

A Romance of New York.

The habitués of a small French restaurant on the West Side were recently the guests of a humble wedding reception, which was the upshot of one of the most pathetic chance meetings that ever were brought about by the surging ocean of cosmopolitan life in this greatest of cosmopolitan cities.

The customers of the restaurant constitute one of the thousands of little worlds of which the American metropolis is made up, and for two or three months a Russian artist and a Polish piano teacher formed a separate microcosm in that world. The other frequenters of the place are Frenchmen, French Canadians, Swiss and Belgians, but Aleksey Alekseevitch Smirnov and Panna (Polish for Mrs.) Roushitzka are natives of Russia. It was not until they had taken their supper at the same table every evening for several weeks that each of them became aware of the other's knowledge of Russian, and the fact thrilled them both like the sudden discovery of a close blood relationship. But there was a far more interesting and, as it has since proved, a far more important revelation in store for them.

Panna Roushitzka was a woman of thirty-five, a well-preserved brunette, slender and stately, and with features somewhat irregular, but full of typical Polish grace. She had been educated partly in Russia and partly in Paris. She had come to New York after losing her husband, with a small soprano voice and with great musical aspirations. The voice had deserted her before her ambitions were on the road to realization, and heartbroken and penniless, she was driven to take up piano lessons as a means of livelihood.

Smirnov was a bachelor, some twenty-three years her senior, though he looked fully ten years younger than his age. Tall and wide awake, with a briar military carriage, a military steel-gray mustache and blond hair, unstreaked with silver save at the temples, he appeared in the prime of health and activity, while his never failing good humor and hearty, generous, genuinely Muscovite laughter made one feel in the presence of a young man of twenty-five. That had been his actual age when he left his native country, and after some three decades of peregrination in Western Europe he had at last settled down in New York. He is a jack of all trades and master of quite a few, and although free hand drawing is one of his strongest points he is clever enough with his pencil to meet the requirements of a small electro-engraving establishment, where he has steady employment at a modest salary.

The language of the restaurant is French, spoken with a dozen different accents. One day, however, when the soup was exceptionally satisfactory, and Smirnov, who is something of an epicure, was going off in ecstasies over it, a word of his native tongue escaped his lips. 'Slavny (capital) soup!' he murmured to himself, as he was bringing the second spoonful under his mustache.

The piano teacher started. 'What is that you said just now—' 'slavny soup?' she inquired, with a flush of agreeable surprise.

This was the way they came to speak Russian to each other, and from that evening on it was the language of their conversations at the restaurant table. Although there are many thousands of Russian-speaking immigrants in New York, the artist and the music teacher felt in the French restaurant like the only two Russians thrown together in a foreign country, and the little place which had hitherto drawn them to the quality of its suppers and its genial company now acquired a new charm for them.

They delighted to converse in Russian, and the privacy which it lent to their chats, in the midst of people who could not understand a word of what they were saying to each other, became the bond of a more intimate acquaintance between the two. They were reticent on the subject of their antecedents, but both were well read and traveled, and there was no lack of topics in things bearing upon Russia, Paris, current America life, the stage, art, literature and the like. The gallant old Russian was full of the most interesting information and anecdotes, and their friendship growing apace, he gradually came to introduce into his talks bits of autobiography, though they were all of the most modest nature, and he seemed to steer clear of a certain event which formed a memorable epoch in the story of his life.

Panna Roushitzka neither asked him questions nor saw fit to initiate him into some of the more intimate details of her own life, though by this time it was becoming clearer to her every day that her Russian friend was in love with her and about to approach her with a proposal which she was by no means inclined to accept. And yet, like many another woman under similar circumstances, she was flattered by his passion, and being drawn to him by the magnetism of sincere friendship, she had not the heart to cut their agreeable acquaintance short.

He procured some lessons for her, escorting her home after supper and took her to theatres and public lectures. All of which attention she would accept with secret self-commendation, each time vowing in her heart that on the following evening she would change her restaurant. Nevertheless, and perhaps unbeknown to herself, she even grew excited, and on one occasion, when she had expressed a desire to see Duse in *Megda*, and he remarked thereupon, with a protestation of impulsive apologies, that he has kept from the pleasure of taking her to the performance by a previous engagement, her face fell, and for five minutes she did not answer his questions and witticisms except

in right earnestly. This engaged well for him, he thought. He did not yield, but at the next week they took together he popped the question in a rather original way.

They stood in front of the house in which she had her room. He had bid her good-night and was about to dash his hat with that dashing sweep of his which makes him ten years younger, when he checked himself, and said, as though in jest: 'Is it not foolish, Panna Roushitzka?'

'What is foolish?' she queried, without a shadow of presentiment as to what was coming.

'Why, the way we go on living separately, each without what could justly be called a home. I am madly in love with you, Panna Roushitzka, and I feel like devoting my life to your happiness.'

She stood eyeing the door of a house across the street and made no response.

'Panna Roushitzka?' he implored her tremulously.

'I'll give you my answer to-morrow,' she whispered.

'Mrs. Roushitzka has not come yet, has she? Any letters for me?' Smirnov asked the next evening, as he entered the little restaurant with his usual blitheness. Like some others of the customers he received his mail at the restaurateur's address.

The Frenchman handed him a letter when he opened it he read, in Russian, the following:

'Much respected Aleksey Alekseevitch—I am the unhappiest woman in the world today. I confess I was not blind to the nature of your feelings toward me, but

exaltation and commiseration to her. He was unconsciously offensive and sentimental, and as if by way of bidding her melancholy farewell he launched out, describing his past, she listening to his disconsolate accents with heart-wracking interest.

'I know it is foolish for me to obtrude my personal reminiscences upon you. Why should you be bored with the hundred details of the life of a man who is a perfect stranger to you. Yet I cannot help speaking of it at this minute. I feel sheepish, like a schoolboy, but it somehow relieves my overburdened heart. You will excuse me.'

She was burning to offer some word of encouragement, to assure him of her profound respect and friendship, and of her interest in everything he had to say, but her tongue seemed grown fast to her palate and she could not utter a syllable.

'It was many years ago that I was torn from my dear native soil and from a splendid career,' he proceeded, egged on by the very taciturnity of his interlocutor. 'I was a young fellow and an officer in the army then, with a most promising future before me. It was during the Polish insurrection of the early sixties. My regiment was stationed at the Government city of N.'

The panna gave a start, and a volley of questions trembled on the tip of her tongue, but she somehow could not bring herself to interrupt him.

'I had been recently graduated from the military school, and that was my first commission,' he went on. 'I had many friends in the regiment, and among them a young Polish officer named Staukevitch.'



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mere mark of interest in a thrilling story.

'Well,' he resumed, 'I did not, of course, utter the terrible word, but at the very moment I was to do so I fell on the ground in a feigned swoon. My place was instantly taken by another officer and I was since then branded as a coward, and had no choice but to resign my commission and to become the rolling stone that I have been ever since.'

He went on narrating some of his subsequent experiences in foreign countries.

my poor father has always been my ideal of a husband, and, will you believe it, I never gave up a vague sort of hope that he would be mine. Your loving
"MARUSIA."
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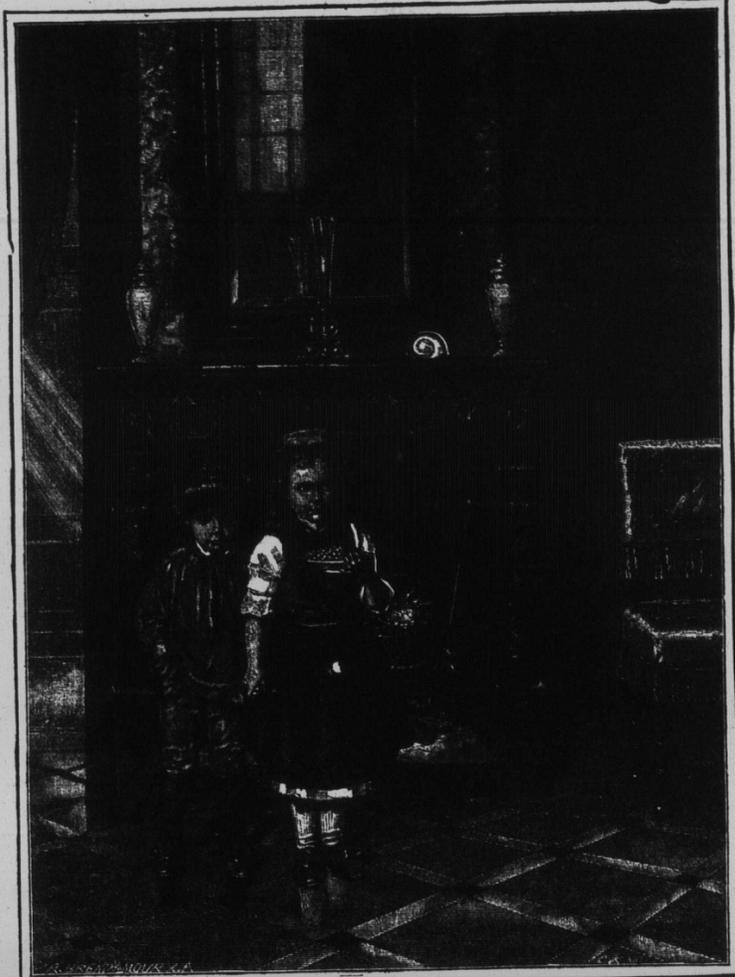
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I hereby certify that Paine's Celery Compound has made a well man of Thomas R. Baxter.
JAMES H. THORNE,
Justice of the Peace.

Nothing Remarkable.
Smith—Hear about the fire over on the west side this morning? Nine persons barely escaped with their lives. Remarkable, wasn't it?
Brown—I fail to see anything very remarkable about it.
Smith—Why not?
Brown—Well, suppose they had escaped without their lives—then it would have been truly remarkable.



"COME ALONG, DON'T BE AFRAID."

was too much of a woman and an egoist to forgo the pleasure of your very flattering kindness to me. Forgive me, I pray you, dear Aleksey Alekseevitch; but my answer must be of a negative character. I have been crying like a baby since last night for having led you into a false position. Do forgive me. Your sincere friend,
'MARIA ROUSHITZKA.'

'Do you forgive me? I beg you again and again.'

Smirnov had had too many successes and failures in life to let this defeat hurt his pride deeply. But he had overcome with a poignant sense of loneliness, coupled with a cruel-consciousness of his old age. At the same time he sincerely regretted the pain he had caused the widow, and out of sympathy for her as well as for the opportunity of seeing her, he secured another interview with her, which took place in one of the remote nooks of Tompkins Square.

'I wish to reassure you, Panna Roushitzka,' he said gravely, 'and to restore peace to your mind, I love you, and your letter leaves me more wretched and desolate than I ever felt before, but believe me your happiness is dearer to me than my own, and since you find that it would be disturbed by your marrying me I am resigned to my fate.'

The panna was overjoyed and thanked him heartily for this friendship, and yet his ready surrender, the ease with which he was getting reconciled to her refusal nettled her.

However, he did not seem as light-hearted as he was affecting to be, and the perception of it was a source of mixed

Panna Roushitzka remained petrified. After a while she made out to enquire: 'Staukevitch, did you say?'

'Why, have you heard of him or some of his family?' Smirnov asked, eagerly. 'No I am simply interested in what you are relating. Proceed please.'

'Well, he was the most delightful fellow in the whole lot of us, but he did not know how to take care of himself, and paid his life for it, poor boy. His heart was with the insurgents, and I knew it and begged him to be guarded, but he was too much of a patriot to allow the instinct of self preservation to get the better of his revolutionary sympathies. One day when the Cossacks had looted the house of a Polish nobleman and taken the owner and his family prisoners, my friend gave loud utterances to his overbrimming feelings in the Officers Club, cursing the Government and vowing vengeance.

You must have heard how strict things were in those days. The city of N—was in a state of siege, martial law prevailed, and the most peaceful citizens were afraid of their own shadows. Well, poor dear Staukevitch was court-martialed and sentenced to be shot within twenty-four hours by a line of these soldiers from the very company of which he had been in command. And who was to take charge of the shooting and utter the fatal word to the soldiers, but I, his best friend, who was ready to die for him.'

Smirnov said it with a grim sort of composure, and then broke off abruptly and fell into a muse.

'Well?' the widow demanded, in a strange voice, which he mistook for a

but the widow did not hear him. All at once she interrupted him.

'Don't tell me about that, pray. Better tell me more about that friend of yours—Staukevitch,' and, succumbing to an overflow of emotion, she burst out, sobbingly: 'I know you. I have your photograph. Staukevitch was my father!'

'Ma ma Marusia! Is that you?' the old man shrieked, jumping to his feet and seizing her by both hands. 'Dear little Marusia! Why, when you were a morsel of a thing I used to play with you.'

'I know,' she rejoined, 'and now that you say it I can recognize your face by the faded old portrait I have in my album. You were photographed together with my unhappy papa. Mamma left me the picture. I did not remember your name, but I heard the story from mother when I was a child, and since then I have held the portrait dear for your sake as well as papa's. Of course it never occurred to me that it was you, but now the identity of it is as clear as day to me.'

She invited him to her lodgings, where she introduced him to her landlady as the best friend of her dead father. They had a long and hearty talk over the portrait and about the persons and things it brought to the old man's mind. And on the following evening, when he came to the French restaurant for his supper, he found there a letter which read as follows:
'Dear Aleksey Alekseevitch—It was not yourself, but an utter stranger, that I refused the other day. I have loved you my whole life without knowing you. The handsome officer who ruined himself for



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