

Through the Wall

By CLEVELAND MOFFETT

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in the midst of these perplexities and technicalities a note was brought in for M. Pougeot. The commissary glanced at it quickly and then, with a word of excuse, left the room, returning a few minutes later and whispering earnestly to M. Simon.

"You say he is here?" exclaimed the latter. "I thought he was sailing for—"

M. Pougeot bent closer and whispered again.

"Paul Coquenil!" exclaimed the chief. "Why, certainly, ask him to come in."

A moment later Coquenil entered, and all rose with cordial greetings—that is, all except Gibelin.

"As you know," explained Coquenil briefly at the judge, "I resigned from the force two years ago. I need not go into details. The point is I now ask to be taken back. That is why I am here."

"But, my dear fellow," replied the chief in frank astonishment, "I understood that you had received a magnificent offer with—"

"Yes, yes, I have."

"With a salary of a hundred thousand francs?"

"It's true, but I have refused it." Simon and Hauterville looked at Coquenil incredulously.

"May I ask why you have refused it?" asked the chief.

"Easily for personal reasons, largely because I want to have a hand in this case."

Gibelin moved uneasily.

"You think this case so interesting?" put in the judge.

"The most interesting I have ever known," answered the other, and then he added, with all the authority of his blue grave face: "It's more than interesting. It's the most important criminal case Paris has known for three generations."

Again they stared at him.

"My dear Coquenil, you exaggerate," objected M. Simon. "After all, we have only the shooting of a billiard player."

M. Paul shook his head and replied impressively: "The billiard player was a pawn in the game. He became troublesome and was sacrificed. He is of no importance, but there's a greater game than billiards here with a master player, and I'm going to be in it."

"Why do you think it's a great game?" questioned the judge.

"Why do I think anything? Why did I think a commonplace pickpocket at the Bon Marche was a notorious criminal, wanted by two countries? Why did I think we should find the real crew to that Bordureux counterfeiting gang in a Passy wineshop? Why did I think it necessary tonight to be on the cab this young American took and not behind it in another cab? He shot a quick glance at Gibelin. "Because a good detective knows certain things before he can prove them and acts on his knowledge. That is what distinguishes him from an ordinary detective."

"Meaning me?" challenged Gibelin.

"Not at all," replied M. Paul smoothly. "I only say that—"

"One moment," interrupted M. Simon. "Do I understand that you were with the driver who took this American away from here tonight?"

Coquenil smiled. "I was not with the driver. I was the driver, and I had the honor of receiving 5 francs from my distinguished associate." He bowed mockingly to Gibelin and held up a silver piece. "I shall keep this among my curiosities."

"It was a foolish trick, a perfectly useless trick," declared Gibelin, furiously.

"Perhaps not," answered the other, with aggravating politeness. "Perhaps it was a rather nice coup leading to very important results."

"Huh! What results?"

"Yes. What results?" echoed the judge.

"Let me ask first," replied Coquenil deliberately, "what you regard as the most important thing to be known in this case just now."

"The name of the woman," answered Hauterville promptly.

"Then the man who gives you this woman's name and address will render a real service?"

"A service?" exclaimed Hauterville. "The whole case rests on this woman."

"Come, come," interrupted the chief. "What are you driving at?"

"I have the woman's name and address," exclaimed Coquenil.

"Impossible!" they cried.

"I got them by my own efforts, and I will give them up on my own terms." He spoke with a look of fearless purpose that M. Simon well remembered from the old days.

"A thousand devils! How did you do it?" cried Simon.

"I watched the American in the cab as he leaned forward toward the lantern light, and I saw exactly what he was doing. He opened the lady's bag and cut out a leather flap that had her name and address stamped on it."

"No," contradicted Gibelin; "there was no name in the bag. I examined it myself."

"The name was on the underside of the flap," laughed the other, "in gilt letters."

Gibelin's heart sank.

"And you took this flap from the American?" asked M. Simon.

Coquenil could contain himself no longer, and, taking the woman's arm, he hurried her to the door.

"Now," he said, "show me just where you saw this glittering object thrown over the wall."

"There," she replied, pointing, "it lies to the left of that heavy doorway on the courtyard stones. I could see it from my balcony."

"Wait!" and, speaking to Tignol in a low tone, M. Paul gave him quick



"IT LIES TO THE LEFT OF THAT HEAVY DOORWAY."

instructions, whereupon the old man hurried across the street and pulled the bell at the doorway indicated.

"Did you happen to see the person who threw this thing?" continued M. Paul gently.

"No, but I saw his arm."

Coquenil gave a start of satisfaction. "His arm? Then a man threw it?"

"Oh, yes; I saw his black coat sleeve and his white cuff quite plainly."

"Do you remember the window from which he threw this object?" The detective looked at her anxiously.

"Yes, indeed; it is easy to remember. It's the end window on the first floor of the hotel. There!"

Coquenil felt a thrill of excitement, for, unless he had misunderstood the commissary's diagram, the seamstress was pointing not to private room No. 6, but to private room No. 7!

"Lucien!" he called, and, taking his friend aside, he asked, "Does that end window on the first floor belong to No. 6 or No. 7?"

"No, 7."

"And the window next to it?"

"No, 6."

"Thanks! Just a moment," and he rejoined the seamstress. "But one point is not quite clear," he said. "Just look across again. You see two open windows—the end window and the one next to it. Isn't it possible that this bright thing was thrown from the window next to the end one?"

"No, no!"

"They are both alike and, both being open, one might easily make a mistake."

She shook her head positively. "I have made no mistake; it was the end window."

Just then Coquenil heard the click of the door opposite and, looking over, he saw Papa Tignol beckoning to him. "Excuse me," he said and hurried across the street.

"It's there," whispered Tignol.

"The pistol?"

"Yes."

"You remember what I told you?" The old man looked hurt. "Of course I did. I haven't touched it. Nothing could make me touch it."

Again Coquenil rejoined the seamstress. "Thanks, my good woman," he said. "Now go right back to your room and don't breathe a word of this to any one."

(To Be Continued.)

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