

Long Live the King

by

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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 quite 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 of white linen, irked him.

He had been brought to the Opera House under a misapprehension. His aunt, the Archduchess Annunciata, had strongly advocated "The Flying Dutchman," and his English governess, Miss Braithwaite, had read him some inspiring literature about it. So here he was, and the Flying Dutchman was not ghostly at all, nor did it fly. It was, from the royal box, only too plainly a ship which had length and height, without thickness. And instead of flying, after dreary aeons of singing, it was moved off on creaky rollers by men whose shadows were thrown grotesquely on the sea backing.

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

Prince Ferdinand William Otto looked across at the other royal box, 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 Annunciata 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 Hilda, 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 liked Hedwig better than Hilda. 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 pearls and her own carriage with the spokes of the wheels gilded halfway, only the King and Prince Ferdinand William Otto had all-gold wheels, - she still ran off now and then to have tea 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 fooled him at all. They were not really spinning, - any one could see that, but they were sticking very

closely to their business of each outwitting 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. Catching Hedwig's eye, he ran his fingers up through his thick yellow 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 he actually had eleven names - the Prince had been much interested. For some time afterward he had bothered Miss Braithwaite to define being in love, but he had had no really satisfactory answer.

In pursuance of his quest for information, he had grown quite friendly with the young officer, whose name was Larisch, and had finally asked to have him ride with him at the royal riding-school. The grim old King had granted the request, but it had been quite fruitless so far after all. Lieutenant Larisch only grew quite red as to the ears, when love was mentioned, although he appeared not unwilling to hear Hedwig's name.

The Crown Prince had developed a strong liking for the young officer. He assured Hedwig one time when she came to tea that when he was king he would see that she married the lieutenant. But Hedwig was much distressed.

"I don't want him that way," she said. "Anyhow, I shall probably have to marry some wretch with ears that stick out and a bad temper. I dare say he's selected already. As to Lieutenant Larisch, I'm sure he's in love with Hilda. You should see the way he stares at her."

"Pish!" said Prince Ferdinand William Otto over his cup. "Hilda is not as pretty as you are. And Nikky and I talk about you frequently."

"Nikky" was the officer. The Crown Prince was very informal with the people he liked.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the Princess Hedwig, coloring. "And what do you say?"

Miss Braithwaite having left the room, Prince Ferdinand William Otto took another lump of sugar. "Say? Oh, not much, you know. He asks how you are, and I tell him you are well, and that you ate thirteen pieces of bread at tea, or whatever it may have been. The day Miss Braithwaite had the toothache, and you and I ate the fruit-cake her sister had sent from England, he was very anxious. He said we both deserved to be ill."

The Princess Hedwig had been blushing uncomfortably, but now she paled. "He dared to say that?" she stormed. "He dared!" And she had picked up her muff and gone out in a fine temper.

Only - and this was curious - by the next day she had forgiven the lieutenant, and was angry at Ferdinand William Otto. Women are very strange.

So now Ferdinand William Otto ran his fingers through his fair hair; which was a favorite gesture of the lieutenant's, and Hedwig blushed. After that she refused to look across at him, but sat staring fixedly at the stage, where Frau Hugli, in a short skirt, a black velvet bodice, and a white apron, with two yellow braids over her shoulders, was listening with all the coyness of forty years and six children at home to the love-making of a man in a false black beard.

The Archduchess, sitting well back, was nodding. Just outside the royal box, on the red-velvet sofa, General Mettlich, who was the Chancellor, and had come because he had been invited and stayed outside because he said he liked to hear music, not see it, was sound asleep. His martial bosom, with its gold braid, was rising and falling peacefully. Beside him lay the Prince's crown, a small black derby hat.

The Princess Hilda looked across, and smiled and nodded at Ferdinand William Otto. Then she went back to the music; she held the score in her hand and followed it note by note. She was studying music, and her mother, who was the Archduchess, was watching her. But now and then, when her mother's eyes were glued to the stage, Hilda stole a glance at the upper balconies where impecunious young officers leaned over the rail and gazed at her respectfully.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto considered it all very wearisome. If one could only wander around the corridor or buy a sandwich from the stand at the foot of the great staircase - or, better still, if one could only get to the street, alone, and purchase one of the fig women that Miss Braithwaite so despised! The Crown Prince felt in his pocket, where his week's allowance of pocket-money lay comfortably untouched.

The Archduchess, shielded by the velvet hangings with the royal arms on them, was now quite comfortably asleep. From the corridor came sounds indicating that the Chancellor preferred making noises to listening to them. There were signs on the stage that Frau Hugli, braids, six children, and all, was about to go into the arms of the man with the false beard.

The Crown Prince meditated. He could go out quickly, and be back before they knew it. Even if he only wandered about the corridor, it would stretch his short legs. And outside it was a fine day. It looked already like spring.

With the trepidation of a canary who finds his cage door open, and, hopping to the threshold, surveys the world before venturing to explore it, Prince Ferdinand William Otto rose to his feet, tiptoed past the Archduchess Annunciata, who did not move, and looked around him from the doorway.

The Chancellor slept. In the royal dressing-room behind the box a lady in waiting was sitting and crocheting. She did not care for opera. A maid was spreading the royal ladies' wraps before the fire. The princesses had shed their furred carriage boots just inside the door. They were in a row, very small and dainty.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto picked up his hat and concealed it by his side. Then nonchalantly, as if to stretch his legs by walking ten feet up the corridor and back, he passed the dressing-room door. Another moment, and he was out of sight around a bend of the passageway, and before him lay liberty.

Not quite! At the top of the private staircase reserved for the royal family a guard commonly stood. He had moved a few feet from his post, however, and was watching the stage through the half-open door of a private loge. His rifle, with its fixed bayonet, leaned against the stair-rail.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto passed behind him with outward calmness. At the top of the public staircase, however, he hesitated. Here, everywhere, were brass-buttoned officials of the Opera House. A garderobe woman stared at him curiously. There was a noise from the house, too, - a sound of clapping hands and "bravos." The little Prince looked at the woman with appeal in his eyes. Then, with his heart thumping, he ran past her, down the white marble staircase, to where the great doors promised liberty.

Olga, the wardrobe woman, came out from behind her counter, and stood looking down the marble staircase after the small flying figure.

"Blessed Saints!" she said, wondering. "How much that child resembled His Royal Highness!"

The old soldier who rented opera glasses at the second landing, and who had left a leg in Bosnia, leaned over the railing. "Look at that!" he exclaimed. "He will break a leg, the young rascal! Once I could have - but there, he is safe! The good God watches over fools and children."

"It looked like the little Prince," said the wardrobe woman. "I have seen him often - he has the same bright hair."

But the opera-glass man was not listening. He had drawn a long sausage from one pocket and a roll from the other, and now, retiring to a far window, he stood placidly eating - a bite of sausage, a bite of bread. His mind was in Bosnia, with his leg. And because old Adelbert's mind was in Bosnia, and because one hears with the mind, and not with the ear, he did not hear the sharp question of the sentry who ran down the stairs and paused for a second at the cloak-room. Well for Olga, too, that old Adelbert did not hear her reply.

"He has not passed here," she said, with wide and honest eyes; but with an ear toward old Adelbert. "An old gentleman came a moment ago and got a sandwich, which he had left in his overcoat. Perhaps this is whom you are seeking?"

The sentry cursed, and ran down the staircase, the nails in his shoes striking sharply on the marble.

At the window, old Adelbert cut off another slice of sausage with his pocket-knife and sauntered back to his table of opera glasses at the angle of the balustrade. The hurrying figure of the sentry below caught his eye. "Another fool!" he grumbled, looking down. "One would think new legs grew in place of old ones, like the claws of the sea-creatures!"

But Olga of the cloak-room leaned over her checks, with her lips curved up in a smile. "The little one!" she thought. "And such courage! He will make a great king! Let him have his prank like the other children, and - God bless him and keep him!"

And Sees The World

The Crown Prince was just a trifle dazzled by the brilliance of his success. He paused for one breathless moment under the porte-cochere of the opera house; then he took a long breath and turned to the left. For he knew that at the right, just around the corner; were the royal carriages, with his own drawn up before the door, and Beppo and Hans erect on the box, their haughty noses red in the wind, for the early spring air was biting.

So he turned to the left, and was at once swallowed up in the street crowd. It seemed very strange to him. Not that he was unaccustomed to crowds. Had he not, that very Christmas, gone shopping in the city, accompanied only by one of his tutors and Miss Braithwaite, and bought for his grandfather, the King, a burnt-wood box, which might hold either neckties or gloves, and for his cousins silver photograph frames?

But this was different, and for a rather peculiar reason. Prince Ferdinand William Otto had never seen the back of a crowd! The public was always lined up, facing him, smiling and bowing and God-blessing him. Small wonder he thought of most of his future subjects as being much like the ship in the opera, meant only to be viewed from the front. Also, it was surprising to see how stiff and straight their backs were. Prince Ferdinand William Otto had never known that backs could be so rigid. Those with which he was familiar had a way of drooping forward from the middle of the spine up. It was most interesting.

The next hour was full of remarkable things. For one, he dodged behind a street-car and was almost run over by a taxicab. The policeman on the corner came out, and taking Ferdinand William Otto by the shoulder, gave him a talking-to and a shaking. Ferdinand William Otto was furious, but policy kept him silent; which proves conclusively that the Crown Prince had not only initiative - witness his flight - but self-control and diplomacy. Lucky country, to have in prospect such a king!

But even royalty has its weaknesses. At the next corner Ferdinand William Otto stopped and invested part of his allowance in the forbidden fig lady, with arms and legs of dates, and eyes of cloves. He had wanted one of these ever since he could remember, but Miss Braithwaite had sternly refused to authorize the purchase. In fact, she had had one of the dates placed under a microscope, and had shown His Royal Highness a number of interesting and highly active creatures who made their homes therein.

His Royal Highness recalled all this with great distinctness, and, immediately dismissing it from his mind, ate the legs and arms of the fig woman with enjoyment. Which - not the eating of the legs and arms, of course, but to be able to dismiss what is unpleasant - is another highly desirable royal trait.

So far his movements had been swift and entirely objective. But success rather went to his head. He had never been out alone before. Even at the summer palace there were always tutors, or Miss Braithwaite, or an aide-de-camp, or something. He hesitated, took

out his small handkerchief, dusted his shoes with it, and then wiped his face. Behind was the Opera, looming and gray. Ahead was - the park.

Note the long allee between rows of trees trimmed to resemble walls of green in summer, and curiously distorted skeletons in winter; note the coffee-houses, where young officers in uniforms sat under the trees, reading the papers, and rising to bow with great clanking and much ceremony as a gold-wheeled carriage or a pretty girl went by.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto had the fulfillment of a great desire in his small, active mind. 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 hurled one through sheet-iron tunnels of incredible blackness, thrust one out over a gorge, whirled one in mad curves around corners of precipitous heights, and finally landed one, panting, breathless, shocked, 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 put this proposition, like the fig 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 week's allowance, except the outlay for the fig woman, in his pocket, Prince Ferdinand William Otto started for the Land of Desire. The allee was almost deserted. It was the sacred hour of 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 allee, 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 the sheet-iron mountain which was his destination. The Land of Desire was very near!

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