

A Detective's Adventure.

by H.C. Davis.

I had just stepped into a cafe to refresh myself with a cup of coffee and a roll, when a billet was handed to me by a messenger, which contained a request for my presence at head-quarters. Hastily finishing my lunch, I was soon on my way. Arrived at the bureau, I found a despatch awaiting me from the magistrate of the little village of Mayonne, situated in the far out-skirts of the city. It was an earnest and peremptory demand for my services in an undertaking purporting to be one of great difficulty and danger, and which was no less than the ferreting out the perpetrators of a foul murder which had just been committed, and to whom no clue could be obtained. To this was attached a postscript which exhorted me to come in the shortest possible time, and in disguise.

I was in the habit of receiving such summons as these, and equally in the habit of instantly obeying the mandates of duty, so it was not long before I was on my way, dressed in the holiday costume of a marketman, well provided with weapons and tools and an extra stock of clothing.

After arriving at the depot, I went directly to the house of the magistrate, and was admitted into his presence in my assured character as a poor man who had some complaint to offer. When I was alone with him I introduced myself and he seemed overjoyed to see me. In fact I found him greatly concerned in the discovery of the anchors of the late tragedy.

The affair was as yet a complete mystery to all who knew of it, and he could give me no circumstances which could give a clue to the villains. He, however, communicated to me his suspicions, which were strongly—and as facts afterward proved, not without foundation—fastened upon a set of vagabonds and arch-ruffians who had for some days been hanging around the hotel des Armes, and also upon the landlord, with whom they were on remarkably good terms.

The landlord was an Englishman, and had been remarkably reserved in his remarks upon the subject of the murder.

The magistrate advised me to begin my operations at the hotel, and if not entirely successful, my efforts might find some clue which would aid in detection.

He promised also a reward of five thousand francs to be paid out of the private treasury, if I succeeded.

My course was instantly adopted. Bidding the magistrate good day, with the promise to do my utmost, I returned immediately to the depot, and finding the station-master whom I

knew to be a government official, and a trustworthy man, I told him my business. Having let him into my secret, I asked him to lend me a trunk, which he readily did.

Then donning the clothes of a man of business, I found no trouble when the train arrived, in getting a man to take me, trunk and all in his coach to the des Armes.

By this time night was approaching, and as I entered the hotel with the air and bearing of a man of business, I took the landlord aside and pointing to my trunk with an assumed anxiety in my manner, said in a confidential tone, "Monsieur, that trunk contains bank-notes to the amount of eighty thousand francs. I want it to occupy the same room with myself, unless you have a stronger place where you could keep it." I thought I detected a slight flash of delight in his uncertain, gray eyes, as I pronounced these words, and also a slight uneasiness and confusion in his manner as he replied quickly, ["]O yes, monsieur, our rooms are perfectly safe. I will show you and your trunk immediately to the very strongest in the house, and I have no hesitation in warranting you perfect security."

"Oh, no hurry," said I waving my hand, for I wished to draw him into conversation, that I might more fully understand my man. I touched upon the recent murder, and endeavored to elicit further particulars concerning the affair. But little to my surprise, I found him not in the least disposed to be communicative on any subject, and least of all on this.

He only said that the perpetrators had not yet been heard from, and in his opinion, never would be. Failing to overcome his reluctance, I ordered my trunk to be taken to my room, whither I immediately followed it myself. Then dismissing the lackey on pretense of making my toilette, I improved the opportunity to examine my quarters.

The room was large and high; the walls were thick and the mouldings heavy. The door—and there was only one—was very strong, and fastened by a lock with a large brass key. Strange to say, this lock aroused my suspicions. I examined the key and found it to be of a pattern easily counterfeited, and I entertained no doubt that these robbers—if any there were—would attempt an entrance by means of a duplicate, and once within the walls they might promise themselves an easy prey.

It would have been easy for me, with a variety of tools and contrivances close at hand, to prevent their entrance, but I had planned otherwise. I well knew that an attempt would be made by the villains, whom I had no doubt were hovering close by, to take my life, and with it my trunk, which I had represented to the landlord as containing such invaluable property. I knew that to run such a risk was eminently perilous, but it seemed the shortest, and almost the only method of detection of the late murderers, and having finished my examination of the apartment, I descended to the bar-room again, and after calling for supper, sat down to wait the development of my plan. And I had not long to wait. In a half an hour we were disturbed by the entrance of half a dozen of the ugliest looking mortals I ever saw.

They were dressed in every variety of costume, and the expression of their countenances was more like that of gladiators and savages, than civilized men. The tallest and most

burly of them, who seemed to be their leader, had especially a fiendish expression of features.

“A set of fellows fit for murderers, even if they are not murderers,” said I to myself. The company walked up to the bar, and drank freely, and the landlord, exactly according to my expectation—although an eye less keen and watchful would not have observed it—privately signaled the leader of the gang to step aside with him.

How much I would have given to have heard that conversation. I well knew what it was about, and I easily detected a slight uneasiness in the landlord's glance towards me as he returned to the room again.

The next moment, at a sly signal from their captain, the gang withdrew from the house.

And now I felt that the game was fairly commenced, and felt the need of having my faculties in a thoroughly wide-awake state.

The villains had gone for the present, with the intention of allaying my suspicions, but I saw through the ruse and knew that the still hour of midnight would bring them again to accomplish their foul work with unerring certainty.

I almost started as the thought flashed through my brain, “what if they should come before,” and I almost shuddered at the thought of finding my room packed with the blood-thirsty villains I had just seen go away from the hotel. No time must be lost. If the robbers should get to my room before me, all my plans would be frustrated, and so giving a yawn or two, and complaining of fatigue, I asked the landlord as coolly as I could for a light, and went up stairs to my room. Carefully locking the door, I placed the key conveniently in my pocket, and then proceeded to examine the room with the most absolute thoroughness, but without finding anything further to excite my suspicion.

I placed my trunk near the head of the bed. Then throwing off only a part of my clothes, and placing my revolvers where they would be ready for instant use. I proceeded to cover myself up in bed in the exact position of natural slumber. As I lay there hour after hour, broad awake, and listening eagerly for the slightest footfall to break upon the stillness, I need not describe my sensations. Glancing upward at the ceiling, for I had purposely left my light burning, I noticed that the windows were barred. Some how or other this discovery seemed to give me fresh courage, although up to this time I had no settled idea of the consequences if I had carried out my plans.

But my suspense was not long to last. The minute hand of my repeater was over the hour of one, and in another moment there was a faint noise along the stairway. Instantly every nerve in my body was strung to its utmost tension. I listened eagerly. The sounds came closer, till at length they ceased, and in a minute I thought I heard a low, subdued breathing in front of my door. Collecting my scattered wits, I began to snore loud and long as naturally as I could. This sound seemed to reassure them, for the next moment I heard the rattle of the key in the lock.

I grasped my pistols with a nervous grip, while a cold sweat started from every pore in my body. The lock sprang in the socket, and the same gang of ruffians I had seen in the bar-room sprang cautiously into the room.

I kept on snoring, and through my half closed lids saw them creep slowly forward, closing the door after them. An uncontrollable impulse urged me to spring forward and battle for my life, but I felt the time had not yet come. It cost me a tremendous struggle to restrain myself, as I saw one of the villains cautiously approach the bed. One of them began the job of forcing my trunk while the other held a sponge to my nostrils as I lay still snoring in bed. I now felt that the last moment had come, and with a spring like lightning I was in the midst of the robbers, sending a ball through the skull of one of them, and felling another to the floor with the butt of my pistol. This movement on my part was so sudden, that it struck them dumb with amazement, and taking advantage of the moment, I leaped through the door, and turned the key on the outside, which they had, unfortunately for them, left in so exposed a position.

It was now their turn to tremble for they were securely caught in their own trap.

Meeting the landlord in the passage-way, I instantly floored and manacled him, and immediately sent for a posse of constables who served the rest of the gang in the same manner.

I need only say that they were convicted of the murder, and received the condign punishment which their deeds so richly merited.

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