

THE MYSTERY OF COUNT LANDRINOF.

BY FRED WHISHAW.

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"The student shivered. 'I see,' he said. 'Very well. You have the stronger hand. I must submit. See here, Mr. Borofsky, I never did you any harm. Do not ruin me. If the Count Boris should desire to offer me some honorarium for the secret I propose to make over to you, you will not prevent him?'"

"Count Boris may play skittles with his money, so far as I am concerned," said Borofsky.

"And, above all, not a word to Andre about me. He would kill me in a minute."

"You are safe here. I have said so." "And a passport and free passage?" "Guaranteed."

"Then listen and I'll tell you something that will startle you."

CHAPTER XXIX.

PLOT AGAINST THE CZAR.

"The czar," began the student, "is, as perhaps you know, absent in Livadia. He should return on Friday week."

"Well, what has that to do with our affair?"

"This—that if Andre should have his way his majesty will not return, neither on Friday nor on any other day."

Borofsky started violently. He whistled slightly and sat a moment in thought.

"Are you speaking of this very person, Andre?" he asked at last.

"Certainly. Of whom else?" "And you suggest that this man, whom we are harboring here among ourselves, is at present engaged in a plot against his majesty?"

"No; I don't suggest it. I assert it." "Can you prove it, student?"

"Easily, at any moment."

"Why, great heavens, man, there's a fortune in the secret—honor, glory, reward, everything! Do you realize it?"

"There is Siberia in it for such as I," laughed the student. "That or our own president's nickel. There might be reward for you if you were to reveal the plot in time and thus save the czar. But for me such a course is impossible. I would rather have the certainty of 5,000 rubles from the young count than the chance of ten times as much from the gratitude of the czar. Czars generally contrive to reward the wrong men. Come. Is it a bargain? Five thousand rubles down and the secret yours to do as you like with. A grand opportunity for you, Mr. Borofsky, only, mind you, my money and my passport and 48 hours' start before you act upon it."

"I think I may promise that Count Boris will reward you handsomely, though, of course, we have the whip hand of you, and might, if we chose, crew your very soul out of you for nothing. Tell me about this conspiracy, and I will advise him to be generous."

"Well, I will trust you. You will satisfied with my tale. Why do you suppose Andre has come to St. Petersburg? For the pleasure (and risk) of living in this comfortable house and pass-

ing among strangers as the Count Landrinof? No, my friend, there would be no solid advantage to balance the tremendous risks. He has come to your house because he finds it a grand center and sanctuary for the quiet hatching of his own eggs. That's all. The man requires a little time to himself and a quiet place, and here he has found both. The plot? Very well. It is aimed against the head of the realm, of course. Between the station Kirilof and Bootief, where the line runs through a forest, about one mile from the Bootief clearing, is a woodman's cabin. Close to that cabin there is something very wrong with the earth. A careful examination will disclose it."

"I see—a plot to blow up the czar's train. But how is Andre concerned?"

"There are several concerned, but Andre is the head and chief of the affair. The man to ask for on the spot is one Krolok, but he is a desperate sort of character, and it would be as well to be very careful. The ground is undermined from the cabin to the very rails; all is finished, and the web waits for the fly. On Friday, unless he should be warned beforehand, the victim will buzz unsuspectingly into it, and, piff, where is the czar? There; that is my secret. If the police will not believe that Andre is Andre and not Count Landrinof when you shall have presented them with their czar, alive and safe, in order to prove the fact, why, then, they are past praying for, and there is no more to be said."

"How is the responsibility for the conspiracy to be brought home to him?" said Borofsky, thinking aloud rather than asking the question.

"Seize Krolok—let the police seize Krolok! They will soon find out who are his accomplices; they have a way of extracting information from their prisoners which, it is said, is irresistible."

"Well, I think I may say that you have done your best, Mr. Student, to justify your release and perhaps some reward. I will now discuss matters with my friends, and you shall hear the result as soon as possible."

"For the love of heaven, be careful!" cried the student. "I repeat that if Andre were to learn that I am here and in communication with you he would murder me on the spot and then disappear. This would be fatal for your purpose, remember, for the police will assuredly never return you your Count Landrinof unless you have another to give them in his place. If he were to murder me, he would disappear, I tell you."

"We must hope for the best, both for you and for ourselves," said Borofsky. "We shall be careful, of course."

It was while Borofsky was repeating to Percy and myself the details of his conversation with the student that a summons came for him from our other guest, Andre.

Borofsky was in the habit of visiting Andre, so that the summons was nothing unusual, but he prepared to obey it, nevertheless, with some little trepidation tonight.

"He will be agitated about the pristaf's visit!" he said. "Probably he'll insist upon knowing why we visited the pristaf and where we got our information from."

"Gad," I exclaimed, "that's true. What shall you say, Borofsky?"

"That depends upon what he says," said Borofsky. "I must be discreet and give nothing and no one away; that is the main thing."

"He won't be violent, will he?" suggested Percy. "Hadn't you better pocket a revolver before entering the lion's den, Borofsky?"

"He wouldn't be such a fool as that. It would be a suicidal thing to do. His policy will now be, you'll see, to disappear suddenly while he rouses in us no suspicion of his intentions. He does not know that we know that the pristaf was here today, remember."

"Well, be careful, Borofsky!" said I, warningly, "for the fellow's temper is dangerous. Don't forget the Serpentine!"

Borofsky smiled a wan smile. It was not a pleasant recollection for him.

"I think he'll be mild enough tonight!" he said.

But only half an hour later poor Borofsky surprised us by entering the room suddenly and rapidly, as though pursued, and by closing and locking the door behind him. His tie and collar were disarranged, his shirt front rumpled; he looked, as Percy said afterward, as though he had slept in his clothes and had had a restless night.

Borofsky sank into a chair. He crossed himself and muttered something, a bit of a prayer, in Russian.

"What is it?" we asked in a breath. "I've been nearly killed," he gasped. "I thought I was dead—he's an awful man! I wouldn't go through that again

for a year's salary; the infernal, murdering scoundrel!"

"What is it, man?" we both exclaimed once more.

"We must get that little wretch of a student away, and pretty quickly," continued Borofsky, ignoring our remark, "or he'll be murdered as sure as fate!"

"Do tell us what has happened, Borofsky," I implored.

"I was quite wrong in supposing that he would play the cunning game. He made no attempt to control his anger. He was at me the instant I came in. He shook me as if I were a rat and he a terrier, curse him! I didn't breathe a full breath for ten minutes. Have you a brandy and soda there, Boris Vladimirovich?"

I supplied the necessary restorative.

"Great heavens!" continued Borofsky. "If I don't set the police on the rogue for this and get him safely put away in the mines, I'll never undertake another case. I must tell you about it in a few words, for positively no one

in the house is safe with that devil at large, and, as for the student, I wouldn't insure him at cent per cent."

"But surely he doesn't know the student's in the house!" I exclaimed, aghast.

"Well, that's what I want to tell you," said Borofsky.

The Girl of to-day

will be the woman of to-morrow. She does not know it, perhaps her mother does not fully understand it, but between the "to-day" when she is a girl and the "to-morrow" when she will be a woman, her life's happiness and health are in the balance. If she is to be a full-breasted, strong, healthy woman, she must develop rightly now. She is at a crisis. She needs more strength, more blood to tide it over.

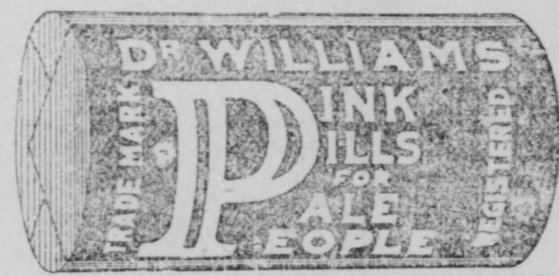
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strangulation when I told him, but tell him I did. I could not help it. Then he let me come away, and I locked the student in his room and brought away the key—here it is—I could think of nothing better to do. We must spirit him from the house tonight and hide him in some hired lodging. I can get him a passport tomorrow, and he can take train to Reval and sail to London from there, or—no; Reval is his best way."

"If we can only safely get through this night," I said, my teeth a-chatter with the excitement into which Borofsky's recital had thrown me. "If we can only get through tonight safely and put the police on to this railway mining business in the morning, keeping our eye on Andre meanwhile, we shall have the department on our side by the evening. Andre won't be at large long once we tell them about the intended attempt on the czar's life—if they believe us sufficiently to verify the story, that is."

"Yes, and if the student hasn't invented the whole tale!" said Percy.

"We should look pretty foolish if the police went there and found nothing!"

"Go out, Percy, like a dear good chap, and take a room somewhere for the unfortunate little wretch," I suggested, and Percy, as usual, stood next upon the order of his going, but went.

He returned in an hour, having found a lodging for our informer. This was half a mile away, behind the Champs de Mars, in a slummy street whose name I have forgotten. The next thing was to get the student out of the house in safety.

We waited until past midnight before we attempted to make the move. Andre might be on the watch, suspicious of such action as this which we were taking.

At length, however, after much caution and listening and watching of doors, we successfully spirited our man down the corridor and into the grand hall and down to the front entrance,

and here old Gregory, the concierge, had a surprise for us.

When we warned him, for the loss of heaven, not to mention this fitting to the "count" (should he come down to inquire), Gregory informed us that the "so called count" was not at home. The old man, though requested, for reasons, to call Andre "the count," would never consent to do so when speaking to ourselves; for us there was always the modifying clause "so called."

Andre had gone out an hour ago and had not yet returned.

I confess that this information gave me a creepy feeling. It was not pleasant to feel that the murderous scoundrel was at large and perhaps on the watch, suspecting and determined to defeat our machinations. Bah! I have often recalled that horrible sensation; it has formed the backbone of most of my nightmares since that distressing time.

The student was radiant, however. He knew nothing of Borofsky's terrible quarter of an hour with Andre, but he was relieved to be out of the house and rejoiced exceedingly over the prospect of tomorrow's escape poor wretch, to make a new start in life with a pocketful of money and a clean bill, in the shape of a passport which set him down as some one else.

He informed me during the drive to his new quarters that he had never had a fair chance in life, having been born and bred in penury and among associates who neither knew nor cared to distinguish between that which is commonly called right and that which is commonly called wrong. I dare say his complaint was perfectly true. If so, who is going to blame him for the terrible mess the poor fellow has made of the thing we call "life?"

(To be Continued.)

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