

THE EDGE OF HAZARD

PICTURE BY A. WEIL

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SYNOPSIS.

Frederick Hardy, a fashionable Boston society man, lost his wealth, was jilted by a girl and sent by a friend to take charge of an American Trading Company store in Russia. On his journey through Japan he met Stapleton Neville, supposedly an Englishman. They agreed to go together to Russia. Under suspicious circumstances they were several times molested by the Japanese. Hardy was arrested and found upon his person were papers of a Russian spy. Hardy was proven guilty. On a train he met Aisome Sano, daughter of a Japanese merchant. In Neville's shoes Jap found pictures of forts, proving him to be a Russian spy. Hardy departed for Russia on a steamer, which was wrecked shortly afterward. He was rescued by a Russian steamer. On reaching Vladivostok he was well treated. He started for Siberia, meeting Princess Romanovna on the train. Hardy boarded a vessel for Mur. Hardy showed the princess his impetuosity as a rifle shot. The steamer was stranded. The princess and her maid were attacked by Chinese. Hardy saved their lives. The princess thanked Hardy for his heroism. Manchurians fired upon the party. Hardy slew their chief. Burning arrows were hurled upon the Pushkin's decks. An attempt was made to board the vessel. The attacking Chinese were repulsed. Romanoff sneered at Hardy's solitude for the princess. Stanka, a messenger sent for help, was failed to a cross on the shore. To put an end to the awful tortures Hardy himself put Stanka out of his misery, taking his own life in his hands.

CHAPTER XIX.

A Perilous Mission.

During all this time the forest fires were increasing in intensity and spreading with great rapidity.

Vividly red and narrow lanes of flame ran zigzag to the water's edge, like streams of fire. Monster designs were worked out on the hillsides in fire, notably an immense head, and, in places where the vegetation was sparse, the slopes were spotted with tiny jets of flame.

By mid-afternoon the heat on the Pushkin was almost intolerable and the discomfort caused to the eyes from the smarting smoke was great, yet there was no longer any fear that those on board would suffocate or perish from the intensity of the heat. Matters were undoubtedly at their worst, and it was possible to live, to breathe! Out there in the middle of the river there was no danger of the boat itself catching fire, and the wind, which was coming straight down the stream brought coolness and life with it from the wide Siberian plains.

As Hardy stood watching the scene that night, the princess came up to him and said:

"We have nothing to fear from the Chinese, I fancy. They must have gone away. They must think we are dead."

"It is most probable," replied Hardy, "but I fear that it will be some time before we shall be able to take to the road."

"At the military station below," said the princess, "there is a telegraph, connecting with the one above. It is possible for a boat of shallow draft to get down the river to a little distance back. The general asked the men if one of their number would volunteer to carry a dispatch to the station, but I am ashamed to say that no one has responded. They are deterred by the dreadful fate of poor Stenka."

"I will go!" cried Hardy. "Ask the general to let me go. I can keep to the middle of the stream till I have passed the fires, either wading or swimming down the swift current. The fires cannot extend more than a mile or so down the river, a distance soon passed over, and then I will take to the highway. I am a foreigner and, if captured, shall not be in so great danger as a Russian. It is not a difficult undertaking. I am sure I shall get through."

The princess left him without a word, but returned ten minutes later, smiling sadly and shaking her head.

"It is as I thought," she said. "The general refuses. He says it would be an eternal disgrace to the Russian arms if a foreigner should undertake this thing. He is making one more appeal to the men. He is calling them sheep, Japanese, potroons."

"I had hoped," said Hardy, sadly, "that you people would no longer regard me quite in the light of a foreigner. As far, at least, as the people on the boat are concerned, I have tried to earn the right to be counted one of you. If I have done anything to merit your own regard, personally, I ask you, as an especial favor, to prepare this dispatch for me and let me be off! I tell you again, that I shall certainly go, with or without it. If you refuse, I shall on the instant jump into the river and start on my journey."

"I beg of you not to put it in that way," replied the princess. "If you put it in that way, you know I cannot refuse. I hope the occasion may arise some day that will allow me in some way to show in a befitting manner my great and lasting gratitude to you. But now you are taking an unfair advantage. You are seeking to place me under still greater obligations to you."

"I ask for no gratitude," replied Hardy. "I am simply seeking a favor, an accommodation from you. I am begging you to write a few lines for me. Does your highness still refuse? Well, then, good-by, and God be with you! If we do not meet again, I beg you sometimes to think of me as one who, who—good-by!"

He laid one hand on the rail, but

she extended her arm and detained him.

"Stay," she whispered, "I will write the dispatch for you."

She went to her cabin and Hardy made his few hurried preparations for departure, which consisted simply in swallowing a few mouthfuls of zakouska, in filling his flask with vodka, and in slipping into his pocket a flat bottle, empty, but tightly corked. When he returned to the deck, he found the princess awaiting him, with the dispatch ready. Hardy wound it into a tight cylinder and poked it into the bottle, which he corked and put into his pocket.

"Thank you," he said, simply, to the princess.

She extended her hand, and he took it, holding it, but afraid to look into her eyes. It was an honest hand that held his own in a strong, warm pressure.

"I shall pray for your safety," she murmured, "all the time till I see or hear from you again."

He raised the hand to his lips, then climbed lightly over the rail and dropped into the river. The water reached nearly to his armpits at this place. He did not look back, but, throwing himself on his face, swam

return, which they are certain to do, when the fire subsides."

"There," said the general, "you have your commands from an authority which you ought to respect, if you do not heed mine. I shall have another talk with the men. I am sure they are ashamed of themselves by this time."

"It will be unnecessary for you to trouble yourself further about the matter," said the princess, blushing slightly and looking down, "for a—man—some one has already gone."

Romanoff started violently and fixed his eyes on her.

"Who was it?" asked the general.

The princess threw her head back and regarded him defiantly. "The American," she replied.

"Ten thousand devils!" exclaimed Romanoff. "The meddling dog!"

"But I refused to let him go," said the general. "It is a disgrace to the Russian name."

"I take all the responsibility," said the Romanovna, bravely. "He asked me as a favor to write the dispatch for him, and I did so. He has placed me under certain obligations, and I felt I could not refuse."

"And I suppose," sneered Romanoff, "that if he were to ask you for a kiss,

call it, if anything happened to you."

"Elizabetha," said Romanoff, eagerly, "you know why I endure 't so ill when others perform services for you. You know that I would undertake any task that might win your regard, your love; that I would gladly face any danger in your behalf. And now that this—this American—has saved your life, I could kill him for it!"

"You did not want my life saved, then?" she asked, sweetly.

"Oh, you are enough to try the temper of an angel! You know what I mean. I did not want him to do it. You are under no obligation to him for saving your life. You know that there is not a man in your circle of acquaintance who would not consider it the greatest luck in the world to have a chance to brave danger for you; and that such an opportunity should have come to this, this—"

"Be generous, Boris, if you wish to win my esteem," interrupted the princess, "and don't be unreasonable in your envy. You have braved danger for me, and are now wounded, fighting in my behalf, and I am nursing you. Can you not imagine that there are those who would envy your present position? You are not grateful even for the favors that you do receive. Think of your wound, which is really quite serious."

"Well, then, you be serious for once," said Romanoff, smiling in spite of himself, "and tell me that you love me. Surely, you cannot doubt my devotion."

"Do you think it quite fair to bring that subject up here?" she asked, "when you know that you have me at a disadvantage?"

"But you always find some excuse for not talking to me about it. You always evade me in some way. But I am not a man," he cried, fiercely, "to be evaded or escaped. I love you as only a Romanoff can love. I shall not give up suing for your hand while I live, and woe to the man who crosses my path! Oh, if I could only fight

"I became positively convinced that the Japanese mean to make war on Russia; that no diplomatic temporizing can postpone the struggle much longer. The whole nation, to a man, to a woman, to a child, is united against us by the bonds of the most fanatic hatred. Their population comprises no classes, no disaffected races; they are a unit in this matter. The war will be one to the death, and they will fight until the last man is killed. I concluded, moreover, that they are not a foe to be despised. They are a formidable sea power, and they can throw large and well-equipped armies into Manchuria and Korea within a very few weeks after the first blow is struck. I shall advise the Little Father to begin pouring troops into the far east and to strengthen the defenses and garrison of Port Arthur immediately. I shall ask to be sent to the front with the first troops that go."

"Of course you will, my brave cousin!" cried the princess, admiringly, "and you will come back from the war covered with glory and I shall be proud of you! But I can scarcely believe that Japan is so formidable an adversary as you say."

"You will see," replied Romanoff, with conviction.

"Well, let her begin the war!" said the princess, rising, her eyes flashing. "There can be only one outcome of it, and that will result in the added prestige and power of Holy Russia! But tell me more of your personal adventures."

"Why, they are not particularly interesting. I passed off all right enough as an Englishman, till this fellow Hardy came along."

"Mr. Hardy? You met him there? You did not tell me this, nor has he."

"No, and I surmise the fellow has good reason not to. Soon after his arrival, I became convinced that the police were on my trail. So I attempted to throw suspicion on him. I conducted him to the fortifications

tensely exciting. What has she to do with the story?"

"Nothing, except that your Hardy remained there in Japan with her, and I was sent home, as I supposed, on a steamer from Hakodate. I had not been out long before I found that I had been betrayed, and that I was to be locked up somewhere, on an island. Such were the orders, but the crew were actually planning to kill me. I escaped, killed two or three of them, put to sea in an open boat, was picked up by a Chinese sampan, and so got back to Russia."

"My brave Boris! The Virgin was with you, and, besides, they found that they had captured a lion."

"But I have not finished telling you about this American. I am convinced that he is a Japanese sympathizer and that he suggested to the authorities there that I was not an Englishman. He is a low fellow, and I strongly suspect that he is a Jew. He was coming over here, he said, to run a store. He is a libertine, I am sure, and remained behind to conduct his intrigues with the Japanese girl—Aisome, I believe she called herself."

"But this is mere conjecture, Boris, and I must not believe these things against him, till they are proved."

"Why must you not believe in them? What reason have you for regarding him with such favor? Tell me."

"Because he has shown himself, so far as I have observed, a gentleman of the most resolute courage, and the most refined and delicate sentiments."

"Oh, he has! Well, when I tell you that he is a low fellow, probably an enemy of Russia, a libertine, perhaps a Jew—"

"I cannot listen to you, Boris," said the princess, "you really must be more generous." Her voice was low, but there was an angry light in her eyes.

"Has the fellow been making love to you, as he did to the Japanese?" sneered Romanoff.

The princess arose and moved away. "I said that I would not quarrel with you, Boris," she murmured. There were tears in her lovely blue eyes. She was sure now that she could never love her cousin, and she knew that the imputations against Hardy, who, as far as her own observations went, approached very near to her ideal of a chivalric gentleman, would rankle in her bosom like a poisoned arrow.

She walked over to Smulders and was inquiring after him, in German, which she understood, when she heard the loud shriek of a whistle, and the general rushed into the room.

"We are saved!" he cried. "Two boats with 20 soldiers on them have come down the river. They were sent down as soon as news of the fire was telegraphed to the station above. They have a launch with them, and her highness can be transferred without even wetting her dainty feet."

"I am forgiven, then, general?" asked the princess. "I have been severely punished in enduring your displeasure, even for so short a time."

"Beauty such as yours, madame, can do no wrong," replied the gallant general, extending his hand.

"Perhaps," said Romanoff, grimly, "the Chinese will get him and serve him as they did Stenka."

They were taken on the two fresh boats in the early dawn and steamed away by the light of a red sun that stained with dragon's blood the clouds piled in masses above the blackened forests, still fiercely burning. As they made a bend in the river that shut out from sight the stranded Pushkin, the ash-gray veil lifted for a moment from the Manchurian side, revealing the great cross and the form of brave Stenka Pugacheff hanging on it. The Russians crossed themselves, and uncovering their heads, prayed silently for the repose of his soul. Then, raising their hands to heaven, they swore vengeance.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Cheering Up.

"When your work seems to be going wrong," says a woman who mixes practical philosophy with her work, "blow yourself to something nice. Go out and buy yourself a lovely dinner at a nice place, or get a new dress, or buy some flowers for your apartment. Yes, I know it will cost money, but the impetus it will give you in your work will amply repay you. When you see these things you will say to yourself: 'Well, I'm doing pretty well, after all, when I can afford to blow myself so,' and when you feel that you are doing well you will do well."

Remarkably Brief Sermon.

What was the shortest sermon? One of them at least is attributed to a monk, who had to preach on St. Stephen's day. Just before he began his brother monks intimated quietly that they were very hungry and would be obliged if he would get his sermon through as quickly as possible. So he began: "My brethren, a year has passed to-day since I set forth to you all that there is to say about this day's saint. As I have not heard that he has done anything new since last year, it is unnecessary for me to say anything further." And there the sermon ended.



Regarded Him Defiantly.. "The American," She Replied.

with easy strokes, the swift current sweeping him rapidly downward. Soon his knees touched the soft sand, and he was able to walk for some distance. He had not gone far ere he came on a stranded and abandoned raft, and he rolled a piece of timber from this which he guided to the deep current. He was glad to lie down again and float upon this bit of wood, letting the water cover his body, for he was coming to a narrower part of the stream and the air was very hot.

CHAPTER XX.

Romanoff's Wooing.

"I tell you I can go! I can get through, somehow! Men have gone greater distances, worse wounded than I."

It was Romanoff who was speaking. He sat up and turned, facing the general as though he would rise. His wound had stiffened and the pain consequent on the exertion caused him to turn pale, but he did not wince. He was lying in the dining room, on one of the upholstered cushions that extended around three sides of it.

"The current is at least six miles an hour," he insisted, "and with something light to cling to I could float the entire distance."

The heat was stifling, and the port-holes were milky with smoke.

At this moment the princess entered.

"Don't excite yourself, Boris," she said, anxiously, "or you will neutralize all the good effects of my nursing. I think it ungrateful of you not to lie still and let me show what I can do."

"Yes, and leave you here to starve or be burned up, or, perhaps, be carried off by the Manchurians when they

you would think it your duty to grant even that. Your gratitude, no doubt, will be undying."

"You forget yourself, sir!" cried Romanovna, turning on him with flashing eyes. "You presume too much on your relationship. One more such speech and I shall cancel your name from the list of my speaking acquaintances. General, I await your sentence. I beg that you will not pass over my offense lightly."

"Oh, this is all nonsense," growled the general. "You know that I cannot punish you—would not if I could. If one of the men had done this, I should know what to do with him. But no way has ever been devised for managing an unruly woman, or preventing her having her way!"

With this ungracious speech, he turned and left the room. The princess gazed after him sadly. This, then, was her punishment—the brave old general's displeasure—and it was not easy to bear.

"I choose to forget your extraordinary remark, Boris," she said, sitting down by her cousin. "I shall remember that you are wounded, and that you must be suffering, here in this hot, smoky air. I sympathize with your irritation, too, and think it noble of you. I would much rather that a Russian had gone"—and she laid her hand soothingly on his.

"Why did you not encourage my going, then?" he asked, still sulken.

"I believe, with the general, that you are unable to go, that the effort would almost certainly have resulted in your death."

"And you don't want me to die, I suppose? You would be desolated by my departure for another sphere?"

"Now, Boris, don't be sarcastic. Of course I should be desolated, as you



"Nothing, Except That Your Hardy Remained There in Japan with Her."

for you, I would wade through seas of blood, but I would have you! I would have you!"

Romanovna shuddered, but she came nearer loving him at that instant than at any other moment of her life.

"If you will not talk of these matters now, will you, after we get to Moscow?"

"Perhaps," she replied, softly, "but tell us about Japan, unless it irritates your wound to talk."

"Why, there isn't much to tell. I passed myself off as an Englishman, and sounded all classes of people. I took note of the popular feeling, of the strength of the national defenses and resources, and made plans of the principal fortifications and sea approaches. All the time I was thinking of you and wearing my heart out for another sight of you—"

"Yes!" exclaimed the princess. "This is most absorbing—about the conditions of affairs there, I mean. And what conclusion did you arrive at, my dear cousin?"

"Jealous? Jealous of his success with a coolie girl? Not I, who know such women as you! Elizabetha, I—"

of Yokohama, and he, in seeming innocence, took photographs of them. I also made a copy of my draft of the fortifications and slipped it into his overcoat pocket. We were arrested, and, after much palaver, we were sent on our way. There was a Japanese girl on the train, by the way, to whom he made love in the most open manner. They were as thick as two billing doves. He was infatuated with her; said that her cheeks were tinged with moonlight, that she was yellow because her mortal clay was mixed with gold-dust and that she was a Queen of Fairy-land—"

"He must be something of a poet," said the princess, laughing nervously, "this Mr. Hardy. Now, if you could talk to the women like that, my dear cousin! Were you not jealous of him?"

"Yes!" exclaimed the princess. "This is most absorbing—about the conditions of affairs there, I mean. And what conclusion did you arrive at, my dear cousin?"

"Jealous? Jealous of his success with a coolie girl? Not I, who know such women as you! Elizabetha, I—"

"But this Japanese girl! This is in-