

Beverly of Graustark

By **GEORGE BARR M'GUTCHEON,**
Author of "Graustark"

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CHAPTER XXXI.

THE Duke of Matz and his associates reached Edelweiss in the afternoon. Their attendants and servants carried luggage bearing the princely crest of Dawsbergen and meant for Prince Dantan and his sister Candace. In the part of the castle set apart for the visitors an important consultation was held behind closed doors. There Dantan met his countrymen and permitted them to renew the pledge of fealty that had been shattered by the overpowering influence of his mad half brother. What took place at this secret meeting the outside world never knew. Only the happy result was made known. Prince Dantan was to resume his reign over Dawsbergen as if it never had been interrupted.

The castle, brilliant from bottom to top, filled with music and laughter, experienced a riot of happiness such as it had not known in years. The war clouds had lifted, the sunshine of contentment was breaking through the darkness, and there was rejoicing in the hearts of all. Bright and glorious were the colors that made up the harmony of peace. Men and women of high degree came to the historic old walls garbed in the richest of royalty and nobility. To Beverly Calhoun it was the most enchanting sight she had ever looked upon. From the galleries she gazed down into the halls glittering with the wealth of Graustark and was conscious of a strange feeling of glorification. She felt that she had a part in this jubilee. With Candace she descended the grand staircase and mingled with the resplendent crowd.

She was the center of attraction. Dressed in a simple, close fitting gown of black velvet, without an ornament, her white arms and shoulders gleaming in the soft light from the chandeliers, she was an enticing creature to be admired by men and women alike. Two stalwart Americans felt their hearts bound with pride as they saw the conquest their countrywoman was making. Candace, her constant companion in these days, was consumed with delight.

"You are the prettiest thing in all this world," she ecstatically whispered into Beverly's ear. "My brother says so, too," she added conclusively. Beverly was too true a woman not to revel in this subtle flattery.

The great banquet hall was to be thrown open at midnight. There were dancing and song during the hours leading up to this important event. Beverly was entranced. She had seen brilliant affairs at home, but none of them compared to this in regal splendor. It was the sensuous, overpowering splendor of the east.

Prince Dantan joined the throng just before midnight. He made his way direct to the little circle of which Beverly and Candace formed the center. His rich, full military costume gave him a new distinction that quite overcame Beverly. They fell into an animated conversation, exchanging shafts of wit that greatly amused those who could understand the language.

"You must remember," Beverly said in reply to one of Ravone's sallies, "that Americans are not in the least awed by Europe's greatness. It has come to the pass when we call Europe our playground. We now go to Europe as we go to the circus or the county fair at home. It isn't much more trouble, you know, and we must see the sights."

"Alas, poor Europe!" he laughed. As he strolled about with her and Candace he pointed out certain men to her, asking her to tax her memory in the effort to recall their faces if not their apparel. She readily recognized in the lean, tired faces the men she had met first at the Inn of the Hawk and Raven.

"They were vagabonds then, Miss Calhoun. Now they are noblemen. Does the transition startle you?"

"Isn't Baldos among them?" she asked, voicing the query that had been uppermost in her mind since the moment when she looked down from the galleries and failed to see him. She was wondering how he would appear in court costume.

"You forget that Baldos is only a guard," he said kindly.

"He is a courtier nevertheless," she retorted.

She was vaguely disappointed because he was missing from the scene of splendor. It proved to her that caste overcame all else in the rock ribbed east. The common man, no matter how valiant, had no place in such affairs as these. Her pride was suffering. She was as a queen among the noblest of the realm. As the wife of Baldos she would live in another world—on the outskirts of this one of splendor and arrogance. A stubborn, defiant little frown appeared on her brow as she pictured herself in her mind's eye standing afar off with "the man" Baldos, looking at the opulence she could not reach. Her impetuous, rebellious little heart was thumping bitterly as she considered this single phase of the life to come. She was ready to cry out against the injustice of it all. The little frown was perfection of deep indignation. She would knock down the social barrier

that kept Baldos from the fields over which prejudice alone held sway. Her love for him and her determination to be his wife were not in the least dulled by these reflections.

The doors to the great banquet hall were thrown open at last, and in the disorder that followed she wondered who was to lead her to the feasting. The Duke of Mizrox claimed the Princess Candace.

"I am to have the honor," said some one at her side, and the voice was the one she least expected to hear utter the words. The speaker was the man who deserved the place beside Yetteve, Prince Dantan himself.

Bewildered, her heart palpitating with various emotions, she took his arm and allowed herself to be drawn wonderingly through the massive doors. As they entered, followed by the brilliant company, the superb orchestra that Beverly had so often enjoyed began to play the stirring "Hands Across the Sea." The musicians themselves seemed to have caught the universal feeling of joy and mirth that was in the air and played as if inspired, their leader bowing low to the young American girl as she passed. It was his affectionate tribute to her. Prince Dantan, to her amazement, led her up the entire length of the banquet hall to the head of the royal table, gorgeous with the plate of a hundred Graustark rulers, placing her on his left and next to the slightly raised royal chairs. Candace was on his right, the picture of happiness. Beverly felt dizzy, weak. She looked helplessly at Prince Dantan. His smile was puzzling. As if in a daze she saw Grenfall Lorry with the Countess Yonne standing exactly opposite to her, he, with the others, awaiting the appearance of the princess and the one who was to sit beside her.

The music ceased, there was a hush over the room, and then Yetteve came forward, magnificent in her royal robes, smiling and happy. A tall man in the uniform of an exalted army officer stood beside her, gold braid and jeweled things across his breast. Beverly turned deathly white, her figure stiffened and then relaxed.

It was Baldos! She never knew how she dropped into the chair the servant held for her. She only knew that his dark eyes were smiling at her with love and mischief in their depths. There was a vague, uncertain sound of chattering; some one was talking eagerly to her, but she heard him not. There was a standing toast to the Prince of Dawsbergen. Then the audacious ghost of Baldos was proposing a ringing response to the Princess Yetteve; the orchestra was playing the Graustark and Dawsbergen national hymns. But it was all as a dream to her. At last she heard Candace calling to her, her face wreathed in smiles. Scores of eyes seemed to be looking at her, and all of them were full of amusement.

"Now, say that a girl can't keep a secret," came to her ears from the radiant sister of Dantan. Ravone, at her side, spoke to her, and she turned to him dizzily.

"You first knew me as Ravone, Miss Calhoun," he was saying genially. "Then it became necessary, by royal command, for me to be Prince Dantan. May I have the honor of introducing myself in the proper person? I am Christobal of Rapp-Thorborg, and I shall be no other than he hereafter. The friendship that binds me to Prince Dantan, at last in his proper place beside the Princess of Graustark, is to be strengthened into a deeper relationship before many days have passed."

"The Princess Candace ceases to be his sister," volunteered the Duke of Mizrox. "She is and long has been his affianced wife."

Enchanted and confused over all that had occurred in the last few moments, Beverly murmured her heartfelt congratulations to the joyous couple. The orchestra had again ceased playing. All eyes turned to Baldos—the real Prince Dantan—who, glass in hand, rose to his feet.

"Your royal highness, ladies and gentlemen, Graustark and Dawsbergen are entering a new era. I pledge you my honor that never again shall the slightest misunderstanding exist between them. They shall go forth to their glorious destiny as one people. Your gracious ruler has seen fit to bestow her hand and affections upon an American gentleman, your esteemed prince consort. We all know how loyal the people have approved her choice. There is one present, a trusted friend of your beautiful princess and lovingly called in your hearts Beverly of Graustark. Whose example more worthy for me to follow than that of the Princess Yetteve? With whom could I better share my throne and please you more than with my beloved American protegee? I ask you to drink a toast to my betrothed, Beverly Calhoun, the future Princess of Dawsbergen."

Every glass was raised and the toast drunk amid ringing cheers. The military band crashed out the air so dear to all Americans, especially to southern hearts. Beverly was too overcome to speak.

"You all!"—she exclaimed.

There was a tremendous commotion in the gallery. People were standing in their seats half frightened and amused, their attention attracted by the unusual scene. A portly negress, totally unconscious of the sensation she was causing, her feet keeping time to the lively strains of music, was frantically waving a red and yellow handanna handkerchief. It was Aunt Fanny, and in a voice that could be heard all over the banquet hall she shouted: "Good Lawd, honey, ef der ain't playin' 'Away Down South In Dixie!' Hooray! Hooray!"

Hours later Beverly was running, confused and humbled, through the halls to her room, when a swifter one than she came up and checked her flight.

"Beverly!" cried an eager voice. She slackened her pace and glanced over her shoulder. The smiling, triumphant face of Baldos met her gaze. The upper hall was almost clear of people. She was strangely frightened, distressingly diffident. Her door was not far away, and she would have reached it in an instant later had he not laid a restraining, compelling hand upon her arm. Then she turned to face him, her lips parted in protest. "Don't look at me in that way!" he cried imploringly. "Come, dearest, come with me. We can be alone in the nook at the end of the hall. Heavens, I am the happiest being in all the world. It has turned out as I have prayed it should."

She allowed him to lead her to the darkened nook. In her soul she was wondering why her tongue was so powerless. There were a hundred things she wanted to say to him, but now that the moment had come she was voiceless. She only could look helplessly at him. Joy seemed to be paralyzed within her. It was as if she slept and could not be awakened. As she sank upon the cushion he dropped to his knee before her, his hand clasping hers with a fervor that thrilled her with life. As he spoke her pulses quickened and the blood began to race furiously.

"I have won your love, Beverly, by the fairest means. There has never been an hour in which I have not been struggling for this glorious end. You gave yourself to me when you knew I could be nothing more than the humblest soldier. It was the sacrifice of love. You will forgive my presumption—my very insolence, dear one—when I tell you that my soul is the forfeit I pay. It is yours through all eternity. I love you. I can give you the riches of the world as well as the wealth of the heart. The vagabond dies; your poor humble follower gives way to the suppliant prince. You would have lived in a cot as the guardsman's wife. You will take the royal palace instead."

Beverly was herself again. The spell was gone. Her eyes swam with happiness and love. The suffering her pride had sustained was swept into a heap labeled romance, and she was rejoicing.

"I hated you tonight, I thought," she cried, taking his face in her hands. "It looked as though you had played a trick on me. It was mean, dear. I couldn't help thinking that you had used me as a plaything, and it—it made me furious. But it is different now. I see, oh, so plainly. And just as I had resigned myself to the thought of spending the rest of my life in a cottage, away outside the pale of this glorious life! Oh, it is like a fairy tale!"

"Ah, but it was not altogether a trick, dear one. There was no assurance that I could regain the throne—not until the very last. Without it I should have been the beggar instead of the prince. We would have lived in a hovel, after all. Fortune was with me. I deceived you for months, Beverly—my Beverly—but it was for the best. In defense of my honor and dignity, however, I must tell you that the princess has known for many days that I am Dantan. I told her the truth when Christobal came that day with the news. It was all well enough for me to pass myself off as a vagabond, but it would have been unpardonable to foist him upon her as the prince."

"And she has known for a week?" cried Beverly in deep chagrin.

"And the whole court has known."

"I alone was blind?"

"As blind as the proverb. Thank God, I won your love as a vagabond. I can treasure it as the richest of my princely possessions. You have not said that you will go to my castle with me, dear."

She leaned forward unsteadily, and he took her in his eager arms. Their lips met, and their eyes closed in the ecstasy of bliss. After a long time she lifted her lids, and her eyes of gray looked solemnly into his dark ones.

"I have much to ask you about, many explanations to demand, sir," she said threateningly.

"By the rose that shields my heart, you shall have the truth," he laughed back at her. "I am still your servant. My enlistment is endless. I shall always serve your highness."

"Your highness!" she murmured reflectively. Then a joyous smile of realization broke over her face. "Isn't it wonderful?"

"Do you think your brothers will let me come to Washington now?" he asked teasingly.

"It does seem different, doesn't it?" she murmured, with a strange little smile. "You will come for me?"

"To the ends of the earth, your highness."

THE END.

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At 10 A. M. Sunday, September 30th, Miss Mamie Holt, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. W. M. Holt, and Mr. Tommie Strickland were happily married at the home of the bride, the ceremony being performed by Rev. Ruffin Johnson. A large crowd was present.

The attendants were: Lawrence Stephenson and Miss Flossie Stephenson, George Massengill and Miss Martha Lee, Arthur Watkins and Miss Maggie Kelley, Jim Massengill and Miss Minnie Lee, Ira Lee and Miss Gertrude Holt, David Price and Miss Hattie Barbour.

After the ceremony the wedding party attended church and returned to Mr. Holt's for dinner. In the afternoon the newly married couple left for Princeton where they will make their future home.

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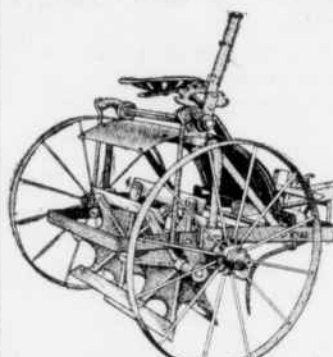
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