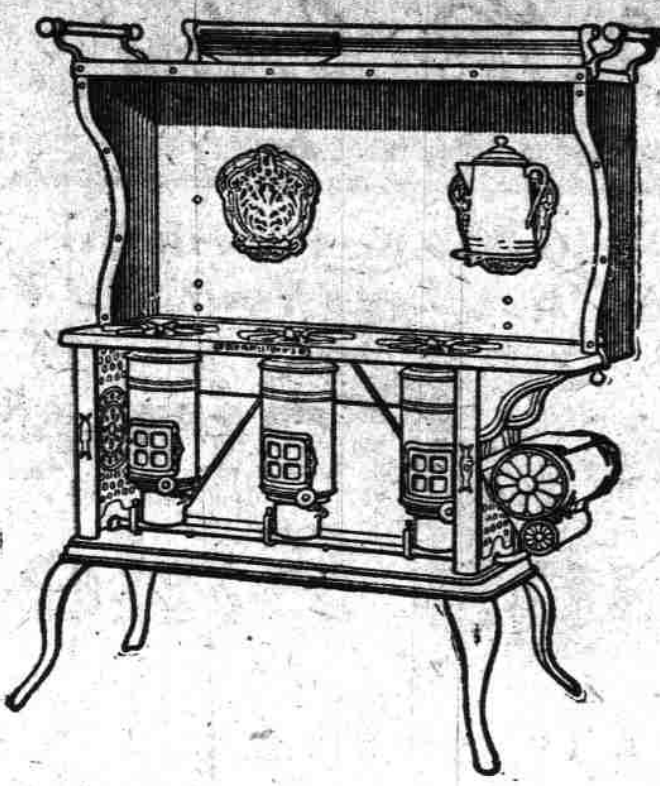


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### Between Duty ... And Love.

(Original.)

Safo Arkadyevna, a little Russian peasant girl, heard sleigh bells and went to the door. A sledge drove up, and a young man alighted and, followed by his valet, hurried into the house. The driver remained with the horses.

"Is there any one here who knows the road to V.?" he asked.

"There is no one here at all except my father and myself. My father is ill in bed. I know the road to V."

"I must get there in time to catch the St. Petersburg express which passes at 10:15. It is now 8. The distance is—"

"Eighteen versts."

"No more than that? Good. There is plenty of time."

"But, excellency, there are many hills, and the snow is deep and in places drifted. You will require all the time you have, and more."

The young man's countenance fell. "My horses are tired out," he said, "and my sledge is heavy, yet I must catch the train."

"We have a fresh horse and a light sledge with seats for but two people. Let your driver and your servant remain here. I will drive you to V."

"You little angel! You little beauty! Take me to V. in time for the train and I will love you forever."

He impulsively threw his arms around Safo and kissed her.

It is astonishing how speedily a very young country girl—and this one was but seventeen—who has never seen a fine gentleman when she first meets one can fall in love with him. For that one moment, for the first time in her life, Safo was in heaven.

The travelers' sledge was driven into the barn, the lighter sledge got out, and Safo Arkadyevna and Alexis Alexandrovitch entered. She holding the reins, the robes were adjusted, and they drove away.

"Why do you so wish to catch the train?" asked Safo.

"It is a matter of life and death."

"Your life or death?" asked the girl, with a gasp.

"No; that of a man on the train."

Safo listened intently for more. Had this to do with revolutionary work? She was an enthusiastic revolutionist. Was she driving this man to the train to enable him to prevent the accomplishment of a revolutionary purpose?

The hills lay within the first ten or a dozen versts of the distance to be traveled. When Alexis became impatient at their slow progress Safo told him that for the last six or eight versts the road lay over level ground. When they had passed the hills they had but half an hour to go the remainder of the distance. But the road was covered with loose snow, and the horse was not as fresh as at starting. To their right they could see to a considerable distance, and two or three versts away was a sledge, the driver of which was whipping his horse unmercifully, going in the same direction as themselves.

"There they are now!"

"Who?" asked Safo.

"The murderers! Get up! Give him the whip!"

"Not until you tell me what this means," she said firmly.

Alexis turned and looked at her, astonished. After a few moments of study he said:

"The minister of the interior is on the train I wish to catch. At an inn where I stayed last night I overheard a conversation that told me a revolutionist would board the train at V, leave his compartment while the train is in motion, walk along the foot-board to the carriage occupied by the minister, shoot him through the window and jump from the train."

He watched eagerly the girl's face as he spoke. She made no comment for a time, though she showed traces of an inward struggle, a struggle between love and duty. She knew of the sufferings of her people under autocratic rule, yet her heart had sprung to this young man as a moth will dash against the glass inclosing an electric light. She could take him to the station in time to save the minister's life or could delay him.

"Well?" he ventured presently.

The girl made no reply. They were going at a good pace, and Alexis, knowing that she was deliberating, preferred to give her a few moments in which to decide. If her decision was against him he would take the reins himself.

But he did not know the way, and this might wreck his purpose. Suddenly she threw the reins to him.

Seizing them in one hand, he laid on the whip with the other. The girl sat mute by his side. Entering a wood, they came to a fork in the road.

"Which?" asked Alexis.

Safo remained silent.

Seeing that she would not choose for him and realizing the impossibility of forcing her to do so, he chose the left hand road. It led him two versts out of his way. When he emerged from the wood he could again see a long distance. There was the train approaching the station. There was the sledge containing the assassins within a few hundred yards of their goal.

Alexis drove on to the station, reaching it some ten minutes after the train had passed. He sent his information by telegraph to the next stopping place, but the train did not stop for more than half an hour, and by that time it was too late. The minister had been assassinated.

Alexis Alexandrovitch told no one how he had been delayed by the little peasant girl, who preferred her duty to her newborn love. The incident made her a revolutionary worker, and she is now in Siberia.

CHARLOTTE BOND HILL

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