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Beverly of
Graustark

By
GEORGE BARR
M'CUTCHEON,
Author of "Graustark"

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(Continued from last week.)

She was awakened in the middle of the night by the violent flapping of her chamber window. Startled, she sat bolt upright and strained her eyes to pierce the mysterious darkness. Aunt Fanny, on her bed of grass, stirred convulsively, but did not awake. The blackness of the strange chamber was broken ever and anon by faint flashes of light from without, and she lived through long minutes of terror before it dawned upon her that a thunder-storm was brewing. The wind was rising, and the night seemed agog with excitement. Beverly crept from her couch and felt her way to the fluttering doorway. Drawing aside the blanket, she peered forth into the night, her heart jumping with terror. Her highness was very much afraid of thunder and lightning.

The fire in the open had died down until naught remained but a few glowing embers. These were blown into brilliancy by the wind, casting a steady red light over the scene. There was but one human figure in sight. Beside the fire stood the tall wanderer. He was hatless and coatless, and his arms were folded across his chest. Seemingly oblivious to the approach of the storm he stood staring into the heap of ashes at his feet. His face was toward her, every feature plainly distinguishable in the faint glow from the fire. To her amazement the black patch was missing from his eye, and what surprised her almost to the point of exclaiming aloud, there appeared to be absolutely no reason for its presence there at any time. There was no mark or blemish upon or about the eye. It was as clear and penetrating as its fellow, darkly gleaming in the red glow from below. Moreover, Beverly said that he was strikingly handsome—a strong, manly face. The highly imaginative southern girl's mind reverted to the first portraits of Napoleon she had seen.

Suddenly he started, threw up his head and, looking up to the sky, uttered some strange words. Then he strode abruptly toward her doorway. She felt back breathless. He stopped just outside, and she knew that he was listening for sounds from within. After many minutes she stealthily looked forth again. He was standing near the fire, his back toward her, looking off into the night.

The wind was growing stronger. The breezes fanned the night into a rush of shivery coolness. Constant flickerings of lightning illuminated the forest, transforming the treetops into great black waves. Tall reeds along the river bank began to bend their tops, to swing themselves gently to and from the wind. In the lowlands down from the cave will-o'-the-wisps played tag with jack-o'-lanterns, merrily scampering about in the blackness, reminding her of the revelers in a famous Brocken scene. Low moans grew out of the havoc, and voices seemed to speak in unintelligible whispers to the agitated twigs and leaves. The secrets of the wind were being spread upon the records of the night. Tales of many climes passed through the ears of Nature.

From gentle undulations the marsh-land reeds swept into lower dips, danced wilder minuets, lashed each other with infuriated glee, mocking the whistle of the wind with an angry swish of their tall bodies. Around the corners of the Inn of the Hawk and Raven scurried the singing brooks, reluctant to leave a playground so pleasing to the fancy. Soon the night became a caldron, a surging, hissing, roaring receptacle in which were mixing the ingredients of disaster. Night birds flapped through the moaning treetops in search of shelter; reeds were flattened to the earth, bowing to



She saw him throw his arms aloft, the sovereignty of the wind; clouds roiled with the rumble of a million chariots, and then the sky and the earth met in one of those savage combats that make all other warfare seem as play.

As Beverly sank back from the crash

she saw him throw his arms aloft as though inviting the elements to mass themselves and their energy upon his head. She shrieked involuntarily, and he heard the cry above the carnage. Instantly his face was turned in her direction.

"Help! Help!" she cried. He bounded toward the swishing robes and blankets, but his impulse had found a rival in the blast. Like a flash the walls of the guest chamber were whisked away, scuttling off into the night or back into the depths of the cavern. With the deluge came the man. From among the stifling robes he snatched her up and bore her away, she knew not whither.

CHAPTER VI.

"MAY all storms be as pleasant as this one!" Beverly heard some one say with a merry laugh. The next instant she was placed suddenly upon her feet. A blinding flash of lightning revealed Baldos, the goat hunter, at her side, while a dozen shadowy figures were scrambling to their feet in all corners of the Hawk and Raven. Some one was clutching her by the dress at the knees. She did not have to look down to know that it was Aunt Fanny.

"Goodness!" gasped Beverly, and then it was pitch dark again. The man at her side called out a command in his own language and then turned his face close to hers.

"Do not be alarmed. We are quite safe now. The royal bedchamber has come to grief, however, I am sorry to say. What a fool I was not to have foreseen all this! The storm has been brewing since midnight," he was saying to her.

"Isn't it awful?" cried Beverly between a moan and a shriek.

"They are trifles after one gets used to them," he said. "I have come to be quite at home in the tempest. There are other things much more annoying. I assure your highness. We shall have lights in a moment." Even as he spoke two or three lanterns began to flicker feebly.

"Be quiet, Aunt Fanny, you are not killed at all," commanded Beverly quite firmly.

"De house is suah to blow down, Miss-yo' highness," groaned the trusty maid-servant. Beverly laughed bravely but nervously with the tall goat hunter. He at once set about making his guest comfortable and secure from the effects of the tempest, which was now at its height. Her couch of cushions was dragged far back into the cavern and the rescued blankets, though drenched, again became a screen.

"Do you imagine that I'm going in there while this storm rages?" Beverly demanded as the work progressed.

"Are you not afraid of lightning? Most young women are."

"That's the trouble. I am afraid of it. I'd much rather stay out here where there is company. You don't mind, do you?"

"Paradise cannot be spurned by one who now feels its warmth for the first time," he said gallantly. "Your fear is my delight. Pray sit upon our throne. It was once a humil' carriage seat of leather, but now it is exalted. Besides, it is much more comfortable than some of the gilded chairs we hear about."

"You are given to irony, I fear," she said, observing a peculiar smile on his lips.

"I crave pardon, your highness," he said humbly. "The heart of the goat hunter is more gentle than his wit. I shall not again forget that you are a princess and I the veriest beggar."

"I didn't mean to hurt you!" she cried in consternation, for she was a very poor example of what a princess is supposed to be.

"There is no wound, your highness," he quickly said. With a mocking grace that almost angered her he dropped to his knee and motioned for her to be seated. She sat down suddenly, clapping her hands to her ears and shutting her eyes tightly. The crash of thunder that came at that instant was the most fearful of all, and it was a full minute before she dared to lift her lids again. He was standing before her, and there was genuine compassion in his face. "It's terrible," he said. "Never before have I seen such a storm. Have courage, your highness. It can last but little longer."

"Goodness!" said the real American girl, for want of something more expressive.

"Your servant has crept into your couch, I fear. Shall I sit here at your feet? Perhaps you may feel a small sense of security if I—"

"Indeed, I want you to sit there," she cried. He forthwith threw himself upon the floor of the cave, a graceful, respectful guardian. Minutes went by without a word from either. The noise of the storm made it impossible to speak and he heard. Scattered about the cavern were his outstretched followers, doubtless asleep once more in all this turmoil. With the first fall in the war of the elements Beverly's nerve utterance to the

thought that long had been struggling for release.

"Why do you wear that horrid black patch over your eye?" she asked, a trifle timidly. He muttered a sharp exclamation and clapped his hand to his eye. For the first time since the beginning of their strange acquaintanceship Beverly observed downright confusion in this debonaire knight of the wilds.

"It has—has slipped off," he stammered, with a guilty grin. His merry insolence was gone, his composure with it. Beverly laughed with keen enjoyment over the discomfiture of the shame-faced vagabond.

"You can't fool me!" she exclaimed, shaking her finger at him in the most unconventional way. "It was intended to be a disguise. There is absolutely nothing the matter with your eye."

He was speechless for a moment, recovering himself. Wisdom is conceived in silence, and he knew this. Vagabond or gentleman, he was a clever actor.

"The eye is weak, your highness, and I cover it in the daytime to protect it from the sunlight," he said coolly.

"That's all very nice, but it looks to be quite as good as the other. And what is more, sir, you are not putting the patch over the same eye that wore it when I first saw you. It was the left eye at sunset. Does the trouble transfer after dark?"

He broke into an honest laugh and hastily moved the black patch across his nose to the left eye.

"I was turned around in the darkness, that's all," he said serenely. "It belongs over the left eye, and I am deeply grateful to you for discovering the error."

"I don't see any especial reason why you should wear it after dark, do you? There is no sunlight, I'm sure."

"I am dazzled, nevertheless," he retorted.

"Fiddlesticks!" she said. "This is a cave, not a drawing room."

"In other words, I am a lout and not a courtier," he smiled. "Well, a lout may look at a princess. We have no court etiquette in the hills, I am sorry to say."

"That was very unkind, even though you said it most becomingly," she protested. "You have called this hall a throne. Let us also imagine that you are a courtier."

"You punish me most gently, your highness. I shall not forget my manners again, believe me." He seemed thoroughly subdued.

"Then I shall expect you to remove that horrid black thing. It is positively villainous. You look much better without it."

"Is it an edict or a compliment?" he asked, with such deep gravity that she flushed.

"It is neither," she answered. "You don't have to take it off unless you want to—"

"In either event it is off. You were right. It serves as a partial disguise. I have many enemies and the black patch is a very good friend."

"How perfectly lovely!" cried Beverly. "Tell me all about it. I adore stories about fends and all that."

"Your husband is an American. He should be able to keep you well entertained with blood-and-thunder stories," said he.

"My hus— What do you— Oh, yes!" gasped Beverly. "To be sure. I didn't hear you, I guess. That was rather a severe clap of thunder, wasn't it?"

"Is that also a command?"

"What do you mean?"

"There was no thunderclap, you know."

"Oh, wasn't there?" helplessly.

"The storm is quite past. There is still a dash of rain in the air, and the wind may be dying hard, but aside from that I think the noise is quite subdued."

"I believe you are right. How sudden it all was."

"There are several hours between this and dawn, your highness, and you should try to get a little more sleep. Your cushions are dry and—"

"Very well, since you are so eager to get rid of me," began Beverly, and then stopped, for it did not sound particularly regal. "I should have said, you are very thoughtful. You will call me if I sleep late?"

"We shall start early, with your permission. It is forty miles to Ganlook, and we must be half way there by nightfall."

"Must we spend another night like this?" cried Beverly dolefully.

"Alas, I fear you must endure us another night. I am afraid, however, we shall not find quarters as comfortable as those of the Hawk and Raven."

"I didn't mean to be ungrateful and—er—suppish," she said, wondering if he knew the meaning of the word.

"No?" he said politely, and she knew he did not, whereupon she felt distinctly humbled.

"You know you speak such excellent English," she said irrelevantly.

He bowed low. As he straightened his figure, to his amazement, he beheld an agonizing look of horror on her face, her eyes riveted on the mouth of the cavern. Then there came an angrier sound, unlike any that had gone before in that night of turmoil.

"Look there! Quick!"

The cry of terror from the girl's palsied lips as she pointed to something behind him awoke the mountain man to instant action. Instinctively he snatched his long dagger from his sheath and turned quickly. Not twenty feet from them a huge catlike beast stood half crouched on the edge of the darkness, his long tail switching angrily. The feeble light from the depth of the cave threw the long, water-soaked shadow into bold relief

against the black wall beyond. Apparently he was as much surprised as the two who glared at him, as though frozen to the spot. A snarling whine, a fierce growl, indicated his fury at finding his shelter, his lair, occupied.

"My God! A mountain lion! Ravone! Franz! To me!" he cried hoarsely, and sprang before her shouting loudly to the sleepers.

A score of men, half awake, grasped their weapons and struggled to their feet in answer to his call. The lion's gaunt body shot through the air. In two bounds he was upon the goat hunter. Baldos stood squarely and firmly to meet the rush of the maddened beast, his long dagger poised for the death dealing blow.

"Run!" he shouted to her.

Beverly Calhoun had fighting blood in her veins. Utterly unconscious of her action at the time, she quickly drew the little silver handled revolver from the pocket of her gown. As man, beast and knife came together, in her excitement she fired recklessly at the combatants without any thought of the imminent danger of killing her protector. There was a wild scream of pain from the wounded beast, more pistol shots, fierce yells from the excited hunters, the rush of feet, and then the terrified and almost frantic girl staggered and fell against the rocky wall. Her wide gray eyes were fastened upon the writhing lion, and the smoking pistol was tightly clutched in her hand.

It had all occurred in such an incredibly short space of time that she could not yet realize what had happened.

Her heart and brain seemed paralyzed, her limbs stiff and immovable. Like the dizzy whirl of a kaleidoscope, the picture before her resolved itself into shape.

The beast was gasping his last upon the rocky floor, the hilt of the goat hunter's dagger protruding from his side. Baldos, supported by two of his men, stood above the savage victim, his legs covered with blood. The cave was full of smoke and the smell of powder. Out of the haze she began to see the light of understanding. Baldos alone was injured. He had stood between her and the rush of the lion and he had saved her at a cost she knew not how great.

"Oh, the blood!" she cried hoarsely. "Is it—Is it—are you badly hurt?" She was at his side, the pistol falling from her nervous fingers.

"Don't come near me. I'm all right!" he cried quickly.

"Take care—your dress!"—

"Oh, I'm so glad to hear you speak! Never mind the dress! You are torn to pieces! You must be frightfully hurt. Oh, isn't it terrible—horrible! Aunt Fanny! Come here this minute!"

Forgetting the beast and throwing off the paralysis of fear, she pushed one of the men away and grasped the arm of the injured man. He winced perceptibly, and she felt something warm and sticky on her hands. She knew it was blood, but it was not in her to shrink at a moment like this.

"Your arm too!" she gasped. He smiled, although his face was white

with pain. "How brave you were. You might have been—I'll never forget it—never! Don't stand there, Aunt Fanny! Quick! Get those cushions for him. He's hurt."

"Good Lawd!" was all the old woman could say, but she obeyed her mistress.

"It was easier than it looked, your highness," murmured Baldos. "Luck was with me. The knife went to his heart. I am merely scratched. His leap was short, but he caught me above the knee with his claws. Alas, your highness, those trousers of mine were bad enough before, but now they are in shreds. What patching I shall have to do! And you may well imagine we are short of thread and needles and thimbles."

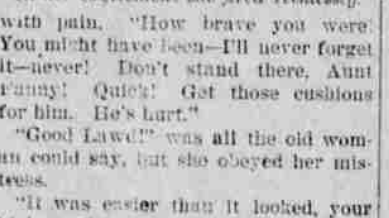
"Don't jest, for heaven's sake! Don't talk like that. Here! Lie down upon these cushions and—"

"Never! Desecrate the couch of Graustark's ruler? I, the poor goat hunter? I'll use the lion for a pillow and the rock for an operating table. In ten minutes my men can have these scratches dressed and bound—in fact, there is a surgical student among them, poor fellow. I think I am his first patient. Ravone, attend me."

He threw himself upon the ground and calmly placed his head upon the body of the animal.

"I insist upon your taking these cushions," cried Beverly.

"And I decline irrevocably." She stared at him in positive anger. "Trust Ravone to dress these trifling wounds, your highness. He may not be as



gentle, but he is as firm as any prince in all the world."

"But your arm?" she cried. "Didn't you say it was your legs? Your arm is covered with blood too. Oh, dear me, I'm afraid you are frightfully wounded."

"A stray bullet from one of my men struck me there, I think. You know there was but little time for aiming!"

"Wait! Let me think a minute! Good heavens!" she exclaimed, with a start. Her eyes were suddenly filled with tears, and there was a break in her voice. "I shot you! Don't deny it—don't! It is the right arm, and your men could not have hit it from where they stood. Oh, oh, oh!"

Baldos smiled as he bared his arm. "Your aim was good," he admitted. "Had not my knife already been in the lion's heart your bullet would have gone there. It is my misfortune that my arm was in the way. Besides, your highness, it has only cut through the skin, and a little below, perhaps. It will be well in a day or two. I am sure you will find your bullet in the carcass of our lamented friend, the probable owner of this place."

Ravone, a hungry looking youth, took charge of the wounded leader, while her highness retreated to the farthest corner of the cavern. There she sat and trembled while the wounds were being dressed. Aunt Fanny bustled back and forth, first unceremoniously pushing her way through the circle of men to take observations and then reporting to the impatient girl. The storm had passed, and the night was still except for the rush of the river. Raindrops fell now and then from the trees, glistening like diamonds as they touched the light from the cavern's mouth. It was all very dreary, uncanny and oppressive to poor Beverly. Now and then she caught herself sobbing, more out of shame and humiliation than in sadness, for had she not shot the man who stepped between her and death? What must he think of her?

"He says yo' all 'd bettah go to bald, Miss Bev-yo' highness," said Aunt Fanny after one of her trips.

"Oh, he does, does he?" sniffed Beverly. "I'll go to bed when I please. Tell him so. No, no—don't do it, Aunt Fanny! Tell him I'll go to bed when I'm sure he is quite comfortable, not before."

"But he's jes' a goat puncher er a—"

"He's a man, if there ever was one. Don't let me hear you call him a goat puncher again. How are his legs?" Aunt Fanny was almost stunned by this amazing question from her ever decorous mistress. "Why don't you answer? Will they have to be cut off? Didn't you see them?"

"Fo' de Lawd's sake, missy, co'se Ah did, but yo' all kindeh surprise me. Dey's p'etty bad skun up, missy; de hide's peeled up consid'ble. But hit sin' dang'ous, no, ma'am—jes' skun; 'at's all."

"And his arm—where I shot him?"

"Puffeely triflin', ma'am—yo' highness. Cobwebs 'd stop de bleedin', an' Ah tole 'em so, but 'at felleh couldn' un'stan' me. Misteb What's-his-name, he says somethin' to de docteh, an' den dey goes afehh de cobwebs, suah 'nough. 'Tain' bleedin' no mo', missy. He's mostes peah deff' ve'y fine. Co'se he caln' walk fo' sev'l days wiv dem laigs o' his'n, but—"

"Then, in heaven's name, how are we to get to Edelweiss?"

"He c'n ride, can't he? Wha's to hinder him?"

"Quite right. He shall ride inside the coach. Go and see if I can do anything for him."

Aunt Fanny returned in a few minutes.

"He says yo'll do him a great favoh if yo' jes' go to bald. He sends his 'spects an' hopes yo' slumbeh won' be disturbed ag'in."

"He's a perfect brute!" exclaimed Beverly, but she went over and crawled under the blankets and among the cushions the wounded man had scorned.

CHAPTER VII.

HERE was a soft, warm, yellow glow to the world when Beverly Calhoun next looked upon it. The sun from his throne in the mountain tops was smiling down upon the valley the night had ravaged while he was on the other side of the earth. The leaves of the trees were a softer green, the white of the rocks and the yellow of the road were of a greater tint. The brown and green reeds were proudly erect once more.

The glimmer of the mountain men had awakened Aunt Fanny, and she in turn called her mistress from the surprisingly peaceful slumber into which perfect health had sent her not so many hours before. At the entrance to the improvised bedchamber stood buckets of water from the spring.

"We have very thoughtful chamber-maids," remarked Beverly while Aunt Fanny was putting her hair into presentable shape. "And an energetic cook," she added as the odor of broiled meat came to her nostrils.

"Ah, rain! see nothin' o' dat beastes. Miss Beverly, an' Ah—Ah got mah suspicions," said Aunt Fanny, with sepulchral despair in her voice.

"They've thrown the awful thing into the river," concluded Beverly.

"Dey's cookin' hit!" said Aunt Fanny solemnly.

"Good heaven, no!" cried Beverly. "Go and see, this minute. I wouldn't eat that catlike thing for the whole world." Aunt Fanny came back a few minutes later with the assurance that they were roasting goat meat. The skin of the midnight visitor was stretched upon the ground not far

(To be continued.)