#ONK

BY SYLVANUS COBB, JR.

It was fairly dark now, as wuric could see by raising the curtain and looking out. He had no idea it was late. Time had passed without his notice. He moved to the side of the bed and took the invalid's hand. "I must go now " he said, "but if you are

willing, I will come again-" "You will come," uttered Conrad, in reply, returning the grasp of the hand with all his feeble power. "Oh, you must come often now. I hope I shall live. Perhaps I shall. If I do, I shall owe my life to you. And God knows-for the feeling is even now firm in my soul—that I will always remember how you saved me-and I will never think, never, of the sad blow you struck me. Coms-come to me when you cap, for now-now-as God lives I speak

the truth -now I love you !" "God bless and keep you," murmured Ruric, in a husky, tremulous voice; and with these words, coming from the very depths of his soul, he turned away and left the room. He heard the voice of the count as he moved toward the open door, and thanked God 'twas a blessing which fell upon his ears.

Ah, those who know not what true forgiveness is, know not the holiest emotion of

Ruric had left his sledge at a neighboring inn, and as soon as he gained the street he bent his steps that way. He had gone half the distance from the residence of the count to the inn, and was just upon the point of crossing the street, when he heard his name pronounced by some one behind him. He stopped and looked around, and saw a man approaching him.

It was too dark to distinguish faces plainly, even at a usual conversational distance, yet Ruric was not long in concluding that the man who had thus hailed him was a stranger. He was a medium-sized man. and so closely enveloped in his bonnet and pelisse that his form and features would have been hidden even had it been lighter than it was.

"Did you speak to me?" asked the youth as the man came up.

"Yes, sir. Is your name Ruric Nevel?" "It is." "Then you are wanted a few moments at

the residence of a lieutenant, named Orsa." "Alaric Orsa?" asked Ruric. "The same."

"But he does not live here in the Krem-

"He s here now, at any rate, and would But you said he was at his residence. suggested our hero, who was fearful that

some evil might be meant for him." "I know to the contrary, sir," the stranger returned, promptly. "All I can say is, Alaric Orsa has fallen upon the ice, informed that you were near by with a sledge, he asked that you might be sent

"Been hurt, has he?"

"Yes, sir." "Badly ?"

"I believe no bones are broken, but he is so badly sprained that he cannot walk." "Ah—then perhaps he wants me to carry him home

"I can't say as to that, sir. They only sent me to find you. I don't know the man

myself." There was something so frank in the statement thus made that Ruric believed it all honest, and he stood no longer in doubt.

"I will go." he said. "but lead the way quickly, for I have no time to waste."

"I will lead as fast as you will want to follow," answered the man.

And thus speaking he turned back, and having gone some dozen rods by the way they had both come, he turned down a narrow street which led towards the river. Haif-way down this he went, and then he turned again-this time to the left-and thus Ruric found himself in a narrow, dark lane, within which the snow was deep and almost untrodden.

"Look ye," cried the youth, stopping as he found himself over knees in snow, "I think we have gone about far enough in this direction."

"This is the shortest way," said the stranger guide, apologetically. "I did not think the snow was so deep here. But it's only in the next street."

"Then on you go." Again the stranger started, and Ruric followed. The lane was a crooked one, and more than once the youth had another inclination to stop. He had no direct fear. but yet he had some just grounds for doubt. Had he not seen what had been attempted against the count, he might have had no such doubts now; but as it was, he thought that if one attempt had been made to ruin him through the Emperor's displeasure by the man who was now trying to murder the count, it would not be at all improbable that some more effective plan should be adopted towards him. He was pondering thus when they came to a cross lane, full as

"Look ye once more, sirrah," cried the youth, now stopping short. "Do you call

this a street?" "Yes, sir: and on this street we shall find the man we seek. It is only a short cut from where he is to the inn where your horse is: so you won't have to retrace these dubious ways. Only a little further, sir." "But I don't like this."

"Why-bless you sir; if you wish to go direct to the inn where you horse is, this will be the nearest way."

"Well-on you go." And on they went again-now slipping on the ice-now in the snow to the knees-and anon stumbling along over frozen hubbles and deep holes. At length the guide stopped and opened a small gate which was fixed in a high, thick brick wall. Rurie hesitated here again. He had no weapon of any kind. If he had had even a pistol, or s sword, he would have cared not. But he did not show his thoughts to his guide. The gate opened with a crack upon its frosty hinges, and by the dim starlight the youth could see an open court beyond, and further still, a house of some kind loomed up.

"This place seems not to be used much,"

remarked Ruric, as he saw the snow in the

two tracks being visible from the gate to

"Ah-yes-you said-what?" "I said this place didn't seem to be used much," the youth repeated, though he was sure the fellow heard the first time.

"Ah, yes-a-the usual entrance is other way, by the sledge path." "And where is that?" Ruric asked, not being able to see any such path. "Oh-it's around on the other side."

By this time they had reached the door of the house, which our hero could now see had an old, dilapidated appearance, and the guide plied the iron knocker with zeal. Ere long a man made his appearance with a lantern in his hand.

"Ah-has the gun-maker come ?" the

atter asked. "Yes," returned the guide. "Well-I'm glad he's here, but I don't elieve Orsa is fit to move." said the first

"But I'm glad you've come, sir, for the neutenant wishes to see you very much. This way, sir."

speaker. And then turning to Ruric he

This was all so frank and prompt that the young man began to think he had been a foo for being frightened. He followed the man with the lantern into the hall, and from thence down a long flight of stairs into a basement. The lantern did not give much light, but it was sufficient to reveal the fact that the house was an old one, and not very large, for Ruric could see windows upon the opposite side of the hall which looked out of doors. As he reached the foot of the stairs he found himself upon a brick floor, and he saw that the walls were of stone. A little further on a door was opened, and this led to a small apartment within which was a fireplace, and a good fire burning.

"There, good sir," said a second guide, if you will wait a few moments I will go and see how the lieutenant is."

As soon as Ruric was left alone he looked about him. The room was of moderate size for a small house, and the idea of inhabiting the cellars was a common one in Moscow during the winter season. The windows, two in number, were close up to the ceiling, and very small, and were patched with pieces of board in two or three places. Ere long the man came back, and with him three others, on of whom the youth recognized as the individual who had conducted him to the house.

"Orsa will see you, sir," said he with the

Ruric arose to follow him, the other three men approaching the fire as though they would remain there. He had reached the door and passed through into the room beyond, when he thought he heard footsteps behind him. It was a sliding, shuffling sound, and he turned his head to see what it was. As he did so he received a blow which staggered him, and which would have felled an ordinary man to the floor. He gathered himself quickly up, but before he could fairly turn about he received a second blow, and hurt himself severely, and upon being heavier than the first, which brought him upon his knees. In an instant all four of the men were upon him, and he could see that they had ropes in their hands with which to bind him. With all his might he threw the fellow who held his right hand back against the wall, and another he sent in an opposite direction, and in a moment more he would have been upon his feet; but just at that instant a noose was adroitly slipped over his head, and as the rope tightened about his neck he was drawn back upon the brick floor

> "Now resist any more, and we'll choke you as sure as fate," cried the man who had held the lantern, and who now had a hold upon the rope.

"Oh!" groaned Ruric; while the massive cords worked like cables in his arms and shoulders, "give me a fair chance. Let me be up and free—then lock your doors, if you

"No, no, good sir," replied the ruffian, with a wicked smile. "We know your power, and we are not disposed to test it further. We have had trouble enough already. Shall we-"

The man stopped speaking, for at that moment another noose was slipped down over Ruric's head, and ere he could avoid it, it had been drawn tightly about his arms. He was now at the mercy of his captors, and having rolled him ov r upon his breast they proceeded to secure his arms behind him, which being done they bade him to rise. Of course he could have no desire to lie there upon the cold bricks, and he got

upon his feet as well as he could. "Now. Ruric Nevel, I will conduct you to your own apartment," said the leader of

"But wherefore is this?" the gun-maker gasped, rendered almost spee hless with the mingled emotions of surprise and anger. "Why have ye done this? Whose hirelings are ye that ye thus waylay and seize upon an honest man who has done no harm to any

"Never mind that now, sir," the ruffian coolly answered, "suffice it for you to know that you are safe for the present."

"But will ye not tell me what this is for? There is some intent. "Yes -and come with me and you shall narrow as this, into which the guide

ee. Come." Thus speaking the man turned once more, and having picked up his lantern he moved on, while the others, taking Ruric by the arms, followed after. The prisoner made no resistance now, for he knew that it would be useless. At a short distance another flight of stairs was reached.

"Down here?" uttered Ruric, with

"Of course. You'd freeze up here." These words struck harshly upon the youth's sou! for it meant that he was to be

detained in this lonesome place.

At the bottom of these stairs they came to a vaulted passage, at the end of which was a door. This was opened, and Ruric was led through into the place beyond. He cast his eyes quickly about, and he found himself in a naarow apartment, the walls and floor of which were of stone, and the roof of brick, the latter being arched. In one corner was a couch, and upon it was some old skins.

And here the youth was to be left. His guide simply pointed to the low couch, and then turned away. Ruric asked a question, but it was not answered. In a few moments more the heavy door was closed upon him, and he was in total darkness. He court was trodden but little—only one or he sank down! CHAPTER XIL

Rosalind Valdai and Zenobie were to-gether in their sitting-room, and the former had been weepi g. She looked paler than when we saw her before, and her brow was heavy. Smiles no longer crept about the dimples of her cheeks, and eyes had a sad, mournful look. Her face plainly showed that she had suffered much.

"My dear mistress," urged the faithful Zenobie, throwing her arms about Rosalind's neck, and drawing her head upon her bosom, "weep no more. Oh, there must be some hope. Surely God will not suffer such an unholy work to be done."

"Ah, Zenobie," returned the fair maiden, in a fluttering, melancholy tone, "where can I look for hope?"

"I say, in God. You have told me we must look to Him, and I have believed you. Have you not always been good to

"I have been as good as I knew how though I have sinned "How sinned? Oh, my, mistress, if you

have sinned, then who is pure? Tell "We all sin. Senobie. It is our na-

"So I have often heard, but I hardly think you have sinned. What have you

done which you knew to be wrong?" "Nothing-nothing." "Then how have you sinned?" "Ah, Zenobie, we all do things which

ve ought not to do : but yet I mean to do as near right as I can." "Then leave the rest with God. Oh. when poor mortals do as near right as lies in their power, surely they may leave the rest without fear. And now, if God is just, as you tell me, why should He allow the wicked duke to triumph over you? What

justice would there be in that-when you are all goodness, and he is sin itself?" Rosalind was puzzled. She had tried to teach her attendant to love and honor God, and she had so far succeeded that Zenobia understood all the principles of Christianity, and embraced them gladly and joyfully; but now how should she make this point understood? How should she reconcile, this apparent injustice with God's universal mercy and justice?

"Can you not tell me?" the young girl asked again. "Why should God allow such a thing? You say He is all-powerful, and can do what He wills."

"Zenobie," returned the maiden, after pondering for a while, "you do not look a the subject in a proper light. God does not operate by petty, individual decisions, as an superor does. He sees that certain laws are necessary for the good of mankind-and not a single law of all his code is there but is very good. Last night your head ached, and you suffered; and of course you had violated some natural law. It was your own fault. And so this suffering which is now come upon me is the result of a violation of one of God's laws."

"Ah," cried Ze robie, eagerly, "but you are the one who suffers, while another violates the law. In my case I did both, and complain."

"But listen:" pursued Rosalind, with a brightening countenance, for the true idea had come to her mind. "It would not be just for a person to enjoy all the good of a law and leave others to suffer all the evil. God has established in us a social nature, and through that part of our nature come the sweetness of our earthly enjoyments. Such a law, the law of sociality-must be universal, and if men break that law they must suffer, and the only just way in which God could shield me from suffering would be to release me from the effects of the law. Then I should be a poor, lonesome outcast, forced to live all the days alone likes barren rock upon the top of some bleak mountains. But I would rather live among people, and enjoy the companionship of my fellows. I have accepted the boon, and now, when its evils come, I must suffer. Had God's intent been followed out there would have been no suffering. It is not H s fault that the duke

sins. Do you understand?" "I don't know," murmured the young

girl dubiously. "Butsee," resumed Rosalind; "you choose to exercise your social nature, and of your accord you mingle among your fellows. Do you not see that thus you are enjoying one of God's richest blessings-the blessing of sociality, friendship, and love?"

"Yes-I see." "Well, so far God is good in having given you that power for such enjoyment?

"Yes-I see." "Well, now, under that law, when I found friend in the duke, and here have found a home. But circumstan es have changed. The duke has become wicke in thought—he wants more money—and he will prostitute a power which, in obeyance of God's law would be good, to my ruin. Now God can not save me without rending to pieces one of His most powerful laws, and one which is meant for a universal good. The moment He does that He destroys that principle of human dependence whence flow those most holy virtues of love, friendshp, and charity. He must act by universal laws, and not by partial rules and individual exceptions. So as long as I can enjoy the blessings of social life, I must be subject to the evils of treachery and social wickedness. Do you not understand now?"

"I see-I see," the girl murmured

"Aye, Zenobie," the mistress added, while a holy light shone upon her countenance, "God has made us subject to ills here; but look beyond the grave, and how bright it i. with hope! I have a father and a mother there. Oh, in all my misery-even in the worst state to which the bad duke can re. duce me, I would not change places with him. You seemed to intimate that God would see me suffer, and yet let the duke triumph. Triumph? Oh, Zenobie, for what would you have that man's heart in your bosom, and his soul in your keeping?"

"I would rather die !" the girl cried, while cold shudder ran through her frame. "Then you see he does not go clear. Oh, how blind and simple are those who imagine

there can be pleasure in sin !" This opened a new theme to Zenobie's mind, and she pondered upon it a long while. But by and by she came back to the theme from whence they had started; and in pursuance thereof she said:

"My mistress, are you sure the duke will "Aye, Zenobie; I know he will," Rosa

"Oh, I hope he can. He is a noble man." Rosalindanswered with a look of gratitude,

nd Zenobie proceeded : "Where is the titled lord more noble than he? Oh, were I to choose a husb nd now and he was free, and I was in your position, I'd choose Ruric Nevel before all the emperers of earth."

"So would I," returned the fair maiden. "If I were a countess, as you are, oh, how should love to make such a man a count. "But my marrying him would not make him a count. Were he a count, and I like

what he is now in station, his marrying me would give me the title; but we poor women do not have that power." "Well, then, we should so much more have the right to choose our own hus-

bands." Rosalind made no oral answer, but his look showed that she sympathized with the

"My mistress," at length spoke Zenobie again, this time in a low whisper, "why may we not leave this place?" Rosalind started as though she had heard

the speech of a spirit, and for a moment a lock of hope gleamed upon her face; but it quickly passed away. "Alas! where should we go!"

This was a part of the pun which Zene. bie had not thought of; and ere she could make any reply one of the fe-male domestics entered the apartment This was a part of the plan which Zenobie had not thought of ; and ere she could make any reply one of the female domestics entered the apartment, and announced that a woman wished to see her young mistress. Rosalind asked who it was, but the girl could only tell her that it was a middleaged woman, and very good-looking. The young countess bade Zenobie go down and conduct her up. Ere long afterwards the attendant returned and with her came Claudia Nevel. Rosalind had not seen the good woman for over a year, but she knew her at once, and starting up from her seat she bounded forward and embraced her warmly.

"Ah, Aunt Claudia, I am glad you have come. You will let me call you aunt. as I did in those happy times long gone

"Aye, sweet Rosalind," returned the widow, imprinting a warm kiss upon the fair brow.

The countess noticed the strange sadness of the woman's tone, and then for the first time, also, she noticed the sadness of her "Aunt Claudia, you look said," she said, while a chill dread struck to her own heart.

"Aye," the widow uttered, as though she were airaid to venture the question she wished to ask. "I have been very sad, because I have had a terrible fear. Has-has the company stood, and his eyes flashed, -not Ruric been here ?" "When?" uttered the maiden, catching

the whole fear now. "Within these three days?" "Just then. Day before yesterday he was here in the forencon."

"And I have not seen him since?" poor woman groaned. "Not seen him !-Ruric gone ? where? where?

"He said he was going to see the Count Damonoff when he left here," interposed Zenobie, who joined in the grief.

"Aye-so he told me," returned the nother. "I have been there, and they have not seen him since that evening. The surgeon who attends the count went out to the inn where Ruric put up his horse, and the animal was still there, his owner having not called for him."

"Oh, God, have mercy!" ejaculated the young countess, in a paroxysm of grief.

"At this moment there came a rap upon the door, and Zenobie went to answer the summons. It was the black monk, Valdimir, who thus demanded admittance. At any other time both Rosalind and Claudia might have been startled by the strange visit, but now they instinctively hailed his coming as a source of hone.

"Ladies," spoke the fat monk, approaching the spot where they stood, and bowing very low, "you will pardon this unseemly method of gaining admission here, but I had no other choice, for I feared the duke wou d refuse me did I apply to him. I have come to learn, if possible, where Ruric Nevel

The widow tried to answer, but instead f speaking she burst into tears. Rosalind struggled a moment with the deep emotions that stirred within her, and she, too, fell to weeping. Zenobie was obliged to answer.

"Good father," said she, "we here are after the same knowledge. His poor mother has come here to try if she might find some clue to the noble youth; and thus did my mistress gain the first intelligence that he was gone. Pray, good sir, do you know anything about him? What have you

Both Claudia and the young countess now raised their heads, for they would hear what reply the monk could make.

"I only know that he is missing," Valdimir replied. "A little while ago I called upon the sick count, and there I learned that Ruric Nevel had mysteriously disappeared. And I learned, also, of the noble purpose for which he visited the count. "Aye," interposed Claudia, with sudden

energy, "he went to try and gain the count's forgiveness. I don't think they spoke falsely there. I don't think any there would wish him harm from any lingering revenge. "Go, on," returned the monk; "his mission thither was most nobly fulfilled. So far from cherishing any spirit of revenge is

the holiest gratitude of his soul." "Do you think so?" the widow asked hopefully.
"I know it," was the monk's assured reply. "But," he continued, relapsing into perplexity, "I can not imagine what has become of him. But hold. My dear child,

the count, that he will ever bear from Ruric

is there not a humpbacked, ungainly priest who sometimes visits your guardian?"

This was addressed to Rosalind, and a earful tremor shook her frame as she heard it, for its import was at once apparent.
"Do you suspect—" she had started forward and grasped the monk's arm, as she thus commenced, but she could not continue. The thought she would have uttered was

"Go on," whispered Valdimir, bending his head low down so as to catch her very thoughts if they left her lips. "What would you say ?"

"Oh, I ought not-and yet I know his soul is capable even of that." Thus much the fair countess murmured to herself; and then she gazed up and spoke to the strange

"Do you suspect my guardian?" "Do you suspect him?" the monk re

"Oh, I know not what to think !" "But listen:" resumed Valdimir, earnesty. "I would know all that you know, and then perhaps I can assist you. Fear not, for as true as God lives I mean to save Rurie if I can; and if I can but gain a clue

to him now, I can surely save you both. Trust me, for I possess a wondrous power for the good of those who trust me. Now, what end could the duke have in view in concoting the duel: It was the death of Damonoff, and the undivided possession of Drotzen. Now, answer me. What does he ain at now?"

In spite of all doubts Rosalind found her self trusting the monk. There was an air of cons ious truth and power in his look and

tone that won upon her. "Good father," she returned, after a few moments' thought, "the duke has sworn by the most fearful oath that he will have me

"Ha! uttered the monk, starting back a pace and clenching his hands. "Does he mean that?"

"Oh, most truly he does!" the young countess replied; and spoke more firmly now, for there was something in the sudden energy of the monk's exclamation that gave her hope.

"Then he wants your estates, too. By my soul, he is aiming for wealth with a heh hand. And do you suppose he fears Ruric Nevel in connection with this

"Yes father-I will speak plainly, for I trust you. I do not think you would betray one who never harmed you." "Let the end of these things tell you that

But now finish what you had begun-about

your thoughts of the duke." "He knows, holy father, that I love Ruric, and he knows too, that Ruric loves me. May he not, under such circumstances, fear that the noble youth will try to thwart

"Very likely," returned Valdimir thoughtfully. "I will profit by this, and I am much mistaken if you do not also pr fit by it. I have those in Moscow who will work for me. I cannot, of course, directly assure you of salvation, for Ruric may never

A quick groan escaped from Claudia's lips as the monk thus spoke; but before Rosa lind could speak the door of the apartment was opened, and the Duke of Tula strode in! He stopped as he came nigh to where and his frame trembled with passion. "How now?" he cried, as soon as he could

command speech. "What means this gathering here in my own palace? Meddling mouk, how dare you drag your detestable form hither? Out, reptile! Out! And let me catch you here again and my dogs shall tear you up as they do carrion !" Without a word the monk turned away. His face was pale as death, and his hands were clenched till the fingers' ends seemed to settle themselves into the palms.

"Remember," the duke exclaimed, as Valdimir reached the door, "if you dare to cross my doorstool again-'

"Hold !" gasped the monk, in a hoarse, startling tone. "Oder no more threats. But, mark me, proud duke, -you shall see the day on which you'll wish God had made you a dog ere he gave you speech to arouse the just vengeance of Valdimir !"

And thus speaking the black monk disappeared. Olga started to pursue him, but he did not follow out the impulse. Ere he reached the door he stopped and turned

"And you, woman, who art thou?" he uttered, turning an angry look upon Claudia. "I am a mourning mother in search of her lost son," the woman sadly replied. "Ha! I see the likeness now. You are

the woman Nevel-mother of the young villain who bears that name! Leave my palace at once; and don't you dare to ente The poor woman tried to speak, but she could not. With a deep sob she turned

away, and slowly walked from the room. "Now," resumed the duke, turning towards Rosalind, "what means this secret

"My lord," returned the countess, struggling hard to overcome her powerful emo tions, "they were here-to-to-"

But she could not finish the sentence. Her soul was too deeply moved. She only gave the foul wretch one look of horror and disgust, and then covering her face with her hands she sobbed aloud.

If the bad man had anything farther to say, he reserved it for some future time.

CHAPTER XIII.

The Count Conrad Damonoff was able to sit up. He was in a great stuffed chair, playing with a favorite dog, while near by him sat Stephen Urgen. The young nobleman had gained rapidly since the visit of Ruric, for the antidotes he had taken had proved efficient, and he soon came back to the point he had reached before the administering of the poison.

"Stephen," he said, pushing his dog gently from him, "ha anything been heard yet from Ruric Nevel ?" "Not that I know of," returned Urzen.

"Oh. I wish I were able to assist in the search. But have you heard anything of what suspicions may be afloat?" "Only that the humpbacked priest is ooked upon by some as having a hand in

"Ha -- and how does suspicion point toward him ?" "Why-in no direct way, I believe. I

can not understand it. All I know is, he is

The count pondered a few moments, and he thought he could see it. Urzen did not know the secret of his friend's strange relapse, for that had been kept private; so he had no clue to the priest's true character. such as the count possessed.

[To be continued.]

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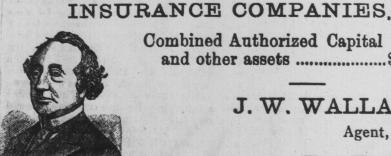
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