

IN THE FOG

BY
Richard Harding Davis.

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At the time of the murder he was two thousand miles away. Lyle interrupted himself suddenly with a sharp cry and turned upon me with his eyes flashing. "But was he?" he cried. "Was he? How do we know that last night he was not in London, in this very house when Zichy and Chetney met?"

"He stood staring at me without seeing me, muttering, and arguing with himself."

"Don't speak to me," he cried, as I ventured to interrupt him. "I can see it now. It is all plain. It was not the servant, but his master, the Russian himself, and it was he who came back for the letters! He came back for them because he knew they would convict him. We must find them. We must have those letters. If we find the one with the Russian postmark, we shall have found the murderer." He spoke like a madman, and as he spoke he ran around the room with one hand held out in front of him as you have seen a mind-reader at a theatre seeking for something hidden in the stalls. He pulled out old letters from the writing-desk, and ran them over as swiftly as a gambler deals out cards; he dropped on his knees before the fireplace and dragged out the dead coals with his bare fingers, and then with a low, worried cry, like a hound on a scent, he ran back to the waste-paper basket and, lifting the papers from it, shook them out upon the floor. Instantly he gave a shout of triumph, and, separating a number of torn pieces from the others, held them up before me.

"Look!" he cried. "Do you see? Here are five letters, torn across in two places. The Russian did not stop to read them, for, as you see, he has left them still sealed. I have been wrong. He did not return for the letters. He could not have known their value. He must have returned for some other reason, and, as he was leaving, saw the letter-box, and taking out the letters, held them together—so—and tore them twice across, and then, as the fire had gone out, tossed them into this basket. Look!" he cried, "here in the upper corner of this piece is a Russian stamp. This is his own letter—unopened!"

"We examined the Russian stamp and found it had been cancelled at St. Petersburg four days ago. The back of the envelope bore the postmark of the branch station in upper Sloane Street, and was dated this morning. The envelope was of official blue paper and we had no difficulty in finding the two other parts of it. We drew the torn pieces of the letter from them and joined them together side by side. There were but two lines of writing, and this was the message: 'I leave Petersburg on the night train, and I shall see you at Trevor Terrace after dinner, Tuesday evening.'"

"That was last night!" Lyle cried. "He arrived twelve hours ahead of his letter—but it came in time—it came in time to hang him!"

The Baronet struck the table with his hand.

"The name!" he demanded. "How was it signed? What was the man's name?"

The young Solicitor rose to his feet and, leaning forward, stretched out his arm. "There was no name," he cried. "The letter was signed with only two initials. But engraved at the top of the sheet was the man's address. That address was 'The American Embassy, St. Petersburg, Bureau of the Naval Attache,' and the initials," he shouted, his voice rising into an exultant and bitter cry, "were those of the gentleman who sits opposite who told us that he was the first to find the murdered bodies, the Naval Attache to Russia, Lieutenant Sears!"

A strained and awful hush followed the Solicitor's words, which seemed to vibrate like a twanging bowstring that had just hurled its bolt. Sir Andrew, pale and staring, drew away with an exclamation of repulsion. His eyes were fastened upon the Naval Attache with fascinated horror. But the American emitted a sigh of great content, and sank comfortably into the arms of his chair. He clasped his hands softly together.

"Capital!" he murmured. "I give you my word I never guessed what you were driving at. You fooled me, I'll be hanged if you didn't—you certainly fooled me."

The man with the pearl stud leaned forward with a nervous gesture. "Hush! be careful!" he whispered. But at that instant, for the third time, a servant, hastening through the room, handed him a piece of paper which he scanned eagerly. The message on the paper read, "The light over the Commons is out. The House has risen."

"Hurrah!" he cried. "The House is up! We've won!" He caught up his glass, and slapped the Naval Attache violently upon the shoulder. He nodded joyously at him, at the Solicitor, and at the Queen's Messenger. "Gentlemen, to you!" he cried; "my thanks and my congratulations!" He drank deep from his glass, and breathed forth a long sigh of satisfaction and relief.

"But I say," protested the Queen's Messenger, shaking his finger violently at the Solicitor, "that story won't do. You didn't play fair—and—and you talked so fast I couldn't make out what it was all about. I'll bet you that evidence wouldn't hold in a court of law—you couldn't hang a cat on such evidence. Your story is condemned to my rot. Now my story might have happened, my story bore the mark."

In the joy of creation the story-tellers had forgotten their audience, until a sudden exclamation from Sir Andrew caused them to turn guiltily toward him. His face was knit with lines of anger, doubt, and amazement.

"What does this mean?" he cried. "Is this a jest, or are you mad? If you know this man is a murderer, why is he at large? Is this a game you have been playing? Explain yourselves at once. What does it mean?"

The American, with first a glance at the others, rose and bowed courteously.

"I am not a murderer, Sir Andrew, believe me," he said; "you need

not be alarmed. As a matter of fact, at this moment I am much more afraid of you than you could possibly be of me. I beg you please to be indulgent. I assure you, we meant no disrespect. We have been matching stories, that is all, pretending that we are people we are not, endeavoring to entertain you with better detective tales than, for instance, the last one you read, 'The Great Rand Robbery.'"

The Baronet brushed his hand nervously across his forehead.

"Do you mean to tell me," he exclaimed, "that none of this has happened? That Lord Chetney is not dead, that his Solicitor did not find a letter of yours written from your post in Petersburg, and that just now, when he charged you with murder, he was in jest?"

"I am really very sorry," said the American, "but you see, sir, he could not have found a letter written by me in St. Petersburg because I have never been in Petersburg. Until this week, I have never been outside of my own country. I am not a naval officer. I am a writer of short stories. And to-night, when this gentleman told me that you were fond of detective stories, I thought it would be amusing to tell you one of my own—one I had just mapped out this afternoon."

"But Lord Chetney is a real person," interrupted the Baronet, "and he did go to Africa two years ago, and he was supposed to have died there, and his brother, Lord Arthur, has been the heir. And yesterday Chetney did return. I read it in the papers."

"So did I," assented the American soothingly; "and it struck me as being a very good plot for a story. I mean his unexpected return from the dead, and the probable disappointment of the younger brother. So I had decided that the younger brother had better murder the older one. The Princess Zichy I invented out of a clear sky. The fog I did not have to invent. Since last night I know all that there is to know about a London fog. I was lost in one for three hours."

The Baronet turned grimly upon the Queen's Messenger.

"But this gentleman," he protested, "he is not a writer of short stories; he is a member of the Foreign Office. I have often seen him in Whitehall, and, according to him, the Princess Zichy is not an invention. He says she is very well known, that she tried to rob him."

The servant of the Foreign Office looked unhappily at the Cabinet Minister, and puffed nervously on his cigar.

"It's true, Sir Andrew, that I am a Queen's Messenger," he said appealingly, "and a Russian woman once did try to rob a Queen's Messenger in a railway carriage—only it did not happen to me, but to a pal of mine. The only Russian princess I ever knew called herself Zabrisky. You may have seen her. She used to do a dive from the roof of the Aquarium."

Sir Andrew, with a snort of indignation, fronted the young Solicitor.

"And I suppose yours was a cock-and-bull story, too," he said. "Of course, it must have been, since Lord Chetney is not dead. But don't tell me," he protested, "that you are not Chudleigh's son either."

"I'm sorry," said the youngest member, smiling in some embarrassment, "but my name is not Chudleigh. I assure you, though, that I know the family very well, and that I am on very good terms with them."

"You should be!" exclaimed the Baronet; "and, judging from the liberties you take with the Chetneys, you had better be on very good terms with them, too."

The young man leaned back and glanced toward the servants at the far end of the room.

"It has been so long since I have been in the Club," he said, "that I doubt if even the waiters remember me. Perhaps Joseph may," he added. "Joseph!" he called, and at the word a servant stepped briskly forward.

The young man pointed to the stuffed head of a great lion which was suspended above the fireplace.

"Joseph," he said, "I want you to tell these gentlemen who shot that lion. Who presented it to the Grill?"

Joseph, unused to acting as master of ceremonies to members of the Club, shifted nervously from one foot to the other.

"Why, you—you did," he stammered.

"Of course I did!" exclaimed the young man. "I mean, what is the name of the man who shot it? Tell the gentlemen who I am. They wouldn't believe me."

"Who are you, my lord?" said Joseph. "You are Lord Edam's son, the Earl of Chetney."

"You must admit," said Lord Chetney, when the noise had died away, "that I couldn't remain dead while my little brother was accused of murder. I had to do something. Family pride demanded it. Now, Arthur, as the younger brother, can't afford to be squeamish, but personally I should hate to have a brother of mine hanged for murder."

"You certainly showed no scruples against hanging me," said the American, "but in the face of your evidence I admit my guilt, and I sentence myself to pay the full penalty of the law as we are made to pay it in my own country. The order of this court is," he announced, "that Joseph shall bring me a wine-card, and that I sign it for five bottles of the Club's best champagne."

The Baronet glanced keenly at the man with the black pearl, and then quickly at his watch. The smile disappeared from his lips, and his face was set in stern and forbidding lines.

"And may I know," he asked icily, "what was the object of your plot?"

"A most worthy one," the other retorted. "Our object was to keep you from advocating the expenditure of many millions of the people's money upon more battleships. In a word, we have been working together to prevent you from passing the Navy Increase Bill."

Sir Andrew's face bloomed with brilliant color. His body shook with supposed emotion.

"My dear sir!" he cried, "you should spend more time at the House and less at your Club. The Navy Bill was brought up on its third reading at eight o'clock this evening. I spoke for three hours in its favor. My only reason for wishing to return again to the House to-night was to sup on the terrace with my old friend, Admiral Simons; for my work at the House was completed five hours ago, when the Navy Increase Bill was passed by an overwhelming majority."

The Baronet rose and bowed. "I have to thank you, sir," he said, "for a most interesting evening."

The American shoved the wine-card which Joseph had given him toward the gentleman with the black pearl.

"You sign it," he said.

THE END.

AN ARMY EPISODE

By HAROLD OTIS.

[Original.]

MISS CORINNE STEPTOE was spending the social season with her aunt in the city. Miss Steptoe was the daughter of Colonel Steptoe of the United States army, commanding Fort Atkins, and while at home her social relations were limited to the officers on duty there and to the members of their families.

Though a true army girl, regarding the army her home, she was not averse to enjoying a round of balls and parties in the city, but the idea of marrying out of the circle in which she had been born never entered her head.

Civilians were well enough to dance with, but no man except a soldier need apply for her hand.

Among the youths with whom Miss Steptoe flirted mildly was one whose collar was higher and whose manners were more pronounced than any of the rest.

It was whispered among the ladies that he was the wildest young man in society.

This was certainly not indicated by his name, which was Pettypace. He was the son of a wealthy merchant who seemed to supply him with plenty of money to throw away.

Among those who presented themselves for what Miss Steptoe considered "a good time" none seemed to fill the conditions so well as Jack Pettypace, and just before the close of the season, when she was about to start for the fort, Mr. Pettypace completed what she considered "a good time" by proposing marriage.

"I am sorry you have so misunderstood me," she said in reply. "I am an army girl and do not expect to marry unless in the army."

"What! One of those slow going fellows made to toe the mark like schoolboys?"

"The army is the home of many brave and dashing men," was the besting reply.

"I think I'll try it myself."

Miss Steptoe laughed.

"I'm going to enlist in the corps under your father's command."

"And have three years of drudgery. Talk about the officers being schoolboys! In the ranks you'll be a prisoner in comparison."

"If I don't like it, I'll leave."

Again Miss Steptoe gave vent to her silvery laugh.

"Oh, I don't care a rap for your army fellows. I'm going to enlist, and when I want to get out of their toils I'll have no difficulty in doing so."

Miss Steptoe laughingly told Mr. Pettypace that if he would enlist in the army and get out of it without deserting, buying his discharge or using political influence, she would accept him for a husband. She limited him to two weeks to accomplish the feat.

Miss Steptoe had scarcely reached her father's quarters when she heard the women gossiping about a recruit who had presented himself for enlistment dressed in the height of fashion and evidently a gentleman.

Many causes were suggested for his having entered the ranks, from a disappointment in love to cheating at cards.

The next morning she was startled at seeing Jack Pettypace walking past before her father's quarters. He did not recognize her, and she had agreed to keep his secret.

A few days later she heard it stated among the officers' wives that the gentlemanly private had gone insane and had been put in a straitjacket. This is a true version of how it happened:

One morning after a horseback ride one of the bachelor officers entered his quarters to find the sentinel who had been on guard before his door standing at the end of his suit of rooms pointing his gun directly at his superior's breast. The sentinel's eyes were wild, and he was muttering incoherently. As soon as his gaze struck the officer he ordered him to halt and stand at attention. The officer lost no time in obeying the order.

"Mutiny! Mutiny! Mutiny!" shrieked the private. "Do you come to your general's quarters to kill him! Turn out the guard! Death to traitors! Would you assassinate the czar?"

While firing these incoherent sentences the lunatic was cocking and uncocking his piece, pointing it at the officer's breast, laughing hysterically and muttering to himself.

"The mutineers are coming!" he howled. "They're going to murder their sovereign. I shall kill every mother's son of them, and then my title to the throne will be perfect."

"General—your majesty, I mean," said the officer, "shall I call a fusar to protect you?"

"Send the Swiss guard!"

In another minute the officer was at the telephone, calling to the sergeant of the guard to bring a dozen men with loaded guns to arrest an enlisted man who had gone insane and was howling in the officers' quarters.

Meanwhile the lunatic was taking a brace from his superior's sideboard to keep him up to his work, and when the guard arrived he had purposely parted with his musket.

But he struggled and screamed as he was hurried off to the guardhouse, and thence to a room in the hospital where he was confined by himself.

The insane man's father was communicated with, the soldier's discharge was made out, and he was sent under guard to a private sanatorium.

One morning Jack Pettypace, armed with his discharge papers, visited Fort Atkins and walked straight to the colonel's quarters. His arrival caused a sensation at the post among the officers, their families, and the enlisted men.

It culminated when Mrs. Steptoe announced the engagement of her daughter with the "insane" private who, by outwitting the officers and the surgeons, had secured his discharge.