

TRUXTON KING

A Story of
...Graftark

By GEORGE BARR
M'UTCHEON

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CHAPTER XI.
UNDER THE GROUND.

THE second day after his incarceration began King was given food and drink. It was high time, for he was almost famished. Thereafter twice a day he was led into the larger room and given a surprisingly hearty meal.

Peter Brutus had just voiced the pleasure of the majority by urging the necessity for physical torture to wring the government's secrets from the prisoner. King, half famished, half crazed by thirst, had been listening to the fierce argument through the thin door that separated the rooms. He heard the sudden, eager movement toward the door of his cell and squared himself against the opposite wall, ready to fight to the death. Then there came a voice that he recognized.

A woman was addressing the conspirators in tones of deadly earnestness. His heart gave a bound. It was the first time since his incarceration that he had heard the voice of Olga Platanova, she who still must be his friend.

"No! You shall not torture him. I have said he is no spy. I still say it!" she was exclaiming.

"God, girl, we cannot turn him loose now. He must die." This was from Spantz.

"We cannot release him, I grant you," she said, and Truxton's heart sank. "Not now, but afterward, yes. When it is all over he can do no harm. But bear me now, all of you. If he is harmed in any way I shall not perform my part of the work on the 26th. This is final."

"You cannot withdraw!" exclaimed Peter Brutus. "You are pledged. You are sworn. It is ordained."

"I, Olga Platanova, say this to you. It is not a plea, not a petition; it is an ultimatum. Spare him or the glorious cause must suffer by my defection."

"Sh! Not so loud, girl! He can hear every word you say!"

"Let him hear. Let him know that I, Olga Platanova, am to hurt the thing that is to destroy the life of Prince Robin. I am not afraid to have him know today what the world will know next week. Then the world will say that Olga Platanova was not a beast, but a deliverer, a creator! Let him hear!"

The listener's blood was running cold. The life of Prince Robin! An assassination! "The thing that will destroy!" A bomb!

For half an hour they argued with her, seeking to turn her from the stand she had taken. Then they came to terms with her. Truxton King owed his life to this strange girl, who knew him not at all, but who believed in him.

Truxton was brought into the room a few minutes later. He was white with emotion as he faced the committee of ten. Before a word could be addressed to him he blurted out:

"You cowards! Weak as I am, I would have fought for you, Miss Platanova, if I could have got through that door. Thank you for what you have done to convince these dogs! Only don't do this awful thing! Think of that dear little boy!"

Olga Platanova cried out and covered her eyes with her hands. She was led from the room by William Spantz.

Peter Brutus stood over King, whose arms were held by two stalwart men. "Enough!" he commanded. "We spare you not for her sake, but for the sake of the cause we serve. Hear me! You are to be held here a prisoner until our plans are consummated. You will be properly fed and cared for. You have heard Miss Platanova say that she will cook the food for you herself, but you are not to see her."

King interrupted him. "I haven't the faintest doubt that you will kill me in the end. She may not be here to protect me after—the assassination."

"She is prepared to die by the same bomb that slays the prince," was all that Brutus would say in response to this, but King observed the sly look that went around among them. He knew then that they meant to kill him in the end.

Afterward, in his little room, he writhed in the agony of helplessness. The prince, his court, the government—all were to be blasted to satisfy the end of this sickening conspiracy. Lo! raine! She, too, was doomed! He groaned aloud in his misery and awe.

There was a telegraph instrument in the outer room. He could hear it ticking off its messages day and night and could hear the discussion of reports as they came in or went out. It soon became clear to him that the wire connected the room with Marlanx's headquarters near Baiak, in Axbain, a branch instrument being stationed in the cave above the witch's hut.

On his third night he heard the committée discussing the conditions at the castle.

"The count is more afraid of this man Tullis than of all the rest," averred Peter Brutus. "He has reasons to hate and fear the Americans. That is why he desires the death of our pris-

oner. He has said time and again over the wire that King will in some way escape and play the deuce with our plans. It does not seem possible, however. We have him absolutely secure."

"This is the 22d; Saturday is the 26th. Nothing could be done to stop us in four days," said one of the women.

"Count Marlanx will be ready on the 26th. He has said so. A new strike will be declared on the railroad on the 25th, and the strikers will be in the city with their grievances. Saturday's celebration will bring men from the mountains and the mines to town. A single blow, and we have won." So spoke Brutus.

"We must not—we cannot fail," grated William Spantz, and the cry was reiterated by half a dozen voices.

The next morning, after a sleepless night, Truxton King made his first determined attempt to escape.

He knew that two armed men stood guard in the outer room day and night. The door to the stairway leading into the armorer's shop was of iron and heavily barred; the door opening into the sewer was even more securely bolted. Besides, there was a great stone door at the foot of the passage. The keys to these two doors were never out of the possession of William Spantz. One of his guards held the key to the stairway door. His only chance lay in his ability to suddenly overpower two men and make off by way of the armorer's shop.

When his little door was opened on the morning of the 23d Truxton King's long, powerful figure shot through as if sped by a catapult. The man with the candle and the knife went down like a beef, felled by a blow on the jaw.

The American, his eyes blazing with hope and desperation, kept onward, to find himself face to face with Olga Platanova.

She was staring at him with frightened eyes, her lips apart, her hands to her breast. He turned.

"He has not the key," she cried, "nor have I. You have no chance to escape. Go back!"

A key rattled in the door. When it swung open two men stood in the aperture, both with drawn pistols. The girl leaped between them and the helpless, defeated American.

"Remember!" she cried. "You are not to kill him!"

Peter Brutus had risen from the

chair, half dazed, but furious. He made a vicious leap at King, his knife ready for the lunge.

"I'm glad it's you!" roared King, leaping aside. His fist shot out, and again Brutus went down.

"Miss Platanova, call your uncle," she was ordered. "It is now necessary to bind the fellow's hands. They are too dangerous to be allowed to roam at large in this fashion."

All day long Truxton paced his little prison, bitterly lamenting his ill timed effort. Now he would be even more carefully guarded. His hands were bound behind his back. He was powerless. If he had only waited! Luck had been against him. How was he to know that the guard with the keys had gone upstairs when Olga brought his breakfast down? It was fate.

The 23d dragged itself into the past, and the 24th was following in the gloomy wake of its predecessors. Two days more! He began to feel the approach of madness. His own death was not far away. It would follow that of the prince and of Olga Platanova, his friend. But he was not thinking of his own death; he was thinking of the prince's life.

Forty-eight hours! That was all! Early that night as he lay with his ear to the crack of the door he heard them discussing his own death. It was to come as soon as Olga had gone to her reward. She was not there to defend him. Spantz had said that she was praying in her room, committing her soul to God. Truxton King suddenly pricked up his ears, attracted by a sentence that fell from the lips of one of the men.

"Tullis is on his way to the hills of Dawsbergen by this time. He will be out of the way on the 26th safe enough."

"Count Marlanx was not to be satisfied until he had found the means to draw him away from Edelweiss," said another. "This time it will work like

a charm. Late this afternoon Tullis was making ready to lead a troop of cavalry into the hills to effect a rescue. Santa Maria! That was a clever stroke! Not only does he go himself, but with him goes a captain with 100 soldiers from the fort. Ha, ha! Marlanx is a fox—a very exceptional fox!"

Tullis off to the hills with soldiers to effect a rescue! Truxton sat up, his brain whirling.

"A wise fox!" agreed Peter Brutus thickly. "I wonder what our fine prisoner will say to it when the new prisoner comes to keep him company over the 26th."

(To Be Continued.)
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T. J. ATWOOD.
January 8th, 1910.

ADMINISTRATOR'S NOTICE.

Notice is hereby given, that the undersigned has, by the county court of the state of Oregon for the county of Jackson, been appointed administrator with the will annexed of the estate of Syllsteen Scudder, deceased.

All persons owning or holding claims against said estate are hereby notified and required to present the same, duly verified, as required by law, to me in Medford, Oregon, within six months after the date of this notice; and all persons owing said estate are notified to make immediate payment.

Dated March 8th, 1910; date of first publication March 8, 1910.

W. E. PHIPPS,
Administrator, with will annexed, of the estate of Syllsteen Scudder, deceased.

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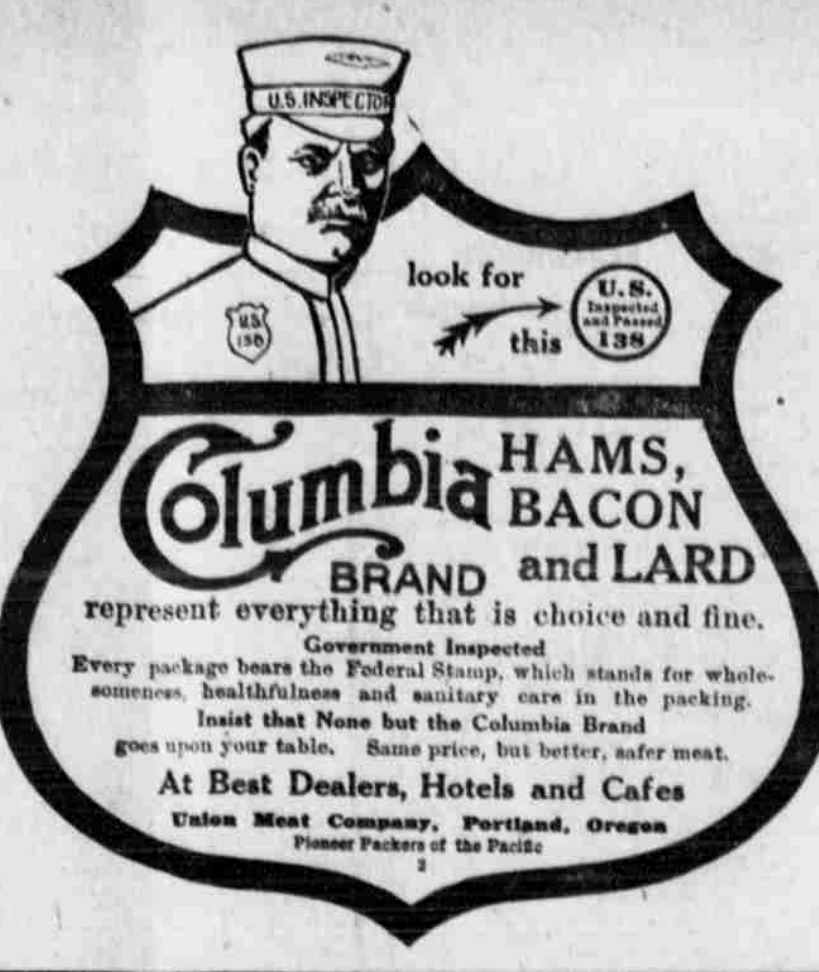
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