

TRUXTON KING

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SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I—Truxton King arrives in Edelweiss, capital of Graustark, and meets the beautiful niece of Spantz, a gunmaker. II—King does a favor for Prince Robin, the young ruler of the county, whose guardian is John Tullis, an American. III—Baron Dangle, minister of police, interviews King and warns him against Olga, the gunmaker's niece. IV—King invades the royal park, meets the prince and is presented to the lad's fascinating Aunt Loraine.

and imperious and that these were diamonds in her cheeks so flaming that he could not gather sufficient strength of purpose to withdraw his gaze from them. Of course he did not see them at the outset. She was so smiling, so how could he?

The prince came to the rescue. "This is my Aunt Loraine, Mr.—Mr."—He swallowed hard and looked helplessly. "King," supplied Truxton—Truxton, King, your highness." Then, with all the courage he could produce, he said to the beautiful lady: "I'm as guilty as he. See!" He pointed respectfully to four

the castle, King toward the gates, somewhat dazed and by no means sure of his senses.

CHAPTER V. THE COMMITTEE OF TEN.

It has been said before that Truxton King was the unsuspecting object of interest to two sets of watchers. The fact that he was under the surveillance of the government police is not surprising when we consider the evident thoroughness of that department, but that he should be continually watched by persons of a more sinister cast suggests a mystery which can be cleared up by visiting a certain underground room known to the police as the two blocks from the Tower of Graustark.

There were two ways of reaching this windowless room, with its low ceilings and dank airs. If one had the secret in his possession he could go down through the mysterious trapdoor in the workshop of William Spantz, armorer of the crown, or he might come up through a hidden aperture in the walls of the great government sewer which ran directly parallel with and far below the walls of the quaint old building. One could take his choice of direction in approaching this hole in the huge sewer—he could come up from the river, half a mile away, or he could come down from the hills above if he had the courage to drop through one of the intakes.

It is of special significance that the trapdoor in Spantz's workshop was reserved for use by the armorer and his more fastidious comrades, of whom three were women and one an established functionary in the royal household.

The committee of ten represented the brains and the activity of a rabid coterie in Edelweiss, among themselves styled the Party of Equals. In plain language, they were "reds."

The nominal leader was William Spantz, he who had a son in the prince's household, Julius Spantz, the master of arms. Far off in the hills above the Danube there lived the real leader of this deadly group—the Iron Count Marlaux, exile from the land of his birth, hated and execrated by every loyal Graustarkian, hating and execrating in return with a tenfold greater venom.

Olga Platanova was the latest acquisition to this select circle. A word concerning her: She was the daughter of Professor Platanova, one time oculist and sociologist in a large German university. He had been one of the most brilliant men in Europe and a member of a noble family. Less than a year before the opening of this tale he was executed for treason and conspiracy against the empire.

His daughter, Olga, was recognized as one of the most beautiful and cultured young women in Warsaw. Her suitors seemed to be without number. Finally there came one who conquered and was beloved. He was the son of a mighty duke, a prince of the blood. The young prince pledged himself to marry her despite all opposition; he was ready to give up his noble inheritance for the sake of love. The all powerful ruler of an empire learned of this proposed mesalliance and was horrified. The will of the crown was made known to him and—he obeyed. Olga Platanova was cast aside, but not forgotten. He became the husband of an unloved, scrawny lady of diadems. When the situation became more than he could bear he blew out his brains.

When Olga heard the news of his death she was not stricken by grief. She cried out her joy to a now cloudless sky, for he had justified the great love that had been theirs and would be theirs to the end of time.

From a passive believer in the doctrines of her father and his circle she became at once their most impassioned exponent. She threw herself, heart and soul into the deliberations and transactions of the great red circle; her father understood and yet was amazed.

Then he was put to death by the class she had come to hate—one more stone in the sepulcher of her tender, girlish ideals. When the time came she traveled to Graustark in response to the call of the committee of ten; she came prepared to kill the creature she would be asked to kill. And yet down in her heart she was sore afraid.

She was there not to kill a man grown old in wrinkles to her people, but to destroy the life of a gentle, innocent boy of seven!

There were times when her heart shrank from the unholy deed she had been selected to perform. But there was never a thought of receding from the bloody task set down for her.

On a Saturday night, following the last visit of Truxton King to the armorer, the committee of ten met in the underground room to hear the latest word from one who could not be with them in person, but was always there in spirit, if they were to believe his most zealous utterances. The Iron Count Marlaux, professed hater of all that was rich and noble, was the power behind the committee of ten. The assassination of the little prince and the overthrow of the royal family awaited his pleasure. He was the man who would give the word.

Alas for the committee of ten! The wildest fox in the history of the world was never so wily as the Iron Count. Some day they were to find out that he was using them to pull his choicest chestnuts from the fire.

The committee was seated around the long table in the stilling, breathless room, the armorer at the head. Those who came by way of the sewer had performed ablutions in the queer toilet room that once had been a secret vault for the storing of feudal plunder. What air there was came from the narrow ventilator that burrowed its way up to the shop of William Spantz or through the chimney hole

in the ceiling. Olga Platanova sat far down the side, a moody, inscrutable expression in her dark eyes. At Spantz's right lounged Peter Brutus, a lawyer, formerly secretary to the Iron Count and now his sole representative among these people. He was a dark faced, sunken eyed young man, with a mop of coarse black hair that hung ominously low over his high, receding forehead.

Julius Spantz, the armorer's son, a plump young man of goodly physical proportions, sat next to Brutus, while down the table ranged others deep in the consideration of the world's gravest problems. One of the women was Mme. Drovansk, whose husband had been sent to Siberia for life, and the other Anna Cromer, a rabid red lecturer, who had been driven from the United States, together with her amiable husband, an assessor of some distinction and many aliases, at present foreman in charge of one of the bridge building crews on the new railroad.

Every man in the party, and there were eight, for Olga was not a member of the "ten," wore over the lower part of his face a false black beard of huge dimensions—not that they were averse to recognition among themselves, but in the fear that by some hook or crook Dangleless or his agents might be able to look in upon them.

Brutus was speaking. "The man is a spy. He has been brought here from America to Tullis."

"We shall continue to watch his every movement," said William Spantz. "Time will tell. When we are positive that he is a detective and that he is dangerous there is a way to stop his operations."

"Dangleless suspects more than one of us," ventured Brutus, his gaze traveling toward Olga. There was lewd admiration in that steady glance. "But we'll fool the old fox. The time will soon be here for the blow that frees Graustark from the yoke."

It appeared in the course of his remarks that Marlaux had friends and supporters in all parts of Graustark. Hundreds of men in the hills, including honest shepherds and the dishonest brigands who thrived on them, coal miners and wood stealers, hunters and outlaws were ready to do his bidding when the time was ripe. Moreover, Marlaux had been successful in his design to fill the railway construction crews with the riffraff of all Europe, all of whom were under the control of leaders who could sway them in any movement provided it was against law and order.

With a cunning that commands admiration, the Iron Count deliberately sanctioned the assassination of the little prince of the reds, knowing that the condemnation of the world would fall upon them instead of upon him and that his own actions following the regicide would at once stamp him as irrevocably opposed to anarchy and all of its practices!

In the course of his remarks Peter Brutus touched hastily upon the subject of the little prince.

"He's not very big," said he, with a laugh, "and it won't require a very big bomb to blow him to smithereens. He will!"

"Stop!" cried Olga Platanova, springing to her feet. "I cannot listen to you! You shall not speak of it in that



"STOP!" CRIED OLGA PLATANOVA, "YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK OF IT IN THAT WAY!"

way! Peter Brutus, you are not to speak of—of what I am to do! Never—never again!"

She shuddered violently as she stood there before them, her eyes closed as if to shut out the horrible picture her mind was painting.

"She will hangle it," sneered Anna Cromer.

Olga's lids were lifted. Her dark eyes looked straight into those of the older woman.

"No," she said quietly, her body relaxing. "I shall not hangle it."

The discussion went back to Truxton King. "Isn't it possible that he is merely attracted by the beauty of our charming young friend here?" ventured Mme. Drovansk.

"It is part of his game," said Julius Spantz. "He knows Olga's past. He is waiting for a chance to catch her off her guard. He may even go so far as to make pretty love to you, cousin, in the hope that—No offense, my dear, no offense!" Her look had silenced him.

"Mr. King is not a spy," she said steadily.

"Well," said William Spantz, "we are safe if we take no chances with him. He must be watched all the time. If we discover that he is what some of us think he is there is a way to end his usefulness. Now, Brutus, what does Count Marlaux say to this day two weeks? Will he be ready? On that day the prince and the court are to witness the unveiling of the Yefev memorial statue in the plaza. It is a full holiday in Graustark. No man will be employed at his usual task, and—"

Brutus interrupted him. "That is the very day that the count has asked

(To be continued)

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"DON'T YOU KNOW ANY BETTER THAN TO COME IN HERE?"

goldfish which he had strung upon wire grass and dropped into the edge of the pool.

"Please put those poor little things back in the pool, Mr. King," said the lady in perfect English.

"Gladly, with the prince's permission," said King, also in English. The prince looked glum, but interposed no imperial objection.

It must be confessed that King's composure was sorely disturbed. He glanced up to find her studying him, plainly perplexed.

"I just wandered in here," he began guiltily. "The prince captured me down there by the big tree."

"Did you say your name is Truxton King?" she asked somewhat skeptically.

"Yes, your—yes, ma'am," he replied. "of New York."

"Your father is Mr. Emerson King? Are you the brother of Adele King?" she asked.

"I am."

"I've heard her speak of her brother Truxton. She said you were in South America."

She was regarding him with cool, speculative interest. "I wonder if you are he?"

"I think I am," he said, but doubtfully. "Please pardon my amazement. Perhaps I'm dreaming. At any rate, I'm dazed."

"We were in the convent together for two years. Now that I observe you closely you do resemble her. We were very good friends, she and I."

"Then you'll intercede for me?" he urged, with a fervent glance in the direction of the wall.

She smiled joyously.

"More than that," she said. "I shall assist you to escape. Come!"

He followed her through the shrubbery, his heart pounding violently.

"Say!" whispered the prince a few moments later, dropping back as if to impart a grave secret. "See that man over there by the fountain, Mr. King?"

"Bobby!" cried the lady sharply.

"Goodby, Mr. King. Remember me to your sister when you write. She—"

"That's Aunt Loraine's beau," announced the prince. "That's Count Eric Vos Vengo. Truxton's look turned to one of interest at once. The man designated was a slight, swarthy fellow in the uniform of a colonel. He did not appear to be particularly happy at the moment.

"May I ask who?" began Truxton timidly.

"She will know if you merely call me Loraine."

They parted company at once, the prince and the lady in the rajah suit going toward



"SHE WILL KNOW IF YOU MERELY CALL ME LORAIN."