

CHAPTER XXI.

HE next morning Aunt Fanny had a hard time of it. Her mistress was petulant; there was no sunshine in the bright August day as it appeared to her. Toward dawn, after she had counted many millions of black sheep jumping backward over a fence, she had fallen asleep. Aunt Fanny obeyed her usual instructions on this luckless morning. It was Beverly's rule to be called every morning at 7 o'clock. But how was her attendant to know that the graceful young creature, who had kicked the counterpane to the foot of the bed and had mauled the pillow out of all shape, had slept for less than thirty minutes? How was she to know that the flushed face and frown were born In the course of a night of distressing perplexities? She knew only that the sleeping beauty who lay before her was the fairest creature in all the universe. For some minutes Aunt Fanny stood off and admired the rich youthful glory of the sleeper, prophetically reluctant to disturb ber happiness. Then she obeyed the impulse of duty and spoke the summoning words.

"Wha-what time is it?" demanded the newcomer from the land of Nod, stretching her fine young body with a splendld but discontented yawn.

"Seben, Miss Bey'ly. Wha' time do yo' s'pose hit is? Hit's d' reg'lah time, o' co'se. Did no' all have a nice sleep, honey?" and Aunt Fanny went blissfully about the business of the hour.

"I didn't sleep a wink, confound it," grumbled Beverly, rubbing her eyes and turning on her back to glare up at the tapestry above the couch.

"Yo' wasa' winkin' any when Ah fust come i to de room, lemme tell cackled Aunt Fanny, with caus-

"See here now Aunt Fanny, I'm not going to stand any lecture from you this morning. When a fellow hasn't

"Who's a-lecturin' anybody, Ah'd lak to know? Ah'm jes' tellin' yo' what yo' was a doin' when Ah came into de Yo' was a sleepin' p'etty doggone tight, lemme tell yo'. Is yo' goin' out fo' yo' walk befo' b'eakfus', honey? 'Cause If yo' is, yo' all 'll be obleeged to climb out'n dat baid maghty quicklike. Yo' baf is ready, Miss Bev'ly."

Beverly splashed the water with unreasonable ferocity for a few minutes, trying to enjoy a diversion that had not falled her until this morning.

"Aunt Fanny," she announced after looking darkly through her window into the mountains above, "if you can't brush my hair-ouch!-any easier than this I'll have some one else do it, that's all. You're a regular old

"Po' lil' honey," was all the complacent bear said in reply, without altering her methods in the least.

"Weil," said Beverly threateningly, with a shake of her head, "be careful, that's all. Have you heard the news?"

"Wha' news, Miss Bev'ly?" "We're going back to Washin'ton."

Thank de Lawd! When? "I don't know. I've just this instant made up my mind. I think we'll start -let's see, this is the 6th of August, Well, look and see if you don't know, stupid! The 10th? My goodness! Where has the time gone, anyway? Well, we'll start some time between the 11th and the 12th."

"Of dis monf, Miss Bev'ly?" "No. September, I want you to look up a time table for me today. We must see about the trains."

"Dey's on'y one leavin' heah dafly, an' hit goes at 6 in de mo'nin'. One train a day! Aln' dat scan'lous?"

"I'm sure, Aunt Fanny, it is their business, not ours," said Beverly se-

werely. "Praps dey mought be runnin' a excubsion roun' 'bout Septembeh, Miss

Bev'ly," speculated Aunt Fanny consolingly. "Dey gen'ly has 'em in Septembeh." "You old goose," cried Beverly in

spite of herself. "Ain' yo' habin' er good time,

honey?" "No, I am not."

"Fo' de lan' sake. Ab wouldn' s'picioned hit fo' a minnit. Hit's de gayest place Ah mos' eveh saw-'cept Wash'ton an' Lex'ton an' Victobu's.'

"Well, you don't know everything," said Beverly crossly. "I wish you'd take that red feather out of my hat

right away.' "Shall Ah from hit away, Mise Bev'ly ?"

"We-il, no. You needn't do that," said Beverly. "Put it on my dressing table. I'll attend to it."

"Wha's become o' de gemman 'ut wo' hit in de fust place? Ah ain' seen him fo' two-three days." "I'm sure I don't know. He's proba-

bly asleep. That class of people never lose sleep over anything." "'E's er pow'ful good lookin' pus-

son," suggested Aunt Fanny. Beverly's eyes brightened.

"Oh, do you think so?" she said, quite indifferently. "What are you doing with that hat?"

"Takin' out de featheh-jes' as"-"Well, leave it alone. Don't disturb any things, Aunt Fanny. How many

"Good Lawd!" was all that Aunt

Fanny could say.

"Don't forget about the time tables," said Beverly as she sailled forth for

her walk in the park. In the afternoon she went driving with Princess Yetive and the young Duke of Mizrox, upon whose innocent and sufficiently troubled head she was heaping secret abuse because of the news he brought. Later Count Marlanx appeared at the castle for his first lesson in poker. He looked so sure of himself that Beverly hated him to the point of desperation. At the same time she was eager to learn how matters stood with Baldos. The count's threat still hung over her head, veiled by its ridiculous shadow of mercy. She knew him well enough by this time to feel convinced that Baidos would have to account for his temerity sooner or later. It was like the cat and the helpless mouse,

"It's too hot," she protested, when he announced himself rendy for the game. "Nobody plays poker when it's 92 in

"But, your highness," complained the count, "war may break out any day. I cannot concede delay."

"I think there's a game called 'shooting craps," suggested she serenely. It seems to me it would be particularly good for warriors. You could be shooting semething all the time."

He went away in a decidedly irascible frame of mind. She did not know it, but Baldos was soon afterward set to work in the garrison stables, a most loathsome occupation, in addition to his duties as a guard by night.

After mature deliberation Beverly set herself to the task of writing home to her father. It was her supreme in tention to convince him that she would be off for the States in an amazingly short time. The major upon receiving the letter three weeks later found noth ing in it to warrant the belief that she was ever coming home. He did observe, however, that she had but little use for the army of Graustark and was especially disappointed in the set of men Yetive retained as her private guard. For the life of her Beverly could not have told why she disap proved of the guard in general or ir particular, but she was conscious of the fact after the letter was posted that she had said many things that might have been left unwritten. Be sides, it was not Baldos' fault that she could not sleep. It was distinctly her own. He had nothing to do with

"I'll bet father will be glad to hear that I am coming home," she said to Yetive after the letter was gone. "Oh, Beverly, dear, I hate to hear of

your going," cried the princess. "When did you tell him you'd start?"

"Why-oh-er-let me see, when did Dash me, as Mr. Anguish I say? would say, I don't believe I gave : date. It seems to me I said soon that's all."

"You don't know how relieved I am." exclaimed Yetive rapturously, and Bev erly was in high dudgeon because of the implied reflection. "I believe you are in a tiff with Baldos," went on Ye tive airily.

"Goodness! How foolish you can be at times, Yetive!" was what Beverly gave back to her highness the Princess of Graustark.

Late in the evening couriers came to from the Dawsbergen frontler with reports which created considerable ex

eftement lu castle and army circles Prince Gabriel himself had been seen in the northern part of his domain, accompanied by a large detachment of picked soldiers. Lorry set out that very night for the frontier, happy in the bellef that something worth while was about to occur. General Marlanx issued orders for the Edelweiss army corps to mass beyond the southern gates of the city the next morning. Commands were also sent to the out lying garrisons. There was to be a general movement of troops before the end of the week. Graustark was not to be caught napping.

Long after the departure of Lorry and Anguish the princess sat on the balcony with Beverly and the Countess Dagmar. They did not talk much. The mission of these venturesome young American husbands was full of danger. Something in the air had told their wives that the first blows of war were to be struck before they looked again upon the men they loved.

"I think we have been betrayed by some one," said Dagmar after an almost interminable stlence. Her companion did not reply. "The couriers say that Gabriel knows where we are weakest at the front and that he knows our every movement. Yetive, there is a spy here after all."

'And that spy has access to the very eart of our deliberations," added Beverly pointedly. "I say this in behalf of the man whom you evidently suspect, countess. He could not know these things."

"I do not say that he does know, Miss Calhoun, but it is not beyond reason that he may be the go-between, the means of transferring information from the main traitor to the messengers who await outside our walls.

"Oh, I don't believe it!" cried Beverly hotly.

"I wonder if these things would have

happened if Baldos had never come to in the drizzle. Edelweiss," mused the princess. As though by common impulse, both of the Graustark women placed their arms about Beverly.

"It's because we have so much at stake, Beverly, dear," whispered Dagmar. "Forgive me if I have hurt you."

Of course Beverly sobbed a little in the effort to convince them that she did not care whom they accused if he proved to be the right man in the end. They left her alone on the balcony. For an hour after midnight she sat there and dreamed. Every one was ready to turn against Baldos. Even she had been barsh toward bim, for had she not seen him relegated to the most obnoxious of duties after promising him a for different life? And now what was he thinking of her? His descent from favor had followed upon the disclosures which made plain to each the identity of the other. No doubt he was attributing his degradation in a sense to the fact that she no longer relished his services, having seen a romantic little ideal shattered by his firm assertions. Of course she knew that General Marlanx was alone instrumental in assigning him to the unpleasant duty he now observed, but how was Baldos to know that she was not the real power behind the Iron Count? A light drizzle began to fall, cold and

lisagreeable. There were no stars, no The ground below was black with shadows, but shimmering in spots touched by the feeble park lamps. She retreated through her window, determined to go to bed. Her rebellious brain, however, refused to banish him from her thoughts. She wondered if e were patrolling the eastle grounds in the rain in all that lonely darkness. Selzed by a sudden inspiration she threw a gossamer about her, grasped an umbrella and ventured out upon the balcoay once more. Guiltily she searched the night through the fine, drizzling rain. Her ears listened eagerly for the trend which was so well known to

At last he strode beneath a lamp not far away. He looked up, but of course could not see her against the dark wall, For a long time he stood motionless beneath the light. She could not help seeng that he was dejected, tired, unhappy. His shoulders drooped, and there was a general air of listlessness about the figure which had once been so full of courage and of hope. The post light fell directly upon his face. It was somber, despondent, strained. He wore the air of a prisoner. Her heart went out to him like a flash. The debonalr night of the black patch was no more, in his place there stood a sullen slave

discipline. "Baldos!" she called softly, her voice enetrating the dripping air with the learness of a bell. He must have been onging for the sound of it, for he started and looked eagerly in her direction His tall form straightened as he passed als hand over his brow. It was but a roice from his dream, he thought. Aren't you afraid you'll get wet?" asked the same low, sweet voice, with the suggestion of a laugh behind it. With long strides he crossed the pavement and stood almost directly beneath her.

"Your highness!" he exclaimed gently, joyously. "What are you doing out there?

"Wondering, Baldos, Wondering what you were thinking of as you stood under the lamp over there." "I was thinking of your highness," he

called up softly. "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 tremulous ly, "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.

"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 eves? But lis-

ten. 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 sald, with a laugh. "But you are a wise counselor. Is the rain so pleasant to "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 sortly. 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 can-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." Yet she spasmodically extended the umbrella so that it covered him and left her out

"And so should I," 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. Tenight when you saw me I was trying to say goodby 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 the 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 s as bright as beaven 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 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 ame 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



'I should die if any one saw you here."

whispered. She could feel his eyes burning into her heart. With trembling, hurried fingers she tore loose a He could not seize it with his bands 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 un-

"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.

"I couldn't help it," she was whispering to herself between joy and shame. Glancing instinctively out toward the solitary lamp, she saw two men standing in its light. One of them was General Marlanx; the other she knew to be the spy that watched Baldos. Her heart sank like lead when she saw that the two were peering intently toward the blacony where she stood and where Baldos had clung but a moment

CHAPTER XXII.

C HE 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 be been standing 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

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 but forgotten umbrella. From below came the sibilant hiss of a man seeking 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 com-

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 frantle haste. Just as she was about to scramble in and bide 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 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 a bold one. Perhaps I dream that I am 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 | I have never wronged you" - She was 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 vallantly 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 ad clutched the weapon. Then she shrank back is 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 debonalr 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-deflantly 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 bittersweet thoughts. she came to the castle doors before she saw who was waiting for her upon the great veranda. As she mounted the steps, a preoccupied frown upon her fair brow, General Marianx, lean, crafty and confident, advanced to greet her. The early hour was responsible for the bright solitude which marked the place. But few signs of life were in evidence about the castle.

She stopped with a sharp exclamation of surprise. Then seem and indig nation 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 then?" she asked scornfelly. "An involuntery 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 be-

youd 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?" "I mean that I saw everything that occurred."

"Well, I'm not ashamed of it," obstinately. "Goodby, 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 be-

wilderment. "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

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

"Bah! This is childish. I am 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. I come to make terms with you. My silence in exchange for your beauty. It's worth it to you. One word from me, you are windows were locked. Out she sprang disgraced and Baldos dies. Come, my fair lady, give me your promise. It's a good bargain for both."

Beverly was trembling like a leaf. This phase of his villainy had not occurred to her. She was like a bird trying to avoid the charmed eye of the

"Oh, you-you miserable wretch!" she cried, hoarse with anger and despoir. "What a cur you are! You know you are not speaking the truth. How can you say such things to me? almost in tears, impotent with shame and fear.

"It has been a pretty game of love for you and the excellent Baldos. You have deceived those who love you best and trust you most. What will the princess say when she hears of last night's merry escapade? What will she say when she learns who was hostess to a common guardsman at the midnight hour? It is no wonder that you look terrified. It is for you to say whether she is to know or not. You can bind me to silence. You have lost Baldos. Take me and all that I can give you in his stead, and the world never shall know the truth. You love him, I know, and there is but one way to save him. Say the word and he goes free to the hills; decline and his life is not worth a breath of air."

"And pretending to believe this of me, you still ask me to be your wife. What kind of a man are you?" she demanded, scarcely able to speak. "My wife?" he said harshly. "Oh,

no. You are not the wife of Baldos,' he added significantly. "Heavens;" gasped Beverly, crushed by the brutality of it all. "I would sooner die. Would to heaven my father were here. He would shoot you

as he would a dog! Oh, how I loathe

you! Don't you try to stop me! I

shall go to the princess myself. She

shall know what manner of beast you are. She was racing up the steps, flaming

with anger and shame. "Remember, I can prove what I have said. Beware what you do. I love you so much that I now ask you to become my wife. Think well over it. Your honor and als life! It rests with you," he cried eagerly, following her to the

door. "You disgusting old fool," she hissed, turning upon him as she pulled the big brass knocker on the door.

"I must have my answer tonight or you know what will happen," he snarted, but he felt in his heart that he had lost through his eagerness.

She flew to Yetive's boudoir, consumed by rage and mortification. Between sobs and feminine maledictions she poured the whole story, in all its ugliness, into the ears of the princess.

"Now, Yetive, you have to stand by me in this," announced the parrator conclusively, her eyes beaming hopefully through her tears.

"I cannot prevent General Marlanx from preferring serious charges against Baldos, dear. I know he was not in your room last night. You did not have to tell me that, because I you both at the balcony rail." Beverly's face took on such a radiant look of rejoicing that Yetive was amply paid for the surprising and gratifying acknowledgment of a second period of eavesdropping. "You may depend upon me to protect you from Marlanx. He can make it very unpleas at for Baldos, but he shall pay dearly 1 - this insult to you. He has gone too far."

"I don't think he has any proof against Baldos," said Beverly, thinking only of the guardsman.

But it is so easy to manufacture evidence, my dear. The Iron Count has set his heart upon having you, and he is not the man to be turned uside eas-

"He seems to think he can get wives as easily as he gets rid of them, I observe. I was going back to Washington soon, Yetive, but I'll stay on now and see this thing to the end. He can't scare a Calhoun; no sir-ee! I'll telegraph for my brother Dan to come over here and punch his head to pieces,"

"Now, now, don't be so high and mighty, dear. Let us see how rational we can be," said the princess gently, whereupon the hot headed girl from Dixle suspended hostilities and became a very demure young woman. Before long she was confessing timidly, then boldly, that she loved Baldos better than anything in all the world.

"I can't help it. Yetive. I know I oughtn't to, but what is there to do when one can't help it? There would be an awful row at home if I married him. Of course he hasn't asked me. Maybe he won't. In fact, I'm sure he won't. I shan't give bim a chance, But if he does ask me I'll just keep putting him off. I've done it before, you know. You see, for a long, long time I fancied he might be a prince, but he isn't at all. I've had his word for it. He's just an ordinary person, like - like - well, like I am, only he doesn't look so ordinary. Isn't he handsome, Yetive? And, dear me, he is so impulsive! If he had asked me to jump over the balcony rail with him last night I believe I would have done Wouldn't that have surprised old Marlanx?" Beverly gave a merry laugh. The troubles of the morning

seemed to fade away under the warmth