

King smoked in silence for many seconds. There was a pucker of annoyance on his wife's fair brow as she stared reflectively through the window at the distant lights of Blitherwood, far up the mountain side.

"Sounds ominous to me," said King dryly. "Is Bobby for sale?"

The Count favored him with a look of horror. "My dear Mr. King!" Then as comprehension came, he smiled. "I see. No, he isn't for sale. He is a Prince, not a pawn. Mr. Blithers may be willing to buy but—" he proudly shook his head.

"He was feeling you out, however," said King, ruminating. "Planting the seed, so to speak."

"There is a rumor that she is to marry Count Lannet," said his wife. "A horrid creature. There was talk in the newspapers last winter of an Italian duke. Poor girl! From what I hear of her, she is rather a good sort, sensible and more genuinely American in her tastes than might be expected after her bringing-up. And she is pretty."

"How about this young Seoville, Rainie?"

"He's a nice boy, but—he'll never get her. She is marked up too high for him. He doesn't possess so much as the title to an acre of land."

"Extraordinary, the way you Americans go after our titles," said the Count good-naturedly.

"No more extraordinary than the way you Europeans go after our money," was her retort.

"I don't know which is the cheaper, titles or money in these days," said King. "I understand one can get a most acceptable duke for three or four millions, a nice marquis or count for half as much, and a Sir on tick." He eyed the Count speculatively. "Of course a prince of the royal blood comes pretty high."

"Pretty high," said the Count grimly. He seemed to be turning something over in his mind. "Your amazing Mr. Blithers further confided to me that he might be willing to take care of the Russian obligation for us if no one else turns up in time. As a matter of fact, without waiting for my reply, he said that he would have his lawyers look into the matter of security at once. I was somewhat dazed, but I think he said it would be no trouble at all for him to provide the money himself, and he would be glad to accommodate us if we had no other plan in mind. Amazing, amazing!"

"Of course, you told him it was not to be considered," said King sharply.

"I endeavored to do so, but I fear he did not grasp what I was saying. Moreover, I tried to tell him that it was a matter I was not at liberty to discuss. He didn't hear that, either."

"He is not in the habit of hearing any one but himself, I fear," said King.

"I am afraid poor Robin is in jeopardy," said his wife, ruefully. "The Bogieman is after him."

"Does the incomprehensible creature imagine—" began the Count loudly, and then found it necessary to pull his collar away from his throat as if to save himself from immediate strangulation.

"Mr. Blithers is not blessed with an imagination, Count," said she. "He doesn't imagine anything."

"If he should presume to insult our Prince by—" grated the old soldier, very red in the face and erect—"if he should presume to—" words failed him and an instant later he was laughing, but somewhat uncertainly, with his amused host and hostess.



MR. BLITHERS reached home in high spirits. His wife was asleep, but he awoke her without any ceremony.

"I say, Lou, wake up. Got some news for you. We'll have a prince in the family before you can say Jack Robinson."

She sat up in bed, blinking with dismay. "In heaven's name, Will, what have you been doing? What have you been—"

"Cutting bait," said he jovially. "In a day or two I'll throw the hook in, and you'll see what I land. He's as good as caught right now, but we'll let him nibble a while before we jerk. And say, he's a corker, Lou. Finest young fellow I've seen in many a day. He—"

"You don't mean to say that you—you actually said anything to him about—about—Oh, my Lord, Will, don't tell me that you were crazy enough to—" cried the poor woman, almost in tears.

"Now cool down, cool down," he broke in soothingly. "I'm no fool, Lou. Trust me to do the fine work in a case like this. Sow the right kind of seeds and you'll get results every time. I merely

dropped a few hints, that's all,—and in the right direction, believe me. Count Equinox will do the rest. I'll bet my head we'll have this prince running after Maud so—"

"What did you say?" she demanded. There was a fine moisture on her upper lip. He sat down on the edge of the bed and talked for half an hour without interruption. When he came to the end of his oration, she turned over with her face to the wall and fairly sobbed: "What will the Kings think of us? What will they think?"

"Who the dickens cares what the Kings think?" he roared, perfectly aghast at the way she took it. "Who are the Kings? Tell me that! who are they?"

"I—I can't bear to talk about it. Go to bed."

HE WIPED his brow helplessly. "You beat anything I've ever seen. What's the matter with you? Don't you want this prince for Maud? Well, then, what the deuce are you crying about? You said you wanted him, didn't you? Well, I'm going to get him. If I say I'll do a thing, you can bet your last dollar I'll do it. That's the kind of a man William W. Blithers is. You leave it to me. There's only one way to land these foreign noblemen, and I'm—"

She faced him once more, and angrily. "Listen to me," she said. "I've had a talk with Maud. She has gone to bed with a splitting headache, and I'm not surprised. Don't you suppose the poor child has a particle of pride? She guessed at once just what you had gone over there for, and she cried her eyes out. Now she declares she will never be able to look the Prince in the face, and as for the Kings—Oh, it's sickening. Why can't you leave these things to me? You go about like a bull in a china shop. You might at least have waited until the poor child had an opportunity to see the man before rushing in with your talk about money. She—"

"Confound it, Lou, don't blame me for everything. We all three agreed at lunch that he was a better bargain than this measly count we've been considering. Maud says she won't marry the count, anyhow, and she did say that if this prince was all that he's cracked up to be, she wouldn't mind being the Princess of Groostock. You can't deny that, Lou. You heard her say it. You—"

"She didn't say Groostock," said his wife shortly. "And you forget that she said she wouldn't promise anything until she'd met him and decided whether she liked him."

"She'll like him all right," said he confidently.

"She will refuse to even meet him, if she hears of your silly blunder tonight."

"Refuse to meet him?" gasped Mr. Blithers.

"I may be able to reason with her, Will, but—she's stubborn, as well you know. I'm afraid you've spoiled everything."

His face brightened. Lowering his voice to a half-whisper, he said: "We needn't tell her what I said to that old chap, Lou. Just let her think I sat around like a gump and never said a word to anybody. We can—"

"But she'll pin you down, Will, and you know you can't lie with a straight face."

"Maybe—maybe I'd better run down to New York for a few days," he muttered unhappily. "You can square it better than I can."

"In other words, I can lie with a straight face," she said ironically.

"I never thought she'd balk like this," said he, ignoring the remark.

"I fancy you'd better go to New York," she said mercilessly.

"I've got business there anyhow," muttered he. "I—I think I'll go before she's up in the morning."

"You can save yourself a bad hour or two if you leave before breakfast," said she levelly.

"Get around her some way, Lou," he pleaded. "Tell her I'm sorry I had to leave so early, and—and that I love her better than anything on earth, and that I'll be back the end of the week. If—if she wants anything in New York, just have her wire me. You say she cried?"

"She did, and I don't blame her."

Mr. Blithers scowled. "Well—well, you see if you can do any better than I did. Arrange it somehow for them to meet. She'll—she'll like him and then—by George! she'll thank both of us for the interest we take in her future. It wouldn't surprise me if she fell in love with him right off the reel. And you may be sure he'll fall in love with her. He can't help it. The knowledge that she'll have fifty millions some day won't have anything to do with his feeling for her, once he—"

"Don't mention the word millions again, Will Blithers."

"All right," said he, more humbly than he knew. "But listen to this, old girl; I'm going to get this prince for her if it's the last act of my life. I never failed in anything and I won't fail in this."

"Well, go to bed, dear, and don't worry. I may be able to undo the mischief. It—it isn't hope-

less, of course."

"I'll trust you, Lou, to do your part. Count on me to do mine when the time comes. And I still insist that I have sowed the right sort of seed tonight. You'll see. Just wait."

Sure enough, Mr. Blithers was off for New York soon after daybreak the next morning, and with him went a mighty determination to justify himself before the week was over. His wily brain was working as it had never worked before.

TWO DAYS later, Count Quinox received a message from New York bearing the distressing information that the two private banking institutions on which he had been depending for aid in the hour of trouble had decided that it would be impossible for them to make the loan under consideration. The financial agents who had been operating in behalf of the Graustark government confessed that they were unable to explain the sudden change of heart on the part of the bankers, inasmuch as the negotiations practically had been closed with them. The decision of the directors was utterly incomprehensible under the circumstances.

Vastly disturbed, Count Quinox took the first train to New York, accompanied by Truxton King, who was confident that outside influences had been brought to bear upon the situation, influence inimical to Graustark. Both were of the opinion that Russia had something to do with it, although the negotiations had been conducted with all the secrecy permissible in such cases.

"We may be able to get to the banks through Blithers," said King.

"How could he possibly be of assistance to us?" the Count inquired.

"He happens to be a director in both concerns, besides being such a power in the financial world that his word is almost law when it comes to the big deals."

All the way down to the city Count Quinox was thoughtful, even pre-occupied. They were nearing the Terminal when he leaned over and, laying his hand on King's knee, said, after a long interval of silence between them:

"I suppose you know (Continued on Page 14)



Spring Night

By Bliss Carman

IN THE wondrous star-sown night,
In the first sweet warmth of Spring,
I lie awake and listen
To hear the glad earth sing.

I HEAR the brook in the wood
Murmuring, as it goes,
The song of the happy journey
Only the wise heart knows.

I HEAR the brachian note
Of the tree-frog under the hill,
And the clear and watery treble
Of his brother silvery shrill.

AND then I wander away
Through the mighty forest of Sleep,
To follow the fairy music
To the shore of an endless deep.