

Records of MICHAEL DANEVITCH

True Tales of Russian Secret Service
Edited by GEORGE T. PARDY

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The Vanishing of Stefan Dashkoff

Count Stefan Dashkoff was a young man, a member of a very old and wealthy Russian family who had in their day wielded great power, and before the abolition of serfdom took place, had held sway over more serfs than any other family in the empire. After a probationary course in the diplomatic service at home he was sent as an attaché to the Russian embassy in Paris. As might be supposed, he took kindly to Parisian life, being about eight-and-twenty, possessed of good looks, sound health, a cheerful disposition and plenty of money. His private residence in the Champs Elysee was conspicuous for the magnificence of its appointments, and was the rendezvous of the elite of the younger generation of Paris society. Two years had passed since the count had established himself in Paris, and then he suddenly and mysteriously disappeared, and all efforts of the police failed to discover a trace of him. The facts of the case were as follows:

In the course of the month of January Count Dashkoff gave a grand ball at his elegant hotel which was largely attended by the gilded youth of both sexes. About two in the morning the host drew an intimate friend of his—a Monsieur Eugene Peon—on one side and told him that he wanted to slip away for an hour, but did not wish it to be known that he had gone out. A few minutes later the concierge saw him leave the hall. He was attired in a costly fur coat, with a cap to match, and although the weather was bitterly cold and the ground covered with snow, he wore patent leather shoes. The concierge, who was much surprised at the fact of his master leaving the house in the midst of the revels, asked him if he wanted a carriage. The count abruptly answered in the negative and seemed annoyed at the question.

The night wore on and the guests finally departed, but the host had not returned. On the following afternoon Eugene Peon called at his friend's hotel and ascertaining that he was not at home, went down to the embassy to inquire for him there. He had not been seen by any of the officials, and when another whole day passed without the count making his appearance at home or at his usual haunts, it was decided that the police should be notified. But notwithstanding the publicity given to the matter and the efforts of the authorities another week passed and not a trace or sign of the missing man had been obtained.

Up to this point the count's relatives in Russia had not been communicated with, for there were hopes that the missing attaché would turn up all right; but the affair began to look serious and a message was sent asking if the count had returned home, and almost simultaneously with the despatch of the message a courier set out for Russia with the tidings and details. As, so far as was known, the missing man had not returned to Russia, great consternation was caused among his friends by the report that reached them. No time was lost in securing the services of Michael Danevitch, who was instructed to leave at once for Paris and institute independent inquiries.

On the detective's arrival in the French capital he found that by order of the Russian ambassador all the count's possessions had been sealed up and his house temporarily closed. Danevitch's preliminary investigations were directed to trying to discover if there were any grounds for believing that Dashkoff had committed suicide. He could find no grounds to support such a theory, however, and his next step was to seek an interview with Monsieur Eugene Peon. As the latter gentleman had been very intimate with the count he was able to speak with a good deal of authority regarding the attaché's mode of life. He admitted that the count was very fond of female society but, as far as he knew, had formed no serious attachment to any woman. Peon could suggest no reason why Dashkoff should have left his guests so abruptly, unless it was to keep an appointment. Danevitch then resolved to look up the count's former body servant, one Auguste Chauby, who informed him that on the night of the ball he had obtained leave of absence after dressing his master. He returned, however, shortly after midnight, and just as he was about to enter the house a man approached him, thrust an envelope into his hand and said: "Give that at once to your master. It is a matter of life and death." The stranger hastened away without awaiting a reply. From the glimpse Chauby had of him he seemed to be well dressed, of medium height and wore a dark beard and mustache. It was some time before the valot could get to his master to deliver the missive. When he did so the count glanced at the writing, frowned and thrust the letter unopened into his pocket. Later he

went forth on the mysterious mission from which he failed to return.

As no trace of the note which summoned the host away from his guests was found in the house, it was evident that he had either taken it with him or destroyed it. Danevitch concluded from the valot's account of the disfavor with which the count received the communication that he knew the writer and was annoyed at being disturbed. Also, he did not go out willingly, consequently his errand was a disagreeable one, and could hardly have been to keep a love tryst. Whoever the writer of the letter was he or she must have had some powerful hold on Dashkoff to induce him to leave the festival at his house and go out at two o'clock on a cold winter morning. It looked as though the count's disappearance was due to conduct which had brought him in contact with unscrupulous people into whose power he had fallen. It was clear that if he were still living he was forcibly detained and was in such a position that he could not communicate with his friends. Danevitch applied to the young man's relatives in Russia for permission to examine the private papers which had been left behind him. In response to his request Dashkoff's father came at once to Paris and he and the detective went through the papers together. The result of the examination was rather disappointing, until a small diary was found in which were some remarkable passages. It was not a record of doings and events from day to day, but seemed to be the outpourings of the writer's feelings and emotions, transcribed in a fitful and irregular manner. The following passage struck Danevitch as being significant, as it seemed to contradict Eugene Peon's assertion that the count was not involved in any serious love affair.

"I have been weak, but am growing strong again. Rosine must not be allowed to keep me bound down in the gutter. I was destined to walk on greater heights, and since it is impossible for me to raise her, she must be out adrift. In a few weeks I shall send in my resignation and quit Paris forever. This I have determined to do, cost what it may. I have taken Eugene Peon into my confidence. He will help me and satisfy the curious when I am gone."

It was now clear to the detective that there was surely a woman in the case. Also, he reflected, Eugene Peon knew more of the count's affairs than he chose to reveal. Yet a second interview with the latter gentleman left Danevitch no wiser than before. Peon insisted that the count had not confided in him as the passage in the diary would seem to indicate, and he knew nothing of the woman mentioned. It seemed as if it was not the count's money that was responsible for his disappearance. He kept a large banking account in Paris, but this had not been drawn upon since the week before he went away. But at this stage a curious incident was brought to light which put a new complexion on the mystery.

Count Dashkoff also had kept a considerable account at the Moscow branch of the Bank of Russia. He owned a good deal of property in and about Moscow, and his affairs in that city were looked after by an agent who had been connected with the Dashkoff family for nearly half a century. It was his duty to pay all money he received into the bank without delay. Consequently there was always a large balance standing to the count's credit. One day a three-months' bill of exchange, purporting to be drawn on the count by Paul Pavlovitch & Co., flax merchants at Riga, for one hundred thousand francs, and accepted by the count and payable at the bank in Moscow, was duly presented by an individual who stated that he was a member of the firm. As all seemed right, the bill was paid and a receipt given in the name of Peter Pavlovitch, who presented himself as the son of Paul. A week later the cancelled bill passed into the hands of the count's agent, and he at once declared it to be a forgery. Pavlovitch & Co. were immediately communicated with and they denied all knowledge of the count, had never had any business transactions with him and knew nothing of the so-called Peter Pavlovitch. This was a revelation indeed. It appeared to Danevitch that the person who forged the bill knew a good deal about the count, and if that person could be laid hold of the plot might be unmasked. It was evident that the forger was acquainted with the count's affairs and also with Russia.

Danevitch at once returned to Moscow, deeming it probable that he might there pick up some thread which would lead him to a clue. The man calling himself Peter Pavlovitch, to whom the money was paid, was described as of medium height, of muscular build, dark complexioned, black hair and mustache, in age about thirty. The forged bill was presented for payment about 10:30 in the morning. That argued that the stranger who drew the money and gave the re-

ceipt had slept in the city and probably lodged at some cafe or hotel. It struck Danevitch that if the unknown had come to Moscow for the sole purpose of drawing the money he would in all probability select a place near the railway station. After making several inquiries he found that a man answering the description of the suspect had stayed at a cafe called The Traveler's Joy, and taken his departure by train on the same day that the bill was presented. He had been a guest of the establishment for four days and when he left settled his account with a brand-new five hundred rouble note, receiving the change in small money. As the hotel-keeper was unable to change the note himself, he had it done at a money-changer's in the neighborhood. The money-changer made an entry of the number of the note and it was therefore easy to prove that it was one of those paid by the bank to "Peter Pavlovitch."

During the time that the pseudo Peter Pavlovitch was staying at The Traveler's Joy he was visited daily by a pretty young woman who, from her manner of dress and general appearance, was supposed to be connected with the theatrical profession. Fortunately a minute description of this woman was obtainable, and from this Danevitch identified her as a Fraulein Holstein, supposed to be of Austrian or German nationality. She was a music hall singer and had been filling an engagement in Moscow, but had then left and gone to a place of entertainment in St. Petersburg whither Danevitch followed her. He learned that when her engagement terminated in St. Petersburg, as it would in a few days, she was going to Vienna for a week, thence to Ber-

lin restaurant where they went frequently to dine or sup, sometimes in the company of their mysterious friend. One night the trio went to the restaurant for dinner and were shown into a private room, where a small stove dispensed a comforting warmth, and to protect the occupants from draught a heavy screen was drawn between the table and the window. After the meal was over the lady and her two companions conversed freely.

"Do you intend to remain in Paris?" asked the stranger.

"Yes," replied Charcot. "I don't see that there is much to fear."

"You feel sure that your visit to Russia in connection with the bill is not known?"

"Perfectly sure. My wife and I managed the affair too cleverly for suspicion to reach us."

"But there is always danger as long as he is alive," said the stranger, moodily.

"Then why should he live?" asked Madame Charcot coolly.

"I will have nothing to do with his death," returned the stranger, with a shudder.

"You are chicken-hearted," commented Charcot scornfully. "One word and an extra hundred francs to old Pierre and the danger would be removed."

"True," said the stranger, "but I would rather not speak the word. The affair has been bungled as it is. Instead of proving a source of wealth to us we have only made a miserable hundred thousand francs between us, and it's hopeless to expect that we can get more. Anyway, I think this place is no longer safe for me, and I shall go abroad."

"As you please," said Charcot.

lowed to occupy the ruin, subject to the payment of a nominal rent. He was a big, muscular old fellow of sinister and forbidding appearance. To this place Charcot was followed by three French police officers in company with Danevitch. While Charcot and old Pierre were conferring together, the Russian and his companions entered and placed the conspirators under arrest. In a dark filthy cellar they found Count Dashkoff lying on a heap of straw close to the wall, to which he was secured by a chain and staple. The once brilliant and handsome attaché was a deplorable sight, his eyes sunken, his face ghastly in its corpse-like appearance. He was wasted to a skeleton, and the vacant stare with which he greeted his rescuers told them only too plainly that the victim's mind had given way under the strain of his sufferings. As soon as possible the count was removed in an ambulance to a hospital. An hour later Eugene Peon and Madame Charcot were arrested, and upon being put through a severe examination confessed the part they had played in the conspiracy. The story that was wrung from the prisoners was as follows:

Years before the events already narrated, an Austrian named Schumacher took up his residence in Paris with his wife and two daughters, named respectively Rosine and Anna, and a son named Fritz. As the girls grew up they developed remarkable beauty, and entered theatrical life at an early age. In the course of time Anna married a music-hall agent named Charcot, and Rosine, who seems to have had numerous lovers, joined a theatrical company and traveled abroad. Returning to Paris she found better employment for her

made. The wife's rapacity for money, jewels, dress was insatiable, and her brother took good care to share her purses. For reasons of his own Dashkoff had insisted on their marriage being kept secret, and Rosine was installed in a residence in a little village some twenty miles from Paris. She had contracted heavy drinking habits, and in the course of time became a confirmed dipsomaniac; and one night, to the horror of the band of conspirators, threw herself into the Seine and was drowned.

Peon, Anna Charcot and her husband managed to keep the news of his wife's death from the count, and he was given to understand that she had taken herself off somewhere. A few months passed and the plotters felt the loss of their supplies severely. Then they resolved to abduct the count and keep him a prisoner until he secured his release by paying a large ransom. The night of the ball was chosen as a good opportunity to put the plan into execution. Anna wrote a letter closely imitating Rosine's style. It stated that she had been away from Paris, but had come back seriously ill, and was then unable to leave her bed. She begged him to go and see her immediately and promised that, if he would give her a sum of money down she would go away and he would never hear of her again. If not, she would proclaim the next morning to all Paris that she was his lawful wife and would also send an intimation to that effect to the embassy. The note wound up by stating that a carriage would be in waiting not far from his house to convey him to her lodgings, and that he could easily get back again in an hour and a half.

The plan worked to perfection. Dashkoff found the carriage at the spot indicated and was driven out past the barrier to Pierre's house. Two powerful ruffians, who were to be well paid for their part of the work, had ridden on the box beside the coachman, who was one of their own kind. When the destination was reached the count alighted, and becoming suspicious of his surroundings, was about to re-enter the carriage and order the driver to return to the city, when he was seized by the hired thugs and a desperate struggle took place. To end matters, one of his assailants struck him a terrific blow on the head with a club, knocking him unconscious. He was then carried into Pierre's den. For two days he remained insensible and when he recovered consciousness the conspirators found that he was no longer in his right mind. As he showed no signs of improvement and they were hard pressed for money, Eugene undertook to forge a bill, and Madame Charcot, who was then in Moscow, was instructed to find out something about the count's business transactions there. Charcot then went to Moscow and representing himself as Peter Pavlovitch, presented the forged bill at the bank and received the money for it which was, of course, shared by all concerned.

Had it not been for Danevitch's timely work in unraveling the plot it is certain that the unfortunate victim, who was becoming an expensive and dangerous burden to the conspirators, would have met his death at the hand of Pierre Mousson. As it was, the careers of the wretches were brought to a close and exemplary punishment was meted out to all of them. The extradition of both Charcot and his wife was demanded by the Russian government to answer for the affair of the forged bill. This demand was complied with only after the couple had served a heavy jail sentence under the French law. They were then handed over to the Russian authorities, by whom they were sent to Siberia. For many months Count Dashkoff lingered between life and death, but at last under careful treatment his health and mind were fully restored. Upon his recovery he returned to his native land, having resigned his post at the embassy in a city which held for him too many painful memories.

RIVALRY OF ROYAL BROTHERS

A Game of Cards Decided Which One Should Be Privileged to Win Peasant.

It is said that the two brothers, Prince Louis Lucien Bonaparte and Prince Pierre, in their early youth, when shooting mousons in the mountains of Corsica, came across a beautiful peasant girl with whom they both fell violently in love.

Who she was, and whether she favored both brothers, or neither, I can not tell. Be that as it may, they quarreled. Les preux chevaliers of old would, no doubt, in similar occurrences have had recourse to lance and sword. The Corsican princes decided to play for their belle a game of cards. They went to the nearest inn and wrote and signed a paper agreeing that whichever won the game should marry the lady fair. Prince Lucien won, and, faithful to his word, a short time after married her.

She never left the island, as far as I know. Prince Lucien lived in England, securing to her a comfortable income, which she received till her death, a few years ago, somewhere about the spring of 1901.—From the Princess Murat's Memoirs.

The Spooners.

For the fourth time he had said "Good night," but still they lingered on the frosty doorstep.

"Ah, dearest," he whispered tenderly, gazing toward the starlit skies, "the night has a thousand eyes."

"Sh! You goose!" cautioned the pretty girl, as she noticed dark forms at the opposite windows. "Not so loud! The night also has a thousand ears."



THE ONCE BRILLIANT AND HANDSOME ATTACHE WAS A DEPLORABLE SIGHT.

lin for a fortnight and after that to Paris to perform in a drama at the Chatelet. The detective was now certain that he was on the right trail. Therefore, when the Fraulein forsook the Russian capital he left by the same train. He followed her to Vienna, from Vienna to Berlin, from Berlin to Paris. When she reached the latter city she was met by a man whom Danevitch recognized from the description he had received as the person who had presented the forged bill for payment at the Moscow bank. The scent was now getting warm, but it would have been premature to take any steps calculated to frighten the suspects, and the detective had yet to prove that there was any connection between the disappearance of Dashkoff and the incident of the forged bill.

The man who had passed himself off as Peter Pavlovitch was known in Paris as Henri Charcot, and by calling he was a theatrical and music-hall agent in a small way. Fraulein Holstein was, or represented herself to be, the wife of Charcot. Shadowing his quarry patiently, Danevitch discovered that a man who evidently occupied a much higher social position. It did not take him long to discover that the Charcots were in the habit of visiting the couple. The Charcots lived in a rather poor quarter of Paris, not far from the Gare d'Est. In this region was a popu-

lar restaurant where they went frequently to dine or sup, sometimes in the company of their mysterious friend. One night the trio went to the restaurant for dinner and were shown into a private room, where a small stove dispensed a comforting warmth, and to protect the occupants from draught a heavy screen was drawn between the table and the window. After the meal was over the lady and her two companions conversed freely.

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beauty in the fascinating of Count Dashkoff. The count was young and impressionable; the girl cunning and far-seeing. In her scheme to entrap Dashkoff she had the aid of her brother, although that gentleman was no longer known as Fritz. At quite an early age Fritz had attracted the attention of an old and eccentric lady, who sent him to school, fostered in him expensive tastes and gave him to understand that he would be her heir. Lured on by his expectations, the young man adopted the name of his patroness and was henceforth known as Eugene Peon. Unfortunately for his dreams of future wealth his benefactress died suddenly without making a will and her entire fortune went to her nearest of kin.

To find himself penniless was a crushing blow to Eugene. He hated work and so set himself to live by his wits. He was a fascinating young fellow, with the power of attracting both men and women. When he made the acquaintance of Dashkoff the count took to him and Peon was far too clever to lose such a chance of benefiting himself. It was then that Rosine entered on the scene. Keeping their relationship a secret, the brother and sister used every art that cunning could suggest to entrap the easy-going count. Her beauty proved too much for Dashkoff, who married her, soon, however, to discover what a terrible error he had