

## HOME AND FARM MAGAZINE SECTION SERIAL.

## The Secret of the Night ———— By Gaston Leroux

THRILLING MYSTERY STORY OF RUSSIAN INTRIGUE BY NOTED FRENCH AUTHOR

## SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Young Joseph Rouletabille, ostensible reporter for a Parisian newspaper, but in fact, a detective of repute, is called to Russia by the Czar to save the life of General Trebassoff (Feodor Feodorovitch), who has been condemned to death by the Nihilists. He is received by the General's ever-faithful and ever-watchful wife, Madame Trebassoff (Matrena Petrovna). He meets Natacha, the General's daughter by a previous marriage. The General is at his villa, surrounded by a few faithful friends, surrounded by the life of the General's first wife, Madame Trebassoff. One of the General's first actions is to disclose the secret police guarding the villa. Rouletabille bears the third attempt on the General's life, by means of a clockwork bomb set in a vase of flowers by Madame Trebassoff, who was slightly injured by the explosion. The detective learns that Natacha is in love with Boris but also is very friendly towards Michael. He learns the secret of the night—the terrible nightmarish scene experienced by the aged General. Natacha is suspected of complicity in the plot against the life of the General, but Rouletabille stoutly affirms his belief in her innocence.

## V.

## The General Permeudes.

"GOOD morning, my dear little familiar spirit. The General slept splendidly the latter part of the night. He did not touch his narcotic. I am sure it is that dreadful mixture that gives him such frightful dreams. And you, my dear little friend, you have not slept an instant. I know it. I felt you going everywhere about the house like a little mouse. Ah, it seems good, so good. I slept so peacefully, bearing the subdued movement of your little steps. Thanks for the sleep you have given me, little friend."

Matrena talked on to Rouletabille, whom she had found the morning after the nightmare tranquilly smoking his pipe in the garden.

"Ah, ah, you smoke a pipe. Now you do certainly look exactly like a dear little domovio-doukh. See how much you are alike. He smokes just like you. Nothing new, eh? You do not look very bright this morning. You are worn out. I have just arranged the little guest chamber for you, the only one we have, just behind mine. Your bed is waiting for you. Is there anything you need? Tell me. Everything here is at your service."

"I'm not in need of anything, madame," said the young man smilingly, after this outpouring of words from the good, heroic dame.

"How can you say that, dear child? You will make yourself sick. I want you to understand that I wish you to rest. I want to be a mother to you, if you please, and you must obey me, my child. Have you had breakfast yet this morning? If you do not have breakfast promptly mornings, I will think you are annoyed. I am so annoyed that you have heard the secret of the night. I have been afraid that you would want to leave at once and for good, and that you would have mistaken ideas about the General. There is not a better man in the world than Feodor, and he must have a good, very good conscience to dare, without fail, to perform such terrible duties as those at Moscow, when he is so good at heart. These things are easy enough for wicked people, but for good men, for good men who can reason it out, who know what they do and that they are condemned to death into the bargain, it is terrible, it is terrible! Why, I told him the moment things began to go wrong in Moscow. 'You know what to expect, Feodor. Here is a dreadful time to get through—make out you are sick.' I believed he was going to strike me, to kill me on the spot. 'I Betray the Emperor in such a moment! His Majesty, to whom I owe everything! What are you thinking of, Matrena Petrovna!' And he did not speak to me after that for two days. It was only when he saw I was growing ill that he pardoned me, but he had to be plagued with my jere-miads and the appealing looks of Natacha without end in his own home each time we heard any shooting in the street. Natacha attended the lectures of the Faculty, you know. And she knew many of them, and even some of those who are being killed on the barricades. Ah, life was not easy for him in his own home, the poor General! Besides, there was also Boris, whom I love as well, for that matter, as my own child, because I shall be very happy to see him married to Natacha—there was poor Boris who always came home from the attacks paler than a corpse and who could not keep from moaning with us."

"And Michael?" questioned Rouletabille.

"Oh, Michael only came towards the last. He is a new orderly to the General. The government at St. Petersburg sent him, because of course they couldn't help learning that Boris rather lacked zeal in repressing the students and did not encourage the General in being as severe as was necessary for the safety of the Empire. But Michael, he has a heart of stone; he knows

nothing but the countersign and massacres fathers and mothers, crying, 'Vive le Tsar!' Truly, it seems his heart can only be touched by the sight of Natacha. And that again has caused a good deal of anxiety to Feodor and me. It has caught us in a useless complication that we would have liked to end by the prompt marriage of Natacha and Boris. But Natacha, to our great surprise, has not wished it to be so. No, she has not wished it, saying that there is always time to think of her wedding and that she is in no hurry to leave us. Meantime she entertains herself with this Michael as if she did not fear his passion, and neither has Michael the desperate air of a man who knows the definite engagement of Natacha and Boris. And my step-daughter is not a coquette. No, no. No one can say she is a coquette. At least, no one had been able to say it up to the time that Michael arrived. Can it be that she is a coquette? They are mysterious, these young girls, very mysterious, above all when they have that calm and tranquil look that Natacha always has; a face, monsieur, as you have noticed perhaps, whose beauty is rather passive whatever one says and does, excepting when the volleys in the streets kill her young comrades of the schools. Then I have seen her almost faint, which proves she has a great heart under her tranquil beauty. Poor Natacha! I have seen her excited as I over the life of her father. My little friend, I have seen her searching in the middle of the night, with me, for infernal machines under the furniture, and then she has expressed the opinion that it is nervous, childish, unworthy of us to act like that, like timid beasts under the sofa, and she has left me to search by myself. True, she never quits the general. She is more reassured and is reassuring to him, at his side. It has an excellent moral effect on him, while I walk about and search like a beast. And she has become as fatalistic as he, and now she sings verses to the guzla, like Boris, or talks in corners with Michael, which makes the two enraged each with the other. They are curious, the young women of St. Petersburg and Moscow, very curious. We were not like that in our time, at Orel. We did not try to enrage people. We would have received a box on the ears if we had."

Natacha came in upon this conversation, happy, in white voile, fresh and smiling like a girl who had passed an excellent night. She asked after the health of the young man very prettily and embraced Matrena, in truth as one embraces a much-beloved mother. She complained again of Matrena's night-watch.

"You have not stopped it, mamma; you have not stopped it, eh? You are not going to be a little reasonable at last? I beg of you! What has given me such a mother! Why don't you sleep? Night is made for sleep. Koupriane has upset you. All the terrible things are over in Moscow. There is no occasion to think of them any more. That Koupriane makes himself important with his police agents and obsesses us all. I am convinced that the affair of the bouquet was the work of his police."

"Mademoiselle," said Rouletabille, "I have just had them all sent away, all of them—because I think very much the same as you do."

"Well, then, you will be my friends, Monsieur Rouletabille, I promise you, since you have done that. Now that the police are gone we have nothing more to fear. Nothing, I tell you, mamma; you can believe me and not weep any more, mamma dear."

"Yes, yes; kiss me. Kiss me again!" repeated Matrena, drying her eyes.

"When you kiss me I forget everything. You love me like your own mother, don't you?"

"Like my mother. Like my own mother."

"You have nothing to hide from me?—tell me, Natacha."

"Nothing to hide."

"Then why do you make Boris suffer so? Why don't you marry him?"

"Because I don't wish to leave you, mamma dear."

She escaped further parley by jumping upon the garden edge away from Khor, who had just been set free for the day.

"The dear child," said Matrena; "the dear little one, she little knows how much pain she has caused us without being aware of it, by her ideas, her extravagant ideas. Her father said to me one day at Moscow, 'Matrena Petrovna, I'll tell you what I think—Natacha is the victim of the wicked books that have turned the brains of all these poor rebellious students. Yes, yes; it would be better for her and for us if she did not know how to read, for there are moments—my word!—when she talks very wildly, and I have said to myself more than once that with such ideas her place is not in our salon but behind a barricade. All the same,' he added after reflection, 'I prefer to find her in the salon where I can embrace her than behind a barricade where I would kill her like a mad dog.' But my husband, dear little monsieur, did not say what he really thinks, for he loves his daughter more than all the rest of the world put together and there are things than even a general, yes, even a governor-general, would not be able to do without violating

both divine and human laws. He suspects Boris also of setting Natacha's wits awry. We really have to consider that when they are married they will read everything they have a mind to. My husband has much more real respect for Michael Korsakoff because of his impregnable character and his granite conscience. More than once he has said, 'Here is the aide I should have had in the worst days of Moscow. He would have spared me much of the individual pain.' I can understand how that would please the general, but how such a tigerish nature succeeds in appealing to Natacha, how it succeeds in not actually revolting her, these young girls of the capital, one never can tell about them—they get away from all your notions of them."

Rouletabille inquired: "Why did Boris say to Michael, 'We will return together?' Do they live together?"

"Yes, in the small villa on the Kras-tovsky Ostrov, the isle across from ours, that you can see from the window of the sitting-room. Boris chose it because of that. The orderlies wished to have camp beds prepared for them right here in the general's house, by a natural devotion to him; but I opposed it, in order to keep them both from Natacha, in whom, of course, I have the most complete confidence, but one cannot be sure about the extravagance of men nowadays."

Ermolai came to announce the petit-dejeuner. They found Natacha already at table and she poured them coffee and milk, eating away all the time at a sandwich of anchovies and caviare.

"Tell me, mamma, do you know what gives me such an appetite? It is the thought of the way poor Koupriane must have taken this dismissal of his men. I should like to go to see him."

"If you see him," said Rouletabille, "it is unnecessary to tell him that the general will go far a long promenade among the isles this afternoon, because without fail he would send us an escort of gendarmes."

"Papa! A promenade among the islands? Truly? Oh, that is going to be lovely!"

Matrena Petrovna sprang to her feet. "Are you mad, my dear little domovoi, actually mad?"

"Why? Why? It is fine, I must run and tell papa."

"Your father's room is locked," said Matrena brusquely.

"Yes, yes; he is locked in. You have the key. Locked away until death. You will kill him. It will be you who kills him."

She left the table without waiting for a reply and went and shut herself also in her chamber.

Matrena looked at Rouletabille, who continued his breakfast as though nothing had happened.

"Is it possible that you speak seriously?" she demanded, coming over and sitting down beside him. "A promenade! Without the police, when we have received again this morning a letter saying now that before forty-

eight hours the general will be dead!" "Forty-eight hours," said Rouletabille, soaking his bread in his chocolate, "forty-eight hours? It is possible. In any case, I know they will try something very soon."

"My God, how is it that you believe that? You speak with assurance."

"Madame, it is necessary to do everything I tell you, to the letter."

"But to have the general go out, unless he is guarded—how can you take such a responsibility? When I think about it, when I really think about it, I ask myself how you have dared send away the police. But here, at least, I know what to do in order to feel a little safe, I know that downstairs with Gniagna and Ermolai we have nothing to fear. No stranger can approach even the basement. The provisions are brought from the lodge by our dvornicks whom we have had sent from my mother's home in the Orel country and who are as devoted to us as bulldogs. Not a bottle of preserves is taken into the kitchens without having been previously opened outside. No package comes from any tradesman without being opened in the lodge. Here, within, we are able to feel a little safe, even without the police—but away from here—outside!"

"Madame, they are going to try to kill your husband within forty-eight hours. Do you desire me to save him perhaps for a long time—for good, perhaps?"

"Ah, listen to him! Listen to him, the dear little domovoi! But what will Koupriane say? He will not permit any venturing beyond the villa; none, at least for the moment. Ah, now, how he looks at me, the dear little domovoi! Oh, well, yes. There, I will do as you wish."

"Very well, come into the garden with me."

She accompanied him, leaning on his arm.

"Here's the idea," said Rouletabille. "This afternoon you will go with the general in his rolling chair. Everybody will follow. Everyone, you understand, Madame—understand me thoroughly, I mean to say that everyone who wishes to come must be invited to. Only those who wish to remain behind will do so. And do not insist. Ah, now, I see, you understand me. Why do you tremble?"

"But who will guard the house?"

"No one. Simply the servant at the lodge to watch from the lodge those who enter the villa, but simply from the lodge, without interfering with them, and saying nothing to them, nothing."

"I will do as you wish. Do you want me to announce our promenade beforehand?"

"Why, certainly. Don't be uneasy; let everybody have the good news."

"Oh, I will tell only the general and his friends, you may be sure."

"Now, dear Madame, just one more word. Do not wait for me at luncheon."

(To Be Continued.)

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