

A LODGING FOR A NIGHT

ROBERT L. STEVENSON.

"My hands are numb to the wrist," pleaded Villon; "my feet are dead and full of twinges; my nose aches with the sharp air; the cold lies at my heart. I may be dead before morning. Only this once, father, and before God, I will never ask again!"

"You should have come earlier," said the ecclesiastic coolly. "Young men require a lesson now and then." He shut the wicket and retired deliberately into the interior of the house.

"Wormy old fox!" he cried. "If I had my hand under your twist I would send you flying headlong into the bottomless pit."

A door shut in the interior, faintly audible to the poet down long passages. He passed his hand over his mouth with an oath. And then the humor of the situation struck him, and he laughed and looked lightly up to heaven, where the stars seemed to be winking over his discomfort.

He passed all his chances under review, turning the white between his thumb and forefinger. Unfortunately he was on bad terms with some old friends who had once taken pity on him in such a plight. He had lampooned them in verse; he had beaten and cheated them; and yet now, when he was in so close a pinch, he thought there was at least one who might perhaps relent. It was chance. It was worth trying at least, and he would go and see.

On the way two little accidents happened to him which colored his musings in a very different manner. For, first, he fell in with the track of a patrol, and walked in it for some hundred yards, although it lay out of his direction. And this spirited him up; at least he had confused his trail; for he was still possessed with the idea of people tracking him all about Paris over the snow, and collaring him next morning before he was awake. The other matter affected him quite differently. He passed a street corner, where, not so long before, a woman and her child had been devoured by wolves.

This was just the kind of weather, he reflected, when the wolves might take it into their heads to enter Paris again; and a lone man in these deserted streets would run the chance of something worse than a mere scare. He stopped and looked upon the place with an unpleasant interest—it was a center where several lanes intersected each other; and he looked down them all, one after another, and held his breath to listen, lest he should detect some galloping black things on the snow or hear the sound of howling between him and the river. He remembered his mother telling the story and pointing out the spot, while he was yet a child. His mother! If he only knew where she lived, he might make sure at least of shelter. He determined he would inquire upon the morrow; nay, he would go and see her, too, poor old girl! So thinking, he arrived at his destination—his last hope for the night.

The house was quite dark, like its neighbors; and yet after a few taps he heard a movement overhead, a door opening and a cautious voice asking who was there. The poet named himself in a loud whisper and waited, not without some trepidation, the result. Nor had he to wait long. A window was suddenly opened, and a pair of slops splashed down upon the doorstep. Villon had not been unprepared for something of the sort, and had put himself as much in shelter as the nature of the porch admitted; but for all that, he was deplorably drenched below the waist. His hose began to freeze almost at once. Death from cold and exposure stared him in the face; he remembered he was of phibetical tendency, and began coughing tentatively. But the gravity of the danger steadied his nerves. He stopped a few hundred yards from the door where he had been so rudely used, and reflected with his finger to his nose. He could only see one way of getting a lodging, and that was to take it. He had noticed a house not far away, which looked as if it might be easily broken into, and thither he betook himself promptly, entertaining himself on the way with the idea of a room still hot, with a table still loaded with the remains of supper, where he might pass the rest of the black hours and whence he should issue, on the morrow, with an armful of valuable plate. He even considered on what viands and what wines he should prefer; and as he was calling the roll of his favorite dainties, roast fish presented itself to his mind with an odd mixture of amusement and horror.

The house in question looked dark at first sight; but as Villon made a preliminary inspection in search of the handiest point of attack, a little twinkling light caught his eye from behind a curtain. "The devil!" he thought. "People awake! Some student or some saint, confound the crew! Can't they get drunk and lie in bed snoring like their neighbors! What's the good of curfew, and poor devils of bell-ringers jumping at a rope's end in bell-towers? What's the use of day if people sit up all night? The gripes to them!" He grinned as he saw where his logie was leading him.

"Every man to his business, after all," added he, "and if they're awake, by the Lord, I may come by a supper honestly for once, and cheat the devil."

He went boldly to the door and knocked with an assured hand. On both previous occasions he had knocked timidly and with some dread of attracting notice; but now when he had just discarded the thought of a burglarious entry, knocking at a door seemed a mighty simple and innocent proceeding. The sound of his blows echoed through the house with thin, phantasmal reverberations, as though it were quite empty; but these had scarcely died away before a measured tread drew near, a couple of

boots were withdrawn, and one wing was opened broadly, as though no guile or fear of guile were known to those within. A tall figure of a man, muscular and spare, but a little bent, confronted Villon. The head was massive in bulk, but finely sculptured; the nose blunt at the bottom, but refining upward to where it joined a pair of strong and honest eyebrows; the mouth and eyes surrounded with delicate markings, and the whole face based upon a thick white beard, boldly and squarely trimmed. Seen as it was by the light of a flickering hand-lamp, it looked perhaps nobler than it had a right to do; but it was a fine face, honorable rather than intelligent, strong, simple, and righteous.

"You knock late, sir," said the old man in resonant, courteous tones. Villon cringed, and brought up many servile words of apology; at a crisis of this sort, the beggar was uppermost in him, and the man of genius hid his head with confusion.

"You are cold," repeated the old man, "and hungry? Well, step in." And he ordered him into the house with a noble enough gesture.

"Some great seigneur," thought Villon, as his host, setting down the lamp on the flagged pavement of the entry, shot the bolts once more into their places. "You will pardon me if I go in front," he said, when this was done; and he preceded the poet upstairs into a large apartment, warmed with a pan of charcoal and lighted by a great lamp hanging from the roof. It was very bare of furniture; only some gold plate on a sideboard, some folios, and a stand of armor behind the windows. Some smart tapestry hung upon the walls, representing the crucifixion of our Lord in one piece, and in another a scene of shepherds and shepherdesses by a running stream. Over the chimney was a shield of arms.

"Will you seat yourself," said the old man, "and forgive me if I leave you? I am alone in my house to-night, and if you are to eat I must forage for you myself." No sooner was his host gone than Villon leaped from the chair on which he had just seated himself, and began examining the room with the stealth and passion of a cat. He weighed the gold folios in his hand, opened all the folios, and investigated the arms upon the shield, and the stuff with which the seats were lined. He raised the window curtains, and saw that the windows were set with rich stained glass in figures, so far as he could see, of martial import.

"Seven pieces of plate," he said. "If there had been ten, I would have risked it. A fine house, and a fine old master, so help me all the saints!" And just then, hearing the old man's tread returning along the corridor, he stole back to his chair, and began tumbly toasting his wet legs before the charcoal pan.

His entertainer had a plate of meat in one hand and a jug of wine in the other. He set down the plate upon the table, motioning Villon to draw in his chair, and going to the sideboard, brought back two goblets, which he filled. "I drink you better fortune," he said, gravely touching Villon's cup with his own.

"To our better acquaintance," said the poet, growing bold. A mere man of the people would have been awed by the courtesy of the old seigneur, but Villon was hardened in that matter; he had made mirth for great lords before now, and found them as black rascals as himself. And so he devoted himself to the viands with a ravenous gusto, while the old man, leaning backward, watched him with steady, curious eyes.

"You have bood on your shoulder, my man," he said. "It was none of my shedding," he stammered.

"I had not supposed so," returned the host quietly. "A brawl?" "Well, something of that sort," Villon admitted with a quaver.

"Perhaps a fellow murdered?" "Oh, no, not murdered," said the poet, more and more confused. "It was all fair play—murdered by accident. I had got ferreted in it. God strike me dead!" he added fervently.

"One rogue the fewer, I dare say," observed the master of the house. "You may dare to say that," agreed Villon, infinitely relieved. "As big a rogue as there is between here and Jerusalem. He turned up his toes like a lamb. But it was a nasty thing to look at. I dare say you've seen dead men in your time, my lord?" he added, glancing at the armor.

"Many," said the old man. "I have followed the wars, as you imagine." Villon laid down his knife and fork, which he had just taken up again.

"Were any of them bald?" he asked. "Oh, yes; and with hair as white as mine."

"I don't think I should mind the white so much," said Villon. "His was red." And he had a return of his shuddering and tendency to laughter, which he drowned with a great draught of wine. "I'm a little put out when I think of it," he went on. "I knew him—damn him! And then the cold gives a man fancies—or the fancies give a man cold. I don't know which."

"Have you any money?" asked the old man. "I have one white," returned the poet, laughing. "I got it out of a dead jake's stocking in a porch. She was as dead as Caesar, poor wench, and as cold as a church, with bits of ribbon sticking in her hair. This is a hard world in winter for wolves and wenchies and poor rogues like me."

"I," said the old man, "am Enguerand de la Feuillie, seigneur de Brise-tout, bailli du Patatrac. Who and what may you be?"

Villon rose and made a suitable reverence. "I am called Francis Villon," he said. "A poor Master of Arts of this university. I know some Latin and a deal of vice. I can make chansons, ballades, lais, virelais, and roundels, and I am very fond of wine. I was born in a garret, and I shall not improbably die upon the gallows. I may add, my lord, that from this night forward I am your lordship's very obsequious servant to command."

"My guest for this evening, and no more."

"A very grateful guest," said Villon politely, and he drank in dumb show to his entertainer.

"You are shrewd," began the old man, tapping his forehead, "very shrewd; you have learning; you are a clerk; and yet you take a small piece of money off a dead woman in the street. Is it not a kind of theft?"

"It is a kind of theft much practiced in the wars, my lord."

"The wars are the field of honor," returned the old man proudly. "There a man plays his life upon the cast; he fights in the name of his lord the king, his Lord God, and all their lordships the holy saints and angels."

"Put it," said Villon, "that I were really a thief, should I not play my life also, and against heavier odds?"

"For gain, but not for honor."

"Gain?" repeated Villon with a shrug. "Gain! The poor fellow wants supper, and takes it. So does the soldier in a campaign. Why, what are all these requisitions we hear so much about? If they are not gain to those who take them, they are loss enough to the others. The men-at-arms drink by a good fire, while the burgher bites his nails to buy them wine and wood. I have seen a good many plowmen swinging on trees about the country; ay, I have seen thirty on one elm, and a very poor figure they made; and when I asked some one how all these came to be hanged, I was told it was because they could not scrape together enough crowns to satisfy the men-at-arms."

"These things are a necessity of war, which the low-born must endure with constancy. It is true that some captains drive overboard; there are spirits in every rank not easily moved by pity; and indeed many follow arms who are no better than brigands."

"You see," said the poet, "you can not separate the soldier from the brigand; and what is a thief but an isolated brigand with circumstanced manners? I steal a couple of mutton chops, without so much as disturbing people's sleep; the farmer grumbles a bit, but sups none the less wholesomely on what remains. You come up blowing gloriously on a trumpet, take away the whole sheep, and beat the farmer pitifully into the bargain. I have no trumpet; I am only Tom, Dick, or Harry; I am a rogue and a dog, and hanging's too good for me—with all my heart; but just ask the farmer which of us he prefers, just find out which of us he lies awake to curse on cold nights."

"Look at us two," said his lordship. "I am old, strong, and honored. If I were turned from my house to-morrow, hundreds would be proud to shelter me. Poor people would go out and pass the night in the streets with their children, if I merely hinted that I wished to be alone. And I find you up, wandering, homeless, and picking farthings off dead women by the wayside! I fear no man and nothing; I have seen you tremble and lose countenance at a word. I wait God's summons contentedly in my own house, or, if it please the king to call me out again, upon the field of battle. You look for the gallows; a rough, swift death, without hope or honor. Is there no difference between these two?"

"As far as to the moon," Villon acquiesced. "But if I had been born lord of Brise-tout, and you had been the poor scholar Francis, would the difference have been any the less? Should not I have been warning my knees at this charcoal pan, and would not you have been hoping for farthings in the snow? Should not I have been the soldier, and you the thief?"

(To be Continued.)

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Into the ground floor office of a magazine noted for the rapidity of its methods rushed a woman. In looks, bearing and clothes she was the typical literary crank, and walking up to the rail especially designed to head off such as she she said, "I want to know whether your magazine will print this for me right away." "This was a bundle of manuscript which, how ever it may have looked in those far days when the woman first began hawking it about, was now tattered and grimy. I was rolled. "We don't—er—we don't consider manuscripts down here," said the young man behind the rail. "You'll have to take it up stairs." "Up stairs," repeated the woman. "How far up?" "Oh, only four flights," said the man. "No, there is no elevator. I'm sorry, madam, but even our editor in chief uses the stairs." The woman glanced at the stairs. "Four flights counting this one?" she asked. "Counting this one," said the man. "That's too much," said the woman. "I don't care if all the editors in creation climb them, I shan't." And she turned to go when something caught her eye and back she came. "Look here," she said. "Isn't that a speaking tube over in the corner?" The man admitted that it was. "Why can't you call up through it and ask them if they will print my manuscript?" The man explained that the manuscript would have to be read first. "Well," went on the woman, "why can't you read it to them through the tube. Then they can tell right off and it'll save me climbing those stairs." The man explained "some more," but, although he did his best, it was in vain. Before he was half through the woman, manuscript in hand, had flounced out of the door with, "And some folks wonder why literature is degenerating."—New York Sun.

Two Failures. Fuddy—Tandem has been married before, hasn't he? Duddy—Yes. He was young and inexperienced when he married the first time. Fuddy—But how about this second marriage? Duddy—Oh, he is old enough to be childish now.—Boston Transcript.

Then He Sleeps. "Williams has a new cure for insomnia." "What is it?" "He takes a pitcher up stairs with him and goes to bed under the impression that he has to be up in time to catch a milkman."—Chicago Record.

The Arabs use camel's milk in place of that of the cow, and in all parts of the east sheep's milk is extensively used as a substitute for cow's milk, while in Spain the goat is the domestic substitute for the cow, that country having 4,530,000 goats.

MORTGAGE SALE. To be sold by Public Auction, at the Court House, in Summerside, on Saturday, the 22nd day of January, A. D. 1898, at the hour of twelve o'clock, noon, under a power of sale contained in a mortgage dated the twenty-first day of September, A. D. 1886, and made between Cyrus Mcneault and Peter Mcneault and Charlotte Mcneault, wife of said Peter Mcneault, of the one part, and J. Edward Wyatt, of the other part.

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