GRAUSTARK

By G. B. McCutcheon.

MR. GRENFALL LORRY boarded the east-bound express at Denver with all the air of a martyr. He had traveled pretty much all over the world, and he was not without resources, but the prospect of a twenty-five hundred mile journey alone filled him with dismay. The country he knew; the scenery had long since lost its attractions for him; countless newsboys had failed to tempt him with the literature they thrust in his face, and as for his fellow passengers—well, he preferred to be alone. And so it was that he gloomily motioned the porter to his boxes and mounted the steps with weariness.

As it happened, Mr. Grenfall Lorry did not have a dull moment after the train started. He stumbled on a figure that leaned toward the window in the dark passageway. With reluctant civility he apologized; a lady stood up to let him pass, and for an instant in the half light their eyes met, and that is why the miles rushed by with incredible speed.

Mr. Lorry had been dawdling away the months in Mexico and California. For years he had felt, together with many other people, that a sea voyage was the essential beginning of every journey; he had started round the world soon after leaving Cambridge; he had fished through Norway and hunted in India, and shot everything from grouse on the Scottish moors to the rapids above Assouan. He had run in and out of countless towns and countries on the coast of South America; he had done Russia and the Rhone Valley and Brittany and Damascus; he had seen them all—but not until then did it occur to him that there might be something of interest nearer home. True, he had thought of joining some Englishmen on a hunting tour in the Rockies, but that had fallen through. When the idea of Mexico did occur to him he gave orders to pack his things, purchased interminable green tickets, dined unusually well at his club, and was off in no time to the unknown West.

There was a theory in his family that it would have been a decenter thing for him to stop running about and settle down to work. But his thoughtful father had given him a wealthy mother, and as earning a living was not a necessity, he failed to see why it was a duty. "Work is becoming to some men," he once declared, "like whiskers or red ties, but it does not follow that all men can stand it." after that the family found him "hopeless," and the argument dropped.

He was just under 30 years, as good-looking as most men, with no one dependent upon him and an income that had withstood both the Maison Doree and a dahabeah on the Nile. He never tired of seeing things and peoples and places. "There's game to be found anywhere," he said, "only it's sometimes out of season. If I had my way—and millions—I should run a newspaper. Then all the excitements would come to me. As it is—I'm poor, and so I have to go all over the world after them."

This agreeable theory of life had worked well; he was a little bored at times—not because he had seen too much, but because there were not more things left to see. He had managed somehow to keep his enthusiasms through everything—and they made life worth living. He felt, too, a certain elation—like a spirited horse—at turning toward home, but Washington had not much to offer him, and the thrill did not last. His big bag and his hatbox—pasted over with foolish labels from Continental hotels—were piled in the corner of his compartment, and he settled back in his seat with a pleasurable sense of expectancy. The presence in the next room of a very smart appearing young woman was prominent in his consciousness. It gave him an uneasiness which was the beginning of delight. He had seen her for only a second in the passageway, but that second had made him hold himself a little straighter. "Why is it," he wondered, "that some girls make you stand like a footman the moment you see them?" Grenfall had been in love too many times to think of marriage; his habit of mind was still general, and he classified women broadly. At the same time he had a feeling that in this case generalities did not apply well; there was something about the girl that made him hesitate at labeling her "Class A or B or Z." What it was he did not know, but—unaccountably—she filled him with an affected formality. He felt like bowing to her with a grand air and much dignity. And yet he realized that his successes had come from confidence.

At luncheon he saw her in the dining car. Her companions were elderly persons—presumably her parents. They talked mostly in French—occasionally using a German word or phrase. The old gentleman was stately and austere—with an air of deference to the young woman which Grenfall did not understand. His appearance was very striking; his face pale and heavily lined; moustache and imperial gray; the eyebrows large and bushy, and the jaw and chin square and firm. The white-haired lady carried her head high with unmistakable gentility. They were all dressed in traveling suits which suggested something foreign, but not Vienna nor Paris; smart, but far from American tastes.

Lorry watched the trio with great interest. Twice during luncheon the young woman glanced toward him carelessly and left an annoying impression that she had not seen him. As they left the table and passed into the observation car, he stared at her with some defiance. But she was smiling, and her dimples showed, and Grenfall was ashamed. For some moments he sat gazing from the car window—forgetting his luncheon—dreaming.

When he got back to his compartment he rang vigorously for the porter. A coin was carelessly displayed in his fingers. "Do you suppose you could find out who has the next compartment, porter?"

"I don't know their name, suh, but they's goin' to New York jis as fas' as they can git thuh. I ain' ax um no questions, 'cause thuh's somethin' 'bout um makes me feel's if I ain' got no right to look at um even."

The porter thought a moment.

"I don' believe it'll do yuh any good, suh, to try to shine up to tha' young lady. She ain' the sawt, I can tell yuh that. I done see too many guhls in ma time——"

"What are you talking about? I'm not trying to shine up to her. I only want to know who she is—just out of curiosity." Grenfall's face was a trifle red.

"Beg pahdon, suh; but I kind o' thought you was like oth' gent'men when they see a han'some woman. Allus wants to fin' out somethin' 'bout huh, suh, yoh know. 'Scuse me foh misjedgin' yuh, suh. Th' lady in question is a foh'ner—she lives across th' ocean, 's fuh as I can fin' out. They's in a hurry to git home foh some reason, 'cause they ain' goin' to stop this side o' New York, 'cept to change cahs."

"Where do they change cars?"

"St. Louis—goin' by way of Cincinnati an' Washin'ton."

She Became Interested in the Search and Bent Over to Scan the Dark Corners With Eager Eyes.

Grenfall's ticket carried him by way of Chicago. He caught himself wondering if he could exchange his ticket in St. Louis.

"Traveling with her father and mother, I suppose?"

"No, suh; they's huh uncle and aunt. I heah huh call 'em uncle an' aunt. Th' ole gent'man is Uncle Caspar. I don' know what they talk 'bout. It's mostly some foh'en language. Th' young lady allus speaks Amehican to me, but th' old folks cain't talk it ver' well. They all been to Frisco, an' th' hired he'p they's got with 'em say they been to Mexico, too. Th' young lady's got good Amehican dollahs, don' care wha' she's been. She allus smiles when she ask me to do anythin', and I wouldn' care if she nevah tipped me, 's long as she smiles thataway."

"Servants with them, you say?"

"Yas, suh; man an' woman, nex' section t'other side the ole folks. Cain't say mor'n fifteen words in Amehican. Th' woman is huh maid, an' th' man he's th' gen'ral hustler fer th' hull pahty."

"And you don't know her name?"

"No, suh, an' I cain't ver' well fin' out."

"In what part of Europe does she live?"

"Australia, I think, suh."

"You mean Austria."

"Do I? 'Scuse ma ig'nance. I was jis' guessin' at it anyhow; one place's as good as 'nother ovah thuh, I reckon."

"Have you one of those dollars she gave you?"

"Yes, suh. Heh's a coin that ain' Amehican, but she says it's wuth seventy cents in our money. It's a foh'en piece. She tell me to keep it till I went ovah to huh country; then I could have a high time with it—that's what she says—'a high time'—an' smiled kin' o' knowin' like."

"Let me see that coin," said Lorry, eagerly taking the silver piece from the porter's hand. "I never saw one like it before. Greek, it looks to me, but I can't make a thing out of these letters. She gave it to you?"

"Yas, suh—las' evening'. A high time on seventy cents! That's reediculous, ain't it?" demanded the porter scornfully.

"I'll give you a dollar for it. You can have a higher time on that."

The odd little coin changed owners immediately, and the new possessor dropped it into his pocket with the inward conviction that he was the silliest fool in existence. After the porter's departure he took the coin from his pocket, and, with his back to the door, his face to the window, studied its lettering.

During the afternoon he strolled about the train, his hand constantly jingling the coins. He passed her compartment several times, yet refrained from looking in. But he wondered if she saw him pass.

At one little station a group of Indian bear hunters created considerable interest among the passengers. Grenfall was down at the station platform at once, looking over a great stack of game. As he left the car he met Uncle Caspar, who was hurrying toward his niece's section. A few moments later she came down the steps, followed by the dignified old gentleman. Grenfall tingled with a strange delight as she moved quite close to his side in her desire to see. Once he glanced at her face; there was a pretty look of fear in her eyes as she surveyed the massive bears and the stark, stiff antelopes. But she laughed as she turned away with her uncle.

Grenfall was smoking his cigarette and vigorously jingling the coins in his pocket when the train pulled out. Then he swung on the car steps and found himself at her feet. She was standing at the top, where she had lingered a moment. There was an expression of anxiety in her eyes as he looked up into them, followed instantly by one of relief. Then she passed into the car. She had seen him swing upon the moving steps and had feared for his safety—had shown in her glorious face that she was glad he did not fall beneath the wheels. Doubtless she would have been as solicitous had he been the porter or the brakeman, he reasoned, but that she had noticed him at all pleased him.

At Abilene he bought the Kansas City newspapers. After breakfast he found a seat in the observation car and settled himself to read. Presently some one took a seat behind him. He did not look back, but unconcernedly cast his eyes upon the broad mirror in the opposite car wall. Instantly he forgot his paper. She was sitting within five feet of him, a book in her lap, her gaze bent briefly on the flitting buildings outside. He studied the reflection furtively until she took up the book and began to read. Up to this time he had wondered why some nonsensical idiot had wasted looking glasses on the walls of a railway coach; now he was thinking of him as a far-sighted men.

The first page of his paper was fairly alive with fresh and important dispatches, chiefly foreign. At length, after allowing himself to become really interested in a Paris dispatch of some international consequence, he turned his eyes again to the mirror. She was leaning slightly forward, holding the open book in her lap, but reading, with straining eyes, an article in the paper he held.

He calmly turned to the next page and looked leisurely over it. Another glance, quickly taken, showed to him a disappointed frown on the pretty face and a reluctant resumption of novel reading. A few moments later he turned back to the first page, holding the paper in such a position that she could not see, and, full of curiosity, read every line of the foreign news, wondering what had interested her.

Under ordinary circumstances Lorry would have offered her the paper and thought nothing more about it. With her, however, there was an air that made him hesitate. He felt strangely awkward and inexperienced beside her; precedents did not seem to count. He arose, tossed the paper over the back of the chair as if casting it aside forever and strolled over to the opposite window and looked out for a few moments, jingling his coins carelessly. The jingle of the pieces suggested something else to him. His paper still hung invitingly, upside down, as he had left it, on the chair, and the lady was poring over her novel. As he passed her he drew his right hand from his pocket and a piece of money dropped to the floor at her feet. Then began an embarrassed search for the coin—in the wrong direction, of course. He knew precisely where it had rolled, but purposely looked under the seats on the other side of the car. She drew her skirts aside and assisted in the search. Four different times he saw the little piece of money, but did not pick it up. Finally, laughing awkwardly, he began to search on her side of the car. Whereupon she rose and gave him more room. She became interested in the search and bent over to scan the dark corners with eager eyes. Their heads were very close together more than once. At last she uttered an exclamation and her hand went to the floor in triumph. They arose together, flushed and smiling. She had the coin in her hand.

"I have it," she said gayly, a delicious foreign tinge to the words.

"I thank you——," he began, holding out his hand as if in a dream of ecstacy, but her eyes had fallen momentarily on the object of their search.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, the prettiest surprise in the world coming into her face. It was a coin from her faraway homeland, and she was betrayed into the involuntary exclamation. Instantly, however, she regained her composure and dropped the piece into his outstretched hand, a proud flush mounting to her cheek, a look of cold reserve to her eyes. He had hoped she would offer some comment on what she must have considered a strange coincidence, but he was disappointed. He wondered if she even heard him say:

"I am sorry to have troubled you."

She had resumed her seat, and to him there seemed a thousand miles between them. Feeling decidedly uncomfortable and not a little abashed, he left her and strode to the door. Again a mirror gave him a thrill. This time it was the glass in the car's end. He had taken but a half-dozen steps when the brown head was turned slyly and a pair of interested eyes looked after him. She did not know that he could see her, so he had the satisfaction of observing that pretty, puzzled face plainly until he passed through the door.

Grenfall had formed many chance acquaintances during his travels, sometimes taking risks and liberties that were refreshingly bold. He had seldom been repulsed, strange to say, and as he went to his section dizzily he thought of the good fortune that had been his in other attempts, and asked himself why it had not occurred to him to make the same advances in the present instance. Somehow she was different. There was that strange dignity, that pure beauty, that imperial manner, all combining to forbid the faintest thought of familiarity.

He was more than astonished at himself for having tricked her a few moments before into a perfectly natural departure from indifference. She had been so reserved and so natural that he looked back and asked himself what had happened to flatter his vanity except a passing show of interest. With this, he smiled and recalled similar opportunities in days gone by, all of which had been turned to advantage and had resulted in amusing pastimes. And here was a pretty girl with an air of mystery about her, worthy of his best efforts, but toward whom he had not dared to turn a frivolous eye.

He took out the coin and leaned back in his chair, wondering where it came from. "In any case," he thought, "it'll make a good pocket-piece, and some day I'll find some idiot who knows more about geography than I do." Mr. Lorry's own ideas of geography were jumbled and vague—as if he had got them by studying the labels on his hat box. He knew the places he had been to and he recognized a new country by the annoyances of the Custom-house, but beyond this his ignorance was complete. The coin, so far as he knew, might have come from any one of a hundred small principalities scattered about the continent. Yet it bothered him a little that he could not tell which one. He was more than curious about a very beautiful young woman—in fact, he was undeniably interested in her. He pleasantly called himself an "ass" to have his head turned over a pretty face, a foreign accent and an insignificant coin, and yet he was fascinated.

Before the train reached St. Louis he made up his mind to change cars there and go to Washington with her. It also occurred to him that he might go on to New York if the spell lasted. During the day he telegraphed ahead for accommodations, and when the flyer arrived in St. Louis that evening he hurriedly attended to the transferring and rechecking of his baggage, bought a new ticket and dined. At 8 he was at the station, and at 8:15 he passed her in the aisle. She was standing in her stateroom door, directing her maid. He saw a look of surprise flit across her face as he passed. He slept soundly that night and dreamed that he was crossing the ocean with her.

At breakfast he saw her, but if she saw him it was when he was not looking at her. Once he caught Uncle Caspar staring at him through his monocle, which dropped instantly from his eye in the manner that is always self-explanatory. She had evidently called the uncle's attention to him, but was herself looking sedately from the window when Lorry unfortunately spoiled the scrutiny. His spirits took a furious bound with the realization that she had deigned to honor him by recognition, if only to call attention to him because he possessed a certain coin.

Once the old gentleman asked him the time of day and set his watch according to the reply. In Ohio the man servant scowled at him because he involuntarily stared after his mistress as she paced the platform while the train waited at a station. Again, in Ohio, they met in the vestibule, and he was compelled to step aside to allow her to pass. He did not feel particularly jubilant over this meeting. She did not even glance at him.

Lorry realized that his opportunities were fast disappearing, and that he did not seem to be any nearer meeting her than when they started. He had hoped to get Uncle Caspar into a conversation and use him, but Uncle Caspar was as distant as an iceberg. "If there should be a wreck," Grenfall caught himself thinking, "then my chance would come; but I don't see how Providence is going to help me in any other way."

Near the close of the day, after they left St. Louis, the train began to wind through the foothills of the Alleghenies. Bellaire, Grafton and other towns were left behind, and they were soon whirling up the steep mountain, higher and higher, through tunnel after tunnel, nearer and nearer to Washington every minute. As they were pulling out of a little mining town built on the mountain side a sudden jar stopped the train. There was some little excitement and a scramble for information. Some part of the engine was disabled, and it would be necessary to replace it before the "run" could proceed.

Lorry strolled up to the crowd of passengers who were watching the engineer and fireman at work. A clear, musical voice, almost in his ear, startled him, for he knew to whom it belonged. She addressed the conductor, who, impatient and annoyed, stood immediately behind him.

"How long are we to be delayed?" she asked. Just two minutes before this same conductor had responded most ungraciously to a simple question Lorry had asked and had gone so far as to instruct another inquisitive traveler to go to a warmer climate because he persisted in asking for information which could not be given except by a clairvoyant. But now he answered in most affable tones:

"We'll be here for thirty minutes, at least, Miss—perhaps longer."

She walked away, after thanking him, and Grenfall looked at his watch.

Off the main street of the town ran little lanes leading to the mines below. They all ended at the edge of a steep declivity. There was a drop of almost four hundred feet straight into the valley below. Along the sides of this valley were the entrances to the mines. Above, on the ledge, was the machinery for lifting the ore to the high ground on which stood the town and railroad yards.

Down one of these streets walked the young lady, curiously interested in all about her. She seemed glad to escape from the train and its people and she hurried along, the fresh spring wind blowing her hair from beneath her cap, the ends of her long coat fluttering.

Lorry stood on the platform watching her; then he lighted a cigarette and followed. He had a vague feeling that she ought not to be alone with all the workmen. She started to come back before he reached her, however, and he turned again toward the station. Then he heard a sudden whistle and a minute later from the end of the street he saw the train pulling out. Lorry had rather distinguished himself in college as a runner and instinctively he dashed up the street, reaching the tracks just in time to catch the railing of the last coach. But there he stopped and stood with thumping heart while the coaches slid smoothly up the track, leaving him behind. He remembered he was not the only one left and he panted and smiled. It occurred to him—when it was too late—that he might have got on the train and pulled the rope or called the conductor, but that was out of the question now. After all, it might not be such a merry game to stay in that filthy little town; it did not follow that she would prove friendly.

A few moments later she appeared—wholly unconscious of what had happened. A glance down the track and her face was the picture of despair.

Then she saw him coming toward her with long strides, flushed and excited. Regardless of appearances, conditions or consequences, she hurried to meet him.

"Where is the train?" she gasped, as the distance between them grew short, her blue eyes seeking his beseechingly, her hands clasped.

"It has gone."

"Gone? And we—we are left?"

He nodded, delighted by the word "we."

"The conductor said thirty minutes; it has been but twenty," she cried, half tearfully, half angrily, looking at her watch. "Oh, what shall I do?" she went on, distractedly. He had enjoyed the sweet, despairing tones, but this last wail called for manly and instant action.

"Can we catch the train? We must! I will give a thousand dollars. I must catch it." She had placed her gloved hand against a telegraph pole to steady her trembling, but her face was resolute, imperious, commanding. She was ordering him to obey as she would have commanded a slave. In her voice there was authority, in her eye there was fear. She could control the one but not the other.

"We cannot catch the flyer. I want to catch it as much as you and"—here he straightened himself—"I would add a thousand to yours." He hesitated a moment—thinking. "There is but one way and no time to lose."

With this he turned and ran rapidly toward the little depot and telegraph office.

II.

TWO STRANGERS IN A COACH.

Lorry wasted very little time. He