

NICETTE.

"You are a dead man!" said the doctor, looking intently at Anatole.

Anatole staggered. He had come gayly to pass the evening with his old friend, Dr. Bardais, the illustrious savant, whose works on venomous substances are known all over the world, whose nobility of heart and almost paternal goodness Anatole had learned to know better than any other living soul; and now, without the least hesitation or preparation, he heard this terrible prognostication issue from those authoritative lips!

"Unhappy child, what have you done?" continued the doctor.

"Nothing that I know of," stammered Anatole, greatly agitated.

"Tax your memory, tell me what you have eaten or drunk—what you have inhaled?"

The last word was a ray of light to Anatole. That very morning he had received a letter from one of his friends, who was travelling in India; in the letter was a flower plucked on a bank of the Ganges by the traveller—a strangely formed red flower, the perfume of which—he now recalled the fact vividly—had appeared to him to be singularly penetrative. He hastily drew forth his pocketbook and produced the letter with its contents and handed them to the savant.

"No doubt is possible!" it is the Pyramenis Indica! the deadly flower, the flower.

Then—you—really think—

"Alas! I am sure of it."

"But—it is impossible!—I am only five-and-twenty years of age and feel full of life and health—"

"At what hour did you open that fatal letter?"

"This morning at 9 o'clock."

"Well—to-morrow morning at the same hour, at the same minute, in full health, as you say, you will feel a pair in your heart—and all will be over."

"And you know of no remedy—no means of—"

"None!" said the doctor.

And, covering his face with his hands, he sank into a chair overcome by grief.

In face of the profound emotion of his old friend, Anatole understood that he was really condemned.

He hurried from the doctor's house like a madman. His forehead bathed in cold perspiration, his ideas all confused, going he knew not whither, he sped on and on amid the darkness of the night, taking no heed of the loneliness of the streets he was traversing.

A restaurant was not far off. Anatole entered it.

"To whom shall I bequeath my 6,000 francs a year? I have neither father nor mother—happily for them! Among the persons who interest me, I see only one—Nicette."

Nicette was a charming girl of 18, with blonde tresses and large black eyes, an orphan like himself.

His last will and testament was speedily drawn up; universal legatee, Nicette.

"Poor Nicette," he mused; "she was very sad when I last saw her. Her guardian, who knows nothing of the world outside of his class and instruments at the Conservatoire de Musique, had taken upon herself to promise her hand to a brute of an amateur in fencing whom she detests—the more because she has given her heart to somebody else. Who is that happy mortal? I haven't the least idea; but he is certainly worthy of her or she would never have chosen him. Good, gentle, beautiful Nicette deserves the ideal of husbands. Ah! she is the very wife that would have suited me, if—if. And, now I come to think of it, what hinders me from becoming the knight errant of Nicette? My fate is settled—at 9 o'clock—after that it will be too late; now, therefore, is the time for action! The hour is a little unusual for visiting people; but, when I reflect that, five hours hence, I shall be no more, I conclude that I have no time for standing on etiquette. Forward!—my life for Nicette!"

It was four o'clock in the morning when he rang at the door of M. Bouvard, the guardian of Nicette. He rang once, twice, and at the third tug broke the bell wire. At length M. Bouvard himself, in his night dress and in great alarm, came and opened the door.

"What is the matter—is the house on fire?"

"No, my dear M. Bouvard," said Anatole. "I have only paid you a little visit."

"At this hour?"

"It is pleasant to see you at any hour, my dear M. Bouvard! But you are so lightly dressed—pray get into bed again."

"I am going to do so. But, I suppose, Monsieur, that it was not simply to trouble me in this way that you have come at such an hour? You have something of importance to say to me?"

"Very important, M. Bouvard! It is to tell you that you must renounce the idea of marrying my cousin Nicette to Monsieur Capdenac."

"What do you say?"

"You must renounce that project."

"Never, Monsieur!—never!"

"Don't fly in the face of Providence by using such language!"

"My resolution is fixed, monsieur; this marriage will take place."

"It will not, monsieur!"

"We will see about that. And, now that you have had my answer, monsieur, I'll not detain you."

"A speech none too polite, M. Bouvard; but, as I am as good natured as I am tenacious, I will pass over it—and remain."

"Stay if it pleases you to do so, but I shall consider you gone, and hold no further conversation with you."

Saying which M. Bouvard turned his face to the wall, grumbling to himself:

"Was ever such a thing seen! Rousing a man at such an hour—breaking his sleep, only to pour into his ears such a pack of nonsense!"

Suddenly M. Bouvard sprang to a sitting posture in his bed.

Anatole had possessed himself of the professor's trombone, into which he was blowing like a deaf man and sending from the tortured instrument sounds of indescribable detestableness.

"My presentation trombone!—given me by my pupils! Let that instrument alone, monsieur!"

"Monsieur, you consider me gone; I shall consider you—absent, and shall amuse myself until you return. Conac! conac!—from! from! Oh?—that was a fine note!"

"You will get me turned out of the house. My landlord will not allow a trombone to be played here after midnight."

"A man who evidently hath not music in his soul! Frout! frout, prr!"

"You will split my ears! You'll spoil my instrument—a trombone badly played on is a trombone destroyed, monsieur!"

"Conac! prounn, pra—pra—prrr—"

"For mercy's sake give over!"

"Will you consent?"

"To what?"

"To renounce the idea of that marriage?"

"Monsieur, I cannot!"

"Then—couac!"

"Monsieur Capdenac—"

"Frout!"

"Is a terrible man to deal with!"

"Frout!"

"If I were to offer him such an affront he would kill me."

"Is that the only reason which stops you?"

"That—and several others."

"In that case leave the matter to me; only swear to me that I obtain M. Capdenac's renunciation my cousin shall be free to choose a husband herself."

"Really, monsieur, you abuse—"

"Couac, frout, frout, prrr!"

"Monsieur, monsieur—she shall be free."

"Bravo! I have your word. Will you now allow me to retire? By the way, where does your Capdenac live?"

"Number 100, Rue des Deux-Epees."

"I fly thither!—Until we meet again!"

"You are going to throw yourself into the lion's mouth, and he will teach you a lesson you deserve," said M. Bouvard, as Anatole hurried from the bed chamber and shut the door after him.

Without a moment's hesitation Anatole betook himself to the address of the fire eating fencer; it was just six o'clock when he arrived there. He rang the doorbell.

"Who is there?" demanded a rough voice behind the door.

"Open!—very important communication from M. Bouvard."

The sounds of a night chain and the turning of a key in a heavy lock were heard.

"Here is a man who does not forget to protect himself against unwelcome visitors!" remarked Anatole to himself.

The door opened at length. Anatole found himself in the presence of a gentleman with a moustache fiercely upturned, whose night dress appeared to be the complete costume of the fencing school.

"You see, always ready; it's my motto."

The walls of the swordsman's ante-chamber were completely covered with panoplies of arms of all descriptions; yatagans, poisoned arrows, sabers, rapiers, one and two handed swords, pistols—a regular arsenal—enough to terrify any timid minded observer.

"Bah!" thought Anatole, "what do I now risk!—at most two hours and a half!"

"Monsieur," said Capdenac, "may I be allowed to know—"

"Monsieur," replied Anatole, "you want to marry Mademoiselle Nicette?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Monsieur, you will not marry her!"

"Ah! thunder!—blood! who will prevent me?"

"I shall, monsieur!"

Capdenac stared at Anatole, who was not very big, but appeared to be decided.

"Ah! young man, you are very lucky to have found me in one of my placable moments. Take advantage of it—save yourself while you have time; otherwise I will not answer for your days!"

"Nor I for yours."

"A challenge!—to me!—Capdenac!—Do you know that I have been a master of the art of fencing for ten years?"

"I have fought twenty duels—and had the misfortune to kill five of my adversaries, besides wounding the fifteen others! Come, I have taken pity on your youth!—once more, go away."

"I see, by your preparations, that you are an adversary worthy of me and my long growing desire to confront a man so redoubtable. Let's see! what shall we fight with? Those two double handed swords standing by the fireplace? Or those two boarding axes? With cavalry sabers, or would you prefer a pair of curved yatagans? You hesitate; can't you make up your mind?"

"I am thinking of your mother and her coming distress."

"I haven't a mother to be distressed. Would you rather fight with a carbine, pistol or revolver?"

"Young man, don't play with firearms."

"Are you afraid? You are trembling!"

"Trembling! I? It's with cold."

"Then fight or at once renounce the hand of Nicette."

"Renounce the hand of Mademoiselle Nicette! By Jove, I admire your bravery! and brave men are made to understand one another. Shall I make a confession to you?"

"Speak!"

"For some time past I have myself had thoughts of breaking off this marriage, but I did not know how to do it. I consent therefore, with pleasure to do what you wish; but at the same time you must see that I cannot appear to give way to threats, and you have threatened me."

"I retract them."

"In that case all is understood."

"You will give me, in writing, your renunciation?"

"Young man, you have so completely won my sympathy that I can refuse you nothing."

Furnished with the precious document Anatole flew back to the dwelling place of M. Bouvard; he had a considerable distance to walk, and by the time he reached the professor's door it was nearly 8 o'clock in the morning.

"Who is there?"

"Anatole."

"Go home, and go to bed!" cried the professor savagely.

"I have got Capdenac's renunciation of Nicette's hand! Open the door, or I will break it down!"

M. Bouvard admitted him, and Anatole placed in his hand the momentous paper. That done, he rushed to the door of Nicette's room and cried—

"Cousin, get up—dress yourself quickly and come here!"

"It appears, monsieur, that I am no longer master in my own home!" exclaimed M. Bouvard; "You go and come, and order as you please! To make you understand that I will have nothing more to say to you, I—will go back to my morning newspaper, in the reading of which you have interrupted me!"

A few minutes later Nicette, looking fresh as dawn, arrived in the drawing room.

"What is the matter?"

"The matter," said M. Bouvard, "is that your cousin is mad!"

"Mad? So be it!" replied Anatole.

"Last night, my dear little cousin, I obtained two things: the renunciation of your hand by M. Capdenac, and the promise of your worthy guardian to bestow it on the man of your choice—the man you love."

"Do you really wish me to marry Anatole, guardian?"

"Oh?" cried Anatole, his breath nearly taken away.

"Since I love you, cousin!"

At that moment Anatole felt his heart beat violently. Was it from pleasure at the unexpected avowal made by Nicette, or was it the agony, the death symptom predicted by the doctor?

"Unfortunate that I am!" he cried. "She loves me—I am within reach of happiness, and am to die without attaining it!"

Then, taking the hands of Nicette feverishly within his own, he told her all about the letter, the venomous flower he had scented, the prognostication of his old friend, the will he had written, and the steps he had successfully taken to release her from the claim of Capdenac.

"And now," he said, in conclusion, "I have only to go home and die!"

"But it is impossible!" cried Nicette.

"This doctor must have mistaken—who is he?"

"A man who is never in error, Nicette—Dr. Bardais!"

"Bardais! Bardais!" cried Bouvard, bursting into laughter. "Listen to what my newspaper here says: 'The learned Dr. Bardais has been suddenly seized with mental alienation. The madness with which he has been stricken is of a scientific character. It is well known that he was absorbingly engaged in an inquiry into the nature of venomous substances, and latterly he had fallen into the delusion that everybody he met was under the influence of poison and endeavored to persuade them that such was their condition. He was last night transported to the Maison de Sante of Dr. Blank.'"

"Nicette!"

"Anatole!"

The two young persons fell into each other's arms—[Strand Magazine.]

The Horse and the Ass.

A shipload of fine horses was recently consigned from Calcutta to Bombay, under the charge of a very honest but somewhat dull agent in the employ of an East India company. While the horses were being landed at the ship, they managed to break away from the men in charge, and ran like wild animals through the city. The agent caught one of them, and mounting him, gave chase. After several hours of exciting work, with the help of his men, he had captured them all but one of the horses, as he counted them.

Finally he made his reluctant way to the superintendent's office, to give an account of the matter. The superintendent came to the door and listened to the story.

"And you say there were 124 horses in, and you have 80 of them in the company's stables and 43 back in the steamer temporarily?"

"Yes, sir, all safe but one; and we cannot find him anywhere."

"What is that horse you are riding? Have you counted him?" asked the superintendent.

"Well I am an ass! Of course, this is one of 'em!" And the agent rode off in disgust, while the superintendent roared with laughter.—Tid Bits.

Better to Have Waited.

The other morning Jones turned up at the office even later than usual. His employer, tired of waiting for him, had himself set about registering the day's transactions, usually Jones's first duty. The enraged merchant laid his pen aside very deliberately, and said to Jones, very sternly indeed, "Jones, this will not do!"

"No, sir," replied Jones, gently, drawing off his overcoat as he glanced over his employer's shoulder, "it will not. You have entered McKurken's order in the wrong book. Far better to have waited a little while till I came!"

She Preferred Repairs.

During the war times, says Kate Field's Washington, an old negro mammy met with an accident on the cars which left her with various bruises, including a sprained ankle and a dislocated knee. Her mistress advised her to sue the railway company. "I certainly would sue them, Aunt," she said, "and for good-sized damages, too." "Lord, Lord!" exclaimed old aunt. "Sue de company for damages, honey! no, honey; when dis pore old nigger sues dat company she done sues 'em for repayas."

Got Even With Him.

Westfield—I got even with the mean cad Lawmno today. Plainfield—That so?

How? Westfield—I pretended to make up with him, and told him to save a seat alongside of him in the train for me. Then I missed the train. As long as he lives everybody in that car will consider him the biggest liar and hog they ever met.—New York Weekly.

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Will arrive at St. John from Sussex, 8:30; from Quebec and Montreal (excepted Monday), 3:55; from Point du Chene, 12:40; from Halifax, 15:30 from Halifax, 3:55.

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LEAVE ANNAPOLIS—Express daily at 1.05 p. m. 4.45 p. m.; Passenger and Freight Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday at 5.50 a. m., arrive at Yarmouth 11.05 a. m.

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CONNECTIONS—At Yarmouth with steamers Yarmouth and Boston for Boston every Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday evenings; and from Boston every Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday mornings. With Stage daily (Sunday excepted) to and from Barrington, Shelburne and Liverpool.