

The Baron's Quarry

Egerton Castle

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"Oh, no, I assure you, you are not boring Mr. Marshfield," said this personage himself in his gentle voice—that curious voice that could flow on for hours, promulgating profound and startling theories on every department of human knowledge or conducting paradoxical arguments without a single inflection or pause of hesitation. "I am, on the contrary, much interested in your hunting talk. To paraphrase a well-worn quotation somewhat widely, nihil humanum a me alienum est. Even hunting stories may have their point of biological interest; the philologist sometimes pricks his ear to the jargon of the chase; moreover, I am not incapable of appreciating the subject matter itself. This seems to excite some derision. I admit I am not much of a sportsman to look at, nor, indeed, by instinct, yet I have had some out-of-the-way experiences in that line—generally when intent on other pursuits. I doubt, for instance, if even you, Major Travers, notwithstanding your well-known exploits against man and beast, notwithstanding that doubtful smile of yours, could match the strangeness of a certain hunting adventure in which I played an important part."

The speaker's small, deep-set, black eyes, that never warmed to anything more human than a purely speculative scientific interest in his surroundings, here wandered round the skeptical yet expectant circle with bland amusement. He stretched out his bloodless fingers for another of his host's superfine cigars and proceeded, with only such interruptions as were occasioned by the lighting and careful smoking of the latter.

"I was returning home after my prolonged stay in Petersburg, intending to linger on my way and test with mine own ears certain among the many dialects of Eastern Europe—anent which there is a symmetrical little cluster of philological knotty points it is my modest intention one day to unravel. However, that is neither here nor there. On the road to Hungary I bethought myself opportunely of proving the once pressingly offered hospitality of the Baron Kossowski.

"You may have met the man, Major Travers; he was a tremendous sportsman, if you like. I first came across him at McNeil's place in remote Ireland. Now, being in Bukowina, within measurable distance of his Carpathian abode, and curious to see a Polish lord at home, I remembered his invitation. It was already of long standing, but it had been warm, born in fact of a sudden fit of enthusiasm for me"—here a half-mocking smile quivered an instant under the speaker's black mustache—"which, as it was characteristic, I may as well tell you about.

"It was on the day of, or, rather, to be accurate, on the day after my arrival, toward the small hours of the morning, in the smoking room at Rathdrum. Our host was peacefully snoring over his empty pipe and his seventh glass of whisky, also empty. The rest of the men had slunk off to bed. The baron, who all unknown to himself had been a subject of most interesting observation to me the whole evening, being now practically alone with me, condescended to turn an eye, as wide awake as a fox's, albeit slightly bloodshot, upon the contemptible white-faced person who had preferred spending the raw hours over his papers, within the radius of a glorious fire's warmth, to creeping slyly over treacherous quagmires in the pursuit of timid bog creatures (snipe shooting had been the order of the day)—the baron, I say, became aware of my existence and entered into conversation with me.

"He would no doubt have been much surprised could he have known that he was already mapped out, craniologically and physiognomically, catalogued with care and neatly laid by in his proper ethnological box, in

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my private type museum; that, as I sat and examined him from my different coigns of vantage in library, in dining and smoking room that evening, not a look of his, not a gesture went forth but had significance for me.

"You, I had thought, with your broad shoulders and deep chest; your massive head that should have gone with a tall stature, not with those short sturdy limbs; with your thick red hair, that should have been black for that matter, as should your wide-set yellow eyes—you would be a real puzzle to one who did not recognize in you equal mixtures of the fair, stalwart and muscular Slav with the bilious-sanguine, thick-set, wiry Turanian. Your pedigree would no doubt bear me out: there is as much of the Magyar as of the Pole in your anatomy. Athlete, and yet a tangle of nerves; a ferocious brute at bottom, I dare say, for your broad forehead inclines to flatness; under your bristling beard your jaw must protrude, and the base of your skull is ominously thick. And, with all that, capable of ideal transports: when that girl played and sang to—night I saw the swelling of your eyelid veins, and how that small, tenacious, claw-like hand of yours twitched! You would be a fine leader of men—but God help the wretches in your power!

"So had I mused upon him. Yet I confess that when we came in closer contact with each other, even I was not proof against the singular courtesy of his manner and his unaccountable personal charm.

"Our conversation soon grew interesting; to me as a matter of course, and evidently to him also. A few general words led to interchange of remarks upon the country we were both visitors in and so to national characteristics—Pole and Irishman have not a few in common, both in their nature and history. An observation which he made, not without a certain flash in his light eyes and a transient uncovering of the teeth, on the Irish type of female beauty suddenly suggested to me a stanza of an ancient Polish ballad, very full of milk—and—blood imagery, of alternating ferocity and voluptuousness. This I quoted to the astounded foreigner in the vernacular, and this it was that metamorphosed his mere perfection of civility into sudden warmth, and, in fact, procured me the invitation in question.

"When I left Rathdrum the baron's last words to me were that if I ever thought of visiting his country otherwise than in books, he held me bound to make Yany, his Galician seat, my headquarters of study.

"From Czernowicz, therefore, where I stopped some time, I wrote, received in due time a few lines of prettily worded reply, and ultimately entered my sled in the nearest town to, yet at a most forbidding distance from, Yany, and started on my journey thither.

"The undertaking meant many long hours of undulation and skidding over the November snow, to the somniferous bell jangle of my dirty little horses, the only impression of interest being a weird gypsy concert I came in for at a miserable drinking-booth half buried in the snow where we halted for the refreshment of man and beast. Here, I remember, I discovered a very definite connection between the characteristic run of the tsimbol, the peculiar bite of the Zigeuner's bow on his fiddle-string, and some distinctive points of Turanian tongues. In other countries, in Spain, for instance, your gypsy speaks differently on his instrument. But, oddly enough, when I later attempted to put this observation on paper I could find no word to express it."

A few of our company evinced signs of sleepiness, but most of us who knew Marshfield, and that he could, unless he had something novel to say, be as silent and retiring as he now evinced signs of being copious, awaited further developments with patience. He has his own deliberate way of speaking, which he evidently enjoys greatly, though it be occasionally trying to his listeners.

"On the afternoon of my second day's drive, the snow, which till then had fallen fine and continuous, ceased, and my Jehu, suddenly interrupting himself in the midst of some exciting wolf story quite in keeping with the time of year and the wild surroundings, pointed to a distant spot against the gray sky to the northwest, between two wood-covered folds of ground—the first eastern spurs of the great Carpathian chain.

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"There stands Yany,' said he. I looked at my far-off goal with interest. As we drew nearer, the sinking sun, just dipping behind the hills, tinged the now distinct frontage with a cold copper-like gleam, but it was only for a minute; the next the building became nothing more to the eye than a black irregular silhouette against the crimson sky.

"Before we entered the long, steep avenue of poplars, the early winter darkness was upon us, rendered all the more depressing by gray mists which gave a ghostly aspect to such objects as the sheen of the snow rendered visible. Once or twice there were feeble flashes of light looming in iridescent halos as we passed little clusters of hovels, but for which I should have been induced to fancy that the great Hof stood alone in the wilderness, such was the deathly stillness around. But even as the tall, square building rose before us above the vapor, yellow lighted in various stories, and mighty in height and breadth, there broke upon my ear a deep-mouthed, menacing bay, which gave at once almost alarming reality to the eerie surroundings. 'His lordship's boar and wolf hounds,' quoth my charioteer calmly, unmindful of the regular pandemonium of howls and barks which ensued as he skillfully turned his horses through the gateway and flogged the tired beasts into a sort of shambling canter that we might land with glory before the house door: a weakness common, I believe, to drivers of all nations.

"I alighted in the court of honor, and while awaiting an answer to my tug at the bell, stood, broken with fatigue, depressed, chilled and aching, questioning the wisdom of my proceedings and the amount of comfort, physical and moral, that was likely to await me in a tete-a-tete visit with a well-mannered savage in his own home.

"The unkempt tribe of stable retainers who began to gather round me and my rough vehicle in the gloom, with their evil-smelling sheepskins and their resigned, battered visages, were not calculated to reassure me. Yet when the door opened, there stood a smart chasseur and a solemn major-domo who might but just have stepped out of Mayfair; and there was displayed a spreading vista of warm, deep-colored halls, with here a statue and there a stuffed bear, and under foot pile carpets strewn with rarest skins.

"Marveling, yet comforted withal, I followed the solemn butler, who received me with the deference due to an expected guest and expressed the master's regret for his enforced absence till dinner time. I traversed vast rooms, each more sumptuous than the last, feeling the strangeness of the contrast between the outer desolation and this sybaritic excess of luxury growing ever more strongly upon me; caught a glimpse of a picture gallery, where peculiar yet admirably executed latter-day French pictures hung side by side with ferocious boar hunts of Snyder and such kin; and, at length, was ushered into a most cheerful room, modern to excess in its comfortable promise, where, in addition to the tall stove necessary for warmth, there burned on an open hearth a vastly pleasant fire of resinous logs, and where, on a low table, awaited me a dainty service of fragrant Russian tea.

"My impression of utter novelty seemed somehow enhanced by this unexpected refinement in the heart of the solitudes and in such a rugged shell, and yet, when I came to reflect, it was only characteristic of my cosmopolitan host. But another surprise was in store for me.

"When I had recovered bodily warmth and mental equilibrium in my downy armchair, before the roaring logs, and during the delicious absorption of my second glass of tea, I turned my attention to the French valet, evidently the baron's own man, who was deftly unpacking my portmanteau, and who, unless my practiced eye deceived me, asked for nothing better than to entertain me with agreeable conversation the while.

"Your master is out, then?" quoth I, knowing that the most trivial remark would suffice to start him.

"True, Monseigneur was out; he was desolated in despair (this with the national amiable and imaginative instinct); but it was doubtless important business. M. le Baron had the visit of his factor during the midday meal; had left the table hurriedly, and had not been seen since. Madame la Baronne had been a little suffering, but she would receive monsieur!"

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"Madame!" exclaimed I, astounded, 'is your master then married?— since when?'—visions of a fair Tartar, fit mate for my baron, immediately springing somewhat alluringly before my mental vision. But the answer dispelled the picturesque fancy.

"Oh, yes,' said the man, with a somewhat peculiar expression. Yes, Monseigneur is married. Did Monsieur not know? And yet it was from England that Monseigneur brought back his wife.'

"An Englishwoman!"

"My first thought was one of pity; an Englishwoman alone in this wilderness—two days' drive from even a railway station—and at the mercy of Kossowski! But the next minute I reversed my judgment. Probably she adored her rufous lord, took his veneer of courtesy—a veneer of the most exquisite polish, I grant you, but perilously thin—for the very perfection of chivalry. Or perchance it was his inner savageness itself that charmed her; the most refined women often amaze one by the fascination which the preponderance of the brute in the opposite sex seems to have for them.

"I was anxious to hear more.

"Is it not dull for the lady here at this time of the year?"

"The valet raised his shoulders with a gesture of despair that was almost passionate.

"Dull! Ah, monsieur could not conceive to himself the dullness of it. That poor Madame la Baronne! not even a little child to keep her company on the long, long days when there was nothing but snow in the heaven and on the earth and the howling of the wind and the dogs to cheer her. At the beginning, indeed, it had been different; when the master first brought home his bride the house was gay enough. It was all redecorated and refurnished to receive her (monsieur should have seen it before, a mere rendezvous—de— chasse—for the matter of that so were all the country houses in these parts). Ah, that was the good time! There were visits month after month; parties, sleighing, dancing, trips to St. Petersburg and Vienna. But this year it seemed they were to have nothing but boars and wolves. How madame could stand it—well, it was not for him to speak—and heaving a deep sigh he delicately inserted my white tie round my collar, and with a flourish twisted it into an irreproachable bow beneath my chin. I did not think it right to cross-examine the willing talker any further, especially as, despite his last asseveration, there were evidently volumes he still wished to pour forth; but I confess that, as I made my way slowly out of my room along the noiseless length of passage, I was conscious of an unwonted, not to say vulgar, curiosity concerning the woman who had captivated such a man as the Baron Kossowski.

"In a fit of speculative abstraction I must have taken the wrong turning, for I presently found myself in a long, narrow passage. I did not remember. I was retracing my steps when there came the sound of rapid footfalls upon stone flags; a little door flew open in the wall close to me, and a small, thick-set man, huddled in the rough sheepskin of the Galician peasant, with a mangy fur cap on his head, nearly ran headlong into my arms. I was about condescendingly to interpellate him in my best Polish, when I caught the gleam of an angry yellow eye and noted the bristle of a red beard—Kossowski!

"Amazed, I fell back a step in silence. With a growl like an uncouth animal disturbed, he drew his filthy cap over his brow with a savage gesture and pursued his way down the corridor at a sort of wild-boar trot.

"This first meeting between host and guest was so odd, so incongruous, that it afforded me plenty of food for a fresh line of conjecture as I traced my way back to the picture gallery, and from thence successfully to the drawing-room, which, as the door was ajar, I could not this time mistake.

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"It was large and lofty and dimly lit by shaded lamps; through the rosy gloom I could at first only just make out a slender figure by the hearth; but as I advanced, this was resolved into a singularly graceful woman in clinging, fur-trimmed velvet gown, who, with one hand resting on the high mantelpiece, the other banging listlessly by her side, stood gazing down at the crumbling wood fire as if in a dream.

"My friends are kind enough to say that I have a catlike tread; I know not how that may be; at any rate the carpet I was walking upon was thick enough to smother a heavier footfall: not until I was quite close to her did my hostess become aware of my presence. Then she started violently and looked over her shoulder at me with dilating eyes. Evidently a nervous creature, I saw the pulse in her throat, strained by her attitude, flutter like a terrified bird.

"The next instant she had stretched out her hand with sweet English words of welcome, and the face, which I had been comparing in my mind to that of Guido's Cenci, became transformed by the arch and exquisite smile of a Greuse. For more than two years I had had no intercourse with any of my nationality. I could conceive the sound of his native tongue under such circumstances moving a man in a curious unexpected fashion.

"I babbled some commonplace reply, after which there was silence while we stood opposite each other, she looking at me expectantly. At length, with a sigh checked by a smile and an overtone of sadness in a voice that yet tried to be sprightly:

"'Am I then so changed, Mr. Marshfield?' she asked. And all at once I knew her: the girl whose nightingale throat had redeemed the desolation of the evenings at Rathdrum, whose sunny beauty had seemed (even to my celebrated cold-blooded aestheticism) worthy to haunt a man's dreams. Yes, there was the subtle curve of the waist, the warm line of throat, the dainty foot, the slender tip-tilted fingers—witty fingers, as I had classified them—which I now shook like a true Briton, instead of availing myself of the privilege the country gave me, and kissing her slender wrist.

"But she was changed; and I told her so with unconventional frankness, studying her closely as I spoke.

"'I am afraid,' I said gravely, 'that this place does not agree with you.'

"She shrank from my scrutiny with a nervous movement and flushed to the roots of her red-brown hair. Then she answered coldly that I was wrong, that she was in excellent health, but that she could not expect any more than other people to preserve perennial youth (I rapidly calculated she might be two-and-twenty), though, indeed, with a little forced laugh, it was scarcely flattering to hear one had altered out of all recognition. Then, without allowing me time to reply, she plunged into a general topic of conversation which, as I should have been obtuse indeed not to take the hint, I did my best to keep up.

"But while she talked of Vienna and Warsaw, of her distant neighbors, and last year's visitors, it was evident that her mind was elsewhere; her eye wandered, she lost the thread of her discourse, answered me at random, and smiled her piteous smile incongruously.

"However lonely she might be in her solitary splendor, the company of a countryman was evidently no such welcome diversion.

"After a little while she seemed to feel herself that she was lacking in cordiality, and, bringing her absent gaze to bear upon me with a puzzled strained look: 'I fear you will find it very dull,' she said, 'my husband is so wrapped up this winter in his country life and his sport. You are the first visitor we have had. There is nothing but guns and horses here, and you do not care for these things.'

"The door creaked behind us; and the baron entered, in faultless evening dress. Before she turned toward him I was sharp enough to catch again the upleaping of a quick dread in her eyes, not even so much dread perhaps, I

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thought afterwards, as horror—the horror we notice in some animals at the nearing of a beast of prey. It was gone in a second, and she was smiling. But it was a revelation.

"Perhaps he beat her in Russian fashion, and she, as an Englishwoman, was narrow-minded enough to resent this; or perhaps, merely, I had the misfortune to arrive during a matrimonial misunderstanding.

"The baron would not give me leisure to reflect; he was so very effusive in his greeting—not a hint of our previous meeting—unlike my hostess, all in all to me; eager to listen, to reply; almost affectionate, full of references to old times and genial allusions. No doubt when he chose he could be the most charming of men; there were moments when, looking at him in his quiet smile and restrained gesture, the almost exaggerated politeness of his manner to his wife, whose fingers he had kissed with pretty, old-fashioned gallantry upon his entrance, I asked myself, Could that encounter in the passage have been a dream? Could that savage in the sheepskin be my courteous entertainer?

"Just as I came in, did I hear my wife say there was nothing for you to do in this place?" he said presently to me. Then, turning to her:

"You do not seem to know Mr. Marshfield. Wherever he can open his eyes there is for him something to see which might not interest other men. He will find things in my library which I have no notion of. He will discover objects for scientific observation in all the members of my household, not only in the good-looking maids—though he could, I have no doubt, tell their points as I could those of a horse. We have maidens here of several distinct races, Marshfield. We have also witches, and Jew leeches, and holy daft people. In any case, Yany, with all its dependencies, material, male and female, are at your disposal, for what you can make out of them.

"It is good," he went on gayly, "that you should happen to have this happy disposition, for I fear that, no later than to-morrow, I may have to absent myself from home. I have heard that there are news of wolves—they threaten to be a greater pest than usual this winter, but I am going to drive them on quite a new plan, and it will go hard with me if I don't come even with them. Well for you, by the way, Marshfield, that you did not pass within their scent today." Then, musingly: "I should not give much for the life of a traveler who happened to wander in these parts just now." Here he interrupted himself hastily and went over to his wife, who had sunk back on her chair, livid, seemingly on the point of swooning.

"His gaze was devouring; so might a man look at the woman he adored, in his anxiety.

"What! faint, Violet, alarmed!" His voice was subdued, yet there was an unmistakable thrill of emotion in it.

"Pshaw!" thought I to myself, "the man is a model husband."

"She clinched her hands, and by sheer force of will seemed to pull herself together. These nervous women have often an unexpected fund of strength.

"Come, that is well," said the baron with a flickering smile; "Mr. Marshfield will think you but badly acclimatized to Poland if a little wolf scare can upset you. My dear wife is so soft-hearted," he went on to me, "that she is capable of making herself quite ill over the sad fate that might have, but has not, overcome you. Or, perhaps," he added, in a still gentler voice, "her fear is that I may expose myself to danger for the public weal."

"She turned her head away, but I saw her set her teeth as if to choke a sob. The baron chuckled in his throat and seemed to luxuriate in the pleasant thought.

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"At this moment folding doors were thrown open, and supper was announced. I offered my arm, she rose and took it in silence. This silence she maintained during the first part of the meal, despite her husband's brilliant conversation and almost uproarious spirits. But by and by a bright color mounted to her cheeks and luster to her eyes. I suppose you will think me horribly unpoetical if I add that she drank several glasses of champagne one after the other, a fact which perhaps may account for the change.

"At any rate she spoke and laughed and looked lovely, and I did not wonder that the baron could hardly keep his eyes off her. But whether it was her wifely anxiety or not—it was evident her mind was not at ease through it all, and I fancied that her brightness was feverish, her merriment slightly hysterical.

"After supper—an exquisite one it was—we adjourned together, in foreign fashion, to the drawing-room; the baron threw himself into a chair and, somewhat with the air of a pasha, demanded music. He was flushed; the veins of his forehead were swollen and stood out like cords; the wine drunk at table was potent: even through my phlegmatic frame it ran hotly.

"She hesitated a moment or two, then docilely sat down to the piano. That she could sing I have already made clear: how she could sing, with what pathos, passion, as well as perfect art, I had never realized before.

"When the song was ended she remained for a while, with eyes lost in distance, very still, save for her quick breathing. It was clear she was moved by the music; indeed she must have thrown her whole soul into it.

"At first we, the audience, paid her the rare compliment of silence. Then the baron broke forth into loud applause. 'Brava, brava! that was really said con amore. A delicious love song, delicious—but French! You must sing one of our Slav melodies for Marshfield before you allow us to go and smoke.'

"She started from her reverie with a flush, and after a pause struck slowly a few simple chords, then began one of those strangely sweet, yet intensely pathetic Russian airs, which give one a curious revelation of the profound, endless melancholy lurking in the national mind.

"'What do you think of it?' asked the baron of me when it ceased.

"'What I have always thought of such music—it is that of a hopeless people; poetical, crushed, and resigned.'

"He gave a loud laugh. 'Hear the analyst, the psychologist—why, man, it is a love song! Is it possible that we, uncivilized, are truer realists than our hypercultured Western neighbors? Have we gone to the root of the matter, in our simple way?'

"The baroness got up abruptly. She looked white and spent; there were bitter circles round her eyes.

"'I am tired,' she said, with dry lips. 'You will excuse me, Mr. Marshfield, I must really go to bed.'

"'Go to bed, go to bed,' cried her husband gayly. Then, quoting in Russian from the song she had just sung: 'Sleep, my little soft white dove: my little innocent tender lamb!' She hurried from the room. The baron laughed again, and, taking me familiarly by the arm, led me to his own set of apartments for the promised smoke. He ensconced me in an armchair, placed cigars of every description and a Turkish pipe ready to my hand, and a little table on which stood cut-glass flasks and beakers in tempting array.

"After I had selected my cigar with some precautions, I glanced at him over a careless remark, and was startled to see a sudden alteration in his whole look and attitude.

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"You will forgive me, Marshfield," he said, as he caught my eye, speaking with spasmodic politeness. "It is more than probable that I shall have to set out upon this chase I spoke of to-night, and I must now go and change my clothes, that I may be ready to start at any moment. This is the hour when it is most likely these hell beasts are to be got at. You have all you want, I hope," interrupting an outbreak of ferocity by an effort after his former courtesy.

"It was curious to watch the man of the world struggling with the primitive man.

"But, baron," said I, "I do not at all see the fun of sticking at home like this. You know my passion for witnessing everything new, strange, and outlandish. You will surely not refuse me such an opportunity for observation as a midnight wolf raid. I will do my best not to be in the way if you will take me with you."

"At first it seemed as if he had some difficulty in realizing the drift of my words, he was so engrossed by some inner thought. But as I repeated them, he gave vent to a loud cachinnation.

"By heaven! I like your spirit," he exclaimed, clapping me strongly on the shoulder. "Of course you shall come. You shall," he repeated, "and I promise you a sight, a hunt such as you never heard or dreamed of—you will be able to tell them in England the sort of thing we can do here in that line—such wolves are rare quarry," he added, looking slyly at me, "and I have a new plan for getting at them."

"There was a long pause, and then there rose in the stillness the unearthly howling of the baron's hounds, a cheerful sound which only their owner's somewhat loud converse of the evening had kept from becoming excessively obtrusive.

"Hark at them—the beauties!" cried he, showing his short, strong teeth, pointed like a dog's in a wide grin of anticipative delight. "They have been kept on pretty short commons, poor things! They are hungry. By the way, Marshfield, you can sit tight to a horse, I trust? If you were to roll off, you know, these splendid fellows—they would chop you up in a second. They would chop you up," he repeated unctuously, "snap, crunch, gobble, and there would be an end of you!"

"If I could not ride a decent horse without being thrown," I retorted, a little stung by his manner, "after my recent three months' torture with the Guard Cossacks, I should indeed be a hopeless subject. Do not think of frightening me from the exploit, but say frankly if my company would be displeasing."

"Tut!" he said, waving his hand impatiently, "it is your affair. I have warned you. Go and get ready if you want to come. Time presses."

"I was determined to be of the fray; my blood was up. I have hinted that the baron's Tokay had stirred it.

"I went to my room and hurriedly donned clothes more suitable for rough night work. My last care was to slip into my pockets a brace of double-barreled pistols which formed part of my traveling kit. When I returned I found the baron already booted and spurred; this without metaphor. He was stretched full length on the divan, and did not speak as I came in, or even look at me. Chewing an unlit cigar, with eyes fixed on the ceiling, he was evidently following some absorbing train of ideas.

"The silence was profound; time went by; it grew oppressive; at length, wearied out, I fell, over my chibouque, into a doze filled with puzzling visions, out of which I was awakened with a start. My companion had sprung up, very lightly, to his feet. In his throat was an odd, half-suppressed cry, grewsome to hear. He stood on tiptoe, with eyes fixed, as though looking through the wall, and I distinctly saw his ears point in the intensity of his listening.

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"After a moment, with hasty, noiseless energy, and without the slightest ceremony, he blew the lamps out, drew back the heavy curtains and threw the tall window wide open. A rush of icy air, and the bright rays of the moon—gibbous, I remember, in her third quarter—filled the room. Outside the mist had condensed, and the view was unrestricted over the white plains at the foot of the hill.

"The baron stood motionless in the open window, callous to the cold in which, after a minute, I could hardly keep my teeth from chattering, his head bent forward, still listening. I listened too, with 'all my ears,' but could not catch a sound; indeed the silence over the great expanse of snow might have been called awful; even the dogs were mute.

"Presently, far, far away, came a faint tinkle of bells; so faint, at first, that I thought it was but fancy, then distincter. It was even more eerie than the silence, I thought, though I knew it could come but from some passing sleigh. All at once that ceased, and again my duller senses could perceive nothing, though I saw by my host's craning neck that he was more on the alert than ever. But at last I too heard once more, this time not bells, but as it were the tread of horses muffled by the snow, intermittent and dull, yet drawing nearer. And then in the inner silence of the great house it seemed to me I caught the noise of closing doors; but here the hounds, as if suddenly becoming alive to some disturbance, raised the same fearsome concert of yells and barks with which they had greeted my arrival, and listening became useless.

"I had risen to my feet. My host, turning from the window, seized my shoulder with a fierce grip, and bade me 'hold my noise'; for a second or two I stood motionless under his iron talons, then he released me with an exultant whisper: "Now for our chase!" and made for the door with a spring. Hastily gulping down a mouthful of arrack from one of the bottles on the table, I followed him, and, guided by the sound of his footsteps before me, groped my way through passages as black as Erebus.

"After a time, which seemed a long one, a small door was flung open in front, and I saw Kossowski glide into the moonlit courtyard and cross the square. When I too came out he was disappearing into the gaping darkness of the open stable door, and there I overtook him.

"A man who seemed to have been sleeping in a corner jumped up at our entrance, and led out a horse ready saddled. In obedience to a gruff order from his master, as the latter mounted, he then brought forward another which he had evidently thought to ride himself and held the stirrup for me.

"We came delicately forth, and the Cossack hurriedly barred the great door behind us. I caught a glimpse of his worn, scarred face by the moonlight, as he peeped after us for a second before shutting himself in; it was stricken with terror.

"The baron trotted briskly toward the kennels, from whence there was now issuing a truly infernal clangor, and, as my steed followed suit of his own accord, I could see how he proceeded dexterously to unbolt the gates without dismounting, while the beasts within dashed themselves against them and tore the ground in their fury of impatience.

"He smiled, as he swung back the barriers at last, and his 'beauties' came forth. Seven or eight monstrous brutes, hounds of a kind unknown to me: fulvous and sleek of coat, tall on their legs, square-headed, long-tailed, deep-chested; with terrible jaws slobbering in eagerness. They leaped around and up at us, much to our horses' distaste. Kossowski, still smiling, lashed at them unsparingly with his hunting whip, and they responded, not with yells of pain, but with snarls of fury.

"Managing his restless steed and his cruel whip with consummate ease, my host drove the unruly crew before him out of the precincts, then halted and bent down from his saddle to examine some slight prints in the snow which led, not the way I had come, but toward what seemed another avenue. In a second or two the hounds were

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gathered round this spot, their great snake-like tails quivering, nose to earth, yelping with excitement. I had some ado to manage my horse, and my eyesight was far from being as keen as the baron's, but I had then no doubt he had come already upon wolf tracks, and I shuddered mentally, thinking of the sleigh bells.

"Suddenly Kossowski raised himself from his strained position; under his low fur cap his face, with its fixed smile, looked scarcely human in the white light: and then we broke into a hand canter just as the hounds dashed, in a compact body, along the trail.

"But we had not gone more than a few hundred yards before they began to falter, then straggled, stopped and ran back and about with dismal cries. It was clear to me they had lost the scent. My companion reined in his horse, and mine, luckily a well-trained brute, halted of himself.

"We had reached a bend in a broad avenue of firs and larches, and just where we stood, and where the hounds ever returned and met nose to nose in frantic conclave, the snow was trampled and soiled, and a little farther on planed in a great sweep, as if by a turning sleigh. Beyond was a double-furrowed track of skaits and regular hoof prints leading far away.

"Before I had time to reflect upon the bearing of this unexpected interruption, Kossowski, as if suddenly possessed by a devil, fell upon the hounds with his whip, flogging them upon the new track, uttering the while the most savage cries I have ever heard issue from human throat. The disappointed beasts were nothing loath to seize upon another trail; after a second of hesitation they had understood, and were off upon it at a tearing pace, we after them at the best speed of our horses.

"Some unformed idea that we were going to escort, or rescue, benighted travelers flickered dimly in my mind as I galloped through the night air; but when I managed to approach my companion and called out to him for explanation, he only turned half round and grinned at me.

"Before us lay now the white plain, scintillating under the high moon's rays. That light is deceptive; I could be sure of nothing upon the wide expanse but of the dark, leaping figures of the hounds already spread out in a straggling line, some right ahead, others just in front of us. In a short time also the icy wind, cutting my face mercilessly as we increased our pace, well nigh blinded me with tears of cold.

"I can hardly realize how long this pursuit after an unseen prey lasted; I can only remember that I was getting rather faint with fatigue, and ignominiously held on to my pommel, when all of a sudden the black outline of a sleigh merged into sight in front of us.

"I rubbed my smarting eyes with my benumbed hand; we were gaining upon it second by second; two of those hell hounds of the baron's were already within a few leaps of it.

"Soon I was able to make out two figures, one standing up and urging the horses on with whip and voice, the other clinging to the back seat and looking toward us in an attitude of terror. A great fear crept into my half-frozen brain—were we not bringing deadly danger instead of help to these travelers? Great God! did the baron mean to use them as a bait for his new method of wolf hunting?

"I would have turned upon Kossowski with a cry of expostulation or warning, but he, urging on his hounds as he galloped on their flank, howling and gesticulating like a veritable Hun, passed me by like a flash—and all at once I knew."

Marshfield paused for a moment and sent his pale smile round upon his listeners, who now showed no signs of sleepiness; he knocked the ash from his cigar, twisted the latter round in his mouth, and added dryly:

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"And I confess it seemed to me a little strong even for a baron in the Carpathians. The travelers were our quarry. But the reason why the Lord of Yany had turned man-hunter I was yet to learn. Just then I had to direct my energies to frustrating his plans. I used my spurs mercilessly. While I drew up even with him I saw the two figures in the sleigh change places; he who had hitherto driven now faced back, while his companion took the reins; there was the pale blue sheen of a revolver barrel under the moonlight, followed by a yellow flash, and the nearest hound rolled over in the snow.

"With an oath the baron twisted round in his saddle to call up and urge on the remainder. My horse had taken fright at the report and dashed irresistibly forward, bringing me at once almost level with the fugitives, and the next instant the revolver was turned menacingly toward me. There was no time to explain; my pistol was already drawn, and as another of the brutes bounded up, almost under my horse's feet, I loosed it upon him. I must have let off both barrels at once, for the weapon flew out of my hand, but the hound's back was broken. I presume the traveler understood; at any rate, he did not fire at me.

"In moments of intense excitement like these, strangely enough, the mind is extraordinarily open to impressions. I shall never forget that man's countenance in the sledge, as he stood upright and defied us in his mortal danger; it was young, very handsome, the features not distorted, but set into a sort of desperate, stony calm, and I knew it, beyond all doubt, for that of an Englishman. And then I saw his companion—it was the baron's wife. And I understood why the bells had been removed.

"It takes a long time to say this; it only required an instant to see it. The loud explosion of my pistol had hardly ceased to ring before the baron, with a fearful imprecation, was upon me. First he lashed at me with his whip as we tore along side by side, and then I saw him wind the reins round his off arm and bend over, and I felt his angry fingers close tightly on my right foot. The next instant I should have been lifted out of my saddle, but there came another shot from the sledge. The baron's horse plunged and stumbled, and the baron, hanging on to my foot with a fierce grip, was wrenched from his seat. His horse, however, was up again immediately, and I was released, and then I caught a confused glimpse of the frightened and wounded animal galloping wildly away to the right, leaving a black track of blood behind him in the snow, his master, entangled in the reins, running with incredible swiftness by his side and endeavoring to vault back into the saddle.

"And now came to pass a terrible thing which, in his savage plans, my host had doubtless never anticipated.

"One of the hounds that had during this short check recovered lost ground, coming across this hot trail of blood, turned away from his course, and with a joyous yell darted after the running man. In another instant the remainder of the pack was upon the new scent.

"As soon as I could stop my horse, I tried to turn him in the direction the new chase had taken, but just then, through the night air, over the receding sound of the horse's scamper and the sobbing of the pack in full cry, there came a long scream, and after that a sickening silence. And I knew that somewhere yonder, under the beautiful moonlight, the Baron Kossowski was being devoured by his starving dogs.

"I looked round, with the sweat on my face, vaguely, for some human being to share the horror of the moment, and I saw, gliding away, far away in the white distance, the black silhouette of the sledge."

"Well?" said we, in divers tones of impatience, curiosity, or horror, according to our divers temperaments, as the speaker uncrossed his legs and gazed at us in mild triumph, with all the air of having said his say, and satisfactorily proved his point.

"Well," repeated he, "what more do you want to know? It will interest you but slightly, I am sure, to hear how I found my way back to the Hof; or how I told as much as I deemed prudent of the evening's grewsome work to the baron's servants, who, by the way, to my amazement, displayed the profoundest and most unmistakable sorrow at

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the tidings, and sallied forth (at their head the Cossack who had seen us depart) to seek for his remains. Excuse the unpleasantness of the remark: I fear the dogs must have left very little of him, he had dieted them so carefully. However, since it was to have been a case of 'chop, crunch, and gobble,' as the baron had it, I preferred that that particular fate should have overtaken him rather than me—or, for that matter, either of those two country people of ours in the sledge.

"Nor am I going to inflict upon you," continued Marshfield, after draining his glass, "a full account of my impressions when I found myself once more in that immense, deserted, and stricken house, so luxuriously prepared for the mistress who had fled from it; how I philosophized over all this, according to my wont; the conjectures I made as to the first acts of the drama; the untold sufferings my countrywoman must have endured from the moment her husband first grew jealous till she determined on this desperate step; as to how and when she had met her lover, how they communicated, and how the baron had discovered the intended flitting in time to concoct his characteristic revenge.

"One thing you may be sure of, I had no mind to remain at Yany an hour longer than necessary. I even contrived to get well clear of the neighborhood before the lady's absence was discovered. Luckily for me—or I might have been taxed with connivance, though indeed the simple household did not seem to know what suspicion was, and accepted my account with childlike credence—very typical, and very convenient to me at the same time."

"But how do you know," said one of us, "that the man was her lover? He might have been her brother or some other relative."

"That," said Marshfield, with his little flat laugh, "I happen to have ascertained—and, curiously enough, only a few weeks ago. It was at the play, between the acts, from my comfortable seat (the first row in the pit). I was looking leisurely round the house when I caught sight of a woman, in a box close by, whose head was turned from me, and who presented the somewhat unusual spectacle of a young neck and shoulders of the most exquisite contour—and perfectly gray hair; and not dull gray, but rather of a pleasing tint like frosted silver. This aroused my curiosity. I brought my glasses to a focus on her and waited patiently till she turned round. Then I recognized the Baroness Kassowski, and I no longer wondered at the young hair being white.

"Yet she looked placid and happy; strangely so, it seemed to me, under the sudden reviving in my memory of such scenes as I have now described. But presently I understood further: beside her, in close attendance, was the man of the sledge, a handsome fellow with much of a military air about him.

"During the course of the evening, as I watched, I saw a friend of mine come into the box, and at the end I slipped out into the passage to catch him as he came out.

"'Who is the woman with the white hair?' I asked. Then, in the fragmentary style approved of by ultra-fashionable young men—this earnest-languid mode of speech presents curious similarities in all languages—he told me: 'Most charming couple in London—awfully pretty, wasn't she?—he had been in the Guards—attache at Vienna once—they adored each other. White hair, devilish queer, wasn't it? Suited her, somehow. And then she had been married to a Russian, or something, somewhere in the wilds, and their names were—' But do you know," said Marshfield, interrupting himself, "I think I had better let you find that out for yourselves, if you care."