

# Through the Wall

By CLEVELAND MOFFETT

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In vain the poor girl protested against this breach of hospitality. Mother Bonneton held her ground grimly, declaring that she had a duty to perform and would perform it.

"What duty?" asked the American. "A duty to M. Groener."

At this name Alice started apprehensively. Kittredge knew that she had a cousin named Groener, a woodcarver, who lived in Belgium and who came to Paris occasionally to see her and to get orders for his work.

"The last time M. Groener was here—that's about a month ago," the woman said—"he asked me and my husband to make inquiries about you and see what we could find out. And we found out things—well, just a few."

"What things?" "We have found out, my pretty sir, that you lived for months last year by gambling. I suppose you will deny it?"

"No," answered Kittredge in a low tone. "It's true."

"Ah! We found also that the money you made by gambling you spent with a huzzar creature who—"

"Stop!" interrupted the American, and, turning to the girl, he said: "Alice, I didn't mean to go into these details. I didn't see the need of it, but—"

"I don't want to know the details," she interrupted. "I know you, Lloyd. That is enough."

She looked him in the eye trustingly, and he blinked a little.

"Flicky!" he murmured. "They're trying to queer me, and maybe they will, but I'm not going to let about it. Listen. I came to Paris a year ago on account of a certain person. I thought I loved her, and I made a fool of myself. I gave up a good position in New York, and after I had been here awhile I went broke. So I gambled. It's pretty bad. I don't defend myself, only there's one thing I want you to know. This person was not a low woman. She was a lady."

"Huh!" grunted Mother Bonneton. "A lady! The kind of a lady who dines alone with gay young gentlemen in private rooms! Ah, we have the facts!"

The young man's eyes kindled. "No matter where she dined, I say she was a lady, and the proof of it is I—I wanted her to get a divorce and—and marry me."

"Oh!" winced Alice. "You see what he is," triumphed the scorpion's wife—"running after a married woman."

But Kittredge went on doggedly: "You've got to hear the rest now. One day something happened that—that made me realize what an idiot I had been. So at last I decided to break away, and I did. It wasn't exactly a path of roses for me those weeks, but I stuck to it, because—because I had some one to help me—he paused and looked tenderly at Alice—"and—well, I cut the whole thing out, gambling and all. That was six months ago."

"And the lady?" sneered Mother Bonneton. "Do you mean to tell us you haven't had anything to do with her for six months?"

"I haven't even seen her," he declared. "For more than six months."

"A likely story! Besides, what we know is enough. I shall write M. Groener tonight and tell him the facts. Meantime— She rose and pointed to the door.

"Well," said he, facing Alice with a discouraged gesture, "I—I'd like to know why you turned me down this afternoon."

He was actually moving toward the door when the bell in the hall tinkled sharply. Mother Bonneton answered the call and returned a moment later, followed by the doorkeeper from below, a cheery little woman, who bustled in, carrying a note.

"It's for the gentleman," she explained, "from a lady waiting in a carriage. It's very important." With this she delivered a note to Kittredge and added in an exultant whisper to the scorpion's wife that the lady had given her a franc for her trouble.

"What kind of a lady?" chuckled Mother Bonneton.

"Oh, very swell," replied the doorkeeper mysteriously—"grand toilet, hair shouderers and no hat. I should think she'd take cold."

"Foggy thing!" jeered the other. Kittredge stood as if in a daze, staring at the note. He read it, then read it again. Then he crumpled it in his hand, muttering, "O God! And his face was white."

"Goodby!" he said to Alice in extreme agitation. "I don't know what you think of this. I can't stop to explain. I—I must go at once!" And, taking up his hat and cane, he started away.

She went to him swiftly and laid a hand on his arm. "Lloyd, you must come back. You must come back tonight. It's the last thing I'll ever ask you. You need never see me again, but—you must come back tonight."

She stood transformed as she spoke, not pleading, but commanding and beautiful beyond words.

wait. But you'll surely come, Lloyd?" He hesitated a moment and then before the power of her eyes, "I'll surely come," he promised. And a moment later he was gone.

Then the hours passed, and still Alice waited for her lover, silencing Mother Bonneton's grumblings with a look that this hard old woman had once or twice seen in the girl's face and had learned to respect. At half past 12 a carriage sounded in the quiet street, then a quick step on the stairs. Kittredge had kept his word, and there was something in the American's face, something half reckless, half appealing, that startled her.

"Well, I'm here," said Kittredge, with a queer little smile. "I couldn't come any sooner, and I can't stay."

The girl questioned him with frightened eyes. "Isn't it over yet?"

He looked at her sharply. "I don't know what you mean by 'it,' but as a matter of fact, it hasn't begun yet."

Alice turned and said quietly, "Was the woman who came in the carriage the one you told us about?"

"Yes." "While they were talking Mother Bonneton had gone to the window, at—"

"HE'S CHARGED WITH MURDER."

tracted by sounds from below, and as she peered down her face showed surprise and then intense excitement.

"Kind saints!" she muttered. "The courtyard is full of policemen."

An impatient hand sounded at the door, while a harsh voice called out those terrifying words, "Open in the name of the law!"

With a mingling of alarm and satisfaction Mother Bonneton obeyed the summons, and a moment later as she unlatched the door a fat man with a bristling red mustache and keen eyes pushed forward into the room where the lovers were waiting. Two burly policemen followed him.

"Ah!" exclaimed Gibelin, with a gesture of relief as his eye fell on Kittredge. Then, producing a paper, he said: "I am from headquarters. I am looking for— He studied the writing in perplexity. "You are M. Lo-est Keetredge?"

"Yes, sir." "I have a warrant for your arrest." But Alice staggered forward. "Why do you arrest him?"

The man from headquarters answered, shrugging his shoulders: "I don't know what he's done. He's charged with murder."

CHAPTER V. COQUENIL GETS IN THE GAME. IT was a long night at the An-soula and a hard night for M. Gritz. France is a land of infinite red tape, where even such a simple thing as getting born or getting married leads to endless formalities. Judge, then, of the complicated procedure involved in so serious a matter as getting murdered, especially in a fashionable restaurant! Long before the commissary had finished his report there arrived no less a person than M. Simon, the chief of police, round faced and affable, a brisk, dapper man, whose ready smile had led more than one trusting criminal into regretted confidences. And a little later came M. Hauteville, the judge in charge of the case, a cold, severe figure, handsome in his younger days, but soured, it was said, by social disappointments and ill health. He was in evening dress, having been summoned posthaste from the theater.

The officials discussed the case with a wide variance in opinions and conclusions. The chief of police and M. Pougeot were strong in the theory of murder, while M. Hauteville leaned toward suicide. The doctor was undecided.

"But the shot was fired at the closest possible range," insisted the judge. "The pistol was not a foot from the man's head. How else account for

the facts? Martinez was a strong, active man. He would never have allowed a murderer to get so close to him without a struggle. But there is not the slightest sign of a struggle, no disorder in the room, no disarrangement of the man's clothing. It's evidently suicide."

"If it's suicide," objected Pougeot, "where is the weapon? The man died instantly, didn't he doctor?"

"Undoubtedly," agreed the doctor. "Then the pistol must have fallen beside him or remained in his hand. Well, where is it?"

"Ask the woman who was here. How do you know she didn't take it?" "Nonsense!" put in the chief. "Why should she take it? To throw suspicion on herself? Besides, I'll show you another reason why it's not suicide. The man was shot through the right eye. The ball went in straight and clean, tearing its way to the brain. Well, in the whole history of suicides there is not one case where a man has shot himself in the eye. Did you ever hear of such a case, doctor?"

"Never," answered Joubert. "A man will shoot himself in the mouth, in the temple, in the heart, anywhere, but not in the eye. There would be an unconquerable shrinking from that. So I say it's murder."

The judge shook his head. "And the murderer?"

"Ah, that's another question. We must find the woman. And we must understand the role of this American."

"No woman ever fired that shot or planned this crime," declared the commissary, unconsciously echoing Coquenil's opinion.

"There's better reason to argue that the American never did it," retorted the judge.

"What reason?" "The woman ran away, didn't she. And the American didn't. If he had killed this man do you think anything would have brought him back here for that cloak and bag?"

"A good point," nodded the chief. "Ah, yes; she knows," reflected the commissary. "And, gentlemen, all our talk brings us back to this—we must find that woman."

At half past 1 Gibelin appeared to announce the arrest of Kittredge. He had tried vainly to get from the American some clue to the owner of cloak and bag.

"I'll see what I can squeeze out of him in the morning," said Hauteville grimly.

"You've got your work cut out," snapped the detective. "He's a stubborn devil."

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