## THE SHOT THAT MISSED.

I came to make, in company with my friend, Dr. Noirot, the tour of the extensive gardens which surrounded his private asylum for the insane; we were returning to his residence, and he was on the point of relating to me the peculiar circumstances connected with the case of one of his patients, whom we had met, and who had greeted us with an air of great condescension.

At that moment the sharp report of a pistol rang out in the still morning air. I grasped the arm of my host and exclaimed:

"What is that? Surely one of your patients is doing mischief!"

Dr. Noirot smiled.

"No," said he, "be composed; it is merely another singular case, which I will show you."

Diverging to the left he drew me toward a small pavilion hidden behind a cluster of trees. He opened a door, and after proceeding a narrow vestibule, we reached a sort of long court, surrounded by high brick walls. A man was there, tall of stature, and clothed in the costume of a hunter, resembling in certain details, the habit of the Mexican cattle herder.

He was reclining against one of the walls of the pavilion, and at the moment of our arrival raised slowly the right hand, in which was firmly grasped a pistol. Our arrival disturbed him not. I followed the direction of the weapon, and I saw at about fifteen paces a white head with a black hole in the center of the forehead. It was, as far as I was able to judge at that distance, a mask of plaster of paris, skillfully executed, and in which I seemed to be able to distinguish a resemblance of Diana the huntress.

The shot was discharged. The head remained intact.

"See," said the doctor. "It is most remarkable; he never misses a shot."

"Is it possible?" said I, half incredulously.

"Yes, all the balls are lodged in the same place—in that dark spot not larger than an inche and a half in diameter. See!"

The man had drawn another pistol from his belt. He fired. The head moved not. The weapon was a handsome revolver, charged with several shots. The marksman discharged successively five other shots, none of which damaged the figure.

The doctor placed his hand upon the shoulder of the marksman, who, turning toward him, revealed a face adorned by a heavy black beard, and upon which reposed an air of determination and melancholy.

"Stop a moment," said the doctor.

The man bowed assentingly, and the doctor then conducted me to the end of the court and behind the mask, and showed me a kind of blackened iron plate which protected the wall from being damaged by the bullets. In the center of the plate I observed a round spot which glistened brightly from the effects of the lead which had been battered in striking.

"You see," said the doctor, in showing me the exact correspondence of the brilliant spot and the hole which passed through the plaster head, "all balls have entered here. You will find this to be true in every instance."

"It is indeed marvelous," I replied. "But what of his strange history?" "Let us go. I will relate it to you without."

We traversed the court and the vestibule, and this is the strange recital of Dr. Noirot, interrupted at regular intervals by the detonations of the mad marksman's revolver:

The poor unfortunate is called Guido Ventura. Whether Italian, Spanish or American, is not certainly known. American I should say, for it is from the United States these masters of the rifle and revolver come. It was from there he came to France. You could have seen him last season at the Alcazar d'Automne, where he had given four or five exhibitions of dexterity and would have performed elsewhere had not imperative reasons terminated abruptly his representations.

Guido Ventura, when he arrived at Paris, was accompanied by a young lady, known professionally as Mademoiselle Arabelle. She was a magnificent creature, with the form of a statue and the head of a goddess. She lacked not adorers, and in less than a week it became quite the fashion to see the superbe Arabelle assist Ventura in his wonderful performance.

She performed splendidly, the arms crossed, the face immovable, while at fifteen paces Ventura leveled his pistol, the bullets invariably pierced a card held between her snowy teeth, and within a few inches of her lips. The crowning feat was the breaking of a small glass ball placed upon her head. A single tremble of the hand of Ventura and—but the hand of Ventura never trembled.

Evidently Ventura loved this splendid woman with a love approaching idolatry. It sufficed to prove this to see once the fierce fires which flashed in his eyes when in the green room, waiting their turns, some gallant became too friendly or attentive to the lovely Arabelle. Jealous? Of course, and the poor fellow suffered atrociously, for his companion, as coquettish as she was beautiful, seemed to take a malicious pleasure in exasperating his passion.

The director of the Alcazar d'Automne had observed this, and had said:

"Take care, mademoiselle. That man each night holds in his hands your life."

Arabelle laughingly replied, as she raised her beautiful shoulders:

"He kill me? No; he gets too much gold from my head to ever think of spoiling it."

Each night she stood before the pistol's muzzle with the same calm tranquility, her soft glances calming the revolt of her lover as the eye of the master subdues the rage of the animal.

One evening, scarcely eight days after the arrival of Ventura at Paris, a gentleman of excellent appearance entered the green room and went toward Arabelle, who, with a slight cry of mingled surprise and pleasure, siezed the extended hand and kissed it passionately. Guido Ventura, who had been conversing with the director turned about upon the entrance of the stranger and witnessed this tender reception. His face assumed a deathlike pallor, and his eyes flashed with a fearful rage.

The new arrival was a rich American, whose attentions to Arabelle had caused some slight scandal during the time which they had remained in New York. It was to avoid this man that Ventura had canceled his engagement there and come to Paris. And now behold him here! Who but Arabelle could have informed him of their destination?

That night upon their return to the hotel, a violent quarrel took place between Ventura and his companion. But the most terrible scene of all occurred eight days later. During the week the American was lavish of his gifts and attentions to Arabelle. Ventura endeavored to induce the director to refuse the American entrance behind the scenes. But to no purpose.

On the evening in question, as Arabelle was preparing her stage costume, Guido saw a note fall from the corsage of her dress. He picked it up unobserved, and perused it eagerly. It was from the American, filled with expressions of endearment, and proposing flight on the morrow.

Five minutes later the call boy announced their turn. On their way to the stage, Ventura beheld the American leaning negligently against a scene. Ventura glared at him and hesitated, but at that moment, Arabelle, who had made the entrance in advance of him, stood prepared, the arms crossed, the glass ball in position on her head. With a bitter oath, but half suppressed, Ventura turned and strode upon the stage.

Ventura was in position, the muzzle of his pistol covered the mark, a stillness of death reigned in that dense mass of human beings in front. Arabelle smiled. On whom was she smiling? On whom save the man who rivaled him in her love? She could smile on a man who dared to make such a proposal! Heavens! she would perhaps assent to it!

The silence was terrible, but it was soon broken; a quick, sharp report rang out. Arabelle tottered and fell heavily on the stage; the bullet had pierced the center of her forehead.

When the arms of Ventura were loosened from the corpse which he held with an iron firmness to his breast, he was raving mad!

Crime? Accident? One knew not how to decide. At Paris sensations pass quickly, and after the first excitement had subsided the characters of this tragedy were soon forgotten.

Since that time he has passed most of his days in confinement here, before his plaster mask. Once and once only his aim failed, and the head was shattered. For eight days thereafter he was violent, but otherwise he has been harmless and inoffensive as you see.

We returned to the pavilion, and found Ventura cleaning his weapon.

"You have not missed, today, Ventura," said the doctor pleasantly.

The man raised his head, and, pointing to the mask, said in a low tone:

"No; always in the centre of the forehead, always in the centre."—New York Weekly.

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### A Whitewashing Job.

"Pay a man to dab a little whitewash on a fence!" Mr. Davis snorted indignantly. "If I couldn't do fool work like that I'd sell out."

Mrs. Davis sighed.

"You'll muss yourself all up," she protested, "and it will hurt your back."

Mr. Davis laughed scornfully.

"Just you watch me," he said with confidence. Then he went out and bought a whitewash brush He paid 25 cents for it. The dealer had tried to make him buy one for 75 cents.

Then he bought a bushel of lime and went home. The lime was a fine powder when it came and when mixed with water became a watery fluid with flakes of white on top. The lime stayed in the bottom of the tub.

When he used the new brush it shed hairs, and being wet, showed that it possessed two thin rows of hairs on either side and none in the middle. Also when the whitewashing dried the fence looked in no wise different from its former ugliness. Mr Davis considered. His back hurt. There was lime in his eyes and he was mad clear through.

He went into the house and found Mrs. Davis preparing to go down town so he went back to his work.

As soon as she was safely out of sight he headed for a negro shack he knew and resurrected Uncle Peter, who was 76 years old and had been whitewashing and doing odd jobs for seventy years.

He turned the job over to Uncle Peter, who threw the brush into the alley, emptied the whitewash and procured $2 from him.

With a wheelbarrow Uncle Peter disappeared and shortly returned with a barrowload of lump lime and a brush and set to work. Mr. Davis sat on the steps with his pipe and watched him work.

When Mrs. Davis returned her husband was washed and shaven and the fence was glistening white.

"Why, you did do it!" she said. Her evident surprise nettled her husband.

"Of course I did," he said; "I do all I set out to do."

"All by yourself?" inquired Mrs. Davis, admiringly.

"Well," confessed Mr. Davis, "I got Uncle Peter to sorter help me."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Davis, and went in to take off her hat.—Galveston News.


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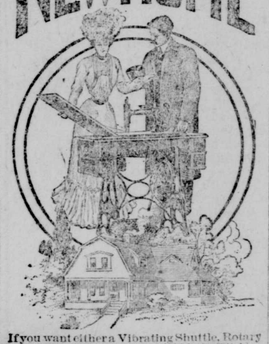

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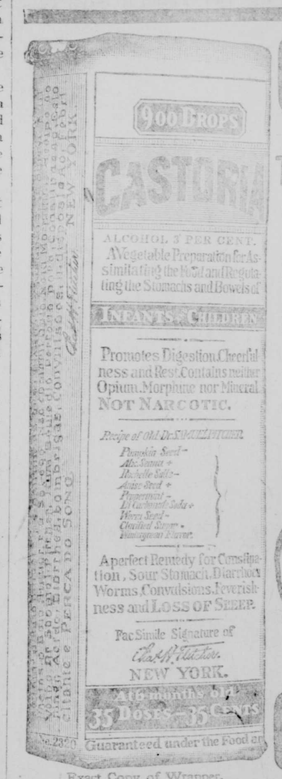


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