

The Prince of Graustark

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seventeen and just over being fatuously in love with his middle-aged instructor in French.

The Prince of Dawsbergen dispatched an embassy of noblemen to assure his neighbor that the match would be highly acceptable to him and that in proper season the betrothal might be announced. But alack! both courts overlooked the fact that there was independent American blood in the two young people. Neither the Prince of Graustark nor the Crown Princess of Dawsbergen, whose mother was a Miss Beverly Calhoun of Virginia, was disposed to listen to the voice of expediency; in fact, at a safe distance of three or four hundred miles, the youngsters figuratively turned up their noses at each other and frankly confessed that they hated each other and wouldn't be bullied into getting married, no matter what anybody said, or something of the sort.

"S'pose I'm going to say I'll marry a girl I've never seen?" demanded seventeen-year-old Robin, full of wrath. "Not I, my lords, I'm going to look about a bit, if you don't mind. The world is full of girls, I'll marry the one I happen to want or I'll not marry at all."

"But, Highness," they protested, "you must listen to reason. There must be a successor to the throne of Graustark. You would not have the name die with you. The young Princess is—"

"Is fifteen, you say," he interrupted loftily. "Come around in ten years and we'll talk it over again. But I'm not going to pledge myself to marry a child in short frocks, name or no name. Is she pretty?"

The lords did not know. They had not seen the young lady.

"If she is pretty you'd be sure to know it, my lords, so we'll assume she isn't. I saw her when she was three years old, and she certainly was a fright when she cried, and, my lords, she cried all the time. No, I'll not marry her. Be good enough to say to the Prince of Dawsbergen that I'm very much obliged to him, but it's quite out of the question."

AND the fifteen-year-old Crown Princess, four hundred miles away, coolly informed her doting parents that she was tired of being a Princess anyway and very much preferred marrying some one who lived in a cottage. In fine, she stamped her little foot and said she'd jump into the river before she'd marry the Prince of Graustark.

"But he's a very handsome, adorable boy," began her mother.

"And half-American just as you are, my child," put in her father encouragingly. "Nothing could be more suitable than—"

"I don't intend to marry anybody until I'm thirty at least, so that ends it, daddy,—I mean, your poor old highness."

"Naturally we do not expect you to be married before you are out of short frocks, my dear," said Prince Dantant stiffly. "But a betrothal is quite another thing. It is customary to arrange these marriages years before—"

"Is Prince Robin in love with me?"

"I—ahem!—that's a very silly question. He hasn't seen you since you were a baby. But he will be in love with you, never fear."

"He may be in love with some one else, for all we know, so where do I come in?"

"Come in?" gasped her father.

"She's part American, dear," explained the mother, with her prettiest smile.

"Besides," said the Crown Princess, with finality, "I'm not even going to be engaged to a man I've never seen. And if you insist, I'll run away as sure as anything."

And so the matter rested. Five years have passed since the initial

overtures were made by the two courts, and although several sly attempts were made to bring the young people to a proper understanding of their case, they aroused nothing more than scornful laughter on the part of the belligerents, as the venerable Baron Dangloss was wont to call them, not without pride in his sharp old voice.

"It all comes from mixing the blood," said the Prime Minister gloomily.

"Or improving it," said the Baron, and was frowned upon.

And no one saw the portentous shadow cast by the slim daughter of William W. Blithers, for the simple reason that neither Graustark nor Dawsbergen knew that it existed. They lived in serene ignorance of the fact that God, while He was about it, put Maud Applegate Blithers into the world on precisely the same day that the Crown Princess of Dawsbergen first saw the light of day.

On the twenty-second anniversary of his birth, Prince Robin fared forth in quest of love and romance, not without hope of adventure, for he was a valorous chap with the heritage of warriors in his veins. Said he to himself in dreamy contemplation of the long journey ahead of him: "I will traverse the great highways that my mother trod and I will look for the Golden Girl sitting by the wayside. She must be there, and though it is a wide world, I am young and my eyes are sharp. I will find her sitting at the roadside eager for me to come, not housed in a gloomy castle surrounded by the spooks of a hundred ancestors. They who live in castles wed to hate and they who wed at the roadside live to love. Fortune attend me! If love lies at the roadside waiting, do not let me pass it by. All the princesses are not inside the castles. Some sit outside the gates and laugh with glee, for love is their companion. So away I go, la la! looking for the princess with the happy heart and the smiling lips! It is a wide world but my eyes are sharp. I shall find my princess."

BUT, alas, for his fine young dream he found no Golden Girl at the roadside nor anything that suggested romance. There were happy hearts and smiling lips—and all for him, it would appear—but he passed them by, for his eyes were sharp and his wits awake. And so, at last, he came to Gotham, his heart as free as the air he breathed, confessing that his quest had been in vain.

"Well, I had the fun of looking," he philosophized (to himself, for no man knew of his secret project) and grinned with a sort of amused tolerance for the sentimental side of his nature. "I'm a silly ass to have even dreamed of finding her as I passed along, and if I had found her what the deuce could I have done about it anyway? This isn't the day for mediaeval lady-snatching. I daresay I'm just as well off for not having found her. I still have the zest for hunting farther, and there's a lot in that." Then aloud: "Hobbs, are we on time?"

"We are, sir," said Hobbs, without even glancing at his watch. The train was passing One Hundred and Twenty-fifth street. "To the minute, sir. We will be in in ten minutes, if nothing happens, sir. Mr. King will be at the station to meet you, sir. Any orders, sir?"

"Yes, pinch me, Hobbs."

"Pinch your Highness?" in amazement. "My word, sir, wot—"

"I just want to be sure that the dream is over, Hobbs. Never mind. You needn't pinch me. I'm awake," and to prove it he stretched his fine young body in the ecstasy of relaxation.

That night he slept soundly in the Catskills.

(Continued in our next issue.)



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