السير أنتوني هوب هاوكنز

ولد أنتوني هوب هاوكنز (Anthony Hope Hawkins) الروائي وكاتب المسرحيات البريطاني، في لندن سنة 1863. تلقى تعليمه في جامعة كامبريدج، ومارس المحاكمة من سنة 1887 إلى سنة 1894، حين تولى الكتابة. نشر العديد من المسرحيات والروايات، لكن شهرته إستندت إلى عمله الأول "سجين زندا" (1894)، وعمله اللامع "روبرت هانتر" (1898). وكلاهما من نوع روایات المغامرة والفروسية التي راجت بين عامة الناس في القرن التاسع عشر.
Chapter 1

THE RASSENDYLL FAMILY

“I wonder when in the world you’re going to do anything, Rudolf?” said my brother’s wife, one morning at breakfast.

“My dear Rose”, I answered, “why should I do anything? My position is a comfortable one. I have enough money—or nearly enough—for my needs (no one ever has quite enough you know); I enjoy a good social position. I am brother to Lord Burlesdon, and brother-in-law to that most charming lady, his wife. Surely it is enough!”

“You are nine-and-twenty”, she remarked, “and you’ve done nothing but——”

“Travel about? It is true. Our family doesn’t need to do things”.

This remark of mine rather annoyed Rose, for everyone knows that, pretty as she is herself, her family is hardly of the same rank as the
Rassendylls. Besides her attractions she possessed a large fortune, and my brother Robert, Lord Burlesdon, was wise enough not to mind whether her family were ancient or not.

Well, if my life had been a useless one in Rose’s eyes, I had picked up a good deal of pleasure and a good deal of knowledge. I had been to a German school and a German University, and spoke German as perfectly as I spoke English. I was also quite good at French. I was, I believe, a fairly good swordsman, and a good shot. I could ride any kind of a horse, and my head was as cool a one as you could find, in spite of the flaming red hair on it.

“The difference between you and Robert”, said my sister-in-law, “is that he knows the duties of his position, and you only see the opportunities of yours”.

“To a man of spirit, my dear Rose”, I answered, “opportunities are duties”.

“Nonsense!” said she, throwing her head back, and after a moment she continued: “Now here is Sir Jacob Borrodaile offering you exactly what you might be equal to”.

“A thousand thanks!” I put in.
"He's to be an ambassador in six months, and Robert says that he'll take you with him as an attaché. Do take it, Rudolf—to please me".

Now, when my sister-in-law puts the matter in that way, bringing her pretty eyebrows together, twisting her little hands, all because of an idle fellow like myself, for whom she has no natural responsibility, the voice of conscience wakes in me. Besides, I thought it possible I could pass the time in the position suggested with some amusement. Therefore I said:

"My dear sister-in-law, if in six months' time nothing has happened to prevent me, and Sir Jacob invites me, why, then, I'll go with him".

"Oh, Rudolf, how good of you! I am glad!"

My promise was thus given; but six months is a long time, and I wanted to find something interesting to do meanwhile. It suddenly came to my mind that I would visit Ruritania, as I saw in the papers that Rudolf the Fifth was to be crowned at Strelsau in the course of the next three weeks, with great ceremony.

For various reasons I had never been to that highly interesting and important kingdom, which, though a small one, had played no small part in European history, and might do the

«سيصبح سفيراً خلال ستة أشهر، ويقول روبرت أنه سيصطحبك معه بصفة ملحق. أرجو يا رودولف أن تقبل بذلك، إرضاء لي».

حين تعرض زوجة أخي الأمär بهذه الطريقة عاقبة حاجبها لا أرى فيهما صغرتهما بسبب شخص خالص مثلي لا تلزم بأي مسؤولية طبيعية تجاها، لا بد أن يستيقظ صوت الضمير في داخلي.
علاوة على ذلك فقد رأيت أن من الممكن تقضية الوقت في ذلك المركز المقترب بشيء من التسلية، قلت: «يا زوجة أخي العزيرة إن لم يحدث ما يعيبني عن ذلك خلال ستة أشهر، واستدعاني السيد جاكوب، لم لا، فسأذهب معه».

«أو يا رودولف، ما أحسنت، إني مسرورة!»

وهكذا أعطيت وعداً، لكن مدة ستة أشهر هي وقت طويل لذا رأيت أن أقضي الوقت بشيء أقوم به حتى ذلك الحين. فخطر في فجأة أن أزور روريتانيا، إذ قرأت في الصحف أن رودولف الخامس سيتوجه في ستريلسجاو بحتفال ضخم خلال الأسابيع الثلاثة القادمة.

لعدة أسباب لم يسبق لي أن زرت تلك المملكة العظيمة الشيقة، وهي برمغ صغرها فقد امتدت بارزةً في التاريخ الأوروبي، وقد تلعب الدور نفسه في عهد حاكم قوي شاب.
same again under the power of a young and strong ruler, such as the new king was said to be. At once I made up my mind to go, and began my preparations.

It has never been my practice to tell my relations where I am going on my many journeys, and as I did not want to be opposed in this case, I merely said I was going for a walking tour in the Alps. Rose was not very pleased, but when I suggested I might write a book about the political and social problems of that district, she cried out with pleasure.

“That would be splendid”, she said, “wouldn’t it, Robert?”

“It is one of the best ways of introducing yourself to political life in these days”, said Robert, who had written several books himself.

“Now promise you’ll do it”, said Rose earnestly.

“No, I won’t promise, but if I find enough material, I will”.

“That’s fair enough”, said Robert.

“Oh, material doesn’t matter”, said Rose.

But she could not get more than a half promise out of me. To tell the truth, I did not think...
for a moment that the story of my tour that summer would stain any paper or spoil any pen. And that shows how little we know what the future holds. For here I am, carrying out my half promise, and writing, as I never thought to write, a book—though it will hardly serve as an introduction to political life, and has nothing to do with the Alps.

Nor would it please Rose, I fear, if I ever gave it her to read, but that is something which I have no intention of doing.

On my way through Paris, a friend came to see me at the station. As we stood talking by the train, he suddenly left me to speak to a lady. Following him with my eyes, I saw him raise his hat to a graceful and fashionably dressed woman, about thirty, tall and dark. In a moment or two he returned to me.

"You've got a charming travelling companion", my friend told me. "That's Antoinette de Mauban, and they say that the Duke of Strelsau—King Rudolf's brother you know—has distinguished her by his attentions. She is a widow, rich and ambitious. Who knows what she is aiming at?"

However, the pretty widow did not appear to...
want to know me, for I saw no more of her, although we were on the same train.

As soon as I reached the Ruritanian frontier (where the official looked at me as if he had seen a ghost), I bought the papers, and found in them news which would have an effect on my movements. For some unexplained reason the date of the coronation had been suddenly advanced, and was to take place on the next day but one. The whole country was excited about it, and I learnt that Streelsau was crowded. Rooms were all let and hotels overflowing; there would be very little chance of my getting a lodging without paying a very high price.

Accordingly I decided to stop at Zenda, a small town fifty miles from the capital, and about ten from the frontier. My train reached there in the evening; I would spend the next day, Tuesday, in walking over the hills, and taking a look at the famous castle, and go by train to Streelsau on the Wednesday morning, returning at night to sleep at Zenda.

I therefore stopped at Zenda, and as the train passed where I stood, I saw Madame de Mauban in her place; clearly she was going through to Streelsau, having reserved a lodging there.
I was very kindly received at the hotel—really no more than an inn—kept by a fat old lady and her two daughters. They were good, quiet people. The old lady was fond of the Duke, for he was now, since the late king’s death, master of the Zenda lands and of the Castle, which rose greatly on a steep hill at the end of the valley, a mile or so from the inn. The old lady, indeed, regretted that the Duke was not on the throne, instead of his brother.

“We know Duke Michael”, said she. “He has always lived among us; every Ruritanian knows Duke Michael. But the King is almost a stranger; he has been abroad, not one in ten knows him even by sight”.

“And now”, said one of the young women, “they say he has shaved off his beard, so that no one at all knows him”.

“Shaved his beard!” cried her mother. “Who says so?”

“Johann, the Duke’s forest-guard. He has seen the King”.

“Ah, yes. The King, sir, is now at the Duke’s hunting-lodge in the forest here; from here he goes to Strelzau to be crowned on Wednesday morning”.

تم استقبالي بطف بلطف بالغرف وكان نزلًا في الواقع لا أكثر—تدبرًا سيدة عجوز ممثلة الجسم مع ابنتيها الاثنتين، وكانتا بالفعل جامعة طبيبين هادئين. كانت السيدة العجوز ممتعة بالله وكادت الآن جلالة الملك الأخير سيد النضال في زاندر والقلعة المرتفعة على زلة سحبية عند سفح الوادي وكانت هذه القلعة على بعد نحو ميل من النزل.

وقد أبدعت العجوز أسفها بصدق لأن الدوق لم يجل مكان أخيه على العرش.

فقالت “نحن نعرف الدوق ميشال، فقد عاش دائماً بيننا، كل روريتاني يعرف الدوق ميشال، لكن الملك غير قريبًا، إذ كان في الخارج ولا يستطيع تمييزه بالرؤية أكثر من واحد من عشرة أشخاص.”

وقالت إحدى الصغيرتين “والآن، يقال أنه حلق لحيته حتى لا يعرفه أحد”.

فصرخت أمها “حلق لحيته! من قال هذا؟”.

جودن، حارس غابة الدوق، لقد رأى الملك.

أه، نعم. الملك يا سيدي موجود الآن في كونغ الصيد الخاص بالدوق في الغابة هنًا، ومن هنا سيدهب إلى شتريلسهو حيث يتج صبح الأربعة”.

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I was interested to hear this, and made up my mind next day to walk in the direction of the lodge, on the chance of coming across the King.

"I wish he would stay at his hunting", went on the old woman, "and let our Duke be crowned on Wednesday.

"As for me", said the younger and prettier of the two daughters, "I hate Black Michael! A red Elphberg for me, mother! The King’s hair, they say, is as red as— as—"

She laughed as she looked across at me.

"Many a man has cursed his red hair before now", said the old lady.

"But never a woman!" cried the girl.

I thought it time to stop a quarrel. "How comes the King to be here?" I asked. "It is the Duke’s land, you say".

"The Duke invited him, sir, to rest here till Wednesday. The Duke himself is at Strelau, preparing to receive the King".

"Then they’re friends?"

The younger girl threw back her head. "Yes", she said, "they love one another as men do who want the same place and the same wife!"
The old woman looked angry, so I said quickly:

"The same place? You mean the throne, I suppose. But the same wife? How's that, young lady?"

"All the world knows that Black Michael—well, then, mother, the Duke—would give his soul to marry his cousin, the Princess Flavia, who is to be the Queen."

"Well", I said, "I begin to be sorry for your Duke. But a younger son has to take what the elder leaves, and be as thankful to God as he can". I laughed, thinking of Madame de Mauban and her journey to Streilsau.

A heavy step sounded at the door and a man came in.

"We have company, Johann", said my hostess, and the fellow took off his cap.

The moment he looked at me, to my astonishment he took a step back as though, like the frontier official, he had seen something wonderful.

"What's the matter, Johann?" asked the elder girl. "This is a gentleman on his travels, come to see the coronation".
The man had recovered himself, but he was looking at me in a strange, almost fierce, manner.

"Good evening to you", said I.

"Good evening, sir", he replied in a low voice, and the younger girl began to laugh.

"See, Johann", she said, "it is the colour you love. He was surprised at your hair, sir. It's not the colour we see most of, here in Zenda."

"I beg your pardon, sir", said Johann.

I then said good night to them all and rose to my feet. The young girl ran to light me on the way to my room. Johann still looked at me strangely as I passed. As the girl went before me up the stairs she said:

"There's no pleasing Master Johann for one of your colour, sir."

"Maybe he prefers yours", I suggested.

"I meant, sir, in a man."

"What", I asked, "does colour matter in a man?"

"I don't know, sir, but I like yours—it's the Elphberg red".
“Colour in a man”, said I, “is a matter of no more importance than that!”—and, I gave her something of no value.

“I hope the kitchen door is shut”, she said.

“Let’s hope so”, I answered, and left her.

In fact, however, as I now know, colour is sometimes of great importance to a man.
Chapter 2

A MERRY EVENING WITH A NEW RELATION

The next day I discovered that by walking ten miles through the forest, I could come to the railway again at a wayside station. So having said good-bye to my kind entertainers, I set out to climb the hill that led to the Castle, and from there to the forest of Zenda. It had been a fortress in the old days, and the old part was still in good preservation. Round it was a moat, deep and broad, and on the other side a fine modern building put up by the last king. It was now the country house of the Duke of Streelsau.

When I came nearer, I saw that the old and the new parts were joined by a drawbridge; in fact that was the only way into the old Castle. A broad avenue led to the new building. I thought how convenient for Duke Michael this was; if he wanted to see no one, he could cross the bridge, and have it drawn after him.
Nothing less than a company of soldiers with heavy guns could get him out.

Passing on, soon I entered the forest and walked for an hour or more in its cool shade. It was a lovely place, the trees touching each other over my head, the sunshine creeping through here and there. After a time I sat down by a fallen tree trunk to smoke my pipe and enjoy myself in peace. When it was finished I went off into the most delightful sleep, regardless of the fact that I was on the private property of Duke Michael.

I was wakened by a voice, rough and loud.

"Why, the devil's in it! Shave him, and he'd be the King!"

I opened my eyes, and found two men looking at me with much curiosity. Both wore shooting dress and carried guns. One was rather short and very strongly built, with a big square head, a grey moustache and small light blue eyes. The other was a thin young man of middle height, with dark hair, rather graceful. I put the first down as a soldier, the second as a gentleman accustomed to move in good society, but with something of the army about him also. It appeared afterwards that my guess was a good one.
The elder one came up to me; followed by the other who politely raised his hat. I rose slowly to my feet.

"He's the height, too", murmured the elder man, looking at my six feet two inches, then with a careless touch of his hat, he spoke to me:

"May I ask your name?"

"As you have taken the first step, gentlemen", said I with a smile, "suppose you tell me yours first".

The young man smiled pleasantly. "This", said he, "is Colonel Sapt, and I am called Fritz von Tarlenheim. We are both in the service of the King of Ruritania".

I bowed, and taking off my hat, answered:

"I am Rudolf Rassendyll, a traveller from England. Once for two or three years I was an officer in the army of Her Majesty Queen Victoria".

"Then we are all brothers of the sword", answered Tarlenheim, holding out his hand, which I took at once.

"Well, Mr. Rassendyll!", said Sapt in his deep voice, "you may not know it, but you're exactly like our King".
This made me feel uncomfortable, and I remembered the looks of the official and of Johann they day before. If I had known this, I should have thought long before visiting Ruritania. However, it was too late now.

At this moment a ringing voice sounded from the wood behind us.

"Fritz, Fritz! Where are you, man?"

Tarlenheim turned, and said hastily: "It's the King!"

Old Sapt laughed as a young man jumped out from behind the trunk of a tree, and stood beside us. As I looked at him, I gave an astonished cry, and he, seeing me, drew back in sudden wonder. Except for the hair on my face and a consciousness of rank which his position gave him, the King of Ruritania might have been Rudolf Rassendyll, and I, Rudolf Rassendyll, the King.

The King found his voice first.

"Colonel—Fritz—who is this gentleman?"

"It seems that you have a double, Sire", said Sapt dryly.

His astonishment over, the King looked at me again, and then burst into the merriest laughter.
“Well met, brother!” he cried, stepping up to me and taking my hand. “You must forgive my surprise. Tell me who you are, and where you are going”.

I did so, but he seemed to look doubtful when I said I was going to Strelau the next day. Then he laughed again.

“Fritz, Fritz”, he cried. “I’d give a thousand pounds to see Brother Michael’s face when he sees a pair of us!”

“Seriously, Sire”, remarked Fritz, “I do not think it would be wise for Mr. Rassendyll to visit Strelau just now”.

The King lit a cigarette. “Well, Sapt?” he said.

“He mustn’t go”, growled the old fellow.

“You mean, Colonel, that I should be in Mr. Rassendyll’s debt if—”

“Oh, wrap it up the right way”, said Sapt.

“Enough, Sire”, said I. “I leave Ruritania to-night”.

“No, you certainly won’t”, replied the King. “And that is spoken directly, as Sapt likes it. You will dine with me to-night, whatever happens afterwards. Come, man, you don’t meet a new brother every day”.

قال “يسرني لقلوكم يا أخي” واقترح مني آخذًا يدي مصافحة. “أرجو أن تذكروا استغفاً. آخرهني من أنت وإلى أين أنت ذاها”. أخبرته بذلك لكن الشك بدأ على محتوى حين قلت بأنني كنت في طريقي إلى سترسلو في اليوم التالي. ضحك مرة أخرى وصاحب قائلًا “فرنتر، روبرت، إنني مستعد أن أعطي ألف جنينه لأرى تعاين وجه الأخ العزيزي عندما يراينا معاً”. وعلق فرنتر “أقول بجد، سيدي، لا أظن أن من الحكمة أن يزور راستدويل سترسلو الآن”.

أشار الملك سيجارة وقال: “ماذا تعتقد يا سابت؟” فتم الحراك العجوز “لا ينبغي أن يذهب”. “لا يعني أي أن يكون مديناً لراستديلا ياكولينإ إذا”.

قال سابت “بل، إنه الأمر بالطريق الصحيحة.” أجاب قائلًا “يكفي ذلك سيدي ساغادر ووريتانيا الليلة”.

أجاب الملك “كلا لن تفعل ذلك”. ثم أردف قائلًا: “الأمر يتوضّح خسبي مشتبه سابت. سوف تعد توريتاني لمي ليلة، مهما يحدث بعد ذلك. تعال يا رجل، قاله لا يستطيع البقاء أخ جديد كل يوم”. وافق سابت وفرنتر على هذا، فانطلقنا بذلك نسير في
Sapt and Fritz agreed, so we set off walking through the forest. The King smoked cigarette after cigarette and talked continuously. He was a merry and interesting companion. Coming out of the wood after about half an hour, we found ourselves before a small hunting-lodge. It had only one floor, and was made of wood. A servant came out to meet us, and I also saw a fat old woman, who, I learned later, was the mother of Johann, the forest-guard.

"Well, is dinner ready, Josef?" asked the King.

"Yes, Your Majesty", the servant answered, and soon we sat down to a plentiful meal. The King called for wine.

"Remember to-morrow", said Fritz. "We have to make an early start".

"Yes—to—morrow!" laughed old Sapt.

The King drank my health, calling me "his new brother", and I replied with "Long life to the Elphbergs!"

The food was plain enough, but the wine was beyond all price or praise, and we did it justice. Fritz's attempts to stop the King were all in vain. In fact, he was soon easily persuaded to go on
drinking himself, and it wasn’t very long before we were all more full of wine than we ought to have been. The King talked of what he would do in the future, old Sapt of what he had done in the past, and Fritz of some beautiful-girl or other, and I of the greatness of Ruritania. We all talked at once, and to-morrow was forgotten.

At last the King sat back in his chair and said he had drunk enough. Josef then set before us a wonderful old bottle.

“His Highness the Duke of Strelsau told me to set this wine before the King when the King was tired of all other wines”, he said.

“Well done, brother Michael!” cried the King. “Out with the cork, Josef! It’s the very last one”.

The King lifted his glass and tasted the wine. Then he turned to us.

“Gentlemen, my friends, Rudolf, my brother, everything is yours to the half of Ruritania. But don’t ask me for a single drop of this marvellous bottle. I drink to the health of that—that rascal, Black Michael”.

And the King seized the bottle, turned it over his mouth, and drank it to the last drop. Then
he threw the bottle against the wall. The sound of the breaking glass was the last thing I heard for many many hours. We all fell asleep where we were.

I woke suddenly, all wet, to see old Sapt with a bucket in his hand. By him was Fritz, sitting on the table and looking as pale as a ghost. I jumped to my feet in anger.

"Your joke goes too far", I cried, rubbing the water from my eyes and hair.

"There's no time to quarrel", returned Sapt. "Nothing else would wake you. It's five o'clock".

"And what's that to me?" I demanded hotly.

"Rassendyll", interrupted Fritz, getting down from the table and taking my arm, "look here".

The King lay full length on the floor. His face was as red as his hair, and he breathed heavily. Sapt disrespectfully kicked him sharply, but he made no movement. I saw that his face and head were wet with water, as were mine.

"We've spent half an hour on him", said Fritz.

I knelt down and felt his pulse; it seemed terribly slow.
"That last bottle must have been drugged", I suggested. "We must get a doctor".

"There's none within ten miles, and a thousand doctors wouldn't get him to Strelsau to-day", said Sapt.

"But the coronation?" I cried.

"We shall have to send a note that he's ill", said Fritz.

Old Sapt laughed scornfully. "If he's not crowned to-day, he never will be".

"But why?" I asked.

"The whole nation is there to meet him; half the army with Black Michael at its head. Shall we send note that the King's too drunk to come?"

"That he's ill", I corrected.

"Ill!" repeated Sapt with another scornful laugh. "The people know his illnesses too well. He's been 'ill' before".

"We must chance what they think", said Fritz.

"You say", Sapt said to me, "you think the King was drugged?"

"Certainly".
"Then who drugged him? Why, Black Michael, of course. His reason? To prevent him from coming to be crowned. You know," he continued, turning to Fritz, "that half Strelsau would prefer Michael as king. I tell you, that if Rudolf the Fifth is not crowned to-day, Michael the First will take his place."

For a moment or two we were all silent; then Sapt turned to me and said, "As a man grows old he believes more and more in Fate. Fate sent you here. Fate sends you now to Strelsau."

I jumped up exclaiming, "Good God!"

Fritz looked up, a sudden eager look on his face.

"Impossible!" I answered. "I should be known."

"It's a risk," said Sapt, "but on the other side it's a certainty. You won't be known, if you shave. Are you afraid?"

"Sir?"

"Come, lad, forgive me. But it's your life, you know, if you're discovered—and mine, and Fritz's here. If you don't go, I swear to you that Black Michael will sit to-night on the throne, and the King will lie in prison or his grave."
"The King would never forgive it", I said.

"Are we women? Who cares for his forgiveness?"

The seconds passed—fifty, sixty, seventy... then I suppose a look came over my face, for old Sapt caught me by the hand, crying:

"You'll go?"

"Yes, I'll go", I said, looking at the figure of the King lying there on the floor.
Chapter 3

THE KING GOES TO STRELSAU

The next two hours passed like a dream. It was fortunate that Sapt was there to think for me, and for Fritz too. Old Sapt thought of everything. He called in Josef and made him shave me. The King was carried into the wine-cellar down below. As for the fat woman, Johann's mother, Sapt suspected her of listening at the door to our doings, so he tied her up and put a handkerchief in her mouth, and locked her in another of the cellar rooms.

"The guard!" cried Fritz. "What will happen? They'll know".

"Michael is sending a guard to go with the King", Sapt explained to me. "We'll go without them, take the train at Hofbau instead of Zenda, and when they come, the bird'll be flown".

الفصل الثالث

الممل يذهب إلى سترلسو

مرت الساعتان التاليتان كالحلم. ومن حسن الحظ أن سابت كان موجوداً ليفكر عنني وعن فريتز أيضاً. فقد فكر في كل شيء، فاستدعى جوزف وطلب إليه أن يخلص لي حيتي. وتم نقل الملك إلى قبو الخمر في الأسفل. أما بالنسبة للسيدة السمينة، والدة جوهان، فقد شكل سابت بأنها استرقت السمع عند اللباب إلى ما كنا نقوم به، فقيدها ووضع منديلاً في فمها ثم سجنها في غرفة ثانية من غرف القبو.

وصاح فريتز «الحرس! ماذا سحدث؟ سيعلمون؟» وأوضح لي سابت قائلاً «ميشال سيرمال أخد الحرس لمواجهة الملك، سنذهب بدونهم، واتخذ القطار من هوفبو بدلاً من زندا، وحين يصلون يكون العصفور قد طار». 
“If they know anything of Michael’s plans”, said I, “they’ll merely think we suspected something”.

I then put on the King’s white uniform, and Sapt and Fritz also put on theirs. Josef was left with strict orders to guard the cellar till we returned. We jumped on our horses—the King’s horses—and rode off through the forest.

On the way Sapt explained as much as he could of the King’s past life, his family, his likes and dislikes, his friends, companions and servants. He told me the rules of the Ruritanian Court, and promised to be at my side at every moment of the day. Fritz spoke little, riding like a man in a dream.

We were by now at the station. Fritz had recovered himself enough to explain to the puzzled station-master the King’s change of plans. The train steamed up; we were just in time. As soon as we were safely in a first-class carriage, Sapt went on with his lessons. I looked at my watch—the King’s watch, of course—and saw it was just after eight.

“I wonder if they’ve gone to look for us”, I said, thinking uneasily of what might be happening at the lodge.
"No use thinking now", said Sapt. "For today you've got to think of nothing but the fact you're the King".

At half-past nine, looking out of the window, I saw the towers and houses of a great city.

"Your capital, Your Majesty", laughed Sapt with a wave of his hand, and leaning forward he felt my pulse. "A little too quick", he murmured.

"I'm not made of stone!" I exclaimed.

"All right, you'll do", he answered. "As for you, Fritz, we must say you've caught a cold. You are trembling like a leaf".

"We're an hour earlier than they expected", said Sapt. "I'll have note sent of your arrival. Meanwhile——"

"Meanwhile", said I, "the King wants some breakfast".

Old Sapt laughed. "Spoken like an Elphberg", he said.

The train stopped. Fritz and Sapt jumped out, took off their helmets and held the door for me. I tried to swallow a lump that had risen in my throat, put my helmet firmly on my head, then stepped out of the train.
A moment later, all was hurry and confusion; men running up, and then off again; men leading me to the restaurant; men mounting and riding in hot haste in various directions. Even as I swallowed the last drop of my cup of coffee, the bells of the city began ringing, and the sound of a band and loud shouting came to my ears.

King Rudolf the Fifth was in his city of Strelsau! And I heard the people crying: “God save the King!”

Sapt smiled. “God save them both”, he whispered. “Courage, my friend”.

As I stepped out of the restaurant with Fritz and Sapt close behind me, a group of officers and people of high rank stood waiting for me. At their head was a tall old man in uniform.

“Marshal Strakencz”, whispered Sapt, and I knew that I was in the presence of the chief of the Ruritanian Army.

Just behind him was a short man in long flowing dress.

“The Chancellor”, whispered Sapt. So this was my chief, Minister.
The Marshal greeted me in a few loyal words, and made an apology for the absence of the Duke of Strelsau. The Duke, it seemed, had suddenly felt ill and could not come to the station. He asked for permission to wait for me at the Cathedral. I replied that I was sorry to hear it. Several other people then came forward, and as no one showed any suspicion, I began to feel some confidence. Fritz, however, was still pale, and his hand shook as he held it out to the Marshal.

Then we formed a procession and went to the station entrance. Here I mounted my horse, and set out, the Marshal on my right, Sapt on my left. The different officials went to their carriages and followed.

The city of Strelsau is partly old and partly new. Wide modern avenues and fine houses surround the narrow, twisting streets of the old town. In the outer circles the upper classes live, in the inner the shops are situated. Behind their rich fronts lie miserable narrow streets crowded with poor, disloyal, and often criminal classes. These social and local divisions marked, as knew from Sapt's information, another division more important to me. The New Town was for the King; but the Old Town preferred Michael of Strelsau, and was not afraid to show it.
The scene was a splendid one as we passed along the Main Avenue to the Square where the Royal Palace stood. Here I was in the middle of my own people, every house covered with flags. All along the way, on both sides, the crowds cheered and waved. I almost began to feel that I really was the King, till suddenly by chance I raised my eye to a window and there saw Antoinette de Mauban, the woman who had travelled with me from Paris.

I saw her lean forward and look at me. I found myself feeling for my revolver. Suppose she had cried, "That's not the King!"

Well, we rode on, and in a few minutes the Marshal gave an order, and the mounted guards closed round me. We were entering the poor district faithful to Duke Michael. This action showed more clearly than he words of Sapt the state of feeling in the town.

"Why this change in our order, Marshal?" I asked.

The Marshal bit his white moustache. "It is safer, Sire", he murmured.

I stopped my horse. "Let those in front ride on", said I, "till they are fifty yards ahead. You, Marshal, and Colonel Sapt and my friends, wait here till I have ridden fifty yards. I will have the people see that their King trusts them."

Spat laid his hand on my arm. I shook him off. The Marshal hesitated.
“Am I not understood?” I said, and the Marshal, biting his moustache again, gave the orders. I saw old Sapt smiling into his beard, and he shook his head at me. If I had been killed in open day in the streets of Strelsau, Sapt’s position would have been a difficult one.

It was more interesting riding thus alone, for I heard the remarks of the crowds. At first there was a murmur, then a cheer, for in my white uniform I am not so modest as to say that I was not a hand-some figure. I heard several people say pleasant things about me, but the greater part remained silent, and my dear brother’s picture was to be seen in most of the windows.

At last we were at the Cathedral. It was then that the full sense of what I was doing came clearly to me. I dismounted as in a dream, for it all seemed unreal. I walked into the fine ancient building with unseeing eyes, and noticed little of the well-dressed crowds waiting for me. I saw only two faces clearly, one that of a girl, pale and lovely, with hair of glorious Elphberg red (for in a woman it is glorious), the other that of a man with deep dark eyes and black hair. I knew this was Black Michael. He looked at me as if I was a ghost.

I remember almost nothing of the ceremony, except where I took the crown from the Cardinal and put it on my head. Then a man cried out, “Her Royal Highness, the Princess Fla-
via!" She bowed low to me and kissed my hand. Before I knew what to do, the Cardinal was in front of me. Then came Black Michael, and I saw Sapt smiling into his beard again. My loving brother was trembling like a leaf. Yet not in his face, nor in the Princess's, nor indeed in anyone's, did I see the least doubt that I was the King.

Then back we went through the streets to the Palace. I was in a carriage now, side by side with the Princess Flavia, and a rough fellow cried out:

"And when's the marriage?" As he spoke another struck him in the face, shouting, "Long live Duke Michael!" The Princess coloured and looked straight in front of her.

Now I felt in a difficulty, because I had forgotten to ask Sapt the state of my feelings, and how far matters had gone between the Princess and myself, or rather, the King. So I kept silent, but after a moment or two the Princess turned to me.

"Do you know, Rudolf", said she, "you look somehow different to-day?"

The fact was not surprising, but I felt uneasy.

"You look more serious", she went on, "and I believe you're thinner. Is it possible that you have begun to take life seriously, at last?"
I had to answer something, so I whispered softly, “Would that please you?”

“Oh, you know my opinions”, she answered, looking away from me.

“Whatever pleases you I try to do”, I said, and as I saw her smile, and even colour again, I thought I was playing the King’s part for him very well. So I continued, and what I said was perfectly true:

“Indeed, my dear cousin, nothing in my life has affected me more than the events of today”.

She smiled again, then became solemn as she whispered:

“Did you notice Michael?”

“Yes. He wasn’t enjoying himself, was he?”

“Do be careful!” she went on. “You must keep a better watch on him, you know”.

“I know this”, I said, “that he wants what I’ve got”. Then I added, without any right to say such a thing for the King:

“And he also wants something which I haven’t got yet, but hope to win some day”.

Had I been the King I should have thought her answer encouraging. She whispered, “Haven’t you enough responsibilities for one day, cousin?”
Bang! Bang! Bang!

We were at the Palace gate. Guns were firing a greeting. I handed the Princess from the carriage, and we all went up the wide steps. Rows of servants were waiting as we went into the immense dining-room. I sat down with the Princess on my right, my brother on my left. All the other important people sat down. Sapt stood behind my chair. At the other end of the table I saw Fritz drink a glass of wine to the bottom...

I wondered what the King of Ruritanian was doing.
Chapter 4

THE SECRET OF A CELLAR

We were in the King's dressing-room—Fritz von Tarlenheim, Colonel Sapt and I. I sat into an arm-chair. Sapt lit his pipe. He did not congratulate me on my success, but his whole manner showed how satisfied he was. Fritz was a new man.

"What a day for you to remember!" he said. "I wouldn't mind being King myself for twelve hours. But didn't Black Michael look blacker than ever when you and the Princess had so much to say to each other?"

"How beautiful she is!" I exclaimed.

"Never mind the woman", growled Sapt. "Are you ready to start?"

"Yes", I answered with a deep breath.

It was five o'clock, and at twelve I should be no more than Rudolf Rassendyll. I remarked on it in a joking way.
“You’ll be lucky if you’re not the late Rudolf Rassendyll,” said Sapt. “I feel my head shaking on my shoulders every moment you are in the city. Michael has had news from Zenda. He went into another room to read it, and came out looking mad.”

“I’m ready”, I said, this news making me all the more eager to go.

“Now, Fritz”, said Sapt, “the King goes to bed. He is tired. No one is to see him till nine to-morrow morning. You understand—no one?”

“I understand, Colonel”, said Fritz.

“Not even Black Michael”, added Sapt. “If the door of this room is opened while we’re away, you’re not to be alive to tell us about it”.

“I need no teaching what my duty is”, said Fritz, a little annoyed.

Sapt and I wrapped ourselves up, I dressing as his servant. We then went through a secret door, along a dark passage and came out into a quiet road bordering on the Palace garden. A man was waiting with two fine horses. Without a word we mounted and rode off.

There were some moments of danger as we passed the old city gate, but once outside the city, it was safe enough. It was a fine night and we rode hard, speaking little. We had done twenty-five miles when Sapt suddenly stopped.
“Listen!” he said.
Far behind us we heard the sound of horses’ feet. The wind was blowing strong towards us, and carried the sound easily.

“Come on!” said Sapt, and we made our horses go as fast as they could. The next time we stopped to listen, Sapt put his ear to the ground.

“There are two of them”, he said. “You see where the road branches here? We go to the right, the other way leads to the Castle. Each about eight miles. Get down.”

“But they’ll be on us”, I objected.

“Get down!” he repeated, and I obeyed. We had entered the Forest of Zenda some time before, and the trees grew very thick here. We led our horses off the road, and waited in hiding.

“You want to see who they are?” I whispered. “Yes, and where they are going”.

In a few moments the two riders were in sight. The moon was full, and we had a clear view.

“It’s the Duke”, I said.
It was, and with him was a big strong fellow, whom I had cause to know well afterwards. He was Max Holf, brother to Johann, the forest-guard. The two stopped at the road fork.

فقال سباست «هنا بانا!» وجعلنا الخيل تنطلق بأقصى ما يمكن. في المرة الثانية التي توقفنا فيها للصواح، وضع سباست أذنه على الأرض.
وقال «هناك اثنان منهم، أرى كيف يتفت عن الطريق هنا؟ سنذهب إلى اليمين، أما الطريق الثاني فيؤدي إلى القصر. يمتد كل واحد نحو ثمانية أميال. ترجل عن الحصان». فاعتزمت قائلة: «لكنهم سيتنقضون علينا»؟
وكرر يقول «إنزل!» وأطعته. كما قد دخلنا غابة زندا منذ بعض الوقت حيث بانت الأشجار مشابكة إلى حد كبير. أبناء الخيل عن الطريق وانتظرونا.
فهمست قائلة «أريد أن أتعلم من هم؟».
نعم ووجهة سباستهم كذلك. بعد بضع دقائق لاح الحيتان، وكان السرير بدراً فاستطعنا الرؤية بوضوح. قالت «إنه الدوق».
كان الدوق فعلاً يراقبه رجل ضخم تسبى في معرفته فيما بعد.
لقد كان ماكس هولف، شقيق جوهان، حارس الغابة. توقف الاثنان عند تفرع الطريق.
"Which way?" asked Black Michael.
"To the Castle, Your Highness?"
"Why shouldn’t we go to the lodge?"
"I fear a trap. If all is well, why go to the lodge? If not, it’s a trap to seize us."
"All right, to the Castle, then", said the Duke, and in a moment the two horses were off up the road to the left.

We waited a few minutes.
"You see", said Sapt, "they’ve sent him a message that all is well".
"What does that mean?"
"God knows", answered Sapt, surprised, "but it’s brought him in hot haste from Strel-sau".

Then we mounted and rode the last eight miles, our minds full of fear and wonder. "All is well". What did it mean?

At last the lodge came in sight. We rode up to the gate. All was still and quiet. No one came out to meet us. Then Sapt caught me by the arm. "Look there", he said.

I looked. At my feet were several torn and cut handkerchiefs.
"They’re what I used to tie the old woman up with", said Sapt.
We fastened our horses and hurried inside. Even Sapt had lost his usual calm. We ran down the steps to the cellar. The door stood wide open!

"They found the old woman", I said.

"You might have known that from the handkerchiefs", replied Sapt, "but what of Josef? What of the King?"

Sapt was unable to enter the room. Afraid for himself he was not—no one ever saw him that, but he was afraid of what he might find in the dark cellar. I got a light and went in first. Over in the corner I saw the body of a man lying on his back, a red wound across his throat. All round him was blood that had flowed and was now dry.

I walked across and knelt down beside him. It was the faithful Josef. Sapt stood behind me, and he cried out in a strange voice:

"The King? My God, where is the King?"

I threw the lamp's light over every inch of the cellar.

"The King is not here", I said.

It took Sapt ten minutes to recover himself. The clock in the dining-room, where he had gone, struck one.

"They've got the King!" said Sapt in a hollow voice.
“Yes”, I answered. “That explains Michael’s message, ‘All’s well’. What a moment it was for him when he got it. No wonder he seemed mad. I should like to know what he thought”.

“What does that matter? What does he think now, lad?”

I rose to my feet.

“We must get back”, I cried, “and collect every soldier in Strelau. Michael will have to be caught”.

Old Sapt lit his pipe and made no move.

“The King may be murdered while we sit here”, I urged.

“That cursed old woman”, said Sapt. “She must have attracted their attention somehow. I see the game. They came here to take the King prisoner, supposing him to be drugged. If you hadn’t gone to Strelau, you and I and Fritz would have been murdered”.

“And the King?”

“Who knows where he is now?”

“Come, let us go”, I cried, and was surprised to see a strange smile creep over the old fellow’s face.

“Yes, we’ll go”, he said. “The King will be in his capital to-morrow”.

قلت: "نعم، وذلك يفسر رسالة ميشال حين قال أن كل شيء على ما يرام يا هول تلك اللحظة التي استمعها فيها. ليس من العجب أن يهتاج ليتي نعلم ما كان يفكر به؟ ماذا يفهم بماذا يفكر الآن، يا بني؟".

قامت واقفًا وصرخت: "أجب أن نعود ونجعل كل جندى في سترلسي ينبغي إقامة القبض على ميشال.

أشعل سابت العجوز غليونه ولم يقم بأي حركة. وأصررت قائلًا، "قد يقتل الملك فيما نحن جالسين هنا".

قال سابت "تلك المرأة العجينة. لابد أنها جذبت إنتماه بطريقة ما. إن أرى اللعبة، لقد جالوا هذا لأخذ الملك سجنًا معتقدين أنه غادر. لو لم تذهب إلى سترلسي، لقفتنا أنا وأنت وفريزي "والملك؟".

ومن يدري أين هو الآن؟" صرخت قائلًا، "هيا بناء، لنذهب" ودعت لرؤية إبتسامة غريبة تظهر على وجه الرجل العجوز.

فأجاب "نعم سنذهب، سيكون الملك في العاصمه غداً".

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"The King?"
"The crowned King!"
"You're mad!" I said.

"If we go back and tell them the trick we've played, what would you give for our lives?"

"Just what they're worth".

"And the King's throne?" he went on. "Do you think the nobles and the people will enjoy being made fools of as they've been? Do you think they'll have a King who was too drunk to be crowned, and sent a servant to take his place?"

"He was drugged—and I'm no servant", I said, somewhat annoyed.

"I was giving you the story as Black Michael will tell it. Lad, if you play the man, you may save the King yet. Go back and keep his throne warm for him".

"But the Duke will know by now; his servants will know".

"Yes, but they can't speak!" he cried. "How can they tell the truth about you without letting everyone know what they've done? Can they say, 'This isn't the King, because we've taken the King prisoner and killed his servant'?"

I saw the position at once. Whether Michael knew me or not, he could not speak. Unless he produced the King, what could he do? And if
he did produce the King, what of his own ambitions? But I also saw the difficulties.

"I must be found out", I urged.

"Perhaps, but every hour is something. Above all we must have a King in Strelsau, or the city will be Michael's in four-and-twenty hours, and what would the King's life be worth then, if he is still alive?"

"Yes, they may be killing him now. Sapt, suppose they do?"

"They won't, if you go to Strelsau. Do you think they'll kill him until you are out of the way? They would gain nothing by killing him to put you on the throne."

It was a wilder and even more hopeless plan than the one we had carried out that day, but there seemed nothing else for me to do. Besides I was young, and the danger attracted me.

"Sapt", I cried, "I'll try it!"

"Good. Now we must get away at once".

"We ought to bury poor Josef", I said.

"No time—oh, all right, as you like. I'll bring the horses; be quick".

I carried Josef up from the cellar, but met Sapt at the door. "Put him down", he said, "someone is coming to do that for you".
He took me to the window, and I saw three hundred yards down the road to Zenda a party of eight horsemen. Some were carrying spades. No doubt they had been sent by Michael to remove all signs of their evil work. I pointed to the dead body on the floor.

"Colonel", I said, "we ought to strike a blow for him".

"It's risky, Your Majesty, but—well, if we are killed, it'll save us a lot of thinking. I'll show you how we can attack them".

We went cautiously through to the back door, and mounted.

"Revolver ready?" asked Sapt.

"No, steel for me", said I.

"Thirsty to-night, eh?" said Sapt with a laugh. "All right".

We mounted, drawing our swords, and as soon as we heard the sound of the men at the front of the lodge, Sapt whispered, "Now!"

We rushed as fast as we could round the house, and in a moment were among them. Sapt told me later that he killed a man, and I believe him, but I saw no more of him. With a cut I broke open the head of a fellow on a brown horse, and he fell to the ground. A big man was opposite to me, and there was another beside me. I rushed into him and drove my
sword into his breast as he fired a revolver. The bullet whistled past my ear. I could not even draw out my sword, but left it in the man's body, and went off at full speed after Sapt, whom I now saw twenty yards away. I waved my hand gaily, but next second dropped it with a cry, for a bullet touched it, and I felt the blood. In another moment or two we were out of sight.

Sapt laughed. "Well, Josef will have company", he said. "Did they notice you?"

"The big fellow did. As I struck him, I heard him cry, 'The King!'"

"Good, Black Michael will have some trouble from us yet".

تحو ودفعت سيفي في صدره فيما أطلق رصاصة من مسدسه. انطلقت الرصاصة وصفرت بقرب ذنبي، ولم استطع سيفي فركته في جسد الرجل وانطلقت باقصى سرعة خلف سابت الذي رأيته الآن على بعد عشرين باردة، فأومأته له نيدي متهجأ، لكنني أُنزلتها في اللحظة التالية صارخاً لأن رصاصة لامستها وشعرت بالدم يسيل. ثم ما لبثنا أن ابتعدنا عن المكان.

ضحك سابت وقال: «حسناً سيد جوزف رفقة له، هل عرفوك؟». 

الرجل الضخم عرفني، فعندما ضربته سمعته يصرخ، 

الملك!». 

حسناً سيد جوزف رفقة له، هل عرفوك؟. 

حسناً سيد جوزف رفقة له، هل عرفوك؟. 

حسناً سيد جوزف رفقة له، هل عرفوك؟. 

حسناً سيد جوزف رفقة له، هل عرفوك؟. 

حسناً سيد جوزف رفقة له، هل عرفوك؟. 

حسناً سيد جوزف رفقة له، هل عرفوك؟.
Chapter 5

A FAIR COUSIN AND A DARK BROTHER

We reached the palace again without danger. Although it was after eight o'clock in the morning, we met very few people, and I was well wrapped up to hide my face. On entering the dressing-room by the secret door, we saw Fritz lying fully dressed on a sofa. He jumped up.

"Thank God, Sire! Thank God you're safe", he cried, and seized my hand to kiss it. Sapt, the cruel old man, laughed.

"That's good, lad", he said. "We'll be all right".

When Fritz understood, he fell back on the sofa.

"Where's the King?" he asked.

"Hush, you fool!" said Sapt. "Not so loud! Here's the King". Then he added in a fierce whisper: "Black Michael's got him—alive we think".

الفصل الخامس

ابنة عم جيللة وأخ شرير

رجعنا إلى القصر دون خطر رغم أن الساعة تجاوزت الثامنة صباحا. التقيينا بقليل جدا من الناس وكانت ملتفة جدا لأغطي وجهي. وبدخولنا غرفة الباب من الباب الشرقي، شاهدنا فريتز بكامل لباسه مستلقياً على ديوان. فنهض سرعة. صاح قائلاً "جداً الله يا سيدي! جدة الله على أنك بأمان!".

وأمسك بيدي ليقبلها. ضحك سابت العجوز وقال: "حسنًا لأبي الشاب، سنكون على ما يرام".

حين فهم فريتز الأمر، استلقى على الديوان وقال: "أين الملك؟".

قال سابت "أمسك بأبي الأحق! ليس بهذا الصوت العالي، هذا هو الملك!" ثم أضاف بهمة حادة: "لقد قضى عليه ميشال الشرير—حياً على ما نعتقد".
After a pretence of having been to bed, I got up and had breakfast. Then Sapt gave me a three hour lesson on my duties. It seemed to me, that if a real king's life is a hard one, a pretended king's is much harder. Then came a visit from the Chancellor with all kinds of papers to sign; my wounded finger came in very useful, for it removed all suspicion about my writing. I also had to meet some of the ambassadors. It was a tiring day.

At last I was alone with Sapt and Fritz, and we had to decide what was to be done.

"We ought to go and catch Black Michael at once", said Fritz.

"Gently, gently", urged Sapt. "Would Michael fall and leave the King alive?"

"Besides", I said, "how can the King for no clear reason suddenly attack his dear brother Michael? The people would not stand it".

"Are we to do nothing, then?" said Fritz.

"We're to do nothing stupid", growled Sapt.

"It seems to me", I said, "Michael and I are in the position of two men each covering the other with a revolver. Neither of us can afford to make the first move, but as he has the most to gain by doing something quickly, I must wait for him to move".

بعد التظاهر بتصويت بعض الوقت، قمت وتناولت الفطور ثم تلقّيت درسًا من سابت لثلاث ساعات عن انجابي. قد بدا لي أنه، إن كانت حياة الملك الحقيقي صعبة، فحياة الملك الزيف أصعب بكثير. إن ذلك حضر المستشار يحمل أوراقًا مختلفة للتوقع عليها، فكان أصعب المروج خبرون لي لأنه أزال كل شك حول طريقي في الكتابة. وكان علي أيضاً لقاء بعض السفراء. فإذا كان الظهار متعبًا.

في النهاية أصبحت وحيدًا مع سابت وفريتز، وكان علينا أن نقرر ما ينبغي القيام به. فقال فريتز "علينا أن نذهب للقبض على مشال الشرير في الحال". فالتاني سابت قائلًا "لطفاً، لن تفعل أيّ شئ. ماذا يعني أن تقوم مشال ويتربك الملك حيا؟".

قلت "كم كيف يمكن للملك من دون سبب واضح أن يهاجم أخاه العزيز مشال؟ سيثير بذلك نقمة الناس".

قال فريتز "أنت فعل شيئاً إذاً؟"

فهدر سابت "لن تقوم بشيء أحمق".

وقلت "يبدو لي أن مشال واناً نشبه رجليين يوجهان مسديهما إلى بعضهما البعض. لا يسع أحدهم أن يأخذ المبادرة الأولى، لكن ما أن الكبس الأكبر سيكون من نصيبه إن هو قام بشيء بالسرعة اللازمة، يجب عليّ انتظاره لأخذ المبادرة".
"Three of Michael’s famous Six are in Strelsau”, said Fritz.

"Only three?” asked Sapt eagerly. “Then the other three are at Zenda, guarding the King. That means he is alive.

Fritz’s face brightened. “Of course”, he said. “If the King was dead, all the Six would be here with Michael. He is back, you know”.

“Gentlemen, gentlemen, who are the famous Six?” I asked.

“You’ll soon meet them”, said Sapt. “They are six gentlemen of Michael’s, and would do anything for him. There are three Ruritanians, a Frenchman, a Belgian and an Englishman”.

“Any one of them would cut a throat if Michael ordered it”, said Fritz.

“Perhaps they’ll cut mine”, I suggested.

“Nothing more likely”, said Sapt. “Who are here, Fritz?”

“Bersonin, de Gautet and Detchard”.

“The foreigners! It’s clear enough. The Ruritaniens are guarding the King, so that they will be able to say nothing about Michael’s game, being in it themselves”.

It was part of my plan to make myself as popular as I could, so I ordered my horse and went for a ride with Fritz in the fine park, then...
through some of the streets, and having in this way gathered a crowd, I went to the house of the Princess Flavia. This caused much interest, and I heard shouts of approval. During my meeting with the Chancellor, he had suggested that the nation would be very happy to learn of an engagement, though, of course, he did not understand the difficulties in the way. The Princess was very popular, and I did not see that any harm could be done by paying her a visit, while it might help to improve the King’s position. Fritz was surprisingly eager for such a visit. I found out that he had a great desire to see the Princess’s friend and lady-in-waiting, the Countess Helga.

It was a difficult part for me to play. I had to show liking, but not feel it, keep the Princess attracted to me, yet not interested. It was made no easier by the fact that she was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen.

“I’m glad and proud, Rudolf”, she said, “to see the change that has taken place in you. You are like the prince in Shakespeare who became a different man when he was king. Why, even your face is changed”.

This was a dangerous subject, so I changed it.

“My brother is back, I hear. He made a journey, it seems”.
“Yes, he is here”, she said, not looking pleased.

“Well, we are all glad to see him. The nearer he is, the better”.

The Princess smiled. “You mean, cousin—?”

“That we can see better what he is doing? Perhaps. And why are you happy?”

“I never said that I was happy. I don’t care in the least what Duke Michael is doing”.

If I had been the King, I should have felt encouraged. Just then there was a cheer from the street, and the Princess ran to the window.

“It is he!” she cried. “It is the Duke himself!”

I smiled but said nothing. I heard the sound of feet in the outside room. I began to talk of general subjects. This went on for some minutes. I wondered what had become of Michael, but it did not seem to be for me to interfere. All at once, to my surprise, Flavia asked in a troubled voice:

“Are you wise to make him angry?”

“What? Who? How am I making him angry?”

“By keeping him waiting, of course”.

“My dear cousin, I don’t want to keep him——”
“Well, then, is he to come in?”

“Of course, if you wish it.”

She looked at me curiously. “How funny you are”, she said. “You know no one can come in while you are here”.

Here was a charming advantage in being a king! Inwardly I cursed Fritz for not telling me; I had nearly made a dangerous mistake. I jumped up, and went to the door, and brought Michael in.

“Brother”, I said, “if I had known you were here, I should not have kept you waiting for a moment”.

He thanked me, but coldly. The man had many qualities, but he could not hide his feelings. Anyone could see that he hated me, and hated even worse to see me with Princess Flavia. He knew I was not the King, but I believe he tried to hide from me what he knew.

“Your hand is hurt, Sire”, he said.

“Yes”, I answered carelessly. “I was playing a game with a dog, and it tried to bite me”.

He understood what I meant, and smiled sourly.

“But there’s no danger from the bite, is there?” asked Flavia anxiously.

“None from this”, I said. “If I gave him a chance to bite more deeply, it would be different, cousin”.

"حسنًا، أذن هل من يدخل؟"
"بالطبع، إن كانت تلك مشتبكة."
تظرت إلى معي "الفضول وقالت: "يا مغوبة، أنت تعلم أن أحدًا لا يمكنه الدخول أثناء وجودك هنا".
إنها مريحة راغبة أن يكون ملكًا. ولعبت فرصة في نفسها لعدم إخباري بذلك، فقد كنت عن وشك ارتباك حقيقة فاحش، لذا فقت وذهبت إلى السراي وأطلعت مشاري، قالت له "لو علمت بوجودك ها يا أخي ما كنت تنتظر حظا في اختاري".
شكرني، إنه يبدو. كان رجلاً فيه صفاته عدة لكنه لم يكن قادر على إخفاء مشاعره، وقد كان واضحًا للجميع مدى كراهيته لي وأكثر ما كان يكره هو رؤيتى مع فلافيا، كان يعلم بأنني لم كنت الملك لكوني أعتقد أنه كان يحاول إخفاء ما يعرفه عنى.
قال "إن ديد مجرد يا سيدي".
أجهزه بلا مبادلة "أجل، كنت ألعب مع كلب وحاول أن أسقطه".
فهم فيه وابتشم براحة.
سألت فلافيا بلطفة "لعن لا خطر من العضة، ليس كذلك؟"
قلت "ليس من هذه، فلن أعطيه الفرصة لثانية بعضاً أعمق.
وعندما كان الأمر قد اختفى، يا ابنه عمي".
“But surely the dog has been destroyed?” continued she.

“Not yet. We're waiting to see if his bite is harmful”.

“And if it is?” asked Michael.

“He'll be knocked on the head, brother”, I said. Then, remembering that I must seem to be friendly, I praised Michael for the wonderful arrangements he had made for the coronation, the state of the army and so on. Michael could not bear it. He rose suddenly to his feet.

“There are three friends of mine very anxious to be introduced to Your Majesty”, he said. “They are here in the other room”.

“Your friends are mine also, I hope”, I said politely, and walked with him to the door. He said good-bye to the Princess, and I took his arm. The look on his face gave me secret delight. As we entered the other room, Michael called his men.

He introduced them one by one, and they kissed my hand—de Gautet, a tall thin fellow with a big moustache; Bersonin, the Belgian, rather fat and of middle height; although he was young, he had no hair; and last, the Englishman, Detchard, a narrow-faced fellow, with close-cut fair hair and sunburnt face. He looked a good fighter, but completely dishonest. I spoke to him in English, with a foreign

"وتابعتم فافيا "لكن ألم تقيل الكلب؟".

"ليس بعد. فما زلنا ننتظر لعرفة إذا كانت عضته مؤذية.

فقال ميشال "وإذا كانت كذلك؟".

أجتيت "سوف تضرب على رأسه يا أخي" ثم تذكرت أن علي أن أكون ودودا، فرحبت ميشال على الإجراءات الراجعة التي أعدهاحلمة التتويج، وحالة الجيش، إلى ما هنالك. ولم يتحمل ميشال الأمر فقام خجلا وقال:

"هناك ثالث من أصدقائي بدأه السوق للقاء جلالةك إنهم في الغرفة الخارجية".

قلت بلباقة "أمل أن يكون أصدقاؤك هم أصدقائي".

ومشيتم معه إلى الباب. ودع الامبراطورية ثم تأبّت ذراعه. ارستمت على وجهها نظرة منحته غيبة خفية، وما دخلنا الغرفة الأخرى نادي ميشال على رجاه.

قدمهم الواحد تلو الآخر فقبلوا يديي دي جويلي، رجل طويل نحيف له شارب كبير، برسورين البلجيكي، ممتهن الجسم معدل الطول ولم يكن لديه شعر رغم صغر سنه، وآخرا دينترارد الإنجليزي، رجل نبيل الوجه أسمر ي新常态 الشمس وشعره قصير. بدأ أنه متائل يارب لكنه منافق إلى حد بعيد. تحدثت إليه..."
accent, and I believe he smiled, though he did it immediately.

"So Mr. Detchard is in the secret", thought I.

When they had gone I returned to the Princess to say good-bye.

"Rudolf", she said, very low, "be careful, won't you?"

"Of what?"

"You know—I can't say. But think what your life is to——"

"Well, to——?"

"To Ruritania".

Was I right to play the part, or wrong? I don't know, but I whispered softly:

"Only to Ruritania?"

She blushed. "To your friends too", she said.

"Friends?"

"And to your cousin", she whispered.

I could not speak. I kissed her hand, and went out, cursing myself. Fritz was sitting on the sofa with the Countess Helga, careless of what the servants thought. He sprang up, and we left the house.
Chapter 6

A NEW USE FOR A TEA TABLE

Several days passed. My secret was still kept, though I had some bad moments, and made some mistakes. However, I escaped discovery, and I think the reason was the very boldness of the deception. I believe it is easier to pretend to be a king successfully than to pretend to be one’s next door neighbour.

One day Sapt came into my room. He threw a letter on the table, saying, “That’s for you—a woman’s writing. I think. But I’ve some news first. The King is in Zenda Castle”.

“How do you know?”

“Because the other half of Michael’s Six are there. I’ve had inquiries made. They’re all three there—Lauengram, Krafstein and young Rupert Hentzau, three rascals, if ever there were any”.

“You think it’s certain the King’s there?”

“Yes. The drawbridge is kept drawn back, and no one is allowed in or out without an order from Michael or young Rupert”.

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“You think it’s certain the King’s there?”

“Yes. The drawbridge is kept drawn back, and no one is allowed in or out without an order from Michael or young Rupert”.
"I shall have to go to Zenda", I said.

"Not yet, lad. We've got to be careful. An open attack would mean the death of the King. What's in the letter?"

I opened it and read it aloud:

"If the King desires to know something very important for him, let him come to the house at the end of the New Avenue at twelve o'clock tonight alone. The house is in a large garden, and there is a small gate in the wall at the back. If he opens the gate and walks twenty yards to the right, he will find a summer-house with six steps. Inside will be someone who will tell him something highly important for his life and throne. This is written by a faithful friend. If he refuses this invitation, his life will be in danger, but he must come alone. Let him show this to no one, or he will ruin a woman who loves him; Black Michael does not pardon."

"No", remarked Sapt, as I ended, "but he can dictate a very pretty letter."

I thought the same, and was about to throw the letter away, when I saw there was some writing on the other side.

"If you hesitate", the writer continued, "speak to Colonel Sapt."

"Eh!" exclaimed Sapt, surprised. "Does she take me for a greater fool than you?"
I continued:

"Ask him what woman would do most to prevent the Duke from marrying his cousin, and therefore most to prevent him from becoming King? Her name begins with A."

I sprang to my feet, and Sapt laid down his pipe.

"Antoinette de Mauban!" I cried.

"How do you know?" he asked.

I told him what I knew of the lady. "Yes", he said thoughtfully; "it's true that she's had a fight with Michael".

"She could be useful to us, if she wished", I remarked.

"I believe, though, that Michael dictated that letter".

"So do I, but I mean to know for sure. I shall go, Sapt".

"No, I shall go", he replied.

"You may go as far as the gate", I said.

"I shall go to the summer-house".

"Sapt", I said, leaning back in my chair, "I believe in that woman, and I shall go".

"And I don't believe in any woman", he replied, "and you shan't go".

أكملت القراءة.

"إسأله عن المرأة التي سبَّل ما بوعسا انتحول دون زواج الدوق من ابنته عمه وتولى بذلك. لن أصيح ملكاً. إنهها يبدا بالحرف أ".

قفلت وافقاً ووضع سابت غليظته.

صدحت "أنطونيت دو موبان!" 

فسأل سابت "كيف علمت؟" و أخبرته بما أعرف عن السيدة. فقال مفكراً "أجل، صحيح أنها تشاحنت مع ميشال".

ألحبت قالاً "قد تكون مفيدة لنا لو أرادت ذلك".

لكني أرى أن ميشال هو الذي أميل تلك الرسالة.

وهذا ما أعطده كنذك، لكن أريد أن أتأكد. سذهب يا سابت".

فأجاب "كلًا، بل سذهب أنا".

فلت "يمكن أن تذهب حتى الباب".

"سذهب إلى البيت الصيفي".

فلت "سابت" وأملت نفسي إلى الخلف على الكرسي "إنني أتى بتلك المرأة وسأذهب".

فأجاب "وأنا لا أتى بأي إمرأة، ولن تذهب".
"I either go to the summer-house or back to England."

Sapt had begun to learn how far he could lead or drive me, and when he must follow.

"All right", he agreed.

To cut a long story short, at half-past eleven that night Sapt and I mounted our horses. Fritz was again left on guard. It was a dark night, and I carried a lantern, a knife and a revolver. We arrived outside the gate. I dismounted.

"I shall wait here, then", said Sapt. "If I hear a shot I'll——".

"Stay where you are; it's the King's only chance. You mustn't be killed too".

"You're right, lad. Good luck!"

I went quietly through the gate into the garden. Turning to the right as the letter told me, I went cautiously up the path, my lantern closed, my revolver in my other hand. Soon I came to a large dark object—it was the summer-house. I went silently up the steps, pushed open the door and walked in. A woman flew to me and seized my hand.

"Shut the door!" she whispered.
I did so, and turned the light of my lantern on her. It was Antoinette de Mauban, looking very beautiful in a dark way, and richly dressed. The only furniture in the bare little room was a chair or two and a small iron table, such as one sees at cafés.

"Don't talk", she said, "there's no time. Listen! I know you, Mr. Rassendyll. I wrote that letter at the Duke's orders".

"So I thought", said I.

"In twenty minutes three men will be here to kill you".

"Three—the Three?"

"Yes. You must be gone by then. If not, you'll be killed".

"Or they will".

"Listen! When you're killed, your body will be taken to a low part of the town. It will be found there. Michael will at once arrest all your friends—Colonel Sapt and Fritz von Tarlenheim first. He will put the city under control of the army, send a message to Zenda for the other Three to kill the King in the Castle. Then he'll make himself King and marry the Princess".

"It's a pretty plan. But why, Madame, do you—"

"Give any reason you like—jealousy, if you wish. Now go; but remember, by night and day,
you are never safe. You have secret guards following you?"

"Yes", I said. "It's Sapt's idea".

"Well, three men follow them. Michael's Three are never more than two hundred yards from you. Now go—not by the gate; there will be a guard on it by now. There is a ladder against the wall on this side of the summerhouse. Climb over it, and run for your life".

"Madame", said I, "you have served the King well to-night, though it will mean danger for yourself. Where is he in the Castle?"

She lowered her voice to a fearful whisper.

"Across the drawbridge you come to a heavy door; behind that lies — Listen! What's that?"

There were steps outside.

"They're coming! They're too soon! Close your lantern!"

I did as she said, and then looked through a crack in the door. I could just see three figures. I drew my revolver. Antoinette hastily put her hand on my arm.

"You may kill one", said she. "But what then?" A voice came from outside—speaking perfect English.
“Mr. Rassendyll”, it said. I made no answer.

“We want to talk to you. Will you promise not to shoot till we’ve done?”

“Have I the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Detchard?” “Never mind names”. “Then let mine alone”.

“All right, Sire. I’ve an offer for you”. I still had my eye to the crack. The three had mounted two more steps; their revolvers pointed at the door.

“Will you let us in? On our honour, we shall not shoot”.

“Don’t trust them”, whispered Antoinette.

“We can speak through the door”, I said.

“Will you promise not to open it and shoot?” “I’ll promise not to shoot before you do”, I answered, “but I’ll not let you in. Stand outside and talk”.

“That’s sensible”, said Detchard.

Still looking through the crack, I saw they were now on the top step just outside the door.

“Don’t trust them”, said Antoinette again, but I did not need her warning. I knew they meant to rush me as soon as I began to talk.
"Well, gentlemen", "what's the offer?"

"A safe-conduct to the frontier, and fifty thousand English pounds".

"That seems handsome", I replied. "Give me a minute to think".

I turned to Antoinette, and whispered;
"Stand close up against the wall, out of the line of fire from the door".

"What are you going to do?" she asked in a fright.

"You'll see", said I.

I took up the iron tea table. It was not heavy for a man of my strength, and I held it by the legs. The top made a complete shield for my head and body. I fastened my closed lantern to my belt, and put my revolver in my pocket. Then I went to the back of the room, and holding the table before me, called out:

"All right, gentlemen, I accept your offer, depending on your honour. If you will open the door——"

"Open it yourself", said Detchard.

"It opens outwards", I said. "Stand back a little, gentlemen".

I pretended to try to open it, then went back to my place.
"It won't open properly", I said. "Pull it from that side".

"I'll open it", cried Detchard. "What, Bersonin, are you afraid of one man?"

I smiled to myself. An instant later the door was thrown back, and the three stood there, their revolvers pointing straight at me. With a shout I charged them as hard as I could. Three shots rang out, but my shield protected me. Next moment I was into them, or rather the table was, and all four of us were rolling together in a confused heap down the steps. Antoinette de Mauban cried out, but I rose to my feet, laughing aloud.

De Gautet and Bersonin lay motionless. Detchard was under the table, but as I rose, he pushed it from him and fired again. I drew my revolver and fired back at him; I heard him curse. Then I ran like the wind past the summer-house along the wall.

"Please God", said I, "she told me the truth about the ladder!" for the wall was high.

Yes, there it was. I was up and over in a minute. Running along the outside, I saw the horses, then Sapt. He was struggling with the lock of the fastened gate, and firing into it like a madman. He had quite forgotten that he was not to take part in the fight.
“Come along”, I cried to him, laughing.
“You’re safe? what are you laughing at?”

“Four gentlemen round a tea table”, I answered. It had certainly been uncommonly funny to see the dangerous Three defeated by a weapon no more terrible than an ordinary tea table.

Besides, you will observe that I had honourably kept my word, and had not fired till they did.
Chapter 7

A QUESTION OF HONOUR

From secret police reports I learnt next day that Michael had left Strelsau and the Three with him. Detchard, it appeared, had a bandaged arm. I was glad to hear I had left my mark on the fellow. Antoinette de Mauban had also left. They could be going only to Zenda. What was more immediately important to me was the following statement in the report:

"The King is much criticized for taking no steps about his marriage; it is believed that the Princess Flavia is also sad. Many people are mentioning her name together with that of the Duke of Strelsau."

"The chief of police is told to speak quite openly," said Sapt, when I made an angry sound. "It is quite true about the Princess," said Fritz. "The Countess Helga told me that Flavia was already much in love with the King—"

"Enough!" I cried. "I have ordered a grand dance to be held tonight at
the Royal Palace in the Princess's honour", said Sapt.

"That's news to me", I said, not feeling pleased. "The arrangements are all made", said Fritz.

Sapt came up to me, and said in a sharp voice:

"You must offer her marriage when you speak to her to-night".

"Good heavens!"

"I suppose", said Sapt, "You've made pretty speeches to a girl before now. That's all she wants".

"I refuse absolutely", I said. "I won't share in any plan to make a fool of the Princess".

Sapt looked at me with his small cunning eyes, and smiled.

"All right. We mustn't press you too far", he said, "but talk nicely to her. We can't allow her to get annoyed with the King".

I went for a short walk in the garden with Fritz. I knew quite well why Sapt gave up urging me to speak words of love. He knew himself that her beauty and my own feeling would carry me farther than all his arguments. He must have seen the unhappiness he was bringing on her, but that meant nothing to him. If
the King was saved, she would have to marry him, either knowing or not knowing the change. If not—well, we had never spoken of it, but I believe that Sapt intended to keep me on the throne rather than let Black Michael get it.

The dance was a marvellous affair. How could I remain cold and careless beside such a beautiful woman, especially when her eyes met mine... In sight of all, I took the Red Rose of Ruritania from my neck and hung it round hers. Everyone applauded and cheered. I saw Sapt smiling, and Fritz frowning.

When it was all finished, I was with her alone in a little room looking over the garden. She was sitting, and I stood before her. I was struggling with myself, and if she had not looked at me, I believe even then I should have won my fight. But she gave me just one sudden look... and I was lost! I forgot the King in Zenda. I forgot the King in Streilsau. She was a Princess—and I a deceiver. Do you think I remembered that? I threw myself on my knee before her and took her hands in mine. I said nothing. Why should I?

Then she pushed me away, crying suddenly, “Ah, is it true? Or is it because you must?”

“IT’s true!” I said. “I love you more than life—or truth—or honour!”

"أكانت مطلقة على التغيير أو جالهة بشأنها، إلا أن كلام لاي تحدث بالامور قبالة، لكي أعتقد أن سابت كان يبتغى إقامة
على العرش بدلاً من سمح ليшлиال الشرير الحصول عليه.

كانت الحفلة الرائعة مناسبة رائعة، وكيف لي إلقاء بارداً بلاف
مبالة قرب امرأة جميلة، خاصة حين تلقى عناها يغبني...
 أمام مرأى الجميع تزعمت وردة روريتانية الشرير من عنقي
وعلقها حول عنقها فهتف الجميع وهلوا: رأيت سابه Поэтому
وورنيت بقبط حاجيهم.

ولما انتهى كل شيء، وجدت نفسي معها في غرفة صغيرة تظل
على الحديقة، كانت تجلس وأنى أفل أن امها. كنت في صراع مع
نفسي، ولم أنظر إليها. كنت كنت مكعن، لكنها رعتي بنظرة
مفتحة. فقدت حينها ابتزته! كنت الملك في رئا! كنت الملك
في ستراسو. كانت أمرأة وكنت مفهداً... أنظروا أنني تذكرت
ذلك؟ تهاو بين ريشاتي وأخذت بيديها بين يدي. لم أكن مشائعاً
ولما ألقى؟ ثم دفعتني بعيداً وكتب: "هل حقاً ما أرى? أم لأنه
يوجب عليك ذلك؟"

"قلت "إنه حقيقة! إنني أحب أكثر من حياتي أو الحقيقة أو
الشرف!"
She set no meaning to my words, thinking them the wild sweet manner of love.

"How is it that I love you now, Rudolf?"

"Now?"

"Yes, just lately. I—I never did before".

How victory filled me! It was I, Rudolf Rassendyll, that she loved. How sweet it tasted!

"You didn't love me before?"

She looked up into my face, and said smiling, "It must have been your Crown. I felt it first on Coronation Day".

"Oh, Flavia, if I were not the King——"

"Whatever you were, I should love you just the same", she said.

There was yet a chance for me to save my honour.

"Flavia", I began, in a strange dry voice that seemed not my own, "I am not——"

There was a heavy step outside the window, and Sapt appeared. My half-finished sentence died on my lips. He frowned and bowed.

"Sire, a thousand pardons, but the Cardinal has been waiting for a quarter of an hour to say good-bye".

I met his eye full and square; and I read in it an angry warning. How long he had been a
listener I don't know, but he had broken into the conversation just in time.

"I must not keep the Cardinal waiting", I said.

"Oh, Colonel Sapt", cried Flavia, "I am so happy!"

There was no mistaking her meaning, and I really believe some tenderness came into Sapt's voice as he kissed her hand and said, "God save Your Royal Highness!" Then he stood up straight and added, "But before all, comes the King!"

"Yes", said Flavia. "God save the King!"

I went into the dance-room again to receive good-byes. I saw Sapt going in and out of the crowd, and where he had been were smiles and whispers. I knew what he was doing, the old rascal. He was spreading the news that he had learnt. To save the Crown and beat Black Michael—that was his one aim. Such news spreads fast, and when I went out of the front gate to hand Princess Flavia into her carriage, there was an immense crowd waiting for us. They welcomed us with thundering cheers. What could I do? By Sapt's tricks and my own uncontrolled feelings I had been forced on, and the way back was closed behind me.

Later—it was nearly daylight—I was alone with Sapt and Fritz.
"Sapt", I said, "you have left me no honour. Unless you want me to become a criminal as well, for God’s sake, let us go to Zenda and crush Black Michael, and bring the King back".

"If you tried——" he began.

"If I tried", I interrupted, "I could marry the Princess, and nothing you could do would be able to stop me. Do you think anyone would believe your story, if you told the truth?"

"I know", he said quietly.

"Then are we going to Zenda?"

He took me by the hand. "By God, you’re the finest Elphberg of them all!" he cried. "But I am the King’s servant. God save the King! Come, we’ll go to Zenda,"

Plans were quickly made. I gave Marshal Strakencz orders as to what to do if the king was killed—He thought I meant myself of course, and was full of trouble at my words.

"May God preserve Your Majesty", he said, "for I think you are going on a dangerous journey".

"I hope that no life more precious than mine may be demanded", I replied.

It was more difficult to break the news to Flavia that I was leaving her. Before I went to see her, she had already heard of the hunting
trip on which, it was said everywhere, I was going.

"I regret that we cannot amuse Your Majesty here in Strelsau", she said, a little coldly. "I would have offered you more entertainment, but I was foolish enough to think—that for a few days—after last night—"

"Yes?"

"That you might be happy without much gaiety. I am told you are going to hunt boars. I hope you'll find them interesting".

I saw a tear fall, and I cursed myself.

"My dear", I said. "Do you dream I should leave you to go hunting?"

"Then—what—?"

"Well, it is hunting. But Michael is the boar".

She turned pale.

"Oh, Rudolf! When will you come back?"

"I—I don't Know when I shall came back", I answered in pain.

"Come soon, Rudolf! Come soon!"

"Yes, by God, I will come again to see you—before I die".

"What do you mean?"

But I could not tell her the truth then. It was too late.
“Should not a man come back to the loveliest lady in all the world?” said I. “A thousand Michaels would not keep me from you!”

This comforted her a little.

“You won’t let anyone keep you from me?” she asked.

“No, sweetheart.”

Yet there was one—not Michael—who, if he lived, must keep me from her, and for whose life I was going away from her to risk my own. I could not bear it any longer, and rushed out into the street. I mounted my horse and rode off at full speed to my own palace.

The next day I was in the train with Sapt and Fritz and ten gentlemen, especially chosen for the present affair. They had been told something of the story of the attack in the summerhouse, and that Michael was trying to get the throne. They were also informed that a friend of the King’s was a prisoner in the Castle of Zenda, and that one of the aims of the journey was to save him. Young, well educated, brave and loyal, they asked no more. It was enough that their King needed them, and they were ready to serve him to the death.

We were going to the Castle of Tarlenheim, which belonged to Fritz’s uncle. It was a modern building about five miles from Zenda—on the opposite side from that on which Michael’s
Castle lay. It stood on top of a hill with woods all round, in which wild boars were known to be common. Of course, the real reason we chose it was because it brought us within striking distance of Black Michael.

Michael himself would not be deceived by the story of the boar hunt. He knew, well enough why we had come, and would naturally take steps to prevent us from doing what we wanted. This was not the only difficulty, for every movement we made was, and had to be, quite public. This was one of the qualities of kingship that I found extremely troublesome.

Our aim was to get the King out of the Castle of Zenda alive. Force was useless. In some trick lay our only chance. We thought, rightly as it appeared, that Michael would not kill the King till he had killed me first. He also probably thought that I was not acting for the sake of honour, but for myself. He could not understand a man in my position doing all he could to lose it and put another in his place. My aim in coming to Zenda, in his view, was to get the King killed so that I could have the throne and the Princess. This gave me courage, for he would keep the King alive as long as he possibly could. And God knows I needed some comfort. So the journey came to an end, and once more I found myself at Zenda.
Chapter 8

SETTING A TRAP

Michael knew of my coming, sure enough. I had not been in the Castle of Tarlenheim an hour when he sent three men to welcome me. He had enough respect for me not to send the men who had tried to murder me, but he sent the other three of his famous Six—the three Ruritanian gentlemen, Lauengram, Krafstein, and Rupert Hentzau. A fine-looking group they made, too, as young Rupert—he could not have been more than twenty-three—took the lead and made me a polite speech. He said that my dear brother was sorry he could not come himself, but he was ill.

"I regret to hear it, sir," I answered, "and I trust that no others of his party are sick. I was told that Mr. Detchard had been hurt. Is he better?"

Rupert laughed, though his two companions did not.

"He hopes soon to find a medicine for it, Sire," said Rupert.
Then I laughed too. I knew the name of Detchard's medicine—it was called revenge.

They then excused themselves and turned to leave. Rupert, throwing back his black hair, a smile on his handsome face, walked past Sapt with a mocking and scornful look. The old fellow looked as black as night at him, and did not hesitate to touch his revolver as if by accident. Instead of dining in the house, I took Fritz out with me to the little town to the inn that I knew of. There was not much danger, for the evening was light and the road on this side of the town was not lonely. I put a covering round my face to prevent the curious from seeing who I was.

"Fritz", I said as we rode along, "you will order a private room for two gentlemen of the King. One has a bad toothache. There is a pretty girl at the inn. You must make sure only she waits on us at dinner".

"How?"

"I leave that to you. Anyhow, if she won't for you, she will for me".

As we entered the inn, nothing of my face could be seen except me eyes. Fritz got the room, and went out to see about the girl. A minute later he returned.

"She's coming", he said.
She came in. I gave her time to set the wine down—I didn’t want it dropped. Fritz poured out a glass and gave it to me.

"Is the gentleman in great pain?" the girl asked sympathetically.

"The gentleman is no worse than when he saw you last", said I, throwing the cover from my face. She gave a little scream; then she cried:

"It was the King then! I told mother so the moment I saw his picture. Oh, sir, forgive me!"

"You did nothing that hurt much", said I.

"But the things we said!"

"I forgive them—if you wish to serve the King".

Oh, thank you, sir. I must go and tell mother.

"Stop", said I, looking serious. "We are not here to-night for amusement. Go and bring dinner, and not a word to anyone about the King being here".

She came back in a few minutes, and was naturally very curious.

"How is Johann?" I asked, beginning my dinner.

"Oh, that fellow, sir—Your Majesty, I mean?"

"‘Sir’, will do, please. How is he?"
"We don't see him much now, sir", she said.

"And why not?"

"I told him he came too often, sir". She threw back her head.

"I see. But you could bring him back, if you wanted?"

"Perhaps I could, sir. But then he's very busy now at the Castle".

"But there's no hunting going on just now".

"No, sir; but he's in charge of the house".

"Johann turned housemaid?" I laughed.

"They haven't a woman in the place, sir—not as a servant, I mean. They do say—it may be false, sir—that there's a lady there".

"But Johann would have time to meet you if you asked him?"

"It depends on the time and the place, sir".

"You don't love him?"

"Not I, sir. But I want to serve you, sir".

"All right. Then ask him to meet you at the second milestone out of Zenda to-morrow evening at ten o'clock".

"You don't mean him any harm, sir?" she asked anxiously.

"Not if he will do as I tell him. Now be off
with you, and see that no one knows that the King has been here”.

I spoke severely, but also gave her some money. We finished our dinner, and rode home, again.

“You want to catch this fellow Johann?” said Fritz, when we were outside the town.

“Yes, and I think the trap is going to get him all right”.

As we reached the avenue leading up to the Castle of Tarlenheim, Sapt came rushing to meet us.

“Thank God you’re safe”, he said. “Have you seen anything of them?”

“Of whom?” I asked, dismounting.

“Lad”, he said seriously, “you must not ride about here unless at least half a dozen men are with you. You remember a tall young fellow, one of your guards, called Bernstein?”

I remembered him well, about my own height, a fine brave fellow.

“He lies in his room upstairs with a bullet through his arm”.

“What!”

“After dinner”, went on Sapt, “he went out for a walk a mile or so in the wood; he thought..."
he saw three men among the trees, and one pointed a gun at him. He was not armed, so he started to run back towards the house. But the man fired at him and hit him. Bärenstein was lucky to get here before he fainted. They were afraid to come nearer the house.

He paused, and added: “Lad, that bullet was meant for you.”

“Very probably”, I answered. “Sapt, before I leave Ruritania I should like to do one thing to repay the many kindnesses I have got.”

“What is that?”

“Kill every one of that Six. The country will be a cleaner place.”

Next morning I was sitting in the garden in front of the house, feeling more contented than I had been for some time. I was at least doing something; and work, though it cannot cure love, is yet a sort of drug for it. Suddenly through the trees came young Rupert Hentzau, riding as if he was in a public park, careless of any danger there might be from my men. He asked for private speech with me to give me a message from the Duke of Strelsau. I made my friends move away a little.

“Rassendyll”, he said. “The Duke——”
I sat up. "Shall I call one of my men to bring you your horse, my lord?"

"Why keep up the pretence?"

"Because it is not yet finished; and meanwhile I will choose my own name".

"Oh, all right, Sire. But I spoke because of my liking for you. I admire you, you know. You are rather like me".

"Thank you", I replied, "except that I am honest, keep faith with men, and honour with women".

He looked angrily at me.

"The message?" I asked.

"The Duke offers you more than I would. A safe-conduct across the frontier and a hundred thousand pounds".

"I refuse, of course".

He smiled at that. "I told Michael you would", he said. "The fact is, between ourselves, Michael doesn't understand a gentleman".

I laughed. "And you?" I asked.

"I do", he answered. "Well, you prefer death, and you'll have it".

"I'm sorry you won't live to see it" said I politely. "How is our prisoner?"
“The K——”
“Your prisoner?”
“Oh, I forgot your wishes, Sire. He’s alive”.
I rose to my feet; he did the same.
“And the pretty princess?” he said mockingly. “How’s the love affair?”

“Go—while your skin’s whole!” I shouted angrily, taking a threatening step towards him.

Then came the most daring thing I have seen in my life. My friends were only thirty yards away. Rupert called a servant to bring up his horse. As he was about to mount, he turned to me, putting out his right hand; the left was resting on his belt.

“Shake hands”, he said.

I bowed and did as he knew I would do—put my hands behind me. Quicker than thought, his left hand darted out at me with a small dagger. It struck me in the left shoulder; if I had not made a sudden movement, it would have reached my heart. With a cry I took a few steps back and sank into my chair, bleeding deeply. Rupert jumped on to his horse and was off like an arrow, followed by cries and revolver shots, the last as useless as the first. Then I fainted.
It was dark when I awoke and found Fritz beside me. I was weak but cheerful, and more so when Fritz told me the wound was not dangerous and would soon be all right. Then he told me that Johann had fallen into our trap, had been seized and was at that moment in the house.

"What seems strange", Fritz said, "is that he is not sorry at being here. He had an idea that when Black Michael has carried out his plan, he will try to get rid of all his helpers, except the Six".

This showed that our prisoner was not a fool, and I thought his help, if we could get it, would be valuable. I ordered him to be brought up to me at once. Sapt led him in. Johann looked afraid and unwilling to speak, but after a long talk, during which he seemed to be a weak man rather than a bad one, he agreed to tell us what we wanted to know. Of course we made him generous promises (all of which were faithfully kept, so that now he lives in comfort, though I must not tell the place). It also appeared that he had acted as he had, more from fear of the Duke and of his own brother Max than for any wish to harm the King. His master, however, believed in him, and he knew a good deal of their plans.

He told us that the King was imprisoned in a small room in the old Castle. Next to it was
another room, in which there were always three of the Six on guard. In case of an attack on the first room (from which the King's opened), two of the guards would defend it while the other, Rupert or Detchard—for one of these two was always there—would run in and kill the King, who was unarmed and had his hands bound with steel chains to prevent much movement. Thus, before the outer room was taken by an attacking party, the King would be dead.

"But his body?" I asked. For of all things that Michael would not wish anyone to see, the King's body was the most important.

"The Duke has thought of that", replied Johann. "Fastened to the window of the King's room, and preventing any light from entering, is the mouth of a large pipe. This is large enough for a man's body to pass down. The pipe curves down to the surface of the moat. When the King is killed, his body will be put down the pipe, weighted so that it will sink at once to the bottom. The guards will then run away, if they can, by sliding down the pipe into the water. They will rise again and swim away, but the King will be at the bottom for ever."

Johann did not tell the story so shortly as this, nor so clearly, but we got it by asking questions.

"Supposing", I suggested, "there is not an armed attack by a few men, but by a whole army that could not be resisted?"
“There would be no resistance”, answered Johann. “The King would be quietly murdered at once, his body put down the pipe, and one of the Six would take his place in the prison, pretending that Michael had put him there. Michael would admit the truth—that the fellow had angered him, but if he apologized, he would set him free”.

Sapt, Fritz and I looked round at one another in shocked astonishment at this cruel and cunning plan. Whether I went openly with an army, or secretly with a few men, the King would be dead before I could get near him. He seemed to have made triumph possible and ruin impossible.

“Does the King know?” I asked.

“Yes, sir. When I and my brother were putting up the pipe at the Duke’s orders, the King asked Rupert Hentzau what it was, and he said it was a kind of Jacob’s Ladder. It was not suitable for the King to go to heaven by the common road, he said. Ah, sir, it is not easy to sleep quiet in the Castle of Zenda, for all of them would cut a throat as play a game of cards”.

“All right, Johann”, I said. “If anyone asks you if there is a prisoner in the Castle of Zenda, you may say ‘Yes’. But if they ask you who it is, don’t answer. I’ll kill you like a dog if the truth about the prisoner becomes known”.

فأجاب جوهان: “لا يوجد مقاومة بل ستقتل الملك بهدوء وسط الذي في الحال داخل الأثرب ثم يأخذ أحد السلاطين مكانه في السجن، مدعياً بأن ميشال وضعه هناك. سيغرف ميشال بحقيقة ذلك — بأن الرجل أخطأه، لكن سيطلق سراحه في حال اعتباره”.

نظر كل من نيرتز وسانتر وأنا إلى بعضنا البعض بدهشة وانعدام جاهزية هذه المخططة القذرة والخبيثة، ولا فرق إن ذهبنا فوراً برفقة جيش أو سراً مع بعض رجال، فإن الملك سيقتل قبل أن أقترب منه. يبدو أنه جعل من النصر أبداً مكننا ومن الدمار شيئاً مستحيلاً.

سألت: “هل يعرف الملك ذلك؟”

أجاب، سيدي. حين كنت وأخي نسيب الأثرب تبعاً لأمر الدوق، سأل الملك روبت هنتزو عنه فأخبره أنه نوع من سلم يعقب (سلم خيال يعتقد بأن يعقب حلمه، وأنه يؤدي إلى السماء). فأوضح روبت أنه لا يجبره الملك أن يذهب إلى السماء بطريق عامي. فأنا سيدي ليس من السهل أن ننام المرء بهدوء في قلعة زندا. فكل منهم يقتل شخصاً وكأنه يلعب بالورق.”

فقلت: “حسناً يا جوهان، إن سأك أحد إذا كان هناك سجين في قلعة زندا يمكنك أن تجيب بنعم لكن إن سألوك من هو فلا تجب ولا تسألوك كالكلب لو غرفت حقيقة السجين”.
When he was gone I looked at Şapt.

"There seems to be", I said, "only two ways for the King to be saved. One is by disloyalty in the Castle, the other by a miracle!"
Chapter 9

JACOB'S LADDER

It would have surprised the good people of Ruritania to know of our conversation. According to the official reports, I had been wounded by an accidental blow while boar-hunting. I caused the notices to sound very serious, which resulted in much public excitement. The aim of this was to make Michael think I was really dangerously wounded and unable to act against him. I learnt from the man Johann that he did believe this. Two other results were: first, I offended the leading doctors of Strelsa; because I refused to let any one attend me except a young friend of Fritz's; second, I received word from Marshal Strakencz that the Princess Flavia would no longer obey his orders or mine to remain in Strelsa, but was leaving at once for Zenda.

Flavia's arrival, and her joy to find me up and well, instead of on my back fighting with death, makes a picture that even now dances before my eyes till they become too full of tears to see it. In truth, to have her with me once
more was like a taste of heaven to a criminal who has to die. I rejoiced in being able to pass two whole days in her company.

It was then that Sapt and I decided that we must risk a blow, for we heard from Johann that the King was growing thin and ill from his imprisonment. Now a man, be he King or no king, may as well die quickly from a bullet or a knife, as let his life waste away in a prison. That thought made action necessary in the interests of the King. From my own point of view, it grew more necessary still. The Marshal urged on me to make arrangements for my marriage. This affected me much, for the longer I remained near the Princess, the more I loved her—and indeed, she my unworthy self.

Sapt told me after that my behaviour at this time was like that of a dictator; I would allow no interference, and listen to no advice that did not lead to action. I could see nothing that made life sweet, so I took my life in my hand and carried it as carelessly as a man might an old stick.

The next night after our decision, Sapt and I, with Fritz and six men with horses, set out secretly for Zenda Castle. Sapt carried a rope, and I a short heavy stick and a knife. Passing round the town, we went cautiously on till we were a quarter of a mile from the old Castle. It was a dark stormy night, very suitable for the plan I had in mind.
The six men hid with the horses in the shelter of some trees. Sapt had a whistle to call them if necessary. We had met no one, Michael no doubt thinking I was still really ill in bed. The three of us were now at the edge of the moat, and Sapt tied the rope to a tree. I pulled off my boots, put my stick between my teeth, the knife in my belt, and after a soft “Good-bye”, I dropped into the water. I was going to have a look at Jacob’s Ladder.

Slowly and carefully I swam along by the high dark walls. There were lights in the new part of the Castle on the other side, and I heard laughter and merry shouts. No doubt Rupert Hentzau was enjoying himself over his wine.

A dark shape appeared in front of me. It was the pipe. I was drawing near to it, when I saw something else, which made my heart stand still. The nose of a boat could be seen on the other side of the pipe. Who was this guarding Michael’s invention? Was he awake or asleep? Close by the wall I found there was a narrow shelf of stone under the water. It was part of the foundations of the Castle. I was able to stand on it with my head and shoulders out of the water. Carefully I crept along till I reached the pipe, and then looked round it, where there was a space between it and the wall.

There was a man in the boat. A gun rested beside him. He did not move, and I listened to
his breathing. It was heavy and regular. By heaven, he slept! I continued to creep along, between the pipe and the wall, till I was within two feet of his face. He was a big fellow—Max Holf, the brother of Johann. I quietly took the knife from my belt, got as close as I could and prepared to strike.

Of all the deeds of my life I always hate to think of this. But I said to myself, "It is war—and the King's life is in danger". Then I raised the knife and brought it down in his heart. He just had time to open his eyes in fear, but fortunately for me, no time to scream. He sank back into the boat.

Leaving him where he was, I turned to Jacob's Ladder. My time was short, for probably another guard would come soon to take Max's place. I examined the pipe from every side, but could find no crack or opening. However, just where the under side went into the wall, covering the window, there was a small beam of light, and I heard voices! Detchard was speaking to the King.

"Have you anything to ask, Sire, before I leave you for the night?"

The King's voice followed. It was his, though it was weak, nothing like the merry one I had heard in the forest and at the lodge.

"Ask my brother", said the King, "to kill me. I am dying by inches here".
“The Duke does not desire your death, Sire—yet”, mocked Detchard. “When he does, this is your path to Heaven!”

The light disappeared, and I heard the sound of the door being bolted. It was too dangerous to try to speak to the King. He might give an exclamation of astonishment. So I climbed and into the boat to remove the body of Max. The storm was blowing more loudly now, so I was able to row fast.

I came to the tree, and as I did so, a whistle sounded over the moat behind me.

“Hullo, Max!” someone shouted.

“Quick, Sapt”, I said. I tied the rope round the body, and when I had climbed up myself we pulled up Max.

“Whistle for our men”, I said. “No talk now”.

Spat did so, but next moment three men on horseback came along the road from the Castle. We saw them, but being on foot, we could not be seen. We heard our own men coming up from the other direction with a shout.

“It’s as dark as the devil”, said someone, and I recognized Rupert’s voice. Next moment shots rang out. Our men had met them. We ran forward to join in the fight. Shouts and cries of pain showed that someone at least was hit. Suddenly a horse came towards me, and I leapt to its head. It was Rupert Hentzau.
“At last!” I cried.

For we appeared to have him. He had only his sword in his hand. My men were close behind him. Sapt and Fritz were just near, for I had run faster than they.

“At last!” I cried again.

“It’s the play-actor!” cried he, using his sword against my stick, which he cut into two. I thought he would have me then, so jumped out of reach of his blows. The devil was in Rupert, for urging his horse forward he went straight for the moat and leapt in, the shots of our party falling all round him. With one ray of moonlight we could have shot him, but it was as black as ink, and in the darkness he swam with his horse to the corner of the Castle wall and escaped.

“What’s happened?” I asked.

“Lauengram and Krafstein both killed, Sire”, said one of my men.

“And Max”, said I. “That’s three of them”.

As it was impossible to hide what had taken place, we threw the bodies into the moat. Then we found that three of my gentlemen had also been killed. We carried their bodies home with us. We were heavy at heart for the death of our friends, troubled about the King, and annoyed at the second success young Rupert had gained over us.
As for me, I was also ashamed that I had killed no man in open fight, nor was I pleased to hear Rupert call me a play-actor.

It was impossible to keep secret the deaths of so many gentlemen, so I gave out a strict order that no duelling would be allowed in future. I also sent a public apology to Michael, and he sent me one; our one point of union was that neither of us could tell the truth about the other. Unfortunately for me, secrecy meant delay. The King might die in prison, or even be carried off somewhere else.

One of the strange results of the necessity of being friendly to Michael in public was that the town of Zenda became in the daytime a place where both sides could meet safely. By night it was doubtless a different matter. Riding down one day with Flavia and Sapt, we had a meeting which in one way was rather amusing, but in another rather difficult for me. An important-looking person in a carriage got out and came towards me. It was the Chief of the Strelnau Police.

"Your Majesty's orders about duelling are being carefully attended to", he said.

"Is that what brings you to Zenda?" I asked, determined that he would have to go back to Strelnau at once. His presence might prove troublesome.
“Why no, Sire. I am here at the request of the British Ambassador”.

“What ever does he want?” I asked carelessly, but secretly anxious.

“A young countryman of his, Sire, a man of some rank, is missing. His friends have not heard from him for two months, and there is reason to believe that he was last seen in Zenda”.

Flavia was not paying attention. I dared not look at Sapt.

“What reason?”

“A friend of his in Paris has told us that it is possible he came here, and the railway officials here remember his name on his luggage”.

“What was his name?”

“Rassendyll, Sire”. Glancing at Flavia he lowered his voice. “It is thought he followed a lady here. Has Your Majesty heard of Madame de Mauban?”

“Why, yes”, said I, my eye moving to the Castle.

“She arrived in Ruritania about the same time as this Rassendyll”.

“You are suggesting?”

“Supposing he were in love with the lady”, he whispered. “Nothing has been heard of him
for two months”. This time it was his eye that travelled towards the Castle.

“Yes, the lady is there”, I said quietly. “But I don’t suppose this gentleman—Rassendyll, did you say his name was?—is there too”.

“The Duke does not like rivals, Sire”.

“You are suggesting a very serious accusation”, I said. “You had better go straight back to Strelsu—

“To Strelsu? But it is here, Sire, that—

“Go back to Strelsu”, I repeated. “Tell the Ambassador that you have information, and will tell him in a week’s time of the result of your inquiries”.

“The Ambassador is very pressing, Sire”.

“You must quiet him. Meanwhile I will look into the matter here myself”.

He promised to obey me, and to leave that night. At all costs inquiries after me must be stopped for a week or two, and this clever official had come surprisingly near the truth.
Chapter 10

A DANGEROUS PLAN

Just as we were turning to ride back to Tarlenheim, we saw a procession coming from Zenda Castle. First came two mounted servants in uniform, then a carriage carrying a coffin, and behind, a man in plain black clothes.

“It’s Rupert”, whispered Sapt.

Rupert it was, and seeing us, he left his party and rode towards us, bowing respectfully.

“Who is the dead man, my lord?” I asked.

“My friend Lauengram”, he replied sadly, but a quick smile shot for a moment across his face as he saw Sapt’s hand in his pocket. He guessed—and rightly—that Sapt held a revolver.

“Was the poor man killed in the fight?” asked Flavia.

“Sir”, I said, “no one regrets the affair more than I”.

“Your Majesty’s words are kind”, he replied.

الفصل العاشر

خطة خطيرة

فيما كنا نتجه للعودة إلى تارلينهم، رأينا مسيرة من قلعة زندا.

في المقدمة كان خادمان بالزي الرسمي ثم عربة تحمل نعشاً وفي الخلف رجل في ثياب بسيطة سوداء.

هيس سابت «إنه روبوت».

لقد كان روبرت وعندما رأينا ترك رفته واتجه نحونا، منحنيناً باحترام.

سألته «من الرجل الميت، سيدي؟»

اجاب بحزن «صديقي لوينغرام»، غير أن إبتسامة سريعة بدأ على وجهه لحظة حين رأى يد سابت في جيبه، لقد صدق ظنه أن سابت كان يحمل مسدساً.

سألت فلافيا «هل قتل المسكن في المعركة؟»

قلت «سيدي، ليس هناك من يأسف لما حصل أكثر مني».

فأجاب «كلمات جلالتك لطيفة. آسف لصديقي، لكن...
“I am sorry for my friend. Yet, Sire, others must soon lie as he lies now”.

“True”, said I. “We should all remember it”.

“Even kings, Sire”, added Rupert daringly.

He moved off. With a sudden thought I rode after him. He turned quickly, fearing that, even in the presence of the dead, and before a lady’s eyes, I would harm him.

“You fought as a brave man the other night”, I said. “Come, you are young, sir. If you will give up your prisoner alive to me, you shall come to no hurt. I swear to you”.

He looked at me with a mocking smile.

“Look here”, he said, “you refused an offer from Black Michael. Hear one from me”. He lowered his voice. “Attack the Castle boldly. Let Sapt and Tarlenheim lead”.

“Go on”, said I.

“Arrange the time with me”.

“I have such confidence in you, my lord!”

“Tut! I’m talking business now. Sapt and Fritz will fall; Black Michael will fall——”

“What!”

“Black Michael will fall, like the dog he is. The prisoner, as you call him, will go down Jacob’s Ladder—you know that!—and only
two men will be left, I, Rupert of Hentzau, and you, the King of Ruritania”.

He paused, and in a voice shaking with eagerness went on, “Is not that a plan to try? For you a throne and a princess! For me, a high position and Your Majesty’s gratitude”.

“Surely”, I exclaimed, “while you’re still alive, the devil has no master”.

“Well, think it over”, he said. “It would take more than any feeling of honour to keep me from that girl——”

“Get out of my reach!” I said; and yet, in a moment I began to laugh at the very boldness of the fellow.

“Would you turn against your master?” I asked.

He swore at Michael, and said, “He gets in my way, you know. He’s a jealous fool! I nearly stuck a knife in him last night”.

I was learning something now, so I asked carelessly, “A lady?”

“Yes, and a beautiful one; but you’ve seen her”.

“Ahh! was it at a tea-party when some of your friends got on the wrong side of the table?”

“That fool Detchard. If only I had been there!”
“And the Duke interferes?”

“Well”, said Rupert, laughing, “I interfere. Michael doesn’t like it. She prefers him, the foolish creature. Well, think over my proposal”.

He went off to rejoin his procession, and I rode home with Flavia, wondering about the wickedness of men. Of all the men I had ever met, Rupert was certainly the wickedest!

As we reached Tarlenheim Castle, a boy handed me a note. I tore it open and read:

“I warned you once. In the name of God, and if you are a man, rescue me from this house of murderers! – A. de M.”

I handed it to Sapt, but all that he said was:

“Whose fault brought her there?”

Although I felt sorry for her, I seemed as powerless to help her as I had been to help the King. Matters soon became worse, for, in addition to the danger of the police inquiries about my disappearance, a more pressing one arose. The people at Strelswa were already murmuring about my absence from the city, and Marshal Strakenz came with the Chancellor to ask me to fix a day for my betrothal, which in Ruritania was as binding as the marriage ceremony itself.
Flavia was sitting by me, and so I was forced to appoint a day two weeks ahead. This caused great happiness all through the Kingdom, so that only two men in the country were annoyed—I mean Black Michael and myself, and only one did not know of it—the King.

We heard from Johann how the news was received at Zenda Castle, but we heard something more important. The King was very sick; in fact, he was too weak to move. They had sent for a doctor, who was terribly frightened at what he saw, but the Duke kept him a prisoner in the same room as the King. Antoinette de Mauban had also been helping to nurse the sick man, for it was quite clear that his life was in danger. And here was I, strong, healthy—and free.

"And how do they watch the King now?" I asked Johann.

"Detchard and Bersonin watch by night, Rupert Hentzau and De Gautet by day, sir, except that the Duke will never allow Rupert Hentzau to be there when Madame de Mauban is with the King, sir."

Johann begged us to keep him at Tarlenheim, but we gave him more money and convinced him to return to tell Antoinette that we were doing all we could, and if possible, she should speak some words of comfort to the
King, for nothing is worse for the sick than despair.

We got an exact statement from Johann about where the different people in the Castle slept. The two of the Six (now only Four), who were not watching the King, lay in a room just above. It was reached by some steps from just inside the main door. Michael himself had a room in the new Castle on the first floor, and Madame de Mauban one also. The Duke locked her door after she had gone in— I understood why after my conversation with Rupert. The drawbridge was drawn back at night, and only Michael had the key.

"And where do you sleep?" I asked Johann.

"In the entrance hall of the new Castle, sir, with the other servants."

"Listen", I said. "I have promised you twenty thousand crowns. You shall have fifty thousand if you will do what I ask of you tomorrow night. At two o'clock in the morning exactly, you must open the front door. Say you want some fresh air, or anything you like. Do not fail by an instant."

"Will you be there, sir?"

"Ask no questions. That is all I want you to do."

"May I run away when I open the door?"
“Yes, as quick as your legs will carry you. One thing more—carry this note to Madame de Mauban, and tell her that all our lives depend on her doing exactly what it says”.

The man was shaking, but I had to trust to what he had of courage and to what he had of honesty. I dared not wait, and as I had failed at Jacob’s Ladder, I must try the other side.

I then called Sapt and Fritz and explained my plan. Sapt shook his head.

“Why can’t you wait?” he asked.

“The King may die”.

“Michael will have to act before that happens; is he going to leave you on the throne?”

“It’s not only that. Supposing the King does live—for two weeks more?”

Sapt bit his moustache. Fritz put his hand on my shoulder.

“You are right, ‘Rudolf’”, he said. “Let us go and make the attempt”.

“Fritz and I will go”, said Sapt. “Then if we fail, and Michael kills the King—us, too—you will still be alive to rule”.

“No”, I said. “I have been a deceiver for the sake of another. I will not be one for my own profit. If the King is not alive on the betrothal day, I will tell the world the truth, whatever happens.
“You shall go with us, then”, said Sapt.

This was my plan:

A strong party under Sapt’s command was to creep up to the door of the new Castle. If they met anyone on the way, they must kill them, with swords if possible to avoid noise. When Johann opened the door, they were to rush in and seize the servants. At the same moment—and the whole plan depended on this—a woman’s cry was to ring out from Antoinette de Mauban’s room. Again and again she was to cry, “Help! Help! Michael, help! It’s Rupert Hentzau!” Then Michael, we hoped, would rush out of his room near by, and fall into the hands of Sapt and his men. Still the cries would go on. My men, getting the key from Michael, would send the draw-bridge across. It would be curious if Rupert, thus hearing his name being used falsely, did not descend from his room and cross the bridge to see what the matter was. De Gautet might or might not come with him; we had to leave that to chance.

And when Rupert was on the bridge? That was my part. I was going to swim in the moat again and hide by the bridge. Rupert—and de Gautet, if he came too—would be killed by me in the dark. There would be only two men left, and we should have the keys. We must rush the room where Detchard and Bersonin were, and trust, in the general confusion, that they would...
defend themselves instead of obeying their commands to kill the King first. There was a further chance that, hearing what he supposed to be a quarrel between Michael and Rupert, Detchard would leave only Bersonin to guard the King, and himself cross the drawbridge to help Michael.

That was the plan—and only despair drove us to it. To hide our preparations somewhat, I had the whole of Tarslenheim Castle brightly lit, as if we were dancing and enjoying ourselves. I ordered Marshal Strakencz, if we did not return by morning, to march openly to Zenda Castle, demand to see the King, and if he did not see him, to take Flavia with him to Strelau at once and proclaim her Queen, telling the country that Black Michael had killed the King.

To say truth, that was what I thought would happen, for I did not think that Michael, the King or I had more than another day to live.

It was late when we had finished making our arrangements, so I went to say good night to Flavia. I took off a ring I had—a family ring—and gave it to her saying:

"Wear that ring even though you wear another when you are Queen."

"Whatever I wear, I will keep this till I die" said she, as she kissed the ring. And there were tears in her eyes and in mine.
Chapter 11

RUPERT AND MICHAEL

The night was fine and clear. I had wished for dirty weather like that on my first trip. However, I thought that by keeping close under the wall of the old Castle I should not be seen from the windows of the new building across the moat. They might search the moat, but it was unlikely. Johann had told me that Jacob's Ladder had been strengthened, and could not be moved. Even if Johann was not true to us, he did not know my plan, and would expect to see me with my friends at the front door when he opened it at two o'clock.

At midnight Sapt's party left, going by lonely ways and through the woods to Zenda Castle. If all went well, they would be at the front door at a quarter to two. If the door was not opened, Fritz would go round the other side of the Castle and meet me, if I was still alive. If I failed to meet him, they were to return to Tarlenheim, gather as much force as possible, and attack the Castle. For if I was not there to meet Fritz, I...
should be dead. And that would mean that the King, too, would be killed a few seconds after me.

I myself set out alone. I was warmly dressed, for there was no need to become so cold in the water of the moat that I might be unable to do my part properly. I took a light rope and a small silk ladder to help me to get out of the moat. I went a shorter way than the others, and about half-past twelve, got off my horse and tied it to a tree out of sight, and then went down to the moat.

I tied the rope to a tree trunk, and let myself into the water. As I began to swim slowly along, I heard the Castle clock strike a quarter to one. After a few minutes I came to Jacob's Ladder, in the shadow of which I waited. Ten yards away I could see the drawbridge; it was still in its place. I could see, on the other side of the moat, the windows of the Duke's and Madame de Mauban's rooms, if Johann had explained correctly.

Suddenly the Duke's window became bright. It was open, and Antoinette herself looked out. I wanted to cry, "Remember!" but I dared not. A moment later a man came up and stood beside her; she sprang away from him, and then I heard a low laugh. It was Rupert! An instant afterwards I saw him. He was whispering to Antoinette.
"Gently, gently!" I murmured. "You're too soon, my boy!"

Rupert came and looked out. "Hang Black Michael!" I heard him say. "Isn't the Princess enough for him? Is he to have everything? What the devil do you see in Black Michael?"

"If I told him what you say——" she began.

"Well, tell him", said Rupert carelessly. Then he suddenly sprang forward and kissed her. He laughed, and cried, "There's something to tell him."

The unhappy woman raised her hands above her head, in prayer or in despair.

"Do you know what he's promised me, if I cut the play-actor's throat?" Rupert went on. "He'll take the Princess, and I—but I don't want to wait, that's all".

I heard the noise of a door opening, and then Black Michael's voice: "What are you doing here, sir?"

He came to the window, and took Rupert by the arm.

"The moat can hold more than the King", he said angrily.

"Does Your Highness threaten me?" asked Rupert boldly.

"A threat is more warning that most men get from me", answered Michael.
“Yet Rudolf Rassendyll has been much threatened, and still lives.”

“Am I in fault because my servants make stupid mistakes?”

“Your Highness has not yet run any risk of making mistakes”, mocked Rupert.

It was telling the Duke he was a coward, but Black Michael had self-control. His voice was quite calm as he answered:

“Enough, enough! We mustn’t fight, Rupert. Are Detchard and Bersonin at their posts?”

“They are, sir”.

“I need you no more”.

“Oh, I’m not tired”, said Rupert.

“Sir, please leave us. In ten minutes the draw-bridge will be drawn back, and I suppose you don’t want to swim to your bed”.

Rupert’s figure disappeared. I heard the door open and shut. Michael and Antoinette were no longer to be seen. Then I heard Rupert’s voice from the end of the bridge.

“De Gautet, unless you want a bath before your bed, come along!”

A moment later the two men crossed the draw-bridge, and as soon as they were over, it was drawn back. The clock struck a quarter past one.
I think some ten minutes had passed when I heard a slight noise near me, beyond the pipe. I was astonished to see it was Rupert in the door-
way of the old Castle. He came towards me, then climbed down some steps cut in the wall that I had not noticed before. He had a sword between his teeth. If it had been a matter of my life only, I should have swum to meet him, for I would have loved to fight it out with him then and there! But I kept myself back, for it was the King's life that I was there to save.

He swam quietly and easily across the moat, and climbed up by the new Castle gate. I heard him unlock the door, and then he disappeared inside. Clearly there were other plans as well as mine being acted on in the Castle that night.

It at once came to my mind that whatever evil deed Rupert was busy with, the fact that he was out of the old Castle was a great advantage to me. It left only three men for me to deal with. Ah! if I only had the keys!

There was still a light in Antoinette's window, but Michael's was dark. He was no doubt fast asleep in bed by now. Then from across the moat I heard the sound of a door being unlocked—slowly and quietly. I was just wondering what on earth it was when I got the answer. Before my friends could be near the main door of the new Castle, before Johann would have thought to go near to open it, there was a sud-

مضت عشر دقائق على ما أعتقد حتى سمعت صوتاً خافتاً بالقرب مني خلف الأبواب. وذهبت حين رأيت روبرت في مدخل باب القلعة القديمة. توجه نحوه ثم نزل على نزاع درجات لم ألاحظها في الجدار قبلاً. وكان يمسك سيفاً بين أكمامه. لو كانت المسألة ترتكز على حياتي فقط لكنها سجعت لمفاقاتها، إذ كنت أتعلم مبارزة هناك في تلك اللحظة! لكنني مكنت في مكاني لأن حياة الملك هي التي كنت هناك من أجل إنقاذها.

سج روبرت بهدوء وسهولة عبر باب القلعة المائي وتسلق بمحاذاة باب القلعة الجديد. سمعته يفتح الباب ثم ابتلى داخلاً. من الواضح أن هناك خططا أخرى يجري تنفيذها بالإضافة إلى خطتي تلك الليلة في القلعة.

خطر بالرائي أن لا قرو أي خطة سيطرانية كان روبرت منها من خذله، فمجرد وجود خارج القلعة القديمة كان في صالحني إلى حد بعيد، إذ أن ذلك أبقى لي ثلاثة رجال أهتم بهم. حبذا لو كانت الفائتة معني!

كان الضوء ما زال منبعثا من نافذة الطوارئ لكن غرفة ميشال كانت مظلمة. لا شك أنه مستغرق في نوم عميق في فراشته. ثم سمعت عبر الخندق صوت باب يفتح ببطء وهدوء. وكانت أسئلة ماذا يمكن أن يكون حين جاءني الحساب. قبل أن يصبح أصدقاء وأوش في مقدمة من المدخل الرئيسي للقلعة الجديدة، وقبل أن يقرر جوهان الأفرباب من الباب لفتحه، حصل ارتباط مجاهي في
den crash from Antoinette’s room. It sounded as though someone had thrown down a lamp; at the same moment the room went dark. Then a cry rang out loud through the night: “Help! Help! Michael, help!”

Mad that I could do nothing, I climbed up the stone steps and stood in the gateway of the old Castle. At any rate, no one could come in or out without meeting me.

There was another cry from Antoinette. Then Michael’s door was thrown open, and I heard the Duke’s voice shouting: “Open the door! In God’s name, what’s the matter?” There was the sound of a door handle being fiercely twisted. He was answered in the very words I had written in my letter:

“Help, Michael! Rupert Hentzau!”

I heard the door broken open, then the ring of sound of crossed swords. At the same time, a window above my head opened, and De Gautet’s voice cried out, “What’s the matter?” It all happened so quickly that it is impossible to tell it clearly. Everything seemed to come at once. Antoinette’s window was thrown open, and I heard the cry of a wounded man. Then Rupert appeared in sight, his back to the window, and he was fighting hard.

“Ah, Johann, there’s one for you! Come on, Michael!”
Johann was there, then, come to the rescue of the Duke! How could he open the front door? "Help!" cried the Duke’s voice, weak and faint.

There were footsteps on the stairs behind me, but before anyone came out, I saw Rupert with five or six men round him. Suddenly he jumped on to the window, and stayed there a second, laughing like a madman, drunk with blood. Then he threw himself straight into the moat.

At the same moment, De Gautet’s face appeared in the oor beside me. I hit him with all my strength, and he fell dead in the doorway. Fiercely and hastily I searched him for the keys. At last I had them. There were only three. I tried one in the door leading to the King’s room. It was the right one! I unlocked the door as quietly as I could, passed through, and relocked it behind me. There were some steps before me, as I saw from an oil-lamp on the wall. I took down the lamp and listened.

"Whatever is it?" I heard a voice say from behind a door facing me at the bottom of the stairs. Another answered: "Shall we kill him?"

There was a pause—terrible enough for me, then Detchard said: "Wait a little. There'll be trouble if we do it too soon".

Next moment I heard the door being...
unlocked, and I put out the lamp, replacing it on the wall.

“It’s dark”, Bersonin said. “The lamp’s out. Give me that one”.

The crisis had come now.

I rushed down the steps, and threw myself at the door, which swung open. Bersonin stood there, sword in hand. Detchard was sitting on a sofa. In his astonishment at seeing me, Bersonin fell back a step or two. Detchard jumped to his sword. I rushed madly at the Belgian, and drove him against the wall. He was a brave man, but no swordsman, and in a moment he lay on the floor before me. I turned. Detchard was not there. Faithful to his orders, he had not risked a fight with me, but had run straight into the inner room, and locked the door behind him.

And surely he would have killed the King, and me also, had it not been for one faithful man who gave his life for the King. For when I broke the door in, the sight I saw was this. The King stood in the corner of the room. Weak from his sickness, he could do nothing but move his bound hands uselessly up and down; he was even laughing like a man going mad. Detchard and the doctor were in the middle of the room, and the doctor had thrown himself on the murderer. He held Detchard’s arms to his sides for an instant. Then Detchard forced
himself free, and as I entered, he drove his sword through the unfortunate man.

Then he turned on me, crying: "At last!"

We were sword to sword. By a blessed chance neither he nor Bersonin had been wearing their revolvers. I found them afterwards on a shelf near the door; my sudden rush had stopped them from reaching them. Yes, we were man to man; and we began to fight silently and hard. He was a better swordsman than I, and slowly he forced me back against the wall. I saw a smile on his face, and he injured me in the left arm.

I take no glory for winning the fight, for he was the best swordsman I have ever met, and he would certainly have killed me, and then done his murderer's work, if we had been alone. But just then, the King, half-mad and weak as he was, began jumping up and down, crying: "It's Brother Rudolf! I'll help you, Brother Rudolf!" He picked up a chair and came towards us.

"Come on!" I cried. "Come on! Drive it against his legs".

The King laughed, and came forward, holding the chair in front of him.

With an angry cry, Detchard jumped back, and before I knew what he was doing, had turned his sword against the King. He made one fierce cut, and the King, with a cry,
dropped to the floor. Then Detchard was at me again, but his own hand had prepared his destruction, for in turning he stepped in the blood flowing from the dead doctor. He slipped and fell. Before he could recover I was on him, and I drove my point through his neck. He fell in a heap across the body of the faithful doctor.

Was the King dead? It was my first thought. I rushed to where he lay, and tried to listen to his heart, but just then I heard a sound that brought me to my feet in a second. It was the drawbridge being pulled across. I should be caught like a rat in a trap, and the King with me, if he was still alive. He must take his chance now.

As I passed into the other room, I saw the revolvers, and took one. At the door of the outer room I stopped to listen. Who was pushing the drawbridge across? My friends? I would have given the world to hear Sapt's voice, as I stood there trying to get my breath and binding up my wound with a strip of my shirt.

Thinking that I could defend the narrow door at the top of the steps I dragged myself up there, and stopped again.

Then came a curious sound—strange for the time and place. It was an easy, scornful laugh—the laugh of young Rupert Hentzau! I could scarcely believe that any man could laugh, but it told me that my men had not
come, for they would have shot Rupert before this. The clock struck half-past two! My God! The door had not been opened! They had gone to the place where I had to meet Fritz and not found me! By now I thought they were back at Tarlenheim with the news of the King's death—and mine.
Chapter 12

FACE TO FACE IN THE FOREST

For a moment or two I sank discouraged against the door. Then I started up again, for Rupert cried scornfully:

"Well, the bridge is there! Come over it! Let's see Black Michael. Keep back, you dogs! Michael, come and fight for her!"

If there was to be a fight, I might yet do something, so I turned the key in the main door and looked out.

It was a strange scene. At the far end of the bridge was a group of the Duke's servants, some holding lights, others armed with old-fashioned steel weapons. They were pale and afraid; in fact, all frightened at Rupert standing in the middle of the bridge, his sword in his hand. At the back I saw Johann holding a handkerchief to a wound in his face. They dared not move forward.

By a marvellous chance I was master. The cowards would not oppose me any more than

الفصل الثاني عشر

وجها لوجه في الغابة

تهاويت عند الباب يأساً لدقيقة أو اثنين ثم قمت مجدداً،
إذ صرخ روبرت مستهزئاً:
«حسناً، هاك الجسر! إسلكه! فلت ميشال الشرير. ابتدوا أيا الكلاب! ميشال، تعال وقاتل في سبيلها!»
إن كانت هناك من قتال فباستطاعتي فعل شيء إذا أدرت المفتاح في الباب الرئيسي ونظرت إلى الخارج.
كان مشهد غريب. عند نهاية الجسر رأت مجموعة من خدم الدوق عمل بعضهم المشعل، والبعض الآخر أسلحة فلولاذة قديمة المهندس. كان يبدو عليهم الخوف والذعر، إذ كان الجميع في الحقيقة خائفًا لوقف روبرت في منتصف الجسر وسيفه في يده.
في المؤخرة شاهدت جوهان يضع منديلًا على جرح في وجهه. لم يجوز على التحرك إلى الأمام. فوجدت نفسي بصدفة عجيبة
سيد الوقيق.
they dared attack Rupert. I had only to raise my revolver to shoot him dead, for he had no idea that I was there. But I did nothing—why, I hardly know to this day. I had killed one man from behind that night, and another by luck rather than skill—perhaps it was that. Again, as cal as the man was, I did not like being one of a crowd against him—may be it was that. But stronger than either of these feelings was one of curiosity. I just wanted to see what would happen. "Michael, you dog! If you can stand, come on!" cried Rupert.

The answer to this came in the wild cry of a woman:

"He's dead! My God, he's dead!"

"Dead!" shouted Rupert. "I struck better than I knew". And he laughed in triumph. Then he went on: "Down with your weapons there! I'm your master now. Down with them, I say!"

I believe they would have obeyed, but as he spoke came new things. First distant shouts and knockings from the other side of the new Castle. My heart sprang with joy. It must be my men, come by a fortunate disobedience to find me. The noise continued, but no one seemed to pay attention, for just then Antoinette herself pushed through the servants and came on to the bridge. She was in a loose white night-dress,
her dark hair streamed over her shoulders, her face was deathly pale and her eyes shone wildly. In her trembling hands she held a revolver, which she raised and fired at Rupert. The shot missed him and struck the wooden door above my head.

"Indeed, Madame", laughed Rupert, "if your eyes had been no more dangerous than your shooting, I should not be in this position—nor Black Michael dead—to-night!"

She tried to calm herself, and aimed at him steadily. He would be mad to risk it. Thinking he would run towards me, I covered him with my own revolver.

However, crying, "I cannot kill where I've kissed", Rupert jumped over the bridge into the moat. At the same moment I heard a rush of feet, and a voice I knew—it was Sapt's—cry: "God! it's the Duke—dead!"

Then I knew that the King needed me no more, and throwing away my revolver, I sprang on to the bridge. There was a cry of wonder from the group of servants, "The King!" and then I, like Rupert, jumped into the moat after him.

I saw him fifteen yards ahead. He swam easily and well. I was tired out and wounded. I could not go so fast. As we reached the corner of the Castle wall, I called out to him: "Stop,
Rupert, stop!” I saw him look over his shoulder, but he didn’t stop, nor did he know me in the dark. There was no way to climb out of the moat except by the rope that I had tied to the tree. Rupert might find it, or he might not.

I was soon to know. I heard him exclaim: “How the devil comes this here?” Then he laid hold of the rope and pulled himself out. At the same moment I arrived, and he saw me.

“Hullo! who’s here?” he cried in surprise. “Why, it’s the play-actor! How did you get here, man?”

I laid hold of the rope, but I stopped. He stood on the bank, sword in hand, and he could cut my head open as I came up.

“Never mind”, said I, “but as I am here, I think I’ll remain”.

He smiled down at me. “These women——” he began; when suddenly the great bell of the Castle started to ring loudly, and a loud shout reached us from the moat. Rupert waved his hand to me.

“I should like a fight with you, but it’s a little too hot”, said he, and off he went.

In an instant I was climbing the rope. I saw him thirty yards away, running like a deer towards the shelter of the forest. For once he preferred wisdom to boldness. I rushed after
him, calling him to stand. He would not. Unwounded and strong, he got farther and farther from me at every step; but forgetting everything in the world except him and my thirst for his blood, I pressed on, and soon the deep shades of the forest of Zenda swallowed us both, pursued and pursuer.

It was three o’clock now, and day was breaking. I was on a long straight grass path, and a hundred yards in front ran young Rupert. He looked over his shoulder and waved mockingly, for he saw that I could not seize him. A moment later he disappeared from my sight, and I thought all was over.

I was just sinking to the ground exhausted when I heard a scream ring through the forest—a woman’s scream. Putting forth the last of my strength, I ran on, and saw him again. He was in the act of lifting a girl down from her horse. It was her scream I had heard. She was a farmer’s daughter, I thought, on the way to Zenda market. He treated her gently, gave her a kiss and some money, but did not leave at once. He waited for me.

“What did you do in the Castle?” he asked as I drew near.

“I killed three of your friends”, said I.

“What! You got to the King’s room?”

“Yes, and I pray that he still lives. I killed Detchard”.

فَأَكَرَّمَ فِي كُلْ خَطَأ يَخْطُوهَا، لَكِنَّى نَسَبَ كَلّ شَيْءٍ فِي الْعَالَم
ٍسَوَى تَعَطُّشِ لَدَهُ، مُضَيِّبَةٌ فِي مَلَاحُقِهِ وَسُعُرَانُ مَا
ابتُلَتُ ظَلَامُ الْغَابِةِ كَلِانَا، الْتَرِيدَةُ وَالْمَطَارِدُ.

كَانَتِ السَّاعَةُ الْآَنْ الثَّلَاثَةُ فَجْرًا، وَكَتَنَّى الْآنَ عَلَى مُرُ وَعْش
طُولِي، وَأَمَامِي عَلَى بَعْدَ مَنْتَرَأَةٍ كَانَ رُوبِرْتُ الشَّاب
يَرْكُضُ، يَنْظُرُ إِلَى الْخَفْفِ وَلِيَ لَا سَخْرَيَةً، إِذْ لَحَظُ أَنْ لَمْ يَكْن
بِإِسْتَعْطَاطِي الْقُبْضِ عَلَيْهِ. ثُمَّ اَخْتَفَى بَعْدَ خَطْهَا مِنْ أَمَامِ نَافُظِي.

وُضِعْتِ أَنْ كُلّ شَيْءٍ قد اَنْتَهِى.

فيما كنت أرتقي إلى الأرض مرها، سمعت صرخة تنطلق
في الغابة—صرخة إمرأة.

أَتَجَمَّعَتْ مَا تَبْقِي مِنْ قَوَى وَرَكْضْتْ، وَرَأِيْتُ هُوَ جَدِيدٌ.
كَانْ يَجَاهِلُ إِنْزَالُ فَتْانَةٍ عَنْ جَوَائْهَا، كَانَ صَرَائِخُهَا هُوَ الَّذِي
سَمِعتَ. كَانَتُ ابْنَةٌ مَزَاعُ، فِي طَرَيقِهَا عَلَى مَا يَبْدُو إِلَى سوق
زِنْدَا. حَالَلَّها بَلْطَفٍ ثُمَّ قَبِلَهَا وأَعْطَاهَا بَعْضٌ الْمَالِ، لَكِنَّهُ لم
يَذِهِبُ فِي الَّحَالِ، بَلْ بَقِيَ فِي الْعَتَارِي.

"فَسَأَلْتُ عِنْدَ ما اَقْرَبْتُ "مَا فَعَلْتُ فِي الْقَلْعَةٍ؟"
أَجَبَتْ "قَتَلْتَ ثَلَاثَةٌ مِنْ رُفَاقِكَ".
"مَاذَا؟ هَلْ وَلَصَتْ إِلَى غَرَفَةِ الْمَلِك؟"
"أَجَلَّ، وَأَرْجُو أَنْ يَكُونَ مَا زَالُ حَيًّا. لَقَدْ قُتِلَ دِينِشَاردّ".
“You fool!” he said pleasantly.

“One thing more I did. I spared your life. I was behind you on the bridge with a revolver in my hand”.

“Then I was between two fires?”

“Get off your horse”, I said, “and fight like a man”.

“What? In front of a lady?” he mocked.

Then in my anger, hardly knowing what I did, I rushed at him. He hesitated, and I struck at him with my sword. I reached his face, and he was puzzled at my fierceness. But before he could ride at me and finish me off there was a shout from behind me, and at the turning of the path I saw a man on a horse. It was Fritz von Tarlenheim. Rupert knew that the game was up. He cried:

“Au revoir, Rassendyll!”

And with his face streaming blood, he bowed to me and rode off at full speed. Fritz fired a shot at him, and struck his sword, which fell to the ground. Away he rode; he was laughing, and once he turned to wave his hand. Thus he disappeared—careless but careful, graceful and graceless, handsome but evil, wicked but unconquered.

I threw my sword on the ground and cried to Fritz to pursue him. But Fritz stopped his
horse, jumped down and ran to me. And indeed it was time, for the wound Detchard had given me was bleeding again.

"Then give me the horse", I cried, and trying to get to my feet, I fell full length on the ground. Fritz knelt beside me.

"Fritz!" I said.

"Yes, friend", he answered, tender as a woman.

"Is the King alive?"

He took his handkerchief and wiped my lips. "Thanks to the bravest gentleman that lives", said he softly, "the King is alive".

The little farm-girl stood by us, weeping for fright and wonder, and I tried to say "Hurrah!" but could not. Tired and cold, I just laid my head back in Fritz's arm and fell asleep.

I knew afterwards the full story of what happened on that night in the Castle of Zenda. Antoinette told how, there had been fights between Rupert and Michael about her before, and this last one was only one of many. Rupert, coming to her room when he knew that Michael had gone, made her cry out for help before the appointed time. At first this seemed to have ruined our hopes, but as it happened it helped them. Rupert and Michael had fought, but Rupert had jumped from the window without knowing that he had killed his master. As for Sapt and Fritz, they had arrived at the Cas-
tle door as arranged, and had waited till half-past two. Then, according to my orders, he had sent Fritz to search the banks of the moat. I was not there. Hurrying back, Fritz told Sapt, who wanted to ride back at full speed to Tarlenheim, as I had said. Fritz, however, would not hear of it, orders or no orders. So they sent a party back to Tarlenheim to fetch the Marshal, while the rest attacked the door of the new Castle. They broke in just as Antoinette was firing at Rupert. The first door they came to was that of Michael's room, and there was the Duke lying dead.

Sapt and Fritz then crossed the bridge, not knowing what had happened to me or the King, for Antoinette could tell them nothing except that she had seen me on the bridge. At last they reached the outer room and found the Belgian, Bersonin, lying dead, and Sapt said: "Thank God, he has been here". When they found Detchard and the doctor, and the King also seemingly dead, at first they thought it was all over. But Sapt, who knew more of wounds and the sign of death than I, recognized that the King was not badly hurt and would soon recover.

Then Fritz was sent to look for me—Sapt dared send no one else, and how he found me you have heard. Fritz was guided by the shout which I made, calling on Rupert to stop. And I think a man has never been more glad to find his own brother alive than was Fritz to find me.
It now only remained to make sure that the secret was kept. Antoinette and Johann swore to say nothing. Fritz, it was said, had ridden off to find the King's friend, imprisoned by the Duke in the Castle of Zenda. The King, having saved his friend, had been wounded almost to death, and lay at Zenda. The Princess was ordered to remain at Tarlenheim till the King could come to her. So ran Sapt's story, and it was everywhere believed. The only thing to upset it was a force that often defeats the most cunning plans—I mean the pleasure of a woman.

For whatever the King might command (or Sapt for him), the Princess Flavia refused to stay at Tarlenheim while her lover was wounded at Zenda. Accordingly she drove in her carriage behind Marshal Strakencz, who tried without success to make her stay at home. Thus she came to the edge of the forest, where I still lay. Just as I awoke from my faint, I saw her, and understanding what I ought to do, I tried to hide behind a bush. We had forgotten the farm-girl, however. She ran to the Princess, crying:

"Madame, the King is here—in the bushes!"

"Nonsense, child", said old Marshal Strakencz. "The King lies wounded at the Castle over there".

"Yes, sir, I know he's wounded", said the girl, "but he's here with Count Fritz von Tarlenheim, not at the Castle"
The girl told what she had seen, and Flavia, smiling at her, descended from her carriage to see who the gentleman was that looked like the King. At that moment Sapt appeared, riding from the Castle, and tried to persuade the Princess to continue her journey.

"Every fine gentleman is a king to girls like this," he said.

"Why, he's as like the King as one bean to another!" cried the girl in wonder.

The Marshal's face asked unspoken questions. Flavia, too, looked round at them. Doubt spreads quickly.

"I'll see this man," said Flavia.

"Then come alone," whispered Sapt.

She was obedient to the strangeness of his tone, and told the Marshal and the others to wait. She and Sapt came forward on foot towards where we lay. Sapt waved the farm-girl to keep away. I could not look at her, and buried my face in my hands. Fritz knelt by me, his hand on my shoulder.

"It is he! Are you hurt?" was Flavia's cry, half of joy, half of fear.

She sat on the ground by me, and gently pulled my hands away.

"It is the King!" she said. "Why did you try to deceive me just now, Colonel?"
No one answered her, and I kept my eyes on the ground. Then she put her arm on mine. "Rudolf——" she began.

"It is not the King", said Sapt. His voice was almost tender.

Fritz's pale face told her that it was true. "But it is Rudolf, my love", she cried.

"It is your love, Madame, but not the King. The King lies here in Zenda Castle".

"Look at me, Rudolf", she cried. "Why do you let them say such things?"

Then I spoke, looking into her eyes. "God forgive me, Madame", I said. "I am not the King".

Her face went even whiter. She looked at Sapt, at Fritz, then again at me. Then she fell forward and fainted. I laid her softly on the ground, cursing my fate that Rupert's sword had left me alive to bear this.
Chapter 13

IF LOVE WERE ALL!

It was night, and I was in the small room where the King had been imprisoned. Fritz had brought me here secretly. Johann had just entered with some supper and he told me what he had seen the King and she, Sapt had Fritz, together with the Marshal (who had been told the story) had been a long time in talk. Outside, all kinds of stories were being told of the mysterious prisoner of Zend. Some said he was dead, some that he was a friend of the King's and had helped him in England during his travels. When I was tired of Johann's talk, I sent him away. And Fritz and I wanted to see me, so we crossed the drawbridge and entered the room that had been Black Michael's. The King was lying there in bed. The doctor (Fritz's friend from Tarlenheim) said the visit must be a brief one. The King held out his hand.

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and shook mine. Fritz and the doctor went to the window. I took the King’s ring from my finger and placed it on his.

“I have tried not to dishonour it, Sire”, said I.

“I can’t talk much”, he said in a weak voice. “I wanted to keep you here with me, but Sapt and the Marshal say it is impossible, and that the secret must be kept”.

“They are right, Sire. Let me go. My work here is done”.

“Yes, it is done, as no man but you could have done it. When they see me again, I shall have my beard on; I shall be changed with sickness. But I shall try to let them find me changed in nothing but appearance. You have shown me how to be a King”.

His eyelids closed. He was tired. I kissed his hand, and Fritz came to lead me away. I have never seen the King since.

Outside, Fritz did not turn the way we had come, but went another way.

“Where are we going?” I asked.

“She has sent for you. When it is over, come back to the bridge. I’ll wait there.

“What does she want?” I asked breathlessly.

He shook his head.
"Does she know everything?"

"Yes, everything."

He opened a door, gently pushed me in, and left me. It was a richly furnished room, and in the middle of it stood the Princess. I walked up to her and fell on one knee, and kissed her hand. Then, before I knew what I was saying, the word came out:

"Flavia!"

She trembled a little as I rose to my feet and faced her.

"Don't stand, don't stand!" she cried. "You mustn't! You're hurt. Sit down here—on this sofa."

She gently made me sit, and put her hand on my forehead.

"How hot your head is!" she said.

I had come to beg for her forgiveness, but somehow love gives to even a dull man the knowledge of his lover's heart. So all I said was:

"I love you with all my heart and soul!"

For what troubled and shamed her? Not her love for me, but the fear that I had pretended to lover her as I had pretended to be the King.

"I love you", I repeated. "There will never be another woman in the world for me. But God forgive me the wrong I've done!"
"They made you do it", she said quickly. "It might have made no difference if I'd known. It was always you that I loved, never the King".

"I tried to tell you—you remember when Sapt interrupted us on the night of the dance at Strelsau?"

"I know", she answered in a low voice. "They have told me all".

"I am going away to-night", I said.

"No, no, no! Not to-night!"

"I must, before more people have seen me. And how could I stay——?"

"If I could come with you", she whispered.

"Don't", and I moved away from her.

"You are right, Rudolf, dear", she said. "If love were all, I would follow you in rags to the world's end. But is love the only thing? If it were, you would have left the King to die in his prison".

"I nearly did it, Flavia", I whispered.

"But honour did not let you. Honour binds a woman too, Rudolf. My honour lies in being true to my country. I shall always wear your ring".

"And I yours", I answered. Then I said good-bye and left her. I heard her saying my name over and over again.
Hastily I walked down to the bridge. Sapt and Fritz were both there. They had brought me some clothes, and I changed into them. Then covering up my face as I had done more than once before, I mounted with them, and we rode off through the forest. We came to a little wayside station on the other side of the frontier, and had to wait for a train. We talked in low voices of this and that, then suddenly Fritz took off his hat, seized my hand and kissed it before I could prevent him.

"Heaven doesn't always make the right men kings", he said, trying to laugh.

Old Sapt's mouth twisted as he shook my hand.

"The devil", said he, "has his share in most things".

The train came, and I got in. There were a few people about, and they looked curiously at us, as Sapt and Fritz, their hats in their hands, said good-bye. Perhaps they thought it was some great man travelling privately. They would have been disappointed, if they had known that it was only I, Rudolf Rassendyll, a younger son of an English family. Yet, what ever I was now, I had been for three months a king. Perhaps I did not think so much of the experience because as the train steamed away from Ruritania, I seemed to hear coming through the air into my ears and into my heart...
the cry of a woman's love—"Rudolf! Rudolf! Rudolf!"

I can hear it now.

The details of my return home can have but little interest. I went straight to the Alps, and spent a quiet ten days there. I sent a careless post-card to my brother Robert, telling him that I was soon coming back. I let my beard grow again.

On my way through Paris, I again met my friend. He was quite sure I had been to Ruritania to follow Antoinette de Mauban, who, he told me, was back in Paris. He wanted to know what I knew of the story of Black Michael's attack on the King, for he said no one could believe what they saw in the newspapers. But he got no information out of me.

When I got home, Rose was very annoyed that I had written no book, nor even gathered any notes.

"We've wasted a lot of time trying to find you", she said.

"I know", I said. "But why? I can take care of myself".

"It wasn't that", she answered. "But I wanted to tell you about Sir Jacob Borrodaile. He's to be an ambassador, and is ready to take you as his attaché".
“Where is he going to?”

“To Strelsa. I believe it’s a very nice place”, said Rose.

“I don’t think I want to go”, I said with some determination.

“You might even become an ambassador yourself”, she urged.

“I don’t want to become an ambassador”.

“It’s more than you ever will be”, she said, annoyed at my disapproval.

That is very likely true, but the idea of being an ambassador could hardly attract me. I had been a king!

Rose went away, and my brother Robert took out an illustrated paper. It had in it a photograph of the Coronation at Strelsa. I sat silently looking at it. There was Sapt beside me. The Marshal and Fritz behind. I saw the Cardinal, Black Michael—and the Princess.

“It’s a strange likeness”, said my brother, looking at me curiously, and then looking at the picture of the King.

I said nothing, for though Robert is one of the best fellows in the world, and I would tell him any secret, this secret was not mine, so I could not tell it.
I have lived quietly since then. Once a year, however, I go to a small town this side of the Ruritanian frontier. There I meet Fritz, now happily married to the Countess Helga, and together we spend a week. I hear all the news of Strelsau, and often we talk of Sapt, the King, and of young Rupert. When the evenings come, we talk at last of Flavia, for every year Fritz brings to me a red rose, and round it is a piece of paper, with these words written on it:

“Rudolf—Flavia—always”.

I also send the same to her, who is now the Queen of Ruritania, and will always be the Queen of my heart.

I still exercise myself with a sword, for somehow I have a feeling that I will meet young Rupert again, and we will end the fight that was interrupted in the cool dark forest of Zenda.

Who knows?