

A STRANGE FRIENDSHIP

The large C. P. R. Steamer "Empress of France" blew for the harbour, the cabin passengers continued their conversation, the steerage passengers bolted rapidly to the side of the boat that they might have a good first view of the largest city of their adopted country. Men of every description, yet evidently all peasants; women wearing dresses of a sameness in material and plain cloth shawls thrown over their heads, with nothing to distinguish one from the other but form and features, composed this band of new Canadian citizens.

There was one face in the gathering which did not reflect the entry into fresh happiness. It was the face of a young man. His features were strikingly Slavonic, yet his complexion spoke of the Latin races. When he walked with the others to the gangplank, a shrewd eye could detect a better carriage than that of his neighbors. Unlike the other immigrants, who were bundled off to Windsor Station, he seemed to have reached his destination, for he wandered baggageless towards the Uptown district. As he strolled along, the inscription, "Pawnbroker," seemed to catch his eye, for he walked into the store that bore this mark.

A cautious-looking Jew, a student of human nature, had him sized up before he reached the counter and he was addressed with, "Vell, vot can I do for you?"

To his surprise, the alien answered in perfect English, "I would like to borrow something on this," handing the second-hand dealer a beautifully jewelled revolver.

For the first time in his life the Jew's feelings got the better of him and he quickly reached for the gun. However, his tongue was not controlled by this feeling, for he said, "Ten dollars."

"One hundred is my price."

The usual bickering followed. Our Russian friend must have had previous dealings with pawnbrokers, for he emerged with eighty dollars.

Two hours later a neatly clad young man made his way from Morgan's down the street into a restaurant. He gave his order and paid for it, giving a long look at the change he had received from a ten dollar bill. His next move was to look for work. He bought a newspaper and scanned the want advertisements.

Five days after the same young man, unshaven, his clothes bearing the unmistakable look of having been slept in, walked into an agency. It was his last resource.

"I wonder if I might procure employment," he asked a none too genteel-looking man.

"What can you do?" inquired the other, at the same time reaching out and feeling the candidate's muscle.

"I sing and play fairly well, and I speak a few languages."

"That won't help you to sweep streets; you had better try the talkies; good-day."

Our friend walked out of the office, rather shaky, for he needed food, and hard park benches give very little strength to one's legs. He walked down the street, and turned into another. As he did so he heard a cry, "Hey, Wop!" He kept going. "Hey! you Bolshevik." He turned, retraced his steps toward the person who had dared to address him thus, and promptly slapped the offender's face.

When our young friend woke up in a cafe, he saw, seated alongside of him, a person with a smiling face which seemed to say, "I am sorry I soaked you, but I didn't think you were so weak."

"If I had food in me you wouldn't get away with it," came the sharp retort.

"Well, come to think of it, you don't look as if you had been dining at the Mount Royal. Come on, I guess I owe you a sandwich for that shove."

"I don't accept charity," came the haughty reply.

A menacing fist was raised; the young Russian had heard that discretion is the better part of valor, so the sandwich pushed towards him soon disappeared. When the seventh sandwich had followed the first the host remarked, "That will be all for now; I neither intend feeding Russia or going broke."

For the first time in many days our hero smiled. He offered his hand to his new found friend, who gave it a good shake. "What is my life saver's name?"

"George Bradshaw; what is your handle?"

"Alphonso Stookovitch. I came to this country lately from Russia."

"I thought your English was too good for a Mont-realer. A Russian Prince or Duke, eh?"

Alphonso flushed. He had found telling people he was Duke of—got him but a laugh.

"I am half Russian," he said, avoiding the question, "my mother was Spanish. That accounts for the Alphonso. I suffered from the Soviets and, as you people say, I am dead broke."

"Well, I am no millionaire myself, but say, I can help you. When I called you before, I was looking for someone to take my place here while the exams are in progress."

Alphonso looked a little surprised, and said, "Oh, you are a college man."

"Sure," came the ready reply, "I drown dishes in this place to help pay expenses. Have you ever been to college?"

"Why, yes, I am a college graduate."

It was George's turn to be surprised, and he asked, "Will you take my place?"

"If it would help you. For my part, it would be a relief to have my stomach satisfied a few times a day."

George jumped up. "That's great! By the way, a barber could work wonders with you. Let's go."

When Alphonso had finished his third night's work, he walked into George's room. George looked up. "I have an examination in Russian History tomorrow," he said.

Alphonso looked over the book, and suggested, "Maybe I could help you, George."

"All right," said the collegian, "let her go from Catherine the Great to the present day."

For the next two hours Bradshaw listened to the best class he had ever had in History. The following day he made A in the examination.

When the plugging was over he returned to the restaurant.

"Alphonso, I hate to put you out of a job," he said to his friend.

"Oh, don't mind that; I have a new one Monday, singing Russian songs in a cabaret" was Alphonso's reply.

Six years later Alphonso Stookovitch the great Russian tenor, gave his first recital in Montreal to a crowded house; at least, the papers said it was his first. The papers also commented on the fact that the great celebrity was a personal friend of the prominent young local barrister, George Bradshaw.

A.J.H., '31