

# TRUXTON KING

By **GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON.**

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## CHAPTER XXI.

"YOU WILL BE MRS. KING."  
It was late in the day when Truxton King was summoned to the devastated state chamber to be made a baron, and the prince completed the American's reward by presenting him with an ancient gold seal ring, one of the crown jewels.

Late that night it was reported at the castle that a large force of men were encamped on the opposite side of the river. A hundred campfires were gleaming against the distant uplands.

"The Grand Duke Paulus!" exclaimed Count Halfont. "Thank God he did not come a day earlier. We owe him nothing today, but yesterday—ah, he could have demanded much of us!"

In one of the wrecked approaches to the terrace, surrounded by fragments of stone and confronted by ugly destruction, sat a young man and a slender girl. There were no lights near them. The shadows were black and forbidding.

His arm was about her; her head nestled securely against his shoulder, and her slim hands were willing prisoners in one of his.

She was saying: "Truxton, dear, I did not love Eric Vos Hugo. I just thought it was love. I never really knew what love was until you came into my life. That's what made it so hard. I had let him believe that I might care for him some day. And I did like him. So I—"

"You will never, never know how happy I am, Lorraine!" he breathed into her ear.

"I hope I shall always bring happiness to you, Truxton," she murmured faintly with the joy of loving.

"You will make me very unhappy if you don't marry me tomorrow."

"I will marry you, Truxton, when we get to New York," she said, but not very firmly. He saw his advantage.

He held her close for a long time, his face buried in her hair. "Listen, darling! Won't you say you'll be my wife before I leave Graustark? I want you so much. I can't go away without you."

She hesitated. "When are you going, Truxton? Yes—you haven't told me."

It was what he wanted. "I am going next Monday," he said promptly. As a matter of fact, he had forgotten the day of the week they were now living in.

"Monday? Oh, dear!"

"Will you?"

"I—I must cable home first," she faltered.

"That's a mere detail, darling. Cable afterward. It will best us home by three weeks. They'll know we're coming."

"I must ask John, really I must, Truxton," she protested faintly.

"Hurry!" he shouted—in a whisper. "He is so desperately in love he won't think of refusing anything we ask. Shall we set it for Saturday?"

They set it for Saturday without consulting John Tullis and then fell to discussing him. "He is very much in love with her," she said wistfully.

"And she loves him, Lorraine. They will be very happy. She's wonderful!"

"Well, so is John. He's the most wonderful man in all this world."

"I am sure of it," he agreed unanimously. "I saw him talking with her and the Duke of Ferse as I came out while ago. They were going to the duke's rooms up there. The duke will offer no objections. He'll permit his daughter to select his next son-in-law."

"I shall be sorry to leave Graustark," she said dreamily after a long period of silent retrospection. "I've had the happiest year of my life here."

"I've had the bestest month of my life here. I'll never again say that the world is a dull place, I shudder when I think of what might have happened to you, my precious sweetheart, if I hadn't come to Edelweiss. I would not have found you."

"Feeling her trembling in his arms, he went on with whimsical good humor: "You would have been eaten up by the eggs long before this, or perhaps you would have succeeded in becoming a countess."

"As it is, I shall be a baroness."

"In Graustark, but not in New York. That reminds me. You'll be more than a baroness—more than a princess. You will be a queen. Don't you catch the point? You will be Mrs. King."

The Grand Duke Paulus was distinctly annoyed. He had traveled many miles, and had quite a number

of hardships, and all to no purpose. When dawn came his emissaries returned from the city with the lamentable information that the government had righted itself, that Mariani's sensational revolution was at an end and that the regents would be highly honored if his excellency could overlook the distressingly chaotic conditions at court and condescend to pay the castle a visit.

The grand duke resolved that he would visit the castle in a very informal way, extend his congratulations and offer his services, which he knew would be declined with thanks. Incidentally he would mention the bond issue; also he would find the opportunity to suggest to the ministry that his government still was willing to make large grants and stupendous promises if any sort of arrangement could be made by which the system might be operated in conjunction with branch lines of the imperial roads.

And so it was that at midday he rode in pomp and splendor through the city gates, attended by his staff and a rather overpowering bodyguard.

The grand duke, with all the arrogance of a royal personage, was late. It was not for him to consider the conditions that distressed the court of Graustark—not at all. He was a grand duke and he would take his own time in paying his respects. When he finally presented himself at the castle doors a sleepy group of attendants actually yawned in his presence.

No one had slept during the night just passed. Excitement and the suffering of others had denied slumber to one and all, even to those who had not slept for many days and nights. Now the reaction was upon them. Relaxation had succeeded tension.

When the grand duke entered the great, somber throne room he was confronted by a punctiliously polite assemblage, but every eyelid was as heavy as lead and as prone to sink.

The prince sat far back in the great chair of his ancestors, his sturdy legs sticking straight out in front of him. The grand duke advanced between the respectful lines and knelt at the foot of the throne.

"Arise, your highness," piped Bobby, with a quick glance at Count Halfont. It was a faint, faraway voice that uttered the gracious command. "Graustark welcomes the Grand Duke Paulus. It is my pleasure to—"

A helpless look came into his eyes. He looked everywhere for support. The grand duke saw that he had forgotten the rehearsed speech and smiled benignly as he stepped forward and kissed the hand that had been extended somewhat uncertainly.

"My most respectful homage to your majesty. The felicitations of my emperor and the warmest protestations of friendship from his people."

With this as a prologue he engaged himself in the ever pleasurable task of delivering a long congratulatory address. After five minutes of high sounding platitudes he again turned to the prince. It was then that he received his first shock.

Prince Robin was sound asleep. His head was slipping sidewise along the satiny back of the big chair, and his chin was very low in the laps at his neck. The grand duke coughed emphatically, cleared his throat and grew very red in the face.

The court of Graustark was distinctly dismayed.

"His majesty appears to have—ahem—gone to sleep," remarked the grand duke tartly, interrupting himself to address the prime minister.

"He is very tired, your excellency," said Count Halfont, very much distressed. "Pray consider what he has been through during the—"

"Ah, my dear count, do not apologize for him. I quite understand. Ahem! Ahem!" Still, he was very red in the face.

"I will awaken him, your excellency," said the prime minister, edging toward the throne.

"Not at all, sir!" protested the visitor. "Permit him to have his sleep out, sir. I will not have him disturbed. Who am I that I should defeat the claims of nature? It is my pleasure to wait until his majesty's nap is over. Then he may dismiss us, but not until we have cried 'Long live the prince!'"

For awhile they stood in awkward silence, this notable gathering of men and women. Then the prime minister in hushed tones suggested that it would be eminently proper under the circumstances for all present to be seated. He was under the impression that his serene highness would sleep long and soundly.

Stiff backed and uncomfortable, the court sat and waited. No one pretended to conceal the listless yawns that would not be denied. A drowsy, ineffably languid feeling took possession of the entire assemblage.

The prime minister sat at the foot of the throne and nodded in spite of himself. John Tullis, far back near the wall, had his head on his hand, bravely fighting off the persistent demon. Prince Danton of Dawsbergen was sound asleep.

The grand duke was wide awake. He saw it all and was equal to the occasion. After all, he was a kindly old gentleman and, once his moment of mortification was over, he was not above charity.

Bobby's poor little head had slipped over to a most uncomfortable position against the arm of the chair. Putting his finger to lips, the grand duke tiptoed carefully up to the throne. With very gentle hands he lifted Bobby's head and, infinitely tender, stuffed a throne cushion behind the curly head. A splendid smile in his eyes, he tiptoed back to his chair.

As he passed Count Halfont, who had risen, he whispered:

"Dear little man! I do not forget, my lord, that I was once a boy. God bless him!"

Then he sat down, conscious of a fine feeling of goodness, folded his arms across his expansive chest and

allowed his beaming eyes to rest upon

the sleeping boy far back in the chair of state. Incidentally he decided to delay a few days before taking up the bond question with the ministry. The grand duke was not an ordinary diplomat.



"DEAR LITTLE MAN! GOD BLESS HIM!" the sleeping boy far back in the chair of state. Incidentally he decided to delay a few days before taking up the bond question with the ministry. The grand duke was not an ordinary diplomat.

In one of the curtained windows, far removed from the throne, sat Truxton King and Lorraine Tullis.

All about them people were watching the delicate little scene, smiling drowsily at the grand duke's tender comedy. No one was looking at the two in the curtained recess. Her hand was in his; her head sank slowly toward his inviting shoulder. Her heavy lids drooped lower and lower, refusing to obey the slender will that argued against complete surrender. At last her soft, regular breathing told him that she was asleep. Awaiting his opportunity, he tenderly kissed the soft brown hair, murmured a gentle word of love and settled his own head against the thick cushions.

Everywhere they dozed and nodded. The grand duke smiled and blinked his little eyes. He was very wide awake.

That is how he happened to see the prince move restlessly and half open his sleep bound eyes. The grand duke leaned forward with his hand to his ear and listened. He had seen the boy's lips move. From dreamland came Bobby's belated "Good night."

THE END.

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