The CZAR'S SPY

The Mystery of a Silent Love

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SYNOPSIS.

The yacht Lola owned by escape woman by Leghorn harbor. Gordon Grange, secret service agent, is ordered to watch the yacht and discovers aboard with him and his friend, Ronald Hardisty, a beautiful girl who calls herself Lola Lamotte, full of mystery and accomplices and a rare photograph of a certain Russian. The girl is suspected by Grange to be robbed and the latter is determined to have it. The police find that Hardisty is in reality Count Ronald Hardisty, a Russian Grange warns Count Hardisty of the danger involved by his connection with the girl, but will not desist. He promises to help Lola. "To convince a woman," he tells Grange, "that she is suspected of crime is to her a further attraction." Lola expresses to Gino to save him, but not to give a clew. Grange meets Mario Gino, a Corsican. Gino gives Grange much information which is afterward afforded at the mountain home of Lola's father, Count Hardisty, brother Count Hardisty was Martin Woodroffe, her father's friend.

CHAPTER IV—Continued.

"Of course. They've been engaged nearly a year, but have been kept apart till quite lately. He is rather close about his own affairs, and never tells us about his travels and adventures, although one day Mr. Woodroffe let slip that his hairbreadth escapes would make a most interesting book if ever written."

"Lesthwort and he are evidently most intimate friends."

"Oh, quite inseparable!" she laughed. "And the other man is always with them in that short, stout, red-faced old fellow standing over there with the lady in pale blue. Sir Ughtred Gardner. Mr. Woodroffe was sickenened him "Sir Fifrid." And we both laughed. "Of course, don't say I said so," she whispered. "They don't call him that to his face, but it's so easy to make a mistake in his name when he's not within hearing. The women don't care for him, so the nick-name just fits."

And she gossiped on, telling me much that I desired to know regarding the new tenant of Bannoch and his friends, and more especially about the man who had first introduced himself to me in the consulate at Leghorn.

Half an hour later my uncle's carriage was announced, and I left with the distinct impression that there was some deep mystery surrounding the Lesthwoorts. Whatever the reason, it had become filled with severe apprehensions. The mystery grew deeper day by day, and was inexplicable.

During the week that followed I sought to learn all I could regarding the new people at the castle.

"They are taken up everywhere," declared my aunt when I questioned her. "Of course, we have very little of them, except that they had a shoot up near Fort William two years ago, and that they have a town house in Green street. They are evidently rather smart folks. Don't you think so?"

"Judging from their house party, yes," I responded. "I suppose they pay a crowd as one could find north of Carlisle just at present."

"Exactly. There are some well known people among them," was my aunt. "I've asked them over to morrow afternoon, and they've accepted."

"Excellent!" I exclaimed, for I want-ed an opportunity for another chat with the dark-eyed girl who was engaged to the man whose alias was Hornby. I particularly desired to ascertain the reason of her fear when I had mentioned the Lola, and whether she possessed any knowledge of its real character.

The opportunity came to me in due course, for next afternoon the Bannoch party drove over in two large brakes, and with other people from the neighborhood and a band from Dumfries, my aunt's grounds presented a gay and animated scene.

As I expected, Woodroffe did not accompany the party. Mrs. Lesthwort, a slightly fussy little woman, apologized for his absence, explaining that he had been suddenly called to London early a few days before, but was returning to Bannoch Castle at the end of the week.

"We couldn't afford to lose him," she declared in my aunt's hearing. "He is actually treasurer—his droll sayings and antics keep us in a perfect roar each night at dinner. He's such a perfect mimic."

I turned away and strolled with Martin Woodroffe, pleading an excuse to her my uncle's beautiful grounds, not a well less picturesque than those of the castle, and perhaps rather better kept.

"I only heard yesterday of your engagement, Miss Lesthwort," I remarked presently when we were alone.

"Allow me to offer my best congratulations. When you introduced me to Mr. Woodroffe the other day I had no idea that he was to be your husband."

She glanced at me quickly, and I saw in her dark eyes a look of suspicion. Then she flushed slightly and, with an assumption and a mere photograph of it which I had taken in Leghorn, replied that he seemed a very fine fellow and very clever.

"He is very good of you, Mr. Grange, to wish me all sorts of such pleasant things."

"And when is the happy event to take place?"

"The date is not exactly fixed—early next year, I believe," and I thought she sighed.

"And you will probably spend a good deal of time yachting?" I suggested, my eyes fixed upon her in order to watch the result of my pointed remark. But she controlled herself perfectly.

"Mr. Woodroffe has gone up to town, your cousin says."

"Yes. He received a wire, and had to start immediately. It was very sudden here, for we had arranged to go for a week's Dunfermaan after dinner that day."

"But he'll be back here again, won't he?"

"I really don't know. It seems quite uncertain. I had a letter this morning, but he could not say when he'd be over to Hamburg on business, instead he'd write up to us again."

There was disappointment in her tone, and I knew that some time I would not fail to recognize how the man for whom she was engaged had lied from Scotland because of my presence.

We passed along those graveled walks of stone-flanked terraces, and I noticed with pleasure that her marriage was being formed only by her and her future husband—a fact that of one who was concealing nothing. Indeed, I felt convinced within the hour that she would be revealed. There was a distinct light of unutterable terror in the dark eyes as though she existed in some context and ever-present dread. Of

The Picture Was That of a Young Girl.

course she told me nothing of her own feelings or affections, yet I recognized from her words and her hearing a curious apathy—a want of the real enthusiasm of affection. Woodroffe, much her senior, was her father's friend, and I naturally guessed no more than that likely that Lesthwort was pressing a matrimonial alliance upon his daughter for some ulterior motive. She was a beautiful girl, she longed to confide and seek advice of someone, yet by reason of her position and untoward circumstances her lips were sealed.

I longed to question her further regarding Woodroffe, of what profession he followed and of his past, but she evidently suspected me, for I had unfortunately mentioned the Lola.

Martin Woodroffe did not rejoin the house party at Bannoch. Although I remained the guest of my uncle much longer than I intended, lured partly through the shooting season, in order to watch the Lesthworts, yet as far as we could judge they were extremely secluded people and very hospitable. We exchanged a good many visits and dinners, and when my uncle several times invited Lesthwort and his friends to his shoot with al fresco luncheons, which the ladies joined, the servant of Bannoch always invited us back in return.

Thus I gained many opportunities of talking with Martin, and of watching her closely. I had the reputation of being a confirmed bachelor, and on account of that it seemed that she was in no way averse to my attentions—which she could handle a rock rifle as well as any woman, and was really a very fair shot. We often found ourselves alone tramping across the wide open moorland, or along those delight ful glens of the Scottish border, with the solemn tints of their luxurious heather.

Her father, on the other hand, seemed to view me with considerable suspicion, and I could easily discern that I was not welcome. Yet it was impossible to invite my uncle without including me.

His pronounced antipathy towards me caused me to watch him more than perhaps I should otherwise have done, and as a man of strong mood, and often he would leave his guests and take walks alone in the moorland brooding. On several occasions I followed him in secret, and found to my surprise that although he made long detours in various directions he always arrived at the same spot—five cross roads.

The place where he halted was on the summit of a dark wood at the head of a hill about three miles from Bannoch. Lesthwort never went there in fact, but always so timed his walks that he arrived just at that spot. I watched him smoking cigarettes until he had finished one, and often he made a ritual of some person he expected.

One afternoon I had the usual quiet hour there in the darkening gloom and, creeping on all fours and on my face to watch the tenant of Bannoch from behind a tree, I was surprised at the presence of another. Once, when I was a boy, I played at Red Indians with her father's capacity for walking alone, and I knew the game.

Oh, yes, he was always fond of walking," my aunt once mentioned Woodroffe. I allowed her plenty of opportunity for talking about the latter's further forthcoming marriage in order that I might observe her face, but it never did his name pass her lips.

Then I was alone I reflected upon my curious adventure on that night when I had been forced to swim to escape from the hands of my unknown enemies. I wondered if that mysterious and dastardly attempt upon my life had really any connection with the strange incident at Leghorn. As day succeeded day, and I found myself held by increasing suspicion. Mystery surrounded me on every hand, and I was met by one curious fact alone it was to succeed a hundredfold.

Late one afternoon, when I had been out shooting and had lost my companions' party, I drove back to the castle in the pony trap and left my gun with the keeper, and found the ladies assembled in the hall. Tea had just been served, and a log fire was blazing in the huge old grate, for the October day was chilly and damp in Scotland and a fire is pleasant to behold.

Martial was seated upon the high padded fender, with his back to the fire, while Mrs. Lesthwort formed a cozy seat for the ladies. Several visitors had arrived. Then I entered, she rose quickly and handed me my cup, explaining as she looked at me:

"Oh, Mr. Grange! What a state you are in!"

"Yes. I was after snipe, and slipped into a bog. I laughed. "But I'm going early this morning, and the mud will dried."

"Come with me, and I'll get you a change," she urged. And I followed her through the long corridors and up the stairs to a small sitting-room, which was her own little sanctum, where she and her sister worked and read—a cozy little place with two queer old windows in the thick stone walls. The room I entered, she took quickly and handed me my cup, saying