

The Prisoner of Zenda

By... ANTHONY HOPE

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CHAPTER XVII.

THE position wherein I stood does not appear very favorable to thought, yet for the next moment or two I thought profoundly. I had, I told myself, scored one point. Be Rupert Hentzau's errand what it might and the villainy he was engaged on what it would, I had scored one point. He was on the other side of the moat from the king, and it would be by no fault of mine if ever he set foot on the same side again. I had three left to deal with—two on guard and De Gautet in his bed. Ah, if I had the keys! I would have risked everything and attacked Detchard and Bersonin before their friends could join them. But I was powerless. I must wait till the coming of my friends enticed some one to cross the bridge—some one with the keys. And I waited, as it seemed, for half an hour, really for about five minutes, before the next act in the rapid drama began.

All was still on the other side. The duke's room remained inscrutable behind its shutters. The light burned steadily in Mme. de Mauban's window. Then I heard the faintest, faintest, sound. It came from behind the door which led to the drawbridge on the other side of the moat. It but just reached my ear, yet I could not be mistaken as to what it was. It was made by a key being turned very carefully and slowly. Who was turning it? And of what room was it the key? There leaped before my eyes the picture of young Rupert, with the key in one hand, his sword in the other and an evil smile on his face. But I did not know what door it was nor in which of his favorite pursuits young Rupert was spending the hours of that night.

I was soon to be enlightened, for the next moment—before my friends could be near the chateau door—before Johann, the keeper, would have thought to nerve himself for his task—there was a sudden crash from the room with the lighted window. It sounded as though some one had flung down a lamp, and the window went dark and black. At the same instant a cry rang out, shrill in the night: "Help, help! Michael, help!" and was followed by a shriek of utter terror.

I was tingling in every nerve. I stood on the topmost step, clinging to the threshold of the gate with my right hand and holding my sword in my left. Suddenly I perceived that the gateway was broader than the bridge. There was a dark corner on the opposite side where a man could stand. I darted across and stood there. Thus placed I commanded the path, and no man could pass between the chateau and the old castle till he had tried conclusions with me.

There was another shriek. Then a door was flung open and clanged against the wall, and I heard the handle of a door savagely twisted.

"Open the door! In God's name, what's the matter?" cried a voice, the voice of Black Michael himself.

He was answered by the very words I had written in my letter: "Help, Michael—Hentzau!" A fierce oath rang out from the duke, and, with a loud thud, he threw himself against the door. At the same moment I heard a window above my head open, and a voice cried, "What's the matter?" and I heard a man's hasty footsteps. I grasped my sword. If De Gautet came my way the Six would be less by one more.

Then I heard the clash of crossed swords and a tramp of feet, and I cannot tell the thing so quickly as it happened, for all seemed to come at once. There was an angry cry from madam's room, the cry of a wounded man. The window was flung open. Young Rupert stood there, sword in hand. He turned his back, and I saw his body go forward to the lunge.

"Ah, Johann, there's one for you! Come on, Michael!" Johann was there, then—come to the rescue of the duke! How would he open the door for me, for I feared that Rupert had slain him?

"Help!" cried the duke's voice, faint and husky.

I heard a stir on the stairs above me, and I heard a stir down to my right in the direction of the king's cell. But before anything happened on my side of the moat I saw five or six men round young Rupert in the embrasure of madam's window. Three or four times he lunged with incomparable dash and dexterity. For an instant they fell back, leaving a ring round him. He leaped on the parapet of the window, laughing as he leaped, and waving his sword in his hand. He was drunk with blood, and he laughed again wildly as he flung himself headlong into the moat.

What became of him then? I did not see, for as he leaped De Gautet's lean face looked out through the door by me, and without a second's hesitation I struck at him with all the strength God had given me, and he fell dead in the doorway without a word or a groan. I dropped on my knees by him. Where were the keys? I found myself muttering, "The keys, zaza, the keys!" as though he had been yet alive and could listen, and when I

could not find them I—God forgive me!—I believe I struck a dead man's face.

At last I had them. There were but three. Seizing the largest, I felt the lock of the door that led to the cell. I fitted in the key. It was right. The lock turned. I drew the door close behind me and locked it as noiselessly as I could, putting the key in my pocket.

I found myself at the top of a flight of steep stone stairs. An oil lamp burned dimly in the bracket. I took it down and held it in my hand, and I stood and listened.

"What in the devil can it be?" I heard a voice say.

It came from behind a door that faced me at the bottom of the stairs.

And another answered: "Shall we kill him?"

I strained to hear the answer and could have sobbed with relief when Detchard's voice came grating and cold:

"Wait a bit. There'll be trouble if we strike too soon."

There was a moment's silence. Then I heard the bolt of the door cautiously drawn back. Instantly I put out the light I held, replacing the lamp in the bracket.

"It's dark—the lamp's out. Have you a light?" said the other voice—Bersonin's.

No doubt they had a light, but they should not use it. It was come to the crisis now, and I rushed down the steps and flung myself against the door. Bersonin had unbolted it, and it gave way before me. The Belgian stood there, sword in hand, and Detchard was sitting on a couch at the side of the room. In astonishment at seeing me, Bersonin recoiled; Detchard jumped to his sword. I rushed madly at the Belgian. He gave way before me, and I drove him up against the wall. He was no swordsman, though he fought bravely, 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 rushed straight to the door of the king's room, opened it and slammed it behind him. Even now he was at his work beside.

And surely he would have killed the king and perhaps me also had it not been for one devoted man who gave his life for the king, for when I forced the door the sight I saw was this: The king stood in the corner of the room. Broken by his sickness, he could do nothing. His fettered hands moved uselessly up and down, and he was laughing horribly in half mad delirium. Detchard and the doctor were together in the middle of the room, and the doctor had flung himself on the murderer, pinning his hands to his sides for an instant. Then Detchard wrenched himself free from the feeble grip, and as I entered drove his sword through the hapless man.

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

We were sword to sword. By blessed chance neither he nor Bersonin had been wearing their revolvers. I found them afterward, ready loaded, on the mantelpiece of the outer room. It was hard by the door, ready to their hands, but my sudden rush in had cut off access to them. Yes, we were man to man, and we began to fight, silently, sternly and hard. Yet I remember little of it, save that the man was my match with the sword—nay, and more, for he knew more tricks than I—and that he forced me back against the bars that guarded the entrance to Jacob's ladder. And I saw a smile on his face, and he wounded me in the left arm.

No glory do I take for that contest. I believe that the man would have mastered me and slain me and then done his butcher's work, for he was the most skillful swordsman I have ever met, but even as he pressed me hard the half mad, wasted, wren creature in the corner leaped high in lunatic mirth, shrieking:

"It's Cousin Rudolf! Cousin Rudolf! I'll help you, Cousin Rudolf!" And, catching up a chair in his hands (he could but just lift it from the ground and hold it uselessly before him), he came toward us. Hope came to me.

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

Detchard replied with a savage thrust. He all but had me.

"Come on! Come on, man!" I cried. "Come and share the fun!"

And the king laughed gleefully and came on, pushing his chair before him.

With an oath Detchard skipped back and before I knew what he was doing had turned his sword against the king. He made one fierce cut at the king, and the king, with a piteous cry, dropped where he stood. The stout ruffian turned to face me again. But his own hand had prepared his destruction, for in turning he trod in the pool of blood that flowed from the dead physician. He slipped; he fell. Like a dart I was upon him. I caught him by the throat, and before he could recover I drove my blade through his neck, and with a stifled curse he fell across the body of his victim.

Was the king dead? It was my first thought. I rushed to where he lay. Aye, it seemed as if he were dead, for

he had a great gash across the forehead, and he lay still in a huddled mass on the floor. I dropped on my



"It's Cousin Rudolf!"

knees beside him and leaned my ear down to hear if he breathed. But before I could there was a loud rattle from the outside. I knew the sound. The drawbridge was being pushed out. A moment later it rang home against the wall on my side of the moat. I should be caught in a trap and the king with me if he yet lived. He must take his chance to live or to die. I took my sword and passed into the outer room. Who were pushing the drawbridge out—my men? If so, all was well. My eye fell on the revolvers, and I seized one and paused to listen in the doorway of the outer room. To listen, say I? Yes, and to get my breath, and I tore my shirt and twisted a strip of it round my bleeding arm and stood listening again. I would have given the world to hear Sapt's voice, for I was faint, spent and weary. And that wildest Rupert Hentzau was yet at large in the castle. Yet, because I could better defend the narrow door at the top of the stairs than the wider entrance to the room, I dragged myself up the steps and stood behind it listening.

What was the sound? Again a strange one for the place and the time. An easy, scornful, merry laugh, the laugh of young Rupert Hentzau! I could scarcely believe that a sane man would laugh. Yet the laugh told me that my men had not come, for they must have shot Rupert ere now if they had come. And the clock struck half past 2! My God, the door had not been opened! They had gone to the bank! They had not found me! They had gone by now back to Tarlenheim with the news of the king's death—and mine. Well, it would be true before they got there. Was not Rupert laughing in triumph?

For a moment I sank unmoved against the door. Then I started up alert again, for Rupert cried scornfully: "Well, the bridge is there! Come over it! And in God's name let's see Black Michael keep back you curs! Michael, come and fight for her!"

If it were a three cornered fight I might yet bear my part. I turned the key in the door and looked out.

CHAPTER XIX.

FOR a moment I could see nothing, for the glare of lanterns and torches caught me full in the eyes from the other side of the bridge. But soon the scene grew clear, and it was a strange scene. The bridge was in its place. At the far end of it stood a group of the duke's servants. Two or three carried the lights which had dazzled me; three or four held pikes in rest. They were huddled together; their weapons were protruded before them; their faces were pale and agitated. To put it plainly, they looked in as arrant a fright as I have seen men look, and they gazed apprehensively at a man who stood in the middle of the bridge, sword in hand. Rupert Hentzau was in his trousers and shirt. The white linen was stained with blood, but his easy, buoyant pose told me that he was himself either not touched at all or merely scratched. There he stood, holding the bridge against them and daring them to come on, or, rather, bidding them and Black Michael to him, and they, having no firearms, cowered before the desperate man and dared not attack him. They whispered to one another, and in the backmost rank I saw my friend Johann leaning against the portal of the door and stanching with a handkerchief the blood which flowed from a wound in his cheek.

By marvelous chance I was master. The cravens would oppose me no more than they dared attack Rupert. I had but to raise my revolver to send him to his account with his sins on his head. He did not so much as know that I was there. I did nothing—why, I hardly know to this day, I had killed one man stealthily that night and another by luck rather than skill—perhaps it was that. Again, villain as the man was, I did not relish being one of a crowd against him—perhaps it was that. But stronger than either of these restraining feelings came a curiosity and a fascination which held me spellbound, watching for the outcome of the scene.

"Michael, you dog! Michael! If you can stand, come on!" cried Rupert. And he advanced a step, the group shrinking back a little before him.

The answer to his taunts 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 triumphantly. 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 there arose a distant sound, as of shouts and knockings from the other side of the chateau. My heart leaped. It must be my men, come by a happy disobedience to seek me. The noise continued, but none of the rest seemed to heed it. Their attention was chained by what now happened before their eyes. The group of servants parted, and a woman staggered on to the bridge. Antoinette de Mauban was in a loose white robe, her dark hair streamed over her shoulders, her face was ghastly pale, and her eyes gleamed wildly in the light of the torches. In her shaking hand she held a revolver, and as she tottered forward she fired at Rupert Hentzau. The ball missed him and struck the woodwork over my head.

"Faith, madam," laughed Rupert, "had your eyes been no more deadly than your shooting I had not been in this scrape nor Black Michael in the lower regions tonight!"

She took no notice of his words. With a wonderful effort she calmed herself till she stood still and rigid. Then very slowly and deliberately she began to raise her arm again, taking most careful aim.

He would be mad to risk it. He must rush on her, changing the bullet, or retreat toward me. I covered him with my weapon.

He did neither. Before she had got her aim he bowed in his most graceful fashion, cried, "I can't kill where I've kissed," and before she or I could stop him laid his hand on the parapet of the bridge and lightly leaped into the moat.

At the very moment I heard a rush of feet and a voice I knew—Sapt's—cry, "God, it's the duke—dead!" Then I knew that the king needed me no more, and, throwing down my revolver, I sprang out on the bridge. There was a cry of wild wonder, "The king!" and then I, like Rupert Hentzau, sword in hand, vaulted over the parapet, intent on finishing my quarrel with him where I saw his curly head fifteen yards off in the water of the moat.

He swam swiftly and easily. I was wearied, and half crippled with my wounded arm. I could not gain on him. For a time I made no sound, but as we rounded the corner of the old keep I cried:

"Stop, Rupert! Stop!"

I saw him look over his shoulder, but he swam on. He was under the bank now, searching, as I guessed, for a spot that he could climb. I knew there to be none, but there was my rope, which would still be hanging where I had left it. He would come to where it was before I could. Perhaps he would miss it; perhaps he would find it, and if he drew it up after him he would get a good start of me. I put forth all my remaining strength and pressed on. At last I began to gain on him, for he, occupied with his search, unconsciously slackened his pace.

Ah, he had found it! A low shout of triumph came from him. He laid hold of it and began to haul himself up. I was near enough to hear him mutter, "How the devil comes this here?" I was at the rope, and he, hanging in midair, saw me, but I could not reach him.

"Hello! Who's here?" he cried in startled tones.

For a moment I believe he took me for the king. I dare say I was pale enough to lend color to the thought, but an instant later he cried:

"Why, it's the play actor! How name you here, man?"

And so saying he gained the bank.

I laid hold of the rope, but I paused. He stood on the bank, sword in hand, and he could cut my head open or split me through the heart as I came up. I let go the rope.

"Never mind," said I, "but as I am here I think I'll stay."

He smiled down on me.

"These women are the deuce"—he began, when suddenly the great bell of the castle began to ring furiously, and a loud shout reached us from the moat.

Rupert smiled again and waved his hand to me.

"I should like a turn with you, but it's a little too hot," said he. And he disappeared from above me.

In an instant, without thinking of danger, I laid my hand to the rope. I was up. I saw him thirty yards off, running like a deer toward the shelter of the forest. For once Rupert Hentzau had chosen discretion for his part. I laid my feet to the ground and rushed after him, calling to him to stand. He would not. Unwounded and vigorous, he gained on 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 engulfed us both, pursued and pursuer.

It was 3 o'clock now, and day was dawning. I was on a long, straight grass avenue, and a hundred yards ahead ran young Rupert, his curls waving in the fresh breeze. I was weary and panting. He looked over his shoulder and waved his hand again to me. He was mocking me, for he saw he had the pace of me. I was forced to pause for breath. A moment later Rupert turned sharply to the right and was lost from my sight.

I thought all was over and in deep vexation sank on the ground, but I was up again directly, for a scream rang through the forest, a woman's scream. Putting forth the last of my strength, I ran on to the place where he had turned out of my sight, and, turning also, I saw him again; but, alas, I could not touch him. He was in the act of lifting a girl down from her horse. Doubtless it was her scream that I heard. She looked like a small farmer's or a peasant's daughter, and she carried a basket on her arms. Probably she was on her way to the early market at Zenda. Her horse was a stout, well shaped animal. Master Rupert lifted her down amid her

shrieks. The sight of him frightened her, but he treated her gently, laughed, kissed her and gave her money. Then he jumped on the horse, sitting sideways like a woman, and then he waited for me. I on my part waited for him.

Presently he rode toward me, keeping his distance, however. He lifted up his hand, saying:

"What did you in the castle?"

"I killed three of your friends," said I.

"What! You got to the cells?"

"Yes."

"And the king?"

"He was hurt by Detchard before I killed Detchard, but I pray that he lives."

"You fool!" said Rupert pleasantly.

"One thing more I did."

"And what's that?"

"I spared your life. I was behind you on the bridge, with a revolver in my hand."

"No? Faith, I was between two fires!"

"Get off your horse," I cried, "and fight like a man!"

"Before a lady," said he, pointing to the girl. "Ere, your majesty!"

Then in my rage, hardly knowing what I did, I rushed at him. For a moment he seemed to waver. Then he reined his horse in and stood waiting for me. On I went in my folly. I seized the bridle, and I struck at him. He parried and thrust at me. I fell back a pace and rushed in at him again, and this time I reached his face and laid his cheek open and darted back before he could strike me. He seemed almost dazed at the fierceness of my attack; otherwise I think he must have killed me. I sank on my knee, panting, expecting him to ride at me. And so he would have done, and then and there, I doubt not, one or both of us would have died, but at the moment there came a shout from behind us, and, looking round, I saw just at the turn of the avenue a man on a horse. He was riding hard, and he carried a revolver in his hand. It was Fritz von Tarlenheim, my faithful friend. Rupert saw him and knew that the game was up. He checked his rush at me and flung his leg over the saddle, but yet for just a moment he waited. Leaning forward, he tossed his hair off his forehead and smiled and said:

"Au revoir, Rudolf Rassendyll!"

Then, with his cheek streaming blood, but his lips laughing and his body swaying with ease and grace, he bowed to me, and he bowed to the farm girl, who had drawn near in trembling fascination, and he waved his hand to Fritz, who was just within range, and let fly a shot at him. The ball came high doing its work, for it struck the sword he held, and he dropped the sword with an oath, wringing his fingers, and clapped his heels hard in his horse's belly and rode away at a gallop.

And I watched him go down the long avenue, riding as though he rode for his pleasure and singing as he went, for all there was that gash in his cheek.

Once again he turned to wave his hand, and then the gloom of the thickets swallowed him, and he was lost from our sight. Thus he vanished—reckless and wary, graceful and graceless, handsome, debonaire, vile and unconquered. And I flung my sword passionately on the ground and cried to Fritz to ride after him, but Fritz stopped his horse and leaped down and ran to me and knelt, putting his arm about me. And, indeed, it was time, for the wound that Detchard had given me was broken forth afresh, and my blood was staining the ground.

"Then give me the horse!" I cried, staggering to my feet and throwing his arms off me. And the strength of my rage carried me so far as where the horse stood, and then I fell prone beside it. And Fritz knelt by me again.

"Fritz!" I said.

"Aye, friend—dear friend!" said he, tender as a woman.

"Is the king alive?"

He took his handkerchief and wiped my lips and bent and kissed me on the forehead.

"Thanks to the most gallant gentleman that lives," said he softly, "the king is alive!"

The little farm girl stood by us, weeping for fright and wide eyed for wonder.

"Au revoir, Rudolf Rassendyll!"

der, for she had seen me at Zenda, and was not I, pallid, dripping, foul and bloody as I was—yet was not I the king?

And when I heard that the king was alive I strove to cry "Hurrah!" but I could not speak, and I laid my head back in Fritz's arms and closed my eyes, and I groaned, and then, lest Fritz should do me wrong in his thoughts, I opened my eyes and tried to say "Hurrah!" again, but I could not, and, being very tired and now very cold, I huddled myself close up to Fritz to get the warmth of him and shut my eyes again and went to sleep.



"Au revoir, Rudolf Rassendyll!"

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Portland Cement.

The first Portland cement was manufactured in England about the year 1824 by Joseph Aspdin of Leeds, and was so called on account of the resemblance of the hardened material to the building stone then quarried on the island of Portland. Many mills were erected from Aspdin's time until 1880 in England and on the continent, but the methods of manufacture were very crude and much credit is due the German and French manufacturers who developed the industry, and who soon controlled the market of the world on account of the high quality of their product.

Until a few years ago, the best Portland cements were made in Germany and it was not until about 1875 that any of the material was produced in this country. From that time the growth of the American industry has been rapid and at the present time there is consumed annually, in the United States alone, over 40,000,000 barrels of Portland cement, less than five per cent of which is imported.

The chief reason for the wonderful success in the manufacture of cement in this country, is the development of the rotary kiln, which simplifies the burning process and insures the uniform perfect calcination of the raw materials. Engineers now agree, and long time tests have shown, that American Portland cements far surpass those of European manufacture.

Today there are nearly one hundred different factories producing Portland cement in the United States, and it is somewhat confusing for one to determine which brand to choose in order to secure the best results. There should be little difficulty, however, in selecting one of the best, if it is remembered that the best Portland cements are those which have long since passed the experimental stage, and are those which have been used with entire success for all classes of high grade concrete construction. The cements to be selected should be those in whose manufacture the greatest care and accuracy is exercised and which are entirely free from any foreign substances or adulteration.—R. B. DICKINSON.

Mayor Schmitz Convicted.

The conviction of Mayor Schmitz, of San Francisco, on a charge of extortion is a distinct triumph for the forces of decency in that graft ridden and unfortunate city. Schmitz has given notice that he will appeal to the court of last resort, on the ground that he was not treated fairly by the trial judge and because the jury was selected under circumstances unfavorable to him. Schmitz, it may now be presumed, will be deposed from the mayoralty, if he has not the good grace to get out voluntarily. Then a new board of supervisors may be installed without the risk of having them deposed by a crooked mayor. Sixteen of the eighteen members of the governing board of the municipality are confessed bribe-takers, yet they are still making the laws of the city. Immunity was promised to them for the sake of getting at the criminals higher up. Probably the city can afford to dispose of the petty grafters in that fashion, although the country generally would like to see the whole batch scattered. After Schmitz is disposed of, Prosecutor Heney will have on hand the trial of the men who are charged with giving the bribes which sixteen men confess they have received. The rich men are beginning to see that grafting is a dangerous business, even in San Francisco. The country is watching the struggle with intense interest, and if Mr. Heney succeeds as well as he gives promise of doing, there will be a demand for his services elsewhere.—Washington Post.

The Two Ages of Man.

There are two periods in a man's life when he is unable to understand women. One is before marriage and the other after.—London Tatler.