

# The Knight of the Silver Star

A Romance of Drussenland

By PERCY BREBNER

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[CONTINUED.]

It was a fiercer struggle than the first. Twice I was nearly thrown from my saddle, once, for a few moments, losing all consciousness of my surroundings and striking madly about me as a man might do in a nightmare. It was fortunate for me that my horse kept his legs. It was Valen's voice that brought me back to consciousness. "Not too far, Verrall. They are surrounding us."

Mechanically almost I swung my horse round, and we began to fight our way back. Valen's warning opened my eyes to the danger, and the press of the enemy, who had closed in behind us as we had fought our way through the mass in front, told me that they had outmaneuvered us. Even now we were too late. There was a triumphant shout as another body of horsemen went by our struggling mass and rode straight for the rising ground



"I TOLD YOU THAT I ALWAYS CRUSHED MY ENEMIES."

What could that little company do against such an overpowering enemy?

"For the princess!" I shouted, rising in my stirrups and swinging my sword with the renewed strength despair gave me. "Back to the princess, every one of us! We'll leave our bodies there, not here."

"For the princess!" some one shouted, and we dashed forward. It was no small body of horsemen that turned to prevent us cutting our way to our comrades, but at least five to one.

"For the princess!" we cried. "For the king!" they shouted answer.

And from many it was a lying shout. This was only the beginning of their treason. They were bent on being as false to the king presently as they had already been to the princess.

Side by side Valen and I went, each by inch fighting our way toward the rising ground, encouraging each other, helping each other. How our companions fared I know not. Valen and I seemed to be alone in the midst of enemies. Still we went on step by step. There seemed no power strong enough to stop us. Success seemed certain when suddenly I was alone. A rush of horsemen parted us, and I saw my comrade carried away from me, hard beset. Still the fight was not lost. I shouted to him, and he heard me. I saw the horseman nearest to him go down as he turned, fighting his way back to me, and I pressed my horse forward to meet him, and we succeeded. We did meet, but at what a cost! Even as I shouted in triumph a sword flashed above him and fell, splitting through his armor near the neck.

"The princess!" he cried once, loudly as in full health, and then he pitched forward from his saddle and lay almost under my horse's hoofs.

I cut down the man who struck the blow, and, my horse stumbling, I came to the ground, falling across the bodies of my friend and my foe.

I was unhurt and sprang to my feet. A clear space was round me. With his sword in his hand Count Vasca looked at me. He did not ride at me at once, but he smiled.

"The time has come, Sir Verrall," he said. It was his smile, not his words, which maddened me.

"Ah, good foeman," I cried, "grant me but a little space to prove this man a coward and a liar, and on my oath I will throw down my sword and you can work your will upon me."

## CHAPTER XX.

THEY might have given me leave, for Vasca had not too many friends, but the count gave them no time to answer. In a moment he was upon me

and his first blow split my harness at the shoulder. I knew that the wound was deep, for afterward it troubled me sorely; but, then, I hardly felt it. My whole ambition was to kill Vasca. That done it mattered not what happened. Even Daria was forgotten for the time. It was an unequal struggle. He was mounted and fresh, I on foot and weary. As he tried to ride me down I caught the horse's bridle and attempted to throw him back upon his haunches. The count was too good a horseman to let me succeed in this, however. He knew his advantage and was not going to throw it away by having to meet me on foot. "The time is nearing its end," he laughed. "I told you that I always crushed my enemies."

He dealt me a blow which staggered me as he spoke. The time was nearing its end. What could I do?

He followed me up as I staggered back, prepared to strike again.

I made a feint, then dodged his blow and sprang up at him, my foot upon his foot in the stirrup. My arms were round him. His horse plunged, and in the confusion I was on the ground. Now we were both swordless and helmetless. My fingers gripped his throat.

"The time has come!" I blurted as, still gripping his throat with one hand, I struck his head twice, thrice, with all my strength with the other.

I should have killed him. My fingers would never have relaxed until they had gripped life out of him, but it was not to be. Men rushed in to separate us. I was dragged from my victim and a few moments later was lying on my back, my arms bound to my side.

The count was not dead, but he was unconscious. They took him up, and a space was cleared for them to carry him to some spot where he could be attended to. And it was through this space that I saw the last incident of that terrible day—the end of the fight.

The rising ground was before me, and its gallant company of defenders lay still upon the sides of it. As I looked the enemies' hands were laid upon the princess, and only one friend was beside her—Jasar. Foes surrounded her and dragged her from her horse. Seeing that all was lost, the priest might have considered that his life was still valuable to his mistress, that he might help her in her captivity. But the hands were laid roughly upon her, and that hurt him. His sword came down upon the nearest of her enemies, and for a minute he was dealing out death around him. They would not have killed a priest, possibly, but Jasar, save in retirement, was a priest no longer. As a warrior there was no quarter for him, and I saw him fall dead at the feet of the woman he had loved and served so well.

It was the last thing I saw—the last episode of that day—for a blackness came between my eyes and the blue sky, and for me the day ended.

When I recovered consciousness we were within sight of Yadasara. I was lying upon a rough litter, which four men carried carefully, and the swinging motion was not unpleasant. My arms were no longer bound, and the wound in my shoulder, which throbbled considerably, had been carefully bandaged up.

I raised my head to look about me. "You're better, then?" said a man, coming to the side of the litter. "Yes. It's hot, and I'm thirsty. May a prisoner drink?"

"Why, yes. We've been doing our best to keep you alive since yesterday."

"Since yesterday! A day and a night passed?"

He nodded. "You know me?"

"You were in my company when you were in the king's guard."

"I remember. It is almost like being among friends. It is almost like being among friends."

"You hardly find it so yonder," and he waved his hand toward the city. "I suppose not. Tell me, where is the princess?"

"In front."

"Well—safe?"

"She is well cared for; have no fear of that. You are both too precious to die for the want of a little attention."

"Could I speak to her?"

"No," he answered sharply. "Not for the sake of old comradeship?"

"No; I cannot do it. I have no ill will toward you. I admire a worthy foeman, and if I can do anything for you yourself I will, but I cannot do what you ask with regard to the princess."

"And Count Vasca?" I asked after a pause.

"Much as you are, getting better."

"That is bad news. I had hoped that the debt was paid."

"You did your best," he returned. "Though we be jailer and prisoner, we have something in common, at any rate," I laughed.

"What is that?"

"We both regret that I did not succeed."

We crossed the river by the bridge of boats, and it was evident that many of the citizens had come out to meet us, for there was much shouting.

My former comrade came to my side again.

"A conqueror could not command more interest than you," he said. "That is poor consolation."

"I think I would be a great traitor rather than nothing," he answered. "I am not even a great traitor," I said.

"I would not say so if I were you. It is easier to confess and have done with it. Better to die quickly than slowly in the fortress yonder. If I dared do it I would plunge my dagger into you now, and I should be doing you a kindness."

"You think so, friend, but I had

rather live. I have been in worse straits than this. I may live to be in worse again."

"You will, and then you may find death too long in coming."

"Death and I seem to be old friends; we have walked so long together," I answered.

"You are a brave man, but a fool!" he said.

With help I walked across the palace yard between ranks of warriors and then was face to face with the king.

"So you come again to Yadasara," he said, a smile upon his lips.

I did not answer. My eyes were fixed on Daria, who stood a few yards from me, guarded by soldiers.

"And you bring a welcome companion this time. We thank you. You made many enemies by your escape, but it has served us better than if you had failed. There's little strength in you now. We must see that that is restored a little before we punish you for your treachery. It would be a poor recompense to see such a man die like a woman."

"Your highness shall not see that," I said.

"We have heard many a strong man boast as much," he answered. "We have good arguments against the boast. To the fortress with him, but treat him gently. He shall have a chance of proving his boast. You, madame, too, are weak, for all you stand so bravely. You shall have rest and gentle treatment for awhile. Then we shall find means to pay you for the lives of our subjects which your rebellion has caused. To the fortress with them both."

I was placed in the litter again and carried up to the fortress. They were very gentle with me, and, knowing what was in store for me, some of them may have pitied me.

The guard of the fortress received us, and with a considerable amount of formality I was handed over to my new jailers. I hardly noticed them, for my eyes were fixed upon a figure sitting in a porch within the gateway. The man sat limply, looked as though he were in pain, and I saw that his arm was in a rough sling. Hope was not dead. I had a friend in the fortress.

"O'Ryan!" I cried, a tone of joy in my voice doubtless.

He looked at me, but did not move. There was an exasperating chuckle at my ear, and I turned to face the Spaniard, Costa.

He was fatter and greasier than ever, and he was tricked out in bright armor.

"You'll find that friendship dead," he said.

I glanced at O'Ryan. He had risen from his seat and looked so different from what I had known him that I concluded that the wound I had given him in that desperate fight upon the stairs must have been deeper than I had thought.

"I will come and make you comfortable presently when I have attended to your princess," Costa said. "Truly this fortress is honored now."

He laughed as the heavy door closed upon me. Presently he returned, followed by two men carrying rugs, with which he proceeded to make me a not uncomfortable bed in one corner. Costa sat down on a stool and remained silent until he dismissed them. "You have a good couch," he said directly we were alone. "You will have good food and drink. You are well lodged."

"As an animal fattening for a fair," I answered.

He laughed. "That is a good description."

"My position amuses you?"

"Not yours so much as the woman's."

"Do you mean the princess?"

"Call her so if you will," he answered. "Carrying herself like a queen—in armor, too; nothing of the miserable prisoner about her. Ah, it amuses me greatly."

"Is she lodged in the fortress?" I asked as unconcernedly as possible.

"Yes, my friend. As chief of the fortress I have the honor to entertain you both. She is now clothed as a woman, and as a woman—Ah, she is better, much better. She has beauty enough to make fools of some men."

"Take care you are not one of them," I said.

"You are too good a warning," he answered. "See what the love of a woman has brought you to."

"Love!" I laughed. "Is that laid to my charge too?"

"Do you say you are not in love with this woman who calls herself a princess? Count Vasca spoke differently."

"Am I to be judged by what Count Vasca says of me?"

"There are other matters, my other matters, that I need not tell you of."

"And the punishment?"

"In good time. It will come."

"When I am strong enough to bear it?"

He nodded. "The machinery and torture, then death, and an exit from Yadasara that way." I pointed to the corner of the cell where the locked flagstone was. "Yes," he said, rising, "but it may be easier than you think—it depends."

"Upon what?"

"The executioners."

"And the princess?" I asked after a pause.

He shrugged his shoulders. "It is always difficult to prophesy the fate of a beautiful woman," he answered. "But for you, my friend, let me advise—make friends with the executioners."

## CHAPTER XXI.

EXCEPT that for many hours a day I sat in a gloomy twilight, I was well treated. I was well fed and was allowed to walk for a certain time each

day upon the ramparts—well guarded, of course.

I had hoped to catch a glimpse of Daria during my daily constitutional, but the hope was not fulfilled. I think it is possible that Costa might have so arranged matters as to grant me this request had I asked him, but I dared not do so. Her beauty might save her. My love might condemn her. So I led Costa to believe that she was no more to me than any other woman.

In my lonely hours I was not idle. I examined my cell, its floors and its walls and the locked trap in the corner. The walls and the floor were hopeless. Such solid masonry would yield but slowly to a company of men with all appliances at hand. But the trap attracted me. It was a way out I knew, even if it were only dead men who took it. I wonder how often and how long I have stood gazing at the trap, fascinated by the thoughts it gave rise to.

I lost count of time. Days and nights passed, and I knew that I had been a prisoner for a long while. An imaginative man might have hoped that he had been forgotten. I knew my enemies too well to think so, and Costa was constantly advising me regarding the future. He seemed to enjoy sitting in my cell, and if his conversation was not of the most consoling kind it helped to pass some weary hours. I have never been able to make up my mind what the Spaniard's true feelings toward me were, whether he had some sort of respect for me or whether it delighted him to speak of the grewsome tortures which were in store for me.

He came one evening late—later than was his wont—and with him came O'Ryan. My quarandam friend had evidently recovered, for he walked vigorously, and his arm looked capable of wielding a good sword again.

"It is tomorrow," said Costa, fixing the torch in the ring in the wall.

"What is tomorrow?"

"Your trial. We are just in Yadasara. We give a man a trial—generally. It seems to me a useless waste of time. It comes to the same thing in the end."

I thought this quite probable. "Shall I be allowed to speak?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, but it would be well to have a care what you say, eh, captain?"

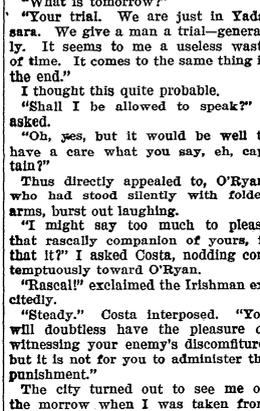
Thus directly appealed to, O'Ryan, who had stood silently with folded arms, burst out laughing.

"I might say too much to please that rascally companion of yours, is that it?" I asked Costa, nodding contemptuously toward O'Ryan.

"Rascal!" exclaimed the Irishman excitedly.

"Steady," Costa interposed. "You will doubtless have the pleasure of witnessing your enemy's discomfiture, but it is not for you to administer the punishment."

The city turned out to see me on the morrow when I was taken from



"I AM NO TRAITOR."

the fortress to the palace. The king was surrounded by his court and was talking and laughing with those about him. A callous assembly it was to try a man for his life! At a little distance from me stood Daria, very pale and very beautiful. Had my courage faltered for a moment the sight of her, firm, resolute and fearless, would have filled me with new strength. To her I bowed; to the king I made no obeisance. Near the king sat Count Vasca and next to the count Lady Aldrida. The count was pale—perhaps by reason of his recent wounds. Lady Aldrida looked as if the proceedings thoroughly amused her. How difficult some Christian laws are to obey! How could I help hating this woman and this man?

Then the smiles went from the king's face, and those around him were silent.

"Madame," he said, turning to Daria. "There is little need for us to tell you of what you are accused. In Drussenland there cannot be two rulers. It has pleased you to set yourself up against your rightful king and with the help of traitors to try to overthrow your country to defy us for this long season, bringing war where peace should be. At your door lie in heaps the men who have fallen in defense of their country, and their blood cries to us to be avenged. Are there any words that can say aught in your defense? If so, speak them. This court shall judge you, not we, and truly your fair face should find many a one to deal out lenient judgment."

"I am no traitor."

The words came firm and clear, no trembling in her voice.

She was as much queen now as when I had first seen her, surrounded by her knights.

"I stand here princess of Drussenland," she said. "The fortune of war places me here standing, while the real traitor remains seated in my presence. You, who call yourself the king, are no king, nor are you established here in Yadasara by the will of true Drussenlanders. You are king only by the help of these paid foreigners, whose very names and country are unknown to you. For the judgment of your court I care nothing."

"We shall find means to subdue that bold spirit within you, madame," said the king.

"To kill it, not to subdue it," she answered.

"So have many spoken. Words come easily. But let us argue a little, madame. In your accusations be just. We are not all foreigners. Am I not a Drussenlander?"

"One I should have delighted to honor had you been true to your country and your sovereign," was the answer.

I expected to see the king become savage, but he astonished me by laughing heartily. There was something of our own Charles II about this monarch. If an answer were ready enough he could appreciate it, even if it were against himself.

"See what we have lost. By being a king we forego the happiness of being honored by a queen. What will you say then, madame, of Count Vasca? Surely he is a true Drussenlander since he is your kinsman?"

"There are no words fitting. You and your assumption of majesty I can understand. You have fought me face to face, a determined struggle in which you have won. It was treachery, indeed, but it was treachery open to the sun. If treachery can be honest, yours was. But for the man who hides his treachery behind a smile, who works in secret to destroy those he professes to honor, for the false friend, the coward who dare not be an open enemy, there are no words. Gather all the scoundrels there are in Drussenland together, take from each one the meanest trait he has, and of these traits build you up a man. Even then shall you have a man I would rather claim kindred with than with Count Vasca."

"It seems you are a dangerous friend," said the king, turning to him.

"Your majesty has not found me so. True, you see, madame, it is well sometimes to use similar weapons to those used by an adversary. If your enemy sends a spy we, too, must do the same or our ignorance may lose us the day. Count Vasca has received harsh language from your lips. What have you to say to your knight there? True, he was faithful to you, but he is just. He is a spy. By a lie he entered Yadasara. He betrayed his friend, our Captain O'Ryan, who is with us to bear witness against him. More—he attempted to kill him. What harsh words have you for that man there?"

The king's finger, pointed at me, caused all eyes to turn toward me; Daria's also.

"Gather the best in Drussenland," she said slowly. "Take what is best, trust, from them all and make me a man. A great Drussenlander indeed would he be, yet head and shoulders over him would rise Sir Verrall—Clintor Verrall—my knight of the Silver Star."

For some moments there was silence, and no voice was raised to sneer at the character which had been given me.

"You have a powerful advocate, Sir Knight," said the king presently, "but there is another side to the question which condemns you deeply."

"I am not worthy either of such high praise, your majesty, or such deep condemnation."

"You are modest as well as valiant, it would seem."

"I lay claim to being an honest gentleman. The world holds no higher distinction."

"Do honest men lie?" he asked severely. "You did, else had you not entered Yadasara the first time."

"Pardon, your highness. It was Captain O'Ryan who gave certain accounts of me, which satisfied you. In truth, my coming to the city was in the nature of a flight from my enemies."

I was not disposed to spare O'Ryan. Why should I be?

"A valiant knight does not flee from his enemies," said the king.

"I fled from a would-be assassin—Count Vasca."

"Truly, count, you have grievous charges laid against you."

"Who would believe the word of a spy?" said the count savagely.

"That is well spoken, Sir Knight. Aspy! What say you to that?"

"It is wise to handle similar weapons to those used by an enemy. In the princess' camp there was not one spy, but a hundred. Ever since I came to Drussenland Count Vasca and his friends have been working to betray the princess. She had not been here now to hear your judgment had not that scoundrel turned against her in the day of battle, sealing a long season of treachery by a crime that any man must revolt at, that your majesty must hate."

"You are here to defend yourself, Sir Knight, not to accuse our friends."

"I have no defense," I answered. "I have fought for the princess I serve. I have done what a man can do, and my conscience acquits me. But I have a word for your majesty, if you will give me leave."

"Are words from such a man worth your majesty's attention?" said Vasca.

"When this man came to Drussenland he made great promises. He spoke boastfully that he would place the princess on the throne in Yadasara;

that he would find the treasure which, it is said, is hid in this land. This man has accused me of treachery, but my deepest sin has been in throwing in my lot with wiser men rather than be carried away by the boastful promises of a dreamer."

"That is not all your sin, Count Vasca," I said. "Your majesty has accepted the friendship of a man who, while he flatters upon you, is plotting your ruin."

The count laughed contemptuously. "The proof," said the king, rising from his chair.

"Captain O'Ryan can give it you."

(To be Continued.)

EASTERN STAR PICNIC.

Orange Chapter Have a Fine Time at Clark Home.

Orange Chapter No. 33, Order of the Eastern Star, about 70 members and guests, participated in a delightful outing and picnic at the home of Mr. and Mrs. George A. Clark in Montague on Thursday. Transportation was furnished by rigs from Mr. Clark's livery.

At noon a bountiful dinner, characteristic of the O. E. S., was served at a series of large tables, and the remainder of the day was spent in various diversions of an informal manner.

The Stars returned to this city shortly after six o'clock, having had a splendid time and, having experienced the generous hospitality of Mr. and Mrs. Clark.

The Chapter will visit Mr. and Mrs. William T. Doty at Circleville on Thursday, August 31.

Saves Two Lives.

"Neither my sister nor myself might be living today, if it had not been for Dr. King's New Discovery," writes A. D. McDonald, of Fayetteville, N. C. R. F. D. No. 8, "for we both had frightful coughs that no other remedy could help. We were told my sister had consumption. She was very weak and had night sweats but your wonderful medicine completely cured us both. It's the best I ever used or heard of." For sore throats, coughs, colds, hemorrhage, la grippe, asthma, hay fever, croup, whooping cough, all bronchial troubles—It's supreme. Trial, bottle, free, 50c, and \$1.00. Guaranteed by All Druggists.

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BURGULARS ARE FOOLED.

For the Third Time in Five Years They Tackle Napanoch Postoffice.

For the third time in five years the postoffice at Napanoch was entered by yeggs Tuesday night. The old safe which had been blown open before with nitro-glycerine, was still on the job but was fitted with a new inner lock. This was blown off again, but evidently the workers were frightened away as nothing was taken.

The money and stamps were found intact on Wednesday morning when Postmaster H. F. Kuhfeldt opened up. Not a sound was heard in the neighborhood, so the yeggs had their fight for nothing.

Children Cry FOR FLETCHER'S CASTORIA

Children Cry FOR FLETCHER'S CASTORIA

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