawn and murmur:

“How I wish we could go to bed!”

A single candle only remained burning in the room.

“Go to bed, madame,” said Annette’s gentle voice. “I will remain up until these gentlemen leave.”

Some of the drinkers understood this hint and retired. There only remained one, who was stupefied with beer. The watchman making his round awakened him, and he in his turn, growling and reeling, left the house.

“At last,” I said to myself, “they are all gone. The hostess will go to bed and little Annette will soon deliver me.”

With this agreeable reflection I stretched out my cramped legs, when I hear the fat proprietress of the inn exclaim:

“Annette, go and shut up, and don’t forget to bar the door. I will go down in the cellar.”

It seemed that this was her usual custom, to see that all was in order.

“But madame,” said Annette, “the cask is not empty—it is not necessary for you—“

“Mind your own business!” interrupted the hostess, and I already saw the cancel shining on the staircase.

I had only just time to bend myself again under the cask. The old woman, bending under the vault of the cellar, went from one cask to another, and I heard her murmur:

“Oh, the hussy! How she lets the beer run! I will teach her to secure the spigots better! Did anyone ever see the like?”

I saw the light reflected on the humid walls of the cellar. I stopped my breathing.

Suddenly, at the very moment I thought the visit ended, I heard the fat woman heave a sigh—but it was such a deep and lugubrious sigh that I thought something extraordinary must have happened. I ventured a glance—and what did I see? The hostess, with her mouth half open, her eyes ready to start from her head, looking underneath the barrel where I lay concealed. She had perceived one of my feet, which projected from my hiding-place, and doubtless imagined that she had discovered the chief of the brigands, who was hidden there for the purpose of strangling her during the night.

My resolution was prompt. I rose up murmuring:

“Madame, in Heaven’s name have pity on me. I am—“

But without looking at me or listening to me she uttered terrible cries, and rushed towards the staircase as fast as her enormous corpulence would permit. I was seized with inexpressible terror, and caught hold of her dress, intending to fall down on my knees before her, but this only made matters worse.

“Help! Murder!” she exclaimed. “Oh, take all my money, but let me go. Oh! Oh!”

It was frightful. It was all to no purpose that I exclaimed:

“Madame, look at me. I am not what you suppose.”

But she was crazy with fear. She roared and screamed in such appalling tones that if we had been above ground she would have aroused the whole quarter. In this extremity, consulting only my own safety, I pushed her behind me, and reached the door before she did, and closed it in her face, taking care to adjust the bolt. During the struggle the light was extinguished, and the old woman was left in the dark. Her voice could only be heard faintly, as if in the distance.

Completely exhausted and overcome I looked at Annette, and her emotion equaled my own.

We had not strength to utter a word, but we listened to the old woman’s cries, which at last ceased. She must have fainted.

“Oh Kaspar!” said Annette, joining her hands together; “Oh, God! What have you done? Save yourself! — save yourself! You have killed her, then?”

“Killed her? I!”

“Make your escape. I will open the door for you.”

She raised the bar and I ran into the street, without even thanking her. But I was afraid, the danger was so pressing. It was horrible weather; not a star in the heavens, not a lamp lighted—and the wind and the snow! It was only after running half an hour that I stopped to take breath. And my fear can be imagined, when raising my eyes I found I was in front of the inn I had so lately quitted. In my terror I had made a tour of that quarter of the town—perhaps two or three times. My limbs grew heavy, and my knees trembled under me.

The inn, so deserted a little while ago, was now humming like a beehive; lights danced in the windows. It was doubtless full of policemen. Then, miserable, exhausted by cold and hunger, not knowing where to find asylum, I formed a most singular resolution.

“I can but die once,” I said to myself; “I may as well be hanged as to leave my bones to rot in the Black Forest.”

And I entered the inn, in order to deliver myself up to justice. Besides the policemen the chief magistrate was also there, accompanied by his clerk. Everything was in confusion, and scarcely any attention was paid to me, which immediately modified my resolution. I sat down in one of the corners of the apartment, behind the stove, in company with two or three men who had entered the inn through curiosity to see what was the matter. I called for a glass of wine and a plate of sauerkraut.

Annette nearly betrayed me.

“Oh heavens!” she exclaimed, “Is it possible?”

But an exclamation more or less in the crowd signified nothing. No one took any notice of it, and while eating with an excellent appetite I listened to the questioning of the hostess, who was seated in a large armchair, with her hair disordered and her eyes dilated by fear.

“How old was this man?” asked the chief magistrate.

“Forty or fifty, sir. He was an enormous man, with black whiskers—er, brown. I am not exactly certain which—a long nose, and black piercing eyes.”

“Had he any particular marks on his face, such as cicatrices?”

“No, not that I can remember. He was armed with a club and pistols.”

“What did he say to you?”

“What did he say to you?”

“He seized me by the throat. Fortunately I screamed so loud that he was seized with fear, and then I defended myself with my nails—for even a woman, if in danger of being assaulted, will defend herself.”

“Nothing is more natural or more legitimate. Write, Mr. Clerk. The coolness of this good woman was really admirable!”

Annette afterward gave her testimony, and simply declared that she was so agitated that she had seen nothing.

“That is sufficient,” said the chief magistrate; “if we require further information we will return tomorrow.”

Everybody retired, and I asked of the hostess a chamber for the night. Fear had so troubled her brain that she had not the slightest recollection of ever having seen me.

“Annette,” she said, “conduct the gentleman to the little green room on the third story. As for myself I cannot stand on my legs. Oh Heavens! To what are we not exposed in this world?”

And she began to sob, which relieved her.

Annette having lighted a candle led me to the room designated, and when we were alone exclaimed:

“Oh, Kaspar! Kaspar! Who would ever have thought that you belonged to the band? I shall never be consoled when I think that my old playmate is a robber.”

“What, Annette, you believe that! I exclaimed, sitting down. “You distress me.”

I was ready to burst into tears, and she saw that she had done me an injustice.

“No, No!” she cried. “I see that you are not of the band. You are too good for that, Kaspar. But you must be very outrageous to have returned here.”

I told her that I should have died of cold outside, and that this had decided me. She then left me. When I was alone, after having assured myself that the windows did not open on any wall and that the bolt was in good order, I thanked God for having preserved me in such dangerous circumstances. Then throwing myself on the bed, I slept profoundly.

The next morning I woke at eight o’clock. The weather was dull and humid. When I drew the curtains of my bed on one side, I noticed that the snow had piled up against the windows. I could not help reflecting on the fate of my poor comrades—how they must have suffered from the cold.

While these thoughts were passing through my brain, I heard a strange tumult in the street. The sound approached the inn. It was not without misgivings that I rushed to the window to see what this new peril might signify.

They were about to confront the famous band with the hostess of the inn, for the excitement of the previous night had made her too ill to leave the house. My poor companions were advancing

along the street between two files of policemen, and followed by a host of gamins who were howling like savages. I fancy I can still see the frightful scene. They were all handcuffed.

“In heaven’s name,” I heard Wilfred exclaim, “In Heaven’s name, have pity on a poor musician. I kill any one! I rob! O God! It is impossible.”

And he wrung his hands. The others walked along mournfully with their heads inclined forward and with their hair hanging about their faces. They entered the inn. The police expelled all strangers. The door was closed, the curious crowd remained outside with their feet in the mud and their noses flattened against the windows.

The deepest silence reigned in the house. When I had dressed myself, I half opened my door to listen, and see if it were possible for me to make my escape.

I heard the sound of voices on the ground floor, and from other movements I became convinced that all the points of exit on the ground floor were thoroughly guarded. My door opened on the landing exactly opposite the window from which the man escaped. At first I did not even notice it. But as I stood there I suddenly perceived that the window was open, and that there was no snow on the windowsill, and having approached it I saw traces of recent footsteps in the snow on the wall. This discovery caused a shiver to run through me. The man had returned! A mysterious light cleared up everything in my mind.

“Oh, if this were true,” said I to myself— “if chance should deliver up the assassin into my hands, my poor comrades would be saved!”

And with my eye I followed these traces, which were exceedingly distinct, to the opposite roof.

At that moment a few words of the examination carried on below reached my ears. I heard:

“Do you confess, that on the 20th of this month you participated in the assassination of the Jewish Rabbi, Ulmet Elius?”

Then there were a few unintelligible words.

“Close the door, Madoc,” said the voice of the chief magistrate, “close the door. Madame is suffering.”

I could hear nothing more.

While my head was leaning against the balustrades, a struggle was going on in my mind. “I can save my comrades,” I said to myself. “God has shown me how to restore them to their families. If fear makes me recoil from such a duty I shall be their murderer. My repose, my honor would be lost forever; I should be a coward—the vilest of all living wretches.” I hesitated for a long time, but suddenly my resolution was taken. I went down stairs and entered the dining-room where the examination was being held.

“Have you ever seen this watch?” said the chief-magistrate to the hostess—consult your memory, madame.”

Without waiting for her reply I advanced into the room, and in a firm voice exclaimed:

“That watch, sir, I saw in the hands of the assassin himself. I recognize it. And as to the assassin, I will engage to deliver him up tonight, if you will deign to listen to me.”

A profound silence reigned around me. All assembled appeared to look on me with a kind of stupor. My poor comrades appeared to be reanimated.

“Who are you, sir?” Asked the chief-magistrate recovering from his emotion.

“I am the companion of these unfortunate men, and I am not ashamed of it, for all of them, although poor, are honest. Not a single one of them is capable of committing the crimes imputed to him.”

There was another silence. Wilfred sobbed aloud; the chief-magistrate regarded me with a fixed glance, and said:

“Where do you pretend to deliver up the assassin?”

“Here, sir; in this house; and in order to convince you, I can only ask for a moment’s private interview with you.”

“Come, then,” said he rising.

He made a sign to the agent of the secret police, Medoc, to follow us, and to the others to remain. We left the room.

I ascended the stairs rapidly. They followed me. At the third story I stopped before the window, showing them the man’s footprints imprinted in the snow.

“You see those traces of the assassin’s feet,” said I. “He passes along that wall every night. The day before yesterday it was two o’clock in the morning when he appeared. He returned again last night, and will doubtless, in all probability, be here again tonight.”

The chief-magistrate examined the footprints without uttering a word.

“And who told you that these are the footsteps of the murderer?” asked the chief of police, with an air of doubt.

I told them of the apparition of the assassin in our garret. I pointed out to them above us the window from which I had seen the murderer advance along the wall. I confessed to them that it was only chance that caused me to observe the imprints of the night before in the snow.

“It is very strange,” murmured the chief magistrate; “this modifies very much the situation of the accused. But how can you explain the presence of the murderer in the cellar of the inn?”

“That murderer, as you call him, was I, sir.”

And I related, in a simple manner, all that had occurred the night before, from the time of the arrest of my companions to my escape from the cellar.

“That is sufficient,” said the chief-magistrate, and the turning to the chief of police, he added: “I confess to you Madoc that the proof against these fiddlers never appeared to me to be very strong

and they were far from convincing me of their participation in these crimes. Besides, the papers of most of them establish an alibi, very difficult to gainsay. In spite, young man, of the apparent truth of your statement, you must take your measures accordingly.”

The chief magistrate descended the stairs in a meditative mood, and then gathering up his papers, without asking a single question more, he exclaimed, casting a look of contempt on the fat hostess:

“Reconduct the accused to prison.”

He then left, accompanied by his secretary. Madoc remained with two policemen.

“Madam,” said he, to the hostess, “you will maintain the most perfect silence on what has passed. You will also give this brave young man the room he occupied the day before yesterday.

Medoc’s look and tone admitted of no reply. The hostess promised to do whatever he pleased, provided that she was rid of the brigands.

“Don’t be uneasy about the brigands,” replied Madoc. “We shall remain here all day and all night to protect you. Attend to your business as usual, and begin by serving us up breakfast. Young man, you will do me the honor to breakfast with us.”

My situation did not permit me to decline the offer. I accepted it.

We sat down to ham and a jug of Rhine wine. Other persons came in to drink as usual, and endeavored to gain the confidence of the hostess and Annette, but they took care not to speak in our presence, and were exceedingly reserved, which, it must be confessed, was very monotonous to them.

We passed the whole morning in smoking and drinking, and as the policemen were in plain clothes, no one took any notice of us.

The chief of police, in spite of his leaden complexion, his pale lips, his piercing eyes, and his hooked nose, was a good drinker. He related jokes with unctiousness; he tried to seize little Annette in the passage. At all his jests the others laughed xxx, but I remained melancholy and silent.

“Come, young man,” said he, laughing, “try and forget the death of your respectable grandmother. The deuce take it, we are all mortal! Drink and chase away your gloomy thoughts.”

Others mingled in our conversation and the time slipped away in the midst of tobacco smoke and the clinking of glasses.

But at nine o’clock the watchman came, all was changed. Madoc rose and cried:

“Now we will proceed to our little business. Fasten the door and the shutters, and be brisk about it. You, madame and mademoiselle, will go to bed.”

These three men, in their disguise, appeared more like robbers than the preservers of order. They drew from their pockets short iron bars, armed at one end with a heavy leaden ball. The chief,

Maloc, struck the pocket of his coat with this hand, as if to assure himself that his pistol was there. A moment afterwards he pulled it out for the purpose of putting on a cap.

All this was done in the coolest manner possible. At last the chief of police ordered me to lead them to my garret.

When we reached the room, where Annette had lighted a fire, Madoc swore between his teeth, and threw water on the burning wood; and then, pointing to the pallet, he said:

“If you feel like it, you can go to sleep.”

He and his two companions then sat down at the end of the apartment, near the wall, and they blew out the light.

I then lay down, praying to the Almighty that the assassin might come.

The silence after midnight became so deep that it was evident that the three men were watching with their eyes open, attentive to the least sound, like hunters of the watch for some wild beast. The hours passed away slowly—slowly. I could not sleep. A thousand fearful thoughts passed through my brain. I heard one o’clock strike—two—and no one appeared!

At three o’clock one of the police agents moved. I thought that the man had arrived, but all was silence again. I began to think that Madoc would look upon me as an imposter, that he must entertain hatred for me, for that next morning he would take his revenge, and that, so far from serving my comrades, I should be compelled to join them in prison.

After three o’clock time passed extremely rapid; I wished that the night would last forever, in order to preserve for me a gleam of hope.

While the same ideas were passing through my brain for the hundredth time, suddenly, without my having heard the slightest sound, the window opened, two eyes shone in the opening. Not the slightest sound was heard in the garret.

“They are asleep,” I said to myself.

The head still remained there, as if listening. One would have said that the villain suspected something. Oh, how my heart galloped! How fast the blood flowed in my veins, and yet cold perspiration poured in large drops down my face. I scarcely breathed.

Several minutes passed in this manner. Then the man appeared suddenly to come to a decision; he glided into the garret with the same prudence as on a previous occasion.

“We have him”

And the whole house was shaken from top to bottom, cries, the stamping of feet, hoarse clamors froze me with fear. The man roared, the others breathed heavily, then there was a shock which made the floors creak. After that I only heard the grinding of teeth and the clanking of chains.

“A light!” cried the terrible Madoc.

And then, when the Sulphur in the match was lighted, casting a bluish gleam in the chamber, I vaguely distinguished the policemen bending over a man in his shirt-sleeves. One held him by the throat, the other had his two knees on his chest, Madoc was forcing his wrists into a pair of handcuffs. The man appeared to be inert, only one of his legs, naked to the knee, was raised every now and then, and struck the floor with a convulsive movement.

His eyes were literally starting from his head, his lips were covered with a bloody foam.

I had scarcely lighted the candle, when the policemen uttered a strange expression:

“Our dean!”

And all three rose up. I saw them look at each other pale with terror.

The assassin turned his eyes, injected with blood, on Madoc. He tried to speak, but only after a few seconds I heard him mutter.

“What a dean! O God, what a dean!”

Then he uttered a deep groan, and remained motionless.

I approached him to look at him. It was really he—the man who had given us such good advice on the road to Heidelberg. Perhaps he had a presentiment that we should be the cause of his ruin, for one has sometimes these terrible presentiments. As he no longer moved, and a small stream of blood flowed along the dusty floor, Madoc recovered from his surprise, leaned over him and tore open his shirt. We then saw that he had stabbed himself to the heart with a knife.

“Ah! Ah!” said Madoc with a sinister smile, “the dean has cheated the gallows. He knew where to strike, and has hit the right place. You remain here while I go and inform the chief-magistrate.

Then, taking his hat, which had fallen to the ground during the struggle, he left the room without adding another word.

I was left in the presence of the corpse with the two agents of police.

The next morning, by eight o’clock, all Heidelberg had heard the great news. It was an event in the country. Daniel van den Berg, the dean, enjoyed such a large fortune, and possessed such a good reputation, that persons refused to believe him guilty of the crime imputed to him.

These events were discussed in a thousand different ways. Some said that the rich dean was a somnambulist, and, consequently, irresponsible for his actions; others that he was an assassin for pure love of blood, having no interest in committing such crimes. Perhaps both parties were right. It is an incontestable fact that the moral being, the will, the soul, no matter what the name is, does not exist in the somnambulist, but the animal nature, abandoned to itself naturally resigns itself to the impulsion of its pacific or sanguinary instincts.

My companions were restored to liberty. Annette, for a fortnight, was regarded as a model of devotion. She was soon sought in marriage by the son of the burgomaster, Trugott, a romantic

young man, who mortally offended his family by it. As for me, I returned immediately to the Black Forrest, where from that time I have served the place of chief of the orchestra of the inn of the Sabre Vert, on the road to Tubingen. If you happen to pass by there, and if my history has interested you, come and see me; we will empty two or three bottles together, and I will relate to you certain details that will make your hair stand on end.

Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, April 4, 1863

Appleton's Journal, August 27, 1870

John B. Williams, MD is the editor of *Leaves from the Note-Book of a New York Detective: The Private Record of J. B.* (New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1865). This collection consists of stories purportedly written by the fictional character James Brampton.