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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. etc.

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The moods of Baroness von Lyndal concerning grim old Schloss Breitstein had varied many times during her years of residence by the lake. Sometimes she pleased herself by reflecting that the great man who had slighted her lived in less luxury than she had attained by her excellent marriage. Again, the thought of the ancient lineage of the present Count von Breitstein filled her with envy, and oftener than all the feeling that the "old grizzly bear" could crouch in his den and watch sneeringly everything which happened at Lyndalberg got upon the lady's nerves. She could have screamed and shaken her fist at the dark mass of rock and stone across the water, but after the birthday ball and during the first days of Leopold's visit at her house she often threw a whimsical glance at the grim silhouette against the northern sky and smiled.

"Can you see, old bear?" she would ask gayly. "Are you spying over there? Do you think yourself all wise and all powerful? Do you see what's in my mind now, and do you guess partly why I've taken all this trouble? Are you racking your brain for some way of spoiling my little plans? But you can't do it, you know. It's too late. There's nothing you can do except sit still and growl and glare at your own claws, which a woman has clipped. How do you like the outlook, old bear? Do you lie awake at night and study how to save your scheme for the emperor's marriage? All your grumpy old life you've despised women, but now you're beginning at last to find out that, powerful as you are, there are some things a woman with tact and money, nice houses and a good natured husband can do which the highest statesman in the land can't undo. How soon shall I make you admit that, Chancellor Bear?"

Thus the baroness, standing at her drawing room window, would amuse herself in odd moments when she was not arranging original and elaborate entertainments for her guests. And she congratulated herself particularly on having had the forethought to invite Egon von Breitstein, the chancellor's half brother.

There was a barrier of thirty-six years' difference in age between the two, and they had never been friends in the true sense of the word, for the old man was temperamentally unable to sympathize with the tastes of understand the temptations of the younger brother, and the younger man was mentally unable to appreciate the qualities of the elder.

Nevertheless it was rumored at court that Iron Heart had more than once used the gay and good looking captain of cavalry for a cat's paw in pulling some very big and hot chestnuts out of the fire. At all events, "Handsome Egon" (so known among his followers, "the chancellor's jackal" (thus nicknamed by his enemies), would have found difficulty in keeping up appearances without the allowance granted by his powerful half brother. The ill assorted pair were often in communication, and the baroness liked to think that news fresh from Lyndalberg must sooner or later be wafted like a wind blown scent of roses across the water to Schloss Breitstein.

She was still less displeased than surprised, therefore, when, the emperor having been three days at Lyndalberg, with two more days of his visit to run, an urgent message arrived for Captain von Breitstein from his brother.

Poor old Lorenz was wrestling with his enemy, gout, it appeared, and wished for Egon's immediate presence.

Such a summons could not be neglected. Egon's whole future depended upon his half brother's caprice, he hinted to the baroness in asking leave to desert her pleasant party for a few hours. So of course she sent the chancellor her regrets, with the baron's, and Egon went off charged with a friendly message from the emperor as well.

When the captain of cavalry had set out from Lyndalberg to Schloss Breitstein by the shortest way—across the lake in a smart little motor boat—promising to be back in time for dinner and a concert, the baroness spent all her energy in getting up an impromptu riding party, which would give Leopold the chance of another tête-à-tête with Miss Mowbray.

Already many such chances had been arranged, so cleverly as not to excite gossip, and if the flirtation, destined by the hostess to disgust Leopold with his chancellor's matrimonial projects, did not advance by leaps and bounds it was certainly not the fault of Baroness von Lyndal.

"Egon has been told to use his eyes and ears for all they're worth at Lyndalberg, and now he's called upon to hand in his first report," she said to herself when the younger von Breitstein was off on his mission across the lake.

But for once, at least, the "chancellor's jackal" was wronged by unjust suspicion. He arrived at Schloss Breitstein ignorant of his brother's motive in sending for him, though he shrewdly suspected it to be something quite different from the one alleged.

The chancellor was in his study, a deep windowed tower room, with walls book lined nearly to the ceiling.

deamea ceing. His old features—budget of letters when Egon was announced, and if he were really ill he did not betray his suffering. The square face, with its beetling brows, eyes of somber fire and forehead impressive as a cathedral dome, showed no new lines graven by pain.

"Sit down, Egon," he said abruptly, tearing in half an envelope stamped with the head of Hungaria's king. "I'll be ready for you in a moment."

The young man took the least uncomfortable chair in the room, which from his point of view was to say little in its favor, because the newest piece of furniture there had been made a hundred years before the world understood that lounging was not a crime. Over the high stone mantel hung a shield, so brightly polished as to fulfill the office of a mirror, and from where Egon sat, perforce upright and rigid, he could see himself vignette in reflection.

He admired his fresh color, which was like a girl's, pointed the waxed ends of his mustache with nervous cigarette stained fingers, and, thinking of many agreeable things, from bacarat to roulette, from roulette to races and races to pretty women, he wondered which he had to thank for this summons to the chancellor. Unfortunately Brother Lorenz knew everything. One's pleasant peccadillo buzzed to his ears like flies. There was little hope of deceiving him.

Egon sighed, and his eyes turned mechanically from his own visage on shining steel to the letter held in an old hand so velvet that it reminded the young man of a rock netted with the sprawling roots of ancient trees. He had just time to recognize the writing as that of Adalbert, crown prince of Hungaria, whom he knew slightly, when keen eyes curtained with furled and wrinkled lids glanced up from the letter.

"It's coming," thought Egon. "What can the old chap have found out?"

But, to his surprise, the chancellor's first words had no connection with his misdeeds.

"So our emperor is amusing himself at Lyndalberg?"

Egon's face brightened. He could be cunning in emergencies, but he was not clever, and always he felt himself at a disadvantage with the old statesman. Unless he had a special favor to ask he generally preferred discussing the affairs of others with the chancellor rather than allowing attention to be attracted to his own. "Oh, yes," he answered brightly. "His majesty is amusing himself uncommonly well. I never saw him in as brilliant spirits. But you, dear Lorenz—tell me about yourself. Is your gout?"

"The devil take my gout!"

Egon started. "A good thing if he did, provided he left you behind," he retorted, meaning exactly the opposite, as he often did when trying to measure wits with the chancellor. "But you sent for me?"

"Don't tell me you supposed I sent for you because I wanted consolation or condolence?"

"No-o," laughed Egon uneasily. "I fancied there was some other more pressing reason. But I'm bound in common courtesy to take your sincerity for granted until you undeceive me."

"Hang common courtesy between you and me!" returned the bear. "I've nothing to conceal. I sent for you to tell me what mischief that witch cat Mechtildie von Lyndal is plotting. You're on the spot. Trust you for seeing everything that goes on—the one thing I would trust you to do."

"Thanks," said Egon.

"Don't thank me yet, however grateful you may be. But I don't mind

hinting that it won't be the worse for you if for once you've used those fine eyes of yours to some useful purpose."

Egon was genuinely astonished at this turn of the conversation, as he had been carefully arming himself against a personal attack from any one of several directions. He sat pointing the sharp ends of his mustache one after the other and trying to remember some striking incident with which to adorn a more or less accurate narrative.

"What would you call useful?" he inquired at last.

The chancellor answered, but indirectly. "Has the emperor been playing the fool at Lyndalberg these last few days?"

"Do you want to make me guilty of lese majesty?" Egon raised his eyebrows, but he was recovering presence of mind. "If by playing the fool, though, you mean falling in love, why, then, brother, I should say he had done little else during the three days, and perhaps even the first of those was not the beginning."

The chancellor growled out a word which he would hardly have uttered in the imperial presence, particularly in the connection he suggested. "Let me hear exactly what has been going on from day's end to day's end," he commanded.

Egon grew thoughtful once more. Clearly here was the explanation of the summons. He was to be let off easily, it appeared. But, suspense relieved, he was not ready to be satisfied with negative blessings.

"Are you sure it isn't a bit like telling tales out of school?" he objected.

"Schoolboys with empty pockets have been known to do that," said the chancellor. "But perhaps your pockets aren't empty—eh?"

"They're in a chronic state of emptiness," groaned Egon.

"On the 15th day of October your quarterly allowance will be paid," remarked his brother. "I would increase the installment by the amount of 5,000 gulden if that would make it worth your while to talk—and forget nothing but your scruples."

"Oh, you know I'm always delighted to please you!" exclaimed Egon. "It's only natural, living the monotonous life you do when you're not busy with the affairs of state, that you should like to hear what goes on in the world outside. Of course I'll gladly do my best as a raconteur."

"My dear young man, don't lie," said the chancellor. "The habit is growing on you. You lie even to yourself. By and by you'll believe yourself, and then all hope for your soul will be over. What I want to know is how far the emperor has gone in his infatuation for this English girl. I'm not afraid to speak plainly to you, so you may safely—and profitably—do the same with me. In the first place, I'll put you at your ease by making a humiliating confession. The other night the woman von Lyndal tried to 'draw me,' as she would express it, on this subject, and I'm bitterly mortified to say she partly succeeded. She suggested an entanglement between Leopold and the girl. I replied that Leopold wasn't the man to pull down a hornet's nest of gossip around the ears of a young woman who had saved his life. No matter what his inclinations might be, I insisted that he would pay her no repeated visits."

"This thrust the fair Mechtildie parried as if repeating a mere rumor by saying that she believed the girl was to stay at the country house of some old friend of the emperor. At the time I attached little importance to her chatter, believing that she merely wished to give me a spiteful slap or two, as is her habit when she has the chance. For once, though, she has succeeded in stealing a march upon me, and she kept the secret of her plan until too late for me to have any hope of preventing Leopold from fulfilling his engagement at her house. After that was safely arranged I don't doubt she was overjoyed that I should guess her plot."

"Do you think that even if you'd known sooner you could have stopped the emperor from visiting at Lyndalberg?" asked Egon. "I know that you are iron, but he is steel."

"I would have stopped him," returned the chancellor. "I should have made no bones about the reason, for I've found that the best way with Leopold is to blurt out the whole truth and fight him—my experience against his will. If advice and warning hadn't sufficed to restrain him from insulting the girl who is to be his wife and injuring the reputation of the girl who never can be, I would have devised some expedient to thwart him for his own good. I'm not a man to give up when I feel that I am right."

"Neither is he," Egon added, "but since you seem so determined to uphold this dainty blossom of love in the bud we'll hope it's not yet too late for a sharp frost to blight it."

"I sent for you," said the chancellor, brushing away metaphor with an impatient gesture, "to show me the precise spot on which to lay my finger."

"I'll do my best to deserve your confidence," responded Egon gracefully. "Let me see—where shall I begin? Well, as you know, it's simpler for the emperor to see a good deal of the woman he admires at a friend's house than almost anywhere else in his own country. This particular woman risked her life to save his, and it's so natural for him to be gracious in return that people would be surprised if he were not. There's so much in their favor at the commencement."

"Miss Mowbray and her mother arrived at Lyndalberg before the emperor, had made friends there and were ready for the campaign. The girl is undoubtedly beautiful—the prettiest creature, I think, I ever saw—and she has a winning way which takes with women as well as men. Not one of her fellow guests seems to put a wrong construction on her flirtation with the emperor or his with her. The other men would think him blind if he didn't admire her as much as they do, and none of the women there are of the sort to be jealous. So, are you sure, Lorenz, that you're not taking too serious a view of the affair?"

"It can't be taken too seriously, considering the circumstances. I've told you my plans for the emperor's future. Princesses are women, and gossip is hydra headed. When the lady hears—she who has been allowed to understand that the emperor of Rhaetia only waits for a suitable opportunity of formally asking for her hand—

for she will surely hear, that he has seized this very moment for his first liaison, I tell you neither she nor her people are likely to accept the statement meekly. She's half German—on her father's side a cousin not too distant of William II. She's half English—on her mother's side related to the king through the line of the Stuarts. And in her there's a dash of American blood which comes from a famous grandmother who was descended from George Washington, a man as proud and with the right to be as proud as any king. All three countries would have reason to resent such an ungallant slight from Rhaetia."

"The little affair must be hushed up," said Egon.

"It must be stopped, and at once," said the chancellor.

"Ach!" sighed the young man, with as much meaning in the long drawn breath as the elder might care to read. And if it did not discourage it at least irritated him. "Go on!" he exclaimed sharply. "Go on with your sorry tale!"

"After all, when one comes to the telling, there isn't a very great deal one can put into cut and dried words," explained Egon. "At table the emperor has his hostess on one side and his fair preserver on the other. The two talk as much together during meals as etiquette allows and perhaps a little

more. Then, as the emperor has been often at Lyndalberg, he can act as eicerone for a stranger. He has shown Miss Mowbray all the beauties of the place. He gathers her roses in the rose garden; he has guided her through the grottoes; he has piloted her through the labyrinth; he has told her which are the best dogs in the kennels and has given her the history of all the horses in the baron's stables. I know this from the table talk. He has explored the lake with Miss Mowbray and her mother in a motor boat. Perhaps you saw the party? And, whether or no he brought his automobile to Lyndalberg on purpose, in any case he's had the Mowbrays out in it several times already. One would hardly think he could have found a chance to do so much in such a short time, but our emperor is a man of action. Yesterday we had a picnic at the Seebach-fall to see Thorwaldsen's Undine. Leopold and Miss Mowbray, being splendid climbers, reached the statue on the height over the fall long before the rest of us. At starting, however, I was close behind with the baroness and overheard some joke between the two about a mountain and a cow. The emperor spoke of milking as a fine art and said he'd lately been taking lessons. They laughed a great deal at this, and it was plain that they were on terms of comradeship. When a young man and a girl have a secret understanding, even the most innocent one, it puts them apart from others."

"Last night there were fireworks on the lake. The emperor and Miss Mowbray watched them together, for everything was conducted most informally. Afterward we had an impromptu cotillon, with three or four pretty new figures invented by the baroness. The emperor gave Miss Mowbray several favors, and one was a buckle of enameled forgetmenots. This morning there was tennis. The emperor and Miss Mowbray played together. They were both so skillful it was a pleasure to watch them. At luncheon they ate a double almond out of one shell, had a game over it, and Leopold caught Miss Mowbray napping. That brings us to the moment of my coming to you. For the afternoon I fancy the baroness was getting up a riding party, and this evening, unless they're too tired, she'll perhaps get up an amateur concert at which Miss Mowbray will sing. The girl has a delicious voice."

"The creature must be a fool or an adventuress," pronounced the chancellor. "If she has kept her senses she ought to know that nothing can come of this folly—except sorrow or scandal."

Egon shrugged his stiffly padded military shoulders. "I have always found that a woman in love doesn't stop to count the cost."

"So! You fancy her 'in love' with the emperor?"

"With the man rather than the emperor, if I'm a judge of character."

"Which you're not!" Iron Heart brusquely disposed of that suggestion. "The merest schoolgirl could pull the wool over your eyes if she cared to take the trouble."

"This one doesn't care a rap. She hardly knows that I exist."

"Humph!" The chancellor's eyes appraised his young brother's features. "That's a pity. You might have tried cutting the emperor out. Her affair with him can have no happy ending, while you, in spite of all your faults, with your good looks, our position and my money, wouldn't be a bad match for an ambitious girl."

"Your money?"

"I mean should I choose to make you my heir, and I would choose if you married to please me. Who are these Mowbrays?"

"I haven't had the curiosity to inquire into their antecedents," said Egon. "I only know that they're ladies, that they must be of some consequence in their own country or they couldn't have got the letters of introduction they have and that the girl is the prettiest on earth."

"Mechtildie talked to me. I remember, a good deal about those letters of introduction," the chancellor reflected aloud. "But Rhaetia is a long cry from England, and letters might be forged. I've known such things to be done. Fetch me a big red volume you'll find on the third shelf from the floor at the left of the south window. You can't miss it. It's Burke's Peerage."

[CONTINUED.]



He had just time to recognize the writing.

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