

STRANGE
TALES
OF A
NIHILIST



WM. LeQUEUX

E. J. ...

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STRANGE TALES OF A NIHILIST

1864-1927

BY

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"ZORAIDA," "GUILTY BONDS," "THE MEMBER FOR
HADES," "A PHANTOM WIFE," ETC.



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AUTHOR'S NOTE.

HIS Imperial Majesty the Tzar, having upon the recommendation of the Press Bureau at St. Petersburg prohibited the circulation, throughout his empire, of my novel "Guilty Bonds," I, therefore, in recognition of the attention he has deigned to bestow upon me, dedicate to him these "Tales of a Nihilist." An acquaintance with the conditions of Russian life, and with prominent members of the Revolutionary Party in London and on the Continent, have combined to assist me in collecting hitherto unpublished information upon which the narratives are based. Although many of the incidents are startling and thrilling, nevertheless they have actually occurred, ample proof of which is contained in evidence of various kinds in my possession. The methods of the agents of the Russian Secret Police in London will probably be a revelation to English readers, few of whom are aware that the headquarters of Nihilism exist in their midst.

That I have been compelled to bestow fictitious names upon the actors in these dramas, and change the scene in more than one instance, is obvious. Notwithstanding this, however, all the characters are from life, and I anticipate that readers will recognize in the stories solutions of more than one sensational mystery.

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STRANGE TALES OF A NIHILIST.

I.

A CROOKED FATE.

BRIEF forewords are necessary to this record of facts.

I, Vladimir Mikhalovitch, subject of the Tzar, now in exile in England, hereby make a free and full confession of my secret alliance with the so-called Nihilist Party.

At the outset it is my earnest desire to disabuse the minds of English readers that the Party of Freedom is a mere murder league. Unfortunately, English novelists, unacquainted with Russian life, ignorant of the true objects of the organization, of its inner working, and only recognizing its far reaching influence, have surrounded it with a glamour and mystery that would be highly amusing to us were it not for the fact that their sensational and sanguinary narratives

injure our cause. So little does the average Englishman know of the conditions of life under the Tzar, that an argument in favor of Nihilism would be useless and wearisome, therefore I leave him to decide for himself, after reading the exciting episodes of an adventurous career, whether Autocracy or Freedom is to be preferred.

Before closing this preface, I have one declaration to make. We, who are struggling to effect a change for the better in the internal and economical condition of the Russian people, look with envy upon every Englishman, at the same time regarding him as a brother. To overthrow Tzardom by murder is not our object, although, alas! human life has been sacrificed, as my narrative will show. We desire peace; and while staying our hand, and refraining from dealing the blows that are at this moment in our power to strike at the Imperial Autocracy, we are living in the expectation that the flood of popular indignation will sweep off the face of the Russian soil the present ruinous and shameful system of organized robbery and tyranny, and create something better than the existing brutality and corruption that has plunged so many millions in abject misery.

Prior to narrating the exciting incidents of my career, it will be necessary, in order that it should be rightly understood why I lifted a hand against the rule of the Great White Tzar, to describe the tragic events which led to the overflow of my indignation against tyranny, and subsequent alliance with the Brothers of Freedom.

I commenced life under a disadvantage, for I am a Jew.

In Russia the law declares all Hebrews to be "aliens whose several rights are regulated by special ordinances," and my race is regarded as a pariah caste in consequence. The memory of my earlier years it is unnecessary to recall. My father, Isaac Mikhalovitch, was a well known operator on the Bourse at St. Petersburg, and he and my mother moved in good society. Our house in the Liteinaia was well known to people with long sounding titles and longer pedigrees, and, as children, my sister Mascha and I had made a practice of standing upon the stairs on Thursday nights, watching the arrival of the uniformed and decorated men and handsome ladies who attended the fêtes which my parents gave weekly during the season.

Mascha, who was three years my junior, was

petted by the guests and servants none the less than I had been, for we were a pair of over-indulged children, and lived a life of uninterrupted happiness.

At last I arrived at an age when departure from home was compulsory, and one eventful day I bade farewell to those I loved and was drafted to Vologda to perform my military service. From a life of luxurious ease to a soldier's existence in the barren district around Lake Kubinskoi was by no means a pleasurable change, especially as, according to law, no Jew can rise to the rank of officer, although he is bound to serve in the rank and file like all other Russians. Nevertheless, I endured the wearying monotony of eternal drilling, receiving occasional letters that came from my distant home like brief rays of sunshine upon my otherwise dark, unhappy life. Suddenly, when I had been at Vologda about two years, they ceased. Several times I wrote, but received no answer. I telegraphed, but with the same result. I wrote to relatives in Petersburg inquiring the cause of my parents' strange silence, yet even these letters remained unanswered.

Unable to obtain leave of absence, the days

passed slowly, and I grew sorely puzzled at the mystery.

Imagine my feelings when one morning a comrade, who had had a *Novoë Vremya* sent to him, handed me the newspaper and, pointing to a line, asked:

“Is he any relation of yours?”

I looked eagerly where he indicated. My heart stood still, and the paper fell from my nerveless grasp.

It was an announcement to the effect that “Isaac Mikhalovitch, Jew, of the Liteinaia, St. Petersburg,” had formed one of the convoy of prisoners exiled by administrative process to Siberia during the past week!

Ignorant of the whereabouts of my mother and sister, and apprehensive regarding their future, I continued my military service until the day arrived when I was free to return and seek them.

To preserve the continuity of this narrative, events must be here described which were afterward related to me by Mascha. It appeared that from some unknown cause my unfortunate father had fallen into disfavor with the Tzar, although nothing was known of it until one night,

during the progress of a ball at home, half a dozen men from the *Okhrannoë Otdelenie*, or "Security Section," entered and arrested him. A fortnight later he was sent, without trial, to the mines of the Trans-Baikal, after which all he possessed was confiscated by the government, and my mother and sister turned into the streets to starve.

Our relations were poor and could do little to assist them, therefore, in order to hide their poverty, Mascha and her mother went to Mstislavl, a small, sleepy town in the Government of Moghilev, where for nearly a year they earned a precarious livelihood by doing needlework and making lace. But the year 1882 was disastrous to Russia, for a terrible famine spread over the land, and, alas! for my unfortunate family, its effects were keenly felt in Moghilev. At the time I arrived at St. Petersburg in search of them, they had no work and were absolutely starving.

Stretched upon a straw mattress in the corner of a cold, bare room, lay my mother, her thin, haggard face, protruding cheek bones, and sunken eyes, showing unmistakably that death was at hand.

Mascha stood, pale and motionless, looking down upon her sorrowfully. In the gray light of the brief autumn day the meager room presented a woeful aspect, being almost devoid of furniture, and the fire in the round, discolored stove having gone out several days ago. Notwithstanding her plain, shabby dress, it was certain that Mascha was beautiful; all Mstislavl, if called upon, would bear witness to this fact. About eighteen years of age, she was tall, slender, graceful, with beautifully rounded throat and arms, light, wavy hair drawn back upon her brow, a dazzling complexion, and eyes of that childlike blue that presupposes a purity of soul. When she smiled her charms were enhanced by an expression of indescribable simplicity and frankness.

At this moment, however, she presented a sad picture, for her hair had fallen disheveled about her handsome face, and her eyes were red with weeping. As her mother tossed wearily upon her pallet, moaning in pain, Mascha fell upon her knees and kissed the cold, drawn face.

"Are you suffering much, mother dearest?" she asked tenderly, smoothing away the dark hair from the clammy forehead.

"Yes; I—I'm sinking fast, my child," she replied in a faint, hoarse voice. "I shall leave you very soon, Mascha, and you will be alone, with no other protector except God, to whose mercy I confide you. Trust in Him in the hours of affliction or misfortune, and by His infinite power He will guide your footsteps and protect you from all harm." She paused, and added, "Though you may be scoffed at and persecuted by orthodox Russians, never forget that you are one of God's chosen, and while resenting insult, always refrain from revenge."

"I can't bear to hear you talk like this," cried my sister, bursting into tears. "You must not—you shall not die!" Springing suddenly to her feet, she stifled her sobs, and said, "You shan't starve! I'll save you, even if compelled to beg bread from the Gentiles. I shall not be long, and I will bring you food."

With these words she threw a cloak around her shoulders, and opening the door, disappeared, while her mother closed her wearied eyes, and prayed earnestly for succor.

Through the old, uncleanly Ghetto—the quarter in which Jews were suffered to reside—Mascha wandered aimlessly, wondering where

she could discover a person generous enough to give her a morsel of bread. She knew it was useless to ask for food of the people of her own faith, for they were in terrible distress also. Owing to the failure of the harvest for two consecutive seasons, food was so scarce in Western Russia, that in many places the peasants were subsisting on grass and roots, while hundreds were dying daily of sheer starvation. But worst of all, the feeling against the Jews had become greatly embittered from the fact that the mujiks, in their ignorant fanaticism, had been taught to believe by the village popes that the Hebrews had brought the famine upon the land. Hence Jew-baiting had become rife. Unfortunate Israelites were cuffed and assaulted in the open streets, and were unable to obtain redress, and in dozens of towns in Little and Central Russia the Ghettos had been looted and afterward burned.

In these anti-Semitic excesses, Jews were treated worse than dogs, and ruthlessly murdered, without a hand being stretched forth to save them, while women were outraged in sight of their children, and various diabolical atrocities committed, which had raised the indignation of

every other European nation. Murder and pillage ran riot through the Tzar's domains side by side with the grim specter Famine, which had spread starvation and death from the White Sea to the Caucasus.

The Ghetto at Mstislavl was the oldest quarter of the little town, consisting of one dark, evil smelling street, into which the sun never seemed to shine. The black wooden houses, with numerous poles projecting from the windows, further increased the darkness of the narrow lane. From end to end, Mascha walked through it, but found no one who could render her assistance. The place seemed deserted, for the houses were all closed, and the usually noisy colony was hushed by death.

Leaving the Jews' quarter, she made her way through the town and entered the market place, where a little business was still being carried on. Groups of mujiks, in their sheepskins, were standing about idly, their thin, pinched faces showing that they, too, were feeling the effect of the dearth of food. While wandering along, engrossed in her own sad thoughts, Mascha chanced to look up, and her eyes fell upon a buxom young woman who held a large piece of

bread in her hand, from which she was feeding a great, black dog.

The thought flashed across her mind that she must get food by some means, and save her mother's life. Without a moment's reflection, she stifled her pride, and, rushing wildly across to where the woman stood, begged for a portion of the bread.

"You! Give bread to you!" cried the woman, with a harsh, brutal laugh. "You Hebrews are dogs, but this"—and she pointed to the animal at her feet—"this is a Christian dog, and I would rather feed him than you."

"For my mother's sake!" implored Mascha. "She's dying!"

"Bah! If she dies it will be one Jewess the less. You people are our curse. Go home and die too!"

And the woman spat upon her contemptuously, and, turning her back upon the suppliant, continued feeding the dog.

Mascha, crestfallen and dejected, was walking slowly away when she suddenly felt a heavy hand upon her shoulder.

"Now, girl; what do you want here?" inquired a rough, coarse voice.

Glancing up quickly, she recognized the sinister features, and shifty feline eyes, of Ivan Osnavitsch, the *ispravnik*, or Chief of Police.

"I want bread; my mother is starving," she replied.

"Starving? Like all the other dogs that infest the Ghetto kennels, eh? Well, you've no right to beg of Christians. The law of the mir forbids it, and I ought to send you to prison as a vagabond. If you want food you should go to the governor. His Excellency has received relief for distribution, and if you call upon him he may probably give you some. Tell him that I sent you."

"Oh, thank you," she replied; "I'll go at once."

Turning, she directed her steps hurriedly toward the palace of the government, about a mile from the town on the Lubkovo road, while the *ispravnik* laughed, muttering as he watched her retreating figure: "His Excellency is a connoisseur of pretty faces. He will thank me for sending her."

Feeling that not a moment was to be lost, Mascha walked quickly along the dusty highway, which ran through a green, fertile country, beside the sedgy bank of the swiftly flowing Soj River.

Only by repute was General Martianoff, the Governor of Mstislavl, known to her. She knew that by the inhabitants of the Ghetto he was dreaded as a cruel, drunken, and depraved official, and she had heard the rabbi warn them against breaking any of the thousand tyrannical laws which comprise the *Swod*, or penal code. A Russian district governor is locally as much of an autocrat as his Imperial Master, the Tzar. He can do exactly what he pleases with the poor, cringing wretches over whom he is given authority. He can condemn Jew or Gentile to prison without trial; he can order anyone who displeases him to be publicly knouted; and with his colleague, the *ispravnik*, and his myrmidons, can enforce inhuman tortures not a whit the less terrible than those of the Spanish Inquisition.

General Martianoff, a fair specimen of the average *nachalniki*, ruled his district with the knout, and hating Jews, considered death without torture too good for them. He had even ordered unoffending Hebrews to be publicly flogged because their children omitted to doff their caps to government officials whom they met in the streets!

It was of this harsh, inhuman governor that

my poor, trusting sister, famished and desperate, sought aid for her dying mother.

The general was lazily smoking a cigar and reading the *Novosti* in his own well furnished room, when a man-servant entered, and after saluting, said: "A young girl desires to see your Excellency. I told her you could not give audience to anyone."

"Idiot! Why did you send her away?"

"She was only a Jewess, your Excellency. But she is still here. She's the daughter of the financier Mikhalovitch of St. Petersburg, who was sent to the mines."

"Mikhalovitch!" repeated the general in a tone of surprise. "Ah! Show her in, and—and see we are not disturbed, Ivanovitch—you understand."

"Yes, your Excellency." And the man saluted and disappeared.

In a few seconds Mascha, pale and trembling, advanced timidly into the room. The governor was standing near the door when she entered, and as he closed it after her, he raised the portière and pushed the bolt into its socket. Then he turned sharply toward her, and asked:

"Well, girl, what do you want?"

"Your Excellency," said Mascha, bowing with that fawning humility which every Hebrew is bound to show toward government officials, "I have been sent by our good *ispravnik*, Ivan Osnavitsch."

"Very kind of him to select beauty for me and send it to my door, I'm sure," remarked the general under his breath.

Continuing, Mascha briefly explained that she and her mother were starving, and that the latter was dying of sheer want.

"But you are a Jewess," he said sternly. "The relief which my Imperial Master has intrusted me to distribute is only for orthodox Russians."

"Have pity; have mercy upon us," she cried earnestly. "I know that I, a Jewess, have no right to ask a favor of your Excellency, but my dear mother is dying!"

"I cannot prevent that, my pretty one," he said more kindly, stroking her fair disheveled hair.

With a quick movement he placed his arm around her waist, and, grasping her tightly, pressed her against his breast, and added: "Come, I must have a kiss!"

Before she could evade him, she felt his hot breath upon her face, and his lips pressed her soft, dimpled cheek. Trembling with fear and flushed with indignation, she struggled, and succeeded in freeing herself from his hateful clutches. But she did not upbraid him, although her face became more woeful than before.

Frowning, he regarded her with an expression of displeasure, saying: "The wife and child of a political exile classed among the dangerous Nihilists can expect no relief from his Majesty's private purse."

"It is to your sympathy that I appeal," Mascha exclaimed imploringly. "Although my people and yours are of different creed, we all adore the same Father, our Tzar."

"And Isaac Mikhalovitch was sent to Siberia by *étape* for conspiring against his life! Curious adoration, eh?"

"It's false!" she cried hotly. "He was wrongly accused, denounced by some unknown enemy, and sent straight to Irkutsk without any chance of defense."

"Ha, ha! my pretty champion. So that is the way you speak of the justice of his Majesty! Your words betray you; they show that you,

too, have become imbued with the revolutionary propaganda."

Mascha saw she had been trapped. In a moment she knew that he suspected her of Nihilistic tendencies.

Martianoff noticed her alarm, and said: "You need not fear. I don't intend that you should share your father's fate. You are too pretty for that."

"Have you decided to give me food?" she demanded, her brows knit in displeasure.

His coarse, sensual features again relaxed into a complacent smile, as he suddenly flung his arm around her neck. Bending, he placed his lips close to her ear, and whispered some words.

"No! no!" she cried wildly. "God protect me! Anything but that!" And she struggled to free herself from his embrace.

"You refuse?" he said in a stern, harsh voice.

"I would rather die than agree to such terms," she replied, her eyes flashing with indignation.

"Very well," he snarled, as he thrust her from him impatiently. "Go back to your hovel and die, you daughter of a dog. Begone!"

"But, your Excellency—I——"

"No more words," he thundered, adding a curse. "Go! or I'll fling you out."

Staggering to the door, sorrowful and crest-fallen, she drew back the bolt and went out, her eyes half blinded by tears.

The moment she had gone, the general touched a gong, at the same time muttering: "The dainty, obstinate little bird must be brought to her senses. She must be put into a cage and tamed."

"Ivanovitch," he said aloud, addressing his servant. "That Jewess is a Nihilist. Order Osnavitsch to have her closely watched."

Then he viciously bit the end off another cigar, and, taking up the paper, resumed his reading.

.

It was night.

Mascha, after leaving the palace of the government, had wandered about for several hours in search of someone who would give her bread; but all her efforts were futile, and when she returned to the Ghetto, she had found that her mother's feeble life had flickered and gone out.

With the moonlight full upon her she was kneeling beside the body, her face buried in the

ragged covering, and sobbing as if her heart would break. Unable to restrain her flood of emotion, she did not notice the cautious opening of the door, or the entrance of a tall, dark figure, which crept noiselessly up behind her and stood in the shadow, watching, and listening to her murmurings.

"It's cruel," she said aloud, suddenly drawing a long breath and clenching her teeth in despair. "To the Tzar is due all the dire misfortune that has fallen upon our house. He has taken our money and cast us forth to die like dogs! It is he—the Tzar—the murderer!—who is responsible for my mother's death. He is a vampire who lives on the blood of such as us." Raising her tear-stained face and looking up to the clear, bright moon, she cried: "What can I do? My father exiled, my mother dead, Vladimir on military service, and I am left alone—alone," she added in a half fearful whisper, "to seek revenge!"

"Very pretty sentiments, indeed," remarked a gruff, harsh voice.

Springing to her feet she confronted General Martianoff.

"You!" she gasped. "Why—why do you come here?"

"To see you, my pretty one," he replied, throwing off his great fur-lined *shuba*.

He endeavored to place his arm around her waist, but she drew back quickly.

"And you have followed me here," she said in a tone of reproachful disgust—"here, into the room where my mother lies dead, in order to continue your hateful advances—to insult me before her corpse!"

"Ho, ho!" he said, annoyed. "Then you have not reconsidered your decision?"

"No," she replied firmly. "Have I not already told you that I would prefer death?"

He argued with her, flattered her, laughing all the time at her indignation, and treating it with flippancy.

Suddenly she turned upon him with angry passion, saying: "I desire none of your detestable caresses. It is such heartless officials as you who curse our country, who carry out the ukases of the Autocrat with fiendish delight, and who are the catspaws of the persecutor of our race. What mercy ought I to expect from you, General Martianoff, who sent Anna Ivanovna to the mines merely because she displeased you, and who condemned Paul Sonvaroff to solitary con-

finement in Petropaulovsk for no offense except that he endeavored to save a defenseless woman from your merciless clutches? It is——”

“Silence, wench!” he thundered.

“I will not be hushed when you insult me! You talk of love—you, whose dissolute habits are as well known as the yellow ticket of shame you would thrust upon us Jewesses. I begged bread from you, and you refused. See! there is the result!” and she pointed to where the body lay.

His face had grown livid, and rushing toward her, he grasped her roughly by the shoulder. “I have not come here on a fool’s errand,” he said fiercely. “I don’t intend that you shall evade me—you understand?”

“Let me go!” she demanded, struggling to get free. “Help! help!” she cried.

“Silence! Curse you!” he growled, striking her a heavy blow upon the nose and mouth. Although stunned for a few moments she continued to struggle desperately.

Suddenly he lifted her from her feet and tried to drag her by sheer force to the door leading to the room beyond. She saw his intention, and for several minutes fought fiercely, with a renewed

strength of which she had not believed herself capable.

Presently, in the heat of the struggle, something heavy fell from his pocket. She stooped and managed to snatch it up. At that moment she felt her strength failing and exerted every muscle.

"Will you let me go?" she shrieked, her lips cut and swollen by the cruel blow he had dealt her.

"No, I will not," he replied, with an imprecation.

As he uttered the words, something bright glittered in her hand. He grasped her arm, endeavoring to gain possession of it.

But too late.

There was a flash, a loud report, and General Martianoff staggered back against the wall with an agonized cry.

"You—you've shot me!" he gasped hoarsely, and then sank upon a chair, inert and helpless, with blood streaming from a wound in his shoulder.

Mascha, in desperation, had resorted to the last extremity in defense of her honor.

.

That night was an eventful one in Mstislavl.

The ignorant moujiks, encouraged by the officials of the government, had heaped every indignity possible upon the Jews, and the anti-Semitic feeling reached a climax when it became known that a Jewess had attempted to assassinate the governor.

Led by a wild-haired local agitator, a mob of a thousand persons proceeded to the Ghetto and carried out a frightful work of destruction. They surged down the narrow street, and after entering the houses and treating the inmates with shocking brutality, looted and set fire to their homes. The enraged rioters wrecked the synagogue and killed the rabbi, shouting: "Clear out the rats' nest! Kill them all!" Screams of pain mingled with wild yells of pleasure, and through the long night the Ghetto was a veritable pandemonium.

The scene was terrible. The street ran with blood. Many Jewish women fell victims to the brutal lust and fanatic frenzy of the mob, and were so barbarously maltreated that eleven succumbed, while a dozen men were shot or stabbed.

Before dawn the Ghetto had been totally de-

stroyed and its unfortunate inhabitants, having lost everything they had, were compelled to seek shelter in the forest on the Kritchev road, where many afterward died of exposure and starvation.

General Martianoff lost no time in wreaking his vengeance upon my hapless sister. She had been arrested and taken to prison immediately after firing the shot, and he had condemned her to receive fifty lashes of the knout. Such a sentence was tantamount to death, for punishment by the knout is so barbarous a torture that few strong men could survive so many strokes. Yet public whippings are of everyday occurrence in the Tzar's empire, and even women are not spared by the officials.

It was about ten o'clock on the following morning when Mascha emerged from the grimy portals of the prison, and, under a strong escort, walked across the market place to the temporary platform that had been erected. A great crowd had assembled to witness the chastisement of "the pretty Jewess," and as she mounted the steps, with pale, determined face, they greeted her with yells of triumph.

She looked round upon the sea of upturned countenances contemptuously.

On the platform there had been set up a square wooden frame, inclined diagonally. Unceremoniously the brutal moujiks who assisted the executioner grasped her with their coarse, dirty hands and tore off her clothing, exposing her bare, white back down to the waist.

The irate mob roared with approbation when they saw this preparation, and a few moments later she was forced upon the black frame, and her wrists and ankles secured so tightly that the tension caused dislocation of the joints. Then the executioner, whose duty it was to carry out the sentence, seized the knout—a number of triangular thongs of leather fixed into a short whip handle—and looked round for the signal to commence. As he did so, General Martianoff, with his shoulder bandaged, made his way through the expectant crowd, and shouted :

“Come, get to work. Don’t spare her, but keep the death blow till last.”

Hushed and open-mouthed, the spectators awaited the result of the first blow.

The executioner receded, swung the terrible torture instrument over his head, and, giving it a peculiar twist, brought it down upon the victim’s back with a sound like a pistol shot.

The cruel thongs cut their way into the flesh, and the blood gushed forth. Time after time the blows fell monotonously, until the flesh was cut into strips, and both victim and executioner were covered with blood.

Such was the scene of fiendish brutality that met my gaze on my arrival at Mstislavl, after having traced my mother and sister from St. Petersburg.

I was making my way through the shouting populace when, out of mere curiosity, I glanced at the face of the unfortunate girl, and recognized her.

Was it surprising that I rushed wildly up and endeavored to stop the horrible punishment? So suddenly did it all happen, however, that I remember very little about it, except that in my wrathful indignation I cursed the Tzar's myrmidons, and struck the inhuman governor, who attempted to throw me off the platform. Thinking that I was Mascha's lover, and enraged at the blow, he thereupon ordered me to receive thirty lashes.

I saw them carry away the insensible and mutilated form of my poor sister.

Then they tied me to the reeking frame.

I felt the thongs cut into my back like knives. Once! Twice! Thrice! The pain became excruciating. My head reeled, and a moment later all became blank.

When I regained consciousness I found myself in the prison hospital with warders rubbing salt into my wounds in order to heal them. I asked after Mascha, and was informed that she was still alive, and recovering.

One morning, while exercising in the prison yard, I saw her for a few brief moments, and she told me the story I have narrated.

Two days afterward my warder announced that my sister and I had been condemned by General Martianoff as assisting in the dissemination of the revolutionary propaganda, and sentenced to hard labor for life in the Siberian mines!

Then I made a solemn vow of revenge, and from that moment became a Nihilist.

II.

ON TRACKLESS SNOWS.

FOR nearly six months I had been kept in solitary confinement in a small, cold, ill lit cell in the fortress at St. Petersburg, whither I had been transferred from Mstislavl. Dispirited by solitude, weakened by lack of exercise, and ill through want of proper medical attention, I began to fear that the confinement would cause my reason to give way, therefore it was with a feeling of relief that one day I greeted the announcement of my warder that we were to start for Siberia on the morrow.

A detailed description of the frightful hardships of my long, terrible journey would fill a volume; it is only my intention to outline them briefly.

With a hundred other men and women of all ages we left the grim fortress at midnight, a sorry, smileless band, whose clanking chains formed an ominous accompaniment to the loud shouts and cracking of whips of our Cossack

escorts. We were each attired in gray kaftan, strong kneeboots, and sheepskin bonnet. Our breasts bore a metal plate with a number, while strapped over our shoulders was the rug, the mess tin, and the wooden spoon that comprised our traveling kit.

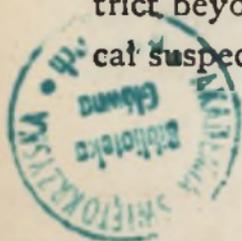
With ankles fettered by long, heavy chains, which were held to the waist by means of a rope, we were fastened together in gangs, and passed out upon the Chudova road on the first stage of the weary tramp to that bourne whence few exiles return. The rumbling of the springless carts in the rear, for those who might fall ill on the way, awoke the echoes of the silent thoroughfares, and following us were several Cossacks with lanterns, who carefully examined the road over which we had passed, in order that no letter should be dropped clandestinely.

The night was wet and stormy as our weird, dismal procession passed through the slumbering city and out upon the broad highway on its journey eastward to the Urals. Our wet clothes clung to us as we walked, and the icy wind that blew across the wide, open plain chilled our bones. Nevertheless, we plodded doggedly onward in silence, for conversation had been forbid-

den, and those who had spoken had felt the heavy thong of the escort's whip. The settled looks of despair, and the sighs that frequently escaped my fellow-exiles, plainly showed what were their feelings at being banished from their native land.

Since the day I had seen Mascha in the prison yard, I had heard nothing of her. A thousand times I had wondered what had been her fate; yet now, in my despair, I had relinquished all hope of seeing her again. Indeed, irreparable ruin had descended upon myself and my family so swiftly, that already I had grown callous as to my ultimate fate.

Without trial, I had been sentenced by the Provincial Governor of Moghilev, upon the report of General Martianoff, to hard labor for life. Such, alas! was my punishment for endeavoring to rescue my poor defenseless sister from the inhuman wrath of the dissolute representative of the Tzar! I was well aware that for the Russian political convict is reserved a death by slow torture to which any other means of ending life is preferable. The silver mines in the terrible district beyond Lake Baikal are the tombs of political suspects. The government is well aware that



the conditions under which convicts work at Kara, Nerchinsk, Pokrofski, and the other distant mining settlements to which "politicals" are sent, are such as to cause death in from five to seven years. With that refinement of cruelty for which the Tzar's government has earned an unenviable notoriety, it has abolished the death sentence and substituted one which is more torturing. The prisons and *étapes* of Siberia are foul, insanitary, half ruined wooden structures where human beings perish like flies. Typhus fever, diphtheria, and other epidemic diseases prevail there constantly, and infect all who have the misfortune to be huddled into the awful places. The 'grievously sick, for want of attendance, wallow on the floor in the midst of filth, and the clothes rot on their bodies; while so overcrowded are these pestilential *kameras* by persons of all ages and both sexes, that for those who are not fever-stricken there is neither room to sit or lie.

The exiles who are consigned underground are convicts of the worst type, and political offenders of the best. The murderer for his villainy, the intelligent, honest Muscovite who expresses liberal opinions—not a whit more revolutionary

than the ideas of English Gladstonians—are deemed equally worthy of slow, agonizing death.

Having reached Chudova, we were conveyed by train to Nijni Novgorod, and there placed in a sort of cage, on board a large barge, and taken down the Volga and up the Kama River to Perm, whence we took train to Ekaterinburg, a town of considerable proportions on the other side of the Urals.

Here our weary journey on foot across Siberia commenced, and long before the Asiatic frontier was reached, the paucity of human habitations, the barrenness of the soil, and the increasing bleakness of the climate, had had their effect upon even the hardiest among us. But we still pushed onward, though ill, hungry, and footsore.

I remember well the day we crossed the frontier, and left our native land.

Already we had walked three hundred versts from Ekaterinburg, along the Great Post Road, which was then covered by a deep snow, and only marked by the long straight line of black telegraph posts and wires. Away, as far as the eye could reach, nothing was visible but the broad plain of dazzling whiteness, and the gray, snow-laden sky, when suddenly we came to a

tall, square, brick-built obelisk, which bore on one side the arms of the European province of Perm, and on the other those of the Asiatic province of Tobolsk. It was the boundary post of Siberia.

No other boundary mark in the world has witnessed so much human suffering, or has been passed by such a multitude of heart-broken people, says Mr. George Kennan. As it is situated about half-way between the last European and the first Siberian *étape*, the captain allowed our convoy to halt for rest, and for a last farewell to home and country. The Russian peasant, even when a criminal, is patriotic, and deeply attached to his native land; and there was a heartrending scene when our wearied band stopped before the crumbling obelisk. Some gave way to wild hysterical grief; some comforted the weeping; others knelt and pressed their faces to the loved soil of their native land, and collected a little earth to take with them into exile, while a few of the women, pale, tragic figures in their black-hooded cloaks, pressed their lips to the European side of the cold brick pillar, kissing good-by to all it symbolized.

The officer commanding our escort, who had

been smoking a cigarette, and looking with calm indifference upon this touching scene, suddenly shouted the stern order, "*Stroisa!*" ("Form Ranks"), and at the word "March," a few moments later, we crossed ourselves, and with a confused jingling of chains and leg fetters, moved slowly away, past the boundary post, into Siberia.

Day after day, week after week, hungry, cold, and fatigued, we trudged across the bleak, snow-covered steppes, until life became so burdensome that we longed for death instead.

Sometimes we passed the night in an insanitary *étape* in one of the wretched little villages along the road, but often we camped out in the open, and after our meager ration of *tshi*, wrapped our rugs around us, and slept upon the ground around the fire we had lit. The hardships of the long, monotonous marches were bad enough for we men to bear, but the women—who numbered about twenty, including several of noble birth, condemned to the mines as Nihilist conspirators—fared worst of all.

One of them, Madame Marie Koutowzow, was a young widow I had met in society at St. Petersburg. She told me that she had incurred the

special animosity of a *tschinovnik*, or government official, by refusing to marry him, and he, anxious to avenge himself, had caused her arrest, and had heaped up the hardships which might hurry her out of life. Death had released three of these delicately nurtured ladies from their misery, and we had buried them, without coffin or religious ceremony, ere we reached Tobolsk.

When at last we arrived at the latter town, we were lodged in the great convict prison, and allowed to rest for two days, after which we resumed our journey eastward to Tomsk, arriving there three weeks later, with our clothing in rags, and almost shoeless.

Although our experiences had been terrible enough during our forced marches, the most horrible of all was our sojourn at the *perisilni* at Tomsk, the prison where exiles remain until their fate is decided upon by the authorities. The horrors of this den of vileness are indescribable. The *kamera*, or public cell, into which we were driven like cattle, was a long, low room, ill ventilated, and disgustingly dirty. Already there were fully fifty convicts in it, and the smell of humanity which greeted us as the great iron door was opened I shall never forget. When I

looked around and noted the dreadful groups, ragged, unkempt, unwashed, some lying on the sloping wooden shelves which formed the common beds, others crouching on the filthy floor, I shuddered with horror, and was appalled.

Amid this filth disease was rife, for no fewer than four men and two women were at that moment dying of typhoid, while the body of a girl who had succumbed was lying unheeded in a corner. No notice whatever was taken of invalids by the officials, and I afterward learnt that this room, originally intended as an infirmary, had been converted into a common cell for the accommodation of the ever increasing crowds of exiles, twelve thousand of which pass through the prison annually.

Coarse brown bread and *tschi*, a kind of cabbage soup, were our two articles of diet. The former was flung to us as to dogs, and owing to the rations never being sufficient to satisfy all, a fierce fight for a morsel of food invariably resulted. Ravenously hungry men struggled with one another to secure bread for their wives and children, who had voluntarily accompanied them into exile, while the friendless female exiles, too ill to move, were left in corners to die.

It was hardly surprising that Marie Koutowzow, a refined and delicate woman, should become infected by the fever that was raging. Very soon she grew too ill to participate in the daily fight for food, and I obtained her rations for her. Lying upon one of the plank beds at the farther end of the *kamera*, she bore the ravages of the disease bravely, praying that death might release her. Her desire was fulfilled, for six days after she had been attacked the fever proved fatal.

For three whole days the body was allowed to remain in the crowded den of filth and vice. None of us dare complain. We knew too well that the reward for pointing out the fact to the officials would be an unceremonious knouting, for in Siberia the terrible lash is used at the slightest provocation.

In the same ragged dress that I had worn during my three months' tramp from European Russia, and which was insufficient to protect me from the intense cold, I was taken from the Dantean *kamera* at dawn one day and chained to a large gang of convicts. Then I learned what fate the authorities had decided for me. My sentence was subterranean hard labor at Kara,

the most terrible mines in the whole of Siberia!

To the exiles who had been my companions from St. Petersburg I bade farewell, and as one of a convoy of criminals of the most dangerous class, I left the forwarding prison and wearily dragged my chains across the endless waste of snow, *en route* for the dreaded district beyond Irkutsk.

The thought that each step took me nearer to my living tomb rendered me desperate. Why should I, innocent of crime, be tortured to death in the same manner as murderers and hardened criminals?

I resolved to endeavor to escape. It was a mad project, I admit, for there was but little chance of crossing the wastes of snow which stretched for four thousand miles before civilization could be reached. Nevertheless, I determined to risk all. If I died in the snow, or was shot, it would end my miserable existence, and prevent further tortures being heaped upon me.

In this frame of mind hope returned, and I walked on day after day, watching for a chance to carry my hazardous design into effect. After leaving Krasnoiarsk, the chains that bound us to

one another were removed, and we were allowed to walk in groups. One day, while trudging along the road which leads to Irkutsk, we halted at a post station. The weather being intensely cold, the captain commanding the Cossacks sometimes allowed those of us who had money to purchase *vodka*. On this occasion, however, when we knocked at the door our summons remained unanswered. It was evident that the two men placed in charge of the low log house had gone to visit their neighbors, the nearest of whom were twenty versts distant; so, after a further endeavor to open the door, we were compelled to resume our weary tramp.

About ten versts farther on we encamped for the night on the border of a gloomy pine forest. It was the first time we had slept near anything which would act as cover, therefore I resolved, when my comrades were asleep, to slip past the sentries, and make a dash for liberty. Tying my leg chain tighter to my waist to prevent it jingling, I threw myself down after eating my evening ration, and waited with breathless impatience.

The minutes seemed hours, until at last the camp was hushed in slumber; then I carefully rose, while the Cossack sentry's back was turned,

and plunged swiftly and silently into the great, dark forest.

It was an exciting moment. Every second I expected to hear the hue and cry raised, but as I gradually increased the distance between my captors and myself, it seemed as though my escape remained undiscovered. For an hour I walked in a straight line through the trees, and at length I doubled, in the hope of finding the post road I had left. My anticipations were realized, and during the remainder of the long, dark Siberian night, I sped along as fast as my tired legs would carry me over the road we had traveled on the previous day.

The almost insurmountable obstacles to my escape never entered my head, so elated was I at the prospect of freedom.

Dawn came, and the weak, yellow rays of the sun were struggling forth, when by chance I turned and looked behind me.

What I saw caused me breathless terror and dismay. In the distance, looking like three black ants on the snowy horizon, were a trio of mounted Cossacks riding at full gallop.

It was evident they had seen me!

I looked round for some means of conceal-

ment, but there was none. In the distance, about two versts away, I saw the deserted post-house which we had passed on the day previous. Without knowing what impelled me, I started running as hard as I could in that direction ; but as I glanced round from time to time, I saw the Cossacks were fast gaining upon me.

They commanded me to stop, but I took no heed. Some superhuman strength seemed to possess me, and I ran swiftly and lightly over the snow toward the house. Gradually they drew nearer. Suddenly I heard the report of a gun, but, finding myself unhurt, I redoubled my pace.

As the triumphant yells of the galloping Cossacks broke upon my ears, I gained the rear of the house and halted for a moment to discover some safe retreat.

There was none. The doors were fastened as they had been on the day before. Not a moment was to be lost, for already I heard the thud of the horses' hoofs upon the snow. I had to choose between a brief life of horrible torture that would follow my recapture, and instant death !

I crossed myself and chose the latter !

Glancing round wildly, I sought means of suicide. As I did so, the yelling soldiers, with revolvers drawn, came tearing round the side of the house.

"Halt! or we'll fire!" they cried.

I looked determinedly into their faces. It was a case of life or death, and they were driving me to the latter.

Before they could anticipate my intention, or level their weapons at me, I made a dash for a well, situated about twenty yards distant, shouting in my despair:

"I'll kill myself rather than go back!"

A moment later I had jumped headlong into it.

How long I remained in a state of semi-consciousness I have no idea. I remember lying silent and motionless, listening to the voices of the soldiers above, and scarce daring to breathe.

"See!" cried one, "it's useless to get him out. His neck is broken, or he could never be crushed into a heap like that."

The second man suggested that I might be merely stunned, but the third exclaimed:

"He's dead enough, poor devil! Why should we trouble ourselves to take him out? Leave

that work for the posthouse keeper when he returns."

"He was no fool, either," observed the first man. "I should kill myself if I had the same choice."

Although the second man did not persist in his demand for my extrication, he fired his revolver down the well, afterward remounting and riding back with his companions.

When I thought they had departed I rose, and to my intense delight found myself uninjured. The well being frozen, the ice was covered with a thick layer of snow, and this had considerably diminished the concussion of my fall. The Cossack's bullet had not struck me, and beyond a bruise on my elbow I was none the worse for my reckless leap.

At this moment I discovered that the chain used to draw up water was unwound from the windlass and suspended close to my hand. With an exclamation of joy I grasped it, and after ascertaining that it was fast at the top, quickly clambered to the surface and in a few moments stood again before the posthouse.

Then the thought suggested itself that if I could effect an entrance I might discover food

and clothing, as it was impossible for me to go far in a convict's dress, with a yellow diamond upon the back, without being rearrested. I tried both doors, but they were securely fastened. After a search, however, I came across a long piece of iron in an outhouse, and with it contrived to wrench off the latch of a window shutter. Afterward I broke open the double windows and clambered in.

The one large room facing the road was a bare-boarded, dirty apartment, and, like all Siberian posthouses, devoid of any furniture beyond a plain deal table, a couple of rush-bottomed chairs, and a bench. In the center stood a large, round stove, while on the wall was a badly executed picture of the Virgin. There was some food upon the table, and the room bore evidence of recent occupation.

As I passed into the sleeping apartment beyond, I started and drew back in alarm, for lying upon the unclean straw mattress, fully dressed, and covered with a heavy fur overcoat, lay a man. His face was turned from me, and after a moment's hesitation I shook him gently by the shoulder.

He did not stir.

I placed my hand upon his face, but drew it back instantly, for its contact thrilled me. It was icy cold! The man was dead!

As I realized the truth, my eyes fell upon a piece of paper lying upon the chair beside him. Taking it up, I read the following words, written in pencil in a feeble, shaky hand:

"I shall die before you can return with medical aid. Send on the dispatches by a trusty messenger. You will be repaid.

"IVAN DRUKOVITCH."

On searching the body, I found the dispatches referred to secreted in the money belt around his waist. There were three official letters, secured by the Imperial seal, and addressed to General Serge Okoulow, Governor of the District of Kolymsk, the Arctic exile settlement in the province of Yakoutsk. With the letters I found about five hundred rubles in notes, and a passport which declared the bearer to be "Ivan Drukovich, messenger in the service of His Imperial Majesty the Tzar, on official business to the Governor of Kolymsk."

It did not take me long to decide what course to adopt. Divesting myself of my rags, which I

put in the stove and set fire to, I attired myself in the dead man's uniform and strapped the money belt with its contents around my waist, together with a revolver. After a brief search I discovered a file among the tools belonging to the posthouse keeper, and in half an hour had succeeded in freeing my ankles of the galling fetters. Getting out of the window, I went to the stable, where I found the courier's horse, and having saddled it, I mounted and rode away in the direction the convoy had taken.

Fortunately, my head had not been shaved, as is usual with criminals entering upon the life sentence. The transformation from convict to Imperial messenger was complete. My official dress, with its brass double-headed eagle on the cap, was an effectual disguise. Just as it was growing dusk I overtook the convoy. As I saluted the officers they responded, and I rode past, inwardly chuckling, and soon left the sorry band of criminals far behind.

Mine was a terribly lonely and monotonous journey. Instead of following the road to Irkutsk, I branched off and rode due north until I came to the mighty river Lena, afterward traveling along its bank a distance of seven hundred

English miles, until I reached Yakoutsck. Remaining there for a couple of days, I again bade farewell to all human companionship, and set out for the terrible regions beyond the Arctic circle.

From the first I recognized that it would be useless to attempt to return to St. Petersburg by recrossing the Urals, for the passport was endorsed with dates so recent that if I presented it at the European frontier it would at once be discovered that I had not had time to travel to Kolymsk. This, combined with other various reasons, caused me to assume the rôle of courier and deliver the Tzar's dispatches to the person to whom they were addressed.

It is needless to refer in detail to my journey of 2500 versts from Yakoutsck across the great uninhabited desert, and over the moss-covered *tundras*, or Arctic swamps, to the most northerly exile settlement. Lonely and weary, I sometimes rode for three and four days together without reaching a posthouse or seeing a single human being, and frequently I was in a half starved, half frozen condition. Time passed and I kept no count of it. My thoughts were only of eventual freedom. Having destroyed the note left by the dying man, together with my

convict's rags, I knew the posthouse keeper would be puzzled at finding the corpse had been plundered, and as there was no telegraph to Yakoutsk, I was confident that I should not be forestalled by the news of the courier's death.

After an incessant journey, lasting nearly a month, I arrived at Sredne Kolymsk, a small town of log huts situated at a point far beyond the Arctic circle, where the deep river Ankudine flows into the Kolyma. The houses, scattered about in disorder, are inhabited by Cossacks, Mieshchany, Yakouts, and exiles. The highest erection is a log church, and the only curiosity a small wooden tower, crooked with age, which stands within the church inclosure, and was built by the conquerors of the country as a protection from raids of hostile tribes. The condition of the unfortunate exiles is terrible, even for Siberia. In this land, where winter commences in August and lasts till May, and where the temperature varies from nine degrees above freezing point to thirteen degrees below, man is utterly powerless. Only a handful of wretched savages inhabit the fearful region, having been driven to outer darkness by the tribes with more vitality and energy.

It takes about eighteen months to reach this extremity of the habitable globe, and by introducing, as a part of the system, exile to the Arctic zone, the Russian government has overstepped even their broad allowance of iniquity. This hamlet is a penitentiary colony for political exiles, whose punishment is purposely aggravated by physical suffering, and who are compelled to exist in a perpetual state of famine in dwellings that are simply wretched huts built of upright beams, with rafters laid across and covered with layers of earth. From the government store musty rye flour is eked out to them at intervals, and for the rest, they subsist upon what fish they can catch in the river.

I was not long in discovering General Okoulow's residence, and, acting the rôle of Imperial messenger, delivered the dispatches in as ceremonious a manner as I could. As I had anticipated, they contained several pardons, and when this became known in the little colony I was feted and treated with every courtesy and kindness. Although such a reception was pleasant after the wearying monotony of the Verkhojansk desert, yet I was anxious for an opportunity to shake the snow of Siberia from off my

feet. Having waited several days, while the governor was preparing his reports for St. Petersburg, I made a request—not without trepidation, I admit—that he should indorse my passport so as to enable me to go on a brief visit to my brother in Petropaulovsk before returning to Russia. To my joy, the accommodating governor saw no objection to this course, and with a light heart I set out at dawn on the following day toward the Stanovoi Mountains.

Crossing them, I rode onward for four weeks through the wild gray mountains of Kamschatka, until my jaded horse sank and died of sheer exhaustion. Being compelled to perform the remainder of the terrible journey on foot, I walked by slow, weary stages across the great lone land, where nothing marked my route except the sun, and, the country being totally uninhabited, I had to eat grass and willow leaves for sustenance. Suddenly, however, at the close of one dull, stormy day, I had the satisfaction of seeing, for the first time, the broad waters of the Pacific Ocean.

Even when I had arrived at Petropaulovsk I had by no means eluded the police. The journey to Kolymsk I had undertaken because I

recognized how extremely dangerous it would have been to travel to the coast with a passport which distinctly stated my route and destination. The police at Siberian ports are ever watchful for escaping convicts, and in my eagerness for freedom it never occurred to me that information would be telegraphed to that extreme corner of the empire, of the theft of the dead man's papers. This carelessness nearly resulted in disaster.

It was late one afternoon when I descended the hill at the entrance to the town and passed along the quay. In doing so I noticed a ship anchored about a mile distant. Of a fisherman I casually inquired what the vessel was, and when she would sail. He replied that it was a Canadian sealer, and that it would sail on the morrow. During the remainder of the day I wandered about the dirty, wretched town in search of some means of escape. I had only twenty rubles left, but with these I intended to bribe some foreign sailor to let me embark as a stowaway.

When it had grown dark and I was looking about for lodging for the night, I discovered, to my dismay, that I was being closely watched by a police spy. In order to allay suspicion, I sought the police bureau, and, entering boldly,

presented my passport. The *ispravnik* chanced to be there, and when he glanced at it a curious smile passed over his features.

"The Imperial courier, Ivan Drukovitch, is dead," he said, looking at me searchingly. "Consider yourself arrested!"

I waited for no more. Ere he had uttered the last sentence, I had dashed out of the door and down the street. Half a dozen policemen were instantly in full cry after me, but in desperation I was determined not to be apprehended just as I was within an ace of securing my freedom. Exerting every muscle, I ran up and down the narrow streets until I suddenly found myself upon the quay. In the glimmering starlight my eyes caught sight of a moored boat. Without a moment's hesitation I jumped into it and cut the cord that held it. Before my pursuers could gain the waterside, the swift current had taken the boat down beside some great piles and I was effectually hidden in the darkness.

It was an intensely exciting moment.

I heard the hurrying footsteps pass close to where I was concealed, and listened to them receding in the distance. Then I breathed again. Taking the oars, and dreading lest I

should be discovered, I pulled swiftly across the bay to the moored ship I had noticed in the afternoon.

The captain, a genial, kind-hearted man, took compassion upon me when I had related my story, and a few hours later I had the gratification of watching the twinkling lights of Petropaulovsk disappear at the stern.

Three weeks later I landed at Victoria, Vancouver, and after a short residence there was provided with funds by our organization, and left *en route* for England.

III.

MY FRIEND, THE PRINCESS.

FEW Londoners are aware that the headquarters of the most powerful secret organization in the world exist in their midst. The unsuspecting persons who pass up and down a certain eminently respectable thoroughfare in the north-west suburb, would be somewhat surprised if they knew that in one of the houses the Nihilist Executive Committee holds daily council and matures the plots which from time to time startle Europe.

The thoroughfare, which, for obvious reasons, I shall designate as Mostyn Road, is formed of large, old-fashioned, detached houses which stand somewhat back with gardens in front. It is lined on each side by fine old elms, and the residences are for the most part built of red brick with those square, white-framed, unornamented windows of the Georgian era. The house in question is hidden from the quiet road by a high wall in which is a heavy wooden door, but inside

one finds a well-kept flower garden and a roomy old house which bears an unmistakable air of wealth and prosperity. Here exiles, whose escape from Siberia fortune has favored, find an asylum.

In this house I took up my abode when I arrived in London. Smarting under the terrible punishment to which I had been unjustly subjected, I had long ago taken the oath, and thereby fettered myself body and soul to the Nihilist party. I was determined to revenge myself upon the oppressors who had starved my mother, knouted my sister, and sent my father to the mines, although all had been perfectly innocent of any crime. Thus, from a devil-may-care recruit I had developed into an ardent Nihilist whose sole ambition was to assist in the struggle for freedom, and who was prepared to go to any length in order to accomplish the object for which the organization was working.

From an early age I had been taught English and French, being able now to speak both languages almost as fluently as my own. This knowledge I found of the utmost service, inasmuch as I had been selected by the Executive to perform certain special duties of espionage.

They made no secret that the work would require courage and tact, and that my life might sometimes be at stake, but I was as fearless as I was enthusiastic.

After a six months' residence in Mostyn Road, during which time I gained a knowledge of London life and made myself acquainted with the majority of those devoted to our cause, resident in the metropolis, the first matter was placed in my hands.

A few months previously, Ivan Grigorovitch one of our party, had been chosen to convey some instructions to the St. Petersburg center. As he was well known to the secret police, he disguised himself as a French commercial traveler, and with a French passport journeyed from Marseilles to Odessa by steamer, intending to proceed thence to St. Petersburg, the ordinary routes from London being considered too dangerous. His intentions, however, were frustrated, inasmuch as the Odessa police had been apprised of his advent and arrested him immediately on landing. A disaster resulted, for the papers found upon him were compromising, the plot was discovered, and wholesale arrests were made in St. Petersburg in consequence.

Twenty-three persons of both sexes were tried in secret, and, according to the *Novosti* newspaper, the evidence given against them by Princess Stratonovski caused life sentences to be passed upon each of them.

From facts that came to our knowledge, it was evident that someone who had learned our secret had divulged it to the police, therefore, the five men forming the Nihilist Executive Committee—who will in future be known as Paul Pétroff, Alexander Grinevitch, Nicolas Tersinski, Isaac Bounakoff, and Dmitri Irteneff—sat in council and condemned the princess to death.

We cast dice and it fell to me to carry out the sentence!

The cool, flippant manner in which my fellow-conspirators spoke of murder awed me. They noticed my scruples and pointed out that the princess had, by giving false evidence, been instrumental in the deportation of more than twenty innocent persons, therefore she must die. As I had taken an oath to carry out all commands of the Executive, under penalty of death, I was compelled to obey.

I had not far to search for Madame the Princess, for she was residing temporarily in London,

having taken a furnished flat at Albert Hall Mansions, overlooking Hyde Park.

In the stalls at the Avenue Theater I first obtained an uninterrupted view of her. She was seated next to me, a fair form in a black evening dress that revealed her delicate chest and arms, with a gleaming diamond necklet around her throat. Her age was about twenty-four, and her perfect oval face had a shade of sadness upon it, notwithstanding the great languishing violet eyes, and the tender winning mouth, while her fair hair had been deftly coiled, and was fastened with a diamond star that flashed and sparkled with a thousand fires. In short, I thought her the most lovely woman I had ever seen.

And I was plotting to kill her!

I gazed into her face, entranced by her marvelous beauty. Toying with her fan, she turned her eyes full upon me, and the faintest flush suffused her cheek; then she made pretense of reading her programme, and afterward became interested in the performance. When I went out to smoke during the *entr'acte* I passed her, and in doing so uttered an apology in Russian, to which she responded in the same language, with a kindly smile.

According to information I had obtained, she was the wife of Prince Stratonovski, a noble in the third degree, some twenty years her senior. Their marriage had been fraught with much unhappiness, and after a year they agreed to separate. Since that time the prince had remained at his gloomy old palace near Markovka in Little Russia, while his wife, accompanied by an old man-servant and her maid, had resided for brief periods in St. Petersburg, Paris, and London.

Since her arrival in England it was apparent that she was fulfilling some mission as a Russian agent, yet the suspicion she excited in some quarters in no way hindered her from obtaining social influence, and she dispensed hospitality to a very select circle. She went everywhere, and her daily doings were chronicled in the personal columns of the newspapers. I had been watching her for several days, and on this evening had followed her to the theater in order, if possible, to become acquainted with her.

When the curtain descended and we rose to leave I turned, and said to her in Russian:

"You are alone, madame. Will you permit me to find your carriage?"

"Thanks, you are very kind," she said in Eng-

lish, with a pretty hesitating accent. "My man has buff livery."

"And the name, madame?"

"Princess Stratonovski," she replied, adding, "we are compatriots, are we not, m'sieur?"

"Yes," I replied smiling. "It is always pleasant to meet Russians in a foreign land," at the same time handing her a card which gave my name as Vladimir Mordvinoff, and my address at a suite of furnished chambers I rented in Shaftesbury Avenue.

A few moments later I handed her into her carriage, and as she thanked me and drove away, I walked, morose and thoughtful, up Northumberland Avenue toward my rooms.

During the week that followed we met several times. She showed herself in no way averse to my companionship, for she told me that she was always at home on Thursdays and would be pleased to see me. This invitation I accepted, and thus I became a frequent visitor.

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The guests had departed.

In the fading light of a summer's evening the princess and I were together in her pretty drawing room that overlooked the Park. As she

stood at the window with the last ray of sunlight falling upon her she looked daintily bewitching.

I admit that I loved her madly, passionately. Overwhelmed by the contemplation of her beauty, enchanted by the magic of her voice, which made the sweetest music out of the merest phrases, I thought of naught but her, and was only happy when at her side. Yet when I remembered the difference in our social position, and her marriage with the prince, I was almost beside myself with despair, for I knew that mine was an adoration that could only end in unhappiness.

Involuntarily my hand touched my pocket and struck something hard. I drew it away in horror. What terrible irony of fate! The woman I loved dearer than life, was doomed to die by my hand!

She had been gazing dreamily out of the window, when suddenly with a mischievous smile she exclaimed:

“You are very silent, m’sieur.”

I scarcely know what prompted me, but, jumping up quickly, and grasping her tiny hand, I raised it to my lips and poured forth the declaration of my love.

She trembled. Her breath came and went in short, quick gasps, but she did not attempt to arrest the flood of passionate words which escaped me. Ere I had concluded, my heart was filled with joy, for I saw my passion was not unreciprocated.

Vainly striving to overcome her emotion, she exclaimed excitedly:

"I—I was unprepared—I did not think you have love for me, Vladimir. Do you doubt I love you? Have you not seen it? *Mon Dieu!* my married life has been wretched enough. I have loved no man until I met you!"

"Do you really care for me, princess?" I asked, scarcely believing the truth.

"To you I am Irene," she said in her pretty broken English. "All my life has been wasted hitherto. You have asked me; I have given you answer. I love only you. Some day you will know me better. Now, you know me only for the great passion I bear for you. But yourself shall make satisfy of my career, my truth, my honor, and—and I shall get—what you call—divorce from Prince Stratonovski, and we two will marry. Of you I ask not one single question. You are my lover, the only man I

have cared for, and—and in return I am your serf.”

And she buried her flushed face upon my shoulder and sobbed.

Taking her in my arms, I swore to her everlasting constancy. All my heart was in the declaration. In the glamour of that hour we were reckless and egotistical as most lovers, heedless of the shadow that was growing up behind the sunshine of our happy vows of undying affection.

When she grew calm, she looked up searchingly into my eyes and said: “You cannot understand me. You do not know the tragedy of my life.”

“No, Irene. Tell me about yourself,” I said.

Hesitatingly she seated herself in a plush-covered wicker chair, and motioned me to a seat at her side.

“No, no,” I said, laughing. “At your feet, princess; always at your feet,” and, casting myself upon a low footstool, took her tiny hand in mine.

“My life has been wasted,” she said mournfully. “My mother was French; my father an Imperial Councilor of Russia. My earlier life was passed at Moscow, and afterward at the

court at St. Petersburg. I was forced by my father to marry Prince Stratonovski, who, as you are well aware, is rich and powerful. But, *ma foi!* from the first he treated me cruelly. Within six months of our marriage he commenced to ill-use me brutally; indeed, I bear upon my body the scars of his violence. The world was *débonnaire* while I was *triste* and downcast, for I found he had a *liaison* with a French *danseuse*. I bore his insults and blows until I was in fear of my life; then I came here."

"How could he be so cruel?" I cried in indignation.

"Ah, I have not told all, Vladimir," she said with a sorrowful sigh. "The prince plotted with his friend, Count Nekhlindoff, in order to obtain a divorce, but I thwarted his vile scheme. Nekhlindoff tried to compromise me, but I repelled his advances, for although I have so far abandoned my marriage vow as to love you while I am still wedded, I have done nothing by which my husband can obtain the freedom he seeks. Since I left Markovka I have wandered about, to Paris, Vienna, Brussels, with no protection against the dishonorable conspiracy. I grew tired of life—I——"

"You have a protector in me," I interrupted.

"Ah, yes, my love," she exclaimed, stroking my hair tenderly, and bending to kiss me upon the forehead. "Though I have been in the midst of luxury and gayety, my life has been dark and dreary. But happiness has now returned."

"It gives me joy to hear you speak like this, Irene," I said. "Nothing will, I hope, occur to part us, or cause our love to be less stronger than it is at this moment."

"What can?" she asked quickly, raising her eyebrows. "We trust one another. I have money enough for both. What more?"

The horrible thought that the poniard in my pocket must sooner or later be plunged into her heart, flashed across my mind, causing me to shudder and gasp for breath.

"No," I replied with a feigned laugh, "I—it is only a foolish fancy on my part. My joy seems almost too perfect to be lasting."

"I am yours; you are mine," she said passionately. "We shall marry and live together always as happy as we are to-day."

Twilight had faded, and it had grown almost dark. I had risen and was standing beside her

chair, bending and kissing her soft cheek, when suddenly the door opened and the maid entered to light the lamps.

"*Pardon, Madame la Princesse,*" exclaimed the girl, "I thought you had gone out."

"No, Nina, I shall not go out to-night," said her mistress. "Tell cook that M'sieur Mordvinnoff will remain and dine."

When the maid had lit the lamps and departed, I returned to where the princess sat, and noticed how her face had changed. Instead of the cold, haughty expression, her flushed countenance beamed with tender, womanly love, an expression that was supremely fascinating. As I stood admiring her, a morbid fancy crept over me. Why should I not take her life now she was in the zenith of her happiness? It would be better so, I argued; better than allowing her passion to develop and overwhelm me.

I was too well aware that the violation of my oath would mean death to me as well as to her, and as I stood behind her chair I placed my hand upon the hilt of the knife in my pocket and half drew it from its sheath.

But I could not bring myself to commit the crime. Drawing a long breath, I pushed the

keen blade into its leather case with a firm determination to overcome my thoughts, and again seating myself upon the stool at her feet, continued talking of our plans for the future.

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A fortnight later I was summoned before a meeting of the Executive.

"We understand," exclaimed Pétroff, the president of the council, "that you hesitate to carry out the sentence of death upon the Princess Stratonovski. Why?"

I glanced round at the pale, determined faces of the five revolutionists who were sitting at a table in the well-furnished dining room in Mostyn Road.

"I—I want time," I stammered.

"Time! You have already had three months. We are well aware that you admire her, but she must not escape. Remember the oath you took upon this knife," and he pointed to a long bright dagger which lay unsheathed on the table before him. "The Executive have decided that the traitress must die. If she escapes, you will pay the penalty with your own life. We trust in you."

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In a frenzy of mad despair I walked the Lon-

don streets one day a week later, seeking some means by which to avert the death of the woman I loved. The decree of the Executive was irrevocable. Their terrible vengeance is known throughout the world, and it is their proud boast that of those whom they condemned to death not one has ever escaped.

After wandering aimlessly for many hours, my footsteps led me involuntarily to Albert Hall Mansions.

It was late in the evening, somewhere about ten o'clock, when the old servant Ivan admitted me. As I entered the drawing room she did not at first observe my presence, and I stood for a few moments watching her. She wore a charming evening costume of cream net relieved by amber ribbons, and was reclining in an armchair, reading a novel. The mellow light of the shaded lamp fell upon her fair head, pillowed on the satin cushion, and her whole attitude was one of peace and repose. She held a lighted cigarette between her fingers.

Suddenly my movement startled her.

"Ah! Vladimir! *Quel plaisir!*" she cried, tossing aside her book and rising to bid me welcome. "All day I have expected you."

After kissing her upturned face I sank into a chair without a word.

"What ails you?" she asked in alarm, noticing my pale face and mud-bespattered clothes. "You—you are ill. Tell me."

"It's nothing," I assured her, striving to smile. "A slight faintness, that's all."

Accepting the explanation, she reseated herself and we commenced to chat. Of what we said I have no recollection. I know that when she lifted my hand to her lips I drew it away as if I had been stung. She was caressing the hand that was soon to take her life! The thought was horrifying.

She was at a loss to understand the meaning of my action.

"You are not well to-night, Vladimir," she said half reproachfully.

"No, no, Princess," I replied, "I'm well enough in health. It is the knowledge of our love that troubles me."

"Of our love? Why so?"

I cast her hand aside, and jumping to my feet, paced the room in frantic distraction. She clutched my arm, entreating me to tell her the cause of my agitation. Suddenly I stopped before her.

"Princess," I whispered hoarsely, grasping her slim, white wrist, "hear me! I am base, ignoble; I have deceived you!"

"What! You love me not—you——"

"I love you better than life. I would do anything to save you, yet, by a devilish vagary of Fate, I am compelled to kill you!"

"Kill me!" she gasped. "*Dieu!* You are imbecile—mad!"

Her face blanched; she tottered and almost fell.

"Yes, I was mad," I said bitterly. "Mad to love you when I knew that I must kill you. I am a Nihilist!"

"A Nihilist!"

"Yes. By your evidence some members of our organization have been sent to Siberia, and the sentence the Executive has passed upon you is death."

"Ah!" she cried wildly. "It is the statement in the *Novosti*. Listen, Vladimir!" Pausing to gain breath, she shuddered at the sight of the long, keen knife that I had drawn and held in my hand. "It was a vile lie concocted by my husband in order that the Nihilist vengeance should fall upon me. When Count Nekhlindoff's plot failed, he resorted to this scheme, and got

some journalist he knew to insert the libelous statement, well knowing that I should not escape death."

"Is the allegation untrue, then?" I asked in astonishment.

"Yes. I swear it is. At the time of the trial I was at Odessa with the Archduchess Paul, and was perfectly ignorant of everything until I saw the paragraph. I wrote contradicting it, but they did not publish my letter. It was the prince who desired that the organization should remove me and leave him free."

"I accept your explanation, Princess," I said, "yet how am I to save you? By my oath I am bound to obey the mandate of our Circle and compass your death."

"I am innocent, Vladimir. Is it that I die?" she asked, glancing apprehensively at the knife that flashed so ominously in the lamplight. "Can I not have time—time to prepare for death?"

"How long?"

"Three days, or more. *Mon Dieu!* I shall not try to escape. I swear."

"Very well," I replied in a low voice. "It is agreed. Three days."

Bidding her a strained, sorrowful farewell, I left her.

At eight o'clock on the evening of the third day the door of the flat was flung open by Ivan in response to my summons.

"Is Madame the Princess at home?" I asked of the grave-faced old man.

"Alas, m'sieur," he replied in a grief-stricken voice, "madame is dead."

"Dead!" I gasped. "When did she die?"

"She—she has been murdered!" he exclaimed in an awed tone. "I discovered her body an hour ago. The doctor and police are now in her room."

I rushed along the hall to the apartment, in which I heard low voices. It was a large, well-furnished bedchamber, dimly illuminated by two candles. Upon a couch near the window lay the body of the princess attired in a white cashmere wrap, the breast of which was stained with blood.

Heedless of the doctor and two police inspectors who were conversing together, I went over to the body and gazed upon it.

What I saw amazed me. I staggered, yet by

presence of mind managed to conceal my agitation.

The fair, handsome face of the princess had been slashed with the knife in the form of a cross, and the blood gave it a terribly ghastly appearance.

The cut was the distinguishing mark which Nihilists set upon the faces of traitors!

Something bright in the hands of one of the police officers attracted my attention. He was examining it by the light of the candles as I peered over his shoulder.

It was a dagger which, in an instant, I recognized as mine!

I felt in my pocket. The sheath was there, but the weapon had gone! I was dumfounded. I had been forestalled, and the princess had been murdered with the knife stolen from me!

The officer, after questioning me, took my assumed name and address, explaining that I should be required at the inquest.

In reply to my inquiries, Ivan told me that the princess, intending to leave for Paris on the morrow, had sent Nina, her maid, on in advance to secure her rooms. At six o'clock, while in the dining room, he heard the outer door slam, and

concluded that his mistress had gone out. An hour later he entered the bedroom and discovered the crime.

The Executive sat on the following evening and I attended to make my report. It was a mere formality, for the papers were full of the mysterious crime.

"Princess Stratonovski is removed," I said briefly, when interrogated by Pétroff.

"Thanks to the assistance of Dmitri," he added, with a smile.

"Irteneff!" I repeated, glancing at the dark, middle-aged man indicated, who sat with his elbows leaning upon the table.

"Yes," he said laughing, "I knew how difficult it is to assassinate the woman one loves, so I assisted you."

At the inquest I identified the body, while Ivan related his brief story. Twice the inquiry was adjourned, and subsequently a verdict was returned that the princess had been murdered by "some person or persons unknown." The prince was communicated with by telegraph, but he took no notice, and at the funeral Ivan and I were the only mourners.

The police could discover no clew to the assassin, and thus another was added to London's long list of unfathomable mysteries.

One day, about six weeks after the funeral, I received a note from Ivan, asking me to meet him at half-past seven that evening under the railway arch adjoining the Charing Cross Station of the Underground Railway.

Thinking that he might have something of importance to tell me, I kept the appointment. The road which runs under the bridge is not too well lit, and the spot is rather quiet about that hour.

Big Ben had just struck the half hour, when I felt a slight pressure on my arm, and heard my Christian name uttered.

Turning quickly, I confronted a female figure enveloped in a traveling cloak, and wearing a soft felt hat, and a veil through which the features were recognizable in the lamplight.

It was the Princess Stratonovski!

"Irene!" I cried, "is it really you?"

"Yes. I am no apparition," she replied with a laugh. "But no one must see me. Let us walk this way."

In a few moments we were strolling under the trees on the Embankment.

"It was quite simple," she said, in reply to my eager questions. "I always was a little inventif. You remember that on the night you told me of my doom you found me alone reading? Well, that night Nina was ill, and I had been attending her. I did not call a doctor, as I had no idea that she suffered from a weak heart. She died, poor girl, at six o'clock on the night you had promised to return. Then a thought occurred to me that, as her hair was the same color as my own, I might pass off her body as mine. I took Ivan into my confidence, telling him of the attempt which would be made upon my life——"

"You did not mention my name?" I said anxiously.

"Of course not. After I had dressed the body in one of my own wraps, we carried it to my room and placed it upon the couch. Nina was about my build, therefore I attired myself in her clothes, and taking the most valuable of my jewels, left at eight o'clock for Paris. Meanwhile Ivan remained. From what he has told me it appears that he watched and saw a middle-aged man enter the flat by means of a latch key. After searching several rooms he went into my

bedroom. There the man saw a female form whom he thought was me, and stabbed it to the heart. This occurred within half an hour of Nina's death."

"And it was the mutilation of the face that prevented me from discovering that it was Nina," I remarked.

"Exactly. Yet no crime has been committed, and I have escaped."

"Wonderful, Princess!" I exclaimed, astonished at the curious combination of circumstances.

"The prince thinks me dead; therefore I am a free woman," she said as we walked up Villiers Street. "I am no longer princess, but Madame Valakhina. I still love you, Vladimir, but I can see it is useless, for if we met often the Nihilists would discover how they have been tricked. I must therefore leave you. To-night I go to Brussels, and afterward to Yvoir, on the Meuse, where I have taken a villa. Ivan is there already. When you can safely leave London, come and see me."

We had ascended the steps and entered the Charing Cross terminus. The hands of the great clock pointed to five minutes to eight.

"See," she added, "I must go to the carriage. The train leaves at eight."

We walked along the platform and she entered an empty first-class compartment, into which a porter had already put her dressing-case.

When the man had taken his tip and departed, I said:

"Farewell, Princess."

My heart was too full to say more.

"No, no, Vladimir. Not farewell," she sobbed, her large violet eyes wet with tears. "*Au revoir*. We shall meet again some day."

And, as the Continental train moved slowly out of the station, she kissed her tiny hand to me and again murmured:

"*Au revoir!*"

IV.

THE BURLESQUE OF DEATH.

THE secret police attached to the Russian Embassy in London are ever watchful and untiring in their efforts to discover the plans and movements of our party. It is, therefore, our constant endeavor to lead them upon false scents and direct their attention to quarters in opposition to that in which we are working.

No monarch possesses such a prodigious organization of police spies as the Tzar. His emissaries are in every European city, and it must be admitted that for cunning and astuteness they are unequaled. Attached to each embassy is the *Okrannoie Otdelenie*, or "Security Section," consisting of some twenty or thirty detectives whose duty it is to closely watch political suspects, and forward elaborate reports of their movements to General Sekerzhinski, chief of the department at St. Petersburg.

The stratagems practiced by these agents, and their insolence, are unbounded. In smaller states, such as Bulgaria, Roumania, Switzerland,

and Italy, both law and political decency are violated, and these men act as if they were in a Russian provincial town. No one in the Balkan Peninsula doubts that the two Bulgarians who attempted to assassinate Mantoff, the Prefect of Rustchuk, when he was so imprudent as to go to Bucharest, were the tools of Yakobson, the third secretary of the Russian Embassy in Roumania. Again, it was proved that they offered people bribes to clandestinely introduce implements for false coining into the lodgings of a well-known literary man, the Russian refugee, Cass-Dobrogeanu. In dozens of cases attempts have been made—often successfully—to introduce bombs and explosives into the houses of Russian suspects abroad in order that they may be accused and imprisoned, thus removing their revolutionary influence. After a recent trial in Paris, where six men were condemned to long terms of imprisonment for having dynamite in their possession, it was proved most conclusively that into the houses of four of them the explosive had been introduced by persons bribed by a provoking agent of the Tzar's government!

It is well known in our circle that in the beginning of the last decade Colonel Soudeikin, the

then chief of spies and provoking agents in St. Petersburg, proposed to his principal confidential agent — afterward his murderer — Decayeff, in order to strengthen his reputation in revolutionary circles, that he should murder an unimportant fellow-spy, P——, first exposing him to the revolutionists. "Of course," remarked Soudeikin, "it is hard on him, but what can one do? You must gain their confidence in some way, and in any case P—— will never be good for anything." Indeed, the man referred to was already suspected of being a spy, and all the revolutionists were on their guard against him.

At such a level of morality the prospect of a "paying job" is sufficient to inspire the agents of the Russian "State police" with a spirit of boundless enterprise. The advantage thus gained by the Russian government is enormous; provocation is the surest way to give false impressions about the Russian patriots and to terrorize foreign public opinion to the detriment of the liberation movement.

Recently the foreign branch of the "higher police" has been strengthened and remodeled. In London the section now works independently. Paris has been constituted the center from which

operations in other towns are superintended; then come the university towns, as Montpellier, Zurich, and Berne, and the towns specially frequented by Russians, as Mentone. From Paris "flying brigades" of spies and provocators are sent out to places where "special activity" is required. The staff of employees has been "renewed," and the numbers greatly augmented. As an instance, no fewer than six new agents were sent from Russia immediately after the assassination of General Seliverstroff by Padlewski in Paris.

More attention is bestowed upon London than elsewhere, because it has become known that many of the foremost Terrorists reside in the English metropolis. The satellites of the "Security Section" are, however, baffled by the watchfulness of our own spies, and unable to make much progress with their inquiries owing to the traps we lay for them. Indeed, finding their activity counteracted, they have decided to found in London some kind of Russian institution, which by its artistic and literary attractions shall induce Russians living in the metropolis to visit it; the aim being to facilitate the obtaining

of information and the choice of future victims for provocation.

At the time the events related in this story occurred, the Executive had resolved upon decisive action.

As a protest against the increasing tyranny of Tzardom, it had been decided that a grand *coup* should be made at the Winter Palace at St. Petersburg, where two members of our organization were engaged as servants in the Imperial household. News of the plot was conveyed secretly to the various circles on the Continent, while we in London set about arranging the various details.

To Nicolas Tersinski, who lived in Heygate Street, Walworth, was the work of manufacturing a dynamite clock intrusted. He had been a locksmith in Warsaw and was skilled in mechanical contrivances. It was he who made the bombs which wrecked the Tzar's train near Grodno, and to his ingenuity the machines that had caused several "outrages" were due.

While these preparations were in progress, it was of course highly essential that our secret should be strictly guarded and that our ubiqui-

tous enemies, the police spies, should entertain no suspicion of our intentions. Nevertheless, we were one day amazed and startled to discover that the "Security Section" had suddenly grown more active than usual, and that there were unmistakable signs that they had gained some knowledge of the conspiracy.

The Executive held a hurried meeting to consider the best means of averting the espionage. I was still living expensively as a young man about town, and, as I rarely visited the house in Mostyn Road, my connection with the revolutionists was unknown to the police. For this reason I was chosen, together with Grinevitch, to assist in the work of shadowing the spies in order that Pétroff and the committee might complete their plans and get the machine safely to St. Petersburg.

The work was exciting, adventurous, and somewhat risky; but it suited my devil-may-care spirit. The daring with which our organization acted inspired me with confidence, and I went about fearlessly, attired in various garbs, and tracked the minions of the Tzar into all sorts of queer corners of London. They were indefatigable; but owing to our headquarters in Mostyn

Road being temporarily abandoned, they were entirely off the scent. It was my object to further puzzle them, and, assisted by half a dozen other members of the party, I think I succeeded.

Meanwhile the clock was being completed, and the plans for the *coup* elaborated.

While sitting one evening at a small table in the Café Royal in Regent Street smoking, sipping kummel, and lazily scanning the *Petit Journal*, a word in guttural Russian addressed to the waiter caused me to glance across to a tall, dark man in evening dress, who had seated himself alone and unnoticed at the other side of the table opposite me. A momentary glance was sufficient for me to recognize in him the original of a photograph which had been given me, and pointed out as Guibaud, the renowned French detective, who had recently been placed at the head of the "Security Section" in London.

He was lighting his cigar and flashing the great diamond ring upon his finger, when I suddenly asked him for the lighted match for my cigarette. By that means I opened a commonplace conversation, and I quickly felt confident that he had no suspicion that I was a Terrorist.

After spending nearly an hour together, and drinking at each other's expense, we strolled to Oxford Circus, where we parted, not, however, before we had exchanged cards, he giving me one with the name "Jules Guibaud," while upon mine was inscribed the words "Pierre Noirel, National Liberal Club." He told me that he was a glove merchant in the Rue de la Paix, Paris, while I made him believe that I was a young Belgian of independent means, who was living in England for the purpose of acquiring the language.

On wishing him "good-night," I jumped into an omnibus which was going in the direction of the Marble Arch; but as soon as the conveyance had traveled about five hundred yards, I alighted and followed the astute chief spy, who was then retracing his steps down Regent Street. Eventually I discovered that he resided in Russell Square, Bloomsbury, and from that evening I haunted him like a shadow, in order to obtain an insight into his methods. I quickly ascertained how closely, day and night, the prominent members were being watched, not only by the Russian police, but by detectives from Scotland Yard, whose aid they had invoked. Guibaud

and I met on several occasions, and always as friends.

One afternoon when I called at the house of Isaac Bounakoff in Aspland Grove, Hackney, to which our headquarters had been temporarily transferred, Pétroff made a statement that caused me amazement and dismay. Notwithstanding our precautions, the spies had discovered Tersinski's house in Walworth, and were watching it. Isaac had recognized one of the "Security Section" men standing at the corner of the street. He had completed the machine, and was anxious to remove it to a place of safety before search was made by the English police. It was imperative that the incriminating object should be got out of the house without delay, and after some discussion the task of removing it devolved upon me, Grinevitch volunteering to assist.

Returning at once to my chambers, I contrived, by the aid of a gray wig and the contents of my "make-up" box, to assume the appearance of an elderly man. Attiring myself in a seedy suit, I donned an apron which I rolled up around my waist, so that when, an hour later, I alighted from an omnibus in the Walworth Road, I presented the appearance of a respectable mechanic.

It was now quite dark, and, as I turned down the quiet street, I met an ill-clad man sauntering up and down, smoking a short clay pipe. The light of a street lamp fell upon his features, which I recognized as those of Guibaud. He gave me a sharp, inquiring glance, but was unsuspecting; therefore I walked on until I came before Tresinski's house—an eight-roomed dwelling, with area and basement of the usual South London type. Then I looked round suddenly, and seeing that his back was turned, darted up the steps leading to the front door, and let myself in quietly with the latchkey.

The unfamiliar interior was pitch dark, and I was afraid to strike a match lest the detective's attention might be attracted. Groping my way carefully up the stairs, I ascended to Tersinski's workshop on the top floor, where he had told me I should find the box.

After a few moments' search I found it standing under a bench near the window. Handling it with the utmost care—for it was already charged with a sufficient quantity of dynamite to wreck the whole street—I drew it forth and found it had the appearance of a small, black tin deed box, with handles at each end, while upon the

side the name "F. Evans" had been painted in white capitals.

I was just bending to lift it from the ground, when I was startled at feeling myself seized from behind.

"Ah! You are my prisoner!" cried a voice, which, in a moment, I had recognized as that of Guibaud, who had evidently followed me into the house.

At first both my arms seemed pinioned, but it was not for long. In a few seconds I had recovered my breath, wrested my right arm free, and drawn my revolver.

It flashed across my mind that we were alone, and that it was imperative I should overpower him.

"Let me go, curse you!" I cried in French. "I give you warning that, if you don't, I'll fire into that box and blow you to the devil."

"Do it," he replied. "You would die too. I arrest you for the manufacture of explosives."

"Don't make too sure of your prey," I said, at the same time taking him off his guard, and freeing myself by dint of a great effort.

In the dim uncertain light, I saw something lying upon the bench, and snatched it up. It was a hammer.

“*Sacré*,” hissed Guibaud, “you shall not escape, now I have caught you in this trap,” and his dark form darted forward.

I was only just in time. Raising the hammer, I brought it down with a crushing blow upon his skull.

Uttering a loud cry of pain, he reeled backward and fell with a heavy thud to the floor.

Without a moment’s hesitation I cast the hammer aside, thrust the revolver in my pocket, and, grasping the box, dashed downstairs to the street door.

At that moment I heard a man passing outside, whistling a music-hall air. It was Grinevitch; I knew that no one was watching outside. Opening the door, I carried the box down the steps and hurried quickly away in the opposite direction to that by which I had approached. Walking down Deacon Street, in order to return to the Walworth Road, I was surprised to find so many police constables, for fully a dozen passed me. Nevertheless, I was unmolested, and on gaining the main thoroughfare hailed a passing hansom, and placing the box on the seat beside me, drove to my chambers.

I had not been joined by Grinevitch as I had

arranged, and supposed that he had remained behind to ascertain the cause of the sudden influx of police.

It was well that I left the house as quickly as I did, for I learnt afterward that a raid was made upon the place almost immediately. But beyond finding three rooms full of furniture, some locksmith's tools, and the chief spy lying insensible, their vigilance was unrewarded.

A week later Guibaud had recovered from the blow I had dealt him, and I was again "shadowing" him. He was walking along the Strand, in the direction of Trafalgar Square, when I passed him and appeared to suddenly recognize him. After a few moments' conversation I found he was going into Oxford Street, therefore I proposed that he should accompany me along Shaftesbury Avenue, and call at my chambers for a whisky and soda, an arrangement to which he made no objection.

Presently, as he sat before my sitting-room fire admiring my little flat for its artistic decorations and coziness, I stood upon the hearthrug, smoking a cigarette and watching him with anxious expectation. He was foolishly unsuspecting, or

he would not have drank the liquor I offered him.

Almost immediately after emptying his glass he became dazed.

"I—I don't know how it is—but—I feel strangely unwell," he exclaimed, with an attempt to laugh, at the same time drawing his hand across his brow. "*Dieu!* my head is swimming—I—I——"

And after struggling to rise, he fell back in the armchair unconscious.

Unbuttoning his coat, I quickly abstracted the contents of his pockets.

There were only several letters and a well-worn pocket-book. Carefully examining the entries in the latter, I found they consisted of the names, addresses, and descriptions of various Russian refugees. Some of the names had a cross against them, which evidently denoted that they were revolutionists. In the cover of the book was a letter on thin foreign paper, which had been carefully preserved. Eagerly reading through the communication, I discovered that the writer had betrayed our secret, and gave a detailed outline of the conspiracy.

It was written in Russian by one who gave his

address at 88 Rue Royale, Dieppe, and signed with the initials "P. P." But the caligraphy was unmistakable, for I had a number of communications in that handwriting, which I recognized as that of Peter Patrovski, a prominent member of the Paris Circle. A number of members of that branch of the organization had recently been arrested and sentenced to imprisonment, and now, from the letter I had discovered, it was clear that this traitor to our cause was in the pay of the secret police. Taking a pencil and paper, I scribbled out a copy of the evidence of Patrovski's treachery. It was his death warrant!

When I had made myself acquainted with the contents of the other letters, I replaced them all in the pockets of the insensible man, and then endeavored to restore him to consciousness.

When at last he opened his eyes and roused himself, I treated the matter jocularly, attributing the result to the strength of the whisky, combined with the heat of the room. Almost the first thing he did was to feel in his breast pocket. Finding both pocket-book and letters safe, his suspicions were apparently allayed, and, after drinking a little brandy, he pulled himself together and took a cab home.

Little did he dream that within half a dozen yards of where he had been seated was the dynamite clock, which I had taken from under his very nose, and for which the police of London, Paris, and Berlin were busily searching.

Next day I reported Patrovski's treachery to the Executive, and the death sentence was passed.

News had been received from St. Petersburg that the arrangements there had been perfected. An emissary from the Russian capital was to travel to Brussels and there receive the clock from the Executive. Every port of departure for the Continent was, however, being carefully watched by the police, and passengers by the various mail trains were closely scrutinized at the London termini. Even had they not been watched, the ordinary routes would have been useless, for the Customs examination at any foreign port would have been fatal to our project. The exact size of the box had been sent to St. Petersburg, and arrangements had been made for smuggling it across the German and Russian frontiers.

At length, after much discussion the Execu-

tive resolved that, as the box was in my possession, I should undertake the handing of it over to the representative from Russia.

Owing to the espionage at London stations, I was compelled to leave the beaten track. On the day following the final decision, I placed the box in a small portmanteau, together with some wearing apparel, and, calling a cab, drove to Croydon, thence taking train to the quaint old town of Deal. As there is no service of boats to the Continent from the sleepy little place I felt secure, and took up my quarters at the "Ship," an old-fashioned inn opposite the beach, frequented mainly by fishermen.

On the afternoon following my arrival I was seated in the dingy little bar parlor, scanning a limp, beer-stained newspaper, a week old, when an elderly, sinister-looking toiler of the sea entered.

"Arf'noon, sir. Fresh breeze outside," was his greeting in a deep, hoarse voice.

I acquiesced, and, as he seated himself in the window-bench and ordered his rum of the ruddy-faced waiting-maid, I commenced to chat. From his conversation I learnt that he was the owner of a small smack, and that he and his

three companions were going to "have a turn around the Goodwins at midnight." When, with a landsman's ignorance, I asked whether the fishermen of those parts were on good terms with the coastguard, he winked knowingly and remarked:

"There's a good deal wot comes ashore here as don't pay duty, you bet."

This remark gave me confidence in my man.

"Look here," I said in a low tone, after we had been discussing the various modes of evading the customs dues. "The fact is, I've got something that I don't want to pay duty upon. How much do you want to run me over to Belgium to-night?"

The man looked keenly at me, and his features relaxed into a curious smile. Removing the long clay pipe from his lips, he gazed thoughtfully into his glass.

"Where do you want to land?" he asked.

"Anywhere that's safe. My bag contains some jewels—their description is in the hands of the police—you understand?"

"Stolen," he muttered, nodding his head. "I've done the same thing afore for gents," and he took a deliberate pull at his pipe. "Wen-

duyne 'ud be the best place to run into. Nobody about; and you could take the dillygance to Blankenberghe and then go by train direct to Brussels."

"Very well; how much?"

"Twenty poun'."

I tried to convince him that the sum asked was too much, but he argued that it was "a contraband job," and that there were three of his mates to be paid out of it.

At last I consented.

"All right," he said, "we'll start at seven, and land you afore daybreak."

The evening was dark and stormy, but at the hour appointed I managed to get the portmanteau out of the inn unobserved, and met him on the beach. Quickly assuming an oilskin and sou'-wester which he handed me, I jumped into a small boat with the four men—about as rough looking a quartette as one could imagine—and a quarter of an hour later we boarded the smack, which lay at anchor some distance from the shore.

We lost no time in preparing to start, and soon hoisted sail, let go our moorings, and set our bows around the Goodwins in the direction

of the Belgian coast. Gradually the weather grew more boisterous, and our boat labored heavily through the rolling seas until midnight, when the storm abated.

The men were on deck managing the craft, while I, with the portmanteau under the bench near me, sat alone in the corner of the narrow, dirty little cabin, smoking and reading an old newspaper by the uncertain light of the swinging oil lamp. The motion of the boat must, I think, have lulled me to sleep, for I was suddenly awakened by hearing whispering near me.

The lamp had gone out and I was in total darkness.

I listened, feeling convinced that I had heard subdued voices.

Suddenly hoarse, ominous words broke upon my ear.

"Garn! Don't be a fool, Ned. He's got jewels in the bag, wot he's stole. There aint no reason why we shouldn't share."

It was the voice of the skipper.

"Hush! You'll wake him."

"If he stirs, darn him, we'll chuck him overboard, like we did the other cove, that's all."

I sat breathless, hesitating to move. It was

plain that the men were a gang of unscrupulous villains who intended to rob me.

While I was reflecting upon my position, I heard the portmanteau being dragged from under the seat where I had placed it. I knew I must act.

"Well, what do you want with my bag, pray?" I cried, jumping to my feet.

"Lie still, will you," replied the skipper's gruff voice, "we're going to have our pick of the stones, and if you utter a word we'll put you over where you can't walk home."

"Oh, indeed," I shouted, drawing my revolver and standing on the defense. "Although I can't see you, you devils, the first one who touches my bag is a dead man."

A blow was immediately aimed at me, but fortunately it fell upon my left arm. At that moment one of the men struck a light, and I found that all four were in the cabin with me.

The skipper, who had a life-preserver in his hand, noticed my revolver and hesitated.

"Twenty poun' aint enough," he said fiercely, "and me and my mates mean to have some o' your jewelry."

As these words fell from his lips, one of the

men, a tall, burly fellow, in a dirty yellow oilskin, grasped the handle of the portmanteau as if to carry it up on deck.

"We want no jaw," exclaimed the skipper. "Say a word, and we'll drown you like a rat."

"Put that down," I shouted to the man. "If you don't, I'll fire!"

But he laughed mockingly.

Pointing the pistol over his head, I pulled the trigger. The bullet whizzed past his ear, and smashed the little square mirror that was hanging up behind where he was standing. The man dropped the bag, and drawing a knife, was in the act of rushing upon me, when one of his companions held him back.

"No," cried the fellow who had grasped his arm. "Give him one more chance of life. If he hands over the bag to us, we'll guarantee to land him at Wenduynne."

"I shan't give it up," I replied in anger. "In the first place, you cowardly villains have been caught in your own trap. There are no jewels inside, but stuff that you'd rather not have on board this craft. All that's inside is dynamite!"

"Dynamite!" ejaculated the men in alarm.

"Yes," I replied. "Now listen! You mistook

your man. I'm not an absconding thief, as you thought, but, nevertheless, I mean that you shall take me to Wenduyme, and what's more, land me there before sunrise. If you don't, my mission will be useless. I'm tired of life, and if you don't fulfill your contract, I shall touch the spring inside, and send us all to kingdom come. Now, you infernal cutthroats, do as you please. I shall remain here, and, if you value your lives, you'll carry out the agreement for which I've paid you."

Then I unlocked the portmanteau, and showed them the box concealed inside.

My fierce, determined attitude cowed them. Like beaten dogs, they returned on deck without scarcely uttering a word.

The announcement that I had such a quantity of explosive had its effect, for, just as dawn was spreading, I was put ashore in a small boat upon a lonely part of the beach, about three miles north of Wenduyme, and directed to the road down which the diligence to Blankenberghe would pass.

That evening I took my seat in the mail train for Brussels.

.

I had taken my chair at the *table d'hôte* at the Hotel Bellevue at Brussels, when a tall, handsome woman entered, and, bowing stiffly, took a vacant chair opposite me. She was about thirty-five, and dressed with taste and elegance. Her dark, piercing eyes looked into mine inquiringly for a moment, while I gazed steadily at her. Then, to my surprise, she gave the sign of our organization. Immediately I gave the counter-sign, and glanced at her reassuringly.

During the meal, we carried on a commonplace conversation in French, and when it had ended, we rose to separate. As we were passing out of the *salle à manger*, she whispered to me in Russian:

"My room is No. 64. Meet me there in half an hour."

I obeyed, and entered her private sitting room unobserved. From the breast of her dress she drew forth her credential, a letter signed by the chief of the St. Petersburg Circle.

As my room was in the same corridor, I found no difficulty in secretly conveying the box from my apartments to hers.

Opening her dressing-case, she placed it in the

side which had been specially constructed to receive it.

We sat talking for some time, she telling me of the progress of the propaganda in the capital, and explaining how, on the occasion of the festival of the Knights of St. George at the Winter Palace, the *coup* was to be made.

"I have been here four days," she said, in reply to a question. "Early to-morrow morning I must leave on the return journey. I have only five days, and it is imperative that I should be back in time."

"Well," I said, rising to take my leave, "the Executive send you greeting, madame, and wish you *bon voyage*. May this forthcoming blow to autocracy prove decisive."

"*Merci, m'sieur*," she replied. "I am utterly devoted to the cause. *Au revoir*." And we grasped hands.

Next morning, when I went down to breakfast, I learned that madame had already left—for Ostend, they believed. After eating my meal, I returned to my room, and was astonished to see a well-dressed man emerging. A moment later I met Guibaud face to face.

"Why, my dear fellow!" he exclaimed, "they told me you were not up, so I came to make an early call. Well, what are you doing over here? A little love affair, eh?"

"No, I've just run over to see a couple of old chums. I was at college here, you know."

"Ah, of course," he said thoughtfully. "I remember, you told me. Well, I'm going down to get something to eat. Come into the *salle à manger* presently, will you. We'll spend the day together."

I replied in the affirmative, and left him.

Entering my room, I at once discovered that my portmanteau had been opened, and the contents turned over.

But the vigilance of the great detective had been frustrated, for he had arrived a couple of hours too late.

.

Six days later. Walking down the Strand in the evening, a newsboy held a paper under my nose, crying, "'Ere ya're, sir. Extra spe-shall! Attempt to murder the Tzar! Spe-shall!"

I purchased a copy, and read the brief telegram regarding the explosion at the Imperial Palace. The Salle Blache, and the adjoining

state apartments, had been wrecked, and although no lives had been lost, several persons had been injured. We regarded the plot as successful, for, once more, without the sacrifice of human life, we had terrified his Imperial Majesty, and showed him that, notwithstanding his rigorous measures, Nihilism was still active.

In the same journal, under the heading, "A Paris Mystery," was the report of the discovery of a body in the Seine, with the face cut in the form of a cross.

It was that of the traitor Patrovski.

V.

SOPHIE ZAGAROVNA'S SECRET.

ON the curb in the Strand opposite the entrance to the Gaiety Theater I stood, one wet winter's night, selling newspapers.

Ill-clad and unwashed, I lounged about with the cab touts who were waiting for the conclusion of the performance, and, although for the past hour I had shouted the contents of the papers under my arm I had only sold three copies. The dirty, ragged rabble from the slums off Drury Lane eyed me askance as a new hand, little suspecting that I was acting the part of detective.

I was engaged in watching one of my compatriots who had recently arrived in England, and whom the party regarded with suspicion. Ostensibly he was the agent of a firm of merchants in Moscow, but from secret information we had received from the Circle in that city, we shrewdly suspected that his real mission was that of agent in the pay of the secret police. Owing

to his failure to discover the authors of the plot at the Winter Palace, Guibaud had been summarily dismissed from the service, and we believed that this man, who called himself Albert Jacolliot, was his successor. The vigilant observation, which for the past fortnight I had kept upon him, went to show conclusively that he was in London for some secret purpose.

Assuming all sorts of disguises, I had watched him continuously, since the first hour we had received warning that he was in London, and under the pretense of selling newspapers was now watching for his reappearance, so that I might follow him.

While standing on the curb, wet and uncomfortable, gazing wistfully into the warm, brilliantly lit vestibule, a tall, very beautiful girl descended the broad flight of stairs. She was in evening dress, with a handsome brocaded opera cloak around her shoulders, and a white fleecy shawl over her head. She was slight and delicate, with large brown, lustrous eyes, wavy hair, a firm mouth, and a nose that was just tip-tilted enough to give the face an expression of piquancy.

Several touts rushed up to her crying, "Keb-

or kerrige, lady?" but she took no heed. Standing at the entrance for a moment she looked anxiously up and down, and then espied me.

Drawing her cloak closer around her, she walked across to where I stood.

"Paper, lady?" I asked. "*Globe, Echo, Star?*"

"Give me anything you like, Vladimir Mikhalovitch," she replied in Russian, at the same time uttering the Nihilist password and giving the secret sign, one that indicates indivisibility and is known to the revolutionary party throughout the world.

I stood for a moment amazed. She noticed my surprise and exclaimed in a low tone, "Give me a paper."

I gave her one, and in return she handed me a penny and a piece of paper folded small.

"An order from the Executive, conceal it," she said, and turning quickly, entered a cab that was standing near and drove away.

Presently, when no one was watching, I turned up at Catherine Street, and opened the note under a street lamp.

The contents were brief, but to the point.

"The bearer is Sophie Zagarovna. Call upon her at 11 A. M. to-morrow at 76, The Terrace, Richmond, and render all assistance possible.

"PAUL PÉTROFF."

Sophie Zagarovna! I knew her by reputation, and had been anxious to meet her, for she was one of the most daring of the Zurich Nihilists, and the boldness and success of her plots had more than once caused them to be a source of comment throughout the world. It was she who, alone and unaided, entrapped General Yagodkin, Chief of the Moscow police, and shot him through the heart because of the wholesale arrests of innocent persons which he made after the attempt to wreck the Winter Palace. For the past three years she had lived in Zurich, where she had been the idol of the students. Young, refined, and eminently beautiful, she was queen of that center of learning, and the Russians and Germans who were studying at the colleges vied with one another to secure her smiles. She knew well the advantages of beauty, and influenced her young admirers to join the party, afterward prevailing upon them to go to Russia and perform various risky missions.

In more than one instance a young man,

madly in love with her and enthusiastic in the cause of freedom, had journeyed to the land of his birth determined to strike a blow against Tzardom in order to secure her favor, yet, alas! the result has been fatal—either death, or the mines. Vain, and fond of admiration, she had numbers worshiping at her shrine, yet, through all, the breath of scandal had never touched her. Indeed, so intensely bent was she upon her purpose, that her heart appeared steeled against love, and she treated those who paid her court with queenly reserve. Of her parentage or real name nothing was known except that she took the oath in St. Petersburg and afterward went to Switzerland, where she speedily developed into one of the most fearless of Terrorists.

When I returned to the theater entrance after reading the order from Pétroff, I was just in time to see my man emerge, and I followed him to the Westminster Palace Hotel, where he was staying.

Punctually at the time appointed, I was ushered into a pretty sitting room, the windows of which commanded a broad view of the Rich-

mond Terrace Gardens and the picturesque valley of the Thames.

In a few moments Sophie Zagarovna entered, and greeting me with a winning smile and pleasant words, sat down and commenced to chat.

"I am here, in England, upon a secret mission from our Circle," she said in Russian, replying to my inquiries. "The Executive have recommended you as one who can assist me. It is for our cause, but its true object must not be known just yet. You must understand that it is not because you are distrusted, but because there are spies in the very walls. Will you help me?"

"For the cause—yes," I replied.

"Then listen. For the future I shall be known as Sophie Kalatenka, daughter of the late Count Kalatenka, Governor of Smolensk, and you are my brother Ivan. We shall both change our residence and live at a West End boarding-house, where the other boarders will know us as brother and sister."

"Yes," I said, puzzled.

"You wonder why?" she added, laughing. "Well, you will see. No one knows you at the Embassy, do they?"

"No."

"Then leave all to me, and we shall succeed."

I remained and lunched with her, spending a very pleasant couple of hours discussing the prospects of the revolutionary programme, and criticising its weak points.

Then I took leave of her, promising to meet her in London on the morrow.

Two months later.

We were guests at a grand ball given at the Russian Embassy, Chesham House.

I had assumed the character of the handsome girl's brother, and we had taken up our quarters at an expensive boarding-house at South Kensington.

By means unknown to me Sophie had procured invitations for us both, and it was about ten o'clock when we alighted from our hired carriage, and shortly afterward entered the fine ball-room.

The uniforms of the men added brilliancy to the gay scene, but among the women there was not one so beautiful as my "sister," who, attired in a dress of pale pink, looked fresh and fair as a spring flower.

Soon we were parted, and for the first hour I only caught occasional glimpses of her as she waltzed with various partners. Her flushed face betokened pleasure, and she laughed merrily at me over her partner's shoulder.

Later in the evening, when I grew tired of dancing, I sought the quietude of the conservatory, which led out from an adjoining room. Casting myself upon a seat behind a great palm, where I was completely hidden from view, I gave myself up to reflection, vaguely wondering what was the nature of Sophie's secret mission.

Once, while she had been left alone for a moment during an interval, I sat beside her, and asked how she was enjoying herself.

"Very well," she replied, in a low whisper behind her fan. "If a tragedy occurs to-night you need not be surprised."

It was this warning that puzzled me.

Suddenly words broke upon my ear. I was not alone, as I had imagined, and as I listened I heard a man's short derisive laugh as he replied to an eager question put by a woman.

I recognized the tones of the latter as those of Sophie.

"Then you are not afraid of these murderous

Nihilists?" she was asking. "Are they not dreadful people?"

"Bah!" he replied confidently. "We are fully able to cope with such scum. Siberia is large enough to hold them all, and before long we shall stamp out the spirit of revolt from among the scoundrels. I myself have sent dozens of Nihilists to the mines, and for that reason my life has been threatened."

"And are you not afraid of their vengeance?" she inquired.

"Scarcely," he replied, laughing. "The cowardly idiots dare not touch me."

"But they are fearless," she observed. "Their emissaries are everywhere. They might kill you!"

"They are perfectly at liberty to do their worst," he replied. "But why talk of such a subject, when all here are so gay? You look charming!"

"Thanks for the compliment," she said. "But to hear about Nihilists always interests me. I suppose you sometimes discover their plots, do you not?"

"Yes, very often," he answered. "Indeed, I am causing investigations to be made now, at

Moscow, and have obtained information which implicates between thirty and forty persons. I shall be returning to Russia in about a fortnight, and as the life of our Father the Tzar must be protected, I shall give orders for the arrest and transportation of the whole batch of conspirators. But one so happy as yourself ought not to trouble your head about such things," he added, laughing.

Then I heard him utter words of love, and the sound of a kiss fell upon my ear.

Presently, when he had declared his affection, and she had admitted in faltering tones that she loved him, they rose and passed out into the ballroom.

I followed them unobserved.

The man upon whose arm she leaned, radiant and content, was Captain Feodor Orfanoff, a tall fellow of about thirty, with a well shaped head, and in whose fiery gray eyes there lurked a joyous twinkle, which told of a right merry nature within. He was the very incarnation of robust, mirthful manhood, and I knew that during the brief period he had been in England, he had been exceedingly popular among the attachés. I had no idea, however, that he was the Chief of

the Secret Police of Moscow, and that he was in London endeavoring to elucidate some mystery connected with the plot he had discovered.

When, shortly before the dawn, Sophie and I were driving home, I observed that the captain was a pleasant fellow, in order to cause her to talk of him.

But, with a preoccupied air, she merely answered: "Yes, charming."

Then she turned our conversation into a different channel.

.

A few days later Orfanoff called, and I was introduced by Sophie as her brother. Soon he became a constant visitor, and we three frequently dined and afterward went to places of amusement together.

As time went on it was plain that Sophie's love for him increased, while on his part he adored her, sending her boxes of choice flowers daily, and making her several costly presents of jewelry. I became more puzzled as to the object of her mission by an event which occurred about three weeks later. I had been out during the day, and returned about seven o'clock. As I passed the door of our sitting room, I noticed

that it was ajar, and, pushing it open, entered noiselessly.

Sophie, who did not notice my entrance, stood facing the fire, bending and examining intently something she held in her hand.

Creeping up behind her, and peeping over her shoulder, I saw, to my surprise, that she held in her hand a morocco case, which contained a pretty ornament, evidently intended for the adornment of the hair. It was in the shape of a rapier, the tapering blade being of steel, while the hilt was set with diamonds.

Intending to frighten her, I suddenly grasped her wrist, and snatched the ornament from its bed of crimson satin.

"*Dieu !*" she cried, "I—I didn't know you were here, Vladimir. You startled me!"

"What a pretty pin," I remarked. "Where did you get it from?"

"It is mine," she replied.

At that moment I made pretense of lunging at her with it, when she shrank back with expressions of fear and repugnance that amazed me.

"Is it sharp?" I inquired, feeling the point with my thumb.

“*Gran’ Dieu!* what would you do? You will kill yourself!” she cried in alarm.

“What do you mean?” I asked, as she wrested the pin from my fingers.

“I mean that a puncture with this would prove fatal,” she said, in a low, serious tone. “You understand?”

“Is it poisoned, then?”

She nodded her head, and, holding the pin nearer the shaded lamp, showed that for about an inch from the point it was discolored by some black substance.

“Why do you carry such a dangerous weapon with you?”

“Cannot you guess?” she asked hoarsely, at the same time unbuttoning the breast of her dress, and drawing forth a letter, which she handed me. Then she sank into a chair, and, covering her face with her hands, burst into tears.

The letter was in Russian. It acknowledged receipt of the facts regarding Feodor Orfanoff, and stated that the death sentence had been passed upon him. Appended was the warrant of the Moscow Circle, ordering her to kill him.

In a moment the object of her secret mission was plain.

"And you love him, Sophie?" I said in a low tone.

"Yes," she sobbed. "I came here to discover how he intended to act on his return to Moscow. I have betrayed him, and the Circle have passed sentence. In spite of myself, I have grown to love him, and must save him. How can I do it? To warn him would be to place the whole Circle in danger, besides bringing the vengeance of the party upon myself."

Jumping up, she paced the room excitedly, while I stood watching her sorrowfully, unable to give advice or render assistance.

As I stood, meditative and silent, a servant entered with a card. She glanced at it, drew a long breath, and exclaimed: "Captain Orfanoff! Show him up!"

Closing the little morocco case with a snap, she put it quickly into the pocket of her dress, and replaced the letter in her breast. Scarcely had she rebuttoned her bodice when Feodor entered, and she went forward to meet him with a smile and an expression of glad welcome.

He grasped her hand—the hand that was ordered to compass his death!

Then he greeted me, and we seated ourselves before the fire.

"Well," he said, after we had been conversing for several minutes, "this is my last visit here."

"Are you going away?" asked Sophie in dismay.

"Yes, dear, I start for Moscow to-morrow. I have some important work to perform, and have come to-night to wish you farewell."

"So soon," she said sorrowfully. "When will you return?"

"Perhaps never. I only came here to endeavor to discover a woman whose Christian name was the same as your own."

"What did you want with her?"

"To arrest her, and demand her extradition. It was she who killed my predecessor—General Yagodkin."

"Ah, I remember," I said. "She escaped from Russia."

"Yes, she's a most dangerous Nihilist, and many recent plots have been due to her inventive genius. If I find her, she will go to the gallows."

"Oh, don't talk of such horrors, Feodor!" exclaimed Sophie, who had turned somewhat pale, and involuntarily shuddered. "How cold it is. I must go and get a shawl."

And she rose and went out.

For nearly half an hour she was absent, while Orfanoff and I smoked, drank our whiskies and sodas, and chatted. Then she returned, and together we wished him farewell and *bon voyage*.

.

Several weeks had passed. Sophie and I, by means of false passports, had journeyed to Moscow. She had decided to run all risks and warn her lover of the impending danger, and had persuaded me to accompany her, in order to allay suspicion. We had taken up our quarters at the Hôtel de Dresde, and frequented the boulevards and the summer gardens daily, in order to meet him alone, for we dare not call at the Bureau of Police.

By means only known to the members of our party we were quickly introduced into the circle of official society, in order, of course, that Sophie might complete her mission. One evening we accepted an invitation to dine at the house of a wealthy merchant, who lived in the Bolshoi Dmietriefka, having previously ascertained that Feodor Orfanoff was also to be a guest.

His surprise and pleasure were unbounded when we met prior to going in to dinner.

Sophie looked bewitching and brilliant in a

well-fitting evening dress, and with her hair dressed in Grecian fashion. There was one thing, however, that caused me alarm. She wore in her hair the poisoned ornament.

The dinner party was a large one, and Orfanoff sat between myself and my *pseudo* "sister." Over the meal we chatted merrily, she explaining how, owing to financial business connected with her late father's estate, she had been compelled to travel to Russia.

After we had joined the ladies in the drawing room I saw she was in earnest conversation with him, and noticed that they presently walked together into an adjoining room, which was unoccupied.

I surmised from her movements and agitated manner that the time had come when she intended to warn him, therefore I followed noiselessly and overheard their conversation.

"Well, *ma chère*, what is this great secret of yours?" he asked with a smile, balancing himself upon the edge of the table.

"Hush!" she whispered. "Someone may hear us. If they did, it would be fatal."

"What do you mean? Why all this mystery?"

"I mean that you are condemned to die!"

"To die!"

"Yes. You will die in the same manner as General Yagodkin. The Nihilists have passed sentence of death upon you."

"Tell me—how do you know?" he asked, breathlessly excited, and pale with alarm.

"Hush!" she urged. "Speak lower. I—I know you love me, Feodor. I have not forgotten your words when in London; you asked me to be your wife; but, alas! I can never be more to you than what I am—a friend—although we love one another so well."

Her voice faltered as she spoke, and the last words of the sentence were almost lost in choking sobs.

"And why?" he asked, slipping his arm around her waist and drawing her head down upon his gold-braided uniform coat.

She shuddered, and gently disengaged herself from his embrace.

"Listen," she said, in a hoarse, fierce whisper; "I have journeyed here, to Moscow, on purpose to warn you of your danger. I leave to-night, and you will never again see me. I am here at great risk, for my life would be taken by the Terrorists if they knew I had given you warning,

whereas, if the Bureau of the Third Section knew that I was on Russian soil, they would, undoubtedly, arrest me."

"Who, then, are you?" asked Captain Orfanoff in surprise.

"You know me, surely?" she said, with an attempt to laugh.

"Sophie Kalatenka."

At that moment I heard voices behind me, and, turning quickly, saw three police officers in uniform at the door.

"There she is!" cried one. "I recognize her."

"Yes; let us enter."

Brushing past me, the men unceremoniously burst into the room.

"What means this intrusion?" demanded Orfanoff fiercely.

The men saluted, but before they could explain a grayheaded man in ordinary dress pushed forward, and walking up to my "sister," exclaimed:

"Sophie Zagarovna! I arrest you for murder, by order of our Imperial Father, the Tzar!"

"*Dieu!*" cried Orfanoff, "Sophie Zagarovna! You—you must be mistaken."

"Tseklinski!" gasped Sophie, deathly pale, and

shrinking from the man who had addressed her. "It is you! By Heaven! we meet again, and—and you are the victor. Once I spared your life as I have spared Feodor's, and this is how you repay me—by arrest! I love Feodor, but I know there is no hope of happiness now I have fallen into your merciless clutches."

"You have deceived me," cried Orfanoff, angry and bewildered at this revelation, "I have loved and trusted a murderess!"

"I—I have risked my life to save you," she said wildly. "Kiss me once—for the last time," she implored.

He flung her from him with an expression of disgust, coupled with an oath.

"You—you cast me aside!" she cried in dismay. "Then I care nothing for my future." Addressing Tseklinski, whom she recognized as the renowned and expert St. Petersburg detective, she shrieked: "When you were my lover I protected you, and through me you escaped the plot for your assassination. Now you arrest me for murder, merely because I removed a tyrant whose inhuman delight was to send innocent persons to Kara——"

"Enough, jade!" cried Tseklinski, his face

flushed with rage. "We have sought for you long enough, and if Captain Orfanoff is weak enough to be tricked and fooled by you, I am not."

Turning to the officers, he added:

"Arrest her, and take her to the Bureau at once."

The men advanced to obey their chief's command, but ere they could lay a finger upon her, she had staggered back and had fallen fainting and senseless upon the floor.

They stooped to raise her, but a look of horror overspread their countenances, as one of them removed his hand from the back of her head and found blood upon it.

Tseklinski bent, gazed into her face, placed his hand upon her heart, and listened intently.

"Dead!" he exclaimed, in a tone of awe.

I rushed forward to ascertain the truth. It flashed upon me in a moment. The pin she had worn in her hair had, by the force of the fall, been driven into her scalp, and the deadly Obeah poison upon the point had caused almost instant death.

It was a strange vagary of fate. The harmless looking weapon with which she had originally

intended to assassinate the newly appointed Chief of Police, had caused her own death.

Yet even that was preferable to the punishment that awaited her had she lived.

Once only I glanced upon the blanched, handsome features, then I hurried out of the house.

Before midnight I had left Moscow and was on my way back to London.

VI.

BY A VANISHED HAND.

FELIX KARELIN and I met in a rather curious manner.

I had been visiting two refugees, Dobroslavin and Bolomez, who lived in Little Alie Street, Whitechapel, and about six o'clock one July evening, was walking along Lemn Street toward Aldgate Station, intending to take train to the West End. As I turned the corner into Commercial Road an aged, decrepit, blind man accidentally stumbled against me. Bent, haggard, and attired in a ragged frock coat, green with age, with a battered silk hat, the nap of which had long ago disappeared, he looked miserable and melancholy.

Halting, and tapping with his stick, he exclaimed in broken English: "I beg your pardon, sir."

He was moving onward when I caught him by the arm. There was an accent in his voice that I recognized.

"What nationality are you?" I asked, in Russian.

In the same language he replied that he was a native of St. Petersburg, and an escaped political exile.

"A political!" I repeated, in surprise, as all escaped revolutionists in London were well known to us, and received money regularly from our relief fund.

"Yes," he said; "I escaped from the Algachi silver mines a year ago. But are you Russian also?"

I replied in the affirmative, and he at once urged me to accompany him to his lodgings, where we could talk. "It is only in Briton's Court, St. George's Road, not very far from here," he said.

Feeling a sudden interest in the old man, I acceded to his request, and he led me up and down several narrow squalid streets, with which he was evidently well acquainted. At length we turned down a dirty, evil-smelling court, and he stopped before a small house at the farther end. He opened the door with a latchkey, and I followed him upstairs.

When we entered his sitting room on the

upper floor, I was astonished to find it bright and comfortably furnished. One would never have expected such a clean, cozy room in a house of that character, situated as it was in one of the lowest quarters of the metropolis. Crimson damask curtains hung from a neat gilt cornice; in the center of the room was a round table, upon which tea was laid, and seated at the window, reclining in a cane rocking-chair, was a pretty fair-haired girl, of about sixteen, reading a novel.

She rose as we entered, and glanced shyly at me.

"Rosa, I've brought a friend, one of our compatriots, whose name, however, I have not the pleasure of knowing."

"Ivan Sidorski," I replied, uttering the first name that crossed my mind. I considered it politic to conceal my identity until I knew more about him.

His daughter smiled, shook hands, and welcomed me.

"You are more comfortable here than in Algachi," I said, glancing around.

"Yes," he replied. "Although I am blind and helpless, I am not exactly destitute."

We took tea together, and were quite a merry trio. Rosa Karelin was charming, and her father's conversation was that of an educated and cultured man.

After I had given him a fictitious account of myself, he told me his story. He was a lapidary in St. Petersburg, and had been thrice arrested and confined in one of the bomb-proof casemates of the prison of Petropaulovsk, because it was alleged that his freedom was "prejudicial to public order." On the last occasion of his arrest he was condemned to hard labor for life, and sent across Siberia to the dreaded mining district beyond Irkutsk. His daughter went into voluntary exile with him, and they remained at Algachi four years. At length, aided by a Cossack officer, who took compassion on the decrepit old man and his devoted child, Karelin succeeded in escaping. He then became a *brodyag*, or escaped convict, who wanders about the country subsisting upon what he can beg or steal, but always traveling toward the west. In this way he managed to walk nearly a thousand miles toward the Urals, when by good chance he fell in with a train of freight sleighs going to Nijni-Novgorod fair. One of the drivers had

fallen ill and died, therefore he disguised himself in the dead man's clothes and took his place, having first, however, succeeded with the help of some of the other men in fling away his leg-irons. The clothes with the yellow diamond upon them he buried in a snowdrift, and with the dead man's passport was allowed to pass safely back to Europe, after an absence of nearly five years.

Soon after his arrival, however, he was stricken down by fever, and lost his eyesight. In Kazan he was joined by Rosa, who had followed him. Afterward they came to England.

The story of the daughter's earnest affection was a touching one, and as the old man related it tears fell from his sightless eyes. The whole narrative was intensely interesting to me, inasmuch as his description of the terrible hardships of deportation by road, of life in the filthy, insanitary *etapes*, and the horrors of the Tomsk *perisylni*, were all well known and vivid in my own recollection. It was evident that the poor old man had been subjected to the same inhuman brutality that had wrecked so many thousand lives, and none could sympathize with him more sincerely than I.

Without giving him any idea that I also had been exiled to the Great Prison Land, I questioned him upon various points, and his replies, one and all, were those of a man who had suffered in the same manner as myself. Besides, his head had been shaved, for upon one side his white locks were thin, while on the other they grew thickly, and were of an iron gray.

"What can I do?" he asked mournfully, when he had concluded his story. "The money I have will not last me much longer. I must seek work."

"But you are blind!" I exclaimed, looking into his dull, bleared, stony eyes.

"Yes; nevertheless I can still do my work. One can feel to cut and polish gems better than using the keenest eyesight. For three months prior to coming here, I was employed at the Roeterseiland factory at Amsterdam. Do you know anyone in London who wants a workman?"

I was silent. I happened to know a wealthy Jew diamond merchant, Goldberg by name, who lived in that dingy thoroughfare which contains more precious stones than the whole of the rest of London, Hatton Garden.

"You do not speak," he said entreatingly, lay-

ing his thin hand upon my arm. "If you do know anyone, give me an introduction to them, and as a Russian and a brother, I shall thank you."

"Yes, do," urged Rosa, jumping to her feet and placing her arm affectionately around her father's neck. "He must do some work, or we shall starve."

I hesitated, reflecting upon the curious fact that this man, being an escaped "political," was not included in our list. It was useless to give him the Nihilist sign, for he could not see.

"Well," I said presently, "I know one gentleman, a dealer in gems, who frequently employs lapidaries. If you like I will speak to him tomorrow."

Both father and daughter thanked me effusively, and I took a leaf from my pocket-book and wrote Goldberg's name and address, at the same time promising to call personally and interest myself on his behalf.

Soon afterward I bade them farewell, and walked homeward through the city in a very mediative frame of mind.

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Within a week of my meeting with Karelin, he

was engaged by Goldberg, who found him an excellent workman. The delicate sense of touch that he had developed caused him to exercise far greater care over his work than the ordinary lapidary, and Goldberg expressed a belief that the old man was the best diamond polisher in London.

I was glad I had been enabled to render the blind man a service, while on his part he continually overwhelmed me with heartfelt gratitude. We met frequently, and although I refrained from explaining my connection with the revolutionary party, I introduced him to several members of Parliament and other prominent persons who were advocates of Russian freedom, and who made the National Liberal Club their headquarters. The blind old man and his daughter were invited to numbers of houses, and much sympathy was shown them. Rosa was petted by the ladies, and her father appeared never tired of describing the terrors of administrative exile.

Occasionally he lectured; on the first occasion at the National Liberal Club, and afterward at various halls in the metropolis. The title of his lecture was "My Life in Siberia," and great crowds assembled to hear him, while the news-

papers reported his observations and criticisms at unusual length.

Although he had been exiled as "a dangerous political," he denied that he had ever entertained revolutionary ideas, and expressed his disagreement with the propaganda of the Nihilists. By reason of that expression I refrained from admitting that I was a Terrorist. Of course I had reported to the Executive, and my instructions had been to watch him narrowly and penetrate the mystery which enveloped his past.

At this period it chanced that we were unusually active with our propaganda, especially in Poland, and the government viewed their futile efforts to suppress the circulation of revolutionary literature with increasing alarm. They were well aware that the majority of the books, pamphlets, and manifestoes came from England, yet they were utterly unable to discover the means by which they evaded the censorship.

One noteworthy document, which was being circulated by hundreds of thousands throughout the length and breadth of the Russian Empire, was the new programme of the Executive Committee.

'By fundamental conviction we are Socialists

and Democrats," is the translation of the opening sentence. Then it proceeded as follows: "We are satisfied that only through socialistic principles can the human race acquire liberty, equality, and fraternity; secure the full and harmonious development of the individual as well as the material prosperity of all; and thus make progress. The welfare of the people and the will of the people are our two most sacred and most inseparable principles." The document then went on to criticise severely the condition of the country under the present Tzar, and pointed out that in view of the stated aim of the party its operations might be classified under the heads of propaganda, destructive activity, the organization of secret societies, the acquirement of ties, and the organization of the revolution.

Clause 2, headed "Destructive and Terroristic Activity," was perhaps the one most calculated to inspire the Tzar and the government with feelings of insecurity and fear. The intentions of the party were expressed boldly in the following terms: "Terroristic activity consists in the destruction of the most harmful persons in the government, the protection of the party from spies, and the punishment of official lawlessness

and violence in all the more prominent and important cases in which such lawlessness and violence are manifested. The aim of such activity is to break down the prestige of governmental power, to furnish continuous proof of the possibility of carrying on a contest against the government, to raise in that way the revolutionary spirit of the people and inspire belief in the practicability of revolution, and, finally, to form a body suited and accustomed to warfare."

So active were the police that it had been impossible to establish a secret press in Russia with any degree of safety; hence it was that Boris Dobroslavin and Isaac Bolomez, two working printers of Warsaw, had come to London for the purpose of printing revolutionary literature, which was afterward smuggled across the Russian frontier.

The house in which they had established themselves was one of a row of small, old-fashioned, grimy private dwellings of the usual type found in the East End, and in the back parlor they had fitted up a hand press, while in an upstairs room they did the work of composing in Russian type, which they had brought from Poland.

Here the manifestoes and pamphlets issued by

the Executive were printed, and by means only known to our organization conveyed into Russia and Siberia, and circulated secretly. For nearly a year the dissemination of Terrorist literature had been going on, and we were gradually flooding the Tzar's Empire with documents advocating freedom.

Dobroslavin and Bolomez were pleasant, easy-going fellows, and one day while walking with Karelin in the Whitechapel Road I met them and introduced him. They had previously heard me speak of the blind exile, and were at once interested in him, inviting him to their house. During the weeks that followed we four often spent evenings together at Little Alie Street, although it must be remembered that no intimation was ever given to Karelin of the nature of the business that was carried on there, nor was he ever shown into the workrooms.

Rosa sometimes accompanied her father, and on those occasions would sing some of those old Polish love songs that touch the heart of the exiled patriotic Russian.

She possessed a pretty contralto voice, and generally accompanied herself upon an old mandolin, which she played with considerable skill.

One evening an incident occurred which puzzled me greatly. We had been chatting together in the front sitting room, and Boris and Isaac had left the room in order to consult in private upon a note they had just received from the Executive. Karelin and I were sitting in armchairs on either side of the fireplace, when I noticed that on a table, immediately behind my companion, there lay a half-printed copy of a sixteen-page pamphlet entitled "The Mad Tzar," which, couched in inflammatory language, had been so largely circulated as to cause the greatest consternation among members of the "Third Section," who were utterly at a loss to discover who was primarily responsible for the multiplication of this severe and ruthless criticism of the Imperial Autocrat.

As I sat watching the old man's expressionless face I could not help reflecting that it was a rash proceeding to allow such a document to lie about openly. Yet I reflected that the old man was blind and could not possibly ascertain the nature of the printed paper. Just at that moment Bolomez put his head inside the door and called me into an adjoining room to join in their conference.

When, five minutes later, I returned to the sitting room, Karelin was still in the attitude in which I had left him, but the pamphlet was no longer there!

Its disappearance surprised me, for it seemed quite as impossible that anyone had entered the room and taken it during my brief absence as that the blind man had discovered it. It was upon my tongue to remark upon it, but I hesitated, perceiving that to refer to it might whet the old man's curiosity and arouse his suspicions.

Nevertheless, the disappearance of the pamphlet was a mystery, and I determined upon finding out whether he had purloined it, and if so, the reason of the theft.

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A few days later I called upon Goldberg. His house was one of that long row of gloomy second-rate-looking private residences, with deep basements and flights of stone steps leading to the front doors, which line one side of Hatton Garden, and where dealers in gems most do congregate. There was nothing in the exterior to attract the attention of the enterprising burglar, with the exception, perhaps, of the iron bars which protected the windows in the area, and

even the shining brass plate bore simply the name, "F. Goldberg," without any indication of his business. Inside, in the room used as office, the feature one would have expected to find—namely, a great green-painted iron safe with enormous handles and hinges—was absent. The room was nothing more than a comfortable library with well-filled bookcases around the walls.

When I entered, Goldberg was busy writing letters. Rising, he grasped my hand, and, greeting me warmly, bade me be seated in the client's chair.

"You would like to see your blind *protégé* at work, eh?" he said, when we had been chatting some time. "Well, you shall. He's a marvellous workman. See, here's a stone he finished this morning"; and taking from a drawer in his writing-table a tiny round card-board box, he removed the lid and handed it to me.

Lying in its bed of pink cotton-wool was an enormous yellow diamond which flashed and gleamed in the ray of sunlight that strayed into the room.

"How much is it worth?" I asked.

"My price is a thousand pounds," he replied.

"That one, however, has been ordered by a jeweler, and is to form the center of an ornament which, in a few weeks' time, will be presented by a bridegroom to his bride."

"I should like to see Karelin at work," I said.

My friend acquiesced willingly, and took me upstairs to a small back room, where the old man was sitting at a lathe. He was busily engaged cutting a rough diamond by means of fine wire and diamond dust. In order that he should not be aware of my presence I did not speak. His master addressed some words to him regarding his work, which the old lapidary answered without turning his sightless eyes toward us. The careful and accurate manner in which he worked was little short of marvelous, for he stopped every few moments to feel with the tip of his forefinger the precise dimensions of the incision he was making in the gem.

My object in seeing him at work was twofold. The first was to watch the movement of his face, but I found that it wore the blank, expressionless look of a blind man. The second was to make an investigation. His coat was hanging upon a nail behind the door, and holding up my finger to my friend, as an indication of secrecy, I

crossed noiselessly to the garment, and, placing my hand in the breast pocket, abstracted its contents.

A momentary glance was sufficient to detect the object which I sought; for, folded in half and lying among a number of letters and bills, was the missing copy of the revolutionary pamphlet.

I pushed the papers back hurriedly, and Goldberg and I left the old man's workshop. I was sorely puzzled to know what the blind man wanted with a document of that description, and after replying evasively to Goldberg's questions, I bade him farewell, and left.

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Several days passed.

One evening I visited the house in Little Alie Street and found Dobroslavin, Bolomez, and Karelin smoking together in the dingy little sitting room. We sat together about an hour, when the old man knocked the ashes from his pipe, and rising, said, "I must be going now. I promised Rosa to return early. She will be so lonely, poor child."

The tender manner in which he spoke of her touched me, and I reflected upon her dull and

lonely life, for she was unable to speak English, and had no friends.

"I will see you home," I said, and presently we set out and walked together to his humble abode. Rosa was sitting as usual, bright and cheerful, ready to welcome him. She jumped to her feet, kissed him affectionately, ran to get his slippers, and bestowed upon him various little attentions which showed how great was the affection between father and daughter.

After remaining chatting with her for half an hour I returned to Little Alie Street, but judge my astonishment when I found that a crowd had assembled outside the house. Hastily inquiring the nature of the disturbance I was informed by a lad that a police inspector and several detectives had entered the place. Such intelligence naturally caused me a good deal of consternation, but I remembered that it was no offense against English law to print Russian pamphlets.

I resolved to put on a bold front and enter the premises.

As I was forcing my way through the crowd to the door, the latter opened, and I saw Dobroslavin and Bolomez in the custody of several constables.

"For what am I arrested?" I heard Bolomez ask in his broken English.

"You've already been told," the constable replied. "Come, you'd best go quietly."

Neither of my two fellow-conspirators saw me, for I was standing among the crowd of White-chapel rabble; but as soon as they started to walk, I followed them to the Lemn Street Police Station—now famed in history as the headquarters of the police when searching for "Jack the Ripper." On arrival I hesitated whether to follow them into the station, but at length decided not to do so, lest I might run unnecessary risks and be identified as a frequent visitor at the house which had just been raided.

Having in vain attempted to ascertain the exact nature of the offense with which Dobroslavin and Bolomez were charged, I hurried away to Aldgate and took train to Edgware Road, taking a cab thence to Mostyn Road in order to report the misfortune to the Executive.

With feelings of intense anxiety I sat in the Thames Police Court on the following morning, waiting for the two prisoners to be brought before the magistrate. Presently, after the usual

applications for summonses and night charges, my two compatriots were placed in the dock.

"Boris Dobroslavin and Isaac Bolomez, you are charged with having forged Russian bank-notes in your possession, and further, with manufacturing them at No. 132 Little Alie Street," exclaimed the clerk of the court.

Forged notes! Impossible, I thought. The press was used for no other purpose than for printing revolutionary literature. The evidence, however, was remarkable. As I sat listening to it I could scarcely believe my ears.

The first witness was a police inspector, who made the following statement: "A warrant to search the premises, 132 Little Alie Street, was given into my hands, and last night I went there with other officers. In answer to a ring, the prisoner Bolomez opened the door, and we at once searched the place. In the back room on the ground floor we found a printing press and printers' materials, together with a very large number of pamphlets and circulars in Russian. On searching the front sitting room, I found, concealed under the cushion of the sofa, four engraved copper plates, which have been used for printing Russian notes of the value of one

and five rubles. In a drawer, in the same room, I found the bundles of forged notes I produce. They are all new, and represent a sum of eight thousand rubles. Two small tins of blue and yellow lithographic ink I found concealed behind a sideboard. I then caused both prisoners to be arrested."

In reply to the magistrate, the officer said that a very large number of forged Russian notes were in circulation, and the Russian Finance Department had obtained information which showed that they were being printed in London. A heavy reward had been offered, but although the London police had been endeavoring to trace the offenders, they had not succeeded until the present occasion.

The other evidence was corroborative. I was dumb with amazement, and the two prisoners seemed too much astonished at hearing the extraordinary charge against them to make any effort to cross-examine the witnesses. At length the case was remanded, and I left the court.

That day the Executive held a meeting to discuss the situation, but no solution of the mystery was forthcoming, and the solicitor we employed to defend entertained little hope of being able

to make a satisfactory defense in the face of such undeniable evidence.

For three days following the arrest of Boris and Isaac and the seizure of our press, I was too busy to call on Karelin, but I expected that he had seen the reports in the papers, with the sensational headlines, "Clever Capture of Banknote Forgers: Thousands of False Notes." On the fourth morning, about nine o'clock, I chanced to be walking along Farringdon Road, when it suddenly occurred to me to call at Goldberg's, and tell the old lapidary how narrowly he had escaped arrest.

When the lad admitted me, I met his master talking excitedly with two men in the hall.

"It's a most clever robbery," I heard one of the men say. "The thief was evidently an expert."

"Robbery!" I echoed. "What's the matter, Goldberg?"

"My safe has been ransacked!" he cried wildly. "See, here!" and he pulled me into his private room.

Bookcases completely lined the walls, but one of these was false, containing only the backs of

books behind a glass door. On pressing a spring it opened, revealing a great safe imbedded in the wall, and large enough for a man to enter. Both doors now stood open, and the place was in great confusion. The drawers in the safe had been sacked, the card-boxes which had contained cut and uncut gems had been emptied and cast aside, while papers had been tossed carelessly upon the floor.

“What does this mean?” I asked, amazed.

“It means that I have lost every gem I possessed. They were worth twenty thousand pounds, and included the great yellow diamond which Karelin cut so beautifully. The burglars, whoever they were, gained admittance by the area window after filing away three of the bars.”

¶ One of the detectives remarked that it was strange Karelin had not come to work as usual that morning, and at his request I accompanied him in a cab to Briton's Court.

My knock at the door was answered by an obese, slatternly woman, who, in reply to my question, said:

“Mr. Karelin's gone away.”

“Gone!” I gasped.

“Yes, he came 'ome yesterday about five

o'clock, and an 'our afterward left with his daughter. They took a small box with them, and said they would probably be absent a month or so."

"He is the thief," the detective briefly remarked, turning to me.

We searched his rooms, but found nothing to show the direction of his flight. I then accompanied the officer to Lemau Street Police Station, where I gave a detailed description of the fugitive and his daughter, which was wired to every police station in the metropolitan area. An hour later, information was telegraphed to the ports of departure for the Continent, together with a description of the stolen gems. As, however, the days passed without tidings of him, it was evident that he and his affectionate daughter had succeeded in getting out of England with their booty.

The celebrated case of forging Russian notes, tried at the Old Bailey, is no doubt still remembered by my readers. The evidence for the prosecution was conclusive, the jury returned a verdict of "guilty" and Dobroslavin and Bolomez were each sentenced to seven years' penal servitude.

Subsequent inquiries made by our party, together with an incident which occurred at Amsterdam, revealed some remarkable facts. Six months after the two innocent men had been sentenced we unraveled the mystery surrounding Karelin, and discovered that he was a genuine escaped exile, but not a "political." On the contrary, he was accredited by the Russian police as the most expert diamond thief in the whole empire, and for robbing a jeweler in Kovno he had been sent to Siberia with a yellow diamond upon his back. For many years he had had an affection of the eyes, but his blindness was only feigned, and the girl Rosa was not his daughter, but a clever accomplice.

After his escape from the mines, he entered the Russian Secret Service as spy, which is no unusual course for criminals to adopt.

The government, viewing with alarm the increasing flood of revolutionary literature emanating from England, saw that the only way to stop it was to get the men who were responsible imprisoned for a term of years. With this object the man we knew as Karelin assumed the character of a blind lapidary, obtained an entrance to the house in Little Alie Street, and, when his

plans were ripe, secreted the plates and forged notes in the room, first, however, giving anonymous warning to the metropolitan police. The result was that two innocent men were convicted, and placed where they could do nothing to annoy the Great White Tzar.

Although Dobroslavin and Bolomez are still at Portland, Karelin met with his deserts. He did not escape our vigilance, for our party found him in Amsterdam some months afterward endeavoring to sell the great yellow diamond which he had polished. He was arrested, extradited to England, and sentenced to ten years' imprisonment, while about half of Goldberg's property was recovered.

No trace, however, was discovered of the charming Rosa.

VII.

THE JUDAS KISS.

BAH! How I hate tuberoses! Their odor is gruesome. There is death in their breath.

She is very fair, but those flowers make her corpse-like. And her hair—what an ashen brown it is! There is something about her figure, too—about her carriage; that sinuous movement from the waist that reminds me——

How heavy the scent of those tuberoses is!

How it clings to the nostrils and stirs the memory!

Shall I never be able to forget? Shall I never succeed in drawing the veil? Tuberoses and——

Where did that whiff of chloroform come from? Is it my imagination playing me tricks to-day, or is that man at my side a surgeon, fresh from some murderous, horrible operation? They are all alike, those doctors, licensed to butcher.

Tuberoses and chloroform! Chloroform and tuberoses! Faugh! they go well together. A

grim specter breathes the one and wears the other.

I suppose it is remorse. How horrible remorse is! Bearing you down, gripping you by the throat and strangling you until your brain whirls, your senses are dulled, and you see all over again scenes you desire most to forget.

It is a couple of years since, yet how fearfully vivid it all is!

That pallid face, whiter than the white pillow; the closed eyes; the ashen-brown hair!

By Heaven! I see it all before me even now. A hideous reality. The *dénouement* of a drama in our struggle for freedom.

* * * * *

Mine was a delicate mission. My readers will probably remember that about two years ago a new Russian literary and social star appeared in the London firmament, in the person of Madame Vera Kovalski. Her sudden appearance in English society, and her ostentatious parade of wealth, aroused our suspicions that she was an agent of the Russian government, a surmise which was quickly confirmed, for one morning we saw in certain London daily newspapers a long letter signed by her, defending Russian

bureaucracy, and eulogizing the humane Tzar for his paternal interest in the millions who called him "father."

From that day she was the object of vigilant espionage. Communications with the various Nihilist Circles in Russia elicited nothing regarding her past, until one day the Executive received a letter from the Kiev center, informing us that the woman who called herself Kovalski was the young wife of Colonel Paul Krivenko, chief of police of that town. Her husband, with his gray-coated myrmidons, had for a long time past endeavored to stamp out the revolutionary movement among the students at the University, but although dozens of innocent persons had been arrested and sent without trial to Verkhni, Udinsk, and Yakutsh, he had, up to the present, been unable to discover any members of the Circle proper.

His wife had earned an unenviable reputation by giving information which led to the arrest of a dozen unfortunate students, who were brought before the special court at St. Petersburg, and evidently fearing to return to Kiev, she had mysteriously disappeared.

The portrait—taken from a lady's newspaper—

which we had sent, had been identified, and the communication warned us that she was in England for the purpose of acting as spy.

Such were the circumstances in which I was entrusted with the discovery of her object in visiting London, and the extent of her knowledge of our movements. Matters were again ripe for a further attempt to overthrow the Romanoffs, and the Executive had in preparation an elaborate and desperate plot which seemed likely to be as successful as that which—unfortunately for Russia—removed Alexander II., providing the astute members of the "Third Section" could be baffled and led upon a wrong scent. It was highly desirable that we should know what Madame Vera was really doing, and with whom she was in communication in Russia, therefore it devolved upon me to watch her.

At frequent intervals signed articles and letters from her pen were appearing in the daily press in defense of the Imperial Autocrat, and endeavoring to prove, by relating personal narratives, that the prison horrors of Siberia, as revealed by Kennan and other travelers, existed merely in the imagination. She even went so far as to assert that "the condition of the much talked of for-

warding prison at Tomsk would do credit to any London hospital."

This paid defender of Russian tyranny was but one of a number, each of whom has flourished in London society for a season or so and disappeared as mysteriously as they came. Some had succeeded in performing the secret services for which they were sent out from St. Petersburg, while upon others had fallen the relentless vengeance of the Terrorists.

I was "in society." In order that my connection with the revolutionist colony in Mostyn Road should not be discovered, I never visited them there. We had another place of meeting when I desired a conference. Indeed, I had found it necessary to remove my quarters from Shaftesbury Avenue to Dane's Inn, that queer, old-fashioned abode of bachelors situated off Wych Street—the oldest and quaintest thoroughfare in London—under the shadow of the Law Courts. There, in chambers, I led the rollicking life of a Bohemian bachelor of independent means, had artists, authors, actors, and barristers for my friends, and was known to them as Pierre Delorme. Speaking French fluently, I had no difficulty in disguising my nationality,

and assuming the rôle of subject of the French Republic.

The rectory of the sleepy little Northamptonshire village of Kingsthorpe was a spacious old Jacobean house, hidden by ivy, with red, lichen-covered roofs, tall chimneys, and diamond-paned, mullioned windows. Standing back from the broad, white highway, a large, old-fashioned flower garden lay in front, while at the rear an orchard and a well kept lawn sloped down to the picturesque river Nene. The Reverend George Farrar, the rector, was a rubicund, happy looking man, a true type of the port-drinking, fox-hunting British parson, and, with his wife and two handsome daughters, he was popular with all throughout his rural parish, from the earl at the Hall down to the most humble and impecunious cottager. Though he hunted with the Fitzwilliam pack and could handle a billiard cue with dexterity acquired by long practice, nevertheless, there was no cant about him, and he was both pious and charitable.

It was at Kingsthorpe that Madame Kovalski was visiting during August, she having met the Farrars frequently in London, and dispensed to them the hospitality of her house in Lexham

Gardens, Kensington. By dint of a little artful maneuvering and the exertions of a mutual friend, I also had contrived to make the acquaintance of the warm-hearted old rector, and had responded to his cordial invitation to "spend a fortnight at Sleepy Hollow," as he called it.

There were several other guests, but my attention was devoted to Madame Vera, with whom I very soon became on terms of pleasant friendship.

* * * * *

Vera and I were idling away the afternoon together in a punt up a romantic and picturesque backwater of the Nene.

Behind us the ground rose, covered thickly with beeches and hawthorn. A small weir, with a few eel baskets of brown osier, closed in the creek. The water was still, and around us masses of white water lily studded the surface with silver stars. Beneath the deep emerald leaves perch and dace darted from time to time, or lazily sucked in some drowning moth or wandering May fly.

It was very hot, yet beneath the protecting willow to which I had chained the punt there was a pleasant, soothing breeze that kept the

gnats away and made the afternoon quite enjoyable.

Vera looked ravishing. I had no idea that the woman upon whom I had to keep observation was so young and beautiful. Her broad, white hat, set back on her shapely head, threw out her copper hair and deep blue eyes. The olive surah that clung round her firm shoulders and waist outlined the broad curve of her limbs and fell in soft draperies about her little feet. The lace sleeves through which her white arms showed were a pretty idea, but far too tempting for a bachelor.

I had found her not averse to flirtation, otherwise I should not have spoken to her as I did.

"Vera, you are a pretty woman!" I said; "yours are the longest eyelashes, I think, I ever saw! Your complexion is simply perfect, while the crisp little curls of brown around your forehead take a copper hue in the warm sun I have never yet seen out of Titian."

"Why do you flatter me so?" she asked, laughing and puckering up her rosy lips.

She was lolling upon the cushions at the end of the punt, having flung down her novel heedlessly.

"I suppose I may be permitted to admire you," I said, smiling. "We Parisians are connoisseurs of beauty. You do not want to read? Then talk to me. Shall I tell you your voice is as sweet as the tinkle of silvery chimes? that your presence is as graceful and bewitching as the vision of an hour? Well, I won't be silly, but as sensible as a man can be when he has for companion the prettiest woman in England."

"How ridiculously you talk!" she exclaimed, with a merry, mischievous smile. "Remember, I've been married two years—and my husband—I——"

"You are not devoted to him, Vera."

"How—how did you know?" she asked, starting. "Who told you?"

"No one. But why deny it?"

"I do not deny it. Indeed, I have tried to be good to him, Pierre, but he is almost double my age, so cold, so careless, and I hear so many awful stories of his dissipated habits that it is quite impossible to love him. We are, therefore, best apart."

"Poor Vera! I fear your life is not a happy one if one knew all."

"Ah, no, alas!" she sighed. "I'll tell you

something of it and you can judge, Pierre. Indeed, I have no one who cares for me."

She did not speak for some minutes; but her head changed its position from the cushion where it lay, and by some aberration of mind rested itself quietly upon my shoulder. There was really no harm. She did not know it.

There was such a sweet odor of violets wafted across my senses that I looked at the copper halo on my arm and wondered if it was not some rare orchid or tropical moss that had fallen there.

She had turned her head away, and her hand was playing with the water lily leaves, which waved gently in the stream.

Her skin was absolutely spotless. Little curls formed arabesques over the nape of her neck; and her ear, pink and transparent, tempted me to whisper in it words of love.

There is no situation in the human drama so interesting as a *tête-à-tête* with a pretty woman; and when that woman is married, with a grievance against her husband, the *tête-à-tête* is all the more attractive.

She told me a sad story: how she had been forced to marry Colonel Kovalski, but she did

not mention that the real name of her husband was Krivenko, or that he was an officer of the Imperial police. She merely told me that he held an important official position, and that, having discovered his unfaithfulness, she had left him and come to England, where she had no enemies to gloat over her unhappiness.

A tear stole down her cheek as she related her narrative, and a sob escaped her.

"There, do not think of it, Vera," I said, endeavoring to console her. "Think of the charming afternoon. Look at that gorgeous butterfly that hovers over the stream; look at its wings, now brown, now purple, with its orange tips and blue eyes, staring like Psyche at her discovered Cupid."

"Ah, yes," she replied with a heavy sigh; "but you, a Frenchman, cannot understand one's social position in Russia."

"Tell me," I exclaimed with sudden interest; "I have heard and read so much of Nihilism that my curiosity has been aroused, and I'm always eager to improve my knowledge."

"Nihilism!" she repeated in surprise. "Why do you ask me about it? How can I know anything about conspirators?"

"But every Russian has knowledge of the Terrorists."

"Yes, they are everywhere," she admitted. "And, indeed, I don't wonder. Wrong a man, deny him all redress, exile him if he complains, gag him if he cries out, strike him in the face if he struggles, and at last he will stab and throw bombs. In view of facts recently brought to light, Terrorism ceases to be an unnatural or inexplicable phenomenon. Our government manufactures murderers."

"Are you, then, in favor of the Revolutionists?" I asked, greatly surprised at this expression of opinion in such direct contrast to the views set forth in her various articles.

"A Russian never dares to publicly express his or her political convictions. As for me—well, I have ceased to trouble my head about them. In a sense, I am an exile."

What an admirable actress she was; yet how charming! I had not been thinking of her as an accomplished spy, but as a woman who yearned for sympathy and affection.

As the sun declined, the river grew more tranquil, and the cawing of the rooks, as they went to bed, told that day was drawing to a close.

Vera offered me a cigarette from her case, and taking one herself, lit them both with the air of an inveterate smoker.

What could be more delicious? A balmy breeze, full of the odor of meadow-sweet, a bewitching woman by my side, with nothing absolutely to do but admire her eyes and lips, while she discoursed with logical clearness upon the struggle of the Russian people against the iron rule of the Great White Tzar.

"I've heard of your articles," I said, after she had been describing incidents in connection with the expulsion of the Jews from Odessa.

"Ah, I write sometimes," she replied. "It is a pleasant and profitable amusement; yet one does not always express one's real political opinions when writing for the press." And she laughed lightly. "Had you lived in Russia you would recognize the extreme danger of commenting adversely upon Tzardom, or criticising the administrative exile system."

Our conversation was interrupted by the clock of Kingsthorpe church striking six. Half past was the dinner hour at the rectory, therefore I unloosed the moorings, and, taking up the pole, pushed the punt lazily homeward, chatting to

my fair freight, expressing the enjoyment her companionship afforded me, and amusing her with tittle-tattle until we stepped ashore on the rectory lawn.

But before we had left our secluded little backwater, I had kissed her, and in return received a fierce, passionate caress.

I had imprinted a Judas kiss upon her lips!

Next morning at breakfast I was sitting beside Vera. We had just finished the meal, when the servant entered with letters. Beside her plate the maid placed two missives, one a tiny note with a superscription in a feminine hand, but the appearance of the other was a revelation to me. It lay for a moment unheeded, and by a quick, sidelong glance I saw that the large, square envelope bore the official frank stamp and double-headed eagle of the Ministry of the Interior at St. Petersburg. When she noticed it she hurriedly folded it in half and thrust it into her pocket, without examining their contents.

That evening, when we had joined the ladies in the drawing room after dinner, I noticed she was not with them. Leaving the room, I inquired of one of the maids, and learnt that the

fair diplomat, wearing her cloak and hat, had been seen to cross the lawn in the direction of the river's bank.

Some mystic influence impelled me to follow.

The summer's night was still and starlit; scarcely a leaf stirred, and the quiet was only broken by the distant rushing of the weir. Passing out by a gate at the side of the lawn, I walked along a by-path, which ran through the meadows by the water's edge. Large alders grew beside the stream, and in their shadow I advanced noiselessly over the grass.

Suddenly I heard voices, and halted to listen.

I recognized hers! She was speaking in Russian.

"*Skajite-mne. Tchto dellut?*" (Tell me. What's to be done?) she was asking.

"Act as before," replied a man's voice in the same language. "You received your instructions from the Ministry to-day."

"They might have spared themselves the trouble, for I have already completed my investigations."

"You have!" cried the man. "What is the plot? Explain it to me."

"I have not yet made out my report," she

replied coldly. "Besides, I am in the employ of the Ministry, not in yours."

"Ah! my dear madame, pardon me if I have given offense. It was out of sheer curiosity that I asked."

"Curiosity of a kind that would ruin me, eh? You would sell the secret to General Gresser, and claim the reward; but I am as wary as yourself, monsieur."

"I beg madame's pardon—she speaks too harshly. Indeed, your secret would be quite safe——"

"As safe as when, by your devilish ingenuity, you learnt of the conspiracy I had unearthed in Paris, and telegraphed it in detail to St. Petersburg as the result of your vigilance. On that occasion who was rewarded—who was decorated by the Emperor? Why, you! As for me, I——"

"But you are my wife. What does it matter?"

"Wife—bah!" she replied in intense disgust. "We have parted, and you have no claim whatever upon me. By what right, pray, have you followed me here? Cannot I carry out this hateful work without your detestable espionage?"

"But I assist you," he urged. "Besides, I—I

sometimes think, Vera, that we might accomplish much better work if we combined our wits."

"With you—never," she replied angrily. "It is true that I married you, but we have never lived together—and never shall."

"Do you forget that I once saved you from death?"

"Was not that a husband's duty?" she asked, adding, "I cannot stay longer; my hostess will miss me."

"But you shall remain and hear my proposal. I intend that you shall return to Russia, and live with me."

"Indeed! Then I may at once tell you, Paul Krivenko, that I hate you; that I would rather die than be your cat's-paw," and she laughed scornfully.

"You! you speak like that to me!" he cried in rage. "I—I will kill you!"

"Bah! do your worst," she exclaimed defiantly.

"Not another word," he hissed, adding a foul oath. "You'll explain the whole of this conspiracy you have discovered, or—or I'll wring your white neck, and fling you into the river here. Now, you have your choice."

There were sounds of a scuffle, and I heard Vera cry hoarsely, "Let me go! You hurt my throat—you coward! Help, for Heaven's sake!"

Creeping from my hiding place, I peered round the clump of hawthorns, and in the faint light beheld madame struggling with her husband. He was about fifty years of age, foppishly dressed, and wore a waxed mustache. I could discern that his eyes were unusually close together, and his features were small, except his mouth, which was wide, his lips thin, the effect being vulpine. By repute I knew Colonel Krivenko as one of the most cunning villains connected with the "Third Section." He was a master of his craft, and, characteristic of the mercenary spy all over the world, he was true to nobody, not even to his employers, not even to his hatreds, for he had accepted service both for and against the Nihilists, both for and against his Imperial Master, the Tzar.

I saw he was bending over his young wife. He had clutched her by the throat, and was forcing her upon her knees, at the same time uttering terrible imprecations, and demanding to be informed of the result of her secret investigations.

Just as I had turned, intending to retreat to my place of concealment, having gained knowledge that would put the Executive on its guard, I heard Krivenko give vent to a fierce, guttural oath.

Then a woman's shrill cry rang out in the still air, followed by a great splash.

Returning quickly, I looked cautiously behind the bush, but neither the man or woman were there. Upon the surface of the water were great eddying rings, momentarily growing larger, plainly showing that the dark stream had closed over some heavy body. I gazed for a few moments at the circling rings, not knowing how to act. Nothing appeared on the surface, and the waters gradually resumed their tranquillity.

Then I searched the bank, behind trees and bushes, and in every nook, but could discover no one.

Shuddering, I retraced my steps to the rectory, and joined the ladies in the drawing room.

Days passed, but Vera Kovalski did not return. Her mysterious disappearance caused a great sensation in Kingsthorpe and the neighborhood. Although telegrams were dispatched in all directions, no tidings could be gleaned of her.

The strange affair cast a gloom over the usually merry household, for everyone appeared to have forebodings that some unknown catastrophe had occurred, and the guests, feeling the solemnity irksome, departed, an example which I quickly followed.

Before I left the rectory, however, I examined the whole of madame's belongings, in the hope of finding something which might serve as a clew to the discovery of the "conspiracy" about which she had spoken. But the search was futile.

When I returned to London and informed the Executive of the occurrence, a council was held, at which it was decided that every agency possessed by our party should be requisitioned, in order to discover whether either Colonel Krivenko or his wife were really still alive. For the success of our plot—which was a bold venture, involving the partial destruction of the Castle of Schlüsselburg and the release of the political prisoners confined there—it was of supreme importance that we should know if Madame Kovalski still lived, and, if so, the extent of her knowledge.

Descriptions and photographs, which were cir-

culated among our members, both in England and on the continent, failed to elicit any clew.

Dmitri Irteneff and I, who worked together, were ever vigilant in the London streets for many weeks, hoping to meet her, while Grinevitch continually kept madame's house in Lexham Gardens, Kensington, under observation. We Nihilists have such a perfect method of tracing those who incur our displeasure that, when once the order is issued by the Executive, escape is hopeless, except by death.

Colonel Krivenko's body had already been found floating in the Nene near Peterborough.

Having satisfied ourselves that his wife had not returned to her circle of friends in London, we directed our attention to other quarters.

A heavy, thick mist was blowing on the gale which swept fiercely in gusts across the English Channel. The yellow light of the November afternoon had already begun to dwindle. No sun had shone on the dreary Sussex coast that day. The tide was out, and the wide, wet sands stretched from the cliffs to the selvage of white foam that flickered in the low light far off, where the waves broke in hissing spray.

In this tempestuous afternoon, Irteneff and I were walking along the top of the cliffs between Eastbourne and Beachy Head. Suddenly, as we rounded a point, we saw below a single human being on the level foreshore. At first it was merely a speck, traversing the sand along the margin of the wind-whitened sea. We waited for its approach, and, as it drew nearer, Dmitri took a small, binocular glass from his pocket. Having focused it upon the moving object, he quickly handed it to me, exclaiming briefly:

“At last! We have found her!”

I looked eagerly, and saw the form of a woman walking with her head bent against the roaring wind. I recognized the figure and gait as that of Vera Kovalski!

As she moved along toward Eastbourne we retraced our steps, and followed her to the Queen's Hotel, where Irteneff, on inquiry, found she had been staying for nearly a month under the name of Mrs. Axford, and also that on several occasions gentlemen had called upon her.

Two hours later I had transferred my abode from the Cavendish to the Queen's, and having

duly installed myself in a room in the same corridor as madame, I resolved to act promptly.

I did not go down to *table d'hôte*, but waited until she returned from dinner. I heard her close her door; then, placing a small vial in my vest pocket, and taking a clean handkerchief from my bag, I stole along the corridor and entered her sitting room without knocking.

She had flung herself upon a couch, but started up on my entrance.

"Ah, my dear madame," I commenced, as I closed the door behind me. "So I have found you at last!"

"Found me!" she cried in alarm, jumping to her feet. "What do you mean by entering my room in this manner? I know who you are—that your real name is Vladimir Mikhalovitch,—that you are a Nihilist. I'll ring for the servants!"

And she made a dash forward. I was compelled to act without hesitation.

"You'll do nothing of the sort," I said determinedly. As I uttered the words I took out the tiny vial and emptied the contents upon the handkerchief, which a moment later I held firmly over her nose and mouth.

In a few seconds, and with only a long sigh, she fell back into my arms, an inert and helpless burden.

Placing her upon the couch, I entered her bedroom and searched her trunk and dressing case. In the latter I discovered some letters of the Ministry of the Interior and some photographs, all of which I crushed into my pockets. While doing so, a thought crossed my mind that she would probably conceal about her person the more important documents.

When I re-entered the sitting room she was lying just as I had left her. I placed my hand in the bodice of her handsome dinner dress, and as I did so a beautiful spray of tuberose fell to the floor. Feeling paper inside her bodice, I drew it forth. It was an envelope, the contents of which I immediately examined.

I discovered that it was the report for which I had been searching. Breathless with excitement, I read it through from beginning to end. Our plot was completely exposed! Moreover, it gave names and descriptions of the Executive and prominent members resident in London, myself included.

When I had devoured the contents, I placed it

carefully in my pocket, afterward turning to cast a farewell glance at her. With alarm I noticed that in the few minutes during which I had been reading, an ashen pallor had overspread her countenance. I laid my hand softly upon her breast.

The heart had ceased to beat! Then the terrible truth dawned upon me. I had administered an overdose! Vera Kovalski was dead, and I had murdered her!

For a moment my head reeled, so overcome was I by the mingled odors of chloroform and tuberoses. But I managed to recover myself and creep noiselessly out.

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On the day following the inquest—at which, by the way, a verdict of “willful murder” was returned—the *Eastbourne Gazette* contained a report, of which the following is an extract: “The doctor made a most astounding statement. On making the *post-mortem* he found that the young lady who had been known as Mrs. Axford was not a woman at all, but a slim, delicate youth, aged about nineteen!”

Is there any wonder why I have never since been able to endure the combined scents of chloroform and tuberoses?

I can smell them now! Faugh!

VIII.

AN IMPERIAL SUGAR PLUM.

THE incident at Borki, when the train in which the Tzar and Tzarina were traveling was wrecked and partially burned, will no doubt be remembered by the majority of my readers. Although generally attributed to a Nihilist plot, the perpetrators of the outrage have never been discovered. It is true that thirty-seven persons of both sexes were arrested at Kirsanoff and Alkarsk and sent to the Kadainski silver mine in Eastern Siberia as a "precautionary measure," but all were innocent, and notwithstanding the strenuous efforts of the Russian "Security Section," aided by the police of the whole of Europe, the matter has always been regarded as a mystery.

Now, for the first time, I shall explain the manner in which the attempt was made, the cause of its failure, and the means employed by the conspirators to effect their escape.

Foreign critics—those in the pay of the Rus-

sian Government—frequently stigmatize Nihilists as frenzied enthusiasts who seek to reform society and reconstitute their country by the aid of dynamite and bombshells.

Nevertheless, although the means employed may, perhaps, appear reprehensible, yet, the majority of patriotic Englishmen are in sympathy with the cause of Russian freedom. Have we not every day examples thrust upon us of the tyranny and callousness of the Tzar? When the lord mayor, representing the city of London, petitioned his Imperial Majesty regarding the inhuman treatment of Jews, what answer did he receive? The representative of English liberty was snubbed; the petition was returned with a curt reply, that Russian Jews did not concern the lord mayor.

Such an illustration of Muscovite despotism should be borne in mind by those who look upon Nihilists as murderers.

Our object is to free our beloved country from the terrible yoke. In the great sorrow-stricken land, tens of thousands of our countrymen groan beneath the curse of infamous laws and the burden of unjust taxation. The Tzar on his throne, and his myrmidons who surround him,

keep their grip upon the desolated country, and no man can breathe with absolute freedom. The police are infamous spies who will sell a man's life for a few kopecks, the magistracy is corrupt, and justice a burlesque. Poverty, misery, and starvation are rampant, and happiness is unknown beneath the crushing weight of this monstrous form of despotism.

Nihilists desire to free their country from this curse, and would do it by peaceable means, and without bloodshed, were it possible. But it is not, and, therefore, the Executive are compelled to be merciless, and to strike enemies of Russia without pity or remorse.

To sweep the Imperial Autocrat from his throne, and to break his power, to destroy the corrupt ministers and infamous advisers by whom he is surrounded, and to bring enlightenment, peace, and freedom, to millions of honest, God-fearing men, women, and children in Russia, are the objects and aims of those who are so frequently designated as murderers.

Yet the work goes on, silently, steadily, deadly. Each day brings the Tzar's power nearer its disastrous termination; each day increases the hopes of those thousands of "political

suspects" buried alive in Siberian snowdrifts; each day brings us nearer the dawn of a bright and prosperous day.

Already my readers have learnt the reason I, Vladimir Mikhalovitch, loyal soldier of his Imperial Majesty, became transformed into a revolutionist, and my case is but one of many thousands. In Russia one must be either a flunkey or a Nihilist, and most persons prefer to work for the cause of freedom.

It was in a small room over a dingy and uninviting-looking café in Gerrard Street, Soho—to which our headquarters had been transferred, in order to elude the vigilance of the spies of the Embassy—that there was arranged one of the most bold and terrible plots that the Terrorists have carried out since the assassination of Alexander II.

The meeting was held hurriedly at midnight, and I attended. Paul Pétroff—who had that day returned from St. Petersburg—presided, and Tersinski, Irteneff, Grinevitch, and Bounakoff were present.

"Brothers," exclaimed Pétroff, after we had seated ourselves and transacted some preliminary business, "our time has arrived. By the

exercise of due caution, we shall be enabled to strike a blow that will paralyze Europe, and remove the tyrant and his underlings. Shall we do so?"

"Yes," we replied with one accord.

"Now that the lips of that traitress, Madame Kovalski, are sealed, we are free to act," he continued. "The *Zemlia i Volia* [Land and Liberty] group in St. Petersburg have supplied us with information. The Tzar and Tzarina will leave the Winter Palace this day fortnight for Astrakhan."

He took from the papers at his elbow a large map of Russia, upon which was marked in red the route by which the Imperial party were to travel. It showed that they would go by way of Moscow, Riazan, Tambov, Atkarsk, to Saratov, and thence by steamer down the Volga.

"You observe, brothers," he said, "the train will pass over several unimportant branch lines. It is suggested by the Circle in St. Petersburg that a disaster should occur on one of these, as they will not be so closely watched as the trunk lines."

"What kind of disaster?" I asked.

Pétroff ran his fingers through his long, dark hair, and fixed his searching eyes upon me.

"We have yet to decide," he replied. "Besides, as it would be extremely dangerous for any member of the St. Petersburg group to undertake the attempt, one of us will be compelled to put the plans into execution, receiving assistance, of course, from our brothers in the capital."

"There are many ways of causing a disaster," observed Tersinski. "A charge of dynamite under the metals, as at Moscow, might prove effective."

"Or destroy a bridge, as we did at Elizabethgrad," suggested Bounakoff.

"And wreck the pilot engine only," remarked the president. "No, neither will do. The only way it can be done effectually is from the train itself."

"But how?" asked Grinevitch, who had been sitting thoughtful and silent.

Pétroff then entered into a minute explanation, producing plans of the various lines that he had brought from St. Petersburg, together with a sketch of the Imperial train, and a list of the suite and ministers who would, in all probability, travel by it.

We sat together until the small hours of the morning, and at length arranged every detail.

Then came the momentous question as to who should be deputed to carry out the project. It was at first suggested that Grinevitch should be intrusted with the mission, but eventually we decided to cast lots as usual.

We threw dice, and the choice of Fate fell upon me.

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A September night. The rain was falling at intervals from bars of ragged, fleecy cloud, and the lights of the city of St. Petersburg cast long, uncertain reflections upon the bosom of the dark Neva. The clock of the Izaak Church had long ago struck the midnight hour; the theaters were emptied, the last café had been closed, and the last *vodka*-inebriated workman had reeled home to bed.

The rain plashed gloomily upon the pavement of the Nevskoi Prospekt as I trudged onward past the Kazan Church toward the Fontanka Bridge. I was making my way to friends who would assist me in my mission. Only half an hour before I had arrived at the Venice of the North, but I was no stranger to the city, although six years had elapsed since I had walked its streets.

Already the rain had soaked through my thick traveling ulster, my teeth were chattering, my limbs ached from being cooped up in a close railway carriage for four days, and I felt generally depressed and uncomfortable. As I crossed the open space between the Gastinoi Dvor and the theater, my attention was arrested by the quick passage of a man, through the light shed by a street lamp—a short man, whose head was sunk between his shoulders, with sharp features and small sharp eyes—who glanced sharply at me and passed rapidly on.

I thought nothing of the occurrence at the time, because I was fearless. My passport was perfectly legitimate, stating that my name was Alexandrovitch Charushin, Russian subject, born at Odessa, and living in Munich; that my calling was that of *chef*, and, further, that I had returned to St. Petersburg in search of employment. So completely was I disguised by the removal of my beard and mustache, and the application of theatrical "make-up," that even the spies of the London division of the secret police would pass me by unnoticed. Therefore I felt confident of my security.

Presently I turned from the Nevskoi into a

dingy by-street, and having walked through to the farther end, halted before a confectioner's and rang the private bell.

My handbag was heavy, and I set it down until I should be admitted.

In a few moments the door opened mysteriously, and on my entrance was quickly closed again, leaving me in darkness.

"Welcome, friend, to St. Petersburg," said a man's voice in a low tone. "Walk forward, and upstairs."

I obeyed, and on gaining the landing, entered a small sitting room. The two occupants—a man and a woman—rose to greet me.

"Here you are at last," exclaimed the young fellow, who subsequently introduced himself as Ivan Liustig, medical student. "You must be hungry. Mascha, here, will get you something to eat."

I turned to glance at his companion.

Our eyes met. Our voices mingled in a cry of joy.

I had found my long lost sister, Mascha!

In the hour that followed, we both related briefly our adventures. She had grown older, more matronly, yet still more beautiful than

when I had last seen her writhing under the terrible torture of the knout in the open market place of Mstislavl. As I felt the soothing touch of her hands, and looked into the deep blue eyes, I saw fathomed there a wealth of love, and patience, and pity.

Sitting at table with Liustig and Boris Soliviot—the proprietor of the confectioner's shop, who had admitted me—I watched Mascha's face as she chatted and drew tea from the shining *samovar*. In repose, its expression was one of infinite gentleness; yet in a moment, at a word regarding the revolutionary movement, it would change: the rosy, childlike lips would meet, the fair cheeks glow, the delicate nostrils dilate, and the eyes would flame with an enthusiasm begotten of wrong and long suffering.

She described to me her life since that day when we last met at Mstislavl; how she had been kept in prison for three years, two of which were spent in the Fortress of Peter and Paul, merely because she was suspected of political enthusiasm. She was never brought to trial; but, after the long years of solitude in damp, moldy cells, during which her health was shattered, she contracted typhoid fever, and was set

at liberty. Since that time she had allied herself with the *Zemlid i Vólia*, and had been considered one of the most daring members of the group. She earned her living by fur-sewing, and was engaged to be married to Ivan Liustig.

My real name had never transpired in connection with the work of the Executive, therefore she had all these years believed that I was still in exile in Siberia, where she had heard our father had died while chained to his work in the Nerchinsk mine.

I was relating how I escaped, when the opening of the street door by a latchkey, and flying footsteps on the stairs, startled us.

The handle of the door was turned, and a thin, dark-haired young man dashed into the room. He must have sped quickly, for he put his hand to his side, and with difficulty gasped:

"Quick! They are searching. The police are already on their way here!" Then turning to me, said, "Hide! hide, for your life!"

Mascha wrung her hands: "Fly! Fly, Vladimir!"

I was making blindly for the door, when Liustig's voice arrested me.

"No—no time; they will meet you—you must hide!"

"Where can I?" And I looked round the room in dismay.

"The window—it is dark." Mascha spoke, pointing upward. The man who had warned us had already disappeared.

My sister saw my hesitation. The window was high in the wall, and I could not reach it.

"Take the bag with you. Jump on my shoulders," gasped Liustig, turning his back and lowering his body.

Something of their anxious energy was lent to me in that supreme moment. I sprang with agility upon the proffered shoulders—I opened the window, and with a rush of cold wind came to me the measured tramp of the police on the stairs.

As I crawled outside and closed the window after me, the fury of the storm was such that I felt it would sweep me from my insecure retreat. I clutched the window frame—my feet were on a sloping roof which seemed to move away under them. In my desperation I felt disposed to let myself go, for the precious bag I had brought up seemed to drag me down. In a few moments,

however, I had found a secure resting place for it, and moving cautiously sideways, discovered a projection upon which I obtained a firm grip. Thus, by bending forward, I was enabled to see into the room, myself unseen.

One cup had been hidden, and Mascha sat by the stove with a book in her hand. Her eyes were turned to the door as if in startled surprise. The picture she thus presented, with the two men calmly smoking cigarettes, was tranquil, innocent, and natural.

In a moment five police officers burst into the room. Liustig's manner was perfect. His eyebrows were raised. He looked astonishment personified. Soliviof had gone to the door, and, with a polite gesture of the hand, seemed to invite the intruders to enter, search and examine anything they liked.

There was an expression of mystification upon the faces of all the officers as their glances traveled round the room. Mascha had risen to her feet and stood with proud, uplifted head in mute protest at the unseemly interruption.

The *ispravnik*, or superior officer, stepped forward in front of Soliviof, and holding him with stern eye, evidently questioned him. Although

I strained every nerve to hear what was being said, the howling of the wind prevented me distinguishing a single word. I could only guess what was transpiring by a close observation of the dumb show.

Soliviof fixed steady, unflinching eyes upon his examiner and gave prompt replies, which apparently satisfied him. Liustig was submitted to the same cross-examination, but with perfect coolness leaned against the wall smoking his cigarette with a half amused air. Then came Mascha's turn. She bore herself like an outraged queen. I saw that her manner impressed the officer, who, when handing back her permit to reside, bowed courteously.

But Russian officers are mostly impressionable, and this *ispravnik* would go through the same insipid genuflections were he conducting my sister to the scaffold.

Mascha sat down and was silent, but watched every movement of the men, who, inactive during the examination, now received orders to prosecute a search.

They left no corner, probable or improbable, uninvestigated, and while they were busy a sudden panic of dread seized me that before

they went one of them might think of the roof.

I drew my body up until I lay pressed flat and close to the side of the dormer window. Just as I had done so the window opened, and a head appeared defined distinctly against the sky.

The eyes pierced the gloom in my direction, but only for an instant. I scarcely dared to breathe.

"There's nobody up here," I heard him exclaim to his companions, then slowly the head disappeared.

I remained undiscovered, and the officers proceeded to other rooms to prosecute their search for incriminating papers, of which they found none.

At last I heard their heavy tramp below in the silent street. It grew gradually fainter until it died in the distance. Then I breathed a prayer of thanksgiving, and grasping my bag, descended into the room.

We all four uttered mutual congratulations upon having had such an excellent escape, and at once set about preparing to retire for the remainder of the night.

Liustig, however, remained up in order to give the alarm should we again be surprised.

“Pashol!”

The engine of the Imperial train whistled loudly, the lines of blue-coated soldiers upon the platform saluted and cheered, and the long saloon cars glided slowly out of the great station on their way to Moscow. Five of the carriages were occupied by the royal party and suite—which included the Ministers of Finance and the Interior, as well as General Bieli of the secret police—while the sixth, which was next the engine, was the traveling kitchen. Among the servants in this latter were Liustig and myself.

How I came to be enrolled in the Imperial service matters little. With our organization everything is possible. It is sufficient to say that two of the *chef's* assistants were taken ill—perhaps purposely, for aught I know—and that, at the last moment, Soliviof supplied us to fill their places. In the car with us was an officer of the “Security Section” disguised as a waiter, therefore my companion and I were compelled to exercise the utmost caution.

Hour after hour we traveled across that great flat tract of fertile country which lies between the Valdai Hills and the Volga.

But our pace was slow, and such were the extraordinary precautions taken, that the whole distance between St. Petersburg and Moscow was lined by troops, who seemed to sustain a continuous cheer as we passed.

Arriving at Moscow in the evening, we did not break the journey, but continued over the Tambov line through Central Russia.

It was about two o'clock in the morning. The upper servants had returned to the sleeping compartment in order to snatch an hour's repose, and there were only two others besides Liustig and myself in the kitchen. I had occasion to carry some wine through to the Imperial dining car, and I was met at the door by the waiter-detective, nevertheless I managed to obtain a glimpse of the interior. I saw that the Tzarina had gone to her private saloon, and that his Majesty was seated with two officers of his suite, calmly smoking, and laughing over his wine.

Returning to my small compartment at the extreme end of the kitchen car, I resumed my work of scouring pans, when suddenly Liustig,

with white, scared face, entered, closing the door quickly after him.

"By Heaven, we are lost!" he gasped in a hoarse, frightened whisper. "Someone has placed it on end!"

"How long ago?" I asked, startled at the position which I at once recognized as extremely critical.

"I don't know. Perhaps a quarter of an hour."

I waited for no more, but opened the door, and, affecting carelessness, passed to the center of the car, where there was a cupboard in which were stored our provisions. On looking inside, I saw on the lower shelf an object which I had conveyed from London, and which was certainly not suspicious looking. It was merely a small sized loaf of white sugar, the conical top of which had been, during the day, broken off and used, while part of the original blue paper wrapping still remained.

During the whole of the journey, I had exercised the greatest care that it should be kept in a horizontal position, but one of the servants, probably noticing it rolling backward and forward with the oscillation of the train, had set it on end in a corner of the cupboard.

Stooping, I was about to replace it in its original position, when my fingers came in contact with some sticky liquid.

I saw it was too late! Closing the cupboard, I quickly rejoined Ivan.

"Well," he asked, "what can we do?"

"Nothing," I replied breathlessly. "We have but one chance."

"What's that?"

"To leap for life."

"From the train?"

I nodded, peering through the window into the darkness, and suddenly recognizing a station through which we passed a moment later. "We are about eighteen versts from Borki, and close to the spot that was arranged. If you remain here, you know what fate awaits you," I added, noticing his hesitation.

The door was open, and the two men in the kitchen beyond were smoking cigarettes and drinking *vodka*.

"Come," I said aloud, so that they should overhear. "We are nearing Borki, I think. Let's go outside and see. I once lived close by when I was a youth."

He followed me. When we stepped out upon

the platform at the end of the car and adjoining the engine, I undid the latch of the little iron gate.

Our pace had quickened, and we were traveling through the wide, open country in the teeth of a fierce storm of rain and wind.

"Follow me," I said briefly, and without glancing round, sprang out upon the line.

I have a dim recollection of sustaining a severe blow on the top of the skull. Then all was oblivion.

On regaining consciousness, I found myself lying upon a grassy bank near the line, with Liustig bending over me.

Day was just dawning.

"Come, pull yourself together, Mikhalovitch," he urged; "we must fly, or we shall be discovered."

Staggering to my feet, I rubbed my eyes, and then remembered the exciting events of the past few hours.

"The train! Where is it?" I asked.

"How should I know?" he asked. "I leapt after you and it went on—to the devil, most probably." And he grinned. "But we've our-

selves to look after now," he continued. "See! our brothers of Tambov have not forgotten us!" and he pointed to a heap of clothes that lay upon the ground.

"You have found them, then?"

"Yes, they were concealed in the shed yonder. We took our leave of our Imperial Master just at the right spot."

While he was speaking, he commenced to divest himself of his clothes, afterward attiring himself in the worn and ragged dress of a moujik, finally enveloping himself in a *polushuba*, or outer garment of sheepskin, an example which I quickly followed.

This completed, we burned our passports, and making up our clothes into a bundle, put several heavy stones in with them and sunk them in a stream near by.

From servants of the Tzar's household we were transformed into two poor peasants whose passports were signed by the Zemski Natchalnik and allowed us to leave our mir and emigrate abroad in search of employment.

During the whole day we tramped along the white road, which led across a barren, desolate steppe, subsequently arriving at Arkadak, a quaint

rural town, where we were sheltered for the night by the village pope, who was a member of our organization. Facilities for our escape had been well arranged by the Tambov Circle, for on our departure on the following morning we found a country cart awaiting us at a lonely part of the road, and in it we were driven along the Koper Valley and through the fertile country of the Don Cossacks to Filinovskaia, a small station on the Tzaritzin-Lipetsk railway.

This being one of the trunk lines, running right across the empire, we were enabled to travel direct to Dunabürg, thence to Vilna, afterward crossing the frontier at Wirballen and reaching Königsberg, where we at once took passage as emigrants for England.

A dozen times during our adventurous journey to the frontier suspicious police officers examined our passports, but they were always found in order, and we were allowed to proceed.

On our way we purchased the *Moscow Gazette*, the *Donskoi Pchela*, and other newspapers, in order to ascertain whether the Imperial travelers had arrived at their destination, but none of the journals mentioned the Tzar's journey. The reason of this was, as we afterward discovered,

that all references to the affair were forbidden by the censorship.

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Fatigued and nauseated by the foulness of the steerage of our vessel, we at length arrived in London.

Sitting in an easy-chair in the bright, comfortable dining room at the house in Mostyn Road, I first learnt of the result of the attempt. Pétroff handed me a copy of the *Times*, pointing to a brief report in the top corner of the page. It was a telegram from its Moscow correspondent, headed: "Terrible Disaster in Russia: Narrow Escape of the Imperial Family," and ran as follows:

"A terrible catastrophe is reported from Borki. The Imperial train, with Tzar, Tzarina, and suite, which left St. Petersburg for Saratov, has been totally wrecked and partially burned. The royal party had a most miraculous escape, for nineteen persons in the train were killed, and two of the servants are missing. It is evident that an explosion of some kind occurred, for all the carriages were completely shattered, and a deep, wide hole was made in the permanent way, which could not possibly have been caused by

the train leaving the rails. Full details have not yet transpired, as an order has been issued prohibiting the publication of any information. It is stated, however, that all the Imperial servants have been placed under arrest pending an inquiry."

Liustig and I had been within an ace of success.

Perhaps never had an explosive been more cleverly concealed as on that occasion. The loaf of sugar was so innocent looking that the Tzar and his family had actually eaten some of it! Inside, however, was a most ingenious contrivance—if it is admissible to admire mechanical genius in the construction of such machines. It consisted of a small American clock attached to two glass tubes containing liquid explosives of the most powerful description, the component parts of which, however, it is unnecessary to describe. The delicate machinery was so arranged that, providing the loaf remained in a horizontal position after being set, twenty-four hours must elapse before the tubes were broken and the liquids allowed to come into contact with one another. If, however, it was placed on end, the clock in question would only run for a quarter of

an hour, when the tubes would be broken, and a terrific explosion ensue.

This arrangement had been made so that, in the event of our inability to enter the Imperial service, we might smuggle it into the kitchen along with the provisions, in which case a quarter of an hour after the departure of the train it would have been wrecked.

The failure of what was one of the most daring attempts upon the life of the Tzar could only be explained by the machine standing in an upright position, as had it exploded horizontally, it would have destroyed everything near its own level, and none of the Imperial family would have escaped.

As it was, it exploded in a downward direction, making the great hole in the railway track, and causing the loss of nineteen lives, a result which no one more deeply deplored than the Nihilists themselves.

IX.

FALSE ZERO.

A BRIGHT July evening, a white, dusty Italian road, and a fugitive from justice mounted upon a stout pony, with an outfit consisting of a well filled canvas valise and a revolver.

The police were searching for me, and in consequence I had a few weeks before escaped from England, and set out upon a wandering journey eastward across Europe. I was in Emilia, lonely, tired, and dispirited, having left Piacenza at early morning and ridden on throughout the scorching day. It had, however, grown cooler, for which I was thankful. The wind had risen, blowing softly from mountain and from sea across the plains, through the pines of Pavia, and across the oak forests at the base of the Apennines.

Now and then a puff of blue wood smoke rose through the branches from charcoal burners' cabins; now and then some great magnolia flower shivered its rosy needles upon me as I passed

beneath the trees; far away down below the Ave Maria was chiming from the church towers in the plain; above low rain clouds, fretted and edged with amber, floated near the sun; over all the day was of that wondrous hue which is like the soft violet blue of the iris, and is clear yet mystical, as children's eyes when they wake from dreams of angels.

As I rode slowly up the long mountain road, I was overtaken by a horseman, who, light-hearted and happy, was singing to himself staves of contadine choruses. He rode up beside me with a genial, "*Buona sera, signore.*"

He was a fine looking man of about thirty, with a dark, pointed beard and waxed mustaches, and the handsome horse he bestrode was somewhat jaded. We rode on together up the hill, and fell into conversation. He inquired where I was from, and my destination, to which I replied that I was traveling for pleasure. He told me that he was a vine grower living in Marengo, and that he was returning from a business visit to Cremona. When we stopped to water at a roadside spring, he asked me to carry a small pair of saddlebags, as his horse was tired out. I complied cheerfully, and we pushed on up the steep

road. Arrived at the top, he took a cross road, remarking that he believed we should reach the *albergo* of Padrone Vincenti before the moon rose.

I found him a pleasant, entertaining Italian, and being, no doubt, conceited, imagined that he found me the same. It was dusk when we rode up to a ruined villa, high up on the mountain side—vast, crumbling, desolate. It was one of those old villas of which there are hundreds in Italy, standing on their pale olive slopes. Those who are strange to them see only the peeling plaster, the discolored stone, the desolate courts, the grass-grown, lichen-covered flags, the broken statues, the straying, unkempt vines, the look of utter loneliness and decay. But those who know them well, love them and learn otherwise; learn the infinite charm of the silent halls, of the endless, echoing corridors, of the wide, frescoed, wind-swept, and sun-bathed chambers, and of the shadowy logge, where the rose glow of the oleander burns in the dimness of the arches.

The old place had once belonged to a great family, but was now half ruined; the few rooms remaining intact had been transformed into an inn.

As we rode up to the porch, a slender girl of about seventeen, with big black eyes, dark hair coiled tightly and fastened with a Genoese filigree pin, came running round the corner of the house. She looked as wild as the goats on the mountain side, and my first thought was, "What a beauty she will make some day!" I raised my wide-brimmed sun hat, and asked if we could obtain accommodation for the night.

"*Non ne so nulla,*" she said shortly. "But I will ask father," and she darted into the house.

A moment later an old man made his appearance, rubbing his hands and smiling benignly. "How are you, signori?" he asked in his patois. "Want to stop? *Potete disporre di me.* Here, Ninetta, call Giovanni to take the horses."

I had just dismounted, and started to remove the saddlebags, when a glance at my traveling companion checked me. He was gazing down the road, and listening intently. I saw an anxious look overspread his face. The next moment he struck spurs into his horse, and, without a word, galloped down the road in the opposite direction in the gathering gloom.

Surprised and alarmed, I sprang into the saddle, and, as the sound of horses approaching at a

rapid rate greeted my ears, I started off down the road after my late companion. My first thought was that brigands were upon us.

Glancing back, I saw a number of horsemen riding furiously down upon me. I heard loud oaths in Italian, and orders to halt. Without heeding them, I spurred on, and drawing my revolver, determined to sell my life as dearly as possible. The next moment a volley of shots rang out, and my horse stumbled and fell.

Before I could rise I was surrounded by several *gendarmes*, and a rough crowd of men. Cries of joy were heard on all sides, and a dozen hands seized me in no gentle grasp.

"What do you want?" I cried.

"We want you," replied one of the *gendarmes*, stepping forward. "Your name is Vladimir Mikhalovitch!"

My heart stood still. The police had tracked me!

"Well, and if it is? What then?" I asked.

"We arrest you for murder and conspiracy!"

His words gave my arms a demoniacal strength. In a moment I had freed myself, and without scarcely knowing why I did so, I quickly pointed my revolver at a man who attempted to recapture me, and pulled the trigger.

There was a bright flash, a report, and the man fell back into the arms of one of his companions.

Cries of "Kill him!" "Shoot him!" "Hang him!" were heard on all sides, while I stood, revolver in hand, ready to defend myself.

"Let's take him back to old Vincenti's and hear what he's got to say," said a tall man, who seemed to be leader.

This proposition met with general disfavor, especially from one officious man who produced a long pair of reins, and leading the way to a spreading oak tree that stood near, exclaimed, "Here's a good limb. Come, fetch him along."

But the tall man demurred and had his way. "If he can't give a proper account of himself, we'll make short work of him," he said.

I attempted to explain, but a pistol was held at my head with a peremptory command to be silent. My arms were then bound, and I was marched back to the half ruined villa and placed in one corner of the common room of the inn.

The crowd then demanded wine, which was served by Vincenti. The girl Ninetta stood at the door looking at me curiously, and I thought rather pityingly. My trial then began. It was brief, and to the point. They had received my

description from both the English and Russian police, and by the latter a large reward had been offered for my capture. They had tracked me thus far, and by the random shot I had fired I had mortally wounded one of their companions.

Without admitting that I was the man they were looking for, I made up a fictitious story, declaring my innocence. It was listened to incredulously by most of them, but among a few I thought I saw looks that encouraged me, and I wound up with an impromptu appeal for life, which I felt must touch them.

I was doomed to bitter disappointment, when the man who had been so officiously anxious to hang me at once, rose, remarking with a harsh laugh: "Young man, you can't deceive us in that way. Come on. Let's hang him!"

Several rose and with loud, voluble oaths supported the suggestion. My blood ran cold as I realized my imminent peril. These rough fellows from Piacenza felt perfectly justified in hanging me to the nearest tree, seeing that I had shot one of their number. What could I do? I gazed from one to the other like a hunted animal.

"Surely you would not hang a man without

evidence," I cried. "I can show you letters that will prove who I am."

The tall man, whom they called Luigi, stepped up and unbound my hands. I drew forth a note I received while in Paris. It contained a *carte-de-visite* of my sister Mascha, which fell to the floor as I drew out the letter. Luigi picked it up.

"It is my sister's picture," I cried. "Here, read the letter, any of you. It will prove that I am an honest man."

Luigi gazed earnestly at the picture. "*Dio mio!* she's a beauty!" he remarked. In my heart I blessed her pretty face, and only wished her there to plead for me in person.

The picture was passed round, but opinions were freely expressed that she was not my sister at all, and more than one of the party urged that I should be hung at once and thus got rid of.

Ninetta crowded in among the men and asked to see the photograph. Luigi handed it to her, jocosely remarking that he would marry her when she grew to be as handsome as that.

She quietly replied: "*Bah! E una vergogna!*" and gazed intently on the photograph. "I'll swear that's his sister," she added presently.

"I'm inclined to think so too," remarked Luigi. "I think we'd better wait and take him back to Piacenza."

At this there was a dissenting murmur, which grew so strong that my courage failed again. Suddenly Luigi turned to the crowd and cried: "*Vi domando scusa.* Let us give him a chance. I'll play him at dominoes. If he loses we'll end his troubles. What do you say?"

"*Bellissimo, credo che sia magnifico!*" cried one of the men, and the idea seemed to tickle the fancy of the crowd. They evidently had confidence in Luigi's ability to play dominoes. Unfortunately for me it was a game of which I knew nothing, and I told them so.

Ninetta was still standing beside Luigi. "Let me play for him," she said eagerly. "Luck is always with me."

"Yes, let her play," cried the men, evidently amused at the novelty of the thing, and also sure that the old Italian's superior skill would win. "Yes, let Ninetta play for him. Give her your money," they said, addressing me.

I looked at the girl curiously. Her big dark eyes were glittering with excitement, but she was cool and self-possessed. Taking out my

purse, which contained my wealth, about £70 in fifty-lire notes, I handed it to her.

The ivory dominoes were produced, and in a few moments she and Luigi were seated opposite each other, and the game began.

It was a weird scene, and I had the odd feeling that I was simply a spectator, and in no way concerned. I remember wishing for paints that I might transfer it to canvas. What a picture it would make! The quaint, old-fashioned, frescoed room; the smoky lamps shedding a sickly light upon the eager group around the table. I could see the face of Ninetta, and knew that in all probability my life hung upon her skill.

She played in silence, except when she shuffled the clicking ivories underneath her small, sun-tanned hands. It was an even game for a while, until the old Italian began to win, and her pile of notes steadily diminished. She played coolly on, despite the comments of the crowd. She was down to her last note when the luck turned in her favor. She won steadily, gathering back the notes, until Luigi had scarcely any left. He began to turn up his dominoes cautiously, having evidently no desire to be beaten by a girl.

I watched Ninetta's face closely for some sign

of excitement, but none was visible. She was thoroughly self-possessed, and the fact that she held my life in her hands had no outward effect upon her. Fortune favored Luigi again, and they were soon about even. The men who crowded around the table grew impatient. "*Siete un figurino, Luigi! Sta a voi giuocare.*" Bah! you're afraid of her; you don't bet," and like expressions were heard, while the others encouraged my little champion. Her father came to where she sat and patted her upon the shoulder, remarking, "Ninetta was always a lucky girl."

They commenced to play with the double blank, and it was the man's shuffle. The betting was high. Ninetta glanced at her dominoes in an uncertain way and then at the few limp notes at her elbow. She had thirty lire less than he. The excitement was intense. For a moment only heavy breathing could be heard. Then the bright-eyed Italian girl laughed nervously and pushed the whole of the notes into the pool.

Her opponent pushed in the rest of his money, breaking into a discordant laugh.

"It's the last game," he said, glancing over at

me. "Sorry for you, but you can get the rope ready. Well, what have you got, Ninetta?"

She quietly turned up the double six, and one by one exhibited dominoes of high denomination. He struck the table a blow that made the ivories jingle. "*Dio! Domino!* Luck is always on your side; I'd have staked my last couple of soldi that I held a winning hand, but the double six was too much for me! Come, comrades, let's have some wine, and drink to my bad luck!"

He led the way to the small bar at the end of the room, followed by the crowd and the *gendarmes*, now appearing in the best of humors. Ninetta calmly swept up the notes, crushed them into my purse and handed it to me, remarking laconically, "*Ho, guadagnato!* You'd better take this and get over the Apennines to Vernazza, where you can get a passage on board a steamer."

"I don't want it all," I exclaimed. "Only what was in it."

"Keep it all. It's yours. They've killed your horse," and before I could say anything further, my fair protector had left the room.

My first impulse was to put as much distance as possible between myself and the uncouth

crowd, but on reflection remembered that there was no other house for miles, that I knew nothing of the country, and if I started out on foot I was liable to be attacked by the thieves who infested the district. I therefore put on a bold front and asked old Vincenti to give me a lodging for the night. He picked up a guttering candle, called Ninetta, and told her to show me upstairs. We entered a large chamber that had evidently once been the ballroom of the villa. There were several beds in it, and on a table beside one she placed the candle, and was about to leave when I detained her.

"*Cara mia*, Ninetta, I have not thanked you for what you have done for me to-night. My life is not worth much, but I should have hated to give it up in such a manner. Is there nothing I can do to show my gratitude?"

She laughed in an embarrassed manner. "Why, it wasn't anything. I like to play; I'd have done it for anybody."

"I'm sure of that; but is there nothing I can do for you?"

She hesitated a moment. "No," she replied, "there is nothing you can do now. Some day, perhaps, I shall be glad of your assistance."

"You will always find me your obedient servant," I replied fervently.

I grasped her hand warmly, and she wished me a merry "*Buona notte.*"

I did not see her about the house next morning. The bloodthirsty party of the night before had vanished. I inquired for Ninetta, but was informed that she had gone off early to attend to the goats on the mountain side. The old Tuscan woman who acted as cook provided me with a scanty breakfast, and presently a peasant's cart halted on its way to Vernazza. Arranging with the driver to give me a lift, I mounted beside him with a feeling of inexpressible relief. Half an hour later, as we rounded a curve in the mountain road, we came face to face with Ninetta. She was mounted on a mule and galloped rapidly past, her hair streaming in the wind. I had only time to raise my hat in response to a smile of recognition, when she passed, as I then thought, out of my life forever.

Two days afterward I arrived at Leghorn, and taking a passage on board a steamer bound for New York, bade farewell to the sunny "garden of Europe," which, I felt convinced, was a decid-

edly dangerous place to sojourn, having regard to the curious circumstances of my capture and release.

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After two years of aimless wandering and hiding from the police I again trod Italian soil. Even in far-off Manitoba, intelligence had reached me of punishments imposed upon the *gendarmes* who had acted so leniently toward me. Two years, however, is a long time, and having a mission to complete for our cause in Italy, my personal appearance being so altered as to be unrecognizable, I returned.

The long, bright day had drawn to a close. The west was a blaze of gold, against which the ilex and the acacia were black as funeral plumes, while in the quaint, crooked streets of ancient Nervi, people were moving, enjoying the *bel fresco* after the burden of the scorching day.

The sun glowed and sank beyond the calm, sparkling Mediterranean, and in the tender violet hues of the east the moon rose. Crimson clouds drifted against the azure, and were reflected as in a mirror on the broad Gulf of Genoa. San Giovanni's tower stood out clear against the blue sky, and its bells chimed solemnly.

As the hour wore on, evening fell. Boats glided over the glassy sea; on the hills the cypresses were black against the faint gold that lingered in the west, and there was an odor of carnations and acacias everywhere.

Noiseless footsteps came and went. People passed softly in shadow. The moonlight was sweet and clear upon the ancient tower and time-worn stones; in the stillness the little torrents made sad rushing sounds as they plashed toward the sea; across the moss-grown piazza an old monk walked slowly and thoughtfully.

Leaving the *osteria* where I had taken up a temporary abode, I strolled through the quaint little half-deserted town, and out upon the road which ran by the seashore toward old Savona. Entranced by my own thoughts, I had stood watching the shadows chase the sun rays on the dusky, purple sides of the Apennines, and the fireflies dancing away their brief lives among the boughs of the magnolias and over the fields of maize.

A cigarette between my lips, I was heedless of where I walked. As I passed a row of small cottages and emerged upon the broad Corniche Road, the strains of mandolins played by happy,

light-hearted fishermen greeted my ears, accompanied by snatches of peasant songs.

I am not a fatalist, neither have I any spiritualistic tendencies, but there are times when I am half inclined to believe in a distinct power—magnetic, if you will.

I think I must have slept, as I have only the most vague recollection of my promenade.

When I became fully aware of things around me, I found myself sitting in an armchair with my chin resting upon my hands. There was a dim, indistinct consciousness of realizing that a storm had occurred; that I had seen a light and knocked timidly at a cottage door.

A young woman dressed in peasant costume and very beautiful was sitting beside me. I glanced slowly round the humble interior; we were alone. Little by little I remembered. It was she who had opened the door and bade me welcome.

Though sad, her face pleased me. Were it not for her light breathing I should think she was of wax.

“How beautiful!” I exclaimed under my breath.

She must have heard the words, for she turned toward me and smiled.

"Why do you pay me such a compliment?" she asked.

I cannot tell what air of recognition I found in that voice and manner. Instantly, however, I remembered a half forgotten period, like a queer dream; a name was upon my lips, but I could not utter it. I stammered a question.

"Well, well," she said, amused, "they tell me I have altered; yet—why, don't you remember Ninetta?"

"Ninetta!"

Ninetta! Only this thought, and I fell on my knees beside her; our hands touched, and I kissed her slim fingers, declaring that I owed my life to her.

"Do you remember when last we met?" I asked earnestly.

"Yes," she murmured, "but do not speak of it. Such memories are painful."

"If to you, none the less to me, Ninetta," I replied, looking into her sad, wan face.

Her lips quivered and tears stole down her cheeks.

During a whole hour it was nothing but expressions of surprise and vague regret. To the depth of our beings we felt the voice of these recollections. We were speaking of them, when suddenly she withdrew her hand and a red flush mounted to her forehead.

"But you soon forgot me when you went away," she said reproachfully. "And I have never ceased to think of you. It was strange playing a game of dominoes for your life, wasn't it?"

I rose and gazed at her. She was seated, her eyes riveted on the dying embers of the fire, her cheek resting upon her hand, appearing to have forgotten my presence. There was nothing awkward in the long silence that followed. We both felt too deeply for idle words. As we contemplated our past, the wind whistled without, the thunder pealed, and the rain fell furiously.

"Ah!" she exclaimed at last, looking up at me seriously, "I am foolish to speak so, now that I am married."

"Married!" I gasped in astonishment, at the same time noticing the ring upon her finger. "I thought this cottage was your father's; that you kept house for him."

There was a brief silence. Then she spoke. Her voice made me tremble, careless ingrate that I was. She uttered the words without moving, as though giving utterance to the thought that possessed her.

"I had no idea that you cared for me," she said. "After you had left I was stricken down with grief; madness followed, and I accepted the first man that proposed to me. I did not love him; I shall never love him. And—and how can I? He is, alas! an idle ne'er do well who spends his days with low companions in the wine shops. It is I who am compelled to toil and earn money for him to spend in drink. Ah! you little know how dull and hopeless is my existence." And she shuddered as if her heart were chilled.

"But your husband—does he not endeavor to make you happy?"

"Happy!" she exclaimed wildly, jumping to her feet and tearing open the bodice of her dress. "See!" she cried; "see here the marks of his violence, where he tried to murder me!"

Disclosed to my view was her delicate white breast, disfigured by an ugly knife wound, only partially healed.

"Horrible!" I said, with an involuntary start.

"That is not all," she continued, turning up her sleeves and revealing great blue bruises upon her alabaster-like arms. "He wants to rid himself of me, to be free again; and when the cognac takes effect he threatens to kill me."

"Why remain here and be so brutally ill used?" I asked.

Shrugging her shoulders, she smiled sadly and replied: "If I were dead it would end my misery. If he knew that you had been here, his jealousy would be so roused that I believe he would carry his threat into effect."

"Try to bear up, Ninetta," I urged. "Do your duty toward your husband and thus compel him to treat you kindly."

"I have tried, Heaven knows!" she replied brokenly, bursting into tears. "But everything is useless. Death alone can release me!"

Her face appeared to grow a shade paler. With her eyes on the clock she seemed to listen.

"You ought not to have come here. You must go," she said. "Promise me you will never return."

I did not reply.

Bending over, her lips met mine in a fierce, passionate kiss.

A second later we were startled by a strange noise, sounding suspiciously like a footstep upon the gravel outside. We strained our ears, but the sound was not repeated.

"You must go," she said. "Your presence would compromise me." And she handed me my hat.

With a force that I should never have suspected, she led me to the door, and after giving me a gentle push, locked it behind me.

"*Addio*," I murmured tenderly.

There was no answer.

Through the keyhole I saw Ninetta kneeling before the little crucifix upon the wall. The light had died out of her blanched face.

Then I went forth into the darkness.

The morning was chill and dull as I walked along the beach road until I came to the door of the cottage. I had spent a restless night; her misery tortured me, and, despite her entreaty, I was now on my way to proffer assistance.

With trepidation I approached the door of the humble abode, and knocked.

No one stirred. Everything seemed strangely silent.

A moment later I noticed the door was unlatched. Pushing it open I entered, at the same time uttering her name.

As I stepped into the neat, well kept room I at first saw nothing, but on glancing round the opposite side of the table my eyes encountered a sight which thrilled me with horror.

Stretched on the floor lay Ninetta, partially dressed, the pale morning light falling across her calm, upturned features. The cheeks and lips were bloodless; the eyes, wide open, were staring wildly into space with a look of horror and dismay.

Falling on my knees, I touched her face with my hand.

It was cold as marble. She was dead!

In her breast a knife was buried up to the hilt, and from the cruel wound the blood had oozed and formed a dark pool beside her.

She had been brutally murdered!

My recollection of the events immediately following this ghastly discovery is but faint. I have a hazy belief that my mind became unhinged; that I left the place without informing

anyone of the tragedy; then walking many miles through woods and vineyards, I reached Ovada, whence I took train for Turin.

The one thing most vivid in my mind was the terrible look of blank despair in the glazed eyes. I have never forgotten it.

One bright autumn day I was wandering in quaint, old-world Genoa, that city which the bright-eyed, laughing Ligurians love to call "La Superba." It was in *festá* that day, and all the ladder-like streets were ablaze with flags, and the many-colored façades of the old sea palaces glowed in the fervid noon heat from the sapphire water.

It was the hour of the *siesta*. The blazing sun beat down mercilessly upon the white, dusty streets; the shops were closed; and behind green *jalousies* the Genoese were taking their noontday rest.

Pétroff was with me. Together we walked on the shady side of the deserted Via Roma, and having crossed the Piazza 'Nunziata were passing the Palazzo di Giustizia, when a knot of persons talking excitedly attracted our attention.

A conversation we overheard between two sol-

diers aroused our curiosity as to a case in progress in the Criminal Court, and glad to seek shelter from the heat, we entered.

As the soldier opened the swing door of the cool, dimly lit court, I slipped inside with my companion. The judge had risen, and was standing solemn and statuesque. Above him hung a great gilt crucifix. He was uttering words in Italian, which caused a sensation it was impossible to mistake.

"Prisoner Lorenzo Bertini," he said, addressing the wild-eyed looking man who stood in fetters before him, "in this Court of Justice of his Majesty the King you have been found guilty of willfully murdering your wife Ninetta, at Nervi. I therefore condemn you to death, and in the name of the Almighty I call upon you to repent!"

I held my breath, and fixed my gaze upon the unhappy man.

In a few seconds I had sufficiently recovered to ask a priest who stood beside me what were the facts. The condemned man, he told me, had confessed that the motive of his crime was jealousy.

He was intoxicated, and having discovered his

wife kissing a stranger who had visited her in his absence, he had entered the house and deliberately stabbed her to the heart.

“What a pair of idiots!” remarked Pétroff when, as we stepped out again into the sunlight, I told him what the priest had said. “The idea of killing a woman because she kissed her lover! Again, what a simpleton the woman was not to have been more wary. But—why, what’s the matter, Vladimir? You look as if you’d seen a ghost! Anyone would think *you* knew the rustic beauty, and were the strange lover!”

I started. A sickening sensation crept over me. My companion had little idea of the terrible truth he spoke.

I pleaded that the intense heat had brought on faintness, and we retraced our steps to the hotel.

That evening we left Genoa, and a fortnight later I read in the *Secolo* that Lorenzo Bertini had paid the penalty of his crime.

X.

THE MYSTERY OF LADY GLADYS.

TWILIGHT was just setting in. Pale yellow sunset poured out its cold half light upon the roofs. Gradually in the depths of the London streets everything grew gray and dim. In the darkening sky the first star was already shining. Objects began to assume a disordered aspect, and melt away in the darkness. Foot passengers could scarcely distinguish one another's features. The city, as if worn out with the vanity of the day, had become calm, as if gathering strength to pass the evening in the same vanity and turmoil.

Already the lights of the street lamps in Mostyn Road were springing up, forming long, straight lines, as I drew down the blind and flung myself into the comfortable armchair before the cheerful fire.

Taking from the table an open letter written in cipher, I read it through by the flickering fire-

light. It was addressed to Pétroff, and ran as follows:

“Nicolas Kassatkin, who will arrive in London on Tuesday next, is a trusted and valued member of our Circle at Novgorod. He has been twice imprisoned, first at Petropaulovsk, and secondly at Schlüsselburg, whence he has escaped. We are sending him to you because we are confident that he can be of assistance. He is daring and enthusiastic, and speaks several languages. Being in possession of a private income, he will not need any financial help from the Executive. He will be the bearer of a note to you.

“Signed on behalf of the Novgorod Brothers of Freedom,

“SOLOMON GOLDSTEIN,
“ALEXANDER ROSTOVTZEFF.”

I replaced it upon the table, and leaning back in the chair, smoked reflectively.

Having called to consult the Executive on some urgent business, Pétroff had asked me to remain and welcome the newcomer. By repute I knew him as a fearless revolutionist, who had taken an active part in several plots, which had for their object the removal of corrupt officials, and which had been more or less successful.

I was plunged in reverie, induced perhaps by

the dim, uncerťain light of the fire and the soothing properties of my pipe, when a loud ring at the hall bell aroused me. Almost immediately afterward I heard the voice of Pétroff, Tersinski, and Grinevitch welcoming the stranger in Russian, and a few moments later they entered and introduced him to me.

We shook hands cordially, and as Grinevitch lit the gas I saw that the newcomer was a man of medium height, and about thirty years of age. His face was of a rather low type. He had deep-set, gray eyes, with a fixed stare, a large, fair mustache, prominent cheek bones, and fair, lank, unkempt hair, while his deeply furrowed brow bespoke mutely of long imprisonment and infinite pain and suffering.

Removing his heavy traveling coat, he seated himself before the fire to thaw, at the same time taking a letter from his pocket and handing it to Paul Pétroff.

Presently we sat down to dinner together, and during the meal Kassatkin showed himself to be an entertaining companion and vivacious talker. I sat next him, and he told us of the progress of the revolutionary movement in Novgorod, declaring that there were unmistakable signs of

general fermentation, of an awakening of the public spirit, of patriotism, and of opposition, foreshadowing a coming struggle. He was bitter in his condemnation of the dark deeds of Tzardom, and expressed an opinion that if Russia could tell something approaching to the full truth about what is going on within her boundaries: the crimes committed in darkness, the malversations practiced by the officials, the real state of the exchequer, the desperate tricks of the financiers, it would inflict upon the Autocracy a more severe blow than many conspiracies could strike.

"Tell us of your escape," I said, after he had related the story of his arrest and imprisonment for carrying on propaganda among the soldiers of the Novgorod garrison.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, his face brightening, "it has been a terrible experience, but I was driven to desperation." Turning to Pétroff he said: "You know the frightful horrors of Schlüsselburg—the cold, wet cells below the Neva?"

"I have, alas! much cause to remember them," Paul answered with a heavy sigh. "My wife, whom I loved so well, was imprisoned there at the same time as myself. The solitary confine-

ment and the horrors of her cell drove her hopelessly insane. She is now an inmate of the criminal asylum at Krasnoje Selo."

"Madness is the fate of the majority of prisoners there," said Kassatkin. "In my case the many months of absolute silence and lack of exercise drove me into a semi-insane state. In order to check the imbecility that was slowly but surely taking possession of me, I used to pace my damp, dark cell and compose verses. For days, weeks, months, I had no other occupation than the composition of poems, which I afterward committed to memory, having no writing materials. This was the only mental employment I had, and although I grew strangely light-headed, yet my self-imposed tasks prevented my mind becoming totally unhinged. An opportunity for escape presented itself in a most unexpected manner. A large batch of 'common law' prisoners had been sent from St. Petersburg, and, the prison being already overcrowded, I was removed from my cell and confined in a room in the fire tower. It thus happened that I was locked up in an ordinary room, with a window looking upon the road. It was rather high, but it was near the water pipe running along the wall

outside, and there was a slanting roof of the lower story which could be utilized for the descent. I could not lose such an opportunity, and, in the dead of night, I opened the window and descended into the road, congratulating myself upon a happy escape."

"Were you discovered?" I asked.

"Yes, almost immediately. By ill luck a sentry noticed me and gave the alarm. It was an exciting moment as I made a dash for the forest and disappeared among the trees. Half a dozen soldiers pursued me, but only a short distance, for apparently considering that they had a poor chance of capturing a fugitive in a forest, they returned to the prison for assistance. I concealed myself and waited. Presently about twenty mounted soldiers galloped past along the forest road. When they were out of sight I left my hiding place and walked on. My position was, however, critical, therefore I made for the Neva, as I could not lose my way beside the river. I soon came to the water's edge. By the opposite bank were some islands and something like a lake or arm of the river, near which I could see what in the fog appeared to be masts. Close beside me on the bank sat a group of fishermen,

and a little way off an old man was doing something to a boat. Having two or three rubles in my pocket, I went up and asked the old man to ferry me across the river. He consented, but asked, in a conversational way, why I wanted to go across. Remembering the masts, I replied that I had to go on board the schooner which lay in the distance. The old man looked at me wonderingly and suspiciously.

“He asked who I was, and I told him that I was a workingman from Tichvin. The old man put on a very suspicious air and began a minute interrogation. I was at my wits’ end, and ready to make a dash for it; but that was out of the question; the fishermen were close by and would have caught me in five minutes. I resolved to take the bull by the horns, and told the man that I had simply made up the former story, and that, in reality, I was an escaped political prisoner seeking a hiding place. When the old man had asked me numerous other questions, he said: ‘Well, I won’t ferry you across myself, but I’ll tell my boy to. He’ll land you on the island, and you can stop there until to-morrow night; you’re all right so far. Only look here, don’t you go telling anybody that you have to go to

your schooner. In my young days there used to be plenty of schooners there, but for thirty years past there hasn't been a schooner near the place.'

"The old man called a young fisherman, and told him to row me across to the island. On parting from the man who ferried me, I started to explore the island, which I found to be very marshy. The morning broke wet and cheerless, and I spent the day in a disused hut. When evening set in, it became too cold for me to spend the night shelterless, and as I was suffering severely from hunger, I wandered up and down the swampy forest looking for a village. By the time I succeeded in finding one it was quite dark. I knocked at a cottage door, but the people would not let me in. I went to a second and third cottage, but with no success. Finally, I lost my temper, and addressing an obdurate householder, asked him where the *starosta* lived.

"The peasant directed me to the *starosta's* cottage, and then slammed his door. I tapped at the door of the residence indicated, and it was opened by a woman. When I asked for the official I was in search of, she replied, 'I am the *starosta*. What do you want?' It appeared

that she really was the *starosta*. The office was filled by all the peasants of the village in turn; and she, being an independent householder, took her turn like the men. I rattled off a wild story: how I had come for a holiday from St. Petersburg with some friends; how they had become intoxicated, and, for a practical joke, had returned home, leaving me alone on the island. The female *starosta* evinced the warmest sympathy with my misfortune, gave me supper, and allowed me to pass the night in her cottage.

“Next morning I hired a boat, arrived safely in St. Petersburg, and found my friends, who hid me for some time, while the police tore backward and forward, scouring the roads and country round Schlüsselburg, and searching all the houses which appeared to them suspicious. When the excitement died down, I traveled as an ordinary passenger to the frontier, and have now arrived here.”

That evening I took Kassatkin to live with me at my chambers at Dane's Inn, and found him a pleasant, easy going fellow, whose shrewdness proved most valuable to me in the various matters of espionage upon which I was from time to time engaged. We went about a good deal, and

made many friends. I had always been considered a fair amateur actor, and was prevailed upon to join a well known dramatic club which gave frequent performances at Kensington Town Hall.

Many of my friends belonged to the club, and I found the rehearsals a pleasant and amusing recreation, inasmuch as the people with whom I was brought into contact were useful to me in a variety of ways. They knew I was a foreigner, but believed me to be French, and little suspected I was a Nihilist.

One evening there had been a dress rehearsal of a new comedy which we were about to produce for copyright purposes. I was cast for the part of an affected English curate, one of the chief characters in the piece.

The rehearsal passed off satisfactorily, and it was nearly midnight when I left the hall and started on my long walk homeward. I had a good hour's tramp through the West End before me; but, as the night was clear and warm, I enjoyed the prospect rather than otherwise. As I walked along Kensington Grove, there was scarce a sound in the street, save the occasional tread of a policeman, or the hurried footfall of the belated pleasure seeker, breaking the stillness

of the night suddenly, and then dying away in a succession of faint echoes.

Had any friend met me I should scarcely have been recognized, from the fact that I was still in clerical attire, having dressed myself at home to avoid trouble. I wore a long black coat of orthodox cut, black unmentionables, a clerical collar, and a soft, wide-brimmed hat, and was effectually disguised, though I thought nothing of the circumstances at the time, having frequently worn my stage clothes out of doors.

I had walked for perhaps half an hour in silent soliloquy, when I suddenly became aware that I had taken a wrong turning, and that my footsteps had involuntarily carried me into that patrician of Kensington thoroughfares, Cromwell Road.

At that moment I was passing a large, handsome looking house, the outward appearance of which had an unmistakable air of wealth. The other houses were in darkness, but several of the windows of this particular one were brilliantly lit.

Suddenly I heard something which caused me to pause. It sounded like a long, shrill scream.

A moment later the door was opened by a man in livery, who ran hurriedly down the steps.

As he confronted me he stopped short, and peering into my face, said:

“Sir, would you have the kindness to step inside for a few minutes? His lordship sent me to look for a clergyman, and it is fortunate I found one so near.”

“A clergyman?” I exclaimed, astonished. “But I——”

“His lordship’s daughter is dying, sir, and he told me to get the first clergyman I could find.”

The man led the way up the steps, and, dumb-founded by the sudden manner in which I had been accosted, I followed.

He ushered me into a small, but very elegantly furnished room, and then went to find his master. Just at that moment I heard the footsteps of two other men, who apparently entered from the street and walked down the hall to the room which adjoined the one in which I was. I had hardly time to look about me, when the flunkey returned, accompanied by a strange looking old man. He was well dressed, but seemed out of place in the clothes he wore. He was small and thin, with snow-white hair, sunken cheeks, and eyes which had a peculiar luster. The manner in which he advanced to greet me was strange,

for he seemed to glide noiselessly across the room. His face was colorless, and would have seemed almost devoid of life had it not been for his restless, glittering eyes.

"His lordship," explained the servant.

I bowed, and the man retired.

For a moment the old gentleman's eyes shifted and roved, then he fixed my gaze with them and said slowly, in a squeaky voice:

"I have a theory that everything may be purchased, that every man has his price. Do you agree with me?"

I was surprised; I shrank from him and despised and hated him.

"Most things can undoubtedly be bought; but not everything," I replied.

He smiled sadly.

"Of course, neither life nor intellect can be purchased, but the securing of any service from any person capable of performing it is merely a question of money."

I nodded approbation of this remark, wondering what service he needed at my hands.

"I am quite at my wits' end, and I require a small service from you," he said suddenly, as a look of blank, unutterable despair swept over his

face. He looked wearied and despondent; I pitied him.

“If I can render you that service I shall be pleased,” I replied.

His face brightened and the haggard expression vanished.

“Thank you,” he said. “It is perhaps a strange request, still I can find many a clergyman who will be only too eager to accept my offer.”

“But I am not a——”

“Never mind,” he interrupted; “allow me to explain. I am the Earl of Tallington.”}

I gave vent to an ejaculation of surprise, for the earl was a well known figure in the political world, and until three years ago had been British Ambassador to Russia.

He smiled as he noticed my astonishment, and continued:

“I have but one daughter, who, alas! is dying. The physicians say hers is a hopeless case, and I desire that her last moments shall be made happy.”

“Ah! you want me to attend at the bedside and minister words of consolation. I am sorry I cannot——”

"No," he snarled, "she is religious enough, and does not require you in that capacity."

"But surely a dying person, whether prepared for the next world or not, should see a clergyman!" I said.

"True; but Gladys is insane," he replied. "You remember what I said a minute ago—that it is only a question of money to any man?"

"What?"

"Why, marriage."

I was puzzled. I could not comprehend his meaning.

"But what do you want of me?" I asked.

"A trifling service. You can perform it now, but if you refuse, you will always regret."

"Tell me what it is and I will give my answer."

"It is this. Some time ago, perhaps about three years, while we were living in St. Petersburg, I became ill and was obliged to go to the South of France. During my absence my daughter met a Russian, for whom she conceived a violent fancy. Since I returned and brought her home to England she has done nothing but mope and mourn for him, with the result that her intellect is impaired."

"But will not the man marry her?" I asked, interested in the romance.

"He disappeared mysteriously, and although I have made the most strenuous efforts to trace him, he cannot be found. Of course she would marry him if she could, but her mental faculties are so weak that she would marry anyone else and believe it to be him. But here's the point——"

He felt in his pocket, and producing a wallet took from it a roll of clean, crisp Bank of England notes. He counted twenty of them, each for one hundred pounds, and held them toward me.

"These are yours," he said slowly, "if you will consent to be my daughter's husband!"

The proposal fairly caused me to gasp. Two thousand pounds! Did ever temptation stand in man's path in a more alluring guise? I had but little money of my own, and with this sum I could do many things.

It was a struggle between the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde of my inner self, if I may so put it.

Here was a dying girl whose passage to the grave would be rendered brighter by my marrying her; who would die in a few days, or weeks

at most, and know no difference. Nobody need be aware of this strange midnight adventure, or the manner in which I had been bought.

I hesitated.

"I give you my word that none know of her insanity besides myself, and that she is upon her deathbed," said my tempter.

Still I paused. I was wondering what could be the earl's ulterior motive. Besides, I had no desire to enter the ranks of benedicts.

"Come, decide. I have a clergyman ready. Someone shall make my darling's last moments happy. Is not the money enough? Well, here's another thousand. Will you accept it?"

I summoned courage, and drawing a long breath, stretched forth my hand and grasped the notes, which I thrust hastily into my pocket.

I had sold myself. I had offered myself as a sacrifice to Mammon, as other men had done.

My purchaser opened the door, and called softly, "It's all right."

"Is it?" asked a clergyman who entered. "You are the affianced husband of Lady Gladys, are you?" he asked, addressing me.

"Yes," I replied. Was it not true? Had I

not three thousand pounds in my pocket as evidence of the fact?

"Come," said the old man impatiently, as he led the way upstairs to a large bedroom on the first floor, where the light was so dim that I could hardly more than distinguish the shape of the bed and the form of someone closely covered up in it. The footman who had accosted me in the street entered behind us, and we took our places at the bedside.

Gradually, as my eyes grew accustomed to the semi-darkness, I could see that my future wife was lying upon her side, with her face turned from me.

"Take her hand," commanded the man to whom I had sold myself.

I obeyed.

"Proceed with the ceremony."

The clergyman droned off the service by heart with the characteristic nasal intonation. Probably I faltered a little at the responses, but my dying bride never hesitated. Though her voice was low as distant music, her every word was prompt and clear.

I gave the alias I frequently used, Vladimir

Mordvinoff, and when I uttered the name I fancied that she started.

"*Mojnoli?*" (Is it possible?) she gasped in a strange half whisper, but she did not turn to look at me. It was evident, however, that she spoke Russian.

The ceremony concluded, we were pronounced man and wife; I was the husband of a girl who was insane, and whose face I had never looked upon!

Was ever there a stranger marriage?

The thin, wasted fingers which lay in my grasp were cold, and a strange sense of guilt crept over me when I remembered that I had bound myself irrevocably to her, deceiving her during her last moments upon earth.

"Come," exclaimed his lordship, "let us go downstairs and sign the necessary documents."

We all repaired to the library, where the register was filled up and the signatures affixed, the clergyman handing me the certificate with a murmur of congratulation.

A bottle of champagne was produced, and we each drank a glass, after which I was allowed to return to the room alone to make the acquaintance of my wife.

I entered on tiptoe, almost breathlessly, and paused for a moment beside the bed, trying to speak. At first my mouth refused to utter a sound. What could I say? Suddenly the Nihilist pass-word flashed across my mind and I uttered it. The effect was almost magical. Struggling, she endeavored to rise, but could only support herself upon her elbow, at the same time giving me the secret countersign.

I was anxious to see her face, so I turned up the gas, afterward bending down to look upon her.

It was a pretty, delicate face, but was cut and swollen as if by savage blows, discolored and disfigured, a face in which were obvious signs of insanity.

When our eyes met she started, scrutinized me closely, and flinging her arms wildly about my neck, uttered a shrill scream of joy.

I recognized her instantly. While I was living in St. Petersburg several years before, she had been admitted to our Circle. She gave the name of Gladys Radford, but beyond the fact that she was English and that she apparently had plenty of money at her command, we knew nothing of her. At the meetings of the Circle we often met

and had many a pleasant *tête-à-tête*. I had admired her, and more than once was tempted to declare my love, but I refrained from doing so until too late, for suddenly, one snowy night in midwinter, I was compelled to fly from the Russian capital. Since then I had neither seen nor heard of her.

Now I had discovered her under these extraordinary circumstances.

She kissed me fondly, passionately, and I was about to explain our strange marriage, when the terrible light of insanity in her eyes caused me to hesitate. What use was it speaking to her? She did not understand.

Taking a small bunch of keys from under her lace-edged pillow she handed them to me, saying:

“Go to that cabinet over there and unlock the second drawer. In the right-hand corner you will find a packet. Bring it here and open it.”

I did as I was bid and brought to the bedside a small packet of letters secured with crimson ribbon. As I untied the knot a cabinet photograph fell out upon the bed. I picked it up and looked at it.

It was a picture of myself!

"How did you get this?" I asked eagerly.

"I have never ceased to think of you," she replied. "I prevailed upon one of your friends in St. Petersburg to give me the picture. But there is another photograph there. Take it out and look at it."

Searching among the papers, I found the picture she indicated.

When I turned it face upward in the gaslight it almost fell from my fingers, for I recognized it as a portrait of the companion with whom I shared chambers.

"Do you know Kassatkin?" I asked in astonishment.

"Yes, I do," she said, and, raising herself upon her elbow, she continued earnestly: "Listen, Vladimir! You are now my husband, although I know I am dying. Nothing can save me, and I shall not live to inflict upon that accursed spy the punishment he deserves. I know——"

"Is he a spy?" I interrupted breathlessly.

"Yes. When you had left St. Petersburg they admitted him into the Circle, believing him to be trustworthy. Soon afterward, however, the police arrested nearly the whole of the members, and had I not been the daughter of the British

Ambassador I should have been arrested also. Inquiries I afterward made proved conclusively that Ivan Bielski—or Nicolas Kassatkin, as he calls himself—was an officer of the secret police; that he was admitted to the Circle by means of forged introductions, and that through his instrumentality over one hundred members of our cause were exiled."

"But what proof have you?" I asked excitedly, remembering how much Kassatkin knew of the conspiracy we were forming.

"The papers you hold in your hand will show that what I say is correct," she replied. Then she continued wildly: "Find the spy. Let death be his reward for ingenuity and double dealing. Kill him! Promise me! Do not let him send other innocent members of the cause to Siberia!" Clutching my hand, she added, "Tell me that you will avenge the deaths of the men and women who fell victims to his treachery. Promise me!"

"I promise," I replied. "If he is a spy he shall die."

"Ah! At last he will receive his well merited punishment. And he had the audacity to love me!" She uttered the words feebly, sinking wearily back upon her pillow.

Her face had changed, becoming paler and more drawn. She did not move, and I stood watching, not knowing what to do. The excitement had proved too much for her.

Suddenly she opened her eyes, and whispered my name. Then she gave vent to a long, deep-drawn sigh, shuddered, and lay strangely still.

I knew then that my wife had passed away.

I was kissing her pale lips and closing the glazing eyes, when the footman entered hurriedly, and whispered that I was required in the library at once. He dashed downstairs, and I followed. On going into the room a sight met my gaze which I shall never forget, for lying stretched upon the couch was his lordship, writhing in the horrible agonies of death from poisoning. A small bottle standing upon the table and a broken champagne glass had but one tale to tell.

He had taken his own life!

The clergyman was kneeling by his side, but in a few moments the old earl gave a final gasp, and ere I had realized it, he passed to the land which lies beyond human ken.

I learned from the doctor who attended that the Earl of Tallington had, since relinquishing his post at St. Petersburg, showed signs of mad-

ness. During a fit of insanity, a year before, he had struck down his daughter, inflicting such injuries that she had been an invalid ever since. Her mind, too, became unhinged. It was supposed that, seized by sudden remorse, his lordship had drunk the fatal draught.

Morning was breaking, cold and gray, as I ascended the stairs to my chambers. Opening the door with a latchkey, I entered the sitting room. The lamp was still burning, and there were evidences that Kassatkin had not returned.

Upon the table was a note addressed to me.

I tore it open and read as follows:

“In the matter upon which we were engaged last week I have made an important discovery, which necessitates me leaving for the continent to-night. Will let you know shortly where I am.”

It suddenly crossed my mind that, having ascertained the details of the plot we were preparing, he had left for St. Petersburg to give information to the police.

That morning I placed the papers my dead wife had given me before the Executive, and the

same evening Tersinski and I, having discovered the route the spy had taken, were on our way to the continent, following the man upon whom the death sentence of our order had been passed.

A week later the special evening edition of the *Globe* contained the following among its general foreign news:

“A Cologne correspondent reports a mysterious murder that has created a good deal of a sensation in Germany. Yesterday the body of a man was discovered floating in the Rhine near Bonn, and on being taken from the water it was found that the man had been stabbed to the heart, and upon his face were two deep cuts in the shape of a cross. From papers found upon him, it appears that the name of the murdered man was Nicolas Kassatkin, a Russian, who has recently been living in London.”

XI.

AN IKON OATH.

IVAN LIUSTIG was not like anyone else. Stevenson has described the bright twenty-year-old youth of fiction as a mixture of shyness and coarseness. But Ivan was entirely poetical, and radiantly bright; and yet he was neither shy nor assuredly coarse.

His friends of the St. Petersburg Circle were conscious of some lack of foundation beneath the graceful superstructure of his character. But they did not array themselves, as his critics, against him. They smiled at him, but they loved him. And he won love and an indulgent admiration as flowers and butterflies do. The drones are better husbandmen. But the butterfly has its place in nature.

Since he had escaped with me after the wrecking of the Tzar's train near Borki, he had returned to Russia, whither I had also gone with Bounakoff upon a secret quest.

When, in St. Petersburg, I heard of him as investigating psychical phenomena, as encoiled in psychology, it seemed another versatile phase at which again to smile. For Ivan, who was an enthusiastic medical student, was sure to have, here, as elsewhere, some exceptional experiences; was sure to pour out the recital of the same, in due time, to his chosen associates with a fullness of picturesque detail that shed a new light on all the questions involved. But when it appeared that it was not psychical research in the abstract, but a feminine psychist in the concrete, that held Ivan Liustig in thrall, there was an altered feeling, inducing a graver view, especially when I learned that he had forsaken my sister Mascha, whom he had been engaged to marry.

"I hope all this we hear is an airy joke," I said to him one day after a meeting of the Circle. He honored me, as his elder, with some deference in his friendship; and the quality of the latter sentiment had been exceptionally warm between us since our journey together in the Imperial train.

He looked at me steadily with his handsome blue eyes.

"What do you mean?"

"You must know well enough. They say that you are spending all your leisure with some shady female, who, at one and the same time, expounds spirits, magnetic psychology, and exploits the pockets of the credulous."

To my surprise, he turned very pale.

"Were you not one of my best friends, I'd knock you down for that."

"By the Virgin, you're lost!" I cried. "Think; what will Mascha do when she learns the truth?"

I was about to turn away on my heel, but he drew me back. His anger had been appeased.

"Don't mind me," he said in his tractable, normal tone. "But don't join the herd of fools who won't understand. I looked for sympathy and comprehension from you. You can't judge till you know her—till you know this wonderful, most wonderful woman."

"I dare say," I assented dryly. "Who, however, and what is she?"

"She is half Russian, half German, and wholly a citizen of the world."

"Ah! I know the type——"

"You know nothing!" he exclaimed, flushing angrily. "But"—he shrugged his shoulders—"the prejudices of the world count for—what?"

Nothing at all. The curse of the Philistine is his Philistinism."

"Very well. Forget what I have said. I approach the Russo-German in the properly reverential spirit to apprehend the phenomena. They say she is young and pretty. And what, especially, does she do?"

"You may see, some day." His gaze grew bright, soft, and vague, as one who catches a glimpse of the floating garments of supernatural mysteries. "Ah! she is wonderful. She is charming!"

It was shortly after this that I obtained an introduction to Ivan Liustig's goddess. She lived in the Vossersenski quarter, on the third floor of a tall house, but with a degree of relative elegance that argued either some personal means or a thriving trade. I had expected to see an electric, opalescent person, with rouged face and a Cleopatra manner calculated to enmesh the unwary. I met instead a little blond woman with great eyes, soft as black pearls and limpid as a brook. I had understood from Ivan that she had been married and widowed. But with her loops of flaxen braid tied in her neck she looked no more matured than a schoolgirl. Her dress,

from head to foot, was tasteful and pleasing, but of the simplest. And she had a way, after she had greeted you, of sitting upon the edge of chairs and sofas and listening in a grave-eyed confidence that made you think of some precocious child forced, through the loss of its natural protectors, to face the blackness of an unfamiliar world alone. She was introduced as Wanda Waluiski.

"Your friend tells me that you are interested in psychical phenomena," she said to me after a few moments. "But I fear I can show you nothing much to-night. The conditions do not seem favorable, somehow."

I made a murmur of regret.

"Are these things dependent on atmospheric conditions?"

"To a certain degree. But other obstacles step in—opposing mental attitudes and currents."

She passed her hand over her eyes as she spoke, as if to rid herself of some invisible oppression.

"A common charlatan, after all," said I to myself. "She sees I am skeptical of the validity of

her claims, and that prevents the full operation of the trickery."

Ivan ardently assured her that it was of no moment; that we would return.

Wanda was silent for an instant, and I had begun to think her manner at least peculiar when she turned her eyes full upon me.

"I ought not to let you come here again," was her extraordinary remark. "I have been warned this moment, I was warned the moment you entered the room, that unhappiness must come to me through you. But one's earthly fate cannot be fought against. My forbidding you to come here would not delay or turn aside the onward march of events."

"I assure you I have no wish to inflict an unwelcome presence upon you," I hastened to explain.

"No—no," her pale, childlike face was overspread with a strange air of weariness. "All we can do is of no use. Come. Come when you choose."

When we were in the street Ivan broke out in apologies, urging that I should not feel myself insulted.

“I do not feel insulted,” I said. “In fact, I find Madame Waluiski much more interesting than I did before.”

And this was the truth. If she were an impostor, an adventuress, I had been impressed with the fact that she was one clever enough to be worthy of study. But again, how doubt a personality apparently so unlike that of a trickster, a face so transparent, a whole being so unusual, so ingenuous?

I knew not what to think.

The scene was, perhaps, one of the most picturesque in St. Petersburg.

The dust and heat of the August day had taken the energy out of Bounakoff and I, and we were sitting at dinner in the beautiful Gardens of Catherinenhoff. With the sunset a cool wind had sprung up from the Neva, rendering Andrejeff's Restaurant an exceedingly pleasant retreat under the clear sky and brilliant stars.

At one of the small *al fresco* tables sat Bounakoff, Mascha, and myself, a merry trio, in the full enjoyment of our meal. It was a band night, and those who have visited the Russian capital know how upon such occasions the Gar-

dens are illuminated and the tables filled by a fashionable throng of men and women, mostly in evening dress.

Ivan was sitting at the next table, and we had invited him to join us, but as he had already finished his dinner he was waiting until we commenced to smoke.

Those of my readers who have refreshed themselves at Andrejeff's will remember that one of the tables is placed against a large trellis, covered with tangled masses of creepers, which screens it from the gaze of passers-by, and makes it a very cozy nook. It was here that Ivan sat alone, contemplatively smoking a cigarette and sipping from the glass of port beside him, while at our table we chaffed and laughed merrily together.

Conversation was general, and the hearty laughter and gay tones of French voices mingled with the guttural exclamations of the Tzar's subjects as they walked under the linden trees beside the lake, while ever and anon a burst of military music reached us from over the water.

As I sat watching the crowd of promenaders, two figures that passed engaged my attention. Why, I cannot tell. One was that of a lady, apparently about thirty-five years of age, good

looking, well preserved, and attired fashionably in a black, jet-trimmed evening dress, with a lace mantilla over her head. She was alone, and walked past slowly and deliberately, at the same time casting a searching glance in our direction. In the dim half light I could see she was undeniably handsome, but in a few moments she had passed out of my sight, and joining in my companions' conversation I had forgotten her.

The other figure, which followed some minutes later, was that of Wanda Waluiski.

A few minutes later a lad, son of the *dvornik* at Ivan's lodging, brought him some letters, being accompanied by his sister, a bright little girl of thirteen. The student complimented the child on the way she was dressed, patted her upon the cheek, and gave her some grapes, rewarding the lad with a few kopecks. Then the girl laughed pleasantly, displaying an even row of white teeth, afterward making a dignified little bow, and turning away with her brother.

They had scarcely gone when we were startled by a terrible cry.

Turning quickly, we saw that Ivan had risen from his chair, his face flushed and distorted. One hand grasped his wineglass, while the other

clutched convulsively at his throat, for he was choking.

Staggering a few uneven steps toward us, he stumbled. The glass fell from his nerveless fingers, and was shattered.

We sat speechless in surprise and alarm.

His face went deathly pale in a moment, and he passed his hand across his agonized brow.

"Ah! Heavens!" he gasped with great effort. "You fellows—my wine! can't you see? I—I'm poisoned!"

We sprang to our feet with one accord and rushed toward him, but before we could stretch forth our hands he had staggered forward with a loud cry and fallen heavily upon the gravel.

Our endeavors to raise him were useless.

"Let me alone!" he shouted hoarsely. "The poison—was put into my glass—through the trellis! You cannot save me. Ah! I—I'm dying! The cowards have killed me!"

I knelt and raised his head upon my arm.

"Don't touch me!" he cried. "Can't you let me die?"

Writhing in paroxysms of intense pain, his face livid, his body horribly distorted, he ground his teeth, and foamed at the mouth.

The sight was awful; yet we were utterly powerless.

A violent trembling suddenly shook his whole frame, and his palsied limbs stretched themselves out rigidly in the final struggle for existence.

Then he gasped, the breath left his body, and he lay pale and motionless under the starlight.

Ivan Liustig was dead!

So quickly had all this happened that scarcely anyone had been attracted, and, fortunately, no crowd had assembled. As we lifted the body and carried it tenderly into the restaurant, the strains of the "*Boje Zara chrani*," which floated over the lake, formed a jarring, incongruous dirge to our silent and sorrowful *cortège*.

A doctor was soon procured, and as soon as he touched him he removed his hat respectfully, and pronounced him beyond human aid. I handed him the pieces of broken glass which I had picked up from the graveled walk. He smelt them, and finding a drop of wine remaining, dipped the tip of his little finger into it, and placed it upon his tongue.

"Arsenic," he remarked. "Without a doubt."

Reverently they covered the body with a

tablecloth, and it was subsequently conveyed away.

It is unnecessary to refer in detail to the events that immediately followed. That Ivan had been murdered in the most cowardly and secret manner possible, was plain, but the identity of the person who had placed the poison in the glass, from the opposite side of the trellis, was a mystery. The police quickly apprehended the *dvornik's* son and daughter, both of whom were submitted to a searching cross-examination. There was such an utter absence of motive, however, and so plain and straightforward were their answers, that the officials were quickly convinced of their innocence.

But I had my own suspicions. Later that night I took a *drosky* to the Vossersenski quarter, and sought the dead man's idol, intending to break the news to her, and closely observe the manner in which she received it.

Wanda Waluiski, when I entered, was sitting alone, dressed in semi-loose drapery of white, that made her childlike figure seem only the more youthful under the light of the bright lamp. Her eyes met mine instantly as I came

in, and their gaze had a fullness of significance I could not fathom. I offered her my hand.

"I never shake the hand of anyone," she observed gently, not moving her own. "It induces loss of power in psychic sensitiveness."

I was looking into her weirdly delicate visage, with the large eyes, whose expression was so haunting, and a certain thrill of quickened zest suddenly replaced the sensation of repugnance in my mind.

"I have come to break bad news to you," I said gently.

"I know," she replied. "I—I am aware that Ivan is dead."

"Who told you?" I asked quickly, but my inquiry was not answered.

At that moment the door was flung open unceremoniously, and two police officers entered.

"Wanda Waluiski," exclaimed the elder of the two, advancing toward her, "I arrest you, in the name of our Father, the Tzar, for the murder of one Ivan Liustig!"

"For murder!" she gasped, half rising from her chair. "I—I am innocent!"

"Upon whose information do you make the arrest?" I asked.

The officer referred to the paper in his hand, and replied: "One Mascha Mikhalovna alleges that this woman placed the poison in the victim's glass."

"My sister!" I exclaimed involuntarily.

"Ah!" said Wanda, who had risen, and stood stern and haggard before me. "I told you on the first occasion you visited me, that unhappiness must come to me through you." Turning quickly toward the golden *ikon*, or holy image, that hung upon the wall, she crossed herself reverently, murmuring, "Before Heaven, I swear I am innocent!"

Then she took up the fur-lined cloak lying upon the couch, and throwing it about her shoulders, drew the hood over her head and announced her readiness to accompany the officers.

As they were about to descend the stairs, two police spies in civilian dress entered and received orders to search the place. I remained behind in order to ascertain what was discovered, but after an hour's investigation they had to acknowledge the absence of any clew.

During the time they were rummaging in holes and corners, I chanced to take up a photograph album, and was looking casually through it when

my eyes fell upon a cabinet portrait of a well preserved, handsomely attired woman, apparently about thirty-five years of age.

In a moment I recognized it as the counterfeit presentment of the woman I had seen strolling in the Catherinenhoff Gardens almost immediately before I had noticed Wanda!

I closed the album and kept the discovery to myself. Within an hour I saw Mascha, and asked her upon what grounds she had given the information that had led to the mysterious Wanda's arrest.

"She loved Ivan, and was my rival," she replied, shrugging her shoulders. "I saw her emerge from behind the trellis. That is all the proof I have."

I pointed out that the allegations were of so serious a character that, in all probability, Wanda would be kept in prison while the matter was being investigated, which would certainly be several months, perhaps years.

"But she stole him from me," my sister replied, with flashing eyes. "She will now have to prove her innocence."

I could see that Mascha was revengeful, and that all argument was useless.

The murder created a good deal of sensation in St. Petersburg; and, as I had anticipated, Wanda was confined in the grim Fortress of Peter and Paul. Days, weeks, months passed, but she was not brought before the court—the police were still investigating. At length, after nearly seven months had gone by, the case was brought to trial, and the accused was acquitted.

Strange how fate seems to direct our course in life. It was about a year afterward. I had returned to London, and, drifting into journalistic work, was representing a daily newspaper, that shall be nameless, in the gallery of the House of Commons. I had a reason for entering journalism, but that has nothing to do with my present story.

The hour was midnight. Mr. Speaker had ordered a division upon an important question affecting Ireland, and honorable members, stretching themselves, had risen wearily and were strolling out to vote. Many of my *confrères* had flung down their pens and made for the press bar, but I was busy. The debate had been almost historical, for in answer to the objections of the opposition, Mr. Balfour had made a brilliant

and telling reply, therefore I was unfortunately compelled to continue writing, and that at express speed.

The *frou-frou* of silk, mingled with frivolous feminine laughter, caused me to look upward. The ladies' gallery is over that devoted to the press, and somewhat in the rear, and is irreverently known as the "gridiron," because the feminine beauty is hidden from the curious gaze of honorable members by ornamental ironwork. From our seats, however, we obtain a good view of the fair ones who come to hear their husbands, fathers, and lovers descant upon their country's ills, and as I glanced up, I saw two faces behind the iron bars peering down upon the half empty benches.

One was that of an elderly, white-haired lady, evidently a patrician. The other was younger, and her features struck me as strangely familiar.

Where could I have seen her before? I tried to think, but, with tantalizing contrariness, my memory refused to answer. Yet I felt a curious desire to remember who she was. It was almost like a presage of evil.

I looked again. Her eyes met mine in a cold, haughty stare, but in a second I had recollected

her. She was the woman I had noticed in the Catherinenhoff Gardens!

My pen almost fell from my grasp.

Although I felt positive I had not mistaken the face, yet, I admit, the identification was so sudden that I found myself doubting whether it was really she whom I had seen in the dimly illuminated grounds.

"Campbell," I said, beckoning one of the attendants, "there's a lady upstairs with blue birds in her hat. Don't notice her for a moment, but look up presently, and tell me if you know who she is."

"Very well, sir," he replied, with a significant smile, arranging his gilt chain of office over his glossy shirt front, and strolling away along the gallery.

Returning in a few moments, he bent over me, and exclaimed, "That lady, sir!"

"Yes," I said anxiously.

"She's Mrs. Elworthy, wife of the member for Northwest Huntingdon. She's well known in society, and comes as regularly when her husband speaks as Mrs. Gladstone does."

"Mrs. Elworthy!" I ejaculated. "Ah! thanks," I added.

Remarking that I was welcome to the information, Campbell walked away.

Mrs. Elworthy! My thoughts were only of her. I knew her by reputation as a leader of fashion, and the center of a dashing set. She joked pleasantly with her elder companion, uttering a low, musical laugh. The diamonds on her slim wrist sparkled as the dainty gloved hand grasped the ironwork.

I was watching that hand surreptitiously when a strange thought occurred to me. I wondered whether it was the same that had reached through the creeper-covered trellis in St. Petersburg two years before!

But as these grave thoughts took possession of me, the "House" filled, the tellers advanced to the table, and the result of the division was declared.

I went out to hand it to my telegraphist in the lobby. When I returned, the object of my thoughts had gone.

It was certainly a curious coincidence that we should thus meet, yet what proof had I that she was a murderess? Nothing beyond a strange, fitful fancy.

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In a handsome drawing room in Brook Street, Grosvenor Square, where the wintry twilight filtered through rose-colored silk curtains, I was sitting alone with Mrs. Elworthy.

Through a friend of the family I had succeeded in obtaining an introduction to her, and now regularly received cards for all her little festivities. Both she and her husband welcomed me warmly whenever I called, and very soon I found myself one of a very pleasant, if extravagant, set. I made, however, two discoveries of a somewhat remarkable character. Firstly, that Mrs. Elworthy was a Russian, and, secondly, that the fascinating girl I had known as Wanda Waluiski was living with her, and was, in reality, her daughter!

On this particular afternoon I had remained behind after the other visitors had departed, and was chatting with Mrs. Elworthy, who, with all a woman's cunning, had chosen a *vieux rose* tea-gown, which, falling in artistic folds, gave sculptural relief to her almost angular outline.

For a woman, she was unusually conversant with political questions, and I had purposely turned our discussion upon the prevalence of famine in Russia.

"Were you ever in St. Petersburg?" I asked, glancing at her suddenly.

She gazed at me inquiringly, and the smile died from her face.

"No," she replied quickly. "I came from Odessa. I have never been to the capital. But of course you have."

"Yes," I said reflectively. "Unfortunately, however, my last visit was marred by a very sad occurrence."

"What was it?" she asked, lounging languidly in her chair.

"The murder of my friend Ivan Liustig," I replied calmly, gazing straight into her eyes.

The announcement did not produce the effect I had intended. She stirred uneasily, but merely raised her eyebrows and uttered a low exclamation of horror.

"The poor fellow was poisoned," I continued, at the same time drawing my wallet from my pocket. "Here is his photograph," I added, handing her a *carte de visite*.

She looked calmly at the pictured face.

"Very sad—very sad, indeed," she remarked. "And was the murderer caught?"

She kept her eyes upon the photograph as she asked the question.

"Excuse me—murderess," I said, in as unconcerned a tone as I could.

"A woman, then?"

"Yes, and moreover, I have traced the assassin."

She looked up sharply into my face. Her handsome features presented a strange, haggard appearance, and she toyed nervously with her rings.

"Why—what—what do you mean?" she gasped.

"Disguise is useless, Mrs. Elworthy," I said sternly, as I rose to my feet. "I mean that I can prove you poisoned Ivan Liustig!"

She started from her chair and glared at me.

"You—you say this! You insult me, sir—in my own house—brand me a murderess! I'll call the servants and have you shown out instantly," she cried angrily, at the same time making a motion as if to ring the bell.

I stayed her hand.

"No, madame," I said, "you will do nothing of the kind. Your daughter has probably not told you that I was present when she was arrested on suspicion. Since then your guilt has been

proved, and it is useless to deny it. The bottle, still containing a portion of the liquid arsenic sold to you by Wagner, the chemist in the Nevskoi, is here," I continued, taking it from my pocket and holding it before her eyes. "Besides, a Russian lad is now in London who actually saw you pour it into Ivan's glass!"

"He lies—I—I—never was in St. Petersburg in my life! I never knew Ivan——"

The proud, handsome woman, now pale as death, stopped suddenly. Her lips refused to articulate; she reeled, clutched at the table for support, but tottering back, fell senseless to the floor.

Ringling for the servants, I told them that their mistress had fainted. Then hurrying on my coat, I crammed my hat upon my head, and left the house.

Smoking before the fire in my bachelor chambers a fortnight afterward, with my slippered feet upon the fender, I had given myself up to reflection. My reverie was somewhat puzzling, for, truth to tell, I was in love, and the object of my affection was none other than Wanda Elworthy. Her face smiled down upon me from a cabinet

photograph that stood upon the mantelshelf; yet, as the smoke curled before it, I could not help thinking how much it resembled that of her unhappy mother.

Suddenly my meditations were interrupted by a loud rat-tat at the door. Opening it, I was surprised to discover a lady, who passed me without a word, and entered my sitting room.

Closing the door I followed her, and found it was Mrs. Elworthy.

"You seldom have lady visitors, I presume?" she exclaimed, with a curious smile, as she seated herself, rested her elbows upon the table, and lifted her veil.

"No," I replied, halting before the fire, with my hands behind my back. "But I confess I'm puzzled, Mrs. Elworthy, as to the object of this interview."

Frowning slightly, she tapped the floor impatiently with her shapely foot.

"My object is to come to terms with you."

"Then you admit your guilt?" I remarked in astonishment.

"It is useless, I suppose, to deny it. You have discovered my secret, and I am prepared to pay the price you name."

Her features were pale and set—a face almost statuesque.

“Pardon me, madame,” I replied warmly; “were I to accept gold from you I should be an accessory to your cowardly crime.”

“You misunderstand me. I have no intention of offering you money.”

“Then what request have you to make, pray?” I asked, looking fixedly at her.

“You know the original of that photograph behind you?” she exclaimed in a harsh, strained voice, pointing at it.

“I do.”

“It has come to my knowledge that you love her.”

“That is so.”

“Then the object of my visit is to make a compact with you. It is this: If you will marry Wanda within three months from to-day she shall have a dowry of twenty thousand pounds.”

We were both silent for a moment.

“Which proposal means that you are prepared to sacrifice your daughter for the preservation of your own secret, eh?”

She did not reply, but bowed her head in humiliation.

"Madame," I said severely, "I admit I love Wanda, but such a proposition is absolutely loathsome."

"Think—think—she cares for you! Besides, if you had money you would no longer be compelled to work for an existence."

"Impossible," I replied decisively.

"Ah, don't say that!" she cried hoarsely, as, with a sudden impulse, she threw herself upon her knees before me. "See! I implore you for mercy. God knows I have tried to atone and do my duty, but I yielded to temptation, and this is my punishment!"

Drawing a long breath, she burst into a flood of tears.

"You—you do not know all, or you would find the circumstances extenuating," she sobbed bitterly. "I—I confess it was I who poisoned Ivan! He was—he was my son!"

"Your son?"

"Yes. I—I'm a vile wretch, as degraded as the woman who walks the pavement. I killed my son. For twenty years he was ignorant of his parentage, but, alas! he discovered the secret of his dishonorable birth. As the living evidence of my shame he declared he would denounce me

—I, who had supplied him with money and secretly guided his career. When he knew I was his mother he loathed me, and cursed me for my sin! His hatred stung me; he threatened to expose me to my husband. Moreover, he fell in love with my lawful daughter, Wanda, then studying in St. Petersburg! What was I to do?"

She paused. Her hands were clasped; her agonized face was uplifted in supplication.

"Do not shrink from me!" she cried. "Have mercy, for here, before Heaven, I swear I am penitent! Exposure meant ruin. Death only could rid me of the terrible Nemesis. I went to St. Petersburg—followed him—and—and—you know the rest. I—his mother—murdered him!"

Her chin rested upon her breast; her white lips moved, but no sound came from them.

"Madame," I said at length, taking her hand and assisting her to rise, "this interview is painful to us both; let us end it."

"Will you not spare me? will you not be merciful and accept my offer?" she implored.

"I cannot. I pity you, and hope forgiveness may be yours."

"You will not accept the dowry?"

I shook my head.

She turned slowly and, blinded by tears, tottered out, closing the door gently after her.

The newspapers of the following evening contained a sensational item of news, headed "Suicide of an M. P.'s wife." It ran as follows:

"Mrs. Elworthy, wife of Mr. Harold Elworthy, M. P., of Brook Street, Grosvenor Square, was discovered dead in her dressing room this morning. A small bottle containing arsenic was found at her side, together with a letter which leaves no doubt that she committed suicide. The contents of the letter have not been ascertained, but it is rumored that it is a confession of a very remarkable character."

An inquest was duly held, and a verdict of "suicide while temporarily insane" returned. Immediately following this came the announcement that the member for Northwest Huntingdon had taken the Chiltern Hundreds and gone abroad, accompanied by his daughter Wanda.

No one has either seen or heard of them since.

XII.

THE TZAR'S SPY.

I.

A CHAOS of terrible recollections bewilders me. I have the sense of having trodden *Via Dolorosa* during long years, but now I have taken my last step for the present in the blood-spotted pathway to Revolution.

The windows at the rear of the Château de Montfermeil, a quaint, old-world place, near the high road from St. Germain to Paris, look out upon a wide, well kept lawn, flanked by dark yew hedges, and backed by the winding Seine, on the opposite bank of which a sparsely timbered slope leads up to a small farm. Zigzag up this slope runs a path—probably it has so run for centuries, for at the foot of it is a ford across a small stream—which in spring is almost invisible, but in autumn is brown and ruddy.

Two men strolled down this path one September evening not long ago. One, a young fellow

under thirty, fair-haired and pink-cheeked, was something of a fop, while the other was a tall man, about fifty-five, of military bearing, with a pair of keen eyes, sharply cut features, and hair and mustache turning gray. Attired in a rather shabby velvet coat and gaiters, he looked like a gamekeeper, but was, in fact, General Martianoff, late Governor of Mstislavl, and now chief of the Russian secret police in Paris.

"I really can't make you out, André," he said, as they sighted the château; and, shifting his gun to the other shoulder, he took occasion to glance searchingly at his companion. "How confoundedly glum you are."

The younger man laughed, but not very merrily; and there was a touch of sullenness in his tone as he answered:

"How absurd! A man cannot be always grinning."

"No; but *pâté de foie gras* is not man's ordinary meat," retorted the general imperturbably. "My dear Chaudet."

"Well?" said the other snappishly.

"You are in a mess; that is my opinion! Now, take my advice, and make a clean breast of the matter. You have some tie or other which

weighs on your mind and of which we are ignorant."

The young man turned his face to his companion, and General Martianoﬀ, albeit a very cool personage, was taken aback by the change which anger or some other emotion had worked in it. Even André Chaudet's voice was altered.

"And what if I have?" he asked hoarsely, stopping short so suddenly that the pair confronted one another. "What if I have, m'sieur?"

The chief spy twirled his mustache thoughtfully.

"Well," he said, outwardly unmoved, "you must break it—get rid of it. That is all, Chaudet."

"And if I am unable?"

"Unwilling, you mean."

"No—cannot, cannot!" replied the younger man with vehemence.

"But you must. You hear? you must! Otherwise it will be your ruin."

"Bah! Don't talk like that. Are you not coming to the château?"

'No!' replied the general violently. And without more, without a word of farewell, he turned his back and strode away through the

long grass to a point half a mile higher up the river, where a wooden bridge gave access to the station of La Pecq, whence he returned to Paris.

I had been following the pair, and had overheard their conversation.

The news that M. Lozé, the Prefect of Paris Police, had called upon the general and was kept for some time by the Tzar's spy, had caused considerable excitement in the Nihilist settlement at La Glacière. It was anticipated that the general and the prefect were putting their heads together for the purpose of getting the worst noted of the refugees entrapped by the Russian police. In order, therefore, to watch Martianoff's movements closely, I had been sent to Paris, with instructions to ascertain, if possible, who were the suspected persons and what system of espionage was being adopted.

Was it surprising that upon this brutal agent of his Imperial Majesty, who had wrecked the career of my sister and myself, I kept a watchful eye? He was a ferret in human shape, and, with the dozen Russian detectives under him, he had a keen scent for Revolutionists and crinating circumstances. Since his resignation from the

governorship of Mstislavl he had been graduated at the Bureau of Secret Police in St. Petersburg.

He lived in the Boulevard Haussmann, at the corner of the Avenue de Messine, where he occupied an *entresol* which looked out into the courtyard, leading the life of a man with an adequate income. He only had two saddle horses, with a groom of all work brought by him from Russia, and he contented himself with a hired brougham. He breakfasted in his rooms, dined at the fashionable restaurants, showed himself in the Bois de Boulogne of an afternoon, at theatrical first performances of an evening, knew all Paris—the “*tout Paris*” of the Boulevard—and was received in almost all circles of society. Yet he had few intimate friends, he seldom received his habitual acquaintances at his rooms, and often absented himself for several days without saying where he was going.

His *concierge* revered him, and never expressed astonishment when he saw rather seedy looking people climb the stairs leading to the apartments of this rich and respectable tenant. General Martianoff made a show of philanthropy, and, according to the hall porter, his reputation

as a charitable gentleman exposed him to the visits of seedy looking individuals.

I did not return to Paris by the same train as the spy, but remained behind in order to make inquiries regarding the companion he had so unceremoniously quitted. With that object I remained at a small *estaminet* on the road which runs through the Bois de Vesinet to Montesson, chatting to an old woodcutter, and eliciting some facts regarding the Chaudets. The château belonged to Count Felix Chaudet, a wealthy old gentleman, who, according to the woodcutter's statement, had held important government offices under the Empire, but who was now on the verge of senile imbecility, and lived in seclusion with his son André. The latter had traveled a great deal, and had quite recently settled down at the château, at the old count's request.

The sun had set, and it was growing dusk as I left the *estaminet*. I had just emerged from the wood and turned into the high road when I perceived, about a hundred paces from me, a shadow rapidly approaching. I slipped behind a tree and watched its progress. It was a tall, slender girl, exquisitely graceful, with rounded

throat and arms, having dark, wavy hair drawn back from her brow, a flawless complexion, and handsome brown eyes. As she passed I recognized her as Natalya Lebedeff, daughter of a prominent member of our organization, who, about four years before, had fled from Russia and taken refuge in Paris, where he now kept a tobacconist's shop in the Rue d'Amsterdam, close to the St. Lazare terminus.

The road that she followed was bordered with oak trees and quickset hedges. I walked after her cautiously, for I was curious to know what had brought her to St. Germain.

After making several turns, the road sloped gently toward a stone bridge thrown across the small stream. Close by was a hamlet built upon the side of a hill, and surrounded by walnut trees, while the green waters bubbling over the pebbles which formed its bed rushed onward toward the Seine.

Upon the bridge stood André, and she moved directly toward him.

When they met she did not take the hand he offered. Withdrawing it quickly, he said, "You are right, Natalya. I am a villain!" The words seemed to come from his inmost heart. Then he

continued, "Spurn me from you, as I deserve. I scarcely expected that you would come from Paris to keep the appointment. Here are the papers; do what you please with them."

As he finished speaking she shook her head, and a bitter smile crossed her lips.

"I have forgiven all," she said, eagerly seizing the papers and folding them small. Then she placed them in the pocket of her dress.

She shivered slightly, and they walked along. The path they entered followed the course of the stream and led down to the river. They were silent and absorbed in thought. One seemed filled with grief, remorse, and expectation; the other felt her destiny weighing heavily upon her, and thought she heard within the woods the agitated beating of a heart, which was kept in motion only by its fears.

From my hiding place I watched them disappear in the fast falling gloom; then I turned and hurried to Le Pecq, where I arrived just in time to catch a train for Paris.

An hour later, while walking down the Rue de Monceau on my way to my unpretentious hotel in the Rue de Lisbonne, I passed General Martianoff. He was in evening dress, and walking

away from the house in which he lived, evidently on his way to dine.

Then a thought suddenly occurred to me, and after a moment's hesitation, I turned down the Avenue de Messine to the corner house on the boulevard.

Ascending the stairs, unnoticed by the sleepy *concierge*, I knocked at the door of the general's apartments. Replying to my inquiry in Russian, the man servant, a thin, cadaverous looking fellow, informed me that his Excellency was out, and his return was uncertain.

"But I have to see him upon official business," I said, at the same time slipping a ten-franc piece into his ready palm. "Show me to his room, and I will wait."

Conducting me along the hall, he showed me into a large, well furnished room, the two windows of which looked out upon the boulevard. The heavy curtains were drawn, a large brass lamp burned brightly under a shade of amber silk, and the spacious saddle bag armchairs gave the apartment an air of coziness. It was half library, half sitting room, and the littered writing table that stood in a recess near the fireplace showed that the ex-governor had considerable correspondence.

It was to ascertain the nature of his communications that I had ventured into the spy's sanctum. When the servant had withdrawn and closed the door I immediately commenced my investigations. Rapidly glancing at the open letters and memoranda, I saw they related to various persons suspected of Nihilism, resident in Paris.

Presently I took up a large folded blue paper and opened it. The document revealed how closely Russian subjects were being watched. It was the report of a secret police agent who had been told off to keep observation upon Israel Lebedeff, the father of Natalya. In order that my readers may fully understand the manner in which the "Security Section" carries out its system of espionage, I give a copy of the printed questions, as follows:

IMPERIAL POLICE DEPARTMENT.

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO BE FILLED IN WEEKLY.

1. What is the Christian name, paternal name, and family name of the person under observation?
2. Where is his (or her) residence? In what district, street, and house? What is the number of the room?

3. Where did you first see him, and under what circumstances? Has he seen you?

4. How long has he resided at his present address? Whence did he come?

5. Does he live alone, or with someone? In the latter case, with whom?

6. Has he any servants? If so, what are their names? If not, who looks after his room, or rooms? What things has he in his rooms? To whom is his dirty linen sent? State name and residence of his laundress?

7. Does he have his meals at home, or elsewhere? In the latter case, where?

8. Does he visit any library, and, if so, which one? State what books he has borrowed in the course of the week.

9. At what o'clock does he leave his rooms, and when does he return?

10. How does he spend his time at home?

11. Has he a wife, or children? If the latter, how many?

12. Is he paying attention to any woman? If so, who is she and where does she live? Where do they meet?

13. Who has visited him in the course of the week? At what times? A. M. or P. M.?

14. Has anyone (male or female) spent the night in his rooms? If so, what person or persons? Their residence?

15. Has he ever been in a state of intoxication?

16. Does he receive letters or papers from Russia?

17. What hour is best for his arrest?

All these questions were answered with a minuteness of detail that was astonishing, the document being signed by the officer of surveillance, and countersigned by General Martianoff.

Absorbed in the perusal of the report, I did not notice the presence of the servant, who had entered stealthily, and suddenly stood before me, causing me to start and replace the paper hurriedly.

"Vladimir Mikhalovitch," he said, "you had better leave before the general returns."

"You know me, then?" I asked in bewilderment.

For answer he smiled, and gave me the sign of our order.

"How came you in the spy's service?" I asked.
"What is your name?"

"I'm Paul Zadlewski. The general engaged me as his servant when he visited Petersburg last year."

"You know the contents of the papers brought here by the spies?"

"I make copies of them all and forward them to the Petersburg Circle."

"Has Lebedeff been warned?"

"Yes. He has sold his business, and is arranging to leave Paris for London."

"And what of Natalya, his daughter?"

"Hark! the general has returned. Quick!"

He almost dragged me through a door which led into an adjoining room, whence I passed out upon the staircase.

I hurried downstairs, and a few moments afterward was walking along the Rue de la Pepinière toward my hotel.

II.

A loud knocking at the door of my bedroom and a voice demanding admittance aroused me.

When I unlocked the door, Karl Schoraffe, a refugee, rushed in.

"They have arrested Lebedeff," he exclaimed breathlessly. "Last night four *sergents de ville* went to the house, searched, and discovered some bombs in course of manufacture and some of our literature. He was arrested and taken to the Prefecture."

"But he was warned in time to escape," I said.

"Yes, but he is now in their grip."

"Where is Natalya?"

"She went out yesterday afternoon, and has not yet returned."

"Very well," I said; "but we must secure his release at all hazards."

Karl seated himself and chatted to me while I dressed. It puzzled me that the Paris police should have found explosives on the tobacconist's premises, especially after the ample warning that Zadlewski had given.

Several days passed. Lebedeff was detained for inquiries, and nothing had been heard of Natalya. Although our organization exerted every effort to trace the girl, no clew to her whereabouts could be discovered. She had mysteriously disappeared, and we were seriously handicapped in our search by the fact that it was not considered wise policy to inquire of André Chaudet, as there was evidently some secret understanding between him and General Martianoff.

One morning, a fortnight after Lebedeff's arrest, I was present at the Correctional Court of the Seine, when he was charged with being in

the possession of explosives, contrary to the Code. Evidence was given by several detectives, while Martianoff stood at the rear of the court watching the proceedings and disguised as an honest looking workman.

When the evidence regarding the bombs was complete, the public prosecutor made an application. He stated that the prisoner had been identified by police agents from St. Petersburg as one who was "wanted" in that city in connection with the laying of a mine of dynamite, under the Norwinski Strasse, in order to make an attempt upon the life of the Tzar. Further evidence was then given by an *attaché* of the Russian Embassy and two agents of the secret police, and eventually the prisoner was formally committed for extradition to Russia.

I left the court with a conviction that the escape of my compatriot was hopeless, and that Siberian hard labor would inevitably be his sentence.

While walking along the Boulevard des Italiens, immersed in my own thoughts, Karl Schoraffe accosted me, and dragged me into a quiet *café*.

"Look," he exclaimed in a low tone, producing

from his pocket a soiled and crumpled copy of that day's *Gaulois*; "read that!" and he pointed to a paragraph.

The few lines were as follows:

"Last night a bargeman, named Debrige, while steering his craft on the Seine near Croissy, noticed a dark object floating in the water. He grappled it with his boat hook, and when he drew it on board was horrified to find that it was the body of a well dressed young girl. Nothing was found upon her whereby her identity could be established, and the body was conveyed to the morgue."

"Well?" I said interrogatively, after I had read it.

"Do you think it can be Natalya Lebedeff?"

"Ah!" I ejaculated, suddenly recollecting her mysterious disappearance. "We will go to the morgue and ascertain."

We at once left the boulevard and proceeded to the house of the dead behind Notre Dame.

It needed not a second glance at the rigid body lying upon its cold slate slab to tell that Schoraffe's surmise was correct. The body was that of the pretty Natalya. Instantly my

thoughts reverted to André Chaudet. Could he be her murderer?

Half an hour afterward I called at General Martianoff's, when Zadlewski handed me secretly a sheet of paper folded small, which I quickly transferred to my pocket. It was a detailed account of the movements of the Chief of Secret Police during the last twenty-four hours.

At midnight the prominent members of the Nihilist Circle of Paris met at a house in La Glacière. I produced reports and papers which conclusively showed that General Martianoff was the head of the Russian spies in the French capital, and Zadlewski, who also attended, made a statement. The manner in which Lebedeff had been watched, arrested, and sent back to St. Petersburg had aroused the ire and hatred of every man present, and it was unanimously agreed that the ex-governor of Mstislavl, being a sworn enemy of Russian freedom, should be sentenced to death.

The president of the tribunal then took a number of pieces of paper, and upon one sketched roughly the death emblem of our order. The papers were then folded carefully, placed in a box, and every man drew one. The drawing was car-

ried on in silence. The one to whose lot it fell to strike the fatal blow made no sign, and none in that assembly were aware who had been selected to carry out the sentence. Silence is always preserved in such cases in order to insure absolute secrecy, and to give the murderer a better chance of evading the police.

That night, as Zadlewski and I were returning to Paris together, I noticed he appeared thoughtful and morose, and asked the reason.

"I must leave the general's service to-morrow," he replied. "There is an urgent reason that I should do so."

"Could I not apply for the situation?" I suggested, as a scheme suddenly entered my mind.

"Yes, why not?" he said, brightening. "You could then continue watching."

"Very well," I replied. "Give notice to-night, and I will apply at midday to-morrow. I already have a recommendation as a valet and trustworthy servant," I added, laughing.

"Who from?"

"A German count with whom I traveled a few years ago."

Then, joining in my hilarity, he once more assumed his usual gayety.

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A week afterward I was duly installed as valet to the general, while Zadlewski had been engaged as messenger at the Franco-Russian Club in the Rue Royale. My work was not particularly heavy, for the chief *mouchard* was out for the greater part of each day, which gave me opportunities for investigating and making copies of the reports of espionage that arrived daily from male and female secret agents.

One morning, about three weeks after the meeting of the Circle at La Glacière, I chanced to take up a paper and my eyes fell upon a telegram from St. Petersburg, stating that Israel Lebedeff had been tried by court-martial, found guilty of an attempt upon the life of the Emperor, and had been sentenced to hard labor for life in Siberia.

Just as I had read it the door bell rang, and I admitted a short, stout, shabbily attired Frenchman, who, without addressing me, walked straight through to the room in which the general was sitting, closing the door after him.

The fact that he had a newspaper in his hand aroused my curiosity, and by placing my ear at the keyhole I was enabled to catch part of the conversation.

"Ah! So they found him guilty, eh?" I heard the general exclaim. "Well, we shall be commended by his Majesty for our shrewdness."

"Shrewdness!" observed the visitor, with a laugh. "True, we may call it so, but, *entre nous*, I do not like the aspect affairs might assume if all the facts were known."

"What do you mean? One Nihilist more or less surely cannot matter!"

"The arrest was made at the cost of the girl Natalya's life."

"She committed suicide," replied the Tzar's agent quickly. "And what is more, her body has been buried without identification."

"She did not commit suicide," said the detective calmly. "She was murdered!"

"How do you know?"

"The spies of the secret police are everywhere. One was present when she was flung into the river—it was I."

"Hush! speak lower," urged the general. "My servant might overhear." Then he added: "Listen, and I will prove to you that our action was justifiable. André Chaudet, who was an *attaché* at St. Petersburg, and whose father owns the Château de Montfermeil, was likely to

be of service to Russia, and for that reason I courted his companionship. I was not long in discovering that he entertained Nihilistic views, and that he was an old friend of Lebedeff's. André and Natalya, although not lovers, frequently met clandestinely in the interests of the Revolutionary movement. Natalya, by some unaccountable means, discovered that I was connected with the Imperial police, and on informing André, prevailed upon him to steal some papers relating to our investigations regarding her father. He called upon me one day, and I was incautious enough to leave him here alone for a few moments, during which time he purloined a most important letter, one that if ever produced would be most damning evidence against us, and probably cause our expulsion from France. It exposed our little plot against Lebedeff, and explained the manner in which the bombs were to be introduced into his house. Of course, you quite understand that the Bureau at St. Petersburg was growing impatient, and we were bound to arrest someone."

"One Nihilist is as good as another, providing you can fasten a conspiracy upon him," remarked the visitor.

"Just so," continued Martianoff. "When I found the letter was missing, I had strict watch kept upon both Chaudet and the girl, by which means I discovered that he handed her the papers without reading them himself, for she had asked him not to do so. It was clear that when she read them she would place her father upon his guard, and there was also a possibility of us being caught like rats in a trap. Hence it was imperative, both for the success of our plans, and the prestige of the Imperial police, that we should secure her silence. There was but one way to do this—death! I returned to St. Germain that night——"

"I know the rest," interrupted the spy; "I followed you, thinking you might require assistance. You met the girl on the river bank, after she had left André, and, after taking the papers from her pocket, gripped her by the throat and threw her into the river."

"Bah! she was only a Jewess," said Martianoff unconcernedly. "Had she escaped she would have probably taken the papers to one of the Socialist deputies, an interpolation would have been made in the Chamber, and the letter produced. With what result? Disaster, disgrace,

and public opinion so strong against us that we should be compelled to leave France."

"Instead of which we shall receive commendation, and perhaps decoration, from the Tzar," observed the Frenchman. "Ah! you were right, M'sieur le Général. You are always right. His Majesty should, indeed, be gratified at possessing such a diplomatic agent as yourself. The murder shall not be mentioned again between us."

At that moment there were sounds as if someone were walking across the room, therefore I left the door abruptly and consequently heard no more.

III.

After the departure of the stout Frenchman I was sent to deliver a letter in the Avenue de l'Opéra, and after an absence of half an hour I returned and continued my work in my own room.

Scarcely had I resumed when the door bell again rang. Opening it, I was confronted by Paul Zadlewski, who held a letter in his hand.

"An invitation to a ball at the Franco-Russian Club; to be delivered personally," he whispered significantly, as he passed me and entered the

general's room unannounced. There was nothing unusual in this, for he frequently brought messages; therefore I returned to my work of dusting books.

A moment later, however, I heard a low exclamation of surprise, followed by a peculiar noise, as if some heavy article had fallen upon the floor, and I saw Zadlewski, with pale, affrighted face, hurrying out.

I rushed into Martianoff's room to ascertain what had happened, but at first saw nothing unusual. On the opposite side of the writing table, however, a horrifying sight met my gaze.

Lying upon the Persian rug before the fireplace was the general. Blood was upon his hands, and a brief examination showed that he had been shot in the breast with a revolver. He was still breathing, and as I lifted his head upon my arm he gasped the one word, in Russian, "Revenge!"

The respiration immediately became fainter, and in a few seconds he died.

The chief spy had been assassinated. His papers were in disorder, and the fact that a bureau had been broken open showed that the

murderer had searched for something he particularly desired.

I quickly summoned medical aid, and was afterward closely examined by the *juge d'instruction*, but as I kept Zadlewski's visit a secret, and could throw no light upon the mysterious crime, I was set at liberty.

The tragedy created a great sensation throughout Paris, especially when it became known that General Martianoff, who was popular in society, and supposed to be a retired officer possessing ample means, was in reality chief of the French section of secret police. The funeral took place at Père Lachaise a week afterward, but neither the *mouchards* of M. Goron nor the spies of the Tzar discovered the murderer.

Information by some means, however, reached the police, that Zadlewski had not returned to the club in the Rue Royale. He was at once suspected, especially when it was discovered that immediately after the murder he had left for Brussels. But the far reaching influence of Nihilism had already been set to work, and although the police of Europe were watching for the fugitive, yet they were baffled at every turn. He moved from place to place with an alacrity that

was almost incredible. Secret information we received showed that after leaving Paris he fled to Namur, thence to Brussels, Antwerp, London, Palermo, Malta, and Gibraltar. While at the latter place he became despondent, and a fiasco nearly resulted. So rapidly had he traveled that the money collected for him in Geneva and London did not reach him, consequently he found himself at the "Rock" penniless and starving. In this condition he was walking the streets, and had determined to give himself up to the English authorities, when a delegate from the Paris Circle found him, and supplied him with funds, by which he was enabled to sail for America.

For several months nothing further was heard of him, although a member of the La Glacière colony, who was connected with the Havas Press Agency, from time to time circulated reports as to the movements of the fugitive, in order to place the police on false scents.

One morning, however, the papers published what appeared to be an authentic account of Zadlewski's suicide, which had taken place in a remote village in Texas. The pistol with which he had shot himself bore the name of a well known Paris politician, who was known to have

aided the criminal in his flight. Photographs which were afterward forwarded to France were those of Zadlewski. Moreover, some of the lists of Revolutionists resident in the French capital, which were abstracted from the spy's bureau, were found upon the body, together with a written confession of the crime.

No doubt was therefore entertained by the police as to the suicide's identity, and the search for the assassin was consequently relinquished.

One winter's afternoon several months afterward, I was sitting at home in my chambers, when I received an unexpected visit from Mascha.

"Congratulate me, Vladimir," she said gayly, after we had exchanged warm greetings. "I have married!"

"Married!" I ejaculated.

"Yes. Our wedding took place in Paris yesterday. Although you know my husband by sight, you have never spoken to him."

"What's his name?"

"André Chaudet."

"The son of Count Felix Chaudet?" I asked, surprised.

"Yes," she replied, laughing. "I knew him when he was an *attaché* at the French Embassy at Petersburg, and although after poor Ivan's death we became engaged, we resolved to keep the matter a secret. He joined our Circle, but his Revolutionary tendency was discovered by the police, and he was recalled to France. In one of his letters he told me that he had become friendly with a General Martianoff. Knowing that our enemy, the ex-governor of Mstislavl, was in the service of the 'Third Section,' I suspected that he was being drawn into the spider's web. Therefore I proceeded to Paris in order to keep watch upon the spy, and warn André against him. I had no idea that you were engaged in the same matter or that you had discovered who murdered Natalya Lebedeff until one day, quite recently, when they were talking of it at a meeting at La Glacière."

"But you were aware that Zadlewski had killed the general?"

"Ah! there even you are mistaken," she said, with a smile. "Paul was innocent."

"How can that be?" I asked. "I was present when he entered the room, and when he left the house after the assassination."

"Exactly. But although he sought the spy intending to carry out the sentence of death that had been passed, he did not commit the deed. It was through me—his victim—that the tyrant of Mstislavl was killed! On the night previous to the tragedy I was with Karl Schoraffe, who, as you know, was one of my admirers. I related to him the story of my life at Mstislavl, and the brutal treatment you and I received at the hands of Martianoff. My description of his brutality, coupled with the vile conspiracy against Lebedeff, so incensed him that he swore he would remove the Tzar's chief spy with his own hand. I did not regard his words seriously, but on the following morning, while I was waiting in the boulevard in order to follow Martianoff when he emerged from his house, he approached me. He was wild looking and haggard. 'I have killed him!' he whispered, at the same time handing me some papers. Then he hurried along the boulevard and was quickly lost to view. The next I heard was that Zadlewski was suspected."

"But Paul fled to America."

"True. But only in order to baffle the police. He has not committed suicide, for I have here a

letter which he wrote from New York to my husband only a week ago."

I took the note and read it. There was no doubt it was from him, for I recognized the handwriting.

Subsequent inquiries I made fully confirmed Mascha's solution of the mystery. It had fallen to Paul Zadlewski's lot to compass the death of General Martianoff, but, prompted by vengeance, Karl Schoraffe—one of the most desperate of the Terrorists—had entered the room and assassinated the Chief of Secret Police while I was absent delivering the letter in the Avenue de l'Opéra.

After Zadlewski had made good his escape, and Schoraffe considered himself secure, he pressed Mascha to marry him. But she refused, and kept her promise to André.

Count Chaudet having died, she now lives happily at the château with her husband. Both are still enthusiastic and sanguine as to the ultimate success of the struggle for freedom, and, being possessed of an ample fortune, contribute generously to the Revolutionary Fund.

The Terrorists are now pausing. They believe

that the ravages caused by the famine in Russia can never be repaired. The vast Empire of the Tzar has now no alternative but to resign herself and gradually sink to the position of a decaying power like Turkey, or to throw open her gates to European progress, which goes hand in hand with freedom.

At present, the Russian people are disloyal and socialistic, their stifled patriotic feelings being concealed beneath the iron mask of Nihilism. Until the new era dawns—as it certainly must ere long—the Great White Terror will continue to combat Autocracy and Officialdom, its Damoclean force becoming stronger and more irresistible, until it brings a disaster upon the House of the Romanoffs that will startle the world.

THE END.



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