The Trail of the Dead:

THE STRANGE EXPERIENCE OF DR. ROBERT HARLAND

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CHAPTER VI.—(Continued.)

It snowed that night, and to some effect, as the morning light showed me. The broad, slovenly street beneath my windows was thickly coated; and though the fall had ceased, a dull sky, streaked as with muddy whitewash, threatened a further downfall. It was bitterly cold and I flung on my clothes in a vile temper.

Graden was meditating before the stove when I entered our breakfast-room, with the strange book he had shown me during the journey in his hands.

"You look pale as a ghost. Are you quite fit?" he asked kindly.

"Oh, yes; though my night was not particularly peaceful."

"What do you mean?"

I told him briefly of my unknown visitor. He seemed greaty interested, questioning me minutely on various points.

"Your theory may be correct," he concluded. "Some guest may have mistaken his chamber, and hurried off on discovering his mistake. Yet, if he had a light with him, how came he to make such an obvious error; whereas, if it was the striking of a match that roused you, what was the man doing wandering in the dark?"

"To tell the truth, when I first woke, I imagined it was Marnac himself."

"I have considered that point. I do not think it could have been he."

"And why?"

"Before you were down this morning I had a talk with our landlord. The guests at his house are of two classes—commercial travelers and those having business at the dye-works. They do not stay long—usually a week at most. Of the nine which he now has, none has exceeded that limit. He knows them all personally—six commercials, two dye-works men, and a rich Englishman, one George Wakefield, who has been staying with some magnate in the neighborhood. But here is Herr Reski himself."

"Gentlemen," said the landlord, bowing low, "your sleigh is at the door."

"How far it it, then, to Castle Oster?" I asked him.

"Close on twenty miles; and with this fresh snow it will be heavy going."

Ten minutes later we slid on our silent runners, to the tinkle of the bells, out through the squalid, sprawling town, out through the wooden hovels of the suburbs, out past the dye-works, with their tall, melancholy chimneys, out into the snow-clad levels beyond, and there from out of the east there sprang upon us a great and bitter wind, chilled by its long journey over the boundless steppes of frozen Russia. Here and there, across the plains, a whiff of powdry snow, like the smoke of heavy guns, would leap up before the fiercer blasts, only to burst and fall as they lulled once more. To the south and east the pine woods ranged their formal ranks, black against the dazzling carpet at their feet. It was a scene of utter desolation.

We drove in silence. Graden sat in a huddled mass, his chin buried in the great woolen comforter he wore, staring out over the plain with fixed, introspective eyes. For myself, I sat amongst the rugs beside him in vague speculation. What could be this danger that threatened the scientist from St. Petersburg in his home at Castle Oster? After all, might not our whole journey be a folly born of Graden's imaginings, a blind guess that had dragged us half across Europe? I shivered, and shivering, muttered anathemas on the climate.

CHAPTER VII.

We entered the forest. On every hand stood the pines, stretching away in long, melancholy avenues floored with drifted snow. The laden branches bowed before us, now and again, at the whirl of a passing gust, flinging their burdens from them. Once a willow grouse, white as the snow beneath it, swept on steady wing through the trees. Once from the far, far distance, borne upon the eastern breeze, there came a cry, a weird, hopeless echo in the air, that set the horses snorting. I knew what it must be—a wolf who felt the first pangs of the winter's hunger gathering round him. But there was no sign of man nor marks of sleigh tracks on the newly fallen snow.

We did not travel fast, though our driver did his best. The snow had not hardened and settled into that enchanting surface on which the runners speed so swiftly. Midday was past before we saw, through a sudden gap in the forest, a rising mound crowned with a low, grey building. "Castle Oster!" cried our driver, turning in his seat to claim our attention. In ten minutes more we had halted at a gate set in a high stone wall.

Before we were clear of the rugs the driver had slipped from his perch and tugged at a rusty iron bell-pull. We waited without an answer. Again he rang; but Graden did not wait the result. The door was not bolted; it opened to his vigorous arm, and we followed him into the broad courtyard of the castle.

Before us sprawled the main building flanked by little towers, like the pepper-box turrets of an old Scotch mansion. The windows were shuttered; the chimneys were smokeless save for one above the central porch, from which a dark plume rose and trailed away to the westward—the solitary sign of habitation. To our right and left were ranged outbuildings, stables, coach-houses, and the like; but all in a condition of ruinous decay. Patches fallen from the roofs laid bare the rafters; from the broken gutters trailed long pendants of ice. Against the old doors the snow had piled itself in heavy drifts. No sound broke the brooding stillness. It was a picture distressingly forlorn.

"Has Professor Mechersky, then, no servants?" asked Graden of our driver. I noticed that he hushed his voice in speaking; he, too, felt the uncanny influence of the place.

"Two, mein Herr—a man and a woman. I cannot think where they can be."

"I had understood he was a man of means. Why does he allow this disrepair?"

"I do not think the professor cares. He shuts himself up with his experiments when he is here—which is not often now. His rooms look to the south on the other side. For the rest, the house is not furnished."

"Well, I suppose there is a servant who will—— Heavens! what is that?"

From somewhere within the house there came a shriek, a cry of supreme terror. Again and yet again it was repeated before it shrank away into silence. Graden ran across the court to the main door, and I was hard upon his heels. He pulled the bell and hammered fiercely upon the heavy oak panels; but no one answered.

"I don't believe the thing is bolted," said he. "Keep the handle turned, and let me try what I can do."

He stepped back a dozen paces, and then came running at the door like a bull. The giant caught it squarely with the point of his shoulder; there was a sharp crack; the next instant we were both sprawling on the floor within.

We found ourselves in a great and dusty hall, indifferently lighted. Against the wall on my right I could dimly discern the figure of a woman crouched on the floor, sobbing bitterly, her face buried in her hands. She did not move, despite our violent entrance. At the foot of the main staircase an old man was bending over something that lay motionless. He looked up at us with a white, pitiful face.

"He is dead—the master is dead!" he whimpered.

Graden strode up to him, and I followed at his heels.

Professor Peter Mechersky—for such I knew it must be—lay huddled under an old grey cloak that spread wing-wise from his neck, a blot upon the polished oak of the floor. From his face, thin though it was and wasted with disease, he must have been a middle-aged man who had preserved a singular beauty. He had died as a child might fall asleep. Yet the horror that he had escaped he had left to the living; for his attitude was abnormal, impossible, and ghastly to behold.

It was not right that a body should resemble an egg that is broken.

My cousin swept aside the cloak for a moment, and replaced it reverently, though with a hand that trembled.

"He has not a sound bone in his body," he muttered, and then, turning to the old servant, "How did this happen?" said he.

"He had been ill for some weeks, mein Herr, and we begged him not to leave his room. But to-day he declared himself better. He insisted that he should descend to the library. Half way down the stairs he tripped and fell. I ran to his side and found him, as you see him, crouched—like—like——"

"Like a toad?"

"Yes, mein Herr, like a toad."

The man broke into hysterical weeping.

"The Englishman, Herr Wakefield, was most anxious about my master's health," he stammered out. "The Herr professor became indisposed some ten days after his arrival; since then he has been most kind, most considerate, sitting by the master's bed for hours. He would allow no other doctor to visit the master. He is a kind, good man, this doctor, the Herr Wakefield."

"So I believe. How came he to know your master?"

"I am not sure; but I think he brought a letter of introduction from a Professor Marnac, of Heidelberg, a gentleman of whom my master disapproved, yet admired for his learning."

"And this Englishman, did he prescribe for your master??"

"Of course. They loved each other, and sat late into the night in their discussions. When my poor master was taken ill, Herr Wakefield took complete charge of him. Ach! If he did but know what had happened!"

"Then he is not here?"

"No; he drove to Lemsdorf yesterday afternoon. He had to return to his own country. Ach! If he did but know!"

It was plain enough—Marnac, the linguist, was Wakefield, the Englishman. It was he, new from this thing that he had done, who had come creeping to my room in the night, being suspicious of the strangers from the south. It was he that had brought about this mysterious horror. I turned from the poor monstrosity upon the floor and leaned, shuddering, against the wall. As I did so, Graden strode past me to the open door.

"Driver, can your horses take us back?" I heard him say.

"Not without rest and feed, mein Herr. The snow is very bad, and they are tired."

"Would a hundred marks to the driver assist them?"

"It is impossible. They could not reach half way. Wait, mein Herr, and it may be done."

My cousin came up to me and laid his great hand upon my shoulder.

"I'm afraid it's the truth," he said. And then turning to the dead man's servant, "Your master—had he horses?" he asked.

"Three, mein Herr, but they have not yet returned from Lemsdorf, where they went this morning with the big sleigh for provisions."

With a sharp order Graden sent our driver hurrying to the stables. Then, with his arm linked in mine, we followed the old servant into a low-roofed dining-hall. As I dropped upon an oak settle before the great china stove, he thrust his flask into my hands and, with a word of encouragement, slipped away. I knew that he was examining the body, but, doctor though I was, the spirit of investigation had gone out of me. I could no more have assisted him than a medical student can watch, unmoved, his first operation.

In about twenty minutes he returned, bearing a tray upon which was set bread and cheese, flanking a great ham. I turned from the food with disgust; but my cousin fell to diligently, complaining the while at my folly in not eating when I had the chance.

"You must pull yourself to together," he protested, with his mouth full. "Try this ham now. It isn't half bad."

More to humor him than with any intention of following his advice, I drew my seat to the table.

"Come, now; that's better," he cried, carving away. "To tell the truth, I haven't the slightest idea what that villain Marnac has been up to. But what I do know is that we've got to catch him—dead or alive. Therefore I recommend you to stoke up your body with this excellent——hallo!"

"What's the matter now?" I asked irritably; for, indeed, his hearty appetite annoyed me.

For answer he rose and pealed the bell. The old manservant, with the brandy flushing his white cheeks, tottered into the room.

"I am sorry to trouble you," said Graden courteously, "but we both set such store by your hams that we wish to know where they can be obtained. Do you cure them yourself?"

"No, mein Herr, but it is done near by," answered the man, with a look of blank surprise.

"Indeed. The Lemsdorf ham is a discovery; it should make a stir. I wonder I had not heard of its merits before."

"You see, mein Herr, the big curing station has not long been established."

"A new enterprise?"

"Yes, mein Herr. It belongs to Herr Drobin, a South German. Two years ago he took the big farm at Gran, which you passed on your way here. It is this side of the dye-works. He has many pigs in the forest. His hams are becoming famous from Warsaw to Konigsberg. It is said he has some secret in the feeding or curing—no one knows which."

"Thank you—that is all."

The door was scarcely shut when I turned hotly upon Graden. "How dare you sit here in this house of murder and talk of the excellence of the food?" I cried furiously. "It is shameful, indecent!"

"Yet we will visit the farm of Gran on our way back. I have some little inquiries to make."

"We shall do nothing of the sort," I snarled.

"If you were a soldier or an explorer, Cousin Robert," he said, leaning across and tapping me kindly on the arm, "you would know that in any expedition one alone can be responsible. The rest obey, whether they be few or many. As it is, I beg you to recognize that fact and to obey."

He was right, and I knew it. But to save appearances I walked to the window and stood drumming upon it with my fingers for a while before I answered him.

"Well, do as you please," I said at length.

"I think the sleigh may be ready by now," he said. "Come, let us go out and inquire."

There is no need to dwell on this miserable drive. The tired horses dragged slowly forward, the driver, sullen and frightened, urging them on with blows and curses. Mile after mile of pine woods marched past us, but we did not speak, crouching in the furs. At last, as night was falling, we reached the edge of the forest and swung aside from the main road into a track that skirted the edge of the pines. The ground sank away into a hollow like the palm of the hand. At the lowest point I could see a square, wooden building flanked by rows of outbuildings. It was, as I imagined, the farm of Gran. But before we reached it, our driver suddenly drew up his horses. A man was advancing toward us through the trees. Our driver turned, and with a wave of the whip explained the situation.

"It is Herr Drobin," said he.

(To be continued.)

Stale at That.

"It is very seldom that they serve actors with five different kinds of vegetables," whispered the short comedian in the quick-lunch room.

"Oh, I don't know," sighed the lanky tragedian. "One time I was served with twenty-five different kinds of vegetables."

"You don't say? In what hotel?"

"No hotel. The audience supplied them."

Their Great Scheme.

"Have you and your wife quarreled?"

"No; why?"

"I notice that when you take a trip you always go on different trains."

"That's for the children's sake. If either one of the trains should be wrecked, the kids would have at least one parent left."—Cleveland Leader.

Tour of Europe

Paris to the American tourist is often a disappointment on the first view. Little accustomed conveniences are missing. Manners of living which our forefathers knew continue to prevail. Candles and smoky lamps are used. At some places the bath tub is hauled to a house on a cart, the owner waits on the curbstone till his client is through with his ablutions, and carts it away. The grand hotels are extortionate, and the "tip" system is in full swing. The boulevards change their names every time they make a change in direction.

In the middle of everything on an island in the river in the oldest part of Paris, retaining its importance on account of the Church of Notre Dame. Upon it the episcopal palace, the oldest hospital, the law courts and the police headquarters are located. The right bank of the river is the center of moneyed luxury and of every fad and folly which wealth produces. Here are the principal boulevards, the majority of the theaters, magnificent avenues, palatial houses and handsome squares. The national library is here, and the city's great centers of commerce and finance. The parks are beautiful, and each has its distinctive charm. The gardens of the Tuileries have their innumerable statues, the Bois de Boulogne is exquisite with the natural beauties of foliage and long woodland vistas, and the park of the Buttes, Chaumont on its hilly site above the town, has its especial attraction of cascades and a fine stalactite grotto. As to the Louvre, its masterpieces represent almost every school of painting, and this famous structure contains more art treasures than any building north of the Alps.

The prefecture of police occupies a great square, alongside of which runs the Rue de Lutece. This name reminds of the spot wherein the city of Lutetia stood in Cæsar's time, the germ of Paris. There is no great difficulty in getting a permit from the director of prisons to visit the conciergerie. The conciergerie is part of the palace of justice, and is interesting as the place of confinement of the victims of the revolution. The place of chief interest is the cell in which Marie Antoinette was imprisoned for two months and a half. The tiled floor is the same, and the door is the same, with the upper part barred that she might in going out be forced to bend her head. She had said she would never bow before them, and so they made her do so literally.

Near by in the graveyard where her body lay for many years till it was finally taken to St. Denis, there to rest among the kings of France. In this little cemetery lie the 1,000 Swiss guards who died at the Tuileries, and there are roses blooming above them "in memory of the queen, for she loved roses."

The Pantheon is one of the notable buildings of Paris, and Notre Dame a chief point of interest. This great church is a marvel of architectural grandeur. It has one eighteen ton bell which requires eight men to ring it. It is a perfect miracle of stained glass and innumerable statues of kings and saints. Its gorgoyles, representing various large animals, are unique and striking features of the general architecture.

The shops of Paris are an interesting feature of the great city, especially the small ones, and the people passed on the street the tourist always remembers. Two-wheeled carts are seen everywhere, some pushed by men in blue blouses, some by bareheaded women, crowned each by a stiff white muslin cap. The carts contain fish, fruits and vegetables. The purchaser can buy a handful of strawberries, and carry them home either in a brown paper cornucopia or a big green leaf. A garlic seller cries his wares as he proceeds along. Here is a vender who has dry twigs for sale. Here is a man who polishes floors. He carries a little velvet bag. In it are his slippers, with the brushes on the bottom of them, also a piece of yellow wax, and screwed into a ferruled stick which he carries is a claw like saddlers use.

Most Parisian barbers are hair dressers, and do not have separate rooms for women. The entrances of buildings are put to commercial uses. At one is a milk stand with two or three weather beaten benches holding bowls and measures of different sizes. Great cans of milk and cream stand on the sidewalk. A big flat basket of rolls and bread is fastened to the wall.

Pere Lachaise is the great city cemetery. The tourist reads some famous names here—Rachel, Rosa Bonheur, Felix Faure, Alfred de Musset, the poet. There are many great musicians, Chopin and Cherubini among them. Here is the name of Hahnemann, founder of homeopathy. It is interesting also to observe that there is a Jewish cemetery, and far to one side a Mohammedan cemetery, containing a small mosque wherein lie the queen of Oudh and her son.

A BETTER GAME.

"No you can't sell me no patent rights, lightnin' rods nor earthquake insurance, but if you want a job in the harvest field I'll pay you more wages than you can make out of any old fake."—St. Paul Dispatch.

Bird in the Hand.

In a certain Western town there was a political office to be filled last spring, paying the munificent salary of $250 per year. The opposing political parties were about evenly balanced, and there was keen opposition and a lively campaign for this small plum. One of the candidates was a shrewd old fellow and was well liked. It looked as though he would be successful, as a neat little sum had been subscribed and turned over to him as a campaign fund. But to the astonishment of every one, however, he was defeated.

"I can't account for it," said one of the political leaders, gloomily. "With that money we should have won. By the way, how did you lay it out?"

"Well, it was this way," replied the defeated candidate, slowly, pulling his whiskers, "you see, that office only pays $250 a year salary, an' I didn't see no sense in payin' $850 out to get the job, so I jist bought meself a little truck farm instead."

Bound to Be Comfortable.

A Philadelphia man went to Maine on his vacation and he found the nights very cold and bedclothes scarce.

"Are these all the bedclothes you give?" he inquired of the chambermaid.

"This is all that goes with one room," she replied.

"Then give me a couple of rooms," said he.

It takes more fortitude to listen to the average man's jokes than it does to listen to his troubles.

Flashes of Fun

He—I asked her to tell me her age, and she said "23." She—Well—did you?—Brooklyn Life.

"Why do you refer to his fortune as hush money?" Wagg—He made it in soothing syrup.—Philadelphia Record.

"Do you leave your valuables in the hotel safe when you go to a summer resort?" "Only when I leave."—Judge.

Stella—Isn't that Mr. Bachelor kind and gentle? Bella—That's just the trouble; he stands without hitching.—Brooklyn Life.

"That man has a very shady business record." "Why, what has he been doing?" "He puts up awnings."—Baltimore American.

Saphedde — A penny for your thoughts, Miss Pert. Miss Pert—They are not worth it. I was merely thinking of you.—Philadelphia Record.

Husband (angrily)—I don't see why I ever married you. You are a fool. Wife (calmly)—Undoubtedly. Otherwise I would have refused you.—Grit.

On An Ocean Liner. The Wife—Shall I have your dinner brought to your room, dear? Husband (feebly)—No. Just order it thrown overboard.—Clipped.

"Out of a job, eh?" "Yeh, de boss said he was losin' money on de t'ings I was makin'." "Dat so? Wot was you makin'?" "Mistakes."—Philadelphia Press.

Dentist (prodding a patient's gum in search of a fragment of root)—Funny, I don't seem to feel it. Patient (ironical in spite of the pain)—You're in luck!—Les Annales.

"Who is it that robs us while we are asleep?" asked the teacher, trying to get the class to spell the word "burglar." "De gas meter!" shouted the boys in unison.—Chicago News.

Assistant—This poet says that the last two verses of his poem may be omitted, if you think it is desirable. Editor—I'll do better than that. I'll omit the whole poem.—Somerville Journal.

"They found a cigar in a safe that had fallen down five stories in San Francisco and wasn't the least bit damaged by fire." "Yes, I've tried to smoke several of those cigars."—Cleveland Leader.

"Really, you know, I don't think Miss Summergal looks at all athletic." "Well?" "Well, you told me she was always engaged in some college sport." "Stupid! I said 'engaged to.'"—Philadelphia Press.

Mistress—What made you angry with the doctor and tell him not to come any more? Bridget—Because he said he thought he would send me to a warmer climate, and I am on ter him.—Los Angeles News.

"Do you think that wealth brings pineas?" "No," answered Mr. Dustin Stax. "It doesn't bring happiness. But it gives a man a little bit of option about the kind of worry he will take on."—Washington Star.

"Pa, what's the difference between a profession and a trade?" "The man who works at a trade quits when his eight hours are up. The man who follows a profession has to keep on until his work is done."—Chicago Record-Herald.

"Don't you like to hear the wind whistling through the wood?" asked the poetical one. "Well," replied the practical one, "if I'm out in the forest I do; but if the wood is made up into a $2 flute, I can't say that I do."—Yonkers Statesman.

"Yes," said the condescending youth, "I am taking fencing lessons." "Good!" answered Farmer Corntossel. "I allus said you was goin' to turn in an' do somethin' useful. What's your specialty goin' to be—rail, stone or barbed wire?"—Washington Star.

"Well, sir," brusquely inquired the girl's father, "what can I do for you?" "Why—er—I called, sir," stammered the timid suitor, "to see if—er—you would give assent to my marriage to your daughter." "Not a cent, sir! Not a cent! Good-day."—Scissors.

A school teacher, one day during the hour for drawing, suggested to her pupils that each draw what he or she would like to be when grown up. At the end of the lesson one little girl showed an empty slate. "Why," said the teacher, "isn't there anything you would like to be when you grow up?" "Yes," said the little girl, "I would like to be married, but I don't know how to draw it."—Life.

His Reason.

"My dear Mr. Magnate, why don't you sue that fellow who is openly accusing you and your trust of using corrupt methods in business?"

"My dear sir, I would not dignify the fellow's charges with a reply."

"No; I suppose a reply wouldn't answer."—Baltimore American.

It is every married man's opinion that all wives are frank.