

MR. MATHIAS.

Everybody in the little town of Lyre-sur-Ys was astonished when it became known that Mr. Mathias was dead.

He was barely 45 years of age and was a robust man, as strong as an arrow. About three years before, he had become the husband of a young girl of 20, a niece of the tax collector, and whom he had loved with frenzy.

Of course, once dead, Mr. Mathias was credited with having been, during his life-time, the possessor of every virtue. It would have gone hard with the one who should have dared speak of him as having been a usurper or miser, as people termed him while living.

No one would have dreamed of publishing anew the account of that celebrated marriage, which certainly did him no honor, and which would have brought back to mind the remembrance of all he had feared that tall, artful, avicious and rich man whom people supposed to occupy his spare moments in concocting poisons, with which he experimented on dogs. It was no time to talk about that man. He was dead. Peace to his ashes!

After all, in thinking the matter over, was there anything so very extraordinary in this death? It was plain that Mr. Mathias had had forebodings of its approach, for he had, but a short time before, sent to Paris for workmen to erect in the cemetery the mortuary chapel that was at that moment waiting to receive his mortal remains. Besides, it had been noticed that of late he had prowled about his house as if fearing mysterious robbers. He requested his wife and closed himself up for weeks at a time in his laboratory, the chimney of which seemed in a blaze every night. All these were the premonitory symptoms of a brain trouble! had said Dr. Labarre, who had decided that death had resulted from apoplexy.

Mr. Mathias had had a splendid funeral. One-third of the population of the town had followed him remains to the graveyard, and it may even be said that there were a few moist eyes when the coffin was lowered into the crypt of the chapel, a real monument in itself, where two men of his size might have slept at their ease.

The mourners returned from the funeral, wondering what the widow would do.

Now, the truth of the matter is that Mr. Mathias was not dead. Two hours after the ceremony, anyone who might have been in the vault where the coffin rested would have verified to the truth of this statement. Two sharp clicks, like the snap of a spring, resounded, and the coffin opened like a closet. Mr. Mathias sat up, stretching his limbs like a man just waking up. Through a grating in the ceiling, a little light entered. Mr. Mathias stood up slowly, rubbing his slightly benumbed knees.

Taking all in all, he felt comfortable, quite comfortable. The dose of the narcotic, which he had carefully measured before taking, had had the exact effect desired. People had supposed him dead, and had buried him, so much the better.

Already! Mr. Mathias, not a little embarrassed, kept on trying to wind his shroud about him, hoping that a ghostly appearance would rid him of his inopportune companion. It did not, however. On the contrary, Grimbot, kindly assisted him in putting on the sheet and arranged it so that the folds fell gracefully.

"I have just left my tomb," began Mr. Mathias in a hollow voice. "So I see," said Grimbot, interrupting him. "You seem to be in a much greater hurry than the others."

"Mr. Mathias did not listen to him. He was taking long strides, walking on tip-toe, just like a ghost. Grimbot kept up with him, and continued to say:

"The idea does not come to the others so soon. They generally let a month or two go by."

Mr. Mathias suddenly turned toward him and extended both arms, exclaiming: "Begone, profane man! Begone!"

"The 'Tush!' said Grimbot in a fatherly tone. 'Don't mind me; after all, I suppose you want only to take an airing like the other fellows.'

Mr. Mathias kept on straight ahead, not deeming it worth his while to answer. He soon perceived, through the darkness, the gate of the cemetery. Being always prepared for the worst, he had a few louis in his pocket. "Come," said he, offering a couple of gold pieces to Grimbot, let's waste no time in talk. Here! let me have the key."

Grimbot stepped back, exclaiming: "What! the key! you want to go out! That's a funny notion! But I say, none that!"

"I will give you four louis!" groaned Mr. Mathias. "What's that?"

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