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# THE MYSTERY OF GRASLOV

By Ashley Towne

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## CHAPTER XVII.

"I AM GOING TO MARRY YOU!"

It was noon in Tomsk, and the Princess Olga had not yet slept. She sat at her window, which faced toward the great plaza, and watched the street. Suddenly there came to her ears the faint sound of a bugle. It came from the direction of the new railway station. The princess smiled. Then came a knock at her door.

"Open it, Therese."

Therese was pale and trembling. The events of the past two nights had shaken her nerves till she was on the verge of collapse. But she obeyed, and the same lieutenant who had assisted during the night came in.

"I fear for your life!" he said. "Neslerov has recovered and is cursing like a madman. He called for me and ordered me to fetch you to him."

"It will not be a difficult task," said the princess. "I will go."

"But he will kill you. He is speaking words that no sane man could ever speak. He says if he is to be destroyed he will destroy you first."

"Does he know that Vladimir is gone?"

"He suspects it. He has not been to see."

Olga looked from her window. Three men were riding abreast, coming toward the palace, and after them a detachment of the soldiers always at the station.

"Some one comes!" said the officer. "Yes. Do you know who that is?"

"I do not," replied the officer. "It must be one of the generals."

"You will see," said Olga. "Come! We will go to Neslerov!"

The governor glared at her in mad fury.

"You drugged that wine! You put me to sleep!" he shouted.

"I drugged the liquor, for I had work to do," she answered.

"What have you done? Let us be frank. You came here as an enemy and as a spy."

"I came to right a wrong; to avenge the crime of Graslov."

"What do you know?"

"I know the truth."

"What do you intend to do?"

"Restore that which is lost and undo what was done by wickedness."

An evil look came into his face, and he stepped toward the door. The lieutenant blocked it.

"Out of the way, dog!" cried Neslerov.

"I protect her highness."

"You! You protect against my orders!"

"There is a higher than you. I obey the czar."

Neslerov started back, so powerful in effect is the name of the czar.

"The czar?"

At the very door of the palace a bugle blew its blast.

"Make way! Admit his excellency the governor general," came a voice. Neslerov went white and leaped at Olga.

"You sent for him, and this means my death! We die together!"

"In the name of the czar!" cried Olga, and the sword of the lieutenant touched the breast of Neslerov.

"What means this?"

The voice came from a tall and soldierly man wearing a brilliant uniform, who blocked the doorway with his burly form.

"De Muloff! Governor general!" gasped Neslerov.

"Sit down," said the governor general sternly. "You sent for me in haste, princess. I came as soon as possible. Fortunately there was a train."

"The railroad has saved me and the Duke of Graslov," said Olga.

Neslerov darted a look of hatred toward her.

"Bring Therese, my attendant," said Olga to the lieutenant.

There was another commotion at the entrance, and three soldiers and an officer came in with two prisoners.

"To the governor!" cried the officer. "There was murder at Tivolofsky!"

Olga started up, and so did Neslerov. The governor general turned calmly to see who had come. The two prisoners were Vladimir and Papa Paulpoff.

"Bring them in here," ordered Olga. "Let them be brought before the governor general."

"This man murdered the superintendent of police and Unsethob," said the officer in charge.

"True," said Vladimir. "I did."

Neslerov was the picture of despair and baffled rage and hate. His glance was venomous, but his very helplessness made him haggard. Therese, white lipped and shivering, came in. Neslerov looked from one to the other. He knew that something was coming—the end of his career. The governor general waited, looking chiefly at Olga, for from her he expected the first bomb.

"Look at that man, Therese!" commanded Olga.

It was a dramatic scene as the girl stood with perfect poise and pointed her finger at Neslerov.

"I see him," faltered Therese.

"Who is he?"

"Prince Nicholas Neslerov."

"Prince Nicholas Neslerov, let me tell you what the governor general already

knows," said Olga, and her voice was cold and steady. "For many years my youth prevented a clear understanding of things. I was born after the death of my unfortunate cousin and so did not fully take in the significance of the mystery of Graslov till a few years ago. But when I did learn of it I resolved to sift it to the bottom and make certain that the one who caused her death should be punished. For years my efforts were unavailing. I pursued every line of investigation that occurred to me, and in them all I had the sanction and assistance of the czar. At last, during a sojourn at Graslov in another name, I met this woman whom you have heard me call Therese. Do you know who she is? She is Mme. Dendoff, widow of that Dendoff who was the slave of your wicked father and yourself."

Neslerov was too crestfallen already to show further effect of her words. He made no answer.

"For twenty years this woman has lived with the truth locked in her bosom because she feared her husband. The governor general is here and will hear this case at once, and from that moment when he hears the truth you are in his hands. Therese, who is that man?"

She pointed at Vladimir as she spoke. "That is—the Duke of Graslov!" said the woman firmly.

"Tell your story."

"It was twenty years ago, your excellency," said Therese, speaking directly to the governor general, "that the little Prince Alexis was lost. He was missing from the palace at Graslov one evening, and the poor princess was beside herself with grief and anxiety. A search was made, and my husband, who was in the service of the duke, returned from the Kama and reported that the child had been seen wandering on its banks, and he brought back a portion of its garments, which he said he found close to the water. It was believed that the child was drowned, and the princess grieved for her dead boy. The poor princess did not survive the shock long, and when she died

there was trouble between the two branches of the Neslerovs. Her family claimed that the duke had murdered her and caused her death. It was never settled, and the two families have since been enemies.

"It was not less than two years after when, one night, while he was intoxicated, my husband said something that aroused my suspicion—that he knew what had become of the young prince. I taxed him with it, and he was maudlin enough to confide in me. He had been poor, but since the loss of the young prince he had not worked, but had plenty of money. This also caused me to suspect. He told me, in his drunken fashion, that the Duke of Graslov did not wish the son of the princess to inherit the title or estate. As the father of the boy had died he was the heir, but the duke preferred his younger son, Nicholas.

"The two, the duke and Prince Nicholas, paid my husband to take the child and drown it. He was a wicked man, my husband, and he agreed. He did take the child to the Kama and was about to take from it the telltale clothes when it cried lustily, and a powerful man sprang from the bushes and took the child. There was a fight in which my husband was badly whipped. But he did not dare report to the duke that he had failed, and so he carried out the plans and reported the finding of the clothing at the river. This was the clothing he had taken off preparing to throw the child in the river. To me this revelation was a great shock, but my husband breathed a word of it to a single person. I knew he would keep his threat, and so I dared say nothing, for the house of Graslov was rich and powerful, and I feared to speak even to the police.

"Thus I lived year after year with the shadow of my husband's crime upon my heart, until I thought I would go mad. Moved by an impulse I could not control, I determined to learn if the child was alive. I found it in the house of the blacksmith Paulpoff at Perm. Having learned that the little Alexis was well and happy I felt easier, but resolved that when my opportunity came I would reveal the truth. The old duke died and Nicholas became his heir and finally became governor of Tomsk. A short time ago my husband died, and I was free to tell. There came to Graslov one day a beautiful girl, giving a name that was not familiar, but she was the picture of that lovely princess who had died, and I watched her. I knew she was searching for the truth, and I told her what I knew. We went to St. Petersburg, where she told the czar, and he gave her authority under his seal. We went back to Perm, but the Paulpoffs were on their way to Siberia. The princess resolved to follow, and this meeting is the result."

"How did you know the boy in Paulpoff's house was the young prince?" asked the governor general.

"I saw his mother's picture which had been around his neck. I recognized his face, his voice, his manner, and Paulpoff told me how he came into his possession."

"This is strange," said the governor general, turning to the old man sternly. "How was it that you kept the young prince and did not disclose the fact that he was alive?"

"It was the prayer of his poor mother," said Papa Paulpoff. "I, too, have my story. On that day I was wandering by the river and had been fishing. I heard the cry of a child. I ran toward the sound and saw the man taking off its clothing. He cursed it and struck it and said that its voice would soon be stilled. I knew he meant to murder the child, and so I attacked him. I was a powerful man then, though not nearly so powerful as Vladimir—as the prince—is now. We fought, and I severely whipped him. I then took the child home with me and resolved to restore him to his parents, for I supposed he had been taken for revenge by enemies. When I saw the beautiful face of the princess, I knew it must be the boy's mother, and so I began to think who among the nobles who lived near the Kama had such a woman. I had heard of the beauty of the Princess Neslerov, and so I went to find her, leaving the child at the forge. I saw her at Graslov and asked to be alone with her. She ordered her women away. I showed her the portrait.

"My picture!" she cried—"the picture that was on little Alexis! Oh, what have you to tell me?"

"I told her what had happened, how I had taken the boy and that he was safe and well in my house. She began to weep tears of mingled joy and sorrow.

"Who are you? What is your name?" she asked.

"Michael Paulpoff, princess," I told her.

"Oh, Michael Paulpoff," she cried, and it seemed that her heart would break—"can I trust you?"

"With anything, lady," I answered. "You are welcome to the life or death of Michael Paulpoff."

"Listen!" she whispered, turning each way to see that we were not watched. "I am in the house of enemies. My husband, who was the heir of the duke, is dead. My little son would be the heir of this estate, but the duke prefers that his own younger son should inherit, and so they have plotted to destroy my child. Thank God for placing you on this earth, Michael Paulpoff! You were sent to save my boy. And now listen. Were he to return here or were it to be known that he was alive, no matter in what part of Russia he might be, they would manage in some way to kill him. Even now I tremble lest some spy overhear our words and reveal this truth. I do not wish to have you quarrel with him and give you some harm now, but you must never come to me. Some day I will come to you and deliver my boy. With you swear, Michael Paulpoff, to cherish my boy and preserve this secret?"

"I gave the promise, excellency, and I have kept it. But she also said, in case I die, Michael Paulpoff, guard my boy as you would your own, for I think he will be like his father—strong, but no match for the wicked and designing ones. Do not permit any one ever to know this truth."

"I have obeyed, excellency. The boy was named Vladimir, and we soon came to love him as our own. He was, as the princess said, strong and of an easy going, simple temperament. He grew up to help me in the forge. The princess did die, and so I held my tongue, as she bade me. But Vladimir—or Prince Alexis—was talented, and he learned to paint. He discovered one day the picture of his mother and became enamored of it. He wished to paint it, and I permitted him. Then he painted it, and I saw it. I was suspicious, and I knew from his manner that we would soon hear from him again.

"We were charged with conspiracy, excellency, we who had honest hearts and had never wronged any one, and were bundled off to Siberia. We were sent to Tomsk, where no doubt Neslerov intended to kill the young man when he got an opportunity. Then one day that American named Denton came to our hut in Tivolofsky. In some way he had learned of the picture. I do not know why he was interested in Vladimir, but he asked to see the picture and questioned me.

"Paulpoff," he said, "Vladimir is not your son."

"I shivered, for I did not know but he was a friend of the governor. But he said he was going to learn who Vladimir was, so I told him the story. He said that Vladimir could not be any worse off than at present, and he could secure the help of the government to restore the estate to him and punish Nicholas Neslerov. He took the picture, and some one came to our hut after that and whipped my wife to death. Vladimir swore vengeance, and today he has killed Jansky and Unsethob."

"This is a strange story of cruelty and crime," said the governor general. "But so far as you are concerned, I congratulate you, Prince Neslerov, duke of Graslov. And this faithful old man, whose life is almost run, how can I show my appreciation of what he has done for Russia? Paulpoff, you shall name your own reward, and it is yours."

"To live with Vladimir," said the old man simply.

"And this American! Where is he?"

"Wounded; lying in the house of a priest at Tivolofsky," answered Vladimir, or, as he should now be called, Alexis.

"Nicholas Neslerov, what have you to say?" asked the governor general.

"It is a lie," said Nicholas.

"Your own face does not indicate it. I believe this is the truth. You are a prisoner! Call the officer of the guard!"

"I am here, your excellency!"

"This lieutenant," said Olga, "whose name I do not know, assisted me in

freeing the prince from the dungeons under this palace. I told him he would be a captain."

"Your name?" said the governor general.

"Ormidoff."

"Captain Ormidoff, conduct this prisoner to the same dungeon in which he had confined the prince, and see that



"I am your slave forever."

he is treated as becomes a murderer and enemy of Russia. This is enough, princess. I congratulate you."

The eyes of De Muloff were moist, and he took Olga's hands and pressed them.

They heard Neslerov cursing as he was led away. He was chained in the dungeon and, in an effort to free himself that night, burst a blood vessel and died, with no hand to help.

As the governor general turned away Olga smiled at Alexis.

"You are not quite my cousin, yet we are in a way related," she said. "I am glad that I have succeeded in giving you your own."

"I am your slave forever," he answered, stooping, with his great shoulders almost covering her, and his lips met hers—and she did not resist.

In the house of the priest at Tivolofsky Denton was recovering from his wounds. His first feeling was of gradually came to himself was of great weakness. A cool small hand was placed upon his brow, and he looked up into the face of Frances.

"Do you know me, Jack?"

"I know you, Frances. What have you been in?"

"I have been in the house where the window does not take the whole front of the house."

"Yes—they came—did they kill poor old Paulpoff?"

"No, Vladimir—the one we know as Vladimir, but now the Duke of Graslov—came and killed them instead. He killed Jansky and Unsethob and brought you here."

"Then it is proved already!" he said, staring.

"Yes. A princess, Olga Neslerov, cousin of his mother, having penetrated the veil of mystery, came to Tomsk to pursue her inquiries. She unmasked Nicholas Neslerov before the governor general, and he died that same night in the very cell in which Vladimir had been confined."

"I am glad," he said, with a sigh. "I knew he was not the son of the Paulpoffs, and, since you loved him, I did not wish you to marry an unknown. That was why I tried to restore him to his rank. I did not do it, but I am glad it was done—glad for him and for you."

"Poor Jack!" she said, nestling her head close to his. "Did you think I was going to marry him?"

"Yes; I thought you loved him. That was why I wanted to bring him to his own."

"Poor, noble Jack! Do you know who I am going to marry? There was never any love between Vladimir and me. I helped him, and he appreciated it. But I am going to marry the noblest, bravest, best man on this earth."

"I hope you will be happy, Frances."

"I know I shall be, Jack. And can you forgive me, Jack, for all those ugly things I said? And will you love me—just the same as you used to—for it's you—you, Jack. I want to marry if you want me."

"Frances?"

"That's right," said the soft voice of the old priest. "He is all right now. I say to you, Denton, that an angel hovered at your bedside, and it was not the angel of death. It was a strong, fine young woman."

"I nursed you, Jack, and papa has been here every day."

"And I'm here now," said the voice of Gordon. "Is he awake?"

"He is awake, but he hasn't said he wants to marry me," said Frances, with a laugh.

"He don't need to say it. Well, old chap, I'm glad you've pulled through, but I'm hanged if I think you would if it hadn't been for Frances."

"I am sure of it," he answered, "and I am going to spend all the rest of my life paying her for it."

She laughed—the happiest laugh of her life—and stooped and kissed him.

THE END.

## HOW HUSBANDS SHOP.

A Blouse That It Was Certain Would Not Please the Lady.

The pleasures of shopping are as rigorously denied to "mere man" as are the advantages of whistling to fair woman. The decree, being nature's own, is universal, and the attempts made to contravene it are few and unsuccessful. An exception, more apparent than real, was made a few days ago by an uxorious Berlin husband intent on presenting his better half with a new blouse. He hurriedly entered one of the first shops in the capital and confided his intention to the graceful young lady assistant. "I want a blouse—a good one. You understand. It must be silk—the best silk."

"May I ask what color you prefer?" inquired the superior young saleswoman, with a smile.

"Oh, I'm not particular about the color, but I may say that it may cost from 30 to 40 marks."

"And the cut?"

"The cut? Well, I really don't much care. After all, it comes to the same thing."

"May I ask about the lady for whom it is destined?"

"Why, she is my wife, of course! Whom else did you?"

"I beg your pardon. What I meant was what is her size, at least approximately?"

"It doesn't matter in the least. Please show me some blouses, one blouse, any blouse, and let me go, for I am in a hurry to catch a train."

"With pleasure, sir, but if you cannot give me an idea of the color, cut or size or anything else to guide me how can I hope to suit you?"

"Give me any blouse you like so long as the price is between 30 and 40 marks. It doesn't matter a straw what cut or color or size I choose, for in any case it's certain to be changed. I told you it is for a lady!"—London Telegraph.

## SHOPS IN JAPAN.

The Shops Are the Counters and Squatting Places of Buyers.

To start a Japanese shop is the simplest thing in the world. You take the front of your house and arrange your worldly possessions on the floor.

Japanese floors are raised off the street, though nothing is raised off them. The transient customer sits on the edge of the floor sidesaddle. A real shopper who means to do the thing properly climbs up on the floor, which is also the counter, and squats on his heels.

Real Japanese shops have no doors or windows or counters. Shop windows in England do not leave much wall in the frontage, but even an English shop window does not take the whole front of the house.

The Japanese have not many regular shops. There are very few streets of shops even in Tokyo, which is as large as Berlin. Foreigners never buy anything but curios. If they are fools, they deal with shops kept by Europeans; if they want bargains, they deal with Chinamen.

There are many Chinese shops in treaty ports. The Chinaman is cheaper and more reliable than the Japanese. European shopkeepers do not set up in Japan for philanthropic reasons. Japanese shopkeepers are the lowest class of population except the outcasts. Servants and laborers take precedence of them in society, and precedence is the hobby of the Japanese.

You have a different bow and a different salutation for a man who is below you or your equal, and several for the people above you. You have even a different language for each, and Japanese writing wriggles like carving on their temples.—London Standard.

## Didn't Rather Him.

A German clergyman who was traveling stopped at a hotel much frequented by wags and jokers. The host, not being used to having a clergyman at his table, looked at him with surprise.

The guests used all their gallery of wit upon him without eliciting a remark. The clergyman ate his dinner quietly, apparently without observing the gibes and sneers of his neighbors. One of them, at last, in despair at his forbearance, said to him: "Well, I wonder at your patience. Have you not heard all that has been said to you?"

"Oh, yes; but I am used to it. Do you know who I am?" "No, sir." "Well, I will inform you. I am chaplain of a lunatic asylum. Such remarks have no effect upon me."

## A Russian Banknote.

The 100 ruble note of Russia is barred from top to bottom with all the colors of the rainbow, blended as when shown through a prism. In the center in bold relief stands a large, finely executed vignette of the Empress Catherine I. This is in black. The other engraving is not at all intricate or elaborate, but is well done in dark and light brown and black inks.

## Related Kindness.

Mr. Smith (in street car)—Madam, take my seat.

Mrs. Jones (who has been standing fifteen minutes)—No, thanks. I get off at the next corner.

Mr. Smith—That's all right. So do I.

## No Use at All.

He (who has offended her)—Won't you look up at me?

She—If I did, you'd kiss me again.

He—No; honest, I won't.

She—Then what's the use?

## A Reminder.

Dearborn—What have you got that string tied about your finger for?

Wabash—Oh, I've been getting married, and my wife doesn't want me to forget it.

## Hypocrisy becomes a necessity for those who live scandalously.—DeFinod.