

THE MYSTERY OF GRASLOV

By Ashley Towne

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(CONTINUED.)

CHAPTER V.

THE SUDDEN INTERRUPTION OF A JOURNEY.

MR. GORDON was beginning to feel anxious. He knew just how long it took to go to Perm and return. Frances had often taken long journeys by herself, but she was now three days overdue, and the engineer was eager to get to the Obi.

"Where can she be?" he asked himself. "She must stop this racing all over the world alone. Something will surely happen to her one of these fine days. I'll stop it."

Frances arrived while he was making the resolve.

"Where have you been?" asked Gordon.

"To Perm."

"To Perm! But you have been away three days longer than was necessary. I do not like this way you have of going off by yourself."

"I fancy I can take care of myself. I've been in Perm the three days."

"With the blacksmith and his people?"

"No. The blacksmith and his people! Vladimir has been sent to Siberia."

"What! Not the ironworker Paulpoff?"

"Vladimir Paulpoff, Mamma Paulpoff and Papa Paulpoff are now on their way to Tomsk."

"The devil!"

"Yes, the devil! That is just the individual who did it."

"What is his other name?"

"Prince Neslerov."

"What! Neslerov sent Paulpoff to—Come, tell me what you mean."

"A man like Neslerov can do anything he likes in Russia except marry an American girl. Tell me just what conversation you had with the prince a few days ago."

"A few days ago! Oh, two weeks ago!"

"I don't know when it was. But he asked you for my hand, did he not?"

"Yes."

"You never told me."

Gordon laughed.

"I haven't told you the names of half the men who have asked me that."

"But in Russia we should know, because there are tricks. Now, what was it? Did he say much?"



"Stand back, you insulter!"

"No, not much; said he was rich and powerful and wanted you as an ornamental wife or something to that effect."

"He told me the same thing."

"Told you! Where?"

"In Paulpoff's house."

Gordon panted and sat down.

"I wish you would tell the whole story," he said.

"I wish you would answer my questions first. What happened when Neslerov was here? What did he say and what did you answer?"

"He didn't say very much—the usual thing. Said he loved you and was rich and powerful and could give you a good station in Russian society and the world."

"And you said what?"

"Why, I said you wouldn't marry the best man on earth unless you loved him. I said if you would marry the man I wanted you to you would long ago have been the wife of Jack Denton, who—"

"Never mind Mr. Denton. We were speaking of Neslerov."

"Yes—but the 'deuce! You pick your old dad up so short! I am telling you what I said. Don't you want to hear?"

"Yes," replied Frances, laughing and kissing him. "Dear old dad, what did you say?"

"I said I liked Jack Denton better than any other man on earth and that you hated him worst. But I wanted you to marry him because he was good and noble and a rising man, a brave man and altogether a—"

"Here and angel in one. What did the prince say to that?"

"He only repeated what he had said before."

"Then what?"

"I said—why—now, don't get angry at your old dad—I said you were a self-willed creature and acted on your own whims."

"That is nothing to get angry about. I do. But I fear that between us we have sent the Paulpoffs to their doom."

"For goodness sake, how?"

"It was natural that—"

"It wasn't natural at all. What did I say—what have you done—to cause Vladimir Paulpoff to plot against the czar?"

"Heavens! Are you so blind? The Paulpoffs are as innocent of this charge as you or I. It was against Vladimir the plot was laid."

"I begin to catch your meaning. Who was it—Neslerov?"

"It is impossible to say whether he did or not, but I suspect him. You remember the day he was here. I met him as I came home from the bazaars, where I had been buying books for Vladimir. I did not, of course, suspect that he had been talking with you about marrying me. Unwittingly I told him they were for Vladimir and asked him also to take an interest in him."

"I also told him of a blacksmith in whom you were taking a great interest. He has put that and your independence together and has imagined Vladimir. Well?"

"I had my fears that something was said about Vladimir. It was so clearly a plot that I knew the jealousy of Neslerov had been aroused. When I learned what had been done, I waited two days at Perm to see Governor Guslav, but he was away, and I could not see him. It was the superintendent of police who gave me the little information I got. It seems that an inspector discovered—so they say—that nihilists were meeting in the forge. Letters were found on them which implicated Vladimir. There was a trial, so it was claimed, and Vladimir was found guilty. I am sure Vladimir would have sent to us if he could."

"I don't want to get mixed up in any nihilist scrape."

"But you will help Vladimir, will you not?"

"What can I do?"

"You can at least stop at Perm and see the governor. It will not delay us long."

"I will do that, certainly; but I don't fancy there is much use talking to Guslav. He is a stern old soldier and has no sympathy for lovers or plotters."

"But he is just and honorable."

"Yes, I am sure of that."

"Then come. We will go to Perm together and see him."

"Well, I suppose I must do as you say, but we are about ready to start for the Obi. We can stop at Perm for a day."

"That will do."

The preparations were hastily made, and four days more saw them at Perm. The governor was at home and received Mr. Gordon, the name being an open sesame anywhere in Russia. Mr. Gordon plunged at once into the matter of Vladimir's arrest.

"That he was arrested, if the circumstances were suspicious, I grant, was proper enough," said Mr. Gordon. "But was there a fair trial? Pardon me if I speak plainly. Your institutions of justice here are quite different from ours at home. I have known where men were hustled off to Siberia with no semblance of a trial."

"But they were guilty," said the governor, with a smile.

"Yes; I believe in all the instances that came under my observation they were."

"It was the same in this case. The Paulpoffs had been using their isolated position for base ends. A circle of the

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brotherhood of nihilists congregated there. Letters were found upon them. These letters were all signed by Vladimir Paulpoff."

"Did he admit anything?"

"They never do. It is only when a man is captured in the very act of assassination, and he knows he cannot escape the death penalty, that he admits his crime and glories in it. The Paulpoffs denied everything, of course."

"Poor Vladimir! He was as innocent as I am," broke in Frances.

"Impossible. The letters were proof enough."

"Are the letters here?"

"No; unfortunately, they were carried away by one of the men who escaped."

"Then you did not see the letters?"

"No; I regret that I did not."

"What was said concerning them?"

"Their import was given by Inspector Jansky and Prince Neslerov, who found them. Their testimony so pleased the minister of justice that Jansky has been promoted to be superintendent of the police at Tomsk. You seem to think there is some doubt of the guilt of these people," said the governor, turning to Mr. Gordon.

"For my part I am quite sure they are innocent. My daughter has been interested in them since the railway ran through Perm. It is not like them to plot. They are too simple and ignorant."

"But Vladimir is not. He is shrewd and intelligent. He has been a reader of books."

"Yes; my daughter furnishes them."

"I am not at all doubtful myself," said the governor, with a grim smile.

"Were I, I would begin an open investigation at once. But, you understand, the accuser was a prince and the governor of Tomsk, and the minister of justice has set the seal of his approval on the thing. It is a delicate matter for me to reopen. But I promise you this: I will guardedly look into the thing, and if I see any chance for doubt for your sake I will do what I can to help the Paulpoffs."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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(From the Afton, Kan., Daily Globe.)

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know the best remedies for croup

and in every neighborhood. One

of the most terrible things in the world

to be awakened in the middle of the

night by a wail from one of the

children. The croup remedies are almost

sure to be lost in case of croup, as

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cares the patient to "throw up the

business" quicker, and gives relief in a

short time. Give this remedy as soon

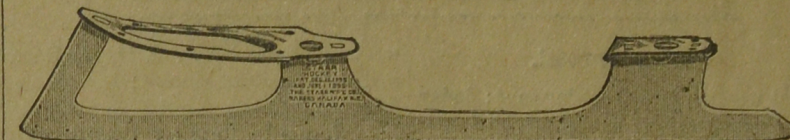
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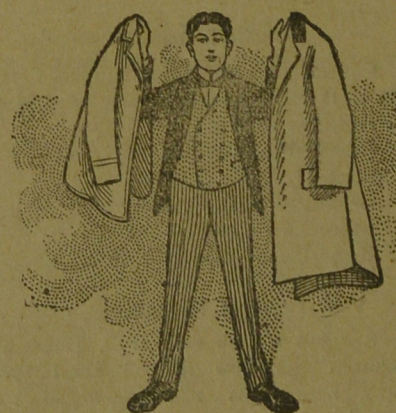
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