

THE MYSTERY OF GRASLOV

By Ashley Towne

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(CONTINUED)

Neslerov was at dinner when a servant announced the Princess Olga. "What about the Princess Olga?" he asked.

"The princess is here—she has asked to see your excellency."

"Here! Olga Neslerov, here!" rising from the table. He had improved much in the last few days, and his face wore a calm look that had not been there since his meeting with Denton.

He found the princess in the reception room.

"Princess Olga!" he exclaimed, kissing her hand. "Fair cousin, what happy circumstance brought you here? And why have you come unannounced and unattended?"

"I saw no reason to herald my approach," she answered, "and I am not unattended. This is my attendant."

The woman courtesied and looked uncomfortable, but Neslerov paid her not the least attention.

"Well, since you are here, I am pleased to see you," said the governor. "Your branch of the Neslerov family and mine have not been too friendly. I am glad that at last one of you has had the grace to begin a reconciliation."

PRINCESS OLGA SMILED.

"Whatever feeling my branch of the family may have for yours could scarcely be said to interest me," she said. "Remember, I have spent much of my time out of Russia, and—it happened twenty years ago."

Neslerov turned to the door and then stopped.

"You refer to the unfortunate mystery of Graslov," he said soberly. "It was that, I fear, that ruptured the former friendships. Yet I have insisted and proved that our family was not to blame. It was either an accident or was done by our enemies. Pardon me! I was so glad to see you that I forgot that you must be weary after your journey. Let me have you shown your rooms, and I will order dinner for you when you wish."

"Thank you. We are both hungry. I will join you in ten minutes, and Theres will be ready to go to the servants' dining room in that time."

"You have become a regular cosmopolitan," laughed Neslerov. "Your visits to America and London have almost taken away the traces of our Russian habits."

"Some of them could be well dispensed with," she answered.

In response to his summons a servant appeared and conducted the women to their rooms.

"Now, what devilish luck could have

brought her here at this time?" was Neslerov to himself. "I must be cautious. But it is so long—she was not born—she can know nothing. But I must be discreet."

"Well, we are here," said the princess to her companion when they were alone. "Now, obey me; let me do the planning. Neslerov must not suspect us. It would ruin all, and there is no telling what he might do. The governor of a province in Siberia is almost supreme."

Her attendant shuddered.

"I lived in dread of Siberia for twenty years!" she said, with a shudder. "And now you have brought me here."

"But not as a convict—as a friend, a woman, like myself, resolved to right a wrong."

The princess was soon ready and joined the governor in the dining room.

"I have just been thinking, Olga," he said, his face wreathed with smiles, "that it is at least three years since we met. Your face has not changed much, but you are now a woman and were then a little girl. You are one of the most beautiful women in Russia."

"Thank you."

"And, I might say, the richest."

"Nearly so. But the wealth brings its responsibilities. It is difficult in Russia to do those things that are just and proper with our wealth."

"I never found it so," said the governor, with a laugh.

"Perhaps," said Olga, "you are not interested in the question. To me it is a burning one. Our nobles have too much wealth and our lower classes have too little opportunity to rise. It is not so in England, France or America."

"You had better leave those questions for older heads, princess. You will become involved with the government before you know. You were not born to waste your beauty and talents in such matters. You were born to be admired, to enjoy your wealth."

"I do enjoy my wealth and do what good a girl can do with it. As to being admired, I meet few from whom admiration seems to come with sincerity."

"Oh, as to that, you cannot expect to find the courtiers at beauty's court all as gruff and outspoken as a drosky driver."

"I have met some who were," she said, laughing pleasantly.

They ate slowly, chatting the while.

"You have not quenched my thirst for knowledge," said the governor. "If I were in St. Petersburg and you did me the honor to ask me to visit you, it would even then surprise me. But that you have come to Tomsk, more than half way across Siberia, to visit me is, to say the least, amazing."

The princess gave her silvery laugh again.

"You are as conceited at any other nobleman I have met. I did not come to see you. I came, first, to ride on the new railway; second, to study the conditions existing in this part of the empire, and, third, to look into this new proposition of the czar to induce peas-



ants to settle in Siberia along the line of the railway. It is a very good idea, if the country will support settlers."

"It will under proper help from the government at the start," replied Neslerov. "I am glad you came to me. We shall have a fine time making our investigations."

"I notice that you do not seem to have the free use of your arm," said Olga. "Have you been ill or injured?"

"A slight injury. I fell from an un-

ruy horse."

"You must be more cautious. It must have been a wild beast. You have the name of being an excellent horseman."

When their meal was finished, they strolled together through the rooms of the palace.

"I am quite interested in your palace," said the princess. "It is not the finest I have seen, but it is excellent."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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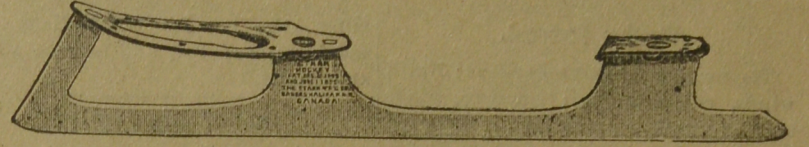
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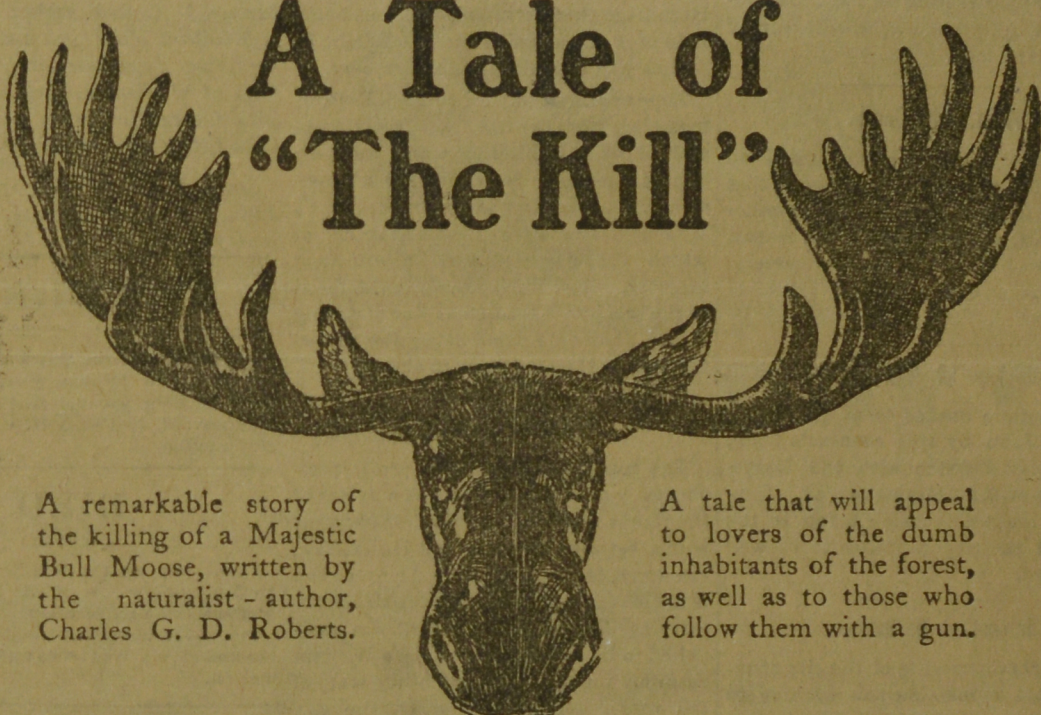
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