

GRAUSTARK

... By ...
GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

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CHAPTER I.

MR. GRENFALL LORRY SEEKS ADVENTURE.

MR. GRENFALL LORRY boarded the eastbound express at Denver with all the air of a martyr. He had traveled pretty much all over the world, and he was not without resources, but the prospect of a 2,500 mile journey alone filled him with dismay. The country he knew; the scenery had long since lost its attractions for him. And so it was that he gloomily motioned the porter to his boxes and mounted the steps with weariness.

As it happened, Mr. Grenfall Lorry did not have a dull moment after the

train started. He stumbled on a figure that leaned toward the window in the dark passageway. With reluctant civility he apologized. A lady stood up to let him pass, and for an instant in the half light their eyes met, and that is why the miles rushed by with incredible speed.

Mr. Lorry had been dawdling away the months in Mexico and California. For years he had felt, together with many other people, that a sea voyage was the essential beginning of every journey. He had started round the world soon after leaving Cambridge; he had fished through Norway and hunted in India, and shot everything from grouse on the Scottish moors to the rapids above Assouan. He had run in and out of countless towns and countries on the coast of South America. He had done Russia and the Rhone valley and Brittany and Damascus. He had seen them all, but not until then did it occur to him that there might be something of interest nearer home. True, he had thought of joining some Englishmen on a hunting tour in the Rockies, but that had fallen through. When the idea of Mexico did occur to him, he gave orders to pack his things, purchased interminable green tickets, dined unusually well at his club and was off in no time to the unknown west.

There was a theory in his family that it would have been a decent thing for him to stop running about and settle down to work. But his thoughtful father had given him a wealthy mother, and as earning a living was not a necessity he failed to see why it was a duty. "Work is becoming to some men," he once declared, "like whiskers or red ties, but it does not follow that all men can stand it." After that the family found him "hopeless," and the argument dropped.

He was just under thirty years, as good looking as most men, with no one dependent upon him and an income that had withstood both the Maison Doree and a dahabeah on the Nile. He never tired of seeing things and peoples and places. "There's game to be found anywhere," he said, "only it's sometimes out of season. If I had my way—and millions—I should run a newspaper. Then all the excitements would come to me. As it is, I'm poor, and so I have to go all over the world after them."

This agreeable theory of life had worked well. He was a little bored at times, not because he had seen too much, but because there were not more

things left to see. He had managed somehow to keep his enthusiasms through everything, and they made life worth living. He felt, too, a certain elation, like a spirited horse, at turning toward home, but Washington had not much to offer him, and the thrill did not last. His big bag and his hatbox, pasted over with foolish labels from continental hotels, were piled in the corner of his compartment, and he settled back in his seat with a pleasurable sense of expectancy. The presence in the next room of a very smart appearing young woman was prominent in his consciousness. It gave him an uneasiness which was the beginning of delight. He had seen her for only a second in the passageway, but that second had made him hold himself a little straighter. "Why is it," he wondered, "that some girls make you stand like a footman the moment you see them?" Grenfall had been in love too many times to think of marriage. His habit of mind was still general, and he classified women broadly. At the same time he had a feeling that in this case generalities did not apply well. There was something about the girl that made him hesitate at labeling her "Class A or B or Z." What it was he did not know, but unaccountably she filled him with an affected formality. He felt like bowing to her with a grand air and much dignity. And yet he realized that his successes had come from confidence.

At luncheon he saw her in the dining car. Her companions were elderly persons, presumably her parents. They talked mostly in French, occasionally using a German word or phrase. The old gentleman was stately and austere, with an air of deference to the young woman which Grenfall did not understand. His appearance was very striking, his face pale and heavily lined, mustache and imperial gray, the eyebrows large and bushy and the jaw and chin square and firm. The white haired lady carried her head high with unmistakable gentility. They were all dressed in traveling suits which suggested something foreign, but not Vienna nor Paris; smart, but far from American tastes.

Lorry watched the trio with great interest. Twice during luncheon the young woman glanced toward him carelessly and left an annoying impression that she had not seen him. As they left the table and passed into the observation car he stared at her with some defiance. But she was smiling, and her dimples showed, and Grenfall was ashamed. For some moments he sat gazing from the car window, forgetting his luncheon, dreaming.

When he got back to his compartment, he rang vigorously for the porter. A coin was carelessly displayed in his fingers. "Do you suppose you could find out who has the next compartment, porter?"

"I don't know their name, suh, but they's goin' to New York jis as fas' as they can git thub. I ain' ax um no questions, 'cause thub's somethin' 'bout um makes me feel 's if I ain' got no right to look at um even."

The porter thought a moment.

"I don' believe it'll do yuh any good, suh, to try to shine up to tha' young lady. She ain' the sawt, I can tell

yuh that. I done see too many gunis in ma time"—

"What are you talking about? I'm not trying to shine up to her. I only want to know who she is—just out of curiosity." Grenfall's face was a trifle red.

"Beg pahdon, suh; but I kind o' thought you was like oth' gent'men when they see a han'some woman; allus wants to fin' out somethin' 'bout huh, suh, yuh know. 'Scuse me foh misjedgin' yuh, suh. Th' lady in question is a foh'ner—she lives across th' ocean, 's tuh as I can fin' out. They's in a hurry to git home foh some reason, 'cause they ain' goin' to stop this side o' New York 'cept to change cabs."

"Where do they change cars?"

"St. Louis—goin' by way of Cincinnati an' Washin'ton."

Grenfall's ticket carried him by way of Chicago. He caught himself wondering if he could exchange his ticket in St. Louis.

"Traveling with her father and mother, I suppose."

"No, suh; they's huh uncle an' aunt. I heah huh call 'em uncle an' aunt. Th' ole gent'man is Uncle Caspar. I don't know what they talk 'bout. It's mostly some foh'en language. Th' young lady allus speaks Amehican to me, but th' old folks cain't talk it ver' well. They all been to Frisco, an' the hired he'p they's got with 'em say they been to Mexico too. Th' young lady's got good Amehican dollahs, don' care wha' she's been. She allus smiles when she ask me to do anythin', an' I wouldn' care if she nevah tipped me, 's long as she smiles thataway."

"Servants with them, you say?"

"Yas, suh; man an' woman, nex' section t'other side th' ole folks. Cain't say mor'n fifteen words in Amehican."



There was a pretty look of fear in her eyes.

Th' woman is huh maid an' the man he's th' gen'ral hustler fer th' hull pahty."

"And you don't know her name?"

"No, suh, an' I cain't ver' well fin' out."

"In what part of Europe does she live?"

"Australia, I think, suh."

"You mean Austria?"

"Do I? 'Scuse ma ig'nance. I was jis' guessin' at it anyhow; one place's as good as 'nother ovah thub, I reckon."

"Have you one of those dollahs she gave you?"

"Yes, suh. Heh's a coin that ain' Amehican, but she says it's wuth 70 cents in our money. It's a foh'en piece. She tell me to keep it till I went ovah to huh country; then I could have a high time with it—that's what she says, 'a high time'—an' smiled kind o' knowin' like."

"Let me see that coin," said Lorry, eagerly taking the silver piece from the porter's hand. "I never saw one like

it before. Greek, it looks to me, but I can't make a thing out of these letters. She gave it to you?"

"Yes, suh, las' evenin'. A high time on 70 cents! That's reedicalous, ain' it?" demanded the porter scornfully.

"I'll give you a dollar for it. You can have a higher time on that."

The odd little coin changed owners immediately, and the new possessor dropped it into his pocket with the inward conviction that he was the silliest fool in existence. After the porter's departure he took the coin from his pocket, and, with his back to the door, his face to the window, studied its lettering.

At one little station a group of Indian bear hunters created considerable interest among the passengers. Grenfall was down at the station platform at once, looking over a great stack of game. As he left the car he met Uncle Caspar, who was hurrying toward his niece's section. A few moments later she came down the steps, followed by the dignified old gentleman. Grenfall tingled with a strange delight as she moved quite close to his side in her desire to see. Once he glanced at her face. There was a pretty look of fear in her eyes as she surveyed the massive bears and the stark, stiff antelopes. But she laughed as she turned away with her uncle.

Grenfall was smoking his cigarette and vigorously jingling the coins in his pocket when the train pulled out. Then he swung on the car steps and found himself at her feet. She was standing at the top, where she had lingered a moment. There was an expression of anxiety in her eyes as he looked up into them, followed instantly by one of relief. Then she passed into the car. Doubtless she would have been as solicitous had he been the porter or the brakeman, he reasoned, but that she had noticed him at all pleased him.

At Abilene he bought the Kansas City newspapers. After breakfast he found a seat in the observation car and settled himself to read. Presently some one took a seat behind him. He did not look back, but unconcernedly cast his eyes upon the broad mirror in the opposite car wall. Instantly he forgot his paper. She was sitting within five feet of him, a book in her lap, her gaze bent briefly on the flitting buildings outside. He studied the reflection furtively until she took up the book and began to read.

The first page of his paper was fairly alive with fresh and important dispatches, chiefly foreign. At length, after allowing himself to become really interested in a Paris dispatch of some international consequence, he turned his eyes again to the mirror. She was leaning slightly forward, holding the open book in her lap, but reading, with straining eyes, an article in the paper he held.

He calmly turned to the next page and looked leisurely over it. Another glance, quickly taken, showed to him a disappointed frown on the pretty face and a reluctant resumption of novel reading. A few moments later he turned back to the first page, holding the paper in such a position that she could not see and, full of curiosity, read every line of the foreign news, wondering what had interested her.

Under ordinary circumstances Lorry would have offered her the paper and thought nothing more of it. With her, however, there was an air that made him hesitate. He felt strangely awkward and inexperienced beside her. Precedents did not seem to count. He arose, tossed the paper over the back of the chair, as if casting it aside forever, and strolled to the opposite window and looked out for a few moments, jingling his coins carelessly. The jingle of the pieces suggested something else to him. His paper still hung invitingly upside down, as he had left it, on the chair, and the lady was poring over her novel. As he passed her he drew his right hand from his pocket.