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The Prince of Graustark

(Continued from page 3.)

marries him?" inquired the young man.

"You will be her choice," said the other without the quiver of an eyelash. "How can you be sure of that? Has she no mind of her own?"

"It isn't incomprehensible that she should fall in love with you, is it?" "It might be possible, of course, provided she is not already in love with some one else."

Mr. Blithers started. "Have you heard any one say that? But that's nonsense. She's not in love with any one, take it from me. And just to show you how fair I am to her--and to you--I'll stake my head you fall in love with each other before you've been together a week."

"It is possible that I could fall in love with her inside of a week or even sooner. But I don't intend to, Mr. Blithers, any more than she intends to fall in love with me. You say that \$20,000,000 will go to the man she marries if he is your choice. Well, I don't give a hang, sir, if you make it \$50,000,000. I am not for sale, Mr. Blithers. Good morning." Robin turned into the wood and was sauntering away with his chin high in the air when Mr. Blithers called out to him from behind:

"I shall expect you tonight, just the same."

Robin halted, amazed by the man's assurance. He retraced his steps to the roadside.

"Will you pardon a slight feeling of curiosity on my part, Mr. Blithers, if I ask whether your daughter consents to the arrangement you propose. Does she approve of the scheme?"

Mr. Blithers was honest. "No, she doesn't," he said succinctly. "At least, not at present. I'll be honest with you. She stayed away from the ball last night simply because she did not want to meet you. That's the kind of a girl she is."

"By jove, I take off my hat to her!" cried Robin. "She's a brick, after all. Take it from me, Mr. Blithers, you will not be able to hand over twenty millions without her consent. I believe that I should enjoy meeting her, now that I come to think of it. It would be a pleasure to exchange confidences with a girl of that sort. Shall I instruct your chauffeur to come for you up here, or will you walk back to--"

"I'll walk to Red Roof," said Mr. Blithers doggedly. "I'm going to ask Mrs. King to let you off for tonight."

CHAPTER VII.

A Letter From Maud.

MR. BLITHERS, triumphant, left Red Roof shortly after luncheon; Mr. Blithers, dismayed, arrived at Blitherswood a quarter of an hour later. He had had his way with Robin, who, after all, was coming to dinner that evening with Count Quinnox. The prince, after a few words in private with the count, changed his mind and accepted Mr. Blithers' invitation with a liveliness that was mistaken for eagerness by that gentleman, who had made very short work of subduing Mrs. King when she tried to tell him that her own dinner party would be ruined if the principal guest defaulted. He was gloating over his victory up to the instant he reached his own lodge gates. There, dismay sat patiently waiting for him in the shape of a messenger from the local telegraph office in the village below. He had seen Mr. Blithers approaching in the distance, and with an astuteness that argued well for his future success in life, calmly sat down to wait--

pedaling his decrepit picyie up the long slope to

by his practiced and adroit better half, who had no compunction in ascribing it to the alarming condition of a very dear friend in New York--one of the Van Valkens, you know.

"Maud is so tender hearted, so loyal, so really sweet about her friends, that nothing in the world could have induced her to leave this dear friend, don't you know."

"I am extremely sorry not to have met your daughter," said Robin, very politely.

"Oh, but she will be here in a day or two, prince."

"Unfortunately, we are leaving tomorrow, Mrs. Blithers."

"Tomorrow?" murmured Mrs. Blithers, aghast.

"I received a cablegram today advising me to return to Edelweiss at once. We are obliged to cut short a very charming visit with Mr. and Mrs. King and to give up the trip to Washington. Lieutenant Dank left for New York this afternoon to exchange our reservations for the first ship that we can--"

"What's this?" demanded Mr. Blithers, abruptly withdrawing his attention from Count Quinnox, who was in the middle of a sentence when the interruption came. They were on the point of going out to dinner. "What's this?"

"The prince says that he is leaving tomorrow--"

"Nonsense!" exploded Mr. Blithers, with no effort toward gentility. "He doesn't mean it. Why--why, we haven't signed a single agreement--" "Fortunately it isn't necessary for me to sign anything, Mr. Blithers," broke in Robin hastily. "The papers are to be signed by the minister of finance, and afterward my signature is attached in approval. Isn't that true, Count Quinnox?"

"I daresay Mr. Blithers understands the situation perfectly," said the count.

Mr. Blithers looked blank. "Of course I understand it," he said bluntly. "Still I had it in mind to ask the prince to put his signature to a sort of preliminary document which would at least assure me that he would sign the final agreement when the time comes. That's only fair, isn't it?"

"Quite fair, Mr. Blithers. The prince will sign such an article tomorrow or the next day at your office in the city. Pray have no uneasiness, sir. It shall be as you wish. By the way, I understood that your solicitor--your lawyer, I should say--was to be here this evening. It had occurred to me that he might draw up the statement, if Mrs. Blithers will forgive us in our haste--"

"He couldn't get here," said Mr. Blithers and no more. He was thinking too intently of something more important. "What's turned up?"

"Turned up, Mr. Blithers?"

"Yes--in Croosstock. What's taking you off in such a hurry?"

"The prince has been away for nearly six months," said the count, as if that explained everything.

"Was it necessary to cable for him to come home?" persisted the financier.

"Graustark and Dawsbergen are endeavoring to form an alliance, Mr. Blithers, and Prince Robin's presence at the capital is very much to be desired in connection with the project."

"What kind of an alliance?"

The count looked bored. "An alliance prescribed for the general improvement of the two races, I should say, Mr. Blithers." He smiled. "It would in no way impair the credit of Graustark, however. It is what you might really describe as a family secret, if you will pardon my flippancy."

The butler announced dinner.

"Wait for a couple of days, prince, and I'll send you down to New York by special train," said Mr. Blithers.

The prince resolutely declared he would be obliged to take the first available steamer.

"We shall go down tomorrow," he said, and even Mr. Blithers subsided.

He looked to his wife in desperation. She failed him for the first time in her life. Her eyes were absolutely messageless.

"I'll go down with you," he said, and then gave his wife a look of defiance.

The next morning brought Maud's letter to her mother. It said:

Dearest Mother--I enclose the cutting from Town Truth. You may see for yourself what a sickening thing it is. The whole world knows by this time that the ball was a joke--a horrible joke. Everybody knows that you are trying to hand me over to Prince Robin neatly wrapped up in banknotes. And everybody knows that he is laughing at us, and he isn't alone in his mirth. What rascal, the Truxton Kings think of us? I can't bear the thought of meeting that pretty, clever woman face to face. I know I should die of mortification, for, of course, she must believe that I am dying to marry anything on earth that has a title and a pair of legs. Somehow, I don't blame you and dad. You really love me, I know, and you want to give me the best that the world affords. But why, oh why, can't you let me choose for myself? I don't object to having a title, but I do object to having a husband that I don't want and who certainly could not by any chance want me.

You think that I am in love with Channie Seville. Well, I'm not. I am very fond of him, that's all, and if it came to a pinch I would marry him in preference to any prince on the globe. Today I met a couple of girls who were at the ball. They are really quite nice and I got into one of them had the nerve to ask what it was going to cost dad to land him. Town Truth says he is to cost ten millions! Well, you may just tell dad that I'll help him to practice economy. He needn't pay a nickel for my husband--when I get him.

So, dearest mother, I am going abroad to forget. Miranda is going with me, and we sail next Saturday on the Jupiter. I think. We haven't got our suit, but Mr. Bliss says he is sure he can arrange it for me. If we can't get one on the Jupiter we'll take some other boat that is just as inconspicuous. You see, I want to go on a ship that isn't likely to be packed with people I know, for it is my intention to travel incog, as they say in the books. I know dad will be perfectly furious, but I'm going or die, one or the other. Now,

it won't do a bit of good to try to stop me, dearest. The best thing for you and dad to do is to come down at once and say good-bye to me, but you are not to go to the steamer! Never! Please, please come, for I love you both and I do so want you to love me. Come tomorrow and kiss your horrid, horrid, disappointing, loathsome daughter--and forgive her too.

Mr. Blithers was equal to the occasion. He slapped his knee with resounding force and uttered an ejaculation that caused his wife to stare at him as if the very worst had happened. He was a chuckling lunatic!

"Immense!" he exclaimed. "Immense!"

"In heaven's name, what are you saying, Will?"

"Great Scott, can't you see? He goes abroad, she goes abroad. See? Same ship. See what I mean? Nothing could be finer. They--"

"But I do not want my child to go abroad," wailed the unhappy mother. "I cannot bear--"

"Stuff and nonsense! Brace up! Grasp the romance. Both of 'em sailing under assumed names. They see each other on deck. Mutual attraction. Love at first sight. Both of 'em. Money no object. There you are. Leave it to me."

"Maud is not the kind of girl to take up with a stranger on board--"

"Don't glare at me like that! Love finds the way, it doesn't matter what kind of a girl she is. But listen to me, Lou, we've got to be mighty careful that Maud doesn't suspect that we're putting up a job on her. She'd balk at the gang plank, and that would be the end of it. She must not know that he is on board. Now, here's the idea," and he talked on in a strangely subdued voice for fifteen minutes, his enthusiasm mounting to such heights that she was fairly lifted to the seventh heaven he produced, and, for once in her life, she actually submitted to his bumptious argument without so much as a single protesting word.

The down train at 2:17 p. m. had on board a most distinguished group of passengers, according to the Pullman conductor, whose skillful conniving resulted in the banishment of a few unimportant creatures who had paid for chairs in the observation coach, but who had to get out, whether or no, when Mr. Blithers loudly said it was a nuisance having everything on the shady side of the car taken on a hot day like this. He surreptitiously informed the conductor that there was a prince in his party, and that highly impressed official at once informed ten other passengers that they had no business in a private car and would have to move.

The prince announced that Lieutenant Dank had secured comfortable cabins on a steamer sailing Saturday, but he did not feel at liberty to mention the name of the boat owing to his determination to avoid newspaper men, who no doubt would move heaven and earth for an interview; now that he had become a person of so much importance in the social world. Indeed, his identity was to be more completely obscured than at any time since he landed on American soil. He thanked Mr. Blithers for his offer to command the "royal suit" on the Jupiter, but declined, volunteering the somewhat curt remark that it was his earnest desire to keep as far away from royalty as possible on the voyage over. A remark that Mr. Blithers couldn't quite fathom, then or afterward.

Arriving at the Grand Central terminal, Prince Robin and the count made off in a taxicab, smilingly declining to reveal their hotel destination.

"But where am I to send my attorney with the agreement you are to sign, prince?" asked Mr. Blithers, plainly irritated by the young man's obstinacy in declining to be "dropped" at his hotel by the Blithers motor.

"I shall come to your office at 11 tomorrow morning, Mr. Blithers," said Robin, his hat in his hand. He had bowed very deeply to Mrs. Blithers.

"But that's not right," blustered the financier. "A prince of royal blood hadn't ought to visit a money grubber's office. It's not--"

"Noblesse oblige," said Robin, with his hand on his heart. "It has been a pleasure to know you, Mrs. Blithers. I trust we may meet again. If you should ever come to Graustark please consider that the castle is yours, as you hospitable Americans would say."

"We surely will," said Mrs. Blithers. Both the prince and Count Quinnox bowed very profoundly and did not smile.

"And it will be ours," added Mr. Blithers, more to himself than to his wife as the two tall figures moved off with the throng. Then to his wife: "Now to find out what ship they're sailing on. I'll fix it so they'll have to take the Jupiter, whether they want to or not."

"Wouldn't it be wisdom to find out what ship Maud is sailing on, Will? It seems to me that she is the real problem."

"Right you are!" said he instantly. "I must be getting dotty in my old age, Lou."

(To Be Continued.)

LIBRARY REPORT

The following is the report of the Carnegie Public Library and Reading Rooms for the month of June, 1916:

- Number of persons in to read or write, 951.
- Average number of persons per day 31.
- Largest daily attendance, 41.
- Smallest daily attendance, 14.
- New members enrolled, 17.
- Number of books loaned, 520.
- Number of Magazines loaned, 42.
- Fines collected, 75c.
- Frances MacDonal, Librarian.

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