

GRAUSTARK

... By ...
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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 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 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 signen 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. IX.—Following the conspirators, Lorry finds himself in a room he heard them designate as that of the princess. X.—Lorry tells the princess of the plot. Mutual recognition; she is Miss Guggenlocker. Danno, the guard, is in the abduction plot. He tells Lorry with a terrible blow. Anguish to the rescue. XI.—Lorry quartered in the castle. The princess visits him, but forbids all talk of love. XII.—Graustark is bankrupt and owes the neighboring principedom of Axlphain \$30,000,000. The creditor demands cash or the cession of the richest districts of Graustark. XIII.—The Prince of Axlphain offers to extend the loan if the princess will marry his son Lorenz. Prince Gabriel of Dawsbergen also bids for the princess's hand with offer of a loan. Yvonne tells Lorry that she belongs to her people and will marry Lorenz.

"That's right. I hadn't thought of that. I hope she turns him down. But there's Gabriel over yonder. See those three fellows in blue? The middle one is the prince."

Near the door leading to the piazza stood several men, gray and blue. The man designated as Gabriel was in the center, talking gayly and somewhat loudly, puffing at a cigarette between sentences. He was not tall, but he was strongly and compactly built. His hair and cropped beard were as black as coal, his eyes wide, black and lined. It was a pleasure worn face, and Lorry shuddered as he thought of the princess in the power of this evil looking wretch. They leisurely made their way to a spot near the talkers. There was no mistaking the voice. Prince Gabriel and Michael were one and the same beyond all doubt. But how to prove it to the satisfaction of others? Skepticism would follow any attempt to proclaim the prince guilty because his voice sounded like that of the chief conspirator. In a matter where whole nations were concerned the gravest importance would be attached to the accusation of a ruler. Satisfying themselves as to the identity of that peculiar voice, the friends passed through to the piazza.

"What's to be done?" asked Anguish, boiling over with excitement.

"We must go to Baron Dangloss, tell him of our positive discovery, and then consult Count Halfont."

"And her royal highness, of course."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Lorry, flicking the ashes from his cigar with a finger that was now steady. He was serving the princess again.

They hurried to the tower and were soon in the presence of the fierce little chief of police. Lorry had spent many hours with Dangloss of late, and they had become friends. His grim old face blanched perceptibly as he heard the assertions of the young men. He shook his head despairingly.

"It may be as you say, gentlemen, but I am afraid we can do nothing. To charge a prince with such a crime and on such evidence would be madness. I am of your belief, however. Prince Gabriel is the man I have suspected. Now I am convinced. Before we can do anything in such a grave matter it will be necessary to consult the princess and her ministers. In case we conclude to accuse the Prince of Dawsbergen it must be after careful and judicious thought. There are many things to consider, gentlemen. For my part, I would be overjoyed to seize the villain and to serve him as we did his tools, but my hands are tied, you see. I would suggest that you go at once to the princess and Count Halfont, tell them of your suspicions"—

"Not suspicions, my lord—facts," interrupted Anguish.

"Well, then, facts, and ascertain how they feel about taking up a proposition that may mean war. May I ask you to come at once to me with their answer. It is possible that they will call for a consultation with the ministers, nobles and high officers. Still, I fear they will be unwilling to risk much on the rather flimsy proof you can give. Gabriel is powerful, and we do not seek a war with him. There is another foe for whom we are quietly whetting our swords." The significant remark caused both listeners to prick up their ears. But he disappointed their curiosity, and they were left to speculate as to whom the other foe might be. Did he mean that Graustark was secretly, slyly, making ready to resist, treaty or no treaty?

It required prolonged urging on the part of Anguish to persuade Lorry to accompany him to the castle, but, when once determined to go before the princess with their tale, he was eager, impatient, to cross the distance that lay between the hotel and the forbidden grounds. They walked rapidly down Castle avenue and were soon at the gates. The guard knew them, and they were admitted without a word. As they hurried through the park they saw many strange men in gray, gaudy uniforms, and it occurred to Lorry that their visit, no matter how great its importance, was ill timed. Prince Lorenz was holding the center of the stage.

Anguish, with his customary impulsiveness, overruled Lorry's objections, and they proceeded toward the entrance. The guards of the princess saluted profoundly, while the minions of Lorenz stared with ill bred wonder upon these two tall men from another world. It could be seen that the castle was astir with excitement, subdued and pregnant with thriving hopes and fears. The nobility of Graustark was there. The visitors of Axlphain were being entertained.

At the castle doors the two men met their first obstacle, but they had anticipated its presence. Two guards halted them peremptorily.

"We must see her royal highness," said Anguish, but the men could not understand him. They stoically stood their ground, shaking their heads.

"Let us find some one who can understand us," advised Lorry, and in a few moments they presented themselves before the guards, accompanied

by a young nobleman with whom they had acquaintance. He succeeded in advancing them to the reception hall inside the doors and found for them a servant who would carry a message to the princess if it were possible to gain her presence. The nobleman doubted very much, however, if the missive hastily written by Lorry could find its way to her, as she had never been so occupied as now.

Lorry in his brief note prayed for a short audience for himself and Mr. Anguish, requesting that Count Halfont be present. He informed her that his mission was of the most imperative nature and that it related to a discovery made concerning the prince who had tried to abduct her. In conclusion he wrote that Baron Dangloss had required him to lay certain facts before her and that he had come with no intention to annoy her.

While they sat in the waiting room they saw through the glass doors dozens of richly attired men and women in the hall beyond. They were conversing animatedly, Graustark men and women with dejected faces, Axlphainians with exultation glowing in every glance. Lorry's heart sank within him. It seemed hours before the servant returned to bid them follow him. Then his blood leaped madly through veins that had been chilled and lifeless. He was to see her again.

Their guide conducted them to a small anteroom, where he left them. A few moments later the door opened, and there swept quickly into the room the Countess Dagmar, not the princess. Her face was drawn with the trouble and sorrow she was trying so hard to conceal. Both men were on their feet in an instant, advancing to meet her.

"The princess? Is she ill?" demanded Lorry.

"Not ill, but mad, I fear," answered she, giving a hand to each. "Mr. Lorry, she bids me say to you that she cannot see you. She appreciates the importance of your mission and thanks you for the interest you have taken. Also she authorizes me to assure you that nothing can be done at present regarding the business on which you come."

"She refuses to see us," said he slowly, his face whiter than ever.

"Nay; she begs that you will excuse her. Her highness is sorely worn and distressed today, and, I fear, cannot endure all that is happening. She is apparently calm and composed, but I, who know her so well, can see the strain beneath."

"Surely she must see the urgency of quick action in this matter of ours!" cried Anguish half angrily. "We are not dogs to be kicked out of the castle. We have a right to be treated fairly!"

"We cannot censure the princess, Harry," said Lorry calmly. "We have come because we would befriend her, and she sees fit to reject our good offices. There is but one thing left for us to do—depart as we came."

"But I don't like it a little bit," growled the other.

"If you only knew, Mr. Anguish, you would not be so harsh and unjust," remonstrated the lady warmly. Turning to Lorry, she said, "She asked me to hand you this, and to bid you retain it as a token of her undying esteem."

She handed him a small, exquisite miniature of the princess framed in gold inlaid with rubies. He took it dumbly in his fingers, but dared not look at the portrait it contained. With what might have seemed disrespect he dropped the treasure into his coat pocket.

"Tell her I shall always retain it as a token of her esteem," he said. "And now may I ask whether she handed my note to her uncle, the count?"

The countess blushed in a most unaccountable manner.

"Not while I was with her," she said, recovering the presence of mind she apparently had lost.

"She destroyed it, I presume," said

he, laughing harshly.

"I saw her place it in her bosom, sir, and with the right hand," cried the countess as if betraying a state secret.

"In her— You are telling me the truth?" cried he, his face lighting up.

"Now, see here, Lorry, don't begin to question the countess' word. I won't stand for that," interposed Anguish good humoredly.

"I should be more than base to say falsely that she had done anything so absurd," said the countess indignantly. "Where is she now?" asked Lorry.

"In her boudoir. The Prince Lorenz is with her—alone."

"What!" he cried, jealousy darting into his existence. He had never known jealousy before.

"They are betrothed," said she, with an effort. There was a dead silence, broken by Lorry's deep groan as he turned and walked blindly to the opposite side of the room. He stopped in front of a huge painting and stared at it, but did not see a line or a tint.

"You don't mean to say she has accepted?" half whispered Anguish.

"Nothing less."

"Thank God, you are only a countess," he said tenderly.

"Why—why—what difference can it make—I mean, why do you say that?" she stammered, crimson to her hair.

"Because you won't have to sell yourself at a sacrifice," he said foolishly. Lorry came back to them at this juncture, outwardly calm and deliberate.

"Tell us about it, pray. We had guessed as much."

"Out there are his people—the wretches!" she cried vindictively, her pretty face in a helpless frown. "Today was the day, you know, on which he was to have his answer. He came and knelt in the audience chamber. All Graustark had implored her to refuse the hated offer, but she bade him rise, and there, before us all, promised to become his bride."

"The greatest sorrow Graustark has ever known grows out of that decision. She is determined to save for us what her father's folly lost. To do this she becomes the bride of a vile wretch, a man who soils her pure nature when he thinks of her. Oh, we sought to dissuade her—we begged, we entreated, but without avail. She will not sacrifice one foot of Graustark to save herself. See the triumphant smiles on their faces—the brutes!" She pointed maliciously to the chattering visitors in the hall. "Already they think the castle theirs. The union of Graustark and Axlphain—just what they most desired, but we could not make her see it so!"

"Is the day set?" asked Lorry bravely after a moment's silent inspection of the dark browed victors.

"Yes, and there is to be no delay. The marriage contract has already been signed. The date is Nov. 20, the day on which we are to account to Bolaroz for our war debt. The old prince's wedding gift to Graustark is to be a document favoring us with a ten years' extension," she said scornfully.

"And where is she to live?"

"Here, of course. She is Graustark's ruler, and here she insists on abiding. Just contemplate our court! Overrun with those Axlphain dogs! Ah, she has wounded Graustark more than she has helped her."

(Continued)

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