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# BY CELIA'S ARBOUR.

## A NOVEL.

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"THE GOLDEN BUTTERFLY," &c.

### CHAPTER XXV.

#### WASSIELEWSKI'S SECRET.

The Polish newspapers at one time, and until they were ordered to desist, used to print the words Past and Future in very large capitals, while they spoke of the present in the smallest possible type. That was Wassielewski's method. The past was radiant with Polish glory and Polish struggles set in a black background of Russian atrocities. Like one of the new-fashioned "Arrangements in Brown," the details were smudged. The Future, after a good deal more of fighting and bloodshed, was also to be a chronicle of great glory. As for the present it did not exist, it was a dream.

For himself he was almost the last of the Poles whom I remembered as a child in the old black barrack. The barrack itself was gone, and the Poles dispersed. Those who were left lived about the town singly. Wassielewski alone among them still nourished thoughts of revenge and patriotism. He was certainly the only man of all the exiled Poles capable of giving life to the cause in a hopeless effort, where the only object was to keep alive the spark of rebellion. He also never flagged or lost heart, because he knew what he had to give, and he knew what he was going to get. I was used to his fanaticism. If he met me when I was a child, he was wont to say, parenthetically, "Ladislav, Poland is not dead, but sleeping," and then pass on without waiting for an answer. He was like a bird which has but one tune; his one idea was the resuscitation of his country. Sometimes he would stop me in the street, and take off his hat, standing like a prophet of Israel with his deep-set eyes, his long white locks, and his passionate look, keeping me beside him while he whispered in earnest tones, "Listen, Ladislav Pulaski, there is a stir in her limbs. She will spring to her feet again, and call upon her children to arise and fight. Then let all the Poles scattered over the broad face of the earth, the Poles of Galicia, the Poles of the Kingdom, join together. We are the children of those who fought with Kosciuszko, and we are the grandchildren of those who followed Sobieski. If we die, the tradition of hate will be preserved. Let us die, if Heaven so will it."

I was therefore trained in the traditional hatred of Russia, almost as much as if I had been brought up in Warsaw among those Polish ladies who go in mourning all their days, and refuse to dance or have any joy. But my own feeling was of the passive kind, which is not fertile in action. By temperament as well as physique I was inclined to the contemplative life. If I regarded the Muscovite with patriotic hatred, I was by no means prepared to leave my own ease, and put on the armour of a soldier. Besides, to all intents I was an Englishman, with English ideas, English prejudices; and the Poles were foreigners to me, although I was of Polish blood, and—I was a cripple.

Wassielewski saw with pity that his most fiery denunciations, his most highly-coloured narratives of blood failed to rouse me to the level of his own enthusiasm, and therefore the old conspirator had recourse to his last and most desperate measure. If that failed I was hopeless. He told me the secret that had been religiously kept from me by the Captain, Mr. Broughton, and the few who knew it—the tragedy of my birth.

I wish he had not told me; I ought to have been spared the bitter knowledge; it was with kindness that it had been kept from me. For the story fired my blood, and maddened me for a while with the thirst of vengeance.

It was about four o'clock one afternoon—a week before Leonard's return, that I went to Wassielewski's lodgings—at his own request. I went unwillingly, because it pained me to see him so eager, and to feel myself so lukewarm over the wrongs of my country; but I went.

His one room was furnished with a narrow bed, a chair, a table, and a music-stand. A crucifix was hanging on the wall—Wassielewski was a Catholic—a sword hung below it; at the head of the bed was a portrait in water colours, which I had never seen before, of a young lady, dressed in the fashion of the Thirties. She had a sweet, calm face, and her eyes which fell upon me when I entered the room seemed to follow me about. They were large eyes full of thought and love.

"It is your mother, Ladislav Pulaski," said the old man slowly. "Your sainted mother, one of the martyrs of Poland. Claudia, wife of Roman Pulaski."

My mother! I who never knew a mother, and hardly ever gave her memory one filial thought. A strange yearning came over me as I gazed at the face, and saw it blurred through the tears that crowded in my eyes.

"My mother? Wassielewski, why have you never shown this to me before?"

"Because I waited for the moment to come when I could give you her portrait, tell you her story, and send you forth to kill Russians in revenge. Sit down, poor boy. I have much to say, and nothing that is not sad."

I sat down with strange forebodings. But I took the portrait of my mother from the wall. "You will give this to me, Wassielewski?" "When I die, or when we go together to Poland."

Ah! The tender sweetness of the face; the kind face; the noble face. Ah! the good and true eyes that saw her son after so many years; so bright, and yet so sad. For they had the sadness which seems to lie in the eyes of all whom death takes young. Death! How did my mother die? And while I looked I felt that the poor old man who loved her so much—or else he could not have been so careful for me—was looking with me in her face, and dropping tears upon my head.

"Do not tell me, Wassielewski—not now—if it pains you so much."

"That will pain you more," he groaned. "Day and night for twenty years it has ever been before my eyes. I was only her humble friend and servant. You are her son. How shall I tell you the shameful story?"

"Sit so, Ladislav Pulaski, with your eyes upon the face of your dead mother—perhaps she will smile upon you as she does upon me sometimes in moonlit nights when I lie awake and listen for the call from Poland. So—while I try to tell you how she died, and how your father died."

His voice was calm and steady, but his eyes were wild. I looked at him no more, but kept my eyes upon the picture, awed and expectant.

He took his violin from the case, and played a few bars walking up and down the room.

"That is a Polish waltz. We used to dance a great deal in Poland before 1830. We were Russian subjects, it is true, but we were happier than our brothers who were under Prussia. Some of us were young, too—not I. I am seventy-five now, and I am talking of events which took place only five-and-twenty years ago. But I was not too old to join in the dances of the people. And I was happy in my stewardship of the Lady Claudia. She was an only child, like your father, Roman Pulaski, and I was the steward of her father, and had special charge of the young lady. There is a girl in this place; I often see you with her."

"Celia Tyrrell?"

"Yes—perhaps. She has the eyes of your mother and her sweet face. I think she must be good like her."

"Lady Claudia was not proud. We went about together, her father and she and I, to all the peasants' festivals. I was but a peasant born, but she, it is true;—she was a great lady. When we had a wedding it lasted a week, and we danced all night; we wore our national dress; we sang our national songs—this was one of them."

He played a quaint delightful air, full of sweetness and character.

"We ate our *bigos* and *chobotnicy*; we laughed and joked. And with the Muscovites we were friends. You would have been a happy child, Ladislav Pulaski, could you have been brought up among your own people, and learned their customs—such as they were. Now, it is all changed. The national costume is forbidden; we may not sing the Polish hymns—Listen to one. Ah! you cannot understand the words."

He played a hymn with soft and melancholy cadences, crooning rather than singing the words, which I could not, as he said, understand.

"We dance no longer; even the young Polish girls, who loved dancing more than any girls in the world, dance no more; we go in mourning all our days;—even the young Polish girls, whose dress was so gay and bright, wear black all their lives; we laugh no more, but sit with weeping eyes; we go to church, not to pray for good harvests and joy, but for the hour of revenge."

He paused for a moment.

"That is what you know already. Up to the age of nineteen, my young lady was as happy as the day is long. She was as happy as God ever allowed any human being to be. For when she was eighteen she was married—to your father."

"Roman Pulaski was worthy of her—he, alone among men. He was of a good descent; he was as rich, he was as handsome, he was as strong and brave as she was true and good. They were married and you were born—a strong and straight-backed boy—a true Pulaski, with curly brown hair, and plenty of it, when you were but a little baby. And who so happy as your mother? All day long she held you in her arms; all day and all night; it made the tears come into my eyes only to see how pleased and happy she was with her child."

"That lasted two years. Then came the insurrection. Of course, your father joined it. How could he keep out of it? And the Lady Claudia wove silk banners, and brought her jewels to buy arms, and gave all she had to the brave rebels."

"One day, after three months of fighting, I came back—alone. Your father disappeared; our men were all killed; and the Russians were marching upon the castle to destroy it. I remembered how, once, they set fire to a house full of Poles, and killed all who tried to escape."

So I hurried your mother away; we carried the child between us, and I escaped into the woods, where we wandered backwards and forwards through the bitter cold night, and watched at nightfall the red glow in the sky, which marked our burning castle. So you no longer had a house, you and the Lady Claudia."

"In the morning finding that the Cossacks were gone, I took her home to our village. It was a place full of women and children; not a man left in it; only a few boys of ten and old men of seventy; but because there were no men I thought she would be safe. She was brave—always brave—and in her pale face there was no thought of repentance. They weighed the cost, and joined the losing side. Her husband gone—perhaps dead; her house destroyed; nothing left in the world but her year-old child. Yet she never lamented. Only, the second day, she sent me away. 'Old friend,' she said. 'Go—and, if you can, bring me news of Roman Pulaski. If he is dead we will mourn for him as those who mourn for the dead in Christ.'"

"I left her—in safety, as I thought—I crept cautiously through the woods, from village to village, and asked of the women and men in each place for news. For a time I could learn nothing, but one day I found a newspaper, and read that Roman Pulaski was not dead, but a prisoner."

"It would have been better for him had he died in battle. You have heard—I have told you over and over again—how the Czar Nicholas hated the very name of Pole; how there was no cruelty practised by his officers, no severity too great, towards the Poles that it should displease him. But the case of one who stood so high as your father was too important to be decided upon even by the Archduke Constantine's favorite, General Kuruta. Roman Pulaski had been a favourite in the St. Petersburg Court; he had attracted the notice of the Empress, who hoped to attach him to the Russian cause; his rebellion incensed the Czar more than the defection of all the other Poles put together. Imagine, therefore, his satisfaction at having his enemy in his own power. At first he ordered that the prisoner should be shot. This order was immediately afterwards commuted, as he called it, to hard labor in the mines of Siberia for life. Which was called the Czar's clemency."

"Even the Russians were appalled at such a sentence, which condemned a gentleman to the lowest degradation of companionship with criminals. They drew up a petition; it was represented that the Count Roman Pulaski was young and hot-headed; they said he had been drawn into the rebellion by disaffected advisers and by misrepresentations. The Czar refused to receive the petition. Then the Empress herself, his own wife, threw herself on her knees at his feet and implored mercy."

"You ask mercy for a Pole," he cried. "Then this is what you shall get for him." He took the paper containing the sentence, and added to it, in his own handwriting, "And the prisoner shall walk the whole way."

"Walk?—walk the whole way from Warsaw to Siberia?"

"Walk. Think of it quietly, if you can for a while. Try to understand something of what it means. To be one of a gang of murderers and common thieves, because they did not allow him to perform his journey with brother Poles; to step side by side, manacled together at the wrist, with one of the worst of those criminals; to sleep with him at night on a sloping bench; to eat and drink with him; never to be separated from him; to be driven along the never-ending road by Cossacks armed with whips; to endure every indignity of blows and curses; to have no rest by day, no repose by night; to eat the vilest and commonest of food; to spend the winter—it was in the winter that he started—pacing for ever along the white and frozen snow; to be on the road when spring returned; to be still walking, always with the thieves and murderers, in the glaring summer."

"Take a map, measure the distance from Warsaw to Moscow, from Moscow to Astrakhan, from Astrakhan to Tobolski, and thence to the mines. You will say to yourself, 'Fifteen miles a day; that makes—how many months of walking? Behind him a wife, young and beautiful as the day; a boy not yet old enough to do more than look in his father's face, and cry, 'Papa—Wassielewski!'"

"Wife and boy gone—happiness gone forever—no hopes—before him the long road with the horrible daily and nightly companions, and after the road. Perhaps after the road the worst part of the sentence; for in the road there is change, in the mines none; day after day the same work; day after day the same hopeless toil; day after day the same gloom; day after day the same wretched fellow prisoners; the same face; the death in life."

"They used to go mad, some of them; they used to commit suicide; some would murder a soldier or a gaoler for the mere excitement of being flogged to death. Some tried to run away. It was fortunate for those who made their escape in winter, because when night fell they lay down in the snow—out on the free white snow, which covered them up and hid them after the cold winter wind had fanned them to sleep, and when they were found in the spring they were dead corpses covered over with tall-grasses and pitiful flowers. Those who neither went mad, nor were knouted, nor were frozen to death, nor committed suicide, dropped away and died day by day, like your father, and for the last few months of their lives, God, more merciful than the Czar, made them stupid."

Wassielewski stopped. I looked up at him

with beating heart and flashing eyes. His own eyes, deep set and stern, were glowing with the intensity of his wrath, and the red gash on his cheek was a long white line.

"Go on, Wassielewski," I cried. "tell me more."

"I have thought upon that journey," he continued in a calm voice, "till I seem to know it every step. And he was so tall, so brave, so handsome."

"News came, later on—not for a long time—about him. More than half the convicts died upon the road, the man to whom he was manacled threw himself down upon the road one day, and refused to make another step; they flogged him till he could not have walked if he had tried; but he still refused, and then they flogged him again until he died. That was part of the Czar's clemency. Your father was one of the few who survived the journey, and reached Siberia in safety. He sent home by a sure hand a little wooden cross, on which he had carved—the names of Claudia his wife, and Ladislav his boy."

"Stop—stop! Wassielewski, I cannot bear it."

"I shall not stop," he replied, "you must bear this, and more. There is worse to hear. Do you think it is for nothing that I tell you all these things? The cross was to show his wife that he was alive, and that he still thought of them. But when it arrived, his wife was dead, and the child was in exile."—he opened a little cabinet which stood upon a chest of drawers—"the cross is here. I have kept it for you."

It was a roughly-carved cross, eighteen inches long, of a dark-grained wood, a Latin cross. On the longer limb was carved in letters rude, but deeply cut in the wood, "Roman to Claudia," and on the transverse limb the single word, "Ladislav."

"See from his grave your father calls you."

"From his grave?"

"He died like all the prisoners in the mines, of hard work, of despair, of misery, and neglect. He could write no letters, he could receive none; he had no longer anything to hope for in this world. Roman Pulaski died. Grey, deaf, and blind, my poor old master died. He was not thirty years of age."

"When he was dead lying news was published in the papers by the command of Nicholas. They said that he had been released from the mines, that he had voluntarily entered as a private soldier in a Caucasian regiment, that he had fallen in action. Lies! Lies! No one believed them. As if Roman Pulaski would not have written to Poland for news of his wife and son; as if he would not have flown along the road as soon as he obtained his liberty, to learn if they were dead or living. No! In the darkest and deepest mine, with the foulest thieves of a Muscovite crowd, Roman Pulaski lived out his wretched years, and died his wretched death. And you are his son."

"Before you go home, remember this: he died for Poland; his death is not forgotten; for fifty generations, if need be, the story shall be told of the Czar's revenge."

He paused for a moment.

### CHAPTER XXVI.

#### THE MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS.

"I have more to tell you," he went on, wiping the beads from his brow wearily. "More to tell you, more that I cannot tell without the bitterest pain, and that will sadden all your after years. But you must learn it, you must learn it, before you become a true child of Poland."

He leant over me and kissed my head.

"Poor boy! I thought at one time that you might be spared. The good Captain said to me when you went away to live with him, 'Let him not know, Wassielewski, let him never know.' I said, 'He shall never know, Captain; no one shall tell him;—unless his country ask for him. Then he shall know, because the knowledge will fire the blood, and make him fight like ten men.' We are all like ten men when we rise to fight the Muscovite. So I promised and I prayed of a night to the Lady Claudia, who is now a saint in Heaven, and hears what sinners ask, that she would guard her son from harm. 'Because,' I said on my knees, 'he is not a strong man like your husband or your servant; he is afflicted, he is feeble, he is a boy of peace and fond of music, and he has made good friends.' I knelt by the bed, and I looked on that face. The face changed as I prayed, and sometimes, by candlelight, or by moonlight, I could see the eyes of my mistress shining upon me, or see her lips move as if to speak or to smile. And always happy. Ladislav, happy are those who forgive."

"But we cannot forgive," I said.

"Never, boy, never. We are God's instruments of wrath. And now the time has come, and Poland asks for you. So I must tell you, Ladislav," he added, pitifully, "I must tell you, in addition, how your mother died. You will think over the story every day for the rest of your life. And you will understand, henceforth, how Russia may become the Protector of Christians—out of her own country."

"It happened while I was away, looking for certain news of your father. I left her in safety, as I thought, among the women and children. Even I did not know how far the Czar could carry his revenge. Not even the little children were safe. An order came from St. Petersburg that all orphan Polish children—all those whose fathers had fallen in the insurrection—all who were a burden to the State—should be carried away and brought up in military schools. That was a master-stroke. The little Poles were to become Russians, to fight their brothers."