

## HOME CIRCLE.

## A TALE OF RUSSIA UNDER NICHOLAS I.

In one of the splendid palaces of the Russian capital, a fair young girl threw herself upon the crimson cushions of a divan in the embrasure of a large window. Alarm and anxiety were depicted on her features, and she constantly clasped and unclasped her small hands, and nervously arose and looked out into the street, and then resented herself as if waiting for some painful intelligence. It was the fair young Natalie Radetski, the beauty of the Russian court, upon whom nature and fortune had showered every gift, and for whom even the stern features of the Emperor Nicholas would relax into something like a smile as he looked upon her beauty and grace.

Hastily the door opened, and a young man advanced towards her.

"I am to bid you farewell, Natalie," he said in a voice broken by emotion.

"Oh, Alexis! what is it?" cried the young girl.

"I have displeased the Emperor, and he has ordered my arrest."

"The Emperor will pardon you—I will go to him," said she. "He will not refuse me. He has always been so kind to me."

"Alas! my Natalie. He will refuse you this. The Emperor believes me concerned in a conspiracy, and he never forgives. I am innocent, but he will not believe it. I know not what is to be done with me; but if I am sent to Siberia—"

"To Siberia! Oh, Alexis! it cannot be—it cannot be!"

For a moment neither spoke. At length, with a powerful effort at self-control, the young man said, "Natalie let me place this ring upon your finger, and promise me that you will wear it always in memory of what my love has been to you. The Emperor will force you to marry. I do not wish the thought of me to make you always wretched."

He placed upon her finger a ring, in which was a single emerald of great brilliancy.

"Do not take it off, nor read the inscription, till you hear certainly that I have been banished," he said. A shiver of horror ran through her frame, but he went on firmly: "Then read it; it will comfort you. Now I must go. The Emperor allowed me this interview, and the guards are awaiting me."

He clasped her convulsively to his breast, kissed her brow and lips, and laying her gently upon the divan passed out. In the street the guards awaited him.

The words of her lover did not deter Natalie from attempting to save him. She sent a petition to the Emperor, imploring an interview; but it was denied her. She lay in bed, the Empress.

"My poor child," said the Empress, kindly, "I would gladly take you to the Emperor, even at the risk of incurring his displeasure; but it is too late. Alexis Potemkin has been sent to Siberia for life."

Natalie heard it not.

"Lift her up," said the Empress; "she has fainted."

But Natalie had not fainted. Slowly, but resolutely, she rose, and made a gesture of respectful submission to the Empress, begged leave to retire.

When Natalie reached her own apartment, she drew from her finger the ring that Alexis had placed upon it, and read the inscription carved upon the inside in French—"Death is the only consoler," it said. "We shall meet in heaven!"

There is no place more dreary, more terrible, even in imagination, than the mines of Siberia.

Among the condemned, in a large quicksilver mine in the very heart of the country, thousands of versts from St. Petersburg, stooped at his daily toil a form whose tall and noble proportions even his coarse habit scarcely shrouded. His delicate frame, unused to labour, and exposed to the rigour of an Arctic climate, soon yielded to the unhealthiness of his occupation; and he was fast sinking under his trials. Yes, death would come, gentle death—and his heart leaped with a momentary joy.

The struggle was not long. A few days of confinement to a hard pallet, a few nights of suffering, and the fiat, which even an imperial decree could not stop, went forth. The victim was released.

Three months after this, the Grand Chamberlain of Russia, presented himself before Mlle. Radetski, and summoned her to the presence of the Emperor.

When conducted to the palace, His Majesty dis-

missed the gentleman-in-waiting, and signed her to approach. His stern features were contracted by an expression of deep displeasure.

"Why does Mademoiselle Radetski wear mourning?" he said. "Does she mourn for conspirators who would subvert the Government and bring destruction upon their country?"

"No, sire," she answered. "I wear mourning for one whom your Majesty saw fit to condemn, but to whom, by your express command, I promised my hand."

"We will not discuss the past," replied the Czar, coldly. "I sent for you for a different purpose. I have chosen a husband for you."

"Mercy, sire!" exclaimed Natalie, clasping her hands imploringly. "Do not force me to marry."

"Force, mademoiselle! that is an ugly word. I, your Emperor, recommend your acceptance of the suit of a young nobleman of high rank. There are reasons of state which make me expressly desire this marriage. And, Natalie," he added, his harsh tone and manner softening visibly, "grief should not be eternal. Life is not given us to waste in idle sorrow for what is irremediable; and new ties will bring you solace, and, in time, happiness."

As she pressed her hands to her bosom, in a momentary spasm of pain, he observed the glittering emerald that encircled her finger.

"So splendid a jewel is hardly befitting a mourning garb, Mademoiselle. May I see the ring?"

Poor Natalie murmured faintly, "Your Majesty will not take it from me?"

"I will return it," replied the Emperor, as he examined the inscription. "Death, the consoler!" he murmured to himself. "Yes, death is the great healer and comforter."

His rigid features relaxed into an expression of deep pity as he remarked her wasted appearance and pallid features; but nothing of this was perceptible in his tone as he said, "It is my will, Mademoiselle, that you should be married a month from this day. The time will come when you will thank me for this decision. You can now retire."

As soon as Natalie had left, the Emperor rang his bell for Dr. Seckendorf, his favourite physician.

"Seckendorf," said the Czar, "go and see Mademoiselle Radetski. Find out if she has any organic disease. Return here and report, but say nothing of what you observe to any one else."

In a few hours Dr. Seckendorf was again admitted to the presence of the Czar.

"How is your patient?" inquired Nicholas.

"I fear very ill, your Majesty. She has aneurism of the heart."

"Is there any immediate danger?"

"There may not be, if she is not excited. But violent agitation or grief may prove fatal."

"What has caused the disease?"

"Her constitution has always been frail; but I think—," here he hesitated.

"Say what you think," said the Czar, impatiently.

"Then with your Majesty's permission, I think that the sentence of Count Potemkin was her death-blow."

The Czar paced his cabinet impatiently. "She will get over it, Seckendorf. A happy marriage will make her forget all that. There is nothing like happiness for a woman's health."

"I do not presume to contradict your Majesty, but I doubt whether Mademoiselle Radetski is able to bear either happiness or sorrow very long."

The Emperor dismissed his physician, after enjoining him to visit his patient daily. In the meantime the preparations for the marriage went on. A costly *trousseau* was provided for the bride, and all the beauty and rank of the capital invited. The Emperor himself was to grace the ceremony with his presence.

But still Dr. Seckendorf visited his patient, and his face grew grave as he looked at her.

One morning he reached her mansion at a later hour than usual. Her attendants informed him that their mistress had not yet rang her bell, and they hesitated to disturb her. He went at once to her apartment. The attendants drew aside the curtains of the bed. With one hand supporting her head, which rested upon the pillow, lay the pale sleeper, less brilliantly beautiful than when, with proud step and careless grace, she trod the gorgeous salons of the capital, but far more lovely.

Death, the consoler, had stooped to kiss his

victim, and had not disturbed the peaceful smile that rested on her lips. In her hand she held the ring, which she had taken from her finger, and she had passed away while reading its inscription.

Gently Seckendorf replaced it upon the marble finger, from which it was never more to be taken.

"Truly," he murmured, "for her, Death is the consoler."

## A DAUGHTER WORTH HAVING.

"Harvey Mills has failed!" said Mrs. Smithson one chilly spring evening, as she ran in to see her next-door neighbour and intimate friend, Mrs. James. "My husband just came home, and he says that what we supposed to be a rumour only is a sad fact; the assignment was made yesterday. I throw on a shawl and ran right over to tell you. They are to keep the house under some sort of an arrangement, but they have discharged all their servants, and what in the world the Mills's will do, Mrs. James, with Mrs. Mills's invalid habits, and Miss Helena with her dainty ways and refined bringing up, is more than I know;" and pretty, shallow Mrs. Smithson looked at her nerve-loving friend and neighbour with the air of an epicure regarding some favourite dish.

"I heard all about it late last evening," said Mrs. James, adjusting the pink ribbon at the throat of her black silk dinner-dress, "and this morning I presumed upon our cousinship so far as to drive over and see how they were getting along. And really, Mrs. Smithson, you will be surprised when I tell you that, although I expected to find the family in great confusion and distress, I never saw them in such a comfortable way, and in such good spirits. The worst was over, of course, and they had all settled into the new order of things as naturally as could be. My cousin, Mrs. Mills, was sitting, as calm as you please, up there in her sunny morning-room, looking so fresh and dainty as she ate her crisp toast and sipped her coffee."

"Our comfortable and cozy appearance is all due to Helena," said she. "That dear child has taken the helm. I never dreamed she had so much executive ability. We were quite broken down at first, but she made her father go over all the details of business with her, and they found that by disposing of Helena's grand piano, the paintings, and slabs, and costly bric-a-brac her father had always indulged her in buying, we could pay dollar for dollar, and so keep the house. My husband's old friend, Mr. Bartlett, who keeps the art store, you know, and who has always taken a great interest in Helena, bought back the paintings, statuary, vases, etc., at a small discount, and Baker, who sold us the piano a year ago or so, and who is another old friend, and knew, of course, just how we were situated, took it back, deducting only twenty-five dollars."

"Helena has just gone into the kitchen. What she will do there I don't know, but she says she needs the exercise, that she has not attended the cooking-school here in the city for nothing, and that, so long as the meals are served regularly and properly, and the house is kept in good order, her father and I are not to worry." After she told me that, I drew my call to a close, and ran down into my cousin's kitchen to see her dainty daughter there. And what do you think? I found the girl at the sink, with her sleeves rolled up, an immense waterproof apron on, washing a kettle!"

"Washing a kettle!" repeated Mrs. Smithson, holding up both her soft, white hands in unmeasured astonishment.

"Yes, Mrs. Smithson, washing a great, black, greasy iron kettle that meat had been boiled in, and that had been left unwashed and gummy when the cook left. And, do you know, she was laughing over it all, and saying to her youngest brother, who stood near by, that she really liked it, for she now felt she was making herself useful."

"The idea! liking to wash kettles!" and the two fine ladies looked at each other in open-eyed wonder.

"It seems to me as if Helena Mills was trying to make the best of her father's altered fortunes, and was simply doing her duty in the premises," spoke Miss Carlton. Ida James's new drawing-teacher, who was that evening engaged in giving her pupil a lesson on the opposite side of the centre-table. She spoke earnestly and yet in a modest way, and it being the vogue in New City just then to patronize Miss Carlton,