The Princess Dehra

BY JOHN REED SCOTT.

Presently, some one caught sight of him, and saluted with raised hat; others looked up, and did the same; and in a moment the crowd was passing in review, the men uncovering, the women greeting him with smiles. He answered with bows and hand waves; and if a bit of satisfied pride stirred his heart and warmed his face, small wonder. He was still new in his royalty; and even if he were not, at this critical period, such demonstration of esteem by the general populace would have been very gratifying and particularly welcome. And he stayed a trifle longer than the required time; then, with a last bow and a wave of especial graciousness, he turned away, and rang for the doors to be opened.

It was the archduke's rule that entire informality should be observed at these affairs, and he emphasized it by sauntering around, speaking to everyone, and not obliging them to go up to him, for a stiff bow and a word. He laughed with this group, joked with another, argued with a third, until not a man but had come under his eye, at least for an instant, and he under theirs. He had begun the receptions soon after he became governor of Dornlitz, more particulary for the purpose of getting acquainted with the officers on duty under him; but it was not limited to them—any one was welcome—and the result had been rather more satisfactory than even he had hoped for. There was not an official in his district to whom he had not given a hearty handshake and a pleasant word; and as he happened to have a truly royal knack of remembering faces, and the names that went with them, many a young lieutenant—and indeed, not a few higher in rank—had gone away with a flattered heart and an ardent enthusiasm, openly proclaimed, for the marshal-prince who would condescend to remember an unimportant subordinate, and seem glad to see him again, and to tell him so. And the contrast it offered to the Duke of Lotzen's ungracious and domineering ways was litle to the latter advantage; and the fruit of it had been ripening fast, within these last few weeks.

So, today, the room was crowded, and the welcome the archduke received was such as might have made even Lotzen pause and think, had he seen it. And this thought occurred to Armand; and he ran his eyes over the many faces, wondering which of them belonged, today, to the duke's spy; for that there usually was one present he had no doubt.

And presently he found him; and, catching his eye, motioned for him to approach.

"I am glad to see you, Monsieur le Comte," he said, relieving himself from offering his hand by re-adjusting his sword. "When was it I saw you last?"

Count Bigler's lips twitched with suppressed amusement.

"Here, your highness?" he answered, "I am ashamed to confess I haven't been here for many weeks."

"Yet, surely, count, I've seen you somewhere since then, and very recently, too—where was it?"

Bigler feigned to think.—"One sees your highness so many times, it is difficult to remember the last . . . on the Field of Mars, last Monday, wasn't it?"

The archduke shook his head. "No," he said, "no; it was in the evening—I recall that very distinctly." Then he looked with deliberate inference at the bandaged ear—"oh, I have it: it was at the De Saure's; you were there when I came, and you left first and—rather hurriedly. It all comes back to me now. Surely, count, you can't have forgot such a pleasant evening!"

Bigler assumed a look of guileless innocence.

"It is not permitted to contradict your highness," he answered, "but I may, I think, at least venture the truism:—what one has not remembered, one cannot forget."

"Or restated, my dear count, to be quite in point:—what is inconvenient to remember, is best denied."

"Just as your highness will have it," Bigler grinned, and impudently fingered his ear.

"And confidentially, count," said Armand smilingly, "while we are dealing in truisms, I give you these two:—'every man's patience has its limit,' and, 'who plays with fire gets burnt'—fatally."

Bigler's grin broadened.

"Is your highness the man with the patience or the man with the fire?" he asked.

"Study it out, sir," said the archduke, as he passed on; "and let your master help you; the answer may concern you both."

The last thing before leaving his office, that afternoon, he wrote a note to the American ambassador, enclosing the anonymous letter, and telling him his intention in reference to it; and adding that if Courtney had not heard from him by morning he should do whatever he thought best. This he dispatched by an orderly; and then, choosing a long, light sword, he rang for his horse.

Just outside his door, he met General Durand and stopped for a word with him; as they separated he saw Ferdinand of Lotzen coming down the corridor.

Between them it had long been a salute given and acknowledged, but now the duke halted, fingers at visor.

"May I have a word with your highness?" he said.

Arman's hand dropped slowly, and he only half paused in his walk.

"I'm in a particular hurry, cousin," he replied, "won't tomorrow do as well?"

Lotzen's eye-brows went up.

"Isn't tomorrow rather uncertain for—both of us?" he asked.

"Yes," said the archduke instantly, "yes, it is; and hence what need of talk between us, at least so late in the day. Wait until we have a tomorrow."

"What I wish to say has nothing to do with futures, cousin, only with the past, with the De Saure house—oh! that surprises you, does it?"

"Not half as much as the amazing mess you made of it," said Armand.

"That, my dear cousin, is just what I came to explain," said Lotzen quickly. "I had nothing whatever to do with the silly affair; it was a clever idea, but sadly bungled; I heard of it only the next day, and I want to assure you it was not my work—though, as I say, it was a clever idea—too clever, indeed, to be wasted so fruitlessly."

The archduke regarded him in speculative silence;—just what manner of man was this; and what could be his ulterior purpose in such an astonishing avowal!

"Will you tell me, cousin," he asked, "why you should trouble to disclaim participation in an outrage, whose only offense; in your eyes, was its failure?"

Again Lotzen's eye-brows went up. "I thought you would understand that it is in justice to myself; I would not have you think me guilty of so stupid a piece of work."

"Doubtless, then, it will gratify you, monsieur, that I never doubted your complicity, however much I may have marvelled at the unskilled execution—you would have arranged it rather differently. Indeed, I was sorry that you, yourself, were not in command. I left a message, both upstairs and down, that I thought you might understand."

Lotzen smiled, rather warmly for him.

"I understand," he said; "your writing was exceedingly legible."

"And I sent you another message, a little while ago, by the man with the wounded ear," said the archduke, his eyes upon the other's bandaged hand.

"I suppose you got it?"

The duke laughed and held up his hand, the back and palm covered with plaster.

"This wasn't made by a bullet, cousin;" he replied; "I got it this morning from a new pet I was trying to train—No, I didn't get your last message."

"Better get it today, cousin," said the archduke, as he turned away; "tomorrow is rather uncertain."

CHAPTER XV.

Four O'Clock at the Inn.

Ten miles out, on the Titian road, is the Inn of the Twisted Pines. Something more than two centuries of storms and sunshine have left its logs and plaster wrinkled and weather-beaten, yet the house stands as stanch and strong as the day the last pin was driven, and the painted sign and the bunch of furze hung above the entrance.

The old soldier who built it had lived long enough to marry a young wife, and leave it to her and a sturdy boy; and, therefore, there was always a son to take the father's place; and with the heirship seemed to go the inherited obligation to maintain the house exactly as received. No modernity showed itself within or without; the cooking alone varied, as it reflected the skill or whim of the particular mistress; and it chanced that the present one was of unusual ability in that particular; and the knowlegde of it coming to the capital, had brought not a little trade of riding parties and the officers of the garrison.

And so Captain Hertz, of the Third Lancers had not done quite the usual growl, when he got the order to march at once with his troop, selecting such a route as would bring him to the inn a few minutes before 4 o'clock, taking care to approach it from the west; and to halt there and await further instructions.

He had confided to his subaltern that it was a crazy sort of proceeding to be maneuvring against old Scartman's Inn; but if it had to be done, it was at least considerate to choose as the objective point, a place where they could have a good meal to eat, and the keeper's pretty daughters to philander.

And between thinking of the victuals and the damsels, the captain so hurried the march that they reached the inn unnecessarily early; yet they had no reason to regret it, for the taproom was cool and pleasant, the food to their taste, and the girl's cheeks prettier and softer than ever—though it would seem that, lately, the last were becoming much more difficult to taste.

"What's got into the hussies?" Hertz demanded, rubbing his face, as the lieutenant and he went out into the courtyard; "They used to be mild enough."

"You've been falling off in looks the last year, my dear fellow," Purkitz laughed—"can't say I much blame the girl—I've no finger marks on my cheek, you see!"

"Huh!" grunted Hertz, "solid brass; wouldn't show the kick of a mule—What in Heaven's name are we sent here for any way!—'await further orders'—that may mean a week."

"And why not," the lieutenant laughed; "the victuals are delicious, and the girls——"

"Oh, go to the devil!"

"And even father, himself, will do for company in a pinch."

The captain laughed, too. "Not if I can get away—did you ever see such a countenance? It positively makes me ill."

"Poor old Scartman," said Purkitz; he's a good man, but there is no denying that 'the Lord made him as ugly as He could and then hit him in the face.'"

From the eastward, came the sound of a galloping horse.

"Our orders, I hope," Hertz exclaimed. He glanced at his watch. "A quarter of four—I wonder what silly business we're to be sent on, now."

The hoof beats drew swiftly nearer, but from where the two officers were standing, the high wall of the courtyard obscured the road, and they sauntered slowly across toward the gateway. As they reached it, a big black horse swept around the corner and was upon them before the rider could draw rein.

Hertz gave a cry of warning and sprang aside, tripped on his spur, and sprawled in the deep dust; while Purkitz's wild jump landed him with both feet on his superior's back, whence he slid off and brought up on Hertz's head, thereby materially augmenting the fine flow of superheated language that was bubbling from the captain's dirt filled mouth—nor did the loud guffaw and the shrieks of feminine laughter, that came from the house, serve to reduce either the temperature or the volume.

Meanwhile, the cause of it all—a slender, sinuous woman, black gowned and black veiled—sat the big horse motionless and silent, waiting for the human tangle to unlose itself.

Coated with dust—his uniform unrecognizable, his face smeared and dirty—Hertz scrambled up.

"What in hell do you——a woman!" he ended, and stood staring.

"Yes, my man, a woman," said she, "and one very sorry for your fall—you are the landlord, I presume."

Lieutenant Purkitz gave a shout, and leaned against the gate.

"Landlord!" he gasped, "landlord!—that face—oh, that face!" and went off into a fit of suppressed mirth.

The woman looked at him and then at Hertz, and though the thick veil hid her features completely, there was no doubt of her irritation.

The captain bowed. "madame will pardon the ill manners of my clownish servant," he said, indicating Purkitz; "I am Captain Hertz, of her highness' Third Lancers. Yonder is the landlord; permit me to call him."

She leaned down and offered him her hand.

"A thousand apologies, my dear captain, for my reckless riding and my awkward tongue—there is small excuse for the former, I admit, but my veil may explain the latter—You are not hurt"

A voice so soft and sweet must have a face to match it, and Hertz went a step nearer.

"Madame can cure everything but my heart, if she but raise the veil," he said.

The voice laughed softly.

"Then, sir, I am afraid to raise it—your heart would not survive the shock. Good-bye, and thank you," and she spurred across to where old Scartman was standing near the stables.

"I am to meet some one here at 4 o'clock," she said; "has my party come?"

Boniface's shrewd little eyes had taken her in at a single glance.

"Gentleman, I suppose?" he asked—"None of them?" jarking his thumb toward the two lancers.—"No? then he's not here yet."

She glided gracefully out of saddle, and hooked up her skirt.

"Put my horse in the stall nearest the door," she ordered; and herself saw it done. "Now, I want a room—the big one on the lower floor—for an hour or so."

The inn-keeper bowed.

"Certainly, madame—and the gentleman?"

She considered. . . . "He is one high in rank, very high—indeed, no one in Valeria is higher—tell him I'm here; and admit him instantly; but don't, do you hear me, don't tell him I'm a woman."

Old Scartman coughed and hesitated.

"But please you, madam," he ventured, "if I'm to tell him you're here, but not to tell him you're a woman, how's he to be sure you are you?"

"True, O patron of rendezvous!" she laughed. "If he ask for proof, you may tell him I'm the one who knows."

"Now, that's more to rule," he said, with a nod and a chuckle.

They went into the house, and he opened the door into the big room.

"This is what madame wishes?"

"Yes," said she—"and remember, no interruptions, now nor later—understand?"

He bowed with rather unusual grace, for one of his appearance and calling.

"Perfectly, madame — does madame think I look so like a fool?"

She surveyed him an instant.

"No, my good man, I don't," and closed the door; "but I wouldn't care to tell you what you do look like," she ended.

Going over to the window, she fixed the curtain so as to permit her to see in front of the house, and then, removing her veil, she drew out a tiny mirror and deftly touched to place the hair that was disarranged. As she finished, she heard horses approaching, and she saw, through the open gateway, a sudden commotion among the lancers who were lounging at east by the roadside, their mounts picketed under the trees. She knew that her man was coming.

A sergeant ran in and said a word to Hertz who, free now of his dust and anger, was sitting on the steps with Purkitz, hoping to get a glimpse of the face behind the veil, and staring at the windows with calm persistency.

"My God!" she heard Hertz exclaim, as both sprang up, and, frantically buttoning tunics and drawing on gloves, ran out into the road and swung to horse. There was a snap of commands, a stamping of hoofs, and the lances rose high above the wall in a line of fluttering pennons; they dipped, and the next moment the archduke and the regent's adjutant drew up before the gate.

The former raised his hand, and Hertz rode forward and saluted.

(To be Continued Next Week.)

"I Don't Sink So."

A little New York girl, eight years old, accompanied her mother to a studio exhibit where many rather languid ladies and gentlemen were viewing a poorly painted and rather questionable picture, about which they were making polite but insincere remarks. Into the middle of the studio to a place in front of the special canvas little Laura strode; after a moment's look at the picture she turned around and in a high-pitched voice cried out:

"Zat's a very bootiful sing, but I don't sink so!"—Youth's Companion.

Man's Length of Life.

According to the president of Cornell university the average length of life in North America is fifty-six years. In 1870 it was forty-one and in 1910 fifty-two and one-half years. Students of this interesting subject say that the average life could be prolonged twenty years if all people could learn and profit by what health experts know. Health education has a lot to do with it. In tropical India the average man is destined to die at twenty-four. Longest lived people in the world are the progressive New Zealanders. They are said to live sixty years on the average.

None know how high they can fly until they have to fly.

Too much honey is sometimes as bad as too much gall.

In Vanity's Eyes.

He was an old man and he was standing beside the hat counter of a department store.

"No, no!" he exclaimed angrily to the very young salesman, "I don't want that hat. Why, that's an old man's hat you're trying to give me. Show me something more suitable, boy."

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