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The Mystery Road

CHAPTER IV—Continued

"For you, yes," Krossney sneered. "Because you risk nothing and you have the spending of the money. For me it is different. I am governor of the fortress; I wear the uniform of the Russian republic."

Elsa Franke laughed loudly and scornfully. She pointed jeeringly at Krossney.

"Uniform of the Russian republic!" she exclaimed. "A pity they didn't make it to fit you! Official position, indeed! What do you get out of it. I should like to know? Would you not starve if it were not for the contributions of the prisoners themselves?"

"It is true," Krossney assented sulkily. "It is a dog's life."

"And a dog's country to live in!" the woman proclaimed. "Listen to me, Ivan."

She sat upon the arm of his chair and talked to him in Russian. So it was evident that he was yielding. She fetched him beer and then spirits of some sort from a cupboard. Once or twice she looked at him and smiled stealthily at Gerald. At last she turned towards him in triumph.

"It is arranged," she announced. "Not so fast," Krossney intervened. "I'll hear how this money is to be paid!"

"In cash," Gerald replied. "I have drafts upon my own banks."

"Well, well," Krossney muttered, "the money is right enough. Then, at ten o'clock, tomorrow morning," he went on, "present yourself at the fortress. Inquire for me. I shall give you an audience. The affair may be concluded at once. Get back to your hotel now and don't come near me or your real business."

Gerald rose blithely to his feet. The idea of leaving the horrible atmosphere of that room was undisturbed to him. He bowed to the governor. Elsa took him to the door and under pretext of calling the servant, passed out with him into the passage.

"You can come back later if you like to talk with me again," she whispered. "Be careful, though, for he is very jealous."

She shouted something to the Russian maid and stepped back into the room with a meaningful smile. Gerald put money into the hand of the woman who opened the postern gate and stepped into the street with a gasp of relief. The clear air was wonderful. He drew in great gulps of air as he made his way along the river bank. Elsa stared at him every passing-by. He could scarcely believe that his task was coming so easily to an end. If all went well, in twenty-four hours he might be on his way back to England.

Chapter V

Gerald, after a weary climb out of the town, stood at last, at the appointed hour, on the following morning, before the rusty iron gates of the fortress. Untidy and neglected though the whole place seemed, there was still something sinister about the various walled enclosures and the presence of a prisoner. For a quarter of a mile, on the outside of the walls, not in themselves formidable, everything in the shape of trees, shrubs or dwellings high beyond ranged on the ground, and every fifty paces across the walls, on the top of a battress, was mounted a machine gun, from which an iron ladder led to the ground. The walls themselves were about eight feet high, of stone covered with white plaster. The fortress itself was built of a kind of gray-colored brick, a square, solid building, with a curiously unexpected pointed top. The battress windows were more than a foot apart. The space of open ground by which the main building was surrounded was inches deep in dust.

A porter in stained and ill-fitting uniform escorted Gerald to the building, escorted him across the yard, and passed him on to a duplicate of himself, to whom Gerald once more presented the card which had obtained him admittance. He was led down a stone passage, which had apparently never been cleaned nor swept for months, into a lofty but bare apartment at the farther end. Krossney, who was sitting before a wooden table, apparently expecting him, dismissed the attendant and motioned Gerald to sit down. He looked at his visitor in unfriendly fashion.

"Why did you not come to me direct instead of going to Elsa Franke?" he demanded.

Gerald was not unprepared for the question.

"I knew your reputation as a soldier and a man of honor," he replied. "I feared that unless this matter was put to you in the proper light, tactfully, as a woman can put it, you would have nothing to say to me!"

The governor grinned.

"It was a mistake," he declared sulkily. "The woman is greedy. She will demand her full share of the money. It is scarcely just!"

"I am sorry," Gerald said. "I acted as I was advised."

"Supposing I accede," Krossney went on, after a short pause, "how do you propose to get Number Twenty-nine out of the country?"

"I was hoping," Gerald admitted, "that you might have been able to help with some suggestion."

The governor stroked his beard.

"Suggestion," he muttered, "are worth money."

Gerald acquiesced.

By E. Phillips Oppenheim

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"I have not command of much more than the amount I spoke of," he said, "but if you can show me how to get my friend safely out of the country, I will add a thousand pounds to your share."

"Which sum," the governor insisted quickly, "will not be mentioned to Elsa Franke and will belong to me alone."

"Agreed," Gerald acquiesced.

"Show me your papers," the governor demanded.

Gerald produced them without hesitation—his passport, an urgent letter of recommendation by the one statesman who was in good odor in both countries, banker's drafts, which needed only his signature to produce a never-ending flow of cash. The governor's eyes glittered as he turned them over in his hand. "It was horrible that a share of these treasures must go to the woman! She was wicked enough under his thumb, the slave of his commands, but with money in her pocket they were wretches of their first youth, but, so far as looks went, in his eyes she still had charm."

"If she were independent of him, all sorts of things might happen. He threw down the documents with a little oath. The passport, however, he kept in his hand. His manner, as he looked at Gerald, changed. He became almost hostile.

"You, too, are an aristocrat, then," he remarked.

"I am of the English aristocracy," Gerald admitted.

"I have heard of you," he said. "You are an American citizen."

The governor nodded. He pushed a box of black cigars across to his visitor. The latter counted himself honored, by accepting a cigarette.

Then he touched a bell. The attendant brought in beer, which was poured into two glasses. As soon as they were alone, Krossney motioned Gerald to draw his chair close to the desk.

"Now here is my scheme," he said. "Number Twenty-nine is of your height and build. You shall see him for yourself and judge. Number One Hundred and One, also, a young man, died yes."



"I have had No Water here for a fortnight," He Groaned.

terday afternoon of malignant fever. His death has not yet been officially reported. Very good! I take you to the cell of Number Twenty-nine. You give him your American passport. You go in with me to the cell. He comes out with me. You remain."

"The devil I do!" Gerald muttered.

"Do not be a fool!" the governor exclaimed impatiently. "I beg your pardon, excellency," he added a moment later, as he remembered his visitor's identity. "Your stay there will not be long. I shall explain in a moment. I drive Number Twenty-nine to a small station on the line, eleven miles off. I take leave of him there. He is an American who has bought my oil concessions. The station is in the middle of the district. My presence with him will remove all suspicion and prevent their examining the passport too closely. He will travel through to Petrograd. There, I take it, you have made arrangements."

"I have a ship waiting," Gerald replied.

"That is my scheme, then."

"So far, I approve of it," Gerald declared, "but what about me?"

"You will bore yourself for twenty-four hours," the governor replied. "I will see, though, that you have beer and newspapers. If you will, Elsa can come and see you."

"For heaven's sake, no!" Gerald begged. "I mean," he added hastily, "I shall need no society. I am very tired. I shall sleep."

"As you will," the governor acquiesced. "In the morning, Number One Hundred and One—should say his remains—will be carried secretly down to your cell. You will be moved up to the cell of Number One Hundred and One. I shall at once report the death of Number Twenty-nine. He will be buried in the cemetery here before intervention is possible. Now the question comes how to dispose of you."

"I was getting interested in that myself," Gerald admitted.

"Number One Hundred and One's time has up," the governor explained. "He could have gone home last week if he had been strong enough. I have his papers of release here, signed by myself. Tomorrow morning early, I shall provide you with suitable clothing, and I shall drive you to the railway station. At myself have leave of absence in my pocket, granted to me a fortnight ago, but, to be honest with you, I have not used it. Because I have had no money with which to enjoy myself. I shall travel with you myself to Petrograd. You will have acted as my clerk in the prison, and I take some interest in you. In my company you are absolutely secure. No one will venture even a question. Arrived at Petrograd, I will drive with you to the docks, you shall take me on board your ship, and I will drink a bottle of champagne together. What do you think of my plan?"

"Capital!" Gerald replied.

"I will conduct you now," the governor announced, to Number Twenty-nine. "We will lock ourselves to his cell. You shall explain the scheme to him and change clothes. I will bring pen and ink with me, also the deeds which will pass the matter. If I am in possession of my oil properties. You shall pay over the drafts. After that you must be patient."

"I am ready," Gerald declared, rising to his feet.

Krossney unlocked a drawer and took out a bunch of keys which shone like silver—the only clean thing in the cell. He unlocked the attendant who had followed them, inserted the key into the lock of the door over which "29" was painted in black figures, and entered himself, motioning Gerald to follow him.

In the sudden somber twilight of the cell, Gerald's first impressions were that a man opposite had handed himself against the wall. At their entrance, however, the figure dropped to the ground, revealing his true nature of the rusty bars to which he had been clinging. A tall, thin young man, with sunken cheeks, long unkempt hair, and eyes a little more than ordinarily bright, stood staring at them. His clothes seemed to be the remains of a prison uniform. The trousers, always too short, had worn away at the bottom of the legs, and he wore neither socks nor shoes. He stared at the two men at Gerald especially—in wonder, but remained silent.

"You speak English?" Gerald inquired.

Number Twenty-nine shook his head.

"I speak French, then," he replied.

"What were you doing when we came in?" the governor asked.

Number Twenty-nine smiled wanly.

"For an hour every day," he told them, "sometimes for more. I spring till I catch those bars, and I hang on until I am tired. I can always see the sky; sometimes, if I am feeling strong, I can lift myself so that I see a little of the country."

"Well, you have something better to do now," the governor declared. "You were a man when you were brought in. I have seen you play a man's part. Remember, if you faint or do anything foolish, you spoil everything. Set your teeth and take off your clothes. You are going to be set at liberty."

Number Twenty-nine scarcely faltered.

"I am to be shot, I suppose," he said coolly. "I trust that your wardens are better marksmen than they are soldiers."

"There is a long story," Gerald intervened, "of which the governor will tell you as much as he chooses. I am an Englishman, sent here by relatives of yours. I have been able to arrange for your freedom. In a few days' time, you will be steaming for England."

"Cut it short," the governor interrupted. "I will do all the explaining."

Gerald took a letter from his pocket book.

"Read that letter," he invited. "It is from Paula. She is my friend. I am Lord Dornby, an Englishman. We shall meet at Petrograd later. On the steamer I will explain everything. Meanwhile, take off your clothes. You will have to wear mine for a couple of days."

The young man took off his coat almost mechanically. His shirt was ragged. He had apparently no underclothes. His fingers began to tingle.

"But it is necessary," Gerald assured him. "See I am half dressed myself."

He took off his coat and waistcoat. At the sight of his silk underclothes, the other man began suddenly to sob.

"I have had no water here for a fortnight," he groaned.

Gerald looked him in the eyes.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Lightening the Burden

By simply dropping a few years many a woman succeeds in carrying her age well.—Boston Evening Transcript

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The remedy with a record of fifty-eight years of surpassing excellence. All who suffer with nervous dyspepsia, sour stomach, constipation, indigestion, torpid liver, dizziness, headaches, coming of food, wind on stomach, palpitation and other indications of digestive disorder, will find GREEN'S AUGUST FLOWER an effective and efficient remedy. For fifty-eight years this medicine has been successfully used in millions of households all over the civilized world. Because of its merit and popularity GREEN'S AUGUST FLOWER is found today wherever medicines are sold. 50 and 90 cent bottles.—Adv.

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Success has been known to assume the guise of a serpent long enough to dig the grave of genius.

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The Saint Gaudens statue in Rock Creek cemetery is correctly called the "Adam Memorial." Saint Gaudens had no intention of symbolizing "grief" in designing the figure. He said that to him it represented the soul face to face with the greatest of life's questions—"If a man die shall he live again?"

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