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AUTHOR OF
"ITINERANT DAUGHTERS"

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ITINERANT DAUGHTERS
A FORGOTTEN SIN
A QUEEN OF CURDS AND CREAM
A SPOTLESS REPUTATION
AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE
ETELKA'S VOW
HOLY MATRIMONY
LADY BABY
LOT 13
MADE OF MONEY
THE ETERNAL WOMAN
THE BRIDGE OF LIFE
THE HOUSE OF RIDDLES
THE IMPROBABLE IDYL
THE COMPROMISE
THE PRIDE OF LIFE
ONE YEAR
MISS PROVIDENCE
ON THE WAY THROUGH
ORTHODOX
RECHA
SAWDUST
THE BLOOD-TAX
THE CONQUEST OF LONDON
THE IMPEDIMENT
THE MILLION
THE SUPREME CRIME
THINGS THAT HAVE HAPPENED
THE WRONG MAN
THE THREE ESSENTIALS

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By

Dorothea Gerard

(Madame Longard de Longgarde)

Author of "Itinerant Daughters"



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PART I

1861-63

CHAPTER I

THE PROCESSION

THE 12th of August, 1861, rose fair and radiant over the plains of Lithuania. From the vast forest swamps soft vapours arose like veils, with which the earth—a bashful bride—sought to hide her face from her conqueror the sun, yet already torn to shreds by his victorious touch as now he stooped to kiss her. At that kiss every dewdrop upon the branches of birch and of fir became a diamond; and every gossamer thread floating between the grass-stalks turned to filagree silver. Summer peace breathed from the landscape.

But it was not peace that was preparing in the river-side town of Kowno. Early though the hour was the place already teemed with a strange, subdued, but no less intense, life. From every side street leading to the wide central square in the heart of the town, crowds were pouring in festive attire. The white gowns of the women mixed gaily with the long, dark tunics and flower-decked hats of the men. Yet upon the lips of these ever-gather-

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ing masses, smart enough for wedding guests, no smile was to be seen; while their eyes were brilliant with something quite distinct from the promise of pleasure. The language of some common enthusiasm stamped all these faces, so different in feature, in age, in sex, with a momentary and illusive family likeness, more conspicuous by far than the resemblance produced by the powerful limbs and the flaxen hair which are the marks of the true Lithuanian. In a stern silence they came, and as the corner of the street was turned each pair of eyes went instinctively towards the southern egress of the square. Here the August sunlight glinted back from the points of many arms and the bits of many horses. A *sotnie* of Cossacks stood in double file across the road leading to the river. At their head, with drawn sword, which seemed to have been especially polished for the occasion, so blindingly did it reflect the sunbeams, was a squat, black-browed captain. The opening of a street close by was alive with the tossing of more horses' heads, and all a-twinkle with the points of lances, for here the Uhlans had been posted as a reserve in case of need. From point to point of the square moved the restless figures of gendarmes. A much-decorated general, with several adjutants beside him, sat his horse in face of the troops, and in expectation of the coming action nervously pulled at his shaggy grey moustache.

Each newcomer could take in the picture at a glance as open space was gained; but no alarm, not even surprise was visible upon any one face, as men and women alike, with tight-set lips and heads held high, pursued their way

The Procession

towards the weather-beaten church from behind whose walls the muffled sound of organ tones was pouring. Old and young, tottering grandfathers and tripping children, they passed before the threatening troops, unheeding, in a silent and sublime contempt.

What was there here to surprise them? It was weeks now since the Russian authorities had published a formal prohibition of the manifestation planned. August 12th, as anniversary of the final union of the Duchy of Lithuania to the Kingdom of Poland—a union held to faithfully for three centuries—is a day great in the national annals. No day more fitting to prove to the Polish brothers that in the struggle already preparing, and soon to overshadow the country, Lithuania's heart was with them. Already, when over there in Warsaw the first blood had flowed, Lithuania had wrapped itself in the national mourning. It was black gowns which these white-clad women had laid aside—for one day only.

The celebration had been planned on a large scale. After the ceremony in the church, the procession would cross the river Niemen and advance to meet a sister procession coming from the kingdom. The official announcement that, should the cortège attempt to form, it would be mercilessly fired upon, had served only to stiffen resolution. No one doubted that the threat would be carried out, but no one thought of yielding. No calmer people in Europe than the Lithuanians, but also none more tenacious. For days before the 12th every confessional for miles around had been besieged by crowds eager to make their peace with heaven. If all these men and women,

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flocking in from the neighbouring towns, and many of whom had passed the night on the roads, looked so contemptuously at the troops, it was because one and all had come here prepared to die.

In front of the church the mass was growing denser with every minute. It was not one-twentieth of the crowd which its walls could attempt to hold. Yet the restless gendarmes, prowling around, could see no occasion for action. Presently, by a movement as orderly as the former quiet had been, it became clear to the spectators that the critical moment was close. From the steps of the church, and as though obeying a word of command which had yet not been spoken, the crowd fell away to the right and to the left, leaving clear a broad passage, while through the space gained the organ notes rolled forth more freely. Many crossed themselves; some of those in the front row knelt down. The gendarmes looked across at their mounted commander, planted straight opposite to the church door and watching intently. The Cossack captain's impatient eyes went over to the general, his hand the while grasping his drawn sword a little tighter. When would the command to charge be given? His shaggy little horse shook its mane, as though as anxious as its master to be at the crowd.

But the general was, obviously, not quite up to his work. A charge seemed to him superfluous. Surely that wall of Cossacks, even passive, would be enough to stop a mob armed only with prayer-books and rosaries! So he sat still upon his horse, while down the steps of the church the first figures of the procession came at a measured

The Procession

pace : at the head a tall, old peasant with a wooden cross upheld between his horny hands, close behind him several pairs of young girls in white muslin gowns, and crowned with white flowers, each two pairs bearing between them a miniature platform upon which throned a wooden figure of the Holy Virgin, or of some patron Saint. There were peasants among these, too, but so were there daughters of noblemen, for this post of honour and of danger had been hotly contested. After these the banner-bearers, followed by a troop of scarlet-robed, white-surpliced acolytes with bells and censers ; at last the group of priests, in their centre the *probosc* (parish priest), a stout but imposing figure, with sternly fixed gaze and massive hands clasped across his vestment, whose gold embroidery seemed to take fire in the passage from shadow to sunshine.

Soon the procession was in full view, growing with every minute, as the crowds in front of the church fell into rank. No one was marshalling these masses, nor was there any need. As steadily and as methodically as though this were a show well rehearsed, without a trace of confusion or of flurry, the mighty column of people came on, with blue and red banners playing in the light breeze sprung up, with bells tinkling and censers swinging out their clouds of perfume into the crisp air. The bearer of the cross was heading straight, though slowly, for the wall of troops barring the passage to the river—as unfaltering as though he did not see them—and behind him came the white-clad girls as unfaltering as he.

The squat, black-browed captain looked more urgently towards the general, but the general was again pulling at

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his moustache. All that he could do upon his own responsibility was to draw his ranks closer ; and this was already done, one rough horse-flank actually touching the other.

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Yet the old man with the cross came on as though they had not been, and behind him the unbroken procession.

The general, staring, could not believe his eyes when he saw the piloting cross reach the first line of Cossacks and still moving on, apparently unchecked. Between the close-set horses the old peasant was calmly shouldering his way, and through the narrow passage thus gained the girls pressed close. Quickly it widened, as the wild little horses, alarmed at the banners, the bells, the white dresses, shied aside, backing in a sort of panic against those behind, which in their turn were disorganised by the alarm.

At sight of the broken ranks the general could hesitate no longer. The concerted sign was given, and simultaneously from the impatient lips of the Cossack captain, loosened at last, came the shouted command :—

“At them with your swords!”

It was upon the head of the cross-bearer that the first stroke fell, bringing him to his knees. There, between the horses, on the ground, with cross still uplifted, he raised his bleeding face, together with his quavering voice :—

“Holy God! Holy Strong One!

“Holy and immortal!

“Show us mercy!”

The first tones were barely uttered when the girls behind him, likewise upon their knees and with the sword-strokes

The Procession

raining upon them, joined their young voices to his cracked old one in the intonation of the popular hymn. In another minute the chant had been taken up by the whole of the mighty column. From twenty thousand throats the prayer for help rose to heaven :—

“ Holy God ! Holy Strong One !

“ Holy and immortal !

“ Show us mercy ! ”

A moment followed never to be forgotten by either friends or enemies.

At the first note of the heart-searching air familiar to them since childhood—since to the same melody the Cossacks had set their own words, appealing to the same throne of mercy—a strange flurry had come over the mounted troops. As though at a word of command the hands grasping the swords went up to their heads ; almost automatically they uncovered. And—oh, bewildering sight!—the general's cap was in his hand too, and the lips under the shaggy moustache were moving. It was clear that he had lost his head.

But, fortunately for Russia's reputation, the gendarme commander was made of sterner stuff. He spurred to the general's side.

“ Your duty, general ! Do not forget your duty ! ”

At the incisive tones of warning, the general gave a rapid shake to his old shoulders ; quickly and shamefacedly he put on his cap.

“ Yes, my duty,” he murmured, turning a still dazed look upon the colonel, while around him the air vibrated with the melody of the hymn.

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"The Cossacks are evidently not to be relied upon. Would it not be time for the Uhlans to charge?"

"Yes, it would be time."

Pulling himself together the general turned to his adjutant and gave a hurried order.

Within a minute the adjutant's horse had cleared the breadth of the square, and almost as he reached the side of the lieutenant in command the long, shining lances were lowered to the saddles. In the space of another breath those murderous points would be let loose upon the helpless mass of people.

But it would seem, after all, as though the prayer for mercy had reached the throne of heaven. The lieutenant's lips had not yet opened for the decisive word when another figure on foot, but in full uniform, strode out into the centre of the square with prohibitory arm uplifted.

At the sight the lieutenant's sword lowered instantly; for the figure in the middle of the square—appeared from no one quite knew where—was that of a high official, the governor's representative, in other words the embodiment of authority. All eyes were upon him; in a moment, as though by common consent, the fervent hymn was hushed.

No attack was to take place, the governor's delegate explained to eagerly listening ears. There was no need to shed blood, since a much simpler way of cutting short the demonstration had been found. The floating bridge across the river, so constructed as to be removable at the time of the great floods, had been taken to pieces that morning. This alone made it impossible for the two processions to join. The troops might therefore go back quietly to their

The Procession

quarters. There was no harm in letting the people take a walk to the river-bank.

The words were humane, but they were contemptuous, and the glance with which he measured the column of people was no more friendly though less ferocious than that of the disappointed Cossack captain. Such an opportunity lost! And all because of those stupid men being knocked over by a hymn! Moodily he headed the way back to the barracks. So there was to be no more bloodshed to-day! Well, it might yet come!

Meanwhile, the procession, ordered again as carefully as before, moved forwards upon its now unobstructed way, with as complete a disregard for the official's announcement as had been shown for the Cossacks' presence. The old cross-bearer again headed the column, only tottering a little in his walk. There was an open gash across his face, while upon the white dresses of the girls that followed him more than one fresh blood-stain shone.

With banners and censers once more in full play, they filed through the street leading to the river and soon stood upon its banks.

Here at last was the first real check. Perhaps they had not fully believed the words of the general's delegate, for at sight of the broken-off bridge many faces, which had not blanched before the swords of the Cossacks, visibly fell. Upon each bank there lay piled the woodwork of the dismantled bridge, while between the two desolate bridge-heads the Niemen rolled its slow, sullen waters. How to reach the other side seemed an insoluble problem. Hesitation began to show. "Have we not done enough?"

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some of the fainter spirits whispered. The removal of the bridge did all honour to the governor's knowledge of human nature. Without doubt his calculations of a peaceful return would have come true but for one circumstance. For while the crowds still consulted upon the bank an approaching murmur was wafted across the water, and the distant tinkle of bells, not their own, met their ears. Soon other banners were waving upon the other side—the sister-procession coming from the heart of Poland! At its head another old cross-bearer—but no peasant this: a white-haired nobleman in resplendent national dress, known to all for miles around as the bearer of an illustrious name.

The sight acted like an electric shock. From all these throats a cry went up—a cry of longing and of comradeship. Upon both banks the people fell upon their knees, with yearning hands out-stretched, while once more their lips opened, not to a hymn this time, but to the solemn words of their national anthem:—

“God, who for so many ages hath surrounded Poland with light and with honour!”

Women's passionate sobs ran like the undertone of the melody.

But the men had no time for tears. Already a group of youngsters had unmoored one of the barges forming the usual supports of the bridge, and now stowed away under the hanging willows. On to its primitive deck, priests and banner-bearers, as well as the white-wreathed girls were led, to be ferried over. It seemed all that it was possible to do. And yet not all.

The people, gazing with wistful eyes after the barge

The Procession

which they could not hope to follow, became all at once aware of a single figure across the water, which advanced to the edge of the bank, and with hands held trumpet-wise to mouth was attempting to communicate with them. A beardless youth this, with the bearing of a nobleman, and in national dress so gay as to give him the appearance of some bird of brilliant plumage poised on the crest of the low cliff. Many of the crowd knew him : Stas Swigello, the twenty-year old son of the white-haired count, heading the second procession. His lithe figure and his authoritative gesture were familiar ; but his words could not reach them.

He did not stop to repeat them. Leaping down the bank to the edge of the water and beckoning peremptorily to those behind him, he seized upon one of the planks of the dismantled bridge and began pulling it back towards its original position.

In the flash of an instant a dozen other men were beside him—then a hundred. The bank became alive with swarming figures, while from the other side a shout arose. They had read his thought, and there too were at work already. No trace of hesitation now. The meeting which the swords of the Cossacks had not been able to stop, the waves of the Niemen should stop as little. In a fever they worked, in momentary expectation of the thunder of approaching horse-hoofs and of those words already once heard to-day :—

“At them with your swords !”

But not one soldier appeared. From the side of the town all remained still. The startled authorities, sur-

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prised out of all their calculations, were consulting in a flurry which precluded all decisive action.

With thirty thousand pairs of hands stirring, work, even under an August sun, progresses fast. In less than two hours the bridge stood there again, not much more rickety than usual ; and across it the people poured in comparative safety, literally to fall into the arms of their compatriots. Many were the strangers whose quivering lips touched on that day—many the peasant who found himself pressed to the heart of a nobleman.

It was not until emotion had had free play that the now united procession formed again, heading towards the church of the neighbouring village, which had been its objective all along. Here it was that thousands of knees bent, and thousands of voices rose to implore better times for Poland.

But the day was not to end without a gayer note being struck. It was from the church steps that the white-haired count Swigello announced to the crowds that they were his guests for that day, and himself led the way to his ancient domain hard by.

Here at last the long strain relaxed. Until this moment even children's nerves had been too highly wrought to let them chance upon the discovery that they were both exhausted and hungry ; but at sight of the tables spread upon the lawns, and laden with cold meats, with pyramids of fresh rolls, with piles of fruits ; of the barrels rolled out upon the gravel and waiting only to be tapped, human nature demanded its rights. Even heroes must eat at given intervals, and these men and women

The Procession

had fasted since morning. Abruptly they became aware that they were not far from the end of their strength. A pleasant sense of security took the place of the iron resolve so long maintained. It was only now that they began to understand what it was that they had done. With a certain astonishment in their eyes they looked at each other, aware of a new-born mutual respect. "We have done it, after all—we have done it!" was the under-current of all remarks, spoken and unspoken. Around the rustic boards and upon the wide grass spaces tongues were at length untied and events discussed in differing moods.

"Can anything be clearer than that God protects Poland?"

"But how if the governor's message had arrived five minutes later?"

"It could not have arrived five minutes later, seeing that it was sent by Heaven. The governor had to send when Heaven commanded."

"And supposing the Uhlans had charged—what then? A few good deaths—better deaths maybe than those we will die some day." And the speaker sighed well-nigh regretfully, as at an opportunity wasted.

"Did you see how the general took off his cap?"

"And how the banners frightened the horses! It made me think of the story in the Bible about the ass and the angel. Who knows whether it was the banners alone which the Cossack horses saw, and not our guardian angels!"

"Old Szymon will take that mark on his head to his

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grave"—said another half enviously. "Did you see one of the young ladies tearing up her handkerchief for a bandage? But your hands are bleeding too; did you also——?" www.libtool.com.cn

"No; it was on the nails in the planks that I tore my hands—and not I alone. Ah, but the beer has a famous taste! Thirsty work bridge-building, eh?"

Inside the big white house, above whose entrance a huge coat of arms, hewn in stone, stood out in strong relief, the heads of the procession were being strengthened with nobler draughts than beer. Here, in the place of honour, the massive *proboscis* sat at ease, divested for the moment of his embroidered vestment, with a glass of golden-brown *mild* before him, and looking, as he smacked his lips, almost commonplace compared to himself of this morning. And many more glasses stood there.

"Let my cellars be empty for a generation, if need be," the count had said to his major-domo that morning, "so long as no one goes away thirsty to-day."

Nor should any one go away hungry either. It was in order to see to this that he now moved about among the crowds encamped upon the grass in the shadow of mighty lime-trees—a splendid old figure with snow-white beard and words of lordly welcome upon his lips. "Like old times—just like old times!" they could hear him murmur. "But almost too many to look after. Is Stas not forgetting?"

He was not forgetting. Light-footed, smiling-lipped, he moved about among the crowds of his father's guests as nimbly as he had gone about the building of the bridge.

The Procession

His hands, too, were badly torn—fair white hands, tended, as a rule, as delicately as those of a lady—and the light-blue satin of his coat was rent and stained, but he heeded nothing of it all as he hurried from group to group, radiant in the dispensation of that hospitality which, after fighting, has ever been to a Swigello the highest delight. If the light-blue coat was seen more frequently in the neighbourhood of white dresses than of other coats, who would blame him, considering how fair some of the faces above the dresses were? A lady's man—oh, yes! But, after to-day, who could hold him for that alone?

"Ah, Panna Zosia," he said now, stopping before a white-wreathed girl who formed the centre of an admiring group, "you will never have that dress washed, will you?"

There was a note of drollery in his voice, as he pointed to the blood-stain which had soaked through the muslin of the sleeve—he had really been serious for as long as his constitution permitted. But the yellow-haired girl raised a pair of grave blue eyes from under the crown of paper lilies to reply:—

"No; I shall never have it washed. I shall keep it to show my children."

An approving murmur greeted the words. Was not this one of the heroines of the day? Wherever a denser group had collected it might be taken for granted that one of these white-wreathed girls was its centre, sometimes with a bandaged hand, displaying the blood-stains upon her dress with a pride too innocent to be called puerile.

But the shadows of the lime-trees were getting long upon the lawn. The white pillars of the terrace stood there

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bathed in golden light ; above them the emblems on the huge escutcheon were picked out minutely by the rays of the setting sun ; below, the rampant bear known to all who had ever come within the sphere of the Swigello name ; above, a battle-axe with a snake coiled around its handle.

Return had to be thought of ; but it should be a return worthy of the departure. Once more youth had taken the initiative. A group had hurried on in advance ; and as, at last, under the first veil of twilight the re-formed procession approached the Niemen—at its head the same old peasant, only that his forehead was now bandaged with a costly lace handkerchief—a triumphant peal of bells greeted them from all the churches of Kowno. As victors they were being welcomed back ; and like victors they re-entered the town unobstructed. Not a finger raised to oppose them. The same moral paralysis which had suffered the re-building of the bridge, still lay upon the authorities. For such a case as this they had no instructions.

So the people rejoiced in their victory. And they did well to rejoice, for there were not many more to follow.

CHAPTER II

"THE LOST ONES"

It was a dark, wet night in May—the second since that August day upon which the two processions had met on the banks of the Niemen.

The twenty-one months which lay between had been among the most turbulent in turbulent Polish annals. The revolution of which the manifestation of Kowno had been one of the heralding sparks, smothered again and again under the iron Russian heel, had finally burst into flame. Over the bulk of the provinces once subject to the Polish crown, the conflagration had been raging since January. Wonders of heroism and of folly, horrors of reprisal and of ferocity had been crowded into this brief space. From the first, and despite some initial successes, the struggle had been as between a man armed and a man naked. With his nails and his teeth alone the naked man had rushed at the steel-clad giant, never stopping to consider whether he might not do better clothed and clad. His cause was good—of that he would have felt certain, even if all Europe had not assured him of it; and for the rest he trusted to Providence and to the support of this same sympathising Europe—which only showed what an extremely unpractical person he was. Providence

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having, doubtless, its own reasons for not interfering, the result was what might be expected.

In an inner yard in one of the suburbs of Kiew, some twenty men were busy packing various articles, not easily distinguishable in the moist darkness, into a couple of carts half-filled with straw. Whenever any of the faces came within the circle of a dim lantern overhead, it showed itself to be beardless. There was not so much as a full-grown moustache among them, and some of these cheeks had not yet lost the roundness of childhood. Much whispering went on. Sometimes the fragment of an excited laugh quickly repressed. In every gesture and movement the suggestion of eager hurry. A pack of schoolboys bent upon some nocturnal escapade—such would have been the impression of any uninformed spectator.

Soon they had all clambered to their places, all but two, who, with the agility of practised horsemen, had swung themselves on to the backs of small, sturdy steeds held ready close by.

As, with a hollow sound, the carts lumbered out through the covered entrance into the street, several hasty signs of the cross were made, such as the Slav loves to make at the start of an undertaking.

The street was long and straggly, almost deserted except for an occasional policeman (those who were not sheltering from the rain under covered doorways), and once for a company of Cossacks patrolling the sleeping town. The leader, peering sharply at the party, met the harmless gaze of a pair of eyes which he instinctively taxed at

“The Lost Ones”

somewhere about fifteen years old, and rode on unconcerned. It was not his business to arrest children. The “milk faces” might go past in peace.

Beyond the last houses more Cossacks, but here, too, the carts as well as the riders passed unmolested and unchallenged. The very openness and simplicity of the proceedings precluded all idea of danger to the public peace. Such supreme impudence as was here at work could not enter into the calculations of the most suspicious official. Nor could he guess at what was hidden beneath the straw.

And now the open country was gained. Beneath the streaming sky the vastness of the horizon was to be more guessed at than seen. The houses were behind them and the steppe in front of them. An audible breath was drawn all round. The first danger was successfully passed, and already these young mad-caps prepared to triumph.

Yet, compared to the mission on which they were bound, that hoodwinking of the Cossack patrols was a successful joke—nothing more. And before each of the twenty immature minds the mission stood clear, the wooing of the peasantry to the Polish national cause. Although their forefathers had been subjects of the dissolved Polish Kingdom, they were not Poles by blood, these hoped-for recruits—else would the wooing have been superfluous—but neither were they full-blood Russians. It was unquestionable that the Ruthenian peasantry had suffered somewhat under the Polish sway; but it might be a question whether they were not suffering more under Russian thralldom. This, at any rate, was what these twenty

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youngsters had undertaken to prove to them. Up to this moment the Ukraine steppes had been passive; the Ruthenians having shown no marked desire to help in snatching the Polish chestnuts out of the fire. This could only be because the matter had not been presented to them in the proper light. Therefore it was to be thus presented without further delay. The "Golden News" of the deliverance from the Muscovite yoke must be carried to the steppes.

A friendly reception was scarcely to be expected; for police and priests had been at work poisoning the peasant mind against the influence of both Poles and aristocrats—and these youths were both. Should they by some miracle elude the troops patrolling the plain—and whither should they flee to with not so much as a mile of forest to hide in, or a hillock behind which to crouch?—there was every prospect of being attacked by the hostile peasants. Some dim conception of their own folly had indeed dawned in the more rational of these minds, since it was they themselves who had given to themselves the jocular name of "The Lost Ones". But, for all that, the twenty hearts beat high with a hope which refused to die. With three guns and fifteen revolvers between them, with a flag bearing the Polish eagle, carefully furled beneath the straw, and a dozen or so copies of the "Golden News" to distribute, they saw no reason why they should not succeed in calling the country to arms.

And, after all, they were only doing in detail what the country at large was doing on another scale. The expedition of the "Lost Ones" was not, in truth, very much

“The Lost Ones”

more lost than was the naked man when he attacked the armed giant, with no other weapons than enthusiasm and bravery.

Well beyond the limits of the town a halt was called for the first council of war, for such had been the hurry of the departure—this dark night being too favourable to be wasted—that no leader had yet been chosen. At the suggestion most of the heads turned towards the two horsemen just then alighting.

“I vote for Juzio Melinski!” said the youngest of the party, but not the most diffident—the same whose harmless gaze had deceived the Cossack patrol—known among his friends by the innocent name of “Bread and Butter,” because of a leaning towards that article of food.

“And I for Stas Swigello. He has seen blood, has that one!”

A lantern had meanwhile been produced from somewhere, and one of the youthful adventurers, crouching under a cart, had managed to get a match to strike. As the foremost of the horsemen, with the bridle over his arm reached the circle of light, it flashed upon a face as streaming with wet as though he had been lately weeping. But he was not weeping, he was laughing, and could scarcely have laughed more gaily had this been a pleasure excursion.

And yet it was quite true that he had seen blood, at various times and far more plentifully than he had seen it on that memorable 12th of August. Even the blood of his father. For when the summons had come no chains would have been strong enough to keep the old count behind walls.

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"I die in bed?" he had stormed, in answer to his son's attempted protest. "I die in bed when there are balls flying? Unless you want me to doubt whether you are indeed my son, never let me hear such craven counsel again! All my life I have waited for this; and now that it has come, you would have me sit behind the stove, because, forsooth, my beard is white! Whom do you take me for? Your grandmother? Not get back again? If we beat them, such a detail as that cannot matter; and if we don't beat them, then—then do you suppose I shall want to get back?"

He had had his will. He had died—not in bed, but on the field, and just in time for final happiness—with in his ears the cries of triumph of one of those early and successful engagements waged in the forests of Lithuania, whose impenetrable thickets and treacherous swamps played the part of man-traps to all but the natives. And from his stiffening lips came the ecstatic words:—

"It has come—it has come at last!"

Over such an end as this it was impossible to grieve for long, even had Stas had leisure for private griefs, which he had not. The "Cause" required both his hands and his thoughts, and got them too, whole-heartedly and with an ever-growing hope. Clearly the hour of Poland's triumph had struck, and Lithuania it was that was heading the march to victory. So certain was he of this latter point that when, through hidden channels, there reached him a despairing cry from a college friend in the Ukraine where the peasants refused to stir, Stas, scenting a greater need, considered himself justified in flying to the more

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exposed position. Lithuania, where all were of one mind, could do very well without him, it seemed, but the Ukraine evidently could not. “They will not move!” Juzio Melinski lamented. It was to help to move them that Stas Swigello had eluded dozens of Cossack patrols and told ingenious lies to countless Russian officials in his passage from north to south of the whole disturbed country.

At Kiew he had been received with all the honours of a victor. These youths till now fretting in inaction, looked upon him with a kind of awe. To have been under fire, and to have undoubtedly accounted for several Russians was, in their eyes, equivalent to wisdom—a slight confounding of reasoning and of fighting powers, excusable in the “teens” and thereabouts. The present raid had been his suggestion, clamorously agreed to. His seniority alone gave weight to his words, since he had twenty-two whole years to his credit, and a chin already rough with the beginnings of an unkempt beard. That rough chin it was, whose very unkemptness spoke of the hurry and pressure of the battle-field, where swords are too busy to let razors have fair play, which formed the chief object of envious admiration; and caused Mizi Chileski, hitherto the “hairiest” of the party, to pull rather sorrowfully at his sprouting moustache, by way of making the most of it.

Stas having decided that no time was to be lost, everyone had become of the same opinion. Hence the necessity of this halt for further consultation.

“I vote for Juzio,” repeated the Benjamin of the party

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with dogged loyalty to the personage who, before the new hero's advent, had played the leading rôle.

"Hold your tongue, 'Bread and Butter,'" said Juzio himself severely. "Nobody is asking your opinion. Of course Stas must lead us. Is he not leading us already? He has not run a thousand dangers in crossing Poland merely to be ordered about by us. That is clear, surely?"

It was the second horseman who spoke—a youth with the luminous brown eyes and sensitive lips of the idealist, set in a pale and perfect oval; one of those faces which seem almost to demand a halo around it, and in the hand a lily or a crucifix, such as becomes the youth of a Stanislas Kostka or of an Aloysius of Gonzaga. He it was whose cry of distress had called Stas from Lithuania.

"That's quite clear," agreed another, carefully adjusting his very first *pince-nez*, which still gave him considerable anxiety by its reluctance to sit firmly upon his unaccustomed nose.

"If we're all agreed, then that is settled. Musio, Tusio, Mizi—" they most of them had names worthy of pet cats and dogs—"what do you say? Let every one who agrees to Stas Swigello as a leader hold up his right hand!"

All the right hands were raised, even that of "Bread and Butter," carried away by the will of the majority.

Stas inclined himself with a touch of stateliness, which had nothing so trivial about it as gratification. He had not really expected any other issue.

"Now for the distribution of arms!" he announced.

Guns and revolvers were already being dug out of the

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straw of the carts. Something like a free fight for their possession ensued, quickly quenched by Stas's authoritative interference. Every one had a fire-arm of some sort, with the exception of “Bread and Butter,” who had to content himself with an old-fashioned dagger, purloined probably from some family armoury, and a youth with a girlish face and an almost girlish giggle which kept recurring with the persistency of nervous excitement, and who found himself put off with a flimsy-looking sword. He giggled a little now as he received it, declaring that it was a toy sword and that he would not know what to do with it; but Stas's word cut short both the protest and the giggle.

“Our first station must be D——,” he decided. “We should make it soon after daylight. Keep the flag handy. And now, forwards, with the grace of heaven!”

Through what remained of the short May night they pressed on under the starless sky. As the immense vault of heaven began by its pallor to detach itself from the immense table of dark earth, Stas peered keenly ahead.

“Not a Cossack within sight, thank God! But goodness, what a place to fight in! Ah, if we had but a handful of Lithuanian forest here, what a dance we could lead the Muscovites! So unclothed a landscape as this seems to me positively indecent.”

At which the lad with the girlish face who was in the cart close by, uttered his irrepressible giggle.

The rain had ceased by this time, and as they splashed up the village street through puddles as large as small

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ponds, doors were opening already, and the men coming out with hoes and spades upon their shoulders.

"Just in time to catch them before they are off to the fields," remarked Stas, and mended the pace.

In another few minutes the carts were drawn up in the centre of the sea of mud which represented the village square and the "Lost Ones," reeking with damp, and thankful to stretch their cramped limbs, nimbly descended. Upon one of the carts, figuring as platform, stood Stas with a sheet of paper in his hand, calling to the people to come and hear the "Golden News," while beside him Juzio Melinski, paler than ever with emotion, unfurled the flag upon which the white Polish eagle spread its wings.

This sight alone would have sufficed to collect a curious crowd. The men with hoes upon their shoulders gaped in a circle, behind them the women peered cautiously, while the children, caught by the brightness of the fluttering rag, came at a run, rubbing the sleep out of their eyes.

It was Stas Swigello's first public speech, but not spoilt by diffidence. His companions, hanging on the glowing words with which he painted the blackness of the Russian oppression and the corresponding brilliancy of the happy future beckoning under Polish rule, could not but congratulate themselves upon their choice of a leader. It did not seem possible that such arguments could be resisted. Eagerly they scanned the listening faces, spying for the responding spark. But in those toil-worn faces small comfort was to be found. The furtive eyes could not be called unfriendly, but they were clearly evasive. Here and there a shaggy head was scratched, here and there a pair

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of shoulders shrugged. For the most they stood passive and somewhat embarrassed, obviously not rightly knowing what to make of the harangue. Some truth in the picture they recognised, but native suspicion requires strong proofs. Besides, their terror of the Muscovite was great—far greater than their confidence in the Pole.

As Stas, holding his breath, looked round the circle with indignant inquiry, the silence fell upon his heart with the chill of cold water. Words of taunting reproach crowded to his lips, but some glimmering of common sense kept them back. It was only for Juzio's ears that he muttered :—

“Ruthenian dogs!”

“We do not ask for your word in this very hour,” he said, with a violent effort at self-control, and unconsciously condescending. “We will leave you the ‘Golden News’ to study and consider, and in a few days we will pass again this way, and find you, I doubt not, gained over to the great ‘Cause’. Till then, live well, my brothers!”

“Live well!” a few voices echoed, while one hesitating hand stretched towards the sheet of paper offered.

“That is better than nothing, I suppose,” said Stas to Juzio, as, followed by the curious eyes of the peasants, the party once more splashed in and out of the immense puddles.

“They have souls of wood!” sighed Juzio, “no, not even wood, for wood can burn.”

“They cannot all be like that,” was the verdict of the majority.

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"They did not attack us, at least," remarked one, "and that is something."

This opinion was generally shared. From want of better things one had to be content with this negative success. As for losing courage, no one even thought of such a thing.

So the "Lost Ones" splashed on.

Daylight had now dispersed the last shadows, but no single bar of sunlight lay upon the vast face of the steppe. Overhead an unbroken vault of grey, to the right and to the left of the wide road stretching from horizon to horizon, miles of coarse grass, tender in its first summer green, and heavy just now with the night's rain.

At one moment several breaths were caught sharply. Ahead a mounted party had come into sight. "The Cossacks!" was the first inevitable thought; and after one wild glance around and the final grasping of the fact that such a thing as cover was not available, every one groped for his weapon.

But the alarm was mercifully brief. Soon the head-coverings alone settled the point. Cossacks do not wear straw hats, nor felt ones either. A group of mounted peasants—on their way to some distant fields, no doubt.

"Get the flag ready!" commanded Stas, as he cleared his throat for the coming harangue.

By the time the parties met, the white eagle was fluttering in the breeze. Even without the imperious gesture of Stas, the sight would have caused the peasants in their astonishment to check their horses.

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“Brothers! You must not proceed without hearing the ‘Golden News,’ which at the peril of our lives we have brought you.”

At the very first words Stas met the shrewd, attentive eyes of a grey-haired peasant among the foremost horsemen. They were such intelligent eyes that he went on talking as to him alone, and therefore with all the warmth of concentrated attention. These were hotter, more fiery words even than those spoken upon the village square; and this time the anxious watchers got something for their pains. Among the elderly faces of the party a dawning emotion was visible, as the eyes, under the wrinkled eyelids and lashes bleached by wind and weather, went from one young face to the other.

“You are a noble young gentleman,” said the shrewd-looking peasant, whom Stas had first noticed; **“but will you graciously permit me a question: Have you got a father?”**

“My father was buried three weeks ago on the battlefield of M——,” said Stas proudly; **“and I ask for nothing better than so good an end as he made.”**

“Yet need it be so soon?” The old man sighed, and then pointed at **“Bread and Butter,”** peering anxiously over the edge of the cart.

“How old is he now? Not older than my Wasyl, I would think.”

“He is old enough to die for his country, if need be!” flashed out Stas, greatly to the relief of **“Bread-and-Butter,”** who had trembled to hear the ignominious fewness of his years proclaimed.

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"You are brave young gentlemen," murmured the peasant.

"It is the justice of our cause which makes us brave. If you doubt it any longer, here you will find it set forth"—and another copy of the "Golden News" was produced. "Your hearts will be with us, I know. Are they not with us already?"

"Our hearts are with you, brothers!" came the answering chorus, and it was not only the shrewd eyes of the first speaker that were moist.

In truth they had not understood much more of the "Golden News" than had the inhabitants of D——; but many of them were fathers, and other things had touched them. It was amidst repeated declarations of brotherhood, and fervent invocations to Providence, touching the safety of the adventurers, that the two parties at length parted.

"I told you they could not all be made of the same stuff," said one youth to another, with spirits bounding up to high-water mark.

It had been a spot of brightness—the single one that was to illuminate their way.

So, with courage renewed, the "Lost Ones" bumped on.

And they had need of their courage. With lightning-like rapidity the news of their presence and of their object flew over the steppe. At every village reached they could divine that their coming had been expected as well as dreaded. The crowds, indeed, were not hard to collect, curiosity doing its part; but no second such moment came as that upon the road. Where thick-skulled indifference did not reign antagonism clearly pierced—that antagonism

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nursed by police and "popes" alike. Many eyes measured them not as deliverers but as would-be oppressors bent upon taking them from the Muscovite yoke only to bend them under a harder one. At times again a hand would be stretched for the "Golden News"; more often the sheet was left to flutter to the mud.

Evening fell upon more than one drooping spirit. Many of these boys had not slept for two nights, and none of them had eaten their fill since yesterday; for, beside patriotic considerations, the provisioning arrangements had somewhat suffered. It did not seem that flesh and blood could go very much farther, unrefreshed. And yet the assumption proved false. For when, with the coming of night—two of the horses having advertised themselves as lame, and one of the carts shedding a wheel in crossing a ditch—it became clear that the bulk of the party would henceforth be reduced to their legs as means of locomotion, no voice was raised to suggest the abandonment of their ungracious task. In the distance village lights twinkled, not too far off to be reached on foot.

So the "Lost Ones" trudged on.

Had they identified those twinkling lights it is possible that, despite their acute fatigue, they would have given the place a wide berth; for S—— had a bad name in the country, inhabited as it was by the descendants of those bandits who in former centuries had made the crossing of the steppe infinitely more perilous than the crossing of the sea. The best that could be said of it now was that it was a nest of thieves.

Through the deep mud the exhausted party dragged

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its feet towards the point which to their ignorance appeared to promise repose, if nothing else. Again the night was moonless and starless, although the rain which had hung all day above their heads mercifully held off.

Barely was the first hut reached than it became clear that here too their coming had been looked for. A crowd appeared to grow out of the ground. Wilder faces, fiercer eyes than any they had seen to-day revealed themselves in the uncertain light. Almost without any doing of their own they found themselves swept up the street by the pressure of the people, and on to the open space before the church, from whose wooden belfry a clamour of bells had abruptly burst forth. The sound of those clanging bells was in itself fraught with threats ; but more ominous was the threat in the fragments of speech caught up :—

“ That will put spurs into the Cossack horses ! ”

“ They can’t be far off, any way.”

As the sense of the words was gathered the drooping nerves of the youths stiffened once more. So the Muscovites were close ! The real struggle was coming. Let it come ! Anything better than this long drawn-out purgatory.

Fiercely they pushed their way through the crowd, right up to the wooden planking surrounding the church ; and here, with their backs against the boards and with their fire-arms in their hands, they prepared to receive their assailants.

A short respite ensued. The inhabitants, taken aback by the resolute movement, had fallen back a little, doubtfully viewing those levelled revolvers. There was no dearth

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of axes and knives among them, but police regulations discouraged the possession of fire-arms.

At sight of the advantage gained, that hope which dies so hard in hearts of twenty raised its head anew. In the space which might elapse before the appearance of the Cossacks, would it be impossible to open the eyes of these blind and misled people? Stas Swigello did not think so, at any rate, as, dismounted now and beside the others, he raised his now somewhat hoarse voice, in order, right through the clamour of the bells once more to proclaim the “Golden News”. Shadows veiled the faces of the hearers, but how doubt of the effect produced when presently, after some whispered consultation, a couple of the village elders, hat in hand, stepped from out of the crowd, inclining themselves profoundly before the speaker.

They wished the strangers no harm, they protested, they honoured their motives and believed their words; but, alas, the Muscovites were the masters and, in fear of their own lives, they dared not follow the Polish standard. They would not hurt the young gentlemen, but their own safety made it necessary to disarm them and confine them until the arrival of the Russian troops.

At the words the eyes of the “Lost Ones” sought each other in a desperate inquiry. Was this really the end?

“It need not be,” decided Stas, locking his teeth. “They have no fire-arms—that is evident. There is nothing to prevent us fighting our way through them, and regaining the open. Not much of a chance, perhaps, but our only one.”

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He had levelled his revolver when a hand fell upon his arm.

"Never!" Juzio was saying, with brown eyes fanatically alight. "Shed the blood of the people we have come to deliver? Stas, oh, surely you forget! Far better all die together."

There was that in his words and look which caused Stas, shamefacedly, to lower his weapon.

"Better all die together!"

The word ran round the circle, for in moments of supreme nervous tension even far lesser things than the spirit of self-sacrifice become infectious.

"Let it be!" said Stas, half sullenly, and casting his revolver at the feet of the foremost negotiator, whose shaggy yet venerable white beard could not but inspire confidence.

In a minute all the surrendered weapons lay in a heap; and as the crowd opened silently, the youths followed their white-haired guide to a hut close by.

If one or two secret sighs of relief were breathed as the threshold was crossed, this meant only that human nature has got its limits. After the strain and hardships of the day the little white-washed room with the bench running round it and the lamp flickering before the holy picture in the corner seemed almost like a haven of rest.

It was to be something quite different for most of them; for between these white-washed walls it was that the last act of this tragi-comedy played itself out.

Scarcely had they all crawled into the narrow space than the cry arose:—

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“Strike them dead, every one!”

And before the horrified victims had realised what it meant, their murderers were upon them.

That which followed will not bear detailing. On one side axes and knives, on the other defenceless boys, caught as surely in a trap as ever was fox or rabbit. The word “massacre” is too mild for the occasion; nothing but “butchery” will serve.

Not that they died meekly. At sight of the men pouring in by the door each one of these lads had become transformed into that appalling thing—a beast at bay. To sell life as dearly as possible had been the instinctive thought, springing to each maddened brain. In default of revolvers and swords stools might do, at a pinch, and even benches. Mizi Chileski, he of the sprouting moustache, had performed wonders with one of these, prolonging his own life and that of several comrades by at least five minutes; while Stas Swigello with one of his lightning-like movements, had actually possessed himself of one of the assailing axes, and by its aid, for five further minutes had kept a clear space around him. Far more congenial work for a Swigello this, than that laying down of arms to which he had so reluctantly submitted. To him, personally, the sight of the axes had been almost a relief, letting loose again, as it did, those fierce, fighting instincts which lived behind his smiling exterior.

But of the end little could be altered. The scene upon which the May sun rose at last was one of silent, blood-stained horror. The white-washed walls were no longer white, but bright with some of the noblest if not the

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wisest blood of Poland. Upon the earth floor a litter of what at first sight appeared to be nothing but corpses—half-naked many of them, with clothes torn off in the struggle, ~~and helpless hands still~~ clenched. Doubled over a bench, his giggle quenched for ever, hung the boy with the girl's face, across his body that of the short-sighted youth, whose *pince-nez* had been stamped to powder very early in the evening. Upon the big brick oven crouched "Bread and Butter" with a split skull. In a pool of blood lay Juzio Melinski with the face of a martyr in the arena, his beautiful brown eyes upturned to the low ceiling; beside him Stas Swigello upon his face, the axe still clutched between his fingers.

Even the Cossacks, when they came, crossed themselves shuddering, and their commander, as he went from body to body seeking for some sign of life, shook his head and muttered beneath his breath. A few hearts were yet beating, but most were still for ever. Hard by the last hut of S—— a big earth-mound shows the resting-place of these, and for generations to come will stand as the monument of one of the most hideous crimes ever perpetrated.

Within the walls of the nearest hospital those of the victims that still breathed—among them Stas Swigello—awoke again to life—no, not to life, but to—Siberia.

PART II

LUBYNIA

CHAPTER I

"IN RIGHTFUL POSSESSION"

"WHAT day of the month is this, Timosh?"

Timosh, leaning upon his punting-pole, went through some process with his stumpy fingers before replying:—

"The 30th, gracious lady."

"The 30th? That is August 12th of the Polish calendar. Why, this is the anniversary of the procession! I imagine that they must have had just such weather as this. Was it not exactly a day like this, Timosh? Tell me again all you remember!"

"I have told the gracious lady so often," grumbled Timosh, again applying himself to his pole.

"And you will tell me often again. I shall never be tired of listening."

"As if one could remember everything at the end of forty-three years!"

"All the more need of questioning you while your memory still holds good."

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There were only two people in the broad, flat boat: a quite young girl and a very old man—he fantastically, almost terrifyingly ugly, with a mop of wiry grey hair surmounting a squat, slit-eyed face, and she quite as charming to look upon as he was repulsive. Hers was a face full of beauties, which is not quite the same thing as a merely beautiful face, and infinitely more stimulating to the imagination. The lustrous black hair was in itself a beauty; so were the straight brows of exactly that same silky blackness, and the dark, thick-lashed eyes, of that traditional almond shape which smacks of the East, and the wide, white forehead, and the subdued richness of complexion in which each wave of colour was of the purest carmine, and of which the shadows merged upon amber. The nose inclined to shortness, the mouth to largeness—not a rosebud mouth, by any means, but richly redeemed by the curve of the crimson lips and the perfection of the white teeth. Altogether a face which, made for breadth rather than for length—a fact which, despite the antipodes of hideosity and of beauty, created a sort of link between her and her grotesque boatman. Both the old and the young, the man and the woman's face had originally been constructed upon the same racial plan. In both, the Tartar as well as the Mongol had left their mark, with widely different results.

Despite the lingering lines of childhood it was likewise a serious face, this of the girl who, her slight form thrown back against the support of the seat, was letting her right hand trail lazily in the water among the reeds.

Just at present the world seemed to consist of reeds

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alone. So completely had they overrun the lake that it was only by creeping through the narrow passage which wound, snake-like, among the stalks, that progress could be made at all. And it required Timosh's experience even to find the passage. On each side a wall of giant reeds, their tips swaying high above the boatman's head ; a very wilderness of them, bending aside before the advancing boat, closing again behind it ; waving and rustling and leaning across to whisper in the intruder's ears, trailing in the water, murmuring in the breeze, swaying with each puff of air, shaken down to their roots by the touch of a passing fish or the leap of a frog. To those who sat in that low boat nothing really existed but the sky and the reeds. They screened out everything else, even the trees—being so high and so near. They deafened to all sounds save their own sad murmur. A world of reeds—of bending, murmuring green reeds ; and with a whole world of life among them, dead though you might think them at first. The frogs gape from between their stalks, the dragon-fly sways to and fro upon their tips, the water-spider shoots from one clump to the other ; green worms, of a crystal transparency, cling to their leaves in a living immobility. Decayed reeds, of a ghastly yellow or livid purple, drift helpless with the slow current, or lie drowned beneath the water—reed corpses—slowly rotting in the depths. The last of the white water-lilies gleam between their leathery leaves, dancing with every wavelet, sparkling with every sunbeam which touches their trembling diamonds. Clumps of duck-weed cling, thick and stagnant, around fallen stalks, dividing

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and uniting, separating only to form again, externally weaving new patterns, with a kind of sleepy caprice.

Of all the spots in the vast park Katya loved this one best. This reed-world held for her a seclusion and a mystery which set her imagination aflame, responding to something within her. It was here in especial that she loved to listen to tales of bygone days.

"Tell me more about the procession!" she commanded, still dabbling in the water. "Did you—did you use your sword too, Timosh."

"No—more's the pity! I was too far off—in the second rank unhappily."

"And were you one of those who took off his cap when the hymn was sung?" questioned Katya, seemingly not much disturbed by the savage utterance just heard.

Timosh grumbled something into his ragged beard, giving another vicious dig with his pole.

"Never mind, I know you were. And tell me again, you saw the girls in the white wreaths quite plainly, didn't you?"

"I saw them plainly enough."

"And they were not at all afraid of the swords?"

"I don't know whether they were afraid or not, but they didn't show it, any way," grudgingly admitted Timosh.

"I wonder whether I could have done that?" mused Katya, gazing down into the depths of the water.

Then after a moment :—

"Yes, I believe I could, if I cared enough for something, or somebody—it wouldn't matter which. But

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Andrej Mikolajow—my grandfather—he did not actually use his sword, did he?”

The boatman bared a set of formidable-looking though dusky teeth in a joyous grin.

“Did he not! He would have used ten swords if he had them. Ah, Andrej Mikolajow was always one for cutting in straight. Such a temper as he was in when we were sent back to barracks! Holy Saints! we had to suffer for it! But he made up for it later on, when the real time came. Once we had hunted them out of the forest it was not many that we let slip through our fingers. Oh, it was hard work that our horses had then; but when Andrej Mikolajow was leading, you would say that they grew wings. Never shall I forget the day when we cut off the last of the flying companies. They would not surrender—the Polish pigs!—and I believe Andrej Mikolajow was glad that they would not. He always preferred making a clean job of a thing when he was about it. Ah, that was a glorious day indeed!”

Katya shuddered a little as she jerked her hand out of the tepid water.

“It was that day which earned for your gracious grandfather the reward which he got. If it had not been for that day, gracious lady, who knows whether you would not be working for your bread, instead of sitting here upon your own soil the mistress of Lubynia.”

Katya, with her head thrown back against the seat, and her eyes upon what she could see of the August sky between the reeds, did not at once reply.

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"I wonder whether any of the name are still alive?" she remarked at last, after a silence which had been filled only with the rustling of reeds, cut here and there by a tiny splash.

"Of the Swigello name? How should they be alive, seeing that the old count had no more than one son, and he one of those young fools who tried to raise the Ukraine and got knocked on the head in consequence—serve them right, for a pack of impertinent boys!"

"They were not all killed; some of them recovered and were sent to Siberia."

"Maybe," said Timosh, with an obvious want of interest in the subject.

"And the young Count Swigello was one of these. I found that out yesterday from the *stanowoi* (police commissioner) Klobinski. He is quite useful for finding out things; which makes me tolerate him—sometimes. And he has found out also that Count Stanislas came back from Siberia, nearly thirty years ago—amnestied or something—and that he went to live in Austria. But more than this he could not find out. He has no connection with Austria."

Timosh was gazing at his mistress with undisguised astonishment, not unmixed with disapproval.

"For what reason does the gracious lady trouble herself about such affairs? What is it to us whether a Swigello still lives or not? Is the gracious lady afraid of his coming to claim his estate? Let him try! Our Little Father will very soon show him the door. Was it not from the Little Father's hand that Andrej Mikolajow re-

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ceived the estate? And are you not therefore in rightful possession—you, his lawful granddaughter?”

“I suppose I am,” said Katya, still exploring the blue of the sky. “No, I am not afraid of being turned out of Lubynia. But that need not prevent me feeling curious about the Swigellos. The Count Stanislas himself—supposing he is still alive—would not be much over sixty now. I wonder whether he ever thinks of Lubynia? Of course he must; it is too beautiful to forget. Even I—if I had to leave it—could not forget it; and to me it is not quite the same thing—not the home of my forefathers. Home-sickness must hurt a good deal, I think. Yes, if he is still alive, I am sorry for him.”

“Sorry for an impious rebel who dared to fight against our Little Father?” spluttered Timosh, fairly turning upon his mistress, his small eyes burning in his head. “The gracious lady forgets what she is saying. Not even his name should be spoken without a curse.”

“But Timosh, they were fighting for their country, for their nation; you never will understand that. It is not as though they were Russians.”

“Traitors! Traitors!” croaked Timosh, digging away fiercely at his pole; “just as black traitors as those little Japanese devils whom our good Cossacks are riding after just now.”

“Traitors to whom? Only to a government of strangers.”

“Traitors to the Little Father,” said Timosh, crossing himself. “How can such as they hope for salvation?”

“But the Czar is not *their* Little Father,” urged Katya,

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with a half-vexed laugh, for the argument was of ancient date, "just as little as he is the Father of the Japanese. They were only doing what you yourself would have done in their place. Say, what would you do, Timosh, if the German Kaiser came and took away the land now?"

"I should put a sword through him the first chance I had," answered Timosh promptly.

"Well, then, you would be acting the same as the Poles acted in '63."

"No, I would not; for they were fighting against the Little Father—the Polish pigs! and I should be fighting for him."

"Oh, you are hopeless, Timosh!—There is the landing place! Take me back to it. It is too hot for an argument to-day."

As Katya slowly followed one of the paths which threaded an untended and picturesque wilderness of hazel and birch, of lilac run wild and of invading bramble, her abstracted gaze made it clear that her thoughts were far away; started, maybe, upon the track of speculations which yesterday's information had awakened and the recent talk stimulated. If she found her way back to the house it was only because she could equally well have found it in her sleep. Not until the edge of the wooded path was reached and she about to step out into the last of the sunshine did a sight, so unusual as automatically to arrest her steps, bring her abruptly back to reality.

The sun was setting in splendour; and as always at this hour and in this weather was transforming the stately, white mansion into a glorified edition of itself. The

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pillars of the terrace seemed, beneath this flood of light, to have grown to twice their size, and a passing touch of gold had fallen upon the huge coat of arms above the entrance, on which the rampant bear and the coiled snake stood out as clearly as they had done on another 12th of August. Across a stretch of rough but luxurious grass the shadows of giant lime-trees were stretching to lay their heads at the feet of the lordly mansion—like humble petitioners—bowing to the dust.

All this Katya had seen more times than she could count, though she never tired of seeing it. It was not this familiar sight which had checked her steps, but the more unexpected one of a stranger standing immovable beneath one of the lime-trees, his face turned from her and towards the house. Not only were strangers extremely rare within these gates, but this man's attitude was, in itself, enigmatical. What was he doing here? Why was he taking such careful stock of the house? A burglar meditating a nocturnal attempt? A detective spying upon the inmates? Considering that the prying tourist had not yet been invented in this part of the world these alternatives seemed all there was to go by.

Katya's first impulse had been that of flight; for a life of extreme seclusion had fostered, if not shyness, yet a certain dread of new faces. But curiosity intervened. On tiptoe she retired a few steps to where a peephole among the branches of a giant lilac bush afforded a good view of the unexplained visitor. She judged him to be a young man from his figure and from the outline of his profile, which, however, included a short, thickly grown

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beard. Ah! there he was turning his head very slowly from side to side, as though striving to take in the entire scene, and thus giving her the opportunity of a better look. Yes, he was young, though not quite so young as she had first supposed—somewhere about thirty seemed the probable figure—with a short, square-cut beard, brown, except where the light caught it on the edges and burnished it with gold. He had pushed his straw hat back upon his head, and Katya could distinctly see the sharp line of demarcation between the white brow above and the deep sunburn of the rest of the face. His clothes and boots were thick with dust, like those of a person who has walked far upon the high-road; but they were better clothes and boots than those which a burglar would be expected to wear.

Now Katya caught her breath, for he had faced full towards her, and she asked herself, alarmed, whether it were indeed possible that he should not see her. Through the peephole among the leaves his eyes for a moment seemed to meet hers—steady, grey-blue eyes beneath somewhat heavy brows. Then they passed on unconcerned. So immovable had she stood that even the gleam of her white summer gown would confound itself for him with the gleam of the birch stems in the thicket. Katya drew a deep breath, knowing herself undiscovered; but the breath still trembled a little from the effects of the recent alarm.

She began to wonder what he would do next. Would he approach the house? But while she was wondering, with a quick gesture he pulled his straw hat down upon

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his forehead, and strode away down the avenue and towards the gate.

Thoughtfully Katya regained the house. The theory of the burglar had been dropped already: that of the detective remained. It seemed the only available explanation. True, she was not conscious of having brought herself within reach of the law; but that need be no objection, as she well knew. And, as for that, an official visit to her library might not necessarily end pleasantly for herself. She could not expect the government censor to approve of *all* the books she had lately been reading. Perhaps it might be wiser to hide them away?

Katya reflected a moment and then shook her head. Somehow the detective theory would not fit any better than did the burglar theory.

“He did not look like that sort of person,” she said to herself; though when she tried to follow up this thought she could lay her hands upon no tangible ground for not thinking him that sort of person.

“Shall I tell Malania Petrowna?” was her next thought.

Again Katya reflected, and again shook her head. To tell Malania Petrowna would be to destroy her own peace; for Malania was equally terrified of burglars and of detectives. Perhaps she might speak to Timosh—but no, she thought she would not. She would keep her discovery to herself, as she had, ere this, done with other discoveries. Katya had always been one for holding her tongue.

CHAPTER II

ELOQUENT WALLS

KATARYNA MALKOFF was that not quite uncommon, but always rather perilous thing to be—an orphan heiress. She was also, according to the opinion of her Polish-born neighbours, a usurper, though a personally guiltless one. That confiscation of the Lubynia estates—unavoidable outcome of the events of '63—which had marked the downfall of the Swigello fortunes, had likewise been the uprise of those of Malkoff.

When rewards came to be distributed it was the distinction earned by his ferocious zeal in the pursuit of fugitive rebels which had caused so fat a morsel as Lubynia to fall to Andrej Malkoff's share.

Compensation enough, truly, for that bitter moment at which, on a certain 12th August, he had been ordered back to barracks.

Katya only vaguely remembered her grandfather as a fierce old personage with a grey moustache so stiff that it pricked her skin when he kissed her—which was not often—and who, on the smallest provocation, would flog his servants personally with a Cossack *nagaika*, and sometimes looked as though—size and maturity notwithstanding—he would like to include his only son Lukasz, who was Katya's father, in the castigation.

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It is to be presumed that the large passive Lukasz Malkoff was fond of his only child, but it is equally certain that her existence somewhat embarrassed him. In him the plebeian stock of the family—for the Cossack captain had risen from the ranks—had taken its revenge upon the class disloyalty committed by Andrej when, after his accession to fortune, he had led to the altar a noble-born bride. It was as though the original race had been bent upon producing one more peasant before yielding to the higher strain to which already Katya belonged. The recognition of this it was which had created the moral distance between father and daughter. In her presence, youthful though it was, he always felt ill at ease. Her distinction of carriage rebuked his clumsiness. He handled her—or refrained from handling her—just as fearfully as he did the costly china vases in the big drawing-room which he lived in constant terror of knocking over. The Lubynia state-rooms were far less congenial to him than other portions of the Lubynia estate—foremost the vast forest track whose sentinel outposts—in the shape of pine and birches—stood down to the edge of the reed-grown lake at the end of the park, and in whose thickets wild-cat and lynx abounded and bear and wolf still lingered. For that paradise of sportsmen alone it was worth while being the possessor of Lubynia. It may be apprehended that to the original Malkoff strain a certain amount of bloodshed was constitutionally necessary; that Lukasz should confine himself to the shedding of that of four-footed creatures could, considering his size

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and strength, only be considered as a merciful dispensation of Providence.

As for Katya, motherless though she was, his conscience was quite at rest. Was she not in the charge of Malania Petrowna, an unimpeachable person of a perfectly safe age, who, armed with first-class testimonials, had crossed the Lubynia threshold somewhere about the time of Katya's eighth birthday, and, except to take a minimum quantity of fresh air, had never again recrossed it. So little did Lukasz Malkoff know of little girls—or of big ones either—that he honestly believed this excellent person to be a suitable companion for his growing daughter. Others, at any rate, were not available, since the inimical neighbourhood had unavoidably tabooed the “Rusniaks”.

But little girls have ways of their own. Deprived of legitimate companions, Katya, when her skirts were still very short, had supplied herself with a set of illegitimate ones, or which would certainly have been considered so by her parent. For, strangely enough, all the things which peopled her solitude bore the name of Swigello.

That the name itself should loom large before her was scarcely to be wondered at. That rampant bear, and the snake coiled around the handle of the battle-axe throning above the entrance, had been the first things to engage her childish fancy. For it was not there alone that they figured; they were to be encountered in every form—engraved on the table silver, carved upon the backs of the dining-room chairs, embroidered in costly silks upon cushions. Why were there so many bears

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and so many snakes in the house? She had questioned her nurse, only to be told with a sniff, that those were the arms of the bad "Pollacks," from whom the good Czar had taken away the land because they did not deserve it. Why had they not deserved it? Because they had dared to fight against the Little Father.

And for a time the answer had sufficed.

Nor was it the bear and the snake alone which sang to her of the past; evidences of her unfortunate predecessors were there on all sides, and in smaller and more insinuating things than the suits of armour which stood so proudly in the big entrance hall, or the coats of mail which hung upon its walls. For the Malkoffs had not only stepped into the Swigello shoes, but they had stepped into them quite warm, so to say, with the plans they had been forming, the books they had been reading, even the clothes they had been wearing, all fallen untouched into their successors' hands. For Katya, personally, this entailed a host of exciting discoveries; as, for instance, of a big wardrobe full of old gowns in the fashion of fifty years back—evidently the mine from which were drawn those gorgeous pieces of brocade and satin, which her nurse had a way of producing whenever she wanted a new frock for her doll. In the same closet—which had served as *garde-robe* to Stas Swigello's mother—there was likewise a drawer full of the most extraordinary sun-bonnets belonging to the same period; and again another stuffed with cast-off crinolines which frightened her by springing up in her face, for a moment making her think that that ubiquitous armorial snake had at last come to

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life. The nurse's explanations of these various phenomena was the usual one—"The Pollacks".

But the chief discovery had been the portraits. These family relics, recognised as meaningless under the new circumstances, had early been replaced by what the Moscow picture-dealer designated as "a distinguished collection of art products," and in which moonlight sledge-drives, with the usual complement of wolves and lovely young mothers bending over cradles, largely figured. Katya herself had ignored the existence of the family portraits until the day, when in consequence of some nursery misdemeanour—it was something connected with unlawfully acquired jam—her nurse had locked her into the garret. This had been meant as an aggravation of the usual "corner," but had completely missed its effect. For although the garret was very badly lighted, Katya's nerves were quite as robust as those of any of her paternal ancestors; and, besides, the sun was shining outside, and one horizontal ray, sliding in by a dormer window, alighted exactly upon a peculiarly perfect spider's-web, turning it into a wheel of silver, whose brilliancy, enhanced by the blackness of the shadows around, clearly belonged to something in a fairy-tale. In the first moment Katya saw nothing but the glorified spider-web; but when she had spent several minutes gazing at it expectantly, and the fat old spider occupying the centre seemed to be taking a dreadfully long time about turning into either a witch or a fairy, she began to look about her for other means of whiling away the penitential time. These were not lacking; for here it was that a whole lot of lumber of former days had been

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thrust away. When she had revelled for a time among broken candelabras and moth-eaten carpets Katya made her great discovery; that of the portraits. They lay in piles upon the dusty floor, or leaned in rows against the rough-hewn beams of the garret. When Katya, having dragged one of them to the light and wiped it with her pinafore, disclosed a beautiful gentleman dressed in satin and velvet, she felt that she could not rest until she had inspected them all. Fortunately they were easy to handle, even for six year old arms—the frames having been used for the “distinguished collection” downstairs—and during the hour which her supposed punishment lasted she made some thrilling acquaintances: of men in the Polish *Kontusz* or the Lithuanian *csamora*—for the Swigellos, though settled on the southern bank of the Niemen, were of Lithuanian origin—and generally with their hands upon their sword-hilts; and of women in stiff bodices and wonderfully piled-up hair, some of them so dazzling to look upon that they almost compensated Katya for the fairies who had refused to appear.

But before she had turned over one quarter of the canvases the nurse's step had sounded upon the stairs, and Katya, acting upon some lightning-like intuition, darted across the garret and adopted an attitude of becoming compunction at a decent distance from her new treasures; to look as though she were enjoying her punishment would be to preclude its repetition in this form, and already she had resolved that it should be thus repeated.

The weeks that followed were marked by what the nurse herself could only explain on the supposition of

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diabolical possession. Never had her charge been either so obstreperous or so destructive. The garret had to be resorted to more and more frequently, and even the rod—the latter being stoically borne for the sake of the former. A Russian nurse is not squeamish when once she has a cane in her hand; therefore it was usually in tears that Katya entered the garret; but they never failed to dry before the door was well locked, and the recollection was never bitter enough to make her shrink from a repetition of the painful process which she had come to regard as the passport to her own especial fairy-land.

For that is what the garret had rapidly become to her. On each of these occasions the first hasty acquaintance with defunct Swigellos had made a further stride. Soon she felt almost familiar with these haughty, keen-eyed men whose delicately pointed beards made her think of silver or golden daggers, for the *blonde* Lithuanian strain persisted—and with the wasp-waisted ladies half-throttled in pearls and with impossible flowers held between their taper fingers. With some of them she grew more intimate than with any living person she had ever known. Many had their names written at the back of the canvas; but the alphabet was still a sealed mystery to Katya, and it was quite easy to make up names for them, and naturally also stories. There was one young woman, for instance, whose pale golden hair and startled blue eyes quite plainly pointed her out as an enchanted princess very recently delivered from the power of some frightful old ogre, who probably had lived in the forest beyond the

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lake, and of whom it might with safety be assumed that he had travelled in a chariot drawn by six bears. And there was also a smiling young man in blue and white satin, who could not well help being the prince who had slain the ogre. In time she identified the young man as Stanislas Swigello, the only son of the last possessor, and the lady in question—alas for romance!—as a great-aunt of his, but that was not until the mysteries of the alphabet had been unsealed; and meanwhile they were called Birbantine and Narcissus, which served quite as well.

By that time, despite many illusions destroyed, there were compensations. The era of solitary confinement was over; but if the garret played a smaller rôle in Katya's life, all the greater was that of the library. There were some well-stocked book-shelves there, on which, between Katya's tenth and eleventh year, the long-gathered dust began to be disturbed. Here records of Polish history, and of the special part played by the Swigellos in that history, abounded. Here also she found the names of many of the canvas heroes and heroines, and the fancy stories began to be superseded by real ones. Malania Petrowna had as little part in all this as the nurse had had in the hidden portrait gallery. With that secretive instinct which an apprehended want of sympathy always awakes, Katya kept the one to herself just as she had kept the other. Malania Petrowna disapproved indeed of so much Polish reading, but she disapproved in vain, as she did most things in vain; and she as little as anybody else divined that Katya was living in a world

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apart—the world of the vanished Swigellos, and that what to her father and grandfather had appeared to be a rightfully merited reward, was beginning in her eyes to assume the outline of a great and cruel wrong. Whether it was her imagination or her generosity which had been more loudly appealed to, it would be hard to say, but to her the wrong seemed indisputable. Ah, if any Swigello had survived, then possibly it might have been put right again—in some way or other—since Lubynia would be hers some day to do with what she liked; but the last bearer of the name had been massacred in the Ukraine—such was the common belief—and this circumstance had necessarily given a sort of dreamy formlessness to that sort of half-remorse which she felt towards the family.

And then had come the time when, by her father's death, she became practically her own mistress, but without, still, finding any new field of action, for the estate was admirably managed by a pedantic and conscientious German, and as for philanthropy, anything in that direction would infallibly bring her into conflict with the police. So it was again to the library that in her solitude she turned, though the shelves were well browsed by this time. There had been more than one philosophical work upon them, and this had whetted her appetite for more. The result was a dabbling in the cream of modern ideas—socialism and atheism not excluded—and a period of mental chaos during which she not only was not sure of owing existence to any supreme being, but even as to whether, rightly speaking, she had any existence at all, and was not a mere product of disordered

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fancy. For a time, to Malania's unspeakable distress, she gave up going to church, and then one day began again, for no better reason than that the nightingales in the park had last night sung her to sleep in a fashion which had caused her to dream of paradise. She would have given a good deal to be able to call herself anything as advanced as an atheist, but here the deep-rooted religious instinct of the Slav stood in the way. There was in the house a small chamber with a *prie-dieu* and a crucifix in it, as well as various be-jewelled holy pictures and a good many dusty and mouldy prayer-books, sometimes with Swigello initials pressed or embroidered upon the binding. Apparently the place had been used as an oratory by the women of the late family. This also had been a discovery of Katya's, who, in moments of depression, or simply upon rainy days, had been rather fond of resorting there, not exactly to pray, but to turn over the limp leaves of the books and read the memorial cards of dead Swigellos there preserved, and look out the prayers and litanies which had pencil marks against them, or otherwise bore evidence of having been frequently resorted to. Of course these people had all been heretics, since they obeyed the Pope of Rome instead of the Czar. For long in Katya herself an awestruck dread had mingled with the attraction of the place. It was her wide and miscellaneous reading which had wiped away that dread, and in its place awakened the interest of a new inquiry. In the course of this inquiry she found what with her would always be one of the chief factors—her imagination, once more powerfully appealed to. The faith of the

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Swigellos attracted her not only because it was the faith of the Swigellos, but also because she found in it a pulse of life which she had never been able to discover in the pompous but corpse-like structure of her own church.

Even out of childhood the Swigellos were to her more real than many of the people surrounding her. Her social isolation had persisted. Acutely though she suffered under the shadow of the intangible wall which surrounded her, pride forbade any attempt to break it down. To recognise herself as a usurper in the privacy of her own thoughts was quite a different thing from acknowledging herself as such before the supercilious glances of her Polish neighbours. Not one of them, meeting her purposely cold gaze, could have guessed what was going on in the apparently hardened usurper's mind. To them all she appeared the unjustly fortunate enjoyer of ill-acquired goods.

CHAPTER III

THE POST-CARD

DISCOVERIES have this much in common with misfortunes, that they seldom come singly, being addicted to the group or bunch-like formation.

After having for years been in ignorance of the existence of any living bearer of the Swigello name, Katya had not only ascertained the fact of Stanislas Swigello's escape from death and return from banishment, but within a few short weeks of this discovery was to come into possession of a perfect chronicle of the family.

The way in which this happened was as absolutely unforeseen as such things usually are, and the chief factor in the process happened to be a post-card.

"Matoushka" (Little Mother), said Katya, one morning early in September, as she came into the room where the ancient governess and present chaperon was sitting in a rather deep *négligé* (although this was not her bedroom), "I am driving into Feliksoto for the post. The books I ordered from Warsaw will be here, I think; and it is better if I go myself, in case of difficulties. I start in twenty minutes. Do you come with me?— Hush, Bijou! Stop that noise, I say!"

This last exhortation, was addressed not to Malania Petrowna, but to an elaborately trimmed white poodle,

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who, sitting before the porcelain stove, was uttering short, spasmodic barks, his bright eyes fixed upon an enigmatical dark object, which at first sight resembled nothing so much as a gigantic sort of spider, crouching within a niche in the stove.

"Twenty minutes!" repeated Malania, with a disconsolate uplifting of her yellow hands. "Does my hair look as though it would be ready in twenty minutes?"

She pointed, as she spoke, not to her head, whose polished surface shone with painful distinctness through a thin covering of hair gathered into a tiny button at the back, but to the fabulous spider upon the stove at which Bijou was indignantly barking, and which, upon close inspection, revealed itself as a rather superior wig done up upon leather curlers bristling around it like so many claws. Considering that the ceremony of what may be termed the "roasting" of Malania's wig, for which even in summer the drawing-room stove (favoured because of the convenient niche) had to be kindled for at least an hour daily, and considering that Bijou had lived for six full years since his earliest puppy-hood under this roof, it was rather ridiculous of him to feign unacquaintance with the exact nature of the matutinal spider. Perhaps the daily display of indignant perplexity had by this time become a matter of principle, or maybe it merely played the part of a standing joke.

"It is so difficult to keep in order just now," observed Malania, dispassionately waving a hand towards the niche. "I am sure the weather is going to change; it always grows limp before rain, you know."

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"You've been roasting it too hard," pronounced Katya, having gravely inspected the spider.

Malania clapped her hand to her meagre and imperfectly veiled bosom.

"Ah! do you think so? That comes from Timosh not looking after those girls! I told him that I wanted no more than a shovelful of fire. Really the liberties which that creature takes! And no wonder, too, with the way you condescend to him! And now my hair is probably done for, because of him. Oh, those menials!"

Snatching the fiery spider from the stove, Malania bent over it, softly moaning, as though over some injured pet.

"Keep up your spirits, Matoushka," laughed Katya. "It is a bit far gone; but it's only three weeks now to your birthday, you know! And just the other day I saw some beautiful new sort advertised—with a gauze foundation."

"I know—the 'Featherweights,'" answered Malania, with a touch of coyness, for the subject was one which appealed to her most intimate feelings. "I have heard about them, and they are said to curl so beautifully. Oh, my sugar-sweet lamb, you are too good to me! And when I think that this is the eleventh birthday that I am celebrating at Lubynia!—and the eleventh wig which you are bestowing upon me," she might just as truthfully have added; for the presentation of the annual *coiffure* had assumed the fixity of an institution ever since the day upon which Katya, consulting her nurse as to the most appropriate birthday gift to her governess, had been somewhat scornfully advised to purchase her a new set of curls.

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If the old nurse, who, needless to say, was jealous of the new governess, had been inspired by any sinister motives with regard to a humiliation of the newcomer, she must have been woefully disappointed. For the presentation of the wig, which the counsellor took care should be as public as possible, in no way disconcerted Malania Petrowna, who, at sight of the hairy construction which Katya carried in upon a plate, wreathed in some of the last flowers of the season, absolutely melted into tears of joy. In her guileless heart false shame was as unknown as was deceit. Any one was welcome to know that she wore a wig—on the sole condition of admiring it.

“Have you had your breakfast yet?” asked Katya.

As though in answer to the question the door opened to admit what appeared to be a procession of small, bare-footed girls, entering in single file. The first of these bore a small tea-pot in one hand and a sugar-basin in the other, the second a cup and saucer, the third a plate piled with slices of golden-yellow bread, the fourth a glass pot full of jam!

At this latter sight Malania's rather forlorn-looking brown eyes brightened in her withered face.

“Strawberries?” she inquired of the fourth bearer.

“Strawberries, Matoushka.”

The ancient governess heaved a contented sigh, and ceasing her anxious examination of the roasted wig which remained lying in her lap—and which Bijou, true to his principles, continued to growl at from a distance—she turned to the table at her elbow upon which the four little girls had deposited their burdens, and was soon deep in

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her first helping of strawberry jam. Meanwhile the procession had filed out again, at the door encountering a furious old woman in a scarlet head-cloth, who, catching hold of the handiest ear of the nearest of the girls, demanded to know what she meant by forgetting the tea-pot strainer and what place she expected to go to when she died, if she persisted in this sinful neglect of given orders.

When the tempest had died away along the passage, another old woman looked in to inquire whether she was to bring down the gracious young lady's hat? It was one of the peculiarities of the domestic arrangements at Lubynia that the female portion of the service was represented either by children or by old hags—a circumstance which sprang from the deep-rooted mistrust of the "sex" entertained by Timosh, who, from time immemorial, had swayed the domestic sceptre.

"So long as they're too young to make eyes at the men you can get some work out of them," he was accustomed to say; "and once they're too old for it, likewise; but I've no use for them while they're at the ogling age."

The consequence was that no girls over twelve and no women under sixty were to be found among the Lubynia domestics, an arrangement which unquestionably made for morality, although morality had nothing whatever to do with Timosh's motives, which were founded upon utility alone. The general arrangement was that the little girls all trembled before the old women, who boxed their ears or slapped their faces, while the old women and the little girls in common trembled before Timosh, who impartially boxed the ears of both young and old.

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Presently (Malania being at her second helping of jam) the household dictator himself entered to announce that the carriage was at the door. The circumstance did not disturb Malania even to the point of causing her to draw together her lace-trimmed but not spotless *peignoir* upon her withered neck. To take cognisance of Timosh as a male human being would have been condescending too much to him, and Katya already condescended far too much.

The expected parcel of books had come; and Katya, as she descended the steps of the post-office at Feliksoto, already looked forward to a peaceful afternoon in one of her favourite nooks in the park—perhaps in the boat among the reeds. So absorbed was she in pleased anticipation that at the foot of the steps she almost ran against another person coming up with a post-card in her hand.

“Ah, I beg your pardon!” said the other, in a tone of confused apology.

Looking up Katya saw a face she knew—that of a certain schoolmistress recently appointed to the Polish school, where the language of the country was taught indeed, but strictly under the eye of the paternal Russian Government and shackled with all the usual restrictions. Only a few days ago Katya had made her acquaintance through the medium of one of the small servant-girls who had unexpectedly developed a thirst for learning, and regarding whom she had wanted to make arrangements for private lessons in the evenings.

“I think that was my fault,” said Katya, who was

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always far more gracious to her social inferiors than to her equals.

"You are too amiable to say so," murmured the girl, who, being a Pole, could scarcely help being elaborately polite even to a Russian.

"Let me not detain you. You want to post that card——"

Katya, whose eyes had fallen upon the post-card in the schoolmistress' hand, stopped short abruptly, with a fixed stare, flushing deep red up to the roots of her hair.

The schoolmistress, following the look, likewise coloured, and made a hasty attempt to hide the address upon the card.

"Thank you. My best compliments. You will have a pleasant drive in this charming weather."

With a rapid inclination she passed on.

One quick movement Katya made as though to stop her, then checked herself, and having stood for a moment longer irresolute and evidently perplexed, turned slowly back to the open victoria and took her place upon the further side of the seat.

"Home?" asked the coachman, who wore livery, of a kind, but had donned a straw hat as a convenient protection from the brilliant September sunshine.

"No. Don't start till I tell you."

Five minutes passed, during which Katya, with two bright spots still burning upon her cheeks, sat with her eyes on the post office entrance, and saw both Jews and Christians entering and leaving, some full and some empty-

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handed. At last came the schoolmistress, and now she too was empty-handed !

At sight of the carriage still standing on the same spot she looked inquiringly towards it.

"Panna Rudkowska," said Katya, bending towards her, and speaking with an eagerness which took the schoolmistress completely by surprise ; "I wonder if you would mind keeping me company for a little ? I am quite alone in this big carriage, you see."

"Keep you company?" repeated the girl almost blankly.

"Yes ; you said just now that it is a charming day for a drive. Let me take you a little bit along the road. The morning school is over, is it not ? and I myself am in no hurry."

"I have some tasks to correct for the afternoon school," said Panna Rudkowska, visibly hesitating.

"Only a little bit," persisted Katya. "Please get in ; the horses are eager to be off ;" and she motioned somewhat impatiently to the seat beside her.

The tone was one which brooked contradiction so little that the schoolmistress, after one more undecided glance around her, yielded to its urgency. The struggle between national prejudice and racial vanity had been short but sharp. If it was disagreeable to be patronised by a person whom all right-thinking Poles had virtually boycotted, it was undoubtedly agreeable to be noticed by the mistress of Lubynia. There was a flattered smile upon Panna Rudkowska's lips as she took her place upon the cushions beside Katya.

The Post-Card

"The forest road," said Katya to the driver, "I am not going home yet."

For several minutes they drove in silence, Katya thoughtful, yet still with those spots of excitement on her cheeks, the schoolmistress likewise not perfectly calm, and throwing furtive side-glances at her companion. She was a small, slight creature, with a rather ghastly and almost elderly face which showed marks beneath the eyes and folds about the large and somewhat coarse mouth, which might have stood for signs of dissipation, but which were in reality the outcome of the stuffy telegraph office in which she had first started the struggle for existence, and of the constant strain of a tortured attention. No one had ever called her pretty—it was impossible to be pretty with that mouth, yet a pair of narrow, black eye-brows and small, deep-set, dark eyes contrasting sharply with a wealth of waving bright hair, almost succeeded in making her interesting.

As they cleared the last squalid houses of the town Katya turned towards her so abruptly as to intercept her furtively inquisitive gaze.

"That card you had in your hand," she said, without preface or preamble, "I could not help seeing the address, and the name was Swigello. Tell me, whom do you know of that name?"

Panna Rudkowska moved uneasily upon her seat.

"Only one person," she said hurriedly, keenly aware of the delicacy of such a topic in present company. And immediately she added: "The birches are beginning to turn already."

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But Katya had no eyes for the birches.

"One person?"

"Yes, only one; and I only know her slightly."

"Her?" repeated Katya, with a sort of moral pounce upon the word. "A woman, then?"

"A girl,—quite young; several years younger than I am."

"And do you know whether she belongs to the family of Swigellos who—who used to live at Lubynia?"

"Yes, of course, they are the Swigellos of Lubynia," said the schoolmistress, with just a flavour of national self-consciousness.

"*They?*" repeated Katya, with another of those pounces. "You said you only knew one?"

"I only know one—Kazimira Swigello, but she has two brothers. Them I have never seen."

"What relations to Stanislas Swigello, he who was taken prisoner in Ukraine?"

"His children."

"Then he married after his return from Siberia?"

"Yes, he married; but he is dead now, and so is his wife. There are only the children remaining."

There was a long pause, while the carriage rolled smoothly on.

"Tell me how you made that girl's acquaintance," said Katya then. "Tell me more—all you know about the family."

It was the same urgent and imperative tone as before, and again Panna Rudkowska yielded to it.

"It was in July," she began slowly, as though speaking against her will. "I have an aunt in Galicia—in Austrian

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Poland. I went to spend my holidays with her, having already the promise of my appointment here when the school year opened. She lives in Miezano. It was there I met Kazimira Swigello. She teaches in the school there; and although the holidays had begun, she had not gone away yet, though she went away later. I think she was waiting for her brothers to send her the money. She was to join them at Krakau."

"They are badly off then?" asked Katya, in a newly constrained voice.

The schoolmistress ventured towards her interlocutor another of those looks of curiosity, mingled this time with something like scorn.

"Of course. How should they not be badly off—now?"

"What do the brothers do?"

"The elder one is an engineer at Krakau. The younger one paints pictures. The father also painted pictures—after his return from Siberia, and nothing but Siberian pictures. It was that he lived by; so Kazimira told me when I met her at my aunt's. She lives very retired at Miezano—visits nobody; but my aunt had been kind to her once when she was ill, so she sometimes comes to her. At first I found her rather, well—stand-off; but after she heard that I was coming to this place she began to question me, and told me the history of the family. I promised to send her a picture post-card of Lubynia—which of course she has never seen—that was the card I was posting just now when you met me—"

"What is she like?"

"She would be pretty, I think, if she were not so dread-

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fully thin, poor thing. Very frail and delicate. Not up to her work, evidently. She had to be in the school every morning at eight o'clock, you know, and sometimes to sit up half the night correcting copy-books. I know what that means, and I am much stronger than she is. Any one can see that she was not meant for that sort of thing."

Katya bit her lip hard, staring straight along the road in front of her.

"Can't her brothers help her?"

"They do help her, but they are working for their daily bread themselves."

"What a come-down for Counts Swigello!" said Katya, and this time the scorn—the scorn of the democrat who cares nothing for titles—was on her side.

"Ah! they don't call themselves counts now. They have never used the title since the confiscation of the property; and they don't mean to use it again unless one or the other makes his fortune."

"And even if they make it, it won't be Lubynia," said Katya, or more truly thought it aloud, and then abruptly fell into silence.

Presently, becoming aware of being under observation, she pulled herself together.

"Does it astonish you that I should take an interest in the subject?" she inquired, with a relapse into the cool society tone. "I think it would be more astonishing if I did not. After all, one likes to hear about one's predecessors, does one not? Artem"—this to the miscellaneous attired driver—"I think we may be turning now. Panna Rudkowska will be wanting to get back to the school."

CHAPTER IV

A SERVANT OF THE CZAR'S

THAT afternoon Katya was again in the boat among the reeds, this time minus her boat-man and with only Bijou, who snapped lazily at the last gnats of the season, to keep her company. The books brought by the morning's post were around her, but unopened. Neither was the punting-pole in requisition. Idle it lay beside the idle volumes, while the flat boat drifted slowly and aimlessly with the slow current. Katya, her hands clasped behind her head, watched, unheeding, the patterns made by the reed-tips against the sky.

"So they live—they *are*—not merely in my brain!"—thus ran the obstinate undercurrent of her thoughts.

Within the last few hours more had happened to her own private world than had ever before happened to it, and she was still reeling under the shock of the transformation. Those dream-Swigellos,—creatures that were half-products of her fancy, half-ghosts of the past,—had become real living persons with definite names and ages, breathing the same air that she breathed. This meant almost more than she was able to grasp just at once; and in first line it meant that there were people living who certainly considered that their right to Lubynia was better than her own. These troubled speculations,

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stirred by the knowledge that Stanislas Swigello had survived the Ukraine massacre, now flowed in a definite channel. That vague, impersonal feeling of self-reproach, haunting her even in the face of dead Swigellos, had abruptly become personal, quickened by acute personal details. The delicate girl forced to lead a schoolmistress's hard life, those brothers toiling for themselves and for her, served to give an edge to something that was very like remorse.

"If any of them had been alive, the wrong could be put right—somehow."

How often still in short frocks she had thought that thought! Well, and now they *are* alive. What then?

Confronted by the question of putting that vague aspiration into practice, Katya was invaded by a sense of helplessness. Part from Lubynia? Her whole being recoiled at the thought. And would the sacrifice—even suppose she could muster the heroism—be accepted? Not by the Swigellos she had in her mind's eye—those haughty aristocrats she had learned to know in the family chronicles. Of course she could leave it them in her will—or to their children; but that might mean fifty years more; and supposing, by that time, she had children of her own to provide for, would she consider herself justified in pauperising them for the sake of what most people would consider a mere sentimental fad? Really the matter was not nearly so simple as it had looked from a distance.

Of course—two young men being in question—there would be one way of settling all claims without having to part from Lubynia, and without despoiling her own

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children ; but that was really a little too radical to attract her. It was inevitable that Katya should throw one glance at the matrimonial solution of the difficulty. It was the usual way in which family feuds or troublesome lawsuits were settled in novels. But no more than a glance was thrown that way. To the girl who, since her fourteenth year, had been her own mistress, in deed if not in word, the surrender of her independence would be almost harder than the surrender of Lubynia. She supposed she would marry some day ; but there was no hurry about that. Freedom could only be parted with gladly in exchange for some greater good. Poets and also other people said that such a greater good, outweighing all else, did actually exist. Well, that might yet come. Not that it seemed clear where it could very well come from in this cloister-like seclusion, into which so few male beings ever penetrated.

And then—perhaps because he was one of those rare apparitions of her solitude—Katya began to think again of the mysterious stranger whom she had seen under the lime-tree not a month ago. Ever since that day she had always, before stepping out of the thicket, looked through her peep-hole in the lilac bush, with a sort of half-expectation of again seeing him at his post. But he had never come back again, which, considering the lack of variety in daily existence, was a little disappointing. Neither had she ever—either at Feliksoto or at Kowno, where she did her shopping, and carefully though she looked about her—ever caught sight of that handsome, sunburnt face with the steady, grey-blue eyes and the striking weight of brow. A stranger in these parts, it would seem.

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"I shall make my will," mused Katya, returning to the subject of her present speculations, in case of accidents. And meanwhile I must keep my eye upon them through Panna Ruckowska. I suppose I shall have to cultivate her acquaintance. Not that I feel particularly attracted by her, though as an informant I greatly prefer her to that man Klobinski. I am glad I shall be independent of him now."

To speak of the devil is one of the well-known recipes for conjuring up his presence, or at least some reminder of it.

Just as Katya had formed the above thought Bijou stopped snapping at the gnats and pricked his woolly ears. Simultaneously a peculiar cry cut through the rustling of the reeds.

Recognising the signal call by which Timosh was accustomed to summon her when need arose, Katya reached for the punting-pole.

"What is it?" she inquired, as she crept up to the landing stage.

"It is his honour, the *stanowoi*, come to pay his respects."

Katya made a face.

"You have not brought him here, surely?"

"No, he is in the drawing-room with the Matoushka."

"Can't they be left to amuse each other? You might say you could not find me."

"Then the gracious gentleman will stay on until the gracious lady finds herself," asserted Timosh, with conviction.

"I suppose he will. Here, look after the books,

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Timosh, while I go and see how best to get rid of this ninny."

Timosh looked at his mistress reprovingly as he stooped to the books. www.libtool.com.cn

"Would the Little Father have a ninny to serve him?" he severely asked. "His honour, the commissioner, seems to me to be a worthy young man."

"What, Timosh—a *Pollack*!"

"But one who has ceased being a *Pollack*—one who wears the Czar's uniform. He is not like some of his lost brethren."

Katya went off with a laugh and a shrug of her shoulders. The reasons which commended Klobinski to Timosh were exactly those which made him distasteful to her. Renegates were not after her mind.

In the big drawing-room Katya found her uniformed visitor discoursing vivaciously with her chaperon. From the repeated recurrence of the word "Japanese" she concluded that war news was under discussion, and felt her heart tightening. For the battle of Liao-yang was still recent, and it was in moments like this that, despite the breadth of her views, Katya was apt to discover that she was, after all, a Russian with Russian sympathies.

As her step sounded in the room Klobinski promptly abandoned both Malania Petrowna and the Japanese, to advance towards her, deferentially smiling.

He was a moderately youthful man, whose tall figure made an elegant though narrow silhouette, with a likewise narrow, rather leathery face and sleek, black hair of that oily consistency which shows the marks of the

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comb almost as plainly as a well-cared-for gravel walk does those of the rake. He had a tiny, equally well-brushed black moustache, and small, black eyes a trifle too closely set.

“Ah, Mademoiselle!” he exclaimed, while Bijou, who did not like him, sniffed discontentedly at his heels (the French form of address commended itself to his higher social instincts) —“this time my eyes do not deceive me! Will you believe me when I tell you that once to-day they have deceived me already? Figure to yourself, that, entering this room not more than a quarter of an hour ago, and Madame”—with a respectful motion towards Malania Petrowna, whom, for motives of convenience he always matronised—“not being present, I perceive a black-haired young person on her knees over there upon the carpet. Her back is towards me, and coming in from the sunshine I do not see plainly. ‘Mademoiselle!’ I exclaim starting forward, ‘what has happened? Are you searching for something?’ And then the young person turns, and—ah! disappointment. It is quite another face than the one I had thought to see. It was like expecting the day and meeting the night. Behold me covered with confusion!”

“That was Nationka, I suppose,” said Katya, in a very matter-of-fact tone, as she withdrew her hand from his hold. “A little sewing-girl whom I have out periodically from Feliksoto for mending things. She was darning the carpet just now.”

“Can you forgive me the insult of the mistake?”

“I don’t see where the insult comes in. We have both

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got black hair. She is about my figure too. I should say that most decidedly we are made after the same pattern."

"The Lord forbid!" exclaimed Klobinski, lightly laying his hand upon his well-cut dark-green uniform at about the spot which, at a rough calculation, might be supposed to cover his heart. "There is no resemblance whatever. You should have seen how foolish I looked when she turned. I think we both gaped at each other. Oh! it was as good as a comedy. Hi, hi!"

He broke into the high-pitched neigh which with him did duty for a laugh. This laugh had a certain psychological importance, inasmuch as its mere sound induced most people to take him for a fool, whereas in reality there was considerably more of the knave in his composition.

"Any news from Manchuria?" briefly inquired Katya, on whom the neighing laugh always had an irritating effect.

The sewing-girl was not further mentioned. It had been one of those small incidents which pass unnoticed at the moment, sometimes to be remembered later on.

Klobinski immediately composed his features into a more appropriate sobriety of expression.

"Nothing good, I grieve to say. When Mademoiselle entered I was just telling Madame of the last telegrams, which all point to a continued retreat of our forces. Of course it is not all made public, but in Mademoiselle's presence even my official discretion fails me."

"I don't see the good of throwing dust in the people's eyes," said Katya bluntly.

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That pronoun "our" from Polish lips was another irritant.

"I bow to your opinion," the adaptable Pole hastened to say, "but likewise I have to bow to the orders of my superiors."

"Katya," burst out Malania Petrowna. "Have you ever heard of such a thing? Our soldiers running away before those tiny Japanese—little dolls that they are, with hair as straight as thread! I was telling the commissioner when you came in that there must be some mistake. I am sure the telegrams have been falsified by the Jews, or the socialists, or some people of that sort, just in order to discourage the recruits. It stands to reason that we could not run away before those straight-haired dwarfs!"

Malania's *foible* for curls was apt to colour most of her views of life. In her eyes the mere shagginess of the Russian troops was enough to attest their superiority.

"Nothing stands to reason any longer, I think," said Katya, a trifle gloomily. "Certainly it does not stand to reason that thousands of Russians should already have died upon Chinese ground, just because we are hungering for another slice of Asia before we have half-digested our enormous helping of Europe."

"My dear!" murmured Malania, with an apprehensive glance at the visitor, "is it our place to criticise the decisions from above? And in the presence of a—a servant of the Czar's!"

"Within these walls I am the servant only of Made-moiselle," came the smooth reply, with an equally smooth inclination towards the mistress of the house.

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"Oh, I don't care who hears me! If it's treason so much the worse. Who cares about this war? Is it a national war? Would it not be better to keep the millions here from starving, instead of sending their sons to be shot by the Japanese? I am sure the *stanowoi* agrees with me in his heart, though of course he dare not say so aloud."

He met her defiant gaze with one of rather ostentatious devotion—successful mask to embarrassment.

"Since Mademoiselle is aware that the thoughts of my heart are condemned to silence, she will not be so cruel as to command my speech. Yet permit me one question: It is not from the papers published here that Mademoiselle has learnt these—let me call them—liberal sentiments?"

"It is not from papers at all; it is through my own eyes, and from books, and not only books published here," she added, with an audacious laugh, looking him straight in the face and not fearing him the least as she did so.

"The commissioner has been wondering what you have done with the other pictures that used to hang here," broke in Malania Petrowna, who felt uncomfortable upon this delicate ground, and in her haste throwing herself upon one which was almost as delicate. "He had not seen the portraits before."

"No, I suppose not," said Katya, glancing round the room where now the rows of past Swigellos hung in their old places. It was only quite recently that a long-cherished thought of restoring them to their rightful positions had—in the teeth of the double opposition of both Malania and Timosh, who, for once, united forces—been carried into effect.

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"I should certainly have expected *you* to find the exchange a good one. The costumes alone ought surely to awaken memories."

There was provocation in the look she turned upon him. To taunt him with the nationality he had sacrificed always gave her a particular pleasure.

But Klobinski had attitudes and accents for every emergency. Out of his well-furnished stores he now produced a certain appearance of mournful acquiescence in fate which he had much in use on these occasions, and more particularly in the presence of Katya, who, as he had speedily discovered, disliked disloyalty. There were other occasions on which he unblushingly jeered at his own nation; but here he never made that mistake.

"Yes—they awaken memories," he dreamily murmured, with just the suspicion of a sigh suppressed; "sad memories of things that might have been."

"Some of the portraits are very good, you know; and I could never stand those theatrical wolves and those aggressively maternal mothers, nor the pillars and palm-trees that looked like varnished tin. There is Stanislas Swigello over there, beside the window, the one who went to Siberia, you know, and came back again, as you were kind enough to find out for me."

"Ah, yes—the last of the Swigellos!"

For a moment Katya was on the point of telling him that this was not the last of the Swigellos—that she had found out for herself far more than he had been able to find out for her; but she desisted. She liked the man too little to share her discoveries with him.

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"He must have been marvellously handsome, do you not think?" she said, instead, looking towards the portrait.

"Marvellously!" echoed Klobinski; but he was not looking at the portrait as he said it but at Katya's profile, and the delicate curve of the ear beneath the silky hair—his small black eyes gleaming the while like coals.

"My dear," said Malania Petrowna to Katya, the visitor having departed, "that man is much further gone than you suppose. One of these days he will be declaring himself; and when you show him the door, what will he do? It is not good to have an enemy in the police force."

"Nonsense, Matoushka!" laughed Katya. "He has plenty of brass, I admit, but not quite enough brass for *that*. You surely forget that I am a *parti*; and he, after all, only a small official. He can't possibly have any hopes. And even as an enemy he could not be a dangerous one—with that laugh! He's quite useful sometimes, and I daresay he's smitten, but I don't think he has it in him to be more than just smitten."

Malania heaved a dissatisfied sigh. She was not clever, but she had the instinctive mistrust of the timid; and besides, she had seen that surreptitiously ardent gaze, which Katya had not, and something more like instinct than intelligence told her that a man who felt like that might become dangerous if balked. It is not always the clever people who have these intuitions, and what says the proverb about the blind hen who occasionally stumbles upon a grain of corn?

WHAT THE WINTER BROUGHT

BIJOU was having his Saturday bath—a weekly ceremony, personally superintended by Malania Petrowna, around whose heart the poodle's corkscrew curls had inevitably wound themselves so tightly that not even his antagonistic attitude towards the wig was able to oust him.

Three of the small girls of the establishment—three specially favoured ones—were busy around the tub in which the unhappy animal—not at all curly for the moment—shivered pathetically; combs and brushes lay about, while upon the stove a blanket was being warmed for the reception of the dripping victim.

It was extraordinary how much occupation was to be got out of Bijou. To Timosh, sometimes at his wits' end as to how to employ the many small lively hands around him, he represented a standing resource. The combing of his coat and certain interesting hunts among the thick forest of his hair, were an infallible antidote to the mischief bred of idleness. These, and the carrying about of pots of jam after Malania Petrowna, most splendidly filled up leisure. There was a pot beside her now as she critically superintended operations. Also a glass of water of which she took mouthfuls between the spoonfuls of jam. For such critical occasions as this the small menials always took care that a favourite jam should be

What the Winter Brought

forthcoming, knowing by experience that its flavour strangely influenced approval of their proceedings.

To-day the jam had been particularly judiciously chosen, and in consequence nothing but words of commendation were agoing.

"Yes, that's the way, Sasia, each ear carefully by itself, the inside as well. A little more soap for the tail. Mind you don't scrub it too hard, though. Is that blanket quite warm, Hasia? In this cold weather one cannot be too careful. What! The post already? Any more telegrams? You're coming to tell me, aren't you, that it's all a mistake about Port Arthur having fallen? I knew it could only be those socialists."

This to Katya who, just in the critical moment of the transference from tub to blanket, entered the room with a parcel of newspapers in her hand.

"I'm afraid it's the Japanese, and not the socialists, Matoushka," said Katya, speaking French because of the youthful auditors. "Here you have all the details of the surrender, if you want them."

"Want them? Of course I don't want them. Who wants a parcel of lies? What's that letter?" asked Malania, with one eye upon Katya and the other upon the girls and the poodle. "That's right! Rub him down gently!"

"From Fedor Gregorow."

Malania, from the corner of her eye, caught a funny little smile upon Katya's lips.

"Anything in it?"

"Yes—a very absurd proposal."

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Fedor Gregorow was Katya's guardian, a retired general living at Moscow, and whom she had only seen once, after her father's death. The general being gouty and also rather lazy, rarely troubled his head about his charge. To-day's proposal—qualified by Katya as absurd—proved, nevertheless, that he was not entirely oblivious of his duties. Nothing less than a matrimonial project which he laid before her, the suggested husband being the bearer of a title and possessor of an estate not much inferior in acreage to Lubynia. Given two young people, each of whom had more fortune than they could possibly require to live upon, what better plan than that of uniting their lots—and their money-bags, and thus furthering by another degree the congestion of wealth?

"And what are you going to say?" asked Malania, when Katya had imparted to her the contents of Fedor Gregorow's letter, her hands, the while, clasped in a sort of ecstasy in her lap, for anything matrimonial deeply thrilled the ancient governess.

"That I have no intention of marrying, and that if I happened to have any I would certainly choose my husband for myself."

Katya was now sitting upon the floor beside the poodle's basket, gently patting its damp head.

"But could anything be more suitable than this?"

"I think it could. Besides, I have told you—I don't mean to marry."

"Never?" asked Malania, turning a little pale in face of so monstrous an announcement.

"Probably never;—unless indeed——"

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"Unless what?"

Katya, her hand among Bijou's curls, was staring out through the window at the slowly falling snowflakes.

"Unless something quite preposterous happens. If I ever do marry it will probably not be to please myself."

"Katya, my honey-dove, what can you possibly mean?"

Malania's forlorn brown eyes were gazing at Katya, panic-stricken, as though fearing for her reason.

"One might marry to satisfy one's conscience, might one not? If, for instance, by marrying, a wrong was to be put right."

This time, Malania, without clue as she was to Katya's thoughts, felt too bewildered to say anything, but her whole attitude and mien so absolutely expressed a note of interrogation that Katya hastened to add:—

"Never mind, Matoushka! there's not the smallest chance of its happening, that I can see.—I do believe the snow is stopping. If it does I shall have the sledge out this afternoon."

"In this cold?"

"Yes, I want to get Panna Rudkowska's last report of Stasia."

"Always Panna Rudkowska!" sighed Malania, with the acidity of jealousy, for the Polish schoolmistress seemed to her to be taking up an undue amount of her "sugar-lamb's" attention.

"I can't think what you see in that girl."

That afternoon, the snow having stopped, Katya was on her way to Feliksoto. Stasia had, ere this, come in usefully. It might be considered eccentric, but not

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incredible, that interest in the servant girl's progress should prompt these periodical talks with the schoolmistress. To Katya they had become a necessity. Panna Rudkowska represented the one slender thread which connected her with the Swigellos, her one precarious channel of information.

This information had been pretty scarce, the correspondence between Panna Rudkowska and Kazimira Swigello being far from brisk. The post-card had been duly acknowledged and a few questions asked concerning the place—this much diplomatic questioning had elicited. More it would have been hard to find out, without overcoming Panna Rudkowska's natural distrust by admitting her, at least partially, to Katya's own point of view. Hence a sort of semi-confidence almost forced upon the schoolmistress—a glimpse allowed her of the sympathy felt with the banished family. The desire of justifying herself in their eyes was here, half-unconsciously, at work ; some vague hope, perhaps, that some of her words would be transmitted—as actually they were—for Panna Rudkowska's fancy, rather lively by nature, had not failed to be caught by the peculiarity of the situation. National prejudice had by this time quite succumbed to the social flattery, and in the very exchange of letters with a real, live countess—though for the moment uncrowned—snobbishness amply found its account, while the evident scruples of the usurper naturally helped towards self-justification. Out of all this grew up a sort of one-sided intimacy, confined to one sphere alone, and quite independent of personal liking. And out of this intimacy again

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came a slender trickle of news, upon which Katya's imagination fed greedily.

It was extraordinary what strides the old interest had made in these winter months of intensified solitude, and now that it had a solid soil to grow upon.

Upon the hard-frozen lake the reeds rattled against each other like dry bones. In the snow-blocked park walking had become impossible, and the blast that howled through it came laden with a breath of terror, since it was from the Lithuanian forests it came—the huge, pathless, unmeasured forests which the popular fancy, even nowadays, peopled with monsters. It was their fortress and their sanctuary. There it was that all the aged beasts of the world came to die, unseen, which is why no wild beast corpse is ever to be spied by human eyes—there that the four-footed robbers hold their courts of justice and with tooth and claw fall upon the doomed offender. All this Katya had heard, time after time, from the same nurse who had locked her into the garret; and now in the long evenings spent *little-by-little* with the usually slumbering Malania Petrowna, the mere voice of the winter gale would be enough to awaken the old memories, beckoning them on to the old roads, and always ending at the old point: that restitution, for which she could see no way except her own death or—that other possibility hinted at to Malania this very morning—the same possibility from which she had turned so decidedly that September day in the boat.

Since then it had grown ever so much more familiar, as well as more obvious. The sacrifice entailed—for the surrender of liberty would be almost as bitter as that of

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life, by suggesting an immolation—rather added to the seduction of the idea. Personal feelings should be allowed no voice in the matter.

But it was only since this morning that she had looked her thoughts quite plainly in the face. The husband suggested by her guardian had brought up in her mind another husband, pointed out by the fitness of things. What she had said to Malania about not marrying to please herself had come rather as a surprise to herself, although it was the fruit of the reflections of half the winter.

As she drew up before the schoolhouse a saluting hand went up to a uniform cap. In another moment the police commissioner stood beside the sledge.

"You have had to-day's paper?" he asked, with a becoming shade of condolence in voice and eyes.

"I have had the paper. Thanks; yes, you may help me out. I am going in here."

"But that is the schoolhouse!"

"Yes. I have something to discuss with the schoolmistress."

"If I am not mistaken I have seen you here before?"

"I daresay you have. Panna Rudkowska is rather a friend of mine. Thank you. Good-day."

She swept into the schoolhouse before his disconcerted eyes.

Panna Rudkowska was still in the schoolroom, whose atmosphere attested the recent presence of much malodorous breath, and where upon a blackboard the word "Port Arthur" was written large in chalk. At sight of it Katya frowned, and the schoolmistress, seeing the

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frown, coloured, and snatching up a duster began wiping away the obnoxious word.

"You are teaching them to rejoice over our defeats, I see," said Katya, loosening her furs, as she sat down upon one of the wooden benches.

"I am only teaching them contemporary history," explained the girl, half-guiltily.

"Well, I suppose it is natural. Why should you mourn with us, who have made you mourn so frequently? I wonder, by the bye, whether the Swigellos are rejoicing very loudly at our reverses? You have never told me whether Kazimira ever speaks of the war in her letters?"

"Sometimes she does," admitted Panna Rudkowska.

"And is pleased with its progress, of course, as no doubt you are yourself."

"I do not count," hastily affirmed the schoolmistress; "and she—you could not be surprised. Remember what they have undergone!"

"Am I in danger of forgetting it? Do you know, Panna Rudkowska, that only the other day I made my will?"

Her companion looked at her inquiringly.

"And I made it in *their* favour. If I die to-morrow Lubynia and every penny I possess goes to the Swigellos."

"Oh!" said the schoolmistress, in her astonishment sitting down opposite to Katya, with the duster still held between ink-stained fingers. There was another ink-smudge upon her unwholesome-looking face—enhancing its ghastliness—the consequence of a hand-to-hand tussle with a refractory schoolboy.

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Then, after a pause of reflection :—

“ And does your guardian approve ? ”

“ I never asked him. It's not his business.”

“ But you are not of age.”

“ What does that matter ? I am old enough to know my own mind. That can't make any difference.”

Panna Rudkowska, who knew a great deal more about business matters than did Katya, thought that it might, but kept her opinion to herself. Why disturb this evident satisfaction ? Acquiescingly she listened while Katya enlarged upon her present relief of mind.

But presently a new doubt crossed her face.

“ You are very generous ; but excuse me for mentioning it—you may marry some day, may you not ? and then——”

“ I shall never marry ! ” burst out Katya—“ unless——”

And there she stopped short, just as she had stopped short that morning with Malania Petrowna. And, like Malania, the schoolmistress, her eyes fixed expectantly on Katya, her large, loose lips parted in what looked like breathless expectation, asked :—

“ Unless what ? ”

“ Unless my marriage would give back the estate into the right hands.” If one of Kazimira Swigello's brothers becomes my husband I shall marry—if not I shall remain single.”

Katya paused, drawing in her breath sharply. It was said at last. And only now that it was said did she become aware that that which had been ripening for months, had, from a formless possibility, become a purpose. This morning it had been hinted at, but it was only now that

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it was spoken; it had assumed a body, and would, presumably, retain it.

Panna Rudkowska sprang to her feet, almost rosy with excitement, and seizing upon Katya's gloved hand, carried it fervently to her lips. She was electrified, but clearly she was not entirely taken by surprise. In her own romantically tinged mind, this solution of the difficulty had inevitably presented itself long since, though, without Katya's initiative, her courage could not rise to a suggestion.

"Oh, what a grand, what a beautiful idea! How perfectly appropriate! And why should it not be, after all? If they could only see you—you who are so beautiful!"

Strange that so warm an approval of her own suggestion should have the effect of chilling Katya. Now she almost jerked back her hand, saying hastily:—

"It's only an idea. Of course it will never happen. One sometimes dreams dreams, you know. I only meant to say that that would be the most radical way of putting my conscience to rest."

And then she remembered Stasia, and became engrossed in reports on her progress.

Despite the cold Katya's cheeks burnt as the sledge bore her homewards. What had moved her to this quite uncalled-for declaration? Now that the words were uttered she would give a good deal to have them back again, safely locked behind her teeth. And yet—placed in the same position—she knew that she would speak them again. Would they reach the ears of those two

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Swigello men whom she knew only as "Kazimira's brothers"—and what could they possibly think of her? Ought she not to have bound over Panna Rudkowska to secrecy? She might, even now, turn back to do so. But no—that would be investing the incident with undue importance. Better let it drop into oblivion.

As a result of this communication Katya for some weeks avoided the schoolhouse. Then came the inevitable day on which curiosity triumphed. The desire of knowing whether indeed Panna Rudkowska had had the effrontery to pass on that unreflected declaration would be gainsaid no longer.

It happened to be the very day upon which all Europe was shuddering under the news of the bloodshed before the Winter Palace, the birthday of that Russian revolution whose death-day which of us shall see? Katya's thoughts, as she sped over the snow, were divided between fierce sympathy with the sufferers and deep interest in her own special life problem.

The schoolmistress received her in her private room this time, and with obvious marks of embarrassment which Katya guessed not to apply to the meagre furniture alone.

"Have you any news of Kazimira Swigello?" she inquired as carelessly as inward trouble would allow, and having exchanged with Panna Rudkowska some necessarily reserved remarks concerning the growing disturbances.

"Yes, alas!—and it is not good. The winter work has been too much for her. I am afraid she has broken down for a time, at least. It is her lungs that are touched."

"Ah! and what is she going to do?" inquired Katya,

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scarcely attempting to disguise the agitation caused by the news.

"She does not know yet, but I suppose she will have to undergo some cure—if she can afford it. I always thought she looked very delicate."

For some minutes she talked, somewhat nervously, about Kazimira's appearance, while Katya watched her, noting the twitch of the mouth and the way in which the schoolmistress' eyes slipped away from under hers.

"Panna Rudkowska," she said suddenly, as the other paused and began picking at a frayed edge of the oil-cloth table cover, "there was something else in that letter. You are hiding it from me."

"What should there have been?" came the feebly inane reply.

"I will help you. You have repeated to Kazimira that foolish speech I made to you about marrying; she perhaps repeated it to her brothers, and you don't want to tell me what they said, perhaps, because you are afraid of hurting my feelings, but you need not fear, they are pretty tough."

To the dark, compelling eyes fixed upon her the schoolmistress succumbed, as she always did.

"They did say something, did they not?"

"Yes, they did say something."

"What?"

"Oh! just foolish talk."

"I want to hear it. They spurn the idea, of course?"

"You cannot expect them to take it seriously—without knowing you."

"They laughed at it?"

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"No, they did not laugh. Kazimira says they were too angry to laugh. I am afraid they took it somehow as an insult, though really that would be quite unreasonable."

"Tell me their words exactly."

"They—well they said that it was clear you did not understand the ways either of their nation or their family, if you could suppose that either of them would ever go in for a bargain of that sort. No Swigello would ever sell himself, even to get back Lubynia."

"I see. And what else?"

"That even if you were the only woman in the world, they would both rather die single than be debased by so mercenary a union."

"I see."

"You must remember that they have never seen you," pleaded Panna Rudkowska deprecatingly. Her eyes were rather plaintive as she gazed at Katya, for in truth she herself had been woefully disappointed by the reception of her news.

"Did they say anything else?"

"They said that you must be an *exalté*, which means
——"

"Thank you, I know quite well what that means," interrupted Katya, as she rose to take her leave.

Noting upon her visitor's cheek the deep crimson spots which she had got to know, and meeting the dangerous brilliancy of her eyes, the schoolmistress asked herself whether she might not have succeeded, after all, in holding her tongue?

CHAPTER VI

THE PASSPORT

UPON the seat which ran round one of the giant limes Katya sat immovable, steeping her soul in sights and sounds. For this was the first day which had borne in upon her the fact that the long terrors of the winter were over and the delights of summer actually coming. Over there, among the skeletons of last year's reeds, the frogs were noisily croaking, and from the forest strongholds beyond, whence for months only the long-drawn cry of some stray wolf had pierced, the coo of a wood-pigeon had to-day met her ear. Here and there a single willow or birch tree already made a pale-green patch against the blackness of the still leafless oaks, and upon all sides bird voices were twittering at a rate evidently meant to make up for lost time. But not the right voices yet ; it would take a few weeks more before out of thickets of lilac and syringa run wild, poured more exquisite concerts than any king could have paid for. Cats did what they could to keep the number of singers within reasonable bounds, and might perhaps have succeeded, had not Timosh, for some reason which he savagely denied to be soft-heartedness, found it necessary to hamper their movements by tying bells round their necks, with the result that in the month of May it became impossible to sleep at Lubynia because of the nightingales.

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While Katya's senses revelled in the surroundings her brain was independently occupied. On the day when the Swigellos' reception of her impulsive declaration had been transmitted to her by Panna Rudkowska, she had set herself a problem, and ever since she had been working at it off and on. That day had introduced her to a new sensation—that of humiliation. Under this unknown lash her woman's pride had awakened, and with it a certain wilful obstinacy, fed large by circumstances.

They would have none of her, would they? They spurned her, unseen and unheard? But supposing they could be made to see and hear her?—could be forced at least to take into consideration that so contemptuously rejected idea? Was her will, her resolution not worth what theirs was?—and with a woman's wit thrown into the scale! not to speak of a woman's beauty; for Katya, not being a fool, knew quite well that she was beautiful. The prospect of putting her power to the test by means of that beauty, had the seduction of novelty; for she had never tested her power at all except upon Klobinski, and he did not count. Given the presumed ages of those brothers, it did not seem at all improbable that she should bring one or the other to her feet, and one would of course do as well as the other. Once there, it would be time to weigh the cost of the sacrifice—for it was as a sacrifice that she continued to regard the possible event. After all, one likes to choose one's husband for oneself, rather than have him chosen by fate or conscience. Supposing—she had been free to choose she rather thought that she would have liked a husband with a beard, a short brown beard, something like that worn by the stranger whom

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she had surprised under the lime tree—had it not been this very lime tree, by the way? And as for the figure and the bearing, that too might well be borrowed from the unknown intruder; there had certainly been nothing amiss about either of those.

But peace to mere fancies, and back to the problem;—the problem, that is, of how to approach the dispossessed family. To do so under her own name was impossible, of course. Not only her nationality but her personal identity would have to be disguised. But that was no objection, rather the reverse; such things had been done before, in real life and in novels—especially in novels. The prospect of the requisite masquerading was exactly the thing to catch Katya's fancy.

She had been brooding upon possibilities for three months now; but it was only since yesterday that something like a solution had seemed to present itself. For it was yesterday that she had heard from the schoolmistress that Kazimira Swigello had started for Zalkiew, where she was to undergo an open-air cure. Zalkiew, as Katya knew, was a much-frequented health resort in the Austrian Carpathians, grown fashionable since the advent of the railway. Could anything be more providential? For at a place of that class, presenting an open field to all comers, nobody need be conspicuous. And the acquaintance of Kazimira (to be encompassed in some as yet indefinite way) must almost infallibly lead to that of her brothers, who, considering the neighbourhood of Krakau, would be certain to visit her. It was the elder brother, the engineer, who, according to Panna Rudkowska, was paying the expenses of his sister's "cure". He had been

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getting on well lately, it appeared, and had the promise of a good appointment somewhere in Bulgaria. This seemed in itself a reason for hurrying her movements, for, one of the brothers gone, her plan would lose just one-half of its chances of success.

But how secure a suitable identity wherewith to present herself to Kazimira? This was the knotty point. A false name was the only thing for it, of course; but here came in the thorny question of the passport—thornier than ever in these troublous times of aggravated supervision.

Katya was puzzling over this, when a light step upon the gravel caused her to turn her head. It was only Nationka coming out to put some question touching the size of the initials with which she was marking a set of new towels. A welcoming smile rose to Katya's lips, for she liked the girl whom she had known almost since infancy, Nationka having begun her career as one of the small menials ousted by Timosh at the attainment of the "ogling age". Not even her plainness of feature had been able to preserve her from the common fate, "for," says he, "the plain ones are usually worse than the good-looking ones, having less chances to go upon". Even her periodical employment as a seamstress was looked upon askance; but on this point Katya had been firm, moved not so much by practical as by sentimental motives, for, in her passive way, the girl had always shown her an attachment almost worthy to be called dog-like. That this devoted slave of hers should belong to the inimical nation only enhanced in Katya's eyes the price of this devotion.

As (the question as to the initials being settled) she

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watched the black-haired girl re-crossing the gravelled space, Katya smiled at a recollection. What a funny idea that had been of the police commissioner to mistake Nationka for herself! And how remorseful he had been about it! Not without reason. And yet, seen from the back, as she was now, there really was some excuse. The figure and the colour of the hair tallied. And even the features might almost be described in the same terms, since Katya knew that her mouth was not small, nor her nose Grecian in shape. In any official description, for instance, such as a passport——

Very slowly Katya straightened herself upon her seat. Was that an inspiration, or only a glimmer of lunacy?

Having during a long, breathless minute anxiously probed her thought, Katya decided in favour of the inspiration. Yes, the essentials tallied. That one face happened to be beautiful and the other plain could matter nothing, since official registrars are not called upon for artistic judgments, but only for literal enumerations. There would be no difference vital enough to arouse the most alert suspicions. And Nationka's Polish name was in itself a treasure. With its help and with the help of the fluent Polish she had spoken since childhood the question of disguised nationality might be considered settled. And another advantage was Nationka's complete isolation from all family ties, with no parents to interfere, no brothers or sisters to stick their inquisitive noses into the matter.

Nationka's personal documents would be the first necessity, and Katya knew she could have them as easily as she could have had Nationka's head, if she had happened

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to have a use for it. The papers obtained, the police commissioner would next come into action. For such things as this he came in useful.

Within a few minutes Katya was in the sewing-room talking to Nationka.

"Listen, Nationka—you have your papers at Feliksoto, have you not? I mean your baptismal certificate, and the certificate of your parents' marriage?"

"Yes, gracious lady, I have them."

"Well, fetch them to-morrow. I have a use for them. You will trust me with them, will you not? Only for a few days."

"The gracious lady knows that I would trust her with my soul," said Nationka, her black eyes moist with emotion.

"I know—I know. But the papers are all I want at present. Be sure to bring them."

"I will bring them," said Nationka, blindly acquiescent.

To inquire what Katya could possibly want with her personal documents occurred to the sewing-girl as little as it occurred to Katya to explain. She was as certain of her mistress's trustworthiness as Katya was of the menial's devotion.

That evening witnessed the first preparation of Malania Petrowna. Not the real initiation yet—which should be postponed till the last possible moment—but only the preliminaries, and quite an easy task, for, ever since the beginning of disturbances, Malania had been nightly expecting to be murdered in her bed. The announcement that they were to spend the summer at Zalkiew, under the pinions of the peaceful Austrian eagle, even while

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half taking her breath away with surprise, met her like a deliverance. Although she had never before crossed the frontier of her beloved country she now very earnestly desired to find herself upon the other side with a whole skin. It was a case of preferring unknown evils to known ones. With alacrity she handed out the papers necessary for the procuring of her own passport.

"Will they take long to get?" she inquired.

"I think not, if I can find the commissioner in his office. I am going in to-morrow myself. Matters are so much more quickly settled verbally."

"Would it not be better to send for him here?" suggested Malania, in whom the instincts of the ancient governess still occasionally stirred, however vainly. "Going to meet him, even in his office, might possibly give him false ideas, raise hopes; I mean——"

"He would need to be a still greater fool than I take him for if it did. It is a pure business matter, as of course he will recognise."

When next day Katya, with the requisite papers in her hand, walked unannounced into the office in question, the expression upon the Pole's leathery face certainly seemed to give some body to Malania's fears.

"Whence this happiness?" he murmured, just softly enough not to be understood by the clerk, working away in a corner of the large, bare space, furnished principally with pigeon-holes.

His small eyes were alight as he looked into hers, to be met by the chilliest reserve.

"Only a small business matter," she said, in a tone to match the glance, and disregarding the chair which he

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had hastened to place at her disposal. "I require some passports, and you are the person to come to for passports, I believe."

"Mademoiselle is leaving the country?" he asked, with an underlip that literally dropped.

"Yes, there seems more prospect of a peaceful summer in Austria than here."

"Ah, you are alarmed! That is conceivable; but, believe me, the danger is not so great as the papers make it out. The arm of authority is still strong; and what small services I can render in the way of protection——"

"I daresay; but I have a fancy for seeing Austria. My plans are made. All I ask of you is to procure me the passports as quickly as you can. I should like to be gone before the end of next week. There are three of them required. Here are the papers."

Though only two of them were required actually, it was naturally unavoidable to ask for one in her own name as well.

Klobinski took the papers with a distracted sigh, his sleek hair ruffled the while by an agitated gesture of his left hand.

"Three of them?" he repeated dully.

"Yes, for myself, for Malania Petrowna, and for Nationka Sagorska."

"Who is that?"

"Oh! a girl who sometimes sews for me; I think you have seen her in the house."

"I remember. And you take her with you?"

"Why should I not take her with me if I choose?"

"Of course, of course. You would require an attend-

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ant. Ah! well, if your resolution is taken I will of course fulfil your desires," said Klobinski funereally. "The dates are here. As for the personal descriptions there will be no difficulty about Malania Petrowna's—much less about yours," his eyes once more becoming active. "But as for this girl——"

"Describe her as you would describe me," said Katya boldly, and not disdaining to put the tiniest spice of coquetry into her smile, "you mistook her for me once, you know."

"Shall I ever forget?"

Desperately Klobinski looked towards the busy clerk, vainly racking his brain for some pretext for getting rid of him.

"I cannot yet understand——"

"I can quite well. There, take a sheet of paper and sit down, and I will dictate her features to you—just in case you should have forgotten what she is really like: Height, medium; figure, slight; eyes, black; mouth, large; nose, short; teeth, even. You see how the items tally, you could use that description indifferently for both of us. No, no—" as he looked up protestingly from the sheet he had been obediently filling—"I have no time to dispute the point with you, and I shall be very much obliged for as much expedition as is possible. You have often told me how glad you would be to do me a service. My coming here to-day will show you at least that I take you at your word."

She was at the door already, nodding back pleasantly to him, outside it in another moment, laughing to herself as she reflected how neatly she had done it, and how easy men were to deceive.

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Still there remained Malania to deal with. But it was not until the very eve of departure that she was taken another step into Katya's confidence, though not by any means the final step yet. Truth could, as a rule, only be applied to Malania in very small doses—and such a truth as this!

The disclosure of Katya's intention of travelling under a false name and with a borrowed passport was quite as much and rather more than she could hear at a time.

"But that means Siberia—Katya, my love—Siberia!" she gasped, standing still in the middle of the apartment littered with such evidences of impending departure as piles of body-linen, open hat-boxes, and a row of wigs laid out on the bed in symmetrical order. There was one in her hand as she stood transfixed, for it was at the critical moment of deciding which of the wigs were worthy of crossing the frontier that Katya had accosted her. Each birthday bringing a wig, and the average lifetime of even the most ill-treated wig extending far beyond a year, accumulation was unavoidable. Thus there came to be best and second-best wigs, with a large gradation of semi-wrecks behind them, Sunday wigs and everyday wigs—even morning and afternoon wigs. The question as to whether the Austrians were worthy of seeing the latest acquisition daily, and whether a *négligé* wig should be included in the baggage was one requiring mature deliberation.

"No, it doesn't mean Siberia," said Katya, "not if I am not caught; and I don't mean to be caught."

The curly product she held almost escaped from between Malania's trembling fingers.

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"But why, Katya, why? In the name of a kind Heaven, why—this comedy?"

"It isn't a comedy; I have a very real purpose. I have found out that young Countess Swigello—one of the last representatives of the name—is at Zalkiew, doing a cure. You know how much the family has always interested me. Well, I want to make her acquaintance, and of course I cannot do it under my real name. That would build a wall between us at once. Therefore I must adopt another, and that of Nationka happens to come handy. The matter is really quite simple."

"Those Swigellos again!"

At the mention of the name Malania had made the sort of face she always made when the jam they brought her was not according to her taste.

"I hoped you had given up troubling your head about those Pollacks; and certainly I should have thought that you would rather go a hundred miles out of your way to avoid meeting them, instead of even one mile in their direction. Can you actually mean to scrape acquaintance with this—person?"

"It's for this purpose exactly that I am going to Zalkiew."

"But what possible satisfaction——"

"Don't bother about that, Matoushka! Put it down to a fancy, if you like. I have taken it into my head to make Countess Swigello's acquaintance, and there's an end of it."

Malania, who knew by experience what that remark about having taken a thing into her head meant with Katya, understood that it was indeed an end. When

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presently, after a few more minutes of futile resistance on the part of the chaperon, Katya calmly announced that she would either cross the frontier under Nationka Sagorska's name, or else not cross at all, the discussion was practically ended; for some particularly daring doings of the revolutionists had, within the last days, sensibly quickened Malania's desire to be on the other side of the frontier. In the reverses of the Russian army—or, at any rate, in their extent—she might affect disbelief, but scarcely in the reality of the revolution. For that the practical proofs, in the shape of daily riots and workmen on strike, were too close at hand. As it was she performed wonders in the way of incredulity, not even Mukden having succeeded in convincing her of the superiority of the Japanese arms. Upon this one point she and Timosh were in complete harmony; though in their staunch national faith there was this one difference, that whereas Malania believed most of the bad reports in the papers to be inventions, Timosh—debarred from personal insight by the lack of the alphabet—flatly refused to believe that they were in the papers at all. A monster conspiracy to make a fool of him by false alarms seemed to him ever so much more credible than that even a single Russian Cossack should run away before any amount of Japanese.

"It will be all right, Matoushka, believe me it will be all right," laughed Katya, seeing the easy victory within her grasp already. "Just you leave it all to me. And meanwhile, what would you say to a little apricot jam by way of recovering from the fright? There was a beautiful

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pot opened this morning, and I told them to have it handy. Ah, there is Sasia bringing it already!"

In another minute, with a sigh, which despite its disturbance bore some relationship to a grunt of satisfaction, Malania had settled down to her favourite jam. It was not the first time, by any means, that the delicious Lubynia apricots had been brought in at the psychological moment. Not infrequently they had sealed acquiescence in the inevitable. Of course there still remained the desperate expedient of appealing to Katya's guardian. But for this initiative was required, of which Malania had none. Besides, in these dreadful times, how foresee to what such a message might lead? Might it not prove the straightest road to Siberia? No, she supposed there was nothing for it but Providence,—and meanwhile the apricot jam.

The last practical difficulty seemed, with this surrender, to be cleared out of Katya's path.

As for Panna Rudkowska, she scarcely gave her a thought now. She had served her end very well; but in the future she would presumably become a dispensable instrument. In the hasty farewell visit paid to the schoolhouse the Austrian journey was spoken of in quite general terms, and without any mention whatever of Zalkiew. There was no need that Katya could see for taking the schoolmistress further into her confidence, and might even be dangerous, since the temptation of betraying the plot to Kazimira Swigello would be obvious. She had never felt drawn to the girl for her own sake, but only for the sake of those with whom she stood in touch.

ZALKIEW

CHAPTER I

BETWEEN BROTHERS

"WHAT I object to about you is your detestable cold blood," said Witek Swigello to his elder brother, between cigarette puffs, and standing back from the easel, in order to get the effect of the piece of drapery he was working at. "From the way you take things you might almost be a German."

"What things?" asked Tadeusz imperturbed.

The cigarette smoke thickening the atmosphere of the studio arose exclusively from Witek's consumption. Tadeusz, seated upon a frayed ottoman, with his left elbow on a tarnished *console* alongside, and his head upon his closed hand, was not smoking.

"National things, to begin with. Here we are at a crucial point of our history, our future in the seething-pot of the Russian revolution, golden opportunities lying all around us; and yet nothing seems to excite you. On you go plodding at that prosaic profession of yours, just as though there were nothing in the world but railways and gas-works, not only refusing to cross the frontier and throw yourself into the movement, but even keeping me

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back, since I am fool enough to submit to leading-strings."

"I imagined there were other reasons beyond fraternal submission which made you prefer this side of the frontier to the other just now;" remarked the elder brother, while his eyes with a gleam of raillery in their gravity, passed to the portrait on the easel—that of a long-faced delicately sallow brunette, with somewhat "intense" looking eyes, and parted hair elaborately puffed over ears in the most orthodox impressionist style.

Witek coloured with boyish readiness, while he tossed aside the stump of his cigarette and immediately lighted another.

"It would be a sacrifice, of course; but if the call came, Olsza would be the last person in the world to keep me back. It's you who manage that matter, you would make of me as tepid a patriot as yourself—you, your father's son, and your mother's! Do you never think of those things, Tadzio?"

Twice he moved the paint-brush in his hand, once towards an oil-painting occupying the centre of the best-lighted wall of the studio, and once towards a table upon which stood a glass-topped case containing what seemed to be some sort of white garment, disposed in folds.

"Yes, I think of them; but, as regards that"—Tadeusz indicated the glass-lidded box—"you know what I hold of this display."

"Oh! you have no imagination; you never had. Were not those blood-stains, drawn by the Cossacks swords, the things which our mother was proudest of in the world? Was not the garment sacred to her?"

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"And so it is to me. But for this very reason I would hide it away in a locked drawer, safe from mocking eyes, instead of exposing it here in this—excuse me for saying it—slightly theatrical fashion."

"Dramatic, if you will—not theatrical. And when you think what a part that white dress has played in our parents' lives! But for it, or for the mutual memories for which it stands symbol, would they ever have become our parents? It was the Twelfth of August which drew them to each other after so many years—and with all Siberia between!"

At his words the eyes of both brothers turned to the picture on the wall, and for a minute there was silence in the studio.

Despite its place of honour, it was only a copy—though a good one—of the best picture which Stanislas Swigello, after his return from Siberia and the late development of a very considerable artistic talent, had ever painted—the one which had brought him fame enough to live on till his life's end, though not to flourish on pecuniarily, since not even Siberia had been able to purge his blood of that light-hearted, open-handed liberality, which takes no mean place among the causes of Poland's misfortunes. From the Siberian mines he had returned as incorrigible a *grand seigneur* as had been any of his ancestors at Lubynia, having shed there neither his charm of manner nor any single aristocratic prejudice. With the gold of his hair turning to silver at thirty, he had worn the martyr's halo with all imaginable grace; but not even the marks of the manacles upon his wrists had been able

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to make of him anything but the typically fascinating, impracticably heroic and only sporadically efficient Pole. Confronted by the necessity of working for his bread, he had instinctively grasped at the brush. But for this necessity, and the scarcely less urgent need of some mode of expression, the artistic instinct which had always lived within him would in all likelihood never have come to its rights. His experiences wanted a voice, and it was upon canvas that they found it easiest to speak. It was out of the fulness of his heart and the store of his bitter memories that he painted those scenes which had earned him fame.

"Sunday in the Mines," was the title he had given to this canvas, the original of which had long since become the property of the nation. Against the dreary background of rocks some dozen figures of both sexes in convict dress are grouped in unwonted idleness—some leaning against the stone-blocks, others cowering among them, all silent and all lost in dreams, for over there, at the foot of the cliff, stands one of their number—a beardless youth with a violin resting on his shoulder and the bow upon the strings. A melody of the far-off home—who can doubt it?—is resounding among these cruel rocks. Merely to look at the faces is to tell you so: ravished, tortured, tear-stained—each according to its kind—dull sometimes, with the long-buried emotion painfully struggling to the blupted surface, all but unable to pierce through the load of deadening years of labour—sometimes frenzied like that of the old man cowering with elbows on knees and finger-nails crammed into his distorted mouth—or maybe with things not possible to show even to fellow-sufferers,

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witness the young woman with the convict child at her knee, and face buried in arms. The ghosts of vanished goods, of severed ties, of lost homes brood over it all with an almost unbearable suggestion, while in the distance the silhouette of the Cossack sentinel against the sky is there to bring back to stern reality the illusion of these souls soaring free for the moment upon the wings of music.

"If ~~he~~ had been alive," said Witek, after that pause and in a voice all but tremulous with tears, for neither of the sons of the man who had painted that picture with his heart's-blood, so to say, could ever look upon it quite unmoved, "do you suppose he would be sitting here quietly—now?"

"I know he would not," said Tadeusz, and in his voice, too, the emotion was patent, though better governed; "but it still remains a question whether he would be serving his country any better by throwing away his life in a hopeless struggle, instead of preserving it for an occasion of some more efficacious service. Remember the Ukraine! It is my belief that whoever now throws himself headlong into the battle, without taking the trouble of observing events and calculating probabilities, is no less a 'Lost One' than were that band of heroic boys."

"But the New Poland, Tadzio! think of the New Poland! If every one were as prudent as you, how could she ever rise from her ashes?"

"Will the New Poland be wiser than the Old?" mused Tadeusz, his head still upon his hand and his eyes upon the floor. "Once again masters of our own fate, shall we

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not again make shipwreck upon the same shoals: individual ambition—personal jealousies—the good of the few as against that of the masses? Has the lesson been hard enough?" www.libtool.com.cn

"Tadeusz!" almost shouted Witek, and although his cigarette was only half-consumed, he felt compelled to ease his feelings by hurling it into a corner. "Is that the language of a Pole?"

Palette in hand and face flushed, he looked at Tadeusz with something of the wrathful glance of an avenging angel, whose ears still ring with the sound of blasphemy.

A slow but very tender smile came to the elder brother's lips as he gazed. Thus, he could imagine, must Stanislas Swigello have looked when he set out for the Ukraine; for it was to his youngest son that Stanislas had handed on his cavalier appearance—not quite so gallant as in the original—just as upon him it was that the artist's mantle had fallen—or, at any rate, a shred of it; for Witek's talent was free of that erratic spark of genius which had flared up in one or two of Stanislas' works. Also he had been spared the source of his father's inspiration. Under the weight of those monuments of Pain, the graceful portraits of fashionable women, the tasteful *genre* pictures produced by his skilful brush, were crushed into insignificance.

"No, it is not the language of a Pole—I agree with you there; not that which our patriotic press is accustomed to use, anyway. But there, Witek, you need not glare quite so hard as all that! Maybe I'm not so bad a patriot as you take me for. It isn't fighting alone that

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builds empires; it's work as well; and I have chosen my part."

"Work!"

With a ~~sigh that sounded~~ dramatic—and his cigarette lit—Witek turned back to his easel.

"The very word smells of drudgery. I wonder what our forefathers would have said of it?"

"Why always look back, Witek? Why not look forward? We have a long road in front of us; and the more resolutely we tread it, the less steep will it seem to us."

"Must we really tread it all the way, Tadzio? Is there no escape?"

"Not unless we prefer to lie down and die a craven's death."

"But there might be an outlet—a side track, so to say—might there not?"

Witek was bending now closely over the easel, with his back to his brother.

"What can you mean?"

"Don't put that high and mighty tone into your voice, Tadzio; I can never talk to you when you do that. It is only an idea that came into my head. The fact is, I have been thinking lately."

"Have you really?" said the elder brother, with no sarcastic intentions, but with a distinctly sarcastic effect.

"Yes, about that strange thing Kazimira wrote to us of in winter concerning the Malkoff girl."

"Well?" asked Tadeusz again, still with the objectionable tone in his voice.

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"Do you think she really meant it?—that about saying she would not marry at all unless she married one of us."

"I daresay she did. It's just the sort of romantic idea that a girl would have."

"Of course it's romantic, but still it's natural also, I think. Perhaps you have not enough imagination to put yourself in her place. I have been trying to do so, and I'm not at all sure that I would not act that way if I was her. Don't you think it speaks well for her, Tadzio?" urged Witek, a little shamefacedly.

"It speaks for her imagination, anyway."

"And for her sense of justice. Do you think it is quite right of us to reject the idea without consideration? No, hear me out first," and, somewhat flushed, Witek now faced towards his brother. "Just at first I was quite as angry as you about it, you know that; but things don't always look the same after a bit. Just think how beautifully it would arrange everything! Of course I am out of the running, since I never could marry anybody but Olsza; but *your* affections are not pledged, so far as I know; so before bestowing them elsewhere might you not turn your thoughts in that direction? Of course I'm not urging you to go off and present yourself at Lubynia, but, supposing that, by any chance, you should meet—dear me, what have I said?"

"That which I particularly beg you never to say again."

Tadeusz had risen suddenly to his feet, confronting his brother with thunderous brow, and towering above him too by well-nigh half a head, though Witek was no small man.

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"Just now you asked me whether that was the language of a Pole; I ask you now whether this is the language of a man?—for surely no man worth the name would ever deign to take into consideration this suggested barter. You or I are to buy back Lubynia with our persons, with our manhood—that is her proposal put into plain words. You or I are to be the sop thrown to her squeamish conscience, or to her romantic fancies, whichever way you chance to take it, as a reward for which she hands back the estate to you or to me."

"To you, not to me," corrected Witek, attempting to brave his brother's gaze. "My lot is cast; it is you alone who can yet escape from the drudgery; since if Olsza and I ever find it possible to marry that would only mean more drudgery."

There was ever so slight a note of aggrievement in the tone in which the words were spoken, as well as in the sigh, half-tender and half-wistful, which here escaped him.

"But you or I at Lubynia, it would be all one. I should never envy you your good luck, supposing anything should ever come of it."

The cloud upon Tadeusz' brow for one moment grew more ominous; in the next, instead of flying into a passion, as he had obviously been on the point of doing, he broke into that sort of tolerant laugh which recognises the uselessness of argument.

"What a child you are, Witek, in spite of your twenty-four years! As loath to part from your new idea as any baby from its toy! Let us not dispute the point any

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further, please. I have already said all I have to say about it."

Very like a wilful child, indeed looked Witek, as with that which the French call a *moue* upon his face he eyed the elder brother who, in his early orphaned childhood, had been to him not brother alone, but a little of father and mother as well.

"You are always the same, Tadzio, about everything—about our home as about our country. I believe you have as little family feeling as you have patriotic feeling. Would Lubynia not be worth a sacrifice?"

"Not of principles, Witek."

"Then you care nothing for it?"

"Who tells you that?"

"Do you ever dream of it as I do?"

"Dreaming is not much in my line; but I occasionally think."

"No, of course; you are always drudging too hard to make dreams possible."

"Drudging and dreams need not always be antagonistic, need they? May not one lead to the other?"

"How? Dear me, Tadzio, why are you smiling so mysteriously? I did not even know that you could muster a mysterious smile."

"Possibly there are other things about me that you do not know either."

"But about the drudgery and the dreams?"

"Work means money, does it not? In my profession it may even mean a good deal of money some day. And money means the fulfilment of many wishes, or what you

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would call dreams. It would take a big pile to ransom Lubynia, no doubt, but I do not despair of making it. The Bulgarian appointment is in my eyes the first step on the road to fortune; and at the end of the road Lubynia stands as goal."

"Oh, Tadzio!"

For a moment longer Witek stood transfixed with a delight that was almost a stupefaction, then, palette in hand, rushed straight for his brother.

"Ah, what an idea! Who would have thought it? And you have had it in your head for long?"

"I can't tell you exactly how long, because I don't rightly remember when it began. Anyway I know it was there already when I still sat upon school-benches. Look out, Witek, please! This is my best coat, and oil-paint stains are horrid things to get out."

"Fancy holding your tongue like that! Tadzio, you're a riddle to me. With such an idea in me I should long ago have exploded" (as an illustration of which process another half-consumed cigarette was hurled into the corner of the studio). "And how unjust I have been! Can you ever forgive me? But it's your own fault, really, for keeping it so close. Oh, how many years do you think you will take to get the money?"

"So long as I am given those I need I don't care how many there are. Oh, if you had seen Lubynia, Witek, you would not mind the drudgery any more than I do."

"Seen it? But you have not."

"Yes, I have. I did not really mean to tell you, but since I've said so much— It was in August last. I had a

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job close to the frontier, and the thought that it would only take me a day to get to Lubynia left me no peace. The twelfth was nearing, and I chose that date for going. If I was ever to see the home of my fathers the anniversary of the Kowno procession seemed to me the most appropriate. I saw it, Witek, on just such an evening as it must have been forty-three years ago, for a few minutes only; but it was enough. That which had been an idea has become a resolve."

"Tell me about it, Tadzio!"

For long after that the two brothers sat together upon the frayed ottoman, while the elder painted for the younger the picture of their lost home. Breathless, Witek listened to the words of the brother "without imagination," that adored yet somewhat awe-inspiring brother whom in so many points he disapproved of, yet could not but blindly confide in. As he listened, once more, as often before, all his ideas concerning Tadeusz were radically upset; once more he told himself that this brother of his was altogether too incomprehensible to be quite understood. And meanwhile his own imagination caught fire at the details of the picture.

"How lovely Olsza would look upon the terrace!" he presently sighed.

"And Kazimira! I could almost see her walking beneath the lime-trees. Ah, there she would not have lost her health!"

For a moment the brothers were silent. Then Witek spoke in another tone.

"But she is getting better. She says so in her last letter."

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"She always says so. I should prefer to see with my own eyes, only that my work holds me fast at present."

"Mine does not," suggested Witek, with a bad show of indifference. "I think I could manage a run to Zalkiew next week."

"I have no doubt you could. In fact—considering the presence there of a certain lode-stone—it becomes much more difficult to understand how you manage to keep away."

Tadeusz' eyes, with a quizzical smile in them, were upon the portrait now.

Witek made another *moue*.

"If you tap my purse you will get the answer required. The mere hollowness of the sound strikes melancholy to my heart. Do you think anything would have kept me away so long, except the usual difficulty?"

"How much will you require?"

Tadeusz, with a slight pull at the corners of his lips, was taking out his purse.

"Oh, Tadzio—you are too good, really! But of course if you want authentic news of Kazimira;—and then I can pay you back when I get the money for Countess Belinska's portrait; it ought to have been finished last week, by-the-bye, but I was not in the right artistic disposition; and you know one only spoils things if——"

"How much will you require?"

"I might manage with fifty florins. Oh, thank you, thank you! I think I had better start soon, before it begins to melt, you know."

"I think so too," said Tadeusz.

CHAPTER II

"THE PRINCESS BIRBANTINE"

THE wide wooden verandah of the Villa Olympia was almost literally strewn with men and women, reclining in attitudes which approached more or less to the horizontal, and mostly muffled to their chins. Every now and then a throat would be huskily cleared, or one of the basket-work *chaise-longues* shaken by a fit of coughing. Of speech little beyond stray remarks, except for a whispered conversation beside the most distant of the *chaise-longues*, over which a young woman, in a terra-cotta dress and with hair fantastically puffed over her ears, was bending.

Some of these people were reading, but more were brooding, with eyes either closed or else opened wide upon the landscape, gloomily grand under a grey sky, with the black of pine forests climbing into the low-hanging clouds, and a formidable suggestion of heights beyond. Though the carpet of meadows spreading to the foot of the forests was of that juicy emerald green which proclaims the fairest month in the year, it was scarcely a day upon which any one, for mere pleasure, would sit upon a verandah. That the inhabitants of the Villa Olympia were not in search of pleasure a glance at the wry faces, at the tucked-in railway rugs and muffled shawls, was enough to

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proclaim. "Open-air cure" was written largely over it all. Those that looked fairly contented and did their best to look comfortable might safely be surmised to be old hands at the business; the apprentices being easily recognisable by the blueness of their noses and the downward droop of their mouths.

"Cure, indeed!" growled a large bony old man, whose huge frame was scarcely decently clothed in flesh. "It's my opinion that all this is just a little plan of the doctors for keeping down the surplus population."

To which sacrilegious remark his neighbour, a hectic youth with over-brilliant eyes, replied only by a smile, which his pinched lips distorted into a grin.

"Doctors, or no doctors, I'm not going to begin my cure to-day!" declared a much-beshawled young woman, struggling to her feet. "Strikes me it's more a case for a heated stove and double windows than for a verandah."

And she went off, coughing, into the house.

Another young woman looked after her enviously, but did not move. She was quite as uncomfortable as the rebel had been, but she had promised her husband to follow the doctor's prescriptions to the letter, and happened to be of a conscientious disposition. Therefore she turned her eyes back to the landscape and endured.

Others were less heroic. One by one pretexts for retirement were produced—first by the bony and sarcastic old man, then by the hectic youth—by another and another, until but for the occupier of the distant *chaise-longue* and her companion, the conscientious young woman, and one other person, the verandah became de-

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serted. The fourth in the quartette was a black-haired girl, apparently engrossed in a book. ‘She and the wearer of the dark red dress alone sat upon ordinary chairs that were devoid of railway rugs or blankets. Once or twice the girl with the book—the deep tone of health upon whose cheek made a sharp contrast to the faces lately around her—glanced over its edge towards the end of the verandah a little impatiently, as though in quest of something.

Presently the wearer of the terra-cotta dress rose.

“Yes, it certainly *is* chilly,” she said, drawing her shawl more tightly around her. “Nothing but the pleasure of your society, Kazimira, could have kept me for so long oblivious of the fact. And since, after all, I am not in the doctor’s hands, or at his orders—besides, I suppose I ought to be looking after the dinner-table”—the tone had become one of gentle complaint. “It’s a horrid nuisance, and you can’t imagine how that girl gets on my nerves, with the way she clatters the plates. But *enfin*, what can one do?”

She went off, a graceful, pallid martyr, carefully holding the red dress out of the dust, with a smile of resigned disgust upon her lips, and upon her hands a pair of pale yellow kid gloves.

The patient upon the *chaise-longue*, looking across the verandah, met the eyes of the girl with the book, and smiled faintly—sufficient invitation, as it appeared to the other, who immediately rose and approached the chair just vacated. But for the conscientious young woman, who was too far off to count, the two were now practically alone.

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"Do you not find it too chilly, Panna Sagorska?" asked the reclining girl, who was tucked up to her chin, with absolutely nothing visible beyond her face—pathetically small and pathetically thin beside the mountain of feather-beds which threatened to bury it. The wisp of hair escaping from under the white woollen shawl muffling her head was of an almost flaxen fairness, and the over-wide, startled-looking eyes, of a pale china-blue.

"No; I do not mind it. I am quite comfortable."

"You don't seem to mind anything. You must have excellent nerves. Fancy living in an establishment like this, of your own free-will, among all these wrecks that we are. Aren't you afraid of infection? And there are plenty of *pensions* for the *well* people. Whatever could have made you choose one of these semi-hospitals? Are you qualifying for a sister of charity?"

"No, I am not. But I like the situation; and I am not in the least afraid of catching anything. I am not made that way."

"How strong you must be! You do look strong; and you look too as if you had everything in the world which you wanted to have."

The china-blue eyes, wider than ever, glanced over the costly fur trimming of the jacket before her.

"Oh, no—I have not got that!" laughed Panna Sagorska, gazing out towards the mist-blurred pines.

"I wanted to ask you," began the other, but was interrupted by a fit of coughing.

When it was over she lay still for some moments with closed eyes; and during those moments Panna Sagorska,

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visibly troubled, scanned the delicate features intently, the high-bred nose, so pinched about the nostrils, the thin bloodless lips, the sharp angle at which the outline fell away from the cheekbone. It was the face of a child, but worn already, and already bearing the double stamp of labour and of disease. Upon it the watcher gazed sorrowfully, and, as it were, in confusion.

Presently the blue-veined lids were raised again.

“What I wanted to ask you was this: Yesterday at supper I heard you answering some question about Kowno. That can only be Kowno in Lithuania. Do you, by any chance, know that part of the country?”

“Yes. I know Kowno and its surroundings,” said Panna Sagorska, with her eyes again upon the pines.

“Ah—I am glad! I have never been there myself; but—well, there are circumstances that make that part of Poland interesting to me. I am always glad when I meet some one who knows it. It must be beautiful.”

“It is beautiful; though some people find it monotonous. Of course we have not got these heights”—glancing up towards that which the clouds curtained from view—“but we have other things; breadth—horizon—and then the forest.”

“Ah, yes, the forest! I was quite little when my mother told me the story of the two sisters who were sent into the forest to gather raspberries, and one of whom murdered the other, because her basket was fuller than her own—the rich suitor was to be the prize of the one who brought back most raspberries, you know. And years afterwards the little son of the murderess found the

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skeleton of his aunt under the leaves, with the remains of the basket beside it. Nothing like that story ever so impressed me with the size of the Lithuanian forests, where you could plausibly make people believe that you had mislaid your sister, just as you might mislay your pocket-handkerchief. You know the legend, of course, and Slowacki's poem?"

"I know it."

"It is that story and Grottger's picture from which all my ideas of Lithuania are drawn: the one where Death floats between the tree-stems, with his scythe on his shoulder, and the lynx coming to drink at the pool between the roots. That brings the forest home to me. How I envy you for having seen it!"

"May you not see it yourself some day?"

"Hardly. Travelling costs money—and I am a school-mistress."

The effort with which it was said hardened the small face abruptly. Well-nigh disdainfully the thin lips closed, while the sides of the fine-cut nose gave one haughty quiver, and were still.

"Yes, I know," said Panna Sagorska quickly.

"You know? How should you——"

The other was biting her lip with vexation.

"That is to say—I think some one mentioned that you had been overworking at the schools. It may have been our hostess's daughter. She is a great friend of yours, is she not?"

Panna Sagorska was speaking rather at random, perhaps by way of creating a diversion.

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“Yes ; we have always known each other, more or less. Her father and my father fought together in '63. It is hard upon Pani Grabinska having to keep a *pension* now. They used to be large proprietors.”

“And was the estate confiscated too?”

“No, not confiscated, for it was in Austria. I'm afraid it was the cards that did it,” admitted Kazimira, overlooking that, “too,” which, considering that the family history had not been confided to this newcomer, seemed to call for an explanation.

“Olympia is very pretty, is she not?”

“Rather too pre-Raphaelite for my taste.”

“That is exactly why some people admire her. I have heard her spoken of as a living Botticelli.”

Kazimira lay silent for a minute, while a reflective smile curved her bloodless lips.

When she spoke again, she seemed to have started a new subject, though in very truth it was but a branch of the same one.

“I hope the clouds will lift by to-morrow. I am expecting a visitor.”

“Are you?”

“Yes. My brother. He is coming from Krakau to stay a few days, I hope.”

“Ah!”

Panna Sagorska stooped suddenly to pick up her bookmark which had fluttered to the ground. When she straightened herself again there was a deep flush of colour in her face, easily explained by the movement.

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"You will be glad of a visitor, no doubt," she stammered, very busy with her book.

"Very glad. I suppose he will bring his painting-things. He is an artist."

"The younger one, then," mentally commented the listener, while aloud, in a queerly constrained voice, she asked :—

"Have you only one brother?"

"Two. But the other is much busier. Perhaps he may be able to come later on."

"And this one is coming to-morrow?"

"Yes—I had a wire this morning. Ah, so you *are* finding it chilly?"

For Panna Sagorska had risen.

"Not chilly, but I have some letters to write. We shall meet again at dinner, shall we not? Will you be able to appear?"

"I hope so."

"*Au revoir*, then!"

Upstairs an elderly lady in a freshly curled wig was sitting disconsolately beside the window. To her enter precipitately Panna Sagorska.

"Katya, my lamb," was the disconsolate one's greeting, "this sort of thing really will not do. Not only do you insist upon flying in the face of Providence, by taking up your quarters in a very nest of invalids, but, instead of adopting the reasonable precautions that I do, you spend your time cheek by jowl with these coughing, spitting creatures—not to speak of the absurdity of sitting out in

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weather like this—and all for the sake of seeing what a person called Swigello is like. Well, now that your curiosity is satisfied on that point, why not move to more salubrious lodgings?”

“Hush, Matoushka!” said Katya, stormily embracing her chaperon. “My curiosity is not nearly satisfied yet. Don’t talk to me of moving! I have seen a female Swigello, it is true; but I want to see a male one as well,—and there’s one coming to-morrow.”

“Is there?” asked Malania, eyeing her charge mistrustfully.

“Yes, there is. It was partly to bring you this item of news that I came up just now; and likewise to renew instructions. You are not nearly up to your rôle yet, Matoushka. Whenever anybody addresses me as Panna Sagorska you always begin by staring. You really must be careful. Remember that I’m down in the police books as that, and that to give a false name is a crime in the eyes of the law. Even in Austria they have prisons, you know, though perhaps not quite as deep ones as with us.”

“I always said it would end in a prison—or in Siberia,” said Malania, raising her withered hands, and dropping them again in a gesture equally balanced between resignation and despair.

“It won’t, unless you make it do so. Stick to the programme, and all will be right. And, above all, don’t drag in Russia at every turn; it makes it frightfully awkward for me who am supposed to be Polish, don’t you see. They’re a little astonished, as it is, at my having

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a Russian companion ; but that doesn't matter, so long as you hold your tongue at the right moment. With a second Swigello to the fore you will have to be doubly careful. The word 'Malkoff' escaping from your lips would entail incalculable consequences. Two pairs of ears to catch it up, mind !”

“It's a godless undertaking from beginning to end,” groaned Malania. “And it leads to nothing,” she insisted, looking with renewed suspicion towards Katya, whose back, however, was towards her, since she was arranging her hair before the glass.

Meeting her own eyes in the mirror, Katya wondered at the light of excitement in them. So far all was going to perfection—each one of her calculations verified by events. The week which had passed since her arrival at Zalkiew had been a series of successes. In a country of pedantic police regulations there had been no difficulty in identifying the *pension* where Kazimira Swigello lodged. Neither, at this early season, had there been any difficulty about finding suitable rooms still unoccupied in the Villa Olympia, though some slight trouble there had been in satisfying the curiosity of the hostess, stirred by the applicant's obvious want of qualification. Healthy guests were so much the exception here as to cause Panna Sagorska to be received with a touch of suspicion, which, however, quickly melted to nothing when the eccentric newcomer, having explained that she had taken a fancy to the situation, pulled out her purse, and declared her readiness to pay down two months' lodging in advance. People with money hold a licence for caprices, as the

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widow of the ruined gambler was sensible enough to acknowledge.

So there and then the bargain was clenched, and after one pitched battle, whose issue was a foregone conclusion, Katya had carried off the protesting Malania Petrowna to the Villa Olympia.

The first sight of Kazimira Swigello had been a shock to overcome. Even in good health this piece of aristocratic fragility, mixture of *grande dame* and child, would have struck her with a sense of incongruity. A creature made to be nurtured delicately, tenderly shielded from all the angles of life. Such would be Kazimira well; but Kazimira ill! broken down by a drudgery for which she had never been formed! it was almost more than Katya could stand. So painful was the impression that for some days it kept her at a distance, fearfully avoiding that closer intimacy which was the very thing which had brought her here. It seemed so inevitable that the other, scenting her natural antagonist, should hate her. Meanwhile, from a distance, she studied her, daily finding new points of contact between the face she saw among the feather-beds, and those she had seen so often painted upon canvas, at Lubynia. “The Princess Birbantine” she had mentally christened her, almost from the moment of first meeting those startled blue eyes, which seemed to belong to somebody recently escaped from some great horror. Ogres were out of date, of course; but for a penniless Swigello no doubt mere everyday life held plenty of horrors in store.

It was not until, the first impression passed, her im-

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agination began to return to bounds, that Katya felt able to take a further step in her programme. Within the last few days the beginning of a nearer acquaintance had been formed, and thanks to the bond of union represented by the one word "Lithuania," promised to draw rapidly closer. Only just in time, it would seem, since on the morrow another of her calculations was to come true.

"To-morrow!" she repeated, with her eyes upon the image in the mirror. And at the thought of finding herself face to face at last with a son of Stanislas Swigello, another thrill passed through her.

"Will it be he, I wonder?" she murmured, as she turned from the glass.

"THE PRINCE NARCISSUS"

NEXT morning, passing by the rustic railway station on her return from an early walk,—for the weather had cleared,—Katya was somewhat surprised to see Olympia Grabinska gingerly descending from a shabby vehicle, from whose box a porter was taking a valise.

"Where to, Panna Olympia? I did not know you were going away."

"Neither did I, at this time yesterday," replied Olympia, in a tone of anything but good-humour, and with the chronic disdain of her lips grown acute. That, and a certain perpetual sniff of the nostrils, seemed to suggest that to her super-delicate senses the world in general smelt bad.

"It is no bad news, I hope?"

"Not a bit of it. It's only an old aunt at Barnow whom I visit at times—sometimes rather suddenly—just as it occurs to Mamma. Periodically, you see, she gets seized with a terror of infection for me, and then I am packed off. Old aunts with spare rooms are very convenient sometimes—to parents."

"Will you be back soon?"

"That does not depend upon *my* movements, but upon those of other people," was the dark reply. "I suppose I ought to be going in there—it's almost time. I do wish

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that engine wouldn't shriek so! Enough to get on anyone's nerves!"

And with skirt held high in her carefully gloved hands Olympia picked her way into the station-house, an impersonification of elegant dissatisfaction with the arrangements of the world in general.

At the time it seemed but an isolated incident, though its connection with other events was not to be long in declaring itself.

For the moment Katya was too preoccupied with the expected arrival to trouble her head any further about this unexpected departure.

Since dinner-time yesterday she had not seen Kazimira Swigello, who, apparently more unwell than usual, had retired to her own room. Would she be at breakfast this morning?

A glance round the table laden with such rustic delicacies as new milk, fresh butter and golden-brown honey settled the question in the negative. And after breakfast Kazimira's customary place on the verandah knew her not. A feeling akin to panic came over Katya. Supposing Kazimira were taken much worse and remained invisible for some days—perhaps for the whole of her brother's stay?

Having sufficiently worried herself with possibilities, and having wasted the whole of the radiant forenoon in the house, waiting for she knew not what, Katya, soon after dinner, becoming acutely aware of the absurdity of the situation, abruptly decided to take a second walk. Everything that she saw from her window loudly invited

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her: the intensely green meadows spread as a carpet ready for her feet—the dark pine-trees on the hill-side beckoning with green finger-tips, newly sprouted—even the grim-looking crags above, whose frown was more a challenge than a threat. And for her ear too there were voices—tinkling water-voices, which spoke of milk-white foam and dark-green, crystal-clear pools. Swigellos or no Swigellos, this was no day for sitting at home.

Several hours later, Katya, drunk with the scent of pine-woods and the breath of fragrant grasses crushed under-foot, dazzled with sunshine, dizzy with the heights gazed at, satiated with all the riches of the resplendent landscape, was wending her homeward way. Within her arm rested a sheaf of the biggest and bluest forget-me-nots she had ever gathered, and in her eyes a new joy shone—the joy of the explorer; for she was still at that delightful stage of unacquaintance with her surroundings which turns every walk into a voyage of discovery.

Full of her new impressions she had almost forgotten her preoccupation of the morning, all but forgotten the existence of any people called Swigello, when, rounding a turn of the road, she found herself close to a wheeled chair, in the shadow of whose hood her first glance showed her Kazimira's wasted face. The chair was stationary and apparently deserted. It was only a second glance that revealed a young man at some paces off, perched upon a tree trunk by the wayside, sketch-book upon knee, pencil in hand and cigarette in mouth.

Abruptly Katya's step faltered. Having this morning

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been terrified at the thought of not meeting Witek Swigello, she now felt equally terrified at the thought of meeting him. So unprepared was she that had flight been possible—www.libtool.com.cn

But of course it was not possible. Already the sick girl's face had lighted up, while a small hand beckoned eagerly.

"Panna Sagorska! Ah, I was wondering where you were! What a lovely walk you must have had! Let me introduce my artist brother. Witek, this is Panna Sagorska, who is so kind as to entertain me sometimes."

The young man with the sketch-book had already sprung to his feet. Tossing aside his cigarette he advanced with straw hat raised from his fair brow, and with the eagerness of his sister's gesture reflected in his vivacious eyes.

Somehow Katya got through a rather bungled salutation. "He is out of the portrait gallery too," she told herself, as the mists of agitation cleared. She had seen that sweep of nostril, those arched eyebrows, that tiny, pointed beard—so like a golden dagger—often and often at Lubynia, upon canvas. "Not quite the Prince Narcissus," she inwardly commented, "a little diluted, somehow, but unquestionably of the strain."

"This is all new to you, is it not?" the "diluted" Prince was meanwhile saying, with a comprehensive wave of his hand towards the mountain panorama.

"Yes, it is new," said Katya, concluding from the remark that her person had been under discussion—perhaps recently. "In fact the Carpathians are the very first

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mountains I have ever seen, and I find them rather overwhelming just at first.”

“They would be—after Lithuania.”

His curious eyes were upon her, expectantly; but Kazimira, more discreet, put in a diversion. For some moments past her gaze had been hanging, fascinated upon the forget-me-nots.

“What beauties! Shall I ever gather forget-me-nots again, I wonder?”

“Soon, let us hope,” said Katya, softly laying the blue sheaf upon the invalid’s knee, and smiling to see the eyes—so much paler than the flowers—light up.

“Ah, that is better!”

Witek drew an almost dramatic breath of relief.

“It’s been worrying me all the time to see those forget-me-nots in the wrong hands. You will forgive the impertinence of an artist”—bestowing upon Katya one of his most frankly fascinating smiles—“when I advise you to leave the gathering of forget-me-nots to fair-haired people. Red roses—the darker the better—the rich, velvet-petalled sort,—that is your field, Panna Sagorska, while, for Kazimira, could anything be better than this?”

He stepped back in a sort of ecstasy. What he saw at this moment was not his suffering sister, but the perfection of the picture formed by the pale face above the blue flowers.

“Oh, Kazia! Would you mind sitting still just five minutes longer, while I put in the outline?”

Kazimira smiled a little wearily.

“Is that the sixth or the seventh sketch you have

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begun, Witek, since we came out? And how about those rocks which you said you could not sleep without taking a note of?"

"Oh! ~~the rocks won't wither~~, and the forget-me-nots will. But there goes my pencil-point; and my pen-knife, where is it?"—feeling rapidly in all his pockets. "Traitorously tarried in my other coat, I do believe! I release you from immobility, Kazia—no more sketching for me to-day—*tant pis!*"

Gaily he closed his sketch-book, and as gaily opened his cigarette case instead.

"It is permitted, is it not?" he asked, as a mere matter of form, and glancing towards Katya.

"It is likewise permitted to you, my brother, to turn my chair round since I have strict orders to be at home before sunset. And Panna Sagorska too is on her homeward way, I fancy."

There was an invitation implied in the words, and Katya resisted not.

As she walked beside the chair which Witek, with a tender care she noted, pushed before him, Katya reflected that, once more, events seemed to be shaping themselves in precise accordance to her wishes. It was Witek whose nimble tongue chiefly kept the ball of talk in motion, and it was round one fixed point that his remarks, surmises, questions buzzed, with the persistency of a bee around a honey-laden flower.

"What a strange sensation it must be seeing mountains for the first time! But I daresay you prefer the plain. I have never seen either the Russian steppe, or the

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Lithuanian forest, except in pictures, but I think I have grasped their inspiration and that of their slow-rolling waters. Do you like the Niemen better than that green river down there, Panna Sagorska? You have it close at Kowno.”

Both brother and sister seemed to take for granted that she lived at Kowno, and Katya saw no reason to disperse the convenient illusion.

“If I could live on the banks of the Niemen I know the picture I should paint—the procession. What a subject! Of course I need not tell you which procession I mean.”

“Of course not,” said Katya hurriedly, and almost guiltily.

They were drawing close to the Villa Olympia when Witek put a question which for some minutes past had been hovering on his lips, and which he felt morally incapable of keeping back any longer.

“You are surprised, perhaps, at my talking so much of Lithuania?”

There was a restless movement within the bath-chair well noted by Katya.

“No, I am not surprised.”

“If you know the history of our family——”

“I know it,” said Katya, looking straight in front of her.

“Ah! Of course you would—living in that neighbourhood. Then you will understand our—my interest in the subject. Perhaps you even know Lubynia? It is quite close to Kowno, really, though there is the river between.”

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"Yes, I know Lubynia."

The forget-me-nots rustled under the convulsive clutch of Kazimira's hand.

"And possibly even its possessor? Her name is Malkoff."

Katya, preferring to be out of the range of his questioning eyes, had dropped back by half a pace.

"I have seen her," she contrived to say. ("Is that a lie, I wonder," she questioned herself meanwhile. "Hardly, since I do see myself daily in the glass.")

"She is quite young, is she not?"

"Really, Witek," broke in Kazimira nervously, "is it fair to put Panna Sagorska through such a catechism?"

Witek laughed, and desisted for the moment, but unpacified curiosity shone in his eyes.

Before night he had managed to procure for it some further satisfaction.

This was after supper, when Katya, leaning against the balustrade of the verandah, was taking a last look at the starlit mountains before returning to the shelter of Malania Petrowna's expectant pinions. The opening of the house-door and the glimmer of a cigarette close by, told her that the visitor, having seen his sister to her room, was now on his way back to his own lodgings, for by this time the Villa Olympia was full up.

The whiteness of the shawl around her shoulders must have caught his quick eye, for the advance of the glowing cigarette towards the garden gate was abruptly arrested.

"Good-night!" he said tentatively, his dimly seen face raised towards the verandah.

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"Good-night, Pan Swigello."

"Ah—Panna Sagorska! I thought so. Is that balustrade very high?"

In the next moment, without awaiting her answer, he had laid his hand upon it and vaulted lightly over.

"Lithuania must be my apology," he said, as he stood laughing beside her, **"I felt that I could not sleep without hearing more about it from your charitable lips. For, since you know our history, you will not refuse to the exile the alms of information, will you?"**

The thing had been done so swiftly and so audaciously that Katya, even wanting to protest, would have found herself left behind by events; as it was, the smiling persistence in his eyes had already disarmed her.

"What is it you want to hear?" she asked, quite forgivingly, and with the quickly risen frown as quickly smoothed.

"Anything you can tell me. To the hungry even crumbs are food—and we are all hungry for Lithuania—and for Lubynia. But what I wanted particularly to ask is about the present possessor. You say you have seen her—a young girl, I believe."

It was clear that Witek, freed of Kazimira's restraining presence, meant to make the most of his opportunities.

"Yes."

"You do not happen to be intimate with her, I suppose? I know that the Poles all shun the Russian usurper."

"No—of course no Pole could be intimate with her."

"But yet they must know something about her. She seems to be rather a peculiar character."

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"What makes you think so?"

"Well, for instance, the resolve she seems to have formed."

"Has she formed any resolve?"

The dim light of the starlit May night was undoubtedly a help. Under the shadow of its protection a certain relish of the situation began to stir in Katya. At the beginning of the enterprise an unreasoning terror of discovery had paralysed her. But already the inner trouble was settling. Calm reflection had shown her the improbability of her highly improbable act being suspected, assured her of the safety of the mask afforded by the mere name of Sagorska.

"It would appear that she has formed a resolve. I fancied that perhaps it might be known over there. She seems to be plagued with scruples; for she has declared her intention of never marrying, unless by her marriage she could give back the estate to the rightful owners."

"That is a strange idea, surely."

"I think it is a very noble idea. Ever since I heard of it I have thought highly of her."

"Ah! But surely quite unfeasible?"

"It's feasibility is another question, of course, but that does not lessen the idea."

"To me it sounds much too appropriate ever to come true."

"I fear you are right."

"Fear? Then you would wish it to come true?"

"Supposing it could do so without detriment to the family honour—why not?"

"I don't see why the family honour need suffer any damage."

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“Neither do I—on reflection. But some people have ideas on the subject—rather overstrained I think them myself. For, after all, supposing everything else tallied—I mean if two young people happened to meet and happened to approve of each other, would there be any sense in their parting, merely because their union would clear away a lot of difficulties?”

“He is, after all, rather practical—for an artist,” reflected Katya, indulging in an invisible smile.

“Then you do not reject the idea upon principle?”

“Why should I?—always supposing that other things tally. For of course in the first place they would need to care for each other,” added Witek, perhaps aware that his last words sounded a trifle prosaic.

Presently Katya was in her room, slowly undressing. The smile was still upon her lips, but it had taken on a faint, a very faint flavour of cynicism. Of all her successes since the beginning of the enterprise surely the success of to-day was the most pronounced. Once more the magic word “Lithuania” had done its work. Scarcely arrived Witek Swigello already talked to her as to an acquaintance of long standing. And to what was she to attribute the singular frankness with which he had opened to her his mind? Could anything be more favourable to her project than the attitude disclosed? Under these auspices the chances of that wild dream of hers coming true were almost assured. Ought not elation to be uplifting her? Whence, then, this dull sense of disappointment—almost of dejection?

The skirmishing with word-weapons upon the verandah

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had been amusing; but in the solitude of her room her mood changed. Was it perhaps the very ease of her progress which disconcerted her? She had not been prepared to see those proud protestations, reported by the school-mistress, surrendered quite so quickly. Even at the price of inconvenience she would have preferred them to be more obstinately defended. Hence the faintly cynical smile upon her lips—all the more cynical because she was without clue to the guiding thought of Witek who clung to the belief that he was working in the interest of Tadeusz, and in spite of Tadeusz himself.

No, this handsome, smiling, talkative youth—acceptable husband though he might be in the abstract—was not at all the figure which had governed the inevitable dreams of girlhood. Well—what of that? since for a sacrifice she had from the first been prepared.

But all the same the dejection would not be shaken off.

Next day, under the influence of more skirmishing, of more treading upon thin ice, of more playing with fire, the sense of enjoyment revived, but with it the cynicism grew. For Witek, carried away by what he considered his mission, returned continually to the subject of last night's talk. Plausibly and glibly—perhaps for the sake of convincing himself, or possibly with some obscure surmise that words spoken to a dweller in Kowno might not impossibly reach the heiress's ears—he expounded to her the absurdity of the overstrained point of view referred to yesterday, ardently justifying the conduct of any Swigello who might possibly agree to the arrangement suggested.

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“Something tells me that we shall be back at Lubynia some day,” he said to her, in one of these snatches of talk; “and this way would be so much quicker than the other.” www.libtool.com.cn

“Which other?”

“Oh, the plan of making a fortune, and buying it back in time! Since the place seems such a burden to her conscience no doubt Kataryna Malkoff would be willing to sell.”

“Has any one got that plan?”

“Tadeusz—my elder brother. But we may both be old men by that time, or perhaps dead. *He* says he doesn’t mind working all his life for it, but I honestly confess that I do. We are very different, you see. I love him; but his share of the Lithuanian slowness is rather obtrusively big at times.”

“He cares for it as much as that?”

“Not more, really, than I do; only that our way of looking at things is different.”

“It seems to be.”

And to herself Katya said: “This young man certainly has none of the Lithuanian slowness in him. Supposing now I were to tell him this moment that I am Kataryna Malkoff, would he make me an offer of marriage on the spot?”

It scarcely seemed quite impossible. For although the young artist’s attitude towards her could not be classified as love-making, it nevertheless betrayed a very keen appreciation of her artistic possibilities—such appreciation as has been known to develop into warmer sentiments.

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Already he talked of a portrait to be painted; her consent being taken for granted with the smiling audacity which was at once his charm and his defect. The only point upon which doubts assailed him was the costume.

"There are all sorts of senses in which you could be taken," he told her. "There is the Oriental sense, or the ultra-modern sense, or else the mere study of colour."

"I think there is another sense still," said Katya, with a sudden thought. "Have patience for ten minutes."

Upstairs in her room she went to one of the trunks in the corner, and from it drew out various rather exotic-looking articles of attire: white and green in colour, with flashes of pink, the Lithuanian national costume, complete in all its details. In one of the ancient *garde-robes* of Lubynia Katya had long ago discovered the dress, worn doubtless at some fancy ball by some defunct Swigello, who must have had something of the same figure as herself, so perfectly did the things fit. At the last moment, when packing, Katya had remembered the costume, and simultaneously remembered being told by Panna Rudkowska that to go about in peasant dress was considered the correct thing by the fashionable world at Zalkiew. With some vague idea of using the costume as a means of *rapprochement* to the Swigellos, she had put it in the bottom of one of her trunks.

When a few minutes later she stood before the glass, fully attired, the picture it displayed was both charming and fantastic. Like two snow-white wings the wide cambric sleeves spread from shoulders to wrists, while the hem of the flowing garment fell to her feet.

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The hips were surrounded by a pale-green tunic, delicately bordered with pink, the full bosom swelled against a bodice of the same pale-green, pink-laced. Pink ribbons at the wrist, at the throat, and fluttering from the ends of the heavy plaits which she had unpinned and let down to far below her waist. A wondrous vision as of a green-chaliced, white-petaled, pink-tipped flower. Round her neck hung a string of amber beads, and in the dark hair above her forehead flashed a miniature silver sickle, half-moon fashion.

When Katya opened the door of the sitting-room of which, rather against the grain, the hostess had permitted Witek Swigello to make a studio, there were two abrupt exclamations and then a pause of silent contemplation. Kazimira, reclining beside the open window, sat up slowly, clasping her hands and opening her wide eyes to an almost unnatural extent.

It was Witek who first recovered from the surprise of the apparition.

“Welcome, Lithuania!” he said, with hand upon heart and an inclination of head, gracefully theatrical. “Thus speaks the Lithuanian. But the artist protests. Those ribbons should be binding flaxen plaits. No true Lithuanian ever could boast of this wealth of shadows.”

“Then you refuse me as a model?” asked Katya, nor would it be truthful to assert that coquetry went for nothing in the question.

But here Kazimira interposed.

“Ah, Witek—paint her in that dress! Begin at once!”

“Hopelessly untypical!”

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"Never mind about its being untypical, so long as it is beautiful. Paint her like that, Witek—I want it so!"

The tone was sharpening to fretfulness, the hectic spots upon the thin cheeks intensifying. Katya, looking at her saw that her experiment had been almost too successful.

"I want it so, too," she quickly decided. "I will sit to you in this dress and in no other."

And so it was settled; upon which the first sitting began.

Half an hour later Witek had hit upon an idea which almost consoled him for the inappropriateness of the dress.

"After all, when you come to think of it," he argued—"this is not without precedent. I have read somewhere that at the celebration of the Polish-Lithuanian Union the women at some places exchanged their national dress by way of a symbol. There must have been plenty of dark-haired Poles in this green and white dress on that day, and plenty of flaxen-haired Lithuanians in flaming tints. This means that my picture has an historical basis."

And he went on painting gaily, his artistic conscience freed from scruples.

"I shall call it 'The Union'. That will cover everything."

"If he knew what 'Union' it much more truly symbolises," thought Katya to herself, "he would be busy with other things than his painting." But aloud she said nothing, keeping her eyes upon the sheaf of field-flowers which he had laid upon her lap, having been out to select them himself. It always startled almost as much as it reassured her to see with what unhesitating confidence her Polish nationality was taken for granted.

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Before the midday meal the outline had been sketched. It was while he was beginning to fill it in during next morning's sitting that Witek's ear was caught by the sound of a cab stopping before the villa.

“More guests? I thought the house was full. Isn't that a valise on the box, Kazimira?”

“Yes,” said Kazimira, from her vantage-ground by the window. “A valise I seem to know. Some one is getting out. Oh, Witek—I do believe it is Olympia!”

The glance which passed between brother and sister seemed to hint at all sorts of things outside of Katya's ken. In the same moment Witek had flung away his cigarette, and sprung to the window—too late to catch any glimpse of the traveller. His next movement was for the door, but before he reached it his sister's voice arrested him,

“Not now, Witek—you will meet Pani Grabinska.”

With fingers running through his hair he came back to his easel—but during this sitting the portrait made no further progress.

That something had gone wrong with their hostess's humour was on that day patent to all the inhabitants of the Villa Olympia. Words of altercation had been heard, by some, passing between mother and daughter.

“Is it my fault if Aunt Marya is called off to her sick brother?”—some one had distinctly heard the words in Olympia's rather shrill voice—“and would you have me stay at Barnow all by myself?”

Upon which came the growl of a maternal reply, unintelligible but obviously unapproving.

Late that evening Katya, going down to the sitting-

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room for her rings which she had taken off during the *sieste* of the morning as unsuited for the dress—and then forgotten—became aware of two figures upon the verandah, standing almost on the same spot on which she had stood the other day beside Witek Swigello. One of the two figures was his again, and the other was that of Olympia Grabinska; the familiar terra-cotta dress was enough to settle that point. They stood very much closer together than he and Katya had ever stood; and—could she be mistaken? No, there was only one explanation of that dark bar across the terra-cotta waist—too broad for a belt, and not so immovable. And taken in conjunction with the subdued *s's* of a whisper—

On tiptoe Katya retired, knowing all that she wanted to know. Whatever corroboration her observations of the morning had required they had it now. Precipitately and gleefully she regained her room. A fearful mortification to her vanity, of course; a tremendous come-down from what had looked like probability. But ah, what a sudden riddance of a weight which had been dragging at her—what a sharp but welcome cutting of the Gordian knot!

"He is appropriated already, that is clear," she mused, with her head on the pillow already. • "It cannot be my duty to marry him since he so evidently wants to marry somebody else. This cuts down my chances by half of course. But, after all, there's the other half remaining!"

Upon which she fell into a peaceful, though possibly not dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER IV

"*MOŻE ZDROWIE!*"

"**PANI GRABINSKA** is really quite intelligent, for a Pole," said Malania Petrowna to Katya, one sunshiny June morning some four weeks after Witek Swigello's appearance at Zalkiew.

"Is she?" asked Katya, who once more stood before the glass settling the silver sickle in her hair. She had got the trick to perfection now, and no wonder either, considering the number of times that during these four weeks she had donned the white and green garments.

After the vision upon the verandah Katya had been quite prepared to see the portrait abandoned, as in all probability it would have been, but for Kazimira. The idea of the picture in the Lithuanian dress had taken possession of her brain with the obstinacy of a sick fancy. And it must be Katya's picture; no other would do. Whether it was the glamour attached to a person who knew Lubynia or merely one of those cases of almost magnetic attraction of health for sickness, of the robust for the feeble, was not easy to say; but one fact was patent; with the rapid advance of disease for which even Zalkiew air could prove no medicine, the stricken girl clung more and more convulsively to this new-found friend, who was so much more reassuring a support than the fallow and fastidious

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Olympia. *Moje Zdrowie* (my health!) she would call her, while stroking with wasted fingers the cheek in which the rich blood mantled so warmly.

"It's lucky for you I am not a vampire, is it not?" she asked Katya once, with one of her bitter smiles. "Else there would not be much chance of your keeping all that beautiful blood in your own veins."

So Witek, yielding with no bad grace to circumstances, added at least a few strokes daily to the picture of the "Union". No need to hurry, of course, since it was chiefly as a means of procrastination that the portrait now came in useful. Thus the stay originally planned for three days had been successfully dragged out to four weeks; and still the final touches tarried. By both Olympia Grabinska and her astute mother these were being looked for with mixed feelings. For, delicious though was the constant presence of the beloved, these long *séances* of a very combustible artist and a strikingly handsome model were fruitful in anxiety. In Pani Grabinska's eyes again, exactly the *séances* were the saving circumstance. Nothing would have suited her better than that the artist should take a fancy to the wealthy and eccentric young stranger. Ancient friendship notwithstanding, the sentimental engagement which she knew to exist between Witek and Olympia had never received her official sanction, and never would. For that the claims of hard cash stood too high in her eyes. Thus his presence here, though a torment to maternal vigilance, gained, from the added presence of Panna Sagorska, an element of hope.

“Moje Zdrowie!”

In the light of this hope it became possible to sweep up the cigarette-stumps in the corner of the desecrated sitting-room without audible maledictions. By their number and their different degree of consumption it was easy approximately to gauge the artist's state of mind, just as by the redness of Olympia's eyes in the morning Katya was able to fix the occurrence of “scenes” between the lovers. Despite the clearness of her conscience, she took note of them remorsefully.

Long ago she had mentally apologised to Witek for the wrong done him by supposing him capable of a mercenary marriage.

Meanwhile the precious weeks were passing, and sign of the appearance of the elder Swigello there was none. Occasionally she heard references to the work which kept him tied to Krakau or to the Bulgarian appointment to be entered on in autumn. This alone implied a departure so decisive as to threaten the upset of her plans. What chances of getting this only available Swigello to her feet before he left Austria? Did she even want to get him there? Supposing he were to prove a second disappointment? A mere replica of his brother? Would she still have the courage—even be willing—to carry out her programme? Never since the birth of her project upon the reed-grown lake at Lubynia had the prospect looked so hopeless; and never, either, had she felt less keen about it. But for Kazimira and that clinging affection which touched her to the heart, there were times when her trunks would have been packed in an hour.

“In what way has Pani Grabinska been proving

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her intelligence, Matoushka?" she asked now, having settled the sickle in her hair.

"In the first place she makes most excellent jams, not with her own hands, of course, but by her own recipes; and that is always a sign of intelligence. And then she is good at other sorts of recipes too. This very morning she gave me one for keeping hair in curl; cucumber seeds boiled in sugar and distilled. The moment the cucumbers are ripe I am going to try it—upon one of the morning wigs first. But when do things ever ripen in this up and down country!"

"Cheer up, Matoushka! We may be back at Lubynia before the cucumber season," said Katya, turning to go.

"Is that portrait ever going to be done?" asked Malania, following her with her forlorn gaze.

"I believe this is to be the last sitting; but I've believed that several times, and final touches continue to crop up."

"And when it is done, we go?"

"Perhaps; I can't say."

"Where to?"

"To Lubynia, of course."

"Might it not be better to give things time to settle down a little? Surely there are other parts of Austria worth visiting?"

"I am not in the least curious to see them, Matoushka, thank you. When we leave this it is for Lubynia."

Malania sighed, sadly torn in mind. Then just as Katya reached the door, she asked abruptly:—

"I suppose there is no danger of that painter falling in love with you, instead of Panna Olympia?"

"Moje Zdrowie!"

"None whatever, Matoushka. Make your mind easy on that point. I'm not a person at all to him—only a model."

The "final" touches were really final touches this time, acquiesced in as such by Witek himself, who, partly warned by the recurrence of the hollow sound in his purse, and partly by what he considered a rather severe letter from Tadeusz, was beginning to reckon seriously with departure.

"He is almost capable—if I don't hurry up—of dragging me back personally by the hair of my head," the artist explained to Katya, as at the end of the last sitting he woefully wiped his brushes.

Kazimira, with hands clasped in lap and wide eyes fixed upon the picture, seemed lost in ecstasy, not quite without cause, for "The Union" was undoubtedly to be ranked among Witek's successes. The fantastic dress, joined to the associations it awakened, had proved exactly the right field for that which the French would have defined as his "amiable talent".

"If he has not flattered me, then—well, then I am certainly beautiful!"

The thought was in Katya's mind, as for the last time she quitted the improvised studio in the white and green dress.

In the lobby which she had to cross before reaching the staircase somebody was standing—a stranger—as she saw at the first glance, though his back was towards her. That breadth of shoulder certainly did not belong to any inmate of the Villa Olympia. At the sound of her

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step behind him he turned, moving aside a little, in order to leave the passage free. But the passage was not wanted just then; for in the moment that he turned, Katya upon an impulse of sheer astonishment stood still, having recognised in the man opposite to her the same she had seen once before at Lubynia—last August—the mysterious intruder, suspected of being a police spy, if not a burglar. Recognition was instantaneous, admitting of no doubt. The short, golden-brown beard, the mighty brow, the straight, grey-blue eyes which she had looked out for in vain at Feliksoto and at Kowno, she saw them now before her, unmistakably. Even the line of sunburn was there again, though burnt by the sun of another summer.

So intense was the surprise that for the moment she stood helpless before him, able to do nothing but gaze, as wide-eyed as Kazimira, and quite forgetful of the impression which such unconventional conduct must necessarily produce. But what was this? Was astonishment infectious? else why should the stranger be gazing at her as fixedly as she at him?

In a flash she remembered the costume, and understood.

Any one not aware of the portrait-sittings could not well help being struck by the seeming eccentricity of her appearance. Barely realised, the thought covered her with a sudden sense of confusion. The rich blood was flooding her cheeks as rapidly she gained the staircase. As she ran up it she had the sensation of running from his eyes—pursued by them, as it seemed to her—up to

"Moje Zdrowie!"

the very threshold of her room. There she fell, breathless, into the only easy-chair it contained.

What name to give to the feeling which possessed her she knew not; but that of its essence it was tumultuous was told her by the throbbing of her heart and the surging of her blood. Troubled it was and stormy; but above the trouble and the storm shone something like a star of joy, an orb whose light had never yet, to her knowledge, shone upon the world, or, at any rate, not upon *her* world.

So he lived, he existed, within her own ken, it had not been a mere creation of her fancy, that face seen so often since in dreams, but never again in the flesh until to-day. Now only in the joy of recognition did she know how eager had been the search, even how yearning. Her sensations were those of a person recovering a lost treasure. And all this because she had recognised a face seen once for five minutes, ten months ago!

Her agitation partly cooled, Katya felt half-inclined to laugh at herself; but even self-derision could not quench the inner joy, though there was a shadow upon it somewhere, a shadow which presently she felt compelled to investigate. Looked at close this shadow revealed itself as bearing the name of Swigello, and took the shape of a phantom standing across the path which otherwise might have led—to what? Perhaps to happiness.

"I am beautiful—the picture says so and *he* thinks so, too, else would even the costume have amazed him so?"

And at the recollection of that moment during which

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they had confronted each other, mutually transfixed with surprise, Katya hid her burning face in her hands, laughing helplessly.

A moment later she had sprung up and was hastily unlacing her bodice. She had remembered that the mid-day meal was close—which meant a chance of again seeing the stranger. At the thought of missing that chance a sudden fear had come over her.

“Am I bound by my resolution?” she questioned herself, as she changed her dress. “Have I made a vow? They have rejected my overtures—and I am free—free—free!”

She repeated the words aloud, as with feverish fingers she pinned up her plaits.

In the dining-room downstairs her eyes went round the table to return discomfited to her own plate. No sign of any stranger. No sign either of Kazimira or of Witek. Something seemed to have detained them upstairs. Nor, long though she dawdled upon the verandah after the meal, and slowly though she mounted the staircase, was there any recurrence of the apparition of the forenoon.

At the head of the stairs she met Olympia Grabinska.

“Oh—Panna Sagorska! I was looking for you. Kazimira asks you to come to her room. You would oblige her greatly by going there at once.”

“Very well,” said Katya, not over graciously, for the prospect of spending the afternoon in Kazimira’s room seemed greatly to lessen the chances of the desired meeting. For one moment she was on the point of questioning Olympia as to the new arrival, but desisted.

“*Moje Zdrowie!*”

“Please!” said Kazimira’s thin voice when she knocked—the Polish equivalent for “Come in!”

Opening the door she hesitated for a moment, becoming aware of a second male silhouette against the light, besides that of Witek; but Kazimira, propped up upon her sofa, with shining eyes and flushed cheeks, beckoned peremptorily.

“Oh, Katya—come here!” (the stage of Christian names had been long since reached.) “Just imagine this surprise! My brother Tadeusz fallen from the skies, without a word of warning! I want you to know him, he is going away again to-night—and taking Witek with him, the wretch! Here he is. Tadeusz, this is her I told you of, my health, my strength—*moje zdrowie!*”

Holding Katya’s hand she nestled it against her cheek. But within her grasp the hand grew cold.

“I told you he was capable of dragging me back by the hair of my head!” laughed Witek, on the wrong side of his mouth.

But Kazimira, startled, was looking up into Katya’s face.

“Dear me—how pale you are! I have never seen you pale before. That long sitting was too much for you; or is it the heat? Witek, get her a glass of water!”

“No, no,” said Katya, recovering at least outward self-possession, though the smile forced to her lips was not her usual smile. “It is the heat, I think—I suppose. May I sit down?”

She took place, very dizzy still, and carefully preserving the mechanical smile upon her lips. The first necessity,

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after all, was not to make herself more ridiculous than necessary; and for that again the first condition was not to look at the man with the short, brown beard, who had risen at her entrance, and was now surprisedly observing her; she was sure of that without looking at him. How should he not be surprised at such inexplicable demeanour? And now came his voice, just the deep, somewhat mellow voice which she would have wished him to have.

"This is not our first meeting, Panna Sagorska, is it? though the other was more sensational."

"No—this is not the first."

And to herself Katya added: "Nor was that the first either, though you think it was!"

"I owe you an apology for what must have seemed to you most shocking manners. It is not my habit to stare as hard as that; but the costume did for me. To meet Lithuania in the flesh is not a daily experience."

"No doubt it must have been startling." And alongside the inner comment:—

"Ah, yes, *he* has explanation enough for his demeanour!"

But what had she? Nothing that could be publicly produced. What could he possibly be thinking of her? Why, oh why was the floor of Kazimira's room so obdurate as not to open and swallow her up?

So troubled did she feel that after ten uncomfortable minutes, and despite Kazimira's entreaties, she rose. Nothing but the solitude of her own room could help her to read just her thoughts to this new situation.

“Moje Zdrowie”!

Half-way down the passage there was a rapid step behind her, and her name spoken :—

“Panna Sagorska!”

In a kind of desperation she stood still, and in another moment Tadeusz Swigello was beside her, grave and apologetic.

“I am taking a great liberty, I know. The briefness of my stay must be my excuse. Kazimira has told me of your kindness; it is that which emboldens me. I speak to you as to her friend; and it is to her friend too that I venture to put the question: Are you going to prolong your stay? There was some talk of your leaving directly the portrait was finished, and Kazimira is living in terror of it.”

Katya was silent for a moment before answering slowly :—

“She need not be afraid. I shall stay.”

There was gratitude in the eyes fixed upon her.

“Thank you,” he said briefly, but obviously from the bottom of his heart. “That lifts a weight from my mind. She is all we have, you see, Witek and I. Once more I thank you, for that, and for all the rest of your kindness. Will you allow me your hand? I am her brother, you know.”

He raised her hand to his lips—Polish fashion; and in the next moment already Katya stood alone in the passage.

CHAPTER V

THE WEEK-END

"SO this is what being in love feels like?"

It was Katya who thus in the sanctuary of her room, somewhat scornfully commented.

Those few moments in the passage, the touch of his lips upon her hand, had been enough to disperse the uncertainty of the forenoon. The inner trouble was identified. Inexperience notwithstanding, the Lubynia library had furnished her with too many instances of other people's experience to let doubt persist. But nothing had warned her of the amount of combustible material which an uncurbed imagination, acting in a life of exceptional isolation, had heaped up within her.

With the clue in her hand the *dénouement* of this morning became almost ludicrously comprehensible. It had been his lost home that Tadeusz Swigello had been gazing at that evening in August. At the thought that in her power it lay to make him master there her heart bounded. The forbidding phantom of the morning was gone; there was nothing to bar the path to what persisted in looking like happiness. And what was there in place of the phantom? Logically speaking there should have been

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exultation pure and simple ; but in point of fact there were other things ; to begin with, a slightly rebellious feeling—for so rapid a subjugation seemed to brook ignominy. This had not been in her calculations. According to the programme it was he who was to have succumbed, while she remained supreme mistress of her own emotions. The whole thing flavoured a little too much of the process known as being caught in one's own nets.

Simultaneously she became aware of a recrudescence of that terror of discovery which she had thought extinct. She knew of no reason why she should not hoodwink Tadeusz as easily as she had hoodwinked Witek, and yet she trembled as till now she had not trembled. Scarcely knowing this man, she already stood in terror of his anger.

For the moment indeed the danger was *nil*, since he was leaving immediately. When would he come back ? When ?

The urgency of the question—abruptly grown to be the most important the world held—pursued Katya into her dreams that night.

If any doubt as to the nature of her feelings had remained to her, it would have been dispelled by a small incident of the following forenoon, when, wandering into one of the sitting-rooms in the wake of a familiar strain of music, Katya found the conscientious young woman at the rarely opened piano, feebly quavering out one of Schumann's gems, one which Katya happened to have heard at Kowno last winter from the lips of a world-famed singer.

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Seit ich ihn gesehen glaub ich blind zu sein;
Wo ich hin nur blicke seh ich ihn allein.
Wie im wachen Traume schwebt sein Bild mir vor;
Taucht aus tiefstem Dunkel heller, heller nur empor.
Sonst ist licht und farblos Alles um mich her.¹

At the Kowno concert already the passion of the music had searched Katya's heart-strings; and even then, as she listened, a face and figure had dipped out of the darkness, exactly as in the song. She had thought it a mere chance; but now she understood—ah, she understood!

Upon the renowned singer's lips the song had been impressive; upon those of the consumptive woman, along whose pinched nose the tears trickled to drop upon the keys, it was almost more impressive. Was she thinking of the husband to whom she had given such strenuous promises about obeying the doctor's orders, and who barely a year ago had placed the ring upon the now wasted finger where it sat so pathetically loose?

Katya went out again softly with tears in her own eyes. The rebellious feeling of last night was gone. Something like a surrender had taken place in her soul.

Sonst ist licht und farblos Alles um mich her——

Without colour, without light were the days that followed, passed for the most part in the company of Kazimira, who, bereft of Witek's society, made larger and larger demands upon her friend's time. And it was

¹ "Since I have seen him I think I am blind. Wherever I look I see but him. Like in a waking dream his picture floats before me. Dips out of darkness brighter and ever brighter. All else is without colour and light."

The Week-End

given liberally; since in Kazimira's society alone could she hope to hear the name, to gather news of the man who had taken such sudden and violent possession of her thoughts. With stupefaction she recognised the fact, unable to find its explanation, which yet was not far to seek, since the funds of affection lying waste in her orphaned life had long been calling for a claimant. Nor would they call with the diffidence of hyper-cultivated Western nerves; for in Katya's veins flowed the vigorous blood of ancestors who had lived close to Nature; men and women with elementary instincts and strong desires.

At the end of a long, colourless week, came a day flooded with almost more colour, with almost more light than she could bear.

The evening was perfect—velvet-aired, star-punctured, heavily scented with the breath of the honeysuckle draping the verandah pillars. Beside them some of the patients still lingered; among them Kazimira upon her basket-work sofa flanked by her usual companions, the three forming a group apart upon the roomy verandah, a group upon which fell spells of dreamy silence. Various subjects had been started; the advance of the revolution across the frontier, the chances of peace being signed at Portsmouth. Local gossip, even summer fashions had had their turn, but each had speedily dropped. Not one among the trio of girls but felt the incongruity of all such things to the mystery of the hour. And then presently, without quite knowing how, they found themselves started upon a new and infinitely more fitting subject—the endless subject of the legend-haunted Lithuanian

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forest. From the store of her nursery memories Katya drew out the tales, one by one, eagerly listened to by the never wearied Kazimira; tales of wild and brutal doings within the Beasts' Fastness,—of phantom stags,—of the fate of children who had strayed too far in search of wild strawberries or of brown fungi, captured by the Lords of the forest, and if judged too thin to be worth eating, find themselves enlisted as slaves of the Snake-King, bound to put him to sleep within their shirts, and to feed him with milk out of cups of bark.

"I wonder what made them choose a snake as King?" objected Olympia, a little disdainful of the Lithuanian stories.

"It was the ancient Lithuanian deity," explained Kazimira. "There used to be one in almost every house, revered as a domestic spirit. Even before the cross the snake did not fly at once. That is why one is to be met in almost every Lithuanian emblem, sometimes reared, sometimes coiled——"

"Round the handle of a battle-axe, for instance," finished Katya, "like in your family arms."

"Ah! have you seen our arms? I do not remember having shown them to you."

"I have seen them."

Again there fell a silence, swept by a wave of perfume almost too sweet to be borne, crossed now and then by the black zig-zag of a bat's flight, filled by the voice of tumbling waters.

Then Kazimira turned her head sharply—her hypersensitive nerves having given her a warning not conveyed

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to the others—and, suddenly, out of the heart of the night, as it seemed, another figure stepped on to the verandah, and was close to them already.

"Good God, Tadeusz!"

It was Kazimira who said it, risen to her elbow, with eyes distended by astonishment.

"Is that really you?"

"Yes, it is I. In the body. Surely you must have been telling ghost-stories to be as startled as that."

"Not ghost-stories, but fairy-tales; and it seemed so queer. But, Tadeusz, what is it?"

"You are alone?" plaintively queried Olympia.

"Alone, Panna Olympia—worse luck—but not by Witek's fault. I had almost to lock him into his studio, in order to ensure the completion of the portrait he is pledged to deliver by Saturday next."

"But, Tadeusz, you have not told us yet what has brought you."

"Saturday has brought me, and a ticket from Krakau, nothing more sensational than that. I found I could treat myself to a week-end, and I am so treating myself. Is that not quite simple?"

"Quite simple in anybody except Tadeusz," thought Kazimira, as she gazed at him perplexed. To "treat himself" to anything was so very unlike this elder brother of hers, whose rigid sense of economy had only last year moved him to the renunciation of cigarettes, to the consumption of which he had been almost as addicted as Witek himself. Even this tone of *insouciance* just tinged with recklessness was new to her, and provoked reflection.

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"You have not said good-evening to Katya yet," she said, noting how his eyes roamed. "There she is, behind you."

Katya gave him her hand, thankful for the shadows, and more thankful still that speech was for the moment not demanded of her.

As he took place beside his sister, Olympia mechanically asked the—in those times—almost unavoidable question:—

"Anything in the papers?"

"Only one thing, but enough: martial law proclaimed at Warsaw."

"Oh, Tadeusz!"

The exclamation came from Kazimira almost with a sob, while Olympia groaned softly and delicately. Katya alone sat without giving a sign, her lips hard-strained against each other. Well could she gauge the horror which those two words, "Martial Law," must awaken in the breasts of Poles, wise with the experience of their fathers. But what part had she, the alien, the natural enemy, in their patriotic grief? Once more she blessed the shadows. Even under their protection it seemed to her that the natural antagonist stood in danger of discovery. Never before had she been so conscious of the gulf which lay between her and these people, nor ever before been so stabbed to the heart by its recognition. The long silence which followed was filled for the three Poles with bitter reflections, at which she had no pains to guess—too bitter to be easily put into words. Then after a minute Tadeusz spoke again, upon another subject, and in an artificially jaunty tone.

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"So it is fairy-tales you have been telling? What sort of Carpathian?"

"No, Lithuanian."

"Ah! May I not come in for the benefit of them? I think fairy-tales would prove a most agreeable contrast to real life just now."

He had turned towards Katya confidently, as though taking for granted that it was from her lips that the fairy-tales had come.

"I am afraid my stock is nearly exhausted, I have told about everything I can remember."

"Tell them again," said Kazimira dreamily. "I find they improve by repetition."

"Yes, tell them again," urged Tadeusz.

For another half-hour they sat, wrapped round by the beauty of the night, while Katya's voice, low and intermittent, thrilled now by the thought of the new auditor, spun out the old tales.

"I love them all," said Kazimira, when at length the thread seemed spun out for good—"but I remain true to my favourite, the one I used to call the 'raspberry story' when I was little."

"That story always frightened me," remarked Katya. "When I was out in the woods I used to expect to find the murdered sister under every heap of dead leaves, The thought quite poisoned all the raspberries for me."

"I wonder whether the murderess ever enjoyed her riches at all," mused Olympia; "or whether the worm of conscience was at work all the time? I mean the real girl of course, not Slowacki's heroine."

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"What should have prevented her enjoying them? Women of that stamp are usually devoid of scruples."

It was Tadeusz who spoke scornfully—a note of intolerance ringing in his voice.

"Might she not have yielded to a momentary temptation?"

"Yes, she might—of jealousy for instance, in which case she need not necessarily have been degraded. But this particular temptation can be tempting only to the base."

"Which means that in your eyes it was a greater crime to marry the rich suitor than to murder her sister?"

"To marry him unloved, and merely because he *was* a rich suitor—yes, a far greater crime, though not in the eyes of the law."

Something at this moment pushed Katya to ask, with a catch in her throat:—

"Then do you condemn all marriages of reason?"

"To my mind there is no such thing as a marriage of reason; the terms appear to me to be mutually exclusive. There are social contracts, if you like, arrangements for reciprocal advantages. Apparently Society cannot do without them. So long as they are called what they are, I have no objection to them. But the real name should be reserved for the real thing: the free, yet irresistible choice by which two human beings elect to belong to each other, in soul as well as in body, and unhampered by motives, whether mercenary or merely reasonable."

Kazimira laughed feebly.

"Would you ever have expected to hear such romantic

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sentiments from the lips of an engineer! Tadeusz always *is* a mine of surprises; but I have never heard him talk quite like this. Is it the hour, or the honeysuckle scent that has unlocked your thoughts, my brother?"

Tadeusz laughed too, a trifle guiltily.

"Oh, of course it is an Utopia, the outline of an impossible condition of things! And well—yes—maybe the honeysuckle has got something to do with it. It does smell considerably better than machine oil, you know."

Katya sat silent, with sinking heart. So *those* were his views of matrimony! The views of an out and out idealist. No longer could she wonder at the stern condemnation of her audacious suggestion.

"This sort of thing is so unlike Tadeusz," Kazimira was saying to Katya, as the latter helped her to her room.

"What sort of thing?"

"This giving himself a holiday without visible reason."

"Is not visiting you reason enough?"

"Perhaps—if he *is* visiting me."

Kazimira's eyes, with a speculative light within them, were upon her friend. It was not her senses alone that were quick, it was her wits as well; and already in her mind was dawning a suspicion—the one which lies nearest to every woman.

As Katya, a little flurried, kissed her good-night, she caught at her sleeve.

"Will you do me a favour, Katya?"

"What favour?"

"Will you put on the Lithuanian dress to-morrow?"

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"But Kazimira—what for?"

"To give me pleasure; is that not enough? And it will please my brother too, I know it will."

"What makes you think so?"

"He asked me just now whether you ever wore that dress in everyday life, so to say. You must remember what it means to him—to us all. I am not quite sure whether the hope of seeing it again has not something to do with the week-end holiday"—persisted Kazimira, mercilessly probing her friend's face.

"Make myself as conspicuous as that!"

"It isn't conspicuous. Half the people go about here in peasant dress. You said yourself the other day that the place seems like a fancy-ball let loose. You will do it, will you not?" coaxed Kazimira, with the half-petulant accents of a fractious child. And as to a fractious child Katya replied soothingly:—

"Yes, yes, I will do it, Kazimira—but no fretting, mind!"

CHAPTER VI

THE MORSKI OKO

"How has it happened? Is this what I wanted?"

The perplexed questions were for ever in Katya's mind during the weeks that followed upon that legend-haunted evening on the verandah.

By this time the week-end had become an institution. Despite the pressure of work still to be got through before his departure for Bulgaria, not one Saturday night had been missed by Tadeusz, coming sometimes alone, more often in the company of his brother, to whose butterfly movements he had lately shown unusual leniency.

Kazimira had long since ceased to marvel and had begun to rejoice. Who would have thought that Fate, so cruel till now, should have held in reserve so precious a gift as this? The brother whom she loved best and the first real friend she had ever had drawing ever nearer together. At Katya's sentiments she easily guessed, and for Tadeusz's doings there seemed but one explanation. The sick girl's fancy was enraptured by the suggestion. Around it the flickering energy of her waning life feverishly twined. She had never known Love herself. The class of men with whom her vocations had thrown her in contact had been too distasteful to her aristocratic prejudices to prove dangerous to her peace. Against their advances she had instinctively surrounded herself with a

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wall of coldness ; and in time the wall had hardened. It was Katya who had made the first breach therein, and now behold roses bloomed upon the stones ! It would be something to know Love at second-hand, if not at first. It would be something to see Tadeusz happy, if she could not be happy herself. And Katya was rich, too, which would spoil nothing and might lead to all sorts of things, perchance to the recovery of Lubynia. There was a sort of mournful delight too in knowing herself the link between those two. Kazimira would smile to herself as astutely as any hardened match-maker when during her fits of coughing she caught them exchanging anxiously sympathetic glances. Who could say how much gratitude to the charitable stranger had had to do with the birth of sentiment ?

" It's either my cough or the Lithuanian dress that has done it," she said to herself, while plotting contrivances destined to hurry on matters ; for they would have to be hurried on if she was to witness the event ; this Kazimira herself knew full well.

As for Katya, she neither reflected nor plotted ; aware only of having somehow lost the direction of events, hitherto so docile. To herself she seemed to be drifting on a current which she could not attempt to stem, and to which she abandoned herself with a feeling of luxurious enjoyment. Of her original plan she had lost sight. One thing only was clear to her mind—that she loved this man, and that he was beginning to love her. And one fear lurked in the background—the fear of anything coming in the way of this budding love. A wonderful,

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pine-scented dream were those summer weeks, crossed at moments by a nightmare-feeling of peril ahead. But that way she would not look. The future was nothing, the present everything. How it had all come about so quickly, so resistlessly, she occasionally puzzled without finding an answer, content that it should be so. Whether lingering on the twilight-veiled verandah, or walking with him behind Kazimira's chair, the moments were too precious to be wasted in vague speculations or in craven fears.

At times only a sort of panic would shake her out of the delicious languor of these weeks, in which for her only the Saturdays and Sundays counted, the rest a long but blissful waiting. Those were the times when some passing incident brought home to her the consciousness of the comedy she was playing. So long as she had had only Witek to deal with the comedy had been played with zest; it was only with Tadeusz on the scene that it began to be played shamefacedly, a feeling of guilt weighing upon her like lead.

Such a moment had been once when the Sunday papers had brought some peculiarly bloody details of General Trepow's rule as applied to Warsaw. When, in Kazimira's room, Tadeusz had done reading them aloud there fell again upon the group one of those thought-laden silences which Katya knew well. Then Witek, hurling a barely lighted cigarette into the corner of the room, rose impetuously.

"And we are here!" he said, facing his brother with reproachful eyes, and a voice which audibly shook.

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"While such things are happening over there we sit in base security! Tadeusz, I can stand it no longer. I must be up and doing."

"Doing what?" asked Tadeusz very quietly, though his brow lay in heavy folds.

"Anything! Everything! Sharing their danger, if nothing else."

"And, increasing it too. Do you not see that our only chance lies in keeping our heads and awaiting our chance? And this is not our chance yet. How could it be, so long as our national movement remains necessarily identified with the revolution, pure and simple, the best pretext they could wish for stamping out the one as brutally as the other."

Witek's restless fingers ran through his hair.

"But I cannot sit still. It is more than should be asked of Polish flesh and blood. Panna Sagorska, I see your eyes shining. I can almost hear your Polish blood boiling—to you I appeal! If you were a man would you not fly over the frontier?"

"I—I believe I would," stammered Katya, with quickly averted eyes, and the blood which knew itself not to be Polish burning in her cheeks.

"I was sure of it! How stop to calculate chances when our countrymen are being massacred by those barbarians—no, barbarian is too good a word—by those butchers. A nation of butchers they are, with a crowned butcher at their head."

"Oh, no, the Czar is no butcher," said Katya quickly, moved by a remorseful sense of disloyalty to her own

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nation. "He is weak, perhaps, but perfectly well-meaning. And among the mass too there are far more kind hearts than cruel ones. You must not judge by a few monsters."

She stopped, disconcerted, aware of four pairs of wondering eyes upon her. An apology for the Russian character from Polish lips was something so unprecedented as to produce the effect of a cold shower-bath.

"Perhaps you have Russian friends," suggested Kazimira, as the most plausible explanation of this seeming eccentricity.

Katya snatched at the excuse.

"Yes, I have, and it hurts me to see them misjudged—thrown into the same pot with those men of blood."

The conversation dropped for the moment under a touch of constraint, and leaving in Katya the sensation of having been near to a great danger. Reflecting on the grave astonishment in Tadeusz's eyes she trembled anew. How fearfully must anger sit upon that mighty brow, which even in the first passing sight had awakened in her dim thoughts of the thunders of Jove!

"I wonder whether she has not got any Russian blood in her?" Olympia speculated, left alone with Kazimira. "She speaks Russian perfectly too; never talks anything else to the old lady."

"It would need to be a very little drop," decided Kazimira, instinctively putting aside the distasteful suggestion. "And of course living over there she could not help knowing Russian."

Yet another fright was provoked by a casual remark of

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Kazimira's, touching the difficulty of getting authentic news of what was really happening in Russian Poland.

"I have a few correspondents at Warsaw, and one at Feliksoto, near Lubynia, you know; but of course they dare not put the truth into their letters, for fear of the censure. It is a long time, by the bye, since Panna Rudkowska has written. I hope they have not locked her up, meanwhile."

"Oh! do you—correspond with her?" asked Katya, with a catch in her breath, caused by the suppression of the adverb "still," almost spoken, but which would have betrayed too much.

"Not much, but I have written to her since I came here."

Katya was silent, struggling with some obscure feeling of danger. She had almost forgotten Panna Rudkowska's existence—the useful instrument for which she now had no further use. Somehow it was not pleasant to be reminded of her. The vague conception of a possible betrayal floated for a moment before her, too vague to cast a lasting shadow. Easily she shook it off and blissfully cast herself once more upon the current, for this was Saturday, the golden day of the week.

The visible aggravation of Kazimira's state was the real shadow upon her joy; for Katya too had never before possessed a friend, and in her generous heart there was room enough for friendship beside love, a friendship and a love which intertwined, since a common fear had made the lovers more intimate in weeks than months of conventional intercourse could have made them.

Never had Katya been so aware of this as upon a

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certain Sunday, when, in the wake of the invalid's chair, she had paused before the principal art-shop of the place whose window was filled with a good choice of engravings.

"Do you know what that is?" Tadeusz asked her, indicating the largest of these.

She looked and saw a group of convicts among rocks, a youth with a violin upon his shoulder. From the inscription: "A Song of Home," her eyes strayed to the signature in the corner. She looked at her companion inquiringly:—

"That was my father's masterpiece, painted from life, of course."

Katya looked long, taking in every detail. And it was *his* father who had painted it—from life. Her eyes darkened with moisture.

"I wonder he came out of it alive," she murmured.

"He did come out alive, but not by any means intact. It is Kazimira who is paying the cost."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that my father brought back tainted lungs from Siberia, and although his marvellous constitution enabled him to carry them about with him for ten years more, yet the seeds of disease were handed on—why to Kazimira instead of to Witek or me, let the learned explain if they can. But from the moment that she fell ill I have had the feeling that her doom had been sealed—there—" with a gesture towards the "Song of Home".

"Ah, not doom, surely!" said Katya quickly, and moving on, for Kazimira's chair, attended by Witek, was disappearing down the street.

A dumb jerk of the shoulders was his only immediate

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reply. It was not until they had almost got within ear-shot of the advance party that he turned to her again, speaking low and hurriedly.

"Panna Katya" (it was some time now since he had dropped the odious "Panna Sagorska"), "I am going to ask for another favour. You would like to keep your eyes shut to the truth—and so would I; but, coming week by week, I see the change too plainly. And besides I have been talking to the doctor. To know you are beside her is my comfort; but it would comfort me yet more if you would give me a promise."

"What promise?" she asked rather faintly.

"Only that in case of any change, of any aggravation, you should write to me—or wire. The matter will be safer in your hands than in Pani Grabinska's, engrossed as she is. If any urgency should arise, or even any emergency, don't scruple to send for me. I shall make time, somehow. Will you promise?"

"I promise," said Katya, with a strange new feeling of closeness of interest piercing right through the alarm awakened by his words and manner.

It was about ten days later that the compact thus hurriedly made came to be acted upon.

In Kazimira's state no marked change was visible, but something had occurred which seemed to deserve the title of an emergency. The last Sunday had been a blank, the first for long, rendered so by an unavoidable business journey. By the emptiness of that one day Katya was able to gauge what—should she come to lose this man—would henceforward be the emptiness of her life. It

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was a revelation at which a nature laid out on less generous lines might well have taken fright. But Katya was not of those who count the cost of their gifts.

It was three days after that long, weary Sunday that her chance came, though in a fashion as startling as it was ghastly.

In the waking intervals of the night she had heard unwonted sounds: muffled steps, the cautious opening and closing of a door which seemed to be the door of her neighbour, the hectic young man. Soon after dawn there was a knock, and Pani Grabinska came in, in a soiled *matinée* and eyes which proclaimed want of sleep.

"Did you hear anything?" she asked, having carefully closed the door and looked to see whether that into Malania's room was shut.

"Yes. What was it?"

It turned out to have been nothing less than His Majesty King Death, who, coming like a thief in the night, had, by an unlooked for *coup de main*, carried off the hectic young man.

Katya grew a little cold as she listened; for her neighbour in the passage had been at dinner yesterday, though not at supper.

"It is most awkward," complained Pani Grabinska, "and very hard upon me. I am usually so careful to get them out of the way in time, because of the effect upon the others, you know; but this quite puts me out of my calculations. Only two days ago the doctor told me he was good for six months more. And now he goes off like that!"

Katya could think of nothing else to say but that to

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decamp thus unceremoniously showed an extreme want of tact ; but preferred not to say it.

"You see, of course, that it has to be kept quiet. That is why I came to you. You are the only person in the house not an invalid or a fool," she mentally added, with a glance at Malania's closed door. "Nobody knows anything except Olympia, and of course she will be quiet. He is confined to his room, you must remember, and by to-morrow his brother will have come to fetch him away. Meanwhile he—*it* is removed already. But the funeral is the delicate point. It will have to take place here, worse luck, and no later than to-morrow. I am planning a long drive for the bulk of the patients, those that are able for it, and those that are not will not be in danger of catching sight of the cortège and asking questions. It is Kazimira I do not know what to do with. She never will mix with the others. And unfortunately the approach to the cemetery is visible from her window. Absolutely she must be got out of the house to-morrow afternoon."

"But how am I to get her away for several hours? She is so averse to moving now."

"I don't know how. I haven't had time to think. If her brothers were here it might be easier. You could propose an easy drive perhaps. Oh, but I must be off now! A thousand things to see about. I leave the matter in your hands."

And Pani Grabinska bustled out.

Katya sat on, thinking hard. "If her brothers were here!" All that her hostess had said seemed to resolve itself into that one idea.

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Presently she rose and went over to the writing-table. The pretext was good enough. To hold in her hands the means of summons and not to use them was too much after the dreadful blank of Sunday.

"Kazimira no worse, but your presence urgently desired for special reasons."

Thus ran the message which a few minutes later left the house.

By midday he had come; and it was to her that he went straight, before attempting to gain sight of Kazimira.

Meeting his eager yet troubled gaze, and hearing his anxious question: "What is it, Panna Katya? Did you say true when you said that she is no worse?" she wondered at her own boldness.

"Yes, I said true."

"Then what is it, or who is it who requires my presence?"

With the question his eyes went far into hers.

Having heard her account he pondered.

"I do not know whether I did right to send for you."

"You did right, ah, much more right than you know!"

Before his glance her own fell, but her heart leaped.

And then they fell to plotting. In view of the missed Sunday the unexpected arrival could be plausibly explained, while the enticing weather, cool after a spell of heat, made the proposal of a drive seem more plausible yet. Kazimira herself fell resistlessly into the net, and so did Malania Petrowna; for so perfect had been Pani Grabinska's arrangements that no suspicion of the ghastly truth had yet disturbed the Villa Olympia. In point of

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fact Kazimira, far from scenting a plot, was plotting on her own account, Tadeusz's non-appearance on Sunday having disappointed her only a little less that it had disappointed Katya. The weather was too good to be wasted on a mere drive she declared. Why not use it for that long-talked of day in the mountains which Katya was always going to have and had never had yet? A family of cheerful and robust girls, headed by a cheerful and robust mother, acquaintances of the Swigellos, and yearly devotees of Zalkiew, had repeatedly asked her to join them in their never-ending tours.

"It is for to-morrow that they have planned the *Morski Oko*,¹ you should go with them, Katya," urged Kazimira. "To leave Zalkiew without having seen the *Morski Oko* would be almost criminal on your part. And I am sure a mountain climb will empty Tadeusz's lungs of at least a month of the fumes of Krakau," she added, with a calm assumption of his movements which was in itself a masterpiece of *insouciance*. Inwardly she hugged herself at the thought of the marvellous opportunities embraced by the conception : a day in the mountains! The words which she felt certain that Tadeusz would have to speak some day, how much more easily would they be spoken among the electrifying influences of wild and beautiful scenery! That fruit which for weeks past she had watched ripening, surely it would have to fall to-morrow!

A glance of hurried consultation passed between the two counter-conspirators.

¹ Literally: Eye of the Sea.

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"But you, Kazimira? You should not spend the day alone."

"I shall not be alone all day. The first part of the road is quite easy. Malania Petrowna and I will drive to meet you (and to hear the news," added the wily Kazimira to herself).

And so after a short debate it came to be settled.

In the event both plots proved successful. Pani Grabinska's foresight enabled Kazimira and her companion on their way to the mountains to get a good start of the young man on his way to the cemetery. As to what had happened meanwhile, her first sight of the returning lovers enlightened her.

For Katya, new to these overwhelming aspects of Nature, the day had been one long intoxication. The depths of the chasms into which she gazed, the height of the crags to which she raised her awe-struck eyes, the roar of distant waters, the savage cry of a mountain-bird echoing through the rocky solitudes, the grim, stern yet entrancing beauty of it all enslaved her senses. Strange sights, strange sounds, even strange perfumes on all sides. And through it all the beloved man beside her. And to be nineteen, and in perfect health! What wonder that even the four robust sisters, hardened in climbing, should cry for mercy before she did? Had she had wings to her feet she could not, after hours of walking, have felt less sensible to fatigue. Now and then only the thought of the funeral in the valley would cross her bliss like a black, winding worm, to be scared away by the next word of her companion.

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That ripe fruit of which Kazimira had thought, hourly hung more heavily on its stalk. It wanted but the smallest touch to bring it down; and such a touch came soon after the picnic dinner, eaten on the shores of the *Morski Oko* itself, whose waters, sombre with the green of giant pines, yet shone with the lustre of a thrice-polished gem. While the guides collected the fragments, the party had dispersed in different directions, some in search of flowers, others of berries or ferns. It was for strawberries that Katya had decided. Over long since in the valley they were here still in full fruit. Bent on bringing back a basketful to Kazimira, whose favourite dessert they were, she had found a likely clearing in the forest, and upon her knees before a rich bed was busily at work; while the engineer, his fingers having proved too clumsy for the delicate task, crouched beside her with the basket.

"These strawberries appear to me to have had other visitors besides us—four-footed visitors," said Tadeusz, pointing to a heavy footmark among some trampled plants.

As he said it a twig cracked on the far side of the clearing; and, looking up, they both became aware of something big and shaggy, a species of hairy hillock among the ferns over there, only that it was a perambulating hillock. At the first glance Katya did not identify the object. It was only when the beast, evidently uneasy, reared itself heavily above the tangle of green to sniff the breeze with widened nostrils, that she understood in what company she found herself.

A moment of reflection would have told her that the

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danger was *nil*, since, unmolested, the Carpathian bear is unmolesting; but before reflection, and in face of the shaggy monster, came the inarticulate desire for protection, pressing her close to her companion's side with a half-unconscious grasp upon his arm. The pressure of his fingers upon hers, calm and reassuring, brought with it a sense of security together with a delicious warmth. For a couple of seconds only they crouched thus, immovable, looking across the clearing at the grunting bear, whose muzzle, smeared with strawberry juice, bore a fictitiously blood-stained appearance, and whose small black eyes were roaming. A second more and they had fallen upon the human intruders; another and the brute, dropping his forefeet, had scuttled away among the undergrowth.

Katya drew a rather deep breath.

"That was stupid of me; I might have known that he would be more frightened of us than we of him."

And she attempted to draw back her hand, but found it prisoner. In both of his Tadeusz was holding it; and now his hot lips were upon it.

"No, no, Katya," he was saying, with a happy, troubled laugh, "you have given it me, and I do not return it until you tell me it is mine—mine for life! Say, Katya, you know that I love you, do you not? Am I a fool for supposing that you can love me in return? You will make me happy, will you not—my love, my all! *Moje zdrowie, moje sycie!* Say, is it not so?"

And on their knees, as they were, she found herself within his arms, with the pines murmuring overhead, and the strawberry basket upset between them.

CHAPTER VII

THE BANNS

THAT day there was no room for reflection ; but on the very next Katya's trial began.

As she turned from the window through which she had waved a farewell to her betrothed, she had the consciousness of having reached a moment dimly foreseen and long-dreaded. Yesterday had stood in the sign of rapture ; to-day was to stand in that of reflection. Until the very last moment, cowardly for once in her life, she had shirked facing the facts of the case ; but escape from them was no longer possible. With a sort of desperate valour she now faced them. What were these facts exactly ?

Hands pressed against glowing cheeks, she sat down to consider them.

Tadeusz Swigello had betrothed himself to a girl whom he believed to be Kataryna Sagorska ; and to her undoubtedly he would be true. But what about Kataryna Malkoff ? Had he incurred towards her the slightest obligation ? He might love her ; after that moment in the forest she could not doubt that he did, but, the fact revealed, would not love be extinguished in wrath,—transformed to contempt and hatred ?

She did not want to see the matter put to the test. Must it be so put ? Could she not remain Kataryna

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Sagorska up to the foot of the altar, the truth revealed only when the knot was irrevocably tied and when, as his lawful wife, she could more confidently throw herself upon his mercy. www.libtool.com.cn

For a little while she busied herself with the wild idea. To her inexperience it seemed possible. Were not even the requisite documents lying ready to her hand? since, acting upon some obscure impulse, she had at the last moment carried off Nationka's papers. Who could prevent her using them? Not Malania Petrowna, who, of course, would be silent if ordered to.

Rising, she went over to her travelling desk, and with eager fingers sought out the papers: baptismal certificate, which in itself proclaimed her independence of parental control, since Nationka, having passed her twenty-fourth year, was of age in the eyes of the law; certificate of parents' marriage, testimonial of morality, every document that could be required by the most fastidious authorities. Katya looked them over; then pushed them back into their wrapper and locked up her desk. She knew quite well what would prevent her using them—conscience; her sense of loyalty to the man; growing hatred of the deceit which for months she had been practising. As an acquaintance, as a friend, she had been able to deceive him; as his affianced wife she could not do so. A new sense of responsibility interfered. Of course he should know the truth; but it must be imparted judiciously, for fear of breaking that fair dream of happiness, barely dawned. Perhaps it would have been best to have made the confession yesterday in the forest while they were both upon their knees with arms interlaced. Under the glow of that

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first kiss, surely even anger would have melted. Ah, but trouble the perfect bliss of that moment, perhaps destroy it? No, she could not be sorry for that silence.

This morning indeed she might have spoken. She saw now quite clearly that she should not have let him return to Krakau under this embarrassing delusion. But it was too late. And, besides, would he then have come back again on Saturday night as he had promised to? This way at least she was sure of another sight of him, even though in anger. Yes, she would tell him on Sunday. There would be a storm, of course, and perhaps a struggle; but, with the fire of his kisses still tingling upon her lips, she could not really doubt its issue. He would be angry; but he *must* forgive her, he *must* believe her. It could not be otherwise. She would not even allow herself to fear anything else, lest her courage should fail.

Meanwhile Kazimira, with almost every word she spoke, innocently aggravated the situation. Even before Tadeusz's departure she had begun to drop remarks about the desirability of haste.

"Formalities take so long," she argued, "and there is not so very much time to spare. We are in August now, and by October 1st he has to be at Serajewo. Of course, you must be married before then."

"Of course," Tadeusz had said, smiling with happy eyes at Katya, who had not smiled back in return.

"Married!" the word had been the first lash to her slumbering conscience. There was something offensively positive, chillingly sober about its mere sound, tearing her, as it did, out of the region of dreams, and placing her in that of hard and circumscribed realities.

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And now, Tadeusz gone, Kazimira wearied not of reiteration.

"There is no reason at all why you should not be married by this day month, Katya, so long as you don't mind buying the *trousseau* afterwards."

"Oh, surely not in a month!" protested Katya, startled by the nearness of the vision, and trembling to think how little time remained her for the difficult avowal and for the soothing of Tadeusz's rightful anger. But immediately she remembered that the avowal was to be made on the very next Sunday, which of course altered the case.

"Yes, in a month, Katya. Only of course we would have to begin seeing about things at once. Let me see, what *has* one got to see about in order to get married? Papers, to begin with—documents of all sorts. Have you got them with you or will you have to write for them?"

"I will have to write," faltered Katya, thinking once more of the papers upstairs in her desk, and once more rejecting them.

"Then I suppose you will require your guardian's consent, since of course you are minor—you have a guardian, have you not?"

"Yes, I have a guardian."

"Will he make difficulties, do you think?"

"No, I don't think so," said Katya, aware of the glee with which the gouty general would hand over his not always docile ward to any eligible husband, even though of Polish name. It was not from that side that difficulties threatened.

"You will write to him at once, will you not? With

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his consent in our pocket there cannot be any difficulties, either civil or religious, since you are of the same faith."

Katya said nothing, though the consciousness of a new complication had driven the blood to her cheek. But this complication at least might be removed. It was at this moment that a certain floating resolve took form, no more than the ripening of a seed which had been sown as far back as in the days when she turned over the leaves of the prayer-books in the oratory at Lubynia. Already she was quite familiar with the ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church, since to visit it on Sundays, and in the teeth of Malania's protestations, had necessarily formed part of the comedy she was playing. She was aware of the readiness with which the path was smoothed for converts. She would make use of that readiness—at once.

That very evening Katya paid a visit to the old priest whom she had seen so often before the altar; and before Saturday came round she was able to tell herself that one obstacle to her happiness was removed.

Yet the others remained—obstacles and difficulties among which even Malania Petrowna ranged. Not that surprise had any part in her emotions. For that the opportunities for gauging the coming event had been too plentiful. After the obligatory "scene," in which she forgot herself so far as sadly to displace her best wig by attempting to act upon it the gesture known as "the tearing out of hair," she dried her tears, and with the wisdom born of experience resigned herself to circumstances, but not without asking a very inconvenient question:—

"Have you told him already?"

"Told him what, Matoushka?"

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"Well, that you are—yourself, and not somebody else."

"Not yet, but I am going to tell him on Sunday. But mind, Matoushka"—in a fresh panic—"it is I myself who must tell him,—no one else. So until I pass you the word I remain Panna Sagorska, mind!"

"But not beyond Sunday, surely? No doubt he is a Pollack, and for a Pollack even lies may pass, since they are all made of lies; but if he is good enough to be married by you (which I absolutely deny) then the lies won't do now—so it seems to me."

It was Katya's own thought put into other words. Malania's naive soul was protesting quite as loudly as her own against any prolongation of the situation. With another pang Katya recognised the growing urgency.

"I don't quite see why you did not tell him at once," maundered on Malania. "He may be a little angry, but of course," with an almost vicious sniff, "he can only be delighted at the discovery that by marrying you he is getting back Lubynia."

"I wish I could think so!" sighed Katya, aware all the time that she did not really wish it; for that would have meant that he was another sort of person altogether.

"I must say I am rather curious as to how he will take it!"

Ah, how the thought echoed in Katya's mind! Yes, how would he take it? For the moment this question had become the pivot of her world.

Saturday came, dreaded and yearned for. A hundred ways had been thought of, a hundred speeches prepared. After a sleepless night she rose, heavy-eyed, bathed in a cold sweat of fear. Supposing this were the day on which she was to see him for the last time!

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And then at the first sight of her betrothed all preoccupation dropped away, powerless, drowned in the joy of his presence. Even before she had freed herself from his first embrace ~~she had resolved that she~~ would say nothing yet, neither to-day nor to-morrow. It would be easier to write. She wondered now that she had not thought of it before. In writing the proper arguments could be more readily chosen ; and by these means too there would be time for his anger to cool before they met again. She would be spared the sight of the indignant astonishment upon that mighty brow, a spectacle which she dreaded with an almost morbid dread. In this way too the happy Sunday would not be spoiled.

And a happy Sunday it was ; the happiest which had yet been. It was not until its joys were almost spent that—in the very moment of parting—terror came back again. They were standing together in the deserted sitting-room, speaking the farewell words. Once he had kissed her, and again, and yet again, when, upon some wild impulse of fear she clutched at his shoulders, pressing hard against him, with quivering face uplifted.

“Swear to me, Tadeusz, swear to me !” she panted, “that you will never give me up, never abandon me, that nothing will ever come between us !”

“Katya, my love, what words ! What thoughts ! I would sooner give up life a thousand times !”

“But swear it ! swear it !” she implored, her features twitching strangely. “If you do not swear it, Tadeusz, I shall die !”

“I swear it—by our love, Katya ; but I do not understand——”

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"Ah, you will some day!" she breathed just audibly, as in a sort of sudden exhaustion she leant against his enclosing arm.

Very gently he kissed the closed eyes, perplexed and a little anxious, though only for her health. Hitherto she had not struck him as a person liable to anything in the shape of "nervous attacks".

The letter was written next day and even stamped and addressed, but it was not posted. After hours of painful reflection she had decided not to send it by the post, but to hand it to him herself on the occasion of his next Sunday visit, and in the very moment before his departure. The terror of the final severance, his not returning even to upbraid her, had once more carried the day. All the week long the closed letter lay within her desk. Early next Sunday morning it was put into her pocket and carried about all day long, awaiting its opportunity, only to be taken out again late that night crumpled and creased and still unopened. Was it that her courage had again failed her, or had the emotions of the parting simply obliterated all thought of the letter? She herself could not have said it. There had been some talk of another betrothal announced, that of one of the four robust hill-climbing sisters to a grey-haired proprietor of the neighbourhood,—a marriage of convenience if ever there was one. In his scathing comments upon the event Katya had again with terror recognised the intolerance of Tadeusz's views in this matter. Maybe it was this observation which had paralysed the painfully mastered resolution.

There opened for her now a period new in her experience, and foreign to her nature. Love was making of

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her what she had never been before—a moral coward. Vainly she pondered over ways and means of escaping the danger which every day of procrastination was augmenting in size, as she knew, without finding courage to risk everything upon one throw. Sometimes she caught herself yearning for an exchange of identity; wishing that she was not herself and Tadeusz not himself, but just two irresponsible mortals, called anything in the world but Malkoff and Swigello. How simple everything would have been then! Lubynia and the original plot were quite out of sight now. And yet, oh irony of circumstances!—it was upon that rock that her life would split, perchance! And first she would have to pass through the fire of his anger, to hear hard words from the lips which had spoken so much love. And—worst of all—she would have to bear his frown. It was the potentialities of displeasure upon that magnificently moulded brow which frightened her most. The picture of what it must be with the thunder upon it began to haunt her with a sort of obsession born of overstrained nerves.

“No answer from Moscow yet?” would be his first question every week, to which Katya would reply with vague remarks as to the irregularity of posts in these troubled times, the delays of censure, etc.; although, in point of fact, she had her guardian’s reply, as well as all the necessary documents, safe in her keeping by this time, awaiting only the moment at which she would hear from Tadeusz’s lips whether or not they would be required.

And Kazimira was worse than he,—unconsciously sharpening the torture.

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"But it is not yet the 1st of October," Katya said once, hard-pressed. "So long as it is done before he has to go."

"Ah, but I want it done before /go!" said Kazimira, with what remained of her voice, and with an element of slyness in her distorted smile.

"Ah, Kazimira, don't speak like that! I cannot stand it!"

And to her friend's consternation she burst into tears.

It was simply that the strain was beginning to tell. Ere this Kazimira had noticed that her "health" was not so radiant, nor so bright-eyed as once. And just now, when she should have been basking in the sunshine of bliss! Kazimira could not understand it at all.

There came another phase—anxiety, worn out by its own sharpness, sunk into apathy, an inclination to passivity, to letting events come on instead of provoking them. It was the fatalistic tendency of her nation coming to the fore. Necessarily—since resolutions formed and not kept have an unavoidably demoralising effect—the springs of her will had relaxed. Of course, the truth would have to be spoken; but she had arrived at thinking that the later it was spoken the better it would be. All sorts of reasons which seemed to have logic on their side pleaded thus. The longer the undisturbed betrothal existed the closer would become the intimacy, the faster would she be able to rivet the beloved man to herself, making forgiveness more possible in proportion as rupture grew impossible. The nearer the day of the consummation of their happiness, the smaller the chances of his renouncing it. Thus she argued, putting out all her woman's wiles, lavishly drawing upon the rich treasure of

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her charms in order to forge for him chains which should prove stronger than his pride. Confidence and diffidence pursued each other in the process. By dint of thinking in a circle she had lost all sense of the true proportion of things. There were moments when she wondered whether he would be angry still, and could see him laughing with her over the success of her stratagem, and again there were other moments in which her act appeared to her far too black to be forgiven either in this world or in the next.

But for the fateful date which stood like a landmark in her way, the situation might have indefinitely dragged on ; yet from the relentless advance of time there was no escape.

There came a day on which, from the tone of Tadeusz's daily note, Katya understood that his patience was beginning to be exhausted. As the only means of soothing his evident irritation she told him by return of post of her guardian's consent, purposely leaving herself no margin for reflection. This brought him radiant to Zalkiew on Saturday. At sight of the white face with which she greeted him, he stopped short in amazement.

"Katya, my love, are you ill?"

She tried to smile at him.

"Not ill, Tadeusz ; only a little nervous ; I can't help being frightened. It is so near, you know."

"Frightened by our happiness ? Oh, Katya !"

"Are you quite sure of our happiness, Tadeusz ?"

He looked at her amazed, and with some of that alarm which her strange demeanour occasionally stirred. With-

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out clue as he was, how was he to explain the hard set of her lips; the wild light in her eyes?

That morning she had knelt in a corner of the church which she now daily visited, and before the image of the Virgin had vowed not to let Tadeusz leave her again without knowing the truth. Hence the pallor of her face and the sternly set lips.

"I am so sure of it, Katya, that I am going to lose not a single moment in securing it. Instead of sitting down now, I am going straight off to Father Zygmunt with the papers. Fetch yours, like a good girl, will you?—my own I have here. The first banns can be put up to-morrow—Sunday—and the third to-morrow fortnight. Father Zygmunt is an old friend; he will waive what formalities he can. To-morrow our names will be read out in Church, Katya; and to-morrow fortnight we shall be man and wife!"

"To-morrow fortnight!" said Katya, below her breath, a shiver of apprehension running over her.

"The papers, Katya, the papers! And quickly, my love, since Father Zygmunt keeps early hours."

She went upstairs mechanically, her plan already formed. She would not need to speak, after all; the papers would speak for her. Having looked at them he would, of course, not go to Father Zygmunt. In a quarter of an hour he would be back again, with blazing eyes and frowning brow, and then her fate would be decided.

Blindly she went to her desk—blindly groped for the envelope in which the documents had lain ready for weeks. With the stiff, measured movements of an au-

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tomaton she went downstairs again and placed the packet in his hand. A minute later she stood at the window, and with eyes which an excess of anxiety had emptied of all expression watched him disappear down the road.

"How will he come back again?" she asked herself. "Where will have gone that happy smile by then? I had better wait here. It cannot take long."

Wearily she sat down and waited—a quarter of an hour—an hour—in vain. Did that mean an instantaneous departure for Krakau? Unarmed for the conflict as she felt, she almost hoped it did.

She was sure of his wrathful departure until late that night a note of explanation arrived. Obligated to track Father Zygmunt about the town, from one sick call to the other—and in a place full of consumptives these were many—Tadeusz explained that he now found it too late to return to the Villa. "But all is arranged for to-morrow. Good-night, my only love! Business will hold me fast in the morning, but I shall meet you before the church at ten o'clock."

With an almost vacant stare Katya let the note drop to her lap. What could it mean? Where was the anger feared? Was it she, or Tadeusz, who had taken leave of their senses? Had he known of her identity all along, and purposely entered into the spirit of the comedy? It seemed the only explanation possible. Or—dreadful thought—had he not looked at the papers at all, and just handed them over unopened to Father Zygmunt?

At the thought she grew cold. Absolutely she must speak to him before to-morrow's proclamation.

Olympia Grabinska, Katya's usual companion on

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Sundays, did not quite understand why she was being so relentlessly hurried next morning in the process of fixing her hat-pins. They reached the church far too early, as it was, so early that there was as yet no sign of Tadeusz. For twenty full minutes Katya waited in a fever, Olympia in a temper—for the sun scorched badly—until well after the opening of the ceremony he appeared, hurried but radiant.

"All right!" was his brief comment, as he drew Katya's hand within his arm. "Let us get into a dark corner, Katya, where no one will see us, and hear ourselves lawfully proclaimed."

She hung back.

"Tadeusz, did you look at the papers?"

"I glanced at them, yes; they seem all right."

"But did you not examine them?"

"No, why should I? That is Father Zygmunt's business. Let us hurry, Katya, or we shall not even find a corner."

"But Tadeusz, have you nothing to say?"

"Lots, but not now. I want to hear what I sound like from the pulpit," he laughed gleefully,—boyishly. "By the bye, you never told me that Katya stood for Karola, I imagined it was Kataryna. But never mind that now, there is no time to lose."

Dazed and uncomprehending she found herself drawn forward. Presently in a retired nook she knelt beside Olympia, and wondered whether the many prayers uttered upon this same spot had, after all, been heard. Could it be that all those terrors had been unfounded? Clearly he must have known the truth all along.

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After a little her troubled spirit began to settle in the soothing atmosphere, though all the time she was trembling, before the moment of the proclamation. It came at last, at once too slowly and too quickly for her desire. Through a mist she saw the old priest climbing painfully to the pulpit, through a haze of incomprehension she heard the gospel of the day read out. Then came the usual announcements; then a pause, while Father Zygmunt readjusted his spectacles for the deciphering of the names upon the banns. Katya's heart began to beat so noisily that it filled her ears. Supposing that, after all, he had not caught her real name when he glanced through the papers!

"Karol Bidski, shoemaker, Zalkiew, son of, etc., to Julia Saniew, daughter of, etc."

After the shoemaker there followed a peasant, and after him again a carpenter. Then at last Katya's painfully strained ears caught the name she was waiting for.

"Tadeusz Boleslaw Antoni Swigello, engineer, domiciled at Krakau, son of Stanislas Swigello and of his wife Sofia, to Nationka Karola Sagorska, daughter of the late Karol Sagorska and of his late wife Marya, domiciled at Feliksoto, in the kingdom of Poland."

"This is the first time of reading."

With a smile in the depths of his eyes Tadeusz turned towards his betrothed, but in the same instant the smile went, changed to quick alarm. Her face blanched, and rigid she had sunk back against the wooden seat. For the first time in her life Katya had fainted.

CHAPTER VIII

IN A SUMMER-HOUSE

"THE gracious lady has not yet been pleased to return."

It was Timosh who said it to a visitor one day early in September. Within the last three months he had said the same words somewhat frequently, and always to the same visitor, whose face of disappointment grew longer with each hearing.

"But has she not announced her coming? Have you no clue to her intentions?"

"The gracious lady does not impart her intentions to such as me."

With a longer face than ever Klobinski remounted his *flacre*. The money spent upon conveyances in the course of this summer was in itself quite enough explanation of his ill-humour, and might likewise serve as a barometer of his affections. Not that worldly motives had not their say. That Katya should be an heiress vastly enhanced her value in his eyes, but that the heiress should be just Katya—the dark, glowing Katya, whose form was so supple and whose eyes so black—was after all the chief point. Of its kind it was a genuine passion, though that kind was not exalted. Of hope, strictly speaking, there had never been much in its elements. What chances had a *stanowoi* with narrow pay and no high patrons—alien

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too in race—of gaining the mistress of Lubynia? No; he could not really hope; for though well-furnished with conceit, he was likewise furnished with common-sense. To feast his eyes upon her beauty, to live as many minutes in her presence as might be vouchsafed to him, such were the crumbs of happiness on which he aspired to live. That was why the weary summer had seemed so never-ending, a desert, arid and dry, stretching back to the day when she had come to his office to ask for the passports. Oh, cruel fate, which had compelled him to lend a hand to his own bereavement! And no prospect yet of its end. With the disturbance of the country growing daily was it likely that she should hasten back? And things always looked so much worse in print than in reality. She would read in Austrian papers that Poland was being held down by main force, as in truth it was; but what could that matter to her so long as it *was* held down? He would have long since written to her in a reassuring sense, if only he knew where to write to; but no amount of cross-questioning had been able to extract anything like an address from Timosh. That fool, Malania Petrowna, would of course act as a drag, terrified as she would be of recrossing the frontier; and that Polish girl, too, whom she had taken with her as maid—the one he had so stupidly mistaken for herself one day in spring—ten to one she would be on Malania's side. As though any one would touch a hair of that precious head!—with him as defender too! Oh! when should he again see that slender figure, that gleaming black hair?

Just then Klobinski sat up straighter, staring intently

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ahead; for in the very forming of the thought a slender figure with gleaming black hair had become visible upon the footpath which stretched to the first houses of Feliksoto already within sight. Had that old ruffian been deceiving him or were his eyes doing that?

Yes, they were; for within another moment the *fiacre* was abreast of the pedestrian, who, turning her head, revealed not the face whose sight he yearned for, although one not entirely unfamiliar. Where had he seen it before? he asked himself as, disappointed, he sank back upon the seat. Of course it had been a mad expectation. But where had he seen that face? He had it! The little seamstress at Lubynia. The mistake of the spring repeated. He sighed dejectedly; then suddenly sat up straight again. He had just remembered that she had no business to be here at all, since she had started with Katya for Austria? Had she been sent back? That would argue her in possession of recent news.

"Stop!" he shouted to the driver; and a moment later had alighted, and with his back once more to Feliksoto, was on his way to meet the slender black figure.

She glanced at him in some astonishment and would have passed.

"One moment, please," said Klobinski, with just the amount of politeness necessary in order not to frighten her. "Am I mistaken in supposing that your name is——"

"I am Nationka Sagorska," said the girl humbly, and obviously alarmed; for to be stopped in the road by a police commissioner might in these critical times portend dreadful things.

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Natalia Sagorska—yes, that was the name upon the third passport, he remembered it quite well.

"You are in the service of Panna Malkoff, are you not? I have seen you at Lubynia."

"I sew for her sometimes when she needs me."

"But how is it that she is not needing you now? Since when have you returned from Austria?"

"From Austria?" repeated Nationka, with a not over-intelligent expression of face.

"Yes, yes, you went to Austria with your mistress in spring as I happen to know, having procured the passports,—in the quality of lady's-maid—so I understood. Have you been discharged?"

"I have never been to Austria, gracious gentleman."

"Oh, she did not take you, after all? Perhaps you were afraid to go?"

"I should not be afraid to go anywhere with Panna Katya, but I was never asked to."

"Then why was the passport wanted?"

"Which passport, gracious gentleman?"

Klobinski struck his patent-leather boot impatiently with his cane. Was the girl half-witted?

"But the one that Panna Malkoff asked of me for you, of course."

"I did not know she had asked for any, gracious gentleman."

"And yet you must have given her the papers. Please try and remember,—and don't look so extraordinarily like an idiot if you can help it," he added, below his breath.

"Yes; I gave the gracious lady the papers one day in spring when she asked me to."

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"What did she want them for?"

Nationka shrugged her shoulders.

"Do I know? Is it my place to ask the gracious lady what she wants my papers for?"

"But when she gave them back again, did she not explain?"

"She has not given them back. At first she said that she would only need them for a few days. But at the end she asked me whether I would mind if she took them with her."

"And she did take them?"

"Yes. I know they are safe with the gracious lady."

Klobinski stood still for a moment staring hard at his boots, the minute wrinkles upon his leathery face immobilised by reflection.

"And you are quite certain that there was never any talk of your accompanying her?"

"Quite certain, gracious gentleman. May I go now?"

"Yes, you may go—to the devil if you like," said Klobinski, quite audibly this time.

While the scared Nationka hurried along the path he regained his vehicle, thoughtfully. Between his fingers he seemed to feel a thread which might yet prove to be a clue—to what? That Katya had asked for three passports when she only wanted two seemed proved already; but her motive? There was something here which escaped him, but which he was determined to run to earth. Katya herself interested him too intensely to let the smallest of her actions leave him indifferent.

He pondered the question while Nationka, vaguely remorseful, pursued her way. Had she done wrong, she

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wondered, in mentioning the fact of the borrowed papers? If Panna Katya had forbidden her to do so no tortures would have extracted the words from her lips; but such prudential measures were not in Katya's habits. Even had she foreseen a possible meeting between Klobinski and the seamstress it would not have occurred to her that he might recognise so insignificant a person, seen but once, *en passant*. For Katya altogether undervalued the man, not only as a lover but likewise as an intriguer. The contempt which she felt for him as a character almost unavoidably coloured her views both of his ardour and of his intelligence.

Already that not exactly masterly but extremely nimble intelligence, ever prone to poke and peer, was at work upon the problem.

The third passport,—what had been the object of the third passport? There lay the knot of the question. Was that old slit-eyed Cerberus in the plot? Even if so Russia certainly did not contain gold enough wherewith to buy his speech. With that appreciation of loyalty of which the disloyal are not necessarily devoid Klobinski recognised this. Besides, the gold was not his. Was there any one else who might possibly be in her confidence? any one available, that is to say. Hardly; since she had no friends, and scarcely an acquaintance. Stop, though; how about the schoolmistress whom she used to visit in winter? He remembered, with a sort of grudge, how before his very eyes she had vanished into the schoolhouse one winter's day. And he had seen her go in since. At the time he had wondered at her choice of acquaintances, explained perhaps by her having next to

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no choice in the matter. Young girls required young girls, so he had been told. If any one was initiated into Katya's plans it would be Panna Rudkowska. To approach her would therefore be the next obvious step. And in this there need not be a day's delay nor an hour's either, seeing that school was over by this time. As to the manner of approach, considering their respective sexes and ages, there could only be one manner, of course; thus, at least, judged the adaptable Pole, prepared at a moment's notice to play any *rôle* for which fate might choose to cast him; he had his best clothes on, too, which could do no harm. Complacently he glanced down at his shining boots; after all they would not have been put on quite in vain. Nothing could be easier than to stroll past the little weedy garden adjoining the schoolhouse, in which at this very hour he had frequently caught sight of the schoolmistress taking the air, and across the conveniently low paling pass her the latest political news. Their common Polish blood might suffice to explain the initiative step; and as for the next, well, he had practice enough.

Long before he reached his lodgings the plan stood outlined. Having dismissed the *fiacre* he first went nimbly upstairs to give another dose of perfume to his handkerchief, another touch of the brush to his sleek hair; then once more sallied forth, his face set towards the street in which stood the schoolhouse flanked by the weedy little garden.

In that weedy garden there stood an insecure, attenuated-looking summer-house, built apparently of overgrown toothpicks, which a meagre growth of Virginian

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creeper precariously held together ; and in its shelter, while Klobinski strolled nearer, the released schoolmistress was sitting, her thoughts, strangely enough, busy with the identical subject which occupied his. She, too, for reasons of her own, had been missing Katya sorely. The visits of the mistress of Lubynia, had, during the winter months, been the brightest spots of her monotonous existence. Her inflammable fancy had been caught by the suggestion of romance in the position, her insignificance flattered at playing an instrumental part in what might possibly prove to be a real social event. With Katya's departure the thread seemed to have snapped, until some weeks later she recovered it again in another form and from another hand. It was in the end of May that she received a letter from Kazimira Swigello at Zalkiew in which mention was made of her new acquaintance, Panna Sagorska, a charming Polish girl, coming from Kowno, and knowing Lubynia well. Followed a glowing personal description of her, a laughable one of the funny old lady who accompanied her. In bewilderment Panna Rudkowska read on. Panna Malkoff and her companion ! Impossible to mistake them. And calling herself Sagorska ! What could it all mean ?

Having reviewed matters for a few moments the schoolmistress felt so excited that she was compelled to go to the window, fanning herself with the copy-book she had been correcting at the postman's entrance. She had caught sight of a possibility which in her mind was rapidly becoming a probability. The conversations of the winter, Katya's announced resolution, her so obvious mortification at the Swigello's rejection of her proposal, her headstrong

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will—of which proofs had not been wanting—all had been passed in review. Supposing she had resolved to outwit the brothers Swigello? It was just the sort of thing that Panna Rudkowska could imagine her doing. By dint of putting two and two together, with feminine intuition, she had arrived at making the sum come right.

Her first sensation was one of admiration, pure and simple, for Katya's enterprise. But other impressions followed fast. So this was the explanation of Panna Malkoff's strange reticence touching her destination—of her reserve at their last interview. The idea of going off on so important an errand without giving her quasi-confidante any clue to her intentions! It was extremely mortifying to her to be thus left out of the plot, she who had first been the means of setting it agoing. Having once caught this point of view Panna Rudkowska's thoughts of Katya become tinged with a certain spite, produced by soreness and aggravated by the emptiness of her present life.

But after that one letter from Kazimira there came nothing more, despite various obsequious and inquisitive missives. Had they even reached their destination? It was impossible to be sure of anything in these days of strict control. How was the romance at Zalkiew progressing? Would she be surprised some day by the announcement of a betrothal? Many were the times that the schoolmistress, torn between interest in the situation and her feeling of soreness, asked herself the question.

She was doing so now within the attenuated summer-house, and unconscious of the visitor drawing ever nearer.

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She was also wondering, as she chronically did, whether anything in the shape of romance would ever enter into her own life. The few mostly insolent compliments which had been paid to her hair, could scarcely be ranked as such. And it was her hair alone she had to look to. More than one pair of male eyes in the street, caught by that wealth of gold, had hastened his steps, only to turn away in almost comical disappointment on catching sight of the face belonging to that hair. Like a glow-worm she attracted from afar, but as little as a glow-worm would bear close inspection.

Just now the large mouth drooped wearily. A prophetic glance into the future had shown her herself, twenty years hence, sitting in the same summer-house—or a similar one—with only the difference that the golden hair would then be turning silver.

And as the thought formed, she raised her eyes and saw a person in a dark-green uniform standing on the other side of the paling.

“My compliments, Panna Rudkowska!”

She was on her feet in a moment, in a kind of panic, since to her the visit of a police commissioner appeared at least as ominous as it might do to Nationka.

With an obsequious and uncertain smile upon her lips she approached the paling, examining her conscience meanwhile in all haste as to possible transgressions. Surely she had been careful enough of late to avoid all pronouncedly Polish subjects, to put down the singing of national airs?

But the impersonification of authority just now leaning upon the paling was looking, for the moment, as mild as

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milk. Lifting his hat in the most approved fashion he inquired in the pleasantest manner possible whether she had heard the latest news? Happening to be passing this way it had occurred to him that she might not have seen the evening papers, and had therefore taken the liberty, etc.

No, she had heard no news, the schoolmistress stammered, still perplexed and uncomprehending.

"Another police inspector shot at Warsaw," explained Klobinski, more pleasantly than ever. "I fear, I very much fear that this will necessitate severer measures of repression than those hitherto used. We have received no new orders yet, but doubtless they are on the way. I thought I might as well drop you a word of warning. In your position, you see, prudence cannot in these times be carried too far."

"Thank you, you are too kind," murmured Panna Rudkowska.

"Can kindness go too far—to a compatriot?" smiled Klobinski, lowering his voice by one eloquent tone.

"Oh, but——"

"We are both loyal servants of the Czar, of course, that needs no saying. But can even the responsibilities of office quite kill early memories?"

Thus Klobinski, looking singularly unofficial and leaning a little further across the paling.

"If I had the chance of speaking to you alone, I could give you some useful hints as to the means of keeping out of danger. But this place is so public; it would not do for me to be seen here. Is that not a summer-house I perceive? Perhaps it is permitted."

A minute later he had slipped in by the narrow gate,

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and, shielded from the public gaze by the already reddening Virginian creeper, was ensconced in the toothpick erection *tête à tête* with Panna Rudkowska.

"Possibly you are astonished at my interest in your welfare," he suggested, while disposing his coat sleeves so as to entail a minimum of harm to them from the roughness of the deal table. "Because we have rarely met, and more rarely spoken, you think no doubt that you are a stranger to me. But you think wrongly. My opportunities of observing you have been greater than you suppose. My eye has been upon you, Panna Rudkowska; and what I have seen has engendered in me a respect to which I have long desired to give expression. These are difficult times, my dear young lady; and to move in them with no detriment either to duty or to—to one's finer feelings, argues not only a strong character but also a high courage. You have so moved, Panna Rudkowska, I am happy to be able to say it."

Under the suavely approving glance bent upon her she coloured with surprise and delight, her large, loose mouth widening in a gratified smile.

"From the first moment that I noticed you I said to myself; 'there is a character!'"

"How should you have noticed me?" she breathed, in pleased confusion.

"How should I not have noticed you unless I was blind? And I am not blind; certainly not to the gleam of such gold as this!" with a discreet but unmistakable gesture towards her *coiffure*.

Why trouble with elaborate approaches when short-cuts would serve?

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The tone in which she murmured : " Oh, Pan Klobinski ! " further strengthened him in his conviction that this was one of the cases in which the colour could, with perfect security, be laid on thick.

" And besides saying to myself : ' What a character ! ' I have likewise said : ' What a life she must lead ! a life so full of work, so empty of pleasure that it is a wonder she can support it ' . "

" It is not easy," sighed Panna Rudkowska, seized by acute self-pity.

" So long as Lubynia was inhabited there were the visits of Panna Malkoff to brighten your days. I am aware of how highly she esteemed you ; but even those have ceased for the moment, though surely not for long. The approaching end of the fine season will no doubt bring back the wanderers. I should not be surprised if already you were informed of your friend and patroness's impending return ? "

" Oh, no, Panna Malkoff never writes to me ! " came from the schoolmistress' lips, with all the acidity of an abruptly reawakened grievance.

" Ah ? "

The note of interrogation in Klobinski's voice was as handy as a hook for the catching up of any stray bits of information that might be floating about in the air.

" That astonishes me. Such friends as you seemed to be in the winter. "

" In winter, yes. But this is summer ; and she has other friends now to cultivate, no doubt. "

" I did not know she had any friends in Austria ? "

" She might want to acquire some, might she not ? But

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of course I know nothing, since she has not thought me good enough to consult."

"I always considered Panna Malkoff to be a capricious person," observed Klobinski, with accomplished shamelessness. To disarm all possible suspicion of personal interest in the matter was of course a prime necessity.

"People in her position and with her means often are. No doubt she is living in a whirl of gaiety in which even the claims of friendship are drowned."

"I don't think Zalkiew is so very gay. It is full of consumptive people, you know."

"Oh, it is at Zalkiew she is? A funny choice, certainly. Did she happen to tell you what made her go there?"

"She never even told me that she was going there; but I—found out."

"It is wonderful what ladies will not find out about each other," observed Klobinski, pleasantly jocose.

"Oh, I have found out more than that; and I daresay I shall find out more yet, even if she does not succeed. I mean"—she broke off with an abrupt realisation of her own indiscretion—"even if she does not want to tell me herself."

Klobinski's gloved fingers drummed reflectively upon the table. Not a word, not even an inflection of the voice had been lost upon him. He was on the right tack; this much he clearly saw already. In which direction should the next move be made? For prudence sake perhaps in a different one.

Accordingly, with renewed earnestness, he returned to the subject of impending police revisions, seasoned

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by valuable items of advice as to demeanour. From this, in due time, he glided back imperceptibly into a more personal tone, hinting more or less delicately that the schoolmistress' safety was a question which touched him rather nearly, efforts which were presently rewarded by a reappearance of the gratified smile upon the wide mouth. It grew broader with his next words.

"How glad I should be if it lay in my power at least partially to replace your absent—and, I fear, forgetful—patroness! Say, Panna Rudkowska!" the pleasantly jocose tone was once more to the fore, "will you have me as a substitute?"

Panna Rudkowska was too overcome to do anything but again murmur:—

"Oh, Pan Klobinski!"

"Hampered as I am by my position, I cannot of course drop in as unceremoniously as she used to do; but there are other ways. Do you ever walk abroad on Sundays? I sometimes stroll beside the river on fine afternoons between four and five. If by any chance you should have that habit, there is no saying whether we may not meet among those charming willows, far from prying eyes."

"It is beautiful beside the river," stammered Panna Rudkowska, her elderly face looking almost young as she said it.

"Exactly what I think. Far more beautiful than in this garden, for instance," with a comprehensive look around him. "How is it, by the bye, that I never see a flower in your hair, Panna Rudkowska? No doubt you have too serious a character for such frivolities. Exactly what I should have expected."

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"There are no flowers in this garden," she sentimentally sighed; "the same as in my life, nothing but weeds."

"Oh, yes, there is one flower in this garden," he assured her, with a not-to-be-misunderstood stare at her blushing face. "I see here at least one red rose. Strange, very strange that it should be yet ungathered!"

"That will do for to-day," was the inner comment with which he presently took his leave. "By to-morrow it will have worked."

Alone, Panna Rudkowska's first move was towards her looking-glass. The face she saw there seemed scarcely familiar, transformed as it was with a new-born excitement. The very aspect gave plausibility to the incredible thing which seemed to have come to pass. The romance sighed after half an hour ago, was it actually entering into her life? Oh, if Heaven were merciful enough to let the sun shine on Sunday!

It was merciful—or unmerciful enough. Among the wilderness of willows bordering the rolling waves of the Niemen which forty-four years ago had tried in vain to keep the two processions apart, Klobinski was able to take much more decisive short-cuts than those taken in the attenuated summer-house, with the result that after a couple of hours of highly diplomatic flirtation he returned home in full possession of all the facts known to Panna Rudkowska, or surmised by her. The opportunity of pouring out her grievance had been too much to resist. Besides, why should she resist? She was no longer in Panna Malkoff's confidence, nor bound over by any promise of secrecy. Piece by piece all the observations

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of the winter were successfully extracted from her not unwilling lips, as well as the crowning proof, the letter from Zalkiew with the reference to a Panna Sagorska who, according to internal evidence, could only be Panna Malkoff.

"It must be that she is trying to marry one of them without letting them know who she is," explained the schoolmistress, to her attentive auditor. "I wonder whether she will succeed!"

"I wonder," said Klobinski, between his teeth.

Soon after that he found that it was getting late.

"And next Sunday?" timidly suggested Panna Rudkowska.

The development of the afternoon had been such as to make the question almost unavoidable. "Shall I walk by the river next Sunday?"

"Next Sunday?—let me see—yes, by all means, walk by the river, Panna Rudkowska; there is no more beautiful place."

With a somewhat distorted smile because of the fury consuming him, he raised the shabbily gloved hand to his lips.

Rage was still upon him when he reached his lodgings.

"Fooled! Fooled like the veriest greenhorn!" That was what it came to. Not for a moment did he doubt Panna Rudkowska's conclusions; too well did they accord with his own. For he had not forgotten the interest betrayed in her predecessors at Lubynia, and those preliminary inquiries for which he himself had been pressed into service. He saw it all now. The borrowed pass-

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port,—the long absence ; all the pieces fitted. And his own hand had been made to work for his own undoing ! Ah, but he was not undone yet ; the famous plot was not yet accomplished ! There was still Marcin Klobinski to be reckoned with, the man who Katya had always undervalued and therefore never feared.

And now, the first fumes of anger dispersed, the situation revealed itself materially improved for him. A new possibility loomed. For the first time in his forlorn courtship hope raised its head. For he held her now by means of the false passport of which he alone of outsiders knew. In such times as these a word from him would be enough to lose her. What inclination had failed to do, might it not yet be accomplished by terror ?

In any case there was not a moment to be lost. Leave of absence was not an easily obtained commodity just now ; but he had arrears to claim, and there were always ways and means. It was fortunate too that he had a suit of plain clothes lying by. Within half an hour of his return home his application for two weeks' leave was written out. He would not need more than that to do what he had to do.

When next Sunday came round, although the sun again shone, Panna Rudkowska walked alone and desolate by the river, turning her head at each rustle of the willows, only to see water-ousels and sandpipers innumerable flying forth, but no smiling and well-groomed police commissioner.

That dazzling romance which had fluttered so abruptly into her life, could it already have fluttered out again ?

CHAPTER IX

A RENDEZ-VOUS

ALONE at last and delivered from the fussy attentions of Malania Petrowna, Katya, still rather dizzy and not quite remembering how she had got back to the villa, rose from the sofa upon which she was supposed to be slumbering and went straight to her desk. Close beneath its lid lay a large envelope full of documents. With unsteady fingers she drew them out, and, having cast a glance upon them, sat down upon the nearest chair, shaking in all her limbs. It was the papers of Kataryna Malkoff which she held in her hands; which meant, of course, that in her flurry last night she had handed to Tadeusz those of Nationka Sagorska. His equanimity, the proclamation in the church, even that puzzling remark about the Christian name—all became only too comprehensible now. The situation, bad enough, in truth, as it had been yesterday, was now complicated a hundred-fold. With her own acts accusing her so loudly, how get him to believe that there had been no intention in the exchange? Well, credited or not, she would not deceive him for one hour longer.

For a few moments she sat still, thinking about the "how"; then, very white still but suddenly quiet, she pulled towards her a sheet of note-paper, and with a

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hand already steadied, began to write. The impossibility of further delay had abruptly given her that fortitude which she had sought so long in vain. She told him that she must speak to him without delay, and alone. Would he meet her at three o'clock at the seat beside the big crucifix in the forest clearing, a spot they both knew well. That which she had to say to him could not be said between the thin walls of the Villa Olympia.

The note despatched by a handy messenger, there was still Malania's vigilance to be eluded, as well as Kazimira's anxiety to be cheated. But for Katya, now that her will was set, obstacles no longer existed. Long before three o'clock struck upon the Zalkiew church-tower, she was waiting on the appointed bench, fearfully watching the narrow path which ran like a passage between the ruddy columns of the pine-stems. No leaves here to turn yellow, no flowers to droop accusingly, nothing but large weather-beaten toad-stools littering the forest floor with a suggestion of broken crockery abandoned here by some monster picnic party, presumably of giants; but even these with their subtle odour of decay were enough to speak quite plainly of the waning summer, that beautiful summer, which for Katya had held all the delights and all the troubles of a dream. Now and then her glance went from the path to the almost grotesque wooden figure upon the cross close by, whose crown of thorns was hidden by a wreath of blue gentians newly placed there by some pious hand. The little bit of shelving roof surmounting the cross—for Carpathian crucifixes have a pattern of their own—and presumably intended to shield the Saviour's figure from the worst of the rain, was decorated

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with tassels carved out of wood and dangling loose by wires. Peter's cock roosting upon the summit boasted about as much anatomy as does an average weather-cock, and the amount of red paint used up in illustration of the victim's wounds suggested extravagance; but, for all that, a sort of childish sincerity in the production touched more than it repelled. Sometimes when sitting here with her betrothed in happier hours, Katya had smiled with him over the cock, if over nothing else; but to-day she did not see the cock at all, only the crucified figure; and not even that, strictly speaking. If, in the difficult moment approaching, help was to come from anywhere, it could only be from the thing for which this quaint production stood as the most elementary of signs. It was because of its privacy that she had chosen this spot, but with the trial close, she found herself half-comforted by that wooden presence hard by.

A twig snapping underfoot drew her alarmed glance back to the pathway. Yes, that was he, that solitary figure unmistakable in outline, advancing so swiftly towards her along the red-stemmed colonnade. Something moved Katya to rise and meet him, but something also held her fast upon the bench. With limbs grown suddenly as heavy as lead she could only sit helpless, gazing, gazing at the man who until now had been her lover, but who, although he knew it not, was now appointed to be her judge. But for some passing pre-occupation he must, even before he reached her, have read the crisis of the moment in her face; but something had evidently annoyed him. More than once he glanced

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back over his shoulder impatiently, and twenty paces off Katya could descry a ruffle upon his forehead.

"Such a tiresome fellow!" were the unexpected words with which he greeted his betrothed. "Might almost take him for a private detective, though this is not Russia, to be sure. Been dogging me ever since this morning in church, when he wanted to insist on helping me to get you out into the air; confound his impudence! Sneaked after me all the way from my hotel, had all the trouble in the world in giving him the slip."

"Tadeusz, what do you mean? Who has been dogging you?" asked Katya perplexed.

"That's more than I can tell you," my love. A long, yellow-faced, dried-herring sort of a man; and for what mortal reason I can't imagine, since I am quite sure of not owing him any money. But he's lost the scent now, I fancy. Don't bother about him, Katya; but let's have the communication for which I have been ordered to the spot! Do you know that you have not got your colour back yet, my love!"

With tender solicitude in his eyes, but obviously no apprehension of the seriousness of the moment, he smiled down upon her. Some little innocent confession to be made, some passing "flirt" to be admitted, this was the most he looked for, and felt too sure of her love to be disturbed by such a trifle.

"Out with it, Katya!" he said quite gaily, as having stooped to carry her hand to his lips he remained standing in front of her, expectant, but not anxious.

"Will you not kiss me, Tadeusz?" she said, almost humbly. "We are alone."

A *Rendez-Vous*

Without that kiss which might be the last—she did not feel that she could have the courage to speak.

For one long moment she clung to him with a passion of movement which took himself by surprise, with panting breath and closed eyes. When she opened them it was to throw a startled glance over his shoulder.

"Tadeusz, we are not alone, after all, there is some one coming."

He turned sharply, and, together with her, became aware of a narrow, black silhouette approaching in the shadow of the pines upon the noiseless needle-carpet.

"The private detective again! Confound the fellow! Let's move on!"

"Let us rather wait until he has passed."

"If he does pass. He looks as if he had something to say to me."

"He could not have the impertinence of saying it before me, could he?"

"Looks almost capable of it. Meanwhile let's talk of the weather—he is almost within ear-shot. What do you think of the chances of rain to-morrow, Panna Sagorska?"

Thus Tadeusz, planted before the bench and making himself as broad as possible, in order to shield Katya from the impertinent stranger's view; for he had noted the way in which the objectionable person's eyes had rested that morning upon her fainting form, and he had not liked it.

She made as coherent an answer as the high tension of her nerves would allow, trying the while to look past him, in order to see whether the intruder was nearly gone by or not. Here was his shadow already, how unpleasantly

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close to be sure!—crowned by a top-hat and cast before him on the grass by a shaft of the low-standing sun which had found its way to the clearing. For the fragment of a second it lay upon the forest floor as sharply outlined as though cut out of black paper. Impatiently Katya craned her neck, just as the black paper arm went up to the paper top-hat.

“My profound respects, Panna Malkoff!”

Her head remained poised in its forward movement, her whole figure immobilised by a sensation which was not so much panic as blank incredulity. Whence that voice? Whence that name? Was not this Zalkiew? Evidently her head had not yet recovered from this morning's shock.

With a gesture of exasperation Tadeusz turned, disclosing the well-groomed but unlovely figure of the renegade Pole, who, sallow with ill-suppressed excitement, and grinning faintly where he meant to smile, was elaborately inclining himself before Katya.

“My profound respects, Panna Malkoff!” this time each word was punctuated as though with a needle.

Tadeusz's right hand closed threateningly, then, remembering Katya's presence he mastered himself sufficiently to say coldly:—

“You are mistaken in the lady. This is Panna Sagorska.”

“I think it is you who are mistaken in the lady,” came the blustering reply. “So long as I have known her she has answered to the name of Malkoff.”

The veins upon Tadeusz's temples began to swell. Yet he spoke with the same studied calm.

A Rendez-Vous

"Sir, I do not know how to explain the delusion under which you are labouring, since naturally I prefer to believe that you are sober—except by supposing that you have been fooled by some jocularly inclined person."

"Somebody has certainly been fooled, but I do not think it is I," smirked Klobinski, obviously uneasy, for his native impertinence was, after all, no match for this supreme *hauteur*.

"I presume that you will take my word for it when I assure you——"

"Nobody's word but her own. Look at her, Pan Swigello—oh, yes, I am as well-informed of your name as of hers—look at her, and ask her! Let her tell me to my face that her name is Sagorska, then I will believe her, but not before!"

Impetuously Tadeusz turned towards the bench.

"Katya, tell him——" he had begun, and then stopped short. For Katya sat there stiffly, with wide, meaningless eyes fixed upon Klobinski, and bloodless lips dropped as helplessly apart as though the well-brushed, well-combed, well-buttoned-up figure had been some vision of terror.

"Look at her!" sniggered Klobinski. "Does she look as though she meant to give me the lie?"

The nervous insolence of his manner was growing; but Tadeusz scarcely noticed him now. He had eyes only for Katya, consciousness only for the enigma of her attitude.

"Will you not speak, Katya?" he said, after a brief pause, full, for him, of fragmentary thoughts and surmises which absolutely refused to join to a coherent whole.

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At the sound of his voice and of the subtle change in it her trance was broken. Her lips moved, but succeeded in forming no words, only in jerking into a foolish sort of smile. Tadeusz's eyes narrowed suddenly as he noted it; and all at once a wave of dark-red blood surged into his face. What he would have said or done in the next moment was incalculable, but that a sharp neigh of hilarity which escaped Klobinski abruptly reminded him of the almost forgotten witness. With a supreme effort at calmness he turned again towards him.

"There seems to be here a slight misunderstanding, for the clearing up of which your presence, Mr. — Mr. — ('Klobinski,' interpolated the other) is by no means necessary. You will therefore be so kind as to leave me alone with this lady—immediately."

All the accumulated haughtiness of generations of coroneted ancestors, bred to despotism, spoke out of the tone and mien of the engineer, as, with coldly commanding eyes and contemptuously curved lips, with every inch of his stature telling, he confronted the commissioner. Klobinski, versed in the traditions of his nation, and long since broken to obedience, knew the manner too well not instinctively to cringe before it.

"If Panna Malkoff commands me to go," he began, meaningly.

"I fancy it will suffice if I *request* you to go."

Tadeusz's eyes were as cold and as fixed as though they were cut out of stone; and about his widened nostrils a slight tremor was discernible, faint as the quiver in the wings of an insect preparing for flight. For one moment longer the betrayer attempted to stand his ground; then

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abruptly his artificial self-confidence collapsed. Without a word he turned upon his heel, all the more readily as he judged the object of his coming gained. From the look of the man before him he surmised that these two could safely be left alone.

With almost the precipitancy of a flight—for the engineer's obvious power of muscle was unpleasantly suggestive—Klobinski retired the way he had come, without so much as a backward glance, thankful only to be out of the range of those threatening eyes.

Tadeusz watched him to a safe distance before turning back towards Katya. But already she had slid from the seat, and, regardless of the figure still plainly within sight—of the fact that this was after all a public pathway—regardless of everything but the impulse of the moment, had thrown herself upon her knees before him upon the forest floor, stretching imploring hands towards him.

"Forgive me, Tadeusz, forgive me!" she said, just coherently. "I have done wrong, I confess it, but it began before I knew you."

And then for fear of seeing his face and the thunder-laden brow, before which in spirit she had so often trembled, she covered her face with her shaking hands.

The mere fact that he made no movement to raise her—he who hitherto had so tenderly lifted every stone from her path—was enough to tell of the change wrought within the last few minutes. His arms tightly folded across his chest, he looked down upon the woman at his feet with eyes almost as hard as those with which he had beat the stranger into retreat. And the voice which now spoke was as hard.

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"It is not a question of forgiveness but of explanation. One word will do it. Was that fellow lying or was he not when he said that you are Kataryna Malkoff?"

"He was not lying," she gasped, between her shielding fingers.

"Kataryna Malkoff, the possessor of Lubynia?"

She made a sign that it was so.

"The same person who devised a fantastic scheme of restitution, rejected by my brother and myself?"

"Yes; but, Tadeusz, listen——"

"One moment, please. It was in order to carry out this plan that you came here under a false name, or, to put it more plainly, in order to trick either my brother or myself into engaging ourselves to you, under a delusion."

"That was my first thought; but——"

"An answer, please, yes or no?"

"Yes," she groaned, with her face still in her hands.

He drew a long, hard breath.

"Then all this summer has been a lie."

"No, no, Tadeusz, not a lie! Not a lie! God is my witness! You do not understand——"

"I think I do. I understand and I admire. No trap could have been more beautifully laid. And it has been successful—almost. Will you allow me to hope that your fastidious conscience is now at rest, Panna Malkoff?"

Under the incisive syllables of the name she shuddered as though under the point of a knife. His open rage she could have borne, so it seemed to her; but before this so perfectly governed passion all hope failed. But it would not die yet. It was not in her to let her happiness go without a struggle.

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"It was a mad idea, of course," she pleaded in tears now; "mad and wrong. But I did not know how wrong until I knew you, Tadeusz. And I would never have deceived you to the end."

"But till very nearly the end, surely—witness those papers handed over yesterday."

"That was a mistake, Tadeusz; I swear to you that it was! You cannot believe that I meant to tell you a lie at such a moment."

"Because you have never told me one before; exactly."

"It was to confess to you the truth that I asked you to come here to-day. I could not have gone on another day with the deception."

"I should think not with such a witness on the scene as that yellow-faced stranger. It is not difficult to understand now what upset you in church this morning. After the fright you got no doubt you thought it wiser to take the initiative. It is only what I should have expected of your so brilliant diplomatic abilities, Panna Malkoff."

"I never saw him, I swear to you that I never saw him. Oh! why did I not speak yesterday?"

"That being a point upon which I can offer no opinion, you will perhaps excuse me if I withdraw from the discussion."

She looked up in a panic, aware of a movement on his part.

"Tadeusz, what do you mean? Where are you going? This cannot be the end!" And now at last she saw his face, the furrowed brow, the unforgiving eyes, such as in her hours of terror she had pictured them to herself, but no, not such,—more crushing yet, harder to bear by far than anything which her imagination had pictured.

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And oh, from what undreamt of heights those eyes looked down upon her!

Her first impulse—instinctively resisted—had been to hide her own face again.

“Tadeusz, you must believe that I love you,—you *must!*” she implored, with all her tortured soul in her eyes. Had anger not blinded him he must have seen it; but he was blind and suffering too much not to be cruel.

“I believe nothing,” he said, while the tremor of his nostrils just perceptibly increased, “except that you are one of the most marvellous actresses I have ever come across, either on the stage or off it.”

“But your promises, Tadeusz, your oaths?” she pleaded, clutching convulsively at the edge of his coat. “Have you not told me a hundred times that you are mine for life?”

“My oaths were sworn to Kataryna Sagorska. Kataryna Malkoff is to me a stranger.”

“But Tadeusz——”

“Kataryna Malkoff is to me a stranger,” he repeated obstinately, and shaking off the fingers upon his coat, as though they had been those of an importunate beggar.

“Tadeusz!” she cried again, but to empty air already; for as she dashed away the blinding tears Katya found that she was kneeling no longer before her human judge, but only before the crucified figure with the glaring wounds and the ridiculous cock above its head. The breeze stealing in between the tree-stems set the fir-cones dancing all around, and rattled the wooden tassels on the cross against each other. To Katya it sounded at that moment like the rattling of dried bones, the naked remains of something which had once been fair and blooming.

PART IV

WARSAW

CHAPTER I

THE NEXT THING

A LARGE, drearily handsome apartment, occupied just now by about a dozen men of different ages, but of one unmistakable class—that of the more or less wealthy aristocrat. Clothes and manners alike unimpeachable. Aquiline noses, superciliously curving lips and flabby eyelids much to the fore. An elegant pallor the general rule, that real indoor complexion so seldom seen in our “breezy” isles. With one exception all these men were smoking cigarettes, and had been smoking for some time—witness the thickness of the atmosphere. Almost all of them were either rich or else handsomely in debt. A handful of *grands seigneurs*, warranted to make any corresponding number of English landowners or German *Junkers* look screamingly vulgar by mere force of contrast, and equally warranted to go down before them in the game of life.

Just now they seemed to be finding the game particularly hard to play. For an hour past they had been sitting round this same highly polished table, weighing

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events, without being able to lay hands upon any tangible result of the operation.

"Waste-paper!" said one, throwing away his cigarette-stump, but with a mien which made it clear that the waste-paper referred to was to be sought elsewhere.

"About as much use to us as last night's play-bill."

And gloomily he rolled another cigarette between his taper fingers.

"Call that a constitution, indeed! I call it a handful of dust flung in the world's eyes."

Poor Nicholas II! naive enough, perchance, to be congratulating himself upon the success of his famous *Ukase*, barely made public. Were the slings and arrows being showered upon his act within these four walls alone not enough to make his royal ears tingle with apprehension?

"It is better than nothing, surely," ventured a very tender youth, with the diffident optimism of his years.

Several of the elder men—those with the drooping eyelids—turned upon him severely.

"Worse than nothing, you mean," corrected the white-haired host who acted as president of the informal meeting, "since by playing the part of sop, it may lull to sleep the awakening movement; and we don't want it lulled yet, not until we have got what *we* want."

"But *some* liberties are granted——"

"Not the liberties *we* require, or, at any rate, not in the measure that we require them. What help is it to us if the Moujik is free, so long as *we* are slaves."

"And what is to become of us if the Socialists gain ground? Presently we shall be asked to hand out our

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land, in order to make proprietors of the people who ought to be blacking our boots! and as a next step we shall be asked to black them ourselves. Appalling to think of what the world is coming to! Have you read their last proclamation? I've got it in my pocket, but it's getting too dark to read."

"Shall I ring for lights?" suggested the host.

"Better not," said a man from the window embrasure. "There's a person been walking up and down the pavement opposite for quite ten minutes past."

"Ah, they're beginning to feel nervous! Yes—we will do without the lights."

Gratification tinged the tone. Time had been—the time when Nihilism and Socialism had lain in their cradles—when no Polish aristocrat had been able to stir without a detective at his heels. Nowadays the police had their hands too full to devote more than a portion of their attention to these fantastic patriots, whom a steady loss of popularity, even among their fellow Poles guaranteed as comparatively harmless. There were other and more formidable fish to fry.

Several pairs of eyes kindled. It was quite pleasant to discover that they were still important enough to be watched.

"The worst about the Red Party is that one can't do without them. We need them in order to lift things out of their grooves, but once lifted, one has to see that they don't make off with the booty."

"Then what is to be done?" asked another of the naive spirits of the assembly.

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It was a question which had been asked more than once during the last hour, without anything but rhetoric being forthcoming in reply.

"The sore kept open, meanwhile, and our arms sharpened. Above all, we must decide about a leader."

At the word "leader" several heads went up as sharply as though worked by a steel spring, and all the elder men threw furtively inimical glances at each other, as at rivals newly started from the ground.

"No time to lose, since any day may bring the moment when, by striking all together, we may raise Poland from her ashes."

"Or else bring Wilhelm's cuirassiers over the frontier."

The words were spoken by the solitary non-smoker of the party, towards whom all heads now turned in a movement of indignant surprise.

Ever since his entry, half an hour ago, this big, brown-bearded man had been listening, dumb, though visibly restless, to the talk around him. Finding himself abruptly become the focus of all eyes he sat back deliberately in his chair.

"If you want to open the door to the Prussians you cannot possibly do better than repeat the experiment of '63."

"You find the moment for a rising ill-advised?"

"I find the rising itself ill-advised. I have told you so before."

"Does that mean that you would refuse to draw your sword for the restoration of Poland?"

"I do not know what I should do or refuse to do under

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the pressure of events, but for the restoration of Poland, as she was—the Poland of history—I should never draw it with conviction.”

There was a burst of protest all around him—a universal furrowing of foreheads.

“You say that? *you*? The son of your father!”

“You would oblige me greatly, gentlemen, by leaving my father out of the question. He acted according to his lights, and paid the penalty for it. I mean to act according to mine, and possibly my penalty may be harder to pay even than his, although the reckoning need not necessarily be made in Siberia.”

“And your lights tell you that Poland should not be restored?” sneered the presiding host.

“Not in her former shape. And every word I have heard spoken here to-day tells me that this is the shape you aim at. It tells me also that we have learnt nothing from history. But it is time we did learn, and time too that we ceased to take ourselves for the heroes of romance which European fiction has made of us. You talk of the National Cause; you should talk rather of the Class Cause. You would have Poland restored, not merely because it is your mother-country, but chiefly because it is the country in which you and your fathers have been able to lord it over the blind masses—kept artificially blind for the purpose—and with no inconvenient middle class to rival your interests. It is not for the nation at large that you are working, but for the privileges of a handful—to wit—yourselves.”

His last words were drowned in a swelling murmur,

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several of the company rose—he with them—several hands automatically clenched, several pairs of dark eyes flashed menacingly; but the aspect of the man was such that it was only beneath their breath that the hottest murmured: "Traitor".

It was the host who, recovering first, demanded silence with a gesture of his white hand.

"Considering the disagreement between the views of this company and those of Count Swi— of Pan Mlodniski," he corrected himself, "I trust I shall not be considered inhospitable if I suggest that the atmosphere of this apartment must be peculiarly uncongenial to him."

The bearded man looked about for his hat, not angrily, sadly rather.

"I am going; never fear. And I am not coming back again, though I do not consider it impossible that we may yet meet upon some battlefield or other—and on the same side, let us hope."

He inclined himself ceremoniously; then walked erect through the passage opened. At the door he turned to say amid a sudden silence:—

"It is, I presume, superfluous to assure you that no word of anything I have heard between these walls, or elsewhere, will ever on any consideration pass my lips."

It was superfluous. Even those who had muttered "Traitor" but a minute ago replied only by another ceremonious inclination. They knew the real traitor too well to be mistaken in the article.

Out into the November gloom Tadeusz Swigello stepped with suddenly altered bearing. The head, poised so proudly as long as there had been antagonists to face,

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now sank a little upon the breast. Although everything had passed in the most irreproachable drawing-room style he felt himself as truly turned out of the room above as though he had been thrown down the stairs. And the men who had excluded him, were, after all, his fellows, his equals, by birth and tradition. The white-haired count who had shown him the door had fought side by side with his father. A thousand associations bound his name together with their names. It was towards them that upon his arrival upon the scene of action several weeks back, his instinct had carried him, despite many misgivings.

How came he to be on the scene of action? Tadeusz himself could scarcely have explained. The terrible parting in the Forest had been followed by a period of mental upheaval, whose shock had flung him out of the path of life so laboriously traced and hitherto so faithfully followed. The moral earthquake over he found himself at Warsaw, much as the victim of a real earthquake may find himself thrown out of his house by mere elementary force.

Returned to Krakau with the desperate ache of loss upon him, he had been met by the news of a fresh movement in Poland. And then the unexpected happened. Witek had been right when he described his elder brother as "full of surprises". Ten minutes had sufficed for the resolution. Within that space he, the prudent, the cool-headed Tadeusz, had flung aside his future prospects as readily as ever Witek had flung away cigarette-stump. What value had these things for him now, since they could never be shared with her—the woman he had thought to love, but who had no real

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existence outside his fancy? Perchance in the tumult and perils of the political arena forgetfulness might be found for the deep pain of the deception, and for its stinging humiliation.

For it was his pride that was suffering almost as much as his sensibilities. There where he had thought himself loved for himself alone to discover that he was no more than a pawn in a game—a necessary piece for the coming right of a problem—it was more than Swigello pride could stand. At moments, indeed, Katya's passion-laden eyes, rising as though in a vision, would protest, but he put their suggestion aside as he might a temptation. Yes, it was possible that her inflammable fancy had been caught, but more probable yet that what she had been in love with all the time was her own idea of justice and restitution, for which he stood as personification, and for which, naturally, Witek might have equally well served. That was not the sort of love to satisfy him.

Witek, burning to be over the frontier, received strict orders to remain beside Kazimira, and ended, as he always ended, by obeying Tadeusz. Passport difficulties notwithstanding—a false passport, too, the name of Swigello belonging to the prescribed ones—a week had not passed after the rupture before Tadeusz stepped on to the platform at Warsaw.

The first impression had been both bewildering and disappointing. The revolution, seen at close quarters, was quite a different thing from the one flaring in newspaper paragraphs. At first sight its symptoms were not even readily discernible. Yet sharpened eyes soon caught

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the bubbles, which betrayed the passions boiling beneath the apparently placid surface: the knots of mounted police, the early closing shops, the abrupt desertion of the streets after nightfall, the sudden apparition of a Cossack patrol at a street corner escorting a hermetically closed vehicle on its way to the citadel. And the silent hurry pervading the passers-by—the veiled eagerness in the glances exchanged on the passage, “Friend or enemy?” Each pair of eyes seemed to say, “Are you for or against us?”

Tadeusz's note-book was full of addresses, and to these addresses he went first of all, in order to find out what exactly was happening. So far as he could make out it did not seem to be much beyond talking; and soon this talk began to enlighten him rather painfully. He would never be able to work side by side with these polished idlers, he felt it, he who had learnt to look at life from the stern and clear point of view of the worker. Their ideas could never be his, though they had been those of his own forefathers. Unflinchingly he judged them, though with sinking heart; for to find himself so completely out of touch with his own class was a sort of exile bitterer perhaps than that endured by his father. To-day it was that the exile had been sealed.

And now, what next? he asked himself as he walked the darkening streets. For there must be something next. He could not afford to sit still, for fear of the spectre of the recent past dogging his footsteps. In a hotbed of political parties, such as Warsaw was now, there must surely exist some group with whose views he would find it possible to identify himself. But in this

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time of chaos, when the outlines of future factions were barely struggling into life, the choice was not easily made. There were some people calling themselves "National Democrats"; a name which attracted him, smacking as it did both of patriotism and of liberalism. He had heard their reason and moderation praised. He would give them a hearing.

The room in which, within a few days, he accomplished this purpose was not nearly so elegantly furnished as the satin-decked space in which the representatives of Old Poland held their sittings, but it was, if possible, thicker yet with cigarette smoke. Neither clothes nor manners were quite so perfect here, while speech was considerably more measured. For the "National Democrats" were nothing if not moderate. Reform was the eminently praiseworthy object they aimed at. While anxious to secure all the blessings of the future they did not wish to lose the legacies of the past. . . . Therefore it would not do to go too far in any direction.

"The great thing is not to frighten off either the too conservative or the too liberal spirits," one of the leaders explained to the newcomer; "and this can only be achieved by compromise."

Compromise was indeed their one golden rule of action; so much so that to a lively imagination they appeared to be balancing continually on a tight-rope, after the fashion of an acrobat who waves his hand, smiling now to the right, now to the left of the audience.

"Until the political atmosphere clears we must, above all, not commit ourselves," pronounced another, adding his quota of cigarette-ashes to the untidy mounds already

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littering the anything but polished table. Cigarette smoking seemed the one thing exempted from the universal rule of moderation.

After a few days passed in their company Tadeusz again went his own ways. They were sincere and excellent persons, but their talk was not inspiring, not at all the sort of thing calculated to carry off his feet a man deliberately courting intoxication.

The winter dragged past and the next summer. The first Duma had been assembled and dissolved; but although Tadeusz had found employment in one of the large manufactories on the outskirts of the town and was therefore quit of the anxiety concerning daily bread, the moral outlet he craved for still tarried. Not one of the political parties, or embryos of parties, forming on all sides, had been able to afford him this. There were still the Socialists, of course; but against the idea of joining their ranks the prejudices of the aristocrat and those of the patriot alike rebelled. But for a chance encounter with an old schoolfellow, fired with the new ideals and still glowing from his recent plunge into the movement, Tadeusz would most certainly have kept clear of the extreme left. Fate having put this man upon his path in one of his hours of deepest despondency, first his ears and then his heart began to burn with the words he heard. Here was ardour at last, nay, more, fanaticism. Even while his common-sense criticised, his nerves vibrated in response to the ringing note of conviction. Perchance in the contact with these burning if reckless spirits he might find the absorption he sought. If he could not serve his country perhaps he might serve humanity.

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Docile he let himself be led to a meeting, and here for the first time enjoyed the thrill of tangible peril, for these people were better worth watching than the aristocrats. The assembly took place in a little Jewish back shop smelling horribly of salt herring. To-morrow it might take place in a garret, the day after in a cellar. Things must not be made too easy for the police. Besides that of the shopkeeper there were several other semitic profiles among the company, which in itself was a shock to Tadeusz. The extreme youthfulness of the majority was another rather instructive surprise. There were well-dressed and ill-dressed people here, cultured and uncultured ones, a mixture quite unlike anything he had seen as yet in the way of political parties. But the enthusiasm was common to all ; and it was this enthusiasm alone which Tadeusz saw, as he listened to the fiery speeches of that first night. These men at least knew what they wanted. They were fighting not for themselves but for a Cause—ready at any moment to sacrifice the few for the good of the many. There was something in this uncalculating generosity which appealed to his inmost nature, and which on the evening of initiation made him think that at last he had found what he sought for.

Disillusion came fast. After a week of further acquaintance Tadeusz had decided bitterly that the gods of the Polish Socialists were not his gods, and never could be. The apparent unity was but a flashing surface, below which moved the most heterogeneous elements. Exalted but unpractical idealists worked side by side with the most prosaic of materialists. Scattered among these was

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a handful of human wild beasts, blindly following their instincts of destruction, senselessly thirsting for the blood of Society. Noble heads and base hearts, dreamers and calculators, heroes and monsters all mixed higgledy-piggledy. Tadeusz's admiration had been aroused and his principles outraged a dozen times within each hour spent in this strange society. With these men he could work as little as with his own class. Neither their secret codes nor their bombs struck him as likely to regenerate either Poland or humanity.

Another blank drawn! He knew it before he had been a week in their society. This was not the road to peace of mind, but rather to perplexity and remorse.

What next? The question was upon him again as once more he hurried through the deserted streets, gloomy with the double gloom of gathering dusk and an impending snowstorm. The meeting he had just left and which had taken place in an isolated wood-shed, was the last he would attend. Chiefly it had been occupied with the discussion of the day's incident, around which the Warsaw police was already agitatedly occupied. At dawn of day a revolutionary proclamation (one at whose composition Tadeusz had been present) had been discovered upon a piece of planking which happened to face the lodging of a Cossack officer. Catching sight of it he had sent over his orderly to tear it down. As the man was in the act of doing so, a bullet whizzed by, which left him unhurt, but which of course must be avenged. Thence the agitated search for the would-be assassin, of whom the Cossack himself had only caught a passing glimpse as he fled from behind cover.

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"Let them search; it is a harmless occupation," grinned some one. "Unless all our calculations are false he is well over the frontier by this time."

"Yes; that part tallies, but not the other; whoever would have thought that 'the hairy one' (nicknames, as less compromising, were much cultivated by the party) was such a bad shot!"

Regret for the missed attempt was clearly discernible in the tones of the speaker, as well as in the mind of the great majority of the audience. A wave of repulsion swept over Tadeusz. Nothing but the nervous entreaties of his friend, for whose personal safety he could not help feeling responsible, had kept him from hurling into the faces of these men the epithets of "Murderers! Assassins!" which trembled on his lips.

"If you speak now it is not at all certain that either of us will get out of this alive," the other had whispered to him. "Don't forget that the floor of the shed is earth, very handy for digging graves."

So perforce Tadeusz had been silent. But he would not lose another hour in severing the bonds which held him to these well-meaning lunatics. It was in order to put his formal resignation to paper that he was now hurrying towards his lodgings. Possibly he might thereby be signing his own death-sentence. Defaulters were not infrequently shot at sight, and he had heard too much not to be mistrusted. Well, that would, at any rate, be a solution. But supposing they did not shoot him, what then?

The question still preyed upon him as he groped his

The Next Thing

way up three pairs of stairs. Attempting to get his latch-key into his own door he was surprised by an obstacle—another key already in the lock. Without stopping to reflect what this might mean, he crossed the small entrance and opened his bedroom door. By the light of a street lantern opposite he could see a man rise from the one chair of the apartment.

"Are you the person calling yourself Mlodinski?" an unfamiliar voice asked.

"Yes, I am."

"Then you will be so good as to follow me."

"Where to, if I may ask?"

"To the police station, in the first place."

"On what grounds?"

"Employment of false documents. We have reason to suppose that your name is not Mlodinski."

He made a gesture towards the table which Tadeusz, still by the light of the lantern, now perceived to be strewn with papers, taken presumably from the gaping desk alongside. The situation became clear in a moment:

"Will you come quietly?" asked the police official, having first taken care to remark that he had a colleague within call.

Tadeusz shrugged his shoulders with a sudden sense of indifference.

—"Why not?"

Why not, after all? If nothing else, this was an answer to the question eternally pursuing him.

"The next thing," was to be the four walls of a prison cell.

CHAPTER II

A TRANSFERENCE

As he gazed at the sheet of paper in his hand Marcin Klobinski's leathery face was a little sallow than usual, though his small eyes shot sparks. His transference to Warsaw was a great and undoubted honour but rather a precarious one, seeing that the police commissioner whose place he was summoned to take had recently been made mince-meat of at a street corner by a well-directed bomb. A post of danger, though also of brilliant possibilities. Thence the mixed feelings with which he regarded the fateful sheet—thence the discrepancy between his complexion and his glance. Ambition exulted, while the flesh weakly trembled, for the Pole, when he does not happen to be a hero, is terribly apt to be craven.

And, besides peril, there was also the question of separation weighing in the balance. It was many months now since he had actually crossed the threshold of Lubynia, on the day when, audacious in the sense of the power he held, he had forced his way into Katya's presence and boldly declared his passion, only, at the end of a brief but stormy scene, to be ordered out of the house and recklessly dared to do his worst!

"Yes, I know what a false passport means," she had said to him in answer to the veiled threats which was all

A Transference

his native smoothness could rise to. "Denounce me if you like ; but first let me tell you that I would much rather spend the rest of my life in Siberia or in the depth of the deepest dungeon Russia holds than by the side of a man whom from the bottom of my heart I despise."

And then she had rung for Timosh, for whose appearance Klobinski did not find it advisable to wait.

With rage in his heart he went, but also with newly raging love. So far his worst had not been done, for the simple reason that, despite her stinging words, hope still refused to die. That, once convinced of her actual danger, she should prefer exile to the acceptance of his love was a conception which depassed his horizon. So he continued to wait and to watch, never doubting that his opportunity must come. And meanwhile even the cursory glimpses caught of her upon the road were crumbs of happiness upon which to live. Of these the transference to Warsaw was to rob him, as well as of his post of observer. He had meant to be more patient, but Fate was forcing his hand. To leave the place without having made one more attempt to secure his happiness seemed to him impossible. Who knows whether these months of solitary reflection had not brought the adored one to her senses—perhaps even cured her infatuation for the brown-bearded giant whom he could not think of without a muttered curse. For that which outraged love had not been able to discover, the keen eye of jealousy had pierced on the instant. Those few minutes in the forest at Zalkiew had been quite enough to tell Klobinski that, whatever her initiative motive may have been, Katya now loved Tadeusz.

The aspect of the house, white and silent under the

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yellowing trees, struck him with an apprehensive chill. The long wait upon the doorsteps, the lowered blinds of the drawing-room sent the chill deeper. It was in answer to the third summons that the door was opened, not by Timosh, but by one of the hags who acted as leaven to the youthful character of the establishment. The gracious lady was not here, she explained, eyeing the visitor mistrustfully through a door chink. Was she out driving or walking? Perhaps rowing on the lake? No, she was not.

"Where is she, then?" asked the exasperated Klobinski. "Can't you open your mouth a little wider, as well as that door? Where is she, you witch?"

"At Warsaw, I fancy, since it was for there she started."

"Warsaw? What has she gone there for?"

"Do I know?"

"You are lying!" said Klobinski in a rage. "It was only yesterday morning I saw her carriage in town."

"It was after the gracious lady came back from town with the post-bag, that the things were packed up."

"A sudden resolution, then?"

"Do I know?"

"And Malania Petrowna?"

"Is gone with the gracious lady, of course."

"And her address at Warsaw?"

"Do I know?"

Klobinski worried his under-lip in deep reflection.

"Call Timosh! He may have the address."

"Timosh is gone with the gracious lady, please."

"Timosh gone—to Warsaw?"

Klobinski stared, almost aghast. Somehow this last piece of news took him more aback than anything else.

A Transference

Since he had known Lubynia he had never known it without Timosh. It must be some very pressing reason indeed which had induced Katya to deprive the place of its perennial watch-dog. And this strange and unexplained hurry! He was still puzzling over the problem long after the old woman had shut the door in his face.

To Warsaw then! A new chain was now drawing him that way, the last thread snapped which would have held him back. After the first shock of disappointment even hope was not quite undiscoverable in the new state of affairs. For of course he would find her. But at least as urgent would it be to discover what the motive of her action had been.

Not many days later the discovery was made.

Within the white-washed walls of his new office it was, while attempting to grapple with the arrears of work left by his murdered predecessor, that enlightenment came. Among these arrears figured mounds of foolscap, containing, amongst other things, the lists of recently arrested persons; and from out of one of these lists the hated name seemed to leap to his eye.

"Swigello, Tadeusz, Count, calling himself Jan Mlodniski, engineer by profession. For the use of false documents." And in pencil the added note, *Pawiak*, which was the name of the prison in which the as yet uninvestigated cases were usually detained.

A rush of blood to the head made the police commissioner almost rosy for a moment. The locks of the *Pawiak* were strong, as he knew. So far, so good. But there were other considerations. A close study of dates, followed by a brief calculation, caused the official

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brow to furrow deeply. The two weeks elapsed between the arrest and the abrupt departure from Lubynia seemed just about the interval in which the news might have been supposed to reach Katya, through some indiscreet channel which he need not trouble to trace.

From rosy the commissioner had turned livid. So *that* was what she felt for him, despite the rupture? No thought of personal peril had been able to keep her from an attempted rescue. Not for a moment did Klobinski doubt that if Katya had hurried to Warsaw now, it was with some wild idea of liberating the man whom she still loved although he had abandoned her. It was a certain feminine strain in his nature—a not infrequent ingredient of male Slav minds, which had helped him to the right conclusion. Russian of the Russians as she was, connections would not be wanting whose influence she might utilise. The mere name of her grandfather, shining in the blood-red halo of '63, was in itself a passport to high places.

Yes, she had chances; but so had he—Marcin Klobinski; and he was not going to let them go cheap. Connections notwithstanding, her name notwithstanding, she was too deeply compromised by the affair of the passport to be able to defy him to the end, now, under the reign of terror, when even the highest placed had enough to do guarding their own safety to be over-solicitous for that of their friends.

He must lose no time in finding her; and having found her, he must lose no time in getting her to understand—in no veiled language this time—that, for all her money and all her relations, her fate yet lay in his hands.

The police commissioner was smiling again as he passed his narrow hand over his sleek hair.

CHAPTER III

A MORNING CALL

"It is fortunate that my hair does not grow upon my head, else it would have turned grey long ago," observed Malania Petrowna, as mournfully she combed her wig before the crackling porcelain stove upon which it had lately been roasting. It was the stove of a hotel sitting-room, and possessed just such a niche as she required for the daily ceremony, which, accordingly, took place here as regularly as at Lubynia, minus the mock indignation of Bijou, who had been left as a very inadequate guard of the abandoned mansion.

"Do you know, my sugar lamb"—with a side-long glance at her companion, "I should not be surprised to see *your* hair turning grey presently."

"Rightly guessed, Matoushka! It was only last night that I found a white hair in my comb."

"Such things grow quickly at Warsaw."

"No, I think this one grew at Lubynia."

Katya was sitting with her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hands and her eyes upon the leaping flame visible within the open grating of the stove. In her black hair, whose shining coronet bound her head, no silver thread was visible, and yet it was true that there had been

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one in her comb yesterday, and she was sure it had grown at Lubynia.

Oh the poignant dreariness of that return! Sometimes she wondered that she had been able to live through it. How hateful had become to her things upon which her soul used to hang. Not a stone about the place that did not speak to her of him—the man she had first gained and then lost. If the walls had been eloquent before, they now screamed at her with a thousand tongues. The huge escutcheon above the entrance, the ancestral portraits, the family relics, they bore another almost un-supportable meaning now that she so intimately knew the man whose by rights they were, who, if justice ruled the world, would be reigning here. Even the reeds at the end of the park rustled his name into the breeze with a persistency which had hunted her off her favourite haunt, long before the boat had been frozen fast into the ice.

If anything like hope still survived it flickered faintly in the memory of her parting with Kazimira. Another moment of agony, but from which Kazimira herself had resolutely kept away despair. For her affection for Katya had stood the shock of the revelation of her true name, perhaps because Kazimira had reached that vantage-ground from which alone it is possible to estimate human things at their true value. As a woman she could not doubt Katya's love for her brother; as a dying woman she could not fail to have revelations touching the absurdity of such things as family pride. That the day might yet come when her point of view would be shared

A Morning Call

by Tadeusz was the hope to which she clung in the bitter hour of separation. And yet she let her brother go without one word in Katya's favour, understanding that the ordering of this affair could be only with time—or with circumstances. In the farewell message conveyed to him on the eve of his departure for Warsaw there was no repining, nothing but brave words, ardent wishes, both sisterly and patriotic, for the success of his venture. She knew that she would never see him again, but she also knew that nothing but a plunge into action could help him through the crisis. There had been more than one heroine in her family—for Polish womanhood has frequently outshone Polish manhood—and Kazimira, despite her frail body, was no unworthy descendant of them. Even from Katya she did not part in tears, though this, too, was, as she knew, a final separation.

"If you love him as I believe you do and if Fate is kind, you will gain him yet," had been her words, those that during the heavy months after the rupture Katya had treasured in her heart. With every day that passed she knew more surely that she loved him. Ah! but would Fate be kind? There lay the anguish of the question.

From time to time a few lines reached her. One of the first of these notes had told her of Tadeusz's presence at Warsaw; but the rapture of the thought of his comparatively near neighbourhood had been quickly drowned in that of his danger. After that only stray lines telling her little else than that Kazimira, contrary to all expectations, was still alive, and that so far no harm had befallen

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Tadeusz. Throughout the following summer a long blank unbroken till the day when once more she had found in the post-bag an envelope bearing Kazimira's straggling hand-writing, only much more straggling than when she had seen it last.

"They have arrested him. The charge as yet is only for the use of false documents, but it may turn into anything, for he has been very imprudent. I know that if you can save him you will do so. You have friends——"

The words fell off into a blotted line, with only an uncertain "K." as signature.

An hour later Katya's box had been packed for Warsaw. She was not at all clear in her mind as to what she would do when she got there; all she knew was that to stay here passive while *he* was in prison, possibly in danger, was an impossible thing. The thought that this man had spurned her, that he did not believe in her love, never once arose to check her resolve, as little as did the idea that her action in itself, by furnishing a proof of her affection, might bring its own reward. For so subtle a calculation her instincts were both too vigorous and too headstrong. For herself she expected nothing. She knew only that the beloved man was in danger, and blindly she rushed to the rescue.

In fear and trembling Malania Petrowna followed her, just as in fear and trembling she would probably have accompanied her charge to the guillotine, had Fate so ordained it. Her one stipulation was for the presence of Timosh—her ancient antagonist having become in her eyes transformed into a very acceptable body-guard.

A Morning Call

So far Katya could not speak of success. Her hermit-like life at Lubynia had put her too much out of touch with official circles as well as with former family friends to let contact be easily restored. Her name, indeed, was known to many; but in the present breathless course of events was apt to fall flat even upon the ears of those who were not too preoccupied to remember that she was an heiress.

"The Malkoff girl? Let me see! She has got a place of her own, has she not? Somewhere down Kowno way. A *parti*. Wonder if she means to go to balls? Might do for Alexis, only that the boy is too crazy about his work just now to think of marriage. He burns a candle every day for the advent of the Polish rising. Says he dreams every night of charging mobs in the streets."

When it became known that the heiress had come to town with the express object of recovering from prison a young man to whom she was understood to be attached—as indeed she made no mystery of (a Pole, too!)—the fathers and mothers of marriageable youths naturally lost interest in her. Already she had visited a whole row of high officials without tangible result. Swigello? Yes, there was a Swigello upon the list of prisoners in the Pawiak—detained for the use of false documents. A friend of hers? No reason at all to be anxious as to his fate. The use of false documents was not a capital offence. When would his trial come off? Really it was difficult to say. The prisons were so full at present, and so much more pressing cases awaiting decision. Perhaps if she cared to inquire again this day month——

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Such and such-like vaguely soothing assurances was all the result obtained, except in those cases when the person in office happened to be a *connoisseur* in female looks, when a precipitate retreat occasionally became advisable.

No, immediate success was not to be expected. She knew that after a few days already. If any road could lead to the goal it would need to be a roundabout one. Those threads of social connection which had been dropped for well-nigh two generations would require to be taken up again judiciously, diplomatically. She must get back into touch with her own countrymen; she must pay visits, multiply acquaintances, dress, smile, even flirt, if need be; do all those things which engender that personal interest, from which alone private influence may be wrung.

Well, if it must be, it must be! Katya was saying it to herself to-day as she sat before the stove. On the whole it would have been easier to share Tadeusz's cell in the Pawiak, easier to hunger and to thirst for his sake. But for his sake too she would be able to tread drawing-rooms, smiling, even though with death in her heart.

To Malania Petrowna, on the other hand, the prospect of the drawing-rooms beckoned pleasantly. A drawing-room naturally seemed to her a safer place than a street, or even than a hotel sitting-room! and in drawing-rooms too she presumed that people would sometimes talk of other things than politics. The more she heard about that terrible subject the less she understood it. Her original assumption that, necessarily, there could only be two sides in the matter, a right one and a wrong one, had speedily been upset by Katya!

A Morning Call

"Those people they call the 'Cadets' for instance," she would inquire of her charge; "I can't at all make out which side they belong to."

Upon which Katya, not without a point of malice:—

"That depends, Matoushka, upon how many of the old abuses you are desirous of maintaining. The 'Cadets' are not revolutionary, exactly, but they want to make use of the revolution for their own purposes. If that's too advanced for you there are plenty of others to choose from. The 'Octobrists,' for instance."

"And what do they want?"

"Well, they don't seem quite clear about that themselves, except that they won't have anything to do with the Socialists. But even they talk occasionally of Reform, with quite a big R. Failing these you might consider the expediency of joining the 'Black Hundred,' whose principles, at least, are quite easy to understand, since they seem to consist in murdering everybody who even pronounces the word Reform."

"Oh, Katya, this is dreadful! How could you suppose that I would consort with murderers!"

"Then I fancy the Socialists would not suit you either, since they also are rather too fond of killing. Perhaps the party of 'Peaceful Reform' would do best on the whole, since their chief virtue is passivity, and bombs have been publicly pronounced by them to be unhealthy articles. But there's quite a choice still, enough to suit all tastes; the 'Democratic Reformers,' and the 'National Democrats,' and the——"

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"Oh, stop, Katya!" implored Malania, with her hands to her ears. "It's all too dreadfully muddling."

But it was not Malania's political perplexities alone which Katya was called upon to settle.

"If you please, gracious lady," Timosh had accosted her on the very morrow of their arrival, "what is this thing they call the 'Duma,' which they tried last spring, and which they say they are going to try again next year?"

"A collection of people who are going to settle the affairs of Russia, or at any rate, talk about them," said Katya, after a moment's reflection.

"But it is the Little Father, who settles the affairs of Russia, surely? What do we require a collection of people for?"

"Well, there are some who say that it can't go on for ever that way. They want to have a word in the matter too."

"That means that they want to take away some of the Little Father's power?"

"Yes,—about that."

"Then they ought to be killed," said Timosh, with conviction.

"But, Timosh, it is the Czar himself who has ordered the Duma, so if you killed its members you would be going directly against his will."

Having grappled with this new problem, speechless, for about a minute, Timosh went out again scratching his mop of a head. To him too there could only be a right and a wrong side in the matter, in other words—those

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who held with the Little Father and those who did not. But the puzzle was to find out which was which. And what infinitely complicated the situation was the discovery that his mistress herself did not stand absolutely above suspicion, since she was trying to get out of prison a person whom the Little Father had found proper to lock up, and who therefore must be reprehensible. Henceforward the two loyalties within him, that towards the sovereign who stood for a sort of invisible divinity, and that towards the mistress whom he had known in leading-strings, were bound to have a hard fight of it.

For the rest, and had it not been for this chronic conflict of mind, there was much in the new surroundings which appealed to Timosh. The ancient Cossack smelt blood in the air, and greedily drank in the once familiar scent. Small signs, passing sights daily stirred instincts which had slumbered, unextinguished, under the ashes of a long row of humdrum years. In every Cossack patrol met in the street and gazed at with enviously admiring eyes he seemed to see the embodiment of his own turbulent youth. Ah, if his arm had not grown so stiff, how he would have loved to ride by their side! Was it so very stiff, after all? Occasionally in the act of brushing a boot he would startle a chance spectator by making a windmill gesture—his fingers shod perchance with a walking-shoe of Katya's—by way of testing the elasticity of his muscles. His sword, at any rate, which he had taken good care to bring with him was as sharp as ever. In the privacy of his sleeping closet he would try the edge with eyes which glistened. Good luck had allowed

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him to be present on a day of street tumults, when the Cossacks charged. He had trembled as he looked on, automatically closing and unclosing his huge fists. And that night he had not been able to sleep. Ah, that sensation of the blade encountering human flesh—that rattle of the hilt upon the skull!—he had known it in '63, that most glorious year of his life. He would give something to know it again. With death walking the streets in broad daylight it was hard to stand by passive. His fingers itched to take part in the work. To stick his sword into somebody or other would be a certain way of settling mental perplexities—only, in order to bring conscientious satisfaction it would require to be done either in the service of the Little Father, or in that of the Gracious Lady. The worst of it was that duty, so far, had refrained from pointing out any individual victim. Ah, '63, '63—how wider far had been thy opportunities!

Meanwhile the sword was kept ready, as became that of a body-guard. From the depths of a wooden trunk he had likewise produced the remains of a Cossack uniform, which, although the moths had been therein disporting themselves peacefully for years, still miraculously held together. With these relics upon his back, and hand ever on hilt, he walked three steps behind Katya in the street, or else decorated the box of the conveyance in which she paid her calls. If he could not do Cossack work he would at least wear Cossack dress. If nothing else, it would serve as a sort of passport of loyalty. But it did more than this, since the combined grotesqueness

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of his attire and of his physiognomy certainly played their part in keeping Katya unmolested.

It was in his self-appointed livery that Timosh now entered the room, with a slender slip of a calling-card almost disappearing in the midst of his lumpy paw.

"W. Nolinski," Katya read indifferently. "I don't know anybody of that name. What a strange hour for a call! Tell him that I receive only in the afternoons, Timosh."

"He says he will speak to the Gracious Lady, even if he has to knock me down for it," explained Timosh, with a display of his defective teeth, suggestive of derision.

"Ah—perhaps it is important! He may have some message——"

"Yes, it is important," said a voice from the doorway, which caused both women to turn their heads, startled. In a dust-stained travelling-suit, cap in hand, Witek Swigello stood upon the threshold.

The wig all but slipped from Malania's hands while Katya rose quickly, a flush of astonishment staining her face. She had not seen Witek since the rupture of her engagement—knew nothing of his estimate of the situation.

"You here? Not with Kazimira? What does this mean?"

"It means that Kazimira has given me my release," said Witek gravely, as he raised to his lips the hand which Katya had impulsively stretched towards him.

"You would say that Kazimira herself has got her release."

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Katya sat down again, the bright colour fading from her face. Her right hand went up to her forehead, then down to her lips and breast, with the hasty and almost unconscious gesture of the sign of the cross. Then for a moment she laid her fingers across her eyes.

"Was it quiet?" she asked presently, very low. "No pain? No fear?"

"Neither pain nor fear. She went to sleep."

"Thank God!"

There was another pause, just long enough for a brief prayer. Then she resolutely uncovered her eyes on whose lashes some brilliant drops shone.

"And you have come now to help me, have you not?" she asked in another tone—"to help me to get his release?"

"Of course, I will help you," said Witek, readily, and yet without that eagerness which she had instinctively expected, and twisting his fur cap rather hard between his hands.

"Is it not for that you have come?"

"For that—and for other things."

She gazed at him in wonder. He looked tired and travel-stained, had evidently come here straight from the station, which in itself was so unconventional a thing as to characterise the unconventional times. But it was not that which astonished her. What puzzled her was this new air of constraint, this obvious nervousness of manner, never before observed in the facile and unselfconscious artist.

"He has something to say to me which he wants to

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say without witnesses," she reflected, intercepting an impatient glance in the direction of her chaperon.

"Matoushka," she said aloud to Malania Petrowna, who had returned, unembarrassed, to the culture of her wig, "don't you think you could do your hair more comfortably in the next room? There is a larger mirror there, you know."

Malania meekly rose, not without a mistrustful look towards Witek. To leave two young people *tête à tête* was entirely against her principles, but these two were both in love with other people, which was at least an extenuating circumstance. Besides she really had no choice in the matter.

"And now, what is it?" asked Katya, as her eyes came back from the door which had closed upon the faithful duenna.

CHAPTER IV

THE PAWIAK

IT was the hour of the mid-day promenade, which meant that all but the prisoners marked "dangerous" were enjoying the privilege of taking whatever air they could get at the bottom of one of the deep, well-like courts intersecting the grim, grey body of the monster known to the Warsawites as the "Pawiak". Considering that "paw" stands for "peacock," the appellation would almost let itself be construed into something like "peacock-house," or "peacockery"; but any inquiry as to the origin of the incongruous title is usually answered by a shrug of the shoulders. Whatever its past the Pawiak in the present is rich in accommodation, though in truth it is no more than a sort of half-way house to the greater and more deadly monster with the less humorous but more appropriate title of the "Citadel". When the Citadel disgorged anything upon which its jaws had closed, it was more often than not in favour of a high and very striking wooden construction planted conspicuously upon a piece of rising ground, which when caught sight of even at a distance, would cause nervous people to turn their heads hastily aside, and pious people to cross themselves as hastily.

The Pawiak

Through the mass of building to the front, street sounds penetrated only as a vague hum. Dark, massive walls pierced by massive gratings, a square of gloomy sky overhead, resting seemingly like a blanket upon the tall chimneys; a sea of mud, crossed by lines of defective pavement,—such was the pleasure-ground in which the privileged ones, not by any means as gay in appearance as should be the rightful inhabitants of a peacock-house, were doing their best to digest the terrible cabbage soup and chunks of aged cow upon which they had lately been dining. Occasionally, a famished cat could be seen scuttling across the space on its way to or from kitchen regions, and in its wake the penetrating odour of sour cabbage seemed to follow like a trail. Warders with revolvers in their belts and sentinels with loaded muskets on their shoulders added to the suggestiveness of the scene. The newcomers looked shyly towards them, but the *habitués* of the place never even glanced that way. They would not allow their one social opportunity of the day to be spoiled by such a trifle as a loaded musket. Human nature, the ever adaptable, had already found means of accommodating itself to the new circumstances. Conversation, ever within earshot of some controlling organ, could not be more than spasmodic, and yet the fragment of a laugh was occasionally heard. Even within the shadow of the gallows the blessed sense of humour is not always unfaithful to its lucky possessors.

"A visitor for you," said a warder so suddenly into the ear of one of the promenaders—a solitary one—that, despite robust nerves, the man started violently. It was true

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that he had a long way to come back from his most recent mental excursion ; all the way from the scented pine-forests of the Austrian Carpathians.

The reality which now confronted him was embodied in the familiar face of one of the warders, whose liberal brick-red shaded off upon the nose into a suggestive purple. It was a face which in another setting might almost have been called jolly.

"A visitor for me? Are you sure?"

"As of my salvation! Come along quietly, little father! What does the prison-master need to know that you have a visitor?"

The drunken wink suggested favour, presumably of an unlawful nature and paid for, no doubt, at its market value. But by whom? Tadeusz could not imagine, unless Karol Dembowski, the socialistic friend to whom he owed his acquaintance with the Red Party, had at last found means of penetrating to him.

It was to his own cell, shared until yesterday with a man now moved on to the Citadel, that the red-faced warder led Tadeusz by by-ways, in itself an irregular proceeding. Clearly the bribe must have been handsome.

"Of course, he *may* be your brother, although he says so," he remarked, with his hand upon the key already, and a more comprehensive wink of his fiery eyelid, "so I won't go in with you, though I ought to. But don't forget that I can see you through the loop-hole all right. The fact is I had a brother too, once, and there's nothing wrong about the gentleman's money either."

The Pawiak

And he pushed Tadeusz in and turned the key upon him, sniggering inanely the while.

Barely within the cell Tadeusz found himself imprisoned by a pair of impetuous arms.

"Tadzio! Oh, good God, Tadzio!"

Witek was kissing him on both cheeks, on the lips, on the shoulders, stormily, almost tearfully, while Tadeusz himself unable to find words at once, strained his brother towards him with a force of which he himself was not aware.

"You at Warsaw, Witek?" he asked at last when he could speak. "Why did you not send me word?"

"I will tell you—one moment, Tadzio, do you know that you are throttling me? I will tell you everything when I have my breath."

Tadeusz let him go and would have asked another question, only that Witek, barely released, and having gained the first unobstructed view of his brother, interrupted him by sharply striking his hands together.

"Tadzio! Good God! What do you look like? This is unbearable! Your beard,—your clothes,—I am sure they have not been brushed to-day."

"Nor yesterday either, Witek."

"And the way they hang upon you! And the holes in your cheeks! They don't give you enough to eat, that is clear, and only cabbage soup, of course. Do you know, Tadzio, that you positively smell of cabbage, and such sour cabbage too!"

And as though it was in this last circumstance that the horror of the situation culminated, Witek sat down upon

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his brother's straw-stuffed mattress, and, before his eyes, burst into a tempest of tears.

Tadeusz took him by the shoulder, not over gently.

"Our minutes are counted. Witek; let us not waste them in sentimentalities. Have we not more weighty things to talk of than cabbage soup?"

Witek dried his tears obediently.

"Did my wire from Zalkiew reach you, Tadzio?"

"It reached me, with delays."

"You know that we have no sister now?"

"I know it," said Tadeusz gently, "tell me about her."

For a short space they talked of Kazimira, only a few questions and answers. Tenderly though they had both loved her, they knew that this was a time at which the dead must be left to bury their dead. The claims of the living were just now too imperative not to take precedence.

"But in your message you said nothing of your coming to Warsaw?"

"I thought you would guess that without announcement,—once Kazimira gone."

"And yet I had warned you that it would be wasted pains, if nothing worse. The 'Pawiak' has room for you as well as for me, Witek."

"Did you suppose I could rest quiet while I knew you were behind prison walls?"

"Was it to get me out that you came? More wasted pains!"

"There were many things that made me come," said Witek, this time without meeting his brother's eyes. He

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was silent for a moment, staring in sudden constraint at the stone floor of the cell, then abruptly looked up.

"I have not told you all yet, Tadeusz. There was a message for you from Kazimira."

"Ah?"

"It was quite at the end, when her voice was going, but I made no mistake about the words, almost her last breath went to them. 'Tell him,' she said, 'that there is only one thing in the world worth living for, and that thing is not pride.'"

"Ah!" said Tadeusz again, but in another tone, and turning abruptly from his brother.

"She said you would understand. You do understand, do you not, Tadzio?"

"I understand what her thought was, but it is not my own."

"You do not believe that you are loved for your own sake?"

Tadeusz laughed harshly.

"I would need to be much more conceited than I am in order to believe that."

For a moment longer Witek measured the broad back turned so squarely towards him, then, impulsively rising, went to lay an arm about his brother's neck.

"Ah, Tadzio, how you wrong her! Do you know that she is at Warsaw?"

Surprise sent the blood to Tadeusz's heart so suddenly as to leave his sunken cheeks livid.

"Katya at Warsaw?" he stammered, entirely thrown off his guard, and facing towards his brother.

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"Yes, for nearly two months past."

"What has brought her here?"

"You. She came up the moment she heard of your arrest. She has been working day and night for your release, though uselessly so far."

Tadeusz took out a soiled handkerchief to pass across his moist brow.

"This is folly," he said, with a strange new unsteadiness in his voice. "She will be exposing herself. This is no place for her. Tell her that I will not have it. Tell her——"

He broke off sharply, remembering that though time had been when he might have sent her commands, that time was no more.

"You are probably mistaken in her motives," he said, with laboured coldness. "What makes you suppose that she is working for my release?"

"Her own words. I have it from her lips."

"Ah! you have seen her?"

"More than once. It was to her I went straight on reaching Warsaw. I come from her now."

Tadeusz's lips opened and closed again. A hundred questions stood in his eyes, but not one of them was spoken. Again he would have turned away; but Witek's arm was about his neck, tightening its hold.

"Don't go, Tadzio, I have something else to tell you. I said I would tell you all. I don't know whether you will be able to forgive me."

"More revelations?" said Tadeusz, with an impatient laugh, recognising the formula with which, ever since

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their boyhood, Witek had been accustomed to usher in a confession.

"Alas, yes! I have told you that I went to her immediately on reaching Warsaw. Do you know what I went there for?"

"How should I?"

"It was to ask her to marry me."

This time Tadeusz shook himself free, his face as red as it had been pale a minute ago.

"You have made an offer of marriage to Kataryna Malkoff?" he asked sharply, yet with incredulous eyes.

Witek nodded as shamefacedly as a boy caught in a scrape.

Something hard came into Tadeusz's eyes; and suggestive jerks about his lips seemed to herald harsh, perhaps contemptuous words, but these too were not spoken.

"And Olympia?" was all he asked, in a tone in which, despite the strong curb he was putting on himself, mockery showed.

"That is just what Panna Malkoff asked me when I spoke. 'What have you done with Olympia?' she inquired. And I had to explain that Olympia and I have quarrelled, and quarrelled about her too. Olsza always was rather jealous of her, you know. It began at the time I was painting the portrait. And when your engagement was broken off, she took it into her head that I meant to try for Panna Malkoff now. I really think it was that which first gave me the idea. It was always 'Panna Malkoff' and 'Panna Malkoff' all the time I was nursing Kazimira. And when after the

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funeral I told her that I was starting for Warsaw, and she made a scene and reproached me with only going for Panna Malkoff's sake, I got angry, and thought I would take her at her word. The more I thought of it the more reasons I found for my action, you see. It always seemed to me that you had been rather hard upon her. Of course, it was not right of her to masquerade in that way; but when you consider the motive——. And then it must have been such a dreadful disappointment to her to see her plans fail, and so very disagreeable to be talked about, as, of course, she would be."

"And you offered yourself as the saviour of her reputation; I see."

"I almost felt called upon to do so, in order to shield her good name——"

"And supply a master to Lubynia. Yes, I see perfectly," said Tadeusz, with all sorts of things vibrating in his voice.

"Tadzio, don't look at me like that, or I cannot go on! I don't deny that the thought of Lubynia had something to do with it; but it was not that alone. And I did not really feel that I was doing you any wrong, since the breaking off of your engagement was your own doing. It was only after I had seen her again and spoken to her that I understood that it *was* a wrong, since, engagement or no engagement, she belongs to you as much as ever."

"Then I gather that Panna Malkoff did not fall in with your plans?"

"She? Ah, Tadzio, how little you understand! When she had listened to my explanation about Olympia, she

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said, after a moment: 'Pan Swigello, I will forgive you only for what you have done on condition that you sit down at once and write to Olympia. I see that you love her still as much as ever, and I see that love has nothing whatever to do with the offer you have just made me. As for me, please understand that even if Olympia did not exist I could never marry you. If I cannot be the wife of your brother, I shall never be the wife of any man; not because he is a Swigello, but because he is the only man I have ever loved, or ever could belong to.' And so bravely and simply said, looking me straight in the face. Oh, Tadzio, you do not understand your good fortune! She is a woman in a thousand."

Tadeusz, his back once more towards his brother, gave no sign.

"She made me feel ashamed of myself, positively she did," said Witek, with a *naïveté* which of its kind was rather fascinating.

"I am ashamed of you, Witek, that should be enough."

Witek gazed wistfully at the impressive breadth of shoulders before him, then in a truly stricken tone:—

"She has forgiven me, Tadzio, will not you forgive me too?"

"What have I to forgive you for? I am not engaged to Panna Malkoff. Any one is free to approach her."

"How hard you are! Now I can understand why Kazimira sent you just that message. Tadzio, you cannot let me go away with that shadow between us. Say that you are not angry with me!"

Another moment of silence, perhaps of inner conflict;

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then Tadeusz turned with a laugh which, though not good to hear, yet meant a surrender.

"Oh, yes! let the shadow go by all means," he said half-indifferently. "What remains, after all, if we lose one another?"

It was the way all their differences had always ended. Once more Tadeusz felt, as a hundred times before, that to be angry with Witek for any length of time was an impossible proceeding, since anger to be reasonable, presupposes a responsible object.

Just as their hands clasped there was a hoarse whisper through the loop-hole in the door.

"Time very nearly up! In five minutes more the prison-master will be coming this way."

"Oh, Tadzio, and there is so much to say still! We have not spoken at all about yourself yet, and your cause. What hopes have you? What prospects? Do you think you will get out? They told Panna Malkoff everywhere that your case is a comparatively light one."

"So it is—for the present. So long as they see in me only the user of a false passport and the member of a prescribed family, I may get off with a few months. But," and his voice sunk abruptly as he leaned towards his brother's ear, "if they should come to see in me the budding anarchist—as they might do, if by ill-luck they should get upon the track of how some of my evenings were spent—then, of course, the matter would bear another face."

"They will not get upon the track," whispered back Witek vehemently. "The police have their hands too

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full, and the Red Party *do* stick to each other, there is that to be said for them."

"If they knew how little I ever belonged to them! Another hour of liberty and my resignation would have been in their hands."

"I know that—from Karol Dembowski. Ah, and that is another message I have for you. Dembowski wants me to tell you that he cannot come near the Pawiak, for fear of compromising you. He has reason to believe that he is being watched. He is very anxious about you, Tadzio, feels terribly responsible."

"Let him make his mind easy. But listen, Witek, I too have a message for Dembowski. Perhaps he remembers a small gold locket I used to wear upon my watch chain. On the day of my arrest I missed it. I know it was in its place when I went to that last meeting—the one in the wood-shed. I cannot help fancying I lost it there. If it were possible to have the shed searched I have a notion it would be found among the sawdust. He told me the place is quite unused now, I don't want to lose that locket, and, besides, if it fell into uncalled-for hands it might be awkward."

"I will tell him," said Witek, just as the red-faced warder beckoned urgently through the chink of the opened door.

CHAPTER V

"JUSTICE"

THE judges were upon the bench; or—to be more accurate—the five generals presiding over the court martial were sitting in a semi-circle, before a large, round table with a handsome velvet cover upon it. Their brilliant appearance, gold-braided sleeves, and breasts ablaze with decorations, were well in keeping with the splendour of their surroundings. For the Warsaw court martial—probably for purposes of temporary convenience—was not held between the four bare walls usually associated with the finding of verdicts, but in a space whose normal vocation in life was that of a ballroom, and which the pressure of circumstances had compelled "justice" to borrow from "frivolity". Frivolity ever liberal, had good-naturedly agreed to the loan, but continued, nevertheless, to haunt the premises; in the white and gold of the walls, in the pearl-grey velvet of the draperies, in the tall mirrors now reflecting the pale faces of the accused, and which to-night would with equal indifference reflect other faces flushed with pleasure and movement. In the pauses the clink of ivory balls could be heard in the distance, for it was in the billiard-room that the witnesses whiled away their time until called. Everything,

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from the rococo chairs to the mouldings on the ceiling, reflected the highest credit upon the good taste of the designer; a triumph of artistic harmony, completed by the fine view upon the river over which towered the Citadel, and with only one blot upon that view—the silhouette of the gallows drawn sharply against the wintry sky.

The elegant chairs and sofas were but sparsely occupied, the quality of the “justice” here dispensed not being of a sort with which publicity readily agreed. A play with a very scanty audience, such was the impression conveyed. The position of the accused helped to enhance the vaguely theatrical suggestion. Upon a raised platform, usually occupied by the orchestra, they sat in an irregular row which with every hour and every sentence passed showed more gaps. The green of tropical plants, artistically massed, made an effective background to their miscellaneous figures, as well as to those of the armed sentinels to the right and to the left. At every new name that was called a vibration, half-sympathy, half-personal apprehension, ran through the group. They had been thirteen to start with. By two o'clock in the afternoon there were but four remaining, and of the nine who had descended the steps of the platform only two had left the room as free men. Four sentences of death had been passed; the rest had long terms of imprisonment in prospect.

Just now a thicker shade of pallor had laid itself upon the tensely strained faces; the last case had been just a little too appalling; a youth of nineteen with a bandaged eye and a bandaged hand, accused of the illicit fabrication of bombs, but desperately protesting his innocence. As

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sole answer to his appeals their excellencies, the judges, had showed him his confession signed by himself.

"Is that your signature, or is it not?" inquired the president, who presumably owed his dignity to his size, which, in conjunction with a wilderness of black eyebrows, was enough to strike terror into the heart of even a guiltless prisoner.

In reply the lad tore off his bandages, displaying an empty eye-socket and a broken finger.

"Yes, it is my signature!" he cried, in a voice which no one present, not even their excellencies, ever forgot; "my signature given after they had done this to me, and this, and this!" And drawing up his trembling upper lip he disclosed his mangled gums, almost toothless.

Some of those on the platform shut their eyes, shuddering, and even a few of the witnesses looked aside; but the generals never blinked. Absolutely they could not see any connection here. A broken finger was one thing and a signature was another. Besides they had the deposition of the prison-master, according to which the prisoner's injuries were the result of unsuccessful attempts at suicide. The objections of the advocate who rose to lay upon the table two blood-encrusted teeth which bore the appearance of having been savagely extracted, were impatiently waved aside as entirely irrelevant. A cheap trick indeed! Short of fitting them back into their sockets—which happened to be too swollen to receive them—how identify the teeth?

After a brief withdrawal into the ladies' cloakroom—doing duty now as consulting-room—the death sentence

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had been pronounced, upon which the prisoner had fallen down in convulsions and been borne kicking and screaming from the room.

While the court still stood under this latest of impressions another name was called:—

“Tadeusz Swigello, engineer.”

He rose with a sigh almost of relief. If nothing else this was the end of the purgatory of suspense, of the humiliating exposure upon this ridiculous elevation. From the moment that he had entered the so incongruously elegant apartment Tadeusz had had the impression of taking part in a farce. The mere fact of his presence here had something farcical about it, since capital offences alone formed the court martial's rightful field of action. Such minor transgressions as a false passport should surely have been far beneath its dignity.

“Why am I not called before an ordinary court?” he had asked the advocate who yesterday had visited him in prison, in order to announce that he had been appointed as official defender of him and of some half-dozen others, a man whom he had never seen before, who knew nothing of him or of his circumstances, but whose mere presence in the court was supposed to come up to all the requirements of justice. Who could call the court martial inhuman since it actually accorded advocates to its victims?

“It appears that you have been notified as ‘suspected’ from some unknown quarter. Do you happen to have any enemy at Warsaw?”

“Not that I know of.”

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"So much the better. But there is something here I do not understand. I have heard an anonymous letter mentioned. No doubt the authorities calculate that if anything is to be extracted from you the court martial will make a better job of it than would an ordinary court," and he smiled a trifle sardonically. "You will do well to be very circumspect in your answers to-morrow—if you have anything on your conscience, and even if you have not, for the matter of that."

And then for about five minutes they talked the case over.

Now, as he stood upon a clear space of the shining parquet floor, with only the armed sentinel behind him, Tadeusz's eyes began by searching out this man. It was beside a small marble-topped table—one that had been taken from the supper-room—that the advocate sat, looking with his gold *pince-nez* and well-cut coat something like a dandy waiting for his dinner at a restaurant. Such as he was Tadeusz looked at him earnestly as at the only thing in the shape of a helper in the whole of this ominous room ; for the scene just passed had shaken even his robust nerves, and stirred apprehensions hitherto slumbering. Then having gleaned a brief nod, perhaps meant for encouragement, his eyes returned with anxious scrutiny to the faces of his judges. By another degree his heart sank. For although Russia, despite the gibes of its enemies, counts many noble men and true gentlemen amongst its commanders, it was not from these that the presidents of the court martial had been taken, nor could be, considering the work they had to do. It was not

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gentlemen that were wanted here, it was butchers. And the selection had been eminently successful. The faces Tadeusz looked upon now showed about their mouths lines which are left only by the exercise of the lowest instincts in nature. Bull-dog jaws, brazen eyes, low foreheads, apoplectic complexions predominated. In arrogant consciousness of their importance, gorged with that sense of unlimited power which comes to one man in a million, honestly convinced, maybe, that the salvation of Russia rested upon their gold-braided shoulders, they sat there, almost swelling out of their uniforms, with legs luxuriously stretched beneath the table which was littered with papers, as well as with a variety of miscellaneous objects, some of which had already played a part in to-day's trials, and some of which had still their part to play. There were such things as a shabby felt hat picked up at a street-corner after a bomb explosion, a button still adhering to a fragment of cloth which had remained in the hands of a pursuing policeman ; clasp-knives, revolvers, pocket-books, letters, all the scourgings of pockets which had been emptied under compulsion, and which now lay heaped up here upon the velvet tablecloth on the chance of furthering either identification or conviction. The two ill-treated teeth which had failed to save the man last sentenced lay here as well, contemptuously disregarded.

The usual questions began, and the first agitation overcome, they were answered by Tadeusz with a self-possession which rather put the generals out of their calculations. Yes, he had been at Warsaw for over a year past now.

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In the exercise of his profession? Just so. Inquiries at the Gutstein manufactory would show that he had been employed there regularly as supervising engineer from shortly after his arrival until his arrest. To the use of a false passport he pleaded guilty as well as to unlawful crossing of the frontier, but no blacker self-accusation than this was to be extracted by the most pressing examination. Their excellencies began to look a little disappointed. This man, darkly signalled as a "suspect," would apparently have to be let off with a term of imprisonment. What could the writer of the anonymous letter mean by causing their precious time to be wasted over such puerile cases as this! One of the generals looked impatiently at his watch. His daughter was to go to her first ball to-night in that very room, and he began to calculate anxiously whether there would be any possibility of getting the place into order again in time for the entertainment. In his way he was a very tender father. He would not have his Zosia disappointed.

"What made you give up your employment in Austria in order to come here?" inquired the president in person, twitching his bushy eyebrows at Tadeusz.

But this time the prisoner did not answer. For some moments past he had been staring fixedly at the heap of *corpus delicti* upon the table, with neck rigidly craned, in order to gain a better view.

"Do you see anything there that belongs to you?" asked one of the generals, almost mildly.

"I think so—yes, one moment, please." A hasty step forward, and Tadeusz's hand descended like a bird of

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prey upon a small, bright object whose glitter had caught his eye in the midst of rags and paper.

“That locket is yours? Are you sure?”

“Quite sure. Yes, it is mine.”

He clutched it in his hand as tightly as though he feared to be robbed of it.

“Ah!”

There was a movement around the velvet-covered table. Their excellencies began visibly to cheer up. Perhaps the anonymous warning was, after all, not empty air. The dry cough of the advocate at the restaurant table came far too late. Glancing towards him Tadeusz saw that he was frowning significantly with many disapproving headshakes.

“Do you know where that locket was found?”

“No.”

“In a wood-shed at one kilometer distance from the town, in which, as the police have positive information, a revolutionary meeting had been held only a few hours earlier.”

With the sensation of having stumbled headlong into a trap Tadeusz stood dumbfounded. Vaguely he put his left hand to his forehead, while in the right still clutching the recovered locket.

“If that locket belongs to you, then you must have attended the meeting on 3rd November.”

All five pairs of eyes were gloating upon him now, almost unbearably.

The advocate rose leisurely, adjusting his *pince-nez*.

“My client is probably mistaken in claiming the

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trinket. It is of a very usual pattern; your excellencies know that the objects on the table have been through my hands repeatedly; there are neither initials nor any other special characteristics about its exterior; and inside only a lock of black hair—a common enough product of Russia, I fancy,” he added, with a faint attempt at jocularity. “Maybe it resembles a locket which——”

“No, it *is* the locket,” said Tadeusz obstinately; at which their excellencies looked positively grateful, and the advocate sat down again with a shrug of his well-clad shoulders, than which no words could have said more plainly: “I wash my hands of you!”

“Then you admit that you attended the meeting in the wood-shed on 3rd November?”

But Tadeusz had already pulled himself together. The gesture of the advocate, by telling him that he had only himself to depend on now, had abruptly awakened the instinct of self-preservation.

“No, I don’t admit anything, except that I lost the locket in the wood-shed.”

“What were you doing in the wood-shed?”

Having thought for a moment he calmly enunciated one of the few lies of his life:—

“I was sheltering from the snowstorm. You will perhaps remember that November 3rd was marked by the first snowstorm of the season.”

Their excellencies laughed with good-natured contempt for such a bungler, and stretched their legs a little further under the table; all but one who was now staring at the prisoner as hard as the prisoner himself had, a minute

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ago, been staring at the heap upon the velvet cover. Presently he leant towards his neighbour to whisper something into his large, red ear. A second pair of eyes became attentive, and then another, as rapidly the whisper passed round the table.

“It was on November 3rd that you took shelter from the storm,” resumed the gigantic president, toning down his voice to as harmless a key as it was capable of assuming. “That storm took place in the evening. Would you mind telling me how you spent the morning of that day?”

“The morning? I don’t think I remember.”

“Did you not happen to pass through the S—— Street at an early hour, about dawn, or thereabouts?”

“Certainly not. What should I be doing there at dawn?”

“Perhaps going to the Gutstein manufactory,” suggested another of the judges. “The S—— Street lies on the road to the manufactory, as you probably know.”

“It lies on one of the roads to the manufactory, but not the one I usually employed.”

“Not usually, perhaps, but sometimes, let us say, for instance, on November 3rd, in which case you might have chanced to hear a shot fired there. There *was* a shot fired in the S—— Street on that day; which was marked not only by the first snowstorm, but also by a cowardly attack upon one of our brave Cossacks. I dare say you remember the circumstance?”

“Yes, I remember,” said Tadeusz, in whose mind a distasteful recollection of the discussion in the wood-shed

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mingled with a rising wave of apprehension, as yet almost formless. "But since I was not in the street I did not hear the shot fired."

"You know of course that the carrying of firearms is at present prohibited. Are you ready to swear that you have never offended in that way?"

"As a rule," began Tadeusz.

"Ah, you would wish to make distinctions! I understand," completed the president, scribbling something on to a scrap of paper which was hastily remitted to one of the attendant orderlies. "We shall have some more questions to ask you presently; meanwhile you can sit down. Next case!"

A little bewildered Tadeusz sat down upon the chair pointed out to him—a dainty affair of gilt wood and *bombé* velvet—looking the while towards his advocate, as if for some explanation of this abnormal proceeding. But the official defender, though in truth as perplexed as himself, had no time for him now, being already occupied with his next client, his being a business that was conducted *en gros*.

Half an hour passed, another sentence—one of banishment for life—had been pronounced, before Tadeusz heard his name once more called out.

This time when he stood upon the clear space of the parquet another figure stood opposite to him; the squat figure of a stolid-looking Cossack, a little out of breath from the pace at which he had just mounted the broad staircase of the palatial mansion.

"Cossack Lukiok," said the president impressively,

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“look at that man well! Is he the one who fired that shot at you last November?”

The Cossack blinked his small eyes hard into Tadeusz's face. www.libtool.com.cn

“It is difficult for me to say, your excellency.”

“But you always declared that it was a big, bearded man you saw running away,” admonished another of the excellencies in a truly fatherly tone. “Look at him well, my son! This is a big, bearded man, is it not?”

“Yes, to your orders, excellency!”

“Then are you ready to swear that it is he who fired the shot?”

“I think it may be he,” said the man, obviously struggling with some elementary sense of justice.

“No prevarications!” thundered the president, with every inch of his stature, every hair in his bushy eyebrows, and every medal upon his breast bearing down upon the witness. “You are not here to make fools of the court. A Cossack must speak the truth and fear no man—beyond the Czar. A straight answer, you block-head: Is it he or is it not?”

“It is he, to your orders, excellency,” stammered the man, with submissive eyes fixed upon the demi-gods at the table.

“Ah!”

A breath of satisfaction ran round the half-circle, while all the five excellencies together beamed upon the witness. From him their eyes returned to the prisoner, who, half-stunned by the development of events, still stared blankly at the man, to him an utter stranger, and

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who had just identified him as his would-be murderer. There was more of a puzzled than a startled look upon his face, as though he were still striving after the real significance of the brief dialogue just passed. The advocate, on his side, had sprung to his feet, for even a professional sense of justice is occasionally stung beyond endurance. Considering that it had been nearly dark at the time, and that the man fired at had originally deposed that he had seen no more than the back of the fugitive assassin, how was personal identification possible?

But presently he sat down again with a final shrug of his shoulders, realising that he was wasting his breath. No one was listening to him, not even Tadeusz, who still stood as though petrified, face to face with his accuser. As for the generals, they were far too pleased with the result obtained to trouble about such trifling objections. For two months past a big, bearded man had been "wanted," and here was a big, bearded man—one signalised too as "suspect," and who had as good as admitted having attended the revolutionary meeting on the day of the attack. What more could you possibly want? Even without the Cossack's testimony—and in these disloyal times a Cossack's word must of course outweigh a hundred ordinary assertions—it must be clear to any but a blockhead that General Felpoff's thought had been an inspiration. And when you consider that this conviction would effectually wipe out a blot upon the reputation of the Warsaw police, who for all these weeks had been hunting vainly for the criminal! So long as the shot of November 3rd was not avenged,

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how be sure that the public would continue to tremble before it?

The consultation in the cloakroom was more a matter of form than anything else. At the end of five minutes of a silence so tense that the click of the balls in the billiard-room near was distinctly audible, Tadeusz, standing now alone upon the free space of the polished floor, heard as though in a dream a sentence of death pronounced in which inexplicably his name figured, gathered also that the sentence was to be put into execution within forty-eight hours—all this without any special feeling of anguish, simply because, while clearly understanding the words, his mind refused to grasp the inner sense of this monstrosity. It was the sensations of a witness, not of an actor in the tragi-comedy here enacted, which he was as yet undergoing.

Another brief pause as of general expectation, as though the judges themselves were prepared to see somebody or other rise in rebellion, then Tadeusz, roused from his trance by a punch in the ribs proceeding from the butt-end of a sentinel's rifle, mechanically inclined his head towards the table around which he had not yet completely realised that his murderers sat, and, without further gesture or word, allowed himself to be led from the room.

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CHAPTER VI

THE HEARING OF THE NEWS

WAVES of exquisite music were breaking voluptuously against the white and gold walls—the electric lamps poured their floods of light upon wonderfully coloured gowns, while darkness and velvet draperies combined to hide the ugly black silhouette which, by daylight, marred the view upon the river. The restaurant tables were all back in their places in the supper-room, and upon the raised platform fiddle and cello were being gaily wielded.

“The room is not what it used to be for dancing,” said a gorgeous lieutenant of the guards to his partner, in the pause after the first waltz that had been played.

“Because of the ghosts that might be looking in at the windows?” she asked, a swift look of horror passing through her black eyes.

He stared, with a miniature gape.

“Ghosts? Oh! is that word in the dictionary still? I thought it had been taken out. It’s the floor I’m thinking of. Such a lot of mud as all those people—soldiers and Jews and so on—er—witnesses, you know, bring in upon their boots! In spite of all the waxing in the world it’s impossible that the parquet should not suffer.”

“There was a sitting this morning, was there not?”

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"Yes! a rather interesting one, too."

"Ah?"

Katya said it almost indifferently. The court martial interested her only in the abstract, as not lying within the circle of her personal apprehensions, since she had been told repeatedly that Tadeusz's case was one for the ordinary courts. During the last ten days she had been cut off from the outer world by a sharp attack of influenza. To-day for the first time she had ventured forth, too early for the doctor's wishes, keen not to miss one of the chief balls of the season at which all the heads of Russian bureaucracy would be present, with its opportunities of making important acquaintances, perhaps also of gleaning news, of which lately there had been a dearth, since Witek, now her devoted if somewhat erratic helper, had in turn succumbed to the prevailing epidemic.

Rather pale she looked and somewhat sharpened in feature in her glittering white dress which covered so heavy a heart, but beautiful in a new, pathetic way. The gleam in her unquiet eyes and the red flowers flaming on breast and hair, seemed alike a reflection of fever, barely passed.

"Yes, quite interesting," lisped the lieutenant, in the shade of the gigantic palm under which they sat waiting for the fiddles to tune up again. In his hand was Katya's lace fan being lazily flapped before her face, while over its edge he regarded her with the approving eye of a *connoisseur*.

"They have at last caught the fellow who fired that shot in November—at the Cossack, you know."

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"Ah?" said Katya again, as languidly as before. There had been so many shots fired since November that it was difficult to keep count.

"It was rather a surprise, too. Man brought up for minor offence, use of false documents or something of that sort. Just on the point of being let off with a couple of years, when the idiot gave himself away by pouncing upon a gold locket on the table, which had been picked up in a police raid on a suspicious spot. Advocate tried to pull him out of the hole by making out that it was a mistake; no use—he stuck to the locket like a bull-dog. As good as a play. I assure you. I was quite glad that it happened to be my day of attendance upon General Lapatkin. But it was to come better yet. For presently one of the generals got an idea, and the Cossack fired at in November was sent for, and after a bit recognised the man as the one he had seen running off. It's true that he hadn't had much more than a glimpse, but a big, bearded fellow like that is easily recognised, you know."

"And did he confess?" asked Katya, her interest fairly aroused by this time.

"Not he! They never do. Swore he had never been near the place at all, and all the usual spotless innocence. And yet it's clear that the shot could not have gone off by itself; and equally clear that some one has got to swing for it."

"Yes, but supposing it were an innocent man!" said Katya, in awe-struck pity for the unknown sufferer.

"That would be hard lines, certainly, for the man; but

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for the public at large it would be a worse thing if the crime went unpunished."

"You cannot mean that!" she said, turning upon him a pair of flashing eyes which, though unsuccessful in confusing him, caused him approvingly to observe the becoming effects of indignation.

"What would you have? These are ticklish times. One cannot be over squeamish with Anarchists."

"Is this man an Anarchist?"

"Something in that line, which is rather strange, as I am told he belongs to one of the big Polish families. A Count Swigello, by rights."

"Oh, but that is impossible!" said Katya quickly, and suddenly sitting up upon her chair as straight as a dart. "Not Tadeusz Swigello?"

"Tadeusz—just so; an engineer by profession. The count is rather down upon his luck, as you see."

For a moment longer Katya sat quite still, her wide open eyes fixed full upon her partner's face. Within that space he saw how the blank astonishment in them passed swiftly to doubt, and from that into wild panic, as it became borne in upon her that nothing was impossible in these times and in this place.

"Did you say he had been condemned?" she asked, very low and hurriedly.

"Naturally. The sentence to be carried out within forty-eight hours."

He had thought her pale before; but now, abruptly, her face became so ghastly that instinctively he put out his arm, expecting to see her slip from her chair. Per-

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haps it was the gesture which brought her to herself ; for in the same moment she rose, still white as death, and with one hand steadying herself by a chair-back, yet having by a supreme effort of will averted the impending fainting-fit.

" It is nothing ; I am not very well," she said, labouring her words as though her tongue were heavy. " Would you please call my companion. I must return to the hotel."

A few minutes later Malania fluttered into the cloak-room, perplexed. Home already ? When the ball had scarcely begun, and there were so many pleasant people. But Katya silenced her with a look.

In the vestibule below, through which late arrivals were still streaming, she almost ran against Witek, looking as white as herself, and muffled to his ears in furs.

" Ah, Panna Malkoff, I was coming for you !"

" *You know ?*" she whispered, not stopping to ask or reflect how Witek, the patient under strict doctor's orders, came to be here at all.

" I know. That is why I came—straight out of bed. I have my nightgown on under this. It was Dembowski who brought me the news half an hour ago. There is not a moment to lose. Come quickly !"

" Where to ?" she asked, pressing already close upon his steps.

" To your hotel. Dembowski is there. He wants to speak to you."

" Then all hope is not gone ? Any chance of an appeal ?"

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"None, he says. But there is a plan. You will hear. Where is Timosh? Is this your carriage?"

As they rolled towards the hotel—at a few minutes distance—not a word was spoken. In one corner of the carriage Witek shivered beneath his furs and in the other Malania Petrowna, who had gathered that something dreadful had happened or was going to happen, made an apprehensive heap. Katya, very upright, looked out of the window with a fixed, gleaming gaze which saw nothing. That gold locket! How well she remembered the day when she herself had fastened it on to his watch-chain, at the foot of that very crucifix which had witnessed their final parting. And was that to cost him his life?—because he would not give it up?

It was in silence too that they mounted the hotel staircase. Within the sitting-room a young man who had been restlessly perambulating the apartment for some time past turned quickly at their entrance. He was a slight, eager-eyed youth, with black hair cropped so short and grown so thickly as to resemble black velvet, and an habitual, half-nervous gesture of passing his hand over it, as though to assure himself of the quality of the pile.

"Dembowski, here she is! Now say what you have to say!"

Witek sank, coughing, on to the nearest chair.

Into the eager eyes, as they rested upon Katya, there came a look of astonished admiration, quickly chased by the urgency of the moment.

"Oh, Panna Malkoff," he groaned, with a sharp smiting together of his hands; "how you must hate me! Witek

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has told me of your generous attachment. It was I—you must know—I who persuaded him into joining our party ; I who took him to that meeting——”

Katya's impatient gesture cut short the words.

“What have you got to propose. I hear you have some plan?”

“Not I, but the party. They have been preparing it for weeks. But——” and his voice dropped apprehensively—“I do not know if I can speak here. A single word betrayed would be a matter of life and death to many.”

Without replying, Katya went to the door and opened it.

“Timosh,” she said to the old Cossack awaiting orders in the lobby beyond ; “you will go into the passage now, and stand before the closed door till I call you ; and until then nobody is to pass.”

Having secured immunity on this side Katya, crossing first the sitting-room and then her own bedroom, took the precaution of locking Malania Petrowna into the apartment beyond, whither she had already fled as to a refuge from these incomprehensible doings.

“You can speak now, safely,” she said, returning to her visitor. “What is the plan?”

He began to unfold it, not too coherently because of his agitation. Heard in these hurried and confused words it sounded like something closely bordering on lunacy—the wildest, most improbable scheme ever born in desperate brains. A project of evasion on a large scale, and which—should calculations come true—was to owe

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nothing to violence, and everything to cold-blood and the thing called "nerve".

Transferences from the Pawiak to the Citadel either of sentenced prisoners, or—in times of over-crowding—of the former's surplus, were no unusual occurrence.

Within the year it had once or twice happened that, in order to avoid disturbances, the transport had taken place in the night, instead of the early morning hours. Upon this fact the project had been built,—nothing less than a sham transference of this description, to take place only a few hours earlier than the one appointed for the official action. Ten was the number of prisoners to be liberated fixed upon as the utmost that could be ventured without dragging out proceedings to a perilous length. In the selection of these favoured ten, party interests had not by any means been paramount, for it was in the brains of the idealists of the party that the gigantic project had been born. The individual danger in which each prisoner stood—of whichever party he might be a member—had alone been considered. It was a fine opportunity for proving the breadth of their humanitarian principles, and they had not been slow in seizing it. Every possible information had been collected as to the chances of those either in danger of a death-sentence, or as to reprieve, if already sentenced, and with great deliberation the list had been drawn up.

To Katya, as with painfully beating heart she listened, the tentative sounded like one of those undertakings of princely knights in fairy-tales, and which owe their

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success only to magic rings and assistant spirits. A thing to be smiled at as at a generous child's fancy.

"Would not an appeal be better than this?" she asked helplessly. "The advocate could tell me——"

Dembowski's restless hand passed over his hair.

"The advocate has appealed already—to no purpose whatever. Only this morning the court martial has received new orders from St. Petersburg, as we managed to find out, stricter ones, of course, and ruling out all possibilities of reprieve."

"But to a higher court?"

"There is no higher court,—save the Czar—and by the time you get there, there would be nothing more to appeal about."

Katya shut her eyes for one moment with a feeling of deadly sickness. "Within forty-eight hours." She had just remembered her partner's words.

"Then, is this—this plan the only hope?"

"The only one."

"For when is it planned?"

"For to-morrow night."

"That is within the forty-eight hours," she said to herself.

Then aloud.

"Have they got his name upon the list?"

"Not yet. The list is closed, as I told you. It was closed before his sentence. They say they dare not take on any more. I tried to persuade them and failed. That is why I came to you. If you try to persuade them I think you will not fail."

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Again the admiring flash passed through his eyes.

"Where are they?"

"In the lodgings of one of the party, where they are at this moment fixing the last details. We would still be in time——"

With a quick movement Katya gathered her white skirts into one hand. She had not sat down since her entrance, nor even taken time to resume her wraps.

"What are you waiting for," she asked impatiently. "Take me there at once!"

"Ah!—that is what I hoped for! But your dress?"

"No one will see my dress," said Katya, wrapping the long dark cloak more tightly around her. "I am ready, Pan Dembowski."

"And I, too," said Witek, unexpectedly rising. "Karol, will they let me in, do you think? There is no saying whether I may not be of some use."

TEN OR ELEVEN?

UPON a narrow landing, up two pairs of wooden stairs, Katya, muffled in costly furs waited breathless while Dembowski, who had exchanged a password with the person who opened the door, went in to bargain for admission. Beside her Witek was coughing worse than ever after the steep ascent; but she was not aware of any pity for him. If he could by any possibility be of use to Tadeusz, then of course his place was here and not in his bed.

Very soon Dembowski came out again and silently held the door open. Quickly and quietly they passed in through a small dark lobby, with a greasy kitchen smell about it, to a couple of rooms, in the second of which some dozen men were sitting round a table with an oil-cloth cover and a smoky petroleum lamp upon it. There were papers too upon the table—official-looking papers—and other more unexpected things, upon which Katya's eyes, even at this critical moment, fell with a sort of wonder; such as razors, pocket mirrors, cheap-looking purses, besides match-boxes in a row and parcels of cigarettes, unopened ones, as distinct from those that were being at this moment plentifully smoked. Also a small bottle with a colourless fluid in it, and which looked like a chemist's bottle. Beside another table two young women with short manes of

Ten or Eleven?

hair had been busily folding up trousers and coats of various colours and cut, among which sheepskin jackets figured almost as frequently as the ordinary *bourgeois* attire.

Katya, following Dembowski into the room, was met by a circle of expectant eyes in which surprise and curiosity fought for the upper hand. As she came into the light of the lamp the men rose, some with alacrity, others reluctantly following their example, while the two women in the background, their hands becoming suddenly idle, opened wide eyes of wonder upon the unlooked-for apparition.

"You have something to say to us; will you please be seated," said the person who sat at the head of the table, pointing to a vacant chair.

Katya sat down and looked around at the faces beside her, as critically and as fearfully as Tadeusz had that morning looked on those of his judges. A strange collection. Some noble physiognomies and some dissolute ones, reckless glances and nervous gestures. Taken all in all they looked like a handful of adventurers of mixed origin, but with between them that common resemblance which fanaticism ever creates. By a certain exaltation in the eye, and by a certain contraction of the lips it might be guessed that upon some point or other they all thought alike, and would doubtless act—possibly even, if need be, die together.

But the man at the head of the table was no adventurer, or so deeply disguised a one as to be unrecognisable. A large, flaxen-fair man, carefully though plainly dressed and with a placid, somewhat flat face, which to all appearance

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seemed incapable of physiognomical disturbance. It was he who had asked Katya to be seated, and who now with great deliberation of manner, seeing that she still struggled with her agitation, repeated his question as to what she had to say, drawing out his watch the while, as though to hint at the value of time.

And then, striving for breath, she began to speak, at first so low that those at the farther end of the long, narrow table leaned forward to hear. Her love for Tadeusz Swigello—the rupture of her engagement and its cause—her resolve to save him at all costs—it was all unveiled before these strangers ruthlessly, with no feeling of shame, with no thought at all of herself, and only the one fixed idea of moving their hearts for him. As the words came faster, more audibly, more eloquently, the eyes of the men, all fixed upon her speaking face which said so much more than even her words could say, began to kindle, some of them to flame, and the two women, drawing near, watched her with an interest which, though more critical, was not less real.

“Oh, the lucky beggar!” reflected more than one of the male listeners, as he marked the glow upon the beautiful cheek, and would probably not have taken back the word, even if reminded that the “lucky” man was bound for the gallows.

When she paused, looking round her with pleading eyes, there was first a silence, and then a slight but general changing of position, as though some spell had been lifted.

“You alone can save him now, by putting him on your list. You will not refuse—you cannot!”

Ten or Eleven?

There was no answer at once. They looked towards the flaxen-haired leader as though for guidance. Katya, divining the master-spirit, looked in the same direction all down the length of the table. His was the only face which had not changed during her appeal, though the light-blue eyes had been as attentive as any.

He spoke now, more deliberately than ever.

"We would save him if we could; believe it. But the line has to be drawn somewhere, and it is drawn already. Even ten is a large number to get through in the time given."

"What difference can one more make?—one single one?"

"The difference of the one passenger who swamps the life-boat."

"But there must be some way—there must!"

"None but striking another name from the list in order to make room for his, and you would not have us do that."

"Yes, I would!" said Katya, with a readiness which made some of them smile at the recklessness of this female egoism—yet not smile disapprovingly. "I know nothing about the others. It is *him* I want saved."

The leader shook his head gravely.

"Personal considerations are ruled out by our principles. It is the need alone that determines."

"And where can you find a greater need than here, and a greater right? He is innocent—you know it!"

"So are the others."

"And a Pole, too, one of yourselves. And almost more a Lithuanian than a Pole. Am I wrong in supposing that you are a Lithuanian yourself?"

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She said it confidently, sure that she could not be mistaken in that so familiar flaxen hair, in those clear and steady blue eyes.

"I have told you already that personal considerations do not count here, nor patriotic ones either. We have more than one Russian on our list."

"Then you refuse?"

"I fear we must."

Katya sat for a moment frowning at the oil-skin tablecloth. When she raised her eyes again something new and almost wicked had come into them.

"Are you sure that you dare do so? Supposing I go from here to denounce you?"

"Supposing you do not go from here at all?"

"What do you mean?" asked Katya, duped by the blandness of the tone.

"I mean that of the two friends you have brought with you one does not seem to be in what you would call a fighting condition, while the other belongs to our party and is perfectly acquainted with its principles. I also mean that we are fourteen and they are two."

There was a half-groan from Witek in the background, while the circular movement of Dembowski's nervous hand upon his hair accelerated. Neither had spoken since their entrance, sure that the cause was safer in her hands than theirs.

Katya's eyes sought the faces beside her, with a panic-stricken question upon her own. They were hardening already, as though in response to her threat. Yes, these were not men to stop before anything which stood in their passage. Not to be intimidated; but perhaps to be

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softened. In the terror of her heart her hands clasped in her lap as she leaned forward, all defiance gone, ready to kneel to them, so that only they consented to the rescue of Tadeusz.

"Listen to me—listen to me—I beg! Your hearts are not of stone. You are men and he is a fellow-man, waiting for an unmerited death behind those dreadful walls. If he dies I die, too; remorse will kill me; for if it had not been for the disturbance I brought into his life he never would have been in this mad adventure. Oh, be kind, be good—to him—and to me! Oh, you to whom they listen, tell them to save him—and me!"

As she half-rose to stretch her clasped hands towards the man at the other end of the table the heavy cloak slipped from her shoulders. She made an impatient snatch at it, then desisted, visited perhaps by some lightning-like intuition touching the value of such weapons as beauty in junctures as critical as this. And here there was beauty and to spare. As the white glittering dress, the jewels upon the bare arms and neck became revealed, a dazzled look came into the men's eyes; while the two women stared eagerly, busy even at this moment with wondering how such frills as that were gathered, and whether the silver on the dress were real or not?

Their hearts would indeed have needed to be of stone and their senses of lead had they not succumbed now. Again that questioning look towards the leader, the placidity of whose flat face seemed no longer perfect. The deliberation of his tone when he spoke sounded almost artificial now.

"I propose to put it to the vote of those who are to be

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engaged in the enterprise. It is their risk, and therefore should be their choice. What say you, Melinski?"

"I am willing!" declared a smiling, golden moustached youth as gaily as though the whole thing were a school-boy escapade, and looking enthusiastically at Katya the while.

"And I—and I!"

They were all willing, not, it is safe to say, because Tadeusz was a fellow-man, but because Katya was a fellow-woman.

"In that case I am willing too, though it is madness."

Katya sat down again, trembling suddenly all over.

"Gentlemen, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. You have given me back to life."

"We may have done so by to-morrow at this hour; we have not done so yet. Are you sure you know what you are thanking us for?"

"And yet you do hope to succeed, or you would not try. Tell me what you mean to do. I know next to nothing as yet."

One of them—a dark, thin man who looked as though he had lived hard, in more senses than one—began to explain. There were to be seven actors in the critical comedy of to-morrow night; six sham policemen and one sham gendarme captain, who would present themselves at the Pawiak to claim the prisoners. The uniforms lay ready, and for weeks past the parts had been studied down to the minutest detail, so as to guard against any hitch in the formalities of the proceedings.

"Let me be one of the policemen!" begged Witek, pushing at last to the front. "He is my brother; his

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danger should be mine. Surely one of those uniforms will fit me, and you will tell me what to do——”

“It is exactly because you are his brother that you cannot be one of them.”

One of the chief points, it appeared, was to keep the prisoners in ignorance of their rescue, as the only means of ensuring that the rôles should be perfectly played. All the actors in the enterprise were to be strangers to them, and in the careful selection made every pains had been taken to be assured that not even a cursory meeting had ever taken place. Members recently joined had therefore been allowed to volunteer for the post of danger, the present leader himself—the gendarme captain of to-morrow—had been sent for from Kowno, where a branch of the party was in process of organisation. And the precautions were wise; seeing that one single flash of joyful recognition would ruin all. So of course would the slightest blunder in the lengthy official proceedings; the momentary failure of nerve of any one of the actors.

Katya grew cold as she listened. Her burning interest in the chief point notwithstanding, she trembled already in spirit for the safety of the seven heroes who, of their own free will, were going to walk into the jaws of the lion, for the sake of eleven men whom they had never before set eyes upon. But would they be able to do it?

Katya looked round with mistrustful scrutiny at the faces to the right and to the left. Poles, every one of them; and therefore, and despite the fact that the man she loved was a Pole, looked down upon by her Russian pride as generally inefficient material. The excitable, volatile, unreliable Pole—he to carry through so cold-

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blooded an action? Yet, looking, reassurance came. This was not the Pole as she knew him in everyday life. It requires the pressure of circumstances to wind up the springs of that complex and paradoxical nature; but, once wound up, there is nothing it cannot accomplish. For the Pole is not a person for everyday life; he is most eminently a person for emergencies. Yes, even Witek would have played his part unflinchingly—she felt convinced of it—and as readily as the young man with the golden moustache who looked almost like another Witek, would doubtless do it. But it was the impassive face of the flaxen-haired Lithuanian which put the seal upon her confidence.

“Then can I do nothing?” asked Witek disconsolately.

Nothing, he was told, except join the reserve who would await the fugitives at a given spot outside the town, and there supply them with the false passports prepared, as well as a few indispensable articles; likewise take charge of the revolvers with which each person was to be armed, in case of a hand to hand conflict.

“There is a disguise ready for each of them, a set of toilet articles and five roubles in each pocket; and cigarettes of course. Ten packets in all.” To the speaker the cigarettes were evidently almost as much a necessity of life as the passports.

“There will have to be eleven now,” said one of the short-haired girls—a practical spirit, apparently. “What size is your brother?”

“The largest size extant,” said Witek, with new-born gaiety. “But you can leave out the cigarettes; he does not smoke.”

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Katya's spirits too had risen abruptly under the glow of success. When, after a little more discussion of details, one of the short-haired girls followed her to the door in order to whisper into her ear: "I understand you—oh, so well! My lover is among those ten." She kissed her as impulsively as though she had found a sister, whispering back: "To-morrow!"

It had been settled already that this girl was to take Katya to the place of *rendez-vous*, where—should the attempt be successful—she would see Tadeusz, if only for a moment. That this meeting could be anything beyond a final parting she did not believe; but even this prospect, joined to the thought of his rescue, was enough to produce a sort of mental intoxication which, being artificial, could not last.

Nor did it beyond the first few minutes of the long drive back to the hotel. It may have been the sight of police patrols in the deserted wintry streets, or it may have been Karol Dembowski's exaggerated display of confidence which depressed her. The more he tried to prove the certainty of success, the more clearly did she see the probability of failure. "Are you sure that you know what you are thanking us for?" the words of the leader came back to her mind with the chill of cold water. What was it indeed? The chance that Tadeusz, instead of being hung, would be shot down like a dog in the scrimmage which was only too likely to ensue—and a few hours earlier too. A less ignoble death, perhaps, but a more expeditious one.

Long before the hotel was reached, she was fighting hard with despondency.

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The night-porter was in readiness, and apparently on the look-out.

"There is a gentleman waiting to speak to the gracious lady," he informed her, as soon as, having dismissed her companions, she stood within the entrance, and speaking with a furtive look of curiosity which she had not observed in him before.

"At this hour? Why, it is nearly two o'clock! Did he give his name?"

"No; but he has been here for some hours."

"Not in my apartments, surely?"

"In the restaurant. His business is urgent, he says."

"The advocate!" thought Katya, with a sudden revival of hope, and with it of animation. "Who else could it be? Perhaps, after all, there was a chance beyond that mad attempt!"

"Yes, I will see him," she said briskly; and without further question followed the porter to the dining-room, in which one of the electric lights had been left turned on in honour of the tardy guest. Straight under this he sat with a glass and several bottles before him, his face to the door, elbows on the table, and cheeks pressed between his closed fists.

Katya had advanced so quickly, and her eyes were still so full of the darkness outside that she was in the middle of the room before she saw that he was in uniform, and quite close already before she recognised him.

"*You?*" she said, standing still, and in the blankest accent of disappointment.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE RESTAURANT

DESPITE the resolution formed in his office on the day on which he had made the discovery of Tadeusz's arrest, this was the first time that Klobinski found himself face to face with Katya since their last meeting at Lubynia. To the resolve of tracking her without delay he had been faithful, but not to that of approaching her with open threats. Having seen her again—unseen himself—the fear of her scorn, the terror of staking everything on one card and losing it, had once more paralysed him. Inevitably he had fallen back upon his old trick of watching, of lying securely in wait for the opportunity which he still believed would come. It had been a weary time, putting a torturing strain upon nerves and temper. His chief preoccupation, of course, was her campaign in Tadeusz's favour ; his chief fear that she should succeed, in which case gratitude might bring about the reconciliation which would be his undoing. An anonymous letter had seemed the most efficacious way of averting this danger, far more so than any official action, for which proofs—of which his hands were empty—would have been required. Upon the corrupt soil of public life anonymous denunciations flourished just then ; and the

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market value of suspicion—even of the vaguest description—was well-known to him. Nor had it here belied its reputation.

It was with something of a shock that he received the news of the sentence; not because of any regret for his hated rival, but simply because his nerves were not robust enough for such radical emotions as this. Besides there was the terror of her anger. To himself he had to acknowledge that should she ever discover his hand in the matter, forgiveness might be impossible.

But for the moment all these emotions were dominated by curiosity, pure and simple, burning curiosity as to how she would take the blow, whether it really would be the blow it would have been some months ago—in one word, whether the infatuation still subsisted. To keep away from her longer seemed impossible. He must see her—perhaps even speak to her, should his courage suffice—must at any rate be able to study her mien and demeanour. But how do it? To go straight to her hotel and send in his card seemed at once too downright and too risky a course.

And then he remembered the ball that was to take place that very night, and for which the invitation had been lying on his table for a week. Might not that give him the opportunity desired? At the very least allow him to draw conclusions from her presence or her absence? He would make a venture on that field before trying any other.

Impatience notwithstanding, official necessities put him among the late arrivals. She was not in the room; but

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she had been here, as he very soon learnt, as well as her hurried and premature departure. Not difficult to read, this riddle! She had come here in ignorance, and had gone away again enlightened; but to do what? Merely to weep in her closed room? It was an assumption which he could not reconcile with her personality. Much more likely that she should be making some desperate attempt at reversing the sentence. Whatever it was, he felt that he must know. The burning curiosity was devouring him more acutely with every minute that passed without showing him her face.

At the hotel to which he followed her, without having made as much as a waltz step, he was met by the disconcerting news that she had been here for a short space and was gone again. Where to? The porter could not tell him. There had been no direction given to the driver within his hearing.

With knitted brow and pinched lips Klobinski stood considering. It was certain now that she was undertaking something or other, making some attempt, which meant of course that her infatuation persisted. In a sense his curiosity was satisfied now; but the fever of rage which took its place had flames as hot. Follow her? But where to? There were so many places she might try; and going to the one he might miss her at the other. Or else—horrible thought—she might, recognising the hopelessness of appeals, be bent only upon a last sight of her lover. Might she not be at the Pawiak even now, paving her way in gold to the cell of the condemned man? A pang of jealousy stabbed him at the thought. 'Surely it would

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be best to drive straight to the Pawiak. And perhaps cross her on the way as she returned—most likely unsuccessful?

No; it was clear that in the midst of this sea of uncertainty the hotel presented the only fixed point; since here she must return in time, sooner or later.

"I will wait," he said, to the patiently expectant porter. And then, as he turned towards the restaurant:—

"You will tell Panna Malkoff that a gentleman wishes to speak to her; nothing more. You understand?"

"I understand," said the porter, with a submissive glance at the dark-green uniform which in his heart of hearts he detested; for he was a Pole and had a brother in Siberia. He began to think with a sort of fatherly compassion of the beautiful young lady who was so liberal with her tips; for a visit from a *stanowoi*, and at this hour of night too, was scarcely to be considered a good omen even for such a staunch Russian as she presumably was.

Within the restaurant, almost deserted already, Klobinski asked for a bottle of wine, principally because it was unavoidable to ask for something, and he felt unable to eat. Before he had drunk half of it he congratulated himself upon his idea. Already the blood was flowing more freely in his veins. The wine was working wonders with him, as it always does on usually abstemious men. Comparing his sensations with those of half an hour ago he scarcely recognised them. That chill fear with which he had been looking forward to the meeting with Katya was well-nigh gone. He felt almost confident already—almost brave. Surely he had made a new and valuable

In the Restaurant

discovery—that of a bottomless fund of moral courage from which he could draw at pleasure. He began to wonder that he had never thought of this before. If one bottle could accomplish this, what might not a second one attain? Very soon it was upon the table, followed by a third. Quite alone now he sat on there for almost three hours, greedily sucking from his glass comfort for the jealous visions pursuing him, valour for the conflict which he knew to be impending. By the time Katya's *droshke* stopped before the entrance he felt ready for anything.

"Yes, it is I!" he said, regaining his feet, with a slight sway of the body. "You are astonished?"

She was more so than she could have explained, not only at the identity of her visitor but also at his appearance. The sallow face was flushed, the small black eyes glazed in a way that was new to her. Even the sleek hair was ruffled, almost beyond recognition. In the first moment—so great was her ignorance in such matters—she did not think of connecting these symptoms with the bottles on the table.

"Yes, I am astonished; I thought you were the advocate."

"The advocate? Hi, hi!" (how loathsomely familiar was the hilarious neigh in this exaggerated edition of itself!) "The advocate for *him*, the traitor who has got his deserts, or is on the point of getting them."

"Is it *you* who dare to talk of traitors?" she flashed out her eyes blazing up superbly in her white face.

But for his fictitious courage he never could have braved it out. As it was he was just able to bluster:—

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"Why not? I dare everything; even I dare ask you where you have come from now?"

"It is nothing to you where I come from."

"Oh, is it not? We shall see. Where have you been, Katya; where have you been? Not to the Pawiak?"

He had made two unsteady steps towards her, and now stood so close that a whiff of his wine-tainted breath could not but reach her, bringing sudden enlightenment. With a gesture of scorn she drew back, shaking from her the fingers which he had laid upon a fold of her cloak.

"Good-night, Pan Klobinski," she said shortly. "I am going to bed; and I should advise you to do the same."

She turned to the door, but her movement had put him on his mettle. To her consternation he was there before her, barring the passage.

"No, Katya—no! You do not go without answering my question. Where have you been? With your lover? your faithless lover who has spurned you—the man at whose feet I left you grovelling in the forest? Will your kisses help him to die more easily? Ah, wretch! how should he have deserved them?"

"Let me pass!" said Katya, with icy voice and eyes.

"What! Still so proud? so cold?—to me, Katya—to me, who have never done to you what that man has done; who have been your slave for months—for years! Ah, for but one of those kisses which you have wasted upon him, what would I not have done!"

His own words came upon himself unexpectedly. He had not come here with the intention of making love. In complete possession of his senses he would have recog-

In the Restaurant

nised the juncture as ill-advised. But wine is a pressing counsellor, if not a wise one. So is the sight of a beautiful face, worshipped for long, and rendered more beautiful yet by the very scorn under which he smarted. The disdainful eyes, the quivering nostrils, the visions of white arms and of a gleaming neck, caught beneath the loose hanging cloak, all combined to make his brain reel. To keep back the words upon his lips would have been as impossible as to stem a torrent with a plank.

"I must say it, Katya—I must, even if you should speak to me again as you spoke to me at Lubynia (ah, cruel one! how could you?) But you will not, for your heart is a woman's heart, after all. Must not my devotion touch you in the end? Compare it but one moment to the conduct of that other——"

"If you do not let me pass this moment," said Katya, speaking through her teeth, "I will touch the bell."

He peered at her face as though to make sure of her inflexibility, leaning heavily the while upon the door against which he had put his back. During that space his face changed—the tipsy ecstasy transformed into a lowering scowl. It was in another tone that he asked:—

"You reject my love, as you rejected it before?"

"I have nothing to say to you, Pan Klobinski. Every moment that I pass in the same room with you is to me a purgatory. I hope this is distinct enough. Have we understood each other now?"

"Ah!"

He folded his arms across his narrow chest, standing

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now without the support of the door. The consciousness of final defeat seemed to have sobered him in an instant, though in one sense he had never been so drunk as at this moment.

"We understand each other, yes, but not quite perfectly yet. There are some things that you forget ; for instance, that my position imposes upon me duties, which I have been content to neglect until now, for the sake of your beautiful eyes. But since those eyes refuse to smile upon me, why should I neglect them further? Have you forgotten the affair of the passport? Do you not know that I hold you in the hollow of my hand?"

Katya, contemptuously silent, coldly gave back his glance.

"For the last time, Katya : Will you make me happy, or will you not?"

He was moving towards her, with arms beginning to unclose ; but at sight of her vehement withdrawal, stood still again, eyeing her strangely.

"Yes or no, Katya? Take your choice!"

"A hundred times, No!" she panted, wrapping her cloak more tightly around her, as though it were an armour against the dreaded embrace.

He gave her one more scrutinising glance, then almost sprang at the bell.

During the minute that followed they stood with only a pace between them, in dead silence, she, white-faced but erect and scornful, he, breathing rather hard and with features twitching. To both it was a relief unspeakable when a sleepy waiter put in his head at a further door.

In the Restaurant

"Is there a *gorodowoi* (policeman) on the premises?" asked Klobinski, in a voice which an extreme tension of nerves helped him to govern.

Of course there was, as he knew there must be. Richly distributed as were the *gorodowois* all over the disturbed town, such critical points as hotels, half-way houses as they were apt to be of doubtful political characters, were naturally not neglected.

The waiter grew wide-awake in an instant. Such a question, joined to the uniform of the questioner and the face of the lady in the fur cloak, were quite enough for that.

"Am I to call him, your honour?"

"Yes, this instant!"

There was another pause—surprisingly short, and then the *gorodowoi* entered, with one or two curious faces peering over his shoulder, that of the night-porter among them.

"Constable Paploff?"

"To your orders, your honour!"

"That person," and Klobinski's shaking finger was pointed at Katya, "is to be taken to the police station at once, *at once*, do you hear? She is accused of the use of false papers."

"To your orders," said the man, without moving a muscle of his face, blunted by this time to the excitement of sensational arrests.

"But might not the lady change her dress?" suggested the fatherly night-porter in the background.

"At once! I said. At once!" almost screamed Klob-

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inski, dimly aware that any delay might be fatal to his resolution. "Fetch a *droshke*!"

"There is one at the door," stuttered the frightened waiter. "An arrival from the station——"

"So much the better. Constable Paploff, you know your duty."

And with a kind of supreme flourish he stood aside, as though to leave free the passage.

Without having once unlocked her white lips, without having glanced even once in his direction, Katya passed him, walking firmly, and nothing beyond the want of colour to betray the shock of real consternation which she had undergone and recovered from by a pulling together of all her moral strength. Whatever might be her inner fears she would not give to this man the spectacle of her discomfiture.

CHAPTER IX

TIMOSH

WHEN Timosh, nodding at his post, opened his eyes once again on this disturbed night, he was astonished to see that the clock-hand pointed almost to 3 A.M. / And the gracious lady not back yet! It was beginning to be a little disquieting. The abrupt departure from the ball, and this new errand on which he had not been allowed to accompany her—he did not know what to make of it. It was long since he had felt certain that some harm was bound to come from taking interest in a person rightfully detained at the pleasure of the Czar—and a Pollack, too!

Rubbing the sleep out of his small eyes he went down to reconnoitre, and stumbled straight upon the night-porter and the waiter, talking in a whisper, and with the scare of the latest episode still showing in their faces. What they told him sounded to Timosh so incredible, all his apprehensions notwithstanding, that frequent repetition alone could achieve conviction. Once achieved, however the effect left nothing to be desired.

“The gracious lady at the police-station?” he bellowed, in a voice fit to disturb the slumbers of at least the first floor, and which the porter, conscious of his responsibilities

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vainly attempted to quell. "My gracious lady? Who has dared to take her there?"

"It was the commissioner himself who ordered the arrest. There was nothing to be done against it."

"But what for? In the name of all the devils, what for?"

"For the use of false papers, it seems."

"That's a lie," said Timosh decisively. "Or"—with instantaneous self-correction—"at least a mistake. I shall go to the police station to explain. Let me out, will you?" And he made for the door.

"It is no use, believe me. They will not let you in. You must wait until to-morrow, or until the trial comes on. What can your word weigh against that of a *stanowoi*?"

"Then I will speak to the *stanowoi* himself. I will tell him that he has heard lies. Where is he? In the house?"

"No. He left immediately after the arrest; gone to his lodgings, I suppose."

"Where does he live?"

"I know nothing of where he lives. How should I?"

"And his name?"

The porter shrugged his fur-clad shoulders.

"I know that as little. He is commissioner in the third district; that is enough for me."

"But how am I to get to him, then?" demanded Timosh, making ready his hands as though to throttle the porter.

"By going to his office. But that is shut up now."

"Then I will sit at the door until it is opened in the morning. Will you show me the way?"

Timosh

"Not now, my friend. I cannot leave the hotel. I will take you there to-morrow forenoon, when I am off duty—to-day, rather, I should say; but, believe me, it will be for nothing."

It was partly his fatherly feeling for the beautiful young guest, and partly because to cross the designs of Muscovite authorities fell in with his principles generally, that the porter was ready to forego his well-earned slumbers. On Timosh's side, again, this prospective crossing of designs was the one distasteful circumstance about the matter. The chronic conflict between the two loyalties—the patriotic and the individual loyalty—was threatening to become acute. Considering that it was a servant of the Little Father who had ordered the arrest, it seemed difficult to criticise the act; but considering again that it was his own gracious lady who was arrested, the granddaughter of Andrej Nikolajow himself, it was far more difficult to acquiesce. A misunderstanding, which he might help to clear up, seemed the only thing to hope for.

The forenoon was advancing before the porter found himself at liberty to fulfil his promise. Soon after dawn a messenger had arrived with a note to Malania Petrowna, signed by Katya, and giving a list of such articles of attire as she immediately required. "Do not be alarmed; I am in no danger," she had scribbled at the end. In spite of which Malania's hands trembled quite piteously as she packed the clothes, which ran some risk of soiling from her fast-falling tears. Timosh carried down the trunk with a snarl upon his lips. The demand for

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the clothes seemed to put the seal upon an event, which until that moment he had not yet brought himself to acknowledge as real. He could scarcely await the porter's leisure.

Yet even this brought only the beginning of new trials to his patience! For the large, barrack-like building in which the *stanowois* of the district had their offices, was at this hour a perfect bee-hive of activity. Police agents and constables, detectives, messengers, jostled each other all over the inner courtyard and passages. For any but an accredited personage to penetrate into a commissioner's office seemed an unattainable dream.

"It is no use," said the porter, at the end of a weary hour. "I told you it would be so. Let us go back."

But Timosh's hand was upon his arm like an iron vice.

"May I wither in my clothes if I go back now! We cannot get in—good! but he will have to come out once upon a time, will he not?"

"At midday, yes—for the dinner-hour."

"Good. It wants but an hour more to that. Take me to some spot which he must pass on leaving the building, and stand there with me to show me the right man; there are so many in uniform here. I will step forward and speak to him—throw myself at his feet, if need be."

"Very well," said the porter resignedly, and a little tired of the whole affair, partly because his interest in the matter was only an indirect one, and partly because he had had no night's rest.

Close to the entrance of the covered passage which

Timosh

led from the courtyard to the street, among a miscellaneous group of clients, they took up their post; Timosh upon the hot coals of expectancy, the porter somewhat drowsily.

"Is that he? Is that he?" the Cossack kept whispering fiercely into his ear, as now one official and now another passed to and fro. The porter had shaken his head at least a round dozen of times before, just on the stroke of twelve, he whispered back:—

"That is he!—the nearer of the two."

With eyes narrowing in their sockets Timosh peered across the courtyard to where two men in the same dark-green uniform were rapidly advancing, the taller of the two bending his ear impatiently, it would seem, to what his shorter colleague was saying.

"That!" whispered back Timosh, his eyes now so widely distended as to become of almost normal size; "but that man's name is Klobinski!"

"I don't know what he is called, but he is *stanowoi* in the third district."

"But that cannot be! It is Klobinski, I tell you!"

"And why should a *stanowoi* not be called Klobinski?"

For the fragment of a second Timosh considered the point. No—he supposed there was no reason against it; since Klobinski undoubtedly was a member of the police force, and he supposed that his transference to Warsaw was an event which possibly might have taken place without his, Timosh's, knowledge.

"And you are certain it was he who ordered the arrest? Not the one at the other side, perhaps?"

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"Do you take me for a fool?" said the porter, somewhat testy by this time. "The one on the near side, I tell you—the thin, black one. He is almost past. Are you not going to speak to him?"

Apparently Timosh was not. Instead of starting forward he had drawn back a little, as though to make use of the porter's broad back as a screen, and there, his head ducked and his back bent, and only his eyes keen and lively, half-crouched, without motion or word, so that Klobinski, occupied with his companion, passed close without becoming conscious of his presence.

"Well?" asked the porter, turning when the two were past to the Cossack behind him. "Is that all? What have I brought you here for?"

"No, it is not all."

By the dazed look on his face Timosh seemed to be recovering from a stroke of mental paralysis occasioned by surprise. "You have brought me for something, ah, yes! But it cannot be here."

"I don't care where it is," grumbled the porter, "so long as I get back to my dinner."

"You can go—I don't need you any longer!" Timosh threw back over his shoulder as he hurried through the passage into the street—just a minute too late, it would seem, for nowhere in the crowd outside could his eagerly searching eyes descry the narrow silhouette they were in search of. Having peered about anxiously on all sides he slowly re-entered the building.

"When are the offices opened again?" he inquired of the first person he met.

Timosh

"At two o'clock," he was told.

Timosh reflected for a moment; then deliberately walked out again, and, having reconnoitred, went over as deliberately to a small eating-house at the other side of the street, where he sought patience in a glass of *wódki* and some chunks of bread and cheese. When two o'clock struck he was once more in an advantageous position near the entrance of the building, and once more caught a glimpse of Klobinski, unseen.

For the rest of the afternoon he watched the place with the persistency of a cat before a mouse-hole, sometimes from the window of the eating-house, sometimes from the pavement among the passers-by. His Cossack uniform came in usefully now; since any inquiring glance directed towards the persistent loiterer could not fail to return satisfied from the encounter of so reassuring a garment.

During these long hours of waiting there was food enough for thought—congenial food. From the moment of recognition the affair had entered on to a new and unforeseen stage. Up to then a wild appeal had been the highest point to which his thoughts had risen. The sight of Klobinski's face, by bringing a personal note into the matter, had changed all that. It was no longer a *stanowor* in general he had to deal with, it was with Klobinski as an individual. The sight of those narrow features which he had seen so often at the door of Lubynia, had convulsed all his mental faculties. A sense of treachery, of hospitality misused—that hospitality which stands almost sacred in every Russian's eyes—was stirring up revolt in his barbarously honest soul. No more appeals for him

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now! He had forgotten even that he had ever meant to make them; was conscious only of the devouring necessity of avenging the insult put upon the gracious lady, by one who had eaten of her bread and salt. A Pollack, too, and one whom the gracious lady herself had always disliked, as he now remorsefully remembered. Not even the Little Father's uniform could shield him this time. Timosh had lost sight even of this circumstance, had lost sight of everything but that one compelling thought, which with the obsession of a fixed idea, had taken possession of his brain, blinding him to all side-issues, reducing him for the time to that strange mental slavery in which the majority of criminal acts are accomplished. Once and for all, the nearer loyalty, the concrete, had triumphed over the abstract. Mingled with all this was a sense of relief at the final solution of a certain pursuing question. Could there be any further doubt as to the person into whom duty demanded that his sword should be stuck? Never had victim been so clearly designated by fate. The tigerish instincts within him, which had been growling for months, now seemed to be licking their lips. Once or twice, seeing himself unobserved, he pulled his sword a little way out of the scabbard, feeling its edge with his finger. That good sword which had drunk so much Polish blood in '63, would it know the taste again?

But it could not be here. That was why, even in that first moment of astonishment, before he had had time to form any coherent intention, he had—purely out of an unreflecting instinct—withdrawn so hastily behind the porter's back. That was why he waited so patiently now.

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The office hours were not yet over when Klobinski, marked at a safe distance, came out again, with a face so drawn as clearly to proclaim his unfitness for further work that day. Timosh was just in time to see him enter a *droshtke*, and, hailing a second, followed close.

Presently, for it was not much of a drive, Timosh stood upon the steps of the house which the commissioner had entered. Here again that caution and patience which was coupled so strangely with the blood-thirst within him—came to his aid. Rather than be cheated of his revenge he would force his way into the rooms above, sword in hand, and fell the traitor to the ground before the eyes of his housemates. But probably there would be a safer way; and this he would prefer; for although ready to sacrifice his life, he could see no reason for throwing it away. He would first wait and see. Was it likely that a bachelor like that would be spending his evening at home?

The house was pierced by the usual covered entrance, leading to an inner yard. Here in the shadows it was not hard to stand concealed. A couple of hours passed during which Timosh scarcely moved except to blow upon his fingers, in order to keep them from stiffening. Various people passed in and out, for the house contained more than one lodging. At each of them Timosh peered through the shadows, with craned neck. The justification of his forecast was long in coming, but it came at last. With a face more haggard than ever, the collar of his cloak turned up to his ears, as though he would hide behind it, Klobinski passed him close.

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Giving him a few steps start Timosh followed him out into the street, in which the lights had been burning now for hours. The commissioner was walking in halting, desultory fashion, like a person with no fixed plan, stopping occasionally, as though in uncertainty, then suddenly mending his pace. The eyes of Timosh, in the rear, and through a still considerable stream of foot-passengers, kept as securely fastened to his figure as though they had been hooks. At the first restaurant he came to Klobinski stopped again, and after another pause of hesitation entered.

Passing by the brilliantly lighted windows and peering over the blinds, Timosh could see him sitting alone at a table ; behind him his fur-lined cloak hanging on a peg ; before him a bottle of wine.

"Good !" he soliloquised. "The more of that he takes the better it will be—just in case my arm really should be a trifle stiff."

And once more he sought a vantage-ground where he could lie securely in wait.

Behind those lighted windows, Klobinski, greedily gulping down the strongest wine upon the card, was seeking to drown in its ruby flood the tortures of that long day.

What an awakening it had been when, after a few hours of leaden sleep, he had opened his eyes, miserably sober, to the recollections of the night ! Having passed them in review he hid his face in his pillow, groaning.

"Lost ! lost ! everything irretrievably lost !" Looking at his own deed of the night by the cold light of day he

Timosh

had difficulty in believing that it was his own deed. In the madman of the restaurant he could not recognise himself.

"It is impossible that she should ever forgive me—quite impossible!"

But if—repairing his injustice—he released her at once?

And in a fever of haste he had sent to the police station—only to gain the information that she had already been transferred to the Pawiak.

The Pawiak! The word tore him with a new pang. To the Pawiak, where *he* was, where it was thinkable that they should attain a glimpse of each other! True, this was the last day which that man had to live; but even this thought could not calm his burning jealousy. From the bottom of his narrow soul he grudged him the one word, the one glance which he might yet glean as Love's viaticum on the way.

And through his own doing—therein lay the bitterness of the thought—no longer to be undone, since the matter had now passed out of his hands into other, higher ones.

All day long he had moved like a man in a nightmare, which was yet dominated by a vision dancing tantalisingly before his inner sight—that of the ruby-red wine which he had drunk last night, and after whose taste his soul, far more than his body, thirsted. True, it had betrayed him into folly; but also it had, for a time, made another man of him, and unless he was to go mad, he must get out of himself again, if only for a few hours. The discovery of yesterday required to be further explored.

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When after an hour he regained the street his gait, although not yet conspicuously unsteady, made considerable calls upon his attention. Slowly and deliberately he retraced his steps; then, at the corner of the street in which he lodged, turned back again with a species of shudder, as though at the thought of the solitude which awaited him. Once more and despite the snow which had begun to fall, he set off to pace the streets, too much absorbed by the problem of keeping the middle of the pavement to have attention over for anything else.

At the next likely locality—a Jewish wine-shop, this time—he entered hastily, in search of another draught of oblivion. Surely in time he must find again that recklessness which had been his yesterday, if only for an hour.

This time, regaining the street, he staggered a little in getting clear of the doorway, but a would-be smile lit up the gloom of his face, for he almost believed that he had found what he sought for. Taking his bearings with some difficulty, he started off resolutely but unsteadily in a new direction. A fresh craving was upon him, that of gazing upon the walls of the Pawiak, behind which was hidden that which he loved and that which he hated most on earth. And perhaps do more than gaze; since even at this hour his uniform and his grade must surely unlock some postern door. Already his fancy was busy with the details of an interview in the cell, in which he would justify all he had done by the strength of his passion. Almost jauntily he set off through the now well-nigh empty streets, mechanically acknowledging the salutes of the policemen at the corners, vaguely aware that the snow

Timosh

was increasing, and again with no attention over for any such thing as a persistent footstep in the rear.

But before the huge mass of the Pawiak looming like a mountain against the night sky, his fictitious courage gave way. At the thought of facing Katya his knees began to tremble, and a cold sweat to break on his brow. What was she doing now, in this crucial night that was to be the last on earth of the man on whom she had wasted her affection? Would they both be waking now? And what must be her thoughts of him, the instrument of her lover's destruction?—for in the depth of his self-accusation it appeared to him impossible that she should not have identified the writer of the anonymous letter. To the eyes of his guilty knowledge his secret seemed to lie behind a wall of glass. Ah, how she must hate him as she counted the hours that still remained before the condemned of to-morrow would be fetched to the Citadel!

With a dull, half-smothered cry he turned so abruptly as to catch the fleeting glimpse of a figure retreating into a doorway. But it was his eyes only that were in play, upon his distracted attention the circumstance took no hold.

Away from the Pawiak! Away! But where to? Not to his detested bed, which he knew already to be a rack of sleepless torture. What else was there? Hold! There was the Citadel. A morbid desire—which at the same time was a dread—to gaze upon the spot on which his rival was to suffer the last penalty to-morrow, had hold of him now. It would both raise his self-confidence and satisfy his hate, so he thought. In this light, of course, the

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gallows would not be visible ; but the lights of the Citadel would guide him.

In sudden haste he set off walking in the direction of the railway bridge, from which, as he knew, the best view was to be gained. To gloat over his enemy's downfall, such was the theory of his act ; but in the act itself his heart fluttered pitifully and his throat tightened, for his nerves quite lacked that vigour which makes the perfect villain.

The snow was falling thicker, thick enough to let him pass the guards at the bridge-head, unchallenged, too thick for the lights of the Citadel to be more than a luminous blur. Towards that blur he stood and gazed as though fascinated, steadying himself by a piece of the ironwork of the huge parapet.

"To-morrow !" he said aloud, as though to raise his own courage.

"No, to-day !" came the answer, almost in his ear—*or* was that but another bit of the nightmare ?

The question was in his brain as he turned affrighted.

When at break of day the body of the *stanowoi* of the third district was found across the rails, badly mangled, the finger of suspicion began by inevitably pointing at the Socialists. Subsequent inquiry, however, having produced evidence that the defunct official had been seen in two different localities in a condition not to be qualified as absolute sobriety, a natural explanation of the mishap seemed too obvious to be neglected even by Russian authorities. As to the immediate cause of death the

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doctors declared themselves unable to identify any injury beyond that of the wheels which had reduced parts of the body to unrecognisable pulp. There was no bullet in it, so much they could attest; whether there had ever been such a thing as a sword or dagger-thrust they could not undertake to say. Perforce, and because under the pressure of more unmistakable cases, time to institute a lengthy hunt was lacking, the matter dropped.

If a certain grey-bearded old porter had any suspicions of his own he never betrayed them. Why should he, after all? Had the Russian authorities any need of his help? Had they not managed the transference of his brother to the Siberian mines without any assistance from such a small personage as he was?

It was he who had let Timosh into the hotel some time after midnight on the critical night, and who—carefully refraining from questions—had noted the metallic gleam of the small slits of eyes, and the breadth of the defective grin under the ragged beard. Could he have followed the Cossack upstairs to his sleeping-closet and watched him as he took his sword from the scabbard and carefully, almost tenderly wiped it upon a piece of paper which he then pushed into the stove, it is probable that the porter would have felt less inclined than ever to ask questions.

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CHAPTER X

ON THE VANTAGE-GROUND

"ONE, two, three steps to the wall—mind the corner of the plank bed—turn right about, one, two, three steps back to the door, right about again ; one, two, three——"

Like a subconscious undercurrent to the thoughts with which the upper stratum of the prisoner's brain were busy as tireless he paced his cell, the directions ran. Not superfluous either, seeing that a glimmer from the lamp in the passage, entering by a narrow grated hole, was all the available light. No sleep had come to Tadeusz in this, which was to be his last night among the living. The hours that remained him were too short, as it was, for the ordering of his thoughts, for the inevitable look back into the past, and that other glance forward into the obscurity of that which might or might not lie on the other side of his felon's grave.

The numb incredulity which had tied his tongue in the ballroom court of justice was gone now. In the silence and solitude of his cell realisation had come to him and with it as its first-fruits, a wild, a rebellious regret for his forfeited life. Very clearly, as under a searchlight turned on, he now saw that with his own hands he had thrown it away. And for the sake of what ? Of his smarting pride quite as much as of his wounded love. The merciless searchlight revealed this beyond possibility of doubt.

On the Vantage-Ground

But for the humiliation of the discovery that Katya's first interest in him had been due to his name instead of to his person, he never would have acted as he had acted—like a pettish child throwing away its toy, it now seemed to himself—and therefore never would have stood where he now stood. The patriotic movement, the humanitarian movement, they had all been but pretexts of hurt vanity, seeking an outlet. And without finding it either, since the insight gained within the last year had served only to convince him that all these variously named attempts at forcing the hand of the future were but so many straws upon the tide of the irresistible, the natural and inevitable evolution of history.

The inadequacy of the case made bitter the thought of his wasted life; but behind that, there was another yet bitterer reflection.

For the sacrifice had been uncalled for, supremely superfluous, since she loved him. Could he doubt it any longer? Although the news of Katya's presence at Warsaw had left him apparently unconvinced, Witek's words had, ever since, been working within him. In face of such eloquent facts, in face of her rejection of Witek, it was no longer possible to maintain the theory of an interested motive. If it was a Swigello, any Swigello who could fulfil her purposes, then Witek was as competent a personage as himself. She loved him—then, as in his heart of hearts he had always known that she loved him, only that outraged pride had stifled the thought.

“One, two, three steps to the wall—mind the corner of the bed—one, two, three.”

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Unceasingly his pace had accelerated under the sting of this new anguish, which yet was so old.

Right through the natural, the almost animal regret for life, one name was ever present with the persistency of an ache, but also with the radiancy of a star shining above the blackness of the moment!

Katya!

Ah, if to tear down these walls with these hands could bring him to her, he knew the strength would be given him! If years of torture could purchase one minute of her presence, only the interval wanted in which—not to forgive her—ah, no, but to plead for her forgiveness, how joyfully he would lay himself down upon the rack!

“How hard you are!” Witek had said one day, in this very cell.

It was the words which had seemed hard to Tadeusz then, but not now. Yes, how hard he had been, how wanting in mercy. With a distinctness which in itself was an agony he saw it all. He had gained that vantage-ground upon which Kazimira had stood when she sent him the message concerning the one thing worth living for, which was not pride. From him too the fumes of life were rolling away, sweeping with them all that was unessential and leaving only the big things, the monumental things in sight. Beside them how small looked such trifles as conceit, as *amour propre*! Where were the traditions of an aristocratic name, where even such a mere spot of earth as Lubynia in the vastness of the prospect which, from the new vantage-ground, he was beginning to more than merely suspect? How little

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anything mattered beyond the two elementary facts of his love for her, and of hers for him!

Now to lose his life, *now* in the very moment when he had discerned its true value! And would it be his life alone that would be lost?

"One, two, three steps to the wall ——"

He ran against the sharp corner of the bed without feeling it.

Yes—those uniformed judges at the velvet-covered table had been in the right after all. Their sentence had been no miscarriage of justice. Death alone could atone for that worst sort of murder—the murder of a heart. They were not monsters; but mouthpieces and instruments of that God, of whose existence he had always felt intimately convinced, although in his busy life He had played no more than a latent part. Sternly he looked his own guilt in the face, unwaveringly drawing the balance of his account. It was not such as he had foreseen it, yet he would pay without flinching, and would not have flinched, even had he foreseen the sum-total. In contradistinction to Katya, who never counted the cost of an act, Tadeusz had all his life been accustomed to do what he did with eyes open. Witek, again, was like Katya in this, that for him too the cost did not exist until the bill was presented; but unlike her in that, this point reached, he either refused to pay it, or else did so lamenting.

"One, two, three—turn right about——"

He was pacing more slowly now, the wild rebellious regret almost fought down at last—almost at peace in the

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acceptance of the penalty deserved. If he could have but one sight of her face he felt that death might even yet be sweet, one glimpse of those pure lips whose touch still pursued him in his dreams, one look into those passionate black eyes through which shone the one woman's soul with which his own could mingle. It could not be, of course—but—if it could be, where would then be the horror of the gallows?

“ Ah, Katya, Katya ! should stone and mortar be able to keep us apart ? Should your soul not be able to catch the whisper of my soul, space and stupid material notwithstanding ? Should that one word : ‘ Forgiveness ! ’ not be able to reach from you to me ? ”

He stood still to lean his folded arms against the wall, and his forehead upon them, aching with the intensity of his desire.

He was still standing thus when the clock struck, bringing him back with a kind of wrench to the sense of the passage of time.

Two o'clock !

With a very slight shudder, immediately suppressed, Tadeusz resumed his walk. Eight A.M. was the hour fixed for the final act. That meant—as he understood—that at seven o'clock the sentenced prisoners would be fetched to the Citadel. Five whole hours more ! The feeling of the briefness of the time remaining had abruptly given way to its exact reverse. Five hours appeared suddenly of an almost incalculable length. There was almost nothing that he would not do in that time. Quite seriously he began to consider how he could best lay out this capital of minutes. Should he

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give it all to this caged-lion sort of exercise? His tired body protested. After the crisis of emotion just passed through, a great lassitude, both physical and mental, was making itself felt. Not his body alone, his mind too had been moving in something like a circle since the fall of night—ever bruising itself against the same reflections. At the thought of resuming that weary promenade everything in him recoiled. He was so rich in hours that one could easily be spared for necessary rest.

Having felt his way to the bed and in the very act of lying down, he straightened himself again to listen. Until now the only sound in the huge, sleeping building had been that of the steps of the sentinel pacing in the yard below. Now new noises were invading the silence. A door being unlocked—the big one at the end of the passage, as he discerned at once—keys jingled, then another door opened and some words spoken. Some one was coming along with a lantern as he guessed from the increased brightness of the grated square in the door. Nearer the steps came. He was still listening, surprised, when in his lock too a key grated, and the face of the jovial jailer appeared like a sleepy full moon within the aperture.

"Ah! you are up? That is good—you are summoned to the prison-master's office."

"Now?" asked Tadeusz, dumbfounded. "What for?"

"Transference to Citadel. The order came a quarter of an hour ago."

"Already!"

For one moment Tadeusz's heart turned to stone; in the next set off beating in furious haste.

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"You told me it was for eight o'clock!" was all he managed to say, reproachfully.

The jailer, *bon enfant* as he was, especially in his cups, hastened to exculpate himself.

"So it is for eight o'clock. Plenty of time yet, little father! only that you will spend it in the Citadel, instead of here. They sometimes have a fancy for these little night excursions. Less people to look on, don't you see? It's not the first time."

"And the—others?"

"Going with you, of course, and not they alone. It's a bigger move than usual, to make room, I suppose. We've been full up lately. Why, there are two gentlemen waiting for your cell already!"

And he sniggered his usual snigger.

"They can have it!" said Tadeusz, speaking collectedly now, for the time occupied by that little fragment of chatter had been enough to steady his nerves. "I am ready."

"Nothing to pack up?—to take with you? Ah, no, to be sure!" and the jailer sniggered again, not meaning to be brutal, but only encouraging.

With a certain violent bracing of all the springs of his mind, whose effect upon his features was as the drawing on of a mask, through which no curious eye should detect the natural tremors beneath, Tadeusz followed the jailer.

In an angle of the passage two or three scared-looking individuals were already huddled together, under the charge of armed guards, waiting for those of the summoned who had had to be wakened and were still putting on their clothes.

CHAPTER XI

THE COMEDY: ACT I

OVER the office of the Pawiak lay the silence of night, punctuated here, as elsewhere, by the steady step of a sentinel below the window. Impossible even in this huge building to get anywhere out of reach of that all-pervading sound. Under the flame of an unshaded gas-light the narrow space revealed itself in all its mean details of dirty board flooring, roughly white-washed walls and rows of deal pigeon-holes stuffed with bundles of papers. One corner was blocked by a huge brick stove; the telephone apparatus occupied another.

A quarter to two o'clock.

The official told off for night service was just beginning to wonder whether he might not safely indulge in a nap, when the telephone bell rang sharply, dispersing his drowsiness like chaff before the wind.

In a moment he was holding the receiver to his ear, the speaking-trumpet to his lips.

"Administration of Pawiak here. Who there?"

"Central police direction: Is that the prison-master himself?"

"No, his assistant, the prison-master is asleep."

"Wake him at once. There is important business."

"To your orders."

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The assistant positively flew upon his errand, spurred by the thought that it was the chief of police in person who stood at the other end of the telephone. He knew his voice and his peculiarities of speech too well to be mistaken; for, a German by origin, the director spoke Russian in a careful, slightly halting fashion, and with a pronounced foreign accent.

At the news the prison-master was wide-awake in an instant, and presently, without even stopping to complete his toilet, had taken the place of his subordinate at the telephone.

"To your orders, excellency! Prison-master of Pawiak."

"Begin by taking a sheet of paper, and write down all I say."

"To your orders!"

The prison-master too, knew that slightly halting voice, and was instantly filled with a devouring zeal. For the German chief was known and dreaded as one of the most tyrannical martinets of the force, punctilious to the point of pedantry, and almost impossible to satisfy. An order which he was giving in person would naturally put the greatest demands upon the hearer.

"Ready?"

"Ready!"

"The five condemned prisoners are to be put in readiness at once for immediate removal to the Citadel. You have their names, read them over."

The prison-master obeyed.

"Good. Besides these, the following seven persons are likewise to be removed by the same conveyance. Attention!"

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Seven names—among them one woman's name—arrived slowly and distinctly through the speaking-tube, with pauses between, affording time for the putting to paper.

"Have you got them all?"

"To your orders, excellency!"

"In a quarter of an hour a gendarme captain with an escort will present himself at the prison, in order to take these twelve persons in charge. He must not be kept waiting. Let everything be prepared for his coming. Have ready one of the prison omnibuses with a driver, since none of our conveyances are at liberty. Is that clear?"

"Quite clear, excellency."

In reality there were some points not absolutely clear to the prison-master, but his awe of his superior was far too great to admit of a question.

"Read over what you have written, loudly and slowly."

The prison-master did so.

"That's it. Now get to work, and no delay, mind!"

Dropping the receiver as though it had been a hot potato, the prison-master precipitated himself upon the electric bell.

"Here!" he said to the entering assistant, and pressing the piece of paper with the list of names into his hand.

"All these are to be called at once. Fetched to the Citadel in a quarter of an hour. Holy Saints! and all the papers to be filled up! Now, look sharp, will you?" he snarled.

There always was a snarl in the prison-master's voice when he was speaking to a subordinate, just as there always was a whine when he was addressing a superior.

"Those for the execution?" asked the assistant, running his eye over the list. "But there are not so many."

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"Those for the execution ; and some others. I have been asking for space, you know, but it's queer isn't it, that just now, with those repairs going on, they should be able to give it me? Yesterday they had not even room enough to take the condemned ones off my hands, and to-day they are able to take even more. I don't quite understand ; but, after all, an order is an order."

"Yes, and the chief is the chief," sighed the assistant. "But he might have waited till morning."

He had wings to his feet, nevertheless, as he went off with the list, and the prison-master had those same wings to his fingers as, having made a raid upon the pigeon-holes, he sat down to fill up the necessary documents which would have to be handed over to the "captain" along with each prisoner. He had scarcely begun to write when he jumped up again in a new flurry, having remembered that he had forgotten to order the conveyance required. There was another onslaught on the electric bell, followed by a general disturbance, for to rouse the stable-men at this hour was no quite easy matter. But here, too, the mere name of the police chief worked wonders. Within a few minutes, knowing that all the preparations were started, the prison-master went back to his writing-table and to his wearisome task.

Once more the silence of night had descended upon the Pawiak. Only within the office the prison-master's pen toiled over the paper and in the stables some yawning grooms were harnessing the horses. No one had thought of warning the porter whose duty was to be awake, but who, in point of fact, was fast asleep when a little after two o'clock two *droshkis* stopped before the gate. In the

The Comedy: Act I

first of these sat four policemen, in the second two more policemen and a "captain" of gendarmerie in full uniform. So deep were the porter's slumbers that it required several volleys of loud and peremptory knocks to arouse him. It was a very drowsy and not over-intelligent face which at length appeared behind the grating of the little window in the postern door.

"Nightcap!" shouted the foremost of the policemen, designated by the others as the "Elder". "How dare you keep the captain waiting—in the cold, too! Open your eyes, grandmother!"

At sight of the uniform terror shot into the members of the porter. His hands were shaking, as with many murmured apologies he opened the door. The "captain" himself only said four words, but they were enough almost to annihilate the porter.

"I shall report you."

After which he added, in the tone of one accustomed to unhesitating obedience:—

"Take me to the office!"

"To your orders, your honour."

He waited only until the six policemen had crossed the threshold, in order to close the door behind them. With a dull thud it fell into its lock. The men were standing in a small inner court, surrounded by prison walls, and with a locked gate between them and the street.

Down a stone-paved passage the porter was ushering the commander to the office. Not one of the policemen even took the trouble to look after him. Their nocturnal task seemed to bore these six men far more than it interested them. Regret for their forfeited night's rest visibly

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predominated. Two or three of them tried to make up for it as best they could by sitting down upon some convenient doorstep, and snatching what slumber they could get. The others, indifferent and apathetic, were not even open to conversation, as some of the jailers, whom curiosity had brought to the courtyard, discovered to their disappointment. The "captain" was rather a Tartar, as one of the policemen—a young and golden moustachioed one,—assured them, with a scared face. They would be sure to receive severe punishment for talking while on duty. Upon which the jailers went off disappointed. They seemed to be a peculiarly stupid and sleepy set of policemen.

The "Elder"—a dark, thin man, who looked as if he had lived hard, in more senses than one, took a turn round the courtyard and past the window of the guard-room, into which he threw a casual glance as he went. All quiet there ; guards and gendarmes fast asleep, unconscious of any peril. Then, having selected another doorstep, he executed a particularly artistic yawn, and allowed his head to nod forward over his crossed arms.

Everything now lay in the hands of one man. How long would the Lithuanian take ? The question was in all the six minds. Behind the consummate mask of apathy all the senses of the six sham policemen were strained in the direction of the office, prepared to catch the concerted signal, at which they should rush to the assistance of their leader, and with the spare revolvers concealed about their persons, arming those of the prisoners who should have already reached the office, should attempt to fight their way out. But so far all was quiet. Was it possible that there was to be no bloodshed ?

The Comedy: Act I

Within the office, meanwhile, the chief act of this precarious comedy was in progress.

Upon entering, the "captain" had handed to the prison-master a sealed packet bearing his typewritten address. The number upon the packet was the right one, and the seal that of the police direction.

"Is everything ready for the removal?" he inquired with so imperious a bearing and so stern a glance of inquiry that the prison-master began exhausting himself in apologies for the unavoidable delay. The papers were not quite ready yet, despite all the haste he had made. In his dishevelled and imperfect attire—for he had not taken time to put on his braces, and was consequently reduced to a constant up-hitching of the recalcitrant breeches—his aspect was so comical that even in this moment the "captain" could barely restrain a smile.

But there was no smile on his face as harshly he said:—

"This is astonishing. Were the chief's orders not plain enough? It seems that you have yet to learn how to obey commands."

The prison-master ducked his head, feeling almost annihilated. Behind the figure of the gendarme "captain" there loomed to his mind that of the dreaded chief. Certainly the German knew how to choose his instruments. Just like him!

"I won't be long, I won't be long," he stammered. "I have been working ever since I got the order. The papers of the five sentenced prisoners are in order, but of the seven others——"

"Hurry, then, and don't keep me waiting longer than you can help. Meanwhile, have the prisoners summoned."

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Having complied, the prison-master plunged into the papers, too absorbed to have any further attention over for the "captain," which was exactly what the "captain" required. All the more closely was he himself observing. Sitting down straight opposite the writing-table, he drew a cigarette case from his pocket, and began to smoke one cigarette after the other, with an intensity of which he had never before been conscious; for even iron nerves may at moments be in need of a soporific. While he smoked he was studying the details of the room, the position of the doors, of the windows, of the telephone, of the electric bells. In case of discovery the first thing to do would be to cut all the wires. He had a penknife in his pocket, ready opened. By a passing touch—he might have been feeling for matches—he assured himself now that it lay ready.

But the first of his attention had been for the face of the prison-master as he began by closely examining the seal upon the packet, and then carefully breaking it. With the keenness of a hawk poised above a farmyard, the light-blue eyes which could look so unmoved were spying for any mark of surprise, of doubt, of perplexity upon the face opposite. Despite all precautions a blunder was so far more than merely possible.

But the prison-master's face showed no disturbance as he compared the order—typewritten like the address—with the one which had been dictated through the telephone. It was only after he had laid it down that his forehead puckered into troubled folds.

"This is rather strange. This morning I was told to

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send the prisoner Nelikoff to the court martial, and now the director orders him to the Citadel. Which is the right order?"

Probably for the first time in his life the "captain" had the illusion of something cold gliding down his spine. Here was one of those unforeseen rocks upon which the whole plan could split in an instant. The smallest sign of hesitation now might ruin everything. But if such a movement occurred the prison-master, flurried and busy, remained unaware. In the next already the "captain," leaning forward, in order to shake the ashes from his cigarette, was saying phlegmatically:—

"The second, of course. There is no mistake. It is from the Citadel that he is to be escorted to the court. Are you not done yet?"

"Immediately—immediately!" murmured the prison-master, resuming his working.

The scratching of his pen upon the paper became again the only sound. The Lithuanian, straining his ears towards the big iron door which connected the office with the body of the prison, could hear nothing yet of the approach of the prisoners. Surely he had been sitting here an hour already? No, only twenty minutes, as a glance at the clock assured him. How would it ever again be possible to estimate the true value of time? He had been in more than one critical situation in his life, but it was only to-day that he probed to its torturing depth the meaning of the word "suspense". And all the time, even to an observant eye, he would have presented the spectacle of a phlegmatic gendarme "captain," phleg-

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matically though sternly fulfilling his duty, sweetened by innumerable cigarettes.

Even when, quite deliberately, he got up to take a turn in the room, simply because he could not sit still any longer, nothing on his flat physiognomy betrayed the inner tempest.

The prison-master, guessing at a recrudescence of impatience, glanced up deprecatingly, and with the usual whine in his voice, began as a means of exculpation, to pour out his personal grievances. "Times were so hard, the service so oppressive just now, all the cells crammed. It was so difficult to please everybody, authorities and prisoners, the latter were so obstreperous."

"In that case," broke in the "captain" with a short and biting laugh, "you should be grateful to me for relieving you of a few of these obstreperous subjects."

"Ah! yes, but what are twelve among so many hundred? I protest continually, but without getting adequately relieved. If perhaps your honour could call the chief's attention to the matter, . . . he seems to have great confidence in you."

"Great confidence," attested the Lithuanian, and, having his back towards the table just then, he allowed himself one smile. Then added in a tone of grave condescension :—

"I shall see what can be done for you. Ah!"

The exclamation had escaped him unawares; for at that moment the big bolt grated, and the iron door opened to admit the first of the summoned prisoners.

CHAPTER XII

THE COMEDY: ACT II

WHEN in the middle of the night which she had spent partly on her knees beside her bed, partly sitting upon it in a state of unbearable suspense, Katya caught the first sounds of approaching commotion, it was to bury her face in her hands, murmuring: "Oh, God, be merciful! Lend them thy arm!"

For an hour past she had, in an agony, been counting the minutes, aware that the preconcerted moment approached, and trembling lest it should pass without bringing what it had promised to bring. Now the crisis was close. Within a few hours Tadeusz would either be free, or else irretrievably lost, if not already dead. With almost frenzied fervour the prayers rose to her lips, her hands so convulsively clasped that the nails cut the skin without her feeling it. This same absorption kept her from noting that one set of the approaching footsteps had stopped before her own door. When through the grated loophole there came the summons to be ready in ten minutes for removal to the Citadel, her first feeling was one of blank incomprehension. It must be a mistake, she began by thinking, unless indeed—unless, her name had, by some extraordinary combination of circumstances,

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got placed upon the same list which held that of Tadeusz. It could only be that, as a few moments reflection told her. But whose work was this? Dembowski's? Witek's? Never once did she think of Malania Petrowna, who had done what neither of them could have hoped to do—who, dragging Dembowski with her, rather than led by him, had penetrated into the presence of the conspirators in the very moment when the final dress-rehearsal of the rescue was taking place, and who, regardless of the position of the wig, which, imperfectly secured as it had been by her shaking fingers, added considerably to the grotesqueness of her appearance, had cast herself at their feet. Her life, as well as the economies of forty years, were freely offered in exchange for the safety of her "sugar lamb," whom they must and should save if they did not want henceforward to be counted as the scum of the earth. For her life they had no use, and her economies they waved aside, but it was not for nothing that she had gone down upon those stiff old knees of hers. Whether Malania and her wig alone would have been successful, without the memory of the white-clad girl who had stood on that same spot yesterday, was debatable. As it was, and after a brief hesitation, the trick was done. Chief ground for hesitation was the question of urgency. None but those in imminent danger had been taken on to the list. Was Kataryna Malkoff in danger? At first sight it would seem that she was not. It was only when Malania let drop the words "personal enmity" that the case took another aspect. They knew what it meant to have a personal enemy in the police force. Almost with-

The Comedy: Act II

out further reflection the decision was taken. The list which yesterday had been declared unable to admit an eleventh name, was to-day burdened with a twelfth, almost unprotestingly, betraying to what point imaginations were aflame.

At the last moment another misgiving arose—the danger of self-betrayal, standing as this prisoner did outside the saving ignorance of the others. The consideration made the conspirators waver, but not for long.

“Trust a woman to keep her counsel!” laughed the thin, dark man who was cast for the rôle of “Elder”; “born actresses as they all are from their cradles upwards!”

It was then that the decision was clinched.

All this was for the present hidden to Katya; nor did she stop to break her head over the “How” of events. All she thought of was the increased risk. The image of the life-boat capsized by the extra passenger stood with terrible clearness before her mind. What could the Lithuanian be thinking of? he who had appeared to be the very embodiment of prudence—of caution! In her heart she came near to anathematising him.

Then abruptly she remembered the meeting now closely impending, and began to tremble. Could it be that within a few minutes she and Tadeusz would be standing within one space?

Something between rapture and terror laid a cloud upon her eyes as she took place in the rough semi-circle ranged before the prison-master’s writing-table—she the only woman among them. Very slowly the cloud lifted, and she found herself looking into the eyes of the man whom

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she had parted from some seventeen months ago in the Carpathian forest.

She had to look again. Was it he indeed? Those gaunt cheeks, that long-grown beard, those sunken eyes written round with the anguish of the last days, the last hours—were those the features of her glorious lover? In the eyes themselves there was no anguish now, but neither was there joy, nothing beyond a fixed incredulity, as of one gazing upon a hallucination of his sick brain.

It could not be flesh and blood he saw before him, it *could* not! More likely far that the conception around which his thoughts had been turning in a circle for hours past should have taken upon itself a seeming body, which yet was not. For a moment he closed his eyes, then looked again. Seeing the movement she interpreted it rightly. How should he understand? how believe his senses in a moment? So closely was she following the workings of his mind that she could note the very point at which belief began to take hold of him, melting the fixity of his gaze, and putting into it a new alarm mingled with a yearning which spoke to her as loudly as words. Horror at seeing her in this place so plainly overshadowed the joy of seeing her at all—for it was joy—yes, she could not mistake; and, forgetful of the actual position, her heart leaped at the recognition. What were his eyes trying to say? Was it good-bye?

And then she remembered that he believed himself to be on the way to execution. Ah, for liberty to whisper one word of hope, to make some small sign of encouragement! It must not be. Even the tremulous smile which

The Comedy: Act II

had risen to her lips was quickly repressed. Less than that might cost his life, as well as that of his unconscious fellow-sufferers and of their quixotic deliverers.

But, good God! *were* these the deliverers? With a new-born panic her eyes went to the figure of the gendarme "captain," just now bending over one of the documents upon the writing-table. Seen from the back in the familiar gendarme uniform it bore to her startled eyes no resemblance to that of the man whom she had seen sitting at the head of that long table last night. Supposing the authorities had decided upon a night transference, and this were the genuine escort, instead of the sham one? Everything grew numb within her as her eyes hung with tortured scrutiny upon the uniformed man before her. A full minute passed before he looked her way. For the fragment of a second his quiet blue eyes met hers, unmoved, yet with in their very immobility a warning. But it was not wanted. Those who had put their trust in her woman's wit had not trusted in vain. Though her pulses were flying like windmills in a gale, her face had grown almost as dull as a pond in dead calm.

Not so all the other faces.

Among the twelve who stood there awaiting their fate, there was another—one of the five condemned—who, like Katya, had been closely following the movements of the would-be "captain". Some reports of the projected rescue had lately penetrated to his cell, no more than a rumour, clandestinely conveyed and devoid of particulars. He knew neither the date, nor whether the plan had not been dropped as impossible, and consequently was reduced to

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mere guess-work as to the present position. "All this would tally with the original plot," the unhappy man told himself, as he jealously watched the "captain," in hopes of being able to decide whether he were a real captain or not; "and of course he would have got up his part carefully. But, no, he could not do it as perfectly as this. He must be the real captain, and therefore we are really on the way to the Citadel."

And a moment later :—

"Would it be possible to be so particular about one's cigarette ashes when one knows how many lives hang in the balance? And yet I have heard of such things before. Supposing they are the Socialists all the time? But no, of course it cannot be."

While he swayed between the extremes of hope and fear another of the prisoners had come within a hair's breadth of betraying them all.

It was while lighting a fresh cigarette that the Lithuanian found the eyes of this man fixed hard upon him. Recognition was mutual and instantaneous. Another of those accidents which, despite all precautions, had escaped the attention of the conspirators. Those two now remembered that they had met, though only once, for a few minutes at Kowno last year. To the prisoner this recognition said everything; since each knew perfectly to which party the other belonged. In the foolish fellow's eyes the Lithuanian now read such a rapture of ecstatic gratitude that again he felt for his pocket-knife, convinced that the moment for cutting the telephone wires was come at last. Brusquely turning his broad back upon him he

The Comedy: Act II

placed himself so as to screen from the prison-master the sight of that tell-tale face, at the same time letting loose a fresh torrent of reproaches regarding the slowness with which the prisoners were being checked off.

"I am going to see whether my men are ready," he irately announced, "and shall expect you to be done when I return."

Outside the Lithuanian fetched several deep breaths. He had forgotten how good tasted any air that was not the air of that torture-chamber he had just left. Within the prison yard the prison omnibus stood ready with the driver on the box; but some of the policemen were still slumbering in an admirably natural fashion. To rouse them as roughly as possible was an additional relief to the "captain's" overstrained nerves.

"Attention!"

Having given the usual orders and taken a good look at the driver, while seemingly inspecting the prison vehicle, the commander returned to the office where already a new peril waited to be grappled with.

"Your honour," were the words with which the prison-master received him, "will you not allow me to put some of my people at your disposal? Six men seem to me too little to guard so many prisoners on the road. I could give you a mounted escort."

The Lithuanian, in a kind of exasperation, had been on the point of answering vehemently, but stopped himself in time. It was with something of a drawl that he said:—

"Quite unnecessary. My men are picked. They will manage easily. Now call over the prisoners' names in my presence. Enough time has been lost already."

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The accents in which the prisoners answered to their names trembled audibly. That talk about the mounted escort had served but to heighten fears. Even those who had not yet been sentenced began to believe that they were being taken straight off to the gallows. With their small bundles of belongings lying at their feet, or tucked under their arms, they looked like a group of needy emigrants cast upon some inhospitable strand.

To one of the names there came no response, it was that of the youth with the bandaged head and hand, who, too far gone for speech, silently rocked his body from side to side, apparently on the point of collapse. For one moment the Lithuanian's eyes rested upon him and then passed on hurriedly, as though in fear of yielding to a compassion too ill at variance with the part until now so faultlessly played.

The names checked off, there still remained the document in which the transference of the prisoners was attested to be signed. The crucial moment was close now. In a well-feigned passion the "captain" threw the pen upon the floor, sharply reprimanding the prison-master for daring to offer him so vile an instrument. In a flurry this much-tried official turned to snarl at his assistant, who promptly shifted the blame on to the shoulders of one of the attendants present. Amid a general tempest of reprimands and reproaches the exit of the prisoners from the office began.

But the prison-master's mind was not quite at rest yet. Once more he returned to the former point. "Would the 'captain' really not consider the advisability of taking a

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mounted escort? The men could be ready in a few minutes."

This time the perfectly governed temper very nearly gave way.

"I have told you already that I require no assistance. Spare me your advice. I know my men."

The prison-master slunk back to his writing-table, re-proved, mournfully hitching up his trousers as he went.

"Draw swords," commanded the "Elder" as the first prisoner came in sight.

With military precision the order was obeyed. Drawn swords in hand the five men took up their position beside the open door of the big omnibus, while the "Elder" led up each single prisoner, placing him in the conveyance with all the customary precautions. Nor were they superfluous, since in their ignorance of the truth, it was conceivable that one or other of the prisoners might make one of those desperate attempts at flight which within the last year had served to render police work at Warsaw even more bloody than it was by nature.

The prison omnibus had two compartments divided by a wooden partition. It was in the inner compartment that, according to the prison-master's suggestion, the five sentenced men were, for greater safety, to be placed. Four of them sat there already. There was a delay before the appearance of the fifth—the wretched youth with the bandages, whom two jailers were half-carrying from the office, by reason of his yielding knees. At sight of the huge conveyance, ominous as a hearse, these stiffened suddenly. Abject terror gave him in one

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moment a strength which had never been his own. With a wrench he tore himself free, and for an instant stood there panting, and throwing from side to side the frenzied glances of a hunted animal spying for a loophole. The moment was critical, but before the jailers had recovered from the surprise the "Elder" was in action.

"Son of Satan!" he thundered, taking the would-be rebel violently by the collar, while from the other side the youngest and nimblest of the policemen—he of the golden moustache—had sprung to his assistance. "None of those tricks! In there you go! In there!"

Brutally cuffing his bandaged head he almost threw him into the carriage.

"No, the 'captain' is right, he requires no escort," mused the prison-master as from the background he approvingly watched the incident. "These men know their business."

Standing in the open doorway the "captain" gave his final orders. One policeman was to enter the carriage along with the prisoners; two to sit beside the driver, two more to take place upon the step behind. He himself was to follow in the *droshke* which had brought him.

At the last he turned to take leave of the prison-master.

"You will be glad to get back to your bed, no doubt," he was condescending enough to observe as he coolly shook hands.

The heavy gate groaned in its hinges and slowly swung back. With a great clatter of horses' hoofs, a mighty grinding of iron upon stone, the unwieldy vehicle lumbered out into the street.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE COMEDY: ACT III—AND LAST

WHAT remained to be done might be accounted a trifle compared to that which was already accomplished, yet no quite easy matter either. Until they had got rid of the driver the fugitives could not believe themselves so much as on the way to safety. The "How" of this was fixed in all its particulars, but the favourable moment yet to be discerned and seized.

"To the right!" was the order given by one of the sham policemen upon the box-seat, as they reached the street.

The driver pulled round his horses sharply, but stared, all the same.

"But that is not the way to the Citadel?"

"We are not going straight to the Citadel. Have to report ourselves first at the police station of the second district. Touch up your horses, will you! They must be wondering what keeps us so long."

The man complied without further remark. For him a *gorodowoi's* order was gospel. And besides, so long as he had no responsibility, it was a matter of supreme indifference to him whether he drove to the right or to the left. He was a large, slow-moving fellow, almost as unwieldy in appearance as the vehicle he drove. As they lumbered through the sleeping streets the two conspirators

Restitution

upon the box scrutinised him sideways furtively and not quite approvingly. They liked his naive face, but would have wished him less Herculean in build.

Within the omnibus emotion ran high. Like wild-fire the truth of the situation had spread from one compartment to the other. In a loud whisper, for fear of the driver's ears, instructions had been given in the event of pursuit or of arrest in the street, and the revolvers, by means of which the last stand would have to be made, handed round. It was upon the "Elder" now that the weight of the situation rested. The "captain" had retired, his *role* played out.

Relief and hope were taking the most various forms of expression. On some faces incredulity still reigned. One or two, though not actually disbelieving, sat there bland and unrejoicing, as though stupefied—unable in one moment to assimilate the tremendous news. Upon some the effect was alarming, as upon the youth with the bandaged head who went off into so shrill and almost hysterical a fit of laughter that he had to be cuffed into silence, with something of the same energy which had forced him into the carriage.

With a revolver upon her knee Katya sat quite still, gazing at the partition behind which sat Tadeusz with his four companions, and hanging in suspense upon the next move which she knew must be close. To rejoice was not yet possible. At every street-corner the patrol stood; one call from that man upon the box, and the revolvers would have to come into play. Oh! why was he still upon the box? What were they waiting for? Not the dawn, surely, not so far off now,—night, their best

The Comedy: Act III—and Last

friend being so nearly spent. Why waste the precious moments of darkness?

And meanwhile the "Elder" was straining his eyes to the front and to the rear, to the right and to the left, spying for the right moment and the right place.

The police station was actually in view when from the rear a voice called sharply:—

"Hold there! The wheel!"

The vehicle stopped with a prodigious jolt, the driver looking over his shoulder inquiringly. Both before and behind them the street stretched empty. If any police organ were at hand he was probably asleep within the shelter of a doorway.

"Something wrong here," came the voice of the "Elder".

"I will hold the reins while you see to it," said the driver's right-hand neighbour obligingly.

The left-hand neighbour, equally obliging, descended with the naive young Hercules from the box.

Over one of the hind wheels the "Elder" was bending low, closely examining something. The driver, following his example, was instantly seized on both sides by strong arms, and thrown to the ground with so lightning-like a rapidity that before a single sound could escape from his startled lips, a rolled-up handkerchief had been securely stuffed into his mouth. Then—unbound as he was, time being too precious—he was lifted like a log, and thrown head foremost on to the floor of the omnibus, lying full length at the feet of the liberated prisoners.

"We shall not shoot you if you scream, because of the noise," explained the "Elder" to him; "but we have plenty of swords about us, and knives, too."

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Even without the gag in his mouth it is probable that the young fellow would not have screamed, being far too paralysed by astonishment and terror to have anything worth calling a voice at his disposal.

The new driver evidently understood his business. It was at a different pace altogether that they now progressed. Here and there a patrol glanced idly after the prison conveyance, and perhaps wondered what the hurry was about, but without giving further thought to so common a sight. As the suburbs were reached the *gorodows* grew scarcer; and presently it was the houses themselves which were growing scarce, as the fugitives began to scent the open country. The region they were bound for was that of the Kitchen Gardens which supply Warsaw's tables—in summer green and succulent, just now lying dead under unbroken snow. There, in an unoccupied tenement, the reserve was waiting, having by this time probably given them up for lost. Already they had got engaged in a maze of lanes, where the wheels, clogged with the new-fallen snow, moved slowly. Safety was very close; yet those within the omnibus scarcely did more than breathe, clutching their revolvers, and seeing pursuers in every tree taking shape in the ghostly light which comes before the dawn.

Was this the right place? Was this? At every turn the question rose, more urgent. Not yet. A few more minutes of an almost unattainable patience, of a forcible holding down of the panic that would ever and ever rise again, threatening to unsettle reason, and at last, at last came the saving words:—

“It is here.”

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With another jolt the vehicle stood still before a tall wooden gate, which, opening as by magic, discovered a circle of anxious faces and of hands either stretched towards them, or else clasped as though in prayer.

A few more jolts; then, throwing the reins from him, the conspirator upon the box leaped to the ground.

Already several pairs of hands had hold of the feet of the prison driver. In the twinkling of an eye he had been pulled out and laid upon the ground. A silk cord for tying hands and feet was in readiness—a better gag introduced. Then one of the number bent over him with in one hand a handkerchief, in the other the small bottle which Katya had seen upon the table during the meeting, and which contained chloroform.

Meanwhile, the tumultuous exit was taking place. There was no time to lose, seeing that all the attires had to be changed, and the present ones disposed of if possible before daylight. Even now, and although there was nothing on either side but deserted buildings and fields of snow, some of the fugitives continued to speak in whispers, from a quickly acquired habit.

Katya, trying to rise like the others, found to her consternation that she could not. Dizzy and with trembling limbs she sank back again upon the seat, more powerless against the reaction of relief than she had been under the pressure of anxiety. Within the same minute, her eyes being closed, she felt herself taken up like a child and carried into the open air; nor even had to look in order to know in whose strong arms she lay. Placed upon her feet on the trampled snow, one of those strong arms still steadied her, and still nothing like curiosity

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stirred. It was only when quite another pair of arms was flung tumultuously around her neck, that her eyes opened with a start.

"My honey-dove! My sugar-sweet lamb! To think that I should ever have lived through this night! Oh, how many candles I shall burn to the Virgin!"

In a disarray almost weird of its kind, Malania Petrowna was sobbing upon Katya's shoulder:—

"You did not look for me here, did you, my precious? It was Witek who brought me!"

Alongside the brothers were silently holding hands; not even Witek being able to think of anything to say which would not have sounded inane at that moment.

And who was this?—this dark-eyed, resolute-looking maiden, in skirts of a business-like shortness, who now pushed Malania unceremoniously aside in order to press a kiss of sisterly warmth upon Katya's unsteady lips. It certainly was not the Olympia of Zalkiew, but it was an Olympia of some sort, the same whose answer to the penitent letter prescribed by Katya, had been her appearance at Warsaw, just too late to nurse her contrite lover through his attack of influenza. And Karol Dembowski was there too, and the short-haired girl who had accompanied Katya to the door that night,—how many months or years ago, was it?—now much too busy to have even a glance for her. To Katya all these figures seemed to have risen as from a trap-door on to a stage. Nothing was clear to her; yet no questions could be asked just now; for that the moments were too precious.

They were standing in a big yard surrounded on three sides by boardings, on the fourth by some dilapidated

The Comedy: Act III—and Last

sheds and pot-houses. Into one of these pot-houses Olympia now hurried Katya, and without further ceremony began unbuttoning her dress. Here among flower-pots and rakes a bundle of clothes lay ready; a coarse linen shirt, a woollen skirt, a sheepskin coat and coloured head-cloth. Within five minutes there stood there the most ravishing peasant lass that Warsaw had ever seen, a little paler than a peasant lass should be, but with the blood already beginning to mantle under her delicate skin.

Olympia clapped her hands as she contemplated her work.

"No one will ever know you! You are not the same person."

"I don't seem to know you, either," murmured Katya, faintly smiling.

There was in the pot-house an exceedingly bad smell, proceeding from decayed roots; but Olympia did not seem so much as to notice it. Decidedly this was not the same person Katya had known at Zalkiew; but at Zalkiew, to be sure, there had been no emergencies.

Malania, assisting at the toilet, indignantly repudiated Olympia's last remark, being of opinion that it was impossible to have seen her sugar lamb without knowing her again. For her taste the disguise was not nearly deep enough yet. As a means of bettering it she went so far as freely to offer her wig, which then and there was heroically plucked from her head. It was only when, in view of the thick woollen head-cloth which allowed not so much as a wisp of hair to escape, the needlessness of the sacrifice was pointed out to her, that in a mixture of disappointment and relief she desisted.

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Daylight was coming fast by the time Katya regained the open. There a motley group was assembled; workmen, peasants, a priest or two, a chimney-sweep with a splendidly smutty face. The foolish young fellow who had all but lost them, was transformed into a white-aproned baker. The injured youth had been turned into a closely veiled nun, as the surest way of concealing the bandages. The whole bore the aspect of a rough masquerade, only with graver and more anxious faces than those that usually go with fancy dress. The policemen of the night, transformed into shabby civilians, were stuffing their uniforms into the prison omnibus, upon whose floor the driver lay now fast asleep. The suggestion of pinning on to the seat a paper inscribed: "With the compliments of the Socialist party," propounded by the golden moustachioed young man, had been rejected as unworthy of the occasion. Unharnessed and tethered to a tree the tired horses were munching some hay which had been found in an out-house. In a hole dug behind one of the sheds the revolvers had been buried, to be fetched again at some convenient time. Now the last act of all—the distribution of the false passports and the small parcels of necessities was taking place.

"You are called Marisia Lavronka," explained Olympia to Katya, as the latter unfolded the paper handed to her. "Whatever you do don't go and forget your own name!"

"Wife of Jan Lavronka," read out Katya from the passport. "They have made me into a married woman. What is this for?"

"You had better ask Jan Lavronka; there he is."

Looking across the yard Katya saw a tall peasant in a sheepskin coat and with a high fur cap upon his head

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issuing from a shed. He had a longish beard, whose brown was touched with gold, and grey-blue eyes which seemed to be looking for something or somebody.

"That is not—" stammered Katya.

"No, of course not. It is Jan Lavronka. Look at his passport if you do not believe me."

"This is your doing!" flashed out Katya, recovered enough now to be wrathful, and anything but pale as she said it.

"Not mine. Proposed by some of those girls and approved by the committee. The Socialists seem to have some romantic heads among them."

"And—I am to go with him?"

"It is the only safe way. Your passports tally, and bear each other out. Besides, a peasant-girl of your appearance cannot well travel without a protector."

"But it is a lie——"

"It need not be a lie for long, need it?" whispered Olympia, "Krakau is close over the frontier, and you have a choice of churches there, and of obliging priests. You need not even wait until Malania Petrowna joins you, unless you are especially anxious to have a chaperon for the occasion. Here, my good man, you are looking for your wife, are you not? It is time you were off!"

And she pushed forward the bewildered girl.

It was just about the time that the party was dispersing that the prison-master of the Pawiak rang up the administration of the Citadel in order to inquire why the omnibus had not yet been sent back.

The driver of said omnibus missed both his breakfast

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and dinner that day, but had a good long sleep, to make up for it, seeing that it was past three P.M. when the frantic hunt instituted by the German chief of police succeeded in running to earth the vehicle, upon whose floor the Herculean youth still peacefully slumbered.

"I should like to get hold of that 'captain,'" the governor-general of Warsaw was reported to have said subsequently to the chief of police.

"In order to send him to the gallows, excellency?"

"No, in order to put him in your place. Men of that stamp are useful."

Late that night at the frontier station of Granica there sat in a third-class compartment a young peasant couple in sheepskin coats—he, a tall, bearded man, the thinness of whose cheeks seemed a slur on the quality of the land which he presumably laboured—she, of that warm, brunette beauty occasionally seen among Polish women even of the lower classes, though, in truth, the type seemed more Russian than Polish. Silent and evidently exhausted, yet with strangely brilliant eyes, she leant against the back of the hard, wooden seat. The hand which rested upon the bundle of belongings on her knees was dirty and travel-stained, but not precisely toil-worn. Upon each of her temples, now hidden by a heavy cloth, a tiny wisp of white, which had not been there yesterday, streaked the silky blackness of her hair. It was the history of one night written in letters of silver.

The passports had just been returned. The long, torturing wait was over; the start imminent. One of the small, dusty hands stole softly into that of her com-

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panion. The compartment was full, and it was the only possible way of communicating with him at this thought-laden moment. He would understand the tremor of her fingers—she knew it—and would forgive even the tears in her eyes. Was she not turning her back upon her fatherland, perhaps for ever? For the present, and probably for long years, Lubynia was lost. So long as the reign of terror raged neither he nor she could venture to show their faces there. Timosh, the ideal watch-dog, would see that the roof stayed whole, if nothing else; but would it ever become *their* roof? Was this the end of restitution, or only its postponement? That which had brought their paths together and then divided them had dropped out of their lives, leaving them standing face to face, empty-handed for the moment—rich only in their love—rich also in their youth, which would allow them to look to the possibilities of the future.

And that future, what would it bring?

Sitting there, in the uncushioned compartment, whose atmosphere was laden with the pungent odour of sheep-skin and cheap tobacco, Tadeusz tried to plunge his gaze into the secrets of coming history. These prodigious convulsions in which the body of the Russian monster writhed, were they birth-pangs, or death-throes? and what would be the gigantic outcome of so violently heralded a birth?

In vain. History kept her secrets, as she always keeps them. From out of the shadows of to-morrow Russia's future stared back, sphynx-like, at the impertinent questioner.

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An ear-rending whistle and the sound of slamming doors running down the length of the train, like a species of dull scale played upon wooden notes.

"*Fertig?*" cried the Austrian station-master, the sight of whose blue uniform had been in itself a deliverance.

And the guard's reply:—

"*Fertig!*"

Yes, finished indeed, closed for ever, that breathless chapter in their lives.

The wooden seats vibrated as the wheels began to revolve.

Behind them lay Russia and the past; before them Austria and that future, towards which they were being borne,—exiles but hand in hand.

THE END

[NOTE.—Most of the particulars of the escape from prison are taken from an actual occurrence which took place at Warsaw in 1906, and was described by W. Wladimirow in the Vienna paper, *Die Zeit*. The picture given of the court martial was suggested by an article of the same writer, to whom the author here gladly acknowledges her debt.]

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