

# The PRINCE of GRAUSTARK

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"If they order her to marry a title, she'll do it," Mrs. King remarked. "What are you talking about? It's your shot," replied Prince Robin.

**R**ETROSPECTIVE—Prince Robin of Graustark, traveling about the world, arrives in the Catskills to visit the Truxton Kings. W. W. Blithers, self-made multimillionaire and doting father of an only daughter, Maud, prematurely decides on the Prince as a son-in-law. He knows that Graustark is financially embarrassed as a result of the Balkan wars, and with the Blithers millions in mind he confides his domestic ambition to his wife. Blithers calls at the King villa and meets the Prince. He decides to lend Graustark \$16,000,000, and departs for New York to confer with Count Quinnox, the Graustark Minister of War.

## CHAPTER V.

### PRINCE ROBIN IS ASKED TO STAND UP.



**L**ATE the same evening, Prince Robin, at Red Roof, received a long distance telephone communication from New York City. The Count was on the wire. He imparted the rather startling news that William W. Blithers had volunteered to take care of the loan out of his own private means! Quinnox was cabling the Prime Minister for advice and would remain in New York for further conference with the capitalist, who, it was to be assumed, would want time to satisfy himself as to the stability of Graustark's resources.

Robin was jubilant. The thought had not entered his mind that there could be anything sinister in this amazing proposition of the great financier.

If Count Quinnox himself suspected Mr. Blithers of an ulterior motive, the suspicion was rendered doubtful by the evidence of sincerity on the part of the

capitalist, who professed no sentiment in the matter but insisted on the most complete indemnification by the Graustark government. Even King was impressed by the absolute fairness of the proposition. Mr. Blithers demanded no more than the banks were asking in the shape of indemnity; a first lien mortgage for twelve years on all properties owned and controlled by the government and the deposits of all bonds held by the people with the understanding that the interest would be paid regularly, less a small per cent as commission. His protection would be complete,—for the people of Graustark owned fully four-fifths of the bonds issued by the government for the construction of public service institutions; these by consent of Mr. Blithers were to be limited to three utilities: railroads, telegraph and canals. These properties, as Mr. Blithers was by way of knowing, were absolutely sound and self-supporting. According to his investigators in London and Berlin, they were as solid as Gibraltar and not in need of one-tenth the protection required by the famous rock.

Robin inquired whether he was to come to New York at once in relation to the matter, and was informed that it would not be necessary at present. In fact, Mr. Blithers preferred to let the situation remain in *statu quo*, (as he expressed it to the Count), until it was determined whether the people were willing to deposit their bonds, a condition which was hardly worth while worrying about in view of the fact that they had already signified their readiness to present them for security in the original proposition to the banks. Mr. Blithers, however, would give himself the pleasure of calling upon the Prince at Red Roof later in the week, when the situation could be discussed over a dish of tea or a cup of lemonade. That is precisely the way Mr. Blithers put it.

**T**HE NEXT afternoon Mrs. Blithers left cards at Red Roof—or rather, the footman left them—and on the day following the Kings and their guests received invitations to a ball at Blitherwood on the ensuing Friday, but four days off. While Mrs. King and the two young men were discussing the invitation the former was called to the telephone. Mrs. Blithers herself was speaking.

"I hope you will pardon me for calling you up, Mrs. King, but I wanted to be sure that you can come on the seventeenth. We want so much to have the Prince and his friends with us. Mr. Blithers has taken a great fancy to Prince Robin and Count Quinnox, and he declares the whole affair will be a fiasco if they are not to be here."

"It is good of you to ask us, Mrs. Blithers. The Prince is planning to leave for Washington within the next few days, and I fear—"

"Oh, you must prevail upon him to remain over, my dear Mrs. King. We are to have a lot of people

up from Newport and Tuxedo—you know the crowd—it's the *real* crowd—and I'm sure he will enjoy meeting them. Mr. Blithers has arranged for a special train to bring them up—a train de luxe, you may be sure, both as to equipment and occupant. Zabo's orchestra, too. A notion seized us last night to give the ball, which accounts for the short notice. It's the way we do everything—on a minute's notice. I think they're jollier if one doesn't go through the agony of a month's preparation, don't you? Nearly every one has wired acceptance, so we're sure to have a lot of nice people. Loads of girls,—you know the ones I mean,—and Mr. Blithers is trying to arrange a sparring match between those two great prize-fighters,—you know the ones, Mrs. King,—just to give us poor women a chance to see what a real man looks like in—I mean to say, what marvelous specimens they are, don't you know. Now please tell the Prince that he positively cannot afford to miss a real sparring match. Every one is terribly excited over it, and naturally we are keeping it very quiet. Won't it be a lark? My daughter thinks it's terrible, but she is flincky. One of them is a negro, isn't he?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"You can imagine how splendid they must be when I tell you that Mr. Blithers is afraid they won't come up for less than fifteen thousand dollars. Isn't it ridiculous?"

"Perfectly," said Mrs. King.

"Of course, we shall insist on the Prince receiving with us. He is our *pièce de résistance*. You—"

"I'm sure it will be awfully jolly, Mrs. Blithers. What did you say?"