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THE MYSTERY OF GRASLOV

By Ashley Towne

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He closed his arms tightly about her and dragged her from the car. The villagers stared in astonishment as they saw him coming toward them with his burden.

"What means this strange happening, little father?" asked a woman of an older man of the village. "Is the man killing her?"

"Let be!" growled the man. "Use your eyes in your house, but meddle not with others. The man's gold is good. He will not hurt her. She is probably his wife."

Russian wives are accustomed to cruelty from their husbands. A beating is but part of their demonstrations of authority as head of the house. The women looked on with apathy, while the men smiled.

"He has married a Tartar," they said among themselves.

"Help! Save me from this man!" gasped Frances as Neslerov half dragged, half carried her into the nearest group.

"Where is your priest?" Neslerov demanded. "Get him at once. Not only he, but all in the place, will receive pay. Call the priest at once!"

"Save me! I am an American! Gordon—the man who built the road—is my father!" cried Frances, struggling again.

A bent old man was seen shambling toward them.

"Come," said Neslerov roughly. "This young woman and I are to be married. Hurry. We have been left behind in that car, and to save her good name she must become my wife. Proceed!"

"No! For pity's sake, do not!" cried Frances. "My father will pay you well! Do not compel me to marry him! I hate him!"

"I command you to marry us!" shouted Neslerov.

A tall man of about middle age stepped from the crowd.

"It is wrong," he said. "Who you are I know not, but it is not the way to win a wife. Release the young woman. Let us hear what she has to say."

"What she has to say! Curse you!" howled Neslerov. He did release her for a moment and sprang forward. His fist shot out against the man's face, without an effort in his own behalf he fell.

"I am Neslerov, governor of Tomsk!" shouted the prince, now perfectly frenzied. "I command you, old dotard, to say the words that will make this girl my wife."

"Please do not!" cried Frances. "He has stolen me from my father! He is a cruel monster! I cannot marry him!"

"He is his excellency, the governor," muttered the old man. "We must obey."

Neslerov seized her by the wrist and swung her toward the priest. The villagers crowded round, awestruck at the great name they had heard. They well knew the governor. Many of them had felt the knout at his command.

"It must be done," again muttered the priest.

"No, no!" cried Frances, trying to wrench away from Neslerov.

A boy slipped quietly away from the crowd and ran.

"Stand there, curse you!" said Neslerov, grasping Frances by the hair. The pain of his rude hand on her lovely hair made Frances cry out in terror, pain and shame. "I'll kill you if you move again!"

There was the sound of a quick and stealthy tread. There was a swish in the air. There was a gasp, a murmur from the crowd, which fell back in consternation.

A heavy Russian riding whip swung through the air in an arc and, descending, cut the skin across the face of Neslerov.

"Curse you!" said a hearty American voice. "I'll have your life for this!"

"Jack! Oh, Jack!" cried Frances, and then, the last vestige of her strength deserting her, she fell unconscious into Jack Denton's outstretched arms.

I arrived in time to see the attempt of yours to take advantage of a defenseless girl. I have been riding along the railway from stream to stream examining the bridges. I reached this place on my horse a moment ago. A boy saw me coming and hurried to tell me what was going on. I had no idea I should find a friend in need of help. But, thank God, I was in time.

"You will never leave this place alive!" said Neslerov.

He plucked a revolver from his pocket and aimed at Denton.

A woman standing near held out her hands and caught the form of Frances and bore it into her house. Denton, with flashing eyes, leaped forward and closed with Neslerov.

"It is a battle to the death between giants!" cried a man in the crowd.

The pistol fell from the grasp of Neslerov, and the whip before wielded by Denton dropped to the ground.

The iron fingers of Denton would close on the throat of Neslerov, and it seemed as though the struggle would end that moment, but Neslerov would wrench himself free and leap at his enemy with a curse and growl.

"It is you or I! One of us must die!" cried Neslerov.

A swinging, crashing blow from the American's right hand sent the governor to the ground, where he lay as if stunned.

"Take care of him, somebody," said Denton in Russian. "I don't want to kill him."

He turned without a look at the fallen man and started toward the hut into which Frances had been carried.

"Look out!" cried a woman.

At the cry, which was echoed in the crowd, Denton turned suddenly. The dastardly Neslerov had feigned. He had risen to his feet and was creeping upon his enemy with a dagger drawn.

"Oh, you are an assassin, eh?" said Denton as he drew his revolver. "Let me see if we can't settle you once for all."

While it might be that not one of the villagers sympathized with Neslerov, yet his act was not a crime to them. With their sordid understanding of women having no rights, no freedom, no liberties save what their lords and masters gave them, the men of this place looked upon the eagerness of Neslerov to be married to so beautiful a girl as natural.

One of them, realizing that the governor's safety was necessary to their own, sprang upon Denton and drove a knife through the fleshy part of his arm.

The pistol fell to the earth near that of Neslerov and two villagers picked them up and hid them.

Like a flash Neslerov was upon his unarmed foe, and his knife was raised to strike, but Denton, with a quicker

CHAPTER VIII.
THE INTERVIEW IN THE HUT.

FRANCES lay on a rude bed, scarcely conscious, and Denton stood a moment looking down solemnly upon the lovely upturned face. He bent over her, touched her brow and felt her pulse. All sense of his own injuries seemed to leave him as he saw her need of immediate care.

Frances felt his touch and looked up at him with about the same expression she might have worn had he been a stern and high priced specialist called in to make an examination.

"You are merely knocked out by the shock," he said, with assumed indifference. "You will probably be all right as soon as we get to Tomsk."

"Yes, if I could get there," she whispered. "My father will be anxious."

"We must relieve his anxiety as soon as possible. You must not worry."

"What will you do? And Neslerov?"

"Never mind Neslerov now. Keep cool. You've got to be braced up a little. I wish I had some wine."

"There was some in the car," she answered. "Neslerov had it. He tried to make me drink, but I would not."

Denton went to the car, still on the main track, and brought from it the remains of the bottle of wine Neslerov had opened. This he took with him to the hut and offered some to Frances.

"I don't want it. I refused it before," she said.

"Oh, don't you want it?" he asked ironically. "I suppose in your keen and subtle mind there is no distinction between a glass of wine offered by Neslerov when you were his prisoner and by me when you are ill."

"I did not mean that," she said meekly. She reached out her hand, took the cup and drained it.

"Now, then," said Denton, coolly seating himself on a stool near her bed. "Tell me this whole miserable business from the beginning."

"I haven't thanked you yet, Jack," she said, with a return of color.

"Never mind thanking me. I did merely what any other American would have done, and, seeing you in danger, it would not have been manly indeed, to stand off. I accept your thanks, but let's get to the business. How did you happen to be here—with Neslerov?"

"We were in Moscow," she said. "There was a meeting about the new railway"



And now began a duel. movement, drew a knife from his belt. He had ridden too often over the tundra to go unprepared for enemies, human and otherwise.

And now began a duel the like of which the banks of the Irish or its branches will probably never see again.

Steel flashed on steel.

The blood from the wound in Denton's arm was dinged over the face and clothing of Neslerov, while that from the bruises on the governor's face grew

thick and dark, making him truly hideous.

With a grasp as of iron Denton seized the hand of Neslerov that held the dagger, but with a wrench the governor got it away and cut to the bone half the length of Denton's finger.

But the American scarcely felt the wound. He was not fighting now for life, nor for vengeance. He was fighting for that girl who lay in the hut. He knew that if Neslerov killed him and was not killed himself, her life would be made such a hell in the power of this monster of brutality that death would be preferable.

A year ago she had told him she did not and never could love him. It had been a quarrel. She didn't want to get married, and he asked her if his rough exterior, the result of years of hard work in rude and dangerous places, was disagreeable to her. He said there were fine gentlemen at Paris, New York, London and St. Petersburg. She had answered that she knew it. She preferred their company to bores. They parted then and had not met till now.

Denton and Neslerov kept fighting on, the villagers too much aghast to step between or utter a word.

Neslerov felt his right arm getting weaker. Denton's knife had slashed through the sleeve of his coat and found the bone near the elbow. An artery must have been cut, for the blood was thrown from the end of the sleeve. Made desperate, he gathered all his strength for a final effort and sprang bodily upon his foe.

Denton, seeing an opportunity and knowing that nothing but a deathblow seemed likely to end the fight, met the plunge and drove his knife into Neslerov's side.

With another curse, a spluttering of blood and a groan the governor of Tomsk sank to the ground at the foot of his adversary unconscious.

"Take care of him, you fellows; no need to let him die," said Denton, examining the wound. "His lung is not touched. Nothing fatal here. I am glad to say. Here, you!"

The old priest came mumbling toward him.

"You know more about surgery than the rest. Get some water, bathe these wounds, take a few stitches in the long cuts and bandage him up."

"Yes, little father," said the priest, trembling. "But what of you?"

"I can take care of myself."

He strode to the bank of the stream, over which he had but a few months before built a bridge, and bathed his wounds. Then he went into the hut to see Frances, as if nothing had happened.

"Yes, I know. That was what took Neslerov there."

"He had an interview with papa while in Moscow—eh?"

"Why do you hesitate? It is not a new experience to have a man want to marry you, is it? You gave him the usual answer, I suppose."

"Oh, Jack! There was but one answer papa could give him. I do not like the prince, and papa knows I will never marry a man I do not love."

"Everybody knows that—who knows you," said Denton soberly.

"He told him about you—and about Vladimir—and the prince got angry."

"About Vladimir? Who is he?"

"Vladimir Paulpoff, an ironworker, now sent."

"Never mind, we will get to that afterward. You started for the Obi, where Gordon is to take a house in Vashnov."

"No, not yet. I must tell you about Vladimir—poor fellow! I met him in the forge—in his shop—one day while the railway was being put through Perm. Papa and I went there. He is a marvelous man, Jack. You would think as much of him as I do if you knew him. He is so handsome and strong. He is—"

"Do you mean young Paulpoff, the blacksmith of Perm?"

"Yes, Jack. Do you know him?"

"I've had him turn out some iron for small bridges. Well?"

"He is so intelligent, and was so anxious to learn, to improve, I helped him. I used to send him books, papers, magazines, scientific works—anything I could get hold of that would help him. He studied hard, poor fellow! He grew to—I think he loved me—eh?"

"Of course you returned his affection. You've done it so—I mean it came quite easy."

Tears glistened in her eyes, and she turned away her head. She had quarreled with this man and had said she would never marry him, and their friendship had been almost cut asunder. But he had saved her from Neslerov. Now he was chiding her.

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VOLCANO DEVASTATES COUNTRY
Plantations Ruined by Rain of Ashes From Colima

Guadalajara, March 2.—The rain of ashes from Mont Colima still continues. Many plantations situated in the rich valleys to the eastward of the volcano have been completely devastated. The slate colored powder covers the ground to a depth of several inches. Lava is pouring down the eastern slope of the mountain. Natives are terror-stricken by the terrific earthquake shocks. These seismic disturbances show no indication of decreasing in violence. Every one is camping out of doors. A pall of smoke that hangs close to the earth and is almost stifling covers the country.

The light of the sun is shut out and lighted lamps are required throughout the day. The cathedrals are crowded with worshippers day and night. Reports have reached Zapotlan of the destruction of many buildings in the towns of Tonila, Santa Maria, Canada, Autlan and Aranja by earthquake shocks.

Wreckage Washed Ashore.
London, March 2.—The gale was renewed on the British isles Saturday night and continued Sunday, but with less violence. Vessels are still taking refuge in the ports, arriving battered by the storm. Others have gone ashore. A quantity of wreckage has been seen off the coast of Northumberland and the indications point to the wreck of the British ship Cambrian Prince, Captain Owens. Later news from the south of Ireland says that the gale was exceedingly fierce. The British steamer Pharsalia went through a terrible experience. The hurricane struck her Feb. 24 and the heavy seas flooded her hold, damaged her cargo, smashed the bridge and almost all the deck fittings. The captain's ribs were broken and several of the crew were injured. The Pharsalia was obliged to put into Queenstown.

FEAR WAR WITH TURKEY
Clash With Russia in the Spring Expected.

GERMANS COMPLICATE MATTERS
Kaiser's Subjects Having Drilled Turkish Troops May Now Finance Sultan for Impending Fight With Czar—Strife Begins in Balkans.

St. Petersburg, March 2.—Some publicists are of the opinion that only the sternest language towards Turkey can prevent a war between Russia and Turkey in the spring. They believe that Turkey will pursue bands of Macedonian revolutionists across the Bulgarian frontier and that public opinion will compel Russia to interfere. The Russians thoroughly understand that a war with Turkey will be a more severe one than that of 1878. Officers are quoted as saying that the Turkish army is the best in the world, owing to its German organization and armament. There is an inclination here to anticipate German financial support of Turkey, and, in view of the situation, forebodings of a clash with Turkey are freely expressed in private, although they are carefully suppressed in the newspapers.

London, March 2.—The Geneva correspondent of the Daily Chronicle telegraphs that news has been received there of an engagement between Macedonian and Bulgarians, near Monastir. The Turks suffered a repulse. After the fighting thirty-two dead and many wounded were found.

Heavy Fire Loss at Halifax.
Halifax, N. S., March 2.—The firemen injured in yesterday's fire are doing so well it is believed all will recover. The loss is now placed at \$300,000, with insurance of \$125,000.

Continued next Tuesday.