A MYSTERY OF THE NEVA.

A STORY OF RUSSIAN INTRIGUE.

I was too stupefied to move, for where I stood I could not actually discern everything in the semi-darkness. I only saw the two men struggling fiercely across the deck, and saw Polvotzoff fall helplessly across his opponent, apparently insensible. For a moment Oberg seemed to stagger beneath the weight, but a second later I saw the two figures move towards the bulwarks, and I heard a loud splash. Then I rushed forward, but too late! The Baron stood alone. He drew back in terror when he saw that I, whom he believed to be ashore, had been witness of his crime. The next second he sprang at me like a wild beast, and at first I believed he intended to throw me into the water also. I screamed, but no aid came. The whisky he had previously given the man had been drugged, and he lay on deck helpless and insensible behind a coil of rope.

"'You have spied on me, girl' he cried. 'Swear, swear, to keep my secret! That man intended to supplant me in the Czar's favor. He was plotting to become Governor-General of Finland. But he did not know that those who thwart Xavier Oberg invariably die. You are the only witness. You will be silent!' he cried, his hands trembling fiercely upon my throat. 'Recollect, if you speak, then you shall die as assuredly as Polvotzoff now lies below!'

"He threw me on my knees and made me promise to keep his secret. I saw that he was desperate, and knew that he would crush me and throw me overboard as he had done the Privy Councillor of the Czar. Then I went back to my cabin and sat horrified as the terrible tragedy, until the others returned at midnight and the Baron greeted them gaily as though nothing whatever had occurred."

"Why, I remember!" cried Muriel. "I remember that night quite well. None of us had the slightest idea that such a thing had taken place. Yet a week after we left I heard that the body of a high Russian official had been washed up by the sea at Sorrento. I read it in the papers."

Then, continuing, I read further the remarkable narrative which my love had written: "The reason the Baron spared me was because he still intended to obtain my fortune; yet he lived always in fear that I might speak. Therefore, with his cruel craftiness, when a few months later we went on another cruise on the Iris—the name of which had been altered he contrived to take me from Leghorn up to a small town. My teeth required seeing to, and the Baron, after a couple of days at the Hotel de Sienne, took me to a dentist—a man who, he said, enjoyed an excellent reputation. I went, sat in the dentist's chair and had gas, fell insensible, and when I awoke an hour later I found a strange soreness at the root of my tongue, and that I was speechless and entirely deaf. The Baron pretended to be greatly concerned about me, but I quickly realized that I had been the victim of a dastardly act, and that he had silenced me because he feared the terrible truths I could tell.

"From that spot he took me quickly to Berlin, and thence to St. Petersburg and back to Helsingfors, always careful that I should be kept apart from anyone to whom I might complain. Then, once in Finland, I was entirely in his power, and was sent straight to that terrible fortress of Kajana, falsely charged with the attempt upon the life of Mme. Xakuroff. Ah! he was a fiend.

"While suffering tortures the hand of Providence directed you to me, and you know all the rest—of our escape and of the man Woodroffe's clever ruse by which he succeeded in taking me to St. Petersburg, hoping at last to marry me himself and thus obtain my fortune.

"But now that it is all over it appears to me like some terrible dream. I never believed that so much craft and wickedness existed in the world. Yet surely Oberg and Woodroffe will obtain their merited deserts—if not in this world, then in the world to come. Are we not taught to forgive our enemies? Therefore, let us forgive."

There it ended. A bold, straightforward narrative that astounded us all. She watched my countenance as I finished reading it, and then, as I placed my arm tenderly around her waist, she raised her face to mine to receive the hot, passionate kiss I placed upon her lips.

"This makes everything plain," Jack exclaimed. "Polvotzoff was a very liberal-minded and upright official who was greatly in the favor of the Czar, and had always been antagonistic to the drastic and merciless methods of Oberg. The Baron knew this, and therefore enticed him on board the Iris for the purpose of freeing himself from his enemy."

CONCLUSION.

Nearly two years have now gone by. One of the events which have since occurred is known to you all.

You read, no doubt, in the newspaoers a short time ago how the Baron Xavier Oberg—the persecutor of Finland, the enemy of education, the relentless foe of the defenceless the man called "The Strangler"—was blown to pieces by a bomb being thrown beneath his carriage in Helsingfors as he drove to the railway station on his way to have audience with the Emperor.

"The Red Priest" decreed that Oberg should die, and the plot was carried out, but to this day the police are in ignorance of who directed it or who threw the fatal missile, although the revolutionists have been hunted from pillar to post by the bloodhounds of the secret police. Yet "The Red Priest" still lives on in St. Petersburg, and the Princess, still unsuspected, devotes the greater part of her enormous income to the revolutionary cause.

Of Muriel and Jack, I need only say that they were married about three months after Elma's return from Russia, and at the present time live on the outskirts of Glasgow, where Jack holds the shore appointment he so long coveted.

By some means—exactly how we are not quite certain—the police discovered that Dick Archer, alias Woodroffe, alias Hornby, was concerned in the robbery of a dressing-bag containing jewels from a footman on Euston platform, and after a long search they found him hiding at an hotel in Liverpool. When, however, they went to arrest him he laughed in the faces of the detectives placed something in his mouth, and swallowed it before they could prevent him, and ten minutes later he fell dead. He knew what revelations must be made if we gave evidence against him, and therefore preferred death by his own hand to that following a judicial sentence.

As for Chater, although an expert thief, he had never been actually guilty of any graver offence; and when we heard that he was in San Francisco, where he had opened a small bar and was trying to live honestly, we resolved to allow him to remain there. Indeed Jack wrote to him warning him never to set foot on English soil again on pain of arrest.

And ourselves? Well, what can I really say? Mere words fail to tell you of the completeness of our happiness.

My proposal of marriage was made to Elma a very few days after she wrote down her strange romantic story, and a year ago, at a little village church in Hertfordshire, we became man and wife, there being present at out wedding Mme. Heath, her mother to whom, by my exertions in official quarters in St. Petersburg, the Czar's clemency was extended, and she was released from the far-off Arctic prison which she had been sent with such cruel injustice.

Two of the greatest London specialists have continually treated my love, and under them she has already recovered her speech so far that she can whisper in a low, soft soft voice. But they tell me they are hopeful that ere long her voice will become stronger and speech practically restored. Already, too, she can begin to hear.

After all the storms and perils of the past lives are now indeed full of a calm, sweet peace. In our own comfortable little house, with its trellised porch covered with roses and honeysuckle, that faces the blue Channel at St. Margaret's Bay, near Dover, we lived an idyllic life of mutual trust and boundless love. We are supremely content—the happiest pair in all the wornld, we think.

Often as we sit together at evening, gazing out upon the ships passing away into the mysterious afterglow, our hands clasp mutually in a silence more eloquent than words, as there occurs to us the Divine injunction: "Whom God hath joined, let no man put asunder."

THE END.

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