

DARKEST RUSSIA

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CHAPTER XIII.—Continued.

He turned to Radaloff and was about to speak when a servant appeared. "An Imperial messenger seeks immediate audience with the minister of police!"

Karsicheff turned pale.

Nicholas, deeply agitated, placed his hand on his mother's arm.

Katherine, with an undefined dread of something, breathed heavily in convulsive gasps.

Another second and the Imperial messenger entered the room. Going directly to General Karsicheff, he handed him a large envelope of an ominously official appearance.

The minister, taking the envelope, tore it open with feverish anxiety, and with sinking heart and burning eyes read the following:

"To Constantine Karsicheff, Minister of Police.

"Sir: His Imperial Majesty has been graciously pleased to make the following orders:

"I. Constantine Karsicheff is hereby removed as Minister of Police and deposed from all other authority heretofore vested in him as such minister.

"II. Paul, the Count Nazimoff, is hereby appointed Minister of Police to succeed Karsicheff, deposed, and will take possession of the official seal and assume all powers of such ministry at twelve o'clock this day, precisely.

"III. Constantine Karsicheff will, without delay, proceed to Siberia, where he will act as civil and military governor of the province of Tobolsk during his Imperial Majesty's pleasure.

"Given under the great seal of the Chancellorie, Gortschakoff, Prime Minister."

With a deep groan, Karsicheff dropped the paper.

"Good God, it is the blow I feared," and he sank back in his chair.

Nicholas picked up the paper. "Give it to me," said the countess, as she almost snatched the document from his hand. A glance told her its contents. She looked at the clock. It wanted but ten minutes of the time—of the hour of noon.

"His excellency, Paul, Count Nazimoff," announced a servant. Katherine stood erect in a moment. She would

ister. "I am quite sure the position cannot be in better hands," he said.

Katherine looked at the clock. It was within five minutes of noon.

She looked at her husband and he understood the meaning.

"I have finished my work," said Karsicheff, turning to Count Nazimoff again, "for, as you doubtless know, I have succeeded in capturing the leaders of the Nihilistic conspiracy. His majesty, I had hoped, would have recognized my services in a different way," he said with a bitter smile, "but his majesty knows best. It is my last duty to prove my loyalty by sentencing the enemies of my sovereign and I shall do it to the end." He paused.

Katherine was furious. She determined to take matters into her own hand. "General Karsicheff," she said to the count, "is still minister."

"Until twelve o'clock," replied the count; "it still wants a few minutes of the hour."

"Then bring in the prisoners and let the general finish his work," said Katherine, looking toward Radaloff.

The latter opened the door and with a file of four soldiers guarding him another prisoner was brought in and placed in position before the minister of police. Count Nazimoff took a seat by the side of Karsicheff and gazed curiously at the scene.

"This is another of the vile gang of conspirators captured this morning," said Karsicheff to the count, and then, turning to the prisoner, whose face was concealed by the hood of his greatcoat, he assumed a tone of judicial severity, and said: "Drop your hood, prisoner. What is your name?"

The prisoner dropped the hood and stood like a statue as he answered, "Alexis Nazimoff!"

"Alexis Nazimoff!" was repeated by all in the room—all save Ivan and Ilda.

With a cry of bitterest anguish from his breaking heart Count Nazimoff staggered to his feet. For a moment he vainly essayed to speak, but his tongue refused to utter a sound.

"Oh, my father!" The cry was wrung from the surcharged heart of Alexis as he stretched out his shackled hands.

Paul Nazimoff, weak and trembling, found his voice at last. "Alexis, my son, my boy," he cried in anguished tones, "what does this mean? Oh, my God, my God!"

He pressed his hands first to his heart, then to his throbbing brain.

"Father!" said Alexis.

"Speak, speak out! Oh, God, speak out!" cried the stricken count. "You, you, my boy here—here—charged with crime—with plotting the assassination of your sovereign! Speak, Alexis; say that it is false! Don't you see my heart is breaking?"

"I swear to you, father, it is not true. I am innocent."

"You hear," faltered Count Nazimoff, looking wildly around. "You hear—he is—"

"He is guilty whoever he may be," spoke up the officer in command, "for I myself found concealed on his person, in his cigar case this sign—the sign of the assassin chosen to kill." He held up his hand!

The Red Rouble!

"My God!" Paul Nazimoff fell back and buried his face in his hands.

The clock showed that it wanted but a minute of the hour.

"Quick," said Katherine, rushing to her husband's side. "You have ample proof of his guilt. Sentence him to Siberia—it will bring him and Olga together."

Karsicheff sat stunned!

The terrible disclosure of Alexis' identity had shaken him.

"Quick," urged Katherine, "it is your last chance!"

The iron will and relentless purpose of his wife swayed Karsicheff

now as they had often swayed him before. It nerved him to a deed that, left alone, he would never have dared.

"Alexis Nazimoff," he said, "there can be no doubt of your guilt with this damning evidence of your unholy purpose found in your possession. You have forfeited your life, but my last act shall be merciful. I spare your life. I sentence you to twenty years in the mines of Siberia!"

Karsicheff rose from his desk. The clock began striking twelve, and as the strokes rang out they fell like a knell on the ears of nearly all present. Turning to Paul, Count Nazimoff, Karsicheff, taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, said, "My work is finished. Count Nazimoff, to you I resign my seal, my keys, my powers. I have done my duty to the end—the rest is yours!"

Radaloff approached Count Nazimoff—Count Nazimoff, the new minister of police—and as he passed the



"MERCY! MERCY!" SCREAMED KATHERINE

countess he gave her one look that repaid all the insult she had heaped upon him less than an hour before. "What is your excellency's command regarding the other prisoners?" he asked, saluting Count Nazimoff. "There is one more to be disposed of. She says she is the wife of that man," and he pointed to Ivan.

Katherine caught the word. His wife! Ilda's brother's wife. She too must suffer. None of them must escape.

"Count Nazimoff," she said, "my husband laid down his work while engaged in meting out justice to this gang of assassins. There is one more—that man's wife. She too should be punished here and now."

Paul, Count Nazimoff, looked up slowly. He had aged ten years in less than two minutes.

"Not now," he said faintly; "not now. We have had enough of—of—"

He could say no more.

Katherine spoke again.

"It ill becomes the minister of his sovereign to show his weakness at such a time as this," she exclaimed. "My husband, at the expense of his feelings, nerved himself to do his duty—now do yours. Russia needs an example now!"

Almost involuntarily Count Nazimoff raised his hand. It was to beg Katherine to be silent.

Radaloff saw the motion and interpreted it to mean that he should produce the prisoner.

In another moment he had left the room and a second later re-entered it with a heavily draped figure clinging to his arms. He had to support her or she would have fallen.

Katherine pointed to the trembling figure supported by Radaloff.

"She is the wife of that man," exclaimed the countess, indicating Ivan. "There can be no excuse for delay. She was captured with the rest—is it not so?" and she turned fiercely to the officer in command.

"It is so, madame, and she was arrested while standing by the printing press, upon which we found this proclamation."

As he spoke he displayed the placard in red.

You see—you see, Count Nazi-

moff," exclaimed the countess, "there can be no doubt. Act—and a heavy sentence too."

"Poor girl." The count glanced at the veiled and shrinking figure before him. "She may be innocent. She—"

"She cannot be innocent with the proof of her guilt in that treasonable proclamation," shouted Katherine. "Sentence her!"

"What is your name?" asked Paul Nazimoff in a faint voice.

The girl said nothing. She seemed to shrink still more.

"Speak, girl—your name! You are that man's wife; do not deny it," said Katherine.

"My name is—"

The veil fell, and the pale face was exposed to the gaze of all present, as Olga stood forth with trembling form and fainting heart.

"Olga!"

Above the exclamation of horror, surprise and amazement with which the name was spoken by all, there rang out a wild shriek of anguish and despair as Katherine Karsicheff recognized her daughter.

"Olga!"

Again the shriek echoed until it struck terror to all within hearing.

"Olga—my daughter—his wife—that man's wife—no! no! no! Oh, God, Count Nazimoff, you do not believe this, you cannot believe this. My daughter, the affianced wife of your son—she here—with these—that man's wife! It is not so—my God, my God, I swear it is not so. Do not sentence her! Spare her! Spare her. Here on my knees at your feet, I beg, I implore you, by the love you bore your dead wife, have mercy on her, on me—on all—have mercy, have mercy!"

Count Nazimoff raised his head. "You have urged my duty well, madame, I must perform it."

"Mercy, mercy, mercy!" screamed Katherine, fairly groveling at his feet.

"I sentence her," said Count Nazimoff, "to Siberia—with her parents!"

CHAPTER XIV.

On the Road to the Mines.

Three days after the events narrated in the preceding chapter the doors of the great prison of Petropavlovsk in St. Petersburg swung open. The entrance was guarded by a squadron of Cossacks, and a line of prison vans stood near, ready to move at the word of command with the first detachment of political prisoners from among the hundreds arrested during the wholesale raids of the police made by order of the minister.

Of the prisoners arrested in the Nihilist rendezvous, four—Oraminsky and Hersy being two—were sentenced to death; the others, without exception, to exile in Siberia for terms ranging from ten years to life. Kirshkin's fate alone was undecided. He had made a full confession of all he knew, and it was determined to keep him in St. Petersburg in hopes that he could furnish the authorities with still fuller details of the great conspiracy.

Two by two, heavily shackled, the prisoners moved slowly from the prison and took their places in the waiting vans.

(To be continued.)

Submarine Experiments.

An important series of experiments with submarines is to be carried out at Portsmouth. One of the principal tests will consist of "fishing" for submarines with a wire net. For the purpose of the experiments a netting 200 feet long, made of thin but strong steel wire, is to be attached to three steam pinnaces, and by then drawn under water at the depth which it is known submarines usually travel. When one of the little craft becomes entangled in the meshes the two outside boats will close in around it, and so force it to come to the surface or sink.—London Engineer.

Woman School Doctor.

Charlottenburg is the first German commune to appoint a woman school doctor.



"IT IS THE BLOW I FEARED."

give no sign of her bitterness of heart, however deeply she felt the blow.

Count Nazimoff entered the room. He was dressed in full uniform.

Karsicheff half arose and then sat back.

Count Nazimoff approached and extended his hand. "Believe me, my dear Karsicheff," he said, "I was not desirous of this position. But his majesty having sent for me and having proffered the honor, it was not to be refused."

The suggestion of a smile passed over the pale face of the deposed min-