

## The Secret Dispatch

By JAMES GRANT

### CHAPTER XXII.—(Continued.)

"Heaven be blessed for this new omen of success!" exclaimed Balgonie in French. "And you were not drowned?"

"No; I swam down the Neva, under water, escaping many a bullet—got ashore and reached the old place in the wood where Olga, the gypsy, stained my face, trimmed and dyed my beard, as you see. She is quite an artist, that girl! Even Marioliza would not know me now."

Balgonie sighed at the poor fellow spoke. He evidently knew nothing of the barbarities to which he had been subjected, so Balgonie resolved, mercifully, to keep him in ignorance; and they proceeded at an easy pace together; he keeping his horse close by the shaft of the wagon, on which the pretended peasant rode; and, as they spoke in French, a language unknown to their ignorant and half-savage escort, Usakoff, in referring to the late event and its failure, poured out all the bitterness, the hate and fury of his soul against the government, the councilors and the role of the empress; and, of course, entered into a fervor into the scheme of escape with Natalie. But still their ultimate plans were undecided when they saw the red flash of the evening gun, as it pealed from Schlusburg, amid the murky haze of a wet and stormy sunset; and ere long they saw the lights that glittered at times from amid the castle towers and black outline of that castle streaming and wavering on the turbulent waters of the lake and the wet silences of the sluices and ditches.

When, all dripping and faded, the escort halted and dismounted under the castle arch, Balgonie found that some changes were taking place in the executive of the fortress.

### CHAPTER XXIII.

Bernikoff, whose wounds had been inflamed to gangrene, was at that moment actually on his deathbed, with Father Chrysostom kneeling by his side. The old sinner was in all the agonies and terrors of reviewing his past life on one hand and anticipating the coming change on the other. Bernikoff was dying in the habit of a friar, with cowl, cord, beads and sandals, hoping even on his deathbed, as Ivan the Terrible hoped, when similarly arrayed and disguised, to cheat the devil if that dread personage came for his sinful soul.

Leaving this scene, Balgonie presented the order of Gen. Weynarn and that of the treasurer to Captain Vlasief, who was now in command, and to whom he stated that "the prisoner referred to was Mademoiselle Natalie Mierowna."

"Carl Ivanovitch," said the captain, "you cannot think of leaving tonight in such a storm of wind and rain?"

"I've seen worse in Siberia," said Balgonie, looking to the locks of his pistols.

"What of that?"

"But the verbal order of the general was most peremptory."

"Ah! and you have brought a wagon for the money?"

"A wagon for the prisoner also—so be quick, captain."

"Tis a large sum in rubles," mused the other.

"I am in haste to be gone; the prisoner—you hear me, sir?" said Balgonie, impatiently.

"You seem more anxious about the prisoner than the treasure?" responded Vlasief, sulkily, but still delayed to move.

"You have my orders—I come in the name of the empress—get there be no delay, Captain Vlasief," was the curt reply.

"Bring in two Cossacks of the escort; the money is here in seventy bags, each containing a thousand rubles."

"Excuse me, but the order of the imperial treasurer says expressly eighty sealed bags of a thousand each," said Balgonie, trembling with anxiety, yet compelled to appear to take an interest when he really felt none.

"Ten thousand are missing," said Vlasief, leisurely. "Suppose," he added, in a whisper, "suppose we divide the lost sum and offer a thousand to the treasurer?"

"Impossible, sir!" said Balgonie, with a fiery and impatient manner.

"Well, well—there are the other ten sealed bags," added Captain Vlasief, with a dark and stealthy frown of greed and hate, as the Cossacks tossed the whole amount of the straw of the wagon.

"It matters little; but I hope you may not find the road best, and so lose the whole."

"To be forewarned, sir, is to be forearmed," said Balgonie, touching his pistols, for he quite understood the treacherous implied, and only trembled lest it might mar his deepest plans. "And now, sir, for my prisoner."

"If she be not drowned, for the lower vaults are apt to be flooded on such a night as this," said Vlasief, spitefully.

Writhing under the keen glances of this lowborn Muscovite, Balgonie felt that all now depended upon his outward and assumed bearing of coolness and carelessness. Night favored him in this, and his face was almost concealed. Could anyone then have read his heart, as he, Usakoff, two Cossacks and two soldiers of the main guard made their way down, down through dark and slimy passages and stairs, till they were foot deep and then knee deep in the water that flooded the low and humid corridors, off which were the arched doors of numerous cells—corridors where spiders spun their webs, rats were swimming and terrified bats flew wildly to and fro!

Ere long they reached the door, through the crannies of which painful, long cries and painful gasping had been heard, and after unlocking forced it open by main strength.

A great flood of water poured from the aperture amid the darkness, and with it came the body of poor Natalie, who was well-nigh drowned.

So the red light seen by Natalie was no fancy, but that of the lamp which was borne by one of those who came just in time to save her from the same terrible death by which the Princess Orloff perished.

Lest all might be perilled by a recognition, Balgonie was compelled to retire and leave her in the chaplain's hands till she was restored to consciousness, to warmth, and till she was habited anew; and he passed three dreadful hours of doubt and anxiety, while pacing to and fro in the cold and gloomy archways of the fortress, and having to conceal his face when she was brought forth and supported into the wagon. Usakoff sprang on the shaft and flourished his whip; then the Cossacks and Balgonie put spurs on their chargers and clattered over the wet drawbridge just as the passing bell for the departure of Bernikoff's tortured spirit rang ominously and

solemnly on the stormy gusts of that black and gloomy night.

Balgonie, instead of proceeding by the way he had come, avoided the town of Schlusburg and wheeled off to the right, committing himself partly to the guidance of Usakoff, and quite in ignorance that, about an hour before, Vlasief, who could by no means let so many rubles escape without paying toll, had beset two of the roads by chosen followers of his own—men whom he hoped might pass for some of the adherents of the late Prince Ivan, rescuing the daughter of the exiled Mierowits.

A strange incident occurred before the internment of old Bernikoff, who had a pompous military funeral. The bottom of his grave was found to be on fire. A Scottish doctor attempted to explain this phenomenon, as resulting from a species of ironstone, which was saturated with the phosphorus supplied by the bones of old interments, and which had been ignited by the friction of the sexton's shovel; but the superstitious Russians took a very different and much more diabolical view of the matter, and laughed to scorn the learned opinion of the Scottish pundit.

### CHAPTER XXIV.

Their horses were tolerably refreshed by the halt at Schlusburg, and so the whole party pushed on at a brisk pace by the road toward the frontiers of Finland—the Cossacks of the escort, whatever they thought, making neither remark nor inquiry, as they trusted obediently and implicitly to the officer who led them; but the darkness of the October morning, the deep and muddy, stony and rough nature of the roads, and the evidence of the storm, ere long began to have a severe effect upon their spirits, and, to the great satisfaction of Balgonie, two of the troopers gradually dropped to the rear and were seen no more.

Now the corporal of the Cossacks ventured to hint that "perhaps they were not pursuing the way they had come, as the lights in St. Isaac's Cathedral must have been visible long ago"; but Balgonie replied, haughtily and briefly, that he "had special orders."

Then the corporal urged a short halt, as the horses were sinking; but again Balgonie replied, that he "had peculiar orders, and must push on."

After passing a little village with a windmill, several miles from the shore of the Lake of Ladoga, the road dipped down into a dark hollow, between impending crags of granite, the gray faces of which were beginning to brighten in the first light of the lagging October sun. The rain and wind were over; the hollow way was full of rolling and peeping mist; but Usakoff affirmed with confidence that he knew the country well.

Out of the gray vapor, from both sides of the path, there flashed, redly and luridly, five or six muskets! One bullet struck white splinters from the wagon, eliciting a shriek from its occupant; another whistled through the mane of Charlie's horse; and a third killed one of the Cossacks, who died without a groan.

The way was beset by armed men, whose numbers and disposition, the dim light, or rather, the darkness and the mist, alike served to conceal.

"Make way, in the name of the Empress," cried Balgonie, dashing forward with his saber drawn; "nay, I command you, on your peril and allegiance!" he added, as the threatening words of Vlasief occurred to him; and, to his astonishment and dismay, he saw that personage actually appear, mounted and armed. His party, who seemed all on foot, were clad like peasants, but were armed with muskets, which they were rapidly casting about and reloading.

"Halt! In the name of the Empress—halt, I command you! for this is not the way to St. Petersburg, whither the prisoner and treasure were to be conveyed. Treason! treason!" shouted the Staff Captain Vlasief.

Balgonie fired a pistol at his head; but the Captain's horse reared, or was compelled to do so by bit and spur, for the bullet pierced its throat; and with an oath, Vlasief fell on the pathway, entangled in the stirrups as the animal sank under him.

The three remaining Cossacks, who were somewhat bewildered by the attack, by the appearance of Vlasief, whom they knew, and whose confident bearing confirmed certain gathering suspicions that something was wrong as to their route, now drew their sabers, aimed several blows at Usakoff's head, and endeavored to cut the reins of his horse, or stab it between the shafts, as he lashed the animal almost to racing speed, and the light wagon jolted, rolled and bounded along the rough road behind him.

By another pistol shot Balgonie rid himself of the Cossack corporal, whose bridle arm he broke, while facing about and galloping in the rear of the wagon, and now, with wild halloo, the entire party of armed men followed it on foot, with all speed, up a steep slope, over which the path wound.

Usakoff ground his teeth, for he was without weapons, and passive in the flying combat; but, being fertile in expedients, he tore open a bag of rubles, and scattered them on the upland road with a ready and reckless hand.

The bright coins drew the excited for the cupidity of the pursuers, who halted to pick them up, tumbling, scrambling, rising and falling over each other, with shouts, curses and maledictions; their firearms sometimes exploding in the while; and so the whole were speedily left behind, as the wagon, guarded nearly by Balgonie alone, was driven along a lonely and unfrequented road that led to the little town of Pommphela.

"Thanks, dear Usakoff—thanks for your presence of mind," said Balgonie; "I had forgotten all about those rubles. To lighten the wagon let us throw out those remaining bags—this perilous lumber, the intended recapture of which has nearly cost us our lives—honor—all, at the hands of Vlasief."

"Nay, nay, never! Lumber, say you? The rubles are Natalie's—hers and mine—hers and yours, when you wed her; they have saved us once, and may do so again," replied Usakoff, cheerfully, as the sun burst forth in his clear October splendor, and they saw the dome shaped cupola of the Church of Pommphela rising with a golden gleam from amid the white morning haze.

There Balgonie's uniform and display of gold rubles operated powerfully on the postmaster, who, without asking for passports or other papers, at once, and on the name of the Empress, supplied them with fresh horses for the frontier, toward which, after procuring some proper nourishment and restoratives for

Natalie, they pushed on without a moment of unnecessary delay.

"Ah," thought Balgonie, with a shudder and a prayer: "had Jagowski's name not been omitted in that order of Weynarn, where would she have been now? Pale with sorrow and long suffering, her face was still beautiful, though sorely wasted; the deep, thoughtful eyes had yet a wealth—a world of tenderness in their liquid depths; and the long, dark hair was thick, soft and wavy as ever, as it fell in masses behind the small, compact and finely formed head.

All was changed now, and, as she laid her head on Charlie's breast, she felt content—almost happy; and the horrors that hung over her family alone prevented her, as yet, from being completely so.

No trace of pursuers was behind them now, though their flight must by this time have been known both in the capital and at Schlusburg. But in those days there were neither railroads nor electric telegraphs; so, riding on more leisurely, Balgonie changed horses again near Viborg, and ere long the great Lake of Salma appeared before them, with the hills of Swedish Finland beyond its further waters.

A boat was procured there; the wagon was abandoned; and with a shout of joy, Usakoff assisted the Finnish boatman to hoist the great lug sail to catch the breeze of a balmy and beautiful evening, as they bade a long farewell to Russia and all its terrors.

In a quiet old church of Finland, by the eastern shore of the Lake of Salma, and in view of its little archipelago of granite isles—a lonely little town, buried amid groves of plum and cherry trees, built of wood and painted red, with a little bell jangling in its lonely heft—Charlie Balgonie and his future bride were united by the old curate; and there a thousand rubles spent among the poor spread in the primitive district a happiness the tradition of which is still remembered with many a grateful exaggeration.

After this, poor Usakoff, finding himself perhaps as a third person, rather in the way, left them to become a soldier of fortune; and he is supposed to have perished in one of the Polish struggles for freedom; at least they heard of him no more after their final journey to Scotland.

Two years before these events Charlie's uncle, Gamall Balgonie, merchant, magistrate and elder, had departed in peace to sin no more, leaving the lands and possessions of Balgonie unimpaired; and a long tombstone records at length all the virtues which his contemporaries believed him to possess.

So Carl Ivanovitch became once more Balgonie of that ilk; and the rubles of Natalie added many a turret and many an acre to his patrimonial dwelling in beautiful Strathearn.

(The end.)

IS THERE REAL SENTIMENT?

Is It Right to Call Deep Emotion "Sheer Sentimentality?"

Some years ago I should have been tempted to declare that the exact female equivalent of the practical man—my antithesis as upon him—did not exist. To-day I dare not go so far in assertion. For to-day there are women—to me they seem sexless as hockey sticks or golf clubs—who take very much the same line. They speak as if passion might be doused, like the burglar's glim, by diet; as if adoration could be killed by a hearty regimen of grape-nuts, a broken heart be mended with platinum. One such charmer recently said to a tortured sister, whose life had been laid in ruins by a man: "My dear, take up typewriting!" The remark would appeal to the practical folk.

It is often assumed nowadays that any real deep emotion is "sheer sentimentality." But sentiment is not sentimentality, whatever the practical one may bellow with machine-made eloquence. There are people, and often they are the very finest, the most sincere, the most delicate, the most true human, who, having once given their hearts, can never take them back. They do love once, and once for all.

Matthew Arnold—no fool, I fancy!—wrote the "Twin soul" that halves one's own. I hear the practical man's own. The very word "soul" always sets him off. Nevertheless, roar his ribs out as he may, it is a fact that thousands, millions of people, both men and women, go through life consciously, or unconsciously, seeking that twin soul. The seeking is hope. The finding is joy, as perfect as exists in this uncertain world.—London Queen.

THE EUROPEAN PLAN.

Mr. Boggs passed the evening paper over to his wife, indicating with a toll-worn thumb a certain paragraph. "Read that," he said, "and see what you think of Nathan Eldridge, that claimed to be so smart and was so keen after dollars. See how he's gone all to smash, and his hotel with him. Pretty doings for a Bushby boy. But I knew 'twould come! I knew 'twould come!"

"How did you know it?" demanded Mrs. Boggs, to whom her husband's claims for unusual wisdom and foresight were sometimes a trifle irritating. "Folks have all said the hotel was full, and Nathan seemed wonderfully prosperous."

"So he did, and so it was," admitted Mr. Boggs, "but no man can do as he did and be prosperous long. Why, I heard tell from those that know that when Amelia Hand went there to pass a week, and 'twas such bad weather—shifty, cleaning, and then something up again, squalling and spitting the whole time, and poor Miss Amelia inquired now and then how the wind set—"

Mrs. Boggs sniffed.

"Inquired now and then how the wind set," repeated Mr. Boggs, firmly. "What did she find tucked on to the end of her bill but an item, 'For use of weather-vane, \$1.'"

THE LESSER EVIL.

Mrs. Phamley (in the sitting room)—As long as Mary is playing the piano, Henry, we may be assured she isn't spooning with that Mr. Huggard.

Mr. Phamley (whose ears are weary)—Well, if the rule works the other way I wish you'd go down and tell them to go ahead and spoon.—Philadelphia Ledger.

OF THE SAME MATERIAL.

"You can't make bricks without straw," observed the man who is fond of moral reflections.

"No," responded McRobinson, "and some people seem to think the same proposition applies to cigars."—Puck.

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