

GRAUSTARK

... By ...
GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

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CHAPTER I.—Grenfall Lorry, a wealthy American globe trotter, stumbles into acquaintance with a charming foreign girl on the train from Denver to Washington. The pair is left behind when the flier stops for repairs in West Virginia. II.—Lorry wires ahead to hold the train. He and the unknown girl ride twenty miles at a tearing pace in a mountain coach. There is no love-making, but a near approach to it as the rolling stage tumbles the passengers about. III.—Lorry dines with the foreign party, consisting of Miss Guggenlocker, Uncle Caspar and Aunt Yvonne. They are natives of Graustark, a country Lorry had never heard of before. IV.—Lorry shows the foreigners the sights of Washington. They leave for New York to sail on the Kaiser Wilhelm. Miss Guggenlocker naively calls Lorry her "ideal American" and invites him to come and see her at Edelweiss. V.—Wildly infatuated, Lorry hurries to New York. The name Guggenlocker is not on the steamer list. He sees the steamer off. Miss G. waves him a kiss from the deck. VI.—Lorry joins his old friend, Harry Anguish, an American artist, in Paris. Graustark and its capital, Edelweiss, are located by a guide book. The Americans get no trace of the Guggenlockers there. VII.—Lorry sees his charmer driving in a carriage with a beautiful companion of her own sex. He gets a glance of recognition, but the carriage rolls on, leaving the mystery unsolved. Later he receives a note at his hotel signed Sophia Guggenlocker, inviting him to visit her next day. VIII.—In the evening Lorry and Anguish ramble about the grounds of the castle where dwells the court of the Princess of Graustark. They overhear a plot to abduct the princess and resolve to capture the plotters red handed.

"You have five of these Viennese?"
"Yes; two to stand beneath the window to receive the booty as we lower it to the ground, one to stand



"He should be here at 12."

guard at the west gate and two to attend the carriage and horses in the ravine beyond the castle."

"When did these men arrive?"

"This morning. I kept them in my sister's home until an hour ago. They are now in the ravine awaiting Ostrom and myself. Are you sure, Michael, that the guards and the cook have been made to understand every detail? The faintest slip will mean ruin."

"They are to be trusted fully. Their pay is to be high enough to make it an object to be infallible. The guard, Dushan, will leave the gate unwatched, and you will chloroform him, with his consent, of course. You will enter, as I have explained before, and crawl along in the dark shadow of the wall until you reach the arbor that leads to the kitchen and scullery. Here another guard, Rabbo, known to Ostrom as a comrade in her royal highness' service not more than a year ago, will be encountered. He will be bound and gagged without the least noise or struggle. Just as the clock strikes 2 the cook will walk past the scullery

window in the basement (trice, carrying a lighted candle. You will see this light through the window and will know that all is well inside the castle. Ostrom, you will then lead the two Viennese to a place directly beneath the third window in the princess' sleeping apartment. There are several clumps of shrubbery there, and under these they will hide, protected from the gaze of any watchman who is not with us. You and Geddos will be admitted to the scullery by the cook, who will conduct you to the hall leading to her highness' bedroom. The man who guards her door is called Danno. He will not be at his post, but will accompany you when you leave the castle. You will understand how carefully you must enter her room and how deeply she must be chloroformed. In the adjoining room her lady in waiting, the Countess Dagmar, sleeps. If her door is ajar, you are to creep in and chloroform her, leaving her undisturbed. Then the princess is to be wrapped in the cloth you take with you and lowered from the window to the men below. They are to remain in hiding until you have left the castle and have reached their side. It will not be difficult, if caution is observed, for you to get outside of the wall and to the carriage in the ravine. I have given you this plan of action before, I know, but I desire to impress it firmly upon your minds. There must not be the slightest deviation. The precision of clockwork is necessary."

The man named Michael hissed the foregoing into the ears of his companions, the palsied Americans hearing every word distinctly. They scarcely breathed, so tremendous was the restraint imposed upon their nerves. A crime so huge, so daring as the abduction of a princess, the actual invasion of a castle to commit the theft of a human being just as an ordinary burglar would steal in and make way with the contents of a silver chest, was beyond their power of comprehension.

"We understand fully how it is to be done, and we shall get her to Ganlook on time," said Geddos confidently.

"Not a hair of her head must be harmed," cautioned the arch conspirator. "In four days I shall meet you at Ganlook. You will keep her in close confinement until you hear from me. Have you the guard's uniforms that you are to wear tonight?"

"They are with the carriage in the ravine. Ostrom and I will don them before going to the castle. In case we are seen they will throw observers off the track long enough for us to secure a good start in our flight."

"Remember, there is to be no failure. This may mean death to you, certainly a long prison term, if you are apprehended. I know it is a daring deed, but it is just of the kind that succeeds. Who would dream that mortal man could find the courage to steal a princess of the realm from her bed and spirit her away from under the very noses of her vaunted guardsmen? It is the bold, the impossible plan that wins."

"We cannot fail if your men on the inside do their work well," said Geddos, repeating what Ostrom had said. "All depends on their faithfulness."

"They will not be found wanting. Your cutthroats must be sent on to Calas with the empty carriage after you have reached Ganlook in safety. You will need them no more. Ostrom will pay them, and they are to leave the country as quickly as possible. At Calas they will be able to join a pack train that will carry them to the Great Northern railroad. From there they will have no trouble in reaching Vienna. You will explain to them, Geddos. All we need them for, as you know, is to prove by their mere presence in case of capture that the attempt was no more than a case of burglary conceived by a band of Viennese robbers. There will be no danger of capture if you once get her outside the walls. You can be half way to Ganlook before she is missed from the castle. Nor can she be found at Ganlook if you follow the instructions I gave last night. It is now nearly 1 o'clock, and in half an hour the night will be as dark as Erebus. Go, men; you have no more time to lose, for this must be accomplished slowly, carefully, deliberately. There must be no haste until you are ready for the race to Ganlook. Go, but, for God's sake, do not harm her! And do not fail!"

"Failure means more to us than to you, Michael," half whispered the hoarse Ostrom.

"Failure means everything to me! I must have her!"

Already the two hirelings were moving off toward the road that ran west of the castle grounds. Michael watched them for a moment and then started swiftly in the direction of the city. The watchers had not been able to distinguish the faces of the conspirators, but they could never forget the calm, cold voice of Michael, with its quaint, jerky English.

"What shall we do?" whispered Anguish when the men were out of hearing.

"God knows!" answered Lorry. "This is the most damnable thing I ever heard of. Are we dreaming? Did we really see and hear those men?" He had risen to his feet, his companion sitting weakly before him.

"There's no question about it! It's a case of abduction, and we have it in our power to spoil the whole job. By gad, but this is luck, Gren!" Anguish was quivering with excitement as he rose to his feet. "Shall we notify old Dangloss or alarm the steward? There's no time to be lost if we want to trap these fellows. The chief devil is bound to escape, for we can't get him and the others too, and they won't peach on him. Come, we must be lively! What are you standing there for? The trap must be set!"

"Wait! Why not do the whole job ourselves?"

"How—what do you mean?"

"Why should we alarm anybody? We know the plans as well as these scoundrels themselves. Why not follow them right into the castle, capture them red handed, and then do the alarming? I'm in for saving the Princess of Graustark with our own hands and right under the noses of her vaunted guardsmen, as Michael says." Lorry was thrilled by the spirit of adventure. His hand gripped his friend's arm and his face was close to his ear. "It is the grandest opportunity two human beings ever had to distinguish themselves!"

"Great heaven, man! We can't do such a thing!" gasped Anguish.

"It's the easiest thing in the world. Besides, if we fail, we have nothing to lose. If we succeed, see what we've done! Don't hesitate, old man! Come on! Come on! We'll take 'em ourselves, as sure as fate. Have you no nerve? What kind of an American are you? This chance won't come in ten lifetimes! Are we not equal to those two scoundrels?"

"Two! There are at least ten of them!"

"You fool! The three guards are disposed of in advance, two of the Viennese are left with the horses, two are chucked off under the princess' window, and one stands at the gate. We can slug the man at the gate, the fellows under the window are harmless, and that leaves but our two friends and the cook. We have every advantage in the world. Can't you see?"

"You are right! Come on! I'll risk it with you! We will save the Princess of Graustark!"

"Don't you see it will be just as easy for us to enter the castle as for these robbers? The way will be clear and will be kept clear. Jove, man, we need not be more than thirty seconds behind them. Is your pistol all right?"

By this time the two men were speeding along the grassy stretch toward the road that ran beside the wall. They looked to their pistols and placed them carefully in outside coat pockets.

"We must throw away these heavy canes," whispered the painter to his friend, who was a pace or so ahead.

"Keep it! We'll need one of them to crack that fellow's head at the gate. Gad, it's dark along here!"

"How the devil are we to know where to go?"

"We'll stop when we come to the gate where we climbed up the wall to-day. That is the only entrance I saw along the west wall, and it is near the castle. Just as soon as the gang enters that gate we'll crawl up and get rid of the fellow who stands watch."

It was so dark that they could barely see the roadway, and they found it necessary to cease talking as they slunk along beside the wall. Occasionally they paused to listen, fearing that they might draw too close upon the men who had gone before. At last they came to a big gate and halted.

"Is this the gate?" whispered Anguish.

"Sh! Yes; I'm quite sure. We are undoubtedly near the castle, judging by the distance we have come. Let us cross the road and lie directly opposite. Be careful!"

Like panthers they stole across the road and down a short grassy embankment. At Anguish's suggestion Lorry wrapped his handkerchief tightly about the heavy end of his cane, preparing in that way to deaden the sound of the blow that was to fall upon the Vienna man's head. Then they threw aside their hats, buttoned their coats tightly and sank down to wait, with bounding hearts and tingling nerves, the arrival of the abductors, mutely praying that they were at the right gate.

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