

Beverly of Graustark

By
**GEORGE BARR
M'CUTCHEON,**
Author of "Graustark"
in 1904.
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"No, no!" cried Beverly. "Don't you dare to go out there again. You are to stay right here in the castle, sir. We have something else for you to do. It was that awful old Marlanx who shot at you. He—"

"I left General Marlanx in Colonel Quinnox's quarters, Miss Calhoun," interposed Baldos grimly. "He could not have fired the shot. For two or three nights, your highness, I have been followed and dogged with humiliating persistence by two men wearing the uniforms of castle guards. They do not sleep at the barracks. May I ask what I have done to be submitted to such treatment?" There was a trace of poorly concealed indignation in his voice.

"I assure you that this is news to me," said Yette in amazement.

"I am being watched as if I were a common thief," he went on boldly. "These men are not your agents; they are not the agents of Graustark. May I be permitted to say that they are spies set upon me by a man who has an object in disgracing me? Who that man is I leave to your royal conjecture."

"Marlanx?"

"Yes, your highness. He bears me a deadly grudge and yet he fears me. I know full well that he and his agents have built a strong case against me. They are almost ready to close in upon me, and they will have false evidence so craftily prepared that even my truest friends may doubt my loyalty to you and to the cause I serve. Before God, I have been true to my oath. I am loyal to Graustark. It was a sorry day when I left the valley and—"

"Oh," cried Beverly piteously, "don't say that!"

"Alas, Miss Calhoun, it is true," said he sadly. "I am penned up here where I cannot fight back. Treason is laid against me. But, beyond all this, I have permitted my loyalty to mislead my ambition. I have aspired to something I can cherish, but never possess. Better that I never should have tasted of the unattainable than to have the cup withdrawn just as its sweetness begins to intoxicate."

He stood before them, pale with suppressed emotion. The women of Graustark looked involuntarily at Beverly, who sat cold and voiceless, staring at the face of the guard. She knew that he was expected of her. A word from her and he would understand that he had not tasted of the unattainable. In one brief moment she saw that she had deliberately led him on, that she had encouraged him, that she actually had proffered him the cup from which he had begun to sip the bitterness. Pride and love were waging a conflict in this hapless southern girl's heart. But she was silent. She could not say the word.

"I think I know what you mean, Baldos," said Yette, seeing that Beverly would not intervene. "We are sorry. No one trusts to your honor more than I do. My husband believes in you. I will confess that you are to be arrested as a spy tomorrow. Tonight you are to serve as a guard in the castle. This should prove to you that I have unbounded faith in you. Moreover, I believe in you to the extent that I should not be afraid to trust you if you were to go out into the world with every secret which we possess. You came here under a peculiar stress of circumstances, not wholly of your own volition. Believe me, I am your friend."

"I shall revere your highness forever for those words," said he simply. His eyes went hungrily to Beverly's averted face and then assumed a careless gleam which indicated that he had resigned himself to the inevitable.

"I am constrained to ask you one question, sir," went on the princess. "You are not the common goat hunter you assume. Will you tell me in confidence who you really are?" The others held their breath. He hesitated for a moment.

"Will it suffice if I say that I am an unfortunate friend and advocate of Prince Dantan? I have risked everything for his sake, and I fear I have lost everything. I have failed to be of service to him, but through no fault of mine. Fate has been against me."

"You are Christobal!" cried Dagmar eagerly.

He gave her a startled glance, but offered no denial. Beverly's face was a study. If he were Christobal, then what of the game warden's daughter?

"We shall question you no further," said Yette. "You enlisted to serve Miss Calhoun. It is for her to command you while you are here. May God be with you to the end. Miss Calhoun, will you tell him what his duties are for tonight? Come, my dear."

Yette and Dagmar walked slowly from the room, leaving Beverly and her guard alone.

"I am at your service, Miss Calhoun," he said easily. His apparent indifference stung her into womanly revolt. "It was a fool last night," she said abruptly.

"No; I was the fool. I have been the fool from the beginning. You shall not blame yourself, for I do not blame you. It has been a sweet comedy, a summer pastime. Forget what I may have said to you last night, forget what my eyes may have said for weeks and weeks."

"I shall never forget," she said. "You deserve the best in the world. Would that I could give it to you. You have braved many dangers for my sake. I shall not forget. Do you know that we were watched last night?"

"Watched?" he cried incredulously. "Oh, fool that I am! I might have known. And I have subjected you to—don't tell me that harsh things have been said to you, Miss Calhoun!" He was deeply disturbed.

"General Marlanx saw you. He has threatened me, Baldos!"

"I will kill him! What do I care for the consequences? He shall pay dearly for—"

"Stop! Where are you going? You are to remain here, sir, and take your commands from me. I don't want you to kill him. They'd hang you, or something just as bad. He's going to be punished, never fear!" Baldos smiled in spite of his dismay. It was impossible to face this confident champion in petticoats without catching her enthusiasm. "What have you done with that rose?" she asked suddenly, flushing and diffident. Her eyes glistened with embarrassment.

"It lies next my heart. I love it," he said bravely.

"I think I'll command you to return it to me," vaguely.

"A command to be disobeyed. It is in exchange for my feather," he smiled confidently.

"Well, of course, if you are going to be mean about— Now, let me see," she said confusedly, "what are your duties for tonight? You are to stand guard in the corridor. Once in awhile you will go out upon the balcony and take a look. You see, I am afraid of some one. Oh, Baldos, what's the use of my trifling like this? You are to escape from Edelweiss tonight. That is the whole plan—the whole idea in a nutshell. Don't look like that. Don't you want to go?" Now she was trembling with excitement.

"I do not want to leave you," he cried eagerly. "It would be cowardly. Marlanx would understand that you gave aid and sanction. You would be left to face the charges he would make. Don't you see, Beverly? You would be implicated; you would be accused. Why did you not let me kill him? No; I will not go!"

"But I insist!" she cried weakly. "You must go away from me. I—I command you to—"

"Is it because you want to drive me out of your life forever?" he demanded, sudden understanding coming to him. "Don't put it that way," she murmured.

"Is it because you care for me that you want me to go?" he insisted, drawing near. "Is it because you fear the love I bear for you?"

"Love! You don't really— Stop! Remember where you are, sir! You must not go on with it, Baldos. Don't come a step nearer. Do go tonight! It is for the best. I have been awfully wicked in letting it run on as it has. Forgive me; please forgive me," she pleaded. He drew back, pale and hurt. A great dignity settled upon his face. His dark eyes crushed her with their quiet scorn.

"I understand, Miss Calhoun. The play is over. You will find the luckless vagabond a gentleman, after all. You ask me to desert the cause I serve. That is enough. I shall go tonight." The girl was near to surrender. Had it not been for the persistent fear that her proud old father might suffer from her willfulness, she would have thrown down the barrier and risked everything in the choice. Her heart was crying out hungrily for the love of this tall, mysterious soldier of fortune.

"It is best," she murmured finally. Later on she was to know the meaning of the peculiar smile he gave her.

"I go because you dismiss me, not because I fear an enemy. If you choose to remember me at all, be just enough to believe that I am not a shameless coward."

"You are brave and true and good, and I am a miserable, deceitful wretch," she lamented. "You will seek Ravone and the others?"

"Yes; they are my friends. They love my poverty. And now, may I please your highness, when I go forth, and in what garb? I should no longer wear the honest uniform of a Graustark guard."

"Leave it to me. Everything shall be arranged. You will be discreet? No one is to know that I am your—"

"Rest assured, Miss Calhoun. I have a close mouth." And he smiled contemptuously.

"I agree with you," said she regretfully. "You know how to hold your tongue." He laughed harshly. "For once in a way will you answer a question?"

"I will not promise."

"You say that you are Dantan's friend. Is it true that he is to marry the daughter of the Duke of Matz, Countess Iolanda?"

"It has been so reported."

"Is she beautiful?"

"Yes; exceedingly."

"But is he to marry her?" she insisted, she knew not why.

"How should I know, your highness?"

"If you call me 'your highness' again I'll despise you!" she flared miserably. "Another question: Is it true that the young Duke Christobal fled because his father objected to his marriage with a game warden's daughter?"

"I have never heard so," with a touch of hauteur.

"Does he know that the girl is dead?" she asked cruelly. Baldos did not answer for a long time. He stared at her steadily, his eyes expressing no emotion from which she could judge him.

"I think he is ignorant of that calamity, Miss Calhoun," he said. "With your permission I shall withdraw. There is nothing to be gained by delay." It was such a palpable affront that she shrank within herself and could have cried.

Without answering, she walked unsteadily to the window and looked out into the night. A mist came into her eyes. For many minutes she remained there, striving to regain control of her emotions. All this time she knew that he was standing just where she had left him, like a statue, awaiting her command. At last she faced him resolutely.

"You will receive instructions as to your duties here from the guard at the stairs. When you hear the hall clock strike the hour of 2 in the morning go into the chapel, but do not let any one see you or suspect. You know where it is. The door will be unlocked."

"Am I not to see you again?" he asked, and she did not think him properly depressed.

"Yes," she answered after a pause that seemed like an eternity, and he went quietly, silently away.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHILE Baldos was standing guard in the long, lofty hallway the Iron Count was busy with the machinations which were calculated to result in a startling upheaval with the break of a new day. He prepared and swore to the charges preferred against Baldos. They were dispatched to the princess for her perusal in the morning. Then he set about preparing the vilest accusations against Beverly Calhoun. In his own handwriting and over his own signature he charged her with complicity in the betrayal of Graustark, influenced by the desires of the lover who masqueraded as her protégé. At some length he dwelt upon the well laid plot of the spy and his accomplice. He told of their secret meetings, their outrages against the dignity of the court and their unmistakable animosity toward Graustark. For each and every count in his vicious indictment against the girl he professed to have absolute proof by means of more than one reputable witness.

It was not the design of Marlanx to present this document to the princess and her cabinet. He knew full well that it would meet the fate it deserved. It was intended for the eyes of Beverly Calhoun, and through them, he hoped to terrorize her into submission. He longed to possess this little, beautiful creature from over the sea. In all his life he had not hungered for anything as he now craved Beverly Calhoun. He saw that his position in the army was rendered insecure by the events of the last day. A bold, vicious stroke was his only means for securing the prize he longed for more than he longed for honor and fame.

Restless and enraged, consumed by jealousy and fear, he hung about the castle grounds long after he had drawn the diabolical charges. He knew that Baldos was inside the castle, favored, while he, a noble of the realm, was relegated to ignominy and the promise of degradation. Encamped outside the city walls the army lay without a leader. Each hour saw the numbers augmented by the arrival of reserves from the districts of the principality. His place was out there with the staff, yet he could not drag himself away from the charmed circle in which his prey was sleeping. Morose and grim he anxiously paced to and fro in an obscure corner of the grounds.

"What keeps the scoundrel?" he said to himself angrily.

Presently a villainous looking man, dressed in the uniform of the guards, stealthily approached. "I missed him, general, but I will get him the next time," growled the man.

"Curse you for a fool!" hissed Marlanx through his teeth. As another hireling came up, "What have you got to say?"

The man reported that Baldos had been seen on the balcony alone, evidently on watch.

Marlanx ground his teeth and his

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blood stormed his reason. "The job must be done tonight. You have your instructions. Capture him if possible; but, if necessary, kill him. You know your fate if you fail." Marlanx actually grinned at the thought of the punishment he would mete out to them. "Now be off!"

Rashly he made his way to the castle front. A bright moon cast its mellow glow over the mass of stone outlined against the western sky. For an hour he glowered in the shade of the trees, giving but slight heed to the guards who passed from time to time. His eyes never left the enchanted balcony.

At last he saw the man. Baldos came from the door at the end of the balcony, paced the full length in the moonlight, and then he disappeared that had afforded him egress.

Inside the dark castle the clock at the end of the hall melodiously boomed the hour of 2. Dead quiet followed the soft echoes of the gong. A tall figure stealthily opened the door to Yette's chapel and stepped inside. There was a streak of moonlight through the clear window at the far end of the room. Baldos, his heart beating rapidly, stood still for a moment, awaiting the next move in the game. The ghostlike figure of a woman suddenly stood before him in the path of the moonbeam, a hooded figure in dark robes. He started as if confronted by the supernatural.

"Come," came in an agitated whisper, and he stepped to the side of the phantom. She turned, and the moonlight fell upon the face of Beverly Calhoun. "Don't speak. Follow me as quickly as you can."

He grasped her arm, bringing her to a standstill.

"I have changed my mind," he whispered in her ear. "Do you think I will run away and leave you to shoulder the blame for all this? On the balcony near your window an hour ago I—"

"It doesn't make any difference," she argued. "You have to go. I want you to go. If you knew just how I feel toward you you would go without a murmur."

"You mean that you hate me," he groaned.

"I wouldn't be so unkind as to say that," she fluttered. "I don't know who you are. Come, we can't delay a minute. I have a key to the gate at the other end of the passage, and I know where the secret panel is located. Hush! It doesn't matter where I got the key. See how easy it is!"

He felt her tense little fingers in the darkness searching for his. Their hands were icy cold when the clasp came. Together they stood in a niche of the wall near the chancel rail. It was dark, and a cold draft of air blew across their faces. He could not see, but there was proof enough that she had opened the secret panel in the wall and that the damp, chill air came from the underground passage which led to a point outside the city walls.

"You go first," she whispered nervously. "I'm afraid. There is a lantern on the steps, and I have some matches. We'll light it as soon as— Oh, what was that?"

"Don't be frightened," he said. "I think it was a rat."

"Good gracious!" she gasped. "I wouldn't go in there for the world."

"Do you mean to say that you intended to do so?" he asked eagerly.

"Certainly. Some one has to return the key to the outer gate. Oh, I suppose I'll have to go in. You'll keep them off, won't you?" plaintively. He was smiling in the darkness, thinking what a dear, whimsical thing she was.

"With my life," he said softly.

"They're ten times worse than lions," she announced.

"You must not forget that you re-

turn alone," he said triumphantly.

"But I'll have the lantern going full blast," she said and then allowed him to lead her into the narrow passage-way. She closed the panel and then felt about with her foot until it located the lantern. In a minute they had a light. "Now, don't be afraid," she said encouragingly. He laughed in pure delight. She misunderstood his mirth and was conscious of a new and an almost unendurable pang. He was filled with exhilaration over the prospect of escape! Somehow she felt an impulse to throw her arms about him and drag him back into the chapel in spite of the ghost of the game warden's daughter.

[CONTINUED.]

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If it was buying votes in any shape it ought to be, and if it was with whiskey—if he is a conscientious man, it ought to be laying him. There was whiskey used here in the 2nd primary. A man who was here from the opening to the closing, said there was more used this year than in six years before. I saw some of the staggering and falling. We do not know who furnished the liquor or means for it, but we do know those drinking, and who drunk men hurried for. He was elected of course, and to him whiskey is a good thing in its place. It was prohibiting—the other fellow from being elected.)

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