

TRUXTON KING

A Story of
—Graumark

By GEORGE BARR
M'GUTCHEON

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CHAPTER XIII. A DIVINITY SAVES.

IT was pitch dark when he awoke. The sound of breathing came to his ears. He sat up. His hands were free. It had not been a dream. She was lying over there asleep. The candle had burnt itself out; that was all. He crept softly across the floor. In the darkness he found her and touched the garments she wore—and drew back enthralled. Afraid to move for fear of disturbing her, he sat quietly for an hour or more. All this time his brain was working like mad in the new found desire to perform miracles for the sake of this lovely, unattainable creature. He was forgetting the prince, the honors of the 26th; he was thinking only of saving this girl from the fate that Marianx had in store for her. Vos Engo may have had the promise, but what could it profit him if Marianx had the girl?

Footsteps in the outer room recalled him to the bitter reality of their position. He awoke her and whispered words of encouragement into her bewildered ears. Then he put on his coat and threw himself on the floor, first wrapping the rope about his wrists to deceive the guard.

A key turned in the padlock. Old man Spantz stood in the doorway. "It is noon," said the old man irresolutely. Then he came in and lit a candle.

"Noon of the 25th," said Truxton bitterly. "In twenty-four hours it will be all over, eh, Spantz?"

"At noon tomorrow."

Julius Spantz brought in the food for the prisoners, setting it on the floor between them.

"It is usually the duty of our friend Julius to feed me," observed Truxton to his fellow prisoner.

"Julius?" queried the girl from the castle, peering at the man. "Not Julius Spantz of the army?"

"The same," said Truxton. Julius laughed awkwardly.

"Enough," snarled William Spantz. His manner changed completely, however, when he turned to address the young lady. "I beg to inform you, madam, that your stay is to be brief. Tonight you will be removed to more pleasant quarters that a friend has prepared for you. As for you, my friend," turning to Truxton and smiling ironically, "I deeply deplore the fact that you are to remain. When we next gather in the room beyond a new dispensation will have begun. You may be interested then to hear what we have to say out there."

With a profound bow to the lady and a leer for King he departed, bolting the door behind him. Instantly King was at her side.

"An idea has come to me," he whispered eagerly. "I think I see a way."

"Mr. King, what is it you intend to do? Please tell me. I must know. You heard what he said about taking me to the count's. He meant Marianx. I will die first."

"No, I will die first. By the way, I may as well tell you that I wasn't thinking altogether of how we are to escape. Why should I save you from Marianx just to have you hurry off and get married to Vos Engo? It's a mean thought, I know," hastily, "but just the same, I hate to think of you marrying some one else."

"Some one else?" she questioned, a pucker on her forehead.

"Oh, I know I wouldn't have a ghost of a chance even if there wasn't a Vos Engo. It isn't that," he explained. "I recognize the—er—difference in our stations and—"

"What has all this got to do with your plan to escape?"

"Nothing at all. The point I'm trying to get at is this: Don't you think it's pretty rough on a hero to save the girl for some other fellow to snap up and marry?"

"I think I begin to see," she said, a touch of pink coming into her cheeks.

"That's encouraging," he said, staring gloomily at the food he had put aside. "You are quite sure you promised Vos Engo that you'd marry him?"

"No, I did not promise him that I'd marry him."

"You said you had promised—"

"You did not allow me time to finish. I meant to say that I had promised to let him know in a day or two that in all, Mr. King, there was a suspicious tremor in her voice.

"What's that?" he demanded. "You—you don't mean to say that—Oh, Lord, I wonder—I wonder if I have a chance—just a ghost of a chance!" He beamed very close, incredulous, fascinated. "What is it that you are going to let him know—yes or no?"

"That was the question I was considering when the brigands caught me," she answered.

"Of course he is in your own class," said Truxton grimly.

She hesitated an instant. "Mr. King, has no one told you my name—who I am?" she asked.

"You are the prince's aunt. That's

all I know."
"No more his aunt in reality than Jack Tullis is his uncle."
"Who are you, then?"
"I am Jack Tullis' sister, a New Yorker bred and born, and I live not more than two blocks from your—"
He stared at her in speechless amazement. "Then—then you are not a duchess or a— he began again.
"Not at all—a very plain New Yorker," she said, laughing aloud. "You are not disappointed, are you? Does it spoil your romance to—"
"Spoil it? Disappointed? No! By George, I—I can't believe that any



THE WHOLE WEIGHT OF TRUXTON KING'S BODY WAS BEHIND THE TERRIFIC BLOW.

such luck—no, no, I don't mean it just that way! Let me think it out. Let me get it through my head.
"Miss Tullis," he said, a thrill in his voice, "you are a princess just the same. I never was so happy in my life as I am this minute. It isn't so black as it was. I thought I couldn't win you because you—"
"Win me?" she gasped.

"Precisely. Now I'm looking at it differently. I don't mind telling you that I'm in love with you—desperately in love. It's been so with me ever since that day in the park. I loved you as a duchess or a princess and without hope. Now, I—I—well, I'm going to hope. Perhaps Vos Engo has the better of me just now, but I'm in the lists with him—with all of them. If I get you out of this place—and myself as well—I want you to understand that from this very minute I am trying to win you if it lies in the power of any American to win a girl who has suitors among the nobility."

"Are—are you really in earnest?" she murmured.

"I mean every word of it. I do love you."

"I—I cannot talk about it now, Mr. King," she stammered, moving away from him in a sudden panic. Presently he went over to her. She was standing near the candle, staring down at the flame, with a strangely preoccupied expression in her eyes.

"Forgive me," he said. "I was hasty, inconsiderate, I—"

"You quite took my breath away," she panted, looking up at him, with a queer little smile.

"I know," he murmured.

Her troubled gaze resumed its sober contemplation of the flame.

"You won't leave me to my fate because you think I'm going to marry—some one else?"

He grew very sober. "Miss Tullis, you and I have one chance in a thousand. You may as well know the truth."

"Oh, I can't bear the thought of that dreadful old man," she cried, abject distress in her eyes.

He gritted his teeth and turned away.

Late in the afternoon Anna Cromer appeared before them, accompanied by two of the men. Crisply she commanded the girl to come forth.

She was in the outer room for the better part of an hour listening to Anna Cromer and Mme. Drovansk, who dinned the praises of the great Count Marianx into her ears. They bathed the girl's face and freshened her garments. It occurred to her that she was being prepared for a visit of the redoubtable Marianx himself and put the question plainly.

"No," said Anna Cromer. "He's not coming here. You are going to him. He will not be Count Marianx after tomorrow, but Citizen Marianx, one of the people, one of us."

Little did they know Marianx.

"Julius and Peter will come for you tonight," said Mme. Drovansk, with an evil, suggestive smile.

Truxton was beginning to tremble with the fear that she would not be returned to their room when the door was opened and she came in.

Some time in the tense, suffocating hours of the night they heard the sounds of many footsteps shuffling about the outer room. There were hoarse, guttural, subdued goodbys and well wishes, the creaking of heavy doors and the dropping of bolts. Eventually King, who had been listening alertly, realized that but two of the men remained in the room, Peter Brutus and Julius Spantz.

An hour crept by and another. King was groaning under the suspense. The time was too slowly approaching when he was to attempt the most desperate act in all this sanguinary tragedy.

He had told her of his plan. She knew the part she was to play. And if all went well—ah, then!

Suddenly he started to his feet, his jaws set, his eyes gleaming. The telegraph instrument was clicking in the outer room.

asking his position near the girl, who was crouching in real dismay, he leaned against the wall, his hands behind him, every muscle strained and taut.

The door opened, and Julius Spantz, bewildered and awkward, entered. He wore a raincoat and storm hat and carried a rope in one of his hands.

"Time you were asleep," he said stupidly, addressing King. He turned to the girl. "Come, madam, I must—"

He did not complete the sentence. The whole weight of Truxton King's body was behind the terrific blow that landed on the man's jaw. Julius Spantz's knees crumpled. He lunged against the wall. The man was stunned beyond all power of immediate action. It was the work of an instant to snatch the revolver from his coat pocket.

"Guard the door!" whispered King to the girl, pressing the revolver into her hand, "and shoot if you have to!"

A handkerchief was stuffed into the unconscious man's mouth. The long coat and boots were jerked from his limp body before his hands and feet were bound with the rope he carried. The bushy whiskers and wig were removed from his head and transferred in a flash to that of the American. Then the boots, coat and hat found a new wearer.

Peter Brutus was standing in the stairway leading to the sewer.

"Hurry up, Julius," he called imperatively. "They are below with the boat."

When a tall, grunting man emerged from the inner room bearing the limp figure of a girl in a frayed raincoat he did not wait to ask questions, but rushed over and locked the cell door. Then he led the way down the narrow stairway. His only reply to King's guttural remark in the Graustark language was:

"Don't speak, you fool! Not a word until we reach the river."

A moment later the girl was being lowered through the hole into rough-eager arms. Brutus and his companion dropped through, the secret block of masonry was closed, and off through the shallow waters of the sewer glided the party riverward in the noiseless boat that had come up to ferry them.

There were three men in the boat, not counting Truxton King.

(To Be Continued.)

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