

THE MYSTERY OF GRASLOV

By Ashley Towne

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(CONTINUE)

"My cousin, whom I have never seen!" she exclaimed.

There are some barbarisms, but I presume you get accustomed to them—in Siberia."

"Yes, in Siberia one gets accustomed to almost anything," he answered.

She continued her inspection with interest and suddenly came to a stop before a painting. Neslerov's face became a shade paler.

"My cousin, whom I have never seen!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands and gazing raptly at the picture Vladimir had painted. "Surely, Nicholas, that must be Princess Alexandra, who married your elder brother."

"I think you are mistaken," said Neslerov. "You surely must have seen"

"Yes, when a mere infant. It is only from other portraits that I recognize her. She was very beautiful. Oh, what a terrible sorrow to her! To lose her child, heir to a fine estate and princely title, and then lose her own life, so young, with the horrible mystery still unsolved as to whether she died of grief and a broken heart or by the hand of an enemy. Oh, that mystery of Graslov! Will it ever be solved?"

"I fear not," said Neslerov solemnly.

"I did not know you had this picture," said Olga. "It is much finer than any we have at home. It was done by a master hand."

"It was," assented Neslerov.

The painting had saddened Olga, and she passed on, making no more of her leaching criticisms.

She soon returned to her room, where her attendant was awaiting her. The woman's face was pale, and she seemed to be struggling with emotion. Olga stood before her, with a peculiar light in her eyes.

"Therese," she said, "an oil painting of my unfortunate cousin, Princess Alexandra, hangs in Neslerov's own room."

"What?" gasped the woman, starting up. Then, as some strange terror overcame her, she shuddered, and with the whispered cry "We are lost!" she fell to the floor unconscious.



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—Miss GULA GANNON, 359 Jones St., Detroit, Mich., Secretary Amateur Art Association. —\$5000 forfeit if original of above letter proving genuineness cannot be produced.

When one considers that Miss Gannon's letter is only one of the countless hundreds which we are continually publishing in the newspapers of this country, the great virtue of Mrs. Pinkham's medicine must be admitted by all.

CHAPTER XII.

PRINCESS OLGA BEGINS TO ACT.

"NOW, Therese, tell me what you have learned. Why did the fact that the picture of Alexandra hangs upon the wall of Neslerov's room make you faint? You have learned something. Tell me."

Therese was sitting in a chair, her face white and drawn, and in her eyes was a bewildered look.

"It was not so much what I heard, princess, as what I knew and suspected," she answered.

"I know what you know. I suspect what you suspect. Tell me what you heard," she said sternly.

"It was in the serfs' hall," she said in reply to the princess. "I was eating; no one seemed to ask who I was, and they talked as servants do. Vladimir Pauloff is in danger of his life."

Princess Olga gave a start, but recovered her composure.

"Go on," she said. "Tell me all."

"It seems there is an American—I do not remember what they called him—but he is an American who builds bridges over the rivers for the new railway. He knows Vladimir Pauloff. He is also a friend of that American girl—you remember—we met at the fair in Moscow?"

"Frances Gordon? I remember her. She gave liberally to the charities. Well?"

"It would seem from what I heard that the governor is in love with her, and that she rejected him. These things are well known among the servants. It seems the American and Neslerov had a fight and Neslerov was injured."

"He told me he fell from a horse. Go on."

"It is believed among the servants that Vladimir is also in love with the American girl and that she is in love with him. And the American—I don't know—but he may be in love with her also."

"Three lovers! She is fortunate—no, I would say most unfortunate. With one true and honorable lover any woman is fortunate, but with three—and one like Neslerov! It is too much."

"You do not seem to suspect where the picture came from."

"Do you mean the oil painting of my cousin, the Princess Alexandra?"

"I mean it. You say it hangs on the wall of Neslerov's room. It is undoubtedly the one painted by Vladimir."

"And when Vladimir and his parents were sent to Siberia Neslerov took the painting?"

"Yes, Vladimir is talented, as you know—at least as I have told you."

"Then Vladimir must be near this place."

Therese shuddered again. "He is—he is in the dungeons under this palace," she whispered in terror.

A sudden change came over the princess. She walked in agitation to and fro across the room.

"Then Neslerov must suspect that Vladimir holds the key to the mystery of Graslov," she said, stopping again before Therese.

"I do not know what he thinks. The American also is here under a charge of conspiring against the czar."

"Oh, then it becomes clearer. These Americans are shrewd. This one, perhaps, in order to gratify his love of truth, has set himself the task of discovering the truth about Graslov."

"Who knows?" asked Therese. "But how would he know anything about the mystery of Graslov?"

"True, but you say Vladimir and the American girl are in love. Vladimir may have discovered something and told the girl. She may have told the American, who may not be a lover, but a friend. She may have enlisted his efforts in the task of unraveling the mystery."

"It is possible."

"What else did you hear?"

"Nothing; that is all. The American was arrested as he was about to leave for Perm. Vladimir was brought from Tivoloffsky, a small village near here."

"By the orders of Neslerov?"

"He must be, since they are in the dungeons of his palace."

"And that is all you heard?"

"All—everything."

"It is enough to place me upon the right scent. You must not, however, give way to these fits of unconsciousness. Be stronger, be brave."

"It is all very well, princess; but if you had lived for twenty years with the horror of that crime, overshadow-

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Is a great deal harder than jumping down. And yet people who have been for years running down in health expect to jump back at once. It takes years generally to make a man a confirmed dyspeptic, and he cannot expect to be cured in a few days.

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ing you, with a constant fear of the Siberian mines weighing upon you, you would not be calm."

"Poor woman! I appreciate your feelings in the matter. But try to maintain your composure, for one mistake now, the slightest suspicion on the part of Neslerov, may destroy the efforts we have made during the last two years."

"Six months, princess."

"For you, since your husband died. I have been working upon this mystery since I returned from Paris two years ago. If God spares my life, I will avenge the crime that was committed against our branch of the Neslerovs."

That evening the princess met Neslerov in the dining room with no show of emotion. Her smile was as winning and her wit as sharp as ever.

"I have not seen you during the afternoon, fair cousin," said Neslerov. "But I have not forgotten you. I have been gathering the resources of Tomsk to give you a fitting welcome to our city. Tomorrow night there will be a reception and fete here in your honor."

"Tomorrow night? That is quickly done."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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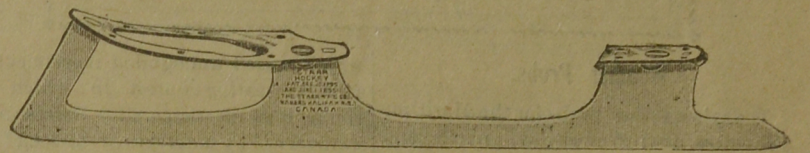


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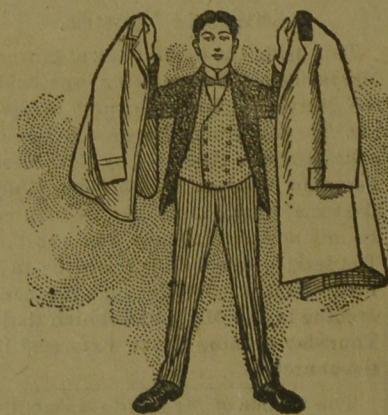
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