

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 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 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 principedom of Axphain \$30,000,000. The creditor demands cash or the cession of the richest districts of Graustark. XIII.—The Prince of Axphain 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.

CHAPTER XIX. THE SOLDIER.

OFF went the carriage with a dash, the rumble of its wheels joining in the grewsome roar of the elements. For some time the two sat speechless side by side. Outside the thunder rolled, the rain swirled and hissed, the wind howled and all the horrors of nature seemed crowded into the blackness of that thrilling night. Lorry wondered vaguely whither they were going, why he had seen no flashes of lightning, if he should ever see her again. His mind was busy with a thousand thoughts and queries.

"Where are we going?" he asked after they had traveled half a mile or so. "To a place of safety," came the reply from the darkness beside him.

"Thanks," he said dryly. "By the way, don't you have any lightning in this part of the world? I haven't seen a flash tonight."

"It is very rare," came the brief reply.

"Devilish uncommunicative," thought Lorry. After a moment he asked, "How far do we travel tonight?"

"A number of miles."

"Then I'm going to take off this wet coat. It weighs a ton. Won't you remove yours?" He jerked off the big rain coat and threw it across to the opposite seat, with the keys and the lantern. There was a moment's hesitation on the part of his companion, and then a second wet coat followed the first. Their rain helmets were also tossed aside. "Makes a fellow feel more comfortable."

After this there was a longer silence than at any time before. The soldier drew himself into the corner of the seat, an action which repelled further discussion, it seemed to Lorry, so he leaned back in the opposite corner and allowed his mind to wander far from the interior of that black, stuffy carriage. Where was he going? When was he to leave Graustark? Was he

to see her soon!

Soon the carriage left the smooth streets of Edelweiss, and he could tell by the jolting and careening that they were in the country, racing over a rough, rocky road. It reminded him of an overland trip he had taken in West Virginia some months before, with the fairest girl in all the world as his companion. Now he was riding in her carriage, but with a surly, untalkative soldier of the guard. The more he allowed his thoughts to revel in the American ride and its delights the more uncontrollable became his desire to see the one who had whirled with him in "Light Horse" Jerry's coach.

"I wish to know how soon I am to see your mistress," he exclaimed impulsively, sitting up and striking his companion's arm by way of emphasis.

To his surprise, the hand was dashed away, and he distinctly heard the soldier gasp. "I beg your pardon!" he cried, fearing that he had given pain with his eager strength.

"You startled me. I was half asleep," stammered the other apologetically. "Whom do you mean by my mistress?"

"Her royal highness, of course," said Lorry impatiently.

"I cannot say when you are to see the princess," said his companion after waiting so long that Lorry felt like kicking him.

"Well, see here, my friend, do you know why I agreed to leave that place back there? I said I wouldn't go away from Graustark until I had seen her. If you fellows are spiriting me away—kidnaping me, as it were—I want to tell you I won't have it that way. I must know right now where we are going in this awful storm!"

"I have orders to tell you nothing," said the soldier stanchly.

"Orders, eh! From whom?"

"That is my affair, sir!"

"I guess I'm about as much interested in this affair as anybody, and I insist on knowing our destination. I jumped into this thing blindly, but I'm going to see my way out of it before we go much farther. Where are we going?"

"You—you will learn that soon enough," insisted the other.

"Am I to see her soon? That's what I want to know."

"You must not insist!" cried the soldier. "Why are you so anxious to see her?" he asked suddenly.

"Don't be so blamed inquisitive,"

cried Grenfall angrily, impatiently. "Tell me where we are going or I'll put a bullet into you!" Drawing his revolver, he leaned over, grasped the guard by the shoulder and placed the muzzle against his breast.

"For God's sake, be calm! You would not kill me for obeying orders! I am serving one you love. Are you mad? I shall scream if you keep pressing that horrid thing against my side." Lorry felt him tremble and was at once filled with compunction. How could he expect a loyal fellow to disobey orders?

"I beg your pardon a thousand times," he cried, jamming the pistol into his pocket. "You are a brave gentleman, and I am a fool. Take me where you will. I'll go like a lamb. You'll admit, however, that it is exasperating to be going in the dark like this."

"It is a very good thing that it is dark," said the soldier quickly. "The darkness is very kind to us. No one can see us, and we can see no one."

"I should say not. I haven't the faintest idea what you look like. Have I seen you at the castle?"

"Yes, frequently."

"Will you tell me your name?"

"You would not know me by name."

"Are you an officer?"

"No. I am new to the service."

"Then I'll see that you are promoted. I like your stanchness. How old are you?"

"I am—er—twenty-two."

"Of the nobility?"

"My father was of noble birth."

"Then you must be so too. I hope you'll forgive my rudeness. I'm a bit nervous, you know."

"I forgive you gladly."

"Devilish rough road this."

"Devilish. It is a mountain road."

"That's where we were too."

"Where who were?"

"Oh, a young lady and I some time ago. I just happened to think of it."

"It could not have been pleasant."

"You never made a bigger mistake in your life."

"Oh, she must have been pretty, then."

"You are right this time. She is glorious."

"Pardon me. They usually are in such adventures."

"By Jove, you're a clever one!"

"Does she live in America?"

"That's none of your affair."

"Oh!" And then there was silence between them.

"Inquisitive fool!" muttered Gren to himself.

For some time they bumped along over the rough road, jostling against each other frequently, both enduring stoically and silently. Suddenly Lorry remembered the lantern. It was still lit with the slide closed when he threw it on the seat. Perhaps it still burned and could relieve the oppressive darkness if but for a short time. He might at least satisfy his curiosity and look upon the face of his companion. Leaning forward, he fumbled among the traps on the opposite seat.

"I think I'll see if the lantern is lighted. Let's have it a little more cheerful in here," he said. There was a sharp exclamation, and two vigorous hands grasped him by the shoulder, jerking him back unceremoniously.

"No, no! You will ruin all! There must be no light!" cried the soldier, his voice high and shrill.

"But we are out of the city."

"I know! I know! But I will not permit you to have a light. Against orders. We have not passed the outposts," expostulated the other nervously.

"What's the matter with your voice?" demanded Lorry, struck by the change in it.

"My voice?" asked the other, the tones natural again. "It's changing. Didn't it embarrass you when your voice broke like that?" went on the questioner breathlessly. Lorry was now leaning back in the seat, quite a little mystified.

"I don't believe mine ever broke like that," he said speculatively. There was no response, and he sat silent for some time, regretting more and more that it was so dark.

Gradually he became conscious of a strange, unaccountable presence in that dark cab. He could feel a change coming over him. He could not tell why, but he was sure that some one else was beside him, some one who was not the soldier. Something soft and delicate and sweet came into existence, permeating the darkness with its undeniable presence. A queer power seemed drawing him toward the other end of the seat. The most delightful sensations took possession of him. His heart fluttered oddly. His head began to reel!

"W;

spell. "you?" he cried in a sort of ecstasy. There was no answer. He remembered his match safe and with trembling, eager fingers drew it from the pocket of the coat he was wearing. The next instant he was scratching a match, but as it flared the body of his companion was hurled against his and a ruthless mouth blew out the feeble blaze.

"Oh, why do you persist?" was cried in his ears.

"I am determined to see your face," he answered sharply, and with a low cry of dismay the other occupant of the carriage fell back in the corner. The next match drove away the darkness and the mystery. With blinking eyes he saw the timid soldier huddling in the corner, one arm covering his face, the other hand vainly striving to pull the skirt of a military coat over a pair of red trouser legs. Below the arm that hid the eyes and nose he saw parted lips and a beardless, dainty chin; above, long, dark tresses strayed in condemning confusion. The breast beneath the blue coat heaved convulsively.

The match dropped from his fingers, and as darkness fell again it hid the soldier in the strong arms of the fugitive—not a soldier bold, but a gasping, blushing, unresisting coward. The lithe form quivered and then became motionless in the fierce, straining embrace. The head dropped upon his shoulder, his hot lips caressing the burning face and pouring wild, incoherent words into the little ears.

"You! You!" he cried, mad with joy. "Oh, this is heaven itself! My brave darling! Mine forever—mine forever! You shall never leave me now! Drive on! Drive on!" he shouted to the men outside, drunk with happiness. "We'll make this journey endless. I know you love me now—I know it! Oh, I shall die with joy!"

A hand stole gently into his hand, and her lips found his in a long, passionate kiss.

"I do not want you to know! Ach, I am so sorry! Why, why did I come tonight? I was so strong, so firm, I thought; but see how weak I am! You dominate me; you own me, body and soul, in spite of everything—against my will. I love you, I love you, I love you!"

"I have won against the princes and the potentates! I was losing hope, my queen—losing hope. You were so far away, so unattainable. I would brave a thousand deaths rather than lose



The next match drove away the darkness and the mystery.

this single minute of my life. It makes me the richest man in all the world. How brave you are! This night you have given up everything for my sake. You are fleeing with me away from all that has been dear to you."

(Continued)