

OUT OF RUSSIA

CHAPTER XV

THREE days after Florence's adventure at the church, that young woman sat on the quarter-deck of the Sea Spume, gazing with unseeing eyes over the lapping water which the descending sun had turned into a golden river stretching away to the west. Upon this yellow flood two boats were moving, and on these Miss Lee's eyes were fixed.



But her thoughts were far away. Not once since Baron Demidroff had told his amazing tale had its substance been out of her ears. Again and again she had gone over the details, wondering if by any chance she could make the fairy tale come true.

In time she almost persuaded herself that she could. She was sure that she understood at last why the professor had not wanted to bring his daughter to Russia. He had been afraid of this very thing—afraid lest Olga's relatives should find her and reclaim her. More than ever now, he would want to keep the substitution secret. And no one else knew of it.

Florence's heart leaped within her as the possibilities danced before her mind's eye. Let her only dare to go ahead and she would have money and wealth. Why not?

A princess! Sharply she drew her breath at the thought. A princess! She! Florence Lee! She who had faced beggary a few short weeks before! Princess Yves Napraxine! Princess Yves Napraxine! Again and again she wrote the words on the fly leaf of a book that lay in her lap. Princess Yves Napraxine! If it could be! If it could be!

A step on the deck aroused her. Hastily she closed the book, with its tell-tale writing, and looked up to see Wilkins close at hand.

Rapidly he strode to the rail and gazed toward the boats; then he turned abruptly back and sat down beside the girl.

"They're getting mighty contiguous," he declared. "I reckon they'll oscillate on it tonight. Well, it don't matter; everything's ready."

Curiously Miss Lee gazed at him. "What in the world are you talking about?" she demanded.

Wilkins withdrew his eyes from the dancing water and fixed them on the girl. For a moment he looked her in the face; then he deliberately winked.

Miss Lee struck at him. "Don't get fresh," she ordered, severely. "I don't allow gentlemen to wink at me except over a cold bottle. Speak out and quit making signs."

Wilkins chuckled. "Say! You're all to the good," he remarked. "See here! I've been watching you, and I don't believe you're much stuck on this crowd you're traveling with. If you had a chance to run off with this here gold they're after, I'm figuring that you'd do it and leave your dad to hold the bag. Now, wouldn't you, honest?"

Florence hesitated. "Maybe I would," she returned, slowly. "Popper don't stand to win much in this game and I ain't working to help any old revolution. If I could get away with that gold to Noo York, I guess I'd do it."

"You ain't scared of none of them bombovitches, are you?"

"Me? Not in Noo York, I ain't. In Russia I ain't saying."

A delighted grin came over Wilkins' face. "Say!" he exclaimed. "You're all rightski. They tried to scare me with them fellows, and I let 'em think they had, but, Lord sakes, they ain't troubling me none. If they come to Colorado after me, the czar 'll have one less to put in his dungeonoffskis. Now just you listen to me, lady. I'm a rough fellow and I know I ain't half good enough for you. I know your dad would have a fit if he thought I was makin' love to you; and your fine friends would think I was crazy. Maybe I am; but it's for you to say. I'm a sheep man, lady, and many a night when I've been bedded down alongside a camp fire, watching them muttous masticatin' and baain' to each other, I've thought how nice it would be to go home to find somebody waiting for me. And the minute I see you and hear you talk so bright and clever, says I to myself: 'That's the girl for me.'"

Wilkins paused for an instant, and then went on. "I ain't no poor man, lady. I've got 25,000 babas in Colorado; I didnt come on this trip for the money, though half a million ain't to be snuz at. I come part for the fun of the thing and part to try to even things up for poor Jim. But now I'm here, I'm out for all that's going. I want all that gold and I'm going to have it—tonight!"

"Tonight!"

"Yes! Tonight! It's me for the broad Atlantic by the light of the moon this very night. Say! Don't you want to shake this gang and come along?"

The girl paled slightly. "Tell me what you mean right away," she ordered, crisply.

Wilkins pointed over the water. "You see that right-hand boat pronouncin' around yonder?" he questioned. "Well! Near's my specification goes,

By Crittenden Marriott
Author of "The Isle of Dead Ships," Etc.

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

AT about the same time, two mysterious messengers arrive in the United States—one a man, the other a beautiful young woman. The former visits Professor Shishkin, a distinguished scientist, formerly of Russia. The latter goes to the New York apartments of a rich young bachelor named Caruth and amazes him by her presence there when he returns at midnight. The man speaks a few mysterious words to Professor Shishkin and demands his obedience to the dictates of the Revolutionary Brotherhood of which both are members; then he tells him of plans to recover the vast Russian treasure that lies at the bottom of the Baltic in the wreck of a ship scuttled by the Revolutionists. He commands Shishkin to join the treasure seekers, and thus lead the world to believe that they are merely scientists investigating the Baltic sea bottom. The young woman, Marie Fitzhugh, tells Caruth that she comes for a letter that is to be delivered to him that very night—a letter found near the coast where a Russian ship was wrecked. The letter comes; she demands it, while Caruth is protesting her claims to his letter, his valet, Wilkins, appears and declares the letter is his. Caruth tears the message open and finds that Wilkins' prediction as to its contents is right and gives it to him. Miss Fitzhugh, in a frenzy of fear and with threats of dire vengeance upon Wilkins, buys the letter, but when Wilkins has gone, she discovers that the envelope no longer contains the real sea-stained message, but a dummy of blank white paper. Caruth pursues Wilkins, only to discover his body lying in blood, murdered and robbed of both money and letter. He forces Miss Fitzhugh to hurry away before the police come and sees her disappear in the dark with another man. He conceals the real story from the police, but confides it to Bristow, a newspaper man, to whom he appeals for help in locating Miss Fitzhugh and protecting her, because he loves her. He is also prompted to action by the appearance of a westerner, Tom Wilkins, who claims to be a brother of the dead Wilkins. This man says he was summoned to New York by his brother and he displays a copy of the missing letter—a letter from a sailor that tells of the millions of sunken Russian treasure. This stranger threatens and impresses Caruth that he is dangerous.

Caruth seeks out Miss Fitzhugh to warn her. She confides in him that she is an emissary of a revolutionary society, sent to organize an expedition to rescue the sunken gold, but she denies that she or her friends killed Wilkins, the valet. Caruth impulsively declares his love for her, and pledges himself to aid her. She insists on meeting the westerner, Wilkins, and finds from him that he holds the key to the location of the treasure ship. He is taken into the plan and Caruth offers his own private yacht for the expedition.

Worried by the command of the Brotherhood to take his daughter with him on the dangerous expedition, Professor Shishkin plots with Bristow, to engage some young woman to impersonate his daughter. Bristow enters into the scheme when Shishkin gives consent to his immediate marriage to Olga, his daughter, and secures a music hall girl for the impersonation.

In the meantime, Baron Demidroff, chief of the Russian secret police, receives from the United States a cipher message divulging to him the plans of the revolutionists and warning him to be on the lookout for Caruth's yacht. When it arrives for its search of the sea bottom, Demidroff manages to get an interview with the notorious daughter of Shishkin. He tells her that she is in fact a wealthy Russian princess who was kidnapped twenty years before by Shishkin on his escape from prison, where he had been placed for plotting against the czar. Demidroff also told her that the gold was in truth hers, for it represented a loan made upon the English estates of her dead father. Before his interview ends he secures her promise to betray the expedition to the police as soon as the gold is recovered and brought on board.

the Orkney lies just about under her. Unless they're too terrible promiscuous, they'll find her mighty soon, and then there'll be goings on worse'n a locoed bronco."

"How do you know?" The girl was leaning over him, every muscle tense with excitement. "How do you know where the Orkney is; and why will there be trouble when it is found?" she demanded.

"Because—say! I guess you didn't see a slim, limpy fellow with a black hirsute adornments on his chin up in the village the day we was up there, did you? Well, that fellow was Bill, my brother Bill, the one that wrote the epizootic that brung us here. He wasn't drowned in the Orkney! Bill wasn't born to be drowned. Everybody else was, but he got on terra cotta, and he's been hibernating here since, waiting his chance to get away with the gold."

"The gold!"

"Yes! Bill's got it. How he done it, I don't know. But he's got it. Bill's a man of his hands; Bill is! He's got all them nuggets out of the ship and cached 'em ashore. There ain't a speck of dust left on the Orkney. Bill's got it all!"

Amazement gripped Florence and held her dumb. The gold whose capture was to be the price of proofs of her princesshood had passed into other hands. What was she to do? There was no time to lose. Should she betray Wilkins to Caruth or to the baron? How could she betray him to the baron even if she wanted to? Should she grasp at the money and let the visionary rank go? She did not question whether she should be true to Professor Shishkin. Long before she had decided that question.

Abruptly she spoke. "Well! What are you going to do?" she demanded.

"Going to run the gold off, of course," returned



the plainsman. "Bill's got a boat of sorts—a schooner or pergola or something—and he's got the gold on board by now. I've staked him to buy provisions and we're off tonight. Bill would have gone before but he's crippled since the wreck and knew he couldn't manage the boat alone. But it's all skeekey now. The scow's lying up here a ways, just a waiting

for night and for you and me to join her. If it coincides with your sentiments, we'll do the fly away act tonight. Will you come?"

Miss Lee considered. Of course, it would be delightful to be a princess, but after all there might be a string tied to Demidroff's offer, while there was something substantial about five million dollars in gold. It might be well to pass up the fairy tale and close with Wilkins. She must consider.

"You can't cross the Atlantic in a sloop," she objected.

"Ain't going to try. We'll just run over the way to Stockholm to a place Bill knows of and go home from there by steamer. Oh! we've got it all diagnosed out proper. It's a cinch."

"But"—Florence was thinking aloud—"how are you goin' to get away from the yacht?"

"That's fixed, too. Bill will float down under the cabin windows about ten o'clock, just before the moon gets on the job, and we'll drop in on him."

"But when they find we're gone—"

"Let 'em find. What difference does it make? They may aspirate to get this here gold, but that don't make it theirs. Bill and me's got it, and I guess we'll keep it. Why, say, there ain't one of 'em'll dare to baa even if they find us, which they wont. Oh! it's a cinch."

"Perhaps! And yet—Say! Mr. Wilkins! You've been on the level with me and I'm going to treat you likewise. Don't you be too sure you've got a cinch! There's others besides the folks on this yacht that's after that gold."

Wilkins did not speak, but he looked the girl in the eye and waited for her to go on.

"The Russian cops are onto their jobs all right. They know what we're after and they're watching us all the time and they're ready to swoop down on us the minute we get the gold on board. I guess they've got a dozen boats lying around here."

Wilkins looked thoughtful. "Humph!" he said. "You're all to the good, you are. You ain't been wasting no time, have you? How'd you find out?"

"The priest! That day at the church. He wanted me to help him."

"And you strung him along, all right, didn't you. You would, of course!" He paused, then went on. "Well," he remarked, "I don't reckon it makes no difference. They won't be suspecting a fishing schooner of any allusions and they won't be aggravatin' us none. They'll be keepin' their optics trained on the yacht circumspectious. We can slip out easy. Is it a go?"

Florence held out her hand. "It's a go," she agreed. "More! I'll help you to get away. I'll fix things so that the yacht won't have any time to bother us. Yes! it's a go. And now—"

Swiftly Florence opened the book that lay in her lap and ripped out the flyleaf with its princely inscription. Swiftly she tore it into tiny fragments and tossed it to the breeze that sang through the rigging. "There!" she cried, as the bits besprinkled the water. "That's the end of the Princess Yves Napraxine. It's a go."

"The princess which?"

"Somebody you never heard of. A bird in the bush. A dream of the impossible. A romance from the chambermaid's own. Let her go. I'll be ready when you are."

CHAPTER XVI

THAT night the wreck was found. Seated in the cabin, close beside the telephone that led over the side down to the divers toiling beneath the darkening water, Caruth received the thrilling news.

Instantly hoarse orders rang through the ship, and the crew sprang to their stations. The furnace doors were flung open and brawny stokers hurled coal upon the banked fires until the hiss of steam told that the Sea Spume was ready to race for the open sea the moment the gold was on board.

Below the divers were picking their way over the sunken hull, seeking the storage place of the treasure.

Above at the telephones stood Caruth and Marie Fitzhugh, cheeks flushed and eyes a sparkle.

"At last! At last!" breathed the girl; and "At last! At last!" echoed Caruth.

His tones penetrated to the girl's consciousness and she blushed brightly. In the triumph of her cause she had forgotten that Caruth's object and hers were not the same.

She blushed, but she did not draw away. After all, if she were fated to give herself for Russia, to sell herself to Caruth in return for his help in the