

The Princess Dehra

BY JOHN REED SCOTT.

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But this took time; and now Bigler's voice rang from the garden.

"Make for the side gate—I'll look to the rear one!" he cried; and almost immediately they heard him and his men between them and their exit.

The archduke stopped. "There is no need to tire ourselves by running," he said; "we shall have to fight for it, so we may as well save our wind.—Gentlemen,"—turning to De Coursey and Marsov—"tonight you are honored above most men—you will draw swords for the regent under her very eye—behold!"

He lifted the hat from the princess' head, and the light of a nearby street lamp, that shone above the walls, fell full on the coils of high piled hair, and the fair face below it.

Both men cried out in astonishment, and, kneeling, kissed her hand.

Then they pressed on, finding almost immediately the path by which they had entered.

Meanwhile, the commotion in the garden near the palace had increased, and now the Duke of Lotzen's stern voice cut sharply into the night, from one of his windows.

"What the devil is all this noise?" he demanded.

"Thieves, your highness," some one answered from below—"five of them in madame's apartments—they escaped into the garden."

The duke made no reply, at least which they could hear; and the princess laughed.

"He's off for madame," she said; "and we are thieves—rather clever of Bigler to have us killed first and recognized later."

"He didn't see you," said Armand; "he recognized me, and thinks this is the chance he missed at the De Saure house."

A moment later they came into the wide driveway, and face to face with the count and a bunch of a dozen men.

He gave a shout that rang through the garden.

"Seize them!" he cried; "kill any that resist!" knowing very well that it would require the killing of them all. He, himself, drew his revolver and stepped to one side—a safer place than in the fighting line, and one where he could get a surer shot at the archduke, if it were necessary.

But even 12 men hesitate to close with five, whose swords are ready; and in the instant's pause, Dehra, flinging off her hat, sprang between Bigler and the archduke, and covered the former with her pistol.

"God in heaven! the princess!" he cried, and stared at her.

"Will you play with treason, my lord count?" she asked. "Drop that revolver!—drop it, I say!—and you men, stand aside—into line, so!—return swords!—now, by the left flank, march!—fall in behind, count, if you please—march!"

With a laugh and a shrug he obeyed.

"The regent commands," he said—"Attention! salute!" and with hands to visors the column went by; while Dehra, fingers at forehead in acknowledgment, watched it pass and go down the drive toward the palace.

Then she turned, and put out her hand to the archduke.

"I'm tired, dear," she said, "very tired—Captain De Coursey, will you bring the carriage to the gate?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

On to Lotzenia.

"It is a most amazing situation," said the ambassador—as he and the archduke sat in the latter's headquarters, the following morning—"and one guess is about as likely to be right as another. It's difficult to believe Spencer honest, and yet she seemed to play straight last night. She is of the sort who fiercely resent a blow and go to any length to repay it. And you think Bigler's interruption was not prearranged?"

"It impressed me that way," said Armand. "In fact, I'd say I am sure of it, if I had any but Lotzen or Spencer to deal with."

"And you saw enough of the book to be satisfied it is the laws?"

"To satisfy myself, yes—if that fool, Bigler, had waited a little longer, I would have known

beyond a doubt."

"And, as it is, you can't be absolutely certain?"

"No; at least, not certain enough to make an open issue of it with Lotzen."

Courtney shook his head decisively.

"It is a great misfortune you were not able to make sure," he said; "for I'm persuaded it was not the book. As I told her highness that day at luncheon, if the duke ever did have it, he has destroyed it to get rid of Frederick's decree; and if there were no decree, then he would have produced it instantly as establishing his right to the crown."

"If that be true—and I grant the logic is not easy to avoid—what was it I saw? I would have sworn it was the book; it resembled it in every particular."

Courtney's fingers went up to his gray imperial, and for a long while he smoked his cigaret and stared thoughtfully at the ceiling.

"It is a fine mess," he said, at length; "Spencer mixes it so abominably. What really brought her to Dornlitz?—how long has she been here?—did the duke strike her—if there is a plot back of it, why should she have been selected to do the open work with you, of all people?—why, if Lotzen have the book, doesn't he destroy it?—why does he want you to see it in his very hands?—why, if he haven't the book, does he want to convince you that he has?— . . . If it's a plot, then its object was either the one you suggest: to tempt you to violent measures against him to recover the book, and so to discredit you with the nobles when it's not found; or—

—and this may be the more likely—to inveigle you into a death trap by using the book as a lure."

"Either of which," observed the archduke, "would explain his preservation of the book."

"Or sentiment," Courtney laughed. "Her highness thinks the duke would never destroy the laws of his house."

"I fancy she wouldn't be quite so strong on that now," Armand observed. "I wish you had seen her last night; she was magnificent, simply magnificent.—Richard, she is the Dalberg of us all!—it's she, not I, nor Lotzen, who ought to wear the sapphire crown."

Courtney nodded in hearty acquiescence.

"And as she may not, it is for you," he said, gravely, "to make her a queen by wearing it yourself—and, as I believe I've admonished once or twice heretofore, to do that you must keep alive—dead archdukes are good only to bury."

"I'm very much alive," the other laughed, "more alive than I've been since I shed cadet gray."

"The lord knows it is not from lack of effort on your part to get killed; you've tempted death in every dare-deviltry you could find—and this De Saure house affair is the limit—though last night was about as idiotic. The princess has more discretion in an eye-lash than you have in your whole head—but for her, you would be surrounded now by tapers and incense—what fresh atrocity against common prudence will you perpetrate next, I wonder!"

The archduke pushed the decanter across.

"Take another drink, old man," he grinned, "you must be dry, with such a warm bunch of ideas jostling one another for exit—I'll promise to be as discreet hereafter as a debutante. I admit the De Saure business appears foolish now, but then, at that hour of night, in darkness, rain and storm, would you, or any other man, have denied a woman's call for help? I couldn't."

"Nor anything else that promises adventure," said Courtney. "If Lotzen doesn't make an end of you—" he shrugged his shoulders and lit another cigaret. . . . "I've sworn a dozen resolves to quit advising you; and then, every time I see you, you've gone and done some other foolish thing, and I blow off—if you will forgive me this time, and may be a few more times, I'll not do it again."

"My dear Dick," said the archduke, "the one thing I'll not forgive is for you not to do it again. You're the only man in all this land who would speak

out his mind to me; and do you think it isn't welcome—to have something of the old life occasionally?"

For a while both men smoked in silence, the marshal thoughtfully, the ambassador waitingly; and in the midst of it Colonel Bernheim entered with a letter for the archduke, which, he explained, he had just received, enclosed in another envelope addressed to himself and marked "Immediate."

Armand glanced at Courtney for permission, got it, and read the letter:

"A—
"We are leaving Dornlitz before daybreak by special train, ostensibly for Paris, really for Lotzen castle. The duke guesses instantly why you were in my apartments, and what you saw. We had a fearful scene, and he struck me again—the cur! It is the B; he admitted it, in his rage—and he has it with him. I am a prisoner now, and compelled to accompany him because I know too much, he says. I'm not asking you for rescue, I can manage him in a few days; but if you want the B, you will know now where to get it. I owe you this, for the fiasco last night, due to that fool, B—, though I don't advise you to follow; Lotzen castle isn't Ferida palace, and I can't aid you there; and besides, and intends to kill you at the now, he is bent on your death, first opportunity. I will find some way to have this mailed, sending it to Colonel Bernheim so it will reach you promptly and not be delayed by official routine."

"3 a. m." "M. S."
Without a word, the archduke passed the letter over to Courtney; and without a word Courtney took it, read it twice, and passed it back; and fell to blowing smoke rings through each other.

"Well," said Armand presently, "when you're satisfied with the rings, and it seems to me they couldn't be bettered, I shall be glad to have your opinion of the letter."

The other shook his head, and went on with the rings.

"What is the use?" he answered. "You are going to Lotzenia."

"I'm sorely tempted, I admit—but I don't know—"

Courtney flung his cigaret at the fireplace, and got up.

"Then, if you don't know, I'll tell you what I think—throw that damn letter into the fire and stay right here in Dornlitz; if you let it lure you to Lotzenia, you are an unmitigated fool."

"But the book!—and Spencer only confirms what my own eyes told me."

"Lies, lies, rotten lies!" said Courtney. "He hasn't the book—it's all a plant—you escaped last night because Bigler blundered in, and because the regent was with you—but in that wild land of the north, you will last about a day, or less. Why don't you forget the miserable book, for a while, and get to work on your vote in the house of nobles!—there is where you will likely have to fight it out any way, even if Frederick did make your decree. Play politics a bit, and you will have Lotzen back in Dornlitz on the jump—and the book with him, too, if he has it."

The archduke went over and put his hand on Courtney's shoulder.

"Dick," he said, "it's something worth living for to have known a man like you, and to have had him for a friend and companion; and if I don't follow your advice you will understand it is because I can't. You have called me headstrong; I grant it, it's bred in the bone I think; and I'm not of those who can sit, and wait, and play politics. I shall find the laws of the Dalbergs, somewhere, somehow, long before the year is over; and if necessary I'm going to kill Lotzen in the finding—or be killed—"

he broke off with a laugh and a shrug. "Positively, old man, I'm ashamed of myself; I seem to have become a braggart and a swash-buckler."

"Who is the braggart and swash-buckler, my dear marshal?" asked the princess, entering suddenly, with Lady Helen Radnor, Mlle. d'Essolde and Colonel Moore, "not Mr. Courtney I hope."

"Unfortunately, no, your highness," said Armand. "Candor compels me to admit that I was characterizing myself."

She pointed her crop at the decanter, and nodded questioningly to the ambassador.

"No," said he, "no; it's only a sudden rush of remorse for deeds past and to come."

"To come!" said she, and looked at the archduke inquir-

ingly. For answer he handed her Madeline Spencer's letter.

She glanced at the signature, smiled, and with a word of excuse, she carried it over to a window; and Armand, chatting with Lady Helen, watched her curiously as she read and re-read it; and then she looked up quickly, and gave him the glance of summons.

"Have you shown it to Mr. Courtney?" she asked. "Did he say what he thought of it?"

"He did—and at some length, and also what he thought of me.—Briefly, it was to the effect that the letter is a snare, and that I'm several kinds of a fool if I let it lure me to Lotzenia."

The princess tapped her crop softly against her boot, and considered.

"Of course," said she, in momentary interruption of her thought, "know what you think—you think you're going—but I don't know—" and the tapping of the crop began afresh. . . . Presently a soft light came into her eyes, and she flashed him the adorable smile. "Are you willing to wait the year for our wedding, dear?" she asked.

He bent down over her, as though looking at something in the letter.

"You know I'm not, sweetheart!" he said, "that's why I want to find the laws—to make you queen the sooner."

"Your queen?"

"Mine—yes, either here in Valeria, or over the seas in old Hugo's land—as the book decides for Lotzen or for me."

"And do you honestly think, Armand, that he has the book?"

"What do you think?" he asked.

"Women don't think—they have only intuition, and mine says that he has."

"Then I shall go this night—"

"And I with you."

"Then I won't go."

"Nonsense, dear—why not?" Dalberg castle is always ready, and I shall take the household or part of it. I most assuredly would not let you go alone, to be butchered by our dear and loving cousin."

He knew it was useless to protest.

"Well, come along, little woman," he said; "and may be, together, we can devise a way for me to get the book out of Lotzen castle."

She turned upon him, full faced and emphatic.

"But I'll not go, nor shall you," she declared, "unless you promise you won't do anything without consulting me. I'm going because you need some one to curb your recklessness; and I have no mind to see you throw your life away just because you won't take a dare."

The archduke gave her cheek a surreptitious pinch.

"I promise," he laughed; "you're something of a Dalberg dare-devil yourself when the fever is on—and you're the finest little comrade and commander God ever made."

Again she gave him the smile—and they went back to the others.

"Mr. Courtney," said she, at once, "we are about to spend a short while at Dalberg castle, going tonight by special train, with a few members of the household; it will be a great pleasure to Armand and me to have you with us."

"I am honored," said the ambassador, with a grave bow; "I shall be glad to go."

"Even if you do disapprove," said she lightly—"but, what would you, monsieur! I don't want to imprison Armand, so the best thing I can do is to go along and try to take care of him; and that's where you can help me."

"And that, your highness, is precisely the reason I'm going," he answered;—"Warwick will stick to his work to the end."

"The end!" she exclaimed, with sharp seriousness.

"In the great Cathedral yonder," he answered.—And the princess, thinking only of the coronation, smiled and glanced with proud faith at the archduke.

But to the latter the real inference went home, and sharply. "The crypt, you mean!" he muttered aside.

And Courtney nodded curtly. "The crypt I mean," he said.

"Even Warwick and Margaret of Anjou together could not save the silly Henry."

But the old, lean-faced prime minister did not deal in inferences when—having come at the regent's summons, from his office in the administration wing of the same building—he was advised of the matter, and that he was to assume charge of the government during her absence.

(To Be Continued Next Week.)

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a way is a matter of much conjecture. The director believes they may have been worn through by the use of sand. The Indian may have used a stick of unusually small diameter and worked the sand through.

A Wise Bride.

The young husband had taken his wife to get her a new spring hat. The clerk, remembering her extravagance before married days, began to show her very expensive hats, much more than the girl could afford to pay. One especially was a beautiful royal purple and orchid bonnet. The bride adored it, but knew it was much more than she could afford to pay. So she bravely refused to try it.

But still the clerk persisted, and her eyes were full of longing. "I'll try it on, but I'll tell you right now that I hope I look like the devil in it."

Fifty-Fifty.

"In regard to hugging, many girls struggle." "Never mind. Others snuggle."—Louisville Courier-Journal.



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