

BOTCHKAREVA'S ATTEMPT AT SUICIDE STOPPED IN TIME BY MAN WHO LOVES HER

Woman Soldier Continues Gripping Narrative of Extraordinary Experiences That Made Her Ready for the Rough, Hard Work of the Trenches

Takes Up Life With Man Who Loses Liberty Because of the Assistance He Gives Political Fugitives and Suffers With Him

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READ THIS FIRST

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 woman's regiment 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 helper in a little village store. At fifteen she became dissatisfied with her lot and procured a position as domestic in a well-to-do family, where the son of the house won her heart and then deserted her. She marries a man in her own class, who beats her, and she leaves him. He finds her and tries to commit suicide by jumping into the river. She is rescued and in the hospital is reconciled to her husband. But his promises are not kept and she again leaves him. For a year she works as foreman of a concrete gang, at the end of which time her health fails. A woman, posing as her friend, proves to be a white slaver. Maria escapes, wanders the streets and prays for guidance.

THEN READ THIS

I RESOLVED to return to Anna Petrovna after my prayer. I thought she had been so kind at first that I begged her to let me work for her as a servant she would agree. Before entering her house I went into the little grocery store nearby, and posing as the new servant of Anna Petrovna, who was a customer of the place, got a small bottle of essence of vinegar. However, the solicitude for my safety angered me, and I resented Anna Petrovna's caresses. I locked myself up in my room, getting ready to poison myself with the essence.

As I was saying my last prayers there was a knock at the door.

"Who is it?" I asked sharply. The reply was:

"I am that young man whom you saw two days ago in the parlor. I want to help you. I realize that you are not a girl of that sort. Pray, open the door and let me talk to you."

I naturally thought that this was another trap and answered wrathfully: "You are a villain! You are all villains! What do you want with me? What have I done to deserve torture and starvation? If I fall into your hands it will be only when I am dead. I am going to drink this poison here and let you gloat over my corpse."

The man got excited. He ran out into the yard, raised an alarm and, dragging several people with him, shouted of my threat to take poison. A large crowd had collected around the house, and he forced the window of my room from the outside and jumped in. Seizing the glass of essence, he threw it out of the window, cursing Anna Petrovna and her house. He made every effort to calm me, expressing his admiration for my courage and virtue. His professions of sincerity and friendship were so convincing that I yielded to his invitation to go with him to the home of his parents.

My savior, who was a handsome young man of about twenty-four, was Yakov Buk. He was a man of education, having studied at high school for some time. His father was a butcher. I was well received by his family, fed, dressed and given a rest. They were kind and hospitable people. Yakov, or Yasha, as he was called intimately, took especial care of me. He loved me, and it was not long before he declared that he could not live without me.

I was also attracted toward him. He knew of my previous marriage and proposed that we live together by civil agreement, without the sanction of the Church, a very common mode of marriage in Russia of late years, because of the difficulty in obtaining a divorce. I consented to his proposal, on condition that he tell me the reason for his living in a small barn in the back yard, apart from the family. He agreed.

"When I was twenty," he began, "my father was in the business of supplying meat to several army regiments. He was a partner in a firm, and was assisted by my brothers and myself. Considering me the most industrious and reliable of his sons, he entrusted me once with 10,000 rubles to go to buy cattle. Most of the money did not belong to him. The bulk I was drawn into a trap, and I was bound by innocent



Group of prisoners in Siberian village on the way to Irkutsk

of adventures. I lost all my money and my clothes to boot. Dressed in rags, with two rubles, presented to me by the gamblers, in my pocket, I sought at the Chinese border in a mood for suicide. There I became acquainted, at an inn, with some Chinese brigands who were members of a band operating in the neighborhood. One of them was the chief of the band.

"I told him my story, adding that I would do anything to save my father from disgrace and bankruptcy. He proposed that I join his band in a raid on an incoming train which was carrying 50,000 rubles. The invitation nearly petrified me. But then I had a vision of my parents thrown out of their house, of their property sold at auction, and of them forced to go begging. It rent my heart. There was nothing to do but accept the offer. Led by the chief into the field, I was there introduced to most of the robbers. I was the only white man in the band.

"In the evening we armed ourselves with daggers, pistols and rifles and started for the railroad line, there we lay in wait for the train. It nearly congealed my blood to think that I had turned highwayman. It was so unlike myself.

"The train was to pass at one in the morning. I prayed to God that He would save me somehow from this experience. Suddenly a body of Cossacks appeared in the distance, racing in our direction. The authorities had been on the track of this band for a long time. Every man in the gang threw down his weapons and ran into the forest. I, too, ran for all I was worth.

"The Cossacks pursued us, and I was caught. As I was a Russian and a new member of the organization, I succeeded by persistent denials of any knowledge of the band in creating doubt in the minds of my captors as to my participation in the projected raid. But I was arrested and sent to the Irkutsk prison, where I was kept for a whole year. There I came in contact with many political and was converted to their ideas. Finally, for lack of evidence, I was set free.

"Disgraced, I returned home. My father had arrived at an understanding with his partner whereby he was to pay in monthly installments the sum I had gambled away. He would not let me enter the house, but my mother defended me. There was a quarrel, which ended in an agreement that I be allowed to occupy this barn. But father swore that he would disinherit me, giving my share of his estate to his other sons."

I soon had occasion to discover that Yasha was considered a suspicious character by the local police, because of his imprisonment. His kindness, too, was his misfortune. Freed or escaped prisoners would sometimes visit him secretly and he would give them his last penny, piece of bread.

or shirt. But I liked him all the more for that. But I liked him all the more for that. But I liked him all the more for that. But I liked him all the more for that.

The barn in which we were going to live was filled with rubbish, and had never been cleaned. I applied myself studiously to make it habitable. It was not an easy task, but I finally succeeded. We received a gift of one hundred rubles from Yasha's parents, and decided to establish a butcher shop of our own. We got some lumber and built a small store. Then Yasha bought three cows and the two of us led them to the slaughter house, where I learned how to butcher. Yasha ran the shop. I was the first woman butcher in that locality.

One summer day, while walking in the street, I saw some boys peddling ice cream. I had learned how to make ice cream during my apprenticeship with Nastasia Leontievna. It occurred to me that I could make ice cream to sell. Finding out from the boys how much they paid for it, I offered them a lower price and a better cream and asked them to come for it the next day. I immediately returned home and bought milk from Yasha's mother, who offered to give it free to me upon learning the purpose for which it was intended. The ice cream I prepared was, happily, very good, and it sold quickly. During the summer I earned two or three rubles daily from this source.

I led a life of toil and peace with Yasha for about three years. Every morning I would get up at six o'clock and go with him to the slaughter house. Then all day I would spend at home. There were always many poor people, mostly women and children, stranded in our town, which was the junction of a railway and river line. They would wander about the streets, begging for bread and shelter. The larger part of them would land in our barn home. At times they would fill the cabin completely, sleeping in rows on the floor. Frequently they were sick. I fed them, washed them, tended to their children.

Yasha would often remonstrate with me for laboring so incessantly and so hard. But I had my reward in the gratitude and blessings those women bestowed upon me. There was joy in being able to serve. In addition, I sent regularly to my mother ten rubles a month. Yasha taught me in leisure moments how to read. My name became a household word in the neighborhood. Wherever I went I was blessed. "There goes Buk-Botchkareva!" people would point at me, whispering. Yasha's parents also grew very attached to me.

It all ended one evening in May, 1912. There was a peculiar knock at the door, and Yasha went out to admit a man of about thirty, well dressed, with a beard and pince-nez, of distinguished appearance. He was pale and apparently agitated. He stood with Yasha in the passageway for ten minutes, conferring inaudibly. He was then introduced to me as an old friend of Yasha's. He had escaped from prison and it was up to us to hide

him, as his capture would mean his death. The unexpected guest was no less a person than the revolutionary slayer of a notorious Russian Governor.

Yasha proceeded to remove our bed from its corner. He next removed a board in the lower part of the wall, revealing, to my great astonishment, a deep cavity in the ground underneath. Our visitor was invited to make himself comfortable there. The board was replaced and the bed restored to its former position. Yasha and I went to bed.

We had barely put out the light when there was heard a thumping of many feet around the house, followed by loud knocks at the door. The police were there! My heart was in my mouth, but I feigned sleep while Yasha opened the door. He had previously given me his revolver to hide and I concealed it in my bosom. The search continued for nearly two hours. I was dragged out of bed, and everything in the house was turned upside down.

We denied any knowledge of a political fugitive, but the sheriff took Yasha along with him. However, he was released a couple of hours later. Upon his return Yasha led the man out of the secret hole, supplied him with peasant clothes and food, harnessed our horse and drove away with him before dawn, instructing me to answer to all inquiries by saying that he had gone to buy cattle.

On the outskirts of the town a policeman, emerging from some dive in a semi-intoxicating state, observed Yasha driving by. He attached little significance to the fact at the time, but when he reported for duty in the morning and learned of the fugitive, he told that he had seen Yasha leave town with a stranger. I was doing some washing when the house was again surrounded by police. "Where is your husband?" the sheriff inquired, fiercely. "Gone to buy cattle," I replied. "Odeivaiva!" (Dress) he rang out angrily. I pleaded innocence, but in a terrible voice he informed me that I was under arrest.

I was taken to the detective bureau, where a middle-aged man, who walked very gently, and seemed very mindful of my comfort, entered into a conversation with me and even invited me to tea, which invitation I refused. He went about his work very subtly, and I was nearly caught when he asked

me if I had also met the young man who had arrived at our house at 9 o'clock the night before.

His information was quite correct, but I obdurately refused to admit his implications. I knew nothing of the young man he spoke of, but my examiner was patient. He was generous in his praise of my help and devotion to the poor. Promising me immunity, he urged me to tell the truth.

I would not yield and his patience finally wore out. Furious, he struck me with a rubber whip a couple of times. I was enraged and addressed him by some epithets that led to my being locked up in a cell where two drunken street women were confined. They were of the most abominable sort, cursing everybody. They persecuted me unceasingly. It was a horrible night that I passed there. The stench alone was sufficient to drive one mad. I was greatly relieved when morning arrived, and I was taken to the office for another examination.

I continued denying. There were threats of long imprisonment, coaxings, rebukes and attempts to extort a confession from me, from which I learned that Yasha had been arrested on his way back, before reaching home, so that he did not know of my arrest. I was detained for seven days, at the end of which the authorities, having been unable to obtain anything from me, set me free.

Yasha was still in jail, and I started out to visit various officials and bureaus in his behalf. The chief of police of the province was then in town, stopping in the house of a friend of ours. I invoked the aid of the latter in obtaining an interview for me. I was finally admitted before a largely built man wearing the uniform of a colonel. I fell on my knees before him and pleaded my husband's innocence, praying for mercy. I was so unnerved that he helped me to rise and ordered some water for me, promising to investigate the case and do justice.

I went next to the jail, hoping to see Yasha. But there I was informed that he had been sent to Nerchinsk, about eighty versts from Stretinsk. I did not tarry long in an effort to catch up with him. Taking along a hundred rubles, I took the next train to Nerchinsk, just as I was, and, immediately upon my arrival there, sought an audience with the Governor, and was told to await my turn in the line. When my turn came

the Governor, reading my name from the list, asked:

"Well, what's your case?" "My husband, your Excellency, Yasha Buk," I replied. "Your husband, eh? How is he your husband if your name is Botchkareva?" "By civil agreement, your Excellency."

"We know these civil marriages," he remarked derisively. "There are many like you in the streets," and dismissed my case. He said it in the hearing of a room-full of people. My blood rushed to my face, and I was painfully hurt. It was with difficulty that I got a card of admission to the prison, but how profound was my grief upon being informed that Yasha had spent there only one night and had been sent on to Irkutsk.

I had barely enough money with me to buy a fourth-class ticket to Irkutsk, and almost no belongings, but I did not hesitate to take the next train westward. It took two days to reach the Siberian capital. I stopped again with the Sementovskys, who were glad to welcome me. I wended my way to the Irkutsk prison, only to discover that Yasha had been taken to the Central Distribution Prison at Alexandrovsk, thirty versts from the near railway station of Usolye. There was little time to lose. I left the

same day for Usolye, whence I had to walk to Alexandrovsk.

It was late in the autumn of 1912. I started out with little food, and was soon exhausted. It was not an easy task to get to Alexandrovsk. The road lay across a river and through an island, connected by ferries.

On the way I made the acquaintance of a woman, Avdotia Ivanovna Kltova, who was also bound for the prison. Her husband was there too, and she told me why. He was drunk when the dog-catcher came to take away his favorite dog, and he shot the dog-catcher; now he was sentenced to exile, and she had decided to go along with him, with her two children, who were in Irkutsk.

(CONTINUED TOMORROW)

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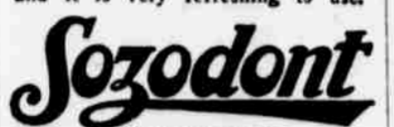
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