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THE MYSTERY OF COUNT LANDRINOF.

BY FRED WHISHAW.

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"I did not say that," I faltered. "Very well," said the official, slightly smiling, as I thought. "We shall do our best. I shall communicate with the pristaf. Inquiries shall shortly be instituted. It is fair to tell you that your story should be easily proved if matters are indeed as you say. But the tale is somewhat incredible. The police—the Russian police in the higher branches—rarely blunder. Much will depend upon the count—or impostor—and the manner in which he passes through the interrogations to which he will be subjected."

"He will have a version of his own, excellence, that is certain. He will lie plausibly. You will be prepared for that," said Borofsky.

"We have to deal with many liars in this department," smiled the official. "We seek the truth through sundry obstacles till we find it. It is our duty to believe nothing until it has been proved. That is why I should recommend our young friend here to reconsider his benevolent desire to screen an acquaintance."

"An acquaintance!" I repeated indignantly. "I would scorn to acknowledge the little rascal as an acquaintance. I met him by the merest accident."

"And will scorn to meet him again?" said our friend, slightly smiling. "I shall see him no more when once I have finished with him." I said hotly, "and shall consider myself well rid of him."

As we left the department Borofsky pinched my arm.

"You'll be shadowed after this, Count Boris," he whispered, laughing. "You have done it this time."

"Why?" I growled. "What have I done?"

"Why, naturally they'll want to find out who your 'little rascal' is, and you'll be followed about for his sake. Let him go, like a wise man. Squeeze his news out of him and let them grab him when and where they like. Fiat justitia!"

"He is safe while in our house," I said. "Afterward he may go hang, for all I care."

"Which is the wisest thing you have yet said in connection with this atrocious little scoundrel!" said Borofsky.

"It is a thousand pities you gave him 5,000 rubles, but, after all, giving him a check for the amount is a vastly different thing from paying him cash down! He'll never cash that check!"

"Why not?" I asked in surprise.

"He won't dare, at first, and the police will grab him before he makes up his mind. You are to be shadowed, remember, and that means that the house will be watched. Naturally, they'll have him in no time."

Just as we reached our house some one ran hurriedly down the steps, jumped into a drosky standing close



There is no sense in trying to dodge any sort of trouble around a tree. The only way is to come squarely out and face the difficulty and fight it. If you are sick or half sick, the best course is not to neglect or ignore it, or pretend that it doesn't exist, but to find the proper remedy and use it.

A bilious, dyspeptic condition of the system not only makes life miserable, but it is sure to lead to something worse, unless promptly taken in hand and corrected. It is foolish to attempt to dodge such troubles by any mere temporary expedient. The only sensible way is to get rid of them for good and all by a thoroughly rational, scientific medicine like Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery.

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by and drove away. I did not notice him particularly.

"Did you see who that was?" whispered Borofsky, jogging my arm. "I wonder what he's been at! He has not lost much time anyway."

"Why, who was it?" I said. "Not the student escaping? We must!"

"Bah! Nonsense! The student knows when he is well off. A squad of soldiers wouldn't drive him out of the place now! It was our friend the pristaf."

"The pristaf!" I repeated. "I thought he had refused to have anything to do with the affair and disbelieved us from start to finish!"

"Well, there it is, or, rather, there he is!" said Borofsky. "And, what's more, I think we may expect that things will now buzz a bit."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THINGS BEGIN TO BUZZ. Things—as I have taken the liberty to translate Borofsky's Russian expression—did begin to buzz almost from this moment.

Several exciting and very important events took place during the next few hours, but the chief actor in these, on our side at least, was Borofsky, and it is his movements that must now be followed for a little while, while I stand aside as a mere narrator.

Borofsky became the principal actor because he absolutely refused to allow me to have any further dealings with the student. I did not know how to manage the little wretch, he declared, for I treated him as an equal, entitled to consideration and respect, as an individual to be accorded his share of the rights and privileges of civilization, and this was quite the wrong attitude to take up with such people. The fellow was an outlaw, he had lost his rights to the blessings of citizenship, he was a scavenger cur that came and fed by night upon the offscourings of society. It was ridiculous to treat such an individual like a decent Christian.

"Well, take him in hand," I laughed; "only don't squeeze his 5,000 rubles out of the poor wretch. He came by that fairly enough!"

And so it happened that I retired, for the present, from the front line of the fight, and allowed Borofsky to carry the colors in my place. Borofsky lost no time about barding the wolf. He went straight to the student's room.

"Now," he said, "young man, do you know me?"

"Oh, yes, very well!" laughed the student. "I have heard of your marvelously pretty detective performance in London. You are to be congratulated, Mr. Borofsky."

"Those are to be congratulated who win the game," said Borofsky. "You have earned 5,000 rubles, I hear; so far, then, it is you that are to be congratulated."

"Thank you," said the student. "Reserve the congratulations until I have finished; then the same felicitations will do for the whole of my exploits. I shall pocket another 5,000 tonight!"

"Indeed! From whom and for what service?"

"From the young count. But I do not discuss my wares before I bring them to market."

"But maybe I am, after all, the merchant with whom it will be necessary to deal!" said Borofsky.

"I deal with the count only."

"What if he be not a buyer?"

"Oh, he will buy, I have little fear. I am a monopolist. They that have need of such goods as I have to sell must come to me, for there are no others that sell them."

"No others—not one?"

"Certainly not."

"Come, think again; that is surely a mistake. Andre is not the only conspirator."

The student winced slightly and flushed. Then he laughed.

"The game of bluff," he said, "is amusing when played upon nervous subjects; its finesse is lost upon me, because I know my hand and can keep my head in order to play it to advantage."

"But I repeat that Andre has confederates besides yourself."

"Find them!" said the student.

"Perhaps! Then there is Andre himself!"

"Oh, your hand is a poor one indeed, my friend! Andre to act as informer upon himself—that is a trump card indeed!"

Borofsky saw that he must change his tactics. The little student clearly intended to brave this matter out. He believed in his monopoly, as he called it.

"You saw the pristaf, I suppose?" said Borofsky suddenly.

This remark scored heavily.

The student started to his feet; his face grew very pale; he sat down again.

"What pristaf. When?" he gasped.

"The pristaf of the third ochastok,

ne who arrested the count, at your invitation, last July."

"Why should I have seen him? Where? What are you talking about?"

"Very simply, about the pristaf. He was here today to make inquiries."

"Here, in this house, today, to make inquiries about the arrest? Then that worm the young count, has betrayed me, curse him! Oh, if I ever get the chance, I'll torture him for this! I'll!"

"My good sir," said Borofsky coolly, "pray be calm. Why all this excitement? You have not been betrayed yet. Your name has not been mentioned—indeed we do not know it; the pristaf is quite unaware of the honor you have done the Count Landrinof by taking up your abode in his mansion. You are quite safe at present. How long you may remain so must depend upon your readiness to oblige."

"Stop! What was the pristaf doing here today? Tell me that first."

"Making inquiries as I have said. He desires to judge for himself whether Andre is Andre or Count Landrinof, and no doubt by this time Andre has convinced him that he is the latter and worthier of the two."

The student considered awhile; he was very pale. Then he spoke:

"Andre will wonder who told you the story which you have passed over to the pristaf. He may persuade the pristaf that you have lied from beginning to end. If I know Andre, he will have persuaded him so, but Andre will nevertheless wonder from whom the pristaf has heard this story. You did not mention me nor describe me to Andre?"

"Certainly not."

"Nor hint that I was here?"

"Not yet."

The student reflected. He looked very ugly and furious when next he spoke.

"I see your game, curse you!" he said. "You will tell Andre that I am here unless I make over to you certain secrets. Is that it?"

"The matter could not have been more clearly or concisely stated," said Borofsky genially.

"And if I walk out of the house and leave you to find out these things the best way you can?"

"But, my good sir, we are not beginners, you and I. Do you seriously suppose that you would be allowed to leave the house with your pocket full of undelivered gifts? You are too valued a guest to be allowed to depart without protest."

The student stamped his foot.

"I will make you sweat for this one day!" he said. "And what do I get for my secret, if I disclose it of my free will?"

"You shall have a passport and a free ticket to—anywhere you like. If the young count is fool enough, he may add a small sum of money. I wouldn't."

"What if I refuse to open my lips?"

"In that case I shall walk across to the apartments of one Andre, or Kornilof, in the opposite wing, and I shall say to him how that a certain student, name unknown, but quite unneeded, has stated this and that about him. Andre will fume and rage, and I shall suggest that, rather than that Andre should break all the furniture, it would be desirable that the student and he should meet, in order to talk matters over, and to this room he shall forthwith be brought."

(To be Continued.)

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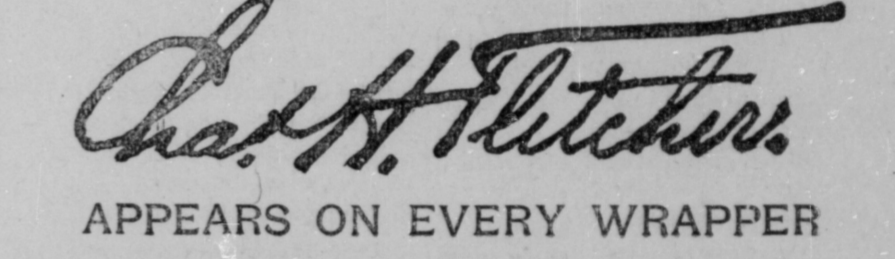
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