

# EXILED TO SIBERIA.

BY W. MURRAY GRAYDON.

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## CHAPTER II. ACROSS THE FRONTIER.

(Continued.)

On a certain March morning of the year following the events related in the preceding chapter, two young Americans left the office of the Russian Consul General at Berlin, and an hour later were speeding as fast as steam could carry them toward the distant frontier of the Russian empire.

Maurice Hammond and Philip Danvers were the names registered on their passports, and while they are hastening toward St. Petersburg, enthusiastic and delighted at the prospect of soon seeing this frozen capital of the north, we will take the opportunity of briefly acquainting the reader with the circumstances necessary to the understanding of the strange and startling drama upon which the curtain is even now rising.

Twenty years before, Frederick Hammond, a young American, an attaché of the United States Legation at St. Petersburg, met and fell in love with Anna Saradoff, a young Russian girl of wealth and position.

Such marriages are uncommon, but when Frederick Hammond returned to New York he took with him a Russian bride.

Anna Saradoff's only relative was her brother, Vladimir, who, having other views for his sister, conceived a most intense hatred of this scheming American, as he chose to call him.

He never forgave his sister and professed from that time to regard her as one dead.

Mrs Hammond in turn, well content with her husband's love, cut off all connection with her native land. Her Russian property was converted into American securities, and without a shadow of regret for the brilliance and magnificence she had voluntarily abandoned she entered upon the quiet occupations of her new life.

Five years later she died, leaving the one child, Maurice, at that time four years of age.

Six years later Frederick Hammond followed his wife, but in the meantime embittered by her loss, he taught his son to detest his Russian uncle, whose cruel treatment had probably hastened his sister's death.

Frederick Hammond had few intimate friends. To one of these, Colonel Hercules Hoffman, he entrusted the care of his son and his son's fortune.

Colonel Hoffman was at that time a man of honesty and integrity, honest because as yet he had not been tempted. That temptation came in the form of the malachite box of jewels, and how Colonel Hoffman resisted a base temptation we have already seen. Maurice Hammond can be described in a few words.

He had inherited the ardent temperament of his mother, his father's intellect and good looks.

At 19 he was tall, athletic, blond-haired, and ruddy cheeked. His life had been passed at preparatory schools and colleges, while in the vacations he usually travelled, for Colonel Hoffman was unmarried, and, moreover, a coelitus, fostered probably by instinct, existed between guardian and ward.

When Colonel Hoffman returned from that trip abroad, Maurice was travelling in the West with his intimate friend and college chum, Philip Danvers.

For several months Colonel Hoffman was the most wretched man in New York.

That diplomatic interview at the Hotel Bristol, which has been described word for word, possessed a sinister meaning that he could not fail to interpret.

He never dared admit to himself that his suspicions were correct, but contently before his mental vision hung that clause in the forgiving Anna Hammond's will. "In case my son Maurice die unmarried, the estate shall revert to my brother, Vladimir Saradoff, of St. Petersburg."

The first sin oft-times paves a smooth pathway for the second.

What was the welfare of his ward compared to his own interests, his fortune, his position, his reputation?

In January Maurice Hammond came east with his friend and himself proposed a six months' continental tour.

The two boys having finished college, what was more natural than that they should wish to see the world?

Colonel Hoffman gladly acquiesced. With infinite finesse he pictured Uncle Vladimir as sorrowful, repentant, anxious to see his nephew for his sister's sake.

He called to St. Petersburg.

Three weeks later a letter came to Maurice Hammond, a warm invitation to visit the Russian capital before the approach of summer made it unpleasant.

The tempting prospects that the letter held out proved irresistible.

The two boys sailed from New York late in February and, contenting themselves with a brief stay in London and Paris, travelled by easy stages across the continent.

Vladimir Saradoff, at the time this story opens, had reached the age of 49 years.

The last member of an old and renowned Russian family, his brilliant gifts, his political influence, and above all, the favour of the czar, gave him a prestige at court, and in St. Petersburg society that was surpassed by no one.

His education, acquired partly at home, partly in German universities, was lacking in nothing, and he possessed a fluent knowledge of English language and customs, the result of a diplomatic term of service at the Russian Legation at London. In disposition he was crafty and revengeful.

His sister's marriage had been a severe shock to his pride.

He was absent in the Caucasus at the time it occurred. When he re-

turned, she had already left Russia, and the vengeance which he meditated on the darling American was beyond his reach. The events of the past 20 years—the death of his sister and her husband and the fortune left to their child—had only added fuel to the flame of his wrath.

To-day he hated Maurice Hammond as implacably as he had hated Frederick Hammond 20 years before.

Let us add one more fact.

Vladimir Saradoff had been all his life addicted to that especially Russian vice, gaming.

He was supposed to be wealthy.

He owned a palace on the Nevskoi Prospekt, a country seat in the north.

His expenses were enormous, but his income was reported to be fabulous. The truth was not even suspected. Slowly, but surely, Vladimir Saradoff's wealth had been slipping away over the gaming tables. A crisis was at hand. He realized that he must acquire a large sum of money or lose

all that he held most dear—his prestige at court, his position in society and his ancestral heritage. He concentrated his thoughts on two objects, the attainment of a long deferred vengeance and the acquisition of the badly needed wealth.

At the vast frontier station of Wirballen, which they reached at midnight, cold and hungry, the boys outlined their first view of Russian life. Passports and baggage were overhauled, and then they were turned into the dreary waiting-room with many other passengers.

There was little time for scrutiny or observation.

The Russian train rattled into the station and almost before they knew it their passports, properly stamped, had been pressed into their hands, and the train was rattling noisily on into the night.

They were speeding over Russian soil now. Before them stretched the dominions of the Czar, an empire that reached thousands and thousands of miles across Siberian wastes and deserts to the faraway Pacific coast.

Hour after hour the train rushed through the gloomy snow-clad country, stopping at intervals at huge barnlike stations, and at last, late on the following evening, they knew that the end of the journey was near.

"I wonder what sort of a reception this aristocratic uncle of yours will give me, Maurice?" said Phil Danvers as he pulled a cap over his curly black hair and unfolded his big fur-trimmed coat preparatory to putting it on. "Don't you think it was a rather cheeky performance to invite a guest on your own responsibility?"

"Don't talk nonsense, Phil," replied his companion. "He will be only too glad to receive a friend of mine. He had plenty of notice. I wrote to him from London, and then you know we telegraphed him from Berlin yesterday morning."

"Petersburg!" shouts the smartly uniformed conductor, and in an instant all is bustle and commotion as the train rolls into the vast station.

Maurice draws a long breath as he hurries from the car.

This is his mother's native city—the lovely, delicate woman whom he remembered so faintly.

A tall man in heavy cloak and astrachan cap suddenly confronts him.

"M. Hammond?" he says, enquiringly, in plain English.

Maurice nods his head, not knowing whether to hold out his hand or not.

"The carriage waits," says the man, with a servile bow, and taking the boys' luggage he motions them to follow him through the crowd.

A huge sleigh is waiting. The boys and their strange guide occupy the spacious seat and pull the rugs closely around them.

The driver perched in front seizes the lines, and presently they are gliding through the streets of St. Petersburg.

A light fall of snow is coming down, and in the lamplight the houses, the people, and the vehicles are seen as through a yellow fog.

It seems a cheerless reception to the two young travellers.

Not a word is spoken during the half-hour's ride. The grim-visaged man with the astrachan cap sits between them.

At length the sleigh halts before a huge palatial building. Their guide leads them up a broad flight of steps, massive doors are flung open, revealing a soft light within, and they are ushered into a spacious apartment. Maurice has barely time to observe the rich furniture, the tapestries, the paintings and the rugs, when a tall, fine-looking gentleman in evening dress comes quickly forward.

"My dear nephew," he exclaims, as he takes him by the hand. "Yes, your mother's face, her very features. But how did you endure the long journey? You must be terribly fatigued."

He extends a warm welcome to Phil, and presently Maurice concludes that he was utterly mistaken in his previous estimation of Vladimir Saradoff.

They dined informally in a large apartment that was a marvel of luxury with its gilded decorations, and then Vladimir Saradoff led the way back to the library.

"My dear Maurice," he began, abruptly. "An unfortunate thing has happened. Urgent business demands my presence in Moscow. I am compelled to forego the pleasure of showing you our city in person. I shall start by an early train and will be absent two or three days. What I would suggest to you is this—Remain here to-morrow and look around St. Petersburg under Ivan's guidance. Ivan Tambor is my trusted servant, who met you at the train to-night. He has always accompanied me and speaks good English. Then on the following day he will escort you to Moscow, and there I shall devote myself to your pleasure. There is much to be seen at Moscow."

He seized paper and pen and began to write.

In need of rest. Pardon my thoughtlessness.

Writing for a servant, and the boys were speedily ushered to another floor, where luxurious bedrooms, not unlike apartments they had seen at home, awaited them.

Vladimir Saradoff, alone in his library, paced the floor with an ill-concealed expression of triumph on his features.

At last, seating himself at a large ebony desk, he seized paper and pen and began to write rapidly. The first letter completed, he sealed and stamped it with coloured wax, and addressed it to "Count Paul Brosky, Minister of the Interior."

He at once resumed his writing, and on finishing a second letter, half an hour later, he sealed that in the same manner, and addressed it to "Captain Susha, Commandant of the Forwarding Prison, Moscow."

He pulled a bell-cord, and Ivan Tambor speedily entered the room.

Vladimir Saradoff handed him the letters.

"Deliver this one immediately," he said, designating the letter first written. "Let the other go by the early mail. You understand everything, Ivan?"

"Yes, your excellency," replied the Russian. "Nothing shall be forgotten." And saluting his master he left the apartment.

Overhead, in the soft, luxurious beds, the two boys slept calmly, little dreaming of their host's perfidy, unconscious of the fatal import of those two letters that were even now speeding to their respective destinations.

In Russia deeds are possible that no other country on the globe would tolerate.

With his wealth, his standing at court, his influence with high officials, what could not Vladimir Saradoff accomplish if he willed?

In the dark days of Ivan the Terrible no viler deed was ever conceived than this aristocratic Russian so coolly perpetrated that night.

CHAPTER III.  
ARRESTED.

One day Maurice Hammond and Philip Danvers spent amid the grandeur and magnificence of St. Petersburg—a day so vivid in contrast to the darkness and gloom that followed that it will ever remain undimmed in their memories.

In a huge Russian sleigh, drawn by three powerful horses, they drove the length of the vast Nevskoi Prospekt—a boulevard more than 100 feet broad and three miles long. The buildings were huge, massive, and imposing; the frozen roadway was filled with sleighs of every description, from the peasant's humble box on runners to the magnificent turnouts of the nobility. The sidewalks were thronged with foot passengers, merchants, porters, civil servants, officers in long cloaks, ladies in Parisian toilets, priests in flowing black gowns and brimless hats, while over the horizon rose gilded and painted domes and countless Greek crosses.

Presently the great street merged into the Court quay, a marvellous highway of rose granite, bordered on the one side by the palaces of the nobility, on the other by the frozen waters of the Neva.

Ivan, sitting like a statue on the front seat, points out from time to time places of note—the Winter palace, where the Czar lives in regal state; the adjoining hermitage and the palaces of the grand dukes.

Now he inclines his hand across the frozen Neva.

"The fortress," he says, briefly, and with thrilling interest the boys' gaze on the bastions and towers of that noted citadel where unhappy prisoners languish in their bombproof cells.

For hours they drove through the streets, crossing and recrossing the seven canals which appear in every direction.

Turning back late in the afternoon, they entered through a massive archway to the palace square.

A burst of music reached the boys' ears, and a scene of splendour opened before them.

From the centre of the square towered the shaft of red granite, the Alexander column, and at its base the band of the Imperial Guard was playing airs from Offenbach. Mounted Cossacks were keeping back the impetuous crowd.

There has been a review," said Ivan. "The troops are returning."

He signalled to the driver, and as the sleigh drew up before the imposing facade of the admiralty the head of the line, a squad of the Imperial guard, reached the archway. Close behind at a sharp trot came the Asiatic troops—Georgians, Persians, Circassians, and Mongols, armed with lances and steel maces, clad in long coats of mail.

Then followed compact bodies of infantry, Finland chasseurs, and the giants of the Paul regiment with mas-

delighted with this arrangement.

"Meanwhile," continued their host, "you will find everything here arranged for your comfort. Ivan will see that nothing is neglected. And now I observe that you are weary and



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