

SCARAMOUCHE

by Rafael Sabatini

To escape hanging on the charge of sedition, ANDRE-LOUIS MOREAU flees from his native town of Gavrielle and hides in a band of strolling players in which he makes a great success in the character of SCARAMOUCHE.

His flight has caused him to delay revenge on the great and powerful MARSIS DE LA VILLEURAYZ, who tricked Andre's dear friend, PHILIPPE DE VILMORIN, a divinity student, into a duel and then left him because he feared the ideologist's "dangerous gift of eloquence."

Overcome with pride by his friend, Andre-Louis swore to come on his work of reforming the lot of the peasants.

Scaramouche, as Andre-Louis is now called, falls in love with CLIMENE, daughter of the owner of the troupe, and tries to forget the beauty of ALICE DE HERIBALD, whom he thinks, will marry the Marquis. Climené treats him with coldness.

"And so, you find me cruel?" Climené challenged him at length.

Andre-Louis looked at her with a half-smile.

"You have grown weary of your part of cruel madam—a dull part, believe me and unworthy of your talents. Were I a woman and had I your loveliness and your grace, Climené, I should disdain to use them as weapons of offense."

"Loveliness and grace?" she echoed, feigning amused surprise. But the vain baggage was mollified. "When was it that you discovered this beauty and this grace, M. Scaramouche?"

"One morning when I beheld you rehearsing a love-scene with Leandre. "Why, that was the first time you saw me."

"I had no earlier occasion to remark your charms."

"You ask me to believe too much," said she, but her tone was softer than he had ever known it yet.

"Then you'll refuse to believe me if I confess that it was this grace and beauty that determined my destiny that day by urging me to join your father's troupe."

At that she became a little out of breath. There was no longer any question of finding an outlet for resentment. Resentment was all forgotten.

"But why? With what object?"

"With the object of asking you one day to be my wife."

"You go very fast, don't you," she asked him, with heat.

"I do. Haven't you observed it? I am a man of sudden impulses. I have curbed and repressed myself not to scare you by precipitancy. I

"And doesn't it matter what I may take into my head?"

"Of course. But you could have neither the bad taste nor the bad heart to offer any obstacle."

"You take that for granted? Aye, that is your way, to be sure—to take things for granted. You have done an unworthy thing, Scaramouche. You have betrayed my trust in you. I am very angry with you."

He rolled forward with his ponderous yet curiously noiseless gait, Scaramouche turned to Climené, smiling, and handed her the candle.

"If you will leave us, Climené, I will ask your hand of your father in proper form."

She vanished, a little fluttered, lovelier than ever in her mixture of confusion and timidity. Scaramouche closed the door and faced the en-

trance. M. Binet, who had flung himself into an armchair.

"Father-in-law," said he, "I congratulate you. This will certainly mean the Comedie Francaise for Climené, and that before long, and you shall shine in the glory she will reflect. As the father of Madame Scaramouche you may yet be famous."

"You're a damned corsair," he cried, thickly, banging his ham-like fist upon the table. "A corsair! First you sell in and plunder me of my legitimate gains; and now you want to carry off my daughter. But I'll be damned if I'll give her to a graceless, nameless scoundrel like you, for whom the gallows are waiting already."

Scaramouche pulled the bell rope, not at all discomposed. He smiled.

There was a flush on his cheeks and a gleam in his eyes. He was very pleased with the world that night. He really owed a great debt to M. de Lesdiguières.

"Binet," said he, "forget for once that you are Pantalo and behave as a nice, amiable father-in-law should behave when he has secured a son-in-law of exceptional merits."

CHAPTER VI.

The Binet Troupe opened in Nantes as you may discover in surviving copies of the "Courrier Nantais"—on the Feast of the Scaramouche with "Les Fourberies de Scaramouche."

For Scaramouche himself the opening success was not confined to the public. At the end of the play a great reception awaited him from his companions assembled in the green room of the theater.

On the following night they played "The Shy Lover" to a full house, the fame of their debut having gone abroad, and the success of Monday was confirmed.

After breakfast the following morning, Andre-Louis and Climené sallied forth to take the air upon the quays. Columbine tactlessly joined them as they were setting out, though matters were improved a little when Harlequin came running after them, and attached himself to Columbine.

Through the bustle of traffic on the quay a cabriolet, the upper half of which was almost entirely made of glass, had approached them. It was drawn by two magnificent bay horses and driven by a superbly liveried coachman.

In the cabriolet sat a slight young girl wrapped in a luxuriant pelisse, her face of a delicate loveliness. She was leaning forward, her lips parted, her eyes devouring Scaramouche until they drew his gaze. When that happened, the shock of it brought him abruptly to a dumfounded halt.

"What is it, Scaramouche?"

But he made no attempt to answer her, and at that moment the coachman, to whom the little lady had al-

ready signaled, brought the carriage to a standstill beside them. Seen in the gorgeous setting of that coach with its escutcheoned panels, its portly coachman and its white-stockinged footman—who swung instantly to earth as the vehicle stopped—its dainty occupant seemed to Climené a princess out of a fairy tale. And this princess leaned forward, with eyes aglow and cheeks flushed, stretching out a choice gloved hand to Scaramouche.

"Andre-Louis" she called him. "Aline!"

(Continued in Our Next Issue.)

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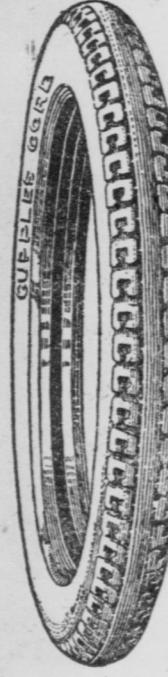
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