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(Continued)

The traitor Daroman was missing, and Maurice searched in vain for his familiar countenance. The cause of his treachery was only too plain. The adverse circumstances which confronted the fugitives, the want of food, the encompassing soldiers, the wind-lashed waters of the harbour that made escape impossible at present, his own ignorance of swimming—all these things made him hopeless and despondent.

He feared capture, and capture in such company would only make his punishment the worse. Then the loophole of escape appeared. He would slip away, surrender himself to the first Russian officer he could find, and disclose the whereabouts of the three escaped convicts, on whose head a heavy price was set. Surely this service would offset the misdemeanour that had made him a fugitive from his own Government.

He would be pardoned, probably restored to his rank and position. So he doubtless reasoned, and so he acted. The mines of Kara yawned once more for Platoff and his comrades.

CHAPTER XXVII. AN OLD FRIEND.

That night the storm passed away and the sun rose on a perfect morning.

The blue Pacific was still beating the sandy coast with whitecapped billows, it is true, but the sky was clear and serene, and the sun shone brightly on the town and harbour of Vladivostok.

What a frightful mockery all this glorious beauty seemed to the three prisoners as they passed for a moment through the cottage yard and entered the closed carriage that had just arrived from the town. Their wan, haggard faces, from which every vestige of hope had fled, seemed to draw sympathy from even the stern and ruthless Cossacks.

The commanding officer took his seat in the carriage and gave the order to start. He had deferred the departure until now purposely, no doubt, that his triumph might be seen of men, and to add dignity to the occasion the carriage was surrounded on all four sides by troops of mounted Cossacks.

They rode briskly out of the wooded valley and turned down the sandy beach, entering the town by its main thoroughfare—a long, narrow street, lined for the most part with wooden houses of a peculiar construction. The sidewalks were filled with people, and Maurice looked with curiosity at the odd types of character—the queerly dressed Russians, the pigtailed Chinese and the dark-featured Coteans.

The triumphant procession—for so it was clearly regarded by the inhabitants—continued on past the Government offices, the Admiralty with its yellow dome and waving flag, the imposing, carved facade of the Naval club, and passing through the Chinese bazaar and the market place swept along the wharf, tantalizing the wretched prisoners with a brief glimpse of the shipping anchored in the harbour—the flags of all nations that fluttered in the morning breeze.

Then a low, gloomy building came in view, frowning with cannon, pierced with embrasures, and the carriage drew up before the fortress.

A brief sigh escaped Platoff's lips. No one spoke, for strict silence had been enjoined.

Another carriage was standing on one side of the massive entrance—an imposing vehicle glistening with new paint and gilded trimmings. A dozen soldiers of huge stature were guarding it, and one of them seemed strangely familiar to Maurice.

The prisoners got out of the carriage before the gateway which was open to receive them, and marched

slowly forward, each between two soldiers. Just at this time a commotion was heard within, and a sentry on the steps called aloud:—"The inspector is coming. Make room for his Excellency."

The officer in charge flushed with pride, and straightened himself an inch or two. "Halt!" he cried, sharply. "Right about! Forward! Halt!" And the prisoners, drawn up beside the short flight of stone steps, awaited the arrival of the inspector.

Maurice fixed his eyes on the arched doorway. He was curious to see this Government official who had travelled across Siberia inspecting the Czar's prisons and penal settlements. A moment later he appeared—a tall, richly uniformed gentleman, preceded by a young Cossack officer—and at sight of that noble face, the wavy, yellow mustache and beard and clear blue eyes, Maurice was thrilled by such a strong emotion that he staggered back, and would have fallen but for the guard's firm grasp on his arm. The dizziness passed off instantly, and he straightened up, trembling and flushed with excitement.

His Excellency halted on the top-most step for a parting word with the commandant of the fortress, who followed him to the door. Then he came quickly down between the presented arms of the sentries, and as his feet touched the bottom, Maurice, with a supreme effort, tore from his guards and flung himself before the amazed official, crying, loudly:—"Colonel Jaroslaw! Colonel Jaroslaw! Help me, help me!"

All was wild excitement in an instant, and the daring lad was dragged roughly aside, struggling fiercely with his captors.

"Help me!" he cried, with all his might. "You remember, Colonel Jaroslaw—St. Petersburg—a year ago, in the square—I saved your life—dragged you from the cannons—I had your card—all. For God's sake, help me! Let me speak a word—just a word—"

Then a burly Cossack clutched his throat, stifling his cry. Another struck him brutally on the mouth, and the officer smote him with the flat of his sword. Still struggling desperately, he

was dragged up the steps, and in a few seconds more the fortress doors would have closed behind him.

"Stop! Who is that man?" Colonel Jaroslaw's voice rose sharply above the tumult.

The officer hurried forward, cap in hand. "A convict, your Excellency," he said. "One of those who escaped from Kara two months ago. Here are the other two. I captured them last night north of the town."

The inspector briefly scanned Phil and Platoff, and turned toward Maurice, who stood white and trembling on the upper step, held by two soldiers.

"Yes, I recognize your face," he said, haughtily. "I deeply regret that we should meet again under these circumstances. Yet even the service you rendered me can hardly justify this demand."

"I ask but a brief interview," said Maurice, eagerly. "For heaven's sake don't refuse me. You will change your mind when you have heard what I have to say."

"I grant your request," said Colonel Jaroslaw. "You shall hear from me again." Then, turning toward the officer in charge of the convicts, he demanded, "Can you procure me a report of this case before evening?"

"Yes, your Excellency; it can be had from St. Petersburg by telegraph at once."

"Very well. Send it to me without delay." And, passing hurriedly through the crowd, Colonel Jaroslaw entered his carriage and drove away.

Dizzy with joy, Maurice followed his guards through the dark hall of the fortress, and was speedily locked in a whitewashed cell with a narrow grated window overhead.

He was rather glad than otherwise that he was separated from his companions. He wanted time to reflect, to collect proofs of the story he must relate to Colonel Jaroslaw, for on that interview rested his only hope, and that hope was now a strong one.

He was treated with some consideration. Food of good quality was brought to his cell, and he was given a soft bed in place of the straw pallet that lay on the floor, but he neither ate nor slept.

Morning found him still wakeful and restless. Before the day was half over the welcome summons came from the gaoler, and he was conducted to a luxuriously furnished room on the first floor of the fortress, where Colonel Jaroslaw was seated at a table glancing over some papers.

The gaoler withdrew, leaving them alone.

"Yours is a strange case," were the colonel's first words. "I am puzzled at the outset. Sit down and let me hear your story."

It was half-past 10 by a small clock on the table when Maurice began to speak. When he finished, the hands pointed to noon. He related everything without reserve, commencing with his family history and the visit to Russia, ending with the perfidy of Captain Daroman and his capture. He spoke, of course, in English, remembering that the colonel was familiar with the language.

With rapt attention Colonel Jaroslaw listened to every word, and at its conclusion he rose and shook Maurice warmly by the hand.

"My poor boy," he said, with emotion, "your story is true. You have been the victim of an infamous crime, but your sufferings are now at an end. You and your friend shall be freed, I promise you."

"Thank God!" cried Maurice. "Oh, thank God!" And, bursting into tears, he buried his face on the table. "It was a dastardly deed," resumed

for the convincing proofs I could not believe Vladimir Saradoff capable of such a crime. But the evidence is so plain that even the Minister of the Interior cannot fail to be convinced. According to the report of the case, which I have, you travelled directly from the frontier to Moscow, where you were arrested, yet I can testify to seeing you in St. Petersburg, and, what is more, I can remember seeing Ivan, Vladimir Saradoff's servant, sitting on the box of the sleigh.

"That was the scoundrel who stole your papers and substituted the nihilistic books and the false passports. This report states two more important facts which go to strengthen your case. It was Vladimir Saradoff himself who gave Count Paul Bresky, Minister of the Interior, the information that caused your arrest, and it is also recorded here that my card was found among your effects when searched. But the most damning evidence of all is yet to come. Do you know why your uncle committed this infamous crime?"

"No," said Maurice, "I do not, unless he hated me on my father's account."

"It was partly that, no doubt," resumed the colonel, "but there was a stronger motive. Let me tell you what occurred after your arrest, and you will readily understand all. Late in April, while you and your friend were on your way to Siberia under the names of Cunningham and Burton, two badly decomposed bodies were found in the Neva. On searching them at the morgue passports were found made out to Maurice Hammond and Philip Dknyevs. The papers announced that the boys had been accidentally drowned. Vladimir Saradoff procured the Government certificate of death in your case and forwarded it to America, making at the same time a claim for your mother's fortune, which, by her will, went to her brother in case of your death. That claim was allowed—your guardian making no attempt to dispute it—and Vladimir Saradoff received your fortune. His crime was plotted with marvellous cunning, and had you arrived at the fortress one half-hour later yesterday morning you would have come back to Kara never again to return. The workings of Providence are truly wonderful."

Maurice's surprise at this story may be readily imagined. His first thought was of Phil, and his friend was sent for at Colonel Jaroslaw's request, who considerably left the room and permitted the boys to remain by themselves.

An hour later they were taken back to their cells, for of course they were not yet free, but in the evening Colonel Jaroslaw returned and sent for them.

"I have received telegraphic instructions from St. Petersburg," he said. "You will return with me at once, and your case will be placed before the Minister. I regret to say that the man to whom you owe so much, Paul Platoff, the revolutionist, will also be sent back to Russia to undergo solitary confinement in the castle of Schusselberg. Nicolas Poushkin's share in your escape has been discovered. He is now under arrest and will be heavily fined, if, indeed, he suffers no worse penalty. The Cossack officer, Captain Daroman, will derive no benefit from his treachery. General Melnikoff, whose daughter he insulted, directs that he be stripped of his rank and sent into penal servitude at the Island of Sakhalien, some miles north of Vladivostok. He is now confined in the fortress."

"Poor Platoff! Can nothing be done for him?" exclaimed Maurice, bursting into tears. "He saved our lives. He is the noblest man living. Ah, if you only knew what we owe to him, Colonel Jaroslaw. Can't you do anything for him?"

"Nothing, I fear," said the colonel, sadly, for he was deeply moved by the boy's tears and pleadings. "It is impossible. Paul Platoff must go to the underground dungeons of Schusselberg. He deserves a better fate; perhaps, but there is no hope for him." "Can we see him?" begged Maurice. "Not at present," replied the colonel. "You will have plenty of opportunities in the future. He will accompany us to St. Petersburg. The gaoler, at my direction, told him what had occurred, so he knows your good fortune. And now let me advise you to obtain as much rest as possible, for in three days we start back across Siberia. Amur river is now open, and the journey which was so long and painful to you we shall accomplish in a few weeks. Of course you are still prisoners, and will be under military guard, but your treatment will be good. I shall see to that myself."

The boys went back to their cells scarcely able to realize that their troubles were nearly over. Maurice, in his deep grief over the fate of Platoff, scarcely tasted his supper.

He was unable to sleep, and tossed for hours on his bed.

Near midnight he fell into a restless doze, from which he was roused by a

"Drop the boats, quick! He's swimming out into the harbour."

CHAPTER XXVIII. SHIFTING SCENES.

Six feet beneath the level of the flat top of the fortress, on the eastern side facing the sea, extended a paved stone wall, twenty feet broad. On the outer edge of this rose a massive parapet deeply embrasured and mounted with frowning cannon that pointed their gaping muzzles day and night on the shipping in the harbour. Seven grated windows directly beneath the roof faced this paved wall, and the middle grating admitted a feeble supply of light to the cell where Paul Platoff was confined.

Five minutes before the alarm occurred that roused Maurice from his sleep, two sentries were patrolling before the row of windows, now back to back as they neared the angles of the fortress, now face to face as they approached and met before the middle window. Three lanterns, placed at irregular intervals, threw a bright light on the scene, and, shining out on the sea, mingled with the wavy reflections from the shipping.

"Have you a light, Ivan?" said one sentry to the other as they met before Platoff's window.

"Yes," was the reply. "Here is my pipe. Hurry and finish your smoke, though, for the night officer will soon be here."

They waited a moment to exchange fire, and as they moved off again neither heard a sharp crack that came from a point close at hand.

The distance between them gradually widened, and they were close to the angles of the fortress, when suddenly the grating dropped from the middle window with a tremendous crash, and they wheeled round in time to see a dark figure slip nimbly to the ground and dash toward the parapet.

Crack! crack! rang the two rifles simultaneously, as the sentries rushed forward, but the dark figure, gaining the top of the parapet unchecked and leaped wildly into the darkness. A heavy splash told that he had reached the sea, fifty feet below.

The alarm gun standing ready, primed and loaded, was touched off instantly, and as the loud boom roused the inmates of the fortress and drew an eager crowd of officers and soldiers to the spot, the figure of the escaped prisoner was seen for an instant striking boldly out into the harbour.

A score of rifles belched out flame and lead—with what effect none could tell—and a few moments later four boats, manned with armed soldiers, were gliding to and fro over the harbour. From midnight until morning they hunted Paul Platoff in vain, and when daylight came a Russian corvette watched the mouth of the harbour, while the commandant of the fortress, armed with the Czar's authority, searched every vessel in the port—German, Danish, Italian, Spanish, English, and American.

(To be Continued.)

The well known poem.

"Curfew Shall Not Ring To-night," in which a young woman by hanging to the curfew bell saves the life of her lover condemned to be executed at the ringing of the curfew, is only one of a thousand striking instances of how a woman will dare everything for love.

Women are readier to make heroic sacrifices than they are to take the commonplace, everyday precautions which insure their greatest happiness. Most women are careless about their health. They forget that physical weakness and disease will wreck the fairest chance in life and shut them out completely from happy womanhood and wifehood.

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Mrs. Ella Howell, of Derby, Perry Co., Ind., writes: "In the year of 1894 I was taken with stomach trouble—nervous dyspepsia. There was a coldness in my stomach, and a weight which seemed like a rock. Everything that I ate gave me great pain; I had a bearing down sensation; was swelled across my stomach; had a ridge around my right side, and in a short time I was bloated. I was treated by three of our best physicians but got no relief. I was so weak I could not walk across the room without assistance. Then Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery was recommended to me and I got it, and commenced the use of it. I began to improve very fast after the use of a few bottles. The physicians said my disease was leading into pulmonary consumption, and I thought I was going to die. I thank God that my cure is permanent."

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"Yes, I recognize your face," he said haughtily.

dull, booming sound that seemed to shake the walls of the cell. Then followed half a dozen sharp reports, and as he sprang to his feet in alarm a rush of footsteps passed his cell, and a hoarse voice shouted: