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The
GOLDEN BOUGH

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By George Gibbs

The Golden Bough

The Secret Witness

Paradise Garden

The Yellow Dove

The Flaming Sword

Madcap

The Silent Battle

The Maker of Opportunities

The Forbidden Way

The Bolted Door

Tony's Wife

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
Publishers **New York**

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ASTOR, LENOX

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The figure remained as before, staring past the lantern at the solitary oak.

[PAGE 4]

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The
GOLDEN BOUGH

BY

GEORGE GIBBS

AUTHOR OF "THE SECRET WITNESS," "PARADISE GARDEN,"
"THE YELLOW DOVE," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK LONDON
1918

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TO

DR. JOHN BACH McMASTER

Your Muse, a-weary with the stress
Of putting facts in careful dress,
Has doffed her dignity and made
Of History a masquerade.
She prays you, sir, to follow me
Into the Realm of Fantasy
Where Clio in a cap and bells,
With blither mien, our story tells.

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THE GOLDEN BOUGH

CHAPTER I

CREPUSCULE

IN the still evening air the dust hung golden for a moment and then slowly settled on tree and hedge-row; from a distance, faintly diminishing, the tinkle of sheep bells, the call of a bird, the sighing of a breeze, and then, silence.

Against the stillness, suddenly, as though pricked upon the velvety background of the summer night, a quick, sharp staccato note near at hand, a crackle as of brittle things breaking and a large thorn bush by the side of the deserted road quivered and shook as its leaves parted and a head appeared.

It was an eager, boyish head, but almost unpleasantly alert, its brows furrowing, its dark eyes peering to right and left, with a swift furtiveness that held little of assurance. A moment of quick inspection and a pair of broad shoulders emerged, followed by a body and long legs which strode into the middle of the road where the man paused a moment looking at the afterglow in the west and then set off with long steps to the south. He wore what had once been a uniform of the Légionnaire, but rough contacts and hard usage had eliminated all distinguishing marks, and a coating of dust and stain

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had further disguised him. It seemed as though Nature, conspiring as it does against the enemies of its wild people, had given this man its protective coloring, that he might elude those who sought him. To carry the analogy further he was shaggy, unkempt, dusty and lean, like a brown bear sniffing the breeze after a long period of hibernation.

The stride was rapid but it was cautious too and once at a fancied shadow in the road ahead of him, the soldier darted into the bushes and crouched listening. Fear had made him cautious, but his necessity knew no law, so he rose at last, went onward more rapidly into the gathering dusk, aware that the end of his pilgrimage was near at hand—there just beyond the hills before him in the free republic of the Swiss.

As he neared the lights of the village, his pace grew slower, and leaving the road he turned into a meadow to his right in the direction of a grove of trees which seemed to promise a temporary refuge while he planned a raid upon some nearby larder or hen-roost. But contrary to his expectations, when he reached the shadows of the trees, he found his way impeded by a high stone wall, which thrust suddenly upon him out of the darkness. A wall! A monastery? Or a barracks perhaps, full of the hated gray uniforms guarding the frontier! He paused a moment, deliberating, but conscious of more than a mild curiosity as to the purpose of this walled enclosure, high up on this mountain side which seemed so peaceful and so free from the horrors he had left back there in the levels below. Only yesterday, down the valley he had seen them—the gray uniforms—and here too, at any moment . . .

He grinned at the wall. He was weary of flight. A

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wall. A garden within—a monastery most likely . . . sanctuary. . . . At any rate he could go no further without food. This place would do as well as another. If there were monks within there would also be a kitchen and with such a wall, a larder unguarded. Moving to the right he found a tree the lower branches of which extended over the coping of the wall. At the foot of the tree he paused again, looking upward curiously, for upon the leaves of the tree he saw the reflection of yellow lights which seemed to be moving within the enclosure. Climbing noiselessly he drew himself to the level of the coping of the wall, and peered over. Through the foliage of his tree he could distinguish nothing clearly but he was aware of a lantern and a figure which moved slowly in an open space just beyond the thicket below him. It seemed that the figure wore a hood upon its head, and a gown. A monastery, of course—and this a monk, the gardener perhaps upon a lonely vigil of penance and meditation.

In any event the fugitive was now in no immediate danger from his pursuers, so he crawled out along a heavy branch of the tree which extended over the garden and noiselessly lowered himself to the top of the wall.

Here he hung in a moment of indecision, preparing an avenue of escape should his venture prove hazardous, and then peering again toward the dark habit of the holy man, now in silhouette against the light, he lowered himself by his hands and dropped to the ground. Danger had made him skillful, but he was aware of the thud of his heavy boots in the soft loam and crouched cautiously behind the thicket, ready for the slightest movement of alarm in the figure by the lantern. After a moment in which he reassured himself that the sound of his fall had

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not awakened the watcher from his revery he crawled forward until he reached the furthermost bush where he paused again, still in hiding and peered across the small stretch of lawn toward the light.

There was a raised daïs or platform of earth, approached from two sides by steps of stone. There were two stone benches above, and upon one of them, leaning forward toward a small oak tree in the center of the guarded space, sat the dark figure which had carried the lantern. The eyes of the Légionnaire, now grown accustomed to the glow of the light, made sure that the figure had not moved, nor was aware of his silent and furtive approach. Two plans of action suggested themselves, one to move behind the foliage to the right and intercept the monk with the lantern should he attempt to flee toward the lights of the house nearby, the other to risk all in a frank statement, a plea for charity and asylum.

But as the figure remained as before, staring past the lantern at the solitary oak tree as though lost in contemplation of its branches, the Légionnaire rose, silently crossed the lawn, and reached the stone steps where the crackle of a twig beneath his foot with a sudden and startling clearness revealed his presence. He was aware of the dark figure above him springing to its feet and turning with a swift graceful motion which swept the dark cowl from its curly head and betrayed the identity of its owner—a girl—quite lovely in her fear of this tattered brown ghost that had come upon her vigils.

In an awed whisper, she spoke a few words in a language he did not understand and then was silent, watching him, frightened.

"Bitte, Fräulein," he began softly.

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The sound of his voice reassured her. She turned toward him and seemed to search his figure more intently. And then in French peremptorily, "What do you want? Who are you?" she said.

At the sound of the French tongue spoken rapidly and without a trace of accent, the brown ghost smiled eagerly.

"Ah, Mademoiselle is French. Then I am sure of her charity and forgiveness."

He had put one foot upon the lowest step of the daïs when she took a pace toward him and extended her cloaked arms as though barring the way, repeating her former questions.

"What are you doing here? And what do you want?"

"I am hungry, Mademoiselle, also thirsty, for I have come far."

Her glance swept his figure and then, as though identifying him, returned with more assurance to his face.

"You are a soldier, a Frenchman?"

"A soldier——" He hesitated, looking down at his tattered sleeve. And then more deliberately as his gaze sought her face, "Mademoiselle is not a German. No German speaks French as you do."

"And what?"

"Merely that I am an escaped prisoner of Germany on my way to Switzerland," he smiled. "You see, I am frank with you. Something tells me that you're friendly."

"Switzerland!" she said. "Did you not know that you were already fifteen kilometers within the Swiss border?"

"Switzerland? Here?" The mingled expression of bewilderment and surprise upon his dirty face was comical.

"Switzerland!" he gasped again.

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"You must have passed the frontier in the night," added the girl. "You're quite safe now, I should say."

"Sacred name of a pipe!" he grinned. And then, with an air of apology, "Pardon, Mademoiselle. If I'd known that I'd passed the border, I shouldn't have intruded. But I was hungry, thirsty, too, and I thought that I might find meat, drink, a place to sleep in peace."

He paused, waiting for the girl to speak, but she said nothing and only stood frowning toward the lights at the other side of the garden.

"Of course, Mademoiselle, since I'm now safe from pursuit, if you wish it, I can retire by the way I came." He shrugged and turned half away when the sound of her voice halted him.

"I—I do not wish to be inhospitable," she said softly. "It is your right to ask asylum of us. But you have come, Monsieur, upon cloistered soil——"

"A convent?"

"No, not a convent," she said. "But private land, dedicated to solitude, and—and——" she paused uncertainly. "You would not understand."

He waited for her to go on. But she stopped abruptly and said no more. The strangeness of her garb, the mingled frankness and reticence of her speech, which excited friendly curiosity while it repelled inquiry, gave the fugitive a new interest in the cowled figure, an interest in which even the pangs of hunger and weariness were forgotten. From the top step she towered above him, her dark robe hanging with a majestic stateliness which somehow belied the testimony of the curly reddish brown hair and the red lips which had already been perilously near a roguish smile. Something in the eager expression of the face of her guest as he looked at her made her suddenly

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aware of the exigencies of the occasion, for she drew the cowl about her head and came down the steps, leaving the lantern upon the stone bench beside the small tree.

"Wait here," she said quietly, "at the foot of the steps. If you will promise me not to——" She turned and looked toward the mound. "If you will remain here without moving, I'll see what can be done."

"I will promise anything, Mademoiselle."

They looked into each other's eyes a moment, smiling in a friendly way, and then she passed him and vanished within the house.

The soldier took off his cap and rubbed his head thoughtfully. "Cloistered soil——" The phrase hung in his ears. A queer place this, a queer creature this girl. To his western eyes she seemed better suited to a tennis match or a game of golf than to this mooning by lamp light, with shadows in eyes which were only meant for joy and laughter. What was her nationality? Not French, though she spoke it like a native, not Swiss, and surely not German, something more Easternly, Oriental almost. She was a paradox, a lovely paradox indeed to eyes long starved of beauty and gentleness.

But other considerations were less important to the fugitive than the gnawing ache of his hunger and the demands of a body already taxed for many weeks to its utmost. Obeying the injunction of the girl not to move, he sank to the stone step. When she returned, she found him with his head bent forward upon his knees, already dozing; but at the light touch upon his shoulders he sprang to his feet, his club raised upon the defensive, almost oversetting the dish which carried his supper.

"Be careful," said the girl.

He stared at her in a moment of incomprehension, but

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the sight of the bread, meat and cheese, quickly restored him to sanity.

"I—I beg pardon," he began, "I dreamed——"

But his hands were already reaching forward toward the dish and with a smile she handed it to him.

"Sit again, eat and drink. There is milk."

He obeyed, wasting no words and she sat beside him, watching calmly while he bolted the food like a famished wolf. He finished what was on the platter and all of the milk before he spoke again. Then he wiped his mouth on the back of his hand and gave a great grunt of satisfaction.

"Shall I bring you more?" she asked.

"No, no, thanks. You're very good, Mademoiselle. I didn't know I was so hungry."

"Are you sure you've had enough?"

"Oh yes."

"When was the last time that you ate?"

"The day before yesterday. I didn't dare to leave the woods, even at night."

"You've traveled far?"

"A million miles, I think. I don't know how far. They had me working on the railroad near Mannheim."

"And you escaped?"

"At night, from the pen. They shot at me, but I swam down a stream and got away. I lived on berries for a while—and potatoes, when I could steal them. I'm a living example of food conservation. It was risky work approaching the farm houses, on account of the dogs. Some of us may think Germany will go to the dogs, but I'm sure of one thing and that is that all the dogs in the world have gone to Germany. And they never sleep. I went miles out of my way to avoid the roads.

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You're the first human being I've spoken to for weeks. It's quite extraordinary to be able to talk again, to have some one listen. Sometimes in the deep woods I used to talk to myself just to hear the sound of my own voice."

"I'm very sorry for you."

There was no doubting the sincerity of her tone or the gentleness in her eyes.

"Sorry? Are you? That's very wonderful. I thought that people had stopped being sorry for anything in this world."

"It's terrible to be so bitter."

He laughed. "I'm not bitter. I never felt more amiable in my life. But the world has gone mad, Mademoiselle."

"The Germans treated you badly?"

He smiled and shrugged.

"What would you have? It is war."

"It is terrible. And what will you do now that you are across the border? Will they not intern you?"

"I must find civilian clothing."

"And then?"

He laughed joyously.

"I will cross into France at the Swiss border, and rejoin my regiment. *Parbleu!* There are some there who will think I have risen from the dead."

She was silent for a moment regarding him thoughtfully, her eyes brightening with a new interest. At first he had seemed a man of middle age, a broken man, such as passed begging along the roads of the village. And the dirt and the ragged beard that covered his face had done nothing to dispel the illusion. But she saw now how far she had been mistaken, for his laughter rippled forth from his lean muscular throat as though in pure

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joy at its own utterance. He was not bitter—he was merely experienced.

"You're a Frenchman, Monsieur?"

"No, Mademoiselle, an American."

"American! And you've fought long for France?"

"More than two years."

"You were living in France?"

"No, Mademoiselle, in America. But I could not stand what happened in Belgium. And so I came. It's very simple."

"But you speak French——"

"German and Italian. I've been much in Europe. I had a gift for languages. But I'm not of much account otherwise. I'm a ne'er-do-well—a black sheep." He grinned at her.

"I do look rather black now, don't I? You'd be surprised to see how much better I look when I'm clean."

"I don't doubt it, Monsieur."

Youth called to youth. Her laugh echoed softly among the venerable trees and as she raised her chin, the cowl slipped from her head again disclosing her curly hair, a copper-colored nimbus against the glow of the lantern.

He turned a little toward her and glanced at her with more assurance, and then with a smile.

"You're just a girl, aren't you?"

She laughed again.

"What did you think I was?"

"I didn't know," he said more slowly. "You seemed something between a Shade and a Mother-Superior."

"A very inferior Mother-Superior, Monsieur," she smiled, and then with more soberness, "I don't wonder you were perplexed. Sometimes I am a little perplexed myself——"

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She halted and did not resume, and so:

"I should not be inquisitive," he said. "Your hospitality gives me no further claim——"

"What is it that you wish to know?"

"Who and what you are. Is it not natural that I should like to know to whom I am indebted——"

"It doesn't matter. What I have done is little enough beside what you have suffered for poor bleeding France. At least we are allies."

"You——"

"A Russian——"

"Ah——"

"A modern Russian, Monsieur. A free spirit of the times in which we live. It is the aim of my life to do for my own country what you have done for France."

"But to fight, Mademoiselle——?"

"With subtler weapons than yours. It is to that I dedicate my life——"

She rose suddenly as though realizing that she had already said too much. She picked up the dish and bowl and took an irresolute step away from him. "I would like to ask you to stay, but——"

She paused and whispered quickly. "He comes. Say nothing. Let me tell your story. Perhaps you may remain to sleep here."

And following her glance, he saw a figure emerging from the gloom in the direction of the house, the tall figure of a man, with shoulders bent and eager eyes which, like those of a black nocturnal cat had already caught a pale reflection of the lantern's gleams.

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CHAPTER II

ENIGMA

AS the man came nearer, he seemed a remarkable creature. His coat, of the kind known in the eighties as a Prince Albert, hung loosely from his lean square shoulders, to a point midway between hip and knee. His hair was dark and long and wisps of it had fallen over his broad pale forehead to which they adhered as though a tight hat-band had pressed them there. Heavy eye-brows met above a long narrow nose, which jutted down over lips turned in, thin and impalpable, to the square chin which was thrust out aggressively as he strode forward, his hands working unpleasantly at the ends of his long wrists.

"What's this, Tanya Korasov?" he asked in a sharp querulous voice.

"A hungry soldier, Kirylo Ivanitch," said the girl.

Her shining eyes glanced quickly toward the daïs.

"He came——"

"Over the wall. He was much in need of rest and food——"

"Ah——" growled the other. "A soldier——"

"He goes to join his colors."

The frown on the brows of the man in the Prince Albert relaxed and he seemed to give a gasp of relief as he examined the intruder more calmly.

"The world has gone rabid with the smell of blood.

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Even here, all about us——" He broke off suddenly, turning to the girl. "You have fed him?"

"Yes, Kirylo. But I doubted——"

"We are not savages, Monsieur," he broke in. "You shall be made comfortable for the night. Come. Tanya, the lantern."

And he led the way across the lawn to the house, while Tanya mounted the daïs for the lantern and followed them. Whatever the doubts of the girl as to the hospitality which might be accorded him, the fugitive now saw no reason to suspect the intentions of the strange gentleman in the Prince Albert coat, for as they reached the building he stood aside, indicating the lighted doorway.

"Enter, mon ami," he said. "It shall not be said that this house refuses charity or alms to any seeker after Liberty, even though he go about his quest in a manner with which we disapprove."

"Thanks, Monsieur," said the soldier gratefully.

The room which they entered was the kitchen, and the two persons who occupied it, an aged woman and a youngish man with a shock of yellow hair, paused in the act of masticating, remaining with their full mouths open and eyes staring until the young soldier had passed through the door into the main building beyond. In the brief moment of passing them, the American experienced the same sense of vague hostility as that which had first greeted him in the man Ivanitch, a querulous attitude of anxious suspicion, which for some unknown reason had now disappeared,—a look of expectancy in their eyes, or was it a veiled fear, as of some danger which might come upon them unawares? Was this the reason for the wall? And if so, why a girl in a monk's cowl for sentry?

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He was too weary to analyze the return of his impressions and when the Russian reached the room beyond the kitchen, he motioned the Légionnaire to a chair while he bade the girl Tanya bring forth glasses and a jug.

"Sit a moment, Monsieur the soldier," he said suavely. "It is Chartreuse—the real Chartreuse, made years ago by the monks not many leagues from here—there is little of it left even in Switzerland. It will give you new life."

The soldier pledged his host and hostess and drank.

"You are very good," he said with real gratitude. "I came to steal and go upon my way," he smiled. "And so your kindness and that of Mademoiselle covers me with confusion."

"Ah! Necessity knows no law," said the Russian pleasantly. "You shall have a bed, a night of sleep. And your necessity shall be our pleasure."

"But my intrusion! If one lives within a wall it is doubtless to keep people out. But in helping me, Monsieur, you are helping France. And in helping France, —Russia."

"Russia!" There was a finality of despair in the tone with which Kirylo Ivanitch uttered the word. "May God grant her help—for she needs it. We pray for her—as we work for her in secret—in secret."

Ivanitch clasped his bony fingers and squeezed them until the knuckles cracked. "If it will give you courage to fight with steel and bullets, I will tell you that great things are in the air, for Russia and for all the world."

"Freedom," said the American. "I know. It is written. So much blood cannot be shed in vain."

"We labor for the same end, you and I," went on the Russian. "The same end, but with different means

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——" And then, with a look of quick inspection—"You join the Legion soon again?"

The gaze of the Russian quickened as for the first time he noted the soldier's uniform.

"What is your name, Monsieur?"

"Phil Rowland."

"Rowlan'?" He puzzled over the pronunciation slowly.

"Rowland. I am an American."

"Ah—American!"

"My mother was Italian——"

"But American. How happens it that you are here in this uniform?"

"I'm a citizen of the world, a nomad. I like adventure. And so when the war broke out I sailed and joined the Foreign Legion."

"The Legion! A regiment of young devils. It is madness. A mad cause—to what end?"

"That France may live."

"Ah, yes." And then, suddenly, "You join the Legion soon again?"

The American would have replied, but the girl Tanya, who had stood behind his chair, broke in quickly.

"Monsieur Rowlan' is tired, Kirylo Ivanitch. Is it not better that I show him to his room? Tomorrow he will tell you——"

"Your Chartreuse has already restored me, Mademoiselle."

The Russian waved his hand and Tanya Korasov sank into a chair.

"An American! I have always wanted to go to America. One day you will learn to think over there.

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And then you will be able to help with the great problems of Europe. Your mother was Italian?" he asked.

Phil Rowland smiled good-naturedly at the persistence of his questioner.

"Yes, Monsieur. Of an ancient and noble family. But in America we make little of ancestry."

"Yet, it is important."

The deep gaze of the Russian, which had been fixed upon the jug upon the table, turned slowly and fastened upon the uniform of the Légionnaire, the shocking condition of which had not been visible in the dim light of the garden.

"You have fared badly, Monsieur Rowlan'. Your uniform shows hard usage."

"What would you? I was captured in it and have worn it ever since. The Boches do not trouble to send their prisoners to a tailor."

"The Boches! You were, then, a prisoner of the Germans——?"

The Russian straightened in his chair, his bony hands clasping its arms, his brows tangling suddenly.

"Until three weeks ago, yes, Monsieur."

It was not imagination that gave Phil Rowland the notion that the tone of voice of the Russian had suddenly changed again. He felt the black eyes, now almost hidden under the dark bushy brows, burning into his own. And while he could not explain the feeling of inquietude, he realized that some chance remark of his had aroused a dormant devil in his host.

"A prisoner! The Germans!" He repeated quickly. "And you come here to Nemi. Who sent you hither?"

"Why, no one, Monsieur," said the American, easily, with a smile which concealed his growing curiosity. "I

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do not even know just when or where I crossed the border."

"Ah. It is strange—that you should come here. Italian, too——"

Ivanitch wagged his great head quickly. The girl Tanya broke in with a short laugh.

"Monsieur Rowlan' is not the first escaping soldier who has passed through the village. You remember, last week——"

"But he went away, Tanya Korasov—he did not stay ——" broke in Ivanitch excitedly.

The American rose from his chair, mystified.

"As I shall do now, Monsieur, if you will permit me——"

He took a pace toward a door which seemed to lead toward the front of the house, but the girl stood before him and faced her compatriot, who had sank again in his chair, his head deep in his shoulders.

"For shame, Kirylo Ivanitch," she said in a spirited voice. "For shame! That you should be so inhospitable! The man is dead upon his feet and you send him out into the night—to be interned perhaps tomorrow!"

"An escaping prisoner! A slave!" He rose from his chair, brushing his hair back with a wild gesture. "You were a slave, were you not—a slave to the Germans? Answer me."

Had the man suddenly gone mad? Or was the brain of the Légionnaire suffering from a delusion of its own weariness? What was the meaning of this extraordinary conversation? What the significance of this sudden and strange hostility? And what difference could it make to this man Ivanitch whether he, Rowland, had been a slave or not?

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The American shrugged and smiled again, more patiently.

"A slave?" he replied. "One might call it that. I worked like a dog upon a railroad. I was chained to the man next me, and would have been shot had I attempted resistance."

The result of this innocent explanation was still more surprising.

"There!" cried the Russian, wildly exhorting the girl. "Did I not tell you so? A slave—an escaping slave—here at Nemi. Let him go, I say, or I shall not answer for the consequences."

"Of course, Monsieur——" said Rowland.

But at a sign from the girl, the American paused at the door and stood, his weariness forgotten in the curious dialogue that followed, which seemed to plunge him deeper into the mystery of this strange couple and the house of the walled garden. The girl Tanya crossed the room swiftly and noiselessly and laid her hand upon the arm of Kirylo Ivanitch, who now paced to and fro before the fireplace, like some caged beast, his head lowered, seeming not to see but furtively watching the dusty boots of the astonished fugitive.

"It is not possible, Kirylo," she said softly. "He knows nothing. Would he not have broken IT at once? Who was to have prevented him? Not I. He is merely a boy and free from guile. Can you not see?"

"It is dangerous for him to remain," gasped the Russian.

"It is more dangerous for you to indulge these mad fancies. IT is safe yonder. Go and see for yourself. I, Tanya Korasov, will vouch for this weary fugitive. But you shall not turn a loyal ally of Russia out into

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the night. Tomorrow he shall go forth and you shall send him, refreshed and safely conducted to the border of France, when he will go and fight your battles and mine, with the common enemy of Humanity. Do you hear?"

He stared at her, sullenly.

"I shall conduct him nowhere. I wish him to go," he said.

But the girl stood her ground, continuing calmly:

"Tomorrow morning you shall give him a suit of civilian clothing and he will go upon his way, thanking you, Kirylo Ivanitch. That is all."

"A boy? Yes. No doubt. . . . But Destiny is too strong. Italian! What if——"

He paused, running his bony fingers through his long hair.

"Impossible. It cannot be," she soothed him.

"I have much to do—tomorrow or next day they are coming—the conference is momentous. If anything should——"

"Sh——! He shall be gone."

The girl turned to the American as though to atone for the strange conduct of her compatriot, and smiled graciously.

"You will forgive the whim of Monsieur Ivanitch, I am sure. He works too hard, all day, and most of the night. You would understand, if you knew his problems, his suspicions, his labors."

"I'm still willing to go, Mademoiselle, if Monsieur still desires it——" said Rowland easily.

For a moment they had been lost in each other. A gasp from the direction of the fireplace, and as they turned, Kirylo Ivanitch fled past them silently and out

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into the darkness of the night. The look the American sent after him gave the girl a true vision of what was passing in his mind.

"You think that he is mad," she said soberly. "It is not so. An obsession——" she paused abruptly as though the words had been stifled upon her lips and shrugged lightly. "I can tell you nothing—but on this I am resolved. You shall not be sent forth tonight or taken tomorrow when France, my country's ally, needs you yonder."

He caught her hand and pressed it to his lips. And then, with a joyous smile:

"I shall fight the better for the memory of this hour. Whatever your mission here, Mademoiselle, God grant you success in it. And for the part of one soul which passes yours like a ship in the night, I pray that we may meet again."

"It shall be so, perhaps," she said easily, though she flushed at the warmth of his words.

"When a razor and a bath shall have made me once more a gentleman," he added with a laugh.

"Perhaps that may be tomorrow?" she returned gaily.

The roguish smile that had died still-born upon her lips, there, earlier, in the garden, came suddenly upon the sweetness of her lips and gave them new lines of loveliness, which made him glad that she had saved it for the light where he might see.

She noted the look of admiration in his dark eyes, and turned quickly away, taking up a candle from the table.

"Until tomorrow, then, Monsieur," she said decisively. "For now you shall go to bed."

"I am no longer tired."

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But she was already moving toward the stairway to the upper floors.

"If you will follow me——" she said calmly, and led the way up the stairs, her soft black robe caressing her slender ankles.

A lamp set in a bracket burned dimly upon the second floor, and he followed her heavily down the high, echoing corridor. A large hall, scantily furnished, dim and mysterious with many doors to right and left, a house, it seemed, more like a hotel than a villa, and more like a monastery than either. The girl led the way and opened at last a door near the end of the corridor, entering the room and setting the candle upon a table. In the flickering light which cast its shadows upward along her face she seemed to have taken again the character of the Priestess, the Shade of the garden, with the cowl and robe of mystery. Her expression too seemed to have grown more serious, though the golden nimbus of light was again entwined about her ruddy hair.

"Good night, Monsieur Rowlan'," she said gently. "Tomorrow morning you will find a change of clothing upon the chair outside the door. Sleep safely. If you fear——" she paused.

"Fear?" he asked. "Of what?"

"I forgot that you are a soldier. But when I go out, nevertheless, you shall bolt this door upon the inside." And as he turned to her in inquiry, "No. You must ask no questions, but only obey."

His smile met with no response. And so he shrugged and bowed.

"It shall be as you desire, Mademoiselle."

And without a word, she was gone.

He listened for a moment to the light tap of her foot-

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falls down the corridor until he heard them no more, when he closed the heavy door, bolted it and sank upon the small iron bed while he tried to ponder a solution of the events of the evening.

Out of the train of vague occurrences stood clearly the wholesome friendly figure of this girl, Tanya Korasov. Her robes, her cowl, the vestments of her strange association with the fanatic Kirylo Ivanitch, seemed only to bring her sanity, youth and kindliness into stronger relief. That she was a member of some secret association of which her compatriot was the head seemed more or less obvious, but what was the personal relationship between them? The man had intellectual power and doubtless held his sway as the official director of some sort of propaganda for the freedom of Russia, but his deference to the wishes of the girl made it also evident that she too was high in his councils. His niece? His cousin? Or was their relation something nearer, something——? Impossible. The man was fifty, the girl young enough to be his daughter. A relationship purely intellectual, more deeply welded by the bonds of a cognate purpose. But what of the robes, the vigils, the daïs in the garden, the strange dialogue about the escaping slave which seemed to have so large a part in determining his own status as a guest in this house of mystery? What was IT? And what the danger suggested by the final injunction of the girl to bolt the door of his bedroom? From whom? Ivanitch? From the shock-headed youth in the kitchen who had stared at him so curiously? Or from others whom he had not seen?

He gave up the problem and slowly removed his boots and tattered clothing which he tossed with some disgust

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into a corner. The order of the room reproached him, and tired as he was, he cleansed himself to be worthy of the immaculate linen, then blew out the light and with a sigh of delight at the luxury of sheets, he crawled into bed and tried to relax. He had thought of this moment for weeks, and how he would sleep if he was ever again offered a bed, but now strangely enough, his muscles twitched and his eyes remained open, staring into the obscurity.

Tanya! That was a pretty name—Tatyana probably. There was a fairy princess of that name who came to him suddenly from out of the mists of childhood—a princess with a filmy veil, a diadem upon her forehead and a magic white wand which accomplished the impossible. She was pure, she was beautiful and had happened long ago, before—before his rather variegated career across two continents. This new Tanya was a part of the night, a gracious kindly shade with a ruddy diadem and a roguish smile, which set aside the symbols of her strange servitude. He smiled as he thought of her and closed his lids again, but they flew open as though actuated by hidden springs.

He was aware of some movement in the house about him, the soft pad of footsteps in the corridor outside which went along a few paces and then seemed to pause just at his door. Then a murmur as though of voices in a low tone. Once he fancied the knob of his door was tried by a stealthy hand. So sure was he of this that he got out of bed and without striking a light, examined the bolt to reassure himself that the door was firmly fastened.

Then he smiled to himself and went noiselessly back

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to bed. The soldier Rowland was merely aware of a devouring curiosity. But presently the demands of his weary muscles vanquished even this, and he slept.

He awoke suddenly, as he had often done in the dug-outs at the warning of the sentry, and started upright in bed, listening. The softness of the sheets perplexed him, and it was a moment before he realized where he was. No sound but the murmur of insects outside the house and the sighing of a breeze. What had awakened him? Noiselessly he got up and tried the bolt of the door. It was fastened. Then he stole cautiously to the window, and peered down into the garden.

By the star-light, he could dimly see the lawn, the path and the daïs beyond where he had first seen Tanya. His eyes, trained like a cat's to the darkness, during his weeks of night traveling, pierced slowly into every part of the obscurity beneath the trees. Something was moving there near the mound of earth, a dark figure with a cowled head and a robe. The figure moved forward slowly a few steps, peering from right to left and then darted suddenly around to the other side of the daïs, but always eager and watchful, near the mound of earth. Rowland seemed to identify the figure by its broad bent shoulders and shuffling walk as Kirylo Ivanitch. As the American watched, he saw the Russian turn and walk slowly toward the house. Beneath Rowland's window the Russian stopped with folded arms and looked upward. From beneath the black cowl the American seemed to feel the blazing eyes of Ivanitch upon his, but he knew that in his place of concealment he could not be seen and so he did not move. And presently, the man turned swiftly

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and went back to the mound of earth to resume his strange sentry duty.

Philip Rowland shrugged as he turned away from the window and went back to bed, grinning to himself.

"Batty," he muttered to himself. "Completely batty."

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CHAPTER III

MYSTERY

PHILIP ROWLAND slept heavily until broad daylight when the sun pierced his window and cast a cheerful golden lozenge upon the white-washed wall above his iron bed. He stretched his arms luxuriously and as the events of the previous night came to him, rose and looked out of the window. A clamor of birds among the gilded tree-tops, long violet shadows along the dewy garden, and there on a bench upon the mound of earth which had perplexed him last night, a solitary black figure, quiescent but watchful. It was not Ivanitch or Tanya, but one that he had not seen before, for the figure wore no cowl and the head was clearly visible. So they had kept watch all night! The American laughed outright. The things that had seemed weird and even uncanny in the darkness were by the broad light of day little short of arrant nonsense. Mediæval flummery such as this in the fair sunlight of the summer morning! It was amateurish, sophomoric, and hardly worthy of the psychos of the intellectual mystic in the Prince Albert coat. Tanya, too—a dealer in magic and spells? He smiled to himself as he turned from the window. He knew women—they had a talent for the dramatic. But he wouldn't acknowledge even to himself that he was disappointed in Tanya. He wanted to keep last night's vision of her as a thing apart. She was his Goddess of

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Liberty. Whatever her share in this mumbo-jumbo business, she herself was never to be tawdry.

He was softly whistling "Tipperary" as he unbolted his door and peered out into the silent corridor. There upon a chair beside his door was the clothing that Tanya had promised him, a suit of dark clothes—not a Prince Albert, he was joyed to discover—underwear, a shirt and —blessings upon blessings—scissors and a razor! She had forgotten nothing. There is a delight in cleanliness that only the cleanly who have become filthy can ever really know. But this escaped prisoner found a secret pleasure in the fact that he was now to become Philip Rowland, gentleman, a person once known on Broadway and Fifth Avenue for the taste of his sartorial embellishments.

He bathed again, shaved and dressed in the clothing (which fitted him atrociously) and went down the stairs into the room through which he had passed last night. There was no one about and the door into the kitchen was closed, though an appetizing odor of coffee pervaded the air. He glanced at the books upon the table, a few novels, Turgeniev, Dostoievsky in French, some Russian newspapers and a miscellaneous lot of German and French socialistic periodicals. Socialism—of course —the veneer that might cover a rougher grain beneath.

But the most extraordinary object in the room, one which the visitor had not noticed last night, was a piece of ancient sculpture upon a pedestal in a corner of the room, a double-headed bust, one face young and beardless with shut lips and a steadfast gaze, the other older with wrinkled brows, a wild, anxious look in the eyes and a mouth open as though in horror. Around the neck of the double-head a garland of what seemed to be oak-leaves was carved into the stone and upon the pedestal,

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the inscription REX NEMORENSIS. That the sculpture was of a great antiquity was indicated by its worn surfaces and discolorations, and Rowland paused, studying it attentively, lost in speculation as to what if any connection this curious work of ancient art could have with the mystery of this house. Nemi—Ivanitch had mentioned it last night. REX NEMORENSIS—King of the Wood. But what was the symbolism of the two heads—the young man and the old, the young one, eager and fearless, the other old, anxious and terrified. Nemi!

Where had he come upon the name before? It seemed to echo to him out of the past. Nemi! A name out of a legend, written as though with fire against the darkness of a childish nightmare and then extinguished. A name of something beautiful and something unhappy, something dreadful and something fascinating—the name of a blessing or of a curse! He shrugged at last, winked cheerfully at the hideous face on the pedestal, and gave the problem up. Then, turning, he sauntered toward a door which seemed to lead to the front of the garden, but before he reached it a voice came from over his shoulder, and turning quickly, he saw the girl Tanya, standing on the stairway giving him good morning. Her black robes had been discarded and she was dressed quite simply in a white morning frock which accentuated the lines of the strong slender figure and answered some of the questions that her sober garb had denied him. She was young, resilient, full of the joys of the awakened day, and wonderfully good to look at. The two of them stood for a moment staring at each other as though they had never seen each other before, Rowland's eyes full of admiration which he made no effort to conceal.

It was Tanya who first spoke.

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"You are so different, Monsieur Rowlan', that I wasn't quite sure——" she laughed. "If I hadn't known the clothes——"

"And you, Mademoiselle." He paused seeking a word. "You—are the morning."

"Did you sleep well?"

"Like the dead. I was not disturbed." He smiled significantly, but she seemed not to notice, as she crossed to the door of the kitchen and ordered the coffee. And in a moment they were sitting at a table in an adjoining room where the shock-headed man brought the urn from the kitchen and a tray upon which were eggs, butter and *petits pains*. Rowland studied the man carefully and noted a sharp look from the fellow as their glances crossed. But in a mirror opposite him he saw the man pause as he went out and turn and stare at him with so malevolent a look that the American recalled quite vividly his impressions of the night before. He was not wanted here. Whatever the affairs of this place it was obvious that to all except the girl Tanya, Rowland was *de trop*. As he ate he found his curiosity as to the strange actions of the men of Nemi gathering impetus. They were like a lot of Boches having a morning "hate." However hospitable the girl, it was clear that they resented his presence, and from a window, even as he sat, he could see the ridiculous black figure of the third man mounting guard over the absurd tree at the other side of the garden. But Rowland grinned and drank of his coffee, sure now that the eyes of Tanya Korasov had something on all those of a Winter Garden chorus rolled into two. But they weren't bold eyes like some others he had known. They appraised him frankly but without the least timidity. She had given him her friendship last night and until he

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went on his way he was her guest to whom the hospitality of the house was open.

"Monsieur Ivanitch," she said after a moment, and with as he fancied a slight air of constraint, "begs that you will excuse him, as he will take his coffee upstairs."

"Of course. I hope that I haven't interfered——"

"It doesn't matter," she put in quickly. "Something happened which disturbed him. He is overworked and often distraught with nerves."

"I'm sorry."

"He is accustomed to being much alone," she added with an abstracted air.

"I won't bother him much longer. I'll be off in a moment. But I regret to go without knowing something more of you, Mademoiselle. Your kindness in spite of the hostility of Monsieur Ivanitch, your fear for my safety last night——"

"I—I merely thought that—that if you bolted your door you would be able to pass a night of rest."

Her manner was not altogether convincing. He looked at her soberly and went on softly.

"I'm not a meddler by nature, Mademoiselle," he continued, "but I do confess to a devouring curiosity. The organization to which you belong is secret. I can perhaps guess some of its purposes, but the mystery which I have met on every hand——"

"I can tell you nothing," she said, her eyes averted.

"Not even that what you do is not distasteful to you?"

She lowered her voice a note.

"I'm not unhappy," she said slowly.

"Nor contented. There is a danger in the air, a nameless danger which if it does not threaten you, menaces those about you."

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"Danger!" she said quickly. "What does that matter to me, when Russia, when all Europe is bleeding to death. I fear nothing——"

"Not even an escaping slave?"

The words uttered quickly, almost at random, had a most startling effect upon her. She drew back quickly from the table and then leaned forward, whispering.

"Sh——! You knew——?" she asked.

"You came here——" she paused and was silent again.

"Was it not that phrase which so profoundly affected Monsieur Ivanitch?" he asked.

She made no reply.

He rose from the table and straightened.

"You wish me to go, Mademoiselle?" he asked.

She hesitated a moment and then with a gasp,

"Yes. You must go—at once."

He shrugged, smiled and turned away. It was too bad.

"Of course I have no right to question you. But I should like to put myself at your command for any service——"

"You can do nothing. Only go, Monsieur."

He looked at her eagerly. There was a change in her manner. She too had at last turned against him. It seemed that she had grown a shade paler, and he saw her eyes staring in a startled way as at some object behind him.

Instinctively he turned. The door into the kitchen was partly open and half through the aperture, distorted with some strange agony, was the face of Kirylo Ivanitch. In the fleeting moment before the Russian emerged it seemed to Rowland that this was the exact expression on the face of the anguished half of the double-bust in the adjoining room, the face of the older man in terror and

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fury. But he had to admit that in the flesh and blood it was far more convincing.

Ivanitch now thrust the door open with a bang and stood, his arms, long like an ape's, hanging to the knees of his trouser legs at which the bony fingers plucked unpleasantly.

He did not speak to Rowland, though his gaze never left his face, but he muttered something hoarsely in Russian to Tanya—an angry phrase, the tone of which sent the hot blood flying to Phil Rowland's temples. He did not know what she replied, but her voice was pitched low and had a note of contrition that still further inflamed him. Last night he had thought Ivanitch merely an eccentric zealot unnerved by too much work. Now he seemed surely mad, a maniac not far from the verge of violence.

The Russian took a pace forward toward the American who stood his ground, conscious of a rising anger at the inhospitality and a growing desire to see the thing through, whatever happened. But a glance at Tanya found her gaze fixed on him with a look so earnestly appealing, that he suppressed the hot words that had risen to his tongue.

"I am sorry, Monsieur Ivanitch," he said coolly, taking refuge in the formal French phrase, "to have so far strained the hospitality of Nemi——"

"Go then——" growled the Russian, pointing toward the door.

The voice was brutal, harsh, inhuman and challenged all that was intemperate in Rowland, aroused again the reckless venturing spirit that had sent him forth to deal with the primitive forces of evil. He leaned forward

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toward the distorted face, his arms akimbo, and stared the Russian in the eyes.

And then a strange thing happened. The blaze in the Russian's eyes was suddenly extinguished. It was as though a film had passed over them, leaving them pale, like a burnt out cinder. His jaw fell too, his arms flapped aimlessly a moment and then fell to his sides as he retreated through the open door into the kitchen.

"Go!" he whispered querulously, as though his voice too had been burnt out. "Go!"

As the man disappeared, Rowland relaxed and turned toward Tanya with a shrug.

"A madman!" he muttered. "You can't stay here, Mademoiselle Korasov."

"It's nothing," she said breathlessly. "When you are gone, he will recover. You must go now, Monsieur. Hurry, or harm will come——"

"To you?" eagerly.

"To you, Monsieur."

"I'm not frightened," he said with a grin.

"I know. But you must go at once. Here. This way. The gate is in the garden wall." And she opened the door and stood aside to let him pass. He took up the cap she had provided for him and paused a moment to offer her his hand.

"I thank you again, Mademoiselle."

She touched his fingers lightly but he caught her own and held them a moment.

"Good-by," he said gently.

"God bless and preserve you, Monsieur Rowlan'," she whispered.

He stepped out into the garden, the girl just behind him indicating the gate in the wall about fifty yards dis-

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tant, the only exit from the enclosure. But as he emerged from the shadow of the house and turned up the path toward the gate a loud whistle sounded from the direction of the daïs, where the monkish figure that had been on guard rose suddenly, like a raven interrupted at a meal, flapping its wings and screaming discordantly. To his left in the wall of the house, doors flew open noisily and men emerged, Ivanitch, the shock-headed man, and another. They did not come toward Rowland but moved abreast of him as he went up the garden path, silent, watchful, keeping pace with him, like men in open order advancing in skirmish-line, Ivanitch nearest him, not more than three paces distant, Ivanitch the fantastic, Ivanitch the impossible. Rowland eyed him curiously. His face was moist with perspiration and the wisp of black hair was glued to his white forehead. His eyes no longer blazed for they were invisible under the dark thatch of his bent brows, but his figure and gait gave every token of the strange terror that had suddenly swept over him in the middle of their conversation last night.

Rowland grinned at him cheerfully. They dreaded him, these four men, dreaded and feared him, but Ivanitch dreaded and feared him most. The situation was comic. Rowland increased his pace; they increased theirs. He paused; they stopped. It was like a game, Rowland went on again. He was the "guide," it seemed, of this strange awkward squad. But as he neared the turn in the path which led to the gate, the shock-headed man went forward in the direction of the daïs while Ivanitch came a pace closer, bent forward, his long arms hanging, still watching him eagerly. The creature was menacing. The dis-

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tance to the gate was now short, but the idea of turning his back to this madman, who might spring upon him from behind, was most unpleasant. So Rowland stopped and faced him, catching a glimpse of Tanya Korasov who had followed them and stood nearby, listening and watching, aware of the hazardous moment.

"It is a pleasant morning, Monsieur Ivanitch," said Rowland coolly.

"The gate—is yonder," croaked the Russian. "Go!"

"All in good time," said Rowland. "But I've something to say first."

The Russian's thin lips worked but he said nothing, though his fingers twitched against his legs.

"I thank you for your hospitality—such as it is. But you don't like me, Monsieur. Our sentiments are reciprocal. Your attitude even now is most unpleasant—not to say offensive. Were it not for Mademoiselle, I should have lost my temper long ago."

"Go——! Go——!" cried the Russian chokingly. He seemed trembling on the brink of some nervous paroxysm.

"When I'm ready. In the meanwhile, listen——"

"What have I to do with you?"

"You know best about that," said Rowland coolly, aware of a new desire to probe the mystery if he could.

The eyes of Ivanitch, paling as though they could not endure the sunlight, stared wildly as he raised his haggard face.

"You have known from—from the beginning?" muttered Ivanitch.

"Yes, yes," cried Rowland eagerly.

"It is not true, Kirylo Ivanitch," he heard the girl Tanya crying. "He knew nothing. He knows nothing

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now." And then, appealingly to Rowland, "Oh, go, Monsieur. Please go, at once."

But Ivanitch was oblivious.

"Destiny!" he muttered wildly. "The Visconti——!"

Rowland started back.

"Visconti!" he repeated. It was the family name of his own mother.

Ivanitch wagged his great head from side to side, his fists clasping and unclasping in the throes of some mad indecision. And then he came for Rowland, head down, his long arms groping. The American heard the girl's scream and the shouts of the other men as he sprang aside to elude the rush, but Ivanitch was quick and in a moment they were locked in struggle.

Rowland was tall, wiry and agile, but privation had sapped some of his strength and the grip of the Russian around his body bore him backward up the lawn, along the wall where they both tripped over a projecting root and fell to the ground, Ivanitch uppermost. The fall stunned Rowland, but he managed to get a hand on the Russian's throat and clutched with the strength of desperation. A madman! Once in a German trench he had fought with such another, but there were weapons there, and fortune had favored him. But his fingers seemed to meet in the throat of the fanatic and the grip around his own body relaxed as, with an effort, he threw the man away from him and rolled clear. As he sprang to his feet he was aware of the other men attacking him. There was a sound of shots and the familiar acrid smell of powder, but he felt no pain and as the shock-headed fellow came at him, a short arm blow under the chin sent him reeling against a tree where he crumpled and fell.

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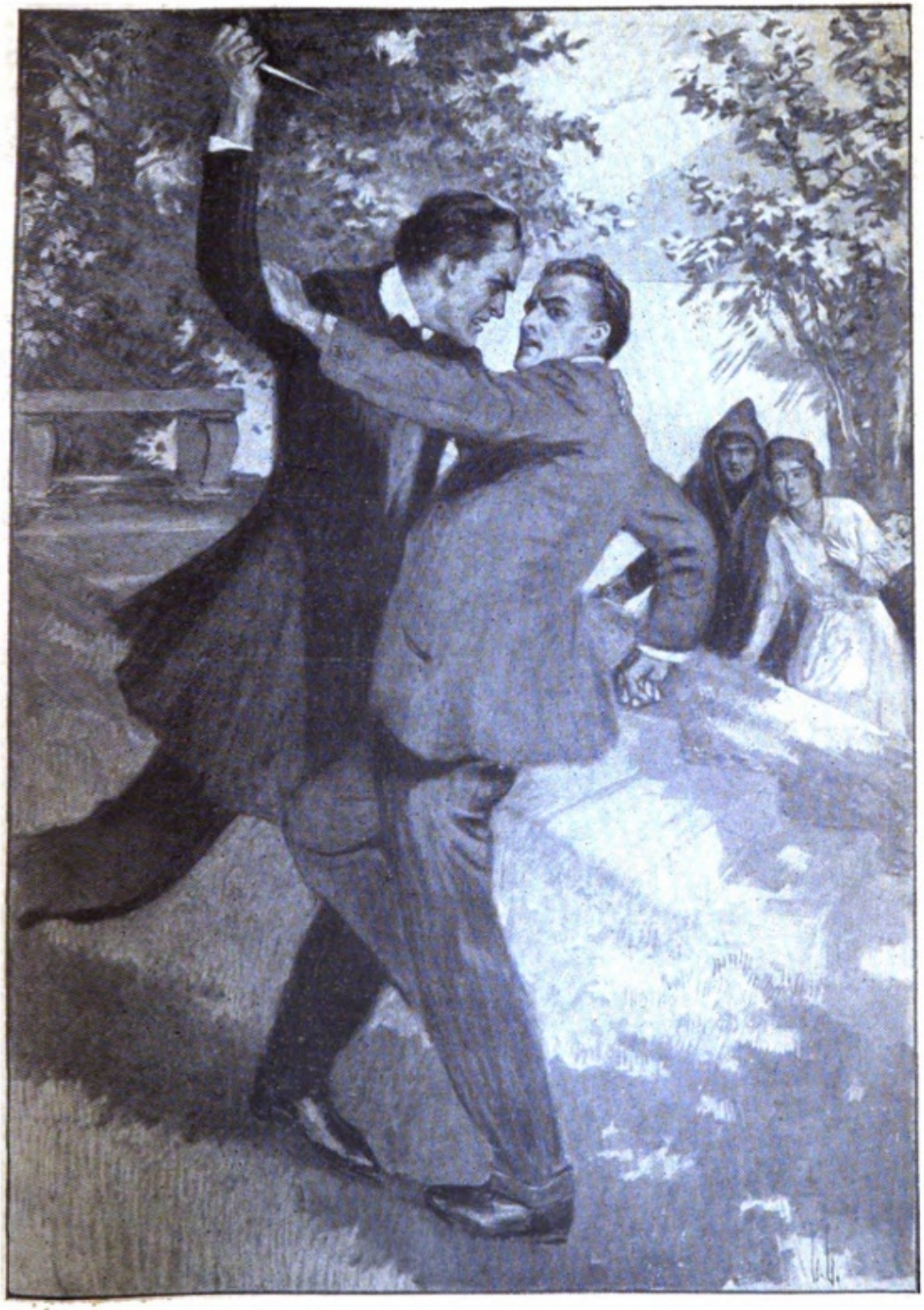

The American caught the glint of sunlight on a weapon.

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As he turned again to meet Ivanitch he had a vision of Tanya with arm upraised and heard her clear voice above the tumult.

"Picard! Issad! Stop! I command you!" And then, "Kirylo! Monsieur Rowlan'! It is madness."

Madness it was, but none of Phil Rowland's choosing. They had fought to a point just below the mound of earth on which he had first seen Tanya by the tree and it was at the foot of the steps that Ivanitch again rushed at him. Rowland's blow staggered him but he came on furiously, and as the arm of the Russian went high over his head, the American caught the glint of sunlight on a weapon and threw up his arm, catching the force of the blow upon his elbow. But he felt a stinging pain in his shoulder and clutched the man's arm as he raised it to strike again. Up the slope of the mound they struggled, breathlessly intent, the one to murder, the other to save himself. Rowland fought coolly now, grimly, smiling as a soldier of the Legion must, aware that only as long as the threatening right arm of the Russian was pinioned was he safe from the treacherous knife. But it was right arm against left and too close to strike. Rowland avoided the stone bench toward which the Russian had forced him, and twisting suddenly freed his right arm and struck the Russian a fearful blow in the body. He felt the arm of Ivanitch relax and in a second had torn the weapon from his clasp and sent it flying into the bushes. Ivanitch came at him again—and again Rowland struck—each time with greater precision. Ivanitch rushed him against the tree, a branch of which was torn off in Rowland's hand.

He heard a cry behind him and a whimper as of an animal in pain from Ivanitch. "The Bough!" he cried.

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"The Bough!" But as he came on again, Rowland stepped aside and hit him as he passed. The Russian staggered sideways, his head striking the stone bench, rolled down the slope of the mound and lay still.

The American slowly straightened and glanced around him. A sudden silence had fallen. At the foot of the steps stood Tanya Korasov, a revolver in her hand and beside her the scarecrow in black, and the two others, inert, horrified. Rowland breathing hard from his exertions stared stupidly at the misshapen bundle of clothing at the foot of the slope and then down at the branch of the tree which he still held in his hand.

"The Bough!" the shock-headed man muttered in an awed whisper, "the Golden Bough!"

Rowland raised the branch of the tree, looked at it curiously and then dropped it to the ground.

"You saw?——" he gasped to the motionless group below. "You saw? He attacked me. It was self-defense. It was not my fault."

Tanya Korasov had rushed to the sprawling figure in the Prince Albert coat, lifted its head, and then recoiled in horror, her face hidden in her hands.

"You saw," Rowland repeated as he came toward them, "all of you—it was self-defense."

They drew back as he came down the steps but made no effort to molest him.

"The Golden Bough!" the shock-headed man said again. And another, "It is broken."

It was no time for such gibberish. Rowland turned them a scornful shoulder and went over to the girl beside the motionless black figure.

To the question in his eyes the girl's eyes replied.

"He is—dead," she whispered.

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And then looked up at Rowland, gaze wide and lips parted.

"And you——"

If there was horror, there was no reproach in her tone. Her attitude was more one of consternation and surprise.

"And you,—Monsieur Rowlan'," she whispered in an awed tone. "It is you who are——"

And then she stopped as though frozen suddenly into immobility and silence.

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CHAPTER IV

TANYA

AND while he stood, still bewildered by the awed tone and startled air of the girl, he saw that the three men had come forward and had taken position in a group beside him. He glanced at them, at once upon the defensive, but was quickly reassured by their passive appearance and attitude, for they stood with heads bowed, like mourners at the grave of a departed friend—with this difference, that their eyes, oblivious of the figure upon the turf, were turned upon Rowland, gazing expectantly, in an awe like Tanya's, but unlike hers, intimidated, respectful, and obedient. Rowland felt like laughing in their faces, but the figure in the Prince Albert coat upon the ground reminded him that the mystery behind this fantastic tragedy was at least worthy of consideration. Whatever the aims of this strange company and however tawdry the means by which they accomplished them, the fact remained that here at his feet lay Kirylo Ivanitch, dead because of his convictions.

With increasing bewilderment he stared at Tanya and again at the others.

"What do you mean, Mademoiselle?" he asked. "I don't understand."

Her reply mystified him further.

"The Visconti!" she stammered. "You know the name?"

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"Visconti, yes. It was the name of my Italian mother."

At this reply Tanya started to her feet and behind him he heard the murmur of excitement.

"Speak, Mademoiselle," said Rowland. "What's this mystery?"

Tanya put her fingers to her brows a moment.

"Something very strange has happened, Monsieur Rowlan'," she said with difficulty. "Something long predicted—promises written in the legends of Nemi for hundreds of years and it is—it is you, Monsieur, who have fulfilled them."

"I!" he asked in surprise. "How?"

"That the Visconti should again become the heads of our order."

"What order?"

"The Order of the Priesthood of Nemi."

"Priesthood! I?" Rowland grinned unsympathetically at the solemn faces, which were mocking at his common sense, his appreciation of the ridiculous which from the first had held in good-humored contempt the signs of mediæval flummery.

"You, Monsieur," said the man in the cowl, whom they called Issad. "There is no doubt. It is written."

"I've not written it," said Rowland contemptuously.

"The Priest of Nemi—you have broken the Golden Bough," put in the shock-headed man.

"Oh, I see. I broke your silly tree. I'm sorry."

"Sorry!" whispered Issad, pointing to the dead man. "It is he who should be sorry."

"I've no doubt he is," muttered Rowland, "but he brought this on himself."

"That is true," said the third man eagerly, the one Tanya had called Picard. "We are all witnesses to it."

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Rowland frowned at the man.

"Then will you tell me what the devil you meant by shooting a pistol at me?" cried Rowland angrily.

Picard hung his head.

"It was he who was the Priest of Nemi—while he lived, our oath, our allegiance——"

"Ah, I see," put in Rowland, "and now the water is on the other shoulder."

He shrugged and as he did so was aware of a sharp pain where the knife of Ivanitch had struck him, and from the fingers of his left hand he saw that blood was dripping.

Tanya, who had stood silent during this conversation, came forward, touching his arm.

"Monsieur is wounded," she said gently. "You must come——"

Rowland impersonally examined the blood at his finger tips.

"If you wish to call the Gendarmes——" he began coolly.

"Gendarmes!" broke out Picard excitedly, "No, Monsieur. There must be no police here. Nemi settles its own affairs."

Rowland glanced at the fellow. He was not hostile, but desperately in earnest, and the faces of the two other men reflected his seriousness. Tanya Korasov was silent, but into her face had come new lines of decision.

"If you will go into the house, Monsieur," she said quietly, "I will bind your wound and perhaps give you a reason why the police should not be called to Nemi."

Her suggestion reminded him that the wounded shoulder was now tingling unpleasantly, and so, with a glance at the others, who seemed eagerly to assent to his departure,

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Rowland nodded and followed the girl toward the house.

A while ago the strange actions of this fantastic household had keenly amused him, for Rowland was a product of an unimaginative age, a Nomad of the Cities, bent upon a great errand which had nothing to do with priesthoods. But now the startling sequence of events, culminating in the mention of his mother's name and the death of Ivanitch had made him aware that the arm of coincidence was long, or that Destiny was playing a hand with so sure an intention that he, Phil Rowland, for all his materialism, must accept the facts and what came of them. Destiny! Perhaps. For a year Rowland had believed it his destiny to be killed in battle, instead of which he had lived the life of a dog in a prison camp, and escaped into freedom. But a priest of a secret order, ordained twenty-seven years ago when in the smug security of the orderly Rowland house in West Fifty-ninth Street, he had been born—the thing was unthinkable! But there before him, treading soberly, her slender figure clad in a modish frock which must have come from the Rue de la Paix, was Tanya; and there behind him, in the arms of Picard, Issad and the shock-headed man, was the dead Ivanitch, in token that the prediction of the legends of Nemi had been fulfilled.

He followed the girl into the house and upstairs, where she helped him remove his coat and shirt and bathed and anointed the slight cut in his shoulder. If in his mind he was uncertain as to the judgment of the Twentieth Century upon his extraordinary adventure, he was very sure that Tanya Korasov at least was very real, her fingers very soft, her touch brave, and her expressions of solicitude very genuine. And it was sufficient for Rowland to believe that an intelligence such as that which burned

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behind her fine level brows, could not be guilty of the worship of false gods. Intelligent, sane and feminine to her finger tips. . . . The sanity of Tanya more even than the madness of Ivanitch gave credence to the story that she was to tell him. . . .

"Thanks, Mademoiselle," he said gently, when she had finished. "You are very good, to one who has brought so much trouble and distress upon you."

She looked up at him quickly and then away, while into her eyes came a rapt expression as that of one who sees a vision.

"Distress!" she said listlessly, and then slowly, "No, it is not that. Monsieur Ivanitch was nothing to me. But Death—such a death can be nothing less—than horrible."

Her lip trembled, she shuddered a little and he saw that a reaction had set in. She rose to hide her weakness and walked the length of the room.

"Forgive me. I should have gone last night——"

"No, no," she said hysterically. "You can bear no blame—nor I. He attacked you yonder. You had to defend yourself——"

She broke off, clasping her hands and turning away from him.

"How could I have known that you were—that you . . . I thought it mere timidity, nervousness on his part—fear born of the danger that had so long hung over him—I knew the legend of Nemi. But Monsieur——" she threw out her arms wildly—"I—I am no dreamer of dreams, no mystic, no fanatic. I have never believed that such strange things could come to pass. But Kirylo Ivanitch had a vision. You were Death! You were stalking him there and he knew——" She laughed hys-

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terically and turned away from him again. "You see, Monsieur, I—I am not quite myself."

Rowland glanced at her steadily a moment and then quickly went to the cupboard where last night she had found the jug of Chartreuse, and pouring her out a glass, carried it to where she stood struggling with herself at the window.

"Drink!" he said sternly. "It will quiet you."

She glanced at the glass, then at him and obeyed.

"Do not speak now," he urged quietly. "Wait until you feel better."

"No, I am well again. I must speak at once. I must tell you all. It is your right to know." She sank resolutely into the chair before him and leaned forward, her hands clasped over her knees, her gaze fixed on the empty hearth.

"Monsieur Ivanitch was—was my compatriot, Monsieur Rowlan'—that is all. I was sent here to him three years ago to help in the great cause to which I have given my life."

"Your parents, Mademoiselle?" broke in Rowland eagerly.

She moved a hand as though to eliminate all things that pertained to herself.

"It does not matter what I am, so long as you know that I am a Russian sworn to bring Russia's freedom from those who seek to work her ruin."

"And Ivanitch——?"

"A Russian born—an exile, a zealot, a possible tool in the hands of those more dangerous than he."

"Mademoiselle. There are others——?"

"Listen, Monsieur. I must begin at the beginning or

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you will not understand, what my task has been, and what—God willing—you will help me to do."

"I?"

"You, Monsieur."

Rowland was silent, looking at her, sure now of a deeper import to her meaning.

"If there is anything I can do to help Russia, to help France here, you may count upon me," he said quietly.

He might have added to help Tanya Korasov, but something warned him that a hidden fire within her had burst into a flame, which burned out all lesser ones.

Her fine eyes regarded him steadily in a moment of intense appraisal, and then she went on.

"The origin of the Priesthood of Nemi, Monsieur," she said, "is lost in the mazes of antiquity. According to one story, the priesthood began with the worship of Diana, at Nemi, near Rome, and was instituted by Orestes, who fled to Italy. Within the sanctuary at Nemi there grew a certain tree of which no branch might be broken. Only a runaway slave was allowed to break off, if he could, one of its boughs——"

"A runaway slave," he smiled. "Then I——"

She nodded. "You may think it fantastic, but that was what Monsieur Ivanitch feared when he learned last night what you were. And I——" she stopped again. "I could not believe that such things were possible——"

"They aren't," said Rowland, quietly.

His quiet voice steadied her.

"It is a strange tale," she said with a slow smile, "but you must hear it all. Only a runaway slave who succeeded in reaching the Golden Bough and broke it was entitled to challenge the Priest in single combat. If he

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—killed him, he reigned in the place of the priest, King of the Wood——"

"REX NEMORENSIS——" muttered Rowland.

"You've heard?"

"I read it—there," pointing to the pedestal. And as he looked, the meaning of the double bust came to him, the anguished face of the older man and the frowning face of the youth who was to take his place.

"He was afraid of me," he said. "I understand."

"The legend tells that the Golden Bough," she went on quickly, "was that which at the Sybil's bidding Æneas plucked before he visited the world of the dead, the flight of the slave was the flight of Orestes, his combat with the priest, a relic of the human sacrifices once offered to the Tauric Diana. A rule of succession by the sword which was observed down to imperial times——"

"A ghastly succession—and Ivanitch——?" he questioned.

She frowned and bent forward, her chin cupped in a hand.

"No one knows of his succession—or no one will tell. It was said that when he returned from Siberia, he killed the man who had sent him there."

"A pretty business," said Rowland, rising. "But I did not kill Kirylo Ivanitch——" he protested. "It was he himself who——" He paused and stared at Tanya thoughtfully.

"You can not deny that if he had not attacked you, he would be here, alive—now."

"That is true, perhaps. But murder—assassination ——" He stopped and smiled grimly.

"Mademoiselle Korasov, I'm a soldier and have seen blood shed in a righteous cause. I kill a strange German

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in a trench because there is not room for us both, and because I am trained to kill as a duty I owe to France. But this——" he waved his hand toward the garden—"this is a brawl. A man attacks me. I defend myself—I strike him with my fists when I might have plunged his own knife into his heart. You saw me—I threw his knife away and fought as we do in my own country, with my hands. If he falls and strikes his head upon a stone——"

He broke off with a shrug.

"Whatever your rights, and I bear witness to them—nevertheless, Monsieur—justified as you are in our eyes and your own conscience, it was you who killed Kirylo Ivanitch."

He stared at her for a moment. Her brows were drawn, but her eyes peered beyond him, as though only herself saw with a true vision. No fanatic—no dreamer? Then what was behind her thoughts—the ones she had not uttered?

"The man is dead," he mumbled. "If I am guilty of his death, I want a court, a judge. I will abide by the law——"

But Tanya was slowly shaking her head.

"There shall be no Court, no Judges but those of Nemi. We saw—we know. There shall be no inquiry. Nemi shall bury its own dead, and you, Monsieur——"

"And I?" he asked as she paused.

"You, Monsieur Rowlan', shall be the Head of the Order of Nemi."

"But, Mademoiselle! You don't understand. I am a part of the Armies of Republican France—a part of the great machinery—a small part, lost but now restored

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to go on with the great task, a free world has set itself to do."

"A great task!" The girl had risen now and caught him by the arm with a grasp that seemed to try to burn its meaning into his very bones. And her voice, sunk to a whisper, came to his ears with tragic clearness. "There's a greater task for you here—Monsieur. A task that will take greater courage than facing the grenades of the trenches, a task that will take more than courage, —a task only for one of skill, intelligence and great daring. Is it danger that you seek? You will find it here—a danger that will lurk with you always, an insidious threat that will be most dangerous when least anticipated. There are others, Monsieur Rowlan', who may be taught to shoot from the trenches, but there is another destiny for you, a great destiny—to do for the world what half a million of armed men have it not within their power to do. It is here—that destiny—here at Nemi and the weapons shall be forged in your brain, Monsieur, subtle weapons, keen ones, subtler and keener than those of the enemies who will be all about you—your enemies, but more important than that—the enemies of France, or Russia, England and all the free peoples of the Earth——"

She had seemed inspired and her eager eyes, raised to his, burned with a gorgeous fire.

"Germany!" he whispered. "Here?"

"Here—everywhere. They plot—they plan, they seek control—to put men in high places where the cause of Junkerism may be served——"

"But they cannot!"

"I have not told you all. Listen!" She released his arm and sat. "You have misjudged us here. To your Western eyes we were mere actors in a morbid comedy

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of our own choqsing, masqueraders, or fanatics, pursuing our foolish ritual in a sort of mild frenzy of self-absorption. But Nemi means something more than that. It reaches back beyond ancient Rome, comes down through the ages, through Italy, the Holy Roman Empire, through France, Germany and Russia, a secret society, the oldest in the history of the world, and the most powerful, with tentacles reaching into the politics of Free Masonry, of Socialism, of Nihilism, of Maximalism. The society of Nemi, an international society, with leaders in every party, a hidden giant with a hundred groping arms which only need a brain to actuate them all to one purpose."

She paused a moment, her hand at her heart, while she caught her breath. "And that purpose—Monsieur Rowlan'—the saving of the world from autocracy!" she said impressively.

He did not dare smile at her for her revelations were astounding, and in spite of himself all that was venturesome in his spirit had caught of her fire. The rapidity of her utterance and the nature of her disclosures for a moment struck him dumb. How much of this story that she told him was true, and how much born in the brain of the dead Ivanitch? A secret society with ramifications throughout Europe—a power which might pass into the hands of the enemies of France. Rowland was not dull, and clear thinking was slowly driving away the mists of illusion, leaving before him the plain facts of his extraordinary situation.

"I am no believer in mysticism, Mademoiselle Korasov," he said at last, smiling, "nor in a destiny written before I was born. What you tell of the history of Nemi is interesting, what you say of the Visconti very strange, startlingly so, but I am the product of an age of material-

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ism. This drama was born and developed in the brain of a dreamer and zealot. Don't you see? A strange coincidence unhinged him. He attacked me as he might have attacked any other escaping prisoner——"

"But all escaping prisoners are not of the Visconti ——" she said.

He shrugged and smiled. "I still think you more than half believe in all this——" he hesitated a moment, and then with cool distinctness, "this fol-de-rol."

She glanced up quickly and rose.

"Listen, Monsieur," she said soberly, "you may believe what you please of the legends of Nemi, but you cannot deny the material facts as to its influence. There are documents here which will prove to you that what I say is true. Members of the Order of Nemi are high in the Councils of the Great—its power is limitless for evil or for good in the world. Whether you believe in it or not, you are its Leader, in accordance with its strange laws of succession, which have come down through the ages, and you are recognized as such by those others yonder, and will be recognized by others who will come. Its High Priest——"

Rowland's gesture of impatience made her pause.

"I'm no Priest——" he laughed.

"Call yourself what you like, then," she cried. "It does not matter. But think, Monsieur, of what I am telling you. An opportunity—power, international leadership, and a goal,—the freedom of Europe! Oh, is not that a career worthy of the ambition of any man on the earth! And you quibble at the sound of a name!"

Her tone was almost contemptuous. She had walked to the window and stood there trembling—he paused a moment and then walked over to her.

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"I haven't denied you, Mademoiselle. I've merely refused to believe in the supernatural. Call my presence here a coincidence, the death of Kirylo Ivanitch by its true name, an act of involuntary man-slaughter and I will do whatever you like—if I can serve France better here than on the battle-line."

She flashed around on him and clasped his hand.

"You mean it?"

"I do. If I can help you here, I will act whatever part you please."

"At once? There is no time to lose."

"I shall obey you."

"No. It is I who must obey you—and they—Picard, Issad, Stepan, Margot—but more than these—Shestov, Madame Rochal, Signorina Colodna, and Liederman——"

"Who are these?"

"Members of the Order. Councilors who will come to you—to give advice and to take it."

He smiled.

"Ah, I see. They are coming here soon?"

She nodded.

"A council has been called—the members may reach here today. You will meet them?"

"Have I not told you that I will do what I can? But I must know their nationalities, their purposes——"

"Oh, I shall tell you all that—and warn you. Remember, Monsieur, you are the Leader of Nemi——"

"And as such," he grinned, "subject to sacrifice upon the altar of your precious Priesthood——"

She touched the back of his hand lightly with her fingers.

"Sh——! Monsieur. It is no laughing matter. And there are those I must warn you against." Her eyes

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stared widely past him from under tangled brows. "Two whom you must fear—of finesse, craft and intelligence—a woman without a conscience and a man without a soul——"

"Ah, you interest me. A woman! Their names——"

Before Tanya Korasov could reply, there was a knock upon the door which was pushed quickly open and the shock-headed man entered.

"What is it, Stepan?" asked the girl.

"Monsieur Khodkine has just come in at the gate, Mademoiselle," he said in French.

Rowland saw the girl start and felt her fingers close upon his arm.

"Ah, Stepan," she said quietly, "tell him to come here, and bring Issad and Picard."

And when Stepan had gone, "It is one of those whom I have spoken, Monsieur Rowlan'," she stammered. "Be upon your guard, Monsieur—and keep this paper, committing to memory the names and figures upon it."

Rowland opened the slip of paper curiously and it bore this inscription:

"*Droite 72 Gauche 23 Droite 7.*"

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CHAPTER V

KHODKINE

WAS it imagination that gave him the idea that the manner of Tanya Korasov betrayed a sudden inquietude at the mention of the name of the newcomer? He was sure that the fingers which touched his sleeve in warning were trembling as she glanced wide-eyed toward the door into the garden by which Monsieur Khodkine would enter. Who was this visitor, and what his mission, what his power, what his authority?

Stepan threw the door open and stood aside, bowing as the visitor entered, followed by Issad and Picard. He was tall and well built, with blonde hair brushed straight back from a broad fine brow, below which steel-blue eyes appraised the room and its occupants. His nose was straight and well chiseled, and his small brown mustache carefully groomed, defined rather than concealed the straight firm line of his rather red lips, which parted slightly as he saw the figure of Rowland before him. His glance met the American's, hovered a second and passed to Tanya, who had risen and stood mute and expectant.

The Russian crossed the room quickly to the girl, and taking the fingers she extended, bowed over them and pressed them to his lips.

"Tatyana!" he said in French, with a deep and pleasant voice. "The days have sped into weeks, the weeks into months, since I have seen you——"

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"Grisha Khodkine, you are welcome!" said the girl, withdrawing her hand, and as the Russian straightened, turned toward the American whom she indicated with a graceful gesture. "You are to meet a—a visitor to Nemi, Monsieur. Permit me to present Monsieur Rowlan'."

The Russian straightened and his clear and slightly surprised gaze passed impudently over the American's ill-fitting clothing from head to foot. Rowland had a sense that it was the garments which Monsieur Khodkine noted, not the man within them, and had a feeling of being still further ignored when the Russian, after the slightest inclination of the head, which indeed had seemed a part of his cursory inspection, turned again quickly to Tanya.

"Where is Kirylo Ivanitch?" he asked.

The girl leaned with one hand upon the table, her gaze upon the floor. Her voice trembled a little as she replied.

"Kirylo Ivanitch is—is dead."

Khodkine started violently.

"Dead! Ivanitch——!" He turned a quick look at Stepan and at Rowland. "When did this happen?" he questioned eagerly. "And who——?"

His look as though impelled returned to Rowland, who had picked up one of the cigarettes of Monsieur Ivanitch from the table and was now lighting it, very much at his ease. Rowland made no reply, and Tanya, with a gesture of her extended fingers:

"It happened but just now,—this morning, Grisha Khodkine," she said. "For some days Kirylo Ivanitch had been distraught with nerves, in a kind of strange fit of uncertainty. He was frightened. . . . He bade us keep watch upon the Tree and what lies below it day and

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night. And to humor him we obeyed. We did not know what was to happen—something strange, Grisha Khodkine——"

As she paused the Russian looked from one to the other in astonishment and mystification.

"Dead!—but how? What happened?"

"This morning," the girl went on, choosing her words carefully, "he attacked Monsieur Rowlan', in the garden, as he was leaving Nemi. Monsieur Rowlan' defended himself, and struck—struck——" Tanya hid her face in her hands, trembling.

"Go on——" said the Russian.

"There is little else to tell," said the girl, raising her pallid face from her hands, "Kirylo fell—He is—dead!"

Khodkine's gaze sought the eyes of the other men in confirmation.

"It is the truth, Monsieur," muttered Picard. "We saw. It was a fair combat. But it was written—what happened!"

Monsieur Khodkine's look passed slowly from one to the other and at last rested on Rowland, who met his glance calmly, soberly, without deference—but without defiance.

"He tried to kill me, Monsieur," he said quietly, "he was dangerous, and so——" He shrugged. "What would you? He fell and his head struck a stone——"

The Russian stared a moment.

"Then you——" He paused.

Rowland smiled a little.

"It seems, Monsieur," he said coolly, "that I am your new Priest of Nemi."

There was a long silence during which the Russian stared at Rowland more intently as though correcting a

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former and mistaken impression. At last he took a pace forward and the eyes of the two men met.

"You—you knew?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Rowland.

"And now——?"

The American shrugged but Picard broke in eagerly: "All the conditions have been fulfilled, Monsieur Khodkine —all from the first to the last——"

And while Rowland stood silent, in good-humored contempt, the Frenchman told all that had happened, including the American's escape from imprisonment and the breaking of the Bough. Rowland keenly watched all the actors in this drama, the zealous sincerity of the excitable Frenchman, the mystic absorption of Stepan, the fixed burning gaze of Issad, sure that those who played the minor parts were committed beyond question to a strict interpretation of the symbols of the order. Tanya, the color coming slowly into her cheeks, answered briefly and clearly the questions that were put to her. If there had been restraint in her acceptance of this successor to Ivanitch, or wonder at the strange chain of facts which linked this matter-of-fact American with the destinies of Nemi, she spoke now with an air of definite assurance and fatalism which went far to convince Rowland that if she were not sincere in her beliefs she was playing a skillful part which warned him how deeply he too was committed to his strange new office. But it was Monsieur Khodkine that Rowland watched the closest. From an expression of consternation the face of the Russian settled into a frowning inquiry and then as his glance and Rowland's met, into a mask-like immobility which revealed nothing of his own state of mind. As one by one the facts were revealed to him, his voice became more quiet,

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his manner more suave, while he nodded his head in solemn deliberation. The phrases he used were theirs, the jargon of mysticism, and yet to Rowland, the man of the world, this change of tone and demeanor failed to comport with the very obvious air of modernity and materialism which Monsieur Khodkine had brought in with him from the world outside.

"The Bough—broken," Khodkine was muttering, "an escaped prisoner of the Germans,—a slave surely! And the combat—either one may challenge. . . . The Visconti. . . . There seems no doubt. Yes—it is strange. You say that Monsieur Rowland did not know the tradition . . . ?"

"Not until after Kirylo Ivanitch was dead," said Tanya calmly. "I told him."

"It is most extraordinary," repeated Khodkine, turning to Rowland with level brows. "An act of Destiny, striking as with the hand of God from out of the mists of the Eternal ages. But it is a sign too definite to be ignored—an act of Revelation and a Prophecy."

The words were spoken soberly, with an air of rapt introspection, but Rowland missed nothing of the alert intelligence of Monsieur Khodkine's pale blue eyes, keen and observing, which unlike Issad, the dreamer's, fairly blazed with objectivity.

The impression that Monsieur Khodkine was playing a part, became more definite. He acted a little too well. The talk of mysticism and destiny fell a little too glibly from his lips to be quite in keeping with Rowland's reading of his character, which made the Russian out to be a politician of an advanced type, a doctrinaire perhaps, but an intriguer with a definite and perhaps sordid purpose, who had come expecting to find the dreamer

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Ivanitch, and instead had found a heretic and an unbeliever. But under this skillful camouflage of mere words, which though they may have meant much to Issad, Stepan and Picard, conveyed nothing to Rowland, he hid his disappointment well, and when all questions had been answered, he went and viewed the dead Ivanitch and agreed as the others had done to an immediate interment of the body.

Through it all Rowland had said little, reading in the quick furtive glances of the girl Tanya a silent petition to accede in these arrangements, and so when the orders had been given Rowland returned with Monsieur Khodkine to the room on the lower floor where Tanya, after a warning glance which Rowland interpreted and answered, left the two men to their own devices. Rowland, now fully aware that he was to deal with a man of no ordinary ability, took a leaf from Monsieur Khodkine's book and fairly met him at his own game.

"An American, Monsieur!" began the Russian, after they had lighted their cigarettes. "It is indeed a far cry from the 'white lights' of Broadway to the Priesthood of Nemi——"

"Ah, you know New York?" asked Rowland.

"I have been there. An extraordinary city—a wonderful people—intensely practical. But you are no nation of dreamers, Monsieur."

"Upon the contrary," replied Rowland, politely. "Were we not dreamers—we should long since have finished disastrously our experiment in individualism. Like you in Russia we dream, Monsieur, but unlike you, our dreams come true."

Khodkine gazed at Rowland with a new interest. Was this smiling American less stupid than he looked?

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"Individualism! Yes. You are even slaves to liberty, which has made you the mere creatures of your own desires."

"You are a monarchist, Monsieur Khodkine?" asked Rowland, with an innocent gaze.

"May the good God forbid!" cried Khodkine abruptly. "I am a Russian, of the heart of Russia which throbs with the pulse-beats of humanity. The Czar has fallen, but the era of absolutism in Russia is not yet over."

Rowland shifted his knees and fixed a cool look of inquiry upon Khodkine.

"I am only a soldier, Monsieur," he said. "For a year I have been in a prison camp. As you must see, I am vastly ignorant of what is going on in the world."

"Then you must know that my country has changed in nothing but a name. Instead of monarchy we have oligarchy—a band of men bent upon usurping the rights of the people. The people of Russia are drunk with freedom and accept the new order of things because they think it is what they have long fought for. But the men now in power in the Provisional Government are not to be trusted—capitalists, bureaucrats, the enemies of——"

"You are a Socialist Democrat, then, Monsieur?" put in Rowland.

"A friend of Russia's freedom—call me by whatever name you please."

Khodkine shrugged and blew a cloud of smoke.

"You mean that there are still those in power who are in sympathy with Germany?" asked Rowland.

Khodkine rose and walked the length of the room while Rowland watched him keenly.

"What else? Is it not clear to you?"

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"I am perhaps dull, Monsieur," said Rowland, vacuously. "Rasputin is dead. The Czarina has gone. In them you will admit the fountain heads of German intrigue have been destroyed."

"Diverted, let us say, Monsieur—upon the surface. But the evil stream still flows—secretly, below the ground, to appear in high places where least expected."

Rowland rose and threw his cigarette into the hearth.

"I have no doubt that what you say is true, Monsieur Khodkine. I am not wise. If I am to be of service here"—Rowland paused significantly, until he found Khodkine's gaze—"if I am to be of service here, I must trust myself into the hands of those who have a deeper insight into the politics of Europe than myself. I have promised Mademoiselle Korasov to stay at Nemi and do what I can. I would like to help." He paused again and then, with an air of frankness: "Perhaps, Monsieur Khodkine, I could do no better than to entrust myself into your hands."

Khodkine turned half toward him, his fine white teeth showing in a smile and then thrust forth a hand in confirmation.

"Can it be that you will trust me?"

"Implicitly."

Khodkine's pale eyes glowed with purpose.

"Ah, that is good, Monsieur Rowlan'. It seems that the hand which guides the destiny of Nemi is still unerring." And then more quietly, "You know what power is yours to command?"

"Mademoiselle Korasov has told me something,—but with skillful advisers——"

"All will be well, Monsieur. But you will have many advisers. They are coming here today, but you must

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select the wheat from the chaff. I shall tell you whom to trust. Russia must be born again. You shall help her in the pains of birth—save her from the malevolent hands which threaten to throttle her in the very act of being."

"It is a great destiny you plan, Monsieur. The society of Nemi may be powerful, but I can hardly believe that such a powerful autocracy as Germany——"

"Tst—Monsieur! You have heard some of the rumblings in the Reichstag. Liebknecht the elder blazed the way. His son has followed——"

"Oh, yes, Liebknecht. I've heard——"

"Only the military might of Germany holds the nation intact, but even in its might it trembles. Nemi is strong in Germany. In many regiments the socialists have revolted and in the navy—mutiny. Those men realize that there is a force let loose into the world, before which the selfish aims of the rulers of the countries of the earth are as chaff in the wind. Not one nation shall rule, or several, but all—Monsieur. All! Internationalism—! Do you know what that means?"

And as Rowland remained silent, as though in deep thought, Khodkine threw his long arms out in a wide gesture.

"You shall see. The time comes soon——"

"And you will help me, Monsieur?" Rowland asked urbanely.

"With all my heart and intelligence."

Khodkine smiled and the two men clasped hands. Monsieur Khodkine's hands were very white and as smooth as a woman's, but there was strength in the sinew beneath. Internationalism! A fine word! which might mean anything. . . . If this man were Rowland's enemy, at least

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he should not start with any advantage. The new Leader of Nemi was learning, still moving in the dark, for the names of those who had come into power in Russia, Lvoff, Rodzianko—and the others had seemed to stand for all that was best in the interests of free government. And so he had led Monsieur Khodkine out, that he might inspect, in profile, as it were, the motives which underlay his politics. As yet nothing definite—only a suspicion. As to the sincerity of his beliefs in the ritual of Nemi, Rowland was soon enlightened.

"You are a practical man, Monsieur Rowland," Khodkine went on easily. "You are no doubt mystified by the curious sequence of events which have brought you here to Nemi, as titular head of this great and secret order. But I too am a practical man, and I will be frank with you. I care nothing for symbols. Whatever the society of Nemi is in the minds of its legion of followers, to me it is merely a means to a great end—the safety and peace of all Europe. The fulfillment of the promises of the legend is extraordinary—almost incredible, but neither you nor I as men of the world can believe that it comes from any supernatural agency. Kirylo Ivanitch was immolated upon the altar of his own fears, a sacrifice to his own superstition. He killed the Priest who preceded him. For years his Nemesis, a true Nemesis, my friend, has pursued him. But you, Monsieur, must permit no such doubts to poison your usefulness."

"Why should I," laughed Rowland. "A man attacks me, stabs me with a knife. If he is killed, is it my fault? My conscience is clear."

"Good. Then we understand each other." He broke off with a shrug.

"As to the ritual of Nemi. There is a strength in

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mysticism, a fact which the vile Rasputin was not long in finding out. A little ceremonial does no harm and you, Monsieur, must play your part with skill and some caution."

"By all means," said Rowland, with a laugh. "Until the new priest of Nemi shall find me out. Then at least I assure you that I shall not stand on ceremony."

"Ah, as to that, you may reassure yourself," said Khodkine, easily. "A Miracle such as this may sometime happen by chance, but not twice in one generation."

"At least," Rowland concluded cheerfully, "you may be sure that I am not afraid."

"Perhaps it is well that we have a soldier at Nemi," said Khodkine with a smile. And then after a pause—"Tell me, Monsieur. Did Mademoiselle Korasov commit to your keeping any documents—any papers?"

"None," lied Rowland coolly. "As you know, this affair has happened so recently——"

"There were no papers found upon the body of Monsieur Ivanitch?"

"If they have not been removed by Issad or Stepan, they should be upon his body now."

"Ah! I will inquire." And getting up quickly, Monsieur Khodkine made his way out of the room in the direction of the adjoining apartment.

Tanya, a warning finger to her lips, joined Rowland immediately. It seemed that she must have been near the door, waiting for the chance to speak with him alone.

"You were careful?" she asked.

"As careful as a person may be who walks on a floor carpeted with egg-shells," said Rowland with a smile.

"He asked if I had told you anything, given you anything?"

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Rowland nodded.

"He has gone to search the body," he said.

"For the paper I gave you," whispered Tanya. "I found it in the pocket-book of Kirylo Ivanitch. I took it—there in the garden as I knelt beside him. You have committed it to memory?"

"Yes. *Droite 72 Gauche 23 Droite 7*——"

"Sh—! You can remember it?"

"Yes."

"Then destroy it quickly."

Rowland struck a match, lighted the scrap of paper and threw it into the hearth. She went toward the door, stood in a tense moment of listening and then quickly returned.

"Do not trust him, Monsieur, and be upon your guard against him always. For the present nothing more. I shall contrive to meet you tonight."

She walked to the chair which Monsieur Khodkine had left and motioned Rowland to another, and then raising her voice, spoke easily in a conversational tone of the members of the Council who were to join them later in the day. A few moments later Monsieur Khodkine, his brows troubled in thought, came into the room.

"You found nothing?" asked Tanya.

"His watch, the talisman, some keys, a little money. Nothing else."

"What was it you were looking for, Monsieur?" enquired Rowland.

Khodkine glanced at Tanya and shrugged.

"A memorandum—it does not matter."

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CHAPTER VI

ZOYA

DURING the afternoon other members of the Council of Nemi reached the village and arrived at the gate in the wall where Issad, clad in his dark robes and sensible of his own importance, greeted them with all solemnity and conducted them to the house where Tanya Korasov, Khodkine and Rowland received them. First, Shestov, who was blonde, bald and slightly pock-marked, with a long neck consisting mostly of tendons and Adam's apple. Shestov spoke French with a thickness of tongue which gave the impression of a being constantly under the influence of liquor,—a mere impediment of the speech, for as Rowland afterward discovered, no spirits of any kind had ever passed his lips. Then came Liederman and Mademoiselle Colodna. Liederman was heavy, Hebraic and noisy; Irina Colodna silent, abstracted and intense; Monsieur Barthou, mild mannered, quiet but eager, his sandy hair cropped short, his little red-rimmed eyes magnified many fold behind his enormous goggles. And lastly Madame Rochal.

If internationalism was the keynote of Monsieur Khodkine's politics, the term might in a general way be applied to the curious and striking personality of Madame Rochal, for she reflected such an intense cosmopolitanism that it was at first difficult to identify her with any nation of Europe. Her name might have been French,

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Russian or Spanish, and her gown might have come from Paris or Vienna. She spoke all languages, French, German, Russian, English with equal facility, each it seemed with a slight accent or tinge of the others, but without preference or favor. Her eyes, set a little obliquely in her head, were of the night, dark and unfathomable, and her hair, black with a faint green-violet gloss, was folded back at each side over her ears like the two wings of a raven. She was jeweled, exotic, slightly tinted, and exhaled a faint suggestion of daintily mingled perfumes. To all appearances she was less than thirty in years, though in her eyes lurked the wisdom of the centuries.

All of these persons were informed by Monsieur Khodkine, the earliest arrival, of the tragic event of the morning and of Philip Rowland's share in it. Monsieur Khodkine pitched his drama in a low key, spoke with great seriousness and earnestly requested the new arrivals to consider the evidence in the light of their own understanding and showed them the body of Ivanitch and the broken Bough, in token of the fulfillment of the prophecy. As to his own mind, he said, that was already made up. As a member of the Order, he would take commands from none other than Monsieur Rowland, who was now the President of the Order of Nemi. Rowland said nothing and stood soberly trying not to laugh, studying this queerly assorted company who had listened to the Russian, regarding the American with a new and rather morbid interest, appraising him (so Rowland thought) as one examines an egg which one expects to devour.

Whatever the others may have thought, only Liederman was outspoken. He got up, swaying from one foot to the other, like a great brown bear, his hairy fists

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clenched, his black brows beetling as he roared his opinions in a French tinged abominably with gutterals.

"Pfui! A new priest and an American! You have a doctrine over in your country. You should permit us to apply it here—Europe for Europeans, Monsieur—We do not need to go so far——"

"But the laws of the Order——" broke in Khodkine.

"Pouf, Grisha Khodkine. We are no longer children, believing in the necromancy of the middle ages. I for one am no exorcist. We live in no day of incantations, nor can we accept the idols which a past age has set up for us. The train of coincidences is extraordinary, but let us accept it as such and end the matter. The Council of Nemi has borne with Kirylo Ivanitch, because as we all know he formed a proper buffer between our conflicting aims. But Kirylo Ivanitch is dead. When our numbers are filled, let us elect a leader, a Priest if you still choose to call him such, who will conduct our meetings and do our bidding. As for this Monsieur Rowland——" and he gave a grunt, "as far as I am concerned, he may very well go upon his way."

"That is impossible," came the cold, clear voice of Madame Rochal, her strange eyes fixed on Rowland's face. "The new Leader of the Order of Nemi has already been selected in accordance with a Destiny which it is not my privilege—nor yours, Herr Leiderman, to thwart."

Herr Leiderman stopped rocking and stared at the speaker, a look of sudden perplexity at his brows.

"You! Zoya!" he roared.

"I," she returned with a quick flash of her eyes. "And why not? God knows we need new wits to bring us harmony. Why not Monsieur Rowland's?"

"But——"

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She shrugged and turned to Shestov who was speaking.

"Madame Rochal is not often wrong and her influence is not to be despised. For Russia I can speak. A man who is willing to offer his own blood unselfishly in sacrifice for a nation not his own, is a friend to Freedom and to Russia."

The red-rimmed eyes of Monsieur Barthou blinked enormously behind his goggles. "I am for the old order of things—as they have been since the beginning——"

"And shall be everlastingly," said Khodkine sententiously. "Amen. And you Irina Colodna?" he asked.

"What has been, shall be," she replied in her soft Italian accent. "Whatever happens—the order must not be broken."

"Bah!" thundered Liederman, "and jeopardize our leadership of the cause of the world by investing this adventurer, this soldier of fortune, with the right to——"

"Hush! Max!" cried Zoya Rochal shrilly. "You are a beast."

Liederman rocked in a moment of silence and then sank into a chair, his fists clasped over his folded arms.

Rowland regarded him a moment and then as the gaze of the others was turned toward him, took a pace forward, faced them, and after a glance at Khodkine spoke quietly, and with growing assurance, while the smile that always lurked at the corners of his lips seemed to be struggling against his sober demeanor.

"Messieurs and Mesdames," he said politely, "I am, as this excellent and veracious Herr Liederman has just said, both an adventurer and a soldier of fortune. But if he chooses to turn these words against me I can only reply that I am an adventurer in the greatest cause the world has ever known, a soldier for the fortune of freedom

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which is to come. I am no diplomat but a soldier of France which stands resolute, undaunted, immovable upon its new frontier. I have been in the cauldron before Verdun and thus am the only one among you who has seen Hell upon this earth. I say to you Messieurs and Mesdames that death is nothing when compared to the tension of nerves tightened like bow-strings. After that I say there is no war that can be right—no Peace that can be wrong." There was a movement of approval and Rowland grinned comfortably and then went on—"Your cause is mine and whatever the means by which you accomplish peace, that is mine also. I will do your bidding if you desire it, but if, as Herr Liederman suggests, the good of your Society is best conserved by my departure I am ready to go upon my way——"

"Enough, Monsieur!" Zoya Rochal rose and threw out one white hand in a wide gesture. "We need you at Nemi, Monsieur Rowlan'—Is it not so, you others—?"

She challenged them quietly, but her eyes shot fire at the silent Liederman, who stared up at her from under heavy brows and shrugged.

"I am out-voted," he said; "I have no more to say."

"That is well," said Khodkine. He crossed the room and clasped Rowland by the hands, an example which all the others now followed. Tanya had stood at one side, a silent spectator of this scene smiling slightly, aware of her own part in this decision, but watching keenly as they came forward. Madame Rochal was the last to greet the visitor. Their hands met and Rowland bowed over the jeweled fingers.

"I thank you for your indulgence, Madame," he said.

"Do not let Herr Liederman disturb you," she whis-

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pered, "we are of many minds at Nemi. But the danger lies not in what is said, Monsieur, but what is unsaid."

"I understand. Perhaps you'll help me——"

"Perhaps. We shall see."

And with a deep look into Rowland's eyes, she passed on and joined the others who following Margot, the old woman whom Rowland had seen in the kitchen, went up the stairs to be shown the rooms they were to occupy.

For a moment Rowland and Tanya were alone.

"You think her beautiful?" the girl asked.

"Magnetic, startling—but beautiful—? The *beauté du Diable* perhaps, but Mademoiselle——"

Tanya moved her expressive fingers.

"She is the most dangerous woman in Europe."

"You alarm me," he grinned. "The only powder a soldier fears is the *Poudre de Riz*."

She smiled.

"I'm not jesting."

"Nor I. You warn me against her?"

"If you love freedom. She is an agent of the Wilhelmstrasse."

"Ah—I see. But her nationality?"

"No one knows. What does it matter? She is an actress—a friend of princes, in Russia, in Austria, a go-between, a shuttle-cock playing her own game for her own ends."

"And Liederman—?"

"Is it not obvious? Her servitor."

"But why should she have chosen to accept me without question as the new President of the Order?"

Tanya was silent a moment, and then:

"Because, if I may make so bold as to say so," she said, "your guileless appearance marks a line of least re-

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sistance best suited to her methods of attack. Kirylo Ivanitch was immune. She thinks to find you less difficult. In other words," she finished dryly, "she means to use you, Monsieur."

"I shall be guileless, Mademoiselle, as long as I can learn something, but not too guileless to be ungrateful to you." She shrugged and laughed as he glanced toward the stairway whence came the sound of voices.

Rowland laughed quietly. "I'm pledged to you, to Khodkine and to Madame Rochal. Messieurs Shestov and Barthou are perhaps on my side. Before the hour passes I shall swear allegiance to Signorina Colodna and Herr Liederman," he grinned, "the society of Nemi at least shall be cohesive and I shall be the amalgam."

"This is no joke."

"Nevertheless I shall not cry over it——"

He caught her hand and pressed it in his strong fingers. "Will you let me solve these problems in my own way? If I seem to be guileless, humor me for my simplicity but do not distrust me, Mademoiselle—for of all these who are at Nemi it is you only who shall be my guide."

"You swear it?" she whispered.

"Upon my honor."

Her face flamed suddenly and her glance fell.

Then he kissed her hand and released her just as Khodkine entered from the garden where what had once been Kirylo Ivanitch had, without ceremony, been put below the ground. But the lines at Monsieur Khodkine's brows were not born of this gruesome informality for it seemed that Nemi turned without question from old gods to new, but of another matter which for some hours had obviously given him inquietude.

"If Monsieur Rowland will permit," he said gravely

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turning to Tanya, "Mademoiselle Korasov is best informed to speak of the affairs of Kirylo Ivanitch and of the business pending in the Council——"

"Shall I leave you, Monsieur?" asked Rowland.

"Why? You are one of us—our leader——"

Rowland chose to read something satirical in his ceremonious bow.

"Well," said the American good-humoredly, "what's the order of business?"

"The reports from the various central committees which these Councilors represent, appropriations of money to carry on the propaganda and the plans for Russia. But first it is necessary to see into the condition of the affairs of Monsieur Ivanitch. The vault must be opened."

"The vault?" echoed Rowland.

Khodkine nodded and glanced at Tanya.

"The Priest of Nemi is sole custodian of the documents and funds of the order. Only Ivanitch knew the secret of the doors to the vault——" Here he turned suddenly to the girl—"Unless perhaps *you*, Tatyana——"

"What should I know, Grisha Khodkine?" she said coolly. "I have merely obeyed orders. Kirylo Ivanitch entrusted me with no such weighty responsibility as this."

"And yet it is strange, that no record should be left——"

"Kirylo Ivanitch died without speaking."

"But you Tatyana were closest in his confidence. He must have given some sign, left some paper——"

"Search for it then, his room, his desk, his clothing——"

"I have done so. There is nothing."

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Rowland found another cigarette which he lighted with the greatest cheerfulness.

"An *impasse*," he smiled, "what are you going to do about it?"

Khodkine shrugged.

"That is a grave question, Monsieur Rowland."

"Dynamite," suggested the American. Khodkine paced the floor slowly for a moment, and then to the girl.

"Go, Tatyana, if you please, and make a thorough search. Perhaps you may succeed where I have failed."

Tanya turned toward the door and then paused. "And the others, what shall you say to them?" she asked.

"Tell them the truth," said Khodkine.

The Russian waited until Tanya had gone and then coming close to the new President of Nemi, spoke rapidly and in whispers.

"You and I are allied for a common purpose. The vault is outside in the garden, deep under the Tree, we must find a way into it, you comprehend, without the knowledge of these others."

"Yes, but how?"

"That we shall devise. I will find a way." At the sound of voices he glanced toward the door. "Meanwhile," he whispered, "say nothing."

Rowland nodded and they drew apart as Madame Rochal and Shestov entered the room.

"Ah, Machiavelli," she said, coming forward with a smile—"already wrapping your tendrils around the Tree of Nemi."

Khodkine laughed uneasily.

"My tendrils perhaps do not grow so far or cling so tightly as yours may do, Madame."

Zoya Rochal glanced at Rowland who caught her look.

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"For the wild rose, Madame," said the new Priest quietly, "the oak always bears a life-long friendship."

"Ah, Monsieur, who has taught you to make pretty speeches? But be sure that I am no poison vine," she said with a shrug.

"It is only the dead oak tree that the poison-vine loves. I, Madame, am very much alive."

She flashed a quick smile at him, at once a challenge and a reproach, while Khodkine looked on gravely.

"Only an escaping slave shall break the golden Bough," muttered the literal Shestov soberly.

Zoya Rochal laughed. "You, Grisha Khodkine?" she said significantly.

Khodkine started.

"Or you, Madame," he replied quickly.

"A slave?" she said. "I have escaped from one servitude into another. But to have political opinions in Russia is fortunately no longer a crime."

Rowland looked from one to the other and laughed.

"Monsieur Shestov has rendered me a service," he said with a grin. "I didn't know of this menace. If you, Madame Rochal, desire my life you shall take it at once." He picked up the dagger of Kirylo Ivanitch which had been brought into the house and put upon the table, and thrust the handle toward her. But she shuddered prettily and turned away. "As for you, Monsieur Khodkine," he said coolly, "from this moment I must be upon my guard."

But the Russian saw no humor in this pleasantry.

"Enough of this nonsense, Monsieur. Let us go in to dinner."

And yet this controversy which had been heard by the others who had followed Zoya Rochal into the room, in

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spite of its apparent triviality, had done something to clear the atmosphere. Rowland's perfect good humor and air of guilelessness which seemed to see nothing but good humor and guilelessness in all those about him, had the effect of providing a common meeting ground of good-fellowship for those of different camps. And whatever the diversity of their opinions, the darkness of their thoughts and purposes, the dinner table gave no sign of the deeper undercurrents of their various allegiances.

And when they all rose from the table at the conclusion of the meal Rowland and Madame Rochal went to smoke their cigarettes.

"I can't make you out, Monsieur Rowland," she said when they were seated on a bench at the end of the garden. "At times you seem very much like an overgrown boy," she began, "and then—something makes me think that you are not so ingenuous as you look."

"I have traveled the world over, Madame," said Rowland with a laugh, "but I've never managed to learn anything, except that women are very beautiful and that men are born to be slaves."

She laid her fingers along his coat sleeve.

"Don't you know, foolish boy," she muttered with sudden earnestness, "that you have happened upon the very edge of an Inferno?"

"No, you surprise me. It has seemed very much like a sort of pleasant game to me." He laughed. "I kill, quite by accident, the chap that runs your shebang and you all come along and pat me on the back. It's great, I tell you. You haven't been in a German prison pen, Madame. The conversation is hardly worth mentioning, the food is unmentionable and now for the first time in a year I find myself set down in a milieu of beautiful women

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and clever men with real food to eat and real conversation to listen to, and you, Madame, wish to spoil my evening by speaking of Infernos. It's really not considerate of you."

He lolled lower in his seat and smoked luxuriously, gazing at her through half-closed eyes.

The fingers on his arm tightened.

"I tell you, Monsieur, that you are in great danger, here at this moment. Don't you understand?"

"I understand what you say," he said smiling at her lazily.

"It's the truth—" she repeated. "Danger—of—death—sudden—at any time."

"I am so contented, Madame. I can imagine no moment more agreeable in which to die."

"You anger me. Have you no eyes to see what is going on about you?"

Rowland straightened and glanced carelessly over his shoulder.

"And what is going on about me?" he asked.

"You have become—in a moment—the most important single figure in Europe. You do not believe me. It is true. Around you, here at Nemi, seethes a struggle of nations gasping for breath and you sit and look into my eyes and dream."

"You must blame that upon your eyes," he whispered.

She shrugged, moved impatiently and then after looking cautiously around them into the shrubbery, turned toward him again.

"I pray you to listen to me, Monsieur," she said eagerly. "I like you, Philippe Rowlan'. From the first in there, when I saw you, I knew that I should like you. I don't know why." She shrugged expressively. "You

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are different. But you are also very foolish and I would not like to see you come to harm."

"And who would harm me?" he said coolly. "Perhaps I am foolish, but you must blame that upon my sense of humor. I blunder into the midst of a pretty little opera-bouffe worthy of the best traditions of Offenbach, with chaps in cowls and cassocks pottering about a saddish-looking tree and muttering about escaping slaves. And you ask me to be afraid. Perhaps when I get through being amused there will be time for that. For the present, Madame, will you bear with me and tell me something about yourself?"

She threw out an arm with a dramatic gesture which showed something of her training. "Ah, I have no patience with you, Philippe Rowlan'," she said, "you are impossible. Think of what I shall tell you, for it is very important. Under the mound below the tree is the treasure-vault of Nemi. It is built of steel, like a bank, and no one may enter it without the secret numbers which open the lock. Those numbers were known only by Kirylo Ivanitch and he is dead."

"That's unfortunate," said Rowland as she paused. "But you can't blame me."

"Do you know what is in that vault, Philippe Rowlan'?" she asked.

"I can't imagine. A pig with a ring in the end of his nose?" he smiled.

"You still disbelieve? Well, I will tell you. The funds of the Order at this time can amount to little less than twenty-five millions of francs. They are there for you or for anyone with imagination to divert into the proper channels."

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Rowland's eyes in spite of himself had become a little larger.

"I'm no burglar, Madame. I've done almost everything—but safe cracking is a little out of my line."

"And yet it is upon you that the responsibility for this money devolves. If it is stolen you will be held accountable."

"Stolen! Who will steal it?"

She shrugged. "Who wouldn't—in a righteous cause?" She caught his arm again to emphasize the importance of her words. "To help the cause of Free Institutions in Europe? You! I! Anyone with a cause like that near his heart."

Rowland flicked his cigarette into the bushes. "I am very dense. There seem to be more causes than one at Nemi, more axes than one to grind. Let me be direct," he said coolly. "Yours—Madame Rochal. What is it?" he asked.

She glanced at him swiftly.

"You do not know?"

"Obviously, or I should not be asking."

She paused a moment, looking away from him. And then as though coming to a resolution she turned and spoke in a low tone. "These others believe that I am acting for the Social Democrats of Germany, like Max Liederman, but that is not the case."

"Ah—what then?"

"I am trusting you, Monsieur——"

"By the witchery in your eyes, I swear——"

She paused a moment as though to be sure of her effect. And then in a whisper—

"I am a secret agent of the Provisional Government of Russia."

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Rowland sat silent a second and then laid his hand over hers while his lips broke into a boyish smile.

"I knew it, Madame. I was sure of it," he whispered softly. "Our cause is the same. You and I together—what can we not do for Russia and for Freedom."

He was so ingenuous, so boyish, so handsome. His very youth refreshed her. She sighed and then laughed softly as she raised the back of her hand toward his lips.

"There," she murmured, "you may kiss my hand."

But Rowland only glanced at the hand and before Madame Rochal knew what he was about had caught her in his arms and kissed her full upon the lips.

"Monsieur!" she stammered and drew away from him hurriedly. Rowland followed her glance and turned to find Tanya Korasov standing before them. Rowland sprang to his feet and stood, his head bowed, looking indeed rather crestfallen.

"Mademoiselle——" he began.

But she cut him short with a gesture, speaking rapidly and he saw that she was very pale and suffering under some suppressed agitation.

"Monsieur, you are to come to the house at once. In the name of Freedom—Grisha Khodkine demands it!"

"I will go at once."

Tanya had already turned and fled down the path. Rowland had taken only a few paces when Zoya Rochal rushed alongside of him and seized his arm.

"Be watchful, Philippe Rowlan'!" she whispered tensely, "for it is he whom you have most to fear."

He laughed softly as he caught her fingers to his lips.

"Thanks, Madame," he said gaily. "No one shall kill me at Nemi but you. That I promise." And left her standing in the darkness.

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CHAPTER VII

CAMOUFLAGE

ROWLAND'S long strides overtook Tanya before she reached the lighted spaces of the lawn.

He had called to her but she had not stopped and so as he caught up with her he barred her way down the path.

"Mademoiselle Korasov," he blurted out eagerly, "just a word——"

She stopped and faced him, still pale in the moonlight, but quite composed, waiting for him to go on.

"I—I've been placed in a false light—I would like——"

"How, Monsieur?" she said indifferently.

"What you saw, just now—there. Perhaps you think——"

His words stumbled and at last failed completely, for he saw that she was bent on making explanations difficult.

"What does it matter to me," she said, "whom you embrace, and why?"

He felt the sting under her words, and realized that every phrase he uttered only placed him at a greater disadvantage.

"I can make no explanation," he muttered. "If you think me a fool, I'm sorry. And yet I'll prove that your confidence was not misplaced." Another silence during which Tanya walked onward without sign that she heard him.

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"Madame Rochal has just confided that she is an agent of the Provisional Government in Russia."

"And you believed her?"

"No. But she believes that I believe her."

"Are you sure?" she shrugged. "You are no match for a woman of her antecedents——"

"I shall meet her with her own weapons."

"It seems," she said disdainfully, "that you have already begun well."

"Mademoiselle Korasov—enough of this!" he said firmly and after a swift search of a bush nearby again placed himself in the path in front of her so that she couldn't pass him. "You may think me a philanderer if you like, or a fool, if that pleases you better. But the end is worthy of the means. Already I've found out some of the things I wanted to know. The vault beneath the tree will be robbed unless you and I can prevent."

Her eyes flashed with sudden attention. He had arrested her interest at last.

"Ah, you know——?"

He grinned. "I'm in league with both burglars. I've only consulted two. There may be others."

"Zoya Rochal?"

"And Khodkine. I suspect Liederman also."

Tanya stood silent a moment and then a wan smile rewarded him.

"You see? I was right." And then bravely, "This must be prevented, Monsieur."

"Yes. But how?"

"Merely by robbing the vault yourself."

"But I shall need your help, Mademoiselle. This money must be removed for safe keeping until it can be properly used."

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"Yes. I can help in that."

"We must waste no time. The sooner the better. Where is the entrance to the vault?"

"An iron door near the wall beyond the mound. I have a key."

"Meet me here then in the shadow of these trees to-night, at one o'clock. Do you agree?"

"Yes," she said after a moment. "I must."

"And do you forgive me for—for——"

She raised her head and looked past him toward the lighted windows.

"What does it matter, Monsieur," she said coldly, "whether I forgive or not? Come." And moving quickly she led the way toward the house while Rowland followed, still certain that however clever he thought himself he felt a good deal of a fool.

Khodkine pacing the floor of his room upstairs awaited Rowland's coming impatiently, but with an effort composed his features in a smile as the American appeared.

"Ah, Monsieur," he said. "It is too bad that I should feel it necessary to interrupt your tête-à-tête with Madame Rochal, who as we all know is the most charming woman in the world. But the President of Nemi is not a free agent. There are matters requiring your attention in conference with me."

"Of course."

"Then I may go, Monsieur?" asked Tanya from the doorway.

"Yes. Go," said Khodkine with an abstracted wave of his hand and a peremptory tone which made a frown gather at Rowland's brow. Gone were Monsieur Khodkine's soft accents of greeting and his courtly bow. And Tanya seemed in awe of him, her look hanging upon his

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commands. Rowland remembered the agitation in her manner when she had come to summon him to this conference. Had Khodkine frightened her tonight? And how? Why? Was there something between them, some threat of Russian for Russian, born of politics or intrigue in which Khodkine played the master hand? Or was it something nearer, more personal . . . ? It seemed curious to Rowland that he should be thinking of this for the first time. He had formed his first impression of Tanya there last night in the garden, when clad in her cowl and robes she had seemed so abstracted from the world outside. "A very inferior Mother Superior," as she had called herself, and by this token secluded but very human. He had considered the fact of her extraordinary beauty merely as a fortunate accident, and having dismissed her relations with Ivanitch from his mind, had dismissed all other sentimental possibilities—all, that is, except his own. A love affair—of course. With Khodkine? Perhaps. And yet that would hardly explain the Russian's attitude toward her tonight—or hers toward him. The one thing that seemed to rise uppermost in Rowland's mind was Tanya's fear of Khodkine . . . As he joined the Russian at the table by the lamp, he found himself examining Monsieur Khodkine with a new interest and a new antipathy.

"I have here some documents requiring your attention, in order that you may familiarize yourself with the order of business tomorrow when our circle is complete. The report of Herr Liederman from the Socialists of Germany, that of Mademoiselle Colodna from Rome, appeals from Shestov and Barthou. You will read them tonight, Monsieur?"

"Willingly. But this, Monsieur Khodkine, was not

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why you interrupted my tête-à-tête in the garden," said Rowland slowly. "You had another motive."

Khodkine smiled, got up and shut the door and went on in a low tone. "Why should I not be honest with you? Madame Rochal is not to be trusted, Monsieur. She has already surprised me. She opposed Liederman in accepting you unreservedly as our leader. It was from these two that I had expected resistance. Liederman is a member of the Reichstag. Madame Rochal—?" He shrugged. "If you can tell what she is, you are cleverer than the rest of us. She brings credentials from a central committee in Bavaria, but that means nothing. Such things are arranged. I merely wished to warn you before you had committed yourself to her interests."

"You need have no fear. I've grown my pin feathers. The cause in which we are interested is more important to me than the fascinations of Madame Rochal."

"We understand each other, Monsieur. We are friends. You will help me. I will help you. We shall work together in a harmony that will bring great good to the world. Are you satisfied?"

"Quite."

Khodkine offered his hand and Rowland took it, longing at that moment in a boyish sense of bravado to try grips with the Russian and see which was the better of the two. But his common sense told him that if there were to be a trial of strength between them, it would be a test of mind, of Rowland's cleverness against the Russian's finesse, of the American's skill in dissimulation against Khodkine's skill in intrigue. As yet there was no damage done, and with Tanya's help, Rowland perhaps held the stronger hand.

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"To show you the confidence I place in you, Monsieur Rowland, I shall give you this."

And Khodkine, with a deliberateness intended to convey the importance of the matter, took out of his card case a small flat silver disk which he fingered a moment and then handed to Rowland. The American examined it curiously. It bore, in low relief, the double-headed bust upon the pedestal in the room downstairs, and below it, the words REX NEMORENSIS.

"A proof of your confidence—Monsieur. What——"

"The talisman of our society. Taken from the watch chain of the dead Priest. Worn only by the Priest but known throughout Europe. Shown to members of our committees, it will carry you safely anywhere."

"Ah, thanks, Monsieur."

"You will forgive me for sending for you, will you not? But it will not do for you to move in the dark. Trust no one but me." He took up the papers on the table and handed them to the American. "Now go to your room, and study these papers carefully with my notes upon the margins, for it is according to this that the council must act tomorrow. But see no one else tonight. Tomorrow morning I will come to your room and tell you of my plan to enter the vault."

"I shall do as you suggest, Monsieur. I am very tired. When I read these papers I shall be ready for a good night of sleep."

"That is well. Good night, Monsieur."

"Good night."

In the seclusion of his room, the Leader of Nemi had much to think of. The labyrinth had grown deeper, its mazes more tortuous, but like Theseus he still held to the silken cord which bound him to Tanya Korasov, and

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having trusted to his own instincts he was now ready to follow blindly where she led him. But it was clear that Tanya had not under-rated the skill and strength of Monsieur Khodkine. He was indeed an adversary worthy of any man's metal. Under his polished veneer, Monsieur Khodkine was made of hardy wood of a fine grain but none the less strong because of that. Though there had been no chance to verify his impressions by a conversation with Tanya, Rowland had decided that Khodkine was working in the interests of Germany for a separate peace with Russia, which would throw all the strength of the German armies upon France, England, Italy and the United States. A mere surmise and based upon the instinct that Tanya was true and a friend of Russia, for which Rowland had fought and was fighting. Without Tanya the whole structure of his intrigue fell to the ground. If he believed that Madame Rochal was an agent of the Provisional Government of Russia, he must also believe that Tanya was plotting against it. And if Madame Rochal were an agent of the Wilhelmstrasse working in the same interests as Monsieur Khodkine, why should the Russian distrust her?

And what was the threat which Khodkine held over Tanya? There seemed no end to the tangle and no course of action but to move softly and await developments. The story of the amount of treasure in the vault below the Tree had opened his eyes. Here, perhaps, was the answer to some of the questions that perplexed him. Politics of the sort that had been disclosed here, would stop at nothing. The times in which he lived made murder a matter of small importance, and what was his own career in France but that of murder highly specialized? Rowland was sure that his own

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safety now hung upon his continued display of friendship and collaboration in Monsieur Khodkine's plans. And those plans in brief seemed to be nothing less than the looting of the strong-box of Nemi before Madame Rochal or Max Liederman could get at it. And for what Cause? For Germany? Or merely for Grisha Khodkine?

Rowland had no weapons, not even a pocket-knife, and Khodkine carried an automatic in his hip pocket, for Rowland had contrived to brush his arm against it earlier in the evening. The situation was interesting, but hardly to his liking. He longed for a good American Colt revolver, one shot of which, well placed, was worth all the automatics in the world.

But the business before him tonight admitted of no delay nor of any consideration for his own safety. At one o'clock he was to meet Tanya at the lower end of the garden, and with luck, by morning the money and papers in the vault would be well out of harm's way if Tanya could find a place for their safe-keeping. Then, so far as Rowland was concerned, they might dynamite the vault to their heart's content.

"*Droite 72 Gauche 23 Droite 7.*" He had repeated the figures to himself frequently and now continued to do so, taking a new delight in their significance. Twenty-five millions of francs! Five million dollars! They might go far, if properly used, in the interests of the cause he served. Whose money was this? How long had it accumulated? And what the purpose of those who had contributed? Peace? Surely Peace would come most quickly if Germany were defeated. And was he not the President of Nemi—the chosen of the Council to represent all the members of the society, whether socialists,

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revolutionists, maximalists, minimalists or what not? The way was difficult. So difficult that there was no arbitrament but the sword. The counter revolutionists of Russia should not betray France, and those who led Russia to destruction under the protection of a fine catchword should not succeed in their treachery if it was in his power to prevent.

Reasoning in this way, Phil Rowland lighted another of the cigarettes of the dead Ivanitch while he scanned the documents entrusted to him by Grisha Khodkine and awaited the hour when he should join Tanya Korasov below in the garden. He had no watch but a clock in the hall downstairs announced the hours slowly. At eleven he blew out his candle and sat in a chair by the window; waiting and listening. It was necessary that Monsieur Khodkine should be disarmed. He heard footsteps in the hall outside from time to time and snored discreetly. He had taken the precaution to fasten the bolt of his door and so feared nothing from the hall. Outside in the garden all was quiet. The moon had set—the moon that had shed its inconstant beams upon his own dissimulation and Zoya Rochal's. . . . Alluring female, that! The essence of all things enchanting, the woman of thirty, a woman with a past. . . . A component of faint delightful odors. . . . Women like that had a way of going to a fellow's head. What the deuce had happened to her after Rowland's sudden exit from the stage she had set for him? He smiled as he remembered the results of his rather violent caress. If Tanya hadn't——

Rowland frowned into the darkness outside. Tanya! He would have given much if Tanya Korasov hadn't come along just at that moment. Women were strange creatures. He had fallen immeasurably in Tanya's eyes, the

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only ones at Nemi that mattered. He hadn't really wanted to kiss Zoya Rochal. It was merely that her lips were there to take—and he had taken them. He seemed quite sure that Madame Rochal had not been displeased. . . . And tomorrow he must still play the game.

The clock in the hallway struck the half hour. Half-past twelve. Rowland bent over and took off his shoes and then moved stealthily to the window where he stood behind the curtain peering out into the obscurity of the garden. There was no lantern upon the mound and no dark figure watching by the Tree as there had been last night. Sure that no one was watching outside, he stuck his head and shoulders out of the window and looked around. All the lights were out. He had at first thought of descending from the window which was less hazardous than passing down the corridor and stairs, but remembered that last night after Tanya's warning he had assured himself that there was no means of entrance to his room by the window. The wall below was quite bare of vines or projections and at least thirty feet high. There was nothing for it but to go by the corridor.

And so with infinite pains to make no sound he slowly moved the bolt of the door until it was drawn entirely back and then waited listening. Silence. He turned the knob cautiously and opened the door. So far so well. After another moment of listening he took up his shoes and on tip-toe went noiselessly down the hallway. The house was as silent as the tomb. If the other members of the Council had any suspicion of one another or of him they gave no sign of it. The house indeed was too quiet—a snore from the door of Monsieur Khodkine would have comforted him.

At the top of the stairway he paused. There was one

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step that creaked, the tenth from the bottom, he had counted it as he came up tonight. The tenth from the bottom and there were thirty-three in all. The twenty-third then. . . . He went down carefully until he had counted twenty-two and then with a hand on the balustrade stepped over what he thought would be the offending stair upon the twenty-fourth—when a loud crash seemed to resound from one end of the echoing house to the other. Idiot! Twenty-four of course! He had not counted the top step.

To his own ears, used to the silence of the house, the noise seemed loud enough to have awakened the dead Ivanitch, and he stood listening for a long minute, awaiting the shuffling of feet or the sounds of opening doors above. But nothing happened. The Councilors of Nemi still slept. Rowland grinned. "Fool's luck," he muttered to himself and carefully opening the door into the garden, went out, stealing along the shrubbery past the kitchen, and in a moment had reached the security of the trees. There he stopped to put on his shoes and repeat to himself the numbers of the combination. "72 23 7. *Gauche Droite Gauche.*" Or was it *Droite Gauche Droite?* The numbers were right—but the direction——" This was no time to be uncertain in such a matter. That Boche bombing party must have done something queer to his head. No. It was *Droite, Gauche, Droite*—he was sure. Tanya would confirm that perhaps.

He found her in the shadow of the designated trees where she had preceded him by some moments. She wore her cowl and robe from beneath the folds of which she brought forth a revolver which she handed to him.

"You have read my mind, Mademoiselle," he whispered joyfully, "it was this that I wanted the most."

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"You heard nothing?"

"No. But one of the steps creaked abominably. And you—have you been here long?"

"No. I came down the back stairs." And then, turning into the shrubbery beside them with no more ado, "Follow me, Monsieur," she said.

Her manner was eloquent of the business they had at hand and reminiscent of nothing personal in their relations. Her thoughtfulness in arming him was merely a matter of self-protection, her trust in him was a matter of necessity for had she not already given him the numbers of the combination? He followed her quietly. They stole along the outside wall in single file, making a complete detour of the garden until they reached a clump of shrubbery near the spot where Rowland had come over the wall. There they followed a well-worn path into the bushes and were confronted by a mound of earth, in the face of which was an iron door. Here Tanya paused, brought forth a key and in a moment led the way down a flight of steps underground. It was pitch black below but Tanya who seemed to have thought of everything brought out from the folds of her gown an electric pocket lamp which she turned into the passage-way before them, at the end of which Rowland made out a steel door with a shining nickel knob and a handle.

"The vault, Monsieur Rowlan'," she said coolly. "It is of American manufacture. Doubtless you are familiar——"

She was looking at him as she spoke, and her eyes for the moment drove all thought of numbers from his head. He caught at her hand.

"Mademoiselle—before we go on, tell me that you've forgiven me. I was but serving your cause——"

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She shrugged away from him and flashed the light upon the shining metal knob of the vault door.

"Serve it here, then," she said quickly. "There!—The numbers, *Droite—Gauche*——"

She was quite relentless. He chose to think her repudiation of him the measure of her own purity and with a last look at her fine profile bent forward and fingered the metal knob.

"*Gauche 72*——" he muttered and paused.

"*Droite*, Monsieur!" she said sharply. "Do you mean to say that you have forgotten?"

"If you would be kind to me, Mademoiselle——" he pleaded smiling, "perhaps I could remember better."

"Oh!" she gasped. "This is no time to lose one's wits——"

"You've robbed me of all I ever had——"

"Monsieur Rowlan'," she whispered in anguish, "the numbers!"

"Say that you forgive me, Mademoiselle," he pleaded again, turning toward her.

She threw out her arms and the light of the torch went out.

"Mademoiselle," he was whispering. "Forgive——"

The light of the torch flared suddenly, full on his face. She had moved a pace away from him and the cowl had fallen from her head, but her eyes were studying his face intently.

"Forgive!" he repeated, smiling eagerly.

Something in his expression may have satisfied her, for she thrust out her hand to meet his own.

"Yes, yes," she muttered hurriedly. "I forgive." And suddenly switched the light upon the door of the vault. "And now the numbers."

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"Ah," he laughed. "I remember them, instantly. *Droite* 72, *Gauche* 23, *Droite* 7. *Droite*. Is it not extraordinary? I cannot do without you, Mademoiselle Tanya—nor you without me. I shall prove it to you. You shall see——"

As she did not reply he relapsed into silence, bending in sudden concentration upon his task. And in a moment, the click of a falling tumbler within the lock announced success. The knob moved no more. Then he took hold of the heavy handle and turned toward the girl with a laugh.

"OPEN, SESAME!" he said. "The Princess Tatyana wishes to enter."

The light wavered as the girl drew back and Rowland saw amazement in her eyes.

"Princess!" she was whispering. "Who told you of my title?"

He stared at her blankly and then her meaning came to him.

"Why, no one, Mademoiselle. The Princess Tatyana is a fairy-friend of my childhood. I dreamed of her as now I dream of you."

She stood puzzled a moment and then switched the light upon the door.

"Open, Monsieur Rowlan'," she said in a half whisper.

He grasped the massive handle in both hands and with an effort, swung the heavy mass of steel outward and the dark entrance to the vault lay open to them.

With no further words, Tanya flashed the light into the interior and quickly entered, while Rowland followed. The place had a musty smell but seemed quite dry, a fact afterwards explained by a double wall and a deep drainage system. The air was close but the electric torch burned brightly, revealing rows of shelves, each carefully lettered,

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upon which were ancient parchments, discolored and illegible, documents bearing pendant seals, in metal boxes tied with heavy silken cords. There was a grinning skull, a steel casque of the Middle Ages, a spearhead, and an ancient piece of sculpture draped with jewels; upon the floor at the further end bulging leather sacks, and a rack of modern rifles and ammunition. All these Rowland's glance took in at a first look, but his attention was quickly arrested by the actions of Tanya Korasov, who bade him hold the light while she went to a shelf upon the right where her nimble fingers quickly began running over a pile of documents, in modern envelopes, tied with tape. She read the superscriptions eagerly and at last came to the one she sought.

As she did so and took the envelope into her hands a slight gasp of triumph escaped her. Rowland looking over her shoulder read eagerly the fine script.

"*Dossier de Gregory Khodkine.*"

And while Rowland's eyes sparkled with this discovery, Tanya without ceremony broke the seal and took out the contents, scanning the papers rapidly, smiling and exclaiming by turns.

"His history, here," she whispered over her shoulder to Rowland, indicating the first sheet. "And the evidence—there," pointing to the documents. "It is what I have longed for, for months. Evidence—proof. Look," she said excitedly. "Read. Gregory Hochwald. A commission in the Prussian Guards—1905—signed Wilhelm—1908—appointment to the Staff, 1910—Resignation. Liberal tendencies—(authorized at Potsdam) Russia 1911—Instructions from Graf von Stromberg—1912—(Head of the Secret Service, Monsieur)—Member of the Duma. Other letters of instruction 1913, 1914, 1916,

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—*since* the war, Monsieur Rowlan'. Is it not damnable?"

"Magnificent," gasped Rowland over her shoulder. "We've got him, Mademoiselle—" and with a grin he paraphrased triumphantly, "where Molly wore her beads."

She glanced at him in a moment of incomprehension, then thrust the papers into their envelope and slipped them into the belt beneath her gown.

"You see, Monsieur," she whispered, "Kirylo Ivanitch was well prepared to deal with this situation. He feared Grisha Khodkine always, but seemed to do as he wished. Now I know why—he was awaiting the overt act which should throw the man into his hands——"

"My heritage," whispered Rowland.

"And mine," said Tanya.

"You've feared him, Mademoiselle. He holds some threat over you. Today—tonight, I saw——"

"I fear him no longer, Monsieur Rowlan'—" she smiled confidently.

"Mademoiselle," said Rowland with boyish eagerness, "if you'll only tell me. Let me help you. I will——"

"No more violence, Monsieur. I shall deal with Grisha Khodkine in my own way."

She took the torch from his hand without a word and led him to a corner of the vault, where upon the lower shelf were a number of packages carefully wrapped in black oil-cloth.

"Bank notes," she said. "Each note of a thousand francs or its equivalent. There are twenty-five thousand of them."

"What shall we do with them? You have a plan?"

The girl nodded.

"It is arranged. We have no time to lose. Picard and

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Stepan are outside the wall. You will drop them over. I will show you."

And taking up several packages of oil-cloth she bade Rowland hold out his hands while she filled his arms.

"Careful! Each one contains a fortune. Follow me."

She turned toward the door into the passageway, then gasped suddenly and stopped, dropping her torch which clattered upon the steel floor. But in the second before the light was extinguished, Rowland saw that a figure stood at the entrance to the vault, a branch of foliage in one hand while in the other, pointed directly toward him, was a most significant weapon.

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CHAPTER VIII

DISASTER

THE surprise was so complete that Rowland stood for a moment immovable, staring at the spot in the darkness where Monsieur Khodkine had been, but before he had time to spring aside, there was an explosion and the shock of a sudden impact against him as one of the packages flew from his arms. Close shooting—but he was unhurt and thinking quickly, dropped his bundles, dodged, and drew his revolver, waiting for the next flash of Monsieur Khodkine's weapon.

No sign or sound. Then an anguished gasp from Tanya. "Grisha Khodkine!" she cried. "Don't shoot again. You've killed him."

"Stand aside——"

It was all the mark that Rowland could hope for and he fired low at the sound. A pause of a second and then the bullets from Monsieur Khodkine's automatic crashed all around him. A splinter of wood struck him in the cheek but if Rowland was hit in the body he did not know it and fired rapidly at the flashes until the hammer of his revolver clicked. His weapon was empty as was Khodkine's. Then creeping along the shelves, groping with tense fingers, Rowland made for the spot where the Russian had been. He felt a breath of air from outside through the powder fumes and knew that he had reached the door. His fingers grasped the cold steel of the door

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jamb, groped across the entrance and—touched an arm. A cry of terror from Tanya as he caught at her fiercely.

"You, Mademoiselle—thank God!" he muttered, and released her.

"He is gone?" she stammered.

The answer came suddenly from behind them within the vault as Khodkine, rushing blindly in the darkness at the sound, brought up against Rowland, who twisted around in his grasp, freeing his right hand, which struck blindly, harmlessly, and then at last found Khodkine's throat.

"Go, Mademoiselle," gasped Rowland. "It—it is better —I will——"

Something told him that Khodkine had another weapon and as he felt the man free his right arm he caught at it desperately, pinioning it to his side. His wrist . . . a knife . . . everything depended upon the knife. . . . He released the throat and while blows rained upon his head and shoulders twisted Khodkine's wrist with both hands until he heard the knife go clattering upon the floor.

"Even terms, Monsieur," he gasped, as body to body they swayed from side to side in the darkness.

"You—fool," stammered the other. "To risk—fortune —on this madness——"

"My—risk," grinned Rowland through his blood and sweat.

Rowland, thinking of Tanya and of Germany fought with cool desperation, his arms around Khodkine, crushing, crushing the very breath from his body. The man was weakening. Powerful as he was, his muscles had not been trained as the American's had been in three years of life in the open.

"A truce—Monsieur," Khodkine whispered hoarsely. But Rowland did not hear him and bore him back against

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the shelves to the left, where their feet stumbled over the pile of packages that Rowland had dropped, and they fell, Rowland uppermost, upon the floor.

All the fight was out of Monsieur Khodkine by this time, and he lay prone while Rowland, the fog of battle still upon him, clutched with his bony fingers even after the man had stopped resisting. It was only when the American realized how tired his fingers were that he sat upon Khodkine's stomach, somewhat bewildered as to what had happened, aware after a moment that his shoulder ached him badly and that his chest burned from his labored breathing, but otherwise that he was quite sound and cheerful.

"Do you give it up, you blighter?" he gasped in English, at last, relapsing into the argot of his platoon of the Legion. "You've got enough?"

A groan from the man beneath was the only reply.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" he asked in a moment, in French.

"N—nothing," stammered Khodkine, struggling for his breath. "I—I am vanquished."

The situation was awkward. If Khodkine were strong enough, he might still slip away in the darkness. Rowland was groping about on the floor beside him for a weapon of some sort, when he heard a frightened whisper behind him.

"Monsieur Rowlan'—! You are safe?" Tanya was murmuring.

"Yes, thanks. But I'm afraid to get up. Can you find the light here—somewhere on the floor?"

"I'll try, Monsieur," she whispered. And he heard her groping about on her hands and knees among the scattered packages. In a moment she found the torch and

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threw its blinding glare into the eyes of the antagonists.

She stared at the sight of them, for the splinter wound in Rowland's cheek still bled freely and made dark discolorations upon his clothing and linen. But the American was sitting upon Monsieur Khodkine's stomach, blinking cheerfully at the light.

"You—you're hurt, Monsieur?" she gasped.

"Am I? It can't be serious. I'm feeling quite all right. And you, Monsieur Khodkine? Comfortable?"

The man groaned. "Enough, Monsieur."

Rowland straightened and released his wrists.

"There's about a million francs between his shoulder blades. Come, roll over a bit, Monsieur. The steel floor will be more comfortable."

Khodkine obeyed as Rowland relinquished the pressure, while Tanya stood dumb and motionless, as though the difficulties of their situation had driven her to her wit's ends.

"Let me—let me up, Monsieur," groaned Khodkine.

"Why? So that you can try to murder me again? Hardly. You've broken another Golden Bough——"

"And you—you have vanquished me," muttered Khodkine. "Kill me—or let me go."

Rowland chuckled. "Either alternative is pleasant to me—but one is dangerous."

"I am—am unarmed—also hurt," said Khodkine. "What harm can I do? You—you are stronger than I——"

"No. Merely more in earnest." As the flash-light wavered a moment in Tanya's hands it fell for a second on the rack of rifles. "Ah, Mademoiselle, I have it. If you'll give me the light," said Rowland calmly. And wondering,

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she handed it to him. "Now, if you please, take a rifle there and load. The clips, I see, are upon the shelf."

While Rowland held the torch, Tanya obeyed quickly and handed the weapon to Rowland, who after examining it and testing it carefully, got quickly to his feet and ordered Khodkine to rise.

"I'm no murderer, Monsieur Khodkine," he said easily, "not in cold blood, at least. And you're quite safe if you remain perfectly still, while Mademoiselle Korasov continues in the task you interrupted."

Khodkine, who had gotten to his feet with an appearance of great difficulty, now stood, quite subdued, still gasping for the breath which Rowland had squeezed out of him.

"Monsieur—" he muttered, his gaze shifting this way and that, "let me speak."

"By all means," said Rowland politely. "If you don't speak too long. We have other business."

"You blame me for—for protecting the Treasury of Nemi. How should I have known that your intentions and Mademoiselle Korasov's were innocent?"

"Merely by our guilelessness, Monsieur Khodkine," grinned Rowland.

Khodkine's smile was sickly.

"You are clever," he said. "I have done you an injustice. But why should we quarrel?"

"We won't. Our quarrel is ended. Is that all you want to say?"

"Let us be honest with each other. Our cause is the same——"

"Is it? Then I'm the worst scoundrel unhung. No, Monsieur Khodkine, we shall go our ways, you yours—I mine. And now," with an inclination of the head in excel-

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lent imitation of Monsieur Khodkine's satirical amenities, "if you will permit us, Mademoiselle shall continue our interrupted task."

Tanya saw his look of command, and setting the catch on the torch and putting it upon the shelf, and filling her arms with the bundles of bank notes, ran out through the door along the passage.

"What are you going to do with me?" asked Khodkine, moving slightly toward the shelf behind him.

"Keep you safe until I can call the Council together." And then, as Khodkine moved another pace. "I would advise you to remain motionless. Another inch backward, Monsieur, and I'll fire."

Khodkine obeyed. The easy manner of the American had deceived him.

"What shall you tell them?" he asked, after a moment.

"That you had planned to rob the vault."

Khodkine laughed.

"This comes ill from you, Monsieur, who were already robbing it."

"No," said Rowland good-naturedly, "we were merely removing the notes to a place of safety."

"Safety! And you think these others will believe you?"

"They will believe Mademoiselle Korasov."

"Ah. Is not my word as good as hers?"

Rowland shrugged. "You're wasting your breath."

Tanya returned at this moment, gathered up more bank notes, and saying nothing, went running down the corridor again.

Khodkine moved his feet a little uneasily but did not move. And his expression which had been shifting through all the phases of uncertainty and apprehension, now broke into a smile.

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"Monsieur Rowland, I admire your skill and *sang-froid*. You have a better genius for the game of intrigue than many more experienced. We should be friends, you and I. There is much we might accomplish together."

Rowland laughed and purposely lowered the muzzle of his rifle a few inches.

"Ah, yes, perhaps," he shrugged. He was a little curious for a peep inside Monsieur Khodkine's brain. "What might we accomplish?"

Khodkine's pale eyes examined Rowland narrowly. And after a pause.

"You are an American, a nation which has blundered into European affairs without cause. You, Monsieur, came to fight for France because you were born for the spirit of adventure—because you live upon excitement and have no fear. Is this not so?"

Rowland thought he saw where the fellow was driving but made no reply, for at this moment Tanya came into the room again, loaded her arms and departed.

"That's a correct statement," he smiled. "And I've surely found it here."

He lowered the muzzle of the rifle a few inches more and saw Khodkine's glance follow it.

Khodkine leaned slightly forward.

"You are taking this money to a place of safety, you say. That may or may not be. But you will not succeed in getting it out of Switzerland."

"Why not?"

"Because it is a long way to the French border. You dare not go into Germany. And the arm of Nemi is long."

Rowland looked aghast and the muzzle of the rifle dropped still further.

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"I'm not afraid of the arm of Nemi—because," and he laughed, "it's my arm, Monsieur."

Khodkine paused a moment, shrugged his disbelief, and then in a lower tone,

"There is only one person who can help you get this money safely away, Monsieur Rowland," he said.

"And he is——"

"Myself. The German border is less than fifteen kilometers away. Once beyond it, I am safe. See!" And while Rowland watched him closely, he thrust a hand into his pocket and drew out some papers, one of which bore signatures, a photograph and a seal. "My *laisser passer* and yours, Monsieur, if you choose to accompany me."

Rowland's eyes opened wider and his jaw fell. This was the real Khodkine—stripped to the skin that had been born Hochwald. But the American made no reply and waited for the revelation to be complete.

Khodkine wasted no words, and his voice concentrated in a tense whisper.

"The money is negotiable, and will pave a broad highway from here to Holland, if one knows the ropes. You are not a rich man, Monsieur. Nor am I. Think what a great fortune like this means, even to you in America where there are many great fortunes. You will be a prince. I too. We will go together and the world will lie at our feet. Is it not a wonderful picture?"

Rowland heard him through until the end, when the look of astonishment upon his face—indeed more than half real—changed to sterner lines and the muzzle of the rifle slowly came up level with Monsieur Khodkine's breast.

"Why, you d—— rascal!" he growled sternly. "You pig—dog of a thieving Boche!" he repeated deliberately. He paused a moment as Khodkine straightened. "You're

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a poor conspirator, Herr Lieutnant Gregory Hochwald!" he said with a malicious laugh, as Khodkine gasped. "Hochwald of the Guard!" he repeated, "Prussian Guard 1906—Secret Agent of General von Stromberg—Russian socialist! Bah, Grisha Khodkine. I've got your *dossier*. It's a sweet one."

He paused in some satisfaction at the consternation he had created in the face of Monsieur Khodkine, who was struggling hard to regain his composure.

"My *dossier*, Monsieur!" he stammered, still staring incredulously. "You are mad."

"Not so mad as I seem—nor so guileless—nor so even-tempered, Monsieur Khodkine. I ought to kill you now as you stand and free Nemi of a spy and Russia of a traitor. But I won't. But I'll draw your sting."

And then with a gesture, "March toward the door. Hands up!"

"What are you going to do?"

"Wake Shestov and Barthou—Ah! would you——!"

Rowland fired as Khodkine leaped back, crashing the light to the floor, and turned toward where he had been, firing again at random, cursing himself for his stupidity. The rifle was awkward in the confined space and as he ran in the direction of the door of the vault to head the man off, his foot struck something on the floor and he stumbled against the shelves. When in desperation he found his way to the door of the vault, it clanged shut with a heavy crash, and he heard the tumblers falling into place.

He was locked in, and Khodkine—Khodkine had escaped!

The nature of this disaster did not for a moment occur to him. He hammered on the unresponsive steel for an

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unreasoning moment, and then stopped to upbraid himself.

"Silly fool," he muttered. "What did you go and do that for? You might have known. You can't shoot, either. H—— of a soldier *you* are!"

Suddenly the terrible meaning of his position began to dawn upon him. The vault closed—with Khodkine outside—and the combination of numbers that opened it unknown to anyone but himself—Unless Tanya—! He put his ear to the steel door and listened. He thought he heard footsteps in the passage-way outside and shouted her name. Silence. The darkness seemed to be closing in on him, like the silence, heavy—oppressive—burdened with meaning.

A tomb! And unless Tanya contrived to find a way to come to his rescue, likely to be his own. And yet how could Tanya——? He dared not follow his thought to its conclusion. Khodkine would find her there in the darkness and . . . Surely he would find her, for she would be coming back to the vault for him. Picard—Stepan! Would they know what to do? And even if they knew what had happened, how would they be able to release him? One by one he thought of the various possibilities and at the last was obliged to dismiss them all. He was caught—like a bear in a trap, and like the bear, raged to and fro for a while, knocking himself and breaking his knuckles against the shelves in the darkness, and cursing his own stupidity, and the wits of Monsieur Khodkine, which after all had proved cleverer than his own. Khodkine had won—Khodkine, whom not five minutes ago he had been laughing at for his stupidity! Was it only five minutes or was it an hour ago? . . .

This wouldn't do. No time to be getting "rattled" now.

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Bad business. Dark as the devil, too, but not hopeless. Nothing was entirely hopeless unless one thought it so. Something might happen. But what? Short of an earthquake that would tear the mound and vault to pieces, there seemed little chance of anything happening except Tanya—and Khodkine would see about her. Rowland was forced to admit that this was a beautiful vengeance for Khodkine to discover, one quite fitting the Boche idea of the eternal fitness of things. To imprison a man, to starve him, to let him beat out his brains in madness against a steel wall, to smother him——

. Rowland frowned into the darkness and whistled thinly. To smother him! The phrase seemed to have a new significance, the more terrible because of its simplicity. Suffocation, slow but certain, as he struggled for the exhausted oxygen. A matter of hours. The acid fumes of rifle and pistol smoke still hung in the air—already he seemed to feel that breathing had become difficult. . . .

Imagination! He breathed quite easily and well. What time was it? Something after two, perhaps. He didn't know. What he did know was that he was tired as the devil standing up and that he wanted to sit down somewhere, and have a smoke. He felt in his pockets. Cigarettes of the luckless Ivanitch—and a box of matches. He struck a match and lighted a cigarette. The skull on the shelf grinned at him. "Silly beggar, to grin on and on for a thousand years. Happier though." *He* always grinned when he could. It helped a lot. But he didn't seem to feel like grinning now.

A thought came to him, and striking another match, he found the electric torch upon the steel floor,—smashed this time beyond hope of use. He threw it away from him in disgust and sat down on the hard steel floor, his hands

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clasped over his knees, gazing at the light of the cigarette. It was a singularly cheerful spot of light in the denseness of the obscurity. . . .

Fool that he was—smoking here, poisoning the little oxygen that was left to him! Angrily he extinguished the cigarette upon the floor—and then clasped his knees with his aching fingers and sat uncomfortably waiting—waiting for what? A miracle? Could anything be expected of Tanya? And even if she succeeded in eluding Khodkine, how could he hope that she would know the numbers of the combination? He was sure that she had not even committed them to memory. And if she succeeded in reaching Shestov or Barthou and telling them of his predicament, it would take a long while to break into the vault, at the end of which he, Rowland, would be dead of suffocation.

He got to his feet, steadying himself by holding to the shelves. In the darkness it seemed less easy to coordinate the movements of his muscles. . . . Suffocation must be something like being "gassed"—only less painful. He had seen fellows in the hospitals struggling for their breath and remembered how they looked—livid—green. This was different but it wasn't going to be pleasant. The pounding of his pulses seemed to echo in the still chamber. He moved slowly to one end of the room and reached upward. The ceiling was low, he could touch it easily with his fingers. Stupid to build a vault with a ceiling as low as that.

What time was it? Four o'clock—five? It seemed as though he had lost all notion of the passage of time. Was it daylight outside? He walked around slowly, peering into the corners, seeking a glimpse of daylight which would mean a breath of air for his lungs and a respite

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at least until starvation came. Everywhere—blackness. The steel of the vault was continuous. Kirylo Ivanitch had planned well.

Poor old Ivanitch. Good sort of a well-meaning lunatic! He was sorry for Ivanitch . . . but it hadn't been Rowland's fault. If Ivanitch had only been Khodkine!

Rowland leaned against the gun rack and fingered the muzzles of the rifles. He had wanted to die out there in the open with a weapon in his hand, rushing a trench and yelling *Vive la France.* That was the kind of a death for a good fellow——

Oh, well. He'd had a good time. He had taken his fun where he found it. . . . But it was rotten luck that he couldn't show Tanya that he had been worthy of her confidence. There was no use crying about it. Somebody might come and let him out. If they didn't this was the end of P. Rowland. He lay flat on the floor where the air seemed very good. Might as well sleep as do anything else. Perhaps tomorrow something would turn up. The ceiling seemed to be closing in on him, like the Pendulum in the Pit. Poe was great on this sort of stuff—but Poe didn't have anything on him.

Once or twice he straightened, thinking that he heard a sound—a dull sound, somewhat like the throbbing of the blood in his ears, only . . . Imagination again. He didn't want to think—everything was black—even thought. . . . He was very drowsy. It wasn't so bad, after all. Tomorrow perhaps Tanya would come. . . . Princess Tatyana . . . Pretty name. . . .

Then suddenly in his dreams the air was riven and his eardrums hurt him horribly as though the blackness in his brain were striving toward the light . . . And then—nothingness.

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CHAPTER IX

SURPRISES

ZOYA ROCHAL had watched the figure of Rowland until it disappeared among the shrubbery. Her brows were slightly drawn and her eyes, shadowed by her dark hair, peered eagerly into the half light of the garden. Monsieur Khodkine, it seemed, respected her intelligence. But it was a pity that he had sent out for Monsieur Rowland so soon. It would have required but ten minutes more to have hitched this handsome American to her chariot wheel. He was a nice boy and it would be a pity if anything happened to him, for it seemed quite certain that something was on the point of happening at Nemi, and whatever happened it was Monsieur Rowland who would be the loser. Against the will of Max Liederman she had chosen to throw her lot in with the new President of Nemi, because he seemed quite young, quite inexperienced and with good management could be made quite useful for her own ends. But she hadn't reckoned upon the speed of Monsieur Rowland's wooing and the sudden culmination of the adventure. She wasn't sure that she hadn't liked the spontaneity of his caress—hurried, boyish and quite ingenuous. She must do what she could to save this newly found admirer from the wiles of Monsieur Khodkine, and with this object in her general plan, she moved slowly in the direction of the house and encountered on her way Max Liederman, walk-

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ing alone in a bypath and furiously smoking a long cigar.

"Ach, Madame," he growled. "So you've at last condescended. It's time——"

"Don't be a beast, Max," she said coolly.

"Well, this is no time for trifling," he growled.

"Sh!" she warned. "I'm not trifling. I've wasted no time. I've learned what I wanted to find out. Monsieur Rowland knows nothing."

"Does he look as if he knew anything?" he said contemptuously. "I could have told you that much. Khodkine twists him around his thumb."

"And so do I."

"Ach—and at what cost?" he muttered suspiciously.

Madame Rochal smiled up at Khodkine's lighted window.

"That's my affair," she said coldly.

"And in the meanwhile," he went on, "this precious Khodkine will get into the vault. Tonight, perhaps—How do I know that even now he hasn't the combination to the doors in his pockets. And I don't trust Fräulein Korasov."

"Nor I. She is much too quiet."

Liederman threw his cigar into the bushes, thrust his fists into his trouser pockets and swayed heavily from one foot to the other.

"Zoya Rochal," he said hoarsely, "you see how things are here at Nemi. While Ivanitch led our committee we were sure at least of a man pledged deeply to Internationalism and the socialist cause. It was his fetish. He was orthodox. He even gave his life for his convictions. And now whom do we find as Priest of Nemi—a friend of France, full of meaningless catchwords about Peace and Liberty—a boy from America, now the enemy of my

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country, ready to be caught by the first wind that blows. You, Zoya, voted for him. You have placed yourself on his side,—why, God knows, when with Khodkine he may work our ruin."

"Nonsense."

"I know what I am talking about. Khodkine comes with credentials from Russia, but that means nothing. *You* carry credentials from the Central Committee of Munich. He may be a Russian or a Roumanian, an Austrian or an agent of the Wilhelmstrasse——"

"That is not possible. I know——"

"What difference does it make to me? I distrust him. You may turn hither and yon for advisers, but no one may say that I'm not loyal to those who sent me here. In Germany I was born and bred, but the cause I serve is greater than nationality, greater than patriotism. And whatever others may do I am ready to give my life for that cause."

Zoya Rochal smiled at him charmingly and laid her slim fingers along his hairy cheek and their touch seemed to quiet him.

"No one doubts your honesty, my great bear," she said with a laugh. "You may not always be pleasant, but you always have the courage of conviction."

"And what thanks do I get?" he growled.

"Mine," she whispered, running a hand through his arm.

"Bah!" he shrugged.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked.

"Nothing, except not to play with fire."

"You've planned something?"

"Yes," he growled. "And I'm going to do it, tonight."

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She turned up toward him in eager inquiry.

"What?"

"I'm going to take no further chances with this situation."

"Are you serious?"

"Am I ever anything else? The money in the vault belongs to the Society of Nemi and the essence of the Society of Nemi—is Socialism. While I live, that money shall be spent in no other service."

"That is right, but you're not sure——"

"I trust no one here. And as the Council stands I can be out-voted. Shestov, Barthou, Colodna, Khodkine—and this young sprig of a Yankee. And the others——? We can't be sure of them. Most of this money should be appropriated for immediate use tomorrow, in Germany, in Austria, in Russia and Italy. And yet what assurances have we that it will not be wrongly used even if used at all—or that Monsieur Khodkine this very night may not make away with it."

"What do you propose to do?"

"Take it, tonight—myself."

"You——!"

Max Liederman shook his massive shoulders and tapped her with a kind of elephantine playfulness upon the hands.

"Did you ever know me to make a boast that I couldn't fulfill?" Then in a hoarse whisper. "I'm going to break into the vault."

"You are prepared?"

"Yes. I've been prepared for a long time. I always believe in being ready for emergencies."

"Do you need my help——"

"Your society, *chère* Zoya, let us say——"

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"When will you do this?"

"Toward morning. I have a drill and explosives. With luck I should succeed in something over an hour."

"And the money? Where shall you take it?" Zoya asked.

"Away from here to a safer place. Will you go with me?"

"Suppose you fail?"

He smiled grimly. "I won't fail. There's no watch kept upon the Tree. Will you meet me here?"

"At what hour?"

"At three. It is the hour of deepest slumber. Your room adjoins mine upon the other side of the house. You must sleep soundly, for we may have to travel far."

Madame Rochal stood in a moment of silence and then assented.

"I see I've not put my faith in you for nothing, Max," she said quietly.

"I've told you," he muttered, "that I've always been worth considering. You shall see—— Will you kiss me, Zoya?"

She made a little *moüe* at him and then obeyed with the deftness of one skilled in illusions.

"There, my great bear," she laughed. "And you'll wake me?"

"Yes. Now go and get your beauty sleep."

"And you? Shall you stay awake?"

"I sleep with one eye open—I can wake when I please. Borrow no trouble on that score."

She moved toward the house, whispering to him:

"Remain here. It will not do for us to be seen together. *Au revoir.*" And blowing a kiss at him with her fingers, she floated away into the shadows.

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Max Liederman was thorough. With characteristic prevision he had prepared all things, including a machine which was to be waiting at daylight outside the wall. Three o'clock found them at the iron door which led down into the passage. Liederman had been prepared to force this lock and to his amazement, and Zoya Rochal's, the key was in the door, which indeed was partly open.

Liederman stopped a moment to rock to and fro and gaze at the door in a puzzled way.

"Curious," he muttered, rubbing his head.

"Some one has been here before us?" questioned Zoya.

He nodded. "It looks so," he growled, "but we'll soon find out." Entering without hesitation and carrying his tools in their canvas wrapping, he threw the light of his pocket-torch down the steps and descended, while Zoya Rochal, her small nose sniffing the air daintily, followed, frowning.

"Don't you smell something?" she whispered when they reached the passage.

"I fancied—yes, I'm sure—the fumes of powder."

"Ah, I was not mistaken then. What can have happened?"

"I don't know. Perhaps we are mistaken."

Zoya, whose eyes seemed to be keener than his, suddenly darted forward ahead of him with a cry, and bending down beside the steel door picked up something and held it before Max Liederman's eyes.

"The Bough!" she cried. "The Golden Bough!"

Liederman started upright, his eyes big as saucers under his tangled brows.

"Khodkine!" he stammered. "Here!"

"It's quite green," she whispered. "Recently broken."

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"He has killed—Monsieur——" she halted, her face white as paper.

"Your little Yankee—!" He shrugged uneasily. "Perhaps. Wait. I must see."

He bent forward with the lamp and examined the nickel knob and handle, turned the light down, then went upon his knees and put his face close to the stone floor.

"There are many footprints in the dust,—one small, one with high heels, Zoya."

"Tanya Korasov?"

"Who else?"

"She and Khodkine—but I don't understand——"

Max Liederman had settled down before the door of the vault with a business-like air, unwrapping the canvas covering of his tools, and examining the knob, listening intently. Then he threw off his coat and rolled up the sleeves of his shirt and set to work while Zoya, her hand trembling, held the light.

"Could they have killed him—do you think?" she asked again anxiously.

"How should I know? It would only be what he deserves," he grunted.

Zoya's dark eyes frowned at him, but she said nothing.

Meanwhile the drill was slowly eating its way into the steel door above the lock. She questioned again but he was intent upon his task and made no answer. The sweat stood out in beads upon his face and fell to the ground. He was a magnificent brute. There were women who . . . But Zoya Rochal was difficult to please.

The first glimmerings of the dawn were filtering down through the iron door at the end of the passage before Max Liederman announced that his work was completed.

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Then he attached the fuse and he and Zoya Rochal went up the stairs, closed the iron door and waited.

A muffled explosion as the iron door swung open and a cloud of dust enveloped them. Liederman darted down the steps with Zoya at his heels. The charge had been cleverly placed and by the use of an iron rod and a short steel jimmy, at last the door of the vault yielded to Liederman's weight and swung inward upon its hinges.

Liederman threw the light into the room and it gleamed upon the swirling dust which for a moment obscured the vision. But as the cloud cleared, they saw a litter of papers upon the floor, and in the midst of the wreckage the figure of Rowland lying prone, his arms outstretched, smeared with blood and grime. A hasty glance around the shelves revealed no trace of the treasure of Nemi.

Liederman rocked to and fro in an awful moment of silent imprecation.

"*Schwein-hund* that I am, for waiting," he muttered. "Khodkine has been here before us."

Zoya Rochal gazed at him wildly a moment, and then fell to her knees beside the prostrate figure upon the floor.

Liederman grunted incuriously.

"He's dead?" he asked.

"Yes—No! His heart beats——"

"Ach—we must get him out of this—into the air. Pfui! It is enough to stifle one. Can you help, Zoya? His feet——"

Max Liederman raised the prostrate man and between them, they half dragged, half carried him out along the corridor and up the steps into the air. Without waiting for instructions Zoya ran to the house and came back with water and brandy. By the time she returned Liederman had loosened the American's collar, and after a while, in

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response to treatment, Rowland moved slightly and opened his eyes. He turned his head from side to side, gazing up through the trees at the spreading dawn and then his look met Zoya Rochal's. He concentrated his gaze with some difficulty as though not sure of himself, and then with an effort raised himself upon one elbow, his hand to his brows in a moment of thought.

"Khodkine!" he muttered weakly in English. "And the —the blighter—got—got away with it."

"Khodkine—yes——" uttered Liederman.

Rowland grinned up at his interrogator and nodded.

"Gone—got the best of me——"

"With the money? And Mademoiselle Korasov——?" questioned Liederman keenly.

Rowland brushed a hand across his brow and started upright.

"Mademoiselle Korasov! Yes. Yes——"

"They've robbed the vault, I tell you," cried Liederman wildly. "The money is gone——!"

It was here that Zoya Rochal took command of the situation.

"We can do nothing alone. Go, Max, arouse Shestov, Barthou and Signorina Colodna. They must learn of this."

"I'm quite all right," muttered Rowland. "Only a little confused. There was an explosion."

She gave him another drink of the brandy which he accepted gratefully.

"You are very kind, Madame," he said.

Zoya Rochal regarded him in a moment of anxiety.

"I warned you, Philippe Rowlan'," she said.

He smiled at her broadly and then whispered quizzically.

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"There *was* a pig in the vault," he laughed. "The trouble was that he hadn't any ring in his nose.

"It is no time to jest, Monsieur. I'm afraid you're badly hurt."

"I'm all right," he smiled, "but nitro-glycerine is not the best thing for a headache."

"I'm sorry, Monsieur." He saw Madame Rochal start and put her finger to her lips. "Sh—," she whispered and peered out from behind the bush where Rowland was sitting, toward the wall. He got up to his knees and followed her glance. It was still quite dark, but in the growing light he saw a movement in the branches of a tree near by and presently made out a pair of legs, dangling above the top of the wall. "It's a man," whispered Madame Rochal, "coming over. What——?"

Rowland slowly got to his feet and stood, his hand in warning on the arm of Madame Rochal, waiting until the man should descend. The gray figure hovered for a moment on the top of the wall and then they heard the thud of his boots as he reached the ground. In a moment, as the man emerged from the bushes, Rowland sprang out and faced the intruder. And as each man recognized the other in the growing light, he stepped back, the one in surprise, the other in consternation.

"Picard——!"

"You, Monsieur Rowland! Safe!" He breathed hard like one in the last stages of exhaustion.

"Quite, as you see. Mademoiselle Korasov sent you?"

Picard gasped and nodded. "With this note to Monsieur Shestov."

"Let me see it."

While Zoya Rochal turned on the light of Liederman's

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torch Rowland unfolded the slip of paper covered with close writing—in Russian.

"The devil!" cried the American. "Madame Rochal—read!"

Zoya Rochal obeyed, translating rapidly.

"Ivan Shestov,

The American Rowland, imprisoned in vault. He will die unless door is forced. Lose no time. I am prisoner of Gregory Khodkine fleeing with bank notes into Germany by upper road—a machine—destination—Munich. Follow. Tatyana."

As she finished, Rowland turned quickly to Picard.

"And Stepan——?"

"Dead, Monsieur. He resisted. Mademoiselle warned me. I obeyed Monsieur Khodkine until the time came, when I took this paper and fled. I have been running for two hours."

"You have done well, my friend. We shall lose no time. But how was Stepan killed?"

"Monsieur Khodkine said that he had broken the Golden Bough—that you, Monsieur Rowland, were killed and that he was the Priest of Nemi. We did not believe him. He ordered Stepan to carry the bank notes—which were already in the suit-case—along the road. Stepan refused to obey and Monsieur Khodkine struck him in the head with a stick. His body is near the road only a hundred yards or so from the wall."

"And you——?"

"Mademoiselle had whispered, 'Do nothing! Obey!' And I went with them, carrying the suit-case until we came to an empty machine standing by the roadside——"

"Liederman's——" explained Zoya Rochal.

"I see," muttered Rowland. And then, to Picard,

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"They had passed the German border when you returned?"

"Yes, Monsieur—a matter of three or four miles perhaps. The machine slowed down upon a hill and I slipped out and ran into a wood, coming back as fast as I could run."

"You saw no one?" asked Zoya Rochal.

"No, Madame. I knew where the sentries were stationed on the frontier and avoided them."

Shestov and Barthou now came with Liederman, drawing on clothing as they ran, their faces wan in the growing light as the details of the situation were explained to them.

"Your note, Monsieur Shestov," said Rowland coolly, handing it to him. "We took the liberty of reading it, As you will see, there's little time to lose."

The tall Russian frowned as he read while the impatient Barthou questioned anxiously.

"But I can't understand how Herr Liederman——"

Zoya Rochal cut him short.

"I heard the sounds of shots and called Herr Liederman," she explained glibly. "We went to the vault which showed signs of having been tampered with. And so with a crow-bar which Monsieur Khodkine had left, we broke into it. Is this not so, Monsieur Rowland?" she challenged him.

Their glances met in comprehension. Rowland turned aside.

"That is true," he said coolly. "Monsieur Khodkine was robbing the vault. I interfered. We fought but he outwitted me and got away——"

"But I don't understand——" persisted Barthou.

"Monsieur," cut in Rowland quickly, "there is no time for explanations. The bank-notes of Nemi are in a machine

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bound for the interior of Germany. Some of us must follow at once. A machine——"

"Mine is in the village," said Zoya.

"Passports——"

"Mine—" cried Liederman.

"And Monsieur Rowland——?" questioned Zoya.

"I shall take my chances. We must go at once."

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CHAPTER X

FLIGHT

MONSIEUR KHODKINE drove steadily into the gray light of the new day, satisfied with the events of the night which had resulted quite miraculously to his advantage, for the suit-case containing the bank notes of Nemi was safe upon the floor of the tonneau and the Princess Tatyana, still clad in her dark robe, sat in the seat beside him, completely at his orders. The escape of Picard had annoyed him, for he had intended taking the man far into the interior of Germany and there turning him over to the authorities as an alien enemy and a prisoner. But in the present turn of affairs it was possible that the counselors of Nemi might be put upon his own tracks and the pig of a Yankee liberated from the vault. He had been imprudent when in the first flush of his success he had told Tanya of their destination, but the chances of Picard getting back safely were not great, and he knew nothing of value.

The way in which the American Rowland had hidden his hand and almost defeated Monsieur Khodkine's projects showed how easily one could be mistaken in appearances and the feeling of comfort that had followed the imprisonment of the Yankee intruder in the vault was now slowly giving way to a vague inquietude. For the arm of Nemi, as Khodkine himself had said, was long and if Max Liederman blew open the door of the vault before the

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air for Rowland's cursed lungs was exhausted, Khodkine would have the whole pack of them yelping at his heels before he could take himself and the money to cover.

It was gratifying to him to turn his head and see the handsome angry profile of the Princess Tatyana there just beside him, but in spite of the way in which fortune had played into his hands and the ease with which her abduction had been accomplished, there were many thoughts that bothered him and her uncompromising attitude of enmity made him aware that he must play his game with a gentle hand. He had held her, heretofore, by the threat which he had hung over her,—a painful business at best, since she was quite the most desirable woman he had ever known. But the pig Rowland had startled him by revealing a knowledge of his nationality, his correct name, regiment and employment. For if Rowland knew who he was, from whom had he received the information? Not from Zoya Rochal, for that lady, clever as she was, could have had no possible means of learning the truth. Not from Liederman nor Barthou nor Shestov, for he had covered his trail far too cleverly. He was not so sure that Kirylo Ivanitch had not discovered something—Kirylo! Had Tatyana gotten something from the dead priest and told what she had learned to Rowland?

And so, driving silently, Monsieur Khodkine tried to think out a solution of his problems, mindful of the girl at his side, who sat rigidly in resolute silence, deaf or oblivious to the small attentions which he offered her. But as the day had now broken and the roads had suddenly seemed to fill with people, some of whom stared at the dark, cowled figure, he turned to her with a smile.

"They think, Princess Samarov," he said, "that I'm eloping with a nun."

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She made no reply.

"If it pleases you, Princess Samarov, we will descend at Tuttlingen."

She understood the meaning of the repetition of her name, but gave no sign that she was aware of it.

"Of course, Gregory Khodkine," she replied coldly, "I must do as you wish."

"Ah, my dear Tatyana," he urged, "do not say that. Rather tell me that you wish it also."

"I wish for nothing but my freedom."

He smiled at her pleasantly.

"How like a woman," he said, "to desire the one thing not in my power to grant. I cannot let you go. And if I did, here in Germany, your position would be precarious." He drove on in a moment of silence and then spoke more soberly. "Come. Be reasonable. Through no fault of my own we are enemies. It is very painful to me to feel that you are not in sympathy with my aims for Russia, but the very fact that I am right and you are wrong, makes me more generous toward you."

"Generous! Is this generosity——?"

"One moment, Princess Tatyana," he broke in as she paused. "You cannot forget, nor can I, that no matter what has passed between us, you had no right to condemn me unheard for what happened in Moscow. Prince Samaroff brought his fate upon himself. Nor had you the right to confide, without the consent of the Council of Nemi, in this absurd adventurer from America, to set him against the established authority, furnish him with the combination of the door which protected the money of the society that he might loot the vault for his own uses——"

"That is a lie," she muttered tensely.

He shrugged.

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"The evidence is all against him—and you, Princess Samarov," he added quietly.

She faced him and in the abrupt action the cowl fell over her shoulders, disclosing her disordered hair.

"You dare not look me in the eyes and say that I would steal money given in a holy cause. You dare not!" she murmured bravely.

He drove on stolidly for a moment and then a smile came on his thin lips.

"Much as I would like to look in your eyes, Princess, it is now impossible, since I would surely run into a market-cart. It is difficult furthermore," he said coolly, "because to look into your eyes is dangerous to my peace of mind——"

"Tch!—" The accent of scorn in her voice was very genuine, as she twisted away from him. "You honor me, Gregory Khokdine," she finished.

"I would honor you more, Tatyana Samarov—the highest honor in the privilege of any man to bestow," he said quietly. "I ask you to be my wife."

She was startled and turned toward him, wide-eyed.

"You!—after what you have done to me and mine——!"

"I beseech you to listen to me. Your father, Prince Samarov, was the enemy of Russia's freedom——"

"Because he believed in order," she broke in wildly, "instead of anarchy——"

"Because he was reactionary—" he paused with some show of delicacy, "because he was a traitor to the very causes you represent."

"That is not true. His cause is mine—the integrity of Russia as well as her freedom."

Khodkine smiled lightly.

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"The old order passeth, Princess, and with it those who are not awake to the new issues."

"And what is the new order of things?" She returned with spirit. "A carefully planned disorder that Germany may triumph, a chase of will-o'-the-wisps through a mist of illusions. *You* speak of treachery; *You*——!" She stifled the scorn of her tongue with an effort, for the thought of the papers in her bodice warned her that she was coming to dangerous ground.

"You are trying to do me injustice, Princess," he said quietly, "but your very words fail you for lack of proof. That it was through my agency that Prince Samarov was thrown into prison is indeed a proof of my loyalty—for did I not know that in condemning him—" Khodkine's voice sank a note as he finished slowly, "that in condemning him I was losing my own heart's desire—the one woman in the world that I have ever loved—or can."

She glanced at him quickly but anger dominated.

"He was innocent of any connection with the *Camarilla* of Rasputin," she said in a tense voice. "He despised trickery—and you knew it."

"That will doubtless be proved, Princess Tatyana, and it may be that I can help," he said suavely. "Indeed I am not without influence with the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Deputies."

"And why should you not be—you who are——!"

Again she paused, her hand below her cassock fingering the *dossier* of Gregory Hochwald.

"I am—what, Tatyana?" he asked keenly.

She shrugged and looked away.

"The apostle of—of license!" she said chokingly.

The promptness of her reply reassured him. She be-

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lieved in the Provisional Government and the dangers that now beset it were very real to her.

He smiled and turned to her softly.

"Aren't your mission and mine the same, after all? We desire a Russia free—not alone from mediævalism but from the traitors within her borders who have stolen the food from her soldiers, profited upon munitions which never reached those who upheld the honor of Russia at the front—the capitalists and those they put in power. I need not go on. You know their names and places—vipers that any true Russian of the nobility or of the people should pledge his life to crush. You too, Tatyana—you are their enemy as I am. Will you deny it?"

Tanya had listened in silence, amazed at the fervor of his denunciation and at his plausibility. Had she not held close against her body the proofs of his perfidy, had she not known the secrets of his Russian intrigue, his clever tongue might have persuaded her. As it was, having in her misery already planned a course of action, she merely answered evasively. Gregory Khodkine should be no more clever than she. At the present moment she seemed to be completely in his power, and until a proper opportunity presented, she must meet him at his own game. This was not the first time he had declared his love for her. There had been other moments in Petrograd and at Nemi when Gregory Khodkine had chosen to dignify her with his attentions, but beneath his suave demonstrations of affection, she had always been sure of his venality and felt the threat of a danger. Her father at this moment lay in a cell in the Prison of St. Peter and St. Paul, a prisoner through this man's agency, and of those others who had sworn falsely. She had blamed Gregory Khodkine, because she had guessed that the currents which actuated

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him had their source among the high places. Now she knew what and where, for the proof was in her possession, and that knowledge made her fear and hate him the more.

The disaster to Monsieur Rowland had stricken her helpless, the death of Stepan had terrified her, but she had managed to gather her wits together in time to feign illness and write the note to Shestov which Picard had taken. All her hopes lay in Picard. Would he reach Nemi in safety and if so would he be in time to save Monsieur Rowland from a frightful death? Monsieur Rowland was a brave man. There was a quality of carelessness in his courage and ingenuity that had made her throw herself impulsively into his confidences and upon his protection. It was incredible that this fine young life should be snuffed out. . . . She would not believe it! And Monsieur Khodkine, Rowland's enemy, Stepan's slayer, sat beside her, driving into the sunshine of the dewy morning, alive, awake, persistent and successful, a portent of the triumph of the dark forces which were spreading their evil snares all about the world. She stole a quick sidelong glance at him and marked the handsome, finely-cut profile. He was good to look at—but cold—so ruthless and so cold! And it was this man who a moment ago had asked her to marry him! There had seemed something more ominous to her in the carefully chosen words of his declaration than there would have been in the rugged orders of an honest jailor. And yet there was too something in the quietness of his manner and in the air of submissiveness with which he had accepted her rebuff which reassured her. Could it be, after all, that under this impassive exterior there was a soul that could be touched, a chord of memory, an ideal to be invoked, in which during moments not given to the soulless pursuit of a mad nation's ambi-

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tions, she, Tanya, could have a part? Once or twice she had believed him genuine, for in his pale blue eyes had come a look that had been born of a real emotion, and then something had happened—a quick return of his imperiousness or suspicion, which had driven from her mind all thoughts except that this was the man who held the fate of Prince Samarov in the hollow of his hand. But what if . . .

She glanced at him again. His position was unchanged, his expression unmoved, sober, determined but not unpleasant, and for the present he seemed to have forgotten her existence. Love? To such a man—it was a thing apart, a trifle, an incident upon the highway of his life and yet —what if she could find it—use it?

There was a weapon here for her woman's fingers to grasp and wield. He had offered it to her. Was that too a part of the tissue of falsehoods he had woven about his life or was it a tangible thing that would cut and rend as a woman's weapons should? There was nothing left for her but to choose. Timidly, but firmly she caught at it.

"Grisha Khodkine," she said with a smile that belied the fear in her heart, "perhaps you are right. I am only a woman. I have thought deeply and sorrowed deeply for Russia, but that is a woman's weakness for her heart leads her always. As to my father——"

She paused and looked over the blue valley which led down to Lake Constance.

"He need not worry you," he broke in. "Before leaving Petrograd, I assured myself that he lacked nothing. He is comfortable, well-fed and in no danger. If you will trust in me, it will not be long before all your clouds are rolled away."

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"I—I do not believe you, Grisha Khodkine," she murmured. "One does not change one's thoughts at the first wind that blows. You are catering to a maddened people drunk with liberty. That is dangerous and bodes no good to my country—and—and yours."

"And yet the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Deputies is to rule all Russia. You shall see. Out of chaos, cosmos shall come, a government 'of the people, for the people, by the people.'"

She shook her head and spoke quickly.

"Nothing can come out of chaos but the chaotic. You see I can not believe in you."

"That is a pity, Princess Tatyana," he said quietly. "But one day you will learn that I have spoken the truth."

She was silent a moment and then she spoke, trying to measure her words which came hotly in spite of herself.

"What have you done to make me believe in you? What does this flight into Germany mean? These passports—which permit you, who call yourself a loyal Russian, to go into the very heart of your enemy's country without hindrance, without question? And by what right do you carry me against my will to this central committee of Munich, which represents a socialism tainted with the poisons of Potsdam——?"

"I would suggest caution, Prince Tatyana," he interrupted sharply. "You are now in Germany and presently may be placed in a position where such a remark if overheard would put you in great danger."

"The daughter of Prince Samarov is not afraid," she said scornfully.

"Then I shall be afraid for you and protect you in spite of yourself."

Her growing anger had driven prudence to the winds.

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"I am no puppet, Gregory Khodkine, to be carried here and there against my will. By what right have you dared do this thing——?"

"By right—of might," he said quietly, "the force that sways Russia and will sway the world." The car had reached a deserted strip of the road and Khodkine drove more slowly. "Listen, Tatyana. Perhaps you did not believe me a while ago when I told you what was in my heart. That is your privilege. But it is mine to serve—and wait——"

"Serve!"

"Let me finish. Perhaps I can make my purposes clearer to you. You believe that I have stolen this money, for some personal or political object. That is not true. It goes to a place of safety, where you as well as I will have some say in its disposition in international affairs. You chose to be suspicious of me and to take into your confidence this mad American, but he did not foresee, nor did you, that there were other forces at work which threatened the Society of Nemi—Ah! You are interested! It is the truth."

"Max Liederman!"

He nodded. "And you know what that meant?"

"Zoya Rochal."

"Exactly! You are clever, Princess Tatyana. Herr Liederman would have wasted no time. I know. I have evidence. He was prepared for the death of Kirylo Ivanitch. He meant that the bank notes should fall into no other hands but his."

"But Herr Liederman, whatever his deficiencies, is at least honest in his convictions and in his allegiance."

Khodkine laughed lightly.

"The convictions, the allegiances of a dotard who is in

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love with a dangerous woman are no more to be relied upon than the woman herself. Zoya Rochal has owned many men and used their fortunes. She is without an occupation. Herr Liederman is not prepossessing, but in her eyes twenty-five million of francs would beautify Pluto himself. And Herr Liederman——"

He shrugged expressively and finished with a smile.

"Herr Liederman would never have carried out his good intentions."

And then as she made no reply,

"So you see why I have acted quickly. Monsieur Rowland is clever, but the Gods serve the righteous. I brought you with me, Princess, because it was impossible to do otherwise. The judgment of a woman is not always to be relied upon. You are out of harm's way. I shall save you from mischief and from others who might do you and the cause I serve incalculable harm. I pray that you will do me the justice of believing in the honesty of my motives."

Under her robe her fingers clutched the *dossier* of Gregory Hochwald.

"Honesty is as honesty does. The passports, Monsieur —to me they can mean but one thing."

"Two things, Princess," he said with a laugh. "I am either a spy of Germany in Russia or a spy of Russia in Germany. Can you choose?"

His impudence amazed her.

"A spy—of Russia!"

It was time that she moved carefully, for the slightest slip might betray her. "Oh," she said carelessly, "I had not thought of that."

"I am not without friends in Germany," he went on—"in Prussia. I was educated in a German university. If

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I have used my connections in Russia's services, how can you blame me?"

She made no reply.

"Does that explain any facts—or help you to understand?" he asked.

"I think—perhaps," she said slowly, "that it does."

He examined her keenly for a moment.

"You suspected—you had heard that I was acting in the interests of Prussia? Did Ivanitch speak of me to you?"

"Oh, no," she said, turning and looking steadily into his eyes. "I was not the confidante of Kirylo Ivanitch in such matters." She broke off and turned away with a shrug.

"My doubts as to your genuineness are purely personal—and based, you must admit, upon good grounds. In the twentieth century abduction is hardly conventional. Women no longer kiss the hands that beat them, Gregory Khodkine."

He was silent for a long moment of meditation.

"It is very painful to me that you should dislike me so much. I ask nothing of you—expect nothing. For while I can help the cause of free Russia, I have sworn that no personal consideration shall stand in the way of duty. It is the irony of fate that it should be you, Princess Tatyana, who are thrown across my path, but that has made no difference to me. My life or happiness is nothing beside the other issue. That day at the British Embassy when we met and afterwards walked along the river, our minds struck fire. I knew then that you were different from other Russian women of your class. I am not sentimental—perhaps you think me cold; but I love you, Tat-

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yana, and whether you believe it or not will serve and protect——"

"Please, Grisha Khodkine," she murmured. "My situation is delicate enough, without making it more difficult."

They were approaching the town and Monsieur Khodkine drove more carefully.

"It shall be as you please," he said quietly. "My desire was to reassure you. You shall be as safe in my company as you are at Nemi, but I pray you to be discreet. One may not speak freely in Germany in times like these. I warn you now that for myself I fear nothing, so that you are powerless against me, but should you antagonize or deride German authority, I may not be able to save you."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Keep silent, that is all. You travel as my sister. At the town ahead of us you will provide yourself with a valise, a hat, coat, and such toilet articles as you may require. Tonight we should reach Munich where you will be again among members of the society. I shall try my case before them, place this money in their care."

"And after that—what?"

"If it pleases you, we shall go on into Russia."

She thought a moment. "And if I promise to obey you thus far, what do you offer me in return?"

"The liberation of Prince Samarov when we reach Petrograd," he replied promptly.

"Very well," she assented at last. "I agree."

"Good," and then with a smile; "one word more, Princess Tatyana, a word of warning and of prophecy. The cause of the Provisional Government is hopeless, its leaders dreamers—idealists. Russia has dreamed too long. The party to come into power will be radical, applying

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desperate remedies to desperate diseases, but it will be practical and it will be triumphant. Do not sink with a lost cause—for in the end the result is the same—Russia free—socialism—Internationalism victorious——"

"International Prussianism——!"

He frowned slightly—

"You are already breaking your agreement——"

"And England, France, Italy—" she persisted eagerly. "What becomes of our agreements with them?"

He shut his jaws grimly.

"They must look out for themselves, Princess Tatyana," he finished.

"Ah!" she gasped, and sinking back into her seat, said no more.

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CHAPTER XI

THE PLOT

THE car drew up at the door of a store the sign upon which proclaimed the sale of articles of feminine apparel and Khodkine got out and stood bowing upon the pavement.

"A suit-case, a hat, gloves and coat and such other articles as you require. Let me know the cost and I will give you money. And remember our agreement. I will await you here."

She had slipped out of her dark robe before getting down, and entered the store. For a moment a vague notion came into her head of escaping through a rear door and hiding from him. But maturer thought soon convinced her that such a plan was impracticable. Gregory Khodkine was far too clever to permit himself to be eluded in such a way. He had made sure, too, that she had no money in her possession and without money her case was hopeless. The exciting events of the night and previous day had worn upon her and she now felt weak from lack of food. There was nothing for it but to obey Monsieur Khodkine's injunctions and so she made her purchase quickly, put on the hat, coat and gloves, and with the other articles in the suit-case, presented the bill to Khodkine, who gave her the money.

As he handed her into the machine he smiled at her gravely.

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"I am sorry to have kept you up all night, but there is an inn near by and breakfast should be welcome."

Monsieur Khodkine was right. The coffee was poor, but it was real coffee, the eggs were freshly laid in a neighboring barn yard and the rations of war bread were nourishing. She found nothing to complain of in the demeanor of her companion and their breakfast finished they were again upon their way. Khodkine had now taken the suitcase into the front seat beside him and put Tanya into the tonneau, expressing a hope that she would find a chance to doze. It would be impossible to stop to rest as many miles were to be covered by nightfall, and there was no time to spare. This rearrangement of their positions was agreeable to Tanya, for she had many things to think of. If she still had any thought of escaping, Gregory Khodkine quickly removed them, for the fuel of the machine having been replenished at Tuttlingen, she soon saw that he was bent on covering the miles to Munich at a speed as rapid as consistent with safety. His suggestion that she try to sleep in the tonneau was impracticable, for though the road was for the most part in good condition, the car swerved violently at the turns and it was difficult without holding by a hand grasp to keep an upright position. Indeed it seemed as though she never wished to sleep again. Her body was weary with sitting upright, but her eyes, wide open, stared along the gray road before her as she wondered at Gregory Khodkine's skill, persistence and tirelessness.

A German agent! Many things had happened that had made her suspect him of Teutonic leanings. But this! And Gregory Khodkine was but one of many. Poor Russia! She had indeed fallen into the hands of the Philistines.

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Every mile they traveled carried the Princess Tatyana further into the enemy's country and nearer to those from whom this traitor drew his high authority. Already she had been given proofs of the character of his *laisser passer*. One glance by an officer of the guard seemed sufficient to send the machine flying upon its way. There was always too an air of quick deference and a military salute which accompanied it. What chance was there for her with the Central Committee at Munich to which they were bound, with the finger of the Wilhelmstrasse upon the latch of its door, with ears near by, strained for the first free murmur which passed the bounds proscribed? Members of this Committee had been to Nemi—Georg Senf—letters had passed between them. Madame Rochal even had come from Munich, properly accredited. Tanya felt very much alone, very much at a loss, helpless in the face of the innumerable forces opposed to her. But somewhere within her heart a hope still leaped that all might yet be well with Monsieur Rowland.

All night and morning the possibility of his death had weighed heavily upon her conscience, for she could not deny a personal responsibility in the series of events which had brought about the final disaster. Of course she could hardly have foretold the madness of Ivanitch, but the fact remained that she had cast her fortunes upon Monsieur Rowland's side, and by giving him the secret of the vault, had plunged him into the danger that had resulted in his undoing. There was a sweetness in the memory of their first encounter in the garden of Nemi. Here was a boy grown to manhood unspoiled by rough contacts. She knew nothing of his history, save by the vague phrases which confessed a roving habit and a knowledge of many sides of life. But the naturalness of their brief friendship,

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its ingenuousness and charm were singularly refreshing to one who from childhood had been brought up in an atmosphere of intrigue and double meaning.

She could not believe that he would die. The vault was large. One, two, perhaps even three days might elapse before the air of the vault should be exhausted, and surely before that time a means would be found to enter it. Gregory Khodkine's revelation of Herr Liederman's plans had filled her with hope. Perhaps already Monsieur Rowland had been liberated and was devising means to offset the successes of her captor.

Would he follow her into Germany? And could he if he wished? If Picard had succeeded in crossing the frontier, her note to Shestov would have been delivered, for Picard, she knew, would go through fire for her. But what claim after all had she on this Philippe Rowland? A strange brief friendship, based upon the call of youth to youth, and an intimate community of interests born of her dependence and his mere love of adventure. (Poor boy! She had got him more than he had bargained for.) Or was his sudden allegiance born of something more than the interests she served? She tried to remember the things that he had said, the good-natured, disarming smile, the amused look in his dark eyes, that could be both deferent and bold.

And as she thought of this a slight frown gathered at her brows. His eyes could be bold and he was quite capable of suiting his actions to their meaning. Madame Rochal had lost no time in discovering Monsieur Rowland's knowledge of the complexities of her sex.

To a woman of the antecedents and training of Zoya Rochal the conquest of a person of Monsieur Rowland's frank disposition was a mere matter of opportunity and

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Madame Rochal had lost no time in creating that. But Tanya had been a little dismayed at finding how quickly the designing *cosmopolitaine* had accomplished her ends, more than a little dismayed, too, to find that Monsieur Rowland had so soon fallen to her wiles. And yet back of it all was the undeniable fact of Monsieur Rowland's cleverness, his genuine appeal to her own generosity and forgiveness which she had granted there at the door of the vault when he had seemed to have forgotten the numbers of the combination. His boyishness and humor had reassured her and something more than mere friendship she had seen in his eyes. The deference had been there, the boldness also, but there was another look which she had seen in other men's eyes, knew, and recognized. Philippe Rowland had given his allegiance to her cause, because it was in a measure his cause too, but he had also given Tanya Korasov his allegiance because of herself.

Unfortunately she realized that his promise to help her defeat an intrigue against the fortunes of the Society of Nemi was one thing; a chase across the enemy's country, from which, by great trial and good fortune he had just managed to escape, was another. She had given Shestov the slenderest of clues and Germany was large. And if, not for her sake merely, but that of Nemi, of which he was the titular head, he decided to follow her fortunes into danger, where could she find the hope that he would succeed—without a passport, without influence and without means unless he borrowed them? Liederman—Zoya Rochal—Shestov—to the outwitted Councilors of Nemi, the loss of twenty-five millions of francs by the society would be a terrible catastrophe, as it was indeed to Tanya, for she had no hope that Gregory Khodkine intended to use this money in the purposes for which it had been con-

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tributed. If any part of it was to be used in Russia, its appropriation would be in the hands of Teuton agents who would dispense it at the dictation of Graf von Stromberg of the Secret Service to debauch the dreamers along the thin gray line which marked the only borderland between Prussianism and the free Russia she loved.

And yet, had not circumstance put Monsieur Rowland in a position of responsibility toward those who had contributed toward this vast sum of money for the propaganda of freedom and liberal government? He was the leader of Nemi, secretly elected in accordance with the strange rites which had come down from the forgotten ages. These hundreds of thousands did not know the names of the leaders of the order, but they did know that the Society of Nemi was great, and actuated by a high purpose and that its leader, whoever he was, was responsible to them for the use of the accumulated funds in its possession.

How much of this responsibility would weigh upon Monsieur Rowland? And if he felt it, what use would he make of the power that had come ready-made to his hands? Was he already upon his way to France to rejoin his regiment of the legion or would he . . .?

The Princess Tanya's pretty head dropped forward upon her breast and she awoke suddenly with a start. How long had she slept? The heat, the dust, the roar of the exhaust of the machine had worn upon her weariness, but she straightened guiltily as though she had been false to a trust. There was no answer to her problems but the implacable back of Gregory Khodkine's head, who drove onward skillfully without a word, the suit-case safe beneath his eyes and the source of his authority ever growing nearer.

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At Ulm he bade her get down at the railroad station and deliver a message for the telegraph. Inside the door of the place, beyond the range of his vision, she scrutinized it eagerly—a mere jumble of words strung together, meaningless to her—in code. She sent it. What would have been the use of opposing him in this when he could confirm the message at the next town they came to? Indeed, during the afternoon messages were delivered to him as he arrived. And he read them with satisfaction.

Her case seemed hopeless and if indeed she had needed the proof, the venality of Gregory Khodkine was fully assured. But after awhile she became curious as to how he would attempt to explain away these evidences of Prussianism.

"The miles increase your assurance," she said bitterly in Russian.

He found her gaze and then glanced away.

"It is well to take precautions. I am not in the habit of traveling with more money than enough for my immediate uses," he said with a lame attempt at humor. "The responsibility weighs upon me."

"The responsibility to whom, Gregory Khodkine?" she asked.

"To those who have sent me," he replied uneasily.

"You grow bold with success."

"Who doesn't?" And then with a frown, "I warn you, Tatyana, of your promise."

Gone were the softer tones in which he had pitched his morning appeal. This was another Khodkine, the man who last night had asked her into his room at Nemi that he might try to frighten her into a confession of what she knew of the secret of the vault. She had evaded him then, had managed as she thought to throw him off the

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