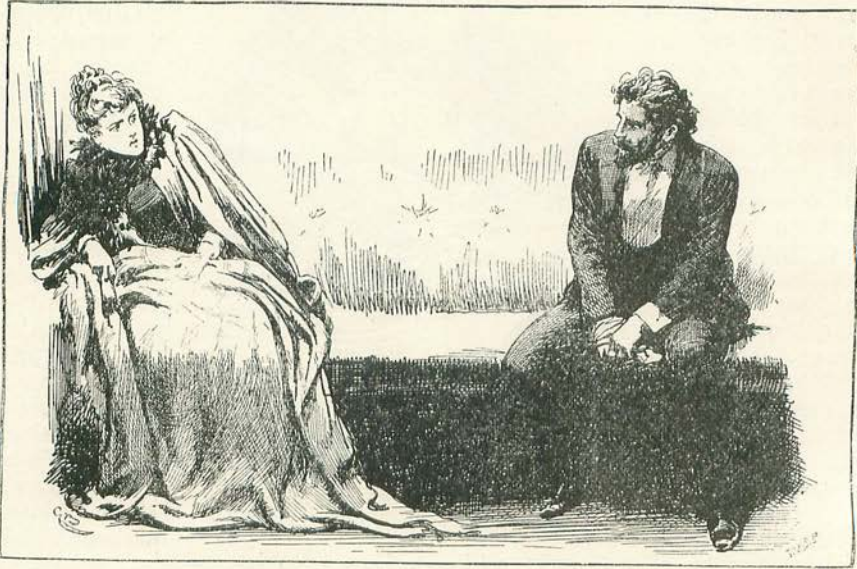


The Doctor's Story.

FROM THE FRENCH OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT.



"HE LOOKED AT HIS NEIGHBOUR WITH A GLITTERING EYE."

I.



ONCE knew a woman, one of my patients, now dead, to whom the most extraordinary thing in the world happened, and the most mysterious and touching.

She was a Russian, Countess Marie Baranow, a very great lady, of exquisite beauty. You know how beautiful the Russians are, or, at least, how beautiful they seem to us—with their delicate noses, their sensitive mouths; their eyes so close together, of an indefinable colour, a blue grey; and their cold, rather hard, charm. They have something wicked and seductive, haughty and melting, tender and severe, utterly charming to a Frenchman. At bottom, perhaps, it is only the difference of race and blood that makes us see so much in them.

Her doctor had, during many years, known that she was threatened by a disease of the chest, and endeavoured to persuade her to come to France for the winter, but she obstinately refused to quit St. Petersburg. At last, in the autumn of last year, the doctor compelled her to leave for Mentone.

She was alone in her compartment of the train, her servants occupying another. She leant against the window a little sadly, watching the country and the villages as she whirled past, feeling very isolated, very lonely in life.

At each station her footman, Ivan, came to see if his mistress had everything she desired. He was an old servant, blindly devoted, ready to obey any order she might give him.

Night fell, the train rolled on at full speed. She could not sleep, she was totally unnerved. Suddenly the idea occurred to her of counting the money given to her at the last moment in French gold. She opened her little bag and emptied on to her lap the glistening stream of metal.

But, of a sudden, a breath of cold air caught her cheek. She lifted her head in surprise. The door opened. The Countess Marie, in dismay, threw a shawl over the money spread out in her lap, and waited. A moment afterwards a man appeared, bare-headed, wounded in one hand, panting, and in evening dress.

He reclosed the door, sat down and looked at his neighbour with a glittering eye, then wrapped his wrist in a handkerchief.

The poor woman felt faint with fright. This man must have seen her counting her money, and had come to kill her and steal it.

He still fixed his gaze upon her, breathlessly, his face drawn, evidently waiting to spring upon her.

He said brusquely—

“Madame, have no fear.”

She answered nothing, she was incapable of opening her lips, she heard her heart beating and a buzzing in her ears.

“I am no malefactor, madame,” he continued.

Still she said nothing; but in a sudden movement she made, her knees knocked together and the money poured on to the carpet like water from a spout.

The man stared in surprise at this flow of gold, and at once stooped to gather it up.

She, terrified, rose, casting all her gold on to the carpet, and rushed to the door to throw herself on to the line. But he perceived her intention, sprang up, seized her in his arms, and forced her on to the seat, holding her by the wrists.

“Listen to me, madame. I am no thief. As a proof I am going to gather up this money and restore it to you. But I am a lost man, a dead man, unless you help me to pass the frontier. I can tell you no more. In one hour we shall be at the last Russian station, in one hour and twenty minutes we shall be on the other side of the boundaries of the Empire. Unless you aid me, I am lost. And yet, madame, I have neither killed nor stolen, nor done anything dishonourable. That I swear to you. I can tell you no more.”

And, going down on his knees, he col-

lected the money, feeling under the seats, and looking into the furthest corners. Then, when the little leather bag was once more full, he handed it to his neighbour without a word, and returned to his seat in the other corner of the carriage.

Neither moved. She sat motionless and mute, still faint with fright, but recovering little by little. As to him, he moved no muscle, he sat erect, his eyes fixedly looking straight before him, very pale, as though he were dead. Every now and then she threw him a glance, which was quickly averted. He was a man of about thirty, very handsome, with every appearance of being a gentleman.

The train tore through the darkness, throwing its ear-piercing whistles into the night, now slackening speed, now off again at its fastest. Then it calmed its flight, whistled several times, and stopped altogether.

Ivan appeared at the door to take orders. The Countess Marie looked for the last time at her

strange companion. Then in a voice brusque and trembling, said to her servant—

“Ivan, you will return to the Count. I have no further need of your services.”

Amazed, the man opened his enormous eyes. He stammered—

“But—but——”

She continued—

“No, you need not come. I have changed my mind. I wish you to stay in Russia. Here, here is money for the journey. Give me your cap and mantle.”

The old servant, bewildered, took off his cap and mantle, with unquestioning obedience, accustomed to the sudden whims and



“HE SPRANG UP AND SEIZED HER.”

strange caprices of his mistress. He walked away with the tears in his eyes.

The train started again, racing to the frontier.

Then the Countess Marie said to her companion—

"These things are for you, monsieur; you are Ivan, my servant. I make but one condition: it is that you will never speak to me, that you will say no word to thank me on any pretext whatever."

II.

ONE day, as I was receiving my patients in my study, I saw a tall man enter. "Doctor," he said, "I come to ask news of the Countess Marie Baranow."

"She is beyond hope," I replied. "She will never return to Russia."

And this man fell to sobbing; then he arose, and went out staggering like a drunken man. That same evening I told the Countess that a stranger had been to



"GIVE ME YOUR CAP AND MANTLE."

The stranger bowed without a word.

Soon a fresh halt was made, and the officials in uniform entered the train. The Countess handed them the papers, and pointing to the man seated in the far end of the carriage—

"My servant, Ivan; here is his passport."

The train started again.

During the whole of the night they remained *tête-a-tête*, dumb both.

In the morning, on stopping at a German station, the stranger alighted. Then, standing by the door, he said—

"Pardon me, madame, that I break my promise, but I have deprived you of your servant; it is only fair that I should replace him. Is there anything you require?"

She replied coldly—

"Go and send my maid."

He went. Then disappeared. Whenever she alighted at a refreshment-room she saw him watching her from a distance. In due course they arrived at Mentone.

me to ask after her health. She seemed touched, and told me the tale I have just told you. She added—

"This man, whom I do not know, follows me like my shadow. I meet him every time I go out. He looks at me very strangely, but he has never spoken to me."

She reflected, and then added—

"Look, there he is, below my window!"

She rose from her sofa, drew the curtains aside, and showed me the man who had called upon me, sitting on a bench on the promenade, his eyes raised to the hotel. He saw us, rose and walked away without once turning his head. So it was that I took part in a strange and incomprehensible episode; in the love of these two beings who were quite unknown to one another.

He loved with the devotion of a rescued animal, grateful and devoted until death. He came every day to ask me, "How is she?" knowing that I had guessed. And

he wept bitterly when he had seen her pass, paler and weaker every day.

She said to me—

“I have spoken but once to this singular man, and it seems to me I have known him for years.”

And when they met she returned his bow with a grave and charming smile. I knew she was happy—she so lonely and dying. I knew she was happy to be loved with such constancy and respect, with this exaggerated poesy, with this devotion ready for all hazards. And yet, faithful to her obstinate though high-minded resolve, she absolutely refused to receive him, to know his name, or to speak to him. She said, “No, no, that would spoil our strange friendship. We must remain strangers to one another.”

As to him, he was of a certainty a kind

of Don Quixote, for he took no steps to approach her. He was determined to keep to the letter the absurd promise he had made to her in the train.

Often during the long hours of weakness she rose from her sofa to draw back the curtains, and look if he were there below the window. And when she had seen him, always immovably seated on his bench, she returned to her couch with a smile on her lips.

She died one morning about six o'clock. As I left the hotel he came to me, his face distorted; he had already heard the news.

“I should like to see her for a second in your presence,” he said.

I took his arm and re-entered the house.

When he was by the bedside of the dead, he took her hand and kissed it, a long, long kiss. Then he fled like a madman.

