

GRAUSTARK

... By ...

GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

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CHAPTER I.—Grenfell 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 train 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 Guggenslocker, 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 Guggenslocker 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 Guggenslocker 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 Guggenslockers 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 Guggenslocker, 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.

CHAPTER IX.

THE EXPLOIT OF LORRY AND ANGUISH.

DURING the half hour spent in the grassy ditch or gutter they spoke not more than half a dozen times and in the faintest of whispers. They could hear the guard pacing the driveway inside the ponderous gate, but aside from his footsteps no sound was distinguishable. A sense of oppression came over the two watchers as the minutes grew longer and more deathlike in their stillness.

They knew nothing of the surroundings. If they failed, there was the danger of being shot by the guards before an explanation could be made. If they succeeded, it must be through sheer good fortune and not through prowess of mind or muscle. Both knew the sensible, judicious act would be to alarm the guards and thus avoid all possible chance of a fiasco. With misgivings and doubts in their hearts the two self appointed guardians of the princess lay there upon the grass, afraid to give up the project, yet fearing the outcome.

"The dickens will be to pay, Lorry, if they dispose of this guard on the inside and lock the gate. Then how are we to follow?" whispered Anguish.

Lorry was thoughtful for awhile. He felt the chill of discouragement in his heart.

"In that case we must lie outside and wait till they come out with the princess; then make a sudden assault and rescue her. In the darkness we can make them think there are a dozen rescuers," he whispered at length. After awhile Anguish asked another appalling question, the outgrowth of brain racking study:

"Suppose these fellows, who will be in guards' uniform, should turn about and capture us. What then? We are strangers, and our story would not be believed. They could slip away in the excitement and leave us in a very awkward position."

"Harry, if we are going to hatch up all sorts of possibilities, let's give up the thing right now. I have thought of a thousand contingencies, and I realize how desperate the job is to be. We must either cast discretion to the winds or we must retreat. Which shall we do?"

"Cast aside discretion and hang our fears," said the other, once more in-

spired. "We'll take chances and hope for the best. If we see we are going to fail, we can then call for the guards. The grounds are doubtless full of soldiers. The only part I'm worried about is the groping through that strange dark castle."

"We must do some calculating, and we must stick close together. By watching where they station the two Viennese we can figure about what direction we must take to get to the princess' room. Sh! Isn't that some one approaching?"

They strained their ears for a moment and then involuntarily, spasmodically shook hands, each heaving the deep breath of excitement. The stealthy rustle of moving bodies was heard, faint, but positive. It was a moment of suspense that would have strained the nerve of a stone image. Where were the abductors? On which side of the road and from what direction did they come? Oh, for the eyes of a cat!

There was a slight shuffling of feet near the gate, a suppressed "Sh!" and then deathly silence. The gate opened, a faint creaking attesting the fact, followed by the heavy breathing of men, the noise of subdued activity, the scent of chloroform, some whispering and then the creaking of the gate.

"They've gone," whispered Anguish. Lorry's form arose to a crouching posture, and a moment later he was crossing the road with the tread of a cat, his cane gripped firmly in his hand. Anguish followed with drawn revolver. So still was their approach that they were upon the figure of a man before they were aware of the fact. In the darkness the foremost American saw the outline of a human figure bending over a long object on the ground. He could smell chloroform strongly and grasped the situation. The Viennese was administering the drug, his companions having left that duty for him to perform. No doubt the treacherous guardsman was lying calmly on his back, bound and gagged, welcoming unconsciousness with a smile of security.

As soon as Lorry gained his bearings fully he prepared to fells the wretch who was to stand watch. Anguish heard his friend's figure suddenly shoot to an erect position. There was a whirling sound as of disturbed air and then a dull thud. Something rolled over on the ground, and all was still. He was at Lorry's side in an instant.

"I hope I haven't killed him!" whispered Lorry. "Quick! Here is his bottle of ether. Hold it beneath his nose. I am going to pile the body of this guard crosswise on top of him. He will not be able to arise if he should recover consciousness."

All this was done in a moment's time, and the two trackers were headed for the entrance. The gate was ajar two or three feet. With turbulent hearts they stole through.

"Keep along the wall," whispered Lorry, "and trust to luck. The castle is to the left."

Without hesitation they crept over the noiseless grass close beside the wall. Directly they heard sounds near at hand. The abductors were binding and chloroforming the guard at the arbor. After waiting for some moments they heard the party glide away in the

darkness and followed. The body of the guard was lying just outside the mouth of the arbor, and the odor of chloroform was almost overpowering. Once inside the long arbor, the Americans moved slowly and with greater caution. There was a dim light in a basement window ahead. Toward the front of the castle and in the second story a faint glow came from another window. They guessed it to be from the princess' room or from that of the countess.

At last they saw four figures steal past the dim basement light. One of them halted near the window and three crept away in the darkness. Presently one of them returned, and all activity was at an end for the time being. How near it was to 2 o'clock the watchers could not tell. They only knew that they were within twenty-five feet of Geddos and Ostrom and that they would not have long to wait.

Soon a bright little blaze of light crossed the basement opening. Then it returned, crossing a second time and a third. All was still again. The soft shuffle of a foot, the rustle of arbor vines, and the form of a man crawled up to the window. With inconceivable stealth and carefulness it glided through the aperture, followed by a companion.

Lorry and Anguish were at the opening a second or two later, lying flat on their stomachs and listening for sounds from within. The dim light was still there, the window was open and there was a sound of whispering. Lorry raised his head and peered through, taking calculations while the light made it possible. He saw an open door on the opposite side of the low room, with steps beyond leading upward. Between the window and the door there were no obstacles. Up those steps he saw three men creep, the leader carrying the dim light. The door was left open, doubtless to afford unimpeded exit from the building in case of emergency. Harry Anguish touched Lorry's arm.

"I took the two pistols from that Vienna man out there. We may need them. Here is one for yourself. Go first, Lorry," he whispered.

Lorry stuck the revolver in his coat pocket and gently slid through the window to the floor below. His friend followed, and they paused to listen. Tak-



"A sound and you die!" he hissed.

ing Anguish by the hand the other led the way straight to the spot where he remembered seeing the door.

Boldly the two men began the breathless ascent of the stone steps. The top was reached, and far ahead, down a narrow hall, they saw the three men and the dim light moving. Two of them wore uniforms of guards. Keeping close to the wall, their followers crept after them. Up another flight of steps they went and then through a

spacious hall. The Americans had no time and no desire to inspect their surroundings. The wide doors at the far side of the room opened softly, and here the trio paused. Down a great marble hallway a dim red light shed its soft glow. It came from the lamp at the foot of the broad staircase.

The cook pointed to the steps and then gave his thumb a jerk toward the left. Without the least sign of fear Geddos and Ostrom glided into the hall and made for the staircase. The watchers could not but feel a thrill of admiration for these daring wretches. But now a new danger confronted them. The cook remained standing in the doorway watching his fellows in crime! How were they to pass him?

There was no time to be lost. The abductors were creeping up the steps already, and the cook must be disposed of. He had blown out the light which he carried and was now a very dim shadow. Lorry glided forward and in an instant stood before the amazed fellow, jamming a pistol into his face.

"A sound and you die!" he hissed.

"Don't move!" came another whisper, and a second revolver touched his ear. The cook, perhaps, did not know their language, but he certainly understood its meaning. He trembled and would have fallen to the floor had not the strong hand of Lorry pinned him to the wall. The hand was on his throat too.

"Chloroform him, Harry, and don't let him make a sound!" whispered the owner of the hand. Anguish's twitching fingers succeeded those of his friend on the cook's throat, his pistol was returned to his pocket, and the little bottle came again into use.

"I'll go ahead. Follow me as soon as you have finished this fellow. Be careful and turn to the left when you come to the top."

Lorry was off across the marble floor, headed for the stairway, and Anguish was left in charge of the cook, of whom he was to make short work. Now came the desperate, uncertain part of the transaction. Suppose he were to meet the two conspirators at the head of the stairs, or in the hall, or that the other traitor, Dannox, should appear to frustrate all. It was the most trying moment in the whole life of the reckless Lorry.

When near the top of the steps, he hugged the high balustrade and cautiously peered ahead. He found himself looking down a long hall, at the far end of which, to his right, a dim light was burning. There was no sound and there was no sign of the two men either to the right or to the left. His heart felt like lead. They evidently had entered the princess' room. How was he to find that room? Slowly he wriggled across the broad, dark hall, straightening up in the shadow of a great post. From this point he edged along the wall for a distance of ten or twelve feet to the left. A sound came from farther down the hall, and he imagined he heard some one approaching.

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