## THE MYSTERY OF GRASLOY

By Ashley Towne

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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 boors. 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.

-rake 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 Then he went into the hut to see Frances, as if nothing had happened.

CHAPTER VIII. THE INTERVIEW IN THE HUT. RANCES 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 whis-

pered. "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 Nesleroy 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 seat-

ing 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 Neslerev?

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

"Yes, I know, That was what took Neslerov there." "He had an interview with papa while in Moscow-he"-

"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."

"Ob. Jack! There was but one answer papa could give nim. 1 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,

Vashlov."

Vladimir-poor fellow! I met him in on your hands?"

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

"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.

"One could not know Vladimir with out admiring him," she said suddenly, with a great accession of spirit. "I fail to see why I should be put through this catechism by you."

"You needn't be if you don't want to," he answered coldly. "This is a nice, quiet village. Neslerov is lying not far away, somewhat cut up now, but he will get over that. I could go on my way and leave you if my questions are distasteful. The thing is that there must be an explanation to this affair, and I'd like to know what it is to be. It is no trifling matter to cut the governor of a Russian province to

"Have you been fighting?" she asked

"No," he replied, with a tinge of sarcasm. "Nesierov and I indulged in a few pleasantries. He doesn't feel as gay over them as I do; that's all." "Oh, I see your hand is bandaged-I

never noticed it. Oh, Jack, forgive me!" "We were following a course of inquiry," he said, putting the bandaged hand behind him. "This Vladimiryou met-there was an attachment-so far, so good. Now, how did that lead to this affair?" "I wanted to see Vladimir and went

by train from Moscow to Perm. I found a drosky at the station and was driven to the shops. Shops, house-all were deserted. I found Neslerov there with a painting under his arm. He was taking it away. It was a beautiful picture, a beautiful face. I asked the prince where Vladimir was. He said that all the Paulpoffs-father, mother and Vladimir-had been sent to Sibe-

"Sent to Siberia! That big simple hearted fellow! For what?" "Conspiring with others to kill the

czar. We were alone; the drosky driver went out, and Neslerov tried to kiss me. I fought him; I shot him." "You shot Neslerov?"

"Yes, I shot him. I would again. then returned to Moscow, but did not tell my father anything about the matter, save that Vladimir was sent to Siberia. We soon after started for the Obi and stopped at Perm. We saw the governor, and he promised that if he discovered that Vladimir was innocent he would help him."

"He might as well have said that if he discovered the moon was cheese he'd give it to you for lunch. Things like that are rarely corrected in Russia."

"When we left Perm, Neslerov was on the train. Of course, as papa did not know anything about the shooting in the house of the Paulpoffs he greeted Neslerov as a friend. Everything went well till we had crossed the border and come into Neslerov's own province. At this place-I had been sleeping-I woke up. The car had become detached from the train. I was alone with Neslerov. He took my revolver from me and dragged me here and ordered the priest to marry us. Then

"Yes, I think I came just in time," ald Denton. inen a stern look came again upo

his face. "Frances," he said, "I do not know of course, how this matter will end. If Neslerov wishes, he can destroy me. If he finds it advisable to keep silent then I may find a way to assist this

the way to the Obl." With these words he left the hut and was met at the door by an angry. threatening mob of villagers. "There he is!" growled an old man evidently the leader, "He tried to kill

Vladimir. I think we shall soon be on

his excellency, Kill him!" "Kill him!" said another, "It is the governor's command. He put the iron road, the bridge, the devil wagons, through our country. The czar does not wish it, and we must avenge the wrong, Kill him!"

CHAPTER IX. DENTON TURNS LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEER. ENTON presented an unruffled

"Take me to the governor," he said. "The governor is resting," growled a fellow whose face was a mass of greasy hair. "You will kill him."

"Nonsense! Take me to the governor. If you kill me, he will die." "Why is that, builder of bridges? Is there a god who avenges the death of

Americans?" "It will need no god to do that now. The case is simply that Neslerov needs better care than you can give bim. He is badly injured. It is necessary that he shall be taken to Tomsk at once. I afterward. You started for the Obl, can start within the hour. There will not be another train to the Obl in four days. Do you desire to keep your pre-"No, not yet. I must tell you about | clous governor here and have him die

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"No. Let us see what the governor has to say."

It was a solemn crowd that marched in two columns, with Denton between, to the hut of the village priest, where

Neslerov lay. "Why do you bring him here?" asked the priest. "Heard you not what his excellency said?"

"Hold your peace. Wait till you hear them speak together," was the reply. Neslerov looked up at his conqueror. and an expression of hatred came into his eyes. Denton made no show of sentiment or compassion.

"I understand you commanded these villagers to kill me," he said, standing at the side of the bed and looking coldly and sternly at his victim. "I just wanted to say before they kill mewhich they certainly will do if you insist-that in that case you would probably die here for lack of proper care." "You cannot help me - you would

not," answered Neslerov. "That is for you to say. I am not a murderer. I had no desire to kill you. You attacked me, and I defended myself. I am going back to Tomsk, provided your savage villagers don't kill me, and I merely came to ask if you would be pleased to go."

"How?" he asked. "In the same car you came thus far

"But how? There is no train due for "I will take you to Tomsk if you promise never again to molest Mr.

Gordon or his daughter." "I promise," said Neslerov. "I will order the villagers to permit you to

Denton then went to the car and examined it. He discovered where a flaw in the iron had weakened the

He was followed at a short distance by several young men, among whom was the boy who had run to tell him that a woman was being roughly handled by Neslerov, and who had taken his horse to shelter. He ordered the boy to bring the horse. Mounting, he was soon out of sight. He did not go far, however. He rode along the track until he reached a siding a short distance from the bridge, where there was an old construction engine.

Denton examined the old hulk. It was fit only for drawing one or two cars. Denton carried water from the river and filled the boiler and built a Soon after the villagers were sur-

prised to see a wheezy, rickety old engine coming slowly, with a prodigious noise, into view. Denton's horse had no difficulty in keeping up with it. The old engine was coupled to the

car, and then Denton went for "The train is ready," he said.

"The train! What train?" "The train that is to carry you to the Obl, where you will join your father."

"But there is no train!" "There is a train, and as the steam is up and the track clear I suggest haste. Your father is probably anx

She went with him. At the sight of the engine she understood. "You are a wonderful-you are doing

this for me!" she said. "Yes, but Neslerov will be a passen-

"And you?" "Engineer, conductor, guard-all." He took her to the car and made her comfortable.

Neslerov was carried to the car by the villagers. The backs of two seats were turned down, a bed was made for him, and he lay there quiet and seemingly content.

"Of course, I know that you are seriously wounded," said Denton to him, "and the possibility of your doing any mischief is small, but I want to tell you before we start that if I catch you at any tricks I will kill you as I would

Neslerov nodded, and Denton went

It was an exciting start, though the it pass." audience was small. The villagers stared, then laughed as the little old engine puffed and screeched and scrap- | ngain." ed as it got under way.

But it had a man in charge of it who was accustomed to overcoming difficultles. And the way he made it groan and work would have made glad the heart of the man who had abandoned It on the siding six months before.

In the car was stlence, Neslerov was too weak to talk; Frances would not talk to him if he wished. She remained at her end of the car, save to go in mercy to him and offer him water at intervals. At such times he would look up at her with an earnest, inscrutable expression on his face. She would not speak, nor he,

Suddenly at a siding toward which he had been aiming Denton turned the engine to the right and brought the little train to a standstill. They had been on the road sixteen hours and had traveled 210 miles.

Frances and Neslerov both looked up as the train stopped and saw the grimy engineer enter the car.

"There is a village near here," he said, "and just beyond this siding there is a small signal box. I have just vis- Tomsk was the village of Tivoloffsky, a ited it, and there is a train coming this way from Tomsk. Undoubtedly, as there is no regular train due, this is a searching party out after Frances Gordon. Now, I have no wish to start an international controversy. What story

shall we tell?" "Tell the truth," said Frances. "It does not, as a rule, harm any person who is innocent."

"No," said Neslerov; "not as a rule. But we are in a part of the world where customs are different from yours. If you tell the truth, you will never make the world believe you. But you will not understand; I cannot tell you."

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ces scornfully. "You mean that your reputation is so bad that if it were known that you had that car left behind to compel me to marry you everybody will be sure I am your wife. Is

"Yes; something like that." "But, then, there is my word," said

"Your story will be believed by your people, my story by mine," said Nesierov. "Let us each tell what we please.

Denton nodded and went back to his engine. But he did not start. The whistle of a speeding locomotive was borne to him by the breeze. It cameone engine and a car, the same as that he was on, but a modern locomotive of American make. Gordon was in the car with some officials from Tomsk. "Hey! That you, Denton?" he gasp-

ed as the grimy bridgebuilder stepped into the car, which was stopped at the side of the construction engine. "My girl and the governor of Tomsk got left behind in a car. Seen"-

"I'm ail right," said Frances as she emerged from her car and flew to her father's arms.

"Did Denton save you? What was it? Where is Neslerov?" asked Gordon "On, ne is in there," said Frances coolly. "We've had a lively experience. I thought at one time we'd be killed by some savages. But'Mr. Denton and the prince-oh, let's get on; I'm tired out and.hungry."

Denton heard and wondered. In every new experience he had had with Frances Gordon he had been made more and more astonished by the uncertain moods, the whims, the strange turns her caprice would take.

where he can do no more mischief." "Hitch on to this train and haul her "I begin to understand," said Jansky back to the Obi," said Denton. "If the road doesn't want this engine, I can use it at the Obi bridge."

This attachment was soon made, and Mr. Gordon, after visiting the prince and congratulating him upon his escape from the savages, assisted in



At the sight of the engine she understood. transferring to him some of the comforts to be found in the other car. The Russian officials swarmed around him

and praised his courage. "And that American! He is a brave one too!" they said. "Yes; he is brave-braver than I,"

said Neslerov weakly. The train started back toward Tomsk. It had about ninety miles to go to reach the Obi. During the journey Denton and Frances found themselves side by side in the rear car, with no one near enough to hear their

low spoken tones. "I cannot understand you," said Denton, "You first said tell the truth, then you yourself told the first deliber-

ate lie. Why?" Frances looked at him coolly. "Because 1 thought it over. There was a good deal in what Neslerov said. Then, again, you and my father have work to do, a career to make, money to earn, and with the enmity of Neslerov you would be ruined. I studied it well. It is better as I said it. Let

"Here we are at Vashlov," he said

"For the time being you are home "Yes," she replied, with the slightest tremor in her voice, "Thanks to you, I am home again-in my temporary

CHAPTER X. JANSKY, SUPERINTENDENT OF POLICE, ESLEROV lay in his palace in Tomsk, slowly recovering. His heart was filled with rage, and he longed for vengeance, His closest confidant now was Jansky, who, owing to his meritorious conduct in the apprehension of so great a gang of conspirators as the Paulpoffs, was promoted at the request of Neslerov to a post where he could assist his superior in his plans and ambi-

He had told Jansky the story of the ride from Moscow, and it was of course colored to suit his purpose. Jansky had received his commission-the first important one since his arrival at Tomsk -to watch the American and find an opportunity to wreak vengeance.

About twenty miles from the city of small mining town peopled by convicts. To this town the Paulpoff's had been sent. Vladimir was useful in the mines. With his tremendous strength he could do the work of two, and in his simple obedience to the mandates of his superiors he never uttered a complaint. The old people did menial work, cooking for the convicts who had no families or cleaning in the houses of

This new life came hardest upon the old people, and it was their sufferings ! ly. that made Vladimir curse under his

him-your enemy."

One day Jansky entered the room where Neslerov sat or half reclined. "Well, what is it? I see you have something to say," said Neslerov. "I have, your excellency," replied the superintendent of police. "It concerns

"The American?" "Yes. I have obeyed your commands

-he has been constantly watched. And at last we are in a position to ttrike." Neslerov sat up straight.

"What? Tell me at once." "It is not yet revealed what the man's object is, but he and the Paulpoffs are plotting again." "The Paulpoffs?"

"They and the American. He has risited them twice. It was overheard conversation about a picture."

Neslerov glanced at a painting that hung on the wall. It was the painting he had taken from the Paulpoffs' house at Perm.

"What can he know about the picture?" asked the governor. "I do not know. That is, as I said, not yet revealed."

"Jansky," he said, "I know what the object is if you do not. Listen carefully now to what I say. It is quite possible the American has discovered the existence of the original of that picture you see there. It is a small medallion, probably in a locket. It was lost some years ago by a member of my family and bears relation to a great mystery-the mystery of Gras-

Jansky shut his eyes and seemed to be thinking.

"Jansky, your life and mine depend en your action now. Do you understand?"

" "necestabe nothing." "That picture, if it is the one I mean, must be brought to me. The American, if he proves to be interested in it, must know or suspect something I do not wish him to know. There are ways whereby even an American could disappear in Siberia. And, Jansky, Vladimir Paulpoff is a most dangerous plotter even here. He ought to be placed

grimly. He bowed and left the palace and rode toward Tivoloffsky.

Two days passed, during which Jansky watched and kept himself in readiness to act. Then, while Mamma Paulpoff was alone in her but, she heard an imperative knocking at the door. Papa Paulpoff and Vladimir had just gone to the mine. Denton, the American, had left the but but a short time before. Mamma Paulpoff had been through so much trouble of late that the slightest sound jarred upon her. She turned whiter still and stepped backward as she saw the dark and forbidding face of Jansky. Behind Jansky were two of the Tomsk po-

"You are Mamma Paulpoff," said Jansky, slipping his foot in the door and working his way inside.

"I am; you know me; I was at Perm," faltered the trembling old wo-"I am quite well aware that you

were at Perm, old woman, and also that conspiring son of yours. It showed the mercy of the czar that you received no worse punishment. This is heaven compared to what you deserved." "We had done nothing, your excel-

"What! You still persist in that lie! You were all in the game, and you are still at it, let me tell you."

"It is not so!" wailed the old woman, having visions of horrible punishments of which she had heard. "Don't tell me," said Jansky, brandishing a-whip he carried. The other two did the same, but their whips were

The old woman crouched against the

"Don't lie to me again," thundered Jansky. "I have been watching you every day since you came to this place. I say you are still conspiring." "It is not so! I swear it in the name of God!" cried Mamma Paulpoff.

you if you do not tell the truth. You are receiving a visitor who is suspect-"I-a visitor! I know no one!" gasp-

"Let me tell you, it will be worse for

ed Mamma Paulpoff. "Oh, do you not? But you were here when he came. Did he come to see you, your husband or your son?"

"Who-of whom do you speak?" asked the frightened old woman, "Of whom would I speak save that accursed American? He has twice made attempts upon the life of the governor of Tomsk. Yet the governor in the kindness of his heart has not molested him. But he was warned if a third attempt was made it would go

"Ah, it is impossible! He is so goodso kind"-"Good and kind, eh? In what manner does he display it?"

hard with him."

"Oh, he came-he came"-The old woman stumbled and floun dered. It had been borne in upon her understanding by Papa Paulpoff that on no account must she breathe a word to any person concerning the visit of which Jansky spoke.

"Come, out with it!" stormed Jansky. "He came-I do not know why he came," murmured the old woman in de-

"I will tell you. He came to conspire

against the life of Neslerov, governor of Tomsk." "No, no! I swear he did not." "Good! Then if you know he did not, you must know why he did come here. Out with it, now, if you value your

"My life! Ah, you would not harm a helpless old woman!" For answer Jansky brought his whip down on her bony shoulders.

"Have mercy!" cried the unfortunate. "Will you tell why the American visited this house?" "I know not!"

over the door!" he commanded savage-His two gallant men needed no further bidding. The aged woman was

"Take her; tie ber thumbs - there,

seized, cords were fastened to her thumbs, and she was placed standing in the doorway Jensky had indicated, with her thumbs hung above her head. "Tear the rags from her back!" A rude hand tere away her garments

"Now, then, old hag," said Jansky, 'nd I have come for the trath A pure hard Soap

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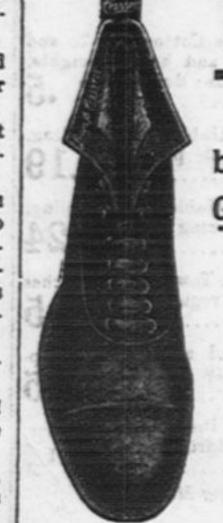
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