

# The Gunmaker Of Moscow

By SYLVANUS COBB, Jr.

(CONTINUED.)

"Perhaps not, but yet, my mother, I will give him credit for better things. Yet," the youth continued in a sad tone, "there is one for whom I care more than self and who is now within the wicked duke's power. Oh, she is his beyond any power of the emperor!"

"Not absolutely beyond his power, is she?" the mother asked.

"Why, of course, Peter has the power to set aside any wardship, but would not be policy for him to interfere in the domestic affairs of his powerful nobles. I feel sure that his heart would bid him interfere, but his judgment would oppose it. You have seen Rosalind?"

"Yes."

"And was she unhappy when she knew that I was missing?"

"Ah, Ruric," returned the mother, with a kindling eye, "you do not know how that noble girl loves you! Oh, her heart was almost broken when she knew that evil had befallen you!"

The widow had it in her mind to tell of the scene which had transpired upon the duke's coming into the maiden's presence when she was there, but she thought a second time ere she spoke, and she then concluded not to speak of it at present, for she knew 'twould only serve to give her son additional pain without bestowing any benefit.

"By heavens," uttered Ruric at the end of a troubled reverie and at the same time clasping his hands vehemently together, "was ever man so surrounded by impenetrable mystery before! This monk is surely a good man. He has served me well, and I am sure he would serve me more if opportunity offered. But who is he? Have you found out anything concerning him?"

"I have not, my son."

"But is it not strange?"

"It is."

And so they conversed until their drooping lids would no longer remain apart, and then, having first rendered up their thanks to God and asked his help for the future, they retired to their respective places of rest. Ruric had strange dreams, and for the life of him he could not tell whether they were good or bad. Once he dreamed that he was a duke himself and that he had a wife whose face he had never seen. She would not raise her veil until the ceremony was performed. Then she removed the obstruction, and Ruric started on beholding the face of Vladimir, the monk! And then Vladimir seemed to say, "All this I have done for thee. Do you like it?" And Ruric dared not object, because Vladimir had done so much for him.

And now while Ruric awakes from his dreams and wonders what they mean let us look in and see what is going on in the ducal palace. It was early morning, and the Duke of Tula was once more in his own private apartment. He had not slept well, for he, too, had had dreams, and they were troublesome ones. They hung about him even now, and they filled his mind with dark and gloomy forebodings. He paced to and fro across the apartment, sometimes stopping and bowing his head with new clouds upon his brow. Thus he walked and pondered until he was aroused by a stealthy footfall close by the door. He stopped and listened. He knew the step. 'Twas the one he had been waiting for. He moved to the door and opened it, and the humpbacked priest, Savotano, entered the apartment.

"By St. Paul, Savotano, I feared you would never come," the duke uttered as his workman closed the door behind him.

"I would have come sooner if I could, my lord, but even now it is early morning. The sun is hardly above the city walls."

"Well, it is early, I know, but I have not slept at all, my lord."

"No, Savotano. You look worn and weary. But you have been at work."

"Aye, I have."

"And you have come to tell me the result of that work. Does it mean you go to do such work? I thought you were used to it?"

"The priest gazed into his master's face, but he did not speak."

"What is the killing of a man?" But tell me, did you conceal the body so that no one will find it?"

It was some moments before Savotano spoke. His frame trembled, and his hands worked nervously together. But at length he said in a hesitating tone:

"He is not dead, my lord."

"Not dead yet? But you promised me he should be."

"I know, but we could not do it."

"Bah! I gave you credit for more firmness. Not kill a man? What is there so terrible in that?"

"You misunderstood me, my lord. We did all we could toward killing him, but he escaped us."

"Hold!" cried the duke, starting forward and grasping the priest by the shoulder. "You do not mean that Ruric Nevel has escaped you?"

"He has, my lord."

"But not entirely. You do not mean that he has fairly gone from out your hands?"

"He has, my lord. But listen!" —

"Listen, thou bungler! By the saints, what story can you tell to make that smooth and reasonable? You had him in your power, and you should have kept him."

"But, my lord, the devil himself is working for that man. We went last night to kill the fellow, and I waited all of two hours for Totma and Viska, but the rascals did not come, and I engaged others."

"And did they prove treacherous?" cried Olga in sudden passion.

"No, my lord; they did their best, but they were interrupted by that accursed monk, who came backed by some dozen men."

"What! Do you mean that Vladimir came there?"

"Yes."

"And with a band of armed men?"

"Yes."

"Then, by the gods, there's treachery somewhere."

"I know not what to think, my lord," returned Savotano in an uneasy, perplexed tone. "The only men who are absent are Lasko Totma and Frederic Viska, and they are surely our best men."

"But you see plainly that there must have been treachery," exclaimed the duke passionately. "Oh, how I would like to know the man! And did this monk carry off the gunmaker?"

"He did. And he captured four of our men. I escaped without being seen."

"That is fortunate!" —

"I mean that the monk did not see me, nor did any of his followers. But the gunmaker saw me."

"And do you think he mistrusted you had any hand in the matter of his imprisonment?"

"I should judge so," returned the priest, with a peculiar twinge of vengeance about the lips. "The villain knocked me down."

"Ha!"

"Aye; the moment he saw me."

"But do you think he knows anything about it?"

"No. I do not think he does. He can only suspect."

"Then we'll be prepared for him if your own men are to be depended upon. But leave that to me. I'll fix that matter with the emperor. I'll see him this very day, and be sure he shall have a story that can destroy all evidence which these fellows can hatch up."

"But I must flee, my lord."

"Not yet, Savotano. I must have your help within a very short time. By the true God, I swear that the Countess Rosalind Valdai shall be my wife within the present week. I'll place the seal of fact upon that matter at once. Fear not, for I know my influence over the emperor will shield you from all harm. Why, Peter would sooner lose his right hand than lose me."

"Then most surely I will remain, my lord, for I much wish to perform that ceremony for you. But who is this black monk—this Vladimir?"

The duke started across the floor, and for some moments he continued pacing to and fro. When he stopped, he brought his hands together with an energetic movement, and looking the priest sternly in the face, he said:

"Let that monk be who he may, whether man or devil, God or saint, I'll destroy him! I have the power, and I'll use it. As warden of the city I have the power to arrest him upon suspicion of conspiracy. I'll do it! Where is he now?"

"I know not."

"Never mind. I'll to the emperor."

first. I'll study my plan, and ere the sun sets it shall be carried out. By heavens, I'll be baffled thus no more. I could have wished that this gunmaker had been quietly out of the way, for then all would have been clear and plain, and I should not have feared the trouble of his clamoring about my ears. But let him go. I would not give much for the life he has left. I'll dispose of him soon. But that monk! By heavens, he dies at once and without consultation with the emperor, for I can swear he is a conspirator."

"Good!" ejaculated the priest. And thus the business was arranged for the present. Passion helped the duke wondrously in his conclusions, and the wish was made into the power. But even before the priest left the stout nobleman began to wish that he had a very little more power. In fact, as he came to reason he began to doubt, but he gave up not one idea of the plan he had formed for the vengeance his soul so madly craved.

## CHAPTER XVII.

TRANSACTIONS OF A NIGHT.

"I dare not! Oh, I dare not!" "But it is your only hope."

"And whither shall we go?" "Anywhere rather than remain here. Oh, my mistress, if you do stay here you know the fate which awaits you. There is no other means of escape from the wicked duke's power."

"And I must thus cast myself among strangers, lose my all of earth?"

"Hold, Rosalind! By St. Paul, there is surely one in Moscow who will help you! Let us go to the emperor. Oh, if he be the man I have heard, he will surely listen."

"Ah, Zenobie, the duke is great in power, and his influence is high at court. Peter would not dare to thwart him."

"It may be so, but I do not believe it. And yet, my mistress, just thinking for one moment how you stand in that respect. You have nothing to lose. This life of earth, with all its pains and sorrows, and with its most exquisite tortures, holds nothing worse for you within the bounds of possibility than to become the duke's wife. If there were but one chance in the thousand, you had better try it. Remember, you cannot possibly lose anything, but the chances are for you. Let us go to the emperor."

"But how, Zenobie?"

"This evening, after the darkness of night has gathered over the city, let us go. I tell you I do not believe the emperor will deliberately suffer a great wrong to be done for the sake of pacifying the duke. He has more noble independence than that."

The young countess did not answer at once. She pressed her small white hand hard upon her brow, and thus she remained for some time buried in profound thought. At length she raised her head, and the fire of determination was in her eye.

"I will go," she said. "I will go to the emperor. He will help me if he has a human heart."

"You have one satisfaction, my mistress—he cannot harm you."

"Cannot?"

"I mean that you can but be made to marry with Olga, and all other harm would be as nothing compared with that."

"Aye; you are right, Zenobie. We will go this very night."

The more Rosalind pondered upon this new resolve the more hope did she derive from it. Ere long she conversed more freely with her attendant, and at times that old smile would struggle for a moment upon her face. Yet she had gloomy moments, too. Her fear was too deeply fixed to be swept away so easily.

The afternoon passed away, and as the shades of night gathered over the great city the two girls were astray. Zenobie gathered together such articles of clothing as would be needed and then proceeded to prepare her mistress for the adventure.

"Fear not," she said as she drew on Rosalind's robe of fur, "for there can be no danger worse than that we flee from. Try only to remember that you flee from the duke's foul embrace."

This served to nerve the fair young countess up to the task, and her frame ceased its trembling.

"I shall not falter now," she said. "But shall we find the emperor at this late hour?"

"Bless me, 'tis not late! But even if we do not see him tonight we can do it in the morning. We shall find plenty in the imperial palace who will shelter us till then."

The girls were now ready, and all that remained was to start on their strange mission. With noiseless steps they left the apartment where they had dressed and proceeded along the corridor to the great staircase. Zenobie knew there would be less danger there than to go down the other way among the servants. Having descended these stairs, they came to the great hall which opened one way into the saloons. They

took the former course and were soon in the court. The only trouble now was in passing the porter's lodge at the gate, for they knew the great gate was not open, and to gain the street they must pass through the room where the porter always staid. Zenobie went ahead and looked in. The porter sat by the fire playing with his dog.

"My mistress," whispered the girl as she came back, "old John is in the lodge, and we need have no fear. He is a simple, good-natured fellow, and I am sure I can get by him. Do you go in advance; cover up your face; don't look at him, and be sure you don't tremble. Leave it all to me. Remember, now, you have—"

"Fear not, Zenobie. Go on!" —

So on they went, and when they reached the lodge Rosalind went in first and stood by the wicket, while Zenobie followed and opened the door that looked into the porter's room.

"Good John," she uttered in anxious tones, "come and open the wicket for me, quick. My good mistress is very ill, and Tilda and I are going for the doctor. Come; be quick."

"But why don't some of the men go?" asked John as he started up and forced his dog back.

"Because 'twould take them longer to do the errand than 'twill us. But don't detain us. We shan't be long."

The honest porter had orders not to allow the countess to pass out, but he thought not of that now. He had known the gentle girl from a child, and so well did he love her that he might not have stopped her even had he known she was then waiting to pass out. At all events, he could not refuse the present request, so he came out and opened the wicket without further question, and the girls passed through.

"Now, now," uttered Zenobie in nervous haste, "we are clear of the palace. Here is the street. Our walk is not long."

Rosalind answered not, but drawing her robe more closely about her to keep out the cold, biting wind, she hastened along by the side of her companion. Hope was now alive within her. She turned one glance behind her, and she could see the light which she had left burning in her chamber. It seemed at that moment to be the fiery eye of a demon gazing after her, and instinctively she quickened her pace.

Twice during the day did the Duke of Tula call at the imperial palace without being able to find the emperor, but in the evening he was more fortunate. The emperor was in, and Olga was admitted at once to his presence.

"Well, my lord duke," said Peter as Olga approached, "what business all you from home at this hour?"

"Business of importance, sire—business of less moment to me than to the state."

"Ah! Proceed."

Only two attendants were with the emperor, one of whom was Demetrius the Greek, and the place of audience was in one of the private apartments near the bedchamber, where only privileged ones were ever allowed to come.

"Sire," commenced the duke, "you remember the gunmaker who was before you not long since?"

"Ah, yes—the one who took my Greek's sword from him?"

"The same, sire. Have you heard from him since?"

"By my soul, Olga, I had well nigh forgotten the fellow. Yes, yes; I remember him well now. 'He was a right stout knave."

"Aye, and a dangerous one, too, sire—a dangerous man," said the duke, with a dubious shake of his head.

"Ah! What has he done?"

"Why, he has been engaged in various robberies to my certain knowledge, and only a few evenings since he knocked down one of our holy priests and robbed him of all he had. He is at the head of a numerous band of desperadoes."

"Is it possible?"

"I know it, sire."

"By St. Paul, I should not have believed this!"

"Nor would I have believed it, sire, had I not received proofs not to be questioned. I, as my duty, have long been anxious to ferret out this gang of robbers."

"But I never heard of them, Olga," interrupted Peter.

"Ah, sire, because I gave direction that you should not be troubled with the affair. But I have them now. It is only last evening that I got a clew upon them. We found them in an old building near the river here in the Kremlin, and this same Ruric Nevel was with them. But he made his escape."

"I do remember me now that the fellow had a bold bearing and a fearless look," said the emperor half to himself, "and if such a man turns villain there must be danger in it."

"Aye, sire, you speak truly, and now, with your power, I can apprehend the fellow at once."

"I can send and have it done, my dear duke."

"But your officers may not find him. I know where he is and can have him taken at once. He has several hiding places."

"Well, then you might do the work with more advantage."

"Aye, and I can have him tried and disposed of without further trouble to you, sire."

"No, no. I wish to see him," returned the emperor. "I will give you the necessary order, and you may bring him here."

Peter then turned to his secretary and bade him fill an order for Ruric Nevel's arrest. The stout matter at arms looked on with a troubled countenance, and his glances toward the duke were anything but loving. He did not seem to relish the business at all, and the expression of his countenance would seem to indicate that he did not believe all that the duke had said.

However, the order was soon made out and in the duke's possession.

"Remember," said Peter, "you will bring him before me."

"You shall be obeyed, sire."

If the emperor did not notice the strange, dark look of the duke as he turned away, the Greek did, and he fancied, too, that he knew what it meant. But he said nothing then.

Olga bowed low as he clutched the order, and, having once more promised obedience, he hurried from the imperial presence. As he passed out through the wide court he walked slowly and thoughtfully and with his head bowed. But soon he started up, his hands came together with an emphatic movement, and he moved on more quickly. He had gained the street and approached a small court within which stood a house of entertainment, where he stopped. In a few moments more a man came out from the inn, and as soon as he had satisfied himself that the newcomer was the duke he spoke.

"Olga, is't you?"

"Yes."

It needed but a single glance in the dim starlight to recognize the form of the humpbacked priest. He walked quickly to where the duke stood, and the two moved off together.

"Now what luck?" Savotano asked as he gazed the street once more.

"Good—as good as I could even hope," returned the duke. "I have the power for arresting the gunmaker."

"And for executing him?"

"It amounts to the same. I am ordered to bring him before the emperor, but that is easily managed."

Here the duke stopped and gazed about him, and then, bending his head so that no word could possibly pass beyond his companion's ears, he continued:

"You can call upon three of your best men, and I can furnish two from among my own servants. Early in the morning, by the time the sun is up, they must be at the gunmaker's dwelling. They must make him angry—of course he will resist—and then kill him. It is very simple—very. They can easily dispatch him thus, and then we have only to tell the emperor that he resisted the imperial authority even unto death.

So, you see, this is even better than it would have been had I received direct authority for his death, for then some form of trial would have been necessary, but now we have only to go to his house, provoke him to quarrel, kill him and then tell the emperor how it happened. What think you?"

"Why," returned the priest, with a wicked chuckle, "I can only say that Master Nevel is done for—he is a dead man."

"Exactly. Nothing could be better—nothing."

After the explanation of this fiendish, hellish scheme the two walked on some distance in silence.

"Stop!" uttered the duke, catching his companion by the arm, "There come two persons this way. We must not meet them. Here—into this passage—quick!"

It was a narrow, dark passage leading to the next street, into which the duke dragged his companion, and here he meant to remain until the two persons had passed. The fact was the duke did not wish to be seen with the priest at that hour in the street, and it is no matter of surprise that he should at that moment have been influenced by giddy fear. The two pedestrians came on and passed the spot where the men stood. They were females, and one of them the priest saw in the face. The features were upturned to the starlight, and he recognized them. He caught the duke quickly and nervously by the arm.

"By the host of heaven," he whispered, "'twas the countess!"

"Rosalind?" gasped Olga.

"Yes, as sure as death!"

"Then come, quick!"

Savotano understood the meaning of this, and he followed the duke quickly out. At a few bounds Olga reached the females, and one of them he caught by the arm. She

uttered a sharp, quick cry, and as she turned her face up she revealed the fair features of the Countess Rosalind Valdai. The priest had no need to stop the other girl, for she stopped of her own accord as soon as she found that her mistress was captured.

"Aha!" Olga uttered when he saw that pale face. "What now, eh? Where are you bound at this unseemly hour?"

"O God!" It was all the poor girl could utter. She saw the dark face of her hated and feared guardian, and the last glimmer of hope faded from her soul.

"By my soul," the duke resumed, fastening his grip surely upon the maiden's arm, "it is fortunate I have found you, for you might have fallen into difficulty else. You were bound for the imperial palace, eh?"

At first Rosalind thought of struggling for escape, but she felt the strong grip upon her arm, and she knew that such a movement could result only in her own harm.

"Say," repeated the duke, "were you not bound for the palace?"

"Aye, proud duke, I was," the countess replied, gazing up into the man's face. "I was trying to escape from your accursed power!"

"Aha! But come; we'll turn toward home. You'll be better off there. And this is our little Zenobie, is it?"

The attendant looked up, but she made no reply. Then Olga turned to the priest.

"Savotano, hurry off your men in the morning, and then come to me. I'll have work for you tomorrow. By St. Paul, the work delays no longer!"

And then, with a sinking, breaking heart, Rosalind Valdai was led back toward the ducal palace.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

STRANGE AND COMPLICATED.

Ruric Nevel dreamed that he was a great general and that he was upon the eve of an engagement. He gained a view of the commander of the opposing army, and he saw that it was the Duke of Tula. Yet the duke had an enormous hump upon his back, and instead of the usual uniform he wore the garb of a priest. This was very strange—at least so ran Ruric's thoughts in the dream. Soon the engagement commenced, and the loud mouthed artillery opened its thunder. The din was deafening and strange, and Ruric shouted in vain to his aids, for the roar of cannon drank up his words direct from his lips. Louder and more loud grew the crash, and finally Ruric started for the charge. His horse was shot under him, and, with a quick leap, he reached his feet.

"Ruric, Ruric, my master!"

Slowly the youth opened his eyes, and Paul stood by him in his night-clothes. He gazed about him and found that he had leaped from his bed and now stood shivering upon the floor.

"Don't you hear that racket at the door?" asked Paul.

"What? Ha! There is some one knocking," Ruric uttered as he heard the sound.

"And have you not heard it before?"

## For a Tonic

You will need something in the line of

Wines And Liquors

and we advise that for the Pursons

you go to

Mathews & Servis Co.

Cor. Main and Fitzhugh Streets.

phone 2075.

FRANK FLECKENSTEIN, FRANK J. FOLEY

Foley & Fleckenstein,

Lehigh Valley COAL,

YARD AND OFFICE,

No. 366 Plymouth Avenue.

Louis Ernst Sons

DEALERS IN

The Most Complete Line of

Steel Hods,

Steel Barrows,

Mechanics' Tools,

Builders Hardware,

Contractors Supplies,

129 and 131 East Main St.

