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Paulpoffs—now that I know you are interested in them—I will protect them from further harm."

"I thank you," said Frances sadly. Neslerov slipped a coin into the hand of the drosky driver, and he immediately had cause to go to his horses, which were standing peacefully enough where he left them.

"I wish to speak one word before we leave here," said the prince, taking the hand of Frances, which she, in her surprise, permitted him to hold a moment. "I love you. I have loved you ever since the day I saw you first. We have beautiful women in Russia, but none like you. I am rich, powerful and am not offering you an empty name. Will you be my wife, my princess?"

"Prince Neslerov," said Frances gently, but still in a tone of reproof, "you cannot mean, I am sure, to take advantage of my situation, alone and at your mercy. You are a gentleman. Please leave such words for a more fitting occasion."

"All occasions are the same to a man who loves as I do," answered Neslerov. "I asked your father. He treated the matter as of no concern. To me it is my life. Make me happy, the world is yours. Refuse me, you plunge me into deep despair. I do not care to live without you."

"What nonsense!" said Frances. "Everybody has sooner or later to live without a loved one. My father—I my mother died many years ago. He loved her. He has been true to her memory, but he has lived."

"Ah, but that is not the same thing at all. Had I possessed you for a time and lost you at the command of death, then I could live, happy in the blessed memory. But to love you and lose you to another! Ah, I would kill him!"

"You are mad. Such words do not inspire love in the heart of an American girl. Fools kill their rivals, but it is a poor revenge. I do not love you, prince, and so cannot marry you. Let that end the matter. I must now return to Moscow."

"You shall not go till you are mine!" cried Neslerov, driven to madness by her coquetry. He sprang forward and slammed the door, shutting them alone in the unoccupied house. He stepped toward her. His breath came hot upon her cheeks. His arms were outstretched to seize her. There was a look of mad passion in his eyes.

She knew no help was near or possible. The drosky driver was a Russian and would not fight the prince. She



"Stand back, you insulter!"

might scream, but her voice could not reach within two miles of the nearest house. The threatening lips, the touch of which would be pollution, were near her own. With a quick movement she slipped her hand into her pocket.

"Stand back, you insulter!" she said, with a cold, steely voice. The shining barrel of a revolver was thrust into his face. It was not a large weapon and was ornamented with silver, but it was large enough to do execution at short range, and it was almost in Neslerov's very mouth. He staggered back, taken by surprise.

"You see devil!" he cried. With an upward motion he made as if to knock the revolver from her hand. She bent the barrel downward. The contact with his hand exploded one cartridge. The flash blinded him. There was a red mark on his forehead where the bullet grazed the skull. Half stunned and cursing, he fell back.

Opening the door, Frances walked out. The drosky driver was waiting. He had heard the shot.

"Do you see this?" she demanded, pointing the revolver at his head.

"Yes," he stammered. "I have just shot Prince Neslerov. If you do not take me to the railway station at Perm and get me there before he overtakes us, I will empty the other four bullets into your head."

"Get in," he mumbled. Then to himself he said: "These American women are devils! They are better fighters than the Cossacks!"

CHAPTER V.

THE SUDDEN INTERRUPTION OF A JOURNEY.

MR. GORDON was beginning to feel anxious. He knew just how long it took to go to Perm and return. Frances had often taken long journeys by herself, but she was now three days overdue, and the engineer was eager to get to the Obl.

"I fancy I can take care of myself. I've been in Perm the three days."

"With the blacksmith and his people?"

"No. The blacksmith and his people! Vladimir has been sent to Siberia."

"What! Not the ironworker Paulpoff?"

"Vladimir Paulpoff, Mamma Paulpoff and Papa Paulpoff are now on their way to Tomsk."

"The devil!"

"Yes, the devil! That is just the individual who did it."

"What is his other name?"

"Prince Neslerov."

"What! Neslerov sent Paulpoff to—Come, tell me what you mean."

"A man like Neslerov can do anything he likes in Russia except marry an American girl. Tell me just what conversation you had with the prince a few days ago."

"A few days ago! Oh, two weeks ago!"

"I don't know when it was. But he asked you for my hand, did he not?"

"Yes."

"You never told me."

Gordon laughed.

"I haven't told you the names of half the men who have asked me that."

"But in Russia we should know, because there are tricks. Now, what was it? Did he say much?"

"No, not much; said he was rich and powerful and wanted you as an ornamental wife or something to that effect."

"He told me the same thing."

"Told you! Where?"

"In Paulpoff's house."

Gordon panted and sat down.

"I wish you would tell the whole story," he said.

"I wish you would answer my questions first. What happened when Neslerov was here? What did he say and what did you answer?"

"He didn't say very much—the usual thing. Said he loved you and was rich and powerful and could give you a good station in Russian society and the world."

"And you said what?"

"Why, I said you wouldn't marry the best man on earth unless you loved him. I said if you would marry the man I wanted you to you would long ago have been the wife of Jack Denton, who—"

"Never mind Mr. Denton. We were speaking of Neslerov."

"Yes—but the deuce! You pick your old dad up so short! I am telling you what I said. Don't you want to hear?"

"Yes," replied Frances, laughing and kissing him. "Dear old dad, what did you say?"

"I said I liked Jack Denton better than any other man on earth and that you hated him worst. But I wanted you to marry him because he was good and noble and a rising man, a brave man and altogether a—"

"Hero and angel in one. What did the prince say to that?"

"He only repeated what he had said before."

"Then what?"

"I said—why—now, don't get angry at your old dad—I said you were a self-willed creature and acted on your own whims."

"That is nothing to get angry about. I do. But I fear that between us we have sent the Paulpoffs to their doom."

"For goodness sake, how?"

"It was natural that—"

"It wasn't natural at all. What did I say—what have you done—to cause Vladimir Paulpoff to plot against the czar?"

"Heavens! Are you so blind? The Paulpoffs are as innocent of this charge as you or I. It was against Vladimir the plot was laid."

"I begin to catch your meaning. Who was it—Neslerov?"

"It is impossible to say whether he did or not, but I suspect him. You remember the day he was here. I met him as I came home from the bazaars, where I had been buying books for Vladimir. I did not, of course, suspect that he had been talking with you about marrying me. Unwittingly I told him they were for Vladimir and asked him also to take an interest in him."

"I also told him of a blacksmith in whom you were taking a great interest. He has put that and your independence together and has imagined Vladimir. Well?"

"I had my fears that something was said about Vladimir. It was so clearly a plot that I knew the jealousy of Neslerov had been aroused. When I learned what had been done, I waited two days at Perm to see Governor Guslav, but he was away, and I could not see him. It was the superintendent of police who gave me the little information I got. It seems that an inspector discovered—so they say—that nihilists were meeting in the forge. Letters were found on them which implicated Vladimir. There was a trial, so it was claimed, and Vladimir was found guilty. I am sure Vladimir would have sent to us if he could."

"I don't want to get mixed up in any nihilist scrape."

"But you will help Vladimir, will you not?"

"What can I do?"

"You can at least stop at Perm and see the governor. It will not delay us long."

"I will do that, certainly; but I don't fancy there is much use talking to Guslav. He is a stern old soldier and has no sympathy for lovers or plotters."

"But he is just and honorable."

"Yes, I am sure of that."

"Then come. We will go to Perm together and see him."

"Well, I suppose I must do as you say, but we are about ready to start for the Obl. We can stop at Perm for a day."

"That will do."

"The preparations were hastily made, and four days more saw them at Perm."

The governor was at home and received Mr. Gordon, the name being an open sesame anywhere in Russia. Mr. Gordon plunged at once into the matter of Vladimir's arrest.

"That he was arrested, if the circumstances were suspicious, I grant, was proper enough," said Mr. Gordon. "But was there a fair trial? Pardon me if I speak plainly. Your institutions of justice here are quite different from ours at home. I have known where men were hustled off to Siberia with no semblance of a trial."

"But they were guilty," said the governor, with a smile.

"Yes; I believe in all the instances that came under my observation they were."

"It was the same in this case. The Paulpoffs had been using their isolated position for base ends. A circle of the brotherhood of nihilists congregated there. Letters were found upon them. These letters were all signed by Vladimir Paulpoff."

"Did he admit anything?"

"They never do. It is only when a man is captured in the very act of assassination, and he knows he cannot escape the death penalty, that he admits his crime and glories in it. The Paulpoffs denied everything, of course."

"Poor Vladimir! He was as innocent as I am!" broke in Frances.

"Impossible. The letters were proof enough."

"Are the letters here?"

"No; unfortunately, they were carried away by one of the men who escaped."

"Then you did not see the letters?"

"No; I regret that I did not."

"What was said concerning them?"

"Their import was given by Inspector Jansky and Prince Neslerov, who found them. Their testimony so pleased the minister of justice that Jansky has been promoted to be superintendent of the police at Tomsk. You seem to think there is some doubt of the guilt of these people," said the governor, turning to Mr. Gordon.

"For my part I am quite sure they are innocent. My daughter has been interested in them since the railway ran through Perm. It is not like them to plot. They are too simple and ignorant."

"But Vladimir is not. He is shrewd and intelligent. He has been a reader of books."

"Yes; my daughter furnishes them."

"I am not at all doubtful myself," said the governor, with a grim smile.

"Were I, I would begin an open investigation at once. But, you understand, the accuser was a prince and the governor of Tomsk, and the minister of justice has set the seal of his approval on the thing. It is a delicate matter for me to reopen. But I promise you this: I will guardedly look into the thing, and if I see any chance for doubt for your sake I will do what I can to help the Paulpoffs."

"Thank you. That is all we can ask," said Mr. Gordon. "We may see them

at Tomsk. I may say to them that your excellency is working to know the truth?"

"You may."

The interview ended, and Mr. Gordon and Frances continued their journey.

The first person they saw when they entered the train was Neslerov. The mark made by Frances' bullet was still there, but he had not, to all appearances, been seriously injured. He looked curiously at the two travelers, as if wondering when the outbreak of wrath from Gordon would come. But that gentleman walked up to him and held out his hand.

"How do you do, your excellency?" he said. "We are going to Tomsk together, it seems."

Neslerov was almost stunned, but he took the hand. Was it possible that Frances had not told her father of the scene in Paulpoff's cottage?

It was so, and Frances had her own reasons. She loved the liberty she had for years been permitted to enjoy. But she knew that if dangers and narrow escapes came to her father's ears her liberty would soon come to an end.

It was a long journey, and a weary one as well. Day after day they passed through the same scenes, crossed rivers on bridges that had been built by Jack Denton, Frances' old playmate, and the strong structures perhaps caused her to think of the hardworking young man who built them and was now planning a very large and excellent bridge across the Obl. But what ever was in Frances' mind did not find expression through her lips, for her father and Neslerov smoked and chatted and played cards with two officers going to garrisons on the border.

Frances said nothing more about the prince, for in the place to which they were going he was supreme, and to involve her father with him in a quarrel would have been to invite a disaster

similar to that which had overtaken the Paulpoffs.

Day after day Frances leaned her head against the glass window and watched the flitting scenes. At last they reached the Irish and crossed the border into that province, which was almost as much Neslerov's own as though he were a king.

There were but few passengers by that time, for the road had not been finished, and the train must stop at the Obl. Frances, half dreaming, lay back, looking at the great expanse of tundra, the new villages springing up, the old huts that were now deserted and the waste of railway supplies along the track.

The prince had asked her father to go into another car and smoke. This left her alone, and she closed her eyes and dozed.

She woke up with a start. A hand was on her shoulder. She saw Neslerov bending over her. A smile of triumph was on his face. Frightened, she glanced out of the window. The car was still. She looked forward—the rest of the train had gone on.

"What has happened?" she cried, leaping to her feet. "Where is the train? Where is my father?"

"Speeding toward the Obl, my dear," said Neslerov. "Unfortunately, at this point the couplings between this car and the next were broken, and the officers of the train, not missing you or me—for I had just come in with a cup of coffee for you—left us and went on. We are in a wild place, surrounded by various tribes of the remarkable collection of savages over whom I am governor. But I am governor, and if you will obey me I promise that you will reach Tomsk in safety."

Frances leaned back weakly and stared.

"My father gone!" she cried, and as she looked out at the savage faces that passed and looked at the car in wonder she shuddered.

"Unfortunately, your father was in a forward car. It was with his consent I came to you with coffee. Fear nothing, however, for, though we are in a wild region, I am governor and will protect you. I love you, and no harm shall come to you—if you obey me."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Reassuring.

"Oh, Harold," wailed the lovely maiden, in whose expressive features grief and indignation seemed to be struggling for the mastery, "how can I believe you in the face of all this evidence of your perfidy and double dealing? The letter to Blanche, in your own handwriting; her photograph, found in your possession; the fact, as told me by a dozen witnesses and tacitly confessed by you, that you kissed her the other evening when you were together in the conservatory—how can you reconcile these things with your continued professions of love for me?"

"All these things, darling," said the hero of the story, the light of truth shining in his dark brown eyes and the impress of sincerity stamped upon his noble forehead, "will be satisfactorily explained the next chapter!"

The jaw of the shark furnishes the best watchmaker's oil. In each shark is found about half a pint.

Sin has many tools, but a lie is the handle that fits them all.—Holmes.

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