

Records of MICHAEL DANEVITCH

True Tales of Russian Secret Service
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The Tracking of Peter Treskin

The period was the reign of the second Alexander; the time, the afternoon of a day in early summer; the place, an office in the building in St. Petersburg known as the palace of the admiralty. The office in question was a large room, officially described as department H, second floor, imperial yachts. It was under the control of a much trusted government servant named Samuel Snell. The latter was of English birth, but left his native country when a youth, and went to Russia, on the advice of a Russian friend in London, who had taught him to speak the Russian language. After a while, Snell became a naturalized subject of the czar, married a Russian lady, the daughter of an official in the naval construction department, and obtained an appointment himself in the admiralty palace. He was rapidly promoted, and at last placed at the head of the department responsible for the building and repairs of the imperial yachts. On this particular afternoon two young women were the sole occupants of the room designated as department H. One was named Catherine, the daughter of Snell, a girl of about twenty, with fair hair and delicate complexion. She was unmistakably of an English type, though born in Russia. Her companion was an unmistakably Russian; a good-looking brunette called Anna Plevski. Catherine was a confidential clerk to her father. Anna belonged in another department altogether, being what is termed "an indexer." The two girls were close friends, and Anna had taken advantage of a little relaxation to slip into room 12 to chat with Catherine, for she knew that Mr. Snell was away.

"I hear that our little father, the czar, is to go on a yachting cruise around the coast of Finland next month, and that his yacht, the North Star, is to be entirely overhauled and refitted," said Anna. "I would like to see that boat, they say she is beautiful. You have the plans of the North Star in this department, Catherine. Let me have a look at them, won't you?"

Catherine hesitated, but failing to see that she could do any harm by complying with her friend's request, she went to a safe and produced a large roll of cartridge paper, which she spread out on the desk before them. It was a scale drawing, showing the hull, the sections, the ground-plan and general design of the imperial vessel. The North Star was then in the hands of the admiralty for refit and overhaul, and was ordered to be at Kronstadt on the twentieth of the following month, to receive the royal party, including the czar, for a trip. Anna looked at the plan critically. Having an excellent memory, the result of her training as an indexer, she was able to carry its salient parts in her mind.

"The czar's quarters are to be reconstructed and removed from the after-part of the ship, where they are now," said Catherine. "A large deckhouse is to be built amidships, and fitted up for him."

"Then I suppose his rooms will be about there," queried Anna, placing a finger on the center of the plan. Catherine nodded assent, and replaced the paper in the safe, and her companion returned to her own department.

A week later three men sat at work in the attic of an old house in what is known as the St. Petersburg quarter, on the north side of the River Neva. Two of them, evidently skilled mechanics of a high class, were fitting together a complicated piece of machinery in a small oblong tin box, while the third, a tall, thin old man, bent over a retort on a table in which he was compounding something from which an obnoxious vapor arose. It was after midnight, and the trio worked on in silence, which was suddenly broken by the sound of a light rap on the door. The old man arose, turned the key, and the door swung open to admit a young fellow wrapped in a cloak, who hailed him as "Professor Smolski," and nodded cheerfully to the other occupants of the apartment.

The new arrival was Peter Treskin, a young lawyer of good family and considerable ability, who had seen fit to cast his lot with the revolutionary body that was sparing no pains to overthrow the government.

"Well, friends," how goes the good work?" asked Treskin.

"The machine will be finished tomorrow night," replied the professor. "My part is also nearly completed."

Smolski was a chemist of considerable renown in his profession. The other two men were brothers, Isaac and Jacob Eisenmann, whose mechanical skill had been utilized by the revolutionists in the making of infernal machines. The one upon which they were working was of peculiarly ingenious construction, and Treskin's face shone with triumph as his co-conspirators explained the operation of the mechanism to him. It was after

four o'clock when he left the attic and hurried home to his lodgings.

Two weeks had passed when a young man and woman arrived at the port of Kronstadt and sought a tavern near the entrance to the harbor. The man was Peter Treskin and his companion was a good-looking brunette, whose features bore a somewhat nervous expression. Treskin carried a leather handbag, which he deposited on a chair beside him as he and the woman seated themselves at a table outside of the tavern and ordered refreshments, which were served by the tavern keeper himself. Treskin got into conversation with the landlord and asked him several questions.

"Where is the little father's yacht, the North Star?" he demanded.

"Out there, moored to that big buoy. You see, she has the imperial flag flying." The landlord pointed to the outside of the harbor, where a large steam yacht, painted white, lay at anchor.

"At what hour will the imperial party arrive tomorrow?"

"They are due here at nine o'clock," responded the landlord.

"So," commented Treskin. "Well I am going on board the yacht in a little while," he added boastfully. "I have official business to transact."

The landlord bowed respectfully, his guest having taken on new importance in his eyes. When he had gone the girl said fretfully:

"You are too careless, Peter. Why do you talk about your intentions in that way?"

"Perhaps you are right," conceded the man. "It was a little bit of vanity on my part. However, all will be well. Our plans are too nicely laid to miscarry. I must leave you now. Don't stir from here till I return."

Taking up his bag, he went to the quay, hired a boat, and instructed the boatman to row him to the imperial yacht. On reaching the vessel, he was challenged by the sentry on duty at the gangway, and stated that he had come on official business. He produced a government document, stamped with the official seal, and setting forth that his name was Ivan Orloff, that he was one of the naval clockmakers, and had been sent down to adjust all the clocks on the North Star preparatory to the czar's arrival. He was admitted on board, and an armed sailor told off to accompany him about the ship, and show him where the various clocks were situated.

The man came at last to the czar's suite of apartments in the newly constructed deckhouse. The sailor paused for an instant to cross himself before a sacred picture that hung on the bulkhead, but his companion pushed on, and passing beneath costly curtains, reached the czar's sleeping cabin. Quickly he took from his bag an oblong box, turned a handle on an index dial, and placed the box beneath the royal bed. He had scarcely time to assume an erect position, and turn to a clock on a table near by, when the sailor entered. Half an hour later the supposed clock maker completed his task, and rejoined the girl who was waiting for him at the tavern.

"I have succeeded," he said, in response to her anxious inquiry, "and the machine is set for thirty-three hours. It will go off tomorrow night when the czar has retired. Now let us go for a walk while dinner is being prepared."

About an hour had gone by when suddenly a terrific explosion occurred in the harbor, and the cry went up that something had happened on board the imperial yacht. From all parts of the harbor boats hurriedly made their way to the North Star, as it was thought that she was foundering. When the explosion took place Treskin and the girl were strolling along one of the quays which commanded a full view of the harbor. The girl staggered and reeled against her companion, and he exclaimed, in horrified accents:

"My God! The machine has gone off before its time. I must have set the index wrong."

He glanced around him anxiously; then seeing a boat containing a solitary boatman, about to put off from the quay, he said to his companion: "Stop where you are for a little while, I will return shortly."

She was so dazed that she made no protest, and hurrying to the edge of the quay, he hailed the boatman, sprang on board the little craft, and they rowed out toward the yacht. The girl waited in a fever of impatience. Twilight fell, followed by the shades of night, but still Treskin did not return. She heard the gossip of people as they returned to the shore from the harbor, and gathered that the imperial yacht had been partially destroyed, and many lives lost. The prevailing opinion was that the mischief had been caused by the bursting of a boiler. At last she went back to the tavern, and told the landlord that her husband had gone to the yacht, but had not yet returned. For two hours she kept her vain vigil, then as the last train for St. Petersburg started at nine o'clock, she settled the tax-

ern bill, took the leather bag with her, hurried to the station and went back to town. She was almost mad with brooding over her companion's strange disappearance, not knowing whether he had been arrested, or had deserted her, but could do nothing but suffer in silence.

When the news of the disaster to the imperial yacht reached St. Petersburg, a special train filled with government officials, including Michael Danevitch, was rushed at once to Kronstadt. Investigations soon proved that the destruction was not due to the bursting of a boiler. The cause of the disaster was, therefore, a mystery until the visit of the government clock-mender was remembered. A messenger was dispatched to St. Petersburg on a special engine, furnished with a description of the supposed Orloff. Then Danevitch began inquiries in Kronstadt. From the survivors on the yacht he ascertained at what time Orloff went on board; an hour and a half before he presented himself, a train had arrived from St. Petersburg. He had probably arrived on that train. The boatman who took him off to the yacht was found. He said the supposed clock-mender carried a black bag with him, both going and coming. Soon after six in the morning the engine that had been sent to the capital returned and brought some more officials. They stated that no one had been sent down to regulate the clocks on the czar's yacht.

It was not long before Danevitch discovered that the man calling himself Orloff, and a female companion, had put up at a tavern near the quay, and the landlord gave all the information he could. It was established that the woman did go up by the last train, but not Orloff. What had be-

son named Orloff? No, she did not. She had looked at the plans of the yacht merely out of curiosity. She was next asked if she had worn gloves the day previous. She replied that she had. What sort were they? Kid gloves, she answered. Had she these gloves with her? No, she had left them at home, and had come to the office that morning without gloves. After a few more inquiries she was allowed to return to her duties, but was kept under close surveillance, while Catherine Snell was suspended for neglect of duty.

In the meantime, Danevitch proceeded to Anna's lodgings, and a search there brought to light the fellow to the glove left in the tavern. This was damning evidence that Anna had accompanied Orloff to Kronstadt the day before, and that established, it was a logical deduction that she had stolen the stamped paper on which the order was forged that gained him admission on board the yacht. Searching further, Danevitch turned up a bundle of letters. They were apparently innocent love missives, a few of them signed "Peter Treskin," the remainder simply bearing the initial "P." There was nothing to cause suspicion, except the following somewhat obscure passage in a letter written a few days before the explosion:

"The time is at hand when your faith and love will be put to the test. The serious business we have in hand is reaching a critical stage. We love each other, and must unite our destinies in a bond that can only be severed by death."

Having learned so much, Danevitch again confronted Anna. She confessed that she had a lover named Peter Treskin, with whom she had

latter met the blow with the fatalistic bravery of a misguided fanatic. He frankly admitted that he had been concerned in an attempt to bring about a better form of government; but steadfastly refused to denounce his accomplices. Smolski, in common with most men, neglected the safe rule that letters should be destroyed when they are likely to compromise one's honor, or betray one's friends. And thus it came about that when the professor's papers were examined, not only were Isaac and Jacob Eisenmann brought into the police net, but many other conspirators. Piece by piece the whole story was put together, and the plot laid bare; but though many were brought under the iron grip of the law, the arch-conspirator was still at large.

In the meantime, while Danevitch was trying to get a clue to Treskin's whereabouts, Smolski, the Eisenmanns and four others were tried, found guilty, and executed. Anna Plevski had been sentenced to Siberia, but a circumstance arose which altered her fate. Danevitch had traced Lydia Zagarin of Werro. She was the daughter of a retired shipmaster, who was a widower. Lydia was his only daughter, and at her father's death she succeeded to a snug little fortune. Treskin had borrowed money from her, and it was probable that he had singled her out from the rest of his female acquaintances as one to whom he could adhere on account of her financial circumstances. Four months after the fateful day when the czar's yacht was partially destroyed Treskin wrote to this young woman, asking her to send him money, and to join him with a view to his marrying her. He gave his address as Point de Galle, Ceylon. He stated that, though

The result was all that he could have wished. Anna burst into a fury, declared that she had been victimized by Treskin, who had promised her on the day after he had planted the infernal machine they would quit St. Petersburg and go to Austria. Danevitch then informed her that if she allowed herself to be used as an instrument of justice to assist in the capture of her false lover, she would be set free on sufferance and permitted to go to Ceylon. If she succeeded in her task she would receive a full pardon and be supplied with a considerable sum of money to enable her to live abroad. In setting her free, however, the government intended to retain a hold upon her. To that end her youngest and favorite brother, who was an invalid, and to whom she was devoted, was arrested on suspicion of being mixed up in revolutionary matters. If Anna did not return within a fixed time, the brother would be sent to the Siberian quick-silver mines. While she was away he would be well treated, and on her return set at liberty.

In two days she gave her decision. She would go to Ceylon and do as she was requested. To prepare the way she wrote a letter to dictation. In it she stated that she had been tried and found not guilty. But on her release she had been visited by a woman named Lydia Zagarin, who abused her fearfully for having corresponded with Treskin, whom she claimed as her lover. In her anger Lydia had betrayed Treskin's whereabouts, vowing she hated him, as she now knew that all he wanted was her money. But Anna asserted that she still loved Treskin to distraction, and could not live without him. She intended, therefore, to go to Ceylon, and she had managed to secure some money, which she would take to him.

This epistle was duly dispatched to Treskin, and a fortnight later Anna set forth on her mission of vengeance. She arrived safely at Point de Galle, and was received by Treskin. As a matter of fact, the gentleman in question would have preferred to greet Lydia Zagarin, but Anna was not a bad substitute, and he inquired eagerly how much money she had brought with her. She told him that she had not a great deal, but that a remittance would arrive in a few weeks. In the meantime there was enough to keep them going. She thus won his confidence, and Treskin began to congratulate himself on his good fortune. Nearly two months passed, when Anna complained that Point de Galle did not agree with her. She wanted a change; she had been told that Colombo was a pretty place, and she would like to see it. As she had just received a remittance of £30 they could well afford the trip. To this Treskin consented, and they traveled to Colombo by gharry. It was the first step toward his doom. With the remittance came another letter to Anna, giving her secret instructions.

Colombo was duly reached. The third night after their arrival Anna expressed a desire to go out on the water in a native boat. The boatmen pulled away from the land, while Treskin lay back in the stern and smoked. Anna sat beside him, and sang softly snatches of plaintive Russian airs. When about four miles from shore they sighted a small steamer sailing slowly along. She came close to the boat, and a voice called her, asking if any one on the boat spoke English. Treskin replied in the affirmative. The voice then inquired if the occupants of the boat would kindly take some letters on shore, as the captain did not wish to go into the port. Treskin consented, and the boat was pulled alongside the steamer, which turned out to be a pleasure yacht. Treskin was politely requested to step aboard, a ladder being lowered for that purpose. He turned to Anna and asked if she would go too. The girl was willing, and she preceded him up the ladder. As soon as he was on deck the gangway was closed, and a man in uniform invited him into the little saloon, where some wine and biscuits stood on the table. The engines of the yacht were started and in a few seconds a stern, determined looking man entered the cabin. He wore the uniform of a lieutenant of the Russian navy, and he gazed grimly at the guest.

"Peter Treskin," he said in Russian, "you have been cleverly lured on board this boat, which is owned by a Russian gentleman, and flies the Russian flag. You are going back to Russia to answer to justice for your dastardly crime."

Treskin turned ghastly pale. He sprang to the door, but found his exit barred by armed men. In another instant he was seized and heavily ironed. Steaming at full speed, the yacht rounded Point de Galle, and when 15 miles due east of Ceylon she suddenly hove to. A Russian gunboat was lying in wait. To her the prisoner was transferred, but Anna remained on the yacht.

The gunboat steamed away at once, and shaped her course for Manila, where she coaled; and that done, proceeded for the sea of Japan and Vladivostok. The yacht went in the other direction, making for the gulf of Aden and the Red sea, and after a pleasant voyage she sailed by the way of the Bosphorus to the Crimea. As Anna Plevski entered Russia in the west her recreant lover entered it in the far east, and thence, under a strong guard, he was conducted through the whole length of Siberia to St. Petersburg, a distance of something like 5,000 miles.

Seven months later Peter Treskin paid the penalty of his crime, being hanged in the presence of an immense crowd on the scaffold on the great plain outside of St. Petersburg, where all the public executions take place.



"YOU ARE GOING TO ANSWER TO JUSTICE FOR YOUR DASTARDLY CRIME!"

come of him? The detective took measures to have every outlet from Kronstadt watched, although he realized that Orloff had had several hours' start in which to make his escape. Then he set out for St. Petersburg.

The official document that Orloff carried was written on government paper, and bore the government seal. Such being the case, and the order having been written on admiralty paper, it followed that it must have been stolen from the admiralty office.

It struck Danevitch that the thief was probably a female employee in the admiralty office, and that it was she who accompanied Orloff to Kronstadt. Whoever she was, she had left in her haste a glove at the tavern. It was a black silk-thread glove, ornamented at the back with sprigs worked in white silk. With this in his possession, Danevitch proceeded to the admiralty palace. But as soon as he arrived he learned that Miss Catherine Snell had made a statement about Anna Plevski having visited room 12, and requested to look at the plans of the North Star. Anna was at once confronted with the detective. Asked where she had been the night before, she replied that she had stayed at home. Did she know a per-

quarreled and he had gone away. She did not know where he had gone to.

"Perhaps you will be able to remember things better in a dungeon," suggested Danevitch, as he arrested Anna and handed her over to the care of a gendarme.

Danevitch next proceeded to Treskin's lodgings. He found that gentleman had been absent for three days. A search for compromising letters revealed several from Anna Plevski, couched in most affectionate language. But there were other love letters, written by a woman who signed herself Lydia Zagarin. This person not only betrayed by her writing that she was madly in love with Treskin also, but from her statements it was obvious that he was much attached to her. She wrote from a place called Werro, in the Baltic provinces. Danevitch took possession of all these documents, and continuing his search, came across a slip of paper which bore the printed heading: "The Technical School of Chemistry, St. Petersburg." On it was written this line: "Yes, I think I shall succeed. Smolski."

Slender as this clue might appear, it was enough for Danevitch to cause the arrest of Professor Smolski. The

he had taken no part in the destruction of the North Star, he happened to be in Kronstadt on the night of the explosion, and as he knew that he was suspected of being concerned in revolutionary movements, he deemed it wise to go abroad. Consequently he had bribed a boatman to carry him to a Swedish schooner which was on the point of leaving the harbor, and paid the captain to take him to Sweden. From Sweden he went to England, from England to Ceylon, where he had a cousin engaged on a coffee plantation.

Through the work of his government spies Danevitch gained possession of this letter instead of the person to whom it was addressed. He was aware that as a political refugee, taking sanctuary under the British flag, Treskin could not be extradited, but he had recourse to stratagem. He visited Anna Plevski, who was still in jail awaiting her transportation to Siberia. The detective proceeded to work on the girl's jealousy. He told her that Treskin had basely deserted her on the night of the crime, showed her Lydia Zagarin's love letters to Treskin; and finally laid before her the intercepted missive from Ceylon.