

TRUXTON KING
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A Story of Graustark
By GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

Truxton King, a millionaire's son, sets out in search of adventure. Where better could he look for stirring events than in faroff Graustark...

come to it if he traveled long enough and far enough into the north and west and if he were not afraid of the hardships that most men abhor...

Not until he sat down to a rare dinner in the historic Hotel Regenetz was he able to realize that he was truly in that fabled, mythical land of Graustark...

And now it becomes my deplorable duty to divulge the fact that Truxton King, after two full days and nights in the city of Edelweiss...

Where were the beautiful women he had read about and dreamed of ever since he left Teheran?

CHAPTER I. TRUXTON KING.

HE was a tall, rawboned, rangy young fellow with a face so tanned by wind and sun you had the impression that his skin would feel like leather if you could affect the impertinence to test it by the sense of touch...

This tall young man in the panama hat and gray dannels was Truxton King, embryo globe trotter and searcher after the treasures of romance...

But neither Truxton's father, who wanted him to be a manufacturing Croesus, nor Truxton's mother, who expected him to become a social Solomon, appears to have taken the young man's private inclinations into consideration.

Young Mr. King believed in romance. He grew up with an ever increasing bump of imagination, contiguous to which, strange to relate, there was a properly developed bump of industry and application...

We come upon him at last—luckily for us we were not actually following him—after two years of wonderful but rather disillusioning adventure in mid-Asia and all Africa...

For twenty days he had traveled by caravan across the Persian uplands through Herat and Meshed and Bokhara, striking off with his guide toward the sea of Aral and the eastern shores of the Caspian...

Somewhere out in the shimmering east he had learned, to his honest amazement, that there was such a land as Graustark. At first he would not believe, but the English bank in Meshed assured him that he would

morner to the crown, sir. My blades are used by the nobility—not by the army, I am happy to say.

"I say, Herr Spantz, or monsieur, I'd like to have a good long chat with you. What do you say to a mug of that excellent beer over in the cafe garden? Business seems to be a little dull. Can't you—er—lock up?"

Spantz looked at him keenly. "May I ask what brings you to Edelweiss?" he asked abruptly.

"I don't mind telling you, Mr. Spantz, that I'm here because I'm somewhat of a fool. False hopes led me astray. I came here looking for romance—for adventure."

"I see," cackled Spantz, his eyes twinkling with mirth. "You thought you could capture wild and beautiful princesses here just as you pleased, eh? Let me tell you, young man, only one American—only one foreigner, in fact—has accomplished that miracle. Mr. Lorry came here ten years ago and won the fairest flower Graustark ever produced—the beautiful Yetive—but he was the only one."

"No, I'm not looking for princesses. I've seen hundreds of 'em in all parts of the world."

"You should see Prince Robin," went on the armorer.

"I've heard of nothing but him, my good Mr. Spantz. He's seven years old, and he looks like his mother, and he's got a jeweled sword and all that sort of thing. I darsay he's a nice little chap. Got American blood in him, you see."

The old man retired to the rear of the shop and called out to some one upstairs. A woman's voice answered, "My niece will keep shop, sir, while I am out," Spantz explained.

They paused near the door until the old man's niece appeared at the back of the shop. King's glance became more or less in the nature of a stare of amazement.

A young woman of the most astounding beauty, attired in the black and red of the Graustark middle classes, was slowly approaching from the shadowy recesses at the end of the shop. His heart enjoyed a lively thump. Truxton King, you may be sure, did not precede the old man into the street. He deliberately removed his hat and waited most politely for age to go before youth. In the meantime blandly gazing upon the face of this amazing niece.

Across the square, at one of the tables, the old man, over his huge mug of beer, became properly grateful. He was willing to repay King for his little attention by giving him a careful history of Graustark, past, present and future.

The old man was rambling on. "The young prince has lived most of his life in Washington and London and Paris, sir. He's only seven, sir. Of course you remember the dreadful accident that made him an orphan and put him on the throne with the three 'wise men of the east' as regents or governors—the train wreck near Brussels, sir. His mother, the glorious Princess Yetive, was killed and his father, Mr. Lorry, died the next day from his injuries. That, sir, was a most appalling blow to the people of Graustark. There never will be another pair like them, sir. God alone preserved the little prince. The collision was from the rear, a broken rail throwing a locomotive into the prince's coach. This providential escape of the young prince preserved the unbroken line of the present royal family."

"I say, Mr. Spantz, I don't believe I've told you that your niece is a most remarkably beautiful girl."

"As I was saying, sir," interrupted Spantz so pointedly that Truxton flushed. "The little prince is the ideal of all the people. Under the present regency he is obliged to reside in the principality until his fifteenth year, after which he may be permitted to travel abroad."

Spantz was eying him narrowly. "You do not appear interested in our royal family," he ventured coldly.

Truxton hastened to assure him that he was keenly interested. "Especially so now that I appreciate that the little prince is the last of his race."

"There are three regents, sir, in charge of the affairs of state—Count Halfont, the Duke of Perse and Baron Jasto Dangloss, who is minister of police. Count Halfont is a granduncle of the prince by marriage. The Duke of Perse is the father of the unhappy Countess Ingomede, the young and beautiful wife of the exiled Iron Count Marlanx. No doubt you've heard of him."

"I remember that he was banished from the principality."

"Quite true, sir. He was banished in 1901 and now resides on his estates in Austria. Three years ago in Budapest he was married to Ingomede, the daughter of the duke. Count Marlanx has great influence at the Austrian court. The Duke of Perse realized this when he compelled his daughter to accept him as her husband. The fair Ingomede is less than twenty-five years of age. The Iron Count is fully sixty-five."

"I'd like to see if she's really beautiful. I've seen but one pretty woman in this whole blamed town, your niece, Herr Spantz. I've looked 'em over pretty carefully too. She is exceedingly attractive."

"You will not find the beautiful women of Edelweiss in the streets, sir," snapped Spantz.

"Don't they ever go out shopping?"

"Hardly. The merchants, if you will but notice, carry their wares to the houses of the noble and the rich. But tomorrow the garrison at the fortress marches in review before the prince"

if you should happen to be on the avenue near the castle gate at 12 o'clock you will see the beauty and chivalry of Graustark. The soldiers are not the only ones who are on parade. There was an unmistakable sneer in his tone.

"You don't care much for society, I'd say," observed Truxton, with a smile.

Spantz's eyes flamed for an instant and then subtly resumed their most ingratiating twinkle. "We cannot all be peacocks," he said quietly. "You will also see that the man who rides beside the prince's carriage wheel is an American, while Graustark nobles take less exalted places."

"An American, eh?"

"Yes. Have you not heard of John Tullis, the prince's friend? He, your countryman, is the real power behind our throne. On his deathbed the prince's father placed his son in his



A SLY, IMPULSIVE SMILE PLAYED ABOUT HER RED LIPS.

American's charge and begged him to stand by him through thick and thin until the lad is able to take care of himself. As if there were not loyal men in Graustark who might have done as much for their prince!"

King looked interested. "I see. The people, no doubt, resent this espionage. Is that it?"

Spantz gave him a withering look, as much as to say that he was a fool to ask such a question in a place so public. Without replying, he got to his feet.

"I must return. I have been away too long."

The American sank back in his chair. Suddenly he became conscious of a disquieting feeling that some one was looking at him intently from behind. He turned in his chair and found himself meeting the gaze of a ferocious looking, military appearing little man at a table near by. His waiter appeared at his elbow with the change.

"Who the devil is that old man at the table there?" demanded young Mr. King loudly.

The waiter assumed a look of extreme insolence. "That is Baron Dangloss, minister of police. Anything more, sir?"

"Yes. What's he looking so hard at me for? Does he think I'm a pick-pocket?"

"You know as much as I, sir," was all that the waiter said in reply. King pocketed the coin he had intended for the fellow and deliberately left the place. As he sauntered across the little square his gaze suddenly shifted to a second story window above the gunshop.

The interesting young woman had cautiously pushed open one of the shutters and was peering down upon a trio of red coated guardsmen. Almost at the same instant her quick, eager gaze fell upon the tall American, now quite close to the horsemen. He saw her dark eyes expand as if with surprise. The next instant he caught his breath and almost stopped in his tracks.

A shy, impulsive smile played about her red lips for a second, lighting up the delicate face with a radiance that amazed him. Then the shutter was closed gently, quickly. He felt his ears burn as he abruptly turned away.

In the meantime Baron Dangloss was watching him covertly from the edge of the cafe garden across the square.

(To Be Continued.)

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