

# EXILED TO SIBERIA

BY W. MURRAY GRAYDON.

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(Continued.)

The sight of this innocent young maiden in such a strange place reminded him irresistibly of home, and for a moment a mist swam before his eyes, and he staggered against his companion.

"Who is that, Platoff?" he asked, in an undertone. "What can such a creature have to do with this miserable place?"

"She must belong to the free command," replied the Russian, "a daughter probably of one of the exiles, and yet she does not look it," he added, after a closer survey.

The convict fled sullenly past, and still the girl stood motionless as a statue, her dark eyes looking unutterably sympathetic at the doleful procession.

Near the end of the line came Captain Daroman, mounted on a Cossack pony. He frequently accompanied the working parties to the mines to see how much gold was being washed out, and this was one of his inspection days.

Strange to say, he was in a passably good humour this morning, and his flushed face showed that he had been indulging rather heavily in vodka.

From under his fur cap he observed the girl by the roadside, and as the pony brought him opposite he slipped out of the saddle and stepped up to her before she had time to move.

"Well, my pretty maiden, have you a kiss for me this morning?" he asked, with a smile. As the startled girl recoiled he threw his arms around her. She uttered one loud cry and struggled fiercely to free herself.

Maurice wheeled round and took in the situation at a glance. There was no help for the girl. The convicts never even turned their heads, and the soldiers marched stolidly forward.

It was no business of theirs. She was only an exile's daughter.

One brief second Maurice stood thus, his eyes flashing, his hands clenched. Then, loose from Platoff's detaining



He flung him with all his strength to the ground.

grasp, he bounded from the ranks. Two Cossacks ran forward, but he slipped easily between them, and springing at Captain Daroman he seized him by the throat, tore him by main force from the struggling maid and flung him with all his strength to the ground.

CHAPTER XIII.  
LORA MELIKOFF.

Cossacks and convicts alike were petrified at the lad's daring deed, and for a moment no one stirred.

Phil made a motion to follow his companion, but Platoff fiercely held him back. Then Captain Daroman staggered dizzily to his feet. He drew his sword and sprang with a savage cry at Maurice, who was standing calmly in front of the girl he had rescued.

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The girl's fate appeared to be sealed, but just when the weapon was within a foot of her head the captain stopped short and cried in a voice hoarse with passion: "No, no, my fine fellow; that's too merciful for you." He sheathed his weapon and turned to the soldiers.

"Bind him to that tree yonder," he shouted, "and shoot him instantly."

The Cossacks sprang forward, and Maurice was speedily tied to a large tree that stood a few yards distant near the base of the hill.

The convicts huddled affrightedly together, and the girl, who seemed unable to comprehend the meaning of the scene, edged away from the spot, looking with unutterable terror at Captain Daroman.

The commandant gave several sharp, quick orders, and a dozen Cossacks advanced from the line. They dropped their rifle butts with a ringing clatter to the frozen ground and then raised them to their shoulders.

Maurice, pale and trembling, faced the glaring muzzles.

He knew that in another moment the leaden volley would pierce his breast, and yet he faced the prospect with a calmness that surprised himself. All his past life was surging through his mind, but still he saw distinctly every detail of the scene before him—the awestruck convicts, the agitated faces of Phil and Platoff, the firing squad of Cossacks and the ferocious countenance of Captain Daroman.

"Why did they not fire?" he wondered, vaguely, and then he began to utter a silent prayer.

"Take aim!" shouted the commandant, and the twelve black muzzles centred together. Maurice closed his eyes with a shudder. A low sob burst from Phil, and Platoff ground his teeth.

"Fire!" was already trembling on Captain Daroman's lips when a startling interruption occurred.

The young girl sprang across the rifles and threw herself in front of Maurice.

"I forbid you to shoot!" she exclaimed, facing the soldiers. "Release this man, or you shall all be punished! And you," she added to Captain Daroman, "you shall pay dearly for this insult."

The commandant swore a frightful oath. "Take her away!" he shouted to his men. "Drag her to one side and finish this dog here."

Half a dozen Cossacks advanced toward the courageous girl, but she held her ground and met them with flashing eyes. In another instant they would have seized her roughly, but just then a clatter of hoofs was heard, and a young Cossack officer, mounted on a black horse, galloped up to the party.

He surveyed the scene for a moment. Then, flinging the lines to a soldier, he leaped from the saddle and approached the girl, doffing his cap respectfully as he did so.

"Miss Lora," he said, "your father, the colonel, has sent me in search of you. He feared you had strayed off and lost your way."

A revolving bombshell could not have caused greater consternation than did the quiet speech of this young officer. The soldiers lowered their rifles instantly, and the convicts began to whisper excitedly among themselves, and Captain Daroman's face assumed an expression that none who saw it can ever forget.

"You have come just in time," replied the maiden. "I have suffered insult at the hands of that man," pointing to the trembling commandant, "and this convict here, who saved me from the wretch, was about to be shot for his noble deed."

The officer turned sternly and inquiringly toward Captain Daroman, who now came unsteadily forward.

"Sudekin, who is that girl?" he asked, in a husky voice. "I thought she belonged to the free command yonder."

"She is the daughter of Colonel Melikoff, the governor of the mines," replied the officer. "She went out for a walk this morning and wandered up here from the lower diggings. I was sent in search of her. It looks as though you were in a pretty bad scrape this time, Danoman."

The commandant grew still paler. "But tell me," he whispered, "can nothing be done to smooth matters over? Why, I didn't even know that Colonel Melikoff had a daughter."

"She just came on a visit from Irkutsk," replied Sudekin, coldly. "Everything rests with her, Daroman. Don't talk to me."

The commandant hesitated a second or two, and then, in a cringing manner that must have been bitter as gall to his proud spirit, approached the girl.

"Miss Melikoff," he began, humbly, but at the first word she indignantly moved to one side.

"Before you dare speak to me," she said, angrily, "release that brave man there."

The commandant gave the necessary orders, and then, while the soldiers were unbinding Maurice, he made an abject apology, and in the most piteous tones begged that his offence might be overlooked, and kept from reaching her father.

It was a strange scene, the savage Captain Daroman suing for mercy in the presence of his own soldiers, and of the convicts who had felt so often his iron rule.

The girl listened calmly to his appeal, and when he had finished she walked proudly away like an offended princess, not deigning to give him so much as a glance.

"Take me home, Lieutenant Sudekin," she said. "I have heard quite enough."

The lieutenant pointed across the

condition of troops around the prison was correspondingly small. It was soon evident that the new commandant had no intention of dealing more leniently with the convicts than his predecessor. All that day the boys toiled hard under the watchful eyes of the overseers, and not the slightest conversation was allowed.

Two or three days passed thus, and still Maurice heard nothing from Colonel Melikoff, nor was the fugitive commandant recaptured.

"He's sure to be caught sooner or later," said Platoff. "It's only a question of time."

On the fifth day, however, many of the absent troops returned, and it began to look as though Captain Daroman had made good his escape, for the time at least.

"They have forgotten me," said Maurice one night, as he sat on his hard bed, thinking of the pretty, dark-eyed girl, who had passed like a vision across the wretched monotony of his life. "She believes me to be some low criminal, no doubt," he added, bitterly, to himself.

"No," said Platoff, glancing up from the cup of tea he was drinking. "Be assured Colonel Melikoff has not forgotten you. He never overlooks a crime against his rules and discipline of the prison, as you will know before long."

A week passed by—a week of heart-sickening toil and misery—and then Platoff's prediction came true, though not just in the way he had anticipated.

CHAPTER XIV.  
A STOLEN INTERVIEW.

It was bitterly cold, and the snow was falling thickly, but weather counts for nothing at the mines of Kara, and the convicts, shivering in their thin garments, worked with feverish energy, hoping to put some warmth into their aching limbs and bodies.

Phil and Platoff were driving their picks into the hard stratum of clay and gravel, and Maurice, in company with half a dozen others, was wheeling the stiffened clods to a distance. Close by stood the watchful overseers, stamping their feet continually and

clapping their arms together, while in the background, out of the snowy mist, loomed the soldiers, pacing to and fro in their heavy coats or grouped about the feeble fires, where the tea was warming for the noonday lunch.

With increasing regularity the long string of wheelbarrows continued to load and unload, and when midday came the weary toilers with the picks had uncovered a large surface of smooth and yellow sand.

The pathetic story of Romeo and Juliet is repeated every day in modern life, with the exception that Juliet does not die by poison. She dies because of her own neglect or ignorance. Neglectfulness causes much of woman's peculiar sickness. Neglect of the minor troubles causes serious complications. The irregularities, the burning, dragging ache, the debilitating drains that mark the progress of feminine diseases, are passed lightly over or borne in ignorance of their cause. Their continuance means death or insanity. This is all unnecessary. So-called female weakness can be cured. It can be cured quickly and permanently, and right in the privacy of the home without the humiliating local treatment so universally insisted upon by physicians. Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription does this and more. It acts directly on the delicate organs concerned and makes them strong and healthy. It banishes the usual discomforts of the expectant period and makes baby's coming easy and almost painless. It tones and strengthens the nerves. At all medicine stores.

W. R. Malcolm, Esq., of Knobel, Clay Co., Ark., writes: "My wife for perhaps four months previous to the birth of our child took the Favorite Prescription. This strengthened her entire system and child-birth to her was very easy, being attended with little pain. Our baby Ruth is thirteen months old and has never been sick a day, not so much as had the colic; she is hearty and stout, and pretty as a picture—pretty because she is healthy, and we very much blame Dr. Pierce's family medicine for it."

We keep Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery, the Favorite Prescription and Pleasant Pellets in our home and use them. We have been married almost three years and I have called a physician into my family but one time—at birth of our baby."

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When told that the commandant had not accompanied the convicts to the mines, he appeared much concerned, and presently the whole party rode away at full speed.

Frustrated from at sunset, three different squads of soldiers were encountered, and on reaching the settlement suppressed excitement was visible on the faces of all whom they met. Within the prison much whispering was going on among the convicts, and the new arrivals were speedily acquainted with a dozen different versions of what was indeed a startling tale.

The facts of the case, as gleaned from these different stories, which had entered the prison in some unaccountable manner, appeared to be as follows:

Captain Daroman, on leaving the convict gangs that morning, had returned in haste to the prison, changed his clothes in his own apartment, armed himself heavily, and then galloped away on a fresh horse, in what direction none observed.

Shortly after his departure a troop of soldiers arrived from the lower diggings with a warrant for his arrest. It was no secret that the commandant had sought safety in flight, and now half the force in barracks was scouring the country in pursuit.

Maurice was jubilant as he sat on the bare platform, eating his frugal supper, with Phil and Platoff by his side. Their fellow-convicts had been crowding about them, eagerly discussing the momentous affair, and now at last they were comparatively by themselves.

"And how do you think this will affect me, Platoff?" asked Maurice.

"Will it lighten my sentence, or is it even possible that I shall obtain a fair hearing from the governor, and be permitted to tell him our story? I feel sure that I should convince him of the truth."

Platoff gravely shook his head.

"Don't be too hopeful, my friend," he replied. "There are complications in this affair, that you are unable to see. To me, with my knowledge and experience, they are only too plain. You have performed a brave deed, it is true, and protected from insult the daughter of Colonel Melikoff, but at the same time you have broken the severest of prison rules, and committed a flagrant crime, for which the penalty is death."

"And would not the one offset the other?" demanded Maurice, with indignation. "Would the circumstances count for nothing?"

"Colonel Melikoff is known as the most stern and rigid disciplinarian in all Siberia," answered Platoff, soberly. "I fear that he may insist on making your case an example to the other prisoners. You assaulted an officer—an unpardonable crime."

"Yes, and saved his daughter," asserted Maurice, hotly. "Can he overlook that?"

"He can overlook anything," said Platoff, grimly. "Listen! I can tell you what kind of a man Colonel Melikoff is in a few words. Do you remember in one of Victor Hugo's romances the gunner who allowed a huge cannon to tear loose from its fastenings on shipboard during a storm, and then, after a terrific combat, in which his life was jeopardized a hundred times, overturned the monster and saved his comrades?"

"Yes, I have read that," said Maurice.

"Very well," resumed Platoff. "The commander of that vessel first rewarded that man for his bravery, then shot him for his negligence. Colonel Melikoff is a second Marquis de Launay."

"But you don't think I'm in any danger of being shot?" asked Maurice, in a hoarse whisper.

"No," said Platoff; "it's not that bad. You may know all to-morrow, and then it is possible that I shall have something to say to you."

Platoff refused to explain himself any further, and presently, in spite of his troubles, Maurice was sleeping soundly.

The morning verification was presided over by Lieutenant Sudekin, who, it seemed, had been appointed temporary commandant of the mines. It was whispered among the convicts that Captain Daroman had not been caught, and this rumour was presently verified, for the working gangs started out that morning in custody of less than half the usual guard of Cossacks, and the

clapping their arms together, while in the background, out of the snowy mist, loomed the soldiers, pacing to and fro in their heavy coats or grouped about the feeble fires, where the tea was warming for the noonday lunch.

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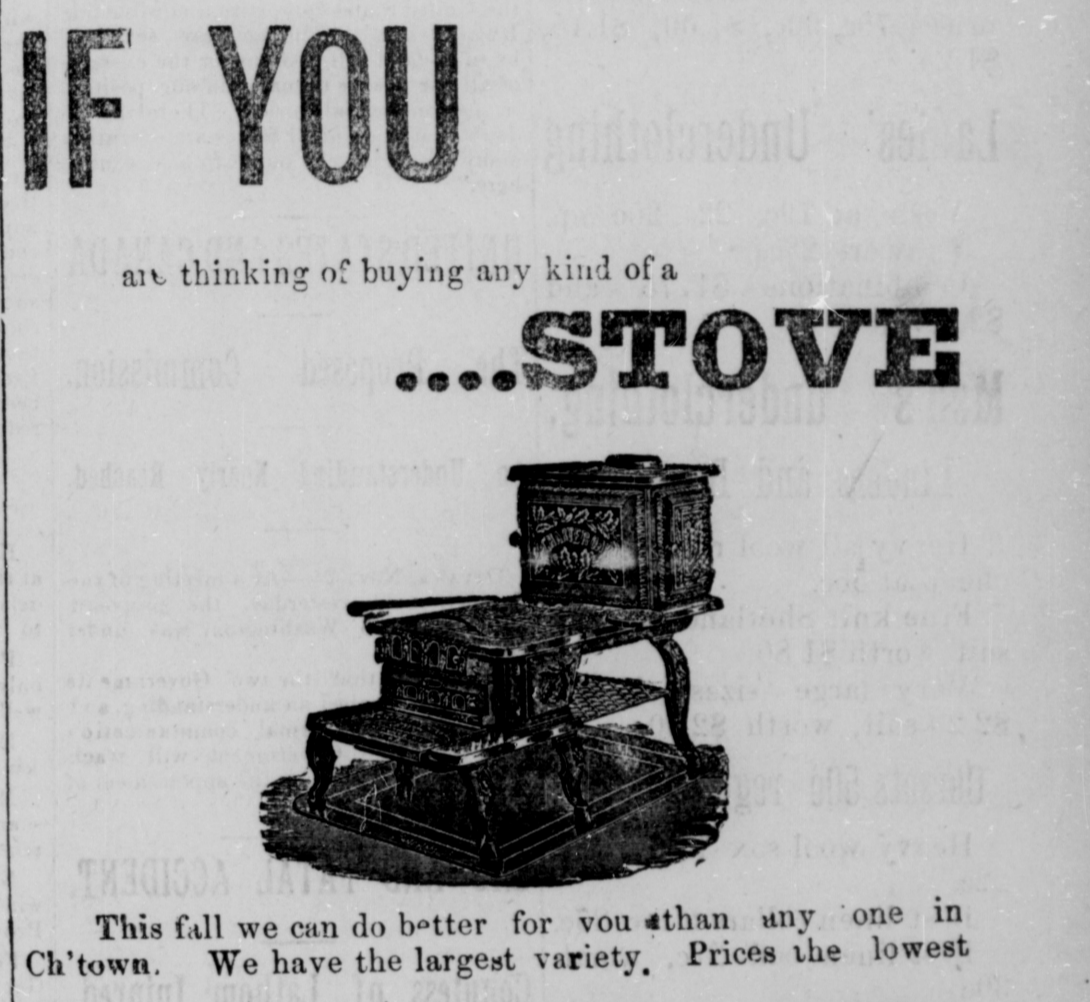
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