

round. Ruric Brassoﬀ, by his side, leaped back astonished. For a moment the young journalist was dazed. It was the voice of the gentlemanly man who had lodgings on the same floor; and beside him stood the good-humoured commercial person who travelled in tea, and whom Ruric Brassoﬀ had seen at Smolensk.

In the background, half a dozen of the soldiers in plain clothes with blue spectacles or light canes came tumbling through the wall. But they were armed with short swords now, and held in their hand regulation revolvers.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW.

It was a minute or two before Mr. Hayward—or Ruric Brassoﬀ, as you will—stunned and surprised by this sudden invasion, had a clear enough head to take in what had happened. Then, as he gazed about him slowly, with one soldier on each side, he felt his arms being helplessly pinioned behind him, he began to realize all was up, and to see how the intruders had entered so noiselessly.

The cupboard door on the opposite side from the cabinet now stood wide open. But the cupboard itself, as he could see to his surprise, had no back or partition; it opened direct into the adjoining room, and through the temporary doorway thus formed he could catch vistas of still more soldiers in civilian costume, waiting the word of command, and all armed with revolvers. In a moment he recognised how they had managed this capture. The soldiers must have sawn through the wooden back of two adjacent cupboards beforehand, and at the exact right moment noiselessly removed the whole intervening woodwork, shelves and contents and all, so as to give access direct to Fomenko's apartment. More too! The two principals must have listened through the key-hole of the outermost door to their entire conversation. One flash of intuition sufficed to show him that Alexis Belietoff's myrmidons now knew exactly who he was and