

The Mystery of Graslöv By Ashley Towne

A Tale Growing Out of the Adventures of Three Americans Connected With the Building of the Great Trans-Siberian Ry.

Copyright, 1901, by Charles B. Etherington. CHAPTER XIII. A TERRIBLE SITUATION.

The palace of the governor of Tomsk was brilliantly lighted, and carriages crowded the plaza before it. Gaily uniformed officers and elegantly attired ladies passed from them into the spacious rooms. The overnights were at his best and was proud of the beautiful relative for whom he had given this suddenly arranged reception.

Princess Olga, who had slept much of the day after her wearying experiences of the night before, showed no effects of her exhaustion. She received the guests with that calmness, that queenly style, which was all her own.

The garrison band played its Russian music, and the atmosphere in the rooms was laden with perfume. It was a strange and motley gathering, but Olga, who had traveled much in strange places, as well as in centers of civilization, looked upon the crowd with complacency.

A colonel of cavalry, with his handsome wife, when they came to greet her was followed by a young man, who in the barbaric splendor of his rank, a Manchurian mandarin, with a long sword on one side and a short one on the other, wearing his native dress, marched with the crowd, a distinctive figure. He had come to Tomsk to confer with his government with Neslerov concerning the crossing of the border into Manchuria.

The new railway brought the guests from places never before heard of by many who lived in Tomsk. A Persian prince who had but the day before arrived in Tomsk, where he had spent a week studying the convict system—a system impossible to his country—added his gorgeousness to the throng.

If Olga was surprised that at so short a notice so great a gathering could be summoned in that Siberian capital, she gave no sign. She accepted the homage as one who was born to it.

Young officers vied with one another to be near her. Grizzled veterans looked at her and smiled, for it made them glad to see so lovely a princess at Tomsk. By far the most distinguished looking man in the throng was the colonel of the cavalry, whose wife, having been long in the palace, was wont to devote some attention to the princess, while his wife rested from the weariness the excitement brought upon her.

Olga, whose travels had given her a clear insight to human character, singled Colonel Barakoff out at once as a man of sterling integrity and a fearless soldier. He was extremely gracious, and encouraged him to talk, and he was proud of her attention. When the dancing began, the crowd scattered, and Olga, who was not long before Colonel Barakoff and Olga found themselves sitting in a retired spot with the colonel's wife.

"It is the first time," said Olga, "that I have seen you here. It is not a short one, and that one of our noble ladies has condescended to visit our capital. And now you are so kind to have returned to the palace, it causes wonder that she would forsake the pleasures and gaieties of St. Petersburg for this dismal place. I am neither a nihilist nor a socialist, and I am not contented with one self one must find some work to do, and do it well."

"You are very young," said the colonel slowly, "and you are so kind to find me here. I, of course, learned it long ago, but my age is three times yours. You say you have found pleasure in work. What work do you do? Can you ask what work has found favor in your eyes?"

"Presumptuous? Not at all, colonel. I am always glad to talk with one who is able to appreciate it. I have become thoroughly convinced that there are faults in our social system. I am neither a nihilist nor a socialist, and I am not contented with one self one must find some work to do, and do it well."

"And the sentiment," said the colonel, "is a relative, and more than that, to study the convict system as worked out under his rule in Tomsk. Men have been sent to Siberia for those sentiments."

"The colonel," said Olga, "is a relative, and more than that, to study the convict system as worked out under his rule in Tomsk. Men have been sent to Siberia for those sentiments."

"I can do so, although that is not yet of my plans. I may tell you in confidence, however, that I have secured the confidence of the czar and that he is interested in the outcome of my studies."

"In my youthful days we did not hear of such things," said the colonel. "A young woman who at your age and with your wealth and position took upon herself so great a task would be sent forth with a lonely castle and kept a semi-prisoner."

"I fear that some of that same spirit dominates our society to-day," he answered, "but I fancy you will not proceed rapidly. I have secured the confidence of the czar and that he is interested in the outcome of my studies."

"I think it will prevail for a time," she said. "Where would you expect me to go to study the convict system at its worst?"

used for prison cells, for chains were hanging on the walls. The lantern's hand flashed its light into every nook and cranny until at last she reached the end of that passage. Making sure Therese was close behind, she turned her head to look at the passage, running apparently at right angles with the other. This she traversed in the same way until the very bigness of the passage and its side began to awe her.

The first courage that had led her to the desperate act gradually gave way to the awful gloom and mystery of the place. Her feet slipped on the cold, slippery floor, and she found herself in a position not to relinquish the search until she had found the unfortunate victims of Neslerov's hate or proved that they were not there. She began to creep forward, increasing her pace. A door at last greeted her vision—a real door that swung on hinges.

"At last, perhaps," she said. She tried her strength against the door, and though it was not locked, yet she could not open it sufficiently to enter. "There is a key," she said, setting the lantern down upon the floor.

The two placed their shoulders against the door and pushed, and it suddenly opened. Therese stepped into another passage, long into the chamber. A rush of foul air almost stifled Olga. There was a peculiar sound, as if Therese had fallen upon a pile of rubbish. She felt a cold, shivering in her terror. Olga seized the lantern and dashed into the chamber. A cry of terror escaped her. She was in what seemed to be an old tomb. At least, there were heaps of bones scattered about, and into one of these poor Therese had pitched headlong.

Olga swung the lantern and, near to the spot where Therese lay, she saw a skeleton hung in chains. One had lost its head, but the other, by reason of being fastened in a peculiar way, had retained its head. Therese was in a dead faint. Olga was now in a terrible difficulty. She knelt by the side of Therese.

"Oh, she is not dead," she said, and she set her feet upon the floor. "Remain here," she said to Therese, "and if I am lost again you can guide me back to the stairs as the American guided me."

She would her way through the passages and at last reached Denton. "You are a brave little woman," he said, "and I am glad to see you here. You are like you in the world—except one. 'I suppose you mean Francis Gordon,' said the princess.

"I met her at the great fair in Moscow. She was very charitable." "While she talked she tried the key. She found it unlocked. She opened the door and the door swung open. She stepped into another passage, long into the chamber. A rush of foul air almost stifled Olga. There was a peculiar sound, as if Therese had fallen upon a pile of rubbish. She felt a cold, shivering in her terror. Olga seized the lantern and dashed into the chamber. A cry of terror escaped her. She was in what seemed to be an old tomb. At least, there were heaps of bones scattered about, and into one of these poor Therese had pitched headlong.

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do so gladly. But I promise you they are there." "I am a cousin of that Princess Neslerov. The last I saw of her was the Duke of Graslöv. It is that sufficient?" "It is. Then if we work together justice will be done."

"With a small iron key. It was on a key chain," she said, "and it hangs in that passage at the head of the stairs. With that key it is not far from this spot. It was not a long distance when I was brought here."

"It may not be far, but in what direction?" "There was a stupid kind of fellow down here once after I was brought in. He searched the whole of the passage and I think I can guide you to the stairs. Count three passages to the left from that black stone in the wall."

"Now go through that till you reach a heap of rubbish in a little court. I remember the rubbish heap, for I stumbled over it. It was a little passage between two passages, and one lane leads to the left and the other to the right. The one on the right will lead you to the stairs."

Taking her lantern, Olga again started carefully following the directions of Denton. She found the rubbish heap and, taking the passage to the right, soon came to the black stone in the wall. With foot of the stairs while she crept softly up.

In the guardroom (Izgit still lay snoring, and Olga glanced at the door to make sure the bolt had not been disturbed. If a dozen Cosacks had been hammering at the door she would not have faltered now. She reached the door, unlocked it, and found a small iron key suspended from a peg by a chain.

"It must be the one," she said, and she set it in the lock. "Remain here," she said to Therese, "and if I am lost again you can guide me back to the stairs as the American guided me."

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CALLED DOWN By DOUGLAS Z. DOTY.

Copyright, 1902, by Douglas Z. Doty. By birth a gentleman, by force of circumstances a jack of all trades, by profession a raconteur:

"I have a record when I arrived in England, whether the fame of my stories had preceded me. Almost directly I received a letter from Lord Brower of Tentowers castle, in Surrey, requesting me to come down to his place, as he was entertaining a large house party."

"The castle, founded as a monastery, was a most romantic place, in the vicinity of architectural periods. Its maze of winding corridors and hidden stairways suggested mystery."

"My initial appearance before Lord Brower's guests was to be at dinner, and I spent the last moments before leaving my apartment in reading over the list of topics I had jotted down for use during the evening. A rascal, I expected to fill in every link, every dull moment. Suddenly there fell upon the quiet of my room these words:

"We must run up to 5,000 tonight! Do you hear? We must!" "I stared round the room. It seemed as if the sound had come through some dull tapestry in a small alcove. Perhaps the tapestry covered a secret door, but there was no time to investigate. A resplendent footman was waiting to conduct me to Lord Brower's presence."

An interesting lot they were gathered around the dinner table of Tentowers castle that night—that is, they were interesting to me. The captain turned rigid as he grasped the arm of his chair, and for a while his eyes, expressing rage, hate and fear, met mine. I smiled grimly, enjoying the situation. The coup had a different effect on Mrs. Marchand. She faintly gasped, and the captain's composure returned. He sprang to her rescue, and the table was overturned.

"When Mrs. Marchand recovered, the guests were so shocked that they all rose. Marchand shook his head, perhaps because I drummed a rhythmic warning. 'Don't play!'" "I sat in my room an hour later, cogitating over the affair. Lord Brower's guests were entertaining a pair of clever tricksters when a servant brought me a message from Marchand asking an interview in his study. I found the two men waiting for me. Marchand shook his head, perhaps because I drummed a rhythmic warning. 'Don't play!'"

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