

# SCARAMOUCHE

by Rafael Sabatini

To escape hanging on the charge of sedition, Andre-Louis Moreau flees from his native town of Gavrilac and hides his identity as a member of a band of roving 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 Marquis de la Tour d'Azyr, who treacherously had killed his friend, Philippe de Villamor, a divinity student, into a duel and then killed him because he feared the idealist's "dangerous gift of eloquence."

Over the dead body of his friend, Andre-Louis swore to carry 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 forest the beautiful ALINE DE KERCAIDOU, whom, he thinks, will marry the Marquis. Climene treats him with coldness.

"And so, you find me cruel?" Climene looked at him at length.

Andre-Louis chuckled 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, Climene, 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

have waited—oh! so patiently—until you should tire of that mood of cruelty."

Mechanically, and as if by tacit consent, they resumed their walk.

"And I ask you to observe," he said, "when you complain that I go very fast, that, after all, I have so far asked you for nothing."

"How?" quoth she, frowning.

"I have merely told you of my hopes."

It was his self-possession that exasperated her; for after that she walked the short remainder of the way in silence, and so, for the moment, the matter was left just there.

But that night, after they had supped, it chanced that when Climene was about to retire, he and she were alone together in the room above-stairs that her father kept exclusively for his company.

As Climene now rose to withdraw for the night, Scaramouche rose with her to light her candle. Holding it in her left hand, she offered him her right, a long, tapering, white hand at the end of a softly rounded arm that was bare to the elbow.

Thus a moment, then he took the tips of her fingers in his grasp, and bowing over the hand, pressed his lips upon it. Then he looked at her again. The intense femininity of her lured him on, invited him, surrendered to him.

By the hand he continued to hold, he drew her toward him. She came unresisting. He took the candle from her and set it down on the sideboard by which she stood. The next moment her slight, lithe body was in his arms, and he was kissing her, murmuring her name as if it were a prayer.

"Am I cruel now?" she asked him, panting. He kissed her again for the only answer. "You made me cruel because you would not see," she told him next in a whisper.

And then the door opened and M. Binet came in to have his paternal eyes regaled by this highly indecorous behavior of his daughter.

"And what may be the meaning of this?" demanded M. Binet, bewildered and profoundly shocked.

"Does it require explaining?" asked Scaramouche. "It means that Climene and I have taken it into our heads to be married."

"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 Climene, smiling, and handed her the candle.

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

She vanished, a little flustered, lovelier than ever in her mixture of confusion and timidity. Scaramouche closed the door and faced the enraged 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 Climene, 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 sail in and plunder me of half 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 galleys are waiting already."

Scaramouche pulled the bell rope, not at all discomfited. 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 Lesdigueres.

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

CHAPTER VII.

The Binet Troupe opened in Nantes as you may discover in surviving copies of the "Courrier Nantais"—on the Feast of the Purification 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 Climene sallied forth to take the air upon the quay. 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 Climene a princess out of a fairy tale. And this princess, leaning forward, with eyes aglow and cheeks aflush, stretching out a choicely gloved hand to Scaramouche.

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

(Continued in Our Next Issue.)

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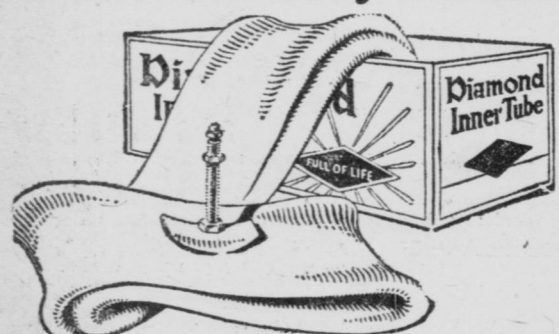
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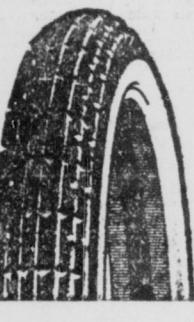
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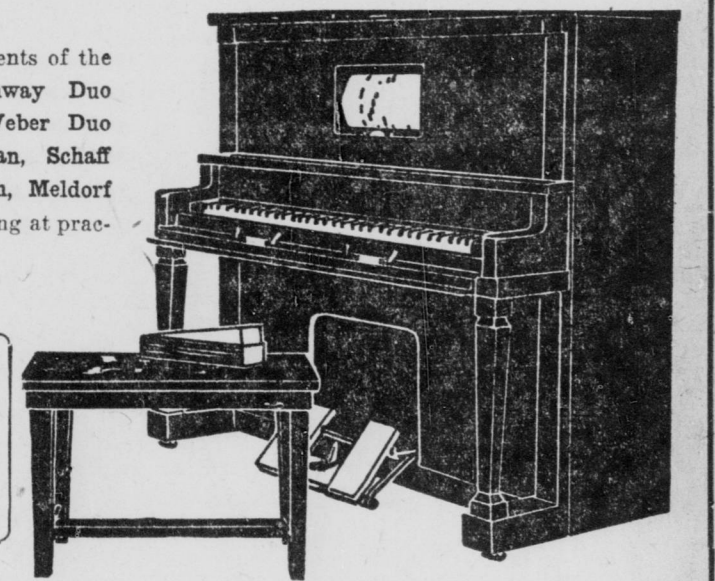
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