GRAUSTARK

THE STORY OF A LOVE BEHIND THE THRONE.

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Synopsis.

Grenfall Lorry, a young man of wealth and position, while traveling on the Denver Express has his interest suddenly awakened in a remarkably attractive young woman who is with her uncle and aunt. He is puzzling his brain for a way to make her acquaintance when the opportunity offers itself by the train accidentally leaving them both in a small town of the mountain district. Lorry wires ahead and by hiring a team manages, after a romantic drive, to catch the train at the next station.

"OH, that's all right. Let's be off," cried Lorry, who had fallen some distance behind his late companion and her uncle. Hurrying after them he reached her side in time to assist her in mounting the car steps.

"Thank you," smiling down upon him bewitchingly. At the top of the steps she was met by her aunt, behind whom stood the anxious man-servant and the maid. Into the coach she was drawn by the relieved old lady, who was critically inspecting her personal appearance when Lorry and the foreigner entered.

"Ach, it was so wild and exhilarating, Aunt Yvonne," the girl was saying, her eyes sparkling. She stood straight and firm, her chin in the air, her hands in those of her aunt. The little traveling cap was on the side of her head, her hair was loose and very much awry, strands straying here, curls blowing there in utter confusion. Lorry fairly gasped with admiration for the loveliness that would not be vanquished.

"We came like the wind! I shall never, never forget it," she said.

"But how could you have remained there, child? Tell me how it happened. We have been frantic," said her aunt, half in English, half in German.

"Not now, dear Aunt Yvonne. See my hair! What a fright I must be! Fortunate man, your hair cannot be so unruly as mine. Oh!" The exclamation was one of alarm. In an instant she was at his side, peering with terrified eyes at the bloodstains on his neck and face. "It is blood! You are hurt! Uncle Caspar, Hedrick—quick! Attend him! Come to my room at once. You are suffering. Minna, find bandages!"

She dragged him to the door of her section before he could interpose a remonstrance.

"It is nothing—a mere scratch. Bumped my head against the side of the coach. Please don't worry about it; I can take care for myself. Really, it doesn't——"

"But it does! It has bled terribly. Sit there. Now, Hedrick," some water!"

Hedrick rushed off and was back in a moment with a basin of water, a sponge and a towel, and before Grenfall fully knew what was happening, the man-servant was bathing his head, the others looking on anxiously, the young lady apprehensively, her hands clasped before her as she bent over to inspect the wound above his ear.

"It is quite an ugly cut," said Uncle Caspar, critically. "Does it pain you, sir?"

"Oh, not a great deal," answered Lorry, closing his eyes comfortably. It was all very pleasant, he thought.

"Should it not have stitches, Uncle Caspar?" asked the sweet, eager voice.

"I think not. The flow is stanched. If the gentleman will allow Hedrick to trim the hair away for a plaster and then bandage it I think the wound will give him no trouble." The old man spoke slowly and in very good English.

"Really, Uncle, is it not serious?"

"No, no," interposed Grenfall Lorry. "I knew it was a trifle. You cannot break an American's head. Let me go to my own section and I'll be ready to present myself, as good as new, in ten minutes."

"You must let Hedrick bandage your head," she insisted. "Go with him, Hedrick."

Grenfall arose and started toward his section, followed by Hedrick.

"I trust you were not hurt during that reckless ride," he said, more as a question, stopping in the aisle to look back at her.

"I should have been a mass of bruises, gashes and lumps had it not been for one thing," she said, a faint flush coming to her cheek, although her eyes looked unfalteringly into his. "Will you join us in the dining car? I have a place prepared for you at our table."

"Thank you. You are very good. I shall join you as soon as I am presentable."

"We are to be honored, sir," said the old gentleman, but in such a way that Grenfall had a distinct feeling that it was he who was to be honored. Aunt Yvonne smiled graciously, and he took his departure. While Hedrick was dressing the jagged little cut, Greenfall complacently surveyed the patient in the mirror opposite, and said to himself a hundred times: "You lucky dog! It was worth forty gashes like this. By Jove, she's divine!"

In a fever of eager haste he bathed and attired himself for dinner, the imperturbable Hedrick assisting. One query filled the American's mind: "I wonder if I am to sit beside her." And then: "I have sat beside her! There can never again be such delight!"

It was seven o'clock before his rather unusual toilet was completed. "See if they have gone to the diner, Hedrick," he said to the man-servant, who departed ceremoniously.

"I don't know why he should be so damned polite," observed Lorry, gazing wonderingly after him. "I'm not a king. That reminds me. I must introduce myself. She doesn't know me from Adam."

Hedrick returned and announced that they had just gone to the dining car and were awaiting him there. He hurried to the diner and made his way to their table. Uncle Caspar and his niece were facing him as he came up between the tables, and he saw, with no little regret, that he was to sit beside the aunt—directly opposite the girl, however. She smiled up at him as he stood before them, bowing. He saw the expression of inquiry in those deep, liquid eyes of violet as their gaze wandered over his hair.

"Your head? I see no bandage," she said, reproachfully.

"There is a small plaster and that is all. Only heroes may have dangerous wounds," he said, laughingly.

"Is heroism in America measured by the number of stitches or the size of the plaster?" she asked, pointedly. "In my country it is a joy, and not a calamity. Wounds are the misfortune of valor. Pray be seated, Mr. Lorry—is it not?" she said, pronouncing it quaintly.

He sat down rather suddenly on hearing her utter his name. How had she learned it? Not a soul on the train knew it, he was sure.

"I am Caspar Guggenslocker. Permit me, Mr. Lorry, to present my wife and my niece, Miss Guggenslocker," said the uncle, more gracefully than he had ever heard such a thing uttered before.

In a daze, stunned by the name—Guggenslocker—mystified over their acquaintance with his own when he had been foiled at every fair attempt to learn theirs, Lorry could only mumble his acknowledgments. In all his life he had never lost command of himself as at this moment. Guggenslocker! He could feel the dank sweat of disappointment starting on his brow. A butcher—a beer maker—a cobbler—a gardener—all synonyms of Guggenslocker. A sausage manufacturer's niece—Miss Guggenslocker! He tried to glance unconcernedly at her as he took up his napkin, but his eyes wavered helplessly. She was looking serenely at him, yet he fancied he saw a shadow of mockery in her blue eyes.

"If you were a novel writer, Mr. Lorry, what manner of heroine would you choose?" she asked, with a smile so tantalizing that he understood instinctively why she was reviving a topic once abandoned. His confusion was increased. Her uncle and aunt were regarding him calmly—expectantly, he imagined.

"I—I have no ambition to be a novel writer," he said, "so I have not made a study of heroines."

"But you would have an ideal," she persisted.

"I'm sure I—I don't—that is, she would not necessarily be a heroine. Unless, of course, it would require heroism to pose as an ideal for such a prosaic fellow as I."

"To begin with, you would call her Clarabel Montrose or something equally as impossible. You know the name of a heroine in a novel must be euphonious. That is an exacting rule." It was an open taunt, and he could see that she was enjoying his discomfiture. It aroused his indignation and his wits.

"I would first give my hero a distinguished name. No matter what the heroine's name might be—pretty or otherwise—I could easily change it to his in the last chapter." She flushed beneath his now bright, keen eyes and the ready, though unexpected retort. Uncle Caspar placed his napkin to his lips and coughed.

Aunt Yvonne studiously inspected her bill of fare. "No matter what you call a rose, it is always sweet," he added, meaningly.

At this she laughed good-naturedly. He marveled at her white teeth and red lips. Arose, after all. Guggenslocker, rose; rose, not Guggenslocker. No, no! A rose only! He fancied he caught a sly look of triumph in her uncle's swift glance toward her. But Uncle Caspar was not a rose—he was Guggenslocker. Guggenslocker—butcher! Still, he did not look the part—no, indeed. That extraordinary man a butcher, a gardener, a—and Aunt Yvonne? Yet they were Guggenslockers.

"Here is the waiter," the girl observed, to his relief. "I am famished after my pleasant drive. It was so bracing, was it not Mr. Grenfall Lorry?"

"Give me a mountain ride always as an appetizer," he said, obligingly, and so ended the jest about a name.

The orders for the dinner were given and the quartet sat back in their chairs to await the coming of the soup. Grenfall was still wondering how she had learned his name, and was on the point of asking several times during the conventional discussion of the weather, the train and the mountains. He considerately refrained, however, unwilling to embarrass her.

"Aunt Yvonne tells me she never expected to see me alive after the station agent telegraphed that we were coming overland in that awful old carriage. The agent at P—— says it is a dangerous road, at the very edge of the mountain. He also increased the composure of my uncle and aunt by telling them that a wagon rolled off yesterday, killing a man, two women and two horses. Dear Aunt Yvonne, how troubled you must have been."

"I'll confess there were times when I thought we were rolling down the mountain," said Lorry, with a relieved shake of the head.

"Sometimes I thought we were soaring through space, whether upward or downward, I could not tell. We never failed to come to earth, though, did we?" she laughingly asked.

"Emphatically! Earth and a little grief," he said, putting his hand to his head.

"Does it pain you?" she asked, quickly.

"Not in the least. I was merely feeling very much perturbed.

"I think he was afraid you would," said Lorry.

"He should have no fear. I could not meet a railroad conductor. Will you please tell him I could not so condescend? Besides, dueling is murder in your country, I am told."

"It usually is, sir. Much more so than in Europe." The others looked at him inquiringly. "I mean that in America when two men pull their revolvers and go to shooting at each other some one is killed—frequently both. In Europe, as I understand it, a scratch with a sword ends the combat."

"You have been misinformed," exclaimed Uncle Caspar, his eyebrows elevated.

"Why, Uncle Caspar has fought more duels than he can count," cried the girl, proudly.

"And has he slain his man every time?" asked Grenfall, smilingly, glancing from one to the other. Aunt Yvronne shot a reproving look at the girl, whose face paled instantly, her eyes going quickly in affright to the face of her uncle.

"God!" Lorry heard the old gentleman mutter. He was looking at his bill of fare, but his eyes were fixed and staring. The card was crumpled between the long, bony fingers. The American realized that a forbidden topic had been touched upon.

"He has fought and he has slain," he thought as quick as a flash. "He is no butcher, no gardener, no cobbler. That's certain!"

"Tell us, Uncle Caspar, what you said to the conductor," cried the young lady, nervously.

"Tell them, Caspar, how alarmed we were," added soft-voiced Aunt Yvronne. Grenfall was a silent, interested spectator. He somehow felt as if a scene from some tragedy had been reproduced in that briefest of moments. Calmly and composedly, a half smile now in his face, the soldierly Caspar narrated the story of the train's run from one station to the other.

"We did not miss you until we had almost reached the other station. Then your Aunt Yvronne asked me where you had gone. I told her I had not seen you, but went into the coach ahead to search. You were not there. Then I went on to the dining car. Ach, you were not there. In alarm I returned to our car. Your aunt and I looked everywhere. You were not anywhere. I shall never forget your aunt's face when she sank into a chair, nor shall I feel again so near like dying as when she suggested tha you might have fallen from the train. I sent Hedrick ahead to summon the conductor, but he had hardly left us when the engine whistled sharply and the train began to slow up in a jerky fashion. We were very pale as we looked at each other, for something told us that the stop was unusual. I rushed to the platform, meeting Hedrick, who was as much alarmed as I. He said the train had been flagged, and that there must be something wrong. Your aunt came out and told me that she had made a strange discovery."

Grenfall observed that he was addressing himself exclusively to the young lady.

"She had found that the gentleman in the next section was also missing. While we were standing there in doubt and perplexity the train came to a standstill, and soon there was shouting on the outside. I climbed down from the car and saw that we were at a little station. The conductor came running toward me excitedly.

"'Is the young lady in the car?' he asked.

"'No. For heaven's sake, what have you heard?' I cried.

"'Then she has been left at O——,' he exclaimed, and used some very extraordinary American words.

"I then informed him that he should run back for you, first learning that you were alive and well. He said he would be damned if he would—pardon the word, ladies. He was very angry, and said he would give orders to go ahead, but I told him I would demand restitution of his Government. He laughed in my face, and then I became shamelessly angry. I said to him:

"'Sir, I shall call you down—not out, as you have said—and I shall run you through the mill.'

"That was good American talk, sir, was it not, Mr. Lorry? I wanted him to understand me, so I tried to use your very best language. Some gentlemen who are traveling on this train and some very excellent ladies also joined in the demand that the train be held. His dispatch from O—— said that you, Mr. Lorry, insisted on having it held for twenty minutes. The conductor insulted you, sir, by saying that you had more—ah, what is it?—gall than any idiot he had ever seen. When he said that, although I did not fully understand that it was a reflection on you, so ignorant am I of your language, I took occasion to tell him that you were a gentleman and a friend of mine. He asked me your name, but as I did not know it, I could only tell him that he would learn it soon enough. Then he said something which has puzzled him ever since. He told me to close my face. What did he mean by that, Mr. Lorry?"

"Well, Mr. Guggenslocker, that means in refined American, 'stop talking,'" said Lorry, controlling a desire to shout.

"Ach, that accounts for his surprise when I talked louder and faster than ever. I did not know what he meant. He said positively he would not wait, but just then a second message came from the other station. I did not know what it was then, but a gentleman told me that it instructed him to hold the train if he wanted to hold his job. Job is situation, is it not? Well, when he read that message he said he would wait just twenty minutes. I asked him to tell me how you were coming to us, but he refused to answer. Your aunt and I went at once to the telegraph man and implored him to tell us the truth and he said you were coming in a carriage over a very dangerous road. Imagine our feelings when he said some people had been killed yesterday on that very road. He said you would have to drive like the—the very devil if you got here in twenty minutes."

"We did, Uncle Caspar," interrupted Miss Guggenslocker, naively. "Our driver followed Mr. Lorry's instructions."

Mr. Grenfall Lorry blushed and laughed awkwardly. He had been admiring her eager face and expressive eyes during Uncle Caspar's recital. How sweet her voice when it pronounced his name, how charming the foreign flavor to the words.

"He would not have understood if I had said other things," he explained hastily.

"When your aunt and I returned to the train we saw the conductor holding his watch. He said to me: 'In just three minutes we pull out. If they are not here by that time they can get on the best they know how. I've done all I can.' I did not say a word, but went to my section and had Hedrick get out my pistols. If the train left before you arrived it would be without its conductor. In the meantime, your Aunt Yvonne was pleading with the wretch. I hastened back to his side with my pistols in my pocket. It was then that I told him to start his train if he dared. That man will never know how close he was to death. One minute passed, and he coolly announced that but one minute was left. I had made up my mind to give him one of my pistols when the time was up and to tell him to defend himself. It was not to be a duel, for there was nothing regular about it. It was only a question as to whether the train should move. Then came the sound of carriage wheels and galloping horses. Almost before we knew it you were with us. I am so happy that you were not a minute later."

There was something so cool and grim in the quiet voice, something so determined in those brilliant eyes, that Grenfall felt like looking up the conductor to congratulate him. The dinner was served, and while it was being discussed his fair companion of the drive graphically described the experience of twenty strange minutes in a shackle-down mountain coach. He was surprised to [illegible] that she omitted no part, not even [illegible] hand clasp or the manner in which s[illegible] clung to him. His ears burned as he listened to this frank confession, for he expected to hear words of disapproval from the uncle and aunt. His astonishment was increased by their utter disregard of these rather peculiar details. It was then that he realized how trusting she had been, how serenely unconscious of his tender and sudden passion. And had she told her relatives that she had kissed him he firmly believed they would have smiled approvingly. Somehow the real flavor of romance was stricken from the ride by her candid admissions. What he had considered a romantic treasure was being calmly robbed of its glitter, leaving for his memory the blur of an adventure in which he had played the part of a gallant gentleman and she a grateful lady. He was beginning to feel ashamed of the conceit that had misled him. Down in his heart he was saying: "I might have known it. I did know it. She is not like other women." The perfect confidence that dwelt in the rapt faces of the others forced into his wondering mind the impression that this girl could do no wrong.

"And, Aunt Yvonne," she said in conclusion, "the luck which you say is mine as birthright asserted itself. I escaped unhurt, while Mr. Lorry alone possesses the pain and unpleasantness of our ride."

"I possess neither," he objected. "The pain that you refer to is a pleasure."

"The pain that a man endures for a woman should always be a pleasure," said Uncle Caspar, smilingly.

"But it could not be a pleasure to him unless the woman considered it a pain," reasoned Miss Guggenslocker. "He could not feel happy if she did not respect the pain."

"And encourage it," supplemented Lorry drily. "If you do not remind me occasionally that I am hurt, Miss Guggenslocker, I am liable to forget it." To himself he added: "I'll never learn how to say it in one breath."

"If I were not so soon to part from you I should be your physician and, like all physicians, prolong your ailment interminably," she said, prettily.

"To my deepest satisfaction," he said warmly, not lightly. There was nothing further from his mind than servile flattery, as his rejoinder might imply. "Alas," he went on, "we no sooner meet than we part. May I ask when you are to sail?"

"On Thursday," replied Mr. Guggenslocker.

"On the Kaiser Wilhelm der Grosse," added his niece, a faraway look coming into her eyes.

"We are to stop off one day, to-morrow, in Washington," said Aunt Yvonne, and the jump that Lorry's heart gave was so mighty that he was afraid they could see it in his face.

"My uncle has some business to transact in your city, Mr. Lorry. We are to spend to-morrow there and Wednesday in New York. Then we sail. Ach, how I long for Thursday." His heart sank like lead to the depths from which it had sprung. It required no effort on his part to see that he was alone in his infatuation. Thursday was more to her than his existence; she could forget him and think of Thursday, and when she thought of Thursday, the future, he was but a thing of the past, not even of the present.

"Have you always lived in Washington, Mr. Lorry?" asked Mrs. Guggenslocker.

"All my life," he replied, wishing at that moment that he was homeless and free to choose for himself.

"You Americans live in one city and then in another," she said. "Now, in our country generation after generation lives and dies in one town. We are not migratory."

"Mr. Lorry has offended us by not knowing where Graustark is located on the map," cried the young lady, and he could see the flash of resentment in her eyes.

"Why, my dear sir, Graustark is in——" began Uncle Caspar, but she checked him instantly.

"Uncle Caspar, you are not to tell him. I have recommended that he study geography and discover us for himself. He should be ashamed of his ignorance."

He was not ashamed, but he mentally vowed that before he was a day older he would find Graustark on the map and would stock his negligent brain with all that history and the encyclopedia had to say of the unknown land. Her uncle laughed and, to Lorry's disappointment, obeyed the young lady's command.

"Shall I study the map of Europe, Asia or Africa?" asked he, and they laughed.

"Study the map of the world," said Miss Guggenslocker proudly.

"Edelweiss is the capital?"

"Yes, our home city—the queen of the crags," cried she. "You should see Edelweiss, Mr. Lorry. .. is of the mountain, the plain and the sky. There are homes in the valley, homes on the mountain side and homes in the clouds."

"And yours? From what you say it must be above the clouds—in heaven."

"We are farthest from the clouds, for we live in the green valley, shaded by the white topped mountains. We may, in Edelweiss, have what climate we will. Doctors do not send us on long journeys for our health. They tell us to move up or down the mountain. We have balmy spring, glorious summer, refreshing autumn and chilly winter, just as we like."

"Ideal! I think you must be pretty well toward the south. You could not have July and January if you were far north."

"True; yet we have January in July. Study your map. We are discernible to the naked eye," she said, half ironically.

"I care not if there are but three inhabitants of Graustark, all told, it is certainly worthy of a position on any map," said Lorry, gallantly; and his listeners applauded with patriotic appreciation. "By the way, Mr. Gug—Guggenslocker, you say the conductor asked you for my name and you did not know it. May I ask how you learned it later on?" His curiosity got the better of him and his courage was increased by the champagne the old gentleman had ordered.

"I did not know your name until my niece told it to me after your arrival in the carriage," said Uncle Caspar.

"I don't remember giving it to Miss Guggenslocker at any time," said Lorry.

"You were not my informant," she said, demurely.

"Surely you did not guess it?"

"Oh, no, indeed. I am no mind-reader."

"My own name was the last thing you could have read in my mind, in that event, for I have not thought of it in three days."

She was sitting with her elbows on the table, her chin in her hands, a dreamy look in her blue eyes.

"You say you obtained that coin from the porter on the Denver train?"

"Within two hours after I got aboard."

"Well, that coin purchased your name for me," she said, calmly, candidly. He gasped.

"You—you don't mean that you—" he stammered.

"You see, Mr. Lorry, I wanted to know the name of a man who came nearest my ideal of what an American should be. As soon as I saw you I knew that you were the American as I had grown to know him through the books—big, strong, bold and comely. That is why I bought your name of the porter. I shall always say that I know the name of an ideal American—Grenfall Lorry."

The ideal American was not unmoved. He was in a fever of fear and happiness—fear because he thought she was jesting, happiness because he hoped she was not. He laughed awkwardly, absolutely unable to express himself in words. Her frank statement staggered him almost beyond the power of recovery. There was joy in the knowledge that she had been attracted to him at first sight, but there was bitterness in the thought that he had come to her notice as a sort of specimen, the name of which she had sought as a botanist would look for the name of an unknown flower.

"I—I am honored," he at last managed to say, his eyes gleaming with embarrassment. "I trust you have not found your first judgment a faulty one." He felt very foolish after this flatsemark.

"I have remembered your name," she said, graciously. His heart swelled.

"There are a great many better Americans than I," he said. "Your forget our President and our statesmen."

"I thought they were mere politicians."

Grenfall Lorry, idealized, retired to his berth that night, his head whirling with the emotions inspired by this strange, beautiful woman. How lovely, how charming, how naive, how queenly, how indifferent, how warm, how cold—how everything that puzzled him was she. His last waking thought was:

"Guggenslocker!" An angel with a name like that!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE INVITATION EXTENDED.

They were called by the porter early the next morning. The train was pulling into Washington, five hours late. Grenfall wondered, as he dressed, whether fortune would permit him to see much of her during her brief day in the capital. He dreamed of a drive over the avenues, a trip to the monument, a visit to the halls of Congress, an inspection of public buildings, a dinner at his mother's home, luncheon at the Ebbitt and other attentions which might give to him every moment of her day in Washington. But even as he dreamed he was certain that his hopes could not be gratified.

After the train had come to a standstill he could hear the rustle of her garments in the next compartment. Then he heard her sweep into the passage, greet her uncle and aunt, utter a few commands to the maid, and, while he was adjusting his collar and necktie, pass from the car. No man ever made quicker time in dressing than did Lorry. She could hardly have believed him ideal had she seen his scowling face or heard the words that hissed through his impatient teeth.

"She'll get away, and that'll be the end of it," he growled, seizing his traps and rushing from the train two minutes after her departure. The porter attempted to relieve him of his bags on the platform, but he brushed him aside and was off toward the station.

"Nice time for you to call a man, you idiot," was his parting shot for the porter, forgetting, of course, that the foreigners had been called at the same time. With eyes intent on the crowd ahead, he plunged along, seeing nobody in his disappointed flight. "I'll never forgive myself if I miss her," he was wailing to himself. She was not to be seen in the waiting-rooms, so he rushed to the sidewalk.

"Baggage transferred?"

"Cab, sir?"

(Continued next week.)

"It is quite an ugly cut," said Uncle Caspar, critically. "Does it pain you, sir?"