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THE MYSTERY OF GRASLOV

By Ashley Towne

cheeks of Neslerov.

CHAPTER I. THE FATHER AND THE LOVER OF AN AMER-

ICAN GIRL. HE great Transsiberian railway had progressed as far to the eastward as the Obi, and trains carrying soldiers, convicts, sightseers, railway constructors, laborers and supplies, with some goods for trade with Manchuria, ran from

Moscow. The possibilities of this immense line of railway made the people of Eurepean Russia gasp. It opened up such a prospect of trade as they had never dreamed of. It gave them a speedy entrance into a region of their domain the crossing of which had formerly oceupled months and involved much

hardship. What a change there was from the old sledges or foot trains of convicts to motives, at once a source of delight and wealth in the world would make and terror to the people whose territory they crossed!

change so remarkable a success was James Gordon, an American engineer, who had charge of much of the advance work of the road.

Gordon was a typical American, ready to go anywhere to build a railway so long as the pay was sufficient to make it an object for him to take his daughter with him.

For Frances Gordon was her father's companion, secretary and comfort.

Left motherless at an early age, she had been brought up by strict aunts till she revolted. Her father had been surveying a route acress New Mexico for a new road, fondly and longingly thinking of his daughter in her faraway home in New York, when, lo, the young lady herself, then aged nineteen, put in an appearance mounted on a broncho and accompanied by a half breed guide, to whom she spoke in so authoritative a tone that he bowed before her slightest wish in abject obedience. Since that day Frances Gordon was to be found wherever her father

A year and a half after they had finished the work in Mexico they journeved together to Russia, where Gordon was to take charge of the important part of putting through the railway that was destined to revolutionize the trade and commerce of the world.

This great railway had progressed as far as the Obl river, in the government of Tomsk, Siberia, when a meeting of managers, engineers and government officials was ordered at Moscow. Thither from the Obi journeyed James Gordon and Frances.

Thither also journeyed Nicholas Neslerov, prince of the empire and governor of the province of Tomsk.

Prince Neslerov was one of the wealthiest nobles of the land, was about thirty-five years of age and had, besides his exalted position as governor of Tomsk, estates in various parts of Russia, particularly a fine one at Graslov, in the government of Perm.

It was after the convention, which had to do with certain concessions and arrangements that were necessary as the road drew near the border of Manchuria, the crossing of certain moun-Agricaltural, Domestic tains, the bridging of certain streams. that Mr. Gordon was preparing to reand 'Dairy Implements turn to the Obi, where the western end of his operations was laid, the operations themselves reaching eastward to Lake Baikal, in Irkutsk.

To him one day as he sat smoking at his hotel in Moscow came Prince Nesle-

"Good morning, your excellency," said Gordon, who had met the prince at several conferences and now knew him because of the fact that the operations had passed almost across his province. "Glad to see you. When do you return to Tomsk?"

"I shall not be long behind you, my friend," replied the prince. "It is a fact, however, that upon your answer to a certain question which I shall put to you depends many of my acts in the immediate future. M. Gordon, you are

an American." "So I believe; I have heard it hinted at," said Mr. Gordon, wondering what

was coming. "And I am a Russian of the Rus-

"That, too, I believe, is a well authenticated fact."

"I am wealthy, a governor of a provmy government we have met frequently; we have been friends."

"Yes," replied Gordon, rather dubiously, stroking his chin.

power protected you." "I believe you," said Gordon, failing when they meet-coolly so. What could

to remember the time when he needed I do? She had to have her own way." the protection of the prince.

"I merely express myself thus to recall to you my friendship," said the prince. "Now I come to the real errand that brought me here. I love your daughter."

"Eh!" exclaimed Gordon, rousing himself and stiffening perceptibly. "I repeat, sir, that I love your daugh-

ter I want her for my wife, my prin-A cloud of smoke came from Gor-

CHAPTER II. THE BLACKSMITH AND THE PICTURE. N a road leading from the city

of Perm toward the forest on the south there stood a rude cluster of buildings, all of jection to your knowing who it is. It them old and in a poor state of repair. is Denton, the bridge builder. Jack This collection of huts was the home Denton was the son of one of my oldest and forge of the Paulpoffs, ironwork Here worked old Michael Paulpoff

through the rascality of a man he trust- and his son Vladimir, and it had been ed. Jack was a sort of genius and ask- to this uninviting place that Frances ed me what profession to take up. I Gordon had come to make the chance acquaintance of the young giant.

The buts and the surroundings were rapidly growing even less inviting, for nothing was being done now to keep anything in repair.

A collection of household goods, over which old Mamma Paulpoff watched carefully, gave evidence that the famment to me. Jack and she have been ily were about to remove themselves friends since they first went to school. and their belongings to another place.

one were at work. The blows that like his noble master, seemed surprised But she won't have him for some rea- Vladimir struck were tremendous. The at his surroundings. son. Said they could never be roman- iron under his hammer bent and flatince and shall soon be promoted to a tic lovers or some such argument. tened as the sparks shot like fireworks better station. Since you entered the Couldn't love him because she had to the far corners of the place. There rude territory in the southern part of known him all her life. Thought it was a gay laugh on his handsome face was easier to love a stranger, I sup- -a face that was almost childlike in its simplicity and guilelessness.

"There was nothing to break off. Paulpoff!" the young man said glee-"When you needed protection, my They were never engaged. She sim- fully, plunging his tongs into the white place for a spot nearer the railway." "What will?" asked the old man,

"The day I can take you and the lit-

tle mother to a better home." "We have been happy here," replied can ask Frances if you like, but it old Papa Paulpoff, looking round at the

"Yes, we have been happy-we shall all." "There is some one in whom your always be happy, for we are simple daughter is much interested, and per- and require little. But with greater ting married?" comfort and more money greater happiness ought to come. It is fine to feel yourself growing to be somebody in the

en. It is study that does it, and work. I think the knowledge gives me more pleasure than the wealth. But we also need the wealth."

The old man sighed.

"Yes, that is good, that knowledge. But you will grow away from us. You will perhaps marry that American girl, and she would not like our simple "Through pity, I suppose, and pity ways."

The hammer in Vladimir's hand came down with redoubled force.

"What is that you say-our Vladimir | wealthiest princes." talking of marrying?" asked the tremulous voice of Mrs. Paulpoff. "I came to say that the meal is ready, and I find-what do I find?"

"Oh, Papa Paulpoff is dreaming one of his dreams," said Vladimir, with a gay laugh.

Papa Paulpoff. "Is it not quite possible that our Vladimir may marry that handsome American girl?"

not love"-"Oh, nonsense!" cried Vladimir. "We tect?" are friends. She is good. I admire.

I am a peasant. She is"-There came the sound of cursing outside and the fall of a horse's hoofs. A shout took the old man to the door.

"Curses upon this beast!" came an angry voice as a man about thirty-five, clad in a neat riding suit, entered the room striking his high boottops with his whip. "I have just been thrown. In some mysterious manner my horse, who never stumbles, caught his foot in something, tore loose his shoe and hurl- er." ed me to the ground. The horse is uninjured, but he has lost the shoe. I heard the sound of a smithy and came to you for assistance. I must reach pleasure of it, unless one is well known. Graslov tonight, and the delay is seri- It will come in time," said Vladimir.

shoers," said the old man. "The rail- toward the big boy. road"-

"But surely you can make a shoe and put it on. I must go forward, and I do not wish to lame this valuable horse."

"Certainly, we will shoe the horse," put in Vladimir, whose kind heart could never refuse any request that was reasonable and proper. "I will attend to it at once." "But the meal is waiting," said the

eld weman.

"The meal is but a short distance, and Graslov is far," said Vladimir, "I will shoe the horse and permit the prince to proceed."

"How did you know that I was a prince?" asked the stranger, looking about him with a keen eye that was

full of inquiry. "The herse is of the herd at Graslov, the seat of the Neslerovs," was the answer. "I know the herd and think I have shed this very horse before."

"Good! That is better than putting him into the hands of a stranger," said the rider. "Is your name Paulpoff?" "It is, I am Vladimir Paulpoff, The

little father here is Michael." "Ah, I have heard of you. You have guessed correctly. I am a prince, My steward, who has charge of my estate while I am away in Siberia, has told that you can bend an iron bar with

Vladimir in response picked up an iron bar about four feet long and an inch thick and bent it double with no apparent effort.

"Good God!" exclaimed the prince. "Are you that powerful?"

"We acquire muscle in this work," Vladimir answered, "and I was born powerful."

A look of wonder had spread over the face of the prince. He sat upon a rude stool while the other two began to pre-



talking of marrying?"

pare for shoeing the horse. The fine But still the old man and the young animal was brought inside, and he,

> "This is not much of a place for successful men," said Neslerov, looking around him.

"Oh, that will be a happy day, Papa have come too soon. See, nothing is being done. We are about to leave this

"Oh, is it not?" said Vladimir. "When looking sidewise at his son, but contin- one has a powerful friend to send the ironwork to him, it is easy to get along. We shall have a fine shop and ten men employed in the work. Instead of this hovel my father and mother shall live in a fine house, and my father shall work no more. I shall make money for

"Ah! Then I suppose you will be get-

of. I do not know."

American girl who thinks well of

"Hush!" exclaimed Vladimir impatiently. "You are speaking of some one whose name must be sacred."

His face was flushed, and Neslerov looked at it searchingly.

"You are very fortunate," said Neslerov jokingly. "I can get no one to mar-

ry me." "You but jest. Any one would be pleased to marry one of Russia's

"But such a one!" continued the indiscreet old man. "She is beautiful, she is rich, and she sends him books." "Good! She is educating you. She must love you," said Neslerov. "Oh, as to love, that is different. Her

acts are kind, and I feel grateful. But "But is it not so, old woman?" asked for marrying - it will require a fine man to make her happy." "He will make any one happy," put

in the old woman, with a glance of "I have seen it so," answered the old | pride at the young giant. "Any girl, woman. "It seems that no young wom- even though she might be a princess, an would take this interest if she did would get no better for a husband. Look at those arms! Can they not pro-

"They could fell a bull!" said Nesle-Why, I could almost worship her, but | rov. "How do you pass the time here? Do you go to the nearest village or to Perm and play?"

"Not he!" said the old man, pausing long enough in his work to add his tribute to this son they loved so well. "That young man spending his time at a village! I think not, your excellency. With his books he spends his nights. He stadies or he paints."

"What's that? Paints!" "Aye, indeed yes. He is a born paint-

"And shoeing horses?"

"One gets a kopeck or two for shoeing horses. One must paint for the

"See, he is not so simple as he looks," "It is long since we were mere horse- said Papa Paulpoff, nodding his head "Very far from simple, I should say,"

answered Neslerov. "Old woman!" shouted Papa Paulpoff suddenly, so suddenly that she jumped in alarm. "Go get the picture. Let the prince see the face of her who

is so kind to Vladimir." The old woman obeyed and ran out. "Her picture! You have her picture

painted!" stammered Neslerov. "Yes, I, and the good part of it is that she knows nothing of it. I shall give it to her when she comes again to

see us," said Vladimir. "But I do not understand. How could you draw a face without having it before you?" asked the prince.

"Ha! It is never from my sight. The most beautiful face! A face that one could not forget. I drew it-I painted it-two-three and four times from

memory, and always alike." At this juncture the old woman returned with a picture in a frame. Silently she handed it to Neslerov. He sat with it in his hands, gazing down hungrily upon the features he knew so well. It showed two things-first, that there was, undeveloped in the young man, a talent that would make him famous if it ever got a chance; secend, that he must have the picture of the girl indelibly in his mind to paint working for the railroad. It is said so true a pleture from memory. And, knew that this man was a most dan-

gerous rival for her hand. "But that is not all he has done," said

the old woman exultingly. "Pshaw!" exclaimed Papa Paulpoff. "He has done nothing else worth men-

tioning." Vladimir looked up in surprise and caught a swift look of warning flashed from Michael's eyes to those of his wife. The warning flash was also seen by Neslerov, and his curiosity was

"Surely this cannot be all," he said. "Such a talent must have an outlet. There must be something else. Come! I will look at all you have and buy

what I want." "But not that," replied Vladimir. "I could not sell that."

"But another of the same face?" "No. I could not sell that face." "Then let me see something elsesomething as good as this-and I will

buy it." "There is another woman's face"began Mamma Paulpoff. "Yes, and as beautiful a face as this,

but a Russian," added Vladimir. "It was a picture. Papa Paulpoff had it. I found it one day and painted one from it." "Show it to me," said Neslerov.

His eyes were fixed on the face of Vladimir with something like fear in them now. He glanced from one to another of the group.

Papa Paulpoff showed evidences of nervousness, but Vladimir was eager to satisfy the prince. He sent the old woman for the other portrait. She brought it and placed it in the

hands of the prince. At the first glance his face went white to the very lips. His hands shook. His frame trembled. "Good heavens!" was breathed under his mustache. The words were not

heard, but the manner of the man did not escape Papa Paulpoff. "Who is this-it is a beautiful woman-but her name?" asked Neslerov, and his voice had turned suddenly hoarse in spite of the effort to control

himself. "I found a small picture one day after a party of nobles passed by," answered Papa Paulpoff. A swift glance of suspicion shot from

the eyes of Neslerov to the face of Papa Paulpoff. But the old man's face was perfectly impassive. "I will buy this. Name your price,"

said the prince. "And I will buy the other, the one you found." "Alas, it is lost!" exclaimed Papa Paulpoff. "It was in a small house we

had years ago, and it burned down." "And the picture destroyed?" "Alas, yes. It was so pretty, a noble

woman, perhaps even a princess," sai Papa Paulpoff. "I wept like a chi when it was lost."

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church tower with eyes that saw no church.

"You seem surprised," said the prince. "Is it a matter of surprise that a man should love so noble and beautiful a young woman as your daughter?" "No," said Gordon slowly, "and if it

were I would be used to it by this time. You are not the first." A slight pallor appeared on the

"You do not mean that she-your daughter Frances-is already promis-"No," answered Gordon. "I don't

know that she is, but I do know that you are not the first who has asked for her. Even now you may be too late." "Impossible! I have seen no one of two."

my-of her own-station near her." "We in America," said Gordon, "look upon this question of station or rank the swiftly moving cars that were with different eyes than you do. If a drawn by the puffing, screaming loco- man suited Frances, all the rank, titles

no difference." "She is different from girls in Eu-

Among those who had made this rope," said the prince, biting his lip. Gordon let out a jeyous guffaw. "I should say she was!" he said. "Different! Why, she is a real, whole,



"I love your daughter." elgarcties, gamble at eards and race | "And I am always glad to meet you, after titles and wealth. Not my girl, Mile, Gordon," he replied. "Did you prince. Frances has a healthy mind enjoy your drive?"

healthy, and-well, she is my boss, I | See, I have quite a number of purcan tell you!"

"Won't do a bit of good, I tell you. a friend, a young man fitted by nature your hands." than ever." If I thought you were the thest man on to adorn a higher station than the one earth, my wishes would not prevail to which he was born. I send him mean Frances to curry you. She will books, and he studies. You could help

make her own choice, when it is made, him, prince. With your power, your

has aiready been made." "No. I did not mean that, prince. It | "You are very kind to my poor coun-

We have each other's confidence." "Still it could not be possible that you suggest I shall be pleased to de

she would be in love and you not know | so." "It might, and I will tell you why. the hotel. She has refused to marry the man I chose for her, the finest young man, in

my estimation, on earth."

"Then you have already given your allegiance to a lover." "I gave it to the lover, but Frances would not marry him. I have no obfriends. Old Denton was at one time ers. worth a lot of money, but lost it told him bridge engineering. He is

one of the best at the business now and is only twenty-five. He is out near the Obi. The big iron bridge we are to put across the Obi will be his work."

"It is a fascinating profession. And your daughter refused him?" "Yes, and it was a great disappoint-He loves her, and his love is the kind that a father likes to see his girl get. pose, who could bamboozle her."

"And so it was broken off?"

ply refused him. They are friendly fire and withdrawing a bar of iron. "A prosaic friendship such as that is uing his work. not dangerous," said the prince. "Have

I your permission to enter the list?"

won't do a bit of good. You are too dingy interior. rich, and Frances has peculiar notions." haps you have not heard. It is my duty to inform you, although I myself do not attach much importance to the

"My permission is worthless. You

and the handsome face of the young ironworker pleased her, and she talked with him. She saw that he was a magnificent specimen of a man and fitted by nature to adorn a higher station. She is trying to assist him in improving himself." "You take this very coolly," said the prince. "But, being Russian, perhaps our customs are so different that this free intercourse between a girl like your daughter and a mere ironworker seems more to me than to you. Then

"Oh, the blacksmith of Perm!" ex-

claimed Gordon, with a slight coldness

in his voice, as though he did not relish

having the story told him by the prince.

"Does Frances-does your daughter

"Goodness, no! She is interested, she

"Well," said Gordon, laughing, "if it

does in this case neither you nor I can

prevent it. I am sure, however, the

girl is fancy free, and, as for him, he

is too simple and sensible to look upon

their friendship as more than ordinary.

They met in this way: When the road

was crossing into Tobolsk, I wanted

some peculiar ironwork done, and she

went with me. The stature and strength

likes him and is trying to help him."

"I am fully aware of all that."

love that man?"

soon leads to love."

"No, I do not assure you of anything of the kind. I do not know. I think, though, if there was Frances would tell me. If there is, she will have her way; if there is not, the same.'

you assure me there is nothing more

than mere friendship between these

"But if this blacksmith asked her to marry him would you consent?" "I'd have to." "Do you consider such a thing prob-

able?" "Prince, I know as little about it as you do. There was only one man-Jack Denton-that I wanted for a son-inlaw, and she won't have him. Now, I know little about her plans, if she has any. She might fall in love with you, in which case I could not prevent her marrying you. If she does not fall in love with you, I could not compel her

to marry you if I would." "I am pleased at your candor," replied the prince. "I shall soon have an opportunity to speak to her myself. I trust that this conversation will not interrupt our friendship." "Nonsense! I appreciate the honor

you have done my girl. But unless she loves you your case is hopeless." The prince bowed and took his departure, and Gordon, laughing, turned into

the hotel. "I'll have to tell her," he said. Then, with a sudden resolve: "No, I won't either. I need the friendship of the prince, and if she knows he wants to marry her who can tell what trouble it

As Neslerov was leaving the hetel he met Frances returning from a drive. "I am pleased to see you, Prince Neslerey," she said, offering her hand.

may cause?"

and is as noble as she is good looking. "Yes, but I did not go far. I visited But she has a mind of her own, if it is several bazaars where books are sold. cluses." "You charm me. I am more in love | "You love books as well as action." "I love them-yes. But these are for

influence, you could do much for him. "You lead me to believe this choice I refer to Vladimir Paulpoff, the blacksmith of Perm." might be so, for all I know to the con- tryman," said the prince, with a smile, trary. Frances might love a man and | "To please you I will make it my businot yet be ready to tell me, although ness to see this blacksmith, and if there is nothing secretive about her. there is any way in which I may be of use in assisting him along the lines

She thanked him and passed on into

What is it that you say-our Vladimin

The old woman, patient now under the rebuke of Vladimir, stood waiting.

"Ho!" chuckled the old man. "You

"That is something I have not thought

"Somebody else knows," chuckled the

world-to feel yourself expand, broad- doting Papa Paulpoff. "There is an He was looking at a distant thing. There is a blacksmith"-