

The Secret Dispatch

By JAMES GRANT

CHAPTER IX.

"So—he is safe," said Nicholas Pavlovitch, looking upward with a grin of savage satisfaction at the closed trap, as he replaced the torch on the table, and then closely scrutinized the corporal, whose eyes had already become red and inflamed.

"Hush!" said Podatchkine, "take care."

"Why?" asked Nicholas, in a hoarse whisper.

"Because all may not be yet as you wish it, and in Russia sometimes the tongue flaps the shoulders and cuts off the head."

"True," said the hitherto taciturn Stepanik, who was carefully feeling the keel edge of his hatchet, "as the Tartars have it, when you have spoken the word, it rules over you; while it is yet unspoken, you rule over it. But it seems to me, Michael Podatchkine, that you have taken a great deal of trouble, and wasted much time in the matter of this dispatch. As you passed through the forest together, why did you not give him a good prod in the back with your lance?"

"Because, if a wound is found on him, folks might say he had been murdered; and he must not bear a scar."

"And neither shall you, friend Podatchkine," said Pavlovitch with a cruel grin.

"Come—don't make unpleasant jests," growled the corporal, with a yawn and a shudder. "I have no desire to travel with the next caravan to Siberia, with one side of my head and face shaved, and an iron rosary, some five pounds in weight, on my wrists."

"Fear not—you will never see Siberia."

"Then you have made all sure about Ivanovitch Balgonie?" said Podatchkine, whose utterance was becoming somewhat horticultural.

"Ay, sure enough; the cups—the cup, I mean—was drugged with those black berries which grow in the forest; and the same stuff used by five ladies to whiten their hands."

"But why the cup and not the candle?"

"For this reason, I might have been constrained to drink with him; and I had no desire to fall, like some one else, into a trap of my own making."

Podatchkine, on whose face the powerful sportive with which his cup had been fringed—the sleepy, nightshade—had been rapidly taking effect, and whose small cunning eyes had been opening and shutting alternately, while a businesslike smile with a weariness over all his faculties, seemed suddenly to grasp at the terrible meaning of the speaker. He gave a start—he essayed to rouse himself and shout, but in doing so, toppled off his stool, and sunk on the clay floor in a profound slumber.

"At last!" said the half-breed, administering a kick to the prostrate figure; "at last he has gone to sleep; now to make sure that he shall never awaken more. Ah! the Asiatic! he was just getting suspicious at the end."

"There are two coins in his pockets," said the Stepanik, after investigating the garments of the snoring Podatchkine, who was now breathing heavily through his red snub nose, which, between his scrubby beard and his shock hair, was almost the only feature of his face that was visible.

"Leave the coins where you found them!" said Nicholas.

"Where?" asked the Stepanik, with surprise.

"It will seem all the more honest in these say good Stepanik, when you take the body—bodies, I should say—to the nearest military post. You have but to say you found them dead in the forest."

"And the wet clothing?"

"Dew or rain—what a head you have!"

"True—true; ah! what a man you are, Nicholas Pavlovitch, so full of bright thoughts! That idea would never have occurred to me."

"Nor the other either. Quick now; we have not a moment to lose!"

They extinguished the pine torch, and tying the corporal's hands securely with a cord, carried him forth to the draw-well before the cottage. Then they substituted that worthy warrior's heels for the bucket which was usually appended to the rope, and permitting the winch to revolve softly and gently, lowered him down, moaning and gasping in his unnatural slumber, head foremost, into the deep, dark water below!

The Stepanik turned the iron handle of the windlass, while the gypsy guided the rope with his heavy burden. He was deliberately lowered down until his heels remained above water, as the two wretches could see by the starlight when stooping and peering into the darkness below.

The snoring had ceased now. The dying corporal was heard to struggle with his hands, as if he sought to free them from the cords; a few bubbles filled with air rose to the surface and burst. This continued for a minute, during which all was silent every where, save the half-suppressed breathing of the two assassins, and the dreary sound of the right wind as it shook the dark branches of the giant pines that towered in solemn gloom around them.

Nicholas Pavlovitch listened intently, and kept his eyes fixed on the cottage where their other victim lay, as he doubtless, not sunk in what was intended to be his last sleep.

As they had left it, the pitcher, the wooden bowls, the two cups, and the empty bottle were on the table, and the platters, with the debris of their rustic supper; but the superstitious gypsy felt a species of shudder come over him, for when the torch flared up in the night wind and cast strange shadows on the dingy and discolored walls of the log hut, it seemed to his diseased imagination, for a moment, as if the outline of the drowned corporal still occupied the spot on which he had been seated.

"Come," said he huskily, "the dispatch!—and then for the other!"

They listened intently, and placed the ladder against the trap door. All was still—not even the breathing of Balgonie was heard. Ascending first, with a knife in his teeth, in case of unexpected resistance, the gypsy knocked three on the trap without receiving any response. He then withdrew the wooden bolt, pushed it up, and introducing his head and shoulders, held aloft the pine torch, and turned toward the bed of sin.

It was unoccupied; and in a moment he saw that the bare and desolate chamber was without a tenant!

"Maleficient!" he shouted; "he has escaped us—but how? Search—search! He cannot be far off; search—the dose I have given him; search—and we must use our hatchets now!"

CHAPTER X.

Balgonie had scarcely thrown himself at length on the sofa but not very odorous pile of skins which formed his couch, when a face appeared at a little window, which was pulled open, and a voice called to him in a low and earnest whisper:

"Hospodeen—Cari Ivanovitch! Hospodeen, attend to me; but oh, be silent, as you value your life!"

He started up, softly approached the window, and saw, by the dim starlight, a fair female face with very dark eyes, white and regular teeth, and long, glittering ear-rings.

"I have seen this face before," thought he; "but when, and where?"

Balgonie, in truth, was too much of a lover to have more than one female face ever before his eyes—that of Natalie Mierowna.

"I am Olga, the gypsy," said the girl humbly.

"Olga! Olga! whom I saw at the house of Mierowitz this evening?"

"The same, Hospodeen!" Balgonie expressed an exclamation of astonishment to find her, as he thought, so far from that place. "You gave me a coin once upon a time, at Krejko, when passing through that town with Michael Podatchkine; and this evening you saved me from the whip of the steward, when for the third time I had ventured near the mansion in a vain search for you of the Hospozna Mierowna."

"In search of us—and for what purpose, girl?"

"To warn you that for nearly a month past a plot has been formed to deprive you of a valuable paper, and even of your life."

"My life! By whom, and where, girl?"

"Here in this solitary hut—even now your assassins are in consultation—listen."

He placed his ear to the trap door, and heard the murmurs of coarse whispers below.

"Hush," said Podatchkine, "take care!" Then followed the question of the subtle and ferocious Stepanik as to why he had not given Balgonie a "prod" with his lance in the forest; and the whole conversation in all its horrible details, up to the moment when the wretched corporal with death and terror mingling in his soul, fell from his seat in a stupor.

"Great heaven!" exclaimed Balgonie, full of despair and horror, as he mechanically felt for his fatal dispatch, to ascertain that it was yet safe. "I have drunk of this drugged stuff, and am also lost!"

"Nay," said the gypsy, hurriedly; "not from the cup which was introduced for you."

"How?—speak!—speak!"

"The cordial and the cups too were all stolen by Podatchkine, with many other things, at different times, from the household of Mierowitz. This night you were daily expected here, and thus a plan was laid to destroy both you and your treacherous guide. Two cups were fully and deeply drugged by my brother, Nicholas; one was richly mounted with silver, and knowing well that it was to be set before you, I abstracted it barely an hour ago, substituting another of the same kind, and now I have it here. Oh, Hospodeen, a narrow escape you have had!"

Balgonie began to breathe more freely; but assured that never had he run so narrow a risk of death, he felt, though enraged and furious, his blood run cold when contemplating the fate intended for him. Peeping through a chink of the hatch or trap door, he saw that the ladder of access had been removed, and that the door of the squallid cottage was open now, for the torch flared more than ever in the night wind. It was then extinguished; but still he could see and hear them dragging forth the passive form of Corporal Podatchkine, whom he supposed to be dead.

"If you would save your life and the dispatch of the empress, follow me this instant, and get your horse before they return; you have not a moment to lose."

It was the gypsy girl who spoke again, in her low earnest whisper, and with perfect decision.

"Then I owe my escape—my safety—"

...upon leaped to the ground, and softly assisted her to descend.

"Here is your horse; you see, Hospodeen, that your kindness to the poor gypsy girl was not thrown away."

Balgonie looked rapidly to his bit and girth, adjusted himself in his saddle, hooked up the bit of his snarling and snorted his rein, almost unaware of the black tragedy being so coolly and deliberately acted on the other side of the cottage.

"Ten miles further from this will bring you to the monastery of the Troitza, which you will know by its domes. You have but to ride straight westward by the forest path; heaven keep you, and may you and the beautiful Hospozna be happy in your loves!"

He slipped into her hand the largest coins he had, and in a moment more was galloping over the soft grass of the forest path she had indicated.

After traversing a green valley some five or six miles in length, bordered on each side by forests of fir trees, he drew his horse at the gates of the Troitza Monastery, where its white walls, its three great cupolas, shaped each like a gigantic onion inverted, covered with plates of burnished copper, and all painted and bestarred, were shining gayly in the morning sun.

There he was made welcome by the monks—quiet-looking men, in high black caps without brims, and having black veils floating behind over their long, straight hair.

A large party of pilgrims on horse and foot were returning to St. Petersburg that afternoon. With them Balgonie traveled for the remainder of his journey; and, after traversing a wild and desert tract of country, on the evening of the next day he had the pleasure of beholding, in the distance before him, the vast and splendid capital.

Balgonie's satisfaction on finding himself so near the end of his journey was somewhat clouded by a trivial circumstance.

After entering the city by a palisaded barrier, where stood a crowd of the Red Guard of Valikutzka, he checked his horse's pace, while the caravan of pilgrims, whom he now wished to quit, traversed a long street of small, wooden houses that lay beyond. Here close by the margin of the Neva lay a man wet and dripping, and a piece of sack or old canvas spread over his face.

On his breast lay his fur cap, as if to receive gifts for his burial, for none doubted that he was a poor-drowned fellow just fished up from the Neva, and that money was required for his obsequies. So all the pilgrims from the Troitza threw something into the fur cap, while the passers muttered prayers and made sign of the cross.

All the caravan had passed; so the cluster of Balgonie's charger, steel scabbard and accoutrements seemed to create a different effect on the attentive ears of the seemingly drowned man, for the knave, who had only been acting, started up and, with his spail, fed like a hare off the wooden street. He vanished in the twilight, yet not so quickly but that Balgonie was able to recognize in his face and form the bulky and muscular half-breed, the gypsy, Nicholas Paulo vitch.

What had brought him to St. Petersburg? Was he still dogging the luckless dispatch bearer, or had he only fled thither that, among its thousands, he might evade the punishment with which Mierowitz would be sure to visit him. If the murder of the corporal was discovered!

This episode made Balgonie feel uncomfortable and suspicious that other and hidden dangers yet menaced him as he rode steadily but watchfully through the densely crowded streets.

Along the northern margin of the Neva, deep, blue and transparent as crystal, lined with solid granite quays and bordered by many stately palatial edifices, Balgonie pursued his way; but the stars were shining at midnight on the vast sheet of water called the Lake of Ladoga before he, weary and worn with fatigue, dismounted beneath the formidable gates of the castellated prison of Schlusselburg.

(To be continued.)

Modern Farm Life.

In the course of a speech before the farmers of Whitman county, Washington, Gov. Henry McBride said: "Farm life is not what it was twenty-five years ago. You have more of the comforts and conveniences of life. You are not so isolated. The building of railroads, the extension of the telegraph and telephone systems, the construction of highways, and increased mail facilities have brought the farmer in closer touch with the world at large. The farmer of today, especially in localities covered by the free rural delivery system, receiving as he does his daily mail, is as well posted and can feel the great throbbing pulse of humanity as well as the dweller in the city."

"This is in utter contrast with the loneliness pervading the farm life in former years—a loneliness that tempted many a boy and girl cityward when, in many instances, it would have been much better for them had they remained in their old homes. With the rapid advancement along material lines—with better schools—with greater opportunities for social intercourse—with the opening up of all the avenues of information, thus bringing it in closer touch with the great outside world, farm life has become more attractive, and there is no longer danger of the urban population increasing at the expense of the rural. And this is well; for an intelligent, contented, sturdy self-reliant class devoted to agricultural pursuits is one of the chief bulwarks of any state or nation."

The Fly in the Ointment.
Mrs. Henpeck—I understand young Footman, who was married last June, has unexpectedly fallen heir to the property of a rich uncle.

Mr. Henpeck—Well, well!
Mrs. Henpeck—Talk about luck!
Mr. Henpeck—Yes, it is tough. If he had only gotten it before last June.

An Expert.
She—I am not the only girl you have ever kissed.

He—How do you know that?
She—Well, I've had some experience myself.—*Detroit Free Press.*

FOR AND ABOUT WOMEN

Child Training.
Should humility be taught in the public schools? Are the children of the present day too proud to perform the tasks that their fathers and mothers performed when they were children? These are pertinent questions. They are becoming more so every day, and it will not be amiss to consider them. Educators are beginning to discuss the matter with great seriousness.

Recently a prominent Eastern school man in a public address said: "Our fathers did chores, our sons refuse to, but put the energy into football. Our girls decline to do housework. We have not the virtue of frugality. We should teach it."

Undoubtedly these statements are to a certain degree correct. It is to be doubted, however, if the school is the place to correct these faults. At best nothing can be done in the schools more than to supplement the work of the home. Children cannot be taught frugality and industry at school unless these things are also impressed upon them in the home. Wasteful and indulgent parents are to blame. If parents with two or three children cannot train them properly, how is a teacher with twenty-five or fifty children under her control to be expected to correct their faults and at the same time instruct them in their studies?

The whole trouble lies in the indulgence of parents. Every one has observed the difference between children in different homes, but enjoying practically the same material advantages.

Families of the same wealth and the same station in society show a marked difference in the way they train their children. In one family the children will be respectful, industrious and well behaved. In another way they will be the opposite.

One trouble is that parents want their children to have things better than they had them when they were young. Their children must have more advantages, better clothes, less work to do and more pleasures. These ambitions on the part of the parents are certainly unselfish. The result, however, often is that the children are selfish.

Parents should cultivate humility on the part of their children. It should be humbly without fear, however. Work should be provided and the tasks should be performed. Teachers should not be expected to do everything. Let the children be properly trained at home.—*The Home Magazine.*

Marry for Love.
In many of the letters that come to me the cry is, "I think I am in love, but am not sure. Would you advise me to marry?"

My answer invariably is, "No." Married life where love and friendship reign supreme is undoubtedly the best state for both men and women. But even at the best married life does not always run smoothly. It is inevitable that there should be many little hitch-ups when two people who have grown up in a totally different environment are suddenly brought together for wed or woe.

Now, it takes the deepest and most abiding love to smooth out these rough spots, and when there is not that love, things do indeed get in a muddle.

So many young people think they are in love, when in reality they are not in love at all. That is, they are not in love with the real person, they are in love with a pretty face, a fascinating manner or something equally unstable.

What I want these young people to do is to look into it seriously and find out just what they are in love with.

Let them go carefully into the loved one's virtues and faults—lovers can be analytical if they try—and if weighing all the pros and cons, they can then say to themselves, "I cannot live without this man or woman, life would be a barren waste." Then I say, "marry, and marry as quickly as possible so as not to lose one precious moment of the greatest sweetness that life can offer."

But, oh, lovers all, be very sure of yourselves before you enter on this compact to "love each other" as long as you both shall live.—*Beatrice Fairfax in Spokesman's Review.*

Health and Beauty Hints.
Direct sunshine gives gloss to hair of any shade, but fair hair it renders like burnished gold.

Unrefreshing but sound sleep nearly always shows that the blood does not leave the brain by the veins at the normal rate. Soaking the feet in hot water, and using a high pillow will be beneficial. In many cases a daily saline draft or similar medicine will prove useful.

When hot fomentations are required the newspaper comes into play. Place the papers on a stove, lay flannel cloths wrung out of water as hot as can be borne on them, and when well heated through and through lift up and wring out in dry towels to save the hands from being burned.

A slice of lemon used as a soap at the toilet works wonders on the skin. The acid searches out the hidden grime that may be contained in the pores and cleanses these tiny pipes as soap could never do. No polisher for the nails can excel in efficiency this same lemon juice, which takes out all stains from the corners of the milk, polishes up their horny texture; makes them shine and softens the thin skin at the roots so that the half-moons at the end show up well.

Greasiness of the skin is an unpleasant condition, and is by no means easy to cure. All rich and greasy foods should be avoided. The face should be washed in rain water, or, if this be unobtainable, in water softened by the addition of borax. The soap used should be of the purest, and contain no glycerine. Wash the face occasionally with white vinegar diluted with rose water.

What He Promised.
Mr. Spratt—I suppose you do not remember that you promised to obey me when we were married?

Mrs. Spratt—Don't you know, John, that a woman who could marry you would be equal to any kind of foolishness.—*Boston Transcript.*

Milan, Italy, not Lyons, France, is now the greatest silk market.

THE HOUSEHOLD

Entire Wheat Bread.
Scald a half pint of milk, add water, salt and yeast. Then add slowly, beating all the while, five half-pint cupfuls of whole wheat flour, knead ten minutes, using another cupful of flour. Put this dough in a bowl, cover and stand in a warm place, 80 degrees Fahrenheit, for two hours or until very light. Then mold carefully into two loaves, cover again for one hour and bake in a moderately quick oven for forty-five minutes.

Almond Custard.
One quart of milk, two cupfuls of sugar, one-half pound of almonds, blanched and pounded fine, four eggs, and four teaspoonfuls of rose water, and four teaspoonfuls of cream, stand over the fire until as thick as cream, then set in the oven until firm. Just before serving cover with whipped cream, tinted delicately pink with strawberry syrup or red currant jelly.

Dinner Bonbons.
Delicious dinner bonbons are made by chopping peanuts or almonds very fine, mixing them with the white of an egg, a little sugar and just enough cherry to flavor, and pressing the paste into the cavity made by removing the stones from fresh prunes or dates. The fruit is then rolled in powdered sugar.

Lemon Soup.
Cut two slices of bacon into small dice. Put them in a kettle and fry brown with an onion sliced, and two tablespoonfuls of flour. Add a quart of boiling water, two cold boiled potatoes, a cup of stewed tomatoes and a little celery. Season to taste. This is a quick and economical soup and very nice for a change.

Raspberry Trifle.
Line the bottom of a deep dish with thin slices of sponge cake and sugar over this a little raspberry juice. Cover the cake with a thick layer of sweetened red or black raspberries. Put a layer of cake on top of this and more berries, and when the dish is three-quarters full pour over all a thin boiled custard.

Chocolate Bread Pudding.
Chocolate Bread Pudding.—Soak two cupfuls of bread crumbs in two cupfuls of scalded milk, add two-thirds cupful of sugar, two squares of chocolate previously melted, and one teaspoonful of vanilla. Mix well and bake in a buttered dish one hour.

Mince-meat.
Mince-meat.—One cup chopped meat, three cups chopped apples, one cup sugar, one and one-half cup raisins, one and one-half cup currants, one-third cup molasses, one cup liquid in which meat was boiled, two teaspoons each salt, cinnamon, cloves and allspice, one-half cup vinegar.

Fruit Jumbles.
One pound of sugar, one pound of butter, one pound and a quarter of flour, six eggs, half a pound of currants, a little soda and nutmeg. Mix the butter, sugar, spices and eggs, then the currants, next the soda, and lastly the flour.

Cocoanut Biscuit.
Grate two ounces of cocoanut, mix with a quarter of a pound of powdered white sugar, and the whites of three eggs, previously beaten to a stiff froth. Drop small pieces of this mixture on paper, place in a baking tin, in a slow oven for about ten minutes.

Lemon Pie.
Lemon Pie.—One lemon, using rind and juice, one cup sugar, one cup water, one tablespoon flour, three eggs. Bake in rich crust and cover with meringue.

Hints for the Housewife.
Before chopping meat for sauce, sprinkle it with sugar. It will then be chopped fine easily and quickly.

A woolen cloth is far better than a brush for polishing a grate, for it does the work more cleanly and produces a softer gloss.

After ironing shirts, etc., place them by the fire till perfectly dry, for this quick dry insures their being as stiff as possible.

It is a good plan to partially fill valuable china vases with sand or to place shot in them, for thus they are rendered too heavy to be easily upset.

Remember that stored blankets and other woolen articles may be kept from soiling if some well-dried yellow soap be put out and scattered in their folds.

To serve stewed figs with whipped cream, put each fig on a small square of sponge cake neatly cut and pile whipped cream on the top.

Drain oysters on a napkin before making a stew. Rub the napkin with butter, heat very hot, put in the oysters, and turn and stir until well plumped and ruffled before making the soup proper.

Telegraph wire of galvanized iron is much better to hang clothes on in winter than rope, as the clothes will not freeze to it. Have it hung by a lineman and it will never "give," no matter what the weather may be.

To clean painted walls give two ounces of borax in two quarts of water and add one tablespoonful of ammonia. Use half this quantity to each bucket of water; do not use soap. Wash a small portion of the paint at a time and rub dry with clean cloth.