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. Therefore she travels incognito in his realm, meeting adventures strange and full of excitement. You will learn with pardonable pride that the American blood in her veins gives her an independence unheard of in the presence of kings, but most of all you will want to know how she succeeds in her bold undertaking. That you will enjoy every minute of the reading is assured by the verdict of thousands who declare "The Princess Virginia" to be a most delightful story.

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."

"Or to shock me. You are so like your grandmother."

"That's the best compliment any one can give me, which is lucky, as he gives so often," laughed the princess. "Dear, adorable Virginia!" She cuddled into the pink hollow of her lap the pearl-crusted ivory miniature of a beautiful, smiling girl which always hung from a thin gold chain about her neck. "They shouldn't have named me after you, should they, if they hadn't wanted me to be like you?"

"It was partly a question of money, dear," sighed the grand duchess. "If my mother hadn't left a legacy to my first daughter only on consideration that her own extremely American name of Virginia should be perpetuated."

"It was a delicious way of being patriotic. I'm glad she did it. I love being the only royal princess with American blood in my veins and an American name on my handkerchiefs. Do you believe for an instant that if Grandmother Virginia were alive she would let Granddaughter Virginia marry Prince Henri de Touraine?"

"I don't see why not," said the grand duchess. "She wasn't too patriotic to marry an English duke and startle London as the first American duchess. Heavens, the things she used to do if one could believe half the wild stories my father's sister told me in warning! And as for my father, though a most charming man, of course he could not—er—have been called precisely estimable, while Prince Henri certainly is, and an exceedingly good match even for you—in present circumstances."

"Call him a match if you like, mother. He's undoubtedly a stick. But, no; he's not a match for me. There's only one on earth." And Virginia's eyes were lifted to the sky as if, instead of existing on earth, the person in her thoughts were placed as high as the sun that shone above her.

"I should have preferred an Englishman for you," said the grand duchess, "if only there were one of suitable rank free to—"

"I'm not thinking of an Englishman," murmured her daughter.

"If only you would think of poor Henri!"

"Never of him. You know, I said I would be dash—"

"Don't repeat it! Oh, when you look at me in that way, how like you are to your grandmother's portrait at home—the one in white, painted just before her marriage! One might have known you would be extraordinary. That sort of thing invariably skips over a generation."

The grand duchess laid down the theory as a law, and, whether or no she were right, it was at least sure that she had inherited nothing of the first Virginia's daring originality—some of her radiant mother's beauty perhaps, watered down to gentle prettiness, for the hereditary Grand Duchess of Baumenburg-Dripps at fifty-one was still a daintily attractive woman, a middle-aged Dresden china lady, with a perfect complexion preserved by an almost perfect temper, surprised eyebrows, kindly dimples and a conventional upper lip.

She was not by birth "hereditary." Her lord and every much her master had been that and had selected her to help him reign over the hereditary grand duchy of Baumenburg-Dripps, not only because her father was an English duke with royal Stuart blood 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 Baumenburg-Dripps 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 Hungaria, the handsome and famously 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.

For a long moment the Dresden china lady thought in silence and something of sadness. Then she roused herself again and asked the one and only royal princess with an American name, what, in the way of a match, she really expected.

"What do I expect?" echoed Virginia. "Why, I wish for the moon, sir, I mean the sun. But I don't expect to get it."

"Is that a way of saying you never intended to marry?"

"I'm afraid it amounts to that," admitted Virginia. "Since there is not one man in the world I would have for my husband."

"And—dearest! A man you have let yourself learn to care for, a man beneath you? How terrible! But you see he does—I."

"I've never seen this man. And I'm not in love with him. That would be too foolish, because, instead of being beneath, he's far, far above me."

"Virginia, of whom can you be talking? Or is this another joke?"

Virginia blushed a little and, instead of answering her mother's look of helpless appeal, stared at the row of tall hollyhocks that blazed along the ivy-hidden garden wall. She did not speak for an instant, and then she said, with the dainty shyness of a child pinned to a statement by uncomprehending elders: "It isn't a joke. Nonsense, maybe, yet not a joke. I've always thought of him—for so many years I've forgotten when it first began. He was so great, so everything that appeals to me. How could I help thinking about him and putting him on a pedestal? I—there's no idea of marriage in my mind, of course, only—there's no other man possible after all the thoughts I've given him—no other man in the world."

"My dear, you must tell me his name."

"What! When I've described him—almost—do you still need to hear his name? Well, then, I—I'm not ashamed to tell. It's Leopold."

"Leopold. You're talking of the emperor of Rhaetia."

"As if it could have been any one else."

"And you have thought of him, you've cherished him, for years as an ideal! Why, you never spoke of him particularly before."

"That's because you never seriously wanted me to take a husband until this prim, dull French Henri proposed himself. My thoughts were my own. I wouldn't have told you only—you see why."

"Of course, my precious child. How extremely interesting and—and romantic!" Again the grand duchess lapsed into silence, yet her expression did not suggest a stricken mind. She merely appeared astonished, with an astonishment that might turn into an emotion more agreeable.

Meanwhile it was left for Virginia to look vexed—vexed with herself. She wished that she had not betrayed her poor little foolish secret—so shadowy a secret that it was hardly worthy of the name. Yet it had been precious—precious since childhood, precious as the immediate jewel of her soul because it had been the jewel of her soul, and no one else had dreamed of its existence. Now she had shown it to other eyes, almost flaunted it. Never again could it be a joy to her.

In the little room, half study, half boudoir, which was her own there was a desk, locked in her absence, where souvenirs of the young emperor of Rhaetia had been accumulating for years. There were photographs which Virginia had contrived to buy secretly—portraits of Leopold from an early age up to the present, when he was shown as a tall, dark, cold eyed, warm lipped, firm chinned young man of thirty. There were paragraphs cut from newspapers telling of his genius as a soldier, his prowess as a mountaineer and hunter of big game, with dramatic anecdotes of his haughty courage in time of danger, his impulsive charities, his well thought out schemes for the welfare of his subjects in every walk of life.

There were black and white copies of bold, clever pictures he had painted. There was martial music composed by him and plaintive folk songs adapted by him, which Virginia had tried softly to herself on her little piano when 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 since 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 catechising.

"Yes, would I not make an empress?" she echoed, stepping out from the shadow of her favorite elm into the noontide radiance of summer.

The sun poured over her hair as she stood with uplifted head and threaded it with a network of living gold; a warm

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ing into the dark gray eyes rimmed with black lashes and turning them to jewels. Her fair skin was as flawless in the unsparing light as the petals of lilies, and her features, though a repetition of those which had made a Virginia girl famous long ago, were carved with royal perfection.

"There is no real reason why you should not make an empress, dearest," said her mother, in pride of the girl's beauty and desiring, womanlike, to promote her child's happiness. "Stranger things have happened. Only last week at Windsor the dear queen was saying what a pity poor Henri was not more. But, no matter; he is well enough. However, if—And when one comes to think of it, it's perhaps not unnatural that Leopold of Rhaetia has never been mentioned for you, although there could be nothing against the marriage. What a match for any woman—a supreme one! Not a royal girl but would go on her knees to him if—"

"I wouldn't," said Virginia. "I might worship him, yet he should go on his knees to me."

"I doubt if those proud knees of his will ever bend in homage to man or woman," replied the grand duchess. "But that's a mere fantasy. I'm serious now, darling, and I very much wish you would be."

"Please, I'd rather not," smiled Virginia uneasily. "Let us not talk of the emperor any more—and never again after this, mother. You know how. That's all that's necessary, and—"

"But it's not a—that's necessary. You have put the idea into my head, and it's not an unpleasing idea. Besides, it has evidently been in your head for a long time, and I should like to see you happy—see you in a position such as you're entitled to grace. You are a very beautiful girl (there's no disguising that from you, as you know you are the image of your grandmother, who was a celebrated beauty), and the best blood in Europe runs in your veins. You are royal, and yet—and yet our circumstances are such that—in fact, for the present we're somewhat handicapped."

"We're beggars," said Virginia, laughing, but it was not a happy laugh.

"Cophetua married the beggar maid," the grand duchess reminded her, with elaborate playfulness. "And, you know, all sorts of things have happened in history—much stranger than any one would dare put in fiction or writing of royalties. My dear husband was second cousin once removed to the German emperor, though he was treated—But we mustn't speak of that. The subject always upsets me. What I was leading up to is this: though there may be other girls who from a worldly point of view are more desirable, so 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 Baumenburg-Dripps 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.'"

"But that's nonsense, darling. Royal people seldom or never have the chance to fall in love," said the grand duchess.

"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."

"Rotten duty!" broke out Virginia. "Think goodness, in these days not all the kings' horses and all the kings' men can make even a princess marry against her will. I think that everything else about 'duty in marriage' when people have each other they be kind and good and sweet and true because it's a joy, not because it's a duty. And that—the only sort of family worth having—behaves much and women according to me. I wouldn't accept anything else from a man, and I should despise him if he were less to me than I am to him."

"Are you—do you mean you believe you love—Leopold?" [illegible] "Why, that was one thing I was trying to find out—to find out for myself. But at moments—in a clash of romance and opinions—in such moments there is current a happy divination in the soul of a woman."

Virginia, who with a negative temperament had nothing but four or three moments of passion, experienced a sensation from the grand duchess, and as soon as the ladies were once more alone together in the walled secluded garden she broke the cross stranger news of her son Adalbert, now by adoption crown prince of Hungaria.

"Open the others for me, dear," she demanded excitedly, "while I see what Dal has to say." And Virginia obediently opened, wondering whether Dal's news would by and by be passed on to her. It was always an event when a long letter came from him, and the grand duchess invariably laughed and exclaimed and sometimes blushed as she read, but when she blushed the letter was not given to the crown prince's sister.

There was a note today from an old friend of her mother's of whom Virginia was fond, and she had just begun to be interested in the third paragraph, all about an adorable Dandy Dinmont puppy, when an odd, half stifled ejaculation from the grand duchess made the girl lift her eyes.

"Has Dal been having something beyond the common in the way of adventures?" she inquired drily.

Her mother did not answer, but she had grown pink and then pale.

Virginia began to be uneasy. "What is the matter? Is anything wrong?" she asked.

"No, nothing in the least wrong, far from it, indeed, but, oh, my child!"

"Mother, dear, what is it?"

"Something so extraordinary, so wonderful, I mean as a coincidence, that I can hardly speak. I suppose I can't be dreaming. You are really talking to me in the garden, aren't you?"

"I am, and I wish you were telling me the mystery. Do, dear. You look awake, only rather odd."

"It would be strange if I didn't look odd. Dal says—Dal says!"

"What has he been doing—getting engaged?"

"No. It is—your emperor, not Dal, who talks of being engaged."

"Oh," said Virginia, trying not to speak blankly, trying not to flush, trying not to show in any way the sudden sick pain in her heart.

Of course she was not in love with him. Of course, though she had been childish enough long ago to make him her ideal and foolishly faithful enough to keep him so, she had always known that he would never be more to her than a shadow emperor. Some day he would marry one of those other royal girls who were so much more suitable than she. That would be natural and right, as she had more than once told herself with no conscious pang, but now that the news had come, now that the royal girl was actually chosen and she must hear the letter and read about the happy event in the newspapers, it was different. She felt suddenly cold and sick under the blow—hurt and defrauded and even jealous. She knew that she would hate the girl—some wretched, commonplace girl, with stick out teeth, perhaps, or no figure and no idea of the way to wear her clothes or do her hair.

But she swallowed hard and clinched her fingers under the voluminous letter about Dandy Dinmont. "Oh, so our friend is going to be married?" she remarked lightly.

"That depends," replied the grand duchess, laughing mysteriously, with a catch in her voice as if she had been a nervous girl. "That depends. You must guess. But, no, I won't tease you. My dear, my dear, after Dal's letter coming, as it has come, in the midst of such a conversation I shall be a firm believer in telepathy. This letter on its way to us must have put the thoughts into our minds and the words on our tongues. It may be that the emperor of Rhaetia will marry; it may not; but, my sweet, beautiful girl, it depends upon—you."

"Me?" The voice did not sound to Virginia like her own. Was she, too, dreaming? Were they both in a dream?

"He wishes to marry you."

All the letters dropped from Virginia's lap, dropped and fluttered to the grass softly, like falling rose leaves. Scarcely knowing what she did, she clasped her hands over the young bosom, shaken with the sudden throbbing of her heart. Perhaps such a betrayal of feeling by a royal maiden deservingly sued for proved for her hand was scarcely correct, but Virginia had no thought for rules of conduct as laid down for her too often by her mother.

"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 to you?"

"Not just precisely that," admitted the grand duchess, her face changing from satisfaction to uneasiness, for Virginia was evident in some way, though unknown to others, and be I sure, greatly alarmed. [illegible] Well, it is in reserve to be told, she would receive the news officially among others.

"The others—[illegible] I like the possibility of them."

"Not precisely. Dear!" she repeated. "Then what?"

"Well, perhaps, though it's not wise, it is the correct thing, you had better read your letter to those other people."

Virginia put her hands behind her back with a childish gesture and a frightened look upon her face which at least three grand dukes gave up the world. "I somehow I can't," she said. "Please tell me."

"To begin with, then, you know what an admiration Dal has felt for a cousin

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von Breitstein ever since that diplomatic visit the Rhaetian chancellor paid to Hungaria. The fancy seemed to be mutual, but then, who could 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 not only near male relative, asking how your family would regard an alliance between Leopold and you or if we have already disposed of your