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(Continued.)

Peeping cautiously from the fringe of bushes, he saw Phil lying motionless in the snow, and the officer apparently leaning over him. Then came a startling interruption. Grodno and Hamid burst from the forest with loud shouts, the former swinging the rifle around his head with one arm, and flung themselves on the officer, who staggered to his feet just in time to meet the attack. Shouts of anger were heard, but the combatants were so enveloped in a cloud of dust that Maurice could not tell how the battle was going.

"If I only had a weapon of some sort," he exclaimed half aloud, and just then his eyes fell on a stout cudgel lying close at hand, a staff



He saw Grodno's evil countenance glaring at him.

dropped probably by some peasant. Seeing this, he hurried quickly down the road, intent on rescuing the imperiled officer. As he drew near a pistol cracked sharply above the din of voices, and Hamid's short, chunky figure spun round for a brief second in the cloud of dust, and then dropped heavily in the roadway.

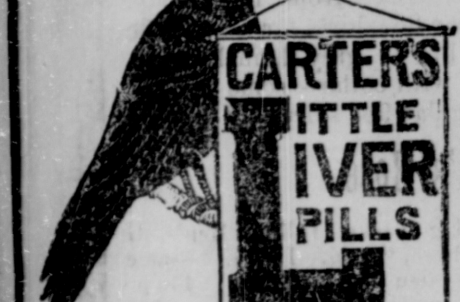
Maurice had barely time to see Grodno and the officer struggling over the possession of a revolver when a sharp trumpet blast echoed through the air, a clash of steel seemed to shake the ground, and then round a slight curve in the road came at full tilt a squad of Cossacks, brandishing their naked swords. They surrounded the wagon with a circle of men six deep, and when Grodno gave up the fight in despair and turned to flee he was hemmed in beyond all hope of escape. A fierce expression passed over his face, and then he calmly folded his arms as a sign of submission.

Hamid lay motionless on the road, his greasy garments stained to match the scarlet of his fez, and close by was Phil, his face pale and corpse-like.

The rescued officer saluted the commander of the Cossacks, and conversed with him for ten minutes or more, pointing from time to time at Maurice and Grodno and the two motionless forms on the ground. He was plainly much puzzled over the affair. From the few words of the Cossack's reply which Maurice was able to understand, such as "escaped prisoners, burning barge and Tomsk," he inferred that these soldiers had been in pursuit of them since the time of their escape.

Fearing that Phil was badly injured, if indeed not dead, he moved toward him, but was roughly ordered back. At the same moment the conversation ceased, and two of the soldiers came forward with the runaway black horse, which they attached to the wagon, dragging the dead animal to the side of the road.

Grodno, whose arm was apparently broken by the officer's bullet, was bound on the black coat suspended.



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Maurice was put behind, his arms bound behind his back, and Hamid's limp body was stowed away at their feet.

Phil, to Maurice's delight, now recovered consciousness and sat up, looking about him in a dazed, stupefied manner.

He was hastily bound and placed on the front seat beside the officer, who had volunteered to drive.

By this time people were in sight coming across the plain from the distant village, but instead of turning back in that direction the officer drove straight ahead, and the wagon rolled smoothly over the grassy road, surrounded on all four sides by the stern-visaged Cossacks.

Another hour later another village started up from the horizon, with its same monotonous Greek crosses, and presently they entered the long, straggling street, with dingy, grey houses, and halted before the posting station, a very unpretentious structure of logs. The people of the village flocked out to see the new arrivals, but the presence of the Cossacks kept them at a respectful distance.

A brisk little man with piercing black eyes arrived presently, whom Maurice rightly divined to be a doctor. He glanced carelessly at Phil's bruised forehead, and prescribed a dose of vodka, which fiery potion was at once produced and poured down the patient's reluctant throat.

He shrugged his shoulders at Grodno's arm and deftly enveloped it in splints and bandages, an operation which the convict submitted to without a murmur of pain.

When he came to Hamid, and saw the ugly wound in the breast, his countenance became more grave, and he directed the unconscious man to be carried into the station. The Cossacks dismounted and took their prisoners inside, placing them in different corners of the room, where conversation was impossible.

A big samovar was steaming on the table, and the soldiers were soon gulping down cups of hot tea and devouring cold meat, pickles, and salted cucumbers. The officer and the commander of the troops were doubtless taking their refreshment in a private apartment. Phil, hidden by a couple of burly Cossacks, was invisible to Maurice. Grodno, a few yards away, glared at him with a look of hatred. He might as well have spared himself the trouble, for Maurice paid him not the least attention. He was thinking very seriously over the events of the past two days, and beginning to realize what a foolish and reckless thing it had been to accept the chance of escape offered by these two convicts.

He and Phil would probably be held equally guilty with Grodno and Hamid, and the penalty for the crimes committed by the two ruffians would be under Russian law—death. This Maurice realized with a shudder. He was amazed with Grodno's audacity in attempting to assassinate a Russian officer on a public road and actually within sight of a village. It could only be accounted for by the dire necessity for procuring money and a change of clothes, and since the officer had baggage in the wagon with him, the undertaking seemed to offer both. Had not Maurice interfered when he did the officer and the driver would undoubtedly have been shot.

It was a clever ruse of Grodno's to shoot the horse first, and thus put the wagon and its occupants at his mercy.

There was one hope—a very slim one. If the rescued officer could only be made to understand that he owed his life to the boys, he might extend them valuable aid, but just there was the trouble, as Maurice told himself. Did the circumstances justify the boys' story?

The struggle between Hamid and Maurice was absolutely unseen, while the scuffle between Phil and Grodno might be easily misconstrued, and, as a clincher, would the officer believe that Maurice was hastening to his aid when he hurried down the road with his club? These reflections left him in a very unenviable frame of mind, which was not at all relieved by the scant supply of food which the Cossacks at last condescended to give him.

About noon he and Phil were taken to another room, where the officer and the Cossack captain were seated at a table smoking pipes. The officer, to Maurice's great satisfaction, was able to speak English fairly well, and he cross-questioned the boys very closely, demanding first of all to know what their share was in setting fire to the convict barge.

He treated them with a certain consideration, which gave Maurice courage to relate the whole story in a frank, straightforward way, which seemed to carry conviction with it. He saw that a favourable impression had been made, and, quick to seize the opportunity, he turned to the officer and said, imploringly:—"I beg of you, sir, the privilege of saying a few words more. You addressed us as Cummings and Burton. I assure you that those are not our names; that an awful mistake has been made, a fearful crime committed—" "Stop!" interrupted the officer, sternly. "Not a word on that subject, or I shall change my intentions regarding you. I have heard of your audacity in accusing a prominent and influential Russian of a most absurd charge. For your own good I advise you to cease. You surely must be aware of the convincing proofs arraigned against you." His face was so grave and his tone so severe that Maurice lost all hope of obtaining a hearing and made no further attempt to speak.

"As for your complicity with these two assassins," continued the officer, ja

and for the service you have done me I shall afford you what aid I can, though I assure you that you are in a most serious position. Your two companions will undoubtedly be shot, and the chances are that you will meet the same fate. I am Lieutenant Brosky, and I happen fortunately to be connected with the Government at Tomsk, whither I am now bound. I will therefore be present at your trial and will state what facts I possess in your favour."

CHAPTER VIII. CONDEMNED.

Lieutenant Brosky turned away, as a sign that the interview was ended, and was about to rap on the table for the guards who were outside in the hall when Maurice asked, respectfully: "Will you be kind enough to tell us



"No, Phil, don't give up."

to what part of Siberia we have been sentenced? No one will give us any information."

The lieutenant spoke a few words to the captain, and then, turning to Maurice, replied:—"I can tell you nothing now. I promise you that you shall know what your original sentence was when you arrive at Tomsk." He signalled to the guards, and the boys were led away to the larger apartment downstairs.

Grodno was still sitting in moody silence in his corner, and the Cossacks were filling their pockets with food and their canteens with tea.

Outside the sturdy ponies were stamping, restlessly, and through the window Maurice saw the wagon standing at the station door. Another horse had been found to match the one shot by Grodno, and the

A bugle blast assembled the Cossacks in haste, and the boys were rebound and placed in the wagon. Grodno was fastened securely on the back of one of the horses, and given in charge of two Cossacks. At the last minute Lieutenant Brosky appeared, and took the front seat. When just on the point of starting an incident occurred which for the moment diverted the boys from their troubles.

Amid the throng of curious villagers standing a little distance from the wagon the keen eyes of Lieutenant Brosky detected the cowardly driver who had run away from him that morning and was lurking in the background hoping to escape detection.

The angry officer seized his whip and sprang from the little wagon with a single bound into the wagon, and, with a merry blast of the bugles, the convoy went across the steppe on its way to Tomsk. Hamid was not with the party. His condition was probably too serious to permit removal, but Maurice noticed that two of the Cossacks remained behind, doubtless to await the Turk's recovery.

At the time the convict barge had been set on fire it was more than 100 miles from the city of Tomsk, and as the fugitives had covered but little ground in their flight the journey was of short duration.

The Cossack ponies and the horses who drew the wagon were animals of superior strength and endurance, as are all Siberian horses, and after two brief delays at wayside posting stations Tomsk was reached late the following evening. They crossed the dark river and drove into the wide and populous streets of the town. On all sides the boys were surprised to see large and imposing buildings and churches of various denominations. As the hour was late, but few people were on the streets, and these barely glanced at the little cavalcade as it wound rapidly through the town.

The challenge of the sentries rang sharply on the air as they halted before a huge military-looking stockade, pierced by a large gate and flanked at its corners by guardhouses.

They passed through the gateway into the courtyard, and the huge forwarding prison of Tomsk was before them, not a single large building, as might have been expected, but a dozen or more one-storey log houses grouped about the enclosure without any attempt at regularity. A large number of soldiers were pacing to and fro with loaded rifles on their shoulders, and owing to the millions of the night hundreds of convicts were sleeping on the ground. When the new arrivals entered, many of them sat up with a harsh clanking of chains. The officer of the prison quickly came forward, accompanied by Captain Stanisla himself, and the prisoners were once more placed in his custody.

Lieutenant Brosky drove away immediately without ever glancing toward the boys, the Cossacks trotted out of the enclosure, and the recaptured fugitives were marched off to an isolated log building with heavy doors and barred windows.

The boys were not slow to realize the serious change in their situation. The guards roughly fastened chains to their legs and thrust them into a

completely nothing but a dirty straw bed in one corner. The door was closed and locked, and they were alone in darkness.

"What do you suppose they will do with us?" asked Phil, in despairing tones. "Not that it matters much, for I don't seem to care any more what becomes of me. I have lost all hope."

"No, Phil, don't give up," said Maurice, firmly. "The outlook is very hard, but all hope is not gone. We can't tell what may turn up yet in our favour. Have courage, Phil; have courage. Lieutenant Brosky may get us free of this present scrape, and when we learn just where they are going to take us—and you know the lieutenant promised to tell us—then we can see better what our chances are."

Phil, however, refused to be comforted, and paced the front of the narrow apartment until compelled to lie down from sheer weariness. Maurice was far from feeling the confident manner which he had assumed. He was deeply impressed with the gravity of their present scrape, and even should they avoid punishment for that through Lieutenant Brosky's influence he realized that Siberian exile offered no hope of escape, Vladimir Saradoff would take every precaution on that score.

At the thought of his treacherous uncle Maurice ground his teeth and clenched his fists.

Presently he became more composed and sat down on the bed beside Phil. If any aid could reach them, it must come from one source—home. His guardian and Phil's friends would make a determined effort to find the boys. But here again Vladimir Saradoff would no doubt be ready with some cunning tale to explain their disappearance.

Little did Maurice dream of the startling truth as he sat on the wretched couch thinking of the home and the friends that he would probably never see again.

He fell asleep at last, and when he woke the guards were tramping heavily past the prison, and from an adjoining cell came furious cries and savage cursing, doubtless the wretched Grodno in a feverish delirium caused by his wound.

His ravings continued until daylight, completely putting an end to the boys' sleep.

They were provided with a scanty, unpalatable breakfast, and then he alone until after midnight, when a file of soldiers, led by a young officer, entered the cell. They were taken outside, where they found Grodno supported by two guards, his ugly face flushed with fever. He glared at the boys with malignity, and even made an effort to spring at Maurice, but was held back by the soldiers. They marched across the courtyard between two rows of convicts who surveyed them curiously, and, as a close observer would have discovered, pitying.

(To be Continued.)

The eruption of Mount Vesuvius, which began last week is increasing to activity. Columns of smoke and tongues of flame are belching from the central crater, while showers of under are falling around.



When a woman gets sickly, nervous, fretful and despondent the average husband doesn't have the faintest conception of what is the matter. When she gets worse, and he finally realizes that ill-health of some description has something to do with it, he calls in some obscure neighborhood doctor. The chances are that the doctor says it's stomach, or liver, or heart trouble.

Nine times in ten he isn't within a mile of right. He treats for these troubles and charges big bills until the husband gets disgusted and throws him out. The trouble is usually weakness or disease of the distinctly feminine organism.

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