

NARKA, THE NIHILIST.

By KATHLEEN O'MEARA.

CHAPTER XXXV.—CONTINUED.

"Oh, Marguerite, it is you! Come in quick," she cried, breathlessly. And she told her in a few hurried words what had just happened.

"And she is gone down with the box to me?" said Marguerite. "Then I must hurry home and be there to meet her." Narka would have been thankful to have the support of her presence when the police came; but it was all-important to get the casket into safe-keeping, so she did not detain her. Marguerite was not surprised on reaching the House to find that Madame Blaquette had not yet arrived; the back way made a great round, and the old lady might linger to make sure of avoiding the police. The dispensary window commanded the court; Marguerite went in there, so as to see her the moment she arrived. But ten minutes passed, then twenty, and Madame Blaquette did not appear. Could she have been seen escaping from the window and followed and arrested? This was highly improbable; still, when half an hour passed, Marguerite grew nervous. There was no one to consult. All the Sisters were absent from their rounds, or engaged in the schools. Suddenly the sound of a light hammer fell on her ear. She opened a door off the dispensary; it was a closet into which they had smuggled Antoine Drex. He was cowering in an old boot, nailing a sole to it. Antoine was safe as a tombstone, and cunning as a rat; he knew the police, and he knew every turn of the lanes and courts through which Madame Blaquette had to pass. Marguerite told him what had happened.

"Most likely she's hiding till she makes sure those vermin are out of the way," said Antoine. "Keep your eye on the gate, ma seur, old Blaque will turn up. He nodded, and went on with his job; but he knit his brow with a scowl. "Take care you don't stay too long at that, Antoine," said Marguerite; "the blood might go to your head and bring on congestion."

"Oh! I'm all right, ma seur," he replied, nodding confidently. Marguerite felt a little reassured. She went back into the dispensary and kept her watch on the gate; but when an hour went by, and there was no sign of Madame Blaquette, she could bear it no longer. The suspense was intolerable. She resolved to go back to Narka and see what had happened there, at any rate. She opened the door of the closet to tell Antoine she was going, but to her surprise the place was empty. Where and how had he gone off? She remembered there was a way out by the garden, but he must have got out of the window; and why on earth had he done this? He was to have made his escape that evening, travelling in a wine wagon till he got to Caen, when he was to be rolled off the truck, and to make his way on foot to St. Aubin, his native village. It seemed to Marguerite that everybody was on the wrong track to-day. She walked quickly on to Narka's. The place was quiet, just as she had left it an hour ago; no groups about, no sign of any unusual incident, such as an arrest, having stirred the neighborhood. This was reassuring; still her hand shook as she pulled the bell, and she uttered an exclamation of relief when Narka appeared.

"Well?" "There has been nobody. I began to think Madame Blaquette imagined the whole thing."

"But the box? What has she done with it?" "The box?" Hasn't she taken it to you?" "No; she has never been near me."

Narka turned deadly pale. A horrible suspicion flashed through both their minds. "Oh, my God! It was a trap," said Narka; "it was a trap set for Basil. They saw him here last night."

Marguerite thought she had gone stark mad. The scared expression of her face reminded Narka that she had not told her about Basil's arrival.

"Oh, darling!" she said, "we have not had a moment to breathe, or I should have told you Basil has escaped; he is here in Paris. He came to see me last night; he had just only arrived by the train, and I was expecting him again this morning when that dreadful woman came."

"Basil is here!" Marguerite repeated, in amazement. "Yes; he came late, about 10 o'clock, and staid till midnight; I watched him across the Place; there was not a soul about; but those blood-hounds must have tracked him! Oh, my God! has he fallen into their fangs again?" She wrung her hands in misery.

"They stood silent, both their hearts beating with terror. "Do you know at all what those papers contained?" Marguerite asked, under her breath.

"I fancy they were a political programme, or something of that sort, drawn up by a man who is dead since Ivan Gorff told me. But then there were those articles in Basil's own handwriting. Oh!"

Marguerite did not know what articles she was talking about; Narka had never told her those translations, or of the meeting.

"Narka," she said, laying her hand on the girl's arm, "do you think there was a confession in them? About Father Christopher?"

"Don't think so; but I don't know. Oh, Marguerite, what is to be done?" "Where is Basil staying?" asked Marguerite.

"I don't know; I never thought of asking him. But Sibyl will know; he is most likely with her now, if—Oh, my God! I feel half mad! Only think: he has barely escaped, and to be caught again!" She put her hand to her forehead, and dropped into a seat.

"We don't know yet whether he is caught," said Marguerite; "or even likely to be caught; don't let us jump at the worst conclusion in a minute. The whole thing may be a silly scare of that old goose Blaquette's invention."

"But she said Schenk sent her to warn me. How could she have known I had papers unless he or some one told her?" "There was no denying this. "Get up and go, and I will hurry off to Sibyl."

"Oh, Sibyl! Sibyl!" Narka cried, in an accent of poignant pain. "Go!" Marguerite persisted, trying to make her rise. Narka seemed incapable either of resisting or deciding. She rose passively, and let Marguerite help her on and cloak.

"I let me see you safe out by the window before I go," said Marguerite.

But Narka, roused at last to some realization of her position and of the necessity of the moment, said that she must put away some few things and lock her drawers. This was reasonable enough, and Marguerite, seeing that she had recovered her presence of mind, was satisfied to leave her behind and hurry off on her own mission. They stood at the door together, Narka took her in her arms and kissed her, a long, loving kiss.

"God bless you, Marguerite! You are God's providence to me always." She opened the door to let her out. As she did so, two men stood outside. One was the Commissary of Police. He laid his hand on Narka's shoulder and said, "I arrest you in the name of the Emperor!"

CHAPTER XXXVI. Sibyl had returned to Paris the moment the riots were over; but she had not ventured near the district quarters, nor had she seen Marguerite, consequently when the latter walked into her boudoir, half an hour after Narka's arrest, Sibyl welcomed her with double delight.

"You haven't met him?" she exclaimed, running to embrace her.

"Whom?" said Marguerite. "Basil—yes, Basil! He had only just left me. He is gone off to see you and Narka. He walked in here this morning, and nearly killed me with the joy of the surprise. You look as if you thought I had gone crazy; but it is perfectly true."

"I am only too glad to believe it," replied Marguerite, with disappointing calmness. "I am glad of good news from any direction."

"Why, what do you mean? What has happened?" Sibyl asked, in alarm. "He has been arrested. She has been arrested."

"Arrested? Again? Here? Good heavens!" Sibyl sat down. "Yes," said Marguerite, sitting too; "it happened half an hour ago. I was there when the police came."

"And what have they arrested her for?" Marguerite was embarrassed. If Basil had not spoken of his engagement, it might be indiscreet to mention the papers that had been seized. "I heard nothing except that they had a warrant to arrest her," she said. But the perplexity in her mind got into her face, and Sibyl saw it.

"You know more than that, Marguerite," she said. "Has Narka been associating with those wicked rioters up at La Villette?"

"A man who was wounded and pursued by the police sought refuge with her one night, and that is what has been discovered. But what is to be done? How are we to help her? You must know hosts of people who have influence. There is Prince Krinsky; you must go to him."

"But he is the Russian Ambassador!" "Well, and is not that a reason? What are ambassadors for but to help their countrymen when they get into trouble?"

"That depends upon what the trouble is. It is not likely our Ambassador would feel it his duty to help any Russian for conspiring against our Emperor."

"Why should you at once conclude that she has been conspiring against our Emperor? My belief is, the whole affair is either a gross mistake or some cruel trick, and if you won't help her, I will ask Gaston to do it for me."

"As if I did not care a great deal more than Gaston about Narka!" retorted Sibyl. "The fact is, I suspect I know more about this arrest than you do. We were warned months ago that Narka was associating with disreputable people who would get her into trouble. That Dr. Schenk that had been attending her bears a very suspicious character. How came she to know him?"

"Through Ivan Gorff. Ivan brought him to her when she fell ill. That was not her fault."

"It was her misfortune, anyhow. It obliged me to be very circumspect in my intercourse with her. It would not have done for me to become identified with a person who associated with bad characters. My house is a centre of Russian society in Paris, and though I am now a French woman, it might have injured my father and Basil if I had paraded my friendship with a Russian who was on intimate terms with conspirators."

And so this was the mot de l'enigme, the secret of the cold aloofness which had wounded Narka so deeply.

"I don't believe Narka has been associating with conspirators," said Marguerite. "You need not have been afraid of her compromising you. Then, after a moment's pause, "What would they do to her if she were accused of anything of that sort?" she asked.

"If she has mixed herself up in any treason against the Emperor of France, the French law would deal with her."

"But if it was against the Emperor of Russia?" "In that case they would send her to Russia to be tried."

"Oh!" "If Sibyl's answer had been, "They will flog her to death," the interjection could not have expressed more horror. Marguerite's look and tone seemed to hold a terrible revelation.

"Did Narka ever tell you about what happened to her in the prison?" Sibyl asked, in an altered manner.

"She let me guess. Oh, Sibyl!" said Marguerite, clasping her hands, and her eyes filled with tears, "how awful if she were to go through that again!"

Sibyl changed color, and stood up, and moved restlessly about the room. Then, as if conquered by some motive which bore down all opposition, "I will go to Prince Krinsky," she said.

Marguerite burst into tears, and kissed her, and hurried away.

Sibyl ordered the carriage and went to dress. Just as she was ready to go downstairs, Basil came back with M. de Beaurillon. They were both in high spirits.

"You have not heard?" said Sibyl. "Narka is arrested."

Basil uttered a violent expletive in Russian, and turned pale.

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"Marguerite, who told me about it—she has only just gone—says she knows nothing but the fact of the arrest. She was with Narka when the police came and carried her away."

"I must go to her at once," said Basil, picking up his hat, that he had dropped in his excitement, and he was leaving the room. "I must go to the prison and see my way in to her. Where is the prison?"

"My dear Basil, you are the last person who ought to go near her," protested Sibyl—"you who are so compromised yourself."

"Sibyl is right," said M. de Beaurillon. "You would only compromise her still more. But what in Heaven's name has Narka been doing to get into this new trouble?"

Basil took a turn in the room, and then suddenly coming up to Sibyl, he said, "The time has come for me to speak out. I am engaged to Narka."

"What?" Sibyl cried, almost with a shriek. "Diable!" exclaimed M. de Beaurillon.

Then followed a pause of stupefied amazement from both.

"Yes," said Basil, "the night I left Yrakow I asked her to be my wife. I cannot see why the newspapers you both dumb with horror, as if they were a crime, Narka is good and gifted and beautiful, and you, Sibyl, have looked on her as a sister all your life."

But Sibyl could not answer him; the power of speech seemed to have left her. She was clutching the mantel, her face was blanched, the color had faded from her eyes, and she stared fixedly at Basil with an expression that was indefinable.

"Mon cher ami!" said M. de Beaurillon. "I must warn you don't understand your condition at the effect of your announcement on my wife. It is not such a surprise to me. I always thought Narka's position in the family was an anomalous one, and likely to end in some catastrophe of this sort. I said so to Sibyl long ago, but she ridiculed the idea and laughed at me."

"I don't see why the culmination should have excited Sibyl's ridicule," Basil retorted, looking angrily at her.

"She has not far to look for the reason, nevertheless," said Gaston. "Mademoiselle Narka is undoubtedly, all that you say, as gifted as she is good, but she is the daughter of a Jewish trader, whereas you are—"

"Her affianced husband," interrupted Basil.

"Ah! just so. Then there is nothing more to be said, and it only remains for me to congratulate you." And M. de Beaurillon bowed stiffly.

"Oh, Basil! Basil!" Sibyl cried, and she clasped her hands and burst into tears, and flung herself sobbing on a couch.

"So much for a woman's friendship!" said Basil, bitterly; and he looked at his brother-in-law as if expecting him to acquiesce in the contemptuous sentiment.

But M. de Beaurillon walked over and looked at the chimney-piece, looking down at his sobbing wife with an air of unconcealed anxiety.

"Look here, Sibyl," said Basil, too, de Beaurillon, listen to what I have to say and give me a fair hearing. When I came back that evening with Father Christopher's pardon there was a warrant signed for my arrest. The Stanovoi gave me notice, and offered to let me escape before the warrant reached him if I paid him fifty thousand roubles. I could not by any possibility lay my hands on the sum within the time. I had three hours to find it. I knew you had not half the amount with you, and there was no one else to call upon. I was prepared to be arrested by 10 o'clock that night. I told Narka about the warrant, and by mere chance I mentioned the offer made me by the Stanovoi. She gave me the money, and I escaped."

"Narka!" they both exclaimed, in amazement.

"Narka," repeated Basil. "It so happened that that very day she learned that a legacy of precisely fifty thousand roubles had been paid into the hands of Perrow for her by the executor of an uncle of Tanta Nathalie. Narka rode in to X, got the money, and returned just in time. The Stanovoi, who had had me closely watched, was lying in ambush at the gate, and I paid him the money. Before making my escape I asked Narka to be my wife."

"Ma foi! I don't see how you could have helped it!" exclaimed M. de Beaurillon, with generous warmth; "no man of honor could have done less."

"I don't see that at all," said Sibyl, whose sobs and tears had been suddenly checked by the counter-current of emotion. "I can't see that honor made it necessary for him to dishonor his name. It was most kind and generous of Narka; but any friend worthy of the name would have done as much. And as far as that went, I would have paid the debt, had I known of it, within a month. I will do so now, and twofold, tenfold, gratefully and willingly."

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"Sibyl is right," said M. de Beaurillon. "You would only compromise her still more. But what in Heaven's name has Narka been doing to get into this new trouble?"

Basil took a turn in the room, and then suddenly coming up to Sibyl, he said, "The time has come for me to speak out. I am engaged to Narka."

ea'd Basil, angry and hurt; "but the money is the least part of what I owe Narka." He pulled at his mustache, and after a moment's wavering and debating, "I had in my possession at the time," documents that were then of great importance, and of the most compromising character; I could not destroy them, and I dared not take them with me. I asked Narka to keep them. I knew and she knew that they would bring grievous trouble on any one with whom they were found; but she accepted the trust without hesitating. The Stanovoi, who knew she had been with me to the last, and who no doubt discovered that she had given me the ransom, denounced her as having my papers. She was arrested, and kept six months in prison. God and herself alone know what she suffered there; but they got nothing out of her. She left Kronstadt without having betrayed me by a word." He seemed almost overcome for a moment. "You know the rest," he went on, hurriedly. "Tante Nathalie could not rally from the shock. Narka came away amongst strangers, first in one place, then in another, she suffered every sort of hardship, and it has been all my doing. And because I don't throw her over like a heartless scoundrel, you cry out that I am dishonoring myself!"

"Narka is a noble creature," said M. de Beaurillon, with genuine feeling. "No man worthy of the name could bring otherwise than you are doing."

Sibyl, who had entirely ceased crying, got up and went over to Basil and kissed him. "Yes, Narka has behaved nobly," she said, "and you are the most chivalrous of men. For the sake of all she has done and suffered, we will receive her as your wife."

The concession was probably as much as Basil could have expected from Sibyl under any circumstances; but he took it coldly, and without a word of thanks or comment.

"The question now is," said M. de Beaurillon, "what is to be done to get her out of this fresh trouble. You have no idea what has led to it?"

"I may still be the cause of it," Basil replied, remembering last night's visit, and the possibility of its having been discovered. "She may have kept those papers; it is very possible."

"Then we must go to Prince Krinsky at once," said Sibyl.

"What has Krinsky to do with it?" asked Basil, sharply.

"If she has been watched by our police—and nobody else had any motive in watching her—Prince Krinsky will know, and he is the only person who can help."

Basil thought it very unlikely that the Prince would help; the name of Krinsky had been as the seven devils let loose on him all these months in St. Petersburg, and the name of Zorokoff was no doubt in equally bad odor with the Krinskys. The ambassador was not likely to extend his favor to any offender who was identified with the family of the man who had rejected Princess Marie.

"Sibyl is right," said M. de Beaurillon. "Krinsky is the person we must apply to, and no other person must be lost."

"I wish I could see Ivan before we move in the matter," said Basil, in evident perplexity. He went to the window, and saw that the brougham was waiting in the court; then pulled out his watch. "I think I could catch him by driving there now. Yes, I will try and see Ivan; he will throw some light on the affair that will guide us. Don't go to the Russian embassy till I come back," he said to Sibyl; and snatching up his hat, he hurried away, and in a minute they heard the brougham driving out of the court.

"Well!" said M. de Beaurillon, flinging himself into a chair, and he threw up his hands in a gesture of utter amazement; "it is the most astounding story that I ever heard!"

Sibyl tore off her bonnet and tossed it from her, and pulled off her gloves in an excited manner; she seemed too agitated to speak. After a pause, "To think," she burst out, "that Narka should have been all this time engaged to him and never told me! The base hypocrisy of it is incredible. And to think of such a scene going on that night at Yrakow and I left in ignorance of it!"

"She showed extraordinary self-control, certainly," said M. de Beaurillon; "very few women could go through such an ordeal without betraying themselves. And by heavens she does know how to love a man!" he added, in a tone of admiration that had a ring of envy in it.

"Better than she knows how to love a woman," retorted Sibyl. "To think that she could be so treacherous!"

"Quelle betise! and M. de Beaurillon threw back his head with a contemptuous laugh.

"It was treacherous of her," repeated Sibyl, her eyes glittering.

"It would have been treacherous of Basil if she had betrayed her secret. Seigneur Dieu, quelle made de mourir moscovites!" M. de Beaurillon laughed again, and rose, and began to walk about the room. "No, ma chere amie," he went on, "such a romance could never be acted in any country under heaven but Russia. Such a series of exaggerations, such a jumble of chivalry and cowardice, of generosity and selfishness! It passes human understanding."

"You are so charivain, Gaston; you never can see things from any but the French point of view."

"Very likely, ma chere amie; just as you can only see them from the Russian point of view. A Frenchman in Basil's place would, ten to one, have fallen in love with Narka, as a boy; would perhaps well, he certainly never would, as a man, have elected to marry her."

"Why, you said just now that no man in Basil's place could have done otherwise."

"Precisely—in Basil's place; but a Frenchman would never have put himself in Basil's place; but having taken her money, and put her life and liberty in peril, and brought her into such terrible tribulation, a Frenchman would not have gone back to Russia and lived in luxury at court, and left the woman he loved all that to in every sort of hardship. Basil ought not to have left his money, but unpaid all this time, at any rate. Why did he not tell the Prince about it?"

"My father?" cried Sibyl. "Basil knew better than to do that. My father would have cursed him."

"Et apres? We are not in the days of the patriarchs, and curses break no bones. Much more, you men have something to be desired; there is a law in their chivalry at its best. But your women—by heaven, they are a splendid race! Narka is a grand specimen of them, and Basil would be a scoundrel if he threw her over for

all the curses of all the papas in holy Russia."

Sibyl could not wish Basil to be a scoundrel, but neither could she face the other alternative. Surely there must be some way out of the difficulty; surely Providence would rescue the pride of the Zorokoffs from this shame, would save the holy place from that abomination of abominations, Jewish blood! She sat still, except for the nervous mechanical action of twisting her handkerchief into a tight rope, unconscious that her fingers were tearing the costly rags to shreds. The gong sounded, announcing a visitor. "I hope no one is coming up here," she said, impatiently.

M. de Beaurillon rang the bell which sounded the desired prohibition, but before a servant could appear, Marguerite, who greeted her with an exclamation of relief, "Well, what news?—have you seen her?" said Sibyl.