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## The Czar's Spy

(Continued from Tenth Page)

the picture, and from the photographer I might perhaps discover her address, for to me it seemed that she was somehow intimately connected with those mysterious yachtsmen.

What Muriel told me concerning her, I did not doubt for a single instant. Yet it was certainly more than a coincidence that a copy of the picture which had created such a deep impression upon me should be preserved in her own little boudoir as a souvenir of a devoted school-friend.

"Then you have heard absolutely nothing as to her present position or whereabouts—whether she is married, for instance?"

"Ah!" she cried mischievously. "You betray yourself by your own words. You have fallen in love with her, I really believe, Mr. Gregg. If she knew, she'd be most gratified—or at least, she ought to be."

At which I smiled, preferring that she should adopt that theory in preference to any other.

She spoke frankly, as a pure honest girl would speak. She was not jealous, but she nevertheless resented—as women do resent such things—that I should fall in love with a friend's photograph.

There was a mystery surrounding that torn picture; of that I was absolutely certain. The remembrance of that memorable evening when I had dined on board the *Lola* arose vividly before me. Why had the girl's portrait been so ruthlessly destroyed and the frame turned with its face to the wall? There was some reason—some distinct and serious motive in it. Had Muriel told me the truth, I wondered, or was she merely seeking to shield the suspected man who was her lover?

Hour by hour the mystery surrounding the Leithcourts became more inscrutable, more intensely absorbing. I had searched a copy of the London Directory at the Station Hotel at Carlisle, and found that no house in Green Street was registered as occupied by the tenant of Rannoch; and, further, when I came to examine the list of guests at the castle, I found that they were really persons unknown in society. They were merely of that class of witty, well-dressed parasites who always cling on to the wealthy and make believe that they are smart and of the *grande monde*. Rannoch was an expensive place to keep up, with all that big retinue of servants and gamekeepers, and with those nightly dinners cooked by a French chef; yet Leithcourt seemed to possess a long pocket and smiled upon those parasites, officers of doubtful commission and younger sprigs of the pseudo-aristocracy who surrounded him, while his wife, keen-eyed and of superb bearing, was punctilious concerning all points of etiquette, and at the same time indefatigable that her mixed set of guests should really enjoy a good time.

But I was not the only person who could not make them out. My uncle was the first to open my eyes regarding the true character of certain of the men staying at Rannoch.

"I think, Gordon, that one or two of those fellows with Leithcourt are rank outsiders," he said confidentially to me one night after we had had a hard day's shooting, and were playing a hundred up at billiards before retiring. "One man, who arrived yesterday, I know too well. He was struck off the list at Boodle's three years ago for card-sharping—that thin-faced, fair-mustached man named Cadby. I suppose Leithcourt doesn't know it, or he wouldn't have him up here among respectable folk." And my uncle, chewing the end of his cigar, sniffed angrily, seeming half inclined to give his friend a gentle hint that the name Cadby was placed beyond the pale of good society.

"Better not say anything about it," I urged. "It's Leithcourt's own affair, uncle—not ours."

"Yes, but if a man sets up a position in the country he mustn't be allowed to ask us to meet such fellows. It's coming a little too thick, Gordon. We men can stand the women of the party, but the men—well, I tell you candidly, I shan't accept his invites to shoot again."

"No, no, uncle," I protested. "Probably it's owing to ignorance. You'll be able, a little later on, to give him valuable tips. He's a good fellow, and only wants experience in Scotland to get along all right."

"Yes. But I don't like it, my boy, I don't like it! It isn't playing a fair game," declared the rigid old gentleman, coloring resentfully. "I'm not going to return the invitation and ask that sharper, Cadby, to my house—and I tell you that plainly."

Next day I shot with the Carmichaels of Crossburn, and about four o'clock, after a good day, took leave of the party in the Black Glen, and started off alone to walk home, a distance of about six miles. It was already growing dusk, and would be quite dark, I knew, before I reached my uncle's house. My most direct way was to follow the river for about two miles and then strike straight across the large dense wood and afterwards over a wide moor full of treacherous bogs and pitfalls for the unwary.

My gun over my shoulder, I had walked on for about three-quarters of an hour, and had nearly traversed the wood, at that hour so dark that I had considerable difficulty in finding my way when—of a sudden—I fancied I distinguished voices.

I halted. Yes. Men were talking in low tones of confidence, and in that calm stillness of evening they appeared nearer to me than they actually were.

I listened, trying to distinguish the words uttered, but could make out nothing. They were moving slowly together, in close vicinity to myself, for their feet stirred the dry leaves, and I could hear the boughs cracking as they forced their way through them.

Of a sudden, while standing there not daring to breathe lest I should betray my presence, a strange sound fell upon my eager ears.

Next moment I realized that I was at that place where Leithcourt so persistently kept his disappointed trust, having approached it from within the wood.

The sound alarmed me, and yet it was neither an explosion of fire-arms nor a startling cry for help.

One word reached me in the darkness—one single word of bitter and withering reproach.

Headless of the risk I ran and the peril to which I exposed myself, I dashed forward with a resolve to penetrate the mystery, until I came to the gap in the rough stone wall where Leithcourt's habit was to halt each day at sundown.

There, in the falling darkness, the sight that met my eyes at the spot held me rigid, appalled, stupefied.

In that instant I realized the truth—a truth that was surely the strangest ever revealed to any man.

### CHAPTER V.

CONTAINS CERTAIN CONFIDENCES.

As I dashed forward to the gap in the boundary wall of the wood, I nearly stumbled over a form lying across the narrow path.

So dark was it beneath the trees that at first I could not plainly make out what it was until I bent and my hands touched the garments of a woman. Her hat had fallen off, for I felt it beneath my feet, while the cloak was a thick woolen one.

Was she dead, I wondered? That cry—that single word of reproach—sounded in my ears, and it seemed plain that she had been struck down ruthlessly after an exchange of angry words.

I felt in my pocket for my vestas, but unfortunately my box was empty. Yet just at that moment my strained ears caught a sound—the sound of someone moving stealthily among the fallen leaves. Seizing my gun, I demanded who was there.

There was, however, no response. The instant I spoke the movement ceased.

As far as I could judge, the person in concealment was within the wood about ten yards from me, separated by an impenetrable thicket. As, however, I stood out against the sky, my silhouette was, I knew, a well-defined mark for anyone with fire-arms.

It seemed evident that a tragedy had occurred, and that the victim at my feet was a woman. But whom?

Of a sudden, while I stood hesitating,

blaming myself for being without matches, I heard the movement repeated. Someone was quickly receding—escaping from the spot. I listened again. The sound was not of the rustling of leaves or the crackling of dried sticks, but the low thuds of a man's feet racing over softer ground. He had scaled the rough stone dyke and was out in the turnip-field adjacent.

I sprang through the gap, straining my eyes into the gloom, and as I did so could just distinguish a dark figure receding quickly beneath the wall of the wood.

In an instant I dashed after it. But the agility of whoever the fugitive was, man or woman, was marvelous. I considered myself a fairly good runner, but racing across those rough turnips and heavy, newly-ploughed land in the darkness and carrying my gun soon caused me to pant and blow. Yet the figure I was pursuing was so fleet of foot and so nimble in climbing the high rough walls that from the very first I was outrun.

(CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.)

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