# THE MYSTERY CLEARED UP;

## OR, THE HERITAGE OF MADAME YALTA.

CHAPTER VII.—(Cont'd)

This exclamation escaped Maxime unguardedly.

"You know the man then? Would it please you to tell me where you have seen him?"

"I saw him dining with you yesterday in a restaurant,—Avenue de l'Opera."

"How do you know that the man of whom I speak is the one who was dining with me?"

"I know it because I followed you."

"You were acting the counter-police as it appears."

"It is admissable when one is dealing with a spy."

"Maxime!" exclaimed the banker, with a severe glance at his nephew.

"Oh, let monsieur speak," continued the colonel, unmoved. "His estimate touches me very little, and I have several questions to ask him."

"You wish to know where I followed you? I was in the orchestra of the opera when you entered the box of that woman. I rode in a carriage behind the hack that took you to Rue Jouffroy. I established myself in a house opposite the one you entered, and remained there until you took flight, and even a little later."

"My best compliment, monsieur. The Nihilists have in you a valuable auxiliary."

"I am not with the Nihilists, you know very well," retorted Maxime, bluntly.

"You say so, and I wish to believe it," replied Borisoff, "but I am driven to think the contrary, for if you passed a portion of the night in watching me, it was not for the purpose of seconding me in my conflict with these people. May I venture to ask what is now your opinion of M. de Carnoel?"

"I can answer without the least embarrassment. M. de Carnoel is evidently the friend of the woman who delivered him."

"You admit also that the woman belongs to the sect which steals, burns, and assassinates."

"I admit it the more readily, as I am in possession of the proof."

"And this proof, would you furnish me with it?"

"To what purpose? You are about to leave France. The plots which are being carried on in Paris do not concern you. Besides, my conviction rests on facts which are personal to myself. As for M. de Carnoel, he has been delivered by a vile creature assisted by a false police agent, and has taken refuge in an asylum prepared for him by this pretty couple. It follows that he makes a part of the band."

"You are wonderfully well informed," said the colonel, smiling sarcastically. "But I did not come to see your uncle for the purpose of entertaining him with the political aspect of this affair. It matters little to him, I suppose, that his former secretary does or does not conspire against the Russian government, but it concerns him, perhaps, to acquire the certainty that this gentleman is a thief. When M. de Carnoel fell into my hands, I made use of means which the police of all countries employ with prisoners. He was searched, and was found to carry on his person five packages of bank notes of ten thousand francs each."

"Just the sum taken from me. It is perfectly clear."

"Here is the amount," continued Borisoff, drawing the notes from his pocket.

"Fifty thousand francs are very easily obtained when one has the funds of a government at his disposal," muttered Maxime.

"I cannot receive this money, at least without being certain where it came from," stammered the uncle, also uncertain of the sincerity of the colonel.

"If you refuse, I shall feel compelled to give it away in charity, for it does not belong to me," said Borisoff. "But I shall prove to you that I did not bring it with me to effect the ruin of M. de Carnoel. When I asked him to account for this sum, his reply was that it had been sent to him by some one who had owed it to his father."

"That could not be," said M. Dorgeres. "His father did not leave a sou or credit of any sort. I was entrusted with the settling of his affairs, and if fifty thousand francs had been owing him I should have known of it."

"That is about what I said to the son. This son then showed me the letter accompanying it, and you may judge of the value of this justification. Here it is."

"It is not signed," said Mr. Dorgeres, glancing over it; "an anonymous restitution; such a thing is inadmissible. What do you say to it?" he added, passing the letter to his nephew.

"I think," said Maxime, "that this letter has every appearance of having been fabricated to meet the necessities of the case; by whom, I cannot tell. The paper it is written on is the kind employed by men of business."

"And the father had no friends engaged in commerce. Besides, a merchant would not reimburse to the amount of fifty thousand francs in an anonymous letter."

"From whence it follows," said Borisoff, "that the son had the letter writeen in case he should be under the necessity of explaining the possession of the money. I think, gentlemen, you must now be satisfied as to the morality of this agent of the Nihilists."

"Oh, completely!" exclaimed M. Dorgeres.

"Then," continued the colonel, "allow me to hand you the sum and the letter. I shall have no further business with M. de Carnoel, since I am recalled to St. Petersburg. The same despatch announces the attempt against the Czar and my disgrace,—for this unexpected recall is a disgrace. I shall no longer be employed except in Russia, and there is little probability that your ci-devant secretary will show himself there. If his accomplices, less prudent, should ever fall into my power, I shall not fail to transmit to you whatever may come to light through these wretches concerning the theft. And in any event I carry with me the satisfaction of having edified you concerning a young man who has sought to bring trouble into your family. Should he renew his audacious attempt, I leave you the means of confounding him." M. Borisoff had placed the notes on the table and handed the letters to M. Dorgeres. "There remains nothing now, gentlemen, but to take leave of you. My steward will come to-day to withdraw my funds. Adieu, monsieur. Present my best respects to Mlle. Dorgeres, and believe in my best wishes."

Before leaving, he turned toward Maxime and tossed him a bit of advice:

"Believe me, monsieur, you would d well to abstain from pursuing the rescuers of M. de Carnoel. They would kill you."

With these words he disappeared just as the valet Joseph entered and said:

"Mademoiselle sends me to say to M. Dorgeres that she is waiting breakfast for him."

"Very well. Say that I am coming."

The valet went out and the banker was left alone with Maxime, who was much less agitated than his uncle.

"May the devil take this Russian with his revelations and his resolutions," he said; "I have a mind to run after him and return these cursed bank-notes."

"Why?" asked the nephew. "Do you suppose he has taken them from his own property for the pleasure of dishonoring M. de Carnoel? I can scarcely believe it."

"Then you think he spoke the truth?"

"Yes; thus far that the fifty thousand francs were found in the pocket of your former secretary. It remains to be seen who wrote the letter."

"Do you doubt that it was this unfortunate young man?"

"Not exactly, though that would upset the ideas I had conceived of his character. But between the act of stealing money and that of which we believe him guilty, the difference is small enough. To associate oneself with rascals who break safes under the pretext of politics is more than enough to dishonor a man. Let me go on with the story which the colonel interrupted. I placed in my pocket a bracelet that was found on the hand, and kept it as a means of discovering the admirable person who had abandoned it to the claws of your safe. One evening, after having exhibited it at a public ball, I met with a woman, very pretty and not at all shy, who permitted me to act as her escort, and drew me into a spot where four scoundrels, posted by her, were lying in wait to murder me and recover the bracelet. The jade after this disappeared, and I saw no more of her until some time after, when she appeared in a box at the Varietes. She gave me a cordial greeting, and accepted an invitation to supper, during which she found means to fly, carrying off the bracelet. It was then quite clear that this creature had been despatched by the thief to recover possession of a means of convicting her. Thereupon a new eclipse of the damsel. She became invisible, undiscoverable. Meanwhile, I discover that Carnoel is a prisoner in Borisoff's house. Yesterday I met Borisoff with a person who appears to me suspicious. I attach myself to them—"

"I know the rest; the colonel has just told us."

"Yes; but the colonel did not tell you that the woman who fled with Carnoel was the same who twice made an attack on me because of the bracelet—the charge d' affaires of the one-handed. And now that you know all, am I right in affirming that Carnoel is the associate of these rascals?"

"Parbleu! I have no doubt of it. I am not the one to whom you must say that in order to repair the mischief you have done."

"But I intend to say the same to my cousin also."

"When? Will you wait until she dies of grief, or flies into a convent? My life is intolerable. Alice neither speaks nor eats. Vignory looks like a funeral. It is enough to drive one mad."

"I ask for twenty-four hours to make a declaration which will produce a decided effect on my cousin."

"Why this delay? She is waiting for me now. Breakfast with us."

"I will do so to-morrow if you wish, and as I am going this evening to lay hands on M. de Carnoel and his mistress—for this woman is his mistress—"

"What! you are going to arrest them. What is your profession, then?"

"Oh, I am not yet enrolled in the prefecture of police; but I wish to know finally where I stand in regard to your former secretary, and I know some one who will introduce me into the house in which he is hiding."

"Diable! it would be a hazardous expedition. Remember the words of the colonel: 'Take care, these people would kill you.'"

"I am not afraid of them."

"You will be always the same—going straight on, doubting and suspecting nothing. They have just blown up the Winter Palace; to murder you would be a much smaller matter."

At this moment Jules Vignory entered. He had an anxious appearance, and seemed surprised at seeing Maxime.

"Monsieur," he said, "I have just been notified that Col. Borisoff will withdraw his funds at three o'clock. May I settle his account?"

"Yes. I have just seen the colonel. But I wish to speak with you. Why did you not tell me of the first attempt at theft? Oh, do not assume the astonished! I know all. Maxime has just given me the history of the hand."

"He ought to have done so sooner," replied the cashier; "it was he who urged me to silence."

Maxime said nothing, but he knit his brow. He found Vignory overprompt to vindicate himself at the expense of a friend.

"I know that, and I am not displeased with you beyond measure, though it seems to me that your situation imposed upon you duties to which you have been wanting. But we will leave the past, and be kind enough to examine these packages of bank-notes," added the banker, pointing to the files which were still spread out on the table.

Vignory took them up and began counting them over.

"There are fifty," he said.

"That is not what I ask. Where do you think they came from?"

"From my safe, undoubtedly. I recognize the way the pin is stuck in; a little more to the right and a little lower down than the packages made at the Bank of France."

"Very well. My rouge of a secretary can no longer maintain that he has stolen them."

"What! it was—"

"We hold in our hands the sum that was taken from me, and it rests with me to have this Carnoel arrested."

"He is in Paris!" exclaimed Vignory.

"Yes, and I have in my hand the proof of his infamy. Would you believe that he has had the audacity to assert that this money was sent to him by a debtor of his father! He had a letter written. Read it, and tell me what you think."

Vignory turned pale and took the letter with a hand that trembled visibly.

"The imposture is evident," he said, after having glanced at it; "it is even very clumsily done; this letter must have been dictated by M. de Carnoel."

"Dictated to whom?" asked Maxime, abruptly.

"To one of his friends, no doubt. I do not know the handwriting."

"But intimate as you were, you must know the friends of Robert de Carnoel."

"Friends—he had few," stammered Vignory. "A few college chums, and those he saw very rarely."

"Then," said the banker, "it is useless to try to find out who wrote the letter."

"I believe so, monsieur — however, if you would entrust it to me I may perhaps—"

"No, it would be waste of time; my mind is entirely made up, and I desire only to impart my conviction to—to all those who doubt still. This letter is a proof and I shall keep it."

The door opened softly, and Alice's face appeared, but seeing her father was not alone she made a movement to go out.

"Come in!" exclaimed M. Dorgeres. He concluded to profit by the presence of Maxime to strike a great blow, but reflecting that that of his cashier would embarrass his explanations with his daughter he took him aside and said:

"Be so good as to leave us. You were going to follow the advice of my hare-brained nephew, but it is not a hanging matter. Go, my friend, and return to dine with us."

Alice avoided looking at him as he went out somewhat discomfited and crestfallen, but exchanging a quick glance with her cousin, she read in his eyes that he was not a bearer of good news.

"Your arrival is opportune," said M. Dorgeres; "I even regret that you did not come sooner. You would have found Col. Borisoff here."

"Then I did well not to come. That man inspires me with horror."

(To be continued.)

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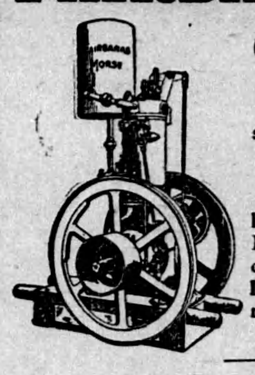

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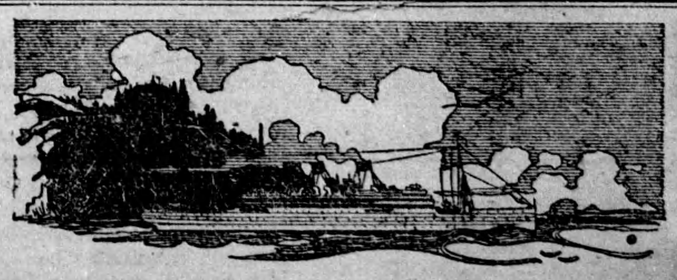

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