

LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 1119  
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

# Follies in Fiction

Stephen Leacock

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arrangement with the publishers

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# Follies in Fiction

## STORIES SHORTER STILL

*(Among the latest follies in fiction is the perpetual demand for stories shorter and shorter still. The only thing to do is to meet this demand at the source and check it. Any of the stories below, if left to soak overnight in a barrel of rainwater, will swell to the dimensions of a dollar-fifty-novel.)*

I  
AN IRREDUCIBLE DETECTIVE STORY  
HANGED BY A HAIR OR A MURDER MYSTERY MINIMISED

The mystery had now reached its climax. First, the man had been undoubtedly murdered. Secondly, it was absolutely certain that no conceivable person had done it.

It was therefore time to call in the great detective.

He gave one searching glance at the corpse. In a moment he whipped out a microscope.

“Ha! ha!” he said, as he picked a hair off the lapel of the dead man’s coat. “The mystery is now solved.”

He held up the hair.

“Listen,” he said, “we have only to find the man who lost this hair and the criminal is in our hands.”

The inexorable chain of logic was complete.

The detective set himself to the search.

For four days and nights he moved, unobserved, through the streets of New York, scanning closely every face he passed, looking for a man who had lost a hair.

On the fifth day he discovered a man, disguised as a tourist, his head enveloped in a steamer cap that reached below his ears. The man was about to go on board the *Gloritania*.

The detective followed him on board.

“Arrest him!” he said, and then drawing himself to his full height, he brandished aloft the hair.

“This is his,” said the great detective. “It proves his guilt.”

“Remove his hat,” said the ship’s captain sternly.

They did so.

The man was entirely bald.

“Ha!” said the great detective, without a moment of hesitation. “He has committed not *one* murder but about a million.”

II  
A COMPRESSED OLD ENGLISH NOVEL  
SWEARWORD THE UNPRONOUNCEABLE  
CHAPTER ONE AND ONLY

“Ods bodikins!” exclaimed Swearword the Saxon, wiping his mailed brow with his iron hand, “a fair morn withal! Methinks twert lithlier to rest me in yon glade than to foray me forth in yon fray! Twert it not?”

But there happened to be a real Anglo-Saxon standing by.

“Where in Heaven’s name,” he said in sudden passion, “did you get that line of English?”

“Churl!” said Swearword, “it is Anglo-Saxon.”

“You’re a liar!” shouted the Saxon; “it is not. It is Harvard College, Sophomore Year, Option No. 6.”

Swearword, now in like fury, threw aside his hauberk, his baldrick, and his needlework on the grass.

“Lay on!” said Swearword.

“Have at you!” cried the Saxon.

They laid on and had at one another.

Swearword was killed.

Thus luckily the whole story was cut off on the first page and ended.

III  
A CONDENSED INTERMINABLE NOVEL  
FROM THE CRADLE TO THE GRAVE OR A THOUSAND PAGES FOR A  
DOLLAR

NOTE. (*This story originally contained two hundred and fifty thousand words. But by a marvellous feat of condensation it is reduced, without the slightest loss, to a hundred and six words.*)

I

Edward Endless lived during his youth  
in Maine,  
in New Hampshire,  
in Vermont,  
in Massachusetts,  
in Rhode Island,  
in Connecticut.

II

Then the lure of the city lured him. His fate took him to  
New York, to Chicago, and to Philadelphia.

In Chicago he lived,  
in a boarding house on La Salle Avenue,  
then he boarded,—  
in a living house on Michigan Avenue.

In New York he  
had a room in an eating house on Forty-first Street,  
and then,—  
ate in a rooming house on Forty-Second Street.

In Philadelphia he  
used to sleep on Chestnut Street,  
and then,—  
slept on Maple Street.

During all this time women were calling to him. He knew and came to be  
friends with,—

Margaret Jones,  
Elizabeth Smith,  
Arabella Thompson,  
Jane Williams,  
Maud Taylor.

And he also got to know, pretty well,  
Louise Quelquechose,  
Antoinette Alphabette,  
and Estelle Etcetera.

And during this time Art began to call him,—  
Pictures began to appeal to him,  
Statues beckoned to him,  
Music maddened him,  
and any form of Recitation or  
Elocution drove him beside himself.

Then, one day, he married Margaret Jones.

As soon as he had married her  
he was disillusioned.

How he hated her.

Then he lived with Elizabeth Smith,—

He had no sooner sat down with her, than,  
He hated her.

Half mad, he took his things over to Arabella Thompson's flat to live with her.

The moment she opened the door of the apartment, he loathed her.

He saw her as she was.

Driven sane with despair, he then,—

(Our staff here cut the story off. There are hundreds and hundreds of pages after this. They show Edward Endless grappling in the fight for clean politic. The last hundred pages deal with religion. Edward finds it after a big fight. But no one reads these pages. There are no women in them. Our staff cut them out and merely show at the end,—

Edward Purified,—

Uplifted,—

Transluted.

The whole story is perhaps the biggest thing ever done on this continent. Perhaps!)

## THE SNOOPATHS, OR FIFTY STORIES IN ONE

This particular study in the follies of literature is not so much a story as a sort of essay. The average reader will therefore turn from it with a shudder. The condition of the average reader's mind is such that he can take nothing but fiction. And it must be thin fiction at that—thin as gruel. Nothing else will "sit on his stomach."

Everything must come to the present day reader in this form. If you wish to talk to him about religion, you must dress it up as a story and label it *Beth-sheba, or The Curse of David*; if you want to improve the reader's morals, you must write him a little thing in dialogue called *Mrs. Potiphar Dines Out*. If you wish to expostulate with him about drink you must do so through a narrative called *Red Rum*—short enough and easy enough for him to read it, without overstraining his mind, while he drinks cocktails.

But whatever the story is about it has got to deal—in order to be read by the average reader—with *A MAN* and *A WOMAN*. I put these words in capitals to indicate that they have got to stick out of the story with the crudity of a drawing done by a child with a burnt stick. In other words, the story has got to be snoopopathic. This is a word derived from the Greek—"snoopo"—or if there never was a Greek verb snoopo, at least there ought to have been one—and it means just what it seems to mean. Nine out of ten short stories written in American are snoopopathic.

In snoopopathic literature, in order to get its full effect, the writer generally introduces his characters simply as "the man" and "the woman." He hates to admit that they have names. He opens out with them something after this fashion:

"The Man lifted his head. He looked about him at the gaily-bedizzled crowd that besplotched the midnight cabaret with riotous patches of color. He crushed his cigar against the brass of an Egyptian tray—'Bah!' he murmured, 'Is it worth it?' Then he let his head sink again."

You notice it? He lifted his head all the way up and let it sink all the way down and you still don't know who he is.

For The Woman the beginning is done like this:

"The Woman clenched her white hands till the diamonds that glittered upon her fingers were buried in the soft flesh. 'The shame of it,' she murmured. Then she took from the table the telegram that lay crumpled upon it and tore it into a hundred pieces. 'He dare not!' she murmured through her closed teeth. She looked about the hotel room with its garish furniture. 'He has no right to follow me here,' she gasped."

All of which the reader has to take in without knowing who the woman is, or which hotel she is staying at, or who dare not follow her or why. But the modern

reader loves to get this sort of shadowy incomplete effect. If he were told straight out that the woman's name was Mrs. Edward Dangerfield of Brick City, Montana, and that she had left her husband three days ago and that the telegram told her that he had discovered her address and was following her, the reader would refuse to go on.

This method of introducing the characters is bad enough. But the new snoopopathic way of describing them is still worse. The Man is always detailed as if he were a horse. He is said to be "tall, well set up, with straight legs."

Great stress is always laid on his straight legs. No magazine story is acceptable now unless The Man's legs are absolutely straight. Why this is, I don't know. All my friends have straight legs—and yet I never hear them make it a subject of comment or boasting. I don't believe I have, at present, a single friend with crooked legs.

But this is not the only requirement. Not only must The Man's legs be straight, but he must be "clean-limbed," whatever that is; and of course he must have a "well-tubbed look about him." How this look is acquired, and whether it can be got with an ordinary bath and water, are things on which I have no opinion.

The Man is of course "clean-shaven." This allows him to do such necessary things as "turning his clean-shaven face towards the speaker," "laying his clean-shaven cheek in his hand," and so on. But every one is familiar with the face of the up-to-date clean-shaven snoopopathic man. There are pictures of him by the million on magazine covers and book jackets, looking into the eyes of The Woman—he does it from a distance of about six inches—with that snoopish earnest expression of brainlessness that he always wears. How one would enjoy seeing a man—a real one with Nevada whiskers and long boots—land him one solid kick from behind.

Then comes The Woman of the snoopopathic story. She is always "beautifully groomed" (Who these grooms are that do it, and where they can be hired, I don't know), and she is said to be "exquisitely gowned."

It is peculiar about The Woman that she never seems to wear a *dress*—always a "gown." Why this is, I cannot tell. In the good old stories that I used to read, when I could still read for the pleasure of it, the heroines—that was what they used to be called—always wore dresses. But now there is no heroine, only a woman in a gown. I wear a gown myself—at night. It is made of flannel and reaches to my feet, and when I take my candle and go out to the balcony where I sleep, the effect of it on the whole is not bad. But as to its "revealing every line of my figure"—as The Woman's gown is always said to—and as to its "suggesting even more than it reveals"—well, it simply does *not*. So when I talk of "gowns" I speak of something that I know all about.

Yet whatever The Woman does, her “gown” is said to “cling” to her. Whether in the street or in a cabaret or in the drawing-room, it “clings.” If by any happy chance she throws a lace wrap about her, then *it* clings; and if she lifts the gown—as she is apt to—it shows—not what I should have expected—but a *jupon*, and even that clings. What a *jupon* is I don’t know. With my gown, I never wear one. These people I have described, The Man and The Woman—The Snoopopaths—are, of course, not husband and wife, or brother and sister, or anything so simple and old-fashioned as that. She is some one else’s wife. She is *The Wife of the Other Man*. Just what there is, for the reader, about other men’s wives, I don’t understand. I know tons of them that I wouldn’t walk round a block for. But the reading public goes wild over them. The old-fashioned heroine was unmarried. That spoiled the whole story. You could see the end from the beginning. But with Another Man’s Wife, the way is blocked. Something has *got* to happen that would seem almost obvious to anyone.

The writer, therefore, at once puts the two snoopos—The Man and The Woman—into a frightfully indelicate position. The more indelicate it is, the better. Sometimes she gets into his motor by accident after the theatre, or they both engage the drawing-room of a Pullman car by mistake, or else, best of all, he is brought accidentally into her room at a hotel at night. There is something about a hotel room at night, apparently, which throws the modern reader into convulsions. It is always easy to arrange a scene of this sort. For example, taking the sample beginning that I gave above, The Man—whom I left sitting at the cabaret table, above, rises unsteadily—it is the recognized way of rising in a cabaret—and, settling the reckoning with the waiter, staggers into the street. For myself I never do a reckoning with the waiter. I just pay the bill as he adds it, and take a chance on it.

As The Man staggers into the “night air,” the writer has time—just a little time, for the modern reader is impatient—to explain who he is and why he staggers. He is rich. That goes without saying. All clean-limbed men with straight legs are rich. He owns copper mines in Montana. All well-tubbed millionaires do. But he has left them, left everything, because of the Other Man’s Wife. It was that or madness—or worse. He had told himself so a thousand times. (This little touch about “worse” is used in all the stories. I don’t just understand what the “worse” means. But snoopopathic readers reach for it with great readiness.) So The Man had come to New York (the only place where stories are allowed to be laid) under an assumed name, to forget, to drive her from his mind. He had plunged into the mad round of—I never could find it myself, but it must be there, and as they all plunge into it, it must be as full of them as a sheet of Tanglefoot is of flies.

“As The Man walked home to his hotel, the cool, night air steadied him, but his brain is still filled with the fumes of the wine he had drunk.” Notice these “fumes.” It must be great to float round with them in one’s brain, where they apparently lodge. I have often tried to find them, but I never can. Again and again I have said, “Waiter, bring me a Scotch whiskey and soda with fumes.” But I can never get them.

Thus goes The Man to his hotel. Now it is in a room in this same hotel that The Woman is sitting, and in which she has crumpled up the telegram. It is to this hotel that she has come when she left her husband, a week ago. The readers know, without even being told, that she left him “to work out her own salvation”—driven, by his cold brutality, beyond the breaking point. And there is laid upon her soul, as she sits there with clenched hands, the dust and ashes of a broken marriage and a loveless life, and the knowledge, too late, of all that might have been.

And it is to this hotel that The Woman’s Husband is following her.

But The Man does not know that she is in the hotel; nor that she has left her husband; it is only accident that brings them together. And it is only by accident that he has come into her room, at night, and stands there—rooted to the threshold.

Now as a matter of fact, in real life, there is nothing at all in the simple fact of walking into the wrong room of a hotel by accident. You merely apologize and go out. I had this experience myself only a few days ago. I walked right into a lady’s room—next door to my own. But I simply said, “Oh, I beg your pardon, I thought this was No. 343.”

“No,” she said, “this is 341.”

She did not rise and “confront” me, as they always do in the snoopopathic stories. Neither did her eyes flash, nor her gown cling to her as she rose. Nor was her gown made of “rich old stuff.” No, she merely went on reading her newspaper.

“I must apologize,” I said. “I am a little short-sighted, and very often a *one* and a *three* look so alike that I can’t tell them apart. I’m afraid——”

“Not at all,” said the lady. “Good evening.”

“You see,” I added, “this room and my own being so alike, and mine being 343 and this, being 341, I walked in before I realized that instead of walking into 343 I was walking into 341.”

She bowed in silence, without speaking, and I felt that it was now the part of exquisite tact to retire quietly without further explanation, or at least with only a few murmured words about the possibility of tomorrow being even colder than today. I did so, and the affair ended with complete *savoir faire* on both sides.

But the Snoopopaths, Man and Woman, can’t do this sort of thing, or, at any rate, the snoopopathic writer won’t let them. The opportunity is too good to miss.

As soon as The Man comes into The Woman's room—before he knows who she is, for she has her back to him—he gets into a condition dear to all snoopopathic readers.

His veins simply “surged.” His brain beat against his temples in mad pulsation. His breath “came and went in quick, short pants.” (This last might perhaps be done by one of the hotel bellboys, but otherwise it is hard to imagine.)

And The Woman—“Noiseless as his step had been she seemed to *sense* his presence. A wave seemed to sweep over her——” She turned and rose “fronting him full.” This doesn't mean that he as full when she fronted him. Her gown—but we know about that already. “It was a coward's trick,” she panted.

Now if The Man had had the kind of *savoir faire* that I have, he would have said: “Oh, pardon me! I see this room is 341. My own room is 343, and to me a *one* and a *three* often look so alike that I seem to have walked into 341 while looking for 343.” And he could have explained in two words that he had no idea that she was in New York, was not following her, and not proposing to interfere with her in any way. And she would have explained also in two sentences why and how she came to be there. But this wouldn't do. Instead of it, The Man and The Woman go through the grand snoopopathic scene which is so intense that it needs what is really a new kind of language to convey it.

“Helene,” he croaked, reaching out his arms—his voice tensed with the infinity of his desire.

“Back,” she iced. And then, “Why have you come here?” she hoarsed. “What business have you here?”

“None,” he glooped, “none. I have no business.” They stood sensing one another.

“I thought you were in Philadelphia,” she said—her gown clinging to every fibre of her as she spoke.

“I was,” he wheezed.

“And you left it?” she sharpened, her voice tense.

“I left it,” he said, his voice glumping as he spoke. “Need I tell you why?” He had come nearer to her. She could hear his pants as he moved.

“No, no,” she gurgled. “You left it. It is enough. I can understand”—she looked bravely up at him—“I can understand any man leaving it.” Then as he moved still nearer her, there was the sound of a sudden swift step in the corridor. The door opened and there stood before them—The Other Man—the Husband of The Woman—Edward Dangerfield.

This, of course, is the grand snoopopathic climax, when the author gets all three

of them—The Man, The Woman, and The Woman’s Husband—in a hotel room at night. But notice what happens.

He stood in the opening of the doorway looking at them, a slight smile upon his lips. “Well?” he said. Then he entered the room and stood for a moment quietly looking into The Man’s face.

“So,” he said, “it was you.” He walked into the room and laid the light coat that he had been carrying over his arm upon the table. He drew a cigar case from his waistcoat pocket.

“Try one of these Havanas,” he said.

Observe the *calm* of it. This is what the snoopopath loves—no rage, no blustering—calmness, cynicism. He walked over towards the mantel-piece and laid his hat upon it. He set his boot upon the fender.

“It was cold this evening,” he said. He walked over to the window and gazed a moment into the dark.

“This is a nice hotel,” he said. (This scene is what the author and the reader, love they hate to let it go. They’d willingly keep the man walking up and down for hours saying “Well!”)

The Man raised his head! “Yes, it’s a good hotel,” he said. Then he let his head fall again.

This kind of thing goes on until, if possible, the reader is persuaded into thinking that there is nothing going to happen. Then:—

“He turned to The Woman. ‘Go in there,’ he said, pointing to the bedroom door. Mechanically she obeyed.” This, by the way, is the first intimation that the reader has that the room in which they were sitting was not a bedroom. The two men were alone. Dangerfield walked over to the chair where he had thrown his coat.

“I bought this coat in St. Louis last fall,” he said. His voice was quiet, even passionless. Then from the pocket of the coat he took a revolver and laid it on the table. Marsden watched him without a word.

Marsden raised his head a moment and let it sink.

Of course the ignorant reader keeps wondering why he doesn’t explain. But how can he? What is there to say? He has been found out of his own room at night. The penalty for this in all the snoopopathic stories is death. It is understood that in all the New York hotels the night porters shoot a certain number of men in the corridors every night.

“When we married,” said Dangerfield, glancing at the closed door as he spoke. “I bought this and the mate to it—for her—just the same, with the monogram on the butt—see! And I, said to her, ‘If things ever go wrong between you and me, there is

always this way out.””

He lifted the pistol from the table, examining its mechanism. He rose and walked across the room till he stood with his back against the door, the pistol in his hand, its barrel pointing straight at Marsden’s heart. Marsden never moved. Then as the two men faced one another thus, looking into one another’s eyes, their ears caught a sound from behind the closed door of the inner room—a sharp, hard, metallic sound as if some one in the room within had raised the hammer of a pistol—a jewelled pistol like the one in Dangerfield’s hand.

And then—

A loud report, and with a cry, the cry of a woman, one shrill despairing cry—

Or no, hang it—I can’t consent to end up a story in that fashion, with the dead woman prone across the bed, the smoking pistol, with a jewel on the hilt, still clasped in her hand—the red blood welling over the white laces of her gown—while the two men gaze down upon her cold face with horror in their eyes. Not a bit. Let’s end it like this:—

“A shrill despairing cry,—‘Ed! Charlie! Come in here quick! Hurry! The steam coil has blown out a plug! You two boys quit talking and come in here, for Heaven’s sake, and fix it.’”

And, indeed, if the reader will look back he will see there is nothing in the dialogue to preclude it. He was misled, that’s all. I merely said that Mrs. Dangerfield had left her husband a few days before. So she had—to do some shopping in New York. She thought it mean of him to follow her. And I never said that Mrs. Dangerfield had any connection whatever with The Woman with whom Marsden was in love. Not at all. He knew her, of course, because he came from Brick City. But she had thought he was in Philadelphia, and naturally she was surprised to see him back in New York. That’s why she exclaimed, “Back!” And as a matter of plain fact, you can’t pick up a revolver without its pointing somewhere. No one said he meant to fire it.

In fact, if the reader will glance back at the dialogue—I know he has no time to, but if he does—he will see that, being something of a snoopopath himself, he has invented the whole story.

FOREIGN FICTION IN IMPORTED INSTALMENTS: SERGE  
THE SUPERMAN.  
A RUSSIAN NOVEL

*(Translated, with a hand pump, out of the  
original Russian.)*

(Special Editorial Note, or, fit of convulsions into which an editor falls in introducing this sort of story to his readers.—We need offer no apology to our readers in presenting to them a Russian novel. There is no doubt that the future in literature lies with Russia. The names of Tolstoi, of Turgansomething, and Dostoiwhatisit are household words in America. We may say with certainty that Serge the Superman is the most distinctly Russian thing produced in years. The Russian view of life is melancholy and fatalistic. It is dark with the gloom of the great forests of the Volga, and saddened with the infinite silence of the Siberian plain. Hence the Russian speech, like the Russian thought, is direct, terse and almost crude in its elemental power. All this appears in Serge the Superman. It is the directest, tersest, crudest thing we have ever seen. We showed the manuscript to a friend of ours, a critic, a man who has a greater command of the language of criticism than perhaps any two men in New York today. He said at once, “This is big. It is a big thing, done by a big man, a man with big ideas, writing at his very biggest. The whole thing has a bigness about it that is,—” and here he paused and thought a moment and added,—“big.” After this he sat back in his chair and said, “big, big, big,” till we left him. We next showed the story to an English critic and he said without hesitation, or very little, “This is really not half bad.” Last of all we read the story ourselves and we rose after its perusal,—itself not an easy thing to do,—and said, “Wonderful but terrible.” All through our (free) lunch that day we shuddered.)

## CHAPTER I

As a child Serge lived with his father—Ivan Ivanovitch—and his mother—Katrina Katerinavitch. In the house, too, were Nitska, the serving maid, Itch, the serving man, and Yump, the cook, his wife.

The house stood on the borders of a Russian town. It was in the heart of Russia. All about it was the great plain with the river running between the low banks and over it the dull sky.

Across the plain ran the post road, naked and bare. In the distance one could see a moujik driving a three-horse tarantula, or perhaps Swill, the swine-herd, herding the swine. Far away the road dipped over the horizon and was lost.

“Where does it go to?” asked Serge. But no one could tell him.

In the winter there came the great snows and the river was frozen and Serge could walk on it.

On such days Yob, the postman, would come to the door, stamping his feet with the cold as he gave the letters to Itch.

“It is a cold day,” Yob would say.

“It is God’s will,” said Itch. Then he would fetch a glass of Kwas steaming hot from the great stove, built of wood, that stood in the kitchen.

“Drink, little brother,” he would say to Yob, and Yob would answer, “Little Uncle, I drink your health,” and he would go down the road again, stamping his feet with the cold.

Then later the spring would come and all the plain was bright with flowers and Serge could pick them. Then the rain came and Serge could catch it in a cup. Then the summer came and the great heat and the storms and Serge could watch the lightning.

“What is lightning for?” he would ask of Yump, the cook, as she stood kneading the *mush*, or dough, to make *slab*, or pancake, for the morrow. Yump shook her *knob*, or head, with a look of perplexity on her big *mugg*, or face.

“It is God’s will,” she said.

Thus Serge grew up a thoughtful child.

At times he would say to his mother, “Matrinska” (little mother), “why is the sky blue?” And she couldn’t tell him.

Or at times he would say to his father, “Boob,” (Russian for father), “what is three times six?” But his father didn’t know.

Each year Serge grew.

Life began to perplex the boy. He couldn’t understand it. No one could tell him

anything.

Sometimes he would talk with Itch, the serving man.

“Itch,” he asked, “what is morality?” But Itch didn’t know. In his simple life he had never heard of it.

At times people came to the house—Snip the schoolmaster, who could read and write, and Cinch, the harness maker, who made harness.

Once there came Popoff, the inspector of police, in his blue coat with fur on it. He stood in front of the fire writing down the names of all the people in the house. And when he came to Itch, Serge noticed how Itch trembled and cowered before Popoff, cringing as he brought a three-legged stool and saying, “Sit near the fire, little father, it is cold.” Popoff laughed and said, “Cold as Siberia, is it not, little brother?” Then he said, “Bare me your arm to the elbow, and let me see if our mark is on it still.” And Itch raised his sleeve to the elbow and Serge saw that there was a mark upon it burned deep and black.

“I thought so,” said Popoff, and he laughed. But Yump, the cook, beat the fire with a stick so that the sparks flew into Popoff’s face. “You are too near the fireplace, little inspector,” she said. “It burns.”

All that evening Itch sat in the corner of the kitchen and Serge saw that there were tears on his face.

“Why does he cry?” asked Serge.

“He has been in Siberia,” said Yump as she poured water into the great iron pot to make soup for the week after the next.

Serge grew more thoughtful each year.

All sorts of things, occurrences of daily life, set him thinking. One day he saw some peasants drowning a tax collector in the river. It made a deep impression on him. He couldn’t understand it. There seemed something wrong about it.

“Why did they drown him?” he asked of Yump, the cook.

“He was collecting taxes,” said Yump, and she threw a handful of cups into the cupboard.

Then one day there was great excitement in the town, and men in uniforms went to and fro and all the people stood at the doors talking.

“What has happened,” asked Serge.

“It is Popoff, inspector of police,” answered Itch. “They have found him beside the river.”

“Is he dead?” questioned Serge.

Itch pointed reverently to the ground,—“He is there!” he said.

All that day Serge asked questions. But no one would tell him anything.

“Popoff’s dead,” they said. “They have found him beside the river with his ribs driven in on his heart.”

“Why did they kill him?” asked Serge.

But no one would say.

So after this Serge was more perplexed than ever.

Everyone noticed how thoughtful Serge was.

“He is a wise boy,” they said. “Some day he will be a learned man. He will read and write.”

“Defend us,” exclaimed Itch. “It is a dangerous thing.”

One day Liddoff, the priest, came to the house with a great roll of paper in his hand.

“What is it?” asked Serge.

“It is the alphabet,” said Liddoff.

“Give it to me,” said Serge with eagerness.

“Not all of it,” said Liddoff, gently. “Here is part of it,” and he tore off a piece and gave it to the boy.

“Defend us!” said Yump, the cook. “It is not a wise thing,” and she shook her head as she put a new lump of clay in the wooden stove to make it burn more brightly.

Then everybody knew that Serge was learning the alphabet, and that when he had learned it he was going to go to Moscow, to the Teknik, and learn what else there was.

So the days passed and the months. Presently Ivan Ivanovitch said, “Now he is ready,” and he took down a bag of rubles that was concealed on a shelf beside the wooden stove in the kitchen and counted them out after the Russian fashion, “Ten, ten, and yet ten, and still ten, and ten,” till he could count no further.

“Protect us!” said Yump. “Now he is rich!” and she poured oil and fat mixed with sand into the bread and beat it with a stick.

“He must get ready,” they said. “He must buy clothes. Soon he will go to Moscow to the Teknik and become a wise man.”

Now it so happened that there came one day to the door a drosky, or one-horse carriage, and in it was a man and beside him was a girl. The man stopped to ask the way from Itch, who pointed down the post road and over the plain. But his hand trembled and his knees shook as he showed the way. For the eyes of the man who asked the way were dark with hate and cruel with power. And he wore a uniform and there was brass upon his cap. But Serge looked only at the girl. And there was no hate in her eyes, but only a great burning, and a look that went far beyond the

plain, Serge knew not where. And as Serge looked, the girl turned her face and their eyes met, and he knew that he would never forget her. And he saw in her face that she would never forget him. For that is love.

“Who is that?” he asked, as he went back again with Itch into the house.

“It is K wartz, chief of police,” said Itch, and his knees still trembled as he spoke.

“Where is he taking her?” said Serge.

“To Moscow, to the prison,” answered Itch. “There they will hang her and she will die.”

“Who is she?” asked Serge. “What has she done?” and as he spoke he could still see the girl’s face, and the look upon it, and a great fire went sweeping through his veins.

“She is Olga Ileyitch,” answered Itch. “She made the bomb that killed Popoff, the inspector, and now they will hang her and she will die.”

“Defend us!” murmured Yump, as she heaped more clay upon the stove.

## CHAPTER II

Serge went to Moscow. He entered the Teknik. He became a student. He learned geography, from Stoj, the professor, astrology from Fudj, the assistant, together with giliodesy, orgastrophy and other native Russian studies.

All day he worked. His industry was unflagging. His instructors were enthusiastic. "If he goes on like this," they said, "he will some day know something."

"It is marvellous," said one; "if he continues thus, he will be a professor."

"He is too young," said Stoj, shaking his head; "he has too much hair."

"He sees too well," said Fudj. "Let him wait till his eyes are weaker."

But all day as Serge worked he thought. And his thoughts were of Olga Ileyitch, the girl that he had seen with K wartz, inspector of police. He wondered why she had killed Popoff, the inspector. He wondered if she was dead. There seemed no justice in it.

One day he questioned his professor.

"Is the law just?" he said. "Is it right to kill?"

But Stoj shook his head and would not answer.

"Let us go on with our orgastrophy," he said. And he trembled so that the chalk shook in his hand.

So Serge questioned no further, but he thought more deeply still. All the way from the Teknik to the house where he lodged he was thinking. As he climbed the stair to his attic room he was still thinking.

The house in which Serge lived was the house of Madame Vasselitch. It was a tall dark house in a sombre street. There were no trees upon the street and no children played there. And opposite to the house of Madame Vasselitch was a building of stone with windows barred, that was always silent. In it were no lights and no one went in or out.

"What is it?" Serge asked.

"It is the house of the dead," answered Madame Vasselitch, and she shook her head and would say no more.

The husband of Madame Vasselitch was dead. No one spoke of him. In the house were only students. Most of them were wild fellows, as students are. At night they would sit about the table in the great room drinking K was made from sawdust fermented in syrup, or golgol, the Russian absinthe, made by dipping a gooseberry in a bucket of soda water. Then they would play cards, laying matches on the table and betting, "Ten, ten, and yet ten," till all the matches were gone. Then they would say, "There are no more matches, let us dance," and they would dance upon the floor, till

Madame Vasselitch would come to the room a candle in her hand, and say, "Little brothers, it is ten o'clock. Go to bed." Then they went to bed. They were wild fellows, as all student are.

But there were two students in the house of Madame Vasselitch who were not wild. They were brothers. They lived in a long room in the basement. It was so low that it was below the street.

The brothers were pale with long hair. They had deep-set eyes. They had but little money. Madame Vasselitch gave them food. "Eat, little sons," she would say. "You must not die."

The brothers worked all day. They were real students. One brother was Halfoff. He was taller than the other and stronger. The other brother was Kwitoff. He was not so tall as Halfoff and not so strong.

One day Serge went to the room of the brothers. The brothers were at work. Halfoff sat at a table. There was a book in front of him.

"What is it?" asked Serge.

"It is solid geometry," said Halfoff, and there was a gleam in his eyes.

"Why do you study it?" said Serge.

"To free Russia," said Halfoff.

"And what book have you?" said Serge to Kwitoff.

"Hamblin Smith's *Elementary Trigonometry*," said Kwitoff, and he quivered like a leaf.

"What does it teach?" asked Serge.

"Freedom!" said Kwitoff.

The two brothers looked at one another.

"Shall we tell him everything?" said Halfoff.

"Not yet," said Kwitoff. "Let him learn first. Later he shall know."

After that Serge came often to the room of the two brothers.

The two brothers gave him books. "Read them," they said.

"They are in English," said Kwitoff. "They are forbidden books. They are not allowed in Russia. But in them is truth and freedom."

"Give me one," said Serge.

"Take this one," said Kwitoff. "Carry it under your cloak. Let no one see it."

"What is it?" asked Serge, trembling in spite of himself.

"It is Caldwell's *Pragmatism*," said the brothers.

"Is it forbidden?" asked Serge.

The brothers looked at him.

"It is death to read it," they said.

After that Serge came each day and got books from Halfoff and Kwitoff. At night he read them. They fired his brain. All of them were forbidden books. No one in Russia might read them. Serge read Hamblin Smith's Algebra. He read it all through from cover to cover, feverishly. He read Murray's *Calculus*. It set his brain on fire. "Can this be true," he asked.

The books opened a new world to Serge.

The brothers often watched him as he read.

"Shall we tell him everything?" said Halfoff.

"Not yet," said Kwitoff, "he is not ready."

One night Serge went to the room of the two brothers. They were not working at their books. Littered about the room were blacksmith's tools and wires, and pieces of metal lying on the floor. There was a crucible and underneath it a blue fire that burned fiercely. Beside it the brothers worked. Serge could see their faces in the light of the flame.

"Shall we tell him now?" said Kwitoff. The other brother nodded.

"Tell him now," he said.

"Little brother," said Kwitoff, and he rose from beside the flame and stood erect for he was tall, "will you give your life?"

"What for?" asked Serge.

The brothers shook their heads.

"We cannot tell you that," they said. "That would be too much. Will you join us?"

"In what?" asked Serge.

"We must not say," said the brothers. "We can only ask are you willing to help our enterprise with all your power and with your life if need be?"

"What is your enterprise?" asked Serge.

"We must not divulge it," they said. "Only this: Will you give your life to save another life, to save Russia?"

Serge paused. He thought of Olga Ileyitch. Only to save her life would he have given his.

"I cannot," he answered.

"Good night, little brother," said Kwitoff gently, and he turned back to his work.

Thus the months passed.

Serge studied without ceasing. "If there is truth," he thought, "I shall find it." All the time he thought of Olga Ileyitch. His face grew pale. "Justice, justice," he thought, "what is justice and truth?"

## CHAPTER III

Now when Serge had been six months in the house of Madame Vasselitch, Ivan Ivanovitch, his father, sent Itch, the serving man, and Yump, the cook, his wife, to Moscow to see how Serge fared. And Ivan first counted out rubles into a bag, "ten, and ten and still ten," till Itch said, "It is enough. I will carry that."

Then they made ready to go. Itch took a duck from the pond and put a fish in his pocket, together with a fragrant cheese and a bundle of sweet garlic. And Yump took oil and dough and mixed it with tar and beat it with an iron bar so as to shape it into a pudding.

So they went forth on foot, walking till they came to Moscow.

"It is a large place," said Itch, and he looked about him at the lights and the people.

"Defend us," said Yump. "It is no place for a woman."

"Fear nothing," said Itch, looking at her.

So they went on, looking for the house of Madame Vasselitch.

"How bright the lights are!" said Itch, and he stood still and looked about him. Then he pointed at a burleski, or theatre. "Let us go in there and rest," he said.

"No," said Yump, "let us hurry on."

"You are tired," said Itch. "Give me the pudding and hurry forward, so that you may sleep. I will come later, bringing the pudding and the fish."

"I am not tired," said Yump.

So they came at last to the house of Madame Vasselitch. And when they saw Serge they said, "How tall he is and how well grown!" But they thought, "He is pale. Ivan Ivanovitch must know."

And Itch said, "Here are the rubles sent by Ivan Ivanovitch. Count them, little son, and see that they are right."

"How many should there be?" said Serge.

"I know not," said Itch: "you must count them and see."

Then Yump said, "Here is a pudding, little son, and a fish, and a duck and a cheese and garlic."

So that night Itch and Yump stayed in the house of Madame Vasselitch.

"You are tired," said Itch; "you must sleep."

"I am not tired," said Yump. "It is only that my head aches and my face burns from the wind and the sun."

"I will go forth," said Itch, "and find a fisski, or drug store, and get something for your face."

“Stay where you are,” said Yump. And Itch stayed.

Meantime Serge had gone upstairs with the fish and the duck and the cheese and the pudding. As he went up he thought, “It is selfish to eat alone. I will give part of the fish to the others.” And when he got a little further up the steps he thought, “I will give them all of the fish.” And when he got higher still he thought, “They shall have everything.”

Then he opened the door and came into the big room where the students were playing with matches at the big table and drinking golgol out of cups. “Here is food, brothers,” he said. “Take it. I need none.”

The students took the food and they cried, “Rah, Rah,” and beat the fish against the table. But the pudding they would not take. “We have no axe,” they said. “Keep it.”

Then they poured out golgol for Serge and said, “Drink it.”

But Serge would not.

“I must work,” he said, and all the students laughed. “He wants to work!” they cried. “Rah, Rah.”

But Serge went up to his room and lighted his taper, made of string dipped in fat, and set himself to study.

“I must work,” he repeated.

So Serge sat at his books. It got later and the house grew still. The noise of the students below ceased and then everything was quiet.

Serge sat working through the night. Then presently it grew morning and the dark changed to twilight and Serge could see from his window the great building with the barred windows across the street standing out in the grey mist of the morning.

Serge had often studied thus through the night and when it was morning he would say, “It is morning,” and would go down and help Madame Vasselitch unbar the iron shutters and unchain the door, and remove the bolts from the window casement.

But on this morning as Serge looked from his window his eyes saw a figure behind the barred window opposite to him. It was the figure of a girl and she was kneeling on the floor and she was in prayer, for Serge could see that her hands were before her face. And as he looked all his blood ran warm to his head and his limbs trembled even though he could not see the girl’s face. Then the girl rose from her knees and turned her face towards the bars, and Serge knew that it was Olga Ileyitch and that she had seen and known him.

Then he came down the stairs and Madame Vasselitch was there undoing the

shutters and removing the nails from the window casing.

“What have you seen, little son?” she asked, and her voice was gentle, for the face of Serge was pale and his eyes were wide.

But Serge did not answer the question.

“What is that house?” he said; “the great building with the bars that you call the house of the dead?”

“Shall I tell you, little son,” said Madame Vasselitch, and she looked at him, still thinking. “Yes,” she said, “he shall know.”

“It is the prison of the condemned, and from there they go forth only to die. Listen, little son,” she went on, and she gripped Serge by the wrist till he could feel the bones of her fingers against his flesh. “There lay my husband, Vangorod Vasselitch, waiting for his death. Months long he was there behind the bars and no one might see him or know when he was to die. I took this tall house that I might at least be near him till the end. But to those who lie there waiting for their death it is allowed once only that they may look out upon the world. And this is allowed to them the day before they die. So I took this house and waited, and each day I looked forth at dawn across the street and he was not there. Then at last he came. I saw him at the window and his face was pale and set and I could see the marks of the iron on his wrists as he held them to the bars. But I could see that his spirit was unbroken. There was no power in them to break that. Then he saw me at the window, and thus across the narrow street we said goodbye. It was only a moment. ‘Sonia Vasselitch,’ he said, ‘do not forget,’ and he was gone. I have not forgotten. I have lived on here in this dark house and I have not forgotten. My sons—yes, little brother, my sons, I say—have not forgotten. Now tell me, Sergius Ivanovitch, what have you seen?”

“I have seen the woman that I love,” said Serge, “kneeling behind the bars in prayer. I have seen Olga Ileyitch.”

“Her name,” said Madame Vasselitch, and there were no tears in her eyes and her voice was calm, “her name is Olga Vasselitch. She is my daughter and tomorrow she is to die.”

## CHAPTER IV

Madame Vasselitch took Serge by the hand.

“Come,” she said, “you shall speak to my sons,” and she led him down the stairs towards the room of Halfoff and Kwitoff.

“They are my sons,” she said. “Olga is their sister. They are working to save her.”

Then she opened the door. Halfoff and Kwitoff were working as Serge had seen them before, beside the crucible with the blue flame on their faces.

They had not slept.

Madame Vasselitch spoke.

“He has seen Olga,” she said. “It is today.”

“We are too late,” said Halfoff, and he groaned.

“Courage, brother,” said Kwitoff. “She will not die till sunrise. It is twilight now. We have still an hour. Let us go to work.”

Serge looked at the brothers.

“Tell me,” he said. “I do not understand.”

Halfoff turned a moment from his work and looked at Serge.

“Brother,” he said, “will you give your life?”

“Is it for Olga?” asked Serge.

“It is for her.”

“I give it gladly,” said Serge.

“Listen then,” said Halfoff. “Our sister is condemned for the killing of Popoff, inspector of police. She is in the prison of the condemned, the house of the dead, across the street. Her cell is there beside us. There is only a wall between. Look—”

Halfoff as he spoke, threw aside a curtain that hung across the end of the room. Serge looked into blackness. It was a tunnel.

“It leads to the wall of her cell,” said Halfoff. “We are close against the wall but we cannot shatter it. We are working to make a bomb. No bomb that we can make is hard enough. We can only try once. If it fails the noise would ruin us. There is no second chance. We try our bombs in the crucible. They crumble. They have no strength. We are ignorant. We are only learning. We studied it in the books, the forbidden books. It took a month to learn to set the wires to fire the bomb. The tunnel was there. We did not have to dig. It was for my father, Vangorod Vasselitch. He would not let them use it. He tapped a message through the wall, ‘Keep it for a greater need.’ Now it is his daughter that is there.”

Halfoff paused. He was panting and his chest heaved. There was perspiration on

his face and his black hair was wet.

“Courage, little brother,” said Kwitoff, “she shall not die.”

“Listen,” went on Halfoff. “The bomb is made. It is there beside the crucible. It has power in it to shatter the prison. But the wires are wrong. They do not work. There is no current in them. Something is wrong. We cannot explode the bomb.”

“Courage, courage,” said Kwitoff, and his hands were busy among the wires before him. “I am working still.”

Serge looked at the brothers.

“Is that the bomb?” he said, pointing at a great ball of metal that lay beside the crucible.

“It is,” said Halfoff.

“And the little fuse that is in the side of it fires it? And the current from the wires lights the fuse?”

“Yes,” said Halfoff.

The two brothers looked at Serge for there was a meaning in his voice and a strange look upon his face.

“If the bomb is placed against the wall and if the fuse is lighted it would explode?”

“Yes,” said Halfoff despairingly, “but how? The fuse is instantaneous. Without the wires we cannot light it. It would be death.”

Serge took the bomb in his hand. His face was pale.

“Let it be so!” he said. “I will give my life for hers.”

He lifted the bomb in his hand. “I will go through the tunnel and hold the bomb against the wall and fire it,” he said. “Halfoff, light me the candle in the flame. Be ready when the wall falls.”

“No, no,” said Halfoff, grasping Serge by the arm—“you must not die.”

“My brother,” said Kwitoff quietly, “let it be as he says. It is for Russia.”

But as Halfoff turned to light the candle in the flame there came a great knocking at the door above and the sound of many voices in the street.

All paused.

Madame Vasselitch laid her hand upon her lips.

Then there came the sound as of grounded muskets on the pavement of the street and a sharp word of command.

“Soldiers!” said Madame Vasselitch.

Kwitoff turned to his brother. “This is the end,” he said; “explode the bomb here and let us die together.”

Suddenly Madame Vasselitch gave a cry,—

“It is Olga’s voice!” she said.

She ran to the door and opened it, and a glad voice was heard crying, “It is I, Olga and I am free!”

“Free,” exclaimed the brothers.

All hastened up the stairs.

Olga was standing before them in the hall and beside her were the officers of the police and in the street were soldiers. The students from above had crowded down the stairs and with them were Itch, the serving man, and Yump, the cook.

“I am free,” cried Olga, “liberated by the bounty of the Czar—Russia has declared war to fight for the freedom of the world and all the political prisoners are free.”

“Rah, rah!” cried the students. “War, war, war!”

“She is set free,” said the officer who stood beside Olga. “The charge of killing Popoff is withdrawn. No one will be punished for it now.”

“I never killed him,” said Olga. “I swear it,” and she raised her hand.

“You never killed him!” exclaimed Serge, with joy in his heart. “You did not kill Popoff? But who did?”

“Defend us,” said Yump, the cook. “Since there is to be no punishment for it, I killed him myself.”

“You!” they cried.

“It is so,” said Yump. “I killed him beside the river. It was to defend my honour.”

“It was to defend her honour,” cried the brothers. “She has done well.”

They clasped her hand.

“You destroyed him with a bomb?” they said.

“No,” said Yump, “I sat down on him.”

“Rah, rah, rah,” said the students.

There was silence a moment. Then Kwitoff spoke.

“Friends,” he said, “the new day is coming. The dawn is breaking. The moon is rising. The stars are setting. It is the birth of freedom. See! we need it not!”—and as he spoke he grasped in his hands the bomb with its still unlighted fuse,—“Russia is free. We are all brothers now. Let us cast it at our enemies. Forward! To the frontier! Live the Czar.”

## MY REVELATIONS AS A SPY

In many people the very name “Spy” excites a shudder of apprehension; we spies, in fact, get quite used to being shuddered at. None of us spies mind it at all. Whenever I enter a hotel and register myself as a spy I am quite accustomed to see a thrill of fear run round the clerks, or clerk, behind the desk.

Us spies or we spies—for we call ourselves both—are thus a race apart. None know us. All fear us. Where do we live? Nowhere. Where are we? Everywhere. Frequently we don’t know ourselves where we are. The secret orders that we receive come from so high up that it is often forbidden to us even to ask where we are. A friend of mine, or at least a fellow spy—us spies have no friends—one of the most brilliant men in the Hungarian Secret Service, once spent a month in New York under the impression that he was in Winnipeg. If this happened to the most brilliant, think of the others.

All, I say, fear us. Because they know and have reason to know our power. Hence, in spite of the prejudice against us, we are able to move everywhere, to lodge in the best hotels, and enter any society that we wish to penetrate.

Let me relate an incident to illustrate this: A month ago I entered one of the largest of the New York hotels which I will merely call the B. hotel without naming it: to do so might blast it. We spies, in fact, never *name* a hotel. At the most we indicate it by number known only to ourselves, such as 1, 2, or 3.

On my presenting myself at the desk the clerk informed me that he had no room vacant. I knew this of course to be a mere subterfuge; whether or not he suspected that I was a spy I cannot say. I was muffled up, to avoid recognition, in a long overcoat with the collar turned up and reaching well above my ears, while the black beard and the moustache, that I had slipped on in entering the hotel, concealed my face. “Let me speak a moment to the manager,” I said. When he came I beckoned him aside and taking his ear in my hand I breathed two words into it. “Good heavens!” he gasped, while his face turned as pale as ashes. “Is it enough?” I asked. “Can I have a room, or must I breathe again?” “No, no,” said the manager, still trembling. Then, turning to the clerk: “Give this gentleman a room,” he said, “and give him a bath.”

What these two words are that will get a room in New York at once I must not divulge. Even now, when the veil of secrecy is being lifted, the international interests involved are too complicated to permit it. Suffice it say that if these two had failed I know a couple of others still better.

I narrate this incident, otherwise trivial, as indicating the astounding ramifications

and the ubiquity of the international spy system. A similar illustration occurs to me as I write. I was walking the other day with another gentleman—on upper B, way between the T. Building and the W. Garden.

“Do you see that man over there?” I said, pointing from the side of the street on which we were walking on the sidewalk to the other side opposite to the side that we were on.

“The man with the straw hat?” he asked. “Yes, what of him?”

“Oh, nothing,” I answered, “except that he’s a spy!”

“Great heavens!” exclaimed my acquaintance leaning up against a lamp-post for support. “A spy! How do you know that? What does it mean?”

I gave a quiet laugh—we spies learn to laugh very quietly. “Ha!” I said, “that is my secret, my friend. *Verbum sapientius! Che sara sara! Yodel doodle doo!*”

My acquaintance fell in a dead faint upon the street. I watched them take him away in an ambulance. Will the reader be surprised to learn that among the white-coated attendants who removed him I recognized no less a person than the famous Russian spy, Poulispantzoff? What he was doing there I could not tell. No doubt his orders came from so high up that he himself did not know. I had seen him only twice before—once when we were both disguised as Zulus at Buluwayo, and once in the interior of China, at the time when Poulispantzoff made his secret entry into Thibet concealed in a tea-case. He was inside the tea-case when I saw him; so at least I was informed by the coolies who carried it. Yet I recognized him instantly. Neither he nor I, however, gave any sign of recognition other than an imperceptible movement of the outer eyelid. (We spies learn to move the outer lid of the eye so imperceptibly that it cannot be seen.) Yet after meeting Poulispantzoff in this way I was not surprised to read in the evening papers a few hours afterward that the uncle of the young King of Siam had been assassinated. The connection between these two events I am unfortunately not at liberty to explain; the consequences to the Vatican would be too serious. I doubt if it would remain top-side up.

These, however, are but passing incidents in a life filled with danger and excitement. They would have remained unrecorded and unrevealed, like the rest of my revelations, were it not that certain recent events have to some extent removed the seal of secrecy from my lips. The death of a certain royal sovereign makes it possible for me to divulge things hitherto undivulged. Even now I can only tell a part, a small part, of the terrific things that I know. When more sovereigns die I can divulge more. I hope to keep on divulging at intervals for years. But I am compelled to be cautious. My relations with the Wilhelmstrasse, with Downing Street and the Quai d’Orsay, are so intimate, and my footing with the Yildiz Kiosk and the

Waldorf-Astoria and Childs' Restaurants are so delicate, that a single *faux pas* might prove to be a false step.

It is now seventeen years since I entered the Secret Service of the G. empire. During this time my activities have taken me into every quarter of the globe, at times even into every eighth or sixteenth of it. It was I who first brought back word to the Imperial Chancellor of the existence of an Entente between England and France. "Is there an entente?" he asked me, trembling with excitement, on my arrival at the Wilhelmstrasse. "Your Excellency," I said, "there is." He groaned. "Can you stop it?" he asked.

"Don't ask me," I said sadly. "Where must we strike?" demanded the Chancellor. "Fetch me a map," I said. They did so. I placed my finger on the map. "Quick, quick," said the Chancellor, "look where his finger is." They lifted it up. "Morocco!" they cried. I had meant it for Abyssinia but it was too late to change. That night the warship *Panther* sailed under sealed orders. The rest is history, or at least history and geography.

In the same way it was I who brought word to the Wilhelmstrasse of the *rapprochement* between England and Russia in Persia. "What did you find?" asked the Chancellor as I laid aside the Russian disguise in which I had traveled. "*A Rapprochement!*" I said. He groaned. "They seem to get all the best words," he said.

I shall always feel, to my regret, that I am personally responsible for the outbreak of the present war. It may have had ulterior causes. But there is no doubt that it was precipitated by the fact that, for the first time in seventeen years, I took a six weeks' vacation in June and July of 1914. The consequences of this careless step I ought to have foreseen. Yet I took such precautions as I could. "Do you think," I asked, "that you can preserve the status quo for six weeks, merely six weeks, if I stop spying and take a rest?" "We'll try," they answered. "Remember," I said, as I packed my things, "keep the Dardanelles closed; have the Sandjak of Novi Bazaar properly patrolled, and let the Dobrudja remain under a *modus vivendi* till I come back."

Two months later, while sitting sipping my coffee at a Kurhof in the Schwarzwald, I read in the newspapers that a German army had invaded France and was fighting the French, and that the English expeditionary force had crossed the Channel. "This," I said to myself, "means war." As usual, I was right.

It is needless for me to recount here the life of busy activity that falls to a Spy in wartime. It was necessary for me to be here, there and everywhere, visiting all the best hotels, watering-places, summer resorts, theatres, and places of amusement. It

was necessary, moreover, to act with the utmost caution and to assume an air of careless indolence in order to lull suspicion asleep. With this end in view I made a practice of never rising till ten in the morning. I breakfasted with great leisure, and contented myself with passing the morning in a quiet stroll, taking care, however, to keep my ears open. After lunch I generally feigned a light sleep, keeping my ears shut. A *table d'hote* dinner, followed by a visit to the theatre, brought the strenuous day to a close. Few spies, I venture to say, worked harder than I did.

It was during the third year of the war that I received a peremptory summons from the head of the Imperial Secret Service at Berlin, Baron Fisch von Gestern. "I want to see you," it read. Nothing more. In the life of a spy one learns to think quickly, and to think is to act. I gathered as soon as I received the dispatch that for some reason or other Fisch von Gestern was anxious to see me, having, as I instantly inferred, something to say to me. This conjecture proved correct.

The Baron rose at my entrance with military correctness and shook hands.

"Are you willing," he inquired, "to undertake a mission to America?"

"I am," I answered.

"Very good. How soon can you start?"

"As soon as I have paid the few bills that I owe in Berlin," I replied.

"We can hardly wait for that," said my chief, "and in any case it might excite comment. You must start tonight!"

"Very good," I said.

"Such," said the Baron, "are the Kaiser's orders. Here is an American passport and a photograph that will answer the purpose. The likeness is not great, but it is sufficient."

"But," I objected, abashed for a moment, "this photograph is of a man with whiskers and I am, unfortunately, clean-shaven."

"The orders are imperative," said Von Gestern, with official hauteur. "You must start tonight. You can grow whiskers this afternoon."

"Very good," I replied.

"And now to the business of your mission," continued the Baron. "The United States, as you have perhaps heard, is making war against Germany."

"I have heard so," I replied.

"Yes," continued Von Gestern. "The fact has leaked out,—how we do not know,—and is being widely reported. His Imperial Majesty has decided to stop the war with the United States." I bowed.

"He intends to send over a secret treaty of the same nature as the one recently made with his recent Highness the recent Czar of Russia. Under this treaty Germany

proposes to give to the United States the whole of equatorial Africa and in return the United States is to give to Germany the whole of China. There are other provisions, but I need not trouble you with them. Your mission relates, not to the actual treaty, but to the preparation of the ground." I bowed again.

"You are aware, I presume," continued the Baron, "that in all high international dealings, at least in Europe, the ground has to be prepared. A hundred threads must be unravelled. This the Imperial Government itself cannot stoop to do. The work must be done by agents like yourself. You understand all this already, no doubt?" I indicated my assent.

"These, then, are your instructions," said the Baron, speaking slowly and distinctly, as if to impress his words upon my memory. "On your arrival in the United States you will follow the accredited methods that are known to be used by all the best spies of the highest diplomacy. You have no doubt read some of the books, almost manuals of instruction, that they have written?"

"I have read many of them," I said.

"Very well. You will enter, that is to say, enter and move everywhere in the best society. Mark especially, please, that you must not only *enter* it but you must *move*. You must, if I may put it so, get a move on." I bowed.

"You must mix freely with the members of the Cabinet. You must dine with them. This is a most necessary matter and one to be kept well in mind. Dine with them often in such a way as to make yourself familiar to them. Will you do this?"

"I will," I said.

"Very good. Remember also that in order to mask your purpose you must constantly be seen with the most fashionable and most beautiful women of the American capital. Can you do this?"

"Can I?" I said.

"You must if need be"—and the Baron gave a most significant look which was not lost upon me—"carry on an intrigue with one or, better, with several of them. Are you ready for it?"

"More than ready," I said.

"Very good. But this is only a part. You are expected also to familiarize yourself with the leaders of the great financial interests. You are to put yourself on such a footing with them as to borrow large sums of money from them. Do you object to this?"

"No," I said frankly, "I do not."

"Good! You will also mingle freely in Ambassadorial and foreign circles. It would be well for you to dine, at least once a week, with the British Ambassador. And now

one final word”—here Von Gestern spoke with singular impressiveness—“as to the President of the United States.”

“Yes,” I said.

“You must mix with him on a footing of the most open-handed friendliness. Be at the White House continually. Make yourself in the fullest sense of the words the friend and adviser of the President. All this I think is clear. In fact, it is only what is done, as you know, by all the masters of international diplomacy.”

“Precisely,” I said.

“Very good. And then,” continued the Baron, “as soon as you find yourself sufficiently *en rapport* with everybody—or I should say,” he added in correction, for the Baron shares fully in the present German horror of imported French words, “when you find yourself sufficiently in *enggeknupfterverwandtschaft* with everybody, you may then proceed to advance your peace terms. And now, my dear fellow,” said the Baron, with a touch of genuine cordiality, “one word more. Are you in need of money?”

“Yes,” I said.

“I thought so. But you will find that you need it less and less as you go on. Meantime, good-bye, and best wishes for your mission.”

Such was, such is, in fact, the mission with which I am accredited. I regard it as by far the most important mission with which I have been accredited by the Wilhelmstrasse.—Yet I am compelled to admit that up to the present it has proved unsuccessful. My attempts to carry it out have been baffled. There is something perhaps in the atmosphere of this republic which obstructs the working of high diplomacy. For over five months now I have been waiting, and willing to dine with the American Cabinet. They have not invited me. For four weeks I sat each night waiting in the J. hotel in Washington with my suit on ready to be asked. They did not come near me.

Nor have I yet received an intimation from the British Embassy inviting me to an informal lunch or to midnight supper with the Ambassador. Everybody who knows anything of the inside working of the international spy system will realize that without these invitations one can do nothing. Nor has the President of the United States given any sign. I have sent word to him, in cipher, that I am ready to dine with him on any day that may be convenient to both of us. He has made no move in the matter.

Under these circumstances an intrigue with any of the leaders of fashionable society has proved impossible. My attempts to approach them have been misunderstood—in fact, have led to my being invited to leave the J. hotel. The fact that I was compelled to leave it, owing to reasons that I cannot reveal, without

paying my account, has occasioned unnecessary and dangerous comment. I connect it, in fact, with the singular attitude adopted by the B. hotel on my arrival in New York, to which I have already referred.

I have therefore been compelled to fall back on revelations and disclosures. Here again I find the American atmosphere singularly uncongenial. I have offered to reveal to the Secretary of State the entire family history of Ferdinand of Bulgaria for fifty dollars. He says it is not worth it. I have offered to the British Embassy the inside story of the Abdication of Constantine for five dollars. They say they know it and knew it before it happened. I have offered, for little more than a nominal sum, to blacken the character of every reigning family in Germany. I am told that it is not necessary.

Meantime, as it is impossible to return to Central Europe, I expect to open either a fruit store or a peanut stand very shortly in this great metropolis. I imagine that many of my former colleagues will soon be doing the same!

## LOST IN NEW YORK—A VISITOR'S SOLILOQUY

Well! Well!

Whatever has been happening to this place, to New York? Changed? Changed since I was here in '86? Well, I should say so.

The hack-driver of the old days that I used to find waiting for me at the station curb, with that impossible horse of his—the hack-driver with his bulbous red face, and the nice smell of rye whiskey all 'round him for yards—gone, so it seems, forever.

And in place of him this—what is it they call it?—this taxi—with a clean-shaven cut-throat steering it. “Get in,” he says. Just that. He doesn't offer to help me or lift my satchel. All right, young man, I'm crawling in.

That's the machine that marks it, eh? I suppose they have them rigged up so they can punch up anything they like. I thought so—he hits it up to fifty cents before we start. But I saw him do it. Well, I can stand for it this time. I'll not be caught in one of these again.

The hotel? All right, I'm getting out. My hotel? But what is it they have done to it? They must have added ten stories to it. It reaches to the sky. But I'll not try to look to the top of it. Not with this satchel in my hand: no, sir! I'll wait till I'm safe inside. In there I'll feel all right. They'll know me in there. They'll remember right away my visit in the fall of '86. They won't easily have forgotten that big dinner I gave—nine people at a dollar fifty a plate, with the cigars extra. The clerk will remember *me*, all right. . . .

Know me? Not they. The *clerk* know me! How could he? For it seems now there isn't any clerk, or not as there used to be. They have subdivided him somehow into five or six. There is a man behind a desk, a majestic sort of man, waving his hand. It would be sheer madness to claim acquaintance with him. There is another with a great book, adjusting cards in it; and another, behind glass labeled “Cashier,” and busy as a bank; there are two with mail and telegrams. They are all too busy to know me.

Shall I sneak up near to them, keeping my satchel in my hand? I wonder, do they *see* me? *Can* they see me, a mere thing like me? I am within ten feet of them, but I am certain that they cannot see me. I am, and I feel it, absolutely invisible.

Ha! One has seen me. He turns to me, or rather he rounds upon me, with the words “Well, sir?” That, and nothing else, sharp and hard. There is none of the ancient kindly pretense of knowing my name, no reaching out a welcome hand and calling me Mr. Er—Er—till he has read my name upside down while I am writing it,

and can address me as a familiar friend. No friendly questioning about the crops in my part of the country. The crops, forsooth! What do these young men know about crops?

A room? Had I any reservation? Any which? Any reservation. Oh, I see, had I written down from home to say that I was coming. No, I had not because the truth is I came at very short notice. I didn't know till a week before that my brother-in-law—He is not listening. He has moved away. I will stand and wait till he comes back. I am intruding here; I had no right to disturb these people like this.

Oh, I can have a room at eleven o'clock. When it is which?—is vacated. Oh, yes, I see, when the man in it gets up and goes away. I didn't for the minute catch on to what the word——He has stopped listening.

Never mind, I can wait. From eight to eleven is only three hours, anyway. I will move about here and look at things. If I keep moving they will notice me less. Ha! books and newspapers and magazines—what a stack of them! Like a regular bookstore. I will stand here and take a look at some of them. Eh! what's that? Did I want to *buy* anything? Well, No, I hadn't exactly—I was just—Oh, I see, they're on *sale*. All right, yes, give me this one—fifty cents—all right—and this and these others. That's all right, miss, I'm not stingy. They always say of me up in our town that when I—She has stopped listening.

Never mind. I will walk up and down again with the magazines under my arm. That will make people think I live here. Better still if I could put the magazines in my satchel. But how? There is no way to set it down and undo the straps. I wonder if I could dare put it for a minute on that table, the polished one—? Or no, they wouldn't likely allow a man to put a bag *there*.

Well, I can wait. Anyway, it's eight o'clock and soon, surely, breakfast will be ready. As soon as I hear the gong I can go in there. I wonder if I could find out first where the dining-room is. It used always to be marked across the door, but I don't seem to see it. Darn it, I'll ask that man in uniform. If I'm here prepared to spend my good money to get breakfast I guess I'm not scared to ask a simple question of a man in uniform. Or no, I'll not ask *him*. I'll try this one—or no, he's busy. I'll ask this other boy. Say, would you mind, if you please, telling me, please, which way the dining-room—eh, what? Do I want which? The grill room or the palm room? Why, I tell you, young man, I just wanted to get some breakfast if it's—what? Do I want what? I didn't quite get that—à la carte? No, thanks—and, what's that? in the palm room? No, I just wanted—but it doesn't matter. I'll wait 'round here and look about till I hear the gong. Don't worry about me.

What's that? What's that boy shouting out—that boy with the tray? A call for

Mr. Something or Other—say, must be something happened pretty serious! A call for Mr.—why, that’s for me! Hullo! *Here I am! Here, it’s Me! Here I am*—wanted at the desk? all right, I’m coming, I’m hurrying. I guess something’s wrong at home, eh! *Here I am*. That’s my name. I’m ready.

Oh, a room. You’ve got a room for me. All right. The fifteenth floor! Good Heavens! Away up there! Never mind, I’ll take it. Can’t give me a bath? That’s all right. I had one.

Elevator over this way? All right, I’ll come along. Thanks, I can carry it. But I don’t see any elevator. Oh, this door in the wall? Well! I’m hanged. This the elevator! It certainly has changed. The elevator that I remember had a rope in the middle of it, and you pulled the rope up as you went, wheezing and clanking all the way up to the fifth floor. But this looks a queer sort of machine. How do you do—Oh, I beg your pardon. I was in the road of the door, I guess. Excuse me, I’m afraid I got in the way of your elbow. It’s all right, you didn’t get hurt—or, not bad.

Gee whiz! It goes fast. Are you sure you can stop it? Better be careful, young man. There was an elevator once in our town that—fifteenth floor? All right.

This room, eh! Great Scott, it’s high up. Say, better not go too near that window, boy. That would be a hell of a drop if a feller fell out. You needn’t wait. Oh, I see. I beg your pardon. I suppose a quarter is enough, eh?

Well, it’s a relief to be alone. But say, this is high up! And what a noise! What is it they’re doing out there, away out in the air, with all that clatter—building a steel building, I guess. Well, those fellers have their nerve, all right. I’ll sit further back from the window.

It’s lonely up here. In the old days I could have rung a bell and had a drink sent up to the room; but away up here on the fifteenth floor! Oh, no, they’d never send a drink clean up to the fifteenth floor. Of course, in the old days, I could have put on my canvas slippers and walked down to the bar and had a drink and talked to the bartender.

But of course they wouldn’t have a bar in a place like this. I’d like to go down and see but I don’t know that I’d care to ask, anyway. No, I guess I’ll just sit and wait. Some one will come for me, I guess, after a while.

If I were back right now in our town, I could walk into Ed. Clancey’s restaurant and have ham and eggs, or steak and eggs, or anything, for thirty-five cents.

Our town up home is a peach of a little town, anyway.

Say I just feel as if I’d like to take my satchel and jump clean out of that window. It would be a good rebuke to them.

But, pshaw! what would *they* care?

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## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

The layout of the poetry in *A CONDENSED INTERMINABLE NOVEL* was changed slightly, guessing on which lines had been wrapped originally.

On the first page, first quote, *meet this demand at the scource* has been assumed to be a printer's error, and *scource* has been changed to *source*. However, in a book this strange, it is conceivable that was incorrect!

pg 21: *the author and the reader love they* added comma after *reader*.

pg 61: *It used always to me marked* -> *It used always to be marked*.

[The end of *Follies in Fiction* by Stephen Leacock]