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THE LOVELY NIHILIST.

Why a Russian Beauty Refused an English Guerdon.

From the London Week.

Rather less than a week ago, during the spring season, at E——, pleasantest of German watering places, three persons, who seemed inseparable, walked daily together in the grounds of the Kursaal. One was a beautiful Russian girl, Ida Koratine, who was always attended by her brother, ex-Colonel in the Czar's army. The third was a young English officer, Captain the Hon Charles Guerdon of the Eighteenth Lancers. It was evident to all who observed this gay youngster that he was deeply in love with his Russian friend's sister.

Was she in love with him? On this point Guerdon himself could have made no satisfactory answer. He had been ordered to E—— by doctors to recruit his health after a hunting accident, and had made the acquaintance of the Koratines at the table d'hote. They were persons of high birth, in affluent circumstances, and of very pleasing manners. Count Koratine, who was not more than 30, had seen a good deal of military service, had traveled much, and was the most companionable of men always ready to join in any amusement, to chat or to listen to others chatting. He quite won Charley Guerdon's heart by his horsemanship (for he had two or three splendid animals and rode every morning with his sister) and also by his bright manner at ecarte table, for he played any stakes you pleased, without caring whether he won or lost. As for Ida Koratine, she was the most delicious of girls. Tall and graceful, with the fair wavy hair and pink complexion which bespoke her Lithunian blood, she had large dark eyes, at once grave and soft, and a little mouth which could smile with exquisite sweetness. Ida was, like most high-born Russian ladies, a capital linguist, speaking English and French with faultless accuracy, and with just a slight foreign accent, which lent piquancy to her talk. She was, moreover, an accomplished pianist and singer; so was her brother.

Sometimes after dinner the Koratines would invite their "English enemy," as they called him for fun, to come to their apartments to take a cup of Caravan tea; and then, at his request, they would sing him some of the ballads of their country. Koratine played on the zithern, Ida on the piano; and the count's well-trained baritone voice blending with his sister's pure soprano made rare melody. Their Lithunian songs were pervaded by a dreamy sadness which grew upon the Englishman, making him fall into long reveries, during which he was glad that there were no candles in the room, but only the spring twilight that veiled his emotion. After every one of Ida's songs Charley Guerdon became more and more in love with her, though he gradually discovered that she had a few strange, ungirlish tastes, which, at first pleased him less than her piano-playing. She was a deadly pistol shot, and practised every day with her brother at a target which had been set up in an alley of the hotel garden for their convenience by the landlord. The rapidity with which the brother and sister loaded, the cool quickness of their aim, their unerring precision in making patterns of crosses or lines on the cards at which they fired, filled the Englishman with surprise the first time he witnessed their performance.

"I say, Miss Ida," he remarked, "it won't do for me to quarrel with you. You would very soon call me out and pink me."

"Oh, we are not practising for duels," laughed Ida. "We have wolves in our country and a girl should know how to protect herself."

The peculiar way in which Ida emphasized the word "wolves," and the light that kindled for a moment in her eyes as she spoke, ought to have arrested Guerdon's attention, but they did not. He had noticed, however, that the Koratines appeared to have a mystery in their lives; they had induced Count Koratine to leave the army, and they expressed radical or nihilist opinions rather curious to hear from persons of their station. Ida seemed to be much more of a revolutionist than her brother. She often questioned the Englishman about his country's free institutions and listened with a wistful eagerness to his confused explanations, for constitutional law was not much studied in the 18th lancers, and Charley Guerdon was puzzled to define in what his birthright of liberty consisted. Now and then Ida betrayed too unguardedly her love for political conversations and then her brother would interfere with a joke and a caress, which always checked her, for every word of his was law in her eyes.

Guerdon had been struck and touched from the outset by the whole-hearted affection which the brother and sister bore to each other. They were orphans, and Koratine's love for Ida had much in it of paternal kindness; but Ida looked up to her brother as a hero, an infallible being, a demigod, and her mere manner of clinging to his arm when they walked, of brightening when he spoke to her, of putting up her forehead to be kissed when she wished him good-night, revealed the extent of her devotion. Now it naturally occurred to Guerdon that so excellent a sister ought to make a perfect wife, so that when he had known and loved her about a month he began to hint timidly at a proposal, but she always parried these advances merrily as though he were joking. If he sulked she smiled at him with irresistible archness and sung him a ballad about a miserable Russian peasant who had fallen in love with a Lorelei, or water-witch, who persisted in asking him at the end of every stanza whether he could change his nature and live under water with her?

"Well, but you are not a Lorelei, Miss Ida," Guerdon exclaimed impatiently when he had heard this song twice.

"Perhaps I am a Pyrie, though," she answered with a smile.

"What is a Pyrie?"

"A fire-witch, in the modernized form, a girl who delights in fire-arms, shells, petroleum and other horrid engines of revolutionary warfare," saying which she laughed with rather forced gayety.

Guerdon made no answer, but hoped that time might work for him. It thus befell that he remained two months at E—, seeing Ida every day, and he was just beginning to feel dispirited by the consciousness that his suit made no progress when unexpectedly he received a summons to hurry back to England on account of his elder brother's illness. As the younger son of a peer, Charley Guerdon might be said to have "expectations" in case of his brother's death; but he loved him too well to think of that, and was on the contrary sincerely grieved at the news. He hastened to pack his traps and then said good-by to the Koratines. He found them both in the garden, looking sad, for he had sent his servant to apprise them of what had occurred. Ida especially was pale, and there was just the slightest quiver in her voice as she said,—'Good-by, Capt. Guerdon; we are sorry to lose you."

"But I shall return," he replied. "I hope my brother will recover, and then I shall hasten back to E——. You will still be here, will you not?"

"Perhaps," she answered evasively.

"Well, but you are surely not going to leave E—— just as the summer season is beginning. Let me go away with the hope that we shall meet again."

"Perhaps," she rejoined anew. Then, as if to take the chill of despondency out of her words, she plucked a branch of May blossoms off a tree and handed it to the Englishman. "Take that to your brother, and let it carry health to him," she said. "I have the superstition of flowers, so you see I am not quite a Nihilist."

Guerdon took her hands, and, at an approving sign from her brother, drew her to him, and kissed her on the brow. It was a chaste kiss, hope was rekindled in his heart as he gave it.

The illness of Charley Guerdon's brother turned out to be a serious affair. It lasted more than six weeks, and during that time Charley was unremitting in his attendance at the bedside. In such spare moments as he could snatch, he wrote several times to the Koratines, and once he received an answer from the count with a postscript in Ida's hand; but after that he got no more replies. Charley had never been a newspaper reader, and the world might have gone all wrong without his hearing anything about it. He sometimes glanced at the *Field*, or at one of the military periodicals, to look for army promotions, but into the *Times* he never dipped, and thus he was kept from learning the grim reason which prevented his Russian friends from writing to him. He was not fated to ascertain it for a long while, for when Lord Guerdon became convalescent his doctors ordered him off on a yachting cruise, and Charley accompanied him. The brothers spent two full months sailing over the seas and receiving no news, till at length they put in at Cadiz and landed. It was in this city that Lord Guerdon, perusing a batch of London papers one morning, while his brother sat at the open window looking listlessly over the waters of the harbor, exclaimed: "I say, Charley, didn't you tell me you had a friend called Count Koratine?"

"Yes. What of him?" answered Charley, turning round with a sudden flush.

"Why, your friend is going to be beheaded for an attempt to murder. Read that!"

Charley rose, doubting whether he was awake. He took the newspaper and with reeling senses read the account of an attempted political assassination about which all Europe had been talking for the last three months. An exalted personage—one of the half-dozen who hold the destinies of Europe in their hands—had come to E——, and had been shot at by Count Koratine. Arrested on the spot, along with his sister, the count was now proved to be the head of a wide-spread nihilist and socialist conspiracy. His bullet had missed its aim, but as it had killed a person who sat beside his intended victim, he was to be tried for his head, and the Countess Ida too.

"I must leave for Germany this day," faltered Charley Guerdon, as the paper fell from his hand. He was so hoarse that he could hardly articulate.

His brother gazed at him with consternation. "Great heavens!" he said; "you don't mean to say this girl is anything to you, Charley?"

"She is everything to me, was the younger brother's answer. Two hours later Guerdon had left for Cadiz.

The trial of the Koratines had taken place at D—— and Ida had been acquitted, but the count had been sentenced to death. Guerdon heard this as he journeyed, and he reached D—— on the eve of the day appointed for the count's execution. His first step was to repair to the central police office and inquire where the Countess Ida lived. He was informed that she was lodging in a small house near the prison, with two servants, but that she was under orders to quit the kingdom on the morrow. The Englishman hastened to the house indicated with all the dust of travel on him. It was past midnight, but Ida received him at once. He found her writing by the fireside in that dismal parlor of her lodging house. She was dressed in deepest mourning, and her features, blanched by her grief and long sojourn in prison, were as those of a statue. But she held out her hand to Guerdon as if nothing much had happened since they had parted.

"Give me no condolences," she said, interrupting the Englishman as he opened his mouth to speak. "I suppose you come to me as a friend?"

"Can you doubt it?" he faltered. "Oh, Ida; God knows what I have suffered on hearing this."

"I want you to render me a service," she said, not heeding his remarks. "You are the only friend I have on earth now. You must go and witness my brother's execution, and then come back and tell me what is the last thing he did before dying. I wanted to go myself, but they would not let me. The execution takes place at 7, in the prison, and you must contrive some means of getting in."

Guerdon hesitated, but a beseeching look from Ida nerved him. "Would you refuse me this?" she asked sadly. My brother on the scaffold will make a sign which is intended for me, and upon which the whole of my life may depend. I must have somebody there to see it."

"I will go then," muttered Guerdon hoarsely.

He went, and was back with Ida at 8 the next day. Heaven knows what he felt and what he looked like; his appearance struck the Russian girl speechless for a moment. But she did not weep; hers was the sorrow that sheds inward tears all a life long. She questioned the Englishman with a glance, folding her hands over her breast as if she were waiting an order.

"He kissed the crucifix," said Guerdon in a low voice. Ida sighed.

"Then I am to abandon the work of conspiracy, and to lead a new life," she answered, bowing her head. "Thank you, Capt. Guerdon; and good bv. I am going to Strelechtzki, where the plague is, to act as hospital nurse."

"Oh! let me give you a home, Ida," the Englishman answered, feeling all his love well up in a sob of anguish.

"No," she replied, with a wan smile and a shake of the head; "you could not brave the world's prejudice by saying that you were proud of my brother, as I am. To me he is a martyr who died for his country. We look at these things differently to what you do. Let me be alone to mourn my brother. Good by again, and forgive me. . . ."

"Good-by," Guerdon moaned, as he raised Ida's hands to his lips. He felt that the strange girl was right, and that there was a gulf between him and her. But he would have given worlds to bridge it.

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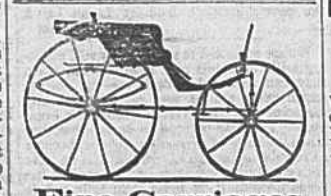

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