

DARKEST RUSSIA

BY H. GRATTAN DONNELLY.

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CHAPTER XIII—Continued.

Radloff had no idea of the contents of the letter. But when Ilda had finished reading it he gave the "waiting" signal, and in response to the single stroke of the bell entered the office to meet the Countess Karsicheff, with the result already described. In vain he attempted to explain to the countess that he found Ilda a prisoner, she having been captured in the Nihilist rendezvous, but the haughty and insulting manner in which he had been interrupted each time he began his explanation, had prevented him from giving that important information. Thus it was when Ilda entered her presence the countess knew nothing of her arrest.

The two women stood face to face—alone. Each measured the other with a glance, and as their eyes met there was exchanged a look which meant that henceforth and forever these two were enemies to the death.

For the moment, however, the feeling that controlled Ilda Barosky was one of deepest love for the exiled father whom she was to clasp to her heart after the long and bitter years of separation. She cast an anxious glance at the countess, who stood regarding her with a feeling of bitterest hate. Katherine saw before her her deadliest foe. It was to this girl she owed all the humiliation she had felt, all the deep disappointment in store for her, if Alexis' marriage to Olga should not take place.

"My father—he is here?" said Ilda, "and I shall see him? I shall see him once again?"

"That depends upon yourself."

Katherine spoke these words, looking at Ilda. There was something in the tone and in the look that placed Ilda instantly on her guard. She felt, she knew not why, that she was to be made the victim of a cruel lie. With an effort she suppressed her feelings and said: "I do not understand you, madame."

"I am the Countess Katherine Karsicheff, wife of the minister of police, and it was by my suggestion and at my desire that your father has been brought here to receive his pardon."

"When was he brought here, madame?"

The question annoyed Katherine.

Ilda noticed the effect and her suspicions became stronger.

"That is not for you to know," said the countess, after a momentary pause. "It is sufficient for you when I say he is here and that his pardon will be granted on one condition."

Ilda's heart beat rapidly. "And that is?"

"That you leave Russia at once and forever—alone!"

Ilda's lips became compressed. Her face turned a trifle paler. "Let me see my father—let me hear his voice—let me feel the grasp of his hand before I answer."

"It is impossible. Your answer must be given here and without delay."

"I will not answer until I have seen my father."

Katherine's face deepened in color, and her eyes flashed. "You are here to sue for mercy," she said, "not to make conditions."

"I am not here to sue for mercy. I am here by the written request of the minister of police. His letter states that my father is here. I demand to see the minister himself."

The countess drew herself up haughtily. "Insolent girl," she said, "you forget yourself, as you did last night. Remember that you are in the presence of the wife of the minister of police, Countess Katherine Karsicheff. I am not used to brook insolence from inferiors."

Ilda's eyes flashed with anger. Meeting the malignant glance of the countess with a look of defiance, she

replied: "I am not your inferior, madame. You are not my equal. You have taken advantage of my position to work upon the affection of a child for her father, for your own ends. Your trick is too transparent. It has failed. I can see the lie upon your face—my father is not here!"

Katherine lost control of herself. "Daughter of the gutter," she hissed, "you are in my power here. When you leave this house it shall be for the prison. You are not now in the house of Count Nazimoff and Alexis is not here to save you."

As the countess spoke of Alexis, Ilda instantly divined the object her enemy had had in view.

The countess continued: "You fool—when he disgraced his uniform, insulted his father, and humiliated his guests last night to save you from the lash you deserved, he simply played the mock heroic to win a smile and the reward from a wanton."

"It is false! He loves me! I shall be his wife!" cried Ilda.

"His wife! Ha! ha! ha!" Katherine's ironical laughter was almost maniacal in its wildness. "His wife! The only intention Alexis Nazimoff ever held regarding you was to make you his plaything—not his wife!"

"Woman, you lie!"

Ilda, roused to uncontrollable passion by the stinging words of the countess, hurled the lie in her teeth with a fury equal to that of Katherine herself, and with heaving bosom she stood gazing defiance at her maddened and baffled enemy. At the same instant the door opened and General Karsicheff entered from the library, while Nicholas, who had just returned, appeared at the other door.

Katherine, wrought up to uncontrollable frenzy, caught the arm of her husband, and in words so shrill as to be almost a scream of rage demanded instant vengeance. "I accuse her," she exclaimed, pointing to Ilda; "she insulted the czar last night, I accuse her. She is here—in my power—punish her—I demand it; punish her now! Do you here now, with the whip. She must feel the lash till she writhes beneath it, till she crawls on her knees for mercy to me!"

"Katherine, for God's sake, control yourself," appealed Constantine.



"HIS PARDON WILL BE GRANTED."

"Your voice can be heard in the square," he said.

"Then act—act now!" yelled Katherine.

The door leading to the library opened.

General Cobb and the baroness appeared.

"Hello!" said the American, as he caught sight of Ilda and recognized her as the girl of the night before—the woman whom Alexis vowed should be his wife—"it is Ilda Barosky."

Ilda, hearing her name in no un-

friendly voice, turned to the speaker, and hurriedly stepped to his side. "Help me," she appealed, "help me! I am in their power without a friend."

"Well, not while I am on deck," said Cobb. "What is the matter?"

"Stop, sir!" commanded Karsicheff. "This is the private office of the minister of police. You have no right here. I demand that you withdraw!"

"Certainly! But first I must hear what this girl has to say. She has appealed to me for protection."

"I have been brought in here by a trick—by a letter signed by the minister of police," hurriedly began Ilda.

Nicholas springing forward stopped her. "Hold! you have no right to speak—I command you to stop. You, sir," he continued, "you have heard my father's order. Leave the room—leave the house!"

"Read that, sir," said Ilda, attempting to hand the letter of the countess to General Cobb.

Nicholas rushed between Cobb and Ilda, and holding her at arm's length, he said: "You cannot give that letter to any one. It belongs to the minister of police. I again command you," he said, addressing Cobb, "to leave the room."

The baroness quickly passed back of Nicholas, and taking the paper from Ilda, handed it to Cobb with the remark: "The letter is on ze go!"

Cobb opened the paper instantly. "Hello," he said, "the girl's father here—where is her father?"

Katherine, who had been almost suffocating with rage all this time, now found her voice again. "Ruffian," she shouted, shaking her fist at Cobb, "ruffian, leave the room or we will have you arrested."

"Look here, General Karsicheff," said Cobb, "this girl has been made a victim of a trick for some object that I do not know. She is here friendless and powerless, and it is my duty as a man to stand by her as any true man should stand by a woman in distress. Now, sir, I say, produce her father, or I will arraign you before Russia—before the world—as a high official who can use his public position to vent his private spleen upon a poor girl."

"I'll hear no more!" shouted Karsicheff, stung to madness, and he sounded the bell.

Radloff entered. "Take this girl into custody!" shouted Karsicheff.

"Pardon, your excellency," replied Radloff, "she is already in custody. She was one of the prisoners captured in the Nihilist headquarters this morning. The others are below awaiting your excellency's pleasure."

Radloff laid his hand on the shoulder of Ilda.

Now for the first time Katherine saw that she had committed a stupid blunder in sending the letter, but she saw also that Ilda was thoroughly in her power. "You hear, general, you hear," she cried, pointing to Ilda. "There she stands, arrested this morning. She is a traitor—an assassin! You are the minister of police. Act at once. Sentence her now—I demand it!"

"Stop," cried Cobb, "there is no proof on which to sentence her."

"Pardon," said Radloff, advancing. "Where this girl was captured there was found a mine, a score of dynamite bombs, and a tunnel leading to the street along which his majesty the emperor was to have passed today."

"It is enough," triumphantly exclaimed Karsicheff. "Ilda Barosky, you have been found plotting the assassination of the czar. I sentence you to ten years' imprisonment in Siberia!"

"Good God, man," cried Cobb, "you are inhuman on such testimony to pass a sentence like that!"

The baroness, overcome by excitement, sank on a lounge and Cobb flew to her assistance.

"What of the others, excellency?" said Radloff, addressing the minister. "They are in the courtyard below. Shall they be sent first to the fortress,

or shall they be brought before you. Her brother is among them!"

Her brother!
The words caught the ear of the countess. "Her brother is also arrested! You hear, general, her brother! He, too, must suffer! Sentence him, too—sentence them all!"

Karsicheff gave a silent signal to Radloff, who retired.

"Action now—merciless severity," whispered Nicholas, "it is your only hope, and," he added in a lower tone to himself, "but a faint hope at that."

A tramp of soldiers outside caused all present to turn their eyes in the direction of the ante-chamber. The door opened. Radloff stood on one



"I SENTENCE YOU TO TEN YEARS' IMPRISONMENT IN SIBERIA!"

side and then appeared two soldiers and two police guarding Ivan Barosky.

The clock now showed about twenty minutes of twelve.

General Karsicheff took his place behind the desk.

Ivan was brought before him.

"Your name?"

"Ivan Barosky."

"You were captured this morning in the Nihilist rendezvous?"

"I was arrested this morning," was the reply of Ivan.

"You admit then your guilt?"

"I admit nothing."

"What! Do you deny that you were in this den of assassins?"

"I deny nothing."

Karsicheff became furious. "I shall find a way to make you speak, traitor!" he exclaimed; "meanwhile, pending further inquiries, you are sentenced to twenty years in Siberia."

"Poor Ivan!" It was from the baroness. She heard no more at the time, for her sympathetic heart was overstrained and she had fainted.

Ivan had turned to Ilda. They were clasped for a moment in each other's arms, for both well knew that in a few minutes more they would be torn apart, in all probability to meet on earth no more.

But the vengeance of Katherine Karsicheff was not yet sated. She leaned over the desk and hissed the words into the ears of her husband—"The others, her friends, sentence them all, do you hear, all! I would have my revenge complete. Do not disappoint me, Constantine, or I swear you will regret it to your dying day!"

Constantine Karsicheff needed no urging.

(To be continued.)

Fad of the Czar.

One of the fads of the emperor of Russia is the collection of models. He possesses miniature reproductions of nearly every great battleship in the world, besides innumerable models of forts, guns, and various weapons of destruction. A somewhat gruesome model in the collection is of a machine to prevent burial before death. It is somewhat like a guillotine and slowly drives a sharp knife into the neck of the doubtful corpse.

Playwright Quits America.

Augustus Thomas, playwright, has decided to settle permanently in Europe.