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## THE SPUR OF FATE.

BY ASHLEY TOWNE.

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### CHAPTER VI. PARIS TO STAVROPOL.

On the evening of that day came the swarthy Kilzlar and with him a woman named Vera. She spoke with him briefly in the drawing room, and then she departed. Mr. and Mrs. Gordon had gone out, expecting to return within the hour. Vera had been waiting in her room, while in a dark corner of the veranda Darrell sat smoking a cigar and holding silent converse with an unruly heart.

A servant had brought a soft felt hat for Darrell to wear, but the young man had tossed it down upon a table and had gone out bareheaded into the warm spring evening. Some minutes after Kilzlar's departure Vera came to the window through which Darrell had passed to the veranda and looked out, but she did not see him, and he did not see her. Turning away, she noticed the hat upon the table, and she held it in her hands for a moment.

When she had gone, a servant entered, and, seeing the hat and deciding that Mr. Darrell did not require it, he took it back to the gentleman's room, where it remained unused for many days.

Darrell finished his cigar and re-entered the house. He hoped to find Vera in the music room, but she was not there, and as he turned to look elsewhere the butler handed him a note written upon cheap paper, hastily folded, and sealed with great dabs of wax. He tore it open and read:

The name of the lady has been reported to the police, and immediate action will be taken. She will probably be arrested as an accomplice in the killing of Ladislov. She is not seriously suspected, but it is believed that her arrest will bring out other evidence.

The note was unsigned, but the writing was Fontaine's. Darrell had received other communications from the detective in similar form.

"Will you inform Miss Lorrimer that I would like to see her here?" said Darrell.

Vera had passed in that house as a cousin of the Miss Lorrimer who had been a guest before her and had been called by that name before the servants.

The butler summoned a maid, who went upon her errand and was gone so long that Darrell became anxious and himself ascended the stairs.

At the head of the stairway he met the maid, who said:

"We cannot find Miss Lorrimer. I am told that she has left the house."

"Have further search made instantly," replied Darrell. "I wish to see her upon a matter of great importance."

He descended the stairs and in the lower hall met Mr. and Mrs. Gordon, to whom he disclosed his news. He had scarcely done so when the maid returned with the positive assurance that Vera had gone out.

"Kilzlar must have told her that her retreat was discovered," said Gordon.

"She could not find any of us!" groaned Darrell. "The poor girl fled alone. What a series of fatalities!"

They had passed from the hall into the drawing room. Gordon now turned back and, addressing the butler, who stood with the maid near the door, ordered that Francois be summoned at once.

It appeared upon investigation that Francois could not be found, and upon the back of this instructive incident the police arrived in search of Vera. Naturally they did not find her. Gordon and Darrell lied with calmness and dignity. They denied all knowledge of Mile. Shevaloff, and they nearly convinced the officers, though those individuals had come with their minds full of perfect certainty.

At the expiration of a fruitless hour the police detail departed, doubtless leaving scrolls posted near the house. Presently Darrell went out to search for Vera, and he returned after midnight, having learned nothing. No word came from her during the night or the succeeding day.

Late in the afternoon both Gordon and Darrell were summoned to the police station of the district and were questioned closely. Like the boy who put five cents into the contribution box at church and took out half a dollar, they gave little and gained much more. They returned from the station with a very fair idea of the condition of the Ladislov investigation.

It appeared that the police had traced Ladislov to the point where the capture of Vera had been made and a

very little farther. They had then lost track of the carriage in which the princess was being taken away and had failed to get any hint about the facts of the rescue by Darrell. The vehicle had been found, of course, and there was an inference that it must have been attacked somewhere, but the police were unable to understand how Darrell or Gordon could have figured in the matter, and they dared not make an arrest upon the evidence of Francois alone, for he proved to be a man of such a shady record that, having sold his information to a minor officer of police, he had disappeared because of fear that his inconvenient past would cause him trouble.

Thus the whole matter hung in the wind, like a vessel taken aboard, for several days, which were among the worst that John Darrell could remember to have experienced. No word came from Vera, no hint of her fate, and the conviction grew stronger in Darrell's mind that the agents of the czar had again laid their hands upon her.

"It is a certainty," he said to Gordon; "otherwise she would have sent us word. She is not the woman to be guilty of ingratitude. I am going to Stavropol."

"To Stavropol?" echoed Gordon.

"She told me that she would probably be taken there for trial," replied Darrell. "It is a long chance, but I have no other, and I cannot remain inactive. This thing is eating the heart out of me, Robert."

Gordon attempted to dissuade him, but to no purpose.

"I must go," he said. "I rely upon you, Robert, to do everything that can be done here. Get to the bottom of the Ladislov case if you can. Spend all the money you can use to advantage. Here's a check for my balance at Morgan's, and you'll see it is not small. You'll keep me posted. Thank heaven, there are telegraph wires leading to most regions of the earth in these days. You can reach me through our consuls."

Darrell took a train that afternoon at the Gare d'Est, where he had the extraordinary fortune to encounter Getchikoff, whom in the past few days he had made many ineffectual attempts to find. The Russian was just alighting from a very elegant private equipage belonging to a young widow of enormous wealth and excellent family, but of a reputation sometimes attacked in whispers. Getchikoff was evidently starting upon a long journey, and his farewell to the lady was somewhat strenuous, considering the public place in which it occurred.

As he was about to board the train Darrell accosted him. Getchikoff seemed startled, yet neither surprised nor altogether pleased. His manner was somewhat puzzling to Darrell. It did not lack cordiality. Indeed Getchikoff was making arrangements that they should travel together, and before they had ridden five miles he confided to the American that he was engaged to the lady in whose carriage he had come to the station and that the marriage, for every reason, was the most desirable thing in life for him.

From Paris to Stavropol is a long way under the best circumstances. To Darrell, with the burden of his nearly hopeless mission, it was almost unendurable. In conversations with Getchikoff he approached the object of his journey as nearly as he dared, and he obtained the other side of Vera Shevaloff's story. Naturally her father was represented by Getchikoff to have been a traitor to the czar and justly condemned. Yet Getchikoff treated the subject without malignity, almost with sympathy, speaking often of the private virtues of Count Konstantin and of the noble character of his wife. As to Vera he professed ignorance.

"She was only a child then," he said. "I knew little about her. It is rumored that she is now high in the counsels of the nihilists, but I cannot speak of that from my own knowledge. If she were in trouble in Stavropol, my father would spare her to the last limit of his power."

And somehow this final sentence seemed to ring true in Darrell's ears and to give him hope.

Otherwise the journey was without incident, except that mysterious men were always bobbing up from unexpected places to hold long and serious talks with Getchikoff.

"I will accompany you to a good hotel," said Getchikoff as they prepared to leave the train at the end of their long journey. "Later I hope to have you for my guest at the palace. But this matter of your connection with Vera Shevaloff—"

"What do you know of that?" demanded Darrell.

"To be frank, I have heard rumors," was the answer. "And Russia is not America, you know."

"Thank God, America is not Russia," said Darrell. "If ever a man learns to love his country, it is when he appreciates its liberties and regard for the rights of its people. Yet I anticipate no trouble here."

"Pardon, colonel. By orders of his excellency!"

Two men had stopped before them on the street.

"What is it?" asked Getchikoff.

"Have you a message to me from my father?"

"None, colonel; but we have orders to arrest at once Sergius Bilowski, the man at your side."

"Bilowski!" exclaimed Darrell. "My name is Darrell. I am an American citizen."

"Your name is Sergius Bilowski, and you are a prisoner," was the reply. One of the men laid his hand on Darrell's arm, but the American thrust him aside.

At the same time the other banded Getchikoff a paper. As he read it he turned white, but at the close he set his teeth firmly together, as one who has taken a strong determination.

"For heaven's sake, Getchikoff, tell these men they are mistaken!" cried Darrell. "I'll knock one of them down in a minute!"

"For God's sake, you will only make it worse!" said Getchikoff. "Go with them. I will intercede with my father."

"But they want a man named Bilowski!" said Darrell.

Getchikoff made no reply. Indeed he seemed unable to utter a word.

"Do you deny your identity?" demanded the officer who had made the arrest.

"I not only don't deny it," rejoined Darrell, "but I am prepared to prove it. Have the kindness to glance at my passport."

The man, with the calmness of a mechanical dummy, took the passport—and kept it. Then, turning to Getchikoff, he said:

"You have traveled from Paris with this suspect. What do you know of him?"

"I believe him to be Sergius Bilowski!" replied Getchikoff, white as a ghost.

"Why, you whelp," exclaimed Darrell, "you were introduced to me by an attaché of the British embassy who has known me for ten years, as you are well aware."

If Getchikoff had any reply to make, he was not permitted to utter it, for the police officer immediately commanded Darrell to follow him, and at the word four guards "fell in" around him with military precision. Resistance would have been a grotesque folly, and Darrell did not attempt it. He marched away, surrounded by his captors, who led him to a low, stone structure fronting a public square of a mean appearance. Within this building he was brought before an official, who heard the charge against him, which was not properly an accusation, but merely a name, and committed him to custody. No defense was allowed. The prisoner, indeed, declared his name and nationality, but not the slightest attention was given to his words. The mere proceeding did not occupy four minutes, and it ended by the magistrate's signing a document of commitment which was suspiciously handy upon his desk.

Darrell was then conducted to a room which was much more habitable than he had expected his prison to be—in fact, except for the basic injustice of the matter, he had no cause to complain of his treatment. He was subjected to search, but nothing was taken from him except his watch, his pocket-knife, some unimportant letters and a small part of his money. The principal portion of his cash was in large notes, which he carried in an inner pocket of his waistcoat. It appeared to him that the failure to take it was a genuine oversight on the part of the searchers—that they really did not see the pocket. On the other hand, the money might have been left with him that he might buy his way out of the prison and get shot by a guard just outside the walls. Such things will happen in the east. His traveler's checkbook was in his baggage, which, of course, had fallen into the hands of the police.

As a matter of form he requested permission to communicate with the American consul, and it was granted. But Darrell was not so simple as to suppose that his letter would be delivered. He realized fully that he was in a trap, though he could not understand the precise object of the proceedings. Doubtless his arrest was connected with the affairs of Vera Shevaloff. He might be seriously suspected of complicity in her designs, whatever they were, and he smiled grimly in his cell at the thought of his own complete ignorance of the matter. It would have been hard for the governor general's secret police to find a man who knew less, though they had searched the city for the most innocent within its limits.

Reflecting upon the problem during a long and tedious evening, Darrell was of the opinion that he had been arrested as a mere precaution and would be held until the affair had been thoroughly sifted; that Vera was also a prisoner in the city, her plots more or less fully known, her liberty and indeed her life at the mercy of the governor general. The thought of his own present helplessness weighed upon him like lead, and many a vow of vengeance he made with the name of Ivan Getchikoff as the chief victim.

### CHAPTER VII. A BAD JUDGE AND A GOOD JAILER.

DARRELL had been served with a good dinner, and on the morrow there was spread a palatable breakfast, after which he was permitted to enjoy a cigar. This leniency augured well.

It had the look of mere brief detention, and if there had been no question of Vera's safety he would have felt little anxiety. It was therefore a complete surprise to him when, about 10 of the forenoon, he was summoned to trial! The announcement was coldly made by the officer who had managed his arrest upon the previous evening.

Darrell demanded counsel and was informed that it was not customary. He insisted upon an interview with the official representative of his country and received the reply that his letter had been forwarded and that nothing more could be done. There was no alternative. He was forced to accept trial on the prosecutor's terms.

He was led before a singular tribunal. The judge sat in a courtroom bare as a barn, and there were not a

dozen persons present, including prisoner, guards and clerks. A villainous looking individual with a face so unsymmetrical that he seemed to be made from the halves of two very different men that had been split longitudinally acted as state's attorney. He charged the prisoner with being an escaped Siberian convict, Sergius Bilowski. His opening remarks were brief, and he galloped through them at such a gait that Darrell had hard work to follow him. Witnesses were then admitted, one at a time, from an adjoining room. They swore to the prisoner's identity with such alacrity that three of them testified within five minutes. Darrell was not permitted to question them, but at the close of the farce he had a chance to testify in his own behalf. As if to make the proceedings perfect-fair, nobody questioned him. When he had said his say, the judge signed some documents, and the officer who had brought Darrell in received them.

"The prisoner will be taken to Gredskov," said the judge, "and will be returned to Siberia at the earliest opportunity."

He then left the bench, vanishing through a door behind it. Darrell was led back to the room in which he had been previously confined. He was not fettered, and there was no added severity in the treatment of him except that an armed guard was placed within the room, a gigantic fellow with a good natured face, who sat on a stool tilted back against the door with a short gun, like a cavalry carbine, across his knees.

Darrell had struggled to preserve his self command throughout the tragic farce of the trial, well aware that the approval of his own sense of honor was all he had to hope for. He had maintained a calm demeanor from first to last, and in his prison room he addressed his guard cheerfully.

"Where is this Gredskov?" he asked.

"Gredskov," was the reply, "with a sort of pitying grin, 'is a prison city in the Caucasian mountains. It is maintained for the purpose of guarding the captives taken among the rogues of the mountainous-Circassians, robbers, Turks or any of the bad men who seek to plot against the czar. Every three months a prison train is made up for Siberia, where the prisoners are divided among the mining towns."

Darrell's stay in Stavropol was short. On the following morning he was placed with about a dozen other prisoners, all seemingly of the lowest type of peasants, and was conducted under a strong guard to the city gate. He had not been dressed in any sort of prison garb and still retained his minor belongings and the money that the searchers had mislaid, but his hat had been replaced by a cap and his overcoat by a ragged garment that might have been a part of an officer's outfit in the far past.

Outside of Stavropol the road was smooth for a considerable distance, and the cavalcade moved slowly along through a rural scene of what might have been prosperous comfort and wealth had it not been for the stagnation arising from the policy of the deputed government of Getchikoff.

At the end of the day's march they rested at a little post village. In the morning they again advanced and at night reached Glugiersk, on the main road leading to the pass over the Caucasus to Tiflis.

Darrell was treated with no more and no less consideration than any other of the prisoners. To the officers and soldiers of the escort he was simply the ill-lit Sergius Bilowski, and no argument could make him anything more.

After leaving Glugiersk the way became more rugged, though the road itself was smooth and hard, traveled as it was by the numerous trading caravans from north to south that crossed and recrossed the mountains.

Finally they reached Mozdok, where a stay of two days was made. Their next stopping place was Vladikaavkas, on the upward slope of the steep mountain pass.

Ten hours after leaving Vladikaavkas, in the morning, the turrets of Gredskov could be seen.

Darrell knew nothing of Gredskov, and as none of the soldiers would talk to him and he was not allowed to speak to his fellow prisoners he could obtain no information in regard to it. But as the morning brightened and he was seen rising above the trees he noticed that the other prisoners became more dejected, and their faces expressed a terrible fear.

It appeared, then, that Gredskov was a place to be dreaded.

At the gate of Gredskov the cavalcade was met by an officer, who halted the prisoners and took from the captain of the escort a paper. This contained the list of names, and the two officers went over it together.

Even then Darrell was not allowed to speak, though he made a desperate attempt to tell the officer at the gate who he was.

Without ceremony he was taken from the column of prisoners, handed over to fresh guards and rudely hustled into a low building that was built close to and under the city wall.

Here he was thrust into a dungeon that was floored with stone, walled with stone and roofed with stone. There was one little window, which opened high in the wall. Through this narrow aperture, when standing upon his table, he could see an esplanade, upon which regiments of the city's garrison sometimes paraded.

For a day or two Darrell cherished the hope that he would be returned to Stavropol, that the trick had been played to keep him out of the city at a critical time when his intervention in Vera's favor might have inconvenienced the authorities, but as the time wore on he began to realize that his view of the affair must be erroneous and that his liberty was lost forever unless he could win it back by his own hands.

While he fully realized the difficulties of his position, he did not despair. He knew that he was destined for Siberia, but the way to Siberia is long, and the



"Where is this Gredskov?"

opportunities to escape must be many. The guard who controlled the door of Darrell's dungeon was a young Russian named Kevski. Accepting for granted the story of Sergius Bilowski that came with the prisoner bearing that name, he had treated Darrell with a sternness that forbade any attempt at conversation, but they were brought into more friendly relations by a singular happening.

One evening, when Darrell was watching through his window the evolutions of an unusually large force upon the esplanade, he was astounded to perceive Ivan Getchikoff mounted upon a horse and wearing the uniform of a brigadier. Evidently the rascal had enjoyed recent promotion. Surrounded by his staff, he took up a position withing in fifty yards of Darrell's window, and the troops passed before him in review.

With no clear notion of the usefulness of the proceeding, but desiring to make his presence known to Getchikoff, Darrell repeated that imitation of the flute which had so surprised Ladislov in the Parisian cafe. The sharp sound reached Getchikoff's ears, and he recognized it. Darrell had the satisfaction of witnessing the nervousness of his enemy, and he was piping lustily when he heard the creaking of the door behind him. He snatched the big pen (not, of course, a necessary part of the musical performance) from his pocket and turned to face Kevski, the guard.

"Where did you get a flute?" demanded Kevski.

"I have had it in my pocket all along," said Darrell. "It is not exactly a flute. It is an American instrument."

"Why were you permitted to retain it?"

"My friend," said Darrell, who had solved this puzzle by long study. "It was safer to let me carry my own property out of Stavropol than to leave it behind. When prisoners' goods are ordered to be destroyed, they have a habit of turning up again, as you are aware. And mine would prove me an American."

"You are not a Russian; I know that," responded Kevski. "Is your name really Sergius Bilowski?"

"It is not. My name, my friend, is Darrell. I am an American."

Kevski seemed to be impressed.

"American! That is the place!" he said. "They have no prisons there!"

"Oh, hold on now! They do have prisons. We are not all angels," said Darrell. "And prisons are necessary in every land. But in America one must commit a crime to be sent to prison."

"I know, I know," said Kevski, eager to display his knowledge of the distant land of freedom. "My cousin, Andrea Kevski, is there. He wrote me a letter once. He is now a merchant, and his children go to school. He sits every Sunday in a church, and no inspector of police searches his house in his absence. It is a great country, that America."

"It is, indeed," said Darrell. "I wish it could know where I am. I think Stavropol would be treated to a sensation."

"Hush! My cousin says that in America you people treat our people with friendship. He says that it is a great country, where railroads go every day, that many of our people have large farms, and the taxes are so light that they can save money. Is it so?"

"I think so. I know that there are many Russian villages in our great west."

"So. That is what my cousin called it, but I know little of these things. Could I get to America?"

"Well, if it was really an object and I got out of here, I think you might reach America."

Kevski seemed to think that the conversation had gone far enough in this direction. He suddenly asked to see the musical instrument, which he examined with childish wonder, making a laughable attempt to extort a tone from it. Then he returned it and hastily left the cell. That evening Darrell had a much better supper than usual. On subsequent occasions the conversation was resumed, and at last Kevski was led to a definite statement regarding the possibilities of escape.

"It can be done," he said. "The officers of the prisoner trains do not care for persons. They convey only names. You are Sergius Bilowski. There are in Gredskov men who have lived in the north and whose friends are near the Urals. One can be found to take your name and place."

"Very good. That gets him to Siberia. But what about me?"

"You and I must find a way to get to America."

said Kevski one day when a month had been spent in the Gredskov prison. "Orders have come to form a prison train for Siberia."

"Are there many to go?"

"Yes, many. You see, there is war in the Caucasus since you came to Gredskov. The Circassians have risen."

"A revolt?" said Darrell. "Who leads it?"

"A mysterious prince called Motman Khan. No one knows who he is. But he holds all the Circassians in his power. Prince Kilzlar, the traitor, is one of the leaders also."

"Kilzlar!" said Darrell. He fell to studying. What might this new turn of events mean to him? With the mysterious Motman Khan he had nothing to do, but Kilzlar he would have given much to see, for undoubtedly Vera's fate must in some way be connected with this revolt of the Circassians. He even cherished the hope that she might have escaped the snares of the Getchikoffs and have joined the revolutionists in the field. That, indeed, would be bad enough for the power of the Russian government could not be overthrown, and the fate of the leaders of such a revolt would surely be death. He had now a triple reason to desire freedom, and he prayed heaven that Kevski had planned well. The man had become reticent and had begun to show traces of anxiety.

"The Circassians are coming," he said one day. "A small force that was sent out to pieces. Motman Khan, the victorious prince, is on his way to Gredskov. There are here about 300 Circassians accused of one crime or another, all to be sent to Siberia. Motman Khan is coming to reduce the city and free his people."

"Tell me, Kevski," asked Darrell, "is there any word of a woman in this thing?"

"Woman! Oh, no!" answered Kevski, starting. "Women do not lead revolts."

"Some of them might well do it. You are sure there is no mention made of a woman's name?"

"No," Kevski laughed. "The only name spoken is the name of Motman Khan. He has a large army. It is armed with good guns and cannon. It was raised almost in a night, they say. Motman Khan is almost a god to his people. They worship him and follow him to death. Village after village has been taken. Russian rule is broken in the mountains. Gredskov is doomed unless the governor general

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ons with a vengeance. It cuts to the quick. Southern Democrats can stand investigation as to their election methods much better than Mark Hanna and his national committee or Mr. Babcock and his congressional committee.

Nobody with two ideas above a Hot-tent doubts that the unprecedented use of boodle put the Republicans in power in 1897, and has kept them in power ever since. The amount of fat-fried out of the national bankers, tariff barons, trust magnates and great corporations in 1896 has been variously estimated at from ten to fifteen millions. An investigation which would twist the exact truth and the whole truth out of Hanna and his confederates would be a public benefaction. We may never know the precise quantity of boodle used that year, but whatever it was the campaign of 1896 furnishes the only example on record where a national committee had a surplus left over after election, a surplus said to have been three millions. The nerve exhibited by Pue in thus bearding the lion in his den shows beyond all cavil that he is a young man with a future. Keep your optic on Pue, of North Carolina.—Champ Clark's Letter.

### BACK TO HIS OWN.

Palma Left Cuba in Chains and Returned as Ruler.

General Tomas Estrada Palma, president elect of the Cuban republic, who arrived on the steamer Admiral Farragut from Old Point Comfort, Va., was greeted, says a Gibara, Cuba, dispatch of Tuesday, to the New York Tribune, with great enthusiasm. Gibara's population of 6,000 was augmented by as many more who came from all quarters of the island, from Havana to Santiago, to pay homage to a man they love.

When the steamer anchored in Gibara harbor a salute of 21 guns greeted General Palma. His face brightened at the scene before him. How different was his return to Cuba! He left in chains and came back with his path literally strewn with roses.

The harbor was a kaleidoscope of color and animation. From every craft flew the flag of Cuba, blue and the Stars and Stripes. Old friends who had known General Palma in the ten years' war and had shared with him the hardships and sufferings of many campaigns came on board and embraced him. Many were in tears. The vessel was soon crowded with members of committees, representing different cities, who came out in steamers and launches, which were decorated from stem to stern, from the mast to the waterline. After a quarter of an hour of informal talk, General Palma and his party were taken ashore in a launch. When he put his foot on the pier there were rounds of cheers by natives as they crowded around their president-elect, which could have been heard across the bay. Mayor Caspedes spoke a few words of welcome, then proposed three cheers for the first president of the Cuban republic.

A procession was formed on the principal street, whence the president-elect and members of the committee were drawn in carriages by a score of stalwart Cubans to the city hall. Every place of vantage along the route was filled. Men, women and children crowded and pushed to embrace and shake the hand of the veteran.

General Palma sat with bared head, bowing in response to cheers. He