

and were standing very erect and soldierly a few yards away. "You know Miss Felton, of course."

"Delighted to meet you, Count," said Mr. Blithers, advancing with outstretched hand. He shook the hand of the lieutenant with a shade less energy. "Enjoying the game?"

"Immensely," said the Count. "It is rarely played so well."

Mr. Blithers affected a most *degagé* manner, squinting carelessly at the Prince.

"That young chap plays a nice game. Who is he?"

The two Graustarkians stiffened perceptibly, and waited for King to make the revelation to his visitor.

"That's Prince Robin of —" he began, but Mr. Blithers cut him short with a genial wave of the hand.

"Of course," he exclaimed, as if annoyed by his own stupidity. "I did hear that you were entertaining a Prince. Slipped my mind, however. Well, well, we're coming up in the world, eh? — having a real nabob among us." He hesitated for a moment. "But don't let me interrupt the game," he went on, as if expecting King to end the contest in order to present the Prince to him.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Blithers?" said Mrs. King. "Or would you prefer a more comfortable chair on the porch? We —"

"No, thanks, I'll stay here if you don't mind," said he hastily, and dragged up the camp chair that Lieutenant Dank had been occupying.

"Fetch another chair, Lucas," said King to the servant. "And another glass of lemonade for Miss Felton."

"FELTON?" queried Mr. Blithers, sitting down very carefully on the rather fragile chair, and hitching up his white flannel trousers at the knees to reveal a pair of purple socks, somewhat elementary in tone.

"We know your daughter, Mr. Blithers," said little Miss Nellie eagerly.

"I was just trying to remember —"

"We live across the road — over there in the little white house with the ivy —"

"— where I'd heard the name," proceeded Mr. Blithers, still looking at the Prince. "By jove, I should think my daughter and the Prince would make a rattling good match. I mean," he added, with a boisterous laugh, "a good match at tennis. We'll have to get 'em together some day, eh, up at Blitherwood. How long is the Prince to be with you, Mrs. King?"

"It's rather uncertain, Mr. Blithers," said she, and no more.

Mr. Blithers fanned himself in patience for a moment or two. Then he looked at his watch.

"Getting along toward dinner-time up our way," he ventured. Everybody seemed rather intent on the game, which was extremely one-sided.

"Good work!" shouted King as Fannie Felton managed to return an easy service.

Lieutenant Dank applauded vigorously. "Splendid!" he cried out. "Capitally placed!"

"They speak remarkably good English, don't they?" said Mr. Blithers in an audible aside to Mrs. King. "Beats the deuce how quickly they pick it up."

She smiled. "Officers in the Graustark army are required to speak English, French and German, Mr. Blithers."

"It's a good idea," said he. "Mand speaks French and Italian like a native. She was educated in Paris and Rome, you know. Fact is, she's lived abroad a great deal."

"Is she at home now, Mr. Blithers?"

"Depends on what you'd call home, Mrs. King. We've got so many I don't know just which is the real one. If you mean Blitherwood, yes, she's there. Course, there's our town house in Madison Avenue, the place at Newport, one at Nice and one at Pasadena — California, you know — and a little shack in London. By the way, my wife says you live quite near our place in New York."

"We live in Madison Avenue, but it's a rather long street, Mr. Blithers. Just where is your house?" she inquired, rather spitefully.

He looked astonished. "You surely must know where the Blithers' house is at —"

"Game!" shrieked Fannie Felton, tossing her racket in the air, a victor.

"They're through," said Mr. Blithers, in a tone of relief. He shifted his legs and put his hands on his knees, suggesting a readiness to arise on an instant's notice.

"Shall we try another set?" called out the Prince.

"Make it doubles," put in Lieutenant Dank, and turned to Nellie. "Shall we take them on?"

AND doubles it was, much to the disgust of Mr. Blithers. He sat through the nine games manifesting an interest he was far from feeling, and then — as dusk fell across the valley — arose expectantly with the cry of "game and set." He had discoursed freely on the relative merits of various motor cars, stoutly maintaining that the one he drove was without question the best in the market (in fact, there wasn't another "make" that he would have as a gift); the clubs he belonged to in New York were the only ones that were worth belonging to (he wouldn't be caught dead in any of the others); his tailor was the only tailor in the country who knew how to make a decent looking suit of clothes (the rest of them were "the limit"); the Pomeranian that he had given his daughter was the best dog of its breed in the world (he was looking at Mrs. King's Pomeranian as he made the remark); the tennis court at Blitherwood was pronounced by experts to be the finest they'd ever seen — and so on and so on, until the long-drawn-out set was ended.

To his utter amazement, at the conclusion of the game, the four players made a dash for the house without even so much as a glance in his direction. It was the Prince who shouted something that sounded like "now for a shower!" as he raced up the terrace, followed by the other participants.

Mr. Blithers said something violent under his breath, but resolutely retained his seat. It was King who glanced slyly at his watch this time, and subsequently shot a questioning look at his wife. She was frowning in considerable perplexity, and biting her firm red lips. Count Quinnox coolly arose and excused himself with the remark that he was off to dress for dinner. He also looked at his watch, which certainly was an act that one would hardly have expected of a diplomat.

"Well, well," said Mr. Blithers profoundly. Then he looked at his own watch — and settled back in his chair, a somewhat dogged expression about his jaws. He was not the man to be thwarted. "You certainly have a cozy little place here, King," he remarked after a

moment or two. There was an embarrassing silence.

"We like it," said King, twiddling his fingers behind his back. "Humble but homelike."

"Mrs. Blithers has been planning to come over for some time, Mrs. King. I told her she oughtn't to put it off — be neighborly, don't you know. That's me. I'm for being neighborly with my neighbors. But women, they — well, you know how it is, Mrs. King. Always something turning up to keep 'em from doing the things they want to do most. And Mrs. Blithers has so many sociable obli — I beg pardon?"



WAS just wondering if you would stay and have dinner with us, Mr. Blithers," said she, utterly helpless. She couldn't look her husband in the eye — and it was quite fortunate that she was unable to do so, for it would have resulted in a laughing duet that could never have been explained.

"Why," said Mr. Blithers, arising and looking at his watch again. "bless my soul, it is *past* dinner time, isn't it? I had no idea it was so late. 'Pon my soul, it's good of you, Mr. King. You see, we have dinner at seven up at Blitherwood, and — I declare it's half-past now. I don't see where the time has gone. Thanks, I will stay if you really mean to be kind to a poor old beggar. Don't do anything extra on my account, though, just your regular dinner, you know. No frills, if you please." He looked himself over in some uncertainty. "Will this rig of mine do?"

"We shan't notice it, Mr. Blithers," said she, and he turned the remark over in his mind several times as he walked beside her toward the house. Somehow it didn't sound just right to him, but for the life of him he couldn't tell why. "We are quite simple folk, you see," she went on desperately, making note of the fact that her husband lagged behind like the coward he was.

"Dinner's at half-past eight," she murmured by way of conclusion, and disappeared through the nearest door when they reached the veranda.

Mr. Blithers settled himself in the big porch chair and glowered at the shadowy hills on the opposite side of the valley. The little cottage of the Feltons came directly in his line of vision. He scowled more deeply than before. At the end of fifteen minutes he started up suddenly and, after a quick uneasy glance about him, started off across the lawn, walking more rapidly than was his wont.

He had remembered that his chauffeur was waiting for him with the car just around a bend in the road — and had been waiting for two hours or more.

"Go home," he said to the man. "Come back at twelve. And don't use the cut-out going up that hill, either."

Later on, he met the Prince. Very warmly he shook the tall young man's hand, — he even gave it a prophetic second squeeze, — and said: "I am happy to welcome you to the Catskills, Prince."

"Thank you," said Prince Robin.

CHAPTER IV. PROTECTING THE BLOOD.

"A MOST extraordinary person," said Count Quinnox to King, after Mr. Blithers had taken his departure, close upon the heels of the Feltons, who were being escorted home by the Prince and Dank. The venerable Graustarkian's heroic face was a study. He had just concluded a confidential hour in a remote corner of the library with the millionaire while the younger people were engaged in a noisy though temperate encounter with the roulette wheel at the opposite end of the room. "I've never met any one like him, Mr. King." He mopped his brow, and still looked a trifle dazed.

King laughed. "There's isn't any one like him, Count. He is the one and only Blithers."

"He is very rich?"

"Millions and millions," said Mrs. King. "Didn't he tell you how many?"

"I am not quite sure. This daughter of his — is she attractive?"

"Rather. Why?"

"He informed me that her dot would be twenty millions if she married the right man. Moreover, she is his only heir. 'Pon my soul, Mrs. King, he quite took my breath away when he announced that he knew all about our predicament in relation to the Russian loan. It really sounded quite — you might say significant. Does — does he imagine that — good heaven, it's almost stupefying!"



"Go home," he said to the man.
"Come back at twelve. And
don't use the cut-out going up
that hill, either."