

# THE MYSTERY OF COUNT LANDRINOF.

BY FRED WHISHAW.

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"But, for heaven's sake, Borofsky, let us be careful what we do. What if the fellow were to commit a crime and be arrested as Count Landrinof and punished under his name?"

"We don't want him to commit any crime, of course, but we do want him to get into our power; that's all."

"It's dangerous, Borofsky, in many ways. Look at the disgrace of it, if anything were to go wrong, the horrible disgrace and dishonor to our family name, father's name to be mixed up with vile, murderous plottings and crimes! Bah! I hate to think of it."

"My dear sir," said Borofsky, "it need never come to that. If we move, we shall move carefully, and nothing shall be left to chance."

"And what if he should be my uncle Andre? Shall we deliver him up to justice when we have done with him?"

"Now you are going too fast!" laughed Borofsky. "We have to catch our hare first before we can cook him. I should think, when one has an uncle of this kind, the sooner one gets rid of him, whether by means of the police or any other way, the better."

"Ought we not to organize some method of combined spying, Borofsky?"

"Percy, 'One doesn't like the work, we must be spied upon if we wish to do anything useful.'"

"We will do so, of course, presently, for awhile he must be left to himself, but he must not have the faintest suspicion that he is suspected or watched. Give the bird a short period to get his first fear, so that it may learn to creep about freely and pick up the news prepared for it. Bring the net when it has forgotten its fears!"

"So for a little while we left the impostor count alone and allowed him to do what he would and go where he pleased, unwatched and undisturbed. During this period only Percy and Borofsky ever spoke to him or our party, and not allow my mother to go to the wretch; neither would I trust myself to approach or speak to him. Borofsky played his game well. He was the fellow to understand that all the establishment had the countess's eyes to see that he had everything he possibly desire and that she was anxious to see him well satisfied in the matter, if only in gratitude for her hospitality and kindness, he would repay presently with some information as to the mystery of father's disappearance."

"Ha, ha!" said our visitor at this. "You you some little make up for the : I played you, Borofsky, eh? You very young, my son, and must learn business by painful experience. Right; you shall have my secret some—that is, if none of you play the before the time comes."

"Play the fool!" said Borofsky. "In what way?"

"In any way that would displease or grieve our impostor. 'Never I shall soon know it if any of you playing the fool.'"

"It Borofsky disclaimed all intention laying either the fool or anything and repeated that the countess had her guest treated well and hoped the return he had indicated as soon possible."

"Well, she shall have it," said the impostor, "when the time comes!"

"News of her husband—that is what excellence is longing for," continued Borofsky. "She believes, rightly or wrongly, that you may be in possession of knowledge which would assist her to find her count."

"Yes, rightly or wrongly, she believes this," said the impostor, with an ugly laugh. "Ha, ha! I shall have plenty to tell her when the time comes."

"When will that be?" asked Borofsky.

"Oh, come, come! Let a man rest after his journey!" said the impostor. "Everything comes to those who wait."

## CHAPTER XVI.

ANDRE LANDRINOF, THE COUNT'S BROTHER. So three men settled down to watch the one man, though we allowed him to observe no indication that we were interested in his actions. And at first we thought we must be mistaken as to his connection with revolutionary people, anarchists and malcontents and shady characters generally, for his conduct was quiet and exemplary, and he came and went in and out of the house, mistaken by most of those who saw him for Count Landrinof.

"Confound the fellow!" said Percy one day after a fortnight or more of this blameless existence. "When is he going to start nihilist meetings in the house, and so on? He gives us nothing to go upon!"

"A watched pot never boils," I laughed; "at least not till one is sick of watching."

Nevertheless presently a little steam began to issue from the spout of our kettle, and we knew that the water was on the move.

In other words, our friend began to show a little activity. He went about the town more frequently. queer, weird looking people came at intervals to see him and sit in father's study in consultation with the impostor. The time had come for us to start work as amateur detectives, an occupation I most cordially disliked.

But father was still unbound. Indeed we were no further on toward clearing up the mystery than we had been a

week after his disappearance, and mother fretted and wept.

Great heavens! To set all this right and see dear mother happy once more I should spy with the best and meanest.

One evening Borofsky returned home in the best of spirits.

"What is it, Borofsky?" I inquired, for I saw that he was longing to be asked.

"I've had a good haul today," he said, rubbing his hands. "Our friend's busy over some devilry, I'd stake my existence on it. He has been present at a secret committee meeting this afternoon, and I know where they met and how many were present."

"And what they plotted," I asked, "and who they were?"

"You are going too fast, my dear sir!" said Borofsky. "How could I possibly know all that? I was not in the room and all these people I have seen today for the first time."

"But how did you get to see them at all?" I asked. "Didn't you run a great risk?"

"Some risk, no doubt, but I wasn't Borofsky, mind you—I was disguised. I went to my lodgings early in the afternoon and put on a beggar's dress that I have in stock—a perfect disguise. In this I returned here, standing outside this very door till our friend came out. I did the same yesterday, but he kept me waiting several hours and never came at all. Well, this afternoon I had hardly been here a quarter of an hour when out comes my man, jumps into a drosky and drives away."

"Luckily I, too, had a drosky waiting round the corner and into this I jumped, throwing the cloak over me that was already prepared for my use in case of need and lay folded ready on the cushion."

"I followed his drosky right across to the island side, down the first line, over the Tuchkof bridge and into the Peterburgskaya. He turned into a small street that led out of the prospect, and I stopped in the main thoroughfare a few yards farther on, threw the cloak to my driver and hurried back to the corner of the small street."

"His drosky was returning empty, and he had disappeared, and I thought I had lost my man; but almost immediately another trap drove up, turned into the street and stopped at a little wooden house half way down it. So I limped toward the gate of that house—a beggar again, now—and took my stand near by."

"No less than seven other individuals drove or walked to that gate, sir, and entered the little wooden house, though I was not exactly on the spot when all arrived, for the first that came gave me a grievance (10 kopecks) and bade me go farther, very much farther; but we need not specify the destination he had fixed upon me. The next was no more polite, and rather than cause anger or rouse suspicion I moved a few doors away. When all had arrived—nine or ten there must have been in all—I waited a few minutes and then departed."

"Well done, Borofsky," said I. "You have certainly advanced matters today. It was undoubtedly a meeting of sorts. Our friend is up to no good, I'll be sworn! Well, now we know one of his haunts, anyway! We'll catch him out yet, and then we'll name our terms for saving his head from the only place it's fit to fill, and that's the noose."

"What manner of men were these friends of his?" asked Percy; "the other members of this charming committee? A set of desperate looking cutthroats, I'll bet."

"They were very mixed," said Borofsky. "There were some who looked quite respectable—officers; two fellows in civilian uniform; one or two awful looking specimens and a couple of stusky."

himself in our power was tantalizing indeed.

Besides, there was always the chance that he had lied throughout and that in reality he had nothing to reveal as to father's fate. Perhaps he had never seen father and knew nothing more of him than his name, excepting the fact that, by a stroke of excellent luck, he must so nearly resemble the real Landrinof that he was able to pass as the count with all but his closest relations, and that the count's house was uncommonly comfortable and that, thanks, from beginning to end, to the accidental resemblance, his lot had fallen in extremely pleasant places.

My mother was assured that our disreputable guest was none other than my father's brother Andre. He could be no other, she said, for, though she now knew that there was nothing in the man's face to recall that of her dear Vladimir excepting the shape of the features and that it had been the grossest calumny upon the count even to mistake this other's photograph for his yet the cast of the features was the same, and the man could be no other than the wretched Andre—supposed at this moment by the police to be far away in Siberia.

Our friend, however, had assumed an absolute ignorance of the existence of any such person as Andre Landrinof, the count's younger brother, when taxed by Borofsky with being that very individual. He had never heard of the man, he said. As for his own name, Borofsky would have to contrive to exist without knowing it if it depended on himself to tell it, because, said he, it was not Borofsky's business to know it.

But one evening our excellent friend rather gave himself away. He had taken to indulging somewhat freely in vodka, the spirit, distilled from rye, which is the favorite drink of the Russian people, and the vodka loosened his tongue.

Borofsky often sat with him of an evening, the only one of us who did, and on this occasion our guest, being slightly overreached, suddenly broached the subject of Andre Landrinof.

"That brother of the count's you were talking about the other day, Borofsky," he said; "where is he, and what is he doing? Is he a count, too, and rich?"

"He isn't a count, but an infernal blackguard," said Borofsky. "And I should say he is just about as rich as the folks he has robbed are the poorer."

"Ha, ha! Good!" said the fellow. "So you think badly of him. Why?"

"Ask the police," said Borofsky.

"Not I! A set of infernal rascals!" exclaimed the other. "I tell you they are 50 times worse, any one of them, than this Andre Landrinof. Now, Andre—"

"Whom you don't know," laughed Borofsky.

"Wait—I think I have met him under a different name. I think he is one who is or was known as Kornilof. I met him in London."

"Not in Siberia—are you sure?" Borofsky put in.

"Curse you, why do you interrupt me!" shouted the other angrily. "I tell you I know nothing of Siberia. I met this man in London—Kornilof. He lives in London owing to persecutions in this infernal country, and has lived there for years."

"Then it can't be Andre," interrupted Borofsky again, "for Andre has spent the flower of his life in the mines of Siberia, where, it is to be hoped, he still blooms and will continue to bloom until judgment day or so."

"Oh, indeed! You seem to know a great deal of this Andre!" said our guest, with tipsy dignity and scorn.

"Would you be surprised to learn that he is not such a confounded fool as you suppose, and, at the present moment, is thousands of miles from Siberia and has no intention of re—returning there?"

"Kornilof, that is?" suggested Borofsky.

"Yes, Kornilof, or Andre—same thing—same man. 'Siberia is for fools, my friend, and the sooner you go there yourself the sooner you'll be in the place that's best suited for you.'"

CHAPTER XVII.

ANDRE'S STUDENT VISITOR.

After this conversation Borofsky declared that he had no doubt whatever that our sham count was Andre Landrinof. But, though mother and I were quite disposed to agree with him, we could not think of any way in which this fact could be brought into connection with the mystery of father's disappearance.

Nevertheless, though we knew it not, we were now at last on the eve of more important discoveries than that of the mere identity of our guest. We were about to strike a trail and a strong one.

Among those who visited our guest, whom I shall crave permission to call Andre henceforth, since it was from this time that we became accustomed to regard him as undoubtedly father's worthless brother; among the shabby looking persons who visited Andre and held long consultations with him in the apartments set aside to his use was a student, one of that plaided and spectacled class of individuals, half famished and obviously ill nourished and poverty ridden, of whom there are many hundreds in St. Petersburg and from among whom the ranks of the disaffected are principally recruited, for the lot of the Russian student is a miserable one indeed, and it is no wonder that he is a reckless, discontented individual, only too ready to become the dupe or the accomplice of those who preach crusades against property and those who possess it. For he is not like the undergraduate of Oxford or Cambridge, passing rich upon a more or less liberal allowance from his father or his guardian. The Russian student keeps himself and pays his own fees in most cases. He gives lessons during the hours which are free of lectures, and by means of the income thus earned he gains just

enough to pay his university fees and to starve handsomely on what is left over. The little student who visited Andre caused poor Borofsky an immense amount of annoyance and trouble, for he was the only one of Andre's visitors (of whom there were several) whom he had hitherto failed to track to his home wherever that might be. Borofsky now knew the address of all the rest of the friends of our highly respectable guest. He also knew all the houses haunted by Andre himself, which were doubtless the homes of these same worthies, but the student had been too clever for Borofsky and would never allow himself to remain long enough in view to be shadowed for more than a few minutes at a time.

"He's like a will o' the wisp," Borofsky complained. "You think you've got him safe in your eye, and, batz!—he's gone—whither? Heaven knows; I don't. Yet he doesn't suspect me. He has never seen me, except in disguise, and not twice in the same. Why is he so suspicious?"

"Bad conscience," said Percy, and I've no doubt he hit the right nail on the head.

One afternoon in November Borofsky came hurriedly into the billiard room, where Percy and I were busy knocking the bulls about for want of a better occupation.

"I want your help, both of you," he said. "That confounded young student is in with Andre. When he goes away, we must make another attempt to follow him. I must and will know where he goes. Will you help, both of you?"

"Though I did not quite see of what use the addresses of all these rascals were to be to us, excepting as strengthening a case against Andre in the event of our requiring such evidence, I consented to help Borofsky to shadow his will o' the wisp, and so did Percy.

"Good," said Borofsky. "Now, see here. I am going to take up my stand at the corner of the palace bridge. I shall be in disguise. One of you can go toward the Liteynaya, to the right along the quay, and watch in some gateway or porch in case he goes that way. The other should wait until he hears the fellow departing. Keep this door open, and you'll hear him go down into the grand hall. I shall warn the porter to look which way he turns up or down the quay and to let you know the instant you appear. Don't lose a minute, but follow him."

Percy and I tossed up for the choice of duties, and I won. I chose that of shadowing our man from the very door. I preferred a chase to an ambush, having a strong objection to shivering in a gateway in hopes of catching sight of the quarry.

So away went Borofsky to the Dvortsovui Most, or palace bridge, and out sallied Percy to stand and shiver in his perch up Liteynaya way. I sat and read, expectant, prepared to dart forth after my quarry, like a tiger that lies and waits for the native postman just about due (as he knows) to trot through the jungle with the afternoon post; like a spider on the lookout for the fly which is audible, buzzing close at hand, but has not yet quite made up its mind to come and be eaten, and like a great many other things too numerous to specify.

At last I heard Andre's door open and shut. There were light steps running quickly down the marble stairs into the hall, the great door was open, and—

"He's gone to the left," whispered old Gregory, the hall porter, "running like a hare."

Well, if it came to running like a hare, I flattered myself I could probably go one better than any Russian student, will o' the wisp or otherwise, that ever "sprouted a hundred!"

Away I scudded, running on my toes, noiselessly—I had put on a pair of tennis shoes on purpose, for I wished to do my best for poor Borofsky this time. It was nearly dark and a cold evening, very different from an English November evening. There had been a hard frost for a week, and the Neva was covered with rough pack ice. In a day or two the restrictions against crossing the ice world would be removed, and roads would be formed over Neva's bosom in every direction that a short cut to any conceivable spot would justify.

My man had not run far. I saw him pass beneath a lamp 30 yards in front of me, walking quickly. He did not turn to go over the palace bridge, though he appeared to be about to do so and changed his mind. Could he have seen Borofsky? I did, at any rate, and whispered to him as I passed.

"It's all right, Borofsky," I said. "Leave this hunt to me: I'm blood hot!"

Then I continued down the quay, past the admiralty and straight for the English quay and the senate.

There were very few people about. The student hastened along, half running, half walking, and I after him, about 30 yards away, going noiselessly. Suddenly he turned and saw me, or saw, at any rate, that he was followed. He did not know me by sight! Observing this, the student started, going a very fair pace for a Russian, but I easily held my own. He turned and observed that he had gained nothing upon me and, like a wise man, slowed down.

As for me, I did not care whether he liked to be followed or not or what he thought about it. I intended to follow him to the end. I therefore made no attempt to conceal my intention, but just went straight on. I could see that the poor fellow was growing very anxious. He did not like it. He ran into the Admiralty square and dodged round the Great Peter statue and into the Galerneya, where there were more people and a better chance of giving me the slip, but when he turned to see I was still behind him.

Up the street he ran, or half ran, I after him and almost at his heels, for I was not going to be shaken off in the crowd, and so we reached the top, at the Nicholas palace, close to the great stone bridge of the same name, and

over this bridge he made as though he would go.

But suddenly another idea struck him. He turned aside from the bridge and, running quickly down the steps that lead to the water, climbed the "danger" obstruction and got upon the ice with the evident intention of shaking me off by attempting the dangerous and forbidden enterprise of crossing the Neva before the ice had been pronounced safe.

I confess I did not like it. It was too cold and too dark for a bath. There was no particular reason for shadowing this unfortunate little wretch all night, until in desperation he should dart into the squalid hole he called his home. What did his address matter to us? I felt that I was doing a foolish thing. Yet I felt also that I must follow. Not because I expected to gain anything by it, but because the English blood in me was of the real old obstinate, bulldog vintage, I suppose, and I must stick to a thing once undertaken until I had carried it through.

So I followed with scarcely an instant's hesitation, and—well, sometimes the things which appear to be the most foolish turn out to be the wisest. I followed—risking my life—which was so unspeakably valuable to my dear mother, without once reflecting upon that domestic circumstance—and followed in the wisdom of utter foolishness, and—

Away scudded my little will o' the wisp, taking a diagonal line in the direction of the mining corps, which is a good half mile or more from the bridge on the other side, and away scudded I after him.

I could hear him run and pant in front of me, though it was so dark out here in midriver that I could not see him.

We had run, I should think, some 200 or 300 yards over the roughest possible ice that twisted one's ankles and "barked" one's shins at every other step when suddenly there was a scream, followed instantly by a splash and an agonized cry for help.

(To be Continued)

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ESCAPE.

It was a very trying, however, to mother and to me. To be obliged to hang about without advancing the matter we had so deeply at heart until such time as our impostor should think fit to commit himself to some villainy and we should find means to suspect or discover it and thus put



"I was disguised," I said, "with plaids and long hair and white faces and spectacles, all complete. Our own men were far the most respectable looking of the company."

We made Borofsky happy by praising him for his skill this afternoon. He had been and still was very sore over his London fiasco and needed encouragement.

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