

TRUXTON KING

A Story of
Granstark
By **GEORGE BARR M'CUTCHEON**

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"Lean on me!" she cried despairingly.
"Nonsense!" he said, with grim stubbornness. "I don't mind the pain. We'll not stop, my dear—not till we get word to Dangloss."
At a wagon road crossing they paused to rest, having covered two miles. Her little cry of joy caused him to look up from the swollen ankle, which he was regarding with dubious confidence. An ox cart was approaching from the west.
"A ride?" she cried joyfully.
They stopped the cart and bargained for a ride to Ross. The man was a farmer, slow and suspicious. He hesitated.
"The country's full of evil men and women these days," he murmured. "Be-wise, I have a heavy enough load as it is for my beast."
Miss Tullis conducted the negotiation.
"We are bound for Edelweiss. Can you get us there in two hours?"
"With these beasts, poor things? Never."
"It will be worth your while. A mounted garrison if you carry us to a place where we can secure quicker transportation."
In time she won him over. He agreed to carry them along the way at the best speed until they came up with better beasts or reached the city gates. They climbed up to the seat, and the tedious journey began. The farmer trotted beside the wheel nearly all of the way, descending warmly in painful English on the present condition of things in the hills.

The first row of dragoons was at ready passing in front of her. Less than 200 feet away rolled the royal coach of gold.
"An anarchist!" shouted King hoarsely. He looked like one himself. "The bomb! The bomb! Stop the prince!"
Colonel Quinnox recognized this bearded, uncouth figure and the flying, terrified girl at his heels. King was dragging her along by the hand.
Quinnox alone prevented the dragoons from cutting down the pallid madman who stumbled blindly toward the coaches beyond.
"Stop the coach!" cried King.
Panic seized the crowd. Olga Platanova stood alone, her eyes wide and glassy, staring as if petrified at the face of Truxton King.

He saw the object in her wavering hand. A plain, white faced farmer in a smock of blue was crossing the street with mighty bounds, his eyes glued upon the arm of the frail, terrified anarchist. If he could only arrest that paled, uncertain arm!
But she hurled the bomb, her hands going to her eyes as she fell upon her knees.

CHAPTER XVII

THE THROWING OF THE BOMB.
THE scene that followed beggars all description. A score of men and horses lay writhing in the street; others crept away screaming with pain: human flesh and that of animals lay in the path of the frenzied, panic stricken holiday crowd; blood mingled with the soft mud of Regeneget's circus, silmy, slippery, ugly!
Olga Platanova—there was nothing left of her! We draw a veil across the picture of Olga Platanova after the bomb left her hand. No one may look upon the quivering, shattered thing that was once a living, beautiful woman.

Down in an alley below the tower a trembling, worn team of oxen stood



THE DESPERATE AMERICAN TOSSED HER INTO THE COACH.

for a day and night, awaiting the return of a master who was never to come back to them. God rest his simple soul!
Truxton King picked himself up from the street, dazed, bewildered, but unhurt. The revolutionists had begun the assault on the paralyzed minions of the government.
He looked back toward the gory entrance to the circus. There was Marlax, mounted and swinging a saber on high. Ahead was a mass of carriages, filled with the white faced, pained prey from the court of Granstark. From somewhere near the spot where Olga Platanova fell came a harsh, penetrating command:
"Cut them off! Cut them off from the castle!"
It was his cue. He dashed into the street and ran toward the carriages, shouting with all his strength:
"Turn back! It is Marlax! To the castle!"
Then it was that he saw the prince. The boy was standing on a seat on the royal coach of state, holding out his eager little hands to some one in the thick of the crowd that surged about him. He was calling some one's name, but no one could have heard him.
Truxton's straining eyes caught sight of the figure in gray that struggled forward in response to the cries and the extended hand.
"Aunt Loraine! Aunt Loraine!" He now heard the name the boy cried with all his little heart.
Two officers struck at the uncouth, desperate American as he lifted the girl from the ground and deliberately tossed her into the coach.
"Turn back!" he shouted. A horseman rode him down. He looked up as the plunging animal's hoofs clattered about his head. Von Engo, with drawn sword, was crowding up to the carriage door, shouting words of rejoicing at sight of the girl he loved.
He caught a glimpse of her, holding the prince in her arms, her white, agonized face turned toward the mob. Distinctly he heard her cry:
"Save him! Save Truxton King!"
From the sidewalks swarmed well armed hordes of desperadoes, firing wildly into the ranks of devoted guardsmen. Truxton fled from the danger zone as fast as his strained ankle would permit him. Bullets were striking all about him.
Some one was shouting his name behind in the scurrying crowd. He turned for a single glance backward. Little Mr. Hobbs, pale as a ghost, his cap gone, his clothing torn, was panting at his elbow.
Soldiers came riding up from behind, turning to fire from their sud-

dies into the throng of outthroats, led by the grim old man with the bloody saber. In the center of the troop there was a flying carriage. The Duke of Perse was lying back in the seat, his face like that of a dead man.
"The prince is safe!" shouted King joyously. "They'll make it! Thank God!"
Colonel Quinnox turned in his saddle and searched out the owner of that stirring voice.
"Come!" he called.
Even as King rushed into the roadway a horseman galloped up from the direction of the castle. He pulled his horse to his haunches almost as he was riding over the dodging American.
"Here!" shouted the newcomer, scowling down upon the young man. "Swing up here! Quick, you fool!"
It was Von Engo, his face black with fury. Quinnox had seized the hand of Mr. Hobbs on seeing help for King and was pulling him up before him. There was nothing for Truxton to do but to accept the timely help of his rival. An instant later he was up behind him and they were off after the last of the dragoons.
"If you don't mind, count, I'll try my luck," grated the American. Holding on with one arm, he turned and fired repeatedly in the direction of the howling crowd of rascals.
"Ride to the barracks gates, Von Engo!" commanded Colonel Quinnox. "Be prepared to admit none but the royal reserves, who are under standing orders to report there in time of need."
Over his shoulder Von Engo hissed to his companion: "It was not little heroics, my friend, nor philanthropy on my part. I was commanded to come and fetch you. She would never have spoken to me again if I had refused."
"She! Ah, yes, I see! She did not forget me!" cried Truxton.
"Understand, it is not for you that I risk my life."
"I understand," murmured Truxton, a wry smile on his pale lips. "You mean, she is going to pay you in some way for picking me up, eh? Well, I'll put an end to that. I'll drop off again. Then you can ride on and tell her—I wouldn't be a party to the game. Do you catch my meaning?"
"You would, eh?" said the count angrily. "I'd like to see you drop off while we're going at this!"
"I've got my pistol in the middle of your back," grated Truxton. "Slow up a bit or I'll scatter your vertebrae all over your system. Pull up!"
"As you like," cried Von Engo. "I've done my part. Colonel Quinnox will bear witness." He began pulling his horse down. "Now you are quite free to drop off."
Less than a hundred yards behind loomed a riderless horse. The dragoon who had sat the saddle was lying far back in the avenue, a bullet in his head. Hobbling to the middle of the road, the American threw up his hands and shouted briskly to the bewildered animal. Five seconds later King was in the saddle and tearing along in the wake of the retreating guard.
"We need such men as King!" KING WAS IN THE CRIED COLONEL QUINNOX AS HE WAITED INSIDE THE GATES FOR THE WILDRIDER.



"YOU ARE TO DIE AT SUNSET."

together with their shivering associates, all of them dumbly muttering to themselves the awful sentence that Marlax had passed upon them.
"You are to die at sunset. Granstark still knows how to punish anarchists. There is no room in Granstark for anarchy. I shall wipe it out today."
"Sir, your promise!" gasped William Spantz. "We are your friends—the true party of—"
"Enough! Do not speak again! Captain Brutus, you will send orders abroad to notify the citizens that I, Count Marlax, have ordered the execution of the ringleaders in the plot to defame the prince, at sunset in the square. Away with the carrion!"
Then it was, and not till then, that the committee of ten found him out! Then it was that they came to know Peter Brutus!
The unrecognizable corpse of Olga Platanova had been buried in quicklime outside the city walls. There was something distinctly greswome in the fact that half a dozen deep graves were dug alongside hers hours before death came to the wretches who were to occupy them.

At 3 o'clock the Iron Count coolly sent messengers to the homes of the leading merchants and bankers of the city. They, with the priests, the doctors, the municipal officers and the manufacturers, were commanded to appear before him at 5 o'clock for the purpose of discussing the welfare of the city and its people.
Marlax stated his position clearly. He left no room for doubt in their minds. The strings were in his hands. Without hesitation he informed the leading men of the city that he was to be the Prince of Granstark.
"I will rule Granstark or destroy her. Those of you who do not expect or desire to live under my rule, which, I promise you, shall be a wise one, may leave the city for other lands," he said calmly. "Just as soon as my deputies have completed the formal transfer of all your belongings to the crown treasury—all, I say, even to the minutest trifle. Permit me to add in that connection, gentlemen, the transfer will not be a prolonged affair."
They glared back at him and subsided into bitter silence.

"I am well aware that you love little, Prince Robin. Now, respecting young master Robin, I have no great desire to kill him."
He waited to see the effect of this brutal announcement. His hearers stiffened, and—yes, they held their breath.
"He has one alternative—he and his lords. I trust that you, as sensible gentlemen, will find the means to convey to him your advice that he seize the opportunity I shall offer him to escape with his life. Let me interrupt myself to call to your attention the fact that I am punishing the anarchists at sunset. To resume, the boy may return to America, where he belongs. I will give him free and safe escort to the United States. If he chooses to accept my kindly terms, all well and good; if not, gentlemen, I shall starve him out or blow the castle down. It may interest you to hear that I expect to establish a new nobility in Granstark. I trust I may now be addressing at least a few of the future noble lords of Granstark. Good day, gentlemen."

At the castle the deepest gloom prevailed. It was like a nightmare to the beleaguered household, a dream from which there seemed to be no awakening. Colonel Quinnox as commander of the royal guard ruled supreme. General Braze tore off his own epaulets and presented himself to Quinnox as a soldier of the file.
Prince Robin, quite recovered from his fright, donned the uniform of a colonel of the royal dragoons, buckled on his jeweled sword and, with boyish zeal, demanded at a council of war Colonel Quinnox's reasons for not going forth to slay the rioters.
"Your highness," said the colonel bitterly, "the real army is outside the walls, not inside. We are a pitiful handful, less than 300 men all told, counting the wounded. Count Marlax heads an army of several thousand. He—"
"He wants to get in here so's he

can kill me. Is that so, Colonel Quinnox?" The prince was very pale, but quite calm.
"Oh, I wouldn't put it just that way, your—"
"Oh, I know! You can't fool me! I've always known that he wants to kill me. But how can he? Nobody can. He ought to know that. He must be awful stupid!"
"We must get word to Tullis!" cried several in a breath. A dozen men volunteered to risk their lives in the attempt to find the American in the hills. Two men were chosen by lot. They were to venture forth that very night.
"My lords," said the prince as the council was on the point of dissolving, "is it all right for me to ask a question now?"
"Certainly, Robin," said the prime minister.
"Well, I'd like to know where Mr. King is."
"He's safe, your highness," said Quinnox.
"Well, you run in and tell Aunt Loraine this minute that Mr. King sends his love to her and begs her to rest easy. See if it doesn't cheer her up a bit."



"HE'S SAFE, YOUR HIGHNESS."

At night two attempts were made by Haddon and another subaltern to leave the castle to reach Tullis, but both sorties proved failures. A day later Marlax sent two men under a flag of truce to offer his infamous ultimatum. His offer of a safe conduct of the prince to America was refused, for the inmates of the castle knew full well the count would doom the lad to instant death if he should get him in his possession.
A single distant volley at sunset had puzzled the men on guard at the castle. They had no means of knowing that the committee of ten and its wretched friends had been shot down like dogs in the public square. Peter Brutus was in charge of the squad of executioners.

(To Be Continued.)

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