

Beverly of Graustark

By
**GEORGE BARR
M'GUTHCHIEON.**
Author of "Graustark"
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"No, no!" she protested. "I, too, was wondering—wondering what you were dreaming of as you slept, for you should be asleep at this hour, your highness, instead of standing out there in the rain."

"Baldos," she called down tremulously, "you don't like this work, do you?" "It has nothing but darkness in it for me. I never see the light of your eyes. I never feel the—"

"Sh! You must not talk like that. It's not proper, and besides some one may be listening. The night has a thousand ears—or is it eyes? But listen. Tomorrow you shall be restored to your old duties. You surely cannot believe that I had anything to do with the order which compels you to work at this unholy hour."

"I was afraid you were punishing me for my boldness. My heart has been sore—you never can know how sore. I was disgraced, dismissed, forgotten!" "No, no; you were not! You must not say that. Go away now, Baldos. You will ride with me tomorrow," she cried nervously. "Please go to some place where you won't get dripping wet."

"You forget that I am on guard," he said, with a laugh. "But you are a wise counselor. Is the rain so pleasant to you?"

"I have an umbrella," she protested. "What are you doing?" she cried in alarm. He was coming hand over hand up the trellis work that inclosed the lower veranda.

"I am coming to a place where I won't get dripping wet," he called softly. There was a dangerous ring in his voice, and she drew back in a panic.

"You must not!" she cried desperately. "This is madness! Go down, sir!"

"I am happy enough to fly, but cannot. So I do the next best thing—I climb to you." His arm was across the stone railing by this time, and he was panting from the exertion, not two feet from where she crouched. "Just one minute of heaven before I go back to the shadows of earth. I am happy again. Marlanx told me you had dismissed me. I wonder what he holds in reserve for me. I knew he lied, but it is not until now that I rejoice. Come, you are to shield me from the rain."

"Oh, oh!" she gasped, overwhelmed by his daring passion. "I should die if any one saw you here." "I should die if any one saw you here," he said, and she came to her feet and ran into the drizzle.

"And so should I," she responded he softly. "Listen to me. For hours and hours I have been longing for the dear old hills in which you found me. I wanted to crawl out of Edelweiss and lose myself forever in the rocks and crags. Tonight when you saw me I was trying to say goodbye to you forever. I was trying to make up my mind to desert. I could not endure the new order of things. You had cast me off. My friends out there were eager to have me with them. In the city every one is ready to call me a spy—even you, I thought. Life was black and drear. Now, my princess, it is as bright as heaven itself."

"You must not talk like this," she whispered helplessly. "You are making me sorry I called to you."

"I should have heard you if you had only whispered, my rain princess. I have no right to talk of love—I am a vagabond, but I have a heart, and it is a bold one. Perhaps I dream that I am here beside you—so near that I can touch your face—but it is the sweetest of dreams. But for it I should have left Edelweiss weeks ago. I shall never awaken from this dream. You cannot rob me of the joys of dreaming."

Under the spell of his passion she drew nearer to him as he clung strongly to the rail. The roses at her throat came so close that he could bury his face in them. Her hand touched his cheek, and he kissed its palm again and again, his wet lips stinging her blood to the tips of her toes.

"Go away, please," she implored faintly. "Don't you see that you must not stay here—now?"

"A rose, my princess—one rose to kiss all through the long night," he

burning into her heart. With trembling, hurried fingers she tore loose a rose. He could not seize it with his hands because of the position he held, and she laughed tantalizingly. Then she kissed it first and pressed it against his mouth. His lips and teeth closed over the stem, and the rose was his.

"There are thorns," she whispered ever so softly.

"They are the riches of the poor," he murmured, with difficulty, but she understood.

"Now, go," she said, drawing resolutely away. An instant later his head disappeared below the rail. Peering over the side, she saw his figure spring easily to the ground, and then came the rapid, steady tramp as he went away on his dreary patrol.

CHAPTER XXII.

SHE shrank back with a great dread in her heart. Marlanx, of all men! Why was he in the park at this hour of the night? There could be but one answer, and the very thought of it almost suffocated her. He was drawing the net with his own hands, he was spying with his own eyes. For a full minute it seemed to her that her heart would stop beating. How long had he been standing there? What had he seen or heard? Involuntarily she peered over the rail for a glimpse of Baldos. He had gone out into the darkness, missing the men at the lamp post either by choice or through pure good fortune. A throb of thankfulness assailed her heart. She was not thinking of her position, but of his.

Again she drew stealthily away from the rail, possessed of a ridiculous feeling that her form was as plain to the vision as if it were broad daylight. The tread of a man impelled her to glance below once more before fleeing to her room. Marlanx was coming toward the veranda. She fled swiftly, pausing at the window to lower the friendly lattice to attract her attention. Once more she stopped to listen. The "Hist!" was repeated, and then her own name was called softly, but imperatively. It was beyond the power of woman to keep from laughing. It struck her as irresistibly funny that the Iron Count should be standing out there in the rain, signaling to her like a lovesick boy. Once she was inside, however, it did not seem so amusing. Still, it gave her an immense amount of satisfaction to slam the windows loudly, as if in pure defiance. Then she closed the blinds, shutting out the night completely.

Turning up the light at her dressing table, she sat down in a state of sudden collapse. For a long time she stared at her face in the mirror. She saw the red of shame and embarrassment mount to her cheeks, and then she covered her eyes with her hands.

"Oh, what a fool you've been!" she half sobbed, shrinking from the mirror as if it were an accuser.

She prepared for bed with frantic haste. Just as she was about to scramble in and hide her face in the pillows a shocking thought came to her. The next instant she was at the windows, and the slats were closed with a rattle like a volley of firearms. Then she jumped into bed. She wondered if the windows were locked. Out she sprang again like a flash, and her little bare feet scurried across the room, first to the windows and then to the door.

"Now I reckon I'm safe," she murmured a moment later, again getting into bed. "I love to go to sleep with the rain pattering outside like that. Oh, dear, I'm so sorry he has to walk all night in this rain. Poor fellow! I wonder where he is now. Goodness! It's raining cats and dogs!"

But in spite of the rain she could not go to sleep. Vague fears began to take possession of her. Something dreadful told her that Count Marlanx was on the balcony and at her window, notwithstanding the rainpour. The fear became oppressive, maddening. She felt the man's presence almost as strongly as if he were in plain view. He was there; she knew it.

The little revolver that had served her so valiantly at the inn of the Hawk and Raven lay upon a stool near the bedside every night. Consumed by the fear that the window might open slowly at any moment she reached forth and clutched the weapon. Then she shrank back in the bed, her eyes fixed upon the black space across the room. For hours she shivered and waited for the window to open, dozing away time and again, only to come back to wakefulness with a start.

The next morning she confessed to herself that her fears had been silly. Her first act after breakfasting alone in her room was to seek out Colonel Quinnox, commander of the castle guard. In her mind she was greatly

troubled over the fate of the bold visitor of the night before. There was a warm, red glow in her face and a quick beat in her heart as she crossed the parade ground. Vagabond though he was he had conquered where princes had failed. Her better judgment told her that she could be nothing to this debonaire knight of the road, yet her heart stubbornly resisted all the arguments that her reason put forth.

Colonel Quinnox was pleasant, but he could give Beverly no promise of leniency in regard to Baldos. Instructions had come to him from General Marlanx, and he could not set them aside at will. Her plea that he might once more be assigned to old time duties found the colonel regretfully obdurate. Baldos could not ride with her again until Marlanx withdrew the order which now obtained. Beverly swallowed her pride and resentment diplomatically, smiled her sweetest upon the distressed colonel and marched defiantly back to the castle. Down in her rebellious, insulted heart she was concocting all sorts of plans for revenge. Chief among them was the terrible overthrow of the Iron Count. Her wide scope of vengeance even contemplated the destruction of Graustark if her end could be obtained in no other way.

Full of these bitter-sweet thoughts, she came to the castle doors before she saw who was waiting for her upon the great veranda. As she moved on steps, a preoccupied frown crossed her fair brow. General Marlanx, in his dignity and confidence, advanced to meet her. The early hour was responsive to the bright solitude which marked the castle. But few signs of life were in evidence about the castle.

She stopped with a sharp exclamation of surprise. Then scorn and indignation rushed in to fill the place of astonishment. She faced the smiling old man with anger in her eyes.

"Good morning," he said, extending his hand, which she did not see. She was wondering how much he had seen and heard at midnight.

"I thought the troops were massing this morning," she said coldly. "Don't you mass too?"

"There is time enough for that, my dear. I came to have a talk with you—in private," he said meaningly.

"It is sufficiently private here, Count Marlanx. What have you to say to me?"

"I want to talk about last night. You were very reckless to do what you did."

"Oh, you were playing the spy, then?" she asked scornfully.

"An involuntary observer, believe me—and a jealous one. I had hoped to win the affections of an innocent girl. What I saw last night shocked me beyond expression."

"Well, you shouldn't have looked," she retorted, tossing her chin, and the red feather in her hat bobbed angrily.

"I am surprised that one as clever as you are could have carried on an amour so incautiously," he said blandly.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I'm not ashamed of my own nature. 'Goodbye, Count Marlanx.'"

"One moment, please. I cannot let you off so easily. What right had you to take that man into your room, a place sacred in the palace of Graustark? Answer me, Miss Calhoun."

Beverly drew back in horror and bewilderment.

"Into my room?" she gasped.

"Let us waste no time in subterfuge. I saw him come from your window, and I saw all that passed between you in the balcony. Love's eyes are keen. What occurred in your chamber I can only—"

"Stop! How dare you say such a thing to me?" she fiercely cried. "You miserable coward! You know he was not in my room. Take it back—take it back every word of that lie!" She was white with passion, cold with terror.

"Bah! This is childish. I am in not the only one who saw him, my dear. He was in your room—you were in his arms. It's useless to deny it. And to think that I have spared him from death to have it come to this! You need not look so horrified. Your secret is safe with me. My silence in exchange for your beauty. It is worth a you. One word from me, you disgraced and Baldos dies. Come, fair lady, give me your promise, a good bargain for both."

[CONTINUED.]

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JASON M. GREER,
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Published in THE UNION TIMES, September 7th, 1906.

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"I should die if any one saw you here," she whispered. She could feel his eyes