



THE JAWS OF DEATH. BY FRANK DAKFELT.

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CHAPTER XXXVII

THE TIDE BEGINS TO TURN.

"Is that fellow a type of his class?" asked Gordon when Peter Schenyl was gone.

"Yes, and the class is typical of the whole genus of government officials. Every one of them is to be bought. With men of his rank the process is, as you see, simple enough."

"But I have enough money in England," said Ivan. "How are you to get it?"

"Write for it. The letter could be addressed to Schenyl."

Ivan Dostremember laughed. "You are a letter writer to Schenyl's hands that has not passed through a dozen on the road. Every official is the looker for a means to bleed another. Your letter would be opened to a certainty, and Peter Schenyl would be forced to hand you over to some one else. You would never get your remittance, though in time, by paying me and then another, you might at last get away, but it would take years, and we haven't a day to lose. Twelve hundred rubles and £3 English."

"I made a mental calculation, then, shaking his head, said: 'I am afraid there is no chance for you, but I can ask Peter Schenyl. Yes, I will go back and have a word with him. I will get away, but it would take years, and we haven't a day to lose. Twelve hundred rubles and £3 English.'"

"Ivan Dostremember looked gravely in Gordon's face for a minute, then, with a smile, turned and left us in silence."

"A long time elapsed—more than two hours, I think—before we saw him again. When at length he returned, he saw by his watch that it was half past five. He was in a deep slumber, his eyes as he drew near the fire that our case was not hopeless."

"I had to make the rascol drunk on his own liquor," he said, in explanation of his long absence, as he threw himself down on the ground. "That's a long job with a Russian peasant, even when he helps himself to your expense. There was no getting a word of sleep out of him while he was sober, would not on any consideration—no, not for all the gold in the world—betray the trust placed in him by the government; preferred death to dishonor and all the rest of it. However, little by little, as he grew more and more drunk he confessed to having at length, that is, he saw by his watch, from about five o'clock, to his deep slumber, his eyes as he drew near the fire that our case was not hopeless."

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justice. But these difficulties you hear our friend speaking of—remember you are only a girl, though quite as brave as the best of us."

"I won't hinder you. You shall never hear me complain," I urged.

"I have not the slightest doubt that mademoiselle could face all that she certainly would be comforted to see," said Ivan, with more courtesy and kindness than he had yet shown me. "But there is one serious objection. This journey must occupy months, and during that time we are doing nothing to save Taras."

"My heart sank within me in shame. I had forgotten Taras—Heaven forgive me!—for the moment."

"At any moment Kavanagh may receive orders to silence Taras. The production of that statute would inevitably lead to the order being given. When it is given, Kavanagh will obey it ruthlessly."

"I will go to him," said I, as eagerly as I had prayed to stay with Gordon the minute before.

"It is advisable to look well at that before you decide," said Ivan. "It is by no means certain that you will reach London, Schenyl, with the greatest incentive to get you through, may fall. Some trusted confidant may think it advisable to betray him; some jealous official may be dissatisfied with his bribe. In that case you lose all hope of seeing Taras again. If you are arrested on the road, you will never see this friend again. You will be banished or kept in prison where no tidings of you will ever reach us, or word from us reach you."

"No matter," said I. "I will venture anything, everything, to save Taras."

"You are a brave girl, but you must go if we can arrange the affair with Schenyl—for the sake of Taras and for yours as well." He added, turning to Gordon, "You have money?"

"At my bankers' in London."

"They would pay a certain sum to your order?"

"I haven't a check-book, but I suppose that is not necessary. An order with my signature would be met all right."

"Schenyl deals in furs. He has an agent in London—Houndsditch, I think he called the part. Your order could be made payable to him. On receipt of the money he could telegraph a word to you—such as 'Send furs'—or any other phrase agreed upon—to Schenyl, who would then find means to get across the frontier."

"By Jupiter, that's it! Why on earth didn't you suggest this at first, old fellow, instead of proposing a scheme that would take years to work out?"

"We are venturing upon treacherous ground, and every step must be sounded. It is a waste of time to be in a hurry."

"You seem to have thought of everything and got your plan all out and dried."

"Schenyl gave me plenty of time to think," observed Ivan dryly.

"You seem to be in great excitement."

"Yes. When shall I go?"

"Nothing is certain," observed Ivan. "It may be that the furs will be sent to Berlin, but I think the prospect of gain will tempt him."

"He shall have as much as he asks to take us to Berlin, and twice as much the day we reach London," said Gordon.

"I hope you will not let him know that. If he sees your eagerness, he may keep us waiting a long time. The hope of getting a ransom that you—even you—cannot pay, is subtle and most to be dealt with with caution. That is why I did not take you with me to sound him upon the business."

"Oh, I shall be cooler tomorrow. This awful good luck has turned my head."

"There is one thing, mademoiselle," said Ivan, with a question of indignation, "I have been thinking of, and that is, you must have a letter to him, and he will help you to conceal your identity. We shall have time to get into that tomorrow."

"I think you may hope now."

"Heaven bless you, old fellow! You forget nothing."

"CHAPTER XXXVIII  
I RETURN TO LONDON.

After raising innumerable objections and creating delays with a view to exciting higher terms, Schenyl, at length accepted Ivan Dostremember's offer, but the agreement being made he lost no time in preparing for my flight.

"I had a daughter who had been for some time ill with a skin complaint common to the Russian peasantry, and it was arranged that he should take me to St. Petersburg, under the pretense that I was his daughter, going there for medical treatment, and so, early one morning, in a peasant's dress, the lower part of my face masked with paste, stained in part with saffron and cochineal, I took my place in Schenyl's sledge and bade 'goodby' to Gordon and Ivan Dostremember. Schenyl tucked me in the wraps suitable to an invalid, and having given another touch to the paste on my face declared gleefully that I could not look better if I were dying of the pest.

"If that don't satisfy the police, I don't know what will," said he, looking back at me as he took his seat, with great satisfaction. "One glance at that face will be enough for them. They won't dare to open her papers for fear of infection."

"There are four daughters' papers, of course," said Ivan.

Schenyl winked, nodded and patted his breast.

"And you yours?" Ivan added, addressing me. These papers were Gordon's order for 300 pounds, a letter from Schenyl to his correspondents in London, and a note from Ivan to his friend in Berlin, all carefully interbedded in a box of ointment which I carried in my hand. I nodded assent.

"Then God speed you!" he exclaimed.

"Farewell, dear little woman," cried Gordon.

"Farewell," I answered as stoutly as I could, and the next minute I lost sight of them.

Schenyl successfully overcame all the difficulties that beset us and left me at the

first station in Germany, whence I proceeded to Berlin without further question. At Berlin I found Ivan Dostremember's friend, Carl Hoffman, and delivered the letter addressed to him. He introduced me to his wife, a bright, intelligent woman, and they held a long consultation on the subject.

"The great thing," said he, going to the window, "is to choose a disguise that is the least likely to attract notice. Come here, mademoiselle, and tell me what people passing along over the way seem to you most remarkable—most un-English."

I pointed out six or eight of the persons. Presently he said:

"You have noticed the thin, tall old lady waiting at the corner for the tram. She is walking this way now. Do you see people like that in a London street?"

"Yes, many," I replied.

"Now see if you can walk across the room with her gait."

I imitated the walk and posture of a woman bent with age as well as I could.

"Excellent!" exclaimed Mrs. Hoffman. "Yes, I think that will do," said her husband.

They hunted up a dress of dingy black, an old bonnet and mantle trimmed with dull jet and a pair of shabby gloves. Mr. Hoffman would have cut my hair and given me a wig, but his wife would not suffer this, so they gathered it close on the top of my head and concealed it with a false front and a knot of gray hair behind. My face was carefully painted and my teeth stained. My new friends laughed heartily as they made these alterations in my appearance, and still more heartily when a spotted veil completing the make-up, I walked across the room, my hands folded, and carrying a rusty leather reticule, with the step of an elderly person, to look at myself in the glass. For a moment or two I stood gazing before the mirror in amazement, for it is no exaggeration to say that I did not know myself. I looked like a woman of advanced age who has seen distress, and this general effect was heightened by the appearance of faded gentility in my dress.

"This disguise, I arrived in London on the morning of Feb. 6—three months within a few days from the date of my capture. 'Keb, mum!' asked a porter, touching his cap as I stepped out of the train. I nodded assent.

"No better compliment than that could have been paid to the friends who had disguised me."

"Where to, lady?" asked the cabman when I was seated.

"Carter street, Houndsditch," said I in the jargon of old age.

At the corner of Carter street I discharged the cab. A few doors down I saw a dark-eyed man with black beard and a white hair, the name I sought—"M. Lazarius, furrier." I entered and told the shopman I wished to see Mr. Lazarius himself.

"What name?" he asked.

"Tell him I have come from Peter Schenyl," I replied.

"I was shown into a private office, where a dark-eyed man with black beard and a white hair, the name I sought—"M. Lazarius, furrier." I entered and told the shopman I wished to see Mr. Lazarius himself.

"I took the minute sheet of closely folded thin paper, carefully opened it, and having read the few lines it contained said: 'You are to give me an order for £300, madam.'"

"Here it is," I replied, giving up the last of the papers with a feeling of relief.

"There may be some difficulty in cashing this," he observed, raising his eyebrows as he looked at the grease stained order. "I have no objection to going with me to the bank."

I agreed to this proposal, and he sent for a cab, in which we went together to Lombard street.

"You had better come in with me," said Mr. Lazarius. "An explanation is sure to be wanted."

We entered the bank, and he presented the cheque to the clerk, who examined it and then took it into the manager's office. After an interval of five or ten minutes he returned, and handing the paper back to Mr. Lazarius said:

"I am sorry to tell you that we cannot cash this order, sir."

"Can I see the manager? The irregularity can be explained."

"The fact is clear, madam," said he. "The cheque is not cashed because it is not drawn on the 12th of last November. Messrs. Duncanson could not make a mistake. On the other hand, it seems incredible that Mr. Gordon, in a case of such importance, could overlook the fact of drawing out so large a sum, especially as the odd figures prove that he was taking every available penny. Then you say he had only £200 in his pocket. A trifle, I believe, is worth about 2 shillings or half a crown."

"Do you know whether he spent much money after leaving England?"

"He could not."

"And what did you do with the money?" I asked.

"I don't know," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "I am sure that you will be understood that he washed his hands of the matter and made use of the money to do with me."

"I followed him to the door, thence, unable to resist under this terrible blow."

"What am I to do?" I asked, overtaking him on the pavement as he was about to get into the cab.

"Well, I advise you to be more careful in the future. It's a lucky thing for you that the manager did not think it worth while to put the matter in the hands of the police."

In speechless dismay I watched the cab drive off, feeling that with all his hope was being kind and well, and then, bewildered and helpless, I yielded to the stream of hurrying city men, and somehow drifted into a quiet turning, where it was possible for a poor creature to collect her scattered wits.

Stupidly, in my desperation, I looked round as if I could find guidance at hand. There was not a soul in the court but a man in a white blouse, painting something on a doorpost. My heart sickened as I realized my folly. Then, apathetically, my eyes rested on the painter's hand. He was writing a name on the doorpost. I spelled out what he had written, "E. Pelham, solicitor, second floor."

"No!" I will be time enough to bring him to account when George Gordon returns."

"Then, hem! may I ask what you wish me to do?"

"I want you to tell me how I can get money to bring him home."

"Evidently the poor little man found it difficult to conceal his disappointment at this dull turn to an unfruitful case. However, putting the best face he could on the affair, he said:

"Do you know anything of Mr. Gordon's private affairs—the name of his solicitor, or any friend who can be appealed to for help?"

"No. I know of nobody who can be appealed to."

"You yourself have not the means?"

"I have barely 20 pounds."

"Ee sighed, and after reflection said:

"Well, madam, the only thing I can think of is to see this Mr. Lazarius and represent the case to him, of course avoiding the names you have mentioned. He may be disposed to advance the sum required upon that order if you convince him that Mr. Gordon is a man of honor. With your permission I will call on him this afternoon, and you shall know the result tomorrow morning."

After some discussion I agreed to the proposal and left Mr. Pelham, who declined to take any fee at the present stage of the case.

CHAPTER XXXIX.  
THE MADNESS OF FEAR.

I couldn't help it. It was stronger than I, as the French say—that yearning to be near Taras, to pass the house in which he lived—the house with which the dearest, the happiest associations of my life were connected, and after seeing the temptation as long as I could, wandering about the city with the endeavor to distract my thoughts by looking in the shops, I took a turning down to the river, and at the first station stepped on board a Chelsea steamer.

"Is it likely," I asked myself, "that I shall be seen by any one I know?" Nevertheless, was the hope of seeing Taras, if but afar-off, that led me into this impudence, for, despite my disguise, I knew that I was doing wrong—that I was jeopardizing the escape of Gordon, the safety of Taras himself—by exposing myself even to the remote chance of discovery. Most of the people on board looked like Lambeth folk. A gentleman was writing on the "Temple" who, in the distance, looked like Kavanagh.

I bowered with suppressed excitement as we drew nearer and nearer to the spot in which all my fondest hopes were centered. My heart beat wildly as I caught sight of the kilns beyond Westminster, my head swam, and every object grew dim and indistinct before my eyes as the boat crossed toward Lambeth pier.

Prudence told me that here at least I ought to go below or screen myself, for every man on the pier knew me well by sight. But I was deaf to every voice, blind to every danger. I even raised my veil that I might better scan the faces of the passengers upon the pier we were nearing.

"Oh, I should like to see among them! I should like to see the old man, who has lost his presence! There were three or four familiar faces close to me when we ran alongside, but not his. I stood up and strained my eyes as the late passengers ran down the foreshore. He was not among them, and that vain hope was gone. But there was still the chance of seeing him at the window where the bridge was passed, and I could get an unobstructed view of the house."

We passed under the bridge, sporting as the funnel was lowered, and then as the smoke blew away something seemed to smite my heart like the blow of a great hammer, for, looking back, I saw the blinds of all the windows were drawn down.

"Gordon, Taras is dead! That was my first thought, and then, divining the truth, I said to myself, 'The ear has congealed.'"

But this end of all happiness was too terrible to be accepted while any spark of doubt remained, and I tried to cheat myself with hopes—as if mere belief could alter the course of inevitable fate, or hope undo what was done. I tried to explain the riddles by supposing a less dreadful calamity. Poor old Mrs. Lucas was gone. I could get no further than the corner opposite the house. Its aspect of desolation paralyzed my limbs and forced me to cling to the wall for support. There was no sign of life in it. The shutters of the living room were closed, the blinds of the dining room were drawn. The blinds Taras gave me to plant in the boxes on my window-rills the last week I was with him had flowered and faded. The withered blossoms hung over the edge. Even the foliage had drooped for want of attention. At the corner of Ferry street one of the carmen from the potters was packing jars in his van. He seemed the riskiest man for there could no longer any need of disguise. I trotted across the road, and in a voice made weak and tremulous by emotion, I asked him if he could tell me where Mrs. Lucas lived.

"Mrs. Lucas," he responded carelessly, still packing away the jars. "Oh, she's gone away. She used to live in the house down there, as I said up now. She's been gone ever since Christmas."

"Does—does any one live there now?" I faltered.

"No. Look here, missis," he added, straggling himself and scratching his head, "you're upset my counting along of your questions. Here, Bill Wright," he added to a young man who was arranging some jars against the wall, "here's a party sent to know something about Mrs. Lucas."

"Only one person."

"Only one?"

"After he tells me his name?"

"Can you tell me his name?" I answered. "His name is Kavanagh."

"Ah! Do you know in what relation they stand to each other?"

"George Gordon was Kavanagh's friend; Kavanagh was George Gordon's enemy. He it was who had us taken away."

"Can you tell me where I can find him—Mime, Lucas, I mean?"

"I know it's Woking way where they live now. Betterford I think's the name of the place, but I can't be sure."

"Here," said the carman, "run round to the office, old lady, and ask for Mr. Kavanagh. He knows. Hand us up them quarts, Bill."

By that name I recognized the rashness of my folly, about neither the car nor William Wright had seen through my disguise—the reckless madness into which my fear had led me. Nevertheless within an hour I was on my way to Betterford.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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