FEDORA

BY VICTONIEN SARDOU

CHAPTER I

"Two went in, and one came out."

It was a man, bending over some footprints in the snow, who said this. He said it, not aloud, but mutteringly under his breath and with a concurrent growl of discontent.

The way of it was this: The man's name was Gretch—whether it was Gretch this or Gretch that, or this Gretch or that Gretch does not matter. They could have told you at the police headquarters, where he belonged, for there they had his description, tooth and toe-nail, as the saying is, and knew more about him than he did himself.

He was especially detailed to look after the Nihilists, but he had a sort of general commission against evil in any guise, and that was precisely why he growled discontentedly under his breath at sight of the footprints in the snow.

He had been working hard all day, and well into the night, and was on his way home, supposing him to have a home, to enjoy the sleep he had earned, and here of a sudden some obtrusive footprints must thrust themselves under his eyes—a pale-blue eye, set in a broad, sallow face, overhung by shaggy, red brows. The eye was the last thing one would notice in his face; but it saw a great deal, too.

It had seen these footprints where another would have passed them unheeding. Gretch would have been very glad not to have seen them, but he had, and therefore he stopped and studied them. At first discontentedly, and afterward with interest.

The spot where he stood and examined the footprints was at the entrance to the park of a nobleman, who was not in St. Petersburg. Gretch, having spent some time in collecting evidence against the nobleman in question, was naturally curious to know who could have been in the park, the gate of which he now saw open for the first time in over two years.

The park was not precisely in the heart of the city, but it was well within its limits, though large enough and well enough wooded to be lonely. Gretch looked at the footprints and summed up the visible evidence.

"Two went in, and one came out both gentlemen; the gate open for the first time in two years; owner away, and—well, I don't believe he's one of them; gate left open; no other way out." the lock of the gate. It had evid-

He stepped carefully over the prints in the snow, and examined ently been opened with a key. Gretch grunted, and bent his head in a manner that indicated that he was listening for some explanatory noise from within the park. None came, and he shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, then, I will go find out." he said to himself.

It was a tingling cold night, with a clear sky, and a bright moon, and it was as easy to distinguish the prints as if it had been daylight. Gretch followed them with no great show of caution, but he had his wits about him, particularly after he was led into the shadow of some large trees.

The tracks wound in among the trees in a way that showed a certain familiarity with the park, and Gretch had begun to consider the advisability of being less certain in his dictum that the owner of the park was not one of the persons who had entered it, when he turned into an open space and stopped short.

"Bah! only that," he ejaculated.

It was a small thing to take him out of his way and rob him of just so much sleep. Only a man lying face down in the snow.

Probably there had been a duel; for the snow was trampled all about the middle of the open space and a sword blade glistened by the side of the fallen man.

Well, the man lay there, and Gretch was bound to go to him since he had found him. He went over and knelt by him, taking him by the shoulder.

"Come, then," he said, "do you find it so comfortable that you lie here? Or are you dead? As good as dead, that is certain. What a fool! If I had such clothes—such furs I would put myself in the way of no man's sword. Well, then, turn over and let us see how much life is left in you."

Gretch was not very sympathetic. Why should he have been? The man was nothing to him. Now, particularly, he was only a "case," and not even an interesting one.

Gretch turned him over as if he had been a sheep—the little life that was left in the body robbing it of the respect which is the due of death. A feeble groan passed the lips of the man, and Gretch looked at his face.

Something familiar in it made him look a second time with a startled expression in his pale eyes, and then lean over and study the face anxiously.

"If he would but open his eyes!"

He lifted the man's head gently—he was full of solicitude now, and bent over to catch a glimpse of the face in its natural position.

"A bad business! Vladimir! What will the general do? What shall I do? I might carry him out. No, I might injure him, and he may be saved. Mr. Vladimir. Bah! he can't hear me. Well, I will go for help."

He put the head gently down in the snow, and ran with all speed to the gate. There he placed to his lips the whistle which the Russian police always carry, and blew a call for assistance.

There were instantly, one, two, three answers, and he blew broken calls to guide the men to him. They came at a run, one after the other. He showed his badge of office, but wasted no words.

"Go for a carriage at once. A dying man is to be moved," he said to the first; to the second, "Get Dr. Loreck, and take him to General—no, that is too far. You know where Vladimir Boroff's rooms are? Yes. Then take the doctor there. Then go to the general, and tell him his son is severely wounded. Hurry!" To the third he said, "Come with me."

Together they returned to the dying man, and lifted him as carefully as they could, and carried him to the gate. The carriage came almost as they reached there and they put him in, and were driven away.

In twenty minutes the young man way lying on his bed, and the doctor was examining him. Gretch stood by and waited for the verdict, though he did not doubt what it would be.

"The wound is fatal," said the doctor. "He may live three hours—not longer. Where is the general?"

"He has been sent for."

"How did this happen? Who did it?"

"I do not know."

The doctor looked at Gretch, shrugged his shoulders, and asked no more questions. Gretch did not look communicative.

CHAPTER II

The Princess Fedora Romanoff was the widow of the Prince Romanoff. To suit her parents she had married the prince when she was a young girl, and he an old man. He had died, and left her pretty nearly the richest widow in St. Petersburg.

The beauty which had attracted the old prinec had not waned. Between eighteen and twenty-four there is not time for that. Her beauty had developed. So had her wit. She was the sprightliest, the most beautiful, and nearly the richest woman in the Russian capital—and that is saying a great deal.

If a woman is beautiful, she is beautiful, and that is enough; but yet it may not be amiss to say that she was of the blue-eyed, milk and rose flesh, tawny haired sort. A very easy woman for a man to love.

She had married the prince to please her parents; she was going to marry Vladimir Boroff to please herself—and Vladimir. Of course this was not taking into account the sword-thrust.

Vladimir should have taken her to the ball at the palace that night, but he had something else on hand, and she was not exacting. He had said to her:

"I would like very much not to go to that ball tonight."

She had smiled and laid her hand on his.

"Well, then, my Vladimir, why should you go?"

"You are an angel."

"No, only a widow," and that was witty of her, and they both laughed, she even more frankly than he.

"Au revoir, then. I will see you tomorrow, and give an account of myself."

There was no more a sword-thrust in his mind than in hers, and he went off gaily, she looking after him with an expression in her blue eyes that the old prince had never seen there.

At the ball General Boroff had approached her.

"Where is that scape-grace of mine, Vladimir?"

"I gave him leave of absence, my general," she had answered, with a pretty imitation of the salute.

"And what had he to do that was more agreeable than escorting you here?" asked the general, with a slight frown.

"Nothing more agreeable, my general. It was not a question of that.

"You are too indulgent, princess."

"Oh, no; but I love him, and he loves me. That is enough. Ah, my general, how good it is to be able to say that! And, you see, being a widow, I can say it without embarrassment."

"But not without a blush, which becomes you divinely," said the general, with a gallant inclination, and a frank look of admiration.

"A blush!" and she had laughed gaily, "why, that is a part of my equipment."

"Left over from the last engagement?" asked the general slyly.

But she was equal to the occasion, as the general had been sure she would be.

"No, the last engagement was only a sham battle, and besides, I was not a combatant then, but a prize to the enemy."

Both laughed and separated. She was too splendid an animal not to thoroughly enjoy all physical pleasures, and she enjoyed the ball to the utmost, dancing when there was dancing to do, and the centre of an eager, admiring throng of men when she sat down.

It was still early, however, when she went home. That is it was not long after midnight. Marka—Marka was her maid—was rejoiced to see her, for she had expected to have to sit up until morning.

"Madam is early."

"Yes, Marka, I am enjoying the luxury of being in love. Valdimir was not there, and I came home.

'Madam is so happy."

'Am I not, Marka? But why not? I am in love, and I am loved."

"There is no doubt of that, madam. You love Monsieur Vladimir, and he—worships you."

"Of course. That is why I love him."

Marka had relieved her of her wrapping of furs as they talked, and, now, Fedora sank with luxurious abandon into a fauteuil drawn up in front of an open fire. But she had hardly seated herself when Marka was summoned into the ante-chamber by a footman. She returned instantly with a troubled face. "Madam," she said, hesitatingly.

Fedora looked at her, and her face blanched suddenly.

"Well, Marka. Speak."

"A messenger has come from General Boroff—"

"Well, well?"

"Monsieur Vladimir is ill."

"Ill? What more? Tell me all the messenger said. Quick! my furs. Order the carriage! What was the message? No. Do as I bid you! Send the messenger here. Go order the carriage. Quickly! No, I will put on my wraps alone. The messenger."

The messenger came.

"You come from General Boroff. What did he say to tell me. His very words!"

When the supreme head of the police of Russia speaks his subordinates listen carefully. General Boroff was the supreme head. The man remembered.

"Go to Princess Romanoff, and tell her that my son is severely wounded. Tell her he is at his rooms."

"The general's carriage is at the door, madam'," said Marka, returning at this moment.

"Do you know how he was wounded, or how badly?" asked Fedora of them an.

"Nothing."

"Come then."

When a woman is in deep distress she is conscious of nothing but her distress. Fedora constantly urged the coachman to drive faster. He said yes; but he did not, for he was already driving like the wind.

Gretch was waiting for her, and led her to the rooms. The general came out of the bedroom, and greeted her with pitifully outstretched hands.

"Vladimir!" she said, not taking his hands, but grasping him by the arms, and devouring his face.

"You must not give way. You must be composed and quiet."

"It is dangerous, then?" and she became like ice.

"Yes," answered the general, in a low voice, "it is dangerous."

"He is not dead?"

"No."

"Then there is hope?"

"No."

"No hope? No hope? He will—he will—"

"Yes."

She caught his arm, and swayed a little.

"Be brave!"

"Yes, I will. I may see him?"

"If you will be calm."

"I will. Take me to him. He is in there," and she swept past the father, and into the bedroom.

The bed curtains were drawn aside, and the doctor was bending over the young man on the other side. Fedora sank on her knees by the side of the bed, but neither spoke nor touched the bed, though one of Vladimir's hands lay just there.

She watched the doctor, and when he had finished his observations over the young man, he looked at her. Then he turned his eyes on the father, who had followed her.

"Any change, doctor?" asked the father.

"None."

May I speak to him, doctor?" whispered Fedora.

"Yes, but he will not hear you."

She unclasped her hands, and took Vladimir's in them. Then she whispered caressingly, coaxingly: "Vladimir, it is Fedora."

Then she waited with her eyes fixed on his face, ready to catch at any sign of recognition or of life; but there was no change in the impassive face.

"Vladimir," she repeated, a little more loudly, "it is I, Fedora. Will you not open your eyes, or move your lips to show that you know that I am here?"

The doctor leaned over him, and after a brief moment looked up, avoiding the eyes of Fedora.

"It is over," he said to the father, and turned away and left the room.

Fedora watched him, and moved her lips in silent repetition of "over." Then she turned with a cry:

"No, no! Vladimir, Vladimir, my Vladimir!" and leaned her head on the bed, and sobbed.

Grief is not a thing to be measured or weighed. One cannot say this one's grief or that one's is the greater. Fedora had lost a lover, and she sobbed. The general had lost an only child, and he closed tight his lips, and shut in every expression of what he felt until his face was hard and harsh.

Some say that tears bring relief; others that there is no deep sorrow where there are ready tears. Some say that grief softens the heart; others that that grief is greatest which hides from the eye of man. Perhaps all sayings are only one half true, and some not true at all.

The man stood silent while the woman wept. The father had been prepared for the blow, and could think of the cause of it, but to the lover the blow had come suddenly, and she could not get beyond the effect of it.

The general watched for some moments in silence; then he went around to the other side of the bed and took up one of the life-

(To be continued)

A CRUEL DECEPTION

(Continued)

Alwynne, fortunately, found in this sorrow something that took up most of her thought at the moment. The boy was so dear to her. She fretted over him as though he were her own child. In London he could have the best advice and attention. To London, therefore, they must go without delay. Taunton, hovering outside and about her life, like a peri outside Paradise, at once wrote to Lady Rose Glenlee and his sister.

The Trevelyans were at Torre. Jack almost restored to his own self, but a hint that Taunton wanted her in the smallest way was enough for Lady Augusta, and, consequently, she and Jack and the babies, and a small retinue, found themselves installed in the large, rambling house in Eaton Square. Blanche Glenlee was paying some visits, and did not accompany her mother to town.

"And if I said I was sorry, I should be telling an untruth!" Lady Augusta said to her husband as she confided everything, good, bad, or indifferent. "I hope it is not wicked of me, Jack, but I simply can't forgive Blanche—no, I can't! Just fancy, believing him to be an impostor, and turning her back on him when there was worry and trouble in front of him. It was horrid of her! I never was so disapponted in any body!"

"Miss Glenlee was only true to her nature, little one.

"Well, then, it is a very poor nature," Lady Augusta declared, "and I am very glad—yes, quite glad, now that she is not going to marry Hugo. She is not worth him!

"All the same, she would give her eyes to undo what she did." Mr. Trevelyan thought to himself. "She is no fool, is Miss Blanche, and I shall not be surprised if she does not make a very good try to get back her lost position. Don't say she will succeed, in fact, I am sure she won't, but she will have a good try, all the same."

Lord Taunton was not long in making known his wishes to his sister.

"I want you to call on her, Gus and see if there is anything you can do. She is in great trouble. This boy is so ill, and he is very dear to her!"

Needless to say, Lady Augusta was overjoyed at the commission, and forthwith set on her visit to Mrs. St. Vincent, the name by which, at the desire of her grandmother, she was generally known.

Alwynne could see no one. She sent down a gentle message both to Lady Augusta Trevelyan and to Lady Rose Glenlee. Her place was in the sick room, and she shrank from seeing any one. Basil was so ill, so very ill, she could not leave him.

Taunton was full of delicate thought. He would not approach her till she sent for him, but as day followed day, and she gave no sign of wanting him, he began to have a dread that she would never send. She had sacrificed herself once before on the altar of duty. Might she not do so a second time?? He feared this because he knew her now so well, he could understand her mental position. Although now she knew herself to be his equal by birth, would she not draw back from him because of her association with the man she had married? Was the widow of a felon, a murderer, the fit wife for Taunton and Torre?

This was what was dominating her. The man was convinced there were still difficulties in the pathway of their future. If only he could have seen her!

He sent daily to inquire for Basil, who was slowly but surely drifting out of life, and Lady Augusta called again and again, but she never saw Alwynne.

It was not only the girl's proud spirit which held her back, it was sorrow. She loved Basil with a depth of affection indescribable, she clung to the boy as the one cherished possession of her life. It was very sweet to be cared for by Marie, sweet to know that there were now others who stood, waiting to be received into her friendship, but she wanted only Basil.

Nevertheless, she could not keep Basil. Death grew closer and closer, and when the last came and the boy's face smiled at her in its peaceful beauty, Alwynne's heart seemed to break.

Marie let her weep uninterruptedly. She felt the tears were needed. When the passion of weeping was over, Alwynne spoke to her maid:

"Pack our trunks, Marie," she said. "We will go away at once."

"Bien!" said Marie, though her heart sank, remembering as she did that one who was so faithful, so unhappy. However, she obeyed her mistress.

"We are going to Basil's sister," Alwynne said, in a low voice. "She sent many messages, and we may, perhaps, make our home out there."

"Bien!" Marie said a second time; but her heart was chill, for she had let herself dream dreams, and the future had held some beautiful pictures for her.

Alwynne called her back as she was leaving the room.

"Tell no one of my movements," she said; and there was authority in her voice. "No one. You understand?"

Marie nodded her head. There were tears in her eyes, but she made no protest.

* * * *

On the very day that Basil was laid to rest in his grave, Lord Taunton had written intimating his desire to follow his little friend to his last resting place. He scarcely hoped for anything. Alwynne he knew he should not see, at least on this day, but surely as the time went she would turn to him, and give him the reward to which his patience and love entitled him.

The modest funeral over, he drove back to the house to inquire after her, and was almost stunned with surprise and pain when he found she had gone away. No one could tell him exactly where. He stood on the doorstep gazing blankly before him. Was it again all over? Must he be forever doomed to disappointment and despair?

He questioned the woman of the house. She could tell him nothing. He turned at last and reentered his cab. As he drove along he lapsed into a mood of utter misery. He suffered intensely and most of all at her going from him in this strange, secret way.

All at once his cab pulled up with a jerk. He roused himself to see Lady Augusta in her cab gesticulating violently. She had so much to say she could hardly speak plainly; but the import of it shot new life through the man's disheartened frame.

"You saw her yourself, Gussie, dear, actually and really?"

"Yes, myself! She did not see me. She must be going on board tonight. The boxes were all labeled for an Atlantic voyage, and they went away in the Liverpool train. Hugo, where are you going?"

"But, my dear, suppose there may not be."

"I will have a special! Gus, don't think me mad; it is only life or death to me, that's all!"

He was gone without another word, and his sister drove on her way, thinking deeply, but overjoyed that she should have been the means of seeing him at such a moment, and bearing such news.

"Surely his fate is going to change! This must mean good for him!" the little creature said to herself. "Oh, to know Hugo was happy! I would give up all I possess in the world except my Jack and my babies! I must get home and tell Jack. Suppose Hugo goes to America? What a funny world it is, all ups and downs! I quite expect she will have started, and then Hugo will follow her to New York or the north pole, or some equally distant place. Well, I like romance a little, but I like it peaceful. This is too unsettling! All the same, if I wanted to find Jack, I should not mind if I had to go twice to the north pole!"

* * * *

But Lord Taunton did not have to go to the north pole. He found Alwynne on board the big steamer, sitting on deck, just as he remembered he saw her the first day she had come into his life. Her face was unveiled. Marie was hovering near her, but as she saw Lord Taunton she disappeared. He went up to Alwynne very quietly. She did not scream when he spoke, only grew deathly pale.

"Alwynne, I have come to find you—my wife!" was all he said.

She shook her head when she had recovered herself a little, and shrank back from him.

"No, no! I must not— I cannot!"

"You must! You shall! You will!" he answered firmly. "You love me! I love you! By right of that love, Alwynne, I command you to become my wife!"

He put out his hand and took hers.

"Give me this happiness—oh, my love, be good to me!" he said, his voice broken with emotion. "Think—think how I have suffered! Oh, you must think of me a little!"

The reproach hurt her, but yet she felt there was a truth in it. She had given all thought to his honor, but what of his heart? She looked at his face. Its worn pallor hurt her to the quick, and tears rushed to her eyes.

"Oh, my dear! my dearest!" she said; and her hands clung to him. Then she looked at him. "Help me to be true, to do what is right! You know I love you! Yes—yes, a thousand times, but—"

"What but is there?" he cried exultantly. "My dear, my own, with love we can face the world, no matter what lies before us! I cannot live without you, Alwynne! It is for you to choose. Am I to be a wanderer all my life, tracking your footsteps wherever you may go, or shall we make our home together?"

What was her answer? Alwynne was, after all, a woman. Pride strong as hers could not live before his arguments, and so she yielded.

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Lord Taunton wrote one letter from Liverpool. It was to his sister, telling her that he had found Alwynne in Marie's care, that her departure to America was postponed three days, in order to allow of their marriage by special licence, when they would both sail for New York, to carry poor Basil's last message to his bereaved sister. He seemed to be a new man since he had at last reached great happiness.

"We shall be home in a few weeks' time, and shall take up our abode at Torre, and from this day forward, Gus, you shall have no reason to complain of your brother as a wanderer. With my beloved wife and my dear sister and her family I shall need nothing more on earth. My love to you, dear Jack, a kiss to you, my Gus! Pray that our marriage may be as happy as yours, and no greater blessing can come to your devoted brother. Hugo."

THE END

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