

# Through the Wall

By CLEVELAND MOFFETT

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## CHAPTER XXI

### THE LAST DOLL.

"I've been so frightened," Alice said to him. "The man said you wanted me, and I came at once, but in the automobile, I felt something was wrong, and you know he is outside?"

"Does Peugeot know about this?" She shook her head. "The man came for me, Peugeot first. They went off together. I'm afraid it was a trick. Then about twenty minutes later the same man came back and said M. Peugeot was with you and that he had been sent to bring me to you. He showed me your ring and—"

"Yes, yes, I understand," interrupted Coquennel. "My poor child!" he muttered. Taking the candle, Coquennel went through the arched opening into the larger chamber and made a hurried inspection. The room was about fifteen feet square and ten feet high, with everything of stone—walls, floor and arched ceiling. Save for the passage into the smaller room there was no sign of an opening anywhere except two small square holes near the ceiling, probably ventilating shafts.

Around the four walls were logs piled evenly to the height of nearly six feet, and at the archway the pile ran straight through into the smaller room. The logs were in two foot lengths, and as the archway was about four feet wide the passage between the two rooms was half blocked with wood.

Coquennel walked slowly around the chamber, peering carefully into cracks between the logs, as if searching for something. As he went on he held the candle lower and lower and presently got down upon his hands and knees and crept along the base of the pile.

"What are you doing?" asked Alice, watching him in wonder from the archway. Without replying, the detective rose to his feet and, holding the candle high above his head, examined the walls above the wood pile. Then he reached up and scraped the stones with his finger nails in several places and then held his fingers close to the candle-light and looked at them and smelled them. His fingers were black with soot.

"M. Paul, won't you speak to me?" begged the girl. "Just a minute, just a minute," he answered absently. Then he spoke with quick decision, "I'm going to set you to work," he said. "By the way, have you any idea where we are?"

"She looked at him in surprise. 'Why, don't you know?' 'I think we are on the Rue de Valenciennes—a big hotel back of the high wall.' 'That's right,' she said. 'Ah, he didn't take me away!' rejoined M. Paul. 'That is something. Peugeot will scent danger and will move heaven and earth to save us. He will get Tignol, and Tignol knows I was here. But can they find us?' Suddenly he said to the girl: 'I may as well tell you our lives are in danger. He's going to set fire to this wall and—'

"Oh!" she cried, her eyes starting with terror. "See here," he said sharply. "You've got to help me. We have a chance yet. The fire will start in this big chamber, and I want to cut it off by blocking the passageway. Let's see!" He searched through his pockets. "He has taken my knife. Ah, this will do!" And, lifting a plate from the table, he broke it against the wall. "See! Take one of these pieces and see if you can saw through the rope. Use the jagged edge—like this. That cuts it. Try over there."

Alice flew to work eagerly, and in a few moments they had freed a section of the wood piled in the smaller chamber from the restraining ropes and stakes.

"Now, then," directed Coquennel, "you carry the logs to me, and I'll make a barricade in the passageway." The word passageway is somewhat misleading. There was really a distance of only three feet between the two chambers, this being the thickness of the massive stone wall that separated them. Half of this opening was already filled by the wood pile, and Coquennel proceeded to fill up the other half, laying logs on the floor lengthwise in the open part of the passage from chamber to chamber and then laying other logs on top of these, and so on as rapidly as the girl brought wood.

"They worked with all speed. Soon the passageway was solidly walled with closely fitted logs to the height of six feet. Above this, in the arched part, Coquennel worked more slowly, selecting logs of such shape and size as would fill the curve with the fewest number of cracks between them. There was danger in cracks between the obstructing logs, for cracks meant a draft, and a draft meant the spreading of the fire.

"Now," said M. Paul, surveying the blocked passageway, "that is the best we can do—with wood. We must stop these cracks with something else. What did you wear?" He glanced at the chair where Alice had thrown her things. "A white cloak and a straw hat with a white veil and a black velvet ribbon. Tear off the ribbon and we can't stand on ceremony. Here are my coat and vest. Rip them into strips and—Great God! There's the smoke now!"

As he spoke a thick grayish-brown smoke rose from the upper logs and spread away, another came from the lower logs, and another from the middle logs. The smoke was now so thick that it was difficult to see more than a few feet ahead.

"All right," he said, "but—how do we get this?"

"Through the door under the shelf. You know perfectly well, Willie!"

"Yes," he agreed, "I know about the door, but I forget how to get it open." "Silly!" She stamped her foot again. "You push on that stone thing under the shelf!"

Coquennel looked at the shelf and saw that it was supported by two stone brackets.

"You mean the thing that holds the shelf up?"

"Yes; you must press it." "But there are two things that hold the shelf up. Is it the one on this side that you press or the one on this side?"

"Dear me, what an aggravating boy! It's the one on this side, of course."

"Good!" He found her suddenly limp in his arms. Having spoken these strange words of wisdom or of folly, she had gone back into unconsciousness.

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"We must stop this," he cried, and, tearing the shirt from his shoulders, he ripped it into fragments and wedged these tight between the logs.

"We must have more cloth," he said gravely. "It's our only chance, little friend. I'll put out the candle! There! Let me have—whatever you can and—be quick!"

Again he worked with frantic haste, stuffing in the last shreds and rags that could be spared from their bodies whenever a dull glow from the other side revealed a crack in the barricade.

"There," he panted; "that's the best we can do! Now it's up to God! I believe we have stopped the draft," he said after a moment.

Suddenly a faint sound broke the stillness, and the detective started violently. It was a low, humming sound that presently grew stronger and then sang on steadily like a buzzing wheel.

"He moved about in perplexity. It seemed to him that he felt a current of air.

"Alice, come here!" he called. "Stand where I am. That's right. Now put out your hand. Do you feel anything?" "I feel a draft," she said.

"As she spoke the humming sound strengthened, and with it the draft blew stronger.

"Merciful God," cried Coquennel in a flash of understanding, "it's a blower!" M. Paul turned his face upward and listened attentively. "No doubt of it! It's sucking through an air shaft up there in the ceiling."

"I don't understand."

"He's forcing a draft from that room to this one. He has started a blower, I tell you, and—"

"What is a blower?" put in Alice. At her frightened tone Coquennel calmed himself and answered gently: "It's like a big electric fan. It's drawing air out of this room very fast with a suction, and I'm afraid unless—"

Just then there came a sharp pop, followed by a hissing noise, as if some one were breathing in air through shut teeth.

"The blower has sucked out one of our cloth plugs. There goes another!" he said as the popping sound was repeated. "And another! It's all off with our barricade, little girl."

The fire may come through a little," he told her comfortingly, "but I'll fix it so you will be all right. Come! We'll build another barricade. You know wood is a bad conductor of heat, and—if you have wood all about you and—over you, why, the fire can't burn you."

"Oh!" said Alice. "We'll go over to this door as far from the passageway as we can get. Now bring me logs from that side pile. That's right!"

Most of the smoke at first was borne upward by the blower's suction, and Alice was able to help Coquennel with the new barricade. They built this directly in front of the iron door with only one space enough between it and the door to allow them to crouch behind it. They made it about five feet long and three feet high.

"Lie down there," he directed. "Stretch right out behind the logs and keep your mouth close to the floor and as near as you can to the crack under the door. You'll have plenty of cool, sweet air. Now I'll fix a roof over this thing. Just shut your eyes and—rest. Understand, little friend?"

"Yes," she said.

He turned toward the barricade and saw that the flames were licking their way through the wall of logs. The heat was becoming unbearable. Coquennel crawled in behind the shelter of logs and crouched down beside the girl. She was quite unconscious now, but was breathing peacefully, smiling, with face flushed and red lips parted.

Suddenly there was a crumbling of logs at the passageway, and the chamber became light as day while a blast of heat swept over them. Coquennel looked out around the end of the shelter and saw flames a yard long shooting toward them through widening breaches in the logs.

Then he thought of his mother. She would know that her boy had fallen in a good cause, as his father had fallen. Alice stirred uneasily and opened her eyes. Then she sat up quickly, and there was something in her face Coquennel had never seen there, something he had never seen in any face.

"You have taken my beautiful doll. Poor little Esmeralda! You threw her up on that shelf, Willie—yes, you did!"

Then, before Coquennel could prevent it, she slipped out from behind the shelter and stood up in the fire bound chamber.

"Come back!" he cried, reaching after her, but the girl evaded him.

"There it is, on that shelf," she went on positively, and, following her finger, Coquennel saw, what he had not noticed before, a massive stone shelf jutting out from the wall just over the wood pile. "You must get my doll," she ordered.

"Certainly, I'll get it," soothingly. She stamped her foot in displeasure. "I don't like this place." She caught Coquennel's hand. "We'll go out where the fairies are. That's a much nicer place to play, Willie."

Here there came to M. Paul an urging of mysterious guidance, as if an inward voice had spoken to him and said that God was trying to save them; that he had put wisdom in this girl's mouth; and that he must listen.

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## LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

Vision of What May Come to Pass in the Rearrangement of Existing Conditions.

The man of the future sat patiently darning the family socks. From time to time his mild blue eyes glanced wearily round at the pile of mending at his elbow, and he sighed as he thought of Murphy, the raw Irishman, who needed incessant instruction in the most elementary details of the culinary art. Two noisy, sturdy girls romped tom-grishly about the room, aggravating his headache, while their gentle little brother sat quietly by his father's side, studying pictures in an old book of bygone fashions, which appealed naturally to the domestic instinct of the little man.

"Look, father," he murmured, pointing to an old print of the year 1909. "See what queer clothing that man has on. What are they? Did men really wear these, then?"

"Yes, dear," replied his father, laying down his needle for a moment and bending over the page. "I never saw any, but father once told me that grandfather wore them when he was a boy. They called them trousers!"

Quick Growth of Mahogany. The rapid growth of mahogany is shown in southern Nigeria, where the site of a town destroyed 60 years ago has been covered with a forest containing mahogany trees, some of which are more than ten feet in diameter.

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Go Far Down in Coal. No coal is mined in this country lower than a depth of 2,300 feet, while several English mines penetrate 5,500 feet down, and there are mines in Belgium 4,000 feet deep. Eight-inch seams of coal are mined commercially abroad, while few veins less than 14 inches thick are worked in this country.

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