

By Order of the Czar

A Story of Russian Power

By MARCUS EASTLAKE

CHAPTER I.

It is a patch of sunlight—a tiny patch, no larger than the palm of my hand. I dreamily follow the bar of glistening notes upward, until my eyes are arrested by the grating window of a prison.

In an instant I have sprung from my low pallet, where—God is pitiful!—I have been sleeping away the last few hours of my mortal existence. I stand here on my prison floor, in full possession of all my faculties, feeling the warm, swift blood coursing in my veins. I fall to pacing the narrow limits of my cell with rapid strides. A burning impatience of inaction is consuming me—a pressing desire to be doing something to bridge over the minutes which must elapse before the moment arrives when I shall stride to the scaffold, with dauntless mien, to meet my doom. My acute sense of hearing detects the clink of the trap in my door. A pair of eyes are looking at me out of a brown, bearded face. I smile and nod affably.

"Good morning, Vladimir Alexandrovitch. I am glad to see you in good spirits," says my official.

"And I thank you for your good wishes, my friend," I reply. "But my breakfast? I tell you, I have a fierce hunger upon me. Remember it will be the last time I shall have the pleasure of gratifying my keen appetite, until I take my first meal of nectar and ambrosia, and they might chance to keep me long waiting for it on the other side."

My official laughs. "Keep your mind easy, your breakfast comes; and look you," lowering his voice, "just because I love a brave spirit, little brother, I will deprive myself of some caviar I have in reserve for my own relish."

"Thanks, my Christian friend!" I cry, reaching my hand toward him through the trap. "May you never die hungry. One minute. Tell me, if you know—if you have seen him—the lad—keeps he a good heart?"

My voice shakes in my eagerness, whilst I rifle my pockets for my last five-rouble note. "Take it, it is all I have, or I would give you more. How bears he himself? He is but nineteen!"

"I saw him even now," replies the man, as he seizes the note. "He does badly. He eats not, and his strength has left him. He lies on his bed and moves not."

At these words the sweat starts to my brow, and the water to my eyes.

"Friend, good friend," I whisper hoarsely, "see him again! Tell him that Vladimir Alexandrovitch bids him be brave! Tell him to eat—he must eat ere he go forth!"

"Listen, I will take your message, just because you are a brave one, and I like you."

"I embrace thee, my brother!" I murmur fervently; and he hurries away.

I am alone again, and continue my walk; but now my mind is troubled with a vision of the fair-faced boy stretched on his pallet, and anon I seem to see his writhing body on the gallows. I shudder and smother a groan that rises to my lips, and turn to seek comfort in the reflection that it will soon be over for him. "He is sure to faint. God grant it!"

Approaching steps in the corridor. My door is unlocked, thrown open, and here is my breakfast and the caviar. When the official enters I wear a smiling face again, for I have a character to sustain. No man should have it to say that he saw a cloud on the brow of Vladimir Alexandrovitch Lubanoff on the morning of his execution. The official is watching me curiously.

"How long now before the play begins, my friend?" I ask between the bites.

It gratifies me to note how he flushes red, and stares at me a space, as if taken aback, before he stammers, "Twenty minutes, Excellency."

I laugh. The notion of an official thrusting a title on a prisoner amuses me. After another prolonged stare he leaves me.

Twenty minutes! Half an hour hence I shall be a lump of cold, senseless clay. And that mysterious actuating essence we call soul, what of it? What will become of it, forced from the tenement wherein it has, for twenty-seven years, ruled supreme? Will it, too, be extinguished like a torch that is stamped out under the foot of man? Away vain speculations. Let me rather, in these my last moments, sum up the good that has been mine. I have tasted as much happiness as this world can offer, and I leave it ere it begins to pall. I have known the rare blessing of true friendship.

"My spirit flies out to meet thee, O my friend, and clasp thee in a farewell embrace!" I have—I still rejoice in the beauty and perfect excellence of woman's pure and entire love!

"Ah, my Maruscha, thou art my only regret. Could I but take thee with me, my dove! My better soul! For I know that without me thy life henceforth will be but a joyless groping through a valley where there is no sin."

I am surprised by a tear on my cheek, and dash it hastily away. Boom! It is the quarter bell sounding from the fortress clock. I close my eyes, and gradually a feeling of peace descends on me. Now I can pray. My hands meet and interlace.

"Spirit of perfect Good, forgive me my sins. Fortify me and my comrades in our last agony. Let the evil we have done perish with our bodies, and the good return to dwell eternally with Thee!"

I hear the tramp of soldiery approaching, and raise my head.

"Maruscha, thou shalt not blush for me!" I whisper, and I feel that it is a radiant face I show them as they enter. I advance to meet my executioner, place my arms in position and silently submit to be pinioned. Not a word is spoken, and in a minute we are ready, and passing in file along the corridor to join the others in the hall of the prison.

I cast a swift glance from face to face of my fellow martyrs, which is answered by a flash of recognition and greeting from all save one, and that is poor Vasil. He is a sorry spectacle; his blue eyes roll vaguely, without speculation; his ashen lips hang apart. A gendarme is supporting him.

We are side by side. "Vasil!" I whisper. He starts as if from some awful dream. Our eyes meet. He gives a great gasp, sets his lips tightly, and pulls himself together, and I am suddenly wheeled round and placed in the front.

Then our last walk begins—through the court, out of the gates into the great open space, where straight in front rises the long platform, and on it the gallows!

Sudden as a flash, a shock of horror seizes me. Only now, with my terrible doom before my seeing eyes, do I fully realize it. To be hanged by the neck! Merciful God, stand by me! But as sudden my soul cries to my shrinking body. "What! Art going to fall now?" and I check the shudder that is already holding me, draw up my body to its full height and march steadily forward.

The steps to the platform creak beneath my heavy tread. I stand high above the heads of the people, and overlook them. Their thousand upturned faces are like the white waves of a troubled ocean. Which is Maruscha's? My eager glances skim the multitude in search of it.

It is there! Quite near me. I could almost kiss it by bending far forward. It is white. Ah! how white! But firm. The eyes are full of tenderness; they are melting with love unspoken, but they are strong! Our hearts meet and mingle for one brief moment, then I tear mine away. I have a word to say before I die. I step forward to the edge of the platform and cry:

"Brothers, I repent not! I die joyfully for the cause of liberty."

The multitude stir and murmur like a forest of trees swayed by the wind. The drums roll out in deafening peal. Already the executioner's hands are upon me. I cast one last look around on Maruscha, and up at the sky.

Something is pulled over my eyes. I am hastily placed in position beneath the gallows. A momentary pause. I feel with one excruciating thrill of horror the touch of the loose rope on my neck. A stupendous shock as if a crashing blow—a noise as of many rushing waters in my ears—a feeling as if my head was bursting asunder—before my eyes a million whirling planets, whilst I plunge madly for a footing. Yet I do not die! I seem to suffer an eternity of agony before it gives place to stupefaction, and I pass away.

CHAPTER II.

Faintly, fearfully my spirit is fluttering in and out of the deserted house from whence it has been driven, uncertain to go or stay, giving me the faintest hint of my identity, to leave me again in darkness, yet returning each time with greater confidence, until it finally stays to feebly spread itself from heart to brain, and I realize that I am I.

I try to move, though it costs me an effort. My body feels as if swollen to an enormous size. I am oppressed for space. I strive to make elbow room. What is this? I stretch out my stiffened arms, and come in contact with my coffin! From all my pores the cold sweat is bursting. My brain is on fire as recollection rushes upon me—the gallows, my death agony, and the appalling conviction that I have been cut down too soon and buried alive!

In my wild anguish I fight out madly with both hands; but, strange, I fight the air! There is no lid, then, to my coffin! I writhe myself into a sitting posture, and there dawns for me a glimmer of hope. Cautiously I begin to feel about me, growing every moment more mystified, for my hand comes in contact with a wooden surface, on which the coffin evidently stands. Though I am in my coffin, I certainly am not in my grave!

A ray of light shoots suddenly from behind me across the gloom, revealing one side of the rough deal shell in which I sit, a strip of the table on which it rests, and facing me a door. I follow with my tortured eyeballs the beam, and see that it is the moon shining through a small window. There is a door and a window, then, in my mysterious abiding place! The hope leaps instantly into vigorous being, and with it the determination to escape. I feel strongly about the second life of mine, that it is a divine gift direct from the hands of God. To have to yield it up now would be to die ten thousand deaths. My other life I risked on a forlorn hope, and lost. There was justice in it. I knew the penalty, and had counted the cost. I suffered death in its most degrading, most awful form, and have therefore paid in full. I have satisfied the law, therefore this life I hold is all my own, and to the last drop of blood I will protect and defend it.

I am in some outhouse adjoining either a dissecting room or the residence of some doctor who has purchased my body for dissection. There are two means of exit, a door and a window. The former will be certainly locked. The window—I turn toward it—is a casement. Alas, for my broad shoulders; it is small!

However, it is my one chance. I must try it. As we are in summer when the nights are short, it must be the dead hour. I have no time to lose. I scramble out of the coffin. I drop my stiffened legs to the floor.

I reel like a drunken man—I make the half circuit of the table, reach the window, and seek with my shaking fingers for button or hasp, and there is a rush of cool night air on my brow. It revives me somewhat, and now for it! I set my teeth, and raise myself with my hands by the frame, thrusting out my head and part of my shoulders. Then I pause to gather up my forces. Something taps my crown, making my heart leap to my mouth. It is only the swaying bough of a tree! Another violent effort and my shoulders stick fast!

And now commences a fearful struggle. It is almost as bad as hanging—the sensations are certainly similar—eyeballs starting, skull bursting, and legs plunging aimlessly, until a frantic kick backward brings my foot unexpectedly in contact with the edge of the table, and—I get a purchase.

I strain every sinew. There is a cracking and crunching which I imagine to be my shoulder blade, and I am precipitated forward, carrying the window frame, with a crash to the ground, where I lie, cut, bruised and panting.

There is no sound save the wind tussling with the trees and bushes that enclose me. No! what is that? It is the faint music of trickling water! My very soul longs for it! My swollen and parched tongue makes a futile effort to lick my lips.

At length, putting out my shaking hand, I feel the ground moist. Another movement, and yet another, and I come in contact with a cool iron tank! Still one desperate effort, and I have dragged myself up by its edge. My fingers are in water, my lips touch it!

I take—ah, what a draught! and sink to the ground again, whilst tears I cannot check rush to my eyes—a perfect torrent of unspoken relief. I scramble to my feet. That drink has wonderfully revived me. And a moment I pause to lave my temples in the water before starting on my hazardous venture.

To get out from amongst the trees and ascertain my whereabouts must be my first step; so I commence to feel my way along the wall until I turn the corner of my recent prison, and at length emerge under the open sky, on what appears to be a gravel drive. I can dimly discern the outlines of things near me, and within a few feet of me the sleeping box of a watchman, which impels me to beat a hasty retreat in amongst the trees again. Now I begin moving in a slanting direction, with a view to arriving at the garden wall; and I eventually come against it; but, alas! my hopes of escape are on the wane again—it is too high to scale! Baffled, but still determined, I set my teeth, and follow the wall. Presently I come out on a path, and before me is a long, low shed, open to the front. "It is a gardener's toolshed," I surmise, and swift as light follows the thought: "Here I shall surely find something to aid me!"

I grope my way in, and just then, as if sent by a merciful Providence, the moon breaks through a cloudrift, and shows me a gardener's light ladder. In a moment it is dark again. But I have the ladder, and the darkness is just what I want.

It is the work of a few moments to place the ladder in position, to mount it, and drop to the other side. I lean for support against the wall, unconscious of everything save the overwhelming shock of pain in my head. It is my head—my head! If only it fell me not, I have confidence in my legs, uncertain though they be, to carry me whither I mean to go.

When I am able to open my eyes I at once recognize the locality, for I am as familiar with St. Petersburg as a school boy with the interior of his trousers' pockets. I am in the very heart of the city. This is the Nevski Prospect, and I stand outside the extensive grounds of Prof. Schlemmer, one of the first surgeons we have, and second to few in the world.

"And so you have purchased the body of your old pupil for dissection, little father!" I smile grimly. "And I am a thief, for I am stealing it from you."

The light of a street lamp shines full on me. I retire quickly out of its radiation, and pause to consider my next move.

My object has been, since quitting the shady retreat of my coffin, to make for the quarters of my friend Ivan Ivanovitch Kolinsky, there to lie in hiding until I should have sufficiently regained my forces to fly the country! now, however, I must change my plans. Ivan loves fully three versts from here; to reach him I should have to traverse many streets and run many risks, even if my strength held out. I put a hand to my raging temples, and pass in review the different members of our section. In the urgency of the case I may not indulge preference; the nearest must be my designation. It is none other than Maruscha! Yes, to gain her lodging is my only chance, for I can gain it in twenty minutes if I am fortunate. My love lives at this end of the "Bazar" over a furrier's shop.

(To be continued.)

Largest Foot in Germany.
There is a New York barber who wears a number 12 shoe. He was a sergeant in the German army, noted for his stability. He has a brother in the old country whose foot is so big that no ready-made shoe can be found to fit him. When he needs a new pair of shoes he buys a side of leather and sends for a shoemaker, who fashions his footgear at home. His foot is the largest in all Germany, about No. 17 in size.

Alfred Capus, a Parisian playwright, says few if any real dramas are written in the United States or England.

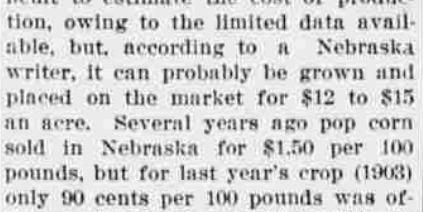


Pop Corn.

In earlier times pop corn was very commonly grown in small quantities on many farms and in gardens for home consumption, for it has long been a favorite food, or food accessory, with Americans. In recent years there has been a tendency to depend on the larger growers for pop corn, and this crop is now raised in some regions to a very large extent, says a bulletin. For instance, a large grower in Iowa is reported to have 1,000 acres annually planted to pop corn, and in some regions of Nebraska, notably on the north and middle loops, pop corn is practically the only crop grown, 100 bushels to the acre, it is said, being an ordinary yield. Fine pop corn is also grown on a large scale in some regions of Michigan.

As regards the culture of pop corn, it may be said in brief that it is much the same as for sweet corn. When grown on a large scale, it is drilled in, and it is not planted in checks. It is usually harvested by hand and marketed on the cob or shelled. It is difficult to estimate the cost of production, owing to the limited data available, but, according to a Nebraska writer, it can probably be grown and placed on the market for \$12 to \$15 an acre. Several years ago pop corn sold in Nebraska for \$1.50 per 100 pounds, but for last year's crop (1903) only 90 cents per 100 pounds was offered. Assuming that the yield is eighty bushels to the acre, the latter price would give a return of something like \$25 to the acre. A prominent Iowa grower of pop corn states that in his experience the price has been as low as 50 cents, and as high as \$4 per 100 pounds.—Exchange.

Inexpensive Hay Rack.
The style of hay and grain rack here illustrated is in common use in many parts of the East and Middle States. The two-bed pieces of spruce 3x6 inches in size are either 14 or 16 feet long. Five crosspieces 2x6 spruce, or 2x4 hardwood, 3 feet 6 inches long, connect the bed pieces. The side pieces which hold the rack, ten in number, five on a side, are 2 inches thick, 4 feet 2 inches long, and taper from 3 inches wide at one end to 1½ inches at the other. A plank 2x12



ONE OF THE HAY RACKS.

runs through the middle of the rack, and these side pieces fit under this, and inside the bed pieces, as shown. Four boards six inches wide are placed on each side to form the rack. The first board rests on the crosspieces, the other three being equal distance apart. Two pieces 2x4, 7 feet 9 inches long, are used, one at each end of the rack, and are bolted to the side arms just beneath the top board. The ladders are made of hardwood and are 6 feet 9 inches long, with two cross pieces. The side arms should be of oak, or other hardwood, but the boards may be of spruce or pine. The ladders are bolted near the ends of the bed pieces, and rest against the cross pieces at the end. By removing the four bolts, the rack may be knocked down flat to save room in storage.

Poultry Pickings.
Underfeeding is expensive. Disinfectants are better than disease.

The chicken coops should be large, airy and proof against rain.

A boiled egg which is done will dry quickly on the shell when taken from the kettle.

The dust heap aids materially to cleanse the feathers and skin from vermin and impurities.

The hens will thrive much better without the presence of the cocks than with them as soon as the hatching is over.

Tobacco stems covered with straw are an excellent preventive of insect breeding, especially when the hens are sitting.

Sawdust, shavings and excelsior are objectionable for nest material. Use straw or leaves.

Wooden floors close to the ground attract the damp from the earth, and are always moist.

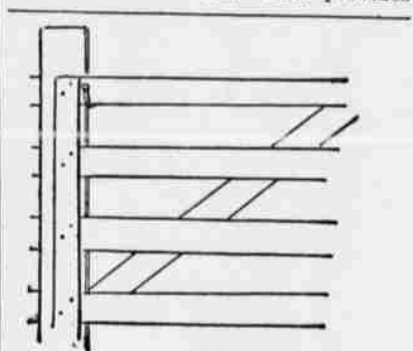
The eggs from hens by themselves will keep good three times as long as those that are fertile.

Sell off the surplus cockerels and do not retain the late-hatched pullets, as they will not lay until spring.

In feeding fowls at any time, whether in confinement or not, give only so much as they will eat up clean.

Making a Handy Gate.

The average farm gate is hard to manage and is usually creaking down. The illustration shows a way of fastening such a gate in a simple manner. Take a horseshoe and fasten it to the gatepost, so that about one-third of it will project, as shown in the detail at lower left of cut. This provides



GATE AND FASTENER.

the latch, and when the gate is to be closed simply raise it so that the top bar will come over the horseshoe, as indicated in the upper portion of the cut. On the lower right of the cut is shown a way of fastening the boards by bending and nailing a long strip of strap iron over the ends of the boards, instead of using the upright board, as usual. The advantage is that the gate is not so heavy as when the upright board is used, which is a consideration with the average farm gate.

Very Diversified Farming.

In Maryville, Mo., last fall the managers of the street fair offered a \$10 prize to the Nodaway County agriculturist who should exhibit the largest number of farm products grown on his farm last season. W. R. Bosley, of Ravenwood, drove up with a wagon-load of stuff and took the prize. His wagon contained a stalk of corn 13½ feet high, white, red, yellow and speckled corn in ear, wheat, rye, buckwheat, rape, timothy seed, oats, thirteen kinds of green beans and peas, three kinds of popcorn, two kinds of cucumbers, one red pig, a turkey, two chickens, two guinea fowls, hedge balls, strawberry vines, one cabbage weighing fifty-one pounds, celery, summer and winter lettuce, peanuts, two kinds of beets, horse radish, asparagus, bluestem grass, slough grass, clover hay, prairie hay, carrots, green mustard, six kinds of pickles, seven kinds of jelly, jam, cherries, three kinds of parsnips, three gourds, two kinds of sunflower seed, sweet corn, can of honey, castor beans, one sunflower, the flower of which measured forty-six inches in circumference; sugar cane, two kinds of millet in stalk, an oyster plant, four kinds of radishes, turnips, four kinds of Irish potatoes, two kinds of sweet potatoes, cabbage, cauliflower, two kinds of squash, green lettuce and onions.

New Butter Keeper.

A new butter preservative has been found by a member of the French Society of Agriculture, who asserts that fluoride of sodium in quantities as small as 7.7 grains or less to a pound of butter will preserve it indefinitely. A claim is made that the substance is not injurious to health when used in this quantity, but is rather an aid to digestion.

Frog Farm in Ontario.

One has been in operation for over twenty years. The waters are simply stocked with mature frogs. No attempt is made to confine the frogs until near the time for shipping; then they are taken alive at night and confined in small pens, which are drained when the frogs are wanted for market. No food is given on this farm, and yearly yields of five thousand pounds of the best frog legs are produced. Probably some such system as this is at present about the only practical way of breeding frogs.