



(Continued.)

something round and black, with a shimmering fuse, fell at Maurice's feet. "Back! Back!" he cried, frantically, clutching Phil by the shoulder, and as they turned to flee a terrific explosion shook the ground and a red flash briefly lit up the scene of carnage.

CHAPTER X.
STORMING THE WRONG CITADEL.

The explosion of the bomb—for such it undoubtedly was—threw Maurice with stunning force to the ground, and when he staggered to his feet, dizzy and blinded, he believed at first that he was badly injured.

When the smoke and dust cleared partially, he forgot his own pain in the misery around him. Two or three of the convicts lay on the ground groaning piteously. The bomb had done dreadful execution, and not among those for whom it was intended, for the guards had escaped the flying fragments of iron and glass.

Phil lay among the injured, his face and hair stained with blood. Maurice bent over him in alarm.

"Phil, Phil," he cried, "speak to me. Are you hurt?" Then, as no answer came, he seized the wounded boy in his arms and staggered backward with his burden.

The excitement had now reached the highest pitch. The mob, inflamed still more by the unintentional injury done the exiles, pressed forward against the few remaining soldiers. The whole square was jammed with the furious combatants. The Cossacks fought well, using bayonet and sabre with deadly effect, but against such desperate numbers their bravery was of no avail, and many of them fell under the volley of cobblestones, clubs, bricks and what other missiles the rioters could lay their hands on.

The rapid approach of darkness made the scene still more dreadful, and as the prisoners realized their situation and saw the discomfiture of their guards many of them broke from the lines and vanished in the crowd.

The intense excitement gave to Maurice almost superhuman strength, and Phil's unconscious body seemed an easy burden as he bore it tenderly into the centre of the lines, where the chance of safety from the flying missiles was best. There he paused irresolutely for a moment. The sullen roar of the mob rang in his ears, an occasional red flash lit up the gloom, and the terror-stricken wretches around him were beginning to flee in all directions.

No attempt was made to check them. The few remaining soldiers were busily engaged in fighting for their lives. As Maurice still hesitated whether to remain where he was or to trust to the tender mercies of the mob the situation changed with appalling suddenness. A terrific report echoed over the square—a report that was instantly succeeded by cries of fright and pain—and the riotous mob, quick to recognize the crash of artillery, fell into a hopeless panic and fled in confusion.

Toward the four approaches of the square they surged, shouting, trampling each other underfoot, and still the vengeful cannon sent its iron messengers tearing among them.

Retaining his presence of mind and clinging to Phil with all his might, Maurice was swept into the thick of the struggle. Jostled, squeezed and bruised, he was carried, without any effort of his own, foot by foot, across the square. Twice he stumbled and gave himself up for lost, but the press lifted him to his feet again, and he held on to his burden with renewed hope.

Above the roar of the people he heard the whistle of rifle balls, for it was evident that re-enforcements had arrived, and were firing recklessly into the mob. The troops seemed bent on slaughtering as many of the rioters as possible, for the shooting became louder and more frequent, and men began to drop in all directions.

Twice Maurice shuddered when he felt something soft underfoot. With every nerve strained to its utmost he held his own against the pressure, expecting every moment to be riddled with bullets.

Suddenly his foot tripped on something hard, and, taking a step upward, he felt the smooth pavement under him. At the same instant there was a stinging pain in his left arm, and his grasp on Phil relaxed. He knew he could go no farther with his burden, and yet to remain where he was meant certain death.

To his right a gloomy building loomed indistinctly out of the darkness. If he could only cross the sidewalk and reach that, he might find a place of refuge till the danger was past.

Summoning all his strength and still grasping Phil with his wounded arm, in spite of the pain, he began to force his way at right angles through the mob.

It was almost a hopeless task, but he stuck to it, bravely pushing the people right and left with desperate strength. The air was clouded with powder smoke, and the guns still pounded unceasingly.

Maurice nodded gratefully, and immediately stretched himself at full length on the topmost step. A glance upward showed him a high stone building. The windows were tightly closed with iron shutters, and the door was of heavy wood with brass trimmings.

Then he turned his attention to the street, and at once forgot Phil, Platoff, and his wounded arm in the scene beneath him.

The house where he had taken refuge was at the entrance of one of the exits from the square. By good fortune the majority of the rioters had turned in this direction. It had so happened that the troops approached the square from all three of the other entrances, leaving this one alone unguarded, and now the narrow passageway was fast choking up with the fleeing fugitives, while a horde of cavalry rode at their heels, sabring the wretched creatures as fast as they could use their weapons. The roar of artillery and the crack of rifles had almost ceased, but the shrieks of the wounded and the frightened cries of the others made an indescribable tumult.

With a sad heart Maurice watched the mass withdrawing, foot by foot, through the narrow street, while the tramp of hoofs and the glare of torches came closer and closer.

Platoff's commanding voice recalled him to his senses.

"Come," he said, touching Maurice on the shoulder. "You are a brave lad. I watched your heroic struggle through the crowd. Let us try to escape. If we can gain access to this house till the square be cleared, I have friends who will care for us. I am wounded, or I would seek safety there."

And he pointed down at the struggling crowd. Most of this speech Maurice understood, for he had by this time acquired a fair knowledge of the language. He sat up gladly and turned to Platoff for instructions. The Russian, however, was bending over Phil and wiping the blood from the boy's pallid face. "Your friend is not dead," he said. "A fragment of bomb has grazed his head. He will be all right shortly."

Reaching within his blouse, he drew out a tiny flask and put it to Phil's lips. The effect was wonderful. The wounded lad opened his eyes and made an effort to sit up. Platoff propped him against the side of the doorway and then turned to Maurice. "Look," he said, "the Cossacks are coming nearer. Their torches will soon light up our hiding place. If we would escape, there is not a moment to lose." Half rising on his uninjured leg, he rattled fiercely at the door and hammered the heavy panel with his fists.

"The cowards," he cried, angrily, "as no response came from within. 'They are afraid to open it. But we will conquer where persuasion fails.'"

He dragged himself to the edge of the steps. The wooden canopy over the door was supported by heavy pillars, and seizing one of these Platoff, with a desperate effort, wrenched it loose. Handing it to Maurice, he tore a second one from its socket for his own use, and turning to the door he dealt it a sturdy stroke with the heavy weapon.

"Strike, lad, strike!" he shouted to Maurice. "Do your best!" And under the double rain of blows the door began to creak and tremble. Carried away by the possibilities of escape which Platoff offered, Maurice once more forgot all prudence, and with nerves wrought to the highest tension he banged away at the resisting barrier with furious energy. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw the square all ablaze with torches and alive with mounted Cossacks and swarms of infantry.

The insurrection had been quickly quelled, and the rest of the mob was

fast struggling out through the narrow street, leaving countless dead behind them. "Harder, harder!" commanded Platoff. "A few more strokes will do it, and then safety." As he spoke a squad of Cossacks clattered down the street, striking right and left at the remnant of the fugitives, and along the sidewalk advanced a turbulent swarm of troops, seeking here and there for some object on which to vent their passion. A torch gleam flashed under the canopy, revealing the fugitives, and the maddened soldiers made a rush for the steps, firing recklessly into the air as they ran. In desperation Platoff and Maurice redoubled their efforts. Crash, crash, rang the heavy pillars, and crack, crack, went the door on its hinges. The bullets pinged sharply round the daring refugees, and just as the foremost of the soldiers swept up the steps, with gleaming bayonets, the lock gave way before the fusillade and the door swung inward.

"Inside for your life!" shouted Platoff, and seizing Phil in his powerful arms he fairly threw him into the dark hallway and pushed Maurice after him. Springing back to the edge of the steps, he snatched the two heavy pillars, and swinging them around his head, moved down the advancing soldiers like ripened wheat.

With a spring he regained the hallway, and slammed the door shut in the very face of a furious storm of bullets.

"I have your companion," he shouted to Maurice. "Follow me quick. They will be here in an instant." He led the way in the darkness, and Maurice followed closely along what seemed to be a vast corridor. Outside were heard furious cries and rifle shots and a clatter of feet. Then the door burst open, revealing a blaze of torches and a multitude of fierce faces.

"Down flat!" shouted Platoff. "They will fire over our heads."

As they dropped to the floor, trembling in expectation of a volley of bullets, a door at the farther end of the corridor opened, and a file of soldiers appeared, led by a young officer with drawn sword. A lamp was burning in the room behind them. For a moment a dire catastrophe impended.

The command to fire was on the officer's lips, and the soldiers at the outer door already held their hands on the triggers. Caught between two fires, the fugitives devoutly hugged the floor, wishing themselves anywhere but in



"If we would escape, there is not a moment to lose."

their present predicament. The thrilling pause was broken by a Cossack officer, who forced his way up the steps and into the hall.

"Don't shoot!" he cried to the men. "What are you doing here? What does this mean, attacking his Majesty's storehouse?"

Before a reply could be made the officer at the farther end of the hall cried, "In the name of the Czar, lay down your arms and surrender, or I fire!"

"Hold on! Don't shoot!" exclaimed the Cossack. "What is the meaning of this, you ruffians?" And he turned angrily to the men.

"It is not we who have broken in here," half a dozen burst out. "It is some of the rioters. They have killed our men, and we demand vengeance." The young officer, who had been under the impression that the men at the door were part of the mob attacking the building, now advanced down the corridor with his file of soldiers, and seeing that the game was up, Platoff rose to his feet, crying loudly: "Don't shoot, don't shoot! We are exiles; we do not belong to the mob!"

The soldiers at the door commenced to clamour for their lives, but the Cossack officer drove them back from the entrance, and the other troops advanced down the corridor and seized Platoff and his companions.

CHAPTER XI.
THE MINES OF KARA.

They were hurried through the corridor into a rear apartment, and the door was quickly closed. The danger was past, however, and the Cossack officer, after driving his men from the house, returned to claim his prisoners.

"Yes," he said, "these are my men. This is Platoff, the fellow who caused all the disturbance. And he glared threateningly at the Russian, who was sitting on the floor nursing his wounded leg.

Then, turning to the officer in command of the building, he added:—"I shall have to leave these fellows in your charge overnight. I fear many of the convicts have escaped, and we must lose no time in retaking them. We have taught your Irkutsk mob a lesson they won't forget, and we are by no means done with them yet." And swearing violently, he hurried away.

"Where are we?" asked Platoff of the officer who had arrested them. "What house is this?"

"You have assaulted and broken into the Czar's storehouse of exile supplies," was the stern reply, "and I am the officer in command of it."

This announcement was a great surprise to Platoff. The fact that he had stormed single handed a building held by the soldiers seemed to impress him from a ludicrous standpoint, for he turned toward the boys with a comical expression on his face.

Maurice was trembling in rear of the consequences of this rash act, and Phil was leaning against the wall, very pale and dazed.

A surgeon presently arrived, who dressed the bullet wound in Platoff's leg, and then the prisoners were led away and placed in separate cells, large, dreary apartments half filled with huge wooden chests.

Maurice spent a wretched night. He tossed from side to side trying in vain to sleep, and listening to the monotonous tread of the sentry. At daybreak a file of mounted Cossacks came after the prisoners. Platoff, on account of his wounded leg, was mounted on horseback, and the boys, heavily ironed, were placed between two columns of soldiers.

As they passed through the square Maurice could with difficulty believe that it was the scene of last night's struggle.

The place was almost deserted. A few people stood on the street corners, and the shutters of the sombre gray houses were tightly closed, probably to hide the broken windows.

The forwarding prison was soon reached. It was a large, dilapidated building on the outskirts of the city. The boys were separated from Platoff as soon as they entered the courtyard and taken away to a large cell, where they were locked up together. Here they spent nearly two weeks of trying suspense, expecting any moment to be led out and shot for their participation in the riot.

The guards visited them daily, but it was impossible to obtain any information from them, and Maurice's entreaties to the commanding officer of the prison were unheeded. Then one cold, raw morning they were hurried through the courtyard in the early dawn. Outside in the dreary street an exile party was forming, and before it was fully light the long procession was winding over the frozen ground toward the distant mines of Kara. That last stage of the journey was more dreadful than anything that had preceded it. Winter set in with Arctic severity, and the wretched exiles toiled through snow and ice, shivering in their scanty garments, weak for want of nourishing food, and sleeping at night in road stations where every form of disease brooded in the vitiated air.

Many died, and some were left in wayside hospitals, but Maurice and Phil fortunately escaped serious illness, though they grew more emaciated day by day.

(To be Continued.)



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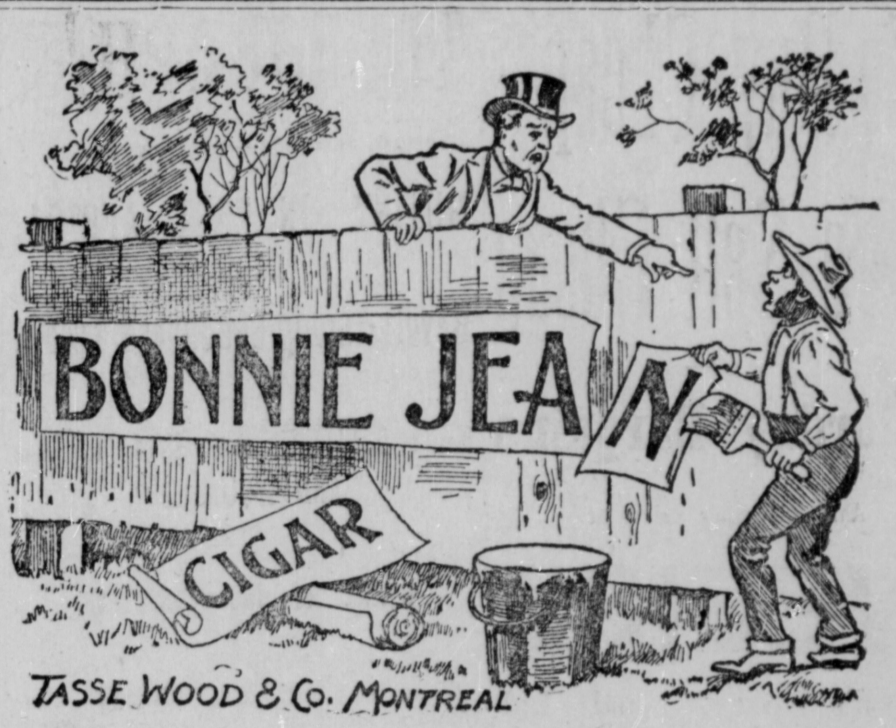
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