THE SPUR OF FATE

By Ashley Towne

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"What is it?" asked Getchikoff. "Have you a message to me from my father?"

"None, colonel; but we have orders to arrest at once Sergius Bilowski, the man at your side."

"Bilowski!" exclaimed Darrell. "My name is Darrell. I am an American citizen."

"Your name is Sergius Bilowski, and you are a prisoner," was the reply. One of the men laid his hand on Darrell's arm, but the American thrust him aside.

At the same time the other handed Getchikoff a paper. As he read it he turned white, but at the close he set his teeth firmly together, as one who has taken a strong determination.

"For heaven's sake, Getchikoff, tell these men they are mistaken!" cried Darrell. "I'll knock one of them down in a minute!"

"For God's sake, you will only make it worse!" said Getchikoff. "Go with them. I will intercede with my father."

"But they want a man named Bilowski," said Darrell.

Getchikoff made no reply. Indeed he seemed unable to utter a word.

"Do you deny your identity?" demanded the officer who had made the arrest.

"I not only don't deny it," rejoined Darrell, "but I am prepared to prove it. Have the kindness to glance at my passport."

The man, with the calmness of a mechanical dummy, took the passport—and kept it. Then, turning to Getchikoff, he said:

"You have traveled from Paris with this suspect. What do you know of him?"

"I believe him to be Sergius Bilowski!" replied Getchikoff, white as a ghost.

"Why, you whelp," exclaimed Darrell, "you were introduced to me by an attache of the British embassy who has known me for ten years, as you are well aware."

If Getchikoff had any reply to make, he was not permitted to utter it, for the police officer immediately commanded Darrell to follow him, and at the word four guards "fell in" around him with military precision. Resistance would have been a grotesque folly, and Darrell did not attempt it. He marched away, surrounded by his captors, who led him to a low, stone structure fronting a public square of a mean appearance. Within this building he was brought before an official, who heard the charge against him, which was not properly an accusation, but merely a name, and committed him to custody. No defense was allowed. The prisoner, indeed, declared his name and nationality, but not the slightest attention was given to his words. The whole proceeding did not occupy four minutes, and it ended by the magistrate's signing a document of commitment which was suspiciously handy upon his desk.

Darrell was then conducted to a room which was much more habitable than he had expected his prison to be—indeed, except for the basic injustice of the matter, he had no cause to complain of his treatment. He was subjected to search, but nothing was taken from him except his watch, his pocketknife, some unimportant letters and a small part of his money. The principal portion of his cash was in large notes, which he carried in an inner pocket of his waistcoat. It appeared to him that the failure to take it was a genuine oversight on the part of the searchers—that they really did not see the pocket. On the other hand, the money might have been left with him that he might buy his way out of the prison and get shot by a guard just outside the walls. Such things will happen in the east. His traveler's checkbook was in his baggage, which, of course, had fallen into the hands of the police.

As a matter of form he requested permission to communicate with the American consul, and it was granted. But Darrell was not so simple as to suppose that his letter would be delivered. He realized fully that he was in a trap, though he could not understand the precise object of the proceedings. Doubtless his arrest was connected with the affairs of Vera Shevaloff. He might be seriously suspected of complicity in her designs, whatever they were, and he smiled grimly in his cell at the thought of his own complete ignorance of the matter. It would have been hard for the governor general's secret police to find a man who knew less, though they had searched the city for the most innocent within its limits.

Reflecting upon the problem during a long and tedious evening, Darrell was of the opinion that he had been arrested as a mere precaution and would be held until the affair had been thoroughly sifted; that Vera was also a prisoner in the city, her plots more or less fully known, her liberty and indeed her life at the mercy of the governor general. The thought of his own present helplessness weighed upon him like lead, and many a vow of vengeance he made with the name of Ivan Getchikoff as the chief victim.

CHAPTER VII.

A BAD JUDGE AND A GOOD JAILER.

DARRELL had been served with a good dinner, and on the morrow there was spread a palatable breakfast, after which he was permitted to enjoy a cigar. This leniency augured well. It had the look of mere brief detention, and if there had been no question of Vera's safety he would have felt little anxiety. It was therefore a complete surprise to him when, about 10 of the forenoon, he was summoned to trial! The announcement was coldly made by the officer who had managed his arrest upon the previous evening.

Darrell demanded counsel and was informed that it was not customary. He insisted upon an interview with the official representative of his country and received the reply that his letter had been forwarded and that nothing more could be done. There was no alternative. He was forced to accept trial on the prosecutor's terms.

He was led before a singular tribunal. The judge sat in a courtroom bare as a barn, and there were not a dozen persons present, including prisoner, guards and clerks. A villainous looking individual with a face so unsymmetrical that he seemed to be made from the halves of two very different men that had been split longitudinally acted as state's attorney. He charged the prisoner with being an escaped Siberian convict, Sergius Bilowski. His opening remarks were brief, and he galloped through them at such a gait that Darrell had hard work to follow him. Witnesses were then admitted, one at a time, from an adjoining room. They swore to the prisoner's identity with such alacrity that three of them testified within five minutes. Darrell was not permitted to question them, but at the close of the farce he had a chance to testify in his own behalf. As if to make the proceedings perfectly fair, nobody questioned him. When he had said his say, the judge signed some documents, and the officer who had brought Darrell in received them.

"My name is Darrell."

"The prisoner will be taken to Gredskov," said the judge, "and will be returned to Siberia at the earliest opportunity."

He then left the bench, vanishing through a door behind it. Darrell was led back to the room in which he had been previously confined. He was not fettered, and there was no added severity in the treatment of him except that an armed guard was placed within the room, a gigantic fellow with a good natured face, who sat on a stool tilted back against the door with a short gun, like a cavalry carbine, across his knees.

Darrell had struggled to preserve his self command throughout the tragic farce of the trial, well aware that the approval of his own sense of honor was all he had to hope for. He had maintained a calm demeanor from first to last, and in his prison room he addressed his guard cheerfully.

"Where is this Gredskov?" he asked.

"Gredskov," was the reply, with a sort of pitying grin, "is a prison city in the Caucasian mountains. It is maintained for the purpose of guarding the captives taken among the rogues of the mountains—Circassians, robbers, Turks or any of the bad men who seek to plot against the czar. Every three months a prison train is made up for Siberia, where the prisoners are divided among the mining towns."

Darrell's stay in Stavropol was short. On the following morning he was placed with about a dozen other prisoners, all seemingly of the lowest type of peasants, and was conducted under a strong guard to the city gate. He had not been dressed in any sort of prison garb and still retained his minor belongings and the money that the searchers had missed, but his hat had been replaced by a cap and his overcoat by a ragged garment that might have been a part of an officer's outfit in the far past.

Outside of Stavropol the road was smooth for a considerable distance, and the cavalcade moved slowly along through a rural scene of what might have been prosperous comfort and wealth had it not been for the stagnation arising from the policy of the deputized government of Getchikoff.

At the end of the day's march they rested at a little post village. In the morning they again advanced and at night reached Gluglersk, on the main road leading to the pass over the Caucasus to Tiflis.

Darrell was treated with no more and no less consideration than any other of the prisoners. To the officers and soldiers of the escort he was simply the nihilist Sergius Bilowski, and no argument could make him anything more.

After leaving Gluglersk the way became more rugged, though the road itself was smooth and hard, traveled as it was by the numerous trading caravans from north to south that crossed and recrossed the mountains.

Finally they reached Mozdok, where a stay of two days was made. Their next stopping place was Vladikaukas, on the upward slope of the steep mountain pass.

Ten hours after leaving Vladikaukas, in the morning, the turrets of Gredskov could be seen.

Darrell knew nothing of Gredskov, and as none of the soldiers would talk to him and he was not allowed to speak to his fellow prisoners he could obtain no information in regard to it. But as the frowning battlements could be seen rising above the trees he noticed that the other prisoners became more dejected, and their faces expressed a terrible fear.

It appeared, then, that Gredskov was a place to be dreaded.

At the gate of Gredskov the cavalcade was met by an officer, who halted the prisoners and took from the captain of the escort a paper. This contained the list of names, and the two officers went over it together.

Even then Darrell was not allowed to speak, though he made a desperate attempt to tell the officer at the gate who he was.

Without ceremony he was taken from the column of prisoners, handed over to fresh guards and rudely hustled into a low building that was built close to and under the city wall.

Here he was thrust into a dungeon that was floored with stone, walled with stone and roofed with stone. There was one little window, which opened high in the wall. Through this narrow aperture, when standing upon his table, he could see an esplanade, upon which regiments of the city's garrison sometimes paraded.

For a day or two Darrell cherished the hope that he would be returned to

"Where is this Gredskov?"

Stavropol, that the trick had been played to keep him out of the city at a critical time when his intervention in Vera's favor might have inconvenienced the authorities, but as the time wore on he began to realize that his view of the affair must be erroneous and that his liberty was lost forever unless he could win it back by his own hands.

While he fully realized the difficulties of his position, he did not despair. He knew that he was destined for Siberia, but the way to Siberia is long, and the opportunities to escape must be many.

The guard who controlled the door of Darrell's dungeon was a young Russian named Kevski. Accepting for granted the story of Sergius Bilowski that came with the prisoner bearing that name, he had treated Darrell with a sternness that forbade any attempt at conversation, but they were brought into more friendly relations by a singular happening.

One evening, when Darrell was watching through his window the evolutions of an unusually large force upon the esplanade, he was astounded to perceive Ivan Getchikoff mounted upon a horse and wearing the uniform of a brigadier. Evidently the rascal had enjoyed recent promotion. Surrounded by his staff, he took up a position within fifty years of Darrell's window, and the troops passed before him in review.

With no clear notion of the usefulness of the proceeding, but desiring to make his presence known to Getchikoff, Darrell repeated that imitation of the flute which had so surprised Ladislov in the Parisian cafe. The sharp sound reached Getchikoff's ears, and he recognized it. Darrell had the satisfaction of witnessing the nervousness of his enemy, and he was piping lustily when he heard the creaking of the door behind him. He snatched the big pen (not, of course, a necessary part of the musical performance) from his pocket and turned to face Kevski, the guard.

"Where did you get a flute?" demanded Kevski.

"I have had it in my pocket all along," said Darrell. "It is not exactly a flute. It is an American instrument."

"Why were you permitted to retain it?"

"My friend," said Darrell, who had solved this puzzle by long study, "it was safer to let me carry my own property out of Stavropol than to leave it behind. When prisoners' goods are ordered to be destroyed, they have a habit of turning up again, as you are aware. And mine would prove me an American."

"You are not a Russian; I know that," responded Kevski. "Is your name really Sergius Bilowski?"

"It is not. My name, my friend, is Darrell. I am an American."

Kevski seemed to be impressed.

"America! Ah! That is the place!" he said. "They have no prisons there!"

"Oh, bold on now! They do have prisons. We are not all angels," said Darrell. "And prisons are necessary in every land. But in America one must commit a crime to be sent to prison."

"I know, I know," said Kevski, eager to display his knowledge of the distant land of freedom. "My cousin, Andrea Kevski, is there. He wrote me a letter once. He is now a merchant, and his children go to school. He sits every Sunday in a church, and no inspector of police searches his house in his absence. It is a great country, that America."

"It is, indeed," said Darrell. "I wish it could know where I am. I think Stavropol would be treated to a sensation."

"Hush! My cousin says that in America your people treat our people with friendship. He says that it is a great country, where railroads go every day, that many of our people have large farms, and the taxes are so light that they can save money. Is it so?"

"I think so. I know that there are many Russian villages in our great west."

"So. That is what my cousin called it, but I know little of these things. Could I get to America?"

"Well, if it was really an object and I got out of here, I think you might reach America."

Kevski seemed to think that the conversation had gone far enough in this direction. He suddenly asked to see the musical instrument, which he examined with childish wonder, making a laughable attempt to extort a tone from it. Then he returned it and hastily left the cell. That evening Darrell had a much better supper than usual. On subsequent occasions the conversation was resumed, and at last Kevski was led to a definite statement regarding the possibilities of escape.

"It can be done," he said. "The officers of the prisoner trains do not care for persons. They convey only names. You are Sergius Bilowski. There are in Gredskov men who have lived in the north and whose friends are near the Urals. One can be found to take your name and place."

"Very good. That gets him to Siberia. But what about me?"

"You and I must find a way to get to America."

"We'll find it," replied Darrell; "have no fear."

The days now passed less miserably. Kevski proved to be a youth of intelligence, and the hours spent in telling him about America shortened the prison days for Darrell.

"Soon we shall be away from here," said Kevski one day when a month had been spent in the Gredskov prison. "Orders have come to form a prison train for Siberia."

"Are there many to go?"

"Yes, many. You see, there is war in the Caucasus since you came to Gredskov. The Circassians have risen."

"A revolt?" said Darrell. "Who leads it?"

"A mysterious prince called Motman Khan. No one knows who he is. But he holds all the Circassians in his power. Prince Kilziar, the traitor, is one of the leaders also."

"Kilziar!" said Darrell.

He fell to studying. What might this new turn of events mean to him? With the mysterious Motman Khan he had nothing to do, but Kilziar he would have given much to see, for undoubtedly Vera's fate must in some way be connected with this revolt of the Circassians. He even cherished the hope that she might have escaped the snares of the Getchikoffs and have joined the revolutionists in the field. That, indeed, would be bad enough, for the power of the Russian government could not be overthrown, and the fate of the leaders of such a revolt would surely be death. He had now a triple reason to desire freedom, and he prayed heaven that Kevski had planned well. The man had become reticent and had begun to show traces of anxiety.

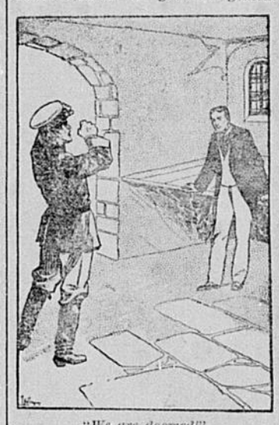
"The Circassians are coming," he said one day. "A small force that was sent from Stavropol to meet them has been cut to pieces. Motman Khan, the victorious prince, is on his way to Gredskov. There are here about 300 Circassians accused of one crime or another, all to be sent to Siberia. Motman Khan is coming to reduce the city and free his people."

"Tell me, Kevski," asked Darrell, "is there any word of a woman in this thing?"

"Woman! Oh, no!" answered Kevski, staring. "Women do not lead regiments.

"Some of them might well do it. You are sure there is no mention made of a woman's name?"

"No." Kevski laughed. "The only name spoken is the name of Motman Khan. He has a large army. It is armed with good guns and cannon. It was raised almost in a night, they say. Motman Khan is almost a god to his people. They worship him and follow him to death. Village after village has been taken. Russian rule is broken in the mountains. Gredskov is doomed unless the governor general



"We are doomed!"

sends us aid. His son was here to examine the defenses, but he left few men to re-enforce the garrison."

"And what then, Kevski?"

Kevski shrugged his shoulders.

"Then we shall all be put to the sword. You may not be, for Motman Khan will not kill the prisoners. They are mostly his own people. He will give them all a chance to join his army."

Darrell heard this with a leap of the heart. It was the chance he wanted. It would bring him within the Circassian lines and give him an opportunity to search for Vera among her mother's people.

One day the booming of heavy guns was heard, and there was a commotion in the walled city.

Kevski came to the dungeon pale with terror.

"We are doomed!" he cried. "There will be no America for me. Motman Khan is attacking the city with his army, and no help has come from Stavropol!"

"But we may escape and join Motman Khan," said Darrell.

"Furies of hell!" cried Kevski. "That is the worst of it! The commander of the city, General Stanovitch, has issued orders to the captain of the guard to kill all the prisoners and put all the prison guards under arms on the city wall."

"That's pleasant," said Darrell. "Are you to do the killing in my case?"

"God! Do not scoff!" exclaimed Kevski, with white lips. "I mean what I say! Hear the trumpets! The captain of the guard is coming! There is just one chance for you! I risk my life to give it! Follow me!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FALL OF GREDSKOV.

THEY darted from the dungeon only a few minutes before the armed guards entered to obey the command of Stanovitch. The cries of the prisoners, who were being ruthlessly murdered, rang through the corridors of the prison. Kevski led Darrell by a dark and narrow way into a dungeon similar to the one he had quit. But here there was evidence that the guard had already been to obey the commands of the general. Two young mountaineers lay upon the earthen floor with the life-blood flowing from gaping wounds in their breasts and throats.

There was a window in this dungeon, as in Darrell's. It opened directly over a stone stairway leading to a parapet in the defenses of the city. There were bars in the window, but Kevski found an iron instrument, with which the two men wrenched the bars away. Then they climbed through the window and ran up the stairway. In a small room on top of the wall there was a gunroom or small armory. Here were some spare uniforms that were held for the soldiers of the garrison. Darrell put on one of them over his other clothing.

"Now we must take our places with the defenders," said Kevski.

He had scarcely uttered the words when a lieutenant on the lookout for stragglers appeared at the door and ordered them to follow him. They joined a party of a dozen men and when they emerged from the prison fell into line with a company that was forming. It was a motley crew, but was officered by experienced soldiers and well enough armed. Presently Darrell found himself upon the walls in a position commanding a view of a stretch of land so rough as to preclude the idea that an assault would be made at that point.

The nearest line of the enemy was upward of 500 yards distant, and there was a scattering and useless fire from both sides. Two batteries of light field guns were visible farther back, but they were not in action. Between them and the skirmish line a considerable body of troops in fairly good formation were moving around to the right. From that direction came the heaviest firing, and there seemed to be considerable artillery at work. Wild shots from these guns occasionally flew clear over the town, and this fire, almost in their rear, constituted the chief danger of the defenders at the point where Darrell was posted. Some shells burst rather close, but no one was hurt.

Darrell's share in the battle consisted in firing often enough to escape attracting the attention of an officer, but under the circumstances he found no difficulty in avoiding the chance of hitting any of the besiegers, whom he viewed as friends.

Presently the faint sound of cheering floated across the rugged expanse from the lines of the encircling enemy. It came from the left, where there were trees that interrupted the view, and the cause of it was not immediately obvious. Soon, however, some mounted officers appeared heading a force which even at the distance showed a superiority of drill and equipment. The sound of the cheering increased. Evidently some idol of the army was among the officers. One of them, indeed, was seen to be distinguished by a rich attire, and the sunlight flashed upon his plumed cap and the hilt of his sword as if they were set with jewels. A long cloak of scarlet hung from his shoulders, and that, too, seemed to be jeweled upon the clasps at the throat.

The word ran along the ranks of the defenders upon the wall:

"That is Motman Khan!"

And at the command of an officer there was some trial of marksmanship, but the range, though not beyond the power of their weapons, was far too long for the skill of the men. The splendid cavalcade moved on unharmed.

For an hour or more the conditions remained nearly unchanged, so far as Darrell could observe. There was a slight increase of artillery fire upon the right, and the number of guns in action surprised Darrell, for the country round Gredskov was not favorable for the transportation of cannon. They seemed to be small pieces, it is true, but of a good modern type, to judge by the execution wrought by some of the shells. Gredskov was on fire in a hundred places, and the smoke rose straight up in the perfectly still air, hanging in the form of a great umbrella that spread wider and darker over the doomed city.

In the shelter of a row of stone buildings on the other side of an open space that lay between the wall where Darrell was and the close built portion of the town a crowd of terrified people were huddled. They seemed to be mostly old men and boys.

"Where are the women?" asked Darrell of Kevski, and the latter replied that a great many had left the city, the besiegers having guaranteed them safety among the hills.

Darrell was surprised at this evidence of civilized warfare, and he said so.

"Wait till the town is taken," answered Kevski, with a shudder.

At this moment there came a great access of tumult from across the city. The noise of rifle firing increased. Terror stricken men and children, with a few screaming women, poured out from among the houses. Then came a heavy explosion that shook the very walls. A red glow flamed in the overhanging cloud.

"It is the magazine under the east wall!" cried Kevski. "A shell has blown it up. There must be ruin as a result of it."

Even the officers had turned their backs upon the enemy. They were staring across the city. A horseman came dashing across the open space. He yelled like a maniac, addressing the colonel commanding in that quarter. Then a shell came groaning over the housetops. It struck the earth almost under the hoofs of the horse that bore the messenger, and they vanished, man and beast, in a flash of flame and a cloud of sand, through which Darrell dimly saw the colonel, who stood upon the edge of the wall, reeling and with his hands clutching his breast. A captain, springing forward, clasped his superior in his arms, then lost his own balance, and they both fell headlong to the ground, where they lay still.

It was one of those incidents that have the seeds of panic in them. Men cried out with meaningless words, and in the midst of the uproar officers could be heard shouting orders that were mostly curses. A shout arose:

"Our own men! The city is taken!"

And Darrell saw a struggling mass of soldiers in the Russian uniform retreating in the narrow streets. Then, with a scurrying as of rats, the force upon that part of the defenses scattered, each man for himself.

"It is over," gasped Kevski, turning a pallid face toward Darrell.

"Not for us," answered the American. "We are all right."

"Every soldier will be butchered!" cried Kevski.

"I am a prisoner," said Darrell. "Just let me strip off this uniform. Now then! We'll get back to our dungeon, and I'll look out for you."

They dropped of the wall and ran along beside it. The prison was not

His hands flung up.

more than 300 yards distant, but before they reached it a force of Circassians surged out of the street opening on the esplanade, and a dozen or more of them fired a ragged volley, but the shots were all high

[CONTINUED.]

Man Made Volcanoes.

A man made volcano exists in Belgium, which has been burning continuously for nearly 100 years and emits vast columns of black smoke, rendering the neighboring country barren, baked and utterly unprofitable.

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Improvement of Corn.

"Uncle Henry" Wallace, is devoting a good deal of space in his paper, Wallaces' Farmer to the improvement of Iowa Corn. He calls attention to the fact that while the Iowa Farmer has been improving his live stock for twenty years and more he has given very little attention to the great Iowa crop, corn. Among the many articles which have appeared in Wallace's Farmer on this subject has been a series by Prof. Shamel, of Illinois, the corn expert, and these are illustrated by a number of photographs showing different varieties of corn, perfect and imperfect ears, the most profitable to raise, etc. The average Iowa farmer thinks he knows as much about corn as anybody does but we miss our guess if he cannot learn a lot from these articles in Wallaces' Farmer.

In this connection we wish to say that Wallaces' Farmer is one of the best agricultural papers that comes to this office. It is handsomely printed on paper of fine quality, filled with attractive illustrations, and in addition to its regular features, its editorials by "Uncle Henry," its departments of Dairying, Horticulture, the Hog and Poultry, its Home Department, for the women; contains full reports of the leading fairs, live stock shows, and sales, agricultural meetings, etc. It is published weekly at Des Moines, Iowa' at $1.00 a year, all subscriptions payable in advance and the paper stops when the time is out. We can send Wallaces' Farmer and the Democrat both one year for only 2.25 and you get one of our nice premiums. Apply at the Democrat office.

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The New York World has got the cost of printing down to a minimum. Its latest offer of its monthly newspaper-magazine is interesting if from no other cause than it shows the acme of "how much for how little." The Monthly World is a 32 page magazine with colored cover. Its pages are about the size of the pages of the Ladies Home Journal, and it is copiously illustrated in half-tone. The illustrations are the results of the best artistic skill, aided by all the latest printing-press appliances, making a magazine unrivalled in the quality of its contents and its appearances. Each issue contains stories of romance, love, adventure, travel; stories of fiction and fact; stories of things quaint and curious, gathered together from all over the world; the results of scientific research, and editorial reviews. It numbers among its contributors the leading literary men and women of the day. A feature each month is a full-page portrait of the most famed man or woman of the moment in the public eye. In collecting and preparing for publication the literary matter and art subjects for the Monthly World no expense is spared. The New York World will send six numbers of this newspaper-magazine on receipt of fifteen cents in stamps. Address The World, Pulitzer Building, New York.

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