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### A. MACDONALD



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#### SYNOPSIS.

The hero of this story, Boris Landrinof is a young Russian, who was sent to England to be educated. He is hastily summoned home by his mother owing to the sudden disappearance of his father Count Landrinof. Shortly after, in London, he is astonished when a friend tells him he has just seen his father. Accompanied by this friend he returns to Russia. Boris discovers a clue, and sets out in search of two men who have as he supposes abducted his father.

We told Borofsky, and I don't know when I have seen any one quite so surprised.

"Why on earth didn't you tell me this?" he said. "It is most important corroboration of the priest's words."

I explained that we had believed Percy to be the victim of an optical delusion.

"Well," he said, "without the priest's confirmation of it, I, too, should have said Mr.—this gentleman—had made a mistake; also without this gentleman's corroboration I should and did say that the priest had for once been too clever or not clever enough. But, taking both stories together, I find that each assertion stands stronger upon its legs by reason of the support it derives from the other. In a word, if I must give my opinion, I should now be inclined to declare that this gentleman did see the count in London, though why his abductors should have taken him there is what at present is quite beyond me to explain. Let us sleep on the matter and take counsel in the morning."

And, it being midnight by this time, we departed to our rooms. As for me, I went to bed with a sense that the mystery was by no means put forward by this new development, but rather set back and complicated.

#### CHAPTER VII

##### THE COUNT REPORTED FOUND.

It is impossible, I suppose, to witness the enthusiastic confidence of another in the correctness of his own reading of a mystery without, in some measure, becoming infected. I did not agree with my young detective. I could not persuade myself that my dear father, whom I loved and respected with all my heart, could possibly be in London and enjoying, as was obviously the case, at least a certain degree of liberty, without using that liberty to write or wire to his wife in order to relieve the anxiety from which he must know she would be suffering. It would not be like father. Why should he do it?

"Because," said Borofsky, in effect, "he hasn't. He has written, and the letter has miscarried or has been intercepted."

"By whom?" I asked.

Borofsky shrugged his shoulders.

"If we knew that," he said, "there



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would no longer be any mystery. It may have simply miscarried. The chapter of accidents is a long one in Russia, as you know, and must always be reckoned with."

"But we can't get over the fact that Percy saw this man in London and said that, though he looked like father, he was dressed so—so funnily, and in fact—to put it quite plainly—that he looked a downright bouncer, which my dear father could never possibly do!"

"Disguises do wonders!" said Borofsky, shrugging his shoulders.

"But why should he be disguised?" I persisted.

"Why has he gone away? Why has all this happened, and how? Tell me that, and I'll tell you the rest!" laughed Borofsky. "Enough that we have a good scent here, and, besides, another old trail that may one day be taken up again at Erinofka."

All this certainly deeply interested if it did not actually convince me that the man Percy met in Oxford street was my father and no other. Then it occurred to Borofsky that it would be well if one, at least, of our little hunting party of three were to take up his post in London in the hope of meeting with this mysterious personage, whether father or some one else.

"You are the right one to go," said Borofsky, wagging his head at me, "for you would be less likely to be the victim of mistaken identity. It would be useless for me to go because, unfortunately, the count is a stranger to me, and I should not know him if I saw him. And as for this gentleman"—Percy—"he might, of course, be deceived, not being a son of the count."

"I don't think I should, all the same," said Percy.

"I can't possibly leave my mother," I put in, "for some little while at all events. I am sure Percy knows my father well enough not to mistake him for any one else if he gets a real good look at him, and perhaps a talk as well. Would you mind undertaking the job, Percy?"

"Of course not," Percy scoffed. "If you think I'll do," he added. "What do you think, Mr. Borofsky?"

"You'll do well enough," said Borofsky, "if our friend here cannot see his way to going. Are you anything of a photographer?" he added unexpectedly. "Only with a little snap shot machine," laughed Percy. "Why? Am I to photograph all the suspicious people I see?"

"Not quite that; but if you should meet the count or this individual you consider so marvelously like him and could get a snap shot at him you might send us over a copy and the countess or Count Boris could easily identify or repudiate the gentleman as per portrait. That would save a great deal of trouble, for though you might make a mistake they could scarcely do so. Thus when your print arrived we should be able to say at once: 'This is the count. We have found him.' Or, 'This is some one else and Mr. Percy may return to help us look elsewhere for the count.'" Percy laughed.

"Well," he said, "I'll take my hand camera anyway. It's only a tiny thing at best, though; so don't expect much result. And if I'm arrested by the city police for taking snap shots at innocent persons I shall expect you to come and bail me out!" Which favor we promised Percy should not be denied him in case of need.

Then we dispatched Percy by train, bidding him wire to us immediately in case he should meet with any kind of success, and warning him above all, if ever he caught sight of the man—father or another—whom he had seen on a former occasion, to make sure of his address by following him, and if possible to watch or have the place watched until we should have had an opportunity of seeing the portrait and, perhaps, even of running over to London to see the original himself.

I don't think Percy was very sanguine as to his mission and the chances of seeing his former friend again. It would be the merest fluke if he did, he said. One might as well search for a grain of wheat in the proverbial sackful of chaff.

Before we left the station the idea occurred to Borofsky that it would be interesting to ask the young fellow at the ticket office whether Count Landrinof had traveled to London lately. The count was so well known in St. Petersburg that the clerk would probably have recognized him, and might tell us the very day he started, and whether alone or accompanied. This would at least show us whether Percy's mission was a mere fool's errand or whether the count, having really departed from London, might still be found there.

"But the clerk will think me such a fool not to know whether my own father has gone to London or not!" I protested. "Can't you say you require the date

of his departure for some case—working up?"

"Good idea," said Borofsky, and forthwith he evolved a fine cock and bull story about some domestic robbery in our household, supposed to have been committed by one of the servants, and how certain evidence rested upon the exact date of the count's departure, which date we had forgotten.

The ticket clerk, on hearing all this, scratched his head and assumed an air of the deepest thought. He had been paring his nails when we disturbed him, and he kindly laid aside this fascinating occupation in order to attend to us.

"I remember the count taking his ticket," he said presently. "It was—let me see—about a fortnight ago, was it not? Stop a minute. I do not issue so very many tickets for London direct—here we are August—no, it was July. This must be it, I think, 17th July, seventeenth old style, twenty-ninth new. I believe that must be the day. You may take it as pretty certain."

"Good!" said Borofsky. "That is the very day we fixed upon; the certainty of it will enable us to place our hands upon the guilty party. We are so much obliged to you. By the bye," he added, "you did not happen to notice the clothes in which his excellence traveled? There is a little point about a certain silk hat, which may or may not have been among the articles stolen. Had the count a tall hat now or a soft Tyrolean?"

"A tall hat," said the clerk promptly, "and a frock coat, such as I have generally seen his excellence wear. I happened to notice it because some one made the remark that Count Landrinof always looked far more of an Englishman than a Russian."

I gave the clerk a cigar. He deserved it.

Borofsky was jubilant as we left the station.

"You see," he said, "your father did go to London and just at the date of his disappearance too. Moreover, he was dressed as usual, and he went alone, for apparently only one London ticket was issued."

"That makes the mystery all the worse," I said, "for why should my dear father, who was always as happy in his own house as any man can be—why should he suddenly depart for London, alone and without notice, unless carried away by force or cunning, the victim of some motive and of some persons as to whose identity we can only guess?"

"As to going alone," said Borofsky, "others may easily have escorted him to the frontier and handed him over to a second batch of escorts. It is sufficient that this man was the count. Everything points to it. The rest we shall learn when your friend shall have found out for us his whereabouts."

As a matter of fact Percy had scarcely been a week away when one evening, to our intense excitement, we received a telegram laconically worded as follows:

"I think I've got him. Will wire again presently." PERCY.

(To be Continued.)

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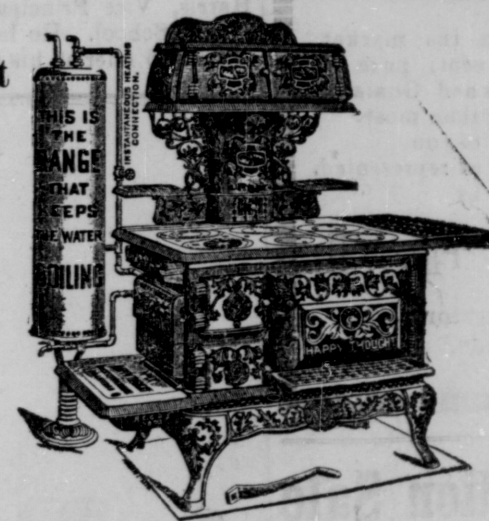
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