

THE TEETH OF THE TIGER

BY MAURICE LEBLANC

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CHAPTER VII.

SHAKESPEARE'S WORKS, VOL. VIII.

Two lodges, belonging to the same old time period as the house itself, stood at the extreme right and left of the low wall that separated the front courtyard from the Place du Palais-Bourbon. These lodges were joined to the main building, situated at the back of the courtyard, by a series of out-houses. On one side were the coach stables, stables, harness rooms, and garage, with the porter's lodge at the end; on the other side, the wash houses, kitchens and offices, ending in the lodge occupied by Mlle. Levasseur.

This lodge had only a ground floor, consisting of a dark entrance hall and one large room, most of which served as a sitting room, while the rest, arranged as a bedroom, was really only a sort of alcove. A curtain hid the bed and wash hand stand. There were two windows looking out on the Place du Palais-Bourbon.

It was the first time that Don Luis had set foot in Mlle. Levasseur's room. Engrossed though he was with other matters, he felt its charm. It was very simply furnished: some old mahogany chairs and armchairs, a plain, empire writing table, a round table with one heavy, massive leg, and some book shelves. But the bright color of the linen curtains enlivened the room. On the walls hung reproductions of famous pictures, drawings of sunny buildings and landscapes, Italian villas, Sicilian temples.

The girl remained standing. She had resumed her composure, and her face had taken on the enigmatical expression so difficult to fathom, especially as she had assumed a deliberate air of dejection, which Perenna guessed was intended to hide her excitement and alertness, together with the tumultuous feelings which even she had great difficulty in controlling.

Her eyes looked neither timorous nor defiant. It really seemed as though she had nothing to fear from the explanation.

Don Luis kept silent for some little time. It was strange and it annoyed him to feel it, but he experienced a certain embarrassment in the presence of this woman, against whom he was inwardly bringing the most serious charges. And, not daring to put them into words, not daring to say plainly what he thought, he began:

"You know what happened in this house this morning?"

"This morning?"

"Yes, when I had finished speaking on the telephone."

"I know now. I heard it from the servants, from the butler."

"Not before?"

"How could I have known earlier?"

She was lying. It was impossible that she should be speaking the truth. And yet in what a calm voice she had replied!

He went on:

"I will tell you, in a few words, what happened. I was leaving the telephone box, when the iron curtain, concealed in the upper part of the wall, fell in front of me. After making sure that there was nothing to be done, I simply resolved, as I had the telephone by me, to call in the assistance of one of my friends. I rang up Major d'Astrignac. He came at once and, with the help of the butler, let me out. Is that what you heard?"

"Yes, monsieur. I had gone to my room, which explains why I knew nothing of the incident or of Major d'Astrignac's visit."

"Very well. It appears, however, from what I learned when I was released, that the butler and, for that matter, everybody in the house, including yourself, knew of the existence of that iron curtain."

"Certainly."

"And how did you know it?"

"Through Baron Malonyi. He told me that, during the revolution, his great grandmother, on the mother's side, who then occupied this house and whose husband was guillotined, remained hidden in that recess for 13 months. At that time the curtain was covered with woodwork similar to that of the room."

"It's a pity that I wasn't in-

formed of it, after all, I was very nearly crushed to death."

This possibility did not seem to move the girl. She said:

"It would be a good thing to look at the mechanism and see why it became unfastened. It's all very old and works badly."

"The mechanism works perfectly. I tested it. An accident is not enough to account for it."

"Who could have done it, if it was not accident?"

"Some enemy whom I am unable to name."

"He would have been seen."

"There was only one person who could have seen him—yourself. You happened to pass through my study as I was telephoning and I heard your exclamation of fright at the news about Mme. Fauville."

"Yes, it gave me a shock. I pity the woman so very much, whether she is guilty or not."

"And, as you were close to the arch, with your hand within reach of the spring, the presence of an evildoer would not have escaped your notice."

She did not lower her eyes. A slight flush overspread her face, and she said:

"Yes, I should at least have met him, for, from what I gather, I went out a few seconds before the accident."

"Quite so," he said. "But what is so curious and unlikely is that you did not hear the loud noise of the curtain falling, nor my shouts and all the uproar I created."

"I must have closed the door of the study by that time. I heard nothing."

"Then I am bound to presume that there was some one hidden in my study at that moment, and that this person is a confederate of the ruffians who committed the two murders on the Boulevard Suchet; for the prefect of police has just discovered under the cushions of my sofa the half of a walking stick belonging to one of those ruffians."

She wore an air of great surprise. This new incident seemed really to be quite unknown to her. He came nearer and, looking her straight in the eyes, said:

"You must at least admit that it's strange."

"What's strange?"

"This series of events, all directed against me. Yesterday, that draft of a letter which I found in the courtyard—the draft of the article published in the Echo de France. This morning, first the crash of the iron curtain just as I was passing under it, next, the discovery of that walking stick, and then, a moment ago, the poisoned water bottle—"

She nodded her head and murmured:

"Yes, yes—there is an array of facts—"

"An array of facts so significant," he said, completing her sentence meaningfully, "as to remove the least shadow of doubt. I can feel absolutely certain of the immediate intervention of my most ruthless and daring enemy. His presence here is proved. He is ready to act at any moment. His object is plain," explained Don Luis. "By means of the anonymous article, by means of that half of the walking stick, he meant to compromise me and have me arrested. By the fall of the curtain he meant to kill me or at least to keep me imprisoned for some hours. And now it's poison, the cowardly poison which kills by stealth, which they put in my water today and which they will put in my food tomorrow. And next it will be the dagger and then the revolver and then the rope, no matter which, so long as I disappear; for that is what they want: to get rid of me."

"I am the adversary. I am the man they're afraid of," the man who will discover the secret one day and pocket the millions which they're after. I am the interloper. I stand mounting guard over the Mornington inheritance. It's my turn to suffer. Four victims are dead already. I shall be the fifth. So Gaston Sauverand has decided: Gaston Sauverand or some one else who's managing the business."

"I used to think myself pretty in-

Perenna's eyes narrowed.

"The accomplice is here, in this house, in the midst of everything, by my side. He is lying in wait for me. He is following every step I take. He is living in my shadow. He is waiting for the time and place to strike me. Well, I have had enough of it. I want to know, I will know, and I shall know. Who is he?"

The girl had moved back a little way and was leaning against the round table. He took another step forward and, with his eyes still fixed on hers, looking in that immobile face for a quivering sign of fear or anxiety, he repeated, with greater violence:

"Who is the accomplice? Who in the house has sworn to take my life?"

"I don't know," she said. "I don't know. Perhaps there is no plot, as you think, but just a series of chance coincidences—"

He felt inclined to say to her, with his habit of adopting a familiar tone toward those whom he regarded as his adversaries:

"You're lying, dearie, you're lying. The accomplice is yourself, my beauty. You alone overheard my conversation on the telephone with Mazeroux, you alone can have gone to Gaston Sauverand's assistance, waited for him in a motor at the corner of the boulevard, and arranged with him to bring the top half of the walking stick here. You're the beauty that wants to kill me, for some reason which I do not know. The hand that strikes me in the dark is yours, sweetheart."

But it was impossible for him to treat her in this fashion; and he was so much exasperated at not being able to proclaim his certainty in words of anger and indignation that he took her fingers and twisted them violently, while his look and his whole attitude accused the girl even more forcibly than the bitterest words.

He mastered himself and released his grip. The girl freed herself with a quick movement, indicating repulsion and hatred.

Don Luis said:

"Very well. I will question the servants. If necessary I shall dismiss any whom I suspect."

"No, don't do that," she said eagerly. "You mustn't. I know them all."

Was she going to defend them? Was she yielding to a scruple of conscience at the moment when her obstinacy and duplicity were on the point of causing her to sacrifice a set of servants whose conduct she knew to be beyond reproach, Don Luis received the impression that the glance which she threw at him contained an appeal for pity. But pity for whom? For the others? Or for herself?

They were silent for a long time. Don Luis, standing a few steps away from her, thought of the photograph, and was surprised to find in the real woman all the beauty of the portrait, all that beauty which he had not observed hitherto, but which now struck him as a revelation. The golden hair shone with a brilliancy unknown to him. The mouth wore a less happy expression, perhaps, a rather bitter expression, but one which nevertheless retained the shape of the smile. The curve of the chin, the grace of the neck revealed above the dip of the linen collar, the line of the shoulders, the position of the arms, and of the hands resting on her knees: all this was charming and very gentle and, in a manner, very seemly and reassuring. Was it possible that this woman should be a murderess, a poisoner?

He said:

"I forget what you told me that your Christian name was. But the name you gave me was not the right one."

"Yes, it was," she said.

"Your name is Florence: Florence Levasseur."

She started.

"What? Who told you? Florence? How do you know?"

"Here is your photograph, with your name on it almost illegible."

"Oh!" she said, amazed at seeing the picture. "I can't believe it! Where does it come from? Where did you get it from?" And suddenly, "It was the prefect of police who gave it to you, was it not? Yes, it was he, I'm sure of it. I am sure that this photograph is to identify me and that they are looking for me, for me, too. And it's you again, it's you again—"

"Have no fear," he said. "The print only wants a few touches to alter the face beyond recognition. I will make them. Have no fear."

She was no longer listening to him. She gazed at the photograph with all her concentrated attention and murmured:

"I was 20 years old. . . . I was living in Italy. Dear me, how happy I was on the day when it was taken! And how happy I was when I saw my portrait! . . . I used to think myself pretty in-

those days. . . . And then it disappeared. . . . It was stolen from me like other things that had already been stolen from me, at that time—"

And sinking her voice still lower, speaking her name as if she were addressing some other woman, some unhappy friend, she repeated:

"Florence. . . . Florence—"

Tears streamed down her cheeks.

"She is not one of those who kill," thought Don Luis. "I can't believe that she is an accomplice. And yet—and yet—"

He moved away from her and walked across the room, from the window to the door. The drawings of Italian landscapes on the wall attracted his attention. Next he read the titles of the books on the shelves. They represented French and foreign works, novels, plays, essays, volumes of poetry, pointing to a really cultivated and varied taste.

He saw Racine next to Dante, Stendhal near Edgar Allen Poe, Montaigne between Goeth and Virgil. And suddenly, with that extraordinary faculty which enabled him, in any collection of objects, to perceive details which he did not at once take in, he noticed that one of the volumes of an English edition of Shakespeare's works did not look exactly like the others. There was something peculiar about the red morocco back, something stiff, without the cracks and creases which show that a book has been used.

It was the eighth volume. He took it out, taking care not to be heard.

He was not mistaken. The volume was a sham, a mere set of boards surrounding a hollow space that formed a box and thus provided a regular hiding place; and, inside this box, he caught sight of plain note paper, envelopes of different kinds, and some sheets of ordinary ruled paper, all of the same size and looking as if they had been taken from a writing pad.

And the appearance of these ruled sheets struck him at once. He remembered the look of the paper on which the article for the Echo de France had been drafted. The ruling was identical, and the shape and size appeared to be the same.

On lifting the sheets one after the other, he saw, on the last but one, a series of lines consisting of words and figures in pencil, like notes hurriedly jotted down.

He read:

House on the Boulevard Cuchet. First letter. Night of 15 April. Second. Night of 25th. Third and four. Nights of 5 and 15 May. Fifth and explosion. Night of 25 May.

And, while noting first that the date of the first night was that of the actual day, and next that all these dates followed one another at intervals of 10 days, he remarked the resemblance between the writing and the writing of the rough draft.

The draft was in a notebook in his pocket. He was therefore in a position to verify the similarity of the two handwritings and of the two ruled sheets of paper. He took his notebook and opened it. The draft was not there.

"Gad," he snarled, "but this is a bit too thick!"

And, at the same time, he remembered clearly that, when he was telephoning to Mazeroux in the morning, the notebook was in the pocket of his overcoat and that he had left his overcoat on a chair near the telephone box. Now, at that moment, Mlle. Levasseur, for no reason, was roaming about the study. What was she doing there?

"Oh, the play actress!" thought Perenna, raging within himself. "She was humbugging me. Her tears, her air of frankness, her tender memories: all bunkum! She belongs to the same stock and the same gang as Marie Fauville and Gaston Sauverand. Like them, she is an accomplished liar and actress from her slightest gesture down to the least inflection of her innocent voice."

He was on the point of having it all out with her and confounding her. This time, the proof was undeniable. Dreading an inquiry which might have brought the facts home to her, she had been unwilling to leave the draft of the article in the adversary's hands.

How could he doubt, at this moment, that she was the accomplice employed by the people who were working the Mornington affair and trying to get rid of him? Had he not every right to suppose that she was directing the sinister gang, and that, commanding the others with her audacity and her intelligence, she was leading them toward the obscure goal at which they were aiming?

(Continued Next Week.)

MADE IMMORTAL BY GOETHE

Leipzig Tavern in Which Poet Located Scene in "Faust" Was Well-known Gathering Place.

Auerbach's cellar was a tavern at Leipzig which disappeared in 1912. It owed its chief fame to Goethe, who in this place located the scene in "Faust" wherein Mephistopheles, standing upon a wine cask, takes his flight into space with Doctor Faust, to the stupefaction of the guests drinking at the tables. The old building to which the cellar belonged was built by Doctor Stromer d'Auerbach at about 1529, the worthy doctor there storing the wine intended for his own use. Later, as the wine was good, he conceived the idea of selling it. In this way was established the tavern to which his name has been attached ever since. From the earliest years of the seventeenth century legend has placed in this cellar the famous adventure of Faust and Mephistopheles. Goethe, studying at Leipzig university from 1765 to 1768, frequented that cellar almost nightly and there talked with his friends of art, literature and politics, and thus he heard of that legend which he turned to such excellent account, at the same time so very greatly enriching the literature of his country.

Had Reason to Agree.

They were all sitting round a log fire roasting chestnuts, and the host had been moralizing generally. At last he remarked:

"No, take my advice; never put off till tomorrow what you can do today."

"Hear, hear," said a handsome young man from the other side of the hearth, with a glance at his host's pretty daughter. "I once did that—and next day you took the mistletoe down!"

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A Puzzle.

"Don't electric wires have to be made of well-tempered metal?"

"I don't know about that. They seem to be very easily crossed."

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The best means to oil the machinery of the body, put tone into the liver, kidneys and circulatory system, is to first practice a good house-cleaning. I know of nothing better as a laxative than a vegetable pill made up of May-apple, leaves of aloe and jalap. This is commonly sold by all druggists as Dr. Pierce's Pleasant Pellets, and should be taken at least once a week to clear the twenty-five feet of intestines. You will thus clean the system—expel the poisons and keep well. Now is the time to clean house. Give yourself a spring house cleaning.—Adv.

Doubtless. Thief—Gimme that watch! Victim—I would, old fellow, but I really can't spare the time!

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