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Princess Virginia

By C. N. and A. M. WILLIAMSON. Authors of "Sie Lightning Conductor," "Resemany In Search of a Pucher," Dtc. Je Jo

[COMPUNED.]

CHAPTER TWELVE

T was for refuge that the princess fled to her own A boudoir shared by the grand duchess adjoined it, and, entering there, to her dismay the girl saw her

Ernestine, the French maid. Virginia's heart sank. She had supposed the grand duchess to be in the white drawing room with the baroness and the other guests of the house. Now there was no hope that she might be left alone and unquestioned. And the girl had longed to be alone.

mother lying on a sofa, attended by

"At last!" exclaimed a faint voice from the sofa. "I thought you would never come."

The princess stared, half dazed, unable to tear her mind from her private griefs. "Are you ill, mother?" she stammered. "Had you sent for me?" "I came very near fainting in the drawing room," the grand duchess answered. "Ernestine, you may leave us now."

The Frenchwoman went out noise

Still Virginia did not speak. Could it be that there had been another spy besides Egon von Breitstein and that her mother already knew how the castle of cards had fallen? Was it the news of defeat which had prostrated

"Have you-did any one tell you?" the girl faltered.

"I've had a telegram-a horrible telegram. Oh, Virginia, I am not young, as you are! I am too old to endure all this. I think you should not have subjected me to it."

The grand duchess' voice was plaintive and pried among the girl's sick nerves like hot wire. "What do you mean, dear? I do not

understand," she said dully. "I'm so sorry you are ill. If it's my fault in any way I"-Her mother pointed toward a writing table. "The telegram is there," she

murmured. "It is too distressing-too humiliating." Virginia picked up a crumpled telegraph form and began to read the mes-

written in English: Some one making inquiries here about the Mowbrays. Beg to advise you to exl at at once or leave Kronburg to avoid almost certain complications.

LAMBERT. Lady Lambert was the wife of the ex-ambassador to the court of Rhaetia from Great Britain.

The princess finished in silence. "Isn't it hideous?" asked the grand duchess. "To think that you and I should have deliberately placed ourselves in such a position! We are to run away, like detected adventuresses, unless-unless you are now ready to

tell the emperor all." "No," said Virginia hopelessly.

"What! Not yet? Oh, my dear, then you must bring matters to a crisisinstantly-tonight even. It's evident NEBRASKA that some enemy, perhaps some jealous person, has been at work behind our backs. It is for you to turn the tables upon him, and there isn't an hour to waste. From the first you meant to make some dramatic revelation. Now the time has come."

"Ah, I meant-I meant!" echoed Virginia, with a sob breaking the ice in her voice. "Nothing has turned out as I meant. You were right, dear; I was wrong. We ought never to have come to Rhaetia."

The grand duchess grew paler than before. She had been vaguely distressed. Now she was sharply alarmed. If Virginia admitted that this great adventure should never have been undertaken, then indeed the earth must be quaking under their feet.

"Ought not-to have come?" she repeated piteously. "What dreadful thing has happened?"

The princess stood with bent head. "It's hard to tell," she said, "harder almost than anything I ever had to do. But it must be done. Everything's at an end, dear."

"What-you've told him, and he has refused to forgive?"

"He knows nothing." "For heaven's sake, don't keep me

in suspense!" Virginia's lips were dry. "He asked me to be his wife," she said. "Oh, wait-wait! Don't look happy. You don't understand, and I didn't at first. He had to explain, and he put the

thing as little offensively as he could. Oh, mother, he thinks me only good enough to be his morganatic wife!"

The storm had burst at last, and the princess fell on her knees by the sofa. mind plan after plan for another where, burying her face in her moth- chance of meeting the girl alone. He er's lap, she sobbed as if parting with had even written a letter, but had

her youth. There had always been mental and temperamental barriers between the Dresden china lady and her daughter, but they loved each other, and never had the girl been so dear to her moth- less. He did not ask for her before er as now. The grand duchess thought of the summer day when Virginia had ess had strolled out together on the knelt beside her, saying, "We are "o North Main St., . ALLIANCE, NEL ing to have an adventure, you and I "

COPYRIGHT, 1907, BY McCLURB, PHILLIPS & CO. Alas, the adventure was over, and summer and hope were dead! Tears trembled in the mother's eyes. Poor little Virginia, so young, so inexperienced and, in spite of her self will and

recklessness, so sweet and loving with-

"But, dear, you are making the worst of things," the grand duchess said soothingly, her hand on the girl's bright hair. "Why, instead of crying you ought to be smilling, I think. Leopold must love you desperately or he would never have proposed marriage, even morganatic marriage. Just at first the idea must have shocked you. knowing who you are. But, remember, if you were Miss Mowbray it would have been a triumph. Many women of high position have married royalty morganatically, and every one has respected them. You seem to forget that the emperor knows you only as Helen Mowbeav."

"He ought to have known that Helen Mowbray was not the girl to consentno, not more easily than Virginia of Baumenburg-Drippe. He should have understood without telling that to a girl with Anglo-Saxon blood in her veins such an offer would be like a blow over the heart."

"How should be understand it? He is Rhactian. His point of view"-

"His point of view to me is terrible. Oh, mother, it's useless to argue! Evcrything is spoiled. Of course if he knew I was Princess Virginia he would be sorry for what he had proposed, even if he thought I'd brought it on myself. But then it would be too late. Don't you understand? I valued his love because it was given to me, not the princess. If he said, 'Now I know you I can offer my right hand instead of my left to you as my wife,' that would not be the same thing at all. No; there's nothing left but to go home, and the emperor of Rhaetla must be told that Virginia of Baumenburg-Drippe has decided not to marry. That will be our one revenge, but a pitiful one, since he'll never know that the princess who refuses his right hand and the Helen Mowbray who wouldn't take his left are one and the same. Oh, mother, I did love him so! Let us get out of this hateful house as soon as we can."

The grand duchess knew her daughter and abandoned hope. "Yes, if you will not forgive him we must go at once and save our dignity if we can," she said. "The telegram will give us sage, which was dated London and our excuse. I told the baroness I had received bad news, and she asked permission to knock at my door before going to bed and inquire how I was feeling. She may come at any moment. We must say that the telegram recalls us immediately to England."

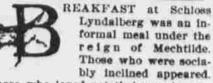
"Listen!" whispered Virginia. "I think there's some one at the door

Baroness von Lyndal stood aghast on hearing that she was to be deserted early in the morning by the bright particular star of her house partyafter the emperor. She begged that Lady Mowbray would reconsider; that she would wire to England instead of going, or, at all events, that she would wait for one day more until Leopold's visit to Schloss Lyndalberg should be

In her anxiety she even failed in tact when she found arguments useless. "But the emperory" she objected. "If you go off early in the morning before he or any one comes down, what will he think? What will he say at being cheated out of his au revoir?"

The grand duchess hesitated. But Virginia answered firmly: "I said goodby to him tonight. The emperor-will understand."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



formal meal under the reign of Mechtilde. Those who were sociably inclined appeared. Those who loved not their species un-

til the day was older ate in their rooms. Leopold had shown himself at the

table each morning, however, and set the fashion. And the day after the parting in the garden he was earlier even than usual. It was easy to be early, as he had not been to bed that night, but he had an extra incentive. He could scarcely wait to see how Helen Mowbray would meet himwhether she would still be cold or whether sound advice from her mother would have made her kind.

This was his last day at Lyndalberg. By his special request no programme of entertainment had been arranged. and before coming down to breakfast Leopold had been turning over in his torn it up because he was unable to say on paper what was really in his heart.

Breakfast passed, however, and when she did not appear Leopold grew restthe others, but when he and the baronterrace, where white peacocks spread their jeweled tails, the emperor sought

some opportunity of bringing in the name that filled his thoughts.

"I see the red October Illies are opening," he said. "Miss Mowbray will be interested. She tells me there's noth-

ing like them in England." "Ah, she has gone just too soon!"

sighed the baroness. The emperor glanced quickly from the mass of crimson flowers to his hostess' face. "Gone?" he repeated.

"Yes," the baroness answered. "They must have reached Kronburg before this. You know, they left their companion there. Perhaps your majesty did not realize that they were leaving here quite so early?"

He turned so white under the brown tan the mountains had given that the baroness was alarmed. She had taken Virginia's words as Virginia had meant her to take them and therefore supposed that a formal farewell of some sort had been spoken. This impression did not prevent her from guessing that there must have been a misunderstanding, and she was tingling with a lively curiosity which she was obliged carefully to hide.

The romance which had been enacted under her eyes she believed to be largely of her own making, and, not being a bad hearted woman, she had grown fond of Virginia. She had even had pangs of conscience, and, though she did not see the way for a happy ending to the pretty drama, it distressed her that the curtain should go down on sadness.

"I did not know they were going at all," Leopold answered frankly, willing to sacrifice his pride for the sake of coming quickly at the truth.

"Oh," exclaimed the baroness, "I am distressed! Miss Mowbray distinctly said when I begged that they would wait. 'The emperor will understand.'

"I do understand-now I know they have gone," he admitted. "But Miss Mowbray thinks she has some cause of complaint against me, and she's mistaken. I can't let such a mistake go uncorrected. You say they must be at Kronburg before this. Are they staying on there?"

"I'm afraid not, your majesty. They leave Kronburg for England today by the Orient express."

"Do you happen to remember at what hour the train starts?"

"I believe at 12." Leopold pulled out his watch. It was twenty minutes past 11. Forty times sixty seconds and the girl would be

The blood rushed to his face. Barring accidents, he could catch her if he ordered his motor car and left at ence. But to cut short his visit at Schloss Lyndalberg would be virtually to take the world into his secret. Let him allege important state business at the capital if he chose, gossip would still say that the girl had fled; that he had pursued her. The baroness knew already. Others would chatter as if they knew. That was inevitable-if he

A month ago, when yielding to inclination meant humbling his pride as emperor and man, such a question would have answered itself. Now it answered itself also, the only difference being that the answer was exactly opposite to what it would have been a month earlier.

"Baroness, forgive me," he said quickly. "I must go. I can't explain." "You need not try," she answered

"Thank you a hundred times. Make everything as straight for me as you can. Say what you will. I give you carte blanche, for we're old friends, and I trust you."

"It's for me to thank your majesty You want your motor car?"

"I'll telephone. Your chauffeur will have it here in six minutes. And your aid-de-camp. Will you"-

"I don't want him, thanks. I'd rather

Seven minutes later the big white motor car was at the door which was the private entrance to the emperor's suit, and the emperor was waiting for it, having forgotten all about the sable lined coat which had been a present from the czar. If it had been midwinter he would have forgotten, just the same, nor would he have known that It was cold.

There was plenty of time now to carry out his plan, which was to catch the Orient express at the Kronburg station and present himself to the Mowbrays in the train later. As to what would happen afterward, it was beyond planning, but Leopold knew that the girl had loved him, and he hoped that he would have Lady Mowbray on his side.

The only way of reaching Kronburg from Schloss Lyndalberg was by road. There was no railway connection between the two places. But the town and the castle were separated by a short eight miles, and until checked by traffic in the suburbs the sixty horsepower car could cover a mile in less than two minutes.

Unfortunately, however, police regulations were strict, and of this Leopold could not complain, as he had approved them himself. Once he was stopped and would certainly not have been allowed to proceed had he not revealed himself as the emperor, the owner of the one unnumbered car in Rhaetia. As it was, he had suffered a delay of five minutes, and just as he was congratulating himself on the goodness of his tires, which had made him no trouble for many weeks, a loud report as of a pistol shot gave warning of a puncture.

But there was not a moment to waste on repairs. Leopold drove on on the rims, only to acknowledge presently the truth of an old proverb, "The more haste the less speed."

Delayed by a torn and flapping tire, the car arrived at the big central station of Kronburg only five minutes before 12. Leopold dashed in careless whether he were recognized or not,

and was surprised at the absence of the crowd which usually throngs the platform before the departure of the most important train of the day.

"Is the Orient express late?" he asked of an inspector to whom he was but a man among other men.

"No, sir. Just on time. Went out

five minutes ago." "But it isn't due to start till 12."

"Summer time table, sir. Autumn time table takes effect today, the 1st of October. Orient express departure changed to 11:50."

An unreasoning rage against fate boiled in the emperor's breast. He ruled this country, yet everything in it seemed to conspire in a plot to wreck his dearest desires. For a few seconds he stood speech-

less, feeling as if he had been dashed against a blank wall and there were no way of getting around it. Yet the seconds were but few, for Leopold was not a man of slow decisions. His first step was to inquire the name of the town at which the Orient

express stopped soonest. In three hours, he learned, it would reach Felgarde, the last station on the Rhaetlan side of the frontier. His first thought on hearing this was to engage a special and follow, But even in these days there is much red

tape entangled with rallway regulations in Rhaetia. It soon appeared that it would be quicker to take the next train to Felgarde, which was due to leave in half an hour and would arrive only an hour later than the Orient express. Leopold's heart was chilled, but he

shook off despondency and would not be discouraged. Telephoning to the hotel where the Mowbrays had been stopping, he learned that they had gone. Then he wrote out a telegram: Miss Helen Mowbray, Traveling From Kronburg to Paris by Orient Express,

Care of Station Master at Felgarde: I implore you leave the train at Felrds and wait for me. Am following in baste. Will arrive Felgarde one hour after you and hope to find you at Leo-poidhof.

So far the wording was simple. He had signified his intention and expressed his wish, which would have been



He wrote another, which he signed "Leo, the Chamois Hunter.

more than enough to assure the accomplishment of his purpose had he been dealing with a subject. Unfortunately, however, Helen Mowbray was not a subject and had exhibited no sign of subjection. It was therefore futile to in our store is always well spent. You get prophesy whether or no she would

choose to grant his request. Revolving the pros and cons, he was forced to conclude that she probably would not grant it-unless he had some new argument to bring forward. Yet what had he to urge that he had not each article to our customers. Our Pickles, already urged twice over? What could he say at this eleventh hour which manufactured today. would not only induce her to await his coming at Felgarde, but justify him In making a last appeal when he came

to explain it in person? As he stood pen in hand suddenly he found himself recalling a falry story which he had never tired of reading in his childhood. Under the disguise of fancy it was a lesson against vacillation, and he had often said to himself would not, like the prince of the story. miss a gift of the gods through weak Satisfactory Service and Prices hesitation.

The pretty legend in his mind had for a hero a young prince who went abroad to seek his fortune and received from one of the fates to whom he paid a visit three magic citrons, which he must cut open by the side of a certain fountain. He obeyed his instructions, but when from the first citron sprang an exquisite fairy maideu, demanding a drink of water, the young man lost his presence of mind. While he sat staring the lovely lady vanished, and with a second experiment it was the same. Only the third citron remained of the fate's squandered gifts, and when the prince cut it in half the maiden who appeared was so much more beautiful than her sisters that in adoring wonder he almost lost her as he had lost the others.

"My knife is on the rind of the last citron now," Leopold said to himself. "Let me not lose the one chance I have left."

Last night he had believed that there would not be room in a man's heart for more love than his held for Helen Mowbray; but, realizing to the full how great was the danger of losing her, he found that his love had grown beyond reckoning.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Gloomy Hamlet, "I went to the theater last night."

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