

THE FLIGHT OF A SERF

Wolves In Front and a Pursuing Master In Rear

By EDGAR L. THOMPSON

During the first half of the nineteenth century a Russian gentleman, Count Koronief, living in Finland, owned a beautiful serf girl named Sonia. Adjoining the Koronief estate lived a small farmer named Orloff. Orloff's son Peter and Sonia were wont to play together as children and when they grew to manhood and womanhood became lovers. Unfortunately for them while Peter was a free man Sonia was a serf.

Now, the count was a firm supporter of the government, while even at that early date there were evidences of discontent among the people. The murmurings were heard mostly among the higher classes, for the serfs were too ignorant, too degraded, too used to consider their master, the czar, a divine being, to protest against anything that emanated from him. Young Orloff was far in advance of the small farmer class, to which he belonged, supporting the few nobles and many intellectual commoners who desired to see the autocracy of the government curbed and the lower classes educated.

When, therefore, Orloff senior offered to buy Sonia and give her to his son to wife the count refused to sell her. "No one belonging to my estate," he said, "shall pass under the influence of these new notions which are intended to interfere with the will of the emperor. In Russia we have always needed and always had a single power to rule. Certain people are now beginning an agitation which if persisted in will educate the lower classes. They will become discontented with their lot, and we shall have anarchy."

When the farmer gave the count's answer to his son, advising him to think no more of Sonia, a rebellious fire flared in the young man's breast. He dare not tell Sonia, for she would undoubtedly feel that the hope of happiness which had been born to her had been quenched, since she would never dream of disputing her master's will. The law gave her to him as a serf, and if she rebelled the law would punish her. Indeed, a marriage without the count's consent was impracticable. If her lover attempted to defy the count he would be sent to Siberia. Sonia's master told her that the proposition had been made, that he had declined it, and there was an end of the matter.

Peter brooded over the matter till he was ready to take any risk to possess Sonia. He had expected to work his father's farm after his father had passed away, as each son had succeeded his father from time immemorial. With Sonia for his wife he would have been content to do so. If he should possess her he must do so by running away with her, and if caught the consequences would be terrible, not only for him, but for her. But love will take any risk. Peter had heard of America. There the people were their own rulers. If he could only get Sonia out of Russia and take her to America they could be united. But any attempt to carry her away would be fraught with great danger, and there was every chance of failure. The only chance for such an attempt to succeed would be by bribery, always a common method of accomplishing objects in Russia, but Peter, so long as his father lived, could not raise much money. The old man was not minded to cripple himself by raising funds to carry out any wild scheme of his son's to satisfy a whim. Besides, sons and daughters in Russia were not supposed to choose mates; they were provided by their parents.

Peter secretly saved what money he could, knowing that even if he succeeded in getting Sonia out of Russia he could not take her to America without means. In one way and another he got together enough to pay a passage. Then he began to weigh the different plans he had been forming for kidnapping his love. He dared not trust her with any intention of what he had in mind, fearing that even a knowledge of it would cause her unwittingly to betray it. Then, too, he had no assurance that she would consent to take a risk fraught with such frightful consequences to her and himself in case of failure.

The plan he chose embodied its formation, its execution and its responsibility solely in himself. No other was to share the secret with him, not even Sonia. It was to kidnap the girl and carry her around the gulf of Bothnia into Sweden. The country through which they must pass was cold and desolate. The only thing that rendered the scheme at all feasible was that the estate from which they would start was only a hundred miles from the Swedish border. But to pass over this distance without being caught and returned was a dangerous undertaking. Peter had enough money to hire a two horse sleigh, including the necessary relays, besides sufficient to take him to a sailing point for America. His arrangements were perfected in September, and, with loverlike impatience, instead of being satisfied to wait till the next spring, he planned to carry out his attempt before the winter set in.

Knowing Sonia's habits and that she had an afternoon to herself once a week, when she would usually visit a friend, he watched for her on one of

these holidays, driving back and forth in his sleigh. He was fortunate enough to meet her and asked her to go for a ride with him. Fearing that if seen with him she would be punished, she demurred, but he finally persuaded her, and when well on their way he told her that they would not stop of their own accord till they reached America. She nerved herself to the risk, and from that moment Peter pushed forward. Unfortunately the pair were seen by a member of the count's family, who as soon as possible gave information that they were driving rapidly westward. As soon as horses could be harnessed the count himself started in pursuit.

Peter had provided everything that he and Sonia would be likely to need. In the sleigh were warm fur rugs, provisions, a bottle of liquor and an armament of rifles and pistols. The latter were to be used in case the escape was dependent upon resistance, for Peter argued that to be caught meant Siberia for him and possibly for Sonia, and the punishment could not be worse if he killed a dozen people. Should the pursuers come to close quarters he would fire at them, trusting to disable the horses or those attempting to overhaul him.

The autumn had set in, and already there was plenty of snow, well beaten for easy going. The pursuing party lost time by taking a wrong road and having to retrace their steps. It was therefore near midnight before they came into the vicinity of the fugitives. The moment Peter heard the sound of bells behind him ringing in gallop tune he heard the bark of a single wolf ahead, then another and another till a whole pack were howling.

Sonia and he turned and looked at each other, Sonia with despair. He well knew that there was now a double danger. If they drove on they would be eaten by the wolves. Behind them were capture, separation and Siberia. Peter, rising to the occasion, gave the reins to Sonia and took up such arms from the bottom of the sleigh as he might have occasion to use. He had intended them for human pursuers. Now he might need them for both man and wolves.

The lovers heard the jingling behind slacken. Evidently the barking had been heard by the pursuers. But it was not long before the bells again bespoke a gallop.

"It's the count," said Peter. "I know him well. He would face certain death rather than forego an act of tyranny."

As they drew nearer the wolves the barking not only grew louder, but came from more throats. The moon was near the full and lit the dark bodies of the animals coming to meet them. The horses, frightened, started to turn, but Peter gave them the whip, and they continued in their course. Handling the whip to Sonia, he seized a rifle, and as they shot through a dozen wolves one making a lodgment on the sleigh was driven off with the iron barrel brought down on its head. The next instant another springing at Sonia received a bullet in its breast between its fore legs and dropped dead. This gave the pack two carcasses to fight over and the fugitives a brief respite.

Meanwhile the sounds of the approaching party behind them grew nearer. Peter attributed the count's pressing on, knowing that he was chasing a pack of wolves which would turn upon his party and devour them, to his mad desire to get possession of Sonia and send him and probably her to Siberia. In this he did the man injustice. Doubtless if he caught them he would take his revenge, but he was a brave man and ready to risk his own life to save that of others.

As soon as the wolves had devoured the two of their number that had been killed they came on again. It seemed to the fugitives that coils of fire were pursuing them, the eyes of the beasts shining out brightly. Again they overtook the lovers, and again Peter fired into the pack. But by this time, while the double danger added to his desperation, his nerves were not so steady as at first. He fired three shots before he dropped a wolf. Then he killed two more.

Sonia laid on the whip, though it was not necessary, and the lovers drew away, while behind them they could hear their pursuers approaching the wolves. Then there was a crackling of rifles, a yelping of wounded animals, the cry of a horse, and the sound of bells ceased.

"The brutes have saved us," said Peter exultingly. "They have downed a horse."

The fugitives sped on, hearing again and again the crackling of a rifle till at last either the firing ceased or passed out of hearing.

The count and two of his servants had not been as fortunate as those they followed. By the time they reached the pack the number of wolves had doubled. They fought well, but one of the wolves sprang at a horse's throat and disabled him. Overwhelmed, the three men, one after another, succumbed.

And so it was that a man who was trying to recover a fugitive serf lost his life and carried down with him the lives of two other persons.

The lovers, being freed from their pursuers, proceeded with deliberation. The next evening they reached the Swedish line, at the head of the gulf of Bothnia, where they left their conveyance at an unfrequented spot, on the east side of the Tornea river, and, crossing, found themselves in Sweden. From there they made their way to Christiania and from thence to America. Setting out toward the west, they at last reached the new territory, which is now the state of North Dakota, where they found many of their countrymen and became prosperous farmers and Peter one of the principal men in that region.

The Teazel.

Those who have never seen a teazel can imagine a fir cone or "swamp cat-tail" set all over with little stiff hooks. It is the burr (or tassel or flower head or thistle top) of the plant dipsacus. However familiar to people who live in lands where the teazel is extensively grown, the fact may be that the prickly heads of that plant are universally used to raise the nap on cloth. A multitude of persons in this country probably never heard of it and would be astonished to learn in what enormous quantities the plant is cultivated. In France alone many thousands of acres of land are exclusively devoted to the cultivation of the teazel. French manufacturers use enormous numbers of the prickly heads, and from France there are exported many millions of them. They are also raised in Austria, England, Belgium, Poland and the Crimea. The prickles of the teazel have a small knob at the end, and this, mounted on an elastic stem and set with great precision on the central spindle, affords a little brush such as the utmost mechanical skill has never been able to rival, at all events at the same price.—Harper's Weekly.

Tea Testers In Formosa.

In the Formosa tea trade the most important man is the chasi, or taster. He inspects and tests samples of all teas offered to his firm, and his judgment determines the price to be paid. In a room admitting light only from the north the chasi does his work. He first examines the leaf, then its fusion in hot water and lastly its odor and taste. Practically all the facilities are exercised in making this test. It requires the services of an expert, and the tea taster receives a good salary, though relatively not so large as obtaining twenty years ago. A tea taster never uses any perfume which would destroy the tea odor. He must not allow the acuteness of his taste to become dull. He never drinks domestic tea. Constant tea testing, it is said, will injure the health. In Formosa the tea testers are Americans or Englishmen.

Black and White.

For many years a large department store has spent thousands of dollars on placards with which almost every article of merchandise is ticketed throughout the store, and only within a short time did they realize the amount of money that was wasted in using the white cardboard with black lettering. These white cards soon become soiled and shop worn if allowed to remain in place any length of time. The cards which are handled by customers in bins, trays, etc., are even more so. By substituting the black cardboard with white lettering this store has overcome this difficulty to a very great extent. The show cards are always clean, fresh and bright looking and they last many times as long, saving the firm several hundred dollars in the course of a year.—Business.

Wesley's "Narrow Neck of Land."

The actual first and last house in England is a shed where a workman sells specimens of rock. Just below this, as one goes down the zigzag path between the rocks, on the neck of the peninsula is a flat stone about two feet square and rising six inches above the ground. This, tradition asserts, is that upon which John Wesley sat when he composed the hymn—

Lo, on a narrow neck of land
"Twixt two unbounded seas I stand
Secure, insensible!"

It is also stated that Wesley wrote other hymns there. Apparently he had at this time (July 30, 1743) experienced a bad spell of weather at Land's End, for he writes, "I saw a strange sight—the sun shining in Cornwall."—English Illustrated Magazine.

Putting an Elephant's Tooth.

Perhaps the greatest dental operation on record was performed upon an elephant in the City of Mexico. The aching tooth was twelve inches long and measured fourteen inches round the root. After the animal had been securely fasten with chains his mouth was pried open and a quantity of cocaine applied to deaden the pain. When this was done a hole was bored through the tooth and an iron bar inserted. Then a rope was twisted around the bar, and four horses were attached thereto to drag the offending molar out.—London Tit-Bits.

Speak to the Horse.

The human voice has more or less marked influence on all animals. In managing horses especially the voice is of the greatest use. It should be quiet and, though confident and masterful, not loud and boisterous. No one should ever touch a horse without at the same time speaking to it.—Exchange.

An Accepted Story.

"Quills really had a story accepted at last," remarked a journalist to a colleague.

"Surely not," was the rejoinder. "Yes. He went home at 2 o'clock this morning with an awful yarn, and his wife believed it."

Germs Spread in Skin

Eczema, Psoriasis and other skin troubles are caused by myriads of germs at work in the skin. Unless these germs are promptly destroyed they rapidly multiply, gnawing their way deep into the sensitive tissue. This is what causes that awful itch, and what seemed a mere rash may grow worse and develop into a loathsome and torturing skin disease with its years of misery. Don't take any chances; destroy the germs at the beginning of a trouble with that soothing and clearing wash, the D. D. Prescription for Eczema. A 25c bottle will prove this to you.

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When Noah drove the animals off the ark did it make the ark light?



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