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# The Prince of Graustark

(Continued from Page 234)

happiness, you are almost sure to find disgrace and death, eh? It doesn't seem a fair division, does it? I suppose you all feel that the worst thing that can possibly happen is for me to find happiness."

"If I were the Prince of Graustark I should first think of the happiness of my subjects. I would not offend."

"Well put, Boske, but fortunately you are not the Prince."

"I implore you, Highness, to give up this mad enterprise and return to your people as——"

TWO figures emerged from the door and, passing by without so much as a glance in his direction, made their way to the mounting block. Robin's heart went down to his boots. Bedelia, a graceful figure in a smart riding habit, was laughing blithely over a soft-spoken remark that her companion had made as they were crossing the porch. And that companion was no other than the tall, good-looking fellow who had met her at Cherbourg! The Prince, stunned and incredulous, watched them mount their horses and canter away, followed by a groom who seemed to have sprung up from nowhere.

"Good morning, Mr. Schmidt," spoke a voice, and, still bewildered, he whirled, hat in hand, to confront Mrs. Gaston. "Did I startle you?"

He bowed stiffly over the hand she held out for him to clasp, and murmured something about being proof against surprise. The color was slowly returning to his face, and his smile was as engaging as ever despite the bitterness that filled his soul. Here was a pretty trick to play on a fellow! Here was a slap in the face!

"Isn't it a glorious morning? And how wonderful she is in this gorgeous sunlight," went on Mrs. Gaston, in what may be described as a hurried, nervous manner.

"I had the briefest glimpse of her," mumbled Robin. "When did she come?"

"Centuries and centuries ago, Mr. Schmidt," said she, with a smile. "I was speaking of the Jungfrau."

"Oh!" he exclaimed, flushing. "I thought you—er—yes, of course! Really quite wonderful. I have heard it said that she never removes her nightcap, but always greets the dawn in spotless—ahem! Of course you understand that I am speaking of the Jungfrau," he floundered.

"Naturally, Mr. Schmidt. And so you came, after all. We were afraid you might have concluded to alter your plans. Miss Guile will be delighted."

He appeared grateful for the promise. "I have been here for three days, Mrs. Gaston. You were delayed in leaving Paris?"

"Yes," she said, and changed the subject. "The riding is quite good, I understand. They are off for Lauterbrunnen."

"I see," said he. "There is a splendid inn there, I am told."

"They will return here for luncheon, of course," she said, raising her eyebrows slightly. His heart became a trifle lighter at this. "Mr. White is a lifelong friend and acquaintance of the family," she volunteered, apropos of nothing.

"Oh, his name is White?" with a quiet laugh.

"If you have nothing better to do, Mr. Schmidt, why not come with me to the Kursaal? The morning concert will begin shortly, and I——"

"I think that you will find that the band plays in the square across the way, Mrs. Gaston, and not in the Casino. At least, that has been the program for the last two mornings."

"Nevertheless, there is a concert at the Casino today," she informed him. "Will you come?"

"Gladly," he replied, and they set off for the Kursaal. He found seats in the half-empty pavilion and prepared to listen to the music, although his real interest was following the narrow highway to Lauterbrunnen—and the Staubbach.

"This is to be a special concert given at the request of the Grand Duke who, I hear, is leaving this afternoon for Berne."

"The Grand Duke? I was not aware of the presence of royalty," said he in surprise.

"No? He has been here for three days, but at another hotel. The Grand Duke Paulus and his family, you know."

Robin shot a swift, apprehensive glance about the big enclosure, sweeping the raised circle from end to end. On the opposite side of the pavilion he discovered the space reserved for the distinguished party. Although he was far removed from that section he sank deeper into his chair and found one pretext after another to screen his face from view. He did know the Grand Duke Paulus and the Grand Duke knew him, which was even more to the point.

The Prince of Graustark had been a prime favorite of the great man since his knickerbocker days. Twice as a boy he had visited in the ducal palace, far distant from Graustark, and at the time of his own coronation the Grand Duke and his sons had come to the castle in Edelweiss for a full month's stay. They knew him well and they would recognize him at a glance. At this particular time the last thing on earth that he desired was to be hailed as a royal prince.

Never, in all his life, had he known the sun to penetrate so brightly into shadows as it did today. He felt that he was sitting in a perfect glare of light and that every feature of his face was clear to the most distant observer.

He was on the point of making an excuse to leave the place when the ducal party came sauntering down the aisle on their way to the reserved section. Every one stood up, the band played, the Grand Duke bowed to the right and to the left, and escape was cut off. Robin could only stand with averted face and direct mild execrations at the sunlight that had seemed so glorious at breakfast time.

"HE IS a splendid-looking man, isn't he?" Mrs. Gaston was saying. She was gazing in rapt admiration upon the royal group.

"He is indeed," said Robin, resolutely scanning a program, which he continued to hold before his face. When he sat down again, it was with his back to the band. "I don't like to watch the conductors," he explained. "They do such foolish things, you know."

Mrs. Gaston was eyeing him curiously. He was bitterly conscious of a crimson cheek. In silence they listened to the first number. While the applause was at its height, Mrs. Gaston leaned forward and said to him:

"I am afraid you are not enjoying the music, Mr. Schmidt. What is on your mind?"

He started. "I—I—really, Mrs. Gaston, I am enjoying it. I——"

"Your mind has gone horseback riding, I fear. At present it is between here and Lauterbrunnen, jogging beside that roaring little torrent that——"

"I don't mind confessing that you are quite right," said he frankly. "And I may add that the music makes me so blue that I'd like to jump into that roaring torrent and—swim out again, I suppose," he concluded with a sheepish grin.

"You are in love."

"I am," he confessed.

She laid her hand upon his. Her eyes were wide with eagerness. "Would it drive away the blues if I were to tell you that you have a chance to win her?"

He felt his head spinning. "If—if I could believe that—that——" he began, and choked up with the rush of emotion that swept through him.

"She is a strange girl. She will marry for love alone. Her father is determined that she shall marry a royal prince. That much I may confess to you. She has defied her father, Mr. Schmidt. She will marry for love, and I believe it is in your power to awaken love in that adorable heart of hers. You——"

"For God's sake, Mrs. Gaston, tell me—tell me, has she breathed a word to you that——"

"Not a single word. But I know her well. I have known her since she was a baby, and I can read the soul that looks out through those lovely eyes. Knowing her so well, I may say to you—oh, it must be in the strictest confidence!—that you have a chance. And if you win her love, you will *have* the greatest treasure in all the world. She—but, look! The Grand Duke is leaving. He——"

"I don't care what becomes of the Grand Duke," he burst out. "Tell me more. Tell me how you look into her soul, and tell me what you see——"

"Not now, sir. I have said enough. I have given you the sign of hope. It remains with you to make the most of it."

"But you—you don't know anything about me. I may be the veriest adventurer, the most unworthy of all——"

"I think, Mr. Schmidt, that I know you pretty well. I do not require the aid of Diogenes' lantern to see an honest man. I am responsible for her welfare. She has been placed under my protection. For twenty years I have adored


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