

The Clearing House of Treason

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Had you watched this slim, febrile woman, as she sat in the super-heated room—with music clanging—talking quite easily of desperate, criminal things, you would have wondered, as I did, what life she had apart and what she thought of as she lay alone in the dark. For men like Thiesen and Schwartz can take care of themselves in a bandit way; but what shall happen to the little, silken woman, who is caught and tangled in this bad web of life? Prison, now and then, of course; and in the end, what grim death? Rose did not know; Rose did not think of it—I daresay she could not think and, indeed, in her twenty-nine years of life, largely tumultuous, had never thought at all. For her life was merely a jumble of riot and intrigue—spaced by dark, exciting hours in this prison or that. And to her it was a drama, amazing, fascinating—as though she were watching it from a theater box.

As I have intimated, the spy-service of Germany is admirably organized and its "clearing house" in Brussels works with fine precision. The English service is no less complete and is quite as far-reaching. It has to do with all the great powers—Russia, Germany, France, Austria, Italy—though, of course, in the present political situation it is concerned chiefly with its German rival. Its chief is a detective who lives in Brussels and who passes himself off as a newspaper correspondent—as such he is even accredited to the British embassy. (All these spies are fond of calling themselves "journalists," which is not at all amusing for professional newspaper writers.) The Austrian spy-service is merely a pale shadow of the German; indeed the work of Austria's spies is chiefly in her own states and in Eastern Europe.

The Russian service in Brussels is important and is directed mainly against Germany. At times, however, the Brussels agents are called upon to act against the Russian revolutionaries, who swarm about the lake of Geneva—at Ouchy, Lausanne, Montreux, and in Geneva itself. Thus a few years ago the chief of the French spies in Brussels lent to his Russian *confidant* a clever woman who is now in jail under the name—possibly a true one—of Therese Prevost. With a young man who posed as her brother, Charles Prevost, she was sent to Switzerland to run down certain Russian fugitives and conspirators. It was a change from the ups-and-downs of military espionage and she set out gaily.

These were her instructions. She was to go to Montreux and pose as a young Canadian heiress. She was to make the acquaintance of the clan of revolutionaries, notably of the chief, an old rebel, Goluchoffsky, who had a son twenty-two years of age. At the railway station in Brussels a lady—she had never seen her before—gave her five thousand francs and wished her good-luck. And she and her "brother" reached Lausanne, reached Montreux. The Canadian heiress made a social hit. One of her first proposals of marriage came from the son of the hungry old revolutionist, and she accepted him. By that time she knew a great deal of what these exiles were plotting.

But what she had been sent to discover was their identity and the names they were using. (Her plan is spoken of with reverent admiration in the spy-world of Europe.) She and her "brother" Charles invited the family and friends of her Russian fiancé to a pre-nuptial luncheon. It was given in the banquet room of the hotel and Therese had sent out invitations to all the revolutionary cohort; and as it was difficult for her to spell their exotic names, she persuaded her husband-to-be to write out the list of guests. At dessert she announced gaily that she had a surprise for them all. She had engaged the best photographer of Lausanne to take a group-picture of them all, in commemoration of the day. The guests looked askance. She turned to the photographer and said:

"You will print three dozen copies and deliver them all to dear Mr. Goluchoffsky, who is soon to be my father-in-law. And he will give one to each of us."

And quite reassured the guests filed out into the sunny garden of the hotel and posed. Within two hours proofs of the photograph and the list drawn up by the "fiancé" were in the hands of the Russian agents in Geneva. And Therese and her brother were on their way back to Brussels. A charming excursion; it had broken the monotony of military and political espionage.

After the Savoy and the Grill-Room are closed—when all the bars are shut down—there is still one place in Brussels where the night-folk go, be they criminals, apaches, wasters, gamblers, or simply bad-husbands. It is a sort of *boogie*, a tavern kept open officially for the use of cab-drivers and chauffeurs. It was here, over a table on which were dishes of sauerkraut and five glasses of beer, that "brother" Charles related, in a husky, amused half-tone, his adventure with Therese in the Russian-haunted "resort" of Territet-Montreux. At a table a dozen feet away a fat Britisher who should have been at home and abed five hours ago, was playing cards with a fox-faced American, who once had some obscure connection with the American ministry in Brussels—and since then leads an existence more mysterious than the lines in the palm of your hand. Out-of-doors a winter dawn, humid and gray, should have been coming up over Brabant. As we sat there (Charles shaking dice against his left hand on behalf of his right, lest he get out of practice; for most spies are gamblers as well) there came in a blind man led by a little girl. Slung at his side he had a huge bundle of papers—Belgian, French, English, German, Italian, Dutch, Scandinavian—and by some deftness of touch or fine quality of arrangement he never deceived himself in pulling out exactly the paper or review that one asked for. Notable figures these in Brussels—the blind man with his drooping mustache and pricked-up ears; the thin pathetic girl in black on whose shoulders he leans for guidance; and the spies and gambler-spies with whom I sat at table, amused themselves by trying to confuse the old man—clamoring at him for newspapers in all languages.

Un vrai zwanze Bruxellois quoi?

NOT being a humorist of this sort, I lightened the blind man's load of illustrated journals that cost as much as twelve and fifteen cents apiece, and I was looking at a picture in *Simplicissimus* which depicted a green lady nine feet high, staring down (with horror!) into a chasm three feet deep, when Charles swore. Being a Frenchman, and a Parisian at that, he swore softly—a long, low ripple of oaths through which cows and camels and zebras and other animals went wickedly. He was reading (while he swore) the *Etoile Belge* of that day—January 23. Huskily to his elbow-mate he said: "They've got Winter at Nice—both Winter and Horstmann!"

"And Wessel?" his neighbor asked.

Charles studied the *Etoile Belge*.

"It is a telegram from their special correspondent at Nice—so it happened yesterday. Otto Winter, aged forty-two, born at Breslau—he's arrested. And they got Horstmann of Amsterdam. Their chief has escaped."

"That is Wessel!"

"Of course," said Charles, "and the paper says: 'Wessel, officer, deserter from the German army, who has been implicated in many affairs of espionage in the last few years, is believed to have succeeded in crossing the Italian frontier.'"

One of the English agents spoke; he said: "Good old Wessel!"

Then Charles: "If he got to Ventimille, he's all right. He'll come up by the Milan express and we'll see him in a few days."

A squat little man, dark and sullen, had been nervously fumbling the dice laid aside by Charles. He was Louis



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