

DARKEST RUSSIA

BY H. GRATTAN DONNELLY.

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CHAPTER XVI—Continued.

The latter wheeled on his foot and was by the side of Karsicheff in an instant. "What!" he thundered. "You dare to speak thus and human beings in danger of a terrible death at your door. Man, I blush for you. Shame! shame!"

The howling of the wolves became louder.

The courier turned to the soldiers: "You hear, men! You know what that means. Come, follow me to the rescue!"

"Halt! I forbid it!" Karsicheff shouted. "I am commandant here."

"Silence!" thundered the courier, and, throwing open his great coat, he pointed to the gold star on his breast. "Silence, sir! I am Col. Ivo Ignatief, chief of the brigade of imperial couriers of Siberia, and the ranking representative of the sovereign master of Russia! You obey my orders! Refuse at your peril! It is I who command you!" he concluded in a voice of thunder; turning to the soldiers, "Come, men, come."

Col. Ignatief rushed from the house, followed by the Cossacks.

Nicholas went to his father. "You have made a mistake—that accursed courier is now your enemy."

Katherine, from the moment the courier entered, had taken a position between him and Alexis and Ivan, who, silenced by reason of the gags which prevented their speech, heard all that passed. It was to prevent their being seen by the Courier that Katherine did this, and, in fact, succeeded. The moment the courier disappeared she went to Karsicheff's side. He was somewhat dazed by the exciting scene. "Quick," she said, "get yonder dogs into the kameras before the courier comes back. Do you not see that there will be trouble if they get a chance to speak to him?"

"But the guards—"

"Fool! Are we not guards enough against a lot of unarmed and shackled prisoners? Up—up—all of you," shouted Katherine, turning to the prisoners. "Up, convicts, in line!"

There was a murmur of dissent. The presence of the courier held out a hope, none knew exactly of what, for them. They did not want to be driven to the kameras before the courier's return.

"What? Muttering mutiny."

A dozen shots rang out in the distance.

The fight with the wolves had begun.

Nicholas passed rapidly over to his mother. "Shall I run the risk?" he said, revolver in hand, as he glared at Alexis and Ivan. "Shall I try it now?"

"No, with all these witnesses it would be madness. Wait till the courier comes. We have plenty of time."

"They shall not leave here alive?" said Nicholas.

"Never!" was his mother's reply.

Distant shouts were heard. They grew nearer and nearer. There was an occasional shot. The rescuers were on their way back from their heroic effort. Had they succeeded?

The voices came nearer.

A confused murmur and then over all the rest was heard the tones of the imperial courier.

"Bear up—all is well. You are safe, madame. Bear up, there is no danger—here we are at last—" and as the words were spoken the courier entered the room bearing in his arms the inanimate form of a woman. I will bear the lady to a room," said the courier, addressing Katherine, who stood impassive. "Which is the door?" he added.

Katherine said nothing. To move would be to reveal Alexis and Ivan.

"Good God, madame," cried the courier, "have you no heart? Don't you see that the lady has fainted. Show me the room at once, or by heaven I will suspend you all from duty at once!"

Katherine saw that it was vain to



stand out longer. She threw open a door and pointed to the interior. "Bring brandy and water to bathe her face," said the courier, and he left the room with the inanimate form still in his arms.

The courier had scarcely left the room when the outer door again opened and two Cossacks entered, supporting between them a man who was barely able to keep his feet, and who was evidently nearly overcome by a fierce struggle with the famished wolves.

The lights, the people, and the heat of the room somewhat revived him, and after being assisted to a chair he made a strong effort to recover him-

said to the soldier, "I will not allow it!"

"Damn your allowance!" thundered the courier, taking the key from the soldier and unlocking the handcuffs, which fell with a clang to the floor. "It is my will. There is the heart of a man in that convict, and the heart of a convict in you!"

Pressing the hand of the courier for an instant, Alexis dropped one knee. "Thank God for the chance," he murmured; "better death in such a case as this than such a life as mine is now," and seizing the rifle which the courier held to him, he rushed from the door and was lost in the darkness.

Karsicheff was shaking with rage and baffled malignity.

They raised the man on the chair.

"Here, drink this, my brave fellow, and you are all right," and so saying, the courier placed the bottle to the rescued man's lips. "Try a little—a swallow or two; it will do you good."

The sufferer made an effort. He succeeded. He did take a swallow or two—in fact he took dozen, for the fiery brandy went down his throat as if it had been smooth as milk. His eyes opened; a half smile passed over his face; with an effort he straightened himself up unassisted and remarked: "That's great stuff!"

"Cobb!"

The word came simultaneously from the lips of the Karsicheffs, father and son.

Cobb here!

Cobb, the man who had been, as the letter said, devoting himself toward securing a pardon for his friend and their enemy.

Had Alexis recognized him, too?

Yes—for he was making an effort to attract his attention.

But the gag prevented him from speaking.

Cobb, for it was our American friend, after feeling the brandy coursing through his veins, and after giving it his personal endorsement, half mechanically, suddenly gazed at the courier with a look of fearful anxiety.

Then his breath came thick and fast, and his voice, broken with painful agitation, trembled as he spoke with feverish haste. "My wife—she is safe—my wife—are we—saved? Speak—I—speak!"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the courier, "she is safe, you are safe, all is well."

"But—but the other—"

"My God; Is there another?" exclaimed the courier.

Cobb paled—a horrible picture rose before his mind, his eyes closed, his features relaxed, and he fell helpless into the arms of the Cossacks.

"Take him there," shouted the courier to the Cossacks, pointing to the room where he had taken the other—who was, in fact, the baroness. "Take him there and follow me!"

The man obeyed and bore Cobb from the room.

The courier started for the door but he had scarcely taken one step when the blood from his wound poured forth in a perfect torrent, and he staggered and would have fallen but for the friendly aid of the Nachalnik. To remove his coat and get a bandage was the work of only a minute, but that minute seemed hours.

For the howling of the wolves, now growing nearer and nearer, had increased to a volume that indicated that the pack was growing larger all the time. As the demoniac chorus of the famished brutes was borne to his ears, the courier made another effort to start to the rescue. But it was useless. He was faint from loss of blood.

Alexis had barely time to use the rifle as a club and to knock the brains out of one of the furious brutes as it sprang upon him, till he heard a cry of anguish.

(To be continued.)

HOSTESS SHOWED MUCH TACT.

Hint Enabled Visitor to Appear in Appropriate Dress.

"One of the most tactful invitations I have received this season," said a girl who is on a round of country house visits, "was accompanied by a short resume of the functions that were to take place during my stay, thus enabling me to take clothes suitable to the occasion. After setting the date of my coming and going and giving me choice of several trains at which I would be met, my hostess said: 'There will be a garden party, a dance at the country club, and a picnic lunch in the woods during the week you are here.' I therefore provided myself with a fluffy, frilly organdie, a simple decollete gown, and something for the picnic which would not show grass stains nor be the worse for briars and brambles."

The soldiers remained silent.

Two or three of them showed marks on their hands and faces where the brutes had torn them in their brave rescue of Cobb and his wife. They were brave men enough, but even the bravest man might well quail with fear at the prospect of a horrible death by being torn to pieces by the famished wolves.

"It is certain death," said the Nachalnik.

"Ay, certain death," said two or three of the others.

"God of Russia!" exclaimed the courier again, making an attempt to rise, "will nobody dare—oh! If I had but the strength!" and he sank into the chair, weak and helpless. "Hear that!" he continued, as the howling of the wolves became louder, "make an effort men—try! try to make a rescue!"

But among the convicts there was a movement, and before Karsicheff or Nicholas could prevent him Alexis Nazimoff staggered forward, and, sinking on one knee at the foot of the courier, raised his shackled hands to the gag in his mouth. Then turning to the direction from which came the howl of the wolves, he flashed a look of pleading appeal into the eyes of the courier.

"You?" gasped the courier.

Alexis nodded his head quickly, while the eager look deepened on his face.

The courier glanced at the shackled hands and the cruel gag that suppressed the speech of the suppliant.

"You, a convict," he said again.

Alexis' head bent quickly. Then again he raised his face to meet the look of the courier.

With a supreme effort the courier rose to his feet and with one hand instantly removed the gag from the mouth of Alexis. Turning to the soldiers, he said, "Strike off those irons!"

A soldier stepped forward with the key.

Karsicheff sprang between them, his face distorted with rage. "Stop,"

he said.

He said.