

NARKA, THE NEILIST.

By KATHLEEN O'MEARA.

CHAPTER XXIV.—Continued.

Narka had pledged her word to Dr. Schenk that she would not attempt to sing for a month from the date of her recovery. Singing lessons were therefore out of the question. In the meantime some of her former pupils were taking German lessons. These gave her a crust of bread, and what was almost as necessary, they kept her occupied. For she was terribly lonely—more lonely than she had ever been amidst the snow-fields of Yrakov. There she had her mother, but she was quite alone now. It was a good thing that the struggle for bare life left her little time to brood; for body and soul must be kept together; the fire must be lighted, the bit of food must be cooked, the room must be swept, her clothes must be kept mended, whether Basil was faithful or not, whether Father Christopher was being beaten or not, whether the Prince was cruel or relenting. And in the interval of home toil there were no pleasures. These German lessons were no pleasure to her, as the singing lessons had been. They were a mere drudgery, and she was longing for the end of the month to set her free to sing, not alone for the sake of the lessons, but because the exercise of her glorious powers was in itself an enjoyment. There was only one more week now to wait. Then the period of dumbness would have expired.

Signor Zampa had gone away in despair on hearing of the illness which had so suddenly fallen like a thunder-bolt on his brilliant scheme. He had, however, assured Sibil that the engagement should hold good for next season, and that as soon as Narka was well enough to enter on her preparatory studies he should expect her to set out for Florence.

CHAPTER XXV.

Marguerite was in the dispensary, measuring and mixing herbs with two green canisters, when Narka came hurriedly in, and going up to her, laid a hand on her arm; she seemed to agonize and speak.

"What is the matter? what has happened?" Marguerite asked, dropping her little shovelful of herbs back into the canister.

"I have lost it!—it is gone, clear gone!" Narka gasped.

"The ivory box? Basil's papers? Oh!"

"No; my voice. I've lost it! I can't sing a note!" She sat down, almost letting herself fall into a chair.

Marguerite clasped her hands.

"When did you discover that it was gone?"

"Just now; not half an hour ago. I had promised not to sing a note until the month was out. Yesterday was the last day, and this morning I went to the piano. Not a note would come. Oh, it is too dreadful! too dreadful!"

Marguerite, with an answering despair in her face, stood silent, her hands still clasped.

Narka looked up, and saw the sweet brown eyes filling with tears; she bent forward, and let her head drop against Marguerite's arm. "Oh," she said, "what a weary burden life is! If one might but escape from it!"

Marguerite put her arms round her, and held her clasped, making a little swaying movement, as if she were rocking a child.

"It is, darling," she said, softly, after a moment's silence; "it is very weary; but we are not carrying it alone. There is one under the burden with us whose help can never fail."

Narka felt the loving breast heave under her head, and then two hot tears fell upon her cheek. If Marguerite's God so full of pity, why was Marguerite's God so cruel?

"Perhaps it is not so bad as you think," said Marguerite, presently, her sunny hopefulness and practical sense coming quickly to the relief. "After all, it may be only a temporary loss of voice. I knew a case like that in a young chorister whom we had to nurse after a typhoid fever; his voice went for some months, and he was in despair, but it came back, and he was a specialist. There is Dr. You must see a specialist. There is Dr. On Tuesday, he is a great authority on the lungs and the throat. I will speak to Sister Jeanne and ask her to arrange for you to see him here after his visit to the infirmary."

This practical suggestion was just the touch that Narka wanted to lift her up from the torpor of despair into which the shock had thrown her. She talked it over with Marguerite, asked questions about the chorister's case; and if Marguerite strained the facts a trifle to sustain the hope they pointed to, the sin was certainly not written down against her by the recording angel. Narka went away wonderfully comforted.

The community were at once interested in her trouble. The children were all set praying for Sister Marguerite's friend, and every one in the house awaited with anxious curiosity to hear what Dr. N— would say. They had not long to wait. On Tuesday morning the consultation took place. The result confirmed Marguerite's sanguine view. Dr. N— was of opinion that the loss of the voice was likely to be only temporary. The organs were weakened by the severe inflammation which had suffered, and rest and care would in time restore their powers. If Narka had had change to the country and proper care during the period of convalescence, the accident would most likely have been avoided. She was now to think as little about it as possible, to take an amusement within her reach, and to follow his treatment carefully, and he promised that before long her voice would be as fine as ever.

This verdict was received with joy by the whole community, to whom it was at once communicated by the Sister Superior. Marguerite was almost as thankful as Narka, and much more demonstrative in her satisfaction, for she already believed, while Narka still only dared to hope.

"I wish you could have some recreation, something to take your mind off trouble and worry," she said, as she and Narka sat together in the parlor after the consultation. "What a pity Sibil is away! And she won't stop in Paris on her way from Biarritz to Carlsbad, it seems; that is, she will only just rest for the night."

"I am very thankful to her for keeping me out of the way," said Narka; "it was irksome as well as odious to me to have to play the hypocrite with her. And what else can I do now?" There was no denying this.

"I almost wish it were the winter that was at hand, and not the summer," Marguerite said; "then your old pupils would be coming round you, and you would have your pleasant little gatherings, as you used to have at Chadlot."

Narka laughed. "I am not so silly as to expect anything of that sort up here. I told you before that I knew my value."

"What do you mean? The people who were fond of you in one place would be fond of you in another, I suppose?"

"Yes, if they ever had been fond of me. But you don't suppose the people who came after me at Chadlot and made a fuss over me were fond of me?"

"I am sure they were fond of you after you had made a fuss over you?"

Narka laughed again. "You heavenly little dunces! You don't know the A B C of the gospel of this world. Its catechism is Greek to you. You don't know that contempt of poverty is the negative side of pride, and that to patronize poverty is one of the amusements of the rich."

"You are a dunces about these things; you know nothing about the vicarities of well-bred people and the cruelties of pious people. Fond of me! Poor dears! they were fond enough of me to turn in and spend a pleasant half-hour on their way to the Bois; but they would not drive up to this shabby place to see me. I'm not worth it."

"Then you have no loss in such butterfly friends," said Marguerite; "there day after day in store for you, please God. One must always reckon on the generous chances of life."

"The generous chances of life!" Narka repeated, with a light laugh that was very acid. "The generous chances of life never come to those who want them. I have found that out before this."

"I will not have you turning sour, and looking like a bad side of life and human beings," said Marguerite.

"I cannot help it; my poverty hides the other side from me. But if it shuts the light out on one side, it lets it in on the other, and shows the flaws in human beings as a magnifying-glass shows the animalcula in a drop of water. When you are poor, you see the world as it really is, with its miseries and its vulgarities; and its cruelties; people don't trouble to wear a mask before you; you are not worth it; it does not matter if you see the seamy side of their character; but they must take pains to make it show fair to society. My rich pupils and their mothers fancied the lessons were all on one side; they were mistaken; they taught me quite as much of their arts as I them of mine."

"Almost say it is a dunces about these things," said Marguerite, "but it strikes me it is morbid, and not very charitable. It is of no use to discover our neighbor's faults unless it helps us to correct our own. There is the bell! I must go to the children's singing class."

"I wish you would take me in hand, Marguerite, and correct me and make me good," said Narka. "I should like to be one of your orphans, and sit on a bench and have you teach me to sing canticles, and scold me when I was naughty."

"I'm afraid I should be scolding you from morning till night," said Marguerite, tossing her head; "you would never obey me without waiting to know the why and the wherefore of everything."

She put the canisters in their place, and hurried off to the singing class, and her step so brisk, her whole air breathing the content of a life brimful of glad activities. "Why could not I have a vocation," Narka thought, "and join these brave women, and make my life a service of love for humanity?" She sighed; but she went home with a lightened heart, as she generally did from Marguerite's companionship.

CHAPTER XXVI.

On entering the house Narka saw a man standing in the dark entry, with the bell-rope of her door in his hand. At the first glance she did not recognize him. It was Ivan Gorff.

She uttered an exclamation of welcoming surprise, and they went in together.

"Where have you come from?" she asked, excitedly, when she had closed the door.

"From everywhere."

"Not from St. Petersburg?"

"St. Petersburg somewhere, is it not?" Ivan said, and his face, that looked very haggard, was momentarily brightened by one of his old frank smiles.

Narka saw there was no bad news, so she inquired after his health. He shrugged his shoulders as if the question were not worth either asking or answering.

"I saw Basil a fortnight ago," he said, taking compass on her. "He is well, and he is growing in wisdom, and I might say in grace, for he has taken the line of trying to circumvent the Prince by playing a waiting game, begging for time, and laying aside the defiant tone he had been fool enough to adopt a few months ago. So there is an end to Kronstadt."

"Thank Heaven for that!" said Narka; "but when is there going to be an end of the rest, I wonder? When will he be free? Will he ever be free?"

Ivan smiled, rubbed his palms together, and bent closer to her.

"I will tell you a secret," he said, dropping his voice to a confidential undertone. "There is a talk of the Emperor coming to pay a visit to his good brother of Berlin, and Prince Zorokoff is to accompany him, leaving Basil behind, well watched, of course; but we may outbid him, or we may outwit the police. I have a plan—"

He chuckled, and squeezed his flattened hands between his knees as if he would have crushed them.

Narka held her breath; she could hardly trust herself to clutch at this splendid idea.

"Yes," Ivan continued, enjoying the effect he was producing; "we must smuggle him out across the Austrian frontier; then he will be safe; let them catch him if they can! It has been a good thing, this time he has spent at St. Petersburg; it has opened his eyes, and now he knows the work that has to be done. When he was called back and put into a court dress he was in despair. He said: 'I had rather they sent me to Siberia to work naked at the gold picking! If one must be a slave, it is better to be naked than to be in livery.'"

But it was a good thing they put him in livery; it made him feel how the livery galls and pinches and degrades the man; it has made him believe all that he heard. He now knows what a devil's workshop a court is! He has seen what an open door into hell it is! He now sees that the only thing to do is to burn it down, and scatter the dust of it to the winds of heaven! He has carried the murderer's hate visible in every line of his haggard face, and he was horrible to look at."

Narka knew not what to make of it. The sudden outbreak of fierce passion was the more startling from its contrast with his habitual quiet bonhomie; she had never dreamed of such fires smouldering beneath the surface of his gentle nature; she admired the strength that it revealed, but she was conscious of a recoil from him; a kind of chill horror crept over her, as if she were being forced into tacit complicity with some criminal conspiracy, or some deed of blood.

He, concentrated in his own passion, had not noticed its effect upon her; but her long silence, after he had done speaking, recalled him to himself.

"That is all," he said, turning to her, and his countenance changed suddenly, as if he had thrown off a mask. "Why did you come to this out-of-the-way place? What are you doing up here?"

She answered his inquiries by giving him the history of all that had happened since they met; for he had left Paris just as she was pronounced out of danger, and had beyond her recovery from Schenk; but he was with us at heart," he said, when she had finished; "why not be with us in action? You said you were ready for any work that your hands or head could do."

"What work can they do?" Narka asked, in vague alarm.

"You could translate for us. Instead of starving on the dreary of lessons, you might earn an easy livelihood by translating our circulars and pamphlets from Russian and German into French. We can pay well for good service, and I could keep you supplied with work."

He plunged his hand into a capacious breast pocket, pulled out a roll of manuscript, unfolded it, and deliberately flattened it out on his knee.

Narka suddenly changed color. "That is Basil's writing," she cried, putting out her hand to seize the paper.

"It is his writing, and it is his composition. I risked my head travelling with it. If it had been found, it would have been as good as a charge of dynamite under my chair." He handed her the paper.

Narka devoured the well-known writing with hungry eyes; it was almost like seeing Basil himself, like touching his hand. Ivan's face, as he watched her, reflected transparently the battle of courage against pain that was being fought out within him; his brow contracted, while a smile of infantine hilarity made his eyes shine. After watching her for a moment he looked away, as if he could bear it no longer.

"There is to be a meeting on the 15th," he said, fumbling in his pockets, "and I want to have that ready to distribute at it; so set to work and translate it at once. The clamorous tongues were hushed, and silence reigned in the room. Schenk spoke with a quiet power that was impressive; his accent was slightly foreign; his voice clear and distinct; his speech simple and direct; like that of a man who is too sure of the strength of his subject to care to borrow any aid from rhetoric or gesticulation.

"We are a company of martyrs," he said, "self-elected victims in the great cause of humanity. Let every man keep this grand ideal well before him. Our duty is to annihilate self in the service of the general good. The claims of the universal brotherhood must swallow up all other claims. Every creed and code and prejudice must succumb at their bidding. In the interests of our noble cause we must be ready, at mid-day or at midnight, to sacrifice self. We must be ready to do and to suffer things hard and vile and hideous. The men and women who join us must hold their lives in their hands, and be ready to fling them away at an hour's notice. They must be prepared to suffer hunger and thirst, to endure heat and cold, to give their flesh to the iron and the scourge, and their good name to the dogs; to be accused by their kindred; to be accounted infamous by the good and virtuous; to be alone in life and in death. All this they must be ready to accept who cast in their lot with us. If there be any among us whose spirit quails before the prospect, let him go no farther, but leave us before he be too late. Let no man or woman who cannot face with unflinching nerve the issues that await them run the risk of betraying the cause, and incurring the traitor's death."

Schenk paused, as if waiting for an answer, it came in a loud shout of assent.

There were about a dozen persons already present, some of them women. Every eye was turned to her, and the women looked eager to claim acquaintance; but Ivan Gorff, after exchanging greetings with the men he knew, sat down beside her, placing his chair so as to barricade her against approach, and then engaged her in confidential talk. The room filled quickly; still they seemed to be waiting for some one who had not yet arrived. Presently the door opened, and Schenk appeared. It was not a pleasant surprise to Narka; but it was not as disagreeable as it might have been under other circumstances. She did not like Schenk, though she was grateful to him for the care he had taken of her in her illness; but she was glad to see him make his way round and take a seat beside her. His presence seemed a protection. Never had she found herself amidst such an assembly of vulgar, vicious, desperate-looking human beings as those who composed this meeting. The first impression of mistrust was gradually giving way to one of horror and amazement. They were all talking at the top of their voices, gesticulating in an excited manner; they seemed to be discussing every subject under the sun, if indeed they were capable of wise and concerted action. When it was ascertained that the meeting was full, the door was locked, and some one stamped on the floor and then knocked on the table, and clamored for silence in order that the speaking might begin.

The first speaker was an elderly Russian, a tall, massively built man, with a quantity of black beard growing all over his face, and through this his sharp, rat-like eyes and exceedingly red nose peered like live things through a jungle. He read some reports from distant members, scarcely intelligible to Narka, but evidently of interest to the company.

The speaker alluded to the hulk—a fact which he evidently gave him a standing, as one entitled by experience to hold a heavy brief against the tyrants. The time had come, he said, for overturning that great collective tyrant called Society, and the work demanded stout hearts and steady hands. The stamping and applause which emphasized this remark left no doubt as to the assent of the hearts and hands of the company.

"Those," continued the speaker, when quiet was restored, "who possess what right belongs to humanity call our work crime, and hunt us down. But if we are guilty, where are the true criminals? If our deeds are bloody, on whose head will be the blood we shed? They goad us to madness, and when we strike in self-defense they call us robbers and assassins; they murder us in the name of justice!"

The old convict went ranting on in the same style, his voice growing louder as he proceeded, until it reached a shout; his gestures, at first heavy and emphatic, grew rapid and vehement, till his Herculean arms leaped and lashed about like the wings of a mill blown this way and that by contrary winds.

Ivan Gorff joined in the general applause, laughing and clapping hands as if the whole thing had been a clever farce. Schenk sat with his arms crossed, impassive and silent.

The next speaker was a very different type. He also was Russian, but young (about thirty), with a battered, consumptive countenance, and faded blond coloring; he was nobly born, but ruined himself by gambling, and been driven from his ancestral estate by the loss of a state bail at the Winter Palace—and felt that his destiny was to denounce the foul corruption of courts and the vices of kings, and to serve the noble cause of revolution by holding himself up as an evil example. He was interrupted by fits of coughing, and the intervals were filled with frantic applause from the meeting.

"It is some consolation to know," he continued, "that others are carrying on the war in the very heart of the citadel, and fighting in the foul atmosphere of courts against those infernal agencies. One of our countrymen is giving a glorious example of self-sacrifice and courage in propagating the gospel of Hate under the roof of the tyrant, and mining the ground under his feet. My friend and heroic brother in arms, Basil Zorokoff—"

A faint, inarticulate cry from a corner of the room was instantly drowned in a loud and prolonged burst of applause from Ivan Gorff, and this was the signal for a general storm of enthusiasm, before which the consumptive speaker, already exhausted, collapsed.

The hubbub might have lasted indefinitely if Schenk had not risen, and, with one hand in his breast, and the other uplifted to command silence, made evident his intention to speak. The effect was immediate. The clamorous tongues were hushed, and silence reigned in the room.

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sent from every side. With a quiet gesture he imposed silence, and went on: "If we are all sure of ourselves, we need fear nothing. No man can hurt us. They can do no more than kill us, and we are willing to be killed. However black in the eyes of men, we are white and clean before Heaven and our own conscience. And we stand all equal as servants in the grand cause. The lowest among us who runs the same risks, deserves the same honor as the Prince who is working in the high places. The only standard we recognize is patriotism; the value of each man is measured by the service he renders to the general cause."

Schenk then proceeded to read letters and reports; but Narka did not hear them. She was reeling from the shock that his speech had dealt her; she felt like a person who had been led blindfolded into a quagmire, and who, when the bandage was removed, saw no way out of it. What could Ivan's motive have been in leading her into such a place? He had, indeed, prepared her vaguely by mysterious hints; but she never dreamed of anything so reckless of morality as his policy expounded by Schenk. And it looked as if Schenk had seized with avidity the opportunity of lighting up the depths of the abyss on the brink of which she stood, and showing her what kind of solidarity she incurred and what risks she ran in throwing in her lot with him and his associates. And these men were Basil's friends! It was impossible. Yet there was his pamphlet. True, it did not contain anything like Schenk's cold-blooded gospel of crime; it was only an eloquent appeal to his countrymen to rise and assert their dignity as men, and their freedom as citizens; it dealt with abstract ideas and principles.

Narka in her bewilderment could not, perhaps would not, see that Schenk's concrete code was only the logical outcome of Basil's abstract principles. Suddenly the thought of Larchoff flashed through her mind. She felt sick with doubt and terror.

Schenk sat down, and then Olga Borzidoff rose to speak. This woman was a friend of Dr. Schenk's, and had kept her eyes on Narka from the first with a glance which, if Narka had noticed it, would have frightened her more than anything she had seen or heard at the meeting. Olga Borzidoff, after draining the cup of pleasure to the dregs, had taken to the game of patriotism in search of a new sensation; but she played badly, got caught, and only escaped with her life, owing to a timely warning from one of the Emperor's aides-de-camp. Her fortune was confiscated, but the sale of her jewels gave her an income which enabled her to play the grande dame amongst the bankrupt aristocracy, whose society she had fallen. She had once been handsome, but now at forty she was a bold, hard-featured, painted coquette.

She opened her speech by an attack on men, denouncing the despotism they exercised over women, and declaring that the emancipation of her sex must be a prelude to the emancipation of her country and mankind, and that her efforts and those of her sisters should tend in that direction. A violent, ranting rigmarole.

After this shrieking sister, a pale-faced, blue-eyed German stood up. She acknowledged that she was a woman, timid and cowardly, and therefore had no right to put herself forward; still, trusting to the chivalrous indulgence of the stronger sex, she dared to lift up her voice and adjure them to make haste in their grand mission of social reform; their action had hitherto been circumscribed by scruples of compassion which in reality the promptings of cowardice. They shrank from sacrificing harmless men and women for such a gain to humanity as to be cheaply bought by the sacrifice of a thousand lives; it would benefit millions yet unborn. Let this thought nerve their arm for the slaughter that must be accomplished if the tyrants and aristocrats, etc., etc.

The blue-eyed woman's voice had a lachrymose tremble in it that was full of pathos. It reminded Narka of the serpent beseeching Eva to eat to the death of the human race.

Several other speakers followed; chiefly French, all young men, evidently of the declamatory type. One after another they stood up and raved and ranted; they were full of their own importance, ready for any enterprise, absolutely reckless of consequences; light-headed fools, seemingly more hungry and discontented than wicked—a wonderful company to undertake the redemption of their respective nations.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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On Sarsaparilla, you will find food for your soul, and record.

There are Christians who and difficulties as life as so many to God to ensure seem, at least, offer for comfort, dreadfully true resist. To talk to do a great I and loving God from an imperfection of the ignorance of God guard to it.

Know, then, the nature of our made up of two conflicting a time when superior, had and the body of destroyed that ity and submissiveness been a pitched body, with its mastery over the In this conflict tend with man battle ground inclinations of source of our will out life; and impulse, a but a victory or do And again, from without, ready to possess guarded monarch world and the to accomplish great enemy All this is this perpetua blood, with p But we must not alone in have God with and will beyond what also remember whatever kind for our good, raw material comes. Our economy. This ens it, while power. So temptations most of its upon which nothing happiness of to which the nature of the tion may be of the soul guise of allurement. It is a good to be temptation possible. of foot enow and solely God. For theft, cer pleasure th because he accrue to h his theft. good in the at all pain So it ha lead us as says the a and we m him. A temptation, first, but we discover wages of be tempt battles m with us, His grace Review.

In con have int departm Bishop of the victi heroic a the mat Paris co one inst graves i gious, religio the hospi chapel lay com rising to sever was cuttable words "Sa Agnes, an of Heaven "I soldier He k after t of the sa rescue Famil roof of garde nun a for th was saved

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