

Beverly of Graustark

By GEORGE BARR M'UTCHEON. Author of "Graustark"

(Continued from last week.)

While the general was explaining one of the new gun carriages to the count...

"What did he mean when he said he had given you a lesson?" she demanded.

"He meant to alarm your highness," "Didn't he give you a talking to?"

"You are evading the question, sir. Was he mean and nasty to you? Tell me; I want to know."

"Well, he said things that a soldier must endure. A civilian or an equal might have run him through for it, your highness."

"But he will have me shot, your highness," said he gladly. "He will do nothing of the kind. You are my guard."

"I have an appointment," he said slowly, but with understanding.

"But you will break it, I am sure," she asserted confidently. "I want to give you a lesson in lawn tennis."

"Now, don't scold," she pleaded, and the countess could go no further.

The following morning Count Marlax reported at 9 o'clock with much better grace than he had suspected himself capable of exercising.

"Good heavens!" gasped poor Beverly. "Have you studied all this out?"

"I was once a real soldier, your highness," he said simply. "It was impos-

curate maps of the fort and of all our masked fortifications along the city walls."

"Neither am I one of you," said Beverly stoutly. "Why shouldn't I prove to be a traitress?"

"You have no quarrel with us, Miss Calhoun," said Dangloss.

"If anything happens, then, I am to be blamed for it!" she cried in deep distress.

"For his own sake, your highness, and, Miss Calhoun, I suggest that no opportunity should be given him to communicate with the outside world."

"Yes, your highness, and as far as possible from the fortress."

"I think it is a wise precaution. Don't be angry, Beverly," the princess said gently.

"It would be easy for some one high in position to accuse and convict him," said Dangloss meaningly.

"And it would be just like some one, too," agreed Beverly, her thoughts, with the others, going toward none but one man "high in power."

"Later in the day she called Baldos to her side as they were riding in the castle avenue. She was determined to try a little experiment of her own."

"I could overthrow it after half an hour's bombardment, your highness," he answered without thinking.

"Is it possible? Are there so many weak points?" she went on, catching her breath.

"There are three vital points of weakness, your highness. The magazine can be reached from the outside if one knows the lay of the land, the parade ground exposes the ammunition building to certain disadvantages and the big guns could be silenced in an hour if an enemy had the sense first to bombard from the elevation northeast of the city."

"I have been watching you for half an hour," she said gently. "Can't you look at the magazine and stars as well as one? Isn't it my grim old castle? Let us sit here together, dear, and dream awhile."

"You dear Yette," and Beverly drew her down beside her on the cushions.

"I have been watching you for half an hour," she said gently. "Can't you look at the magazine and stars as well as one? Isn't it my grim old castle? Let us sit here together, dear, and dream awhile."

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scented the air; the gurgle of fountains was the only music that touched the ear. Beverly Calhoun, dismissing Aunt Fanny, stepped from her window out upon the great stone balcony.

She was troubled. The fear had entered her head that the castle folk were regretting the advent of Baldos, that every one was questioning the wisdom of his being in the position he occupied through her devices.

For many minutes she sat in the dark shadow of a great pillar, her elbows upon the cool balustrade, staring dreamily into the star studded vault above.

"That settles it," she said rigidly. "You are not to report to him at 9 tomorrow."

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"I don't want to talk about him," said Beverly, but she was disappointed when the princess obligingly changed the subject.

Baldos was not surprised, scarcely more than interested, when, a day or two later, he was summoned to appear before the board of strategy.

The Graustark ministry had received news from the southern frontier. Messengers came in with the alarming and significant report that Dawsbergen was strengthening her fortifications in the passes and moving war supplies northward.

"Proceed with the examination, Mr. Lorry," said Count Halfont, interpreting a quick glance from Yette.

"Are you willing to answer any and all questions we may ask in connection with your observations since you became a member of the castle guard?" asked Lorry.

"I am."

"Did you take especial care to study the interior of the fortress when you were there several days ago?"

"I did."

"Have you discussed your observations with any one since that time?"

"I have."

"With whom?"

"With her highness the princess," said Baldos without a quiver. There was a moment's silence, and furtive looks were cast in the direction of Yette, whose face was a study.

"And your impressions have gone no farther?"

"They have not, sir. It was most confidential."

"Could you accurately reproduce the plans of the fortress?"

"I think so. It would be very simple."

"Have you studied engineering?"

"Yes."

"And you could scientifically enumerate the defects in the construction of the fort?"

"It would not be very difficult, sir."

"It has come to our ears that you consider the fortress weak in several particulars. Have you so stated at any time?"

"I told the princess that the fortress is deplorably weak. In fact, I think I mentioned that it could be taken with ease."

"He was not looking at Count Marlax, but he knew that the old man's eyes were flaming. Then he proceeded to tell the board how he could overcome the fortress, elaborating on his remarks to Beverly. The ministers listened in wonder to the words of this calm, indifferent young man."

"Will you oblige us by making a rough draft of the fort's interior?" asked Lorry after a solemn pause.

have the benefit of your superior intelligence? No, gentlemen, all this prating of loyalty need not deceive us," he cried, springing to his feet.

"My—my kindnesses?" cried Marlax. "What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean this, Count Marlax," said Baldos, looking steadily into the eyes of the head of the army. "It was kind and considerate of you to admit me to the fortress, no matter in what capacity, especially at a critical time like this. You did not know me, you had no way of telling whether my intentions were honest or otherwise, and yet I was permitted to go through the fort from end to end. No spy could wish for greater generosity than that."

"You will understand, Baldos, that we have some cause for apprehension," said Lorry, immensely gratified by the outcome of the tilt. "You are a stranger, and, whether you admit it or not, there is reason to believe that you are not what you represent yourself to be."

"I am a humble guard at present, sir, and a loyal one. My life is yours should I prove otherwise."

Yette whispered something in Lorry's ear at this juncture. She was visibly pleased and excited. He looked doubtful for an instant and then apparently followed her suggestion, regardless of consequences.

"Would you be willing to utilize your knowledge as an engineer by suggesting means to strengthen the fortress?"

"Never!" he blurted out hoarsely.

"I will do anything the princess commands me to do," said Baldos easily.

"You mean that you serve her only?"

"I serve her first, sir. If she were here she could command me to die, and there would be an end to Baldos."

"She could hardly ask you to die," said Yette, addressing him for the first time.

"A princess is like April weather, madam," said Baldos, with rare humor, and the laugh was general.

"I would like to ask the fellow another question," said Marlax, fingering his sword hilt nervously.

"I believe I enlisted as a member of the castle guard, sir. The duty of the guard is to protect the person of the ruler of Graustark and to do that to the death."

"It is my belief that you are a spy. You can show evidence of good faith by endeavoring to fight against Dawsbergen and by shooting to kill," said the count, with a sinister gleam in his eye.

"And if I decline to serve in any other capacity than the one I now?"

"Then I shall brand you as a spy and execute you."

"You have already called me a spy, your excellency. It will not make it true, let me add, if you call me a coward. I refuse to take up arms against either Dawsbergen or Asphain."

"The remark created a profound sensation. Then you are employed by both instead of one!" shouted the Iron Count defiantly.

"I am employed as a guard for her royal highness," said Baldos, with a sardonic glance at Yette, "and not as a fighter in the ranks. I will fight till death for her, but not for Graustark."

"CHAPTER XVI. Jove, I like that fellow's coolness," said Lorry to Harry Anguish, after the meeting.

"He is right about that darned old fort," said Anguish. "His knowledge of such things proves conclusively that he is no ordinary person."

"Yette had a bit of a talk with him just now," said Lorry, with a reflective smile. "She asked him point blank if he knew who she was. He did not hesitate a second. 'I remember seeing you in the audience chamber recently,' that was a fencer for Yette. 'I assure you that it was no fault of mine that you saw me,' she replied. 'Then it must have been your friend who rustled the curtains,' said the confounded bluffer."



Baldos stood at the window, sifting for me not to see the defects in your fort."

"You've haven't told any one of this, have you?" she cried, white faced and nervous.

"No, no, your highness. You do not employ me as a talebearer, I trust."

"I did not mean to question your honor," she said. "Would you mind pointing before the heads of the war department and telling them just what you have told me? I mean about the weak spots."

"If it is your command, your highness," he said quietly, but he was surprised.

"You may expect to be summoned, then, so hold yourself in readiness. And Baldos—"

"Yes, your highness."

"You need say nothing to them of our having talked the matter over beforehand, unless they tell you down to it, you know."

"CHAPTER XV. FEW hours later all was dark and silent within the castle. On the same night, however, the moon shone brightly on the towers of the fortress. The wind whistled through the battlements, and the sentries on the walls were silent.

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