

"I can only assure you, sir, that Graustark is in a position to indemnify you against any possible chance of loss. You will be amply secured. I take it that you are not coming to our assistance through any desire to be philanthropic, but as a business proposition, pure and simple. At least, that is how we regard the matter. Am I not right?"

"Perfectly," said Mr. Blithers. "I haven't got sixteen millions to throw away. Still I don't see that that has anything to do with my request that you be present at the conference tonight. To be perfectly frank with you, I don't like working in the dark. You have the power to veto, as you say. Well, if I am to lend Groostork a good many millions of hard-earned dollars, I certainly don't relish the idea that you may take it into your head to upset the whole transaction merely because you have not had the matter presented to you by me instead of by your cabinet, competent as its members may be. First hand information on any subject is my notion of simplicity."

"The integrity of the cabinet is not to be questioned, Mr. Blithers. Its members have never failed Graustark in any —"

"I beg your pardon, Prince," said Mr. Blithers firmly, "but I certainly suspect that they failed her when they contracted this debt to Russia. You will forgive me for saying it, but it was the most asinine bit of shortsightedness I've ever heard of. My office boys could have seen farther than your honorable ministers."

TO his utter astonishment, Robin turned a pair of beaming, excited eyes upon him.

"Do you really mean that, Mr. Blithers?" he cried eagerly.

"I certainly do!"

"By Jove, I — I can't tell you how happy I am to hear you say it. You see it is exactly what John Tullis said from the first. He was bitterly opposed to the loan. He tried his best to convince the prime minister that it was inadvisable. I granted him the special privilege of addressing the full House of Nobles on the question, an honor that no alien had known up to that time. Of course, I was a boy when all this happened, Mr. Blithers, or I might have put a stop to the — but I'll not go into that. The House of Nobles went against his judgment and voted in favor of accepting Russia's loan. Now they realize that dear old John Tullis was right. Somehow it gratifies me to hear you say that they were — ahem! short-sighted."

"What you need in Groostock is a little more good American blood," announced Mr. Blithers, pointedly. "If you are going to cope with the world, you've got to tackle the job with brains and not with that idiotic thing called faith. There's no such thing in these days as charity among men, good will, and all that nonsense. Now, you've got a splendid start in the right direction, Prince. You've got American blood in your veins and that means a good deal. Take my advice and increase the proportion. In a couple of generations you'll have something to brag about. Take Tullis as your example. Beget sons that will think and act as he is capable of doing. Weed out the thin blood and give the crown of Grasstiek something that is thick and red. It will be the making of your —"

"I suppose you are advising me to marry an American woman, Mr. Blithers," said Robin drily.

Mr. Blithers directed a calculating squint into the tree-tops. "I am simply looking ahead for my own protection, Prince," said he.

"In what respect?"

"Well, I am putting a lot of money into the hands of your people. Isn't it natural that I should look ahead to some extent?"

"But my people are honest. They will pay."

"I understand all that, but at the

same time I do not relish the idea of some day being obliged to squeeze blood from a turnip. Now is the time for you to think for the future. Your people are honest, I'll grant. But they also are poor. And why? Because no one has been able to act for them as your friend Tullis is capable of acting. The day will come when they will have to settle with me, and will it be any easier to pay William W. Blithers than to pay Russia? Not a bit of it. As you have said, I am not a philanthropist. I shall exact full and prompt payment. I prefer to collect from the prosperous, however, and not from the poor. It goes against the grain. That's why I want to see you rich and powerful — as well as honest."

"I grant you it is splendid philosophy," said Robin. "But are you not forgetting that even the best of Americans are sometimes failures when it comes to laying up treasure?"

"As individuals, yes; but not as a class. You will not deny that we are the richest people in the world. On the other hand I do not pretend to say that we are a people of one strain of blood. We represent a mixture of many strains, but underneath them all runs the full stream that makes us what we are: Americans. You can't get away from that. Yes, I do advise you to marry an American girl."

"In other words, I am to make a business of it," said Robin tolerantly.

"It isn't beyond the range of possibility that you should fall in love with an American girl, is it? You wouldn't call that making a business of it, would you?"

"You may rest assured, Mr. Blithers, that I shall marry to please myself and no one else," said Robin, regarding him with a coldness that for an instant affected the millionaire uncomfortably.

"Well," said Mr. Blithers, after a moment of hard thinking, "it may interest you to know that I married for love."

"It does interest me," said Robin. "I am glad that you did."

"I was a comparatively poor man when I married. The girl I married was well-off in her own right. She had brains as well. We worked together to lay the foundations for a — well, for the fortune we now possess. A fortune, I may add, that is to go, every dollar of it, to my daughter. It represents nearly five hundred million dollars. The greatest king in the world today is poor in comparison to that vast estate. My daughter will one day be the richest woman in the world."

"Why are you taking the pains to enlighten me as to your daughter's future, Mr. Blithers?"

"Because I regard you as a sensible young man, Prince."

"Thank you. And I suppose you regard your daughter as a sensible young woman?"

"Certainly!" exploded Mr. Blithers.

"Well, it seems to me, she will be capable of taking care of her fortune a great deal more successfully than you imagine, Mr. Blithers. She will doubtless marry an excellent chap who has the capacity to increase her fortune, rather than to leave it stand at a figure that some day may be surpassed by the possessions of an ambitious king."

THERE was fine irony in the Prince's tone but no trace of offensiveness. Nevertheless, Mr. Blithers turned a shade more purple than before, and not from the violence of exercise. He was having some difficulty in controlling his temper. What manner of fool was this fellow who could sneer at five hundred million dollars? He managed to choke back something that rose to his lips and very politely remarked:

"I am sure you will like her, Prince. If I do say it myself, she is as handsome as they grow."

"So I have been told."

"You will see her tonight."



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