

By MARVIN DANA

Author of
"History of General Custer"
"Wars of the Century," etc.

Illustrations by
WLADYSLAW T. BENDA



The Secret Name

A MAN mighty of body, mighty of power, the autocrat of his province. Ivan the Terrible, they called him.

But that was only between friend and friend, with the perilous words whispered lest a spy overhear. For the Prince Essipoff was a savage ruler, and a suspicious; and his hired ears were long and many—witness the knout and Siberia for those who had talked overmuch. For his oppressions the governor was hated widely and deeply; for his power and for his malevolence, he was feared more widely, more deeply. Most of all, his wife feared him; and with most reason, since she was nearest him. But she did not hate him, because the church forbids hate, save sin, and the Princess was devout. One comfort she had, however, and the life of it was warm in her bosom always; she loathed her husband. The church says no word against loathing. So, the Princess loathed her lord and master with a fierceness that was her sole pleasure through all the first year of her married life. Inasmuch as she was at pains not to seek information as to the status of such loathing from a discriminating church, her conscience was at peace.

But loathing became a secondary matter, a dull thing of habit, or a flare before some particular atrocity, after the child came. Now, at last, love entered her heart, and abode triumphant. There was only one flaw in the perfection of the boy; his name, Ivan, which perforce reminded her of the father. This she glossed by a secret christening in solitude. Stephen was the name she chose, the name she whispered fondly over her son, mingling it with kisses. Doubtless, the church, had it known, would have rebuked her sternly for thus usurping the sacred rite of its priests: it must have condemned her yet more harshly, had it known that, as she whispered the secret name and gave her kisses in the sigh, her mind was filling with a passionate memory of the young officer in the Imperial Guards, thrilling with tender yearning toward him who had won her heart ere the splendors of a Prince awed covetous parents to the sacrifice of her happiness.

To-day, the Prince felt his thin blood warming from the winter wine of the air. The severity of his usual crown was relaxed. His mood was so genial that he did not trouble to kick aside his wife's Pomeranian, which, by some fault of instinct, remained within reach as he strode into the boudoir.

"We shall drive across to dine with my cousin," he announced.

The Prince spoke with a cadence of rough tenderness, for he had pride in his wife and child. It was not love that moved him. God forbid that we profane the world! He loved nothing on earth or of hell—with heaven he had no concern at all—except himself. But his vanity had taken note that Vera Potemskina was famed as the chief beauty through three provinces. Thereupon, for his pride's sake, he purchased her from venal parents, decked her with richest robes, with rarest furs, with jewels of price, and set her before the world as the mistress of his palace, gloating greedily over her loveliness and over

the envy of his fellow men. It flattered him, too, to ape the martial Lothario, to pose as the master of a heart as well as of a person. Wherefore, he oftenest spoke her gently, even when there were no witnesses by. She, poor

child! had learned that she must respond with some similitude of affection, albeit her heart retched at his presence.

On his entrance now, the Princess turned from the window by which she had been standing. She was as beautiful as a flower, yet without any fragility. Her slender form curved in a movement of ease that evidenced abundant bodily vigor. Grace and exquisiteness, superb health of flesh and of soul, radiated from each detail of her personality. The Prince regarded this, his best possession, with uxorious approval. His conceit preened itself anew.

"As you wish, Ivan," she answered, simply.

"And we shall take the boy with us," the husband continued. Pride became exultant over the thought that he would exhibit his sturdy heir to the jealous discomfiture of his childless cousin.

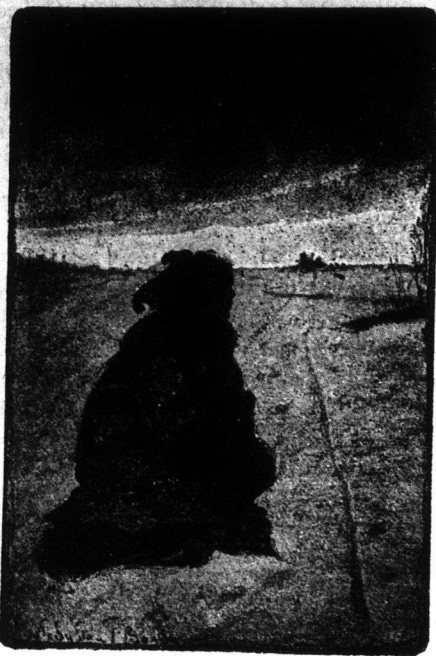
The Princess, however, dared to be mutinous:

"No," she ventured, with some show of spirit in her voice. "The cold would be too severe for the little one. And, too, the journey would be too long for him—and it would be so late for him when we returned! No, he must not go."

The Prince preserved his temper admirably in the face of such audacious rebellion against a decree.

"Ivan will go with us," he said, quietly. There was that note in his voice which his wife had learned to dread. She realized that resistance must prove futile, and held her peace. But the mother-love was troubled with fear. The loathing shut within her bosom burned hotly.

Nevertheless, the Princess forgot sorrow and dread, when it was come time for the journey. A physical exhilaration eddied in her blood. She murmured the secret name gaily to the child in her arms, as the sleigh swept forward. A radiant pleasure shone in her eyes, the while they scanned the vista of shimmering white, in which myriad points of color blazed the iridescence of a powdered rainbow. A cloudless heaven bent its arch of lapis lazuli, from which the sun burned gold. The runners of the sleigh creaked noisily in the intense cold. The crumpled snow protested loudly against the fleet movement over it. The three horses abreast were a-tremble with the joy of life, and fled their fastest in friendly rivalry, the coned steam from their nostrils flaunting wide. The bells from the teluga jangled merrily the rhythm of the flight. Snug in her sables the Princess held the child close, and murmured to him often, in unaccustomed delight. For the moment, since her husband had no heed for aught save the wild frolic of the horses, she was wholly glad—gay, as was her right of years. . . . Only, at last, a thought of the return by night came to her, and she shivered. [Continued on Page 8.]



She sat up then, feebly—