

# Records of MICHAEL DANEVITCH

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

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## THE CROWN JEWELS

Moscow—or as the natives call it, Maskva—might almost be described as a city within a city; that is to say, there is the Kremlin, and a town outside of that again. Kremlin is derived from the Slavonic word Krim, which signifies a fort. It is built on a hill, surrounded by a high turreted wall sixteen feet thick. This wall varies from thirty to sixty feet in height, and is furnished with battlements, embrasures and gates.

Within the Kremlin are most of the government offices, including the treasury. In the treasury are preserved the state jewels. These costly possessions are kept in a large well-lighted room to which visitors are freely admitted.

One morning, on opening the museum for the day, there was great consternation among the officials and attendants when it was discovered that no less than three crowns, two sceptres, a diamond belt and a diamond tiara were missing. The circumstance was at once reported to the keeper of the jewels—General Kuntzler. This official had many subordinates under him, but he himself was held entirely responsible by the government for the safeguarding of the jewels. General Kuntzler had occupied the position for about two years, after long and important military service. When he heard of the robbery he was so affected that his mind gave way, and before the day was over he shot and killed himself.

As the affair was a very serious one for all concerned, no time was lost in summoning Michael Danevitch and enlisting his services. Among the crowns carried off was the one worn by the last king of Poland. It was a magnificent bauble, so thickly encrusted with gems that it was worth in American money something like \$250,000. The affair must have been very carefully planned and arrangements made for conveying the articles out of the country at once, or of effectually destroying their identity. In their original condition they would be worth nothing to the thieves, inasmuch as no man dare offer them for sale; but by taking out the gems and melting the gold, the materials could thus be converted into cash. Danevitch ascertained that when the museum was closed in the evening previous to the robbery being discovered, everything was safe.

It appeared that it was the duty of the chief subordinate, one Maximoff, to go around the hall the last thing, after it had been closed to the public for the day, and see that everything was safe. He then reported to General Kuntzler. This had been done with great regularity. It so happened, however, that the day preceding the discovery that the jewels had been stolen was an official holiday, when all public government departments were closed. This holiday had favored the work of the thieves, and sometime during the forty hours that elapsed between the closing of the hall in the evening before the holiday and the discovery of the robbery on the morning after the holiday the jewels had been carried off. The holiday was on a Wednesday. On Tuesday evening Maximoff made his round of inspection as usual and duly reported to his chief. According to that report everything was safe; the place was carefully locked up and all the keys deposited in the custody of the general, who kept them in an iron safe in his office. It was pretty conclusively proven that those keys never left the safe from the time they were deposited there on Tuesday night until Maximoff went for them again on Thursday morning. During the whole of Wednesday Maximoff and the attendants were away. Maximoff was a married man, with three children, and he had taken his family into the country. Kuntzler remained and there was the customary military guard at the treasury. The guard consisted of six sentinels, who did duty day and night, being relieved every four hours.

Danevitch was satisfied that General Kuntzler had been entirely innocent of any complicity in the affair, and he could see no reason for suspecting Maximoff. There were twelve other subordinates. They were charged with the duty of dusting the various glass cases in which the jewels were deposited, and of keeping the visitors in order on public days. It was possible that one or more of these men had been corrupted and proved false to the trust. Without a confederate on the inside it was hard to see how the thieves had effected an entrance. The treasury was a large white stone building, with an inner courtyard, around which were grouped numerous government offices. At the gateway of this yard a sentry was constantly posted. The museum was situated in about the center of the left wing of the main block of buildings. The entrance was from the courtyard, and the hall, being in an upper story, was reached by a flight of marble steps. To gain admission to the hall the

visitors were necessarily compelled to pass through the gate into the courtyard. Of course, there were other ways of reaching the hall of jewels, but they were used only by the employees and officials. General Kuntzler, his lieutenant, Maximoff, and four of the subordinates, resided on the premises. They had rooms in different parts of the building.

A careful study of the building, its approaches and exits, led Danevitch to the conclusion that the thief or thieves must have reached the hall from one of the numerous government offices on the ground floor of the block, or from the direction of Kuntzler's apartments. He found that one of the offices referred to was used as a depository for documents relating to treasury business, and beneath it, in the basement, was an arched cellar, also used for storing documents. This cellar was one of many others, all connected with a concrete subway, which in turn was connected with the upper stories by a narrow staircase, considered strictly private and supposed to be used only by employees. The office was officially known as Bureau 7. Exit from it could be had by a door, which opened into a cul-de-sac, and was not a public thoroughfare. It was, in fact, a narrow alley, formed by the treasury buildings and a church. Danevitch was not slow to perceive that Bureau 7 and the cul-de-sac offered the best, if not the only, means of egress to anyone, who being on the premises illegally, wished to escape without being seen. It was true that one of the sentries always on duty patrolled the cul-de-sac at intervals, but that, to the mind of the detective, was not an insuperable obstacle to the escape of any one from the building. He ascertained that the door into the cul-de-sac was very rarely used, and had not been opened for a long time, as the office itself was only a storeroom for documents, and days often passed without anyone going into it. Critical examination, however, revealed to Danevitch that the outer door had been opened very recently. This was determined by several minute signs which were manifest to the practised eyes of the famous sleuth. But something more was forthcoming to confirm his theory. On the floor of Bureau 7 he found two or three diamonds, and in the passage of the cul-de-sac he picked up some more. Here was clear proof that the thief or thieves had made exit that way. Owing to rough handling or to the jarring of the stolen treasures some of the precious stones had become detached and a few of them had fallen unperceived to the ground.

It seemed tolerably certain that the criminals must have been well acquainted with the premises. The fact of the robbery having been committed on the Wednesday, which was a government holiday, showed that it had been well planned. The importance of the discovery of the way by which the intruders had effected their escape could not be overrated, and yet it was of still greater importance that the way they had entered should be determined. The probability was that those concerned had lain hidden in the building from the closing time on Tuesday night until the business was completed, which must have been during the hours of darkness from Tuesday night to Wednesday morning or Wednesday night and Thursday morning. In the latter case, however, the enterprising exploiters must have remained on the premises the whole of Wednesday, and that was scarcely likely. They could not have entered on Wednesday, because as it was a nonbusiness day a stranger or strangers seeking admission would have been challenged by the sentries and not allowed to pass without a special permit. At night a password was always sent around to the people residing in the building, and if they went out they could not gain entrance again without the password.

Altogether something like sixty persons had lodgings in the treasury building, but only fourteen of these persons, including Kuntzler himself, were attached to the museum portion. The general's apartments were just above the hall in which the crown jewels were kept. He had a suite of rooms, six in number, including a kitchen and a servant's sleeping room. He was a widower, but his sister lived with him as his housekeeper. She was a widow and her name was Anna Ivanovna. The general also had an adopted daughter, a pretty girl of about twenty years of age, named Lydia. She was the child of one of the general's former comrades, who had been killed on the field of battle. For obvious reasons Danevitch made a close study of the general's household and so learned the above particulars.

As may be imagined, the general's death was a terrible blow to his family and Lydia, in particular, grieved so bitterly that she became ill. Danevitch found not a jot of suspicion attaching to the dead man's reputation. Kuntzler had held many important positions of trust, and had been elected to the post of crown jewel keeper on account of the confidence reposed in

him by the government. An examination of his books, papers and private papers proved that his accounts were straight in every way. Although believing Kuntzler guiltless of all complicity in the robbery, Danevitch felt more convinced than ever that the thieves had been aided by someone connected with the place and knowing it well. Also he came to the conclusion that the stolen property was still within the limits of the Kremlin, for it was evident that the thieves could not have passed out during the night, as they would have been questioned by the guards at the gate. Nor could they have conveyed out such a bulky packet on Wednesday, as they would have been called upon for a permit. On the other hand, if the property had been divided into small parcels the risk would have been great and suspicion aroused. But assuming that the thieves had been stupid enough to carry off the things in bulk, they must have known that they could not get far before attracting attention, while any attempt to dispose of the articles as they were would have been fatal. Although there are no regular streets, as understood, in the Kremlin, there are numerous shops and private residences, the latter being for the most part inhabited by officials and employees of the many government establishments. The result is that within the Kremlin itself there is a very large population. In view of the fact that false keys had been used the theory of collusion could not be ignored; the difficulty was to determine who was the most likely person to have turned traitor. Maximoff bore a high reputation; General Kuntzler had reposed full confidence in him. The subordinates were also men of good repute. When several days had passed and General Kuntzler had been buried, Danevitch interviewed the dead man's sister, Anna Ivanovna. She was in a state of great mental excitement and intensely nervous. Lydia, the general's adopted daughter, was also ill. Anna was a somewhat remarkable woman. She was a tall, big-boned, determined person. Her manner of

sonally, I wish to forget the affair as well as I can. You may imagine that the subject is not a pleasant one for me to discuss."

Three weeks after the interview between Danevitch and Anna Ivanovna, three men were seated in a restaurant known as the Zemlinoigorod, which means "earthen town," and is so called because at one time it was surrounded by an earthen rampart. This part of Moscow contains a number of drinking places, spirit stores, shops, cafes and restaurants. The one in which these three men were seated was a very typical Russian fifth-rate house. The night being very cold, the three men were crowded around the stove, talking earnestly. Two of them were young; one about three and twenty, the other a year or so older. They were well dressed and apparently belonged to a class not usually given to frequenting such dens. The third man was of a striking appearance. He was swarthy as a gipsy, with black hair and eyes. In his ears he wore small gold rings, and his manner and general appearance proved him to be a seafaring man.

Presently the glazed door of the shop swung open and a stranger tumbled in. He was heavily bearded, on his head was a black, tightly fitting skull cap. He divested himself of a fur-lined coat of ancient appearance, hung it on a peg, and called for vodka and caviare.

The trio by the stove ceased talking when the stranger came in; and when he had finished his repast he walked to the stove with the uncertain gait of a man under the influence of liquor, and asked if he might join their circle. With no very good grace the three made room for him and the stranger having applied a light to a cigar, turned to the seafaring man, and said: "Unless I'm greatly mistaken, you're a sailor, friend?"

The man addressed nodded sulkily. "I am," he responded. "Where do you hail from?"

"Constantinople. I am a trader."

"What do you trade in?"

"Anything on earth, so it brings in



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speaking and sullen expression gave one the notion that she was a disappointed woman.

"This is a sad business," began Danevitch, after some preliminary remarks.

"Yes," returned Anna curtly. "It has cost my brother his life."

"Father said," remarked Lydia from the lounge where she lay, "that there had been a traitor in the house. It was the thought of that which drove him to kill himself."

"That is nonsense," rejoined Anna harshly. "My brother was an excessively sensitive, high-strung man, and the loss of the jewels committed to his care weighed so heavily on his mind that it gave way under the strain. But I do not believe in the traitor theory."

"Do you think it possible that such a crime could have been committed without the assistance of a confederate in the camp?" asked Danevitch.

"What do you mean?" demanded the woman, as though she resented the bare suspicion which the question implied.

"My meaning is plain, surely. An utter stranger to the place could hardly have done this deed."

"Perhaps not. But whoever did it couldn't have been an utter stranger."

"Do I understand from that that you suggest the culprit or culprits are people who are employed here?"

"I don't suggest anything. But it stands to reason that anyone undertaking such a crime would be careful to make himself acquainted with the building. The place is open to the public. What is there to prevent anyone studying its interior?"

"Nothing, so far as the public part of it is concerned. But unless with the aid of a confederate I do not see how anyone could become acquainted with the parts where the public are not admitted."

"I am not a detective," replied Anna coldly, "and therefore do not feel competent to answer your questions. Per-

sonally, I wish to forget the affair as well as I can. You may imagine that the subject is not a pleasant one for me to discuss."

The invitation was readily accepted, and for a time the conversation was friendly and general. Then the trader remarked:

"That's a curious robbery that took place lately."

"What robbery?" queried one of the young men, eyeing the speaker keenly.

"The robbery of the crown jewels," returned the trader. "I understand the thieves haven't been caught yet."

It was a clever piece of business, and I can't help admiring the lads that brought it off. I wonder how they disposed of the jewels."

"You had better be cautious how you talk," remarked the sailor, "or you may land yourself in trouble."

"True," rejoined the trader moodily, "but one can't help thinking what a fine haul that was." He relapsed into silence and sat gazing at the stove, as though he were dreaming of the precious gems. The two younger men arose, bade the other two good-night and left, for the hour was growing late. Then the trader seemed to awake from his reverie, and asked the sailor if he, too, were going away.

"No, I am lodging here," was the reply.

"So; that reminds me. Landlord, can I have a bed?"

The landlord replied in the affirmative, and the trader invited his new acquaintance to have some more vodka. They sat drinking for some time and the sailor was pretty far gone in his cups when the hour for retiring came. They mounted the greasy, rickety stairs and the trader accompanied the sailor to his room. Then he produced a bottle of vodka from his pocket and they set to work to empty it. Presently the trader murmured in a muffled way, as if his thoughts still ran upon the gems:

"What a grand haul it was. Why, there must have been a million roubles worth of them!"

"Of what?" asked the sailor drowsily.

"The stolen jewels," muttered the trader. "I wish I had the chance of buying them. I would give a good price, I warrant you."

"What price would you give?" queried the sailor, with a forced laugh.

"How could I tell, unless I saw them?" returned the trader.

The sailor became thoughtful and silent. The trader continued to mumble incoherently of gems, gold and jewels, until the sailor, overcome by his potations, stretched himself on the bed and fell asleep. Then his erstwhile companion crept slowly from the room and sought his own chamber.

The next morning the two men drank their tea together, and the sailor invited his friend to accompany him into the city.

"You say you are from Constantinople?" queried the sailor, as they walked on.

"Yes, I live there."

"If you were a rich man I might be able to put something in your way that would double your wealth," said the sailor, glancing sharply at his companion.

"I am not rich," said the trader excitedly, "but I can get money for anything like a good deal. Tens of thousands, millions of roubles, if need be. I have good backing, and I want to get rich. Tell me what your plan is?"

"Have you any friends in Moscow?"

"No, I am a stranger here. But I have come to trade. I will lend money at interest on safe security, or I will buy anything that I can sell again."

"Meet me at the same lodgings tonight and I may put something worth while in your way," said the sailor. "I must leave you now."

"Count on me," returned the trader eagerly. "By the way, how are you called?"

"I am known as Captain Blok. I command a small trading vessel doing business in the Black Sea. She is being overhauled at Azov. The two friends you saw last night will be with me when I meet you."

"Good. I will be there without fail."

The sailor went off, and the trader continued to walk through the town. When nine o'clock came it found him by the big stove in the restaurant. Soon afterwards Captain Blok came in. He approached hurriedly and requested the trader to accompany him to his room.

"What is your name?" inquired Blok, as he shut the door.

"Nikolai, Peter Nikolai. I was born in Poland, but have been trading in Constantinople and the Levant for many years."

"You are good for a deal in a big way and can be trusted to keep your mouth shut?"

"That is my business," returned the trader earnestly.

At this point the door opened and Blok's companions of the previous night entered. They looked at Blok's visitor suspiciously.

"He's all right," said Blok reassuringly. Then turning to the trader he continued: "Now, look here, Peter Nikolai, you say you can command money?"

"Yes, to any extent."

"Very well. We have some stuff to sell, and we are going to take you to see it. The stuff is contraband, therefore you must be careful. And if you play us false, your throat will be cut and your body flung into the river Maskva, as sure as there is a God above us."

The four men descended the stairs and went into the street. It was a very dark night; the lamps in that quarter were poor affairs and gave but little light. They had proceeded for a short distance when Blok said:

"Nikolai, before we go any further you must let us blindfold you."

The trader protested, but finally yielded, and a thick scarf was bound about his eyes. They led him along in silence for some time, until, by the sound of flowing water, the trader knew he was near the river. A halt was made. There was the grating of keys in a lock, a door was opened and Nikolai was led forward into a passage, while the door was locked and barred. He was then taken down a flight of stairs, where the bandage was removed and a light procured. Nikolai found himself in a cellar, with an arched brick roof, from which water dripped, while the floor of red brick was slimy and foul. In one corner was a large trunk. This was opened and some bundles lifted out, placed on a table and untied. There shone before the trader's eyes heaps of precious stones, including diamonds, rubies, amethysts, pearls, sapphires and turquoises. Blok held the lamp so that its rays were thrown full on the gems, and the three men watched Nikolai's every movement. He examined the stones carefully, giving vent to exclamations of delight.

"What will you give for the lot?" inquired Blok. "They are worth far more than a million roubles, but you can have them for that sum."

Nikolai protested excitedly that the price was too high, and wound up by offering seventy-five thousand roubles. After much haggling, the trio agreed to accept, and Nikolai said he would go next day to the Bank of Moscow, to which he had letters, and draw the money. It was arranged that the four men were to meet the following night outside of the restaurant and proceed again to the cellar, where the money would be exchanged for the gems.

The business, so far, being concluded, Nikolai was once more blindfolded and they all left the place together. After going some distance the bandage was removed from the trader's eyes. The two young men went away and Nikolai and Blok proceeded to their lodgings.

The following morning Nikolai told Blok that he was going to the bank to

arrange about the money, but that the deal would have to take place that evening in their bedroom at the cafe, as he would not trust himself with them in the cellar with so much money about him. But Blok stood firm, and replied that the transaction would have to be made in the cellar, and that everything would be perfectly fair and square. Reluctantly the trader yielded and went away. He met the captain again in the restaurant in the evening and Blok inquired anxiously if he had got the money. Nikolai pulled from a deep pocket inside his vest a bundle of notes, the sight of which caused Blok's eyes to sparkle, and a little later they set forth on their mission, being met on the way by Blok's two friends. The trader refused resolutely to be blindfolded again, saying there was no necessity for it. He also warned his companions that he was armed and prepared to resist any attempt to rob him. They laughed and assured him that all would be well, as they were anxious to trade and not likely to offer violence which might result in getting them into trouble.

At last they reached the house by the river. One of the young men inserted the key into the lock and was about to turn it, when a whistle echoed shrilly through the air. As if by magic the four were surrounded by armed men. Before they could offer resistance, Blok and his two confederates were seized and handcuffed. Then a police officer, Nikolai and five other men entered the house, descended to the cellar, and seized the trunk containing the stolen gems. It was placed on a cart that was waiting and the jewels were conveyed to the treasury under a strong escort. Blok and his companions, terror-stricken and dismayed, realized that they had been tricked, trapped and betrayed by the erstwhile trader, who was none other than Michael Danevitch.

It was one of the proudest moments of the detective's career, for he had played his part with consummate art, and his triumph was complete. It remains now to explain how he managed to get on the track of the criminals and net them so cleverly.

After Danevitch had interviewed Anna Ivanovna he began to think that she could throw some light on the mystery if she liked, and he had her shadowed. He ascertained from Lydia that Anna had a son of about five and twenty. A few months before the robbery this young man had spent a fortnight with his mother during the temporary absence of General Kuntzler. His mother was blindly devoted to him, although he was known to be an idle, dissolute vagabond. His name was Ivan, and one night, some days after the robbery, he and his mother were seen to meet in a lonely part of the suburbs. From that moment a close watch was kept on Ivan's movements, and it was ascertained that he associated with another young man named Maleski. They were always together, and were joined after a while by Blok, who was Ivan's cousin. The old disused house on the banks of the river was taken in Maleski's name, ostensibly to store grain there; but little by little the gems from the stolen articles, which were ruthlessly broken up, were conveyed from a house in the Kremlin which Ivan rented, to the place on the river bank. Blok had secured lodgings in the restaurant in the poor quarter of the earthen city, as he hoped thereby to escape attracting any attention. At this place the three confederates were in the habit of meeting. Then it was that Danevitch, being sure of his ground, assumed so successfully the role of the trader.

On the night when he and Captain Blok staggered up to the latter's room Danevitch was perfectly sober, although he shammed intoxication. When Blok had gone to sleep the detective searched his person and found in a pocketbook letters of a compromising description. They appeared to indicate that the first idea was that the three men were to travel singly to Azov, each man carrying as many of the gems as he could without arousing suspicion. They were to be deposited on Blok's vessel, and when all was ready Blok and his companions were to sail to Constantinople, where they hoped to dispose of the gems. The appearance of the trader on the scene altered their plans. They fancied that if they could induce him to buy them their risk would be greatly lessened, and the moment they secured the money they intended to clear out and seek safety in some other country. At Ivan's lodgings the battered gold of the stolen property was found, but ultimately the Polish crown was restored almost to its original state, and may still be seen in the museum at Moscow. As the plot of the robbery was gradually unfolded, it was seen that Anna Ivanovna was the victim of her worthless son. She was a weak, rather stupid woman—at any rate, where he was concerned—and succumbed to his wiles. If she did not actually assist him, she shut her eyes while he made wax impressions of various keys, and on the night of the robbery she unquestionably helped him and his companion, Maleski, who was secretly admitted, it is possible that when Kuntzler heard of the crime he had some suspicion that his sister was implicated, and unable to face the disgrace and shame of exposure, took his life.

Neither Maximoff nor his subordinates had anything to do with the robbery. They were all exonerated after a searching investigation, which led to the conviction of the guilty parties, who, with the exception of Anna, were sent to the Siberian mines for life. She was condemned to ten years' incarceration in the prison fortress of Schusselburg, a sentence that was practically equivalent to a living death.