

THE COPPER HOUSE

A Detective Story

BY
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"Look here, you must keep those nerves of yours in better order! Yes, I know, neither of us had a wink of sleep last night, but you will feel another man when you have had a splash in cold water, and changed your things; do it now!"

"I left my luggage at Stockholm," murmured Leo, without moving. "But it doesn't matter..."

"Well then, take a nip out of my pocket-pistol," said his friend, perseveringly. "There, you see, you're better already."

And, in fact, Leo sat up, after a mouthful from Wallion's silver flask.

"What's the good?" asked the young man slowly. "Now we are here, after so much trouble, it seems to me we can't do anything. If we stop where we are, we shall be no better than prisoners, and who knows what may happen when they discover that you are here. We have voluntarily deprived ourselves of liberty..."

"No," replied the journalist decidedly: "we have gained it. Full, unlimited liberty to be in the very place where they least want us. They will do all in their power to get us out of it. I say 'us' because they will not remain long in ignorance of my presence here, although several things will probably happen first."

"No doubt about that. There will be plenty of movement—but as for liberty—that's quite another matter!"

"Don't misunderstand me," said the Problem-hunter, with a steely glint in his eye. "In Stockholm I was obliged to keep a constant lookout, to try and discover my opponents; here, I can see enemies freely on every side of me, and may expect a fresh one at any minute. The situation is perfectly simple—we have only to be prepared!"

"Are you armed?"

"Of course! I have a perfect arsenal, what with a pair of eyes, two ears, a tongue, and my brains. Don't you think that's enough? Well, here's a revolver into the bargain. That will do for Rastakov."

"Or for Lona Ivanovna, who shot Bernard Jenin!" exclaimed Leo impetuously. "You may joke, but I..."

The journalist came and sat down beside him.

"Why, now you are angry," he said calmly; "that's good, it shows you're in working order again."

Nobody could resist Maurice Wallion when he chose. Leo began to smile.

A soft breeze from the wooded hills around them blew in upon them, cooling and refreshing; a blue butterfly was fluttering in the folds of the white window curtains.

"How can I be angry!" said Leo. "But you are so—different from other people. Here we have just smuggled ourselves into a house which is full of mysteries, and probably of powerful enemies as well, and you sit down and deal in paradoxes. You are playing with danger!"

"My dear fellow," replied the journalist, "when one has got to the point of playing with danger, it means that one has first learned to estimate it correctly. A hunter does not judge of the strength of a lion merely by shooting it. He tracks it to its lair, 'plays' it, so to speak—and in that way forms a true estimate of its individual powers."

"Stop, stop!" entreated Leo, holding up his hands in mock surrender. "You will be making me say next, that

Rastakov is my dearest friend!"

"And you couldn't do a wiser thing," retorted the journalist imperturbably. "The wind would be quite taken out of his sails, and he would become wax in your hands."

He bent forward, and addressed Leo impressively:

"What you must do—and now I am speaking quite seriously—is to be a really staunch friend to Lona Ivanovna and Sonia Bernin."

"What about Andrei Bernin?"

"I intend to befriend him myself, for a reason that will probably surprise you both. But now it is time for you to go downstairs..."

A quarter of an hour later, Leonard Grath came down into the hall. Sure enough, there by the glass door sat a man, his gun propped against the wall, within easy reach; he got up as soon as he saw Leo, and stood at attention. The young man went past him into the dining room, where he could hear low voices. The breakfast table was laid near the windows, and with some surprise, he realized that they were waiting for him.

Sonia Bernin was standing by the window, and when she turned and saw him, she greeted him with a friendly smile. Lona Ivanovna, who had been talking in a low and impressive tone, also turned round. Leo bowed. As a self-invited guest, he found the situation a little awkward, but his hostess said frankly:

"Good morning, Mr. Grath. I am afraid I left you very unceremoniously yesterday evening, but I trust you will remember that a place will always be laid for you as long as you give us the pleasure of your company."

"It is most kind of you," mumbled Leo. He noticed for the first time that the old blind author also was in the room. Andrei Bernin was sitting in an armchair, stiff and upright, in a listening attitude, near a window on the left, with the curtains drawn. In his dim corner at the end of the room, he looked like some grotesque and inanimate mask, with his white beard, blue spectacles, and black velvet skull cap; a pathetic and immovable figure, laid aside and forgotten. As Lona Ivanovna's masculine profile and vigorous form bent over the blind man, the contrast was so acute, that Leo could not help feeling touched by it.

"Andrei Ivanovitch," said his sister, "this is Mr. Grath."

"I'm very glad to make your acquaintance, sir," said Leo.

The blind man bowed, and held out a thin, but white and well kept hand.

"We are all glad that you have come," said he, in a voice as low and gentle as a softly tinkling bell. "But why have you come alone?"

After a pause, during which Sonia raised her head and looked at Leo, the blind man repeated his question, still more slowly and mechanically.

"Why have you come alone?"

Lona Ivanovna also cast an inquiring glance at the young man. The blind man had clutched the arms of his chair, and was bending forward; little wrinkles undulated over his worn face, and the blue spectacles gleamed like two steel mirrors. Leo, whose thoughts were centered on the journalist hidden in his bedroom, felt like a prisoner at the bar.

"I am certainly alone," he

said slowly, "though I didn't come alone."

"Ah, indeed," said the blind man, in a tone which suddenly resembled his sister's. "Not alone! And who was your companion?"

"He was a stranger to me," explained Leo. "Bernard Jenin was my traveling companion in the train yesterday."

The expression of the faces around him changed suddenly, and became cold, strange and secretive. It seemed almost as though the sunny atmosphere of the room was charged with electricity, which sent a shock through him, and a new light dawned upon him. He perceived that these three persons were unhappy, weighed down by an unknown catastrophe, or by the apprehension of an imminent one. He had been cruel; he had reopened a wound. They were looking at him as though they saw in him an executioner, and Sonia's eyes were misty with tears. The old man's voice broke the silence:

"We mustn't judge by appearances. Important conclusions are often based on very slight grounds. And although I cannot see you, I can feel what you are thinking. The question is, whether Bernard Jenin is still in the Copper House, or whether Lona Ivanovna killed him last night, at sunset."

Leo raised his hand involuntarily, and took a step back. The blind man, who sat with his white head turned towards him, continued softly:

"What, are you afraid of your own suspicions? At sunset, that's a goodtime to die! Why do you let the matter trouble you so deeply? There are so many brave fellows, 100 times better than Bernard Jenin, who are lying dead in a hell of carnage, that it seems almost a luxury to die of nothing worse than one little revolver shot."

"Mr. Bernin!" burst out Leo violently, "I have not expressed any such suspicion!"

"No, I have expressed it. To banish a groundless suspicion it is often enough just to put it into words. Some thoughts won't stand that proof. You said you saw Bernard Jenin in the train, and you have guessed that a mystery attaches to his arrival here. But why need the mystery be a criminal one? Why must you feel obliged to extort an explanation which would be willingly given to you, if it were possible?"

Leo did not hesitate a moment. The frank words acted upon him like a fresh breeze, blowing away the cobwebs, and he exclaimed: "I will not insist upon any explanation. You do not know me; I cannot claim to be your friend, but at any rate, do not regard me as your enemy."

Lona Ivanovna had crossed her lean arms upon her breast and she laughed grimly. It struck Leo how much alike Andrei Bernin and his sister were, in spite of their outward dissimilarity. The same quiet and resigned manner, the same intellectual strength, characterized them both. He could not understand how he had seen in the blind author nothing more than a weak and senile invalid.

"Well, well!" said the old lady, "I see that we are agreed. So let us have breakfast."

The tension was eased, though a certain amount of constraint still remained. Only Leo and Sonia Bernin exchanged a few commonplace remarks every now and then.

As soon as they got up from the table, the elder lady took out her interminable crochet, as if it was the only thing that mattered; then she leaned over the table, looked the young man straight in the face, and inquired:

"When is Maurice Wallion coming?"

"I—I can't say," answered

worked out with the department whereby the government would notify finance companies of applications for the licensing of airplanes on which liens exist. Planes must be re-licensed when they are sold by owners. This would enable finance companies to "ground" planes through repossession for violation of contract.

Farm Relief Solution Placed With Schools

ATLANTA—(AP)—Permanent effective farm relief can come only through the rural schools. Prof. Norman Frost of Nashville, Tenn.

Leo, taken by surprise. "Why do you ask me?"

"Because, if he has a mind to rescue Bernard Jenin a second time, he has my permission to be quick about it!"

Leo was tempted to tell the truth about the journalist's hiding place, but he contented himself with answering: "I am convinced that he will come—but he will choose his own time."

Chapter IX. Uarest in Both Camps; an Outpost Skirmish and a Warning

It was raining in Stockholm; heavy clouds were drifting over the sky, and an occasional peal of thunder rolled over the wet, glistening roofs. At the office of the Finno-Russian Import and Export company, Marcus Tassler stood looking gloomily out at the rain. He was alone in the two showily furnished rooms, for he had sent out the typist who was his only assistant, if one excepts those who came and went on business that had nothing to do with the purchase and sale of tea and coffee. He was alone with his thoughts, hence his gloom.

He was thinking principally of the baron—who had inspired him with a certain amount of dread that morning—and of the future, which he dreaded even more. He was aware that he was standing on dangerous ground, and he knew that his one hope of escape was—in plain English—to cut and run! That is an unpleasant conviction for anyone, and especially for a man whose most prominent characteristics are an Oriental love of pleasure and a barbaric thirst for gold.

Marcus Tassler gulped down half a glass of old cognac, and lighted a dark cigar, with a band round it. He looked at that minute like some fat, pagan high priest, engaged in mystic rites, and in forecasting gruesome omens from the sacrificial offerings.

Baron Fayerling came in without knocking. He greeted his partner with a diabolical smile, provoked partly by Tassler's harassed expression, partly by his empty glass. He appeared to be in a hurry, for he kept his hat on, and remained standing, leaning on his cane.

"Well!" said Tassler sharply. "You are late. Have you caught him?"

"No," replied the baron. "That duffer I sent up to his flat last night came back in a panic, reporting that the journalist was at home, and had a visitor into the bargain—since then, Maurice Wallion has vanished as completely as Pharaoh in the Red Sea."

"Does nobody know who his visitor was?"

"No."

"And when our men searched his room at the office did they find nothing?"

"No. Nothing! Nichts! Rien!"

The baron uttered each successive negative with an explosive emphasis which made his companion wince. He added:

"His being away wouldn't matter so much if I had not the written proof that the fellow is set on exterminating us. Can you imagine anything cooler than his treatment of Rastakov and myself! Informing us frankly that he will fight us for the Tarraschir document—for, of course, that is what he's after."

"At any rate, he can't get anything now out of B.22," remarked Tassler.

"Out of whom?" said the baron sharply. "What may B.22 be? I'm not acquainted with the witness."

"Oh, come, baron, between ourselves! From the way in which he died, I can pretty well guess whom you sent..."

The baron collared the fat man, and shook him till he quivered like a jelly.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

declared before the convention here of the Education association.

"Schools can prevent over production," he said, "by educating more pupils so that they can leave the farms if they wish. They can make country life more satisfactory by increasing individual efficiency and bringing a higher standard of living."

"Intelligent, educated farmers, who understand economics, he pointed out, either can improve the present marketing of farm products or revise the system if it needs revision."

Boys Almost Bury Wounded Chum



After accidentally shooting their 11 year old pal, Arthur Gentile, in the head, these two youths, Attilio Tassi, left, 9 years, and Romulus Lucentini, 13 years, of Woburn, Mass., innocently dug a grave and were about to bury their victim, still alive, when a neighbor came upon the scene and snatched the dying boy from his grave. He was rushed to Choate Memorial Hospital, but later died. Police were notified and the two boys are held for manslaughter.

(International Newswire)

Reports Big Profit



The Maytag Company, of New York, of which F. L. Maytag, above, is chairman of the board, reports a net profit for the six months ended June 30, of \$3,236,122, after charges and Federal taxes, a new earnings record in the history of the company.

(International Newswire)

Let Men Govern



Representative Pearl P. Oldfield of Arkansas, maybe because she is a member of Congress, opines that the government at Washington is best run by men. Mrs. Oldfield, who was elected to fill the unexpired term of her late husband, William P. Oldfield, announces that she will retire at the end of her term.

(International Newswire)

Heir to Millions in Fatal Crash



Wreckage of the plane after a drop of 2,500 feet, in which Ambrose Monell, 23 years, of New York and London, heir to \$20,000,000 fortune, was riding. They were over North Greenwich, Conn., when the plane crashed to earth on the estate of John H. Sterling, causing the deaths of young Monell, a friend of his and their pilot.

(International Newswire)

Time Payment System

In Plane Sales Sought

NEW YORK—(AP)—The problem of marketing the projected production of between 6,000 and 10,000 airplanes this year has brought up the question of proper financing of purchases, which a chamber of commerce is seeking to solve. The committee is drawing up uniform time payment legislation.

Just as the automotive industry found the time payment plan a great stimulant to sales, the airplane industry hopes to provide a sound means of financing for increasing sales on the deferred pay-

A co-operative agreement is being