

chance of speedy work, they might have tried to conceal their presence, but under the circumstances this would be impossible. So they had resolved to proclaim their presence, and even to welcome visitors, if any should appear, up to the moment before the gold began to be brought aboard.

Besides the advisability of making their presence known to the authorities, there was always the off chance that careful watch as the launch sped to and fro in the inlet might disclose the Orkney lying like a dark shadow beneath the water. The fisher boats, of course, had not discovered it, but this argued little, because the boats generally used the other, or eastern, outlet, rather than the western; and further, perhaps, because the fishermen were not looking for anything of the kind.

So, soon as possible after the divers had gone below the water, Caruth ordered out a steam launch to make the quarter mile trip to the head of the inlet and visit the village which he knew lay there, though screened from view of the yacht by a turn in the channel.

Caruth had intended to go to the village alone on the first trip, leaving Marie Fitzhugh (who thought it best not to show herself) and Captain Wilson to superintend affairs on board the yacht and deal with any emergencies that might arise. It was no part of his plan to take Wilkins along, but when that individual joined him, evidently intending to go, he did not quite know how to refuse.

So far he had no reason to question the plainsman's good faith. Wilkins had produced his brother's letter at the time promised and it had proved to be all that he had claimed for it. Caruth could not risk exciting any animosity by showing unwillingness to trust the man on shore.

**S**UDDENLY, in the midst of his hesitation, he recalled the westerner's marked liking for the pretended Olga Shishkin, and at once sought out that young woman and invited her to go on the trip to the village.

"You'll be doing us all a favor if you'll come, Miss Shishkin," he urged. "Of course we are all loyal and all that, but"—he dropped his voice—"none of us know very much about Wilkins, and it would make things a good deal safer for your father and the rest of us if you'd go along and keep an eye on him. He's all right, you know, but—"

"But you're on the anxious bench all the same. I know how it is myself. Sure! I'll go with pleasure, Mr. Caruth."

The run up to the village was brief, and soon the launch grated against a little wooden pier and disembarked her passengers, who started toward the cluster of buildings that seemed to constitute the village.

"There's the church and the store and the post-office and the mayor's house," explained Caruth, pointing out the several edifices. "There's no mistaking any of them once you know the type. I'll have to go to the mayor first to report my arrival, and give him a chance to inform St. Petersburg. You needn't come in unless you like. It will only take a few minutes and then we can do the town."

By the time the party had reached the village, quite a little crowd had collected. Visitors are few on Burdo Island, and the news of their coming spread apace. Curious faces appeared at doors and windows, while gaping children lined the way.

Caruth vanished into the house of the mayor, where he found that his business would take a much longer time than he had expected. The mayor, a stupid and suspicious peasant, spoke no English, and Caruth spoke no Russian, and there was a delay until an interpreter could be found.

This interpreter proved to be a slim fellow, whose appearance, despite the fact that his features were hidden by a profusion of beard, nevertheless impressed Caruth with a vague sense of familiarity. For an instant, indeed, the young fellow was sure that he had seen the man before; the next moment, however, he dismissed the idea as preposterous.

But he quickly adverted to his former feeling when the interpreter addressed him in very good American.

"Mornin', cap'n," he said, with a nod. "This old son of a gun wants to know who you are and what you want here, anyhow."

Caruth gave his name and explained the object of his trip; then added: "Who are you? You talk like an American."

"American! Well, I guess yes! Me for the starry banner every time. I'm from little old Noo York; I am. But wait a minute till I tell this pie face what you say."

He turned and translated what Caruth had said

into halting Russian, and then appeared to render into English something that the mayor said in return.

"He says you are a liar or crazy," he translated, cheerfully. "He puts it kinder easier, but that's what it means all right. Say, that yarn you told me about hunting things at the bottom of the bay is straight, I suppose?"

"Of course it's straight."

"Well, I'll try to sneeze it to him again, though I ain't much on the Russian. It tastes too much like it sounds and that's enough. Say! I suppose you belong to the safety vault crowd and have barrels of samoleons at home!"

Caruth flushed; then laughed. The man's impudence was refreshing. "Well," he answered, "I've got enough to keep me going."

"I guessed so. Wait a minute. I must keep the old geezer satisfied." He turned and for a moment



"I suppose you know what you mean," she answered insolently, "but I don't"

the language of the czar held the floor. Finally the man resumed.

"It's that touch of yours about rising sea bottoms that gets him," he exclaimed. "He says he's lived here all his life and never seen the sea bottom rise yet. Come to think of it, it is a sort of tough gag to spring on one of these two by four government officers what rank somewhere between Jack high and a bobtail flush and is intelligenced according. Not but what I reckon it's true enough. But about this here question of wealth. If you've got it to burn, I don't reckon you'd care to pyramid it a million or so, would you?"

**C**ARUTH was startled, his unquiet conscience making him suspect that everything anyone said to him had reference to his own true errand.

"I don't know," he answered cautiously. "What have you got? A gold mine?"

The man laughed shortly. "A gold mine," he echoed. "A gold mine! Well! I guess you might call it that. What I want to know is, do you care to go in on it? Or if you don't, will you help out an American marooned on this d—d holeski?"

Caruth nodded uneasily. "Oh! I suppose so," he answered slowly. "I'm always willing to help a fellow countryman in distress. But you'll have to explain more fully."

"I'll explain all right. But I can't do it here. Besides, you've got to answer all the questions on this sheet of paper first, or you'll have the czarski in your hairski."

The questions were long and tedious, and when they were finished, Caruth rose from the interview with a sigh of relief.

The interpreter rose also. "I've told his joblots that you want me to show you round the mud puddle," he explained.

"That'll give me a chance to spiel. Come along."

The two walked to the door. As they walked out Wilkins met them. "Miss Shishkin's looking at the church," he explained. "She's—"

He broke off and his face grew red, then white, as his eyes fell on the interpreter. Once or twice he swallowed; then coughed. "Damn that Russian tobacco," he exclaimed, evidently to explain his actions. "It's been strangling me ever since I sniffed it half an hour ago."

Caruth, who had waited smilingly till the plainsman recovered, glanced toward the church. "Shall we go over and join Miss Shishkin?" he suggested. "I've got an interpreter here who can—Hello! What's become of the fellow?"

The interpreter had vanished. In the few instants that Caruth's attention was centered on Wilkins, he had slipped away, probably around one of the houses that stood close by. At first Caruth supposed that the disappearance would be but temporary, but as the minutes went by without sign, he was forced to conclude that it was both permanent and intentional.

When at last doubt no longer remained, the young fellow laughed angrily. "Let him go. Confound him!" he exclaimed. "He was half crazy, anyhow. Come! Let's go to the church."

#### CHAPTER XIV

**N**EITHER Wilkins nor Florence had waited long for Caruth to return. In fact, that gentleman had scarcely vanished into the mayor's office when Florence had turned to her companion.

"Gee!" she remarked. "Me for the breakaway. These high brows gets on my nerves. Let's see the town; even if it ain't all to the giddy, it's better than the old boat. Gee! But it's slow!" Miss Lee, it will be observed, was glad to pretermit, when opportunity offered, her use of the forms of speech she was rapidly acquiring.

Wilkins looked at her suspiciously. "You ain't seemed in no ways bored?" he suggested.

"Oh! I got to put up a front, of course," rejoined the girl indifferently; "but if it wasn't for you I guess I'd fade away. This style of life's all right for those that likes it, I guess, but it's me for Coney Island every time."

They had reached the church now and were peering in at the open door. Miss Lee was not impressed; she had seen Russian churches in her beloved New York, and mentally compared them with this one, much to its disadvantage. Wilkins, however, found it all new and interesting. The candles ranged before the icons, the gilt and glass of the altar, the tawdry trappings, all impressed him, and he advanced into the building, studying its details.

Scarcely had he left the girl, when a man dressed in the habiliments of a priest stepped to her side, holding out his hat, as if for alms. As Florence stared at him, he muttered swiftly, in excellent English:

"Pardon, mademoiselle. I must speak to you secretly. You have been deceived. You are not Prof. Shishkin's daughter. You are a princess of Russia with a huge fortune. I have come from St. Petersburg to talk with you. Give me a chance, I beg."

Miss Lee turned away. "Say, Mr. Wilkins," she called. "I left my jacket in the boat. Would you mind chasin' down and gettin' it for me? I'll wait here for you."

When the plainsman had gone, Florence turned to the priest. "Make good," she ordered, briefly. "You look like the Caliph of Bagdad and I guess you can do the magic. If I'm a face card instead of a two spot, of course I want to know all about it."

The priest did not answer Florence's speech in words. Turning, he stepped to the door and threw up his hand. "Begone," he shouted to the curious crowd that had assembled, and at the word it melted away.

Then he came back. "Will you not be seated, princess?" he inquired, courteously, pointing toward a bench that stood against the wall. "I regret that I have no better accommodation to offer you, but—"

Florence took the seat. "Cut it out," she advised. "Get on with the fairy tale."

The priest removed his cap and threw back his vestments, revealing himself as a well preserved courtly gentleman of perhaps fifty years of age. Beautiful white hair curled about his brow, while his beard and moustaches were the pink of military perfection. Florence, studying him furtively, found him very good to look upon. To her he represented romance, aristocracy, refinement—all that she had never had in her sordid life. He was too old to play Prince Charming, she concluded, but he was of the type to which she believed Prince Charming belonged.

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