

There was a little silence—crammed with feeling. Young Vandermuellen got to his feet. "Let's make it unanimous!" he said

The Man Who Wasn't Wanted

By Nelia Gardner White

ILLUSTRATIONS BY F. R. GRUGER

STANISLAUS TOBOLSKI was born on Jefferson Street in Queen City. His father was born in Minsk. Stanislaus spoke English with hardly an accent. He grew from thin, pale boyhood to tall, thin, not quite so pale manhood, and he became a sign painter. There was never any huge notice beside his handiwork which announced to the world: "This sign painted by S. Tobolski." His name was generally to be found somewhere about his work, but the letters were insignificant and no

one noticed them before they noticed his signs. He was saving and thrifty and hard working, as his father had been; and when he was twenty-nine he had two men working for him out in his small East Side shop, and he had a wife and two babies.

But Stanislaus Tobolski was a foreigner. It was not in what he said—his English was as good and about as well proportioned in slang as was Bill Adams's, who sold him paint occasionally. It was not his clothes—his work clothes were overalls and blue shirt, and his best clothes

came from Haganbecker's. It was not his home—it was in as good taste as many a West Side home; in fact, there was about it a sort of dignified simplicity that many would have wondered at and envied. His children—they were American from their bobbed hair to their little trimly clad feet. But, nevertheless, Tobolski was different. It was almost intangible, certainly inexpressible, but it was there.

Tobolski's great passion, after his really beautiful wife and little Paul and Joseph, was chess. He was, indeed, marvelously

keen, and he could sit silently hour after hour, a half-smile on his thin lips, and never falter in judgment or brilliancy. He had a little room back of his sign shop fixed up for a sort of club-room, and the East Side men used to meet there on Tuesdays and Saturdays to play. Rough, working men most of them, Poles and Russians and a couple of Germans, but they loved chess; and there were some matches there in the little back room that would have made the men at the Queen City Club gasp with surprise.

The East Side men looked upon Tobolski as a genius. He could outplay them all, and they referred to him in their occasional club items in the "News" as the city champion. And, so far as he had had a chance to demonstrate, he was.

It was Tobolski's great thorn that he was never given a chance to prove the claims of his East Side friends. Karaugh, was acknowledged champion of the Queen City Club. And Karaugh, never by so much as a word or a press notice, showed awareness of the existence of Stanislaus Tobolski. He held autocratic sway in the dignified, high old room on Minden Street where the club met, and he occasionally played in county and even state tournaments and came out well in the lead.

Tobolski was Karaugh's thorn. For, no matter how many matches he won, no matter how many bronze and silver cups came into his possession, he was eternally conscious of that tall, fair, Polish sign painter on Jefferson Street whom he had never met across a chess board, or any other way. He knew Tobolski could play. Some of his games had been printed in the "News" (just to curry East Side political favor of course). There were brilliant attacks in them that made Karaugh frown in wonder. There was a farsightedness that was uncanny. In his heart Karaugh knew that he was not quite equal to Tobolski. So he religiously avoided even the mention of his name.

THEN one night the men began talking of him. There were only a few at the Queen City Club: Wylie, with his nervous, long fingers ever playing with the pieces; Brand, patently and smugly successful but absorbed in the game; Vandermuellen, dreamy and young, and not so very clever at chess or anything; Karaugh, picturesquely patrician.

"I see Tobolski's won another tournament," said Wylie suddenly after a game.

Vandermuellen laughed a little.

"That's his specialty—after he gets out of his overalls at night," he said. "Or maybe he doesn't dress for the club!" There was a good-natured sneer in his voice. Wylie flushed. He often wanted to spank Vandermuellen.

"To tell the truth," went on Wylie, with a little dogged undertone to his words, "I wish he were in here with us. It sort of makes a farce of any claims we make, when really his standing is as good as any of ours."

The rest stared at him unbelievably.

"In here!" ejaculated Brand. He looked around the room. There were velvet curtains at the windows that shut out the sleety winter storm, the walls had a few good paintings, the chairs were deep and comfortable, the tables of mahogany.

"Yes; why not?" asked Wylie. "Can't he play chess? Isn't this club for that

purpose? It's not a solely social affair—or wasn't intended to be. I happen to know Tobolski wants to get in. I think we ought to ask him. He certainly has it all over any of us—unless it's Karaugh; and I fancy he'd give him a few jolts."

"But he's—a Polack!" said Vandermuellen.

WYLIE smiled slightly. He looked straight at Vandermuellen till he had the grace to flush a bit.

"My own ancestors didn't come over in the Mayflower," Wylie said.

"But—well, I don't want to be a snob," put in Brand, "I never thought I was one; but, really, Wylie, I'm afraid I'd balk at letting Tobolski in. A Pole may be a gentleman, I'll admit; but—well, he's not our style, and you know it. He's a little coarser fiber. Maybe it's not his fault; but, after all, this is a mighty pleasant place socially, and it doesn't seem sensible to me to spoil it even if the fellow *can* play!"

Wylie turned to Karaugh.

"What do you think?"

"I think I'd leave the club sooner than have him in it," Karaugh answered quietly.

It settled the question for them all. Karaugh was undoubtedly their leader, and he had a certain aristocracy of gesture and tone that made a finality of what he chose to say.

"Of course—if you all feel that way," said Wylie; "but I can't help thinking we're making a mistake. Why—John Lenning's daughter married the man; he can't be such a bounder!"

"Yes," assented Vandermuellen triumphantly, "and her father disinherited her when she did it!"

So that was an end to that.

Wylie didn't say that Tobolski had come to him directly and asked him how he could become qualified for membership. And he was secretly ashamed of the letter he sent, stating that the membership of the club was limited and the vacancies were all filled at present.

There was a big simultaneous chess exhibition by Hermshall during the late winter, and it was held at the Queen City Club. Any chess player in the city could participate. Tobolski and half a dozen other East Side men entered. Vandermuellen and a few others avoided them when they came into the club. But, after all, they were all there to play chess, so the coldness was not remarkable in the intense interest of the games. Hermshall, moving from board to board swiftly, played his usual, world-famous, safe, sane game, and won and won and won. He forced Karaugh to resign in thirty-three moves. He met but one defeat from the twenty-seven players—and that was from Stanislaus Tobolski.

Wylie and some of the others shook hands with Tobolski and congratulated him upon his success. But Karaugh got his hat and coat and went out without a word to him. Wylie knew Tobolski noted the slight, though he said nothing to indicate it. Wylie felt strangely drawn to the lonely Tobolski; he always felt that the right stuff was there, but that the man could not express it in Yankee fashion.

It was only a few days after Hermshall had been there that there was a heavy March rain. And after the March rain a March freeze. Everything was coated

with the dangerous, glassy sheath—sidewalks, roads, trees, door knobs, steps. Karaugh, crossing Main, his cane picking the way ahead of him, slipped just as a huge truck was given the sign to pass on. It was just a week afterward that he found courage to say to the doctor:

"But I can't move my legs, Doctor!"

And Doctor Sanborn had hesitated a moment and then said quietly and kindly: "I'm sorry; you never will, Karaugh."

At first the men of his acquaintance dropped in to see him. He had been a rather important figure in his little world. But in the beginning the pain was bad, and the bitterness was so keen that he could scarcely be civil to visitors. So, one by one, they dropped away. Wylie came the longest. He refused to accept rebuffs that had driven others from the house, but gradually even his visits became further and further apart. He was young and full of life, and the older man's cynicism and helpless anger began to grate unbearably at last. And he stayed away, too.

Karaugh thought at first he was glad that they didn't come. Fair-weather friends, that was all! But after a time the pain was not quite so intense; his brain began to settle down to the calm of ordinary living again; he began to think of things besides his own discomfort—and then he found that he was not so glad.

He lived alone, except for an old lady, his cousin, who kept house for him. He had a rather fine old establishment on Dinwoodie Place and he'd always been proud of it in his quiet way. But in the stillness of the long evenings, and amid the loneliness of the daytime with its myriad outside taunting noises, he grew to hate it. The same patterns on the rugs, the same gleams of sunlight on the same silver and picture frames, the same time for medicine day after day, the same daily interruptions of postman and garbage man, and milkman and iceman! He thought sometimes of advertising for a man to come and live with him, but he soon gave the idea up. A man the doctor knew came in in the morning and dressed him, and then again at night. But he was still too unused to his helplessness to want another to view it and sympathize with him over it day after day.

HE KEPT his chessmen beside him almost constantly. They were his only means of forgetfulness. He had several fine chess books, and day after day he studied out openings and planned attacks and solved problems. It was very interesting in the beginning. He had always studied more or less, but never had he had the time to do so exhaustively. But when he came upon a particularly fine combination, or had mastered something rather stiff in problems, he found he wanted to reach out and lay a hand on Wylie's arm and say:

"Isn't that a pretty three-mover, Wylie? Did you ever see that position before?"

And there was never any Wylie there—or anyone.

It began to affect Karaugh's nerves. He got so he couldn't sleep. Knights and pawns and bishops chased kings and queens and rooks over the wall paper, and attacks kept forming through all his dreams—attacks that no one tried to



Almost immediately, it seemed, Tobolski was in the room. He was a little ill at ease, but he smiled friendly-wise at Karaugh. He did not offer to shake hands

break up, but that needed someone to break them. That came to be the hideous thing to Karaugh—no one ever across the board from him! He tried to read, to write, to do a score of things—but he had been a devotee of chess for so long. He couldn't get it out of his head.

THEN, one October night, when all the world was calling folks out into the crisp tang of the purple twilight, Cousin Martha came to Karaugh's room and tapped on the door.

"Come in," he said wearily. It had been a bad day.

"There's a man to see you," she said, rather doubtfully.

"Did he give any name?" asked Karaugh.

"Kobolski, or something like that, a foreign name, anyway!"

Karaugh gripped the arms of his wheel chair.

"Bring him up," he said. He didn't know why he said it. But, almost immediately, it seemed, Tobolski was in the room. He was a little ill at ease, but he smiled friendly-wise at Karaugh. He did not offer to shake hands.

"Good evening, Mr. Karaugh!" he said. "Sit down," said Karaugh, and Tobolski sat down.

"I just heard about your accident," he

said, after a few seconds. "Don't know why I hadn't heard before. I thought, maybe, being alone so much and having so much extra time, you might enjoy a bit of chess now and then." He was obviously embarrassed, but went on determinedly. "Maybe you get enough of that, though. I just wondered."

Karaugh's hands trembled as he pulled the chess table that stood by his chair around in front of him.

"I'd be very glad to," he managed to say quietly. But he could not keep his fingers steady as he set up the men. Tobolski, without more ado, drew his chair up opposite Karaugh and they began to play. The twilight deepened into dusk and the dusk into darkness. Once Karaugh asked Tobolski to turn on the lights. Except for that brief interlude, they played steadily on, hour after hour. They were nearly even; perhaps Tobolski was a shade better, but the long nights of study had told on Karaugh's playing. It was better than in the days when he had haunted the Queen City Club. At last he had a chance to show someone what he had learned about the Queen's Gambit! And he found out some tricks about the French Defense that he had missed. At midnight Tobolski leaned back in his chair and left the pieces where they were at the end of the game.

"I must be going," he said.

"One more!" pleaded Karaugh.

"No—not to-night; perhaps you'd care to play again?"

"To-morrow night!" said Karaugh eagerly.

"Tuesday and Saturday nights are all I have free," said Tobolski. "If you'd like it, I could come Saturday."

"I'll expect you," said Karaugh.

KARAUGH was a new man from that day on. Someone to play with, someone to talk to, someone to appreciate what he appreciated. He steadfastly would not remember the things that he had said about Tobolski in the past. And Tobolski evidently remembered none of the snubs and small pettinesses. He came every Tuesday and Saturday nights. It soon became an established custom. The tantalizing dreams vanished. Books began to take on charm and meaning. Work began to beckon to him as Karaugh's powers of concentration came back. Doctor Sanborn got hold of some literary work he could do. But Tuesdays and Saturdays really made the week for him. Once he made up his mind to apologize for past slights; but when Tobolski came that night, gravely friendly and courteous, the words would not come.

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played, but after a while they talked a little before they played their games. Karaugh was astonished at the man's intelligence. He had always thought of him as a rather ignorant day laborer with a special aptitude for chess. But the man showed an understanding of international affairs, an acquaintance with books, a keen grasp of everyday problems that often put Karaugh himself to shame.

Then one night Tobolski went and stood before a picture that hung between the two great cases of books.

"An Inness, isn't it?" he asked.

"Yes," Karaugh admitted, surprised.

"I have one; but not so good as that," said Tobolski.

Karaugh almost gasped. This sign painter, owning a picture by Inness!

"It meant a good bit of saving to buy it," explained Tobolski. "But home means a lot to my wife and myself. We don't go out very much or have so very many friends, therefore we do all we can to make our home a place we'll want to stay in."

Karaugh remembered Vandermuellen's "But—he's a Polack!"

Tobolski went on, frowning a slightly troubled frown:

"It isn't as though we spent for entertaining a lot," he said. "I'm not—not just up to the folks I'd like to know; I can't seem to let the American atmosphere soak into me like lots do. My wife isn't Polish, and I think she feels it."

HE ABRUPTLY began to set up the black men. It was the nearest to confidences he had ever come in all the months. Karaugh wanted to probe.

"But you have your club," he said. Tobolski flushed embarrassedly and did not answer.

"That has quite a few members, hasn't it? There must be lots of interest in keeping that going, I should think?"

Tobolski stammered, "I... don't know. I—I guess so."

"Guess so?" insisted Karaugh, puzzled. "Why, those men have you on a pedestal, as high as the moon!"

"Well," said Tobolski, "you see—I don't feel as though I could spare more than two nights a week from home and work—the shop's pretty busy now; so I've sort of dropped the club since I've been coming over here."

Karaugh looked at him a moment in silence.

Just before Tobolski left that night, Karaugh stopped him:

"Friday's my birthday," he said; "I wonder if you and Mrs. Tobolski couldn't come to dinner with me and Cousin Martha and help me celebrate."

Tobolski hesitated; then he reached out his hand to Karaugh—the first time they had ever shaken hands.

But when Friday night came Tobolski and his wife were not there. Instead, about half past seven, the Queen City Chess Club *in toto* appeared on the scene.

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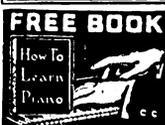
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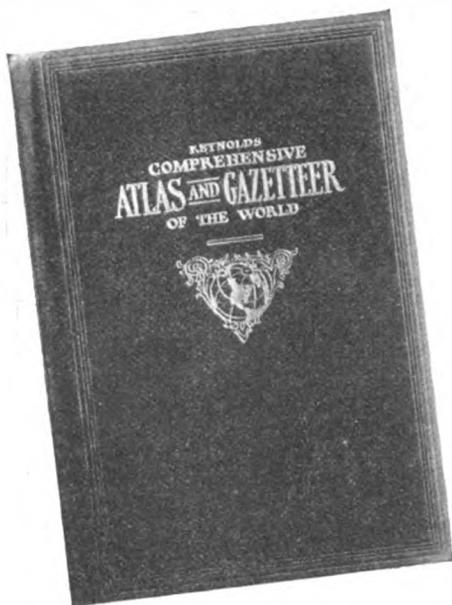
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Karaugh rubbed his eyes as they crowded into the room:

"Congratulations!"

"Happy birthday!"

They had brought the birthday spread with them, and they immediately began to make merry in quite the old fashion, as though it were only the day before that Karaugh had ruled over their little circle. Karaugh was too bewildered to talk much at first; but after they had eaten and chess boards were beginning to appear about the rooms, he finally gained their attention.

"How in thunder did you fellows know it was my birthday?" he demanded. Wylie answered for them all.

"Tobolski," he said.

"Tobolski suggested the party," said Karaugh. "Didn't he?"

Wylie hesitated. "Well, yes—he did," he said at last; "but we were all mighty glad to come; we rather thought you didn't care much about having us drop in, or we'd have had this for a regular club rendezvous long ago."

"You mean I was such a crank you couldn't stand it to drop in," said Karaugh sternly.

And he told them about the pain and the ugliness of those first days, about the desire to be alone and the after-desire to be with folks. About the ugly, tantalizing, brain-upsetting dreams and fancies and the hideous longing for someone to play with him. And finally about the coming of Tobolski.

"YOU know how I've always felt about him—and he knew it too; but he thought I was lonely, and he came, anyway. He gave up his two nights a week at his club to come over here and cheer up a lonesome old man. And all the time he knew I didn't think he was my equal—why, men, he's got more brains than any man in this whole room!"

"Probably he's been mighty sick of this room, the same as I have; but he's never missed a night even when it was the stormiest. And sometimes, even yet, I get horribly cranky when the pain gets up into my back, and I take it out on him. But he keeps coming. Why, even Wylie couldn't stand it—and he can stand a lot. But Tobolski never quit. The doctor says I can get out on crutches in another month or so—and the first place I go will be down to the club on Minden Street; but I don't believe even the Queen City Club will ever mean so much to me again as this old room."

"To-night I asked him to dinner, his wife too; it was the first time I'd done it. Was just snob enough to hold off all this time. But he's a *man*, I tell you, and I'm proud to have him for a friend. Think of his going over and getting up this party for me—and then having the tact to stay out of it himself! Coarser fiber, bosh! And I know he wanted to come—he and his wife don't get invited out much. Gentlemen," he paused, then lifted his aristocratic old head regally:

"Gentlemen, I have the honor of suggesting the name of Stanislaus Tobolski for membership in the Queen City Chess Club!"

There was a little silence—crammed with feeling. Young Vandermuellen got to his feet.

"Let's make it unanimous!" he said.