

A MYSTERY OF THE NEVA.

A STORY OF RUSSIAN INTRIGUE.

(Continued.)

"Did you see me on board the Lora?" asked.

"Yes, but I could not warn you, although I had overheard their intentions. They took me ashore when you had gone and I fell ill in Sienna. After three days I found myself deaf and dumb—I was made so."

Her allegation startled me. She had been purposely afflicted?

"Who did it?"

"A doctor, I suppose. They put me under chloroform."

"Who?"

"People who said they were my friends."

I turned to the woman in the religious habit and cried:

"Do you see what she has written? She has been named by some friends who intend that the secret she holds shall be kept. They feared to kill her, so they bribed a doctor to deliberately operate upon her so she could not speak or hear. And now they are doing her to suicide!"

"Monsieur, I am astounded," declared the nun. "I have always believed that she was not in her right mind, yet assuredly she seems to be as sane as I am, only wilfully mutilated by some fiend who determined that no further word should pass her lips."

A shameful mutilation has been committed upon this poor, defenceless girl!" I cried in anger. "And I will make it my duty to discover and punish the perpetrators of it."

"Ah, monsieur, do not act rashly. I pray of you," the woman said, seriously, placing her hand upon my arm. "Recollect you are in Finland—where the Baron Oberg is all-powerful."

"I do not fear Baron Oberg!" I exclaimed. "If necessary I will appeal to the Czar himself. Mademoiselle is kept here for the reason that she is in possession of some secret. She must be released; I will take the responsibility."

"But you must not try to release her from here. It would mean death to you both. The Castle of Kajana tells no secrets of those who die within its walls, or of those cast headlong into its waters and forgotten."

Again I turned to Elma, who stood in anxious wonder of the subject of our conversation, and had suddenly taken the old nun's hand and kissed it affectionately, perhaps to show me that she trusted her.

Then upon the paper I wrote:

"Is the Baron Oberg your uncle?"

She shook her head in the negative, showing that the dreaded Governor-General of Finland had only acted a part towards her in which she had been compelled to concur.

"Who is Philip Hornby?" I inquired, writing rapidly.

"My friend."

Friend! And I had all along believed him to be an adventurer and an enemy.

"Why did he go to Leghorn?" I asked.

"For a secret purpose. There was a plot to kill out only I managed to thwart them," were the words she printed with much labor.

"Then I owe my life to you," I wrote. "And in return I will do my utmost to rescue you from here, if you do not fear to place yourself in my hands."

And to this she replied:

"I shall be thankful for I cannot bear this awful place longer. I believe they must torture the woman here. They will torture me some day. Do your best to get me out of here and I will tell you everything. But," she wrote, "I fear you can never secure my release. I am confined here on a life sentence."

"But you are English, and if you had no trial I can complain to our Ambassador."

"No, I am a Russian subject. I was born in Moscow and was sent to England when I was eight years old."

That altered the case entirely. As a subject of the Czar in her own country she was amenable to that disgraceful blot upon civilization that allows a person to be consigned to prison at the will of a high official, without trial or without being afforded any opportunity of appeal. I therefore at once saw difficulty.

Yet she promised to tell me the truth if I could but secure her release. A flood of recollections of the amazing mystery swept through my mind. A thousand questions arose within me, all of which I desired to ask her, but there, in that noisome prison-house, it was impossible. As I stood there a woman's shrill scream of exulting pain reached me, notwithstanding those cypeline walls. Some unfortunate prisoner was, perhaps, being tortured and confession wrung from her lips.

Could I allow this refined, defenceless girl to remain an inmate of that Bastille, the terrors of which I had heard men in Russia hint at with bated breath? They had wilfully maimed her and deprived her of both hearing and the power of speech, and now they intended that she should be driven mad by that silence and loneliness that must always end in insanity.

"I have decided," I said suddenly, turning to the woman who had conducted me there and, having now removed the steel bonds of the prisoner with a key she carried in secret, now stood with folded hands in the calm attitude of the religious.

"You will not act with rashness," she implored, in quick apprehension. "Remember, your life is at stake, as well as my own."

"Her enemies intended that I, too, should die!" I answered, looking straight into those deep, mysterious brown eyes, which held me as beneath a spell. "They have drawn her into their power because she had no

means of defence. But I will assume the position of her friend and protector."

"How?"

"The man is awaiting me in the boat outside. I intend to take her with me."

"But, monsieur, why, that is impossible!" cried the woman, in a hoarse voice. "If you were discovered by the guards who patrol the lake in boats, both night and day, they would shoot you both."

"I will risk it," I said, and without another word I dashed into the tiny bedchamber and tore an old brown blanket from off the narrow truckle-bed.

Then, linking my arm in that of the woman whose lovely countenance had verily become the sun of my existence, I made a sign, inviting her to accompany me.

The sister barred the door, urging me to consider my decision.

"Leave here alone, in secret and act as you will, appeal to the Baron, to the Czar, but do not attempt, monsieur, to rescue a prisoner from here, for it is an impossibility. The man who brought you from Abo will not dare to accept such responsibility."

"Come," I said to Elma, although, alas! she could not hear my voice. "Let us at least make a dash for freedom."

She recognized my intentions in a moment, and allowed herself to be conducted down the long, intricate corridor, walking stealthily and making no noise.

I had seized the old horn lantern, and as the nun held back, not daring to accompany us, we stole on alone, turning back along the stone corridor until I recognized the door of the room to which I had been first conducted.

All was silent, and as we crept along on tiptoe I felt the girl's grip upon my arm, a grip that told me that she placed her faith in me as her deliverer.

I own that it was a rash and headstrong act, for even beyond the lake how could we ever hope to penetrate those impenetrable, inhospitable forests, so far from any hiding place?

Yet I felt it my duty to attempt the rescue, and, besides, had not her marvellous beauty enmeshed me? Had I not felt by the first unaccountable intuition at the first moment we had met that our lives were linked in the future?

She clung to me, as though fearful of discovery, as we went forward in silence along that dark, low corridor where I knew the strong door in the tower opened upon the lake. Once in the boat, and we could row back to where the horses awaited us, and then away.

The old nun had not arrested our progress nor raised an alarm after all. Once I had mistrusted her, but I now saw that her heart was really filled with pity for the poor girl at my side.

Without a sound we crept forward until within a few yards from that unlocked door where the boat awaited us below when, of a sudden, the uncertain light of the lantern fell upon something that shone, and a deep voice cried out of the darkness in Russian:

"Halt! or I fire!"

And, startled, we found ourselves looking down the muzzle of a loaded carbine.

A huge sentry stood with his back to the secret exit, his dark eyes shining beneath his peaked cap, as he held his weapon to his shoulder within six feet of us.

"The big bearded fellow demanded fiercely who I was."

My heart sank within me. I had acted recklessly, and had fallen into the hands of His Excellency, the Baron Xavier Oberg, the unscrupulous Governor-General—fallen into a trap which, as I afterwards discovered, had been very cleverly prepared for me.

I was a prisoner in the terrible fortress whence no single person, save the guards had ever been known to emerge—the Bastille of "The Stranger" of Finland."

(To be Continued.)

WATER BASEBALL.

Knowledge of the Game and Fair Swimming Ability Required.

Hear, O athletes! Have you tried water-baseball? No; not water-polo or water-football, but the good old national game, played on a lake or bay or swimming pool, or a quiet bit of a river where there is not much current.

If you haven't tried it, get in line and begin at once with the new game of the season. They are playing it at many popular pleasure resorts. There the sport has become more than a fad of the moment. It is enjoying a boom that is almost a mania.

One need not be a great ball player nor a star swimmer to play the game. All it requires is a rudimentary knowledge of baseball and fair swimming ability. The outfit consists of a tennis ball, a yard or less of broomstick, and four rafts—one large and three small.

The batsman and the catcher stand on the big raft. On a small raft ten yards away stand the pitcher. He may deliver the ball in any style he chooses so that it crosses the plate. In striking everything goes—bunt, bungle, sweat or foul tip. There are five men on a side. The moment bat and ball come in contact the batsman must start for first base.

It doesn't matter how the ball is hit, you count it as fair. Indeed, it is a triumph of skill to turn and swing with the ball and send it flying past the catcher.

Suppose you have driven a good ball out near third base. You pile overboard with a dive toward first. As you rise to the surface you see the third baseman and the pitcher furiously swimming after the ball.

To your excited eyes it seems as if first base were a mile away. As you near the base you see the pitcher seize the ball and turn in the water to throw it, but it is no easy matter to throw a ball while treading water, and the chances are that the throw is a bad one, and you are safe.

You now turn your attention toward second. To steal it seems easy, and so, as soon as the pitcher delivers the ball, you start. But if all goes well with the other team, when you have gone about a third of the distance you notice that the second baseman has the ball. Giving up hope of gaining second, you turn to regain first, only to note that the first baseman has followed you and waits for the ball about five feet to your rear.

You again turn your efforts toward second, only to see the second baseman swimming toward you. With much splashing you try to evade this latest comer, but you are put out and retired amid the yells of the on-lookers. The game is full of fun. Sometimes an ardent baseman will lean too far over to one side in his efforts to get the ball. This will cause the raft to tilt until the player loses his balance, and in his efforts to regain the centre of the raft will shoot from under him, and he will land smack on the surface of the water.

The game is full of unexpected fancy stunts. The spectators laugh even more than they do at the ludicrous happenings in indoor baseball, for the rolling and tumbling in the water makes the mishaps twice as funny.

Along the sandy beaches of the Shrewsbury river, and the Great South bay, and thousands of others bays on the Atlantic coast the game ought to be popular this summer.

It is most important to have one keen-eyed watcher constantly looking out for all the players who are in the water, so that there shall be no danger of accident.

FOREST FIRES.

In Many Cases They Are Caused by Careless City Folk.

At this season of the year the city man goes into the woods, and lucky for the woods if he leaves them standing. Not that he chops them down with his little camp hatchet, a few evergreen boughs hacked off for a bed are no great loss to the forest. The trouble is that the amateur woodsman too often goes in with a plentiful supply of tobacco, and the cigarette stubs do the rest. As a wise poet has written:

"The camps neither toil nor spin
But pretty blazes they begin;
Not Solomon in all his ease
Burned money up like one of these."

Along the Atlantic seaboard, thronged from June to October with excursionists and cottagers from every section of the country, the problem of keeping the forests intact has become in that region even more difficult than elsewhere, and nowhere else certainly is its gravity more thoroughly appreciated. The thrifty Easterner hates to see his wealth go up in smoke. Standing timber in regions close to the great markets of New York, Philadelphia and Boston is at once more valuable than in more remote districts. Besides the incalculable loss of attractiveness every time a piece of forest land is really the most serious item of all. The woods are worth millions to New England, Long Island and New Jersey—those, particularly, that are close to the sea—because they help to draw eastward each summer thousands of well-to-do westerners and southerners.

Take away the sylvan background and you spoil the seaside picture. It is the combination of forest, beach and rocky headlands that has given national popularity to the Maine coast, and the North Shore and the South Shore of Massachusetts. So it is not strange that unusual attempts are being made just now in Massachusetts and other Eastern States to prevent in the future the forest fires which have been so destructive in the past.

Take the case of Plymouth Woods one of the biggest and the eastern part of the United States, and specially famous because situated, curiously enough, all about the oldest settled town north of the Chesapeake. Here, where the Pilgrim Fathers first landed, is a tract of eighty or ninety square miles, covered with a varied growth of timber which, since very early days, has frequently been devastated by fires. On account of its summer popularity, no place, probably, in the United States, can less well afford to have fires in its forests than Plymouth, and its efforts to prevent the recurring disasters are strenuous indeed.

The provisions that have been adopted for the protection of the Plymouth Woods are typical of those that are coming to be used everywhere in forests adjacent to populous territory. The prime necessity is a system of incessant watchfulness, whereby certain men living at certain points are, all the time on the lookout for trouble. Particularly along the railroads somebody must always be ready to detect the first appearance of a curling wisp of smoke that may be the beginning of a great conflagration. Secondly, there is going on here year by year an extension of the lanes, which are in universal use for preventing the spread of the fires. These consist merely of long trenches connecting at strategic points the wood points which form natural fire lanes. All that is needed is to dig up and clear away the vegetable mold. It is unnecessary with these stands of trees to separate the branches of a tree strip of bare ground suffices as a barrier to check further progress of the

blaze, unusually it is an unusually hot one. These lanes have been spread in the last few years throughout the ancient Pilgrim Woods, although the deep snows of the last two or three winters have somewhat hindered their progress. Above all, Plymouth Woods are witnessing the extension of the telephone service which has already been proved to be very effective in helping to confine blazes to small areas.

The various state forestry associations in the east are making special efforts of the methods of checking fires when started and of preventing their recurrence.

How big an evil people with the welfare of the forests at heart have to combat appears in such statements as that 600,000 acres of timber land in the Adirondacks were burned in the single year of 1904; that to fight these fires cost more than \$175,000, and that the direct loss of timber was estimated at \$3,500,000, to say nothing of the vast indirect loss from destruction of young timber that had no present, but great prospective value.

Most of the states, east and west, are acquiring forestry reserves, and adopting the methods of advanced forestry. Thus New York has already taken over 1,436,000 acres for a permanent park reserve, and Pennsylvania 572,000 acres for similar purposes. In order to make these holdings, together with the great tracts privately owned, useful and profitable, they must first and foremost be safeguarded from the danger of fire.

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