

SHAMEFUL DRUDGERY THE LOT OF CHILD LATER TO FIGURE IN WORLD HISTORY

Maria Botchkareva, Leader of the Battalion of Death in the Russian Army, Continues the Story of Her Youth

Marrying at Fifteen to Escape the Brutality of Her Father, Her Lot Is Not Improved, and She Deserts Her Husband

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THE STORY THIS FAR
In the early summer of 1917 the world was thrilled by a news item from Petrograd announcing the formation by one Maria Botchkareva of a women's fighting unit under the name of "The Battalion of Death." With this announcement an obscure Russian peasant girl made her debut in the international hall of fame. This is her story told by herself. The first installment told of her early childhood. While still a child she became a helper in a little village store.

CHAPTER I—(Continued)

I RETURNED to my place at the grocery and went to bed, but my eyes would not close; my conscience troubled me. "What if she suspected that a loaf of sugar was missing? What if she discovers that I have stolen it?" And a feeling of shame came over me. The following day I could not look straight into Nastasia Leontievna's eyes. I felt guilty. My face burned. At every motion of hers my heart quivered in anticipation of the terrible disclosure. Finally she noticed that there was something the matter with me. "What's wrong with you, Marusia?" she questioned drawing me close to her. "Are you not well?" This hurt even more. The burden of the sin I had committed weighed heavier and heavier. It rapidly became unbearable. My conscience would not be quieted. At the end of a couple of restless days and sleepless nights I decided to confess. I went into Nastasia Leontievna's bedroom when she was asleep. Rushing to her bed, I fell on my knees and broke into sobs. She awoke in alarm.

"What's happened, child? What is it?" Weeping, I proceeded to tell the story of my theft, begging forgiveness and promising never to steal again. Nastasia Leontievna calmed me and sent me back to bed, but she could not forgive my parents. Next morning she visited our home, remonstrating with my father for his failure to return the sugar and punish me. The shame and humiliation of my parents knew no bounds.

Sundays I spent at home, helping my mother in the house. I would go to the well, which was a considerable distance away, for water. My mother baked bread all week and father carried it to the market, selling it at ten kopecks a loaf. His temper was steadily getting worse, and it was not unusual for me to find mother in the yard in tears after father's return in an intoxicated state.

I reached the age of fifteen and began to grow dissatisfied with my lot. Life was awakening within me and quickening my imagination. Everything that passed by and beyond the confined little realm in which I lived and labored called me, beckoned to me, lured me. The impressions of that foreign world which I caught in the theater implanted themselves in my soul deeply and gave birth there to love-stirring forces. I wanted to dress nicely, to go out, to enjoy life's pleasures. I wanted to be educated. I wanted to have enough money to secure my parents forever from starvation and to be able to lead for a time, for a day even, an idle life, without having to rise with the sun, to scrub the floor or to wash clothes.

Ah! what would I not have given to taste the sweetness, the joy, that life held. But there seemed to be none for me. All day long I slaved in the little store and kitchen. I never had a spare ruble. Something revolted within me against this bleak, purposeless, futureless existence.

CHAPTER II

Married at Fifteen

CAME the Russo-Japanese War. And with it, Siberia, from Tomsk to Manchuria, teemed with a new life. It reached even our street, hitherto so lifeless and uneventful. Two officers, the brothers Lazov, one of them married, rented the quarters opposite Nastasia Leontievna's grocery. The young Madame Lazov knew nothing of housekeeping. She observed me at work in the grocery store, and offered me service in her home at seven rubles a month.

Seven rubles a month was so attractive a sum that I immediately accepted the offer. What could one not do with so much money? Why, that would leave four rubles for me, after the payment of mother's rent. Four rubles! Enough to buy a new dress, a coat or a pair of those modish shoes. Besides, it gave me an opportunity to release myself from the bondage of Nastasia Leontievna.



Typical Russian peasants

keeping at the Lazovs. They were kind and courteous, and took an interest in me. They taught me table and social etiquette, and took care that I appeared neat and clean.

The younger Lazov, Lieutenant Vasil, began to notice me, and one evening invited me to take a walk with him. In time Vasil's interest in me deepened. We went out together many times. He made love to me, caressing and kissing me. Did I realize clearly the meaning of it all? Hardly. It was all so new, so wonderful, so alluring. It made my pulse throb at his approach. It made my cheeks flame.

Vasil said he loved me. Did I love him? If I did, was more because of the marvelous world into which he was to lead me than on account of himself. He promised to marry me. Did I particularly want to marry him? Scarcely. The prospect of marriage was more enticing to me because of the end it would put to my life of drudgery and misery than on account of anything else. To become free, independent, possessed of means, was the attractive prospect that marriage held for me. I was then fifteen and a half years old. Then orders came to the Lazovs to leave for a different post. Vasil informed me of the order.

"Then we will have to get married quickly, before you go," I declared. But Vasil did not think so.

"That's quite impossible, Marusia," he said.

"Why?" I inquired sharply, something rising in my throat, like a tide, with suffocating force.

"Because I am an officer, and you are only a plain moujikka. You understand, yourself, that at present we can't marry. Maruska, I love you just as much as ever. Come, I'll take you home with me; you'll stay with my parents. I'll give you an education, then we will get married."

I became hysterical and throwing myself at him like a ferocious animal, I screamed at the top of my voice:

"You villain. You deceived me. You never did love me. You are a scoundrel. May God curse you!"

Vasil tried to calm me. He drew near, but I repulsed him. He cried, he begged, he implored that I believe that he loved me, and that he would marry me. But I would not listen to him. I trembled with rage, seized by a fit of uncontrollable temper. He left me in tears.

I did not see Vasil for two days. Neither did his brother or sister-in-law. He had disappeared. When he returned, he presented a pitiable sight. His haggard face, the appearance of his clothes, and the odor of vodka told the story of his two days' debauch.

"Ah, Marusia, Marusia," he lamented, gripping my arms. "What have you done, what have you done? I loved you so much. And you did not want to understand me. You have ruined my life and your own."

My heart was wrung with pity for Vasil. Life to me then was a labyrinth of blind alleys, tangled bewildering. It is now clear to me that Vasil did love me genuinely, and that he had indulged in the wild orgy to forget himself and drown the pain I had caused him. But I did not understand it then. Had I loved him truly, it might all have been different. But a single thought dominated my mind: "He had promised to marry me and failed." Marriage had become to me the symbol of a life of independence and freedom.

The Lazovs left. They gave me money and gifts. But my heart was like a deserted ruin in the winter, echoing with the whine of wild beasts. Instead of a life of freedom, my parents' basement awaited me. And deep in my bosom lurked a dread of the unknown.

drive me and mother barefoot out of the house, and for hours, at times, we slivered in the snow, hugging the icy walls.

Life became an actual inferno. Day and night I prayed to God that I fall ill or die. But God remained deaf. And still I felt that only sickness could save me from the daily punishment. "I must get sick," I said to myself. And so I lay on the oven at night to heat my body, and then I went out and relied in the snow. I did it several times, but without avail. I could not fall sick.

Amid these insufferable conditions, I met the new year of 1905. My married sister had invited me to participate in a masquerade. My father would not hear, at first, of my going out for an evening, but consented after repeated entreaties. I dressed as a boy, which was the first time I ever wore a man's clothes. After the dancing we visited some friends of my sister's, where I met a soldier, just returned from the front. He was a common moujik, of rough appearance and vulgar speech, and at least ten years older than myself. He immediately began to court me. His name was Afanasi Botchkarev.

It was not long afterward that I met Botchkarev again in the house of a married sister of his. He invited me to go out for a walk, and then suddenly proposed that I marry him. It caught me so unexpectedly that I had no time for consideration. Any thing seemed preferable to the daily torments of home. If I had sought death to escape my father, why not marry this boorish moujik? And I consented thoughtlessly.

My father objected to my marrying since I was not yet sixteen, but without avail. As Botchkarev was penniless, and I had no money, we decided to work together and save. Our marriage was a hasty affair. The only impression that I retain is my feeling of relief at escaping from my father's

brutal hands. Alas! Little did I then suspect that I was exchanging one form of torture for another.

On the day following our marriage, which took place in the early spring, Afanasi and I went down to the river to live ourselves as day laborers. We helped to load and unload lumber barges. Hard labor never daunted me, and I would have been satisfied, had it only been possible for me to get along with Afanasi otherwise. But he also drank, while I didn't, and intoxication invariably brutalized him. He knew of my affair with Lazov, and would use it as a pretext for punishing me.

"That officer is still in your head!" he would shout. "Wait, I'll knock him out of there." And he would proceed to do so.

Summer came. Afanasi and I found work with an asphalt firm. We made floors at the prison, university and other public buildings. We paved some streets with asphalt. Our work with the firm lasted about two years. Both of us started at seventy kopecks a day, but I rose to the position of assistant foreman in a few months, receiving a ruble and fifty kopecks a day. Afanasi continued as a common laborer. My duties required considerable knowledge in the making of concrete and asphalt.

Afanasi's low intelligence was a sufficient torment. But his heavy drinking was a greater source of suffering to me. He made a habit of beating me, and grew to be unendurable. I was less than eighteen years old, and nothing but misery seemed to be in store for me. The thought of escape dug itself deeper and deeper into my mind. I finally resolved to run away from Afanasi.

My married sister had moved to Barnaul, where she and her husband served as domestics on a river steamer. I saved some twenty rubles, and determined to go to my sister, but I needed a passport. Without a pas-

port one could not move in Russia, so I took my mother's.

On the way, at a small railway station, I was held up by an officer of the gendarmes.

"Where are you going, girl?" he asked brusquely, eyeing me with suspicion.

"To Barnaul," I replied, with sinking heart.

"Have you a passport?" he demanded.

"Yes," I said, drawing it out of my bag.

"What's your name?" was the next question.

"Maria Botchkareva."

In my confusion I had forgotten that the passport was my mother's, and that it bore the name of Olga Prokova. When the officer unfolded it and glanced at the name, he turned on me fiercely:

"Botchkareva, ah, so that is your name?"

It dawned upon me then that I had committed a fatal mistake. Visions of prison, torture and eventual return to Afanasi flashed before me. "I am lost," I thought, falling upon my knees before the officer to beg for mercy, as he ordered me to follow him to headquarters. In an outburst of tears and sobs, I told him that I had escaped from a brutal husband, and since I could not possibly obtain a passport of my own, I was forced to make use of my mother's. I implored him not to send me back to Afanasi, for he would surely kill me.

My simple peasant speech convinced the officer that I was not a dangerous political, but he would not let me go. He decided that I should go with him. "Come along; you will stay with me, and tomorrow I will send you to Barnaul. If you don't, I'll have you arrested and sent by stage (under convoy from prison to prison) back to Tomsk."

I was as docile as a sheep. This was my first contact with the authorities, and I dared not protest. If I had any power of will it must have been dormant. Wasn't the world full

of wrong since my childhood? Wasn't this one of life's ordinary events? We moujiks were created to suffer and endure. They, the officials, were made to punish and maltreat. And so I was led away by the guardian of peace and law, and made to suffer shame and humiliation. * * *

(CONTINUED TOMORROW)

Lansdale Memorial Plans Ready
Lansdale, Pa., Feb. 23.—Plans have been perfected for Lansdale's proposed \$150,000 community building at a memorial to soldiers and sailors of the borough. The building will house borough civic organizations, the fire department, fraternal and patriotic organizations. It will contain a public library, reading room, a large auditorium with a stage, a ball room, a quiet hall, gymnasium and other features.

No. 3
DEAR FOLKS

The manager of the Employment Bureau where all of the men laborers in the Wilson & Company plant, Chicago, are employed, invited me to sit in his office all of one morning and look over the men who applied for jobs. I accepted his invitation and I had a most interesting experience. I will tell you about it.

In the first place I heard practically every man say: "I want to work here, boss, because Wilson & Company treat men right and you give them a chance to get higher up in the ranks when they make good!"

In the second place I noticed, with great personal satisfaction, that the manager treated every applicant for a job with as much courtesy as if he were receiving him in his own home.

In the third place, I got the surprise of my life when I saw men, who had been told by the manager that he could not give them anything to do just then, leave the office with a smile and a thank you.

I wondered why men could smile and say thank you after being told that there was nothing for them to do. So, I asked one of them what there was to smile about and why he said thank you, and he said, in effect, this:

"Oh, the boss, there, is always kind to everybody, and I like kindness. I know he would give me a job if he could. I am coming back again until I get a job with this company. I want to work here because I am sure of getting a square deal."

And he went away happy; so did the others. However, men keep on applying for work in the Wilson & Company plant in spite of the fact that they know the company is always full up with laborers who never want to leave their jobs.

The manager is the type that Mr. Wilson selects to deal with his army of workers. He won't have a man unless love for his fellows is thoroughly developed in him—unless he is a good judge of human nature—unless he has the quality of selecting workers who will keep up the good fellowship and the loyal spirit that exists so markedly in all departments of the Wilson & Company plant.

He made no mistake in choosing the manager of the Men's Employment Bureau, who is a man of big frame, big heart, big character and with a big idea of his duty toward his company and toward his fellow man.

Among the number who applied for jobs while I was in the manager's office was a soldier in uniform. His appearance and manner and conversation indicated that he was a refined, educated man.

The manager told him that he guessed he had made a mistake in applying to him for a job—that evidently he wanted an office position, or, perhaps, wanted to go on the road as a salesman—that he employed men only who were willing to work with their hands. Mark what this soldier said:

"No, I don't want an easy job. I want to work with my hands. I 'found myself' over here. Living in trenches and going over the top made a different man of me. That hard work gave me health and strength. I never felt better in my life. I want to keep my body as healthy and as strong as it is now, and I want a job that requires the use of my hands, arms, legs, shoulders, feet. I can use my head, too, in doing manual labor. I want very much to work for this company. I hear everybody speak so well of the organization. I will appreciate it greatly if you will give me an opportunity to work as a laborer. I'll take my chance on working my way up. The president of your company got to the top by starting at the bottom of the ladder. Maybe I can climb to the top, too, if I am not too particular about the kind of work I start to do."

The manager said to him: "You are all right, my lad; you've got the right stuff in you. Come here next Monday and I will start you to work. We want men of your grit."

He came to work the following Monday. He has already made a hit with his fellow-workmen. They like him a lot and are very proud of him.

They are true-blue Americans and think a soldier who was in fight over there is the kind of man they want to be. They think very often of their fellow-workers who went overseas but will never come back.

I want to tell you, folks, that it does a fellow a lot of good to get next to the hearts of real people.

The Heart in the Wilson & Company organization shows everywhere. It does not play hide-and-seek. It comes right out in the open. There is no difficulty in tagging it.

If you are going to give to you in my next week letter a very human story about a little slip of a girl—25 years old—who is the inspiring leader in the fight over 1100 women workers in the Wilson & Company plant.

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Fur skins are very much higher now than they were a year ago. This means higher fur prices next season.

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(4) Beaver Sets 69.50 Reg. 140.00	(4) Mink Sets 145.00 Reg. 290.00	(6) Marmot Coats 48.00 Reg. 99.00	(5) Natural Muskrat Coats 74.50 Reg. 150.00
(5) Australian Seal Coats 94.00 Reg. 190.00	(4) Natural Nutria Coats 96.00 Reg. 195.00	(2) Hudson Seal Coats 120.00 Reg. 250.00	(5) Natural Raccoon Coats 125.00 Reg. 250.00
(4) Hudson Seal Coats 142.50 Reg. 290.00	(3) Natural Squirrel Coats 240.00 Reg. 375.00	(2) Scotch Moleskin Coats 275.00 Reg. 550.00	(1) Natural Mink Coat 345.00 Reg. 650.00

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