THE MYSTERY OF COUNT LANDRINOF.

BY FRED WHISHAW.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

PLOT AGAINST THE CZAR.

"The czar," began the student, "is, as perhaps you know, absent in Livadia. He should return on Friday week."

"Well, what has that to do with our affair?"

"This—that if Andre should have his way his majesty will not return, neither on Friday nor on any other day."

Borofsky started violently. He whistled slightly and sat a moment in thought.

"Are you speaking of this very person, Andre?" he asked at last.

"Certainly. Of whom else?"

"And you suggest that this man, whom we are harboring here among ourselves, is at present engaged in a plot against his majesty."

"No; I don't suggest it. I assert it."

"Can you prove it, student?"

"Easily, at any moment."

"Why, great heavens, man, there's a fortune in the secret—honor, glory, reward, everything! Do you realize it?"

"There is Siberia in it for such as I," laughed the student. "That or our own president's pistol. There might be re-

Poor Borofsky surprised us by entering this room suddenly and rapidly.

es. It for you if you were to reveal the situa time and thus save the czar. s the r me such a course is impossible. wned s d rather have the certainty of attend ubles from the young count than your ca nce of ten times as much from of their titude of the czar. Czars gener- o exper ntrive to reward the wrong men. be told Is it a bargain? Five thousand not. If down and the secret yours to do treat y like with. A grand opportunity you such n, Mr. Borofsky, only, mind you, They ly new oney and my passport and 48 forms start before you act upon it." turn, b think I may promise that Count tendenc consum will reward you handsomely. l. It wi, of course, we have the whip igh exa f you, and might, if we chose, t all dis your very soul out of you fo w discov g. Tell me about this conspiracy, lectricity will advise him to be generous.' eumatic ell, I will trust you. You will be ous syst humanit d with my tale. Why do you at the m Andre has come to St. Peters- ected wh For the pleasure (and risk) of liv- oduced. this comfortable house and pass- hope of mong strangers as the Count Lan- opportun ? No, my friend, there would be no without dvantage to balance the tremen- reputatio isks. He has come to your house e of medi y, gives e he finds it a grand center and at other ary for the quiet hatching of his a weak ggs. That's all. The man requires if you a le time to himself and a quiet s new s and here he has found both. The Don't fa Very well. It is aimed against ialists, a d of the realm, of course. Be- ng and i the station Kirilof and Bootief, ct kidney the line runs through a forest, tle of you one mile from the Bootief clear- ical anal ces are a a woodman's cabin. Close to improving abin there is something very not com with the earth. A careful exam- ime. W n will disclose it." y of time, ce—a plot to blow up the czar's es not per But how is Andre concerned?" and poor ere are several concerned, but curiosity is the head and chief of the y. Our The man to ask for on the spot ncer, tun Krolok, but he is a desperate sort nd blood aracter, and it would be as well ases cur ery careful. The ground is un- Piles cur ed from the cabin to the very s with out ll is finished, and the web waits y of disea fly. On Friday, unless he should ember n ned beforehand, the victim will r all the unsuspectingly into it, and, piff, re to all m. Posi is the czar? There; that is my trip. O accomp If the police will not believe t Wils Andre is Andre and not Count nd Sat rinof when you shall have present- 19th, D them with their czar, alive and safe. order to prove the fact, why, then, y are past praying for, and there is more to be said."

"How is the responsibility for the conspiracy to be brought home to him?" said Borofsky, thinking aloud rather than asking the question.

"Seize Krolok—let the police seize Krolok! They will soon find out who are his accomplices; they have a way of extracting information from their prisoners which, it is said, is irresistible."

"Well, I think I may say that you have done your best, Mr. Student, to justify your release and perhaps some reward. I will now discuss matters with my friends, and you shall hear the result as soon as possible."

"For the love of heaven, be careful!" cried the student. "I repeat that if Andre were to learn that I am here and in communication with you he would murder me on the spot and then disappear. This would be fatal for your purpose, remember, for the police will assuredly never return you your Count Landrinof unless you have another to give them in his place. If he were to murder me, he would disappear, I tell you."

"We must hope for the best, both for you and for ourselves," said Borofsky. "We shall be careful, of course."

It was while Borofsky was repeating to Percy and myself the details of his conversation with the student that a summons came for him from our other guest, Andre.

Borofsky was in the habit of visiting Andre, so that the summons was nothing unusual, but he prepared to obey it, nevertheless, with some little trepidation tonight.

"He will be agitated about the pristaf's visit!" he said. "Probably he'll insist upon knowing why we visited the pristaf and where we got our information from."

"Gad," I exclaimed, "that's true. What shall you say, Borofsky?"

"That depends upon what he says," said Borofsky. "I must be discreet and give nothing and no one away; that is the main thing."

"He won't be violent, will he?" suggested Percy. "Hadn't you better pocket a revolver before entering the lion's den, Borofsky?"

"He wouldn't be such a fool as that. It would be a suicidal thing to do. His policy will now be, you'll see, to disappear suddenly while he rouses in us no suspicion of his intentions. He does not know that we know that the pristaf was here today, remember."

"Well, be careful, Borofsky!" said I, warningly, "for the fellow's temper is dangerous. Don't forget the Serpentine!"

Borofsky smiled a wan smile. It was not a pleasant recollection for him.

"I think he'll be mild enough tonight!" he said.

But only half an hour later poor Borofsky surprised us by entering the room suddenly and rapidly, as though pursued, and by closing and locking the door behind him. His tie and collar were disarranged, his shirt front rumpled; he looked, as Percy said afterward, as though he had slept in his clothes and had had a restless night.

Borofsky sank into a chair. He crossed himself and muttered something, a bit of a prayer, in Russian.

"What is it?" we asked in a breath.

"I've been nearly killed," he gasped. "I thought I was dead—he's an awful man! I wouldn't go through that again for a year's salary; the infernal, murdering scoundrel!"

"What is it, man?" we both exclaimed once more.

"We must get that little wretch of a student away, and pretty quickly," continued Borofsky, ignoring our remark, "or he'll be murdered as sure as fate!"

"Do tell us what has happened, Borofsky," I implored.

"I was quite wrong in supposing that he would play the cunning game. He made no attempt to control his anger. He was at me the instant I came in. He shook me as if I were a rat and he a terrier, curse him! I didn't breathe a full breath for ten minutes. Have you a brandy and soda there, Boris Vladimirich?"

I supplied the necessary restorative.

"Great heavens!" continued Borofsky. "If I don't set the police on the rogue for this and get him safely put away in the mines, I'll never undertake another case. I must tell you about it in a few words, for positively no one in the house is safe with that devil at large, and, as for the student, I wouldn't insure him at cent per cent."

"But surely he doesn't know the student's in the house!" I exclaimed, aghast.

"Well, that's what I want to tell you," said Borofsky.

CHAPTER XXX.

UNMASKING THE IMPOSTOR.

Borofsky gulped down his dose and began.

"When I entered that raving maniac's room," he said, "the fellow came straight to me and took me by the shoulders. 'You've given me away to the police, you sneaking hound,' he muttered, 'and I'm going to kill you for it! Now, what have you to say before I strangle you? Why have you broken faith? Did you not promise that you would keep quiet and not let your tongue wag?'

"'Let me breathe, you fool,' I gasped, 'or how can I speak?'

"He loosened his hold on my collar a little, and I added that I certainly had so promised, but that many things had since happened which had altered the conditions.

"'Yes,' he said, 'you have heard a fool's yarn as to the arrest of Count Landrinof, and so on. I have had a visit from the pristaf, who has told me the whole silly tale. Can you believe this kind of nonsense?'

"'Not I,' I said, wishing to conciliate him.

"'Then why repeat it to the police? You have done no good by it, friend. The pristaf did the wisest thing he could have done and came straight to me. He is now convinced that I am Landrinof and that my wife and son have conspired, for reasons of their own, to get rid of me by means of this clumsy plot. It will not succeed. Meanwhile, who is your informant? You invented the tale—is that so?'

"'Yes!' I said, jumping at a straw, for the man's eyes looked devilish and terrible.

"'You liar!' he hissed, tightening his hold again. 'Who is your informant? Come; I will know!'

"I could scarcely breathe; I was suffocating. In another moment I must have died.

"'The student!' I gasped. He relaxed his hold that instant.

"'Ah, that is better—the student!' he repeated. 'How did you get hold of the student, and here?'

"'Count Boris caught him and squeezed him,' I said; 'it was not his fault.'

"'Oh, I don't blame him!' he said. 'Well, where is this student? I have missed him these days. Well, he is a liar—that is, he has lied to you—but he is useful to me, a kind of Mercury, and I must find him. Come; where is he?' His fingers tightened upon my neck. 'Where is he?' he repeated. I struggled, but it was useless. He is far stronger than I. I was on the point of strangulation when I told him, but tell him I did. I could not help it. Then he let me come away, and I locked the student in his room and brought away the key—here it is—I could think of nothing better to do. We must spirit him from the house tonight and hide him in some hired lodging. I can get him a passport tomorrow, and he can take train to Reval and sail to London from there, or—no; Reval is his best way.'

"If we can only safely get through this night," I said, my teeth a-chatter with the excitement into which Borofsky's recital had thrown me. "If we can only get through tonight safely and put the police on to this railway mining business in the morning, keeping our eye on Andre meanwhile, we shall have the department on our side by the evening. Andre won't be at large long once we tell them about the intended attempt on the czar's life—if they believe us sufficiently to verify the story, that is."

"Yes, and if the student hasn't invented the whole tale!" said Percy.

"We should look pretty foolish if the police went there and found nothing!"

"Go out, Percy, like a dear good chap, and take a room somewhere for the unfortunate little wretch," I suggested, and Percy, as usual, stood not upon the order of his going, but went.

He returned in an hour, having found a lodging for our informer. This was half a mile away, behind the Champs de Mars, in a slummy street whose name I have forgotten. The next thing was to get the student out of the house in safety.

We waited until past midnight before we attempted to make the move. Andre might be on the watch, suspicious of such action as this which we were taking.

At length, however, after much caution and listening and watching of doors, we successfully spirited our man down the corridor and into the grand hall and down to the front entrance, and here old Gregory, the concierge, had a surprise for us.

When we warned him, for the love of heaven, not to mention this flitting to the "count" (should he come down to inquire), Gregory informed us that the "so called count" was not at home. The old man, though requested, for reasons, to call Andre "the count," would never consent to do so when speaking to ourselves; for us there was always the modifying clause "so called." Andre had gone out an hour ago and had not yet returned.

I confess that this information gave me a creepy feeling. It was not pleasant to feel that the murderous scoundrel was at large and perhaps on the watch, suspecting and determined to defeat our machinations. Bah! I have often recalled that horrible sensation; it has formed the backbone of most of my nightmares since that distressing time.

The student was radiant, however. He knew nothing of Borofsky's terrible quarter of an hour with Andre, but he was relieved to be out of the house and rejoiced exceedingly over the prospect of tomorrow's escape, poor wretch, to make a new start in life with a pocketful of money and a clean bill, in the shape of a passport which set him down as some one else.

He informed me during the drive to his new quarters that he had never had a fair chance in life, having been born and bred in penury and among associates who neither knew nor cared to distinguish between that which is commonly called right and that which is commonly called wrong. I dare say his complaint was perfectly true. If so, who is going to blame him for the terrible mess the poor fellow has made of the thing we call "life?"

"There's something in this world amiss shall be unraveled by and by," sings a great poet, and I think he voices what we all feel.

I left the student in a happy and peaceful frame of mind, first extracting a promise from him that he would not venture out until, with passport in hand, he could set out for the station tomorrow evening. Borofsky or I, I promised, or Percy should bring him the document as early as possible.

Moreover, he was to receive a second check. I did not grudge this. He had been very useful to us and had run terrible risks, even greater risks than he knew.

When I reached home, Andre was still out, old Gregory reported. Could he have thought matters over and decided to take the safer course of flight? And indeed, we all agreed, he would be none the less discreet in having done so, for verily the net was closing round him, as we hoped and believed it, and he was not the kind of man to remain in a fools' paradise of security when the danger signal had been sounded. We laid our plans carefully for the morrow. We felt that this would be an important day for us and for the great object we had in view—namely, my dear father's justification.

There were three things to be done—first, the student's passport must be begged, borrowed or stolen, and he himself safely dispatched. Secondly, the police must be warned of the devil's work in progress on the railway. We should go straight to the chief of police himself about this and persuade him to wire the depot nearest to the spot to send a party of inspection. Should there prove to be truth in the student's tale, we should have no difficulty in attaining our third and chiefest object—Andre's arrest. Even if he escaped, the authorities would scarcely venture to contest our contention further—namely, that Andre was an impostor and that my poor father was now suffering for another's sins.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MURDER OF THE INFORMANT.

The "high official" at the department received us on the following morning courteously, but, I thought, somewhat superciliously.

"I fear I have not much encouragement to offer you today," he said; "it appears that the pristaf of the oochastok in which the arrest admittedly took place has interviewed the count and has heard his version of the story. That version differs so materially from your own that the fullest investigations must be made before we can reasonably hope for any progress."

"It would naturally differ from ours," said Borofsky; "that was to be expected. May we ask what particular line he has adopted?"

"He asserts that his wife is mad and utterly refuses to recognize him and that his son—whether insane also, or only a blind partisan of his mother—chooses to support her incomprehensible conduct. He is prepared, he declares, to bring forward witnesses—servants and others—to prove his identity. To be strictly honest, it appears to me that the man, were he an impostor, as you contend, would scarcely dare to brave out his deception, now that the police are in possession of the facts of the case and intend to make an investigation. He would suddenly disappear from the house and"—

"He left the house last night and has not since reappeared."

The chief winced and remained silent a moment.

"Well," he said, "I quite admit that is a point in your favor, so far as it goes. Is that what you came to tell me?"

"That and something still more startling, excellence," said Borofsky. "We believe we have unearthed a plot!"

"A plot?" repeated the chief sternly. "What kind of a plot? It is very unlikely that you should have unearthed anything which is not known to this department. Explain."

"The czar is to return this week, I believe, and by train."

"Stop! I warn you that the mention of the czar and his movements instantly renders every communication of vital importance. Are you prepared for the responsibility you will incur by embarking upon such a course?"

"It is absolutely necessary to inquire into this matter that I have to speak of. We are ready to take the consequences, good or evil. Our fears may be groundless. If so, so much the better. We only know that which we have been told by one who professes to be accurately informed."

The great man paused awhile to consider.

"The same source," he said presently, "I suppose, as that from which you drew the fairy tale of yesterday."

"Yesterday's was no fairy tale, but the plain truth. This may be a lie, told with a purpose; I cannot tell, but you will agree that, lie or truth, the thing must be inquired into."

"Well, I will hear, in any case," said the chief. "Speak, if you will!"

"It is a plot to wreck the czar's train!" Borofsky began.

The chief started to his feet.

"Who's plot? What! How dare you say such a thing! Such an assertion must be fully proved and should be well tested before it is made in this place. Who are the conspirators? Where and how, do you suggest, would the attempt be made?"

"This very impostor, who, as you have seen, would pass as Count Landrinof, is, we suggest, the head and center of the affair. That is our information. The place is a spot between Kirilof and Bootief, on the Moscow-Boulogne line of railway. Our impostor has disappeared, but your men can surely lay hands upon him. For the rest you can, of course, send a telegram to the nearest town or station to the spot where the attempt is or was to be made."

"Stop! Your informant—where is he to be found?"

"That is our secret," I said.

"My dear sir," said the chief warmly, "do you seriously suppose that we should allow the author of so serious a warning as this to escape our hands? The man must be personally implicated or he would not be in a position to turn informer. Come; we are neither children nor fools. Who is this man, and where is he to be found?"

"I have promised that he should remain screened," I said. "Without the giving of such an undertaking I should never have learned the secrets he had to reveal."

"And which he revealed doubtless in hope of a reward? What reward?"

"Ten thousand rubles—half for the information as to my father's arrest and deportation by a plunder of the police, who fell into the trap laid for them; the other half for this secret."

"And why, pray, should you pay 5,000 rubles for the secret of this conspiracy? It is magnanimous. But why?"

"Because you refused to believe in the imposture of this man. It was necessary to bring home to him some other undoubted offense, such as this. Then I hoped you would realize that a mistake had been made in the other affair and would have the mistake set right by releasing my father and punishing this wretch."

"But your informer probably invented this new thing in order to gain an extra reward—5,000 rubles. Gracious heaven! What lie would not any man tell for such a sum of money?"

"Well, telegraph and let your fellows see whether the thing is lie or truth. You can detain me here, if you like. If it should prove that my informant has not lied, why, then, he will have done you a signal service, and you will not regret allowing him to escape from the country, on condition that he leaves a written deposition."

"I will telegraph, at any rate!" said the chief, who, in spite of his bullying air, put on by way of covering his annoyance to find that so serious a matter as an attempt at the czar's life should be in actual preparation without his knowledge, was obviously agitated and far more inclined to take us seriously than he had been yesterday or at the commencement of the interview.

"If you will sit down, both of you, and rest awhile," he continued, "I will have this matter set going at once. We can settle the question of the informer at a later stage of the inquiry; there may be nothing in it."

He left Borofsky and me seated in his private o

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"Don't say he has escaped
"It would mean that he had
through."

"He's dead!" muttered Percy
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with the knife in his heart—a f
sight! I thought I'd better co
here and tell you about it at once.

(To be Continued)

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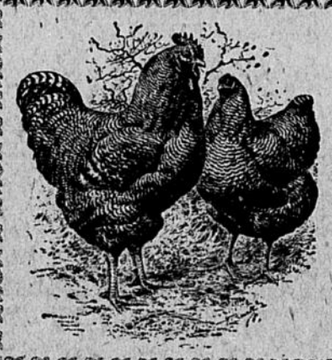

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