

THE Princess Virginia

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Through the gate of dreams lies the fair land of romance into which you would travel, finding welcome relief from the daily grind. Now you are invited to accompany the Princess Virginia, who determines that the royal personage who would honor her with his hand must fall in love with her and woo her as any other man would a woman.

CHAPTER ONE

"No," said the princess; "no, I'm dashed if I do." "My darling child," exclaimed the grand duchess, "you're impossible. If any one should hear you!" "It's he who's impossible," the princess amended. "I'm just trying to show you."

In his veins, but because her Virginian mother had brought much gold to the Northmoreland exchequer. Afterward he had freely spent such portion of that gold as had come to his coffers in trying to keep his little estates intact. But now it was all gone, and long ago he had died of grief and bitter disappointment. The hereditary grand duchy of Baumburg-Drippe was ruled by a cousinly understudy of the German Emperor William II.; the one son of the marriage had been adopted as heir to his crown by the childless king of Hungary; the handsome and lamentably extravagant old Duke of Northmoreland was dead; his title and vast estates had passed to a distant and disagreeable relative, and the widowed grand duchess, with her one fair daughter, had lived for years in a pretty old house with a high walled garden at Hampton Court, lent by the generosity of the king and queen of England.

nobody was near. There were reports of speeches made by him since his accession to the throne, accounts of improvements in guns and an invention of a new explosive. There was a somewhat crude yet witty play which he had written and numerous other records of the accomplishments and achievements and even eccentricities which had built up the Princess Virginia's ideal of this celebrated young man, proclaimed emperor after the great revolution eight years ago. "You are worthy to be an empress." Her mother's voice broke into Virginia's thoughts. She started and found herself under inspection by the grand duchess. At first she frowned; then she laughed, springing up on a quick impulse to turn earnest into jest and so perhaps escape further catechizing.

"I'm tired of being royal," snapped the princess. "Being royal does nothing but spoil all one's fun and oblige one to do stupid, boring things which one hates." "Nevertheless noblesse does oblige," went on the Dresden china prophetess of conventionality. "When alliances are arranged for women of our position, we must content ourselves with the hope that love may come after marriage, or, if not, we must go on doing our duty in that state of life to which heaven has graciously called us."

"He wishes to marry-me?" she echoed dazedly. "Why?" "Providence must have drawn your inclination toward him, dearest. It is indeed a romance. Some day, no doubt, it will be told to the world in history." "But how did he?"—Virginia broke off and began again. "Did he tell this to Dal and ask him to write you?" "Not—not precisely that," admitted the grand duchess, her face changing from satisfaction to uneasiness, for Virginia was difficult in some ways, though adorable in others, and held such peculiar ideas about life—inherited from her American grandmother—that it was impossible to be sure how she would receive the most ordinary announcements.

rumor has reached Rhaetia that you are—good to look at. Leopold has been heard to say that, whatever else the future empress of Rhaetia may be, he won't give his people an ugly woman to reign over them. And so altogether—" "And so altogether, my references being satisfactory, at a pinch I might do for the place," cut in Virginia, with the hot, impatient rebellion of her youth. "Oh, mother, you think me mad or a fool, I know, and perhaps I am mad, yet not mad enough not to see that it would be a great thing, a wonderful thing, to be asked in marriage by the one man in my world if—ah, that great if—he had only seen and fallen in love with me. It might have happened, you know. As you say, I'm not ugly, and I can be rather pleasant if I choose—so I believe. If he had only come to this land to see what I was like, as royal men did in the dear old fairy stories, and then had asked me to be his wife, why, I should have been consoled enough to think it was because he loved the even more than because of other things. Then I should have been happy—yes, dear, I'll confess it to you now—almost happy enough to die of the great joy and triumph of it. But now I'm not happy. I will marry Leopold or I'll marry no man, but I swear to you I won't be married to Leopold in Count von Breitstein's hateful old, cold and dried way."



WILL JONES



"Yes, would I not make an empress?" point of view are more desirable, still you're strictly within the pale from which Leopold is entitled to choose his wife, and if—" "Dear little mother, there's no such if. And, as for me, I wasn't thinking of a 'worldly point of view.' The emperor of Rhaetia barely knows that I exist. And even if by some miracle he should suddenly discover that little Princess Virginia Mary Victoria Alexandra Hildegrade of Baumburg-Drippe was the one suitable wife for him on earth I wouldn't have him want me because I was 'suitable,' but—because I was irresistible. I'd want his love—all his love—or I would say, 'No, you must look somewhere else for your empress.'"

"He wishes to marry-me?"

von Breitstein ever since that diplomatic visit the Rhaetian chancellor paid to Hungary. The fancy seemed to be mutual; but then, who could ever resist Dal if he wanted to be liked? The chancellor has written to him from time to time, and Dal has quite enjoyed the correspondence. The old man can be witty as well as cynical if he chooses, and Dal says he tells good stories. Now, it seems, in the informal way in which such affairs are usually put forward, that Count von Breitstein has written confidentially to Dal, as our only near male relative, asking how your family would regard an alliance between Leopold and you or if we have already disposed of your hand. At last the emperor is inclined to listen to his chancellor's advice and marry, and you, as a Protestant princess—" "A Protestant princess, indeed?" cried Virginia. "I protest against being approached by him on such terms." The face of the grand duchess was darkened by the gloom of her thoughts. "My daughter," she exclaimed mildly, yet despairingly, "it's not possible that when this wonderful chance, this unheard-of chance, this chance that you were praying for, actually falls into your hands you will throw it away—for a sentimental schoolgirl scruple." "I was not praying for it," said Virginia. "I'm sure, mother, you would have considered it most bold in me to pray for it. And I didn't. I was only refusing other chances."

"Well, at all events, you have this one now. It is yours." "Not in the one way I should have loved to see it come. Oh, mother, why does the emperor want to marry me? Isn't there some other reason than just because I'm a proper Protestant princess?" "Of course," insisted the grand duchess, faintly encouraged. "Dal mentions several most excellent reasons in his letter, if you would only take them sensibly." "I should like to hear them, at all events," answered Virginia. "Well, you see, the empress of Rhaetia must be a Protestant, and there aren't many eligible Protestant girls who would be acceptable to the Rhaetians—girls who would be popular with the people. Oh, I have finished about that! You need not look so desperate. Besides, Dal explains that Leopold is a young man who dominates all around him. He wishes to take for his bride a girl who could not by any possibility herself be helpless to a throne. Dal fancied that his desire is to mold his wife and therefore to take a girl without too many important and important relatives, for he is not one who would dream of adding to his greatness by using the wealth or position of a woman. He has all he needs or wants of that sort. And then, Dal reminds me, Leopold is very partial to England, which helped Rhaetia passively in the time of her trouble eight years ago. The fact that you have lived in England and had an English education would be favorably regarded both by Leopold and his chancellor. And, though I've never allowed you to have a photograph taken since you were a child (I hate seeing young girls' faces in the newspapers and magazines; even though they are royal their features need not be public property) and you have lived here in such seclusion that you've been little seen, still the

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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