

The Czar's Spy

The Mystery of a Silent Love

By Chevalier WILLIAM LE QUEUX Author of "The Closed Book," etc.

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CHAPTER I.

His Britannic Majesty's Service.
"There was a mysterious affair last night, signore."

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "Anything that interests us?"

"Yes, signore," replied the tall, thin Italian consular clerk, speaking with a strong accent. "An English steam yacht ran aground on the Meloria about ten miles out, and was discovered by a fishing boat that brought the news to harbor. The admiral sent out two torpedo boats, which managed after a lot of difficulty to bring in the yacht safely, but the captain of the port has a suspicion that the crew were trying to make away with the vessel."

"To lose her, you mean?"

Francesco nodded.

"Sounds curious," I remarked.

"Since the consul went away on leave things seem to have been humming—two stabbing affrays, eight drunken seamen locked up, a mutiny on a tramp steamer, and now a yacht being cast away—a fairly decent list! And yet some stay-at-home people complain that British consuls are only paid to be ornamental! They should spend a week here, at Leghorn, and they'd soon alter their opinion."

"Yes, they would, signore," responded the thin-lipped old fellow with a grin, as he twisted his fierce gray moustache. Francesco Carducci was a well-known character in Leghorn. An honest, good-hearted, easy-going fellow, who for twenty years had occupied the same position under half a dozen different consuls.

My old friend, Frank Hutcheson, his Britannic Majesty's vice-consul at the port of Leghorn, was away on leave in England, his duties being relegated to young Bertram Cavendish, the pro-consul. The latter, however, had gone down with a bad touch of malaria, and I, the only other Englishman in Leghorn, had been asked by the consul-general in Florence to act as pro-consul until Hutcheson's return.

It was mid-July, and the weather was blazing in the glaring sun-blanched Mediterranean town. If you know Leghorn, you probably know the consulate, a large, handsome suite of huge, airy offices facing the cathedral. The legend painted upon the door, "Office hours, 10 to 3," gives one the idea of an easy appointment, but such is certainly not the case, for a consul's life at a port of discharge must necessarily be a very active one.

Carducci had left me to the correspondence for a half an hour or so, when he re-entered, saying:
"There is an English signore waiting to see you."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know him. He will give no name, but wants to see the signore consule."

"All right, show him in," I said lazily, and a few moments later a tall, smartly-dressed, middle-aged Englishman entered, and bowing, inquired whether I was the British consul.

When he had seated himself I explained my position, whereupon he said: "I couldn't make much out of your clerk. He speaks so brokenly, and I don't know a word of Italian, but perhaps I ought to first introduce myself. My name is Philip Hornby, and he handed me a card bearing the same with the addresses 'Woodcroft Park, Somerset—Brook's.'" Then he added: "I am cruising on board my yacht, the Lola, and last night we unfortunately went aground on the Meloria. Very fortunately for us a fishing-boat saw our plight and gave the alarm at port. The admiral sent out two torpedo-boats and a tug, and after about three hours they managed to get us off."

"And you are now in harbor?"

"Yes. But the reason I've called is to ask you to do me a favor and write me a letter of thanks in Italian to the admiral, and one to the captain of the port—polite letters that I can copy and send to them. You know the kind of thing."

"Certainly," I replied, the more interested in him on account of the curious suspicion that the port authorities seemed to entertain. He was evidently a gentleman, and after I had been with him ten minutes I scouted the idea that he had endeavored to cast away the Lola.

I scribbled the drafts of two letters. "Fortunately, I left my wife in England, or she would have been terribly frightened," he remarked presently. "There was a nasty wind blowing all night, and the fool of a cap-

tain seemed to add to our peril by every order he gave."

I examined him critically as he sat facing me. He was about forty-five, with a merry, round, good-natured face, red with the southern sun, blue eyes, and a short, fair beard. His speech was refined and cultivated, and as we chatted he gave me the impression that as an enthusiastic lover of the sea he had cruised the Mediterranean many times from Gibraltar up to Smyrna. He had, however, never before put into Leghorn.

After we had arranged that his captain should come to me in the afternoon and make a formal report of the accident, we went out together across the white sunny piazza to Nasi's.

"We shall be here quite a week, I suppose," he said as we were taking our vermouth. "We're on our way down to the Greek island, as my friend Chater wants to see them. The engineer says there's something strained that we must get mended. But, by the way," he added, "why don't you dine with us on board tonight? Do. We can give you a few English things that may be a change to you."

This invitation I gladly accepted for two reasons. One was because the suspicions of the captain of the port had aroused my curiosity, and the other was because I had, honestly speaking, taken a great fancy to Hornby.

The captain of the Lola, a short, thickest Scotsman from Dundee, with a barely healed cicatrice across his left cheek, called at the consulate at two o'clock and made his report, which appeared to me to be a very lame one. He struck me as being unworthy his certificate, for he was evidently entirely out of his bearings when the accident occurred. The owner and his friend Chater were in their berths asleep, when suddenly he discovered that the vessel was making no headway. They had, in fact, run upon the dangerous shoal without being aware of it. A strong sea was running with a stiff breeze, and although his seamanship was poor, he was capable enough to recognize at once that they were in a very perilous position.

"Very fortunate it wasn't more serious," he added, after telling me his story, which I wrote at his dictation for the ultimate benefit of the board of trade.

"Didn't you send up signals of distress?" I inquired.

"No, sir—never thought of it."

"And yet you knew that you might be lost?" I remarked with recurring suspicion.

The canny Scot, whose name was Mackintosh, hesitated a few moments, then answered: "Well, sir, you see the fishing-boat had sighted us, and we saw her turning back to port to fetch help."

"How long have you been in Mr. Hornby's service?" I inquired.

"Six months, sir," was the man's reply. "Before he engaged me, I was with the Wilsons of Hull, running up the Baltic. I've held my master's certificate these fifteen years, sir. I was with the Bibbys before the Wilsons, and before that with the General Steam. I did eight years in the Mediterranean with them, when I was chief mate."

"And you've never been into Leghorn before?"

"Never, sir."

I dismissed the captain with a distinct impression that he had not told me the whole truth. Was it possible that an attempt had actually been made to cast away the yacht, and that it had been frustrated by the master of the felucca, who had sighted the vessel aground? How, I wondered, had the captain received that very ugly wound across the cheek? I was half-inclined to inquire of him.

That evening when the fiery sun was sinking in its crimson glory I took a cab along the old sea-road to the port where, within the inner harbor, I found the Lola, one of the most magnificent private vessels I had ever seen. Her dimensions surprised me. She was painted dead white, with shining brass everywhere. At the stern hung limply the British flag, at the masthead the ensign of the Royal Yacht Squadron.

On stepping on deck Hornby came forward to greet me, and took me along to the stern where, lying in a long wicker deck-chair beneath the awning, was a tall, dark-eyed, clean-shaven man of about forty. His keen face gave one the impression that he was a barrister.

"My friend, Hylton Chater—Mr. Gordon Gregg," he said, introducing us, and the clean-shaven man ex-

claimed, smiling pleasantly: "Glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Gregg. You are not a stranger by any means to Hornby or myself. Indeed, we've got a couple of your books on board. But I had no idea you lived out here."

"At Ardenza," I said. "Three miles along the sea-shore. Tomorrow I hope you'll both come and dine with me."

"Delighted, I'm sure," declared Hornby, and then we began chatting about the peril of the previous night, Hornby telling me how he had copied the two letters of thanks in Italian and sent them to their respective addresses.

"Well, you certainly did the right thing to thank the admiral," I said. "It's very unusual for him to send out torpedo-boats to help a vessel in distress. That is generally left to the harbor tug."

"Yes, I feel that it was most kind of him. That's why I took all the trouble to write. I don't understand a word of Italian, neither does Chater."

"But you have Italians on board?"

I remarked. "The two sailors who rowed me out are Genoese, from their accent."

Hornby and Chater exchanged glances—glances of distinct uneasiness. I thought.

Then the owner of the Lola said: "Yes, they are useful for making arrangements and buying things in Italian ports. We have a Spaniard, a Greek, and a Syrian, all of whom act as interpreters in different places."

"And make a handsome thing in the way of secret commissions, I suppose?" I laughed.

"Of course. But to cruise in comfort one must pay and be pleasant," declared Hornby.

"Did you have any trouble with the customs here?" I inquired.

"They didn't visit us," he said with a smile, and at the same time he rubbed his thumb and finger together, the action of feeling paper money.

This increased my surprise, for I happened to know that the Leghorn customs officers were not at all given to the acceptance of bribes. They were too well watched by their su-



It Was an Armory, Crammed With Rifles and Ammunition.

periors. If the yacht had really escaped a search, then it was a most unusual thing. Besides, what motive could Hornby have in eluding the customs visit? They would, of course, seal up his wines and liquors, but even if they did, they would leave him out sufficient for the consumption of himself and his friends.

No, Philip Hornby had some strong motive in paying a heavy bribe to avoid the visit of the dogana. If he really had paid, he must have paid very heavily; of that I was convinced.

Was it possible that some mystery was hidden on board that splendidly appointed craft?

Presently the gong sounded, and we went below into the elegantly fitted saloon, where was spread a table that sparkled with cut glass and shone with silver. Everywhere it was apparent that none but an extremely wealthy man could afford such a magnificent craft.

Hornby took the head of the table, and we ate one of the choicest and best cooked dinners it has ever been my lot to taste. Chater and I drank wine of a brand which only a millionaire could keep in his cellar, while our host, apparently a most abstemious man, took only a glass of iced Cinciano water.

From his remarks I discerned that, contrary to my first impression, Hylton Chater was an experienced yachtsman. He owned a craft called the Alicia, and was a member of the Cork Yacht club. He lived in London, he told me, but gave me no information as to his profession. It might be the law, as I had surmised.

"You've seen our ass of a captain, Mr. Gregg?" he remarked presently. "What do you think of him?"

"Well," I said rather hesitatingly, "to tell the truth, I don't think very much of his seamanship—nor will the board of trade when his report reaches them."

"Ah!" exclaimed Hornby. "I was a fool to engage him. From the very first I mistrusted him, only my wife somehow took a fancy to the fellow, and, as you know, if you want peace, you must always please the women. In this case, however, her choice almost cost me the vessel, and perhaps our lives into the bargain."

"The captain seems to have had a nasty cut across the cheek," I remarked, whereupon my two companions again exchanged quick, apprehensive glances.

"He fell down the other day," explained Chater, with a rather sickly smile, I thought. "His face caught the edge of an iron stair in the engine room and caused a nasty gash."

I smiled within myself, for I knew too well that the ugly wound in the captain's face had never been inflicted by falling on the edge of a stair. But I remained silent, being content that they should endeavor to mislead me.

After dessert had been served we rose, and in the summer twilight, when all the ports were opened, Hornby took me over the vessel. As he was conducting me from his own cabin to the boudoir we passed a door that had been blown open by the wind, and which he hastened to close, not, however, before I had time to glance within. To my surprise I discovered that it was an armory crammed with rifles, revolvers and ammunition.

It had not been intended that I should see that interior, and the reason why the customs officers had been bribed was now apparent.

I passed on without remark, making believe that I had not discerned anything unusual, and we entered the boudoir, Chater having gone back to the saloon to obtain cigars.

The dainty little chamber bore everywhere the trace of having been arranged by a woman's hand, although no lady passenger was on board.

Just as we had entered, and I was admiring the dainty nest of luxury, Chater shouted to his host asking for the keys of the cigar cupboard, and Hornby turned back along the gangway to hand them to his friend, leaving me alone for a few moments.

I stood glancing around, and as I did so my eyes fell upon a quantity of photographs, framed and unframed, that were scattered about—evidently portraits of Hornby's friends. Upon a small side table, however, stood a heavy oxidized silver frame, but empty, while lying on the floor beneath a couch was the photograph it had contained, which had apparently been taken hastily out, torn first in half and then in half again, and cast away.

Curiosity prompted me to stoop, pick up the four pieces and place them together, when I found them to form the cabinet portrait of a sweet-looking and extremely pretty English girl of eighteen or nineteen, with a bright, smiling expression, and wearing a fresh morning blouse of white pique.

About the expression of the pictured face was something which I cannot describe—a curious look in the eyes which was at the same time both attractive and mysterious. In that brief moment the girl's features were indelibly impressed upon my memory.

I looked at the back of the torn photograph, and saw that it had been taken by a well-known and fashionable firm in New Bond street.

Next second, however, hearing Hornby's returning footsteps, I flung the fragments hastily beneath the couch where I had discovered them.

Why, I wondered, had the picture been destroyed—and by whom?

Afterwards on deck I purposely led the conversation to Hornby's family, and learned from him that he had no children.

"You'll get the repairs to your engines done at Orlando's, I suppose?" I remarked, naming the great ship-building firm of Leghorn.

"Yes, I have already given the order. They are contracted to be finished by next Thursday, and then we shall be off to Zante and Chio."

For what reason, I wondered, recollecting that formidable armory on board. Already I had seen quite sufficient to convince me that the Lola, although outwardly a pleasure yacht,

was built of steel, armored in its most vulnerable parts, and capable of resisting a very sharp fire.

It was past midnight when, having bade the strange pair adieu, I was put ashore by the two sailors who had rowed me out and drove home along the sea-front, puzzled and perplexed.

Next morning, on my arrival at the consulate, old Francesco, who had entered only a moment before, met me with blanched face, gasping:

"There have been thieves here in the night, signore! The signore con sole's safe has been opened!"

"The safe!" I cried, dashing into Hutcheson's private room, and finding to my dismay the big safe, where in the seals, ciphers and other confidential documents were kept, standing open, and the contents in disorder, as though a hasty search had been made among them.

Was it possible that the thieves had been after the admiralty and foreign office ciphers, copies of which the chancelleries of certain European powers were endeavoring to obtain? I smiled within myself when I realized how bitterly disappointed the burglars must have been, for a British consul when he goes on leave to England always takes his ciphers with him, and deposits them at the foreign office for safekeeping. Hutcheson

had, of course, taken his, according to the regulations.

Curiously enough, however, the door of the consulate and the safe had been opened with the keys which my friend had left in my charge. Indeed, the small bunch still remained in the safe door.

In an instant the recollection flashed across my mind that I had felt the keys in my pocket while at dinner on board the Lola. Had I lost them on my homeward drive, or had my pocket been picked?

While we were engaged in putting the scattered papers in order the door bell rang, and the clerk went to attend to the caller.

In a few moments he returned, saying: "The English yacht left suddenly last night, signore, and the captain of the port has sent to inquire whether you know to what port she is bound."

"Left!" I gasped in amazement. "Why, I thought her engines were disabled!"

A quarter of an hour later I was sitting in the private office of the shrewd gray-haired functionary who had sent this messenger to me.

"Do you know, signore commendatore," he said, "some mystery surrounds that vessel. She is not the Lola, for yesterday we telegraphed to Lloyd's, in London, and this morning I received a reply that no such yacht appears on their register, and that the name is unknown. The police have also telegraphed to your English police inquiring about the owner, Signore Hornby, with a like result. There is no such place as Woodcroft Park in Somerset, and no member of Brook's club of the name of Hornby."

I sat staring at the official, too amazed to utter a word. Certainly they had not allowed the grass to grow beneath their feet.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Just Like a Boy.

The teacher was having an interesting half hour with the children, asking them questions, anyone having the privilege to answer. It was a great time to show off. The teacher asked about various things, and one question was about locusts. Several hands were raised, and finally one boy was selected to speak. "A locust is a bug that gives people tuberculosis," was his answer.

An aeroplane using three horse-power can be built, experts say, which will sustain a man, but as the best athletes can exert only a maximum of two horsepower for 15 seconds at a time, man's dream of imitating the flight of great birds can never be realized. He always will be dependent on a machine.

Close Buying.

"Commend me to the average woman shopper for real shrewdness," says the manager of a well-known establishment. "We received a visit from one the other day that taught us something."

"She was considering the purchase of a yard of silk at 80 cents. The woman's purchase left a remnant of a yard and a half, which the salesgirl suggested that she should take."

"What'll it cost?" asked the shopper.

"Fifty cents."

"I'll take it," was the prompt response, "and you may keep the yard you've torn off."—Youth's Companion.

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AT POINT OF REBELLION

Jimmy Had Reached the Stage of Boyhood When Kissing Became Rather tiresome.



"The Safe!" I Cried, Dashing Into Hutcheson's Private Office.

Little Jimmy had reached the conclusion that everybody in the world had kissed him or wanted to badly. He could not help being a boy that all the ladies wanted to pet and bestow their kisses upon. In fact, Jimmy longed for the day when he would have a say so in the matter of being kissed. One day a famous woman came to call upon his mother. Jimmy chanced to enter the parlor and was directed by his mother to come up and see the noted Mrs. So and So. Jimmy knew what was coming, but he could not prevent the occurrence. The visitor took him by the hand and gently gathered him up into her lap, and as she let him down to the floor again she graciously bestowed a kiss upon his pouting lips. Jimmy jumped away from her and began to rub his lips in a vicious manner.

"What, you are not rubbing my kiss off, my little man?" questioned the woman. Jimmy was puzzled for a few moments, then replied:

"No, ma'am, I'm just rubbing it in," and then vanished through the door.

A Sad Case.

"The first month Chugson had his motor car he talked of nothing else."

"I see."

"He's had it a year now."

"Does he still talk about it?"

"Only when drinking. He's one of those fellows who never unbosoms himself of his trouble unless he's drinking."

Ambiguous.

Artist (showing latest picture)—"My object was to try to express all the horrors of war." Friend—"I have never seen anything more horrible."

Now You Know.

Little Lemuel—What's an incubator, paw?

Paw—An incubator, son, is one kind of an egg plant.

A man picks out a nice round stone.

A woman throws anything that is handiest.



Corn on the Cob —the Roasting Ear

is not more delicious than

Post Toasties

—the toasted sweet of the corn fields!

In the growth of corn there is a period when the kernels are plumped out with a vegetable milk, most nutritious. As it slowly ripens this hardens and finally becomes almost flinty.

Only this part of the corn is used in making Post Toasties, the husk, germ and all waste being rejected.

This nutritious part is cooked, seasoned "just right," rolled and toasted to a crackly golden-brown crispness—Post Toasties—the

Superior Corn Flakes

And they cost no more than the ordinary "corn flakes." Insist upon having Post Toasties.

—sold by Grocers everywhere.

AS VIEWED BY PHILOSOPHER

Happiness Not Always to Those Who Make Great Catches in the World's Fish Pond.

We have seen men absorbedly fishing for wealth, and we imagine that when they fail to get it they are defeated and disappointed. Neither one. The only men who are defeated in this worldly fishpond are the ones who haul up great bags of gold on their hooks. They are very soon burdened with the catch, and unable to march comfortably farther along the road. The only disappointed ones are those who have no real purpose in life, and suppose that fishing is an end in itself.

I had a great-uncle once who died quite happy and bankrupt. Throughout his life he was jubilantly full of schemes for making a fortune. But if his patent flouring mill had ever succeeded, or his method for tanning leather had brought him wealth, so that he had been obliged to have two houses and 20 servants and several suits of clothes and bills and accounts

and lawsuits, I am sure he would have died miserable.

Unfeeling and misunderstanding persons are forever pitying the old maids, and especially those who seem to be always angling for men. But such behavior seems to me quite intelligible and quite pardonable—especially if they never catch anything. Having begun this game in early life, earlier than I began fishing, and having founded it on instincts even deeper than mine, they would be silly indeed now to give up so good a sport just because they have found other, and possibly more important, objects in life.—Suburban Life.

Docks Building at Bombay.

Bombay is possessed of the biggest docks east of Suez, but the port has been wanting in respect of facilities for taking railway borne goods to the dock side and vice versa. This defect is being remedied little by little by the extension of the Port Trust railway from one end of the port to the other, and seven stations are to be opened for goods traffic during the course of a month.

POSSIBLE TO BE TOO GOOD

Writer in Woman's Magazine Gives Some Wise Advice to Others of Her Sex.

Women mourn and rail at man's unfaithfulness, but it is only fair to remember, when such shortcomings are brought up against man as set over against woman, that Lillith was just as truly a woman as was Eve. In our accusations and recriminations we too often forget that man's faithfulness to a good woman is usually encouraged by the wiles of a bad one, and that more often than not a woman stands at each end of the path that stretches from heaven to hell.

We forget, too, by what dear and lovable things a man may be held to the fair and honest ways of life. An eager comradeship with him in the things for which he cares, good humor in sunshine as well as in storm, an easy-going conscience as to the smaller duties of life, and an abiding love for frills and laces, these are the gentle virtues that will serve to keep

sweet and eager the dreariest masculine heart.

Good women have a world of sin and sorrow for which to answer, and a recent chance remark of a famous writer has more truth in it than we always care to believe. "When good women are too good," she said, "to be restful, dainty and sweet, they are being as faithless to their marriage vows as are the tired husbands who no longer pay them homage."—Southern Woman's Magazine.

Man-Driven 'Planes.

Before the invention of the aeroplane many attempts were made to invent flying machines in which man-power alone would be employed. All these attempts, however, ended in failure.

Mathematicians have now estimated that man is far too heavy to be sustained in the air by the power of his own muscles, no matter how large may be the wings that he fastens to his body. Among birds the weight limit is approached most closely by the Australian crane, which flies, although it weighs 20 pounds.