



Princess of Gratz

LOUIS ARTHUR CUNNINGHAM

CHAPTER IX

The Princess Meridel of Gratz and her cousin arrive in Canada to visit Baron Ruhl in Morpion her uncle. He had been employed in Madame Fabre Lusignan, who turned the estate over to the baron in order that he could entertain the Princess without her knowing of her reduced circumstances. Roger Fabre of the Canadian Air Force and nephew of the Malame falls in love with the Princess. The estate is turned over to the care of the unfortunate children of war-torn Europe. Pol Martin and Rosine find a photograph of the Madame's table and learn that it is the man whom Roger has vowed to kill. They then learn that the man is Roger's brother. Roger still does not know the connection between his brother and the crime he is pledged to avenge. The children break the picture frame and tell Madama the truth. She tries not to believe that Roger's own brother had killed Bonhomme Fricot, but a doubt remains. The princess learned that the baron was not the owner of the castle, so they all left for Coq d'Or where he bought an interest in the Golden Cock. Roger returns to find the Princess gone and Madama's fortune in a bad way. He sets out with Madama to find the Princess and have her and the children return.

"You could not take captives from your airplane, could you?" asked Pol Martin. "Who takes these prisoners, I know. The soldiers on the ground take them and send them over here and put them in big wire cages. A prisoner told us that there was a big one full of them down in the woods back of Philbert. It would not take us to see them. He said 'Suppose you were shut up in a cage, would you like to come and give us a hand? Of course they would!'"

"Did you see your brother?" asked Rosine. "Did you see the little where we used to live? The golden cock still wears the hat of the inn? Emil and Margot did me to ask you. They are always wondering about it."

Roger smiled and shook his head. "I may have seen over Gratz, my little ones, but if I did it was in the night and there was nothing I could see. Probably the brave little cock is still there above the door—unless the army of occupation has eaten him in a stew."

"They could not eat a wooden bird, Monsieur Roger!" protested Rosine. "Still do they not have sawdust in their sausage?"

"Do they not indeed. But I was only joking. That cock of Jules' would be too tough even for those men of iron. There's the clock strikes ten—it's bed for little men—and also little women."

He sat at the fire with Meridel after madame had retired, while Rudolph and Jules went over their accounts in the little enclosure in the taproom. Roger's dark eyes studied her face shyly. He said, "This is an hour I have waited for. And I pictured it just like this. There would be a fire and you and I would sit beside it, and I would know such happiness as never before. To be near you is all I'd ask. To know that, by reaching out I could touch you, that by bending I could kiss your lips—"

"She looked at him, then away. "But—but you do not?"

"No, I do not." He, too, was intent on the blaze. The mystic figure that was between my love and me—his voice held now a little if that same wryness that had been in it when he learned of her previous meeting with the red one—it has crystallized into the very solid form of my brother, Michel."

"Madame told you about the picture?"

"All about it."

"And you think?"

"I think with you and my aunt it is a thing too awful, too monstrously appalling, to be believed. But could—it—could it be? Your brother—how could he live among them, serve with them—?"

"You mean could he get away with it? Yes, he could, readily. He was educated in Germany, spoke the language well, had many friends there. He knew the political setup and admired some of the things about it. There! I swore I wouldn't talk about this business and here I spoil our first moments together by dwelling on it. I will not mention it again—even though I know you keep his photograph and—pray to it."

"I do not!" She was as swift with her denial as any school-girl. "I do not! I keep it because I remember him pleasantly because I had some lovely hours with him, because he seemed—"

"I'm sorry, sweet. Forgive me. He is a marvelous fellow, Mike. Anyone who ever knew him will tell you that. He was always a romantic figure—remote, doing fascinating things such as climbing glaciers in Alaska, exploring the regions of the Congo and digging in Mayan ruins. And he could charm the birds out of the tree. What a fine John Alden I have turned out to be. John was a fellow, Meridel, who pleaded for another man, while he himself really loved the girl he was trying to win for the other. I'm not going to give Mike any more of a bulldup. I've praised him too

highly now. From now on I shall tell you what a wonderful fellow is Roger Fabre, what the King said to him, how Mr. Churchill, looking at a few hundred of the Air Force boys one day said, "And who is that tall dark fellow there? Can that be this Fabre I've heard so much about? The man at the mere mention of whose name Marshal Goering says, 'Ground der Luftwaffe at once!' And, believe it or not, it really was Roger."

"Ah, you are fine, Roger. You can laugh always and have fun. Deep inside, though, you do not laugh so much, eh?"

"I try not to look too deep inside, Meridel. It's no good. And right now especially. After this is over, after we can think quietly, for a while and no longer hear the thunder of guns and the roar of flames—why then, perhaps, we can look into our hearts and raise them up to God. Right now it's laugh while you can, be merry while there's gaiety about. Would you like to go somewhere and dance with me?"

"Dance? It's so long since I've danced that I shouldn't know how to go about it. And you are fatigued. You must be so weary."

"But I'm not. I snatch a wink here, a wink there. I can't be tired when I am with you."

"I think it is better that you stay here and you will rest. If you like I shall sing for you."

"A lullaby, no doubt. You want to put me to sleep to get rid of me?"

She laughed. "I wouldn't leave you even if you slept." And she sang in French.

My little one, sleep.
The day has gone and the night is here.
Sleep, on sleep.
My little one, sleep.
While the angels hover near."

She sang on. Roger listened. She saw him nod, his eyelids drooping. She smiled, sang more softly. Slowly his dark head came to her, he rested there. Meridel did not move—not until almost an hour had passed. He stirred then and sat up in an instant, looking at her in utter confusion.

"I dreamed of angels," he said. "And this is one dream that carries on waking. Why ever did you let me go to sleep, Meridel?"

"So that I might see what you looked like in repose."

"I must have looked horrible."

He rubbed his short hair. "I feel fine now."

"My first night home," muttered him, and flowers and music! You were never to leave my arms. Instead—"

"I held you in my arms while you slept."

"Which is why I dreamed so pleasantly. Ah, well, there will be other nights, I shall be here for a while and you are coming back to Philbert with us?"

"Yes, Madame Fabre has asked for all."

Everywhere, last season, was the ringing music of children's voices. The threat of poverty was ignored even if it was not entirely nonexistent. The government and the authorities in charge of the little visitors had assured Madame that Philbert would be maintained by them and it still would belong to her. "You began this noble work, Madame," the Premier said. "Be assured we shall not let it languish."

Roger, aided by a lawyer who had been a classmate at McGill, was trying to bring some semblance of order out of the chaos left by that lord of misrule, Gabriel Follet. "We shall make some fair arrangement madame," he told his aunt. "It will be all right. But you will be a working girl, mind—directress of all these little refugees you have taken in. That will be no work. And Meridel has promised now to stay here and help me, and Rudolph will come too. There will be more children—"

"Yes, for many years to come there will be children in need of just such aid as you can offer. You will be doing something great and useful. And you are repaid in such coin as that."

Late that evening, Madame raised the delicate, thin-stemmed glass and watched the ruddy fires in the depths of the wine, the warm heart's blood of the Burgundy grapes.

"There is one more toast," she said slowly. "And tonight, somehow, I do not hesitate to propose it. You know what it is, Roger, you all know—let us drink to Michel."

Suddenly, as if a hand invisible had dashed the glass from her lips, the fragile bit of crystal the old lady held was shattered on the hearthstone at her feet and the wine spread like blood. Her hand stayed halted near her lips. Tre others were on their feet, staring at the two men in sheepskin jackets who stood in the wide doorway, at the dark menace of the automatic the short one held, at the grim, red studded visage of the tall one who surveyed them with blue eyes cold as the ice of the river.

"Be quiet, all of you," said he. And the voice was the voice of Michel Fabre, but how altered, how harsh, how hateful! "We are sorry to spoil this occasion, but our lives are important to us. We escaped from your prison

camp in the backwoods. You will remember me as Oberlieutenant Fabre. My companion is Manfred Kehl. What we want from you, my friends, is the key of the station wagon parked in front of the house. You have them, brother." He looked at Roger, his face expressionless. "Bring them here."

"The laughing soldier who killed Bonhomme Fricot," said Madame softly. "And I thought it was some wild story the children had made up."

Michel started. His eyes strayed from Roger to the scornful face of his aunt. "We have no time for talk." The keys, please; and at once. We cut your telephone wires and have fixed the other car so it will not go. Ah—" he had seen Roger reach for a bronze book-end as he passed behind a chair and in one leap he was on him. His fist shot and cracked cruelly on his brother's mouth, bodying it, sending Roger crashing to the floor.

"Fool! You would not have tried that had you known how good Manfred is with the trigger." He bent and took the keys from Roger's pocket. "Thank you—" He stood up. "And you, my friends. Let this not spoil your merriment. It is war, you know—a war whose demands transcend anything else."

"Even the love of God and the love of your brother," said Meridel.

"Princess of Gratz n." Oberlieutenant bowed stiffly. A: O yes even perhaps such loves as you mention. I am glad you have found sanctuary in this country. It would be a shame for such beauty as yours to sicken."

"Make haste!" said Kehl in German. "There is no time for talk. You know the pretty one? She is the Princess of Gratz, isn't she?" He bowed slightly in a north set in a hard smile. She is warm here, nicht? We shall go now."

Roger had risen slowly to his feet. Rudolph stood beside him. Meridel moved close to the old lady whose eyes never left the thin stubbled visage of Michel Fabre.

"Oberlieutenant Fabre," she said. "A little child stamped on your picture and said she hated you."

"It is war," he said. "War. You do not understand, you people. You will know one day soon Auf Wiedersehen."

No one moved. Not until, above the low moaning of the wind, heard the sound of a motor, did anyone have the will to speak, to think, even, of what happened. Roger went to the window then. Meridel came and stood beside him, her hand through his arm. They saw the tail lights of the station wagon receding until they were only fiery pin points; then nothing.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

WARTIME HINTS FOR BUSY HOUSEWIVES

New, appetizing recipes that make meat go farther, interesting suggestions for sewing attractive slip covers and draperies, and high lights to beauty are a few of the features that await readers of the Household Almanac in the September 24th issue of

TODAY and TOMORROW
By DON ROBINSON

STUDENTS . . . Individualists

In spite of the tremendous upheavals in our way of living have taken place during the past ten years, the youngsters of the coming generation don't seem to have lost the desire for personal independence which has always been typical of Americans.

At least a survey of over 100,000 high school boys and girls showed that the majority would prefer to be in business for themselves to working for someone else.

The boys and girls of high school age today were born during a major business depression, grew up during an era of great social changes, and have, for the past three years, lived under abnormal conditions of world war. These major shakeups are bound to leave permanent impressions on the minds of the coming generation. Some teachers have predicted that it would result in socialistic thinking—a desire to substitute group action for individual action. But the response to the "ambition poll" conducted by the Scholastic Institute of Student Opinion would indicate that individualism will continue to be a potent force in our country.

INDEPENDENT . . . 60 percent

The scholastic poll named six work classifications from which each student was asked to choose the one which best answered the question: "If you could begin your career in any of the following and obtain the same income in the start, which would you choose?"

The choice included three classifications which might be considered independent occupations and three which necessitated working for someone else.

Among the boys questioned, 60 per cent chose an independent occupation; 26.2 per cent said they would like to own or manage their own business, 21.7 per cent chose a profession such as medicine, law or teaching, and 12.1 per cent said they would prefer farming or some branch of agriculture.

Of the 40 per cent who thought they would prefer to work for someone else, 16.9 per cent wanted to work for a large business or industry, 16.6 per cent said they would like to work for the government and 6.5 percent thought they would like working for a small business or industry.

Among the 61,115 girls covered by the poll, the greatest proportion—45 per cent—expressed a preference for teaching, nursing, law or medicine; 13 percent said they would like to work for the government, 19 per cent for a large business or industry, 10 per cent for a small business, and 2 per cent expressed a preference for agriculture.

GOVERNMENT . . . danger

There may be somewhat of a threat which bears watching in the fact that 16.6 per cent of the boys and 13.3 per cent of the girls expressed a choice for government or public service. Since there are approximately 12,000,000 boys and girls of high school age, this would indicate that almost 4,000,000 are more inter-

tel in government careers than in private business.

Perhaps this choice merely indicates a schoolboy desire to be in the public eye—to be President or senator. Perhaps it grows out of the dissatisfaction with the way this country is run and a desire to have a hand in improving it. But it is also possible that it can be interpreted as indicating approval of big government—of the government rather than private enterprise being considered the most important category.

But if, as the poll suggests, over 7,000,000 of the present high school generation want to be in business for themselves, there is not too much to worry about. What occupation they actually do enter will depend on numerous conditions beyond their control—but, as of today, it would seem that American youth is just as ambitious, just as freedom-loving and just as anxious for independence as previous generations.

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