

# DARKEST RUSSIA

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## CHAPTER XIV.—Continued.

Rumors of Ilda's comparatively happy lot in the ispravnik's house at Stralensk had reached them, and had relieved them of apprehension as to her whereabouts and condition. As long as she was so near and until some word was heard regarding Olga, they determined to make no effort to escape. The time they remained they felt was not wasted, for Alexis was convinced that Cobb was not idle, and that he would soon get tidings from his friend.

Matters were in this condition when an event occurred which changed the whole aspect of affairs, and which had a momentous bearing upon the lives and fortunes of the exiles.

The work on the roads to which Ivan and Alexis had been assigned was in charge of an officer named Onasoff—a coarse and brutal man of no education. The fact that Alexis and Ivan, by reason of their attainments, had been excused from manual labor, and has been detailed as petty overseers, rankled in his heart. He hated them for their superiority over the class he was accustomed to command, and lost no opportunity of venting upon them his spiteful nature. But it was only after the party of exiles left Chita and Onasoff was placed in command, when for the time being he was supreme, that he had the full opportunity he craved to show his hostility to Ivan and Alexis. A failure to salute him when he passed—and he made a point of passing a dozen times an hour; the slightest cessation in their work, even their conversa-



tion, was made a pretext for venting his brutal rage upon the helpless exiles. They well knew that remonstrance or resistance were equally futile, and submitted in silence to the insults and jeers and insulting epithets launched at them by the brute who had them in his power.

But there was a limit to their endurance.

One morning a poor fellow named Helmanoff found himself so ill that when the orders were given to fall in he was unable to respond. The officer ran to where the prostrate man lay suffering, and with the remark that he would allow no shamming in his command, kicked the helpless sufferer in the face.

Alexis sprang forward.

"Well!" said Onasoff, "what do you want?"

"The man is ill—do not treat him like that."

Onasoff drew his hand and struck at Alexis. Ivan sprang up at the same moment and stopped the blow.

It was enough.

Onasoff's orders were given. The soldiers rushed upon Alexis and Ivan, and in a minute, bruised and bleeding, they were borne to the earth and placed in irons. Then, under a strong

guard, they were marched to Chitka and charges preferred against them.

Their punishment in the first place was to be deprived of all privileges, and to be compelled to take their places with the common convicts, while awaiting the decision of the governor of the province on the charges which Onasoff had forwarded.

When these charges were returned, after examination by the governor, he had endorsed thereon the punishment of the exiles.

The sentence was that Alexis and Ivan were to be sent immediately to hard labor in the dreaded mines of Karc!

## CHAPTER XV.

### A Mutual Recognition.

It was the close of a winter day—a winter day in Siberia. Heavy snows had been prevailing for a week, and the roads were, in some places, almost impassable from the drifts. The winds howled mournfully through the pines, and ever and anon there was borne the sound that of all others sends the most fearful dread to the heart of the lone traveler in Siberia—the blood-curdling cry of a pack of famished wolves.

But the howling of the wolves and the piercing blasts of the wind had no terrors for two men who sat in the large hall of an etape or exile station on the road from Chitka to Nerchinsk. Copious draughts of steaming hot vodka sat on the table before them, while the warm atmosphere of the apartment was in decided contrast to the bitter temperature which prevailed out of doors.

"Go on with the letter," said the elder of the two men, addressing his companion, who had stopped reading some communication while he swallowed a generous supply of the fiery vodka.

Nicholas Karsicheff—for the two men were Constantine Karsicheff and his son—lifted the letter which was on the table before him and resumed the reading of its contents. Constantine listened eagerly to every word.

"Three months after your departure from St. Petersburg," so the letter ran, "that irrepressible American, whom we met at the Nazimoff fete, was married to the Baroness von Rhineberg. The ceremony took place at the American minister's residence, and was one of the brilliant social events of the season."

"Curses on them both," said Nicholas. "I always thought that the baroness was a fool—now I know it."

Nicholas did not explain that once he had tried to make matrimonial overtures to the baroness himself, but had been so quietly but effectually repulsed that he never renewed the attempt.

"What else?" said Constantine, impatiently. "Read on."

"Count Nazimoff, as I suppose you have heard," continued Nicholas, reading, "resigned his position as minister of police within a few months after taking office. He secured the sworn confession of one Kishkin, a Nihilist who had been captured during your memorable raid on their rendezvous. This confession, I am told, puts an entirely different light on the guilt of Alexis. The story goes that Alexis merely went there to see the girl Ilda, and that he refused to take any oath of secrecy, and denounced the conspirators, even going so far, with the aid of Ivan Barosky, as to attempt to capture them. These facts have been laid before the czar, and I should not be surprised to hear that their pardons were issued at any time."

"Damnation!" Constantine could stand it no longer. He jumped to his feet and strode up and down the room. He had aged perceptibly within the year, and the hard, cruel lines

about his mouth were deepened and intensified by what he had endured. For, since we last saw him in St. Petersburg, he had suffered enough humiliation to make him a bitter man. On his way to assume the post to which the czar had assigned him on his deposition from the ministry of police he had given expression to his feelings in no unmeasured language. One remark—that the czar should get a dictionary containing a definition of the word "gratitude"—had been reported back to St. Petersburg, and came to the ears of the czar himself. The result was that when Karsicheff reached his destination he found his commission as civil and military governor revoked, and received an order degrading him from his rank. He was detailed to take charge as commandant of an etape, or exile station, on the road to the mines, and warned that any further expression derogatory to the czar would be followed by imprisonment at hard labor.

The etape at which we find Karsicheff and his son was a large one. It consisted of the commandant's house, a rather commodious building, which stood on one side of the road. On the opposite side was a large enclosure surrounded by a stockade about twelve feet high made of rough hewn logs. Within this enclosure stood three long, low buildings—two, the kameras or sleeping places for the exiles. The furnishing of the kameras was of the simplest description, consisting of a long row of nares (sleeping benches) and a couple of rough tables. There was no bedding of any description. Heat was supplied by a large oven-like stove; and, wrapped up in their great coats, the exiles were obliged to pass the night on the bare boards, to get sleep as best they could.

Up and down in front of the great gate which admitted to the stockade were the guards, and their orders were of the simplest description, when the kameras were occupied—"In the event of mutiny or attempt to escape, fire, and fire to kill!"

"What does your mother say of the letter?" at length asked Constantine of his son.

"Nothing—but she keeps thinking," was the reply.

Even as they spoke the door leading to the private apartment of the house opened, and Katherine Karsicheff appeared. She, too, had aged considerably since we last saw her. Her hair had begun to turn gray, and the face had a harder expression than ever before.

Katherine's eyes lighted on the letter which Nicholas still held in his hand. Her brow darkened as she caught sight of it, for the news it contained had given her anything but pleasure. She took the chair vacated by Constantine and with a hard, bitter laugh said: "Pleasant news for us to hear, isn't it?"

Constantine said nothing.

"What are we going to do?" continued Katherine. "Are we to remain for life in this accursed place? Cannot something be done? The thought of our fate drives me wild. I could almost be persuaded to become a Nihilist myself if I had a chance to drive a knife into the heart of that paltering fool, the czar!"

"Hush, for God's sake, Katherine," exclaimed Constantine, turning perfectly white with fear. "Suppose you should be overheard. Think of what we have already suffered for one remark."

Katherine turned on him like a tigress.

"The remark of a fool who was afraid to say all he felt, and yet had not sense enough to say nothing. Your idiotic babble brought us here," she continued, looking daggers at her husband, "and here I suppose you would be content to stay forever. Well, I am not!"

Constantine bit his lip, turned to the table and swallowed the great goblet of vodka at a single gulp. He had just placed the glass on the table when a loud knocking was heard at the door.

"See to it, Nicholas," said Constantine.

Nicholas rose, went to the door and threw it open.

A Cossack, muffled up to the throat, appeared at the depot and, saluting, said: "A convoy is approaching, your excellency. We stop here to-night."

"Not here—you must push on to the pooloo-etape. Our provision for prisoners is running low." It was Nicholas who spoke.

"Pardon, excellency," said the Cossack soldier, producing a paper, "but night is coming on. There are not many prisoners, but we have had a hard time of it in the heavy snow, and to make the pooloo-etape is next to impossible. Besides—"

"That will do," peremptorily exclaimed Nicholas, "the commandant is the best judge of what is possible."

The Cossack saluted and was silent. Constantine Karsicheff leisurely opened the paper handed to him by Nicholas, which the latter had received from the Cossack.

It was the official list of prisoners—a list furnished by the Nachalink to the commandant of each etape from which to call the names of the prisoners so as to be assured that all were present.

Constantine had barely glanced at the list when he jumped to his feet with an exclamation of surprise.

"Outside and halt your prisoners when they come up here. They stop here to-night. You are right—it is too far to the pooloo-etape! Halt them here and march them in before they go to the kamera. I will inspect them here and give you your receipt—that is all!"

The Cossack saluted and withdrew, and in another moment the hoofs of his horse were heard, as he galloped over the crisp surface of the snowy



road to rejoin the convoy even then in sight.

Katherine and Nicholas regarded Constantine with surprise. The arrival of a convoy was not of such unusual occurrence as to cause him such excitement.

"What is the matter?" demanded Katherine.

"Why," returned her husband with a strangely triumphant ring in his voice, "these convicts have arrived!"

"Well," said Katherine, "what of it? Convicts do arrive here almost daily."

(To be continued.)

### Put on Tan at Seashore.

The New York Browning society takes its outing at Manhattan Beach this summer. Its chief purpose is to enable its members to get as sunburnt as possible. This develops intense rivalry in the degree of tan that each takes on. The study of the poet is strictly confined to the physical, as none of his works are permitted to be opened during the sessions.

### Shoes Have Seen Long Service.

James Smith of Fulton, Mo., owns a pair of boots that have been worn for seventeen years without being patched or mended in any way.