The Czar's Spy

The Mystery of a Silent Love

By Chevalier WILLIAM LE QUEUX Author of "The Closed Book," etc.

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CHAPTER I.

"His Britannic Majesty's Service.

"There was a mysterious affair last night, signore.

"Eh?" I exclaimed. "Anything that interests me?"

"Yes, signore," replied the tall, thin Italian commissaire chief, speaking with a strong accent. "An English steam yacht was agrounded on the Meloria about ten miles out, and was discovered by a fishing boat that brought the news to harbor. The admiral sent out two torpedoes, which managed after a lot of difficulty to bring in the yacht safely, but the captain of the port has a suspicion that the crew were trying to make away with the vessel."

"I lose her, you mean?"

Francesco nodded.

"Sounds curious," I remarked. "Since the steamer went away on more things seem to have been running—two smashing affrays, cigar smokers assaulted, a mutiny on a tramp steamer, and now a yacht being cast away—a fairly decent list! And yet some elsewhere people complain that British consuls are only paid to be ornamental! They should spend a week here, at Leghorn, and they'd soon alter their opinion."

"Yes, they would, signore," responded the Sicilian-Italian with a grin, as he twisted his fierce gray mustache. Francesco Carducci was a well-known character in Leghorn. An honest, good-hearted, easy-going fellow, who for twenty years had occupied the same position under half a dozen different consuls.

My old friend, Frank Hutcheson, his Britannic majesty's viceconsul at the port of Leghorn, was away on leave in England, his duties being relegated to young Bertram Cavendish, the pro consul. The latter, however, had gone down with a bad touch of malaria, and I, the only other Englishman in Leghorn, had been asked by the consul-general in Florence to act as pro-consul until Hutcheson's return.

It was mid-July, and the weather was blazing in the glaring sun-bleached Mediterranean town. If you know Leghorn, you probably know the consulate, a large, handsome suite of bags, airy offices facing the cathedral. The legend painted upon the door, "Office hours, 10 to 2," gives one the idea of an easy appointment, but such is certainly not the case, for a consul's life at a port of discharge must necessarily be a very active one.

Carducci had left me to the curre spondence for a half an hour or so, when he reentered, saying:

"There is an English signore waiting to see you."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know him. He will give no name, but wants to see the pro-consule."

"All right, show him in," I said lazily, and a few moments later a tall, wiry-framed middle-aged Briton came entering, and bowing, inquired whether I was the British consul.

When he had seated himself I explained my position, whereupon he said: "I could make much out of your clerk. He speaks no English and I don't know a word of Italian. But perhaps I ought to first introduce myself. My name is Philip Hornby," and he handed me a card bearing the name with the addresses "Woodcroft Park, Somerset ——— Brooks's." Then he added: "I am cruising on board my yacht, the Lolo, and last night we unfortunately went aground on the Meloria. Very fortunately for us a fishing boat saw our plight and gave the alarm at once. The admiral sent out two torpedo-boats and a tug, and after about three hours they succeeded in get ro off."

"And you are now in harbor?"

"Yes. But the reason I've called is to ask you to do me a favor and give me a letter of thanks in Italian to the admiral, and one to the captain of the port—polite letters that I can copy and send to them. You know the kind of thing."

"Certainly," I replied, the more interested in him on account of the curious suspicion that the port authorities seemed to entertain. He was evidently a gentleman, and after I had been with him ten minutes I assured the idea that he had endeavored to cast away the Lolo.

I scribbled the letters and handed them to him.

"Fortunately, I left my wife in Rome, or she would have been horribly frightened," he remarked presently. "There was a nasty blow last night, and the fool of a captain seemed to add to our peril by every order he gave."

I examined him critically as he sat facing me. He was about forty-five, with a merry, round, good-natured face, red with the southern sun, blue eyes, and a short, fair beard. His speech was refined and cultivated, and as we chatted I gave me the impression that as an enthusiastic lover of the sea he had crossed the Mediterranean many times from Gibraltar up to Smyrna. He had, however, never before put into Leghorn.

After we had arranged that his captain should come to me in the afternoon and make a formal report of the accident, we went out together across the white sunny piazza to Nan's.

We shall be here quite a week, I suppose," he said as we were taking our vermouth. "We're on our way from the Greek island, as my friend Chater wants to see them. The engineer says there's something strained in the main port gearing. But, by the way, I ought to add, I've a friend with me, so on board tonight! Do We can give you a few English things that may be a change to you."

This invitation I gladly accepted for two reasons. One was because the suspicious of the capital of the port had aroused my curiosity, and the other was because I had lunched on macaroni for a great fancy to Hornby.

The owner of the Lolo, a short, stout, ruddy-faced man, dressed in a loose jacket and flannel trousers, and wearing a yachting cap, greeted me cordially, and the other was introduced to me as Hornby's guest, a fair, fresh-faced, clean-shaven man of about forty. He seemed to be a quiet, reserved man, but was a fascinating conversationalist.

"My friend, Hylton Chater—Mr. Gordon Gheng," he said, introducing us, and the clean-shaven man rose, bowed, and shook hands with me, and we sat down to one of the choicest and best cooked dinners it has ever been my lot to have. Chater and Hornby wine of a brand which only a million aire could keep in his cellar, while our host, apparently a most abstemious man, took only a glass of Evian mineral water.

From his remarks I discerned that, contrary to my first impression, Hylton Chater was an experienced yachtsman. He owned a craft called the Ariadne, and was a member of the Club Yacht de France. He lived in London, he told me, but was not a barrister, nor was he in his profession, it might be the law, as I had surmised.

"I'm a gentleman, you see, I'm a captain, Mr. Gregg!" he remarked, smiling.

"What do you think of Lolo?"

"Well," I said rather hesitatingly, "I'm not the trouble I don't think very much of his seamanship—nor will the board of trade when his report reaches them."

"Eh?" exclaimed Hornby, "I was fool to engage him. From the very first I mistrusted him, only my wife somehow took a fancy to the fellow. I'm a bad sailor myself, and I suppose you must always please the women. In this case, however, I had chosen the most cost me the vessel, and perhaps my life into the bargain."

"The captain seems to have had a narrow escape," I said to him. "I remarked, whereupon my two companions burst into a hearty laugh, apparently amused.

"He fell down the other day," explained Chater, with a rather sickly smile, "and hurt himself. I've had the edge of an iron stair in the engine room and caused a nasty gash."

I smiled within myself, for I knew too well that the captain of the Lolo had taken a fare hard never been inflicted by Hylton Chater, and I felt that he had remained silent, being content that the other should explain away.

After dessert had been served we rose, and in the summer twilight, when all the ports were opened, Hornby took me aside and said, "I want you to do something for him his own cabin to the way of secret conversation. I suppose?"

I laughed

"Well, I'm a bachelor, so I can get out more than any of married friends."

"Did you have any trouble with the captain of the port?"

"They didn't visit us," he said with a smile, and at the same time he rubbed his thumb and finger together.

"Ah! A strong sea was running, eh?"

"Very fortunate it wasn't more heavy, sir," he added, after telling me his story, which I wrote at his dictation, for the ultimate benefit of the board of trade.

"Didn't you send up signals of distress?" I inquired

"No, sir—never thought of it."

"And yet you knew that you might be lost?" I remarked with recurrent suspicion.

"The canny Scot, whose name was Macintosh, hesitated a few moments, then answered: "Well, sir, you see the fishing boat had sighted us, and we saw no turning back to port to fetch help."

"How long have you been in Mr Hornby's service?" I inquired

"Six months, sir," was the man's reply. "Before he engaged me, I was with the Wilsons of Hull running in the Baltic. I've held my masters certificate these fifteen years, sir. I was with the Dibbys before the Wilsons, and before that on the Royal Mail Steam. I did eight years in the Mediterranean with them, when I left chief mate."

"And you've never been into Leghorn before?"

"Never, sir."

I dismissed the captain with a distinct impression that he was a rascal on the whole truth. Was it possible that an attempt had actually been made to cast away the yacht, and that it had been frustrated by the intervention of the fellows, who had sighted the vessel aground? How, I wondered, had the captain received that Very self wound across the chest? I was half inclined to inquire of him.

That evening when the fiery sun was sinking in the crimson glory I took a cab along the seafront to the port where, within the inner harbor, lay the Lolo, one of the most magnificent private vessels I had ever seen. Her dimensions surprised me. She was painted dead white, with shining brass everywhere. At the stern hung limply the British flag, at the masthead the ensign of the Royal Yacht squadron.

On stepping on deck Hornby came forward to greet me, and took me aboard to see the vessel. Thing is a long wicker dock-chair beneath the awning, was a tall, dark-eyed, clean-shaven man of about forty. His keen face gave quite an impression that he was a barrister.

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It Was an Armory, Crammed With Rifles and Bayonets.

perture. If the yacht had really escaped a search, then it was a most unfortunate affair. Perhaps, however, I could Hornby have in stalling the custom house officers. I went out to my rooms, and wrote a long letter to the Lolo, and at the same time he rubbed his thumb and finger together.

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AS VIEWED BY PHILOSOPHER

Happiness Not Always to Those Who Make Great Catches in the World's Fish Pond.

We have seen men absorbedly fishing for wealth, and we imagine that they are happy. Perhaps they are deluded and disappointed. Neither can. The only man who is happy is the man who, having dropped his line, has also had up great bags of wealth in their hooks. They are very rare indeed with the catch, and unable to match comfortably farther along the road. Too only disappointed ones are those who have no real purpose in life, and suppose that fishing is an end in itself.

I had a great-uncle once who died quite happy and happy. Through out his life he was jubilantly full of schemes for making a fortune. But if his patent flooring mill had ever succeeded, or his method for tanning leather had brought him wealth, so that he had been obliged to have two houses and 20 servants and several suits of clothes and bills and accounts and lawsuits, I am sure he would have died miserable.

Unfeeling and misunderstanding persons are forever pitying the old maids, and especially those who seem to be always angling for men. But such behavior seems to me quite intelligible and quite pardonable—especially if they never catch anything. Having begun this game in early life, the habit is deep fixed, and they, being founded it on instincts even deeper than sense, they would be silly indeed now to give up so good a sport just because they have found nothing and possibly more important, objects in life.—Suburban Life.

Dooks Building at Bombay.

Bombay is possessed of the biggest docks east of Suez, but the port has been wanting in respect of facilities for taking railway borne goods to the dock side and vice versa. The first defect is being remedied little by little by the extension of the Port Trust railway from one end of the port to the other, and seven stations are to be opened for goods traffic during the course of a month

POSSIBLE TO BE TOO GOOD

Writer in Woman's Magazine Gives Some Wise Advice to Others of Her Sex.

Women scours and rail at man's infirmities, but it is only fair to remember, when such shortcomings are brought up against man as are cast against woman, that Lilith was just as much a woman as was Eve. In her unconscious and recriminatives we too often find a man's defensive because a good instinct is usually encouraged by the wiles of a woman, and that more than then and at most times stands at each end of the path that revolves from heaven to hell.

We forget, too, by what dear and lovable things a man may be held to the fair and honorable ways of life, and forget considerably with him in the things for which he carries the scars of his sensitive as well as in stories as easy-going conscience as to the strength of his will. Man is, in the end, more for frills and bows, these are the gentle virtues that will serve to keep man within the greatest measure, love heart.

Good women have a world of sin and sorrow for which to answer, and I record conscience of a good and writer has more truth in it than we are prone to believe. "When good women are too good," she said, "to be good, faithful and loyal, they are as big as faithless to their marriage vows as the tired husband, who has ceased to be a good husband, and ceased to be a good husband, and ceased to be a good husband, and