

There was no reply. The young man then drew a pistol from his pocket, exclaiming: "You old witch, I'll force you to tell me!" At the sight of the weapon the Countess gave a second sign of life. She threw back her head and put out her hands as if to protect herself; then they dropped, and she sat motionless.

Herman grasped her arm roughly and was about to renew his threats when he saw that she was dead!

Seated in her room, still in her ball-dress, Lisaveta gave herself up to her reflections. She had expected to find the young officer there, but she felt relieved to see that he was not.

Strangely enough, that very night at the ball Tomsky had allied her about her preference for the young officer, assuring her that he knew more than she supposed he did.

"Of whom are you speaking?" she had asked in alarm, fearing her adventure had been discovered.

"Of the remarkable man," was the reply. "His name is Herman."

Lisa made no reply. "This Herman," continued Tomsky, "is a romantic character; he has the profile of a Napoleon and the heart of a Mephistopheles. It is said he has at least three wives on his conscience. But how pale you are."

"It is only a slight headache. But why do you talk to me of this Herman?"

"Because I believe he has serious intentions concerning you."

"Where has he been seen?"

"At church, perhaps, or on the street."

The conversation was interrupted at this point, to the great regret of the young girl. The words of Tomsky made a deep impression upon her, and she realised how imprudently she had acted. She was thinking of all this and a great deal more when the door of her apartment suddenly opened, and Herman stood before her. She drew back at sight of him, trembling violently.

"Where have you been?" she asked, in a frightened whisper.

"In the bed-chamber of the Countess. She is dead," was the calm reply.

"My God! What are you saying?" cried the girl.

"Furthermore, I believe that I was the cause of her death."

The words of Tomsky flashed through Lisa's mind.

Herman sat down and told her all. She listened with a feeling of terror and disgust. So those passionate letters, that audacious pursuit, were not the result of tenderness and love. It was money that he desired. The poor girl felt that she had in a sense been an accomplice in the death of her benefactress. She began to weep bitterly. Herman regarded her in silence.

"You are a monster!" exclaimed Lisa, drying her eyes.

"I didn't intend to kill her; the pistol was not even loaded."

"How are you going to get out of the house?" inquired Lisa. "It is nearly daylight. I intended to show you the way to a secret staircase, while the Countess was asleep, as we would have to cross her chamber. Now, I am afraid to do so."

"Direct me, and I will find the way alone," replied Herman.

She gave him minute instructions and a key with which to open the street door. The young man pressed the cold, inert hand, then went out.

The death of the Countess had surprised no one, as it had long been expected. Her funeral was attended by every eye of note in the vicinity. Herman mingled with the throng without attracting any special attention. After all the friends had taken their last look at the dead face, the young man approached the bier. He prostrated himself on the cold floor and remained motionless for a long time. He rose at last with a face almost as pale as that of the corpse itself, and went up the steps to look into the casket. As he looked down, it seemed to him that the rigid face returned his glance mockingly, closing one eye. He turned abruptly away, made a false step and fell to the floor. He was picked up, and, at the same moment, Lisaveta was carried out in a faint.

Herman did not recover his usual composure during the entire day. He dined alone at an out-of-the-way restaurant, and drank a great deal, in the

hope of stifling his emotion. The wine only served to stimulate his imagination. He returned home and threw himself down on his bed without undressing.

During the night, he awoke with a start; the moon shone into his chamber, making everything plainly visible. Some one looked in at the window, then quickly disappeared. He paid no attention to this, but soon he heard the vestibule door open. He thought it was his orderly, returning late, drunk as usual. The step was an unfamiliar one, and he heard the shuffling sound of loose slippers.

The door of his room opened, and a woman in white entered. She came close to the bed, and the terrified man recognised the Countess.

"I have come to you against my will," she said abruptly; "but I was commanded to grant your request. The tray, seven and ace in succession are the magic cards. Twenty-four hours must elapse between the use of each card, and after the three have been used, you must never play again."

The phantom then turned and walked away. Herman heard the outside door close, and again saw the form pass the window.

He rose and went out into the hall, where his orderly lay asleep on the floor. The door was closed. Finding no trace of a visitor, he returned to his room, lit his candle, and wrote down what he had just heard.

Two fixed ideas cannot exist in the brain at the same time any more than two bodies can occupy the same point in space. The tray, seven and ace soon chased away the thoughts of the dead woman, and all other thoughts from the brain of the young officer. All his ideas merged into a single one: how to turn to advantage the secret paid for so dearly. He even thought of resigning his commission and going to Paris to force a fortune from conquered fate. Chance rescued him from his embarrassment.

Tehekalinsky, a man who had passed his whole life at cards, opened a club at St. Petersburg. His long experience secured for him the confidence of his companions, and his hospitality and genial humour conciliated society.

The gilded youth flocked around him, neglecting society, preferring the charms of fate to those of their sweethearts. Naroumov invited Herman to accompany him to the club and the young man accepted the invitation only too willingly.

The two officers found the apartments full. Generals and statesmen played whist; young men lounged on sofas, eating ices or smoking. In the principal salon stood a long table at which about twenty men sat playing faro, the host of the establishment being the banker.

He was a man of about sixty, grey haired and respectable. His ruddy face shone with genial humour; his eyes sparkled, and a constant smile hovered around his lips.

Naroumov presented Herman. The host gave him a cordial hand shake, begged him not to stand upon ceremony, and returned to his dealing. More than thirty cards were already on the table. Tehekalinsky paused after each coup, to allow the punters time to recognize their gains or losses, politely answering all questions and constantly smiling.

After the deal was over the cards were shuffled and the game began again.

"Permit me to choose a card," said Herman, stretching out his hand over the head of a portly gentleman to reach a bivet. The banker bowed without replying.

Herman chose a card and wrote the amount of his stake upon it with a piece of chalk.

"How much is that?" asked the banker; "excuse me, sir, but I do not see well."

"Forty thousand roubles," said Herman, coolly.

All eyes were instantly turned upon the speaker.

"He has lost his wits," thought Naroumov.

"Allow me to observe," said Tehekalinsky, with his eternal smile, "that your stake is excessive."

"What of it?" replied Herman, nettled. "Do you accept it or not?"

The banker nodded in assent. "I have only to remind you that the cush will be necessary. Of course,

your word is good, but in order to keep the confidence of my patrons I prefer the ready money."

Herman took a bank cheque from his pocket and handed it to his host. The latter examined it attentively, then laid it on the card chosen.

He began dealing, to the right a nine, to the left a tray.

"The tray wins," said Herman, showing the card he held—a tray.

A murmur ran round the crowd. Tehekalinsky frowned for a second only, then his smile returned. He took a roll of bank bills from his pocket and counted out the required sum. Herman received it and at once left the table.

The next evening saw him at the place again. Everyone eyed him curiously and Tehekalinsky greeted him cordially.

He selected his card and placed upon it his fresh stake. The banker began dealing, to the right a nine, to the left a seven.

Herman then showed his card—a seven spot. The onlookers exclaimed, and the host was visibly disturbed. He counted out ninety-four thousand roubles and passed them to Herman, who accepted them without showing the least surprise, and at once withdrew.

The following evening he went again. His appearance was the signal for the cessation of all occupation, everyone being eager to watch the developments of events. He selected his card—an ace.

The dealing began, to the right a queen, to the left an ace.

Herman, without glancing at it, turning up his card

"Your queen is killed," remarked Tehekalinsky, quietly.

Herman trembled; looking down he saw, not the ace he had selected, but the queen of spades. He could scarcely believe his eyes. It seemed impossible that he could have made such a mistake. As he stared at the card it seemed to him that the queen winked one eye at him mockingly.

"The old woman!" he exclaimed involuntarily.

The croupier raked in the money while he looked on in stupid terror. When he left the table all made way for him to pass; the cards were shuffled, and the gambling went on.

Herman became a lunatic. He was confined at the hospital at Oboukov, where he spoke to no one, but kept constantly murmuring in a monotonous tone, "The tray, seven, ace! The tray, seven, queen!"

**A
PROPOSAL**



**TO EVERY LADY TO MAKE
DELICIOUS CUSTARD
WITH
BIRD'S
CUSTARD
POWDER
A DAILY LUXURY!**

BIRD'S Custard Powder makes a perfect High-Class Custard at a minimum of cost and trouble. Used by all the leading Diplomates of the South Kensington School of Cookery, London. Invaluable also for a variety of Sweet Dishes, recipes for which accompany every packet.

NO EGGS! NO RISK! NO TROUBLE!

Storekeepers can obtain Supplies from all the leading Wholesale Houses.



**MOTHER
SEIGEL'S
CURATIVE
SYRUP**

AN IDEAL TONIC

is one that restores tone and efficiency to the stomach, liver and kidneys impaired through worry, overwork, climatic changes, unhealthy atmosphere in factory or office, disease or any other cause. It promotes the thorough digestion and assimilation of food, which are the foundation of good health. Such a tonic is Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup. Mr. ALEX. COCHRANE, Eva St., Tooranga, Victoria, in a letter describing how he had for five years suffered from acute indigestion and been completely cured by Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup, says: "Though it is eighteen months since I took the last dose I feel better and stronger than ever I did in my life before." Such is the power of Mother Seigel's Curative Syrup.

MADE FROM ROOTS AND HERBS.