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The SOWERS

By Henry Seton Merriman

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(CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK)

jauntless, like a very strong man armed.

"Well, I think I am a model wife," she said, "to give in meekly to your tyranny, to go and bury myself in the heart of Russia in the middle of winter. By the way, we must buy some furs; that will be rather exciting. But you must not expect me to be very intimate with your Russian friends. I am not quite sure that I like Russians"—she went toward him, laying her two hands gently on his broad breast and looking up at him—"not quite sure—especially Russian princes who bully their wives. You may kiss me, however, but be very careful. Now I must go and finish dressing. We shall be late as it is."

She gathered together her fan and gloves, for she had petulantly dragged off a pair which did not fit.

"And you will ask Maggie to come with us?" she said.

He held open the door for her to pass out, gravely polite even to his wife—this old-fashioned man.

"Yes," he answered, "but why do you want me to ask her?"

"Because I want her to come."

CHAPTER XV.

THE ball to which Paul and Etta were going was managed by some titled ladies who knew their business well. The price of the tickets was fabulous. The success of the ball was therefore a foregone conclusion. In French fiction there is invariably a murmur of applause when the heroine enters a room full of people, but there was no applause when Paul and Etta made their appearance. That lady had, nevertheless, the satisfaction of perceiving glances, not only of admiration, but of interest and even of disapproval, among her own sex.

To Paul this ball was much like others. There were a number of the friends of his youth—tall, clean featured, clean limbed men, with a tendency toward length and spareness—who greeted him almost affectionately. Some of them introduced him to their wives and sisters, which ladies duly set him down as nice, but dull, a form of faint praise which failed to damn. There were a number of ladies to whom it was necessary for him to bow in acknowledgment of past favors which had missed their mark.

And all the while Karl Steinmetz was storming in his guttural English at the door, upbraiding hired waiters for their stupidity in accepting two literal facts literally. The one fact was that they were forbidden to admit any one without a ticket, the second fact being that tickets were not to be obtained at the price of either one or the other of the two great motives of man—love or money.

Steinmetz was Teutonic and imposing, with the ribbon of a great order on his breast. He mentioned the names of several ladies who might have been, but were not, of the committee. Final-

ly, however, he mentioned the historic name of one whose husband had braved more than one Russian emperor successfully for England.

"Yes, me lord, her ladyship's here," answered the man.

Steinmetz wrote on a card, "In memory of '56, let me in," and sent in the missive.

A few minutes later a stout, smiling lady came toward him with outstretched hand.

"What mischief are you about," she inquired, "you stormy petrel? This is



Karl Steinmetz was storming in his guttural English.

no place for your deep laid machinations. We are here to enjoy ourselves and found a hospital. Come in, however. I am delighted to see you. You used to be a famous dancer—well, some little time ago."

"I came to see Prince Pavlo," answered Steinmetz. "I must thank you for enabling me to do so. I may not see you again this evening. My best thanks, my very dear lady."

He bowed and, with his half humorous, half melancholy smile, left her.

The first face he recognized was a pretty one. Miss Maggie Delafield was just turning away from a partner who was taking his leave when she looked across the room and saw Steinmetz. He had only met her once, barely exchanging six words with her, and her frank, friendly bow was rather a surprise to him. She came toward him, holding out her hand with an open friendliness which this young lady was in the habit of bestowing upon men and women impartially—upon persons of either sex who happened to meet with her approval.

Steinmetz she liked, and there was an end to it.

"I was afraid you did not recognize me," she said.

"My life has not so many pleasures that I can afford to forget one of these," replied Steinmetz in his somewhat old-fashioned courtesy. "But an

old-luffer, shall I say—hardly expects to be taken much notice of by young ladies at a ball."

"I wanted to speak to you," she said. "I have been asked to go and stay at Osorno. Shall I go?"

"By whom?"

"By Paul."

"Then go," said Steinmetz, making one of the few mistakes of his life.

"You think so—you want me to go?"

"Ach, you must not put it like that! It does not affect me—your going, frau-

lein."

"Since you will be there?"

"Does that make a difference, my dear young lady?"

"Of course it does."

"I wonder why."

"So do I," answered Maggie frankly. "I wonder why. I have been wondering why ever since Paul asked me. If you had not been going I should have said 'No' at once."

Karl Steinmetz laughed quietly.

"What do I represent?" he asked.

"Safety," she replied at once.

"She gave a queer little laugh.

"And Paul?" he said.

"Strength," replied Maggie promptly.

He looked down at her—a momentary glance of wonder. He was like a woman, inasmuch as he judged a person by a flicker of the eyelids—a glance, a silence—in preference to judging by the spoken word.

"Then, with us both to take care of you, may we hope that you will brave the perils of Osorno?"

"If I may assure my mother that there are no perils."

Something took place beneath the gray mustache—a smile or a pursing up of the lips in doubt.

"Ah, I cannot go so far as that. You may assure Lady Delafield that I will protect you as I would my own daughter. If—well, if the good God in heaven had not had other uses for me I should have had a daughter of your age."

He took her back to her chaperon, bowed in his old world way to both ladies and left them.

"If I can help it, my very dear young friend," he said to himself as he crossed the room, looking for Paul, "you will not go to Osorno."

He found Paul talking to two men. "You here," said Paul in surprise. "Come up into the gallery."

A certain listlessness which had been his a moment before vanished when Paul recognized his friend. He led the way up the narrow stairs. In the gallery they found a few people—couples seeking, like themselves, a rare solitude.

"What news?" asked Paul, sitting down.

"Bad!" replied Steinmetz. "We have had the misfortune to make a dangerous enemy—Claude de Chauville."

"Claude de Chauville," repeated Paul.

"Yes. He wanted to marry your wife—for her money."

Paul leaned forward and dragged at his great fair mustache. He was not a subtle man, analyzing his own thoughts. Had he been he might have wondered why he was not more jealous in respect to Etta.

"Or," went on Steinmetz, "it may have been—the other thing. It is a singular thing that many men incapable of a lifelong love can conceive a lifelong hatred based on that love. Claude de Chauville has hated me all his life, for very good reasons, no doubt. You are now included in his antipathy because you married Madame."

"I dare say," replied Paul carelessly. "But I am not afraid of Claude de Chauville or any other man."

"I am," said Steinmetz. "He is up to some mischief. I was calling on the Countess Lanovitch in Petersburg when I walked Claude de Chauville. He was constrained at the sight of my stout person and showed it, which was a mistake. Now, what is he doing in Petersburg? He has not been there for ten years at least. He has no friends there. He revived a minute acquaintance with the Countess Lanovitch, who is a fool of the very first water. Before I came away I heard from Catrina that he had wheedled an invitation to Thors out of the old lady. Why, my friend, why?"

Paul reflected, with a frown. "We do not want him out there," he said.

"No, and if he goes there you must remain in England this winter."

Paul looked up sharply. "I do not want to do that. It is all arranged," he said. "Etta was very much against going at first, but I persuaded her to do so. It would be a mistake not to go now."

Looking at him gravely, Steinmetz muttered, "I advise you not to go."

Paul shrugged his shoulders. "I am sorry," he said. "It is too late now. Besides, I have invited Miss Delafield, and she has practically accepted."

"Does that matter?" asked Steinmetz quietly.

"Yes. I do not want her to think that I am a changeable sort of person."

Steinmetz rose, and, standing with his two hands on the marble rail, he looked down into the room below.

"Well," he said resignedly, "it is as you will. There is a certain pleasure in outwitting De Chauville. He is so clever!"

CHAPTER XVI.

YOU must accept," Steinmetz repeated to Paul. "There is no help for it. We cannot afford to offend Vassili, of all people in the world."

They were standing together in the saloon of a suit of rooms assigned for the time to Paul and his party in the Hotel Bristol in Paris. Steinmetz, who held an open letter in his hand, looked out of the window.

Steinmetz looked at the letter with a queer smile. He held it out from him as if he distrusted the very stationery.

"So friendly," he exclaimed, "so very friendly! 'That good Steinmetz' he calls me. 'That good Steinmetz'—confound his cheek! He hopes that his dear prince will waive ceremony and bring his charming princess to dine in the Champs Elysees. He guarantees that only his sister, the marquise, will be present, and he hopes that 'that good Steinmetz' will accompany you and also the young lady, the cousin of the princess."

Steinmetz threw the letter down on the table, left it there for a moment, and then, picking it up, he crossed the room and threw it into the fire.

"Which means," he explained, "that M. Vassili knows we are here, and unless we dine with him we shall be subjected to annoyance and delay on the frontier by a stupid—a singularly and suspiciously stupid—minor official. If we refuse, Vassili will conclude that we are afraid of him. Therefore we must accept, especially as Vassili has his weak points. He loves a lord, 'this Vassili.' If you accept on some of that stationery I ordered for you with a colossal gold coronet, that will already be of some effect."

Paul laughed. It was his habit either to laugh or to grumble at Karl Steinmetz's somewhat subtle precautions.

"Of course," he said, "I leave Vassili, at all events, that we are not afraid of him."

"Then sit down and accept."

That which M. Vassili was pleased to call his little dog hole in the Champs Elysees was in fact a gorgeous house in the tawdry style of modern Paris, resplendent in the iron railings and high gateposts, surmounted by green cactus plants cunningly devised in cast iron.

The heavy front door was thrown open by a lackey, and others bowed in the halls as if by machinery. Two maids pounced upon the ladies with the self assurance of their kind and country and led the way upstairs, while the men removed fur coats in the hall. It was all very prettily and gorgeous and Parisian.

Vassili and his sister the marquise—a stout lady in ruby velvet and amethysts, who invariably caused Maggie Delafield's mouth to twitch whenever she opened her own during the evening—received the guests in the drawing room. They were standing on the white fur hearth rug side by side when the doors were dramatically thrown open, and the servant rolled the names unctuously over his tongue.

Steinmetz, who was behind, saw everything. He saw Vassili's mask-like face contract with stupefaction when he set eyes on Etta. He saw the self contained Russian give a little gasp and mutter an exclamation before he collected himself sufficiently to bow and conceal his face, but he could not see Etta's face for a moment or two—until the formal greetings were over. When he did see it he noted that it was as white as marble.

"Aha, my good Steinmetz!" cried Vassili, with less formality, holding out his hand with frank and boyish good humor.

"Aha, my dear Vassili!" returned Steinmetz, taking the hand.

"It is good of you, M. le Prince, you, madame, to honor us in our sm house," said the marquise.

"So," said Vassili, with a comprehensive bow to all his guests—"so you are bound for Russia. But I envy you, I envy you. You know Russia Mme. la Princesse?"

Etta met his veiled gaze calmly. "A little," she replied.

There was no sign of recognition in his eyes now, nor pallor on her face.

"A beautiful country, but the rest of Europe does not believe it. And the estate of the prince is one of the vastest, if not the most beautiful. It is a sporting estate, is it not, prince?"

"Essentially so," replied Paul. "Bears, wolves, deer, besides, of course, black game, capercaillie, ptarmigan—everything one could desire."

"Speaking as a sportsman," suggested Vassili gravely.

"Of course"—Vassili paused and with a little gesture of the hand included Steinmetz in the conversation; it may have been that he preferred to have him talking rather than watching—"of course, like all great Russian landholders, you have your troubles with the people, though you are not, strictly speaking, within the famine district."

"Not quite; we are not starving, but we are hungry," said Steinmetz bluntly.

Vassili laughed and shook a gold eye-glass chidingly.

"Ah, my friend, your old pernicious habit of calling a spade a spade! It is unfortunate that they should hunger a little, but what will you? They must learn to be provident, to work harder and drink less. With such people experience is the only taskmaster possible. It is useless talking to them. It is dangerous to pauperize them. Besides, the accounts that one reads in the newspapers are manifestly absurd and exaggerated. You must not, mademoiselle," he said, turning courteously to Maggie—"you must not believe all you are told about Russia."

The table was gorgeously decorated; the wine was perfect, the dishes Parisian. Everything was brilliant, and Etta's spirits rose. Such little things affect the spirits of such little minded women.

"It is exile; it is nothing short of exile," protested Vassili, who led the conversation. "Much as I admire my own country as a country, I do not pretend to regret a fate that keeps me resident in Paris. For men it is different, but for madame and for you, mademoiselle—ach!" He shrugged his shoulders and looked up to the ceiling in mute appeal to the gods above it. "Beauty, brilliancy, wit—they are all lost in Russia. What would Paris say if it knew what it was losing?" he added in a low tone to Etta, who smiled, well pleased. She was not always able to

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