

The Princess Dehra

BY JOHN REED SCOTT.

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"Look, Elise!" she said, "look at those saddle cloths yonder."

The archduke followed her motion, and understood. It was almost infernally unfortunate contratemps, but it would have to be met, and at once.

"The regent is on the porch," he said. "I do not care for her to know of this meeting nor its purport, until after tonight. Madame, will you please be good enough to conceal yourself; the door is the only exit, and it is impossible now—I will try to prevent her highness entering here, but I may fail; I likely shall. Come, Moore," and he hurried out.

But Madeline Spencer only laughed, and, winding the veil into place, went and stood by the chimney—here was a very God given opportunity, and assuredly she had no notion to let it pass unused.

And the landlord, slumbering in the hall, had been tardily aroused by the cheering, and coming forth, still half asleep, he met the princess just at the entrance.

"Scartman," she said sharply, "where are his highness and Colonel Moore?"

The landlord awoke with a suddenness that was painful, and which left him staring at her in silly eyed speechlessness.

"What ails you, man?" she demanded—"tell the archduke I'm here—we shall be in the large room."

This brought back a bit of his senses, and he bowed to the ground, hoping to get back more of them before he need come up.

"I will find his royal highness at once," he said; "I did not know he was here—I've been asleep—but if your majesty—your regency—your highness, I mean, will permit—the large room is occupied, I will—"

At that moment, Armand and Moore came out.

"So it would seem," the princess remarked dryly.

"Don't blame the poor fellow, Dehra," the archduke laughed; "he did the best he could, doubtless, and at my order. We are here on the business I spoke of this morning—it's finished now, and we will ride back with you, if we may."

Dehra held out her hand, and gave him the smile she knew he loved.

"Of course you may," she said, "and gladly; but first I want a cup of tea—Scartman, the kettle instantly!"—and before Armand could detain her, she was past him and into the room.

As she crossed the threshold, she caught the faint perfume that a woman always carries, and which often times is so individualized, as to betray her identity instantly. It was a peculiar odor—the blended fragrance of many flowers—and she recognized that she had known it before; but what was it doing in this room, now—it was too fresh to be many minutes old.

"Armand," she said, "what woman has been here?" glancing laughingly around. "And is here still!" and pointed with her crop to the veiled figure in the shadow near the chimney.

The archduke ground back an oath, and stepping forward bowed to Madeline Spencer.

"Madame," said he, "will you do the governor of Dornitz the favor to excuse him, and to accept his thanks for your service? Colonel Moore, madame's horse."

"Je vous remercie, Monsieur le Prince," she murmured, taking Moore's arm, and moving with sinuous grace toward the door. But as she passed the princess regent, who had stepped aside to give her way, the veil slipped from her face, and the two women looked into each other's eyes—the one with a smile of mocking impertinence, the other with a calmly ignoring stare, and showing, by not so much as the quiver of a muscle, her anger and surprise.

And when they had gone, the princess turned her gaze upon the archduke, the blue eyes ominous in their steadiness; and as he would have spoken, she repelled him with an imperious gesture, and gave him her back.

"Come, Elise!" she said, and left the room.

In the courtyard, Colonel Moore had just swung Mrs. Spencer to saddle, and was fixing her skirt. Dehra paused in the entry until the black horse had passed the gate; then she went leisurely down the steps, waved Moore to Mlle. d'Essolde, and let the

groom put her up.

Asking Moore's farewell salute, with her crop, but no smile, and with never a glance toward the window, behind whose curtain she must have known the archduke would surely be, she rode away—the lancers again cheering her devotedly as she passed.

CHAPTER XVI.

A Too Convincing Argument.

Colonel Moore went slowly up the steps and into the room, through the half open door of which he saw the archduke standing, with chin on breast and back to the fireplace. He looked up, as the adjutant paused at the threshold, and nodded for him to come in.

"Ordinarily it would be proper now for us to have a good, stiff drink, may be several of them," he remarked, "but the only kind that fits this situation, so far as I'm concerned, is straight whisky, and I don't believe this cursed place can supply it."

"Quite right; it can't," said Moore; "I tried the other day—won't anything else do?"

"No—nothing else; and it's just as well I can't get the whisky; I may need a clear head tonight."

"You are not going, sir?"

Armand nodded. "Going? of course I'm going—why not? and I only hope I'll get a chance at my sweet cousin. We promised only to look—to raise no disturbance—and on Spencer's account it is right enough that we should do nothing to betray her; but if Lotzen get in the way, colonel, we are not obligated to avoid him."

"Why should your highness walk deliberately into the tiger's lair—when another can go quite as well, and without danger?" Moore protested.

The archduke took a cigaret and tossed the case across to the adjutant.

"Because I'm really hunting the tiger," he laughed; "and I like excitement in good company—though I fear it will be a very tame affair."

The other shook his head dubiously. "It's not right, sir, for you to expose yourself so unnecessarily—let me go in command."

"Nonsense, Ralph, you're getting in Bernheim's class; quit it. What I wish you would tell me is whether Spencer dropped her veil intentionally or by accident."

"It seemed so accidental it must have been intentional," said Moore.

"If I were sure of it, that would cancel a trifle more of my obligation."

"Her highness will know—the colonel began, and stopped abashed at his blunder.

"And so will Mademoiselle d'Essolde," said Armand. "I may have to depend on you for information."

"Then your highness will like to have to get it, yourself," Moore laughed. "We're not speaking either, it seems; she let me put her up, because the regent sent me to her; but—I'm chilly yet. Did you ever notice, sir, how disconcerting it is to think you're talking to a woman, and then find it's a mistake and that really you're talking only to yourself?"

The archduke smiled. "Yes," said he, "I've noticed it; and we may have a rather frigid atmosphere for a few moments this evening until I can explain—we are to dine with her highness and mademoiselle."

"If you don't mind, sir, I'll violate propriety and let you arrive first; your explanation will do for both—and besides, I fancy such things are best done a deux."

"You fancy!—you innocent Irishman—afraid of a woman!" He drew on his gloves. "Come along—put on a brave front and I'll take you home. Five minutes talk will set matters right."

"If you're not talking to yourself," Moore observed.

The landlord was awaiting them in distress and trepidation almost pitiful. Such ill luck had not befallen the inn in all its years of busy life. The regent and the governor! It was the end of his favor—the end of the Twisted Pines. Tomorrow—may be today—would come the police, and the nails would go into the doors, and boards across the windows, and the big gates, that had

always swung open at daybreak, would swing no more, and in disgrace and shame he and his would be turned out, with the curt admonition to seek a harbor in another land.

He almost dropped as the archduke's hand fell on his shoulder.

"Scartman," said he kindly, yet incisively, "doubtless your mind is much too occupied to remember everything that happens here—but let me suggest that it would be well even to make a special effort to forget what has occurred this afternoon. I have known such forgetfulness to merit special reward."

The landlord looked up in bewildered joy.

"But her highness, sir—she will not—"

"Tush, man," Armand interrupted, "I'll answer for the regent."

The old man began to cry, and through his tears he groped for the archduke's hand and kissed the gauntlet fervently.

"God bless your highness!" he said—and was still repeating it when the latter passed the gate.

The archduke rode slowly along the line of lancers, scrutinizing every man as he went; then motioned the officers to him.

"Messieurs," he said, "my compliments on your troop.—Captain Hertz, you may return to barracks."

Hertz saluted, faced his men and raised his sword. And Armand, galloping down the road, turned in saddle and with his cap answered the wild cheer they sent after him.

"Purkitz," said the captain, before giving the order to break into column, "now is your opportunity to prove you can actually know something and not tell it."

"And your also, O wiser than serpents," the lieutenant laughed, "to prove you actually do know something that you tell."

But the archduke had not deemed it necessary to caution either of them; here, even the dullest witted soldier in the army would have the sense to hold his tongue.

Where the road for the summer palace took off at the old forge, the colonel left him, and Armand went on to the capital. He rode these last few miles at a slow jog, and thoughtfully. It was well enough to treat the matter lightly to Moore, but, none the less, it troubled him. Dehra's conduct had been so extraordinary for her—who had refused to credit, for an instant, Madeline Spencer's claim to be his wife, though actually supported by a marriage certificate—that he was puzzled and all sorts of doubts and fears harassed him. It suggested some untoward influence; what he could not imagine, nor when it had come; but, even then, everything would be very easy to explain, if she would give him the opportunity, and not, in the natural perversity of a woman, refuse to see him, and so make herself miserable, altogether needlessly. He had yet to learn that sometimes it is well to let a woman inadvertently discipline herself; it is more effective than if the man does it; and usually saves him a vast amount of re-primand. Then, too, he did not want Dehra to know of this intended night visit to the Ferida, where the natural prospect was duplicity and murder, and only Madeline Spencer's worthless word to guarantee its safety. As it was not, if he explained at all, it would have to be down to the minutest detail, and he could foresee what the regent would have to say about any such adventure on his part. Yet if the Ferida party went he must lead it—and the Ferida party was going.

So when he reached the Epsau, he was almost hoping to find a message from the princess that he was not expected for dinner. But it was not there, nor had it come when he started for the palace, though he waited until the very last moment.

He found Moore pacing the corridor, on watch for him, but with nothing to clear up the situation.

"And I've spent most of the time since I got back," he ended, "in prancing up and down here, trying to get a glimpse of mademoiselle, or some one, who might give me an ingling of the temperature inside—all on your account, sir, of course; I'm getting used to this freezing and thawing process."

"Very good, colonel, then we will go right in, and you can be thawing while I am explaining—come along, man, come along," and taking him by the arm they went on down the corridor, and entered the princess's small reception room next her boudoir.

"Announce us," said the archduke to the footman, "but say to

her highness that I would like a few minutes private speech with here—and to Mademoiselle d'Essolde say that Colonel Moore has a message from me and awaits here here. . . . I leave that message to your Irish wit," he remarked when the servant had gone.

But the man was very slow in returning, and presently Moore laughed.

"It's getting chilly," he observed—"notice it?"

The boudoir room swung open and Mlle. d'Essolde came in.

"Can't say I do," said the archduke aside, as he acknowledged her curtsy; "looks very charming to me."

She gave the archduke a smile, Moore a look of indifferent greeting, and then Armand another smile.

"My mistress receives your highness," she said, holding back the door; and quite ignoring Moore's effort, as he sprang forward to relieve her.

Under the chandelier, where 60 candles fluttered their mellow light about her, the regent of Valeria was standing; but her eyes were on the red rose she was slowly pulling apart, nor did she lift them when Armand entered. Having come in a little way, slowly and with purposeful deliberation, he stopped, and leaning on his sword turned to her to speak; and willing that she should not, for a while, that so, he might have this picture long enough to see it ever after—this white-robed, fair headed daughter of the Dalbergs, waiting to pass judgment on her betrothed.

The last petal fell; she plucked another rose—a white one—from her corsage, and looked up.

"You may speak, sir," she said, in voice an impersonal monotone.

The archduke bowed.

"I have nothing to say," he replied.

She raised her eye-brows in polite surprise.

"I thought you had requested 10 minutes private speech with me."

"I did," said Armand, "but I withdrew the request; explanations are vain, when one has been already judged, and judged unheard."

"One who is taken red-handed can have no explanation that explains," said she.

Then, of a sudden, out flashed the adorable smile, and she laughed, and flung him the white rose.

"There, dear," she said, "there, is your pardon—now, come," and she held out both hands; "come and forgive me for this afternoon."

And when he had forgiven her, she put him in a chair and perched herself on the arm beside him.

"Tell me, Armand," she said, "are we never to be free of that awful woman?—where did she come from?—how did she happen to be at the inn?"

"And how did I happen to be with her there, you want to know," he laughed.

She nodded. "That more than all—yet I didn't ask it."

He took out the anonymous letter, which he had remembered to get from Courtney; and when she had read it, he tore it into bits.

"Will you have the explanation that explains now or during dinner?" he asked.

She sprang up.

"I forgot I was hungry! Come we will get Elise and Moore—that girl is a rare coquette; she makes my poor adjutant's life very miserable."

"It looks like it!" said Armand opening the door just as Moore caught Mlle. d'Essolde and kissed her, despite her struggles.

"I warned you, my lady," he was saying, "you would tempt me too far some day. . . . will you forgive me now, or shall I do it all over again?"

The princess laughed. Moore's arms dropped and he sprang back, while Mlle. d'Essolde, flaming with embarrassment and anger, buried her face in her hands.

"Forgive him until after dinner Elise," said Dehra; "you can retract then, and resume the situation, if you wish."

"O wise and beneficent ruler!" said Moore, bowing to the ground, "I agree to the compromise."

(To be Continued Next Week.)

Gold coins are again being minted in Russia, many from sacred articles of the church confiscated by the soviet government.

St. Petersburg, Fla., is entertaining more tourists this winter than at the peak of any previous season. There are 80,000 visitors.

"Cat feed for two, \$30.50" was an exemption claimed by a fish market owner at Terre Haute, Ind., in his income tax report.

CHRISTIANITY MODIFIES YELLOW PERIL.

VASTLY encouraging to those who have contributed to the support of foreign missions in China is the report brought from that field by Dr. J. F. Peat, district superintendent of the Chung King district for the Methodist Episcopal church. Dr. Peat is in Sioux City in the interest of a memorial church and school near Chung King for the late Bishop Lewis.

"Christianity is making rapid gains in China now," says Dr. Peat. "The seven missions of the Chung King district in 1921 reported a gain of 9,151. When one considers that the work of all the Christian missionaries in China for the first 63 years after they were admitted showed only 9,000 converts, the progress is easily realized."

According to the best available figures about one-eighth of 1 per cent. of the present Chinese population is Christian, Dr. Peat says. Then he calls attention to two startling facts.

First, in a recent nation wide voting contest to determine the 12 Chinese who, in the popular mind, rank highest in the republic, six of the 12 selected in a voluminous and representative balloting came from the one-eighth of 1 per cent. of Christians.

Second, with a national average of literacy of about 2 per cent., a careful survey of the Christian Chinese in the Chung King district showed that fully 85 per cent. of them are able to read any part of the Chinese new testament, taught almost entirely by native Christian mission workers.

"I never greatly feared the Yellow Peril," says Dr. Peat. "But any menace there might be there cannot be met so easily in any other way as by extension of the work the Christian churches are doing."

Which more than ever makes Christianity and civilization seem synonymous terms.

In Case an Auto Bumps You.

From the Omaha Bee.

An old engineer lay dying in the swith shanty, where he had been carried after being struck by the locomotive. "What hit me?" he gasped. "It was the big 948," answered one of the attendants. "Thank God," replied the dying man, "I didn't want to be killed by a dinky switch engine," and he went out happy.

None of us care to be knocked down by a 10-ton truck, or by a \$10,000 imported motor, but if we had to make a choice it would be one of those rather than a flivver.

Alaska Not "Wild and Woolly." Sherman Rogers, in the Outlook.

So far as social conditions are concerned throughout Alaska, they are not different from those in any other part of the country where the stars and stripes float.

The homes I visited were furnished as well as those in the states; in fact, on an average, I think better. Perhaps it might be well to explain why: There is no poverty in Alaska; begging is unheard of and unnecessary. While it is true that there is no ostentatious display of wealth, neither do you meet with the pitiable cases of poverty that we so often meet with in metropolitan cities in the states.

The citizens of the territory are well dressed, well mannered, extremely well informed, and so far as hospitality is concerned they have few equals.

In fact, to make a long story short, from a standpoint of schools, social conditions, stores, hotels and modern economic life, any part of Alaska, from Ketchikan to Fairbanks will come up to par with any like distance in the states.

I don't want to overlook another very interesting feature of Alaskan life: In ratio to population I make the carefully studied statement that there is no part of the world where as many magazines are read. There are large news stores in every Alaskan town and city. Magazines are piled high on all news stands as soon as the boats arrive, and boats arrived twice a week while I was in the territory.

Everyone reads these publications from cover to cover, and I have never spent four months among better informed people than I did this summer in Alaska. I could engage in conversation with anyone from the mayor of a town to a prospector 40 miles from a railway, and they could put up an intelligent argument on any question concerning the public welfare that was receiving attention in American publications.

The territory has excellent newspapers, every town of more than 500 population having a daily newspaper with Associated Press service.

My general impression of the people of Alaska is that they are delightfully big hearted, extremely frank, and engagingly courteous. They have their petty quarrels among themselves, quite true; but let an outsider mix in, and they immediately stand shoulder to shoulder. All in all, they are that same wonderfully hospitable type that were so numerous in the west, 20 years ago.

Sacred relics, with a document which declares them to be fragments of the true cross, signed and sealed by Sigismund Cardinal of Vienna, in 1750, have been discovered by the Anderson Galleries, in New York, in a silver cross included in a collection of antiques recently consigned to them from Austria by Gregory Mycander, a Swedish collector in Austria. Mr. Mycander has been notified of the discovery and the cross has been withdrawn from the sale.

The silver cross is 33 inches high, and in taking apart it was discovered that the base is hollow. In the space was found a Latin manuscript with the Cardinal's seal and signature.

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Two Better Than One.

Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but was to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to lift him up. And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him, and a threefold chord is not quickly broken.—Ecclesiastes.

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Wolves Revered by Indians.

Wolves, up to recent times, were never killed by Indians, as, according to their belief, the spirits of the departed inhabited the bodies of the wolves. When they came too close to the camp the Indians would throw a firebrand or rock at them, and would use a rifle only if the dogs were attacked or a child was in danger. If the wolf was killed, the rifle was considered useless afterward and thrown away.

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