

The Triflers

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Illustration by George E. Wolfe



"It's Teddy again!" she trembled. "We're to be married to-morrow?" he asked quietly. "It's the only way to get rid of him."

WHEN the gendarmes came hurrying to 64 Boulevard St. Germaine, Marjory was the only one in the house cool enough to meet them at the door. She quieted them with a smile.

"It is too bad, messieurs," she apologized, because it did seem too bad to put them to so much trouble for nothing. "It was only a disagreeable incident between friends, and it is closed. Madame Courcy lost her head."

"But we were told it was an assassination," the lieutenant informed her. He was a very smart-looking lieutenant, and he noticed her eyes at once.

"To have an assassination it is necessary to have some one assassinated, is it not?" inquired Marjory.

"But yes, certainly."

"Then truly it is a mistake, because the two gentlemen went off together in a cab."

The lieutenant took out a memorandum-book.

"Is that necessary?" asked Marjory.

"A report must be made."

"It was nothing, I assure you," she insisted. "It was what in America is called a false alarm."

"You are American?" inquired the lieutenant, twisting his mustache.

"It is a compliment to my French that you did not know," smiled Marjory.

It was also a compliment to the lieutenant that she smiled. At least, it was so he interpreted it.

"The report is only a matter of routine," he informed her. "If mademoiselle will kindly give me her name."

"But the newspapers!" she exclaimed. "They make so much of so little."

"It will be a pleasure to see that the report is treated as confidential," said the lieutenant, with a bow.

So, as a matter of fact, after a perfunctory interview with madame and Marie, who had so far recovered them-

selves as to be easily handled by Marjory, the lieutenant and his men bowed themselves out and the incident was closed.

Marjory herself escorted them to the door, and then, a little breathless with excitement, she went into the reception-room a moment to collect herself.

The scene was set exactly as it had been when from upstairs she heard that shot—the shot that for a second had checked her breathing as if she herself had been hit. As clearly as if she had been in the room, she had seen Monte stretched out on the floor, with Hamilton bending over him. She had not thought of any other possibility. As she sprang down the stairs she had been sure of what she was about to see. But when she entered she had found Monte standing erect—erect and smiling, with his light hair all awry like a school-boy's. Then, sinking into the chair near the window,—this very chair beside which she now stood,—he had asked her to go out and attend to madame.

Come to think of it, it was odd that he had been smiling. It was not quite natu-

ral for one to smile over a matter as serious as that. After all, even if Teddy was melodramatic, even if his shot had missed its mark, it was not a matter to take lightly.

SHE seated herself in the chair he had occupied, and her hands dropped wearily to her side. Her fingers touched something sticky—something on the side of the chair next to the wall—something that the gendarmes had not noticed.

She did not dare to move her fingers. She was paralyzed, as if they had met some cold, strange hand. For one second, two seconds, three seconds, she sat there transfixed, fearing, if she moved as much as a muscle, that something would spring at her from below—some awful fact.

Then finally she did move. She moved slowly, with her eyes closed. Then, suddenly opening them wide, she saw her fingers stained carmine. She knew then why Monte had smiled. It was like him to do that. Running swiftly to her room, she called Marie as she ran:

"Marie—my hat! Your hat! Hurry!"

READ THIS: THEN START THE STORY

MONTE COVINGTON, an American bachelor, finds his schedule of pleasure marred, on his tenth visit to Nice, by the death of Edliart, his favorite maître d'hôtel. He feels suddenly old, at thirty-two. For the first time in his life he is bored. Going on to Paris, he is pursued by the feeling of something gone wrong. One night he meets, coming from the opera alone, Marjory Stockton, a girl he has known a long time, but whose time has been devoted to an elderly aunt to the exclusion of her friends. The aunt is now dead, and Marjory, inheriting her fortune, is enjoying her first taste of freedom. But she is unable to enjoy it because of admirers offering marriage. She tells Monte that the most troublesome of these is Teddy Hamilton, a music-hall favorite, whom she met on the boat coming over. Monte's zest for life returns, and he sees Marjory frequently. One morning he finds her in a nervous state because Hamilton is threatening to shoot himself if she refuses his suit. While she is talking to Monte in her sitting-room, Teddy arrives downstairs. To Monte's proposal to go down and settle the boy, Marjory replies that he has no right—that it would only cause a scandal in Paris. Monte wishes he could be transformed into a brother or even a cousin. It suddenly occurs to him that there is one relationship he can assume that would solve the whole problem. He makes his suggestion to Marjory—to marry him for protection against unwelcome attention and to be a *camarade de voyage*, without further obligation on the part of either. Marjory accepts the strange proposal. Monte goes down and tells Teddy that Marjory is going to marry him, and the crazed boy whips out a revolver and shoots—wounding Monte's right shoulder. When Marjory and her maid come in, he conceals his hurt and hurries Teddy out and into a cab, accompanying him. He gets Hamilton home, and then starts for his own hotel. Before he has reached it he becomes unconscious in the cab.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Marie. "Has anything happened?"

"I have just learned what has already happened," she answered. "But do not alarm madame."

It was impossible not to alarm madame. The mere fact that they were going out alarmed madame. Marjory stopped in the hall and quite coolly worked on her gloves.

"We are going for a little walk in the sunshine," she said. "Will you not come with us?"

Decidedly madame would not. She was too weak and faint. She should send for a friend to stay with her while she rested on her bed.

"That is best for you," nodded Marjory. "Au revoir."

With Marie by her side, she took her little walk in the sunshine, without hurrying, as far as around the first corner. Then she signaled for a cab, and showed the driver a louis d'or.

"Hotel Normandie. This is for you—if you make speed," she said.

IT was a wonder the driver was not arrested within a block; but it was nothing less than a miracle that he reached the hotel without loss of life. A louis d'or is a great deal of money, and these Americans are all mad. When Marie followed her mistress from the cab, she made a little prayer of thanks to the *bon Dieu* who had saved her life.

Mademoiselle inquired of the clerk for Monsieur Covington.

Yes, Monsieur Covington had reached the hotel some fifteen minutes before. But he was ill. He had met with an accident. Already a surgeon was with him.

"He—he is not badly injured?" inquired Marjory.

"I do not know," answered the clerk. "He was carried to his room in a faint. He was very white."

"I will wait in the writing-room. When the surgeon comes down I wish to see him. At once—do you understand?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

Marie suspected what had happened. Monsieur Covington too had presented the driver with a louis d'or, and—miracles do not occur twice in one day.

Marjory seated herself by a desk, where she had a full view of the office—of all who came in and all who went out. That she was here doing this, and that Monte Covington was upstairs wounded by a pistol shot, was confusing, considering the fact that as short a time ago as yesterday evening she had not been conscious of the existence in Paris of either this hotel or of Monsieur Covington. Of the man who, on the other hand, had been disturbing her a great deal—this Teddy Hamilton—she thought not at all. It was as if he had ceased to exist.

HE had stood by the window in Madame Courcy's dingy reception-room, smiling—his hair all awry. She recalled many other details now: how his arm had hung limp; how he had been to a good deal of awkward trouble to keep his left arm always toward her; how white he had been.

She must have been a fool not to understand that something was wrong with him—the more so because only a few minutes before that he had stood before her with his cheeks a deep red, his body firm, his eyes clear and bright.

That was when he had asked her to marry him. Monte Covington had asked her to marry him, and she had consented. So, technically, she was at this moment engaged. The man upstairs was her fiancé. That gave her the right to be here.

Where was the surgeon? She rose and went to the clerk.

"Are you sure the surgeon has not gone?" she asked.

"Very sure," answered the clerk. "He has just sent out for a nurse."

"A nurse?" repeated Marjory.

"The doctor says Monsieur Covington must not be left alone."

"It's as bad—as that?"

"I do not know."

"I must see the doctor at once," she

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