

GRAUSTARK

By GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

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of the horrors of that war." "But we would be thankful for the story of it, your excellency. War is a hobby of mine. I read every war scare that gets into print," said Angulsh eagerly.

"We of Graustark at present have every reason to recall the last war and bitterly to lament its ending. The war occurred just fifteen years ago—but with the recital tire you, Mr. Lorry? I came to spend a few moments socially and not to go into history. At any other time I shall be—"

"It will please and not tire me. I am deeply interested. Pray, go on," Lorry hastened to say, for he was interested more than the count suspected.

"Fifteen years ago Prince Ganlook of this principality, the father of our princess, became incensed over the depredations of the Axphain soldiers who patrolled our border on the north. He demanded restitution for the devastation he had created, but was refused. Graustark is a province comprising some 800 square miles of the best land in this part of the world. Our neighbor is smaller in area and population. Our army was better equipped, but not so hardy. For several months the fighting in the north was in our favor, but the result was that our forces were finally driven back to Edelweiss, hounded and battered by the fierce thousands that came over the border. The nation was staggered by the shock, for such an outcome had not been considered possible. We had been too confident. Our soldiers were sick and worn by six months of hard fighting, and the men of Edelweiss—the merchants, the laborers and the nobility itself—flew to arms in defense of the city. For over a month we fought, hundreds of our best and bravest citizens going down to death. They at last began a bombardment of the city. Today you can see the marks on nearly every house in Edelweiss. Hundreds of graves in the valley to the south attest the terrors of that siege. The castle was stormed, and Prince Ganlook, with many of the chief men of the land, met death. The prince was killed in front of the castle gates, from which he had sallied in a last brave attempt to beat off the conquerors. A bronze statue now marks the spot on which he fell. The princess, his wife, was my sister, and as I held the portfolio of finance it was through me that the city surrendered, bringing the siege to an end. Fifteen years ago this autumn—the 20th of November, to be explicit—the treaty of peace was signed in Sofia. We were compelled to cede a portion of territory in the far northeast, valuable for its mines. Indemnity was agreed upon by the peace commissioners, amounting to 20,000,000 gavvos, or nearly \$30,000,000 in your money. In fifteen years this money was to be paid, with interest, on the 20th of November, this year, to the people of Graustark must pay 25,000,000 gavvos. The time is at hand, and that is why we recall the war so sadly. It means the bankruptcy of the nation, gentlemen."

"Whether of his listeners spoke for many moments. Then Lorry broke the silence.

"You mean that the money cannot be raised?" he asked.

"I have been taxed so sorely in raising their homes and in recuperating from the effect of that dreadful war that they have been unable to pay the levies. You must remember we are a small nation and of a poor people. Your nation could raise 20,000,000 in one hour for the war."

"To us it is like a death-knell. I am not betraying a state secret, but I tell you of the sore straits in which we are placed, for every man's condition has been made cognizant to all conditions. We are all factious."

"Was something so quietly felt in your manner that both men felt agitated, looking at the military aide who brought the message."

"Thought through the war, your excellency?"

"I am minister, sir, to go to the front in the first battle in the last," he said simply.

"The princess—the present ruler, was a mere child at that time, she succeeded to the throne?"

"The great world does not recall the little history! Within a few years, my sister, passed away, broken heart. Her daughter, my child, was, according to the crown at once. She has ruled for three full years. For three years she has done all in her power to meet the shadow that is the alternative in case it is not paid?" asked Lorry, for he saw some of the approaching calamity.

"All that part of Graustark, including all of our mines and all of our resources, is in that event Graustark than one of the western countries."

"The Countess Dagmar, when not monopolized by the very progressive or aggressive Angulsh, unfolded to Lorry

royal highness to rule save a tract so small that the word principality will be a travesty and a jest—this city and twenty-five miles to the south, a strip about 150 miles long. Think of it! Twenty-five by 150 miles, and yet called a principality! Once the proudest and most prosperous state in the east, considering its size, reduced to that! Ah, gentlemen—gentlemen, I cannot think of it without tearing out a heart string and suffering such pains as mortal man has never endured. I lived in Graustark's days of wealth, power and supremacy. God has condemned me to live in the days of her dependency, weakness and poverty. Let us talk no more of this unpleasant subject."

"Willingly, your excellency, since it is distasteful to you. I hope, however, you will permit me to ask how much you are short of the amount," said Lorry considerately, yet curiously.

"Our minister of finance, Gaspon, will be able to produce 15,000,000 gavvos at the stated time, far from enough. This amount has been sucked from the people from excessive levy and has been hoarded for the dreaded day. Try as we would, it has been impossible to raise the full amount. The people have been bled and have responded nobly, sacrificing everything to meet the treaty terms honorably, but the strain has been too great. Our army has cost us large sums. We have strengthened our defenses and could, should we go to war, defeat Axphain. But we have our treaty to honor. We could not take up arms to save ourselves from that honest bond."

"Our levies have barely brought the amount necessary to maintain an army large enough to inspire respect among those who are ready to leap upon us the instant we show the least sign of distress. There are about us powers that have held aloof from us with us simply because we have bowed them with our show of force. It has been our safeguard, and they are not a citizen of Graustark who objects to the manner in which state affairs are conducted. They know that our army is an economy of any price. Until last spring we were confident that we could raise the full amount due Axphain, but the people in the rural districts were unable to meet the levies on account of the panic that came at a most unfortunate time. That is why we were hurrying home from your country, Mr. Lorry. Gaspon had cabled the princess that affairs were in a hopeless condition, begging her to come home and do what she could in a final appeal to the people, knowing the love they had for her. She came and has seen these loyal subjects offer their lives for her and for Graustark, but utterly unable to give what they have not—money. She asked them if she should disband the army, and there was a negative wall from one end of the land to the other. Then the army agreed to serve on half pay until all was tided over. Public officers are giving their services free, and many of our wealthy people have advanced loans on bonds, worthless as they may seem, and still we have not the required amount."

"Cannot the loan be extended a few years?" asked Lorry, angry with the ruler in the north, taking the woes of Graustark as much to heart as if they were his own.

"Not one day! Not in London, Paris nor Berlin."

Lorry lay back and allowed Angulsh to lead the conversation into other channels. The count remained for half an hour, saying as he left that the princess and his wife had expressed a desire to be remembered to their guests.

"Her royal highness spent the evening with the ministers of finance and war, and her poor head, I doubt not, is racking from the effects of the consultation. These are weighty matters for a girl to have on her hands," solemnly stated the count, pausing for an instant at the door of the apartment.

After he had closed the Americans looked long and thoughtfully at each other, each feeling a respect for the grim old gentleman that they had never felt for man before.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNDER MOON AND MONASTERY.

FOR two days Lorry lived through intermittent stages of delight and despondency. His recovery from the effects of the blow administered by Danno was naturally rapid, his strong young constitution coming to the rescue bravely. He saw much of the princess, more of the Countess Dagmar, and made the acquaintance of many lords and ladies for whom he cared but little except when they chose to talk of their girlish ruler. The atmosphere of the castle was laden with a depression that could not be overcome by an assimilated gaiety.

The princess could not hide the trouble that had sprung up in her eyes. Her laugh, her gay conversation, her rare composure and gentle hauteur were powerless to drive away the haunted, worried gleam in those expressive eyes of blue. Lorry had it on his tongue and a dozen times during the next day or so after the count's narrative to question her about the condition of affairs as they appeared to her.

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certain pages in the personal history of the princess, and he, of course, encouraged her confidential humor, although there was nothing encouraging in it for him.

Down by the great fountain, while the soldiers were on parade, the fair but voluble countess unfolded to Lorry a story that wrenched his heart so savagely that anger, resentment, helplessness and love oozed forth and enveloped him in a multitude of emotions that would not disperse.

"She will not mind my telling you, because she considers you the very best of men, Mr. Lorry," said the countess, who had learned her English under the Princess Yette's tutor.

It seems, according to the very truthful account given by the lady, that the princess had it in her power to save Graustark from disgrace and practical destruction. The Prince of Axphain's son, Lorenz, was deeply enamored of her, infatuated by her marvelous beauty and accomplishments. He had persuaded his father to consider a matrimonial alliance with her to be one of great value to Axphain. The old prince, therefore, some months before the arrival of the Americans in Graustark sent to the princess a substitute ultimatum, couched in terms so polite and conciliatory that there could be no mistaking his sincerity. He agreed to give Graustark a new lease of life, as it were, by extending the fifteen years or, in other words, to grant the conquered an additional ten years in which to pay off the obligations imposed by the treaty. He furthermore offered a considerable reduction in the rate of interest for the next ten years. But he had a condition attached to this good and gracious proposition—the marriage of Graustark's sovereign. His ambassador set forth the advantages of such an alliance, and departed with a message that the matter should have most serious consideration.

The old prince's proposition was a blow to the princess, who was placed in a trying position. By sacrificing herself she could save her country, but in so doing her life was to be plunged into interminable darkness. She did not love Lorenz, she respected Lorenz, who was not favorably supplied with civilized intelligence.

The proposition was laid before the cabinet and the nobility by the princess



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herself, who said that she would be guided by any decision they might reach. The countess to a man refused to sacrifice their girlish ruler, and the people vociferously rattled the resolution. But the princess would not allow them to send an answer to Axphain until she could see a way clear to save her people in some other manner. An embassy was sent to the Prince of Dawbergen. His domain touched Graustark on the south, and he ruled a wild, turbulent class of mountaineers and herdsmen. This embassy sought to secure an indorsement of the loan from Prince Gabriel sufficient to meet the coming crisis. Gabriel, himself smitten by the charms of the princess, at once offered himself in marriage, agreeing to advance, in case she accepted him, 20,000,000 gavvos at a rather high rate of interest for fifteen years. His love for her was so great that he would pawn the entire principality for an answer that would make him the happiest man on earth. Now, the troubled princess abhorred Gabriel. Of the two, Lorenz was much to be preferred. Gabriel flew into a rage upon the receipt of this rebuff and openly avowed his intention to make her suffer. His infatuation became a mania, and up to the very day on which the countess told the story he persisted in his appeals to the princess. In person he had gone to her to plead his guilt on his knees, groveling at her feet. He went so far as to exclaim madly in the presence of the alarmed but relentless object of his love that he would win her or turn the whole earth into everything unpleasant.

So it was that the Princess of Graustark, erstwhile Miss Guggensloeker, was being dragged through the most unhappy affairs that ever beset a sovereign. Within a month she was to sign away two-thirds of her domain, transforming multitudes of her beloved and loving people into subjects of the hated Axphain or to sell herself, body and soul, to a loathsome bidder in the guise of a sultana, and with all this confronting her, she had come to the realization of a truth so sad and distressing that it was breaking her tortured heart. She was in love, but with no royal prince! Of this, however, the countess knew nothing, so Lorry had one great secret to cherish alone.

"Has she chosen the course she will pursue?" asked Lorry as the countess concluded her story. His face was turned away.

"She cannot decide. We have wept together over this dreadful, this horrible thing. You do not know what it

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"I cannot command you to leave Edelweiss. I can only tell you that you will have something to answer for if you stay," said the countess.

"Will you help me if I show to you that I can reach the wreck and save the one who clings to it despairingly?" he asked, smiling, suddenly calm and confident.

"Willingly, for I love the one who is going down in the sea. I have spoken to you seriously, though, and I trust you will not misunderstand me. I like you, and I like Mr. Angulsh. You could stay here forever so far as I am concerned."

He thought long and intently over what she had said as he smoked his cigar on the great balcony that night. He saw in one moment the vast chasm between the man and the princess; in the next he laughed at the puny space. Down on the promenade he could see the figures of men and women strolling in the moonlight. To his ears came the occasional laugh of a man, the silver gurgle of a woman. The royal military band was playing in the stand near the edge of the great circle. There were gaiety, comfort, charm and security about everything that came to his eyes and ears. Where was she? He had seen her in the afternoon and had talked with her, had walked with her. Their conversation had been bright, but of the commonplace kind. She had said nothing to indicate that she remembered the hour spent beside his couch a day or so before; he had uttered none of the words that struggled to rush from his lips—the questions, the pleadings, the vows. Where was she now? Not in that gay crowd below, for he had scanned every figure with the hawk's eye; closeted again, no doubt, with her ministers, wearying her tired brain, her brave heart into fatigue without rest.

For court still trembled with the excitement of the daring attempt of the abductors and their swift punishment. Functionaries flocked to Edelweiss to inquire after the welfare of the princess, and indignation was at the highest pitch. There were theories innumerable as to the identity of the arch conspirator. Baron Danglose was at sea completely. He cursed himself and everybody else for the hasty and ill timed execution of the hirelings. It was quite evident that the buzzing wonder and intense feeling of the people had for the moment driven out all thought of the coming day of judgment and its bitter atonement for all Graustark. Today the castle was full of the nobility, drawn to its walls by the news that had startled them beyond all expression. The police were at work, the military trembled with rage, the people clamored for the apprehension of the man who had been the instigator of this audacity. The general belief was that some brigand chief from the south had planned the great theft for the purpose of securing a fabulous ransom. Grenfall Lorry had an astonishing theory in his mind, and the more he thought it over the more firmly it was imbedded.

The warm, blue coils from the cigar wafted away into the night, carrying with them a myriad of tangled thoughts—of her, of Axphain, of the abductor, of himself, of everything. A light step on the stone floor of the shadowy balcony attracted his attention. He turned his head and saw the Princess Yette. She was walking slowly toward the balustrade, not aware of his presence. There was no covering for the

"Is there no other to whom she can turn—no other course?" asked Lorry.

"There is none who would assist us, bankrupt as we are. There is a question I want to ask, Mr. Lorry. Please look at me. Do not stare at the fountain all the time. Why have you come to Edelweiss?" She asked the question so boldly that his startled embarrassment was an unspoken confession. He calmed himself and hesitated long before answering, weighing his reply. She sat close beside him, her clear gray eyes reading him like a book.

"I came to see a Miss Guggensloeker," he answered at last.

"For what purpose? There must have been an urgent cause to bring you so far. You are not an American banker?"

"I had intended to ask her to be my wife," he said, knowing that secrecy was useless and seeing a faint hope.

"You did not find Miss Guggensloeker?"

"No, I have not found her."

"And are you going home disappointed, Mr. Lorry, because she is not here?"

"I leave the answer to your tender imagination."

"There was a long pause."

"May I ask when you expect to leave Graustark?" she asked somewhat timidly.

"Why do you wish to know?" he asked in turn.

"Because I know how hopeless your quest has been. You have found Miss Guggensloeker, but she is held behind a wall so strong and impregnable that you cannot reach her with the question you came to ask. You have come to that wall, and now you must turn back. I have asked how soon?"

"Not until your princess bids me take up my load and go. You see, my lady, I love to sit beneath the shadow of the wall you describe. It will require a royal edict to compel me to abandon my position."

"You cannot expect the princess to drive you from her country, you who have done so much for her. You must go, Mr. Lorry, without her bidding."

"I must?"

"Yes, for your presence outside that wall may make the imprisonment all the more unendurable for the one your love cannot reach. Do you understand me?"

"Has the one behind the wall instructed you to say this to me?" he asked miserably.

"She has not. I do not know her heart, but I am a woman and have a woman's foresight. If you wish to be kind and good to her, go."

"I cannot!" he exclaimed, his pent feelings bursting forth. "I cannot go!"

"You will not be so selfish and so cruel as to increase the horror of the wreck that is sure to come," she said, drawing back.

"You know, countess, of the life saving crews who draw from the wrecks of ships lives that were hopelessly lost. There is to be a wreck here. Is there to be a life saver? When the night is darkest, the sea wildest, when hope is gone, is not that the time when rescue is most precious? Tell me, you who

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