

## IT WAS FATE

The flickering beams of two feeble candles gleamed upon the circle of implacable faces.

From time to time they turned their searching glances upon the fair captive, who shrunk from their eyes, and cowered in the corner. Two men with gleaming knives guarded her.

The leader sat quietly at the head of the rough table, his face buried between his hands. Occasionally he raised his head and regarded the prisoner with a piercing gaze, as if he would read her to her very soul. Whenever she encountered this searching scrutiny she cringed as from a lash. The very air was intense with a nameless horror.

Suddenly the leader arose from his seat with a burst of terrible energy, stretching out his arm with a menacing gesture.

"Olga Oronkoff," he thundered, "you have been nurtured in our midst, and our choicest treasures have been freely rendered unto you. You were freely admitted to the secrets of the inner council. You pledged your honor and your life to the cause of liberty with the knowledge that death alone would release you from your vows. And how have you kept them? You have betrayed us to our enemies, and many of our bravest and best have suffered death, or what is worse—the mines of Siberia! The blood of slaughtered brothers and sisters call from the tomb for vengeance upon you.

"You know the penalty provid-

ed for such as you. Yonder is the clock of death! When the hands shall point to the hour destined by the council, overwhelming vapors shall be liberated, and you shall perish slowly, inch by inch. When your friends, the police spies, come at your appointed hour, they shall find your fair body a thing of horror, and they shall tremble for the vengeance of the Scarlet Ensign."

A low murmur of approval ran the length of the table as the speaker ceased. In the dim light of the candles the face of the prisoner blanched gray. Her lips moved as if in prayer, but no sound issued from them.

Suddenly she broke from her captors and falling to her knees stretched out her clasped hands with wild prayers for mercy. She was roughly seized and bound upon the table. The clock was placed close to her face, and the hands set in motion. In the silence of the room the ticking of the clock pulsated with terrible distinctness. The line of men and women filed slowly past.

Left to herself the girl struggled horribly. Her eyes remained fixed on the dial, and the ticking of the timepiece roared in her ears like the waves of the sea. In her efforts to scream the rough gag was choking her. The grinning spirits of those sacrificed through her gamboled upon her shrinking flesh. Suffocation throbbled in her breast.

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The police commander regarded the clock curiously. Its hands