

Kingston William Henry Giles

The Circassian Chief: A Romance of Russia



William Kingston

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The Circassian Chief: A Romance of Russia

Volume One – Chapter One

Between the ancient and modern capitals of Russia, a fine broad road now affords an easy communication, although, but a few years ago, the traveller who would journey from one city to the other, was compelled to proceed at a slow pace, along a wild track, over rough stony ground, through swamps, under dark forests, and across bleak and unsheltered plains.

The sun had already begun his downward course towards the more happy, and free lands of the far West, shedding forth his summer rays on the heads of two horsemen, who pursued their way in a southerly direction, along the yet unimproved part of the road, to which we have alluded. Their pace, as the nature of the ground over which they travelled required, was slow – their attention being chiefly occupied in guiding their steeds between the many deep ruts and cavities, which lay in their path.

The tone of their voices, their noble bearing, and general appearance, bespoke them at a glance, to belong to a station far above the common rank of life. They were dressed alike, in a half military uniform; their arms consisting solely of pistols, and heavy riding whips the latter even no despicable weapon when wielded by a strong arm.

The travellers might have been taken for brothers, but that the dark flashing eye, black hair, clear olive-complexion, and regular Grecian features of the one, offered too great a contrast to the laughing blue eye, light complexion and hair of the other, whose features, though inferior to those of his companion, were not deficient in manly beauty. There appeared to be scarcely any difference in their ages, both having emerged from boyhood, into that joyous time of life, when the man has completely shaken off what he then considers the irksome trammels of his childish days; happily, unconscious how soon in their stead, advancing years may too probably bring around him the many cares, and disappointments that flesh is doomed to bear, from manhood to the grave.

The last mentioned of the two wayfarers, was in reality, however, the elder; although the light laugh he occasionally indulged in, and his debonair manner, gave him a younger look, than his more serious companion. They were followed at a short distance by a most primitive looking, low, square vehicle, containing their baggage; drawn by a shaggy little pony, and driven by a man almost as rough looking and unpolished as the animal itself. A low crowned, broad-brimmed hat of felt, covered a head of sandy hair, while a huge long beard of the same hue hung down upon his breast: the twinkle of his light grey eye, and a smile on his lips, giving a good humoured expression to his flat, and otherwise unmeaning features.

His dress consisted of a long coat of coarse cloth, buckled round the waist by a leathern belt, and boots of the latter material, untanned, reaching just above his ankles. He urged on his little animal, as fast as it could travel, over the rugged road, whistling, as he lashed his whip, and whirled it round his head – his thoughts evidently not extending beyond his immediate occupation.

The scenery through which the road led, was probably as dreary and uninteresting as any to be found in Russia; a country, which can boast of but few natural beauties, throughout its widely extended territory. It ranged over a landscape, as far as the eye could reach, consisting of a dry uncultivated plain, with here and there, a few clumps of stunted trees struggling into existence upon the arid and ungrateful soil – fit emblems of the miserable, and enslaved peasantry of the country.

The travellers had continued on their course through scenery equally unpicturesque for some distance, when gradually it began to improve, exhibiting a greater number of trees, and a brighter verdure. A proposal was then made by one of them, to which the other readily assented; this was to urge forward the driver of their baggage-cart, with his charge to Tver, a town they purposed resting

at for the night, while they followed at their leisure, through the forest they were approaching. The servant was summoned by the name of Karl, and ordered to proceed with as much speed as his weary beast was capable of, in order to secure a lodging and to prepare supper, the materials for which he carried, together with their bedding for the night – a necessary precaution, the inns at the small towns in Russia, affording very miserable accommodation.

Karl signified his comprehension of the order and willingness to obey it, by a few guttural sounds, and several low bends of the neck; when flourishing his long whip, he bestowed a few additional lashes on the flanks of the pony, who reluctantly started into a trot, dragging the rude little vehicle over ruts and stones after a most uncomfortable fashion.

The cavaliers then followed quietly on, at the slow pace which the heat of a warm spring day made most agreeable, each occupied with his own thoughts; those of the younger of the two appearing to be rather of a sombre hue, as occasionally a shade of melancholy would pass across his expressive features; while, at other times, his bright eye would kindle with animation, and his lip would curl, as if some strong feelings were working within his bosom. His friend, however, endeavoured to amuse himself, and to enliven the journey with snatches of gay French songs, which he carolled forth in a rich, clear, and cheerful voice; and he now and then broke into a merry laugh. At length, weary apparently of his own thoughts, he exclaimed —

“Thank Heaven, Ivan, my friend, that we are for ever free from dull and laborious studies, and those odious college drills. Bah! I have so worn out my eyes and the small portion of brains I was ever endowed with, by reading, I will not look into a book for a year to come. We shall have no more of those sham fights, but henceforth may expect every day to be called upon to engage in the honour and glory of real warfare. What say you, Ivan, does not your pulse beat with quicker throbs in anticipation of the glorious scenes of battle and conquest, which we may soon find ourselves engaged in? What say you, shall we flesh our maiden swords in the carcasses of the turbaned infidels of Turkey? They are said to be no despicable enemies to contend with; or if perchance our regiment should be out of favour at head-quarters, we may be sent to try our mettle against the mountain barbarians of the Caucasus. I hear that there is enough of hard fighting with them; more perhaps than is at all times agreeable. It is said, indeed, that the Emperor considers a campaign in the Caucasus an excellent field for the display of the military talents of those, whose ideas of that phantom called ‘Liberty’ do not exactly coincide with his own. If such be the case, I shall not be much surprised if we some day receive an intimation that our valuable services are required to strengthen his armies in that distant and savage part of the globe. What say you, Ivan, to this notion? Do you not eagerly long to be wielding your sword against the savage hordes of those unchristianised barbarians of Circassia?”

The brow of Ivan had contracted during these observations, which were uttered in a light, careless tone, and he had several times attempted to interrupt his friend; now, that the latter had concluded, he indignantly exclaimed:

“I thought you knew me better, Thaddeus, than to make a proposition of that nature to me. Never will I unsheathe my sword to aid the cause of tyranny and injustice – such vile work I leave to slaves and hirelings. Should Russia herself be assailed, most willingly would I shed my blood for her defence, as in such a glorious struggle as that when she so gallantly beat back the aspiring conqueror of Europe from her territories; but never will I lend my arm to assist in subjugating a free and independent people, over whom she has not even the shadow of a right to claim command. Rather would I break my weapon into fragments, and forswear all hope of advancement in the world.”

A smile was rising on the lips of Thaddeus at this sudden declaration of principles, so unusual in Russia; but it was quickly checked on his perceiving the stern expression of his friend’s countenance.

“Can you yourself, Thaddeus, not feel for the oppressed?” Ivan went on to say; “you, whose native land has so grievously suffered from the power of Russia; you, who have such deep cause to rue the tyranny of her iron sway! Then, as you love me, never again give utterance to the subject you have so thoughtlessly touched upon, for it is one on which I cannot trust my feelings.”

“I spoke but in jest,” answered the other, “and most sincerely do I applaud your sentiments; but alas! I fear the principles you profess, when put in practice, will answer but badly in this country, and are such as it is more prudent to suppress. For my own part, I confess that, though I have a high respect for the liberty of all men – especially for my own, I have such an innate love of fighting, that, provided an opportunity offer of exercising my propensity, I care little in what cause I draw my sword.”

“For shame, Thaddeus!” cried Ivan, indignantly. “I blush to hear one, whom I call my friend, and who I trusted was formed for nobler purposes, confess himself ready to become the willing tool of a despot; for to this does your declaration amount.”

Thaddeus laughed, and gave a shrug of his shoulders, as he replied —

“Your emancipation from college, my dear Ivan, has, in truth, wonderfully expanded the liberality of your sentiments; and it is indeed fortunate that the idea had not there occurred to you of giving lectures on the rights and independence of man; they would have wonderfully edified your hearers among the cadets, and made most admirable subjects and soldiers of them for the Emperor; but your exertions in the cause of liberty would not have gained you much credit in higher quarters.”

“Your foolish bantering,” answered the excited Ivan, “is but a poor apology for your want of liberal principles. Nor am I the madman you wish to make me appear. You well know how much I detested the thralldom in which we were kept at college, and that I pursued my studies with redoubled efforts and perseverance, in order to emancipate myself as soon as possible from that irksome and hated state. To you, as a tried and only friend, I have now opened my mind, trusting to have had a hearer who would cordially agree in my sentiments; but it appears that I have been grievously mistaken, and I have learned a bitter lesson – to trust in no living soul!”

The tones of the speaker’s voice shewed that his anger had risen to such a degree, that a reply in the former bantering strain would probably have caused a breach in the friendship of the two young men. Thaddeus, therefore, wisely endeavoured to calm his friend’s anger by acknowledging the justness of his sentiments, and by promising to adopt them himself if possible, when suddenly their attention was roused by a sound, which seemed like a human voice shrieking for help, as from a distance the breeze conveyed it faintly to their ears. They had now entered an extensive tract of open forest, the trees generally scattered over the ground at some distance from each other, yet in many places clustering together, surrounded by dense masses of thick and tangled underwood.

The young men seemed mutually to have banished the feelings raised by their late warm discussion, and instantly urged their horses at full speed in the direction whence they fancied the sound had proceeded, when a second faint cry, though appearing to come from a greater distance, assured them that they were following the right course.

Their horses were greatly impeded by the rough and uncertain nature of the ground, and often they were obliged to make them leap over the furze and straggling underwood, at the risk of descending into some unseen cavity, or of plunging into a morass. Notwithstanding the numerous obstacles, they hurried on at increased speed, eager to render their assistance; for they were confident that the piercing cry they had heard must have been uttered by a woman in distress. They were just emerging from a clump of trees among which they had been entangled, when again the cry was heard, loud and distinct, and at that instant they caught sight of two horsemen galloping among the trees, one of whom bore a female in his arms; these were followed by two men on foot running at full speed. It was the work of some few minutes before they could disengage themselves from the thickets and brushwood, a delay which afforded the party ahead of them an opportunity of increasing their distance; but, urging their horses with whip and spur over every obstacle, and gaining the more clear around, they ere long overtook the men on foot, who, seeing their rapid approach, shouted loudly to their companions to return to their support. The latter, however, in lieu of turning to render assistance, redoubled their speed, intent upon escape, and regardless of the loud cries of their overtaken followers. These, finding escape impossible, rushed forward to seize the bridles of their pursuers’ horses, but

were so effectually attacked by the heavy whips of the two cavaliers, that they were fain, not only to loose their hold, but were completely disabled from following.

Having thus got rid of these antagonists, the two friends set off in pursuit of the mounted ruffians, who were forcibly carrying away the female; her continued cries for assistance, indicating the track they had taken.

The scene had become highly exciting. Before them lay an open forest glade, and it was now a trial of speed. The noble animals urged to their utmost, dashed onwards, appearing to partake of the feelings which animated their riders.

The ravishers, on the near approach of their pursuers, turned on their saddles, each levelling a pistol at his selected man; these, fearful of wounding the female, would not venture to use their arms. The unencumbered horseman discharged his pistol at Thaddeus, as the latter approached; but, at the speed they rode, the aim was uncertain, and the ball flew wide of its mark; before the villain had time to use a second, the young Pole struck him on the head with the butt-end of his whip, with so powerful and well directed a blow, as to force him from the saddle, from which he fell heavily to the earth.

At the same moment, his companion, on Ivan's attempting to seize his horse's bridle, aimed a pistol at his breast; but that movement leaving his victim free, she quickly disengaged her arm from the folds of the cloak which shrouded her, and struck aside the barrel of the weapon levelled at her rescuer; the impulse, though feeble, was sufficient to divert its deadly aim; the ball nevertheless grazed Ivan's side. The latter succeeded, notwithstanding, in grasping the bridle of his antagonist's horse, and the same delicate hand which had but a moment previously, in all probability saved his life, promptly snatched the pistol yet remaining in the ruffian's belt, and cast it to the ground.

The man who had fired at Ivan, was now obliged to defend himself, and was accordingly compelled to relax his hold of the girl, who, when falling from the saddle, was fortunately caught by Thaddeus. The latter had thrown himself from his horse to prevent her sustaining any serious injury, which, closely engaged as Ivan was with his adversary, he had no power to avert.

Giddy from the pain of his wound, and loss of blood, Ivan loosened his grasp of the rein he had seized; this being perceived by his antagonist, he plunged his spurs into his horse's flanks, and dashed off at headlong speed into the depths of the forest, where pursuit was entirely useless.

The young men, left victors of the field, now turned their attention to the fair creature whom their gallantry had so opportunely rescued; and well did the extreme beauty of her form and features merit the looks of surprise and admiration with which they regarded her.

Her appearance was indeed unusual, and though they saw at once, that she was not one of the exalted and proud ones of the land, they internally confessed, that she was well worthy of that distinction. The agitation of the scene had caused the rich blood to mantle on her brow and beautifully oval cheeks, the complexion of which was of a clear, though slightly tinted olive, while her large sparkling black eyes, moist with tears, were now beaming with a look of gratitude, as bending on her knees, she attempted to kiss the hands of her deliverers, who prevented her from paying them this homage. Her glossy black locks, bound by a silver fillet on her high and polished brow, were uncovered, and hung down in long ringlets on her neck, nearly reaching to her slender waist. A light blue cloak thrown over her shoulders, and a vest and petticoat of red cloth trimmed with silver, completed her fantastic, but elegant and rich attire.

The character of her strange costume, and her dark expressive features, proclaimed her to be of that extraordinary race now wandering over the greater part of the old world, who profess to trace their origin from the aboriginal inhabitants of Egypt; retaining the same language and customs from age to age, and ever keeping distinct from the people in whose territories they pass their migratory lives.

The scene we have described, passed in the course of a few moments, during which time the young men had become entire masters of the field; one villain, who by his dress and manners, appeared to be of a rank far above his companions, had fled; the other still remained senseless on

the earth, from the stunning blow Thaddeus had dealt him; while the two men, whom they had first attacked, lay in a similar plight at a considerable distance.

Astonishment kept her deliverers silent, as they gazed with admiration on the Gipsy girl, for her delicate features and slight airy figure shewed her extreme youth; she was accordingly the first to speak, when she found herself prevented by them from expressing her feelings of gratitude in the way she wished.

“Though you may deem, gentle Sirs, that the thanks of a humble Gipsy girl can be but of little worth,” she said, “oh! believe me, that from the depth of my heart, I am grateful to you, for having saved me from worse than death, for well do I know the vile nature of the man from whom you have rescued me. But let me entreat you, haste from hence, or the ruffian noble who has escaped, will return with a band of his followers trained to evil, and will thus not only render your generous and timely aid unavailing, by again getting me into his power, but his return may bring destruction on yourselves.”

“Fear not for us;” cried Thaddeus, “for your sake, lovely maiden, we would face a hundred foes; and think not that such an arrant coward, as yonder villain has shewn himself to be, can make us hurry our departure. If he be even one of the most powerful of the land, we fear him not.”

“He is wicked and powerful enough to commit his crimes with impunity,” answered the Gipsy girl; “let me pray you earnestly, therefore, to complete the benefit you have rendered me, and to follow my advice by hastening from hence; for I feel confident, that he will endeavour to revenge himself on you, for your interference in my favour, and will return shortly with a greater number of men than you could possibly resist.”

“You speak truly, I believe,” said Ivan, “and we shall do well to follow your advice.”

“You are always in the right, Ivan,” answered Thaddeus, “so I suppose we may beat a retreat after our victory, without dishonour, when an overpowering force threatens us.”

“Oh! yes! – yes!” exclaimed the liberated girl, “hasten from hence; and believe me, there is not a moment to be lost. Yet, grant me but the one favour more, of allowing my kindred and friends to return you those thanks which my words cannot fully convey.”

“We will, at all events, see you in safety,” answered Ivan, “and, at your desire, we will avoid the chance of meeting your enemies, however little we have reason to fear them.”

They accordingly prepared to quit the scene of their encounter, and Ivan was about to offer to raise the fairy-like form of the Gipsy girl on his horse, when the slight exertion he made, caused the blood to flow more freely from his side, and she caught sight of the red stream trickling down, which he himself had not observed, for the pain was but slight, and the excitement of action had diverted his attention from it. The colour for an instant deserted her cheek, as taking a light scarf from under her cloak, she petitioned him to allow her to bind his wound. “You are hurt, Sir,” she exclaimed, “and I am the unhappy cause of the injury. My tribe have some skill in surgery: even I myself have received instruction in the art from an aged woman learned in simples, and thus think me not bold in making the offer, but as the slightest mark of my gratitude, let me be allowed to heal the wound I have been the cause of your receiving.”

Ivan thankfully accepted her aid, as with gentleness she quickly bound his side with the scarf, for the pain had now considerably increased. While thus engaged, they perceived the two villains whom they had left senseless on the earth, cautiously endeavouring to steal upon them, crouching as they advanced among the low thickets; and at the same time the man who had been felled from his horse, shewed signs of returning animation. Thaddeus humanely placed the body of the latter reclining against a tree, having wrested from him his weapons, which he cast, together with such as lay on the ground, to a distance, amongst the underwood. The Gipsy girl had just completed her task, when the horse belonging to their prostrate enemy, after ranging the glade in a wide circle, without however going out of sight, now approached the spot he had first left, as if in search of his master:

with the rapidity of thought she sprung forward, and catching the animal's bridle, lightly vaulted on his back without any apparent effort, merely touching the saddle to steady herself in her perilous feat.

"Now, for the love of the God you worship," she exclaimed, "ride on, noble Sirs, nor care for me. We children of the Desert are early accustomed to far more difficult feats than this, and without danger, I can retain my seat on a more spirited steed than the one which now bears me."

The young men, following her example, had mounted their horses, and on her pointing out with her hand the road they were to take, the party set off at full speed, though the former were compelled to apply their spurs closely in order to keep pace with the less fatigued steed of their beautiful and extraordinary guide. She, avoiding the thick tangled part of the forest, which had before impeded them, conducted them by a more circuitous way, but over smooth open ground, and at a much greater speed than they had been able to attain when hurrying to her rescue, until they regained the high road, which they crossed, and plunged into the adjoining forest. Suddenly checking her horse, she then addressed them —

"Fear gave me the fleetness of the timid hare; but truly ungrateful must I appear, through my own weakness, in forgetting that one of my generous preservers is suffering severe pain. Oh, pardon me, for my fault, caused by the dread of a danger which you are now unable to understand."

Ivan assured her that his wound inconvenienced him so little, that he was able to continue at the same swift pace, if she thought it advisable; she again resumed the lead, though not quite so rapidly as before.

"Your horses are fatigued," she said, as they rode onwards, "and the day is so far spent, that it will be after nightfall ere you can reach any shelter, and I fear that, before long, a storm will burst over our heads: yon black cloud is but the forerunner of others."

As she spoke, she pointed to an opening among the trees, through which were seen dense masses of clouds fast gathering on the sky. "If you despise not the humble shelter of a gipsy tent, you will there be treated to the best of our means, for the people of my tribe, though rough and fierce in aspect, will vie with each other in shewing their attention and devotion to those who have rescued one of their daughters from peril."

A determination not to leave the young Gipsy, until they had escorted her to a place of safety, added to a natural feeling of curiosity to learn something of the beautiful creature whom chance had introduced to them under such exciting circumstances, prompted both Ivan and Thaddeus to accept her offer of hospitality without hesitation.

Although but a few minutes previously, the sky over head had been bright and clear, the storm which their guide had predicted, now threatened to overtake them, as the heavens became overcast with a dark canopy of clouds.

Once more pressing their jaded horses, they galloped on for several miles, scarcely noticing the nature of the country through which they passed, until they arrived at a spot so thickly wooded as to render a passage impracticable. Their conductress, however, advancing a little to the right, led them along a path formed apparently by the hand of nature, through a narrow entrance, winding in various directions, and widening as they proceeded, till they suddenly emerged into a sylvan amphitheatre carpeted with soft green turf. In one part of the wood-encircled glade, arose a group of tents, surrounded by waggons; whilst horses and other cattle tethered hard by, were browsing on the luxuriant pasture.

The approach of the party was immediately announced by the loud barking of several large shaggy dogs, who rushed forward with open jaws, prepared to attack all intruders; but no sooner did the savage animals hear the silvery tone of the guide's voice, than their angry growl was changed into a cry of joy, as leaping up they fawned on her, and endeavoured to gain her caresses. They were quickly recalled by a man who issued from the shelter of the waggons, armed with a long gun; he, on recognising the Gipsy maiden advanced without any parley, to hold her horse's rein, as she

dismounted, springing lightly on the turf. A shrill whistle from him brought out two rough looking little urchins, who, at his sign, ran quickly forward to perform the same office for the strangers.

After exchanging a few words with the attendant, in a language unintelligible to Ivan and Thaddeus, their guide led the way towards a tent, which, from its size appeared to be the principal in the encampment: like the rest it was formed of skins neatly sewn together, affording a secure shelter from the weather.

In front stood a tall well-built man, whose dark elf locks escaping from beneath a sheep-skin cap, gave him somewhat of a ferocious appearance, which, however, his full and sparkling black eye, and the laughing curl of his lips fully belied. His dress consisted of a cloth jacket confined at the waist by a leathern belt, and full trousers with leggings of untanned leather. He gazed with a look of astonishment at the intruders, then at their conductress, from whom he seemed to ask for an explanation, as she hastened to meet him with an air of affection. Folding her in his arms with a fond and gentle embrace, after exchanging a few words in a hurried and low tone of voice, he stepped up to where the strangers stood, and grasping their hands, pressed them to his heart.

“The preservers of my daughter,” he said, addressing them in Russian, “are thrice welcome to my humble tent, and it will be my aim, and that of all the tribe, of which I am the head, to show to the utmost our gratitude for the benefit conferred upon us. Think not, noble Sirs, that, though the world accuses us of many vices, ingratitude is one with which we can be justly charged. But see! while I thus detain you the storm is about to burst, and my tent will at least afford you shelter from its fury, though it be destitute of the luxuries to which you are accustomed.”

Heavy drops of rain had now commenced falling; the wind whistled mournfully through the boughs of the trees, which became wildly agitated by the sudden blast, while vivid flashes of lightning darted from the heavens, and played around their heads.

“Will you deign, noble Sirs, to enter the only abode I can call my own,” said the Gipsy chief, leading the way to his tent; “a very changeable one in truth; but wherever my tent is pitched, there shall my friends be welcome.”

Saying which, he arrived at the entrance of the principal tent, while his daughter, making a sign of respect to his guests, withdrew to a neighbouring one.

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The travellers had full reason to congratulate themselves on escaping the torrents of rain now rushing down from the thick-gathered clouds, as they followed the Gipsy chief into his tent, the interior of which seemed to afford better accommodation than its outward appearance had promised. About midway, a curtain stretching the whole width of the tent, now drawn up, exposed the whole of the interior at one view; but on being unfolded, formed two distinct apartments. The furniture was of the most simple description, consisting merely of several large chests, on which were piled various rolls of skins and blankets, and a few stools and benches. At one end, suspended against the sides of the tent, hung a variety of kitchen utensils in the highest state of polish; at the other, fire-arms of different sizes and workmanship, powder-flasks, and shot-belts, and hunting-knives, picturesquely mingled with the produce of the chase. There were also several planks intended for tables, beds, or for seats. The ground was hidden from view by a warm and soft carpet of skins; the selection of the spot was judicious, for, being raised slightly above the surrounding land, it remained perfectly dry, notwithstanding the flood of rain outside.

The only inmate of the tent, when the party entered, was a handsome woman, whom the Gipsy introduced to the strangers as his wife. She was busily employed in some housewifery occupation, which she quitted to receive the visitors, assuming an air which would not have disgraced a high-born lady, and then proceeded to prepare the evening repast.

A couple of chests were brought forward, upon which they laid a platform of boards, forming an excellent table: this was quickly covered with an abundance of cold provisions, fowls and game of various kinds, coarse but sweet bread, and a bottle of Quass, the common beverage of the country, manufactured from malt; nor were more potent spirits wanting to cheer the guests.

Their host requested the young men to be seated at the table, while he and his wife attended to their wants, nor would he be prevailed upon to join them in their repast. "It behoves us," he replied, "to wait on you, while our tent is honoured by your presence; and I pray you, Sirs, to excuse my daughter Azila's absence, she has retired among the other maidens of the tribe, to rest awhile after the fatigue her looks too clearly betray she has suffered. I confess I am still ignorant of the details of her adventure; it was sufficient at first for me to know that you had conferred a benefit on one so dear to me.

"Her protracted absence had, indeed, given me anxiety, as she had not told me of her intention to quit the camp; but at the same time I do not interfere with her movements, which are often unknown to any of the tribe, and she is accustomed to go and return unquestioned. Azila is indeed a strange girl, and few can match her in understanding, or resolution; I well know that she has always just reasons for her frequent excursions from the camp, and that her exertions are in the cause of justice and humanity, so I do not seek to inquire into more than what she herself thinks right to tell me; I know well that I can trust her."

Although their host's features and manner evidently exhibited his anxiety to learn all that had occurred, his hospitality would not permit his guests to speak of their adventure until the repast was finished; when they recounted the events which led to their liberation of his daughter. While they were speaking, the object of their conversation entered the tent, and approaching her father, reverently kissed his hand, then bowing to his guests, with arms crossed on her bosom she stood with downcast eyes by his side. The father gazed on her with looks of affection, while the young men could scarcely conceal their admiration.

"Can this retiring, modest creature," thought Ivan, "be the same who, so short a time since, proved herself endowed with so much courage and resolution?"

Neither of the two friends could, for some time, find words to address her, for they felt that terms of flattery and compliment would be despised by one so superior; her father, however, relieved them from their embarrassment.

“Now that our guests have tasted of our food, and drunk from our cup, I may ask of you, my child, an explanation of the circumstances that preceded your rescue. I burn to know who has dared to commit such an outrage on one of the children of the Zingani; whoever he be, he shall not escape the punishment due to his villainy.”

A blush mantled on the cheek of the Gipsy girl as she answered, “Alas! my father, I fear that my enemy is too powerful and cautious, for you to be able to punish him, and there are circumstances which have lately occurred to me, I would fain have hidden even from you, had not he of whom I am about to speak, carried his persecution to so flagrant an extent. My story is a long one; but at your desire I will relate it, entreating my brave defenders will pardon a poor maiden for her hesitation in recounting events which have caused her much pain.

“During one of my last visits to Moscow, when our encampment was formed in its vicinity, I one day joined a party of the daughters of another tribe of our people, to one of whom I had matters to communicate. They were dancing and singing in the public gardens to crowds of admiring citizens, who were enjoying their evening’s recreation after the toils of the day. As we moved from place to place, I observed a person intently observing me, who I fancied had, during the day, been watching and following me; and him I now distinguished from the crowd by his handsome dress, and the disdain with which he regarded all around him. As I moved on with my companions he still followed us, till at length weary, doubtless, of viewing the same dances, and hearing the same songs, he disappeared from the gardens, and I then concluded that I had been mistaken in my suspicions. The evening was far advanced when, having parted from my companions, I set out alone to return to the encampment, and in seeking to reach it by a shorter path, I found myself in a secluded walk. Hastening along, I was suddenly confronted by a stranger whom I immediately recognised as the same, who had previously watched my movements in the gardens. As I endeavoured to pass him unnoticed, he seized my arm with a rude grasp, and exclaimed:

“Ah! have I at last found you, my fair damsel, for whom I have been searching so many long days? Often have I seen you, but until now never gained an opportunity of declaring my sentiments. I am the Count Erintoff! My carriage is waiting near, and will soon transport you beyond the reach of those who have interested motives in detaining you among them.’

“I cannot repeat all the arguments he used to persuade me to accompany him, or the terms of flattery and base offers he made. I treated them all with the disdain they deserved. When he pronounced his name, I recollected that I had heard he was notorious for many vices, even among those of his own rank, with whom virtue is too seldom practised, or prized.

“Unhand me, Sir,’ I exclaimed; ‘I will no longer listen to you, but would pursue my way to my friends.’

“Ah, my scornful beauty,’ he answered with a laugh, ‘not so fast I pray you; if prayers avail not, I must e’en use gentle force to compel you to accept advantages you would so foolishly reject; though not for the universe would I injure you. Here, knaves!’ summoning to the spot by their various names, some of the vile assistants in his crimes.

“Seeing his servants hastily advancing, I struggled in his grasp, and managed by a sudden effort to break from his hold; when darting along the road, without once looking back, I reached the camp, panting and breathless. This outrage remained concealed within my own bosom, for I well knew that the least hint would cause many to take more than ample revenge for the insult I had received. Having sustained no actual injury, and trusting that he would desist from any further persecution of me, I was unwilling to bring any of my tribe into danger, by interfering with so powerful an adversary.

“Alas! I was doomed to be too soon again exposed to his vile projects! This morning, I had gone forth from the camp with Aza, Lina, and other of our maidens, accompanied by many of the

children, to enjoy our pastime in the woods, when in the midst of our sport, after chasing each other among the trees, I became separated from the rest. I heard the laughter of my companions as they retreated, but owing to the closeness of the trees, I could not distinguish their figures; at that moment, a cry was raised by the children, that they had seen a stranger in the wood. I hurried away as rapidly as possible to rejoin the party, when on a sudden, I was seized by two men, who had sprung from a neighbouring thicket. In an instant, before I could recover from the alarm of their assault, they threw a handkerchief over my head, to prevent me from crying for assistance. Notwithstanding my utmost resistance, they bore me roughly forward, until they reached another thicket; when the handkerchief being partly withdrawn from my eyes, I beheld a man on horseback, whose features were shrouded in his large cloak, attended by another holding the rein of a led horse. They endeavoured to persuade me to mount it, but I resolutely refused to stir from the spot; nothing they said could induce me, when the cloaked horseman losing patience at the delay, seized me round the waist, placed me on the saddle before him, and bidding one of his followers mount the led horse, bore me off at full speed. Catching a glimpse of my captor's countenance, to my horror I discovered that I was in the power of the Count Erintoff. The dreadful recollection now flashed across my mind, that we were in the neighbourhood of one of his estates; and I exerted my utmost strength to escape from his grasp, careless of falling to the ground in the attempt; but he held me firmly, protesting, that he loved me to distraction, and that nothing mortal should deliver me from him; while he threatened deadly vengeance against any who should dare to make the attempt.

"I could only vent my anger and terror in loud cries for assistance, having succeeded in withdrawing the bandage from my mouth, nor could he replace it, though the advantage offered me but slender hopes of my cries being heard.

"Thus was I forced away for a considerable distance, in utter despair of being liberated, when I was gallantly rescued by these noble gentlemen at the hazard of their lives. Oh, believe me, Sirs," she added, "that the Zingani maiden can never, while life endure, be unmindful of the great benefit you have bestowed on her."

At this recital, the eye of the Gipsy chief flashed with indignation; "The audacious barbarian," he exclaimed, "shall rue his vile attempt, though happily rendered abortive; nor shall his high rank protect him! Can he not be content to tyrannise over the hapless slaves already in his power, but that he must seek for fresh victims among our tribe? Does he mistake us for the wretched serfs who till his lands? He has yet to learn that the Zingani are not of their base caste. But, Azila, my child! what causes thy sudden agitation?"

"See, see, my father," she cried, pointing to Ivan, who overcome by fatigue and the pain of his wound, was falling to the ground, when the Gipsy sprang forward and caught him in his arms. "Alas," cried Azila, with an agitated voice, "how ungrateful indeed I have been, and neglectful of him who risked his life to save me, that I should forget he had been wounded! but I will haste and conduct Hagar hither, who will tend him with greater skill than I can, though not with more care." Azila had scarcely left the tent when Ivan returned to consciousness, as he reclined in his friend's arms, Thaddeus having relieved the Gipsy of his charge.

"He will soon be restored by the care of our venerable mother, Hagar," said the chief; "for there are few in this country so well acquainted as she is with the healing art." As he spoke, the person mentioned entered the tent, accompanied by Azila.

Her locks were blanched, and her form bowed down by the weight of many years; yet though her skin was wrinkled and tawny, the fire of her dark expressive eye seemed unquenched. "Mother," said Azila, "as you love your child, exercise your utmost skill in the healing art, by recovering this stranger, who has been wounded in my defence; by your help I know that he may be speedily restored to health."

"Child," replied the sybil, "the power of healing belongs alone to the great spirit who guards our tribe, and I am but his poor servant, ready to use the means he places in my hands; these will I

gladly employ to cure this stranger, though by his looks, I judge that quiet and repose are the remedies most needful for him.”

Such indeed was the case, and in compliance with the old woman’s request, the Gipsy’s wife busied herself in preparing the tent for the night. The curtain alluded to, as intended to separate it into two chambers, was lowered, while, a bundle of skins and blankets being unrolled, a couch was quickly spread on the planks and chests, which had previously composed the table. Thither Ivan was soon conveyed in the arms of his friend and their host, the rest of the family having quitted the tent, with the exception of Hagar, who proceeded to examine the wound; the Gipsy meanwhile preparing a second couch, which he begged Thaddeus would occupy. The old woman, having completed her inspection of the hurt, and desiring the sufferer to remain perfectly quiet until her return, left the tent to procure the curative simples necessary to dress it.

Placing a lamp on the ground in the centre of the tent, the Gipsy chief, ere he parted from his guests, thus addressed them:

“Rest in perfect security, noble Sirs. I am about to perform the rounds of the encampment, to place trusty men on the watch, in case the ruffians, who have this day attempted so vile an outrage on my daughter, should be excited by revenge at her liberation to attack us under cover of the night. I scarcely deem them possessed of sufficient courage to venture on so bold a project; but their leader is capable of any atrocity; and in this land, where the rich and powerful are above the law, he relies on escaping with impunity, however flagrant the injury committed against the poor and humble. The wandering life we lead teaches us caution; but on my well-trained dogs I can place most reliance in case of a sudden assault, for they never slumber on their posts.” With a respectful salutation, he then quitted the tent.

Left alone with his friend, Thaddeus endeavoured to enter into conversation on the occurrences of the day; but Ivan, overcome by the pain of his wound, replied in so faint and languid a voice, as plainly shewed that he was in no state to answer his observations. He accordingly stepped noiselessly to the entrance of the tent, and gazed on the wild and unusual scene which lay before him. The storm had now passed away, leaving the dark blue sky in unobscured splendour, spangled with millions of glittering stars, which appeared to have derived a brighter lustre, as if burnished by the rolling of the dark clouds, or sparkling in triumph at the rapid flights of their sable adversaries.

A crescent moon threw a silvery light on the topmost boughs of the forest trees, whose giant shadows lay stretched in calm repose across the verdant glade.

At times he could perceive dark figures emerging from the shade, and flitting through the moon-light, again to be lost in the gloom, like uneasy spirits wandering in search of rest; but which he concluded were either parties returning to their tents, or the patrols on duty in the camp.

Thus he stood for some time wrapt in meditation, when suddenly he started at the apparition of a figure which, issuing noiselessly from the obscurity, was within a few paces of him ere it was observed. He instantly recognised Hagar, as she advanced, leaning on her staff, and bearing in her hand a small basket. Her white locks, hanging in disorder over her wrinkled and care-worn brow, caused her to resemble one of the weird sisters bent on midnight evil, rather than a minister of good, hastening to relieve a human being.

The young Pole might be excused if a tinge of superstitious distrust crossed his mind, and he hesitated to commit his wounded friend to the care of so strange a leech; but quickly banishing his doubts, he led the way into the tent. Kneeling by Ivan’s couch the aged Hagar gently withdrew the scarf, which Azila had applied as a bandage, and washing the wound with a decoction of herbs contained in her basket, again swathed it in linen. During the operation, she had continued muttering to herself, regardless whether her patient or his friend were listening, in the following strain:

“Aye, aye, too clearly do I see how it will be, and thus it has ever been! Slight wounds oft pierce far deeper than mortal eyes can see; and young hearts fear not the weapon that destroys them, but bare their bosoms to the stroke! Aye, my child, my loved one! bound nearer to my heart than my

own offspring, may thy generous and noble heart have no cause to rue the wound this stranger youth has this day received in thy cause! Would that I could so read thy fate, as to guard thee from evil! Yet when I gaze on the star of thy destiny, my eyes grow dim, my thoughts become confused, and it vanishes from my sight. This stranger – he will be led by a far different path to any that thou canst follow, my child; for in this world justice will never be done thee. He will pursue his course among the high and mighty, and forget the Gipsy maiden. Or if perchance she should recur to his memory, it will be but as a phantom of a waking dream. Alas! far different will it be for her! And thus much can I foresee, that his coming will work danger to my child. Alas! alas! though I see it impending, I know not how to prevent it. Full well I marked the earnest gaze she unthinkingly cast on this gallant youth. In that one look lay concentrated, feelings, deep, subtle, unknown even to herself, for her thoughts were alone of gratitude to her preservers. Though the fate of her I love, the pride of my bosom, and child of my tribe, is hid from my sight, no sooner did the bright stars illumine the Heavens, than I discovered and traced the destined course of this stranger. Like the brilliant meteor which darted across the firmament, unseen by any mortal eye but mine, as I gazed but now above, I read that his course will be rapid and brilliant, but boisterous and marked with blood, yet pure and unsullied by crime, and leading to a high destiny. As I contemplate these features, calm, and composed, I mark that he is incapable of those crimes which debase human nature. Yes, he is worthy of her love. May the mighty spirit who guards our tribe, watch over and protect the preserver of my child.”

When the aged sybil had concluded these obscure predictions, uttered in a low tone of voice, as she performed her task, she poured out a cooling draught, which she tendered to Ivan, who gladly drank it off, and again composed himself to sleep.

Thaddeus had but a short time before thrown himself on his rude couch, and was fast wrapped in slumber, when Hagar took her seat by his friend’s side. Commencing in a low soothing chaunt, she continued singing till she observed that his eyes were closely sealed in slumber.

The words she sang, or rather chaunted, were to the following effect; but being in the Zingani language, which is known to few beyond their own people, it is difficult to render their literal meaning; most of the predictions she uttered whilst dressing Ivan’s wound, were in the same tongue, so that he remained perfectly ignorant of the fate she had prophesied for him.

Spirits, I summon ye;
Spirits of air,
Come round this stranger,
Watch him with care.

Come, come ye misty shapes,
Whence far ye stray,
Shunning the glaring beams
Of the bright day.

Come from dark Egypt’s land,
Spirits who dwell
’Neath the vast pyramids’
Deep hidden cell;

And who were worshipp’d in
Temples of old,
When priests of stern Apis
Men’s fates foretold;

From whence in middle earth
Fearless ye dwell,
Through its fierce fires,
List to my spell.

Come whence the northern blasts
Furious blow,
Fly on your whiten'd wings
From frost and snow.

Ye, who 'neath ocean roam,
Through coral caves,
Or in the sparkling foam,
Sport o'er the waves:

Ye, who on tempests ride,
When the fierce blast,
Driving the hapless bark,
Rives the stout mast:

Ye whose loud shriek is heard
'Mid ocean's roar,
When the doom'd bark is hurl'd
On the stern shore:

Come, come, attend my will,
I summon all;
Haste through the elements,
Come at my call.

After a profound sleep of some hours, Ivan awoke with parched lips and a feverish thirst, which he sought to allay with more of the same refreshing beverage before presented to him. He begged for it, and on taking the cup, could not help fancying that the hand which offered it, was not that of the aged nurse who had previously tended him.

He spoke, to satisfy his doubts, but receiving no answer, and drowsiness again returning, he turned on his couch to recompose himself to sleep, when by the dim light which now issued from the lamp, he fancied that he saw a light airy figure gliding from the tent. Yet fully aware of his own feverish state, he attributed the idea to a delusion of the brain; nor had he much time to think on the subject ere he again sank into a sound and balmy slumber.

Volume One – Chapter Three

Daylight was streaming brightly through the opening of the tent, when Ivan was awakened by the cheerful voice of his host in conversation with his friend, who had already risen. To their inquiries, he declared himself well nigh, if not entirely recovered, since he was able to rise and dress without feeling any inconvenience from his wound; nor did he consider it necessary to call in again the assistance of Hagar, so efficacious had been her remedies. He was soon, therefore, on his feet, and accompanied Thaddeus and their host into the woods surrounding the encampment; the latter carrying his gun, his constant companion he informed them, in case any game should cross the path.

“So, my worthy host,” said Thaddeus, “your camp has escaped an attack from our enemies.”

“I little feared them,” answered the Gipsy, “as I considered that the Count Erintoff, and his myrmidons lacked the courage to attack us, however powerful his inclination to possess himself of my daughter, for they knew that we should be prepared for them. Let them do their worst; we, the outcasts of society, and despised of men, fear them not. Thus it is, Sirs, in this unhappy country, where the haughty nobles trample on, and oppress the soulless, and therefore helpless people; but let them not suppose that we are of the same mould as those over whom they tyrannise! No, if we cannot oppose them by open force, we can summon to our aid our wit and stratagem.

“They have to learn also that a day of dreadful retribution is at hand; that it will come, when least they expect it. The people will soon be aware of their own strength, however ignorant they may now be of it, and will then no longer submit to bear the chains of servitude, to which they now patiently offer their necks. But your pardon, noble Sirs, you yourselves are of the privileged order, and it may not please you to hear your equals thus spoken of with disrespect; though I deem you both very different in nature from those I have described, and consequently know that I can trust in you, or I would not thus unburden my tongue.”

Ivan was surprised to hear a man, whom he imagined to be a wild, unlettered Gipsy, give utterance to ideas so similar to those which had been passing through his own mind; but still unwilling to express his own sentiments to a stranger, he merely assured him that what he had said, gave no offence, either to his friend or to himself; and he strengthened the assurance by warmly wringing the Gipsy’s hard hand as he spoke.

Thaddeus added, as he sauntered onwards, picking the wild flowers, that he considered it a grievous pity, that there were not a few more honest men like him in the world; as then there would be but little to complain of.

“Sir,” answered the Gipsy, “thousands of bosoms beat with impulses similar to my own, and wait but for the time and opportunity to free themselves from bondage. It will be a dreadful crisis, for what power can place bounds to an infuriated and desperate populace, when once they have received the frenzied impulse. Let those, who have been the first cause of the insurrection, attempt to quell it; it would be as vain to hope to check the mighty torrent rushing from the before pent up glacier, when it has burst its icy bonds. But enough of this, Sirs. I warn you that even now, a storm is gathering which will ere long burst over this country; and may you be prepared to meet the danger when it shall come. More I may not, dare not say, and thus much gratitude, and the certainty that I may fully trust you, have impelled me to speak, that you may benefit by the warning.”

As they retraced their steps in silence towards the camp, Ivan’s thoughts reverted to the expressions which the Gipsy had let fall.

“And can there,” he mused, “be a chance of the regeneration of this country; when slavery shall no longer exist; and all men shall have equal lights, and equal justice! Oh, how ardently do I wish that I could be instrumental in bringing about so happy a consummation!”

On their arrival, they found a repast laid out in front of the tent, consisting of wheat cakes, and bowls of milk. In the places assigned to the two visitors, were laid bunches of wild flowers; that

of Ivan being distinguished by a wild rose, with the pure morning dew yet glistening on its delicate tinted leaves.

“These flowers,” said the Gipsy, “are my daughter’s gift to her guests, though she herself cannot appear before them.”

They both expressed their thanks for the delicately marked attention, and on finishing their simple, but plentiful meal, they mentioned their wish to resume their journey to Tver.

The Gipsy chief endeavoured to prevail on them, in his rough, but open and manly way, to tarry another day at his camp; but they excused themselves on the plea of their servant being in waiting for them, and Ivan declared himself fully capable of undergoing the fatigues of the journey.

“If we may not then keep you longer with us,” replied their hospitable friend, “we will, at least, accompany you on your way as far as the Volga; on the banks of which rapid stream, we are about to form our next encampment, for after the occurrence of yesterday, I have deemed it prudent to move at once.”

The young men gladly accepted of his escort thus far on the road, and he accordingly gave orders to strike the tents without delay. The order was obeyed most expeditiously; men, women, and children moving about with the greatest alacrity in its execution. Some dismantled the tents, and rolled up their covers; others stowed their goods away in chests, each undertaking his task according to his strength. The different rude vehicles used to transport the baggage were thus quickly laden, and in the course of a few minutes, on the spot where lately the skin-covered village stood in tranquil repose, was to be seen a moving mass of noisy human beings; the black marks of their fires on the grass being the sole vestiges of their transitory abode. Two wild-looking boys, whose elf locks hung down on their shoulders in tangled masses, and whose eyes sparkled with intelligence, led forward the strangers’ horses from a sheltered spot, where they had been picqueted and well taken care of, the chief of the tribe insisting himself on holding their stirrups, while his guests mounted, as he repelled the wild-looking creatures, who gathered round to perform the office.

Bestriding a strong built cob, which seemed fully able to perform a long day’s journey, he gave the signal, and the whole caravan was set in motion, proceeding at as rapid a pace, as the horses could drag forward the well piled baggage-carts.

The horsemen led the van, while Azila, the chief’s wife, and some of the more aged and feeble of the women, followed in a covered conveyance, of rather better construction than those which conveyed the baggage; the rest of the tribe proceeded on foot, assisting in guiding the carts and baggage horses.

The men were in general tall, strong limbed, and dark looking, their eyes sparkling with animation and intelligence while the wildness prevailing in their dress and manner, with the look of careless confidence in their countenances, shewed they were but little oppressed with care. The women were dressed in apparel of the most gaudy and fantastic colours, their free and independent gait and air, being very different from that of the inhabitants of crowded cities; their dark complexions set off by their flashing eyes, were handsome and expressive; and their light elastic laugh resounded through the woods, as jest succeeded jest amongst the party. Some beguiled the way by singing wild and plaintive melodies, with rich and harmonious voices, while others accompanied the singers on various instruments, which they touched with considerable taste and execution.

The Gipsies have indeed full scope for the exercise of their musical talents in the east of Europe, where they are invariably the chief musicians at all feasts and festivals; whenever a fair or merry-meeting takes place there, a number of them are to be found, and are always well treated by the people.

As Ivan and Thaddeus rode past the several groups, the latter testified the utmost respect for their leader’s guests.

The party travelled on for several hours, halting only for a short time to rest, till the fast-flowing stream of the majestic Volga first met their view, rushing onward in its unimpeded course towards the east, until it empties its mighty volume of waters into the far distant Caspian. Here the order was

given to encamp, and a fitting spot being selected at a short distance from the river, the whole party were soon actively engaged in unloading the waggons, and in erecting their frail tenements.

“My worthy friend,” said Ivan, addressing their host, “time urges us to pursue our journey, and with many thanks for your hospitality, we must bid you farewell.”

“Well, Sirs,” he replied, “since it is your wish to depart from us, I must needs yield, though I would fain have persuaded you to remain longer among us, to have seen more of the independent wild life we lead; yet, ere you go, there is one here, who would again assure you of her gratitude for your timely assistance in her rescue; and, for my part, although it may seem presumptuous in me to make the offer, yet should you ever be in difficulty or danger, let me know of it, and I may be perhaps able to afford you more aid, than other friends in a higher station may be willing to effect.”

Her father summoned Azila, when the maiden advanced with timid and bashful steps, followed at a short distance by the aged Hagar, who tottered in her walk as she came forward.

Already had the strangers paid their adieus to the Gipsy’s wife, when turning round they perceived Azila standing near them, with her arms crossed on her bosom, and her eyes cast on the ground.

“Adieu, noble Sirs,” she exclaimed in faltering tones, while tears glistened in her eyes, which shone more brightly than before, undimmed by those eloquent vouchers of her feelings, “the remembrance of your gallant bearing will ever dwell in the mind of the humble Gipsy girl, and though she may never be able to shew any other mark of her gratitude, receive all she has to give – her deep and sincere thanks.”

She bowed her head to conceal her embarrassment and agitation, and the old Sibyl then advancing, thus addressed the strangers: “May the mighty spirit who watches over the people of the Zingani protect you from all dangers, for well do I foresee that you will require his all potent aid. The strong wind bloweth on a sudden, and none can tell whence it ariseth; so will dangers come thickly around you, nor can you foresee from what quarters they will spring, but like the bold mariner who steers his storm-driven bark amid rocks and quicksands to a safe port, be prepared to meet and escape them, and you have nought to fear. And thou, noble youth with the dark eye,” she said, turning towards Ivan, “the cold suns of Russia shone not upon thy birth. Thou earnest from a far distant land, and thither thou must return, where a high and glorious destiny awaits thee; the way will be stormy and dangerous, but hesitate not to follow it; for last night did I read thy fate in the starry firmament above, and it leads to what thou most desirest. And thou, gallant Sir,” she said, addressing Thaddeus, “with the joyous eye, and light laugh, the stars smiled when I read thy destiny, and it will be happy. Fare ye well! ye may never see the aged Hagar more, but remember her words. Farewell!”

While the Sibyl was uttering this prophetic rhapsody, with all the fervour of action and tone, which her supposed inspiration gave her, the tribe stood round in attentive and respectful silence; and even the young men were so struck by her impressive manner, that they could not resist paying more attention to her words than, perhaps, their judgment would have allowed them to bestow at other times.

“Thanks for your predictions, good mother, and may they prove true,” exclaimed Thaddeus, who was always ready to give a light turn to anything which appeared more serious than suited his humour; “and now, our worthy host, we must in truth delay no longer, and bid our last adieu.”

“Not yet, by your leave, Sirs,” answered the Gipsy, “I will, at least, shew you the road which will lead you more directly, and in less time across the forest; which, without my aid, you would scarcely find.”

“The longer we keep your company, the better shall we be pleased,” replied Thaddeus; “and therefore we again most willingly accept of your offer.”

Ivan had remained absorbed in thought, at the conclusion of the Sibyl’s predictions; but suddenly rousing himself, he joined the Gipsy and his friend; and as the young travellers rode off, they received the parting salutations of the whole tribe, and paid their more marked adieus to Azila.

Ere they lost sight of the encampment, Ivan descried the maiden's light form, watching their departing steps, and, for many a day after, did her graceful figure, and lovely countenance dwell in his recollection.

Volume One – Chapter Four

tion, which the noble mind of the generous Russian could conceive, was lavished on his unfortunate prisoner, with the benevolent view of banishing the recollection that he was an exile and a captive.

Although he expressed his gratitude for these courtesies, they proved of little avail in overcoming his wretchedness; and, for some time, he refused to give his parole to his captor, that he would not attempt to escape. At length, the patriotic old noble ceased to entertain hopes that his beloved country could ever regain her liberty, after the final and complete discomfiture of her heroic sons under the walls of Warsaw. With a heavy heart, he gave the required promise; and bowed down with grief at his country's loss of freedom, he abandoned all wish of ever regaining his own. He thus lived on a hopeless exile from that land, where his forefathers had dwelt in honour and power for so many ages, and where all the affections of his heart were concentrated, save his love for his only son, now, the sole link which held the chain of his existence. On him he lavished all his care, and the boy returned his father's affection with all the ardour of youth.

Although the Russian noble had rescued his friend from the rigorous sentence of banishment to Siberia, the whole of his interest and influence could not save from confiscation the property of one who had taken so prominent a part in every attempt of his countrymen to throw off the Russian yoke; so that, with the exception of a small pittance allowed him, he was entirely dependant on his generous host.

The old Polish noble, broken-spirited, and humbled as he was, hoarded his slender means to the utmost, that, although dependant himself on his friend, his son Thaddeus might never owe aught to any one but himself. During his son's boyhood, he devoted his entire attention to his education, and it was a solace to the old man to find him so well worthy of his care; and when he had attained a proper age, he sent him to the military college at St. Petersburg, where he gave him a sufficient allowance from his accumulated savings, to enable him to support that standing in society which he considered his birth demanded.

He would willingly indeed have sent him to any other country for his education, in preference to that of the oppressors of Poland; but he found, on application, that his son could not be allowed to quit Russia; and disdaining any other than a military life for him, he was compelled to take advantage of the best which the country afforded.

With a father's doting fondness, he hoped that his son might, with his talents and his sword, some day carve out a way to distinction; and perhaps, too, a latent hope existed in his breast that he might aid in the restoration of his native land.

From the time since Thaddeus resided under the roof of his father's Russian friend, he became a favourite with every member of the family; and when he mixed more in the world, his pleasing manners and generous disposition caused his society to be much sought after by all of his own age and rank. No one, however, appeared to have gained so much of his regard as the young Ivan Galetzoff, who had won his affection without the slightest effort; but there was something in the bold, independent, and almost haughty manners of Ivan, which made Thaddeus at first regard him with more interest than he bestowed on the rest of his companions who were younger than himself.

Ivan was nearly two years his junior, which, at that time of life, often makes a great difference in a youth's standing at school or college. From his first arrival at college, Ivan Galetzoff had appeared to keep aloof from the friendship of his companions, though he joined, and excelled in all athletic sports and exercises. He was courteous to all; but his cold and reserved behaviour prevented the greater number of his companions from making advances in his confidence or friendship. Thaddeus, by many trivial attentions to the solitary youth, was the first to overcome this reserve, and the latter seemed to feel grateful for his kindness. They had been as yet, however, but little in each other's

society, until Thaddeus was seized with a severe illness, when Ivan attended on him with fraternal care, ministering to all his wants, and scarcely ever leaving his side.

From that period was to be dated their firm friendship, which, though warm and sincere, could not thaw the reserve with which Ivan always guarded the subject of his family and connexions; and when any sought to question him, he would turn away with a haughty and angry air, so that even Thaddeus remained nearly as ignorant as before of his friend's history. Every day, however, seemed more closely to cement the friendship of the two young men, until they were constantly together, supporting each other on every occasion of need. On one point, however, they were dissimilar in taste; while Thaddeus's love of gaiety caused him to seek society, Ivan, on all occasions, shunned it, devoting himself with so much perseverance and energy to his studies and military exercises, that he was qualified to quit college at the same period with his friend.

Ivan Galetzoff was generally supposed at college to be the son of the Baron Galetzoff; but as the young man never spoke of him as his father, and indeed avoided, as much as possible, mentioning his name, there were some doubts entertained on the subject; and his proud and retiring manners were, therefore, considered to result from the galling feelings caused by a supposed stigma on his birth. The château of the Baron Galetzoff lay a short distance from Moscow; and in the neighbourhood of that city was also the residence of the generous noble who had been the protector of Thaddeus's father; but there was no intercourse between the two families, the Baron living entirely secluded from the world.

The Baron Galetzoff was in truth, a fierce unpolished soldier, who had frequently distinguished himself in the wars of Russia against the Turks and the inhabitants of the Caucasus, as much by his unexampled cruelty, as by his bravery and military talents.

To his own soldiers he was overbearing and tyrannical, and he seemed to enjoy inflicting barbarities on the miserable foes who fell into his power; while to his dependants and the serfs on his estates, he was morose and hard-hearted; so that none could love, and all feared and hated him. His compeers disliked and shunned him, while he, on his part, seemed equally to disregard their censure or applause.

He had now retired for some time past from military command, and had since then immured himself in his own château, within which the stranger never obtained admittance.

When on several occasions Ivan had been tempted by Thaddeus to leave its sombre halls, and to mix in society, nothing could ever be gleaned from him respecting the internal arrangements of the family, notwithstanding all the attempts which were made to discover the secrets of the mansion.

Some of the more charitably disposed neighbours concluded that the Baron's temper had been soured by domestic affliction, as it was reported that he had lost by sudden death a beautiful wife, whom he tenderly loved, and her child, which had mysteriously disappeared; others however declared, that his brow had always been clouded by the same dark lines.

In spite of these various rumours, all concurred in the opinion, that the generous qualities of the young Ivan almost made amends for the Baron's defects; but they deplored his fate in being obliged to live with a person of so opposite a character. The serfs on the estate loved him almost to adoration, every one of whom was ready to lay down his life in his service.

Ivan had ever regarded the Baron more with fear and awe, than with those feelings of affection and respect, which a son owes to a parent.

There was however, one inmate of the château, on whom he lavished all the warmth and tenderness of a fond and affectionate heart. She was the one bright star pure and lustrous, towards which he gazed through the cloudy atmosphere of his existence. From his earliest days he had remembered that lovely countenance bending over him with a soft and enraptured gaze. Those bright eyes which looked lustreless on others, on him always shed a benign and soothing light. He had long ceased to call her mother, for he had once done so in his childish days, when with a deep drawn sigh, and a gush of tears, she pressed him closer to her bosom, and bade him never again to use that

name: the child could not however be taught to call her by any other, and he would therefore avoid all mention of her to any one.

She had moreover succeeded in teaching him to refrain from paying her any attention or notice when, by chance, they appeared together in the Baron's presence, and the lady's greatest care seemed to be to appear equally regardless of the child.

How delightful was it, as a reward for this apparent estrangement, to commune during the Baron's absence, with her, when he would listen to every word she uttered, and hear with delight the soft music of her voice. Then would she teach him a strange language, which none other around them spoke, and they would converse in it for hours together secure from interruption, until the child spoke it as fluently as Russian. He had never inquired, in what country the language he had learned was spoken, it was sufficient for him to know, that it was given to him by the being he most revered and loved, and he cherished his knowledge as a sacred gift which it would be profanation to impart to any other mortal. He always thought in that language, and in it he always poured forth his soul to the great Dispenser of good, for he looked upon it as the language of adoration; and as it had become his medium of communication with her he loved most on earth, he felt it as the most fit to adore Him who reigns in Heaven.

Upon her he looked as upon a being with an existence separate from and above all the rest of the world. In her presence, his thoughts became more holy, his aspirations loftier; his breast would swell proudly, as she oft described to him the noble deeds of gallant warriors fighting for the liberty of their country, until he ardently longed to emulate their actions; and thus were early implanted in his breast a sincere love of liberty, and a hatred of despotism, with a contempt of every danger which might beset him in the pursuit of the fame he thirsted after.

These sentiments had lain almost dormant within him, during the uneventful life which he had hitherto led, and it was only, when at college, he was witness to any tyrannical act of his own companions over their inferiors, that they burst forth; on such occasions he would always step forward in aid of the weakest and injured party.

He had so early been taught to conceal his feelings and opinions within his own bosom, that none of his companions were aware of their force or tendency, and had the officers of the college become acquainted with them, a decisive check would have been given to his advancement.

As far back as his memory could carry him, no event of importance had occurred to him: ere he was sent to college his education had been placed under the direction of a very worthy but most unintellectual priest, who did not attempt to give him more than the first general rudiments of knowledge; so that from an early age he was accustomed to depend much on his own powers to attain what he sought after.

At times the Baron seemed to take an interest in his welfare, and in the progress of his studies, but he was very uncertain and variable in his behaviour towards the boy; sometimes treating him with the greatest severity, at others, with indulgence; but never with that kindness or justice which wins the love and respect of youth.

He would frequently summon him to attend at the usual field sports of the country, in which he soon learnt to excel; but when the boy could make his escape, he would prefer wandering by himself in the woods with his gun, far more occupied with his own contemplations, than in the pursuit of game; or at other times he would urge his light skiff over the surface of a neighbouring lake, then resting on his oars, would sit gazing on the waters, his thoughts wandering to regions far away.

When safe from the Baron's detection, he would hasten to a rendezvous with his beautiful guardian and friend, and spend hours of delightful intercourse in her society.

Reclining at her feet, his recollection would revert faintly and indistinctly to scenes of a far distant, undefinable period, when he fancied he could recall to memory a picture of the bright and sunny mountains of a soft and genial clime – a cottage on the green hill's side, in front a clear and rapid stream, bounding from rock to rock, and sparkling joyously on its way to the blue distant sea beyond;

the trees of varied foliage waving in the breeze, and gay-coloured flowers filling the air with sweet perfumes. Then would appear, before the vision of his mind, a figure of commanding stature, with noble features, clad in glittering armour, who oftentimes had carried him in his arms. He remembered the very shape of his shield, and the dazzling brightness of his sword, as it was wielded before his eyes in the rays of the sun. Then a confused tumult – the loud roar of cannon – the rattle of musketry – the clashing of swords – red blood flowing around – the wild shouts of men striving in deadly combat – the shrieks of terror-stricken women – the anguish-wrought groans of the wounded and dying – rushed across his recollection.

After those scenes, if such had ever been presented to his sight, the tablet of his memory, for a lapse of time, remained a complete blank, and his first clear remembrance was of the Chateau of the Baron Galetzoff, when he found himself loved and petted by its inmates, and even treated by its haughty Lord with as much kindness as his capricious nature would allow, and with much more than he seemed to bestow on any other human being.

Once only had Ivan mentioned the obscure recollection of his infant years to his fair protectress, but she had, in a passionate flood of tears, charged him, as he valued her love and happiness, never to allude to the subject again.

With advancing years, the visions faded gradually from his mind, or if he thought of them, he considered them but as a dream of childhood, and believed himself in reality to be the son of the tyrannical Baron Galetzoff.

Volume One – Chapter Five

We left the serf Karl urging on the weary animal which drew his master's baggage-cart towards Tver, and there he arrived without any other accident than a thorough drenching from the same storm which they had escaped under shelter of the Gipsy's tent. He proceeded straightway to the best inn the town possessed, which was kept by one of the despised race of Israel, who are the principal innkeepers throughout the country. The inn in question was very inferior to those houses of entertainment which most of the larger cities of Russia now afford; but rapid improvements in all the conveniences for travelling have lately taken place.

The lower floor of the house consisted of two divisions; the one appropriated to the horses and equipages of travellers, the other to the culinary department of the establishment, as also to the accommodation – at that precise moment – of a motley assemblage of human beings, soldiers, mechanics, carriers, wagoners, postillions, all talking at the same time in their guttural language; smoking, drinking, and hallowing to each other, with loud laughter and jokes; yet the ear was never shocked by the profane oath, or other evidences of the fierce quarrels, which too often occur amongst a mixture of people of similar degree in other countries.

The upper part of the building was laid out in rooms for the accommodation of the better order of travellers. One of larger dimensions than the rest formed the dining-room – this was completely impregnated with the fumes of tobacco; the rest consisted of sleeping apartments.

As Karl drove into the court-yard, he seemed to have roused himself to a sense of his own importance, and the responsibility with which he was entrusted, for he endeavoured to assume an air of authority. “Help, here! help!” he exclaimed as the wheels of his cart rattled over the stones, “help here, to carry the baggage of my noble masters up-stairs! Does no one come? Help here, help, halloo!”

His calls for assistance were at last heeded by a being very similar to himself in dress and features. “Halloo, villain!” cried Karl, as the man approached, “can you not hear when a Christian calls? Here, help me to carry this baggage, will you?”

“Who art thou that speakest thus to me?” demanded the other; “art thou better than I am myself, knave? Art thou not a slave as well as I?”

“Ay, ay, truly,” answered Karl, “but I serve a noble master, whilst thou art but the slave of a base-born Hebrew innkeeper!”

“There thou liest!” exclaimed the indignant ostler, for such was his office. “I serve the innkeeper truly, and if he did not oblige me to observe his fasts, as well as those of our own holy church, the service would not be so bad; but I am no slave of his. I am the born serf of the noble Baron Ogstrosty; he has let me out for hire, to the old Jew Levi, to pay off an old score, and when I have worked it out, I shall return to my own master.”

“That alters the case,” replied Karl, rubbing his forehead, that he might more clearly understand the knotty difference, “so now let us be friends, and lend me your aid.”

“With all my heart, now that thou art civil,” said the ostler.

Suiting the action to the word, after fastening the horse's bridle to a ring in the wall, he assisted in taking the luggage from the cart, and led the way up a rude flight of steps, on the landing of which they were met by the landlord Levi, who had been eagerly looking out, in the hope of making considerable gain by his new guests.

“My noble master, the son of the Baron Galetzoff, and my noble master's friend, sent me on before them to announce their coming, and to engage beds and supper. They will be here anon, so make ready for their reception: their baggage must be placed in their room that I may unpack it, for they will be rather wet, I fancy, when they arrive.”

“Your noble masters shall be well served,” answered Levi, bowing rather to the young nobles' portmanteaus, than to the bearer of them. “This way, this way!”

And he conducted Karl into a room, boasting of but little comfort. To him, however, it appeared a luxurious apartment, and he immediately commenced unpacking the luggage. That done, he locked the door, and descended with his fellow-serf to look after his horse, and to attend to his own creature comforts.

Seating himself at the long table in the common eating-room, among the strange variety of guests, he applied himself with unwearied energy to the business of mastication, washing down his food with deep draughts of quass; and so completely was he engaged in this, to him, most grateful occupation, that he paid but little attention to what was going on around him.

When his appetite was at length thoroughly satisfied, he pushed the empty dish from before him, with a sigh, and took another long and steady draught from the jug of quass. He then resigned himself to the enjoyment of his sensations of satisfaction, when his eye-lids began to fall; re-opening slightly, they closed again, his head nodded for a minute, when he shook it to rouse himself, but it soon again fell slowly down, and he dropped fast asleep, resting his arms and shoulders on the table.

Some time had elapsed, when he was aroused by the entrance of two men, who seated themselves close to him, one of them pushing rudely against him as he took his seat at the table. The movement made Karl raise his head, and seeing two serving men in the liveries apparently of a nobleman, he endeavoured, for the sake of good fellowship, to join in their conversation; but he found it impossible to sustain his head without the support of the table. He listened, however, for some time to what they were saying, till their words grew indistinct and meaningless to his comprehension, and Karl sunk again into sleep.

“Well,” said one of the new-comers, “this is a pretty business we’ve been engaged in. First, the certainty of being knocked on the head by the Gipsies, had they caught us, of which there was every risk; then, the very clear reality of finding ourselves knocked down by two wild horsemen, who seemed to have risen out of the forest, for no other purpose than to interfere where they had no business; and then, because we could not prevent their getting up to the Count, when we did our best, to be rewarded with a thrashing and a load of abuse; and finally, to be sent, with our broken heads, scampering across the country to look after these gentlemen. And after all, what is the cause of all this fuss? – a woman – a girl – a piece of painted flesh! a baggage, no better than those who go singing about the streets of Moscow. So coy and modest too! Why the Count is mad to make such a disturbance about her. It makes me thirsty to think of it – hand the quass, Kruntz.”

“You may well say that,” answered his companion, “for I never saw our master in such a taking before. He swears he will have deadly vengeance against those who prevented him from carrying off the girl; and he says that he should know them again, whether he met them in this world or the next. I don’t think he has much chance of meeting them in a better place, do you, Groff?”

“No, no,” answered the first speaker; “our master has played too many odd tricks on earth for that. He may know them, perhaps, for he had time to see their faces; but it is too hard of him to expect that we should; for I could have sworn, when they came so suddenly upon us, that they were the wild horsemen of the woods.”

“They may be devils themselves, and still not escape our master’s vengeance,” replied Kruntz; “and, as for the girl, he will entrap her before long, or he will not act like himself. If he cannot do it by open force, he has numerous secret means to bring about his ends.”

“That I’ll be sworn he has,” said the other; “and so long as he pays me well, I am ready to serve him, though I do not much relish so hard a ride as he sent us, in a storm, on a fool’s errand. Yet if I could find out who the two young gallants were, who gave us such confoundedly hard blows, I should like to see how they felt under like treatment. Some more vodka, Kruntz, that’s the stuff; now for our pipes. Drown care first, and then smoke him dry, and he won’t trouble you; that’s the way for honest men like us to live.”

These two worthies, after enjoying their tobacco, left the room. They will be easily recognised as the myrmidons of the Count Erintoff, sent forward in great haste by their master, to trace the

horsemen, who had arrested him in his flight with the Gipsy maid – a circumstance the more embittering to his pride, after his success in securing her person. He had also dispatched others in an opposite direction, with the same orders.

Karl at length awoke to find that the shades of evening had already enveloped the town in obscurity; and he rushed out in great dismay, at having overslept himself, to endeavour to gain some tidings of his young master and his friend; but in vain – he could hear nothing of them. The honest fellow now became greatly alarmed, making inquiries of every body he met, till finding that his master had certainly not yet arrived in Tver, he lay down, to await his coming, on one of the wooden benches in the eating-room, when he very soon again fell into a sleep – not the less sound from his deep potations of quass – and did not awake till long after the morning had dawned, and the inmates of the hotel were astir. He started up, rubbing his eyes, and looking around to convince himself where he was; when recollecting the events of the previous day, he instantly set off to gain intelligence of his master. With eager agitation, he questioned all who came in his way, high and low; but most people pushed the lowly unshorn serf aside, without deigning to answer him; some ridiculed him, and bade him seek a new master, if he had lost his old one, for he would never find him again. Among those whom he had casually addressed, was one of the two individuals, whose conversation he had partly overheard when sitting by his side on the previous evening.

“You are inquiring for your master and his friend,” asked Groff; “two young men, you say, whom you parted from about twenty versts off; as they rode by themselves through the forest.” By thus interrogating the honest, but simple Karl, he learned every particular he sought to know respecting Ivan Galetzoff and his companion.

Poor Karl spent the long day in great tribulation, walking to and fro in front of the inn, inquiring of everybody who arrived from the direction of St. Petersburg, if they had overtaken his master and fellow traveller; but obtaining no intelligence, he proceeded along the road for some miles in the hope of meeting them; again unsuccessful, he returned in case they should have passed by some other way. Towards evening, when he perceived the lost cavaliers approaching, his joy knew no bounds.

Running to meet them, and ere they had time to dismount, he seized their hands and covered them with kisses. He gave their horses in charge to the ostler, and conducted them to their room, where they were glad to rest, after the excitement and fatigues of the preceding day.

Their arrival had been observed by others with equal satisfaction to that felt by honest Karl, though arising from very dissimilar motives. Groff and his companion concealed within a doorway, watched them as they dismounted, and being fully satisfied of their identity, both from Karl’s description, and their own recollection of the wild horsemen, by whom they had been felled in the forest, they immediately mounted their horses to convey their information to the Count.

Ivan felt but little inconvenience from his wound; the aged Hagar having treated it so efficaciously. He was, therefore, enabled to continue on the journey to Moscow, early the next morning; notwithstanding the numerous eloquent reasons urged by their considerate landlord, to persuade them to delay it.

They crossed the magnificent Volga, by a bridge of boats. This mighty current rushing onward in its course, divides Europe from Asia; it is navigable well nigh to its very source – a distance of four thousand miles; and after bathing the walls of Astracan, finishes its career in the far distant Caspian. Its banks are peopled by the warlike tribes of Cossacks, who so unrelentingly harassed the skirts of the French army, during their disastrous retreat from Russia. On its noble waters were being transported rich cargoes of grain, the produce of its fertile banks, in boats of various sizes, rigged with a single but lofty mast, supporting an immense sail, and a long rudder, projecting far beyond the stern, which is admirably adapted to guide them, when passing the rapids.

The villages through which the travellers’ route lay, were forlorn and miserable; being generally the property of the Seigneurs, and occupied by their serfs. They consisted of a single long street, lined on either side with cottages built of rough logs: those of the more affluent being formed of the

same materials, hewn and squared into more regular shape. Their gable ends projecting far into the street, discovered occasionally patches of rude carving; small holes perforated in the walls serving as windows.

In many spots along the road, were small chapels with pictures of the Panagia (the Russian appellation of the Virgin Mary,) or of some of the multitudinous saints in their calendar; these were the especial objects of Karl's devotion, as he bowed his head to them, and crossed himself all over with the greatest reverence. They overtook many teams of small carts, sometimes forty together; carrying tallow, hides, and hemp to the cities, to be exchanged for merchandise, with which they return to the interior: their drivers were generally lying asleep on their goods, one alone at the head of the train, conducting the team. As evening closed in, they halted, forming bivouacs by the way-side, and their cheering fires served as beacons for the wayfarer.

Although but a few years have glided by, since the period to which we allude, great changes have taken place on the highway between St. Petersburg and Moscow. Not only has the road been macadamised, and become one of the best in Europe, but elegant bridges have been thrown across the rivers and streams; handsome, well-conducted post-houses have been established on the road, and public conveyances traverse it regularly.

It was towards the evening of the second day of their departure from Tver, that they approached the Phoenix-like, the resuscitated, holy, and ancient city of Moscow.

The rays of the setting sun shed a glittering lustre on the innumerable gilded domes, steeples and spires, of its churches, shooting upwards from amid the dark masses of habitations, like trees of gold in a forest of enchantment. Each tower being surmounted by the emblem of Christian faith, resplendent with gold, and connected by golden chains, which shone more brightly as they waved in the breeze.

This gorgeous scene breaking suddenly on their sight, arrested their progress; the stately city, extending over a wide space of undulating ground, encompassed by woody and cultivated heights – the hundred-crested Kremlin rising majestically above all – the magnificent palaces, churches, and convents, with their cupolas and domes of blue, and white, and gold, giving it an aspect of oriental magnificence.

Karl, animated by a spirit of devotion, threw himself from the cart, and prostrated himself on the soil, in adoration, as he beheld the Jerusalem of Russia – the city sanctified in their hearts, and so beloved by every true Muscovite. Having completed the ceremony, with innumerable genuflexions and crossings, much to his own satisfaction, he drove on to regain his master and Thaddeus, who not being imbued with the same feeling of respect for the City of the Czars, and having often viewed the spectacle, had, after a slight pause at the grandeur of the scene, proceeded on their road.

After traversing many of the irregular, winding streets of the city, the moment arrived when they were to part, to hasten to their respective homes. Exchanging pledges to meet again as soon as circumstances would permit, they then started off in opposite directions.

Volume One – Chapter Six

Missing the society of his lively companion, a shade of gloom overspread the handsome features of Ivan; his mind being thus thrown back upon itself, the sombre scenery through which he passed, as he drew nigh to the end of his journey, on the day after he quitted his friend, contributed to augment the melancholy bias of his thoughts.

On either side of his path arose a thick and dark wood, without a single opening vista, or a green glade; every part seemed impenetrable to joy and gladness. The habitations of the miserable and oppressed serfs were closed; their inmates having early retired to rest, after the ill-requited toils of the day.

Occasionally, however, he fell in with labourers returning to their homes, who, as they recognised the son of their seigneur, saluted him with respect and a look of affection. In an instant, the cloud on his brow would be dissipated as he returned their greetings, and offered a kind word to each, either in inquiries after their families, or other good-natured remarks, by which the unsophisticated peasant's heart is so easily gained.

On approaching the chateau, even such signs of life as had previously appeared ceased to exist, and all around wore, if possible, a still more gloomy and dreary aspect.

He unconsciously shortened his rein; that action sufficed to betray that he could not regard the Baron in the light of a father. So far from having an anxious desire to hasten to receive his welcome, his languid pace proved his reluctance to enter sooner than necessary into the presence of the fierce lord of that dark domain. His heart was a blank as he drew up at the principal entrance.

No group of bustling and pleased domestics stood ready to receive him on his return, after a long absence; no fond mother or affectionate sisters, to rush forward with outstretched arms, to welcome him in a loving embrace, or to surround him as they gazed with eager and delighted eyes, their repeated inquiries lost amid the confusion of anxious tongues. All within was as silent as without, a solitary household serf alone presenting himself at Ivan's summons; while, after considerable delay, another of the same class appeared, to lead his horse to the stables; both, however, greeted him with welcome smiles.

His heart now beat with eagerness to hasten to the presence of the revered and much loved being so mysteriously connected with him, for well he knew how anxiously she was awaiting his arrival. At the same time, a feeling of dread came over him, of misfortune having befallen her; she might be on her death-bed, perhaps – horrible thought! – extended a cold and lifeless corpse! Lost to him for ever, and her important secret known to none but her God!

This idea became almost insupportable. He dared not make any inquiries respecting her of the domestic. To visit her, ere he had appeared to the Baron, who he was informed had desired his presence immediately on his arrival, would have been attended by results equally injurious to her as to himself.

Without delay, therefore, he was ushered into the apartment where the Baron was sitting, who neither rose as the young man advanced to pay his respects, or relaxed the cold stern cast of his features.

The Baron Galetzoff seemed a man long past the prime of life, on whom age had laid its wintry marks, but still retaining the air and firm port of a soldier. His stature was rather under than above the middle height, and his figure full and unwieldy. His features might have been handsome in his youth, though now they were disfigured by an habitual scowl on his forehead, and a deep cut reaching from the left eye to the lower part of the ear; his cold grey sunken eyes retreating, as if from observation, under the shade of his coarse overhanging brows. His grizzled moustache was long and untrimmed; and this, when excited by passion – no uncommon occurrence, unfortunately for his dependants – or labouring under uncertainty as to the success of his projects, he was wont to twist and pluck at.

“So, Sir,” he exclaimed, in a tone of severity, as Ivan approached the table, “you have loitered on your way, methinks; else why this delay in your arrival? Your duty and obedience would have been better proved by a more rapid journey. How did it thus happen, Sir?”

Ivan explained that the delay arose from a violent storm, which had obliged him to take shelter under the tent of a Gipsy; but he did not choose to hazard a relation of the rest of his adventures.

The Baron’s brow lowered as he resumed —

“And is this, Sir, the bent of your disposition to herd with outcasts, and the vilest of the earth? A race I detest and abhor; and strong enough are my reasons. Rather would I have bared my head to the fiercest storm the heavens ever sent forth, than to have been beholden to such wretches for a dry crust, or the covering of their miserable tents.”

“The people you speak of, Sir,” answered Ivan, “I found as kind and hospitable in their humble way, as any of a higher rank; and I received much attention from them.”

The Baron here rose from his seat, and took several turns across the apartment; then suddenly addressing himself to Ivan, exclaimed —

“Talk not to me of receiving kindness at the hands of such ignominious beings as those cursed Gipsies. I loathe their very name! Is this the return you render me, degenerate youth, for the care and attention I have lavished on your infancy and education? Though how could I have expected ought else? Yet I thought you possessed more proper pride than to have thus demeaned yourself. Learn, however, henceforth to pay more respect to my honour and dignity, though you may be careless of your own; and remember, the name you bear must not, and shall not, be disgraced by associating with the base and worthless.”

Ivan remained mute during this tirade, for he saw that the Baron required an object to vent his spleen upon, and he willingly offered his own shoulders, to screen some victim less able to bear it.

The haughty noble had thus worked himself into a state of passionate excitement, as undignified as it was causeless, and continued pacing the floor with hasty steps, while the young man stood silently by, waiting its result, knowing that his withdrawal from the scene would but increase the Baron’s anger.

After the lapse of a few minutes, this fit of rage seemed to have subsided, as turning towards Ivan, he said —

“Young man, let me never hear again of so discreditable an occurrence. And now listen to the reasons which induced me to recall you. I have been appointed by our gracious Emperor to high command in his armies destined for foreign service; and I intend that you shall accompany me to learn the art of war by practical experience, as you have hitherto done in theory. Before you, now opens a path which will lead you to honour and renown; and it rests with yourself to enter it or not. If you follow it, and I find you worthy, it then will be my care to advance you rapidly. But mark me! I demand from you implicit obedience; that rendered, rank and fortune shall be yours – if not, beware!”

Ivan’s heart beat high at this information, though conveyed in harsh and uncourteous words; but he ardently sought to enter at once into the exciting scenes of active life, and his eye brightened as he expressed his readiness to comply with the Baron’s wishes, and thanked him for the solicitude he professed for his welfare.

“My intention,” continued the Baron, “is, that you should visit Moscow in a few days, to procure your military equipments, and to mix somewhat in society; for though, I myself detest its ceremonies and trivialities, I wish you to gain the advantages its lessons afford, ere you enter into the more active and stirring scenes of life. You may now retire to rest after your journey, and to-morrow, I will impart my other projects.”

His listener, having expressed the gratitude he really felt at the prospects held out to him, gladly retired from the presence of his capricious father.

The above conversation, so characteristic of the Baron’s usual deportment towards his son, was little calculated to win either his respect or his love: indeed, his conduct altogether seemed

inexplicable; for while he had spared neither care, nor expense in his education, he had evidently no affection for him; and had on every occasion tried his utmost, to imbue him with his own fierce and savage disposition: in the latter, however, he had signally failed, through an agency he little suspected. The young man, meanwhile, profited by the great advantages offered by a good education, and grew up endued with extraordinary firmness and courage.

Ivan had retired to his chamber for the night, after endeavouring in vain to obtain some communication with the lady before alluded to, as a mysterious inmate of the château; when, as he was reclining in a chair, and gazing through the window on the dark groves which surrounded the building, he was startled by a knock at his door. Hastening to open it, a person presented himself, of unusual and remarkable appearance.

He was one of those extraordinary productions of nature, possessing a figure of just proportions, though in stature he was scarcely three feet high. His dress was arranged with extreme neatness and care, but of a fantastic cut; and the little man seemed to delight in the most gaudy colours. His feathered hat was placed with a rakish air on one side of his head, from which flowed a profusion of curling locks. His whiskers were also curled with the greatest care, while his long thin moustaches rose fiercely upward, in imitation of heroes of larger size.

It was difficult to define the expression of his diminutive, but very regular features, which would have been considered handsome in a larger mould. Age had spared him not, for already wrinkles furrowed his cheeks, which were of a shallow, parchment-like hue. His small grey eyes still bright and twinkling, expressed talent, and cunning; there was a restlessness too in his look and manner – each movement he made being quick, but uncertain. He would first cast a hurried glance at the person he was speaking to; next on the ground, then suddenly over his shoulder, as if he expected an attack from behind; and presently he would spin his little body round on one leg, ere he recommenced the subject he had abruptly discontinued. When he spoke, the tone of his voice was so shrill and loud, that those who heard it, could scarcely believe that the sound proceeded from so diminutive a creature.

As this lilliputian-like figure entered the room, he opened his arms to their full extent to embrace Ivan, who kindly stooped to the requisite level to meet him, for otherwise the little personage, who seemed unconscious of his own size, would have been unable to clasp more than one of his friend's knees.

“My friend, my dear boy!” exclaimed the dwarf, “my heart beats with pleasure to see you back again. You are grown, Ivan, since I saw you last, for we could then walk arm in arm; and now, I doubt if we could do so with perfect ease. I have been longing to have you here again, for I knew not what to do without you. I could neither ride, hunt, or shoot with any satisfaction during your absence; but now we will recommence our former amusements.”

“I am truly glad to see you, my worthy friend Ladislau,” answered Ivan, “and to find you as vivacious and active as ever; but there is one I would inquire after; my kind protectress – my most beloved friend – tell me, Ladislau, how is she? of no one else have I been able to learn, nor as you well know, dared I to seek the information, my heart yearned after, though my thoughts have been filled with sad forebodings.”

“My young friend,” replied Ladislau, “she is well, and is anxiously waiting to see you; but the mighty man, the great Baron, has been treating her more severely than ever, and will not allow her to proceed beyond the walls of the garden. One of these days his cruelty will meet with its due reward!”

“Alas!” said Ivan, “that I should not have the power to rescue that angelic being from his tyranny! She herself forbids me to interfere. Tell me, my dear Ladislau, when shall I find an opportunity of seeing her?”

“I cannot now say,” answered the dwarf. “I will, however, contrive the matter for you, whilst the Baron is from home, and the meeting will contribute greatly to the lady's cure. Ha! ha! ha! I am laughing at the idea that those, whom the mighty tyrant despises, can so outwit him; aye, and revenge themselves too, in a way he little dreams of. The day will come, when he shall learn that the being

he has kept to laugh and jeer at, has a soul with passions strong as his own, and who has known how to revenge himself for all the injuries and insults heaped on him for so many years. But away with such thoughts: now that you are returned, Ivan! pleasure must be our sole study, and I owe you my utmost services, for you were ever kind and attentive, while others scorned me, although they laughed at what they termed my antic tricks. I am grateful, Ivan, and I will prove it; for though I can be a bitter and implacable hater, I can also be a firm and true friend.”

“In your love, I have always trusted, my good Ladislau, though what I may have done is not worthy of mention; and you amply repay me by your services, and constant readiness to follow my wishes.”

“Well, well, we will not discuss that matter now;” said Ladislau, “but tell me, Ivan, how came it, that you did not arrive yesterday? I was looking out for you the whole day!”

Ivan gave him an account of his adventure, in rescuing the Gipsy maid Azila, and of his visit to the tents of her tribe, to which the dwarf listened attentively.

“You acted rightly,” said he, as Ivan concluded; “and you may some future day be richly rewarded. Is she not beautiful, and endowed with talent, and far superior to the life she leads?”

“If you allude to Azila,” replied Ivan, “she is both; but how happens it, that you are acquainted with these Gipsies?”

“Ha! ha! ha!” chuckled the dwarf, “that’s a long story, my dear boy, and I cannot tell it you now, though I may some day. You have much to learn – many deep secrets – of which my bosom is the depositary; ha! ha! those who despise me, little know the power I possess! There is one, who would give half he is worth, to know a secret which is safely locked up in my breast, and he would not scruple to tear it open, if he knew that it was there! Ha! ha! ha!” and the dwarf laughed shrilly, as he triumphed in this consciousness of his own power, and of the revenge he was taking on those by whom he considered himself injured.

“Now to you, Ivan,” he continued, “who indulge in no idle curiosity, and treat me so kindly, I will some day, when the fit moment arrives, disclose the treasured secret.”

“You are one of the first of the few persons I remember ever since my childhood,” answered Ivan, “and I act towards you as I feel – with sincere regard. But tell me, Ladislau, what is there remarkable, or unusual, with respect to the Gipsy’s daughter, besides her beauty, which I can judge of, and her talents which I suppose do not extend beyond her sweet singing, and a clever tact in turning her pretended knowledge of palmistry to account.”

“Ah, you little see into her character, if you imagine that she practises any of the vulgar deceits of her tribe,” answered the dwarf. “She is above every act of that kind. Her heart is with her people, and she delights in their wild life; yet she might, if it so pleased her, dwell in cities, and enjoy all the luxuries others value so highly. Her education has not been neglected, while her talents are of the highest order, her judgment superior, and her virtue unquestionable; these high endowments she employs for her noble ends. She might have been far different from what she is – enjoying rank, riches and power; but then too probably, alas! she might have been proud, vicious and ignorant. I love her much, but would not have her different to what she is, though on some future day, it may be said that I have injured her; but I know better. I am saying, perhaps, more than is prudent; I can, however, trust you, Ivan, and I beseech you, utter not a syllable of what you have heard, as you love me.”

“Your confidence shall not be abused,” answered Ivan.

“Fare thee well, fare thee well! I must now away, my young friend;” quickly cried the little man, as whisking round on one foot, waving his hand, and singing his adieus, he skipped out of the room.

As long back as Ivan could recollect, he had always been on terms of perfect friendship with the dwarf Ladislau; but never since his earliest infancy had he observed the slightest alteration in his appearance. At that early age, he used to romp and play with him; and as he grew older and stronger, with a consideration which few boys would have possessed, he never exerted his power and strength to his annoyance, so that the diminutive creature cherished a feeling of attachment for him, stronger

than for any other human being; while Ivan, having but few to expend his affections upon, returned his regard with equal sincerity.

It is still the custom in many of the wealthy and noble families, both of Russia and Poland, to retain in their establishments, one of the race of dwarfs, to amuse their children and dependants, and as a butt for their own wit. As in former days, a jester, a fool, or a dwarf was considered a necessary appendage to the household of every noble throughout Europe, though that custom is now fortunately banished to the less civilised countries of the eastern part of the continent, where education has made but slow advances.

As soon as the dwarf had retired, Ivan threw himself on his couch; but it was long, ere the repose he sought, drew a veil over his confused and agitated thoughts.

Volume One – Chapter Seven

Ivan had obtained but few and brief opportunities of meeting the lady who resided at the chateau, and whose history was so totally unknown to the world. The Baron constantly required his attendance, and narrowly watched her actions.

Some days had elapsed since Ivan's arrival, during which time he had invariably accompanied the Baron in his hunting expeditions, the latter having determined to clear his forests of the wolves which infested them. On the next of these expeditions, he determined to find some expedient for absenting himself, so as to be able to obtain the long-sought interview with his mysterious friend.

Accordingly, whilst the followers were beating about for the lurking plunderers, and the woods echoed with their loud shouts, he feigned an excuse, and galloped back to the chateau, trusting that his brief absence would be overlooked. In the mean time, the dwarf, who had not been summoned to the chase by his lord, had willingly remained at home, and prepared every means to facilitate the meeting. The young man, with anxious haste, repaired to the appointed spot, where, beneath a bower covered with luxuriant dark foliage, and shaded by a group of venerable trees, he beheld the loved object of his search.

The lady had scarcely reached the meridian of life, still retaining every feature of matronly beauty. Her figure was tall; its every movement graceful; her face cast in the true Grecian mould, with a pure and translucent complexion; the long dark silken eyelash shading a clear grey eye, and giving a subdued softness of expression to her countenance. A casual observer on viewing the two persons, side by side, would have discovered a striking resemblance between them.

Her watchful ear caught the sound of his footstep, and rising, she rushed forward to meet him, folding him in a momentary embrace, as he endeavoured reverently to kiss her hand. A convulsive sob impeded her utterance as she attempted to speak; but her fast-falling tears, which bedewed his neck, expressed the fulness of her love. That agitating moment over, her composure returned; and retiring to a seat, Ivan placed himself by her side, his hand being fondly locked in hers.

"Loved one," she said, "is it thus alone we can meet, by stealth, and but for a brief space, after so long an absence, and when, too, you may be torn from me for ever? Oh, Ivan! much have I suffered for your sake, and gladly would I suffer more; yet a woman's weakness overpowers me, when I think of the dangers you may be exposed to. He has told me that you are about to accompany him on a distant military expedition wherein you may gain honour and renown, such as I know your noble heart will rejoice in; but dreadful forebodings haunt my mind, for I feel it will be full of peril; and I cannot trust him. I seek to discover the plans he is meditating for you, but they are beyond my comprehension. Whether affection, or any other motive influences him, I know not; yet though he promises to advance you rapidly, I doubt the sincerity of his words. But oh! Ivan, I am powerless, and commit you to the charge of the God of your fathers."

"For your sake," exclaimed the young man, "I would resign all my fond aspirations, and would gladly remain to protect you; but, alas! as a slave I must obey the Baron's will, or seek my own fortune in the world without his aid."

"Well do I know your love, my brave youth," replied the lady, "which would hazard all for my welfare; but that I ask not. No! go where glory and fame await you, and care not for me, for I feel that my course of life is well nigh run, and that the day of my freedom is at hand. Much more of anguish than you, Ivan, can possibly know, has my bosom borne; but the hour is not yet come when I may recount to you the tale of my woes."

"To what secret woes do your words allude?" exclaimed Ivan, in agitation. "Oh, my more than mother! my protectress! my guardian angel! am I then incapable of protecting you, or at least of comforting you? Oh despise me not by concealing your sufferings from me!"

“Alas! your interference,” said the lady, despondingly, “would be of little avail; it might bring ruin on yourself, without improving my lot. No, no, loved one! I would not blight your happiness with my sorrow. You are on the eve of visiting Moscow; when there, mix in the world; seek all the enjoyment it can afford, though I fear there is but little to be found. Yet I too was once blest with perfect happiness. You will return here, I learn, before you depart for the army, when I will relate all; till then, may your young heart be unseared by grief.”

“Oh! disclose your griefs to me now, dearest lady. Let me endeavour to console them; and let my devotion in your service prove my love. Surely the Baron, though severe and unjust at times to me, cannot – dare not, be so barbarous as to injure one so lovely and gentle as yourself.”

“I may not at present reveal to you my sad history,” replied the lady; “prudence demands that the veil should not yet be withdrawn. You know not what the Baron is. Time will display his nature.”

The lady and the youth were still indulging in their melancholy, yet interesting conversation, when they were suddenly interrupted by the appearance of Ladislau, looking like some woodland sprite, as, with alarm on his countenance, he rushed up to them through the mass of the shrubbery.

“Hist! hist!” he cried, but in a suppressed voice; “fly, Ivan, fly! off with you – begone! this is no place for you! Madam, pardon my intrusion. Fly, Ivan, fly! The Baron has returned; this moment I heard the tramp of his horse’s hoofs in the court-yard, and his voice raised in anger; so I hastened to warn you. He stormed and raged as usual. Yes, his high mightiness was storming like a tornado.”

The dwarf laughed in a shrill tone, and added, “He will undoubtedly come this way; and it would not calm his anger to find his son here instead of accompanying him in the chase of animals, less savage than himself. So fly, my friend, fly from hence; tarry not another moment. And I would recommend you too, Madam, to avoid him at present, if you wish not to bear the brunt of his fury, which has been excited by Ivan’s absence.”

Ivan respectfully raised the lady’s hand to his lips, and was bidding her farewell, when the dwarf exclaimed, “Haste, haste, or you will be discovered – see, here he comes;” and at that instant, the Baron was seen at a short distance, walking rapidly towards them. Ivan quickly retreated by an opposite path, fortunately unperceived by his father, while the Baron advanced towards the lady and dwarf, with a dark frown on his brow.

“So, ho, Madam,” he cried; “is it thus you abide by my injunctions not to move beyond your apartment? Be pleased forthwith to retire to your chamber, until I repair thither; I shall know how to correct this disobedience to my commands. Make no answer! go, Madam, at once!”

The lady spoke not, though her lip trembled with emotion, and there was a flush on her brow, as she turned to obey the Baron’s command, and walked calmly towards the château.

“And you, imp! what business of state brought you to the lady?” said the Baron, turning to the dwarf. “Doubtless, you have been laying some mischievous plans together. Have you lately seen Ivan, sir manikin?”

“Yes, most noble and potent Seigneur,” answered Ladislau; “I met him some time since, walking in solitary and meditative mood. I ventured not to interrupt the current of his thoughts. Can I be the bearer of any of your most gracious orders to him?”

“Yes, go find him, and say I desire his attendance,” said the Baron. “No, stay – I myself will seek him. In which direction went he, do you say?”

“In yonder avenue,” replied the dwarf, pointing to an opposite spot to the one he believed the youth was to be found in.

As the Baron walked quickly forward, he muttered to himself, “Can it be that she, whose stubborn soul would never bend to my will, should be captivated by this youth! By heavens! if I so find it, I will tear her limb from limb, and let the boy feast his eyes on the spectacle. Had the idea occurred to me before, he never should have returned here. He is capable of any deed; there is a bold, unruly spirit within him, which I must curb with a tight rein, or he will break loose even from me. He to be my rival, forsooth! here comes the audacious youth. By heavens! he has a right noble air,

which may well win any woman's love. I would destroy him at once, to prevent any further mischief; but then I lose the cherished object for which I nurtured him – no, no, that were worse than folly. He shall live to become the fierce soldier I would make him, and when he gains more of the spirit of the tiger, which he now somewhat lacks, I shall be content. He comes of a race, whose blood is strongly imbued with it, and in his it must exist also.”

By the time the Baron had arrived at the conclusion of this soliloquy, which vaguely hinted at his sinister schemes, his anger had been tempered, partly by the ideas of future triumph it awakened, partly by the cool perfumed breeze, which played within the shady walk. He had been unsuccessful that morning in the chase, which had raised his choler; and when he missed Ivan from his side, and ascertained on inquiry, that he had been seen riding in the direction of the château, his rage was greatly increased. On his return, he learned that his son had proceeded into the grounds, whither the lady had shortly before also been observed to go.

“I perceive, Sir,” he said on confronting his son, “that you prefer luxurious ease in shady bowers, to the hardy and noble exercise of hunting, in disobedience moreover to my wishes; but let me tell you, young man, such is but a bad promise of your future conduct in a military career; and you need not expect my countenance or support, during the continuance of such frivolities, and opposition to my will. I expect henceforth to find you foremost in danger, and ever prompt to endure hardships without murmur. Thus it was that I fought my way up the ladder of fame, and thus must you follow, if you desire advancement, and value a high name.”

“I trust, Sir, you will never find me remiss in my military duties,” answered Ivan.

“I have found you already deficient in its most essential branch;” angrily rejoined the Baron, then assuming a calmer tone, he added “you had some motive, and not a trifling one, which induced you to act contrary to my will this day; ah, you start! Beware, young man, should my suspicions prove correct, your fate is sealed! Again, I say, beware! My nature is such as will not be trifled with; prepare for your departure to-morrow for Moscow; that is a favour I grant you; so answer me not; you now know my will.”

Accustomed as he was to the authoritative tone of one who, in his mildest mood, never brooked a reply, Ivan's lips moved with emotion, yet they uttered no sound, as the Baron turned away, and walked towards the mansion.

The dark hints which his father had let fall fixed Ivan to the spot in deep meditation; yet he could not settle in his mind to what they could allude, dismissing at once, as too preposterous, the real cause. Finally he came to the resolution of implicitly following his orders, though he would fain have tarried a few days longer in the chateau, to hold further intercourse with his sorrowful protectress. Then retiring to his chamber, to make the requisite preparations, he was soon joined by the dwarf.

As soon as he was informed of his friend's banishment, tears fell from the little man's eyes.

“Oh, Ivan,” he exclaimed, “my friend, my brother, my son – for you are each and all to me – I have experienced many cruel trials; but to part with you is severer than all combined. We may never meet again, for I fear the Baron will not allow you to return here; and I am growing so weary of this cruel world, that I expect not to remain much longer an inhabitant of it. Ivan, my dear boy, forget not Ladislau, for be assured his first and last daily thought will be of you.”

Ivan succeeded in soothing his little friend's grief, by sincere assurances of his remembrance. He then requested him to take his earnest farewell to the lady, as he could not hope to see her again before his departure, promising that, at every risk, he would return ere he joined the army, while during the interval, he would regularly inform Ladislau of his proceedings.

After quitting his son in the grounds which encompassed the mansion, the Baron repaired forthwith to the chamber of the lady, who received him with a proud and dignified air, before which even he for a moment paused abashed.

“Your time, Madam, I have discovered, is not always passed in the dismal solitude of which you so repeatedly complain. Hear me! you would seduce the affections of my son! Ha. Madam, is

it so? You turn pale and tremble! This moment I parted from the youth; and as I taxed him with my suspicions, his look of conscious guilt revealed the truth. He had not a word to urge in his own defence. Do you answer for him? Am I not correct? Speak, woman!”

The lady stood for a while in mute astonishment at the accusations so suddenly and violently brought against her. At length she uttered, in a voice, choking with emotion:

“Be Heaven my witness that I speak the truth, when I declare that I am guiltless of the crime you charge me with.”

“Deceitful woman, thou liest!” cried the Baron, giving vent to a burst of uncontrollable anger; he gnashed his teeth, while his eyes rolled wildly; he lifted his arm, and struck the defenceless female. She uttered no cry; but every drop of blood quitted her cheek, and she would have fallen to the floor, had not the wall supported her. Rivetting her eye on her oppressor, and mustering all her energy, she proudly confronted him in scorn and contempt, branding him with the epithet of coward. The ruffian, in his turn, trembled, and quailed before the superior might – the majesty of a lovely woman, conscious of her unsullied virtue. He felt himself to be the despicable being she termed him; his honour had been for ever disgraced by this foul indelible stain. He felt that his name was for ever blotted from the rolls of chivalry; that every slave who crawled in chains on his land would be deemed more worthy to touch a lady’s hand than he.

The haughty lord answered not: his tongue was tied – he was conquered. Without even daring to meet her glance of scorn, he turned away, and quitted the apartment. When left in solitude, the lady sunk on a couch, and pressed her brow within her hands.

“For what fate am I reserved?” she cried. “To perish by the hand of this dastard tyrant! No more to revisit my own sunny hills and smiling vales. Yet, for the sake of that loved one, I can and will bear all. Could I but feel assured of his happiness, I would yield to death contentedly. There is, however, one duty more due to him – then welcome death!”

Volume One – Chapter Eight

Ivan was fully equipped for his journey to Moscow, in pursuance of his father's orders, when he received a summons to attend him.

"I have desired your presence," said the Baron, as he entered, "to communicate my last orders. I will allow you an ample sum for your expenses, and a sojourn of six weeks in Moscow. Dedicate that period to amusement; at its expiration you will be attached to my staff; meanwhile have your uniforms prepared. You may now depart."

The young man withdrew, his parting salutation being scarcely noticed. He was met in the court-yard by his friend the dwarf, who shed tears as Ivan mounted his horse; while he himself felt sad in parting from one of the few friends he possessed in the world. He took a last look at the apartment occupied by the lady so deeply beloved by him. All was closed and mournful there. Then spurring his horse, he rode rapidly from the chateau.

A lively and bustling scene met his view as he entered Moscow. It was a day dedicated to one of the numerous saints in the calendar of the Greek church, and a holiday; so that all the world was abroad, taking recreation during their brief but beautiful spring.

The sumptuous equipages of the nobles were dashing by, with their four spirited horses, harnessed in long traces, and guided by a tiny postillion, while a portly, liveried coachman was seated more for state than service, on the richly ornamented coach-box. Officers, in various uniforms, and followed by wild and fierce-looking Calmuc Tartars, galloped in every direction. Countless were the gay vehicles in motion; conspicuous amongst these, was the light-formed drosky, drawn by a pair of horses, the animal in the shafts advancing at a finely paced trot, while his companion, now prancing and curvetting, now sidling in graceful bounds, attracted the spectators' admiring gaze. Costly were the dresses, and glittering the stars with which the proud nobles were arrayed, as they rode or drove past in rapid succession, offering a marked contrast to the humble and bearded citizens assembled on the occasion. Every human being, whatever his garb or condition, seemed happy; and the young visitor unconsciously caught the same feeling. Having given his friend Thaddeus notice of his intended coming, he was not surprised, though much pleased, to be welcomed by him on dismounting at his hotel.

"Most grave hermit," exclaimed his friend, "happy am I to find that you have been enticed away from your contemplations amid groves and lakes, and I trust soon to initiate your philosophy in the mysteries of a city existence."

"Thanks, my good Thaddeus, I have determined upon seeing what you term the world and its amusements, and resign myself entirely to your sage guidance."

It is unnecessary to follow the two friends through all the scenes of gaiety, into which they plunged with the ardour of youth; it is sufficient to say, that Ivan, in spite of his retiring disposition, soon found himself much sought after, among the highest circles of rank and tone in Moscow, formed as he was both in person, and mind to adorn society. He could not but feel gratified by the attentions he received, and amused by the various scenes of gaiety in which he moved; so that sombre reflections had no opportunity to creep in, and mar his pleasure. Many days had thus flown quickly by, without a single interruption to their light and joyous course; even the adventure with the Gipsies, on their journey from St. Petersburg, was forgotten; when one evening, at an entertainment given by the Prince Galitzin, they were startled on hearing announced the name of the Count Erintoff.

Shortly after, they saw him advancing with an acquaintance of theirs, in the direction where they were standing, apparently without his recognising them, and he would have passed by, had not Ivan's eye been fixed sternly upon him. A sudden start accompanied by a frown marked the recognition, when his companion turning round, and observing the two young men, stopped to present him to them. With a bland smile he advanced, and politely saluting them, began, without hesitation, a light

and diverting conversation on the common topics of the day. His address was so unembarrassed, and his manner so cordial towards them, that they became doubtful whether he actually remembered them as his former opponents; a slight incident, however, took place later in the evening, which made them again feel certain, that he knew them. Ivan had engaged, as a partner in the dance, a beautiful girl, to whom the Count had been paying marked attention; and he was standing near to her, when Ivan advanced to claim her hand, which she offered with a smile.

The eyes of the Count turned upon him with a peculiarly dark and ominous expression, indicating his feelings of animosity more fully and directly than any words, that he could venture to utter in such an assembly; ere Ivan had time to scrutinise that glance, the Count's features had resumed their wonted bland expression; and he had turned with some witty repartee to the nearest lady.

"No matter," thought Ivan, "if he does recognise me, I may yet laugh at, and despise his vengeance."

On quitting the palace with Thaddeus, they fancied that their steps were dogged by some one, who appeared to be watching the course they took; but whoever it might be, he kept at so wary a distance, that they could not devise a plausible excuse for addressing him; and ere they had reached their hotel, the individual had disappeared.

The following day was also a festival of the church, and again were the promenades and public drives swarming with old and young; the gay noble, and sober tradesman.

Thaddeus engaged Ivan to accompany him in his drosky, to the favourite promenade of the citizens, called "L'Allée des Peuples," which is without the city barrier; and were the shopkeepers and inferior classes of society assemble to enjoy their favourite pastimes. On their way they observed in the distance the state prisons, where the unfortunate exiles are confined, previously to their departure for Siberia; collected together from all parts of the Empire, in gloomy despondency, they there await the day, which always falls on Monday, when it shall be their turn to set forth in a troop on their toilsome and dreary journey.

"Ah," thought Ivan, as he gazed on the long, low, but strongly guarded walls, "how many an innocent victim has there parted from all the sweet, and fond ties of life, to march bare-footed, and in chains over hundreds of long leagues, weak and bleeding; his companions dying by his side, day after day, as lying down to rest, they find an everlasting repose, happier than the survivors left to eke out, with hopeless toil, a miserable existence, in an inhospitable clime."

It must, however be observed, that though the fate of most of the exiles is forlorn and miserable in the extreme; others of higher rank, and banished for slight political offences, are allowed comparative freedom, on their arrival at their place of destination. Many reside in cities with their families, surrounded with most of the luxuries of Europe, though under the surveillance of the police. Yet what can compensate for a banishment from their native land without the remotest hope or power of returning thither?

The promenade of the people of which we have spoken, is a wide tract, ornamented with noble trees, and furnished with all the means necessary to promote the national amusements of the Russians. Thither had resorted the easily pleased citizens to amuse themselves, to the utmost, after their busy occupations. Surrounded by their families and friends, seated on the turf, they were enjoying their tea, which was served out of large urns, placed before them on the ground; the joke and the refreshments passing merrily round. Here, a large concourse of idlers formed a circle round a party of mountebanks and jugglers; each feat of dexterity receiving loud applause: there, a troop of Gipsy girls gained equal admiration, as, in the mazy figures of the dance, they exhibited their picturesque and graceful movements.

It mostly happens that those of a higher station do not deign to become spectators of these scenes, and restrict themselves to their own promenades; yet, there were a few whose curiosity, like of that our two friends, had led them to this spot.

Thaddeus was conversing with an acquaintance whom he accidentally met, while Ivan, standing a few paces from them, observed the approach of a band of dancing girls, and, among them, he recognised a face he could not easily forget, though the person was evidently not taking a part in the exhibition. He could not be deceived in Azila, the Gipsy maiden. She passed close to him, and a slight momentary blush tinged her cheek, as beckoning to him, she separated from her companions. He followed her, until she stopped beneath a thick cluster of trees, which screened them from observation.

“I fear you will think me bold, and forward in thus addressing you,” said she, “but I have urgent reasons for so doing. This day, I purposed seeking you out in another part of the city; when, having joined the band of dancers, with a view of meeting those whom I sought, without suspicion, I saw you enter the gardens. Think not,” and she blushed deeply; “that I would exhibit myself to the gaze of the miserable slaves assembled to witness the performances of my companions. You will shortly understand more clearly the reasons which induce me to appear among them; till then, judge not ill of me – but to my errand, for time presses. Danger threatens under many shapes; and one whom you know, the Count Erintoff, has sworn to revenge himself on you, for your generous defence of me. He seeks your life, and that of your friend; and though he is too great a coward to hazard his own, he may employ others to do his bidding. Be therefore constantly on your guard, yet without fear, for there are those who feel an earnest interest in your welfare, who will watch over your safety, and have marked each movement of yours, since you arrived in Moscow.”

“I thank you, fair one, for your warning,” answered Ivan; “but I fear not the Count, or any plans he may form against me or my friend.”

“You know not,” hastily rejoined Azila; “what means a man of his vindictive, and dastard disposition would stoop to, for the accomplishment of a vile purpose; and I entreat you to beware of him – but I have more to say. You are destined for nobler deeds than the life you now lead affords, where you are dissipating your time and talents in pursuits totally unworthy of you. My boldness of speech may surprise you, and appear unmaidenly; but I know that I may trust you in what I am about to impart. A great revolution in the affairs of this country is about to take place; yet you – so fit to lead your countrymen, and to aid in their regeneration, are ignorant of the project. Sure I am, that were you once summoned to join in the noble work, you would stake all on the glorious enterprise. One, on whom you may rely, will shortly communicate with you on the subject; oh! do not hesitate to follow his advice. The day of the regeneration of Russia is at hand! Thus much – but more I may not disclose; but think deeply on my words; – see, some one draws near, farewell for a time!”

Ere Ivan had time to make any answer to this extraordinary communication, the speaker had escaped, and following her with his eye, he traced her, until she rejoined the party of dancing girls, who shortly moved away from the spot.

On returning in search of Thaddeus, he pondered on what he had just heard. “Extraordinary being that she is,” thought he; “what secret motive can so deeply interest her in my actions, and how can she become acquainted with plots and conspiracies of such deep import?”

At first, he hesitated to mention the occurrence to his friend; but, on their return to the hotel, when he was rallied on account of his silent and meditative mood, he informed him of the warning he had received.

Thaddeus laughed loud, as he expressed his opinion; “Truly, indeed, this is an excellent excuse which the pretty Gipsy has discovered for renewing her acquaintance with you; why, Ivan, I see through it all. She has fallen desperately in love with you, and would have told you so, had you given her the slightest encouragement, and the time been more opportune.”

Ivan indignantly repelled the idea. “No, no!” he said, “her manner was too earnest – too respectful to bespeak any such inclination. She naturally feels gratitude for our aid in rescuing her from the power of that smiling faced ruffian, the Count Erintoff, and, in return, has warned us of the revenge he meditates for our interference, and which she has, by some means, discovered. With regard to the more important part of her disclosure, I confide in you with an equal trust to that she

has reposed in me. I gather from her words that a plot is being laid to overthrow the whole mighty fabric of this despotic government, which now appears to stand on so immovable a foundation.”

A laugh again burst from his friend, who replied, “Your vivid imagination, my dear Ivan, carries you beyond the limits of probability; though I sincerely wish it were so; but I rather think that the pretty messenger’s sole view, was to excite your curiosity, in order to gain another interview.”

“Time will shew, Thaddeus,” replied the other, “I differ entirely from you, and, until then, I will not give up the opinion I have formed of Azila.”

Immediately on quitting the public promenade of the citizens, and previously to their return to the hotel, Thaddeus drove to a far distant scene. The aristocratic promenade of Pedroski leads through a magnificent forest; the grounds encompassing the venerable château are laid out with perfect taste, and are ornamented with every variety of tree and shrub. Here they were among the votaries of rank and fashion; the élite of Moscow; vying with each other in the magnificence and style of their equipages. Elegantly dressed ladies, reclined in their carriages, and proud seigneurs covered with decorations, and followed by their attendants, galloped by with erect and haughty mien. Dashing young officers, in their brilliant uniforms, were displaying themselves and their mettled steeds to their own satisfaction – if not to that of others.

Whilst they were in earnest conversation, on the subject of Azila’s warning, a messenger arrived to summon Thaddeus home, on account of the illness of his father. He accordingly departed, leaving Ivan again alone. Left to his own thoughts, a heavy weight oppressed his spirits, for his mind dwelt forcibly on the mysterious import of Azila’s words. At one moment, his calm reason warned him not to listen to the seductive arguments that might be used to induce him to join in an attempt, which would too probably lead to the utter destruction of all engaged in it; and, then again, his enthusiasm would be aroused, and he confessed the enterprise was well worthy of a severe struggle.

He was alone in the hotel on the following day, when a noble of some consideration, whom he had frequently met in society, was announced.

The visitor, as soon as the servant had retired, looked cautiously round the room, and approaching the door, secured it. “I would be private,” he whispered, “and free from any chance of interruption, for I have a communication of deep importance to make: – are we safe from eaves-droppers?”

“I believe so,” answered Ivan, wondering to what grave matter such cautious preliminaries would lead.

“Can I trust to the most inviolable secrecy in what I am about to say?” inquired the stranger guest; “but why do I ask, for I am satisfied that I may.”

“Undoubtedly you may, Sir,” proudly replied Ivan, “in anything not opposed to my honour.”

“Far from it,” hastily rejoined the other. “Think not for a moment that I would propose aught that would reflect disgrace on your name. I pledge you my own word of honour; that all I require, in return for my disclosure, is inviolable secrecy on your part; any step farther I leave to your own judgment.”

“Speak on,” answered Ivan, “whatever you may reveal, shall never pass my lips.”

“My confidence is fully confirmed,” replied the guest, “or I should not have visited you. You were last evening in the ‘Allée des Peuples’ with your friend, Stanisloff; you were there accosted by a Gipsy girl, whom you had previously known; she beckoned to you, and you followed her. You recollect the words she uttered – ‘The day of the regeneration of Russia is at hand.’ Nay, start not, no one overheard you: she was but performing a commission for others of power and of influence – a task she gladly undertook. You have been marked by them as one fit to assist in the noble cause in which they are engaged. Azila, the Gipsy girl, is one of the chief means of communication with our friends in all parts of the country; she has guaranteed your honour and fidelity.”

“What aid can I afford to the cause of freedom?” inquired Ivan, “when I am myself utterly powerless; opposed as you must know the Baron Galetzoff to be to any measures calculated to give liberty to the people.”

“We well know that the son has far different opinions to those entertained by his father; we are also well aware that the Baron is a staunch upholder of despotism; but, need I ask – is it incumbent on the son to adhere to the despotic principles of his parent? No! – I feel confident that you at least, will not.”

The stranger, as he spoke, had intently watched Ivan’s countenance, and appearing to gather confidence, continued —

“That you will ultimately join us, I anticipate with satisfaction; meanwhile, however, come and hear our plans. These I dare not utter within these walls, for even they may have ears and a voice to carry the tale; but, would you know more, I will conduct you where all will be disclosed. Will you accompany me?”

“I must deeply consider the matter, ere I answer you; but tell me,” said Ivan, “where I can meet you, should I consent.”

“On the banks of the Moskowa, beneath the walls of the Kremlin, is a secluded walk, which is entered from the public gardens – you doubtless know it; there we may escape observation; our converse secure from the lurking spy. At dusk this evening – may I reckon upon your coming?”

A few minutes succeeded, during which Ivan appeared wrapped in thought. At length, he answered firmly —

“I will meet you at the spot and hour you name, and, though I do not engage to enter into your views, I swear that your confidence in me shall not be abused.”

His visitor smiled, and replied: “With you, fear has doubtless little influence; but there are some who require that motive for secrecy; and imagine not that a thought of treachery can be harboured, without drawing down instant retribution. At dusk we meet again, adieu!”

Ivan ushered the stranger to the door, the latter, passing out into the street, assumed the easy and careless air of the numerous loungers thronging around him.

How little can the passenger through the crowded streets tell of the varied thoughts, feelings, and passions, which fill the breasts of those who encounter him! The grief and agony; despair and hatred; the avarice, love, or beneficence, the joy, or careless indifference of the wayfarers; the man whose dearest tie has been torn from him; the ruined gamester; the assassin, advancing to his work of blood, the miser to his hoards; the father to his offspring; the lover to his mistress; the Samaritan, hastening to relieve the distressed; the long-absent traveller, to his home; the fop, the fool, or the wise man; every character is passed in succession each instant, unheeded and unknown.

Volume One – Chapter Nine

Ivan, once having resolved to follow the guidance of his new friend, looked forward with eagerness to the approach of evening; and, ere the time had arrived, throwing his cloak about him, he sauntered forth in the direction of the Kremlin.

This venerable pile, regarded by the inhabitants of Moscow as the heart – the sacred place – the tabernacle, as it were, of their city, was anciently a fortress of the rude and fierce Tartars; and indeed, at that period, the whole of the city was contained within its walls. It stands on a commanding site by the banks of the Moskwa, whose waters wash its base, surrounded by high and ancient walls of a triangular form, nearly two miles in extent. Its area encloses numerous cathedrals, gorgeous palaces, churches and monasteries; surmounted by towers, belfries, and steeples; displaying every variety of architecture, including the Tartar, Hindoo, Chinese, and Gothic. Above all this vast pile rises the lofty tower of Ivan Veliki, its golden ball now reflecting the rays of the setting sun with dazzling brilliancy; the whole forming a strange mixture of barbaric splendour, blended with the stately elegance of modern times.

There are no regular streets within the Kremlin, the buildings being raised around several open places or squares, to which the inhabitants resort for walking or driving.

The walls, which are surmounted by battlements and watch-towers, have five gates, the principal of which is the “Saviour’s” or “Holy Gate.” Through this awe-commanding portal no male, not even the Czar and Autocrat of all the Russias, may pass, save with uncovered head and bended body.

Through this gate, Ivan now proceeded bareheaded, and entered a noble esplanade, commanding one of the most interesting views of Moscow, having in front the range of the palaces of the Czars, with their varied and fanciful style of architecture. He paced its extent for some time, meditating on the important affairs which he was likely to be suddenly, and as he could not but admit to himself, rashly engaged in.

As the shades of evening began to close around him, he left the Kremlin by one of the less remarkable gates, and sought the appointed place of rendezvous.

After traversing the walk several times, he began to suspect that he must have mistaken the time and place, as no one appeared; or that his new friend had been prevented from keeping the appointment by some unforeseen circumstance. He accordingly determined to return to the hotel, when suddenly, as if springing from the earth, a dark figure stood before him, so closely muffled as to baffle recognition. Ivan recoiled a few paces, so unexpectedly did the figure come upon him; and, as his mind recurred to Azila’s warnings respecting the secret revenge of the Count Erintoff, the idea of treachery presented itself, and his hand clutched the pistols concealed within his breast. Thus prepared, he confronted the stranger, friend or foe as he might prove to be.

“Why come you here?” demanded the figure, in a voice unknown to Ivan’s ear.

“In search of him who appointed a meeting with me here,” answered the young man. “Know you aught of him?”

“Behold him before you,” said the visitor of the morning, stepping forward, and speaking in a tone which the other immediately knew.

“It is well,” replied Ivan. “Your feigned voice at first deceived me. But how came you so suddenly upon me?”

“All, you were taken unawares,” said the other. “You then did not observe my skiff, as I guided it noiselessly under the bank, and landed when you had turned the other way while I closely watched you. It behoves all of us, in these times, who seek success in bold enterprises, to be wary in our movements. But we have no time to lose; and now to the matter on which we have met.”

“Speak on,” said Ivan. “I am prepared to hear, and shall not forget my promise.”

“Listen then,” said the other. “Ivan Galetzoff, you are far better known than you are aware of. Since you came to Moscow you have been constantly followed, and your words marked. Many, of whom you are totally ignorant, know you, and admire your principles; and further, have selected you as fit to engage in noble and daring deeds.”

“You surprise me!” exclaimed Ivan, yielding to flattery, so difficult for youth to resist when administered to the very points on which he probably prides himself; “I did not deem myself of sufficient importance to have notice taken of my words and actions.”

“I speak but the truth respecting you,” answered his companion. “Say, do you not abhor despotism and tyranny? Do you not cherish the love of freedom, and the happiness of your fellow-creatures?”

“I both detest tyranny and love freedom,” answered Ivan; “but what service can my single arm afford, either to overthrow the one, or to defend the other?”

“Much,” hastily responded the stranger. “You do not stand alone. Your principles are supported by thousands of spirits, noble as your own. The sacred cause of liberty must, and will be triumphant over all her base opponents.”

“I fear that our chains are too securely rivetted, to be wrenched asunder,” answered Ivan, “and too many are interested in forging fresh links to leave us hope of freeing ourselves, even at the sacrifice of our heart’s blood.”

“You labour under a false impression, my young friend,” answered his companion; “for all classes join heart and soul in this glorious work. Indeed, the Despot has no greater enemies than many among the highest in the land, who feel their chains more galling than do the humble serfs; again I ask you, do you not wish success to their gallant spirits engaged in the noble attempt?”

“Most earnestly do I hope they may succeed,” said Ivan.

“Enough,” answered the conspirator, for such he declared himself, “I need test you no more; for I place implicit confidence in you. This evening, the advocates of Russian Liberty hold a meeting, and, as I anticipate that ere long you will join them with heart and hand, I will introduce you to them.”

“Lead – and I will follow,” replied Ivan, with enthusiasm; “my heart yearns to join any who advocate so noble a cause, and I trust I may not prove unworthy of it.”

“No time must then be lost; e’en now they are assembled,” rejoined his companion, “their place of council is at some distance, and speak not, till I give the word, for we shall be obliged to pass the police patrols, ever watchful and vigilant.”

“Forward then,” said Ivan, “and rely on my prudence.”

The conspirator stealthily led the way down a path to the margin of the river, where they found a small skiff, capable of containing three persons – a rower resting on his oars being already seated, who, on a signal from the former, pulled rapidly down the stream. Continuing their course in silence for some time, the oarsman abruptly ceased rowing, and the little bark glided swiftly into a dark and narrow creek on the opposite bank of the river. Ivan followed his guide on shore, while the boat held her course again down the narrow stream.

As they advanced, lights were visible in the apartments of many handsome buildings, and Ivan found himself in a respectable part of the city, though one in which many vestiges still remained of the devastating conflagration which had reduced Moscow to ashes. His guide threaded in his way many lanes, and traversed wide streets, till suddenly retreating to the back of a handsome mansion, that had lately been raised from the ruins which surrounded it, he gave a low and peculiar knock at a wicket gate, opening apparently into a garden. The signal on being twice repeated, was answered by a decrepit old man, with a long beard and tattered dress, who unclosed the gate, but instantly relocked it, as the two visitors entered.

“Who is it,” said he, “seeking to disturb the old serf Kersoff at this late hour? – If any wish to buy his garden produce, let them come by daylight, and not rouse him from his bed.”

The guide whispered a word in the old man’s ear, and he retired to his hut by the side of the gate.

The light afforded by the starry heavens enabled Ivan to distinguish the appearance of the place where he stood, which seemed to have been a large garden, now filled with ruins; apparently the remains of buildings of considerable extent.

Passing over heaps of rubbish, his guide stopped at what appeared to be a small summer house – also in a ruinous state; the same signal as before was given, and the door opening, admitted them into an apartment in total darkness.

Ivan for a moment hesitated to follow; the idea of some diabolical treachery – such as he had heard of too often – again rushing on his mind; yet, quickly determining to brave the worst, he prepared to go on. His guide spoke a few words to the person who had admitted them, and who yet remained concealed, and then offered his hand to Ivan to conduct him onwards.

“The neophyte must pass through darkness before he can reach the light,” he whispered; “but fear not, it will soon burn brightly on you. Ah! I feel your pulse beats calm and regular, such are the nerves we require; do not speak now.”

They descended a flight of steps, narrow and winding, till they were again stopped by another door, which was opened, on the like signal as before being given, without the porter being visible, and they found themselves in a small chamber, lighted by a single dim lamp suspended from the ceiling. The walls were hung with black; a chair, and a table, on which were placed a skull and cross bones, an hour glass, and writing materials, were the only furniture.

His guide again spoke. “This,” said he, “is the chamber of meditation; if you doubt, you may draw back. Stir not from hence till I return, when I will lead you to undergo your ordeal, should you still nobly keep to your determination of engaging in our cause. I need not tell you not to fear, or to shrink from an ordeal which you will pass through with ease, though it may fright nerveless fools. I now go to prepare the friends of freedom for your coming; adieu!” Saying which, the conspirator disappeared through a door opposite to the one by which they had entered, and which closed with a loud noise behind him.

Ivan looked round, not a door was visible; he was a prisoner, he knew not where. Left to his own reflections, he half repented the step he had taken.

“I like not this mummery,” thought he. “How weak I have been to put such implicit trust in a man of whom I know so little. He may, after all, have deceived me; but it is now too late to retract, and if deceived, I must suffer for my folly, and will boldly carry through the adventure.” He threw himself on the chair. “Emblem of mortality!” he exclaimed, looking at the skull, “to this must we all come, and to a brave man, what terrors canst thou bring? Death, what have we to fear in thee? Why, then, should I hesitate, when thou, happen what may, must be the victor at last! Thou art, at the same time, the mighty despot of all, and the only true dispenser of liberty! Thou canst conquer the proudest potentates, and make all men equal – and yet I fear not thee; then, why should I fear aught else? Time flies quickly; I learn this lesson, that one must not delay when work is to be done!” His eye caught sight of a sheet of paper, on which were inscribed several questions. He seized the pen, and wrote appropriate answers. He remained lost in thought. “Yes,” he exclaimed, “the die is cast; I will plunge boldly in, nor dream of retracting.”

He had just come to this conclusion, when suddenly, three dark figures stood before him enveloped in cloaks, and their features concealed by masks.

“You must consent to be for a time deprived of sight,” said one, “ere the true light can shine on you. Are you ready to undergo your ordeal?”

“I am prepared for every ceremony necessary,” answered Ivan; “do as you will!”

One of the dark figures advanced, a handkerchief was tightly bound over his eyes, and he felt his hand grasped by some one.

“Follow me,” said a voice, “we have a long and toilsome road to take, full of difficulties and perils, such as you dream not of finding here; but true courage and perseverance will carry you through all dangers.”

“Lead on then,” said Ivan, “I am eager to undertake the journey.”

Ivan felt that he was led from the chamber, when a sudden rush of cold air met him, almost stopping his breath. He then seemed to be climbing over rough rocks, from which he had to spring to others, following the guide’s directions; then a torrent seemed to be rushing at his feet, into which he appeared every instant to be ready to fall, so slippery was the broken ground. He felt himself next led up a steep mountain, the ashes on its sides giving way under his feet as he climbed, till at length, he reached some harder ground, when, no sooner did he appear to have attained the summit, than he was as quickly obliged to descend, and to pass through some low and damp cavern. On a sudden, his guide bidding him spring forward, and dragging him at the same time, enabled him to evade an icy torrent, which broke overhead. On, on he went; but he neither hesitated nor trembled. A loud din now assailed his ears, of a strange variety of confused sounds, and in a moment he found himself near some immense furnace, into which he appeared to be about to plunge, when his guide drew him aside, as the fierce and forked flames rushed after him. Again he heard a loud noise, and this time it was intelligible. He could distinguish the clashing of swords, the shrieks of the wounded, the cries of the victors. He was in the midst of some fierce combat. On every side was heard the jarring sound of weapons; he felt them whirling round his head, as his guide protected him; their sharp edges seemed to pass close to his ears, the struggling combatants swept by him in their desperate strife, but he remained unharmed. On a sudden, the silence of death reigned around. He stood alone: some one presently approached, and a deep and solemn voice thus spoke —

“Ivan Galetzoff! you have shewn that you can go through the lesser dangers and difficulties of life without shrinking; but have you courage to face the worst, for what you have just undergone is as nothing to what you must suffer, before we can confide in you.”

“I am prepared for the most terrific dangers, and fear nothing.”

“Stay then,” said the voice; “answer our questions. Wherefore did you come hither?”

“To meet those who are lovers of true freedom,” answered Ivan.

“You speak well,” said the voice; “are you ready to devote your talents, your fortune, and your life, to their sacred cause?”

“Most willingly would I do my utmost to win true Liberty for Russia,” he answered.

“Are you willing to take the oaths which bind all the members of this association?”

“I would be equally bound to support others, as they are to support me, but I cannot pledge myself to measures of which I know not the aim.”

“You speak sensibly,” said the voice, “that we do not demand. Inviolable secrecy and fidelity are all that is required of you, but oaths must not be taken in the dark: from henceforth, may the light of liberty shine as bright and purely as this flame.”

At that moment, the bandage fell from Ivan’s eyes, and he was almost blinded by a dazzling and brilliant flame which burned before him. On recovering his sight, he found himself standing in the midst of a circle of persons, the points of whose swords radiated towards him.

“With these swords we swear to protect you! to gain true liberty for Russia, or to perish in the attempt, with them in our hands! – and with these swords we swear to destroy any, who, by word or deed, shall betray the trust reposed in him! – We swear!” uttered all the persons present.

“Our aims are these,” added the first speaker: “to curb the despotic power of the autocrat; to abolish the exclusive privileges of the nobles; to place every subject of Russia on an equal footing of liberty; to liberate the serfs from the thraldom under which they groan; to have but one law in the land to govern all men.”

“To these we have sworn,” responded the conspirators.

“Ivan Galetzoff! are you ready to swear to do your utmost to aid in the accomplishment of these objects?”

“To all this I solemnly swear!” said Ivan, repeating the secret form of the oath.

No sooner had he uttered these words, than the conspirators dropped the points of their swords, which they had hitherto held up at his breast, and advanced towards him with extended hands, exclaiming —

“Welcome, our brother in the great work of the regeneration of Russia!”

“We will leave you now,” said he who appeared to be the conductor of the ceremony, “till it be time to summon you to the assembly of members;” saying which, the conspirators disappeared by a number of separate doors, from the chamber, which was much larger than the one where he had been previously left, and Ivan again found himself alone.

The room was vaulted, and lighted by a number of lamps, shedding a bright glare on the various devices with which it was ornamented; but Ivan was too much occupied and confused by the strange adventures he had gone through to examine them. He had now banished all hesitation and doubt, having once made the step from which there was no retracting, and he stood with dilated eye, compressed lip, and determination on his brow, boldly prepared to redeem, to the utmost, the pledge he had given. He had not much time left for thought, when his friend, who had conducted him to the place, entered, summoning him to follow, and led the way down a flight of rude and broken steps, through a long passage, ascending to a door, through which proceeded the sound of many voices. He presently found himself in a rude, but large and vaulted apartment, in the centre of which was placed a long table, surrounded by a number of persons, who rose at his entrance, and he was desired to take a seat by his guide, near the head of the table. As he gazed around him, he recognised, to his astonishment, the faces of several nobles whom he had met in the first circles of the society of Moscow, though, with the greater number of persons present he was unacquainted.

The association comprised men of rank, fortune, and influence; military officers; grave citizens, distinguished from the rest by their beards and long coats; and even some who appeared to be lowly serfs. All present wore an air of anxiety and eagerness on their countenances, conversation being carried on in an undertone: meanwhile, several others entered, and took their seats at the board. When all were seated, the president of the meeting arose, and silence ensued. He was a man long passed the prime of life, of a tall and commanding figure, whose expansive forehead, piercing eye, and firm set lips, marked one fit to command.

“Countrymen! Fellow Russians!” he cried, “the sacred cause of liberty is advancing with rapid strides, and soon may we hope to see its standard unfurled, and floating proudly in the face of our panic-struck enemies. To those who have not yet had an opportunity of hearing our ultimate ends and aims discussed, I now address myself.

“We have not combined to overthrow religion, virtue, and honour, order, and wholesome government; no, my countrymen! our purpose is rather to confirm and strengthen them throughout the land. We war alone against vice and tyranny, unjust power and misrule. These shall crouch trembling before our triumphant standard. I ask you, is it right — is it just, that one man should rule millions, by the fiat of his will — that he should be the sole and undisputed master of their lives and properties? Are Russians worthy of the name of men, while they tamely submit to bow their necks to so despicable a yoke? Who amongst us is, for a moment, safe? The noble, the citizen, or the serf, by the single word of a tyrant, may be deprived of his liberty, his property, and his life; each amongst them is liable to be torn from his home and family — from all that is held dear and sacred, to be bound in chains, and sent to pass a life of exile amidst the dreary wilds of Siberia. Can we longer submit to be thus enslaved? No — justice, honour, manhood forbid it!

“We have, moreover, other enemies to contend with. We must attack the privileges of those vain and dastardly nobles, who, bending their necks to the yoke of the despot, aid and abet him in his tyranny; for without them, how could his power stand? Are not the rest of their countrymen equal to them in intellect, in talents, in virtue? Why then should they be allowed to hold in slavish subjection, creatures, human as themselves, with the same blood and sinews, with hearts beating to the same impulses, with thoughts as free, and sentiments as noble, as their own? There are many among us here

of aristocratic birth, disinterestedly refusing to avail themselves of their privileges, and animated by a spirit of the most exalted philanthropy, who have arrayed their power under the banner of freedom.”

The speaker paused; his eye proudly surveyed the assembly, and the countenances of all tacitly echoed his sentiments. He resumed:

“My brave, my loved countrymen! pardon me for speaking of myself; but I must do so to afford you an example. I was born of the privileged class. I once held high rank, noble possessions, unbounded wealth, and, as I thought, power. I was young, and vainly fancied myself happy and free. I dared to speak the thoughts of my heart, which were bold and free, under the impression that I was too far removed from the authority of the Emperor, to fear his anger. I dared to assert the right and just independence of man – to utter the word liberty. Yet how had I deceived myself in my dream of impunity; for a word spoken thoughtlessly, I was deprived of my rank, stripped of my wealth, dragged from my family, and banished from my rich possessions, to the barren soils of Siberia. I, who had been brought up in the most luxurious indulgence, was driven over hundreds of weary leagues, bare-footed, and in chains, exposed to the inclemency of the weather the lash of the brutal guards impelling my drooping, my exhausted steps. Each time that the sharp thong became crimsoned with my blood, I swore deeply that no human power should prevent me from returning, and straining every nerve to overthrow the tyranny which could allow such atrocious barbarities to be perpetrated. I passed many years in banishment, forgotten, and unknown. At length, I escaped, to return to my native city; and here again I vow to accomplish that noble purpose, or to perish in the attempt. Russians, you know my history – many here will remember my name. The same fate may await any of you, when least expected; and thus you are all equally interested in rescuing our country from so abject a thralldom.

“Is it not preposterous – is it not shameful, that men who, with the light of education, have by their own exertions gained wealth, must still wear the vile mark of bondage; that they cannot without their masters’ will be free, and that their children must be brought up as slaves!

“To liberate the serfs from their state of galling vassalage, is, in itself, a great and noble work. No sooner shall the bright folds of the standard of liberty be displayed, than thousands, tens of thousands of that now debased class, arousing from their lethargy, will flock around it, and proclaim the regeneration of Russia! For this cause we are all ready to shed our blood; and again do I swear never to sheath my sword till our holy, our glorious object is accomplished.”

Every man simultaneously animated by the same spirit, stood up, and with one accord, drawing their weapons, exclaimed together “We swear to accomplish the regeneration of Russia, or to die in the attempt.”

The president was succeeded by several of the conspirators, who in their turn rose to address the meeting. Some were fierce and fiery characters, to whom mild measures were distasteful, and who would be satisfied with nothing short of the total overthrow of the Imperial family; the abrogation of all the privileges and titles of nobility; and the establishment of a republic, in which each member of the government should be elected by ballot. Ivan was at first carried away by the enthusiasm, and force of eloquence displayed by some, but he soon discovered, that many were actuated by motives far different from those which they professed; some by vindictive feelings; others by the anticipation of succeeding to offices and employments, from which the present occupiers would be thrust. Some, bankrupt in purse and character, hoped to reap a harvest amid the general confusion, which must ensue on a revolution, having themselves nothing to risk; but few of the whole number perhaps, were solely influenced by the exalted principles of liberty.

The meeting, after numerous speeches, and discussions, at length broke up; no plan of proceedings having yet been arranged. The conspirators departed a few at a time, each man as he reached the open air, shrouding himself in his cloak, and bending his steps in various directions across the mass of ruins, so that no two persons sought the same path at the same time.

As Ivan was about to depart, he was accosted by the friend who had brought him to the meeting.

“You have acted well, and nobly,” said he; “and I trust that you may never have reason to repent, that you have engaged in this just cause. Ere we go, I will explain to you the secrets of this place of meeting. This large vaulted chamber was a cellar belonging to a mansion, destroyed at the burning of the city, during the French occupation. The former inhabitants of the place have all died, or have left Moscow; and no one knows of this vault, save the owner of the new house, and he is one of the principal and most active members of the Association. He discovered the vault amid the ruins, and prepared it for our meetings: he himself never approaching it, except at night, and by the many secret exits, he has formed with indefatigable labour. In every avenue are trusty guards in various disguises, so that there is but little likelihood of a surprise; yet, should we by any chance be discovered, we are prepared to sell our lives dearly. I will now lead you forth; follow – but at a short distance behind me.” Threading several passages, they gained the open air, and passing from the garden by a different gate, to that by which they had entered, after a short walk, Ivan found himself in a part of the city, with which he was acquainted; his guide then bidding him farewell, he returned to his temporary home.

Volume One – Chapter Ten

It has been the constant aim of the Imperial Court to draw within its focus the noblesse from all quarters of the Empire, with a view to keep them more entirely under the eye of government, tempting them with ribbons, stars, and titles.

However well the plan has succeeded with the poorer nobles and many indeed of the more powerful, attracted by the pomp and magnificence of St. Petersburg, no lures have been found to decoy others equally rich and influential, who prefer the independence and freedom they enjoy in their palaces at Moscow, and country-seats, to the formality and tedious etiquette of the court. The Czar, therefore, naturally regards with a jealous eye, those who shun his presence, – as inimical to his rule, and none more so perhaps, than the proud and wealthy patricians of Moscow, known to possess the liberal principles so subversive of despotism: men who prefer to reside with their families among the ancient retainers of their house, and to enjoy the freedom, and surpassing beauty of their native city.

Not so, however, the Count Erintoff; he kept at a distance from the court, and the eye of authority, that he might enjoy greater license for his vices and profligacy. His palace stood in the environs of the city, and was furnished with all the magnificence and luxury for which his fortune gave ample means.

It was a stately mansion, and had been rebuilt after the conflagration by his father; a nobleman every way qualified to fill the high station he held; but who with culpable indulgence had not paid that attention to the education of his son, which would qualify him to be a worthy successor to himself. Magnificent mirrors and pictures adorned the walls; couches and hangings from the East; objects of virtu from Italy; of decoration, from France; and furniture and all the appurtenances of comfort from England, filled the rooms.

The Count was pacing through his spacious galleries with hasty steps, when a servant submissively approached him.

“How now knave! what want you here?” said the Count, angrily; without noticing the person of the intruder.

“I come to bring you the information you sent me to gain,” answered the man. “I have been partly successful.”

“Ah, Groff! is it you, faithful villain. I did not expect you so soon,” said the noble. “What is the information you bring me? for if I recollect right, you had a variety of commissions to perform.”

“Why, what I should think would please you most – about the Gipsy girl, who before slipped through our fingers,” answered the man.

“What of her, knave?” said the Count, in an angry tone at his servant’s freedom of speech; but the man seemed unmoved as he answered, “She is now in Moscow, I passed her just now on my way here, and I have formed a plan by which I think I can induce her to come here.”

“Tell me not of your plans, knave!” answered the Count. “I require no suggestion but must have execution, and you shall then have the reward I promised. But say, when do you expect to succeed with this most notable plan you talk of? The girl is not to be entrapped so easily as you anticipate.”

“By to-morrow at furthest, or perchance this very day, if my messenger can find the girl, though he may have some difficulty in falling in with her; but you may have changed your mind, Sir. Is it still your pleasure that she come here?”

“Yes, knave; and mark me, if you fail and disappoint me, you shall suffer!” said the Count. “Now, tell me quickly, how you hope to succeed; let me hear all you have to say.”

“In the first place, fortune has favoured us, Sir,” said Groff, “for while I was out concerning the affairs you sent me on, it appears that two Gipsy boys were singing and playing in front of the palace, to the idle porters and other servants, when a drosky, driven furiously by, knocked one of them down, and left him senseless on the ground. I know not how it was, but Kruntz and some of the other men,

were seized with a fit of humanity, and brought the wounded boy within the palace, and when his companion was crying over him, some of them bathed his bruises and hurts. I arrived at that time, having just encountered the damsel of the same race where I told you. A thought struck me, that I might turn the accident to some account. I found that the boys did not know in whose palace they were; and after some talk with the one who was not wounded, I contrived to learn that he belonged to the same tribe as the girl you are in search of. I accordingly hinted to the boy, where she was likely to be found, and persuaded him to set off, in order to bring her to his brother, as she was better able to cure him than any doctor. I told him, therefore, that this was the palace of the Prince Raziminski, into which she will not fear to enter; and having directed him to mark it well so as not to forget it, sent him off to bring her here immediately. Have I done well, Sir?”

“I have no great expectation, that your ill-contrived scheme will succeed,” answered the Count, stiffly; “I know she will not come! What else have you to communicate?”

“Somewhat with respect to the son of the Baron Galetzoff. I think Sir, you may soon have your revenge on him.”

“Ah!” exclaimed the Count, looking deeply interested, “what of that youth? could I wreak my vengeance on him, and win the girl into the bargain, I should be contented. What have you to say of him?”

“Why, Sir,” replied Groff, “I have discovered where he resides, and have dogged his steps constantly; once or twice I have been nearly discovered; but have hitherto eluded him successfully. I know all his haunts, his habits and his movements; and I find that he constantly passes a spot where a dagger might reach his bosom, without fear of the deed being discovered. You have thus a full opportunity of satisfying your vengeance.”

“What, villain!” exclaimed the noble, indignantly, “do you think that I have become a common assassin, to strike my enemy in the dark? I would have revenge; but not such as your dull brain can invent. In what part of the city, do you say you have seen him?”

Groff mentioned a part of Moscow, near the spot where the conspirators held their meetings.

“And at what time did he usually pass by?”

“Soon after sun-set,” answered Groff. “I marked him on his way from the hotel; but each time I lost sight of him, soon after he passed that spot: I have then waited for hours till his return; but before long, I hope to discover where he vanishes to, and he will be clever if he again escapes me. I have my suspicions, that he is not the only person who visits that part of the city by stealth; for I confess that I have twice made a mistake, and followed different people, when I was in search of him.”

“That must be looked to,” said the Count, “we may find that something is going forward worth discovering; beware, that you do not make a mistake. For myself, I would not imbue my hands with blood. It would be but slight satisfaction to feel my dagger entering his bosom, and his warm life-blood streaming from the wound: I leave those feelings to the passionate, fiery-blooded Italians. Yet, mark me Groff! I hate the young Galetzoff, and it would be enough for me to know that he had ceased to live. There are many dark lanes in Moscow, and the Istvostchiks are great villains, and often commit murder with no better object, than for the sake of the paltry sums a person may have about him; you understand me. I loathe the very sight of that youth. He faces me with the coolest indifference, as if he had not injured me to the utmost; and yet there is something in his eye, when he meets my gaze, by which I have strong suspicions that he knows me. I cannot rest till I am revenged on him. You will probably win one reward, and here take half for what you have already done, in earnest of the future.”

The Count then tendered a purse which Groff weighed in his hand, as if to consider whether the bribe was high enough for the deed. “I will do my best to please you, Sir,” he answered.

“Enough, I need now say no more then; ten times the sum you hold in your hand shall be yours, if, by chance, I hear of that youth’s death. The police are not over vigilant in those matters, and I think the Baron will take no great pains to discover the author of his son’s death, for he seems not

to have much love for him. Now leave me, and think well on what I have said. Should the Gipsy girl fall into your snare, let me immediately know of her arrival; but take care that she does not see your face – that alone is enough to frighten her, and she would remember it. See that the wounded boy is well tended, that he may learn to speak well of the owner of the mansion; and let the girl remain some time with him, if possible, ere I go to her.”

As soon as Groff had disappeared, the Count continued his walk through the corridor. “Fortune seems to favour me,” he soliloquised; “as to young Galetzoff, I need trouble myself no more; – his fate is sealed! I saw that in the look that villain Groff gave, as I promised him the gold! His eyes glistened as he seemed eager to clutch it. He is a faithful ruffian, and well earns his reward. Such slaves as he, would sell their very souls for gold; and I, some would say, would sell mine; but oh! for what? – Not for gold; no; – for revenge – for love – for power – a worthy exchange too! What would life be worth, if one could not enjoy all three?”

“That Gipsy maiden has enchained me. I scarce know why, but, though lowly her lot, there is a fascination about her which I cannot withstand. I must win her at all hazards in some way. Either gold or flattery must gain her; she must be more than woman if she holds out against the two combined. And if she does, with that proud and haughty air she possesses, she is worthy to become the Countess Erintoff, though that is an alternative I would avoid. Bah! I cannot think I shall be brought so low as to sue at the feet of a Gipsy!”

While the Count was thus uttering his thoughts aloud, Groff returned.

“Success attends us, Sir,” he exclaimed. “The maiden is at length safe within your palace, from whence she may have some difficulty in escaping, though she firmly believes that she is under the roof of the most grave and virtuous Prince Raziminski, and continues heaping blessings on his head, for his charity in protecting one of her tribe.”

“Enough, knave! the reward shall be yours,” said the Count. “In what part of the palace have they put the boy?”

“I will lead you to it, Sir,” answered Groff, “for I doubt if alone you could find the room.”

“Shew me to it then, and leave me,” said the Count; “your presence would alarm the maiden!”

Saying which, he followed Groff down several flights of steps, and through long passages to a room in the lower part of the palace. He then waited at the half open door, through which he heard the sound of voices.

“I thought that few of the nobles of this city possessed charity sufficient to shelter a humble Gipsy boy; but I see that I am mistaken, and may blessings rest on the head of the good and kind Prince,” said Azila.

“He is indeed, kind,” said one of the boys, “for he has sent us abundance of good things to eat, and his servants told us we should have more, and that he would send us away with plenty of money in our pockets.”

“He will not go unrewarded. See, Conrin! I have bound up your brother’s arm, and he will now do well, and if the kind Prince will let you remain, you must take charge of him, for I have matters of importance to attend to, and must away!”

Hearing this, the Count moved from the door, and went in search of a servant.

“Go quickly,” said he, “to the chamber where the wounded boy and the Gipsy girl are, and say that the Prince – mark you, the Prince, your master, desires to see her, ere she departs, to inquire how her brother fares; then conduct her to the state apartment. Guard her well, and see that she escapes not, by any chance.”

The Count repaired immediately to the magnificent room he had mentioned, to await the coming of Azila. The floor was covered with rich Turkey carpets; superb pictures, and mirrors, reaching from the ground to the highly embossed ceiling, ornamented the walls, the latter reflecting the luxurious and handsome furniture which filled the room, while from the windows was seen an extensive view of the beautiful city of Moscow.

“Though other means have failed,” he said, “I will try if she is not to be tempted by this display of magnificence and luxury to become the mistress here. Surely a girl, brought up beneath a skin-covered tent, cannot resist such a temptation; and if so, my conquest is easy.”

He stood partly concealed by the thick drapery of the curtains; a light step approached; Azila entered the apartment, and the door was closed behind her. She was dressed in the same graceful costume as when Ivan and Thaddeus had first seen her, except that a cloak, worn over her dress, almost concealed her form. She advanced to the centre of the apartment, ere she had perceived the Count, when he turned towards her. She started slightly as she saw him, but betrayed no other sign of trepidation or fear.

“I must have been deceived,” she said. “I came to thank the noble Prince Raziminski for his kindness and charity to a wounded boy of my tribe; but it seems that to you is due the credit of that charitable deed. I will send some of our people to take away the child, and beg to offer you our grateful thanks for your charity in taking care of him. With your leave I will now depart.”

She was turning to go, when the Count advanced somewhat nearer towards her.

“Lovely girl,” he said, with an impassioned air, “I took advantage of the boy’s accident, and used an excusable artifice to draw you here. I sought but to see you, to convince you of the ardour – the truth of my affection. Believe me, that I regret the violence I before used, which your coldness – your cruelty compelled me to resort to. Let me hear my pardon from those lips, beautiful maiden! ’tis all I ask for!”

“For the favour you have done to one of my tribe, I would endeavour to forget any injury you would have caused me. Beyond this, I have nothing to forgive: I bear you no malice, noble Lord! and all I now ask is leave to depart,” said Azila.

“Still haughty and cold! why this indifference? you know not the love – the passion – with which your charms have inspired my bosom. Surely it cannot be in your nature to be thus so cruel to me, who love you to desperation, who would do ought to please you. Behold this spacious palace! these magnificent chambers! Are they not superior to your skin-covered tents? Remain, and you shall be mistress of all; numberless servants will obey you; sumptuous fare shall be served to you; boundless wealth shall be at your command. Every luxury and indulgence which love can invent shall surround you, if you will but consent to accept them at my hands. Whatever you may desire – any thing – every thing shall be granted to you?”

“I make but one simple demand,” answered the maiden. “It is to be allowed to depart, free as I came; – more I cannot say.”

“Have you no other answer to make than that, cruel, inexorable maiden? Hear me!” exclaimed the Count, throwing himself at her feet, and seizing her hand, which she vainly endeavoured to disengage. “Hear me! I love, I adore you to desperation; your very coldness has inflamed my passion! the bright glance of your eyes consumes me; the sweet tones of your voice thrill through my frame, and drive me to madness at the thought of losing you! I cannot exist without you. Hear me once again! I offer you wealth, power, unbounded luxury! I offer you more – my name – my rank – for well could you, as the Countess Erintoff, grace that station. Speak, ere I die at your feet, for I rise not till you give me hopes of life and happiness with you.”

Azila for an instant seemed moved, and turned aside her head, to avoid his fixed gaze; but there was no answering softness in the expression of her full bright eye.

She spoke at length: “Rise, noble Lord! rise, you but demean yourself by thus bending before one humble as myself! I am grateful for your generous offers, but I cannot accept them. A captive can make no just conditions with his jailor, and I still ask but one favour; to depart as I came.”

The Count started from the ground, astonishment and rising fury blending in his look.

“Can that heart,” he exclaimed, “be so frozen by the frosts of winter, that it is callous to the voice of love? But no, it would be contrary to the law of nature, it is impossible! Maiden, you love

another! I know it – answer me – is it not the truth? By heavens! I cannot brook a rival in your love, and he shall deeply rue it!”

As the Count spoke, a blush did now for the first time rise on her cheeks and brow, and as he went on threatening his vengeance, with furious action against his rival, the colour again forsook her face, and left her as she then stood in an unintentionally commanding attitude; like some lovely statue of a goddess uttering her commands to mortals.

“If my love is given to another, why ask me for what I no longer possess? but I say not, that it is so. Again I ask to depart; for in no way, while an unwilling prisoner, could I make any engagements with my captor.”

The Count advanced furiously again to seize her hand, but she started back a step from him.

“Girl,” he cried, “think you I can tamely submit to be thus despised, to have my love – my devotion trampled on. Again I ask you, consent to return here – to become my Countess! to accept my love, and you are free to depart; my carriage shall then convey you where you will.”

“It cannot be,” answered Azila, firmly, “I have but to repeat my former words.”

“Rash girl, your obduracy has driven me to madness, and the blame must rest on your own head!” exclaimed the Count, again springing forward to seize her; but she calmly retreated, placing her hand beneath her vest.

“Proud noble, forbear! I fear you not, for I venture not abroad without the means of defending myself, since you first taught me the necessity of so doing. Advance another step, and you either destroy me or yourself.” The Count seemed again about to spring forward, when she drew a dagger from beneath her vest, and pointed it to her bosom.

“See,” she said, “my weapon is of so fine a tempered steel, that even my feeble arm will suffice to protect me.”

The Count stood astounded; he seemed fearful of advancing, and unable to speak, as she continued:

“Now let me depart, lead the way and I will follow you. See! I hold my firmest protector to my bosom, so attempt not to stop me, or the first hand that is laid on me will be the signal of my death. I fear not to die, so think not to detain me; with full confidence I leave the boys of my tribe under your care.”

The Count exclaimed, “Inexplicable girl! you have conquered for a time; I now obey you! but you have kindled an inextinguishable flame within my bosom, which will consume us both. We must soon meet again. I will lead the way as you desire.”

Uttering these words, the Count led the way from the apartment towards the hall of entrance, where the domestics stood with amazed looks, as their haughty lord passed, followed by the humble Gipsy girl. The portal stood open as Azila passed out, bowing coldly to the Count, when he stepped aside to allow her to pass; she did not cast a glance at the others who were present. She seemed more like some distinguished guest respectfully attended to the entrance of the mansion by her host, than one of a despised and lowly race, escaping from the toils of a proud and libertine noble.

The Count retreated to the upper apartments of his sumptuous palace, moody, and furious at his defeat. The ruffian Groff was then summoned to attend him.

“Hear me, villain,” he exclaimed, “the youth I spoke of must die! I will have no doubt or hesitation on your part. The sum I promised you, when I hear of his death, shall be doubled; although you have enough to revenge for your own sake, without requiring any other stimulant. Mark me! he has again crossed my path, so let there be no delay, for I cannot longer endure the thought that he should triumph over me.”

“Your orders are sufficiently clear,” Sir, answered Groff, “and they shall be obeyed without fear of the consequences. I am not a man to hesitate in my duty to so generous a master; and perhaps you will recollect that my first plan succeeded as far as it was in my power; the ultimate failure will be no fault of mine.”

“I understand you, knave, you would receive your wages as you proceed; here, take this purse, it contains a trifle in comparison with the sum you will be soon possessed of, if I do not mistake. Now begone! and let me not see your face till you can bring me the news I wish to hear.”

Groff departed, and the Count continued pacing the floor with feelings, of which few would envy him the possession.

Volume One – Chapter Eleven

It was a dark and stormy night. The wind blew in violent and fitful gusts through the ill-lighted and irregular streets, now and then entirely extinguishing some of the few straggling lamps, while the remainder gave but a feeble and uncertain light, as the rain rushed down in torrents, making the road and pathway slippery with slime and mud.

The night had just closed in; yet, notwithstanding the inclemency and boisterousness of the weather, and the difficulties of the road, persons were still wandering abroad on various avocations, when a figure closely muffled in a large cloak, (apparently to shield himself from the tempest), issued from a side door of the palace of the Count Erintoff. He walked hastily along, keeping on the darker sides of the streets, as if to avoid recognition, and paused not till he reached the hotel where Ivan had taken up his abode. He remained concealed beneath the shelter of a porch, on the opposite side of the street, into which no gleam of light penetrated; though a lamp, burning in the doorway of the hotel, enabled him to command a distinct view of all who might enter, or depart. Thrusting his hand in his bosom, he thus muttered to himself:

“Ah! most trusty weapon, thou art not likely to fail me, if my arm proves true. Far better is the silent and sharp dagger to do such a deed, than the noisy and treacherous pistol, which has often failed a better man than myself, on a like occasion; yet, I did well to bring my noisy friend, in case, by any chance, the first should fail to strike home. – Ah! some one approaches.”

Groff, for it was he, drew farther back into the shade, to prevent himself from being seen by the stranger who was about to pass. At that moment, a person with a light and active step, completely shielded from the weather, walked quickly by, so that Groff could catch a glance of his features. He had not long to remain after this on his watch, when a figure appeared at the door of the hotel, whom he guessed must be his intended victim; for having cast a look at the dark and clouded sky, the person issued forth in the direction Groff expected him to take. The ruffian accordingly emerged from his hiding-place, and stealthily followed, at a short distance, the steps of his hoped for prey.

It was impossible to distinguish the figures of anybody, on such a night, wrapped up as all were who ventured abroad; but Groff felt that he could not be mistaken, both from seeing his intended victim issue from the hotel in which Ivan resided, and from the direction he was taking.

The person walked rapidly along, threading the intricate and obscure streets, without hesitation; every now and then, however, drawing his cloak closer around him, and casting a hurried look behind, as if to observe if he was followed. On these occasions, Groff contrived to shrink under the shade of some buttress, or projecting wall. Owing to his being perfectly well acquainted with the streets, and knowing each turning the person would probably take, he was enabled, successfully to dodge his footsteps, till he had arrived in the neighbourhood of the mansion previously described, in the garden of which the meetings of the conspirators were held. The man there stopped, and looked cautiously around, retracing his steps for a short distance, as if to assure himself that he had not been followed; throwing a scrutinising glance, as he lifted his hand to shade his eyes, down two or three narrow lanes, which there turned off from that along which he had passed. He seemed, however, satisfied, and was about to pass on.

“Now is my time,” thought Groff, who had hidden beneath a dark arch way, “I will now rush forward, and strike him, to make sure, and save myself a long and disagreeable watch; but he looks as if prepared for danger, and I may find a warmer reception than I wish, or he may cry out and give the alarm, before I have time to escape.”

While Groff was thus debating with himself, the person again walked on, unconscious of the danger he had so narrowly just escaped; and the assassin, fearful of being discovered after his evident wariness, if he pursued him further, concealed himself carefully under an arch, let into a wall, which

had at one time served as an entrance to the garden behind it; but, for some reason, the inner part was now blocked up with stones, leaving, however, a recess sufficiently deep for a person to hide within it.

“Here I will await his return,” muttered Groff; “he has never yet failed to pass this way, and I have well marked his figure, so that I should know him if there was but a glimpse of light. I wish I had followed him to find out where he goes to, for there may be some secret worth knowing in that. It is an odd place for a person to come to so constantly, and I should make a fine thing of it, if I discovered any hidden plot, which the Count could reveal to the Emperor; it would bring him into high favour, and I, his follower, would benefit by it. I might easily manage to get rid of the youth in some other place, and if I slay him now, I lose my opportunity. But no! one scheme is but a chance, while his death will give me a certainty of reward.”

Having thus made up his mind, Groff remained in concealment for two or three hours, till he began almost to fear that his victim had escaped, by passing some other way. He watched with breathless expectation – anxiously looking forth from his place of shelter. The rain still fell in torrents, and flashes of lightning now and then darted from the heavens. One flash, brighter than the others, almost blinded him, as he grasped his dagger firmly in his hand; but he was no coward, though but a common ruffian, and he did not tremble. He again drew back, and listened attentively. Footsteps approached, he could not be mistaken; he heard the light and quick step advancing – nearer and nearer it came – he feared to breathe lest the sound might reach his victim’s ears – he more firmly clutched his dagger. With one foot advanced – his arm raised ready to strike, he stood pressing his body against the wall; he could distinguish the very breathing of him who was approaching. The figure filled the archway – the assassin sprang from his lair, his dagger’s point towards the breast of his victim. The lightning flashed brightly in forked streaks from the sky and played round the blue steel, but it failed to bring heaven’s vengeance, as it glanced before the eyes of the doomed one. He started back, but, alas, too late! the sharp point pierced his bosom. Too firmly was the assassin’s arm nerved; deep – deep, he drove his murderous weapon home; his whole force was in the thrust. Loud rolling peals of thunder reverberated through the heavens, as the work of blood was doing, and drowned the dying groan of the murdered man. Heavily he fell, struck down by the force of the blow. No sigh escaped his breast; but the foul midnight murderer was not content; drawing the reeking steel from the wound, his teeth grinding with fury, his eyes starting from his head, he plunged it again, and again, to the very hilt, into the bosom of the fallen man, the warm blood spouting from each fresh wound, and dyeing his hands. He stooped down, tearing aside the cloak and vest, seeking with eager haste, to feel the bosom of him whom he had slain, to find if perchance it yet palpitated with life; but well and truly had he done his work; a deep deadly wound had pierced that heart, which, but a few moments before, had beat with confidence – true patriotism – high hopes and aspirations; inflicted by his foul hand.

For a moment, a gleam of satisfaction passed through the murderer’s bosom that his work was accomplished, and his reward gained; but an instant afterwards, and oh! for ten thousand worlds would none have exchanged the most wretched poverty for the feelings which possessed him. It was his first cold, deliberate, mercenary shedding of blood; he felt himself to be an accursed wretch on the earth.

He could not fly, a fascination chained him to the spot; his fingers were clammy with blood, thick clotted to his dagger’s handle. He sought for a pool that he had stepped in near the spot; he tried to wash away the damning stains, but he knew that to be impossible.

In the exciting moment of the murder, he had been thoughtless of the blood which flowed over him, but he now observed that he was covered with it. The rain again fell in torrents, he stood exposed to its fury, to let it wash away the stain. It revived him; his thoughts again returned to their accustomed channel. The recollection of the money, for which he had done the deed, recurred to him; avarice seized his heart, and he remembered that, perchance, the murdered man might have gold about him.

He now neither trembled nor hesitated, as he felt about the body of his victim. With joy he clutched a purse, by the size and weight of which he knew it must contain gold; he felt in the breast, he drew from thence a packet of letters; a thought struck him that they might be of use to his master;

he also possessed himself of watch and jewels. He was satisfied: no regret, no compunction for the deed oppressed him. His callous indifference had returned; an idea then occurred to him – horrid – diabolical. He searched around, to find some large stones, and with all his force he dashed one on the head of the murdered man; he seized another, and another, and hurled them with fury on the head of his victim, till he knew that every feature must be obliterated.

Again the lightning flashed brightly, and shewed him his work. He gazed on the ghastly spectacle; the thunder rolled terrifically, and seemed about to cast its bolts on his head. Even the assassin, callous and hardy as he was, now trembled, he could stand no more, and fled hastily from his cursed work. On – on – he went, nor dared to look behind him, for he felt himself pursued by some phantom of tremendous, of horrid aspect. There was a weight at his breast, his brain burned; he longed to shriek, to give vent to his feelings; but his voice seemed choked, he could utter no sound. He felt a longing desire to rush into fierce strife, to find more and more to slay, more to destroy. He was like the tiger who has once tasted of blood; nothing could slake his thirst; blood – blood he longed for, and still he fled away from that he had first spilled; but he thought he could blot out, with fresh blood, the remembrance of that dreadful deed.

He was flying on, a sort of brute instinct guiding his way, when he was called to his senses, by the loud challenge of a sentry from some government building. In a moment, he was again himself, the bold, careless ruffian; he answered calmly to the challenge, and was allowed to proceed onward; he drew his cloak closely around him, and walked towards the palace of his master, with a steady step; but it still required some exertion over his nerves, to prevent himself from rushing onward at his former pace.

At length he reached the palace, and knocked at a side door, where Kruntz was in waiting for him. His fellow ruffian started, as holding up a light, he caught sight of his pale, haggard cheek, his starting eye, and the dark red stains with which, as his cloak fell off, his dress was besmeared.

“What work hast thou been about now, Groff?” asked the man, “thou look’st like some wandering ghost.”

“A butcher’s!” answered Groff, in a thick husky voice; “but ask me no questions. Where is our lord? I must see him directly; I have matters of importance to communicate.”

“Would’st go to him in that pretty guise, friend?” said Kruntz; “truly it would please him much to see thee thus. Look at thyself in a glass, man, and thou would’st not much admire thine own countenance; if thou didst look always thus, thou would’st have but poor chance with the fair damsels thou seekest to captivate, and even men would be apt to shun thy company. I, for one, should not much like to be as near thee always as I now am. Get thee in, man, and change thy draggled garments.”

“Aye, I forgot me,” answered Groff. “Say not a word, Kruntz, nor rouse the other knaves. I’ll go change these wet garments, and then present me to our Lord; here, give me thy lamp.”

Thus saying, Groff seized the lamp from Kruntz’s hand, and turned the light away from himself. “Go, tell the Count, that I have returned and will give my news, when I am fit to appear before him.”

While Kruntz went to report the return of Groff, the assassin hastened to throw off his blood-stained garments, which he carefully tied up in a bundle, and hid them away together with his dagger; then having washed all stains from his cheeks and hands, he presented himself before the Count Erintoff.

He entered the room abruptly. “The deed is done which you required,” he said; “to-morrow morning the whole city will ring with it, and I may then claim my reward. I made sure work, and the youth will never more stand in your way.”

“Good,” answered the Count, “you shall have your reward. Come to-morrow to claim it.”

“It is well and hardly earned, let me say; and here is something that I found in the breast of the youth; these papers may give you some information,” said Groff.

“Let me have them,” said the Count. “Is this all you found upon him, knave, eh?”

“Nothing farther; I stayed not to search him,” answered the ruffian.

“Well, well, it matters not,” said the Count; “leave me, I will examine these papers.”

The murderer gladly withdrew from the presence of his instigator to crime, to join his companion, and to drown his conscience with wine; first examining and then carefully hiding the spoils he had taken from his victim.

The Count, when left alone, eagerly tore open the papers he had received, though he shuddered as on the outer packet, he caught sight of the stains of blood; the blood of the youth he had so heartlessly, so revengefully consigned to an early death; but all thoughts of remorse for the deed were forgotten, as he glanced his eye over the documents. Some were in cypher, but others he perused with the deepest interest. As he read, he exclaimed aloud: “Ah, this is a fortunate discovery! How many do I now hold in my power! Ah, and you too! The man I hate! I shall be amply revenged on him! My fortune is on the ascendant! By Heavens! this information is worth a principedom to me! Ay, and I will gain it too! I would have sacrificed a thousand lives to have gained it! My revenge satisfied, now for love! Ah, beautiful but haughty girl, your lover dead, you will now become mine; you will soon willingly come to my arms. Fortunately, that villain cannot read, nor has he even looked at these papers; I must not let him guess at their contents, or he may make higher demands on me. I trust he has not kept back any other papers; but no, he has given these as my share, and has kept the youth’s gold, if he had any, to himself: – he is welcome to it. But if I give information of this affair, may I not be suspected of the murder? However, that matters nothing; the government will be too well pleased to gain the information, to inquire very minutely how I came by it, or, if they should, I may easily invent a tale to account for it. I must see to this.”

Volume One – Chapter Twelve

We must now turn our view to a chamber in the chateau of the Baron Galetzoff. It was furnished with heavy and old fashioned hangings which gave it a solemn and sombre air, increased by the windows being closed to exclude the glare of day; one stream of light alone entering through the curtains, and throwing a still darker shade into the rest of the room. Two female attendants stood by the side of a couch, on which reclined, now wan and emaciated, that unhappy and mysterious lady, whom Ivan had so short a time before left in health, and all the majesty of beauty.

Her eye fixed and regardless of all around, her thoughts seemed to be far away, wandering perchance amid the scenes of her youth, with the loved beings of other days, whom she had long, long ago lost, but soon hoped again to meet in other and happier realms. As she gazed, their airy forms flitted before her eyes, and the well remembered lineaments became clear, and distinct, beckoning her to follow. She moved not, she spoke not, and as the attendants looked on her, they thought her spirit had departed.

A slow and gentle step approached: it was that of a venerable grey-headed man in the robes of a priest, whose clear, calm eye, and placid countenance, betokened an amiable and tender heart. He seated himself quietly by the side of the couch, but the movement roused the lady from her seeming trance, and she turned her eyes towards him.

“Daughter,” he said, “I could not rest away from your side, and as soon as I had performed the duties which called me hence, I returned to afford you all the consolation of which religion has so great a store.”

“Father!” she answered in a low voice, “to your instructions do I owe the great, the inestimable benefits which I may now partake of; else had I remained like the beast that perishes, without that faith and hope which now sustain me.”

“Daughter! those are the sentiments which should possess the bosoms of all who are about to leave this vale of tears,” continued the holy man; “clear your thoughts of all things appertaining to this world, and fix them on the next.”

“I would do so, Father, but I cannot!” answered the lady. “I must, ere I die, see one, the dearest to me on earth; till then I cannot tear my thoughts from him. Has he arrived? Oh! that I could see him, ere my spirit wings its flight from hence. Oh! let there be no delay when he comes, for each instant I feel the throbbing of my heart grow weaker.”

“There shall be no delay, my daughter! a faithful messenger has been sent to summon him; but, when I just now entered the house, he had not arrived,” said the priest. Scarcely had he uttered the words, when the lady exclaimed, “Ah, I now hear his horse’s steps approaching; oh! haste, Father, and bid him come hither.”

“You are mistaken, daughter, I heard no sound, and he could scarcely arrive by this hour,” answered the priest.

“Ah, no! Father, I mistake not, even now I hear his footstep in the hall. He approaches. Oh, my heart! cease not to beat, till I have seen him once again,” she exclaimed, nor had her sense of hearing deceived her; rendered still more acute, as her other faculties were fast failing.

In a few moments, a gentle knock was heard, and the dwarf entered. “I know that he is come,” said the lady, “oh! let me see him without delay; and holy Father, I would be alone with him.” The priest rose to obey her wishes, and withdrew with the attendants, as Ivan entered.

As she saw him, her faded eye brightened; and she stretched out her arms to receive him, as throwing himself on his knees by the side of the couch, he shaded his face with his hands, and a convulsive sob escaped his bosom.

“Do I find you thus?” he exclaimed after a moment’s pause, “my friend – my kind protectress? why was I not before apprised of your illness? why was I not here to solace and comfort you?”

“I knew not that death was making such rapid strides towards me,” answered the lady; “but think not that I am unhappy. Now that I have you with me, loved one! I am content to bear my lot; but I must not waste these precious moments, for I have much to say and my time on earth will quickly end. Listen to me,” and she spoke in that language which she had taught Ivan in his youth, and in which they loved to commune together.

“Can you remember the early days of your youth, and those scenes of which I once forbade you to speak?” she said.

“Yes – yes – vividly can I now recall several to my mind,” answered Ivan. “I remember a strange land, and scenes far different to this country; and also your kindness, your love from my earliest days.”

“Think you that the affection and fond solicitude with which I tended your youth, could ever have been felt by any but a mother! None but a mother could feel the undying love which I bear for you. My boy! my child! come to my arms, and let me hold thee there, before I die. You are – you are my son, and though in life, I dared not, for your sake, acknowledge it, I rejoice to die, that now I may declare the truth before all the world.”

“My heart always told me so,” exclaimed the young man, fondly embracing her, as she held out her arms to receive him. “O my loved mother! would that I might thus have called you before! but say who is my father? Is it not the Baron?”

“Thank great Heaven! no, my loved son – no! Your father was noble, generous, and brave; methinks, I now see his noble countenance reflected in my boy; but my strength fails me, my voice grows weak. Listen, ere it be too late, to my story.

“It was in our own loved and beautiful land, amid the magnificent mountains, the green and fertile glens of Circassia, that your father was distinguished as one of the noblest and bravest chieftains. Five thousand daring horsemen assembled at his command, ready to follow wherever he should lead. Many of the neighbouring chiefs were subject to him; all honoured or feared him. He kept free from the feuds which distracted and weakened the other tribes, and all sought to be in amity with him. He had numerous flocks and herds, which fed on the richest pastures; he had abundance of wealth; fleet and hardy steeds; rich armour and apparel; faithful and devoted servants.

“I was the daughter of a neighbouring prince; your noble father sought and won me in marriage. We had two children, you my loved son, and a fair young daughter; how my heart has bled as I have thought of that lovely cherub, whom I have been destined to see no more, and whose fate I tremble to think of! But our happiness, which seemed as full as mortals could enjoy, was destined to be fleeting and transitory; we were awoke, suddenly and without preparation, from our short-lived dream of bliss.

“Our territories, which extended over many of the rocky and precipitous mountains bordering on the sea, had hitherto, on account of their lofty situation, almost inaccessible to attack, escaped the devastating visits of the invaders of our country. Our home was near, the coast, and your father, confiding in the security of our situation, had gone with the greater part of his followers to repel a distant inroad of the enemy, leaving only a few to protect our herds, when a fleet of the lofty ships of the Russians, made a sudden descent on our coast. Their troops landed in numbers, and stormed the passes leading to our dwellings, destroying the fields of corn on their road, and carrying off, or killing all the cattle they could seize; the few of our men remaining in the neighbourhood assembled in haste, and disputed each spot of ground practicable of defence, with all the energy and bravery of despair; even the women seized arms and joined the men, aiding them to their utmost; some hurling down stones on the heads of the invaders, as they defiled through each narrow gorge. But what could a handful of men do, taken almost by surprise, against a host of well-equipped and ferocious enemies? Frantic with our hopeless efforts, we fought till our men were all slain, for none would yield, while they had strength to use their weapons.

“My heart sickens even now at the wanton and cruel butcheries which the ruthless barbarians committed. The children were torn from their mothers’ arms and slaughtered in their sight; some few

of the women however escaped with the infants under their charge, among whom was your young sister, and gained the mountains, beyond the reach of their pursuers.

“A ruffian was about to destroy you, my boy, when you were rescued from his grasp by a more humane comrade, who, as I afterwards found, was a servant belonging to the leader of the enemy’s forces. From a height overlooking the pass, I beheld you borne away in the arms of the soldier, and I sought to throw myself down, to tear you from the robber’s grasp, or to share your captivity. I was, however, forcibly prevented by my attendants, who deaf to my entreaties and disobedient to my commands, when I ordered them to release me, compelled me to remain concealed in a cavern from the sight of our enemies. The Russians had retired from the defiles and passes in the mountains and encamped near the seashore, under protection of the guns of their ships; we, the wretched and melancholy few who remained, watched from the neighbouring heights, there passing the live-long night, for we had no homes to return to; our once smiling dwellings were burnt to the ground, our streams choked with the dead, and tinged with their blood, our cattle carried off, and desolation reigned around.

“We were aroused from our lamentations over the fallen brave, by the arrival of a band of horsemen, who had been sent back by your father; they proposed to delay making any attack on the foe till their numbers could be increased from the neighbouring villages; but I thought of you, my boy – you a prisoner in the hands of our enemies, and I dreaded lest they should set sail, and bear you far away without a hope of recovering you. With lamentations and entreaties, with tears and commands, I urged on our men to the attack. I shewed them the ignominy, the disgrace, which would cover them, should they allow an enemy, who had devastated their lands, slain their kinsmen, and carried away captive their wives and children, to escape, without attempting to revenge their loss. I pointed out to them that the son of their beloved chieftain was in the power of their enemies, and that should they discover the value of their prize, they would endeavour to bring us to terms, disgraceful and injurious to our country, for the sake of recovering him. I excited their valour – I fired their souls with my eloquence, wrought to the highest pitch by a mother’s anxiety – I offered to lead them, putting myself at their head, and swore never to return unsuccessful.

“We sent out messengers in all directions around, summoning all who could be collected to join our forces. None hesitated to obey our summons, for the same detestation of our invaders animated the breasts of all. Before the morning broke, we had assembled from all quarters an irregular, but heroic band, eager to be led against the common foe. From the thick wooded heights, which overhung the coast, we rushed down upon the unprepared camp, like some mountain torrent, suddenly swelled by the thunder cloud, sweeping over the plain, bearing all before it. I felt not like a weak, timid woman, but as the enraged lioness, whose young has been torn from her by the hands of the huntsmen. I sprung to rescue you; by word and action, I encouraged our men to the assault, and heeded not the overwhelming numbers opposed to us.

“The Russians roused from their sleep, ere the out-posts could give the alarm, rushed to their arms; many, owing to the confusion and darkness, missed their weapons. In an instant we were upon them; and as corn before the sickle we hewed them down, none crying for mercy; they knew they deserved it not, we shewed none. But ere our work was done, the morning broke, and exhibited our scanty force to the enemy, who rallied at the sight, and retreated fighting in order. But I had not recovered my child, and it was for that object alone that I fought. Suddenly, I caught sight of you at a distance, with other prisoners amid the ranks of the foe. I strained every nerve to reach you – I saw not the blows aimed at me – I encouraged my followers, and on – on, we rushed, fearless of the danger, and ignorant of the vast power of the mighty engines of destruction which their huge ships bore. Fighting step by step, we repelled the Russians, till they gained the very margin of the sea, and then, just as we thought victory secure – their ships opened upon us suddenly the hot shower of their artillery, which no valour could withstand; my brave companions fell fast around me while fighting, and still hotly pursuing the foe, till death arrested their course.

“Scarcely any remained by my side, when it seemed that a sickness came over me, and I fell to the ground, and knew not what further happened.

“When I awoke to consciousness, I found myself on board of one of the Russian ships, borne far from my native land. I endeavoured to recall my scattered senses: a fever raged through my brain, as I was conducted into the presence of the chief who had led the attack on our territory – he was the Baron Galetzoff!”

Ivan’s brow grew dark, and an exclamation of anger rose to his lips; but he restrained his passion.

“He eyed me with a glance which pierced me through my soul, as I stood with my head bowed before him, nor could words find utterance through my parched lips. He spoke, but I was deaf to the sound. Strange people were around me; an uncouth language was spoken, whose meaning I could not understand: entreaty, resistance, complaint, were alike unavailing. I had none to appeal to from whom I could hope for assistance. I knew myself to be utterly helpless; none around me could understand my words. I was led back, unresistingly, to my solitary cabin. I yielded to my fate, for all thoughts of escape were hopeless. I thought of death as a refuge for my wretchedness; but one idea, one hope still sustained me, and bade me cling to life. I might, should you have escaped destruction, still have a chance, though a remote one, of meeting with you. The very thought restored me. I determined to live to devote my energies to find you; for I knew not of the difficulties in my way. The ship in which I was borne captive from Circassia, reached the shores of Russia; and I was transported to this mansion in some strange conveyance, which I had never before seen. I was here treated with every care and attention, having female attendants to wait on me, and to supply all my wants. From them I learned gradually the strange language they spoke, being inspired with the hope that it might be of service to me in my search after you; and sustained by this deep feeling, I became partially reconciled to my fate. I had not seen or heard of my captor since I left the ship, except that, as far as I could understand, he was still absent from his domain.

“My sole delight and employment was in wandering through the woods, while thinking of you, and in forming many different projects to discover to what part of the country you had been conveyed. On one of these excursions I had gone further than usual from home, and had for an instant lost sight of my attendant, when a child’s cry caught my ear. I rushed forward eagerly at the sound, for the notes vibrated through my heart like some beloved and well-known voice. I was not to be deceived. Oh! joy of joys! blessing unspeakable! it was you, my own loved boy – far off, I knew you. I sprang forward – I pressed you to my bosom – I covered you with kisses – I placed you on the ground: again and again I snatched you in my arms. I wept – I felt mad with joy; all my sorrows, all my miseries were, for the moment, forgotten; all the happiness I had lost, in an instant, appeared restored tenfold. I know not if you recognised me; but I thought you did; for you returned my embrace, looking up smilingly in my face.

“A rough, but honest-faced looking man, broke through the woods in search of you, and looked surprised and alarmed on finding you in my arms. He made signs that he must take you from me; and though I sought to prevent it, you returned willingly to him. With my spirit broken, I could not dare to oppose him; and I guessed, too, from his manners and countenance, that he might prove a friend. This honest serf was the father of Karl; and from him I learned that you had been carried off by his brother, who had saved your life from the hands of some of his comrades; that the Baron had seen you, and for some unknown reason, had taken a fancy to you, and ordered you to be committed to his charge; and also, that you had been conveyed to the estate at the very time that I was, while I had been pining in despair for your loss. Every day I frequented the same spot, which was near the serf’s hut, in hopes of seeing you and clasping you to my bosom; when the honest fellow at length, taking compassion on me, used to bring you forth to meet me. Oh! the happiness, the bliss of those moments, almost repaid me the misery I had suffered. I was not acquainted with the Baron’s disposition; but an idea occurred to me, though I scarcely know how it originated, that, should he discover you to be my son, he might, by threatening to tear you from my sight, endeavour to gain more control over me. Every time that

this thought recurred to me, it gave fresh strength to my opinion, and I resolved, at all hazard, to profess utter carelessness on your account; and thankful I have ever since been, that I adopted that course; for no sooner did the Baron arrive, than my trials commenced. I, at first, with the most abject entreaties, prayed to be restored to my own country, hoping to take you with me; but he laughed at my petition; and when I pressed my demand, with some haughtiness of manner, he sternly refused.

“All hopes of escape were as vain as the prayers addressed to my captor had been unsuccessful, for I knew not even to what part of the country I had been conveyed. I thought of the beloved husband to whom I was lost – of my sweet daughter – of friends and home; and I felt that I could not survive their loss: but your voice, though at a distance, struck on my ear, and for your sake I resolved to live on.

“When you were brought to the chateau, your playful manners, and light prattle, seemed to win on the affections of the Baron, as much as his rough and savage nature would permit; but I kept to my prudent resolution, and pretended not to recognise you. At first you would oftentimes throw your arms round my neck, and call me by the endearing name of mother, in your native tongue; but I taught you not to utter that name, though it almost broke my heart to do so; and my artifice succeeded; for you were constantly allowed to be with me, and the Baron seemed to have no idea of our relationship.

“The Baron’s conduct towards you was always inexplicable, for it appeared entirely contrary to his fierce and cruel disposition, to treat you as he has done. I have lately suspected that he has some secret motive for thus acting, for to me he has always been harsh and tyrannical.

“There was one person in the Baron’s establishment who soon became entirely devoted to me – it was the dwarf Ladislau. I pitied his weakness and helplessness, treating him always with kindness, for which he has shewn his gratitude by every means in his power. From him I learned that the Baron had, some time before, married a lady of great beauty, who, his servants and dependants fancied, was a native of some foreign country, though they knew not from what part of the world she came. Ladislau added that he himself perfectly knew, and that she was of the Zingani race, and had been induced to marry the Baron, more for his rank and wealth, than for any great love she bore him. This he soon discovered, and in revenge treated her so barbarously, that she was preparing to fly from his mansion, but was prevented. Soon after the unfortunate lady died, after giving birth to a child; but, previously to that event, she had called the dwarf to her, and given some injunctions, which he had sworn most solemnly to fulfil, and even to keep secret within his own bosom.

“The Baron at first seemed repentant of his jealousy and tyranny, and grieved for his loss, seeking to make amends by his kindness to the child, for his cruelty to the mother; but, during his absence from home for a time, the child had mysteriously disappeared, and all his attempts at discovering it, had proved fruitless. Methought the dwarf gave a sinister look, as he told me the tale. He said that the Baron had raged and stormed at the loss of his child, but had at length given up all hopes of ever discovering the perpetrators of the deed; rather believing that it had come to some violent end, and perhaps, when he first saw you, the smiling cherub that you then were, he thought of supplying the place of his own lost one.

“From the dwarf I learned, that the Baron bore a deadly hatred to my country, for the reverses he had so constantly met with there; and he had sworn utterly to subdue, and reduce its inhabitants to the most abject slavery. He knew little of the noble spirit which animated their bosoms, while indulging in hopes of success against them. Ladislau added, when the Baron found that you, a Circassian child, had been saved by one of his soldiers, he, with a refinement of cruelty, had determined to bring you up, and teach you to feel the most deadly hatred against your own countrymen, if by chance they were not subdued before that time. I thanked heaven that I was at hand to counteract his evil intentions, and the aim of my life has been, to inspire you with a love of freedom, and a hatred of all tyranny and injustice. The Baron would be less than human had he not one redeeming quality; having been a father himself, he seemed, when you were a child, to have some sparks of affection for you, beyond the object for which he has educated you. He has even now adopted you, and would leave you all his wealth, would you comply with his requests. But oh! my loved son, be not seduced by the glittering

baits he will offer – to turn traitor to your native land! Else shall my life, and all my sufferings have been in vain. Oh no! even I, to whom you are dearer than all else, counsel you to hazard death or captivity, rather than shed the blood of your countrymen, by the side of their foes. Let me beseech you to fulfil the lofty purpose for which I consented to live in this hated place; and when I am no more, as I soon shall be, then fly from hence, and endeavour to reach your native land. That amulet, which you carry round your neck, has always been worn by the eldest son of the chieftain of your tribe. No sooner shall your father's followers see it, than they will acknowledge you, if unhappily your noble father no longer lives. Seek the spot which was once your home, then proclaim yourself, and relate my unhappy story, when all with joy will own you; and should my loved husband still exist, give him my parting sighs.”

Her voice, during this recital, frequently faltered through weakness; and as she fell back exhausted at its close, a thrill of horror shot through her son's frame, as for an instant he thought that, in truth, her spirit had fled to the realms of bliss; but to his great joy, she again opened her eyes, to gaze on him she loved so deeply, as he held her sinking form in his arms. He was overwhelmed with the interest of the story he had heard; and though he had loved her before he knew she was his mother, how deep and earnest was his gratitude now for her devoted, her heroic affection for him?

“Mother!” he cried, “I swear to obey your commands. Already have I engaged in the accomplishment of a great work, after the issue of which I will haste to that land, which oft have I visited in my dreams.”

“Enough, my son, sure I am that heaven will protect you on your way; but I have yet more to add. When you reach your native land, oh! endeavour to instil into your countrymen that mild and pure religion, which the good priest, who educated you, first taught me to know. It was once the religion of our forefathers, and the cross – the emblem of that faith – is still to be seen in the land. Oh! reclaim them to the true and ancient worship of their country. My loved son! let me gaze on thee once more, ere my sight fail me. May heaven guard thy life, and make thee the deliverer of thy country! Then shalt thou be known by thy true name, and well wilt thou prove worthy of thy gallant father. I cannot longer see thee, my son; but kiss me once more, and receive my last sigh: – when thou bearest it to thy father, say that I loved him to the last.”

She ceased to speak, Ivan felt her form recline more heavily in his arms; no pulse answered to his touch. She looked lovely still, but her eye had lost that mysterious expression of the mind, when the living soul yet animates the frame. Her spirit had fled!

In that bleak land died the lovely exile, far distant from her own sunny clime: but she was happy at the last, when folded in the arms of that son for whose sake she had so nobly endured long and weary captivity.

The young man uttered no loud complaint; but laid her form calmly on the couch, and with reverent awe closed her eyes; then gazing earnestly on her features, he threw himself on his knees by her side. The attendants entered, and found him in this posture when he was aroused by the entreaties of his faithful friend Ladislau, who led him unresistingly to his chamber; and the kind-hearted dwarf then lavished his attentions upon the bereaved Ivan.

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