

# Through the Wall

By  
**CLEVELAND MOFFETT**

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The capacity of the Latin mind for ingenious intrigue was never better illustrated than in this thrilling narrative. The author of "The Battle" has created a new detective genius in Paul Coquenil, the Parisian sleuth. He ranks with Sherlock Holmes, Vidocq and Martin Hewitt and in many respects distinctly outclasses them. A young American, in love with a mysterious French girl who sells candles in Notre Dame, finds himself in a tangled net that only the cunning brain of Coquenil can unravel. The marvelous personality of the woodcarver is depicted in one of the most wonderful character studies in modern fiction. Action never halts, incident crowds on incident, romance and adventure mingle with sinister tragedy, and over all hovers the inspiring influence of the sweet young girl Alice, the Notre Dame candle seller, who combats the most malignant forces for evil in all France.

## CHAPTER I.

### A BLOOD-RED KEY.

It was late in the afternoon of a hot July day, the hottest day Paris had known that year (1907), and Paul Coquenil, the famous French detective, followed by a splendid white and brown shepherd dog, was walking down the Rue de la Etoile past the somber mass of the City hospital. Before reaching the Place Notre Dame he stopped twice, once at a flower market that offered the grateful shade of its gnarled poles trees just beyond the Conciergerie prison and once under the heavy archway of the prefecture of police. At the flower market he bought a white carnation from a woman in a green apron and wooden shoes, who looked in awe at his pale, grave face and thrilled when he gave her a smile and friendly word. She wondered if it were true, as people said, that M. Coquenil always wore glasses with a slightly bluish tint so that no one could see his eyes.

The detective walked on, busy with pleasant thoughts. This was the hour of his triumph and justification. This made-up for the cruel blow that had fallen two years before and resulted, no one understood why, in his leaving the Paris detective force at the very moment of his glory, when the whole city was praising him for the St. Germain investigation. Beau Cocono! That was the name they had given him. He could hear the night crowds shouting it in a silly couplet:

Il faut faut-e  
Beau Cocono-o!

And then what a change within a week! What bitterness and humiliation! M. Paul Coquenil, after scores of brilliant successes, had withdrawn from the police force for personal reasons, said the newspapers. His health was affected, some declared. He had laid by a tidy fortune and wished to enjoy it, thought others. But many shook their heads mysteriously and whispered that there was something queer in all this. Coquenil himself said nothing.

But now facts would speak for him more eloquently than any words. Now, within twenty-four hours it would be announced that he had been chosen on the recommendation of the Paris police department to organize the detective service of a foreign capital with a life position at the head of this service and a much larger salary than he had ever received, a larger salary, in fact, than Paris paid to its own chief of police.

Coquenil and the dog advanced toward the great Cathedral of Notre Dame, directing their steps to the left hand portal under the northern tower. And presently there appeared a white bearded sacristan in a three-cornered hat of blue and gold and a gold embroidered coat.

"Ah, Bonneton, my friend!" said Coquenil.

"Good evening, M. Paul," answered the other, while he patted the dog affectionately. "Shall I take Caesar?"

"One moment. I have news for you," Coquenil said, while the other listened anxiously. He told of his brilliant appointment in Rio de Janeiro and of his imminent departure. He was sailing for Brazil in three days.

"Mon Dieu!" murmured Bonneton in amazement. "Sailing for Brazil! So our friends leave us. Of course I'm glad for you. It's a great chance, but will you take Caesar?"

"I couldn't leave my dog, could I?" smiled Coquenil.

fact he did not remain outside; but growing impatient at Bonneton's delay, he pushed open the double swinging doors, with their coverings of leather and red velvet, and entered the sanctuary. Immediately he saw a girl. She was in the shadows near a statue of the Virgin before which candles were burning. On the table were rosaries and talismans and candles of different lengths that it was evidently the girl's business to sell. In front of the Virgin's shrine was a prie-dieu, at which a woman was kneeling, but she presently rose and went out, and the girl sat there alone. When she lifted her eyes he saw that they were dark and beautiful, though tinged with sadness. He was surprised to find this lovely young woman selling candles here in Notre Dame church.

And suddenly he was more surprised, for as the girl glanced up she met his gaze fixed on her, and immediately there came into her face a look so strange, so glad and yet so frightened that Coquenil went to her quickly with reassuring smile. He was sure he had never seen her before, yet he realized that somehow she was equally sure that she knew him.

What followed was seen by only one person—that is, the sacristan's wife, a big, hard faced woman with a faint mustache and a wart on her chin, who sat by the great column near the door dispensing holy water out of a cracked saucer and whining for pennies. Nothing escaped the hawklike eyes of Mother Bonneton, and now, with growing curiosity, she watched the scene between Coquenil and the candle seller. What interest could a great detective have in this girl, Alice, whom she and her husband had taken in as a half charity boarder?

"Holy saints, how she talks!" grumbled the sacristan's wife. "And see the eyes she makes! And how he listens! The man must be crazy to waste his time on her! Now he asks a question, and she talks again with that queer, faraway look. He frowns and clinches his hands, and upon my soul, he seems afraid of her!"

The incident wrought an extraordinary change in Coquenil. He looked worn, almost haggard, as he walked to the church door with face set in an ominous frown. "There's some devil's work in this," he muttered.

"What is it?" asked the sacristan. The detective faced him sharply. "Who is the girl in there? Where did she come from?" He stopped abruptly and pressed the fingers of his two hands against his forehead. "No, no!" he changed. "Don't tell me yet. I must be alone. I must think. Come to me at 9 tonight."

"Yes, yes," murmured the sacristan, following him. "But, M. Paul—which day do you call?"

Coquenil snapped angrily, "I may not call at all!"

A day of sinister portent this must have been, for scarcely had Coquenil left Notre Dame than another scene was enacted there that should have been happy, but, alas, was not. And again it was the girl who made trouble, this seller of candles, with her wistful dark eyes. A pathetic figure she was, sitting there alone in the somber church—quite alone now, for it was closing time. Mother Bonneton had shuffled off rheumatically after a cutting word—she knew better than to ask what had happened—and the old sacristan was making his round of the galleries, securing doors and windows.

With a shiver of apprehension Alice turned away from the whispering shadows and went to the Virgin's shrine, where she knelt and tried to pray. But she found it a difficult matter. Lloyd Kittredge—how often she had murmured that name in her lonely hours! He would be here shortly for his answer.

And, alas, she must say "No" to him. She must give him pain. She could not hope to make him understand. How could any one understand? And then perhaps he would misjudge her. Perhaps he would leave her in anger and not come back any more. Not come back any more!

A descending step on the tower stairs broke in upon her meditations, and she rose quickly from her knees. The sacristan had finished his rounds and was coming to close the outer doors. It was time for her to go. And, with a glance at her hair in a little glass and a touch to her hat, she went out into the garden back of Notre Dame, where she knew her lover would be waiting.

"Ah, at last!" he exclaimed, springing toward her, with a wistful, boyish smile. He was a man of twenty-seven, slender of build, but carrying himself well.

She tried to speak gayly, but he was not deceived and answered seriously in French:

"Hold on. There's something wrong. We've been sad, eh?"

"Why—er"—she began, "I—er—"

"Been worrying, I know. Too much church, too much of that old church about it." He led her to a bench shaded by a friendly sycamore tree. Kittredge thrilled under the spell of her beauty. He longed to take her in his arms and comfort her.

"Suppose we go back a little," he said reassuringly. "About six months ago, I think it was in January, a young chap in a fur overcoat drifted into this old stone barn and took a turn around it. He saw the treasure and the fake relics and the white marble French gentleman trying to get out of his coffin, and he didn't care a hang about any of 'em until he saw you. Then he began to take notice. The young fellow with the fur overcoat kept coming back and coming back, only soon he came without his overcoat."

"In bitter cold weather," she said reproachfully.

"He was pretty blue that day, wasn't he? Dead sore on the game. Money all blown in, overcoat up the spout, nothing ahead and a whole year of—of darned foolishness behind. Excuse me, but that's what it was. Well, he blew in that day, and—he walked over to where you were sitting, you darling little saint!"

"No, no," murmured Alice; "not a saint, only a poor girl who saw you were unhappy and—was sorry."

Their eyes met tenderly, and for a moment neither spoke. Then Kittredge went on unsteadily: "Anyhow, you were kind to me, and I opened up a little. I told you a few things, and when I went away I felt more like a man. I said to myself, 'Lloyd Kittredge, if you're any good you'll cut out this thing that's been raising the dickens with you—excuse me, but that's what it was—and you'll make a new start right now.' And I did it. There's a lot you don't know, but you can bet all your rosaries and relics that I've made a fair fight since then. I've worked and—been decent, and—I did it all for you."

He caught her hand in his, and she felt his warm breath on her cheek. "All for you. You know that, don't you, Alice?"

She drew her hand away and forced herself to say, "You mustn't do that!"

He looked at her in surprise. "Why not?"

"Because I cannot be what you—what you want me to be," she answered, looking down.

"I want you to be my wife."

"I know," she lifted her eyes bravely and faced him. "It is true, Lloyd. I can never be your wife."

"But why? Why?"

"I cannot tell you," she faltered. "Is it something you've heard that I've done or—or not done? Do not be afraid to hurt my feelings. God knows I was a fool, but I've kept straight since I knew you. I'll swear to that."

"I believe you, dear."

"You care for me, and yet you turn me down," he said bitterly.

Her eyes filled with tears.

"Then you will never be my wife, no matter how long I wait?"

"That's it," she sobbed.

Kittredge rose, eying her sternly. "I understand," he said, "or rather I don't understand, but there's no use talking any more. I'll take my medicine, and—good-by."

She looked at him in frightened supplication. "You won't leave me? Lloyd, you won't leave me?"

He laughed harshly. "What do you think I am—a jumping jack for you to pull a string and make me dance? Well, I guess not. Leave you? Of course I'll leave you. I wish I had never seen you. I'm sorry I ever came inside this blooming church. You don't play fair," he went on recklessly. "You haven't played fair at all. You knew I loved you, and you led me on, and this is the end of it."

He turned away impatiently and glanced at his watch.

"Lloyd," she said gently, "come to the house tonight."

"Got an appointment—a banquet."

She looked at him in surprise. "You didn't tell me."

"It is at the Ansonia. It's a new restaurant on the Champs Elysees, very swell. I didn't tell you because—well, because I didn't."

"Lloyd," she whispered, "don't go to the banquet."

"Don't go? Why, this is our national holiday, I'm down to tell some stories. I've got to go. Besides, I wouldn't come to you, anyway. What's the use? I've said all I can, and you've said 'No.' So it's all off—that's right, Alice, it's all off." His eyes were kinder now, but he spoke firmly.

"Lloyd," she begged, "come after the banquet. I ask it for you. I—"

you. Do I get a smile now?"

"Oh, Lloyd!" she murmured happily. "I'll be there about 9."

"About 9," she repeated, and again her eyes turned anxiously to the blood-red western sky.

(To Be Continued.)

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"ITS RED—RED LIKE BLOOD."

feel that something is going to happen. Don't laugh. Look at the sky there beyond the black towers. It's red—red like blood—and, Lloyd, I'm afraid."

He saw that she was suffering. Finally he said: "I'll cut out that banquet tonight—that is, I'll show up for soup and fish—and then I'll come to