

Graustark

George Barr McCutcheon

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I. MR. GRENFALL LORRY SEEKS ADVENTURE

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.

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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 thirty 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 labelling 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

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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, sub, 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 orh' gent'men when they see a han'some woman. Allus wants to fin' out somethin' 'bout huh, suh, yuh 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."

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' the 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', an' 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' the man he's th' genial hustler fer th' hull pahty."

"And you don't know her name?"

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

"In what part of Europe does she live?"

"Australia, I think, suh."

"You mean Austria."

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"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, sub. 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 kind 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' evenin'. A high time on seventy cents! That's reedicrous, 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 man.

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 of 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 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, gaily, a delicious foreign tinge to the words.

"I thank you " he began, holding out his hand as if in a dream of ecstasy, 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 customs 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 by 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 eight he was in 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 manservant 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 then 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.

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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 one 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 dashed into the depot and up to the operator's window.

"What's the nearest station east of here?"

"P , " leisurely answered the agent, in some surprise.

"How far is it?"

"Four miles."

"Telegraph ahead and hold the train that just left here."

"The train don't stop there."

"It's got to stop there or there'll be more trouble than this road has had since it began business. The conductor pulled out and left two of his passengers gave out wrong information, and he'll have to hold his train there or bring her back here. If you don't send that order I'll report you as well as the conductor." Grenfall's manner was commanding. The agent's impression was that he was important that he had a right to give orders. But he hesitated.

"There's no way for you but to get to P anyway," he said, while turning the matter over in his mind.

"You stop that train! I'll get there inside of twenty minutes. Now, be quick! Wire them to hold her or there'll be an order from headquarters for some ninety-day lay-offs." The agent stared at him; then turned to his instrument, and the message went forward. Lorry rushed out. On the platform he nearly ran over the hurrying figure in the tan coat.

"Pardon me. I'll explain things in a minute," he gasped, and dashed away. Her troubled eyes blinked with astonishment.

At the end of the platform stood a mountain coach, along the sides of which was printed in yellow letters: "Happy Springs." The driver was climbing up to his seat and the cumbersome trap was empty.

"Want to make ten dollars?" cried Grenfall.

"What say?" demanded the driver, half falling to the ground.

"Get me to P inside of twenty minutes, and I'll give you ten dollars. Hurry up! Answer!"

"Yes, but, you see, I'm hired to "

"Oh, that's all right! You'll never make money easier. Can you get us there in twenty minutes?"

"It's four mile, pardner, and not very good road, either. Pile in, and we'll make it er kill old Hip and Jim. Miss the train?"

"Get yourself ready for a race with an express train and don't ask questions. Kill 'em both if you have to. I'll be back in a second!"

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Back to the station he tore. She was standing near the door, looking up the track miserably. Already night was falling. Men were lighting the switch lanterns and the mountains were turning into great dark shadows.

"Come quickly; I have a wagon out here."

Resistlessly she was hurried along and fairly shoved through the open door of the odd-looking coach. He was beside her on the seat in an instant, and her bewildered ears heard him say:

"Drive like the very deuce!" Then the door slammed, the driver clattered up to his seat, and the horses were off with a rush.

"Where are we going?" she demanded, sitting very straight and defiant.

"After that train I'll tell you all about it when I get my breath. This is to be the quickest escape from a dilemma on record providing it is an escape." By this time they were bumping along the flinty road at a lively rate, jolting about on the seat in a most disconcerting manner. After a few long, deep breaths he told her how the ride in the Springs hack had been conceived and of the arrangement he had made with the despatcher. He furthermore acquainted her with the cause of his being left when he might have caught the train.

"Just as I reached the track, out of breath but rejoicing, I remembered having seen you on that side street, and knew that you would be left. It would have been heartless to leave you here without protection, so I felt it my duty to let the train go and help you out of a very ugly predicament."

"How can I ever repay you?" she murmured. "It was so good and so thoughtful of you. Oh, I should have died had I been left here alone. Do you not think my uncle will miss me and have the train sent back?" she went on sagely.

"That's so!" he exclaimed, somewhat disconcerted. "But I don't know, either. He may not miss you for a long time, thinking you are in some other car, you know. That could easily happen," triumphantly.

"Can this man get us to the next station in time?" she questioned, looking at the black mountains and the dense foliage. It was now quite dark.

"If he doesn't bump us to death before we get half way there. He's driving like the wind."

"You must let me pay half his bill," she said, decidedly, from the dark corner in which she was huddling.

He could find no response to this peremptory request.

"The road is growing rougher. If you will allow me to make a suggestion, I think you will see its wisdom. You can escape a great deal of ugly jostling if you will take hold of my arm and cling to it tightly. I will brace myself with this strap. I am sure it will save you many hard bumps."

Without a word she moved to his side and wound her strong little arm about his big one.

"I had thought of that," she said, simply. "Thank you." Then, after a moment, while his heart thumped madly: "Had it occurred to you that after you ran so hard you might have climbed aboard the train and ordered the conductor to stop it for me?"

"I I never thought of that?" he cried, confusedly.

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"Please do not think me ungrateful. You have been very good to me, a stranger. One often thinks afterward of things one might have done, don't you know? You did the noblest when you inconvenienced yourself for me. What trouble I have made for you." She said this so prettily that he came gaily from the despondency into which her shrewdness, bordering on criticism, had thrown him. He knew perfectly well that she was questioning his judgment and presence of mind, and, the more he thought of it, the more transparent became the absurdity of his action.

"It has been no trouble," he floundered "An adventure like this is worth no end of er inconvenience, as you call it. I'm sure I must have lost my head completely, and I am ashamed of myself. How much anxiety I could have saved you had I been possessed of an ounce of brains!"

"Hush! I will not allow you to say that. You would have me appear ungrateful when I certainly am not. Ach, how he is driving! Do you think it dangerous?" she cried, as the hack gave two or three wild lurches, throwing him into the corner, and the girl half upon him.

"Not in the least," he gasped, the breath knocked out of his body. Just the same, he was very much alarmed. It was as dark as pitch outside and in, and he could not help wondering how near the edge of the mountain side they were running. A false move of the flying horses and they might go rolling to the bottom of the ravine, hundreds of feet below. Still, he must not let her see his apprehension. "This fellow is considered the best driver in the mountains," he prevaricated. Just then he remembered having detected liquor on the man's breath as he closed the door behind him. Perhaps he was intoxicated!

"Do you know him?" questioned the clear voice, her lips close to his ear, her warm body pressing against his.

"Perfectly. He is no other than Lighthorse Jerry, the king of stage drivers." In the darkness he smiled to himself maliciously.

"Oh, then we need feel no alarm," she said, reassured, not knowing that Jerry existed only in the yellow-backed novel her informant had read when a boy.

There was such a roaring and clattering that conversation became almost impossible. When either spoke it was with the mouth close to the ear of the other. At such times Grenfall could feel her breath on his cheek, Her sweet voice went tingling to his toes with every word she uttered. He was in a daze, out of which sung the mad wish that he might clasp her in his arms, kiss her, and then go tumbling down the mountain. She trembled in the next fierce lurches, but gave forth no complaint. He knew that she was in terror but too brave to murmur.

Unable to resist, he released the strap to which he had clung so grimly, and placed his strong, firm hand encouragingly over the little one that gripped his arm with the clutch of death. It was very dark and very lonely, too!

"Oh!" she cried, as his hand clasped hers. "You must hold to the strap."

"It is broken!" he lied, gladly, "There is no danger. See! My hand does not tremble, does it? Be calm! It cannot be much farther."

"Will it not be dreadful if the conductor refuses to stop?" she cried, her hand resting calmly beneath its protector. He detected a tone of security in her voice.

"But he will stop! Your uncle will see to that, even if the operator fails."

"My uncle will kill him if he does not stop or come back for me," she said, complacently.

Graustark

"I was not wrong," thought Grenfall; "he looks like a duelist. Who the devil are they, anyhow?" Then aloud: "At this rate we'd be able to beat the train to Washington in a straight-away race. Isn't it a delightfully wild ride?"

"I have acquired a great deal of knowledge in America, but this is the first time I have heard your definition of delight. I agree that it is wild."

For some moments there was silence in the noisy conveyance. Outside, the crack of the driver's whip, his hoarse cries, and the nerve-destroying crash of the wheels produced impressions of a mighty storm rather than of peace and pleasure.

"I am curious to know where you obtained the coin you lost in the car yesterday," she said at last, as if relieving her mind of a question that had been long subdued.

"The one you so kindly found for me?" he asked, procrastinatingly.

"Yes. They are certainly rare in this country."

"I never saw a coin like it until after I had seen you," he confessed. He felt her arm press his a little tighter, and there was a quick movement of her head which told him, dark as it was, that she was trying to see his face and that her blue eyes were wide with something more than terror.

"I do not understand," she exclaimed.

"I obtained the coin from a sleeping-car porter who said some one gave it to him and told him to have a 'high time' with it," he explained in her ear.

"He evidently did not care for the 'high time,'" she said, after a moment. He would have given a fortune for one glimpse of her face at that instant.

"I think he said it would be necessary to go to Europe in order to follow the injunction of the donor. As I am more likely to go to Europe than he, I relieved him of the necessity and bought his right to a 'high time.'"

There was a long pause, during which she attempted to withdraw herself from his side, her little fingers struggling timidly beneath the big ones.

"Are you a collector of coins?" she asked at length, a perceptible coldness in her voice.

"No. I am considered a dispenser of coins. Still, I rather like the idea of possessing this queer bit of money as a pocket-piece. I intend to keep it forever, and let it descend as an heirloom to the generations that follow me," he said, laughingly. "Why are you so curious about it?"

"Because it comes from the city and country in which I live," she responded. "If you were in a land far from your own would you not be interested in anything even a coin that reminded you of home?"

"Especially if I had not seen one of its kind since leaving home," he replied, insinuatingly.

"Oh, but I have seen many like it. In my purse there are several at this minute."

"Isn't it strange that this particular coin should have reminded you of home?"

Graustark

"You have no right to question me, sir," she said, coldly, drawing away, only to be lurched back again. In spite of herself she laughed audibly.

"I beg your pardon," he said, tantalizingly.

"When did he give it you?"

"Who?"

"The porter, sir."

"You have no right to question me," he said.

"Oh!" she gasped. "I did not mean to be inquisitive."

"But I grant the right. He gave it me inside of two hours after I first entered the car."

"At Denver?"

"How do you know I got on at Denver?"

"Why, you passed me in the aisle with your luggage. Don't you remember?"

Did he remember! His heart almost turned over with the joy of knowing that she had really noticed and remembered him. Involuntarily his glad fingers closed down upon the gloved hand that lay beneath them.

"I believe I do remember, now that you speak of it," he said, in a stifled voice. "You were standing at a window?"

"Yes; and I saw you kissing those ladies goodby, too. Was one of them your wife, or were they all your sisters? I have wondered."

"They they were cousins," he informed her, confusedly, recalling an incident that had been forgotten. He had kissed Mary Lyons and Edna Burrage but their brothers were present. "A foolish habit, isn't it?"

"I do not know. I have no grown cousins," she replied, demurely. "You Americans have such funny customs, though. Where I live, no gentleman would think of pressing a lady's hand until it pained her. Is it necessary?" In the question there was a quiet dignity, half submerged in scorn, so pointed, so unmistakable that he flushed, turned cold with mortification, and hastily removed the amorous fingers.

"I crave your pardon. It is such a strain to hold myself and you against the rolling of this wagon that I unconsciously gripped your hand harder than I knew. You you will not misunderstand my motive?" he begged, fearful lest he had offended her by his ruthlessness.

"I could not misunderstand something that does not exist," she said, simply, proudly.

"By Jove, she's beyond comparison!" he thought.

"You have explained, and I am sorry I spoke as I did. I shall not again forget how much I owe you."

"Your indebtedness, if there be one, does not deprive you of the liberty to speak to me as you will. You could not say anything unjust without asking my forgiveness, and when you do that you more than pay the debt. It is worth

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a great deal to me to hear you say that you owe something to me, for I am only too glad to be your creditor. If there is a debt, you shall never pay it; it is too pleasant an account to be settled with 'you're welcome.' If you insist that you owe much to me, I shall refuse to cancel the debt, and allow it to draw interest forever."

"What a financier!" she cried. "That jest yeas worthy of a courtier's deepest flattery. Let me say that I am proud to owe my gratitude to you. You will not permit it to grow less."

"That was either irony or the prettiest speech a woman ever uttered," he said, warmly. "I also am curious about something. You were reading over my shoulder in the observation car " "I was not!" she exclaimed, indignantly. "How did you know that?" she inconsistently went on.

"You forget the mirror in the opposite side of the car."

"Ach, now I am offended."

"With a poor old mirror? For shame! Yet, in the name of our American glass industry, I ask your forgiveness. It shall not happen again. You will admit that you were trying to read over my shoulder. Thanks for that immutable nod. Well, I am curious to know what you were so eager to read."

"Since you presume to believe the mirror instead of me, I will tell you. There was a despatch on the first page that interested me deeply."

"I believe I thought as much at the time. Oh, confound this road!" For half a mile or more the road had been fairly level, but, as the ejaculation indicates, a rough place had been reached. He was flung back in the corner violently, his head coming in contact with a sharp projection of some kind. The pain was almost unbearable, but it was eased by the fact that she had involuntarily thrown her arm across his chest, her hand grasping his shoulder spasmodically.

"Oh, we shall be killed!" she half shrieked. "Can you not stop him? This is madness madness!"

"Pray be calm! I was to blame, for I had become careless. He is earning his money, that's all. It was not stipulated in the contract that he was to consider the comfort of his passengers." Grenfall could feel himself turn pale as something warm began to trickle down his neck. "Now tell me which despatch it was. I read all of them."

"You did? Of what interest could they have been?"

"Curiosity does not recognize reason."

"You read every one of them?"

"Assuredly."

"Then I shall grant you the right to guess which interested me the most. You Americans delight in puzzles, I am told."

"Now, that is unfair."

"So it is. Did you read the despatch from Constantinople?" Her arm fell to her side suddenly as if she had just realized its position.

"The one that told of the French ambassador's visit to the Sultan?"

Graustark

Almost before they realized how near they were to the lights, the horses began to slacken their speed, a moment later coming to a standstill. The awful ride was over.

"The train! the train!" she cried, in ecstasy. "Here, on the other side. Thank heaven!"

He could not speak for the joyful pride that distended his heart almost to bursting. The coach door flew open, and Light-horse Jerry yelled:

"Here y'are! I made her!"

"I should say you did!" exclaimed Grenfall, climbing out and drawing her after him gently. "Here's your ten."

"I must send you something, too, my good fellow," cried the lady. "What is your address quick?"

"William Perkins, O , West Virginy, ma'am."

Lorry was dragging her toward the cars as the driver completed the sentence. Several persons were running down the platform, dimly lighted from the string of car windows She found time to pant as they sped along:

"He was not Light-horse Jerry, at all!"

III. MISS GUGGENSLOCKER

He laughed, looking down into her serious upturned face. A brief smile of understanding flitted across her lips as she broke away from him and threw herself into the arms of tall, excited Uncle Caspar. The conductor, several trainmen and a few eager passengers came up, the former crusty and snappish.

"Well, get aboard!" he growled. "We can't wait all night."

The young lady looked up quickly, her sensitive face cringing beneath the rough command. Lorry stepped instantly to the conductor's side, shook his finger vigorously under his nose, and exclaimed in no uncertain tones:

"Now, that's enough from you! If I hear another word out of you, I'll make you sweat blood before tomorrow morning. Understand, my friend."

"Aw, who are you?" demanded the conductor, belligerently.

"You'll learn that soon enough. After this you'll have sense enough to find out whom you are talking to before you open that mouth of yours. Not another word!" Mr. Grenfall Lorry was not president of the road, nor was he in any way connected with it, but his well assumed air of authority caused the trainman's ire to dissolve at once.

"Excuse me, sir. I've been worried to death on this run. I meant no offence. That old gentleman has threatened to kill me. Just now he took out his watch and said if I did not run back for his niece in two minutes he'd call me out and run me through. I've been nearly crazy here. For the life of me, I don't see how you happened to be "

"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

Graustark

"There! I have displeased you again. You must pardon my antiquated ideas. We, as true and loyal subjects of a good sovereign, cannot forget that our rulers are born, not made. Perhaps we are afflicted at times with brainless monarchs and are to be pitied. You are generous in your selection of potentates, be generous, then, with me, a benighted royalist, who craves leniency of one who may some day be President of the United States."

"Granted, without discussion. As possible, though not probable, President of the United States, I am magnanimous to an unfortunate who can never hope to be princess, no matter how well she might grace the gilded throne."

She greeted this glowing remark with a smile so intoxicating that he felt himself the most favored of men. He saw that smile in his mind's eye for months afterward, that maddening sparkle of joy, which flashed from her eyes to the very bottom of his heart, there to snuggle forever with Memory's most priceless treasures. Their dinner was but one more phase of this fascinating dream. More than once he feared that he was about to awake to find bleak unhappiness where exquisite joy had reigned so gloriously. As it drew to an end a sense of depression came over him. An hour at most was all that he could have with her. Nine o'clock was drawing nigh with its regrets, its longings, its desolation. He determined to retain the pleasures of the present until, amid the clanging of bells and the roll of car wheels, the dismal future began. His intention to accompany them to the station was expressed as they were leaving the table. She had begun to say good-by to him when he interrupted, self-consciousness forcing the words hurriedly and disjointedly from his lips:

"You will let me go to the station with you. I shall er deem it a pleasure."

She raised her eyebrows slightly, but thanked him and said she would consider it an honor. His face grew hot and his heart cold with the fancy that there was in her eyes a gleam which said: "I pity you, poor fellow."

Notwithstanding his strange misgiving and the fact that his pride had sustained quite a perceptible shock, he drove with them to the station. They went to the sleeping car a few minutes before the time set for the train's departure, and stood at the bottom of the steps, uttering the good-bys, the God-speeds and the sincere hope that they might meet again. Then came the sharp activity of the trainmen, the hurry of belated passengers. He glanced soberly at his watch.

"It is nine o'clock. Perhaps you would better get aboard," he said, and proceeded to assist Aunt Yvonne up the steps. She turned and pressed his hand gently before passing into the car.

"Adieu, good friend. You have made it so very pleasant for us," she said, earnestly.

The tall, soldierly old gentleman was waiting to assist his niece into the coach.

"Go first, Uncle Caspar," the girl made Lorry happy by saying. "I can easily come up unaided."

"Or I can assist her," Lorry hastened to add, giving her a grateful look which she could not misunderstand. The uncle shook hands warmly with the young man and passed up the steps. She was following when Lorry cried,

"Will you not allow me?"

She laughingly turned to him from the steps and stretched forth her hand.

"And now it is good-by forever. I am so sorry that I have not seen more of you," she said. He took her hand and held it tightly for a moment.

Graustark

"But in that case we are to have ten thousand gavvos apiece for each year we lie in prison. It's fair pay not only for our failure, but for our silence," said the other, whose English was more difficult to understand.

Anguish's fingers gripped Lorry's leg, but there was no sound from either of the thoroughly aroused dreamers. "A plot, as I live," thought each, with a thrill.

"We must be careful to speak only in English. There are not twenty people in Edelweiss who understand it, but the night has ears. It is the only safe tongue. Geddos speaks it well. He should be here." It was the first speaker who uttered these words, little knowing that he had listeners other than the man to whom he spoke.

A dark figure shot across the roadway, and, almost before the Americans were aware of it, the party numbered three.

"Ah, Geddos, you are punctual."

"I have found it ever a virtue." responded the newcomer.

"Have you secured your men?"

"I have, your "

"Sh! Call me Michael, on your life! They are ready and willing to undertake the venture?"

"Yes, but they do not understand the true conditions. I have told them that we are to rob the castle and carry the booty to Ganlook before morning."

"They do not know the real object of the raid, then. That is as I desired. Are they trusty and experienced men?"

"The best or the worst that I could find in Vienna. Not one understands our language, and they are so ignorant of our town that they are entirely dependent on me. They know nothing whatever of the Princess, Michael, and will do only as they are told, realizing that if caught they will be guillotined. I have told them it is the royal palace we are to rifle. Ostrom, here, and I are the only ones, except yourself and the men who will aid us inside the castle, who know the truth, sir."

"It cannot fail, unless those inside prove false or unworthy," said the hoarse-voiced Ostrom. Anguish's fingers were gripping Lorry's leg so fiercely that the blood was ready to burst out, but he did not feel the pain. Here, then, was some gigantic plot in which the person of the Princess herself was to be considered. Was it an assassination?

"You have five of these Viennese?"

"Yes. Two to stand beneath the window to receive the booty as we lower it to the ground, one to stand guard at the west gate and two to attend the carriage and horses in the ravine beyond the castle."

"When did these men arrive?"

"This morning. I kept them in my sister's home until an hour ago. They are now in the ravine, awaiting Ostrom and myself. Are you sure, Michael, that the guards and the cook have been made to understand every detail? The faintest slip will mean ruin."

"They are to be trusted fully. Their pay is to be high enough to make it an object to be infallible. The guard, Dushan, will leave the gate unwatched, and you will chloroform him with his consent, of course. You will enter,

Graustark

"Keep along the wall," whispered Lorry, "and trust to luck. The castle is to the left."

Without hesitation they crept over the noiseless grass, close beside the wall. Directly they heard sounds near at hand. The abductors were binding and chloroforming the guard at the arbor. After waiting for some moments they heard the party glide away in the darkness, and followed. The body of the guard was lying just outside the mouth of the arbor, and the odor of chloroform was almost overpowering. Once inside the long arbor, the Americans moved slowly and with greater caution. There was a dim light in a basement window ahead. Toward the front of the castle and in the second story a faint glow came from another window. They guessed it to be from the Princess' room or from that of the countess.

At last they saw four figures steal past the dim basement light. One of them halted near the window, and three crept away in the darkness. Presently one of them returned, and all activity was at an end for the time being. How near it was to two o'clock the watchers could not tell. They only knew that they were within twenty-five feet of Geddos and Ostrom, and that they would not have long to wait.

Soon a bright little blaze of light crossed the basement opening. Then it returned, crossing a second time, and a third. All was still again. The soft shuffle of a foot, the rustle of arbor vines, and the form of a man crawled up to the window. With inconceivable stealth and carefulness it glided through the aperture, followed by a companion.

Lorry and Anguish were at the opening a second or two later, lying flat on their stomachs and listening for sounds from within. The dim light was still there, the window was open, and there was a sound of whispering. Lorry raised his head and peered through, taking calculations while the light made it possible. He saw an open door on the opposite side of the low room, with steps beyond, leading upward. Between the window and the door there were no obstacles. Up those steps he saw three men creep, the leader carrying the dim light. The door was left open, doubtless to afford unimpeded exit from the building in case of emergency. Harry Anguish touched Lorry's arm.

"I took the two pistols from that Vienna man out there. We may need them. Here is one for yourself. Go first, Lorry," he whispered.

Lorry stuck the revolver in his coat pocket and gently slid through the window to the floor below. His friend followed, and they paused to listen. Taking Anguish by the hand the other led the way straight to the spot where he remembered seeing the door.

Boldly the two men began the breathless ascent of the stone steps. The top was reached, and far ahead, down a narrow hall, they saw the three men and the dim light moving. Two of them wore uniforms of guards. Keeping close to the wall their followers crept after them. Up another flight of steps they went, and then through a spacious hall. The Americans had no time and no desire to inspect their surroundings. The wide doors at the far side of the room opened softly, and here the trio paused. Down a great marble hallway a dim red light shed its soft glow. It came from the lamp at the foot of the broad staircase.

The cook pointed to the steps, and then gave his thumb a jerk toward the left. Without the least sign of fear Geddos and Ostrom glided into the hall and made for the staircase. The watchers could not but feel a thrill of admiration for these daring wretches. But now a new danger confronted them. The cook remained standing in the doorway, watching his fellows in crime! How were they to pass him?

There was no time to be lost. The abductors were creeping up the steps already, and the cook must be disposed of. He had blown out the light which he carried, and was now a very dim shadow. Lorry glided forward and in an instant stood before the amazed fellow, jamming a pistol into his face.

"A sound and you die!" he hissed.

Graustark

"Is that you, Donnox?"

She spoke in German, and the voice came from somewhere in front and to his right. He could not answer, could not move. The paralysis of indecision was upon him.

"How is it that the outer door is open?"

This time there was something like a reprimand in the tones, still low. He almost could see the wide-open, searching eyes.

X. YETIVE

There could be no further hesitation. Something must be done and instantly. He gently closed the door before answering the third question. In his nervousness he spoke in English, advancing to the middle of the room. Impossible to see the woman to whom he hissed this alarming threat—he only could speculate as to its effect:

"If you utter a sound, madam, I shall kill you. Be calm, and allow me to explain. my presence here!"

He expected her to shriek, forgetting that she might not understand his words. Instead there was a deathly silence. Had she swooned? His heart was leaping with hope. But she spoke softly again, tremulously, and in English:

"You will find my jewels on the dressing table. Take them and go You will not hurt me?"

"I am not here to do you injury, but to serve your Princess, "whispered the man. "For God's sake, do not make an outcry. You will ruin everything. Will you let me explain?"

"Go! Go! Take anything! I can be calm no longer. Oh, how can I expect mercy at your hands!" Her tones were rising to a wail of terror.

"Sh! Do you want to die?" he hissed, striding to the canopy bed, discernible as his eyes grew accustomed to the darkness. "I will kill you if you utter a sound, so help me God!"

"Oh!" she moaned.

"Listen! You must aid me! Do you hear?"

Another heart-breaking moan. "I am here to save the Princess. There is a plot to abduct her to-night. Already there are men in the castle, perhaps in her room. You must tell me where she sleeps. There is no time to be lost. I am no thief, before God! I am telling you the truth. Do not be alarmed, I implore you. Trust me, madam, and you will not regret it. Where does the Princess sleep?" He jerked out these eager, pleading words quickly, breathlessly.

"How am I to trust you?" came back a whisper from the bed.

"Here is a revolver! Take it and kill me if I attempt the slightest injury. Where are you?" He felt along the bed with his hand.

"Keep away! Please! Please!" she sobbed.

"Take the pistol! Be calm, and in heaven's name help me to save her. Those wretches may have killed her already!"

Graustark

As he rolled to the floor he saw the two forms near the bed moving about like shadows: two red objects that resembled dancing telegraph poles leaped past him from he knew not where, and then there was a shout, the report of a pistol, a horrid yell. Something heavy crashed down beside him and writhed. His eyes were closing, his senses were going, he was numb and sleepy. Away off in the distance he heard Harry Anguish crying:

"That settles you, damn you!"

Some one lifted his head from the carpet and a woman's voice was crying something unintelligible. He was conscious of an effort on his part to prevent the blood from streaming over her gown a last bit of gallantry. The sound of rushing feet, shouts, firearms oblivion!

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When Lorry regained consciousness, he blinked in abject amazement. There was a dull, whirring sound in his ears, and his eyes had a glaze over them that was slow in wearing off. There were persons in the room. He could see them moving about and could hear them talking. As his eyes tried to take in the strange surroundings, a hand was lifted from his forehead and a soft, dream-like voice said:

"He is recovering, Mr. Anguish. See, his eyes are open! Do you know me, Mr. Lorry?"

The unsteady eyes wandered until they fell upon the face near his pillow. A brighter gleam came into them, and there was a ray of returning intelligence. He tried to speak, but could only move his lips. As he remembered her, she was in white, and he was puzzled now to see her in a garment of some dark material, suggestive of the night or the green of a shady hillside. There was the odor of roses and violets and carnations. Then he looked for the fatal, fearful, glaring chandelier. It was gone. The room was becoming lighter and lighter as his eyes grew stronger, but it was through a window near where he lay. So it was daylight! Where was he?

"How do you feel, old man?" asked a familiar voice. A man sat down beside him on the couch or bed, and a big hand grasped his own. Still he could not answer.

"Doctor," cried the voice near his head, "you really think it is not serious?"

"I am quite sure," answered a man's voice from somewhere out in the light. "It is a bad cut, and he is just recovering from the effect of the ether. Had the blow not been a glancing one his skull would have been crushed. He will be perfectly conscious in a short time. There is no concussion, your Highness."

"I am so happy to hear you say that," said the soft voice. Lorry's eyes sought hers and thanked her. A lump came into his throat as he looked up into the tender, anxious blue eyes. A thrill came over him. Princess or not, he loved her he loved her! "You were very brave oh, so brave!" she whispered in his ear, her hand touching his hair caressingly. "My American!"

He tried to reach the hand before it faded, but he was too weak. She glided away, and he closed his eyes again as if in pain.

"Look up, old man; you're all right," said Anguish. "Smell this handkerchief. It will make you feel better." A moist cloth was held beneath his nose, and a strong, pungent odor darted through his nostrils. In a moment he tried to raise himself to his elbow. The world was clearing up.

"Lie still a bit, Lorry. Don't be too hasty. The doctor says you must not."

"Where am I, Harry?" asked the wounded man, weakly.

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"Ah, you are still a woman," he said, smiling at her pretty vanity. "Nothing could impress me more pleasantly."

She stepped carelessly and impulsively upon the royal platform, leaned against the arm of the throne, and with the charming blush of consciousness turned to him with the quickness of a guilty conscience, eager to hear his praise but fearful lest he secretly condemned her conceit. His eyes were burning with the admiration that knows no defining, and his breath came quick and sharp through parted lips. He involuntarily placed a foot upon the bottom step as if to spring to her side,

"You must not come up here!" she cried, shrinking back, her hands extended in fluttering remonstrance. "I cannot permit that, at all!"

"I beg your pardon," he cried, "That is all the humble plebeian can say. That I may be more completely under this fairy spell, pray cast about yourself the robe of rank and take up the sceptre. Perhaps I may fall upon my face."

"And hurt your head all over again," she said, laughing nervously. She hesitated for a moment, a perplexed frown crossing her brow. Then she jerked a rich robe from the back of the throne and placed it about her shoulders as only a woman can. Taking up the scepter she stood before the great chair, and, with a smile on her lips, held it above his head, saying softly:

"Graustark welcomes the American prince."

He sank to his knee before the real princess, kissed the hem of her robe and arose with face pallid. The chasm was now endless in its immensity. The princess gingerly seated herself on the throne, placed her elbow on the broad arm, her white chin in her hand, and tranquilly surveyed the voiceless American prince.

"You have not said, 'Thank you,'" she said, finally, her eyes wavering beneath his steady gaze.

"I am only thinking how easy it would be to cross the gulf that lies between us. With two movements of my body I can place it before you, with a third I can be sitting at your side. It is not so difficult after all," he said, hungrily eyeing the broad chair.

"No man, unless a prince, ever sat upon this throne," she said.

"You have called me a prince."

"Oh, I jested," she cried quickly, comprehending his intention. "I forbid you!"

The command came too late, for he was beside her on the throne of Graustark! She sat perfectly rigid for a moment, intense fear in her eyes.

"Do you know what you have done?" she whispered, miserably.

"Usurped the throne," he replied, assuming an ease and complacency he did not feel. Truly he was guilty of unprecedented presumption.

"You have desecrated desecrated! Do you hear?" she went on, paying no attention to his remark.

"Peccavi. Ah, Your Highness, I delight in my sin. For once I am a power; I speak from the throne. You will not have me abdicate in the zenith of my glory? Be kind, most gracious one. Besides, did you not once cry because your uncle refused to sit with you? Had he been the possessor of a dangerous wound, as I am, and had he found himself so weak that he could stand no longer, I am sure he would have done as I have sat down in preference to

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falling limp at your feet. You do not know how badly I am wounded," he pleaded, with the subtlest double meaning.

"Why should you wound me?" she asked, plaintively. "You have no right to treat the throne I occupy as a subject for pranks and indignities. I did not believe you could be so forgetful." There was a proud and pitiful resentment in her voice that brought him to his senses at once. He had defiled her throne. In shame and humiliation he cried:

"I am a fool an ingrate, You have been too gentle with me. For this despicable act of mine I cannot ask pardon and it would be beneath you to grant it. I have hurt you, and I can never atone. I forgot how sacred is your throne. Let me depart in disgrace." He stood erect as if to forsake the throne he had stained, but she, swayed by a complete reversal of feeling, timidly, pleadingly touched his arm.

"Stay! It is my throne, after all. I shall divide it, as well as the sin, with you. Sit down again, I beg of you. For a brief spell I would rule beside a man who is fit to be a king but who is a desecrator. There can be no harm and no one shall be the wiser for this sentimental departure from royal custom. We are children, anyhow mere children."

With an exclamation of delight, he resumed his position beside her. His hand trembled as he took up hers to carry it to his lips. "We are children playing with fire," he murmured, this ingrate, this fool!

She allowed her hand to lie limply in his, her head sinking to the back of the chair. When her hand was near his feverish lips, cool and white and trusting, he checked the upward progress. Slowly he raised his eyes to study her face, finding that hers were closed, the semblance of a smile touching her lips as if they were in a happy dream.

The lips! The lips! The lips! The madness of love rushed into his heart; the expectant hand was forgotten; his every hope and every desire measured themselves against his discretion as he looked upon the tempting face. Could he kiss those lips but once his life would be complete.

With a start she opened her eyes, doubtless at the command of the masterful ones above. The eyes of blue met the eyes of gray in a short, sharp struggle, and the blue went down in surrender. His lips triumphed slowly, drawing closer and closer as if restrained and impelled by the same emotion arrogant love.

"Open your eyes, darling," he whispered, and she obeyed. Then their lips met her first kiss of love!

She trembled from head to foot, perfectly powerless beneath the spell. Again he kissed a princess on her throne. At this second kiss her eyes grew wide with terror, and she sprang from his side, standing before him like one bereft of reason.

"Oh, my God! What have you done?" she wailed. He staggered to his feet, dizzy with joy.

"Ha!" cried a gruff voice from the doorway, and the guilty ones whirled to look upon the witness to their blissful crime. Inside the curtains, with carbine leveled at the head of the American, stood Allode, the guard, his face distorted by rage. The Princess screamed and leaped between Lorry and the threatening carbine.

"Allode!" she cried, in frantic terror.

He angrily cried out something in his native tongue and she breathlessly, imploringly replied. Lorry did not understand their words, but he knew that she had saved him from death at the hand of her loyal, erring guard. Allode lowered his gun, bowed low and turned his back upon the throne.

"He he would have killed you," she said, tremulously, her face the picture of combined agony and relief. She remembered the blighting kisses and then the averted disaster.

"You what did you say to him?" he asked.

"I I oh, I will not tell you," she cried.

"I beg of you!"

"I told him that he was to was to put down his gun."

"I know that, but why?" he persisted.

"I Ach, to save you, stupid!"

"How did you explain the the " He hesitated, generously.

"I told him that I had not been that I had not been "

"Say it!"

"That I had not been offended!" she gasped, standing stiff and straight, with eyes glued upon the obedient guard.

"You were not?" he rapturously cried.

"I said it only to save your life!" she cried, turning fiercely upon him. "I shall never forgive you! Never! You must go you must leave here at once! Do you hear? I cannot have you near me now I cannot see you again. Ach, God! What have I given you the right to say of me?"

"Stop! It is as sacred as "

"Yes, yes I understand! I trust you, but you must go! Find some excuse to give your friend and go to-day! Go now!" she cried, intensely, first putting her hands to her temples, then to her eyes.

Without waiting to hear his remonstrance, if indeed he had the power to utter one, she glided swiftly toward the curtains, allowing him to follow at his will. Dazed and crushed at the sudden end to everything, he dragged his footsteps after. At the door she spoke in low, imperative tones to the motionless Allode, who dropped to his knees and muttered a reverential response. As Lorry passed beneath the hand that held the curtain aside, he glanced at the face of the man who had been witness to their weakness. He was looking straight ahead, and, from his expression, it could not have been detected that he knew there was a man on earth save himself. In the hall she turned to him, her face cold and pale.

"I have faithful guards about me now. Allode has said he did not see you in the throne room. He will die before he will say otherwise," she said, her lips trembling with shame.

"By your command?"

"By my request. I do not command my men to lie."

Side by side they passed down the quiet hall, silent, thoughtful, the strain of death upon their hearts.

"I shall obey the only command you have given, then. This day I leave the castle. You will let me come again to see you? There can be no harm "

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"No! You must leave Graustark at once!" she interrupted, the tones low.

"I refuse to go! I shall remain in Edelweiss, near you, just so long as I feel that I may be of service to you."

"I cannot drive you out as I would a thief," she said, pointedly.

At the top of the broad staircase he held out his hand and murmured:

"Good-by, your Highness!"

"Good-by," she said, simply, placing her hand in his after a moment's hesitation. Then she left him.

An hour later the two Americans, one strangely subdued, the other curious, excited and impatient, stood before the castle waiting for the carriage. Count Halfont was with them, begging them to remain, as he could see no reason for the sudden leave-taking. Lorry assured him that they had trespassed long enough on the Count's hospitality, and that he would feel much more comfortable at the hotel. Anguish looked narrowly at his friend's face, but said nothing. He was beginning to understand.

"Let us walk to the gates. The Count will oblige us by instructing the coachman to follow," said Lorry, eager to be off.

"Allow me to join you in the walk, gentlemen," said Count Caspar, immediately instructing a lackey to send the carriage after them. He and Lorry walked on together, Anguish lingering behind, having caught sight of the Countess Dagmar. That charming and unconventional piece of nobility promptly followed the prime minister's example and escorted the remaining guest to the gate.

Far down the walk Lorry turned for a last glance at the castle from which love had banished him. Yotive was standing on the balcony, looking not at the monastery but at the exile.

She remained there long after the carriage had passed her gates, bearing the Americans swiftly over the white Castle Avenue, and there were tears in her eyes.

XV. THE BETROTHAL

Harry Anguish was a discreet, forbearing fellow. He did not demand a full explanation of his friend. There was enough natural wit in his merry head to see that in connection with their departure there was something that would not admit of discussion, even by confidential friends. He shrewdly formed his own conclusions and held his peace. Nor did he betray surprise when Lorry informed him, in answer to a question, that he intended to remain in Edelweiss for some time, adding that he could not expect him to do likewise if he preferred to return to Paris. But Mr. Anguish preferred to remain in Edelweiss. Had not the Countess Dagmar told him she would always be happy to see him at the castle, and had he any reason to renounce its walls? And so it was that they tarried together.

Lorry loitered aimlessly, moodily about the town, spending gloomy days and wretched nights. He reasoned that it were wisdom to fly, but a force stronger than reason held him in Edelweiss. He ventured several times to the castle wall, but turned back resolutely. There was hope in his breast that she might send for him; there was, at least, the possibility of seeing her should she ride through the streets. Anguish, on the other hand, visited the castle daily. He spent hours with the pretty Countess, undismayed by the noble moths that fluttered about her flame, and he was ever persistent, light-hearted and gay. He brought to Lorry's ears all that he could learn of the Princess. Several times he had seen her and had spoken with her. She inquired casually after the health of his

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Axphain! Just what they most desired, but we could not make her see it so."

"Is the day set?" asked Lorry, bravely, after a moments silent inspection of the dark-browed victors.

"Yes, and there is to be no delay. The marriage contract has already been signed. The date is November 20th, the day on which we are to account to Bolaroz for our war debt.

"The old Prince's wedding gift to Graustark is to be a document favoring us with a ten years' extension," she said, scornfully.

"And where is she to live?"

"Here, of course. She is Graustark's ruler, and here she insists on abiding. Just contemplate our court! Over-run with those Axphain dogs! Ah, she has wounded Graustark more than she has helped her."

There was nothing more to be said or done, so, after a few moments, the Americans took their departure. The Countess bade them farewell, saying that she must return to the Princess.

"I'll see you to-morrow," said Anguish, with rare assurance and the air of an old and indispensable friend.

"And you, Mr. Lorry?" she said, curiously.

"I am very much occupied," he mumbled.

"You do wrong in seeking to deceive me," she whispered, as Anguish passed through the door ahead of them. "I know why you do not come."

"Has she told you?"

"I have guessed. Would that it could have been you and not the other."

"One cannot be a man and a prince at the same time, I fancy," he said, bitterly.

"Nor can one be a princess and a woman." Lorry recalled the conversation in the sickroom two weeks before and smiled ironically. The friendly girl left them at the door and they passed out of the castle.

"I shall leave Edelweiss to-morrow," said one, more to himself than to his companion, as they crossed the parade. The other gave a start and did not look pleased. Then he instinctively glanced toward the castle.

"The Princess is at her window," he cried, clutching Lorry's arm and pointing back. But the other refused to turn, walking on blindly. "You ought not to have acted like that, Gren," said Anguish, a few moments later. "She saw me call your attention to her, and she saw you refuse to look back. I don't think that you should have hurt her." Lorry did not respond, and there was no word between them until they were outside the castle gates.

"You may leave to-morrow, Lorry, if you like, but I'm going to stay a while," said Harry, a trifle confusedly.

"Haven't you had enough of the place?"

"I don't care a whoop for the place. You see, it's this way: I'm just as hard hit as you, and it is not a Princess that I have to contend with."

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handsome was the reflection of a roue, dashing, devilish. He was fair-haired and tall, taller than his companions by half a head. With reckless abandon he drank and sang and jested, arrogant in his flighty merriment. His cohorts were not far behind him in riotous wit.

At length one of the revelers, speaking in German, called on Lorenz for a toast to the Princess Yetive, his promised bride. Without a moment's hesitation the Prince sprang to his feet, held his glass aloft, and cried:

"Here's to the fairest of the fair, sweet Yetive, so hard to win, too good to lose. She loves me, God bless her heart! And I love her, God bless my heart, too! For each kiss from her wondrous lips I shall credit myself with one thousand gavvos. That is the price of a kiss."

"I'll give two thousand!" roared one of the nobles, and there was a laugh in which the Prince joined.

"Nay! I'll not sell them now. In after years, when she has grown old and her lips are parched and dry from the sippings I have had, I'll sell them all at a bargain. Alas, she has not yet kissed me!"

Lorry's heart bounded with joy, though his hands were clenched in rage.

"She will kiss me to-morrow. To-morrow I shall taste what no other man has touched, what all men have coveted. And I'll be generous, gentlemen. She is so fair that your foul mouths would blight with but one caress upon her tender lips, and yet you shall not, be deprived of bliss. I shall kiss her thrice for each of you. Let me count: thrice eleven is thirty-three. Aye, thirty-three of my kisses shall be wasted for the sake of my friends, lucky dogs! Drink to my Princess!"

"Bravo!" cried the others, and the glasses were raised to lip.

A chair was overturned. The form of a man landed suddenly at the side of the Prince and a rough hand dashed the glass from his fingers, the contents flying over his immaculate English evening dress.

"Don't you dare to drink that toast!" cried a voice in his astonished ear, a voice speaking in excited German. He whirled and saw a scowling face beside his own, a pair of gray eyes that flashed fire.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, anger replacing amazement. The other members of his party stood as if spell-bound.

"I mean that you speak of the Princess of Graustark. Do you understand that, you miserable cur?"

"Oh!" screamed, the Prince, convulsed with rage, starting back and instinctively reaching for the sword he did not carry. "You shall pay for this! I will teach you to interfere "

"I'll insult you more decidedly just to avoid misapprehension," snarled Lorry, swinging his big fist squarely upon the mouth of the Prince. His Royal Highness landed under a table ten feet away.

Instantly the cafe was in an uproar. The stupefied Apxhainians regained their senses and a general assault was made upon the hotheaded American. He knocked another down, Harry Anguish coming to his assistance with several savage blows, after which the Graustark spectators and the waiters interfered. It was all over in an instant, yet a sensation that would live in the gossip of generations had been created. A Prince of the realm had been brutally assaulted! Holding his jaw, Lorenz picked himself from the floor, several of his friends running to his aid. There was blood on his lips and chin; it trickled to his shirt front. For some moments he stood panting, glaring at Lorry's mocking face.

XVII. IN THE TOWER

The two captives who were not prisoners were so dazed by the unexpected events of the morning that they did not realize the vast seriousness of the situation for hours. Then it dawned upon them that appearances were really against them, and that they were alone in a land far beyond the reach of help from home. One circumstance puzzled them with its damning mystery: how came the blood stains upon the door-knob? Dangloss courteously discussed this strange and unfortunate feature with them, but with ill-concealed skepticism. It was evident that his mind was clear in regard to the whole affair.

Anguish was of the opinion that the real murderer had stained the knob intentionally, aiming to cast suspicion on the man who had been challenged. The assassin had an object in leaving those convicting finger-marks where they would do the most damage. He either desired the arrest and death of the American or hoped that his own guilt would escape attention through the misleading evidence. Lorry held, from his deductions, that the crime had been committed by a fanatic who loved his sovereign too devotedly to see her wedded to Lorenz. Then why should he wantonly cast guilt upon the man who had been her protector, objected Dangloss.

The police guards came in from the hotel about ten o'clock, bearing marks of an ugly conflict with the Axphainians. They reported that the avengers had been quelled for the time being, but that a deputation had already started for the castle to lay the matter before the Princess. Officers had searched the rooms of the Americans for blood stains, but had found no sign of them.

"Did you find bloody water in which hands had been washed?" asked Anguish.

"No," responded one of the guards. "There was nothing to be found in the bowls and jars except soapy water. There is not a blood stain in the room, Captain."

"That shakes your theory a little, eh?" cried Anguish, triumphantly. "Examine Mr. Lorry's hands and see if there is blood upon them." Lorry's hands were white and uncontaminated. Dangloss wore a pucker on his brow.

Shortly afterward a crowd of Axphain men came to the prison gates and demanded the person of Grenfall Lorry, departing after an ugly show of rage. Curious Edelweiss citizens stood afar off, watching the walls and windows eagerly.

"This may cost Edelweiss a great deal of trouble, gentlemen, but there is more happiness here this morning than the city has known in months. Everybody believes you killed him, Mr. Lorry, but they all love you for the deed," said Dangloss, returning at noon from a visit to the hotel and a ride through the streets. "The Prince's friends have been at the castle since nine o'clock, and I am of the opinion that they are having a hard time with the High Priestess."

"God bless her!" cried Lorry.

"The town is crazy with excitement. Messengers have been sent to old Prince Bolaroz to inform him of the murder and to urge him to hasten hither, where he may fully enjoy the vengeance that is to be wreaked upon his son's slayer. I have not seen a wilder time in Edelweiss since the close of the siege, fifteen years ago. By my soul, you are in a bad box, sir. They are lurking in every part of town to kill you if you attempt to leave the Tower before the Princess signs an order to restrain you legally. Your life, outside these walls, would not be worth a snap of the fingers."

Captain Quinnox, of the Princess's bodyguard, accompanied by a half dozen of his men, rode up to the prison gates about two o'clock and was promptly admitted. The young captain was in sore distress.

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"The Duke of Mizrox has sworn that you are the murderer, Mr. Lorry, and stakes his life," said he, after greetings. "Her highness has just placed in my hands an order for your arrest as the assassin of Prince Lorenz."

Lorry turned as pale as death. "You you don't mean to say that she has signed a warrant that she believes me guilty," he cried, aghast.

"She has signed the warrant, but very much against her inclination. Count Halfont informed me that she pleaded and argued with the Duke for hours, seeking to avert the act which is bound to give pain to all of us. He was obdurate, and threatened to carry complaint to Bolaroz, who would instantly demand satisfaction. As the Duke is willing to die if you are proved innocent, there was no other course left for her than to dictate and sign this royal decree. Captain Dangloss, I am instructed to give you these papers. One is the warrant for Mr. Lorry's arrest, the other orders you to assume charge of him and to place him in confinement until the day of trial."

While Quinnox was making this statement the accused stood with bowed head and throbbless heart. He did not see the captain's hand tremble as he passed the documents to Dangloss, nor did he hear the unhappy sigh that came from the latter's lips. Anguish, fiery and impulsive, was not to be subdued.

"Is there no warrant for my arrest?" he demanded.

"There is not. You are at liberty to go, sir," responded Quinnox.

"I'd like to know why there isn't. I am just as guilty as Lorry."

"The Duke charges the crime to but one of you. Baron Dangloss, will you read the warrant?"

The old chief read the decree of the Princess slowly and impressively. It was as follows:

"Jacot, Duke of Mizrox, before his God and on his life, swears that Grenfall Lorry did foully, maliciously and designedly slay Lorenz, Prince of Axphain, on the 20th day of October, in the year of our Lord 189-, and in the city of Edelweiss, Graustark. It is therefore my decree that Grenfall Lorry be declared murderer of Lorenz, Prince of Axphain, until he be proved innocent, in which instance, his accuser, Jacot, Duke of Mizrox, shall forfeit his life, according to the law of this land providing penalty for false witness, and by which he, himself, has sworn to abide faithfully.

"Signed: Yetive."

There was silence for some moments, broken by the dreary tones of the accused.

"What chance have I to prove my innocence?" he asked, hopelessly.

"The same opportunity that he has to prove your guilt. The Duke must, according to our law, prove you guilty beyond all doubt," spoke the young captain.

"When am I to be tried?"

"Here is my order from the Princess," said Dangloss, glancing over the other paper. "It says that I am to confine you securely and to produce you before the tribunal on the 26th day of October."

"A week! That is a long time," said Lorry. "May I have permission to see the signature affixed to those papers?" Dangloss handed them to him. He glanced at the name he loved, written by the hand he had kissed, now signing away his life, perhaps. A mist came over his eyes and a strange joy filled his soul. The hand that signed the name

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had trembled in doing so, had trembled pitifully. The heart had not guided the fingers. "I am your prisoner, Captain Dangloss. Do with me as you will," he said, simply.

"I regret that I am obliged to place you in a cell, sir, and under guard. Believe me, I am sorry this happened. I am your friend," said the old man, gloomily.

"And I," cried Quinnox.

"But what is to become of me?" cried poor Anguish, half in tears. "I won't leave you, Gren. It's an infernal outrage!"

"Be cool, Harry, and it will come out right. He has no proof, you know," said the other, wringing his friend's hand.

"But I'll have to stay here, too. If I go outside these walls, I'll be killed like a dog," protested Harry.

"You are to have a guard of six men while you are in Edelweiss, Mr. Anguish. Those are the instructions of the Princess. I do not believe the scoundrels I mean the Axphain nobles will molest you if you do not cross them, When you are ready to go to your hotel, I will accompany you."

Half an hour later Larry was in a cell from which there could be no escape, while Anguish was riding toward the hotel, surrounded by Graustark soldiers. He had sworn to his friend that he would unearth the murderer if it lay within the power of man. Captain Dangloss heard the oath and smiled sadly.

At the castle there was depression and relief, grief and joy. The royal family, the nobility, even the servants, soldiers and attendants, rejoiced in the stroke that had saved the Princess from a fate worse than death. Her preserver's misfortune was deplored deeply; expressions of sympathy were whispered among them all, high and low. The Axphainians were detested the Prince most of all and the crime had come as a joy instead of a shock. There were, of course, serious complications for the future, involving ugly conditions that were bound to force themselves upon the land. The dead man's father would demand the life of his murderer. If not Lorry, who? Graustark would certainly be asked to produce the man who killed the heir to the throne of Axphain, or to make reparation bloody reparation, no doubt.

In the privacy of her room the stricken Princess collapsed from the effects of the ordeal. Her poor brain had striven in vain to invent means by which she might save the man she loved. She had surrendered to the inevitable because there was justice in the claims of the inexorable Duke and his vindictive friends. Against her will she had issued the decree, but not, however, until she had learned that he was in prison and unable to fly the country. The hope that delay might aid him in escaping was rudely crushed when her uncle informed her of Lorry's whereabouts. She signed the decree as if in a dream, a nightmare, with trembling hand and broken heart. His death warrant! And yet, like all others, she believed him guilty. Guilty for her sake! And this was how she rewarded him.

Mizrox and his friends departed in triumph, revenge written on every face. She walked blindly, numbly to her room, assisted by her uncle, the Count. Without observing her aunt or the Countess Dagmar, she staggered to the window and looked below. The Axphainians were crossing the parade ground jubilantly. Then came the clatter of a horse's hoof and Captain Quinnox, with the fatal papers in his possession, galloped down the avenue. She clutched the curtains distractedly, and, leaning far forward, cried from the open window:

"Quinnox! Quinnox! Come back! I forbid I forbid! Destroy those papers! Quinnox!"

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But Quinnox heard not the pitiful wail. He rode on, his dark face stamped with pity for the man whose arrest he was to make. Had he heard that cry from his sovereign the papers would have been in her destroying grasp with the speed that comes only to the winged birds. Seeing him disappear down the avenue, she threw her hands to her head and sank back with a moan, fainting. Count Halfont caught her in his arms. It was nightfall before she was fully revived. The faithful young Countess clung to her caressingly, lovingly, uttering words of consolation until long after the shades of night had dropped. They were alone in the Princess's boudoir, seated together upon the divan, the tired head of the one resting wearily against the shoulder of the other. Gentle fingers toyed with the tawny tresses, and a soft voice lulled with its consoling promises of hope. Wide and dark and troubled were the eyes of the ruler of Graustark.

An attendant appeared and announced the arrival of one of the American gentlemen, who insisted on seeing Her Royal Highness. The card on the tray bore the name of Harry Anguish. At once the Princess was aflutter with eagerness and excitement.

"Anguish! Show him to this room quickly! Oh, Dagmar, he brings word from him! He comes from him! Why is he so slow? Ach, I cannot wait!"

Far from being slow, Anguish was exceedingly swift in approaching the room to which he feared admittance might be denied. He strode boldly, impetuously into the apartment, his feet muddy, his clothing splashed with rain, his appearance far from that of a gentleman.

"Tell me! What is it?" she cried, as he stopped in the center of the room and glared at her.

"I don't care whether you like it and it doesn't matter if you are a Princess," he exploded, "there are a few things I'm going to say to you. First, I want to know what kind of a woman you are to throw into prison a man like like Oh, it drives me crazy to think of it! I don't care if you are insulted. He's a friend of mine and he is no more guilty than you are, and I want to know what you mean by ordering his arrest?"

Her lips parted as if to speak, her face grew deathly pale, her fingers clutched the edge of the divan. She stared at him piteously, unable to move, to speak. Then the blue eyes filled with tears, a sob came to her lips, and her tortured heart made a last, brave effort at defense.

"I I Mr. Anguish, you wrong me, I I " She tried to whisper through the closed throat and stiffened lips. Words failed her, but she pleaded with those wet, imploring eyes. His heart melted, his anger was swept away in a twinkling. He saw that he had wounded her most unjustly.

"You brute!" hissed the Countess, with flashing, indignant eyes, throwing her arms about the Princess and drawing her head to her breast.

"Forgive me," he cried, sinking to his knee before the Princess, shame and contrition in his face. "I have been half mad this whole day, and I have thought harshly of you. I now see that you are suffering more intensely than I. I love Lorry, and that is my only excuse. He is being foully wronged, your Highness, foully wronged."

"I deserve your contempt, after all. Whether he be guilty or innocent, I should have refused to sign the decree. It is too late now. I have signed away something that is very dear to me, his life. You are his friend and mine. Can you tell me what he thinks of me what he says how he feels?" She asked the triple question breathlessly.

"He believes you were forced into the act and said as much to me. As to how he feels, I can only ask how you would feel if you were in his place, innocent and yet almost sure of conviction. These friends of Axphain will resort to any subterfuge, now that one of their number has staked his life. Mark my word, some one will deliberately swear that he saw Grenfall Lorry strike the blow and that will be as villainous a lie as man ever told.

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What I am here for, your Highness, is to ask if that decree cannot be withdrawn."

"Alas, it cannot! I would gladly order his release if I could, but you can see what that would mean to us. A war, Mr. Anguish," she sighed miserably.

"But you will not see an innocent man condemned?" cried he, again indignant.

"I have only your statement for that, sir, if you will pardon me. I hope, from the bottom of my heart, that he did not murder the Prince after being honorably challenged."

"He is no coward!" thundered Anguish; startling both women with his vehemence. "I say he did not kill the Prince, but I'll stake my life he would have done so had they met this morning. There's no use trying to have the decree rescinded, I see, so I'll take my departure. I don't blame you, your Highness; it is your duty, of course. But it's pretty hard on Lorry, that's all."

"He may be able to clear himself," suggested the Countess, nervously.

"And he may not, so there you have it. What chance have two Americans over here with everybody against us?"

"Stop! You shall not say that! He shall have full justice, at any cost, and there is one here who is not against him," cried the Princess, with flashing eyes.

"I am aware that everybody admires him because he has done Graustark a service in ridding it of something obnoxious a prospective husband. But that does not get him out of jail."

"You are unkind again," said the Princess, slowly. "I chose my husband, and you assume much when you intimate that I am glad because he was murdered."

"Do not be angry," cried the Countess, impatiently. "We all regret what has happened, and I, for one, hope that Mr. Lorry may escape from the Tower and laugh forevermore at his pursuers. If he could only dig his way out!"

The Princess shot a startled look toward the speaker as a new thought entered her wearied brain; a short, involuntary gasp told that it had lodged and would grow. She laughed at the idea of an escape from the Tower, but as she laughed a tiny spot of red began to spread upon her cheek, and her eyes glistened strangely.

Anguish remained with them for half an hour. When he left the castle it was with a more hopeful feeling in his breast. In the Princess's bed-chamber late that night, two girls, in loose, silken gowns sat before a low fire and talked of something that caused the Countess to tremble with excitement when first her pink-cheeked sovereign mentioned it in confidence.

XVIII. THE FLIGHT AT MIDNIGHT

Lorry's cell was as comfortable as a cell could be made through the efforts of a kindly jailer and a sympathetic chief of police. It was not located in the dungeon, but high in the tower, a little rock-bound room, with a single barred window far above the floor. There was a bed of iron upon which had been placed a clean mattress, and there was a little chair. The next day after his arrest a comfortable arm chair replaced the latter; a table, a lamp, some books, flowers, a bottle of wine and some fruit found their way to his lonely apartment whoever may have sent them. Harry Anguish was admitted to the cell during the afternoon. He promptly and truthfully denied all interest in the donations, but smiled wisely.

Graustark

He reported that most of the Axxphain contingent was still in town; a portion had hurried home, carrying the news to the old Prince, instructed by the aggressive Mizrox to fetch him forthwith to Edelweiss, where his august presence was necessary before the twenty-sixth. Those who remained in the Graustark capital were quiet but still in a threatening mood. The Princess, so Harry informed the prisoner, sent sincere expressions of sympathy and the hope that all would end well with him. Count Halfont, the Countess, Gaspon and many others had asked to be remembered. The prisoner smiled wearily and promised that they should not be forgotten in a week which was as far as he expected his memory to extend.

Late in the evening, as he was lying on his bed, staring at the shadowy ceiling and puzzling his brain with most oppressive uncertainties, the rattle of keys in the lock announced the approach of visitors. The door swung open and through the grate he saw Dangloss and Quinnox. The latter wore a long military rain coat and had just come in from a drenching downpour. Lorry's reverie had been so deep that he had not heard the thunder nor the howling of the winds. Springing to his feet he advanced quickly to the grated door.

"Captain Quinnox brings a private message from the Princess," said the Chief, the words scarcely more than whispered. It was plain that the message was important and of a secret nature. Quinnox looked up and down the corridor and stairway before thrusting the tiny note through the bars. It was grasped eagerly and trembling fingers broke the seal. Bending near the light he read the lines, his vision blurred, his heart throbbing so fiercely that the blood seemed to be drowning out other sounds for all time to come. In the dim corridor stood the two men, watching him with bated breath and guilty, quaking nerves.

"Oh!" gasped Lorry, kissing the missive insanely as his greedy eyes careened through the last line. There was no signature, but in every word he saw her face, felt the touch of her dear hand, heard her timid heart beating for him—for him alone. Rapture thrilled him from head to foot, the delirious rapture of love. He could not speak, so overpowering was the joy, the surprise, the awakening.

"Obey!" whispered Quinnox, his face aglow with pleasure, his finger quivering as he pointed commandingly toward the letter.

"Obey what!" asked Lorry, dully.

"The last line!"

He hastily reread the last line and then deliberately held the precious missive over the lamp until it ignited. He would have given all he possessed to have preserved it. But the last line commanded: "Burn this at once and in the presence of the bearer."

"There!" he said, regretfully, as he crumpled the charred remnants between his fingers and turned to the silent watchers.

"Her crime goes up in smoke," muttered Dangloss, sententiously.

"The Princess commits no crime," retorted Quinnox, angrily, "when she trusts four honest men."

"Where is she?" whispered the prisoner, with thrumming ears.

"Where all good women should be at nine o'clock in bed," replied Dangloss, shortly. "But will you obey her command?"

"So she commands me to escape!" said Lorry, smiling. "I dare not disobey my sovereign, I suppose."

Graustark

"We obey her because we love her," said the captain of the guard.

"And for that reason, I also obey. But can this thing be accomplished without necessitating explanations and possible complications? I will not obey if it is likely to place her in an embarrassing position."

"She understands perfectly what she is doing, sir. In the first place, she has had my advice," said Dangloss, the good old betrayer of an official trust.

"You advised her to command you to allow me to escape?"

"She commanded first, and then I advised her how to command you. Axphain may declare war a thousand times over, but you will be safe. That's all we I mean, all she wants."

"But I cannot desert my friend. How is he to know where I've gone? Will not vengeance fall on him instead?"

"He shall know everything when the proper time comes. And now, will you be ready at the hour mentioned. You have but to follow the instructions I should say, the commands of the writer."

"And be free! Tell her that I worship her for this. Tell her that every drop of blood in my body belongs to her. She offers me freedom, but makes me her slave for life. Yes, I shall be ready. If I do not see you again, good friends, remember that I love you because you love her and because she loves you enough to entrust a most dangerous secret to your keeping, the commission of an act that may mean the downfall of your nation." He shook hands with them fervently.

"It cannot be that, sir. It may cost the lives of three of her subjects, but no man save yourself can involve the Princess or the Crown. They may kill us, but they cannot force us to betray her. I trust you will be as loyal to the good girl who wears a crown, not upon her heart," said Dangloss, earnestly.

"I have said my life is hers, gentlemen," said Lorry, simply. "God, if I could but throw myself at her feet! I must see her before I go. I will not go without telling her what is in my heart!" he added, passionately.

"You must obey the commands implicitly, on your word of honor, or the transaction ends now," said Quinnox, firmly.

"This escape means, then, that I am not to see her again," he said, his voice choking with emotion.

"Her instructions are that you are to go tonight, at once," said Dangloss, and the black-eyed soldier nodded confirmation.

The prisoner paced the floor of his cell, his mind a jumble of conflicting emotions. His clenched hands, twitching lips and half-closed eyes betrayed the battle that was inflicting him with its carnage. Suddenly he darted to the door, crying:

"Then I refuse to obey! Tell her that if she permits me to leave this hole I shall be at her feet before another night has passed. Say to her that I refuse to go from Graustark until I have seen her and talked with her. You, Quinnox, go to her now and tell her this, and say to her also that there is something she must hear from my own lips. Then I will leave Graustark and not till then, even though death be the alternative." The two men stared at him in amazement and consternation.

"You will not escape?" gasped Quinnox.

Graustark

"I will not be dragged away without seeing her," he answered, resolutely, throwing himself on the bed.

"Damned young ass!" growled Dangloss. The soldier's teeth grated. A moment later the slab door closed softly, a key rattled, and his visitors were gone messengers bearing to him the most positive proof of devotion that man could exact. What had she offered to do for his sake? She had planned his escape, had sanctioned the commission of an unparalleled outrage against the laws of her land she, of all women, a Princess! But she also had sought to banish him from the shrine at which his very soul worshiped, a fate more cruel and unendurable than the one she would have saved him from.

He looked at his hands and saw the black stains from the charred letter, last evidence of the crime against the state. A tender light came to his eyes, a great lump struggled to his throat, and he kissed the sooty spots, murmuring her name again and again. How lonely he was! how cold and cheerless his cage! For the first time he began to appreciate the real seriousness of his position. Up to this time he had regarded it optimistically, confident of vindication and acquittal. His only objection to imprisonment grew out of annoyance and the mere deprivation of liberty. It had not entered his head that he was actually facing death at close range. Of course, it had been plain to him that the charges were serious, and that he was awkwardly situated, but the true enormity of his peril did not dawn upon him until freedom was offered in such a remarkable manner. He grew cold and shuddered instinctively as he realized that his position was so critical that the princess had deemed it necessary to resort to strategic measures in order to save him from impending doom. Starting to his feet he paced the floor, nervousness turning to dread, dread to terror. He pounded on the door and cried aloud. Oh, if he could but bring back those kindly messengers!

Exhausted, torn by conflicting emotions, he at last dropped to the bed and buried his face in his arms, nearly mad with the sudden solitude of despair. He recalled her dear letter the tender, helping hand that had been stretched out to lift him from the depths into which he was sinking. She had written he could see the words plainly that his danger was great; she could not endure life until she knew him to be safely outside the bounds of Graustark. His life was dear to her, and she would preserve it by dishonoring her trust. Then she had unfolded her plan of escape, disjointedly, guiltily, hopelessly. In one place near the end, she wrote: "You have done much more for me than you know, so I pray that God may be good enough to let me repay you so far as it lies within my power to do so." In another place she said: "You may trust my accomplices, for they love me, too." An admission unconsciously made, that word "too."

But she was offering him freedom only to send him away without granting one moment of joy in her presence. After all, with death staring him in the face, the practically convicted murderer of a prince, he knew he could not have gone without seeing her. He had been ungrateful, perhaps, but the message he had sent to her was from his heart, and something told him that it would give her pleasure.

A key turned suddenly in the lock, and his heart bounded with the hope that it might be some one with her surrender in response to his ultimatum. He sat upright and rubbed his swollen eyes. The door swung open, and a tall prison guard peered in upon him, a sharpeyed, low-browed fellow in rain coat and helmet. His lantern's single unkind eye was turned menacingly toward the bed.

"What do you want?" demanded the prisoner, irritably.

Instead of answering, the guard proceeded to unlock the second or grated door, stepping inside the cell a moment later. Smothering an exclamation, Lorry jerked out his watch and then sprang to his feet, intensely excited. It was just twelve o'clock, and he remembered now that she had said a guard would come to him at that hour. Was this the man? Was the plan to be carried out?

The two men stood staring at each other for a moment or two, one in the agony of doubt and suspense, the other quizzically. A smile flitted over the face of the guard; he calmly advanced to the table, putting down his lantern.

Graustark

Then he drew off his rain coat and helmet and placed in the other's hand a gray envelope. Lorry reeled and would have fallen but for the wall against which he staggered. A note from her was in his hand. He tore open the envelope and drew forth the letter. As he read he grew strangely calm and contented; a blissful repose rushed in to supplant the racking unrest of a moment before; the shadows fled and life's light was burning brightly once more. She had written:

"I entreat you to follow instructions and go to-night. You say you will not leave Graustark until you have seen me. How rash you are to refuse liberty and life for such a trifle. But why, I ask, am I offering you this chance to escape? Is it because I do not hope to see you again? Is it not enough that I am begging, imploring you to go? I can say no more."

He folded the brief note, written in agitation, and, after kissing it, proceeded to place it in his pocket, determined to keep it to the last hour of his life. Glancing up at a sound from the guard, he found himself looking into the muzzle of a revolver. A deep scowl overspread the face of the man as he pointed to the letter and then to the lamp. There was no mistaking his meaning. Lorry reluctantly held the note over the flame and saw it crumble away as had its predecessor. There was to be no proof of her complicity left behind. He knew it would be folly to offer a bribe to the loyal guard.

After this very significant act the guard's face cleared, and he deposited his big revolver on the table. Stepping to the cell's entrance he listened intently, then softly closed the heavy iron doors. Without a word he began to strip off his uniform, Lorry watching him as if fascinated. The fellow looked up impatiently and motioned for him to be quick, taking it for granted that the prisoner understood his part of the transaction. Awakened by this sharp reminder, Lorry nervously began to remove his own clothes. In five minutes his garments were scattered over the floor and he was attired in the uniform of a guard. Not a word had been spoken. The prisoner was the guard, the guard a prisoner.

"Are you not afraid this will cost you your life?" asked Lorry, first in English, then in German. The guard merely shook his head, indicating that he could not understand.

He quickly turned to the bed, seized a sheet and tore it into strips, impatiently thrusting them into the other's hands. The first letter had foretold all this, and the prisoner knew what was expected of him. He therefore securely bound the guard's legs and arms. With a grim smile the captive nodded his head toward the revolver, the lantern and the keys. His obliging prisoner secured them, as well as his own personal effects, and was ready to depart. According to instructions he was to go forth, locking the doors behind him, leaving the man to be discovered the next morning by surprised keepers. It struck him that there was something absurd in this part of the plan. How was this guard to explain his position with absolutely no sign of a struggle to bear him out? It was hardly plausible that a big, strong fellow could be so easily overpowered single-handed; there was something wretchedly incongruous about the but there came a startling and effective end to all criticism.

The guard, bound as he was, suddenly turned and lunged head-foremost against the sharp bedpost. His head struck with a thud, and he rolled to the floor as if dead. Uttering an exclamation of horror, Lorry ran to his side. Blood was gushing from a long gash across his head, and he was already unconscious. Sickened by the brave sacrifice, he picked the man up and placed him on the bed.

A hasty examination proved that it was no more than a scalp wound, and that death was too remote to be feared. The guard had done his part nobly, and it was now the prisoner's turn to act as resolutely and as unflinchingly. Sorry to leave the poor fellow in what seemed an inhuman manner, he strode into the corridor, closed and locked the doors clumsily, and began the descent of the stairs. He had been instructed to act unhesitatingly, as the slightest show of nervousness would result in discovery.

Graustark

With the helmet well down over his face and the cape well up, he steadily, even noisily made his way to the next floor below. There were prisoners on this floor, while he had been the only occupant of the floor above. Straight ahead he went, flashing his lantern here and there, passing down another stairway and into the main corridor. Here he met a guard who had just come in from the outside. The man addressed him in the language of the country, and his heart almost stopped beating. How was he to answer? Mumbling something almost inaudible, he hurried on to the ground floor, trembling with fear lest the man should call to him to halt. He was relieved to find, in the end, that his progress was not to be impeded. In another moment he was boldly unlocking the door that led to the visitors' hall. Then came the door to the warden's office. Here he found three sleepy guards, none of whom paid any attention to him as he passed through and entered Captain Dangloss' private room. The gruff old Captain sat at a desk, writing. The escaping man half paused as if to speak to him. A sharp cough from the Captain and a significant jerk of the head told him that there must be no delay, no words. Opening the door he stepped out into a storm so fierce and wild that he shuddered apprehensively.

"A fitting night!" he muttered, as he plunged into the driving rain, forcing his way across the court-yard toward the main gate. The little light in the gate-keeper's window was his guide, so, blinded by the torrents, blown by the winds, he soon found himself before the final barrier. Peering through the window he saw the keeper dozing in his chair. By the light from within he selected from the bunch of keys he carried one that had a white string knotted in its ring. This was the key that was to open the big gate in case no one challenged him. In any other case he was to give the countersign, "Dangloss," and trust fortune to pass him through without question.

Luck was with him, and, finding the great lock, he softly inserted and turned the key. The wind blew the heavy gate open violently, and it required all of his strength to keep it from banging against the wall beyond. The most difficult task that he had encountered grew from his efforts to close the gate against the blast. He was about to give up in despair when a hand was laid on his shoulder and some one hissed in his startled ear:

"Sh! Not a word!"

His legs almost went from under his body, so great was the shock and the fear. Two strong hands joined his own in the effort to pull the door into position, and he knew at once that they belonged to the man who was to meet him on the corner at the right of the prison wall. He undoubtedly had tired of the delay, and, feeling secure in the darkness of the storm, had come to meet his charge, the escaping prisoner. Their united efforts brought about the desired result, and together they left the prison behind, striking out against the storm in all its fury.

"You are late," called the stranger in his ear.

"Not too late, am I?" he cried back, clutching the other's arm.

"No, but we must hasten."

"Captain Quinnox, is it you?"

"Have a care! The storm has ears and can hear names," cautioned the other. As rapidly as possible they made their way along the black street, almost a river with its sheet of water. Lorry had lost his bearings, and knew not whither he went, trusting to the guidance of his struggling companion. There seemed to be no end to their journey, and he was growing weak beneath the exertion and the excitement.

"How far do we go?" he cried, at last.

"But a few rods. The carriage is at the next corner."

"Where is the carriage to take me?" he demanded.

"I am not at liberty to say."

"Am I to see her before I go?"

"That is something I cannot answer, sir. My instructions are to place you in the carriage and ride beside the driver until our destination is reached."

"Is it the castle?" cried the other, joyously.

"It is not the castle," was the disappointing answer.

At that moment they came upon a great dark hulk and heard the stamping of horses' hoofs close at hand. It was so dark they could scarcely discern the shape of the carriage, although they could touch its side with their hands.

A soldier stood in the shelter of the vehicle and opened the door for the American.

"Hurry! Get in!" exclaimed Quinnox.

"I wish to know if this is liable to get her into trouble," demanded Lorry, pausing with one foot on the steps.

"Get in!" commanded the soldier who was holding the door, pushing him forward uneasily. He floundered into the carriage where all was dry and clean. In his hand he still carried the keys and the lantern, the slide of which he had closed before leaving the prison yard. He could not see, but he knew that the trappings of the vehicle were superior. Outside he heard the soldier, who was preparing to enter, say:

"This carriage travels on most urgent business for Her Royal Highness, captain. It is not to be stopped."

A moment later he was inside and the door slammed. The carriage rocked as Quinnox swung up beside the driver.

"You may as well be comfortable," said Lorry's companion, as he sat rigid and restless. "We have a long and rough ride before us."

XIX. THE SOLDIER

Off went the carriage with a dash, the rumbles of its wheels joining in the grewsome roar of the elements. For some time the two sat speechless, side by side. Outside the thunder rolled, the rain swirled and hissed, the wind howled and all the horrors of nature seemed crowded into the blackness of that thrilling night. Lorry wondered vaguely whither they were going, why he had seen no flashes of lightning, if he should ever see her again. His mind was busy with a thousand thoughts and queries.

"Where are we going?" he asked, after they had traveled half a mile or so.

"To a place of safety," came the reply from the darkness beside him.

"Thanks," he said, drily. "By the way, don't you have any lightning in this part of the world? I haven't seen a flash to-night."

"It is very rare," came the brief reply.

"Devilish uncommunicative," thought Lorry.

Graustark

After a moment he asked: "How far do we travel tonight?"

"A number of miles."

"Then I'm going to take off this wet coat. It weighs a ton. Won't you remove yours?" He jerked off the big rain coat and threw it across to the opposite seat, with the keys and the lantern. There was a moment's hesitation on the part of his companion, and then a second wet coat followed the first. Their rain helmets were also tossed aside. "Makes a fellow feel more comfortable."

"This has been too easy to seem like an escape," went on Lorry, looking back reflectively over the surprises of the night. "Maybe I am dreaming. Pinch me."

A finger and a thumb came together on the fleshy part of his arm, causing him to start, first in amazement, then in pain. He had not expected his reserved guardian to obey the command literally.

"I am awake, thanks," he laughed, and the hand dropped from his arm.

After this there was a longer silence than at any time before. The soldier drew himself into the corner of the seat, an action which repelled further discussion, it seemed to Lorry, so he leaned back in the opposite corner and allowed his mind to wander far from the interior of that black, stuffy carriage. Where was he going? When was he to leave Graustark? Was he to see her soon?

Soon the carriage left the smooth streets of Edelweiss and he could tell, by the jolting and careening, that they were in the country, racing over a rough, rocky road. It reminded him of an overland trip he had taken in West Virginia some months before, with the fairest girl in all the world as his companion. Now he was riding in her carriage, but with a surly, untalkative soldier of the guard. The more he allowed his thoughts to revel in the American ride and its delights, the more uncontrollable became his desire to see the one who had whirled with him in "Light-horse Jerry's" coach.

"I wish to know how soon I am to see your mistress," he exclaimed, impulsively, sitting up and striking his companion's arm by way of emphasis. To his surprise the hand was dashed away, and he distinctly heard the soldier gasp. "I beg your pardon!" he cried, fearing that he had given pain with his eager strength.

"You startled me I was half asleep," stammered the other, apologetically. "Whom do you mean by my mistress?"

"Her Royal Highness, of course," said Lorry, impatiently.

"I cannot say when you are to see the Princess," said his companion after waiting so long that Lorry felt like kicking him.

"Well, see here, my friend, do you know why I agreed to leave that place back there? I said I wouldn't go away from Graustark until I had seen her. If you fellows are spiriting me away kidnapping me, as it were, I want to tell you I won't have it that way. I must know, right now, where we are going in this damnable storm."

"I have orders to tell you nothing," said the soldier, staunchly.

"Orders, eh! From whom?"

"That is my affair, sir!"

Graustark

"I guess I'm about as much interested in this affair as anybody, and I insist on knowing our destination. I jumped into this thing blindly, but I'm going to see my way out of it before we go much farther. Where are we going?"

"You you will learn that soon enough," insisted the other.

"Am I to see her soon? That's what I want to know."

"You must not insist," cried the soldier.

"Why are you so anxious to see her?" he asked, suddenly.

"Don't be so blamed inquisitive," cried Grenfall, angrily, impatiently. "Tell me where we are going or I'll put a bullet into you!" Drawing his revolver he leaned over, grasped the guard by the shoulder and placed the muzzle against his breast.

"For God's sake, be calm! You would not kill me for obeying orders! I am serving one you love. Are you mad? I shall scream if you keep pressing that horrid thing against my side." Lorry felt him tremble, and was at once filled with compunction. How could he expect a loyal fellow to disobey orders?

"I beg your pardon a thousand times," he cried, jamming the pistol into his pocket. "You are a brave gentleman and I am a fool. Take me where you will; I'll go like a lamb. You'll admit, however, that it is exasperating to be going in the dark like this."

"It is a very good thing that it is dark," said the soldier, quickly. "The darkness is very kind to us. No one can see us and we can see no one."

"I should say not. I haven't the faintest idea what you look like. Have I seen you at the castle?"

"Yes, frequently."

"Will you tell me your name?"

"You would not know me by name."

"Are you an officer?"

"No; I am new to the service."

"Then I'll see that you are promoted. I like your staunchness. How old are you?"

"I am er twenty-two."

"Of the nobility?"

"My father was of noble birth."

"Then you must be so, too. I hope you'll forgive my rudeness. I'm a bit nervous, you know."

"I forgive you gladly."

"Devilish rough road, this."

"Devilish. It is a mountain road."

"That's where we were, too."

"Where who were?"

"Oh, a young lady and I, some time ago. I just happened to think of it."

"It could not have been pleasant."

"You never made a bigger mistake in your life."

"Oh, she must have been pretty, then."

"You are right this time. She is glorious."

"Pardon me! They usually are in such adventures."

"By Jove, you're a clever one!"

"Does she live in America?"

"That's none of your affair."

"Oh!" and then there was silence between them.

"Inquisitive fool!" muttered Gren to himself.

For some time they bumped along over the rough road, jostling against each other frequently, both enduring stoically and silently. The rain was still falling, but the thunder storm had lost its fury. The crashing in the sky had abated, the winds were not so fierce, the night was being shorn of its terrors. Still the intense, almost suffocating darkness prevailed. But for the occasional touch neither could have told that there was another person on the seat. Suddenly Lorry remembered the lantern. It was still lit with the slide closed when he threw it on the seat. Perhaps it still burned and could relieve the oppressive darkness if but for a short time. He might, at least, satisfy his curiosity and look upon the face of his companion. Leaning forward he fumbled among the traps on the opposite seat.

"I think I'll see if the lantern is lighted. Let's have it a little more cheerful in here," he said. There was a sharp exclamation, and two vigorous hands grasped him by the shoulder, jerking him back unceremoniously.

"No! No! You will ruin all! There must be no light," cried the soldier, his voice high and shrill.

"But we are out of the city."

"I know! I know! But I will not permit you to have a light. Against orders. We have not passed the outpost," expostulated the other, nervously.

"What's the matter with your voice" demanded Lorry, struck by the change in it.

"My voice?" asked the other, the tones natural again. "It's changing. Didn't it embarrass you when your voice broke like that?" went on the questioner, breathlessly. Lorry was now leaning back in the seat, quite a little

mystified.

"I don't believe mine ever broke like that," he said, speculatively. There was no response, and he sat silent for some time, regretting more and more that it was so dark.

Gradually he became conscious of a strange, unaccountable presence in that dark cab. He could feel a change coming over him; he could not tell why, but he was sure that some one else was beside him, some one who was not the soldier. Something soft and delicate and sweet came into existence, permeating the darkness with its undeniable presence. A queer power seemed drawing him toward the other end of the seat. The most delightful sensations took possession of him; his heart fluttered oddly; his head began to reel under the spell.

"Who are you?" he cried, in a sort of ecstasy. There was no answer. He remembered his matchesafe, and with trembling, eager fingers drew it from the pocket of the coat he was wearing. The next instant he was scratching a match, but as it flared the body of his companion was hurled against his and a ruthless mouth blew out the feeble blaze.

"Oh, why do you persist?" was cried in his ears.

"I am determined to see your face," he answered, sharply, and with a little cry of dismay the other occupant of the carriage fell back in the corner. The next match drove away the darkness and the mystery. With blinking eyes he saw the timid soldier huddling in the corner, one arm covering his face, the other hand vainly striving to pull the skirt of a military coat over a pair of red trouser-legs. Below the arm that hid the eyes and nose he saw parted lips and a beardless, dainty chin; above, long, dark tresses strayed in condemning confusion. The breast beneath the blue coat heaved convulsively.

The match dropped from his fingers, and, as darkness fell again, it hid the soldier in the strong arms of the fugitive not a soldier bold, but a gasping, blushing, unresisting coward. The lithe form quivered and then became motionless in the fierce, straining embrace; the head dropped upon his shoulder, his hot lips caressing the burning face and pouring wild, incoherent words into the little ears.

"You! You!" he cried, mad with joy. "Oh, this is Heaven itself! My brave darling! Mine forever mine forever! You shall never leave me now! Drive on! Drive on!" he shouted to the men outside, drunk with happiness. "We'll make this journey endless. I know you love me now I know it! God, I shall die with joy!"

A hand stole gently into his hand, and her lips found his in a long, passionate kiss.

"I did not want you to know! Ach, I am so sorry! Why, why did I come to-night? I was so strong, so firm, I thought, but see how weak I am. You dominate, you own me, body and soul, in spite of everything, against my will. I Love you I love you I love you!"

"I have won against the princes and the potentates! I was losing hope, my Queen, losing hope. You were so far away, so unattainable. I would brave a thousand deaths rather than lose this single minute of my life. It makes me the richest man in all the world. How brave you are! This night you have given up everything for my sake. You are fleeing with me, away from all that has been dear to you."

"No, no. You must not be deluded. It is only for tonight, only till you are safe from pursuit. I shall go back. You must not hope for more than this hour of weakness, sweet as it is to me," she cried.

"You are going back and not with me?" he cried, his heart chilling.

Graustark

"You know I cannot. That is why I hoped you would never know how much I care for you. Alas, you have found me out! My love was made rash by fear. You could never have escaped the vengeance of Axphain. I could not have shielded you. This was the only course and I dared not hesitate. I should have died with terror had you gone to trial, knowing what I knew. You will not think me unwomanly for coming with you as I am. It was necessary really it was! No one else could have " But he smothered the wail in kisses.

"Unwomanly!" he exclaimed. "It was by divine inspiration. But you will come with me, away from Graustark, away from every one. Say that you will!"

"I cannot bear to hear you plead, and it breaks my heart to go back there. But I cannot leave Graustark I cannot! It would be Heaven to go with you to the end of the world, but I have others besides myself to consider. You are my god, my idol. I can worship you from my unhappy throne, from my chamber, from the cell into which my heart is to retreat. But I cannot, I will not desert Graustark. Not even for you!"

He was silent, impressed by her nobility, her loyalty. Although the joy ebbed from his craving heart, he saw the justice of her self-sacrifice.

"I would give my soul to see your face now, Yetive. Your soul is in your eyes; I can feel it. Why did you not let me stay in prison, meet death and so end all? It would have been better for both of us. I cannot live without you."

"We can live for each other, die for each other, apart. Distance will not lessen my love. You know that it exists; it has been betrayed to you. Can you not be satisfied just a little bit with that knowledge?" she pleaded.

"But I want you in reality, not in my dreams, my imagination."

"Ach, we must not talk like this! There is no alternative. You are to go, I am to stay. The future is before us; God knows what it may bring to us. Perhaps it may be good enough to give us happiness who knows? Do not plead with me. I cannot endure it. Let me be strong again! You will not be so cruel as to battle against me, now that I am weak; it would only mean my destruction. You do not seek that!"

His soul, his honor, the greatest reverence he had ever known were in the kiss that touched her brow.

"I shall love you as you command without hope," he said, sadly.

"Without hope for either," she sobbed.

"My poor little soldier," he whispered, lovingly, as her body writhed under the storm of tears.

"I I wish I were a soldier!" she wailed. He comforted her as best he could and soon she was quiet oh, so very quiet. Her head was on his shoulder, her hands in his.

"How far do we drive?" he asked, at last.

"To the monastery. We are nearly there." she answered, in tones far away.

"The monastery? Why do we go there?" he cried.

"You are to stay there."

"What do you mean? I thought I was to leave Graustark."

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"You are to leave later on. Until the excitement is over the abbey is to be your hiding place. I have arranged everything, and it is the only safe place on earth for you at this time. No one will think of looking for you up there."

"I would to God I could stay there forever, living above you," he said, drearily.

"Your window looks down upon the castle; mine looks up to yours. The lights that burn in those two windows will send out beams of love and life for one of us, at least."

"For both of us, my sweetheart," he corrected, fondly. "You say I will be safe there. Can you trust these men who are aiding you?"

"With my life! Quinnox carried a message to the Abbot yesterday, and he grants you a temporary home there, secure and as secret as the tomb. He promises me this, and he is my best friend. Now, let me tell you why I am with you, masquerading so shamefully "

"Adorably!" he protested.

"It is because the Abbot insisted that I bring you to him personally. He will not receive you except from my hands. There was nothing else for me to do, then, was there, Lorry? I was compelled to come and I could not come as the Princess as a woman. Discovery would have meant degradation from which I could not have hoped to recover. The military garments were my only safeguard."

"And how many people know of your deception?"

"Three besides yourself. Dagmar, Quinnox and Captain Dangloss. The Abbot will know later on, and I shiver as I think of it. The driver and the man who went to your cell, Ogbot, know of the escape, but do not know I am here. Allode you remember him is our driver."

"Allode? He's the fellow who saw me er who was in the throne room."

"He is the man who saw nothing, sir."

"I remember his obedience," he said, laughing in spite of his unhappiness. "Am I to have no freedom up here no liberty, at all?"

"You are to act as the Abbot or the prior instructs. And, I must not forget, Quinnox will visit you occasionally. He will conduct you from the monastery and to the border line at the proper time."

"Alas! He will be my murderer, I fear. Yetive, you do not believe I killed Lorenz. I know that most of them do, but, I swear to you, I am no more the perpetrator of that cowardly crime than you. God bears testimony to my innocence. I want to hear you say that you do not believe I killed him."

"I feared so at first, no, do not be angry I feared you had killed him for my sake. But now I am sure that you are innocent."

The carriage stopped too soon and Quinnox opened the door. It was still as dark as pitch, but the downpour had ceased except for a disagreeable, misty drizzle, cold and penetrating.

"We have reached the stopping place," he said.

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"And we are to walk from here to the gate," said the Princess, resuming her hoarse, manly tones. While they were busy donning their rain coats, she whispered in Lorry's ear: "I beg of you, do not let him know that you have discovered who I am."

He promised, and lightly snatched a kiss, an act of indiscretion that almost brought fatal results. Forgetful of the darkness, she gave vent to a little protesting shriek, fearing that the eyes of the captain had witnessed the pretty transgression. Lorry laughed as he sprang to the road and turned to assist her in alighting. She promptly and thoughtfully averted the danger his gallantry presented by ignoring the outstretched hands, discernible as slender shadows protruding from an object a shade darker than the night, and leaped boldly to the ground. The driver was instructed to turn the carriage about and to await their return.

With Lorry in the center the trio walked rapidly off in the darkness, the fugitive with the sense of fear that belongs only to a blind man. A little light far ahead told the position of the gate, and for this they bent their steps, Lorry and Quinnox conversing in low tones, the Princess striding along silently beside the former, her hand in his a fact of which the real soldier was totally unaware. Reaching the gate, the captain pounded vigorously, and a sleepy monk soon peered from the little window through which shone the light.

"On important business with the Abbot, from Her Royal Highness, the Princess Yetive," said Quinnox, in response to a sharp query, spoken in the Graustark tongue. A little gate beside the big one opened and the monk, lantern in hand, bade them enter.

"Await me here, captain," commanded the slim, straight soldier, with face turned from the light. A moment later the gate closed and Lorry was behind the walls of St. Valentine's, a prisoner again. The monk preceded them across the dark court toward the great black mass, his lantern creating ghastly shadows against the broken mist. His followers dropped some little distance behind, the tall one's arm stealing about the other's waist, his head bending to a level with hers.

"Is it to be good-by, dearest?" he asked. "Good-by forever?"

"I cannot say that. It would be like wishing you dead. Yet there is no hope. No, no! We will not say good-by, forever," she said, despairingly.

"Won't you bid me hope?"

"Impossible! You will stay here until Quinnox comes to take you away. Then you must not stop until you are in your own land. We may meet again."

"Yes, by my soul, we shall meet again! I'll do as you bid and all that, but I'll come back when I can stay away no longer. Go to your castle and look forward to the day that will find me at your feet again. It is bound to come. But how are you to return to the castle tonight and enter without creating suspicion? Have you thought of that?"

"Am I a child? Inside of three hours I shall be safely in my bed and but one person in the castle will be the wiser for my absence. Here are the portals." They passed inside the massive doors and halted. "You must remain here until I have seen the prior," she said, laughing nervously and glancing down at the boots which showed beneath the long coat. Then she hastily followed the monk, disappearing down the corridor. In ten minutes ten hours to Lorry she returned with her guide.

"He will take you to your room," she said breathlessly, displaying unmistakable signs of embarrassment. "The prior was shocked. Good-by, and God be with you always. Remember, I love you!"

The monk's back was turned, so the new recluse snatched the slight figure to his heart.

"Some day?" he whispered.

She would not speak, but he held leer until she nodded her head.

XX. THE APPROACHING ORDEAL

"The American has escaped!" was the cry that spread through Edelweiss the next morning.

It brought undisguised relief to the faces of thousands; there was not one who upbraided Baron Dangloss for his astounding negligence. Never before had a criminal escaped from the Tower. The only excuse, uttered in woebegone tone, was that the prison had not been constructed or manned for such clever scoundrels as Yankees good name for audacity. But as nobody criticised, his explanation was taken good-naturedly and there was secret rejoicing in the city. Of course, everybody wondered where the prisoner had gone; most of them feared that he could not escape the officers, while others shrewdly smiled and expressed themselves as confident that so clever a gentleman could not be caught. They marveled at his boldness, his ingenuity, his assurance.

The full story of the daring break for liberty flashed from lip to lip during the day, and it was known all over the water-swept city before noon. Baron Dangloss, himself, had gone to the prisoner's cell early in the morning, mystified by the continued absence of the guard. The door was locked, but from within came groans and cries. Alarmed at once, the Captain procured duplicate keys and entered the cell. There he found the helpless, blood-covered Ogbot, bound hand and foot and almost dead from loss of blood. The clothes of the American were on the floor, while his own were missing, gone with the prisoner. Ogbot, as soon as he was able, related his experience of the night before. It was while making his rounds at midnight that he heard moans from the cell. Animated by a feeling of pity he opened the slab door and asked if he were ill. The wretched American was lying on the bed, apparently suffering. He said something which the guard could not understand but which he took to be a plea for assistance. Not suspecting a trick, the kindly guard unlocked the second door and stepped to the bedside, only to have the sick man rise suddenly and deal him a treacherous blow over the head with the heavy stool he had secreted behind him. Ogbot knew nothing of what followed, so effective was the blow. When he regained consciousness he was lying on the bed, just as the Captain had found him. The poor fellow, overwhelmed by the enormity of his mistake, begged Dangloss to shoot him at once. But Dangloss had him conveyed to the hospital ward and tenderly cared for.

Three guards in one of the offices saw a man whom they supposed to be Ogbot pass from the prison shortly after twelve, and the mortified Chief admitted that some one had gone through his private apartment. As the prisoner had taken Ogbot's keys he experienced little difficulty in getting outside the gates. But, vowed Dangloss stormily, he should be recaptured if it required the efforts of all the policemen in Edelweiss. With this very brave declaration in mind he despatched men to search every street and every alley, every cellar and every attic in the city. Messengers were sent to all towns in the district; armed posses scoured the valley and the surrounding forests, explored the caves and brush heaps for miles around. The chagrin of the grim old Captain, who had never lost a prisoner, was pitiful to behold.

The forenoon was half over before Harry Anguish heard of his friend's escape. To say that he was paralyzed would be putting it much too mildly. There is no language that can adequately describe his sensations. Forgetting his bodyguard, he tore down the street toward the prison, wild with anxiety and doubt. He met Baron Dangloss, tired and worn, near the gate, but the old officer could tell him nothing except what he had learned from Ogbot. Of one thing there could be no doubt: Lorry was gone. Not knowing where to turn nor what to do, Anguish raced off to the castle, his bodyguard having located him in the meantime. He was more in need of their protection than ever. At the castle gates he encountered a party of raving Axfhainians, crazed with anger over the flight of the man whose life they had thirsted for so ravenously. Had he been unprotected, Anguish would have fared badly at their hands, for they were outspoken in their assertions that he had aided Lorry in the escape. One fiery little

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fellow cast a glove in the American's face and expected a challenge. Anguish snapped his fingers and sarcastically invited the insulter to meet him next winter in a battle with snowballs, upon which the aggressor blasphemed in three languages and three hundred gestures. Anguish and his men passed inside the gates, which had been barred to the others, and struck out rapidly for the castle doors.

The Princess Yotive was sleeping soundly, peacefully, with a smile on her lips, when her Prime Minister sent an excited attendant to inform her of the prisoner's escape. She sat up in bed, and, with her hands clasped about her knees, sleepily announced that she would receive him after her coffee was served. Then she thought of the wild, sweet ride to the monastery, the dangerous return, her entrance to the castle through the secret subterranean passage and the safe arrival in her own room. All had gone well and he was safe. She smiled quaintly as she glanced at the bundle of clothes on the floor, blue and black and red. They had been removed in the underground passage and a loose gown substituted, but she had carried them to her chamber with the intention of placing them for the time being in the old mahogany chest that held so many of her childhood treasures. Springing out of bed, she opened the chest, cast them into its depths, turned and removed the key which had always remained in the lock. Then she summoned her maids.

Her uncle and aunt, the Countess Dagmar (whose merry brown eyes were so full of pretended dismay that the Princess could scarcely restrain a smile), and Gaspon, the minister of finance, were awaiting her appearance. She heard the count's story of the escape, marveled at the prisoner's audacity, and firmly announced that everything possible should be done to apprehend him. With a perplexed frown on her brow and a dubious twist to her lips, she said;

"I suppose I must offer a reward."

"Certainly!" exclaimed her uncle.

"About fifty gavvos, uncle?"

"Fifty!" cried the two men, aghast.

"Isn't that enough?"

"For the murderer of a prince?" demanded Gaspon. "It would be absurd, your Highness. He is a most important person."

"Quite so; he is a most important person. I think I'll offer five thousand gavvos."

"More like it. He is worth that, at least," agreed Uncle Caspar.

"Beyond a doubt," sanctioned Gaspon.

"I am glad you do not consider me extravagant," she said, demurely. "You may have the placards printed at once," she went on, addressing the treasurer. "Say that a reward of five thousand gavvos will be paid to the person who delivers Grenfall Lorry to me."

"Would it not be better to say 'delivers Grenfall Lorry to the tower'?" submitted Gaspon.

"You may say 'to the undersigned,' and sign my name," she said, reflectively.

"Very well, your highness. They shall be struck off this morning."

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"In large type, Gaspon. You must catch him if you can," she added. "He is a very dangerous man and royalty needs protection." With this wise bit of caution she dismissed the subject and began to talk of the storm.

As the two young plotters were hastening up the stairs later on, an attendant approached and informed the Princess that Mr. Anguish requested an audience.

"Conduct him to my boudoir," she said, her eyes sparkling with triumph. In the seclusion of the boudoir she and the Countess laughed like children over the reward that had been so solemnly ordered.

"Five thousand gavvos!" cried Dagmar, leaning back in her chair, to emphasize the delight she felt. "What a joke!"

Tap, tap! came a knock on the door, and in the same instant it flew open, for Mr. Anguish was in a hurry. As he plunged into their presence a pair of heels found the floor spasmodically.

"Oh, I beg pardon!" he gasped, as if about to fly. "May I come in?"

"Not unless you go outside. You are already in, it seems," said the Princess, advancing to meet him. The Countess was very still and sedate. "I am so glad you have come."

"Heard about Lorry? The fool is out and gone," he cried, unable to restrain himself. Without a word she dragged him to the divan, and, between them, he soon had the whole story poured into his ears, the Princess on one side, the Countess on the other.

"You are a wonder!" he exclaimed, when all the facts were known to him. He executed a little dance of approval, entirely out of place in the boudoir of a princess, but very much in touch with prevailing sentiment. "But what's to become of me?" he asked, after cooling down. "I have no excuse for remaining in Graustark and I don't like to leave him here, either."

"Oh, I have made plans for you," said she. "You are to be held as hostage."

"What!"

"I thought of your predicament last night, and here is the solution. This very day I shall issue an order forbidding you the right to leave Edelweiss. You will not be in prison, but your every movement is to be watched. A strong guard will have you under surveillance, and any attempt to escape or to communicate with your friend will result in your confinement and his detection. In this way you may stay here until the time comes to fly. The Axphain people must be satisfied, you know. Your freedom will not be disturbed; you may come and go as you like, but you are ostensibly a prisoner. By detaining you forcibly we gain a point, for you are needed here. There is no other way in which you can explain a continued presence in Graustark. Is not my plan a good one?"

He gazed in admiration at her flushed cheeks and glowing eyes.

"It is beyond comparison," he said, rising and bowing low. "So shrewd is this plan that you make me a hostage forever; I shall not escape its memory if I live to be a thousand."

And so it was settled, in this pretty drama of deception, that Harry Anguish was to be held in Edelweiss as hostage. At parting she said, seriously:

"A great deal depends on your discretion. Mr. Anguish. My guards will watch your every action, for they are not in the secret, excepting Quinnox, and any attempt on your part to communicate with Grenfall Lorry will be

fatal."

"Trust me, your Highness. I have had much instruction in wisdom to-day."

"I hope we shall see you often," she said.

"Daily as a hostage," he replied, glancing toward the Countess.

"That means until the other man is captured," said that young lady, saucily.

As he left the castle he gazed at the distant building in the sky and wondered how it had ever been approached in a carriage. She had not told him that Allode drove for miles over winding roads that led to the monastery up a gentler slope from the rear.

The next afternoon Edelweiss thrilled with a new excitement. Prince Bolaroz of Axphain, mad with grief and rage, came thundering into the city with his Court at his heels. His wrath had been increased until it resembled a tornado when he read the reward placard in the uplands. Not until then did he know that the murderer had escaped and that vengeance might be denied him.

After, viewing the body of Lorenz as it lay in the sarcophagus of the royal palace, where it had been borne at the command of the Princess Yetive, he demanded audience with his son's betrothed, and it was with fear that she prepared for the trying ordeal, an interview with the grief-crazed old man. The castle was in a furore; its halls soon thronged with diplomatists and there was an ugly sense of trouble in the air, suggestive of the explosion which follows the igniting of a powder magazine.

The slim, pale-faced Princess met the burly old ruler in the grand council chamber. He and his nobles had been kept waiting but a short time. Within a very few minutes after they had been conducted to the chamber by Count Halfont and other dignitaries, the fair ruler came into the room and advanced between the bowing lines of courtiers to the spot where sat the man who held Graustark in his grasp. A slender, graceful figure in black, proud and serious, she walked unhesitatingly to the old man's side. If she feared him, if she was impressed by his power, she did not show it. The little drama had two stars of equal magnitude, neither of whom acknowledged supremacy in the other.

Bolaroz arose as she drew near, his gaunt face black and unfriendly. She extended her hand graciously, and he, a prince for all his wrath, touched his trembling lips to its white, smooth back.

"I come in grief and sadness to your Court, most glorious Yetive. My burden of sorrow is greater than I can bear," he said, hoarsely.

"Would that I could give you consolation," she said, sitting in the chair reserved for her use at council gatherings. "Alas! it grieves me that I can offer nothing more than words."

"You are the one he would have made his wife," said the old Prince, sitting beside her. He looked into her deep blue eyes and tears sprung to his own. His voice failed him, and long moments passed before he could control his emotion. Truly she pitied him in his bereavement.

Then followed a formal discussion of the crime and the arrangement of details in connection with the removal of the dead Prince from Graustark to his own land. These matters settled, Bolaroz said that he had heard of the murderer's escape and asked what effort was being made to re-capture him. Yetive related all that had happened, expressing humiliation over the fact that her officers had been unable to accomplish anything, adding that she did not believe the fugitive could get away from Graustark safely without her knowledge. The old Prince was

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working himself back into the violent rage that had been temporarily subdued; and at last broke out in a vicious denunciation of the carelessness that had allowed the man to escape. He first insisted that Dangloss and his incompetent assistants be thrown into prison for life or executed for criminal negligence; then he demanded the life of Harry Anguish as an aider and abettor in the flight of the murderer. In both cases the Princess firmly refused to take the action demanded. She warmly defended Dangloss and his men, and announced in no uncertain tones that she would not order the arrest of the remaining American. Then she acquainted him with her intention to detain Anguish as hostage and to have his every action watched in the hope that a clue to the whereabouts of the fugitive might be discovered, providing, of course, that the friend knew anything at all about the matter. The Duke of Mizrox and others loudly joined in the cry for Anguish's arrest, but she bravely held out against them and in the end curtly informed them that the American, whom she believed to be innocent of all complicity in the escape, should be subjected to no indignity other than detention in the city under guard, as she had ordered.

"I insist that this man be cast into prison at once," snarled the white-lipped Bolaroz.

Her eyes flashed and her bosom heaved with anger.

"You are not at liberty to command in Graustark, Prince Bolaroz," she said, slowly and distinctly. "I am ruler here."

The heart of every Graustark nobleman leaped with pride at this daring rebuff. Bolaroz gasped and was speechless for some seconds.

"You shall not be ruler long, madam," he said, malevolently, significantly.

"But I am ruler now, and, as such, I ask your Highness to withdraw from my castle. I did not know that I was to submit to these threats and insults, or I should not have been kind enough to grant you an audience, Prince though you are. When I came to this room it was to give you my deepest sympathy and to receive yours, not to be insulted. You have lost a son, I my betrothed. It ill becomes you, Prince Bolaroz, to vent your vindictiveness upon me. My men are doing all in their power to capture the man who has so unfortunately escaped from our clutches, and I shall not allow you or any one else to dictate the manner in which we are to proceed." She uttered these words cuttingly, and, at their conclusion, arose to leave the room.

Bolaroz heard her through in surprise and with conflicting emotions. There was no mistaking her indignation, so he deemed it policy to bottle his wrath, overlook the most offensive rebuke his vanity had ever received, and submit to what was evidently a just decision.

"Stay, your Highness. I submit to your proposition regarding the other stranger, although I doubt its wisdom. There is but one in whom I am really interested, the one who killed my son. There is to be no cessation in the effort to find him, I am to understand. I have a proposition. With me are three hundred of my bravest soldiers. I offer them to you in order that you may better prosecute the search. They will remain here and you may use them in any way you see fit. The Duke of Mizrox will linger in Edelweiss and with him you and yours may always confer. He, also, is at your command. This man must be retaken. I swear, by all that is above and below me, he shall be found, if I hunt the world over to accomplish that end. He shall not escape my vengeance! And hark you to this: On the twentieth of next month I shall demand payment of the debt due Axphain. So deeply is my heart set on the death of this Grenfall Lorry that I agree now, before all these friends of ours, that if he be captured, and executed in my presence, before the twentieth of November, Graustark shall be granted the extension of time that would have obtained in the event of your espousal with the man he killed. You hear this offer, all? It is bound by my sacred word of honor. His death before the twentieth gives Graustark ten years of grace. If he is still at large, I shall claim my own. This offer, I believe, most gracious Yetime, will greatly encourage your people in the effort to capture the man we seek."

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The Princess heard the remarkable proposition with face deathly pale, heart scarcely beating. Again was the duty to Graustark thrust cruelly upon her. She could save the one only by sacrificing the other.

"We will do all in our power to to prove ourselves grateful for your magnanimous offer," she said. As she passed from the room, followed by her uncle, she heard the increasing buzz of excitement on all sides, the unrestrained expressions of amazement and relief from her own subjects, the patronizing comments of the visitors, all conspiring to sound her doom. Which way was she to turn in order to escape from herself?

"We must catch this man, Yetive," said Halfont, on the stairway. "There is no alternative."

"Except our inability to do so," she murmured. In that moment she determined that Grenfall Lorry should never be taken if she could prevent it. He was innocent and it was Graustark's penalty to pay.

The next day, amidst pomp and splendor, the Prince of Axpain started on his journey to the land of his forefathers, to the tombs of his ancestors, all Edelweiss witnessing the imposing procession that made its way through the north gates of the town. Far up on the mountain top a man, looking from his little window, saw the black, snakelike procession wind away across the plain to the northward, losing itself in the distant hills.

XXI. FROM A WINDOW ABOVE

The longest month in Lorry's life was that which followed his romantic flight from the Tower. To his impatient mind the days were irksome weeks. The cold monastery was worse than a prison. He looked from its windows as a convict looks through his bars, always hoping, always disappointed. With each of the infrequent visits of Captain Quinnox, his heart leaped at the prospect of liberty, only to sink deeper in despair upon the receipt of emphatic, though kindly, assurances that the time had not yet come for him to leave the haven of safety into which he had been thrust by loving hands. From his little window he could see the active city below, with the adored castle; to his nostrils came the breath of summer from the coveted valley, filling him with almost insupportable longing and desire. Cold were the winds that swept about his lofty home; ghastly, gruesome the nights, pallid and desolate the days. Out of the world was he, dreary and heartsick, while at his feet stretched life and joy and love in their rarest habiliments. How he endured the suspense, the torture of uncertainty, the craving for the life that others were enjoying, he could not understand. Big, strong and full of vigor, his inactivity was maddening; this virtual captivity grew more and more intolerable with each succeeding day. Would they never take him from the tomb in which he was existing? A hundred times had he, in his desperation, concluded to flee from the monastery, come what might, and to trust himself to the joyous world below, but the ever-present though waning spark of wisdom won out against the fierce, aggressive folly that mutinied within his hungry soul. He knew that she was guarding him with loving, tender care, and that, when the proper time came, the shackles of danger would drop and his way would be cleared.

Still there was the longing, the craving, the loneliness. Day after day, night after night went by and the end seemed no nearer. Awake or asleep, he dreamed of her, his heart and mind always full of that one rich blessing, her love. At times he was mad with the desire to know what she was doing, what she was thinking and what was being done for her down there in that busy world. Lying on his pallet, sitting in the narrow window, pacing the halls or wandering about the cold courtyards, he thought always of her, hoping and despairing with equal fervor. The one great question that made his imprisonment, his inactivity so irksome was: Was he to possess the treasure he longed so much to call his own? In those tantalizing moments of despair he felt that if he were free and near her he could win the fight against all odds. As it was, he knew not what mischief was working against his chances in the world from which he was barred.

The prior was kind to him; everything that could be done to provide comfort where comfort was a stranger was employed in his behalf.

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He lived well until his appetite deserted him; he had no questions try answer, for no one asked why he was there; he had no danger to fear, for no foe knew where he lived. From the city came the promise of ultimate escape; verbal messages from those who loved him; news of the world, all at long intervals, however. Quinnox's visits were like sunbeams to him. The dashing captain came only at night and in disguise. He bore verbal messages, a wise precaution against mishap. Not once did he bring a word of love from the Princess, an omission which caused the fugitive deep misery until a ray of intelligence showed him that she could not give to Quinnox the speeches from her heart, proud woman that she was.

Anguish sent words of cheer, with commands to be patient. He never failed to tell him, through Quinnox, that he was doing all in his power to find the real murderer and that he had the secret co-operation of the old police captain. Of course, the hidden man heard of the reward and the frenzied search prosecuted by both principalities. He laughed hysterically over the deception that was being practiced by the blue-eyed, slender woman who held the key to the situation in her keeping.

It was not until the night of the eighteenth of November that Quinnox confirmed his fears by telling him of the conditions imposed by Prince Bolaroz. For some reason the young officer had deceived Lorry in regard to the all-important matter. The American repeatedly had begged for information about the fatal twentieth, but on all previous occasions his visitor doggedly maintained a show of ignorance, vowing that he knew nothing of the circumstances. Finally Lorry, completely out of patience and determined to know the true state of affairs, soundly upbraided him and sent word to the Princess that if she did not acquaint him with the inside facts he would leave the monastery and find them out for himself. This authoritative message brought Quinnox back two nights later with the full story of the exciting conference. She implored him to remain where he was, and asked his forgiveness for having kept the ugly truth from him. Quinnox added to his anguish by hastily informing him that there was a possibility of succor from another principality. Prince Gabriel, he said, not knowing that he was cutting his listener to the heart, was daily with the Princess, and it was believed that he was ready to loan Graustark sufficient money to meet the demand of Bolaroz. The mere thought that Gabriel was with her aroused the fiercest resentment in Lorry's breast. He writhed beneath the knowledge that she was compelled to endure his advances, his protestations of love, his presence.

As he paced his narrow room distractedly a horrid thought struck him so violently that he cried aloud and staggered against the wall, his eyes fixed on the face of the startled soldier. Perhaps she might submit to Gabriel, for in submitting she could save not only Graustark, but the man she loved. The sacrifice but no! he would not believe that such affliction could come to her! Marry Gabriel! The man who had planned to seize her and make her his wanton! He ground his teeth and glared at Quinnox as if he were the object of his hatred, his vicious jealousy. The captain stepped backward in sudden alarm.

"Don't be afraid!" Lorry cried, savagely. "I'm not crazy. It's your news your news! Does she expect me to stay up here while that state of affairs exists down there? Let me see: this is the eighteenth, and day after to-morrow is the twentieth. There is no time to be lost, Captain Quinnox. I shall accompany you when you leave St. Valentine's to-night."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Quinnox. "I cannot allow that, sir. My instructions are to "

"Hang your instructions! All the instructions on earth can't compel me to sit up here and see this sacrifice made. I am determined to see her and put a stop to the whole affair. It is what I feared would come to pass. She is willing to sacrifice herself or half her kingdom, one or the other, in order that I may escape. It's not right, captain, it's not right, and I'm going to stop it. How soon can we leave this place?" He was pacing the floor, happy in the decision he had reached, notwithstanding the danger it promised.

"You are mad, sir, to talk like this," protested the other, despairingly. "Edelweiss swarms with Apxhain soldiers; our own men are on the alert to win the great reward. You cannot go to the city. When a safe time comes, you will

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be taken from this place, into the mountains instead of through the city, and given escort to Dassas, one hundred miles east. That step will not be taken until the way is, perfectly clear. I tell you, sir, you cannot hope to escape if you leave the monastery now. The mountains are full of soldiers every night."

"I didn't say anything about an escape, did I? On the contrary, I want to give myself up to her. Then she can have Gabriel thrown over the castle wall and say to Bolaroz, 'Here is your man; I've gained the ten years of grace.' That's the point, Quinnox; can't you see it? And I want to say to you now, I'm going whether you consent or refuse. I'd just as soon be in jail down there as up here, anyhow. The only favor I have to ask of you is that you do the best you can to get me safely to her. I must talk with her before I go back to the Tower."

God help me, sir, I cannot take you to her," groaned Quinnox, trying to control his nervous apprehension. "I have sworn to her that I will keep you from all harm, and it would be to break faith with her if I led you into that mob down there."

"I respect your oath, my friend, but I am going, just the same. I'll see her, too, if I have to shoot every man who attempts to prevent me. I'm desperate, man, desperate! She's everything in the world to me, and I'll die before I'll see her suffer."

Quinnox calmly placed his hands on the other's shoulders, and, looking him in the eye, said quietly:

"Her suffering now is as nothing compared to what it will be if you go back to the Tower. You forget how much pain she is enduring to avoid that very suffering. If you care for my mistress, sir, add no weight to the burden she already carries. Remain here, as she desires. You can be of no service down there. I implore you to be considerate."

It was an eloquent appeal, and it struck home. Lorry wavered, but his resolution would not weaken. He argued, first with Quinnox, then with himself, finally returning to the reckless determination to brave all and save her from herself. The soldier begged him to listen to reason, implored him to reconsider, at last turning in anger upon the stubborn American with a torrent of maledictions. Lorry heard him through and quietly, unswervingly announced that he was ready to leave the monastery at any time his guide cared to depart. Quinnox gave up in despair at this, gazing hopelessly at the man he had sworn to protect, who insisted on placing his head in the lion's jaw. He sat down at the window and murmured dejectedly:

"What will she say to me what will she say to me?"

"I shall exonerate you, captain. She can have no fault to find with your action after I have told her how loyal you are and how how well, how unreasonable I am," said Lorry, kindly.

"You may never live to tell her this, sir. Then what is to become of me? I could not look her in the face again. I could only die!"

"Don't be so faint-hearted, Quinnox!" cried Lorry, stimulated by the desire to be with her, recognizing no obstacle that might thwart him in the effort. "We'll get through, safe and sound, and we'll untangle a few complications before we reach the end of the book. Brace up, for God's sake, for mine, for hers, for your own. I must get to her before everything is lost. My God, the fear that she may marry Gabriel will drive me mad if I am left here another night. Come! Let us prepare to start. We must notify the Abbot that I am to go. I can be ready in five minutes. Ye Gods, think of what she may be sacrificing for me!"

The distracted captain gloomily watched the nervous preparations for departure, seeing his own disgrace ahead as plainly as if it had already come upon him. Lorry soon was attired in the guard's uniform he had worn from the Tower a month before. His pistol was in his pocket, and the bunch of violets she had sent to him that very night

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was pinned defiantly above his heart. Quinnox smiled when he observed this bit of sentiment, and grimly informed him that he was committing an act prohibited in Dangloss's disciplinary rules. Officers on duty were not to wear nosegays.

"Dangloss will not see my violets. By the way, the moon shines brightly, doesn't it?"

"It is almost as light as day. Our trip is made extremely hazardous for that reason. I am sorely afraid, rash sir, that we cannot reach the castle unseen."

"We must go about it boldly, that's all."

"Has it occurred to you, sir, that you are placing me in a terrible position? What excuse can I have, a captain of the guard, for slinking about at night with a man whom I am supposed to be tracking to earth? Discovery will brand me as a traitor. I cannot deny the charge without exposing Her Royal Highness."

Lorry turned cold. He had not thought of this alarming possibility. But his ready wit came again to his relief, and with bright, confident eyes he swept away the obstacle.

"If discovered, you are at once to proclaim me a prisoner, take the credit for having caught me, and claim the reward."

"In that case, you will not go to the castle, but to the Tower."

"Not if you obey orders. The offer of reward says that I must be delivered to the undersigned. You will take me to her and not to the Tower."

Quinnox smiled and threw up his hands as if unable to combat the quick logic of his companion. Together they made their way to the prior's cell, afterward to the Abbot's apartment. It was barely eleven o'clock and he had not retired. He questioned Quinnox closely, bade Lorry farewell and blessed him, sent his benediction to the Princess and ordered them conducted to the gates.

Ten minutes later they stood outside the wall, the great gates having been closed sharply behind them. Above them hung the silvery moon, full and bright, throwing its refulgent splendor over the mountain top with all the brilliancy of day. Never had Lorry seen the moon so accursedly bright.

"Gad, it is like day," he exclaimed.

"As I told you, sir," agreed the other, reproof in his voice.

"We must wait until the moon goes down. It won't do to risk it now. Can we not go somewhere to keep warm for an hour or so?"

"There is a cave farther down the mountain. Shall we take the chance of reaching it?"

"By all means. I can't endure the cold after being cooped up for so long."

They followed the winding road for some distance down the mountain, coming at last to a point where a small path branched off. It was the path leading down the side of the steep overlooking the city, and upon that side no wagon-road could be built. Seven thousand feet below stretched the sleeping, moon-lit city. Standing out on the brow of the mountain they seemed to be the only living objects in the world. There was no sign of life above, below or beside them.

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"How long should we be in making the descent?" asked Lorry, a sort of terror possessing him as he looked from the dizzy height into the ghost-like dimness below.

"Three hours, if you are strong."

"And how are we to get into the castle? I hadn't thought of that."

"There is a secret entrance," said Quinnox, maliciously enjoying the insistent one's acknowledgment of weakness. "If we reach it safely I can take you underground to the old dungeons beneath the castle. It may be some time before you can enter the halls above, for the secret of that passage is guarded jealously. There are but five people who know of its existence."

"Great confidence is placed in you, I see, and worthily, I am sure. How is it that you are trusted so implicitly?"

"I inherit the confidence. The captain of the guard is born to his position. My ancestors held the place before me, and not one betrayed the trust. The first-born in the last ten generations has been the captain of the guard in the royal palace, possessing all its secrets. I shall be the first to betray the trust and for a man who is nothing to me."

"I suppose you consider me selfish and vile for placing you in this position," said Lorry, somewhat contritely.

"No; I have begun the task and I will complete it, come what may," answered the captain, firmly. "You are the only being in the world for whom I would sacrifice my honor voluntarily, save one."

"I have wondered why you were never tempted to turn traitor to the Princess and claim the fortune that is represented in the reward."

"Not for five million gavvos, sir!"

"By George, you are a faithful lot! Dangloss, Allode and Ogbot and yourself, four honest men to whom she trusts her life, her honor. You belong to a rare species, and I am proud to know you."

The stealthy couple found the cave and spent an hour or more within its walls, sallying forth after the tardy darkness had crept down over the mountain and into the peaceful valley. Then began the tortuous descent. Quinnox in the lead, they walked, crawled and ran down the narrow path, bruised, scratched and aching by the time they reached the topmost of the summer houses along the face of the mountain. After this walking was easier, but stealthiness made their progress slow. Frequently, as they neared the base, they were obliged to dodge behind houses or to drop into the ditches by the roadside in, order to avoid patrolling police guards or Axfhain sleuth-hounds. Lorry marveled at the vigil the soldiers were keeping, and was somewhat surprised to learn from the young captain that prevailing opinion located him in or near the city. For this reason, while other men were scouring Vienna, Paris and even London, hordes of vengeful men searched day and night for a clew in the city of Edelweiss.

The fugitive began to realize how determined was the effort to capture him and how small the chance of acquittal if he were taken. To his fevered imagination the enmity of the whole world was shaping itself against him. The air was charged with hatred, the ground with vengeance, the trees and rocks with denouncing shadows, while from the darkness behind merciless hands seemed to be stretching forth to clutch him. One simple, loyal love stood alone antagonistic to the universal desire to crush and kill. A fragile woman was shielding him sturdily, unwaveringly against all these mighty forces. His heart thrilled with devotion; his arm tingled with the joy of clasping her once more to his breast; his wistful eyes hung upon the flickering light far off in the west. Quinnox had pointed it out to him, saying that it burned in the bedchamber of the Princes Yetive. Since the memorable night that took him to the cell in St. Valentine's, this light had burned from dusk to daylight. Lovingly, faithfully it

had shone for him through all those dreary nights, a lonely signal from one heart to another.

At last, stiff and sore, they stole into the narrow streets of Edelweiss. Lorry glanced back and shivered, although the air was warm and balmy. He had truly been out of the world. Not until this instant did he fully appreciate the dread that possesses a man who is being hunted down by tireless foes; never did man's heart go out in gratitude and trustfulness as did his toward the strong defender whose sinewy arm he clasped as if in terror.

"You understand what this means to me," said Quinnox gravely, as they paused to rest. "She will call me your murderer and curse me for my miserable treason. I am the first to dishonor the name of Quirinnox,"

XXII. GRENFALL LORRY'S FOE

The Princess Yetive had not flinched a hair's breadth from the resolution formed on that stormy night when she sacrificed pride and duty on the altar of love and justice. Prince Bolaroz's ultimatum overwhelmed her, but she arose from the wreckage that was strewn about her conscience and remained loyal, steadfast and true to the man in the monastery. To save his life was all she could hope to accomplish, and that she was bound to do at any cost. She could be nothing to him not even friend. So long as he lived he would be considered the murderer of Lorenz, and until the end a price would hang over his head. She, Princess of Graustark, had offered a reward for him. For that reason he was always to be a fugitive, and she least of all could hope to see him. There had been a brief, happy dream, but it was swept away by the unrelenting rush of reality. The mere fact that she, and she alone, was responsible for his flight placed between them an unsurmountable barrier.

Clinging tenaciously to her purpose, she was still cognizant of the debt she owed the trusting, loving people of Graustark. One word from her could avert the calamity that was to fall with the dawn of the fatal twentieth. All Graustark blindly trusted and adored her; to undeceive them would be to administer a shock from which they could never recover.

Her heart was bursting with love for Lorry; her mind was overflowing with tender thoughts that could not be sent to him, much as she trusted to the honor of Quinnox, her messenger. Hour after hour she sat in her window and marveled at the change that had been wrought in her life by this strong American, her eyes fixed on the faraway monastery, her heart still and cold and fearful. She had no confidant in this miserable affair of the heart. Others, near and dear, had surmised, but no word of hers confirmed. A diffidence, strange and proud, forbade the confession of her frailty, sweet, pure and womanly though it was. She could not forget that she was a Princess.

The Countess Dagmar was piqued by her reticence and sought in manifold ways to draw forth the voluntary avowal, with its divine tears and blushes. Harry Anguish, who spent much of his time at the castle and who invariably deserted his guards at the portals, was as eager as the Countess to have her commit herself irretrievably by word or sign, but he, too, was disappointed. He was, also, considerably puzzled. Her Highness's manner was at all times frank and untroubled. She was apparently light-hearted; her cheeks had lost none of their freshness; her eyes were bright; her smile was quick and merry; her wit unclouded. Receptions, drawing-rooms and state functions found her always vivacious, so much so that her Court wondered not a little. Daily reports brought no news of the fugitive, but while others were beginning to acquire the haggard air of worry and uncertainty, she was calmly resigned. The fifteenth, the sixteenth, the seventeenth, the eighteenth and now the nineteenth of November came and still the Princess revealed no marked sign of distress. Could they have seen her in the privacy of her chamber on those dreary, maddening nights they would not have known their sovereign.

Heavy-hearted and with bowed heads the people of Graustark saw the nineteenth fade in the night, the breaking of which would bring the crush of pride, the end of power. At court there was the silent dread and the dying hope that relief might come at the last hour. Men, with pale faces and tearful eyes, wandered through the ancient castle, speechless, nerveless, miserable. Brave soldiers crept about, shorn of pride and filled with woe. Citizens sat and

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stared aimlessly for hours, thinking of naught but the disaster so near at hand and so unavoidable. The whole nation surged as if in the last throes of death. To-morrow the potency of Graustark was to die, its domain was to be cleft in twain, disgraced before the world.

And, on the throne of this afflicted land sat the girl, proud, tender, courageous Yetive. To all Graustark she was its greatest, its most devoted sufferer; upon her the blow fell heaviest. There she sat, merciful and merciless, her slim white hand ready to sign the shameful deed in transfer, ready to sell her kingdom for her love. Beneath her throne, beneath her feet, cowered six souls, possessors of the secret. Of all the people in the world they alone knew the heart of the Princess Yetive, they alone felt with her the weight of the sacrifice. With wistful eyes, fainting hearts and voiceless lips five of them watched the day approach, knowing that she would not speak and that Graustark was doomed. Loyal conspirators against that which they loved better than their lives their country were Dangloss, Quinnox, Allode, Ogbot and Dagmar. To-morrow would see the north torn from the south, the division of families, the rending of homes, the bursting of hearts. She sanctioned all this because she loved him and because he had done no wrong.

Aware of her financial troubles and pursuing the advantage that his rival's death had opened to him, Prince Gabriel, of Dawsbergen, renewed his ardent suit. Scarce had the body of the murdered Prince left the domain before he made his presence marked. She was compelled to receive his visits, distasteful as they were, but she would not hear his propositions. Knowing that he was in truth the mysterious Michael who had planned her abduction, she feared and despised him, yet dared make no public denunciation. As Dawsbergen was too powerful to be antagonized at this critical time, she was constantly forced to submit to the most trying and repulsive of ordeals. Tact and policy were required to control the violent, hot-blooded young ruler from the south. At times she despaired and longed for the quiet of the tomb; at other times she was consumed by the fires of resentment, rebelling against the ignominy to which she was subjected. Worse than all to her were the insolent overtures of Gabriel. How she endured she could not tell. The tears of humiliation shed after his departure on the occasion of each visit revealed the bitterness that was torturing this proud martyr.

He had come at once to renew his offer of a loan, knowing her helplessness. Day after day he haunted the castle, persistent in his efforts to induce her to accept his proposition. So fierce was his passion, so implacable his desire, that he went among the people of Edelweiss, presenting to them his proposal, hoping thereby to add public feeling to his claims. He tried to organize a committee of citizens to go before the Princess with the petition that his offer be accepted and the country saved. But Graustark was loyal to its Princess. Not one of her citizens listened to the wily Prince, and more than one told him or his emissaries that the loss of the whole kingdom was preferable to the marriage he desired. The city sickened at the thought.

His last and master-stroke in the struggle to persuade came on the afternoon of the nineteenth, at an hour when all Edelweiss was in gloom and when the Princess was taxed to the point where the mask of courage was so frail that she could scarce hide her bleeding soul behind it.

Bolaroz of Axphain, to quote from the news-despatch, was in Edelweiss, a guest, with a few of his lords, in the castle. North of the city were encamped five thousand men. He had come prepared to cancel the little obligation of fifteen years standing. With the hated creditor in the castle, his influence hovering above the town, the populace distracted by the thoughts of the day to come, Gabriel played what he considered his best card. He asked for and obtained a final interview with Yetive, not in her boudoir or her reception room, but in the throne room, where she was to meet Bolaroz in the morning.

The Princess, seated on her throne, awaited the approach of the resourceful, tenacious suitor. He came and behind him strode eight stalwart men, bearing a long iron-bound chest, the result of his effort with his bankers. Yetive and her nobles looked in surprise on this unusual performance. Dropping to his knee before the throne, Gabriel said, his voice trembling slightly with eagerness and fear:

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"Your Highness, to-morrow will see the turning point in the history of two, possibly three nations Graustark, Axphain and Dawsbergen. I have included my own land because its ruler is most vitally interested. He would serve and save Graustark, as you know, and he would satisfy Axphain. It is in my power to give you aid at this last, trying hour, and I implore you to listen to my words of sincerest friendship, yes, adoration. To-morrow you are to pay to Prince Bolaroz over twenty-five million gavvos or relinquish the entire north half of your domain. I understand the lamentable situation. You can raise no more than fifteen millions and you are helpless. He will grant no extension of time. You know what I have proffered before. I come to-day to repeat my friendly offer and to give unquestioned bond as to my ability to carry it out. If you agree to accept the loan I extend, ten million gavvos for fifteen years at the usual rate of interest, you can on to-morrow morning place in the hand of Axphain when he makes his formal demand the full amount of your indebtedness in gold. Ricardo, open the chest!"

An attendant threw open the lid of the chest. It was filled with gold coins.

"This box contains one hundred thousand gavvos. There are in your halls nine boxes holding nine times as much as you see here. And there are nine times as much all told on the way. This is an evidence of my good faith. Here is the gold. Pay Bolaroz and owe Gabriel, the greatest happiness that could come to him."

There was a dead silence after this theatrical action.

"The interest on this loan is not all you ask, I understand," said Halfont, slowly, his black eyes glittering. "You ask something that Graustark cannot and will not barter the hand of its Sovereign. If you are willing to make this loan, naming a fair rate of interest, withdrawing your proposal of marriage, we can come to an agreement."

Gabriel's eyes deadened with disappointment, his breast heaved and his fingers twitched.

"I have the happiness of your Sovereign at heart as much as my own," he said. "She shall never want for devotion, she shall never know a pain."

"You are determined, then, to adhere to your original proposition?" demanded the Count.

"She would have married Lorenz to save her land, to protect her people. Am I not as good as Lorenz? Why not give " began Gabriel, viciously, but Yetive arose, and, with gleaming eyes and flushing cheeks, interrupted him.

"Go! I will not hear you not one word!"

He passed from the room without another word. Her Court saw her standing straight and immovable, her white face transfigured.

XXIII. THE VISITOR AT MIDNIGHT

Below the castle and its distressed occupants, in a dark, damp little room, Grenfall Lorry lived a year in a day. On the night of the eighteenth, or rather near the break of dawn on the nineteenth, Captain Quinnox guided him from the dangerous streets of Edelweiss to the secret passage, and he was safe for the time being. The entrance to the passage was through a skillfully hidden opening in the wall that enclosed the park. A stone doorway, so cleverly constructed that it defied detection, led to a set of steps which, in turn, took one to a long narrow passage. This ended in a stairway fully a quarter of a mile from its beginning. Ascending this stairway one came to a secret panel, through which, by pressing a spring, the interior of the castle was reached. The location of the panel was in one of the recesses in the wall of the chapel, near the altar. It was in this chapel that Yetive exchanged her male attire for a loose gown, weeks before, and the servant who saw her come from the door at an unearthly hour in the morning believed she had gone there to seek surcease from the troubles which oppressed her.

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Lorry was impatient to rush forth from his place of hiding and to end all suspense, but Quinnox demurred. He begged the eager American to remain in the passage until the night of the nineteenth, when, all things going well, he might be so fortunate as to reach the Princess without being seen. It was the secret hope of the guilty captain that his charge could be induced by the Princess to return to the monastery, to avoid complications. He promised to inform Her Highness of his presence in the underground room and to arrange for a meeting. The miserable fellow could not find courage to confess his disobedience to his trusting mistress. Many times during the day she had seen him hovering near, approaching and then retreating, and had wondered not a little at his peculiar manner.

And so it was that Lorry chafed and writhed through a long day of suspense and agony. Quinnox had brought to the little room some candles, food and bedding, but he utilized only the former. The hours went by and no summons called him to her side. He was dying with the desire to hold her in his arms and to hear her voice again. Pacing to and fro like a caged animal, he recalled the ride in West Virginia, the scene in her bed chamber, the day in the throne room and, more delicious than all, the trip to the monastery. In his dreams, waking or sleeping, he had seen the slim soldier, had heard the muffled voice, and had felt the womanly caresses. His brain now was in a whirl, busy with thoughts of love and fear, distraught with anxiety for her and for himself, bursting with the awful consequences of the hour that was upon them. What was to become of him? What was to be the end of this drama? What would the night, the morrow bring about?

He looked back and saw himself as he was a year ago in Washington, before she came into his life, and then wondered if it could really be he who was going through these strange, improbable scenes, these sensations. It was nine o'clock in the evening when Quinnox returned to the little room. The waiting one had looked at his watch a hundred times, had run insanely up and down the passage in quest of the secret exit, had shouted aloud in the frenzy of desperation.

"Have you seen her?" he cried, grasping the new-comer's hand.

"I have, but, before God, I could not tell her what I had done. Your visit will be a surprise, I fear a shock."

"Then how am I to see her? Fool! Am I to wait here forever "

"Have patience! I will take you to her tonight aye, within an hour. To-morrow morning she signs away the northern provinces and her instructions are that she is not to be disturbed to-night. Not even will she see the Countess Dagmar after nine o'clock. It breaks my heart to see the sorrow that abounds in the castle to-night. Her Highness insists on being alone and Bassot, the new guard, has orders to admit no one to her apartments. He is ill and I have promised that a substitute shall relieve him at eleven o'clock. You are to be the substitute. Here is a part of an old uniform of mine, and here is a coat that belonged to Dannox, who was about your size. Please exchange the clothes you now have on for these. I apprehend no trouble in reaching her door, for the household is in gloom and the halls seem barren of life."

He threw the bundle on a chair and Lorry at once proceeded to don the contents. In a very short time he wore, instead of the cell keeper's garments, a neat-fitting uniform of the royal guard. He was trembling violently, chilled to the bone with nervousness, as they began the ascent of the stairs leading to the chapel. The crisis in his life, he felt, was near at hand.

Under the stealthy hand of Quinnox the panel opened and they listened intently for some moments. There was no one in the dimly-lighted chapel, so they made their way to the door at the opposite end. The great organ looked down upon them and Lorry expected every instant to hear it burst forth in sounds of thunder. It seemed alive and watching their movements reproachfully. Before unlocking the door, the captain pointed to a lance which stood against the wall near by.

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"You are to carry that lance," he said, briefly. Then he cautiously peered forth. A moment later they were in the broad hall, boldly striding toward the distant stairway. Lorry had been instructed to proceed without the least sign of timidity. They passed several attendants in the hall and heard Count Halfont's voice in conversation with some one in an ante-room. As they neared the broad steps who should come tripping down but Harry Anguish. He saluted Quinnox and walked rapidly down the corridor, evidently taking his departure after a call on the Countess.

"There goes your hostage," said the captain, grimly. It had required all of Lorry's self-possession to restrain the cry of joyful recognition. Up the staircase they went, meeting several ladies and gentlemen coming down, and were soon before the apartments of the Princess. A tall guard stood in front of the boudoir door.

"This is your relief, Bassot. You may go," said Quinnox, and, with a careless glance at the strange soldier, the sick man trudged off down the hall, glad to seek his bed.

"Is she there?" whispered Lorry, dizzy and faint with expectancy.

"Yes. This may mean your death and mine, sir, but you would do it. Will you explain to her how I came to play her false?"

"She shall know the truth, good friend."

"After I have gone twenty paces down the hall, do you rap on the door. She may not admit you at first, but do not give up. If she bid you enter or asks your mission, enter quickly and close the door. It is unlocked. She may swoon, or scream, and you must prevent either if possible. In an hour I shall return and you must go back to the passage."

"Never! I have come to save her and her country, and I intend to do so by surrendering myself this very night."

"I had hoped to dissuade you. But, sir, you cannot do so to-night. You forget that this visit compromises her."

"True. I had forgotten. Well, I'll go back with you, but to-morrow I am your prisoner, not your friend."

"Be careful," cautioned the captain as he moved away. Lorry feverishly tapped his knuckles on the panel of the door and waited with motionless heart for the response. It came not and he rapped harder, a strange fear darting into his mind.

"Well?" came from within, the voice he adored.

Impetuous haste marked his next movement. He dashed open the door, sprang inside and closed it quickly. She was sitting before her escritoire, writing, and looked up, surprised and annoyed.

"I was not to be disturbed Oh, God!"

She staggered to her feet and was in his arms before the breath of her exclamation had died away. Had he not supported her she would have dropped to the floor. Her hands, her face were like ice, her breast was pulseless and there was the wildest terror in her eyes.

"My darling my queen!" he cried, passionately. "At last I am with you! Don't look at me like that! It is really I I could not stay away I could not permit this sacrifice of yours. Speak to me Do not stare like that!"

Her wide blue eyes slowly swept his face, piteous wonder and doubt struggling in their depths.

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"Am I awake?" she murmured, touching his face with her bewildered, questioning hands. "Is it truly you?" A smile illumined her face, but her joy was short-lived. An expression of terror came to her eyes and there was agony in the fingers that clasped his arm. "Why do you come here?" she cried. "It is madness! How and why came you to this room?"

He laughed like a delighted boy and hastily narrated the events of the past twenty-four hours, ending with the trick that gave him entrance to her room.

"And all this to see me?" she whispered.

"To see you and to save you. I hear that Gabriel has been annoying you and that you are to give up half of the kingdom to-morrow. Tell me everything. It is another reason for my coming."

Sitting beside him on the divan, she told of Gabriel's visit and his dismissal, the outlook for the next day, and then sought to convince him of the happiness it afforded her to protect him from an undeserved death. He obtained for Quinnox the royal pardon and lauded him to the skies. So ravishing were the moments, so ecstatic the sensations that possessed them that neither thought of the consequences if he were to be discovered in her room, disguised as one of her guardsmen. He forgot the real import of his reckless visit until she commanded him to stand erect before her that she might see what manner of soldier he was. With a laugh, he leaped to his feet and stood before her attention! She leaned back among the cushions and surveyed him through the glowing, impassioned eyes which slowly closed as if to shut out temptation.

"You are a perfect soldier," she said, her lashes parting ever so slightly.

"No more perfect than you," he cried. She remembered, with confusion, her own masquerading, but it was unkind of him to remember it. Her allusion to his uniform turned his thoughts into the channel through which they had been surging so turbulently up to the moment that found him tapping at her door.

He had not told her of his determination, and the task grew harder as he saw the sparkle glow brighter and brighter in her eye.

"You are a brave soldier, then," she substituted. "It required courage to come to Edelweiss with hundreds of men ready to seize you at sight, a pack of bloodhounds."

"I should have been a miserable coward to stay up there while you are so bravely facing disaster alone down here. I came to help you, as I should."

"But you can do nothing, dear, and you only make matters worse by coming to me. I have fought so hard to overcome the desire to be near you; I have struggled against myself for days and days, and I had won the battle when you came to pull my walls of strength down about my ears. Look! On my desk is a letter I was writing to you. No; you shall not read it! No one shall ever know what it contains." She darted to the desk, snatched up the sheets of paper and held them over the waxed taper. He stood in the middle of the room, a feeling of intense desolation settling down upon him. How could he lose this woman?

"To-morrow night Quinnox is to take you from the monastery and conduct you to a distant city. It has all been planned. Your friend, Mr. Anguish, is to meet you in three days and you are to hurry to America by way of Athens. This was a letter to you. In it I said many things and was trying to write farewell when you came to this room. Do you wonder that I was overcome with doubt and amazement yes, and horror? Ach, what peril you are in here! Every minute may bring discovery and that would mean death to you. You are innocent, but nothing could save you. The proof is too strong. Mizrox has found a man who swears he saw you enter Lorenz's room."

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"What a damnable lie!" cried Lorry, lightly. "I was not near his room!"

"But you can see what means they will adopt to convict you. You are doomed if caught, by my men or theirs. I cannot save you again. You know now that I love you. I would not give away half of the land that my forefathers ruled were it not true. Bolaroz would be glad to grant ten years of grace could he but have you in his clutches. And, to see me, you would run the risk of undoing all that I have planned, accomplished and suffered for. Could you not have been content with that last good-bye at the monastery? It is cruel to both of us to me especially that we must have the parting again." She had gone to the divan and now dropped limply among the cushions, resting her head on her hand.

"I was determined to see you," he said. "They shall not kill me nor are you to sacrifice your father's domain. Worse than all, I feared that you might yield to Gabriel."

"Ach! You insult me when you say that! I yielded to Lorenz because I thought it my duty and because I dared not admit to myself that I loved you. But Gabriel! Ach!" she cried, scornfully. "Grenfall Lorry, I shall marry no man. You I love, but you I cannot marry. It is folly to dream of it, even as a possibility. When you go from Graustark tomorrow night you take my heart, my life, my soul with you. I shall never see you again God help me to say this I shall never allow you to see me again. I tell you I could not bear it. The weakest and the strongest of God's creations is woman." She started suddenly, half rising. "Did any one see you come to my room? Was Quinnox sure?"

"We passed people, but no one knew me. I will go if you are distressed over my being here."

"It is not that not that. Some spy may have seen you. I have a strange fear that they suspect me and that I am being watched. Where is Captain Quinnox?"

"He said he would return for me in an hour. The time is almost gone. How it has flown! Yetive, Yetive, I will not give you up!" he cried, sinking to his knees before her.

"You must you shall! You must go back to the monastery to-night! Oh how I pray that you may reach it in safety! And, you must leave this wretched country at once. Will you see if Quinnox is outside the door? Be quick! I am mad with the fear that you may be found here that you may be taken before you can return to St. Valentine's."

He arose and stood looking down at the intense face, all aquiver with the battle between temptation and solicitude.

"I am not going back to St. Valentine's," he said, slowly.

"But it is all arranged for you to start from there tomorrow. You cannot escape the city guard except through St. Valentine's."

"Yetive, has it not occurred to you that I may not wish to escape the city guard?"

"May not wish to escape the what do you mean?" she cried, bewildered.

"I am not going to leave Edelweiss, dearest. It is my intention to surrender myself to the authorities."

She gazed at him in horror for a moment and then fell back with a low moan.

"For God's sake, do not say that!" she wailed. "I forbid you to think of it. You cannot do this after all I have done to save you. Ach, you are jesting; I should have known."

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He sat down and drew her to his side. Some moments passed before he could speak.

"I cannot and will not permit you to make such a sacrifice for me. The proposition of Bolaroz is known to me. If you produce me for trial you are to have a ten years' extension. My duty is plain. I am no cowardly criminal, and I am not afraid to face my accusers. At the worst, I can die but once."

"Die but once," she repeated, as if in a dream.

"I came here to tell you of my decision, to ask you to save your lands, protect your people, and to remember that I would die a thousand times to serve you and yours."

"After all I have done after all I have done," she murmured, piteously. "No, no! You shall not! You are more to me than all my kingdom, than all the people in the world. You have made me love you, you have caused me to detest the throne which separates us, you have made me pray that I might be a pauper, but you shall not force me to destroy the mite of hope that lingers in my heart. You shall not crush the hope that there may be a some day!"

"A some day? Some day when you will be mine?" he cried.

"I will not say that, but, for my sake, for my sake, go away from this place. Save yourself! You are all I have to live for." Her arms were about his neck and her imploring words went to his heart like great thrusts of pain.

"You forget the thousands who love and trust you. Do they deserve to be wronged?"

"No, no, ach, God, how I have suffered because of them! I have betrayed them, have stolen their rights and made them a nation of beggars. But I would not, for all this nation, have an innocent man condemned nor could my people ask that of me. You cannot dissuade me. It must be as I wish. Oh, why does not Quinnox come for you!" She arose and paced the floor distractedly.

He was revolving a selfish, cowardly capitulation to love and injustice, when a sharp tap was heard at the door. Leaping to his feet he whispered:

"Quinnox! He has come for me. Now to get out of your room without being seen!"

The Princess Yetive ran to him, and, placing her hands on his shoulders, cried with the fierceness of despair:

"You will go back to the monastery? You will leave Graustark? For my sake for my sake!"

He hesitated and then surrendered, his honor falling weak and faint by the pathway of passion.

"Yes!" he cried, hoarsely.

Tap! tap! tap! at the door. Lorry took one look at the rapturous face and released her,

"Come!" she called.

The door flew open, an attendant saluted, and in stepped Gabriel!

XXIV. OFF TO THE DUNGEON

The tableau lasted but a moment. Gabriel advanced a few steps, his eyes gleaming with jealousy and triumph. Before him stood the petrified lovers, caught red-handed. Through her dazed brain struggled the conviction that he could never escape; through his ran the miserable realization that he had ruined her forever. Gabriel, of all men!

"I arrive inopportunistically," he said, harshly, the veins standing out on his neck and temples. "Do I intrude? I was not aware that you expected two, your highness!" There was no mistaking his meaning. He viciously sought to convey the impression that he was there by appointment, a clandestine visitor in her apartments at midnight.

"What do you mean by coming to my apartment at this hour?" she stammered, trying to rescue dignity from the chaos of emotions. Lorry was standing slightly to the right and several feet behind her. He understood the Prince, and quickly sought to interpose with the hope that he might shield her from the sting.

"She did not expect me, sir," he said, and a menacing gleam came to his eyes. His pistol was in his hand. Gabriel saw it, but the staring Princess did not. She could not take her eyes from the face of the intruder. "Now, may I ask why you are here?"

Gabriel's wit saved him from death. He saw that he could not pursue the course he had begun, for there was murder in the American's eye. Like a fox he swerved and, with a servile promise of submission in his glance, said:

"I thought you were here, my fine fellow, and I came to satisfy myself. Now, sir, may I ask why you are here?" His fingers twitched and his eyes were glassy with the malevolence he was subduing.

"I am here as a prisoner," said Lorry, boldly. Gabriel laughed derisively.

"And how often have you come here in this manner as a prisoner? Midnight and alone in the apartments of the Princess! The guard dismissed! A prisoner, eh? Ha, what a prison!"

"Stop!" cried Lorry, white to the lips.

The Princess was beginning to understand.

Her eyes grew wide with horror, her figure straightened imperiously and the white in her cheeks gave way to the red of insulted virtue.

"I see it all! You have not been outside this castle since you left the prison. A pretty scheme! You could not marry him, could you, eh? He is not a prince! But you could bring him here and hide him where no one would dare to think of looking for him in your apartments!"

With a snarl of rage Lorry sprang upon him, cutting short the sentence that would have gone through her like the keenest knife-blade.

"Liar! Dog! I'll kill you for that!" he cried, but, before he could clutch the Prince's throat, Yotive had frantically seized his arm.

"Not that!" she shrieked. "Do not kill him! There must be no murder here!"

He reluctantly hurled Gabriel from him, the Prince tottering to his knees in the effort to keep from falling. She had

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saved her maligner's life, but courage deserted her with the act. Helplessly she looked into the blazing eyes of her lover and faltered:

"I I do not know what to say or do. My brain is bursting!"

"Courage, courage!" he whispered, gently.

You shall pay for this," shrieked Gabriel. "If you are not a prisoner you shall be. There'll be scandal enough in Graustark to-morrow to start a volcano of wrath from the royal tombs where lie her fathers. I'll see that you are a prisoner!" He started for the door, but Lorry's pistol was leveled at his head.

"If you move I'll kill you!"

"The world will understand how and why I fell by your hand and in this room. Shoot!" he cried, triumphantly. Lorry's hand trembled and his eyes filled with the tears of impotent rage. The Prince held the higher card.

A face suddenly appeared at the door, which had been stealthily opened from without. Captain Quinnox glided into the room behind the Prince and gently closed the door, unnoticed by the gloater.

"A prisoner?" sneered Gabriel. "Where is your captor, pray?"

"Here!" answered a voice at his back. The Prince wheeled and found himself looking at the stalwart form of the captain of the guard. "I am surely privileged to speak now, your Highness," he went on, addressing the Princess significantly.

"How came you here?" gasped Gabriel.

"I brought my prisoner here. Where should I be if not here to guard him?"

"When when did you enter this room?"

"An hour ago."

"You were not here when I came!"

"I have been standing on this spot for an hour. You have been very much excited, I'll agree, but it is strange you did not see me," lied Quinnox.

Gabriel looked about helplessly, nonplussed.

"You were here when I came in?" he asked, wonderingly.

"Ask Her Royal Highness," commanded the captain, smiling.

"Captain Quinnox brought the prisoner to me an hour ago," she said, mechanically.

"It is a lie!" cried Gabriel. "He was not here when I entered!"

The captain of the guard laid a heavy hand on the shoulder of the Prince and said, threateningly:

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"I was here and I am here. Have a care how you speak. Were I to do right I should shoot you like a dog. You came like a thief, you insult the ruler of my land. I have borne it all because you are a Prince, but have a care have a care. I may forget myself and tear out your black heart with these hands. One word from Her Royal Highness will be your death warrant."

He looked inquiringly at the Princess as if anxious to put the dangerous witness where he could tell no tales. She shook her head, but did not speak. Lorry realized that the time had come for him to assert himself. Assuming a distressed air he bowed his head and said, dejectedly:

"My pleading has been in vain, then, your Highness. I have sworn to you that I am innocent of this murder, and you have said I shall have a fair trial. That is all you can offer?"

"That is all," she said, shrilly, her mind gradually grasping his meaning.

"You will not punish the poor people who secreted me in their house for weeks, for they are convinced of my innocence. Your captain here, who found me in their house to-night, can also speak well of them. I have only this request to make, in return for what little service I may have given you: Forgive the old people who befriended me. I am ready to go to the Tower at once, captain."

Gabriel heard this speech with a skeptical smile on his face.

"I am no fool," he said, simply. "Captain," shrewdly turning to Quinnox, "if he is your prisoner, why do you permit him to retain his revolver?"

The conspirators were taken by surprise, but Lorry had found his wits.

"It is folly, your Highness, to allow this gentleman and conquering Prince to cross-examine you. I am a prisoner, and that is the end of it. What odds is it to the Prince of Dawsbergen how and where I was caught or why your officer brought me to you?"

"You were ordered from my house once today, yet you come again like a conqueror. I should not spare you. You deserve to lose your life for the actions of tonight. Captain Quinnox, will you kill him if I ask you to end his wretched life?" Yetive's eyes were blazing with wrath, beneath which gleamed a hope that he could be frightened into silence.

"Willingly willingly!" cried Quinnox. "Now, your Highness? 'Twere better in the hall!"

"For God's sake, do not murder me! Let me go!" cringed the Prince.

"I do not mean that you should kill him now, Quinnox, but I instruct you to do so if he puts foot inside these walls again. Do you understand?"

"Yes, your Highness."

"Then you will place this prisoner in the castle dungeon until to-morrow morning, when he is to be taken to the Tower. Prince Gabriel may accompany you to the dungeon cell, if he likes, after which you will escort him to the gates. If he enters them again you are to kill him. Take them both away!"

"Your Highness, I must ask you to write a pardon for the good people in whose house the prisoner was found," suggested Quinnox, shrewdly seeing a chance for communication unsuspected by the Prince.

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"A moment, your Highness," said the Prince, who had recovered himself cleverly. "I appreciate your position. I have made a serious charge, and I now have a fair proposition to suggest to you. If this man is not produced to-morrow morning I take it for granted that I am at liberty to tell all that has happened in this room to-night. If he is produced, I shall kneel and beg your pardon."

The Princess turned paler than ever and knew not how she kept from falling to the floor. There was a long silence following Gabriel's unexpected but fair suggestion.

"That is very fair, your Highness," said Lorry. "There is no reason why I should not be a prisoner to-morrow. I don't see how I can hope to escape the inevitable. Your dungeon is strong and I have given my word of honor to the captain that I shall make no further effort to evade the law."

"I agree," murmured the Princess, ready to faint under the strain.

"I must see him delivered to Prince Bolaroz," added Gabriel mercilessly.

"To Bolaroz," she repeated.

"Your Highness, the pardon for the poor old people," reminded Quinnox. She glided to the desk, stunned, bewildered. It seemed as though death were upon her. Quinnox followed and bent near her ear. "Do not be alarmed," he whispered. "No one knows of Mr. Lorry's presence here save the Prince, and if he dares to accuse you before Bolaroz our people will tear him to pieces. No one will believe him."

"You you can save him, then?" she gasped, joyously.

"If he will permit me to do so. Write to him what you will, your Highness, and he shall have the message. Be brave and all will go well. Write quickly! This is supposed to be the pardon."

She wrote feverishly, a thousand thoughts arising for every one that she was able to transfer to the paper. When she had finished the hope-inspired scrawl she arose and, with a gracious smile, handed to the waiting captain the pardon for those who had secreted the fugitive.

"I grant forgiveness to them gladly," she said.

"I thank you," said Lorry, bowing low.

"Mr. Lorry, I regret the difficulty in which you find yourself. It was on my account, too, I am told. Be you guilty or innocent, you are my friend, my protector. May God be good to you." She gave him her hand calmly, steadily, as if she were bestowing favor upon a subject. He kissed the hand gravely.

"Forgive me for trespassing on your good nature tonight, your Highness.

"The five thousand gavvos shall be yours tomorrow, Captain Quinnox," she said, graciously. "You have done your duty well." The faithful captain bowed deep and low and a weight was lifted from his conscience.

"Gentlemen, the door," he said, and without a word the trio left the room. She closed the door and stood like a statue until their footsteps died away in the distance. As one in a daze she sat at the desk till the dawn, Grenfall Lorry's revolver lying before her.

Through the halls, down the stairs and into the clammy dungeon strode the silent trio.

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But before Lorry stepped inside the cell Gabriel asked a question that had been troubling him for many minutes.

"I am afraid I have ah misjudged her," muttered Gabriel, now convinced that he had committed himself irretrievably.

"You will find she has not misjudged you," said the prisoner, grimly. "Can't I have a candle in here, captain?"

"You may keep this lantern," said Quinnox, stepping inside the narrow cell. As he placed the lantern on the floor he whispered: "I will return in an hour. Read this!" Lorry's hand closed over the bit of perfumed paper.

The Prince was now inside the cell, peering about curiously, even timorously. "By the way, your Highness, how would you enjoy living in a hole like this all your life?"

"Horrible!" said Gabriel, shuddering like a leaf.

"Then take my advice: don't commit any murders. Hire some one else."

The two men eyed each other steadily for a moment or two. Then the Prince looked out of the cell, a mad desire to fly from some dreadful, unseen horror coming over him.

Quinnox locked the door, and, striking a match, bade His Highness precede him up the stone steps.

In the cell the prisoner read and reread the incoherent message from Yetive:

"It is the only way. Quinnox will assist you to escape to-night. Go, I implore you; as you love me, go. Your life is more than all to me. Gabriel's story will not be entertained and he can have no proof. He will be torn to pieces, Quinnox says. I do not know how I can live until I am certain you are safe. This will be the longest night a woman ever spent. If I could only be sure that you will do as I ask, as I beg and implore! Do not think of me, but save yourself. I would lose everything to save you."

He smiled sadly as he burned the "pardon." The concluding sentences swept away the last thought he might have had of leaving her to bear the consequences. "Do not think of me, but save yourself. I would lose everything to save you." He leaned against the stone wall and shook his head slowly, the smile still on his lips.

XXV. "BECAUSE I LOVE HIM"

The next morning Edelweiss was astir early. Great throngs of people flocked the streets long before the hour set for the signing of the decree that was to divide the north from the south. There were men and women from the mountains, from the southern valleys, from the plains to the north and east. Sullen were the mutterings, threatening the faces, resentful the hearts of those who crowded the shops, the public places and the streets. Before nine o'clock the great concourse of people began to push toward the castle. Castle Avenue was packed with the moving masses. Thousands upon thousands of this humbled race gathered outside the walls, waiting for news from the castle with the spark of hope that does not die until the very end, nursing the possibility that something might intervene at the last moment to save the country from disgrace and ruin.

A strong guard was required to keep the mob back from the gates, and the force of men on the wall had been quadrupled. Business in the city was suspended. The whole nation, it seemed, stood before the walls, awaiting, with bated breath and dismal faces, the announcement that Yetive had deeded to Bolaroz the lands and lives of half of her subjects. The northern plainsmen who were so soon to acknowledge Axphain sovereignty, wept and wailed over their unhappy lot. Brothers and sisters from the south cursed and moaned in sympathy.

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Shortly before nine o'clock, Harry Anguish, with his guard of six, rode up to the castle. Captain Dangloss was beside him on his gray charger. They had scarcely passed inside the gates when a cavalcade of mounted men came riding up the avenue from the Hotel Regengetz. Then the howling, the hissing, the hooting began. Maledictions were hurled at the heads of Axphain noblemen as they rode between the maddened lines of people. They smiled sardonically in reply to the impotent signs of hatred, but they were glad when the castle gates closed between them and the vast, despairing crowd, in which the tempest of revolt was brewing with unmistakable energy.

Prince Bolaroz, the Duke of Mizrox and the ministers were already in the castle and had been there since the previous afternoon. In the royal palace the excitement was intense, but it was of the subdued kind that strains the nerves to the point where control is martyrdom.

When the attendants went to the bed chamber of the Princess at seven o'clock, as was their wont, they found, to their surprise, no one standing guard.

The Princess was not in her chamber, nor had she been there during the night. The bed was undisturbed. In some alarm the two women ran to her parlor, then to the boudoir. Here they found her asleep on the divan, attired in the gown she had worn since the evening before, now crumpled and creased, the proof positive of a restless, miserable night.

Her first act after awakening and untangling the meshes in her throbbing, uncomprehending brain, was to send for Quinnox. She could scarcely wait for his appearance and the assurance that Lorry was safely out of danger. The footman who had been sent to fetch the captain was a long time in returning. She was dressed in her breakfast gown long before he came in with the report that the captain was nowhere to be found. Her heart gave a great throb of joy. She alone could explain his absence. To her it meant but one thing: Lorry's flight from the castle. Where else could Quinnox be except with the fugitive, perhaps once more inside St. Valentine's? With the great load of suspense off her mind she cared not for the trials that still confronted her on that dreaded morning. She had saved him, and she was willing to pay the price.

Preparations began at once for the eventful transaction in the throne room. The splendor of two Courts was to shine in rivalry. Ten o'clock was the hour set for the meeting of the two rulers, the victor and the victim. Her nobles and her ladies, her ministers, her guards and her lackeys moved about in the halls, dreading the hour, brushing against the hated Axphain guests. In one of the small waiting rooms sat the Count and Countess Halfont, the latter in tears. The young Countess Dagmar stood at a window with Harry Anguish. The latter was flushed and nervous and acted like a man who expects that which is unexpected by others. With a strange confidence in his voice, he sought to cheer his depressed friends, but the cheerfulness was not contagious. The sombreness of a burial hung over the castle.

Half an hour before the time set for the meeting in the throne room Yative sent for her uncle, her aunt and Dagmar. As Anguish and the latter followed the girl turned her sad, puzzled eyes up to the face of the tall American and asked:

"Are you rejoicing over our misfortune? You do not show a particle of regret. Do you forget that we are sacrificing a great deal to save the life of your friend? I do not understand how you can be so heartless."

"If you knew what I know you'd jump so high you could crack those pretty heels of yours together ten times before you touched the floor again," said he, warmly.

"Please tell me," she cried. "I knew there was something."

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"But I am afraid so high a jump would upset you for the day. You must wait awhile, Dagmar." It was the first time he had called her Dagmar, and she looked startled.

"I am not used to waiting," she said, confusedly.

"I think I can explain satisfactorily when I have more time," he said, softly in her ear, and, although she tried, she could find no words to continue. He left her at the head of the stairs, and did not see her again until she passed him in the throne room. Then she was pale and brave and trembling.

Prince Bolaroz and his nobles stood to the right of the throne, the Graustark men and women of degree to the left, while near the door, on both sides were to be seen the leading military men of both principalities. Near the Duke of Mizrox was stationed the figure of Gabriel, Prince of Dawsbergen. He had come, with a half dozen followers, among a crowd of unsuspecting Axphainians, and had taken his position near the throne. Anguish entered with Baron Dangloss and they stood together near the doorway, the latter whiter than he had ever been in his life.

Then came the hush of expectancy. The doors swung open, the curtains parted and the Princess entered.

She was supported by the arm of her tall uncle, Caspar of Halfont. Pages carried the train of her dress, a jeweled gown of black. As she advanced to the throne, calm and stately, those assembled bent knee to the fairest woman the eye ever had looked upon.

The calm, proud exterior hid the most unhappy of hearts. The resolute courage with which her spirit had been braced for the occasion was remarkable in more ways than one. Among other inspirations behind the valiant show was the bravery of a guilty conscience. Her composure sustained a shock when she passed Allode at the door. That faithful, heart-broken servitor looked at her face with pleading, horror-struck eyes as much as to say: "Good God, are you going to destroy Graustark for the sake of that murderer? Have pity on us have pity!"

Before taking her seat on the throne, she swept the thrilled assemblage with her wide blue eyes. There were shadows beneath them and there were wells of tears behind them. As she looked upon the little knot of white-faced northern barons, her knees trembled and her heart gave a great throb of pity. Still the face was resolute. Then she saw Anguish and the suffering Dangloss; then the accusing, merciless eyes of Gabriel. At sight of him she started violently and an icy fear crept into her soul. Instinctively she searched the gorgeous company for the captain of the guard. Her staunchest ally was not there. Was she to hear the condemning words alone? Would the people do as Quinnox had prophesied, or would they believe Gabriel and curse her?

She sank into the great chair and sat with staring, helpless eyes, deserted and feeble.

At last the whirling brain ended its flight and settled down to the issue first at hand—the transaction with Bolaroz. Summoning all her self-control, she said:

"You are come, most noble Bolaroz, to draw from us the price of our defeat. We are loyal to our compact, as you are to yours, sire. Yet, in the presence of my people and in the name of mercy and justice, I ask you to grant us respite. You are rich and powerful, we despoiled and struggling beneath a weight we can lift and displace if given a few short years in which to grow and gather strength. At this last hour in the fifteen years of our indebtedness, I sue in supplication for the leniency that you can so well accord. It is on the advice of my counsellors that I put away personal pride and national dignity to make this request, trusting to your goodness of heart. If you will not hearken to our petition for a renewal of negotiations, there is but one course open to Graustark. We can and will pay our debt of honor."

Bolaroz stood before her, dark and uncompromising. She saw the futility of her plea.

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"I have not forgotten, most noble petitioner, that you are ruler here, not I. Therefore I am in no way responsible for the conditions which confront you, except that I am an honest creditor, come for his honest dues. This is the twentieth of November. You have had fifteen years to accumulate enough to meet the requirements of this day. Should I suffer for your faults? There is in the treaty a provision which applies to an emergency of this kind. Your inability to liquidate in gold does not prevent the payment of this honest debt in land, as provided for in the sixth clause of the agreement. 'All that part of Graustark north of a line drawn directly from east to west between the provinces of Ganlook and Doswan, a tract comprising Doswan, Shellotz, Varagan, Oeswald, Sesmai and Gattabaton.' You have two alternatives, your Highness. Produce the gold or sign the decree ceding to Axphein the lands stipulated in the treaty. I can grant no respite."

You knew when that treaty was framed that we could raise no such funds in fifteen years," said Halfont, forgetting himself in his indignation. Gaspon and other men present approved his hasty declaration.

"Am I dealing with the Princess of Graustark or with you, sir?" asked Bolaroz, roughly.

You are dealing with the people of Graustark, and among the poorest, I. I will sign the decree. There is nothing to be gained by appealing to you. The papers, Gaspon, quick! I would have this transaction finished speedily," cried the Princess, her cheeks flushing and her eyes glowing from the flames of a burning conscience. The groan that went up from the northern nobles cut her like the slash of a knife.

"There was one other condition," said Bolaroz, hastily, unable to gloat as he had expected. "The recapture of the assassin who slew my son would have meant much to Graustark. It is unfortunate that your police department is so inefficient." Dangloss writhed beneath this thrust. Yetive's eyes went to him, for an instant, sorrowfully. Then they dropped to the fatal document which Gaspon had placed on the table before her. The lines ran together and were the color of blood. Unconsciously she took the pen in her nerveless fingers. A deep sob came from the breast of her gray old uncle, and Gaspon's hand shook like a leaf as he placed the seal of Graustark on the table, ready for use.

"The assassin's life could have saved you," went on Bolaroz, a vengeful glare coming to his eyes.

She looked up and her lips moved as if she would have spoken. No words came, no breath, it seemed to her. Casting a piteous, hunted glance over the faces before her, she bent forward and blindly touched the pen to the paper. The silence was that of death. Before she could make the first stroke, a harsh voice, in which there was combined triumph and amazement, broke the stillness like the clanging of a bell.

"Have you no honor?"

The pen dropped from her fingers as the expected condemnation came. Every eye in the house was turned toward the white, twitching face of Gabriel of Dawsbergen. He stood a little apart from his friends, his finger pointed throneward. The Princess stared at the nemesis-like figure for an instant, as if petrified. Then the pent-up fear crowded everything out of its path. In sheer desperation, her eyes flashing with the intensity of defiant guilt, bitter rage welling up against her persecutor, she half arose and cried:

"Who uttered those words? Speak!"

"I, Gabriel of Dawsbergen! Where is the prisoner, madam?" rang out the voice.

"The man is mad!" cried she, sinking back with a shudder.

"Mad, eh? Because I do as I did promise? Behold the queen of perfidy! Madam, I will be heard. Lorry is in this castle!"

Graustark

"He is mad!" gasped Bolaroz, the first of the stunned spectators to find his tongue.

There was a commotion near the door. Voices were heard outside.

"You have been duped!" insisted Gabriel, taking several steps toward the throne. "Your idol is a traitress, a deceiver! I say he is here! She has seen him. Let her sign that decree if she dares! I command you, Yetive of Graustark, to produce this criminal!"

The impulse to crush the defiler was checked by the sudden appearance of two men inside the curtains.

"He is here!" cried a strong voice, and Lorry, breathless and haggard, pushed through the astonished crowd, followed by Captain Quinnox, upon whose ghastly face there were bloodstains.

A shout went up from those assembled, a shout of joy. The faces of Dangloss and Allode were pictures of astonishment and it must be said relief. Harry Anguish staggered but recovered himself instantly, and turned his eyes toward Gabriel. That worthy's legs trembled and his jaw dropped.

"I have the prisoner, your Highness," said Quinnox, in hoarse, discordant tones. He stood before the throne with his captive, but dared not look his mistress in the face. As they stood there the story of the night just passed was told by the condition of the two men. There had been a struggle for supremacy in the dungeon and the prisoner had won. The one had tried to hold the other to the dungeon's safety, after his refusal to leave the castle, and the other had fought his way to the halls above. It was then that Quinnox had wit enough to change front and drag his prisoner to the place which, most of all, he had wished to avoid.

"The prisoner!" shouted the northern nobles, and in an instant the solemn throne room was wild with excitement.

"Do not sign that decree!" cried some one from a far corner.

"Here is your man, Prince Bolaroz!" cried a baron.

"Quinnox has saved us!" shouted another.

The Princess, white as death and as motionless, sat bolt upright in her royal seat.

"Oh!" she moaned, piteously, and, clenching her hands, she carried them to her eyes as if to shut out the sight. The Countess Halfont and Dagmar ran to her side, the latter frantic with alarm. She knew more than the others.

"Are you the fugitive?" cried Bolaroz.

I am Grenfall Lorry. Are you Bolaroz?'

"The father of the man you murdered. Ah, this is rapture!"

"I have only to say to your Highness, I did not kill your son. I swear it, so help me God!"

"Your Highness," cried Bolaroz, stepping to the throne, "destroy that decree. This brave soldier has saved Graustark. In an hour your ministers and mine will have drawn up a ten Tears' extension of time, in proper form, to which my signature shall be gladly attached. I have not forgotten my promise."

Yetive straightened suddenly, seized the pen and fiercely began to sign the decree, in spite of all and before those about her fairly realized her intention. Lorry understood, and was the first to snatch the document from her hands.

Graustark

A half-written Yetive, a blot and a long, spluttering scratch of the pen told how near she had come to signing away the lands of Graustark, forgetful of the fact that it could be of no benefit to the prisoner she loved.

"Yative!" gasped her uncle, in horror.

"She would have signed," cried Gaspon, in wonder and alarm.

"Yes, I would have signed!" she exclaimed, starting to her feet, strong and defiant. "I could not have saved his life, perhaps, but I might have saved him from the cruel injustice that that man's vengeance would have invented. He is innocent, and I would give my kingdom to stay the wrong that will be done."

"What! You defend the dog!" cried Bolaroz. "Seize him, men! I will see that justice is done. It is no girl he has to deal with now."

"Stop!" cried the Princess, the command checking the men. Quinnox leaped in front of his charge. "He is my prisoner, and he shall have justice. Keep back your soldiery, Prince Bolaroz. It is a girl you have to deal with. I will say to you all, my people and yours, that I believe him to be innocent and that I sincerely regret his capture, fortunate as it may be for us. He shall have a fair and a just trial, and I shall do all in my power, Prince Bolaroz, to secure his acquittal."

"Why do you take this stand, Yative? Why have you tried to shield him?" cried the heartbroken Halfont.

She drew herself to her full height, and, sweeping the threatening crowd with a challenge in her eyes, cried, the tones ringing strong and clear above the growing tumult:

"Because I love him!"

As if by magic the room became suddenly still.

"Behold an honest man. I would have saved him at the cost of my honor. Scorn me if you will, but listen to this. The man who stands here accused came voluntarily to this castle, surrendering himself to Captain Quinnox, that he might, though innocent, stand between us and disaster. He was safe from our pursuit, yet returned, perhaps to his death. For me, for you and for Graustark he has done this. Is there a man among you who would have done as much for his own country? Yet he does this for a country to which he is stranger. I must commit him to prison once more. But," she cried in sudden fierceness, "I promise him now, before the trial, a royal pardon. Do I make my meaning clear to you, Prince Bolaroz?"

The white lips of the old Prince could frame no reply to this daring speech.

"Be careful what you say, your Highness," cried the prisoner, hastily. "I must refuse to accept a pardon at the cost of your honor. It is because I love you better than my life that I stand here. I cannot allow you and your people to suffer when it is in my power to prevent it. All that I can ask is fairness and justice. I am not guilty, and God will protect me. Prince Bolaroz, I call upon you to keep your promise. I am not the slayer of your son, but I am the man you would send to the block, guilty or innocent."

As he spoke, the Princess dropped back in the chair, her rash courage gone. A stir near the doorway followed his concluding sentence, and the other American stepped forward, his face showing his excitement.

"Your Highness," he said, "I should have spoken sooner. My lips were parted and ready to cry out when Prince Gabriel interposed and prevented the signing of the decree. Grenfall Lorry did not kill the young Prince. I can produce the guilty man!"

XXVI. THE GUESSING OF ANGUISH

The startling assertion created a fresh sensation. Sensations had come so thick and so fast, however, that they seemed component parts of one grand bewildering climax. The new actor in the drama held the center of the stage undisputed.

"Harry!" cried Lorry.

"Prince Gabriel, why do you shake like a leaf? Is it because you know what I am going to say?" exclaimed Anguish, pointing his finger accusingly at the astonished Prince of Dawsbergen.

Gabriel's lips parted, but nothing more than a gasp escaped them. Involuntarily his eyes sought the door, then the windows, the peculiar uncontrollable look of the hunted coming into them. Bolaroz allowed his gaze to leap instantly to that pallid face and every eye in the room followed. Yetive was standing again, her face glowing.

"An accomplice has confessed all. I have the word of the man who saw the crime committed. I charge Prince Gabriel with the murder of His Highness, Prince Lorenz."

With a groan, Gabriel threw his hands to his heart and tottered forward, glaring at the merciless face of the accuser.

"Confessed! Betrayed!" he faltered. Then he whirled like a maniac upon his little coterie of followers. "Vile traitor!" he shrieked, "I will drink your heart's blood!"

With a howl he leaped toward one of the men, a darkfaced nobleman named Berrowag. The latter evaded him and rushed toward the door, crying:

"It is a lie! a lie! He has tricked you! I did not confess!"

The Prince was seized by his friends, struggling and cursing. A peculiar smile lit up the face of Harry Anguish.

"I repeat, he is the assassin!"

Gabriel broke from the detaining hands and drawing a revolver, rushed for the door.

"Out of the way! I will not be taken alive!"

Allode met him at the curtains and grasped him in his powerful arms, Baron Dangloss and others tearing the weapon from his hand. The utmost confusion reigned women screaming, men shouting and above all could be heard the howls of the accused Prince.

"Let me go! Curse you! Curse you! I will not surrender! Let me kill that traitor! Let me at him!" Berrowag had been seized by willing hands, and the two men glared at each other, one crazy with rage, the other shrinking with fear.

Dangloss and Allode half carried, half dragged the Prince forward. As he neared Bolaroz and the Princess he collapsed and became a trembling, moaning suppliant for mercy. Anguish's accusation had struck home.

"Prince Bolaroz, I trust you will not object if the Princess Yetive substitutes the true assassin for the man named in your promise to Graustark," said Anguish, dramatically. Bolaroz, as if coming from a dream, turned and knelt

before the throne.

"Most adorable Yetive," he said; "I sue for pardon. I bow low and lay my open heart before the truest woman in the world." He kissed the black lace hem of her gown and arose. "I am your friend and ally; Axphain and Graustark will live no more with hatred in their hearts. From you I have learned a lesson in justice and constancy."

Prince Gabriel was raving like a madman as the officers hurried him and Berrowag from the room. A shout went up from those assembled. Its echo, reaching the halls, then the gardens, was finally taken up by the waiting masses beyond the gates. The news flew like wild-fire. Rejoicing, such as had never been known, shook Edelweiss until the monks on the mountain looked down in wonder.

After the dazed and happy throng about the throne had heaped its expressions of love and devotion upon the radiant Princess a single figure knelt in subjection, just as she was preparing to depart. It was the Duke of Mizrox.

"Your Royal Highness, Mizrox is ready to pay his forfeit. My life is yours," he said, calmly. She did not comprehend until her uncle reminded her of the oath Mizrox had taken the morning after the murder.

"He swore, on his life, that you killed Lorenz," she said, turning to Lorry.

"I was wrong, but I am willing to pay the penalty. My love for Lorenz was greater than my discretion. That is my only excuse, but it is one you should not accept," said Mizrox, as coolly as if announcing the time of day. Lorry looked first at him and then at the Princess, bewildered and uncertain.

"I have no ill will against you, my Lord Duke. Release him from his bond your Highness."

"Gladly, since you refuse to hold him to his oath," she said.

"I am under an eternal obligation to you, sir, for your leniency, and I shall ever revere the Princess who pardons so graciously the gravest error."

Yetive begged Bolaroz to continue to make the Court his home while in Graustark, and the old Prince responded with the declaration that he would remain long enough to sign and approve the new covenant, at least. Before stepping from the throne, Yetive called in low tones to Lorry, a pretty flush mantling her cheek:

"Will you come to me in half an hour?"

"For my reward?" he asked, eagerly.

"Ach?" she cried, softly, reprovingly. Count Halfont's face took on a troubled expression as he caught the swift communication in their eyes. After all, she was a Princess.

She passed from the room beside Halfont, proud and happy in the victory over despair, glorying in the exposure of her heart to the world, her blood tingling and dancing with the joys of anticipation. Lorry and Anguish, the wonder and admiration of all, were given a short but convincing levee in the hallway. Lords and ladies praised and lauded them, overwhelming them with the homage that comes to the brave. But Gaspon uttered one wish that struck Lorry's warm, leaping heart like a piece of ice.

"Would to God that you were a Prince of the realm," said the minister of finance, a look of regret and longing in his eyes. That wish of Gaspon's sent Lorry away with the sharp steel of desolation, torturing intensely as it drove deeper and deeper the reawakened pangs of uncertainty. There still remained the fatal distance between him and

the object of his heart's desire.

He accompanied Captain Quinnox to his quarters, where he made himself presentable before starting for the enchanted apartment in the far end of the castle. Eager, burning passion throbbed side by side with the cold pulsing of fear, a trembling race between two unconquerable emotions. Passion longed for the voice, the eyes, the caresses; fear cried aloud in every troubled throb: "You will see her and kiss her and then you will be banished."

The two emotions thus thrown together, clashing fiercely for supremacy, at last wove themselves into a single, solid, uncompromising whole. Out of the two grew an aggressive determination not to be thwarted. Love and fear combined to give him strength; from his eyes fled the hopeless look, from his brain the doubt, from his blood the chill.

"Quinnox, give me your hand don't mind the blood! You have been my friend, and you have served her almost to the death. I injured and would have killed you in that cell, but it was not in anger. Will you be my friend in all that is to follow?"

"She has said that she loves you," said the captain, returning the hand clasp. "I am at your service as well as hers."

A few moments later Lorry was in her presence. What was said or done during the half hour that passed between his entrance and the moment that brought them side by side from the room need not be told. That the interview had had its serious side was plain. The troubled, anxious eyes of the girl and the rebellious, dogged air of the man told of a conflict now only in abeyance.

"I will never give you up," he said, as they came from the door. A wistful gleam flickered in her eyes, but she did not respond in words.

Near the head of the stairway an animated group of persons lingered. Harry Anguish was in the center and the Countess Dagmar was directly in front of him, looking up with sparkling eyes and parted lips. The Count and Countess Halfont, Gaspon, the Baron Dangloss, the Duke of Mizrox, with other ladies and gentlemen, were being entertained by the gay-spirited stranger.

Here he comes," cried the latter, as he caught sight of the approaching couple.

"I am delighted to see you, Harry. You were the friend in need, old man," said Lorry, wringing the other's hand. Yotive gave him her hand, her blue eyes overflowing.

"Mr. Anguish had just begun to tell us how he how he " began Dagmar, but paused helplessly, looking to him for relief.

"Go ahead, Countess; it isn't very elegant, but it's the way I said it. How I 'got next' to Gabriel is what she wants to say. Perhaps your Highness would like to know all about the affair that ended so tragically. It's very quickly told," said Anguish.

"I am deeply interested," said the Princess, eagerly.

"Well, in the first place, it was all a bluff," said he, coolly.

"A what!" demanded Dagmar.

"Bluff," responded Harry, briefly; "American patois, dear Countess."

Graustark

"In what respect," asked Lorry, beginning to understand.

"In all respects. I didn't have the slightest sign of proof against the festive Prince."

"And you you did all that 'on a bluff'?" gasped the other.

"Do I understand you to say that you have no evidence against Gabriel?" asked Halfont, dumbfounded.

"Not a particle."

"But you said his confederate had confessed," protested Dangloss.

"I didn't know that he had a confederate, and I wasn't sure that he was guilty of the crime," boasted Anguish, complacently enjoying the stupefaction.

"Then why did you say so?" demanded Dangloss, excited beyond measure.

"Oh, I just guessed at it!"

"God save us!" gasped Baron Dangloss, Chief of Police.

"Guessed at it?" cried Mizrox.

"That's it. It was a bold stroke, but it won. Now, I'll tell you this much. I was morally certain that Gabriel killed the Prince. There was no way on earth to prove it, however, and I'll admit it was intuition or something of that sort which convinced me. He had tried to abduct the Princess, and he was madly jealous of Lorenz. Although he knew there was to be a duel, he was not certain that Lorenz would lose, so he adopted a clever plan to get rid of two rivals by killing one and casting suspicion on the other. These deductions I made soon after the murder, but, of course, could secure no proof. Early this morning, at the hotel, I made up my mind to denounce him suddenly if I had the chance, risking failure but hoping for such an exhibition as that which you saw. It was clear to me that he had an accomplice to stand guard while he did the stabbing, but I did not dream it was Berrowag. Lorry's sensational appearance, when I believed him to be far away from here, disturbed me greatly but it made it all the more necessary that I should take the risk with Gabriel. As I watched him I became absolutely convinced of his guilt. The only way to accuse him was to do it boldly and thoroughly, so I rang in the accomplice and the witness features. You all know how the 'bluff' worked."

"And you had no more proof than this?" asked Dangloss, weakly.

"That's all," laughed the delighted strategist.

Dangloss stared at him for a moment, then threw up his hands and walked away, shaking his head, whether in stupefied admiration or utter disbelief, no one knew. The others covered Anguish with compliments, and he was more than ever the hero of the day. Such confidence paralyzed the people. The only one who was not overcome with astonishment was his countryman.

"You did it well," he said in an undertone to Anguish; "devilish well."

"You might at least say I did it to the queen's taste," growled Anguish, meaningly,

"Well, then, you did," laughed Lorry.

XXVII. ON THE BALCONY AGAIN

Three persons in the royal castle of Graustark, worn by the dread and anxiety of weeks, fatigued by the sleepless nights just past, slumbered through the long afternoon with the motionless, deathlike sleep of the utterly fagged. Yetive, in her darkened bed chamber, dreamed, with smiling lips, of a tall soldier and a throne on which cobwebs multiplied. Grenfall Lorry saw in his dreams a slim soldier with troubled face and averted, timid eyes, standing guard over him with a brave, stiff back and chin painfully uplifted. Captain Quinnox dreamed not, for his mind was tranquil in the assurance that he had been forgiven by the Princess.

While Lorry slept in the room set apart for him, Anguish roamed the park with a happy-faced, slender young lady, into whose ears he poured the history of a certain affection, from the tender beginning to the distracting end. And she smiled and trembled with delight, closing not her ears against the sound of his voice nor her heart to the love that craved admission. They were not dreaming.

After dinner that evening Lorry led the Princess out into the moonlit night. The November breezes were soft and balmy and the shadows deep.

"Let us leave the park to Dagmar and her hero, to the soldiers and the musicians," said Yetive. "There is a broad portico here, with the tenderest of memories. Do you remember a night like this, a month or more ago? the moon, the sentinel and some sorrows? I would again stand where we stood on that night and again look up to the moon and the solemn sentinel, but not as we saw them then, with heartache and evasion."

"The balcony, then, without the old restrictions," Lorry agreed. "I want to see that dark old monastery again, and to tell you how I looked from its lofty windows through the chill of wind and the chill of life into the fairest Eden that was ever denied man."

"In an hour, then, I will meet you there."

"I must correct you. In an hour you will find me there."

She left him, retiring with her aunt and the Countess Dagmar. Lorry remained in the hall with Halfont, Prince Bolaroz, Mizrox and Anguish. The conversation ran once more into the ever-recurring topic of the day, Gabriel's confession. The Prince of Dawsbergen was confined in the Tower with his confederate, Berrowag. Reports from Dangloss late in the afternoon conveyed the intelligence that the prisoner had fallen into melancholia. Berrowag admitted to the police that he had stood guard at the door while Gabriel entered the Prince's room and killed him as he slept. He described the cunning, deliberate effort to turn suspicion to the American by leaving bloodstains. The other Dawsbergen nobles, with the exception of two who had gone to the capital of their country with the news of the catastrophe, remained close to the hotel. One of them confessed that but little sympathy would be felt at home for Gabriel, who was hated by his subjects. Already there was talk among them of Prince Dantan, his younger brother, as his successor to the throne. The young Prince was a favorite with the people.

Bolaroz was pleased with the outcome of the sensational accusation and the consequent removal of complications which had in reality been unpleasant to him.

One feature of the scene in the throne room was not discussed, although it was uppermost in the minds of all. The positive stand taken by the Princess and her open avowal of love for the dashing American were never to be forgotten. The serious wrinkles on the brow of Halfont and the faraway expression that came frequently to his eyes revealed the nature of his thoughts. The greatest problem of them all was still to be solved.

As they left the room he dropped behind and walked out beside Lorry, rather timidly detaining him until the

others were some distance ahead.

"You were closeted with the Princess this morning, Mr. Lorry, and perhaps you can give me the information I desire. She has called a meeting of the ministers and leading men of the country for to-morrow morning. Do you know why she has issued this rather unusual call? She did not offer any explanation to me."

"I am only at liberty to say, your excellency, that it concerns the welfare of Graustark," answered the other, after a moment's thought. They walked on in silence for some distance.

"I am her uncle, sir, but I love her as I would love my own child. My life has been given to her from the day that her mother, my sister, died. You will grant me the right to ask you a plain question. Have you told her that you love her?" The Count's face was drawn and white.

"I have, sir. I loved her before I knew she was a Princess. As her protector, it was to you that I would have told the story of my unfortunate love long ago, but my arrest and escape prevented. It was not my desire or intention to say to her what I could not speak about to you. I do not want to be looked upon as a coward who dares not face difficulties. My love has not been willingly clandestine, and it has been in spite of her most righteous objections. We have both seen the futility of love, however strong and pure it may be. I have hoped, your excellency, and always shall."

"She has confessed her love to you privately?" asked Halfont.

"Against her will, against her judgment, sir."

"Then the worst has come to pass," groaned the old Count. Neither spoke for some time. They were near the foot of the staircase when Halfont paused and grasped Lorry's arm. Steadily they looked into each other's eyes.

"I admire you more than any man I have ever known," said the Count, huskily, "You are the soul of honor, of courage, of manliness. But, my God, you cannot become the husband of a Princess of Graustark! I need not tell you that, however. You surely must understand."

"I do understand," said Lorry, dizzily. "I am not a prince, as you are saying over and over again to yourself. Count Halfont, every born American may become ruler of the greatest nation in the world—the United States. His home is his kingdom; his wife, his mother, his sisters are his queens and his princesses; his fellow citizens are his admiring subjects if he is wise and good. In my land you will find the poor man climbing to the highest pinnacle, side by side with the rich man. The woman I love is a Princess. Had she been the lowliest maid in all that great land of ours, still would she have been my queen, I her king. When first I loved the mistress of Graustark she was, you must not forget, Miss Guggenslocker. I have said all this to you, sir, not in egotism nor in bitterness, but to show my right to hope in the face of all obstacles. We recognize little as impossible. Until death destroys this power to love and to hope I must say to you that I shall not consider the Princess Yevive beyond my reach. Frankly, I cannot, sir."

The Count heard him through, unconscious admiration mingling with the sadness in his eyes.

"There are some obstacles that bravery and perseverance cannot overcome, my friend," he said, slowly. "One of them is fate."

"As fate is not governed by law or custom, I have the best reason in the world to hope," said Lorry, yet modestly.

"I would indeed, sir, that you were a Prince of the realm," fervently cried the Count, and Lorry was struck by the fact that he repeated, word for word, the wish Gaspon had uttered some hours before.

Graustark

By this time they were joined by the others, whereupon Grenfall hurried eagerly to the balcony, conscious of being half an hour early, but glad of the chance afforded for reflection and solitude. Sitting on the broad stone railing he leaned back against a pillar and looked into the night for his thoughts. Once more the moon was gleaming beyond St. Valentine's, throwing against the sky a jagged silhouette of frowning angles, towering gables and monstrous walls, the mountain and the monastery blending into one great misty product of the vision. Voices came up from below, as they did on that night five weeks ago, bringing the laughter and song of happy hearts. Music swelled through the park from the band gallery; from afar off came the sounds of revelry. The people of Edelweiss were rejoicing over the unexpected deliverance from a fate so certain that the escape seemed barely short of miraculous.

Every sound, every rustle of the wind through the plants that were scattered over the balcony caused him to look toward the door through which she must come to him.

At last she appeared, and he hastened to meet her. As he took her hands in his, she said softly, dreamily, looking over his shoulder toward the mountain's crest:

"The same fair moon," and smiled into his eyes.

"The same fair maid and the same man," he added. "I believe the band is playing the same air; upon my soul, I do."

"Yes, the same air, La Paloma. It is my lullaby. Come, let us walk. I cannot sit quietly now. Talk to me. Let me listen and be happy."

Slowly they paced the wide balcony, through the moonlight and the shadows, her hand resting on his arm, his clasping it gently. Love obstructs the flow of speech; the heart-beats choke back the words and fill the throat.

Lorry talked but little, she not at all. Times there were when; they covered the full length of the balcony without a word. And yet they understood each other. The mystic, the enchanting silence of love was fraught with a conversation felt, not heard.

"Why are you so quiet?" he asked, at last, stopping near the rail.

"I cannot tell you why. It seems to me that I am afraid of you," she answered, a shy quaver in her voice.

"Afraid of me? I don't understand."

"Nor do I. You are not as you were before this morning. You are different yes, you make me feel that I am weak and helpless and that you can say to me 'come' and 'go' and I must obey. Isn't it odd that I, who have never known submissiveness, should so suddenly find myself tyrannized?" she asked, smiling faintly.

"Shall I tell you why you are afraid of me?" he asked.

"You will say it is because I am forgetting to be a Princess."

"No; it is because you no longer look upon me as you did in other days. It is because I am a possibility, an entity instead of a shadow. Yesterday you were the Princess and looked down upon the impossible suitor; to-day you find that you have given yourself to him and that you do not regard the barrier as insurmountable. You were not timid until you found your power to resist gone. Today you admit that I may hope, and in doing so you open a gate through the walls of your pride and prejudice that can never be closed against the love within and the love without. You are afraid of me because I am no longer a dream, but a reality. Am I not right, Yetime?"

Graustark

She looked out over the hazy, moonlit park.

"Yesterday I might have disputed all you say; to-day I can deny nothing."

Leaning upon the railing, they fell into a silent study of the parade ground and its strollers. Their thoughts were not of the walkers and chatters, nor of the music, nor of the night. They were of the day to come.

"I shall never forget how you said 'because I love him,' this morning, sweetheart," said Lorry, betraying his reflections. "You defied the whole world in those four words. They were worth dying for."

"How could I help it? You must not forget that you had just leaped into the lion's den defenseless, because you loved me. Could I deny you then? Until that moment I had been the Princess adamant; in a second's time you swept away every safeguard, every battlement, and I surrendered as only a woman can. But it really sounded shocking, didn't it? So theatrical."

"Don't look so distressed about it, dear. You couldn't help it, remember," he said, approvingly.

"Ach, I dread to-morrow's ordeal!" she said, and he felt the arm that touched his own tremble. "What will they say? What will they, do?"

"To-morrow will tell. It means a great deal to both of us. If they will not submit what then?"

"What then what then?" she murmured, faintly.

Across the parade, coming from the direction of the fountain, Harry Anguish and Dagmar were slowly walking. They were very close together, and his head was bent until it almost touched hers. As they drew nearer, the dreamy watchers on the balcony recognized them.

"They are very happy," said Lorry, knowing that she was also watching the strollers.

"They are so sure of each other," she replied, sadly.

When almost directly beneath the rail, the Countess glanced upward, impelled by the strange instinct of an easily startled love, confident that prying eyes were upon her. She saw the dark forms leaning over the rail and rather jerkily brought her companion to a standstill and to a realization of his position. Anguish turned his eyes aloft.

"Can you, fair maid, tell me the names of those beautiful stars I see in the dark dome above?" he asked, in a loud, happy voice. "Oh, can they be eyes?"

"Eyes, most noble sir," replied his companion. "There are no stars so bright."

"Methought they were diamonds in the sky at first. Eyes like those must belong to some divinity."

"They do, fair student, and to a divinity well worth worshiping. I have heard it said that men offer themselves as sacrifices upon her altars."

"Unless my telescope deceives me, I discern a very handsome sacrifice up there, so I suppose the altar must be somewhere in the neighborhood."

"Not a hand's breadth beneath her eyes," laughed the Countess, as she fled precipitately up the steps, followed by the jesting student.

Graustark

"Beware of a divinity in wrath," came a sweet, clear voice from the balcony, and Anguish called out from his safe retreat, like the boy he was:

"Ah, who's afraid!"

The Princess was laughing softly, her eyes radiant as they met those of her companion, amused yet grave.

"Does he have a care?" she asked.

"I fear not. He loves a Countess."

"He has not to pay the price of ambition, then?" said she, softly.

"Ambition is the cheapest article in the world," he said. "It concerns only a man's self."

XXVIII. THE MAID OF GRAUSTARK

Expectancy, concern, the dread of uncertainty marked the countenances of Graustark's ministers and her chief men as they sat in the council chamber on the day following, awaiting the appearance of their Princess, at whose call they were unexpectedly assembled. More than two score eyes glanced nervously toward the door from time to time.

All realized an emergency. No sooner were they out of one dilemma than another cast its prospects across their path, creating the fear that rejoicing would be short. While none knew the nature of the business that called them together, each had a stubborn suspicion that it related to the stirring declarations of the day before. Not one in that assembly but had heard the vivid, soulful sentence from the throne. Not one but wished in secret as Gaspon and Halfont had wished in open speech.

When the Princess entered with the prime minister they narrowly scanned the face so dear to them. Determination and cowardice were blended in the deep blue eyes, pride and dejection in the firm step, strength and weakness in the loving smile she bestowed upon the faithful counsellors. After the greetings she requested them to draw chairs about the great table. Seating herself in her accustomed seat, she gazed over the circle of anxious faces and realized, more than at any time in her young life, that she was frail and weak beyond all comparison. How small she was to rule over those strong, wise men of hers; how feeble the hand that held the sceptre.

"My lords," she said, summoning all her strength of mind and heart, "I am gratified to find you so ready to respond to the call of your whimsical sovereign. Yesterday you came with hearts bowed down and in deepest woe. To-day I assemble you here that I may ask your advice concerning the events of that strange day. Bolaroz will do as he has promised. We are to have the extension papers this afternoon, and Graustark may breathe again the strong, deep breath of hope. You well remember my attitude on yesterday. You were shocked, horrified, amazed by my seemingly ignoble effort to preserve my preserver's life. We will pass over that, however. It is to discuss my position that I have called you here. To begin, I would have sacrificed my kingdom, as you know, to save him. He was innocent and I loved him. If, on yesterday, I would not let my kingdom stand between me and my love, I cannot do so to-day. I have called you here to tell you, my lords, that I have promised to become the wife of the man who would have given his life for you and for me that I love as a woman, not as a Princess."

The silence of death stole into the room. Every man's eyes were glued upon the white face of the Princess and none could break the spell. They had expected it, yet the shock was overwhelming; they had feared it, yet the announcement stupefied them. She looked straight before her, afraid to meet the eyes of her subjects, knowing that sickening disapproval dwelt in them. Not a word was uttered for many seconds. Then old Caspar's tense

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muscles relaxed and his arms dropped limply from their crossed position on his breast.

"My child, my child!" he cried, lifelessly. "You cannot do this thing!"

"But the people?" cried Gaspon, his eyes gleaming. "You cannot act against the will of the people. Our laws, natural and otherwise, proscribe the very act you have in mind. The American cannot go upon our throne; no man, unless he be of royal blood, can share it with you. If you marry him the laws of our land you know them well will prohibit us from recognizing the marriage."

Knowing that, my lords, I have come to ask you to revise our laws. My throne will not be disgraced by the man I would have share it with me." She spoke as calmly as if she were making the most trivial request instead of asking her ministers to overthrow and undo the laws and customs of ages and of dynasties.

"The law of nature cannot be changed," muttered Caspar, as if to himself.

"In the event that the custom cannot be changed, I shall be compelled to relinquish my right to occupy the throne and to depart from among you. It would break my heart, my lords, to resort to this monstrous sacrifice, but I love one man first, my crown and my people after him."

"You would not leave us you would not throw aside as despised the crown your ancestors wore for centuries?" cried Gaspon. "Is your Royal Highness mad?"

The others were staring with open mouths and icy hearts.

"Yes, as much as it would grieve me, I would do all this," she answered, firmly, not daring to look at her uncle. She knew his eyes were upon her and that condemnation lurked in their depths. Her heart ached to turn to him with a prayer for forgiveness, but there could be no faltering now.

"I ask you, my lords, to acknowledge the marriage of your ruler to Grenfall Lorry. I am to be his wife; but I entreat you to grant me happiness without making me endure the misery that will come to me if I desert my father's throne and the people who have worshipped me and to whom I am bound by a tie that cannot be broken. I do not plead so much for the right to rule as I do for the one who may rule after I am gone. I want my own to follow me on the throne of Graustark."

Then followed a long, animated discussion, growing brighter and more hopeful as the speakers' willing hearts warmed to the proposition. Lorry was a favorite but he could not be their prince. Hereditary law prohibited. Still his children if God gave him children, might be declared rightful heirs to the throne of their mother, the Princess. The more they talked, the more the problem seemed to solve itself. Many times the Princess and her wise men met and overcame obstacles, huge at first, minimized in the end, all because they loved her and she loved them. The departure from traditionary custom, as suggested by the Princess, coupled with the threat to abdicate, was the weightiest, yet the most delicate question that had ever come before the chief men of Graustark. It meant the beginning of a new line of princes, new life, new blood, a complete transformation of order as it had come down through the reigns of many Ganlooks. For the first time in the history of the country a woman was sovereign; for the first time there had been no direct male heir to the throne. With the death of old Prince Ganlook the masculine side of the illustrious family ended. No matter whom his daughter took for a husband, the line was broken. Why not the bold, progressive, rich American? argued some. Others fell in with the views of the few who first surrendered to the will of Yetive, until at last but one remained in opposition. Count Caspar held out until all were against him, giving way finally in a burst of oratory which ended in tears and sobs and which made the sense of the gathering unanimous.

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The Princess Yetive won the day, so far as her own position was concerned. But, there was Lorry to be considered.

Mr. Lorry knows that I called you together in consultation, but he does not know that I would have given up my crown for him. I dared not tell him that. He knows only that I was to ask your advice on the question of marriage, and that alone. Last night he told me he was confident you would agree to the union. He is an American, and does not appreciate the difficulties attending such an espousal. Over there distinction exists only in wealth and intelligence position, I believe they call it, but not such as ours. He is a strange man, and we have yet to consult him as to the arrangement," she said to her lords, pursing her lips. "I fear he will object to the plan we have agreed upon," she went on. "He is sensitive, and it is possible he will not like the idea of putting our marriage to the popular vote of the people."

"I insist, however, that the people be considered in the matter," said Gaspon. "In three month's time the whole nation can say whether it sanctions the revision of our laws of heredity. It would not be right or just for us to say who shall be their future rulers, for all time to come, without consulting them."

"I have no hesitancy in saying that Graustark already idolizes this brave American," said Halfont, warmly. "He has won her affection. If the question is placed before the people to-morrow in proper form, I will vouch for it that the whole nation will rise and cry: 'Long live the Princess! Long live the Prince Consort!'"

"Goin' back, I see," said Sitzky, the guard, some months later, addressing a very busy young man, who was hurrying down the platform of the Edelweiss railway station toward the special train which was puffing impatiently.

"Hello, Sitzky! Is it you? I'm glad to see you again. Yes, we are going back to the land of the Stars and Stripes." The speaker was Mr. Anguish.

"You'll have fine company 's fer as Vienna, too. D' you ever see such a celebration's dey're havin' here to-day? You'd t'ink d' whole world was interested in d' little visit Her Royal Highness is goin' to pay to Vienna. Dummed if d' whole city, soldiers an' all, ain't down here to see 'er off. Look at d' crowd! By glory, I don't b'lieve we c'n pull d' train out of d' station. 'Quainted wid any of d' royal crowd?"

"Slightly," answered Anguish, smiling. He was watching a trim figure in a tailor-made gown as it approached, drawing apart from the throng. It was Mrs. Harry Van Brugh Anguish.

"Say, you must cut some ice wid dese people. But dat's jest like an American, dough," the little guard went on. "De Princess married an American an' dey say he's goin' to put d' crown away where d' moths won't git at it an' take her over to live in Washington fer six months. Is it a sure t'ing?"

"That's right, Sitzky. She's going back with us and then we're coming back with her."

"Why don't he keep 'er over dere when he gits her dere? What's d' use what's d' use?"

"Well, she's still the Princess of Graustark, you know, Sitzky. She can't live always in America."

"Got to be here to hold her job, eh?"

"Inelegant but correct. Now, look sharp! Where do we find our Ah!" His wife was with him and he forgot Sitzky.

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The guard turned to watch the procession a file of soldiers, a cavalry troop, carriages and then the carriage with spirited horses and gay accoutrements. It stopped with a jangle and a man and woman descended.

"The Princess!" cried Sitzky.

"Long live the Princess!" cried the crowd. "God save our Yetive!"

Sitzky started as if shot, Raring at the tall man who approached with the smiling Sovereign of Graustark. "Well," he gasped, "what d' you t'ink o' dat!"

The train that was to carry them out of the East into the West puffed and snorted, the bell clanged, the people cheered, and they were off. Hours later, as the car whirled through the Hungarian plain, Yetive, looking from her window, said in that exquisite English which was her very own:

"Ah, the world, the dear world! I am so sorry for queens!"

THE END