

The Princess Dehra

BY JOHN REED SCOTT.

Copyright, 1928, by John Reed Scott

"It isn't a lie—that's the pity."

"Then why all this bother as to the succession, and search for the book?" she asked incredulously.

"Because, my dear, I'm the only one who knows it's there—listen, and I'll tell you how it happened."

At last! at last! she was to know—and she nestled close to him and waited. Truly, this was her day. And he told all, not even omitting the killing of the valet.

Her first question was typical of her mind, it went straight to the crux of the whole matter.

"But why can't you get the book?" she asked.

"Because I can't get at it. The infernal American has put a cordon of troops around the palace, so that it's impossible to pass at night without declaring myself; Moore occupies the library; and finally the combination on the vault has been changed."

"Isn't it absurd?" said she; "the book actually in its place and yet lost."—She sat up sharply. "Do you really want it, Ferdinand?—because, if you do, may be I can help you."

"Assuredly I want it. If the decree is against me, we will destroy the book and go on with our game."

"Then, dear, let us go after it—and now, now! The regent is absent, hence less vigilance in the palace; Moore is with her, hence the library is deserted; it should be easy for you to get us in it by day and unsuspected."

"And having blown open the vault, be caught in the act," he smiled.

"That is where I come in, dear; I will engage to open it, noiselessly, and in less than 15 minutes, too."

"Is it possible that you are one of those wonder workers who can feel a combination?"

"Yes," said she, "though I've not tried it for years."

"Come, come, try it now!" indicating a small iron safe in the far corner.

She went to it, and sinking to the floor with sinuous grace, she put her ear close to the dial plate and felt for manipulating the knob with light fingers; turning it back and forth very slowly and with extreme care.

And the duke, leaning against the safe, watched her with eager eyes—could she do it?—if she could—

Mrs. Spencer sprang up.

"That was easy," she said.

Lotzen reached over and seized the handle; the bolts snapped back and the door swung open.

With the first burst of impulse she had ever seen him display, he whirled and caught her in his arms.

"We will win now, my duchess!" he exclaimed, "we will win sure. No burglarious entry—no explosion—no flight; instead, the Duke of Lotzen and his aide will go openly to the library, and then in a trice will have the book and be gone."

And I shall owe it all to you, dear—ma chérie duchesse."

She closed her eyes; truly, this was her day!

"Let us go to Dornitz this very night," she said.

He shook his head. "We must wait a day, little one; until our friends across the valley have assured themselves that I am here. But tomorrow night we will steal away to the capital, and get the book; and then, if necessary, we will come back, and send our dear cousin to the devil where he belongs."

CHAPTER XX.

The Princess Turns Strategist.

The archduke put up his field glasses and turning to the princess, waived his hand toward the open country, and around to the castle behind them.

"So, dear," he said, "this is home—the Dalberg aerie and its feeding grounds. I like them well. And particularly do I like the way the nest itself has been kept up to the time in comforts and appointments."

"Do be serious, Armand," she protested; haven't you any sentiment! Look at the wonderful blue of the Veragian mountains; and the shifting shadows on the foothills; and this spur, and Lotzen's yonder, trailing out from them like tendrils of a vine; and the emerald valley, streaked through the center by the sparkling Dehra; and the fair lands to

the south, as far as eye can carry, and yet farther, league upon league to the sea—yours, my lord, all yours—the heritage of your house—the kingdom of your fathers."

"You have forgot the loveliest thing in all the landscape," said he, "the one thing that makes the rest worth while."

She sprang from him. "No, sir, not here on the wall in view of the bailey and every window; confine your sentiment at present to the inanimate portion of the landscape."

He went over and leaned on the parapet beside her.

"I fear I have quite too much sentiment," he said; "I have already expended far more than you would believe—on the castle, and the mountains, and the valley, and all the rest. Now I'm done with it, except for animate objects; the business we have in hand promises to be sufficiently occupying. Yonder is the book; and how to get it, and quickly."

He leveled his glasses at Lotzen castle and studied it a long time. "A pretty hard proposition," he remarked. "Have you ever been in it?"

"Unfortunately, no; but Major Meux has been constable here for two years, and surely must have been there often—yonder he is now, by the gate tower."

The archduke caught Meux's glance and motioned for him. "Major," said he, "can you give us an idea of the plan of Lotzen Castle?"

"I can do better than that, your highness, I can show you a complete. I came upon it in the library only last week. It's more than a hundred years old but I think it is still in effect accurate."

"I wonder how it happens to be here?" said the princess, with the peculiar curiosity of a woman as to non-essentials.

"At the time it was made Lotzen was also a royal castle," the constable explained; "it was very natural to deposit the draft here with the king's own records."

As they crossed the main hall, they chanced upon Colonel Moore, and taking him with them, they went into the library—a great, high-ceilinged room, on the second floor of the keep, the walls hidden by massive, black oak cases, filled with books and folios, in bindings of leather stamped with the Dalberg lion—and from a shelf in a dark corner the constable brought a small portfolio, made to resemble a book, in which the draft was folded.

"This is admirable," the archduke remarked, examining it with the trained eye and instant comprehension of the engineer officer; "it could not be done better now. . . . See, Dehra, it is the whole fortification, as plain as though we were on the high tower, here—" indicating on the draft.

"I suppose so," she smiled; "but to me it looks only like a lot of black lines, flung down at random and with varying degrees of force; sort of an embroidery pattern, you know."

Armand, bending over the sheet, did not hear her.

"What did you make out of this, major?" he asked; "there seems to be nothing on the key to explain it—might it be intended to indicate a secret passage from the second floor of the keep to the postern?"

"That puzzled me also," said Meux, "but your explanation, sir, seems very likely—Possibly old Jessac might know something; he has been here for more than 70 years, as a boy, and upper servant, and steward, and now as sort of steward emeritus and general reminiscer; and he has the legends and history of this castle at his tongue's end."

"Yes," said the princess, "if anyone know, it's Jessac, and I think he served for a time in Lotzen castle—have him here, major, if you please."

The old man came, tall, slender, shriveled of face, white and thin of hair, yet erect and vigorous, despite his almost four and a half score years. They raised men, and kept them long, in the tingling, snapping, life-giving air of the Voragian mountains.

"Don't kneel, Jessac," the regent exclaimed, giving him her hand.

He bent and kissed it with the most intense devotion.

"My little princess! my little princess!" he repeated; "God is

good to have let old Jessac see you once more before he dies." Then he straightened, and, turning sharply toward the archduke, scanned him with an intensity almost savage. Suddenly his hand rose in salute. "Yes, you're a man, and a Dalberg, too—the finest Dalberg these old eyes ever saw."

And Armond understood, and went to him, and took his hand, and held it.

"Every one loves her, Jessac," he said, "but none quite as you and I." Then he drew him over to the table. "Do you know the interior of Lotzen castle?" he asked.

"As I know this one, my lord—I lived in it for 20 years in my young days; even now I could go blindfolded from gate to highest turret."

"Is this plan accurate now? See, here is the gateway, and this is the keep."

"I understand, sir."—He studied it for a little while, following the lines with his finger, and muttering brokenly to himself, under his breath. "Yes, your highness, it's about the same, except that there is an outer building for servants, and here a storehouse; and the arrangement of the rooms in the main part is some different, particularly on the second floor, where several have been made out of one; but the stairway and hall are still as they always were. Indeed, sir, there has been small change or improvement since long before the present lord's father died. Duke Ferdinand had never visited it for more than a score of years, until a few weeks ago, just a little while before our gracious master was called."

The old man was garrulous; so far, age had not missed him; and here the archduke interrupted.

"Jessac," he said kindly, "you have made all that very clear; now can you tell us if there is any secret passage in the castle?"

"One, sir," was the prompt answer; "leastwise, I know one, there may be others."

"And it?"

"From the library to the postern gate, near the west tower—this is it, sir," indicating the line on the plan; "many is the time I've used it, his lordship being absent, when I wanted to get out at night; indeed, sir, there is a key to the postern still here, as well as duplicates to almost every door. They were not surrendered when King Henry gave the place to the late duke—all the locks had been changed shortly before that. Would your highness care to see the keys—they are in the armory."

"Bring them here," said the constable quickly. "I know by experience, sir, that if Jessac get you into the armory, you won't escape for hours; he has a story for every piece in it, and wants to tell them all."

The old man came back, a dozen large keys jangling; and laid them on the table.

"This is to the postern," he said; "it's smaller than the others, so it could be carried more easily, you know, sir—these brass tags, sir, show where they belong."

The archduke looked them over.

"I don't see the key from the library to the secret passage," he said.

"There is none, sir; the big stone in the middle of the side wall of the library, and the one on the right just inside the postern arch, revolve when pushed at the upper edge—this way, your highness," and he demonstrated, using a book as the stone.

"Thank you, Jessac," said Armond, with a smile and a nod of dismissal; "we may want you again tomorrow. I'll keep the keys," and he swept them into a drawer of the desk.

Then the constable withdrew, and for a while Armond and Moore studied the plan, and went over the problem confronting them; and which, though greatly simplified now, was still difficult and delicate beyond anything either had ever been obliged to solve. Perilous it was, too—but that neither regarded for himself; and Moore would gladly have assumed it alone could he have insured thereby the archduke's safety.

Through it all the princess watched them, harkening carefully to what was said, and saying a few things herself, mainly in the shape of questions which showed that, even if to her the draft did resemble an embroidery pattern, she was astonishingly apt at following the discussion. But when Armond remarked that he would make the

attempt that very night, she interposed promptly.

"Wait until tomorrow," she urged; "take at least one night's rest; you need it; and the extra day may disclose something as to the situation in Lotzen castle."

"Tonight is the proper time," said the archduke; "we may not be expected then; we shall be most assuredly tomorrow; it's our chance for a surprise."

"And with our dear cousin that chance is no chance, as you are very well aware," said she; "he knows you are here, and why you are here, and he is ready for you this instant. No, no, dear, it's simply your natural impetuosity, which I came along to moderate; and here is my first veto: not tonight." She put her hand on his arm. "Please, Armond, please; don't you understand—I want to be sure of you a little longer; the day you enter Lotzen castle may be our last."

Moore turned quickly away—and the archduke looked once into the soft eyes, and at the adorable smile; and the eyes and smile always will when the one woman uses them, as the one woman always can, if she try.

"I ought not to let you persuade me," he said, with a half serious shake of his hand, "but—you're pretty hard to resist. At least, you won't prohibit my riding over toward the castle, and having a look at it now, in broad day, if I promise not to venture inside nor very near."

"On the contrary, I should like to go with you; come, we will all go—you tell the ambassador, and I'll get Helen and Elsie," with a nod and a smile at Moore.

"A reconnaissance in force!" the archduke laughed, when the regent had gone; then he ordered the horses, and he and Moore went off to get into riding uniform.

A wide, macadamized avenue wound sharply down from the castle to the valley, where the roads were of the soil, soft and sandy. Once there, the six loosed bride and sped away across the level country; nor drew rein but thrice until they came to the forks, where the road to Lotzen took off for its mile of tortuous ascent.

Here they halted, and Armond and Moore scanned through their glasses the castle and its approach; and by riding a very little way up toward it, they were able to see the postern gate, which was on the edge of the hill about a third of the distance around from the bridge, and was approached by a narrow, rain-washed, boulder-strewn path, leading almost straight up the side of the acclivity. The moat ran only across the front, the almost sheer descent on the other sides of the wall having been deemed, even in the old days, quite sufficient protection against assault.

"Well," said the archduke, as he shoved the glasses back into their case, "thank God, we have old Jessac to tell us how to find that postern path—and, colonel, before we start, it might be wise for each of us to make his will, and to say good-bye to his lady, for, of a truth, it is going to be a rather serious business."

They rode back by way of Porgia, the garrison town, five miles down the valley. It was also the railway station for both castles, though some years before, King Frederick had run a track over as close as possible to Dalberg, so his own train could always be at hand to hurry him away. And there it had brought the regent that morning, and was now waiting, ready for instant use.

A regiment of Uhlans were at drill on the edge of the town, and the princess waved her cocked hat to them as she cantered by. The colonel in command answered with his saber, while from 2,000 lusty throats went up a wild cheer of passionate devotion.

Armond reached over and patted her on the arm.

"Surely, dear, the soldiers love you," he said.

"They seem to,"—then out flashed the smile again; "but there is only one I'm sure of," leaning over close.

"You little temptress!" he said, "I've a great mind to prove it now."

(To Be Continued Next Week.)

He Would Try One.

A young married couple engaged a pretty cook. But her cooking was terrible. On the first morning the bacon was burned to a cinder.

"Darling," said the wife, "I'm afraid cook's burned the bacon. You'll have to be satisfied with a kiss for breakfast."

"All right," said the husband gruffly; "kiss her in."

2 or 3 Cans of Baking Powder

Are Not Worth the Price of One

If they are the "big can and cheap" kind because they may mean baking failures.

CALUMET

The Economy BAKING POWDER



BEST BY TEST

Don't let a BIG CAN or a very low price mislead you.

Experimenting with an uncertain brand is expensive—because it wastes time and money.

The sales of Calumet are over 150% greater than that of any other baking powder.



THE WORLD'S GREATEST BAKING POWDER

Question. "My youngest sister is engaged." "Well, girly?" "I was just wondering." "About what?"

LOOK OLD? Gray, thin, straggly hair makes people look very old. It isn't necessary—a bottle of Q-Ban Hair Restorer will bring back original color quickly—stops dandruff. At all good druggists, 75c, or direct from House-Elle, Chicago, Memphis, Tenn.

Yeast Foam

The girl who knows how to make good bread can do most other cooking well

Send for free booklet "The Art of Baking Bread"



Northwestern Yeast Co. 1730 N. Ashland Ave., Chicago



Find What CANADA has to offer YOU!

If your dream of success seems like a hopeless ambition, if you are discouraged trying to get ahead on high priced land, if your present location fails to give you opportunity, there is a new deal for you, a new chance in the fertile, virgin farms of Western Canada, where wheat produces 20 to 40 bushels to the acre, where the 1922 crop was biggest in history, where oats, barley and hay and fodder crops are the basis of a great dairy industry, and a man's work brings him success and prosperity.

Low Priced Land—the Last Great West

In Western Canada you still can buy virgin prairie land at \$15 to \$20 per acre, on long terms if desired, near to town, railroads, etc.—land such as has for many years produced the world's prize winning wheat, oats, barley, flax, rye, alfalfa. Canada had no "war time" land boom; prices are not inflated—you get in on the ground floor.

Taxes Favor the Farmer as Values Increase

The tax laws of Western Canada encourage the producing farmer. The tax on land is reduced when it is brought under cultivation—while on your buildings, machinery, improvements, personal property, automobile, there is no tax at all. A single crop is often worth more, acre for acre, than the cost of the land.

Rent Now—Buy Later Pay Out of Profits

Canada welcomes the industrious settler. What you have now isn't so important. If your capital is small, or you cannot sell your present holdings to advantage, rent a fertile Canadian farm and "try it out" for a season or two. Make a good living, increase your capital, and buy later. Farms may be rented from successful settlers on easy terms in some cases with option of purchase.

Buy on Exceptional Terms—32 Years to Pay

For the benefit of those wishing to buy land a national non-profit sharing organization—the Canada Colonization Association—has been established with head office at Winnipeg, and United States office at St. Paul. This Association offers selected land convenient to railroads—much of it at \$15 to \$20 per acre—on very small cash payment; no further payment until third year; balance extended over thirty years, but purchaser may pay up and obtain title at any time if desired. Interest six percent per annum on deferred payments.

We Help Find Your Opportunity

The Canadian Government maintains information bureaus in leading American centers, where you can get full information, without cost, about all parts of Canada. The men in charge are Government officials, interested only in the service of the prospective settler.

Get the Facts—No Cost

MAIL THE COUPON. Let us know something of your position, and receive free book with maps, and free service of the Canadian Government Agent in your territory; also information how special railway rates can be arranged for a trip of inspection.

Mail Coupon to Nearest Agent:

G. A. COOK, Desk W, Watertown, S. Dakota; W. W. BENNETT, Desk W, 300 Peter's Trust Bldg., Omaha, Neb. or R. A. GARRETT, Desk W, 311 W. Jackson St., St. Paul, Minn.

FREE HOMESTEADS are still available in some localities. Canada welcomes tourists—come and see our country for yourself.

Address Nearest Agent:
G. A. COOK, Desk W, Watertown, S. Dakota; W. W. BENNETT, Desk W, 300 Peter's Trust Bldg., Omaha, Neb. or R. A. GARRETT, Desk W, 311 W. Jackson St., St. Paul, Minn.

FREE HOMESTEADS are still available in some localities. Canada welcomes tourists—come and see our country for yourself.

No Passports Required. U. S. P. O.