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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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The GUILLOTINE CLUB

by Capwell Wyckoff



"That is Queen Marie Antoinette sitting beside him. All of them have been guillotined."

MONSIEUR DALLARD, the scholar, was greatly beloved by his neighbors. They considered him a good-natured, studious sort of man, kindly to his acquaintances, and harmless. He studied constantly, but it made no difference in his manner—he was always jovial and sociable. Those most interested noted that he paid particular attention in his studies to the great revolution which had set France free; indeed, he had written a history of the French Revolution which the critics proclaimed as better than the average, and he seemed fascinated by the drama which had taken place around him so many years ago. His neighbors, not in any sense literary people, heard vaguely that he was an ardent champion of the aristocratic class which had been wiped out by the Terror, but as long as he was not aristocratic with them, they did not care.

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He was their neighbor, and they liked him.

One evening late in the fall, Monsieur Dallard sat, deep in thought, beside the little iron stove which heated his modest lodgings in the Rue St. Jacques. It was while he sat thus that his maid put her head in the door and coughed meaningly.

"Eh?" inquired Monsieur Dallard, looking up.

"Monsieur Clubin to see you, *Monsieur*," the maid said.

Monsieur Clubin was the neighborhood baker, one of the best in Paris, so Dallard thought, and a humble man. Nevertheless, *Monsieur* could not have been more polite to a prince, had one come to his door.

"Show him up," Monsieur Dallard said, setting some papers in order on his desk.

Monsieur Clubin came in at once, bowing to the scholar, who smiled

agreeably. The baker sat down in the chair that the scholar pushed toward him and lighted a cigar.

"*Peste!*" said Dallard, without looking fully at him. "A most gloomy countenance, my friend. What troubles you?"

Clubin sighed dismally. "I wish that I had not laughed at the story of Anthony Ferroe, the ironworker," he said.

"What do you mean?" Monsieur Dallard asked, sharply.

"That I have had the same experience, my friend," said the baker.

"*Ma foi!* I think you both dream," the scholar scoffed.

"That is what I told Ferroe when he told me his story, but I am ready to apologize now. Let me tell you how it happened. I was abroad last night at a very late hour, toward 1 in the morning, to be exact, and I returned to my house by way of the Rue St. Antoine. You perhaps know where I mean, down by that alley which leads to the darkest dens of the street, a place I would instinctively avoid in the daytime, and would certainly have avoided at night if I had not been in a hurry. Well, *Monsieur*, just as I passed the throat of that dark alley I noted before me a very old man, walking slowly, and the circumstance did not at once impress me; for, after all, why should not someone else be walking the street at that hour and in that place? But as this old man moved out into a splash of the brilliant moonlight, I noted something that quickened my interest. Monsieur Dallard, this man was not dressed in the modern fashion. I can not describe him to you, for I never saw such clothes, all lace and silk and bows and ruffles, much like the pictures which one sees in the books that you have. I realized that he looked exactly like the unknown man described to us by Monsieur Ferroe, and I slowed my pace, half afraid, but interested, nevertheless.

"As we approached the end of the Rue St. Antoine he slowed his step,

making it compulsory for me to come up to him. I had some thought of crossing the pavement to the other side, but thought better of it, as I was a little ashamed; so I drew up to him. When he heard my footsteps he turned and waited for me. Upon my joining him he bowed slightly and asked me the way to the Place de la Revolution!"

"Eh! Ah!" Monsieur Dallard exclaimed. "is not that exactly what the same man, or one like him, asked Monsieur Ferroe only last week?"

"Exactly. The same question. And the circumstances were the same. I looked at him closely, and what do you suppose I saw? The red ring around his neck, just as friend Ferroe has said. I saw that ring very closely, and what do you think? It cuts into the skin, much as though the head had been cut off at one time and glued back on again!"

"Ha!" ejaculated Monsieur Dallard. "Go on, my friend!"

"It was all very unusual, so I thought as we stood there. The city was asleep, at that point at least, and the voice of this old man echoed a trifle loudly. I pointed the way to him, and he thanked me kindly and moved off. It was then that I saw he was not real!"

"Come," the scholar said, impatiently. "You are dreaming, Monsieur Clubin."

"Was Ferroe dreaming? I said as much to him. But as this strange old man moved from the darker shadows I saw right through him! Clearly I saw the lamp post across the street, right through his body, as plainly as I see you now, friend Dallard. Well, this remarkable old man left me and walked rapidly away, leaving me rubbing my eyes in astonishment."

"It is very strange," mused Dallard, after a moment of silence. "From anyone else I would not listen to such a story, but you and Ferroe are honest men. Yet I find this much difference in your stories: Ferroe said

it was a young man who stopped him. True, the hour was the same, the question the same, and as you say, the body without substance, yet Ferroe insists that this was a young man, with a fine, aristocratic face and a fierce mustache. What does that signify?"

"I do not know," Clubin shrugged, helplessly. "I have told you what happened, that is all."

MONSIEUR FERROE owned a small ironworking shop in the heart of Paris, one of the oldest in the country. It had been handed down from father to son for generations, and Ferroe loved it jealously. He worked at times at the forges and benches and although he was fairly well off, was known as Ferroe, the ironworker. He gloried in the reputation as he gloried in the business itself. To his shop accordingly went Monsieur Dallard the scholar bright and early the following day.

He found the ancient doors wide open and a scene of uproar. Two gendarmes talked with Ferroe and a crowd of ragged children hovered about the shop, standing on tiptoe to look inside. When Ferroe had finished talking with the police Monsieur Dallard asked him anxiously what had happened.

"Bah!" said Monsieur Ferroe, angrily. "I have been robbed!"

"Robbed!" exclaimed Dallard, knowing that Ferroe kept no cash at any time in his shop.

"Come inside, away from those who would hear everything," Ferroe invited. And when the scholar had stepped inside, the ironworker continued, "I have been robbed of that which was more precious to me than gold."

"What was it, my friend?"

"The ax of the guillotine which sheared off the head of Louis XVI!" the ironworker replied.

"*Mordieu!*" cried Monsieur Dal-

lard, falling back a step. "What do you mean?"

"I mean just that. Perhaps you are not aware that it was in this shop that the ax-blade of the guillotine which stood in the Place de la Revolution, and on which Louis XVI was executed on the 21st of January, 1793, was made. Yes, my friend, it is so. Well, at the time that the Terror came to an end one of my ancestors was in charge of dismantling the famous guillotine upon which so many lost their lives, and he carried the knife back here, where it has lain for more than a century. Last night someone stole that blade."

"*Mon Dieu!*" Monsieur Dallard murmured, dazed at being so near an actual relic of the revolution he studied so much about.

"The perplexing part is this: it is not known how they broke in. Not a door or window has been touched. It was only yesterday that I last looked at the knife, to see if rust was attacking it. It has lain up there in my loft in a packing-case for more than a hundred years, and I watch it closely. This morning I looked again; and it was gone, the packing-case broken open. The police think I am crazy, but I am not," concluded Monsieur Ferroe, who looked quite wild, nevertheless.

MONSIEUR DALLARD thought much of the theft of the guillotine ax in the days that followed, dropping around to see Ferroe at stated intervals, to learn whether the blade had been recovered, but it had not. Dallard longed for a glimpse of the sharp weapon which had cut off the heads of the fairest and noblest of French chivalry, hoping for an experience which would lend indescribable romance to his life, wrapped up as it was in the happenings of the past. But he was disappointed, and gradually his visits fell away. Time had almost erased the memory from his mind when a piece from a daily paper revived it.

Sitting in his study before the fire Monsieur Dallard read the following with more than unusual interest:

Thieves, showing once more an amazing interest in things of the remote past, have again turned their hands to affairs relating to the Terror and the Revolution. Monsieur Dumont, who keeps the extensive and ancient lumberyards in the Rue Paysanne, reports the theft last night of two upright pieces of wood and a crossbeam, said by him to be the actual pieces of the guillotine which stood in the Place de la Revolution, formerly the Place Louis Quinze, where King Louis the XVI was executed by the republicans under General Santerre on January 21st, year 1793. This remarkable theft, coming as it does after a similar affair at the iron-shop of Monsieur Ferroc, at which time the blade of the same guillotine was stolen, baffles the police. Two witnesses have testified that late last night they saw two men going down the old Rue St. Antoine with these timbers on their shoulders.

Considerable interest has been awakened by these two amazing thefts, and speculation has been heightened by the fact that the men bearing the timbers of the historic guillotine were dressed in costumes unknown to the present day, being so odd that the witnesses were unable to describe them at all. It is thought in some quarters that they have been carried away to be sold to foreign collectors.

After many hours of deep thought Monsieur Dallard the scholar came to a decision. With the knowledge of the two men who had asked the way to the Place de la Revolution in his mind he was far from thinking that common thieves had stolen the parts of the historic guillotine. Monsieur Dallard looked below the surface of things at all times, and he was convinced that there was depth to this affair. Accordingly, he began to leave the house late at night, to return hungry and disappointed in the morning. His landlady tried hard to find the key to his movements, but failed.

The truth of the matter was that Monsieur Dallard, wrapped in his overcoat, patrolled the streets night after night without avail. From one end of Paris to the other he walked, looking for something which he could not name, but which lured him on, nevertheless. Most of his wanderings

led him down the dark well that was the Rue St. Antoine, that den from which a frenzied twenty-five million poor of France got the impetus to send them at the throats of the aristocracy. He was familiar with the street from his studies of history, and the dens were well known to him. But one house in the narrowest rut of the street which had been transformed under Napoleon was unknown to him.

He found himself regarding it musingly. It was off the main street, in a blind alley, a little, squat house with darkened and shuttered windows, surrounded by a low wall that was smothered by a black vine which weaved and twisted its way over it like some horrible monster. In the daytime this house was forbidding enough, and at night it was repulsive to the last degree. It was the source of the corruption and rot which had at one time dominated the entire section, and the scholar found a particular fascination in it. Approaching an old inhabitant of the district late one winter afternoon the scholar inquired concerning the house.

"It is the Plotters' House," the old man said, after studying him for a moment through bloodshot eyes.

"What do you mean, my friend?"

The old man explained readily. "At the time of the Terror a group of aristocrats, seeking to escape by hiding in the very neighborhood of those who sought to tear them to pieces, lived in that house and hatched plots against the republican government. At the time that Louis and Marie Antoinette were imprisoned the plotters met there to formulate plans to deliver them. In time they were taken, and all perished on the guillotine in the Place de la Grève. Since then, no one has lived in the house, for it is haunted."

"Come, my friend," coaxed Dallard. "This is a modern day; we laugh at ghosts. You romance, surely."

The old man looked fixedly at him for a moment and then turned away. "Listen some day at the doors or the

windows, my friend, and you will hear sobbing that will break your heart," he said, and so was gone.

After that Dallard found the Plotters' House a place of fascination. For hours he roamed there, watching the house and wondering. The inhabitants of the street thought him crazy and mothers kept a wary eye on their children. But the man who paced the street had eyes for nothing but the house which squatted inside of its wall as though defying the feeble efforts of men to penetrate its secrets.

IT WAS the night of the 21st of January when Dallard took his last walk down the Rue St. Antoine. He had begun to weary of his nightly excursions, the more so as they had proved fruitless except in the matter of the house which was such a find to him, but by this time he knew its outward appearance so well that he could do without seeing it for some time to come. He approached the house to look at it for the last time, and the fact that it was near 2 o'clock in the morning did not occur to him. He approached the rusty iron gate that opened like a grinning mouth in the wall and looked in.

The place was wrapped in intense darkness, but a film of light shone from under the front door. Surprise gripped him. He had been given to understand that the house was empty: what, then, was a light doing in the house? He leaned a little too heavily on the gate in order to see more clearly, and it swung back. This was stranger yet, for at other times he had failed to budge it. He pushed his way past it and walked up the uneven stones, his heart beating rapidly with excitement and a certain fear.

The porch was scarce a foot above the weedy yard, and he stepped carefully upon it. As he approached the door he was oppressed by a sense of evil, a feeling of something wrong and out of place. The impression lingered

in his mind that in crossing the small yard he had crossed the years to the fearful days of the Terror, when suspicion and murder stalked the country. And as the scholar drew near to the door a sound reached him that chilled his blood.

It was the sound of terrible sobbing!

All the sobs that human beings ever uttered might have been there in that house that night as he listened, too terror-stricken to move. Soft, almost silent, in volume, it reached him, that terrible, shuddering sound of suffering that unnerved the body and numbed the brain. Outside of that there was no sound: even the wind was quiet, the stiff branches of a few ghostly trees standing erect and mute in the front yard. St. Antoine was silent as the grave, and except for the sobbing there might have been no living soul in the world, for Monsieur Dallard was now not quite sure that he was alive.

Suddenly the sobbing ceased, leaving the world as silent as a tomb. There was no movement or sound inside the Plotters' House. Driven to his wits' end, undecided as to whether to run away or to seek further, the scholar leaned weakly against the thick front door.

It opened without a sound, throwing him into a single room.

White with terror the scholar jumped from his knees where he had landed and looked around. He was in a low, vaulted room of some width and length, and he was by no means alone. The strangest company in the world was assembled, watching him mutely, a medley of different expressions on their faces. Leaning against the wall the scholar looked at them attentively.

A score of men and as many women stood back of a long table looking at him, and such men and such women! Spectral, every one of them, for he saw objects back of them easily, as Monsieur Clubin had seen through the old man of the Rue St. Antoine, but life unmistakable in their burning

eyes. Dressed in silks and satins, in knee-breeches and flowing gowns, the men and women were plainly aristocrats, living or dead. With a thrill Dallard noted one characteristic that made them all kin: Each shadow had a red ring around his or her neck!

Three-score candles burned on the table, but the candles were spectral, too. They gave light, but there was no substance to them. No candle-grease fell from them and no breath disturbed their flame. From the candles Dallard shifted his eyes to the company, to find that the men all held their hands on the hilts of their swords and that the women were silently crowded together.

One of the men, a tall individual with a turned-up mustache, turned to the man at the door, the one who had opened it so suddenly, causing Dallard to fall in.

"Count Cagliostro, who is this man?"

The count, whom Dallard recognized from his study of history as the arch-quack of pre-Revolution history, bowed slightly and gracefully.

"My Lord Charolois, this is Monsieur Dallard, a scholar of the Rue Vendôme. He has written a history of the revolution, in which he loudly defends the nobility of old France. That makes him our friend indeed, and if I could prevail upon your lordship to admit this one human being to our yearly meeting, I should be most happy."

Charolois shrugged his shoulders. "Since he is our friend, I care little. The rapid changes which sweep over our city may soon wipe out this meeting-place, so I do not greatly care. See you to it, Count."

Count Cagliostro bowed again, and the others, losing their interest in the newcomer in the pressure of whatever business had brought them back from the spirit world, seemed to forget him. Cagliostro, on the contrary, moved nearer the scholar and engaged him in conversation.

"No doubt you are greatly surprised to find yourself in such company, Monsieur Dallard?"

Dallard made him a stately bow. "I am delighted, my lord. Who are these people?"

"This is the Guillotine Club," the notorious count explained. "A society of spirits murdered during the Reign of Terror. I am admitted because of my connection with it in prophecy. You will recall that I eloquently prophesied the Revolution."

"I recall your prophecy well," the scholar said, now more at his ease. "But tell me, is that man who spoke to you the infamous Charolois who went about the country shooting slaters and plumbers from off of roofs just for the pleasure of it?"

Cagliostro placed a hand lightly on his arm. "Softly, friend Dallard! Be careful of the use of that word 'infamous'! Yes, that is Charolois. You see who is sitting beside him? That is Queen Marie Antoinette, and to his left is Louis XVI. All of them have been guillotined, as you may see from the red ring about the neck. Look down the board. You note the lady with the lofty bearing and the red mark on her cheek? That is Charlotte Corday, who slew the terrible Marat in his bath, saving scores of lives by doing so. That red spot is the place where the brutal executioner struck her when he held the head up for the people after it had fallen into the basket. And that lady with the snow-white hair is the lady *maréchale* who exclaimed concerning the Count d'Artois, 'Depend upon it, sir, God will think twice before damning a man of that quality.' The others are of less importance—Mirabeau, the traitor Phillippe and others."

COUNT CHAROLOIS had risen by now and a hush fell over the assembled spirit. The shadow of the roof-sniper addressed them.

"Brothers and sisters of the Guil-

lotine Club, confederation of death," he said solemnly, "we are here once more in this most worthy house to transact the business which engages our attention yearly. On this, our anniversary of the damnable murder of King Louis, we consider briefly those matters of business which concern this eternal association." Picking up a list he scanned it rapidly and then went on: "It has been your pleasure to nominate me chairman. First in order of business is the election of president of the Guillotine Club."

There was a bustle and a stir, and under cover of it Dallard whispered to the count, "How is it that Mirabeau is a member? He was never guillotined."

"His sympathy and gallantry toward the queen make him a member," Cagliostro replied.

King Louis XVI arose and addressed the gathering: "Mr. Chairman and comrades. It has been your pleasure to make me president in years past, but I must decline with thanks on the present occasion. It is my thought that we have with us one more worthy to lead our distinguished club than myself. I am referring to Louis Pelletier, the highwayman, the first man ever to go to his death under the guillotine. Most of you will recall that Monsieur Pelletier was executed in the Place de la Grève on April 25th, 1792. Under the circumstances, I feel sure that Monsieur Pelletier is more worthy the office than I am."

Pelletier arose and bowed. He was a short, swarthy man with the look of a villain. The red ring around his neck seemed to be of a deeper red than the others, the scholar noticed. He was voted into office and the meeting went on.

"We will pass over the much disputed question that comes up yearly," the infamous chairman went on. "I mean the question as to whether Charlotte Corday was struck on the face

by the executioner or if the eternal red mark came from the rough bottom of the basket when the head hit it. In my own case, I recall very distinctly that the bottom of the basket which I faced as the knife sheared my head off looked to be exceedingly rough. But we'll let that pass for now. There is the matter of the puce coat of King Louis."

"Question, *Monsieur*," interrupted Pelletier.

The chairman bowed to him. "It seems that after our king—God bless him!—was guillotined, the rabble took his puce coat and tore it to shreds. Most of the material has perished, but to this day there are two or three finger rings in existence in France with King Louis' puce coat fragments in it. We must locate and confiscate these rings. With this in mind I delegate Count Cagliostro and Philippe Égalité to investigate and report on it definitely at the next meeting, one year from tonight."

The two delegates bowed. The chairman went on: "Now for the pressing business of the evening. Each year we kill in some manner or other a descendant of the man who sent us to the guillotine. By heart attacks and loathsome maladies which we bring up from the pit of death with us, each year we rid the world of an offspring of the rabble that murdered us. Tonight we have on our list the name of Anthony Ferroe, direct descendant of the man who made the blade of the guillotine of the Rue de la Revolution!"

Dallard started at hearing his friend's name. The company showed the liveliest signs of interest and pleasure.

"By what means, Monsieur Chairman?" Marie Antoinette inquired.

"We have been exceedingly fortunate in securing from the shop of Monsieur Ferroe the ax of the guillotine itself, and from a local lumberyard the timbers of the original ma-

chine. I regret to say, however, that the basket into which our heads fell could not be found. Apparently it has been burned up. But we can do without it. Listen!"

A hush fell over the ghastly company, and above it could be heard the hammering of timbers. Charolois turned to the company again.

"They are putting up the guillotine now. It will be our pleasure in a few minutes to stand by and watch this Ferroe die under the ax as we died." Reaching forward he touched a tiny gold bell which rested on the table before him. "Bring in the prisoner," he said, as two lackeys appeared at a back door.

While they waited for the prisoner conversation ran high. The assembly seemed enchanted by the coming spectacle.

A MOMENT later Anthony Ferroe was led in, his arms tightly bound. He did not see Dallard, but was marched to the table and faced the count.

"Monsieur Ferroe," said the murderous count, solemnly, "you have been informed as to why you are to die. Have you any request to make of this company before you die?"

Ferroe, his eyes bulging with amazement, but calm notwithstanding, only shook his head. The chairman continued: "It gives us great pleasure to do this. Within a sufficient number of years we shall have wiped out the descendants of our murderers, and then our task will be complete. Remove the prisoner to the guillotine!"

Scholar Dallard sprang forward. In a loud voice he cried: "Wait! Anthony Ferroe is my friend, and he must not go to the guillotine!"

Charolois looked balefully at Cagliostro. "Upon your head be this, Count Cagliostro!"

Ferroe had recognized his friend and sprang toward him. Side by side they faced the ghostly company. Dal-

lard stripped off the ironworker's bonds.

"Monsieur Ferroe leaves this house with me at once," he said, quietly.

With a single movement the men rose and placed hands on swords. The ladies moved back, making room.

President Pelletier strode forward. "Arrest both of these men. They both die on the guillotine at once," the highwayman announced.

Cagliostro had moved away from Dallard and took his stand with the men of the Guillotine Club. Ferroe, now sure of himself, swung his heavy fists.

"We'll see who goes to the guillotine," he roared.

Louis XVI drew his sword. "We can't waste time. Dawn is near. At them, gentlemen."

A small forest of swords was leveled at them and the men of the guillotine bore down on the two moderns. They had no arms and turned to flee, but Cagliostro had turned the key before joining the others. They found themselves forced apart, and their case desperate.

A multitude of small cuts suddenly appeared on Dallard as the sharp swords of the nobles cut him. Ferroe had succeeded in wrapping his massive arms around most of the weapons which were aimed at him. Out of the corner of his eye, even in his agony, Dallard saw Charlotte Corday unsheath her dagger, the same one with which she had killed Citizen Marat.

"Hark!" thundered Mirabeau, suddenly.

A bell rang out on the streets outside. Orders were given and someone pounded on the door.

"The gendarmes, *Messieurs*," panted Cagliostro, the prophet. "Vanish, all!"

"After a final thrust," hissed Pelletier. "That for treachery, sir scholar!" And he ran his sword through Monsieur Dallard.

THE papers carried this account of the affair in the Rue St. Antoine on the following day:

When the police, having been notified by neighbors that something strange was going on in the old house on the alley off the Rue St. Antoine, known to history as the Plotters' House, burst into the place they found it empty except for Monsieur Louis Dallard, a scholar of the Rue Vendôme, and Monsieur Anthony Ferroe, owner of the iron foundry of that name. The house was empty of furniture except for a long table.

Monsieur Dallard had just expired from a wound, presumably inflicted by a knife, and Monsieur Ferroe was exhausted. The story that Monsieur Ferroe told was so wild and incredible that he will be held for examination as soon as possible. It is sup-

posed that the two men were set upon by some bandits and severely used before the police arrived.

But the most remarkable circumstance of all is the fact that a complete guillotine, said by experts to be the very one which stood in the Place de la Revolution during the Terror, was found assembled in the rear yard of the Plotters' House. It will be taken down today and placed in the custody of the police. Plotters' House will be razed at once and a new structure erected on its site.

Small wonder was expressed today by the neighbors of Monsieur Dallard, who said that long study and erratic habits, one of which was constant night-wandering, had apparently broken his health mentally and taken him often to the house and to business which, judging by Monsieur Ferroe's peculiar mental state, will ever remain a profound mystery.