

A DEAD RECKONING.

CHAPTER IV.

"Pardon. I hope I do not intrude?" said M. Karovsky, addressing himself to Mrs. Brooke with the suave assurance of a thorough man of the world. "I saw through the window that Mr. Brooke had returned, and as my time here is limited—me voici." Then advancing a few steps and holding out his hand to Gerald, he added: "It is five years, mon ami, since we last met. Confess now, I am one of the last men in the world whom you thought to see here!"

"You are indeed, Karovsky," responded Gerald as he shook his visitor's proffered hand, but with no great show of cordiality. "Have you been long in England?"

"Not long. I am a bird of passage. I come and go, and obey the orders that are given me. That is all."

"My wife, Mrs. Brooke, but you have seen her already—Clara, Monsieur Karovsky is a gentleman whose acquaintance I had the honor of making during the time I was living abroad."

"May we hope to have the pleasure of Monsieur Karovsky's company to dinner?" asked Clara in her most gracious manner, while at the same time hoping in her heart that the invitation would not be accepted.

"Merci, madame," responded the Russian, for such he was. "I should be delighted, if the occasion admitted of it; but, as I said before, my time is limited. I must leave London by the night-mail. I am due in Paris at ten o'clock to-morrow."

"For the present, then, I must ask you to excuse me," said Clara.

Karovsky hastened to open the door for her, and bowed low as she swept out of the room.

"That man is the bearer of ill news, and Gerald knows it," was the young wife's unspoken thought as she left the two together.

M. Karovsky was a tall, well-built man, to all appearance some few years over thirty in point of age. His short black hair was parted carefully down the middle; his black eyes were at once piercing and brilliant; he had a long and rather thin face, a long nose, a mobile and flexible mouth, and a particularly fine arrangement of teeth. He wore neither beard nor moustache, and his complexion had the faint yellow tint of antique ivory. He was not especially handsome; but there was something striking and out of the common in his appearance, so that people who were introduced to him casually in society wanted to know more about him.

An enigma is not without its attractions for many people, and Karovsky had the air of being one whether he was so in reality or not. He was a born linguist, as so many of his countrymen are, and spoke the chief European languages with almost equal fluency and equal purity of accent.

"Fortune has been kind to you, my friend, in finding for you so charming a wife," he said, as he lounged across the room with his hands in his pockets, after closing the door behind Mrs. Brooke.

"But Fortune has been kind to you in more ways than one."

"Karovsky, you have something to tell me," said Brooke a little grimly.

"You did not come here to pay compliments, nor without a motive. But will you not be seated?"

Karovsky drew up a chair. "As you say—I am not here without a motive," he remarked. Then, with a quick expressive gesture, which was altogether un-English, he added: "Ah, bah! I feel like a bird of ill-omen that has winged its way into paradise with a message from the nether world."

"Whatever your message may be, pray do not hesitate to deliver it."

But apparently the Russian did hesitate. He got up, crossed the room to one of the windows, looked out for half a minute, then went back and resumed his seat. "Eight years have come and gone, Gerald Brooke," he began in an impressive tone, "since you allied yourself by some of the most solemn oaths possible for a man to take that Sacred Cause to which I also have the honor of being affiliated."

"Do you think I have forgotten! At that time I was an impetuous and enthusiastic boy of eighteen, with no knowledge of the world, save what I had gathered from books, and with a head that was full of wild, vague dreams of Liberty and Universal Brotherhood."

"The fact of your becoming one of the US is the best of all proofs that the cause of Liberty at that time was dear to your heart."

"When as a boy I joined the Cause, I was ignorant of much I have learned since that time."

"The world does not stand still. One naturally knows more to-day than one did eight years ago."

"Karovsky, I know this—that the Cause, which when I joined it, I believed to be so pure in its aims, so lofty in its ideas, so all-embracing in its philanthropy, has, since that time, been stained by crimes which make me shudder when I think of them—has dragged its colors through shambles reeking with the blood of those who have fallen victims to its blind and ferocious notions of revenge."

"I am listening to one who, only eight short years ago, was saturated with philanthropic ideas which seemed excessive enough to include the whole of every man should be free and happy—Ah, yes, you are the same—only time and the world have contrived to spoil you, as they have spoiled so many others. In those days you were poor, now you are rich. Then you had no fixed home; you were a wanderer clouded and uncertain. Now, you are the wealthy Mr. Brooke—a pillar of your country; this grand old mansion and all the broad acres, for I know not how far around it, are yours. You are married to one whom you love, and who loves you in return. Away, then, with the wild notions of our hot youth!"

"Karovsky, you wrong me. My love of my fellows is as ardent as ever it was. My— But why prolong a discussion that could serve no good

end? You have a message for me?"

"The man was evidently ill at ease. He rose, crossed to the chimney-piece, took up one or two curios, and examined them through his eyeglass, then went back and resumed his seat. Gerald, for the moment, he continued, "eight years ago, on a certain winter evening, in a certain underground room in Warsaw, and before some half-dozen men whose faces you were not permitted to see, you of your own free-will, took the solemn oath which afflicted you to that great Cause for the furtherance of which thousands of others have given their fortunes, their lives, their all. From that day till this you have been a passive member of the Society; nothing has been demanded at your hands; and you might almost be excused if the events of that winter night had come at length to seem to you little more than a half-remembered dream."

"That you have not been called before now is no proof that you have been overlooked or forgotten, but simply that your services have not been required. Other instruments were at hand to do the work that was needed to be done. But at length the day has come to you, Gerald Brooke, as it comes to most men who live and wait."

Gerald had changed color more than once during the foregoing speech. "What is it that I am called upon to do?" he asked in a voice that was scarcely raised above a whisper.

"You are aware that when an individual is needed to carry out any of the secret decrees of the Supreme Tribunal, that individual is drawn for by lot?"

"And my name?"

"Has been so drawn."

The light faded out of Gerald Brooke's eyes; a death-like pallor crept over his face; he could scarcely command his voice; as for the second time he asked: "What is it that I am called upon to do?"

"The Supreme Tribunal has decreed that a certain individual shall suffer the penalty of death. Carry out the person drawn by lot to carry out the sentence."

"They would make an assassin of me!"

"You are bound by your oath to carry out the behests of the Tribunal, be they what they may."

"No oath can bind a man to become a murderer!"

"One of the chief conditions attached to your oath is that of blind and unquestioning obedience."

"Karovsky, this is monstrous!"

"I am sorry that things have fallen out as they have, mon ami; but such being the case, there is no help for it."

"Gerald Brooke—whose ancestors fought at Cressy, to bring to the level of a common assassin!"

"Pardon. Might it not be as well, before you express your determination in such emphatic terms, to consider what would be the consequence of a refusal on your part to comply with the instructions of which I have the misfortune to be the bearer?—Mrs. Brooke is very young to be left a widow."

"Karovsky!"

"Fardon. But that is what it means. Any afflicted member who may be so ill-advised as to refuse to carry out the decrees of the Tribunal renders himself liable to the extreme penalty; and so surely as you, Gerald Brooke, are now a living man, so surely, in a few short weeks, should you persist in your refusal, will your wife be left a widow."

"This is horrible—most horrible!"

"Obedience, blind and unquestioning, the utter abnegation of your individuality to the will of your superiors, is the first rule of the Propaganda to which you and I have the honor to belong. But all this you know, or ought to have known, long ago."

"Obedience carried to the verge of murder is obedience no longer—it becomes a crime. However you may put it, assassination remains assassination still."

"Fardon. We recognize no such term in our vocabulary."

"Karovsky, had you been called upon to do this deed?"

"I should have done it. For if there were one man in the world, Brooke, who I have cause to hate more than another, that man is Baron Otto von Rosenberg."

"On Rosenberg?"

"Pardon. Did I not mention the name before? But he is the man."

"For a moment or two Gerald could not speak. It is but half an hour since I parted from him, he continued, to say at last,—"Karovsky, I feel as if I were entangled in some horrible nightmare—as if I were being suffocated in the folds of some monstrous Python."

"It is a feeling that will wear itself out in the course of a little while. I remember that no use was made of the word of honor that no use was made of the information so acquired. Wretch that he was! Von Rosenberg turned traitor, and revealed everything to the police. In the dead of night, a certain house in which a secret printing press was at work was surrounded by the police. Two of the inmates were shot down while attempting to escape. The rest were made prisoners, among them being three women and a boy of seventeen—my brother. Two of those arrested died in prison, or were never heard of more; the rest were condemned to the mines. On the road, my brother and one of the women sank and died, killed by the dreadful hardships they had to undergo; the rest were rotting away their lives in the silver mines, forgotten by all but the dear ones, and left behind—You now know the reason why the Baron Otto von Rosenberg was sentenced to death. The vengeance of the Supreme Tribunal may be slow, but it is very sure."

There was silence for a few moments, then Gerald said: "All this may be as you say; but I tell you again, Karovsky, that mine shall not be the hand to strike the blow."

"Then you seal your own death-warrant."

"So be it. Life at such a price would not be worth having. Death before dishonor is the motto of our English. Dishonor shall never come to it through me."

Gerald rose and walked to the window. His face was pale; his eyes were full of trouble; what he had said had been lacking neither in dignity nor pathos.

The Russian's cold glance followed him, not without admiration. "English to the backbone," he muttered under his breath. "It was a blunder never to allow such a man to become one of us." Then he looked at his watch, and started to find it was so late. "I

can stay no longer—I must go," he said aloud. "But remember my last warning words." He took up his hat and moved slowly towards the window.

"Karovsky, for the last time I solemnly declare that this man's death shall not lie at my door!" Gerald sank into a chair, let his elbows rest on the table, and buried his face between his hands.

"I have nothing more to say," remarked the Russian. He stepped through the doorway, took his hat in his hand, and then turned.

At that moment the door opened, and Mrs. Brooke, on the point of entering her room, paused suddenly as her eyes took in the scene before her. "Gerald!" she exclaimed in a frightened voice, and then her gaze travelled from her husband to Karovsky. The latter, with his eyes still resting on the bowed figure at the table, pronounced in low clear accents the one word, "Remember!"

The Russian, and Mrs. Brooke, and Mrs. Brooke, and next moment was gone.

CHAPTER V.

Ten weeks had come and gone since the memorable visit of Karovsky to the master of Beechly Towers. It was a pleasant evening towards the end of June. There had been a heavy shower a little while ago; but since then a cloud had hovered low to the east, and now drawing westward in a blaze of glory. In the same pleasant morning-room, in which we first made their acquaintance, Mrs. Brooke and her aunt, Miss Primby, were now sitting. The latter was dozing in an easy-chair with a novel on her lap, the former was seated at the piano playing some plaintive waltz, and the great light, the light of happiness that knew no cloud, which shone from her eyes when she saw her first, dwelt there and around her, and she was anxious and distraite, like one who is a prey to some hidden trouble. She had spoken no more than the truth when she said that her happiness was too perfect to last.

As the last sad note died away under her fingers she turned from the instrument. "I cannot play—I cannot play," she murmured, and she murmured under her breath.

"At this juncture Miss Primby awoke. "My dear Clara, what a pity you did not keep on playing," she said. "I was in the midst of a most lovely dream. I thought I was about to be married; my wreath and veil had been sent home and I was just about to try them on; when you stopped playing and I awoke."

"If I were to go on playing, would you think that you could finish your dream?"

"No, my dear, it is gone, and the chances are that it will never return," said the spinster with a sigh.

Clara closed the room, and sat down on a low chair near the window, whence she could catch the first glimpse of her husband as he came, and he had been a change of evergreens at the corner of the terrace.

"I wish you would not mope so much, and such emphatic terms, to consider what would be the consequence of a refusal on your part to comply with the instructions of which I have the misfortune to be the bearer?—Mrs. Brooke is very young to be left a widow."

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PRACTICAL FARMING.

FOOD FOR LAMBS.

A contributor to American Sheep Breeder says: Let us first consider the mother. From her the lamb gets, by all odds, the most important, the most indispensable part of his food. She digests the crude, raw food stuffs in her large stomach and prepares the concentrated, easily digested and perfect mother's milk. In the abundance and regularity of this supply of milk depends your hopes of good lambs. You must feed the mother generously; yet, the food must be of the right sort to be turned readily into milk, and this brings us to consider what milk is made of and why. Not to go specifically into details, the milk is very rich in nitrogenous materials, in what we call protein. This protein is the stuff that muscle and brain-stuff and nerve-stuff and blood is made of. It is exactly what the young animal needs to make his frame grow and build up his young tissues. Now to produce this milk in abundance the ewe must be fed foods that have in them the elements of milk. They must be foods that are somewhat rich in protein. Of course, there is fat in milk, and the animal system burns a good deal of carbon, so we don't want a food free from the starchy principles that are made of carbon yet, for milk production, you do need a greater proportion of protein to starchy food or fat-forming foods than if you were fattening the mother.

This bars out the large use of corn in the diet. Corn will not make milk satisfactorily, no matter in what amount it is fed. I have tried it by keeping ewes on full diet of corn, with clover hay, too, but the lambs did not generally thrive. You did not expect them to thrive, I was fattening their mothers for sale. Now there are any number of combinations of foods that will be good for the ewe, but we will consider what is easiest and cheapest for you. Mix up the following mixture, by weight: 100 lbs. cornmeal, 100 lbs. wheat bran, 25 lbs. oil-meal; shovel it over until well mixed, then give the ewes a little of it. Each day increase the amount that you give them until they have all that they will eat; then I would make a self-feeder, if I were you, and let them run to it all the time; they like to eat little and often; they will not eat too much, and by sucking their lambs after once accustomed to it. It is true that they will rapidly gain in flesh sometimes when fed this ration. A lamb is more likely to be put up the food for a few weeks or less, after the lambs are sold and the mothers, too. Now the lambs will be getting what their mothers are capable of producing, and they will soon want to be eating themselves. I know of no better food for them than this same mixture that I have advised for the ewes. Let them eat when they will, and let them eat and they and their mothers will want clover hay of the best, and in abundance, too. Have it so that they can all get it, but not get on it with their dirty little feet. A lamb is more likely to be put up the food for a few weeks or less, after the lambs are sold and the mothers, too. Now the lambs will be getting what their mothers are capable of producing, and they will soon want to be eating themselves. I know of no better food for them than this same mixture that I have advised for the ewes. 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