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THE Princess Virginia

By C. N. and A. M. WILLIAMSON,
Authors of "The Lightning Conductor," "Rosemary in Search of a Father," Etc.

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The ladies of the court, who, with their husbands, had been waiting to congratulate Leopold, crowded round the girl as the emperor turned to them with a look and gesture of invitation. A seat was given her, and the arm in its blood stained sleeve was hastily bound up. She was the heroine of the day, dividing honors with its hero.

There was scarcely a grande dame among the brilliant assemblage on the emperor's platform to whom Lady Mowbray and her daughter had not a letter of introduction from their invaluable friend. But no one knew at this moment of any title to their recognition possessed by the girl other than the right she had earned by her splendid deed. All smiled on her through grateful tears, though there were some who would have given their ten fingers to have stepped into her place.

Thus Virginia sat through the ceremonies, careless that thousands of eyes were on her face, thinking only of one pair of eyes, which spared a glance for her now and then, hardly seeing the statue of Rhaetia, whose glorious marble womanhood unveiled roused a storm of enthusiasm from the crowd, hearing only the short, stirring speech made by Leopold.

When everything was over and the people had no excuse to linger save to see the emperor ride away and the great personages disperse, Leopold turned again to Virginia.

All the world was listening, of course; all the world was watching, too, and, no matter what his inclination might have been, his words could be but few.

Once more he thanked and praised her for her courage, her presence of mind; thanked her for remaining as if she had been granting a favor to him and asked her where she was staying in Kronburg, as he promised himself the honor of sending to inquire for her health that evening.

His desire would be to call at once in person, he added; but, owing to the programme arranged for this day and several days to follow, not only each hour, but each moment, would be officially occupied. These birthday festivities were troublesome, but duty must be done, and then, Leopold repeated, when he had Miss Mowbray's name and address, the court surgeon and physician would be commanded to attend upon her without delay.

With these words and a chivalrous courtesy at parting, the emperor was gone, Baron von Lyndal, grand master of ceremonies, and his baroness having been told off to take care of Miss Mowbray.

In another mood it would have pricked Virginia's sense of humor to see Baroness von Lyndal's almost shocked surprise at discovering her to be the daughter of that Lady Mowbray whom she was asked to meet. Luckily all the letters of introduction had reached their destinations, it merely remaining, according to the etiquette in Rhaetia, for Lady Mowbray to announce her arrival in Kronburg by sending cards to the recipients. But Virginia had no heart for laughter now.

She had been on the point of forgetting until reminded by a dig from the spur of necessity that she was only a masquerader acting her borrowed part in a pageant. For the first time since she had hopefully taken it up that part became detestable. She would have given almost anything to throw it off and be herself, for nothing less than clear sincerity seemed worthy of this day and the event which crowned it.

Nevertheless, in the vulgar language of proverb which no well brought up princess should ever stoop to use, she had made her own bed, and she must lie in it. It would not do for her suddenly to give out to the world of Kronburg that she was not, after all, Miss Mowbray, but Princess Virginia of Baumenburg-Drippe. That would not be fair to the grand duchess, who had yielded to her wishes, nor fair to her own plans. Above all, it would not be fair to the emperor, handicapped as he now was by a debt of gratitude. No; Miss Mowbray she was, and Miss Mowbray she must for the present remain.

Naturally the grand duchess fainted when her daughter was brought back

with ominous red stains upon the gray background of her traveling dress. But the wound was neither deep nor dangerous. The court surgeon was as consoling as he was complimentary, and by the time that messengers from the palace had arrived with inquiries from the emperor and invitations to the emperor's ball the mother of the heroine could dispense with her sal volatile.

She had fortunately much to think of. There was the important question of dress for the ball tomorrow night; there was the still more pressing question of the newspapers, which must not be allowed to publish the borrowed name of Mowbray lest complications should arise, and there were the questions to be asked of Virginia: How had she felt? How had she dared? How had the emperor looked, and what had the emperor said?

If it had been natural for the grand duchess to faint it was equally natural that she should not faint twice. She began to believe, after all, that Providence smiled upon Virginia and her adventure, and she wondered whether the princess' white satin embroidered with seed pearls or the silver spangled blue tulle would be more becoming to wear to the ball.

Next day the Rhaetian newspapers devoted columns to the attack upon the emperor by an anarchist from a certain province (once Italian), who had disguised himself as an official in the employ of the burgomaster. There were long paragraphs in praise of the lady who, with marvelous courage and presence of mind, had sprung between the emperor and the assassin, receiving on the arm with which she had shielded Unser Leo a glancing blow from the weapon aimed at the imperial breast; but, thanks to a few earnestly imploring words written by Lady Mowbray to Baron von Lyndal, commands impressed upon the landlord of the hotel and the fact that Rhaetian editors are not as modern as Americans in their methods, the lady was not named. She was a foreigner and a stranger to the capital of Rhaetia. She was, according to the papers, "as yet unknown."

CHAPTER EIGHT

NOT a window of the fourteenth century yellow marble palace on the hill, with its famous garden of the nine fountains, that was not ablaze with light, glittering against a faraway background of violet mountains crowned by snow.

Outside the tall bronze gates where marble lions crouched the crowd that might not pass beyond stared, chattered, pointed and exclaimed without jealousy of their betters. Unser Leo was giving a ball, and it was enough for their happiness to watch the slow moving line of splendid state coaches, gorgeous automobiles and neat broughams with well known crests upon their doors; to strive good naturedly for a peep at the faces and dresses, the jewels and picturesque uniforms; to comment upon all freely, but never impudently, asking one another what would be for supper and with whom the emperor would dance.

"There she is—there's the beautiful young foreign lady who saved him!" cried a girl in the throng. "I was there and saw her, I tell you. Isn't she an angel?"

Instantly a hearty cheer went up, growing in volume, and the green coated policemen had to keep back the crowd that would have stopped the horses and pressed close for a long look into a plain dark blue brougham.

Virginia shrank out of sight against the cushions, blushing and breathing quickly as she caught her mother's hand.

"Dear people—dear, kind people!" she thought. "I love them for loving him. I wonder, oh, I wonder, if they will ever see me and cheer me driving by his side!"

She had chosen to wear the white dress with the pearls, though up to the last moment the grand duchess had suffered tortures of indecision between that and the blue, to say nothing of a pink chiffon trimmed with crushed roses. Before the carriage brought them to the palace doors the girl's blush had faded, and her face was as white as her gown when at her mother's side she passed between bowing lackeys through the marble Hall of Lions, on through the frescoed Kittersaal to the throne room, where the emperor's guests awaited his coming.

It was etiquette not to arrive a moment later than 10 o'clock, and a few minutes after the hour Baron von Lyndal in his official capacity as grand master of ceremonies struck the polished floor twice with his gold knobbed wand of ivory. This signaled the approach of the court from the imperial dinner party, and Leopold entered, with a stout, middle aged royal highness from Russia on his arm.

Until his arrival—the beautiful Miss Mowbray had held all eyes, and even when he appeared she was not forgotten.

ten. Every one was on tenterhooks to see how she would be greeted by the grateful emperor.

The instant that his dark head towered above other heads in the throne room it was observed even by those not usually observant that never had Leopold been so handsome.

His was a face remarkable for intellect and firmness rather than for classical beauty of feature, though his features were strong and clearly cut. But tonight the sternness that sometimes marred them in the eyes of women was smoothed away. He looked young and ardent, almost boyish, like a man who has suddenly found an absorbing new interest in life.

The first dance he went through with the Russian royalty, who was the guest of the evening, and still rigidly conforming to the line of duty, which obtains in court ballrooms as on battlefields, the second, third and fourth dances were for the emperor penances instead of pleasures. But for the fifth, a waltz, he bowed before Virginia.

During this long hour there had been hardly a movement, smile or glance of hers which he had not contrived to see since his entrance. He knew just how well Baron von Lyndal carried out his instructions concerning Miss Mowbray. He saw each partner presented to her for a dance the emperor might not claim, and to save his life or a national crisis he could not have forced the same expression in speaking with her royal highness from Russia as that which spontaneously brightened his face when at last he approached Virginia.

"Who is that girl?" asked Count von Bretstein in his usual abrupt manner as the arm of Leopold girdled the slim waist of the princess and the eyes of Leopold drank light from another pair of eyes lifted to his in laughter.

It was to Baroness von Lyndal that the old chancellor put his question, and she fluttered a tiny diamond spangled fan of lace to hide lips that would smile as she answered, "What, chancellor, are you jesting, or don't you really know who that girl is?"

Count von Bretstein turned eyes cold and gray as glass away from the two figures moving rhythmically with the music to the face of the once celebrated beauty. Long ago he had admired Baroness von Lyndal as passionately as it was in him to admire any woman, but that day was so far distant as to be remembered with scorn, and now such power as she had over him was merely to excite a feeling of irritation.

"I seldom trouble myself to jest," he answered.

"Ah, one knows that truly great men are born without a sense of humor. Those who have it are never as successful in life as those without," smiled the baroness, who was by birth a Hungarian and loved laughter better than anything else except compliments upon her vaunting beauty. "How stupid of me to have tried your patience! 'That girl,' as you so uncompromisingly call her, has two claims to attention at court. She is the English Miss Helen Mowbray whose mother has come to Kronburg armed with sheaves of introductions to us all. She is also the young woman of whom the papers are full today, for it is she who saved the emperor's life."

"Indeed?" said the chancellor, a gray gleam in his eye as he watched the white figure floating on the tide of music in the arms of Leopold. "Indeed?"

"I thought you would have known, for you know most things before other people hear of them," went on the baroness. "Lady Mowbray and her daughter are staying at the Hohenlangenwald hotel. That's the mother sitting on the left of Princess Neufried—the pretty Dresden china person. But the girl is a great beauty."

"It's generous of you to say so, baroness," replied the chancellor. "I didn't see the young lady's face at all clearly yesterday. I was stationed too far away. And dress makes a great



"Who is that girl?" difference. As for what she did," went on the old man, whose coldness to women and merciless justice to both sexes alike had earned him the nickname of "Iron Heart"—"as for what she did, if it had not been she who intervened between the emperor and death it would have been the fate of another to do so. It was a fortunate thing for the girl, we may say, that it happened to be her arm which struck up the weapon."

"Or she wouldn't be here tonight, you mean," laughed the baroness. "Don't you think, then, that his majesty is right to single her out for so much honor?" Her eyes were on the dancers, yet that mysterious skill which most women of the world have learned taught her how not to miss the slightest change of expression, if there were any, on the chancellor's square, lined face.

"His majesty is always right," he replied. "An invitation to

pled diplomatically. ... a ball, a dance or two, a few compliments, a call to pay his respects—a gentleman could not be less gracious. And his majesty is one of the first gentlemen in Europe."

"He has had good training what to do and what not to do." The baroness flung her little sop of flattery to Cerberus with a dainty ghost of a bow for the man who had been as a second father to Leopold since the late emperor's death. "But—we're old friends, chancellor"—she was not to blame that they had not been more in the days before she became Baroness von Lyndal—"so, tell me, can you look at the girl's face and the emperor's and still say that everything will end with an invitation, a dance, some compliments and a call to pay respects?"

Iron Heart frowned and sneered, wondering what he could have seen twenty-two years ago to admire in this flighty woman. He would have escaped from her now if escape had been feasible, but he could not be openly rude to the wife of the grand master of ceremonies at the emperor's ball, and, besides, he was not unwilling perhaps to show the lady that her sentimental and unsuitable innuendoes were as the buzzing of a fly about his ears.

"I'm close upon seventy and no longer a fair judge of a woman's attractions," he returned carelessly. "A look at her face conveys nothing to me, but were she Helen of Troy instead of Helen Mowbray the invitation, the dance, the compliments and the call, with the present of some jeweled souvenir, are all that are permissible in the circumstances."

"What circumstances?" and the baroness looked as innocent as an inquiring child.

"The lady is not of royal blood, and his majesty, I think heaven, is not a rouse."

"He has a heart, though you trained him, chancellor, and he has eyes. He may never have used them to much purpose before, yet there must be a first time, and, the higher and more strongly built the tower, once it begins to topple the greater is the fall thereof."

"Is it the sense of humor, which you say I lack, that gives you pleasure in discussing the wildest improbabilities as if they were events to be considered seriously? If it is I'm not sorry to lack it. In any case, it's well that neither of us is the emperor's keeper."

"We're at least his very good friends, you as well as I in my humbler way, chancellor, and you and I have known each other for twenty-two years. If it amuses me to discuss improbabilities, why not? Since you call them improbabilities it can do no harm to dwell upon them as ingredients for romance. Not for worlds would I suggest that his majesty isn't an example for all men to follow nor that poor, pretty Miss Mowbray could be tempted to indiscretion, but yet I'd be ready to make a wager, the emperor being human and the girl a beauty, that an acquaintance so romantically begun won't end with a ball and a call."

"What could there possibly be more, or what you hint at as more, in honor?"

The chancellor's voice was angry at last as well as stern, for he could not bear persistence in other people unless it were to further some cause of his own. To the delight of the woman who had once tried in vain to melt his iron heart, Count von Bretstein began to look somewhat like a baited bull. Really, said the baroness to herself, there was an actual resemblance in feature, and joyously she searched for a few more little ribbon tipped banderillos.

"What fun it was to ruffle the temper of the surly old brute who had humiliated her woman's vanity in days long past, but not forgotten! She knew the chancellor's desire for the emperor's marriage as soon as a suitable match could be found and, though she was not in the secret of his plans, would have felt little surprise at learning that some eligible royal girl had already been selected. Now how amusing it would be actually to make the old man tremble for the success of his hopes, even if it should turn out in the end to be impossible or undesirable to upset them!"

"What could there be more in honor?" she echoed lightly after an instant given to reflection. "Why, the emperor and the girl will see a great deal of each other unless you banish or imprison the Mowbrays. There'll be many dances together, many calls—in fact, a serial romance instead of a short story. Why shouldn't his majesty know the pleasure of a platonic friendship with a beautiful and charming young woman?"

"Because Plato's out of fashion, if ever he was in, among human beings with red blood in their veins and because, as I said, the emperor is above all else a man of honor. Besides, I doubt that any woman, no matter how pretty or young, could wield a really powerful influence over his life."

"You doubt that? Then you don't know the emperor and you've forgotten some of the traditions of his house."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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Once Fitz-Greene Halleck, the author of "Marco Bozzaris," called upon her in New York in his old age, and she asked him to define for her what was poetry and what was prose.

He replied: "When General Morris commands his brigade and says, 'Soldiers, draw your swords!' he talks prose. When he says 'Soldiers, draw your willing swords!' he talks poetry."

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