

Through The Wall

By CLEVELAND MOFFETT

Synopsis of Previous Chapters.
 Paul Coquennil, famous French detective, meets a mysterious young girl selling candles in Notre Dame cathedral. The girl, Alice, loves an American, Lloyd Kittredge. Coquennil believes a great crime is about to be committed, and presently it occurs. He has a strange premonition of danger. A man is found murdered in a restaurant. He is recognized as Martinez, well known throughout all Paris as a billiard player.

Lloyd Kittredge is suspected of having murdered the billiard player. He is arrested at Alice's home and put in prison.

Coquennil starts to solve the case. He discovers the identity of a woman known to have been with Martinez when murdered.

The murderer's pistol is found. Coquennil puts his dog Caesar on the trail and interviews M. Gritz, proprietor of the restaurant, where the crime had taken place. Coquennil discovers two auger holes in the wall in the private dining room where Martinez was killed. They lead into another private dining room, which he visits.

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Detective Gabelin, Coquennil's rival, discovers valuable clues. Circumstantial evidence thickens about young Kittredge.

Coquennil cross examines an American woman, Mrs. Wilmott, as to her past relations with the prisoner, Kittredge. He and Martinez, she said, had had a serious quarrel over Alice. Coquennil begins to demonstrate that Kittredge is innocent. Coquennil is dismissed from the case by an order from a man "higher up." He continues to work as a private investigator. He proves that the assassin had a "long little finger" and that Alice knows him. Coquennil's man hunting dog is shot by a wealthy man in a forest. Coquennil traces Alice's past in Brussels and learns much.

Coquennil suspects as the murderer a man posing as a wood carver and as Alice's uncle from Belgium. Coquennil arrests the woodcarver after hard fighting.

On the prisoner's right leg is found a mark made by Coquennil in a street fight with a strange man, who made his escape.

The prisoner, Groener, is examined by Judge Hanteville in a sensational manner, but he maintains that he is guiltless.

Groener undergoes a nerve-racking "moving picture" test, a most ingenious mode of revealing the guilt or innocence of suspects. He now appears to be the murderer.

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CHAPTER XX.

Coquennil came back to consciousness he moved his arms and legs and discovered no injury; then he reached out a hand and found that he was lying on a cold stone floor, with his head on a rough sack filled apparently with straw.

Finally he spoke aloud in playful reproach. "It's a pity, baron, to write in that wonderful diary of yours with a lead pen!"

The baron's voice showed his interest. "Where do you think you are?"

"In a deep underground room where you store fireworks."

"How do you know we are underground?"

"By the smell of the floor and because you need a candle when it's full daylight above."

Coquennil was now looking about him wondering, noting the damp stone walls and high vaulted ceiling of a large, windowless chamber. By the uncertain light of the baron's candle he made out an arched passageway at one side and around the walls piles of logs carefully roped and stacked together.

"Coquennil," said de Heidelberg-Bruck slowly, "I give you credit for unusual cleverness, but if you tell me you have any making what I am waiting for."

"I know that you are waiting for the girl."

"The girl?" The other started.

"The girl Alice of Mary, your step-daughter."

"God Almighty!" burst out the baron. "What a guess!"

M. Paul shook his head. "No, not a guess—a fair deduction. My ring is gone. It was on my hand before you took it. That means you needed it. Why? To get the girl. You knew it would bring her, though how you knew it I more than I can understand."

"Gabelin heard you speak of the ring."

marched out from a cell in the illustrious prison some fine morning, about dawn, between a jailer and a priest to the guillotine.

"Yes," nodded the other.

"Ah!" smiled the baron. "I must destroy you or be destroyed."

"I see," murmured M. Paul.

For some moments the two were silent; then M. Paul asked gravely, "How soon will the girl be here?"

"She's undoubtedly here now. She is waiting outside." He pointed to a heavily barred iron door.

"But—she doesn't know anything about you or against you," added M. Paul, and he seemed to be almost pleading.

"She has caused me a lot of trouble, and—she might know."

"You mean—her memory?"

"Yes, it might come back."

"Of course," agreed the other with judicial fairness. "I asked Duprat about it, and he said it might."

"Goodby, Coquennil." He held out his hand. "I'm sorry."

"Goodby," answered the detective with quiet dignity. "If it's all the same to you, I—won't shake hands."

"No?" He moved toward the heavy door.

"Wait!" said M. Paul. "You have left your diary." He pointed to the table.

The baron smiled mockingly. "I intended to leave it. The book has served its purpose. Don't be alarmed. It will not be found." He glanced with grim confidence at the stacked wood. "You'll have fifteen or twenty minutes after she comes in. Goodby."

The door swung open, and Coquennil saw a dim, white light figure among the shadows, and Alice, with beautiful, frightened eyes, staggered toward him.

CHAPTER XXI.

"I've been so frightened," Alice said to him. "The man said you wanted me, and I came at once, but in the automobile, I felt something was wrong, and—you know he is outside."

"Does Ponguet know about this?"

She shook her head. "The man came for M. Ponguet first. They went off together. I'm afraid it was a trick. Then about twenty minutes later the same man came back and said M. Ponguet was with you and that he had been sent to bring me to you. He showed me your ring and—"

"Yes, yes, I understand," interrupted Coquennil. "My poor child!" he muttered. Taking the candle, Coquennil went through the arched opening into the larger chamber and made a hurried inspection. The room was about fifteen feet square and ten feet high, with everything of stone—walls, floor, and arched ceiling. Save for the passage into the smaller room there was no sign of an opening anywhere except two small square holes near the ceiling, probably ventilating shafts.

Around the four walls were logs piled evenly to the height of nearly six feet, and at the archway the pile ran straight through into the smaller room. The logs were in two foot lengths, and as the archway was about four feet wide the passage between the two rooms was half blocked with wood.

Coquennil walked slowly around the chamber, peering carefully into cracks between the logs, as if searching for something. As he went on he held the candle lower and lower and presently got down upon his hands and knees and crept along the base of the pile.

"What are you doing?" asked Alice, watching him in wonder from the archway.

Without replying, the detective rose to his feet and, holding the candle high above his head, examined the walls above the wood pile. Then he reached up and scraped the stones with his finger nails in several places and then held his fingers close to the candle-light and looked at them and smelled them. His fingers were black with soot.

"M. Paul, won't you speak to me?" begged the girl.

"Just a minute, just a minute," he answered absently. Then he spoke with quick decision, "I'm going to set you to work," he said. "By the way, have you any idea where we are?"

She looked at him in surprise. "Why, don't you know?"

"I think we are on the Rue de Valenciennes—a big hotel back of the high wall."

"That's right," she said.

"Ah, he didn't take me away!" rejoined M. Paul. "That is something. Ponguet will scent danger and will move heaven and earth to save us. He will get Tignol, and Tignol knows I was here. But can they find us?"

Suddenly he said to the girl: "I may as well tell you our lives are in danger. He's going to set fire to this wood and—"

"Oh!" she cried, her eyes starting with terror.

"See here," he said sharply. "You've got to help me. We have a chance yet. The fire will start in the big chamber, and—I want to cut it off by blocking the passageway. Let's see!"

He searched through his pockets. "He has taken my knife. Ah, this will do." And, lifting a plate from the table, he broke it against the wall. "There! Take one of these pieces and see if you can saw through the rope. Use the jagged edge—like this. That cuts it. Try over there."

Alice fell to work eagerly, and in a few moments they had freed a section of the wood piled in the smaller chamber from the restraining ropes and stakes.

"Now, then," directed Coquennil, "you carry the logs to me, and I'll make a barricade in the passageway."

The word passageway is somewhat misleading. There was really a distance of only three feet between the two chambers, this being the thickness of the massive stone wall that separated them. Half of this opening was already filled by the wood pile, and Coquennil proceeded to fill up the other half, laying logs on the floor lengthwise in the open part of the passage



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noticed before, a massive stone shelf jutting out from the wall just over the wood pile. "You must get my dolly."



A MOMENT LATER HE HAD CARRIED HER SAFELY THROUGH FLAMES.

"You mean the thing that holds the shelf up?"

"Yes; you must press it."

"But there are two things that hold the shelf up. Is it the one on this side that you press or the one on that side?"

"Dear me, what an aggravating boy! It's the one on this side, of course."

"Good!"

He found her suddenly limp in his arms. Having spoken these strange words of wisdom or of folly, she had come back into unconsciousness.

Coquennil believed that they were words of wisdom, and without a moment's hesitation he acted on that belief. The wall underneath the shelf was half covered with piled up logs, and these must be removed in spite of the flames.

It was the work of a madman or of one inspired. Three times Coquennil fell to the floor, gasping for breath. The skin on his arms and neck was hanging away in shreds.

At last the space was cleared, and Paul Coquennil stumbled forward and seized the left hand bracket and pressed it with all his might.

Instantly a door underneath, cunningly hidden in the wall, yawned open on a square black passage.

With a bound he was back at the shelter and had Alice in his arms, smiling again, as she slept—as she dreamed. And a moment later he had carried her safely through flames that actually singed her hair and laid her tenderly in the cool passage. And beside her he laid the baron's diary.

Then he went back to close the door. But first he reached up inside that fiery furnace and, groping over the hot stone shelf, brought down a scorched and battered and dust-covered little figure that had lain there for many years.

It was the lost dolly!

(To be Continued.)

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