

A STRANGE STORY.

What was I to do? Never was a woman placed in such a pitiable condition. I had been brought to Russia by an English sewing machine company to run their machines at an agency of theirs in—street, in St. Petersburg, where a handsome shop had been taken.

One blustering, cold day, toward the close of October I found the shop door closed, and learned to my dismay that our agent had disappeared, and the machines had all been seized for rent and debts.

What was to be done? All the money I had in the world was about equivalent to \$3. What was due to me I had left in our agent's hands and I felt sure it was lost. I thought of everything in the twenty-five minutes which elapsed between my heart-breaking, when I found the shop door closed, and my rapid walk to my lodgings.

Fortunately my room had been hired for the month and had been paid for in advance. I had at least a roof over my head for a few weeks. An idea suddenly struck me. I had been making an evening dress on the machine for a Russian lady who spoke English. She had some idea of buying a machine. In order to hasten the work I had taken to my room the body of her dress and having a machine there had sewed at it of nights. That machine I would certainly keep. It would go very little toward the payment of the debt the agent owed me.

I hurried home. Perhaps there was a letter with some money in it. There was nothing. I must find the lady, but how? She had left no address. She had hardly spoken to me. I thought I had heard her say she would come again, but I believed she had fixed on this very day. There was but one chance in a thousand. I must stand on the street and wait until she appeared.

I hastened back and took my position near the shop. I scanned every woman passing by. It was bitterly cold and raw, and the wind chilled me. I was faint with anxiety. Suddenly a carriage drove up, a footman opened the door, and a lady, elegantly dressed, alighted. I tore across the street—it was the Russian lady.

With my heart in my mouth, I told her my pitiful story and begged her to help me. If she wanted a servant, would she only try me? I had a sewing machine, and would make her dresses for nothing if I could only stay with her until I could write to my people at home; they would send me money and I could get back to England.

"And my dress—am I to lose it?" the lady asked impatiently.

"Not all of it. The skirt is in the shop; the body is in my room, almost finished."

It seemed to me dreadful that in my agony she should talk about her dress.

"Where do you live?" she inquired abruptly.

I told her.

"Get into the carriage," she said.

I did so.

When we were off the main street she stopped the carriage, got out with me, and we walked to my lodgings. I opened the door. On the table was her dress body. It did not seem to interest her. She picked it up, however, glanced at it a moment, then threw it down on a chair and examined the sewing machine.

"How long would it take me to become proficient in working this?" she inquired as she sat down before the machine and tried the pedals.

"Two weeks—perhaps less."

"Would it disfigure my hands?"

She took off her gloves showed her well-cared-for hands, her fingers glittering with rings.

"Your beautiful hands would hardly be spoiled."

"Well, then, give me a lesson at once—at once. I will pay you for your trouble."

She sat down, and under my instruction worked for an hour. She was wonderfully clever with her fingers, and seemed to seize the peculiarities of the machine at once.

"At this rate of progress, madam, you would become quite a good work-woman in ten days," I said approvingly.

She made no reply, but worked away for another half-hour.

"It is not so tiresome, after all," she said, "but I have had enough for today. Tomorrow I will call, and then you will take the machine to pieces, and show me how it must be put together again. You will oblige me very particularly by not going out today. I have to thank you for your patience. Keep my visit silent. I hope you have learned that in Russia it is better to keep a quiet tongue. Do not return to the shop. Pray take this for my first lesson," and she placed on the machine table a piece of gold.

I felt very much inclined to kiss her. She looked cold and haughty, but my heart was so full of thankfulness that, overcoming somewhat the awe I felt, I ventured to take her hand in mine and put it to my lips. She did not withdraw it.

"Poor child," she said; "you do not look more than twenty, and, at your age, to be in such trouble! This must be a hard experience for you. Good-bye until tomorrow."

She gazed at me steadfastly, as if she would look me through, and then bowing, left me.

Next morning early there was a low knock at my door. I opened it, and a woman plainly dressed entered. She did not say a word. She placed a bundle she held in her hand in a chair and at once went to the machine and commenced sewing.

"You will kindly forget the lady of yesterday, and know me as Elise simply, or rather, as Elise is French, you will say Eliza. I want to learn your trade. It is a whim of mine. Do you think that in a month I could earn my bread this way? I offer you a partnership. I can find the funds. The contents of the shop will probably be sold out, and you will be able to buy one of the machines for me. Now, will you take this one apart?"

I had not a word to say. I brought a wrench, a screw-driver, an oil-can, and loosened the working parts of the machine. She took the oil-can, and bent over the machine, studying it. I noticed that she

touched with her white fingers all the grimy parts, until her hands were soiled.

"It is by no means so complicated as a revolver," she said.

I made no comment as I put the working parts together. She was very silent, working incessantly on some coarse material she had brought with her—I sat near her teaching her what to do. She worked on until it was past noon.

"Is it not time now to eat something?"

"It is," I replied, "will madam partake of my simple meal?"

"Madam! I am Eliza—and you say your name is Mary. I shall be very glad to share your food with you, if you will let me. If you have not enough for two, I will go out and buy what is wanted. What shall it be? I daresay I can shop better than you. Will you lend me your shawl, your furs and your overshoes?"

Before I could say a word she had them all on. Then she laughed for the first time and courtesied to me.

"Sister Mary, Sister Mary," she cried in great glee, "our copartnership begins from today. I am to be capital and you brains. Little sister, good-by. I shall not be gone more than a quarter of an hour."

I was so astonished as to be speechless. In a trice she was back, loaded down with packages. She had a loaf of bread, a piece of cheese, a pot of preserves, a breast of smoked goose and some salted cucumbers.

"I got a samovar, but it was too heavy for me to carry. The man I bought it of will bring it here at once. I see you have a teapot. My only two extravagances were some good soap and a pound of the best tea. Come, let us eat. I can arrange anything. I am to wait on you."

In a day I learned to love that woman. All the haughty, proud manner was gone. She waited on me. She was up first in the morning. She was always busy. The porter of the house evidently mistook her for one of the two girls who had been in the employ of the sewing machine company, for one or the other of them had often been in my room. Some small extra compensation was given him for the new lodger. She never spoke save in English, and her coming to me had been so mysterious that I felt quite certain the porter was entirely ignorant of her condition.

Certainly it worried me a great deal. More than once I ventured to ask for an explanation, but Eliza would place her hand on my mouth so that my speech was interrupted. It distressed me to see how hard she worked, for I felt sure that this new life was hurting her. I could see that from her pallor. If anything more than another made me feel sorry, it was for her beautiful hands. She seemed to take infinite pains in spoiling them.

"They are filthy—horrible," she would say, "and still I think I care for them more than I should. If I could only get a thick, red rough skin on them!"

As she said, the owner of the shop was only too glad to sell a machine. Eliza furnished the money. Work came to us in a mysterious way—left downstairs with the porter. By-and-by a fashionable dress-maker, who made dresses for the court ladies, sent for me and gave me work. As what we had to do was well sewed, and we were always prompt, in less than three weeks we were doing a good business. My companion, save for the daily purchases made in the immediate neighborhood, never went out. No one called on her; she never received a letter. A few days over the month had passed, when one morning as I was running up a seam in a piece of cloth, my needle struck something. It was a piece of paper.

"It is for me, Sister Mary," said Eliza. She took the bit of paper, held it to the stove, appeared to read something, and then opened the stove door and burned it. I did not question her. She worked cheerfully all day, chatting on different subjects.

That night, when we were in bed, taking me in her arms, she said:

"Poor Mary, your troubles, your anxieties are now over. Tomorrow, early, apply for your passport. It will cost you to go from here to London, say £30. I wish it could have been more, but you will have altogether £300 which, after deducting your traveling expenses, will leave you some money to begin your life with again. For me—who has learned to love a singularly honest and simple-minded woman—you shall have this ring," and she slipped on my finger a ring. "But don't wear it; the diamond might betray me. So far, Mary, you have run no risk; but next week you might be ruined forever, for you have harbored—"

I was speechless with terror.

"Only a woman," she continued, "whose own life—or the life of anyone else who stood in her way—she would care no more of taking than a cook would of wringing a chicken's neck. Do not be shocked, Mary. I shall sleep as sweetly tonight as if death did not threaten me. My story, as far as relates to you, is soon told. It became necessary for me a month ago to disappear. Had you been of any other nationality than English, I would never have trusted you. You might go out, Mary, and sell me, Judas like, for a sum of money which would make you rich for life."

I clung convulsively to her and bade her be quiet.

"Through my veins, child, there runs the best blood in Russia, but every drop of it I will shed for the cause. Thank heaven for your lowly estate. You must go away tomorrow, and now good night."

I begged her to come to England with me. She said:

"No, my place is here. I should be useless there."

Then she complained of lassitude and presently went to sleep. I looked at her, her face pillowed on her arm, breathing as calmly as an infant, and thought her the loveliest woman I had ever seen.

Next morning, out of a package of some material, she produced, as if by magic, a roll of notes which, without counting, she handed to me.

"Later in the day there ought to arrive some furs for me, for poor Mary must not get cold. Now away with you."

Her old manner had returned.

"Get your passport. Go by Bremen to England, or the ice will delay you. Do not wait."

Ship Captains give Kerr Evaporated Soup Vegetables the highest praise as they are always fresh, sweet and cheap, and can be enjoyed when other vegetables are impossible.

JAMES ROBERTSON, A. M., LL. D., Rector of Wilmot.

Still I was irresolute. I could not bear to leave her. I sobbed as if my heart would break.

Then she knelt to me and implored me to go. At last I consented.

My passport was given to me at police headquarters without a word.

I returned to our room. As I stood at the landing a cheerful clatter of the machine was heard. Eliza was bending over her work, singing some plaintive air.

"Is it all right?" she asked, very quietly.

"See, your furs have come. They are very beautiful, and so warm."

"I have permission to leave."

"Thank God. See my work. I think I could do now without you."

"You do not love me, Eliza," I cried.

"Not love you—my sister! I loved my husband—he was shot. I loved my only child; in the agony of my grief—because his father was killed—he sucked poison from my breast and died. After them I love you best."

Then, for the first time, she burst in a paroxysm of tears.

"It is because I love you—that I might be your death."

As she wrung my hand she felt the ring on my finger.

"Off with it. You wore your mittens at the police office! If they had seen it! Quick, let me hide it!"

She took off my shoe and hid the ring in my stocking.

"Should you ever marry sell the ring and you will not be portionless. Now off with you. I have made a bundle for you. The rest of your things you will give me. Here is a photograph of yours—you will let me keep it?"

She took me by the hand, gave me one long kiss, closed the door on me, and I never saw her more.

My trip home was without a single incident. My dear mother comforted me. Still there was some vague feeling of dread. My mind wandered in spite of all I could do toward my room companion. Picking up a newspaper when at home, some two weeks after my arrival, I read in the telegraphic dispatches:

"ST. PETERSBURG, Dec. 13.—An arrest of great importance has been made. One of the chief actors in the nihilist plots, a Russian Princess, was taken, but only after she had killed one of the police. Disguised as a sewing machine woman she had hitherto baffled the detectives."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

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Equal pay for equal labor, equal hours, equal conditions all round for both sexes, would be the sure fruit of their equality before the law and at the polls.—*Hildreth*.

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A wise physician once said that the opinion that a good woman should stay closely at home had killed more women than any other one cause.—*Mrs. A. A. Clayton*.

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Gambling does not properly begin until you begin to risk more money than you would think it right to spend in securing a rather trivial kind of rest and recreation.—*Spectator*.

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The mixed religions of China are just as natural and just as historical as the mixed religions of India. China has changed Buddhism more than Buddhism has changed China; the historical religion is as much a child of nature as so-called natural religion is a thing of history.—*Speaker*.

This is to certify that I came to the Wilmot Spa Springs in Oct. 1857 so much afflicted with dyspepsia that I did not expect to live long. Freely drinking the water completely cured me in a few weeks.

NEHUMAH VRANDENBURG.

Fredericton, N. B.

PROGRESS PICKINGS.

The young man, like the mosquito, is often mashed on a pretty face.—*Baltimore American*.

Corn is well provided with ears, but its talk doesn't amount to much, it's too husky.—*Lowell Courier*.

Many young hearts have been set on fire this summer by tennis matches.—*Binghamton Republican*.

"Well, Nettie, are you a good little girl?" "Oh, yes, sir. I must be! Father says I'm a holy terror."—*Life*.

Mrs. Strong—"The great thing is—what you are! Her pretty niece—Wrong, auntie; the great thing is, what you wear."—*Life*.

"I am the short stop in our nine." "Tis very strange," said she, "The long stop seems more in your line. Where'er you visit me."—*Washington Star*.

"Thanks," said the guest to the colored man who brought his soup at last. "You have taken a great wait off my mind."—*Washington Star*.

Judge—What led you to think the prisoner was a burglar? Officer—Why, his pockets were full of burglar alarms when I arrested him.—*Puck*.

Alas, for all their ecstasy, They knew not what was best; The young man reached the front door, The old man did the rest. —*Fort Valley (Ga.) Enterprise*.

He (desperately)—"You are the only woman I ever loved!" She—"That may be; but if it is, I am certainly not the only woman you have ever lied to."—*Life*.

She said he was a great big bear. When he one day displeased her. "All right," said he, and then there Just like a bear he sneezed her.—*Puck*.

"Papa," said little Freddy, whose nautical knowledge is a little mixed, "when ships beat their records, do they do it with their spankers?"—*Baltimore American*.

This one—"Do you know, Miss Honeydew—er—Dolly—you are the first girl I have ever kissed!" Dolly (incredulously)—"Oh, that's just what they all say!"—*Life*.

"Where are you going my pretty maid?" "Going to cooking school, sir," she said. "Can I go with you, my pretty maid?" "We don't cook real today," she said.—*New York Herald*.

She (sternly)—"What was the noise I heard early in the hall this morning when you came in?" He (hastily)—"It must have been the day breaking, darling."—*Baltimore American*.

"Your face is painted on my heart," The lover's voice was hushed; He did not know what made him start, Nor why the maiden blushed. —*Free Press*.

"In these idyllic autumn days," began the new boarder, "butterflies—" "Indeed it does," interrupted the landlady as she snatched the butter plate, "but you're the first one that's had the consideration to speak of it."—*Free Press*.

Mr. Jaggs—"I tell you, whiskey is a handy thing to have around when you have cramps." Mrs. Jaggs (who knows a thing or two)—"Yes, and cramps are a handy thing to have around when you have whiskey in the house."—*Philadelphia Record*.

"I hope my visits are not disagreeable to you," he said. "Not at all," she politely answered. "I have sometimes thought that I wearied you." "Oh, no. No matter how gloomy I feel when you call, I am always happy when you go."—*N. Y. Press*.

Assistant—I see the *Morning News* has an editorial called, "Did Patrick Henry Smoke?" Editor—Well, you write one for tomorrow's edition, and call it, "Would Washington Have Made a Good Tennis Player?" We've got to keep our end up, somehow.—*Puck*.

"Pa," said little Johnny Cutely, "I heard you talking with Mr. Brown just now, and you said you—didn't believe in future punishment." "Well, Johnny," replied the old man, "the subject is a strange one for you to speak about; but, really, I don't." "Then, I suppose—I suppose that lets me out of the lickin' you promised me after supper."—*Puck*.

An eccentric old gentleman placed in a field on his estate a board with the following generous offer painted thereon: "I will give this field to any man who is contented." It was not long before he had an applicant. "Well, my man, you are a contented fellow?" "Yes, sir, very." "Then why do you want my field?" The applicant did not wait to reply.—*Ex*.

There's a nice clerk in a certain Detroit music store, who is not only a dreamer, but of late he had become very religiously inclined. The other day a pretty girl from the country came into the store. "Good morning," he said politely. "Good morning," she responded; "have you 'White Wings'?" "I beg your pardon," he stammered. "Have you 'White Wings'?" she repeated. "Not yet," he answered meekly. Then hopefully, "but I expect to have some day, miss." The girl looked at him for a second and hurriedly got out.—*Free Press*.

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