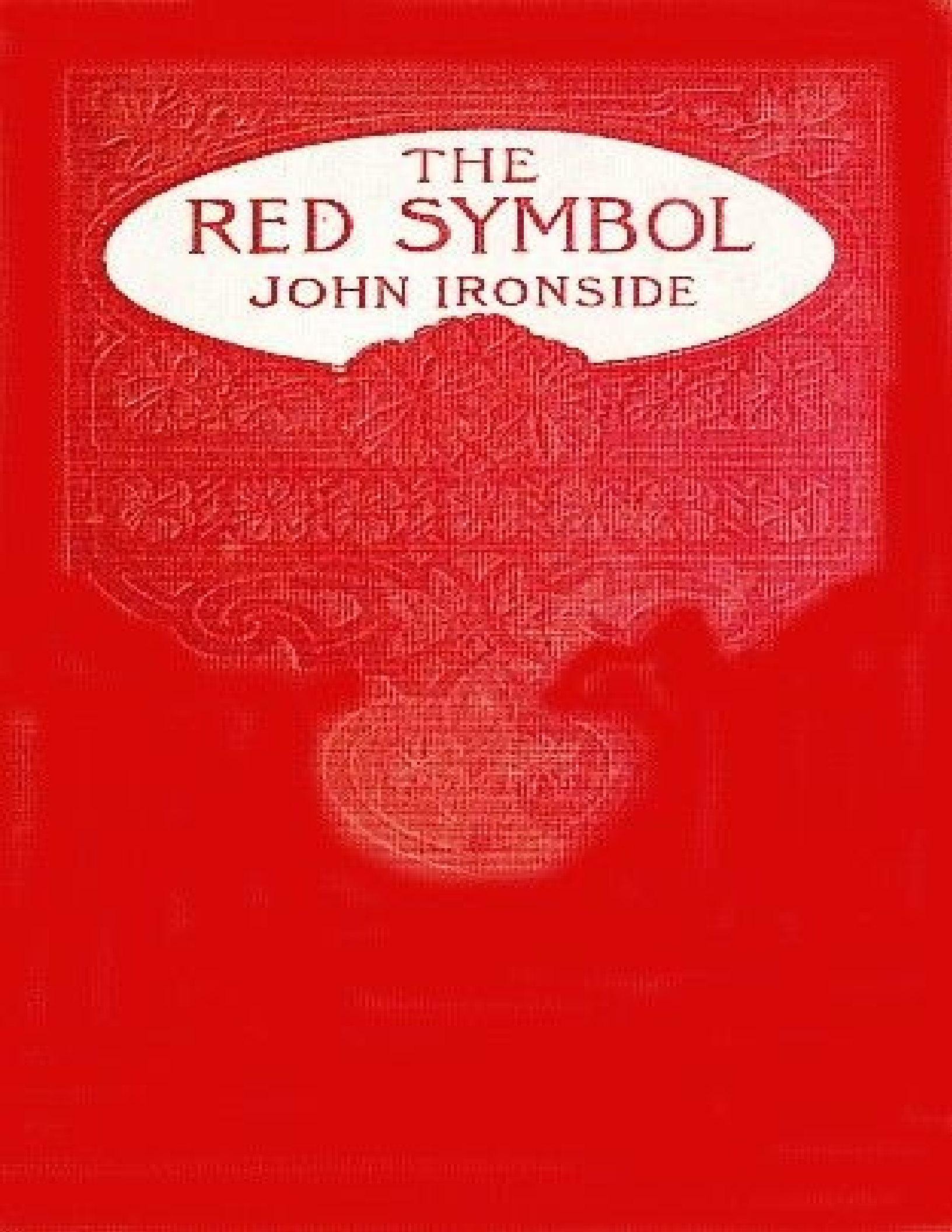
THE RED SYMBOL

JOHN IRONSIDE



Title: The Red Symbol

Author: John Ironside

Illustrator: F. C. Yohn

Release Date: April 1, 2010 [EBook #31860]

Language: English

Produced by D Alexander and the Online Distributed
Proofreading Team at http://www.pgdp.net (This file was
produced from images generously made available by The
Internet Archive)

THE
RED SYMBOL

BY

JOHN IRONSIDE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

F. C. YOHN

BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1910

Published, April, 1910

THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, CAMBRIDGE, U. S. A.

I heard him mutter in French: “The symbol! Then it is she!” **Frontispiece.**

See p. 16

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

THE RED SYMBOL

CHAPTER I

THE MYSTERIOUS FOREIGNER

“

Hello! Yes—I’m Maurice Wynn. Who are you?”

“Harding. I’ve been ringing you up at intervals for hours. Carson’s ill, and you’re to relieve him. Come round for instructions to-night. Lord Southbourne will give them you himself. Eh? Yes, Whitehall Gardens. Ten-thirty, then. Right you are.”

I replaced the receiver, and started hustling into my dress clothes, thinking rapidly the while.

For the first time in the course of ten years’ experience as a special correspondent, I was dismayed at the prospect of starting off at a moment’s notice—to St. Petersburg, in this instance.

To-day was Saturday, and if I were to go by the quickest route—the Nord express—I should have three days’ grace, but the delay at this end would not compensate for the few hours saved on the journey. No, doubtless Southbourne would expect me to get off to-morrow or Monday morning at latest. He was—and is—the smartest newspaper man in England.

Well, I still had four hours before I was due at Whitehall Gardens; and I must make the most of them. At least I should have a few minutes alone with Anne Pendennis, on our way to the dinner at the Hotel Cecil,—the Savage Club “ladies” dinner, where she and my cousin Mary would be guests of Jim Cayley, Mary’s husband.

Anne had promised to let me escort her,—the Cayley’s brougham was a small one, in which three were emphatically a crowd,—and the drive from Chelsea to the Strand, in a hansom, would provide me with the opportunity I had been wanting for days past, of putting my fate to the test, and asking her to be my wife.

I had thought to find that opportunity to-day, at the river picnic Mary had

arranged; but all my attempts to secure even a few minutes alone with Anne had failed; though whether she evaded me by accident or design I could not determine, any more than I could tell if she loved me. Sometimes, when she was kind, my hopes rose high, to fall below zero next minute.

“Steer clear of her, my boy,” Jim Cayley had said to me weeks ago, when Anne first came to stay with Mary. “She’s as capricious as she’s imperious, and a coquette to her finger-tips. A girl with hair and eyes like that couldn’t be anything else.”

I resented the words hotly at the time, and he retracted them, with a promptitude and good humor that disarmed me. Jim was a man with whom it was impossible to quarrel. Still, I guessed he had not changed his opinion of his wife’s guest, though he appeared on excellent terms with her.

As for Mary, she was different. She loved Anne,—they had been fast friends ever since they were school-girls together at Neuilly,—and if she did not fully understand her, at least she believed that her coquetry, her capriciousness, were merely superficial, like the hard, glittering quartz that enshrines and protects the pure gold,—and has to be shattered before the gold can be won.

Mary, I knew, wished me well, though she was far too wise a little woman to attempt any interference.

Yes, I would end my suspense to-night, I decided, as I wrestled with a refractory tie.

Ting ... ting ... tr-r-r-ing! Two short rings and a long one. Not the telephone this time, but the electric bell at the outer door of my bachelor flat.

Who on earth could that be? Well, he’d have to wait.

As I flung the tie aside and seized another, I heard a queer scratching noise outside, stealthy but distinct. I paused and listened, then crossed swiftly and silently to the open door of the bedroom. Some one had inserted a key in the Yale lock of the outer door, and was vainly endeavoring to turn it.

I flung the door open and confronted an extraordinary figure,—an old man, a foreigner evidently, of a type more frequently encountered in the East End than Westminster.

“Well, my friend, what are you up to?” I demanded.

The man recoiled, bending his body and spreading his claw-like hands in a servile obeisance, quaint and not ungraceful; while he quavered out what was seemingly an explanation or apology in some jargon that was quite unintelligible to me, though I can speak most European languages. I judged it to be some Russian patois.

I caught one word, a name that I knew, and interrupted his flow of eloquence.

“You want Mr. Cassavetti?” I asked in Russian. “Well, his rooms are on the next floor.”

I pointed upwards as I spoke, and the miserable looking old creature understood the gesture at least, for, renewing his apologetic protestations, he began to shuffle along the landing, supporting himself by the hand-rail.

I knew my neighbor Cassavetti fairly well. He was supposed to be a press-man, correspondent to half a dozen Continental papers, and gave himself out as a Greek, but I had a notion that Russian refugee was nearer the mark, though hitherto I had never seen any suspicious characters hanging around his place.

But if this picturesque stranger wasn’t a Russian Jew, I never saw one. He certainly was no burglar or sneak-thief, or he would have bolted when I opened the door. The key with which he had attempted to gain ingress to my flat was doubtless a pass-key to Cassavetti’s rooms. He seemed a queer person to be in possession of such a thing, but that was Cassavetti’s affair, and not mine.

“Here, you’d better have your key,” I called, jerking it out of my lock. It was an ordinary Yale key, with a bit of string tied to it, and a fragment of dirty red stuff attached to that.

The stranger had paused, and was clinging to the rail, making a queer gasping sound; and now, as I spoke, he suddenly collapsed in a heap, his dishevelled gray head resting against the balustrade.

I guessed I’d scared him pretty badly, and as I looked down at him I thought for a moment he was dead.

I went up the stairs, and rang Cassavetti’s bell. There was no answer, and I tried the key. It fitted right enough, but the rooms were empty.

What was to be done? Common humanity forbade me to leave the poor wretch lying there; and to summon the housekeeper from the basement meant traversing

eight flights of stairs, for the block was an old-fashioned one, and there was no elevator. Besides, I reckoned that Cassavetti would prefer not to have the housekeeper interfere with his queer visitor.

I ran back, got some whiskey and a bowl of water, and started to give first aid to my patient.

I saw at once what was wrong,—sheer starvation, nothing less. I tore open the ragged shirt, and stared aghast at the sight that met my eyes. The emaciated chest was seamed and knotted with curious scars. I had seen similar scars before, and knew there was but one weapon in the world—the knout—capable of making them. The man was a Russian then, and had been grievously handled; some time back as I judged, for the scars were old.

I dashed water on his face and breast, and poured some of the whiskey down his throat. He gasped, gurgled, opened his eyes and stared at me. He looked like a touzled old vulture that has been badly scared.

“Buck up, daddy,” I said cheerfully, forgetting he wouldn’t understand me. I helped him to his feet, and felt in my trouser pocket for a coin. It was food he wanted, but I had none to give him, except some crackers, and I had wasted enough time over him already. If I didn’t get a hustle on, I should be late for my appointment with Anne.

He clutched at the half-crown, and bent his trembling old body again, invoking, as I opined, a string of blessings on my unworthy head. Something slipped from among his garments and fell with a tinkle at my feet. I stooped to pick it up and saw it was an oval piece of tin, in shape and size like an old-fashioned miniature, containing a portrait. He had evidently been wearing it round his neck, amulet fashion, for a thin red cord dangled from it, that I had probably snapped in my haste.

He reached for it with a quick cry, but I held on to it, for I recognized the face instantly.

It was a photograph of Anne Pendennis—badly printed, as if by an amateur—but an excellent likeness.

Underneath were scrawled in red ink the initials “A. P.” and two or three words that I could not decipher, together with a curious hieroglyphic, that looked like a tiny five-petalled flower, drawn and filled in with the red ink.

How on earth did this forlorn old alien have Anne’s portrait in his possession?

He was cute enough to read my expression, for he clutched my arm, and, pointing to the portrait, began speaking earnestly, not in the patois, but in low Russian.

My Russian is poor enough, but his was execrable. Still, I gathered that he knew “the gracious lady,” and had come a long way in search of her. There was something I could not grasp, some allusion to danger that threatened Anne, for each time he used the word he pointed at the portrait with agonized emphasis.

His excitement was so pitiable, and seemed so genuine, that I determined to get right to the root of the mystery if possible.

I seized his arm, marched him into my flat, and sat him in a chair, emptying the tin of crackers before him, and bidding him eat. He started crunching the crackers with avidity, eyeing me furtively all the time as I stood at the telephone.

I must let Anne know at once that I was detained.

I could not get on to the Cayley’s number, of course. Things always happen that way! Well, I would have to explain my conduct later.

But I failed to elicit much by the cross-examination to which I subjected my man. For one thing, neither of us understood half that the other said.

I told him I knew his “gracious lady;” and he grovelled on the floor, clawing at my shoes with his skinny hands.

I asked him who he was and where he came from, but could make nothing of his replies. He seemed in mortal fear of some “Selinski”—or a name that sounded like that; and I did discover one point, that by Selinski he meant Cassavetti. When he found he had given that much away, he was so scared that I thought he was going to collapse again, as he did on the staircase.

And yet he had been entrusted with a pass-key to Cassavetti’s rooms!

Only two items seemed perfectly clear. That his “gracious lady” was in danger,—I put that question to him time after time, and his answer never varied,—and that he had come to warn her, to save her if possible.

I could not ascertain the nature of the danger. When I asked him he simply shook his head, and appeared more scared than ever; but I gathered that he would be

able to tell “the gracious lady,” and that she would understand, if he could only have speech with her. But when I pressed him on this idea of danger he did a curious thing. He picked up Cassavetti’s key, flattened the bit of red stuff on the palm of his hand, and held it towards me, pointing at it as if to indicate that here was the clue that he dare not give in words.

I looked at the thing with interest. A tawdry artificial flower, with five petals, and in a flash I understood that the hieroglyphic on the portrait represented the same thing,—a red geranium. But what did they mean, anyhow, and what connection was there between them? I could not imagine.

Finally I made him understand—or I thought I did—that he must come to me next day, in the morning; and meanwhile I would try and arrange that he should meet his “gracious lady.”

He grovelled again, and shuffled off, turning at every few steps to make a genuflection.

I half expected him to go up the stairs to Cassavetti’s rooms, but he did not. He went down. I followed two minutes later, but saw nothing of him, either on the staircase or the street. He had vanished as suddenly and mysteriously as he had appeared.

I whistled for a hansom, and, as the cab turned up Whitehall, Big Ben chimed a quarter to eight.

CHAPTER II

THE SAVAGE CLUB DINNER

Dinner was served by the time I reached the Cecil, and, as I entered the salon, and made my way towards the table where our seats were, I saw that my fears were realized. Anne was angry, and would not lightly forgive me for what she evidently considered an all but unpardonable breach of good manners.

I know Mary had arranged that Anne and I should sit together, but now the chair reserved for me was on Mary's left. Her husband sat at her right, and next him was Anne, deep in conversation with her further neighbor, who, as I recognized with a queer feeling of apprehension, was none other than Cassavetti himself!

Mary greeted me with a comical expression of dismay on her pretty little face.

"I'm sorry, Maurice," she whispered. "Anne would sit there. She's very angry. Where have you been, and why didn't you telephone? We gave you ten minutes' grace, and then came on, all together. It wasn't what you might call lively, for Jim had to sit bodkin between us, and Anne never spoke a word the whole way!"

Jim said nothing, but looked up from his soup and favored me with a grin and a wink. He evidently imagined the situation to be funny. I did not.

"I'll explain later, Mary," I said, and moved to the back of Anne's chair.

"Will you forgive me, Miss Pendennis?" I said humbly. "I was detained at the last moment by an accident. I rang you up, but failed to get an answer."

She turned her head and looked up at me, with a charming smile, in which I thought I detected a trace of contrition for her hasty condemnation of me.

"An accident? You are hurt?" she asked impulsively.

"No, it happened to some one else; and it concerns you, Cassavetti," I continued, addressing him, for, as I confessed that I was unhurt, Anne's momentary flash of compunction passed, and her perverse mood reasserted itself. With a slight shrug of her white shoulders she resumed her dinner, and though she must have heard what I told Cassavetti, she betrayed no sign of interest.

In as few words as possible I related the circumstances, suppressing only any mention of the discovery of Anne's portrait in the alien's possession, and our subsequent interview in my rooms. I remembered the man's terror of Cassavetti —or Selinski—as he had called him, and his evident conviction that he was in some way connected with the danger that threatened "the gracious lady," who, alas, seemed determined to be anything but gracious to me on this unlucky evening.

Cassavetti listened impassively. I watched his dark face intently, but could learn nothing from it, not even whether he had expected the man, or recognized him from my description.

"Without doubt one of my old pensioners," he said unconcernedly. "Strange that I should have missed him, for I was in my rooms before seven, and only left them to come on here. Accept my regrets, my friend, for the trouble he occasioned you, and my thanks for your kindness to him."

The words and the tone were courteous enough, and yet they roused in me a sudden fierce feeling of antagonism against this man, whom I had hitherto regarded as an interesting and pleasant acquaintance. For one thing, I saw that Anne had been listening to the brief colloquy, and had grasped the full significance of his remark as to the time when he returned to his rooms. The small head, with its gleaming crown of chestnut hair, was elevated with a proud little movement, palpable enough to my jealous and troubled eyes. I could not see her face, but I knew well that her eyes flashed stormy lightnings at that moment. Wonderful hazel eyes they were, changing with every mood, now dark and sombre as a starless night, now light and limpid as a Highland burn, laughing in the sunshine.

She imagined that the excuse I had made was invalid; for if, as Cassavetti inferred, his—and my—mysterious visitor had been off the premises before seven o'clock, I ought still to have been able to keep my appointment with her. Well, I would have to undeceive her later!

"Don't look so solemn, Maurice," Mary said, as I seated myself beside her. "Tell me all about everything, right now."

I repeated what I had already told Cassavetti.

"Well, I call that real interesting!" she declared. "If you'd left that poor old creature on the stairs, you'd never have forgiven yourself, Maurice. It sounds

like a piece out of a story, doesn't it, Jim?"

"You're right, my dear! A fairy story," chuckled Jim, facetiously. "You think so, anyhow, eh, Anne?"

Thus directly appealed to, she had to turn to him, and I heard him explaining his question, which she affected not to understand; heard also her answer, given with icy sweetness, and without even a glance in my direction.

"Oh, no, I am sure Mr. Wynn is not capable of inventing such an excuse."

Thereupon she resumed her conversation with Cassavetti. They were speaking in French, and appeared to be getting on astonishingly well together.

That dinner seemed interminable, though I dare say every other person in the room except my unlucky self—and perhaps Mary, who is the most sympathetic little soul in the world—enjoyed it immensely.

I told her of my forthcoming interview with Southbourne, and the probability that I would have to leave London within forty-eight hours. She imparted the news to Jim in a voice that must have reached Anne's ears distinctly; but she made no sign.

Was she going to continue my punishment right through the evening? It looked like it. If I could only have speech with her for one minute I would win her forgiveness!

My opportunity came at last, when, after the toast of "the King," chairs were pushed back and people formed themselves into groups.

A pretty woman at the next table—how I blessed her in my heart!—summoned Cassavetti to her side, and I boldly took the place he vacated.

Anne flashed a smile at me,—a real smile this time,—and said demurely:

"So you're not going to sulk all the evening—Maurice?"

This was carrying war into the opposite camp with a vengeance; but that was Anne's way.

I expect Jim Cayley set me down as a poor-spirited skunk, for showing no resentment; but I certainly felt none now. Anne was not a girl whom one could judge by ordinary standards. Besides, I loved her; and she knew well that one

smile, one gracious word, would compensate for all past capricious unkindness. Yes, she must have known that; too well, perhaps, just then.

“I told the truth just now, though not all of it,” I said, in a rapid undertone.

“I knew you were keeping something back,” she declared merrily. “And now you have taken your punishment, sir, you may give your full explanation.”

“I can’t here; I must see you alone. It is something very serious,—something that concerns you nearly.”

“Me! But what about your mysterious old man?”

“It concerns him, too—both of you—”

Even as I spoke, once more the incredibility of any connection between this glorious creature and that poor, starved, half-demented wreck of humanity, struck me afresh.

“But I can’t tell you now, as I said, and—hush—don’t let him hear; and beware of him, I implore you. No, it’s not mere jealousy,—though I can’t explain, here.” I had indicated Cassavetti with a scarcely perceptible gesture, for I knew that, though he was still talking to the pretty woman in black, he was furtively watching us.

A curious expression crossed Anne’s mobile face as she glanced across at him, from under her long lashes.

But her next words, spoken aloud, had no reference to my warning.

“Is it true that you are leaving town at once?”

“Yes. I may come to see you to-morrow?”

“Come as early as you like—in reason.”

That was all, for Cassavetti rejoined us, dragging up a chair in place of the one I had appropriated.

“So you and Mr. Wynn are neighbors,” she said gaily. “Though he never told me so.”

“Doubtless he considered me too insignificant,” replied Cassavetti, suavely enough, though I felt, rather than saw, that he eyed me malignantly.

“Oh, you are not in the least insignificant, though you are exasperatingly—how shall I put it?—opinionated,” she retorted, and turned to me. “Mr. Cassavetti has accused me of being a Russian.”

“Not accused—complimented,” he interpolated, with a deprecatory bow.

“You see?” Anne appealed to me in the same light tone, but our eyes met in a significant glance, and I knew that she had understood my warning, perhaps far better than I did myself; for after all I had been guided by instinct rather than knowledge when I uttered it.

“I have told him that I have never been in Russia,” she continued, “and he is rude enough to disbelieve a lady!”

“I protest—and apologize also,” asserted Cassavetti, “though you are smoking a Russian cigarette.”

“As two-thirds of the women here are doing. The others are non-smoking frumps,” she laughed.

“But you smoke them with such a singular grace.”

The words and tone were courtier-like, but their inference was unmistakable. I could have killed him for it! A swift glance from Anne commanded silence and self-restraint.

“You are a flatterer, Mr. Cassavetti,” she said in mock reproof. “Come along, good people; there’s plenty of room here!” as other acquaintances joined us. “Oh, some one’s going to recite—hush!”

The next hour or so passed pleasantly, and all too quickly. Anne was the centre of a merry group, and was now in her wittiest and most gracious mood. Cassavetti remained with us, speaking seldom, though he could be a brilliant conversationalist when he liked. He listened to Anne’s every word, watched every gesture, unobtrusively, but with a curious intentness.

Soon after ten, people began to leave, some who lived at a distance, others who would finish the evening elsewhere. Anne was going on to a birthday supper at Mrs. Dennis Sutherland’s house in Kensington, to which many theatrical friends had been bidden. The invitation was an impromptu one, given and accepted a few minutes ago, and now the famous actress came to claim her guest.

“Ready, Anne? Sorry you can’t come with us, Mr. Wynn; but come later if you can.”

We moved towards the door all together, Anne and her hostess with their hands full of red and white flowers. The “Savages” had raided the table decorations, and presented the spoils to their guests.

Cassavetti intercepted Anne.

“Good night, Miss Pendennis,” he said in a low voice, adding, in French, “Will you give me a flower as souvenir of our first meeting?”

She glanced at her posy, selected a spray of scarlet geranium, and presented it to him with a smile, and a word that I did not catch.

He looked at her more intently than ever as he took it.

“A thousand thanks, mademoiselle. I understand well,” he said, with a queer thrill in his voice, as of suppressed excitement.

As she passed on I heard him mutter in French: “The symbol! Then it is she! Yes, without doubt it is she!”

CHAPTER III

THE BLOOD-STAINED PORTRAIT

In the vestibule I hung around waiting till Anne and Mrs. Dennis Sutherland should reappear from the cloak-room.

It was close on the time when I was due at Whitehall Gardens, but I must have a parting word with Anne, even at the risk of being late for the appointment with my chief.

Jim and Mary passed through, and paused to say good night.

“It’s all right, Maurice?” Mary whispered. “And you’re coming to us to-morrow, anyhow?”

“Yes; to say good-bye, if I have to start on Monday.”

“Just about time you were on the war-path again, my boy,” said Jim, bluffly. “Idleness is demoralizing, ’specially in London.”

Now this was scarcely fair, considering that it was little more than a month since I returned from South Africa, where I had been to observe and report on the conditions of labor in the mines; nor had I been by any means idle during those weeks of comparative leisure. But I knew, of course, that this was an oblique reference to my affair with Anne; though why Jim should disapprove of it so strongly passed my comprehension. If Anne chose to keep me on tenter-hooks, well that was my affair, not his! Still, I wasn’t going to quarrel with Jim over his opinion, as I should have quarrelled with any other man.

Anne joined me directly, and we had two precious minutes together under the portico. Mrs. Sutherland’s carriage had not yet come into the courtyard, and she herself was chatting with folks she knew.

There were plenty of people about, coming and going, but Anne and I paced along out of the crowd, and paused in the shadow of one of the pillars.

She looked ethereal, ghostlike, in her long white cloak, with a filmy hood thing drawn loosely over her shining hair.

I thought her paler than usual—though that might have been the effect of the electric lights overhead—and her face was wistful, but very fair and sweet and innocent. One could scarcely believe it the same face that, a few minutes before, had been animated by audacious mischief and coquetry. Truly her moods were many, and they changed with every fleeting moment.

“I’ve behaved abominably to you all the evening,” she whispered tremulously. “And yet you’ve forgiven me.”

“There’s nothing to forgive. The queen can do no wrong,” I answered. (How Jim Cayley would have jeered at me if he could have heard!) “Anne, I love you. I think you must know that by this time, dear.”

“Yes, I know, and—and I am glad—Maurice, though I don’t deserve that you should love me. I’ve teased you so shamefully—I don’t know what possessed me!”

If I could only have kissed those faltering lips! But I dare not. We were within range of too many curious eyes. Still, I held her hand in mine, and our eyes met. In that brief moment we saw each into the other’s soul, and saw love there, the true love passionate and pure, that, once born, lasts forever, through life and death and all eternity.

She was the first to speak, breaking a silence that could have lasted but a fraction of time, but there are seconds in which one experiences an infinitude of joy or sorrow.

“And you are going away—so soon! But we shall meet to-morrow?”

“Yes, we’ll have one day, at least; there is so much to say—”

Then, in a flash, I remembered the old man and Cassavetti,—the mystery that enshrouded them, and her.

“I may not be able to come early, darling,” I continued hurriedly. “I have to see that old man in the morning. He says he knows you,—that you are in danger; I could not make out what he meant. And he spoke of Cassavetti; he came to see him, really. That was why I dare not tell you the whole story just now—”

“Cassavetti!” she echoed, and I saw her eyes dilate and darken. “Who is he—what is he? I never saw him before, but he came up and talked to Mr. Cayley, and asked to be introduced to me; and—and I was so vexed with you, Maurice,

that I began to flirt with him; and then—oh, I don't know—he is so strange—he perplexes—frightens me!"

"And yet you gave him a flower," I said reproachfully.

"I can't think why! I felt so queer, as if I couldn't help myself. I just had to give him one,—that one; and when I looked at him,—Maurice, what does a red geranium mean? Has it—"

"Mrs. Dennis Sutherland's carriage!" bawled a liveried official by the centre steps.

Mrs. Sutherland swept towards us.

"Come along, Anne," she cried, as we moved to meet her. "Perhaps we shall see you later, Mr. Wynn? You'll be welcome any time, up to one o'clock."

I put them into the carriage, and watched them drive away; then started, on foot, for Whitehall Gardens. The distance was so short that I could cover it more quickly walking than driving.

The night was sultry and overcast; and before I reached my destination big drops of rain were spattering down, and the mutter of thunder mingled with the ceaseless roll of the traffic.

I was taken straight to Lord Southbourne's sanctum, a handsomely furnished, but almost ostentatiously business-like apartment.

Southbourne himself, seated at a big American desk, was making hieroglyphics on a sheet of paper before him while he dictated rapidly to Harding, his private secretary, who manipulated a typewriter close by.

He looked up, nodded to me, indicated a chair, and a table on which were whiskey and soda and an open box of cigarettes, and invited me to help myself, all with one sweep of the hand, and without an instant's interruption of his discourse,—an impassioned denunciation of some British statesman who dared to differ from him—Southbourne—on some burning question of the day, Tariff Reform, I think; but I did not listen. I was thinking of Anne; and was only subconsciously aware of the hard monotonous voice until it ceased.

"That's all, Harding. Thanks. Good night," said Southbourne, abruptly.

He rose, yawned, stretched himself, sauntered towards me, subsided into an

easy-chair, and lighted a cigarette.

Harding gathered up his typed slips, exchanged a friendly nod with me, and quietly took himself off.

I knew Southbourne's peculiarities fairly well, and therefore waited for him to speak.

We smoked in silence for a time, till he remarked abruptly: "Carson's dead."

"Dead!" I ejaculated, in genuine consternation. I had known and liked Carson; one of the cleverest and most promising of Southbourne's "young men."

He blew out a cloud of smoke, watched a ring form and float away as if it were the only interesting thing in the world. Then he fired another word off at me.

"Murdered!"

He blew another smoke ring, and there was a spell of silence. I do not even now know whether his callousness was real or feigned. I hope it was feigned, though he affected to regard all who served him, in whatever capacity, as mere pieces in the ambitious game he played, to be used or discarded with equal skill and ruthlessness, and if an unlucky pawn fell from the board,—why it was lost to the game, and there was an end of it.

Murdered! It seemed incredible. I thought of Carson as I last saw him, the day before I started for South Africa, when we dined together and made a night of it. If I had been available when the situation became acute in Russia a few weeks later, Southbourne would have sent me instead of him; I should perhaps have met with his fate. I knew, of course, that at this time a "special" in Russia ran quite as many risks as a war correspondent on active service; but it was one thing to encounter a stray bullet or a bayonet thrust in the course of one's day's work,—say during an *émeute*,—and quite another to be murdered in cold blood.

"That's terrible!" I said huskily, at last. "He was such a splendid chap, too, poor Carson. Have you any details?"

"Yes; he was found in his rooms, stabbed to the heart. He must have been dead twenty-four hours or more."

"And the police have tracked the murderer?"

"No, and I don't suppose they will. They've so many similar affairs of their own

on hand, that an Englishman more or less doesn't count. The Embassy is moving in the matter, but it is very unlikely that anything will be discovered beyond what is known already,—that it was the work of an emissary of some secret society with which Carson had mixed himself up, in defiance of my instructions."

He paused and lighted another cigarette.

"How do you know he defied your instructions?" I burst out indignantly. The tone of his allusion to Carson riled me. "Don't you always expect us to send a good story, no matter how, or at what personal risk, we get the material?"

"Just so," he asserted calmly. "By the way, if you're in a funk, Wynn, you needn't go. I can get another man to take your place to-night."

"I'm not in a funk, and I mean to go, unless you want to send another man. If you do, send him and be damned to you both!" I retorted hotly. "Look here, Lord Southbourne; Carson never failed in his duty,—I'd stake my life on that! And I'll not allow you, or any man, to sneer at him when he's dead and can't defend himself!"

Southbourne dropped his cigarette and stared at me, a dusky flush rising under his sallow skin. That is the only time I have ever seen any sign of emotion on his impassive face.

"I apologize, Mr. Wynn," he said stiffly. "I ought not to have insinuated that you were afraid to undertake this commission. Your past record has proved you the very reverse of a coward! And, I assure you, I had no intention of sneering at poor Carson or of decrying his work. But from information in my possession I know that he exceeded his instructions; that he ceased to be a mere observer of the vivid drama of Russian life, and became an actor in it, with the result, poor chap, that he has paid for his indiscretion with his life!"

"How do you know all this?" I demanded. "How do you know—"

"That he was not in search of 'copy,' but in pursuit of his private ends, when he deliberately placed himself in peril? Well, I do know it; and that is all I choose to say on this point. I warned him at the outset,—as I need not have warned you,—that he must exercise infinite tact and discretion in his relations with the police, and the bureaucracy which the police represent; and also with the people,—the democracy. That he must, in fact, maintain a strictly impartial and impersonal

attitude and view-point. Well, that's just what he failed to do. He became involved with some secret society; you know as well as I do—better, perhaps—that Russia is honeycombed with 'em. Probably in the first instance he was actuated by curiosity; but I have reason to believe that his connection with this society was a purely personal affair. There was a woman in it, of course. I can't tell you just how he came to fall foul of his new associates, for I don't know. Perhaps they imagined he knew too much. Anyhow, he was found, as I have said, stabbed to the heart. There is no clue to the assassin, except that in Carson's clenched hand was found an artificial flower,—a red geranium, which—"

I started upright, clutching the arms of my chair. A red geranium! The bit of stuff dangling from Cassavetti's pass-key; the hieroglyphic on the portrait, the flower Anne had given to Cassavetti, and to which he seemed to attach so much significance. All red geraniums. What did they mean?

"The police declare it to be the symbol of a formidable secret organization which they have hitherto failed to crush; one that has ramifications throughout the world," Southbourne continued. "Why, man, what's wrong with you?" he added hastily.

I suppose I must have looked ghastly; but I managed to steady my voice, and answer curtly: "I'll tell you later. Go on, what about Carson?"

He rose and crossed to his desk before he answered, scrutinizing me with keen interest the while.

"That's all. Except that this was found in his breast-pocket; I got it by to-night's mail. It's in a horrid state; the blood soaked through, of course."

He picked up a small oblong card, holding it gingerly in his finger-tips, and handed it to me.

I think I knew what it was, even before I looked at it. A photograph of Anne Pendennis, identical—save that it was unframed—with that which was in the possession of the miserable old Russian, even to the initials, the inscription, and the red symbol beneath it!

CHAPTER IV

THE RIVER STEPS

“

This was found in Carson’s pocket?” I asked, steadying my voice with an effort.

He nodded.

I affected to examine the portrait closely, to gain a moment’s time. Should I tell him, right now, that I knew the original; tell him also of my strange visitant? No; I decided to keep silence, at least until after I had seen Anne, and cross-examined the old Russian again.

“Have you any clue to her identity?” I said, as I rose and replaced the blood-stained card on his desk.

“No. I’ve no doubt the Russian Secret Police know well enough who she is; but they don’t give anything away,—even to me.”

“They sent you that promptly enough,” I suggested, indicating the photograph with a fresh cigarette which I took up as I resumed my seat. I had managed to regain my composure, and have no doubt that Southbourne considered my late agitation was merely the outcome of my natural horror and astonishment at the news of poor Carson’s tragic fate. And now I meant to ascertain all he knew or suspected about the affair, without revealing my personal interest in it.

“Not they! It came from Von Eckhardt. It was he who found poor Carson; and he took possession of that”—he jerked his head towards the desk—“before the police came on the scene, and got it through.”

I knew what that meant,—that the thing had not been posted in Russia, but smuggled across the frontier.

I had met Von Eckhardt, who was on the staff of an important German newspaper, and knew that he and Carson were old friends. They shared rooms at St. Petersburg.

“Now why should Von Eckhardt run such a risk?” I asked.

“Can’t say; wish I could.”

“Where was he when poor Carson was done for?”

“At Wilna, he says; he’d been away for a week.”

“Did he tell you about this Society, and its red symbol?”

“’Pon my soul, you’ve missed your vocation, Wynn. You ought to have been a barrister!” drawled Southbourne. “No, I knew all that before. As a matter of fact, I warned Carson against that very Society,—as I’m warning you. Von Eckhardt merely told me the bare facts, including that about the bit of geranium Carson was clutching. I drew my own inference. Here, you may read his note.”

He tossed me a half-sheet of thin note-paper, covered on one side with Von Eckhardt’s crabbed German script.

It was, as he had said, a mere statement of facts, and I mentally determined to seize an early opportunity of interviewing Von Eckhardt when I arrived at Petersburg.

“You needn’t have troubled to question me,” resumed Southbourne, in his most nonchalant manner. “I meant to tell you the little I know,—for your own protection. This Society is one of those revolutionary organizations that abound in Russia, but more cleverly managed than most of them, and therefore all the more dangerous. Its members are said to be innumerable, and of every class; and there are branches in every capital of Europe. A near neighbor of yours, by the way, is under surveillance at this very moment, though I believe nothing definite has been traced to him.”

“Cassavetti!” I exclaimed with, I am sure, an excellent assumption of surprise.

“You’ve guessed it first time; though his name’s Vladimir Selinski. If you see him between now and Monday, when you must start, I advise you not to mention your destination to him, unless you’ve already done so. He was at the Savage Club dinner to-night, wasn’t he?”

One of Southbourne’s foibles was to pose as a kind of “Sherlock Holmes,” but I was not in the least impressed by this pretension to omniscience. He was a member of the club, and ought to have been at the dinner himself. If he had

looked down the list of guests he must have seen “Miss Anne Pendennis” among the names, and yet I believed he had not the slightest suspicion that she was the original of that portrait!

“I saw him there,” I said, “but I told him nothing of my movements; though we are on fairly good terms. Do you think I’m quite a fool, Lord Southbourne?”

He looked amused, and blew another ring before he answered, enigmatically: “David said in his haste ‘all men are liars.’ If he’d said at his leisure ‘all men are fools,—when there’s a woman in the case’—he’d have been nearer the mark!”

“What do you mean?” I demanded, hotly enough.

“Well, I also dined at the Cecil to-night, though not with the ‘Savages,’ and I happened to hear that you and Cassavetti—we’ll call him that—were looking daggers at each other, and that the lady, who was remarkably handsome, appeared to enjoy the situation! Who is she, Wynn? Do I know her?”

I watched him closely, but his face betrayed nothing.

“I think your informant must have been a—journalist, Lord Southbourne,” I said very quietly. “And we seem to have strayed pretty considerably from the point. I came here to take your instructions, and if I’m to start at nine on Monday I shall not see you again.”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“All right; we’ll get to business. Here’s the new code; get it off by heart between now and Monday, and destroy the copy. It’s safer. Here’s your passport, duly *viséd,* and a cheque. That’s all, I think. I don’t need to teach you your work. But I don’t want you to meet with such a fate as Carson’s; so I expect you to be warned by his example. And you are not to make any attempt to unravel the mystery of his death. I tell you that for your own safety! The matter has been taken up from the Embassy, and everything possible will be done to hunt the assassin down. Good-bye, and good luck!”

We shook hands and I went out into the night. It was now well past midnight, and the streets were even quieter than usual at that hour, for there had been a sharp storm while I was with Southbourne. I had heard the crash of thunder at intervals, and the patter of heavy rain all the time. Now the storm was over, the air was cool and fresh, the sky clear. The wet street gleamed silver in the moonlight, and was all but deserted. The traffic had thinned down to an

occasional hansom or private carriage, and there were few foot-passengers abroad. I did not meet a soul along the whole of Whitehall except the policemen, their wet mackintoshes glistening in the moonlight.

But, as I reached the corner of Parliament Square, I saw, just across the road, a man and woman walking rapidly in the direction of Westminster Bridge. I glanced at them casually, then looked again, more intently. The man looked like a sailor; he wore a pea-jacket and a peaked cap, while the woman was enveloped in a long dark cloak, and had a black scarf over her head. I saw a gleam of jewelled shoe-buckles as she picked her way daintily across the wet roadway to the further corner by the Houses of Parliament.

My heart seemed to stand still as I watched her. At any other time or place I would have sworn that I knew the tall, slender figure, the imperial poise of the head, the peculiarly graceful gait, swift but not hurried. I inwardly jeered at myself for my idiocy. My mind was so full of Anne Pendennis that I must imagine every tall, graceful woman was she! This lady was doubtless a resident in the southern suburbs, detained by the storm, and now on her way to one of the all-night trams that start from the far side of Westminster Bridge. There was quite a suburban touch in a woman in evening dress being escorted by a man in a pea-jacket. She might be an *artiste*, too poor to afford a cab home.

Nevertheless, while these thoughts ran through my mind, I was following the couple. They walked so swiftly that I did not decrease the distance between us. Half-way across the bridge I was intercepted by a beggar, who whined for “the price of a doss” and kept pace with me, till I got rid of him with the bestowal of a coin; but when I looked for the couple I was stalking they had disappeared.

I quickened my pace to a run, and at the further end looked anxiously ahead, but could see no trace of them. There were more people stirring in the Westminster Bridge Road, even at this hour; street hawkers starting home with their sodden barrows, the usual disreputable knot of loungers gathered around a coffee-stall; but those whom I looked for had vanished. Swiftly as they were walking they could scarcely have traversed the distance between the bridge and the trams in so short a time.

Had they gone down the steps to the river embankment? I paused and listened, thought I heard a faint patter, as of a woman’s high heels on the stone steps, and ran down the flight.

The paved walk below St. Thomas’ Hospital was deserted; I could see far in the

moonlight. But near at hand I heard the plash of oars. I looked around and saw that to the right there was a second flight of steps, almost under the shadow of the first arch of the bridge, and leading right down to the river.

I vaulted the bar that guarded the top of the flight and ran down the steps. Yes, there was the boat, with the sailor and another man pulling at the oars, and the woman sitting in the stern. The scarf had slipped back a little, and I saw the glint of her bright hair.

“Anne! Anne!” I cried desperately.

She heard and turned her face.

My God, it was Anne herself! For a second only I saw her face distinctly, then she pulled the scarf over it with a quick gesture; the boat shot under the dark shadow of the arches and disappeared.

I stood dumbfounded for some minutes, staring at the river, and trying to convince myself that I was mad—that I had dreamt the whole incident.

When at last I turned to retrace my steps I saw something dark lying at the top of the steps, stooped, and picked it up.

It was a spray of scarlet geranium!

CHAPTER V

THE MYSTERY THICKENS

When I regained the bridge I crossed to the further parapet and looked down at the river. I could see nothing of the boat; doubtless it had passed out of sight behind a string of barges that lay in the tideway. As I watched, the moon was veiled again by the clouds that rolled up from the west, heralding a second storm; and in another minute or so a fresh deluge had commenced.

But I scarcely heeded it. I leaned against the parapet staring at the dark, mysterious river and the lights that fringed and spanned it like strings of blurred jewels, seen mistily through the driving rain.

I was bareheaded, for the fierce gust of wind that came as harbinger of the squall had swept off my hat and whirled it into the water, where doubtless it would be carried down-stream, on the swiftly ebbing tide, in the wake of that boat which was hastening—whither? I don't think I knew at the time that my hat was gone. I have lived through some strange and terrible experiences; but I have seldom suffered more mental agony than I did during those few minutes that I stood in the rain on Westminster Bridge.

I was trembling from head to foot, my soul was sick, my mind distracted by the effort to find any plausible explanation of the scene I had just witnessed.

What was this mystery that encompassed the girl I loved; that had closed around her now? A mystery that I had never even suspected till a few hours ago, though I had seen Anne every day for this month past,—ever since I first met her.

But, after all, what did I know of her antecedents? Next to nothing; and that I had learned mainly from my cousin Mary.

Now I came to think of it, Anne had told me very little about herself. I knew that her father, Anthony Pendennis, came of an old family, and possessed a house and estate in the west of England, which he had let on a long lease. Anne had never seen her ancestral home, for her father lived a nomadic existence on the Continent; one which she had shared, since she left the school at Neuilly, where she and Mary first became friends.

I gathered that she and her father were devoted to each other; and that he had spared her unwillingly for this long-promised visit to her old school-fellow. Mary, I knew, would have welcomed Mr. Pendennis also; but by all accounts he was an eccentric person, who preferred to live anywhere rather than in England, the land of his birth. He and Anne were birds of passage, who wintered in Italy or Spain or Egypt as the whim seized him; and spent the summer in Switzerland or Tyrol, or elsewhere. In brief they wandered over Europe, north and south, according to the season; avoiding only the Russian Empire and the British Isles.

I had never worried my mind with conjectures as to the reason of this unconventional mode of living. It had seemed to me natural enough, as I, too, was a nomad; a stranger and sojourner in many lands, since I left the old homestead in Iowa twelve years ago, to seek my fortune in the great world. During these wonderful weeks I had been spellbound, as it were, by Anne's beauty, her charm. When I was with her I could think only of her; and in the intervals,—well, I still thought of her, and was dejected or elated as she had been cruel or kind. To me her many caprices had seemed but the outcome of her youthful light-heartedness; of a certain naïve coquetry, that rendered her all the more dear and desirable; "a rosebud set about with little wilful thorns;" a girl who would not be easily wooed and won, and, therefore, a girl well worth winning.

But now—now—I saw her from a different standpoint; saw her enshrouded in a dark mystery, the clue to which eluded me. Only one belief I clung to with passionate conviction, as a drowning man clings to a straw. She loved me. I could not doubt that, remembering the expression of her wistful face as we parted under the portico so short a time ago, though it seemed like a lifetime. Had she planned her flight even then,—if flight it was,—and what else could it be?

My cogitations terminated abruptly for the moment as a heavy hand was laid on my shoulder, and a gruff voice said in my ear: "Come, none o' that, now! What are you up to?"

I turned and faced a burly policeman, whom I knew well. He recognized me, also, and saluted.

"Beg pardon; didn't know it was you, sir. Thought it was one of these here sooicides, or some one that had had—well, a drop too much."

He eyed me curiously. I dare say I looked, in my hatless and drenched condition,

as if I might come under the latter category.

“It’s all right,” I answered, forcing a laugh. “I wasn’t meditating a plunge in the river. My hat blew off, and when I looked after it I saw something that interested me, and stayed to watch.”

It was a lame explanation and not precisely true. He glanced over the parapet in his turn. The rain was abating once more, and the light was growing as the clouds sped onwards. The moon was at full, and would only set at dawn.

“I don’t see anything,” he remarked. “What was it, sir? Anything suspicious?”

His tone inferred that it must have been something very much out of the common to have kept me there in the rain. Having told him so much I was bound to tell him more.

“A rowboat, with two or three people in it; going down-stream. That’s unusual at this time of night—or morning—isn’t it?”

He grinned widely.

“Was that all? It wasn’t worth the wetting you’ve got, sir!”

“I don’t see where the joke comes in,” I said.

“Well, sir, you newspaper gents are always on the lookout for mysteries,” he asserted, half apologetically. “There’s nothing out of the way in a boat going up or down-stream at any hour of the day or night; or if there was the river police would be on its track in a jiffy. They patrol the river same as we walk our beat. It might have been one of their boats you saw, or some bargees as had been making a night of it ashore. If I was you, I’d turn in as soon as possible. ’Tain’t good for any one to stand about in wet clothes.”

We walked the length of the bridge together, and he continued to hold forth loquaciously. We parted, on the best of terms, at the end of his beat; and following his advice, I walked rapidly homewards. I was chilled to the bone, and unutterably miserable, but if I stayed out all night that would not alter the situation.

The street door swung back under my touch, as I was in the act of inserting my latch-key in the lock. Some one had left it open, in defiance of the regulations, well known to every tenant of the block. I slammed it with somewhat

unnecessary vigor, and the sound went booming and echoing up the well of the stone staircase, making a horrible din, fit to wake the seven sleepers of Ephesus.

It did waken the housekeeper's big watch-dog, chained up in the basement, and he bayed furiously. I leaned over the balustrade and called out. He knew my voice, and quieted down at once, but not before his master had come out in his pyjamas, yawning and blinking. Poor old Jenkins, his rest was pretty frequently disturbed, for if any one of the bachelor tenants of the upper flats—the lower ones were let out as offices—forgot his street-door key, or returned in the small hours in a condition that precluded him from manipulating it, Jenkins would be rung up to let him in; and, being one of the best of good sorts, would certainly guide him up the staircase and put him comfortably to bed.

"I'm right down sorry, Jenkins," I called. "I found the street door open, and slammed it without thinking."

"Open! Well there, who could have left it open, going out or in?" he exclaimed, seeming more perturbed than the occasion warranted. "Must have been quite a short time back, for it isn't an hour since Caesar began barking like he did just now; and he never barks for nothing. I went right up the stairs and there was no one there and not a sound. The door was shut fast enough then, for I tried it. It couldn't have been Mr. Gray or Mr. Sellars, for they're away week ending, and Mr. Cassavetti came in before twelve. I met him on the stairs as I was turning the lights down."

"Perhaps he went out again to post," I suggested. "Good night, Jenkins."

"Good night, sir. You got caught in the storm, then?" He had just seen how wet I was, and eyed me curiously, as the policeman had done.

"Yes, couldn't see a cab and had to come through it. Lost my hat, too; it blew off," I answered over my shoulder, as I ran up the stairs. Lightly clad though he was, Jenkins seemed inclined to stay gossiping there till further orders.

When I got into my flat and switched on the lights, I found I still held, crumpled up in my hand, the bit of geranium I had picked up on the river steps. But for that evidence I might have persuaded myself that I had imagined the whole thing. I dropped the crushed petals into the waste-paper basket, and, as I hastily changed from my wet clothes into pyjamas, I mentally rehearsed the scene over and over again. Could I have been misled by a chance resemblance? Impossible. Anne was not merely a beautiful girl, but a strikingly distinctive personality. I

had recognized her figure, her gait, as I would have recognized them among a thousand; that fleeting glimpse of her face had merely confirmed the recognition. As for her presence in Westminster at a time when she should have been at Mrs. Dennis Sutherland's house in Kensington, or at home with the Cayleys in Chelsea, that could be easily accounted for on the presumption that she had not stayed long at Mrs. Sutherland's. Had the Cayleys already discovered her flight? Probably not. Was Cassavetti cognizant of it,—concerned with it in any way; and was the incident of the open door that had so perplexed Jenkins another link in the mysterious chain? At any rate, Cassavetti was not the man dressed as a sailor; though he might have been the man in the boat.

The more I brooded over it the more bewildered—distracted—my brain became. I tried to dismiss the problem from my mind, "to give it up," in fact; and, since sleep was out of the question, to occupy myself with preparations for the packing that must be done to-morrow—no, to-day, for the dawn had come—if I were to start for Russia on Monday morning.

But it was no use. I could not concentrate my mind on anything; also, though I'm an abstemious man as a rule, I guess I put away a considerable amount of whiskey. Anyhow, I've no recollection of going to bed; but I woke with a splitting headache, and a thirst I wouldn't take five dollars for, and the first things I saw were a whiskey bottle and soda syphon—both empty—on the dressing-table.

As I lay blinking at those silent witnesses—the bottle had been nearly full overnight—and trying to remember what had happened, there came a knock at my bedroom door, and Mrs. Jenkins came in with my breakfast tray.

She was an austere dame, and the glance she cast at that empty whiskey bottle was more significant and accusatory than any words could have been; though all she said was: "I knocked before, sir, with your shaving water, but you didn't hear. It's cold now, but I'll put some fresh outside directly."

I mumbled meek thanks, and, when she retreated, poured out some tea. I guessed there were eggs and bacon, the alpha and omega of British ideas of breakfast, under the dish cover; but I did not lift it. My soul—and my stomach—revolted at the very thought of such fare.

I had scarcely sipped my tea when I heard the telephone bell ring in the adjoining room. I scrambled up and was at the door when Mrs. Jenkins announced severely: "The telephone, Mr. Wynn," and retreated to the landing.

“Hello?”

“Is that Mr. Wynn?” responded a soft, rich, feminine voice that set my pulses tingling. “Oh, it is you, Maurice; I’m so glad. We rang you up from Chelsea, but could get no answer. You won’t know who it is speaking; it is I, Anne Pendennis!”

CHAPTER VI

“MURDER MOST FOUL”

“

I’m speaking from Charing Cross station; can you hear me?” the voice continued. “I’ve had a letter from my father; he’s ill, and I must go to him at once. I’m starting now, nine o’clock.”

I glanced at the clock, which showed a quarter to nine.

“I’ll be with you in five minutes—darling!” I responded, throwing in the last word with immense audacity. “*Au revoir*; I’ve got to hustle!”

I put up the receiver and dashed back into my bedroom, where my cold bath, fortunately, stood ready. Within five minutes I was running down the stairs, as if a sheriff and posse were after me, while Mrs. Jenkins leaned over the hand-rail and watched me, evidently under the impression that I was the victim of sudden dementia.

There was not a cab to be seen, of course; there never is one in Westminster on a Sunday morning, and I raced the whole way to Charing Cross on foot; tore into the station, and made for the platform whence the continental mail started. An agitated official tried to stop me at the barrier.

“Too late, sir, train’s off; here—stand away—stand away there!”

He yelled after me as I pushed past him and scooted along the platform. I had no breath to spare for explanations, but I dodged the porters who started forward to intercept me, and got alongside the car, where I saw Anne leaning out of the window.

“Where are you going?” I gasped, running alongside.

“Berlin. Mary has the address!” Anne called. “Oh, Maurice, let go; you’ll be killed!”

A dozen hands grasped me and held me back by main force.

“See you—Tuesday!” I cried, and she waved her hand as if she understood.

“It’s—all right—you fellows—I wasn’t trying—to board—the car—” I said in jerks, as I got my breath again, and I guess they grasped the situation, for they grinned and cleared off, as Mary walked up to me.

“Well, I must say you ran it pretty fine, Maurice,” she remarked accusatively. “And, my! what a fright you look! Why, you haven’t shaved this morning; and your tie’s all crooked!”

I put my hand up to my chin.

“I was only just awake when Anne rang me up,” I explained apologetically. “It’s exactly fifteen and a half minutes since I got out of bed; and I ran the whole way!”

“You look like it, you disreputable young man,” she retorted laughing. “Well, you’d better come right back to breakfast. You can use Jim’s shaving tackle to make yourself presentable.”

She marched me off to the waiting brougham, and gave me the facts of Anne’s hasty departure as we drove rapidly along the quiet, clean-washed, sunny streets.

“The letter came last night, but of course Anne didn’t get it till she came in this morning, about three.”

“Did you sit up for her?”

“Goodness, no! Didn’t you see Jim lend her his latch-key? We knew it would be a late affair,—that’s why we didn’t go,—and that some one would see her safe home, even if you weren’t there. The Amory’s motored her home in their car; they had to wait for the storm to clear. I had been sleeping the sleep of the just for hours, and never even heard her come in. She’ll be dead tired, poor dear, having next to no sleep, and then rushing off like this—”

“What’s wrong with Mr. Pendennis?” I interpolated. “Was the letter from him?”

“Why, certainly; who should it be from? We didn’t guess it was important, or we’d have sent it round to her at Mrs. Sutherland’s last night. He’s been sick for some days, and Anne believes he’s worse than he makes out. She only sent word to my room a little before eight; and then she was all packed and ready to go. Wild horses wouldn’t keep Anne from her father if he wanted her! We’re to send

her trunks on to-morrow."

While my cousin prattled on, I was recalling the events of a few hours back. I must have been mistaken, after all! What a fool I had been! Why hadn't I gone straight to Kensington after I left Lord Southbourne? I should have spared myself a good deal of misery. And yet—I thought of Anne's face as I saw it just now, looking out of the window, pale and agitated, just as it had looked in the moonlight last night. No! I might mentally call myself every kind of idiot, but my conviction remained fixed; it was Anne whom I had seen. Suppose she had left Mrs. Sutherland's early, as I had decided she must have done, when I racked my brains in the night. It was close on one o'clock when I saw her on the river; she might have landed lower down. I did not know—I do not know even now—if there were any steps like those by Westminster Bridge, where a landing could be effected; but suppose there were, she would be able to get back to Cayleys by the time she had said. But why go on such an expedition at all? Why? That was the maddening question to which I could not even suggest an answer.

"What was it you called to Anne about seeing her on Tuesday?" demanded Mary, who fortunately did not notice my preoccupation.

"I shall break my journey there."

"Of course. I forgot you were off to-morrow. Where to?"

"St. Petersburg."

"My! You'll have a lively time there by all accounts. Here we are; I hadn't time for breakfast, and I'm hungry. Aren't you?"

As we crossed the hall I saw a woman's dark cloak, flung across an oak settee. It struck me as being rather like that which Anne—if it were Anne—had worn. Mary picked it up.

"That oughtn't to be lying there. It's Mrs. Sutherland's. Anne borrowed it last night as her own was flimsy for a car. I must send it back to-day. Go right up to Jim's dressing-room, Maurice; you'll find all you want there."

She ran up the stairs before me, the cloak over her arm, little thinking how significant that cloak was to me.

I cut myself rather badly while shaving, and I evinced a poor appetite for breakfast. Jim and Mary, especially Jim, saw fit to rally me on that, and on my

solemn visage, which was not exactly beautified by the cut. I took myself off as soon after the meal as I decently could, on the plea of getting through with my packing; though I promised to return in the evening to say good-bye.

I had remembered my appointment with the old Russian, and was desperately anxious not to be out if he should come.

On one point I was determined. I would give no one, not even Mary, so much as a hint of the mysteries that were half-maddening me; at least until I had been able to seek an explanation of them from Anne herself.

My man never turned up, nor had he been there while I was absent, as I elicited by a casual inquiry of Jenkins as to whether any one had called.

I told him when I returned from the Cayleys that I was going away in the morning, and he came to lend a hand with the packing and clearing up.

“No, sir, not a soul’s been; the street door was shut all morning. I’d rather be rung up a dozen times than have bad characters prowling about on the staircase. There’s a lot of wrong ’uns round about Westminster! Seems quieter than usual up here to-day, don’t it, sir? With all the residentials away, except you.”

“Why, is Cassavetti away, too?” I asked, looking up.

“I think he must be, sir, for I haven’t seen or heard anything of him. But I don’t do for him as I do for you and the other gents. He does for himself, and won’t let me have a key, or the run of his rooms. His tenancy’s up in a week or two, and a pretty state we shall find ’em in, I expect! We shan’t miss him like we miss you, sir. Shall you be long away this time?”

“Can’t say, Jenkins. It may be one month or six—or forever,” I added, remembering Carson’s fate.

“Oh, don’t say that, sir,” remonstrated Jenkins.

“I wonder if Mr. Cassavetti is out. I’d like to say good-bye to him,” I resumed presently. “Go up and ring, there’s a good chap, Jenkins. And if he’s there, you might ask him to come down.”

It struck me that I might at least ascertain from Cassavetti what he knew of Anne. Why hadn’t I thought of that before?

Jenkins departed on his errand, and half a minute later I heard a yell that brought

me to my feet with a bound.

“Hello, what’s up?” I called, and rushed up the stairs, to meet Jenkins at the top, white and shaking.

“Look there, sir,” he stammered. “What is it? ’Twasn’t there this morning, when I turned the lights out, I’ll swear!”

He pointed to the door-sill, through which was oozing a sluggish, sinister-looking stream of dark red fluid.

“It’s—it’s blood!” he whispered.

I had seen that at the first glance.

“Shall I go for the police?”

“No,” I said sharply. “He may be only wounded.”

I went and hammered at the door, avoiding contact with that horrible little pool.

“Cassavetti! Cassavetti! Are you within, man?” I shouted; but there was no answer.

“Stand aside. I’m going to break the lock,” I cried.

I flung myself, shoulder first, against the lock, and caught at the lintel to save myself from falling, as the lock gave and the door swung inwards,—to rebound from something that it struck against.

I pushed it open again, entered sideways through the aperture, and beckoned Jenkins to follow.

Huddled up in a heap, almost behind the door, was the body of a man; the face with its staring eyes was upturned to the light.

It was Cassavetti himself, dead; stabbed to the heart.

CHAPTER VII

A RED-HAIRED WOMAN!

I bent over the corpse and touched the forehead tentatively with my finger-tips. It was stone cold. The man must have been dead many hours.

“Come on; we must send for the police; pull yourself together, man!” I said to Jenkins, who seemed half-paralyzed with fear and horror.

We squeezed back through the small opening, and I gently closed the door, and gripping Jenkins by the arm, marched him down the stairs to my rooms. He was trembling like a leaf, and scarcely able to stand alone.

“We’ve never had such a thing happen before,” he kept mumbling helplessly, over and over again.

I bade him have some whiskey, if he could find any, and remain there to keep an eye on the staircase, while I went across to Scotland Yard; for, through some inexplicable pig-headedness on the part of the police authorities, not even the headquarters was on the telephone.

The Abbey bells were ringing for afternoon service, and there were many people about, churchgoers and holiday makers in their Sunday clothes. The contrast between the sunny streets, with their cheerful crowds, and the silent sinister tragedy of the scene I had just left struck me forcibly.

If I had sent Jenkins on the errand, I guess he would have created quite a sensation. That is why I went myself; and I doubt if any one saw anything unusual about me, as I threaded my way quietly through the throng at Whitehall corner, where the ’buses stop to take up passengers.

A minute or two later I was in an inspector’s room at “the Yard,” giving my information to a little man who heard me out almost in silence, watching me keenly the while.

I imagine that I appeared quite calm. I could hear my own voice stating the bald facts succinctly, but, to my ears, it sounded like the voice of some one else, for it was with a great effort that I retained my composure. I knew that this strange and

terrible event which I had been the one to discover was only another link in the chain of circumstances, which, so far as my knowledge went, began less than twenty-four hours ago; a chain that threatened to fetter me, or the girl I loved. For my own safety I cared nothing. My one thought was to protect Anne, who must be, either fortuitously, or of her own will, involved in this tangled web of intrigue.

I should, of course, be subjected to cross-examination, and, on my way to Scotland Yard, I had decided just what I meant to reveal. I would have to relate how I encountered the old Russian, when he mistook my flat for Cassavetti's; but of the portrait in his possession, of our subsequent interview, and of the incident of the river steps, I would say nothing.

For the present I merely stated how Jenkins and I had discovered the fact that a murder had been committed.

"I dined in company with Mr. Cassavetti last night," I continued. "But before that—"

I was going to mention the mysterious Russian; but my auditor checked me.

"Half a minute, Mr. Wynn," he said, as he filled in some words on a form, and handed it to a police officer waiting inside the door. The man took the paper, saluted, and went out.

"I gather that you did not search the rooms? That when you found the man lying dead there, you simply came out and left everything as it was?"

"Yes. I saw at once we could do nothing; the poor fellow was cold and rigid."

I felt that I spoke dully, mechanically; but the horror of the thing was so strongly upon me, that, if I had relaxed the self-restraint I was exerting, I think I should have collapsed altogether. This business-like little official, who had received the news that a murder had been committed as calmly as if I had merely told him some one had tried to pick my pocket, could not imagine and must not suspect the significance this ghastly discovery held for me, or the maddening conjectures that were flashing across my mind.

"I wish every one would act as sensibly; it would save us a lot of trouble;" he remarked, closing his note-book, and stowing it, and his fountain pen, in his breast-pocket. "I will return with you now; my men will be there before we are, and the divisional surgeon won't be long after us."

The rooms were in great disorder, and had been subjected to an exhaustive search. Page 51

The rooms were in great disorder, and had been subjected to an exhaustive search. **Page 51**

We walked the short distance in silence; and when we turned the corner of the street where the block was situated, I saw that the news had spread, as such news always does, in some unaccountable fashion, for a little crowd had assembled, gazing at the closed street-door, and exchanging comments and ejaculations.

I pulled out my keys, but, for all the self-control I thought I was maintaining, my hand trembled so I could not fit the latch-key into the lock.

“Allow me,” said my companion, and took the bunch out of my shaking hand, just as the door was opened from within by a constable who had stationed himself in the lobby.

On the top landing we overtook another constable, and two plain-clothes officers, to whom Jenkins was volubly asserting his belief that it was none other than the assassin who had left the door open in the night.

The minute investigation that followed revealed several significant facts. One was that the assassin must have been in the rooms for some considerable time before Cassavetti returned,—to be struck down the instant he entered. The position of the body, just behind the door, proved that. Also he was still wearing his thin Inverness, and his hat had rolled to a corner of the little hall. He had not even had time to replace his keys in his trousers pocket; they dangled loosely from their chain, and jingled as the body was lifted and moved to the inner room.

The rooms were in great disorder, and had been subjected to an exhaustive search; even the books had been tumbled out of their shelves and thrown on the floor. But ordinary robbery was evidently not the motive, for there were several articles of value scattered about the room; nor had the body been rifled. Cassavetti wore a valuable diamond ring, which was still on his finger, as his gold watch was still in his breast-pocket; it had stopped at ten minutes to twelve.

“Run down, so that shows nothing,” the detective remarked, as he opened it and looked at the works. “Do you know if your friend carried a pocket-book, Mr. Wynn? He did? Then that’s the only thing missing. It was papers they were after, and I presume they got ’em!”

That was obvious enough, for not a scrap of written matter was discovered, nor the weapon with which the crime was committed.

“It’s a fairly straightforward case,” Inspector Freeman said complacently, later, when the gruesome business was over, and the body removed to the mortuary. “A political affair, of course; the man was a Russian revolutionary—we used to call ’em Nihilists a few years ago—and his name was no more Cassavetti than mine is! Now, Mr. Wynn, you told me you knew him, and dined with him last night. Do you care to give me any particulars, or would you prefer to keep them till you give evidence at the inquest?”

“I’ll give them you now, of course,” I answered promptly. “I can’t attend the inquest, for I’m leaving England to-morrow morning.”

“Then you’ll have to postpone your journey,” he said dryly. “For you’re bound to attend the inquest; you’ll be the most important witness. May I ask where you were going?”

I told him, and he nodded.

“So you’re one of Lord Southbourne’s young men? Thought I knew your face, but couldn’t quite place you,” he responded. “Hope you won’t meet with the same fate as your predecessor. A sad affair, that; we got the news on Friday. Sounds like much the same sort of thing as this”—he jerked his head towards the ceiling—“except that Mr. Carson was an Englishman, who never ought to have mixed himself up with a lot like that.”

Again came that expressive jerk of the head, and his small bright eyes regarded me more shrewdly and observantly than ever.

“Let me give you a word of warning, Mr. Wynn; don’t you follow his example. Remember Russia’s not England—”

“I know. I’ve been there before. Besides, my chief warned me last night.”

“Lord Southbourne? Just so; he knows a thing or two. Well, now about Cassavetti—”

I was glad enough to get back to the point; it was he and not I who had strayed from it, for I was anxious to get rid of him.

I gave him just the information I had decided upon, and flattered myself that I

did it with a candor that precluded even him from suspecting that I was keeping anything back. To my immense relief he refrained from any questioning, and at the end of my recital put up his pocket-book, and rose, holding out his hand.

“Well, you’ve given me very valuable assistance, Mr. Wynn. Queer old card, that Russian. We shouldn’t have much difficulty in tracing him, though you never can tell with these aliens. They’ve as many bolt holes as a rat. You say he’s the only suspicious looking visitor you’ve ever seen here?”

“The only one of any kind I’ve encountered who wanted Cassavetti. After all, I knew very little of him, and though we were such near neighbors, I saw him far more often about town than here.”

“You never by any chance saw a lady going up to his rooms, or on the staircase as if she might be going up there? A red-haired woman,—or fair-haired, anyhow —well-dressed?”

“Never!” I said emphatically, and with truth. “Why do you ask?”

“Because there was a red-haired woman in his flat last night. That’s all. Good day, Mr. Wynn.”

CHAPTER VIII

A TIMELY WARNING

It was rather late that evening when I returned to the Cayleys; for I had to go to the office, and write my report of the murder. It would be a scoop for the "Courier;" for, though the other papers might get hold of the bare facts, the details of the thrilling story I constructed were naturally exclusive. I made it pretty lurid, and put in all I had told Freeman, and that I intended to repeat at the inquest.

The news editor was exultant. He regarded a Sunday murder as nothing short of a godsend to enliven the almost inevitable dulness of the Monday morning's issue at this time of year.

"Lucky you weren't out of town, Wynn, or we should have missed this, and had to run in with the rest," he remarked with a chuckle.

Lucky!

"Wish I had been out of town," I said gloomily. "It's a ghastly affair."

"Get out! Ghastly!" he ejaculated with scorn. "Nothing's ghastly to a journalist, so long as it's good copy! You ought to have forgotten you ever possessed any nerves, long ago. Must say you look a bit off color, though. Have a drink?"

I declined with thanks. His idea of a drink in office hours, was, as I knew, some vile whiskey fetched from the nearest "pub," diluted with warm, flat soda, and innocent of ice. I'd wait till I got to Chelsea, where I was bound to happen on something drinkable. As a good American, Mary scored off the ordinary British housewife, who preserves a fixed idea that ice is a sinful luxury, even during a spell of sultry summer weather in London.

I drove from the office to Chelsea, and found Mary and Jim, with two or three others, sitting in the garden. The house was one of the few old-fashioned ones left in that suburb, redolent of many memories and associations of witty and famous folk, from Nell Gwynn to Thomas Carlyle; and Mary was quite proud of her garden, though it consisted merely of a small lawn and some fine old trees

that shut off the neighboring houses.

“At last! You very bad boy. We expected you to tea,” said Mary, as I came down the steps of the little piazza outside the drawing-room windows. “You don’t mean to tell me you’ve been packing all this time? Why, goodness, Maurice; you look worse than you did this morning! You haven’t been committing a murder, have you?”

“No, but I’ve been discovering one,” I said lamely, as I dropped into a wicker chair.

“A murder! How thrilling. Do tell us all about it,” cried a pretty, kittenish little woman whose name I did not know. Strange how some women have an absolutely ghoulish taste for horrors!

“Give him a chance, Mrs. Vereker,” interposed Jim hastily, with his accustomed good nature. “He hasn’t had a drink yet. Moselle cup, Maurice, or a long peg?”

He brought me a tall tumbler of whiskey and soda, with ice clinking deliciously in it; and I drank it and felt better.

“That’s good,” I remarked. “I haven’t had anything since I breakfasted with you,—forgot all about it till now. You see I happened to find the poor chap—Cassavetti—when I ran up to say good-bye to him.”

“Cassavetti!” cried Jim and Mary simultaneously, and Mary added: “Why, that was the man who sat next us—next Anne—at dinner last night, wasn’t it? The man the old Russian you told us about came to see?”

I nodded.

“The police are after him now; though the old chap seemed harmless enough, and didn’t look as if he’d the physical strength to murder any one,” I said, and related my story to a running accompaniment of exclamations from the feminine portion of my audience, especially Mrs. Vereker, who evinced an unholy desire to hear all the most gruesome details.

Jim sat smoking and listening almost in silence, his jolly face unusually grave.

“This stops your journey, of course, Maurice?” he said at length; and I thought he looked at me curiously. Certainly as I met his eyes he avoided my gaze as if in embarrassment; and I felt hot and cold by turns, wondering if he had divined

the suspicion that was torturing me—suspicion that was all but certainty—that Anne Pendennis was intimately involved in the grim affair. He had always distrusted her.

“For a day or two only. Even if the inquest is adjourned, I don’t suppose I’ll have to stop for the further hearing,” I answered, affecting an indifference I was very far from feeling.

“Then you won’t be seeing Anne as soon as you anticipated,” Mary remarked. “I must write to her to-morrow. She’ll be so shocked.”

“Did Miss Pendennis know this Mr. Cassavetti?” inquired Mrs. Vereker.

“We met him at the dinner last night for the first time. Jim and Maurice knew him before, of course. He seemed a very fascinating sort of man.”

“Where is Miss Pendennis, by the way?” pursued the insatiable little questioner. “I was just going to ask for her when Mr. Wynn turned up with his news.”

“Didn’t I tell you? She left for Berlin this morning; her father’s ill. She had to rush to get away.”

“To rush! I should think so,” exclaimed Mrs. Vereker. “Why, she was at Mrs. Dennis Sutherland’s last night; though I only caught a glimpse of her. She left so early; I suppose that was why—”

I stumbled to my feet, feeling sick and dizzy, and upset the little table with my glass that Jim had placed at my elbow.

“Sorry, Mary, I’m always a clumsy beggar,” I said, forcing a laugh. “I’ll ask you to excuse me. I must get back to the office. I’ve to see Lord Southbourne when he returns. He’s been out motoring all day.”

“Oh, but you’ll come back here and sleep,” Mary protested. “You can’t go back to that horrible flat—”

“Nonsense!” I said almost roughly. “There’s nothing wrong with the flat. Do you suppose I’m a child or a woman?”

She ignored my rudeness.

“You look very bad, Maurice,” she responded, almost in a whisper, as we moved towards the house. I was acutely conscious that the others were watching my

retreat; especially that inquisitive little Vereker woman, whom I was beginning to hate. When we entered the dusk of the drawing-room, out of range of those curious eyes, I turned on my cousin.

“Mary—for God’s sake—don’t let that woman—or any one else, speak of—Anne—in connection with Cassavetti,” I said, in a hoarse undertone.

“Anne! Why, what on earth do you mean?” she faltered.

“He doesn’t mean anything, except that he’s considerably upset,” said Jim’s hearty voice, close at hand. He had followed us in from the garden. “You go back to your guests, little woman, and make ’em talk about anything in the world except this murder affair. Try frocks and frills; when Amy Vereker starts on them there’s no stopping her; and if they won’t serve, try palmistry and spooks and all that rubbish. Leave Maurice to me. He’s faint with hunger, and inclined to make an ass of himself even more than usual! Off with you!”

Mary made a queer little sound, that was half a sob, half a laugh.

“All right; I’ll obey orders for once, you dear, wise old Jim. Make him come back to-night, though.”

She moved away, a slender ghostlike little figure in her white gown; and Jim laid a heavy, kindly hand on my shoulder.

“Buck up, Maurice; come along to the dining-room and feed, and then tell me all about it.”

“There’s nothing to tell,” I persisted. “But I guess you’re right, and hunger’s what’s wrong with me.”

I managed to make a good meal—I was desperately hungry now I came to think of it—and Jim waited on me solicitously. He seemed somehow relieved that I manifested a keen appetite.

“That’s better,” he said, as I declined cheese, and lighted a cigarette. “‘When in difficulties have a square meal before you tackle ’em; that’s my maxim,—original, and worth its weight in gold. I give it you for nothing. Now about this affair; it’s more like a melodrama than a tragedy. You know, or suspect, that Anne Pendennis is mixed up in it?”

“I neither know nor suspect any such thing,” I said deliberately. I had recovered

my self-possession, and the lie, I knew, sounded like truth, or would have done so to any one but Jim Cayley.

“Then your manner just now was inexplicable,” he retorted quietly. “Now, just hear me out, Maurice; it’s no use trying to bluff me. You think I am prejudiced against this girl. Well, I’m not. I’ve always acknowledged that she’s handsome and fascinating to a degree, though, as I told you once before, she’s a coquette to her finger-tips. That’s one of her characteristics, that she can’t be held responsible for, any more than she can help the color of her hair, which is natural and not touched up, like Amy Vereker’s, for instance! Besides, Mary loves her; and that’s a sufficient proof, to me, that she is ‘O. K.’ in one way. You love her, too; but men are proverbially fools where a handsome woman is concerned.”

“What are you driving at, Jim?” I asked. At any other time I would have resented his homily, as I had done before, but now I wanted to find out how much he knew.

“A timely warning, my boy. I suspect, and you know, or I’m very much mistaken, that Anne Pendennis had some connection with this man who is murdered. She pretended last night that she had never met him before; but she had,—there was a secret understanding between them. I saw that, and so did you; and I saw, too, that her treatment of you was a mere ruse, though Heaven knows why she employed it! I can’t attempt to fathom her motive. I believe she loves you, as you love her; but that she’s not a free agent. She’s not like an ordinary English girl whose antecedents are known to every one about her. She, and her father, too, are involved in some mystery, some international political intrigues, I’m pretty sure, as this unfortunate Cassavetti was. I don’t say that she was responsible for the murder. I don’t believe she was, or that she had any personal hand in it—”

I had listened as if spellbound, but now I breathed more freely. Whatever his suspicions were, they did not include that she was actually present when Cassavetti was done to death.

“But she was most certainly cognizant of it, and her departure this morning was nothing more or less than flight,” he continued. “And—I tell you this for her sake, as well as for your own, Maurice—your manner just now gave the whole game away to any one who has any knowledge or suspicion of the facts. Man alive, you profess to love Anne Pendennis; you do love her; I’ll concede that much. Well, do you want to see her hanged, or condemned to penal servitude for

life?”

CHAPTER IX

NOT AT BERLIN

“

Hanged, or condemned to penal servitude for life.”

There fell a dead silence after Jim Cayley uttered those ominous words. He waited for me to speak, but for a minute or more I was dumb. He had voiced the fear that had been on me more or less vaguely ever since I broke open the door and saw Cassavetti’s corpse; and that had taken definite shape when I heard Freeman’s assertion concerning “a red-haired woman.”

And yet my whole soul revolted from the horrible, the appalling suspicion. I kept assuring myself passionately that she was, she must be, innocent; I would stake my life on it!

Now, after that tense pause, I turned on Jim furiously.

“What do you mean? Are you mad?” I demanded.

“No, but I think you are,” Jim answered soberly. “I’m not going to quarrel with you, Maurice, or allow you to quarrel with me. As I told you before, I am only warning you, for your own sake, and for Anne’s. You know, or suspect at least __”

“I don’t!” I broke in hotly. “I neither know nor suspect that—that she—Jim Cayley, would you believe Mary to be a murderess, even if all the world declared her to be one? Wouldn’t you—”

“Stop!” he said sternly. “You don’t know what you’re saying, you young fool! My wife and Anne Pendennis are very different persons. Shut up, now! I say you’ve got to hear me! I have not accused Anne Pendennis of being a murderess. I don’t believe she is one. But I do believe that, if once suspicion is directed towards her, she would find it very difficult, if not impossible, to prove her innocence. You ought to know that, too, and yet you are doing your best, by your ridiculous behavior, to bring suspicion to bear on her.”

“I!”

“Yes, you! If you want to save her, pull yourself together, man; play your part for all it’s worth. It’s an easy part enough, if you’d only dismiss Anne Pendennis from your mind; forget that such a person exists. You’ve got to give evidence at this inquest. Well, give it straightforwardly, without worrying yourself about any side issues; and, for Heaven’s sake, get and keep your nerves under control, or —”

He broke off, and we both turned, as the door opened and a smart parlor-maid tripped into the room.

“Beg pardon, sir. I didn’t know you were here,” she said with the demure grace characteristic of the well-trained English servant. “It’s nearly supper-time, and I came to see if there was anything else wanted. I laid the table early.”

“All right, Marshall. I’ve been giving Mr. Wynn some supper, as he has to be off. You needn’t sound the gong for a few minutes.”

“Very well, sir. If you’d ring when you’re ready, I’ll put the things straight.”

She retreated as quietly as she had come, and I think we both felt that her entrance and exit relieved the tension of our interview.

I rose and held out my hand.

“Thanks, Jim. I can’t think how you know as much as you evidently do; but, anyhow, I’ll take your advice. I’ll be off, now, and I won’t come back to-night, as Mary asked me to. I’d rather be alone. See you both to-morrow. Good night.”

I walked back to Westminster, lingering for a considerable time by the river, where the air was cool and pleasant. The many pairs of lovers promenading the tree-shaded Embankment took no notice of me, or I of them.

As I leaned against the parapet, watching the swift flowing murky tide, I argued the matter out.

Jim was right. I had behaved like an idiot in the garden just now. Well, I would take his advice and buck up; be on guard. I would do more than that. I would not even vex myself with conjectures as to how much he knew, or how he had come by that knowledge. It was impossible to adopt one part of his counsel—impossible to “forget that such a person as Anne Pendennis ever existed;” but I

would only think of her as the girl I loved, the girl whom I would see in Berlin within a few days.

I wrote to her that night, saying nothing of the murder, but only that I was unexpectedly detained, and would send her a wire when I started, so that she would know when to expect me. Once face to face with her, I would tell her everything; and she would give me the key to the mystery that had tortured me so terribly. But I must never let her know that I had doubted her, even for an instant!

The morning mail brought me an unexpected treasure. Only a post-card, pencilled by Anne herself in the train, and posted at Dover.

It was written in French, and was brief enough; but, for the time being, it changed and brightened the whole situation.

> “I scarcely hoped to see you at the station, *mon ami*; there was so little time. What haste you must have made to get there at all! Shall I really see you in Berlin? I do want you to know my father. And you will be able to tell me your plans. I don’t even know your destination! The Reichshof, where we stay, is in Friedrich Strasse, close to Unter den Linden. *Au revoir!*
>
> A. P.”

A simple message, but it meant much to me. I regarded it as a proof that her hurried journey was not a flight, but a mere coincidence.

Mary had a post-card, too, from Calais; just a few words with the promise of a letter at the end of the journey. She showed it to me when I called round at Chelsea on Monday evening to say good-bye once more. The inquest opened that morning, and was adjourned for a week. Only formal and preliminary evidence was taken—my own principally; and I was able to arrange to leave next day. Inspector Freeman made the orthodox statement that “the police were in possession of a clue which they were following up;” and I had a chat with him afterwards, and tried to ferret out about the clue, but he was close as wax.

We parted on the best of terms, and I was certain he did not guess that my interest in the affair was more than the natural interest of one who was as personally concerned in it as I was, with the insatiable curiosity of the journalist superadded. Whatever I had been yesterday, I was fully master of myself to-day.

Jim was out when I reached Chelsea, somewhat to my relief; and Mary was alone for once.

She welcomed me cordially, as usual, and commended my improved appearance.

“I felt upset about you last night, Maurice; you weren’t a bit like yourself. And what on earth did you mean in the drawing-room—about Anne?” she asked.

“Sheer madness,” I said, with a laugh. “Jim made that peg too strong, and I’m afraid I was—well, a bit screwed. So fire away, if you want to lecture me; though, on my honor, it was the first drink I’d had all day!”

I knew by the way she had spoken that Jim had not confided his suspicions to her. I didn’t expect he would.

She accepted my explanation like the good little soul she is.

“I never thought of that. It’s not like you, Maurice. But I won’t lecture you this time, though you did scare me! I guess you felt pretty bad after finding that poor fellow. I felt shuddery enough even at the thought of it, considering that we knew him, and had all been together such a little while before. Has the murderer been found yet?”

“Not that I know of. The inquest’s adjourned, and I’m off to-morrow. I’ll have to come back if necessary; but I hope it won’t be. Any message for Anne? I shall see her on Wednesday.”

“No, only what I’ve already written: that I hope her father’s better, and that she’d persuade him to come back with her. She was to have stayed with us all summer, as you know; and I’m not going to send her trunks on till she writes definitely that she can’t return. My private opinion of Mr. Pendennis is that he’s a cranky and exacting old pig! He resented Anne’s leaving him, and I surmise this illness of his is only a ruse to get her back again. Anne ought to be firmer with him!”

I laughed. Mary, as I knew, had always been “firm” with her “poppa,” in her girlish days; had, in fact, ruled him with a rod of iron—cased in velvet, indeed, but inflexible, nevertheless!

I started on my delayed journey next morning, and during the long day and night of travel my spirits were steadily on the up-grade.

Cassavetti, the murder, all the puzzling events of the last few days, receded to my mental horizon—vanished beyond it—as boat and train bore me swiftly onwards, away from England, towards Anne Pendennis.

Berlin at last. I drove from the Potsdam station to the nearest barber’s,—I needed a shave badly, though I had made myself otherwise fairly spick and span in the toilet car,—and thence to the hotel Anne had mentioned.

She would be expecting me, for I had despatched the promised wire when I started.

“Send my card up to Fraulein Pendennis at once,” I said to the waiter who came forward to receive me.

He looked at me—at the card—but did not take it.

“Fraulein Pendennis is not here,” he asserted. “Herr Pendennis has already departed, and the Fraulein has not been here at all!”

CHAPTER X

DISQUIETING NEWS

I stared at the man incredulously.

“Herr Pendennis has departed, and the Fraulein has not been here at all!” I repeated. “You must be mistaken, man! The Fraulein was to arrive here on Monday, at about this time.”

He protested that he had spoken the truth, and summoned the manager, who confirmed the information.

Yes, Herr Pendennis had been unfortunately indisposed, but the sickness had not been so severe as to necessitate that the so charming and dutiful Fraulein should hasten to him. He had a telegram received,—doubtless from the Fraulein herself,—and thereupon with much haste departed. He drove to the Friedrichstrasse station, but that was all that was known of his movements. Two letters had arrived for Miss Pendennis, which her father had taken, and there was also a telegram, delivered since he left.

Both father and daughter, it seemed, were well known at the hotel, where they always stayed during their frequent visits to the German capital.

I was keenly disappointed. Surely some malignant fate was intervening between Anne and myself, determined to keep us apart. Why had she discontinued her journey; and had she returned to England,—to the Cayleys? If not, where was she now? Unanswerable questions, of course. All I could do was to possess my soul in patience, and hope for tidings when I reached my destination. And meanwhile, by breaking my journey here, for the sole purpose of seeing her, I had incurred a delay of twelve hours.

One thing at least was certain,—her father could not have left Berlin for the purpose of meeting her *en route*, or he would not have started from the Friedrichstrasse station.

With a rush all the doubts and perplexities that I had kept at bay, even since I received Anne’s post-card, re-invaded my mind; but I beat them back resolutely.

I would not allow myself to think, to conjecture.

I moped around aimlessly for an hour or two, telling myself that Berlin was the beastliest hole on the face of the earth. Never had time dragged as it did that morning! I seemed to have been at a loose end for a century or more by noon, when I found myself opposite the entrance of the Astoria Restaurant.

“When in difficulties—feed,” Jim Cayley had counselled, and a long lunch would kill an hour or so, anyhow.

I had scarcely settled myself at a table when a man came along and clapped me on the shoulder.

“Wynn, by all that’s wonderful. What are you doing here, old fellow?”

It was Percy Medhurst, a somewhat irresponsible, but very decent youngster, whom I had seen a good deal of in London, one way and another. He was a clerk in the British Foreign Office, but I hadn’t the least idea that he had been sent to Berlin. He had dined at the Cayleys only a week or two back.

“I’m feeding—or going to feed. What are you doing here?” I responded, as we shook hands. I was glad to see him. Even his usually frivolous conversation was preferable to my own meditations at the moment.

“Just transferred, regular stroke of luck. Only got here last night; haven’t reported myself for duty yet. I say, old chap, you look rather hipped. What’s up?”

“Hunger,” I answered laconically. “And I guess that’s easily remedied. Come and join me.”

We talked of indifferent matters for a time, or rather he did most of the talking.

“Staying long?” he asked at last, as we reached the coffee and liqueur stage. We had done ourselves very well, and I, at least, felt in a much more philosophic frame of mind than I had done for some hours past.

“No, only a few hours. I’m *en route* for Petersburg.”

“What luck; wish I was. Berlin’s all right, of course, but a bit stodgy; and they’re having a jolly lot of rows at Petersburg,—with more to come. I say, though, what an awful shame about that poor chap Carson. Have you heard of it?”

“Yes; I’m going to take his place. What do you know about him, anyhow?”

“You are? I didn’t know him at all; but I know a fellow who was awfully thick with him. Met him just now. He’s frightfully cut up about it all. Swears he’ll hunt down the murderer sooner or later—”

“Von Eckhardt? Is he here?” I ejaculated.

“Yes. D’you know him? An awfully decent chap,—for a German; though he’s always spouting Shakespeare, and thinks me an ass, I know, because I tell him I’ve never read a line of him, not since I left Bradfield, anyhow. Queer how these German johnnies seem to imagine Shakespeare belongs to them! You should have heard him just now!

‘He was my friend, faithful and just to me,’

—and raving about his heart being in the coffin with Caesar; suppose he meant Carson. ’Pon my soul I could hardly keep a straight face; but I daren’t laugh. He was in such deadly earnest.”

I cut short these irrelevant comments on Von Eckhardt’s verbal peculiarities, with which I was perfectly familiar.

“How long’s he here for?”

“Don’t know. Rather think, from what he said, that he’s chucked up his post on the *Zeitung*—”

“What on earth for?”

“How should I know? I tell you he’s as mad as a hatter.”

“Wonder where I’d be likely to find him; not at the *Zeitung* office, if he’s left. I must see him this afternoon. Do you know where he hangs out, Medhurst?”

“With his people, I believe; somewhere in Charlotten Strasse or thereabouts. I met him mooning about in the Tiergarten this morning.”

I called a waiter and sent him for a directory. There were scores of Von Eckhardts in it, and I decided to go to the *Zeitung* office, and ascertain his address there.

Medhurst volunteered to walk with me.

“How are the Cayleys?” he asked, as we went along. “Thought that handsome Miss Pendennis was going to stay with them all the summer. By Jove, she is a ripper. You were rather gone in that quarter, weren’t you, Wynn?”

I ignored this last remark.

“How did you know Miss Pendennis had left?” I asked, with assumed carelessness.

“Why? Because I met her at Ostend on Sunday night, to be sure. I week-ended there, you know. Thought I’d have a private bit of a spree, before I had to be officially on the *Spree*.”

He chuckled at the futile pun.

“You saw Anne Pendennis at Ostend. Are you certain it was she?” I demanded.

“Of course I am. She looked awfully fetching, and gave me one of her most gracious bows—”

“You didn’t speak to her?” I pursued, throwing away the cigarette I had been smoking. My teeth had met in the end of it as I listened to this news.

My ingenuous companion seemed embarrassed by the question.

“Well, no; though I’d have liked to. But—fact is, I—well, of course, I wasn’t alone, don’t you know; and though she was a jolly little girl—she—I couldn’t very well have introduced her to Miss Pendennis. Anyhow, I shouldn’t have had the cheek to speak to her; she was with an awfully swagger set. Count Loris Solovieff was one of ’em. He’s really the Grand Duke Loris, you know, though he prefers to go about incog. more often than not. He was talking to Miss Pendennis. Here’s the office. I won’t come in. Perhaps I’ll turn up and see you off to-night. If I don’t, good-bye and good luck; and thanks awfully for the lunch.”

I was thankful to be rid of him. I dare not question him further. I could not trust myself to do so; for his words had summoned that black horde of doubts to the attack once more, and this time they would not be vanquished.

Small wonder that I had not found Anne Pendennis at Berlin! What was she doing at Ostend, in company with “a swagger set” that included a Russian Grand Duke? I had heard many rumors concerning this Loris, whom I had never seen;

rumors that were the reverse of discreditable to him. He was said to be different from most of his illustrious kinsfolk, inasmuch that he was an enthusiastic disciple of Tolstoy, and had been dismissed from the Court in disgrace, on account of his avowed sympathy with the revolutionists.

But what connection could he have with Anne Pendennis?

And she,—she! Were there any limits to her deceit, her dissimulation? She was a traitress certainly; perhaps a murderess.

And yet I loved her, even now. I think even more bitter than my disillusion was the conviction that I must still love her, though I had lost her—forever!

CHAPTER XI

“LA MORT OU LA VIE!”

I took a cab from the newspaper office to Von Eckhardt’s address,—a flat in the west end.

I found him, as Medhurst had reported, considerably agitated. He is a good-hearted chap, and a brilliant writer, though he’s too apt to allow his feelings to carry him away; for he’s even more sentimental than the average German, and entirely lacking in the characteristic German phlegm. He is as vivacious and excitable as a Frenchman, and I fancy there’s a good big dash of French blood in his pedigree, though he’d be angry if any one suggested such a thing!

He did not know me for a moment, but when I told him who I was he welcomed me effusively.

“Ah, now I remember; we met in London, when I was there with my poor friend. ‘We heard at midnight the clock,’ as our Shakespeare says. And you are going to take his place? I have not yet the shock recovered of his death; from it I never shall recover. O judgment, to brutish beasts hast thou fled, and their reason men have lost. My heart, with my friend Carson, in its coffin lies, and me, until it returns, you must excuse!”

I surmised that he was quoting Shakespeare again, as he had to Medhurst. I wanted to smile, though I was so downright wretched. He would air what he conceived to be his English, and he was funny!

“Would you mind speaking German?” I asked, for there was a good deal I wanted to learn from him, and I guessed I should get at it all the sooner if I could head him off from his quotations. His face fell, and I hastened to add—

“Your English is splendid, of course, and you’ve no possible need to practise it; but my German’s rusty, and I’d be glad to speak a bit. Just you pull me up, if you can’t understand me, and tell me what’s wrong.”

My German is as good as most folks’, any day, but he just grabbed at my explanation, and accepted it with a kindly condescension that was even funnier

than his sentimental vein. Therefore the remainder of our conversation was in his own language.

“I hear you’ve left the *Zeitung*,” I remarked. “Going on another paper?”

“The editor of the *Zeitung* dismissed me,” he answered explosively. “Pig that he is, he would not understand the reason that led to my ejection from Russia!”

“Conducted to the frontier, and shoved over, eh? How did that happen?” I asked.

“Because I demanded justice on the murderers of my friend,” he declared vehemently. “I went to the chief of the police, and he laughed at me. There are so many murders in Petersburg, and what is one Englishman more or less? I went to the British Embassy. They said the matter was being investigated, and they emphatically snubbed me. They are so insular, so narrow-minded; they could not imagine how strong was the bond of friendship between Carson and me. He loved our Shakespeare, even as I love him.”

“You wrote to Lord Southbourne,” I interrupted bluntly. “And you sent him a portrait,—a woman’s portrait that poor Carson had been carrying about in his breast-pocket. Now why did you do that? And who is the woman?”

His answer was startling.

“I sent it to him to enable him to recognize her, and warn her if he could find her. I knew she was in London, and in danger of her life; and I knew of no one whom I could summon to her aid, as Carson would have wished, except Lord Southbourne, and I only knew him as my friend’s chief.”

“But you never said a word of all this in the note you sent to Southbourne with the photograph. I know, for he showed it me.”

“That is so; I thought it would be safer to send the letter separately; I put a mere slip in with the photograph.”

Had Southbourne received that letter? If so, why had he not mentioned it to me, I thought; but I said aloud: “Who is the woman? What is her name? What connection had she with Carson?”

“He loved her, as all good men must love her, as I myself, who have seen her but once,—so beautiful, so gracious, so devoted to her country, to the true cause of freedom,—‘a most triumphant lady’ as our Sha—”

“Her name, man; her name!” I cried somewhat impatiently.

“She is known under several,” he answered a trifle sulkily. “I believe her real name is Anna Petrovna—”

That conveyed little; it is as common a name in Russia as “Ann Smith” would be in England, and therefore doubtless a useful alias.

“But she has others, including two, what is it you call them—neck names?”

“Nicknames; well, go on.”

“In Russia those who know her often speak of her by one or the other,—‘La Mort,’ or ‘La Vie,’ it is safer there to use a pseudonym. ‘La Mort’ because they say,—they are superstitious fools,—that wherever she goes, death follows, or goes before; and ‘La Vie’ because of her courage, her resource, her enthusiasm, her so-inspiring personality. Those who know, and therefore love her most, call her that. But, as I have said, she has many names, an English one among them; I have heard it, but I cannot recall it. That is one of my present troubles.”

“Was it ‘Anne Pendennis,’ or anything like that?” I asked, huskily.

“Ach, that is it; you know her, then?”

“Yes, I know her; though I had thought her an English woman.”

“That is her marvel!” he rejoined eagerly. “In France she is a Frenchwoman; in Germany you would swear she had never been outside the Fatherland; in England an English maiden to the life, and in Russia she is Russian, French, English, German,—American even, with a name to suit each nationality. That is how she has managed so long to evade her enemies. The Russian police have been on her track these three years; but they have never caught her. She is wise as the serpent, harmless as the dove—”

I had to cut his rhapsodies short once more.

“What is the peril that threatens her? She was in England until recently; the Secret Police could not touch her there?”

“It is not the police now. They are formidable,—yes,—when their grasp has closed on man or woman; but they are incredibly stupid in many ways. See how often she herself has slipped through their fingers! But this is far more dangerous. She has fallen under the suspicion of the League.”

“The League that has a red geranium as its symbol?”

He started, and glanced round as if he suspected some spy concealed even in this, his own room.

“You know of it?” he asked in a low voice.

“I have heard of it. Well, are you a member of it?”

“I? Gott in Himmel, no! Why should I myself mix in these Russian politics? But Carson was involved with them,—how much even I do not know,—and she has been one of them since her childhood. Now they say she is a traitress. If possible they will bring her before the Five—the secret tribunal. Even they do not forget all she has done for them; and they would give her the chance of proving her innocence. But if she will not return, they will think that is sufficient proof, and they will kill her, wherever she may be.”

“How do you know all this?”

“Carson told me before I left for Wilna. He meant to warn her. They guessed that, and they condemned, murdered him!”

He began pacing up and down the room, muttering to himself; and I sat trying to piece out the matter in my own mind.

“Have you heard anything of a man called Cassavetti; though I believe his name was Selinski?” I asked at length.

Von Eckhardt turned to me open-mouthed.

“Selinski? He is himself one of the Five; he is in London, has been there for months; and it is he who is to bring her before the tribunal, by force or guile.”

“He is dead, murdered; stabbed to the heart in his own room, even as Carson was, four days ago.”

He sat down plump on the nearest chair.

“Dead! That, at least, is one of her enemies disposed of! That is good news, splendid news, Herr Wynn. Why did you not tell me that before? ‘To a gracious message an host of tongues bestow,’ as our Shakespeare says. How is it you know so much? Do you also know where she is? I was told she would be here, three days since; that is why I have waited. And she has not come! She is still in

England?”

“No, she left on Sunday morning. I do not know where she is, but she has been seen at Ostend with—the Russian Grand Duke Loris.”

I hated saying those last words; but I had to say them, for, though I knew Anne Pendennis was lost to me, I felt a deadly jealousy of this Russian, to whom, or with whom she had fled; and I meant to find out all that Von Eckhardt might know about him, and his connection with her.

“The Grand Duke Loris!” he repeated. “She was with him, openly? Does she think him strong enough to protect her? Or does she mean to die with him? For he is doomed also. She must know that!”

“What is he to her?”

I think I put the question quietly; though I wanted to take him by the throat and wring the truth out of him.

“He? He is the cause of all the trouble. He loves her. Yes, I told you that all good men who have but even seen her, love her; she is the ideal of womanhood. One loves her, you and I love her; for I see well that you yourself have fallen under her spell! We love her as we love the stars, that are so infinitely above us,—so bright, so remote, so adorable! But he loves her as a man loves a woman; she loves him as a woman loves a man. And he is worthy of her love! He would give up everything, his rank, his name, his wealth, willingly, gladly, if she would be his wife. But she will not, while her country needs her. It is her influence that has made him what he is,—the avowed friend of the persecuted people, ground down under the iron heel of the autocracy. Yet it is through him that she has fallen under suspicion; for the League will not believe that he is sincere; they will trust no aristocrat.”

He babbled on, but I scarcely heeded him. I was beginning to pierce the veil of mystery, or I thought I was; and I no longer condemned Anne Pendennis, as, in my heart, I had condemned her, only an hour back. The web of intrigue and deceit that enshrouded her was not of her spinning; it was fashioned on the tragic loom of Fate.

She loved this Loris, and he loved her? So be it! I hated him in my heart; though, even if I had possessed the power, I would have wrought him no harm, lest by so doing I should bring suffering to her. Henceforth I must love her as Von

Eckhardt professed to do, or was his protestation mere hyperbole? “As we love the stars—so infinitely above us, so bright, so remote!”

And yet—and yet—when her eyes met mine as we stood together under the portico of the Cecil, and again in that hurried moment of farewell at the station, surely I had seen the love-light in them, “that beautiful look of love surprised, that makes all women’s eyes look the same,” when they look on their beloved.

So, though for one moment I thought I had unravelled the tangle, the next made it even more complicated than before. Only one thread shone clear,—the thread of my love.

CHAPTER XII

THE WRECKED TRAIN

I found the usual polyglot crowd assembled at the Friedrichstrasse station, waiting to board the international express including a number of Russian officers, one of whom specially attracted my attention. He was a splendid looking young man, well over six feet in height, but so finely proportioned that one did not realize his great stature till one compared him with others—myself, for instance. I stand full six feet in my socks, but he towered above me. I encountered him first by cannoning right into him, as I turned from buying some cigarettes. He accepted my hasty apologies with an abstracted smile and a half salute, and passed on.

That in itself was sufficiently unusual. An ordinary Russian officer,—even one of high rank, as this man's uniform showed him to be,—would certainly have bad-worded me for my clumsiness, and probably have chosen to regard it as a deliberate insult. Your Russian as a rule wastes no courtesy on members of his own sex, while his vaunted politeness to women is of a nature that we Americans consider nothing less than rank impertinence; and is so superficial, that at the least thing it will give place to the sheer brutality that is characteristic of nearly every Russian in uniform. Have I not seen? But pah! I won't write of horrors, till I have to!

Before I boarded the sleeping car I looked back across the platform, and saw the tall man returning towards the train, making his way slowly through the crowd. A somewhat noisy group of officers saluted him as he passed, and he returned the salute mechanically, with a sort of preoccupied air.

They looked after him, and one of them shrugged his shoulders and said something that evoked a chorus of laughter from his companions. I heard it; though I doubt if the man who appeared to be the object of their mirth did. Anyhow, he made no sign. There was something curiously serene and aloof about him.

"Wonder who he is?" I thought, as I sought my berth, and turned in at once, for I was dead tired.

I slept soundly through the long hours while the train rushed onwards through the night; and did not wake till we were nearing the grim old city of Konigsberg. I dressed, and made my way to the buffet car, to find breakfast in full swing and every table occupied, until I reached the extreme end of the car, where there were two tables, each with both seats vacant.

I had scarcely settled myself in the nearest seat, when my shoulder was grabbed by an excited individual, who tried to haul me out of my place, vociferating a string of abuse, in a mixture of Russian and German.

I resisted, naturally, and indignantly demanded an explanation. I had to shout to make myself heard. He would not listen, or release his hold, while with his free hand he gesticulated wildly towards two soldiers, who, I now saw, were stationed at the further door of the car. In an instant they had covered me with their rifles, and they certainly looked as if they meant business. But what in thunder had I done?

At that same moment a man came through the guarded doorway,—the tall officer who had interested me so strongly last night.

He paused, and evidently took in the situation at a glance.

“Release that gentleman!” he commanded sternly.

My captor obeyed, so promptly that I nearly lost my balance, and only saved myself from an ignominious fall by tumbling back into the seat from which he had been trying to eject me. The soldiers presented arms to the new-comer, and my late assailant, all the spunk gone out of him, began to whine an abject apology and explanation, which the officer cut short with a gesture.

I was on my feet by this time, and, as he turned to me, I said in French: “I offer you my most sincere apologies, Monsieur. The other tables were full, and I had no idea that these were reserved—”

“They are not,” he interrupted courteously. “At least they were reserved in defiance of my orders; and now I beg you to remain, Monsieur, and to give me the pleasure of your company.”

I accepted the invitation, of course; partly because, although it was given so frankly and unceremoniously, it was with the air of one whose invitations were in the nature of “commands;” and also because he now interested me more strongly than ever. I knew that he must be an important personage, who was

travelling incognito; though a man of such physique could not expect to pass unrecognized. Seen in daylight he appeared even more remarkable than he had done under the sizzling arc lights of the station. His face was as handsome as his figure; well-featured, though the chin was concealed by a short beard, bronze-colored like his hair, and cut to the fashion set by the present Tsar. His eyes were singularly blue, the clear, vivid Scandinavian blue eyes, keen and far-sighted as those of an eagle, seldom seen save in sailor men who have Norse blood in their veins.

I wonder now that I did not at once guess his identity, though he gave me no clue to it.

When he ascertained that I was an American, who had travelled considerably and was now bound for Russia, he plied me with shrewd questions, which showed that he had a pretty wide knowledge of social and political matters in most European countries, though he had never been in the States.

“This is your first visit to Russia?” he inquired, presently. “No?”

I explained that I had spent a winter in Petersburg some years back, and had preserved very pleasant memories of it.

“I trust your present visit may prove as pleasant,” he said courteously. “Though you will probably perceive a great difference. Not that we are in the constant state of excitement described by some of the foreign papers,” he added with a slight smile. “But Petersburg is no longer the gay city it was, ‘Paris by the Neva’ as we used to say. We—”

He checked himself and rose as the train pulled up for the few minutes’ halt at Konigsberg; and with a slight salute turned and passed through the guarded doorway.

“Can you tell me that officer’s name?” I asked the conductor, as I retreated to the rear car.

“You know him as well as I do,” he answered ambiguously, pocketing the tip I produced.

“I don’t know his name.”

“Then neither do I,” retorted the man surlily.

I saw no more of my new acquaintance till we reached the frontier, when, as with the other passengers I was hustled into the apartment where luggage and passports are examined, I caught a glimpse of him striding towards the great *grille*, that, with its armed guard, is the actual line of demarcation between the two countries. Beside him trotted a fat little man in the uniform of a staff officer, with whom he seemed to be conversing familiarly.

Evidently he was of a rank that entitled him to be spared the ordeal that awaited us lesser mortals.

The tedious business was over at last; and, once through the barrier, I joined the throng in the restaurant, and looked around to see if he was among them. He was not, and I guessed he had already gone on,—by a special train probably.

The long hot day dragged on without any incident to break the monotony. I turned in early, and must have been asleep for an hour or two when I was violently awakened by a terrific shock that hurled me clear out of my berth.

I sat up on the floor of the car, wondering what on earth could have happened. The other passengers were shrieking and cursing, panic-stricken, though I guess they were more frightened than hurt, for the car had at least kept the rails. I don’t recollect how I managed to reach the door, but I found myself outside peering through the semi-darkness at an appalling sight.

His stern face, seen in the light of the blazing wreckage, was ghastly. Page 87

His stern face, seen in the light of the blazing wreckage, was ghastly. **Page 87**

The whole of the front part of the train was a wreck; the engine lay on its side, belching fire and smoke, and the cars immediately behind it were a heap of wreckage, from which horrible sounds came, screams of mortal fear and pain. Even as I stood, staring, dazed like a drunken man, a flame shot up amid the piled-up mass of splintered wood. The wreckage was already afire, and as I saw that, I dashed forward. Others were as ready as I, and in half a minute we were frantically hauling at the wreckage, and endeavoring to extricate the poor wretches who were writhing and shrieking under it, before the fire should reach them.

A big man worked silently beside me, and together we got out several of the victims, till the flames drove us back, and we stood together, a little away from the scene, breathing hard, and incapable for the moment of any fresh exertion.

I looked at him then for the first time, though I had known all along that he was my courtly friend of the previous morning. His stern face, seen in the sinister light of the blazing wreckage, was ghastly; it was smeared with the blood that oozed from a wound across his forehead, and his blue eyes were aflame with horror and indignation.

He was evidently quite unaware of my presence, and I heard him mutter: “It was meant for me! My God! it was meant for me! And I have survived, while these suffer.”

I do not know what instinct prompted me to look behind at that moment, just in time to see that a man had stolen out from among the pines in our rear, and was in the act of springing on my companion.

“*Gardez!*” I cried warningly, as I saw the glint of an upraised knife, and flung myself on the fellow. As if my shout had been a signal, more men swarmed out of the forest and surrounded us.

What followed was confused and unreal as a nightmare. My antagonist was a wiry fellow, strong and active as a wild cat; also he had his knife, while I, of course, was unarmed. He got in a nasty slash with his weapon before I could seize and hold his wrist with my left hand. We wrestled in grim silence, till at last I had him down, with my knee on his chest. I shifted my hand from his wrist to his throat and choked the fight out of him, anyhow; then felt for the knife, but he must have flung it from him, and I had no time to search for it among the brushwood.

I sprang up and looked for my companion. He had his back to a tree and was hitting out right and left at the ruffians round him,—like hounds about a stag at bay.

“*A moi!*” I yelled to those by the train, who were still ignorant of what was happening so close at hand, and rushed to his assistance. I hurled aside one man, who staggered and fell; dashed my fist in the face of a second; he went down too, but at the same moment I reeled under a crashing blow, and fell down—down—into utter darkness.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GRAND DUKE LORIS

I woke with a splitting headache to find myself lying in a berth in a sleeping car; the same car in which I had been travelling when the accident—or outrage—occurred; for the windows were smashed and some of the woodwork splintered.

I guessed that there were a good many of the injured on board, for above the rumble of the train, which was jogging along at a steady pace, I could hear the groans of the sufferers.

I put my hand up to my head, and found it swathed in wet bandages, warm to the touch, for the heat in the car was stifling.

A man shuffled along, and seeing that I was awake, went away, returning immediately with a glass of iced tea, which I drank with avidity. I noticed that both his hands were bandaged, and he carried his left arm in a sling.

“What more can I get the *barin*, now he is recovering?” he asked, in Russian, with sulky deference.

“Where are we going,—to Petersburg?” I asked.

“No. Back to Dunaburg; it will be many hours before the line is restored.”

I was not surprised to hear this, knowing of old the leisurely way in which Russians set about such work.

“My master has left me to look after your excellency,” he continued, in the same curious manner, respectful almost to servility but sullen withal. “What are your orders?”

I guessed now that he belonged to my tall friend.

“I want nothing at present. Who is your master?”

He looked at me suspiciously out of the corners of his eyes.

“Your excellency knows very well; but if not it isn’t my business to say.”

I did not choose to press the point. I could doubtless get the information I wanted elsewhere.

“You are a discreet fellow,” I said with a knowing smile, intended to impress him with the idea that I had been merely testing him by the question. “Well, at least you can tell me if he is hurt?”

“No, praise to God, and to your excellency!” he exclaimed, with more animation than he had yet shown. “It would have gone hard with him if he had been alone! I was searching for him among the wreckage, fool that I was, till I heard your excellency shout; and then I ran—we all ran—and those miscreants fled, all who could. We got five and—” he grinned ferociously—“well, they will do no more harm in this world! But it is not well for the *barin* to talk much yet; also it is not wise.”

He glanced round cautiously and then leaned over me, and said with his lips close to my ear:

“Your excellency is to remember that you were hurt in the explosion; nothing happened after that. My master bade me warn you! And now I will summon the doctor,” he announced aloud.

A minute later a good-looking, well-dressed man bustled along to my side and addressed me in French.

“Ah, this is better. Simple concussion, that is all; and you will be all right in a day or two, if you will keep quiet. I wish I could say that of all my patients! The good Mishka has been keeping the bandages wet? Yes; he is a faithful fellow, that Mishka; but you will find him surly, *hein*? That is because Count Solovieff left him behind in attendance on you.”

So that was the name,—Count Solovieff. Where had I heard it before? I remembered instantly.

“You mean the Grand Duke Loris?” I asked deliberately.

His dark eyes twinkled through their glasses.

“*Eh bien*, it is the same thing. He is travelling incognito, you understand, though he can scarcely expect to pass unrecognized, *hein*? He is a very headstrong young man, Count Solovieff, and he has some miraculous escapes! But he is brave as a lion; he will never acknowledge that there is danger. Now you will

sleep again till we reach Dunaburg. Mishka will be near you if you need him."

I closed my eyes, though not to sleep. So this superb young soldier, who had interested and attracted me so strangely, was the man whom Anne loved! Well, he was a man to win any woman's heart; I had to acknowledge that. I could not even feel jealous of him now. Von Eckhardt was right. I must still love her, as one infinitely beyond my reach; as the page loved the queen.

> “Is she wronged? To the rescue of her honour
> My heart!
> Is she poor? What costs it to be styled a donor
> Merely an earth to cleave, a sea to part.
> But that fortune should have thrust all this upon her!”

Yes, I must for the future “choose the page’s part,” and, if she should ever have need of me, I would serve her, and take that for my reward!

I fell asleep on that thought, and only woke—feeling fairly fit, despite the dull ache in my head and the throbbing of the flesh wound in my shoulder—when we reached Dunaburg, and the cars were shunted to a siding.

Mishka turned up again, and insisted on valeting me after a fashion, though I told him I could manage perfectly well by myself. I had come out of the affair better than most of the passengers, for my baggage had been in the rear part of the train, and by the time I got to the hotel, close to the station, was already deposited in the rooms that, I found, had been secured for me in advance.

I had just finished the light meal which was all Dr. Nabokof would allow me, when Mishka announced “Count Solovieff,” and the Grand Duke Loris entered.

“Please don’t rise, Mr. Wynn,” he said in English. “I have come to thank you for your timely aid. You are better? That is good. You got a nasty knock on the head just at the end of the fun, which was much too bad! It was a jolly good fight, wasn’t it?”

He laughed like a schoolboy at the recollection; his blue eyes shining with sheer glee, devoid of any trace of the ferocity that usually marks a Russian’s mirth.

“That’s so,” I conceded. “And fairly long odds; two unarmed men against a crowd with knives and bludgeons. Why don’t you carry a revolver, sir?”

“I do, as a rule. Why don’t you?”

“Because I guess it would have been confiscated at the frontier. I’m a civilian, and—I’ve been in Russia before! But if you’d had a six-shooter—”

“There would have been no fight; they would have run the sooner,—all the better for some of them,” he answered, and as he spoke the mirth passed from his face,

leaving it stern and sad. “I ought to have had a revolver, of course, but I was pitched out of bed without any warning, as I presume you were. By the way, Mr. Wynn, in the official report no mention is made of our—how do you call it?”

“Scrimmage?” I suggested.

“Ah, that is the word. Our scrimmage. Your name is in the list of those wounded by the explosion of the bomb. It was a bomb, as perhaps you have learned. Believe me, as you are going to Petersburg, and expect to remain there for some time, you will be the safer if no one—beyond myself and the few others on the spot, most of whom can be trusted—knows that you saved my life. Ah, yes, indeed you did that!” he added quickly, as I made a dissentient gesture. “I could not have kept them off another minute. Besides, you saw them first, and warned me; otherwise we should both have been done for at once.”

“Do you know who they were?” I asked.

He shrugged his broad shoulders.

“I have my suspicions, and I do not wish others to be involved in my affairs, to suffer through me. Yet it is the others who suffer,” he continued, speaking, as it seemed, more to himself than to me. “For I come through unscathed every time, while they—”

He broke off and sat for a minute or more frowning, and biting his mustache.

A sudden thought struck me. I rose and crossed to the French window which stood open. Outside was a small balcony, gay with red and white flowers. I nipped off a single blossom, closed the window, and returned to where he sat, watching my movements intently.

“I, too, have my suspicions, sir,” I said significantly. “I wonder if they coincide with yours.”

I laid the flower on the table beside him, flattening out the five scarlet petals, and resumed my seat.

I saw instantly that he recognized the symbol, and knew what it meant, doubtless better than I did.

He glanced from it to me, then round the room, crossed to the door, opened it quickly, saw Mishka was standing outside, on guard, and closed it again.

“Now, who are you and what do you know?” he asked quietly. “Speak low; the very walls have ears.”

“I know very little, but I surmise—”

“It is safer to surmise nothing, Mr. Wynn. I only ask what you know!”

“Well, I know that some member of the League, the organization, that this represents,” I pointed to the flower, “murdered an Englishman.”

“Mr. Carson, a journalist. You knew him?” he exclaimed.

“Yes, and I am going to Petersburg as his successor.”

“Then you have great need to act with more caution than—pardon me—you have manifested so far,” he rejoined. “Well, what more?”

“One of the heads of the League, a man named Selinski, who called himself Cassavetti, was murdered in London a week ago.”

That startled him, I saw, though he controlled himself almost instantly.

“Are you sure of that?”

“I found him,” I answered, and thereupon gave him the bare facts.

“And the English police, they have the matter in hand? Whom do they suspect?” he demanded.

“I cannot tell you, though they say they have a clue.”

He paced to the window and stood there for a minute or more with his back towards me. Then he returned and looked down at me.

“I wonder why you have told me this, Mr. Wynn,” he said slowly. “And how you came to connect me with these affairs.”

“I was told that your Highness was also in danger, and I wished to warn you.”

“I thank you. Who was your informant?”

“I am not at liberty to say. But—there is another who is also in danger.”

I paused. My throat felt dry and husky all at once; my heart was thumping against my ribs. I had told myself that I was not jealous of him, but—it was hard

to speak of her to him!

He misconstrued my hesitation.

“You may trust me, Mr. Wynn,” he said gravely. “This person, do I know him?”

I stood up, resting my hand on the table for support.

“It is not a man. It is the lady whom some speak of as *La Mort*,—others as *La Vie*.”

CHAPTER XIV

A CRY FOR HELP

A dusky flush rose to his face, and his blue eyes flashed ominously. I noticed that a little vein swelled and pulsed in his temple, close by the strip of flesh-colored plaster that covered the wound on his forehead.

But, although he appeared almost equally angry and surprised, he held himself well in hand.

“Truly you seem in possession of much information, Mr. Wynn,” he said slowly. “I must ask you to explain yourself. Do you know this lady?”

“Yes.”

“How do you know she is in danger?”

“Chiefly from my own observation.”

“You know her so well?” he asked incredulously. “Where have you met her?”

“In London.”

The angry gleam vanished from his eyes, and he stood frowning in perplexed thought, resting one of his fine, muscular white hands on the back of a tawdry gilt chair.

“Strange,” he muttered beneath his mustache. “She said nothing. By what name did you know her—other than those pseudonyms you have mentioned?”

“Miss Anne Pendennis.”

“Ah!”

I thought his face cleared.

“And what is this danger that threatens her?”

“I think you may know that better than I do,” I retorted, with a glance at the flower—the red symbol—that made a vivid blot of color like a splash of blood

on the white table-cloth.

“That is true; although you appear to know so much. Therefore, why have you spoken of her at all?”

Again I got that queer feeling in my throat.

“Because you love her!” I said bluntly. “And I love her, too. I want you to know that; though I am no more to her than—than the man who waits on her at dinner, or who opens a cab door for her and gets a smile and a coin for his service!”

It was a childish outburst, perhaps, but it moved Loris Solovieff to a queer response.

“I understand,” he said softly in French.

He spoke English admirably, but in emotional moments he lapsed into the language that is more familiar than their mother-tongue to all Russians of his rank.

“It is so with us all. She loves Russia,—our poor Russia, agonizing in the throes of a new birth; while we—we love her, the woman. She will play with us, use us, fool us, even betray us, if by so doing she can serve her country; and we—accept the situation—are content to serve her, to die for her. Is that not so, Monsieur?”

“That is so,” I said, marvelling at the way in which he had epitomized my own ideas, which, it seemed, were his also. Yet Von Eckhardt had asserted that she—Anne Pendennis—loved this man; and it was difficult to think of any woman resisting him.

“Then we are comrades?” he cried, extending his hand, which I gripped cordially. “Though we were half inclined to be jealous of each other, eh? But that is useless! One might as well be jealous of the sea. And we can both serve her, if she will permit so much. For the present she is in a place of comparative safety. I shall not tell you where it is, but at least it is many leagues from Russia; and she has promised to remain there,—but who knows? If the whim seizes her, or if she imagines her presence is needed here, she will return.”

“Yes, I guess she will,” I conceded. (How well he understood her.)

“She is utterly without fear, utterly reckless of danger,” he continued. “If she should be lured back to Russia, as her enemies on both sides will endeavor to

lure her, she will be in deadly peril, from which even those who would give their lives for her may not be able to save her."

"At least you can tell me if her father has joined her?" I asked.

"Her father? No, I cannot tell you that; simply because I do not know. But, as I have said, so long as she remains in the retreat that has been found for her she will be safe. As for this—" he took up the blossom and rubbed it to a morsel of pulp, between his thumb and finger, "you will be wise to conceal your knowledge of it, Mr. Wynn; that is, if you value your life. And now I must leave you. We shall meet again ere long, I trust. I am summoned to Peterhof; and I may be there for some time. If you wish to communicate with me—"

He broke off, and remained silent, in frowning thought, for a few seconds.

"I will ask you this," he resumed. "If you should have any news of—her—you will send me word, at once, and in secret? Not openly; I am surrounded by spies, as we all are here! Mishka shall remain here, and accompany you to Petersburg. He will show you where and how you can leave a message that will reach me speedily and infallibly. For the present good-bye—and a swift recovery!"

He saluted me, and clanked out of the room. I heard him speaking to Mishka, who had remained on guard outside the door. A minute or two later there was a bustle in the courtyard below, whence, for some time past, had sounded the monotonous clank of a stationary motor car.

I went to the window, walking rather unsteadily, for I felt sick and dizzy after this strange and somewhat exciting interview. Two magnificent cars were in waiting, surrounded by a little crowd of officers in uniform and soldiers on guard. After a brief interval the Grand Duke came out of the hotel and entered the first car, followed by the stout rubicund officer I had seen in attendance on him at Wirballen. A merry little man he seemed, and as he settled himself in his seat he said something which drew a laugh from the Duke. Looking down at his handsome debonnaire face, it was difficult to believe that he was anything more than a light-hearted young aristocrat, with never a care in the world. And yet I guessed then—I know now—that he was merely bluffing an antagonist in a game that he was playing for grim stakes,—nothing less than life and liberty!

Three days later I arrived, at last, in Petersburg, to find letters from England awaiting me,—one from my cousin Mary, to whom I had already written, merely telling her that I missed Anne at Berlin, and asking if she had news of her. There

could be no harm in that. Anne had played her part so well that, though Jim had evidently suspected her,—I wondered now how he came to do so, though I'd have to wait a while before I could hope to ask him,—Mary, I was certain, had not the least idea that her stay with them was an episode in a kind of game of hide and seek. To her the visit was but the fulfilment of the promise made when they were school-girls together. And I guessed that Anne would keep up the deception, which was forced upon her in a way, and that she would write to Mary. She would lie to her, directly or indirectly; that was almost inevitable. But she would write, just because she loved Mary, and therefore would not willingly cause her anxiety. I was sure of that in my own mind; and I hungered for news of her; even second-hand news. But she had not written!

"I am so anxious about Anne," my cousin's letter ran. "We've had no word from her since that post-card from Calais, and I can't think why! She has no clothes with her, to speak of, for she only took her dressing-bag; and I don't like to send her things on till I hear from her; besides, I hoped she would come back to us soon! Did you see her at Berlin?"

I put the letter aside; I could not answer it at present. Mary would receive mine from Dunaburg, and would forward me any news that might have reached her in the interval.

And meanwhile I had little to distract my mind. Things were very quiet, stagnant in fact, in Petersburg during those hot days of early summer; even the fashionable cafés in the Nevski Prospekt were practically deserted, doubtless because the heat, that had set in earlier than usual, had driven away such of their gay frequenters as were not detained in the city on duty.

I slept ill during those hot nights, and was usually abroad early. One lovely June morning my matutinal stroll led me,—aimlessly I thought, though who knows what subtle influences may direct our most seemingly purposeless actions, and thereby shape our destiny—along the Ismailskaia Prospekt,—which, nearly a year back, had been the scene of the assassination of De Plehve, the man who for two years had controlled Petersburg with an iron hand.

There were comparatively few people abroad, and they were work-people on their way to business, and vendors setting out their wares on the stalls that line the wide street on either side.

Suddenly a droshky dashed past, at a pace that appeared even swifter than the breakneck rate at which the Russian droshky driver loves to urge his horses

along. It was evidently a private one, drawn by three horses abreast, and I glanced at it idly, as it clattered along with the noise of a fire-engine. Just as it was passing me one of the horses slipped on the cobblestones, and came down with a crash.

There was the usual moment of confusion, as the driver objurgated vociferously, after the manner of his class, and a man jumped out of the vehicle and ran to the horse's head.

I stood still to watch the little incident; there was no need for my assistance, for the clever little beast had already regained his footing.

Then a startling thing occurred.

A woman's voice rang out in an agonized cry, in which fear and joy were strangely blended.

"Maurice! Maurice Wynn! Help! Save me!"

On the instant the man sprang back into the droshky, and it was off again on its mad career; but in that instant I had caught a glimpse of a white face, the gleam of bright hair; and knew that it was Anne—Anne herself—who had been so near me, and was now being whirled away.

Something white fluttered on the cobblestones at my feet. I stooped and picked it up. Only a handkerchief, a tiny square of embroidered cambric, crumpled and soiled,—her handkerchief, with her initials "A. P." in the corner!

In that instant I had caught a glimpse of a white face. Page 102

In that instant I had caught a glimpse of a white face. **Page 102**

CHAPTER XV

AN UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCE

With the handkerchief in my hand, I started running wildly after the fast disappearing droshky, only to fall plump into the arms of a surly gendarme, a Muscovite giant, who collared me with one hand, while he drew his revolver with the other, and brandished it as if he was minded to bash my face in with the butt end, a playful little habit much in vogue with the Russian police.

“Let me go. I’m all right; I’m an American,” I cried indignantly. “I must follow that droshky!”

It was out of sight by this time, and he grunted contemptuously. But he put up his weapon, and contented himself with hauling me off to the nearest bureau, where, in spite of my protestations, I was searched from head to foot roughly enough, and all the contents of my pockets annexed, as well as the handkerchief. Then I was unceremoniously thrust into a filthy cell, and left there, in a state of rage and humiliation that can be better imagined than described. I seemed to have been there for half a lifetime, though I found afterwards it was only about two hours, when I was fetched out, and brought before the chief of the bureau,—a pompous and truculent individual, with shifty bead-like eyes.

My belongings lay on the desk before him,—with the exception of my loose cash, which I never saw again.

He began to question me arrogantly, but modified his tone when I asserted that I was an American citizen, resident in Petersburg as representative of an English newspaper; and reminded him that, if he dared to detain me, he would have to reckon with both the American and English authorities.

“That is all very well; but you have yet to explain how you came to be breaking the law,” he retorted.

“What law have I broken?” I demanded.

“You were running away.”

“I was not. I was running after a droshky.”

“Why?”

“Because there was a woman in it—a lady—an Englishwoman or American, who called out to me to help her.”

“Who was the woman?”

“How should I know?” I asked blandly. I remembered what Von Eckhardt had told me,—that the police had been on Anne’s track for these three years past. If the peril in which she was now placed was from the revolutionists, as it must be, I could not help her by betraying her to the police.

“You say she was English or American? Why do you say so?”

“Because she called out in English: ‘Help! Save me!’ I heard the words distinctly, and started to run after the droshky. Wouldn’t you have done the same in my place? I guess you’re just the sort of man who’d be first to help beauty in distress!”

This was sarcasm and sheer insolence. I couldn’t help it, he looked such a brutal little beast! But he took it as a compliment, and actually bowed and smirked, twirling his mustache and leering at me like a satyr.

“You have read me aright, Monsieur,” he said quite amiably. “So this lady was beautiful?”

“Well, I can’t say. I didn’t really see her; the droshky drove off the very instant she called out. One of the horses had been down, and I was standing to look at it,” I explained, responding diplomatically to his more friendly mood. I wanted to get clear as soon as possible, for I knew that every moment was precious. “I just saw a hat and some dark hair—”

“Dark, eh? Should you know her again?”

“I guess not. I tell you I didn’t really see her face.”

“How could she know you were an American?”

I shrugged my shoulders.

“Perhaps she can’t speak any language but English.”

“What is this?” He held up the handkerchief, and sniffed at it. It was faintly perfumed. How well I knew that perfume, sweet and elusive as the scent of

flowers on a rainy day.

“A handkerchief. It fell at my feet, and I picked it up before I started to run.”

“It is marked ‘A. P.’ Do you know any one with those initials?”

Those beady eyes of his were fixed on my face, watching my every expression, and I knew that his questions were dictated by some definite purpose.

“Give me time,” I said, affecting to rack my brains in an effort of recollection. “I don’t think,—why, yes—there was Abigail Parkinson, Job Parkinson’s wife,—a most respectable old lady I knew in the States,—the United States of America, you know.”

His eyes glinted ominously, and he brought his fat, bejewelled hand down on the table with a bang.

“You are trifling with me!”

“I’m not!” I assured him, with an excellent assumption of injured innocence. “You asked me if I knew any one with those initials, and I’m telling you.”

“I am not asking you about old women on the other side of the world! Think again! Might not the initials stand for—Anna Petrovna, for instance?”

So he had guessed, after all, who she was!

“Anna what? Oh—Petrovna. Why, yes, of course they stand for that, but it’s a Russian name, isn’t it? And this lady was English, or American!”

He was silent for a minute, fingering the handkerchief, which I longed to snatch from the contamination of his touch.

“A mistake has been made, as I now perceive, Monsieur,” he said smoothly, at last. “I think your release might be accomplished without much difficulty.”

He paused and looked hard at my pocket-book.

“I guess if you’ll hand me that note case it can be accomplished right now,” I suggested cheerfully. I don’t believe there’s a Russian official living, high or low, who is above accepting a bribe, or extorting blackmail; and this one proved no exception to the rule.

I passed him a note worth about eight dollars, and he grasped and shook my

hand effusively as he took it.

“Now we are friends, *hein*?” he exclaimed. “Accept my felicitations at the so happy conclusion of our interview. You understand well that duty must be done, at whatever personal cost and inconvenience. Permit me to restore the rest of your property, Monsieur; this only I must retain.” He thrust the handkerchief into his desk. “Perhaps—who knows—we may discover the fair owner, and restore it to her.”

His civility was even more loathsome to me than his insolence had been, and I wanted to kick him. But I didn’t. I offered him a cigarette, instead, and we parted with mutual bows and smiles.

Once on the street again I walked away in the opposite direction to that I should have taken if I had been sure I would not be followed and watched; but I guessed that, for the present at least, I would be kept under strict surveillance, and doubtless at this moment my footsteps were being dogged.

Therefore I made first for the café where I usually lunched, and, a minute after I had seated myself, a man in uniform strolled in and placed himself at a table just opposite, with his back to me, but his face towards a mirror, in which, as I soon discovered, he was watching my every movement.

“All right, my friend. Forewarned is forearmed; I’ll give you the slip directly,” I thought, and went on with my meal, affecting to be absorbed in a German newspaper, which I asked the waiter to bring me.

In the ordinary course I should have met people I knew, for the café was frequented by most of the foreign journalists in Petersburg, but the hour was early for *déjeuner*, and the spy and I had the place to ourselves for the present.

I knew that I should communicate the fact that Anne was in Petersburg to the Grand Duke Loris as soon as possible; in the hope that he might know or guess who were her captors, and where they were taking her; but it was imperative that I should exercise the utmost caution.

After we reached Petersburg, and before he left me, Mishka had, as his master had promised, given me instructions as to how I was to send a private message to the Duke in case of necessity. He took me to a house in a mean street near the Ismailskaia Prospekt—not half a mile from the place where I was arrested this morning—of which the ground floor was a poor class café frequented chiefly by

workmen and students.

“You will go to the place I shall show you,” he had informed me beforehand, “and call for a glass of tea, just like any one else. Then as you pay for it, you drop a coin,—so. You will pick it up, or the waiter will,—it is all one, that; any one may drop a coin accidentally! Now, if you were just an ordinary customer, nothing more would happen; the waiter would keep near your table for a minute or two, and that is all. But if you are on business you will ask him, ‘Is Nicolai Stefanovitch here to-day?’ Or you may say any name you think of,—a common one is best. He will answer, ‘At what hour should he be here?’ and you say, ‘I do not know when he returns—from his work.’ Or ‘from Wilna,’ or elsewhere; that is unimportant, like the name. But the questions must be put so, and there must be the pause, between the two words ‘returns from’ just for one beat of the clock as it were, or while one blows one’s nose, or lights a cigarette. Then he will know you are one of us, and will go away; and presently one will come and sit at the table, and say, ‘I am so and so,—’ the name you mentioned. He will drink his tea, and you will go out together; and if it is a note you will pass it to him, so that none shall see; or if it is a message, you will tell it him very quietly.”

We rehearsed the shibboleth in my room. I did it right the first time, much to Mishka’s satisfaction; and when we reached the café he let me be spokesman. Within three minutes a cadaverous looking workman in a red blouse lounged up to our table, ordered his glass of tea, nodded to me as if I was an old acquaintance, and muttered the formula.

He and I had gone out together, leaving Mishka in the café,—since in Russia three men walking and conversing together are bound to be eyed suspiciously,—and my new acquaintance remarked:

“There is no message, as I know; this is but a trial, and you have done well. If there should be a letter, a cigarette, with the tobacco hanging a little loose at each end,—” he rolled one as he spoke and made a slovenly job of it,—“is an excellent envelope, and one that we understand.”

We had separated at the end of the street, and Mishka rejoined me later at my hotel. But I had not needed to try the shibboleth since, though I had dropped into the café more than once, and drank my glass of tea,—without dropping a coin. And now the moment had come when I must test the method of communication as speedily as possible.

CHAPTER XVI

UNDER SURVEILLANCE

I paid my bill, strolled out, and in the doorway encountered a man I knew slightly—a young officer—with whom I paused to chat, thereby blocking the doorway temporarily, with the result that I found my friend the spy—as I was now convinced he was—at my elbow. My unexpected halt had pulled him up short.

“Pardon!” I said with the utmost politeness, stepping aside, so he had to pass out, though I guessed he was angry enough at losing my conversation, for I was telling Lieutenant Mirakoff of my arrest,—as a great joke, at which we both laughed uproariously.

“They should have seen that you were a foreigner, and therefore quite mad,—and harmless,” he cried.

“Now, I ought to call you out for that!” I asserted.

“At your service!” he answered, still laughing, as we separated.

The spy was apparently deeply interested in the contents of a shop window near at hand, and I went off briskly in the other direction; but in a minute or two later, when I paused, ostensibly to compare my watch with a clock which I had just passed, I saw, as I glanced back, that he was on my track once more.

This was getting serious, and I adopted a simple expedient to give him the slip for the present. I hailed a droshky and bade the fellow drive to a certain street, not far from that where Mishka’s café was situated. We started off at the usual headlong speed, and presently, as we whirled round a corner, I called on the driver to stop, handed him a fare that must have represented a good week’s earnings, and ordered him to drive on again as fast as he could, and for as long as his horse would hold out.

He grinned, “clucked” to his horse, and was off on the instant, while I turned into a little shop close by, whence I had the satisfaction, less than half a minute after, of seeing a second droshky dash past, in pursuit of the first, with the spy

lolling in it. If my Jehu kept faith—there was no telling if he would do that or not, though I had to take the risk—*monsieur le mouchard* would enjoy a nice drive, at the expense of his government!

In five minutes I was at the café, where I dropped my coin; it rolled to a corner and the waiter picked it up, while I sipped my tea and grumbled at the scarcity of lemon. I asked the prescribed question when he restored the piece; and almost immediately Mishka himself joined me. This was better than I had dared to hope, for I knew I could speak to him freely; in fact I told him everything, including the ruse by which I had eluded my vigilant attendant.

“You must not try that again,” he said, in his sulky fashion. “It has served once, yes; but it will not serve again. When he finds that you have cheated him he will make his report, and then you will have, not one, but several spies to reckon with; that is, if they think it worth while. Still you have done well,—very well. Now you must wait until you hear from my master.” Mishka never mentioned a name if he could avoid doing so.

“But can’t you give me some idea as to where she is likely to be?” I demanded. To wait, and continue to act my part, as if there was no such person as Anne Pendennis in the world and in deadly peril was just about the toughest duty imaginable.

“I can tell you nothing, and you, by yourself, can do nothing,” he retorted stolidly. “If you are wise you will go about your business as if nothing had happened. But be in your rooms by—nine o’clock to-night. It is unlikely that we can send you any word before then.”

Nine o’clock! And it was now barely noon! Nine mortal hours; and within their space what might not happen? But there was no help for it. Mishka had spoken the truth; by myself I could do nothing.

It was hard—hard to be bound like this, with invisible fetters; and to know all the time that the girl I loved was so near and yet so far, needing my aid, while I was powerless to help her,—I, who would so gladly lay down my life for her.

Who was she? What was she? How was her fate linked with that of this great grim land,—a land “agonizing in the throes of a new birth?” If she had but trusted me in the days when we had been together, could I have saved her then? Have spared her the agony my heart told me she was suffering now?

Yes,—yes, I said bitterly to myself. I could have saved her, if she had trusted me; for then she would have loved me; would have been content to share my life. A roving life it would have been, of course, for we were both nomads by choice as well as by chance, and the nomadic habit, once formed, is seldom broken. But how happy we should have been! Our wanderings would never have brought us to Russia, though. Heavens, how I hated—how I still hate it; the greatest and grandest country in the world, viewed under the aspect of sheer land; a territory to which even our own United States of America counts second for extent, for fertility, for natural wealth in wood and oil and minerals. A country that God made a paradise, or at least a vast storehouse for the supply of human necessities and luxuries; but a country of which man has made such a hell, that, in comparison with it, Dante's "Inferno" reads like a story of childish imaginings.

Yes, Russia was a hell upon earth; and Petersburg was the centre and epitome of it, I said in my soul, as I loitered on one of the bridges that afternoon, and looked on the swift flowing river, on the splendid buildings, gleaming white, as the gilded cupolas and spires of the churches gleamed fire red, under the brilliant sunshine. A fair city outwardly, a whited sepulchre raised over a charnel-house. A city of terror, wherein every man is an Ishmael, knowing—or suspecting—that every other man's hand is against him.

There was a shadow over the whole land, over the city, over myself, the stranger within its gate; and in that shadow the girl I loved was impenetrably enveloped.

I raised my eyes, and there, fronting me across the water, sternly menacing, were the gray walls of the fortress-prison, named, as if in grim mockery, the fortress of "Peter and Paul." Peter, who denied his Lord, though he loved Him; Paul, who denied his Lord before he knew and loved Him! Perhaps the name is not so inconsistent, after all. The deeds that are done behind the walls of that fortress-prison by men who call themselves Christians, are the most tremendous denial of Christ that this era has witnessed.

Sick at heart, I turned away, and walked moodily back to my hotel. The proprietor was in the lobby, and the whole staff seemed to be on the spot. They all looked at me as if they thought I might be some recently discovered wild animal, and I wondered why. But as no one spoke to me, I asked the clerk at the bureau for my key.

"I have it not; others—the police—have it," he stammered.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" I said. "They're up there now? All right."

I went up the stairs—there was no elevator—and found a couple of soldiers posted outside my door.

“Well, what are you doing here?” I asked, in good enough Russian. “This is my room, and I’ll thank you to let me pass.”

The one on the right of the door flung it open with a flourish, and motioned me to enter.

As I passed him he said, with a laugh to his fellow, “So—the rat goes into the trap!”

CHAPTER XVII

THE DROSHKY DRIVER

Inside were two officials busily engaged in a systematic search of my effects. Truly the secret police had lost no time!

I had already decided on the attitude I must adopt. It was improbable that they would arrest me openly; that would have involved trouble with the Embassies, but they could, if they chose, conduct me to the frontier or give me twenty-four hours' notice to quit Russia, as they had to Von Eckhardt, and that was the very last thing I desired just now.

"Good evening, gentlemen," I said amiably. "You seem to be pretty busy here. Can I give you any assistance?"

I spoke in French, as I didn't want to air my Russian for their edification, though I had improved a good deal in it.

One of them, who seemed boss, looked up and said brusquely, though not exactly uncivilly: "Ah, Monsieur, you have returned somewhat sooner than we expected. We have a warrant to search your apartment."

"That's all right; pray continue, though I give you my word you won't find anything treasonable. I'm a foreigner, as of course you know; and I haven't the least wish or intention to mix myself up with Russian affairs."

"And yet you correspond with the Grand Duke Loris," he said dryly.

"I don't!" I answered promptly. "I've never written a line to that gentleman in my life, nor he to me."

"There are other ways of corresponding than by writing," he retorted. I guessed I had been watched to the café after all, but I maintained an air of innocent unconcern, and, after all, his remark might be merely a "feeler." I rather think now that it was. One can never be sure how much the Russian Secret Police do, or do not, know; and one of their pet tricks is to bluff people into giving themselves away.

So I ignored his remark, selected a cigarette, and, seeing that he had just finished his—I've wondered sometimes if a Russian official sleeps with a cigarette between his lips, for I fear he wouldn't sleep comfortably without!—handed him the case, with an apology for my remissness. He accepted both the apology and the cigarette, and looked at me hard.

"I said, Monsieur, that there are other ways of corresponding than by writing!" he repeated with emphasis.

"Of course there are," I assented cheerfully. "But I don't see what that has to do with me in the present instance. I only know the Grand Duke very slightly. I was hurt in that railway accident last month, and his Highness was good enough to order one of his servants to look after me; and he also called to see me at an hotel in Dunaburg. I thought it very condescending of him. Though I don't suppose I'd have the chance of meeting him again, as there are no Court festivities now; or if there are, we outsiders aren't invited to them. Won't your friend accept one of my cigarettes?"

This was addressed to the other man, who seemed to be doing all the work, and was puzzling over some pencil notes in English which he had picked out of my waste-paper basket. They were the draft of my yesterday's despatch to the *Courier*, a perfectly innocuous communication that I had sent openly; it didn't matter whether it arrived at its destination or not. As I have said, Petersburg was quiet to stagnation just now; though one never knew when the material for some first-class sensational copy might turn up.

"I'll translate that for you right now, if you like," I said politely. "Or you can take it away with you!"

I think they were both baffled by my apparent candor and nonchalance; but the man who was bossing the show returned to the charge persistently.

"Ah, that railway accident. Yes. But surely you have made a slight mistake, Monsieur? You incurred your injuries, from which, I perceive, you have so happily recovered."

He bowed, and I bowed. If I hadn't known all that lay behind, this exchange of words and courtesy—a kind of fencing, with both of us pretending that the buttons were on the foils—would have tickled me immensely. Even as it was I could appreciate the funny side of it. I was playing a part in a comedy,—a grim comedy, a mere interlude in tragedy,—but still comic.

“You incurred these, I say, not in the accident, but while gallantly defending the Grand Duke from the dastards who assailed him later!”

I worked up a modest blush; or I tried to.

“I see that it is useless to attempt to conceal anything from you, Monsieur; you know too much!” I confessed, laughing. “But I’m a modest man; besides, I didn’t do very much, and his Highness seemed quite capable of taking care of himself.”

I saw a queer glint in his eyes, and I guessed then that the attempt on the life of the Grand Duke had been engineered by the police themselves, and not, as I had first imagined, by the revolutionists.

My antagonist waved his hand with an airy gesture of protestation.

“You underrate your services, Monsieur Wynn! I wonder if you would have devoted them so readily to his Highness if—”

He paused portentously.

“If?” I inquired blandly. “Do have another cigarette!”

“If you had known of his connection with the woman who is known as *La Mort*?”

That wasn’t precisely what he said. I don’t choose to write the words in any language; but I wanted to knock his yellow teeth down his throat; to choke the life out of him for the vile suggestion his words contained! I dared not look at him; my eyes would have betrayed everything that he was seeking to discover. I looked at the end of the cigarette I was lighting, and wondered how I managed to steady the hand that held the match.

“I really do not understand you!” I asserted blandly.

“Perhaps you may know her as Anna Petrovna?” he suggested.

“Anna Petrovna!” I repeated. “Now, that’s the second time to-day I’ve heard the lady’s name; and I can’t think why you gentlemen should imagine it means anything to me. Who is she, anyhow?”

I looked at him now, fair and square; met and held the gimlet gaze of his eyes with one of calm, interested inquiry. We were fighting a duel, to which a mere

physical fight is child's play; and—I meant to win!

"You do not know?" he asked.

"I do not; though I'd like to. The officer at the bureau this morning—I don't suppose I need tell you that I was arrested and detained for a time—seemed to think I should know her; but he wouldn't give me any information. You've managed to rouse my curiosity pretty smartly between you!"

"I fear it must remain unsatisfied, Monsieur, so far as I am concerned," he said suavely. "Well, we will relieve you of our presence. I congratulate you on the admirable order in which you keep your papers."

His subordinate had risen, with an expressive shrug of his shoulders. I knew their search must be futile, since I had fortunately destroyed Mary Cayley's letter the day I received it; and there was nothing among my papers referring either directly or indirectly to Anne.

"You'll want to see this, of course," I suggested, tendering my passport. He glanced through it perfunctorily, and handed it back with a ceremonious bow. So far as manners went, he certainly was an improvement on the official at the bureau; and of course he already knew that my personal papers were all right.

He gave me a courteous "good evening," and the other man, who hadn't uttered a syllable the whole time, saluted me in silence. I heard one of them give an order to the guards outside, and then the heavy tramp of their feet descending the staircase.

I started tidying up; it would help to pass the time until I might expect some message from the Grand Duke. Mishka had said nine o'clock, and it was not yet seven.

Presently there came a knock at my door. I wondered if this might be another police visitation; but it was only one of the hotel servants to say a droshky driver was below, demanding to see me. He produced a dirty scrap of paper with my name and address scrawled on it, which the man had brought. I thought at once of the man who had driven me in the morning, and wondered how on earth he got my name and address. I was sure it must be he when I heard that he declared "the excellency had told him to call for payment." This was awkward; the fellow must be another police spy, probably doing a bit of blackmailing on his own account. Well, I'd better see him, anyhow. I told the man to bring him up.

“He is a dangerous looking fellow,” he demurred.

“That’s my lookout and not yours,” I said. “If he wants to see me he’s got to come up. I’m certainly not going down to him.”

He went off unwillingly, and a minute or two later returned, showing in my queer visitor, a big burly chap who seemed civil and harmless enough.

I didn’t think at first sight he was the man who drove me, but they all look so much alike in their filthy greatcoats and low-crowned hats. He had a big grizzled beard and a thatch of matted hair, from which his little swinish eyes peered out with a leer. Yes, he looked exactly like any other of his class, but—

As he entered behind the servant, touched his greasy hat, and growled a guttural greeting, he opened his eyes full and looked at me for barely a second, but it was sufficient.

“Oh, it is you, Ivan; why didn’t you send your name up?” I said roughly. “How much is it I owe you? Here, wait a minute; as you are here, you can take a message for me. Wait here while I write it. It’s all right; I know the fellow,” I added to the servant. “You needn’t wait.”

He went out, and for a minute my visitor and I stood silently regarding each other. His disguise was perfect; I should never have penetrated it but for the warning he had flashed from those bright blue eyes, that now, leering and nearly closed, looked dark and pig-like again.

The droshky driver was the Grand Duke Loris himself.

CHAPTER XVIII

THROUGH THE STORM

I moved to the door and locked it noiselessly. I dared not open it to see if the servant had gone, for if he had not that would have roused his suspicions at once. The Duke had already crossed to the further side of the room, and I joined him there.

He wasted no time in preliminaries.

“Mishka has told me all,” he began, speaking in English, though still in the hoarse low growl appropriate to his assumed character. “And I have learned much since. There is to be a meeting to-night, and if things are as I suspect she will be brought before the tribunal. We must save her if we can. Will you come? To say it will be at the risk of your life is to put it mildly. It will be a forlorn hope.”

“I’ll come; tell me how,” I said.

“You will go to the place where you met Mishka to-day, dine there, and change your clothes. They will have some for you, and you need not use the formula. They expect you already; I knew you would come! Mishka will join you, and will accompany you to the rank where I shall be waiting with my droshky. You will hire me in the usual way; and we will tell you my plans when we are clear of the city. Have you any weapon?”

“No.”

He felt in an inner pocket of his filthy greatcoat and brought out a revolver and a handful of spare cartridges.

“It’s loaded; you can have these, too, though if there’s any shooting I doubt if you’ll have the chance of reloading. Let’s hope you won’t fall in with the police for the third time to-day! Mishka will join you between nine and ten. We need not start till then,—these light nights are a drawback, but that cannot be helped. The meeting will be held as usual, after midnight. That is all now. I must not stay longer. Give me the note you spoke of. A blank sheet—anything—I will destroy

it immediately."

I put a sheet of note-paper into an envelope, and addressed it to Lieutenant Mirakoff at his barracks. His was the first name that occurred to me.

"You know him?" he asked, pointing to the name.

"Very slightly."

He nodded and picked up the note, holding it carefully by one corner between his filthy thumb and finger.

I unlocked the door as quietly as I had locked it, and a moment later he opened it noisily and backed out, growling guttural and surly thanks; backed right up against the servant, who, as we both guessed, was waiting just outside. Even I was surprised at the altercation that followed. A Russian droshky driver has a bigger command of bad language than any other cabby in the world, and the Grand Duke Loris had evidently studied his part from life. He was letter perfect in it!

I strode to the door and flung it open.

"Here, stop that!" I shouted. "Be off with you, Ivan; you impudent rascal!"

He leered at me and shambled off, but I could hear the coarse voice growling ribaldries all the way down the staircase.

It was a masterpiece of impersonation!

I waited a while, till I judged it safe to start on the first stage of my expedition. I meant to take a circuitous route to the café, in case I was still being watched. I would run no unnecessary risks, not for my own sake, but I guessed that the success of our enterprise—whatever it was—would depend on the exercise of infinite caution, at the beginning, anyhow. I felt strangely elated, happier than I had done for many a long day; although I knew that the worst, or almost the worst, had come to pass, and that Anne was here, in the power of her enemies. But we were going to save her,—we would save her. "A forlorn hope" even Loris Solovieff had called it. Nothing of the kind. Could anything that such a man as he attempted be a forlorn hope; and together, working loyally side by side, what could we not dare, and accomplish? Nothing seemed impossible to-night.

“Merely an earth to cleave, a sea to part!”

I kept a wary lookout as I made my way along the streets, most of them thronged at this hour of the summer evening. The air was sultry, and huge masses of cloud were piling up, ominous of a storm before long.

I reached the café eventually and, so far as I knew, unobserved, and came out of it an hour or so later, looking, I hope, as like a shabbily attired Russian student as the Grand Duke Loris looked like a droshky driver, accompanied by a man of the artisan type, who might have been my father,—none other than Mishka himself.

The sky was overcast, and already, above the rumble of the traffic, one could hear the mutter of distant thunder. It reminded me of that eventful night in London, little more than a month ago, though I had seemed to live a lifetime since then.

“The storm comes soon,” said Mishka. “That is well, very well.”

We came to a rank where several droshkys were standing; and he paused irresolute, fumbling in his pocket.

“We will drive, Paul,” he asserted aloud, with the air of a man who has just decided to indulge in an extravagance. “Yes, I say we will; the storm comes soon, and thy mother is alone.”

He began to haggle, after the usual fashion, with the nearest driver; and again I marvelled at the Duke’s disguise; for it was he, of course.

Once clear of the city Mishka unfolded the plan.

“Presently we turn across country and come to a house; there we leave the droshky; and there also will be horses for us in readiness if we should need them —later. Thence we go on foot through the forest to the meeting-place. We must separate when we get near it, but you will keep close to Ivan”—we spoke always of the Duke by that name—“and I will come alone. You will be challenged, and you will give the word, ‘For Freedom,’ and the sign I showed you. Give it to me, now.”

He held out his hand, palm upwards; and I touched it with my thumb and fingers in turn; five little taps.

“Good, you are a quick learner—Paul! The meeting will be in an old chapel,—or

so we imagine; the place is changed many times, but it must be there, or in the clearing. Either way there will be little light, there among the pines. That is in our favor. If she is there, we shall know how to act; we must decide then. She will be accused—that is certain—but the five may acquit her. If that comes to pass—good; we shall easily get speech with her, and perhaps she may return with us. At least she will be safe for the moment. But if they condemn her, we must act quickly and all together. We must save her and get her away,—or—die with her!"

"Well said!" growled "Ivan."

The rain was pattering down now in big drops, and the lightning flashes were more frequent, the thunder nearer each time. The horse shied as there came a more vivid flash than before, followed almost instantly by a crackling roll—the storm was upon us.

As the thunder ceased, I found "Ivan" had pulled the horse up, and was listening intently. I listened also, and above the faint tinkle of our bells and the slight movements of the horse, I heard, faint, as yet, but rapidly approaching, the thud of hoofs and the jangle of accoutrements.

"A patrol," said "Ivan" quickly. "They are coming towards us; I saw them by the lightning flash. They will challenge us, and I shall drive on, trusting to the darkness and storm. If they follow—as they probably will—and shoot, you two must seize your opportunity, and jump. There is just the chance that they may not see you; I shall drive on. If I distance them, I will follow you. But we must not all be taken, and it will be better for me than for you."

He started again on the instant, and another flash showed several mounted figures just ahead.

A challenge rang out, and "Ivan's" reply was to lash the horse into a gallop. We charged through them, and they wheeled after us, and fired. I heard the "zsp" of a bullet as it ripped through the leather hood close to my ear; but in the darkness and confusion they fired wildly. And, for the present at any rate, our gallant little horse was more than a match for theirs, and was distancing them rapidly.

Another flash, and "Now!" roared "Ivan," above the roar of the thunder. I had already sprung up, knowing that I must jump before the next flash came; and Mishka, as I found afterwards, did the same.

Steadying myself for a moment, I let myself drop, stumbled backward for a few steps, fell, and rolled into the ditch, just as the pursuers clattered past, in a whirlwind of oaths.

For the moment I, at least, had escaped; but where was Mishka?

CHAPTER XIX

NIGHT IN THE FOREST

As the sounds of flight and pursuit receded, I crawled out of the ditch, and called softly to my companion, who answered me, from the other side of the road, with a groan and an oath.

“I am hurt; it is my leg—my ankle; I cannot stand,” he said despairingly.

As the lightning flared again, I saw his face for a moment, plastered with black mud, and furious with pain and chagrin. I groped my way across to him, hauled him out of the ditch, and felt his limbs to try to ascertain the extent of his injury.

It might have been worse, for there were no broken bones, as I had feared at first; but he had a badly sprained ankle.

“Bind it—hard, with your handkerchief,” he said, between his set teeth. “We must get out of this, into the wood. They will return directly.”

His grit was splendid, for he never uttered a sound—though his foot must have hurt him badly—as I helped him up. Supporting him as well as I could, we stumbled into the wood, groping our way through the darkness, and thankful for every flash that gave us light, an instant at a time, and less dazzling—though more dangerous—here under the canopy of pine branches than yonder on the open road.

Even if Mishka had not been lamed, our progress must have been slow, for the undergrowth was thick; still, he managed to get along somehow, leaning on me, and dragging himself forward by grasping each slender pine trunk that he lurched up against.

He sank down at length, utterly exhausted, and, in the pause that followed, above the sound of our labored breathing and the ceaseless patter of the rain on the pines, I heard the jangle of the cavalry patrol returning along the road. Had “Ivan” eluded or outdistanced them? Were they taking him back with them, a prisoner; or, worst of all, had they shot him?

The sounds passed—how close we still were to the road!—and gradually died

away.

“He has escaped, thanks be to God!” Mishka said, in a hoarse whisper.

“How do you know that?”

“If they had overtaken him they would have found the droshky empty, and would have sought us along the road.”

“Well, what now? How far are we from the meeting-place?”

“Three versts, more or less. We should have been there by this time! Come, let us get on. Have you the pocket lamp? We can use it now. It will help us a little, and we shall strike a track before long.”

The lamp was a little flash-light torch which I had slipped into my pocket at the last moment, and showed to Mishka when I was changing my clothes. It served us well now, for the lightning flashes were less frequent; the worst of the storm was over.

I suppose we must have gone about half a verst—say the third of an English mile—when we found the track he had mentioned, a rough and narrow one, trodden out by the foresters, and my spirits rose at the sight of it. At least it must lead somewhere!

Here Mishka stumbled and fell again.

“It is useless. I can go no further, and I am only a hindrance. But you—what will you do—?”

“I’m going on; I’ll find the place somehow.”

“Follow the track till you come to an open space,—a clearing; it is a long way ahead. Cross that to your right, and, if your lamp holds, or the storm passes, you will see a tree blazed with five white marks, such as the foresters make. There is another track there; follow it till you are challenged; and the rest will be easy. God be with you.”

We gripped hands and parted. I guessed we should not meet again in this world, though we might in the next,—and that pretty soon!

I pushed on rapidly. The track, though narrow, was good enough, and I only had to flash my torch occasionally. I was afraid of the battery giving out, which, as a

fact, it did before I emerged in the clearing Mishka had mentioned. But the light was better now, for the storm had passed; and in this northern latitude there is no real night in summer, only “the daylight sick,” as Von Eckhardt would say. Out in the clearing I could see quite a distance. The air felt fresh and pleasant and the patch of sky overhead was an exquisite topaz tint. I stood to draw breath, and for a moment the sheer splendor of the night,—the solemn silence,—held me spellbound with some strange emotion in which awe and joy were mingled. Yes, joy! For although I had lost my two good comrades, and was undertaking, alone, a task which could scarcely have been accomplished by three desperate men, my heart was light. I had little hope, now, of saving Anne, as we reckon salvation in this poor earth-life; but I could, and would, die with and for her; and together, hand in hand, we would pass to the fuller, freer life beyond, where the mystery that encompassed her, and that had separated us, would vanish.

I was about to cross the clearing, keeping to the right and seeking for the blazed tree, as Mishka had told me, when I heard the faint sound of stealthy footsteps through the wet grass that grew tall and rank here in the open. In the soft light a shadowy figure came from the opposite side, passed across the space, and disappeared among the further trees, followed almost immediately by two more. The time was now, as I guessed, after midnight, and these were late comers, who had been delayed by the storm, or perhaps, like myself, had had to dodge the patrol.

I followed the last two in my turn, and at the place where they re-entered the wood I saw the gleam of the white blazes on the tree. I had struck the path right enough, and went along it confidently in the gloom of the trees, for perhaps a hundred yards, when a light flashed a few paces in front of me, just for a second, and I saw against the gleam the figures of the two men who were preceding me. They had passed on when I reached the place, and a hand grasped my shoulder, while the light was flashed in my face. I saw now it was a dark lantern, such as policemen carry in England.

“The password, stranger, and the sign,” a hoarse voice whispered in the darkness that followed the momentary flash of light.

I felt for his hand, gave both word and sign, and was allowed to go on, to be challenged again in a similar manner at a little distance. Here the picket detained me.

“You are a stranger, comrade; do you know the way?” he asked. All the

questions and answers had been in Russian.

“No. I will follow those in front.”

He muttered something, and a second man stepped out on to the path, and bade me follow him. How many others were at hand I do not know. The wood seemed full of stealthy sounds.

My guide followed the path for only a short distance further, then turned aside, drawing me after him, his hand on my coat-sleeve.

“Be careful; the trees are thick hereabouts,” he said in a low voice, as he walked sideways. He seemed to know every inch of the way. I followed his example, and after a minute or two of this crab-like progress we emerged into a second clearing, smaller than the first, made round a small building, from which came the subdued sound of voices, though for a moment I could see no light. Then a door was partially opened, emitting a faint gleam, and two men passed in,—doubtless those whom I had seen in front of me just now.

Without a word my guide turned back into the darkness, and I walked forward boldly, pushed the door, which gave under my touch, and entered the place.

CHAPTER XX

THE TRIBUNAL

It was a small, ruinous chapel, the windows of which had been roughly boarded up; and, so far as I could see by the dim light cast by two oil lanterns hung on the walls, all those assembled inside were men,—about fifty in number I guessed, for the place was by no means crowded. There was a clear space at the further end, round the raised piece where the altar had once stood, and where four men were seated on a bench of some sort. I could not distinguish their faces, for they all wore their hats, and the lamplight was so dim that it only served to make the darkness visible. The atmosphere was steamy, too, for we were a drenched and draggled lot.

There was no excitement at present; one of the four men on the dais was speaking in a level monotonous voice; but, as I cautiously edged my way towards the front, I felt that this silent, sinister crowd was in deadly earnest, as was the man who was addressing it. He was speaking in Russian, and I could not make out quite all he said.

I gathered that some resolution was about to be passed, for just as I got sufficiently forward to peer round and convince myself that Anne was not there, each man present, except myself and two others, held up his right hand. I followed suit instantly, judging that to be wisest, and one of the other two—he was standing close beside me—put his up, after a momentary hesitation that I think was unnoticed save by myself. I took a sidelong glance at him. He was an elderly, distinguished looking man, with a short gray beard cut to a point, and an upturned gray mustache. He was listening intently, but, though I couldn't see his face distinctly, I got the impression that he also was a stranger, and that he understood even less than I did what was going on.

The president spoke again.

"Are there any here who are against the election of Constantine"—I could not catch the other name, which was a long Polish one, I think—"to the place on the council, vacant since the murder of our comrade, Vladimir Selinski?"

Selinski! Cassavetti! He little guessed as he spoke that the man who found

Cassavetti’s body was now within five paces of him!

Not a hand was raised, and the man who had not voted stepped on to the dais, in obedience to a gesture from the president, and took his seat in silence.

A hoarse murmur of approval went round; but that was all. The grim quietude of these men was more fearful than any amount of noise could have been, and, as the president raised his hand slightly, a dead silence fell.

“Remains now only that we do justice on the murderess of Selinski, the traitress who has betrayed our secrets, has frustrated many of our plans, has warned more than one of those whom we have justly doomed to death—her lover among them—with the result that they have escaped, for the present. We would not condemn her unheard, but so far she is obdurate; she defies us, endeavors once more to trick us. If she were other than she is, or rather than she has been, she would have been removed long since, when suspicion first fell upon her; but there are many of us who love her still, who would not believe her guilty without the evidence of their own eyes and ears; and therefore we have brought her here that she may speak for herself, defend herself if that is possible. It will rest with you to acquit or condemn her!”

He spoke quite quietly, but the cool, deliberate malignity of his tone was horrible; and somehow I knew that the majority of those present shared his animosity against the prisoner, although he had spoken of “many of us who love her.”

The man beside me touched my arm, and spoke to me in French.

“Do you understand him?”

“Yes, do you?”

“No.”

There was no time for more, for, at a signal from the president, a door at the side near the dais was opened, and a woman was led in by two men, each holding her by an arm. They released her, and she stepped back a pace, and stood against the wall, her hands pressed against it on either side, bracing herself like a royal creature at bay.

It was Anne herself, and for a moment I stood, unable to move, scarcely able to breathe. There was something almost unearthly about her beauty and courage.

The feeble lamplight seemed to strengthen, and to concentrate itself on her face, —colorless save for the vivid red lips,—on her eyes, wide and brilliant with indignation, on the bright hair that shone like a queenly crown. Wrath, and scorn, and defiance were expressed by the beautiful face, the tense figure; but never a trace of fear.

They were all looking at her, as I was, in silence,—a curious hush that lasted but a few seconds, but in which I could hear the beating of my own heart; it sounded as loud as a sledge hammer.

The spell was broken by a cry from the man with the pointed beard next me who sprang forward towards her, shouting in English: “Anne! Anne! It is I, your father!”

I was only just less quick; we reached her almost together, and faced about, shielding her with our bodies, and covering those nearest us with our revolvers.

“Father! Maurice!” I heard her sob. “Oh, I knew, I knew you would come!”

“What is this devilry?” shouted Anthony Pendennis in French. “How comes my daughter here? She is a British subject, and you—you shall pay dearly—”

He got no further. Our action had been so swift, so unexpected, that the whole crowd stood still, as if paralyzed by sheer astonishment, for a few breathless seconds.

“Spies! Traitors! Kill them all!” shouted the president, springing forward, revolver in hand.

Those words were his last, for he threw up his arms and fell as my first shot got him. The rest came at us all together, like a mob of furious wild beasts. They were all armed, some with revolvers, others with the horrible little bludgeons they call “killers,”—a short heavy bar of lead set on a strong copper spring, no bigger than an ordinary round office ruler, but more deadly at close quarters than a revolver.

I flung up my left hand, tore down the lamp that hung just above us, and hurled it among them. It was extinguished as it fell, and that gave us a small advantage, for the other lamp was at the far end, and its faint light did not reach us, but only served to dimly show us our antagonists. I felt Anne sink down to the floor behind me, though whether a shot had reached her or she had fainted I did not know.

When I had emptied my revolver I dropped it, grabbed a “killer” from the hand of a fellow I had shot pointblank, and laid about me with that. I suppose Pendennis did the same. As Loris had warned me, when it came to shooting, there was no time for reloading; but the “killer” was all right. I wonder he hadn’t given me one!

We were holding our own well, in spite of the tremendous odds, and after a while—though whether it was five minutes or fifty I couldn’t say—they gave back a bit. There was quite a heap of dead and wounded round about us; but I don’t think Anne’s father was hurt as yet, and I felt no pain, though my left arm hung limp and useless, numbed by a blow from a “killer” that had missed my head; and something warm was dripping down my right wrist.

“What now?” I heard Pendennis say, in that brief lull in the pandemonium.

“God knows. We can’t get to the door; we must fight it out here; they’re coming on again. On guard!”

We swung up our weapons, but before the rush could reach us, there was a crash close at hand; the door through which Anne and her guards had entered the chapel was thrown open, and a big man dashed in,—Loris himself, still in his disguise. So he had reached us at last!

He must have grasped the situation at a glance, for he shouted: “Back; back for your lives! By the other door. We are betrayed; the soldiers are here. They are coming this way. Save yourselves!”

CHAPTER XXI

A FORLORN HOPE

They were a craven crew,—bold enough when arrayed in their numbers against two men and one helpless girl, but terror-stricken at these fresh tidings.

That was my opinion of them at the time, but perhaps it was unjust. Every man who attended that meeting had done so at the deliberate risk of his life and liberty. Most of them had undoubtedly tramped the whole way to the rendezvous, through the storm and swelter of the summer night, and they were fatigued and unstrung. Also, the Russian—and especially the revolutionary Russian—is a queer psychological amalgam. Ordinarily as callous and stoical as a Chinaman in the infliction or endurance of death or torture, he is yet a bundle of high-strung nerves, and at any moment his cool cynicism is liable to give place to sheer hysteria.

Therefore at the warning shout, panic seized them, and they fled, helter-skelter, through the main door. In less than a minute the place was clear of all but ourselves and the dead and wounded on the floor.

Loris slammed the door, barred it, and strode back to us. Pendennis was kneeling beside Anne, calling her by her name, and I leaned against the wall, staring stupidly down at them. I was faint and dizzy all at once, incapable for the moment of either speech or action.

“Well done, my friend!” the Duke exclaimed. “You thought I had failed you, eh? Come, we must get out of this quickly. They will return when they find it is a ruse. Is she hurt?”

He pushed Pendennis aside unceremoniously, and lifted Anne in his arms, as easily as if she had been a child.

I think she must have been regaining consciousness, for I heard him say rapidly and tenderly:

“Courage, *petite*, thou shalt soon be safe.”

“Who are you?” demanded Pendennis, peering at him in perplexity. His disguise

was palpable and incongruous enough, now that he was speaking in his natural voice.

“Her friend, as I presume you are; therefore follow if you would save her and yourself. There is no time for talk!”

With Anne in his arms he made for the door by which he had entered, and Pendennis rushed after him. Anne’s arms were round his neck; she was clinging to him, and her head lay on his shoulder. I saw the gleam of her bright hair as they passed through the doorway,—the last I was to see of Anne Pendennis for many a long day.

I staggered forward, trying to beat back the horrible faintness that was overwhelming me, and to follow them, stumbled over a corpse, and fell headlong. An agonizing pain shot through me, beginning at my left arm, and I knew now that it was broken. The pain dispelled the faintness for the time being, but I made no attempt to rise. Impossible to follow them now, or even if not impossible, I could be of no service; I should only hamper their flight. Better stay here and die.

I think I prayed that I might die soon; I know I prayed that they might yet reach safety. Where had Anne’s father sprung from? How could he have known of her capture, of this meeting in the heart of the woods? How had he made his way here?

Why, he must himself belong to this infernal society, as she did; that was it, of course. What an abominable din this was in my head,—worse to bear than the pain of my wounds. In my head? No, the noise was outside—shrieks and shouts, and the crackle of rifles. I dragged myself to a sitting posture and listened. The Duke had said that his tale of the soldiers was a mere ruse, but certainly there was a fight going on outside. Were the soldiers there, and had Loris unwittingly spoken the truth,—or had he himself betrayed the revolutionists as a last resource? Unanswerable questions, all of them; so why worry about them? But they kept whirling round maddeningly in my half delirious brain, while the din still raged without, though it seemed to be abating.

The remaining lamp had flickered out, but sufficient light came now through the gaps in the broken roof to enable me to see about me. The place was like a shambles round the spot where we had taken our stand; there were five or six bodies, besides the president, whom I had shot at first. It was his corpse I had stumbled over, so he had his revenge in a way.

I found myself wondering idly how long it would be before they would search the chapel, and if it would be worth while to try and get out by the door through which Loris had come and gone; but, though I made a feeble effort to get on my feet, it was no good. I was as weak as an infant. I discovered then that I was soaked with blood from bullet wounds in my right arm and in my side, though I felt no pain from them at the time; all the pain was concentrated in my broken left arm.

There came a battering at the barred door, to which my back was turned, and a moment afterwards the other door swung open, and an officer sprang in, sword in hand, followed by a couple of soldiers with fixed bayonets.

He stopped short, with an exclamation of astonishment, at the sight of the dead man, and I laughed aloud, and called:

“Hello, Mirakoff!”

It was queer; I recognized him, I heard myself laugh and speak, in a strange detached fashion, as if I was some one else, having no connection with the battered individual half sitting, half lying on the blood-stained floor.

“Who is it?” he asked, staying his men with a gesture, and staring down at me with a puzzled frown.

“Maurice Wynn.”

“Monsieur Wynn! *Ma foi!* What the devil are you doing here?”

“Curiosity,” I said. “And I guess I’ve paid for it!”

I suppose I must have fainted then, for the next thing I knew I was sitting with my back to a tree, while a soldier beside me, leaning on his rifle, exchanged ribald pleasantries with some of his comrades who, assisted by several stolid-faced *moujiks*, were busily engaged in filling in and stamping down a huge and hastily dug grave.

At a little distance, three officers, one of them Mirakoff, were talking together, and beside them, thrown on an outspread coat, was a heap of oddments, chiefly papers, revolvers, and “killers.” As I looked a soldier gathered these up into a bundle, and hoisted it on his shoulder. A watch and chain fell out, and he picked them up, and pocketed them.

I heard a hoarse word of command on the right, and saw a number of prisoners —the remnant of the revolutionists, each with a soldier beside him—file into the wood. They all looked miserable enough, poor wretches. Some were wounded, scarcely able to stand, and their guards urged them forward by prodding them with their bayonets.

I wondered why I wasn't among them, and guessed if they tried to make me march that way, I'd just stay still and let them prod the life out of me!

I still felt dazed and queer, and my broken left arm hurt me badly. It hung helpless at my side, but my right arm had been roughly bandaged and put in a sling, and I could feel a wad over the other wound, held in place by a scarf of some kind. My mouth and throat were parched with a burning thirst that was even worse than the pain in my arm.

The group of officers dispersed, and Mirakoff crossed over to me.

"Well, you are recovering?" he asked curtly.

I moved my lips, but no sound would come, so I just looked up at him.

He saw how it was with me, and ordered the soldier to fetch water. He was a decent youngster, that Mirakoff, too good for a Russian; he must have had some foreign blood in him.

"This is a serious matter," he said, while the man was gone. "Lucky I chanced on you, or you'd have been finished off at once, and shoved in there with the rest"—he jerked his head towards the new-made grave. "I've done the best I could for you. You'll be carried through the wood, and sent in a cart to Petersburg, instead of having to run by the stirrup, as the others who can stand must do. But you'd have to go to prison. What on earth induced you to come here?"

The man came back with the water, and I drank greedily, and found my voice, though the words came slowly and clumsily.

"Curiosity, as I told you."

"Curiosity to see '*La Mort*,' you mean?"

"No; though I've got pretty close to death," I said, making a feeble pun. (We were, of course, speaking in French.)

“I don’t mean death; I mean a woman who is called ‘*La Mort*.’ Her name’s Anna Petrovna. She was to have been there. Did you see her? Was she there?”

I forgot my pain for the instant, in the relief that his words conveyed. Surely he would not have put that question to me if she was already a prisoner. Loris must have got away with her, and, for the present, at least, she was safe.

CHAPTER XXII

THE PRISON HOUSE

“

There was a woman,” I confessed. “And that’s how I came to be chipped about. They were going to murder her.”

“To murder her!” he exclaimed. “Why, she’s one of them; the cleverest and most dangerous of the lot! Said to be a wonderfully pretty girl, too. Did you see her?”

“Only for a moment; there wasn’t much light. From what I could make out they accused her of treachery, and led her in; she stood with her back against the wall, —she looked quite a girl, with reddish hair. Then the row began. There were only two or three took her part, and I joined in; one can’t stand by and see a helpless girl shot or stabbed by a lot of cowardly brutes.”

I had found an air of apparent candor serve me before, and guessed it might do so again.

“Well, what then?”

“That’s all I remember clearly; we had a lively time for a few minutes, and then some one shouted that the soldiers were coming; and the next I knew I was sitting on the floor, wondering what had happened. I’d been there quite a while when you found me.”

“It is marvellous how she always escapes,” he said, more to himself than to me. “Still, we’ve got a good haul this time. Now, how did you get here? Some one must have told you, guided you?”

“That I can’t tell you.”

“You mean you won’t?”

“Well, put it that way if you like.”

“Don’t be a fool, Wynn; I am asking you for your own sake. If you don’t tell me, you’ll be made to tell later. You haven’t the least idea what you’ve let yourself in

for, man! Come, did not Count Solovieff—you know well who I mean—bring you here?”

“No. I came alone.”

“At least he knew you were coming?”

“He may have done. I can’t say.”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“Have it your own way. You will regret your obstinacy later; remember, I have warned you.”

“Thanks,—it’s good of you, Mirakoff; but I’ve told you all I mean to tell any one.”

He paused, biting his mustache, and frowning down at me.

“Fetch more water,” he said abruptly to the soldier, who had heard all that passed, and might or might not understand; the Russians are a polyglot people.

“I have done what I could,” Mirakoff continued hurriedly in the brief interval while we were alone. “You had two passports. I took the false one,—it is yonder; they will think it belongs to one of the dead men. Your own is still in your pocket; the police will take it when you get to prison; at least it will show your identity, and may make things easier.”

“Thanks, again,” I said earnestly. “And if you could contrive to send word to the American or English Embassy, or both.”

“I’ll see what I can do. Give him the water,” he added, as the soldier again returned.

He watched as I drank, then turned on his heel and left me, without another word. He had, as I knew, already compromised his dignity sufficiently by conversing with me at all.

But he had cheered me immensely. I was sure now that those three—Anne, her father, and Loris—had got clear away, doubtless to the house Mishka had mentioned, where horses would be waiting for them; and by this time they might be far from the danger zone. Therefore I felt able to face what lay in store for myself, however bad it might be. It was bad enough, even at the beginning;

though, as Mirakoff had said, it would have been worse but for his intervention. A few minutes after he left me, I was hoisted into a kind of improvised carrying chair, borne by a couple of big soldiers, who went along the narrow track at a jog-trot, and amused themselves by bumping me against every tree trunk that was conveniently near. They had been ordered to carry me, and they did so; but I think I'd have suffered less if I had marched with the others, even counting in the bayonet prods!

We reached the road at last, where horses were waiting, and a wagon, containing several wounded prisoners. I was thrown in on top of them, and we started off at a lumbering gallop, the guard of soldiers increasing in numbers as those who had followed on foot through the wood mounted and overtook us. I saw Mirakoff pass and ride on ahead; he did not even glance in my direction. More than once we had to stop to pick up a dead or dying man, one of the batch of prisoners who had been forced to "run by the stirrup," with their hands tied behind them, and a strap passed round their waist, attaching them to the stirrup of the horse, which its rider urges to full speed,—that is part of the fun. It is a very active man who can maintain the pace, though it is marvellous what some can accomplish under the sharp incentives of fear and pain. He who stumbles is jerked loose and left by the wayside where he fell; as were those whom we found, and who were tossed into the wagon with as much unconcern as scavengers toss refuse into their carts.

It was during one of these brief halts I saw something that discounted the tidings I had heard from Mirakoff.

I was the least hurt of any of the wretched occupants of the wagon, and I had managed to drag myself to the far end and to sit there, in the off-side corner, my knees hunched up to my chin. My arms were helpless, so I could do nothing to assist my unfortunate companions, and could only crouch there, with my teeth set, enduring the pain that racked me, with as much fortitude as I could muster.

There was a clatter and jingle on the road behind us, and an instant later a droshky passed, at a comparatively slow pace,—the one horse seemed almost spent,—preceded and followed by a small escort of cavalry.

For the moment I forgot the torture I was enduring, as I recognized, with dismay, the Grand Duke Loris as one of the two occupants of the little carriage,—a bizarre, disreputable-looking figure, for he still wore the filthy clothes and the dirty face of "Ivan," the droshky man, though the false beard and wig were gone. Yet, in spite of his attire and the remains of his disguise, he looked every inch a

prince. His blue eyes were wide and serene, and he held a cigarette between two begrimed fingers. Beside him was a spick and span officer, sitting well back in his corner and looking distinctly uncomfortable; while the easy grace of the Duke's attitude would have suited a state-carriage rather than this shabby little vehicle; though it suited that, too.

He glanced at the cart, and our eyes met. I saw a flash of recognition in his, but next instant the droshky, with its escort, had passed, and we were lumbering on again.

He also was a prisoner, then! But what of Anne and her father? Had they escaped? Surely, if they had been taken, he would not have sat there smoking so unconcernedly! But who could tell? I, at least, knew him for a consummate actor.

Well, conjecture was futile; and I was soon in a state of fever, consequent on pain and loss of blood, that rendered conjecture, or coherent thought of any kind impossible.

I don't even recollect arriving at the prison,—that same grim fortress of Peter and Paul which I had mused on as I looked at it across the river such a short time back, reckoned by hours, an eternity reckoned by sensations! What followed was like a ghastly nightmare; worse, for it was one from which there was no awaking, no escape. Often even now I start awake, in a sweat of fear, having dreamed that I was back again in that inferno, racked with agony, faint with hunger, parched with thirst. For the Russian Government allows its political prisoners twelve ounces of black bread a day, and there's never enough water to slake the burning thirst of the victims, or there wasn't in those awful summer days, which, I have been told, are yet a degree more endurable than the iron cold of winter.

Small wonder that of the hundreds of thousands of prisoners who are flung into Russian jails only a small percentage are ever brought to trial, and executed or deported to Siberia. The great majority are never heard of again; they are dead to the outside world when the great gates clang behind them, and soon they perish from pain and hunger and privation. It is well for them if they are delicate folk, whose misery is quickly ended; it is the strong who suffer most in the instinctive struggle for life.

Whether I was ever interrogated I don't know to this day, nor exactly how long I was in the horrible place; I guess it was about a fortnight, but it was a

considerable time, even after I left it, before I was able even to attempt to piece things out in my mind.

I was lying on my bunk,—barely conscious, though no longer delirious,—when one of the armed warders came and shook me by the shoulder, roughly bidding me get up and follow him. I tried to obey, but I was as weak as a rat, and he just put his arm round me and hauled me along, easily enough, for he was a muscular giant, and I was something like a skeleton.

I didn't feel the faintest interest in his proceedings, for I was almost past taking interest in anything; but I remembered later that we went along some flagged passages, and up stone stairs, passing more than one lot of sentries. He hustled me into a room and planked me down on a bench with my back to the wall, where I sat, blinking stupidly for a minute. Then, with an effort, I pulled myself together a bit, and was able to see that there were several men in the room, two of them in plain clothes, and the face of one of them seemed vaguely familiar.

"Is this your man, Monsieur?" I heard one of the Russians say; and the man at whom I was staring answered gravely: "I don't know; if he is, you have managed to alter him almost out of knowledge."

I knew by his accent that he was an Englishman, and a moment later I knew who he was, as he came close up to me and said sharply: "Maurice Wynn?"

"Yes, I'm Wynn," I managed to say. "How are you, Inspector Freeman?"

Somehow at the moment it did not seem in the least wonderful that he should be here in Petersburg, and in search of me. I didn't even feel astonished at his next words.

"Maurice Wynn, I have a warrant for your arrest on the charge of murdering Vladimir Selinski,—alias Cassavetti."

CHAPTER XXIII

FREEMAN EXPLAINS

The next I knew I was in bed, in a cool, darkened room, with a man seated in an easy-chair near at hand, smoking a cigarette, and reading what looked remarkably like an English newspaper.

I lay and looked at him lazily, for a few minutes. I hadn't the least idea as to where I was, or how I came there; I didn't feel any curiosity on the point. The blissful consciousness of cleanliness and comfort was quite sufficient for me at present. My broken arm had been set and put in rude splints while I was in the prison, by one of my fellow sufferers, I expect, and was now scientifically cased in plaster of Paris; the bullet wounds in my right arm and side were properly dressed and strapped, and felt pretty comfortable till I tried to shift my position a little, when I realized they were there.

At the slight movement the man in the chair laid down his paper and came up to the bed.

"Hello, Mr. Wynn; feel a bit more like yourself, eh?" he asked bluffly, in English.

"Why, yes, I feel just about 'O. K.,' thanks," I responded, and laughed inanely. My voice sounded funny—thin and squeaky—and it jumped from one note to another. I hadn't the least control over it. "Say, where am I, and who are you? I guess you've done me a good turn!"

"Humph, I suppose we have. Good Lord, think of an Englishman—you're an American, but it's all the same in this case—being treated like that by these Russian swine! You're still in St. Petersburg; we've got to patch you up a bit before we can take you back to good old England."

Now why should he, or any one else, be "taking me back to England?" I puzzled over it in silence before I put the question.

"Never you mind about that now," he said with brusque kindliness. "All you've got to think about is getting strong again."

But already I began to remember, and past events came jumping before my mind like cinematograph pictures.

“You fetched me out of prison,—you and Inspector Freeman,” I said slowly.

“Look here, don’t you worry,” he began.

“Yes, I must—I want to get things clear; wait a bit. He said something. I know; he came to arrest me for murder,—the murder of Cassavetti.”

“Just so; and a jolly good thing for you he did! But, as you’ve remembered that much, I must warn you that I’m a detective in charge of you, and anything you say will be used against you.”

More cinematograph pictures,—Cassavetti as I saw him, lying behind the door, his eyes open, staring; myself on the steps below Westminster Bridge, calling to Anne, as she sat in the boat. Anne! No more pictures, but a jiggery of red and black splashes, and then a darkness, through which I passed somehow into a pleasant place,—a garden where roses bloomed and a fountain plashed, and Anne was beside me; I held her hand in mine.

Now she was gone, she had vanished mysteriously. What was that man saying? “The Fraulein has not been here at all!” Why, she was here a moment ago; what a fool that waiter was! A waiter? No, he was a droshky driver; I knew it, though I could not see him. There were other voices speaking now,—men’s voices,—subdued but distinct; and as I listened I came back from the land of dreams—or delirium—to that of reality.

“Yes, he’s been pretty bad, sir. He came to himself quite nicely, and began to talk. No, I didn’t tell him anything, as you said I wasn’t to, but he remembered by himself, and then I had to warn him, and he went right off again.”

“You’re an ass, Harris,” said another voice. “What did you want to speak to him at all for?”

I opened my eyes at that, and saw Freeman and the other man looking down at me.

“He isn’t an ass; he’s a real good sort,” I announced. “And I didn’t murder Cassavetti, though I’d have murdered half a dozen Cassavettis to get out of that hell upon earth yonder!”

I shut my eyes again, settled myself luxuriously against my pillows, and went,—back to Anne and the rose-garden.

I suppose I began to pull round from that time, and in a few days I was able to get up. I almost forgot that I was still in custody, and even when I remembered the fact, it didn't trouble me in the least. After what I had endured in the Russian prison, it was impossible, at present, anyhow, to consider Detective-Inspector Freeman and his subordinate, Harris, as anything less than the best of good fellows and good nurses. True, they never left me to myself for an instant; one or other of them was always in close attendance on me; but there was nothing of espionage in that attendance. They merely safe-guarded me, and, at the same time, helped me back to life, as if I had been their comrade rather than their prisoner. Freeman, in due course, gave me his formal warning that "anything I said with respect to the crime with which I was charged would be used against me;" but in all other respects both he and Harris acted punctiliously on the principle held by only two civilized nations in the world,—England and the United States of America,—that "a man is regarded as innocent in the eyes of the law until he has been tried and found guilty."

"Well, how goes it to-day?" Freeman asked, as he relieved his lieutenant one morning. "You look a sight better than you did. D'you think you can stand the journey? We don't want you to die on our hands *en route*, you know!"

"We'll start to-day if you like; I'm fit enough," I answered. "Let's get back and get it over. It's a preposterous charge, you know; but—"

"We needn't discuss that, Mr. Wynn," he interrupted hastily.

"All right; we won't. Though I fancy I shouldn't have been alive at this time if you hadn't taken it into your heads to hunt me down as the murderer of a man who wasn't even a naturalized Englishman. You came just in the nick of time, Mr. Freeman."

"Well, yes, I think we did that," he conceded. "You were the most deplorable object I've ever seen in the course of my experience,—and that's fairly long and varied. I'd like to know how you got into their clutches; though you needn't say if it has any connection with—"

"Why, certainly. It's nothing to do with Cassavetti, or Selinski, or whatever his name was," I said.

“I got wind of a Nihilist meeting in the woods, went there out of curiosity; and the soldiers turned up. There was a free fight; they got the best of it, took me prisoner with the others, and that’s all. But how did you trace me? How long had you been in Petersburg?”

“Only a couple of days. Found you had disappeared and the Embassies were raising Cain. It seemed likely you’d been murdered, as Carson was. The police declared they were making every effort to trace you, without success; and I doubt if they would have produced you, even in response to the extradition warrant, but that some one mysteriously telephoned information to the American Embassy that you were in prison—in the fortress—and even gave your number; though he would not give his own name or say where he was speaking from.”

Who was it, I wondered,—Loris or Mirakoff? It must have been one or the other. He had saved my life, anyhow.

“So acting on that, we simply went and demanded you; and good heavens, what a sight you were! I thought you’d die in the droshky that we brought you here in. I couldn’t help telling the officer who handed you over that I couldn’t congratulate him on his prison system; and he grinned and said:

“‘Ah, I have heard that you English treat your prisoners as honored guests. We prefer our own methods.’”

CHAPTER XXIV

BACK TO ENGLAND

We started for England the next night, second class, and travelled right through, as I stood the journey better than any of us expected. After we crossed the frontier, I doubt if any of our fellow travellers, or any one else, for the matter of that, had the least suspicion that I was a prisoner being taken back to stand my trial on the gravest of all charges, and not merely an invalid, assiduously tended by my two companions. I didn't even realize the fact myself at the time,—or at least I only realized it now and then.

"Well, Mr. Wynn, you've looked your last on Russia, and jolly glad I should be if I were you," Freeman remarked cheerfully when we were in the train again, on the way to Konigsberg.

"Looked my last,—what do you mean?" Even as I spoke I remembered why he was in charge of me, and laughed.

"Oh, I suppose you think you're going to hang me on this preposterous murder charge."

He was upset that I should imagine him guilty of such a breach of what he called professional etiquette, as, it seemed, any reference to my present position would have been.

"I meant that, if you wanted to go back, you wouldn't be allowed to. They've fired you out, and won't have you again at any price," he explained stiffly.

"Oh, won't they? I guess they will if I want to go. Look here, Freeman, I bet you twenty dollars, say five pounds English, that I'll be back in Russia within six months from this date,—that is, if I think fit,—and that they'll admit me all right. You'd have to trust me, for I can't deposit the stakes at present; I will when we get back to England. Is it a deal?"

His answer was enigmatic, and I took it as complimentary.

"Well, you are a cough-drop!" he exclaimed. "No, I can't take the bet, —'twouldn't be professional; though I'd like to know, without prejudice, as the

lawyers say, why on earth you should want to go back. I should have thought you'd had quite enough of it."

I could not tell him the real reason,—that, if I lived, I should never rest till I had at least learned the fate of Anne Pendennis.

"There's a fascination about it," I explained. "They're back in the middle ages there; and you never know what's going to happen next, to yourself or any one else."

"Well, I'm—blessed! You'd go back just for that!"

"Why, certainly," I assented.

There were several things I'd have liked to ask him, but I did not choose to; for I guessed he would not have answered me. One was whether he had traced the old Russian whose coming had been the beginning of all the trouble, so far as I was concerned, anyway; and how he knew that a woman—a red-haired woman as he had said—had been in Cassavetti's rooms the night he was murdered.

If that woman were Anne—as in my heart I knew she must have been, though I wouldn't allow myself to acknowledge it—he must have discovered further evidence that cleared her, or he would certainly have been prosecuting a search for her, instead of arresting me.

However, I hoped to get some light on the mystery either when my case came before the magistrate, or between then and the trial, supposing I was committed for trial.

It was when we were nearing Dover, about three o'clock on a heavenly summer morning, that I began to understand my position. We were all on deck,—I lying at full length on a bench, with plenty of cushions about me, and a rug over me.

"Well, we're nearly in," Freeman remarked cheerfully. "Another five minutes will do it. Feel pretty fit?"

"Splendid," I answered, swinging my feet off the bench, and sitting up.

"That's all right. Here, take Harris's arm—so. I sha'n't worry about your left arm; this will do the trick."

"This" meant that a handcuff was snapped round my right wrist, and its fellow, connected with it by a chain, round Harris's left.

I shivered involuntarily at the touch of the steel, at the sensation of being a prisoner in reality,—fettered!

“I say, that isn’t necessary,” I remonstrated, rather unsteadily. “You must know that I shall make no attempt to escape.”

“Yes, I know that, but we must do things decently and in order,” he answered soothingly, as one would speak to a fractious child. “That’s quite comfortable, isn’t it? You’d have had to lean on one of us anyhow, being an invalid. There, the rug over your shoulder—so; not a soul will notice it, and we’d go ashore last; we’ve a compartment reserved on the train, of course.”

I dare say he was right, and that none of the many passengers noticed anything amiss; but I felt as if every one must be staring at me,—a handcuffed felon. The “bracelet” didn’t hurt me at all, like those that had been forced on my swollen wrists in the Russian prison, and that had added considerably to the tortures I endured; but somehow it seemed morally harder to bear,—as a slight but deliberate insult from one who has been a friend hurts more than any amount of injury inflicted by an avowed enemy.

They were both as kind and considerate as ever during the last stage of our journey. From Dover to Charing Cross, Harris, I know, sat in a most cramped and uncomfortable position all the way, so that I should rest as easily as possible; but in some subtle manner our relationship had changed. I had, of course, been their prisoner all along, but the fact only came home to me now.

From Charing Cross we went in a cab to the prison, through the sunny streets, so quiet at this early hour.

“Cheer up,” counselled Freeman, as I shook hands with him and Harris, from whom I was now, of course, unshackled. “You’ll come before the magistrate to-morrow or next day; depends on what the doctor says. He’ll see you directly. You’ll want to communicate with your friends at once, of course, and start arranging about your defence. I can send a wire, or telephone to any one on my way home if you like.”

He really was an astonishing good sort, though he had been implacable on the handcuff question.

I thanked him, and gave him Jim Cayley’s name and address and telephone number.

“All right; I’ll let Mr. Cayley know as soon as possible,” he said, jotting the details in his note-book. “What about Lord Southbourne?”

“I’ll send word to him later.”

I felt distinctly guilty with respect to Southbourne. I ought, of course, to have communicated with him—or rather have got Freeman to do so—as soon as I began to pull round; but somehow I’d put off the unpleasant duty. I had disobeyed his express instructions, as poor Carson had done; and the disobedience had brought its own punishment to me, as to Carson, though in a different way; but Southbourne would account that as nothing. He would probably ignore me; or if he did not do that, his interest would be strictly impersonal,—limited to the amount of effective copy I could turn out as a result of my experiences.

Therefore I was considerably surprised when, some hours afterwards, instead of Jim Cayley, whom I was expecting every moment, Lord Southbourne himself was brought up to the cell,—one of those kept for prisoners on remand, a small bare room, but comfortable enough, and representing the acme of luxury in comparison with the crowded den in which I had been thrown in Petersburg.

Lord Southbourne’s heavy, clean-shaven face was impassive as ever, and he greeted me with a casual nod.

“Hello, Wynn, you’ve been in the wars, eh? I’ve seen Freeman. He says you were just about at the last gasp when he got hold of you, and is pluming himself no end on having brought you through so well.”

“So he ought!” I conceded cordially. “He’s a jolly good sort, and it would have been all up with me in another few hours. Though how on earth he could fix on me as Cassavetti’s murderer, I can’t imagine. It’s a fool business, anyhow.”

“H’m—yes, I suppose so,” drawled Southbourne, in that exasperatingly deliberate way of his. “But I think you must blame—or thank—me for that!”

CHAPTER XXV

SOUTHBOURNE'S SUSPICIONS

"

You! What had you to do with it?" I ejaculated.

"Well, Freeman was hunting on a cold scent; yearning to arrest some one, as they always do in a murder case. He'd thought of you, of course. Considering that you were on the spot at the time, I wonder he didn't arrest you right off; but he had formed his own theory, as detectives always do, and in nine cases out of ten they're utterly wrong!"

"Do you know what the theory was?" I asked.

"Yes. He believed that the murder was committed by a woman; simply because a woman must have helped to ransack the rooms during Cassavetti's absence."

"How did he know that?"

"How did you know it?" he counter-queried.

"Because he told me at the time that a woman had been in the rooms, but he wouldn't say any more, except that she was red-haired, or fair-haired, and well dressed. I wondered how he knew that, but he wouldn't tell me."

"He has never told me," Southbourne said complacently. "Though I guessed it, all the same, and he couldn't deny it, when I asked him. She dropped hairpins about, or a hairpin rather,—women always do when they're agitated,—an expensive gilt hairpin. That's how he knew she was certainly fair-haired, and probably well dressed."

I remembered how, more than once, I had picked up and restored to Anne a hairpin that had fallen from her glorious hair. Jim and Mary Cayley had often chaffed her about the way she shed her hairpins around.

"What sort of hairpins?" I asked.

"A curved thing. He showed it me when I bowled him out about them. I know

the sort. My wife wears them,—patent things, warranted not to fall out, so they always do. They cost half a crown a packet in that quality."

I knew the sort, too, and knew also that my former suspicion was now a certainty. Anne had been to Cassavetti's rooms that night; though nothing would ever induce me to believe she was his murderess.

"Well, I fail to see how that clue could have led him to me," I said, forcing a laugh. I didn't mean to let Southbourne, or any one else, guess that I knew who that hairpin had belonged to.

"It didn't; it led him nowhere; though I believe he spent several days going round the West End hairdressers' shops. There's only one of them, a shop in the Haymarket, keeps that particular kind of hairpin, and they snubbed him; they weren't going to give away their clients' names. And there was nothing in the rooms to give him a clue. All Cassavetti's private papers had been carried off, as you know. Then there was the old Russian you told about at the inquest. He seems to have vanished off the face of the earth; for nothing has been seen or heard of him. So, as I said, Freeman was on a cold scent, and thought of you again. He came to me, ostensibly on other business. I'd just got the wire from Petersburg—Nolan of *The Thunderer* sent it—saying you'd walked out of your hotel three nights before, and hadn't been seen or heard of since. It struck me that the quickest way to trace you, if you were still above ground, was to set Freeman on your track straight away. So I told him at once of your disappearance; and he started cross-questioning me, with the result,—well—he went off eventually with the fixed idea that you were more implicated in the murder than had appeared possible at the time, and that your disappearance was in some way connected with it. Wait a bit,—let me finish! The next I heard was that he was off to St. Petersburg with an extradition warrant; and, from what he told me just now, he was just in time. Yes, it was the quickest way; they'd never have released you on any other consideration!"

"No, I guess they wouldn't," I responded. "You've certainly done me a good turn, Lord Southbourne,—saved my life, in fact. But what about this murder charge? Is it a farce, or what? You don't believe I murdered the man, do you?"

"I? Good heavens, no! If I had I shouldn't have troubled to set Freeman on you," he answered languidly. I've met some baffling individuals, but never one more baffling than Southbourne.

"As far as we are concerned it is a farce,—though he doesn't think it one. He

imagines he's got a case after his own heart. To snatch a man out of the jaws of death, nurse him back to life, and hand him over to be hanged; that's his idea of a neat piece of business. But it will be all right, of course. I doubt if you'll even be sent for trial; but if you are, no jury would convict you. Anyhow, I've sent for Sir George Lucas,—he ought to be here directly,—and I've given him *carte blanche*, at my expense, of course; so if a defence is needed you'd have the best that's to be got."

I began to stammer my thanks and protestations. I should never have dreamed of engaging the famous lawyer, who, if the matter did not prove as insignificant as Southbourne seemed to anticipate, and I had to stand my trial, would, in his turn, secure an equally famous K. C.,—a luxury far beyond my own means.

But Southbourne checked me at the outset.

"That's all right," he said in his lazy way. "I can't afford to lose a good man,—when there's a chance of saving him. I hadn't the chance with Carson; he was a good man, too, though he was a fool,—as you are! But, after all, it's the fools who rush in where angels fear to tread; therefore they're a lot more valuable in modern journalism than any angel could be, when they survive their folly, as you have so far! and now I want to know just what you were up to from the time you left your hotel till you were handed over by the Russian authorities; that is, if you feel equal to it. If not, another time will do, of course."

I told him just as much—or as little—as I had already told Freeman. He watched me intently all the time from under his heavy lids, and nodded as I came to the end of my brief recital.

"You'll be able to do a good series; even if you're committed for trial you'll have plenty of time, for the case can't come on till September. 'The Red Terror in Russia' will do for the title; we'll publish it in August, and you must pile it on thick about the prison. It's always a bit difficult to rake up sufficient horrors to satisfy the public in the holidays; what gluttons they are! But, look here, didn't I tell you not to meddle with this sort of thing?"

I had been expecting this all along, and was ready for it now.

"You did. But, as you've just said, 'Fools rush in,' etcetera. And I'm quite willing to acknowledge that there's a lot more of fool than angel in me."

"You're not fool enough to disobey orders without some strong motive," he

retorted. “So now,—why did you go to that meeting?”

I was determined not to tell him. Anne might be dead, or in a Russian prison, which was worse than death; at any rate nearly two thousand miles of sea and land separated us, and I was powerless to aid her,—as powerless as I had been while I lay in the prison of Peter and Paul. But there was one thing I could still do; I could guard her name, her fame. It would have been a desecration to mention her to this man Southbourne. True, he had proved himself my good and generous friend; but I knew him for a man of sordid mind, a man devoid of ideals, a man who judged everything by one standard,—the amount of effective “copy” it would produce. He would regard her career, even the little of it that was known to me, as “excellent material” for a sensational serial, which he would commission one of his hacks to write. No, neither he nor any one else should ever learn aught of her from me; her name should never, if I could help it, be touched and smirched by “the world’s coarse thumb and finger.”

So I answered his question with a repetition of my first statement.

“I got wind of the meeting, and thought I’d see what it was like.”

“Although I had expressly warned you not to do anything of the kind?”

“Well, yes; but still you usually give one a free hand.”

“I didn’t this time. Was the woman at the meeting?”

“What woman?” I asked.

“The woman whose portrait I showed you,—the portrait Von Eckhardt found in Carson’s pocket. Why didn’t you tell me at the time that you knew her?”

“Simply because I don’t know her,” I answered, bracing up boldly for the lie.

“And yet she sat next to Cassavetti at the Savage Club dinner, an hour or two before he was murdered; and you talked to her rather confidentially,—under the portico.”

I tried bluff once more, though it doesn’t come easily to me. I looked him straight in the face and said deliberately:

“I don’t quite understand you, Lord Southbourne. That lady at the Hotel Cecil was Miss Anne Pendennis, a friend of my cousin, Mrs. Cayley. Do you know her?”

“Well—no.”

“Then who on earth made you think she was the original of that portrait?”

“Cayley the dramatist; he’s your cousin’s husband, isn’t he? I showed the portrait to him, and he recognized it at once.”

This was rather a facer, and I felt angry with Jim!

“Oh, Jim!” I said carelessly. “He’s almost as blind as a mole, and he’s no judge of likenesses. Why he always declares that Gertie Millar’s the living image of Edna May, and he can’t tell a portrait of one from the other without looking at the name (this was quite true, and we had often chipped Jim about it). There was a superficial likeness of course; I saw it myself at the time.”

“You didn’t mention it.”

“Why, no, I didn’t think it necessary.”

“And the initials?”

“A mere coincidence. They stand for Anna Petrovna. Von Eckhardt told me that. I saw him in Berlin. She’s a well-known Nihilist, and the police are after her in Russia. So you see, if you or any others are imagining there’s any connection between her and Miss Pendennis, you’re quite wrong.”

“H’m,” he said enigmatically, and I was immensely relieved that a warder opened the door at that moment and showed in Sir George Lucas.

“Oh, here you are, Lucas,” said Southbourne, rising and shaking hands with him. “This is your client, Mr. Wynn. I’ll be off now. See you again before long, but I’ll give you a bit of advice, with Sir George’s permission. Never prevaricate to your lawyer; tell him everything right out. That’s all.”

“Thanks; I guess that’s excellent advice, and I’ll take it,” I said.

CHAPTER XXVI

WHAT JIM CAYLEY KNEW

I did take Lord Southbourne's advice, partly; for in giving Sir George Lucas a minute account of my movements on the night of the murder, I did not prevaricate, but I made two reservations, neither of which, so far as I could see, affected my own case in the least.

I made no mention of the conversation I had with the old Russian in my own flat; or of the incident of the boat. If I kept silence on those two points, I argued to myself, it was improbable that Anne's name would be dragged into the matter. For whatever those meddling idiots, Southbourne or Jim Cayley (I'd have it out with Jim as soon as I saw him!), might suspect, they at least did not know for a certainty of her identity as Anna Petrovna, of her presence in Cassavetti's rooms that night, or of her expedition on the river.

Sir George cross-examined me closely as to my relation with Cassavetti; we always spoke of him by that name, rather than by his own, which was so much less familiar; and on that point I could, of course, answer him frankly enough. Our acquaintanceship had been of the most casual kind; he had been to my rooms several times, but had never invited me to his. I had only been in them thrice; the first time when I unlocked the door with the pass-key with which the old Russian had tried to unlock my door, and then I hadn't really gone inside, only looked round, and called; and the other occasions were when I broke open the door and found him murdered, and returned in company with the police.

"You saw nothing suspicious that first time?" he asked. "You are sure there was no one in the rooms then?"

"Well, I can't be certain. I only just looked in; and then ran down again; I was in a desperate hurry, for I was late, as it was; I thought the whole thing a horrible bore, but I couldn't leave the old man fainting on the stairs. Cassavetti certainly wasn't in his rooms then, anyhow, and I shouldn't think any one else was; for he told me afterwards, at dinner, that he came in before seven. He must have just missed the old man."

"What became of the key?"

“I gave it back to the old man.”

“Although you thought it strange that such a person should be in possession of it?”

“Well, it wasn’t my affair, was it?” I remonstrated. “I didn’t give him the key in the first instance.”

“Now will you tell me, Mr. Wynn, why, when you left Lord Southbourne, you did not go straight home? That’s a point that may prove important.”

“I didn’t feel inclined to turn in just then, so I went for a stroll.”

“In the rain?”

“It wasn’t raining then; it was a lovely night for a little while, till the second storm came on, and my hat blew off.”

“And when you got in you heard no sound from Mr. Cassavetti’s rooms? They’re just over yours, aren’t they? Nothing at all, either during the night or next morning?”

“Nothing. I was out all the morning, and when I came in I fetched up the housekeeper to help me pack. It was he who remarked how quiet the place was. Besides, the poor chap had evidently been killed as soon as he got home.”

“Just so, but the rooms might have been ransacked after and not before the murder,” Sir George said dryly. “Though I don’t think that’s probable. Well, Mr. Wynn, you’ve told me everything?”

“Everything,” I answered promptly.

“Then we shall see what the other side have to say at the preliminary hearing.”

He chatted for a few minutes about my recent adventures in Russia; and then, to my relief, took himself off. I felt just about dead beat!

In the course of the day I got a wire from Jim Cayley, handed in at Morwen, a little place in Cornwall.

“Returning to town at once; be with you to-morrow.”

He turned up early next morning.

“Good heavens, Maurice, what’s all this about?” he demanded. “We’ve been wondering why we didn’t hear from you; and now—why, man, you’re an utter wreck!”

“No, I’m not. I’m getting round all right now,” I assured him. “I got into a bit of a scrimmage, and then into prison. They very nearly did for me there; but I guess I’ve as many lives as a cat.”

“But this murder charge? It’s in the papers this morning; look here.”

He held out a copy of *The Courier*, pointing to a column headed:

“THE WESTMINSTER MURDER.
ARREST OF A WELL-KNOWN JOURNALIST,”

and further down I saw among the cross-headings:

“*Romantic Circumstances.*”

“Half a minute; let’s have a look,” I exclaimed, snatching the paper, fearing lest under that particular cross-heading there might be some allusion to Anne, or the portrait. But there was not; the “romantic circumstances” were merely those under which the arrest was effected. Whoever had written it,—Southbourne himself probably,—had laid it on pretty thick about the special correspondents of *The Courier* obtaining “at the risk of their lives the exclusive information on which the public had learned to rely,” and a lot more rot of that kind, together with a highly complimentary *précis* of my career, and a hint that before long a full account of my thrilling experiences would be published exclusively in *The Courier*. Southbourne never lost a chance of advertisement.

The article ended with the announcement: “Sir George Lucas has undertaken the defence, and Mr. Wynn is, of course, prepared with a full answer to the charge.”

“Well, that seems all right, doesn’t it?” I asked coolly.

“All right?” spluttered Jim, who was more upset than I’d ever seen him. “You seem to regard being run in for murder as an everyday occurrence!”

“Well, it’s preferable to being in prison in Russia! If Freeman hadn’t taken it into his thick head to fix on me, I should have been dead and gone to glory by this time. Look here, Jim, there’s nothing to worry about, really. I asked Freeman to wire or ’phone to you yesterday when we arrived, thinking, of course, you’d be

at Chelsea; then Southbourne turned up, and was awfully good. He's arranged for my defence, so there's nothing more to be done at present. The case will come before the magistrate to-morrow; so far as I'm concerned I'd rather it had come on to-day. I don't suppose for an instant they'd send me for trial. The police can't have anything but the flimsiest circumstantial evidence against me. I guess I needn't assure you that I didn't murder the man!"

He looked at me queerly through his glasses; and I experienced a faint, but distinctly uncomfortable, thrill. Could it be possible that he, who knew me so well, could imagine for a moment that I was guilty?

"No, I don't believe you did it, my boy," he said slowly. "But I do believe you know a lot more about it than you owned up to at the time. Have you forgotten that Sunday night—the last time I saw you? Because if you have, I haven't! I taxed you then with knowing—or suspecting—that Anne Pendennis was mixed up with the affair in some way or other. It was your own manner that roused my suspicions then, as well as her flight; for it was flight, as we both know now. If I had done my duty I should have set the police on her; but I didn't, chiefly for Mary's sake,—she's fretting herself to fiddle-strings about the jade already, and it would half kill her if she knew what the girl really was."

"Stop," I said, very quietly. "If you were any other man, I would call you a liar, Jim Cayley. But you're Mary's husband and my old friend, so I'll only say you don't know what you're talking about."

"I do," he persisted. "It is you who don't or pretend you don't. I've learned something even since you've been away. I told you I believed both she and her father were mixed up with political intrigues; I spoke then on mere suspicion. But I was right. She belongs to the same secret society that Cassavetti was connected with; there was an understanding between them that night, though it's quite possible they hadn't met each other before. Do you remember she gave him a red geranium? That's their precious symbol."

"Did you say all this to Southbourne when he showed you the portrait that was found on Carson?" I interrupted.

"What, you know about the portrait, too?"

"Yes; he showed it me that same night, when I went to him after the dinner. It's not Anne Pendennis at all."

“But it is, man; I recognized it the moment I saw it, before he told me anything about it.”

“You recognized it!” I echoed scornfully. “We all know you can never recognize a portrait unless you see the name underneath. There was a kind of likeness. I saw it myself; but it wasn’t Anne’s portrait! Now just you tell me, right now, what you said to Southbourne. Any of this nonsense about her and Cassavetti and the red symbol?”

“No,” he answered impatiently. “I put two and two together and made that out for myself, and I’ve never mentioned it to a soul but you.”

I breathed more freely when I heard that.

“I just said when I looked at the thing: ‘Hello, that’s Anne Pendennis,’ and at that he began to question me about her, and I guessed he had some motive, so I was cautious. I only told him she was my wife’s old school friend, who had been staying with us, but that I didn’t know very much about her; she lived on the Continent with her father, and had gone back to him. You see I reckoned it was none of my business, or his, and I meant to screen the girl, for Mary’s sake, and yours. But now, this has come up; and you’re arrested for murdering Cassavetti. Upon my soul, Maurice, I believe I ought to have spoken out! And if you stand in danger.”

“Listen to me, Jim Cayley,” I said determinedly. “You will give me your word of honor that, whatever happens, you’ll never so much as mention Anne’s name, either in connection with that portrait or Cassavetti; that you’d never give any one even a hint that she might have been concerned—however innocently—in this murder.”

“But if things go against you?”

“That’s my lookout. Will you give your word—and keep it?”

“No.”

“Very well. If you don’t, I swear I’ll plead ‘Guilty’ to-morrow!”

CHAPTER XXVII

AT THE POLICE COURT

The threat was sufficient and Jim capitulated.

“Though you are a quixotic fool, Maurice, and no mistake,” he asserted vehemently.

“Tell me something I don’t know,” I suggested. “Something pleasant, for a change. How’s Mary?”

“Not at all well; that’s why we went down to Cornwall last week; we’ve taken a cottage there for the summer. The town is frightfully stuffy, and the poor little woman is quite done up. She’s been worrying about Anne, too, as I said; and now she’ll be worrying about you! She wanted to come up with me yesterday, when I got the wire,—it was forwarded from Chelsea,—but I wouldn’t let her; and she’ll be awfully upset when she sees the papers to-day. We don’t get ’em till the afternoon down there.”

“Well, let her have a wire beforehand,” I counselled. “Tell her I’m all right, and send her my love. You’ll turn up at the court to-morrow to see me through, I suppose? Tell Mary I’ll probably come down to Morwen with you on Friday. That’ll cheer her up no end.”

“I hope you may! But suppose it goes against you, and you’re committed for trial?” Jim demanded gloomily. His customary cheeriness seemed to have deserted him altogether at this juncture.

“I’m not going to suppose anything so unpleasant till I have to,” I asserted. “Be off with you, and send that wire to Mary!”

I wanted to get rid of him. He wasn’t exactly an inspiriting companion just now; besides, I thought it possible that Southbourne might come to see me again; and I had determined to tackle him about that portrait, and try to exact the same pledge from him that I had from Jim. He might, of course, have shown it to a dozen people, as he had to Jim; and on the other hand he might not.

He came right enough, and I opened on him at once. He looked at me in his lazy

way, through half-closed lids,—I don't think I've ever seen that man open his eyes full,—and smiled.

"So you do know the lady, after all," he remarked.

"I'm not talking of the original of the portrait, but of Miss Pendennis," I retorted calmly. "I've seen Cayley, and he's quite ready to acknowledge that he was misled by the likeness; but so may other people be if you've been showing it around."

"Well, no; as it happens, I haven't done that. Only you and he have seen it, besides myself. I showed it him because I knew you and he were intimate, and I wanted to see if he would recognize her, as you did,—or thought you did,—when I showed it you, though you wouldn't own up to it. I'm really curious to know who the original is."

"So am I, to a certain extent; but anyhow, she's not Miss Pendennis!" I said decisively; though whether he believed me or not I can't say. "And I won't have her name even mentioned in connection with that portrait!"

"And therefore with,—but no matter," he said slowly. "I wish, for your own sake, and not merely to satisfy my curiosity, that you would be frank with me, or, if not with me, at least with Sir George. However, I'll do what you ask. I'll make no further attempts, at present, to discover the original of that portrait."

That was not precisely what I had asked him, but I let it pass. I knew by his way of saying it that he shared my conviction—and Jim's—that it was Anne's portrait right enough; but I had gained my point, and that was the main thing.

The hearing at the police court next day was more of an ordeal than I had anticipated, chiefly because of my physical condition. I had seemed astonishingly fit when I started,—in a cab, accompanied by a couple of policemen,—considering the extent of my injuries, and the sixty hours' journey I had just come through; and I was anxious to get the thing over. But when I got into the crowded court, where I saw numbers of familiar faces, including Mary's little white one,—she had come up from Cornwall after all, bless her!—I suddenly felt myself as weak as a cat. I was allowed a seat in the dock, and I leaned back in it with what was afterwards described by the reporters as "an apathetic air," though I was really trying my hardest to avoid making an ass of myself by fainting outright. That effort occupied all the energy I had, and I only heard scraps of the evidence, which seemed, to my dulled brain, to refer to some

one else and not to me at all.

At last there came a confused noise, shouting and clapping, and above it a stentorian voice.

“Silence! Silence in the court!”

Some one grasped my right arm—just where the bandage was, though he didn’t know that—and hurt me so badly that I started up involuntarily, to find Sir George and Southbourne just in front of the dock holding out their hands to me, and I heard a voice somewhere near.

“Come along, sir, this way; you can follow to the ante-room, gentlemen; can’t have a demonstration in Court.”

I felt myself guided along by the grip on my arm that was like a red-hot vice; there were people pressing about me, all talking at once, and shaking hands with me.

I heard Southbourne say, sharper and quicker than I’d ever heard him speak before:

“Here, look out! Stand back, some of you!”

The next I knew I was lying on a leather sofa with my head resting on something soft. My collar and tie lay on the floor beside me, and my face was wet, and something warm splashed down on it, just as I began to try and recollect what had happened. Then I found that I was resting on Mary’s shoulder, and she was crying softly; it was one of her tears that was trickling down my nose at this instant. She wiped it off with her damp little handkerchief.

“You poor boy; you gave us a real fright this time,” she exclaimed, smiling through her tears,—a wan little ghost of a smile. “But we’ll soon have you all right again when we get you home.”

“I’m all right now, dear; I’m sorry I’ve upset you so,” I said, and Jim bustled forward with some brandy in a flask, and helped me sit up.

I saw then that Sir George and Southbourne were still in the room; the lawyer was sitting on a table close by, watching me through his gold-rimmed pince-nez, and Southbourne was standing with his back to us, staring out of the window.

“What’s happened, anyhow?” I asked, and Sir George got off the table and came

up to me.

“Charge dismissed; I congratulate you, Mr. Wynn,” he said genially. “There wasn’t a shred of real evidence against you; though they tried to make a lot out of that bit of withered geranium found in your waste-paper basket; just because the housekeeper remembered that Cassavetti had a red flower in his buttonhole when he came in; but I was able to smash that point at once, thanks to your cousin.”

He bowed towards Mary, who, as soon as she saw me recovering, had slipped away, and was pretending to adjust her hat before a dingy mirror.

“Why, what did Mary do?”

“Passed me a note saying that you had the buttonhole when you left the Cecil. I called her as a witness and she gave her evidence splendidly.”

“Lots of the men had them,” Mary put in hurriedly. “I had one, too, and so did Anne—quite a bunch. And my! I should like to know what that housekeeper had been about not to empty the waste-paper basket before. I don’t suppose he’s touched your rooms since you left them, Maurice!”

“It might have been a very difficult point,” Sir George continued judicially; “the only one, in fact. For Lord Southbourne’s evidence disposed of the theory the police had formed that you had returned earlier in the evening, and that when you did go in and found the door open your conduct was a mere feint to avert suspicion. And then there was the entire lack of motive, and the derivative evidence that more than one person—and one of them a woman—had been engaged in ransacking the rooms. Yes, it was a preposterous charge!”

“But it served its purpose all right,” drawled Southbourne, strolling forward. “They’d have taken their time if I’d set them on your track just because you had disappeared. Congratulations, Wynn. You’ve had more than enough handshaking, so I won’t inflict any more on you. Wonder what scrape you’ll find yourself in next?”

“He won’t have the chance of getting into any more for some time to come. I shall take care of that!” Mary asserted, with pretty severity. “Put his collar on, Jim; and we’ll get him into the brougham.”

“My motor’s outside, Mrs. Cayley. Do have that. It’s quicker and roomier. Come on, Wynn; take my arm; that’s all right. You stand by on his other side, Cayley.

Sir George, will you take Mrs. Cayley and fetch the motor round to the side entrance? We'll follow."

I guess I'd misjudged him in the days when I'd thought him a cold-blooded cynic. He had certainly proved a good friend to me right through this episode, and now, impassive as ever, he helped me along and stowed me into the big motor.

Half the journalists in London seemed to be waiting outside, and raised a cheer as we appeared. Mary declared that it was quite a triumphant exit.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WITH MARY AT MORWEN

“

It’s terrible, Maurice! If only I could have a line, even a wire, from her, or her father, just to say she was alive, I wouldn’t mind so much.”

“She may have written and the letter got lost in transit,” I suggested.

“Then why didn’t she write again, or wire?” persisted Mary. “And there are her clothes; why, she hadn’t even a second gown with her. I believe she’s dead, Maurice; I do indeed!”

She began to cry softly, poor, dear little woman, and I did not know what to say to comfort her. I dare not give her the slightest hint as to what had befallen Anne, or of my own agony of mind concerning her; for that would only have added to her distress. And I knew now why it was imperative that she should be spared any extra worry, and, if possible, be reassured about her friend.

“Nonsense!” I exclaimed. “You’d have heard soon enough if anything had happened to her. And the clothes prove nothing; her father’s a wealthy man, and, when she found the things didn’t arrive, she’d just buy more. Depend upon it, her father went to meet her when he left the hotel at Berlin, and they’re jaunting off on their travels together all right.”

“I don’t believe it!” she cried stormily. “Anne would have written to me again and again, rather than let me endure this suspense. And if one letter went astray it’s impossible that they all should. But you—I can’t understand you, Maurice! You’re as unsympathetic as Jim, and yet—I thought—I was sure—you loved her!”

This was almost more than I could stand.

“God knows I do love her!” I said as steadily as I could. “She will always be the one woman in the world for me, Mary, even if I never see or hear of her again. But I’m not going to encourage you in all this futile worry, nor is Jim. He’s not unsympathetic, really, but he knows how bad it is for you, as you ought to know,

too. Anne's your friend, and you love her dearly—but—remember, you're Jim's wife, and more precious to him than all the world."

She flushed hotly at that; I saw it, though I was careful not to look directly at her.

"Yes, I—I know that," she said, almost in a whisper. "And I'll try not to worry, for his,—for all our sakes. You're right, you dear, kind old boy; but—"

"We can do nothing," I went on. "Even if she is ill, or in danger, we can do nothing till we have news of her. But she is in God's hands, as we all are, little woman."

"I do pray for her, Maurice," she avowed piteously. "But—but—"

"That's all you can do, dear, but it is much also. More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. Keep on praying—and trusting—and the prayers will be answered."

She looked at me through her tears, lovingly, but with some astonishment.

"Why, Maurice, I've never heard you talk like that before."

"I couldn't have said it to any one but you, dear," I said gruffly; and we were silent for a spell. But she understood me, for we both come from the same sturdy old Puritan stock; we were both born and reared in the faith of our fathers; and in this period of doubt and danger and suffering it was strange how the old teaching came back to me, the firm fixed belief in God "our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." That faith had led our fathers to the New World, three centuries ago, had sustained them from one generation to another, in the face of difficulties and dangers incalculable; had made of them a great nation; and I knew it now for my most precious heritage.

"*I should utterly have fainted; but that I believe verily to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. O tarry thou the Lord's leisure; be strong and He shall comfort thy heart; and put thou thy trust in the Lord.*

"*Through God we will do great acts; and it is He that shall tread down our enemies.*"

Half forgotten for so many years, but familiar enough in my boyhood,—when my father read a psalm aloud every morning before breakfast, and his wrath fell on any member of the household who was absent from "the reading,"—the old

words recurred to me with a new significance in the long hours when I lay brooding over the mystery and peril which encompassed the girl I loved. They brought strength and assurance to my soul; they saved me from madness during that long period of forced inaction that followed my collapse at the police court.

Mary, and Jim, too,—every one about me, in fact,—despaired of my life for many days, and now that I was again convalescent and they brought me down to the Cornish cottage, my strength returned very slowly; but all the more surely since I was determined, as soon as possible, to go in search of Anne, and I knew I could not undertake that quest with any hope of success unless I was physically fit.

I had not divulged my intention to any one, nor did I mean to do so if I could avoid it; certainly I would not allow Mary even to suspect my purpose. At present I could make no plans, except that of course I should have to return to Russia under an assumed name; and as a further precaution I took advantage of my illness to grow a beard and mustache. They had already got beyond the "stubby" and disreputable stage, and changed my appearance marvellously.

Mary objected strenuously to the innovation, and declared it made me "look like a middle-aged foreigner," which was precisely the effect I hoped for; though, naturally, I didn't let her know that.

Under any other circumstances I would have thoroughly enjoyed my stay with her and Jim at the cottage, a quaint, old-fashioned place, with a beautiful garden, sloping down to the edge of the cliffs, where I was content to sit for hours, watching the sea—calm and sapphire blue in these August days—and striving to possess my soul in patience. In a way I did enjoy the peace and quietude, the pure, delicious air; for they were means to the ends I had in view,—my speedy recovery, and the beginning of the quest which I must start as soon as possible.

We were sitting in the garden now,—Mary and I alone for once, for Jim was off to the golf links.

I had known, all along, of course, that she was fretting about Anne; but I had managed, hitherto, to avoid any discussion of her silence, which, though more mysterious to Mary than to me, was not less distressing. And I hoped fervently that she wouldn't resume the subject.

She didn't, for, to my immense relief, as I sat staring at the fuchsia hedge that screened the approach to the house, I saw a black clerical hat bobbing along, and

got a glimpse of a red face.

“There’s a parson coming here,” I remarked inanely, and Mary started up, mopping her eyes with her ridiculous little handkerchief.

“Goodness! It must be the vicar coming to call,—I heard he was back,—and I’m such a fright! Talk to him, Maurice, and say I’ll be down directly.”

She disappeared within the house just as the old-fashioned door-bell clanged sonorously.

A few seconds later a trim maid-servant—that same tall parlor-maid who had once before come opportunely on the scene—tripped out, conducting a handsome old gentleman, whom she announced as “the Reverend George Treherne.”

I rose to greet him, of course.

“I’m very glad to see you, Mr. Treherne,” I said, and he could not know how exceptionally truthful the conventional words were. “I must introduce myself—Maurice Wynn. My cousin, Mrs. Cayley, will be down directly; Jim—Mr. Cayley—is on the golf links. Won’t you sit down—right here?”

I politely pulled forward the most comfortable of the wicker chairs.

“Thanks. You’re an American, Mr. Wynn?” he asked.

“That’s so,” I said, wondering how he guessed it so soon.

We got on famously while we waited for Mary, chatting about England in general and Cornwall in particular. He’d been vicar of Morwen for over forty years.

I had to confess that I’d not seen much of the neighborhood at present, though I hoped to do so now I was better.

“It’s the loveliest corner in England, sir!” he asserted enthusiastically. “And there are some fine old houses about; you Americans are always interested in our old English country seats, aren’t you? Well, you must go to Pencarrow,—a gem of its kind. It belongs to the Pendennis family, but—”

“Pendennis!” I exclaimed, sitting up in astonishment; “not Anthony Pendennis!”

He looked at me as if he thought I’d suddenly taken leave of my senses.

“Yes, Anthony Pendennis is the present owner; I knew him well as a young man. But he has lived abroad for many years. Do you know him?”

CHAPTER XXIX

LIGHT ON THE PAST

“

Yes, I’ve met him once, under very strange circumstances,” I answered. “I’d like to tell them to you; but not now. I don’t want my cousin to know anything about it,” I added hastily, for I heard Mary’s voice speaking to the maid, and knew she would be out in another minute.

“May I come and see you, Mr. Treherne? I’ve a very special reason for asking.”

He must have thought me a polite lunatic, but he said courteously:

“I shall be delighted to see you at the vicarage, Mr. Wynn, and to hear any news you can give me concerning my old friend. Perhaps you could come this evening?”

I accepted the invitation with alacrity.

“Thanks; that’s very good of you. I’ll come round after dinner, then. But please don’t mention the Pendennises to my cousin, unless she does so first. I’ll explain why, later.”

There was no time for more, as Mary reappeared.

A splendid old gentleman was the Rev. George Treherne. Although he must certainly have been puzzled by my manner and my requests, he concealed the fact admirably, and steered clear of any reference to Pencarrow or its owner; though, of course, he talked a lot about his beloved Cornwall while we had tea.

“He’s charming!” Mary declared, after he had gone. “Though why a man like that should be a bachelor beats me, when there are such hordes of nice women in England who would get married if they could, only there aren’t enough men to go round! I guess I’ll ask Jane Fraser.”

She paused meditatively, chin on hand.

“No,—Jane’s all right, but she’d just worry him to death; there’s no repose about

Jane! Margaret Haynes, now; she looks early Victorian, though she can't be much over thirty. She'd just suit him,—and that nice old vicarage. I'll write and ask her to come down for a week or two,—right now! What do you think, Maurice?"

"That you're the most inveterate little matchmaker in the world. Why can't you leave the poor old man in peace?" I answered, secretly relieved that she had, for the moment, forgotten her anxiety about Anne.

She laughed.

"Bachelorhood isn't peace; it's desolation!" she declared. "I'm sure he's lonely in that big house. What was that he said about expecting you to-night?"

"I'm going to call round after dinner and get hold of some facts on Cornish history," I said evasively.

I hadn't the faintest notion as to what I expected to learn from him, but the moment he had said he knew Anthony Pendennis the thought flashed to my mind that he might be able to give me some clue to the mystery that enveloped Anne and her father; and that might help me to shape my plans.

I would, of course, have to tell him the reason for my inquiries, and convince him that they were not prompted by mere curiosity. I was filled with a queer sense of suppressed excitement as I walked briskly up the steep lane and through the churchyard,—ghostly looking in the moonlight,—which was the shortest way to the vicarage, a picturesque old house that Mary and I had already viewed from the outside, and judged to be Jacobean in period. As I was shown into a low-ceiled room, panelled and furnished with black oak, where the vicar sat beside a log fire, blazing cheerily in the great open fireplace, I felt as if I'd been transported back to the seventeenth century. The only anachronisms were my host's costume and my own, and the box of cigars on the table beside him, companioning a decanter of wine and a couple of tall, slender glasses that would have rejoiced a connoisseur's heart.

Mr. Treherne welcomed me genially.

"You won't find the fire too much? There are very few nights in our West Country, here by the sea at any rate, when a fire isn't a comfort after sunset; a companion, too, for a lonely man, eh? It's very good of you to come round to-night, Mr. Wynn. I have very few visitors, as you may imagine. And so you have

met my old friend, Anthony Pendennis?”

I was thankful of the opening he afforded me, and answered promptly.

“Yes; but only once, and in an extraordinary way. I’ll tell you all about it, Mr. Treherne; and in return I ask you to give me every bit of information you may possess about him. I shall respect your confidence, as, I am sure, you will respect mine.”

“Most certainly I shall do that, Mr. Wynn,” he said with quiet emphasis, and forthwith I plunged into my story, refraining only from any allusion to Anne’s connection with Cassavetti’s murder. That, I was determined, I would never mention to any living soul; determined also to deny it pointblank if any one should suggest it to me.

He listened with absorbed interest, and without any comment; only interposing a question now and then.

“It is astounding!” he said gravely at last. “And so that poor child has been drawn into the whirlpool of Russian politics, as her mother was before her,—to perish as she did!”

“Her mother?” I asked.

“Yes, did she—Anne Pendennis—never tell you, or your cousin, her mother’s history?”

“Never. I doubt if she knew it herself. She cannot remember her mother at all; only an old nurse who died some years ago. Do you know her mother’s history, sir?”

“Partly; I’ll tell you all I do know, Mr. Wynn,—confidence for confidence, as you said just now. She was a Polish lady,—the Countess Anna Vassilitzi; I think that was the name, though after her marriage she dropped her title, and was known here in England merely as Mrs. Anthony Pendennis. Her father and brother were Polish noblemen, who, like so many others of their race and rank, had been ruined by Russian aggression; but I believe that, at the time when Anthony met and fell in love with her,—not long before the assassination of the Tzar Alexander the Second,—the brother and sister at least were in considerable favor at the Russian Court; though whether they used their position there for the purpose of furthering the political intrigues in which, as transpired later, they were both involved, I really cannot say. I fear it is very probable.

“I remember well the distress of Mr. and Mrs. Pendennis,—Anthony’s parents,—when he wrote and announced his engagement to the young countess. He was their only child, and they had all the old-fashioned English prejudice against ‘foreigners’ of every description. Still they did not withhold their consent; it would have been useless to do so, for Anthony was of age, and had ample means of his own. He did not bring his wife home, however, after their marriage; they remained in Russia for nearly a year, but at last, soon after the murder of the Tzar, they came to England,—to Pencarrow.

“They did not stay many weeks; but during that period I saw a good deal of them. Anthony and I had always been good friends, though he was several years my junior, and we were of entirely different temperaments; his was, and is, I have no doubt, a restless, romantic disposition. His people ought to have made a soldier or sailor of him, instead of expecting him to settle down to the humdrum life of a country gentleman! While as for his wife—”

He paused and stared hard at the ruddy glow of the firelight, as if he could see something pictured therein, something that brought a strange wistfulness to his fine old face.

“She was the loveliest and most charming woman I’ve ever seen!” he resumed emphatically. “As witty as she was beautiful; a gracious wit,—not the wit that wounds, no, no! ‘A perfect woman nobly planned’—that was Anna Pendennis; to see her, to know her, was to love her! Did I say just now that she misused her influence at the Russian Court in the attempt to further what she believed to be a right and holy cause—the cause of freedom for an oppressed people? God forgive me if I did! At least she had no share in the diabolical plot that succeeded all too well,—the assassination of the only broad-minded and humane autocrat Russia has ever known. I’m a man of peace, sir, but I’d horsewhip any man who dared to say to my face that Anna Pendennis was a woman who lent herself to that devilry, or any other of the kind—yes, I’d do that even now, after the lapse of twenty-five years!”

“I know,” I said huskily. “That’s just how I feel about Anne. She must be very like her mother!”

CHAPTER XXX

A BYGONE TRAGEDY

He sat so long silent after that outburst that I feared he might not be willing to tell me any more of what I was painfully eager to hear.

“Did she—the Countess Anna—die here, sir?” I asked at last.

He roused himself with a start.

“I beg your pardon; I had almost forgotten you were there,” he said apologetically. “Die here? No; better, far better for her if she had! Still, she was not happy here. The old people did not like her; did not try to like her; though I don’t know how they could have held out against her, for she did her best to conciliate them, to conform to their narrow ways,—except to the extent of coming to church with them. She was a devout Roman Catholic, and she explained to me once how the tenacity with which the Polish gentry held to their religious views was one more cause of offence against them in the eyes of the Russian bureaucracy and episcopacy. I don’t think Mrs. Pendennis—Anthony’s mother—ever forgave me for the view I took of this matter; she threatened to write to the bishop. She was a masterful old lady—and I believe she would have done it, too, if Anthony and his wife had remained in the neighborhood. But the friction became unbearable, and he took her away. I never saw her again; never again!

“They went to London for a time; and from there they both wrote to me. We corresponded frequently, and they invited me to go and stay with them, but I never went. Then—it was in the autumn of ’83—they returned to Russia, and the letters were less frequent. They were nearly always from Anna; Anthony was never a good correspondent! I do not know even now whether he wrote to his parents, or they to him.

“I had had no news from Russia for some months, when Mr. Pendennis died suddenly; he had been ailing for a long time, but the end came quite unexpectedly. Anthony was telegraphed for and came as quickly as possible. I saw very little of him during his stay, a few days only, during which he had to get through a great amount of business; but I learned that his wife was in a

delicate state of health, and he was desperately anxious about her. I fear he got very little sympathy from his mother, whose aversion for her daughter-in-law had increased, if that were possible, during their separation. Poor woman! Her rancour brought its own punishment! She and her son parted in anger, never to meet again. She only heard from him once,—about a month after he left, to return to Russia; and then he wrote briefly, brutally in a way, though I know he was half mad at the time.

"'My wife is dead, though not in childbirth. If I had been with her, I could have saved her,' he wrote. 'You wished her dead, and now your wish is granted; but I also am dead to you. I shall never return to England; I shall never bring my child home to the house where her mother was an alien.'

"He has kept his word, as you know. He did not write to me at all; and it was years before I heard what had happened during his absence, and on his return. When he reached the frontier he was arrested and detained in prison for several days. Then, on consideration of the fact that he was a British subject—"

"That doesn't weigh for much in Russia to-day," I interpolated.

"It did then. He was informed that his wife had been arrested as an accomplice in a Nihilist plot; that she had been condemned to transportation to Siberia, but had died before the sentence could be executed. Also that her infant, born a few days before her arrest, had been deported, with its nurse, and was probably awaiting him at Konigsberg. Finally he himself was conducted to the frontier again, and expelled from 'Holy Russia.' The one bit of comfort was the child, whom he found safe and sound under the care of the nurse, a German who had taken refuge with her kinsfolk in Konigsberg, and who confirmed the terrible story.

"I heard all this about ten years ago," Treherne continued, "when by the purest chance I met Pendennis in Switzerland. I was weather-bound by a premature snowstorm for a couple of days, and among my fellow sufferers at the little hostelry were Anthony and his daughter."

"Anne herself! What was she like?" I asked eagerly.

"A beautiful girl,—the image of her dead mother," he answered slowly. "Or what her mother must have been at that age. She was then about—let me see—twelve or thirteen, but she seemed older; not what we call a precocious child, but womanly beyond her years, and devoted to her father, as he to her. I took him to task; tried to persuade him to come back to England,—to his own home,—if

only for his daughter's sake. But he would not listen to me.

"'Anne shall be brought up as a citizeness of the world,' he declared. 'She shall never be subjected to the limitations of life in England.'

"I must say they seemed happy enough together!" he added with a sigh.

"Well, that is all I have to tell you, Mr. Wynn. From that day to this I have neither seen nor heard aught of Anthony Pendennis and his daughter; but I fear there is no doubt that he has allowed her—possibly even encouraged her—to become involved with some of these terrible secret societies, that do no good, but incalculable harm. Perhaps he may have inspired her with an insane idea of avenging her mother; and now she has shared her mother's fate!"

"I will not believe that till I have proof positive," I said slowly.

"But how can you get such proof?" he asked.

"I don't know yet; but I'm going to seek it—to seek her!"

"You will return to Russia?"

"Why, yes; I meant to do that all along; whatever you might have told me would have made no difference to that determination!"

"But, my dear young man, you will be simply throwing your life away!" he remonstrated.

"I think not, and it's not very valuable, anyway. I thank you for your story, sir; it helps me to understand things a bit,—Anne's motive, and her father's; and it gives me a little hope that they may have escaped, for the time, anyhow. He evidently knew the neighborhood well, or he couldn't have turned up at that meeting; and if once he could get her safely back to Petersburg, he could claim protection for them both at the Embassy, though—"

"If he had been able to do that, surely he or she would have communicated with your cousin, Mrs. Cayley?" he asked, speaking the thought that was in my own mind.

"That's so; still there's no use in conjecturing. You'll not let my cousin get even a hint of what I've told you, Mr. Treherne? If she finds out that Pencarrow belongs to Mr. Pendennis, she'll surely cross-question you about him, and Mary's so sharp that she'll see at once you're concealing something from her, if

you’re not very discreet.”

“Thanks for the warning. I promise you that I’ll be very discreet, Mr. Wynn,” he assured me. “Dear me—dear me, it seems incredible that such things should be!”

It did seem incredible, there in that peaceful old-world room, with never a sound to break the silence but the lazy murmur of the waves, far below; heard faintly but distinctly,—a weird, monotonous, never ceasing undersong.

We parted cordially; he came right out to the porch, and I was afraid he might offer to walk some of the way with me. I wanted to be alone to try and fix things up in my mind; for though the history of Anne’s parentage gave me a clue to her motives, there was much that still perplexed me.

Why had she always told Mary that she knew nothing of Russia,—had never been there? Well, doubtless that was partly for Mary’s own sake, to spare her anxiety, and partly because of the vital necessity for secrecy; but a mere evasion would have served as well as the direct assertion,—I hated to call it a lie even in my own mind! And why, oh why had she not trusted me, let me serve her; for she knew, she must have known—that I asked for nothing better than that!

But I could come to no conclusion whatever as I leaned against the churchyard wall, gazing out over the sea, dark and mysterious save where the moonlight made a silver track across the calm surface. As well try to fathom the secret of the sea as the mystery that enshrouded Anne Pendennis!

On one point only I was more resolved than ever,—to return to Russia at the earliest possible moment.

CHAPTER XXXI

MISHKA TURNS UP

“

You must have found Cornish history very fascinating, Maurice,” Mary declared at breakfast-time next morning. “Jim says it was nearly twelve when you got back. You bad boy to keep such late hours, after you’ve been so ill, too!”

“I’m all right again now,” I protested. “And the vicar certainly is a very interesting companion.”

There were a couple of letters, one from the *Courier* office, and another from Harding, Lord Southbourne’s private secretary, and both important in their way.

Harding wrote that Southbourne would be in town at the end of the week, *en route* for Scotland, and wished to see me if I were fit for service. “A soft job this time, a trip to the States, so you’ll be able to combine business with pleasure.”

Under any other circumstances I could have done with a run home; but even while I read the letter I decided that Southbourne would have to entrust the matter—whatever it might be—to some one else.

I opened the second letter, a typed note, signed by Fenning the news editor, enclosing one of the printed slips on which chance callers have to write their name and business. I glanced at that first, and found it filled in with an almost indecipherable scrawl. I made out the name and address right enough as “M. Pavloff, Charing Cross Hotel,” and puzzled over a line in German, which I at length translated as “bearing a message from Johann.” Now who on earth were Pavloff and Johann?

> “Dear Wynn,” the note ran:
>
> “One of your Russian friends called here to-night, and wanted your address, which of course was not given. I saw him—a big surly-looking man, who speaks German fairly well, but would not state his business—so I promised to send enclosed on to you.

“Hope you’re pulling round all right!

“Yours sincerely,

“WALTER FENNING.”

A big surly-looking man. Could it be Mishka? I scarcely dared hope it was, remembering how and where I parted from him; but that underlined “Johann” might—must mean “Ivan,” otherwise the Grand Duke Loris. To give the German rendering of the name was just like Mishka, who was the very embodiment of caution and taciturnity.

“Well, I’ve got my marching orders,” I announced. “I’ll have to go back to London to-day, Mary, to meet Southbourne. Where’s the time-table?”

Mary objected, of course, on the score that I was not yet strong enough for work, and I reassured her.

“Nonsense, dear; I’m all right, and I’ve been idle too long.”

“Idle! When you’ve turned out that Russian series.”

“A month ago, and I haven’t done a stroke since.”

“But is this anything special?” she urged. “Lord Southbourne is not sending you abroad again,—to Russia?”

“No fear of that, little woman; and if he did they would stop me at the frontier, so don’t worry. Harding mentioned the States in his note.”

“Oh, that would be lovely!” she assented, quite reassured. I was thankful that she and Jim were settled down in this out-of-the-way place for the next few weeks, any way. It would be easy to keep them in ignorance of my movements, and, once away, they wouldn’t expect to hear much of me. In my private capacity I was a proverbially remiss correspondent.

They both came with me the seven-mile drive to the station; and even Jim, to my relief, didn’t seem to have the least suspicion that my hurried departure was occasioned by any other reason than that I had given.

Anne’s name had never been mentioned between him and myself since my release. Perhaps he imagined I was forgetting her, though Mary knew better.

I sent a wire from Exeter to “M. Pavloff,” and when I arrived at Waterloo, about

half-past ten at night, I drove straight to the Charing Cross Hotel, secured a room there, and asked for Herr Pavloff.

I was taken up to a private sitting-room, and there, right enough, was Mishka himself. In his way he was as remarkable a man as his master; as imperturbable, and as much at home in a London hotel, as in the café near the Ismailskaia Prospekt in Petersburg.

He greeted me with a warmth that I felt to be flattering from one of his temperament. In many ways he was a typical Russian, almost servile, in his surly fashion, towards those whom he conceived to be immeasurably his superiors in rank; more or less truculent towards every one else; and, as a rule, suspicious of every one, high or low, with whom he came in contact, save his master, and, I really believe, myself.

At an early stage in our acquaintanceship he had abandoned the air of sulky deference which he had shown when we first met on the car returning to Dunaburg after the accident, and had treated me more or less *en camarade*, though in a kind of paternal manner; and yet I doubt if he was my senior in years. He was a man of considerable education, too, though he was usually careful to conceal the fact. To this day I do not know the exact position he held in his master's service. It may perhaps be described as that of confidential henchman,—a mediæval definition, but in Russia one is continually taken back to the Middle Ages. One thing, at least, was indubitable,—his utter devotion to his master.

"So, the little man kept his word, and sent for you. That is well. And you have come promptly; that also is well. It is what you would do," he said, eying me quite affectionately. "We did not expect to meet again,—and in England, *hein*?"

"That we didn't!" I rejoined. "Say, Mishka, how did you get clear; and how did you know where to find me?"

"One thing at a time. First, I have brought you a letter. Read it."

With exasperating deliberation he fetched out a bulky pocket-book, and extracted therefrom a packet, which proved to be a thick cream envelope, carefully protected from soilure by an outer wrapping of paper.

Within was a letter written in French, and in a curiously fine, precise caligraphy. It was dated August 10th, from the Castle of Zostrov, and it conveyed merely an

invitation to visit the writer, and the assurance that the bearer would give me all necessary information.

“I can offer you very little in the way of entertainment, unless you happen to be a sportsman, which I think is probable. There is game in abundance, from bear downwards,” was the last sentence.

It was a most discreet communication, signed merely with the initial “L.”

“Read it,” I said, handing it to Mishka. He glanced through it, nodded, and handed it back. He knew its contents before, doubtless; but still I gathered that he could read French as well as German.

“Well, are you coming?” he asked.

“Why, certainly; but what about the information his Highness mentions?”

He put up his hand with a swift, warning gesture, and glanced towards the door, muttering:

“There is no need of names or titles.”

“Or of precautions here!” I rejoined impatiently. “Remember, we are in England, man!”

“True, I forgot; but still, caution is always best. About this information. What do you wish to know?”

“Why, everything, man; everything! How did you escape? What is—he—doing at this place; have you news of *her*? That first, and above all!”

“That I cannot give, for I have it not. I think he knows somewhat, and if that is so he himself will tell you. But I have heard nothing—nothing! For the rest, I crawled further into the forest, and lay quiet there. I heard enough through the night to know somewhat at least that was befalling, but I kept still. What could I have done to aid? And later, I made my way to a place of safety; and thence, in due time, to Zostrov, where I joined my master. It is one of his estates, and he is banished there, for how long? Who can say? Till those about the Tzar alter their minds, or till he himself sees reason to go elsewhere! They dare do nothing more to him, openly, for he is a prince of the blood, when all is said, and the Tzar loves him; so does the Tzarina (God guard her), though indeed that counts for little! It is not much, this banishment,—to him at least. It might have been worse.

And he is content, for the present. He finds much work ready to his hand. We get news, too; much more news than some imagine,—the censor among them. We heard of your deliverance almost as soon as it was accomplished, and, later, of your—what do you call it?"

"Acquittal?" I suggested.

"That would be the word; you were proved innocent."

"Not exactly; there was not sufficient evidence of my guilt and so I was discharged," I answered; and as I spoke I remembered that, even now, I was liable to be rearrested on that same charge, since I had not been tried and acquitted by a jury.

"We know, of course," he continued, "that you did not murder that swine Selinski."

"How do you know that?" I demanded.

"That I may not tell you, but this I may: if you had been condemned, well—"

He blew a big cloud of smoke from his cigar, a cloud that obscured his face, and out of it he spoke enigmatically:

"Rest assured you will never be hung for the murder of Vladimir Selinski, although twenty English juries might pronounce you guilty! But enough of that. The question is will you return with me, or will you not? He has need of you; or thinks he has, which is the same thing; and I can smooth the way. There will be risks."

"I know all about that," I interrupted impatiently. "And I shall go with you, of course!"

"Of course," he acquiesced phlegmatically. But, as he spoke, he held out his big blunt hand; and I gripped it hard.

CHAPTER XXXII

BACK TO RUSSIA ONCE MORE

Two days later I saw Lord Southbourne, and resigned my position as a member of his staff. I felt myself mean in one way, when I thought of how he had backed me right through that murder business,—and before it, when he set Freeman on my track.

He showed neither surprise nor annoyance; in fact he seemed, if anything, more nonchalant than usual.

“Well, of course you know your own affairs best. I haven’t any use for men who cultivate interests outside their work; and you’ve done the straight thing in resigning now that you ‘here a duty divided do perceive,’ as I heard a man say the other day.”

“Von Eckhardt!” I exclaimed.

“Guessed it first time,” he drawled. “Could any one else in this world garble quotations so horribly? If he would only give ’em in German they would be more endurable, but he insists on exhibiting his English. By the way, he has relinquished his vendetta.”

“That on Carson’s account?”

“Yes, he believes the murderer, or murderers, must have been wiped out in that affair where you came to grief so signally. He had heard about it before he saw your stuff, though no official account was allowed to get through; and he gave me some rather interesting information, quite gratuitously.”

“Does it concern me, or—any one I know?” I asked, steadying my voice with an effort.

“Well, not precisely; since you only know the lady by repute, and by her portrait.”

I remembered that Von Eckhardt was the one person besides myself who was aware of Anne’s identity, which I had betrayed to him in that one unguarded

moment at Berlin, for which I had reproached myself ever since. True, before I parted from him, I had exacted a promise that he would never reveal the fact that he knew her English name; never mention it to any one. But he was an erratic and forgetful individual; he might have let the truth out to Southbourne, but the latter's face, as I watched it, revealed nothing.

"Oh, that mysterious and interesting individual," I said indifferently. "Do you mind telling what he said about her?"

"Not at all. It appears that he admires her enthusiastically, in a quite impersonal sort of way—high-flown and sentimental. He's a typical German! He says she is back in Russia, with her father or uncle. She belongs to the Vassilitzi family, Poles who have been political intriguers for generations, and have suffered accordingly. They're actively engaged in repairing the damage done to their precious Society in that incident you know of, when all the five who formed the executive, and held and pulled the strings, were either killed or arrested."

This was startling news enough, and it was not easy to maintain the non-committal air of mild interest that I guessed to be the safest. Still I think I did manage it.

"That's queer," I remarked. "He said the Society had turned against her, condemned her to death."

Southbourne shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"I'm only repeating what he told me. Thought you might like to hear it. She must be an energetic young woman; wish I had her on my staff. If you should happen to meet her you can tell her so. I'd give her any terms she liked to ask."

Was he playing with me,—laughing at me? I could not tell.

"All right, I'll remember; though if she's in Russia it's very unlikely that I shall ever see her in the flesh," I said coolly. "Did he say just where she was? Russia's rather vague."

"No. Shouldn't wonder if she wasn't Warsaw way. McIntyre—he's at Petersburg in your place—says they're having no end of ructions there, and asked if he should go down,—but it's not worth the risk. He's a good man, a safe one, but he's not the sort to get stuff through in defiance of the censor, though he's perfectly willing to face any amount of physical danger. So I told him not to go; especially as we shan't want any more sensational Russian stuff at present;

unless—well, of course, if you should happen on any good material, you can send it along; for I presume you are not going over to Soper, eh?"

"Of course I'm not!" I said with some warmth. Soper was chief proprietor of several newspapers in direct opposition to the group controlled by Southbourne, and he certainly had made me more than one advantageous offer,—the latest only a week or two back, just after my Russian articles appeared in *The Courier*.

"I didn't suppose you were, though I know he wants you," Southbourne rejoined. "I should rather like to know what you are up to; but it's your own affair, of course, and you're quite right to keep your own counsel. Anyhow, good luck to you, and good-bye, for the present."

I was glad the interview was over, though it left me in ignorance as to how much he knew or suspected about my movements and motives. I guessed it to be a good deal; or why had he troubled to tell me the news he had heard from Von Eckhardt? If it were true, if Anne were no longer in danger from her own party, and was again actively associated with it, her situation was at least less perilous than it had been before, when she was threatened on every side. And also my chances of getting into communication with her were materially increased.

I related what I had learned to Mishka, who made no comment beyond a grunt which might mean anything or nothing.

"Do you think it is true?"

"Who knows? It is over a fortnight since I left; and many things may happen in less time. Perhaps we shall learn when we return, perhaps not."

In some ways Mishka was rather like a Scotsman.

A few days later his preparations were complete. The real or ostensible object of his visit to England was to buy farm implements and machinery, as agent for his father, who, I ascertained, was land steward of part of the Zostrov estates, and therefore a person of considerable importance. That fact, in a way, explained Mishka's position, which I have before defined as that of "confidential henchman." I found later that the father, as the son, was absolutely devoted to their master, who in his turn trusted them both implicitly. They were the only two about him whom he could so trust, for, as he had once told me, he was surrounded by spies.

Mishka's business rendered my re-entry into the forbidden land an easily

arranged matter. Several of the machines he bought were American patents, and my rôle was that of an American mechanic in charge of them. As a matter of fact I do know a good deal about such things; and I had never forgotten the apprenticeship to farming I had served under my father in the old home. Poor old dad! As long as he lived he never forgave me for turning my back on the farm and taking to journalism, after my college course was over. He was all the more angry with me because, as he said, in the vacation I worked better than any two laborers; as I did,—there's no sense in doing things by halves!

It would have been a very spry Russian who had recognized Maurice Wynn, the physical wreck that had left Russia in the custody of two British police officers less than three months back, in "William P. Gould," a bearded individual who spoke no Russian and only a little German, and whose passport—issued by the American Minister and duly *viséd* by the Russian Ambassador in London—described him as a native of Chicago.

Also we travelled by sea, from Hull to Riga, taking the gear along with us; which in itself minimized the chance of detection.

We were to travel by rail from Riga to Wilna, via Dunaburg; and the rest of the journey, rather over than under a hundred and twenty miles, must be by road, riding or driving. From Wilna the goods we were taking would follow us under a military escort.

"How's that?" I asked, when Mishka told me of this. "Who's going to steal a couple of wagon-loads of farm things?"

His reply was enigmatic.

"You think you know something of Russia, because you've seen Petersburg and Moscow, and have never been more than ten miles from a railroad. Well, you are going to know something more now; not much, perhaps, but it may teach you that those who keep to the railroad see only the froth of a seething pot. We know what is in the pot, but you, and others like you, do not; therefore you wonder that the froth is what it is."

A seething pot. The time soon came when I remembered his simile, and acknowledged its truth; and I knew then that that pot was filled with hell-broth!

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE ROAD TO ZOSTROV

Even before we left Riga,—where we were delayed for a couple of days getting our goods through the Customs and on to the train,—I realized somewhat at least of the meaning of Mishka's enigmatic utterance. Not that we experienced any adventures. I suppose I played my part all right as the American mechanic whose one idea was safeguarding the machinery he was in charge of. Anyhow we got through the necessary interviews with truculent officials without much difficulty. Most of them were unable to understand the sort of German I chose to fire off at them, and had to rely on Mishka's services as interpreter. The remarks they passed upon me were not exactly complimentary,—low-grade Russian officials are foul-mouthed enough at the best of times, and now, imagining that I did not know what they were saying, they let loose their whole vocabulary,—while I blinked blandly through the glasses I had assumed, and, in reply to a string of filthy abuse, mildly suggested that they should get a hustle on, and pass the things promptly.

I quite appreciated the humor of the situation, and I guess Mishka did so, too, for more than once I saw his deep-set eyes twinkle just for a moment, as he discreetly translated my remarks, and, at the same time, cordially endorsed our tyrants' freely expressed opinions concerning myself.

"You have done well, 'Herr Gould,' yes, very well," he condescended to say, when we were at last through with the troublesome business. "We are safe enough so far, though for my part I shall be glad to turn my back on this hole, where the trouble may begin at any moment."

"What trouble?" I asked.

"God knows," he answered evasively, with a characteristic movement of his broad shoulders. "Can you not see for yourself that there is trouble brewing?"

I had seen as much. The whole moral atmosphere seemed surcharged with electricity; and although as yet there was no actual disturbance, beyond the individual acts of ruffianism that are everyday incidents in all Russian towns, the populace, the sailors, and the soldiery eyed each other with sullen menace, like

so many dogs, implacably hostile, but not yet worked up to fighting pitch. A few weeks later the storm burst, and Riga reeked with fire and carnage, as did many another city, town, and village, from Petersburg to Odessa.

I discerned the same ominous state of things—the calm before the storm—at Dunaburg and Wilna, but it was not until we had left the railroad and were well on our two days' cross-country ride to Zostrov that I became acquainted with two important ingredients in that "seething pot" of Russian affairs,—to use Mishka's apt simile. Those two ingredients were the peasantry and the Jews.

Hitherto I had imagined, as do most foreigners, whose knowledge of Russia is purely superficial, and does not extend beyond the principal cities, that what is termed the revolutionary movement was a conflict between the governing class, —the bureaucracy which dominates every one from the Tzar himself, an autocrat in name only, downwards,—and the democracy. The latter once was actively represented only by the various Nihilist organizations, but now includes the majority of the urban population, together with many of the nobles who, like Anne's kindred, have suffered, and still suffer so sorely under the iron rule of cruelty, rapacity, and oppression that has made Russia a byword among civilized nations since the days of Ivan the Terrible. But now I realized that the movement is rendered infinitely complex by the existence of two other conflicting forces,—the *moujiks* and the Jews. The bureaucracy indiscriminately oppresses and seeks to crush all three sections; the democracy despairs of the *moujiks* and hates the Jews, though it accepts their financial help; while the *moujiks* distrust every one, and also hate the Jews, whom they murder whenever they get the chance.

That's how the situation appeared to me even then, before the curtain went up on the final act of the tragedy in which I and the girl I loved were involved; and the fact that all these complex elements were present in that tragedy must be my excuse for trying to sum them up in a few words.

I've knocked around the world somewhat, and have had many a long and perilous ride through unknown country, but never one that interested me more than this. I've said before that Russia is still back in the Middle Ages, but now, with every verst we covered, it seemed to me we were getting farther back still, —to the Dark Ages themselves.

We passed through several villages on the first day, all looking exactly alike. A wide thoroughfare that could not by any stretch of courtesy be called a street or road, since it showed no attempt at paving or making and was ankle-deep in

filthy mud, was flanked by irregular rows of low wooden huts, reeking with foulness, and more like the noisome lairs of wild beasts than human habitations. Their inhabitants looked more bestial than human,—huge, shaggy men who peered sullenly at us with swinish eyes, bleared and bloodshot with drunkenness; women with shapeless figures and blunt faces, stolid masks expressive only of dumb hopeless endurance of misery,—the abject misery that is the lot of the Russian peasant woman from birth to death. I was soon to learn that this centuries' old habit of patient endurance was nearly at an end, and that when once the mask is thrown aside the fury of the women is more terrible, because more deliberate and merciless, than the brutality of the men.

At a little distance, perhaps, would be a small chapel with the priest's house adjacent, and the somewhat more commodious houses of the tax-gatherer and *starosta*—the head man of the village, when he happened to be a farmer. Sometimes he was a kalak keeper, scarce one degree superior to his fellows. One could tell the tax-gatherer's house a mile away by its prosperous appearance, and the kind of courtyard round it, closed in with a solid breast-high log fence; for in these days the hated official may at any moment find his house besieged by a mob of vodka-maddened *moujiks* and implacable women. If he and his guard of one or two armed *stragniki* (rural police) are unable to hold out till help comes, —well, there is red murder, another house in flames, a vodka orgy in the frenzied village, and retribution next day or the day after, when the Cossacks arrive, and there is more red murder. Then every man, woman, and child left in the place is slaughtered; and the agglomeration of miserable huts that form the village is burned to the ground.

That, at least, is the explanation Mishka gave me when we rode through a heap of still smouldering and indescribably evil-smelling ruins, where there was no sign of life, beyond a few disreputable-looking pigs and fowls grubbing about in what should have been the cultivated ground. The peasant's holdings are inconceivably neglected, for the *moujik* is the laziest creature on God's earth. In the days of his serfdom he worked under the whip, but as a freeman he has reduced his labor to a minimum, especially since the revolutionary propagandists have told him that he is the true lord of the soil, who should pay no taxes, and should live at ease,—and in sloth.

The sight and stench of that holocaust sickened me, but Mishka rode forward stolidly, unmoved either physically or mentally.

"They bring it on themselves," he said philosophically. "If they would work

more and drink less they could live and pay their taxes well enough and there would be no trouble."

"But why on earth didn't they make themselves scarce after they'd settled scores with the tax collector, instead of waiting to be massacred?" I mused.

"God knows," said Mishka. "The *moujik* is a beast that goes mad at the sight and smell of blood, and one that takes no thought for the morrow. Also, where would they run to? They would soon be hunted down. Now they have had their taste of blood, and paid for it in full, that is all. There were no Jews there," he jerked his head backwards, "otherwise they might have had their taste without payment."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

He shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Wait, and perhaps you will see. Have you never heard of a *pogrom*?"

And that was all I could get out of him at the time.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE OLD JEW

We halted for the night at a small town, with some five or six thousand inhabitants as I judged, of whom three-fourths appeared to be Jews. Compared with the villages we had passed, the place was a flourishing one; and seemed quiet enough, though here again, as at Wilna and Riga, there was something ominous in the air. Nearly all the business was in the hands of the Jews; and their shops and houses, poor enough, according to civilized notions, were far and away more prosperous looking than those of their Russian neighbors; while their synagogue was the most imposing block in the town, which is not saying much, perhaps.

We put up at the best inn in the place, where we found fresh horses waiting us, as we had done at a village half-way on our day's march, under the care of a couple of men in uniform. There was a telegraph wire to Zostrov, and Mishka had sent word of our coming. I learned later that, when the Grand Duke was in residence, a constant line of communication was maintained with relays of horses for carriages or riders between the Castle and the railroad.

I had wondered, when Mishka told me the arrangements for the journey, why on earth motor cars weren't used over this last stage, but when I found what the roads were like, when there were any roads at all, I guessed it was wise to rely on horses, and on the light and strong Russian travelling carriages that go gayly over the roughest track, rather than on the best built motor procurable.

The landlord of the inn was a Jew, of course,—a lean old man with greasy ear locks and a long beard, above which his hooked nose looked like the beak of a dejected eagle. He welcomed us with cringing effusion, and gave us of his best. I'd have thought the place filthy, if I hadn't seen and smelt those Russian villages; but it was well appointed in a way. The dinner-table, set in the one bedroom which we were to share, so that we might dine privately and in state, was spread with a cloth, which, though grimy to a degree, was of fine damask, and displayed forks, spoons, and candlesticks of solid silver. The frowsy sheets and coverlids on the three beds were of linen and silk. Evidently Moses Barzinsky was a wealthy man; and his wife,—a fat dame, with beady eyes and a

preposterous black wig,—served us up as good a meal as I've ever tasted. I complimented her on it when she brought in the samovar; for here, in the wilds, it didn't seem to matter about keeping up my pretended ignorance of the language. She was flattered, and assumed quite a motherly air towards me; she didn't cringe like her husband. As I sat there, sipping my tea, and chatting with her, I little guessed what would befall the comfortable, homely, good-tempered old lady a very few days hence. Mishka listened in disapproving silence to our interchange of badinage, and, when our hostess retreated, he entered on a grumbling protest.

"You are very indiscreet," he grunted. "Why do you want to chatter with a thing like that?"

He jerked his pipe towards the doorway; Mishka despised the cigarette which, to every other Russian I have met, seems as necessary to life as the air he breathes; and when he hadn't a cigar fell back on a distinctly malodorous briar.

"Why in thunder shouldn't I talk to her?" I demanded. "She's the only creature I've heard laugh since I got back into Holy Russia; it cheers one up a bit, even to look at her!"

"You are a fool," was his complimentary retort. "And she is another—like all women—or she would know these are no days for laughter. But, I tell you once more, you cannot be too cautious. You must remember that you know no Russian. You are only an American who has come to help the prince while away his time of exile by trying to turn the Zostrov *moujiks* into good farmers. That, in itself, is a form of madness, of course, but doubtless they think it may keep him out of more dangerous mischief."

"Who are 'they'? I wish you'd be a bit more explicit," I remonstrated. He did make me angry sometimes.

"That is not my business," he answered stolidly. "My business is to obey orders, and one of those is to bring you safely to Zostrov."

I could not see how my innocent conversation with the fat Jewish housewife could endanger the safety of either of us; but I had already learned that it was quite useless to argue with Mishka; so, adopting Brer Fox's tactics, "I lay low and said nuffin." We smoked in silence for some minutes, while I mused over the strangeness of my position. I had determined to return to Russia in search of Anne; had hailed Mishka's intervention, seized on the opportunity provided by

the Grand Duke's invitation, as if they were God-sent. And yet here I was, seemingly even farther from news of her than I had been in England, playing my part as a helpless pawn in a game that I did not understand in the least.

The landlord entered presently, and obsequiously beckoned Mishka to the far end of the room, where they held a whispered conversation, which I tried not to listen to, though I could not help overhearing frequent references to the *starosta* (mayor), an important functionary in a town of this size, and the commandant of the garrison. From my post of observation by the window I had already noticed a great number of soldiers about; though whether there was anything unusual in the presence of such a strong military force I, of course, did not know.

Mishka crossed over to me.

"I am going out for a time. You will remain here?"

"I'll see. Perhaps I'll go for a stroll later," I replied. It had occurred to me that he regarded me almost as a prisoner, and I wanted to make sure on that point.

"Please yourself," he returned in his sullen manner. "But if you go, remember my warning, and observe caution. If there should be any disturbance in the streets, keep out of it; or, if you should be within here, close the shutters and put the lights out."

"All right. I guess I'm fairly well able to take care of myself," I said imperturbably; though I thought he might have given me credit for the possession of average common sense, anyhow!

I went out soon after he did, more as a kind of assertion of my independence than because I was inclined for a walk. It was some time since I'd been so many hours in the saddle as I had that day, and I was dead tired.

It was a glorious autumn evening, clear and still, with the glow of the sunset still lingering in the western sky, though the moon was rising, and putting to shame the squalid lights of the streets and shops. The sidewalks—a trifle cleaner and more level than the rutted roadway between them—were thronged with passers; many of them were soldiers swaggering in their disreputably slovenly uniforms, and leering at every heavy-visaged Russian woman they met. I did not see one woman abroad that evening who looked like a Jewess; though there were Jews in plenty, slinking along unobtrusively, and eying the Russian soldiers and townsmen askance, with glances compounded of fear and hatred.

I attracted a good deal of attention; a foreigner was evidently an unusual object in that town. But I was not really molested; and, acting on Mishka's advice, I affected ignorance of the many and free remarks passed on my personal appearance.

I walked on, almost to the outskirts of the little town, and turned to retrace my steps, when I was waylaid by a pedler, who had passed me a minute or so before. He looked just like scores of others I had seen within the last few minutes, except that he carried a small but heavy pack, and walked heavily, leaning on his thick staff like a man wearied with a long day's tramp.

Now I found he had halted, and as I came abreast with him, he held out one skinny hand with an arresting gesture. For a moment I thought he was merely begging, but his first words dispelled that notion.

"Is it wise of the English excellency to walk abroad alone,—here?" he asked earnestly, in a voice and patois that sounded queerly familiar. I stopped short and stared at him, and then, in a flash, I knew him, though as yet he had not recognized me, save as a foreigner.

He was the old Jew who had come to my flat on the night of Cassavetti's murder!

Then, in a flash, I knew him. Page 228
***Then, in a flash, I knew him.* Page 228**

CHAPTER XXXV

A BAFFLING INTERVIEW

“

It is less safe than the streets of London, perhaps,” I said quietly, in Russian. “But what of that? And how long is it since you left there, my friend?”

He peered at me suspiciously, and spread his free hand with the quaint, graceful gesture he had used before. I’d have known the man anywhere by that alone; though in some ways he looked different now, less frail and emaciated than he had been, with a wiry vigor about him that made him seem younger than I had thought him.

“The excellency mistakes!” he said. “How should such an one as I get to London?”

“That is for you to say. I know only that you are the man who wanted to see Vladimir Selinski. And now you’ve got to come and see me, at once, at the inn kept by Moses Barzinsky.”

“Speak lower, Excellency,” he stammered, glancing nervously around. “In God’s name, go back to your inn. You are in danger, as all strangers are here; yea, and all others! That is why I warned you. But you mistake. I am not the man you think, so why should I come to you? Permit me to go on my way.”

He made as if to move on, and I couldn’t detain him forcibly and insist on his accompanying me, for that would have drawn attention to us. Fortunately there were few people hereabouts, but those few were already looking askance at us.

An inspiration came to me. I thought of the red symbol that had dangled from the key of Cassavetti’s flat that night, and of the signal and password Mishka had taught me in Petersburg.

In two strides I caught up with him, touched his shoulder with the five rapid little taps, thumb and fingers in succession, and said in his ear: “You will come to Barzinsky’s within the hour,—‘For Freedom.’ You understand?”

I guessed that would fetch him, for I felt him thrill—it was scarcely a start—under the touch.

“I will come, Excellency; I will not fail,” he answered promptly. “But go you now,—not hurriedly.”

I hadn’t the least intention of hurrying, but passed on without further parley, and reached the inn unhindered. Mishka had not yet returned, and I told the landlord a pedler was coming to see me, and he was to be brought up to my room at once.

As I closed the shutters I wondered if he would come, or if he’d give me the slip as he did in Westminster, but within half an hour Barzinsky brought him up. The landlord looked quite scared, his ear-locks were quivering with his agitation.

“Yossof is here, Excellency,” he announced, so he evidently knew my man.

I nodded and motioned him out of the room, for he hovered around as if he wanted to stay.

Yossof stood at the end of the room, in an attitude of humility, his gray head bowed, his dingy fur cap held in his skinny fingers; but his piercing dark eyes were fixed earnestly on my face, and, when Barzinsky was gone and the door was shut, he came forward and made his obeisance.

“I know the Excellency now, although the beard has changed him,” he said quietly. His speech was much more intelligible than it had been that time in Westminster. “I remember his goodness to me, a stranger in the land. May the God of our fathers bless him! But I knew not then that he also was one of us. Why have you not the new password, Excellency?”

“I have but now come hither from England at the peril of my life, and as yet I have met none whom I knew as one of us,” I answered evasively. “What is this new word? It is necessary that I should learn it,” I added, as he hesitated.

“I will tell you its meaning only,” he answered, watching me closely. “It means ‘in life and in death,’—but those are not the words.”

“Then I know them: *à la vie et à la mort*; is it not so?” I asked, remembering the moment he spoke the names by which Anne was known to others besides members of the League; for the police officer who had superintended the searching of my rooms at Petersburg, and later, young Mirakoff, had both mentioned one of them.

I had hit on the right words first time, and Yossof, evidently relieved, nodded, and repeated them after me, giving a queer inflection to the French.

“And where is she,—the gracious lady herself?” I asked. It was with an effort that I forced myself to speak quietly; for my heart was thumping against my ribs, and my throat felt dry as bone dust. What could—or would—this weird creature tell me of Anne’s present movements; and could—or would—he tell me the secret of Cassavetti’s murder? Through all these weeks I had clung to the hope, the belief, that he himself struck the blow, and now, as he stood before me, he appeared more capable, physically, of such a deed than he had done then. But yet I could scarcely believe it as I looked at him.

He met my question with another, as Mishka so often did.

“How is it you do not know?”

“I have told you I have but now come to Russia.”

He spread his hands with a deprecatory gesture as if to soften his reply, which, however, was spoken decisively enough.

“Then I cannot tell you. Remember, Excellency, though you seem to be one of us, I have little knowledge of you. In any matter touching myself I would trust you; but in this I dare not.”

He was right in a way. Such knowledge as I had of the accursed League was gained by trickery; and to question him further would arouse his suspicion of that fact, and I should then learn nothing at all.

“Listen,” I said slowly and emphatically. “You may trust me to the death in all matters that concern her whom you call your gracious lady. I was beside her, with her father and one other, when the Five condemned her,—would have murdered her if we had not defended her. She escaped, God be thanked, but that I only learned of late. I was taken, thrown into prison, taken thence back to England, to prison again, accused of the murder of Vladimir Selinski,—of which I shall have somewhat more to say to you soon! When I was freed, for I am innocent of that crime, as you well know, I set out to seek her, to aid her if that might be; and, if she was beyond my aid, at least to avenge her. I was about to start alone when I heard that she was no longer threatened by the League; that she was, indeed, once more at the head of it; but I failed to learn where I might find her. Therefore I go to join one who is her good friend, in the hope that I may

through him be yet able to serve her. For the League I care nothing,—all my care is for her. And therefore, as I have said, you may trust me."

He watched me fixedly as I spoke, but his gaunt face remained expressionless; though his next words showed that he had understood me well enough.

"I can tell you nothing, Excellency. You say you care for her and not for the League. That is impossible, for she is its life; her life is bound up in it; she would wish your service for it,—never for herself! This I will do. If she does not hear otherwise that you are at Zostrov, as you will be to-morrow—though it is unlikely that she will not have heard already—I will see that she has word. That is all I can do."

"That must serve. You will not even say if she is near at hand?"

"Who knows? She comes and goes. One day she is at Warsaw; the next at Wilna; now at Grodno; again even here. Yes, she has been here no longer than a week since, though she is not here now."

So I had missed her by one week!

"I do not know where she is to-day, nor where she will be to-morrow; in this I verily speak the truth, Excellency," he continued. "Though I shall perchance see her, when my present business is done. Be patient. You will doubtless have news of her at Zostrov."

"How do you know I am going there?"

"Does not all the countryside know that a foreigner rides with Mishka Pavloff? God be with you, Excellency."

He made one of his quaint genuflexions and backed rapidly to the door.

"Here, stop!" I commanded, striding after him. "There is more,—much more to say. Why did you not keep your promise and return to me in London? What do you know of Selinski's murder? Speak, man; you have nothing to fear from me!"

I had clutched his shoulder, and he made no attempt to free himself, but drooped passively under my hand. But his quiet reply was inflexible.

"Of all that I can tell you nothing, Excellency. It is best forgotten."

There was a heavy footstep on the stair and next moment the door was tried, and

Mishka's voice exclaimed: "It is I. Open to me, Herr Gould."

There was no help for it, so I drew back the bolt. The door had no lock,—only bolts within and without.

As Mishka entered, the Jew bowed low to him, and slipped through the doorway. Mishka glanced sharply at me, muttered something about returning soon, and followed Yossof, closing the door behind him and shooting the outer bolt.

CHAPTER XXXVI

STILL ON THE ROAD

“

Will you never learn wisdom?” demanded Mishka, when, after a few minutes, he returned. “Why could you not rest here in safety?”

“Because I wanted to walk some of my stiffness off,” I replied coolly. “I had quite a good time, and met an old acquaintance.”

“Who gave you much interesting news?” he asked, with a sardonic inflection of his deep voice that made me guess Yossof had told him what passed at our interview.

“Why, no; I can’t say that he did that,” I confessed. Already I realized that I had learned absolutely nothing from the Jew save the new password, and the fact that he was, or soon would be, in direct communication with Anne.

Mishka gave an approving grunt.

“There are some who might learn discretion from Yossof,” he remarked sententiously.

“Just so. But who is he, anyhow? He might be ‘the wandering Jew’ himself, from the mysterious way he seems to get around the world.”

“Who and what he is? That I cannot tell you, for I do not know, or seek to know, since it is no business of mine. I go to bed; for we must start betimes in the morning.”

Not another word did he speak, beyond a surly “good night;” but, though I followed his example and got into bed, with my revolver laid handily on the bolster as he had placed his, hours passed before sleep came to me. I lay listening to Mishka’s snores,—he was a noisy sleeper,—and thinking of Anne; thinking of that one blissful month in London when I saw her nearly every day.

How vividly I remembered our first meeting, less than five months back, though

the events of a lifetime seemed to have occurred since then. It was the evening of my return from South Africa; and I went, of course, to dine at Chelsea, feeling only a mild curiosity to see this old school-fellow of Mary's, whose praises she sang so enthusiastically.

"She was always the prettiest and smartest girl in the school, but now she's just the loveliest creature you ever saw," Mary had declared; and though I wasn't rude enough to say so, I guessed I was not likely to endorse that verdict.

But when I saw Anne my scepticism vanished. I think I loved her from that first moment, when she came sweeping into Mary's drawing-room in a gown of some gauzy brown stuff, almost the color of her glorious hair, with a bunch of white lilies at her bosom. She greeted me with a frank friendliness that was much more like an American than an English girl; indeed, even then, I never thought of her as English. She was, as her father had told his friend Treherne he meant her to be, "cosmopolitan to her finger-tips." She even spoke English with a curious precision and deliberation, as one speaks a language one knows perfectly, but does not use familiarly. She once confided to me that she always "thought" either in French or German, preferably French.

Strange that neither Mary nor I ever imagined there was any mystery in her life; ever guessed how much lay behind her frank allusions to her father, and the nomadic existence they had led. I wondered, for the thousandth time, how it was that Jim first suspected her of concealing something. How angry I was at him when he hinted his suspicions; and yet he had hit on the exact truth! I knew now that her visit to Mary was not what it had seemed,—but that she had seized upon the opportunity presented by the invitation to snatch a brief interval of peace, and comparative safety. If she had happened to encounter Cassavetti earlier, doubtless her visit would have terminated then. Yes, that must be the explanation; and how splendidly she had played her dangerous part!

I hated to think of all the duplicity that part entailed; I would not think of it. The part was thrust on her, from her birth, by her upbringing, and if she played it gallantly, fearlessly, resourcefully, the more honor to her. But it was a bitter thought that Fortune should have thrust all this upon her!

As I lay there in that frowzy room, staring at a shaft of moonlight that came through a chink in the shutters, making a bar of light in the darkness like a great, unsheathed sword, her face was ever before my mind's eyes, vividly as if she were indeed present,—the lovely mobile face, "growing and fading and growing

before me without a sound," now sparkling with mirth, now haughty as that of a petulant young queen towards a disfavored courtier. Mary used to call her "dear Lady Disdain" when she was in that mood. Again, it appeared pale and set as I had seen it last, the wide brilliant eyes flashing indignant defiance at her accusers; but more often with the strange, softened, wistful expression it had worn when we stood together under the portico of the Cecil on that fatal night; and when she waved me good-bye at Charing Cross.

In those moments one phase of her complex nature had been uppermost; and in those moments she loved me,—me, Maurice Wynn, not Loris Solovieff, or any other!

I would not have relinquished that belief to save my soul; although I knew well that the mood was necessarily a transient one. She had devoted her beauty, her talents, her splendid courage, her very life, to a hopeless cause. She was as a queen, whose realm is beset with dangers and difficulties, and who therefore can spare little or no thought for aught save affairs of state; and I was as the page who loved her, and whom she might have loved in return if she had been but a simple gentlewoman. Once more I told myself that I would be content if I could only play the page's part, and serve her in life and death, "*à la vie et à la mort*" as the new password ran; but how was I even to begin doing that?

An unanswerable question! I must just go on blindly, as Fate led me; and Fate at this moment was prosaically represented by Mishka. Great Scott, how he snored!

We were astir early; I seemed to have just fallen asleep when Mishka roused me and announced that breakfast was waiting, and the horses ready.

We rode swiftly, and for the most part in silence, as my companion was even less communicative than usual. I noticed, as we drew near to Zostrov, a change for the better in the aspect of the country and the people. The last twenty versts was over an excellent road, while the streets of the village where we found our change of horses waiting, and of two others beyond, were comparatively clean and well-kept, with sidewalks laid with wooden blocks. The huts were more weather-tight and comfortable,—outside at any rate. The land was better cultivated, too, and the *moujiks*, though most of them scowled evilly at us, looked better fed and better clothed than any we had seen before. They all wore high boots,—a sure sign of prosperity. Yesterday boots were the exception, and most of the people, both men and women, were shod with a kind of moccasin made of plaited grass, and had their limbs swathed in ragged strips of cloth kept

clumsily in place with grass-string.

“It is his doing,” Mishka condescended to explain. “His and my father’s. He gives the word and the money, and my father and those under him do the rest. They try to teach these lazy swine to work for their own sakes,—to make the best of their land; it is to further that end that all the new gear is coming. They will have the use of it—these pigs—for nothing. They will not even give thanks; rather will they turn and bite the hand that helps them; that tries to raise them out of the mud in which they wallow!”

He spat vigorously, as a kind of corollary to his remarks.

As he spoke we were skirting a little pine wood just beyond the village, and a few yards further the road wound clear of the trees and out across an open plain, in the centre of which rose a huge, square building of gray stone, crowned with a cupola that gleamed red in the rays of the setting sun.

“The castle!” Mishka grunted.

“It looks more like a prison!” I exclaimed involuntarily. It was a grim, sinister-looking pile, even with the sun upon it.

Mishka did not answer immediately. There was a clatter and jingle behind us, and out of the wood rode a company of horsemen, all in uniform. Two rode ahead of the rest, one of them the Grand Duke himself.

Mishka reined up at the roadside, and sat at the salute, and I followed his example.

The Duke did not even glance in our direction as he passed, though he acknowledged our salute in soldierly fashion.

We wheeled our horses and followed well in the rear of the imposing escort,—a whole troop of cavalry.

“You are right,” Mishka said, in a husky growl, that with him represented a whisper. “It is a prison, and yonder goes the prisoner. You will do well to remember that in your dealings with him, Herr Gould.”

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE PRISONER OF ZOSTROV

The castle stood within a great quadrangle, which we entered through a massive stone gateway guarded by two sentries. Two more were stationed at the top of a steep and wide marble stairway that led up to the entrance hall, and the whole place seemed swarming with soldiers, and servants in handsome liveries. A couple of grooms came to hold our horses, and a third took possession of my valise, containing chiefly a dress suit and some shirts. My other belongings were coming on in the wagon.

Mishka's manner underwent a decided change from the moment we entered the castle precincts. The bluff and often grumpy air of familiarity was gone, and in its place was the surly deference with which he had treated me at first. As we neared the end of our journey, he had once more warned me to be on my guard, and remember that I must appear as an utter stranger to the Duke and all about him, except Mishka himself.

"You have never been in Russia before," he repeated. "And you speak only a few words of Russian, which I have taught you on our way. That will matter little, since most here speak French and German."

He parted from me with a deferential salute, after handing me over to the care of a gorgeously attired functionary, whom I found to be a kind of majordomo or house steward. This imposing person welcomed me very courteously; and I gathered that I was supposed to be a new addition to the Grand Duke's suite. I had rather wondered on what footing I should be received here, especially since Mishka's remark, a while back, about the "prisoner." But some one—Loris himself or Mishka, or both of them—had planned things perfectly, and I am sure that no one beyond ourselves and the elder Pavloff, who was also in the secret, had the slightest suspicion that I was other than I appeared to be.

My new acquaintance himself conducted me to the rooms prepared for me,—a spacious bedroom and sitting-room, with plain, massive furniture, including a big bookcase that occupied the whole of an alcove between the great Russian stove and the outer wall. Facing this was a door leading to a smaller dressing and

bath room, where the lackey who had carried up my valise was in waiting.

“This Nicolai will be in attendance on you; he speaks German,” my courteous guide informed me in French. “He will bring you all you need; you have only to give him orders. You will dine at the officers’ mess, and after dinner his Highness will give you audience.”

“Does Monsieur Pavloff—the land steward—live in the castle?” I asked, thinking it wise to emphasize my assumed rôle. “I understand that I’ll have to work with him.”

“No; his house is some two versts distant. But he is often in attendance here, naturally. Perhaps you will see him to-night; if not, without doubt, you will meet him to-morrow. Nicolai awaits your orders, and your keys.”

He bowed ceremoniously, and took himself off.

That Nicolai was a smart fellow. He already had the bath prepared,—I must have looked as if I wanted one,—and when I gave him the key of my bag, he laid out my clothes with the quick deftness of a well-trained valet.

I told him I shouldn’t want him any more at present, but when I had bathed and changed, I found him still hovering around in the next room. He had set a tea-table, on which the silver samovar was hissing invitingly. He wanted to stay and wait on me, but I wouldn’t have that. Smart and attentive as he was, he got on my nerves, and I felt I’d rather be alone. So I dismissed him, and, in obedience to some instinct I didn’t try to analyze, crossed the room softly, and locked the door through which he had passed.

I had scarcely seated myself, and poured out a glass of delicious Russian tea,—which is as wine to water compared with the crude beverage, diluted with cream, which Americans and western Europeans call tea,—when I heard a queer little sound behind me. I glanced back, and saw that one section of the big bookcase had moved forward slightly. With my right hand gripping the revolver that I had transferred from my travelling suit to the hip pocket of my evening clothes, I crossed swiftly to the alcove, just as some three feet of the shelves swung bodily inwards, revealing a doorway behind, in which stood none other than Mishka.

“The fool has gone; but is the outer door locked?” he asked in a cautious undertone.

“Yes,” I answered, noticing as I spoke that he stood at the top of a narrow spiral

staircase.

“That is well. Approach, Highness; all is safe,” he whispered down the darkness behind him, and flattened himself against the narrow wall space, as a second figure came into sight,—the Grand Duke Loris himself, who greeted me with outstretched hand.

“I do not care for this sort of thing,—this elaborate secrecy, Mr. Wynn,” he said softly in English. “But unfortunately it is necessary. Let us go through to your dressing-room. There it is less likely that we can be overheard.”

I followed him in silence. He sat himself down on the wide marble edge of the bath, and looked at me, as I stood before him, as though his brilliant blue eyes would read my very soul.

“So you have come; as I thought you would. And you are very welcome. But why have you come?”

“Because I hope to serve your Highness, and—she whom we both love,” I answered promptly.

“Yes, I was sure of that, although we have met only twice or thrice. I am seldom mistaken in a man whom I have once looked in the eyes; and I know I can trust you, as I dare trust few others,—none within these walls save the good Mishka. He has told you that I am virtually a prisoner here?”

I bowed assent.

“I am closely guarded, my every word, my every gesture noted; though when the time is ripe, or when she sends word that she needs me, I shall slip away! There is a great game, a stern one, preparing; and there will be a part for us both to play. I will give you the outline to-night, when I shall come to you again. That staircase yonder leads down to my apartments. I had it made years ago by foreign workmen, and none save myself and the Pavloffs—and you now—know of its existence, so far. In public we must be strangers; after the formal audience I give you to-night I shall probably ignore you altogether. But as Gould, the American farming expert, you will be able to come and go, riding the estates with Pavloff—or without him—and yet rouse no suspicion. To-night I shall return as I said; and now *au revoir*.”

He left just in time, for a minute or two after I had unlocked the door, Nicolai reappeared, and conducted me to an ante-room where I found quite a throng of

officers, one of whom introduced himself as Colonel Grodwitz, and presented me to several of the others. They all treated me with the easy courtesy which well-bred Russians assume—and discard—with such facility; but then, and later, I had to be constantly on guard against innumerable questions, which, though asked in what appeared to be a perfectly frank and spontaneous manner, were, I was convinced, sprung on me for the purpose of ascertaining how much I knew of Russia and its complicated affairs.

But I was quite ready for them, and if they had any suspicions I hope they abandoned them for the present.

After dinner a resplendent footman brought a message to Grodwitz, who thereupon told me that he was to conduct me to his Highness, who would receive me now.

“Say, what shall I have to do?” I asked confidentially as we passed along a magnificent corridor. “I’ve been to a levee held by the King of England, but I don’t know anything of Russian Court etiquette.”

He laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

“There is no need for you to observe etiquette, *mon ami*. Are you not an American and a Republican? Therefore none will blame you if you are unceremonious,—least of all our puissant Grand Duke! Have you not heard that he himself is a kind of ‘*Jacques bonhomme*’?”

“That means just a peasant, doesn’t it?” I asked obtusely. “No, I hadn’t heard that.”

He laughed again.

“Did the good Mishka tell you nothing?”

“Why, no; he’s the surliest and most silent fellow I’ve ever travelled with.”

“He is discreet, that Mishka,” said Grodwitz, and drew himself up stiffly as the footman, who had preceded us, threw open a door, and ushered us into the Duke’s presence.

He was standing before a great open fireplace in which a log fire crackled cheerily, and beside him was the little fat officer I had seen him with before; while there were several others present, all ceremoniously standing, and looking

more or less bored.

Our interview was brief and formal; but I noted that the fat officer and Grodwitz were keenly observant of all that passed.

“Well, that’s all right,” I said with a sigh of relief, when Grodwitz and I were back in the corridor again. “But there doesn’t seem to be much of the peasant about him!”

“I was but jesting, *mon ami*,” Grodwitz assured me. “But now your ordeal is over. You will take a hand at bridge, *hein*?”

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE GAME BEGINS

That hand at bridge lasted till long past midnight, and I only got away at last on the plea that I was dead tired after my two days' ride.

"Tired or not, you play a good hand, *mon ami*!" Grodwitz declared. We had been partners, and had won all before us.

"They shall have their revenge in good time," I said, stifling a yawn. "*Bonsoir, messieurs*."

I sent Nicolai to bed, and wrapping myself in a dressing gown which I found laid out for me, sat down in a deep divan chair to await the Duke, and fell fast asleep. I woke with a start, as the great clock over the castle gateway boomed four, and saw the Duke sitting quietly smoking in a chair opposite.

He cut short my stammered apologies in the frank unceremonious manner he always used when we were alone together, and plunged at once into the matter that was uppermost in his mind, as in mine.

Now at last I learned something of the working of that League with which I had become so mysteriously entangled, and of his and Anne's connection with it.

"For years its policy was sheerly destructive," he told me. "Its aims were as vague as its organization was admirable. At least nine-tenths of the so-called Nihilist murders and outrages, in Russia as elsewhere, have been planned and carried out by its executive and members. To 'remove' all who came under their ban, including any among their own ranks who were suspected of treachery, or even of delaying in carrying out their orders, was practically its one principle. But the time for this insensate indiscriminating violence is passing,—has passed. There must be a policy that is constructive as well as destructive. The younger generation sees that more clearly every day. She—Anna—was one of the first to see and urge it; hence she fell under suspicion, especially when she refused to carry out certain orders."

He broke off for a moment, as if in slight embarrassment.

“I think I understand,” I said. “She was ordered to ‘remove’ you, sir, and she refused?”

“That is so; at least she protested, even then, knowing that I was condemned merely as a member of the Romanoff family. Later, when we met, and learned to know each other, she found that I was no enemy, but a stanch friend to these poor peoples of Russia, striving so blindly, so desperately, to fling off the yoke that crushes them! Then it was that, with the noble courage that distinguishes her above all women I have ever met, she refused to carry out the orders given her; more than that, she has twice or thrice saved my life from other attempts on it. I have long been a member of the League, though, save herself, none other connected with it suspected the identity of a certain droshky driver, who did good service at one time and another.”

His blue eyes twinkled merrily for an instant. In his way his character was as complex as that of Anne herself,—cool, clever, courageous to a degree, but leavened with a keen sense of humor, that made him thoroughly enjoy playing the rôle of “Ivan,” even though it had brought him to his present position as a state prisoner.

“That reminds me,” I said. “How was it you got caught that time, when she and her father escaped?”

He shrugged his shoulders.

“I had to choose, either to fly with them, and thereby endanger us all still further, or allow myself to be taken. That last seemed best, and I think—I am sure—I was right.”

“Did you know the soldiers were coming?”

“No. That, by the way, was Selinski’s doing,—Cassavetti, as you call him.”

“Cassavetti!” I exclaimed. “Why, he was dead weeks before!”

“True, but the raid was in consequence of information he had supplied earlier. He was a double-dyed traitor. The papers she—the papers that were found in his rooms in London proved that amply. He had sold information to the Government, and had planned that the Countess Anna should be captured with the others, after he had induced her to return, by any means in his power.”

“But—but—he couldn’t have brought her back!” I exclaimed. “For she only left

London the day after he was murdered, and she was at Ostend with you next day."

"Who told you that?" he asked sharply.

"An Englishman I saw by chance in Berlin, who had met her in London, and who knew you by sight."

He sat silent, in frowning thought, for a minute or more, and then said slowly:

"Selinski had arranged everything beforehand, and his assistants carried out his instructions, though he, himself, was dead. But all that belongs to the past; we have to deal with the present and the future! You know already that one section of the League at least is, as it were, reconstructed. And that section has two definite aims: to aid the cause of freedom, but also to minimize the evils that must ensue in the struggle for freedom. We cannot hope to accomplish much,—there are so few of us,—and we know that we shall perish, perhaps before we have accomplished anything beyond paving the way for those that come after! There is a terrible time in store for Russia, my friend! The masses are ripe for revolt; even the bureaucracy know that now, and they try to gain time by raising side issues. Therefore, here in the country districts, they stir up the *moujiks*,—now against the tax-gatherers, more often against the Jews. Murder and rapine follows; then the troops are sent, who punish indiscriminately, in order to strike terror into the people. They create a desolation and call it a peace; you have seen an instance yourself on your way hither?"

I nodded, remembering that devastated village we had passed.

"The new League is striving to preserve peace and to save the innocent. Here in the country its members are pledged first to endeavor to improve the condition of the peasants, to teach them to be peaceable, self-supporting, and self-respecting,—a hard, well-nigh hopeless task, since in that, as in all other attempts at reform, one has to work in defiance of the Government."

"Well, from what I've heard—and seen—during the last part of my journey, you've managed to do a good deal in that way, sir," I suggested respectfully.

"It is little enough. I have worked under sufferance, and, as it were, with both hands tied," he said sadly. "If I had been any other, I should have been sent to Siberia long ago. It is the mere accident of birth that has saved me so far. But as to the League. The present plan of campaign is, roughly speaking, to prevent

riots and bloodshed. If news is gained of an intended raid on an isolated country-house, or, what is more frequent, on a Jews' quarter, a warning is sent to those threatened, and if possible a defence arranged. Even from here I have been able to assist a little in such matters." Again his eyes gleamed with that swift flash of mirth, though he continued his grave speech. "More than one catastrophe has been averted already, but the distances are so great; often one hears only of the affairs after they are over.

"That will be part of your work. To bring news as you gather it,—the Pavloffs will help you there,—and to accompany me when I choose to elude my jailers for a few hours; perhaps to go in my stead, if it should be impossible for me to get away. I know what you can do when it comes to a fight! Well, this is the 'sport' I offered you! Do you care to go in for it? If not—"

"You know I care!" I exclaimed, half indignantly; and on that we gripped hands.

We talked for a good while longer. He gave me much information that I need not set down here, and we spoke often of Anne. He seemed much interested in my cousin, Mary Cayley,—naturally, as she was Anne's friend and hostess,—and seemed somehow relieved when I said Mary was still in complete ignorance of all that had happened and was happening.

"I should like to meet your charming cousin; but that will never be, I fear; though perhaps—who knows?—she and her friend may yet be reunited," he said, rousing himself with a sigh and a shiver.

I slept late when I did get to bed, and was awakened at last by Nicolai, who had breakfast ready, and informed me that Mishka was in readiness to escort me to his father's house.

For a time life went smoothly enough. I was out and about all day with the Pavloffs, superintending the trial of the new farming machines and the distribution of the implements. During the first day or two Grodwitz or one of the other officers always accompanied me, ostensibly as an act of courtesy towards a stranger,—really, as I well understood, to watch me; and therefore I was fully on my guard. They relaxed their vigilance all the sooner, I think, because, in my pretended ignorance of Russian, I blandly endeavored to press them into service as interpreters, which they found pretty extensively boring.

They treated me quite *en bon camarade*; though even at dinner, and when we were playing cards at night, one or other of them was continually trying to

“draw” me, and I had to be constantly on the alert. I had no further public audience with the Duke, though he came to my room several times by the secret stair.

But one evening, as Mishka and I rode towards the castle, a pebble shot from a clump of bushes near at hand, and struck his boot. With a grunt he reined up, and, without glancing in the direction whence the missile came, dismounted and pretended to examine one of the horse’s feet. But I saw a fur cap, and then a face peering from among the bushes for an instant, and recognized Yossof the Jew. Another missile fell at Mishka’s feet,—a small packet in a dark wrapping. He picked it up, thrust it in his pocket, swung into the saddle, and we were off on the instant.

All he condescended to say was:

“See that you are alone in the hour before dinner. There may be work to do.”

I took the hint, and as usual dispensed with Nicolai’s proffered services. Within half an hour the bookcase swung back and the Duke entered quickly; his face was sternly exultant, his blue eyes sparkling.

“Dine well, my friend, but retire early; make what excuse you like, but be here by ten at the latest. You will manage that well, if you do not attend the reception,” he exclaimed. “We ride from Zostrov to-night; perhaps forever! The great game has begun at last,—the game of life and death!”

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE FLIGHT FROM ZOSTROV

At dinner I heard that the Grand Duke was indisposed, and was dining alone, instead, as usual, with the Count Stravensky, Commandant of the Castle—by courtesy the chief member of his suite, but in reality his custodian—and two or three other officers of high birth, who, with their wives, formed as it were, the inner circle of this small Court in the wilderness. There were a good many ladies in residence,—the great castle was like a world in little,—but I scarcely saw any of them, as I preferred to keep to the safe seclusion of the officers' mess, when I was not in my own room; and there was, of course, no lack of bachelors much more attractive than myself. I gathered from Grodwitz and others that they managed to enliven their exile with plenty of flirtations,—and squabbles.

On this evening the Countess Stravensky was holding a reception in her apartments, with dancing and music; and all my usual after-dinner companions were attending it.

"Better come, *mon ami*," urged Grodwitz. "You are not invited? Nonsense; I tell you it is an informal affair, and it is quite time you were presented to the Countess."

"I'd feel like a fish out of water," I protested. "I'm not used to smart society."

"Smart! *Ma foi*, there is not much smartness about us in this deadly hole! But have it your own way. You are as austere as our Grand Duke himself; though you have not his excuse!" he retorted, laughing.

"What excuse?"

"You have not heard?" he asked quizzically; and rattled out a version of the gossip that was rife concerning Anne and Loris.

"The charitable declare that there is a morganatic marriage," he asserted. "They are probably right; for, I give you my word, he is a sentimental fool, our good Loris. *Voilà*, a bit of treason for the ears of your friend Mishka, *hein*?"

"I don't quite understand you, Colonel Grodwitz," I said quietly, looking at him

very straight. “If you think I’m in the habit of gossiping with Mishka Pavloff or any other servant here, you’re very much mistaken.”

“A thousand pardons, my dear fellow; I was merely joking,” he assured me; but I guessed he had made one more attempt to “draw” me,—the last.

As I went up to my room I heard the haunting strains of a Hungarian dance from the Stravensky suite, situated on the first floor in the left wing leading from the great hall, while the Duke’s apartments were in the right wing.

Mishka entered immediately after I had locked the door.

“Get your money and anything else you value and can carry on you,” he grunted. “You will not return here. And get into this.”

“This” was the uniform of a cavalry officer; and I must say I looked smart in it.

Mishka gathered up my discarded clothes, and stowed them in the wardrobe.

“Unlock the door; Nicolai will come presently and will think you are still below,” he said. “And follow me; have a care, pull the door to—so.”

I closed the secret opening and went down the narrow stairway, steep almost as a ladder, By the dim light of the small lantern Mishka carried, I saw the door leading to the Duke’s rooms. We did not enter there, as I expected, but kept on till I guessed we must about have got down to the bowels of the earth. Then came a tremendously long and narrow passage, damp and musty smelling; at the end of it a flight of steep steps leading up to what looked like a solid stone wall. Mishka motioned me to wait, extinguished the lantern, and I heard him feeling about in the pitch darkness for a few seconds. Then, with scarcely a sound, the masonry swung back, and I saw a patch of dark sky jewelled with stars, and felt the keen night wind on my face. I passed out, waited in silence while he closed the exit again, and kept beside him as he walked rapidly away. I glanced back once, and saw beyond the great wall, the castle itself, and the lights gleaming from many windows, while from the further wing came still the sound of the music.

We appeared to be making for the road that led to Pavloff’s house, where I guessed we might be going, but I asked no questions. Mishka would speak when necessary,—not otherwise. We passed through a belt of pine trees on to the rough road; and there, more heard than seen in the darkness, we came on two horsemen, each with a led horse.

“That you, Wynn?” said a low voice—the Duke’s. “You are in good time. This is your horse; mount and let us get on.”

We started at a steady pace, not by the road, but across country, and for three versts or more we rode in absolute silence, the Duke and I in advance, Mishka and his father close behind.

“Well, I told you I could get away when I wished to,” said Loris at last. “And this time I shall not return. You are a good disciplinarian, my friend! You have come without one question! For the present we are bound for Zizcsky, where she probably awaits us. There may be trouble there; we have word that a *pogrom* is planned; and we may be in time to save some. The Jews are so helpless. They have lived in fear, and under sufferance for so long, that it is difficult to rouse them even to defend themselves,—out here, anyhow. In Warsaw and Minsk, and the larger towns within the pale, it is different, and, when the time comes, some among them at least will make a good fight of it!”

“We may find that the alarm was false, and things are quiet. If so,—good; we ride on to Count Vassilitzi’s house some versts further. He is Anna’s cousin and she will be there to-morrow if she is not in Zizcsky; and there we shall decide on our movements.

“I said that the game begins,—and this is it. Perhaps to-morrow,—or maybe a week or a month hence, for the train is laid and a chance spark might fire it prematurely,—a great strike will commence. All has been carefully planned. When the moment comes, the revolutionists will issue a manifesto demanding a Constitution, and that will be the signal for all workers, in every city and town of importance, to go on strike; including the post and telegraph operatives, and the railway men. It will, in effect, be a declaration of civil war; and God alone knows what the upshot will be! There will be much fighting, much violence; that is inevitable. The people are sanguine of success, for many of the soldiers and sailors are with them; but they do not realize—none of the lower classes can realize—how strong a weapon the iron hand of the bureaucracy wields, in the army and, yes, even in the remnant of the navy. Supposing one-tenth of the forces mutiny, and fight on the side of the people, or even stand neutral,—and I do not think we can count on a tenth,—there will still be nine-tenths to reckon with. Our part will be, in a way, that of guerillas. We go to Warsaw, the headquarters of our branch of the League. We shall act partly as Anna’s guards. She does not know that; she herself is utterly reckless of danger, but I have determined to protect her as far as possible, as you also are determined, eh, *mon*

ami? Also we shall give aid where we can, endeavor to prevent unnecessary violence, and save those who are unable to defend themselves. That, in outline, is the program; we must fill in the details from one moment to the next, as occasion serves. I gather my little band as I go," he continued, speaking, like a true son of the saddle, in an even, deliberate voice that sounded distinct over the monotonous thud of the horses' hoofs. "Yossof has carried word, and the first recruits await us outside the village yonder. They are all picked men, members of the League; some have served in the army, and—"

From far in our rear came a dull, sinister roar, followed by a kind of vibration of the ground under our feet, like a slight shock of earthquake.

“My God, how they hate me!” I heard Loris say softly. Page 259

“My God, how they hate me!” I heard Loris say softly. **Page 259**

We pulled up, all four of us, and, turning in our saddles, looked back. We were nearing the verge of the great undulating plain, and the village from whence in daylight the first view of the castle, some eight versts distant, was obtained. Even now the long range of lights from the left wing could be seen distinctly, like a galaxy of stars near the horizon, but from the right wing, where the Duke’s apartments were, shone a faint reddish glow, which, as we looked, increased rapidly, revealing clouds of black smoke.

“An explosion,” grunted Mishka. “Some one has wrecked the state apartments, and they are afire. There will be a big blaze. If you had been there,—well, we are all well out of it!”

He rode on with his father; but Loris and I remained as if spellbound for a minute or more, staring at the grim light that waxed brighter every instant, till we could actually see the flames darting through the window spaces and up the outer walls. The place was already a raging furnace.

“My God, how they hate me!” I heard Loris say softly. “Yet, I have escaped them once again; and it is well; it could not be better. I am free at last!”

CHAPTER XL

A STRICKEN TOWN

We rode on, avoiding the village, which remained dark and silent; the sleeping peasants had either not heard or not heeded the sound and shock of the explosion.

When we regained the road on the further side, two mounted men awaited us, who, after exchanging a few low-spoken words with the Pavloffs, fell in behind us; and later another, and yet another, joined us in the same way.

It must have been about one in the morning when we reached the village half-way between Zizcsky and Zostrov, where Mishka and I had got the last change of horses on our journey to the castle. Here again all was dark and quiet, and we rode round instead of through the place, Loris and I, with the Pavloffs, halting at a little distance, near a small farmhouse which I remembered as that of the *starosta,* while our four recruits kept on.

Mishka rode up and kicked at the outer gate. A light gleamed in the yard and the *starosta,* yawning and blinking, appeared, holding a lantern and leading a horse.

“The horses are ready? That is well, little father,” Mishka said approvingly.

“They have been ready since midnight, and the samovar also; you will drink a glass of tea, Excellencies.”

As he led out the other three horses in turn, a lad brought us steaming glasses of tea, and I was glad of mine, anyhow; for the night, though still and clear, was piercingly cold.

“The horses will come on, with four more recruits, after a couple of hours’ rest,” said Loris, as we started again.

We kept up an even pace of about ten miles an hour till we had traversed about half the remaining distance, picking up more silent men on little shaggy country horses till we rode a band of some fifteen strong.

I think I must have fallen half asleep in my saddle when I was startled by a quick

exclamation from Loris.

“Look! What is yonder?”

I looked and saw a ruddy glow in the sky to northward,—a flickering glow, now paling, now flashing up vividly and showing luminous clouds of smoke,—the glow of a great fire.

“That is over Zizscky; it was to-night then, and we are too late!”

We checked instinctively, and the Pavloffs ranged alongside. We four, being better mounted, were well ahead, and the others came straggling in our rear.

“They were to defend the synagogue; we may still be in time to help,” said Pavloff.

“True, we four must push on; these others must follow as they are able, and tell the rest as they meet them. Give Stepán the word, Mishka,” commanded the Duke.

Mishka wheeled his horse and rode back, and we pressed forward, increasing the pace to a gallop. Within an hour we had covered the twenty versts and were on the outskirts of the town. Every instant that awful glow grew brighter, and when we drew near we saw that half the houses in the Jewish quarter were ablaze, while horrible sounds came to us,—the noise of a devils’ orgy, punctuated irregularly by the crackle of rifle shots.

“They are holding the synagogue,” Loris said grimly. “Otherwise the firing would be over by this time.”

The straggling street that formed this end of the town was quiet and deserted, save for a few scared women and children, who were standing in the roadway, and who scurried back to their houses at the first sound of our horses’ hoofs.

“Dismount, and turn the horses loose!” Loris commanded. “We shall find them later, perhaps; if not, well, we shall not!”

We hurried along on foot, and a minute or two later we entered the Jewish quarter and were in the midst of a hellish scene, lighted luridly by the glare of the burning houses. The road was strewn with battered corpses, some lying in heaps; and burly *moujiks*, shrieking unsexed viragoes, and brutal soldiers, maddened with vodka, delirious with the lust of blood and pillage, were sacking

the houses that were not yet ablaze, destroying, in insensate fury, what they were unable to carry off, fighting like demons over their plunder. Here and there were groups of soldiers, who, though they were not joining in the work of destruction, made no effort to check it, but looked on with grim jests. I saw one present his rifle, fire haphazard into the crowd, and yell with devilish mirth as his victim fell, and the confusion increased.

His laugh was cut short, for Loris knocked the rifle out of his hand, and sternly ordered him back to the barracks, if that was all he could do towards restoring order.

The man and his comrades stared stupidly. They did not know who he was, but his uniform and commanding presence had their effect. The ruffians stood at attention, saluted and asked for orders!

“Clear the streets,” he commanded sternly. “Drive the people back to their quarter and keep them there; and do it without violence.”

He stood frowning, revolver in hand, and watched them move off with sheepish alacrity and begin their task, which would not have been an easy one if the soldiers had been under discipline. But there was no discipline; I did not see a single officer in the streets that night.

“Are you wise?” Mishka growled unceremoniously, as we moved off. I saw now that he and his father were also in uniform, and I surmise that every one who saw us took the Grand Duke to be an officer in high command, and us members of his staff.

We had our revolvers ready, but no one molested us, and as we made our way towards the synagogue, Loris more than once repeated his commands to the idle soldiers, with the same success.

Barzinsky’s inn, where Mishka and I had slept less than a fortnight back, was utterly wrecked, though the fire had not yet reached it, and in a heap in the roadway was the corpse of a woman, clad in a dirty bedgown. Her wig was gone and her skull battered in, but I knew it was the placid, capable, good-tempered landlady herself. The stumps of her hands lay palm down in a pool of blood,—all the fingers gone. She had worn rings, poor soul.

But that was by no means the most sickening sight I saw on that night of horror!

We reached the square where the synagogue stood, and found it packed with a

frenzied, howling mob, who were raging like wolves round the gaunt weather-worn stone building. There was no more firing, either from within or without.

The glass of the two small windows above the doorway—whence, as I learned later, the defenders had delivered the intermittent fusilade that had hitherto kept the mob at bay—was smashed, and the space filled in with hastily fixed barricades. The great door was also doubtless strongly barricaded, since it still withstood an assault with axes and hammers that was in progress.

“They shoot no more; they have no more bullets,” shrieked a virago in the crowd. “Burn them out, the filthy *zhits*.”

Others took up the cry.

“Burn them out; what folly to batter the door! Bring straw and wood; burn them out!”

“Keep away,—work round to the left; there will be space soon,” growled Mishka, clutching me back, as I began to force my way forward. “Do as I say,” he added authoritatively.

I guessed he knew best, so I obeyed, and edged round on the outside of the crowd.

Something whizzed through the air, and fell bang among the crowd, exploding with a deafening report.

A babel of yells arose,—yells of terror now; and the mob surged back, leaving a clear space in which several stricken figures were writhing,—and one lay still.

“Fly!” shouted a stentorian voice. “They are making bombs and throwing them; fly for your lives. Why should we all perish?”

I was carried back in the rush, and found myself breathless, back against a wall. Three figures cleared themselves from the ruck, and I fought my way to them.

“Well done, Mishka,—for it was thou!” exclaimed Loris. “How was it done?”

“*Pouf*, it was but a toy,” grunted Mishka. “I brought it in my pocket,—on chance; such things are useful at times. If it had been a real bomb, we should all have entered Heaven—or hell—together.”

“Get to the steps; they are coming back,” cried Loris.

He was right. A section of the crowd turned, and made an ugly rush, only to halt in confusion as they found themselves confronted by levelled revolvers, held by four men in uniform.

“Be off,” Loris shouted. There was no anger in his voice; he spoke as sternly and dictatorially as one speaks to a fractious child. “You have done enough mischief for one night,—and the punishment is still to come. Back, I say! Go home, and see that you do no more evil.”

He strode towards them, and they gave back before him.

“Jèsu! It is the archangel Michel! Ah, but we have sinned, indeed,” a woman wailed hysterically. The cry was caught up, echoed in awestruck murmurs; and the whole lot of them quickened their flight, as we marched on their heels.

“A compliment to you, my Mishka,—you and your toy bomb; somewhat more like Jove and his thunderbolts though, eh?” said Loris, and I saw his eyes gleam for a moment with a flash of the quaint humor that cropped up in him at the most unexpected moments. “It was a good thought, for it achieved much, at very little cost. But these poor fools! When will they learn wisdom?”

We stood still, waiting for a brief space, to see if the mob would return. But the noise receded,—the worst was over; though the baleful glare of the burning houses waxed ever brighter, revealing all the horrors of that stricken town.

With a sigh Loris thrust his revolver back into his belt,—none of us had fired a shot,—and strode back to the door of the synagogue.

From within we could hear, now that the din had ceased, the wailing of frightened children, the weeping of women.

Loris drew his revolver again and beat on the door with the butt.

“Open within there!” he cried. “All is safe, and we are friends.”

“Who are you? Give the name, or the word,” came the answer, in a woman’s voice; a voice that I knew well.

“Open, Anna; *à la vie et à la mort*!” he called.

A queer dizziness seized me as I listened. She was within, then; in another minute I should meet her. But how could I hope that she would have a word, a glance, to spare for me, when *he* was there. I could not even feel jealous of him;

he was so far above me in every way. For me there must still be only “the page’s part,” while he was the king, and she the queen.

There were lumbering noises within, as of heavy goods being moved; but at last the door swung back, and there on the threshold, with her hands outstretched, stood Anne Pendennis.

CHAPTER XLI

LOVE OR COMRADESHIP?

“

I knew thou wouldst come,” she said in French, as he caught those outstretched hands in his.

She looked pale and worn, as was natural,—but lovelier than ever, as she stood, a shadowy figure in her dark gown against the gloom behind her, for there was no light within the synagogue. The lurid glare from without shed an unearthly radiance on her white face and shining hair.

“I am not alone,” he said. “Maurice Wynn is with me; and the good Mishka and his father.”

She glanced at me doubtfully, and then held out her hand, flashing at me the ghost of her old arch smile.

“It is Maurice, indeed; how the beard has changed you,—and the uniform! I did not know you,” she said, still in French. “But come; there is still much to do, and we must be gone before daylight. How did you drive them off? Will they make another attack?” she asked, turning to Loris.

“I think not; they have had enough for one time. You must thank Mishka here for putting them to the rout,” he answered. “Ah, Stepán, you are here also, as I expected,” he added to a young man of about my own age, whom I guessed to be Anne’s cousin, Count Vassilitzi, from the strong likeness between them, though his hair was much darker than hers, and he wore a small mustache.

“I knew thou wouldst come,” she said. Page 268
“I knew thou wouldst come,” she said. **Page 268**

What passed in the synagogue both before and after we came, I only learned later; for Mishka and I were posted on guard at the entrance of the square, while Pavloff went off to seek our horses and intercept the men who were following us. If he met them in time, they would make a *détour* round the town and wait for us to join them on the further side.

Our sentry-go business proved an unnecessary precaution, for no more rioters appeared; the excitement in the town was evidently dying out, the *pogrom* was over,—for the time.

Some of the bolder spirits among the Jews came from the synagogue, exchanging pious ejaculations of thanks to God for their deliverance. They slunk furtively by us; though one venerable-looking old man paused and invoked what sounded like a blessing on us,—in Hebrew, I think.

“You can keep all that for the gracious lady,” growled Mishka. “It is to her you owe your present deliverance.”

“It is, indeed,” he answered in Russian. “The God of our fathers will bless her,—yea, and she shall be blessed. And He will bless you, Excellencies,—you and your seed even to the third and fourth generation, inasmuch that you also have worked His will, and have delivered His children out of the hands of evil-doers.”

Mishka scratched his head and looked sheepish. This blessing seemed to embarrass him more than any amount of cursing would have done.

“They are harmless folk, these Jews,” he grunted. “And they are brave in their way, although they are forever cringing. See—the old man goes with the others to try and check the course of the fires. They are like ants in a disturbed ants’ nest. They begin to repair the damage while it is yet being done. To-morrow, perchance even to-day, they will resume their business, and will truckle to those who set out to outrage and murder them this night! That is what makes the Jew unconquerable. But it is difficult to teach him to fight, even in defence of his women; though we are doing something in that way among the younger men. They must have done well to hold out so long.”

“How did they get arms?” I asked.

“They have not many so far, but there is one who comes and goes among them,—one of themselves,—who brings, now a revolver or two, now a handful of cartridges, now a rifle taken to pieces; always at the risk of his life, but that to him is less than nothing.”

“Yossof!” I exclaimed.

He nodded, but said no more, for Count Vassilitzi came across the square to us.

“All is quiet?” he asked. “Good. We can do no more, and it is time we were off.

You are Monsieur Wynn? I have heard of you from my cousin. We must be friends, Monsieur!”

He held out his hand and I gripped it. I’d have known him anywhere for Anne’s kinsman, he was so like her, more like her in manner even than in looks; that is, like her when she was in a frivolous mood.

There was quite a crowd now on the steps of the synagogue, a crowd of weeping women—yes, and weeping men, too,—who pressed around Anne, jostling each other in the attempt to kiss her hands, or even the hem of her gown.

She looked utterly exhausted, and I saw,—not without a queer pang at heart,—that Loris had his arm round her, was indeed, rather carrying, than merely supporting her.

“Let us through, good people,” I heard him say. “Remember that her peril is as great as yours, even greater.”

As he spoke, her eyelids drooped, and she swayed back on to his shoulder. He swung her into his arms as I had seen him do once before, on that memorable summer night more than three months ago, when I thought I had looked my last on her; and, as the women gave way before him, he strode off, carrying his precious burden as easily as if she had been a little child.

We followed closely, revolvers in hand; but there was no need to use them. The few streets we traversed on the route Loris took were deserted; and though the houses on either side were smouldering ruins, we passed but few corpses, and some of those were Russians. The worst of the carnage had been in the streets further from the synagogue.

“You came just in time,” remarked Vassilitzi. “We were expecting the door to be burst in or burnt every moment; so we packed the women and children up into the women’s gallery again—we’d been firing from there till the ammunition was gone—and waited for the end. Most of the Jews were praying hard; well, I suppose they think their prayers were efficacious for once.”

“Without doubt,” I answered. His cynical tone jarred on me, somehow.

“They will need all their prayers,” he rejoined, shrugging his shoulders. “To-night is but a foretaste of what they have to expect. But perhaps they will now take the hint, and learn to defend themselves; also they will not have the soldiers to reckon with, if they can hold out a little longer.”

“How’s that?” I asked, because he seemed to expect the question; not because I was particularly interested; my mind was concentrated on those two in front.

“Why, because the soldiers will be wanted elsewhere, as I think you know very well, *mon ami*,” he laughed. “Well, I for one am glad this little affair is over. I could do with some breakfast, and you also, eh? Anna is worn out; she will never spare herself. *Ma foi!* she is a marvel; I say that always; and he is another. Now if I tried to do that sort of thing”—he waved his hand airily towards Loris, tramping steadily along. “But I should not try; she is no light weight, I give you my word! Still they make a pretty picture,—eh? What it is to be a giant!”

I’d have liked to shake him, and stop his irresponsible chatter, which seemed out of place at the moment. I knew he wouldn’t have been able to carry Anne half across the street; he was a little, thin fellow, scarcely as tall as Anne herself.

But I could have carried her, easily as Loris was doing, if I’d had the chance and the right.

Yet his was the right; I knew that well, for I had seen the look in her eyes as she greeted him just now. How could I have been such a conceited fool as to imagine she loved me, even for a moment! What I had dared to hope—to think—was love, was nothing of the kind; merely frank *camaraderie*. It was in that spirit she had welcomed me; calling me “Maurice,” as she had done during the last week or two of her stay at Mary’s; but somehow I felt that though we had met again at last, she was immeasurably removed from me; and the thought was a bitter one! She loved me in a way,—yes, as her friend, her good comrade. Well, hadn’t I told myself for months past that I must be content with that?

CHAPTER XLII

THE DESERTED HUNTING LODGE

Our own horses were already at the appointed place, together with Pavloff and the Duke's little band of "recruits;" sturdy young *moujiks* these, as I saw now by the gray light of dawn, cleaner and more intelligent-looking than most of their class.

They were freshly horsed, for they had taken advantage of the confusion in the town to "commandeer" re-mounts,—as they say in South Africa. There were horses for Anne, and her cousin, too. Pavloff, like his son, was a man who forgot nothing.

Anne had already revived from the faintness that overcame her on the steps of the synagogue. I had heard her talking to Loris, as we came along; more than once she declared she was quite able to walk, but he only shook his head and strode on.

He set her down now, and seemed to be demurring about her horse. I heard her laugh,—how well I knew that laugh!—though I had already swung myself into the saddle and edged a little away.

"It is not the first time I have had to ride thus. Look you, Maurice, it goes well enough, does it not?" she said, riding towards me.

I had to look round at that.

She was mounted astride, as I've seen girls ride in the Western States. She had slipped off the skirt of her dark riding-habit, and flung it over her right arm; and was sitting square in her saddle, her long coat reaching to the tops of her high riding-boots.

I felt a lump come to my throat as I looked at the gallant, graceful figure, at the small proud head with its wealth of bright hair gleaming under the little astrachan cap that she wore, at the white face with its brave smile.

I knew well that she was all but dead-beat, and that she only laughed lest she might weep, or faint again.

“It goes well indeed, *capitaine*,” I answered, with a military salute.

Pavloff, still on foot, came forward and stood beside her, speaking in a low growl; he was an elder edition of his son Mishka.

She listened, looking down at him gravely and kindly. I could not take my eyes from her face, so dear and familiar, and yet in one way so changed. I guessed wherein the change lay. When I had known her before she had only been playing a part, posing as a lovely, light-hearted, capriciously coquettish girl, without a real care in the world. But now I saw her without the mask, knew her for what she was, the woman who was devoting her youth, her beauty, her brilliant talents, to a great cause,—a well-nigh hopeless one,—and I loved her more than ever, with a passionate fervor that, I honestly declare, had no taint of selfishness in it. From that moment I told myself that it was enough for me merely to be near her, to serve her, shield her perhaps, and count, as a rich reward, every chance word or thought or smile she might bestow on me.

“Yes, it is well; your duty lies there,” I heard her say. “God be with you, old friend; and farewell!”

She slipped her right hand out of its loose leather glove, and held it out to him.

When I first saw her at Chelsea, I had decided that hers were the most beautiful hands in the world, not small, but exquisitely shaped,—hands that, in their graceful movements, somehow seemed to convey a subtle idea of power and versatility. She never wore rings. I remembered how Mary once remarked on this peculiarity, and Anne had answered that she did not care for them.

“But you’ve quite a lot in your jewel case, lovely old ones; you ought to wear them, Anne,” Mary protested, and Anne’s eyes had darkened as they always did in moments of emotion.

“They were my mother’s. Father gave them me years ago, and I always carry them about with me; but I never wear them,” she said quietly.

The remembrance of this little episode flashed through my mind as I saw her hold out her ringless hand,—begrimed now with dirt and smoke, with a purple mark like a bruise between the thumb and first finger, that showed me she had been one of the firing party.

Pavloff bared his shaggy head, and bent over the hand as if it had been that of an empress; then moved away and went plump on his knees before Loris.

“Where is he going?” I asked Anne, ranging my horse alongside.

“Back to his work, like the good man he is,” she said, her eyes fixed on Loris, who had raised the old steward and was speaking to him rapidly and affectionately. “He came thus far lest we should have need of him; perhaps also because he would say farewell to me,—since we shall not meet again. But now he will return and continue his duty at Zostrov as long as he is permitted to do so. That may not be long,—but still his post is there.”

“They will murder him, as some of them tried to murder the Duke last night,” I said. “You have heard of the explosion?”

She nodded, but made no comment, and, as Pavloff mounted and rode off alone, Loris also mounted and joined us with Vassilitzi, and the four of us started at a hand-gallop, a little ahead of the others. Loris rode on Anne’s right hand, I on her left, and I noticed, as I glanced at her from time to time, how weary and wistful her face was, when the transient smile had vanished; how wide and sombre the eyes that, as I knew of old, changed with every mood, so that one could never determine their color; at one moment a sparkling hazel, at another—as now—dark and mysterious as the sky on a starless night.

The last part of our route lay through thick woods, where the cold light of the dawn barely penetrated as yet, though the foliage was thin overhead, and the autumn leaves made a soft carpet on which our horses’ hoofs fell almost without a sound.

We seemed to move like a troop of shadows through that ghostly twilight. One could imagine it an enchanted forest, like those of our nursery tales, with evil things stirring in the brakes all about us, and watching us unseen. Once there came a long-drawn wail from near at hand; and a big wolf, homing to his lair at the dawning, trotted across the track just ahead, and bared his fangs in a snarl before he vanished. A few minutes later another sound rang weirdly above the stealthy whispers of the forest,—the scream of some creature in mortal fear and pain.

“That is a horse that the wolves are after—or they’ve got him!” exclaimed Vassilitzi. He and I were leading now, for the track was only wide enough for two to ride abreast. We quickened our pace, though we were going at a smart trot, and as a second scream reached our ears, ending abruptly in a queer gurgle, we saw in front a shapeless heap, from which two shadowy forms started up growling, but turned tail and vanished, as the other wolf had done, as we

galloped towards them.

The fallen horse was a shaggy country nag, with a rope bridle and no saddle. The wolves had fastened on his throat, but he was not yet dead, and as I jumped down and stood over him he made a last convulsive effort to rise, glaring at me piteously with his blood-flecked eyes. We saw then that his fore-leg was broken, and I decided the best thing to do was to put the beast out of his misery. So I did it right then with a shot in his ear.

“He has been ridden hard; he was just about spent when he stumbled on that fallen trunk and fell, and that was some time since,” said Vassilitzi, looking critically at the quivering, sweat-drenched carcase. “Now, what does it mean? If the wolves had chased him,—and they are not so bold now as in the winter,—they would have had him down before, and his rider too; but they had only just found him.”

He stared ahead and shrugged his shoulders with the air of a man who dismisses an unimportant question to which he cannot find a ready answer.

The others caught up with us as I got into my saddle again, and we made no delay, as the incident was not of sufficient moment.

We passed one or two huts, that appeared to be uninhabited, and came at last to the open, or rather to a space of a few hundred acres, ringed round by the forest, and saw in the centre of the clearing a low, rambling old house of stone, enclosed with a high wall, and near the tall gateway a few scattered wooden huts.

Some fowls and pigs were straying about, and a few dejected looking cows and a couple of horses were grazing near at hand; but there was no sign of human life.

“*Diable!* Where are they all?” exclaimed Vassilitzi, frowning and biting his mustache.

“What place is this?” I asked him.

“Mine. It was a hunting lodge once; now it represents all my—our—possessions. But where are the people?”

He rode to the nearest hut, kicked open the crazy door, and shouted imperatively; but there was no reply. The whole place was deserted.

Thence to the gateway, with its solid oak doors. He jumped down and tried them,

petulantly muttering what certainly sounded like a string of oaths. But they were locked and barred.

The others rode up, Anne and Loris first, the men straggling after.

Anne was swaying in her saddle; her face was ashy pale. I think she would have fallen but that Loris steadied her with his arm.

“What now?” she gasped. “There has been no fighting;” she glanced wildly around, “and yet—where are they all? We left twenty to guard her, within, besides these others.” She stretched her hand towards the empty huts.

“Give the signal!” she continued, turning to Loris. “If there are any within they will answer that!”

He drew his revolver and fired five shots in the air; while we all sat, staring at him, and wondering what would happen next; at least that was what I was wondering. The silence was so uncanny!

CHAPTER XLIII

THE WOMAN FROM SIBERIA

At last there was a movement within. Halting footsteps approached the gates, and a man's voice, hoarse and weak, demanded: "Who is there?"

"It is Yossof," Anne exclaimed. "How comes he here alone? Where is my mother, Yossof?"

I started as I heard that. Her mother was alive, then, though Anne had said she could not remember her, and Treherne had told me she died soon after her arrest, more than twenty years back.

"She is within and safe; Natalya is with her," came Yossof's quavering voice, as he labored to unbar the gates. We heard him gasping and groaning as if the task was beyond his strength, but he managed it at last. The great doors swung open, and he stood leaning against one of them. In the chill morning light his face looked gray and drawn like that of a corpse, just as it had looked that first time I saw him on the staircase at Westminster. On the weed-grown path beside him lay a revolver, as if he had dropped it out of his hand when he started to unbar the gates.

"What has happened, Yossof?" Anne asked urgently.

"Nothing; all is well, Excellency," he answered. "I rode and gave the word as the order was, and when I reached the town the madness had begun, so I did not enter, but came on hither. My horse was spent, and I found another, but he fell and I left him and came on foot. I found none here save the Countess and Natalya; the others had fled, fearing an attack. So I closed the gates and kept guard."

"God reward thee, friend; thou hast done well, indeed," Anne said, and moved on to the house.

I felt a twitch on my sleeve, and Mishka muttered in my ear.

"Count our men in and then see the gate barred. We shall be safer so. I will look after Yossof, and find also what food is in the house for us all. We need it

sorely!”

So I sat in my saddle beside the gateway, waiting till the last of our laggards had come in. I saw Loris lift Anne from her horse and support her up the short flight of wide stone steps that led up to the house.

An elderly peasant woman hurried out to meet them, and behind her appeared a weird unearthly figure; a tall woman, wearing a kind of loose white dressing-gown. Her gray hair was flying dishevelled about her shoulders; and her face, even seen from a distance as I saw it now, appeared like some horrible travesty of humanity. The wide open eyes were sightless, covered with a white film; the nose was flattened and distorted, the lips contracted, while the other features, forehead and cheeks and chin, were like a livid lined mask, grotesquely seamed and scarred.

The “Thing”—I could not think of it as a human being at that moment—flung out its hands, and shrieked in French, and in a voice that, though shrill with anguish, was piercingly sweet and powerful.

“They have come,—but they shall never take me again; at least they shall not take me alive. Anthony—Anthony! Where are you, my husband? Save me! do not let them take me!”

Anne hurried towards her, but with a scream she turned and sped back into the house, and some one pushed the door to, so I saw no more; but for some minutes those dreadful screams continued. They sounded almost like the shrieks of Yossof’s horse when the wolves were on him.

The men had all ridden in and were muttering to each other, crossing themselves in superstitious fear. They seemed scared to approach the house; and I believe they’d have stampeded back into the forest if I hadn’t slammed the gates and barred them again.

“It is not good to be here, Excellency,” stammered one. “This place is haunted with ghosts and devils.”

“Nonsense,” I answered roughly. “Brave men you are indeed to be frightened of a poor mad lady who has suffered so cruelly!”

By judicious bullying I got them calmed down a bit; a Russian peasant is a difficult person to manage when he’s in a superstitious funk. Mishka joined me presently, and we marched our men round to the back of the house, and set them

foraging for breakfast. Fortunately there was plenty of food; the place seemed provisioned for a siege. I stood about, watching and directing them. I didn't feel in the least hungry myself, only rather dazed.

A hand fell on my shoulder, and I found Loris beside me.

"Come and eat and sleep, my friend; we have done well so far. Mishka will take charge here."

He looked almost as fresh and alert after that tremendous night we'd had, as if he'd just come out of his bedroom at Zostrov, when we joined him in a big dilapidated dining-room, where he'd planked some food and a couple of bottles of wine on the great oaken table, though I was as big a scarecrow as Vassilitzi, who was as used up as if he hadn't been to bed for a week.

He had dropped his flippant manner, and was as cross and irritable as an over-tired woman.

"Think of these *canaille* that we feed and clothe, and risk our lives for!" he exclaimed half hysterically. "We left twenty of them here, when Anna and I started for Zizscky yesterday,—twenty armed men. And yet at the first rumor of danger they sneak away to the woods, and leave their charge, that they had sworn to defend, so that we trusted them. And it is these swine, and others like them,—dastards all!—who clamor for what they call freedom, and think if they get their vote and their Duma, all will go well. Why should we throw our lives away for such as these? We are all fools together, you and I and Anna. And you," he turned towards me, "you are the biggest fool of us all, for you have not even the excuse that is ours! You have no stake in this accursed country and its people. *Nom du diable*, why do you act as if you had? You are—"

"Calm yourself, Stepán," Loris interposed. "Go and sleep; we all need that. And as for your cowardly servants, forget all about them. They are worth no more. Go, as I bid you!"

His level voice, his authoritative manner, had their affect, and Vassilitzi lurched away. He wasn't really drunk; but when a man is famished and dead-tired, two or three glasses of wine will have an immense effect on him; though one glass will serve to pull him together, as it did me, to a certain extent anyhow. I was able to ask Loris about that horrible apparition I had seen.

"Yes, she is the Countess Anna Pendennis, or all that remains of her," he

answered sternly and sadly. “You have only seen her at a distance, but that was sufficient to show you what Siberia may mean to a delicately nurtured woman. If she had only died—as was given out! But she did not die. She worked as a slave,—in the prison in winter, in the fields in summer. She had frost-bite; it destroyed her sight, her face; it made her a horror to look upon. Yet still she did not die, perhaps because her mind was gone, and strength lingers in mad creatures!

“Yossof told all this. He was her fellow prisoner, and he made his escape two—no, three years or more, since. He made his way here, and Anna was good to him; as she is good to every creature in adversity. Until then she had always believed that her mother died at her birth; but when she learned the truth, she would have moved Heaven and earth to deliver her. It was accomplished at last; the Tzar was induced to sign an order for the release of this mad and maimed woman. Just when all hope seemed lost the deliverance came; and the wreck that remains of the Countess Anna Pendennis was brought here,—less than three months ago; and—”

He broke off as the woman servant Yossof had spoken of as Natalya hurried into the room and unceremoniously beckoned him out. He rose at once and followed her, but turned at the door.

“Get some sleep while you can,” he said, nodding towards a great couch covered with a bear-skin rug. “None will disturb you here for a few hours; and we shall have either to fight or to travel again ere long.”

I sat for a minute or two, trying to think over the long tragedy that he had summed up in so few words, and wondering where Anthony Pendennis was. Surely he should have been here with his wife and daughter; and yet no one had mentioned him, and I had had no opportunity of asking about him,—had, in fact, forgotten his very existence till these last few minutes.

But consecutive thought was impossible, and I gave up the attempt, as I stumbled to the couch and fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER XLIV

AT VASSILITZI'S

Into my dreams came voices that I knew, speaking in French, in low tones which yet reached my ears distinctly.

"I think we should tell him; it is not right, or just, to keep him in ignorance."

"No,—no,—we must not tell him; we must not!" Anne said softly, but vehemently. "We shall need him so sorely,—there are so very few whom we can really trust. Besides, why should we tell him? It would break his heart! For remember, we do not know."

They were not dream voices, but real ones, and as I found that out, I felt I'd better let the speakers,—Anne and Loris,—know I was awake; for I'd no wish to overhear what they were saying, especially as I had a queer intuition that they were talking of me. So I sat up under the fur rug some one had thrown over me, and began to stammer out an apology in English.

The room was almost dark, and through the window, with its heavy stone frame, I saw the last glow of a stormy sunset. Anne and Loris stood there, looking out, and as I moved and spoke she broke off her sentence and came towards me.

"You have slept long, Maurice; that is well," she said, also in English, with the pretty, deliberate accent I had always thought so charming. "There is no need for apologies; we should have roused you if necessary, but all is quiet so far. Will you come to my boudoir presently? I will give you tea there. We have scarcely had one word together as yet,—and there is so much to say! I will send lights now; some of the servants have returned and will get you all you need."

Loris opened the door for her, and crossed back to his former post by the window, while I scrambled up, as a scared-looking, shamefaced man servant entered with a lamp, and slunk out again.

"Those wretches! They deserve the knout!" Loris said grimly, when we were alone. "They were all well armed, and yet, at the first hint of danger, they took themselves into hiding, leaving those two women defenceless here. Well, they

will have to take care of themselves in future, the curs! The countess is dead," he added abruptly.

"Dead!" I exclaimed.

"Yes. Always, even in her madness, she remembered all she had suffered, and her terror of being arrested again killed her. It is God's mercy for her that she is at peace,—and for us, too, for we could not have taken her with us, nor have left her in charge of Natalya and these hounds, as we had intended. We shall bury her out in the courtyard yonder. It is the only way, and later, if nothing prevents, we start for the railroad."

"Where is Pendennis?" I asked. "Is he not here?"

"No; he may join us later; I cannot say," he answered, staring out of the window. I felt that he was embarrassed in some way; that there was something he wished to say, but hesitated at saying it. That wasn't a bit like him, for he had always been the personification of frankness.

"I wonder if there's a bath to be had in the house," I said inanely, looking at my grimy hands.

"Yes, in Vassilitzi's dressing-room; the servant will take you up," he answered abstractedly, and as I moved towards the wide old-fashioned bell-pull by the stove, he turned and strode after me.

"Wait one moment!" he said hurriedly. "Are you still determined to go through with us? There is still time to turn back, or rather to go back to England. It would not be easy perhaps, but it would be quite possible for you to get through, via Warsaw and Alexandrovo, if you go at once."

"Why do you ask me that?" I demanded, looking at him very straight. His blue eyes were more troubled than I had ever seen them. "Do you doubt me?"

"No, before God I trust you as I trust none other in the world but Mishka and his father! But you are a stranger, a foreigner; why should you throw your life away for us?"

"I have told you why, before. Because I only value my life so far as it may be of service to—her. If I left her and you, now, as you suggest, smuggled myself back into safety,—man, it's not to be thought of!"

“Well, I will urge you no more,” he said sadly. “But you are sacrificing yourself for a chivalrous delusion, my friend.”

“Where’s the delusion? I know she does not love me; and I am quite content.”

Long after, I knew what he had wished to tell me then, and I can’t even now decide what I’d have done if he had spoken, whether I would have gone or stayed; but I think I’d have stayed!

When I had bathed and dressed in Vassilitzi’s dressing-room,—he was still in bed and asleep in the adjoining one,—a servant took me to Anne’s boudoir, a small bare room that yet had a cosey homelike look about it.

She was alone, sitting in a low chair, her hands lying listlessly on the lap of her black gown. Her face was even whiter and more weary than it had looked in the morning, and she had been weeping, I saw, for her long lashes were still wet; but she summoned up a smile for me,—that brave smile, that was, in a way, sadder and more moving than tears.

“You have heard that my mother is dead?” she asked, in a low voice. “She died in my arms half an hour after we got in; and I am so glad,—so glad. I have been thanking God in my heart ever since. She never knew me; she knew none of us, but Yossof; and that only because he had been near her in that dreadful place. You saw her—just for a moment; you saw something of what those long years had made of her,—and we—my God, we had thought her dead all that time!”

She shuddered, and sat staring with stern, sombre eyes at the fire, her slender fingers convulsively interlaced.

She was silent for a space, and so was I, for I could find never a word to say.

Suddenly she looked straight at me.

“Maurice Wynn, if ever the time comes when you might blame me, condemn me,—justifiably enough,—think of my mother’s history. Remember that I was brought up with one fixed purpose in life,—to avenge her, even when I only thought her dead. How much more should that vengeance be, now that I know all that she had to suffer! And she is only one among thousands who have suffered,—who are suffering as much,—yes, and more! There is but one way,—to crush, to destroy, the power that has done,—that is doing these deeds. It will not be done in our time, but we are at least preparing the way; within a few days we shall have gone some distance along it—with a rush—towards our goal. I tell

you that to further this work I would—I will—do anything; sacrifice even those who are dearer to me than my own soul! Therefore, as I said, remember that, when you would condemn me for aught I have done, or shall do!”

“I can never condemn you, Anne; you know that well! The queen can do no wrong!”

The fire that had flashed into her eyes faded, dimmed, I thought, by a mist of tears.

“You are indeed a true knight, Maurice Wynn,” she said wistfully. “I do not deserve such devotion; no, don’t interrupt me, I know well what I am saying, and perhaps you also will know some day. I have deceived you in many ways; you know that well enough—”

“As I now know your purpose,” I answered. “But why didn’t you trust me at first, Anne? When we were in London? Don’t think I’m blaming you, I’m not, really; but surely you must have known, even then, that you might have trusted me,—yes, and Mary, too.”

She was not looking at me now, but at the fire, and she paused before she answered slowly.

“It was not because I did not trust you, and her; but I did not wish to involve either of you in my fortunes. You have involved yourself in them,—my poor, foolish friend! But she, have you told her anything?”

“No. She does not even know that I am back in Russia; and before I returned I told her nothing.”

“She thinks me dead?”

“She did not know what to think; and she fretted terribly at your silence.”

“Poor Mary!” she said, with a queer little pathetic smile. “Well, perhaps her mind is at rest by this time.”

“You have written to her?”

“No,—but she has news by this time.”

“And your father?” I asked.

She shook her head.

“You must ask me nothing of him; perhaps you will learn all there is to know one day. How strangely your fate has been linked with mine! Think of Yossof meeting *you* that night. He had heard of my danger from the League. Ah, that traitor, Selinski! How much his miserable soul had to answer for! And he did not know whom to trust, so he set out himself, though he speaks no word of any language but his own, and bribed and begged his way to London. He found out some of the League there, at a place in Soho, learned there where Selinski lived, stole the key to his rooms, and—met you. He is a marvel, the poor good Yossof!”

“Did you know it was he, when I described him that night?” I asked impulsively.

She looked up quickly.

“I have told you, I did not wish to entangle you in my affairs, and—”

The door opened and her cousin entered.

“Ah, you are engaged,” he exclaimed, glancing from one to the other of us.

“No, we have finished our chat,” said Anne. “Come and sit down, Stepán—for a few minutes only. We have much to do,—and far to go, to-night.”

How weary and wistful her face looked as she spoke!

CHAPTER XLV

THE CAMPAIGN AT WARSAW

A few hours later we were on the road once more,—Anne and Natalya in a travelling carriage, the rest of us mounted. The old servant was sobbing hysterically as she followed her mistress down the steps, but Anne's white face was tearless, though she turned it for a moment with a yearning farewell glance towards the fresh-made mound in the courtyard, the grave where we had laid the corpse of her mother, in the coffin which Mishka and some of the men had made during the day.

That hurried funeral was as impressive as any I've ever been at, though there was no service, for it would have been impossible to summon a priest in time. Besides, I doubt if they'd have got an orthodox Russian priest to come, for the Vassilitzis were Roman Catholics, as so many of the old Polish nobility are.

In dead silence the four of us, Loris and Stepán, Mishka and I, carried the coffin down, wrapped in an old curtain of rich brocade, and stood by with bowed heads, while, still in silence, it was lowered down, pall and all.

As we turned away, I saw a face at one of the windows and knew Anne had watched us at our task. Her self-control, her powers of endurance, were marvellous. I do not believe she had slept all that day, and yet when the carriage was ready she came out with a steady step; and I heard her speak soothingly to the weeping Natalya.

That was the last I saw or heard of her for several days, for it had been arranged that she should drive to Pruschan, escorted only by Loris and her cousin and a couple of our men, and travel thence by train to Warsaw, while Mishka and I with the others would ride the whole way. It meant a couple of days' delay in reaching Warsaw, but it seemed the safest plan; and it worked without a hitch. By twos and threes we rode into Warsaw in the early morning of the day that saw the beginning of the great strike,—and of the revolution which will end only when the Russian Empire becomes a Free Republic; and God only knows when that will come to pass!

I have been through three regular campaigns in different parts of the world

during the last ten years, and had a good many thrilling experiences, one way and another; but the weeks I spent in Warsaw in the late fall of the year 1905 were the strangest and most eventful I've ever gone through.

As I look back now, the whole thing seems like a long and vivid nightmare, of which some few incidents stand out with dreadful distinctness, and the rest is a mere blur, a confusion of shifting figures and scenes; of noise and dust and bloodshed. Strenuous days of street rioting and fighting, in which one and all of us did our share; and when the row was over for the time being, turned our hands to ambulance work. Nights that were even more strenuous than the days, for in the night the next day's plan had to be decided on, funds and food given out, the circulars (reporting progress and urging the people to stand fast) to be drawn up, printed, and issued. Such publications were prohibited, of course; but Warsaw, like most of the other cities, was strewn with them. People read them, flaunting them openly before the eyes of the authorities; and though the police and the soldiers tried the plan of bayoneting or shooting at sight every one whom they saw with a revolutionary print, they soon had to reserve it for any defenceless woman or even child whom they might encounter. For the great majority of the strikers were armed, and they showed themselves even quicker with their revolvers and "killers" than the soldiers were with their rifles; while every soldier killed represented one more rifle seized.

We reported ourselves on arrival, as arranged, at a spacious old house in a narrow street near the University, which thenceforth became our headquarters; and, within a few hours, a kind of hospital, also, for there were soon many wounded to be cared for.

Anne organized a band of women as amateur nurses, with Natalya at the head of them, in our house, while others were on duty elsewhere. This quarter, as I found, was a stronghold of the League; and many houses were, like ours, turned into temporary hospitals. But I gathered that comparatively few of Anne's most influential colleagues were in sympathy with her efforts to mitigate the horrors that surrounded us. In that way, we, her own chosen band, worked almost alone. Most of the revolutionists were as callous, as brutal, as the Cossacks themselves, —women as well as men. They would march in procession, waving banners and singing patriotic songs, and, when the inevitable collision with the soldiers came, they would fight like furies, and die with a laugh of defiance on their lips. But those who came through, unscathed, had neither care nor sympathy to bestow on the fallen.

“I join your band of nurses?” a handsome vivacious little woman—evidently one of her own rank—said to Anne one day, with a scornful laugh. “I am no good at such work. Give me real work to do, a bomb to throw, a revolver to fire; I have that at least”—she touched her fur blouse significantly. “I want to fight—to kill—and if I am killed instead, well, it is but the fortune of war! But nursing—bah—I have not the patience! You are far too tender-hearted, Anna Petrovna; you ought to have been a nun; but what would our handsome Loris have done then? Oh, it is all right, *ma chère*; I am quite discreet. But do you suppose I have not recognized him?”

Anne looked troubled.

“And others,—do they recognize him?” she asked quietly.

“Who knows? We are too busy these days to think or care who any one is or is not. Besides, he is supposed to be dead; it was cleverly planned, that bomb affair! Was it your doing, Anna? He is too stupidly honest to have thought of it himself. There! Do not look so vexed, and have no fear that I shall denounce him. He is far too good-looking! You have a *penchant* for good-looking men,” she added, with an audacious glance in my direction.

It happened for once that Anne and I were alone together, until Madame Levinska turned up, in the room that was used as an office, and where betweenwhiles I did a good bit of secretarial work. That small untidy room represented the bureau from which the whole of this section of the League was controlled, practically by that slender, pale-faced girl in the black gown, who sat gravely regarding her frivolous acquaintance.

Her grasp of affairs was as marvellous as her personal courage in time of need; she was at once the head and the heart of the whole organization.

I felt angry with the Levinska woman for her taunt. She, and such as she, who were like so many undisciplined children, and whose ideas of revolution were practically limited to acts of violence committed in defiance or reprisal, could not even begin to understand the ideals not merely held, but maintained, by Anne and Loris, and the few others who, with them, knew that permanent good could never be accomplished by evil means. Those two were dreamers, dreaming greatly; theirs was the vision splendid, though they saw it only from far off, and strove courageously but unavailingly to draw near to it. That vision will some day become a reality; and then,—I wonder if any remembrance of those who saw it first and paved the way to its realization, will linger, save in the

minds of the few who knew, and loved, and worked beside them, but who were not permitted to share their fate? I doubt it, for the world at large has a short memory!

Anne made no comment on Madame Levinska's last remark, while I kept on with my work. I wished the woman would go, for we had much to get through this afternoon, and at any moment some serious interruption might occur; or the news we were awaiting might come.

The streets were unusually quiet to-day, hereabouts at any rate, and a few timid folk who had kept within doors of late had again ventured out. On the previous day several big meetings had been held, almost without opposition, for, although martial law was proclaimed, and thousands of soldiers had entered the city, "to repress disturbances" many of the troops, including a whole regiment of hussars from Grodno, had refused to fire on the people. Since then there was a decided abatement of hostilities; though one dared not hope that it meant more than a mere lull in the storm.

The railway and telegraph strikes were maintained, but plenty of news got through,—news that the revolution was general; that Kronstadt and Riga were in flames; Petersburg and Moscow in a state of anarchy; that many of the troops had mutinied and were fighting on the side of the revolutionists, while the rest were disheartened and tired out. During the last few hours persistent rumors had reached us that the Tzar was on the point of issuing a manifesto granting civil and political liberty to the people; a capitulation on all important points in fact. If the news were true it was magnificent. Such of us as were optimists believed it would be the beginning of a new and glorious era. Already we had disseminated such information as had reached us, by issuing broadcast small news-sheets damp from the secret printing-press in the cellar of the old house. A week or two ago that press would have had to be shifted to a fresh hiding-place every night; but in these days the police had no time for making systematic inquisitions; it was all they could do to hold their own openly against the mob.

And now we were waiting for fresh and more definite tidings, and I know Anne's heart beat high with hope, though we had not exchanged a dozen words before Madame Levinska made her unwelcome appearance; and Anne, who had but just returned to the room after going the round of our amateur hospital, tackled her about the nursing.

She stayed for a few minutes longer, continuing her irresponsible chatter and

then, to my relief, anyhow, took herself off, announcing airily that she was going to see if there was any fun stirring.

“Do not be reckless, Marie,” Anne called after her. “You do no good by that, and may do much harm.”

“Have no fear for me, little nun,” she retorted gaily, over her shoulder. “I can take care of myself.”

“She sees only,—cares only for the excitement, the poor Marie!” I heard Anne murmur with a sigh, as she crossed to the window and watched her friend’s retreating figure; a jaunty audacious little figure it was!

There was a clatter and jingle below, and three or four Cossacks cantered along. One of them called out something to Madame Levinska, and she turned and shrilled back an answer, her black eyes flashing.

He reined up and slashed at her with his *nagaika*.

Even before the jagged lead caught her face, ripping it from brow to chin, she drew her revolver and fired pointblank at him, missed him, and fell, as he spurred his horse on to her and struck again and again with his terrible whip.

In an instant the street was in an uproar.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

The whole thing happened far more quickly than it can be told. I dragged Anne back from the window, slammed the shutters to,—for one of the Cossacks' favorite tricks was to fire at any one seen at a window in the course of a street row,—and, curtly bidding Anne stay where she was for the moment, rushed downstairs and out into the street, revolver in hand.

Mishka and half a dozen of our men were before me; there were very few of us in the house just now; most of the others were with Loris and Vassilitzi, attending a big procession and meeting in Marchalkowskaia, with their usual object,—to maintain order as far as possible, and endeavor to prevent conflicts between the troops and the people. It was astonishing how much Loris had achieved in this way, even during these last terrible days of riot and bloodshed. He was ever on the alert; he seemed to know by instinct how to seize the right moment to turn the temper of the crowd or the soldiers, and avert disaster; and his splendid personality never failed in its almost magnetic effect on every one who came in contact with it. He was a born leader of men!

And, although he was always to the fore in every affair, as utterly reckless of his own safety as he was anxious to secure the safety of others, he had hitherto come unscathed through everything, though a couple of our men had been killed outright, several others badly wounded, and the rest of us had got a few hard knocks one way or other. I'd had a bullet through my left arm, the arm that was broken in the scrimmage outside Petersburg in June, a flesh wound only, luckily, though it hurt a bit when I had time to think of it,—which wasn't often.

By the time we got into the street, the affair was over. The Cossacks, urging their ponies at the usual wild gallop, and firing wantonly up at the houses, since the people who had been in the street had rushed for cover, were almost out of sight; and on the road and sidewalk near at hand were several killed and wounded,—mostly women,—besides Madame Levinska, who had been the cause of it all, and had paid with her life.

She was a hideous sight, she who five minutes before had been so gay, so

audacious, so full of vivacity. The brutes had riddled her prostrate body with bullets, slashed at it with their whips, trampled it under their horses' hoofs; and it lay huddled, shapeless, with scarce a semblance to humanity left in it.

I head a low, heartfelt cry, and saw Anne beside me, her fair face ashen white, her eyes dilated with horror and compassion, as she stared at her friend's corpse.

"Go back!" I said roughly. "You can do nothing for her. And we will see to the rest; go back, I say. There may be more trouble."

"My duty is here," she said quietly, and passed on to bend over a woman who was kneeling and screaming beside a small body,—that of a lad about eight or nine years old,—which lay very still.

It was, as I well knew, useless to argue with Anne; so I went on with my ambulance work in grim silence, keeping near her, and letting the others go to and fro, helping the wounded into shelter and carrying away the dead. Natalya had run out also and joined her mistress. Yossof was not at hand; it was he whom we expected to bring the news we were awaiting so eagerly. He had come with us to Warsaw, and though he lived in the Ghetto among his Jewish kindred, was constantly back and forth. He was invaluable as a messenger,—a spy some might call him,—although he knew no language but Yiddish and Polack, and the queer Russian lingo that was a mingling of all three. But of course he learned a great deal from his fellow Jews. Hunted, persecuted, wretched as they are, the Polish and Russian Jews always have, or can command, money, and the way they get hold of news is nothing short of marvellous,—in the Warsaw Ghetto, anyhow!

There was quite a crowd around us soon, as the people who had fled before the Cossacks came back again,—weeping, gesticulating, shouting imprecations on the Tzar, the Government, the soldiers,—as they always did when they were excited; but, as usual, doing very little to help.

All at once there was a bigger tumult near at hand, and a mob came pouring along the street, a disorderly procession of men and women and little children, flaunting banners, waving red handkerchiefs, laughing, crying, shouting, and singing, as if they were more than half delirious with joy and excitement. And what was more remarkable, there were neither police nor soldiers in sight, nor any sign of Loris or his men. Many such processions occurred in Warsaw that day, when the great news came,—news that was soon to be so horribly discounted and annulled; and that, for me, was rendered insignificant, even in that first hour, by the great tragedy that followed hard upon its coming,—the

tragedy that will overshadow all my life. Even after the lapse of years I can scarcely bring myself to write of it, though every incident is stamped indelibly on my brain. Clear before my eyes now rises Anne's face, as, with her arm about the poor mother—who was half fainting—she turned and looked at the joyous rabble.

"What is it?" she cried, and at the same instant Yossof hurried up, and spoke breathlessly to her.

She listened to his message with parted lips, her eyes starry with the light of ecstatic joy.

"What is it?" I asked in my turn, for I couldn't catch what Yossof said.

"It's true,—it's true; oh, thank God for all His mercies! The end is in sight, Maurice; the new era is beginning—has begun. The Tzar has yielded; he has issued the manifesto, granting all demands—"

I stood staring at her, stricken dumb, not by the news she told, but by her unearthly beauty. The face that was so worn with all the toil and conflict and anxiety of these strenuous days and weeks was transfigured; and above it her red-gold hair shone like a crown of glory.

I know what was in her mind at that moment,—the thought that all had not been in vain, that the long struggle was almost ended, victory in sight; with freedom for the oppressed, cessation of bloodshed, a gradual return to law and order, the patient building up of a new civilization. Had I not heard her and Loris speak in that strain many times, the last only a few hours back, when the reassuring rumors began to strengthen?

"They were dreamers, dreaming greatly!"

For a few seconds only did I stand gazing at her, for the mob was upon us. It jostled us apart, swept us along with it, and, as I fought my way to rejoin her—she and Natalya still supported the woman whose little son had just been killed—a quick revulsion of feeling came over me, and with it a queer premonition of imminent evil.

The mob was so horrible; made up for the most part of the scum of Warsaw, reeking with vodka, drunk with liquor and excitement.

Pah! They were not fit for the freedom they clamored for, and yet it was for them

and for others like them, that she toiled and plotted in peril of her life!

Before I could win to her side, a warning cry arose ahead, followed instantly by the crackle of rifle fire, the *phut* of revolver shots, yells, shrieks, an infernal din. A squadron of Cossacks was charging the crowd from the front, and as it surged back, the same hellish sounds broke from the rear. More soldiers were following, the mob was between two fires,—trapped.

Gasping, bleeding, I struggled against the rush, striving to make my way back to where I could see the gleam of Anne's golden hair, close against the wall. I guessed that, with her usual resource, she had drawn her companions aside when the turmoil began, and they had their backs to the wall of one of the houses.

The soldiers were right among the mob now, and it was breaking into groups, each eddying round one or more of the horsemen, who had as much as they could do to hold their own with whip and sabre. It was impossible to reload the rifles, and anyhow they would not have been much use at these close quarters. I saw more than one horse overborne, his rider dragged from the saddle and hideously done to death. The rabble were like mad wolves rather than human beings.

A fresh volley from the front,—more troops were coming up there,—yells of triumph from the rear, where the soldiers had been beaten back and a way of retreat opened up. The furious eddies merged into a solid mass once more, a terror stricken *sauve qui peut* before the reinforcements.

Impossible to make headway against this; and yet every instant I was being swept along, further from Anne. All I could do was to set my teeth and edge towards the sidewalk. I got to the wall at last, set my back to it, and let the rout pour by, the Cossacks in full chase now, felling every straggler they overtook, even slashing at the dead and wounded as they rode over them.

I started to run back, and the wild horsemen did not molest me. I still wore the uniform in which I had left Zostrov; it was in tatters after this frenzied half-hour, but it stood me in good stead once again, and prevented my being shot down.

There was Anne, still alive, thank God; she was kneeling beside the woman; and Natalya, also unhurt, stood by her, trying to raise her, and seemingly urging her to seek shelter.

I tried to shout, but my mouth was too dry, so I ran on, stumbling over the bodies

that strewed the ground.

Some of the Cossacks had turned and were riding back; a group passed me as I neared Anne, and one of them swung his rifle up and fired. Natalya fell with a scream, and Anne sprang up.

“Shame, shame, you cowards, to shoot defenceless women!” she cried indignantly.

He spurred towards her, but I was first. I flung myself before her and fired at him. He reeled, swerved, and galloped on, but his companions were round us. I fired again, and yet again; something flashed above me; I felt a stunning blow on my forehead, staggered back, and fell.

The last thing I heard was a woman’s shriek.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE TRAGEDY IN THE SQUARE

It was the flat of the sabre that had got me on the forehead, otherwise there'd have been an end of me at once. I was not unconscious for very long, for when I sat up, wiped the blood out of my eyes, and stared about me, sick and dazed, unable for the moment to recollect what had happened, I could still hear a tumult raging in the distance.

The street itself was quiet; the soldiers, the mob were gone; all the houses were shut and silent, though scared faces were peeping from some of the upper windows. Here and there a wounded man or woman was staggering or crawling away; and close beside me a woman was sitting, like a statue of despair, with her back against the wall, and something lying prone across her knees—the little mangled body of the boy who had been killed in the first scuffle, that Marie Levinska had provoked.

I remembered all then, and looked round wildly for Anne. There was no sign either of her or of Natalya.

I scrambled up, impatiently binding my handkerchief tight round my wounded head, which was bleeding profusely now, and stood over the silent woman.

"Where are they? Where is the lady who was with you?" I demanded hoarsely. "Answer me, for God's sake!"

"They took her away—those devils incarnate—and the other woman got up and ran after," she answered dully. "There was an officer with them; he cried out that they would teach her not to insult the army."

I felt my blood run cold. Since I returned to this accursed country I had seen many—and heard of more—deeds of such fiendish cruelty perpetrated on weak women, on innocent little children, that I knew what the Cossacks were capable of when their blood was up. They were, as the women said, devils incarnate at such times.

My strength came back to me, the strength of madness, and I rushed away, down

that stricken street, with but one clear idea in my mind,—to die avenging Anne, for I knew no power on earth could save her.

As I ran the tumult waxed louder, coming, as I guessed, from the great square to which the street led at this end.

Half-way along, a woman, huddled in the roadway, clutched at me, with a moaning cry. I shook off her grasp, glanced at her, and saw she was Natalya. The faithful soul had not been able to follow her mistress far.

“Where have they taken her?” I cried.

She could not speak, but she glared at me, a world of anguish and horror in her dark eyes, and pointed in the direction I was going, and I hurried on. I had a “killer” in my hand, the deadly little bludgeon of lead, set on a spiral copper spring, that was the favorite weapon of the mob, though I haven’t the least notion as to when I picked it up.

Now I was on the fringe of the crowd that overflowed from the square, and was pushing my way forward towards the centre, a furious vortex of noise and confusion. A desperate fight was in progress, surging round something, some one.

“It is Anna Petrovna!” a woman screamed above the din. “They tore her clothes from her; they are beating her to death with their *nagaikas*! Mother of Mercy! That such things should be!”

“‘*À la vie et à la mort.*’ Save her; avenge her,” some one shouted, I myself I think, and the cry was taken up and echoed hoarsely on all sides. So, there must be many of the League in the turmoil.

Now I was in the thick of it, a swaying, struggling mass of men and horses; many of the horses plunging riderless as the wild horsemen were dragged from their saddles, and disappeared in that stormy sea of outraged humanity. The Cossacks were getting the worst of it, for once, not a doubt of that.

“Back,” roared a mighty voice. “We have her; back I say; make way there,—let us pass!”

Mishka’s voice, and Mishka’s burly figure, mounted on a horse, pressed forward slowly, forcing a way through for another horseman who followed close in his wake.

“Make way, comrades,” shouted Mishka again, and at the cry, at the sight of the grim silent horseman in the rear, a curious lull fell on all within sight and hearing; though elsewhere the strife raged furiously as ever.

Loris sat erect in his saddle, as if on parade; bareheaded, his face set like a white mask, his brilliant blue eyes fixed, expressionless, no, that’s not the right word, but I can’t say what the expression was; neither horror nor anguish, nor despair, just a quiet steady gaze, without a trace of human emotion in it. Save that he was breathing heavily and slowly, he might have been a statue,—or a corpse. I am sure he was quite unconscious of his surroundings. The reins lay loose on his horse’s neck, and, though its sides heaved, and its coat was a plaster of sweat and foam and blood, the good beast took its own way quietly through that densely packed, suddenly silent mob, as if it, like its master, was oblivious of the mad world around them.

But it was on the burden borne by the silent horseman that every eye was fixed; a burden partly hidden by a soldier’s great coat. I knew she was dead,—we all knew it,—though the head with its bright dishevelled hair, as it lay heavily on her lover’s shoulder, seemed to have a semblance of life, as it moved slightly with the rise and fall of his breast. Her face was hidden, but from under the coat one long arm swayed limp, its whiteness hideously marred with jagged purple weals, from which the blood still oozed, trickling down and dripping from the tips of the fingers,—those beautiful ringless fingers that I knew and loved so well.

I had no further thought of fighting now; my brain and heart were numb, so I just dropped my weapon and fell in behind the horse, following close on its heels. Others did the same, the whole section of the crowd on this side the square moving after us, in what, compared with the chaos of a few minutes back, was an orderly retreat.

Well it was for some of them that they did so, for we had scarcely gained the street when the rattling boom of artillery sounded in the rear; followed by a renewed babel of shrieks and yells. The guns had been brought up and the work of summarily clearing the square had begun. But before the panic-stricken mob overtook us, flying helter-skelter before the new terror, Loris had urged his horse forward, or it quickened its pace of its own accord as the throng in front thinned and gave way more easily. I think I tried instinctively to keep up with it, but the crowd closed round me, the rush of fugitives from the rear overtook, overwhelmed us, and I was carried along with it.

I suppose I must have kept my footing, otherwise I should have been trampled down, as were so many others on that awful day. But where I went and what I did during the hours that followed I don't know, and I never shall. I lost all sense of time and place; though I've a hazy recollection of stumbling on alone, through dark streets, sodden with the rain that was now falling in a persistent, icy drizzle. Some of the streets were silent and deserted; in others I paused idly to watch parties of sullen soldiers and police, grumbling and swearing over their gruesome task of collecting the dead bodies, and tossing them into carts; and again I stared into brilliantly lighted cafés and listened to the boisterous merriment of those within. Were they celebrating an imaginary victory, or acting on the principle, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow—perchance to-night—we die?"

Death brooded over the city that night; I felt His presence everywhere,—in the streets that were silent as the grave itself; in those whence the dead were being removed; most of all where men and women laughed and sang and defied Him! But I felt the dread Presence in a curious detached fashion. Death was my enemy indeed, an enemy who would not strike, who passed me by as one beneath contempt! And always, clear before my eyes, in my ears, above all other sights and sounds, I saw Anne's face, heard her voice. Now she stood before me as I had first known her,—a radiant, queenly vision; a girl whose laughing eyes showed never a care in the world, or a thought beyond the passing moment. Her hands were full of flowers, red flowers, red as blood. Why, it was blood; it was staining her fingers, dripping from them! Yet the man didn't see it; that man with the dark eager face, who was standing beside her, who took a spray of the flowers from her hand. What a fool this Cassavetti is not to know that she is "*La Mort!*"

Now she is changed; she wears a black gown, and the red flowers have vanished; but she is lovelier, more queenly than ever, as she looks at me with wide, pathetic eyes, and says, "I have deceived you!"

Again she stands, with hands outstretched, and cries, "The end is in sight; thank God for all His mercies;" and her face is as that of an angel in Heaven.

But always there is a barrier between her and me; a barrier impalpable yet unpassable. I try to surmount it, but I am beaten back every time. Now it is Cassavetti who confronts me; again, and yet again, it is Loris, with his stern white face, his inscrutable blue eyes. He is on horseback; he rides straight at me, and he bears something in his arms.

I struggled up and looked around me. I knew the place well enough, the long narrow room that had once been the *salle à manger* in the Vassilitzi's Warsaw house, but that, ever since I had known it, had been the principal ward in the amateur hospital instituted by Anne. A squalid ward enough, for the beds were made up on the floor, anyhow, and every bit of space was filled, leaving just a narrow track for the attendants to pass up and down.

Along that track came a big figure that I recognized at once as Mishka, walking with clumsy caution.

"You are better? That is well," he said in a gruff undertone.

"How did I get here?" I demanded.

"Yossof brought you; he found you walking about the streets, raving mad. It is a marvel that you were not shot down."

Then I remembered something at least of what had passed.

"How long since?" I stammered, putting my hand up to my bandaged head.

"Two days."

"And—?"

"I will answer no questions," he growled in his surliest fashion. "I will send you food and you are to sleep again. He will see you later."

"He—Loris; he is safe, then?"

He nodded, but would say no more, and presently I drifted back into sleep or unconsciousness.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE GRAND DUCHESS PASSES

I've heard it said that sick or wounded people always die if they have no wish to live, but that's not true. I wanted to die as badly as any one ever did, but yet I lived. I suppose I must have a lot of recuperative energy; anyhow, next time I woke up I felt pretty much as usual, except for the dull throb of the wound across my forehead, which some one had scientifically strapped up. My physical pain counted as nothing compared with the agony of shame and grief I suffered in my soul, as, bit by bit, I recollected all that had happened. I had failed in my trust, failed utterly. I was left to guard her; I ought to have forbidden—prevented—her going out into the street at all; and, when the worst came, I ought to have died with her.

I tried to say something of this to Loris when I was face to face with him once more, in the room where Anne and I had been working when that ill-omened woman, Marie Levinska, interrupted us; but he stopped me with an imperative gesture.

"Do not reproach yourself, my friend. All that one man could do, you did. I know that well, and I thank you. One last service you shall do, if you are fit for it. You shall ride with us to-night when we take her away. Mishka has told you of the arrangements? That is well. If we get through, you will not return here; that is why I have sent for you now."

"Not return?" I repeated.

"No," he answered quietly but decisively. "Once before I begged you to leave us, now I command you to do so; not because I do not value you, but because—she—would have wished it. Wait, hear me out! You have done noble service in a cause that can mean nothing to you, except—"

"Except that it is a cause that the lady I served lived,—and died—for, sir," I interrupted.

More than once before I had spoken of her to him as the woman we both loved; but now the other words seemed fittest; for not half an hour back I had learned

the truth, that, I think, I had known all along,—that she who lay in her coffin in the great drawing-room yonder was, if her rights had been acknowledged, the Grand Duchess Loris of Russia. It was Vassilitzi who told me.

“They were married months ago, in Paris,—before she went to England,” he had said, and for a moment a bitter wave of memory swept over me, though I fought against it. Hadn’t I decided long since that the queen could do no wrong, and therefore the deception she had practised counted for nothing? All that really mattered was that I loved her in spite of all; asked nothing more than to be allowed to serve her.

“You served her under a delusion,” he rejoined with stern sadness. “And now it is no longer possible for you to serve her even so. I cannot discuss the matter with you; I cannot explain it,—I would not if I could. Only this I repeat. I request—command you, to make your way out of this country as soon as possible, and rejoin your friends in England, or America,—where you will. It may mean more to you than you dare hope or imagine. You will have some difficulty probably, though some of the trains are running again now. I think your safest plan will be to ride to Kutno—or if necessary even to Alexandrovo. Here is a passport, permitting you to leave Russia; it is made out in the name you assumed when you returned as ‘William Pennington Gould,’ and is quite in order. And I must ask you, for the sake of our friendship, to accept these”—he took a roll of notes out of the drawer of the writing-table—“and, as a memento, —this. It is the only decoration I am able to confer on a most chivalrous gentleman.”

He held out a little case, open, and I took it with an unsteady hand. It contained a miniature of Anne, set in a rim of diamonds. I looked at it,—and at him,—but I could not speak; my heart was too full.

“There is no need of words, my friend; we understand each other well, you and I,” he continued, rising and placing his hands on my shoulders. “You will do as I wish,—as I entreat—insist—?”

“I would rather remain with you!” I urged. “And fight on, for the cause—”

He shook his head.

“It is a lost cause; or at least it will never be won by us. The manifesto, the charter of peace! What is it? A dead letter. Nicholas issued it indeed, but his Ministers ignore it, and therefore he is helpless, his charter futile and the reign of

terror continues,—will continue. Therefore I bid you go, and you must obey. So this is our parting, for though we shall meet, we shall be alone together no more. Therefore, God be with you, my friend!”

When next I saw him he stood with drawn sword, stern and stately, foremost among the guard of honor round the catafalque in the great drawing-room, where all that remained of the woman we both loved lay in state, ere it fared forth on its last journey.

The old house was full of subdued sounds, for as soon as darkness fell, by ones and twos, men and women were silently admitted and passed as silently up the staircase to pay their last homage to their martyr.

Nearly all of them had flowers in their hands,—red flowers,—sometimes only a single spray, but always those fatal geranium blossoms that were the symbol of the League. They laid them on the white pall, or scattered them on the folds that swept the ground, till the coffin seemed raised above a sea of blood.

Every detail of that scene is photographed on my memory. The great room, hung with black draperies and brilliantly lighted by a multitude of tall wax candles; the air heavy with incense and the musky odor of the flowers; the two priests in gorgeous vestments who knelt on either side, near the head of the coffin, softly intoning the prayers for the dead; the black-robed nuns who knelt at the foot, silent save for the click of their rosaries; and the ghostly procession of men and women, many of them wounded, all haggard and wan, that passed by, and paused to gaze on the face that lay framed, as it were, beneath a panel of glass in the coffin-lid, from which the pall was drawn back. Many of them, men as well as women, were weeping passionately; some pressed their lips to the glass; others raised their clenched hands as if to register a vow of vengeance; a few,—a very few,—knelt in prayer for a brief moment ere they passed on.

I stood at my post, as one of the guard, and watched it all in a queer, impersonal sort of way, as if my soul was somehow outside my body.

Although I stood some distance away, the quiet face under the glass seemed ever before my eyes; for I had looked on it before this solemn ceremonial began. How fair it was,—and yet how strange; though it was unmarred, unless there was a wound hidden under the strip of white ribbon bound across the forehead and almost concealed by the softly waving chestnut hair. But even the peace of death had not been able to banish the expression of anguish imprinted on the lovely features. Above the closed eyelids, with their long, dark lashes, the brows

were contracted in a frown, and the mouth was altered, the white teeth exposed, set firmly in the lower lip. Still she was beautiful, but with the beauty of a Medusa. I could not think of that face as the one I had known and loved; it filled me with pity and horror and indignation, indeed; but—it was the face of a stranger.

Why had I not been content to remember her as I had known her in life! She seemed so immeasurably removed from me now; and that not merely because I could no longer think of her as Anne Pendennis,—only as "The Grand Duchess Anna Catharine Petrovna, daughter of the Countess Anna Vassilitzi-Pendennis, and wife of Loris Nicolai Alexis, Grand Duke of Russia," as the French inscription on the coffin-plate ran,—but also because the mystery that had surrounded her in life seemed more impenetrable than ever now that she was dead.

Where was her father, to whom she had seemed so devotedly attached when I first knew her? Even supposing he was dead, why was he ignored in that inscription, save for the mere mention of his surname, the only indication of her mixed parentage. She had never spoken of him since that day at the hunting-lodge when she had said I must ask nothing concerning him. I had obeyed her in that, as in all else, and had even refrained from questioning Vassilitzi or any other who might have been able to tell me anything about Anthony Pendennis. Besides, there had been no time for queries or conjectures during all the feverish excitement of these days in Warsaw. But now, in this brief and solemn interlude, all the old problems recurred to my mind, as I stood on guard in the death-chamber; and I knew that I could never hope to solve them.

The ceremony was over at last. As in a dream I followed the others, and, at a low-spoken word of command, filed past the catafalque, with a last military salute, though I was no longer in uniform, for Mishka had brought me a suit of civilian clothes.

In the same dazed way I found myself later riding near the head of the procession that passed through the dark silent streets, and out into the open country. I didn't even feel any curiosity or astonishment that a strong escort of regular cavalry—lancers—accompanied us, or when I recognized the officer in command as young Mirakoff, whom I had last seen on the morning when I was on my way to prison in Petersburg. He didn't see me,—probably he wouldn't have known me if he had,—and to this day I don't know how he and his men came to be there, or how the whole thing was arranged. Anyhow, none molested

us; and slowly, through the sleeping city, and along the open road, the cortège passed, ghostlike, in the dead of night. The air was piercingly cold, but the sky was clear, like a canopy of velvet spangled with great stars.

Mishka rode beside me, and at last, when we seemed to have been riding for an eternity, he laid his hand on my rein, and whispered hoarsely, “Now.”

Almost without a sound we left the ranks, turned up a cross-road, and, wheeling our horses at a few paces distant, waited for the others to go by; more unreal, more dreamlike than ever. Save for the steady tramp of the horses’ feet, the subdued jingle of the harness and accoutrements, they might have been a company of phantoms. I saw the gleam of the white pall above the black bulk of the open hearse,—watched it disappear in the darkness, and knew that the Grand Duchess had passed out of my life forever.

Still I sat, bareheaded, until the last faint sounds had died away, and the silence about us was only broken by the night whisper of the bare boughs above us.

“Come; for we have yet far to go,” Mishka said aloud, and started down the cross-road at a quick trot.

CHAPTER XLIX

THE END OF AN ACT

How far we rode I can't say; but it was still dark when we halted at a small isolated farmhouse, where Mishka roused the farmer, who came out grumbling at being disturbed before daybreak. After a muttered colloquy, he led us in and called his wife to prepare tea and food for us, while he took charge of the horses.

"You must eat and sleep," Mishka announced in his gruff way. "You ought to be still in the hospital; but we are fools, in these days, every one of us! Ho—little father—shake down some hay in the barn; we will sleep there."

I must have been utterly exhausted, for I slept heavily, dreamlessly, for many hours, and only woke under Mishka's hand, as he shook me. Through the doorway of the barn, the level rays of the westering sun showed that the short November day was drawing to a close.

"You have slept long; that is well. But now we must be up and away if we are to reach Kutno to-night."

"You go with me?"

"So far, yes. If there are no trains running yet, we go on to Alexandrovo. I shall not leave you till I have set you safely on your way. Those are my orders."

"I don't know why I'm going," I muttered dejectedly, sitting up among the hay. "I would rather have stayed."

"You go because he ordered you to; and we all obey him, whether we like it or not!" he retorted. "And he was right to send you. Why should you throw your life away for nothing? Come, there is no time to waste in words. I have brought you water; wash and dress. Remember you are no longer a disreputable revolutionist, but a respectable American citizen, and we must make you look a little more like one."

There was something queer in his manner. Gruff as ever, he yet spoke to me, treated me, almost as if I were a child who had to be heartened up, as well as taken care of. But I didn't resent it. I knew it was his way of showing affection;

and it touched me keenly. We had learned to understand each other well, and no man ever had a stancher comrade than I had in Mishka Pavloff.

During that last of our many rides together he was far less taciturn then usual; I had never heard him say so much at one stretch as he did while we pressed on through the dusk.

“We have shown you something of the real Russia since you came back—how many weeks since? And now, if you get safe across the frontier, you will be wise to remain there, as any wise man—or woman either—who values life.”

“I don’t value my life,” I interrupted bitterly.

“You think you do not. That is because you are hasty and ignorant, though the ignorance is not your fault. You think your heart is broken, *hein*? Well, one of these days, not long hence, perhaps, you will think differently; and find that life is a good thing after all,—when it has not to be lived in Russia! If we ever meet again, you will know I have spoken the truth.”

I knew that before many days had passed, and wondered then how much he could have told me if he had been minded.

“If we meet again!” I echoed sadly. “Is that likely, friend Mishka?”

“God knows! Stranger things have happened. If I die with, or before my master, —well, I die. If I do not, I, too, shall make for the frontier when he no longer has need of me. Where is the good of staying? What should I do here? I would like to see peace—yes, but there will be no peace within this generation—”

“But your father?” I asked, thinking of the stanch old man, who had gone back to his duty at Zostrov.

“My father is dead.”

“Dead!” I exclaimed, startled for the moment out of the inertness that paralyzed my brain.

“He was murdered a week after he returned to Zostrov. There was trouble with the *moujiks*,—as I knew there would be. The garrison at the castle was helpless, and there was trouble there also, first about my little bomb that covered our retreat. You knew I planned that,—*hein*?”

“No, but I suspected it.”

“And you said nothing; you are discreet enough in your way. *He* never suspected,—does not even now; he thinks it was a plot hatched by his enemies—perhaps by Stravensky himself, the old fox! But we should never have got through to Warsaw, if, for a time, at least, all had not believed that he and I and you were finished off in that affair. Better for him perhaps, if it had been so!”

He fell silent, and I know he was thinking of the last tragedy, as I was. The memory of it was hard enough for me to bear; what must it not be for Loris?

“Yes, there was much trouble,” Mishka resumed. “Old Stravensky was summoned to Petersburg, and he had scarcely set out before the revolution began, and the troops were recalled. There was but a small garrison left; I doubt if they would have moved a finger in any case; and so the *moujiks* took their own way, and my father—went to his reward. He was a good man, and their best friend for many a year, but that they did not understand, since the Almighty has made them beasts without understanding!”

The darkness had fallen, but I guessed he shrugged his shoulders in the way I knew so well. A fatalist to the finger-tips was Mishka.

“The news came three days since,” he continued. “And such news will come, in time, from every country district. I tell you all you have seen and known is but the beginning, and God knows what the end will be! Therefore, as I have said, this is no country for honest peaceable folk. My mother died long since, God be thanked; and now but one tie holds me here.”

“Look, yonder are the lights of Kutno.”

The town was comparatively quiet, though it was thronged with soldiers, and there were plenty of signs that Kutno had passed through its own days of terror, and was probably in for more in the near future.

We left our horses at a *kabak* and walked through the squalid streets to the equally squalid railway depot where we parted, almost in silence.

“God be with you,” Mishka growled huskily. His face looked more grim than ever under the poor light of a street-lamp near, and he held my hands in a grip whose marks I bore for a week after.

He strode heavily away, never once looking back, and I turned into the depot, where I found the entrance, the ticket office, and the platform guarded by surly, unkempt soldiers with fixed bayonets. I lost count of the times I had to produce

my passport; and turned a deaf ear to the insults lavished upon me by most of my interlocutors. I thought I had better resume my pretended ignorance of Russian and trust to German to carry me through, as it did. I was allowed to board one of the cars at last; they were filthy, lighted only by a candle here and there, and crowded with refugees of all classes. I was lucky to get in at all, and, though all the cars were soon crammed to their utmost capacity, it was an hour or more before the train started. Then it crawled and jolted through the darkness at a pace that I reckoned would land us at Alexandrovo somewhere about noon next day,—if we ever got there at all.

But the indescribable discomforts of that long night journey at least prevented anything in the way of coherent thought. I look back on it now as a blank interval; a curtain dropped at the end of a long and lurid act in the drama of life.

At Alexandrovo more soldiers, more hustling, more interrogations; then the barrier, and beyond,—freedom!

I've a hazy notion that I arrived at a big, well-lighted station, and was taken possession of by some one who hustled me into a cab; but the next thing I remember clearly was waking and finding myself in bed,—a nice clean bed, with a huge down pillow affair on top,—in a big well-furnished room. That down affair—I couldn't remember the name of it for the moment—and the whole aspect of the room showed that I was in a German hotel; though how I got there I really couldn't remember. I rang the bell; my hand felt so heavy that I could scarcely lift it as far, and it looked curiously thin, with blue marks, like faint bruises on it, and the veins stood out.

A plump, comfortable looking woman, in a nurse's uniform, bustled in; and beamed at me quite affectionately.

"Now, this is better! Yes, I said it would be so!" she exclaimed in German. "You feel quite yourself again, but weak,—yes, that is only to be expected—"

"Will you be so good as to tell me where I am?" I asked, as politely as I knew how; staring at her, and wondering if I'd ever seen her before.

"Oh, you men! No sooner do you find your tongue and your senses than you begin to ask questions! And yet you say it is women who are the talkers!" she answered, with a kind of ponderous archness. "You are at the Hotel Reichshof to be sure; and being well taken care of. The head?" she touched my forehead with her firm, cool fingers. "It hurts no more? Ah, it has healed beautifully; I did well

to remove the strappings yesterday. There will be a scar, yes, but that cannot be helped. And now you are hungry? Ah, we will soon set that right! It is as I said, though even the doctor would not believe me. The wounds are nothing,—so to speak; the exhaustion was the mischief. You came through from Russia? What times they are having there! You were fortunate to get through at all. Yes, you are a very fortunate man, and an excellent patient; therefore you shall have some breakfast!”

She worried me, with her persistent cheerfulness, but it would have been ungracious to tell her so. She was right in one way, though. I was ravenously hungry; and when she returned, bringing a tray with delicious coffee and rolls, I started on them, and let her babble away, as she did,—nineteen to the dozen.

I gathered that nearly a week had passed since I got to Berlin. The hotel tout had captured me at the depot, and I collapsed as I got out of the cab.

“In the ordinary way, you would have been sent to a hospital, but when they saw the portrait—”

“What portrait?” I asked; but even as I spoke my memory was returning, and I knew she must mean the miniature Loris had given me.

“What portrait? Why, the Fraulein Pendennis, to be sure!”

CHAPTER L

ENGLAND ONCE MORE

I started up at that.

“Fraulein Pendennis!” I gasped. “You know her?”

“I should do so, after nursing her through such an illness,—and so short a time since!”

“But,—when did you nurse her,—where?”

“Why, here; not in this room, but in the hotel. It is three—no, nearer four months since; she also was taken ill on her way from Russia. There is a strange coincidence! But hers was a much more severe illness. We did not think she could possibly recover; and for weeks we feared for her brain. She had suffered some great shock; though the Herr, her father, would not say what it was—”

She looked at me interrogatively; but I had no mind to satisfy her curiosity, though I guessed at once what the “shock” must have been, and that Anne had broken down after the strain of that night in the forest near Petersburg and all that had gone before it. She had never referred to this illness; that was so like her. Anything that concerned herself, personally, she always regarded as insignificant, but I thought now that it had a good deal to do with her worn appearance.

“And Herr Pendennis, where is he?” I demanded next.

“I do not know; they left together, when the Fraulein was at last able to travel. Ah, but they are devoted to each other, those two! It is beautiful to see such affection in these days when young people so often seem to despise their parents.”

It was strange, very strange. The more I tried to puzzle things out, the more hopeless the tangle appeared. Why had Pendennis allowed her to return alone to Russia, especially after she had come through such a severe illness? Of course he might be attached to some other branch of the League, but it seemed unlikely that he would allow himself to be separated from her, when he must have known

that she would be surrounded by greater perils than ever. I decided that I could say nothing to this garrulous woman—kindly though she was—or to any other stranger. I dreaded the time when I would have to tell Mary something at least of the truth; though even to her I would never reveal the whole of it.

The manager came to my room presently, bringing my money and papers, and the miniature, which he had taken charge of; lucky it was for me that I had fallen into honest hands when I reached Berlin!

He addressed me as “Herr Gould” of course, and was full of curiosity to know how I got through, and if things were as bad in Warsaw as the newspapers reported. Berlin was full of Russian refugees; but he had not met one from Warsaw.

“They say the Governor will issue no passports permitting Poles to leave the city,” he said. “But you are an American, which makes all the difference.”

“I guess so,” I responded, wondering how Loris had managed to obtain that passport, and if it would have served to get me through if I had started from the city instead of making that long *détour* to Kutno.

I assured my host that the state of affairs in the city of terror I had left was indescribable, and I’d rather not discuss it. He seemed quite disappointed, and with a queer flash of memory I recalled how the little chattering woman—I forget her name—had been just as disappointed when I didn’t give details about Cassavetti’s murder on that Sunday evening in Mary’s garden. There are a lot of people in this world who have an insatiable appetite for horrors,—when they can get them at second-hand.

“They say it’s like the days of the terror in the ‘sixties’ over again,—tortures and shootings and knoutings; and that the Cossacks stripped a woman and knouted her to death one day last week; did you hear of that?”

“I tell you I don’t mean to speak of anything that I’ve seen or heard!” I said, feeling that I wanted to kick him. He apologized profusely, and then made me wince again by referring to the miniature, with more apologies for looking at it, when he thought it necessary to take possession of it.

“But we know the so-amiable Fraulein and Herr Pendennis so well; they have often stayed here,” he explained. “And it is such a marvellous likeness; painted quite recently too, since the illness from which the Fraulein has so happily

recovered!”

I muttered something vague, and managed to get rid of him on the plea that I felt too bad to talk any more, which drew fresh apologies; but when he had gone I examined the miniature more closely than I’d had an opportunity of doing since Loris gave it me.

It was not recently painted, I was quite sure of that, and yet it certainly did show her as I had known her during these last few weeks, before death printed that terrible change on her face,—and not as she was in London. But that must be my imagination; the artist had caught her expression at a moment when she was grave and sad; no, not exactly sad, for the lips and eyes were smiling,—a faint, wistful, inscrutable smile like the smile of the Sphinx, as it gazes across the desert—across the world, into space, and eternity.

As I gazed on the brave sweet face, the sordid misery that had enveloped my soul ever since that awful moment when I saw her dead body borne past, in the square, was lifted; and I knew that the last poignant agony was the end of a long path of thorns that she had trodden unflinchingly, with royal courage and endurance for weary months and years; that she was at peace, purified by her love, by her suffering, from all taint of earth.

“Dumb lies the world; the wild-yelling world with all its madness is behind thee!”

I started for England next evening, and travelled right through. I sent one wire to Jim from Berlin and another from Flushing,—where I found a reply from him waiting me. “All well, meeting you.”

That “all well” reassured me, for now that I had leisure to think, my conscience told me how badly I’d treated him and Mary. It’s true that before I started from London with Mishka I wrote saying that I was off on secret service and they must not expect to hear from me for a time, but I should be all right. That was to smooth Mary down, for I knew what she was,—dear little soul,—and I didn’t want her to be fretting about me. If she once got any notion of my real destination, she’d have fretted herself into a fever. But if she hadn’t guessed at the truth, I might be able to evade telling her anything at all; perhaps I might pitch a yarn about having been to Tibet, or Korea, for she would certainly want

to know something of the reason for my changed appearance. I scarcely recognized myself when I looked at my reflection in the bedroom mirror at Berlin. A haggard, unkempt ruffian, gray-haired, and with hollow eyes staring out of a white face, disfigured by a half-healed cut across the forehead. I certainly was a miserable looking object, even when I'd had my hair cut and my beard shaved, since I no longer needed it as a disguise. Mary had always disliked that beard, but I doubted if she'd know me, even without it.

I landed at Queensboro' on a typical English November afternoon; raw and dark, with a drizzle falling that threatened every moment to thicken into a regular fog. There were very few passengers, and I thought at first I was going to have the compartment to myself; but, at the last moment, a man got in whom I recognized at once as Lord Southbourne. I hadn't seen him on the boat; doubtless he'd secured a private stateroom. He just glanced at me casually,—I had my fur cap well pulled down,—settled himself in his corner, and started reading a London paper,—one of his own among them. He'd brought a sheaf of them in with him; though I'd contented myself with *The Courier*. It was pleasant to see the familiar rag once more. I hadn't set eyes on a copy since I left England.

I didn't speak to Southbourne, though; I don't quite know why, except that I felt like a kind of Rip van Winkle, though I'd only been away a little more than a couple of months. And somehow I dreaded that lazy but penetrating stare of his, and the questions he would certainly fire off at me. So I lay low and said nothing; keeping the paper well before my face, till we stopped at Herne Hill for tickets to be taken. As the train started again, he threw down his paper, and moved opposite me, and held out his hand.

"Hello, Wynn!" he drawled. "Is it you or your ghost? Didn't you know me? Or do you mean to cut me? Why, man alive, what's wrong?" he added, with a quick change of tone. I'd only heard him speak like that once before,—in the magistrate's room at the police court, after the murder charge was dismissed.

"Nothing; except that we've had a beastly crossing," I answered, with a poor attempt at jauntiness.

"Where have you come from,—Russia?" he demanded.

I nodded.

"H'm! So you went back, after all. I thought as much! Who's had your copy?"

“I’ve sent none; I went on private business,” I protested hotly. It angered me that he should think me capable of going back on him.

“I oughtn’t to have said that; I apologize,” he said stiffly, still staring at me intently. “But—what on earth have you been up to? More prison experiences? Well, keep your own counsel, of course. I’ve kept it for you,—as far as I knew it. Mrs. Cayley believes I’ve sent you off to the ends of the earth; and I’ve been mendaciously assuring her that you’re all right,—though Miss Pendennis has had her doubts, and nearly bowled me out, once or twice.”

“Miss—*who*?” I shouted.

“Miss Pendennis, of course. Didn’t you know she was staying with your cousin again? A queer coincidence about that portrait! Hello, here we are at Victoria. And there’s Cayley!”

CHAPTER LI

THE REAL ANNE

“

It’s incredible!” I exclaimed.

“Well, it’s true, anyhow!” Jim asserted. “And I don’t see myself where the incredibility comes in.”

“You say that Mr. Pendennis wrote from Berlin not a week after I left England, and that he and Anne—*Anne*—are at this moment staying with you in Chelsea? When I’ve been constantly with her,—saw her murdered in the streets of Warsaw!”

“That must have been the other woman,—the woman of the portrait, whoever she may be. No one seems to know, not even Pendennis. We’ve discussed it several times,—not before Anne. We don’t think it wise to remind her of that Russian episode; it upsets her too much; for she’s not at all the thing even yet, poor girl.”

He seemed quite to have changed his mental attitude towards Anne, and spoke of her as kindly as if she had been Mary’s sister.

“It’s another case of mistaken identity based on an extraordinary likeness,” he continued. “There have been many such,—more in fact than in fiction. Look at the Bancrofts and their ‘doubles,’ for instance, a pair of them, husband and wife, who passed themselves off as Sir Squire and Lady Bancroft innumerable times a few years back, and were never discovered. And yet, though it mightn’t be difficult for a clever impersonator to make up like Bancroft, it seems incredible that he could find a woman who could pose successfully as the incomparable Marie Wilton. You should have seen her in her prime, my boy—the most fascinating little creature imaginable, and the plainest, if you only looked at her features! It must have been a jolly sight harder to represent her, than if she’d been a merely beautiful woman, like Anne. She’s an uncommon type here in England, but not on the Continent. I don’t suppose it would be difficult to find half a dozen who would answer to the same description,—if one only knew

where to look for ’em.”

“It wasn’t the resemblance of a type,—eyes and hair and that sort of thing,”—I said slowly; “the voice, the manner, the soul; why—*she*—knew me, recognized me even with my beard—spoke of Mary—”

“She must have been an astonishingly clever woman, poor soul! And one who knew a lot more about Anne than Anne and her father know of her. Well, you’d soon be able to exchange notes with Pendennis himself, and perhaps you’ll hit on a solution of the mystery between you. What’s that?”

I had pulled out the miniature and now handed it to him. He examined it intently under the bright light of the little acetylene lamp inside the brougham.

“This is another portrait of her? You’re right,—there’s a marvellous likeness. I’d have sworn it was Anne, though the hair is different now. It was cut short in her illness,—Anne’s illness, I mean, of course,—and now it’s a regular touzle of curls. Here, put it up. I wouldn’t say anything about it to Anne, if I were you,—not at present.”

The carriage stopped, and as I stumbled out and along the flagged way, the front door was flung open, and in a blaze of light I saw Mary, and, a little behind her,—Anne herself.

I’m afraid I was very rude to Mary in that first confused moment of meetings and greetings. I think I gave her a perfunctory kiss in passing, but it was Anne on whom my eyes were fixed,—Anne who—wonder of wonders—was in my arms the next moment. What did it matter to us that there were others standing around? She was alive, and she loved me as I loved her; I read that in her eyes as they met mine; and nothing else in the world was of any consequence.

“You went back to Russia in search of me! I was quite sure of it in my mind, though Mary declared you were off on another special correspondent affair for Lord Southbourne, and he said the same; he’s rather a nice man, isn’t he, and Lady Southbourne’s a dear! But I knew somehow he wasn’t speaking the truth. And you’ve been in the wars, you poor boy! Why, your hair is as gray as father’s; and how *did* you get that wound on your forehead?”

“I’ve had some lively times one way and another, dear; but never mind about that now,” I said. We were sitting together by the fire in the drawing-room, after dinner, alone,—for Mary had effaced herself like the considerate little woman

she is; probably she had joined Jim and Pendennis in the smoking-room, that was also Jim's sanctum.

"Tell me about yourself. How did you get to Petersburg? It was you?"

"Yes; but I can't remember even now how I got there," she answered, frowning at the fire, and biting her underlip. A queer thrill ran through me as I watched her; she was so like that other.

"I got into the train at Calais, and I suppose I fell asleep; I was very tired after the dinner at the Cecil and Mrs. Sutherland's party. There were two other people in the same carriage,—a man and a woman. That's the last thing I can recollect clearly until I found myself again in a railway carriage. I've a confused notion of being on board ship in between; but it was all like a dream, until I suddenly saw you, and called out to you; I was in an open carriage then, driving through a strange city that I know now was Petersburg. I was taken to a house where several horrid men—quite superior sort of men in a way, but they seemed as if they hated me, and I couldn't think why—asked me a lot of questions. At first they spoke in a language I didn't understand at all, but afterwards in French; and then I found they wanted to know about that Mr. Cassavetti; they called him by another name, too—"

"Selinski," I said.

"Yes, that was it; though I haven't been able to remember it. They wouldn't believe me when I said I'd only met him quite casually at dinner, the night before I was kidnapped,—for I really was kidnapped, Maurice—and that I knew nothing whatever about him. They kept me in a dark cell for hours, till I was half-crazy with anger and terror; and then they brought me out, and I saw you, and father; and the next thing I knew I was in bed in an hotel we've often stayed at, in Berlin. Father tries to persuade me that I imagined the whole thing; but I didn't; now did I, Maurice? And what does it all mean?"

"It was all a mistake. You were taken for some one else; some one whom you resemble very closely."

"That's just what I thought; though father won't believe it; or he pretends he won't; but I am sure he knows something that he will not tell me. But there's another thing,—that dreadful man Cassavetti. Perhaps I oughtn't to call him that, as he's dead; I only heard about the murder a little while ago, and then almost by accident. Maud Vereker told me; do you know her?"

“That frivolous little chatterbox; yes, I’ve met her, though I’d forgotten her name.”

“She told me all about it one day. Mary and Jim had never said a word; they seemed to be in a conspiracy of silence! But when I heard it I was terribly upset. Think of any one suspecting you of murdering him, Maurice,—just because he lived on the floor above you, and you happened to find him. You poor boy, what dreadful troubles you have been through!”

There was an interlude here; we had a good many such interludes, but even when my arm was round her, when my lips pressed hers, I could scarcely realize that I was awake and sane.

“It was just as well they did suspect me, darling,” I said after a while, “or I most certainly shouldn’t have been here now.”

She nestled closer to me, with a little sob.

“Oh, Maurice, Maurice! I can’t believe that you’re safe here again, after all! And I feel that I was to blame for it all—”

“You? Why, how’s that, sweetheart?”

“Because I flirted with that Cassavetti—at the dinner, don’t you remember? That seemed to be the beginning of everything! I was so cross with you, and he—he puzzled and interested me, though I felt frightened just at the last when I gave him that flower. Maurice, did he take me for the other girl? And was there any meaning attached to the flower?”

“Yes, the flower was a symbol; it meant a great deal,—among other things the fact that you gave it to him made him quite sure you were—the person he mistook you for. You are marvellously like her—”

“Then you—you have met her also? Who is she? Where is she?”

“She is dead; and I don’t know for certain who she was; until Jim met me to-night I believed that she was—you!”

“Were we so like as that?” she breathed. “Why, she might have been my sister, but I never had one; my mother died when I was born, you know! Tell me about her, Maurice.”

“I can’t, dear; except that she was as brave as she was beautiful; and her life was

one long tragedy. But I'll show you her portrait."

She gave a little cry of astonishment as I handed her the miniature; the diamond setting flashed under the softly shaded electric light.

"Oh, how lovely! But—why, she's far more beautiful than I am, or ever shall be! Did she give you this, Maurice?"

There was a queer note in her voice as she put the question; it sounded almost like a touch of jealousy.

"No; her husband gave it to me,—after she died," I said sadly.

"Her husband! She was married, then. Who was he?"

"A man worthy of her; but I'd rather not talk about them,—not just at present; it's too painful."

"Oh, Maurice, I'm so sorry," she murmured in swift penitence; and to my great relief she questioned me no more for that evening.

But I told the whole story, so far as I knew it, to Pendennis and Jim, after the rest of the household had gone to bed; and we sat till the small hours, comparing notes and discussing the whole matter, which still presented many perplexing points.

I omitted nothing; I said how I had seen Anne—as I believed then and until this day—in that boat on the Thames; how I had suspected,—felt certain,—that she had been to Cassavetti's rooms that night, and was cognizant of his murder; what I had learned from Mr. Treherne, down in Cornwall, and everything of importance that had happened since.

Jim punctuated the story with exclamations and comments, but Anthony Pendennis listened almost in silence, though when I came to the part about the mad woman from Siberia, who had died at the hunting-lodge, and who was spoken of as the Countess Vassilitzi, he started, and made a queer sound, like a groan, though he signed to me to continue. I was glad afterwards that I hadn't described what she looked like. He was a grave, stern man, wonderfully self-possessed.

"It is a strange story," he said, when I had finished. "A mysterious one."

"Do you hold the key to the mystery?" I asked him pointblank.

“No, though I can shed a little light on it; a very little, and I fear even that will only make the rest more obscure. But it is only right that I should give you confidence for confidence, Mr. Wynn; since you have suffered so much through your love for my daughter,—and through the machinations of this unhappy woman who certainly impersonated her,—for her own purposes.”

I winced at that. Although I knew now that “the unhappy woman” was not she whom I loved, it hurt me to hear her spoken of in that stern, condemnatory way; but I let it pass. I wanted to hear his version.

CHAPTER LII

THE WHOLE TRUTH

“

She must have been one of the Vassilitzis, and therefore Anne’s near kinswoman,” Pendennis said slowly. “You say she was often spoken of as Anna Petrovna? That explains nothing, for Petrovna is of course a very common family name in Russia. ‘The daughter of Peter’ it really means, and it is often used as a familiar form of address, just as in Scotland a married woman is often spoken of by her friends by her maiden name. My wife was called Anna Petrovna. But you say this unhappy woman’s name was given as ‘Vassilitzi Pendennis’? That I cannot understand! It is impossible that she could be my daughter; that the mad lady from Siberia could have been my wife,—and yet—my God—if that should be true, after all!

“They did send me word, and I believed it at the moment, though later I thought it was a trick to get me—and Anne—into their power,—part of a long-delayed scheme of revenge.”

His face was white as death, with little beads of sweat on the forehead, and his hands shook slightly; though he showed no other signs of emotion.

“Treherne told you the truth about my marriage, Mr. Wynn,” he continued, raising his voice a little, and looking at me with stern, troubled eyes. “Until you spoke of him I had almost forgotten his existence! But he did not know quite everything. The one point on which I and my dear wife were at variance was her connection with this fatal League. Yes, it was in existence then; and I was—I suppose I still am, in a way—a member of it; though I only became one in order that I might protect my wife as far as possible. After she died and I was banished from Russia, I severed myself from it for many years, until a few months ago, when I received a communication to the effect that my wife was still alive; that she had been released and restored to her relatives,—to her brother Stepán, I supposed. He had always hated me, but he loved her well, though he managed to make his escape at the time she was taken.”

“But Stepán Vassilitzi is a young man,—younger than I am,” I interrupted.

“He is the son; the father died some years back, though I only learned that after I returned to Russia. I started at once; that was how you missed me when you came to Berlin. I sent first to the old château near Warsaw, which had been the principal residence of the Vassilitzis. But I found it in possession of strangers; it had been confiscated in ’81, and nothing was known of the old family beyond the name. I wasted several days in futile inquiries and then went on to Petersburg, where I got in communication with some of the League. I had to execute the utmost caution, as you will understand, but I found out that a meeting was to be held at a place I knew of old,—the ruined chapel,—and that Anna Petrovna was to be there,—my wife, as I supposed.

“The rest of that episode you know. The moment I saw Anne brought out I realized, or thought I did, for I am not so sure now, that it was a trap. That big, rough-looking man who carried Anne off—”

“He was the Grand Duke Loris.”

“So I guessed when you spoke of him just now; and at the time I knew, of course, that he was not what he appeared, for he didn’t act up to his disguise.”

“He did when it was necessary!” I said emphatically, remembering how he had slanged the hotel servant that evening at Petersburg.

“Well, he said enough to convince me that I was right, though why he should trouble himself on our behalf I couldn’t imagine.

“We hadn’t gone far when we heard firing, and halted to listen. We held a hurried consultation, and I told him briefly who we were. He seemed utterly astounded; and now I understand why,—he evidently had thought Anne was that other. He decided that we should be safer if we remained in the woods till all was quiet, and then make our way to Petersburg and claim protection at the English Embassy.

“We went on again; Anne was still insensible, and he insisted on carrying her,—till we came to a charcoal burner’s hut. He told us to stay there till a messenger came who would guide us to the road, where a carriage would be in waiting to take us to Petersburg.

“He left us then, and I have never seen him since. But he kept his word, though it was nearly a week before the messenger came,—a big, surly man, very lame, as

the result of a recent accident, I think."

"Mishka!" I exclaimed.

"He would not tell his name, and said very little one way or the other, but he took us to the carriage, and we reached the city without hindrance. Anne was in a dazed condition the whole time,—partly, no doubt, as a result of the drugs which those scoundrels who kidnapped her and brought her to Russia had administered. She knew me, but everything else was almost a blank to her, as it still is. She has only a faint recollection of the whole affair.

"I secured a passport for her and we started at once, though she wasn't fit to travel, and the journey nearly killed her. We ought to have stopped as soon as we were over the frontier, but I wanted to get as far away from Russia as possible. She just held out till we got to Berlin, and then broke down altogether—my poor child!

"I ought to have written to Mrs. Cayley, I know; but I never gave a thought to it till Anne began to recover—"

"That's all right; Mary understood, and she's forgiven the omission long ago," Jim interposed. "But, I say, Pendennis, I was right, after all! I always stuck out that it was a case of mistaken identity, though you wouldn't believe me!"

Pendennis nodded.

"The woman from Siberia—what was she like?" he demanded, turning again to me.

"I can't say. I only saw her from a distance, and for a minute or so," I answered evasively. "She was tall and white-haired."

I was certain in my own mind that she was his wife, for I'd heard the words she called out,—his name, "An-thony," not the French "Antoine," but as a foreigner would pronounce the English word,—but I should only add to his distress if I told him that.

"Well, it remains a mystery; and one that I suppose we shall never unravel," he said heavily, at last.

But it was unravelled for us, and that before many weeks had passed.

One dark afternoon just before Christmas I dropped in for a few minutes, as I

generally contrived to do before going down to the office; for I was on the *Courier* again temporarily.

Anne and her father were still the Cayleys' guests; for Mary wouldn't hear of their going to an hotel, and they had only just found a flat near at hand to suit them. Having at last returned to England, Anthony Pendennis had decided to remain. He'd had enough, at last, of wandering around the Continent!

Mary had other callers in the drawing-room, so I turned into Jim's study, where Anne joined me in a minute or so,—Anne, who, in a few short months, would be my wife.

The front-door bell rang, and voices sounded in the lobby; but though I heard, I didn't heed them, until Anne held up her hand.

"Hush! Who is Marshall talking to?"

The prim maid was speaking in an unusually loud voice; shouting, in fact, as English folk always do when they're addressing a foreigner,—as if that would make them more intelligible.

A moment later she came in, looking flustered, and closed the door.

"There's a foreign man outside, sir, and I think he's asking for you; but I can't make out half he says,—not even his name, though it sounds like Miskyploff!"

"Mishka!" I shouted, making for the door.

Mishka it was, grim, gaunt, and travel-stained; and as he gripped my hands I knew, without a word spoken, that Loris was dead.

I led him in, and he started slightly when he saw Anne, who stared at him with a queer expression of half-recognition. She knew who he was, for I had told her a good deal about him; though we had all agreed it was quite unnecessary that she should know the whole story of my experiences in Russia; there were a lot of details I'd never given even to her father and Jim.

She recovered herself almost instantly, and held out her hand to him with a gracious smile, saying in German:

"Welcome to England, Herr Pavloff! I have heard much of you, and have much to thank you for."

He bowed clumsily over the hand, with the deference due to a princess, and watched her as she passed out of the room, his rugged face strangely softened.

“So, she is safe, after all,” he said when the door was closed. “We all hoped so, but we did not know; that is one reason why you were never told. For if she were dead what need to tell you; and also—but I will come to that later. There is a marvellous resemblance; but it is often so with twins.”

“*Twins!*” I ejaculated; and yet I think I’d known it, at the back of my mind, ever since the night of my return to England; only Pendennis had spoken so decidedly about his only child. “Why, Herr Pendennis himself doesn’t know that!”

“No, it was kept from him,—from the first. It is all old history now, though I learned it within these last few months, chiefly from Natalya. It was her doing,—hers, and the old Count’s, Stepán’s father. The old Count had always resented the marriage; he hated Herr Pendennis, his brother-in-law, as much as he loved his sister. Herr Pendennis was away in England when the children were born; and that increased the Count’s bitterness against him. He thought he should have hastened back,—as without doubt he should have done! It was but a few days later that the young mother was arrested, and, ill as she was, they took her away to prison in a litter. The Count got timely warning, and made his escape. It was impossible for his sister to accompany him; also he did not believe they would arrest her, in her condition, and as she was the wife of an Englishman. He should have known that Russians are without pity or mercy!”

“But the child! He could not take a week-old baby with him, if he had to fly for his life.”

“No, Natalya did that. She escaped to the Ghetto and took the baby with her,—and young Stepán, who was then a lad of six years. There was great confusion at the château, and the few who knew that two children were born doubtless believed one had died.

“For the rest, Natalya remained in the Ghetto for some three years, and then rejoined the Count at the old house near Ziscky,—the hunting lodge. It was all he had left; though he had patched up a peace with the Government. He had friends at Court in those days.

“You know what the child became. He trained her deliberately to that end as long as he lived; taught her also that her father deserted her and her mother in the hour of need,—left them to their fate. It was a cruel revenge to take.”

“It was!” I said emphatically. “But when did she learn she had a sister?”

“That I do not know. I think it was not long before she came to England last; she had often been here before, for brief visits only. She came on the yacht then, with my master; it was their honeymoon, and we had been cruising for some weeks,—the only peaceful time she had ever had in her life. He wished her never to return to Russia; to go with him to South America, or live in England. But she would not; she loved him, yes, but she loved the Cause more; it was her very life, her soul!

“The yacht lay off Greenwich for the night; she meant to land next day, and come up to see Selinski. She had never happened to meet him, though he was one of the Five.”

“Selinski! Cassavetti! Mishka, it was not she who murdered him!”

“No, it was Stepán Vassilitzi who killed him, and he deserved it, the hound! I had somewhat to do with it also; for I had come to London in advance, and was to rejoin the yacht that night. Near the bridge at Westminster whom should I meet but Yossof, whom I thought to be in Russia; and he told me that which made me bundle him into a cab and drive straight to Greenwich.

“The Countess Anna—she was Grand Duchess then, though we never addressed her so—made her plan speedily, as she ever did. She slipped away, with only her cousin Stepán and I. My master did not know. He thought she was in her cabin after dinner.

“We rowed swiftly up the river,—the tide was near flood,—and I waited in the boat while they went to Selinski’s; Yossof had given them the key. They found his paper, with all the evidences of his treachery to the League and to her. Selinski came in at the moment when their task was finished, and Stepán stabbed him to the heart. It was not her wish; she would have spared him, vile though he was! Well, it is all one now. They are all gone; she and Stepán,—and my master —”

“He is dead, then?”

“Should I be here if he were living? No, they did not kill him. I think he really died when she did,—that his soul passed, as it were, with hers; though he made no sign, as you know. I found him,—it is more than a week since,—in the early morning, sitting at the table where she used to write, his head on his arms,—so.

He was dead and cold,—and I thanked God for it. There was a smile on his face —”

His deep voice broke for the first time, and he sat silent for a space,—and I did.

“And so,—I came away,” he resumed presently. “I have come to you, because he loved you. It was not his wish, but hers, that you should be deceived, made use of. I think she felt it as a kind of justice that she should press you into the service of the Cause,—as she meant to do from the moment she heard of you. And it was quite easy, since you never suspected that she was not the Fraulein you knew, and loved—*hein*? She herself, too, had borne the burden so long, had toiled, and schemed, and suffered for the Cause; while this sister had always been shielded; knew nothing, cared nothing for the Cause,—though, indirectly, she had suffered somewhat through that mistake on the part of Selinski’s accomplices. Therefore this sister should give her lover to the Cause; that was the thought in her mind, I am sure. She was wrong; but we must not judge her too harshly, my friend!”

“God forbid!” I said huskily.

All that was over a year ago, and now, my task done, I sit at my writing-table by a western window and watch the sun, a clear red ball, sink into the Atlantic. We are at Pencarrow, for Anthony Pendennis has at last returned to his own house. He is my father-in-law now, for Anne and I were married in the spring, and returned after a long honeymoon to Pencarrow. We found Mishkai settled on a farm near, as much at home there as if he had lived in England all his life. He speaks English quite creditably,—with a Cornish accent,—and I hear that it won’t be long before the farm has a mistress, a plump, bright-eyed widow who is going to change her present name of Stiddyford for that of Pavloff.

We are quite a family party just now, for Jim and Mary Cayley and the baby,—a smart little chap; I’m his godfather,—have come down to spend Easter; and Mr. and Mrs. Treherne will drive over from Morwen vicarage, for Mary’s matchmaking in that direction panned out exactly as she wished.

All is well with us,—pleasant and peaceful, and homelike,—and yet—

I look at a miniature that lies on the table before me, and my mind drifts back to

the unforgettable past. I am far away from Pencarrow, when—some one comes behind my chair; a pair of soft hands are laid over my eyes.

“Dreaming or working,—which?” laughs Anne.

I take the hands in mine, and draw her down till she has her chin on my shoulder, her soft cheek against my face.

The dusk is falling, but through it she sees the glint of the diamonds on the table, —and pulls her hands away.

“You have been thinking of those dreadful days in Russia again!” she says reproachfully, with a queer little catch in her voice. “Why don’t you forget them altogether, Maurice? Let me put this in the drawer. I hate to look at it,—to see you looking at it!”

She picks up the miniature, gently enough, slips it into a drawer, and turns the key.

“I—I know it’s horrid of me, darling, but I can’t help it,” she whispers, kneeling beside me, her fair face upturned,—a face crowned once more with a wealth of bright hair, which she dresses in a different way now, and I’m glad of that. It makes her look less like her dead sister.

Some one comes behind my chair.
Some one comes behind my chair. **Page 354**

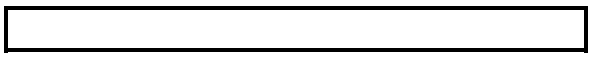
“I know how—she—suffered, and—and I’m not bitter against her, really,” she continues rapidly. “But when I think of all we had to suffer because of her, I—I can’t quite forgive her, or—or forget that you loved her once; though you thought you were loving me all the time!”

“I did love you all the time, sweetheart,” I assure her, and that is true; but it is true also that I still love that dead woman as I loved her in life; not as I love Anne, my wife, but as the page loved the queen.

I shall never tell that to Anne, though. She would not understand.

THE END

Mr. Oppenheim's Latest Novel



PASSERS-BY

By ANTHONY PARTRIDGE

Author of
"The Kingdom of Earth," "The Distributors," etc.
Illustrated. Cloth, $1.50

Has the merit of engaging the reader's attention at once and holding it to the end.—*New York Sun*.

It is exciting, is plausibly and cleverly written, and is not devoid of a love motive.—*Chicago Examiner*.

It can be heartily recommended to those who enjoy a novel with a good plot, entertaining characters, and one which is carefully written.—*Chicago Tribune*.

One of the most fascinating mystery stories of recent years, a tale that catches the attention at the beginning and tightens the grip of its hold with the turn of its pages.—*Boston Globe*.

A mysterious story in which nearly all the personages are as much puzzled as the reader and a detective encounters a unique surprise. Originality is the most striking characteristic of the personages.—*New York Times*.

The first chapter compels the absorbed interest of the reader and lays the groundwork for a thrilling tale in which mystery follows upon mystery through a series of dramatic situations and surprises.—*Philadelphia Press*.

LITTLE, BROWN, & CO., PUBLISHERS

34 BEACON STREET, BOSTON

By the Author of "Aunt Jane of Kentucky"

THE LAND OF LONG AGO

By ELIZA CALVERT HALL

Illustrated by G. Patrick Nelson and Beulah Strong
12mo. Cloth. $1.50

The book is an inspiration.—*Boston Globe.*

Without qualification one of the worthiest publications of the year. —*Pittsburg Post.*

Aunt Jane has become a real personage in American literature.—*Hartford Courant.*

A philosophy sweet and wholesome flows from the lips of "Aunt Jane."—*Chicago Evening Post.*

The sweetness and sincerity of Aunt Jane's recollections have the same unfailing charm found in "Cranford."—*Philadelphia Press.*

To a greater degree than her previous work it touches the heart by its wholesome, quaint human appeal.—*Boston Transcript.*

The stories are prose idyls; the illuminations of a lovely spirit shine upon them, and their literary quality is as rare as beautiful.—*Baltimore Sun.*

MARGARET E. SANGSTER says: "It is not often that an author competes with herself, but Eliza Calvert Hall has done so successfully, for her second volume centred about Aunt Jane is more fascinating than her first."

LITTLE, BROWN, & CO., PUBLISHERS

"*A howling success*"

AN AMERICAN BABY ABROAD

***By* MRS. CHARLES N. CREWDSON**

Illustrations by R. F. Outcault and Modest Stein
12mo. Cloth. $1.50

When the American baby's mother hurries off from London to Egypt, where her husband is ill with fever, the baby, in company with its colored nurse and a friend of its mother's, follows more leisurely. The trio stop at Oberammergau to see the Passion Play, in Rome to witness a special mass conducted by Pope Leo,—in a word, do more or less sightseeing, until they finally reach Cairo, where much more exciting events befall them. The description of the places they visit is enhanced by a pleasant vein of humor, and an attractive love episode sustains the interest. It is an extremely entertaining story, light and vivacious, with brisk dialogue and diverting situations—just the book for summer reading.

A series of characteristic pictures, by the well-known artist, Mr. R. F. Outcault, and Modest Stein gives additional charm to the volume.

LITTLE, BROWN, & CO., PUBLISHERS

34 BEACON STREET, BOSTON

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE:

Minor changes have been made to correct typesetters' errors; otherwise, every

effort has been made to remain true to the author’s words and intent.

through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg-tm License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg-tm License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg-tm.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg-tm License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg-tm work in a format other than "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg-tm web site (www.gutenberg.net), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg-tm License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg-tm works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works provided that

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg-tm works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg-tm License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the

electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from both the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and Michael Hart, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread public domain works in creating the Project Gutenberg-tm collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH F3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS' WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTIBILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any

provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg-tm work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg-tm work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg-tm

Project Gutenberg-tm is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg-tm's goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg-tm collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg-tm and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation web page at http://www.pglaf.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Its 501(c)(3) letter is posted at http://pglaf.org/fundraising. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's principal office is located at 4557 Melan Dr. S. Fairbanks, AK, 99712., but its volunteers and employees are scattered throughout numerous locations. Its business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887, email business@pglaf.org. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's web site and official page at http://pglaf.org

For additional contact information:

Dr. Gregory B. Newby
Chief Executive and Director
gbnewby@pglaf.org

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg-tm depends upon and cannot survive without wide spread public support and donations to carry out its mission of

increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit http://pglaf.org

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg Web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: http://pglaf.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works.

Professor Michael S. Hart is the originator of the Project Gutenberg-tm concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For thirty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as Public Domain in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our Web site which has the main PG search facility:

http://www.gutenberg.net

This Web site includes information about Project Gutenberg-tm, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.