

Leaping on a point of rock, the ruffian poised a huge stone against his shoulder and slung it full at the door-mouth with all his might,—such a stone and such a strength as would have dinged a hole in the very wall, to say nought of a man's frail ribs. By the mercy of God his foot slid as he launched the missile. Turning on his palm it left his hand askew, and falling between Marcel and the King bounded across the floor until the farther wall stayed its progress. But in the event the miss was no gain to us. Twisting aside that the stone might pass, Marcel slipped his foot, staggered, and fell upon his knees, snapping his blade short off at the hilt as he fell.

On the instant the King and I stepped inwards to cover him.

"De Montamar's sword, quick," I cried; but the mischief was done. The rabble was on us with a savage rush that meant murder, and in a flash murder was wrought, but not on us.

Seeing the two blades ready, the fellow who faced me in the second rank thrust the man in front of him sheer upon my point, and with such force that the hilt jarred against his ribs. With a piteous scream the poor wretch flung his arms in the air, and falling forward, hung his whole dead weight upon me, bearing down my arm. That was the opportunity looked for. In a wink the fellow behind drove his point full at my exposed breast.

"One!" he cried, baring his teeth in a grin.
"One!"