

THE UNDOING OF THE UNSOLVABLE

BY Matthew Coyne

THE following paragraph is taken from a paper in a large western city and properly opens the mystery:

"The police of the second precinct came upon a strange case of suicide in the rooming house district of the north side last night. Willingham Constance, an old Englishman who lived alone in a little room on Atlantic street was found dead on his bed, a knife buried to the hilt in his breast. Evidently, after having stabbed himself, the suicide, fearful lest some innocent person be suspected and punished for his death, had dipped the forefinger of his right hand in his own blood and had written on the bed cover, in a weak, crawling hand: 'Willingham Constance killed me.' The use of his formal name under such circumstances the police believe was due to the delirium which seized him as death approached. The authorities took charge of the body as it is not known that he had any relatives or acquaintances."

This was also the view of the matter that the coroner's jury took. A verdict of suicide was returned. But both the police and the jury were in the wrong, for it was no case of suicide that occurred on that night and it was not Willingham Constance who died there on the bed. Here is the true story in full:

Willingham Constance was a doomed man. The Sons of Freedom at their headquarters in Whitechapel, London, had decided his fate more than a year before. In common with other anarchistic societies the Sons of Freedom had many dark and gruesome secrets hidden among them, and once a man had entered their iniquitous fold and had gained their confidence, he was in a position to send several men to the gallows and a score more to prison. Of course the man who took advantage of his knowledge of these secrets and turned them over to the authorities risked his life every minute, for the society had only one code of punishment for those who played the spy on it—death.

And this is what Willingham Constance had done. He had played the spy and played it so successfully that the anarchists had sentenced him to die. Constance was a younger son, and as so often is the case with younger sons in England, he had gone astray. Possibly he was not bad at heart to begin with, but years of roaming around the world, and living by his wits, had made him thoroughly bad and careless of life and honor. At first he cheated at cards when playing with friends. For this he was ostracized and went out into the world, first to Australia, later to America, and still later to the capitals of continental Europe where there are always fat pickings for unscrupulous blackguards who have the polish and manners of a gentleman. He had killed a fellow gambler in Australia, helped rob and murder a miner in one of the western states, and he had gone to Brussels to hide and make a living in his usual manner. There it was that he had come into contact with the anarchists, and then the idea of entering their society, securing possession of their secrets, and imparting the information to the police, who were always glad to secure and pay for such stuff, was conceived in Constance's mind. He needed the money badly, and the work was much easier than the work he had done, for, although he was a thorough blackguard, the man was imbued with a courage that would have made his name famous had he applied it to fighting in one of his country's regiments. A few weeks after his advent in Brussels he became one of the anarchists.

In a cheap café in one of the most vicious quarters of the city the society was accustomed to hold its meetings and it was here that Constance was taken into the fold, after having sworn to all the oaths in the society's code of initiation. After this he was a blood brother and qualified to sit in the councils and listen to the innermost secrets of the past, present, and future.

In this manner he soon became invaluable to the Brussels police. His inner knowledge of the workings of the society soon enabled the authorities to begin a crusade which resulted in the arrest of the most notorious anarchists in Europe, men who had fled from other countries and were hiding in Brussels. So consistent were these arrests that the society soon began to suspect it had a traitor in its midst. Naturally they began to watch Constance, he being the latest addition to their ranks, and it was not long before they discovered that it was he who was betraying their brethren to the hated police. The discovery spelled death for Constance. One night as he entered the café he saw that the members of the society were all there before him. He knew that he was discovered when they rose as one man, and with clenched fists hurled at him the words: "The spy—kill him!"

Constance, ever ready for an emergency, stepped back and drew a revolver. A man behind him knocked the revolver from his hands and he was left, unarmed and helpless, before his accusers. He protested vigorously that he was innocent, that it was someone else who was revealing the society's secrets, but the rest merely laughed at him. They tried him and they knew. Constance had faced death before, and now he faced it



and going over and over again every detail of the plan, and laughing each time as he ended at his own shrewdness and at the freedom which would come to him at the cost of another's life. Nothing remained save to find his victim.

This was not hard for a man who knew the seamy side of life in a large city as did Constance. The rooming districts of cities always contain plenty of old and broken men who are willing to do anything in their power in order to make a living. Constance knew this and he set about to find such a one. He found him without much trouble. He was living in a small room on the fifth floor of a cheap house and he readily responded to Constance's suggestion that he do something to better his condition.

"What is it, and I'll do it, no matter how queer it is," he said in reply to the other's volunteered information that the work which he would be required to do was of a strange nature. "Just so long as it don't interfere with the police," he added.

"This does not interfere with the police in any way," Constance hastened to assure him. "There is nothing criminal about it. I just want you to move over in a room that I have hired in the next square, and live under an assumed name."

"What's that for?"

"For good and sufficient reasons," was the sharp answer. "And there's five hundred dollars in it for you if I pull off the deal that I'm planning. Now, then, do you want the job, or don't you?"

The man fairly groveled when he heard the sum mentioned, and within a week Willingham Constance, now an old and broken down man with white hair and shabby clothes, was living in the rear room of a large rooming house and receiving \$5 a day for doing it. The old man went largely to the restaurant, but he went out twice a day—at 11 o'clock when he went to a nearby cheap restaurant and had a meal which served both for breakfast and luncheon, and again at 5 when he went farther away to a better establishment and ate his dinner. He made no acquaintances among his fellow roomers and spoke only to the landlady, and only to her when he wished to complain about the heat or ventilation of his room. He was called "grouchy" by those who observed his coming and going, and he was left entirely to himself. He received much mail. In fact, there was no mail delivery in which there was not a letter for Willingham Constance, so it was not long before the name of the silent roomer was known to every person in the house.

As the days went by and nothing developed the old man grew impatient. He met the real Constance each evening by appointment, and now he began to inquire anxiously as to just why nothing was happening. Constance assured him that the deal was nearing its completion, which was quite true, and told him to wait patiently for the next few days. The truth of the matter was that even so cold blooded a criminal as Constance balked considerably at murdering the helpless old man. But some one must be killed, and finally the schemer nerved himself for the deed.

Taking advantage of his dupes' absence one evening he quickly slipped into the little room and behind the door seated the old man's corpse. When he did so he gave a blow on the point of the chin silenced his scream and a knife thrust in the middle of his chest laid him out helpless on the bed. It was over in a second and in a few more Constance was in the street hurrying away to his own apartments. And at his apartments a message from the Sons of Freedom was awaiting him. He started to see it and he saw it and he opened it and read its contents: "Do you think you can fool us with the old man? You cannot. We know all about your scheme. There is no escape for you."

Constance tore the message into a hundred bits and cursed impotently. Was there no escape from these murderers? Would they follow him forever? He locked himself in for the night and until next morning sat and cursed and pondered over his chances. With the coming of daylight came the shrill cries of the newsboys in the streets, and the first item that caught his eye after buying a paper was the news of the strange suicide. Now he knew that his only escape lay in flight in some remote region where he would be beyond the reach of both the strong arm of the law and the knives of the anarchists. He waited until midnight, then hurriedly packed a grip, called a cab and prepared to start for the cattle country of the west. But, as he stepped into the cab, a man came upon him from behind and stabbed him through the heart so that his body fell into the bottom of the cab. The door snapped shut after him, the cabman whipped up his horses and drove to the nearest bridge across the river and stopped. Here two men were waiting. They opened the door, dragged the dead man out and pitched him over the railing into the murky water below. Then they walked nonchalantly away while the cabman continued to drive across the river.

Five years later the Sons of Freedom had kept their word. And this is how the strange suicide did not happen.

The Governor's Revenge.

By WALLACE WANTHIER.

CAPT. PAUL PETROVITCH had sent in his name to the governor's wife, and the servant returned to say that she regretted she could not see him—she was suffering from headache.

"But it is of the utmost importance I should see her," he explained. "I bring an urgent message from the governor—to be delivered to madame only. You will tell your mistress that at once."

Left alone again, he laughed softly.

"She plays the game well," he thought. And he told himself that no woman could help loving him. He crossed to the glass to admire his handsome face at closer view, as his eyes caught the sound of light footsteps approaching.

"Madame will see you, sir," the servant said, holding open the door.

She announced him, closed the door, and descended. The next instant the governor's wife was folded in his strong embrace, and her arms were clasped about his neck.

"I am so glad you have come, Paul!" the woman murmured. "I began to fear you would not."

Greater haste might have been indicated, my dear Horstense," he answered. "My heart, you know, is ever here." And he kissed her.

"You say the brute safely off?" she asked.

"He is on his way now."

"And, pray heaven, he never will return!" the woman cried passionately. "I hate him—hate him! You will keep your word, Paul? You will rid me of this man?"

"It is the only thing I live for; the only thing I think of nightly," he assured her. "For I love you, Horstense, darling, and I want you!"

"My own dear Paul!" Her voice was soft and caressing. "No, no—be patient. There is little time, for your visit, if too prolonged, may arouse suspicion; and I have much to tell you." She spoke quickly, feverishly. "Now, sit down and listen, Paul. I have schemed out my freedom and our happiness. All that I have thought out and planned has been done because of the love I have for you, dear Paul, you whom I love with all my heart and soul."

He sat down opposite her. The love light had died out of her eyes—they were filled with a blazing hate; the soft smile had vanished from her lips, they were set in a hard, thin line.

"Immediately Kremeloff returns," she began, leaning forward and speaking in a low, hard tone. "I shall leave for Paris. I shall receive a telegram that my mother is seriously ill. I have arranged for this; it will be my excuse to get away."

"Before I go I shall pack all my jewels in the jewel case, and leave it in the safe, of which I shall give you the key. To take them with me might excite suspicion. Three days after I arrive there I shall send a telegram saying my mother has died, and it will be necessary for me to remain at least a week."

"Thus he will have no suspicion. I will send you a telegram at the same time, so that you will know at what hour the message for him arrives. Following this you must time your movements to fit his. When you are sure he is at home you will call and see him, and remain there an hour."

"You will bring with you, Paul, a small box, which I shall give you ere I leave. You will place a button in its lid as you mount the stairs, and place it

in the dark recess. You will see Kremeloff, speak with him for a few moments, refuse to play cards, beg him to excuse you, and take your leave. Go at once to my safe, secure the jewel case, and leave the house."

"Now, hear me well, Paul," she laid emphasis on every word—"from the moment you press the button you can remain in this house but twenty minutes. In five more I shall be without a governor, I shall be a widow, and—well, six months later you will leave the army, and I shall be your wife."

Paul had listened in dead silence as sentence by sentence the plot was unfolded to his wondering ears in silence and amazement. But the cold, emotionless manner of the woman as she condemned her husband to death chilled his heart, and horror and fear of her were mingled with his love.

"And that is all?" he asked, in a dry, hard voice, when Horstense had finished.

She nodded.

"Is there no way out but this?" he went on. "I do not like it. I have been bad enough to betray the trust of the man who has done so much for me; I can't murder him."

The woman's eyes blazed furiously.

"You coward! This, then, is the depth of your love! I have thought and plotted, willing to risk all. Have I not already risked enough in my love for you? Were you to beseech me to stoop to further depths I would willingly go; now you desert me! You are tired of me, maybe?"

"No, no! I—"

"Listen, Capt. Paul Petrovitch," she commanded, sternly. "You know how I can love. You shall learn how I can hate."

"No, no!" he cried again. "Do not speak so, Horstense, dearest. I was weak. For the moment my conscience stabbed me. Forgive me, Horstense."

"That is more like you, Paul," she said, pressing her cheek to his own. "Believe me, it is for love of you alone I go so far. And there is nothing to fear; failure is impossible, discovery beyond chance. The crime will be credited to our enemies. Kremeloff is the most hated man in Irksh, as he is the cruellest. You are not afraid, Paul?"

"I swear it, dearest."

"Fall me and I shall hate you," she threatened. "I shall return from Paris; I shall denounce you to Kremeloff, and you know what that will mean."

"I swear I will not fail," Paul said again.

There came a gentle tap at the door. In an instant Horstense was seated at her escritoire, busy with the pen. Capt. Petrovitch stood humbly waiting at the other end of the room.

"Enter," madame commanded.

A servant brought in a card. Madame glanced at it carelessly, and threw it aside. Then sealing an envelope she handed it to the waiting officer.

"Have a courier sent at once with this," she directed. "I shall return from Paris; I shall denounce you to Kremeloff, and you know what that will mean."

Alone, she jumped lightly from her chair and laughed aloud—a hard, merciless, vicious laugh.

"Fool! Fool! Paul Petrovitch!" she exclaimed. "As if I could love such a man—handsome, vain fool! I could as soon love Kremeloff; he at least is a man who knows his own mind, bully though he is. But they are all the same, these Russians—ardent lovers at first, terrible bullies when their passion wanes, and their heart grows as cold as their country."

The door opened, and she stepped forward, her face wreathed in smiles, both hands outstretched in welcome.

"O, my dear count, what a delightful pleasure!"

"The pleasure is mine," he said gallantly, aloud. As the door closed he said softly: "Things are going well, my love."

"Beautifully!" was the answer. "The love smitten youth has just left. You must have passed him on the stairs. He knows my scheme by heart. He has sworn to carry it through, and I can trust him."

"That is well," said the count, seating himself.

"It is a clever scheme," Horstense said. They spoke now in French. "You must have a wonderful brain, Alfred; I could never have conceived it."

"Simplicity itself, Horstense," he said lightly.

"It is a pity the same bomb could not also destroy Capt. Petrovitch," she said, regretfully. "It would have been so much safer."

"But the diamonds, Horstense," the count reminded her. "He is the only person who could secure them. And after he has murdered Kremeloff, and you refuse to marry him, what can he do? He dare not denounce you—cannot without condemning himself."

"You have the bomb ready? You are sure it will not fail?" the count laughed.

"It never has failed yet," he replied. "When does the governor return?"

"The day after tomorrow. I shall leave for Paris the same evening. Ah, my dear Alfred, soon I can call you mine! And she placed one arm around his neck and kissed him.

II.

The governor of Irksh hardly had taken off his greatcoat when his young wife ran to meet him. Her face was pale, her eyes red rimmed from recent tears. She held a telegram in her hand, and when she spoke her voice shook.

"My mother is very ill, Nicholas," she said, thrusting the telegram into his hands. "Look, I have just received the news."

"This is bad, Horstense," he remarked. "You will go at once to Paris, of course?"

"I am sorry I cannot accompany you. I would love to see Paris again," he went on, with a yearning look in his deep blue eyes, "for it was there I first met you, five years ago."

Horstense regarded him in surprise. It was not often that he spoke thus. He seemed to read her thoughts, for he continued:

"When I think of Paris it recalls all the happiness of my first days there, when I found life without you would be impossible. Life is so different in your warm land; it makes for sentiment and love as this country never can. Sometimes I think you must fancy me changed—imagine, perhaps, because I am not ever with you, whispering endearing terms, I have lost my love for you."

"You are mistaken, Nicholas," she replied. "I know your duties make you irritable, leave you little time for tender thoughts, but I believe you love me as I love you, my husband!"

"As you love me, Horstense, I love you," he said. "Duty still claims me here; there is trouble brewing. But you must go. I will send Capt. Petrovitch to see you to the station for I must rest; I have not slept for forty-eight hours. Go at once, Horstense; a train leaves for the capital in an hour." He rose, and, taking her hands, kissed them. "Au revoir, dear wife; and God be with you. I hope your mother will recover soon."

He passed from the room, and Horstense sat thinking. This was the old Nicholas—the man she had

learned to love and then to hate when she thought him grown cold and loveless for her. It was the first time for two years he had spoken to her of love. What had wrought the change in him? Did he still love her? Well, if he did, it was too late now.

Capt. Petrovitch received the promised telegram from Mme. Kremeloff, in Paris, and set out from his quarters to search for the governor. His mind was made up; he had strangled the remnant of his conscience since that had troubled him. Gen. Kremeloff was doomed.

Paul learned from inquiries that the governor had just entered his residence. He hastened back to his rooms and secured the innocent looking box wrapped in black paper. Secretly he took it to the governor's study, and mounted the stairs he quickly deposited the box in the dark recess, pressing the button as he went. Then he hastened on to the governor's room, where he found him writing at his desk. The governor looked up, smiled, left the captain standing, and continued writing. On the table a small clock ticked swiftly. His back was towards the captain, so he could not see the minutes as they fled. How long would the governor keep him waiting? How many minutes had passed since he pressed the button? The governor ceased his writing and gazed on the paper before him, apparently lost in thought. And the clock ticked swiftly on. Surely five minutes had passed, Paul thought, and he fidgeted uneasily. He coughed, and brought his forehead back from his pocket. His hands had already grown clammy, his brow was wet, his mouth dry. The suspense was horrible. Now the governor's pen crawled again across the paper—O, so slowly, while the tiny clock ticked so swiftly.

A neighboring clock chimed a quarter of an hour, and Paul realized that at least five minutes had sped. His heart began to beat like a hammer, the blood coursed madly through his veins and beat in waves about his brain. His face was wet with perspiration, his knees shook under him. Downstairs he knew the contents of the box were approaching with each moment the height of temperature that would cause the explosion.

"Tick, tick, tick, tick, tick went the vicious little clock; scratch, scratch, scratch went the slow moving pen. Now the captain could scarcely breathe; he rocked as he stood; the veins in his head seemed ready to burst. He coughed again, a harsh, dry cough that pained his throat. A few minutes more and he must step forward and speak or be blown into stardust. There was no time to wait. He stepped forward. Words trembled on his lips.

As he did so the governor threw down his pen, rose from his seat, and without a word left the room. In an instant the captain followed. Was there yet time to secure the diamonds? The friendly neighboring clock struck 4. He had been in the house twenty minutes—the limit of his time. Five still remained.

He would try it, for he realized he might as well die as face Horstense without the jewels. He sped along the passage and into her room. Feverishly he unlocked the safe and snatched the jewel case; then passing to the other end of the passage he disappeared down the stairs and out of the house. He was a hundred yards away when the sound of a terrific explosion rent the air, starting the people in the streets. He turned, and saw the governor's house a pile of flaming ruins that lay half over the roadway.

III.

Horstense, waiting in Paris, was shocked by the news when she heard it two hours later. She had been going to the theater with her brother. He purchased a paper in the street, and read that the governor's residence at Irksh had been blown up by anarchists. Five people had been killed outright, four who were passing in the street, and the governor himself. His mutilated remains had been found among the ruins when the fire had been mastered.

Horstense fainted directly she reached her hotel. Half an hour later she was sobbing her heart out. She had received three telegrams—an official one from the governor's secretary informing her of the outrage, one from Paul containing one word, "Safe," one from count de Gant, also acquainting her of the assassination. As swiftly as a train could carry her she journeyed back to Irksh. Here she put up at the hotel, and her first visitor was Paul Petrovitch.

"It is done," he said. "Here is the jewel case. Now I must go. I will see you tomorrow, Horstense, after the governor's funeral."

As he turned to the door it opened.

"The count de Gant has called!" announced a servant.

"The count de Gant has arrived," said a voice, the sound of which struck terror into the hearts of madame and the captain; and they fell back with a cry of alarm as the governor of Irksh, Nicholas Kremeloff, entered, closing the door behind him. His face was as pale as the faces of the pair before him, but while fear stood in their eyes, his were softly blue as ever, and for a moment he smiled.

"You can go, Capt. Petrovitch," he said. "If you are alive tomorrow we can settle our difference, which is of a private, not a political, nature."

The captain crept from the room. Horstense fell on her knees at her husband's feet, a look of wild despair in her eyes.

"Forgive me, Nicholas!" she cried. "Forgive me!"

"For such you may well ask," he answered. "But a murderer is never forgiven. You are surprised I am alive. You sought to murder me, having lied to me and betrayed me, and betrayed not only me, but your own Paul Petrovitch, the fool who thought you loved him!"

"You see, I know all," he went on. "I was warned of your intrigue with Petrovitch. My last journey was but a blind. I returned to my house, and in the secret passage behind your room heard all. But I had no suspicion of the count de Gant. Petrovitch had been a fool, lured by your wiles. Count de Gant was a s—undrel—this man you loved."

"He plotted death for you, to meet it himself. By his own bomb this lover of yours was blown to pieces, and I wrecked my house to do it. I had him a prisoner in it; and his last hours of suffering, knowing the fate he could not escape, were terrible."

As he laughed harshly, Mme. Kremeloff glared at him horror-stricken.

"Forgiveness," he continued, "is impossible. But I will show you mercy. Here is a vial of poison; the alternative is Sakhalin, the convicts' home, where all pray for the death that will not come."

He threw the bottle at her feet, turned, and quitted the room.

As he left the hotel an officer approached with the news that Capt. Paul Petrovitch had blown his brains out. And three days later saw Horstense, fettered and in rags, on the long, long road to Sakhalin. Willing to kill, she was afraid to die.