

## The Malachite Collar

She was gorgeously attired and wore about her through a broad collar, curiously wrought, of rough malachite and blackened silver. She had fingered the jewel almost continuously since we had been on deck, and at last her devoted slave, a celebrated doctor, said to her:

That collar seems to gall your neck. Why don't you take it off?"

"No," she replied; "but somehow or other I cannot keep my hands off it. It seems to help me think. I have not worn it for sometime, and it has aroused a train of memory, of things passed and gone—things that would make a story worth the telling.

We all knew well her wonderful power of word painting, and felt that it behooved us to wait till she was ready to speak.

"It is your turn for a story, and why not this one?" the Judge remarked suggestively.

"I do not know," she said, after a pause, "why my mind has been on this adventure specially today." And again she shifted the heavy collar about her neck into a more comfortable position.

"It was on Christmas Eve and in St. Petersburg," she continued. "I had gone there principally in search of an adventure of some kind, to be turned into a story; for my brain stock was running low, and I was under contract to supply so much material in a given time. I could not speak a word of Russian; but was fluent in French, and trusted to that language to pull me through any difficulty—and there was always the American Ambassador to appeal to in an extreme case.

"It was Christmas Eve, as I said, and I was returning home as twilight by one of the streets leading into the grounds of the Winter Palace, when a woman bearing a bundle approached me, followed closely by a boy of about twelve years.

"The woman had a long cloak about her, and a heavy lace veil over her head. I should not have noticed her if her manner had not been nervous, and when she came closer I saw a hunted look in her eyes as she glanced behind her many times, as if to make sure she was not followed. As she came close to me she whispered hurriedly in good French:

"Madame, quickly take this child! You are not a Russian,' and she thrust the bundle into my arms. 'For the love of God take this child! The boy will show you where to go. There are those following who would take his life, and he means everything to the Russian people.' She flung off her cloak and thrust it quickly about my shoulders, and as quickly threw the veil over my head. 'These are signals to those who understand. The boy will lead you. If I kept the child another five

minutes, it would mean an end to all things. I am a marked woman, and you, they who mean evil to the child will not recognize. 'Go!' she repeated intensely. 'Follow the boy! I hear footsteps even now! Go!' she begged, seemingly in an agony of fear.

"The boy started off in a dog trot, which he gradually increased to a run, and I followed, feeling, rather than understanding, the necessity of moving as quickly as might be, without attracting attention; and we were soon racing down the street. The boy, looking back from time to time, suddenly reported in French that we were followed.

"'We must make the corner of the street,' he explained hurriedly, 'and then turn back on ourselves up another street.'

"I put forth all my strength; but the weight and clumsiness of the cloak retarded me frightfully, and a baby, no matter how small, soon becomes a dead weight to unaccustomed arms. But I felt that this child's welfare had been thrust upon me by Providence, and his safety, rather than the needs of the Russian people, hurried my feet, and we made the turn of the street while the footsteps were well behind us.

"'Now run for your life,' the boy said, 'to the right!' and pointed up a narrow alleyway. The cloak was flopping about my feet and I was beginning to feel weak in the knees. I unclasped the fastening and with one hand threw it to the boy.

"'The veil must be sufficient identification,' I said.

"He caught the cloak and answered, 'I will drop it in the way we did not take, and it may be a blind as to which street we chose. I will catch up with you in a few minutes,' and he darted off up a street to the left. In a few seconds he was by my side. 'Turn to the right again!' he whispered sharply, and we stumbled together into a low, arched way, pitch dark.

"When we were well in the shadow the boy gave a sigh of relief and said, 'We are all right for a little while, if the child does not cry.'

"We heard, as an echo, the racing of hurried feet and a consultation almost at the mouth of our retreat as to which way we had taken. They had divided, it appeared, one half of the party following on our heels, and the other party taking the road to the left. We had almost ceased to breathe for fear of betraying our whereabouts, and it seemed to me that my heart was making a noise that could be heard for miles.

"Suddenly a cry from the distance announced the finding of the cloak, and they all rushed off on the false scent.

"'Now,' said the boy, 'fly for all our lives!' and he rushed out of our hiding place into the street again; and I, having regained my breath, followed nimbly, still clasping that precious baby in my arms.

"Suddenly we again heard the thud of following feet.

"‘They have found us out!’ he gasped, and in a second he plunged into another abyss, I following.

"The darkness of the covered alleyway into which we had disappeared was blacker than the traditional pit, and the flicker of a street lamp nearby seemed to make it more intense.

"The men soon passed our hiding place, and we could hear the quick indrawing of breath as they redoubled their efforts.

"‘God send the child is quiet,’ muttered the boy, ‘or we are lost!’

"The baby had never once stirred or made a sound.

‘Doubtless,’ I thought at the moment, ‘he has been drugged.’

"When we could no longer hear the footsteps the boy gave a deep sigh of relief. ‘We must chance the other end of the alley this time,’ he said. ‘I think it leads into a street where there is a house I know of that will shelter us; they also may remember this house and be watching it. Then death for us!’

"He slid quickly by me and disappeared round a turn in the passageway, whispering to me to follow. When we were still in the shadow, toward the outlet, he motioned me back till he could reconnoiter.

"He assumed an air of indifference which I could not but admire, and emerged into the court beyond, thrusting his hands into his pockets and whistling. In a minute he dashed back, calling softly, ‘Run for your life! It is safe for three minutes only!’

"I flew like the wind and followed him into a house, the doors of which swung back as if by magic when we pushed against them and closed silently behind us. I heard a bolt softly pushed in place, and in the dark a small hand was thrust through my arm.

"The boy said a few words in Russian to someone who stood by the door.

"‘Now,’ I thought to myself, ‘you were looking for an adventure, and you are certainly in the midst of what promises to be one, probably with consequences!’

"Suddenly there was a frightful pounding on the door beside us, and my heart stood still. The boy muttered something and dragged me through a doorway. There was still no sound from the doorkeeper. In an adjoining room I could see the faint glimmer of artificial light. The boy pulled me toward it, and we entered, to find a coffin, the upper half of which was open, revealing the body of a man. There were two watchers in the room, and the light came from a couple of candles at the head of the bier.

"The boy snatched the baby from my arms and, lifting the lower half of the coffin, thrust it in and replaced the lid.

"He took from a chair nearby a long, heavy, black cloak with a hood and, whispering to me to kneel at the foot of the coffin, threw it about me and the hood over my head, obscuring me entirely. Meanwhile the blows upon the door became more violent.

"When I was placed to his satisfaction, he muttered, 'Heaven send the dose is strong enough!' and gave a peculiar groan or catcall. In a second there was the sound of footsteps going noisily toward the door, and a fumbling of heavy chains and bolts, and then the sound of angry inquiries, and a sort of stupid misunderstanding reply. Suddenly footsteps came closer, and a number of men burst into the room with noisy violence.

"If I had any lucid thought at that moment it was to echo the boy's prayer, 'Heaven send the dose is strong enough!'

"The men stopped a moment at the door, abashed in the presence of death, the doorkeeper following them.

"Then one spoke to him roughly in Russian, and he whined back in French that he did not understand the Russian tongue. One of the other men was pushed forward by the first speaker. 'Had the doorkeeper happened to see a woman, carrying a child and led by a boy, pass that way?' he said in very bad French.

"And how could a poor servant from the South, who had just lost a good master, be expected to note what manner of persons passed by on such a day, let alone night?

"Had not a woman, carrying a child, and led by a boy, just been admitted by him?

"As he lived, none but the persons in the room had entered that day, saving only the Angel of Death, and they could see for themselves who were there!

"And who might be the persons in the room?

"Two relatives of the dead man watching with his widow.'

"The first speaker laid his hand roughly upon my shoulder; but the doorkeeper threw it off, saying, 'Was he such a beast as to interrupt the widow in her prayers for the welfare of the soul of the departed one?'

"The man slunk back, and with further parley they drew toward the door, the spokesman asking if the doorkeeper was sure that the widow did not have a child hidden under the cloak.

"If Madame will but hear and stretch out both hands, to show she had no child in her arms, she may soon be rid of the villainous son of perdition, who persisted in interrupting her intercessions.'

"Taking my cue, I stretched out both hands, thanking God that I was clad in black, and then withdrew them into the shadow of the cloak.

"The men, only half satisfied, left the room, explaining to the doorkeeper that they were Secret Service men, searching for

a woman escaped from a gang of convicts about to be sent to Siberia.

"The man again feigned misunderstanding, and the speaker, cursing him for a fool, spoke a few words to his companions in Russian, and they all withdrew.

"I knelt, trembling, for what seemed an eternity, after the bolts had been sprung in the door behind the men. Every nerve was on a tension, and my knees began to shake so that I was afraid I should fall over against the coffin. I knew, though, that I must summon all my strength to keep quiet till another cue was given me. The whole thing seemed to be so thoroughly planned out! I did wonder, though at the quietness of the baby. Even when the men were all talking noisily, there was no sign from the coffin. I was beginning to think the poor child would be suffocated if we did not soon take it out, when the boy appeared from the shadow and whispered to me that we must be off; for the men were sure to return. He helped me to rise, and then, opening the coffin, restored my charge to my arms and hurried me out of the room by a door opposite the one we had entered.

"He ran ahead, up some steps, but dimly lighted, and after a couple of turns down a stone passageway, opened a door, and we were in another room, with three windows reaching from ceiling to floor. The boy motioned me back and, noiselessly opening one of them, peered out. He beckoned me to follow him, and I stumbled out on a sort of balcony or parapet with a closed stone railing breast high. He whispered to me to keep as close to the railing as possible, and to crouch down as low as I could with my burden.

"We passed several houses, and then the boy knocked softly on a window, which was quickly opened. He dragged me in, and it was closed behind us."

"My arms ached with my unaccustomed burden; but the excitement of the chase; or rather the chased, was hot in my veins, and I had reached the point when I could have walked into the cannon's mouth without the turn of an eyelash.

"The room was without light, except what came through the closed, unshuttered windows from the lamps in the street. The boy led me across it and opened a door into a passageway which was faintly illuminated by a smoky lamp. We ascended a stone stairway and presently came to a sort of loophole which led out on the roof of an adjoining house. The snow had blown and drifted till the roof was almost perfectly clear, and we were able to cross without leaving any footprints to mark our progress.

"When we came to the far edge of the roof I saw there was a drop of about five feet. The boy swung himself down, and whispered to me to drop the baby into his arms and to swing myself down as he had done.

"It was a nasty drop for one encumbered with skirts; but it was do or die with me now, and too late to draw back. I was not a heavyweight and was quite agile from tennis and gymnasium work. I managed to follow him; but gave my wrist a horrid wrench that made it hard not to cry out with pain.

"He gave me back the precious bundle, and led the way through a perfect nest of chimneys, till we came to a trapdoor. This he raised easily and, feeling for a ladder, soon found a foothold, and I at once prepared to follow. Suddenly, when I was standing on the first run, the silence was rent by the most awful, bloodcurdling scream I have ever heard in my life, coming from directly under my feet. My blood froze within me, and my knees trembled so that I almost lost my foothold on the ladder.

"The boy below me paused a second and caught his breath. 'That was awful,' he whispered; 'but it means greater safety for us. No one can hear our footfalls while that is going on.'

"I asked him what it was; but he either did not or would not understand my question, for he made no answer, and proceeded down the ladder. How I ever reached the bottom I cannot tell; but I did land safely on the floor without further adventure.

"We descended a perfectly dark winding stairway by feeling the walls, and once again, when we were resting a moment in a sort of vestibule, did we hear that awful cry, this time smothered and desperate.

"The boy opened the door with difficulty, and we passed out into the night again.

"Now we walked quickly in the direction for a cross street which seemed lighter than the one we were in. The boy led me by one hand and whispered hurriedly, 'If we meet anyone, we are beggars, and you are blind! It is too dark for them to see that we are not.'

"We passed into the wider, lighter street, and met but few people; to each of whom the boy said a few words in Russian. Some stopped and gave him money, and others passed us by without even glancing at us. We made our way in this fashion slowly toward what seemed to be a public park or garden. This we skirted round rapidly, till we came to a high wall with a small door, heavily studded with ponderous nails. The wall stretched endlessly to right and left of the doorway, and the garden, thick with trees and underbrush, all coated heavily with a recent fall of damp snow, lay behind us, or rather across a sort of street or roadway.

"The boy fumbled in the dead vines clinging to the wall for the bell handle, and with difficulty found it. He pulled it very

gently, looking furtively over his shoulder toward the wooded depths of the garden opposite. He pulled it again and again, without response.

“‘Curse the doorkeeper!’ he muttered. ‘Drunk or asleep already!’

“Hust then we were startled by the sound of something creeping stealthily through those awful ghostly bushes. There was no light nearby; but the moon was struggling to break through the drifting snow clouds. We tried to flatten ourselves against the dark wall, so as to be unobserved in the fitful moonlight. The boy gave the bell another desperate pull, muttering, ‘They are close upon us, and we are so near to safety! Once beyond the gate, we may laugh at them.’

“The soft noise in the bushes came nearer. The boy gave one terrific pull to the bell, and we heard a door open in the distance.

“Suddenly the space about us seemed alive with men, rushing from the garden. The oak door was thrown open, and more men rushed out into the street. In a second they were all fighting. The men from the garden seemed determined to surround me and my charge; and the men who had come out of the door seemed equally determined they should not. I tried desperately to hold the child so the blows could not touch it; but all at once I felt a stinging sensation in my throat, and I staggered back. In an instant the baby was snatched from me, and I saw the man rush off toward the shelter of the bushes, followed by two other men. To my horror, just as I fell, before losing consciousness, I saw the man carrying the baby stab it two or three times, and, throwing it into the bushes, rush off into the darkness of the garden still pursued by the two men.

“I knew no more.

“I awoke in a sumptuous bed in a comfortable room.

I lay still for sometime, trying to collect my thoughts, and watching the shadows made by the firelight on the ceiling. My throat felt very queer and dry, and I put my hand up to it, to find it bandaged. At once the memory of it all came to me. I tried to sit up in bed; but fell back on my pillows, weak and giddy.

“Someone came to my side from beyond the shadow of the firelight, a woman in white with a red cross on her arm. She motioned me to be quiet, and brought me a delicious draft of something I had never tasted before; and I soon sank into another stupor.

“A young doctor visited me daily, and talked a little in broken French. I questioned him as to the events that had brought me there; but he either knew nothing about them, or had been instructed not to discuss them with me.

"I soon began to regain my strength, and he assured me I should be able to leave my bed before very long, as the wound in my neck had not been so serious as he had at first feared, and my weakness was due almost entirely to loss of blood.

"The evening of the first day I was able to go beyond my room the doctor brought a sweet faced English girl, dressed in the uniform of one of the London hospital nurses, to take the place of my Russian nurse.

One afternoon the doctor appeared at an unusual hour, and at his bidding she got me ready to go out. I was evidently going some distance, for I was dressed again in my own black dress and jacket; and then a most wonderful sable lined traveling coat and hood were thrown about me.

"The nurse soon made her own preparations, and together we three descended, and were ushered out of the oak door in the long garden wall. We found a closed carriage, with a man on the box and another at attention. The doctor helped us in, and followed, the man closing the door and mounting the box without asking for or receiving any orders.

"We drove silently for a long time. I, for one, had learned the futility of asking questions long since.

"We seemed to be going through poorer, meaner streets, when suddenly we turned down one that led to a jetty, and I could see indistinct lines of shipping, for it was quite dark by this time. We drove along the jetty, till we came to a broad stone stairway, at the foot of which was a rowboat, manned by several men in uniform. I began to wonder if they were going to row me over and drop me in the water as a finish to recent events.

"We were rowed off into the stream, and soon an unlighted vessel loomed up in the darkness. We were rowed close to her side, and silently mounted the ladder waiting for us. When we were all on board, the doctor ushered us below into the sumptuous cabin of what appeared to be a private yacht.

"My nurse at once busied herself with preparations for my retiring, and before I was ready to turn in, while I was consuming a dainty repast brought by a trim young steward, we began to feel the motion of our engines, and we were steaming off somewhere—Heaven only knew where!

"I slept comfortably that night and late into the morning, till I was awakened by the nurse standing beside me with an exquisitely appointed breakfast tray. She reported that it was a glorious day and we were out of sight of land.

"The officers of the boat kept to their end of the ship; so my only companions were the doctor and my nurse.



"I asked the doctor the first day where we were going, and he said we were cruising about, waiting for a Marconi message<sup>i</sup> giving us our orders.

"On the morning of the seventh day I was awakened by the engines stopping suddenly. I could see through my porthole that we were in what seemed to be a river; on the banks I could see wharves and shipping. It looked familiar to me, and suddenly a little river steamer tooted by, and I knew we were in the Thames.

"Till this moment of realizing I was in a home country, I did not know how great a strain I had been under since the moment I took that baby into my arms, and I had a good cry to myself as I thought of that poor little baby stabbed to death and thrown into the bushes. And, after all, my efforts had been powerless to save him!

"In course of time I was dressed and escorted by my two friends to the same small boat in which we had embarked, and we were rowed to the shore.

"There was a carriage, with two men, awaiting us, the men in some kind of official livery, with cockades on their tall hats.

"We were driven rapidly to a fine looking house, which I at once recognized as the Russian Embassy.

"We were admitted by wonderful footmen and ushered into a sort of half office, half reception room, and the footmen withdrew after receiving an order in Russian from the doctor.

"We were kept waiting only a few minutes, and then led across the broad hall to a library, where was seated at a desk a handsome, elderly man of soldierly appearance. He glanced at me keenly as he rose, and then advancing toward me asked in exquisite English if I were Miss Marian Howard.

"I replied that I was.

"He asked me a few more questions, and then motioned to my companions to withdraw and requested me to be seated. He regarded me critically for some moments, and then said, 'So you are the young lady who risked your life to save a little baby boy you had never seen before?'

"'And all for nothing!' I replied impulsively.

"'Oh, no,' he said. 'The baby is alive and well.'

"'But I saw him stabbed and thrown into the bushes.'

"He did not reply; but opened a dispatch box beside him and drew out a sealed package. 'I must ask your solemn oath not to reveal the contents of this package to either of your companions,' and, placing it on a small desk in an alcove, motioned me to take the chair beside it.

"The package contained a newspaper printed in French, and dated two months back. Around a column on the first page was drawn the censor's mark.

"I was soon deeply interested. It was an account of a plot discovered to kidnap the Czarevitch. The nurse, it appeared, had confessed that she had arranged to bring the child to a certain spot at an hour when there would be few to observe her. She was to place a large doll in the cradle, so that anyone approaching would believe the imperial infant to be quietly sleeping in it, thus giving the plotters time to escape.

"At the last minute her heart failed her; for she was fond of the child, and, fearing not to keep her engagement with the kidnappers, had placed the child as usual in the cradle and carried the doll to the rendezvous agreed upon.

"Its being Christmas Eve, the men were late, and she had lost heart, fearing other danger for the child, and had thrust the doll into the arms of the first woman she had met. Her brother, a child of twelve, had accompanied her, and, being brought up in a atmosphere of intrigue, at a word from the sister had led the woman with the doll through a maze of adventures, throwing the plotters off the track for sometime. Finally, when about reaching a place of safety, the men had fallen upon them and, seizing the supposed baby, had stabbed it several times and thrown it into the bushes, making off just as the gate to the house, where they had hoped to find refuge, had been opened. The woman had a bad wound in the neck; but the boy escaped injury. After recovering the doll from the bushes, he had thrust it after the woman through the gate. The men had all escaped in the Christmas crowd.

For sometime I sat silent, going over the whole adventure.

"The gentleman rose from his desk and came over to where I was sitting and, handing me another package, said, 'I am furthermore ordered to give this into your hands. Let me congratulate you on your nerve and action. But for you, the child would without doubt have suffered; for the men had arranged, in case of miscarriage of this plot, that another attempt was to be made on the child's life within twenty-four hours. The men, seeing the child stabbed and thrown into the bushes, had hurried off, and also the man chosen to finish the deed in case of accident, seeing the plot accomplished, as he believed.

"It's a shame,' I exclaimed, 'that a poor, innocent baby should always be in danger!'

"He did not answer, but quietly withdrew the newspaper from under my hand, and I saw it was numbered. He folded it and locked it again in the despatch box.

“‘You are the only living soul, except a few Russians concerned in various ways, who knows this, and we rely upon you to keep it a secret for at least two years.’

“And I have; though it would have been a great story for my paper.

“I took the other package and opened it. There were two long boxes in it. One contained a roll of what seemed to be printed paper.

“‘That will keep,’ said my companion. Afterward I found it to contain a large sum of money in Bank of England notes.

“The other box I opened, and this collar was in it. On a card was written that the man who had stabbed me had been apprehended in a few days and had later dug the malachite composing the collar from the Government mines in Siberia, and the man who stabbed the baby had mined the silver in the Caucasus Mountains.

“My host soon bowed me out, and I was escorted to a carriage, and driven to one of the first class hotels, where I was shown to a suite of rooms engaged for me and paid for in advance for one month. At the end of this time I set sail for America.”

We discussed the adventure with her at length, and she lifted the collar, so we might by the aid of lighted matches see the scar on her neck,--a straight, white line along the collarbone, where the hard neck muscles were.

The doctor shivered and said he did not see how she could possibly have escaped death, from the position of the wound

She shrugged her shoulders and said pensively, “Maybe I am saved for the gallows or a trolley car. And I never found out if that wretch of a boy knew that I was carrying a doll and not a baby.”

Just then eight bells sounded and she rose from her chair.

“Gentlemen,” she said, this is all a bit of fiction, built on the flimsy foundation of this scar on my neck, caused by lancing a carbuncle, and the collar—I bought it for ten francs on the Rue Rivoli.”

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<sup>1</sup> Marconi message: a radio message. Guglielmo Marconi (1874-1937) transmitted the first long-distance radio message in 1897, and the technology was rapidly adapted for land-sea communications.