

**THE BLIND MUSICIAN.
A PROFESSIONAL
LADY-KILLER**

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The Blind Musician. A Professional Lady-Killer by Vladimir Korolenko & Ethel Marryat

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**THE BLIND MUSICIAN.
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LADY-KILLER**

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THE
BLIND MUSICIAN

FROM THE RUSSIAN OF KOROLENKO

BY
WILLIAM WESTALL
AND
SERGIUS STEPNIAK



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THE BLIND MUSICIAN.

CHAPTER I.

THE child was born at midnight in the house of his father, a rich Ruthenian noble.

The young mother lay, half unconscious, with closed eyes, but when the babe's first plaintive cry reached her ear she tossed restlessly on the pillow, her lips moved, and over the pale delicate face, with its refined features, flitted an expression of impatient suffering, like that of a child troubled with an unwonted sorrow. The nurse, bending her head to the lady's lips, heard, faintly whispered, these words:

“Why—why is he——?”

The nurse, failing to understand the question, was about to turn away, when the babe cried again: and again a look of keenest anguish passed over the mother's face, and a tear-drop welled from her still closed eyes.

"Why—why is he——?" she repeated in a scarcely audible whisper.

"Oh! You mean why is he crying? Babies always cry. There is nothing to be uneasy about. The doctors say it does them good."

But the mother refused to be comforted. At every fresh cry of her child she visibly shuddered and went on repeating:

"Why—why does he cry so—so pitifully?"

The nurse, seeing nothing unusual in the crying of a young child, thought that her mistress must be slightly delirious, and leaving the bedside gave all her attention to the little stranger.

Presently the lady ceased her murmurings. But now and then, as if some hidden sorrow, or dark foreboding too deep for words, were gnawing at her heart, tears would filter through her long dark eyelashes, and trickle slowly down her colorless cheeks.

Was she, as the nurse supposed, delirious, or did her mother's heart tell her that her little one had come into the world bearing a cross; that he was the victim of a terrible calamity, a calamity which would overshadow his life from the cradle to the grave?

The child was born blind, yet for a while nobody,

with the possible exception of the mother, suspected the truth.

The boy seemed to look before him with that vague and stolid gaze which is common to all nurslings up to a certain age.

Day followed day, and the life of the new-born man could be reckoned by weeks. Yet though his eyes became clearer and the pupils could be distinctly traced, there was a look—an indefinable something—which differentiated him from other young children. He never turned his head to follow the ray of light that streamed into the room, together with the joyous warbling of birds and the rustling of the young birch trees, which waved their leafy boughs before the window.

The mother, who had by this time regained her strength, observed with deepening alarm the portentous strangeness of her boy's face. It was always so immutably and unchildishly grave. She fluttered about him like a frightened bird, asking all and sundry who came into the nursery the same question.

"Do you know? Oh, tell me, why is he like that? So strange!"

"Like what?" was the invariable answer. "I

see no strangeness in him. He is just like other babies."

"But, don't you see how strangely he feels for everything with his little hands?"

"The child cannot, as yet, co-ordinate the movements of his hands with his optical impression," explained the surgeon, to whom, for the twentieth time, she had put the same question.

"But why are his eyes always fixed? as if—My God! he is—he is blind!"

After this terrible suspicion had taken root in the mother's mind she refused to be comforted.

The surgeon, taking the child into his arms, turned it rapidly to the light, and then looked intently into its eyes.

For a moment he seemed doubtful, and then, muttering some meaningless excuse, left the house. The next day he came again, bringing with him his ophthalmoscope. Taking a lighted candle, he moved it to and fro before the boy's eyes; next using the ophthalmoscope he looked several times into the child's eyes. The more he looked the graver became his face.

"Madam," he said, turning to the mother, and speaking in a voice of deep compassion, "madam, you were unfortunately not mistaken. Your son

is blind, and I fear—I am sorry to say—that I do not think there is the slightest possibility of a cure.”

The mother listened with calm sadness.

“I knew it—knew it long ago,” she said in a low voice.

CHAPTER II.

IN addition to the young mother and the child, the family consisted merely of the father and Uncle Maxim, as everybody in the neighborhood called Lady Popelsky's only brother.

The father was a genial, good-natured man, kind to his laborers and tenants, but so given to building and rebuilding that he had little leisure for aught else. Indeed, save at meal times and bed time, he was seldom in the house. On these occasions, however, he never failed to inquire with affectionate solicitude after his wife's health, and then, unless he had some new thing to tell about his building enterprises, he would lapse into his habitual silence.

It need hardly be said that this guileless and taciturn country gentleman had little influence on the inner life of his son or the development of his character.

Uncle Maxim was a man of another stamp. Ten years before his nephew's birth he had been noted, not only in all the country side but also in Kieff