

DARKEST RUSSIA

BY H. GRATTAN DONNELLY.

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CHAPTER XVII.—Continued.

"Very well," said the courier, "respect his wishes until he awakes. I will see him myself before I go. Alexis Petroffsky," he added, as he entered the name in his book. "It will be my duty to lay his noble conduct before the authorities with a view of getting him a pardon." He paused a moment and then sharply asked: "Why was he gagged when I arrived?"

"He had been villifying our Imperial master the czar," said Katherine.

"And cursing our holy church," added Nicholas.

A shade of disappointment passed over the face of the courier. "I am sorry to hear it," he said.

Then he was silent and thoughtful for a moment.

"See that I have fresh horses ready by daybreak," at length he said, "and that my rest is undisturbed."

"You go hence to—" said Katherine waiting for the courier to complete the sentence.

"I go hence to Stralensk," replied the courier, "where I am to deliver a pardon to a young girl who has proved herself a heroine, having been the only nurse who was available during a terrible outbreak of fever. Her pardon has been granted at the request of the governor of the province, who petitioned for it on the ground that the young girl's unselfish devotion and unflinching exertion was undoubtedly the means of saving scores of lives. More than that, she appealed to the convicts and prevented a dangerous uprising when the guards were stricken down. All Russia is ringing with the story of her good deeds."

"Ah," said Katherine, "and may I ask the name of this heroine. Doubtless she is celebrated, but we hear so little of the world's news in this out-of-the-way place."

"Certainly," answered the courier, "her name is Ilda Barosky!"

"Ilda Barosky!"

The name was uttered together by Constantine Karsicheff and his wife and son. It was spoken with such a bitterness of surprise—such a tone of incredulous wonder—that the courier could not help giving expression to his curiosity.

"Do you know her?" he asked.

"Know her," replied Katherine, "I do know her. A vile Nihilist, a daughter of the gutter of St. Petersburg—an assassin, a reptile—I do know her,



"YES—YES—YOUR HUSBAND—IT IS HE WHO IS TO SUFFER!"

this then is—you are General Karsicheff?"

It had been the first time the name was spoken in the presence of the and I shall protest against her pardon, even to the czar. I have some claims yet on his majesty. He cannot afford to forget what has been done for the Russian crown by the ancestors of Katherine Karsicheff!"

"Katherine Karsicheff! Are you—

courier, and he repeated it with scarcely less surprise in his tones than the three persons before him had the name of Ilda Barosky a moment before.

What caused his surprise!

That was what the Karsicheffs wanted to know.

Their anxiety was interrupted by the marked change in the courier's manner. It had been polite before when he spoke. Now there was in his voice an unpleasant ring which boded no good.

"So!"

The courier paused a moment, thoughtfully, and then, as if he had made up his mind, he produced a large official envelope. Handing this to Karsicheff, he said: "You will forward these papers immediately to-morrow morning by a trusted messenger on whom you can rely to the ispravnik at Chitka. You must lose no time and use relays of horses where necessary. Sign a receipt for the pardons!"

"Pardons?"

"Yes. This envelope contains pardons for two politicals, Alexis Nazimoff and Ivan Barosky. Strange," he paused as the similarity of the name struck him. "Can he be any relation to the girl for whom I have the pardon at Stralensk?—no matter! These papers," he continued, addressing Karsicheff, "have been forwarded by special relay from the frontier, and are to be delivered at the earliest moment. You will be held responsible for any delays. You will sign the receipt."

Katherine and Nicholas exchanged glances.

Karsicheff signed the paper—the receipt for the pardons.

"Call me at daybreak," said the courier; "and now where is my apartment?"

Katherine, Constantine and Nicholas, with one simultaneous step moved toward a door adjoining that in which Cobb and his wife and her companion had entered.

The courier paused thoughtfully.

"On second thought," he said, "I will not retire just yet. The storm has ceased, and the moon is about to rise. I will take a turn or two and smoke a cigar before—ah, the brave American!"

It was the appearance of Cobb at the door leading from his room that caused the courier's exclamation. Going forward with outstretched hand, the courier greeted him warmly and expressed a hope that he had suffered no lasting ill effects from his terrible experience with the wolves.

Cobb warmly returned the greeting and begged to know the name of the man to whom, as he said, "I owe my life, the life of my wife, and that of—of her companion," and at the same time he presented a card bearing his own name.

Having informed him of his name and rank, the courier said, after glancing at the card, "It is evident, general, that we are two old soldiers, though not now in active service. I was just going to smoke a cigar, but it would be doubly pleasant if I had company—your company, I mean!"

"Nothing will give me greater pleasure. My wife, the baroness, and her companion, are sound asleep, and I was anxious to see you and express my gratitude for your noble conduct!"

"Come along then," said the courier, "we will walk up and down for an hour. That will quiet our nerves and this—handing Cobb a cigar—"will do the rest."

So saying, the courier and Cobb left the room.

The moment the door closed, Katherine, Nicholas and Karsicheff remained silent, and then, as if by a common impulse, they came close together as if for mutual protection.

They felt—they knew that they were on the verge of an abyss. What

did Cobb's presence mean? What would he and the courier say to each other?

And then the astounding discovery that they had made!

A pardon for Ilda Barosky!

Pardons for Alexis and Ivan.

"Give me the paper," at length said Katherine to her husband.

He handed her the document given him by the courier.

"These papers," said Katherine, "will never reach their destination—or if they do it will be when pardons will be more necessary for them"—and she pointed to the stockade—"in another world than this."

"What do you mean," asked Karsicheff breathlessly, as his wife placed the envelope in her bosom.

"That Alexis Nazimoff and Ivan Barosky shall never leave this place alive."

"You would not dare—"

"Anything," exclaimed Katherine, "rather than that they should live to triumph over me—rather death than that Alexis Nazimoff should rejoin Ilda Barosky, and Ivan claim my daughter as his wife."

"Ilda Barosky! She too will be free!" said Nicholas.

Katherine lowered her voice. "If the courier—curses on him—should reach Stralensk with her pardon."

"And he will if he leaves here," said Karsicheff.

"He must not leave here at all."

The three looked at each other. There was no sign of quailing on the part of mother or son. Karsicheff was paler than usual, and was visibly agitated.

The voices were lowered until they were scarcely audible, and for fifteen minutes there was no sound save the murmur of their suppressed conversation as they completed the details of their plot.

For they had conceived a plan—a plan born of the evil genius of Katherine Karsicheff.

They had finished their talk when the door opened at the head of the stairway, and with pale and agonized face Olga appeared, and gliding down silently as a shadow, suddenly appeared before them. With her hands outstretched and with tears streaming from her eyes she appealed to them. "Oh, my mother—father—Nicholas, what are you about to do? Your faces terrify me! You are going to commit some great crime—oh, God!—not—not murder? For God's sake, stop before you bathe your hands in blood. Do not—do not bring eternal sorrow on us all. Oh, my mother—dear mother—"

This far they had been so startled by Olga's unexpected appearance that none of them had interrupted her.

But now Katherine, utterly lost to all maternal feeling, sprang on the unhappy girl, and glaring at her with devilish malignity, hissed into her ears: "Yes—yes—your husband—it is he who is to suffer. Back to your room and wear out your soul in anguish, for he is to die!"

Nicholas took his sister by the arm.

She gave one appealing look, and then as they began to force her back to her room she uttered a piercing shriek that was heard even by the prisoners in the kameras. Quickly Nicholas lifted her in his arms and bore her from the room.

As he did so Katherine fell back!

"Say that it was my cry," she said to her husband.

The door opened and Cobb and the courier quickly entered.

"What was that?"

"Look there," replied Karsicheff, pointing to the prostrate form of Katherine. "She was overcome by the excitement of the night and became hysterical."

Katherine apparently began to revive and opened her eyes. "Where am I?" she asked in the voice of one just recovering consciousness.

Cobb turned his head away and smiled. The query recalled a joke he had heard some years before.

Karsicheff raised Katherine to a sitting position, and then gave a suggestive look to Cobb and the courier.

Rightly construing it as a request to withdraw they went back to the

open air to finish their cigars.

The courier and Cobb had scarcely withdrawn from the room when the Russian turned to his companion and said: "Do you believe that the cry we heard was uttered by that woman?"

"No! I'll be — if I do," was the emphatic reply of Cobb.

Heretofore their conversation had been of a general character.

They had discussed their military services, their travels, the dangers of the wolves, and other matters. But the pointed inquiry brought them on a common ground regarding the Karsicheffs.

"Why," asked the courier, "do you not believe that story?"

"Can I trust you fully and freely?" asked Cobb.

The courier extended his hand. The



"CAN I TRUST YOU FULLY AND FREELY?" ASKED COBB.

action was enough. A thousand oaths could not have made the promise more binding. Cobb in a few words told the courier all that he knew of the Karsicheffs. He told of the lives of Ilda and Alexis and of Olga and Ivan, of the raid on the Nihilist rendezvous, the arrests and the circumstances under which they took place, ending with the scene where Karsicheff sentenced the prisoners.

The courier listened with intense interest. When he heard that Ivan and Alexis—the very men for whom he had given the pardons to their bitterest enemy—were the heroes of Cobb's story, his amazement knew no bounds. His sympathies for the unhappy Olga were keenly aroused. Suddenly he had a revelation.

"And that cry was?" he paused.

"The cry of Olga!"

"My God! the poor, poor girl," said the courier.

Cobb said nothing. He kept thinking. Olga and the baroness under one roof. The baroness would never leave until she had made an effort to rescue the unhappy girl.

Suddenly the courier turned to Cobb. "You have trusted me freely," he said, "and in return I will trust you."

Then to Cobb's profound amazement he told him of the pardons granted to Ilda, Alexis and Ivan. Ilda, he explained, was at Stralensk, where he was going under orders to deliver her pardon in person. And Ivan and Alexis were at Chitka, to which point the pardons were to be forwarded by Karsicheff.

(To be continued.)

Tunnel for English Channel.

Since a French engineer named Gamond planned a submarine tunnel, in 1857, various projects have been advanced for connecting England with the continent. The latest is the suggestion of Bunau-Varilla, who wants to build a tunnel to within three kilometers of England, and thence a bridge, which England (which has not favored a tunnel) could destroy at any time in case of danger of a foreign invasion, thus rendering the tunnel useless.

The true worth of a man is to be measured by the object he pursues.—Marcus Aurelius.