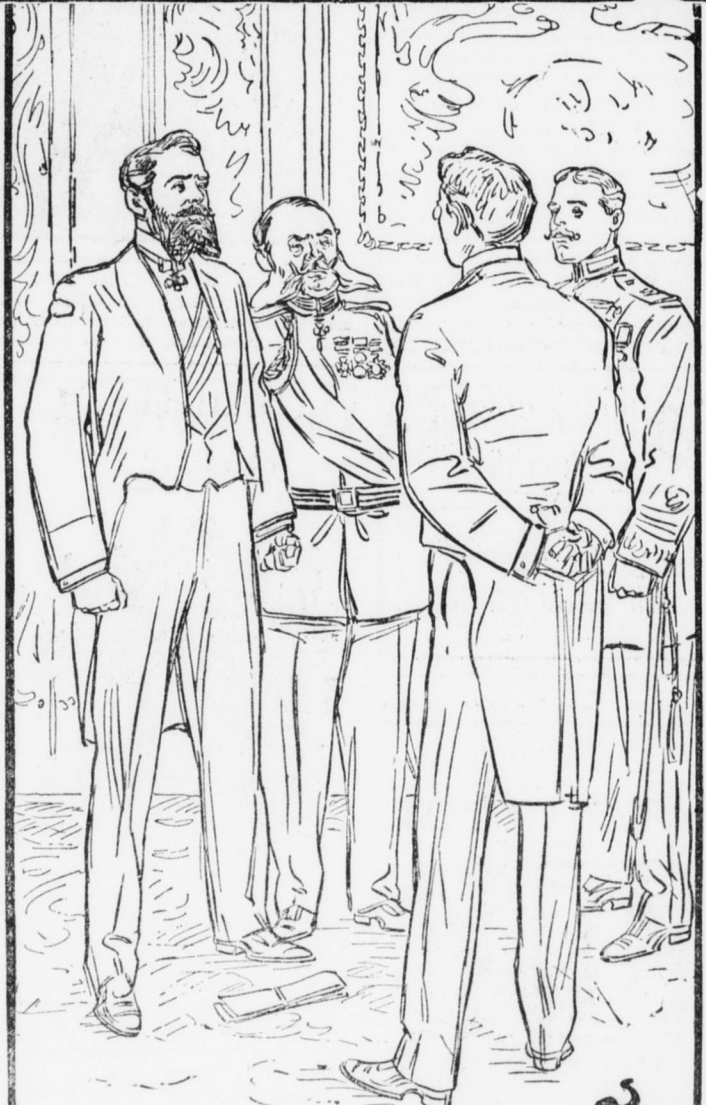


THE EDGE OF HAZARD

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BY GEORGE HORTON

SYNOPSIS.

Frederick Hardy, a fashionable Boston society man, lost his wealth, was flitted 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. Because of suspicious circumstances they were several times molested by the Japanese. Hardy was arrested and found upon his person were papers showing maps of Jap forts. Hardy was proven guiltless. On a train he met Aisome Sano, daughter of a Jap 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 Russian steamer. On reaching Vladivostok he was well treated. He started for Siberia, meeting Princess Romanovna on the train. Hardy boarded a vessel for Amur. Hardy showed the princess his expertness 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 craft. Hardy slew their chief. Burning arrows were hurled upon the Puskikin's decks. An attempt was made to board the vessel. The attacking Chinese were repulsed. Romanoff sneered at Hardy's solicitude for the princess. Stanka, a messenger sent for help, was hailed to a cross on the shore. To put an end to the awful torture Hardy himself put Stanka out of his misery, taking his own life in his hands. Forest fires menaced the vessel. Hardy volunteered to go for help. Refused permission he jumped overboard and started to swim with the princess' distress message. Romanoff was angry at Hardy for his brave efforts to rescue the princess. He wooed her in his own savage way. He said Hardy had made love openly to a Japanese girl. Help came and the princess was rescued. Hardy journeyed on a raft. Arriving at his destination he took charge of the trading company's business. Hardy received a letter from a social leader in Boston and another from Aisome. Hardy took lessons in Russian of a Jew, thus connecting himself in a way with that race. Hardy received a letter from the princess, thanking him for his bravery. Hardy's teacher was in danger of death. He employed Wang as a servant. Hardy went to Moscow, where he was invited to call upon the princess. He started for the palace home of Princess Romanovna. Hardy aroused unaccountable jealousy of his Korean boy by announcing that he was going to call on the princess. He engaged a cabman who drove him to a large house on a poorly lighted street. After entering the house, Hardy discovered that it was a resort of nihilists who supposed he was Felix Hulin, come to tell them of a powerful explosive he had discovered. The real Hulin arrived and denounced Hardy as an impostor. The nihilists determined to kill Hardy in order to protect themselves. Finding an unloaded revolver in his overcoat pocket, he pulled it out. Hulin's bomb, which lay on the table, and swore to blow them all up together if they touched him. Holding the nihilists at bay, Hardy started to leave the room when the police were heard at the outer door. Hulin threw his bomb, killing several policemen, the nihilists fled and Hardy to the cellar. Baruch conducted Hardy through an underground passage to another house, from which he boldly emerged and returned to his hotel. Hardy visited the princess, contributed to the fund for the relief of the victims of the nihilists.



"He Became Infatuated with a Woman of Disreputable Character."

"It gives me great pleasure to make your acquaintance," said the lieutenant, extending his hand.

"The pleasure is mine, I assure you," replied Hardy.

"Gen. Catkoff has already told me of your heroic deeds on the Amur," said the lieutenant. "I have been hoping for some time that I might have the honor of meeting you. I had no idea that you were in Moscow."

Gortchakov was a frank, ingenuous youth, to whom the American took an immediate liking.

"I shall leave you two together," said the princess, rising, "while I go and get my wraps. Oh, by the way, Alexieff, why can we not drive Mr. Hardy by the Slaviansky Bazar? The lieutenant has a new pair of white Arabian horses, which he is anxious for me to see. I am sure that Mr. Hardy can appreciate fine horses."

"I shall be most happy," replied the lieutenant, "if Mr. Hardy will accept."

"Oh, I am sure he will," laughed the princess, "if he is sufficiently urged."

you a certain degree of courage, considerable shrewdness and any amount of insolence. But you are making a sad mistake if you hope to force your way into high society simply because you happened to kill a Chinaman or two on the Amur. You may take advantage of my cousin's good nature, but you can not impose on the rest of us. The best thing for you to do is to accept a good, substantial check for your services to the family, and take yourself off. How much shall it be?"—and he pulled a checkbook from his pocket. "Better take my advice and accept it now, while we are in the mood, and the offer is open."

"Upon my soul!" exclaimed Koukolnik.

"I suppose that I shall be offended at this later," drawled Hardy, "when I get to thinking over it. At the present you are too interesting as a study in ah-zoology. I do not believe there is such another boor and ruffian living in all Moscow as you. Certainly, the Russians of the better class that I have met thus far have all been gentlemen."

"I trust this doesn't bore you, Alexieff, nor you, general," said Romanoff, "but I really must settle with this fellow once and for all, and have it over with. I met him first in Japan, where he played me a low trick, for which he, no doubt, received money from the Japanese authorities. He became infatuated with a woman of disreputable character there, and he and the woman had me put on a boat, ostensibly sailing for Vladivostok. I soon found out that I was to be imprisoned or put to death. This fellow remained in Japan with his paramour, and he came on here afterward at his leisure. I have had him watched since by the police, and it is certain that he is an enemy of the government, and perhaps a Japanese spy. It is known that he consorts with Jews, and I strongly suspect that he is himself an American Jew. The Romanoff family is, unfortunately, under certain obligations to him, for which I am offering to pay him liberally. Come, now, my man, how much shall it be?"

"There must surely be some mistake here," said Gortchakov. "I was introduced to Mr. Hardy by the princess, who recommended him to me as a possible friend. What have you to say to these accusations of the prince, Mr. Hardy?"

"Nothing," replied the American, "save that if we were not under the roof of a lady, I should tell Romanoff that I can not believe that he is mistaken."

"You would have us think then—" suggested Gortchakov.

"—that he is undoubtedly lying!"

"Have a care!" cried Romanoff, raising his voice. "Do not presume too far on the protection of the princess! Once more and for the last time, I ask you, how much do you want?"—and he thrust the checkbook under Hardy's nose.

"You are positively growing tiresome," said Hardy, and he flipped the

book from Romanoff's fingers, so that it flew fluttering half-way across the room.

"Hell and furries!" exclaimed Romanoff. "Take that, you son of a dirty Jewess!"—and he struck Hardy violently in the face with the flat of his hand. The blow staggered the American and left a number of red welts, that contrasted strangely with the marble whiteness of his cheeks.

"This insult must be answered for elsewhere," he said in low, even tones. "Lieut. Gortchakov, I am a comparative stranger here; will you do me the honor of seconding me in this affair?"

"You want me to fight a duel with you?" laughed Romanoff. "With you, a Jew storekeeper? Leave this house instantly, or I shall have you kicked into the street."

"I am an American," Hardy explained to Gortchakov, "and the gen-

"I will pardon him," replied Hardy, "after he has fought me, according to the custom among gentlemen in this country. He has struck me and he must give me satisfaction."

"What!" cried the princess, "a duel? It is against the law. I shall not permit it."

"This Jew, this shopkeeper, wants me to fight him," sneered Romanoff.

"Your highness has been pleased to express gratitude for certain services which I have been fortunate enough to render you—to express a hope that you might be able, in fact, to do something for me in return. I now demand a gentleman's satisfaction for this blow. It is all that I shall ever ask from the Romanoff family."

"I shall also pay you for the blow," snarled Romanoff.

"The princess glanced indignantly at Romanoff, then turned her eyes

urged, "a mere tradesman, who will lose his nerve when made to stand up and be shot at. Take my word for it, Koukolnik, his arm will tremble like a dog's tail when you pat it on the head. If it were I, I'd rather shoot him down than dirty my sword on him, and I've no doubt in the world that Romanoff will feel the same. If we insist on the rapier, too, when this American is, as you know, the aggrieved party, we shall be casting a slur on our man's courage. No Russian nobleman fears any adversary, with any weapon."

By this time Koukolnik had taken so many potations of vodka that the bravado in this sentiment appealed to him.

"You are right!" he cried, "and pistols it shall be. Prince Romanoff shall shoot this tradesman down—he shall not soil his rapier on him."

Gortchakov was jubilant over this arrangement and he hastened to Hardy's quarters in the hotel to tell him of the success of his negotiations.

"All you have to do now," said the dapper young Russian, "is to shoot the great bully through the heart, or between the eyes."

Hardy glanced at Gortchakov's flushed face. He was struck by the eagerness of his manner, and his evident delight at Romanoff's mortal peril.

"Don't wait till he shoots first," counseled the lieutenant; "for he has a sort of awkward skill with the pistol himself. Take aim and shoot just as you hear the word 'three.' My associate and I will see that you do not get into serious trouble with the law. We shall testify to the grossness of the insult. The princess, too, will stand by you. Whatever her feelings for Romanoff, she is too much of a thoroughbred to see an injustice done, and she has great influence with the czar."

There was a slight break in Gortchakov's voice when he mentioned the name of the princess, an agitation in his manner that suggested a possible explanation of his hatred of Romanoff. Hardy remembered the adage: "All is fair in love and war."

The princess' beauty was of the sort that breeds murder in the hearts of men.

"If her highness loves her cousin," Hardy said, sadly, "killing him will not make her love him the less, or—us the more. She is not the sort of woman who loves twice in a lifetime."

"She does not, she can not, know what a worthless brute he is!" cried Gortchakov. "If she loves him, it would be saving her from a fate worse than death to kill him. And think of the insult which he heaped on you! And I assure you that you can kill him with perfect safety."

Hardy laid his hand on the younger man's shoulder.

"A gentleman does not think of the consequences to himself when he is vindicating his honor. I shall settle this score with Romanoff with a full realization of all the aggravating circumstances."

Gortchakov seized the American's hand impulsively.

"Pardon me, my friend," he said, "I intend no imputation on your courage; but there are others besides myself who are tired of this great bully, Romanoff."

"When is the meeting to take place?" asked Hardy.

"To-morrow morning at eight, in a grove on the banks of the river. If you will permit me, I shall call for you at half-past seven with my sledge, and shall drive you there."

"I shall be deeply indebted to you. And now, if you will take no offense, I shall ask you to excuse me, as I must get a good night's rest. There is no medicine like sleep, and plenty of it, to make the hand steady and the eye clear."

The young Russian glanced at the other admiringly.

"You have the nerve of a Russian!"

"Or of an American," replied Hardy, smiling. "You will find me ready at 7:30, and don't fail to be on time. We must not be one second late at this rendezvous."

Left to himself, Hardy sat for a long time with his head in his hands, thinking.

Of his ability to kill Romanoff at the distance agreed on—30 paces—he had not the slightest doubt. He was also aware that he stood a chance himself of being wounded, or of losing his life. Romanoff enjoyed the reputation of being a fair shot, though how much this meant in Russia, Hardy had no means of judging. Probably not much, according to American standards; but even a poor shot will sometimes hit the mark.

Was the princess in love with her cousin? The more Hardy debated this possibility in his mind, the more it took on the shape and tangibility of probability. That she had commanded the prince to fight was no proof against the supposition. She came of fighting blood, and the man she loved must be no coward. Moreover, Hardy had taken advantage of her own princely word to himself, and had claimed fulfillment of the promise that she had made to him.

(TO BE CONTINUED)



"My Seconds Will Wait on You in the Morning," Said Hardy.

lemen of America earn their living by honest toil. Moreover, I am by birth and education a gentleman. Will you be my second?"

Gortchakov caught sight of a stately white figure standing in a distant door—the figure of a tall woman, wearing a long white opera cloak, a coronet blazing with diamonds surmounting her regal brow.

He extended his hand to Hardy.

"I will be your second," he said.

"Are you mad?" said Romanoff. "I can not fight with this low fellow, this tradesman."

"I know Mr. Hardy through the introduction of the Princess Romanovna," declared Alexieff; "that is quite sufficient for me."

"You will either fight me or I will horsewhip you on the public streets," insisted Hardy, not raising his voice. "I knew you to be a liar—I did not suspect that you were also a coward."

"Gentlemen, for shame!" cried the princess, advancing to the angry group, her eyes blazing with indignation. "Do you forget that you are in my house?"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Koukolnik, "it is the princess! Madame, I humbly salute you"—and clicking his heels together, he made a low bow.

"Ah, good evening, cousin," said Romanoff; "I beg your pardon for this disturbance, but really, this fellow here is to blame. I offered to pay him for the service which he has rendered to a member of the family. He knocked my checkbook from my hand, and I very properly chastised his insolence by slapping his face. As the head of the family it is my duty to protect you from low adventurers. I demand now most decidedly that you bid him begone!"

"Oh, Boris!" cried the princess, more in sorrow than in anger, "out of your own mouth I condemn you. If you offered this gentleman money, I am obliged to decide that he did a very spirited and proper thing in knocking your checkbook from your hand. In the name of the Romanoff family, Mr. Hardy, I ask your pardon for this insult that has been heaped on you under my roof!"

searchingly on Hardy, who stood there, white to the lips, rigid as a statue, looking scornfully at her cousin.

"You must fight him, Boris," she said at last, in a voice low, yet perfectly distinct in the tense silence.

Romanoff bowed gracefully, with an evil smile.

"I shall kill him with pleasure, since you desire it," he said.

"My seconds will wait on you in the morning," said Hardy. "Madame, I am your debtor and grateful servant. I have the honor of wishing you good evening"—and he walked from the room.

CHAPTER XXXV.

The Princess Entreats.

In the preliminary arrangements for the duel, Lieut. Gortchakov represented the American with zeal and fidelity. Romanoff's seconds, fully aware of Hardy's reputation for skill with the pistol, objected to that weapon.

"Why, bless my soul!" exclaimed Gen. Koukolnik, "an exchange of bullets would be nothing less than murder, and none of us, as Russians, could permit that. This American could shoot his adversary through the heart or between the eyes without the least trouble in the world, and his hatred of him is so great that he will certainly do it. We can't permit that—upon my soul, we can't!"

"For the time being," replied Gortchakov, with firmness, "I shall forget that I am a Russian, and shall demand justice for the man who has asked me to represent him. My man has little or no knowledge of the rapier. A combat a l'outrance with swords would mean just as surely his destruction. He is, as you well know, the outraged party, and the choice of weapons should be his. Romanoff, moreover, is not unskillful with the pistol, and there is no doubt as to the quality of his nerve."

Fortunately for Gortchakov's contention, the Baron Koubelk, Koukolnik's associate, believed Hardy's reputation for skill greatly exaggerated.

"The fellow is a plodder, too," he

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The Princess Commands.

"Being only a merchant," replied the American, "I find it necessary to cultivate good manners to a certain extent. Were I a prince, I might also be a boor."

"Upon my soul!" exclaimed Gen. Koukolnik, "but this is a very peppery merchant!" The general's checks and nose were adorned with a network of varicose veins, the result of innumerable deep potations of vodka. He was that anomalous combination, an excitable fat man, and he had a habit of jerking so fiercely at his long, pointed side-whiskers that he pulled down the puffy underlip of his eye, disclosing the red conjunctiva.

Romanoff flushed with rage.

"Fellow," said he, "I am not going to waste any words with you. I grant

CHAPTER XXXIII.—Continued.

The American was puzzled for a moment. He knew why this handsome daredevil Russian had subscribed so large an amount. That Boris Romanoff was touched by the suffering of the poor was a thought to bring a smile to the face of any who chanced to know him.

Hardy was not rich, as we know. He had saved a few thousands from his fortune, and his salary and profits from commissions brought him a respectable income. He held his pen for a moment suspended, as he remarked, looking the princess quizzically in the eye:

"Your cousin is very tender-hearted, is he not—quite charitably disposed?"

"He has responded handsomely, has he not?" she replied, carelessly, but there was an amused look in her eye. "But he is rich and doesn't mind a little sum like this. Besides, he knows that I am anxious to make these poor people comfortable."

Hardy scribbled his name on the paper and handed it back carelessly to the princess.

"But, monsieur!" she gasped, "my friend, I could not accept so much from you! You have made some mistake here!"

He adjusted his gold pince-nez, looked critically at the paper, and read sotto voce:

"Frederick Courland Hardy, rubles 2,500." No, that is quite correct, your highness. I shall take great pleasure in sending you a check in the morning. You have little idea of how this cause appeals to me."

The princess flushed and held the paper in her hand for some moments in silence, looking at it.

"The Americans are as generous as they are brave," she said at last, in a low voice. "I shall accept this noble gift on behalf of my poor people, in whose name I thank you."

At this moment a servant appeared at the door and announced:

"Lieutenant Gortchakov!"

"I regret that I must be leaving you now," said the Romanovna; "but stay! I should like to introduce you to the lieutenant. He is a great admirer of America and Americans. Show the lieutenant in, Aleko."

The lieutenant entered, tall, in his twenties, very slender and handsome. He was attired in the uniform of the Imperial Guards. Seeing the princess, he bowed very low, clicking his heels together. Then he walked rapidly to her, and, bending with exquisite grace and assurance, lifted her hand to his lips. After which he turned politely and inquiringly toward Hardy, who arose.

"Lieut. Gortchakov," said the princess, "this is Mr. Hardy, the brave American, of whom you have heard me speak. I desire you to be friends."