

# THE MYSTERY OF COUNT LANDRINOF.

BY FRED WHISHAW

COPYRIGHT 1893 BY THE AMERICAN PRESS ASSOCIATION.

## CHAPTER I. THE MISSING COUNT.

It was in the pavilion at Lord's that I received the telegram which has in a way transformed my life, and it all happened like this: We were playing our annual match against the M. C. C.—but stay. You don't know as yet who "we" are. Let me explain. "We" are (or, alas, were, in so far as I am concerned) the boys of Toddlestone school, and it was our glory, as well as the dread ordeal of those who took part in the match, to appear once in the year at Lord's cricket ground, generally about the first days of the summer holidays, in order to exhibit our proficiency in the great game before the eyes of a delighted and admiring world.

Well, it was my last term at school—for I was in my eighteenth year—and I was due at Oxford in October—and I think perhaps dear old Adkins may have allowed this fact to influence him a little when he gave me my colors, entitling me to play at Lord's. After much vigorous play we won the game by four wickets, in which I made my first and only "century."

Then came the congratulations at the pavilion, following the cheers that greet the path of him who retires in glory from the wicket; then the refreshing shower bath and the sense of conviction that this is the supreme moment of one's life, and that if it were not for the hopes and anticipations that lurk in the word "varsity" one might appropriately lie down to the cadence of "Nunc dimittis" and wake no more.

And then, just as—with many elated and joyful school companions—I prepared to depart for that dinner which was to crown the glorious day, then the telegram.

"By George, Boris," said one of the pale, unwholesome looking documents handed to me, "your friends are pretty smart with the congratulations. The match must have been reported in the evening papers. I didn't know how we were to be honored. Did you, Adkins?"

"I didn't know old Boris was going to make a century!" said Adkins.

I tore open the envelope and read the message.

"Good Lord, what's the matter? Look at the color of his face!" I heard the man say.

"Let me sit down," I said, and for a moment I sat down.

I sat and reread my telegram, while a flood in my head seemed to surge and prevent my brain working sufficiently to grasp the meaning of the message.

The message ran thus:

1818, Countess Landrinof, St. Petersburg, to Boris Landrinof, Toddlestone: To all me as soon as possible. Will have to be in terrible distress about your father.

"What is it, old man? Not bad news, and hope," said Adkins.

"Heaven only knows what it means!" I murmured. "Read it, will you? My distaste seems to buzz so. Is my poor father dead, do you think?"

"I believe I burst into tears or made lock myself otherwise supremely ridiculous. Spiridon's sudden blow was too much of a wreck for me in the midst of my delirious joy."

Adkins read the message.

"Oh, no, old man," he said soothingly at first. "I should say certainly not that; then by this telegram. Cheer up. We'll stay at once for more news."

"Yes, we'll do that," I said. "I'm sorry I'm such a fool, but I didn't know the old man was even ill."

"Perhaps it's only money," suggested Teogood.

"Oh, no, it can't be that," I sighed. It could not, I was sure; for my father

And then—the telegram.

was one of the largest landowners in our part of Russia and had, besides, iron works in St. Petersburg and other sources of revenue. He was, in fact, a very rich man.

"Cheer up, anyhow, old boy," continued Adkins. "I'm sure it will be all right about the count. What about Oxford, though—does it mean you won't be able to go up? After your innings today that would be a double pity, for we should look to see you tried for the varsity—and carefully tried."

"Oh, don't talk about cricket! I can't bear it!" I groaned. "I feel as though I had played my last game."

I did feel this. I felt as though some heavy cloud had suddenly fallen upon my future, blotting out all hope of happiness, present or future. This was ridiculous and foolish, of course, but one is always inclined in youth, to exaggerate the power of misfortune. Misfortunes do bow the head for the time being, no doubt, but as the tree bent with the sudden downfall of snow will, after a day or two, cast its burden and stand upright once more to the winds of heaven, so does the young heart free itself in time of its load of misfortune, however heavy, and perhaps gradually forget that which once seemed too great to be borne.

I would not go to the dinner lest I should throw a shadow over the rest of the party, but I returned to the hotel and sat down to think quietly over this blow and its possible nature and consequences. I loved my father intensely. He was a Russian, as his name would indicate, and so, of course—in name—was I. But my mother was English. My father had met her at Cowes while yachting and had brought her home to our huge estates near Kazan as his bride. I was the only child. By special permission of the czar (Alexander II, who was still reigning when I was born) I was allowed to be baptized into the English communion, to which, of course, mother belonged, and for which my father had the greatest respect, perhaps more than for his own branch of the church. Consequently I was from the first an Englishman, and an Englishman I remained, for my parents placed me at school at Toddlestone at the age of 10, and I had remained there ever since, only returning to Russia for such of my holidays as my parents did not pass with me in England.

Thus in name I was a Russian count. In religion and in upbringing and in every taste and sentiment that I possessed I was an Englishman. I sent my mother a long telegram from the hotel. I entreated her to let me know whether my father lived, whether Oxford was to be given up finally or provisionally only, and whether I could stay a day or two just to collect my things, buy clothes, and so forth.

My mother replied by noon of the following day that—stay, I have the astounding message by me to this hour. The reader of my memoirs shall enjoy the advantage of being utterly puzzled and bewildered, just as I was, for assuredly the message was one of the most surprising and bewildering that ever schoolboy received, for schoolboy practically I still was, though actually I had left Toddlestone the day before yesterday.

Here is the telegram, my mother's ipisissima verba:

Father disappeared. Cannot explain. Come soonest possible. I want you. Afraid must renounce Oxford present. Make arrangements possible return later if happier circumstances ensue.

Poor, dear mother! She must indeed have been in sore strait to have sent me such a message as this!

She wanted me, however. That was enough. She must have me, poor dear, as quickly as the railway could take me to her. Oxford might go bang. There was time enough for Oxford.

The Flushing express started from Victoria at 8:30 tonight. I should catch it without fail. Poor, dear old mother in distress and father disappeared!

When a man disappears in England or America, one goes and drags the nearest pond and gives notice at the police station. But what of a disappearance in Russia? Alas, a man may disappear in many ways in our country—or could, for, though but a few years have passed since the time of which I write, things are improving by leaps and bounds; light is spreading—God's light of civilization. One's first thought in such a case as my father's would, of course, be a mixed one—spies, nihilists, police, Siberia. I passed rapidly in thought over all these things in the first shock of that word "disappeared."

But I banished the idea with scorn. My father stood high above such things. He lived in an atmosphere wherein such matters had no existence. He had no cause to fear either the police or the revolutionists. He was beloved by his peasantry, for he was an enlightened and indulgent landlord. In the country he was a power. In town he was universally respected. He took no part in politics, however, and could scarcely therefore come under the ban either of those who hated or of those who administered the law.

In a word, it was hopeless to attempt to conjecture what the meaning of my mother's message could be. Such attempts only led to a feeling of helpless despair, and I tried to postpone all consideration of the matter.

I went for a walk in Kensington gardens to pass away the time, and it was while standing gloomily on the shores of the Round pond, watching the sailing of some tiny yachts, that some one touched me on the shoulder. I turned and saw Percy Morris, the most unexpected and yet perhaps the most entirely welcome person I could possibly have seen at the moment, for Percy was—had been—my greatest friend at Toddlestone. He had left last term on account of his father's death and his mother's unexpected poverty, and I had missed him badly. He had been to Russia with me more than once during the summer vacation, and I felt that an outpouring of my story into his sym-

pathetic ears—for he knew my people—would do me a heap of good. I showed him my telegram. He started.

"Why, man alive," he said. "I saw your father this very afternoon. I thought you must be staying up here with him and was just going to ask you about it."

## CHAPTER II. THE COUNT'S DOUBLE.

When Percy made this astonishing announcement, I subsided into one of the seats that surround the pond. It was too bewilderingly unexpected. I felt for a moment so utterly, helplessly amazed that I most either laugh or cry.

"Impossible!" I gasped. "You could not have, old man. Why, how could the dear old governor—no; it's impossible! You didn't speak to him?"

"Yes, I did. I met him in Oxford street and capped him and said, 'Zdravstvui, graf' (Good morning, count), and—well, he seemed a bit surprised and looked me over as though he didn't recognize me, but he returned my salutation."

"Go on," I said, "in heaven's name! What did he say then—where, did he go?"

"That's the funny part of it," said Percy. "He didn't stop to talk, and your pater is generally so kind and nice to me. Instead of taking my arm and having a chat and probably standing me presently a rare lunch, he nodded, jumped into a hansom and drove away."

"I can't believe it of old dad, Percy," I said. "You must have been mistaken, old man; you mistook some one else for him."

"His double, then, and another Russian, too, for he answered in Russian, 'Zdravstvui,' but of course that might be a coincidence, if it were not that I am ready to swear to it that he was your father and no other, or almost ready, perhaps I ought to say."

I jumped at the little point of implied uncertainty.

"Ah—almost! You are not absolutely certain, then?"

"Well, to be entirely straight"—Percy hesitated—"I remember now very particularly your father is about dress, and so on. Today he did look different in that respect. He wore a Tyrolean hat and a seedyish coat; he didn't look—you know—quite so distinguished as usual—that's all—and he hadn't shaved."

"Then I'd swear it wasn't dad," I cried, "for the dear old man would sooner perish than walk up Piccadilly looking like the hound you describe!"

"Oxford street," Percy corrected. "Or even Oxford street," said I.

"But stop, old chap! You seem to be anxious it shouldn't be your father," said Percy, puzzled by my attitude. "Wouldn't you rather know he was over here, safe and all well, than—well—heaven knows where?"

"The thing is," I tried to explain. "I shouldn't like to think he was here, free on his own hook, as it were, because then, why shouldn't mother know about it, and I and all the world for the matter of that? It would mean that the dear old man had gone dotty, you know, and I'd almost rather anything had happened than that."

"I see," said Percy, and we walked on awhile in silence, taking the nearest route to my hotel. I told my friend my intention of starting tonight, and he promised to dine early with me and see me off at 8:30.

"Hang it!" he said presently. "I wish I was going with you. D'you know this is the most hopeless place in the world to find anything to do in."

"There are nearly always matches at Lord's or the Oval," I said, "and there are the theaters."

"I mean work," he explained—"a living. I can get £1 a week as a clerk in the city and that's the best offer I've had as yet. Jolly prospect, isn't it?"

What a selfish brute I was, for the last hour I had talked bridle about my own affairs and had never even thought of asking after his. Yet he was very badly off, indeed, I had heard, and, as his words showed, he was without immediate prospect of employment.

"I most heartily wish you were coming over with me," I said. "Look here," I added. "Why not come?"

"Oh, I couldn't!" he laughed. "Matters—my affairs are too important for that, or rather my want of affairs!"

"Well, but"—I said, struck with a sudden idea. "We shall require a steward badly until the old dad turns up again to look after things. Why not come and help us? I promise you a fair reward if my dear old mother has anything to do with it, which she certainly will."

"Don't tempt me too sore, or I shall fall!" he laughed.

Then I went at him tooth and nail and almost compelled him to accept the suggestion, and presently he did consent. He could not be ready, he said, in time to start with me tonight, but he would come tomorrow or next day. By that time he would get his passport and luggage together. It was rather short notice and might be a bit of a shock to his mother, but she would quite understand. "Yes, old man," he ended. "I'm on for it."

This decision of Percy's comforted me greatly, for I was very fond indeed of my friend. At Toddlestone he and I had been known as Fidus and Achates. He would come as a guest at present. If afterward it should turn out that mother required some one as agent or clerk or whatever you like to call it, then Percy would step forward and say, "Will I do?"

So we dined and drove to Victoria, and Percy saw me off, promising to follow by the same train tomorrow or next day.

I had plenty to think about during the journey as the train flew through Holland and Germany and presently through my own poor, barren looking native country—the mystery of my father's disappearance and the thousand and one conjectures that grew out of it; the dead days of dear Toddlestone; Ox-

ford and its untried delights, long looked forward to, now suddenly nudged in the bud; the match and my sudden revelation of talent; sweet visions of varsity matches saved by me for Oxford, foolish dreams, but consoling things that helped me to pass through that trying time of suspense and uncertainty! I arrived at St. Petersburg at last.

One of our men was at the station to meet me and a carriage waited outside. I asked after my mother.

"The countess is well," said the man, "but"—he hesitated.

"Well, but what—speak!" I said. "Is my father well also?" I said this on purpose to watch the fellow's face in order to observe whether father's mysterious absence was a matter of general knowledge in the establishment at least.

"The count is still absent," said the man, "and the countess, though well—it is said—in health, will, I believe, be very glad to see her son!"

This was oracular quite and revealed just about as much as the old Grecian oracles were wont to predict, which was just nothing. I could not gather from the fellow's face whether he knew of our trouble or only guessed it.

## CHAPTER III. THEORIES OF THE DISAPPEARANCE.

I found my poor mother in a sad condition indeed. The shock of father's disappearance and the uncertainty and helpless misery of the whole wretched affair had quite upset her, and for the time being at least she was practically in a state of collapse.

She lay in bed, looking a shadow of her real self, and she burst into tears when I entered the room.

"My son, my son!" she cried. "Thank God you have come, for we



poor women are wretched beings when we are suddenly deprived of the strong arm in which we have trusted."

"I thank God, too, mother, that I came," I said, "though I feel sure that we shall not be deprived for long of dear old father's presence!"

"Oh, do you really believe it?" she wailed. "I have tried to—so hard, but I feel I am losing my hope. Tell me, my Boris, have you formed any theory—do you find your hopes upon anything you know or have thought of?"

"I cannot form a theory, mother, until I know the facts," I said, "but I have a kind of feeling that we shall find father in God's good time. Be sure we shall be surprised when we know it at the simple solution of what seems so mysterious now; we shall laugh and say, 'How is it we never thought of it?'"

"Heaven knows—heaven knows! I cannot tell what to hope or believe. And did you think it thoughtless or unnecessary in me to have sent for you and put an end to your Oxford career?"

"Mother," I said, "I would not have staid away from you for a hundred years of Oxford! Besides, when father comes home I shall be able to return. Now, tell me all the particulars, darling, and then we can consult quietly."

Mother dried her tears and sat up and told me her story.

Father, it appeared, had traveled by the private railway to Erinofka, a big moor, the shooting of which he rented with two other sportsmen, a Russian grand duke and an English gentleman called Hulbert. Father liked the place principally for the excellence of its bathees for elk. This was not the season for elk, but he had set out on the Tuesday morning intending to walk the moors for grouse and black game on the Wednesday and to return by the mid-night train that day, but he had not turned up at home. Mother had waited till Thursday night, thinking that possibly father might have found the birds so plentiful that he had decided to remain another day. But when Friday morning had come and still father had not arrived mother grew anxious and telegraphed to the head keeper at Erinofka, inquiring whether father was still there.

An answer came presently to the effect that father had left on Thursday evening with the rest of the party.

Then mother sent a man down to the lodge, 40 miles away, to make inquiries, but nothing had transpired excepting that father had undoubtedly been to the lodge and had as certainly left it again to return to town.

"That's all," said mother. "I waited until the Tuesday, as you know, to send for you, my beloved, and now you have come. At least we can bear our sorrow together. Alas, what else is left to us but to bear it?"

"Oh, mother, much," I said encouragingly. "The time has not nearly arrived to give way to despair. Believe me, I shall not rest until I have either found my father or learned the secret of his disappearance. Cheer up, my sweet. It is not like you to give way. You are so brave and sensible. All the world knows that!"

"I can bear ascertained calamity," said poor mother. "When one knows the full extent of the trouble, it can be borne more easily. It is the uncertainty of this that has unnerved me. But you are right. We ought still to hope, my Boris. I will be brave. I will hope as you do. We will not despair until we have done all that there is to be done. What shall be our first move? Come, tell me. You have done me good already. Thank God that I have still a brave son. What is to be done?"

"Percy is coming to help me tomorrow or next day," I said. "I thought it would be as well to have him here. You know him and like him."

"Kind Percy!" murmured mother. "He is a friend indeed."

"And meanwhile I shall go to Erinofka by the very first train I can catch tomorrow morning in order to make inquiries on the spot. Whom did you send from here?"

"The second coachman, Pavel, an honest fellow. He knows the keeper, Armin, and interviewed him at Erinofka. Armin could give him no satisfaction."

"I shall see Armin for myself and many other people besides," I said. "I shall make preliminary inquiries tomorrow and then come back for Percy and continue them together with him."

"But have you any sort of notion as to what can have occurred? That is what is so dreadful to me that I cannot imagine what nature of calamity could possibly have happened to him. I feel so helpless about it."

"I cannot, really, until I have made inquiries, dear mother. It is possible that poor father may only have fallen from the train en route and rolled down an embankment. You have not seen the line to Erinofka. It is a mere toy railway, with a gauge but three feet wide and tiny carriages like small busses with balconies. The train runs most unsteadily, and father might have fallen asleep and been jerked from the balcony without any one seeing. He might have lain stunned until some one found and took him into shelter. The finder, unaware of his name, would be unable to communicate with his friends, and poor father still too ill perhaps to give him any information. That is at least a theory and would account for the absence of news. Then there is another thing that might possibly have happened, though I admit it does not seem very likely."

"Go on, Boris, tell me everything you have thought of," said poor mother, who wept quietly through my somewhat grieved recital. "How dreadful to think that my poor dear Vladimir may be lying even now unconscious, and we unable to help him because ignorant where to look for him—God grant it is not that!"

"He will have found kind friends, never fear," I said, "but my other theory is less painful to contemplate. I told you the worst first. It is this: Father is well known and known to be rich too. It may be that some wretched fellows, desperate perhaps for want of money, may have formed a band, like Greek brigands, to abduct him. If so, they will send a deputation one day, presently, or a message, claiming a sum of money for his ransom."

"Is that possible, here in civilized Russia?" said mother wistfully. "I have never heard of anything of the kind, have you? At all events, not in this part of Russia."

I was obliged to confess that I had not.

"But we must not reject the idea on that account. We must weigh and investigate every notion either of us has, however wild or impossible it may be."

"Yes, yes, that is true. We will not leave a stone unturned!" said mother.

I traveled up to Erinofka the next morning. I could not help thinking, as I stood upon the balcony outside the little railway carriage, that any one tired from a hard day's shooting over the moors and leaning on the rail as I now leaned might most easily be pitched out by a jerk of the train. Jerks, violent ones, were common enough, for the train was but a makeshift thing and the line very narrow and badly laid. It had been made for the sole use of a factory of some sort, close to Erinofka, the manufactured goods being sent by its means to St. Petersburg, while the raw materials were carried up from town to the works.

Accidents were of frequent occurrence, though the train went so slowly that personal injury was rare. Passengers were allowed to use the line, which was thus most useful for my father and his fellow sportsmen. He might easily have fallen out then. But in that case would not Hulbert—who was shooting with him that day, as I had ascertained—have known of it either at once or when the train arrived at St. Petersburg? At any rate, he would have missed my father and have given the alarm. As a matter of fact, and as I discovered presently, Hulbert had remained behind for another day's sport when my father returned, Hulbert returning on the Thursday and father on the Wednesday, so that the accident—if it happened—would have occurred without Hulbert knowing anything about it.

I found Armin, the keeper at the lodge. It was from him that I learned that father had started for home earlier than Hulbert. He had done so, Armin explained, because he had found that the birds were still so small that he did not care to shoot them. Armin had been away in town when our man came to make inquiries. It was Spiridon that the man had interviewed.

"Did you see my father off on the Wednesday, Armin?" I asked him. Armin reflected. No, he said presently, he had not. He had been out on the moors till late with Mr. Hulbert. If our men had been told that the count returned with Mr. Hulbert, it was a mistake.

"The count left us early in the day," he added, "being discontented with the size of the birds. They certainly were small, for it was the very first day of the shooting, or near it."

"Did Spiridon (the second keeper) drive him to the station?" I asked.

Spiridon scratched his head and reflected. I drew a bow at a venture.

"You were drunk when our man came to interview you, Spiridon," I said. "Confess it. You don't remember what you told him."

"I certainly went home with the count from the moor," he said, "but when we reached the house he gave me a ruble and sent me back to the moor, to the other gentleman and Armin, saying they might want me to carry game. He had no luggage and would walk to the station." Then Spiridon grinned and scratched his head. "I may have been a little drunk when your man came down," he added; "the gentlemen had both tipped me generously."

There was no more to be got out of Spiridon.

Then I went to the station and inquired of the station master, who said he knew the count well, whether he had seen my father on the day in question.

"Did he travel home by the afternoon train on Wednesday the—?" I asked.

"Wednesday, the—," repeated the man reflectively, consulting his day-book. "Ah, I thought so—no, he did not, for that was the afternoon that the line was blocked. Some rascal had laid a tree across and the engine ran off the line—the up engine—and plowed the metals. I remember your father coming to the station, but he did not travel."

"What did he do, then?" I asked, flushing with agitation, for here, I thought, was the beginning of a clue.

"Well, I can't tell you," he said. "He left the station, and now I come to think of it, he did not reappear. I other gentleman took the train no day, but not the count."

"Not the count?" I repeated. "A you sure?"

"Quite sure!" said the man. "He came on the Tuesday, but—well, he's not gone back yet, and that's a fact!"

(To be Continued)

75 BARRED PLYMOUTH ROCK COCKERELS FOR SALE



These Birds are The Very Best

B. F. LESH

Illinois Central R.R. OF INTEREST TO STOCKHOLDERS.

Free Transportation to Attend the Special Meeting at Chicago.

ILLINOIS CENTRAL RAILROAD COMPANY. NOTICE TO STOCKHOLDERS.

Public notice is hereby given that a special meeting of the stockholders of the Illinois Central Railroad Company will be held at the company's office in Chicago, Illinois, on Saturday, January 20, 1901, at 11 o'clock in the forenoon.

To permit personal attendance at this meeting, there will be issued to each holder of one or more shares of the capital stock of the Illinois Central Railroad Company, as registered on the books of the company, a ticket enabling him, or her, to travel free over the company's lines from the station on the Illinois Central Railroad nearest to his or her registered address to Chicago and return; such ticket to be good for the journey to Chicago only during the four days immediately preceding, and the day of the meeting, and for the return journey from Chicago only on the day of the meeting, and the four days immediately following, when properly countersigned and stamped during business hours—that is to say, between 9:00 a. m. and 5:00 p. m.—in the office of the Assistant Secretary, Mr. W. G. Bruen, in Chicago. Such ticket may be obtained by any registered holder of stock on application, in writing, to the president of the company in Chicago. Each application must state the full name and address of the stockholder exactly as given in his or her certificate of stock, together with the number and date of such certificate. No more than one person will be carried free in respect to any one holding of stock as registered on the books of the company.

For the purpose of this meeting the Stock Transfer Books will be closed at 3 o'clock p. m. on Thursday, December 20, 1900, and remain closed until the morning of Monday, January 7, 1901.

A. G. HACKSTAFF, Secretary.

For acceptable ideas, State if patented. THE PATENT RECORD, Baltimore, Md.

Subscription price of the PATENT RECORD \$1.00 per annum. Samples free.

CASH