

# The Secret Dispatch

By JAMES GRANT

## CHAPTER III.—(Continued.)

"Nay, if he was to perish thus, suspicion might too readily fall upon me; for he is a favorite officer of the Empress, and of Weymann, too. My plan is this: I may get the dispatch to-night in your castle."

"And if not?"

"Then I shall again lure and mislead Balgonie, and bring him here in the night."

"What then?" asked the woodman, doggedly.

"How dull we are, Paulovitch. We shall drag and drown him; thus shall he die without a wound. I will take back the dispatch to Novgorod, and you can carry the body on his horse to St. Petersburg, where a sum will be given you for finding it. The poor stranger, they will say, has perished amid our keen Russian frosts, and that will be all. Nicholas Paulovitch, the carcass will be well worth twenty roubles to thee."

"And thy fifty?"

"You shall receive when the affair is over, and when you come to me at Novgorod, where I am quartered."

"By the bones of my tribe, I am with you, Podatchkine!" exclaimed the half-breed with ferocious joy. Then they shook heartily their hard and dingy hands—hands that had wrought many a deed of merciless cruelty.

A few minutes more and these worthy compatriots had separated.

There was a third person who had overheard the first savage plot, and who felt her heart stirred with pity and terror for Balgonie, who had given her a silver kopeck at Krejko but yesterday—the gypsy girl, Olga Paulowna, the sister of Nicholas Paulovitch; and she resolved to baffle both conspirators if she could.

## CHAPTER IV.

Corporal Podatchkine was an admirable specimen of his own type of Russian. His thick black scrubby hair was cut straight across the forehead in a line with the eyebrows, and at each side it hung perpendicularly down below the ears, and was, moreover, cut square across the neck behind; and he kept alternately scratching and smoothing his rugged front, nervously and assiduously, when he removed his fur Cossack cap; and, full of affected concern, even to exhibiting tears in his small, cunning eyes, presented himself to Natalie Mierowna next morning, and besought her to have him "conducted to the chamber of his brave, his beloved captain, his comrade and brother, who was, he now learned, seriously ill, helpless and delirious"—and, in fact, just as the cunning corporal wished him to be.

There he found Balgonie, certainly too ill and weak either to recognize him or understand what he was about; so the faithful Cossack made a rapid and skillful investigation of all the officer's pockets for the dispatch. Not a vestige of it was to be found.

"What can he have done with it?" muttered the bewildered corporal; "can he have lost it in the river, or swallowed it?"

The truth is that Natalie Mierowna had her doubts about the fidelity of Podatchkine, and even of some of her own domestics, and aware of the risk run by the stranger if he lost a dispatch of the empress, she had, prior to the introduction of the corporal, secured the document, and at that moment it was hidden in her own fair bosom until she could secure it in a safer place. Poor Natalie! Alas, she little knew its contents, and the horrors they were yet to produce.

Baffled thus in his attempt to secure it, there was no resource for the faithful warrior of the steppes now but to take up his quarters which he was nothing loath to do, at the Castle of the Louga, and there quietly await the recovery or the death, he cared not which, of Balgonie; and to concert further measures with the huge gypsy, Nicholas Paulovitch, whom he saw daily.

It was no feverish dream of Balgonie that Natalie Mierowna had been hovering about his bedside; for she and her cousin Mariolizza had been his especial nurses.

In less than three days the feverish delirium subsided, sense completely returned, and the young captain appeared to be laboring under a species of influenza.

"My dispatch!" he frequently said aloud—"I must be gone with my dispatch!"

"Might it not be intrusted to Corporal Podatchkine?" asked Natalie one morning, as she personally gave him his wa and soothing drink with her own hands. Katinka, the maid, standing demurely by with a silver salver.

"Impossible, Hoshphoza, for so I may call you; an officer alone can carry a dispatch for the empress. Its contents are most urgent; this delay, over which I have no control, may be visited by royal disfavor, even punishment; and I fear that the air of Tobolsk or Arkutsk would fill suit a Scotsman's lungs, Natalie Mierowna."

"Yet tarry here you must," she said, with a smile, the beauty of which proved very bewitching; "the Louga is coated with ice this morning, but not so thick, however, that it might not be broken by throwing a stone from here; but to travel yet would only kill you, Carl Ivanovitch, and cannot be thought of just now."

Then she glided away, with her beaming smile, her white hands and taper arms, her rustling dress of scarlet silk trimmed with snowy miniver, and all the sense of perfume that pervaded her

Balgonie sighed wearily yet pleasantly, and half thought that beautiful figure a dream, as he turned on his soft and luxurious pillow and marveled whether his past or his present existence was the real one.

## CHAPTER V.

Charles Balgonie, son of John Balgonie of Strathearn, had come into the world during that which was perhaps the most stupid, lifeless and impoverished era of Scottish existence, the middle of the reign of George II.

By the early death of his parents, Charlie had been cast, in his extreme boyhood, upon the tender mercies of a bachelor uncle, Mr. Gamaliel Balgonie, a hard-hearted, grasping, avaricious merchant in Dundee.

In the lovely vale of Strathearn stood the home of Charlie Balgonie. On the death of his parents his small paternal estate of a few hundred per annum would have become his inheritance, but the relation before mentioned—the paternal uncle, Gamaliel, suddenly produced a will, by which, to the profound astonishment of all, the entire estate was left to him as a return for certain loans and sums advanced to the deceased, of which, however, no proof could be found; but it was a veritable deathbed will, written accurately by a notary, and duly signed.

Though tremulous and shaky, strangely so—and rather unlike the usual signature of the deceased laird, three men there were, accounted good, worthy and religious men, who solemnly deposed to having seen "the hand of the dead man pen those words."

It was a case which made some noise in those days, because thirty-six hours after the alleged signature was given John Balgonie died.

The law of Scotland requires that, after framing and signing such a deed, the testator must have been able to go on—at least to church or market. How it came to pass we know not now, but the dispute, though without a basis, was brought before the supreme court by some friends of the orphan, for there were not a few persons in Strathearn who alleged that John Balgonie's hand had certainly traced the signature which was sworn to so solemnly as his—but had done so after death; the pen being placed in the fingers of the corpse, which were guided by those of the pious and worthy merchant of Dundee, who wanted his nephew's little patrimony in aid of certain speculations of his own.

Pending a decision, the bereaved boy was removed to the busy town on Tayside, and was left to solace his sorrows at school, prior, as he supposed, to becoming a drudge in his affectionate uncle's counting house, when the last of his slender inheritance had been frittered away in the fangs of the law.

One day his worthy uncle Gam returned to Edinburgh by the packet. The case had been decided against him, and the court was about to name trustees to look after the estate of the orphan boy. Mr. Gamaliel Balgonie was unusually grave, stern and abstracted; but he deliberately seated himself at his desk, and while humming, as was his wont, a verse of a psalm, he penned a letter addressed to the captain of a vessel then lying in the harbor, and gave it to his nephew for immediate delivery, desiring him to wait for the answer.

The boy, then in his fifteenth year, started on his errand with alacrity. He soon found the ship, which was moored at some distance from the shore, with her fore-topsails loose, to indicate that she was ready for sea; yet Charlie had no suspicion of the trap into which he was running or the cruel fate that awaited him.

The skipper, a rough, surly and brutal looking man, eyed the boy keenly, while tearing the letter into minute fragments, after he had perused it, with a grim smile of satisfaction. He then went to a locker, where he poured out a glass of milk.

"Drink that, my lad," said he, "while I write an answer to your uncle."

Charlie drained the glass; but scarcely had he done so when the cabin seemed to be whirling round him; he thought that he was becoming seasick, and was in the act of staggering toward the cabin stairs when he was felled to the floor by a blow from the skipper's heavy hand—a blow dealt cruelly and unsparringly.

He recovered consciousness some time after, to find himself—stiff, sore and bloody, from a wound in the temple—lying on deck in the moonlight, with some twenty-five other boys, several of whom were in the same state of stupor in which they had been brought on board. To his horror and dismay, Charlie now found that the ship was at sea, and running between the dangerous reef known as the Bell Rock and the flat sandy shore of Barrie; and that, through the machinations of Uncle Gamaliel, he had been lured into the hands of one of the most notorious plantation crimps that ever infested the Scottish coast, Captain Zachariah Coffin of New England, whose craft, the *Piscatona*, was a letter of marque, carrying twelve six-pounders and fighting her own way.

After this the *Piscatona* was hauled up, in order to go north about by Cape Wrath, having on board nearly fifty boys. Storms came on when the *Piscatona* entered the Pentland Firth, and four days after Dunnet Head with its flinty brow, 400 feet in height, had vanished into the wrack and mist astern, a sudden cry of fire caused every heart to thrill on board the lawless vessel.

Whether an act of treachery or not, it was impossible to ascertain; but it had broken out near the ship's magazine, to which it communicated with frightful rapidity, for suddenly, while the crew were all running fore and aft with buckets, a dreadful explosion seemed to rend the *Piscatona* in two. Half of the main deck was blown away with two of the boats. A whirlwind of fragments flew in every direction, and then the flames shot into the air in scorching volumes.

Discipline, or such a system of it as Zachariah Coffin maintained on board, was totally at an end. Some of the crew lowered the only remaining boat and fought like wild beasts for possession of it, knocking each other into the water without mercy. Captain Coffin cocked his pistols at the gangway, shot one man dead and swore that he would kill the next man who dared to precede him; but he was struck from behind by an iron marine spike and, falling, together with his savage dog, into the flaming gulf that yawned amidships, was seen no more.

Some of the crew ultimately pushed off the boat; others sprang overboard and held on to the spars and booms. But these perished miserably after being half scorched. Some were crushed to death by the falling yards and masts. Many held on to the fore and main chains, till these became so unbearably hot that they had to drop off, with screams of despair—when they sank, faint, weary and helpless, to the bottom at last.

How it all happened Charlie Balgonie never knew. But hours after the whole affair was over and the detested *Piscatona* had burned down to her waterline and sank, leaving all the sea around her discolored and covered with floating pieces of charred wood and the buoyant parts of her cargo, he found himself adrift in the wide and stormy Pentland Firth, but wedged with comparative safety in a large fragment of the fore-top, to which, the yard being still attached by the sling, a certain amount of steadiness was given; yet his heart leaped painfully each time when the fragment of wreck rose on the summit of a green glassy wave or went surging down into the dark and watery trough between.

To add to the terrors of his lonely situation, the sun had sunk amid gloomy purple clouds and a rainy night was drawing on. Half-drowned, the poor boy soon became faint and exhausted, and would seem to have dropped into a species of stupor, for when roused by the sound of strange voices he found himself close by a great and towering ship, which lay to, now right in the wind's eye with her mainyard aback and her gunports and hammock nettings full of weather-beaten faces, gazing at him with eagerness and curiosity in the twilight, while a boat was lowered and pulled steadily toward him by six sailors clad in dark green.

She proved to be a Russian fifty-gun ship, the *Anno Ivanovna*, commanded by Thomas Mackenzie, one of the many Scottish admirals who have bravely carried the Russian flag in the Baltic and the Black sea.

His youthful countryman became his protegee. The worthy admiral sought to make a sailor of Charlie, but the latter had seen quite enough of the sea while on board the *Piscatona*, and while he was clinging like a limpet or barnacle to the piece of drifting wreck; so he became a soldier, and served under General Ochterlony, of Guynd, in the Regiment of Smolensko, where as a cadet his superior smartness, intelligence and education, not less than his courage, soon distinguished him among his thick-pated Russian comrades. Thus in less than ten years he became, as we find him, Captain Carl Ivanovitch Balgonie, the most trusted aide-de-camp of Lieutenant General Weymann, commander-in-chief of the city and district of St. Petersburg.

## CHAPTER VI.

"You can never know, Ivanovitch Balgonie, how much I pined you!"

"You, lady?" was the joyous response.

"That is, I and Mariolizza," said Natalie Mierowna, slightly blushing, "when we found you sunk on a fever bed in a foreign land, so far from your country, your friends, your mother perhaps, for you are young enough, I think, to miss her still at such a time, although a soldier."

"Far, indeed, in many ways!" replied Balgonie, with a bitter smile, as he thought of Uncle Gam, or perhaps it was illness that had weakened him. "I have a country, to which it is more than probable I shall never return; but father, mother or friends I have none there—all who loved me once have gone to the silent grave before me."

"Ally?"

"Yes, lady."

"But you are making many friends in Russia," said Mariolizza cheerfully; "there are my cousin, Basil Mierowitz, and my brother, Apollo Usakoff, who both, I know, love you as a brother."

"True, and most grateful am I to them for their regard, for both are polished gentlemen. I have old General Weymann, too, though I know not what he will think of this delay in delivering the imperial dispatch."

"Alas, that most tiresome dispatch!" exclaimed Natalie. "But I forgot," she added, with a curl of her short upper lip; "those who proceed on the errands of the Empress Catharine would need seven-league boots, or the carpet of the prince in the fairy tale, which transported the owner at a wish."

"Hush, cousin," said Mariolizza, glancing timidly around.

But no one was near, save Corporal Podatchkine, who was at a little distance on the terrace, when this conversation took place two days after Balgonie became convalescent, and fully a week since the night of peril on which he swam the Louga.

"I cannot describe to you, ladies, the relief that came to my mind in discovering that it had neither been lost nor stolen, but was safe—"

"In Natalie's bosom!" said Mariolizza, laughing.

(To be continued.)

# FOR AND ABOUT WOMEN

## Women Are Not Extravagant.

One is constantly hearing and reading of the extravagant follies of women, but there is seldom anything said of the wastefulness of the opposite sex. Of course, everyone knows there is extravagance in both sexes, but the women are not responsible for the extravagant men, while the men are responsible for the extravagant women. Women, as a class, not being wage earners, have not the same reason for appreciating the value of money as men.

Husbands and fathers, as a rule, are either very stingy or fail to let their womenfolk know their real financial condition. In the first case, a woman naturally attributes the doling out of money to her a pure selfishness or lack of regard, and takes a natural delight in extracting and spending all she can; in the second case she has no reason to think the man "can't afford it" or realize that economy is necessary; in either case it is the man, not the woman, who is to blame. The majority of women are certainly not extravagant, declares a writer in *The Housekeeper*. The reports show that there are more women depositors in the savings banks than men, and they are slower in withdrawing their savings, and the man's "bargain counter" joke, with its odd cent price, is conclusive evidence of woman's regard for the penny.

Every man knows that a woman is better and closer at making a bargain than he is. The woman's mind is constituted to consider trifles and it is trifles that count in economy. The average woman can get along on less and "make an appearance" than the average man can. I have never met a man yet who stinted himself on cigars or his stomach or his neckties, but if the woman wants a new 98-cent shirtwaist this man will want to know what she has done with the one he bought two years ago!—New Orleans Picayune.



"Don't feed the baby with adult food. Giving the child this sort of nourishment too early produces soft bones and hence the host of bowlegged and knock-kneed youngsters."

Don't box the baby's ears. You are liable to render it permanently deaf. In fact, consider well before you chastise the child, since it is quite easy to use the rod and spoil the child.

The weight of a growing child is the most important index of its general health. The standard weight for growing children usually given by authorities in the matter is that at 5 years of age a child should weigh as many pounds as it is inches high. As a rule this will not be much over or under forty pounds. Children who come of large parents should weigh something more than that. The rate of increase should be about two pounds for every inch of growth, with a tendency for the weight to exceed this standard rather than to fall below it. When a child is heavier in proportion to its height than this standard, it is a sign of good health. If the child is growing rapidly, it should not be allowed to fall much below it without being made to rest more than has been the custom. A deficiency of weight in proportion to height is always an unfavorable sign. Any interruption in the progress of increase of weight, especially while growth continues, is a danger signal that should not be neglected by those interested in the child.

## For the Woman Who Travels Alone.

My plan for locating in a strange place, especially when it savors of a foreign country, is to ask the purser or steward which is considered the best family hotel. Then, on arrival, to wait until the first rush of landing is over, thus avoiding the confusion which reigns supreme at such times. Standing quietly back, the excited endeavors of the crowd to hurry all the officials into attending to their first affairs much amusement and furnishes a study of the routine of things. When you finally do go down the gangway you know which way to turn, can walk up to the carriage or omnibus bearing the name of the hotel, and be driven to the door, without any haggling with cabmen or fuss of any kind. Having reached the hotel, tell the porter who takes your bag to show you to the parlor for ladies. Then write on your card, "Please assign me a

room; price not to exceed three dollars a day." A bell-boy will soon return with a key, and conduct you to the elevator. What if it does shoot you up to the top floor to a small room? You are not going to stay there long, and it's pretty sure to have a good bed and plenty of towels.

This plan of mine may seem extravagant at first, but consider the advantages—you see one of the best hotels, always worth a visit in such places; you can examine local papers and guide-books in the reading-room, and get at the addresses of private boarding houses and smaller hotels, easily locating their whereabouts.—*Woman's Home Companion*.



Japanese ladies as a rule make their own dresses and if the sewing is done for them the beautiful embroidery, at any rate, is their own handiwork.

Shamokin, Pa., has a woman cobbler—Mrs. Clantine Clemence De-furne, who was born in France 62 years ago. The old woman has "seen better days," as she is possessed of education and culture.

One of the most picturesque characters in Europe is the Countess Schimmelmänn, of Denmark. She devotes her life to missionary work, and for eight years has traveled exclusively in foreign lands.

Miss Caroline L. Griesham, a clerk in the civil service bureau at Washington, has had a unique duty cut out for her. She has been detailed to make a tour of inspection of the post-offices of the country and interpret the civil service regulations. Miss Griesham does not expect to have a warm reception, but this does not worry her, she says.

An extraordinary head of hair is possessed by Mercedes Lopez, the wife of a poor sheep herder in San Vicente, Mexico. Her height is 5 feet, and when she stands erect her hair trails on the ground four feet eight inches. The hair is so thick that she can completely hide herself in it. She has it cut very frequently, as it grows so quickly, enabling her to sell large tresses to hair dealers every three or four months.

A certain Mrs. Beaumont, of Bretton, England, who lived in the time of Pitt, and whom the possession of lead mines made wealthy and purse-proud, one day thought to impress Pitt, who was staying at Bretton, with her riches. She had the most splendid service of plate at dinner and, waving her hand, she said: "There, Mr. Pitt, that's all from the mines." "Indeed!" answered Pitt. "If you had not told me, Mrs. Beaumont, I should have thought it was silver."

## Theater Blonnes.



(1) Of heliotrope crepe de sole with black chenille fringe and lace.

(2) Soft white satin with long lace cuffs and berthe of applique lace.

## Styles in Coats.

Some of the new sack coats end well above the deep waist belt with broad box plaits back and front allowed to flow loose. Of quite another nature are the whole back coats reaching to the knees, while the most fashionable are a revival from the middle of the '50s. With the addition of a wattleau plait they have the same turndown collars and wide, hanging sleeves. Some of the shorter ones have little attempt at fastening save cords, which are but seldom secured, and are usually accompanied by a big turndown collar, often with drooping tassels or cord ornaments.

Patronize those who advertise.