

## The Moral of the Russian Nobleman

There was, many, many years ago, a sad case of irritation leading to grievous loss. It happened, so the story goes, in a far-flung and little known place called Diksk in the eastern edges of Russia. They say it is between Tomsk and Harrisk, but my geography is not good enough to confirm or deny it. Certainly it is very cold there in the winter and it seems, the locals say, to be winter for an awfully long time every year; this is where the saying 'there's snow place like home' originated.

One year during the October blizzards, which follow close on the heels of the September blizzards and the August snowstorms, the head butler was summoned to the chambers of his employer - the Comte Viscomte Diksk. The Comte was a stocky little chap and was nicknamed, behind his back and out of his earshot, Compact Diksk.

"Butler" the Comte quoth (noble personages are apt to 'quoth', it is a dignified, they imagine, form of saying 'hey, you! Dogbreath, come here') "I wish to search your mind for anything which might resemble a thought so that I may stamp it out forthwith. Come hither."

The Butler shuffled over to the point where the Comte had bade him stand.

"There is word from Moscow that strange things are happening among the peasants. That they are demanding the right to make their own decisions; they want to decide which way up to have their eggs and whether to have their toast buttered or not. If this continues there will be anarchy! Anarchy, do you hear?"

"What, your Comteness, is anarchy, may I make so bold as to ask?"

"Anarchy is rule by the proletariat who have no imagination or training and are, thus, not born to rule."

"What, your Comteness, if I might make so bold as to ask, is a prolee...prolit...?"

"The proletariat is a committee made of sub-humans, like yourself, who have the IQ of a turnip and the charisma of a dying slug. In short, they are useless, verminous, maggots. What do you think of that, Butler?"

"What do you suggest I think, your Comteness?"

"Ah! Exactly. My point is proven. You are dismissed, Butler. You may return to licking the driveway clean in lieu of dinner and be damned grateful for it, too, I might add."

The Butler bowed deeply in gratitude as his eyes filled with tears at the Comte's concern for his well being.

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There was a strong wind outside which had caused the snow to drift so that there was only a few inches of it on the driveway. The Butler raised his eyes heavenwards and gave quiet thanks to the Lord for this blessing. His joints creaked as he knelt slowly down onto the soft whiteness covering the gravel.

"What on earth are you doing, Old Man?"

The Butler looked up and saw a fit young man dressed in rags looking down at him.

"I'm clearing the driveway, young man, as instructed by my noble lord, Comte Viscomte Diksk. Now, be off with you before I set the dog on you."

"This is no way to behave. Stand up. Be a man."

"At least I have a job, young fellow, which is, apparently, more than can be said for you."

"I am free."

"Of course you are - who would want to pay for you. Now, again, be off with you."

"Where is this Comte you speak of so admiringly?"

"He will not see you. He does not see beggars and riffraff. Apart from me he will only talk to real people like the Archduke Bridgeski, the Archduke Getamov and the Baroness Upanova (who is often underneath the arches) that are coming to visit this very day - happiness is ours for we will have leftover slops for supper."

"I will see him, anyway, with, or without, your consent,  
Old Man

"Why? For what purpose do you crave an audience? I will have to announce you and I refuse to announce refuse like you! Be off! Now!"

"I will not 'crave' anything from the likes of him. Have you not heard of the great news from Moscow? The people are taking the country back from the parasitic blue-bloods who have sucked us dry for generations - especially that Baroness Upanova you speak of, I can tell you!"

"Aah! You are a verminous maggot, a prolichariot along for the ride. I've been warned about you!"

With this he shook his fist at the young man and died of apoplexy - joyous in the knowledge that he was protecting the young master from an undoubted scoundrel and blackguard.

The young man stepped over the corpsicle and shook his head sadly. He would have an accounting, he felt, with the evil Comte and strode into the castle. He found the Comte sitting with his feet up in front of a roaring fire and eating a roast chicken. A footman stood by shivering and trying to get in range of some warmth from the last of his burning clothes.

"Shiver harder, Man, I don't want you dying of pneumonia on me just yet."

"Thank you, Sir, thank you." The footman wept with

happiness at being both noticed and needed.

"You there. You with the greasy chops!"

He was ignored. Not that the Comte was ungracious, it was just that whoever had made this undignified utterance could not possibly have been referring to him and it was impossible that the footman should have greasy chops - whatever that might be. However, he thought, I could have someone come and investigate this intrusion. But, before he could speak, the young man stepped in front of him. The Comte felt a chill as some of the fire was blanked off from him.

"What? What?" He was outraged. Never, in all his born days....

"I'm talking to you, you anachronistic, mentally disadvantaged and vertically challenged abscess on the skin of life."

The Comte sat back with a thud. He could not believe he was hearing this. With a squeal of abject terror the footman left at high speed.

"I didn't dismiss that man! Come back here and lower yourself onto this sword immediately and be glad it's sharp, damn you! Who the hell are you? Speak up, vermin, since you are capable of speech if not actual independent thought. My word, the wonders that can be done with you simian specimens these days."

The young man deftly removed the sword - a heavy double

handed weapon, from the Comte's fingers and held it in a threatening manner. The Comte was in no doubt as to the threat and was enraged.

"How very dare you come into my house and wave my sword at me. Get out at once. You should be bloody well hung just for entering let alone speaking to me, you insolent cur!"

"I am bloody well hung and it's none of your business as Baroness Upanova will testify. Now hand over all your family treasures to me so that I may help fund the revolution."

"How dare you speak the name of the Baroness with your vile peasant breath. She who is pure as the driven snow and the light of my life."

"Pure as the driven mud and the light's gone out, you rake, now hand over your cash."

"Never will I give you a penny of the family fortune which I have hewn out of life with my bare hands using only my wit and my late father's last will and testament."

The young man threw down the sword and grabbed an axe from beside the fire, he preferred this weapon for the concentrated weight in the blade and he could see that it was kept very sharp.

"Enough drivel - give me the money." He was making threatening motions with the axe as he spoke.

"I have told you I will never, ever disclose the whereabouts of my wherewithal - do your worst, you peasant

scum, you godless heathen!"

The axe whistled through the air.

"Then die, you aristocratic prat, I will search your palace until I find the hoard without your help!" He grinned broadly, anticipating the death of the Comte with huge pleasure. As the blade closed on the Comte's throat he screamed.

"No, no, stop! I'll tell y....." his words were snapped off and his last breath came out in a gurgling sigh. His head rolled onto the carpet, the eyes looking at the young man in disbelief and the mouth screaming "what have you done?" soundlessly. The body slid down from the chair and lay on the floor spreading the Comte's life-blood into the fire where it sizzled and steamed.

"Damn." The young man swore, "Why did he have to leave it so late. Typical blue-blood although it doesn't look so blue now. He flung down the axe and went to round up the staff in order to explain their freedom to them, as if they'd understand.

Such is the impetuosity of youth, but he did, indeed, learn a valuable lesson from this event in his life:

Never hatchet your counts before they've chickened.

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