

THE EDGE OF HAZARD

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SYNOPSIS.

Frederick Hardy, a fashionable Boston society man, lost his wealth, was killed by a girl and sent by a friend to a charge of an American Trading Company store in Russia. On his journey through Japan he met Stappleton, Neville, and possibly an Edelman. 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, daughter of a Jap merchant. In Neville's shoes Jap found pictures of forts, proving him to be a Russian spy. Upon reaching Vladivostok on a steamer, which was wrecked shortly afterward. He was rescued by a Russian spy. 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 expertise 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 Pushkin's decks. An attempt was made to board the vessel. The attacking Chinese were repulsed. Romanoff sneaked at Hardy's solitude for the princess. Stanka a messenger, sent for help, was nailed 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 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 was in 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 room Hardy discovered that it was a resort of nihilists who supposed he was Felix Hulin, come to pay them of a powerful exploit 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 pointed it at 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 Aisome the Jew suddenly appeared and led Hardy to the cellar. Baruch conducted Hardy through an underground passage to another house, from which he emerged and returned to his hotel. Hardy visited the princess, contributed to the fund for the relief of the victims of the nihilists. He gave more than Romanoff had. The letter, entering the room, openly insulted him. Romanoff struck Hardy, who challenged him to a duel. The Russian accepted. Preparations for the duel were made. The princess asked Hardy to spare Romanoff's life. Hardy purposely missed Romanoff, but was himself wounded. Hardy was placed in the hospital. He sent his servant to the duel scene for a cuff button of Romanoff's, which he purposely shot off, rather than violate the princess' wish. This he sent to her.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Murder and Mystery.

Hardy was able to leave the hospital on February the first and return to his quarters at the hotel, where he was much more comfortable, for the hospitals of Moscow are inferior to those of other European cities of equal size. He was pale and weak, but his appetite was good and he was gaining strength rapidly. Though he had come off second-best in the duel, to all appearances, yet his countenance had taken on a look not in any way characteristic of the man who has been beaten or cowed by punishment. There was something new in his eyes, and there was an expression about his mouth that suggested rather the man who has fought a mental fight and won. In his conversations with Wang he avoided all mention either of the princess or of her cousin. His only desire was to close up the business in Moscow and get back to Stryetensk as soon as possible—get back to the warehouses and the great water highway that led eastward to the Pacific ocean, to that frontier of the vast Russian empire that lies close to Korea and scowls across the Japan sea at Nippon and its hive of angry, buzzing bees. In the preparations for departure the Korean boy displayed a competency and assiduity that were a revelation even to Hardy. He superintended the shipment to Stryetensk of large orders of goods, he made valuable suggestions, he worked till all hours of the night, relieving his principal of the labor of correspondence and bookkeeping. In addition, he was a cheerful and even amusing companion, whose brain was fertile in delicate little attentions that made Hardy's enforced detention in the hotel less irksome.

Meantime, letters from Emory and other advisers were insistent to the effect that war was inevitable. On the morning of the 7th Wang came into the office and laid a paper down before Hardy, pointing, without a word, to a double-headed article with "scary" headlines.

JAPAN ENRAGED; PETERSBURG HER MINISTERS LEAVES PETERSBURG.

The article, in a fit of rage, withdrew Russia from the Russian negotiatory policy, and it was possible to conduct the war's calm and dignified course. Hardy glanced through the article, which set forth at length the Russian government's reasonable and righteous

course, as alleged by the writer, and the hot-headed, childish and unwarrantable demands of the islanders.

"Well," he commented, "even this does not mean war. Russia will simply wait—she has always been waiting, and the Japanese must strike the first blow if they want war."

"Wait and see," was Wang's only reply.

It was only two days later that Hardy became aware that something extraordinary had happened. Toward evening the city was seized with excitement. Some great, some terrible news was in the air. Men were talking excitedly in the corridors of the hotel, groups were gathering in the streets, hoarsely shouting. Wang was out, so Hardy rang for a bellboy and asked him what was the matter.

"Matter!" cried the boy; "the Japanese have captured Port Arthur! They have murdered 100,000 Christians. They have sunk the whole Russian fleet, treacherously, falsely, in the night. The czar will send a great army and kill every cursed Japanese on earth. I am going, Ivan Nekresov is going—we are all going. Curse the Japanese!"

"My God!" exclaimed Hardy as the excited boy left, slamming the door, "they are at it in earnest, and the Japanese have struck hard. This means war, indeed. If the Russian navy has been destroyed it means a long war. Wang will be wild."

At this moment the Korean entered, but, to Hardy's surprise, he was not carried away by excitement. There was a hectic spot on each yellow cheek, and his eyes were burning, but he was self-contained.

"Well, Wang," said Hardy, "you were right, after all, and the Japanese have attacked. I have heard some very wild rumors. Have you learned anything definite?"

"Yes," replied Wang; "what seem to be reliable reports have arrived. The mikado's fleet last night attacked the Russian ships at Port Arthur and sank the Czarvitch and the Retvizan, two of the heaviest battle-ships in the czar's navy, and the Pallada, a cruiser. The Russians are very indignant, naturally, but they should save their feelings. The Japanese have only begun."

Within two weeks after the breaking out of the war, during which time many disastrous blows were struck at the naval prestige of Russia, Hardy was ready for the long railway journey back to Stryetensk.

Wang secured a first-class compartment for his master, and second-class accommodations for himself, and the two drove to the great terminal station, which commodious building they found crowded with officers of every rank, military officials and Red Cross nurses hastening to Vladivostok and the front.

Among these, Hardy noticed the gallant, towering form of Boris Romanoff, attired in officer's cap and cloak. The prince was surrounded by a group of officers, with whom he was talking. He noticed Hardy and gave him a look of hate. The American turned his eyes quickly away and busied himself with identifying his baggage and getting it aboard.

On the morning of the third day out from Moscow the prince was found murdered in his compartment. He was lying peacefully sleeping in his berth, the last long sleep, with a slender stiletto sticking in his heart.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Wang as a Witness.

This tragic occurrence occasioned tremendous excitement on the train, which was stopped at the next station and surrounded by a band of Cossacks. Here it was kept for three days until a squad of police and detectives could be hurried to the scene from Moscow. Numerous arrests were made and many of the passengers were questioned separately.

Wang was one of those examined. He was taken into a small, bare room on the second floor of the station, where sat a shrewd old man at a pine table. He was flanked by two younger officers, while a stenographer, steno-graphic pen in hand, bent over a writing pad.

"Your name is Wang?" said the officer.

"It is."

"Wang what?"

"Just Wang."

"What is your nationality?"

"I am a Korean."

"You are in the employ of the alleged American, Frederick Courland Hardy?"

"I am in the employ of the American, Frederick Courland Hardy."

"Be careful, sir, do not be insolent. Do not attempt to amend the expressions of the court. Make a note there—witness very intelligent and inclined to be insolent—Got it down? Very well. How do you know that he is an American?"

"Because he says he is."

"Oh, ah! very well. Tell us what you know of the duel which was fought on January 5 between this alleged American, Hardy, and his highness, the Prince Boris Romanoff. Speak the truth, or it will be the worse for you!"

"I know nothing of the duel which your honor alluded to as having taken place," replied Wang. The boy showed not the slightest sign of fear. His yellow face was flushed, he held his head high and looked the judge defiantly in the eyes.

"You know nothing of it?" roared the latter. "Do not attempt to deceive the court. We know more than you think. Did not this Hardy tell you that he had fought a duel with his highness?"

"He told me also that he was an American," replied Wang, "and since your honor intimates that his word is unreliable—"

"Make another note—witness insolent—did he or did he not tell you that such a duel had been fought?"

"He did."

"Ah! he did! That he was seriously wounded in that duel as a result of his highness' superior coolness and marksmanship, we know. We also are acquainted with the causes of said duel; that his highness was obliged to chastise this Hardy for presumption and insolence; and that it was in accordance with the request of the princess, his cousin, that his highness shot him. All this we know. You must tell us what threats of vengeance the wounded man breathed out against the prince."

"None at all, your honor—absolutely none at all," replied Wang, turning

away station, facing the desolate, snow-covered plains. In the distance was a miserable peasant village, with thatched roofs. The train lurches, the mortal remains of the murdered prince, were gone. The boy asked a stolid-faced stationmaster what had become of his employer, and the latter only shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

Wang entered the station, sat down on a bench and thought for a long time. Then he came out on the platform and walked up and down for an hour—for two hours, after which he entered the station and passed another hour on the bench. Though he had not eaten since noon, he did not feel hungry. Toward midnight a man entered the ticket office, opened the window and lighted a lamp. Wang stepped up to the window.

"Do you expect a train?" he asked.

"Yes, in half an hour."

"Going which way?"

"To Moscow."

"How much is the fare?"

The agent told him, and the boy found that he had enough money with him to pay for a third-class ticket and leave a few roubles over, sufficient to buy food. He procured a ticket, and when the train thundered up to the station he boarded it and soon was speeding back to the Muscovite capital. Arriving there after two days

"Well, her highness consents to see you, after all. Remember your manners, young man, and if you have any begging scheme, don't impose on her too much. She has a very soft heart."

Wang disappeared within the palace.

CHAPTER XL.

A Princess and a Woman.

The Princess Romanovna received Wang in a small library on the second floor. She was walking to and fro, with her hands clasped behind her back, and her lovely brows knit in thought, the while she dictated letters to her secretary. The boy's keen glance detected that she was pale. As he entered and stood by the door, silently waiting, she turned to him eagerly and said:

"Well! What is this communication that you have to make to me? Do you bring me a letter?"

"I must see you alone," replied Wang. There was something in his manner and expression that could not be denied. The princess turned toward her secretary, saying:

"You may leave the room until I ring for you, Olga."

"But surely," protested Olga, "your highness does not wish to be left alone with this stranger? Let me stay, I beg of you, to protect you!"

Romanovna smiled.

"I fear you would be of small protection in case of danger. Besides," glancing at the boy's slight form, "this young man does not look like a dangerous person. Go, I insist!"

The girl gathered up her papers and left the room at once.

"Do you know where my master is?" demanded Wang in perfect Russian.

"Your master?"

"Yes, or my employer, if you will, though I love to call him my master. I mean the American, Frederick Courland Hardy."

"Oh! So you are the Korean boy of whom I have heard—his secretary? No, my poor boy, I do not know where he is, further than that he is in prison in St. Petersburg charged with a terrible crime, on presumptive evidence so strong that his conviction is almost certain. Was he a kind master to you?" asked the princess. "Do you love him very much? Why, what is the matter?"

Wang turned an ashen color, reeled as if wounded and caught at the knob of a door.

"No—nothing," he gasped, "just a little faintness—the heat of the room, perhaps. I am all right now. Mr. Hardy is the kindest man that I have ever known—and the bravest and truest gentleman that walks the earth."

"I am glad to hear him so well spoken of," said the princess. Her hands were still clasped behind her back as she stood gazing fixedly at Wang. "My acquaintance with him would lead me to have the same opinion, were it not for this terrible accusation, so strongly substantiated by evidence."

She was talking with this wonderful boy as though he were an equal.

"And do you believe this accusation—you, who love him? Shame upon you! Does not your heart tell you that he is innocent?"

It was now the Romanovna's turn to grow pale and stagger, as though she had been struck a physical blow.

"How dare you?" she cried; "you insolent boy! Did he tell you that I loved him? But no! He is a gentleman. He could not do such a thing. But something, though it cannot be my heart, tells me that he is innocent."

"Then something tells you right," said Wang, quietly, "for he did not kill your worthless cousin. I killed him!"

"You—you killed him!" Her expression, as she said these words, denoted perplexity, quickly followed by pity. "You poor boy!" she cried, "your sufferings have affected your mind. Those little hands have never committed murder—and such a terrible murder!"

"Listen," said Wang, "and you will understand and believe. The Prince Romanoff hated my master from the beginning of his acquaintance with him, because he could not make him his tool. In Japan, where the prince came as a spy, he attempted to throw suspicion on Mr. Hardy, but did not succeed in getting him into any serious trouble. His hatred was increased on the Amur because it was my master who saved your life, and not he. The affair of the duel, in which the American figured as the real hero by sparing his life at your request, changed his animosity into a resentment which Mr. Hardy's death alone could have satisfied."

"I overheard the prince talking in the station at Moscow with two of his associates. He mentioned the name of Hardy with murderous hate, and I shadowed them for two days. I learned that the prince was planning to kill my master. They were going to have the coach in which he was traveling blown up with dynamite and the rumor spread that a mistake had been made, as has happened before, and that the explosion had been in

tended for the car containing Romanoff and some of the nobles. I overheard the words, 'This Jew must die!' and I knew that if a noble like Romanoff had determined on the death of a man without powerful friends he would accomplish his end. I could not expose them, for how could the word of a boy like me, a despised Korean, stand against that of the Prince Romanoff. So, to save the life of my master, I killed Romanoff. I crept into his compartment at night when he was sleeping in a drunken stupor and thrust a stiletto into his heart. He sighed—a long sigh—shuddered, and kept on sleeping."

"Who are you?" asked the princess, "you who, for love, have done this dreadful deed of hate?"

"I am Aisome Mosuro, known in my own country as Aisome, the Fox. I am supposed to be cunning, brave, heartless and patriotic to the last drop of blood in my body. I am in the secret service of my country, and have been one of its most trusted agents. I speak many of the languages of Europe and all the dialects of China. And yet I am a woman—just a woman, who, at the chivalrous touch of a man's lips, find my whole nature changed, and am ready to give up all for him, friends, country, individuality, yes, even life itself, happy only if I can be near him, can serve him, can hear his voice!—when I think of it all, I am ashamed of myself," sobbed the girl, pressing a handkerchief to her eyes, "but I cannot help it. I am even now asking you to save me, if you can, for his sake. I can never see him again. He will know now that I am not Wang, the Korean boy, and, besides, my hands are stained with blood. But he would be distracted if he knew that I were in the hands of the Russian authorities; he would be unhappy all his life if they were to kill me. For he loved Wang, though he has forgotten poor Aisome. I am asking you to save me for his sake, and let me go away to my own country. You do not despise me, do you, and you do not fear me?"

"I neither fear nor despise you," replied the princess, sorrowfully, "though I shrink with horror from your dreadful deed. You are a woman and a sister, and I will save you if I can, for I believe you. Alas! I knew too well my cousin's revengeful and violent nature. Listen! I shall see the czar and use my woman's wits to clear Mr. Hardy without giving the name of the actual perpetrator. I am going to Port Arthur to take charge of a hospital there for our sick and wounded heroes. You must remain here in my house till I return from St. Petersburg, and then go with me to the sea coast, whence I will send you across to Japan. I believe that Mr. Hardy would wish this, and there is nothing I would not do for his sake, within honor. But if I find that it is necessary, in order to save his life—"

"—to tell my name? Then tell it, and I shall be here to say that you speak the truth!"

CHAPTER XLI.

Imperial Favor.

The Princess Romanovna was received by his imperial majesty in a small room of the Winter palace, a room which, equipped with graceful and dainty furniture of the sixteenth century, was a cheerful symphony in a delicate shade of blue. The fact that she was a favorite at court, together with her high connections and her noble descent, through which she even claimed distant relationship with the imperial family itself, rendered it comparatively easy for her to obtain a private and informal interview.

His majesty was standing when Romanovna entered, looking out of the window on the semi-circle where stands the huge monolith in honor of Alexander I. He turned, as her name was announced and smiled. She noticed that he was pale and careworn, and that his expression, even as he smiled, was very sad. Her heart went out to him in mingled affection and reverence. She bowed low with exquisite grace as his eyes fell on her, then advanced to where he stood, and, kneeling, kissed his hand. He assisted her to arise, and, still holding her hand, led her to a sofa.

"Sit, my daughter," he said, "and speak freely. There is none of our subjects to whom we will give a more indulgent ear than to you."—as if he dropped wearily on the divan. "Sit," he repeated, as she remained respectfully standing, "it is our command."

She sat down on the divan, at some distance from him, and turned her eyes on him, waiting for him to speak.

"You have our permission to proceed," he said.

"I come, sire," she began, "to speak to you of my cousin's, Boris Romanoff's, death and to tell you something of the man who is accused of his murder—the American, Frederick Courland Hardy."

"You have our deepest sympathy in this matter, my daughter," said his majesty. "I understand from the minister of justice that you loved your cousin—that you were engaged to him."

The princess remained silent. (TO BE CONCLUDED.)



The Prince Was Surrounded by a Group of Officers.