

EXILED TO SIBERIA

BY W. MURRAY GRAYDON.

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CHAPTER I.

A REMARKABLE INTERVIEW.

It was November in Paris. The proverbial gloominess, however, was entirely lacking in the estimation of Colonel Hercules Hoffman as he looked down from his apartment in the Hotel Bristol.

Colonel Hoffman was a New Yorker, a man of wealth, position, and prominence, and in spite of the seductive attractions of the French capital he was contemplating himself on the completion of his business that had taken him abroad and the prospects of a speedy return home.

In Paris Colonel Hoffman was an attraction; in New York he was a somebody.

He turned from the window and gazed softly across the room.

A faint smile hovered on his features as a huge mirror brought him face to face with his own reflection.

What he saw was a tall, finely-formed man, with a pleasing face, becomingly adorned with a light moustache and English side whiskers.

As the colonel turned again to the window a sharp rat-tat-tat echoed on the panels of the door, and a servant entered, with a card on a silver salver.

"A gentleman for monsieur; he waits below."

Colonel Hoffman raised the card with his thumb and forefinger and carefully read the inscription, "Vladimir Saradoff, Nevskoi Prospekt, St. Petersburg."

A dusky pallor passed swiftly over his ruddy features, and the card trembled in his fingers.

"Show the gentleman up," he said, briefly, and then muttered under his breath—"Vladimir Saradoff of all men. What ill wind brings him here to-day?"

Warned by approaching footsteps, he hastily composed his features.

A moment later the door was thrown open, and Vladimir Saradoff appeared in person.

The Russian was a typical representative of his race.

Huge of stature, yet graceful in every movement, his patrician bearing and aristocratic features awoke Colonel Hoffman's deepest admiration. His hair was coal black, and his moustache and beard were trimmed and pointed in French fashion.

A huge cloak, richly trimmed with fur, was thrown loosely over his shoulders, and he held a cap of the same material in his hand. He glanced sharply at the colonel under his gold eyeglass.

Colonel Hoffman, of New York, I believe," he said, in perfect English, and then the two gentlemen shook hands.

The Russian tossed aside his coat and esp and took the chair that his host handed him.

Colonel Hoffman seated himself opposite, and then ensued a brief, embarrassing silence.

An attentive observer would have promptly concluded that the interview about to take place would be no friendly one.

The Russian's features were stern, and his eyes were fixed on the American with an intensity of gaze that made Colonel Hoffman ill at ease.

He shuffled to and fro in his chair, glanced from one part of the room to the other, and at last in desperation drew out a cigar and, lighting it, began to smoke furiously.

A faint smile flitted across Vladimir Saradoff's features.

"Pardon my intrusion," he said, abruptly. "By mere chance I became aware of your presence in Paris and have thus spared myself the fatigue of a voyage across the Atlantic. I presume I am not mistaken. You are the guardian of my—my nephew, Maurice Hammond, the son of my dear sister?"

Colonel Hoffman inclined his head. "Yes, I am."

"Where is the boy now?" asked the Russian.

"Travelling in the Western States of America, with a college mate."

"When does he come of age?"

"In a little more than two years. He will be 19 in December."

Vladimir Saradoff leaned forward in his chair.

"By my sister's will," he said, slowly, "all her property was left to her husband, in trust for their only child Maurice. In case the boy died unmarried, the whole of the property reverted to me. Am I right?"

"Yes, precisely right."

"New," continued the Russian, in soft tones, "on the death of Frederick Hammond ten years ago you were appointed guardian of the boy. May I ask what is the extent of the property intrusted to your care?"

Behind the curling cigar smoke Colonel Hoffman paled visibly.

The Russian watched him closely.

"In rough figures," he said, with assumed carelessness, "the estate would possibly amount to \$200,000."

"Very good," replied Vladimir Saradoff. "Your memory is not bad. I have here," he continued, pulling a small notebook from his inner pocket, "a copy of the inventory which you filed as guardian. The estate consists of negotiable bonds and stocks to the amount of \$210,000, in Russian money 400,000 rubles."

"Now, M. Hoffman," he added, with a sudden change of voice, "what did you do with the malachite box of jewels?"

Had a bombshell exploded in the apartment that instant, it could not have produced a more startling effect upon Colonel Hoffman.

Trembling in every limb, he sank back in his chair.

The Russian looked on calmly.

"Sit still," he added, sharply, as the colonel made a feeble effort to rise, "and don't attempt to deny your guilt. It is useless. I am in possession of

all the facts. I knew of the existence of those jewels and of my sister's intention to leave them to her son. I procured a copy of your inventory on the death of Frederick Hammond. The jewels were not included. The rest was simple. Ten years ago you were a man of moderate circumstances. Today, enriched by those stolen jewels, you are a man of wealth and renown. Relying on the fact that the boy knew nothing of them, you hoped to escape detection."

Colonel Hoffman rose and staggered to the table.

"Spare me!" he whispered. "Spare me! I will make restitution, I will—"

"Sit down," commanded the Russian. "I know all, even where the stones were disposed of, and what became of the malachite box. They were old family jewels, and they netted you the sum of nearly 200,000 rubles. I possess all the proofs of your guilt."

Colonel Hoffman threw himself into his chair and buried his face in his hands.

"Yes," continued the Russian, in the same cutting tones, "I hold in my hands your reputation, which I am told stands high in your American city. I can consign you to a felon's cell."

He paused impressively, and then added:—"But I have concluded to take no action. Your secret is safe with me."

Colonel Hoffman rose to his feet in surprise.

"Do you mean it?" he cried. "Can it be possible?"

"Be seated," added the Russian, and the colonel obeyed.

For a moment or two Vladimir Saradoff surveyed his victim with an inscrutable expression.

When he spoke again, his voice was unnaturally harsh.

"I will spare you," he said—"on one condition. In what light does young Hammond regard me—his uncle?"

"Unfavorably, I am sorry to say," stammered the colonel, with an effort. "You must be aware—"

"Yes," interrupted the Russian: "of course he believes that I treated his mother cruelly. His father taught him that. There was a time when I would gladly have given 100,000 rubles to lay my hands on Frederick Hammond. From the day that Anna Saradoff left Russia with that vile, scheming American she ceased to a sister of mine."

With eyes flashing, he waved his hand, studded with diamonds, before the colonel's countenance. Then his anger suddenly passed off, and his face assumed a crafty expression.

"M. Hoffman," he said, abruptly, "do you know I have taken a fancy to that young nephew of mine? I did not forgive my sister, it is true, but I still think of her tenderly, and perhaps this boy resembles her. At all events, I would like to see him. I would have him visit me. Now this is what you must do:—Give him to understand



"Sit down," commanded the Russian.

that I am not the savage that he has been taught to believe me. Tell him that you have seen me, that I spoke tenderly of his mother, of his father, that I am lonely amid the grandeur of my Russian home, and that I want him, for his mother's sake, to come to St. Petersburg. Do you understand?"

Vladimir Saradoff leaned forward on his chair, and stared coolly in the face of the American.

Colonel Hoffman breathed hard and fast.

"Yes," said he, "I understand." And the double meaning of his reply was obvious to the Russian. Their eyes met, each conscious that the innermost secret of his soul stood revealed to the gaze of the other.

"Suppose I refuse?" remarked the colonel, finally.

"Do so at your peril," said the other. "I will pursue you to the very limits of the law. I will hunt you to a felon's cell."

A period of silence followed.

Colonel Hoffman rose and walked to the window. The Russian drew a cigarette case from his pocket and began to smoke, confident of his victory.

Fearful, indeed, must have been the colonel's emotions as he stood looking vacantly down on the crowded boulevard. His crime had found him out.

Two alternatives confronted him, each equally terrible at first contemplation.

On the one side was long imprisonment, with loss of fortune, position, reputation, everything.

On the other was absolute immunity from punishment, a continued enjoyment of his ill-gotten wealth without fear of detection, but to secure these benefits he must consent to be the passive actor in a crime so dread-

ful that he dared not frame it in

words, for Vladimir Saradoff's demand admitted no misconception.

Ten minutes passed in silence, and then Colonel Hoffman moved back to his chair.

Every spark of colour had fled from his face, and in its stead was only an ashen pallor.

"I am at your mercy," he groaned. "I must consent to your infamous proposition. You still refuse to allow me to make restitution?"

"Absolutely," replied Vladimir Saradoff. "You know my terms. You know also what you are expected to do. You will have no difficulty. Suggest to the lad that he take a continental tour before settling down. Let him start early in the spring and see that he comes to St. Petersburg. You have my address. Keep me posted by cablegram. I will attend to the rest."

"I intended sailing for America next week, but I saw your name in Gallinani, and thus spared myself the trouble. And now, M. Hoffman, I shall bid you 'au revoir.' It pleases me to have made your acquaintance. We shall meet again, and should you ever come to St. Petersburg you may be sure of a hearty welcome."

Smiling pleasantly, the Russian flung his coat over his arm and picked up his cap.

Slightly touching the colonel's cold, expressive hand, he bowed and in the doorway and was gone.

Ten days later the New York papers announced that Colonel Hercules Hoffman, the well-known broker and financier, had returned from a short trip abroad.

(To Be Continued.)



The raging lion that ravages the earth, seeking that which it may devour is a personage an antagonist to fight. Ill-health is a stealthier but much more dangerous enemy. It is always easier and better to avoid it than to fight it. It comes in various guises. At first it is usually as a trifling indigestion or a slight attack of biliousness. Then follow loss of appetite, or headache, or nervousness and sleeplessness, or stupor. These are the advance heralds of consumption, malaria, nervous exhaustion and prostration, and a multitude of other ills.

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Then Her Love Grew Cold.

Not long ago a servant living in Dorsetshire gave notice to leave her situation, informing her mistress that she was about to be married. As the time drew near for leaving she addressed her mistress thus: "Please, mum, have you got a girl yet?" "No, Bridget. Why do you ask?" "Because if you haven't I should like to stay." "What! I thought you were going to marry the chimney sweep!" "Oh, yes, ma'am," replied Bridget hesitatingly, "but when I saw him after his face was washed I felt I couldn't love him."—Answers

When the Ass Spoke to Him.

A doctor at one of the London hospitals was one day lecturing to a class of medical students, when he stopped and asked a question which for some time none of them answered. But one man, who had never answered a question before and was looked upon as the fool of the class, answered him correctly. The doctor was astonished and stared at the man in amazement.

"You look surprised, sir," said the student.

"So did Balaam," was the doctor's sharp reply.—Argonaut.

The Mad Mollah.

Todgers (with the evening paper)—I see the mad mollah is at it again.

Mrs. Todgers (who doesn't read the papers)—I should say she was. She broke down the fence this afternoon and chased me half way to the trolley station.

"Wh-what are you talking about?"

"Why, that mad moolay cow of Hopwood's."—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

"Jolly"ing a King.

One day, when George IV was talking about his youthful exploits before the Duke of Wellington, he boasted of having led a charge of cavalry down the Devil's Dyke, near Brighton. Upon which the Duke of Wellington merely observed to him, "Very steep, sir."—Household Words.

An Angliomanic Bird.

"Can that parrot talk English?" asked the shopper.

"He just can," said the dealer, with much enthusiasm. "He won't talk United States at all. When you ask him if Polly wants a cracker, he answers, 'Polly wants a biscuit.'"—Cincinnati Enquirer.

Vain Longing.

Ardup looked up bitterly from the book he was reading. The words "one touch of nature" had caught his eye and had started a train of thought.

"I wish it were possible," he soliloquized. "I've touched everybody else."—Chicago Tribune.

Bald as a Billiard Ball.

Tomtom—What in the world has old Baldpate gone west for?

Buzzfuzz—Why, he's gone out there in the hope of having some hair-raising adventures.—New York Journal.

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