

CHAPTER I

A CHANCE MEETING

“DO you mean to take me for a spy?”

I had hard work to prevent myself laughing at the man to his face and it is no light matter to laugh at these self-satisfied, bullying officials in Russian Poland. Some of them have too much power.

“Do I understand that you refuse to answer my questions and shew me your papers?”

“And what if I do?” He had burst into my room in the little inn at Bratinsk as I sat reading my paper over a cigar, and without any preface had fired his questions at me with the peremptory incivility of the average police agent. My temper had taken the intrusion badly.

He shrugged his shoulders and raised his eyebrows. “I am a police agent from Warsaw and must know your business in Bratinsk.”

At that I saw light. I recalled a paragraph I had just read in the Warsaw paper. I pointed to it. “Is this the key to your visit?”

“Ah, you have read it,” he replied with that offensive manner in which these people always contrive to imply that everything you say or do is a matter of suspicion.

“I’ll read it again now with more interest,” said