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in, and he prescribed a new medicine. He said the medicine I had been taking was unsuited to my case, and so he gave me new. You can see the result."

"Yes—I see," was the reply; "and as you seem to have very good company I'll take my leave. I have several calls to make before night."

The count made no reply to this, and as the priest found he was not urged to remain he arose at once. He stopped twice before he reached the door, but in neither case did he speak. As soon as he gained the street he turned toward the upper part of the city, and he stopped not until he had reached the palace of the Duke of Tula. The old porter admitted him without question, and he made his way at once to the hall, where he inquired for the duke. One of the servants went in search of his master, and when he returned he bade the priest follow him.

The duke was in his private room, and as soon as the servant had withdrawn he bade his visitor take a seat.

"Now, Savotano, how is it?" he asked.

"Have you seen the count?"

"Aye—I am from there now. By all that's bad, my lord, the villain is gaining."

"Gaining?" repeated Olga, with surprise. But you assured me he was well-nigh gone."

"So he was—so he was. But he is recovering now."

"But how is it?"

"Why—he tells me he had a new physician, and that the old medicine was all condemned, and an entire new course prescribed."

"And under this new treatment he is recovering, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well—have you not taken some measures to fix this new medicine? By the gods, Savotano, you must not let him slip now."

"Ah, my lord, I have only told you how he explained the matter. I have another explanation."

"What is it, sir priest?"

"Why—they simply know that some one has attempted to poison the count."

"Ha! Did they say anything?"

"No—there was no need. I knew that the medicine he was taking before was the right kind of medicine, so far as it came from the hands of the surgeon. And then there is another thing: The count must have had some powerful antidote on purpose for the poison."

"How do you know that?"

"Simply because he would not have now been alive had not such been the case. You may be sure, my lord, that they know poison has been administered. They have discovered it in some way, and taken the most effective and speedy method to overcome it. I know this."

"And do you think they suspect you?"

"The duke asked, with some show of uneasiness."

"I don't know, but I fear they do. However, that amounts to nothing—only to prevent me from working any farther at present in the same direction. I have not laid myself open to detection in any way. By heavens, 'tis too bad! In four-and-twenty hours more he would have been a dead man."

"Then you know when the discovery was made?"

"Yes—on the afternoon before Ruric Nevel was captured. I was there just before night, and the gun-maker was then there, and I noticed that the phials were gone from the table, though I gave no signs then of having noticed it. They had even then commenced some treatment for his cure, for I could see that the appearance of his skin had changed. You must not blame me."

"I do not, Savotano. But there may be some way left yet."

"Oh, yes; there are a hundred ways in which we can dispose of him. But I may find some way yet before he gets out."

"Look ye," the duke said, after a short pondering over his own thoughts; "you must watch every chance. Something may turn up in our favor. You may find some opportunity to finish him yet. I wish you could."

"I will do all I can; be sure of that. I shall watch narrowly. And now about the other one. Young Nevel is safe, and can be disposed of at any moment. I have let him live thus far, because I had no orders otherwise."

"Aye—that was right," replied Olga; and as he did so he arose and commenced to pace the room. The priest followed him with his eyes, but said nothing. At length the duke stopped and looked at Savotano in the face.

"It would not be a difficult case to kill him," he uttered in a low whisper.

"Not at all. Nothing could be more easy."

"And could detection ensue?"

"In no possible way."

"Then—"

"Listen!" spoke the humpback, as Olga hesitated. "I strongly suspect that 'twas this same gun-maker that led to the investigation of that medicine; and if it was him, then you will be more quickly suspected than I shall."

"Ha! Why think ye so?"

"Because he is a fellow of wondrous wit and intelligence, and can see without being told. He has had several conferences here, and it was from here that he went direct to the count's residence. He knows by this time why the duel was hatched up, and if he has half the mind I give him credit for, he will know that you

are at the bottom of the poisoning business. I am sure of this."

"By heavens, you are right, Savotano. Let him die!"

"I had thought myself that would be the best way; for if he were at large you would not be safe."

"You can have him killed without noise or disturbance?"

"I think so," replied the priest, with a wicked smile. "At all events, his noise would not hurt any one, for he is rather too far away from the world to make himself heard."

"Where is he?"

"Why—where you recommended: In the furthest vault beneath your old bathing-house; and that is a place where he cannot be readily found."

"And what disposition can you make of the body after the work is done?"

"Why—that is simple. It can be hidden in the old conduit. You know the conduit still exists there, and probably in some place between there and the river it is perfect; but near the building it is all in ruins. The body can be hidden so far in that no stench can come from it in summer time even to those in the vault itself. So you see that is easy."

"Then let the work be done at once—say to-night."

"To-morrow night, my lord, will do as well, for I am engaged to-night."

"Very well—let it be to-morrow night. But mind—this is settled. There is no more question about this affair. When I see you again I trust you will have no reason to offer why Ruric Nevel has not been disposed of."

"You need have no fears on that head, my lord. You may consider that the gun-maker is dead."

"Right! So let it be."

"And thus did the wicked duke dispose of Ruric Nevel!"

Again Olga took a turn across the room, and when he stopped there was a dark cloud upon his brow.

"Savotano," he said, "there is one more man whom I at least would be assured is not in my way. I mean that infernal monk."

"I saw him this morning, my lord, and I am sure he is watching me. And he is not alone. He has others with him. I have been followed, and one of my men—the one who entrapped Nevel—told me not two hours ago, that he knew his steps had been followed."

"And do you think this monk is at the bottom of it?" asked the duke with some uneasiness.

"I know it, for I have seen him when I knew he was watching me."

"Then why have you not got him out of the way?"

"Aha," uttered the priest, with a dubious shake of the head, "we cannot always do as we would. But he shall not live long—if I can help him off; and I think the opportunity may offer itself."

"He is a bold fellow. Why—I found him only yesterday in my own palace—in the chamber of the countess."

"Ha! And could you not have disposed of him then?"

"Not well. It was in broad day, and the people were about. But if I catch him here again my sword shall find his heart. I have given him legal warning. But," continued the duke, after some further thought, "you must be careful in your dealings with him. He may have some organized band always about him."

"I will be caught in no trap," returned the priest confidently. "He shall find that I can be as keen as he can. But it is very strange—"

"What is strange?" asked Olga, starting, for he, too, had been thinking of a very strange thing.

"Why—that this black monk should turn up here in Moscow so suddenly, and commence, the first thing, to dog my footsteps and hang about your palace."

"Aye," responded Olga. "And the same thought was in my mind when you spoke. But never mind—he shall not escape me if he presumes much more. By heavens, they shall know that the Duke of Tula is not to be trifled with. There is but one power in Moscow above mine, and that is the Emperor himself; and I may say that even he is not above me. He cannot get along without me. Does anything turn up to puzzle him he sends straightway for me."

"Then use your power for your own good my lord."

"I will. Fear not for me on that score."

At this juncture the priest arose to take his leave.

"You have your instructions," said Olga.

"I remember them well, my lord—and they shall be carried out to the letter."

"And when done, let me know."

"I will obey."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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