

# DARKEST RUSSIA

BY H. GRATTAN DONNELLY.

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## CHAPTER XVII—Continued.

Cobb started. He well knew that the Karsicheffs would run any risk to prevent the pardons reaching their destination, and urged the courier to obtain them again. "I will take them to Chitka myself as fast as horses can carry me."

The courier shook his head. "The regulation of the corps of couriers imperial of Siberia," he said, "are very strict and the slightest violation of the rules is visited with the severest punishment. Once delivered and signed for, the pardons may not be recalled. Even if I had the pardons I dare not give them in your keeping."

"Cannot you go to Chitka yourself?" asked Cobb, eagerly.

"It is impossible. I must obey my instructions to the letter. The rules give me no option."

The courier walked a few paces away from his companion and stood silently in a deep study.

Cobb was no less intently occupied with his thoughts for the moment. The courier had a pardon for Ilda Barosky!

He was about to start for Stralensk with that pardon and would find that Ilda Barosky was not there!

For Ilda Barosky had escaped!

Cobb was in a state of terrible uncertainty as to the best course to pursue. He knew that the courier was a man devoted to his duty, and he felt that if he informed the courier that Ilda Barosky was no longer in Stralensk that the pardon might be annulled. Besides, it would give the courier knowledge of an escaping prisoner and it would be his duty to arrest her at any point.

While he was thus deliberating as to the best course to pursue, the courier rejoined him and, leading him still further away from the house, he placed his hand on Cobb's arm with a cautionary pressure, and said: "I have not told you all—there is one ray of hope that we may get the pardons again."

Cobb's heart beat faster.

The courier went on, speaking quickly. "Some time ago charges of robbery of the government were preferred against Karsicheff and his son. It is alleged that they made false returns of the amount of food consumed. Their uncalled-for cruelty to the exiles



"I PITY HIM FROM THE BOTTOM OF MY HEART."

is another charge. These charges have been considered by the governor of the province. If found guilty Karsicheff will be deposed at once and must return all government papers in his possession. The decision of the governor was to have been forwarded to me at the last etape, but as it did not arrive I came on to investigate the charges myself, without waiting for the governor's decree. I had an idea that Karsicheff was commandant of Etape No. 8, instead of No. 7, and did not imagine that I was dealing

with him until his wife mentioned her name. I was surprised. I have seen enough to-night to convince me that he should be dismissed, but I can not act on account of the absence of the governor's decree. I instructed my secretary to wait at the etape where I passed last night until the governor's dispatches for me arrived, and then to follow me with all possible speed. He is on his way now, and must be on the road between here and the pooloo-etape. Now, if that decree were in my hands, I could depose Karsicheff on the spot, and if, as I believe is the case, he is to be sent to exile as a common prisoner for his offense against the government, that fact will free his daughter Olga from his control and leave her mistress of herself. She can not be kept in restraint by any one convicted of crime."

Cobb listened with breathless anxiety.

"What can I do?" he asked, eagerly.

"Dare you attempt to reach my secretary, you would meet him on the road, and I will give you an order to bring on the dispatches without delay!"

"Dare I—dare I!" exclaimed Cobb; "by the soul of Hickory Jackson, there is nothing in the world I couldn't or wouldn't dare just now!"

"Brave fellow," said the courier. "I knew that would be your answer. He gave a low whistle. His Cossack driver appeared from the shed where he had been awaiting his master's orders with patient docility. The courier whispered a few words to him. The driver disappeared.

"But we forget the wolves!" said the courier.

"All the wolves this side of Hades would not scare me to-night," exclaimed Cobb. "But I must have arms."

"You will find them in the sleigh—two repeating rifles and a revolver."

"And a pocket pistol?" asked Cobb. The courier looked puzzled.

Cobb laughed and in an instant the courier smiled also. "You will find supplies in the sleigh," he said. At the same moment the sleigh came up noiselessly, the driver walking by the side of the spirited horses, and keeping his hand on the bells to prevent any sound.

Cobb sprang into the sleigh.

The courier lifted a robe and drew forth two bottles of brandy. Both of the men took a long pull.

"All ready?" asked the courier.

"Ready!" said Cobb.

The driver slipped away from the head of the impatient, fiery horses.

"Go!"

One touch of the long whip in the hand of Cobb and the horses bounded forward. The sleigh bells jingled a merry tune. The driver, dismissed by a nod from the courier, disappeared, and in another ten seconds Cobb had reached a turn in the road that skirted the dark forest, and he was out of sight on his adventurous journey.

The doors of the house opened.

Karsicheff, Nicholas and Katherine stood revealed in the strong light.

"What was the noise?" they asked in one voice.

"Gen. Cobb has gone for a pleasure ride in my sleigh," was the reply, and the courier entered the house.

"I do not understand you," said Karsicheff.

"No?" said the courier. "That is unfortunate! This is my room? A lamp? Thanks! I am going to bed—good-night!" And he was gone.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### Out of the Depths.

Katherine gazed after the courier with an expression of the bitterest hate. "That man is our enemy," she said, "and even now he is plotting against us. Cobb gone—where?"

What does it mean? Heavens!" she exclaimed, as the thought occurred to her. "Can he have sent Cobb to Stralensk with the pardon of Ilda Barosky?"

Father and son looked at each other—then at Katherine.

"I have formed my plan," she said, "but I must think of my instrument."

Even as she spoke the door of the room leading to the chamber occupied by the baroness opened.

Katherine, Karsicheff and Nicholas turned quickly.

A woman appeared, hesitated a moment, and was about to retire again,



"POURED THE LIQUOR DOWN THE BARRELS OF THE GUNS"

when Katherine in her softest voice said: "Pray come in."

The stranger hesitated a moment, and then entered.

"You have quite recovered?" asked Katherine with apparent solicitude. There was no answer.

Perhaps the question had not been understood.

Katherine repeated it.

In a low voice and with a pronounced English accent, the stranger—she was apparently young—said that she did not speak Russian fluently and at times had some difficulty in understanding the language.

"You are with the wife of Gen. Cobb?" asked Katherine.

The stranger must have misunderstood the question, for she evidently thought that her passport had been asked for, as she handed that important document to Katherine.

The latter glanced at the document, Karsicheff and Nicholas gazing over her shoulder as she did so.

"Caroline Cobb," exclaimed the countess—"a relative?"

With some difficulty Caroline Cobb explained that she was a poor relation.

"Won't you be seated?" said the countess, "you must be tired."

Caroline sat down.

"A glass of vodka?" suggested Nicholas.

Caroline shook her head.

"A cup of tea is better," said Katherine, drawing the beverage from a steaming samovar that stood on a table near. As she handed the tea to the girl, she made a signal to Karsicheff and Nicholas to leave them alone.

"I will go and see that the prisoners are all right," said Karsicheff. "Come, Nicholas!" and both men left the room.

Katherine and the companion of Cobb and his wife were alone.

"Prisoners did he say, madame," said Caroline in her broken Russian, and with that pronounced English accent that Katherine had noted before. "Prisoners did he say—and is this, then, a prison?"

Katherine explained that the prison was on the other side and that the house was the residence of the commandant of the etape.

"Do the prisoners remain here?" inquired Caroline.

"Oh, no; they only arrived to-night; they came from Chitka, and are on their way to the mines."

"They are exiles—political exiles—then?"

"Some of them are, but others of

them are thieves and robbers and murderers of the most desperate character. It is that which makes the commandant, my husband, so careful. He is fearful that they may break out and massacre us all."

"But there are soldiers to protect you?"

"The guard is small and might easily be overpowered by those wretches if they had the slightest knowledge that so little stood between them and liberty."

Katherine sat in thought a moment as if revolving some plan.

"You have not asked for your preserver," she said, at length.

"Pardon me, madame," was the reply, "I have been thinking of him; he risked his life to save mine. I long to see him and to thank him from the bottom of my heart for saving my life. What is his name?"

"I do not know it, but he is one of the unfortunate political convicts sentenced for life to hard labor in the mines!"

"Oh, madame!"

"Poor fellow," Katherine resumed, speaking in a voice of sympathetic tenderness; "he is so young, so handsome, it is such a pity that he is destined to such a fate. He will die before he is twelve months in the mines. I pity him from the bottom of my heart," and she sighed deeply.

Katherine, as we know, had an exceedingly sympathetic nature.

"Is there no hope for him?" at length said Caroline.

"There is no hope," said Katherine in a low voice, "unless—"

"Yes! yes!"

"There is no hope for him unless he could escape. Poor fellow! If he had a chance he might be able to secure his freedom." She thought a moment and then went on: "There is but one way," she continued, "if it could be done. If some one were to go to Alexis—"

"Alexis—is that his name. You recall it, then—you had forgotten it."

Katherine saw that she had made a slip. But she recovered herself and with apparent frankness went on. "Yes, his name is Alexis Nazimoff."

Caroline started.

Katherine noticed the start.

"You have heard of him?" she asked.

"I suffer—one of the brutes got his fangs in my shoulder and it makes me wince at times. Pray go on, madame!"

"Alexis Nazimoff and his companion, a young student named Barosky, are two of these exiles. There is one plan by which Nazimoff can escape—but only one, and that plan, if carried out, would enable you to effect the rescue of the man who saved your life, and also enable my husband to quell the mutiny of the desperate convicts if it should arise. The plan is this" continued Katherine. "We will admit you to the camera. Your desire to thank the man who saved you will be an excuse that will disarm all suspicion. That will bring you in contact with Nazimoff. You will be supplied with a file to remove his irons and that of his companion. You must tell them to pass the word to all the others that a simultaneous rush will be made to overpower the guards. My husband will have the soldiers ready to fire on the others and in the confusion your preserver and his companion can escape. What do you say?"

(To be continued.)

### Things for Breakfast.

This morning about 7 o'clock I was in a grocery store near my house and there were a number of people there waiting anxiously to be waited upon. In rushed a little fellow and he pushed himself up to the counter and called out:

"Say, mister, hurry up and wait on me, will yer, 'cause me mudder wants de tings fur breakfast?"

"Well, my little man," asked the kindly storekeeper, "what do you want?"

"A bar of soap, a wooden pail and a broom," yelled the urchin.—Atlanta Journal.