

THE MYSTERY OF COUNT LANDRINOF.

BY FRED WHISHAW.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

THE COUNT'S EXILE TO SIBERIA.

"Do you mean," I said, "that you will be able to provide evidence that this man Andre is the convict Kornilof and not my father?"

"Perhaps," said the student, smiling conceitedly.

"It is ridiculous," I cried hotly, "to suppose that the police will refuse to accept the evidence of a man's own wife and child and will believe yours for the asking."

"It may be ridiculous, but the police never admit a blunder if they can make any one else suffer for it instead of themselves. As for my part in the business, you forget that I possess information of various kinds with regard to Andre, which might be useful and even important to them and might throw a light on this matter."

"I see," I said. "But I shall be both surprised and disgusted if it prove to be as you say, and the authorities refuse to believe our evidence. I shall have you now and consult my friends. Believe your story as to father's capture; so you may consider your check safe. At the same time you are to remain where you are until other matters are settled. You have no objection continue as my guest?"

"So long as my safety is guaranteed I shall be charmed to remain," said the student. "Does Andre enjoy the run of the house? He must not see me or that I am here. He would murder me, and your cause would be lost."

"I shall not come here or know of your presence. I shall see that only persons are aware that I have an acquaintance staying in the city."

"Good! See that the same wine is brought to me, like the generous host you are, and plenty of it!" He shouted the last words at me as I left the room.

"I shall have you watched, my fine fellow," I said to myself as I hurried to my room. "For you are a pearl of price. And I may say in this time until—well, certain things had happened. Percy or Borofsky or I was concerned in the passage outside the student's room, both to see that he attempted to escape and to guard against a bugbear that one must dread and fear all times."

"And Borofsky and Percy playing hide-and-seek?" I cried the latter. "What a game! Both he and Borofsky laid down their arms and waited for me to speak."

"I was here and my heart was throbbing with the news I had to tell you. I was unable to utter a single word. I suppose I dreaded being disgraced. I had formed lovely hopes so many times and on each occasion they were dashed from me that I suppose, I feared to be told by Borofsky that this which my student had told me was mere humbug; that he had deceived me, and there was not a word of truth in his story."

"I'll probably say it's all a tissue of lies," I blurted at length, with difficulty.

"That's extremely probable," said Borofsky, who had been soured of late by his ill successes and was not in the least humorous.

"If any rate, old man, we'll count on it in its bearings," said Percy. "The heads are better than one. Of, I admit yours is not such a bad one. Is it so very incredible?"

"On the contrary, I don't think it is at all," I said, "but Borofsky may disagree."

"I suppose," said Borofsky, "she shall not pay him another penny."

"She's a detective order of mind, and I don't dread to be told there's nothing there, because—"

"Well—because what?" said Borofsky. "I shall criticize. It is my duty. I shall be only too glad to recognize your cleverness."

"I think it is a real clever, and that I know what became of my poor father," I said. "You see, the student told me—"

"Stop! You forget that we should like to hear the tale itself before listening to your comments on it," laughed Borofsky.

Then I told them as clearly as I could, and without the circumlocution that my conceited student garnished the tale with, how father had been cruelly and wickedly entrapped and substituted for a wretch who was wanted by the police, and how the police had fallen into the ambush prepared for them.

and had in all probability deported father to Siberia, while Andre was left to live in luxury and freedom.

I paused when I had finished the story. Then, "Great Caesar!" murmured Percy. Borofsky meditated in silence.

"Well, Borofsky," I said presently, "don't keep me in suspense. I long to hear your opinion. Is the tale true or a tissue of lies?"

"Stop!" said Borofsky. "Did you tell the rascal anything of your journey to Erinofka and your finding of a clew there?"

I reflected a moment. "No," I said. "I don't think I did. I'm sure I didn't."

"Ah! Then the tale is true," said Borofsky, "for it fits in with that which we know, unless, of course, he was sharp enough to put two and two together and build his tale on the rumors he may have heard of our researches at Erinofka. His precious society, or brotherhood, or gang of thieves, or whatever you like to call it, may have heard of our being on the scent there, even though it were not they who murdered the wretched little peasant who brought you information."

"No," said Percy. "The Erinofka bit belongs all right; it is part of our affair. The little peasant told us a true tale and suffered death for it. Who murdered him? Why, these infernal rascals; possibly the student himself. The story is consistent, Borofsky, from beginning to end. Boris has got hold of the right man at last. You were after him, I know, for weeks, and therefore the credit is yours as much as his; but Boris it was that nabbed him. Well done, Boris, old boy! You deserve your success. Gad, Borofsky! You wouldn't have gone in after the fellow into an ice hole! Come, would you now?"

Borofsky, pleased with the compliment conveyed in the earlier part of the sentence, smiled acquiescence.

"I don't think I would," he said. "I can't swim. Yes," he continued, "the story sounds consistent enough, and it may be that our little rascal has come over, body and soul, into the enemy's camp."

"And no wonder either, I should say," said Percy, "since they starved him in the other, while we offer him food and raiment and shekels of gold and of silver. This student knows which side of his bread is well jammed!"

"The thing is, could the police have been such utter idiots as this would prove them," I said, "and, again, if they have blundered, will they acknowledge their blunder and allow poor father to come back?"

"The police blunder often enough," said Borofsky. "There would be nothing extraordinary in that. They would have drugged the count, of course—Andre & Co. I mean—so that he could not protest his innocence when arrested; at any rate, not in a comprehensible manner. As for whether the police will admit their blunder, that remains to be seen. We must interview the pristaf who arrested him. The student will tell you which district the house lay in."

"And if they simply laugh in our faces, as my fellow says they probably will, what then?"

"Then, apparently, he has another card up his sleeve," said Borofsky, "and since he seems to be very proud of it and very anxious to produce it for a wage we may hope it is a trump."

"If it is the key that will unlock father's secret and bring him back to his own," I said, "mother will pay any amount for it and feed the little rascal like a fighting cock all his life besides."

"Nonsense!" said Borofsky quite angrily. "She shall not pay him another penny. This time he shall swallow the pill which is not gilded. I shall take him in hand myself. You have done well, Count Boris, but not too wisely!"

"Let's tackle the police first," I said. "There's no need to quarrel over the other matter yet awhile. I'll just go back and find out from my man the address of the house in which my father had been placed in order to be arrested, according to the scheme of Andre and his friends."

The student was in a bad humor, I found. I had forgotten to send up wine, he complained.

"You shall have it presently," I promised, and I bade him tell me at once the address I required.

"Not till I have the wine!" said he. "You shall have it the instant you have told me," I replied angrily. "Do you think I grudge you the wine? What is it to me if you besot yourself with two bottles or three?"

"Not a word till I see the wine!" he replied obstinately.

Had he known it, his pigheadedness cost that student dear, for I then and there determined that his next secret, if required, should not be unlocked with a key of gold, as the first had been. Borofsky should squeeze it out of him. The little fool seemed to forget or ignore that we had the terror side of him, if we cared to attack him at a disadvantage.

CHAPTER XXV.

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE POLICE.

The student got his wine and I the required address. Some remark was made as to the length of time I had been in his room, but I said nothing of the undignified defeat I had suffered. Then I went with Borofsky to the

pristaf of the second oochastok of the Vassily Ostrof divisional police, leaving Percy on duty at home to hang about the passage and see that my friend the student was up to no mischief.

We found the pristaf at home and Borofsky did all the talking for our side, excepting when I was addressed and was obliged to answer.

The official looked coldly at us as we entered. Russian officials have a most disagreeable way. I have never seen any Muscovite in authority without this particular manner—a kind of disdainful and supercilious hauteur which neither affability nor humor nor gross flattery will penetrate, but only, occasionally—rather often—the almighty and all-penetrating ruble.

"Yes?" said the pristaf. "We have called," said Borofsky. "to consult you about a certain arrest effected by you or your men on or about the—"

"Stop!" said the pristaf. "Why have I to listen to this? Is the case still sub judice?"

"Yes and no," said Borofsky boldly. "It has been judged, or went without judgment; but it must be reopened."

"Who says so?" "Those who have suffered injustice by it."

"Injustice? That is a foolish word to use in this place. Proceed. Who has suffered injustice—the delinquent?"

"The convicted, yes; he and others." "Indeed! How so? He was convicted, you say, and, of course, punished. Has his innocence only now come to light?"

"It is not a matter of innocence and guilt, pristaf. A great blunder has been committed."

"A blunder! Dence take it, what blunder? Where—in this oochastok? It is impossible!"

"I admit that the department in this quarter is not to be suspected of blundering, as a rule," said Borofsky. "Justice reigns supreme in this oochastok and in the bosom of its enlightened pristaf, but this time you have been the victim of an organized conspiracy."

"Well, proceed," said the pristaf, not in the least flurried or softened by Borofsky's flattery. The fellow took it for what it was worth, and he knew the value of the compliments of those who came to make appeals at the police court.

"Proceed," he said. "We have blundered, but through no fault of our own. Some one has been too clever for us. Yes; proceed, sir."

"You must allow me to tell you the details of the affair, pristaf," said poor Borofsky, feeling that his remarks beat like waves upon the hard rock of this man's official impenetrability.

"Why should I?" said the pristaf. "It is surely your duty to investigate matters which are declared to you to need investigation and to set right that which is wrong. Here is a case in which, as I say, a terrible mistake has been made."

"I am not the judge," said the pristaf coldly. "My duty is to carry out the instructions of my superiors and to keep order in my district."

"Nevertheless a word from you signifying that a mistake may have been made would cause those superiors to reconsider the matter which is concerned. On the other hand, should you refuse to say that word the court could scarcely reopen any question unless influence and pressure were applied from without."

"Come. This is mere waste of time and idle talking," said the pristaf, looking closely at Borofsky and at me. I think he wished to discern whether he had cause to fear any such influence and pressure from without as Borofsky's words made hint of.

"I have no time to waste on such matters as you speak of. My experience is that blunders are invariably imaginary. The court knows its business, and we know ours. Why should we blunder? You say there has been an intrigue. Who are you?"

"Borofsky, private detective, engaged in this matter, which is more important than you appear to suppose, Mr. Pristaf, and which will go further than this court."

"So? A private detective—a young one indeed. The detective art is not to be learned in the nursery, young sir. And who is this other?"

"Count Boris Landrinof," I said. The pristaf distinctly winced.

"Oh!" he said. "The son of Count Vladimir, no doubt? What can the son of so eminent a person require in a police court?"

"That is what I wish to explain to you, pristaf, if you will allow me!" said Borofsky. "If you will turn back to the month of July last, you will find that you effected the arrest of a—"

"Stop! What has Count Landrinof to do with all this?"

"May I not tell the story from the beginning?" said Borofsky. "It is impossible to explain all without beginning at the beginning."

"Stop—the date of this arrest?" "Seventeenth of July of this year." "Good! The place of arrest?" Borofsky gave the name of the house as provided by the student. The pristaf turned back the pages of his daybook.

"Good again," he said. "Now, what is the mistake complained of? Is it you, Count Boris, who complains, or Count Vladimir himself?"

"It is I," I said. "I both complain, and I will move heaven and earth but you shall set right your blunder, pristaf. Never think you will frighten me with your hauteur!"

"Excuse me, count, but you have gone beyond me," said the pristaf. He spoke more politely to me than to Borofsky, but I could see that my words did not please him. "You have not yet explained the nature of the complaint. The name of the arrested on the day and at the address named was, I perceive, Kornilof, an escaped convict, a murderer and a rogue of the first water. God. There is no doubt of his guilt, for he is known to have escaped from

Siberian exile. He was tracked to St. Petersburg, arrested here and taken back to complete his sentence. There can scarcely be a mistake here. Indeed you have pitched upon a case, young sir, in which, there can be less question of blunder than in any other almost in our sheets. It is not your father who complains, I understand, but yourself. Let me warn you that this is a dangerous case in which to interfere. Should you prove yourself interested in this Kornilof, the authorities would be obliged, in spite of respect for your parent and other considerations, to regard your future actions with suspicion and perhaps even to put a watch upon your doings. Now, then, what have you to complain of?"

"Speak for me, Borofsky," I said. "No, excuse me, I will hear no complaint from any but the complainant himself."

"Very well, then," I said doggedly. "Only he would have said it more politely than I, maybe. I complain, pristaf, that your fools of constables arrested the wrong man. You must have seen the prisoner?"

"Certainly," interrupted the pristaf. "Therefore you are as much to blame as they—perhaps more—and I warn you that unless you set the matter right, and at once, as I shall indicate, steps shall be taken to get justice done in another way, and in that case you shall not go unpunished."

"But, Holy Mother!" cried the pristaf, somewhat impressed, perhaps, by my earnestness. "What is all this to you, count? Even supposing that I had arrested the wrong delinquent—which I deny—how should you know of it, of all people you, and why should it interest you? As soon I would expect one of the

czar's sons to come to me with a similar tale. Now, in a word, supposing that we did not actually arrest this Kornilof—which, again I deny—we arrested another in his place. You are, then, interested in this other—is that it?"

"I am."

"Name him, then."

"Count Vladimir Landrinof!" I said, playing my trump card as boldly as I could. I longed to impress this man with the seriousness of the affair he was inclined to treat so lightly. I would bluff him, frighten him, amaze him, but he should believe me and obey me!

The effect of my words upon the pristaf was certainly marked. He started and looked at me and then at Borofsky. Then he addressed himself to my companion.

"Is the young gentleman mad?" he asked.

"To be Continued"



"Is the young gentleman mad?" he asked.

"To be Continued"

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