



DE RAYLAN

THE MYSTERY OF THE CENTURY

Not since the time of the puzzling Chevallier d'Eon, in the eighteenth century, has there come to public attention such a sex riddle as has been presented in the case of Nicolai de Raylan, who masqueraded eighteen years as a man and was found to be a woman only after her death in Phoenix, Ariz., last December. A diary and a bundle of correspondence, in the office of the Chicago public administrator, reveal an amazing story.

De Raylan, it appears, was started on her career of deception in an attempt to blackmail her mother, at whom she was incensed because the paternity of the girl was kept a secret. De Raylan adopted male attire and tried to prove that she had been masqueraded as a girl by her mother in violation of the laws of Russia, which provide heavy punishment for such an offense. A feature of the story is the fact that De Raylan interested the late M. Constantini Petrovitch Pobledonosteff, procurator of the holy synod, in her case, and prevailed on him to start suit against her mother.

The diary, which covers the period between 1888 and 1892, shows that the real family name of De Raylan was Taletsky. The first entries depict her as a school girl 15 years old, about to graduate from a seminary at Kiev, Russia. At this time the girl's mother suddenly acquires wealth to the amount of 250,000 rubles (about \$125,000), and Nicolai, the only name by which De Raylan is known to have been called, discovers that the money has been settled on her parent as trustee by a member of the nobility, to be conserved in the interests of Nicolai. The girl becomes curious as to the reason for the settlement and suspects that the unknown nobleman is her father, but fails to drag information on the point from her mother. Then comes the inspiration that resulted in eighteen years of pseudo-masculinity for De Raylan.

In Russia the law makes it a crime punishable by imprisonment for any person to gain entrance for a boy into a girls' school and also, under the mil-

itary statutes, makes it a serious crime for a mother to hide the sex of a male child. Young De Raylan, according to the journal, schemed to blackmail her own mother by aid of these laws, and to this end took into her confidence her French governess, Louise Ratone. Two years were spent in preparing for the assumption of the male disguise, and in 1891 Louise Ratone wrote to the late M. Pobledonosteff, procurator of the holy synod, telling in detail the alleged facts in the case. The churchman insisted on starting criminal proceedings against the mother. At his instance Nicolai swore out a complaint against her mother in Odessa. The woman was arrested and preparations started for the trial.

This, however, was too swift a proceeding for Nicolai, and, fearing detection, she procured money from Zaney Rosdorhney, a woman living in St. Petersburg with whom she had professed to fall in love, and fled to Helsinki, Finland, leaving a letter for M. Pobledonosteff, telling him that filial devotion prevented her appearance against her mother. The procurator was chagrined, but ordered the officials to proceed with the case. The mother produced evidence that Nicolai was a girl. The procurator was enraged.

From Helsinki Nicolai soon fled to Antwerp, Belgium, changing her name to Nicolai Konstantinevitch. At Antwerp a banker, M. Gittens, sent her to the United States. Arrived in Chicago, Nicolai was presented to Charles Herrotin, Belgian consul, who introduced her to the Russian consul, and, after taking out naturalization papers, Nicolai eventually became secretary to Baron Schlippenbach, Russian consul.

The life of De Raylan in Chicago was disclosed after her death in Phoenix. She smoked and drank hard, used profane language and traveled with a rapid set of young men. She married her first "wife" when 20 years old. Nine years later the "wife" obtained a divorce, and then married Francis P. Bradchulis, De Raylan's business partner. Nicolai at once went to New York and married Anna Davidson, an actress, who brought suit to get possession of the estate after De Raylan's death and sought to establish that De Raylan was a man. Letters discovered in the strong wooden chest in which the dairy was found indicate that Mrs. Anna De Raylan knew Nicolai's life secret.