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THE STRANGER AND THE PRINCESS

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS

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"Come, now, Pierre," came the voice from the door. "You take the lantern, and lead a party through the cellars, and I will lead another to the right, around the square. Reber, here, will lead another to the left. We will meet on the street in the rear. He cannot get away."

Buckford did not wait to hear any more. He gathered from what had been said that the cellar he was in communicated with the street in the rear. Taking his direction from the door, where the light could still be seen, he started as briskly as possible toward the rear.

He clambered over debris of all kinds. Cellar walls had been partially destroyed, and loose stones lay all about. Old foundations and party walls were standing to enable him to constantly keep a screen between himself and the lantern. This had now been lowered into the cell.

The searching party, however, made slower progress than he did, notwithstanding they had a lantern. They were spreading out and searching every nook and cranny of the cellars as they went. He, on the other hand, was making all speed straight ahead.

He soon found himself in a part where there was less debris and ruin and more of the newly built walls. It was the cellar under the building on the rear street.

He saw a red lantern hanging on a pole outside to warn drivers of the trench before the house. He made for this.

Sitting on a pile of lumber outside was a man wearing a leather jacket and slouch hat. He carried a stout club in his hand. It was the watchman.

The watchman, seeing Buckford emerging from the cellar he was supposed to be guardian over, rushed to him.

"Well, well! Who are you? What do you want?"

"Hush, my friend!" whispered Buckford quickly. "I am pursued by enemies. Is there a police officer near?"

"No; they passed ten minutes ago."

"I must escape. Can you not help me?"

"Help! Me help? What can I do?"

At that moment there was a shout up the street, and Buckford saw lanterns. The party under Reber or the other had turned the corner.

"Too late!" groaned Buckford. "Stay! There is one chance. Here is a 5 franc piece. Lend me your hat, jacket and club. I will watch your buildings while you go drink up your health."

"Le Diable! I may get into trouble. But a 5 franc piece! Here! Give it to me! Quick! Get into the jacket! The hat! Pull it down over your eyes. Speak as little as possible. Ah!"

A stolid watchman sat on the lumber pile and a bareheaded Frenchman was starting off to drink on the 5 franc piece.

"Ho! My keys!" he exclaimed. "I must take my keys."

"Leave them; they will be safe. If any one suspects, the keys will prove that I am the watchman."

"Good! But do not use the large brass one. It is to the floor in the end building. There M. de Bullion has his office. He is there now. He must not know."

"I will not disturb him. Now go."

The watchman went lumbering off, none too soon. The searching party in the cellar came out on to the street and met the other that had gone half way round the square. A short distance away the third party was seen approaching.

"Here, M. le Never Sleep," said one leader. "Have you seen a man come out of these cellars?"

"Mon Dieu! I just saw a score," replied Buckford, almost in a tremor lest his French should not be such as to pass muster. But the man hunters were too excited to notice just then a little thing like the accent of a watchman in a leather jacket and slouch hat.

"It is a strange, devilish strange," said one. "How could he vanish so completely? Was he a magician?"

"You! With your magicians!" said another. "He was a French and blood man, but a quick one. Did we not see his blood on the broken window?"

Buckford trembled. He had wiped the blood from his hands and face with his handkerchief, but now kept his hands concealed and his face screened from the light lest a show of blood should betray him.

"Well, are we to stand here till he comes and asks us to kill him?" asked one of the party. "In a moment the police will be here. And then what, eh?"

"Very well," said a man owning the voice Buckford had heard in the door. "Have some one wait here to watch. We will continue."

"Have you any objection, stay awake, to our company?"

"None. I shall be pleased," replied Buckford.

Four men were told off to remain there on watch. The others separated into groups and went in various directions.

If the watchman was drunk?

The American thought over every possible method of defeating his foes that came into his head. Nothing promised success. If the police came that way, he would certainly call for assistance, but to call for the police when there was no police in sight would be folly. He would simply be pounced upon and slain before the police could arrive.

An hour passed while he was thus wild with apprehension, and then a drunken whistle was heard coming.

"Here comes some one. We must question him," said one of the watchmen.

Buckford looked toward the approaching man. As he passed under a street light Wallace noted that he wore no hat.

Horror! It was the watchman, and he was far from sober.

And now, with certain destruction staring him in the face, Buckford Wallace thought as he had never thought before.

To wait till the drunken watchman came and demanded his keys, his jacket, his slouch hat, would be to sit silently inviting death.

He rose, stretched himself, yawned and said:

"My friends, I should have been relieved an hour ago. My assistant sometimes stops at M. Jacques'. I leave the place in your care while I go to see if he is there. I request, however, that you allow no one to enter the buildings."

"Oh, never fear, old stay awake. We will take care of your buildings. You are so anxious you must have a fortune invested here."

They all laughed at this joke, and Buckford walked away in the opposite direction from that in which the real watchman was.

"Good!" he said to himself. "My only chance is M. de Bullion, and fortunately I am before his door. I will waken the millionaire and tell him the whole story. He will give me his powerful protection until I can communicate with the police."

He turned into the corner building. He ran up one flight of stairs. He knocked loudly on a door.

"This M. de Bullion is a sound sleeper," he said. "I will get him up if I have to pound in the door."

It was not so easy to pound in the door, but he did make a tremendous noise.

"Heavens! The mob will hear it even if M. de Bullion does not," said Buckford. "Stop! This won't do. I'll use the key and make my explanations afterward."

It was easy to find the big brass key and fit it to the lock. It turned easily, and Buckford opened the door. He turned again, shut the door and locked it.

For the first time since he had faced his enemies in the little room he breathed freely.

"There," he said, with a grunt of satisfaction, "I am safe for a time. They will scarcely dare intrude upon the privacy of M. de Bullion."

Having secured himself thus, he took a match from his pocket and lighted it. The gas had not yet been piped into the buildings. He found, however, a dingy looking lamp resting on a dusty shelf. He lighted this.

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"I fancy," he said, "that the watchman was mistaken. There is surely no one in this apartment tonight. I have made noise enough to wake the dead."

He looked around the room. It was, or would be when finished, a cozy and pretty reception room. It was now littered with bits of wood, plaster and nails.

He stepped from this room into the next. No one there.

In this room there was a chair, but it had been overturned.

In one corner a small ornamental closet had been built. This was open. Workmen's clothing had been in it. Now this was strewn on the floor.

"Hello," said Buckford when he saw this. "Looks as if some one had got the best of the watchman and rifled the pockets for a sou."

From this room Buckford stepped into still another.

He stepped short on the threshold, and a cry of horror burst from his lips, which had turned white.

This room was fitted up as an office. Near the window stood a desk. At this desk sat a well dressed elderly man, dead.

His drawn face, his staring eyes, expressing terror; the position of his body—all spoke of violence.

Buckford stepped to him and made a hasty examination.

There was a wound in his left side penetrating undoubtedly to the heart. It was the only wound to be seen. Scarcely any blood had flowed. The knife with which the foul blow had been dealt lay on the floor by the dead man's chair.

"My God!" exclaimed Buckford. "I go from one horror to another; I seek safety with a man and find him a corpse. What under the sun of heaven am I going to do now?"

Meantime the four who had been left to watch had waited for the drunken whistler to come up.

"Well," said one of them as he drew near. "This fellow can give us but little help. He has been having a fine time. See how he takes the entire sidewalk?"

"Come, Bibbler!" said another, stepping out to intercept the whistler. "Which way have you come? Did you see a young man running away?"

"Eh—eh!" stammered the watchman. "Young—man! I see young man! Who are you, my friend?"

"I'll show you who I am if you don't answer."

The watchman was not so drunk but what his senses were alert with sudden suspicion.

"Who are you, and what do you want here?" he asked. "Where is that man I left in my place?"

"Eh! What! Left in your place! The man you left in your place! What do you mean?"

"Police!" yelled the drunken watchman. "Police! I have been robbed!"

"What kind of fool is this?" angrily asked one of the four. "Come, idiot. We are not going to rob you."

"No, but my keys! Where is that fellow—your fellow robber, I believe."

"Hold on! Don't shake the life out of him!" exclaimed one of the four who had not yet spoken. "This fellow has an idea. Let us get at it in a quiet way. Come, now, my friend! Who are you, and what brought you here?"

"Who am I? What brought me here! Well, that is good. I suppose I have a right to come, messieurs, since I am M. de Bullion's watchman."

"Watchman! Are there two of you then? Oh, you are that other fellow's relief. Now I begin to see. Well, he went to find you. He said you frequently stopped at M. Jacques'. He went there to look for you."

"He went! He said what! He is a thief, I tell you!"

"Who is a thief? This is bewildering. We found a watchman here. He said that his relief had not come and went to look for him. You must be that relief."

To be Continued.

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Jan. 15, 1900.
This is to certify that I had been a sufferer from Nervous Debility, lost vitality and weakness for a long time; had been doctoring both in Canada and Detroit without receiving any benefit, and placed myself under Dr. Goldberg's care, Dec. 26, 1899. I noticed an improvement in my condition in less than one week; was discharged entirely cured April 19, 1900, and have had no return of said trouble. Signed, A. E. LECHARTER.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 15th day of January, 1900.
Wm. A. Smith, Notary Public, Wayne Co., Mich.

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