

## **Rassendylls and Elphbergs**

'When are you going to do something, Rudolf?' my sister-in-law asked me one day.

'What do you mean, Rose?'

'When are you going to find some work?'

'Work!' I replied.

'I don't need to work. I'm a Rassendyll. My family is one of the best in England. I'm rich - I don't need to do anything.'

'Your brother works,' Rose reminded me crossly. 'He works very hard.'

Just at that moment my brother Robert came into the room. He looked at his wife. He could see that she was angry about something.

'What's wrong, dear?' he asked.

'Rose is angry because I don't do anything,' I explained. 'I told her I don't need to work. We Rassendylls don't need to do anything.'

I looked at my sister-in-law again. She was looking at my red hair.

'Perhaps she's also angry because I've got red hair,' I joked.

Rose blushed.

'Don't be silly!' she told me. 'That's not your fault. But all the same,' she went on, 'your red hair does remind people of that story about the Rassendylls. It's a pity.'

Robert smiled at me.

'Of course it's not his fault,' he said cheerfully. 'He's got the nose as well,' he added thoughtfully.

'I like my nose, and J like my hair,' I told them.

I turned to look at the picture of Countess Amelia on the wall.

Rose saw where I was looking. She became angry again.

'That picture!' she complained to Robert. 'People will never forget the story if you don't take that picture down.'

'People will never forget the story while Rudolf's here,' Robert said. 'Look at his red hair - and that nose!'

Then I decided to annoy Rose a little.

'Actually,' I said, 'I like being an Elphberg.'

'Rudolf!' Rose cried. 'How can you say that?'

I'm sure you want to know why Rose was so angry about my red hair and my nose. I'll tell you the whole story.

We Rassendylls are a very old family. Old families have scandals, and we have a very interesting one. It all happened a long time ago - in 1733.

The young prince of Ruritania came to England that year. Prince Rudolf Elphberg was a tall man, and he had red hair and a long nose. He was a dashing figure, and was popular everywhere he went. He was a good linguist, he could ride well, and he was an excellent marksman and swordsman.

The Prince stayed in England for a long time, and then something strange happened. One day he fought a duel with an Englishman. The Englishman's name was James Rassendyll. Rassendyll wounded the Prince. The Prince was not badly hurt, but he returned to Ruritania after the duel.

A few months later James Rassendyll died. His wife, the Countess Amelia, had a son who was born after Rassendyll's death. The baby looked exactly like Prince Elphberg. He had red hair and a long nose. Now everybody understood why Rassendyll and the Prince had fought a duel!

Ever since that time, there have always been some Rassendylls who have red hair and long noses. We call them 'Elphberg' Rassendylls. I'm an 'Elphberg' Rassendyll myself, you see.

Rose did not like the old story of Countess Amelia and the Prince of Ruritania. It embarrassed her. Almost as much as my Elphberg features embarrassed her. She

thought that my features showed the weakness of character and the uselessness of my life. However, I thought that I had learnt quite a lot. I spoke fluent German, my French was very good, and my Italian was acceptable. I was good enough with a pistol, but not excellent. I could also ride any horse you gave me.

I started to think about Ruritania over the next few days. I thought about Countess Amelia and the Prince. It was a romantic story. I knew that the old King was dead. His son, another Prince Rudolf, was going to be the next King. I decided to visit Ruritania. I wanted to see the coronation of the young Prince Rudolf.

I did not tell my brother Robert of my plan to visit Ruritania. I told him I was going to the Tyrol for a short holiday.

I was very excited when I left England. I did not know that I was going on a great adventure - the greatest adventure of my life!

## **The Journey to Ruritania**

I decided to stay in Paris for a night on my way to Ruritania. Paris is a lively city, and I enjoyed myself a lot. I spent the evening with two friends. One of them, George, worked in the British Embassy.

We were three young men, and we talked about the beautiful women in Paris. Somebody mentioned Antoinette De Mauban.

'I've heard of her,' I said excitedly. 'She's a famous beauty. What does she look like?'

'She's the most wonderful woman in Paris,' George told me. 'You won't see her, I'm afraid,' he added. 'She's leaving Paris tonight.'

He spoke quietly now.

'The Duke of Strelsau visited here in Paris,' he said.

'Really,' I replied. 'I wonder I where she's going.'

I knew that the Duke of Strelsau was the half-brother of Prince Rudolf of Ruritania. Perhaps Antoinette De Mauban was going to Ruritania as well!

George went to the railway station with me the next day. I did not tell him I was travelling to Ruritania because I did not want anyone to know. I told him I was going to Dresden.

There was a smartly dressed lady on the platform when we arrived.

'Excuse me, Rudolf,' he said. 'I know that lady. I'll just go and say hello to her. I won't be long.'

He went to talk to the lady. He was smiling when he came back.

'You're in luck!' he joked. 'That's Antoinette De Mauban, and she's travelling on your train. She's going to Dresden as well.'

I did not see Antoinette De Mauban again until the train arrived at Dresden. I got off the

train there because I wanted to take the train for Ruritania. Then I saw her! Antoinette De Mauban got on the same train as me. She was travelling to Ruritania as well. Perhaps she was going to visit the Duke of Strelsau.

As soon as we reached the Ruritanian border, I went to buy some newspapers and the officer in charge of the customs house gave me such a stare that I was surer than ever of my resemblance to the Elphbergs. The train journey to Ruritania was a long one. I read some of the Ruritanian newspapers during the journey.

There were lots of articles about Prince Rudolf and the coronation. The capital city, Strelsau, was full of people who wanted to see the ceremony. I did not want to stay in a crowded hotel, so I decided not to go to Strelsau. There is a little town called Zenda about fifty miles from the capital. I decided to stay there until the day of the coronation. 'I can travel into Strelsau every day on the train,' I said to myself, i can come back to



Zenda every night. It's not very far.'

I got off the train at Zenda. There was a good hotel in the town. I was comfortable there.

There was a lot of excitement in Zenda because of the coronation. Everybody was talking about Prince Rudolf and his half-brother, the Duke of Strelsau. I learned that the Duke owned the castle in Zenda.

Everybody spoke very well about the Duke. They made less friendly remarks about Prince Rudolf. He had spent a long time away from the country, and very few people even knew what he looked like. I heard that he had also shaved off his famous beard which made it even more difficult for people to recognize him.

The old lady who owned the hotel was excited about the coronation like everybody else.

'Prince Rudolf is here in Zenda!' she told me. 'He's staying near the castle. He'll travel

from Zenda to Strelsau on the day of the coronation.

Suddenly she looked very serious.

'It's a pity,' she told me. 'The Duke's a good man - he'd be a very good king for Ruritania. Prince Rudolf's'

'-Mother!' one of the old lady's daughters cried. She was angry. 'The Duke's a bad man, you know that. I want Prince Rudolf to be king. He's a real Elphberg, with red hair and a long nose.'

'Are the Prince and the Duke good friends?' I asked the old lady.

'No,' the old lady's daughter said. 'They hate each other really. They're both in love with the same girl, Princess Flavia.'

'Be quiet!' the old lady commanded her. She turned to me with a smile.

'You mustn't take what she says seriously, sir,' she told me. 'The Duke and the Prince are the best of friends. The Duke is helping the Prince to prepare for the coronation.'

'You know that's not true!' the old lady's daughter interrupted once again. 'The Duke hates Prince Rudolf. Black Michael -'

The door of the room opened and a man came in. He looked very angrily at the girl.

'I've told you before not to call him 'Black Michael', he shouted angrily. 'He's the Duke of Strelsau!'

The man saw me in the room now and he was suddenly silent. He seemed shocked for a moment. The old lady explained who I was.

'This is Mr. Rassendyll,' she said. 'He's come from England to see the Prince's coronation.'

She turned politely to me.

'This is Johann,' she said. 'Fie works for the Duke of Strelsau.'

The man was still silent. He stared at me in a very strange way. I did not understand what was troubling him.

The girl began to laugh.

'You've got red hair, sir,' she said to me.

'He doesn't like red hair. It's the Prince's colour, you see.'

The man laughed.

'I'm sorry, sir,' he said. 'You look -'

He was silent again and then he said, 'You surprised me. I didn't know anyone was staying in the hotel.'

## - CHAPTER THREE -

### **The Cousins Rudolf**

I went for a walk in the forest the next morning. I walked near the castle. The old part was very imposing and still in good condition. I noticed that it stood on an island, and there was a moat full of water surrounding it. The water looked deep and cold. On the other side of the moat there was an elegant modern chateau, the country home of the Duke of Strelsau. I walked for a long time. I decided to lie down and rest for a while. I fell asleep in the forest.

I dreamt I was married to Princess Flavia and we lived in the castle of Zenda. I was about to kiss the Princess when I heard someone say, 'This man looks just like the Prince except for his beard.'

I opened my eyes and saw two men looking at me with great curiosity.

Then the other man said, 'He's the same

height as the Prince, as well. Really, it's very odd!'

I stood up now and looked at the two men. One of them was quite an old man. He had a square head and a grey moustache, and he looked serious. The other one was young. He had dark skin, and he seemed friendlier than the older man. The young man smiled at me.

'What's your name?' he asked politely.

'Rassendyll' I told him. 'Rudolf Rassendyll.'

'I'm Fritz von Tarlenheim,' he said. He pointed at the older man. 'And this is Colonel Sapt,' he told me. 'We work for the Prince.'

Colonel Sapt smiled at me now.

'So you're a Rassendyll,' he said happily. 'You know the old story about the Prince of Ruritania and the Countess Amelia, I suppose?'

I smiled as well.

'I know the story very well,' I told him.

There was a noise behind some trees, and

a man began to shout.

'Fritz! Fritz! Where are you?'

'It's the Prince,' Fritz von Tarlenheim said. 'He's calling me.'

Now the man came forward. I looked at him in great surprise. He looked at me in great surprise. Prince Rudolf of Ruritania and Rudolf Rassendyll looked the same - except for my beard.

I studied the Prince carefully. The likeness was remarkable. He was a little shorter than me, and his face was a little fatter than mine. I also noticed that his mouth did not look as determined as mine. But for all that, we were nearly identical!

For a moment no one spoke. Then the Prince turned to Fritz and Colonel Sapt.

Colonel Sapt whispered something in the Prince's ear. The Prince listened carefully, and then he began to smile. Suddenly he laughed very loudly.

'We're cousins!' he said to me. I'm very

pleased to know you, cousin,' he added. 'Come and dine with me tonight. We'll talk of old times together. And you will stay at my house tonight, of course.'

Colonel Sapt stepped forward to speak to the Prince again. He spoke seriously.

'THE CORONATION IS TOMORROW MORNING, SIR,' HE SAID. 'THERE IS A LOT TO DO BEFORE THEN. WE HAVE A LOT OF THINGS TO TALK ABOUT. IT'S NOT THE EVENING FOR A DINNER WITH MR. RASSENDYLL.'

PRINCE RUDOLF LOOKED ANGRILY AT COLONEL SAPT. HE DID NOT SEEM PLEASED WITH THE COLONEL'S ADVICE.

'I WANT TO DINE WITH MR. RASSENDYLL!' HE SAID CROSSLY, 'I WANT TO DRINK WINE WITH HIM. HE'S MY COUSIN - AND I DON'T MEET A NEW COUSIN EVERY DAY.'

THAT IS HOW I CAME TO DINE WITH PRINCE RUDOLF. WE ATE WELL, AND WE DRANK A LOT OF WINE. PRINCE RUDOLF DRANK MORE WINE THAN ANYONE ELSE. HE



WAS VERY HAPPY BECAUSE OF THE WINE. IT WAS A LONG DINNER.

I THOUGHT THE EVENING WAS FINISHED, BUT I WAS WRONG. THE SERVANT, JOSEPH, BROUGHT ANOTHER BOTTLE OF WINE TO THE TABLE.

'THIS BOTTLE COMES FROM THE DUKE OF STRELSAU,' HE TOLD PRINCE RUDOLF. 'HE TOLD ME TO GIVE YOU THIS MESSAGE: "DRINK THIS WINE BECAUSE YOU LOVE ME." THAT'S WHAT HE TOLD ME TO SAY, SIR.'

'WHAT A GOOD BROTHER MICHAEL IS!' PRINCE RUDOLF CRIED JOYFULLY. 'I'LL CERTAINLY DRINK HIS WINE.'

HE REACHED FOR THE BOTTLE AND Poured A GLASS OF THE WINE. HE DRANK THE GLASS QUICKLY. THEN HE PUT HIS HEAD ON THE TABLE AND FELL ASLEEP.

NOBODY ELSE TOUCHED THE WINE FROM THE DUKE OF STRELSAU.

I LOOKED AT FRITZ VON TARLENHEIM AND COLONEL SAPT. I DID NOT SAY

ANYTHING, BUT THE PRINCE OF RURITANIA WAS A DISAPPOINTMENT TO ME. HE SEEMED A SELFISH YOUNG MAN - A SELFISH YOUNG MAN WHO WAS TOO FOND OF WINE. I REMEMBER NOTHING ELSE ABOUT THAT EVENING. I, TOO, HAD DRUNK TOO MUCH WINE. I FELL ASLEEP AT THE TABLE.

- CHAPTER FOUR -

## **THE GAME BEGINS**

I WOKE SUDDENLY THE NEXT MORNING. SOMEONE HAD THROWN WATER OVER ME! I OPENED MY EYES ANGRILY AND LOOKED UP AT FRITZ AND THE COLONEL.

'THAT WASN'T A GOOD JOKE!' I SAID ANGRILY.

'BE QUIET,' COLONEL SAPT ORDERED ANGRILY. 'WE HAD TO WAKE YOU UP. THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG.' HE POINTED TO THE FLOOR. THE PRINCE WAS LYING THERE. 'THE PRINCE IS STILL SLEEPING. WE'VE TRIED TO WAKE HIM, BUT WE CAN'T.'

'WE THINK THE DUKE PUT SOMETHING IN THAT BOTTLE OF WINE,' FRITZ EXPLAINED. 'SOMETHING THAT WILL MAKE THE PRINCE SLEEP ALL DAY.'

'IT'S A CRISIS FOR RURITANIA,' COLONEL SAPT SAID. 'THE CORONATION IS THIS MORNING. IF PRINCE RUDOLF DOES NOT GO

TO STRELSAU TODAY, HE'LL NEVER BE KING!

'WHAT DO YOU MEAN?' I ASKED.

'THE DUKE WANTS TO BE KING,' COLONEL SAPT TOLD ME. 'PRINCE RUDOLF IS NOT POPULAR. I THINK THE DUKE WILL SEIZE THE CROWN!'

'WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT IT?' I ASKED HIM.

'THERE'S ONLY ONE CHANCE,' COLONEL SAPT EXPLAINED. 'THE CORONATION IS TODAY. PRINCE RUDOLF MUST GO TO STRELSAU THIS MORNING!'

'BUT IF HE'S ASLEEP - ' I BEGAN.

'YOU CAN GO,' COLONEL SAPT SAID. 'YOU CAN BE PRINCE RUDOLF FOR THE DAY.'

'ME!' I CRIED. 'BUT THAT'S RIDICULOUS. I DON'T KNOW HOW TO BEHAVE LIKE A PRINCE. I CAN'T PRETEND TO BE THE PRINCE OF RURITANIA!'

'YOU LOOK LIKE THE PRINCE, EXCEPT FOR YOUR BEARD,' COLONEL SAPT SAID SLOWLY. 'YOU CAN DO IT. RASSENDYLL, I KNOW YOU

CAN.'

I DID NOT SAY ANYTHING.

'IF YOU DON'T DO IT, THE DUKE WILL BE THE NEXT KING OF RURITANIA,' COLONEL SAPT WENT ON. 'AND HE'LL KILL PRINCE RUDOLF.'

THEN I DECIDED. I WAS YOUNG AND I LIKED EXCITEMENT AND ADVENTURE.

'VERY WELL,' I TOLD THE COLONEL. 'I'LL HELP YOU. I'LL BE THE PRINCE FOR A DAY.'

'WELL DONE!' THE COLONEL CRIED EXCITEDLY. HE SHOOK MY HAND. 'THERE'S A LOT TO DO. LET'S MAKE A START.'

I GOT UP AND BEGAN TO SHAVE OFF MY BEARD WHILE THE COLONEL TOLD ME HIS PLAN.

'I'LL HIDE THE PRINCE IN THE WINE-CELLAR,' HE SAID EXCITEDLY. 'THEN WE ALL GO TO STRELSAU TOGETHER TO THE CORONATION, AND YOU BECOME KING. THEN WE COME BACK TO ZENDA. WE WAKE THE REAL KING. HE GOES BACK TO STRELSAU

WITH US THE NEXT DAY. AND YOU, MR. RASSENDYLL, YOU LEAVE RURITANIA VERY SECRETLY.' HE PAUSED THEN HE CLAPPED HIS HANDS TOGETHER. 'YES! IT'S A GOOD PLAN,' HE CRIED.

THE COLONEL PICKED UP THE PRINCE AND CARRIED HIM TO THE DOOR. HE WAS VERY STRONG. HE OPENED THE DOOR SUDDENLY - AND THEN STOPPED. JOHANN'S MOTHER WAS STANDING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DOOR.

'WAS SHE LISTENING?' FRITZ ASKED QUICKLY.

'I'LL MAKE SURE SHE'S QUIET!' THE COLONEL SAID GRIMLY. THE COLONEL CARRIED THE PRINCE INTO THE WINE CELLAR. THEN HE CAME UPSTAIRS AGAIN AND SEIZED HOLD OF JOHANN'S MOTHER. HE PUT A HANDKERCHIEF IN HER MOUTH AND TIED HER UP. THEN HE CARRIED HER DOWN TO A COAL-CELLAR AND LOCKED HER IN.

THEN COLONEL SAPT, FRITZ AND I CONTINUED TO MAKE OUR PLANS.

'NO ONE WILL EVER KNOW,' FRITZ SAID. 'IT'LL WORK - AND YOU'LL SAVE RURITANIA FROM DISASTER, MR. RASSENDYLL.'

'ALL WE'VE GOT TO DO IS HIDE THE REAL PRINCE WHILE WE'RE ALL IN STRELSAU,' THE COLONEL SAID. 'FRITZ AND I WILL DO THAT WHILE YOU'RE GETTING READY, MR. RASSENDYLL. JOSEPH WILL GUARD HIM WHILE WE'RE AWAY.'

COLONEL SAPT HURRIED OUT OF THE ROOM TO MAKE ALL THE ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE SERVANT.

- CHAPTER FIVE -

## **CORONATION OF A KING**

IT WAS NOW SIX O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING. I DRESSED IN ONE OF PRINCE RUDOLF'S UNIFORMS. COLONEL SAPT, FRITZ AND I TOOK OUR HORSES AND RODE TOWARDS STRELSAU.

IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL RIDE THAT EARLY MORNING, AND I WILL NEVER FORGET IT. THE COLONEL GAVE ME ADVICE ABOUT HOW TO BEHAVE WHEN WE REACHED STRELSAU. HE TOLD ME ABOUT THE THINGS THAT PRINCE RUDOLF LIKED, AND THE THINGS HE DID NOT LIKE.

'DON'T WORRY,' HE SAID. I'LL STAND NEXT TO YOU ALL THE TIME. I'LL TELL YOU WHAT TO SAY.'

WE REACHED THE RAILWAY STATION AT EIGHT O'CLOCK. AT NINE - THIRTY WE WERE IN THE CAPITAL CITY.

'ARE YOU FRIGHTENED?' COLONEL SAPT



ASKED ME.

'DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME,' I TOLD HIM. I'LL MANAGE.'

'I THINK YOU WILL,' THE COLONEL REPLIED. 'YOU'RE A REAL ELPHBERG, MR. RASSENDYLL.'

WHEN WE GOT OFF THE TRAIN, THE PEOPLE SURROUNDED US. THEY WERE EXCITED TO SEE THEIR PRINCE IN FRONT OF THEM. THEY BEGAN TO CHEER AND SHOUT. SOON THE STATION WAS FULL OF NOISE AND SHOUTING. A PARTY OF IMPORTANT PEOPLE WERE WAITING FOR US. THE COMMANDER OF THE RURITANIAN ARMY, AN IMPORTANT-LOOKING MARSHAL, WAS ALSO THERE WITH SOME SOLDIERS. WE ALL RODE TOWARDS THE CATHEDRAL TOGETHER.

FIRST WE RODE THROUGH THE NEW PART OF STRELSAU. THE COLONEL TOLD ME THAT THE PEOPLE IN THIS PART OF THE CITY WERE LOYAL TO PRINCE RUDOLF. THEY WANTED HIM TO BE KING. THE CROWDS IN THE STREET CHEERED AS WE RODE PAST. SUDDENLY I

LOOKED UP AT ONE OF THE BUILDINGS. ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN WAS STANDING IN THE WINDOW WATCHING THE PROCESSION. FOR A MOMENT I WAS VERY NERVOUS. I WAS SURE SHE WOULD RECOGNIZE ME AND TELL EVERYONE THAT I WAS NOT THE REAL PRINCE. SHE DID NOT DO ANYTHING, HOWEVER.

THEN WE RODE THROUGH THE OLD PART OF THE CITY. THE PEOPLE IN THIS PART OF STRELSAU DID NOT LIKE PRINCE RUDOLF. THEY WANTED HIS BROTHER, THE DUKE OF STRELSAU, TO BE KING. THE MARSHAL MADE A SIGN TO THE SOLDIERS WHO WERE RIDING WITH US. HE WANTED THEM TO STAY CLOSE TO ME. HE WANTED THEM TO PROTECT ME FROM THE CROWD.

I DECIDED THAT A REAL PRINCE WOULD BE A BRAVE MAN.

'WHY DID YOU TELL THE SOLDIERS TO RIDE CLOSE TO ME?' I ASKED THE MARSHAL.

'FOR YOUR SAFETY, SIR,' THE MARSHAL REPLIED.

I'm not afraid,' I told the marshal. 'I'll ride in front of the soldiers. I'm not afraid of my own people!'

Colonel Sapt put a hand on my arm. He did not like what I was doing.

'I'LL RIDE IN FRONT,' I REPEATED. 'TELL THE SOLDIERS TO GO AWAY, MARSHAL.'

I rode out in front of the soldiers. For a few moments I felt like a real king. It was a wonderful feeling.

Soon we arrived at the cathedral. It was a splendid building, and it was full of people. Everyone was wearing their best clothes for the coronation of their king. I do not remember much about the ceremony. It was long, and Colonel Sapt stood very close to me throughout it. He whispered to me all the time, telling me what to do.

I saw Prince Rudolf's brother, the Duke of Strelsau, in the cathedral. He was very surprised to see me - he looked quite ill for a moment! He looked at me as if he had seen a

ghost. I also saw a beautiful young woman. Colonel Sapt told me she was Princess Flavia. She was the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. She had the red hair of the Elphbergs.

The coronation was a great success. No one recognized that I was not the real Prince Rudolf. When it was over Fritz, Colonel Sapt and I went to the palace. We laughed and joked together. The day had gone well for us.

I did think about the real Prince Rudolf - or King Rudolf, as he now was. I wondered what he was doing.

- CHAPTER SIX -

## **Kingship and Love**

Colonel Sapt and I waited in the palace until very late that night. We talked together about the ceremony, and about the Duke of Strelsau.

'He's a dangerous man,' the Colonel told me. 'But we've defeated him this time - thanks to you, Mr. Rassendyll.'

At last everyone was asleep. We went outside to the stables. We found our horses, and put on their saddles.

'Let's go,' the Colonel said quietly.

We jumped on the horses and rode out of the palace grounds. It was exciting to ride through the sleeping city.

We rode all night on our way back to Zenda. Suddenly we heard two horses following us in the darkness - the Duke and one of his men! We rode on very quickly and managed to lose them at a cross-roads in a

forest.

We arrived at Zenda very early in the morning. We went straight to the house - and there we found a terrible tragedy. At first there seemed to be no one in the house. Then we saw some blood coming from under the locked door of the wine - cellar, where we had left the King. Perhaps the King was dead! We opened the door to the room. The servant Joseph was lying there - he was dead. We looked everywhere for the King, but we could not find him.

'The Duke of Strelsau!' the Colonel said angrily. 'He's been here.' He pointed at the body of the servant on the floor. 'This is the Duke's work!' he exclaimed.

'BUT WHERE'S THE KING?' I ASKED. 'DO YOU THINK THE DUKE HAS KILLED HIM, TOO?'

'NO,' THE COLONEL REPLIED. 'I THINK THE KING IS A PRISONER IN HIS BROTHER'S CASTLE.'

'WHAT DO WE DO?' I ASKED.

'EVERYTHING'S CHANGED NOW,' THE COLONEL SAID THOUGHTFULLY. 'WE MUST CHANGE OUR ORIGINAL PLAN.'

HE THOUGHT FOR A MOMENT.

'RURITANIA NEEDS HER KING,' HE TOLD ME. 'YOU WILL HAVE TO BE THE KING FOR A WHILE LONGER, MR. RASSENDYLL.'

'YOU WANT ME TO GO BACK TO STRELSAU?' I ASKED. 'BUT WHAT ABOUT THE REAL KING? WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO HIM?'

'YOU'RE THE ONLY KING WE'VE GOT,' THE COLONEL SAID GRIMLY. 'GO BACK TO STRELSAU, MR RASSENDYLL. YOU ARE THE KING OF RURITANIA AGAIN.'

'BUT THE DUKE OF STRELSAU KNOWS THAT I'M NOT THE REAL KING,' I SAID. 'HE KNOWS I'M A FAKE!'

'THAT'S TRUE,' THE COLONEL ADMITTED. 'HE KNOWS YOU'RE NOT THE REAL KING, BECAUSE THE REAL KING IS HIS PRISONER IN THE CASTLE HERE AT ZENDA. BUT THE DUKE CAN'T TELL ANYONE THAT YOU'RE A FAKE.'

HE CAN'T TELL ANYONE THAT THE REAL KING IS A PRISONER, CAN HE?'

I NODDED MY HEAD. THE COLONEL WAS RIGHT.

'DO YOU THINK THE KING IS IN DANGER?' I ASKED. 'WILL THE DUKE KILL HIM?'

COLONEL SAPT LOOKED AT ME VERY SERIOUSLY FOR A MOMENT.

'THE KING'S LIFE IS IN GREAT DANGER,' HE SAID SLOWLY. 'THE DUKE HAS ALREADY KILLED ONCE. BUT IF HE DOES KILL THE KING,' HE WENT ON, 'YOU'LL HAVE TO STAY HERE. YOU'RE AN ELPHBERG, AFTER ALL!'

COLONEL SAPT AND I WENT OUTSIDE TO OUR HORSES. WE RODE BACK TO THE CAPITAL. NO ONE SAW US ENTER THE PALACE.

THE NEXT DAY THE COLONEL AND FRITZ TOLD ME MORE ABOUT THE KING.

'DO YOU REMEMBER PRINCESS FLAVIA?' THE COLONEL ASKED ME. 'SHE WAS AT THE CORONATION.'



I REMEMBERED HER VERY WELL. SHE WAS THE BEAUTIFUL GIRL I HAD NOTICED IN THE CATHEDRAL.

'THE KING'S IN LOVE WITH HER,' COLONEL SAPT TOLD ME.

'PRINCESS FLAVIA IS VERY POPULAR WITH THE PEOPLE. EVERYONE HOPES THE KING WILL MARRY HER.'

FRITZ LOOKED IMPATIENTLY AT COLONEL SAPT. HE WAS YOUNG AND VERY LOYAL TO THE KING. HE ALWAYS WANTED TO BE BUSY, TO BE DOING SOMETHING TO HELP THE KING. THE OLDER MAN WAS ALSO VERY LOYAL TO THE KING, BUT HE KNEW HOW TO WAIT, HOW TO BE PATIENT UNTIL THE TIME FOR ACTION CAME.

'WHEN ARE WE GOING TO RESCUE THE KING?' HE ASKED IMPATIENTLY. 'WE CAN'T SIT HERE IN THE PALACE FOREVER, COLONEL!'

'WE MUST BE PATIENT' COLONEL SAPT TOLD HIM. 'THE DUKE WON'T KILL THE KING

WHILE MR. RASSENDYLL IS HERE PRETENDING TO BE THE KING. HE'LL WAIT AND SEE WHAT WE DO. WE MUST WAIT, TOO'

'YOU KNOW THAT SOME OF THE SIX ARE HERE IN STRELSAU?' FRITZ ASKED.

THE COLONEL NODDED.

'YES,' HE REPLIED. 'THE DUKE SENT THEM HERE TO SPY ON MR. RASSENDYLL'

'WHO ARE THE SIX?' I SAID.

'THEY'RE THE DUKE'S FAVORITE SOLDIERS' FRITZ TOLD ME. 'THEY'RE THE MOST DANGEROUS MEN IN THE COUNTRY, AND THEY'RE VERY LOYAL TO THE DUKE. THEY DO EVERYTHING HE TELLS THEM TO.'

'THREE OF THEM ARE RURITANIANS' THE COLONEL EXPLAINED. 'THERE'S ALSO A FRENCHMAN, A BELGIAN AND AN ENGLISHMAN. BUT THE MOST DANGEROUS OF THE SIX IS RUPERT HENTZAU.'

THE THREE OF US TALKED FOR A LONG TIME. FRITZ AND I WANTED TO DO SOMETHING TO HELP THE KING, BUT

COLONEL SAPT TOLD US TO BE PATIENT. HE SAID WE COULD DO NOTHING UNTIL WE KNEW WHAT THE DUKE WAS PLANNING.

'BE PATIENT, MY FRIENDS,' HE SAID. 'THE TIME FOR ACTION WILL COME SOON.'

'VERY WELL,' I AGREED. 'WE'LL DO NOTHING UNTIL YOU TELL US, COLONEL. BUT MEANWHILE, I'M THE KING OF RURITANIA. LET'S ENJOY OURSELVES THIS EVENING!'

WE ALL WENT OUT THAT EVENING TO VISIT PRINCESS FLAVIA. FRITZ TOLD ME THAT HE WAS IN LOVE WITH ONE OF THE PRINCESS'S LADIES — IN -WAITING.

'COUNTESS HELGA IS VERY BEAUTIFUL,' HE SAID. 'WE'LL SEE HER WHEN WE ARRIVE.'

PRINCESS FLAVIA WAS VERY HAPPY TO SEE ME. SHE DID NOT REALIZE THAT I WAS NOT THE REAL KING. SHE SEEMED WORRIED ABOUT SOMETHING, THOUGH, AND I ASKED HER WHAT WAS THE MATTER.

'IT'S YOUR BROTHER,' SHE SAID. 'I THINK MICHAEL IS DANGEROUS. PLEASE BE

CAREFUL. YOUR MAJESTY!'

'I'M NOT FRIGHTENED OF MICHAEL,' I TOLD HER.

SHE LOOKED AT ME VERY SERIOUSLY.

'YOUR LIFE IS IMPORTANT TO RURITANIA,' SHE TOLD ME. 'AND TO YOUR FRIENDS, AS WELL,' SHE ADDED WITH A TENDER LOOK.

I BEGAN TO FALL IN LOVE WITH PRINCESS FLAVIA THAT EVENING. IT WAS DIFFICULT FOR ME NOT TO TELL HER THE TRUTH. I WANTED TO TELL HER WHO I REALLY WAS. BUT I WAS PLAYING A DANGEROUS GAME - AND THE KING'S LIFE DEPENDED ON ME. I KEPT SILENT.

- CHAPTER SEVEN -

## **A DANGEROUS MEETING**

THE NEXT MORNING COLONEL SAPT CAME INTO MY ROOM AT THE PALACE. HE WAS CARRYING A LETTER FOR ME. HE LOOKED AT THE WRITING ON THE ENVELOPE BEFORE HE GAVE ME THE LETTER.

'FROM A WOMAN, I THINK,' HE SAID WITH A SMILE. 'I WONDER WHO IT IS?'

AT FIRST I THOUGHT THE LETTER WAS FROM PRINCESS FLAVIA. I OPENED IT EXCITEDLY AND BEGAN TO READ.

*'Your Majesty,*

*I have important news for the King. Come to the old house in New Avenue tonight. Do not come with anyone else. Antoinette De Mauban'*

I HANDED THE LETTER TO THE COLONEL. HE READ IT QUICKLY.

'YOU CAN'T GO.' HE DECIDED. 'ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN IS A FRIEND OF

THE DUKE'S. THEY WANT TO CATCH YOU ALONE AND KILL YOU.'

'I MUST GO,' I ARGUED. 'SHE SAYS SHE HAS IMPORTANT NEWS. PERHAPS SHE WANTS TO HELP US.'

'I FORBID IT,' THE COLONEL SAID ANGRILY. 'THE DUKE'S MEN WILL KILL YOU IF YOU GO TO THIS MEETING TONIGHT.'

'I'M GOING,' I ANNOUNCED FIRMLY. 'IF YOU TRY TO STOP ME, I'LL GO STRAIGHT BACK TO ENGLAND!'

COLONEL SAPT LOOKED AT ME IN SURPRISE. HE WAS BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND ME. WE RASSENDYLLS CAN BE VERY STUBBORN!

'ALL RIGHT,' HE AGREED AT LAST, 'YOU CAN GO IF YOU WANT TO - BUT I'M GOING WITH YOU, MR. RASSENDYLL!'

THE COLONEL AND I LEFT THE PALACE VERY SECRETLY THAT NIGHT. WE WERE BOTH CARRYING PISTOLS IN OUR POCKETS. WE WENT TO THE OLD HOUSE IN NEW AVENUE

AND I LEFT COLONEL SAPT AT THE GATE. I ENTERED THE GROUNDS OF THE HOUSE, AND SAW SOMEONE IN THE SUMMERHOUSE.

I WALKED ACROSS THE GARDEN TO THE SUMMERHOUSE. ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN TURNED TO GREET ME WHEN I ENTERED. SHE WAS VERY PALE AND NERVOUS.

'YOU'RE IN DANGER, MR. RASSENDYLL,' SHE TOLD ME QUICKLY. 'MICHAEL FORCED ME TO WRITE THAT LETTER TO YOU. I DIDN'T WANT TO DO IT. HIS MEN WILL BE HERE IN A FEW MINUTES. THEY WANT TO KILL YOU. THEN THEY'RE GOING TO SAY THE KING IS DEAD. THEY'LL ARREST ALL YOUR FRIENDS, AND MICHAEL WILL BE THE NEW KING. YOU MUST ESCAPE FROM HERE. GO QUICKLY!'

I DID NOT MOVE.

'WHY ARE YOU TELLING ME THIS?' I ASKED HER. 'MICHAEL'S YOUR FRIEND, ISN'T HE?'

SHE LOOKED AT ME UNHAPPILY.

'I LOVE HIM,' SHE SAID SADLY. 'BUT I

KNOW HE'LL MARRY PRINCESS FLAVIA IF HE BECOMES KING. THAT'S WHY I'M HELPING YOU, MR. RASSENDYLL.'

SUDDENLY I HEARD A NOISE OUTSIDE IN THE GARDEN. I TURNED TOWARDS THE DOOR OF THE SUMMERHOUSE AND LOCKED IT. I COULD SEE THREE MEN STANDING OUTSIDE IN THE GARDEN - THREE OF THE SIX! ONE OF THEM BEGAN SPEAKING SOFTLY IN ENGLISH. IT WAS THE DUKE'S MAN, DETCHARD.

'WE JUST WANT TO TALK,' HE SAID. 'WE'VE COME FROM DUKE MICHAEL. HE WANTS TO MAKE YOU AN OFFER, MR. RASSENDYLL.'

'WHAT KIND OF AN OFFER?' I ASKED.

'THE DUKE WANTS YOU OUT OF THE COUNTRY,' THE MAN SAID. 'HE'LL GIVE YOU FIFTY THOUSAND POUNDS IF YOU LEAVE RURITANIA.'

ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN MOVED CLOSE TO ME. SHE PUT HER HAND ON MY ARM.

'DON'T TRUST THEM,' SHE WHISPERED



URGENTLY.

I MOVED VERY QUIETLY AWAY FROM THE DOOR OF THE SUMMERHOUSE. I PICKED UP A SMALL TEA TABLE.

'ALL RIGHT,' I CALLED. 'I'M COMING OUT NOW.'

I HELD THE TEA TABLE IN FRONT OF ME AND RAN OUT OF THE SUMMERHOUSE INTO THE GARDEN. I PUSHED TWO OF THE DUKE'S MEN ONTO THE GROUND AS I RAN PAST THEM. THEN I HEARD DETCHARD SHOUTING. HE FIRED A PISTOL AT ME, BUT IT MISSED. I TURNED AND FIRED MY PISTOL. HE GAVE A CRY OF PAIN. I CONTINUED RUNNING.

COLONEL SAPT WAS WAITING FOR ME WHEN I REACHED THE ROAD.

'WHAT HAPPENED?' HE ASKED. 'I THOUGHT YOU WERE DEAD WHEN I HEARD THE SHOOTING.'

WE WENT BACK TO THE PALACE. WHEN WE ARRIVED, I TOLD HIM EVERYTHING THAT HAD HAPPENED IN THE SUMMERHOUSE.

## - CHAPTER EIGHT -

### **A KING'S LOVE**

THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED WERE VERY DIFFICULT FOR ME. I SAW PRINCESS FLAVIA VERY OFTEN. EACH TIME I SAW HER I LOVED HER MORE. SHE, TOO, SEEMED TO LOVE ME MORE EACH TIME WE MET. I REMEMBER THAT THERE WAS A BALL ONE NIGHT, AND I GAVE PRINCESS FLAVIA A RED ROSE. I BEHAVED LIKE ALL YOUNG MEN WHEN THEY ARE IN LOVE.

'You're different, Rudolf,' she told me once. 'You changed when you became King. You're a new man!'

I wanted to tell her who I really was. I wanted to tell her that I was not the King of Ruritania. I wanted her to love Rudolf Rassendyll, not the King of Ruritania!

Sometimes I imagined the future.

'Will I always have to pretend to be the King? Will I marry Princess Flavia? Will she

become my queen?'

One day she and I were talking. She said to me, 'You are the King. Why can't you be an ordinary man? Then I'd show you how much I love you!'

'Would you really love me if I were an ordinary man, Princess?' I asked. 'Do you love me that much?'

'Of course I do,' she said.

Her words made me very happy. I decided that I could not go on lying to her any more. I loved her. I wanted to tell her the whole truth about myself and the King of Ruritania. I decided to speak.

'Princess,' I began. 'I want to tell you something. I am -'

Just at that moment the door of the room opened and Colonel Sapt came in. He looked angrily at me.

'Forgive me, sir,' he said. 'I need to talk to you about something important.'

'One moment, Princess,' I said.

I left the room and followed Colonel Sapt. He was furious with me.

'I heard everything you said,' he told me. 'You were going to tell her the truth. Be careful,' he warned me. 'The King's life is in your hands, Mr. Rassendyll.'

Princess Flavia was not the only person who liked the new King. The people seemed happy with me, as well. I was becoming popular as the King of Ruritania. I spoke about this to Colonel Sapt one evening when we were alone together.

'You know, Colonel,' I said, 'I'm a good king. The people like me. I could stay here and pretend to be the King forever. No one could stop me.'

The Colonel smiled.

'IT'S TRUE,' HE AGREED. 'NO ONE COULD STOP YOU. BUT I KNOW YOU'RE A MAN OF HONOR, MR. RASSENDYLL. I KNOW YOU'LL HELP US TO FIND THE REAL KING. AND THEN YOU'LL HAVE TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY.'

THERE CAN'T BE TWO RUDOLFS IN RURITANIA!

I SIGHED DEEPLY. THE COLONEL WAS RIGHT.

'I PROMISED TO HELP THE KING,' I SAID, 'AND I WILL HELP HIM. I'LL HELP HIM EVEN IF - EVEN IF -'

'Even if the real King marries Princess Flavia?' the Colonel asked gently.

'EVEN THAT,' I REPLIED. 'THE PRINCESS WILL MARRY THE KING. IT'S HER DUTY, COLONEL. YOU KNOW THAT.'

## - CHAPTER NINE -

### **RETURN TO ZENDA**

At last Colonel Sapt decided that the time was right for rescuing the real King.

'We'll go to Zenda together,' the Colonel explained. 'We'll tell everyone that we're going hunting I there. No one will suspect anything.'

We took ten soldiers with us. The soldiers did not know the real truth. They thought I was the King. The Colonel told them I was in danger. He said someone had tried to kill me in the summerhouse in New Avenue.

We stayed in Zenda for a few days while the Colonel made his plans to get inside the castle. One afternoon I was sitting in the garden of the house, when Rupert Hentzau rode up to the house. He waved at me and smiled cheerfully. Then he got down from his horse and came into the garden.

'I've come with another offer from the Duke,' he said.

'I don't want to hear it,' I told him.

The Duke will give you one million crowns if you leave Ruritania,' Rupert said. 'What do you say?'

'No,' I replied coldly.

'I THOUGHT YOU'D SAY THAT,' RUPERT TOLD ME WITH A SMILE. 'I TOLD THE DUKE IT WAS NO GOOD. YOU'RE A GENTLEMAN, MR. RASSENDYLL - BUT YOU'RE A FOOL AS WELL!'

I SAID NOTHING, AND WE LOOKED AT EACH OTHER FOR A FEW MINUTES IN SILENCE. THEN RUPERT SPOKE AGAIN.

'LISTEN TO ME,' HE SAID. 'YOU COULD REALLY BE THE KING OF RURITANIA, IF YOU WANT. MY FRIENDS AND I WILL HELP YOU. BEING KING IS FUN, ISN'T IT, MR RASSENDYLL? AND THE KING WILL MARRY PRINCESS FLAVIA, WON'T LIE?'

I STILL SAID NOTHING.

'WE'LL HELP YOU, AND YOU HELP US,' HE

WENT ON. 'I WANT TO BE THE DUKE OF STRELSAU. I LIKE THE DUKE'S CASTLE - AND I LIKE HIS LADY AS WELL,' HE LAUGHED. 'ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN'S A BEAUTY!'

NO,' I SAID AGAIN. 'I PROMISED TO HELP THE KING - AND I'LL KEEP MY PROMISE.'

'I LIKE YOU, RASSENDYLL,' RUPERT SAID. HE SPOKE IN A FRIENDLY WAY. 'I DON'T WANT TO BE YOUR ENEMY. SHAKE MY HAND BEFORE I GO. YOU'RE A BRAVE MAN.'

HE PUT OUT HIS HAND FOR ME TO SHAKE. HE WAS SMILING. SUDDENLY HE TOOK OUT A DAGGER FROM HIS COAT. HE STABBED ME IN THE ARM WITH THE DAGGER. I CRIED OUT IN PAIN AND THE SOLDIERS RAN INTO THE GARDEN. RUPERT HENTZAU JUMPED ONTO HIS HORSE AND RODE AWAY.

THE SOLDIERS CARRIED ME INTO THE HOUSE AND PUT ME TO BED. MY ARM WAS VERY PAINFUL.

THAT EVENING FRITZ CAME TO THE HOUSE TO SEE ME. HE BROUGHT SOMEONE



WITH HIM. I RECOGNIZED JOHANN, THE OLD MAN FROM THE HOTEL IN ZENDA. I REMEMBERED THAT JOHANN WORKED FOR THE DUKE OF STRELSAU. THE THREE OF US TALKED TOGETHER, AND JOHANN AGREED TO WORK WITH US. HE KNEW THE KING WAS A PRISONER IN THE CASTLE. HE WAS AFRAID OF THE DUKE, HE TOLD US. JOHANN TOLD US THAT THE KING WAS STILL ALIVE BUT HE WAS VERY ILL.

'HE'LL DIE SOON,' JOHANN TOLD US.

THERE ARE TWO SECRET ROOMS IN THE CASTLE,' HE EXPLAINED. THEY'RE HOLDING THE KING IN ONE OF THE ROOMS. TWO MEMBERS OF THE SIX ARE IN THE OTHER ROOM. THE DUKE HAS TOLD THEM TO KILL THE KING IF ANYONE TRIES TO RESCUE HIM.'

'WHAT WILL THEY DO WITH THE KING'S BODY?' I ASKED HIM. 'IF THEY KILL HIM, WE'LL FIND HIS BODY. EVERYBODY WILL KNOW THE DUKE'S A MURDERER THEN.'

THEY'VE GOT A PLAN,' JOHANN TOLD ME. 'THERE'S A METAL PIPE THAT GOES FROM THE

ROOM WHERE THEY'RE KEEPING HIM, DOWN INTO THE MOAT. WHEN THEY KILL THE KING, THEY'RE GOING TO THROW THE BODY INTO THE CASTLE MOAT. THE DUKE'S MEN WILL SLIDE DOWN THE PIPE INTO THE MOAT AND SWIM AWAY. THERE'LL BE NO EVIDENCE OF THE MURDER. NO ONE WILL EVER FIND THE KING'S BODY.'

I KNEW THAT WE HAD TO DO SOMETHING TO SAVE THE KING. SUDDENLY I HAD AN IDEA.

'LISTEN, JOHANN,' I SAID, 'I WANT YOU TO HELP US TO ENTER THE CASTLE. WILL YOU DO THAT?'

'YES, SIR,' THE OLD MAN REPLIED.

'GOOD,' I SAID. 'OPEN THE CASTLE GATE TOMORROW NIGHT AT TWO O'CLOCK.'

'WHAT DO I DO THEN?' THE OLD MAN ASKED NERVOUSLY.

'NOTHING,' I TOLD HIM. 'OPEN THE CASTLE GATE, AND THEN GO AWAY. LEAVE THE CASTLE.'

'VERY WELL,' HE AGREED. 'I'LL DO IT.'

I GAVE JOHANN A LETTER FOR ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN. I TOLD HER TO MAKE A NOISE AT TWO O'CLOCK THE NEXT NIGHT. I WANTED HER TO SHOUT FOR HELP. I WANTED THE DUKE TO GO TO HER ROOM WHEN SHE CRIED FOR HELP. THEN WE COULD ENTER THE CASTLE THROUGH THE GATE.

THE NEXT NIGHT I HID NEAR THE CASTLE AND WATCHED. IT WAS VERY DARK, AND THE CASTLE SEEMED HUGE AGAINST THE SKY.

- CHAPTER TEN -

**RESCUE**

WHEN IT WAS NEARLY TWO O'CLOCK I ENTERED THE CASTLE MOAT. THE WATER WAS COLD. I SWAM TO THE METAL PIPE UNDER THE KING'S CELL. IT WAS VERY CLOSE TO ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN'S ROOM IN THE CASTLE.

I LOOKED UP AT THE CASTLE. THERE WAS A LIGHT IN ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN'S ROOM. THERE WAS A MAN IN THE ROOM WITH HER. IT WAS RUPERT HENTZAU. THEY WERE ARGUING ABOUT SOMETHING. I SAW RUPERT APPROACH HER, AND SHE WALKED AWAY FROM HIM. I HEARD HER SAY ANGRILY, 'NEVER! YOU'RE MAD.'

'FORGET BLACK MICHAEL,' RUPERT TOLD HER. 'I'M A BETTER MAN THAN HE IS.'

HE MOVED FORWARD AGAIN AND TRIED TO KISS ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN. SHE PUSHED HIM AWAY ANGRILY. THEN I HEARD

SOMEONE COME INTO THE ROOM. IT WAS THE DUKE!

'LEAVE US ALONE' HE ORDERED RUPERT. RUPERT SMILED CRUELLY AND LEFT THE ROOM. A FEW MINUTES LATER THE DUKE ALSO LEFT ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN'S ROOM.

THE CASTLE WAS NOW DARK. I WAS WAITING FOR JOHANN TO OPEN THE GATE WHEN THERE WAS A TERRIBLE SCREAM FROM ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN'S ROOM.

'HELP, MICHAEL!' SHE CRIED, IT'S HENTZAU, HELP ME!' I COULD NOT SEE ANYTHING, BUT I HEARD IT ALL. FIRST THERE WAS THE SOUND OF A MAN RUNNING TOWARDS ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN'S ROOM - THE DUKE.

THEN I HEARD THE NOISE OF SWORDS. RUPERT AND THE DUKE WERE FIGHTING. ONE MAN CALLED OUT IN PAIN, AND THERE WAS SILENCE. THE WINDOW OPENED, AND I SAW RUPERT STANDING THERE. HE HAD KILLED THE DUKE OF STRELSAU! THEN MORE MEN

RUSHED INTO THE ROOM. THEY ATTACKED RUPERT, BUT HE JUMPED OUT OF THE WINDOW INTO THE CASTLE MOAT.

ONE OF THE DUKE'S MEN TRIED TO FOLLOW RUPERT. I GRABBED HIM AND KILLED HIM QUICKLY AND QUIETLY. THEN I SEARCHED HIS BODY FOR THE KEYS TO THE KING'S CELL. I TOOK THE KEYS AND OPENED THE DOOR THAT LED TO THE CELL. I WAS NOW OUTSIDE THE KING'S CELL.

THERE WERE TWO MEN WITH THE KING. THEY THOUGHT I WAS A FRIEND. THEY OPENED THE CELL DOOR. I RAN IN AND ATTACKED THEM. I KILLED ONE OF THEM IMMEDIATELY. THE OTHER MAN, DETCHARD, RAN TOWARDS THE KING WITH HIS SWORD. THE KING WAS WEAK AND ILL, AND HE STOOD IN ONE CORNER OF THE CELL.

I ATTACKED DETCHARD BEFORE HE COULD KILL THE KING. HE WAS A GOOD SWORDSMAN, AND WE FOUGHT FOR A LONG TIME DOWN THERE IN THE DARK CELL. DETCHARD WAS STRONGER THAN ME, AND I

WAS IN GREAT DANGER. SUDDENLY THE KING RECOGNISED WHO I WAS.

'COUSIN RUDOLF!' HE CRIED. 'I'LL HELP YOU.'

HE RAN FORWARD AND PICKED UP A CHAIR. THEN HE PUSHED THE CHAIR AGAINST DETCHARD. DETCHARD TURNED AND WOUNDED THE KING WITH HIS SWORD. THE KING FELL TO THE FLOOR. THEN DETCHARD TURNED BACK TO ME, BUT HE SLIPPED ON THE BLOOD FROM THE KING'S WOUND. I KILLED HIM AS HE FELL. THE FIGHT WAS OVER.

I HELPED THE KING TO CLIMB THE STEPS INTO THE CASTLE. THEN WE SAW A STRANGE SIGHT. THERE WAS A GROUP OF THE DUKE'S MEN STANDING NEAR RUPERT HENTZAU. COLONEL SAPT AND OUR SOLDIERS WERE APPROACHING RUPERT FROM THE OTHER DIRECTION. RUPERT LOOKED AT BOTH GROUPS OF ENEMIES AND SMILED. HE DID NOT SEEM AFRAID OF DANGER.

THEN I SAW ANTOINETTE DE MAUBAN. SHE WAS STANDING IN A DOOR OF THE

CASTLE - AND SHE WAS POINTING A PISTOL AT RUPERT. SHE FIRED, BUT THE BULLET MISSED. RUPERT TURNED TO HER AND SMILED. THEN HE LOOKED ONCE AT THE DUKE'S MEN AND ONCE AT COLONEL SAPT AND THE SOLDIERS.

HE RAN TO THE WALL AND JUMPED INTO THE CASTLE MOAT ONCE MORE. I JUMPED IN AFTER HIM, BUT HE WAS A GOOD SWIMMER. HE SWAM TO THE OTHER SIDE QUICKLY AND CLIMBED OUT. THEN HE BEGAN TO RUN THROUGH THE COUNTRYSIDE. I RAN AFTER HIM, BUT HE WAS FASTER THAN ME. HE SUDDENLY TURNED TO THE RIGHT, AND I COULD NOT SEE. THEN I HEARD A SCREAM - IT WAS A WOMAN'S VOICE. I RAN AS FAST AS I COULD TOWARDS THE SOUND. THEN I SAW RUPERT. HE WAS PULLING A YOUNG GIRL OFF HER HORSE. HE PULLED HER TO THE GROUND, KISSED HER GENTLY, AND JUMPED ONTO THE HORSE.

HE RODE UP TO ME.

'WHAT HAPPENED IN THE CASTLE?' HE ASKED.



• *E*I KILLED THREE OF YOUR FRIENDS,' I TOLD HIM.

'And the King?' he asked.

'THE KING IS HURT,' I REPLIED STERNLY, 'BUT I THINK HE WILL LIVE. I KILLED YOUR FRIEND DETCHARD.'

'YOU'RE A FOOL!' RUPERT SAID IN A FRIENDLY WAY.

'ONE MORE THING,' I TOLD HIM. 'I SAVED YOUR LIFE. I WAS BEHIND YOU ON THE BRIDGE WITH A PISTOL'

HE LOOKED AT ME IN SURPRISE.

'NOW GET OFF THE HORSE' I SAID ANGRILY. 'COME AND FIGHT ME LIKE A MAN.'

I ran towards him and hit him. I was furious. He defended himself, and I think he would have killed me there and then, I except for a sudden noise. Someone was coming towards us on a horse. I turned and saw that it was Fritz. He was carrying a pistol.

Rupert looked at Fritz. He stopped fighting me.

'Au revoir, Rassendyll,' he said. Then he rode away laughing.

Back at the castle the King was now lying in Black Michael's own room. His men sent a message to Princess Flavia that he was safe. She now hurried to Zenda to see him.

The Princess immediately set out for Zenda in her carriage. She arrived just as Fritz and I were approaching the castle. Fritz gave me a sudden look. I understood that Princess Flavia must not see me. I hid behind some bushes - near the road.

Just at that moment the young girl whose horse Rupert had taken, came forward. She ran up to Princess Flavia.

'The King is here, Princess!' she cried. 'In the bushes.'

'Nonsense' one of the soldiers told her. 'The King is in the castle.'

'He's here, I tell you!' the girl cried. 'He's here with Count Fritz.'

'How can the King be in two places?'

Princess Flavia asked. 'Or are there two kings?'

Colonel Sapt now appeared. He told the Princess that the King was in the castle.

'But this girl says he's here, in the bushes,' the Princess told him.

Colonel Sapt smiled at the girl.

'Every fine gentleman looks like a king to a simple girl like her,' he said.

'I'll see this man,' the Princess decided.

'Then come alone,' Colonel Sapt advised her.

A FEW MINUTES LATER PRINCESS FLAVIA AND THE COLONEL WERE STANDING OVER ME.

'IT IS THE KING!' SHE CRIED EXCITEDLY.

SHE MOVED FORWARD TO KISS ME.

'IT IS NOT THE KING,' COLONEL SAPT TOLD HER. 'YOU CANNOT KISS THIS MAN, PRINCESS.'

'OF COURSE LIE'S THE KING!' PRINCESS

FLAVIA CRIED. 'IT IS THE KING'S FACE - IT IS MY LOVE!'

'YOUR LOVE. PRINCESS,' THE COLONEL SAID SLOWLY, 'BUT HE IS NOT THE KING.'

'WHY DO YOU LET THEM TORTURE ME?' THE PRINCESS ASKED ME. 'TELL ME WHAT IT MEANS.'

I LOOKED AT HER SADLY FOR A MOMENT, THEN I SPOKE.

'I AM NOT THE KING!' I SAID SADLY.

## EPILOGUE

That night I went to see the King. He thanked me for my loyalty.

'You have been a good and dear friend, cousin,' he told me. 'I will try to be a good king. You have shown me how a good king behaves.'

Fritz and I left the King. Fritz seemed in a hurry, and he led me quickly to another part of the building.

'Where are we going?' I asked him.

'We're going to see Princess Flavia,' he told me. 'She heard that the King was here, and she came to see him.'

He coughed awkwardly.

'Colonel Sapt has told her everything. She knows who you are now, Mr. Rassendyll'

'I see.' I said slowly, i wonder why she wants to see me.'

Fritz opened a door and pushed me into

the room. He did not enter. The room was dark, and at first I thought I was alone. Then I saw the figure of a woman standing near the window. I approached her.

'Princess!' I said.

I bowed very low to her.

'No!' she cried. 'You must not bow to me, Rudolf - you're the man I love.'

'I love you,' I told her. 'I love you with all my heart.'

Princess Flavia looked at me tenderly, but she did not say a word.

'PERHAPS I WAS WRONG TO PRETEND TO BE THE KING,' I SAID. 'BUT I NEVER LIED ABOUT MY LOVE FOR YOU - NEVER!'

'You were very brave to do what you did,' she told me. 'You saved the real King, and you had to pretend to me. I understand that.'

'I nearly told you the truth,' I explained. 'I wanted to, but the King's life was in danger.'

'What will you do now?' she asked me.

'I'm going back to England tonight,' I said

quietly. 'I have to leave Ruritania now that the real King is safe.'

'I want to come with you!' Princess Flavia said desperately.

'Yes,' I said eagerly. 'Come with me. We'll be happy together, Flavia!'

She looked at me sadly, then she said gently, 'Love isn't the only thing, Rudolf. I also have my duty here in Ruritania.'

'I know,' I replied. 'I was wrong to ask you to come with me.'

'I believe in love. Rudolf,' the Princess went on. 'But I believe in honor, too. I know you believe in honor as well. You played this dangerous game because you believe in honor.'

'You're right,' I said. I felt that my heart was breaking. 'You must stay here in Ruritania, and I must go back to England. We'll never see each other again.'

The Princess kissed me, and I held her in my arms. It was the saddest moment of my

life.

A few minutes later I was outside the castle with Fritz and Colonel Sapt. It was now early morning. We went to the railway station and waited for the train.

'We're tired,' I said. 'But we played our part like men, didn't we, my friends?'

'We defeated the enemy and saved Ruritania,' Sapt said proudly.

Fritz shook my hand warmly.

'The right man is not always the real king!' he said.

Soon the train arrived, and I found myself an empty carriage. I looked out of the window to wave goodbye to Fritz and Colonel Sapt. They both stood on the platform. They took their hats off their heads and bowed to me with great respect. They stood like that until the train was a long way from the station.

That was the end of my Ruritanian adventure. A few months later Princess



Flavia married the King. It was her duty.

I settled into a quiet life in England. I never married. I often wonder what happened to Rupert Hentzau. Sometimes I think he will return to Ruritania one day, and make more trouble for the King. Then, who knows, I will go back there to help the Elphbergs again!

I take a holiday in Dresden every year. I meet Fritz and his wife, the Countess Helga there. We spend a few days together. Every year Fritz carries a little box with him and gives it to me. There is a rose inside, and a note: "Rudolf - Flavia - always". Fritz carries a similar little box back to Ruritania with him after each holiday.

-THE END-