

THE CASTLE OF GLOOM

A Zenda Romance of
Modern New York

—By—
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SYNOPSIS

The Castle of Gloom, on the Hudson, built by a crazy man, is occupied by "Mildred Boltwood," having claims on the throne. King Leander comes to America in the yacht Ibez to urge marriage.

Rich young Arthur Van Tassel discovers the king, whom Lucretia hates. Lucretia loves Van Tassel, but rejects him to snatch the crown in the king's absence.

Van Tassel plans to send the princess to Luxembrecht in his yacht, Hell Diver, with his chum, Fosdick. Van Tassel is to remain to capture the king and detain him aboard the Sea Gull.

Lucretia is to leave the castle secretly by a tunnel. Then Van Tassel is to lure the king to the castle and abduct him through the same exit.

CHAPTER XXIX Everlasting Fealty

In the morning Van Tassel set Fosdick at work, with instructions to purchase the Sea Gull, and to hurriedly provision her, as well as the Hell Diver.

Having seen to this, Van Tassel drove his touring car out to the castle to conclude the arrangements. First of all, he must unfold his new plan to the princess. Her part in it would be simply to indite a nice little note to the king, to be dispatched by Van Tassel after her departure. Lucretia's agents, of course, knew where the king's yacht lay at anchor.

On the way Van Tassel had time for lugubrious reflection. In a few hours he would bid her farewell. He wondered if he would ever see her again. Perhaps, he thought, when she had become a great queen, and lived in regal state over in Middeldam, with perhaps a royal husband, he would go over there and be presented at court.

He wondered, dolefully, how she would greet him. No doubt he would have to wear knee-breeches, and get down on his right knee before her, and kiss her hand, and all that sort of thing. Then he would go away, and she wouldn't even invite him for luncheon at the palace. Invite a common Van Tassel to a queen's luncheon! Ridiculous!

No, he made up his mind that he wouldn't go to Middeldam to be snubbed, and refused an invitation to eat at the palace. He wouldn't do it—not by a jugful! He would stay in New York, after he got back from his cruise with the captive Leander, and go into business. He would buy some huge factory and build a mighty addition to it—so big that it would take all his time and thought to run it.

Then, perhaps, he would be able to forget the sweet Lucretia—the dream princess who had come into his life so strangely and who was slipping out of it again, so soon that she seemed indeed to be only a dream.

Lucretia smiled on him in a most stately manner, and approved of the plot to abduct his majesty. Van Tassel had vowed that when his business with the princess was concluded he would coldly take his departure. He had forsworn his love. Nothing but stern duty should move him henceforth!

Yet, alas! when the business was finished, Van Tassel lingered. There were traces of tears in Lucretia's eyes, and he had to fight with himself. Only the fact that she was now cool and calm kept Van Tassel from losing his head again.

"When you are gone," he said, "I shall arrange to purchase the castle, and I shall dedicate it to the memory of Mildred Boltwood, who once lived here. Sometimes I shall come out here and dream of her. Mildred Boltwood is dead, but the Castle of Gloom shall be her monument. It shall be sacred to her. No profane feet shall tread its floors."

For a second the princess resembled the lost Mildred; then she remembered that the romance was ended. With a most lofty air she replied:

"The castle shall be yours without purchase. The queen of Luxembrecht shall give you a grant of it as a slight token of the service you have rendered Mildred Boltwood, whom we both mourn."

Since she was a queen, Van Tassel could only bow, and kiss her fingers.

"For all time," he said, "Mildred Boltwood shall be mistress of the Castle of Gloom. Those who go by on the Hudson will point to it as the spot where Mildred Boltwood met a tragic end."

Much more of this sort of thing would have brought the dead Mildred back to life. Her reappearance would have been most inconvenient. Therefore, Lucretia, having given her lover the castle, attempted to squelch him.

"Mildred Boltwood is dead beyond recall, Mr. Van Tassel. Let us leave her in peace. After all, she was a weak creature, and it is well for Luxembrecht that she is gone."

Van Tassel didn't care to stay long. The Castle of Gloom was too gloomy for him. It froze him. Mildred was dead, and he and the princess had nothing in common. He didn't even have the assurance to ask her to go for a final automobile ride, down the cliff and back again. When he was leaving she gave him a lifeless hand and looked at him undisturbed, as if she had really forgotten her love.

This was too much for Van Tassel, for was this not the last moment they were to have together alone? He began an impromptu funeral address.

"Please don't make it any harder," she interrupted, "since our romance, Mr. Van Tassel, must end."

"Why must it end?" he asked, impulsively, and altogether illogically.

The princess looked at Van Tassel hopelessly. What could even a princess do with a Van Tassel—a Van Tassel madly in love?

Remember!" warned Lucretia, sternly.

"Oh, bother the vow!" he retorted. "Let's forget it. We love each other. What the devil's the use—"

"Mr. Van Tassel!"

For a moment she seemed to falter, and Van Tassel took advantage, but in a second she was the Princess Lucretia again, with all of a princess' imperiousness.

"Release me, Mr. Van Tassel!" she commanded.

Van Tassel felt the tone and fell back. "I have been weak for a moment," said the princess, with flaming eyes, "but my answer is final. For the Princess Lucretia there is no such thing as love."

With a rush his defeat came over Van Tassel. The end had come. He had lost her.

"Then," he exclaimed savagely, "you must swear that as long as you live you will love no other man. Will you swear it, Lucretia, before I go? Shall we both swear eternal fealty to a love that is hopeless?"

She was pallid, but the light in her eyes was transcendent as she answered:

"Yes. I swear it!"

CHAPTER XXX

King's Valets Are Blind

It was twilight when Van Tassel got back to New York, and he sat for a time in his rooms, waiting for Fosdick.

"Never mind the lights," he said to James when the valet came in. "I prefer to sit here in the gloaming. Do you ever like the gloaming, James—that nice quiet hour of the evening when the crickets begin to chirp (though you wouldn't know it here in New York) and the fireflies begin to sparkle? Didn't you ever like to sit in the twilight and think, James?"

"Oh, yes," said James. "At 'ome,

were they 'ave crickets and fireflies, I hoften used to sit and listen to 'em, and watch 'em, sir."

Then he added, sagely:

"It's the time, sir, w'en men as are in love like to sit in the dark and think of their sweethearts, sir."

"Ah!" sighed Van Tassel, "so they do, James, so they do. You have a sweetheart yourself."

James was blushing, but the gloom hid his color.

"Yes," he assented. "She's the finest of girls, sir! And now that you've mentioned 'er, Mr. Van Tassel, there was something I've been wanting to ask you."

"All right," said Van Tassel. "Ask whatever you please, only don't ask to get married until after we are back from our cruise. You know I can't get along without you on the boat, James. You don't intend to desert?"

"No, sir; that aint it, sir."

He hesitated and floundered for words.

"Begging your pardon, sir, Priscilla wanted me to ask you, Mr. Van Tassel, if, after we're married, we couldn't both work for you in a royal castle—when you're king. She's used to kings, sir, 'aving been born and bred, like myself, in old Hengland, sir."

Van Tassel sat up straight and took his cigar from his lips. Was James making fun of him? Was this scally fellow bold enough for that? He had a sharp reply on his lips, but the innocent face of the servant restrained it.

"Why, bless you, James," he said, "of course you can both work for me when I'm king. That is, you shall be my valet and your wife shall be one of the queen's maids. How would she like that?"

James' face was beaming. "Oh, sir, she'd be the 'appiest girl in—in—were is the royal palace, sir?"

The valet's inquisitiveness was getting Van Tassel into a corner.

"That's a secret," he said, "that nobody knows except me."

And the princess, I s'pose, sir!" supplied James. "She knows it, too. Would you mind, sir, if I asked when the wedding's to be, sir?"

"Another secret! It's all secret, James, and don't you tell anybody. By the way, you haven't mentioned it already, have you, to any one?"

James looked doubtful.

"Whom have you told?" demanded Van Tassel.

"Not knowing it was a secret, sir, I 'appened to mention it to the Arringtons' coachman, and to the Farraguts' chauffeur, sir, that she was a princess, as was to be a queen."

Van Tassel groaned.

"It'll be all over New York, and in the papers, I haven't a doubt," he said. "It's a good thing we're going away. James, if you're to be a king's valet, you've got to learn to keep your mouth shut. A king's valet never knows anything, never sees anything, never hears anything."

"Yes," said James, remorsefully.

"You might as well begin training now. I want you to go aboard the Sea Gull tonight. You know I bought her today of Jim Blackwell."

The valet's face grew instantly long. "I didn't know we were to sail tonight, sir."

"You needn't look so gloomy over it, James, for I am going to give you all the evening in which to say goodbye to your sweetheart, but I want you to be aboard the Sea Gull, at Jersey City, by midnight. Just when we'll start will depend on—conditions in Wall street, you know, but when I get ready, I'm likely to be off at a minute's notice and I don't want to get out and drum up a valet."

"Yes," said James, with some relief in his voice at the prospect of

having another evening, at least, with his love.

"And I want you to begin tonight, James," Van Tassel went on, "to be blind and deaf and dumb to whatever may go on around you. No matter what happens, remember that you are a king's valet, and that kings have secrets."

"Yes'r, and queens, too. SHE'LL be as mum and deaf as I, sir, when she's maid to the queen."

"Good!" approved Van Tassel.

For some time after night had come Van Tassel sat there and smoked in the darkness, thinking strange thoughts.

(To Be Continued)

WHEN WOMEN VOTE

"I don't see why women should be made to vote if they don't want to," is heard in pathetic tones on all sides. Some one should reassure these injured ladies. They need not vote. Brutal force will not be used upon them by their more militant sisters. We will even step softly on our way to the polls, so as not to disturb them. But if we promise to make big detours around them, will they not in their turn promise to let us vote, even though they fail to see why we want to do it? They apparently feel that they are in the hands of some awful power that will show them no pity; and they have already made preparations to faint in case anything happens, says the woman who saw in the New York Evening Sun. It is so unobservant of these women. Have they never noticed that there are men who manage to extricate themselves from the tangle of voting? In case the anti-suffragettes are uncertain as to the best way of staying away from the polls, the men will show them. They are not in such danger as they think.

They are not in such danger as we, the would-be voters. For we are inundated with such a flood of unenviable characteristics, all assured us to belong solely to women, that it is a miracle if we do not disappear from view, buried under a pile of the deplorable traits recently presented to us. Why have we all these years had such charming things said of us by half of mankind when the other half possessed, so it would seem, a knowledge of us that they should have acted on with much severity? How did some contrive to think us angels when others were convinced we were lacking all moral sense? It must have been that both spoke on nothing but hearsay, and so, knowing us only by rumor, were naturally divergent in their views.

With the kindest intentions in the world, and hoping sincerely that it will not be too much of a shock, we would like to break it to them, with all gentleness, that we bear a dim resemblance to themselves.

One of the darts aimed at us most frequently (we have been long accustomed to a ducking and dodging which we hear with amazement has been interpreted as kowtowing and salaaming) is the probable personal element which women will introduce into politics. It is feared we will hate out of politics all those we disagree with in politics, vote for a man without a beard in preference to one with, and be down on a candidate who tore our frock at a dance in our early youth. Ah, then these are accusations not to be answered just now. We optimistically hope our future behavior will disprove them, and in the meantime we solace ourselves with the thought that even these petty reasons for not liking a man are not very much worse than liking him for the generosity of his backers.