

# THE Princess Virginia

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## CHAPTER FIVE

"Ach, himmel!" exclaimed Frau Yorvan, and "Ach, himmel!" she exclaimed again, her voice rising to a wail, with a frantic uplifting of the hands.

The grand duchess grew pale, for the apple checked lady suddenly exhibited these alarming signs of emotion while passing a window of the private dining room. Evidently some scene of horror was being enacted outside, and Virginia and Miss Portman had been away for many hours.

It was the time for tea in England, for coffee in Rhaetia. Frau Yorvan had just brought in coffee for one, with heart shaped sugared cakes which would have appealed more poignantly to the grand duchess' appetite if the absent ones had been with her to share them. Naturally at the good woman's outburst her imagination instantly pictured disaster to the one she loved.

"What, oh, what is it you see?" she implored, her heart leaping, then falling. But for once the courtesy due to an honored guest was forgotten, and the distracted Frau Yorvan fled from the room without giving an answer.

Half paralyzed with dread of what she might have to see, the grand duchess tottered to the window. Was there, —yes, there was a procession coming down the hilly street that led to town from the mountain. Oh, horror upon horror! They were perhaps bringing Virginia down, injured or dead, her beautiful face crushed out of recognition! Yet, no; there was Virginia herself, the central figure in the procession. Thank heaven! It could be nothing worse than an accident to poor, dear Miss Portman. But there was Miss Portman, too, and a very tall, bronzed peasant man, loaded with cloaks and rucksacks, headed the band, while the girl and her ex-governess followed after.

Unspenkably relieved, yet still puzzled and vaguely alarmed, the grand duchess threw up the window overlooking the little village square. But as she strove to attract the truant's attention by waving her hand and crying out a welcome or a question, whichever should come first, the words were arrested on her lips. What could be the matter with Frau Yorvan?

The stout old landlady popped out through the door like a Jack out of his box on a very stiff spring, flew to the overloaded peasant and, almost rudely elbowing Miss Portman aside, began distractedly babbling up and down, tearing at the bundle of rucksacks and cloaks. Her inarticulate cries ascended like incense to the grand duchess at the open window, adding much to the lady's intense bewilderment.

"What has that man been doing?" demanded the grand duchess in a loud, firm voice, but nobody answered, for the very good reason that nobody heard. The attention of all those below was entirely taken up with their own concerns.

"Pray, mein frau, let him carry our things indoors," Virginia was insisting, while the tall man stood among the three women, motionless, but apparently a prey to conflicting emotions. If the grand duchess had not been obsessed with a certain idea which was growing in her mind she must have seen that his dark face betrayed a mingling of amusement, impatience, annoyance and boyish mischief. He looked like a man who had somehow stumbled into a false position from which it would be difficult to escape with dignity, yet which he half enjoyed. Torn between a desire to laugh and fly into a rage with the officious landlady, he frowned warningly at Frau Yorvan, smiled at the princess and divided his energies between quick, secret gestures intended for the eyes of the Rhaetian woman and endeavors to unburden himself in his own time and way of the load he carried.

With each instant the perturbation of the grand duchess grew. Why did the man not speak out what he had to say? Why did the landlady first strive to seize the things from his back, then suddenly shrink as if in fear, leaving the tall fellow to his own devices? Ah, but that was a terrible look he gave her at last—the poor, good woman! Perhaps he was a brigand! And the grand duchess remembered tales she had read—tales of fearful deeds, even in these modern days, done in wild mountain fastnesses and remote villages such as Alleheilgen—not in Rhaetia perhaps, but then there was no reason why they should not happen in Rhaetia at a place like this. And if there were not something evil, something to be dreaded, about this big, dark browed fellow, why had Frau Yorvan uttered that exclamation of frantic dismay at sight of him and rushed like a mad woman out of the house?

It occurred to the grand duchess that the man must be some notorious desperado of the mountains who had obtained her daughter's confidence or got her and Miss Portman into his power. But, she remembered, fortunately

some or all of the mysterious gentlemen stopping at the inn had returned and were at this moment assembled in the room adjoining hers. The grand duchess resolved that at the first sign of insolent behavior or threatening on the part of the luggage carrier these noblemen should be promptly summoned by her to the rescue of her daughter.

Her anxiety was even slightly allayed at this point in her reflections by the thought (for she had not quite outgrown an innate love of romance) that the emperor himself might go to Virginia's assistance. His friends were in the next room, having come down from the mountain about noon, and there seemed little doubt that he was among them. If he had not already looked out of his window, drawn by the landlady's excited voice, the grand duchess resolved that in the circumstances it was her part as a mother to make him look out. She had promised to help Virginia, and she would help her by promoting a romantic first encounter.

In a penetrating voice which could not fail to reach the ears of the men next door or the actors in the scene below she adjured her daughter in English.

"This language was the safest to employ, she decided hastily, because the brigand with the rucksacks would not understand, while the flower of Rhaetian chivalry in the adjoining room were doubtless acquainted with all modern languages.

"Helen!" she screamed, loyally remembering in her excitement the part she was playing. "Helen, where did you come across that ferocious look-



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ing ruffian? Can't you see he intends to steal your rucksacks or—black-mal! you or something? Is there no manservant about the place whom the landlady can call to help her?"

All four of the actors on the little stage glanced up, aware for the first time of an audience, and had the grand duchess' eyes been younger she might have been still further puzzled by the varying and vivid expressions of their faces. But she saw only that the dark browed peasant man who had glared so haughtily at poor Frau Yorvan was throwing off his burden with haste and roughness.

"I do hope he hasn't already stolen anything of value," cried the grand duchess. "Better not let him go until you've looked into your rucksacks. Remember that silver drinking cup you would take with you."

She paused, not so much in deference to Virginia's quick reply as in amazement at Frau Yorvan's renewed gesticulations. Was it possible that the woman understood more English than her guests supposed and feared lest the brigand, perhaps equally well instructed, might seek immediate revenge? His bare knees alone were evidence against his character in the eyes of the grand duchess. They gave him a brazen, abandoned air, and a young man who cultivated so long a space between stockings and trousers might be capable of any crime.

"Oh, mother, you're very much mistaken!" Virginia was protesting. "This man is a great friend of mine and has saved my life. You must thank him. If it were not for him I might never have come back to you."

At last the meaning of her words penetrated to the intelligence of the grand duchess through an armor of misapprehension.

"He saved your life?" she echoed. "Oh, then you have been in danger! Heaven be thanked for your safety, and also that the man's not likely to know English or I should never forgive myself for what I've said. Here is my purse, dearest. Catch it as I throw and give it to him just as it is. There is at least £20 in it, and I only wish I could afford more. But what is the matter, my child? You look ready to faint."

As she began to speak she snatched from a desk at which she had been writing a netted silver purse. But while she paused, waiting for Virginia to hold out her hands, the girl forbade the contemplated act of generosity with an imploring gesture.

"He will accept no reward for what he has done except our thanks, and those I give him once again," the girl answered. She then turned to the chamois hunter and made him a present of her hand, over which he bowed

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with the air of a courtier rather than the rough manner of a peasant. And the grand duchess still hoped that the emperor might be at the window, as really it was a pretty picture and, it seemed to her, presented a pleasing phase of Virginia's character.

She eagerly awaited her daughter's coming, and, having lingered at the window to watch with impatience the rather ceremonious leave taking, she hastened to the door of the improvised sitting room to welcome the mountaineers as they returned to tell their adventures.

"My darling, who do you think was listening and looking from the window next ours?" she breathlessly inquired when she had embraced her newly restored treasure, for the secret of the adjoining room was too good to keep until questions had been put. "Can't you guess? I'm surprised at that since you were so sure last night of a certain person's presence not far away. Why, who but your emperor himself?"

The princess laughed happily and kissed her mother's pink cheek. "Then he must have an astral body," said she, "since one or the other has been with me all day, and it was to him—or his doppelgänger—that you offered your purse to make up for accusing him of stealing."

The grand duchess sat down, not so much because she wished to assume a sitting position as because she experienced a sudden uncontrollable weakness of the knees. For a moment she was unable to speak or even to speculate, but one vague thought did trail dimly across her brain: "Heavens, what have I done to him? And maybe some day he will be my son-in-law."

Meanwhile Frau Yorvan—a strangely subdued Frau Yorvan—had droopingly followed the chamois hunter into the inn.

"My dear old friend, you must learn not to lose that well meaning head of yours," said he in the hall.

"Oh, but, your majesty!"—  
"Now, now, must I remind you again that his majesty is at Kronburg or Petersbruck or some other of his residences when I am at Alleheilgen? This time I believe he's at the baths of Melina. If you can't remember these things I fear I shall be driven away from here to look for chamois elsewhere than on the Schneehorn."

"Indeed, I will not be so stupid again, your—I mean I will do my very best not to forget. But never before have I been so tried, to see your high-born, imperial shoulders loaded down as if—as if you had been a common gopakträger for tourists instead of!"—  
"A chamois hunter. Don't distress yourself, good friend. I've had a day of excellent sport."

"For that I am thankful. But to see you—to see you coming back in such an unsuitable way has given me a weakness of the heart. How can I order myself civilly to those ladies who have!"—

"Who have given peasant Leopold some hours of amusement. Be more civil than ever for my sake. And, by the way, can you tell me the names of the ladies? That one of them—a companion, I judge—is a Miss Manchester, I have heard in conversation, but the others!"—

"They are mother and daughter, sir. The elder, who in her ignorance cried out such treasonable abominations from the window, as I could tell even with the little English I have picked up, is Lady Mowbray. I have seen the name written down, and I know how to speak it because I have heard it pronounced by the companion, the Miss Manchester. The younger, the beautiful one, is also a mees, and the mother calls her Helene. They talk together in English, also in French, and though I have a few words of either language, I could tell that London was mentioned between them more than once while I waited on the table. Besides, it is painted in black letters on their traveling boxes."

"You did not expect their arrival?"  
"Oh, no, sir! Had they written beforehand at this season, when I generally expect to be honored by your presence, I should have answered that the house was full or closed or any excuse which occurred to me to keep strangers away. But none have ever before arrived so late in the year, and I was taken all unawares when my son, Alois, drove them up last night. He did not know you had arrived, as the papers spoke so positively of your visit to the baths, and I could not send travelers away. You have bidden me not to do so once they are in the house. But these ladies are here but for a day or two more on their way to Kronburg for a visit, and I thought!"—

"You did quite right, Frau Yorvan. Has my messenger come up with letters?"  
"Yes, your—yes, sir. Just now also a telegram was brought by another messenger, who came and left in a great hurry."

The chamois hunter shrugged his shoulders and sighed an impatient

sigh. "It's too much to expect that I should be left in peace for a single day, even here," he muttered as he went toward the stairs.

To reach Frau Yorvan's best sitting room (selfishly occupied, according to one opinion, by four men absent all day on a mountain) he was obliged to pass by a door through which issued unusual sounds. So unusual were they that the emperor paused.

Some one was striking the prelude of a volk'slied, a Rhaetian variation of the zither. As he lingered, listening, a voice began to sing. Ah, what a voice!

Softly seductive it was as the cooing of a dove in the spring to its mate, pure as the purring of a brook among



"She's an English girl, yet she sings our Rhaetian music."

meadow flowers, rich as the deep notes of a nightingale in his passion for the moon. And, for the song, it was the heartbreaking cry of a young Rhaetian peasant who, lying near death in a strange land, longs for one ray of sunrise light on the bare mountain tops of the homeland more earnestly than for his first sight of an unknown heaven.

The man outside the door did not move until the voice was still. He knew well, though he could not see, who the singer had been. It was impossible for the plump lady at the window or the thin lady with the glasses to own a voice like that. It was the girl's. She only of the trio could so exhale her soul in the very perfume of sound, for to his fancy it was like hearing the fragrance of a rose breathed aloud. "I have heard an angel," he said to himself, but in reality he had heard Princess Virginia of Baumenburg-Drippe showing off her very prettiest accomplishment in the childish hope that the man she loved might hear.

Leopold of Rhaetia had heard many golden voices—golden in more senses of the word than one—but never before, it seemed to him, a voice which so stirred his spirit with pain that was bittersweet, pleasure as blinding as pain and a vague yearning for something beautiful which he had never known.

If he had been asked what that something was he could not, if he would, have told, for a man cannot explain that part of himself which he has never even tried to understand.

Before he had moved many paces from the door the lovely voice, no longer plaintive, but swelling to brilliant triumph, broke into the national anthem of Rhaetia—warlike, inspiring as the "Marsellaise," but wider, calling her sons to face death singing in the defense.

"She's an English girl, yet she sings our Rhaetian music as no Rhaetian woman I have ever heard can sing it," he told himself, slowly passing on to his own door. "She is a new type to me. I don't think there can be many like her. A pity that she is not a princess or else—that Leopold, the emperor, and Leo, the chamois hunter, are not two men. Still, the chamois hunter of Rhaetia would be no match for Miss Mowbray of London, so the weights would balance in the scales as unevenly as now."

He gave a sigh and a smile that lifted his eyebrows. Then he opened the door of his sitting room to forget among certain documents which urged the importance of an immediate return to duty the difference between Leopold and Leo, the difference between women and a woman.

"Goodby to our mountains tomorrow morning," he said to his three chosen companions. "Hey for work and Kronburg!"

She was going to Kronburg in a few days, according to Frau Yorvan. But Kronburg was not Alleheilgen, and Leopold, the emperor, was not at his palace in the way of meeting tourists or even "explorers."

"She'll never know to whom she gave her ring," he thought, with the dense innocence of a man who has studied all books save women's looks. "And I'll never know who gives her a plain gold one for the finger on which she once wore this."

But in the next room, divided from him by a single wall, sat Princess Virginia of Baumenburg-Drippe.

"When we meet again at Kronburg he mustn't dream that I knew all the time," she was saying to herself. "That would spoil everything—just at first. Yet, oh, some day how I should love to confess all—all! Only I couldn't possibly confess except to a man who would excuse or perhaps even approve because he had learned to love me well. And what shall I do, how shall I bear my life now I've seen him, if that day should never come?"

(Continued.)

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