

THE SPUR OF FATE

By Ashley Towne

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CHAPTER III.

THE BALL OF THE QUATRE-Z-ARTS.

WHEN they came to the end of the street, they found more lights and a livelier region; but, for Paris, it was not much to boast of, and cabmen were scarce. At last, however, they were able to waylay an empty vehicle, into which Darrell assisted the lady of the brown eyes.

Where would monsieur wish to go? It was the cabman's question, and Darrell seemed not to hear it. "You were on your way?" he began and paused.

"To the Place Blanche," said the coachman.

"Ah, yes," responded Darrell. "We will go to the Place Blanche."

He took his place in the carriage and became immediately aware that his companion was shivering pitifully. As the night was unseasonably warm, this phenomenon required an explanation.

"You are ill?" he asked.

"Frightened," she answered. "I am quaking with terror. Absurd, now that it is all over."

And then she burst into tears, weeping with a perfect self abandonment which he was sufficiently experienced to recognize as the best possible relief.

Her calmness in the first minutes of their acquaintance had been astounding and doubtless had been no less so in the terrible scenes that had preceded her extraordinary rescue.

Darrell now saw at what expense it had been maintained.

Consolation and tenderness are inseparably connected, and before Darrell was really aware of it he was holding her hand and caressing it as innocently as if she had been a woman again, and he was a man of the world restrained by all the barriers of conventionality.

"I am not often so weak," she said. "You would be surprised to know what I have borne without a tear. But I have no intention of burdening you with my sorrows. Help me through a few more minutes until I have formed a plan, and then I will relieve you absolutely of all care of me."

"Surely there must be some one with whom you would wish to communicate," he said.

"There are a few to whom I would send word," she replied. "But unfortunately I do not know just where they are. Certainly they can be of no use to me this night. Moreover, it is disagreeable to mention the circumstance, but I am absolutely without money. I had a purse containing a small sum, but it is gone. There is more at the house where I have been living, but I dare not visit it, for I think the Russian agents are ignorant of the fact that I dwell there, and I would not direct their attention to my friends. Perhaps tomorrow I can send word."

"I will agree to manage that," said Darrell. "and in the meantime let me say in the quietest way that money does not enter into this problem. I have a large pocketful, and of course you are more than welcome to all you may need. As to the night, we could ride in this cab till daylight if necessary, but I would rather you should have rest, and as to that I have a plan. I have some friends at the students' ball—Mr. and Mrs. Gordon, Americans and very nice people; precisely the sort for an emergency such as this. I have a card for the ball. It was my intention to go, but I changed my mind. And now fate has changed it for me in the other direction. If you wouldn't mind waiting in this carriage near the Moulin Rouge, I might go in and consult Mrs. Gordon. She is a person of expedients."

"You cannot ask her to take any interest in me," said the girl. "She does not know me, and I have no means of making myself truly known to you. The circumstances of our meeting are a poor guarantee in such a matter."

"There is, however," said Darrell, "such a thing as instinctive recognition of individual character. I have seen

the Place Blanche and presently stopped amid a press of vehicles before the portals of the Moulin Rouge.

Darrell directed the cabman to go on a little way, and then alighted. Immediately he was aware of two figures, man and woman, who were hurrying toward him. The man was frocked like a gray friar, with cord and cowl; the woman wore a fawn colored domino, and she twirled a mask by her cord. She had abundant dark brown hair, and she was tall, like Vera. Her companion was a six footer, and he looked a giant in his gray robe.

"I beg your pardon," he said in English. "Are you done with the cab? All these are engaged."

"You leave the ball early," said Darrell, without answering the question. "Is it less interesting than usual?"

"We say goodbye to Paris at sunrise," the young man replied. "Isn't that beastly? We have just time to get to our lodgings and finish packing. You are an American, aren't you?"

"Yes," replied Darrell, "I'm an American, as you are, and I'm in a bit of a fix also, as you are. You want a cab, and I want to go into the ball with my friend, but we can't do it without costumes. If we don't get any, I shall be obliged to go in alone, and she will wait in the cab; so you can't have it. If, on the other hand, you will sell me your frock—are you dressed completely under it?"

"Oh, yes, I'm dressed all right," "And as to the domino? Could it be spared?"

"How funny!" exclaimed the young woman, with a laugh. "But everything happens in Paris. Certainly your friend can have the domino. Somebody spilled a glass of beer on the back of it," and she turned to reveal the stain—"but if your friend doesn't mind that?"

"The stain is an advantage," replied Darrell. "What says the monk?"

"My frock for the cab!" cried the friar. "It is yours."

Darrell protested that he must pay the worth of the dresses—indeed much more—and he succeeded in forcing the young man to accept a sum that was probably an agreeable addition to his exchequer. Then the two women got into the cab, and it was Vera in mask and domino who got out. Meanwhile Darrell in the shadow of the vehicle had slipped the monk's frock over his head.

"I have made her a present of my cloak," whispered Vera. "She fancies that I am a millionaire upon a trifling escapade. She will change her opinion about my wealth when she views the cloak by daylight. It has seen hard service."

"I might give the gentleman my opera hat," replied Darrell, "or your handkerchiefs. But the latter I value too highly as a souvenir, and the former, closed, lies easily in the bosom of my gown. And now for cabby."

He beckoned to the driver, who climbed down from the box.

"Fifty francs for you," said Darrell, "and as much more tomorrow evening if you are discreet. Do you understand? You will forget everything. Call there at 6 tomorrow."

He gave the man his card, upon which was written the address of a club.

"Why do you bribe him?" asked Vera.

"If any successful attempt is made to trace you," replied Darrell, "this man will be found, and if that happens I want to know of it. Meanwhile these costumes are great luck."

The unfrocked monk leaned from the cab window and gave directions to the coachman. Vera and Darrell, turning away, waved their hands in farewell.

The portals of the Moulin Rouge were beset by such a throng that Darrell and his companion passed through unnoticed. But a moment later, as they worked their way out of the press, a couple dressed as sailors, the woman's costume being like the man's in the minutest detail, accosted them with merry badinage.

"We knew you weren't going away," said the woman. "You were afraid of drinking too much wine."

"Mistaken identity," laughed Darrell in Vera's ear. "I hope our friends were well behaved, for their reputation has passed to us. Now to find the Gordons. What a lark! And I told Gordon this afternoon that I would never have any more fun!"

A wild outburst of applause suddenly arose upon their right, and the crowd eddied and swirled as all sought places of advantage from which to look down upon the dancing floor. Darrell felt Vera's hand on his arm; she seemed to be drawing him forward.

"Do you care to see it?" he asked.

"Why, yes," said she, "since we are here. What are they doing? I know nothing of these grand entertainments. I was too young to see much of such fetes as we had in Stavropol. There is a place from which we can see."

And with the words she stepped nimbly ahead of him, securing a remarkably good position.

"It is the procession," said he, standing close behind her. "I did not expect to see it at this hour. It represents the entry of a Roman conqueror into a captured city of Assyria."

"It is like a scene in a theater," she cried. "See the painted palaces! How beautiful, and with such an air of antiquity! There is the conqueror in his chariot. There are the warriors and the captives. It is magnificent!"

She turned and looked up at Darrell, and he noted how her eyes were shining through the mask.

There had been music. It ceased and then burst forth again in delicious melody, which was instantly caught up by the throng upon the floor. The procession had passed around the circle, winding among the painted palaces, in whose windows could be seen men and women in the ancient Assyrian costume, copied with great exactitude from the memorials of that vanished era. Dancers were crowding upon the floor. Quadrilles formed as if by magic. One caught glimpses of famous men in the world of art, and among them, dominating the scene, were the beautiful women of that world, the famous models, garbed in costumes the most magnificent or the most simple, some shod in gold leather, others barefoot, some shining with jewels, others garlanded with cheap posies daintily put on.

And they all sang till the voices drowned the great orchestra and the roof rang with the song.

"What is it?" asked Vera. "I have heard it in the street."

"It is 'L'Heure Charmante,' the latest craze of the Quarter," replied Darrell. "You know it, then? For she had begun to sing. 'Then why not? It is in the air.'"

He added his own strong and clear voice to hers, and they sang together lustily.

Suddenly the people on their left veered toward the dancing floor. Vera turned quickly, her eyes burning. He nodded, and their hands were clasped together. Another moment and these two, so strangely met, were dancing among the revelers—this woman with the scars of fetters on her wrists, this man who was alive because a bullet fired half an hour before and meant for him had gone astray. It was in harmony with the night's adventure that they should dance and sing together in this mad throng that whirled them hither and thither, aimless as fate.

The music stopped with an abrupt crash of the instruments and a break of the voices from song to shouting, then to silence. All looked toward the highest gallery, where appeared Lucia, acclaimed the favorite model and now proudly perched upon a pedestal. She was small of stature, and her beauty was not of the type that "carries" to a great distance. Her costume, however, was wonderfully effective. She wore a gown of pale green, brocaded with

frises, and she held in her hands a yellow veil so variable in quality under the lights that it seemed to waver round her body like a tongue of flame. A famous artist made a quick sketch of her as she stood there, and then the oldest of the students, a giant, dressed like a gladiator, gave her his hand, and as she stepped down from the pedestal he kissed her on the forehead, as if to typify the reverence for beauty in the hearts of all that vast assembly of his worshippers. Applause rewarded him, and then the band struck up once more "L'Heure Charmante." A thousand voices seized upon the strain, the dancers whirled away into new measures, and upon the instant Darrell said in his companion's ear:

"There are the Gordons."

He had described his friends at the edge of the lower gallery.

"We must hurry," he added, "or they will escape us." Then suddenly, "Upon my word, I am glad that we danced!"

"I, too," she replied. "It is something for me to have known this life if only

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for a moment. But I am ashamed to go to your friends. It is like asking a favor. I am too proud."

"We ask nothing," returned Darrell, "not even advice. We merely tell our amusing little story for their greater joy in the midst of this merry-making. It is a favor that we confer upon them. Hasten!"

It proved to be easy to overtake the Gordons, for they returned immediately to a table and an unfinished bottle of wine. The friar of orders gray was a stranger in their eyes as he approached them and bowed gravely, as became his character.

"Pax vobiscum," said he.

"And with you also, father," replied Gordon. "May I be permitted to inquire—Jack Darrell! Well, upon my soul!"

And Edith! cried Mrs. Gordon, for as much as could be seen of Vera in mask and domino was not without a suggestion of Miss Lorrimer.

"You are in error," whispered Darrell, stooping beside her chair. "This lady is Vera Shevaloff, a princess by right; an exile through injustice. I took her from the agents of the czar this evening, and one of them, Robert," he added, looking across at Gordon, "was our friend, the pirate, Ladislav."

Gordon rose hastily and bowed, while his wife extended her hand to Vera, for there was a gleam in Darrell's eyes which meant, "If you are my friend, receive her well."

"And you are the man who swore adventure!" said Gordon aside. "Well, I am not surprised."

"It is this that is the test," replied Darrell; "my presence here. No man can expect to dictate absolutely in the matter of general peace and quietness. The thing is too difficult, for the house may take fire over his head while he lies asleep with his hands folded upon his breast. But in regard to special acts, most of us still retain the delusion of choice. Therefore, in order to set me definitely right in the matter, fate has brought me to this spot. Otherwise I might have fancied that I was free to decide whether I would or would not attend a ball. Let me dismiss the notion. I am thistledown in the wind of destiny."

"I will give you my opinion of that," replied Gordon, "when I have seen the princess without her mask."

CHAPTER IV.

A CRIME OF THE NIBBLISTS.

MRS. BOB GORDON, as she was generally known in the American colony, was a woman of broad views and invincible independence. Her social position was very strong, being founded

on ancestry, buttressed by money and

defended by tact and individuality—the last named a great power, for it is the conventional creature, who must do the conventional things, while the strong personality wins a measure of freedom.

She heard Vera's story, somewhat more fully told than before, yet with nothing of real importance added to the tale as Darrell had received it. Vera mentioned no names of friends in Paris and avoided any reference to a reason for her choice of that city as a place of residence, but the impression was strong upon Darrell that his princess was not in the great capital for the sake of its climate nor to behold its many beauties. He felt that this woman's life must be directed by some strong purpose, and if its mainspring had been the desire for vengeance that would have seemed natural. Yet she had denied complicity with nihilism, and Darrell had taken her word. He must therefore seek some other explanation of the mystery surrounding her.

In spite of all that Americans know of the various injustices that are rife in Russia, it is impossible to bear such a narration as Vera's story, almost incredible in it; that men in high station, surrounded by the attributes of power and dignity, cannot be dragged down in a moment to the level of grinding, hopeless, unrewarded toil in the mines of a frozen desert; that gently nurtured women cannot be cast out of palaces into hovels buried in arctic snows. Gordon heard the story with a growing wrath, his elbows on the table, his head thrust forward, his eyes shining, and his wife, who showed less emotion, was yet moved to clasp the hand that had slain the villain Gorski and to hold it firmly for some seconds after that incident had been disclosed.

At the last Vera showed signs of the strain involved in the recital, with its ghastly memories, and so when it was done the others felt an impulse to withdraw her mind from retrospection as soon as possible.

"Let us have one more look at the dancers," said Gordon, rising. "The sight of such light hearted people will do us good."

He turned toward the larger hall as he uttered the words, and at that moment two men came hastily up to him.

"You are Mr. Robert Gordon," said one of them, and as he spoke a third man joined the two.

"I am," replied Gordon.

"And you are Mr. John Darrell?"

"That is my name," answered the gray friar.

"It is believed that you have certain information which is desired by the police," said the officer in a low tone. "Will you accompany us?"

"With pleasure," replied Darrell. "May I ask the nature of the affair?"

"The commissary will inform you," said the officer. "Shall we go at once?"

Darrell was perfectly willing, his only desire being to lead these solemn faced detectives as far as possible from Vera Shevaloff.

"Pardon me one moment," he said, turning toward Gordon, and at that instant he heard one of the officers whisper to the spokesman of their party.

"The ladies are Mme. Gordon and Mlle. Lorrimer, Americans."

Mrs. Gordon also overheard these words, and she said instantly:

"Robert will take Miss Lorrimer and myself home, and then he will go to you, if these men will give us the necessary information."

To this the leader of the detectives replied that his orders were to ask Mr. Darrell to accompany him to the station on the Rue Gluck, beside the opera house. If he should not be there when Mr. Gordon should arrive, there would be no difficulty in learning where he had gone.

Darrell did not wait for further words. He gave his hand to Vera and the Gordons and then hurried away, attended by the officers who were kind enough to avoid giving the affair the appearance of an arrest.

There was a four seated cab outside, and it conveyed the party to the station on the Rue Gluck. He could exert no information from his companions upon the way, and, indeed, he made no great effort to do so, being satisfied in advance that it would be futile. In fact, he was of the opinion that the time could be better passed in thinking than in talking.

Undoubtedly Ladislav had made some sort of complaint, probably for assault. The purpose of the action must be the recapture of Vera, for Ladislav was not the man to ask the law to right any personal wrong so long as words and pistols or even bludgeons continued to be procurable for money. Darrell had no fear either of the public or the private vengeance of "the pirate." He was prepared to justify his own conduct if necessary, but his first concern must be to shield Vera. It would have pleased him to do this boldly—to tell the story of the night's adventure precisely as it had occurred and then to defy the czar's agents and all other persons to do their level worst. He did not believe that there was any law in France by which she could be taken from the Gordons' house, but he was forced to admit, with the utmost delicacy, that that might depend upon the lady herself.

Obviously her business in Paris was secret, for otherwise she would have mentioned it. There was too much reason to believe that it might be nihilism under another name. But whatever it was, she evidently desired to conceal it. She was not ready to come out into the open.

"Such being the case," said Darrell to himself when he had reached this stage of his meditations, "I am in a place that is well defined by the usages of polite society. I am called upon to lie and lie good and hard by all the principles of honor. I don't like lying for its own sake, but I will do it for her sake, and I will make a workman-like job of it."

When he had purchased the costumes of the two Americans, it had come into Darrell's mind that they might be of more important service than merely to pretend of waiting in the carriage. It amounted to a persuasion, since the costumes must have been noticed by many persons, including the secret police scattered about through the assembly. Yet there was little chance that the faces of the wearers would

be remembered. The monk's hood was nearly as good as a mask, and the stain of beer on the fawn colored domino was more distinctive than anything that could be noted of the lady's actual personality. As a means for confusing any possible pursuers, the gown and the domino might have served well, though Darrell had not foreseen that they would be needed as the matter of a claim of alibi.

As to their value in this regard, Darrell resolved upon a test. He had a theory about the three men in the cab with him. The one who had conducted the "arrest" might be an agent of the district commissary of police, but Darrell suspected him of connection with the central bureau de la surete (the detective bureau of Paris). The second was a man from the precinct in which Darrell and the Gordons lived, and he was there for purposes of identification. It was he who had said that the ladies were Mrs. Gordon and Miss Lorrimer, the latter of whom Darrell now blessed for her hasty and almost secret flight from the house. The Paris police are sure, but slow, though their military discipline and unquestioning obedience, combined with excellent organization, sometimes give them the delusive aspect of rapidity. It might take them a week or even a fortnight to discover that Vera had replaced Miss Lorrimer, despite the rigid supervision to which strangers are subjected.

So much for policeman No. 2 and his fortunate error. Passing to No. 3, Darrell made him out to be a member of the force assigned for that evening to the Moulin Rouge to watch the merry students and their guests. He had been brought along to testify concerning the Gordon party, and Darrell was pleased to observe that he was gnawing his upper lip and cracking the joints of his long and bony fingers.

"Your name, my friend?" cried Darrell suddenly, slapping the man on the knee.

The officer sat up so suddenly that his long backbone gave forth a snapping sound as from a whip.

"Hien! Fontaine!" he cried. "Why do you ask?"

"Merely from interest," replied Darrell. "It happened to have seen you several times this evening. You remember when the beer was spilled on my friend's domino?"

Fontaine did not reply in words, but his face was well worth noticing. A light shone favorably into the cab, revealing a glance full of "I told you so" directed by Fontaine toward the chief detective. Darrell knew that he had made a center shot and that Fontaine must have already expressed his belief that Darrell and the lady had been in the Moulin Rouge at the time of the act of which Ladislav had complained, whatever that act might be. Of course there was no certainty that the black visaged rascal had sworn to the truth.

The cab stopped, and its occupants alighted. As they entered the station Darrell was annoyed to observe that the detectives surrounded him with a somewhat elaborate display of precaution. First he should escape, and the passage of the party through the outer room excited an audible thrill of interest. They entered a private office, where Darrell perceived a gray and soldierly officer seated by a table topped desk. Behind him sat a man who leaned forward as if buried in thought, his elbow on his knee, his chin in his hand. The attitude and the peculiar arrangement of the lights made this man's face a blurred shadow except for his left eye, which, being turned toward Darrell, shone like a jewel.

The three men who had brought in the prisoner fell away from him, leaving him standing alone before the desk in a glare of light. Immediately the elderly officer took up a paper from the table and began to read aloud in a hasty but monotonous tone a fairly accurate description of John Darrell, American, and of his doings since he had come to Paris.

"Sir," said Darrell in his gentlest tone, "this record is very interesting and surprisingly correct, but it does not seem to explain my presence here at this time. Would you favor me with a few words on that point?"

"The charge against you," said the officer, putting the paper carefully into a pile of them, as if to show that it was only one of many damning documents in the case—"the charge against you, Mr. Darrell, relates to Captain Sergius Ladislav."

"If Captain Ladislav has made a complaint against me," answered Darrell,

"I would like to meet him face to face," he repeated in his presence. That is more the manner of my country. I would like to meet him face to face."

The officer shook his head, but before he had denied the request in words the man in the shadow said:

"If such is your wish, follow me."

He arose and walked toward a door at the rear of the office, and Darrell followed him. They descended some iron steps, not too well lighted, and passed into a long room below the street level. At the farther end sat two policemen, one upon each side of a large table. Darrell at first supposed that a third officer lay upon the table asleep and covered with a cloak, but as he approached, the policeman who had been seated arose and, apparently obeying a sign, drew away the covering from the recumbent figure.

It was Ladislav who lay there dead.

Sur Noodle—Oh, I'm not such a fool as I look.

Miss Uppish—Then you've a good deal to be thankful for.—St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

(TO CONTINUE.)

The Popular Song.

Above the voices of the spring We hear this song Monotonous that starts with "ping" And ends with "pong." —Philadelphia Press.

CAUSE FOR GRATITUDE.

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