

Complete Story.

The Wayward Princess.

"Put not your trust in princes. But whatever you do, put it still less in princesses," said Madame Van der Boll.

Her axiom was the outcome of experience, for she had superintended the education of many princesses. In her youth, she was the companion of a scatter-brained little German Serenity who became the wife of an English Royal Duke, and who found such joys in the freedom of English life and the excitements of le flirt as practised a l'Anglaise that she fell into disgrace at the Court of her husband's cousin, Queen Victoria, and was constrained to find her amusement for the rest of her life in foreign watering places. The two daughters (in whom she took no interest whatever, they being the legitimate offspring of the man who bored her to despair) were entrusted to the care of Madame Van der Boll, a loyal but steady-going soul, of respectability unimpeachable. In due time they both married back into their flighty mother's country, and Madame Van der Boll followed the fortunes of the younger to the Duchy of Saxenstein. Princess Augusta was understood to have conferred unusual distinction on the younger son of the Grand Duke by marrying him, and her reward was a greater consideration at the petty Court than her position warranted. It was an understood thing that her daughters were to make brilliant marriages to bring great foreign influences home to root in Saxenstein; the more so that their importance in the matrimonial market was not eclipsed by the existence of any daughter of the Hereditary Grand Duke, their father's elder brother. Their education had run on the most approved lines, superintended by the indispensable Madame Van der Boll; they were charming, pretty girls, and to-day they are elegant fascinating women, but it was before she had done with them that Madame Van der Boll formulated her celebrated axiom.

Princess Augusta was a disappointed woman. She had spent all her grown-up girlhood hoping against hope that the indiscretions of her mother would not debar her from making a figure at her cousin's Court, and ultimately a marriage worthy of an English princess; no one, however, interested themselves in her to the point of taking her destiny in hand, and late in life, for a princess, she married Prince Luitpold of Saxenstein, *faute de mieux*. She determined that her daughters should not suffer the heart sickness she herself had experienced, that they should marry young and not disillusioned; she forgot that disappointment is the lot of poor humanity, and that her best efforts could not ward it off the lives of the children whom she adored.

"Since marriage is the destiny of woman, and above all of Royal woman, let them marry suitably, but let them be before all things marry young," she said in the course of many talks with Madame Van der Boll on the subject next her heart. She added, "and let those who know better than they do make the choice for them."

Madame Van der Boll would not have held the responsible position she did if she had invariably given voice to her thoughts. She looked inscrutable, with a head motion that might have signified assent after due consideration, or anything else the Princess pleased. But she said nothing until she had left that lady's presence.

"This poor good Princess!" she then remarked, shrugging her shoulders, "her theories are admirable. But alas, she does not know her daughters. For that matter, she does not know human nature. Theories are fine, and theories based on experience may lead us right five times in six, but the sixth time may fail us. We shall see."

Princess Margarethe, the eldest of the daughters on whom the said theories were to be practised, was a fair, fluffy, docile little thing, who looked like a pretty doll. When she was sixteen, she was suddenly shown a young man riding in a royal procession, and told that he was to be

her husband. In the importance of being betrothed and the delight of new dresses and diamonds, she overlooked the personality of the bridegroom, and never discovered that he was enduring, but not welcoming, the marriage state. It took her several months to find that pretty dolls have hearts, and that dresses and diamonds cannot fill them.

Princess Elizabeth was slightly more fortunate, for her Prince was a middle-aged man of solid character, and did not mortify her by open infidelities. But he was deadly dull and puritanical, and the matron of seventeen, who pined for balls and supper parties, the laughter and admiration of her contemporaries, found herself expected to take her pleasure in Calvinistic prayer-meetings and the dry discourse of silver-haired politicians.

Princess Dagmar was the youngest of their highnesses, and her sisters had been married respectively three and two years when she reached the age of seventeen. So she heard a great many things of which she would have otherwise remained in ignorance, a great many more than her mother could have wished.

The Princesses were not allowed to see anything of the gay world before they married; their only glimpse of the life of Pleasure was at the Opera, where they sat in a row in the Grand Ducal box in front of their *dame de compagnie* and looked about them with a naive curiosity and enthusiasm. The people stared back at them from the stalls and boxes, and said among themselves how fresh and pretty the little girls were; perhaps here and there a more thoughtful older woman gave a sigh to think how evanescent was that girlish freshness, the dew on the rose, the flush of the dawning sky, the breeze of the morning. The elder princesses frankly cared nothing for Wagner and Beethoven, Gounod and Bizet; they only enjoyed looking at the audience, and making conjectures about the pretty girls, the officers in uniform, the gay matrons who shone in diamonds on gala nights, denizens all of a world they could only look at as if it were a show. For these

innocent tastes they were a thorn in the flesh to their uncle, Prince Adolf Heinrich, the only member of the Grand Ducal family who really cared for music and who occupied the Grand Ducal box, generally in solitary glory, every night of the Opera season. His scowls were so severe and his head shakings so awe-inspiring that the three sisters were frightened into a very rigid form of good behaviour in his presence; it was during the entr'acte that they gave reign to their harmless laughter, and naive speculations, for then Prince Adolf Heinrich was in the habit of leaving the box, to confer with some musical protegee, or if none such were at hand, at any rate to mark his lack of interest in anything in the Opera House besides the music.

The Princesses Margarethe and Elizabeth married and removed the aggravation of their presence from their persecuted uncle, the Princess Dagmar remained to offer the painful spectacle of a frivolous and immature female creature to his disapproving gaze. At least this was his expectation; but on the first time he came to the Opera House after Princess Elizabeth's marriage he found to his surprise his youngest niece and—which was more remarkable still—with the open score of the music in front of her upon the ledge of the box.

"Umph! Umph!" ejaculated Prince Adolf in his amazement, "What are you doing that for; do you flatter yourself that you can follow all the motifs of this great masterpiece?"

"I may not be clever enough for that," twittered the Princess, meekly, "but—but I am very fond of music, uncle. I like to listen."

"Is it possible," exclaimed Prince Adolf, "that I have a niece with some sense in her head?"

Now this was the beginning of all the mischief. Prince Adolf was so gratified by his discovery that he took to patronising his niece, and when she found that this meant gay doings of which she had never dreamt, she was willing enough to be patronised. The Prince was a bright particular star of a brilliant and cultivated, but Bohemian world, in which art and beauty were preferred before state and ceremonial, and in which even decorum and morality took decidedly the second place. Prince Adolf would have been horribly shocked at the thought of undermining the rules of good conduct to which his niece had been brought up, but he did not realise that by showing her glimpses of this world, he was unsettling her, and giving her ideas which should not

trouble the heads of marriageable princesses. Besides, Prince Adolf's musical fetes and gay informal supper parties, the grand State Balls at which Princess Margarethe was obliged to watch the flagrant attentions paid to other women by her husband, seemed heavy and dreary affairs, and the minister-haunted tear-parties, flavoured with an amount of prayer and praise that might be supportable in Heaven, but was quite beyond human endurance here below to which Princess Elizabeth was doomed, were intolerable nightmares. Princess Dagmar had seen nothing of either of these forms of entertainment, but she heard much, and she was a girl who thought for herself.

The watchful Madame Van der Boll soon espied how the land lay, and was displeased with Prince Adolf, as was also the rest of the Grand Ducal family when they came to hear of what was going on. People's ideas of sense differ. Prince Adolf's and those of his family differed enormously. The family was angry, Prince Adolf was angry and injured, Princess Luitpold was angry, injured and apprehensive.

"There is only one thing to be done, and before there are any serious consequences," said everybody, "Marry her."

But the mischief was done by this time.

The latest of Prince Adolf's proteges was a Swedish pianist. He was a fine player, but less fine than he himself and his admirers thought, he had a certain dash, a mannerism of his own invention, tricks with his hands, and a rolling eye, and these covered a multitude of faults in execution and technique. In appearance, he was very artistic and rather dirty, he exposed a scraggy throat above the lowest and limpest of collars, with a bow of surprising size and colour, and spindle legs below baggy velvet knickerbockers. His clothes did not fit and were always of some material more suited to the apparel of the other, than of his own sex. He wore as many gold chains as a Lord Mayor, diamonds the size of shillings in his embroidered shirt front, pearls in his bat-like ears, and gorgeous rings on every finger of hands which he did not wash. His hair appeared to be seldom cut and never combed. He was a very fair specimen of the average conceited, under-pred artist of the second rank, and he was not attractive, save to the eyes of seventeen.

But Princess Dagmar was very young, and knew little of the world, less of men, and least of artists. She believed in Genius, and was therefore



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