

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 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. 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 principality of Axpain \$30,000,000. The creditor demands cash or the cession of the richest districts of Graustark. XIII.—The Prince of Axpain 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. Yetive tells Lorry that she belongs to her people and will marry Lorenz.

"I will not be dragged away without seeing her," he answered resolutely, throwing himself on the bed.

"Confounded young ass!" growled Dangloss. The soldier's teeth grated. A moment later the slab door closed softly, a key rattled and his visitors were gone—messengers bearing to him the most positive proof of devotion that man could exact.

He looked at his hands and saw the black stains from the charred letter, last evidence of the crime against the state. A tender light came to his eyes, a great lump struggled to his throat, and he kissed the sooty spots, murmuring her name again and again. How lonely he was! How cold and cheerless his cage! For the first time he began to appreciate the real seriousness of his position. Up to this time he had regarded it optimistically, confident of vindication and acquittal. He grew cold and shuddered instinctively as he realized that his position was so critical that the princess had deemed it necessary to resort to strategic measures in order to save him from impending doom. Starting to his feet, he paced the floor, nervousness turning to dread, dread to terror. He pounded on the door and cried aloud. Oh, if he could but bring back those kindly messengers!

Exhausted, torn by conflicting emotions, he at last dropped to the bed and buried his face in his arms, nearly mad with the sudden solitude of despair. He recalled her dear letter, the tender, helping hand that had been stretched out to lift him from the depths into which he was sinking. She had written—he could see the words plainly—that his danger was great; she could not endure life until she knew him to be safely outside the bounds of Graustark. His life was dear to her, and she would preserve it by dishonoring her trust. Then she had unfolded her plan of escape, disjunctedly, guiltily, hopelessly.

But she was offering him freedom only to send him away without granting one moment of joy in her presence. After all, with death staring him in the face, the practically convicted murderer of a prince, he knew he could not have gone without seeing her. He had been ungrateful perhaps, but the message he had sent to her was from his heart, and something told him that it would give her pleasure.

A key turned suddenly in the lock and his heart bounded with the hope that it might be some one with her surrender in response to his ultimatum. He sat upright and rubbed his swollen eyes. The door swung open, and a tall prison guard peered in upon him, a sharp eyed, low browed fellow in raincoat and helmet. His lantern's single unkind eye was turned menacingly toward the bed.

"What do you want?" demanded the prisoner irritably.

Instead of answering, the guard proceeded to unlock the second or grated door, stepping inside the cell a moment later. Smothering an exclamation, Lorry jerked out his watch and then sprang to his feet, intensely excited. It was just 12 o'clock, and he remembered now that she had said a guard would come to him at that hour. Was this the man? Was the plan to be carried out?

The two men stood staring at each other for a moment or two, one in the agony of doubt and suspense, the other quizzically. A smile flitted over the face of the guard. He calmly advanced to the table, putting down his lantern. Then he drew off his raincoat and helmet and placed in the other's hand a gray envelope. Lorry reeled and would have fallen but for the wall against which he staggered. A note from her was in his hand. He tore open the envelope and drew forth the letter. As he read he grew strangely calm and contented. A blissful repose rushed in to supplant the racking unrest of a moment before. The shadows fled and life's light was burning brightly once more. She had written:

I entreat you to follow instructions and go tonight. You say you will not leave Graustark until you have seen me. How rash you are to refuse liberty and life for such a trifle! But why, I ask, am I offering you this chance to escape? Is it because I do not hope to see you again? Is it not enough that I am begging, imploring you to go? I can say no more.

He folded the brief note, written in agitation, and, after kissing it, proceeded to place it in his pocket, determined to keep it to the last hour of his life. Glancing up at a sound from the guard, he found himself looking into the muzzle of a revolver. A deep scowl overspread the face of the man as he pointed to the letter and then to the lamp. There was no mistaking his meaning. Lorry reluctantly held the note over the flame and saw it crumble away as had its predecessor. There was to be no proof of her complicity left behind. He knew it would be folly to offer a bribe to the loyal guard.

After this very significant act the guard's face cleared, and he deposited his big revolver on the table. Stepping to the cell's entrance, he listened intently, then softly closed the heavy iron doors. Without a word he began to strip off his uniform. Lorry watching

him as if fascinated. The fellow looked up impatiently and motioned for him to be quick, taking it for granted that the prisoner understood his part of the transaction. Awakened by this sharp reminder, Lorry nervously began to remove his own clothes. In five minutes his garments were scattered over the floor and he was attired in the uniform of a guard. Not a word had been spoken. The prisoner was the guard, the guard a prisoner.

"Are you not afraid this will cost you your life?" asked Lorry, first in English, then in German. The guard merely shook his head, indicating that he could not understand.

He quickly turned to the bed, seized a sheet and tore it into strips, impatiently thrusting them into the other's hands. The first letter had foretold all this, and the prisoner knew what was expected of him. He therefore securely bound the guard's legs and arms. With a grim smile the captive nodded his head toward the revolver, the lantern and the keys. His obliging prisoner secured them, as well as his own personal effects, and was ready to depart. According to instructions, he was to go forth, locking the doors behind him, leaving the man to be discovered the next morning by surprised keepers. It struck him that there was something absurd in this part of the plan. How was this guard to explain his position with absolutely no sign of a struggle to bear him out? It was hardly plausible that a big, strong fellow could be so easily overpowered single handed. There was something wretchedly incongruous about the—but there came a startling and effective end to all criticism.

The guard, bound as he was, suddenly turned and lunged headforemost against the sharp bedpost. His head struck with a thud, and he rolled to the floor as if dead. Uttering an exclamation of horror, Lorry ran to his side. Blood was gushing from a long gash across his head, and he was already unconscious. Sickened by the brave sacrifice, he picked the man up and placed him on the bed. A hasty examination proved that it was no more than a scalp wound and that death was too remote to be feared. The guard had done his part nobly, and it was now the prisoner's turn to act as resolutely and as unflinchingly. Sorry to leave the poor fellow in what seemed an inhuman manner, he strode into the corridor, closed and locked the doors clumsily and began the descent of the stairs. He had been instructed to act unhesitatingly, as the slightest show of nervousness would result in discovery.

With the helmet well down over his face and the cape well up he steadily, even noisily, made his way to the next floor below. There were prisoners on this floor, while he had been the only occupant of the floor above. Straight ahead he went, flashing his lantern here and there, passing down another stairway and into the main corridor. Here he met a guard who had just come in from the outside. The man addressed him in the language of the country, and his heart almost stopped beating. How was he to answer? Mumbling something almost inaudible, he hurried on to the ground floor, trembling with fear lest the man should call to him to halt. He was relieved to find, in the end, that his progress was not to be impeded. In another moment he was boldly unlocking the door that led to the visitors' hall. Then came the door to the warden's office. Here he found three sleepy guards, none of whom paid any attention to him as he passed through and entered Captain Dangloss' private room. The gruff old captain sat at a desk writing. The escaping man half paused as if to speak to him. A sharp cough from the captain and a significant jerk of the head told him that there must be no delay, no words. Opening the door he stepped out into a storm so fierce and wild that

he shuddered apprehensively.

"A fitting night!" he muttered as he plunged into the driving rain, forcing his way across the courtyard toward the main gate. The little light in the gatekeeper's window was his guide, so, blinded by the torrents, blown by the winds, he soon found himself before the final barrier. Peering through the window, he saw the keeper dozing in his chair. By the light from within he selected from the bunch of keys he carried one that had a white string knotted in its ring. This was the key that was to open the big gate in case no one challenged him. In any other case he was to give the countersign, "Dangloss," and trust fortune to pass him through without question.

Luck was with him, and, finding the great lock, he softly inserted and turned the key. The wind blew the heavy gate open violently, and it required all of his strength to keep it from banging against the wall beyond. The most difficult task that he had encountered grew from his efforts to close the gate against the blast. He was about to give up in despair when a hand was laid on his shoulder and some one hissed in his startled ear:

"Sh! Not a word!"

His legs almost went from under his body, so great was the shock and the fear. Two strong hands joined his own in the effort to pull the door into position, and he knew at once that they belonged to the man who was to meet him on the corner at the right of the prison wall. He undoubtedly had tired of the delay and, feeling secure in the darkness of the storm, had come to meet his charge, the escaping prisoner. Their united efforts brought about the desired result, and together they left the prison behind, striking out against the storm in all its fury.

"You are late," called the stranger in his ear.

"Not too late, am I?" he cried back, clutching the other's arm.

"No, but we must hasten."

"Captain Quinnox, is it you?"

"Have a care! The storm has ears and can hear names," cautioned the other. As rapidly as possible they made their way along the black street, almost a river with its sheet of water. Lorry had lost his bearings and knew not whither he went, trusting to the guidance of his struggling companion. There seemed to be no end to their journey, and he was growing weak beneath the exertion and the excitement.

"How far do we go?" he cried at last.

"But a few rods. The carriage is at the next corner."

"Where is the carriage to take me?" he demanded.

"I am not at liberty to say."

"Am I to see her before I go?"

"That is something I cannot answer, sir. My instructions are to place you in the carriage and ride beside the driver until our destination is reached."

"Is it the castle?" cried the other joyously.

"It is not the castle," was the disappointing answer.

At that moment they came upon a great dark hulk and heard the stamping of horses' hoofs close at hand. It was so dark they could scarcely discern the shape of the carriage, although they could touch its side with their hands.

A soldier stood in the shelter of the vehicle and opened the door for the American.

"Hurry! Get in!" exclaimed Quinnox.

"I wish to know if this is liable to get her into trouble," demanded Lorry, pausing with one foot on the steps.

"Get in!" commanded the soldier who was holding the door, pushing him forward uneasily. He floundered into the carriage, where all was dry and clean. In his hand he still carried the keys and the lantern, the slide of which he had closed before leaving the prison

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