GRAUSTARK

...By...

GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

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"Thank God, you are only a countess," he said tenderly.

"Why—why—what difference can it make—I mean, why do you say that?" she stammered, crimson to her hair.

"Because you won't have to sell yourself at a sacrifice," he said foolishly. Lorry came back to them at this juncture, outwardly calm and deliberate.

"Tell us about it, pray. We had guessed as much."

"Out there are his people—the wretches," she cried vindictively, her pretty face in a helpless frown. "Today was the day, you know, on which he was to have his answer. He came and knelt in the audience chamber. All Graustark had implored her to refuse the hated offer, but she bade him rise, and there, before us all, promised to become his bride.

"The greatest sorrow Graustark has ever known grows out of that decision. She is determined to save for us what her father's folly lost. To do this she becomes the bride of a vile wretch, a man who soils her pure nature when he thinks of her. Oh, we sought to dissuade her—we begged, we entreated, but without avail. She will not sacrifice one foot of Graustark to save herself. See the triumphant smiles on their faces—the brutes!" She pointed maliciously to the chattering visitors in the hall. "Already they think the castle theirs. The union of Graustark and Axphain—just what they most desired, but we could not make her see it so!"

"Is the day set?" asked Lorry bravely after a moment's 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 Nov. 20, 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! Overrun 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 tomorrow," 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 tomorrow," said one, more to himself than to his

"Out there are his people."

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 the window!" he cried, catching 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 drew 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 tomorrow, Lorry, if you like, but I'm going to stay awhile," said Harry a trifle confusedly.

"Haven't you had enough

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."

"You mean that you are in love with the countess?"

"Emphatically."

"I'm sorry for you."

"Think she'll turn me down?"

"Unless you buy a title of one of these miserable counts or dukes."

"Oh, I'm not so sure about that. These counts and dukes come over and marry our American girls. I don't see why I can't step in and pick out a nice little countess if I want to."

"She is not as avaricious as the counts and dukes, I'll wager. She cares nothing for your money."

"Well, she's as poor as a church mouse," said the other doggedly.

"The countess poor? How do you know?"

"I asked her one day, and she told me all about it," said Anguish.

CHAPTER XVI.

A CLASH AND ITS RESULT.

"I FEEL like spending the rest of my days in that monastery up there," said Lorry after dinner that evening. They were strolling about the town. One was determined to leave the city, the other firm in his resolve to stay. The latter won the day when he shrewdly if explosively reminded the former that it was their duty as men to stay and protect the princess from the machinations of Gabriel, that knave of purgatory, and fly, at last recognizing the hopelessness of his suit, was ready to throw down his arms and abandon the field to superior odds. His presumption in aspiring for the hand of the princess began to touch his sense of humor, and he laughed, not very merrily, it is true, but long and loudly, at his folly. At first he cursed the world and every one in it, giving up in despair, but later he cursed only himself. Yet as he despaired and scoffed he felt within himself, all over present hope that luck might turn the tide of battle.

This puny ray grew perceptibly when Anguish brought him to feel that she needed his protection from the man who had once sought to despoil and who might reasonably be expected to persevere. He agreed to linger in Edelweiss, knowing that each day would add pain to the torture he was already suffering, his sole object being, he convinced himself, to frustrate Gabriel's evil plans.

Returning late in the evening from their stroll, they entered a cafe celebrated in Edelweiss. In all his life Lorry had never known the loneliness that makes death welcome.

The cafe was crowded with men and women. In a far corner sat a party of Axphain nobles, their prince, a most delectable fellow, at the head of a long table. There were songs, jests and boisterous laughter. The celebration grew wilder, and Lorry and Anguish crossed the room and, taking seats at a table, ordered wine and cigars, both eager for a closer view of the prince. How Lorry loathed him!

Lorenz was a good looking young fellow, little more than a boy. His smooth face was flushed, and there was about him an air of dissipation that suggested depravity in its advanced stage. The face that might have been handsome was the reflection of a rone, 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 mighty 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 1,000 gavvos. That is the price of a kiss."

"I'll give 2,000!" 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 clinched in rage.

"She will kiss me tomorrow. Tomorrow 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 to the floor, the wine

e Engli

ening dress.

"Don't you dare to drink that toast!" ied a voice in his astonished ear, ice speaking in excited German. He hirled and saw a scowling face b de his own, a pair of gray eyes th shed fire.

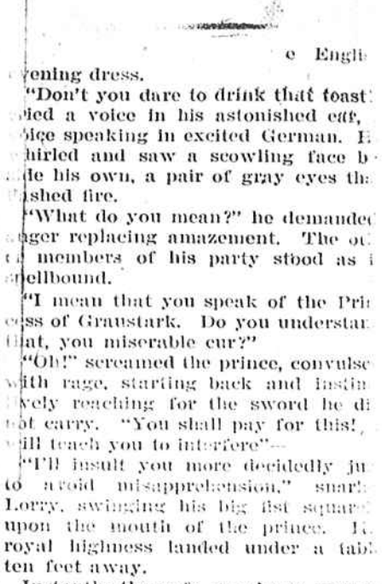
"What do you mean?" he demanded ger replacing amazement. The ot members of his party stood as i ellbound.

"I mean that you speak of the Pri ss of Graustark. Do you understa hat, you miserable cur?"

"Oh!" screamed the prince, convulse ith rage, starting back and instin ively reaching for the sword he di ot carry. "You shall pay for this! ill teach you to interfere"—

"I'll insult you more decidedly ju to avoid misapprehension," snarl Lorry, swinging his big fist squar upon the mouth of the prince. H royal highness landed under a tabl ten feet away.

Instantly the cafe was in an uproar The stupefied Axphainians regaine their senses, and a general assault wa made upon the hotheaded American He knocked another down. Harry A guish coming to his assistance wit several savage blows, after which t Graustark spectators and the waiter interfered. It was all over in an in



"Don't you dare to drink that toast!"

stant, yet a sensation that would liv in the gossip of generations had bee created. A prince of the realm ha been brutally assaulted! Holding hi jaw, Lorenz picked himself from th floor, several of his friends running t his aid. There was blood on his lip and chin; it trickled to his shirt front For some moments he stood panting glaring at Lorry's mocking face.

"I am Lorenz of Axphain, sir," h said at last, his voice quivering wit suppressed anger.

"It shall be a pleasure to kill you Lorenz," observed his adversary, dis playing his ignorance of leze majesty.

Anguish, pale and very much con cerned, dragged him away, the prince leaving the cafe ahead of them, fo lowed by his chattering, cursing com panions. Prince Gabriel was standin near the door as they passed out. H looked at the Americans sharply, and Anguish detected something like triumphant joy in his eyes.

"Good Lord, Lorry, this means a duel! Don't you know that?" cried he as they started upstairs.

"Of course I do, and I'm going to kill that villain too!" exclaimed Lorry loud enough to be heard from one end of the room to the other.

"This is horrible, horrible! Let me square it up some way if"— began the alarmed Anguish.

"Square it up! Look here, Harry Anguish, I am the one who will do the squaring. If he wants a duel, he can have it at any old time and in any style he desires."

"He may kill you!"

"Not while a just God rules over our destinies. I'll take my chances with pistols, and now let me tell you one thing, my boy: He'll never live to touch his lips to hers, nor will there be a royal wedding. She cannot marry a dead man." He was beside himself with excitement, and it was fully half an hour before Anguish could bring him to a sensible discussion of the affair. Gradually he became cool, and, the fever once gone, he did not lose his head again.

"Choose pistols at ten paces and at 8 tomorrow," he said nonchalantly, as a rap at the door of their apartment announced the arrival of the prince's friend.

Anguish admitted two well dressed black bearded men, both of whom had sat at the prince's table in the cafe. They introduced themselves as the Duke of Mizrox and Colonel Arlobrawn. The visit was brief, formal and con clusive.

"We understand that you are persons of rank in your own America?" said the duke of Mizrox after a few mo men

"We are sons of business men," re spo Mr. Anguish.

"Well, I hardly kno But his hig is very willing t ive his ran to grant you a n ."

"I lighted by his fi s' com des which I perf under sta observed Mr. Ang "Now, wh we to settle, ge en?"

"T tail of weapons

W Anguish announ ut his pri chose pistols, a s gleam cre the eyes of the ians. and seemed satisfied el At tob ted as interprete ng this sho very importan rview. wh s carried on in xphain lan Lorry sat on th ow all ste y gazing into th t. The vis parted soon, and

(TO CONTINUE

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12:15 p m [illegible] for Laurens, Clinton, New[illegible] Sumter and Charleston with A. C. L. Trai[illegible] ichmond, Washington and [illegible] Lau Laurens with C. W. [illegible] for Spartanburg and trains [illegible] ood, Augusta, etc.

Arrive [illegible] :35 p m, Clinton 2:22 [illegible] 0 p m, Columbia 4 Sum[illegible] rleston 9:40, Spartanburg [illegible] nwood 2:46 p m, Augusta [illegible]

4:40 p m, No. 36 Daily except Sunday, for Laurens and intermediate stations. Arrive Laurens 6:40.

ARRIVALS

10:20 a m, No. 87, daily except Sunday from Laurens and intermediate stations.

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3:25 p m, No. 52, daily from Charleston Sumter Columbia, Newberry, Clinton, Spartanburg, Augusta, Greenwood Laurens, etc.

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