

CHAPTER I THE CROWN PRINCE RUNS AWAY

THE Crown Prince sat in the royal box and swung his legs. This was hardly princely, but the royal legs did not reach the floor from the high crimson-velvet seat of his chair.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto was bored. His royal robes, consisting of a pair of blue serge trousers, a short Eton jacket, and a stiff, rolling collar, white lined, looked him.

He had been brought to the Opera House under a misapprehension. His aunt, the Archduchess Annunziata, had strongly advised "The Flying Dutchman," and his English governess, Miss Braithwaite, had read him some inspiring literature about it.

The orchestra, assisted by a brass solo and intermittent thunder in the wings, was making a deafening din, and the shadows on the sea backing took its handkerchief and wiped its nose.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto looked across at the other royal boxes, and caught his cousin Hedwig's eye. She also had seen the handkerchief; she took out her own scrap of linen, and mimicked the shadow. Then, Her Royal Highness the Archduchess Annunziata, being occupied with the storm, she winked across at Prince Ferdinand William Otto.

In the opposite box were his two cousins, the Princesses Hedwig and Anna, attended by Hedwig's lady-in-waiting. When a princess of the Court becomes seventeen, she drops governesses and takes to ladies-in-waiting. Hedwig was eighteen. The Crown Prince was fifteen, Hedwig better than fifteen. Although she had been introduced formally to the court at the Christmas eve ball, and had been duly presented by her grandfather, the King, with the usual string of bows and her own carriage with the spokes of the wheels tilted halfway—only the King and Prince Ferdinand William Otto had all-gold wheels.

She still ran off now, and then to her room with the Crown Prince and Miss Braithwaite in the schoolroom at the Palace; and she could eat a great deal of bread and butter. Prince Ferdinand William Otto winked back at the Princess Hedwig. And just then "Listen, Otto," said the Archduchess, leaning forward. "The spinning song—is it not exquisite?"

They are only pretending to spin," remarked Prince Ferdinand William Otto. Nevertheless he listened obediently. He rather liked it. They had not felt him at the spinning; they were not spinning—any one could see that—but they were sticking very closely to their business of each outgirding the other, and collectively of drowning out the orchestra.

The spinning chorus was followed by long and tiresome solos. The Crown Prince yawned again, although it was but the middle of the afternoon. Hedwig's eye, he ran his fingers up through his thick hair and grinned. Hedwig blushed. She had confided to him once, while they were walking in the garden at the summer palace, that she was thinking of being in love with a young lieutenant who was attached to the King's suite. The Prince—who was called Otto, for short, by the family; because his father, the King, loved names—the Prince had been much interested. For some time afterward he had bothered Miss Braithwaite to define being in love, but she had not really satisfactory answers.

In pursuance of his friend for information he had grown quite friendly with the young officer, whose name was Larisch, and had finally asked to buy him a pair of riding boots. The young lieutenant, the grim old King had granted the request, but it had been quite fruitless so far after all. Lieutenant Larisch only grew queerer and queerer when he was questioned, although he seemed not unwilling to hear Hedwig's name.

CHAPTER II AND SEES THE WORLD

THE Crown Prince was just a trifling dazzled by the brilliancy of his success. He paused for one breathless moment under the fullness of a great desire in his small, active body. This was nothing less than a ride on the American scenic railroad, which had secured a concession in a far corner of the park. Hedwig's lieutenant had described it to him—how one was taken in a small car to a dizzy height, and then turned loose on a track which dropped giddily and rose again, which hurried one through sheer tunnels of incredible blackness, thrust one out over a gorge, whirled one in mad curves around corners of precipitous heights, and finally landed one in a bustling, broadsheeted, and reeling, but safe, at the very platform where one had purchased one's ticket three eternities, which were only minutes before.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto had had this proposition, like his big woman, to Miss Braithwaite. Miss Braithwaite replied with the sad history of an English child who had clutched at his cap during a crucial moment on a similar track at the Crystal Palace in London.

"When they picked him up," she finished, "every bone in his body was broken." "Every bone?" "Every bone," said Miss Braithwaite, solemnly. "The little ones in his ears and all!" "Every one," said Miss Braithwaite, refusing to weaken.

The Crown Prince had pondered. "He must have felt like jelly," he remarked, and Miss Braithwaite had dropped the subject. So now, with freedom and his wife's allowance, except the outlay for the big woman, in his pocket, Prince Ferdinand William Otto started for the Land of Desire. The allies were coffee. The terraces were empty, but from the coffee houses along the drive there came a cheerful rattle of cups, a hum of conversation.

As the early spring twilight fell the gas lamps along the alley, always burning, made a twin row of pale stars ahead. At the end, even as the wanderer gazed, he saw myriads of tiny red, white and blue lights, rising high in the air, outlining the crags and peaks of an oblique mountain which was a mountain. The Land of Desire was very near!

There came to his ears, too, the occasional rumble that told of some palpitating soul and that moment hurried and twisted and joyously thrilled, as per the lieutenant's description.

Now, it is a strange thing, but true, that one does not reach the Land of Desire alone. It is with some one else, and the Land of Desire, alone, is not the Land of Desire at all. Quite suddenly Prince Ferdinand William Otto discovered that he was lonely. He sat down on the curb under the gas lamp and ate the fig woman's bread, taking out the clove, because he did not like clove. At that moment there was a soft whirling off to one side of him and a yellow bird, rising and falling erratically on the breeze, careened suddenly and fell at his feet.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto bent down and picked it up. It was a small toy aeroplane, with yellow silk planes, gay ropes of waxed thread and a wooden rudder. Its motive power vested in a tightly twisted rubber.

One of the wings was bent. Ferdinand William Otto straightened it and looked around for the owner. A small boy was standing under the next gas lamp. "Go!" he said in English, "did you see it go that time?"



"It is my intention, Lieutenant Larisch, to place the Crown Prince in your personal charge," the old King said. "I want a real friend for the little Crown Prince; one who is both brave and loyal. I depend on you."

CHAPTER III DISGRACED

AT EIGHT o'clock that evening the Crown Prince Ferdinand William Otto approached the palace through the public square. He approached it slowly, for two reasons. First, he did not want to go back. Second, he was rather frightened. He had an idea that they would be disagreeable.

There seemed to be a great deal going on at the palace. Carriages were rolling in under the stone archway, and having discharged their contents, mostly gentlemen in uniform, were moving off with a thundering of hoofs that reached from the vaulted roof of the entrance. All the lights were on in the wing where his grandfather's study was, and when he struck his hand in his pocket and saw that he had secured cigarettes from Lieutenant Larisch and dropped them from one of his windows, which were just overhead, they would look straight ahead and not see them.

The guards were all standing and there seemed to be a great many of them. And just as he had made up his mind to take the plunge, so to speak, a pair of his own regiment of cavalry came out from the courtyard with a thundering of hoofs, wheeled at the street and clattered off.

The Crown Prince Ferdinand William Otto felt in his pocket for his handkerchief, and moistening a corner with his tongue, wiped his face. Then he wiped his shoes. Then, with his hands in his trousers pockets, he sauntered into the light.

Now, sentries are trained to be impassive. One of the sentries was standing in the courtyard with a thundering of hoofs, wheeled at the street and clattered off.

CHAPTER IV THE TERROR

UNTIL late that night General Mettlich and the King talked together. The King had been lifted from his bed and was propped in a great chair. Above his shabby dressing gown his face showed gaunt and old. In a straight chair facing him sat his old friend and Chancellor.

"What it has shown is not entirely bad," said the King, after a pause. "The boy has initiative. And he made no attempt at evasion. He is essentially truthful."

"Yes, it has also shown, sire, is that up protection of his grandfather. He loved the lad, and would—and when I could sleep and let him get away, as I did—"

"The truth is," said the King, "we are both of us getting old. I'm tapped with my gnarled fingers on the blanket that covers his knees. 'The truth is also,' he observed, a moment later, 'that the boy has very few pleasures. He is alone a great deal. General Mettlich raised his shaggy head. Many years of wearing a soldier's cap had not injured his grey hair. He had bristling eyebrows, white now, and a short, slight mustache on his upper lip."

"When he was irritated, or disagreed with any one, his eyebrows came down and his mustache went up. 'How—alone, sir?' 'You do not regard that disgraced English woman as a companion, do you?' 'He is attached to her,' observed the old King. 'She doesn't appear to have a single human quality.' General Mettlich eyed his King with concern. Since when had the retiring family demanded human qualities in their governesses? 'She is a thoughtful and conscientious woman, sire,' he said stiffly. It happened that he had selected her, 'she does her duty. And as to the boy being lonely, he has not time to be lonely. His tutors—'

CHAPTER V THE TERROR

THE Crown Prince Ferdinand William Otto went up the stone staircase. Here and there he passed guards who stared and saluted. He had not been observed with the vision of Miss Braithwaite, he would have known that relief followed by a lower jaw suddenly clenched into a smile as his Royal Highness drew a hand from his refuge and saluted. He saluted first at one, then at the other, rather sheepishly, hesitated between them, lapped his hat on more securely and marched in.

"The young rascal!" said the second sentry to himself. And by turning his head slightly for a sentry learns to see all around like a horse, without twisting his neck—he watched the runaway into the palace.

"I have told you all I know," said the Archduchess, impatiently. "One moment he was in the photograph gazed at one. He was boyish, and smiling. There was a dog beside him, and its head was on his knee. Whoever one stood in the room, the King knew this, and because he was quite old, and because there were few persons to whom a king dared to speak his inmost thoughts, he frequently spoke to the photograph."

The older he grew, the more he felt, sometimes, as though it knew what he said. He had begun to think that death, after all, is not the end, but only the beginning of things. This rather worried him, too, at times. What he wanted was to lay things down, not to take them up.

"If they've got him," he said to the picture, "it is out of my hands and into yours, my boy."

CHAPTER VI THE TERROR

THE Crown Prince Ferdinand William Otto was most terribly frightened. Everything was at sixes and sevens. Miss Braithwaite had been crying her head off, and on seeing him had fallen in a faint. Not that he thought it was a real faint. He had unmistakably seen her eyelids quiver. And when she came to she had ordered him no supper, and four pages of German translation, and to bed at seven o'clock instead of seven-thirty for a week. All the time crying, too. And then she had sent him to his grandfather, and taken aromatic ammonia.

His grandfather said nothing, but looked at him. "Here—here I am, sir," said the Crown Prince from the door.

The King drew a long breath. But the silence persisted. Prince Ferdinand William Otto furtively rubbed a dusty shoe against the back of a trousers leg.

"I'm afraid I'm not very neat, sir," said Prince Ferdinand William Otto, and took a step forward. Until his grandfather commanded him, he could not advance into the room.

"Come here," said the King. He went to the side of the bed. "Where have you been?" "I'm afraid—I ran away, sir." "Why?" Prince Ferdinand William Otto considered it was rather an awful moment. "I don't exactly know. I just thought I would."

CHAPTER VII THE TERROR

"You see, it was really extremely difficult to say that he was tired. Things as simple as that would sound ungrateful. Would, indeed, be quite impolite. And then, exactly why had he run away?" "Supper," said the King. "You draw up a chair and tell me about it. We'd better talk it over, I think."

"The Royal Highness drew up a chair and sat on it. His feet not reaching the floor, he hooked them around the chair-rung. This was permissible because, first, the King could not see them from his bed; second, it kept the lines of the drawing. "Probably you are aware," said the King, "that you have alarmed a great many people."

"I'm sorry, sir; I didn't think—"

"A Prince's duty is to think."

"Although," observed His Royal Highness, "I don't really believe Miss Braithwaite faints. She has been thought she fainted, but her eyelids moved."

"Where did you go?" "To the park, sir. I—I thought I'd like to go and work by myself."

"Go on."

"It's very hard to enjoy things with Miss Braithwaite, sir. She does not really enjoy the things I like. Nobby shaking. 'You were disobedient, you were causing grave anxiety and distress—and you were happy! The first duty of a Prince is to his country. His first lesson is to obey laws. He must always obey certain laws. A King is but the servant of his people.'"

"Yes, sir," said Prince Ferdinand William Otto.

The old King's voice was stern. "Some day you will be the King. You are being trained for that high office now. And yet you would set the example of insubordination, disobedience and reckless disregard of the feelings of others."

"Yes, sir," said Prince Ferdinand William Otto, feeling very small and ashamed.

"Not only that. You slipped away. You did not go openly. You sneaked off, like a thief. Are you proud of it?"

"No, sir."

"I shall," said the King, "require no promise from you. Promises are poor things to hold to. I leave this matter in your own hands. Otto, please, do not push by Miss Braithwaite, and for the next ten days you will not visit me. You may go now."

Otto got off his chair. He was feeling exceedingly crushed. "Good-night, sir," he said. And waited for his grandfather to extend his hand. But the old King lay looking straight ahead, with his mouth set in a line and his hands folded over his breast.

At the door the Crown Prince turned and bowed. His grandfather's eyes were fixed on the two sentries who were passing. The photograph on the table appeared to be smiling at him.

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