

# DARKEST RUSSIA

BY H. GRATTAN DONNELLY.

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## CHAPTER IX.—Continued.

"Then lend me your greatcoat. I shall be less liable to be questioned by any of the gendarmes when they recognize an officer's coat. Then rest here, and I swear to you that in less than forty minutes I shall return here with Olga."

Alexis thought a moment. Then, taking up his coat, he handed it to Ivan, who, quickly assuming the garment, said: "Rest here, and trust me. I will keep my word. Should any one enter in my absence, say you are my friend and await me."

Then as he was going he suddenly stopped.

Taking his overcoat, he said: "You are tired from your journey and exhausted, no doubt, by your experience to-night. Rest there, and throw this over you. You will wait my return?"

"I will await your return."

He glanced up the steps as Ivan departed, saw the door close and heard a key turn in the outer lock; then rapidly departing footsteps till they were lost in the distance, and then there was profound silence.

Ivan had started on his mission, and Alexis was alone.

## CHAPTER X.

### Caught in the Trap.

It was only after he had sat a minute or two, amid silence so profound that he could have heard his heart beat, that Alexis Nazimoff began to reason with himself. "What if this were a trap?"

The idea no sooner occurred than it was dismissed. No one had induced him to visit the place. His coming had been entirely of his own volition, and could not have been anticipated. Besides, there could be no possible mistake about Ivan's amazement when he had revealed his name, and there was something in the manner of the man, despite his excitement, that forbade the idea of treachery.

Then he thought of Ilda.

She here—with her evident refinement and highly wrought nature—here, in this dark, gloomy, forbidding place—in the cellar-like apartment of a house in the lower quarter of the town. What did it mean? And she was still here!

Alexis looked around, this time with more eager interest.

There was apparently no door except the one at the top of the steps.



It puzzled him. Had Ilda gone in the interim between the time when his man had seen her enter and his own arrival? Then he remembered that Ivan had not, after all, admitted that his sister was in the place.

"Well," was his silent conclusion, "there is nothing for it but to wait his return. I must be patient."

When a man gets into a frame of

mind when he says he must be patient, the most natural thing in the world to enable him to endure patience with a comparatively cheerful equanimity is a cigar. To his annoyance he found that his cigar case was in his greatcoat pocket.

Suddenly his eyes rested on Ivan's coat. In Russia all men are smokers, and Alexis felt the chances of finding a cigar were strongly in his favor. He lifted the cloak, and as he did so he uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

There was a cigar case sure enough.

Alexis withdrew it from the pocket, and as he sat down he tossed the coat back on the table. As he did so, from a small receptacle or pocket for matches on the side of the cigar case, something fell with a jingle to the floor.

Alexis picked it up.

A Red Rouble!

He lighted the cigar, and then, after a whiff or two, he gazed curiously at the coin.

A Red Rouble—painted—dyed? Alexis turned it over in his hand. "Singular thing," he thought, "to have a silver piece so stained. What did it mean? What could be the object?"

He had been sitting there examining the coin for perhaps a minute when the silence was broken. He could hardly tell how or by what. But so slight as to be barely heard, but unmistakably a sound.

Alexis rose to his feet. An undefined feeling of danger of some sort, he knew not what, took possession of him. He listened, with every nerve strained to its utmost. There was silence again. He tried to shake off the unpleasant impression of some unseen danger and thought that his imagination had deceived him.

Hark! There was the sound again. That was no rat. The sound came from within the apparently solid walls. Noiselessly as he could he went on tiptoe and placed his ear to the wall, and then waited with bated breath.

What was that?

"Good God!" he exclaimed, in a whisper to himself, as a murmur of voices reached his ear, "there are people within this wall!"

Even as he made the discovery a sound came from the opposite side. He was there in an instant, his ear again pressed to the wall.

The same murmur reached him.

"By heaven, the place is alive with people," he exclaimed. "What does it mean?"

A grating sound, different from any he had yet heard, reached him.

He felt that something, he knew not what, was about to take place—that the danger, if danger it was, was at hand. The place, its appearance, the mysterious noises—all boded deadly peril of some kind.

He was in a den of criminals.

"Trapped!" he thought, "caught, by heaven, like a rat in a trap!"

Alexis Nazimoff was a brave man—none braver. But the bravest man may be unnerved by the presence of an unseen danger—of a danger that is felt, not confronted. He was accustomed to think quickly, and to act impulsively. Hastily thrusting the cigar case into the open front of his coat, he quickly but softly moved to where Ivan's coat was lying on the table.

To take the coat and move to the long bench that stood alongside the wall was the work of a couple of seconds, and in as many more he had lain down, pulled Ivan's coat over him, and was apparently asleep!

But he had so arranged the coat that while it covered his head he could see anything that transpired on the opposite side of the room—the side on which he had heard the sound for the second time.

Softly and silently as a shadow the solid wall seemed to move!

Every panel was a revolving door which turned noiselessly on its axis, and from every door entered as silently as a specter an occupant of the mysterious recesses beyond. A rush of air and the movement of softly treading feet convinced Alexis that exactly the same movement was being executed simultaneously behind his back.

Such was the fact.

Then to the amazement of Alexis he realized that the apartment of which he had been the sole occupant a moment before was now tenanted by a score of people.

He lay perfectly still—astonished, spellbound.

Suddenly the silence was broken.

"All is well," said Oraminsky. "Whoever it was, there could have been no danger, since we did not hear the signal."

"Nor the signal to come out," some one said, in a growling voice; "it is the first time we broke the rules."

"I have suspended the rules," said Oraminsky, with grim irony, "without breaking them." Just what he meant nobody seemed to understand.

Oraminsky, resuming his authoritative tone, put an end to the silence by directing the people to resume their work. "Now that Ivan has gone we can run off the remaining copies of his proclamation. Kirshkin, start the press!"

The man thus addressed went to the wall, and touched a concealed spring, a section of the solid structure revolved and a clumsy hand-press of an old type was run on noiseless rollers into the room.

"Go ahead with that bomb," directed Oraminsky, addressing two of the men. "You, Orloff," to another—"go ahead with the wires. You, Palet, see to the tunnel—quick, to work, all of you. There is no time to lose. Let us work to-night! Our task will be complete, and then, one touch to the wire and Russia will be free from the tyrant."

Alexis never moved. He understood it all now.

The press began running, and as the first impression of the work was taken off Oraminsky held up his hand—the signal for silence.

"Here, brothers, listen to this," he said, as he took up the paper, and, speaking in low tones, read as follows:

"Alexander the Tyrant Is Dead!

"Rise Russia!

"Death to the Oppressors!

"To Arms, Free Russians, to Arms!

"Long Live the People!"

"We will have a thousand copies of that posted throughout St. Petersburg," said Oraminsky, "and then—the Revolution! That would stir the sluggish blood of the moderates—even of such a kindergarten revolutionist as Ivan Barosky."

"Read it to Ivan," said Kirshkin.

"Ivan is gone," said two or three.

"Not so," was the reply of the printer, Kirshkin, as he caught sight of the recumbent figure. "There lies Ivan fast asleep!" and he pointed as he spoke.

"Fool!" muttered Oraminsky, "he has no right to sleep at such a time as this. Wake him up, Hersy!"

Alexis drew a deep breath.

The moment had come.

It was a question now of life or death.

Hersy—a woman of the people, dark and sullen—sprang to his side. "Wake up, Ivan Barosky! wake up! We have just finished a letter of invitation."

"To the funeral of the czar," said Kirshkin, whereupon there was a laugh.

"And printed in red, too—red will be the fashionable color in St. Petersburg," said another.

"Because the czar will wear it and set the fashion for all."

"Come, come," said Hersy, "wake up!" and as she spoke she grasped the coat and pulled it from the recumbent form.

"Ah!" with a scream of astonished rage as she discovered the stranger,

Hersy pointed one finger at Alexis—"a spy!"

Quickly springing to his feet Alexis drew his sword.

"Down with him!" "Kill him!" "His life!" were some of the exclamations which fell on the ears of Alexis, as pale and resolute, with no evidence of fear in the steady eye, he gazed at the faces of the now blood-thirsty crew before him.

"Well, dogs of the gutter," at length he said, as for a moment they stood at bay, held back by his undaunted front, "what seek you? My life? Take it when you can!"

And now with knives drawn, with such weapons as came to hand—a hammer, chisels, an ax—they began to close in upon him with murder in their eyes.

But none, not even Oraminsky himself, felt like leading the assault, and



being the first to feel the thrust of the naked blade which Alexis held with the grip of iron and the masterful ease of the perfect swordsman.

"But a scratch and we have him," said Oraminsky. "Rush on him in a body!"

But nobody rushed. Nobody was itching for a scratch.

Kirshkin at the first moment had left his press, and as Alexis drew his sword he had crept up the room behind the others and on all fours had gone under the stairs and around to the rear of the dauntless swordsman who, with certain death staring him in the face, kept a bold front to his would-be murderers.

Oraminsky had seen Kirshkin's motion and had at once divined his intention. He made a threatening movement forward with a bar of iron as a weapon. Alexis made a pass as he came within reaching distance, but the weapon never reached Oraminsky, for at that moment Kirshkin, with a suppressed yell of triumph, sprang upon the back of the young soldier. There was an instant rush, and a moment later, bound and helpless, Alexis Nazimoff was at the mercy of Oraminsky and his companions.

As Alexis was borne back by the weight of numbers, and in spite of his gallant struggle against such overpowering odds, there fell from his pocket a bundle of letters, and these it was but an instant's work for Oraminsky to grasp. He fairly shouted, despite his habitual caution, as he read the superscription.

(To be continued.)

### Gould an Expert Telegrapher.

When a boy in his father's office George J. Gould learned the telegrapher's art, and he has kept it up ever since. A private wire connects Georgian court, his home in Lakewood, N. J., with his office in Broadway, New York, and as Mrs. Gould also understands telegraphy they are able to chat whenever occasion demands.

### Very Shocking.

Rodrick—"This paper says that some things at St. Louis are so large they really appal the visitor."

Van Albert—"H'm! they must mean the hotel bills."