

Peculiarly promising to their hopes was the indisputable fact that the Prince's mother had married an American, thereby establishing a precedent behind which no constitutional obstacle could thrive, and had lived very happily with the gentleman in spite of the critics. Moreover, she had met him while sojourning on American soil, and that was certainly an excellent augury for the success of the present enterprise. What could be more fitting than that the son should follow in the footsteps of an illustrious mother? If an American gentleman was worthy of a Princess, why not the other way about? Certainly Maud Blithers was as full of attributes as any man in America.

It appears that the Prince, after leisurely crossing the continent on his way around the world, had come to the Truxton Kings for a long-promised and much desired visit, the duration of which depended to some extent on his own inclinations, and not a little on the outcome of the war talk that affected two great European nations—Russia and Austria. Ever since the historic war between the Balkan allies and the Turks, in 1912 and 1913, there had been mutterings, and now the situation had come to be admittedly precarious. Mr. Blithers was in a position to know that the little principality over which the young man reigned was bound to be drawn into the cataclysm, not as a belligerent or an ally, but in the matter of a loan that inconveniently expired within the year and which would hardly be renewed by Russia with the prospect of vast expenditures of war threatening her treasury. The loan undoubtedly would be called and Graustark was not in a position to pay out of her own slender resources, two years of famine having fallen upon the people at a time when prosperity was most to be desired.

HE WAS in touch with the great financial movements in all the world's capitals, and he knew that retrenchment was the watchword. It would be no easy matter for the little principality to negotiate a loan at this particular time, nor was there even a slender chance that Russia would be benevolently disposed toward the debtors, no matter how small their obligations. They who owed would be called upon to pay; they who petitioned would be turned away with scant courtesy. It was the private opinion of Mr. Blithers that the young Prince and the trusted agents who accompanied him on his journey were in the United States solely for the purpose of arranging a loan through sources that could only be reached by personal appeal. But, naturally, Mr. Blithers couldn't breathe this to a soul. Under the circumstances he couldn't even breathe it to his wife, who, he firmly believed, was soulless.

But all this is beside the question. The young Prince of Graustark was enjoying American hospitality, and no matter what he owed to Russia, America owed to him its most punctilious consideration. If Mr. Blithers was to have anything to say about the matter, it would be for the ear of the Prince alone and not for the busybodies.

The main point is that the Prince was now rusticiating within what you might call a stone's throw of the capacious and lordly country residence of Mr. Blithers; moreover, he was an uncommonly attractive chap, with a laugh that was so charged with heartiness that it didn't seem possible that he could have a drop of royal blood in his vigorous young body. And the perfectly ridiculous part of the whole situation was that Mr. and Mrs. King lived in a modest, vine-covered little house that could have been lost in the servants' quarters at Blitherwood. Especially aggravating, too, was the attitude of the Kings. They were really nobodies, so to speak, and yet they blithely called their royal guest "Bobby" and allowed him to fetch and carry for their women folk quite as if he were an ordinary whipper-snapper up from the city to spend the week-end.

The remark with which Mr. Blithers introduces this chapter was in response to an oft-repeated declaration made by his wife in the shade of the red, white and blue awning of the terrace overlooking, from its despotie heights, the modest red roof of the King villa in the valley below. Mrs. Blithers merely had stated—but over and over

again—that money couldn't buy everything in the world, referring directly to social eminence and indirectly to their secret ambition to capture a Prince of the royal blood for their daughter Maud. She had preface this opinion, however, with the exceedingly irritating insinuation that Mr. Blithers was not in his right mind when he proposed inviting the Prince to spend a few weeks at Blitherwood, provided the young man could cut short his visit in the home of Mr. and Mrs. King, who, he had asseverated, were not in a position to entertain royalty as royalty was in the habit of being entertained.

Long experience had taught Mr. Blithers to read the lip and eye language with some degree of certainty, so by watching his wife's indignant face closely he was able to tell when she was succumbing to reason. He was a burly, domineering person who reasoned for everyone within range of his voice, and it was only when his wife became coldly sarcastic that he closed his ears and boomed his opinions into her very teeth, so to say, joyfully overwhelming her with facts which it were futile for her to attempt to deny. He was aware, quite as much so as if he had heard the words, that she was now saying:

"Well, there is absolutely no use arguing with you, Will. Have it your way if it pleases you."



"I will find the Golden Girl sitting at the roadside eager for me to come"

Eyeing her with some uneasiness, he cautiously inserted his thumbs in the armholes of his brocaded waistcoat, and proclaimed:

"As I said before, Lou, there isn't a foreign nobleman, from the Emperor down, who is above grabbing a few million dollars. They're all hard-up and what do they gain by marrying ladies of noble birth if said ladies are the daughters of noblemen who are as hard up as all the rest of 'em? Besides, hasn't Maud been presented at Court? Didn't you see to that? How about that pearl necklace I gave her when she was presented? Wasn't it the talk of the season? There wasn't a Duke in England who didn't figure the cost of that necklace to within a guinea or two. No girl ever had better advertising than —"

"We were speaking of Prince Robin," reminded his wife, with a slight shudder. Mrs. Blithers came of better stock than her husband. His gaucheries frequently set her teeth on edge. She was born in Providence and sometimes mentioned the occurrence when particularly desirous of squealing him, not unkindly, perhaps, but by way of making him realize that their daughter had good blood in her veins. Mr. Blithers had heard, in a roundabout way, that he first saw the light of day in Jersey City, although after he became famous Newark

claimed him. He did not bother about the matter.

"Well, he's like all the rest of them," said he, after a moment of indecision. Something told him that he really ought to refrain from talking about the cost of things, even in the bosom of his family. He had heard that only vulgarians speak of their possessions. "Now, there's no reason in the world why we shouldn't consider his offer. He —"

"Offer?" she cried aghast. "He has made no offer, Will. He doesn't even know that Maud is in existence. How can you say such a thing?"

"I was merely looking ahead, that's all. My motto is 'Look Ahead.' You know it as well as I do. Where would I be today if I hadn't looked ahead and seen what was going to happen before the other fellow had his eyes open? Will you tell me that? Where, I say? What's more, where would I be now if I hadn't looked ahead and seen what a marriage with the daughter of Judge Morton would mean to me in the long run?" He felt that he had uttered a very pretty and convincing compliment. "I never made a bad bargain in my life, Lou, and it wasn't guesswork when I married you. You, my dear old girl, you were the solid foundation on which I —"

"I know," she said wearily; "you've said it a thousand times: 'The foundation on which I built my temple of posterity'—yes, I know Will. But I am still unalterably opposed to making ourselves ridiculous in the eyes of Mr. and Mrs. King."

"Ridiculous? I don't understand you."

"Well, you will after you think it over," she said quietly, and he scowled in positive perplexity.

"Don't you think he'd be a good match for Maud?" he asked, after many minutes. He felt that he had thought it over.

"Are you thinking of kidnaping him, Will?" she demanded.

"Certainly not! But all you've got to do is to say that he's the man for Maud and I'll—I'll do the rest. That's the kind of a man I am, Lou. You say you don't want Count What's-His-Name,—that is, you don't want him as much as you did,—and you do say that it would be the greatest thing in the world if Maud could be the Princess of Grosstiek —"

"Graustark, Will."

"That's what I said. Well, if you want her to be the Princess of THAT, I'll see that she is, providing this fellow is a gentleman and worthy of her. The only Prince I ever knew was a damned rascal, and I'm going to be careful about this one. You remember that measly —"

"THERE is no question about Prince Robin," said she sharply.

"I suppose the only question is, how much will he want?"

"You mean—settlement?"

"Sure."

"Have you no romance in your soul, William Blithers?"

"I never believed in fairy stories," said he grimly. "And what's more, I don't take any stock in cheap novels in which American heroes go about marrying into royal families and all that sort of rot. It isn't done, Lou. If you want to marry into a royal family you've got to put up the coin."

"Prince Robin's mother, the poor Princess Yetive, married an American for love, let me remind you."

"Umph! Where is this Groostock anyway?"

"Somewhere east of the setting sun," she quoted. "You must learn to pronounce it."

"I never was good at foreign languages. By the way, where is Maud this afternoon?"

"Motoring."

He waited for additional information. It was not vouchsafed, so he demanded somewhat fearfully:

"Who with?"

"Young Seoville."

He scowled. "He's a loafer, Lou. No good in the world. I don't like the way you let —"

"He is of a very good family, my dear. I —"

"Is he—er—in love with her?"

"Certainly."

"Good Lord!"

"And why not? Isn't every one she meets in love with her?"

"I—I suppose so," he admitted sheepishly. His face brightened. "And there's no reason why this Prince shouldn't fall heels over head, is there? Well,