

RASPUTIN - DEVIL OR SAINT

by The Princess Radziwill

"If in St. Petersburg Rasputin had been considered as a prophet, here, in this remote corner of Siberia (his native town, Pokrowskoie), he was fast becoming a kind of small god at whose shrine a whole nation was worshipping."

During the Few Months Which Immediately Preceded the War the "Rasputin Craze" Became More Violent Than Ever Before and Verged Upon Complete Fanaticism for His Personality by All His Worshipers, High and Low

When the President of France Came to Visit the Tzar of Russia Rasputin Told His Friends He Was Going Back to His Native Pokrowskoie—He Said He Had Tired of Life in the Capital, but Others Insisted That He Was Asked to Leave

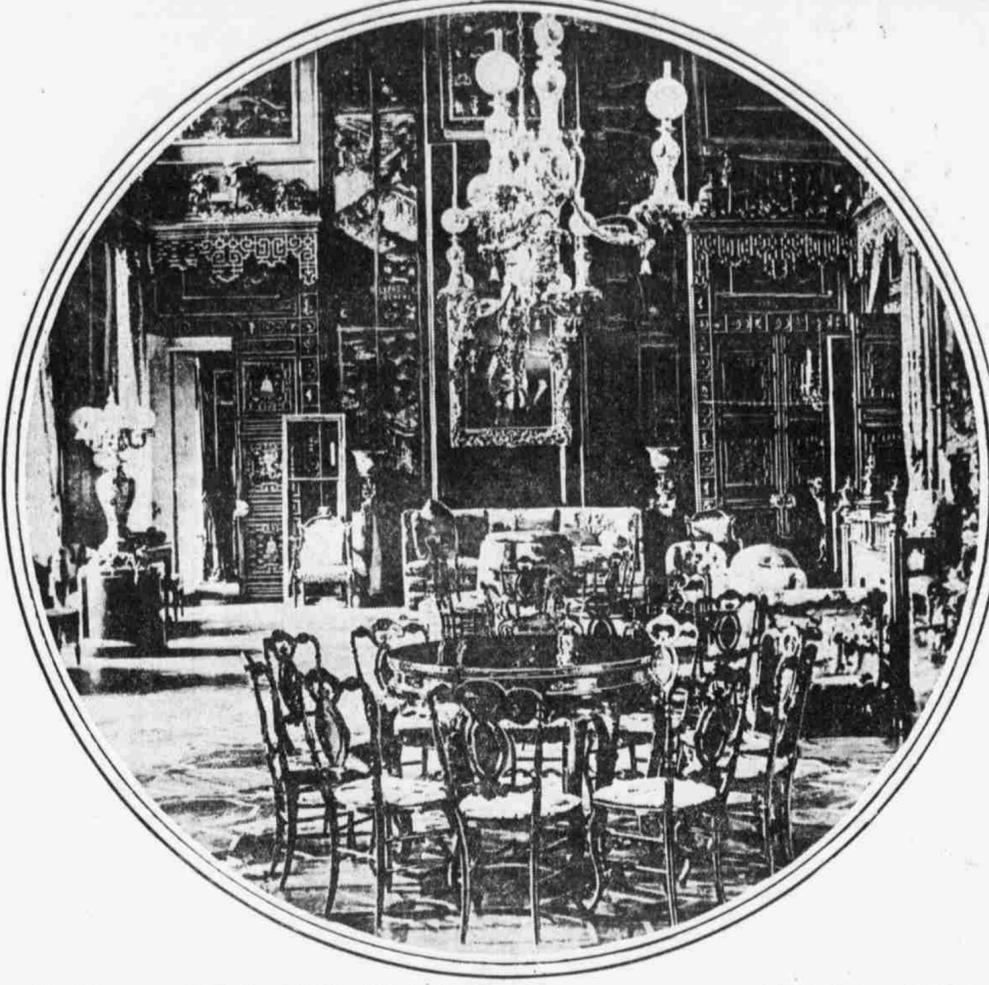
CHAPTER V (Continued)

MR. MANULOFF was a spendthrift who never could deny himself any of the good things of life. These are always considered to be expensive ones, and consequently he had expensive tastes. His capacity of police agent had allowed him to blackmail to advantage people against whom he had discovered, or thought he had discovered, something in the way of dangerous political opinions. One of his favorite occupations consisted in going about among these people and hinting to them that unless they showed themselves willing to minister to his numerous wants they might find themselves one day in a very tight corner. Generally these tactics proved successful, until he was caught red-handed in Paris, where he had been sent on a special mission, tampering with the funds of which he had control. This accident caused him to be dismissed. But the man knew far too much and had been far too advanced in the confidence of his superiors for them to be able to do without his services, so he was allowed to return to Russia and enroll himself in journalism, thus to make himself useful again. He had a wonderful intelligence and was an excellent worker and talked fluently in most of the European languages. He therefore made his way up the ladder once more, until at last he became the private secretary of Mr. Sturmer when the latter was Prime Minister, an advancement that proved fatal to him because it brought him to prison. But of this I shall speak later on when touching upon the events which culminated in the murder of Rasputin.

The "Monk" Becomes a "Prophet"

Such were the men who virtually controlled every action of the "Prophet," and it is no wonder if guided by them he sometimes contrived to influence never the Tzar himself, but the latter's Ministers and officials, who had been told, they did not even know by whom, but probably by the loud voice of the public, that to do anything to please Rasputin was to secure for oneself the good graces of the highest people in the land. As time went on the "Prophet" showed himself less and less in public, remaining among a small circle of personal friends, whose interest it was to represent him as a kind of Indian idol, unapproachable except to his worshipers.

And in the meanwhile the ladies who had been the first artisans of Rasputin's favor were still holding religious meetings under his guidance and still seeking inspiration from his teachings. They believed him to be a real saint, refused to admit that he could do anything wrong and refused to accept as true the rumors which went about and which, unfortunately for the "Prophet's" reputation, were but too exact, that he was fond of every kind of riotous living, that he spent his nights in drunken revels and that he gave his best



The "Chinese room" in the Tsarskoie-Selo. This chamber is considered the most exquisitely furnished in the Imperial Palace, but it was not too fine for Rasputin's use.

attention to brandy mixed with champagne. His admirers persisted in seeing in him the prophet of the Almighty and believed that they could never be saved unless they conformed to all the directions which it might please him to give them.

The Rasputin craze became more violent than ever during the few months which immediately preceded the war, and it very nearly

verged upon complete fanaticism for his personality. Everything that he did was considered to be holy. His insolence and arrogance, displayed with increasing violence every day and hour, were almost incredible. This illiterate peasant dared to send dirty little scraps of paper on which he had scribbled a coarse message to ministers and public men ordering them to do this or that according to his

pleasure, and presuming to give them advice, which was never his own, in matters of the utmost public importance. At first people had laughed at him, but very soon they had discovered that he could revenge himself on them quickly and effectively, and this had led to the general determination not to interfere with him any more, but to leave him severely alone, no matter what extravagance he might commit or say. And when it came to the extortion of large sums of money, those who were challenged to pay them generally did so with alacrity, as happened in the case of several banks to which Mr. Manuloff applied for funds, with the help of these illiterate scraps of paper upon which Rasputin had scribbled his desire that the money should be put at the disposal of his "protege."

What I have been writing is fact, which has been proved publicly, and never contradicted by so much as one single word of protestation. It accounts for the hatred with which the "Prophet" came to be viewed. As time went on it was felt that something ought to be attempted against the impostor who had contrived to break through barriers one could have believed to be absolutely impregnable. But no one knew how this was to be done, and at the time I am referring to the idea of a political assassination of Rasputin had not entered into the people's heads. It was a woman who was to bring it before the public in the following circumstances.

Rasputin's Return to Siberia

During the spring of the year 1914, Rasputin, to the general surprise of everybody, declared to his friends that he intended to leave the capital and to return for a few months to his native village of Pokrowskoie in Siberia to rest from his labors. Strenuous efforts were made to detain him in Petrograd, but he remained inflexible and rudely thrust aside those who would fain have kept him back. He declared that he was tired and weary of the existence which he had been leading the last year, and that the various annoyances and difficulties that had been put in his way by his numerous enemies had quite sickened him. Such, at least, was the explanation which he chose to give and to which he stuck. Others, it is true, declared that the real reason for his departure was that he had been given to understand that he would do better to absent himself from St. Petersburg during the time when the visit of the President of the French Republic was expected, as his presence there might prove embarrassing from more than one point of view. The hint had enraged him, and he had determined to go away for a much longer time than he had been told to do. He had even declared to a few of his closest friends that he was not going to return to the capital any more, but that he would remain in Siberia, where, as he graphically put it, "there was a great deal more money to be made than anywhere else in the world."

Whether the above is strictly true or not, I am not in a position to say, but it does not sound improbable. The fact remains that Rasputin left St. Petersburg for Pokrowskoie, where he arrived in the first days of June, 1914, accompanied by the "Sisters," who were his constant companions. He was received with such honors that he might have been the sovereign himself instead of the simple peasant he was. A crowd composed of several thousand men and women met him at the gates of the village and threw themselves at his feet imploring his blessing and calling upon him to pray with them, and to show them the real way to God which he was supposed to be the only one in Russia capable of indicating. For a few days this kind of thing continued, and Rasputin's house was literally besieged by crowds of people who had gathered at Pokrowskoie from all parts of Siberia eager to pay homage to their national hero, for such he was considered to be. Rasputin smiled and chuckled and rubbed his hands, as was his wont in those moments when he allowed his satisfaction at anything to overpower him. If in St. Petersburg he had been considered as a prophet, here in this remote corner of Siberia he was fast becoming a kind of small god at whose shrine a whole nation was worshipping. This was just the sort of thing to please him and to make him forget any small unpleasantnesses he might have experienced before his departure from the capital.

(CONTINUED TOMORROW)

RAINBOW'S END

By REX BEACH

Author of "The Spoilers," "The Barrier," "Heart of the Sunset"

A novel of love, hidden treasure and rebellion in beautiful, mysterious Cuba during the exciting days of the revolt against Spain.

CHAPTER III (Continued)

ROSA'S face, as she looked at the two men, was white and worried. For a time the three of them sat silent; then the American said slowly, "You'll be shot if you're caught."

Rosa whispered, "Yes! Think of it!"

"Some one must run chances," Esteban averred. "We're fighting tyranny; all Cuba is ablaze. I must do my part."

"But sooner or later you'll be discovered—then what?" persisted O'Reilly.

Esteban shrugged. "Who knows? There'll be time enough when—"

"What of Rosa?"

At this question the brother stirred uneasily and dropped his eyes. O'Reilly laid a hand upon his arm. "You have no right to jeopardize her safety. Without you, to whom could she turn?"

The girl flashed her admirer a grateful glance. "Senor, you for one would see that she—"

"But—I'm going away," O'Reilly felt rather than saw Rosa start, for his face was averted. Purposely he kept his gaze upon Esteban, for he didn't wish to see the slow pallor that rose in the girl's cheeks, the look of pain that crept into her eyes. "I came here to tell you both goodby. I may be gone for some time, I—I don't know when I can get back."

O'Reilly Joins the Rebels

"I'm sorry," Esteban told him, with genuine regret. "We have grown very fond of you. You will leave many friends here in Matanzas, I'm sure. But you will come back before long, eh?"

"Yes, as soon as I can. That is, if—"

He did not finish the sentence.

"Good, you're one of us. In the meantime I'll remember what you say, and at least I'll be careful." By no means wanting in tact, Esteban rose briskly and, after shaking hands with O'Reilly, left the two lovers to say farewell as best suited them.

But for once O'Reilly's ready tongue was silent. The laughter was gone from his blue eyes when he turned to the girl at his side.

"You say you are going away?" Rosa inquired, breathlessly. "But why?"

"I'm going partly because of this war and partly because of—something else. I tried to tell you yesterday, but I couldn't. When the revolution started everybody thought it was merely a local uprising, and I wrote my company to that effect; but, bless you, it has spread like fire, and now the whole eastern end of the island is ablaze."

"Esteban says it will be more terrible than the Ten Years' War."

"God forbid! And yet all the old fighters are back again. Nobody believed that Gomez had returned, but it's

true. And the Macos are here, too, from Costa Rica. Antonio has already gained control of most of Santiago Province, and he's sweeping westward. Of course, the Spaniards minimize the reports of his success, and we, here, don't understand what's really going on. Anyhow, business has stopped, and my employers have ordered me home to find out what's happened to their profits. They seem to hold me personally responsible for this insurrection."

"I see. And when you have told them the truth you will come back. Is that it?"

"I—Perhaps."

"You said there was something else—"

O'Reilly's hesitation became an embarrassed silence. He tried to laugh it off.

"There is, otherwise I'd stay right here and tell my penurious friends to whistle for their profits. It seems I'm cursed with a fatal beauty. You may have noticed it? No? Well, perhaps it's a magnificent business ability that I have. Anyhow, the president of my company has a notion that I'd make him a good son-in-law."

"I—Oh!" cried Rosa.

"At her tone O'Reilly hurried on: "These rich men have the most absurd ideas. I suppose I'll have to—"

"Then you are in love, senor?"

The young man nodded vigorously. "Indeed I am—with the sweetest girl in Cuba. That's the whole trouble. That's why I'm hurrying home to resign before I'm fired." Not daring to look too long or too deeply into Rosa Varona's eyes until she had taken in the whole truth, he waited, staring at his feet. "I'm sort of glad it has come to a show-down and I can speak out. I'm hoping she'll miss me." After a moment he ventured, "Will she—will you, Rosa?"

A Woman's Charms

"I? Miss you?" Rosa lifted her brows in pretended amazement. Then she tipped her head daintily to one side, as if weighing his question earnestly. "You are amusing, of course, but—I won't have much time to think about you, for I am so soon to be married."

"Married? What?" O'Reilly started violently, and the girl exclaimed, with well-forgotten concern:

"Oh, senor. You have wounded yourself again on that thorn-bush. This place is growing up to brambles."

"It wasn't my finger! Something pierced me through the heart. Married? Non-sense!"

"Indeed! Do you think I'm so ugly nobody would have me?"

"Good Lord You—"

"I won't tell you the truth when you know it so well."

"The richest man in Matanzas asked for my hand this very afternoon."

"Who? Mario de Castano?"

"Yes."

O'Reilly laughed with relief, and though

Rosa tried to look offended, she was forced to smile. "He's fat, I know," she admitted, "and he makes funny noises when he breathes; but he is richer than Croesus and I adore rich men."

"I hate 'em!" announced O'Reilly. Then for a second time he took Rosa's dimpled hand, saying earnestly: "I'm sure you know now why I make love so badly, dear. It's my Irish conscience. And you'll wait until I come back, won't you?"

"Will you be gone—very long?" she asked.

O'Reilly looked deeply now into the dark eyes turned to his and found that at last there was no coquetry in them anywhere—nothing but a lonesome, hungry yearning—and with a glad, inebriated exclamation he held out his arms. Rosa Varona crept into them; then with a sigh she upturned her lips to his.

"I'll wait forever," she said.

CHAPTER IV RETRIBUTION

ALTHOUGH for a long time Dona Isabel had been sure in her own mind that Pancho Cueto, her administrator, was robbing her, she had never mustered courage to call him to a reckoning. And there was a reason for her cowardice. Nevertheless, De Castano's blunt accusation, coupled with her own urgent needs, served to fix her resolution, and on the day after the merchant's visit she sent for the overseer, who at the time was living on one of the plantations.

Once the message was on its way, Isabel fell into a condition bordering upon panic, and was half minded to countermand her order. She spent an evening of suspense and a miserable night. This last, however, was nothing unusual with her; she was accustomed to unpleasant dreams, and she was not surprised when old familiar shapes came to harass her.

Nor, in view of her somnambulistic vagaries, was she greatly concerned to find, when she awoke in the morning, that her slippers were stained and that her skirt was bedragged with dew and filled with burs.

Scarcely a month passed that she did not walk in her sleep.

Cueto was plainly curious to learn why he had been sent for, but since he asked no questions, his employer was forced to open the subject herself. Several times he led up to it unsuccessfully; then she took the plunge. Through dry, white lips she began:

A Battle of Wits

"My dear Pancho, times are hard. The plantations are falling, and so—"

Pancho Cueto's eyes were set close to his nose, his face was long and thin and harsh; he regarded the speaker with such a sinister, unblinking stare that she could scarcely finish: "—and so I—can no longer afford to retain you as administrator."

"Times will improve," he said.

"Impossible! This war threatens to bring utter ruin; and now that Esteban

THE STORY THUS FAR

DON ESTEBAN VARONA, one of the wealthiest Spaniards in Cuba, has hoarded the jewels and gold acquired through the sale of slaves and the profits derived from his extensive sugar plantations in a secret chamber at the bottom of a well. Rumors of his treasure have spread throughout the land, and after the death of his first wife, the crafty, scheming Isabel finally becomes the second Dona Varona.

SEBASTIAN, Esteban's most trusted slave, is the only one to share the secret of the hoarded wealth, and Isabel vainly tries to get information from the black. She even seeks to get at Sebastian by suggesting that Esteban sell the slave's daughter Evangelina. This the master steadfastly refuses to do, until one night, after he has become drunk in attempting to escape his wife's nagging, he places Evangelina as the stake in a game and loses.

ROSA and ESTEBAN, the children of the distressed planter and his first wife, leave their beds and appear in the room before their father to beg that Evangelina, their nurse, be retained. But their prayers are to no avail. When Sebastian pleads with his master not to let his daughter go, Don Esteban, infuriated, turns upon the slave and for the first time in his life has the black chained to a window grating and dogged.

Sebastian is dying from thirst and the torture of the flies upon his wounds when Isabel appears at the window and asks him again if there is a treasure. He finally says yes. But further information she fails to get. When Esteban once more attacks Sebastian the slave tears himself free, kills his former master and several others before he is finally shot.

PANCHO CUETO, manager of the Varona plantations, also feels certain that there is a treasure, and he lays plans to get it.

DON MARIO DE CASTANO, a wealthy sugar merchant, calls upon Isabel to ask for the hand of Rosa. He is fat, unattractive and well along in years, but is conceited enough to feel that his wealth will win the step-mother's support. But despite the latter's willingness, she holds out little hope. Rosa loves another.

JOHNNIE O'REILLY, more commonly called THE O'REILLY, is a young American representing a New York firm in Cuba. He is Rosa's lover. While the two are talking in a secluded part of the estate Esteban joins them and confesses that he is a spy for Colonel Lopez, leader of the Cuban insurrectionists.

and Rosa are home they spend money like water. I groan with poverty."

"Yes, they are extravagant. It is the more reason for me to remain in your service."

"No, no! I tell you I'm bankrupt."

"So? Then the remedy is simple; sell a part of your land."

Although this suggestion came naturally enough, Dona Isabel turned cold, and felt her smile stiffen into a grimace. She wondered if Cueto could be feeling her out deliberately. "Sell the Varona lands?" she queried, after a momentary struggle with herself. "Esteban would rise from his grave. No. It was his wish that the plantations go to his children intact."

"And his wife's is sacred to you, eh?" Cueto nodded his approval, although his smile was disconcerting. "An admirable sentiment! It does you honor. But speaking on this subject, I am reminded of that dispute with Jose Oroz over the boundary to La Joya. He is a rascal, that Oroz; he would steal the sap out of your standing cane if he could. I have promised to show him the original deed to La Joya and to furnish him with the proofs about the boundary line. That would be better than a lawsuit, wouldn't it?"

"Decidedly! But—I will settle with him myself."

Cueto lifted an admonitory hand, his face alight with the faintest glimmer of ironic mirth. "I couldn't trust you to the

mercies of that rascal," he said, piously. "No, I shall go on as I am, even at a sacrifice to myself. I love Don Esteban's children as my very own; and you, senora—"

Isabel knew that she must win a complete victory at once or accept irremediable defeat.

"Never!" she interrupted, with a tone of finality. "I can't accept your sacrifice. I am not worthy. Kindly arrange to turn over your books of account at once. I shall make you as handsome a present as my circumstances will permit in recognition of your long and faithful service."

Then Pancho Cueto did an unexpected thing: he laughed shortly and shook his head.

Dona Isabel was ready to faint and her voice quavered as she went on: "Understand me, we part the best of friends despite all I have heard against you. I do not believe these stories people tell, for you probably have enemies. Even if all they say were true I should force myself to be lenient because of your affection for my husband."

Pancho Cueto Scores

The man rose, still smiling. "It is I who have been lenient," said he.

"Eh? Speak plainly."

"Gladly. I have long suspected that Don Esteban hid the deeds of his property with the rest of his valuables, and now that you admit—"

Dona Isabel recoiled sharply. "Admit! Are you mad? Decidedly! What are you

talking about?" Her eyes met his bravely enough, but she could feel her lips trembling loosely.

Castling aside all pretense, the overseer exclaimed: "Por el amor de Dios! An end to this! I know why you sent for me. You think I have been robbing you. Well, to be honest, so I have. Why should I toil as I do while you and those twins live here in luxury and idleness, squandering money to which you have no right?"

"Have I lost my reason?" gasped the widow. "No right?"

"At least no better right than I. Don't you understand? You have no title to those plantations! They are mine, for I have paid the taxes out of my own pockets now these many years."

"Taxes! What do you mean?"

"I paid them. The receipts are in my name."

"God! Such perfidy! And you who knew him!"

The Final Straw

"The deeds have been lost for so long that the property would have reverted to the crown had it not been for me. You doubt that, eh? Well, appeal to the court and you will find that it is true. For that matter, the officials make new laws to fit each case, and should they learn that Esteban Varona died intestate they would arrange somehow to seize all his property and leave you without a roof over your head. Fortunately, I can prevent that, for I have a title that will stand in want of a better one."

"There was a momentary silence while the unhappy woman struggled with herself. Then:

"You took advantage of my ignorance of business to rob me," she declared. "Well, I know something about the Government officials; if they would make a law to fit my case they will make one to fit yours. When I tell them what you have done perhaps you will not fare so well with them as you expect." She was fighting now with the desperation of one cornered.

"Perhaps," Cueto shrugged. "That is what I want to talk to you about, if only you will be sensible. Now then, let us be frank. Inasmuch as we're both in much the same fix, hadn't we better continue our present arrangements?" He stared unblinkingly at his listener. "Oh, I mean it! Is it not better for you to be content with what my generosity prompts me to give rather than to risk ruin for both of us by grasping for too much?"

"Merciful God! The outrage! I warrant you have grown rich through your stealing." Isabel's voice had gone flat with consternation.

"Rich? Well, not exactly, but comfortably well off." Cueto actually smiled again. "No doubt my frankness is a shock to you. You are angry at my proposition, eh? Never mind. You will think better of it in time, if you are a sensible woman."

"What a fiend! Have you no sentiment?"

"Oh, senora! I am all sentiment. Don Esteban was my benefactor. I reverse his memory, and I feel it my duty to see that his family does not want. That is why I have provided for you and will continue to provide—in proper measure. But now, since at last we enjoy such confidential relations, let us have no more of these miserable suspicions of each other. Let us entirely forget this unpleasant misunderstanding and be the same good friends as before."

Thief Versus Thief

Having said this, Pancho Cueto stood silent a moment in polite expectancy; then, receiving no intelligible reply, he bowed low and left the room.

To the avaricious Dona Isabel Cueto's frank acknowledgment of theft was maddening, and the realization that she was helpless, nay, dependent upon his charity for her living fairly crucified her proud spirit.

All day she brooded and by the time evening came she had worked herself into such a state of nerves that she could eat no dinner. Locking herself into her room, she paced the floor, now wringing her hands, now twisting in agony upon her bed, now biting her wrists in an endeavor to clear her head and to devise some means of outwitting this treacherous overseer. But mere thought of the law frightened her; the longer she pondered her situation the more she realized her own impotence. There was no doubt that the courts were corrupt; they were notoriously venal at best, and this war had made them worse. Graft was rampant everywhere.

To confess publicly that Esteban Varona had left no deeds, no title to his property, would indeed be the sheerest folly. No, Cueto had her at his mercy.

Isabel's Torture

Some time during the course of the evening a wild idea came to Isabel. Knowing that the manager would spend the night beneath her roof, she planned to kill him. At first it seemed a simple thing to do—merely a matter of a dagger or a pistol, while he slept—but further thought revealed appalling risks and difficulties, and she decided to wait. Poison was far safer.

That night she lay awake a long time putting her scheme into final shape, and then for an interval that seemed longer she hung poised in those penumbral regions midway between wakefulness and slumber. Through her mind meanwhile there passed a whirling phantasmagoria, an interminable procession of figures, of memories, real yet unreal, convincing yet unconvincing. When she did at last find all awareness of reality the effect was merely to enhance the vividness of these phantasms, to lend substance to her vague visions.

(CONTINUED TOMORROW)