

"I beg pardon?"

"I'm sorry. I was speaking to the Prince. He just called up stairs to me."

"What does he say?"

"It was really nothing. He was asking about Hobbs."

"Hobbs? Tell him, please, that if he has any friends he would like to have invited we shall be only too proud to —"

"Oh, thank you! I'll tell him."

"You must not let him go away before —"

"I shall try my best, Mrs. Blithers. It is awfully kind of you to ask us to —"

"You must all come up to dinner either tomorrow night or the night after. I shall be so glad if you will suggest anything that can help us to make the ball a success. You see, I know how terribly clever you are, Mrs. King."

"I am dreadfully stupid."

"Nonsense!"

"I'm sorry to say we're dining out tomorrow night and on Thursday we are having some people here for —"

"Can't you bring them all up to Blitherwood? We'd be delighted to have them, I'm sure."

"I'm afraid I couldn't manage it. They — well, you see, they are in mourning."

"Oh, I see. Well, perhaps Maud and I could run in and see you for a few minutes tomorrow or next day, just to talk things over a little — what's that, Maud? I beg your pardon, Mrs. King. Ahem! Well, I'll call you up tomorrow, if you don't mind being bothered about a silly old ball. Good-by. Thank you so much."

MRS. KING confronted Robin in the lower hall a few seconds later and roundly berated him for shouting up the steps that Hobbs ought to be invited to the ball. Prince Robin rolled on a couch and roared with delight. Lieutenant Dank, as became an officer of the Royal Guard, stood at attention — in the bow window with his back to the room, very red about the ears and rigid to the bursting point.

"I suppose, however, we'll have to keep on the good side of the Blithers' syndicate," said Robin soberly, after his mirth had subsided before her wrath. "Good Lord, Aunt Lorraine, I simply cannot go up there and stand in line like a freak in a side show for all the ladies and girls to gape at. I'll get sick the day of the party, that's what I'll do, and you can tell 'em how desolated I am over my misfortune."

"They've got their eyes on you, Bobby," she said flatly. "You can't escape so easily as all that. If you're not very, very careful they'll have you married to the charming Miss Maud before you can say Jack Rabbit."

"Think that's their idea?"

"Unquestionably."

He stretched himself lazily. "Well, it may be that she's the very one I'm looking for, Auntie. Who knows?"

"You silly boy!"

"She may be the Golden Girl in every sense of the term," said he lightly.

"You say she's pretty?"

"My notion of beauty and yours may not agree at all."

"That's not an answer."

"Well, I consider her to be a very good-looking girl."

"Blonde?"

"Mixed. Light brown hair and very dark eyes and lashes. A little taller than I, more graceful and a splendid horse-woman. I've seen her riding."

"Astride?"

"No. I've seen her in a ball gown, too. Most men think she's stunning."

"Well, let's have a game of billiards," said he, dismissing Maud in a way that would have caused the proud Mr. Blithers to reel with indignation.

A little later on, at the billiard table, Mrs. King remarked, apropos of nothing and quite out of a clear sky, so to speak:

"And she'll do anything her parents command her to do, that's the worst of it."

"What are you talking about? It's your shot."

"If they order her to marry a title, she'll do it. That's the way she's been brought up, I'm afraid."

"Meaning Maud?"

"Certainly. Who else? Poor thing, she hasn't a chance in the world, with that mother of hers."

"Shoot, please. Mark up six for me, Dank."

"Wait till you see her, Bobby."

"All right. I'll wait," said he cheerfully.

The next day Count Quinnox and King returned from the city, coming up in a private car with Mr. Blithers himself.

"I'll have Maud drive me over this afternoon," said Mr. Blithers, as they parted at the station.

But Maud did not drive him over that afternoon. The pride, joy and hope of the Blithers family flatly refused to be a party to any such arrangement, and set out for a horse-back ride in a direction that took her as far away from Red Roof as possible.

"What's come over the girl?" demanded Mr. Blithers, completely nonplussed. "She's never acted like this before, Lou."

"Some silly notion about being made a laughing-stock of, I gather," said his wife. "Heaven knows I've talked to her till I'm utterly worn out. She says she won't be bullied into even meeting the Prince, much less marrying him. I've never known her to be so pig-headed. Usually I can make her see things in a sensible way. She would have married the duke, I'm sure, if — if you hadn't put a stop to it on account of his so-called habits. She —"

"Well, it's turned out for the best, hasn't it? Isn't a prince better than a duke?"

"You've said all that before, Will. I wanted her to run down with me this morning to talk the ball over with Mrs. King, and what do you think happened?"

"She wouldn't go?"

"Worse than that. She wouldn't let me go. Now, things are coming to a pretty pass when —"

"Never mind. I'll talk to her," said Mr. Blithers, somewhat bleakly despite his confident front. "She loves her old dad. I can do anything with her."

"She's on a frightfully high horse lately," sighed Mrs. Blithers fretfully. "It — it can't be that young Seoville, can it?"

"If I thought it was, I'd — I'd —" There is no telling what Mr. Blithers would have done to young Seoville, at the moment, for he couldn't think of anything dire enough to inflict upon the suspected meddler.

"In any event, it's dreadfully upsetting to me, Will. She — she won't listen to anything. And here's something else: She declares she won't stay here for the ball on Friday night."

MR. BLITHERS had her repeat it, and then almost missed the chair in sitting down, he was so precipitous about it.

"Won't stay for her own ball?" he bellowed.

"She says it isn't her ball," lamented his wife.

"If it isn't hers, in the name of God whose is it?"

"Ask her, not me," flared Mrs. Blithers. "And don't glare at me like that. I've had nothing but glares since you went away. I thought I was doing the very nicest thing in the world when I suggested the ball. It would bring them together —"

"The only two it will actually bring together, it seems, are those damned prize-fighters. They'll get together all right, but what good is it going to do us, if Maud's going to act like this? See here, Lou, I've got things fixed so that the Prince of Groostuck can't very well do anything but ask Maud to —"

"That's just it!" she exclaimed. "Maud sees

through the whole arrangement, Will. She said last night that she wouldn't be at all surprised if you offered to assume Graustark's debt to Russia in order to —"

"That's just what I've done, old girl," said he in triumph. "I'll have 'em sewed up so tight by next week that they can't move without asking me to loosen the strings. And you can tell Maud once more for me that I'll get this Prince for her if —"

"But she doesn't want him!"

"She doesn't know what she wants!" he roared. "Where is she going?"

"You saw her start off on Katydid, so why —"

"I mean on the day of the ball."

"To New York."

"By gad, I'll — I'll see about that," he grated. "I'll see that she doesn't leave the grounds if I have to put guards at every gate. She's got to be reasonable. What does she think I'm putting sixteen millions into the Graustark treasury for! She's got to stay here for the ball. Why, it would be a crime for her to — but what's the use of talking about it! She'll be here and she'll lead the grand march with the Prince. I've got it all —"

"Well, you'll have to talk to her. I've done all that I can do. She swears she won't marry a man she's never seen."

"Ain't we trying to show him to her?" he snorted. "She won't have to marry" (Continued on Page 8)



COME TO ME, my children, daughters of men, sons of women, for I, The Sea, have gifts for you all!

Come, sweating toilers, from dark dens in cities. Seek me out where you can find me alone, and enter into my arms. Smoke and dust I can rinse from you. I can brace your muscles and cause you to breathe deep; I can steep you in strength. I will grant you to be clear-eyed and confident once more, and when you return, brave with my valor, perhaps you will be able to defy evil.

Come to me, also, you who are pampered in palaces, for I am a good democrat. I can entertain you more generously than your friends. For I can exalt you in your own eyes, lifting the gentleman into the man, and the lady into the woman. I have no warmed and perfumed luxury for you. As I always have been so am I now — cool, sane, elemental. Elegance and ennui I shall most assuredly banish. But your chalky pallor shall blush ruddy when I have caressed you. The lines about your lips shall betoken resolution which you shall wrest from me.

Come to me, old people, who have grown weary, and rest near to me. We are comrades together, for I am very old. Touch my wet rocks with withered fingers, tenderly; shake your gray locks loose where the sun shines upon my sands, for I am yours and you are mine. Listen to me, for I sing you songs of the Infinite.

Come to me, you who are lovers, for I am the deepest and most inclusive lover. In me were the beginnings of life and the earliest promptings and choosings of love. I teem with multitudes brought near together. Mine are lustiness and rapture and the storms that glorify the race.

And O, you little ones, come to me. I offer you my hard sandy beaches, my glistening pebbles, my seaweeds and my shells for your pleasure. Perhaps for you are the greatest of all my gifts. Of you would I make poised, fair-minded women, and gentle, firm-willed men, a race too gay for crime and insanity. Dive into me, splash merrily, swim lustily.

Come to me, my children, for I am the struggle of the brave who will conquer or die. I am the going and coming of the great. I am health and prowess and achievement!

