

MYSELF

One morning a man in a close carriage bowled along over the Elysian fields in Paris toward a summit upon which the great Napoleon built the arch to commemorate his victories and passed down on the other side to the Boulogne wood. A man inside called a halt.

Alighting, he directed the coachman to drive on over a crest and wait. Then he began to pace idly back and forth, now turning to the east to admire the tints painted on the clouds by the coming day of day, now snapping off a blossoming head of clover or dandelion. He was an intellectual looking person, with a cast of countenance denoting the artistic or imaginative faculty, straight and slender, with a mass of black hair falling down over his coat collar.

Presently he took out his watch, noted the hour and muttered: "It is time some of them should arrive."

A moment later the grinding of wheels was heard and another carriage came in sight, drove to where the man was standing, stopped, and a gentleman alighted and stood face to face with the first comer. He was followed by two companions, one carrying a bundle of fells, the other a box.

"Ah, M. Charlier," said the newcomer, "why do I find you here alone? Where are the seconds?"

"Wait," said M. Charlier. "You are not the only person I am to meet this morning. There are several persons who wish to deprive me of my life, and I propose that all shall have a fair chance."

"First come, first served," is a good rule. I solicit the privilege of taking my revenge before any one else has had a chance to deprive me of it. The insult I have received cannot possibly have been equaled. I demand an opportunity to show you!"

Meanwhile another carriage drove up, and out stepped another party. This time there were two men carrying fells and, as before, one bearing a box. The principal could easily be recognized from the surprise with which he noticed that a party similar to his own had arrived before him.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," he said. "What does this mean?"

"It means, M. de Musser," said Charlier, "that M. Rubidoux here, having demanded satisfaction, as you have done, is entitled to it as much as you."

"But M. Rubidoux cannot possibly have the grievance that I have. Some petty breach of etiquette, perhaps, while I—"

Again there was a sound of wheels. The men looked and saw two more carriages coming.

"What do you mean, M. Charlier?" asked M. Rubidoux. "Are these carriages intended for your funeral train?"

"They bear other persons who come here for satisfaction."

The two carriages stopped, and from each a party alighted, all looking astonished at seeing so many persons present. M. Charlier stepped forward to introduce them.

"M. Rubidoux, M. de Musser, permit me to present M. Tetedoux and M. Cardiac."

All four men bowed very low, taking off their hats and stirring up considerable dust with the wind made by their sweeps. Their attendants stood in groups looking on, wondering at the strange turn the affair had taken.

"If all those you expect," said M. Rubidoux, "are present, I beg to say to them that, as first comer, I shall insist—"

"And I, too, insist," interrupted De Musser.

"Gentlemen!" exclaimed M. Tetedoux in a sonorous bass voice.

"Gentlemen!" cried M. Cardiac in tones of a shrill reed instrument.

Charlier folded his arms and waited.

"This fellow," cried Rubidoux, "has sought to save himself from my just wrath by picking a quarrel with so many that he thinks all not being able to take satisfaction we will let him off. I propose we cast lots for first chance."

"Agreed," cried all the others at once. Charlier himself wrote their names each on a separate bit of paper, put them in a hat, one of the seconds drew and the first chance fell to M. Rubidoux. They fought, and M. Rubidoux was so eager to finish the case himself that he fenced botly and badly. Presently his foil went flying in the air. He was obliged to give way to the next man whose name had been drawn, and M. Cardiac stood up before the victor.

"I'll show you that I do not insult me by drawing with a man whose name has been drawn before me to my character in a considerable novel with impunity."

"What novel?" asked M. Cardiac.

"Moi," replied Cardiac, "the novel 'Garnier in that story is a caricature of myself.'"

"Not at all," put in M. Tetedoux. "Garnier was drawn from me."

"Gentlemen," interrupted M. Rubidoux, "I think I can convince you that the portrait is intended to be mine when I tell you that M. Charlier sent me a copy of the book to read."

"He sent me a copy!" exclaimed M. Tetedoux.

"And me! And me!" cried both the others.

Charlier smiled ironically.

"Gentlemen," he said, "the portrait of Jules Garnier was drawn from myself."

It was some time before he could convince each of the four men that he was not caricatured, but all finally gave way, and he invited them to breakfast with him. The next morning an account of the affair appeared in the morning papers, and all Paris rushed to the book stands to buy a copy of "Moi."

WENDELL C. McLAIN.

The Man in the Skiff

One dark night a skiff bearing a light that illuminated a red flag drifted down the Allegheny river between the "twin cities." It moved with the current, the sole occupant standing in the stern, keeping it in the middle of the stream by means of a single oar instead of a rudder. The pilot of a ferryboat saw it and rang to stop the engines. Though the skiff passed a hundred feet from the ferryboat's bow the pilot again rang, this time to back water. As the skiff floated on under a bridge the man in the stern looked anxiously at the abutments and kept away, using his oar for a paddle. He was watched from above by a little knot of people, who wondered at his anxiety to keep off from contact and as to what was the load in the skiff's waist covered with a tarpaulin, giving the effect of a coffin under a pall.

A wheezy little steamer puffing up stream, as soon as her pilot caught sight of the red flag, turned to starboard and gave the mysterious little boat a wide berth. Then the skiff drifted past a wharf boat and passed very near it. A watchman with a lantern called to him to keep at a safer distance.

"Aye, aye," grunted the other, but before he could direct his skiff nearer to midwater it had passed the wharf boat. Coming to the mouth of the river where it meets the Monongahela the current took the little boat nearer to a steamer than was intended. Indeed it passed along the steamer's side within a dozen yards. There was a commotion among those on watch on the steamer. A man, seizing a pole, made ready to shove the skiff off should it come within touch; another stood swinging a lantern, yelling to the skiff's pilot to stand away and enforcing his order with a volley of oaths.

Then the skiff passed out on to the bosom of la belle riviere and commenced its descent.

An hour later the morning broke, and a steamboat came snorting down behind the mysterious skiff. The light had been put out and the red flag taken in. As the steamer passed the man in the skiff sang out:

"Gimme a lift."

"All right," grunted the captain from the hurricane deck.

A rope was thrown and the little boat taken in tow. All day the steamer towed the skiff. Toward evening a knot of men leaned over the steamer's stern guard. The man in the skiff saw them, but a hat was pulled over his eyes and they could not see his face except his mouth, which was firmly set. Suddenly the steamer's wheels stopped. The man in the skiff quickly thrust his oar into the water beside his boat and commenced to pull backward hastily. He avoided even any contact with his tower, and those looking on wondered why he was so cautious. Surely a slight bump would not have hurt him.

Then they mused upon the corpse-like burden. Was it a body? If so that was no reason for the steersman's timidity at contact. Something must be wrong with the little craft. Whatever we don't understand must be wrong. One of those who had been looking on went forward and interviewed the captain, who came aft and stood looking at the skiff.

"What 'y' got there?" he inquired gruffly.

The man in the skiff looked up at him as though loath to tell, then drawled:

"Dynamite."

The secret was out. They were towing a dynamite boat that in case of a jar might blow them all into eternity.

"Cast off," yelled the captain.

The man reluctantly went to the bow, passing his load gingerly, and loosened the rope.

The man in the skiff saw the boat pass around a bend in the river below and turned his head to look for another to come from the eastward. Far in the distance two funnels were pouring forth columns of black smoke. A steamer came by, and again the skiff was taken in tow, but this time not for long. The mate came aft, asked the nature of the cargo and, when told, with one blow of an ax severed the tow line.

This time the man in the skiff gave a low laugh, a laugh of intense satisfaction. "Over there," he said to himself, "is Ohio and over there is either West Virginia or Kentucky." Then, as the sun had set and twilight where the sun had set, he added: "Another hour, and no bit of bad luck for sixty days, and the game's won."

When the sun fell he paddled his boat toward the southern bank.

"Ben," he said, "there's not a craft in sight. Got up."

The tarpaulin was lifted, and a man in striped clothes sat up. He did not look like a criminal. Indeed he looked like a martyr. There was a careworn look in his face, a glassy, suffering look in his eye. There was no elation, but an expression of relief.

"Take off those clothes," said the man at the helm. And, reaching under his seat, he drew forth a bundle and tossed it at the other, who proceeded to put on a suit of ordinary clothes.

"Look out for that tin can," said his companion. "I don't want to save you from the gallows to blow you up."

In ten minutes the boat's nose touched the shore and the passenger got out.

"You are convinced," he asked, "of my innocence?"

"Certainly, or I wouldn't have used my business to save you."

"Very well. Goodby. I'm going south, where my wife and children will soon follow me."

"Goodby and good luck."

ALAN B. STARK.

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