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The Prisoner of Zenda

By ANTHONY HOPE

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Rudolf Rassendyll—An adventurous young Englishman, age 29, related by an ancient marriage to the Elphbergs, the royal family of Ruritania.
Rudolf—The new King of Ruritania. Both he and Rudolf Rassendyll are distinguished for their dark red hair, and long, sharp, straight noses—characteristics of the Elphberg family.
"Black Michael," Duke of Strelsau—Half-brother of the King, unscrupulously ambitious to be King himself and far more popular with the people and army than his brother Rudolf.
Antoinette de Mauban—A beautiful young Frenchwoman, in love with Black Michael, Duke of Strelsau.
Princess Flavia—The beautiful Princess of Ruritania, whom the King is expected to marry and make his queen. Duke Michael is also passionately in love with her.
Johann—Keeper of Duke Michael's castle, of Zenda.
Josef—Servant to King Rudolf.
Colonel Sapt—Chief Aide-de-camp to the King.
Fritz von Tarlenheim—A young nobleman in the service of the King.

face in his hands. The king breathed loudly and heavily. Sapt stirred him again with his foot.

"The drunken dog!" he said. "But he's an Elphberg and the son of his father, and may I rot in perdition before Black Michael sits in his place!"

For a moment or two we were all silent; then Sapt, knitting his bushy gray brows, took his pipe from his mouth and said to me.

"As a man grows old he believes in Fate. Fate sent you here. Fate sends you now to Strelsau."

I staggered back with an ejaculation of amazement. Fritz looked up with an eager, bewildered gaze.

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

"It's a risk—against a certainty," said Sapt. "If you shave I'll wager

DON'T miss the joy and excitement of reading "The Prisoner of Zenda," just because you may not have read the earlier chapters. The condensed outline of what they contained, given in small type at the beginning of each week's installment, will put you right into the middle of the story, will enable you to know all that has gone before and prepare you for enjoying this week's chapter and all the later ones. Read the Synopsis and join the thousands of readers, young and old, who are watching for "The Prisoner of Zenda" every week that comes.

SYNOPSIS

Rudolf Rassendyll, the young English hero, is 29 years old and brother of Lord Bursledon. He has inherited the dark red hair and long, sharp, straight nose which characterize the Elphbergs, the royal family of Ruritania, to whom the Rassendylls are related through an ancient and unpleasant marriage. The family resemblance strikes in Rudolf a desire to see the country of his royal kinsfolk, which is increased by the news that a new king, Rudolf the Fifth, is to be crowned at Strelsau. On his way to Strelsau Mme. Antoinette de Mauban, who is said to be in love with the Duke of Strelsau, is pointed out to him. Unable to secure accommodations in the capital, Rudolf leaves the train at Zenda, a small town near the estate of the Duke. At the inn his resemblance to the new king is commented on, and he learns that "Black Michael" is much more popular with the people than his brother, who is to be their king and marry the Princess Flavia. Desiring to see something of the Duke's estate, Rassendyll goes for a stroll, when he encounters the young king, Colonel Sapt and Fritz von Tarlenheim. His striking likeness to the king being explained he is invited to dine with them. The king drinks heavily, the last bottle being one sent by Duke Michael. The next morning, the day for the coronation, the king is found to be stupefied with a drug, supposed to have been taken through Michael's wine. In desperation Colonel Sapt and von Tarlenheim persuade Rassendyll to shave and take the king's place in the coronation ceremonies to frustrate Michael's plans who would doubtless be crowned should the rightful king not appear.

CHAPTER IV.

Wherein I Assume a New Role

YES, continued Old Sapt, "the whole nation will be there; half the army—aye, and with Black Michael at the head. Shall we send word that the King's drunk?"

"That he's ill," said I, in correction. "Ill!" echoed Sapt, with a scornful laugh. "They know his illness too well. He's been 'ill' before!"

"Well, we must chance what they think," said Fritz helplessly. "I'll carry the news and make the best of it."

Sapt raised his hand. "Tell me," said he: "do you think the king was drugged?"

"I do," said I. "And who drugged him?"

"That fiendish hound, Black Michael," said Fritz between his teeth.

"Aye," said Sapt, "that he might not come to be crowned. Rassendyll here doesn't know our pretty Michael. What think you, Fritz—has Michael no king ready? Has half Strelsau no other candidate? As God's affive, man, the throne's lost if the king show himself not in Strelsau today. I know Black Michael."

"We would carry him there," said I. "And a very pretty picture he makes," sneered Sapt.

Fritz von Tarlenheim buried his

you'll not be known. Are you afraid?"

"Sir!"
"Come, lad, there, there; but it's your life, you know, if you're known—and mine—and Fritz's here. But if you don't go I swear to you Black Michael will sit to-night on the throne, and the king lie in prison or his grave."

"The king would never forgive it," I stammered.

"Are we women, Who cares for his forgiveness?"
The clock ticked fifty times, and sixty and seventy times, as I stood in thought. 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," said I, and I turned my eyes on the prostrate figure of the king on the floor.

"To-night," Sapt went on in a hasty whisper, "we are to lodge in the palace. The moment they leave us you and I will mount our horses—Fritz must stay here and guard the king's room—and ride here at a gallop. The king will be ready—Josef will tell him—and he must ride back with me to Strelsau, and you ride as if the devil were behind you to the frontier."

I took it all in in a second, and nodded my head.

"There's a chance," said Fritz, with his first sign of hopefulness.

"If I escape detection," said I.
"If we're detected," said Sapt, "I'll send Black Michael down below before I go myself, so help me Heaven! Sit in that chair, man."

I obeyed him.
He darted from the room, calling, "Josef! Josef!" In three minutes he was back, and Josef with him. The latter carried a jug of hot water, soap, and razors. He was trembling as Sapt told him how the land lay, and bade him shave me.

Suddenly Fritz smote on his thigh: "But the guard! They'll know! they'll know!"

"Pooh! We shan't wait for the guard. We'll ride to Hofban and catch a train there. When they come the bird'll be flown."

"But the king?"

"The king will be in the wine cellar. I'm going to carry him there now."

"If they find him?"

"They won't. How should they? Josef will put them off."

"But—"

Sapt stamped his foot.
"We're not playing," he roared. "By—, don't I know the risk? If they do find him he's no worse off than if he isn't crowned today in Strelsau."

So speaking, he flung the door open and, stooping, put forth a strength I did not dream he had, and lifted the king in his hands. And as he did so the old woman, Johann the keeper's mother, stood in the doorway. For a moment she stood, then she turned on her heel, without a sign of surprise, and clattered down the passage.

"Has she heard?" cried Fritz.
"I'll shut her mouth!" said Sapt grimly, and he bore off the king in his arms.

For me, I sat down in an armchair, and as I sat there, half dazed, Josef clipped and scraped me till my mustache and imperial were things of the past and my face was as bare as the king's. And when Fritz saw me thus he drew a long breath and exclaimed "By Jove, we shall do it!"

It was six o'clock now, and we had no time to lose. Sapt hurried me into the king's room, and I dressed myself in the uniform of a colonel of the Guard, finding time, as I slipped on the king's boots, to ask Sapt what he had done with the old woman.

"She swore she'd heard nothing," said he; "but to make sure I tied her legs together and put a handkerchief in her mouth and bound her hands, and locked her up in the coal cellar, next door to the king. Josef'll look after them both, later on."

Then I burst out laughing, and even old Sapt grimly smiled.

"I fancy," said he, "that when Josef tells them the king is gone they'll think it is because we smelt a rat. For you may swear Black Michael doesn't expect to see him in Strelsau today."

I put the king's helmet on my head. Old Sapt handed me the king's sword, looking at me long and carefully.

"Thank God, he shaved his beard!" he exclaimed.

"Why did he?" I asked.

"Because Princess Flavia said he grazed her cheek when he was graciously pleased to give her a cousinly kiss. Come, though, we must ride."

"Is all safe here?"
"Nothing's safe anywhere," said Sapt, "but we can make it no safer."

Fritz now rejoined us in the uniform of a captain in the same regiment as that to which my dress belonged. In four minutes Sapt had arrayed himself in his uniform. Josef called that the horses were ready. We jumped on their backs and started at a rapid trot. The game had begun. What would the issue of it be?

The cool morning air cleared my head, and I was able to take in all Sapt said to me. He was wonderful. Fritz hardly spoke, riding like a man asleep; but Sapt, without another word for the king, began at once to instruct me most minutely in the history of my past life, of my family, of my tastes, pursuits, weaknesses, companions, and servants. He told me the etiquette of the Ruritanian court, promising to be constantly at my elbow to point out everybody whom I ought to know, and give me hints with what degree of favor to greet them.

"By the way," he said, "you are a Catholic, I suppose?"

"Not I," I answered.

"Lord, he's a heretic!" groaned Sapt, and forthwith he fell to a rudimentary lesson in the practices and observances of the Romanish faith.

"Luckily," said he, "you won't be expected to know much, for the king's notoriously lax and careless about such matters. But you must be as civil as butter to the cardinal. We hope to win him over, because he and Michael have a standing quarrel about their precedence."

We were by now at the station. Fritz had recovered nerve enough to explain to the astonished station master that the king had changed his

(Continued on page 22, this issue)