THE MYSTERY OF COUNT LANDRINOF.

BY FRED WHISHAW.

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CHAPTER X.

MEETING IN A LONDON RESTAURANT.

"But stop a minute, mother!" I cried, bewildered by the sudden revelation. "Let us consider. What does the existence of this criminal uncle of mine exercise upon the mystery? Do you suggest that this man in London may be father's brother and not father, is that it?"

"That is what struck me; only that it must be remembered the unfortunate man is, or is supposed to be, suffering a life sentence in Siberia."

"He might have escaped!" I reflected. "Let me see, supposing that he has escaped and is at large in London, is, in fact, the man Percy found, how would that affect father's disappearance? It need not affect it at all, need it, excepting that we should have wasted all this time over a false clew? No, mother, I don't think it can be this precious uncle. When one comes to think of it, things point so conclusively to father having left for London at the time of his disappearance—the police declare it, the station officials testify to it—it must have been father himself and not his brother, for, in the first place, how could he have escaped from Siberia? And even if he did is it likely that he would have deliberately come to St. Petersburg, the most dangerous place to appear in that an escaped convict could choose? And then think of the coincidence of the time of his departure with father's disappearance! It would be too extraordinary."

"I am thinking," said mother, "that Andre, the brother, may have come to Petersburg on purpose to harass father and obtain money from him. Poor father may have been so ill and horrified by his sudden appearance here that the shock temporarily unseated his reason, so that he—"

"No, mother, I can't believe it!" I interrupted. "Father is too sane and likely to collapse in that way at the sight of his rogue of a brother. Consider. We will not do him the injustice of believing it possible. What was Andre sent to Siberia for?"

"Political murder. He got into a bad set in the corps as a youth. Heaven knows why he should have inclined to revolutionary ideas, a youth of such means and prospects as he enjoyed. The commandant expelled him for some foolish speech or action, and he went from bad to worse. Even when the poor wretch was concerned in the diabolical plot, was arrested, tried and condemned—under his assumed name, I pray God—and dispatched to Siberia."

"Where he is still to be found, never doubt, mother. Did he actually kill anyone?"

"I believe so," said mother, shudderingly.

"Oh, they'll have taken good care of that. I don't doubt it. He is still there, the man in London is father, and no other."

"He must be. We must find a better theory for his turning up in England than this. Your original one about debts and financial worries is better than the other. Borofsky will bring us news of dear old father to us; never doubt that."

"God grant it prove so, dear, brave boy," she sighed. "I would not be critical or unkind, but I do sincerely hope and trust this terrible Andre, whose crime caused your dear father so much shame and bitter sorrow, is, as you say, securely locked up in some Siberian mine. If he were really at large I should fear I know not what for our beloved."

"How could he injure father, excepting by revealing himself and causing father shame?" I asked. "I am sorry to hear of this shady relation, dear mother. But I really don't see how he can have anything to do with this mystery of ours."

Mother became pacified gradually and thought with me that there were too many chances against the probability of my disreputable uncle having turned up in London to make such a theory worth troubling ourselves about. We therefore dismissed it, leaving Andre the convict to languish in his Siberian mines, so far as our imaginations condescended to recall from time to time the rascal's existence. It was father that Percy had found, not a doubt of it.

And now, to confirm us in this view, an important letter arrived from Borofsky and arrived in the nick of time.

Borofsky wrote in a jubilant strain. He had not cared to write before, he explained, because, though he had soon hit upon the original of Percy's photograph, he had been unable, until now, to make any progress toward making acquaintance with him. But now there was at last something to report.

Borofsky had shadowed his man for several days, learning in this way where he took his meals and how he employed his time, and so on. Mr. Robinson—as Percy had called him in his telegram—seemed to have many friends in town and visited two or three every day. This did not surprise us. It rather pleased us, for it went to prove, as we agreed, that father could not be very seriously demented if he could visit his acquaintances, of whom, of course, he possessed many in London.

He took his meals at a restaurant in Tottenham Court road, Borofsky wrote. (I could not help laughing to hear this. Why, in the name of wonder, I thought, did father choose such a queer venue for a restaurant?) And it was at this place that Borofsky made his acquaintance. Having discovered father's weird eating house, Borofsky went one evening and dined there, choosing a table alongside that which father always occupied. (I am calling him "father" because both mother and I, and of course Percy, were at this time quite agreed that the unknown was certainly my father and none other.)

Half way through dinner father came in and sat down at the table next to Borofsky, who presently started a conversation. Father began by being brusque and silent, but warmed up by degrees. They spoke in French, neither being proficient in English, but Borofsky, desiring to show that Russian was his natural language, suddenly upset the salt on purpose, uttering an exclamation of anger in Russian.

"Vui Kajetsya Russki!" ("Why, you're a Russian!") exclaimed father in surprise, and from that moment conversation was easy, and the unknown one became, in the joy of his heart to have met a compatriot, more communicative.

Borofsky introduced himself as a young Russian compelled, for political reasons, to seek an asylum outside his native country. The unknown one laughed at this.

"Ah," he said, "there are many in that position. I, too, might tell a tale, but that in this country—which is nevertheless the best in the world for those situated as some of us are—one never knows who are the bona fide politicians and who are the spies!"

Borofsky laughed with his companion at this sally and declared that if the stranger felt any compunctions as to confiding in him he at least need not return the compliment, for no one in his senses and with any elementary notion as to "who is who" would ever dream of mistaking for a spy so well known a personality as—the unknown himself.

"Do you mean to tell me you know who I am?" asked Borofsky's companion, scanning him suspiciously and freezing up a little.

"Every one knows Count Landrinof!" said our acute little detective.

At this, wrote Borofsky, the count gave a great jump. Then he set down his knife and fork and began to laugh so that the table shook, "which shows," Borofsky commented, "that the count is not melancholy mad, whatever his ailment may be."

"Why," he said at last, "I did think I would be unknown in these queer haunts, at any rate, but I suppose there are people about that know a big man when they see him. Landrinof knows."

"There would be many to wonder, I imagine, should they see the fancy [illegible] of accounts, as your [illegible] Borofsky," he [illegible] the other replied that he was living in London strictly incognito in order to inquire privately into certain financial speculations in which he was engaged.

"It cannot matter much to my friends at home whereabouts in London I pitch my tent," he added, and Borofsky agreed that every man was free to live where he liked.

"The countess would laugh to see a grandee of Russia dining in a restaurant in Tottenham Court road," he added.

"My wife has given me a holiday," laughed the count. "You needn't mention having seen me here. I wish my incognito strictly preserved."

"Better to have no address than one in the purlieus of Tottenham Court road, excellence," said Borofsky, laughing also. "But what if your friends should be seriously anxious, being ignorant of your whereabouts?"

The count gave a great jump.

At this the count froze up at once. "That is a matter which may be left to my friends and myself," he said coldly, and the conversation closed for the evening.

This was the extent of the letter which the writer had evidently penned while in a condition of great excitement. "The count parted from me in some displeasure," ended Borofsky. "But all will be well, for I intend to improve our acquaintance at the first opportunity, and if I do not bring the count back within a fortnight you need never trust me again."

CHAPTER XI.

DETECTIVE'S LIFE IN PERIL.

Borofsky's letter was the source of much thought and much agitated conversation among our little party of three, for, though it seemed indeed to establish the fact that he had seen my dear father himself, yet it did little toward elucidating the painful mystery of his disappearance or the still more painful and bewildering mystery of his silence.

Here was father, obviously a free agent and able if he chose to write home with explanations of his absence, yet he preferred to live a secret and semi-hidden life in a slummy, or at least third rate, quarter of London. He was free and living alone. Those rascals who had carried him off from Erinofka and conveyed him over the frontier and away were no longer with him. He was out of their power. But, if out of their power, why did he not return or write?

Had they some mysterious hold upon him, forbidding him under pain of sudden death—a death such as had befallen the unfortunate little talebearer at Erinofka—to communicate in any way whatever with those who were familiar with him at home?

"No," said I heartily, when this theory was put forward by Percy, "certainly not. Father would never tamely submit to such a thing. Once out of their hands and free to do as he liked, father would soon find means to turn the tables on the rascals, blackmailers or whatever they may be, and it is quite possible, if they exist at all in connection with this affair, that they are blackmailers."

"What would they blackmail your father for?" asked Percy quite indignantly. "He is not at all the man to have a skeleton in the cupboard that he is afraid to show to all the world."

"Quite true," I said, "but there's that precious brother that mother told us of, the nihilist Johnny, who murdered or helped to murder some one. These chaps, if they exist, may have found out all about it and are threatening father with heaven knows what if he does not pay up some huge sum of money. But even this doesn't explain his silence or his mysterious journey to London, either, unless he has gone to raise funds. But he would have let mother know as soon as he was free. I am cocksure of it."

"Unless they have driven him out of his senses for the time being," mother sighed.

"No, mother," I said, "I'll tell you what I think. I've come to the conclusion that those Erinofka rascals have nothing whatever to do with it or with us. Their affair was merely a coincidence as regards father and his disappearance. They were there, granted, and they were up to some game which needed secrecy and even murdered a man who divulged their secret, but the drugged man (I conclude he was drugged) or the sick man was not father. We thought we had struck a trail, but it was a false scent."

"God grant it, dear Boris," said mother, "for I cannot bear to think of your father having fallen into such hands. But why have you come to this conclusion?"

"For two reasons—one is that if these fellows had any good reason for bagging father and carrying him away they would not have let him go free as they have done, and the other is that, as I have said, now father is free and we know that he is. If his silence and disappearance and all had been brought about by these people, he would certainly communicate with us. There must be another reason for his flight. These Erinofka fellows had nothing to do with it."

Yet, neither I nor mother nor Percy could put forth any good theory to replace the old one, and the situation remained unchanged and the mystery unsolved. We must await further developments from the other side of the water, and trust to Borofsky's talent and exertions to bring light into our dark places, and this he could only do by restoring poor father to his right mind and persuading him to return to us.

I think I should have set out myself, presently, in order to see father and find out, in person, what ailed him and whether an appeal from me, and in mother's name, would restore him to reason, but a few days later we had a second and a very exciting letter from Borofsky.

"I have met with astonishing success since my last letter," he wrote, "though not without much patience and some personal risk."

"Personal risk!" echoed mother, interrupting me as I read aloud.

"Then those rascals are still hanging about. May God protect dear Vladimir and also this poor Borofsky!"

I, too, had been surprised to see the expression used—"personal risk." I continued to read the letter aloud:

"The count, at our last interview, had suddenly closed the conversation, angrily giving me to understand that he considered my last remark a liberty. He rose from the table, bowed and left the restaurant, I following a minute later. The count returned home. I saw him to his lodgings and I re-entered my own, which were nearly opposite, and wrote and posted my letter.

"That evening later I was surprised to see a cab drive up to the door of the count's lodging. The count himself then came out with his portmanteau, stepped into the vehicle and was driven toward Marylebone church.

"When I had recovered my breath, I seized my hat and rushed after his cab. Luckily I found a hansom at the corner. Jumping breathlessly into it, I bade the driver follow the cab at a respectful distance. So the count suspected me—heaven knows what of—and was endeavoring to escape me. He had nearly done it. What if I had been napping? I should not have had this great news to tell, that's all, and I might have lost touch with his excellence altogether.

"On drove the cab, and on I followed. Right down into Edgeware road it went and across into a street called Harrow road, and here it stopped at a small hotel. I bade my man drive a short distance farther, 100 paces or so, and then I stopped also and jumped out on the pavement, just in time to see the count disappearing with his bag into the hotel. Then I crossed the road and stood nearly opposite the dirty little hotel, pretending to look at shop windows, but keeping a good lookout upon the door within which our good count had disappeared.

"Presently he came out, looked up and down the road and started to walk down Edgeware road and toward Hyde park. It was dark now, except for the gaslight, and I hoped to be able to follow him unobserved, for, I thought, if I had an opportunity I would speak to him where it was quiet in order to bid him not be afraid, since I wished him no harm.

"So I walked after him, he never looking round not once, and so we came into the great park at the end of Edgeware road. The park was gloomy and deserted, and about half way down the middle road he suddenly turned and came toward me. I drew my hat over my eyes and hoped to pass unrecognized, for I was taken by surprise and had nothing ready to say. But, instead of going by me, he seized me roughly by the collar of my coat with his fingers in my neck and muttered through his teeth in Russian: 'Now, then, you little spying skoteena, I have you, you see. You are caught this time, my man!'

"'Let go!' I said, half choking, 'or I'll shout for help!'

"'Not I,' he said; 'there's a nice lake near here, and you're going into it unless you'd prefer this.'

"He showed me a revolver in his other hand.

"'Come, not a sound, now, or I'll shoot; I swear it!'

"He looked so evilly at me that my tongue froze in my mouth, and I could not have cried out if I had wished it.

"'I know you,' he said. 'You are a government spy, and there's only one place such offal is fit for, and that's the lake. Come! stop a moment. Open your mouth—quickly, I say.'

"Half dead with terror, I opened my mouth. He instantly pushed a rolled

"Now, then, you little spying skoteena."

up handkerchief into it. I tried now to call for help, but could not utter a cry. He was twice my size and strength, and with a neckerchief that he were he tied me round the face in such a way that my mouth remained gagged. Then he took my arm and walked me toward the lake, called the Serpentine, going over grass and railings, I praying hard the while, for I thought the man was stark mad and that my last hour had come.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SUPPOSED COUNT IN DISGRACE.

"My poor Vladimir!" groaned my mother at this point of Borofsky's letter. "He must indeed be mad to have acted in this way. Just think of it, Boris! This violence, this murderous anger, from your dear father!"

"It is not a bit like him, I admit," I said. "He must have been furiously angry for some reason. Shall I go on? He did no harm to Borofsky, at any rate, for Borofsky is all right—vide his letter. I continued to read:

"The count dragged me to the very shore of the lake and there stopped. I thought he would now push me in and was prepared to fight for my life, but instead he spoke:

"'You deserve death unheard,' he said, 'but I shall allow you to speak once in your defense, but observe, speak low and do not raise your voice, or you are a dead man. I have the revolver ready; see here. Now, be warned!'

"He unfastened the gag.

"'Now,' he said, 'explain. Why have you followed and dogged me? Are you a government spy?'

"'Before heaven, no!' I exclaimed.

"'Swear it!'

"'I do swear it. I am not in the service of any government or body whatever, and, if I am a spy, it is only for the advantage of those upon whom I am paid to keep a watch.'

"'Oh, then, you are paid to dog me, and by whom?'

"'It is a secret!' I faltered.

"'Speak, by whom?' he repeated.

"'The secret is not my own,' I began, but the count furiously bade me speak, or I should swim, and I was obliged to admit that her excellence the Countess Landrinof, being most anxious and unhappy by reason of her husband's prolonged and unexplained absence, had employed me to find him and, if possible, to bring him back to St. Petersburg; at all events, to see him and report upon his condition.

"The count laughed aloud. (My poor mother shuddered as I read this part of the letter and cried quietly as she listened.)

"'Why, what does she think ails me?' he said.

"'I cannot tell you,' I replied.

"'Speak, you fool!' he repeated angrily. 'What does she think ails me? She thinks I am mad; is that it?'

"I admitted that this was the case, and I admitted it in fear and trembling, for I, too, was assured that the poor count was not in full possession of his reason, so different was his conduct from that which I should have expected in one whom all Russia knows and respects.

"'Mad to have left my beloved wife's side, though only for a short holiday abroad, eh?' he laughed. 'Why, man alive, what queer things these women are! Can't a man take a little holiday and enjoy a trip abroad without dragging his whole establishment with him? Besides, I'm away on business.'

"'The countess is distressed because she has heard nothing of your excellence,' I murmured, 'and was not even aware of your intention to depart or of your present whereabouts.'

"'What!' he said, as though surprised. 'Has she not received my letters?'

"'I believe not one,' I said.

"'Why, man alive,' he said, 'I am a very model of a husband. I came in a hurry, true. But I sent word of my departure by the man who drove me to the station. Since then I have written—as a husband should—nearly every day. Have the letters miscarried?'

"'They must have. So far as I am aware the countess has received none at all.'

"'The rascals, the rascals!' said the count, as though to himself. 'You must know, my friend,' he continued, addressing me, 'that I have enemies. You look surprised. It is odd that so good and universally respected a man as I should have enemies. They are men, you must understand, who are jealous of my position, and—er—of my favor with the czar. These men are building up a plot against my reputation. I tell you this in strict confidence. I am here in order to escape the worry of their persecutions if only for awhile. I—I—you will laugh over it, as I do now—I took you for their spy. You will forgive me? My anger was excusable. Imagine, my friend, these men will not allow a man to write to his own wife, but must needs intercept the letters. Is it not too bad? You will forgive me? Come, we will return and sup together.'

"'Willingly,' I said, and in my heart I thanked heaven and all the saints in the calendar that the count's anger was over and he was now in a quiet and reasonable frame of mind.

"We left the park and walked up Oxford street, and we supped together as he had suggested. During this meal the count bade me explain how I had found him.

"'The credit of it is not my own, excellence,' I said, 'but belongs to the young Englishman, Mr. Morris—Percy, as they call him.'

"'Who?' said the count, looking bewildered.

"I repeated Mr. Percy's name. 'He who met you one day soon after your arrival, in Oxford street,' I added, 'and greeted you in Russian.'

"'Oh, ah, yes!' said the count. 'I remember, of course. He knows me well and recognized me. Is it not so?'

"'He has so often staid at your house, both in town and country,' I said, 'that he could scarcely meet you without recognition. Nevertheless, neither your wife nor your son was quite prepared to believe that he could have seen yourself here in London until this same Percy cleverly took your photo and sent over a copy.'

"The count started and looked angry at this.

"'What,' he exclaimed, 'took my photograph? For what purpose? Explain, sir, at once. How dared he take my photograph?'

"'For the consolation of the countess, only,' I hastened to reply. 'That she and the young count might recognize that you were indeed your excellence and no other.'

"Then the count's face softened, and he laughed.

"'Of course, of course!' he said. 'Naturally, not having received my letters, they would be unaware of my presence in London and disinclined to believe I could have gone so far afield without letting them know—ha, ha! So they must verify my photograph taken by this youth, my son's friend! It is good, and very good—a curious turn and combination of events! And my wife recognized the portrait at once, I suppose, though it can have been but a mere daub of a thing, done by a boy, eh?'

"'The countess recognized it at once, though she pronounced you haggard and worn as if with trouble.'

"'Ha, trouble! That's this infernal conspiracy that I told you of. Haggard with trouble. Lord, I may well be all that, my friend, and more. Well, and the lad, the young count, he swore to me, too, no doubt, eh? One doesn't forget one's father in a week or two, even though worn with trouble and so on, eh?—ha, ha!—a good lad, this young count. So he knew me by the portrait?'

"'At once,' I said, 'though he demurred to the clothes. You were accustomed to a tall hat and the coat that is called in English "frock coat;" you would never wear such clothes and a soft felt, he said, such as these you now have on.'

"'Ah, a la guerre, comme a la guerre!' laughed the count. 'Let the hunted fox change his coat if he can. Disguise, my friend, disguise!'

"'That is how I myself explained the matter,' I said.

"'Good!' laughed the count. 'You have served the countess well, and I shall tell her so with my own lips when I return to her.'

"'Ah, count, let that be soon,' I said, 'for, if I may say so, it is sad to see her worrying and fretting because of your absence.'

"'Ha! Well, poor woman; I shall return, I shall return. It may be very soon. I shall consider what is best. Have we finished? Shall we go? Do you desire to write to the countess and to tell her that it shall be as she wishes? Do so then, my friend, for my letters are, as we have seen, intercepted by my enemies. Tell the countess that I may return at any time, maybe this very week—who knows? Perhaps we shall return together, you and I.'

"With that," wrote Borofsky, "we parted, but though we parted, I made sure that his excellence returned to the hotel, for I followed him. This was last night, and today we have not spoken. The count is considering, he told me, whether to risk a return at once. In a few days we shall know for certain—a week at latest. Have I done well? I have done my best."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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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 represented by the books of the company, a ticket entitling 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.

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