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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DEAN'S WATCH \*\*\*

# THE DEAN'S WATCH

By Erckmann-Chatrian

Translated by Ralph Browning Fiske

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## I

On the day before Christmas of the year 1832, my friend Wilfred, with his double-bass slung over his back, and I, with my violin under my arm, started to walk from the Black Forest to Heidelberg. It was unusually snowy weather; as far as we could see across the great, deserted plain, there was no trace of road nor path. The wind kept up its harsh aria with monotonous persistency, and Wilfred, with his flattened wallet at his belt, and the vizor of his cap drawn over his eyes, moved on before me, straddling the drifts with his long, heron legs, and whistling a gay tune to keep up his spirits. Now and then, he would turn around with a

waggish smile, and cry: "Comrade, let's have the waltz from 'Robin,' I feel like dancing." A burst of laughter followed these words, and then the good fellow would resume his march courageously. I followed on as well as I could, up to my knees in snow, and I felt a sense of melancholy take possession of me.

The spires of Heidelberg began to appear on the extreme horizon, and we hoped to reach there before nightfall. It was then about five o'clock in the afternoon, and great flakes of snow were whirling through the gray atmosphere. Suddenly we heard the sound of a horse approaching from behind us. When the rider was within twenty yards of us, he moderated his speed, studying us meanwhile with a sidelong glance. We returned his gaze.

Picture to yourself a large man, with reddish hair and beard, in a three-cornered hat and loose fox-skin pelisse; his arms buried to the elbows in fur gloves. He carried a handsome valise behind him, resting on the haunches of his powerful stallion. He was evidently some alderman or burgomaster or personage of like importance.

"Ho! Ho! my good fellows!" he cried; "you are on your way to Heidelberg to perform, I see." Wilfred surveyed the traveler from the corner of his eye, and replied briefly: "Is that of any interest to you, sir?" "Yes, for in that case I wish to give you a bit of advice." "Advice?" "Precisely; if you wish it." Wilfred started on without replying. I noticed that the traveler's appearance was like that of an enormous cat; his ears wide apart, his eyelids half closed, with a bristling mustache, and a fatherly, almost caressing manner. "My friend," he continued, addressing himself to me, "frankly, you will do well to retrace your steps." "Why so, sir?" "The great Maestro Pimenti has just now announced a concert to take place at Heidelberg on Christmas day. The entire city will be there, and you will not earn a kreutzer." At this point, Wilfred turned around ill-humoredly: "We care not a sou for your Maestro nor all the Pimentis in Christendom," he said; "look at this young fellow here, without even the sign of a beard on his chin! He has never yet played outside of the ale-houses of the Black Forest, for the woodcutters and charcoal-women to dance; and yet this boy, with his long yellow curls and big blue eyes, defies all your Italian impostors. His left hand is possessed of inimitable melody, grace, and suppleness, and his right of a power to draw the bow, that the Almighty rarely accords us mortals."

"Oh! ho! Indeed!" returned the other. "It is just as I tell you," Wilfred replied, and he resumed his pace, blowing on his fingers that were red with the cold, I saw that he was ridiculing the horseman, who continued to follow us at an easy trot. We continued thus for a full half mile in silence. Suddenly the stranger said to us abruptly: "Whatever skill you may possess, go back to the Black Forest; we have vagabonds enough in Heidelberg without you to increase the number. I give you good advice, particularly under the existing circumstances; you will do well to profit by it."

Wilfred, now thoroughly out of patience, was about to reply, but the traveler, urging his horse into a gallop, had already crossed the broad Avenue d'Electeur. An immense flock of crows flew up from the plain and seemed to be following him, filling the heavens with their cawing. We reached Heidelberg at about seven o'clock, and we did indeed see Pimenti's magnificent posters on all the walls of the city, which read: "Grand Concert Solo."

That same evening in visiting the various inns, we met many old comrades from the Black Forest, who engaged us to play in their troupe. There was old Bremer, the 'cellist, his two sons, Ludwig and Karl, both good second violins; Heinrich Siebel, the clarionet player, and Bertha with her harp; Wilfred with his double-bass and I with my violin made up the number. We agreed to travel together after the Christmas concert and divide the proceeds among us. Wilfred had already hired a room for us both on the sixth floor of the Pied de Mouton Tavern, which stood halfway down the Holdergasse, and for it he was to pay four kreutzers a day. Properly speaking, it was nothing but a garret, but fortunately there was a stove in it, and we lighted a fire to dry ourselves.

As we were comfortably seated, toasting chestnuts over the fire and enjoying a jug of wine, little Annette, the housemaid, appeared in a black calico dress and velvet turban, with rosy cheeks and lips like a cluster of cherries. She came running up the stairs, gave a hasty knock and threw herself joyfully into my arms. I had known the pretty little girl for a long time; we were of the same village, and if truth must be told, her sparkling eyes and frolicsome ways had quite won my heart. "I came up to have a little talk with you," she said, dropping into a chair. "I saw you come up a moment ago and here I am."

She began to chatter away, asking for this one or that one of the village and hardly giving me time to reply. Every now and then she would pause and look at me with the greatest tenderness. We might have continued thus until the next morning had not Dame Grédel Dick begun to call from the foot of the stairs: "Annette! Annette! Are you never coming?" "Right away, ma'am!" answered the poor child reluctantly. She tapped me lightly on the cheek and ran toward the door; but just as she was crossing the threshold, she suddenly stopped. "By the way," she cried, "I was forgetting to tell you; but perhaps you have heard about it?" "About what?" "The death of our precentor, Zahn." "But how does that, affect us?" "To be sure; only see that your passport is all right Tomorrow morning at eight o'clock they will come to examine it. Everybody is being arrested in the last fortnight. The precentor was assassinated last night in the library of Saint Christopher's Chapel, and only a week ago, old Ulmet Elias, the sacrificer, was similarly murdered in the Rue des Juifs. Some days before that Christina Haas, the old midwife, was also killed, as well as the agate dealer Seligmann of the Rue Durlach. So look out for yourself, dear Kasper, and see that your passport is all right."

While she was speaking, Dame Grédel's voice came again from below: "Annette! will you come here? The good-for-nothing child, leaving me to do all the work!"

And the sound of men's voices calling for wine, beer, ham, or sausages mingled with her own. Further delay was out of the question. Annette hastened down the stairs, crying as she went: "Goodness, ma'am! what has happened? One would think that the house were afire!" Wilfred crossed the room and closed the door behind her; then returning to his chair, we looked at each other, not without a feeling of apprehension.

"That is singular news," he said; "your passport is all right, I suppose?" "Certainly," And I produced my papers. "Good! Mine is too, for I had it made out just before leaving. But nevertheless, these murders do not augur us any good. I am afraid we shall not be able to do much business here; many of the families will be in mourning; and then, too, the bother and pettifogging of the authorities." "Pshaw! you take too gloomy a view

of it," I replied.

We continued to discuss these singular happenings until after midnight. The glow from our little stove lighted up the angle of the roof, the square window with its three cracked panes, the straw strewn about the floor, the blackened beams propped against each other, and the little firwood table that cast its uncertain shadow upon the worm-eaten ceiling. From time to time, a mouse, enticed by the warmth, would dart like an arrow along the wall. The wind howled in the chimney and whirled the snow about the gutters. I was dreaming of Annette; the silence was complete. Suddenly Wilfred exclaimed, throwing off his jacket: "It is time for sleep. Put another stick on the fire and we will go to bed!" "We can't do better than that," I replied. So saying, I drew off my boots, and a moment later we stretched out on the straw with the coverlid tucked under our chins and a log under our heads for a pillow. Wilfred lost no time in getting to sleep. The light from the stove flickered and trembled; the wind redoubled its force outside, and as I lay thus with a sense of perfect contentment, I, too, dozed off. At about two o'clock in the morning I was awakened by a strange noise. I thought at first that it was a cat running along the gutter, but, putting my ear to the wall, my uncertainty was at once dispelled; somebody was walking on the roof. I nudged Wilfred. "Sh!" he whispered, pressing my hand; he had heard it, too. The firelight was casting its last shadows on the decrepit walls. I was considering whether I would get up or not, when the little window, held only by a bit of brick, slowly opened. A pale face with shining eyes, red hair, and quivering cheeks appeared in the opening and gazed into the interior of the chamber. Our fear was so great that we hadn't strength left to cry out. At length the man glided through the sash and let himself down into the loft without a sound. The man, short and thick-set, the muscles of his face contracted like a tiger about to spring, was none other than the ingenuous person who had volunteered his advice on the road to Heidelberg. But how different he seemed to us now! In spite of the bitter cold, he was in his shirt sleeves, dressed only in a pair of breeches, woolen stockings, and silver buckled shoes. A long, blood-stained knife glittered in his hand.

Wilfred and I thought our last hour had surely come. But he did not appear to see us in the oblique shadow of the loft, notwithstanding that the fire started up again in the cold draft from the open window. He squatted down on a chair and began to shiver in a strange manner. Suddenly he fixed his yellowish-green eyes upon me; his nostrils dilated and he watched me for a full minute, while the blood froze in my veins. Then turning toward the stove, he gave a hoarse cough, like the purring of a cat, without moving a muscle of his face. He drew a large watch from his breeches pocket, made a gesture as if looking at the time, and either inadvertently or purposely laid it on the table. This done, he rose as if undecided, looked doubtfully at the window, hesitated, and finally disappeared through the door, leaving it wide open behind him. I sprang up to turn the lock; already the man's footsteps creaked on the staircase two floors below. An irresistible curiosity asserted itself over my fear, and hearing a window open, which looked upon the court, I approached the sash of the little winding staircase on the same side of the house. The courtyard, from where I stood, lay at a dizzy depth, and a wall from fifty to sixty feet high divided it. On the right of the wall was the yard of a pork butcher; on the left, the inn yard of the Pied de Mouton. The top of this wall, which was overgrown with damp mosses and that sort of vegetation that thrives in dark places, extended in a straight line from the window, which the man had just opened, to the roof of a large, sombre-looking dwelling, built in the rear of the Bergstrasse. I took all this in at a glance while the moon shone between the heavy, snow-laden clouds, and I shuddered as I saw the man flee along the wall, his head bent forward and the knife still in his hand, while the wind howled lugubriously around him. He reached the opposite roof and disappeared. I thought I must be dreaming. For some moments I stood there, open-mouthed with wonder, my breast bare, and hair tossed about, drenched by the sleet that fell from the roof. At length recovering from my bewilderment, I returned to the loft and found Wilfred, who looked at me with a haggard expression and was mumbling a prayer. I hastened to bolt the door, dress myself, and replenish the fire.

"Well," said my comrade, sitting up. "Well," I rejoined, "we have escaped this time, but if that fellow didn't see us, it was only because our time has not yet come." "You are right!" he cried. "He is one of the murderers Annette spoke of. Great Heavens! What a face! And what a knife!" And he fell back on the straw.

I emptied at a draft what wine still remained in the jug, and then, as the fire started up again, diffusing a grateful warmth through the chamber, and the lock appeared sufficiently strong, my courage began to revive. But the watch was still there and the man might return for it. The thought filled us with horror.

"Well, what is our next move?" asked Wilfred. "The best thing we can do is to strike out at once for the Black Forest." "Why so?" "I have no further desire to figure on the double-bass; you may do as you like." "Why should we leave? We have committed no crime." "Speak low!" he replied, "that one word 'crime' might hang us. We poor devils are made to serve as examples for others. They don't bother their heads much to find out whether we are guilty or not. If they should discover that watch here, it would be enough." "Look here, Wilfred! It won't do to lose your head! A crime has undoubtedly been committed in this neighborhood, but what should honest men do under the circumstances? Instead of running away from Justice, they should try to aid it." "How aid it?" "The simplest way would be to take this watch to the bailiff and tell him what has passed." "Never! I wouldn't even dare to touch it!" "Very well, I will take it myself, but now let's go back to bed and try to get some more sleep if we can." "I don't care to sleep." "Well, light your pipe, then, and we will talk while we wait for daylight. Let's go downstairs, there may be some one there still." "I would rather stay here." "All right." And we sat down again before the fire.

As soon as dawn appeared, I took the watch from the table. It was a fine one with minute and second hands. Wilfred seemed somewhat reassured. "Kasper," he said, "on second thoughts, it seems more suitable for me to go to the bailiff. You are too young to take part in such matters. You would make a mess of it when you tried to explain the affair." "Just as you like," I replied. "Yes, it would look odd for a man of my years to send a mere child in my place." "Very good; I understand."

He took the watch, but I believe that only his pride drove him to this resolution. He would have been ashamed to show less courage than I before his comrades. We went down from the loft in a thoughtful mood. As we crossed the alleyway that comes out on the Rue Saint Christopher, we heard the clicking of glasses. I recognized the voice of old Bremer and his sons, Ludwig and Karl. "By Jove," said I, "it wouldn't be a bad idea to take a glass before we start." I pushed open the door of the tap-room as I spoke, and we found all our

company gathered there, their instruments variously deposited about the room. We were received with shouts of satisfaction and places were quickly made for us at the table. "Ho! Good morning, comrades," said Bremer; "more snow and wind. All the taverns are full of people, and every bottle that is opened means a florin in our pockets." I saw little Annette looking as fresh and fair as a rose, and smiling fondly at me with her lips and eyes. This sight reanimated me. It was I who got the daintiest morsels, and whenever she approached to set a glass of wine at my elbow, she touched me caressingly on the shoulder, and I thought, with a beating heart, of the days when we used to go chestnutting together. But in spite of this, the pale face of our strange visitor of the night before recurred to me from time to time, and made me tremble. I looked at Wilfred; he, too, seemed thoughtful.

Eight o'clock came and our party was about to start out, when the door was thrown open, and three big fellows, with lead-colored complexions, their eyes shining like rats, and their hats awry, appeared on the threshold, followed by several others of a like description. One of them, with a razor-back nose, and with a heavy club bound to his wrist, stepped forward, crying: "Your passports, gentlemen!" Each one hastened to comply with the request. Unfortunately, Wilfred, who stood near the stove, was seized with a sudden trembling. The officer's experienced eye detected his agitation, and as he paused in his reading to give him a questioning look, my comrade conceived the unlucky idea of slipping the watch into his boot; but before it had reached its destination, the official slapped his hand against the other's hip, and said jeeringly: "Something seems to trouble you here." To everybody's amazement, Wilfred was seized with a fainting spell and dropped upon a bench pale as death. Without further ceremony, Madoc, the Chief of Police, pulled up his trousers' leg and drew out the watch with a burst of evil laughter. He had no sooner glanced at it, however, than he became sober, and, turning to his men, he cried in a terrible voice: "Let no one leave the room! We have caught the whole band at last! Look! this is the watch of Dean Daniel Van den Berg. Bring hither the handcuffs!" This order chilled us to the marrow. A tumult followed, and I, believing that we were lost, slid under a bench near the wall. As I was watching them chain the hands of poor old Bremer and his sons, Karl and Ludwig, together with Heinrich and Wilfred, I felt Annette's little hand brush against my cheek and she drew me gently toward her—slowly and quietly toward the open cellar door. I was unnoticed in the general confusion; I slipped within; the door closed behind me. It was but the matter of a second. Scarcely had I concealed myself, before I heard my poor comrades depart; then all became silent.

I will leave you to imagine the nature of my reflections during an entire day, crouched down behind a wine cask with my legs gathered under me, and realizing that if a dog should enter the cellar, if the landlady should take the notion to come downstairs to fill a pitcher, if the cask should run out before night and were to be replaced; in short, if the slightest thing went amiss, it would be all up with me. All these thoughts and a thousand others passed through my mind, and I fancied that I already saw my comrades being led to execution. Little Annette, no less anxious than myself, closed the door prudently each time that she came up from the cellar. At last, I heard the old woman cry: "Leave the door open! Are you mad to lose half your time in shutting it?" After that the door remained ajar, and from my nook in the shadows I could see the tables gradually filling with new customers.

Stories, discussions, and exclamations concerning the famous band of robbers reached my ears. "Oh! the rascals!" cried one; "thank Heaven they are caught. What a scourge they have been to Heidelberg! No one dared risk himself in the streets after ten o'clock, and even business was beginning to suffer; but now things are changed and in a fortnight it will all be forgotten."

"Those musicians of the Black Forest are a lot of bandits!" chimed in another; "they make their way into the houses under pretext of playing, and meanwhile they are examining the locks, bolts, chests, and windows, and some fine morning we hear that such a one has had his throat cut in his bed; that his wife has been murdered, his children strangled, and his house rifled from top to bottom. The wretches should be strung up without mercy! Then we might have some peace." "The whole village will turn out to see them hanged," said Mother Grédel, "and as for me, it will be the happiest day of my life." "Do you know, if it hadn't been for Dean Daniel's watch, no trace of them would have been found. Last night the watch disappeared, and this morning the Dean notified the police. An hour later, Madoc bagged them all! Ha! Ha! Ha!" The entire roomful burst out laughing, and I trembled with shame, indignation, and fear in turn.

Meanwhile, the night drew on. Only a few loungers remained. The people of the inn, who had sat up the night before, were anxious to get to bed. I heard the landlady yawn and mutter: "Oh, dear! How long before we can get some sleep?" Most of the tipplers comprehended the force of this remark and withdrew; only one remained, sitting half asleep before his glass. The watchman, going his rounds, woke him up and he went off grumbling and staggering.

"At last!" I said to myself; "this is good luck; Mother Grédel has gone to bed and Annette will not be slow in getting me out." With this agreeable prospect in view, I had already stretched out my stiffened limbs, when Dame Grédel's voice reached my ear: "Annette, go and lock up, and don't forget to bolt the door! I am going down cellar." It appeared that this was a wise custom of hers to assure herself that everything was right. "But, madame," stammered the girl, "the cask isn't empty. You needn't bother to—" "Mind your own business," interrupted the mistress, whose candle was already lighting up the passageway. I had barely time to squat down again behind the cask, when the old woman, stooping beneath the low, dingy ceiling, passed from one keg to another, mumbling as she went: "Oh! the little wretch. How she lets the wine leak. I'll teach her to close the spigots tighter; did ever any one see the like?" The candle threw great shadows against the damp wall. I huddled closer and closer. Suddenly, just as I thought the visit happily ended, and was beginning to breathe easier again, I heard the old creature give a sigh so long and so full of woe that I knew something unusual was happening. I risked just the least glance, and I saw Dame Grédel Dick, her under jaw dropped and her eyes sticking out of her head, staring at the bottom of the barrel behind which I lay. She had caught sight of one of my feet underneath the joist that served as a wedge to keep the cask in place. She evidently believed she had discovered the chief of the robbers concealed there for the purpose of strangling her during the night. I formed a sudden resolution. "Madame, for God's sake, have pity on me!" I cried: "I am—" Without looking at me, or listening to a word I said, she set up an ear-splitting shriek and started up the stairs as quickly as her great weight would permit. Seized with inexpressible terror, I clung to her skirt and went down



on my knees. This only made matters worse. "Help! seize the assassin! Oh, my God! release me! Take my money! Oh! Oh!"

It was horrible. In vain did I cry: "Only look at me, my dear madame; I am not what you think me!" She was beside herself with fear; she raved and screamed in such piercing tones that had we not been underground, the whole neighborhood would inevitably have been aroused. In this extremity, consulting only my rage, I overturned her, and gaining the door before her, I slammed it in her face, taking care to slip the bolt. During the struggle the candle had been extinguished and Dame Grédel was left in the dark. Her cries grew fainter and fainter. I stared at Annette, giddy, and with hardly strength enough left to stand. Her agitation equaled mine. We neither of us seemed able to speak, and stood listening to the expiring cries of the mistress, which soon ceased altogether. The poor woman had fainted.

"Oh! Kasper," cried Annette, wringing her hands, "what is to be done? Fly! fly! You may have been heard! Did you kill her?" "Kill her? I?" "I am so glad! But fly! I will open the door for you." She unbarred it, and I fled into the street, without stopping even to thank her; but I was so terrified and there was not a moment to lose. The night was inky black; not a star in the sky, and the street lamps unlighted. The weather was abominable; it was snowing hard and the wind howled dismally. Not until I had run for a good half-hour did I stop to take breath. Imagine my horror when I found myself directly opposite the Pied de Mouton Tavern. In my terror I had run around the square a dozen times for aught I knew. My legs felt like lead and my knees tottered under me.

The inn, but a moment before deserted, swarmed like a bee-hive, and lights danced about from window to window. It was evidently filled with the police. And now, at my wits' end, desperate, exhausted with cold and hunger, and not knowing where to find refuge, I resolved upon the strangest possible course. "By Jove," I said to myself, "as well be hanged as leave my bones on the road to the Black Forest." And I walked into the tavern with the intention of giving myself up to the officials. Besides the fellows with their cocked hats tilted rakishly over their ears, and the clubs fastened to their wrists, whom I had already seen in the morning, and who were now running here and there, and turning everything upside down, there was the bailiff, Zimmer, standing before one of the tables, dressed in black, with a grave air and penetrating glance, and near him the secretary Roth, with his red wig, imposing countenance, and large ears, flat as oyster shells. They paid no attention to my entrance, and this circumstance altered my resolution at once. I sat down in a corner of the room behind the big cast-iron stove, in company with two or three of the neighbors, who had run hither to see what was going on, and I ordered a pint of wine and a dish of sauerkraut. Annette came near betraying me. "Goodness!" she cried, "is it possible!" But one exclamation, more or less, in such a babel of voices possessed but little significance. It passed unnoticed, and, while I ate with a ravenous appetite, I listened to the examination to which Dame Grédel was subjected as she lay back in a large armchair, her hair falling down and her eyes bulged out with fright. "How old did the man appear to be?" asked the bailiff. "Between forty and fifty, sir. He was an enormous man with black side whiskers, or maybe brown, I don't exactly remember, with a long nose and green eyes." "Did he have any birthmark or scars?" "I don't remember any. He only had a big hammer and pistols." "Very good! And what did he say to you?" "He seized me by the throat, but fortunately I screamed so loud it frightened him, and I defended myself with my finger-nails. When any one tries to murder you, you fight hard for your life, sir." "Nothing is more natural or legitimate, madame. Take this down, Roth! The coolness of this good woman is remarkable." The rest of the deposition was in the same strain. They questioned Annette afterward, but she testified to having been so frightened that she could remember nothing.

"That will do," said the bailiff; "if we need anything further, we will return to-morrow morning." Everybody withdrew, and I asked Dame Grédel for a room for the night. So great had been her fear that she had not the slightest recollection of having seen me before. "Annette," said she, "Show the gentleman to the little room on the third floor. I can not stand on my legs. Oh! dear! what trials we have to bear in this world." She began to weep.

Annette, having lighted a candle, led me up to the little chamber, and when we found ourselves alone, she cried innocently: "Oh! Kasper, Kasper! Who would have believed that you were one of the band! I can never console myself for having loved a robber!" "What! you, too, believe us guilty, Annette?" I exclaimed despairingly, dropping into a chair; "that is the last straw on the camel's back." "No! no! you can not be. You are too much of a gentleman, dear Kasper! And you were so brave to come back." I explained to her that I was perishing with cold and hunger, and that that was the only consideration which led me to return.

We were left to ourselves for some time; then Annette departed, lest she should arouse Madame Grédel's suspicions. Left to myself, after having ascertained that the windows were not approached by any wall, and that the sashes were securely fastened, I thanked God that I had thus far been brought safely through the perils which surrounded me, and then going to bed, I was soon fast asleep.

## II

I got up at about eight o'clock the next morning. It was foggy and dark. As I drew aside the hangings of the bed, I noticed that the snow was drifted on a level with the windows; the sashes were all white. I began to reflect upon the sad condition of my companions; they must have suffered with the cold, particularly old Bremer and Bertha, and the idea filled me with sorrow. As I was reflecting thus, a strange noise arose outside. It drew near the inn, and I sprang anxiously to the window to see if some new dangers were threatening. They were bringing the famous band of robbers to confront Dame Grédel Dick, who was not yet sufficiently recovered from her fright to venture out of doors. My poor comrades came down the street between a double file of police, and followed by a crowd of street urchins, who screamed and yelled like savages. It seems to me that I can still see that terrible scene; poor Bremer chained between his sons, Ludwig

and Karl, Wilfred behind them, and Bertha bringing up the rear and crying piteously: "In the name of Heaven, my masters, have pity on a poor, innocent harpist! I kill? I steal? O God! can it be?" She wrung her hands distractedly. The others proceeded with bowed heads, their hair falling over their faces.

The crowd swarmed into the dark alleyway of the inn. The guards drove back the rabble, and the door was closed and barred. The eager crowd remained outside, standing ankle-deep in slush, with their noses flattened against the panes. A profound silence settled upon the house. Having by this time got into my clothes, I opened the door part way to listen, and see if it would be possible to escape from my unpleasant quarters. I heard the sound of voices and of people moving about on the lower floors, which convinced me that the passages were strongly guarded. My door opened on the landing, directly opposite the window through which the man had fled two nights before. I did not pay any attention to this circumstance at first, but as I stood there I suddenly noticed that the window was open, and that there was no snow on the sill; approaching it, I saw fresh tracks along the wall. I shuddered. The man must have returned last night; perhaps visited the inn every night. It was a revelation to me, and at once the mystery began to clear up.

"Oh! if it were only true," I said to myself, "that fortune had placed the murderer's fate in my hands, my unhappy fellows would be saved!" And I followed with my eyes the footprints, which led with surprising distinctness to the opposite roof. At this moment some words fell on my ear. The door of the dining hall had just been opened to let in the fresh air, and I heard the following conversation: "Do you recall having taken part in the murder of Ulmet Elias on the twentieth of this month?" Some unintelligible words followed. "Close the door, Madoc!" said the bailiff; "the woman is ill." I heard no more. As I stood with my head resting against the balusters, a sudden resolution seized me. "I can save my comrades!" I exclaimed; "God has pointed out to me the means, and if I fail to do my duty, their blood will be upon my head. My self-respect and peace of mind will be forever lost, and I shall consider myself the most cowardly of wretches." It took me some time, however, to summon up resolution enough. Then I went downstairs and entered the dining-room.

"Did you ever see this watch before?" the bailiff was saying to Dame Grédel. "Do your best to remember!" Without waiting for her answer, I stepped forward and replied firmly: "That watch, bailiff? I have seen it before in the hands of the murderer himself. I recognize it perfectly, and if you will only listen to me, I will agree to deliver the man into your hands this very night." Perfect stillness followed my bold declaration.

The officials stared at each other, dumfounded; my comrades seemed to cheer up a bit. "I am the companion of these unfortunate people," I continued, "and I say it without shame, for every one of them is honest, even if he is poor, and there is not one among them capable of committing the crimes imputed to him."

Again silence followed. Dame Bertha began to weep quietly. At last the bailiff aroused himself. Looking at me sharply, he said: "Where do you pretend to deliver the assassin into our hands?" "Right here in this very house! And to convince you of it, I only ask for a moment's private conversation." "Let us hear what you have to say," he replied, rising. He motioned Madoc to follow us; the others remained. We left the room. I went hastily up the stairs, with the others at my heels. Pausing at the window on the third floor, I showed them the man's footprints in the snow. "Those are the murderer's tracks!" I said; "he visits this house every night. Yesterday he came at two in the morning; last night he returned, and he will undoubtedly be back again this evening."

The bailiff and Madoc examined the footprints without a word. "How do you know that these are the murderer's tracks?" asked the chief of police, doubtfully. Thereupon I told him of the man's appearance in our loft. I pointed out to them the little window above us through which I had watched him as he fled in the moonlight, and which Wilfred had not seen, as he remained in bed. I admitted that it was mere chance that had led me to the discovery of the tracks made the night before.

"It is strange!" muttered the bailiff; "this greatly modifies the position of the accused. But how do you explain the presence of the robber in the cellar?" "That robber was myself." I now related briefly everything that had taken place from the time of my comrades' arrest until the moment of my flight from the inn. "That will do," said the bailiff; and, turning toward the chief of police, he added: "I must admit, Madoc, that the depositions of these musicians never seemed to me very conclusive of their guilt; moreover, their passports established an alibi difficult to controvert. Nevertheless, young man," turning to me, "in spite of the plausibility of the proofs you have given us, you must remain in our power until they are verified. Keep him in sight, Madoc, and take your measures accordingly." The bailiff descended the stairs thoughtfully, and, refolding his papers, he said, without continuing the examination: "Let the accused be taken back to the prison!" And with a scornful glance at the landlady, he departed, followed by the secretary. Madoc alone remained with two officials.

"Madame," he said to Dame Grédel, "maintain the strictest secrecy about what has happened, and give this brave young man the same room he occupied night before last." Madoc's look and emphasis admitted of no reply. Dame Grédel swore she would do whatever was required of her if she could only be rid of the robbers! Madoc replied: "We shall stay here all day and to-night to protect you. Go about your work in peace, and begin by giving us some breakfast. My good fellow, you will give us the pleasure of dining with us?" My situation did not permit me to decline. I accepted accordingly, and we soon found ourselves seated before a leg of ham and a jug of Rhine wine. Other people arrived from time to time, and endeavored to elicit the confidence of Dame Grédel and Annette, but they maintained a discreet silence, for which they deserve no little credit. We spent the afternoon smoking our pipes and emptying our mugs; no one paid any attention to us.

The chief of police, in spite of his sallow face, piercing glance, pale lips, and sharp nose, was excellent company after a bottle or two; he told us some excellent stories, and at every word of his the other two burst out laughing. I remained gloomy and silent. "Come, young fellow!" he said with a smile, "forget for a little the death of your respectable grandmother. Take a drop, and put your troublesome thoughts to flight."

Others joined in the conversation, and the time passed in the midst of tobacco smoke, the clinking of glasses, and the ringing of mugs. But at nine o'clock, after the watchman's visit, the expression of things changed. Madoc rose and said: "Well, my friends, let us proceed to business. Fasten the doors and shutters

quietly! You, ladies, may go to bed!" His two tattered followers looked more like robbers themselves than like props of law and order. Each drew a club with a knob of lead attached to one end, from his trousers' leg, and Madoc tapped his breast pocket to make sure that his pistol was there. This done, he bid me lead them to the loft. We climbed the stairs. Having reached the little room, where thoughtful little Annette had taken care to light a fire, Madoc, cursing between his teeth, hastened to throw water on the coals; then motioning to the pile of straw, he said to me: "You may go to sleep if you like."

He sat down, together with his two acolytes, at the end of the room close to the wall, and they put out the light. I lay down on the straw, breathing a prayer to the Almighty to send hither the assassin. After midnight the silence became so profound that you would never have suspected three men were there with wide-open eyes, on the alert for the slightest sound. The hours wore slowly away. I could not sleep. A thousand terrible ideas teemed in my brain. One o'clock—two o'clock—three o'clock struck, and nothing appeared. At three o'clock one of the officials stirred slightly. I thought the man had come at last. But again all was still. I began to think that Madoc would take me for an impostor, and that in the morning things would fare badly with me; thus, instead of helping my companions, I should only be fettered with them.

The time seemed to me to pass very rapidly after three o'clock. I wished the night might last forever, that the only ray of hope might not be gone. I was starting to go over all these thoughts for the fiftieth time, when, suddenly, without my having heard a sound, the window opened and two eyes glistened in the opening. Nothing stirred in the loft. "The others are asleep," I thought. The head remained in the opening, listening. The wretch seemed to suspect something. My heart galloped and the blood coursed through my veins. I dared not even breathe. A few moments passed thus. Then, suddenly, the man seemed to make up his mind. He let himself down into the loft with the same caution as on the preceding night. On the instant a terrible cry, short, piercing, blood-curdling, resounded through the house. "We've got him!"

The whole house shook from cellar to attic; cries, struggles, and hoarse shouts, coupled with muttered oaths, filled the loft. The man roared like a wild beast, and his opponents breathed painfully as they battled with his terrible strength. Then there was a crash that made the flooring creak, and I heard nothing more but a gritting of teeth and a rattle of chains. "A light here!" cried the formidable Madoc. And as the sulphur burned, illuminating the place with its bluish light, I vaguely distinguished the forms of the three officials kneeling above the prostrate man. One of them was holding him by the throat, another had sunk his knees into his chest, and Madoc encircled his wrists with handcuffs hard enough to crush them. The man, in his shirt sleeves as before, seemed inert, save that one of his powerful legs, naked from the knee to the ankle, raised up from time to time and struck the floor with a convulsive movement. His eyes were literally starting from his head, and his lips were covered with a bloody foam. Scarcely had I lighted the taper when the officials exclaimed, thunderstruck: "Our Dean!" All three got up and stood staring at each other, white with astonishment. The bloodshot eyes of the murderer turned on Madoc. He tried to speak, and after a moment I heard him murmur: "What a terrible dream! My God, what a terrible dream!" Then he sighed and became motionless.

I approached to take a look at him. It was indeed the man who had given us advice on the road to Heidelberg. Perhaps he had had a presentiment that we would be the means of his destruction, for people do sometimes have these terrible forebodings. As he did not stir, and a tiny stream of blood flowed on the dusty floor, Madoc, rousing himself from his stupor, bent over him and tore away his shirt; we then saw that he had stabbed himself to the heart with his great knife. "Ho! ho!" cried Madoc, with a sinister smile, "our Dean has cheated the gallows. You others stay here while I go and notify the bailiff." He picked up his hat, that had fallen off during the mêlée, and left without another word. I remained opposite the corpse, with the two others.

The news spread like wildfire. It was a sensation for the neighborhood. Dean Daniel Van den Berg enjoyed a fortune and a reputation so well established that many people refused to believe in the abominable instincts which dominated him. The matter was discussed from every conceivable point of view. Some held that he was a somnambulist and irresponsible for his acts; others that he was a murderer through love of blood, having no other possible motive for committing these crimes. Perhaps both were right, for it is an undeniable fact that moral being, will, soul, whatever name you choose to call it by, is wanting in the somnambulist. The animal nature left to itself naturally yields to the dictates of its pacific or sanguinary instincts. Be that as it may, my comrades were at once restored to liberty. Little Annette was quoted for a long time after as a model of devotion. She was even sought in marriage by the son of the burgomaster Trugott, a youth, who will one day disgrace his family.

As for me, I lost no time in returning to the Black Forest, where, since that time I have officiated as leader of the orchestra at the Sabre Vert Tavern, on the road to Tübingen. If you should ever happen to pass that way, and my story has interested you, come in and see me. We will drink a bottle or two together, and I will relate to you certain details that will make your hair stand on end.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DEAN'S WATCH \*\*\*

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