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The SOWERS

By Henry Seton Merriman

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(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK)

and suddenly breathless, he half-frowning. But he did not meet her eyes. "Paul," she said again, "what did you do this for? Why are you here? Oh, why are you in this wretched place?"

"Because you sent for me," he answered quietly. "Come, let us go out. I have finished here. That man will die. There is nothing more to be done for him. You must not stay in here." Steinmetz lingered behind to give some last instructions, leaving Paul and Catrina to walk on down the narrow street alone.

"How long have you been doing this?" asked Catrina suddenly. She did not look toward him, but straight in front of her.

"For some years now," he replied simply. He lingered. He was waiting for Steinmetz, who always rose to such emergencies, who understood secrets and how to secure them when they seemed already lost.

Catrina walked on in silence. She was not looking at the matter from his point of view at all.

"Of course," she said at length, "of course, Paul, I admire you for it im-

Her hands were running over the breast of the tattered coat he wore. It was lamentably obvious, even to him, that she loved him. In her anxiety she either did not know what she was doing or she did not care whether he knew or not.

"Are you sure—are you sure you have not taken it?" she whispered.

He walked on almost roughly.

"Oh, yes; quite," he said.

"I will not allow you to go into any more houses in Thors. I cannot—I will not! Oh, Paul, you don't know. If you do I will tell them all who you are, and—and the government will stop you."

"What would be the good of that?" said Paul awkwardly.

"Of course," Catrina went on, with a sudden anger which surprised herself. "I cannot stop you from doing this at Osterno, though I think it is wicked, but I can prevent you from doing it here, and I certainly shall."

Paul shrugged his shoulders.

"As you like," he said. "I thought you cared more about the peasants."

"I do not care a jot about the peasants," she answered passionately, "as compared— It is you I am thinking about, not them. I think you are selfish and cruel to your friends."

"I did it after mature consideration," said Paul. "I tried paying another man, but he shirked his work and showed the white feather, so Steinmetz and I concluded that there was nothing to be done but do our dirty work ourselves."

"And that is why you have been so fond of Osterno the last two years?" she asked innocently.

"Yes," he answered, falling into the trap.

Catrina winced. One does not wince the less because the pain is expected.

"Only that?" she inquired.

Paul glanced at her.

"Yes," he answered quietly.

They walked on in silence for a few moments. Paul seemed tacitly to have given up the idea of visiting any more of the stricken cottages. They were going toward the long old house, which was called the castle more by courtesy than by right.

"How long are you going to stay in Osterno?" asked Catrina at length.

"About a fortnight. I cannot stay longer. I am going to be married."

Catrina stopped short. She stood for a moment looking at the ground with a sort of wonder in her eyes not pleasant to see. Then she walked on.

"I congratulate you," she said. "I only hope she will make you happy. She is beautiful, I suppose?"

"Yes," answered Paul simply.

The girl nodded her head.

"What is her name?"

"Etta Sydney Bamborough."

Catrina had evidently never heard the name before. It conveyed nothing to her. Womanlike, she went back to her first question.

"What is she like?"

Paul hesitated.

"Tall, I suppose?" suggested the stunted woman at his side.

"Yes."



"You must not go in there."

mensely. It is just like you to go and do the thing quietly and say nothing about it; but, oh, you must go away from here. I—I—it is too horrible to think of your running such risks. Rather let them all die like flies than that. You mustn't do it. You mustn't."

She spoke in English, hurriedly, with a little break in her voice which he did not understand.

"With ordinary precautions the risk is very small," he said practically.

"Yes. But do you take ordinary precautions? Are you sure you are all right now?"

She stopped. They were quite alone in the one silent street of the stricken village. She looked up into his face.

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"And gracefully?"

"Yes."

"Has she—pretty hair?" asked Catrina.

"I think so—yes."

"You are not observant," said the girl in a singularly even and emotionless voice. "Perhaps you never noticed."

"Not particularly," answered Paul.

Catrina was unaware of the thought of murder that was in her own heart. Nevertheless the desire—indefinite, shapeless—was there to kill this woman, who was tall and beautiful, whom Paul Alexis loved.

It must be remembered in extenuation that Catrina Lanovitch had lived nearly all her life in the province of Tver. She was not modern at all. Deprived of the advantages of our enlightened society press, without the benefit of our decadent fictional literature, she had lamentably narrow views of life.

She only knew that she loved Paul and that what she wanted was Paul's love to go with her all through her life. She was not self-analytical nor subtle nor given to thinking about her own thoughts. Perhaps she was old-fashioned enough to be romantic.

Catrina hated Etta Sydney Bamborough with a simple, half-barbaric hatred because she had gained the love of Paul Alexis. Etta had taken away from her the only man whom Catrina could ever love all through her life. The girl was simple enough, unsophisticated enough, never to dream of compromise. She never for a moment entertained the cheap, consolatory thought that in time she would get over it; she would marry somebody else and make that compromise which is responsible for more misery in this world than ever is vice.

"Where does she live?" asked Catrina.

"In London."

"I wonder," said Catrina, half to herself, "whether she loves you?"

It was a question, but not one that a man can answer. Paul said nothing, but walked gravely on by the side of this woman, who knew that even if Etta Sydney Bamborough should try she could never love him as she herself did.

When Karl Steinmetz joined them they were silent.

"I suppose," he said in English, "that we may rely upon the discretion of the Fraulein Catrina?"

"Yes," answered the girl. "You may, so far as Osterno is concerned. But I would rather that you did not visit our people here. It is too dangerous in several ways."

"Ah!" murmured Steinmetz. "Then we must bow to your decision," he went on, turning toward the tall man striding along at his side.

"Yes," said Paul simply.

"Will you come to the castle?" asked the girl. And Steinmetz by a gesture deferred the decision to Paul.

"I think not tonight, thanks," said the latter. "We will take you as far as the gate."

Catrina made no comment. When the tall gateway was reached she stopped, and they all became aware of the sound of horses' feet behind them.

"What is this?" asked Catrina.

"Only the starosta bringing our horses," replied Steinmetz. "He has discovered nothing."

Catrina nodded and held out her hand.

"Good night," she said rather coldly. "Your secret is safe with me."

CHAPTER XII.

THE Palace of Industry, where, with a fine sense of the fitness of the name, the Parisians amuse themselves, was in a blaze of electric light and fashion. The occasion was the Concours Hippique, an ultra equine fete, where the lovers of the friend of man and such persons as are fitted by an ungenerous fate with limbs suitable to horsey clothes meet and bow.

A crowd of well-dressed men jostled each other good-naturedly around a long table, where insolent waiters served tepid coffee and sandwiches.

In the midst of these, as in his element, moved the Baron Claude de Chauville, smiling his courteous, ready smile, which his enemies called a grin. Not far from him stood a stout gentleman of middle age with a heavy fair mustache brushed upward on either side. This man had an air of distinction, which was notable even in this assembly, for there were many distinguished people present, and a Frenchman of note plays his part well.

He stood with his hands behind his back, looking gravely on at the social festivity. He bowed and raised his hat to many, but he entered into conversation with none.

"This Vassili is a dangerous man," he heard more than once whispered.

Now, if a very keen observer had taken the trouble to ignore the throng and watch two persons only, that observer might have discovered the fact that Claude de Chauville was slowly and purposely making his way toward the man called Vassili.

De Chauville knew and was known of many. He had recently arrived from London. He found himself called upon to shake hands with this one and that. He went from one to the other, and each change of position brought him nearer to the middle-aged man with upturned mustache, upon whom his movements were by no means lost.

Finally De Chauville bumped against the object of his quest, possibly indeed the object of his presence. He turned with a ready apology.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "the very man I was desiring to see."

The individual known as "this Vassili," a term of mingled contempt and distrust, bowed very low. He was a plain compeer, while his interlocutor was a baron. The knowledge of this was subtly conveyed in his bow.

"How can I serve M. le Baron?" he

inquired in a voice which was naturally loud and strong, but had been reduced by careful training to a tone inaudible at the distance of a few paces.

"By following me to the Cafe Tante in ten minutes," answered De Chauville, passing on to greet a lady who was bowing to him with the labored grace of a Parisienne.

Vassili merely bowed and stood upright again. There was something in his attitude of quiet attention, of unobtrusive scrutiny and retiring intelligence vaguely suggestive of the police—something which his friends refrained from mentioning to him, for this Vassili was a dignified man, of like susceptibilities with ourselves and justly proud of the fact that he belonged to the diplomatic corps.

What position he occupied in that select corporation he never vouchsafed to define, but it was known that he enjoyed considerable emoluments, while he was never called upon to represent his country or his emperor in any official capacity.

He was attached, he said, to the Russian embassy. His enemies called him a spy.

In ten minutes Claude de Chauville left the Concours Hippique.

At the Cafe Tante—not in the garden, for it was winter, but in the inner room—he found the man called Vassili consuming a pensive and solitary glass of liqueur.

De Chauville sat down, stated his requirements to the waiter in a single word and offered his companion a cigarette, which Vassili accepted, with the consciousness that it came from a coroneted case.

"I am rather thinking of visiting Russia," said the Frenchman.

"Again," added Vassili in his quiet voice. "And M. le Baron wants a passport?"

"And more," answered De Chauville. "I want what you hate parting with—information."

The man called Vassili leaned back in his chair with a little smile. It was an odd little smile, which fell over his features like a mask and completely hid his thoughts. It was apparent that Claude de Chauville's tricks of speech and manner fell here on barren ground.

The Frenchman's epigrams, his method of conveying his meaning in a non-committing and impersonal generality, failed to impress this hearer.

"Then," said Vassili, "if I understand M. le Baron aright, it is a question of private and personal affairs that suggests this journey to—Russia?"

"Precisely."

"In no sense a mission?" suggested the other, sipping his liqueur thoughtfully.

"In no sense a mission. I give you a proof. I have been granted six months' leave of absence, as you probably know."

"Precisely so. When a military officer is granted a six months' leave it is exactly then that we watch him. And you want a passport?"

"Yes; a special one."

"I will see what I can do."

"Thank you."

Vassili emptied his glass, drew in his feet and glanced at the clock.

"But that is not all I want," said De Chauville.

"So I perceive."

"I want you to tell me what you know of Prince Pavlo Alexis."

"Prince Pavlo Alexis," said Vassili, "is a young man who takes a full and daring advantage of his peculiar position. He defies many laws in a quiet, persistent way which impresses the smaller authorities and to a certain extent paralyzes them. He was in the Charity league—deeply implicated. He had a narrow escape. He was pulled through by the cleverest man in Russia."

"Karl Steinmetz?"

"Yes," answered Vassili behind the rigid smile, "Karl Steinmetz."

"Prince Paul is about to marry—the widow of Sydney Bamborough."

"Sydney Bamborough," repeated Vassili musingly, with a perfect expression of innocence on his well-cut face. "I have heard that name before."

CHAPTER XIII.

ON the English quay of St. Petersburg a tall, narrow house stands looking glumly across the river. It is a suspected house and watched, for here dwelt Stepan Lanovitch, secretary and organizer of the Charity league.

The Countess Lanovitch belonged to the school existing in Petersburg and Moscow in the early years of the century—the school that did not speak Russian, but only French; that chose to class the peasants with the beasts of the field; that apparently expected the deluge to follow soon.

Her drawing room, looking out on to the Neva, was characteristic of herself. Camellias held the floral honors in vase and pot. The French novel ruled supreme on the side table. The room was too hot, the chairs were too soft, the moral atmosphere too lax. One could tell that this was the dwelling room of a lazy, self-indulgent and probably ignorant woman.

The countess herself in nowise contradicted this conclusion. She was seated on a very low chair, exposing a slipped foot to the flame of a wood fire. She held a magazine in her hand and yawned as she turned its pages. She was not so stout in person as her loose and somewhat highly colored cheeks would imply. Her eyes were dull and sleepy. The woman was an incarnate yawn.

She looked up, turning lazily in her chair, to note the darkening of the air without the double windows.

"Ah," she said aloud to herself in French, "when will it be tea time?"

As she spoke the words the bells of a sleigh suddenly stopped with a rattle beneath the window.

Immediately the countess rose and went to the mirror over the mantelpiece. She arranged without enthusiasm her straggling hair and put

(CONTINUED ON THIRD PAGE)