

BEVERLY OF GRAUSTARK

By George Barr McCutcheon.

Author of "Graustark"

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"Count Marlaux, give me that paper," demanded Beverly breathlessly. "Is it a love letter? Perhaps it is intended for me. At any rate, your highness, it is safe against my heart for the time being. When we reach the castle I shall be happy to restore it. It is safer with me. Come, we go one way and—have you not gone, sir?"

In his most sarcastic tone to the guard, Beverly was trembling. "No, I have not, and I shall not go until I see you obey the command of her highness. She has asked you for that piece of paper," said Baldos, standing squarely in front of Marlaux. "Insolent dog! Do you mean to question my?"

"Give over that paper!" "If you strike me, fellow, it will be—"

"If I strike you it will be to kill, Count Marlaux. The paper, sir," Baldos towered over the Iron Count, and there was danger in his daredevil voice. "Surely, sir, I am but obeying your own instructions. Protect the princess and all that is hers with your life, you have said to me."

"Oh, I wish you hadn't done this, Baldos," cried Beverly, panic-stricken. "You have threatened my life. I shall not forget it, fool! Here is the precious note, your highness, with my condolences to the writer." Marlaux passed the note to her and then looked triumphantly at the guard. "I dare say you have done all you can, sir. Do you wish to add anything more?"

"What can one do when dealing with his superior and finds him a despicable coward?" said Baldos, with cool irony. "You are reputed to be a brave soldier. I know that to be false or I would ask you to draw the sword you carry and—"

He was drawing his sword as he spoke. "Baldos!" implored Beverly. Her evident concern infuriated Marlaux. In his heart he knew Baldos to be a man of superior birth and a foeman not to be despised from his own station. Carried away by passion, he flashed his sword from its sheath.

"You have drawn on me, sir," he snarled. "I must defend myself against even such as you. You will find that I am no coward. Time is short for your gallant lover, madam."

Before she could utter a word of protest the blades had clashed, and they were hungry for blood. It was dark in the shadows of the trees, and the trio were quite alone with their tragedy. She heard Baldos laugh recklessly in response to Marlaux's cry of:

"Oh, the shame of fighting with such a coward as you!"

"Don't jest at a time like this, count," said the guard softly. "Remember that I lose, no matter which way it goes. If you kill me I lose, if I beat you I lose. Remember, you can still have me shot for insubordination and conduct unbecoming!"

"Stop!" almost shrieked Beverly. At the risk of personal injury she rushed between the two swordsmen. Both drew back and dropped their points. Not a dozen paces had been made.

"I beg your highness' pardon," murmured Baldos, but he did not sheathe his sword.

"He forced it upon me," cried Marlaux triumphantly. "You were witness to it all. I was a fool to let it go as far as this. Put up your sword until another day—if that day ever comes to you."

"He will have you shot for this, Baldos," cried Beverly in her terror. Baldos laughed bitterly.

"Tied and blindfolded, too, your highness, to prove that he is a brave man and not a coward. It was short, but it was sweet. Would that you had let the play go on. There was a spice in it that made life worth living and death worth the dying. Have you other commands for me, your highness?" His manner was so cool and defiant that she felt the tears spring to her eyes.

"Only that you put up your sword and end this miserable affair by going to your—your room."

"It is punishment enough. Tomorrow's execution can be no harder." Marlaux had been thinking all this time. Into his soul came the thrill of triumph, the consciousness of a mighty power. He saw the chance to benefit by the sudden clash, and he was not slow to seize it.

"Never fear, my man," he said easily; "it won't be as bad as that. I can well afford to overlook your indiscretion of tonight. There will be no execution, as you call it. This was an affair between men, not between man and the state. Our gracious referee is to be our judge. It is for her to pardon and to condemn. It was very pretty while it lasted, and you are too good a swordsman to be shot. Go your way, Baldos, and remember me as Marlaux the man, not Marlaux the general. As your superior officer, I congratulate and commend you upon the manner in which you serve the princess."

"You will always find me ready to fight and to die for her," said Baldos gravely. "Do you think you can remember that, Count Marlaux?"

"I have an excellent memory," said the count steadily. With a graceful salute to Beverly, Baldos turned and walked away in the darkness.

"A perfect gentleman, Miss Calhoun, but a wretched soldier," said Marlaux grimly.

"He is a hero," she said quietly, a great calmness coming over her. "Do you mean it when you say you are not going to have him punished? He did only what a man should do, and I glory in his folly."

"I may as well tell you point blank that you alone can save him. He does not deserve leniency. It is in my power and it is my province to have him utterly destroyed not only for this night's work, but for other and better reasons. I have positive proof that he

is a spy. He knows I have this proof. That is why he would have killed me just now. It is for you to say whether he shall meet the fate of a spy or go unscathed. You have but to exchange promises with me, and the estimable guardsman goes free—but he goes from Edelweiss forever. Today he met the enemy's scouts in the hills, as you know quite well. Messages were exchanged secretly, which you do not know, of course. Before another day is gone I expect to see the results of his treachery. There may be manifestations tonight. You do not believe me, but wait and see if I am not right. He is one of Gabriel's cleverest spies."

"I do not believe it. You shall not accuse him of such things," she cried. "Besides, if he is a spy why should you shield him for my sake? Don't you owe it to Graustark to expose?"

"Here is the princess," said he serenely. "Your highness," addressing Yette, "Miss Calhoun has a note which she refuses to let any one read but you. Now, my dear young lady, you may give it directly into the hands of her highness."

Beverly gave him a look of scorn, but without a second's hesitation placed the missive in Yette's hand. The Iron Count's jaw dropped, and he moistened his lips with his tongue two or three times. Something told him that a valuable chance had gone.

"I shall be only too happy to have your highness read the result of my first lesson in the Graustark language," she said, smiling gayly upon the count.

Two men in uniform came rushing up to the party manifestly excited. Saluting the general, both began to speak at once.

"One at a time," commanded the count. "What is it?"

Other officers of the guard and a few noblemen from the castle came up, out of breath.

"We have discerned signal fires in the hills, your excellency," said one of the men from the fort. "There is a circle of fires, and they mean something important. For half an hour they have been burning near the monastery; also in the valley below and on the mountains to the south."

There was an instant of deathly silence, as if the hearers awaited a crash. Marlaux looked steadily at Beverly's face, and she saw the triumphant, accusing gleam in his eyes. Helplessly she stared into the crowd of faces. Her eyes fell upon Baldos, who suddenly appeared in the background. His face wore a hunted, imploring look. The next instant he disappeared among the shadows.

CHAPTER XX.

"THERE is no time to be lost," exclaimed Count Marlaux. "Ask Colonel Brazo to report to me at the eastern gate with a detail of picked troops—a hundred of them. I will meet him there in half an hour." He gave other sharp, imperative commands, and in the twinkling of an eye the peaceful atmosphere was transformed into the turbulent, exciting rush of activity. The significance of the fires seen in the hills could not be cheaply held. Instant action was demanded. The city was filled with the commotion of alarm; the army was brought to its feet with a jerk that startled even the most ambitious.

The first thing that General Marlaux did was to instruct Quinnox to set a vigilant watch over Baldos. He was not to be arrested, but it was understood that the surveillance should be but little short of incarceration. He was found at the barracks shortly after the report concerning the signal fires and told in plain words that General Marlaux had ordered a guard placed over him for the time being, pending the result of an investigation. Baldos had confidently expected to be thrown into a dungeon for his affront. He did not know that Grenfall Lorry stood firm in his conviction that Baldos was no spy and was supported by others in high authority.

Marlaux was bottling his wrath and holding back his revenge for a distinct purpose. Apart from the existence of a strong, healthy prejudice in the guard's favor, what the old general believed and what he could prove were two distinct propositions. He was crafty enough, however, to take advantage of a condition unknown to Beverly Calhoun, the innocent cause of all his bitterness toward Baldos.

As he hastened from the council chamber his eyes swept the crowd of eager, excited women in the grand hall. From among them he picked Beverly and advanced upon her without regard for time and consequence. Despite her animation he was keen enough to see that she was sorely troubled. She did not shrink from him, as he had half expected, but met him with bold disdain in her eyes.

"This is the work of your champion," he said in tones that did not reach ears other than his own. "I prophesied it, you must remember. Are you satisfied now that you have been deceived in him?"

"I have implicit confidence in him, I suppose you have ordered his arrest?" she asked, with quiet scorn.

"He is under surveillance, at my suggestion. For your sake, and yours alone, I am giving him a chance. He is your protegee. You are responsible for his conduct. To accuse him would be to place you in an embarrassing position. There is a sickening rumor in court circles that you have more than a merely kind and friendly interest in the rascal. If I believed that, Miss Calhoun, I fear my heart could not be kind to him, but I know it is not true. You have a loftier love to give. He is a clever scoundrel, and there is no telling how much harm he has already done to Graustark. His every move is to be watched and reported to me. It

will be impossible for him to escape. To save him from the vengeance of the army I am permitting him to remain in my service, ostensibly at least. His hours of duty have been changed, however. Henceforth he is in the night guard, from midnight till dawn. I am telling you this, Miss Calhoun, because I want you to know that in spite of all the indignity I have suffered you are more to me than any other being in the world, more to me even than my loyalty to Graustark. Do me the honor and justice to remember this. I have suffered much for you. I am a rough, hardened soldier, and you have misconstrued my devotion. Forgive the harsh words my passion may have inspired. Farewell! I must off to undo the damage we all lay at the door of the man you and I are protecting."

He was too wise to give her the chance to reply. A moment later he was mounted and off for the eastern gates, there to direct the movements of Colonel Brazo and his scouts. Beverly flew at once to Yette with her plea for Baldos. She was confronted by a rather sober faced sovereign. The news of the hour was not comforting to the princess and her ministers.

"You don't believe he is a spy?" cried Beverly, stopping just inside the door, presuming boldly that Baldos alone was the cause for worry. She resolved to tell Yette of the conflict in the park.

"Dear me, Beverly, I am not thinking of him. We've discussed him jointly and severally and every other way, and he has been settled for the time being. You are the only one who is thinking of him, my dear child. We have weightier things to annoy us."

"Goodness, how you talk! He isn't annoying. Oh, forgive me, Yette, for I am the silliest, addled pate of a goose in the kingdom! And you are so troubled. But do you know that he is being watched? They suspect him. So did I at first; I'll admit it. But I don't—now. Have you read the note I gave to you out there?"

"Yes, dear. It's just as I expected. He has known from the beginning. He knew when he caught Dagmar and me spying behind that abominable curtain. But don't worry me any longer about him, please. Wait here with me until we have reports from the troops. I shall not sleep until I know what those fires meant. Forget Baldos for an hour or two for my sake."

"You dear old princess! I'm an awful brute, sure 'nough. I'll forget him forever for your sake. It won't be hard either. He's just a mere guard. Pooh! He's no prince."

Whereupon, re-enforced by Mrs. Anguish and the Countess Halfont, she proceeded to devote herself to the task of soothing and amusing the distressed princess while the soldiers of Graustark ransacked the moonlit hills. The night passed, and the next day was far on its way to sunset before the scouts came in with tidings. No trace of the mysterious signalers had been found. The embers of the half dozen fires were discovered, but their builders were gone. The search took in miles of territory, but it was unavailing. Not even a straggler was found. The so-called troupe of actors, around whom suspicion centered, had been swallowed by the capacious solitude of the hills. Riders from the frontier posts to the south came in with the report that all was quiet in the threatened district. Dawsbergen was lying quiet, but with the readiness of a skulking dog.

There was absolutely no solution to the mystery connected with the fires on the mountain sides. Baldos was questioned privately and earnestly by Lorry and Dangloss. His reply was simple, but it furnished food for reflection and at the same time no little relief to the troubled leaders.

"It is my belief, Mr. Lorry, that the fires were built by brigands and not by your military foes. I have seen these fires in the north, near Aphlain, and they were invariably meant to establish communication between separated squads of robbers, all belonging to one band. My friends and I on more than one occasion narrowly escaped disaster by prying into the affairs of these signalers. I take it that the squads have been operating in the south and were brought together last night by means of the fires. Doubtless they have some big project of their own sort on foot."

That night the city looked for a repetition of the fires, but the mountains were black from dusk till dawn. Word reached the castle late in the evening from Ganlook that an Aphlainian nobleman and his followers would reach Edelweiss the next day. The visit was a friendly but an important one. The nobleman was no other than the young Duke of Mirox, intimate friend of the unfortunate Prince Lorenz who met his death at the hand of Prince Gabriel and was the leader of the party which opposed the vengeful plans of Princess Volga. His arrival in Edelweiss was awaited with deep anxiety, for it was suspected that his news would be of the most important character.

Beverly Calhoun sat on the balcony with the princess long after midnight. The sky was black with the clouds of an approaching storm. The air was heavy with foreboding silence. Twice from their darkened corner near the pillar they saw Baldos as he paced steadily past the castle on patrol, with Haddan at his side. Dreamily the watchers in the cool balcony looked down upon the somber park and its occasional guardsman. Neither was in the mood to talk. As they rose at last to go to their rooms something whizzed through the air and dropped with a slight thud in the center of the balcony. The two young women started back in alarm. A faint light from Beverly's window filtered across the stone floor.

"Don't touch it, Beverly!" cried the princess as the girl started forward with an eager exclamation. But Beverly had been thinking of the very object that now quivered before her in the dull light, saucy, aggressive and jaunty as it was the night when she saw it for the first time.

A long, slim red feather bobbed to and fro as if saluting her with soldierly fidelity. Its base was an orange, into which it had been stuck by the hand that tossed it from below. Beverly grasped it with more ecstasy than wisdom and then rushed to the stone railing. Yette looking on in amazement. Diligently she searched the ground below for the man who had sent the red message, but he was nowhere in sight.

Then came the sudden realization that she was revealing a most unmaidenly eagerness, to him as well as to the princess, for she did not doubt that he was watching from the shadows below. She withdrew from the railing in confusion and fled to her bedchamber, followed by her curious companion. There were explanations—none of



"Don't touch it, Beverly!"

which struck speaker or listener as logically there were giggles which completely simplified the situation. Beverly thrust the slim red feather into her hair and struck an attitude that would have set Baldos wild with joy if he could have seen it. The next day, when she appeared in the park the feather stood up defiantly from the band of her sailor hat, though womanly perverseness impelled her to ignore Baldos when he passed her on his way to mess.

The Duke of Mirox came into the city hours after the time set for his arrival. It was quite dark when the escort sent by Colonel Quinnox drew up at the castle gates with the visitor. The duke and his party had been robbed by brigands in the broad daylight and at a point not more than five miles from Edelweiss! And thus the mystery of the signal fires was explained. Count Marlaux did not soon forget the triumphant look he received from Beverly Calhoun when the duke's misfortunes were announced. Shameless as it may seem, she rejoiced exceedingly over the acts of the robbers.

Mirox announced to the princess and her friends that he was not an emissary from the Aphlainian government. Instead he was but little less than a fugitive from the wrath of Volga and the crown adherents. Earlier in the week he had been summoned before Volga and informed that his absence, for a few months at least, from the principality was desirable. The privilege was allowed him of selecting the country which he desired to visit during that period, and he coolly chose Graustark. He was known to have friendly feelings for that state, but no objections were raised. This friendship also gave him a welcome in Edelweiss. Mirox plainly stated his position to Yette and the prime minister. He asked for protection, but declined to reveal any of the plans then maturing in his home country. This reluctance to become a traitor, even though he was not in sympathy with his sovereign, was respected by the princess. He announced his willingness to take up arms against Dawsbergen, but would in no way antagonize Aphlain from an enemy's camp.

The duke admitted that the feeling in Aphlain's upper circles was extremely bitter toward Graustark. The old time war spirit had not died down. Aphlain despised her progressive neighbor.

"I may as well inform your highness that the recent holds another and a deeper grudge against Graustark," he said in the audience chamber, where were assembled many of the nobles of the state, late on the night of his arrival. "He insists that you are harboring and even shielding the pretender to our throne, Prince Frederic. It is known that he is in Graustark, and moreover, it is asserted that he is in direct touch with your government."

Yette and her companions looked at one another with glances of comprehension. He spoke in English now for the benefit of Beverly Calhoun, an interested spectator, who felt her heart leap suddenly and swiftly into violent insurrection.

"Nothing could be more ridiculous," said Yette after a pause. "We do not know Frederic, and we are not harboring him."

"I am only saying what is believed to be true by Aphlain, your highness. It is reported that he joined you in the mountains in June and since has held a position of trust in your army."

"Would you know Prince Frederic if you were to see him?" quietly asked Lorry.

"I have not seen him since he was a very small boy and then but for a moment—on the day when he and his mother were driven through the streets in their way to exile."

"We have a new man in the castle guard, and there is a mystery attached to him. Would you mind looking at him and telling us if he is what Frederic might be in his manhood?" Lorry put the question, and every one present drew a deep breath of interest.

Mirox readily consented, and Baldos, intercepted on his rounds, was led unsuspecting into an outer chamber. The duke, accompanied by Lorry and Baron Dangloss, entered the room. They were gone from the assemblage but a few minutes, returning with smiles of uncertainty on their faces.

"It is impossible, your highness, for me to say whether or not it is Frederic," said the duke frankly. "He is what I imagine the pretender might be at his age, but it would be sheer folly for me to speculate. I do not know the man."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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Notice to Creditors.

Notice is hereby given that the undersigned has been duly appointed administrator of the estate of John W. Keas, deceased, by the County Court of the State of Oregon, for Polk County, and has qualified.

All persons having claims against the said estate are hereby notified to present the same duly verified, together with the proper vouchers therefor, to the undersigned, at his residence near Buel, in said County, within six months from the date of this notice.

Dated and first published February 1, 1907.

FANNIE L. KEAS, Administrator of the estate of John W. Keas, deceased.

Oscar Hayter, Attorney.

Notice to Creditors.

Notice is hereby given that the undersigned has been duly appointed administrator of the estate of Phoebe A. Johnson, deceased, by the County Court of the State of Oregon, for Polk County, and has qualified.

All persons having claims against the said estate are hereby notified to present the same duly verified, together with the proper vouchers therefor, to the undersigned, at his residence near Buel, in said County, within six months from the date of this notice.

Dated and first published February 1, 1907.

FRED JOHNSON, Administrator of the estate of Phoebe A. Johnson, deceased.

Oscar Hayter, Attorney.

Administrator's Notice.

Notice is hereby given to whom it may concern, that the undersigned, administrator of the estate of Irene Zumwalt, deceased, has this day filed with the County Court of Polk County, Oregon, his duly verified final account in the above entitled estate and said Court has set the same for hearing on Saturday, March 23, 1907, at the hour of 10 o'clock a. m. of said day, at which time all persons interested are hereby notified to appear in said County Court, at Dallas, in the County Court room, and present objections, if any there be, to said final account, and if they fail so to do, said administrator will apply to said County Court for an order approving said final account and ordering that said administration be closed, the administrator discharged and his bondmen released.

Dated this 18th day of February, 1907.

G. B. ZUMWALT, Administrator of the estate of Irene Zumwalt, deceased.

Sibley & Eakin, Attys.

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