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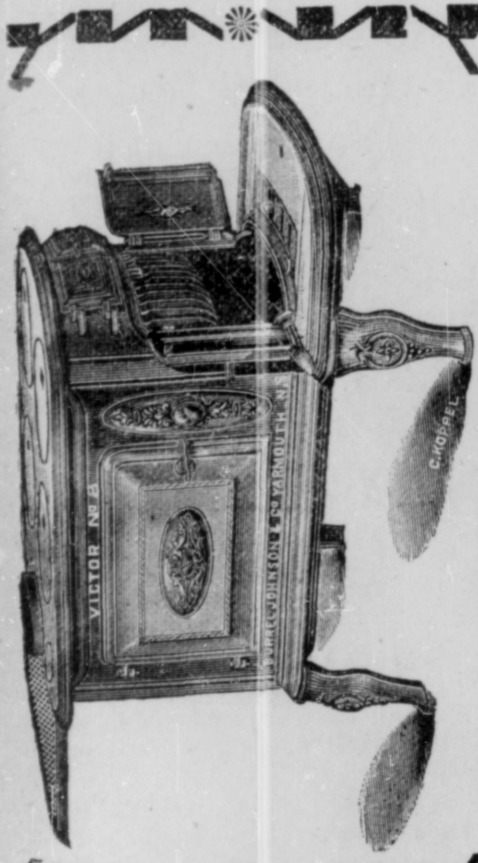
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THE MYSTERY OF COUNT LANDRINOF

BY FRED WHISHAW

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My thoughts dwelt on the fate of the student. Poor little creature that he was, victim of a very cruel destiny, he had had a hard life of it from start to finish. It was to be hoped such as he would be mercifully judged, for indeed he had never a chance! Who could blame him? Not I for one. On the contrary, I felt grateful enough toward him, for how in the world should we ever have attained the end, which now loomed well in view, but for his good offices? He had been very aggravating in the manner of giving his information, he had been foxy and avaricious, and, of course, from the point of view of good or bad faith toward his friends, his conduct had been treacherous and atrocious. Nevertheless I felt softly toward the poor fellow by reason of the services he had rendered me, services which—as a matter of fact—had cost him his life.

Was he stabbed while sleeping? I wondered. God grant that he suffered none of the terrible anguish of suddenly awaking to see his murderer, like an avenging fury, standing over his bed, perhaps bidding him prepare for instant death, a traitor's violent death, while horror paralyzed his limbs and his tongue so that he could neither move nor cry out.

Did I dream, or was that the figure of a man standing in the doorway which led into the bedroom?

For a moment I imagined that it must be Percy or Borofsky or perhaps my own man Petka, who had been preparing my room for the night; then he suddenly stepped out into the light, seeing, I suppose, that I peered at him, and I perceived, with a gasp of horror, that it was Andre.

The odious creature laughed aloud. "Ah," he said, "my charming and most elegant nephew! I have long intended to pay you a call in your own apartments, since you seemed determined to keep aloof from me in my own!"

I was too frightened—there is no other word—I was too terrified to speak. Horror and surprise kept my tongue tied to my palate. I could not have spoken, if my life depended on it, during that first minute or two.

"You are surprised to see me, I perceive," he continued. "I am aware that I am uninvited. Probably you believed me to be out of town—nicht wahr?"

I made no reply. "I should have left before now, no doubt," he went on, "but unfortunately I forgot to draw a check upon my bankers before leaving home. You don't happen to have a checkbook in your writing table there, do you?"

He pointed with his right hand toward my roller desk, and I now observed that he held a revolver in it.

My thoughts had begun to work now. I racked my brain madly for ideas. I did not know what course to take.

"You infernal murderer!" I now muttered from between my dried up



The raging lion that ravages the earth, seeking that which it may devour is a fearsome antagonist to fight. Ill-health is a stealthier but much more dangerous enemy. It is always easier and better to avoid it than to fight it. It comes in various guises. At first it is usually as a trifling indisposition or a slight attack of biliousness. Then follow loss of appetite, or headache, or nervousness and sleeplessness, or stupor. These are the advance heralds of consumption, malaria, nervous exhaustion and prostration, and a multitude of other ills.

There is an easy way to avoid, and a sure way to escape from, ill-health. Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery gives edge to the appetite, invigorates the liver, makes the digestion perfect and the blood pure. It is the great appetite-sharpener, blood-maker, flesh-builder and nerve-tonic. It cures 95 per cent of all cases of consumption. It does not make flabby flesh like cod-liver oil, but firm, healthy tissue, without copiousness. Honest dealers don't urge substitutes for a little extra profit.

"I cannot praise Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery too highly," writes Mrs. Mary A. Seay, of Andersonville, Buckingham Co., Va. "My friends gave me up as dying of consumption. I tried everything, but grew worse, until I became so weak I gave up all my household work. I tried four bottles of the 'Golden Medical Discovery' and now I am well and strong. It is the best medicine of any kind. I recommend your medicines—the 'Golden Medical Discovery' and 'Pleasant Pellets'—to my friends with a full belief in their efficiency."

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"You shall never have a farthing from me!"

"Oh, oh!" he said. "For shame! What, grudge your own uncle a thousand or two from your affluence? Beware, undutiful nephew, lest I take an uncle's privilege and chastise you!"

"You dare not shoot that thing off!" I said. "The noise would alarm the household, and you would be caught at once."

"Pooh, there are other ways less noisy, if need be; moreover, there are also other checkbooks in the house. There is the dear countess', your mother's."

"You shall not go near my mother," I said, "even though you stabbed me as you stabbed the student."

"You fool!" he said. "Come; write me the check and let me go. I have a journey to make tonight, and I will not be delayed. Do not make me desperate. I would as soon kill you as not, you hellhound! It was you that caught the student and wormed my secrets out of him. You would have been a dead man by this but that I must have the money. I was an infernal fool not to stick a knife into you as you sat dozing in that armchair. Your mother can pay the money as easily as you. Come, now, shall she pay it or you? I will have the cash, mind you!"

My mind was working quickly and well now. "Stop!" I said. "You have the whip hand of me, for I am unarmed. We will make a bargain of it. You shall write me a declaration that you are Andre Landrinof or Kornilof or any one you please, and that my father, Count Vladimir, was arrested in your place. You shall give me such a document, and I will sign a check for—what, 1,000 rubles?"

I never really intended to bargain with this infernal assassin. My intention was to spring upon him as he wrote. "Twenty thousand is the sum," said he, "and there is no bargain. I sign nothing. I will have the money without conditions of any kind. Come; time passes. Do not make me desperate. I can force the countess to pay me; remember that."

"Not while I live," I said. "You shall not leave this room, though you may carry an arsenal of arms."

"Pooh!" he said. "You defy me? You are one that talks much, I take it, and acts little. I say I shall go from this room to the apartment of the countess. Sit where you are or you are a dead man. I mean what I say. This is not a dummy revolver. All the chambers are charged. I will shoot the whole infernal household and escape, curse you! Sit still now!"

He edged toward the door. I sprang to my feet, starting to rush toward him. He raised the pistol and fired. At the same moment I tripped over something that lay between him and me, and fell.

The shot passed, I suppose, over my head.

At the same moment a very surprising thing happened. From out of my



Then there was a rough and tumble on the floor.

bedroom, which seemed to be a kind of enchanted chamber tonight, rushed a party of men, gendarmes. How they came there I could not and did not attempt to imagine. Andre flashed his pistol at them and again and a third time. Then there was a rough and tumble on the floor, and many flowers of speech, both from Andre and the others.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SEARCHING FOR THE COUNT.
It was a simple enough matter in reality. These good fellows had tracked Andre back to our house. He had entered by my bedroom window from the yard, using a ladder, under cover of the darkness. They had done the same, climbing in noiselessly in the nick of time. One of them was wounded in the arm, the only successful shot of the affair.

As for Andre, he raved and blas-

phemed, struggling like a maniac. I was obliged to assist the police in securing him, and in the scuffle he aimed several vicious kicks and blows at me, together with much vile language. I carry the marks of one of his "backs" to this day. However, he was caught, and I may say in this place, for we have now finished, personally, with the consummate scoundrel, that this time the police did not blunder, but sent him away to places from which there is no return. I believe he is now at Sakhalin or thereabout.

Early the following morning I received a message from the chancellery of the gradonachalik, which is the official title of the chief of police. The messenger requested that I would convey myself as quickly as possible to the head office.

I went, this time without much anxiety of heart, for I knew well enough that even without the fulfillment of his farcical condition of identification by scar, the chief would now no longer withhold his consent to father's release, for, Andre caught and the student's tale verified, no sane man, gradonachalik or commoner, could any longer pretend to disbelieve in the blunder which had been committed.

I was not therefore prepared for another check; yet, so closely had fate woven the net around my poor father's liberty, I was destined to experience a new disappointment.

The chief received me very civilly and began by congratulating me upon Andre's capture and thanking me for my share in effecting it. I had had a narrow escape, he said; the delinquent had fired point blank at me—was it not so?

"Certainly, excellence," I said, "and kicked me very violently on the shins besides. Not quite the line of conduct one would expect a father to pursue toward an obedient and dutiful son."

The chief grinned slightly. "I concede the point," he said. "There has been a mistake, though, owing to the circumstances, a pardonable one. You shall have your father back, unless destiny should have been too strong for us—an event I should deeply deplore."

"What do you mean, excellence?" I said, my heart sinking to my boots, "have you news—bad news?"

"Read this," said the chief, handing me a telegram from I forget what remote place in Siberia. "All may be well with him, but there is some doubt, as you will see."

I snatched the telegram and read these words: "Convict Kornilof never reached here; reported detained Spask; severe illness; probably died since; no later advice received."

(To be Continued)

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