

# Sad Tragedy of Vera Gelo

Paris, March 20. Following the tragic suicide of the lover she rejected, after desperately attempting her own life, Mlle. Vera Gelo, the young Russian student, has disappeared.

She is the overwrought, super-sensitive, nerve-tortured girl of twenty-one years who tried to kill Prof. Emil Deschanel, whose bullet, aimed at that venerable savant, was fatal to her own dearest friend and fellow-student, Mlle. Alexandra Zelenine. That tragedy, enacted scarce fourteen months ago, and Alexandra's heroic life-sacrifice to save Prof. Deschanel aroused Paris to the supremest interest.

What emotional French jury could find Vera Gelo guilty of murder in causing the death of the girl who was so dear to her? Mlle. Vera, after a trial crowded with sensational incidents, was acquitted. But she was ordered to leave France.

She disobeyed; she returned here lately. The cemetery of Saint Ouen, where is the grave of Alexandra Zelenine, possesses a horrible but irresistible attraction for her.

Michael Zelenine, who loved Vera, followed her and again implored her to be his wife, to forget, in his love, the fearful occurrence that robbed him of a sister and her of a girl she loved.

**HER SPIRIT STOOD BETWEEN.** Again Vera refused to marry him, sadly telling him that an apparition, Alexandra's spirit, stood between them and must forever separate them.

"Her spirit stands between us," he cried. "But see! she stretches her hands to us; she would unite us. She forgives; she forgave with her last breath. She blesses us."

Sorrowfully, firmly the remorse-torn girl put away the happiness he offered her. For the last time she refused to wed him a few days ago. Zelenine, his brain whirling, his bosom rent by an agony of despair, threw himself from the top of the Eiffel Tower and was picked up a shapeless mass.

Three hours later Vera Gelo sprang into the Seine from the Pont de Grenelle. Two workmen saw her take the plunge. They jumped into a boat and with all their strength rowed to her rescue.

She, determined to end an existence so melancholy, fought their attempts to save her, crying, again and again, "Let me alone! I wish to die! Death is welcome to me!"

But she was not then to have her wish. They drew her, faint, weak from her struggles, into the boat. She was detained by the police, she revealed her identity, the commissary of police interrogated her and extracted from her a promise that she would relinquish her design on her life and that she would call at his bureau the next morning.

She did not go to the bureau; that much of her promise she has certainly broken. The police cannot find her. She has disappeared as completely as if indeed she too was hidden in Saint Ouen.

Has she completely broken her promise to the commissary of police? Has she ended an existence so intolerable and rejoined Alexandra and Michael Zelenine?

For the last four years, since she blossomed into womanhood, Vera Gelo has been the victim of her own temperament. But her early history is simplicity itself. Born in Odessa, she passed a quiet girlhood in the company of her father, an able but a self-effacing man, the steward of a great estate. When she became eighteen, Vera, like so many modern Russian girls, decided that she must study medicine and went to Geneva for that purpose.

**FORMING A FRIENDSHIP.** There she met Alexandra Zelenine, a charming and gifted girl, two years older than herself. Both Russians, both voluntary exiles, both students, these interesting young women were drawn together by an unusual bond. Their friendship grew constantly stronger. They were inseparable.

One day Vera returned from a walk in an alarming state of excitement. Anxiously Alexandra questioned her. Her replies, given with intense emotion, were, nevertheless, entirely vague.

"A man, a man old enough to be my grandfather, insulted me just now," she said. "Oh, that I, whom all men have respected, should suffer such an indignity! A man, too, whose gray hairs should command respect! I could kill him as I would a dog!"

Under Alexandra's soothing Vera slowly recovered her composure. Soon she forgot, it seemed, the incident that so deeply wounded her honor, her pride.

In December, 1900, the two young women went together to Paris and shared a cheap lodging at No. 49

Rue de Faubourg, Saint Honore, which Mme. Hart, an estimable person, was landlady.

Vera Gelo had discontinued her study of medicine, both she and Alexandra pursued the study of philosophy and literature at the college of France. There Prof. Emile Deschanel is one of the lecturers, a man of the highest character, universally respected and absolutely free from the remotest suspicion.

Moreover, he is in no wise associated with political life, except through his distinguished son, Paul Deschanel, president of the chamber of deputies, whom many regard as the next president of the republic.

A few weeks passed. Mlle. Vera and Alexandra assiduously attended the lectures at the college. About January 15 of last year they went to their first lecture by M. Deschanel.

The instant he entered the lecture-room Vera became violently agitated.

Seated next to her, Alexandra was alarmed by her staring eyes, her clinched hands, her trembling limbs.

"Hy dear Vera, what ails you? Are you suddenly ill, dearest?"

"There he is," whispered Vera, trying to restrain her indignant anger—"the old man of Geneva, the only man who ever dared to insult me. At last I see him again. Miserable one, I will kill him, as I have sworn to do!"

**SHE OBTAINED A REVOLVER.** Vainly Alexandra tried to soothe the girl, assuring her that she must be mistaken, that an accidental resemblance of two men was deceiving her; that it was impossible that a man of M. Deschanel's character could have been guilty of the conduct she accused him of.

Vera abruptly left the lecture-room. Unknown to Alexandra she obtained a revolver. On Jan. 19 the learned Deschanel lectured again. Vera and Alexandra listened to him. Outwardly calm, Vera had made her friend believe she had convinced herself that she was mistaken; that M. Deschanel was not the old man of Geneva.

He finished his discourse, the students trooped from the lecture-room. M. Deschanel halted in the corridor leading to his private study and was surrounded by a group of admirers. Vera and Alexandra were almost the last of the students to depart from the lecture-room.

Vera did not recognize M. Deschanel, who stood with his back toward her, until she was very near him in the corridor.

"Now I will kill him!" she shouted, and instantly whipped the revolver from her pocket.

"Vera!" shrieked Alexandra, and tried to seize the weapon.

Too late. The infuriated Vera touched the trigger, the pistol was discharged. But in that fraction of a second the heroic Alexandra, with a motion quick as lightning, had thrown herself between the revolver's muzzle and M. Deschanel, who was all unconscious that he had been marked as a victim.

Alexandra received the bullet in her breast and sank to the floor unconscious. Vera glanced at her, shrieked and fell fainting.

The scene immensely astonished M. Deschanel, who did not know that an attempt had been made on his life until he was so informed by M. Pailisse, manager of the college. The professor did not then lose his composure. He left the college in usual arm in arm with his wife, who had called for him, and was driven straight to his son's official residence. It was only after reaching his own apartment in the Avenue Marceau that the shock unnerved Prof. Deschanel and he was forced to retire to bed.

The wounded Alexandra was conveyed to one of the lecture halls, where a surgeon, after brief examination, reported her wound severe, but not necessarily fatal. When she regained consciousness, although she was suffering grievously, Alexandra proved her affection for the misguided Vera.

**"I AM THE ONE TO BLAME."** "Vera was mad for the moment," Alexandra insisted. "She was not responsible. Harm me? She would lay down her life for me. Indeed it is I who am to blame. For as soon as I saw what the mad girl intended to do I jumped before her pistol!"

Vera, recovering from her faint, was overcome by grief at the result of the crime to which she had been driven by the resistless energy of her self-respect. The police hurried Vera away. Alexandra was taken in an ambulance to the Hospital de la Pitié, where the surgeons found that the bullet had imbedded itself in her spine and that her survival was impossible.

She was removed to the Hotel Dieu, and in that hospital received

the most devoted attention from the Deschanel, father and son, and their wives. The newspapers rang with praises of Alexandra's bravery; the government gave the dying girl a life-saving medal of the first class.

Michael Zelenine, who had followed Vera and his sister to Paris, passed every moment that the hospital authorities would permit by Alexandra's bedside. Already deeply in love with Vera, the weight of his double grief almost overwhelmed the handsome young Russian.

At Alexandra's prayer the police allowed Vera to visit her dying friend. They mingled their tears. But no reproach fell from Alexandra's lips. Instead she sought to explain and excuse Vera's deed.

"Dearest, it was but the result of a horrible confusion of identities," the heroic girl said. "After I leave you I implore you to give up your studies. You, with your wealth of emotion, are unfitted for the rigors and repressions of student life."

Alexandra frequently interceded with the authorities for Vera, and prepared a deposition which was read with great effect at Vera's trial. After several weeks welcome death came to Alexandra.

Paris flocked to Vera's trial in the court of assizes last summer. The girl's sufferings had rendered her semi-hysterical, and alienists were not wanting who declared she was the victim of hallucinations.

When the judge first mentioned the name of Alexandra Zelenine, Vera burst into a paroxysm of tears. The nervous twitchings of her face as she sat in the dock revealed her mental anguish.

So tense was her nervous strain during the trial that a physician twice administered ether to her to relax it.

But the most dramatic moment of the trial was that when Vera was for the first time convinced of her mistake of confounding the estimable M. Deschanel with the unknown old man who insulted her. M. Deschanel was giving his testimony when the girl, who had been staring at him as if she hoped to visually penetrate his brain, suddenly shrieked:

"Forgive me, I pray you, sir, forgive me. I acknowledge my fearful mistake."

The jurors were entirely sympathetic. During their brief consideration of the verdict Vera sat, her face buried in her hands, seemingly oblivious to what was passing around her.

The jurors, weighing her state of mind, decided with Alexandra that the unhappy Vera was momentarily mad when she fired the fatal shot. When the jurors returned to court every one could see in their faces what the verdict would be. In anticipation of it and led by Prof. Deschanel the people in the courtroom burst into applause which could not be quickly suppressed.

When the verdict of acquittal was announced Vera smiled feebly and swooned. Michael Zelenine was the first at her side, and raising her in his arms whispered the fondest congratulations. If the president of the court felt sympathy he did not betray it. Sternly he ordered Vera to leave France and never to return.

In a few days the newspapers announced that she and Michael Zelenine had gone to Russia and that they would be married.

**LEAPED FROM EIFFEL TOWER.** On March 14 last a well-dressed young man jumped from the top of the Eiffel Tower. Turning, twisting in the long, frightful descent, he struck the ground head first. Necessarily his features, his form were entirely unrecognizable. Nor had he a scrap of paper, a mark by which he might have been identified.

A few hours after this determined, spectacular suicide, a girl threw herself into the Seine from the Pont de Grenelle. One Villeneuve, a carpenter employed at the Port Royal floating baths, now moored near the Ile des Cygnes, saw the girl as with a desperate gesture of farewell she sprang from the bridge. Villeneuve and another man jumped in a boat and quickly rowed to the drowning woman.

So vigorous were their strokes that their boat reached her as she arose from her first plunge.

Leaping far out of the boat they seized her. But she beat at them with her hands, and repeatedly begged them to let her die. It was not until she had exhausted herself by her struggles that Villeneuve and his companion could lift her into the boat.

Silent, almost sullen, like one who has suffered a grievous disappointment, she was taken to the emergency station near the bridge, where she would say only that her name was Muller and that she was stopping at a hotel in the Rue de Passy.

Her attempted suicide was instantly reported by the police and the Commissary sent orders that she must be detained until the next morning, when he might find leisure to interrogate her.

The woman shivered and shrank

away when the police were about to take her to jail. Finally she said hesitatingly:

"Tell M. the commissary that it is Vera Gelo who has tried to end her wretched life. He will remember me, the unfortunate one in the affair Deschanel."

"Implore him, if he wishes to interrogate me, to come to me at once or to permit me to be conducted to him. At least spare me the shame of being again a prisoner."

Receiving this message the commissary hastened to Mlle. Gelo, who awaited him, silent, unmovable as a woman carved out of stone.

"Why have you returned to Paris? Why have you attempted your life?" were his first questions.

**TELLS OF HER WANDERINGS.** "Obedient to the order of the president of the court I returned to Russia," answered Vera, speaking almost mechanically. "I found that my father had married again, that another woman was in my mother's place. So I was a stranger in my old home. M. Zelenine again and again asked me to marry him, and I refused. I could see that dear, sad figure that stood between us that was invisible to him. The desire possessed me to return to Paris to die, to be buried next to Alexandra, whose life was forfeited to my mad mistake."

"Courts, judges to the contrary, I could not resist that desire. I came here by way of Italy. I have been in Paris but a week. M. Zelenine followed me."

"Once more I refused to listen to his prayers that I marry him. Today I received a letter from him telling me that he would cast himself from the great tower this morning. My love for him, which I hid at Alexandra's death, tells me that he has kept his word, has destroyed himself."

For hours the commissary of police reasoned with the girl, threatened her with serious punishments for having returned to Paris and implored her to make no further attempt on her life.

Acquainted with every phase of human unhappiness, the commissary of police was nevertheless touched by Vera's silent, hopeless misery. The morning was three hours gone before he released her and left her. But he had made her solemnly promise that she would not again try to take her life and that she would visit him at his bureau later that morning.

But when the hour appointed arrived Mlle. Gelo did not appear at his office. Instead she sent this note, dated from a hotel in the Rue de Passy:

"Mons. le Commissaire: Forgive me, if you please, for not responding to your invitation. I am ill. I am in bed. **VERA GELO.**"

Hastening to the little hotel the commissary quickly learned that Vera had left there that very morning. A few days before she had registered under the name "Muller." She has disappeared. The closest search by the police has not found her.

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