The Princess Dilemma

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Excerpt

“Colonel?”

Edward glanced over the balustrade to see a woman of such natural beauty as to put the King’s Staircase to shame. All the magnificence of the palace seemed to dim around her. Her shining gold hair contained more than a hint of auburn and her eyes were very dark under reddish brows. Surely lips were not so naturally red past childhood, and he suspected this woman was in her mid-twenties. Still, she had a splendid figure, and was tall for a woman. She would rest her head right against his shoulder if she leaned against him. Who was she?

He nodded his head at her and came slowly down the stairs, conscious of the kingly effect of his gleaming white trousers and shined boots against the black stairs and gold walls. He could see her breasts rise and fall. She was breathing rapidly, as if she had run down a long corridor to reach him.

A woman so beautiful must have wed right out of the schoolroom, though she wore no ring on her plump little fingers. Strange to see such hands on such a tall lady.

She stared at him a little strangely, as if he should know her. “I am lady-in-waiting to the queen,” she said. When he didn’t respond, she continued. “Baroness Lehzen sent for me in early spring, when it became obvious the princess would need a larger household soon.”

Her beauty must have made his mouth go dry. He worked his tongue against his teeth before he spoke. “You must be a cousin on the German side, and not related to me.”

She blinked then inclined her head, indicating she knew his relationship to her mistress. “I am a second cousin through Her Majesty’s mother, the Duchess of Kent.”

“I see,” he murmured. That explained the faint Continental accent. “I am very happy to see my sister, Princess Victoria, but my appointment is with Princess Sophia. I will, of course, be happy to pay my respects.” In fact, he could hardly contain his glee at reaching his sister so easily.

“The princess is in the *queen’s* apartments at present,” the lady said, arching one of her brows as she emphasized his sister’s assumed title. “Will you follow me?”

He had been told many a time that he never smiled, but he could feel the corners of his lips tilting up as he trailed the woman. While her wide skirt hid the curves of her hips, he could see she had a pleasingly tiny waist. Being in mourning for the king, she was dressed all in black, but her sash accented those curves with great proficiency. The wide, ruffled sleeves on her arms were pure silliness, however, a waste of money that could get caught in doors, catch fire, and rip on anything protruding. Women’s fashion had never made sense to him.

Sometimes he wondered what a woman would look like in men’s clothing. He wanted to see this lady-in-waiting in tight buff trousers, all the better to see her backside. A trim linen shirt might display her bosom well. It was hidden from view by a fichu, though the bodice of her dress itself was low-cut enough to display her charms if she dared.