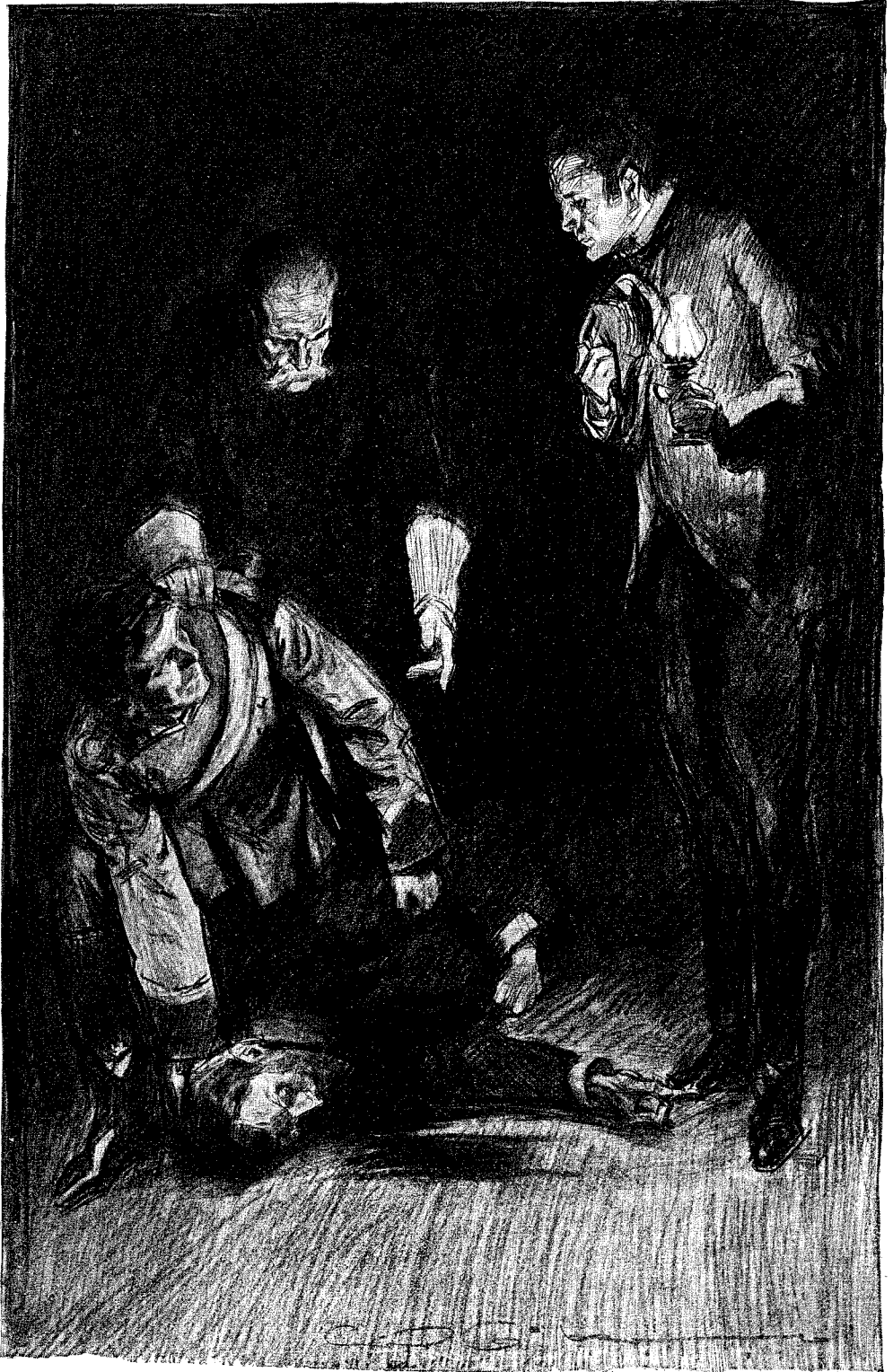
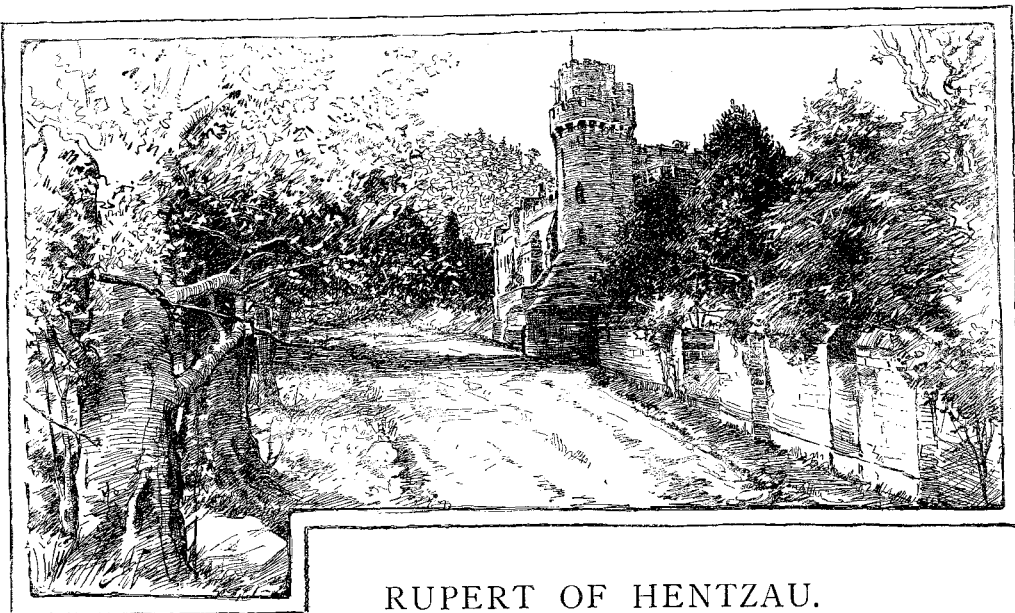


DRAWN BY CHARLES DANA GIBSON.



"He was dead." See page 338.

RUPERT OF HENTZAU, CHAPTER VIII.



RUPERT OF HENTZAU.

FROM THE MEMOIRS OF FRITZ VON TARLENHEIM.

BY ANTHONY HOPE.

Being the sequel to a story by the same writer entitled "The Prisoner of Zenda."

WITH FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHARLES DANA GIBSON.

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF EARLIER CHAPTERS.

Rudolf Rassendyll, as an act of friendship to Rudolf, King of Ruritania, his distant relative, takes advantage of a close resemblance between them and impersonates the king through a grave crisis in the latter's affairs. He even plays the king's part as the prospective husband of the Princess Flavia. But in so doing he loses his heart, while the princess suddenly discovers in her lover a fervor and fascination she had not found in him before. In the end, the princess dutifully marries the real king; but thereafter, once a year, she sends a gift and a verbal message to Rassendyll in token of her remembrance of him. All this is told in the story of "The Prisoner of Zenda." The present history opens with the Princess (now Queen) Flavia come to such a pass that she dare not longer trust herself in sending the yearly mes-

sage to Rassendyll. She therefore writes a letter that is to be her last word to him. The bearer, Fritz von Tarlenheim, is betrayed by his servant Bauer, and assaulted and robbed of the letter by Rupert of Hentzau. Rupert's tool, the Count of Luzau-Rischenheim, hurries to Zenda with a copy of it, to lay before the king. But he is met there by Rassendyll, is deceived for the moment into thinking him the king, and yields him the copy. He soon realizes his mistake, but is prevented by Colonel Sapt and Bernenstein from coming into private communication with the king. He is also made to discover the hiding-place of Rupert,—19 Königstrasse, Strelsau. Von Tarlenheim, the meanwhile, lies at Wintenberg, recovering from his beating, under the care of Rassendyll's servant James.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TASK OF THE QUEEN'S SERVANTS.

THE doctor who attended me at Wintenberg was not only discreet, but also indulgent; perhaps he had the sense to see that little benefit would come to a sick man from fretting in helplessness on his back, when he was on fire to be afoot. I fear he thought the baker's rolling-pin was in my mind, but at any rate I extorted a consent from him, and was on my way home from Wintenberg not much more than twelve hours after Rudolf Rassendyll left me. Thus I arrived at my own house

in Strelsau on the same Friday morning that witnessed the Count of Luzau-Rischenheim's twofold interview with the king at the Castle of Zenda. The moment I had arrived, I sent James, whose assistance had been, and continued to be, in all respects most valuable, to despatch a message to the constable, acquainting him with my whereabouts, and putting myself entirely at his disposal. Sapt received this message while a council of war was being held, and the information it gave aided not a little in the arrangements that the constable and Rudolf Rassendyll made. What these were I must now relate, although, I fear, at the risk of some tediousness.

Yet that council of war in Zenda was

held under no common circumstances. Cowed as Rischenheim appeared, they dared not let him out of their sight. Rudolf could not leave the room into which Sapt had locked him; the king's absence was to be short, and before he came again Rudolf must be gone, Rischenheim safely disposed of, and measures taken against the original letter reaching the hands for which the intercepted copy had been destined. The room was a large one. In the corner farthest from the door sat Rischenheim, disarmed, dispirited, to all seeming ready to throw up his dangerous game and acquiesce in any terms presented to him. Just inside the door, guarding it, if need should be, with their lives, were the other three, Bernenstein merry and triumphant, Sapt blunt and cool, Rudolf calm and clear-headed. The queen awaited the result of their deliberations in her apartments, ready to act as they directed, but determined to see Rudolf before he left the castle. They conversed together in low tones. Presently Sapt took paper and wrote. This first message was to me, and it bade me come to Zenda that afternoon; another head and another pair of hands were sadly needed. Then followed more deliberation; Rudolf took up the talking now, for his was the bold plan on which they consulted. Sapt twirled his moustache, smiling doubtfully.

"Yes, yes," murmured young Bernenstein, his eyes alight with excitement.

"It's dangerous, but the best thing," said Rudolf, carefully sinking his voice yet lower, lest the prisoner should catch the lightest word of what he said. "It involves my staying here till the evening. Is that possible?"

"No; but you can leave here and hide in the forest till I join you," said Sapt.

"Till we join you," corrected Bernenstein eagerly.

"No," said the constable, "you must look after our friend here. Come, Lieutenant, it's all in the queen's service."

"Besides," added Rudolf with a smile, "neither the colonel nor I would let you have a chance at Rupert. He's our game, isn't he, Sapt?"

The colonel nodded. Rudolf in his turn took paper, and here is the message that he wrote:

"Holf, 19, Königstrasse, Strelsau.—All well. He has what I had, but wishes to see what you have. He and I will be at the hunting-lodge at ten this evening. Bring it and meet us. The business is unsuspected.—R."

Rudolf threw the paper across to Sapt; Bernenstein leant over the constable's shoulder and read it eagerly.

"I doubt if it would bring me," grinned old Sapt, throwing the paper down.

"It'll bring Rupert of Hentzau. Why not? He'll know that the king will wish to meet him unknown to the queen, and also unknown to you, Sapt, since you were my friend: what place more likely for the king to choose than his hunting-lodge, where he is accustomed to go when he wishes to be alone? The message will bring him, depend on it. Why, man, Rupert would come even if he suspected; and why should he suspect?"

"They may have a cipher, he and Rischenheim," objected Sapt.

"No, or Rupert would have sent the address in it," retorted Rudolf quickly.

"Then—when he comes?" asked Bernenstein.

"He finds such a king as Rischenheim found, and Sapt, here, at his elbow."

"But he'll know you," objected Bernenstein.

"Aye, I think he'll know me," said Rudolf with a smile. "Meanwhile we send for Fritz to come here and look after the king."

"And Rischenheim?"

"That's your share, Lieutenant. Sapt, is any one at Tarlenheim?"

"No. Count Stanislas has put it at Fritz's disposal."

"Good; then Fritz's two friends, the Count of Luzau-Rischenheim and Lieutenant von Bernenstein, will ride over there to-day. The constable of Zenda will give the lieutenant twenty-four hours' leave of absence, and the two gentlemen will pass the day and sleep at the *château*. They will pass the day side by side, Bernenstein, not losing sight of one another for an instant, and they will pass the night in the same room. And one of them will not close his eyes nor take his hand off the butt of his revolver."

"Very good, sir," said young Bernenstein.

"If he tries to escape or give any alarm, shoot him through the head, ride to the frontier, get to safe hiding, and, if you can, let us know."

"Yes," said Bernenstein simply. Sapt had chosen well, and the young officer made nothing of the peril and ruin that Her Majesty's service might ask of him.

A restless movement and a weary sigh from Rischenheim attracted their attention. He had strained his ears to listen

till his head ached, but the talkers had been careful, and he had heard nothing that threw light on their deliberations. He had now given up his vain attempt, and sat in listless inattention, sunk in an apathy.

"I don't think he'll give you much trouble," whispered Sapt to Bernstein, with a jerk of his thumb towards the captive.

"Act as if he were likely to give you much," urged Rudolf, laying his hand on the lieutenant's arm.

"Yes, that's a wise man's advice," nodded the constable approvingly. "We were well governed, Lieutenant, when this Rudolf was king."

"Wasn't I also his loyal subject?" asked young Bernstein.

"Yes, wounded in my service," added Rudolf; for he remembered how the boy—he was little more than—had been fired upon in the park of Tarlenheim, being taken for Mr. Rassendyll himself.

Thus their plans were laid. If they could defeat Rupert, they would have Rischenheim at their mercy. If they could keep Rischenheim out of the way while they used his name in their trick, they had a strong chance of deluding and killing Rupert. Yes, of killing him; for that and nothing less was their purpose, as the constable of Zenda himself has told me.

"We would have stood on no ceremony," he said. "The queen's honor was at stake, and the fellow himself an assassin."

Bernstein rose and went out. He was gone about half an hour, being employed in despatching the telegrams to Strelsau. Rudolf and Sapt used the interval to explain to Rischenheim what they proposed to do with him. They asked no pledge, and he offered none. He heard what they said with a dull uninterested air. When asked if he would go without resistance, he laughed a bitter laugh. "How can I resist?" he asked. "I should have a bullet through my head."

"Why, without doubt," said Colonel Sapt. "My lord, you are very sensible."

"Let me advise you, my lord," said Rudolf, looking down on him kindly enough, "if you come safe through this affair, to add honor to your prudence, and chivalry to your honor. There is still time for you to become a gentleman."

He turned away, followed by a glance of anger from the count and a grating chuckle from old Sapt.

A few moments later Bernstein returned. His errand was done, and horses for himself and Rischenheim were at the gate of the castle. After a few final words and a clasp of the hand from Rudolf, the lieutenant motioned to his prisoner to accompany him, and they two walked out together, being to all appearance willing companions and in perfect friendliness with one another. The queen herself watched them go from the windows of her apartment, and noticed that Bernstein rode half a pace behind, and that his free hand rested on the revolver by his side.

It was now well on in the morning, and the risk of Rudolf's sojourn in the castle grew greater with every moment. Yet he was resolved to see the queen before he went. This interview presented no great difficulties, since Her Majesty was in the habit of coming to the constable's room to take his advice or to consult with him. The hardest task was to contrive afterwards a free and unnoticed escape for Mr. Rassendyll. To meet this necessity, the constable issued orders that the company of guards which garrisoned the castle should parade at one o'clock in the park, and that the servants should all, after their dinner, be granted permission to watch the manœuvres. By this means he counted on drawing off any curious eyes and allowing Rudolf to reach the forest unobserved. They appointed a rendezvous in a handy and sheltered spot; the one thing which they were compelled to trust to fortune was Rudolf's success in evading chance encounters while he waited. Mr. Rassendyll himself was confident of his ability to conceal his presence, or, if need were, so to hide his face that no strange tale of the king being seen wandering, alone and beardless, should reach the ears of the castle or the town.

While Sapt was making his arrangements, Queen Flavia came to the room where Rudolf Rassendyll was. It was then nearing twelve, and young Bernstein had been gone half an hour. Sapt attended her to the door, set a sentry at the end of the passage with orders that Her Majesty should on no pretence be disturbed, promised her very audibly to return as soon as he possibly could, and respectfully closed the door after she had entered. The constable was well aware of the value in a secret business of doing openly all that can safely be done with openness.

All of what passed at that interview I do not know, but a part Queen Flavia

herself told to me, or rather to Helga, my wife; for although it was meant to reach my ear, yet to me, a man, she would not disclose it directly. First she learnt from Mr. Rassendyll the plans that had been made, and, although she trembled at the danger that he must run in meeting Rupert of Hentzau, she had such love of him and such a trust in his powers that she seemed to doubt little of his success. But she began to reproach herself for having brought him into this peril by writing her letter. At this he took from his pocket the copy that Rischenheim had carried. He had found time to read it, and now before her eyes he kissed it.

"Had I as many lives as there are words, my queen," he said softly, "for each word I would gladly give a life."

"Ah, Rudolf, but you've only one life, and that more mine than yours. Did you think we should ever meet again?"

"I didn't know," said he; and now they were standing opposite one another.

"But I knew," she said, her eyes shining brightly; "I knew always that we should meet once more. Not how, nor where, but just that we should. So I lived, Rudolf."

"God bless you!" he said.

"Yes, I lived through it all."

He pressed her hand, knowing what that phrase meant and must mean for her.

"Will it last forever?" she asked, suddenly gripping his hand tightly. But a moment later she went on: "No, no, I mustn't make you unhappy, Rudolf. I'm half glad I wrote the letter, and half glad they stole it. It's so sweet to have you fighting for me, for me only this time, Rudolf—not for the king, for me!"

"Sweet indeed, my dearest lady. Don't be afraid: we shall win."

"You will win, yes. And then you'll go?" And, dropping his hand, she covered her face with hers.

"I mustn't kiss your face," said he, "but your hands I may kiss," and he kissed her hands as they were pressed against her face.

"You wear my ring," she murmured through her fingers, "always?"

"Why, yes," he said, with a little laugh of wonder at her question.

"And there is—no one else?"

"My queen!" said he, laughing again.

"No, I knew really, Rudolf, I knew really," and now her hands flew out towards him, imploring his pardon. Then she began to speak quickly: "Rudolf, last night I had a dream about you, a

strange dream. I seemed to be in Strelsau, and all the people were talking about the king. It was you they meant; you were the king. At last you were the king, and I was your queen. But I could see you only very dimly; you were somewhere, but I could not make out where; just sometimes your face came. Then I tried to tell you that you were king—yes, and Colonel Sapt and Fritz tried to tell you; the people, too, called out that you were king. What did it mean? But your face, when I saw it, was unmoved, and very pale, and you seemed not to hear what we said, not even what I said. It almost seemed as if you were dead, and yet king. Ah, you mustn't die, even to be king," and she laid a hand on his shoulder.

"Sweetheart," said he gently, "in dreams desires and fears blend in strange visions, so I seemed to you to be both a king and a dead man; but I'm not a king, and I am a very healthy fellow. Yet a thousand thanks to my dearest queen for dreaming of me."

"No, but what could it mean?" she asked again.

"What does it mean when I dream always of you, except that I always love you?"

"Was it only that?" she said, still unconvinced.

What more passed between them I do not know. I think that the queen told my wife more, but women will sometimes keep women's secrets even from their husbands; though they love us, yet we are always in some sort the common enemy, against whom they join hands. Well, I would not look too far into such secrets, for to know must be, I suppose, to blame, and who is himself so blameless that in such a case he would be free with his censures?

Yet much cannot have passed, for almost close on their talk about the dream came Colonel Sapt, saying that the guards were in line, and all the women streamed out to watch them, while the men followed, lest the gay uniforms should make them forgotten. Certainly a quiet fell over the old castle, that only the constable's curt tones broke, as he bade Rudolf come by the back way to the stables and mount his horse.

"There's no time to lose," said Sapt, and his eye seemed to grudge the queen even one more word with the man she loved.

But Rudolf was not to be hurried into leaving her in such a fashion. He clapped

the constable on the shoulder, laughing, and bidding him think of what he would for a moment; then he went again to the queen and would have knelt before her, but that she would not suffer, and they stood with hands locked. Then suddenly she drew him to her and kissed his forehead, saying: "God go with you, Rudolf my knight."

Thus she turned away, letting him go. He walked towards the door; but a sound arrested his steps, and he waited in the middle of the room, his eyes on the door. Old Sapt flew to the threshold, his sword half-way out of its sheath. There was a step coming down the passage, and the feet stopped outside the door.

"Is it the king?" whispered Rudolf.

"I don't know," said Sapt.

"No, it's not the king," came in unhesitating certainty from Queen Flavia.

They waited: a low knock sounded on the door. Still for a moment they waited. The knock was repeated urgently.

"We must open," said Sapt. "Behind the curtain with you, Rudolf."

The queen sat down, and Sapt piled a heap of papers before her, that it might seem as though he and she transacted business. But his precautions were interrupted by a hoarse, eager, low cry from outside, "Quick! in God's name, quick!"

They knew the voice for Bernenstein's. The queen sprang up, Rudolf came out, Sapt turned the key. The lieutenant entered, hurried, breathless, pale.

"Well?" asked Sapt.

"He has got away?" cried Rudolf, guessing in a moment the misfortune that had brought Bernenstein back.

"Yes, he's got away. Just as we left the town and reached the open road towards Tarlenheim, he said, 'Are we going to walk all the way?' I was not loath to go quicker, and we broke into a trot. But I—ah, what a pestilent fool I am!"

"Never mind that—go on."

"Why, I was thinking of him and my task, and having a bullet ready for him, and—"

"Of everything except your horse?" guessed Sapt, with a grim smile.

"Yes; and the horse pecked and stumbled, and I fell forward on his neck. I put out my arm to recover myself, and—I jerked my revolver on to the ground."

"And he saw?"

"He saw, curse him. For a second he waited; then he smiled, and turned, and dug his spurs in and was off, straight across country towards Strelsau. Well, I

was off my horse in a moment, and I fired three times after him."

"You hit?" asked Rudolf.

"I think so. He shifted the reins from one hand to the other and wrung his arm. I mounted and made after him, but his horse was better than mine and he gained ground. We began to meet people, too, and I didn't dare to fire again. So I left him and rode here to tell you. Never employ me again, Constable, so long as you live," and the young man's face was twisted with misery and shame, as, forgetting the queen's presence, he sank despondently into a chair.

Sapt took no notice of his self-reproaches. But Rudolf went and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"It was an accident," he said. "No blame to you."

The queen rose and walked towards him; Bernenstein sprang to his feet.

"Sir," said she, "it is not success but effort that should gain thanks," and she held out her hand.

Well, he was young; I do not laugh at the sob that escaped his lips as he turned his head.

"Let me try something else!" he implored.

"Mr. Rassendyll," said the queen, "you'll do my pleasure by employing this gentleman in my further service. I am already deep in his debt, and would be deeper."

There was a moment's silence.

"Well, but what's to be done?" asked Colonel Sapt. "He's gone to Strelsau."

"He'll stop Rupert," mused Mr. Rassendyll.

"He may or he mayn't."

"It's odds that he will."

"We must provide for both."

Sapt and Rudolf looked at one another.

"You must be here?" asked Rudolf of the constable. "Well, I'll go to Strelsau." His smile broke out. "That is, if Bernenstein 'll lend me a hat."

The queen made no sound; but she came and laid her hand on his arm. He looked at her, smiling still.

"Yes, I'll go to Strelsau," said he, "and I'll find Rupert, aye, and Rischenheim too, if they're in the city."

"Take me with you," cried Bernenstein eagerly.

Rudolf glanced at Sapt. The constable shook his head. Bernenstein's face fell.

"It's not that, boy," said old Sapt, half in kindness, half in impatience. "We

want you here. Suppose Rupert comes here with Rischenheim!"

The idea was new, but the event was by no means unlikely.

"But you'll be here, Constable," urged Bernstein, "and Fritz von Tarlenheim will arrive in an hour."

"Aye, young man," said Sapt, nodding his head; "but when I fight Rupert of Hentzau, I like to have a man to spare," and he grinned broadly, being no whit afraid of what Bernstein might think of his courage. "Now go and get him a hat," he added, and the lieutenant ran off on the errand.

But the queen cried:

"Are you sending Rudolf alone, then—alone against two?"

"Yes, madam, if I may command the campaign," said Sapt. "I take it he should be equal to the task."

He could not know the feelings of the queen's heart. She dashed her hand across her eyes, and turned in mute entreaty to Rudolf Rassendyll.

"I must go," he said softly. "We can't spare Bernstein, and I mustn't stay here."

She said no more. Rudolf walked across to Sapt.

"Take me to the stables. Is the horse good? I daren't take the train. Ah, here's the lieutenant and the hat."

"The horse 'll get you there to-night," said Sapt. "Come along. Bernstein, stay with the queen."

At the threshold Rudolf paused, and, turning his head, glanced once at Queen Flavia, who stood still as a statue, watching him go. Then he followed the constable, who brought him where the horse was. Sapt's devices for securing freedom from observation had served well, and Rudolf mounted unmolested.

"The hat doesn't fit very well," said Rudolf.

"Like a crown better, eh?" suggested the colonel.

Rudolf laughed as he asked, "Well, what are my orders?"

"Ride round by the moat to the road at the back; then through the forest to Hofbau; you know your way after that. You mustn't reach Strelsau till it's dark. Then, if you want a shelter——"

"To Fritz von Tarlenheim's, yes! From there I shall go straight to the address."

"Aye. And——Rudolf!"

"Yes?"

"Make an end of him this time."

"Please God. But if he goes to the

lodge? He will, unless Rischenheim stops him."

"I'll be there in case, but I think Rischenheim will stop him."

"If he comes here?"

"Young Bernstein will die before he suffers him to reach the king."

"Sapt!"

"Aye?"

"Be kind to her."

"Bless the man, yes!"

"Good-by."

"And good luck."

At a swift canter Rudolf darted round the drive that led from the stables, by the moat, to the old forest road behind; five minutes brought him within the shelter of the trees, and he rode on confidently, meeting nobody, save here and there a yokel, who, seeing a man ride hard with his head averted, took no more notice of him than to wish that he himself could ride abroad instead of being bound to work. Thus Rudolf Rassendyll set out again for the walls of Strelsau, through the forest of Zenda. And ahead of him, with an hour's start, galloped the Count of Luzau-Rischenheim, again a man, and a man with resolution, resentment, and revenge in his heart.

The game was afoot now; who could tell the issue of it?

CHAPTER VII.

THE MESSAGE OF SIMON THE HUNTSMAN.

I RECEIVED the telegram sent to me by the Constable of Zenda at my own house in Strelsau about one o'clock. It is needless to say that I made immediate preparations to obey his summons. My wife indeed protested—and I must admit with some show of reason—that I was unfit to endure further fatigues, and that my bed was the only proper place for me. I could not listen; and James, Mr. Rassendyll's servant, being informed of the summons, was at my elbow with a card of the trains from Strelsau to Zenda, without waiting for any order from me. I had talked to this man in the course of our journey, and discovered that he had been in the service of Lord Topham, formerly British Ambassador to the Court of Ruritania. How far he was acquainted with the secrets of his present master, I did not know, but his familiarity with the city and the country made him of great use to me. We discovered, to our annoyance, that no train left

till four o'clock, and then only a slow one; the result was that we could not arrive at the castle till past six o'clock. This hour was not absolutely too late, but I was of course eager to be on the scene of action as early as possible.

"You'd better see if you can get a special, my lord," James suggested; "I'll run on to the station and arrange about it."

I agreed. Since I was known to be often employed in the king's service, I could take a special train without exciting remark. James set out, and about a quarter of an hour later I got into my carriage to drive to the station. Just as the horses were about to start, however, the butler approached me.

"I beg your pardon, my lord," said he, "but Bauer didn't return with your lordship. Is he coming back?"

"No," said I. "Bauer was grossly impertinent on the journey, and I dismissed him."

"Those foreign men are never to be trusted, my lord. And your lordship's bag?"

"What, hasn't it come?" I cried. "I told him to send it."

"It's not arrived, my lord."

"Can the rogue have stolen it?" I exclaimed indignantly.

"If your lordship wishes it, I will mention the matter to the police."

I appeared to consider this proposal.

"Wait till I come back," I ended by saying. "The bag may come, and I have no reason to doubt the fellow's honesty."

This, I thought, would be the end of my connection with Master Bauer. He had served Rupert's turn, and would now disappear from the scene. Indeed it may be that Rupert would have liked to dispense with further aid from him; but he had few whom he could trust, and was compelled to employ those few more than once. At any rate he had not done with Bauer, and I very soon received proof of the fact. My house is a couple of miles from the station, and we had to pass through a considerable part of the old town, where the streets are narrow and tortuous and progress necessarily slow. We had just entered the Königstrasse (and it must be remembered that I had at that time no reason for attaching any special significance to this locality), and were waiting impatiently for a heavy dray to move out of our path, when my coachman, who had overheard the butler's conversation with me, leant down from his box with an air of lively excitement.

"My lord," he cried, "there's Bauer—there, passing the butcher's shop!"

I sprang up in the carriage; the man's back was towards me, and he was threading his way through the people with a quick, stealthy tread. I believe he must have seen me, and was slinking away as fast as he could. I was not sure of him, but the coachman banished my doubt by saying, "It's Bauer—it's certainly Bauer, my lord."

I hardly stayed to form a resolution. If I could catch this fellow or even see where he went, a most important clue as to Rupert's doings and whereabouts might be put into my hand. I leapt out of the carriage, bidding the man wait, and at once started in pursuit of my former servant. I heard the coachman laugh: he thought, no doubt, that anxiety for the missing bag inspired such eager haste.

The numbers of the houses in the Königstrasse begin, as anybody familiar with Strelsau will remember, at the end adjoining the station. The street being a long one, intersecting almost the entire length of the old town, I was, when I set out after Bauer, opposite number 300 or thereabouts, and distant nearly three-quarters of a mile from that important number nineteen, towards which Bauer was hurrying like a rabbit to its burrow. I knew nothing and thought nothing of where he was going; to me nineteen was no more than eighteen or twenty; my only desire was to overtake him. I had no clear idea of what I meant to do when I caught him, but I had some hazy notion of intimidating him into giving up his secret by the threat of an accusation of theft. In fact, he had stolen my bag. After him I went; and he knew that I was after him. I saw him turn his face over his shoulder, and then bustle on faster. Neither of us, pursued or pursuer, dared quite to run; as it was, our eager strides and our carelessness of collisions created more than enough attention. But I had one advantage. Most folk in Strelsau knew me, and many got out of my way who were by no means inclined to pay a like civility to Bauer. Thus I began to gain on him, in spite of his haste; I had started fifty yards behind, but as we neared the end of the street and saw the station ahead of us, not more than twenty separated me from him. Then an annoying thing happened. I ran full into a stout old gentleman; Bauer had run into him before, and he was standing, as people will, staring in resentful astonishment at his first assailant's retreating figure. The

second collision immensely increased his vexation; for me it had yet worse consequences; for when I disentangled myself, Bauer was gone! There was not a sign of him; I looked up: the number of the house above me was twenty-three; but the door was shut. I walked on a few paces, past twenty-two, past twenty-one—and up to nineteen. Nineteen was an old house, with a dirty, dilapidated front and an air almost dissipated. It was a shop where provisions of the cheaper sort were on view in the window, things that one has never eaten but has heard of people eating. The shop-door stood open, but there was nothing to connect Bauer with the house. Muttering an oath in my exasperation, I was about to pass on, when an old woman put her head out of the door and looked round. I was full in front of her. I am sure that the old woman started slightly, and I think that I did. For I knew her and she knew me. She was old Mother Holf, one of whose sons, Johann, had betrayed to us the secret of the dungeon at Zenda, while the other had died by Mr. Rassendyll's hand by the side of the great pipe that masked the king's window. Her presence might mean nothing, yet it seemed at once to connect the house with the secret of the past and the crisis of the present.

She recovered herself in a moment, and curtseyed to me.

"Ah, Mother Holf," said I, "how long is it since you set up shop in Strelsau?"

"About six months, my lord," she answered, with a composed air and arms akimbo.

"I have not come across you before," said I, looking keenly at her.

"Such a poor little shop as mine would not be likely to secure your lordship's patronage," she answered, in a humility that seemed only half genuine.

I looked up at the windows. They were all closed and had their wooden lattices shut. The house was devoid of any signs of life.

"You've a good house here, mother, though it wants a splash of paint," said I. "Do you live all alone in it with your daughter?" For Max was dead and Johann abroad, and the old woman had, as far as I knew, no other children.

"Sometimes; sometimes not," said she. "I let lodgings to single men when I can."

"Full now?"

"Not a soul, worse luck, my lord."

Then I shot an arrow at a venture.

"The man who came in just now, then, was he only a customer?"

"I wish a customer had come in, but there has been nobody," she replied in surprised tones.

I looked full in her eyes; she met mine with a blinking imperturbability. There is no face so inscrutable as a clever old woman's when she is on her guard. And her fat body barred the entrance; I could not so much as see inside, while the window, choked full with pigs' trotters and such-like dainties, helped me very little. If the fox were there, he had got to earth and I could not dig him out.

At this moment I saw James approaching hurriedly. He was looking up the street, no doubt seeking my carriage and chafing at its delay. An instant later he saw me.

"My lord," he said, "your train will be ready in five minutes; if it doesn't start then, the line must be closed for another half-hour."

I perceived a faint smile on the old woman's face. I was sure then that I was on the track of Bauer, and probably of more than Bauer. But my first duty was to obey orders and get to Zenda. Besides, I could not force my way in, there in open daylight, without a scandal that would have set all the long ears in Strelsau aprick. I turned away reluctantly. I did not even know for certain that Bauer was within, and thus had no information of value to carry with me.

"If your lordship would kindly recommend me—" said the old hag.

"Yes, I'll recommend you," said I. "I'll recommend you to be careful whom you take for lodgers. There are queer fish about, mother."

"I take the money beforehand," she retorted with a grin; and I was as sure that she was in the plot as of my own existence.

There was nothing to be done; James's face urged me towards the station. I turned away. But at this instant a loud, merry laugh sounded from inside the house. I started, and this time violently. The old woman's brow contracted in a frown, and her lips twitched for a moment; then her face regained its composure; but I knew the laugh, and she must have guessed that I knew it. Instantly I tried to appear as though I had noticed nothing. I nodded to her carelessly, and bidding James follow me, set out for the station. But as we reached the platform, I laid my hand on his shoulder, saying:

"The Count of Hentzau is in that house, James."

He looked at me without surprise; he was as hard to stir to wonder as old Sapt himself.

"Indeed, sir. Shall I stay and watch?"

"No, come with me," I answered. To tell the truth, I thought that to leave him alone in Strelsau to watch that house was in all likelihood to sign his death warrant, and I shrank from imposing the duty on him. Rudolf might send him if he would; I dared not. So we got into our train, and I suppose that my coachman, when he had looked long enough for me, went home. I forgot to ask him afterwards. Very likely he thought it a fine joke to see his master hunting a truant servant and a truant bag through the streets in broad daylight. Had he known the truth, he would have been as interested, though, maybe, less amused.

I arrived at the town of Zenda at half-past three, and was in the castle before four. I may pass over the most kind and gracious words with which the queen received me. Every sight of her face and every sound of her voice bound a man closer to her service, and now she made me feel that I was a poor fellow to have lost her letter and yet to be alive. But she would hear nothing of such talk, choosing rather to praise the little I had done than to blame the great thing in which I had failed. Dismissed from her presence, I flew open-mouthed to Sapt. I found him in his room with Bernenstein, and had the satisfaction of learning that my news of Rupert's whereabouts was confirmed by his information. I was also made acquainted with all that had been done, even as I have already related it, from the first successful trick played on Rischenheim to the moment of his unfortunate escape. But my face grew long and apprehensive when I heard that Rudolf Rassendyll had gone alone to Strelsau to put his head in that lion's mouth in the Königstrasse.

"There will be three of them there—Rupert, Rischenheim, and my rascal Bauer," said I.

"As to Rupert, we don't know," Sapt reminded me. "He'll be there if Rischenheim arrives in time to tell him the truth. But we have also to be ready for him here, and at the hunting-lodge. Well, we're ready for him wherever he is; Rudolf will be in Strelsau, you and I will ride to the lodge, and Bernenstein will be here with the queen."

"Only one here?" I asked.

"Ay, but a good one," said the constable, clapping Bernenstein on the shoulder. "We shan't be gone above four hours, and those while the king is safe in his bed. Bernenstein has only to refuse access to him, and stand to that with his life till we come back. You're equal to that, eh, Lieutenant?"

I am, by nature, a cautious man, and prone to look at the dark side of every prospect and the risks of every enterprise; but I could not see what better dispositions were possible against the attack that threatened us. Yet I was sorely uneasy concerning Mr. Rassendyll.

Now, after all our stir and runnings to and fro, came an hour or two of peace. We employed the time in having a good meal, and it was past five when, our repast finished, we sat back in our chairs enjoying cigars. James had waited on us, quietly usurping the office of the constable's own servant, and thus we had been able to talk freely. The man's calm confidence in his master and his master's fortune also went far to comfort me.

"The king should be back soon," said Sapt at last, with a glance at his big, old-fashioned silver watch. "Thank God, he'll be too tired to sit up long. We shall be free by nine o'clock, Fritz. I wish young Rupert would come to the lodge!" And the colonel's face expressed a lively pleasure at the idea.

Six o'clock struck, and the king did not appear. A few moments later, a message came from the queen, requesting our presence on the terrace in front of the *château*. The place commanded a view of the road by which the king would ride back, and we found the queen walking restlessly up and down, considerably disquieted by the lateness of his return. In such a position as ours, every unusual or unforeseen incident magnifies its possible meaning, and invests itself with a sinister importance which would at ordinary times seem absurd. We three shared the queen's feelings, and forgetting the many chances of the chase, any one of which would amply account for the king's delay, fell to speculating on remote possibilities of disaster. He might have met Rischenheim—though they had ridden in opposite directions; Rupert might have intercepted him—though no means could have brought Rupert to the forest so early. Our fears defeated common sense, and our conjectures outran possibility. Sapt was the first to recover from this foolish

mood, and he rated us soundly, not sparing even the queen herself. With a laugh we regained some of our equanimity, and felt rather ashamed of our weakness.

"Still it's strange that he doesn't come," murmured the queen, shading her eyes with her hand, and looking along the road to where the dark masses of the forest trees bounded our view. It was already dusk, but not so dark but that we could have seen the king's party as soon as it came into the open.

If the king's delay seemed strange at six, it was stranger at seven, and by eight most strange. We had long since ceased to talk lightly; by now we had lapsed into silence. Sapt's scoldings had died away. The queen, wrapped in her furs (for it was very cold), sat sometimes on a seat, but oftener paced restlessly to and fro. Evening had fallen. We did not know what to do, nor even whether we ought to do anything. Sapt would not own to sharing our worst apprehensions, but his gloomy silence in face of our surmises witnessed that he was in his heart as disturbed as we were. For my part I had come to the end of my endurance, and I cried, "For God's sake, let's act! Shall I go and seek him?"

"A needle in a bundle of hay," said Sapt with a shrug.

But at this instant my ear caught the sound of horses cantering on the road from the forest; at the same moment Bernenstein cried, "Here they come!" The queen paused, and we gathered round her. The horse-hoofs came nearer. Now we made out the figures of three men: they were the king's huntsmen, and they rode along merrily, singing a hunting chorus. The sound of it brought relief to us; so far at least there was no disaster. But why was not the king with them?

"The king is probably tired, and is following more slowly, madam," suggested Bernenstein.

This explanation seemed very probable, and the lieutenant and I, as ready to be hopeful on slight grounds as fearful on small provocation, joyfully accepted it. Sapt, less easily turned to either mood, said, "Aye, but let us hear," and raising his voice, called to the huntsmen, who had now arrived in the avenue. One of them, the king's chief huntsman Simon, gorgeous in his uniform of green and gold, came swaggering along, and bowed low to the queen.

"Well, Simon, where is the king?" she asked, trying to smile.

"The king, madam, has sent a message by me to your majesty."

"Pray, deliver it to me, Simon."

"I will, madam. The king has enjoyed fine sport; and, indeed, madam, if I may say so for myself, a better run——"

"You may say, friend Simon," interrupted the constable, tapping him on the shoulder, "anything you like for yourself, but, as a matter of etiquette, the king's message should come first."

"Oh, aye, Constable," said Simon. "You're always so down on a man, aren't you? Well, then, madam, the king has enjoyed fine sport. For we started a boar at eleven, and——"

"Is this the king's message, Simon?" asked the queen, smiling in genuine amusement, but impatiently.

"Why, no, madam, not precisely his majesty's message."

"Then get to it, man, in heaven's name," growled Sapt testily. For here were we four (the queen, too, one of us!) on tenterhooks, while the fool boasted about the sport that he had shown the king. For every boar in the forest Simon took as much credit as though he, and not Almighty God, had made the animal. It is the way with such fellows.

Simon became a little confused under the combined influence of his own seductive memories and Sapt's brusque exhortations.

"As I was saying, madam," he resumed, "the boar led us a long way, but at last the hounds pulled him down, and his majesty himself gave the *coup de grâce*. Well, then it was very late——"

"It's no earlier now," grumbled the constable.

"And the king, although indeed, madam, his majesty was so gracious as to say that no huntsman whom his majesty had ever had, had given his majesty——"

"God help us!" groaned the constable.

Simon shot an apprehensive apologetic glance at Colonel Sapt. The constable was frowning ferociously. In spite of the serious matters in hand I could not forbear a smile, while young Bernenstein broke into an audible laugh, which he tried to smother with his hand.

"Yes, the king was very tired, Simon?" said the queen, at once encouraging him and bringing him back to the point with a woman's skill.

"Yes, madam, the king was very tired; and as we chanced to kill near the hunting-lodge——"

I do not know whether Simon noticed

any change in the manner of his audience. But the queen looked up with parted lips, and I believe that we three all drew a step nearer him. Sapt did not interrupt this time.

"Yes, madam, the king was very tired, and as we chanced to kill near the hunting-lodge, the king bade us carry our quarry there, and come back to dress it to-morrow; so we obeyed, and here we are—that is, except Herbert, my brother, who stayed with the king by his majesty's orders. Because, madam, Herbert is a handy fellow, and my good mother taught him to cook a steak and——"

"Stayed where with the king?" roared Sapt.

"Why, at the hunting-lodge, Constable. The king stays there to-night, and will ride back to-morrow morning with Herbert. That, madam, is the king's message."

We had come to it at last, and it was something to come to. Simon gazed from face to face. I saw him, and I understood at once that our feelings must be speaking too plainly. So I took on myself to dismiss him, saying:

"Thanks, Simon, thanks: we understand."

He bowed to the queen; she roused herself, and added her thanks to mine. Simon withdrew, looking still a little puzzled.

After we were left alone, there was a moment's silence. Then I said:

"Suppose Rupert——"

The Constable of Zenda broke in with a short laugh.

"On my life," said he, "how things fall out! We say he will go to the hunting-lodge, and—he goes!"

"If Rupert goes—if Rischenheim doesn't stop him!" I urged again.

The queen rose from her seat and stretched out her hands towards us.

"Gentlemen, my letter!" said she.

Sapt wasted no time.

"Bernenstein," said he, "you stay here as we arranged. Nothing is altered. Horses for Fritz and myself in five minutes."

Bernenstein turned and shot like an arrow along the terrace towards the stables.

"Nothing is altered, madam," said Sapt, "except that we must be there before Count Rupert."

I looked at my watch. It was twenty minutes past nine. Simon's cursed chatter had lost a quarter of an hour. I opened my lips to speak. A glance from

Sapt's eyes told me that he discerned what I was about to say. I was silent.

"You'll be in time?" asked the queen, with clasped hands and frightened eyes.

"Assuredly, madam," returned Sapt with a bow.

"You won't let him reach the king?"

"Why, no, madam," said Sapt with a smile.

"From my heart, gentlemen," she said in a trembling voice, "from my heart——"

"Here are the horses," cried Sapt. He snatched her hand, brushed it with his grizzly moustache, and—well, I am not sure I heard, and I can hardly believe what I think I heard. But I will set it down for what it is worth. I think he said, "Bless your sweet face, we'll do it." At any rate she drew back with a little cry of surprise, and I saw the tears standing in her eyes. I kissed her hand also; then we mounted, and we started, and we rode, as if the devil were behind us, for the hunting-lodge.

But I turned once to watch her standing on the terrace, with young Bernenstein's tall figure beside her.

"Can we be in time?" said I. It was what I had meant to say before.

"I think not, but, by God, we'll try," said Colonel Sapt.

And I knew why he had not let me speak.

Suddenly there was a sound behind us of a horse at the gallop. Our heads flew round in the ready apprehension of men on a perilous errand. The hoofs drew near, for the unknown rode with reckless haste.

"We had best see what it is," said the constable, pulling up.

A second more, and the horseman was beside us. Sapt swore an oath, half in amusement, half in vexation.

"Why, is it you, James?" I cried.

"Yes, sir," answered Rudolf Rassendyll's servant.

"What the devil do you want?" asked Sapt.

"I came to attend on the Count von Tarlenheim, sir."

"I did not give you any orders, James."

"No, sir. But Mr. Rassendyll told me not to leave you, unless you sent me away. So I made haste to follow you."

Then Sapt cried: "Deuce take it, what horse is that?"

"The best in the stables, so far as I could see, sir. I was afraid of not overtaking you."

Sapt tugged his moustaches, scowled, but finally laughed.

"Much obliged for your compliment," said he. "The horse is mine."

"Indeed, sir?" said James with respectful interest.

For a moment we were all silent. Then Sapt laughed again.

"Forward!" said he, and the three of us dashed into the forest.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TEMPER OF BORIS THE HOUND.

LOOKING back now, in the light of the information I have gathered, I am able to trace very clearly, and almost hour by hour, the events of this day, and to understand how chance, laying hold of our cunning plan and mocking our wiliness, twisted and turned our device to a predetermined but undreamt-of issue, of which we were most guiltless in thought or intent. Had the king not gone to the hunting-lodge, our design would have found the fulfilment we looked for; had Rischenheim succeeded in warning Rupert of Hentzau, we should have stood where we were. Fate or fortune would have it otherwise. The king, being weary, went to the lodge, and Rischenheim failed in warning his cousin. It was a narrow failure, for Rupert, as his laugh told me, was in the house in the Königstrasse when I set out from Strelsau, and Rischenheim arrived there at half-past four. He had taken the train at a roadside station, and thus easily outstripped Mr. Rassendyll, who, not daring to show his face, was forced to ride all the way and enter the city under cover of night. But Rischenheim had not dared to send a warning, for he knew that we were in possession of the address and did not know what steps we might have taken to intercept messages. Therefore he was obliged to carry the news himself; when he came his man was gone. Indeed Rupert must have left the house almost immediately after I was safe away from the city. He was determined to be in good time for his appointment; his only enemies were not in Strelsau; there was no warrant on which he could be apprehended; and, although his connection with Black Michael was a matter of popular gossip, he felt himself safe from arrest by virtue of the secret that protected him. Accordingly he walked out of the house, went to the station, took his ticket

to Hofbau, and, traveling by the four o'clock train, reached his destination about half-past five. He must have passed the train in which Rischenheim traveled; the first news the latter had of his departure was from a porter at the station, who, having recognized the Count of Hentzau, ventured to congratulate Rischenheim on his cousin's return. Rischenheim made no answer, but hurried in great agitation to the house in the Königstrasse, where the old woman Holf confirmed the tidings. Then he passed through a period of great irresolution. Loyalty to Rupert urged that he should follow him and share the perils into which his cousin was hastening. But caution whispered that he was not irrevocably committed, that nothing overt yet connected him with Rupert's schemes, and that we who knew the truth should be well content to purchase his silence as to the trick we had played by granting him immunity. His fears won the day, and, like the irresolute man he was, he determined to wait in Strelsau till he heard the issue of the meeting at the lodge. If Rupert were disposed of there, he had something to offer us in return for peace; if his cousin escaped, he would be in the Königstrasse, prepared to second the further plans of the desperate adventurer. In any event his skin was safe, and I presume to think that this weighed a little with him; for excuse he had the wound which Bernenstein had given him, and which rendered his right arm entirely useless; had he gone then, he would have been a most inefficient ally.

Of all this we, as we rode through the forest, knew nothing. We might guess, conjecture, hope, or fear; but our certain knowledge stopped with Rischenheim's start for the capital and Rupert's presence there at three o'clock. The pair might have met or might have missed. We had to act as though they had missed and Rupert were gone to meet the king. But we were late. The consciousness of that pressed upon us, although we evaded further mention of it; it made us spur and drive our horses as quickly, aye, and a little more quickly, than safety allowed. Once James's horse stumbled in the darkness and its rider was thrown; more than once a low bough hanging over the path nearly swept me, dead or stunned, from my seat. Sapt paid no attention to these mishaps or threatened mishaps. He had taken the lead, and, sitting well down in his saddle, rode ahead, turning neither to right nor left, never slackening his pace,

sparing neither himself nor his beast. James and I were side by side behind him. We rode in silence, finding nothing to say to one another. My mind was full of a picture—the picture of Rupert with his easy smile handing to the king the queen's letter. For the hour of the rendezvous was past. If that image had been translated into reality, what must we do? To kill Rupert would satisfy revenge, but of what other avail would it be when the king had read the letter? I am ashamed to say that I found myself girding at Mr. Rassendyll for happening on a plan which the course of events had turned into a trap for ourselves and not for Rupert of Hentzau.

Suddenly Sapt, turning his head for the first time, pointed in front of him. The lodge was before us; we saw it looming dimly a quarter of a mile off. Sapt reined in his horse, and we followed his example. All dismounted, we tied our horses to trees and went forward at a quick, silent walk. Our idea was that Sapt should enter on pretext of having been sent by the queen to attend to her husband's comfort and arrange for his return without further fatigue next day. If Rupert had come and gone, the king's demeanor would probably betray the fact; if he had not yet come, I and James, patrolling outside, would bar his passage. There was a third possibility; he might be even now with the king. Our course in such a case we left unsettled; so far as I had any plan, it was to kill Rupert and try to convince the king that the letter was a forgery—a desperate hope, so desperate that we turned our eyes away from the possibility which would make it our only resource.

We were now very near the hunting-lodge, being about forty yards from the front of it. All at once Sapt threw himself on his stomach on the ground.

"Give me a match," he whispered.

James struck a light, and, the night being still, the flame burnt brightly: it showed us the mark of a horse's hoof, apparently quite fresh, and leading away from the lodge. We rose and went on, following the tracks by the aid of more matches till we reached a tree twenty yards from the door. Here the hoof-marks ceased; but beyond there was a double track of human feet in the soft black earth; a man had gone thence to the house and returned from the house thither. On the right of the tree were more hoof-marks, leading up to it and then ceasing. A man had ridden up from the right, dismounted,

gone on foot to the house, returned to the tree, remounted, and ridden away along the track by which we had approached.

"It may be somebody else," said I; but I do not think that we any of us doubted in our hearts that the tracks were made by the coming of Hentzau. Then the king had the letter; the mischief was done. We were too late.

Yet we did not hesitate. Since disaster had come, it must be faced. Mr. Rassendyll's servant and I followed the constable of Zenda up to the door, or within a few feet of it. Here Sapt, who was in uniform, loosened his sword in its sheath; James and I looked to our revolvers. There were no lights visible in the lodge; the door was shut; everything was still. Sapt knocked softly with his knuckles, but there was no answer from within. He laid hold of the handle and turned it; the door opened, and the passage lay dark and apparently empty before us.

"You stay here, as we arranged," whispered the colonel. "Give me the matches, and I'll go in."

James handed him the box of matches, and he crossed the threshold. For a yard or two we saw him plainly, then his figure grew dim and indistinct. I heard nothing except my own hard breathing. But in a moment there was another sound—a muffled exclamation, and the noise of a man stumbling; a sword, too, clattered on the stones of the passage. We looked at one another; the noise did not produce any answering stir in the house; then came the sharp little explosion of a match struck on its box; next we heard Sapt raising himself, his scabbard scraping along the stones; his footsteps came towards us, and in a second he appeared at the door.

"What was it?" I whispered.

"I fell," said Sapt.

"Over what?"

"Come and see. James, stay here."

I followed the constable for the distance of eight or ten feet along the passage.

"Isn't there a lamp anywhere?" I asked.

"We can see enough with a match," he answered. "Here, this is what I fell over."

Even before the match was struck I saw a dark body lying across the passage.

"A dead man!" I guessed instantly.

"Why, no," said Sapt, striking a light: "a dead dog, Fritz."

An exclamation of wonder escaped me as I fell on my knees. At the same in-

stant Sapt muttered, "Aye, there's a lamp," and, stretching up his hand to a little oil lamp that stood on a bracket, he lit it, took it down, and held it over the body. It served to give a fair, though unsteady, light, and enabled us to see what lay in the passage.

"It's Boris, the boar-hound," said I, still in a whisper, although there was no sign of any listeners.

I knew the dog well; he was the king's favorite, and always accompanied him when he went hunting. He was obedient to every word of the king's, but of a rather uncertain temper towards the rest of the world. However, *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*; there he lay dead in the passage. Sapt put his hand on the beast's head. There was a bullet-hole right through his forehead. I nodded, and in my turn pointed to the dog's right shoulder, which was shattered by another ball.

"And see here," said the constable. "Have a pull at this."

I looked where his hand now was. In the dog's mouth was a piece of gray cloth, and on the piece of gray cloth was a horn coat-button. I took hold of the cloth and pulled. Boris held on even in death. Sapt drew his sword, and, inserting the point of it between the dog's teeth, parted them enough for me to draw out the piece of cloth.

"You'd better put it in your pocket," said the constable. "Now come along;" and, holding the lamp in one hand and his sword (which he did not resheathe) in the other, he stepped over the body of the boar-hound, and I followed him.

We were now in front of the door of the room where Rudolf Rassendyll had supped with us on the day of his first coming to Ruritania, and whence he had set out to be crowned in Strelsau. On the right of it was the room where the king slept, and farther along in the same direction the kitchen and the cellars. The officer or officers in attendance on the king used to sleep on the other side of the dining-room.

"We must explore, I suppose," said Sapt. In spite of his outward calmness, I caught in his voice the ring of excitement rising and ill-repressed. But at this moment we heard from the passage on our left (as we faced the door) a low moan, and then a dragging sound, as if a man were crawling along the floor, painfully trailing his limbs after him. Sapt held the lamp in that direction, and we saw Herbert the forester, pale-faced and wide-

eyed, raised from the ground on his two hands, while his legs stretched behind him and his stomach rested on the flags.

"Who is it?" he said in a faint voice.

"Why, man, you know us," said the constable, stepping up to him. "What's happened here?"

The poor fellow was very faint, and, I think, wandered a little in his brain.

"I've got it, sir," he murmured; "I've got it, fair and straight. No more hunting for me, sir. I've got it here in the stomach. Oh, my God!" He let his head fall with a thud on the floor.

I ran and raised him. Kneeling on one knee, I propped his head against my leg.

"Tell us about it," commanded Sapt in a curt, crisp voice, while I got the man into the easiest position that I could contrive.

In slow, struggling tones he began his story, repeating here, omitting there, often confusing the order of his narrative, oftener still arresting it while he waited for fresh strength. Yet we were not impatient, but heard without a thought of time. I looked round once at a sound, and found that James, anxious about us, had stolen along the passage and joined us. Sapt took no notice of him, nor of anything save the words that dropped in irregular utterance from the stricken man's lips. Here is the story, a strange instance of the turning of a great event on a small cause.

The king had eaten a little supper, and, having gone to his bedroom, had stretched himself on the bed and fallen asleep without undressing. Herbert was clearing the dining-table and performing similar duties, when suddenly (thus he told it) he found a man standing beside him. He did not know (he was new to the king's service) who the unexpected visitor was, but he was of middle height, dark, handsome, and "looked a gentleman all over." He was dressed in a shooting-tunic, and a revolver was thrust through the belt of it. One hand rested on the belt, while the other held a small square box.

"Tell the king I am here. He expects me," said the stranger.

Herbert, alarmed at the suddenness and silence of the stranger's approach, and guiltily conscious of having left the door unbolted, drew back. He was unarmed, but, being a stout fellow, was prepared to defend his master as best he could. Rupert—beyond doubt it was Rupert—laughed lightly, saying again, "Man, he expects me. Go and tell him," and sat

himself on the table, swinging his leg. Herbert, influenced by the visitor's air of command, began to retreat towards the bedroom, keeping his face towards Rupert. "If the king asks more, tell him I have the packet and the letter," said Rupert. The man bowed and passed into the bedroom. The king was asleep; when roused he seemed to know nothing of letter or packet, and to expect no visitor. Herbert's ready fears revived; he whispered that the stranger carried a revolver. Whatever the king's faults might be—and God forbid that I should speak hardly of him whom fate used so hardly—he was no coward. He sprang from his bed; at the same moment the great boar-hound uncoiled himself and came from beneath, yawning and fawning. But in an instant the beast caught the scent of a stranger: his ears pricked and he gave a low growl, as he looked up in his master's face. Then Rupert of Hentzau, weary perhaps of waiting, perhaps only doubtful whether his message would be properly delivered, appeared in the doorway.

The king was unarmed, and Herbert in no better plight; their hunting weapons were in the adjoining room, and Rupert seemed to bar the way. I have said that the king was no coward, yet I think that the sight of Rupert, bringing back the memory of his torments in the dungeon, half cowed him; for he shrank back crying, "You!" The hound, in subtle understanding of his master's movement, growled angrily.

"You expected me, sire?" said Rupert with a bow; but he smiled. I know that the sight of the king's alarm pleased him. To inspire terror was his delight, and it does not come to every man to strike fear into the heart of a king and an Elphberg. It had come more than once to Rupert of Hentzau.

"No," muttered the king. Then, recovering his composure a little, he said angrily, "How dare you come here?"

"You didn't expect me?" cried Rupert, and in an instant the thought of a trap seemed to flash across his alert mind. He drew the revolver half-way from his belt, probably in a scarcely conscious movement, born of the desire to assure himself of its presence. With a cry of alarm Herbert flung himself before the king, who sank back on the bed. Rupert, puzzled, vexed, yet half-amused (for he smiled still, the man said), took a step forward, crying out something about Rischenheim—what, Herbert could not tell us.

"Keep back," exclaimed the king. "Keep back." Rupert paused; then, as though with a sudden thought, he held up the box that was in his left hand, saying:

"Well, look at this, sire, and we'll talk afterwards," and he stretched out his hand with the box in it.

Now the thing stood on a razor's edge, for the king whispered to Herbert, "What is it? Go and take it."

But Herbert hesitated, fearing to leave the king, whom his body now protected as though with a shield. Rupert's impatience overcame him: if there were a trap, every moment's delay doubled his danger. With a scornful laugh he exclaimed, "Catch it, then, if you're afraid to come for it," and he flung the packet to Herbert or the king, or which of them might chance to catch it.

This insolence had a strange result. In an instant, with a fierce growl and a mighty bound, Boris was at the stranger's throat. Rupert had not seen or had not heeded the dog. A startled oath rang out from him. He snatched the revolver from his belt and fired at his assailant. This shot must have broken the beast's shoulder, but it only half arrested his spring. His great weight was still hurled on Rupert's chest, and bore him back on his knee. The packet that he had flung lay unheeded. The king, wild with alarm and furious with anger at his favorite's fate, jumped up and ran past Rupert into the next room. Herbert followed; even as they went Rupert flung the wounded, weakened beast from him and darted to the doorway. He found himself facing Herbert, who held a boar-spear, and the king, who had a double-barreled hunting-gun. He raised his left hand, Herbert said—no doubt he still asked a hearing—but the king leveled his weapon. With a spring Rupert gained the shelter of the door, the bullet sped by him, and buried itself in the wall of the room. Then Herbert was at him with the boar-spear. Explanations must wait now: it was life or death; without hesitation Rupert fired at Herbert, bringing him to the ground with a mortal wound. The king's gun was at his shoulder again.

"You damned fool!" roared Rupert, "if you must have it, take it," and gun and revolver rang out at the same moment. But Rupert—never did his nerve fail him—hit, the king missed; Herbert saw the count stand for an instant with his smoking barrel in his hand, looking at the king, who lay on the ground. Then Ru-

pert walked towards the door. I wish I had seen his face then! Did he frown or smile? Was triumph or chagrin uppermost? Remorse? Not he!

He reached the door and passed through. That was the last Herbert saw of him; but the fourth actor in the drama, the wordless player whose part had been so momentous, took the stage. Limping along, now whining in sharp agony, now growling in fierce anger, with blood flowing but hair bristling, the hound Boris dragged himself across the room, through the door, after Rupert of Hentzau. Herbert listened, raising his head from the ground. There was a growl, an oath, the sound of the scuffle. Rupert must have turned in time to receive the dog's spring. The beast, maimed and crippled by his shattered shoulder, did not reach his enemy's face, but his teeth tore away the bit of cloth that we had found held in the vise of his jaws. Then came another shot, a laugh, retreating steps, and a door slammed. With that last sound Herbert woke to the fact of the count's escape; with weary efforts he dragged himself into the passage. The idea that he could go on if he got a drink of brandy turned him in the direction of the cellar. But his strength failed, and he sank down where we found him, not knowing whether the king were dead or still alive, and unable even to make his way back to the room where his master lay stretched on the ground.

I had listened to the story, bound as though by a spell. Half-way through, James's hand had crept to my arm and rested there; when Herbert finished I heard the little man licking his lips, again and again slapping his tongue against them. Then I looked at Sapt. He was as pale as a ghost, and the lines on his face seemed to have grown deeper. He glanced up, and met my regard. Neither of us spoke; we exchanged thoughts with our eyes. "This is our work," we said to one another. "It was our trap, these are our victims." I cannot even now think of that hour, for by our act the king lay dead.

But was he dead? I seized Sapt by the arm. His glance questioned me. "The king," I whispered hoarsely. "Yes, the

king," he returned. Facing round, we walked to the door of the dining-room. Here I turned suddenly faint, and clutched at the constable. He held me up, and pushed the door wide open. The smell of powder was in the room; it seemed as if the smoke hung about, curling in dim coils round the chandelier which gave a subdued light. James had the lamp now, and followed us with it. But the king was not there. A sudden hope filled me. He had not been killed then! I regained strength, and darted across towards the inside room. Here too the light was dim, and I turned to beckon for the lamp. Sapt and James came together, and stood peering over my shoulder in the doorway.

The king lay prone on the floor, face downwards, near the bed. He had crawled there, seeking for some place to rest, as we supposed. He did not move. We watched him for a moment; the silence seemed deeper than silence could be. At last, moved by a common impulse, we stepped forward, but timidly, as though we approached the throne of Death himself. I was the first to kneel by the king and raise his head. Blood had flown from his lips, but it had ceased to flow now. He was dead.

I felt Sapt's hand on my shoulder. Looking up, I saw his other hand stretched out towards the ground. I turned my eyes where he pointed. There, in the king's hand, stained with the king's blood, was the box that I had carried to Wintenberg and Rupert of Hentzau had brought to the lodge that night. It was not rest, but the box that the dying king had sought in his last moment. I bent, and lifting his hand unclasped the fingers, still limp and warm.

Sapt bent down with sudden eagerness.

"Is it open?" he whispered.

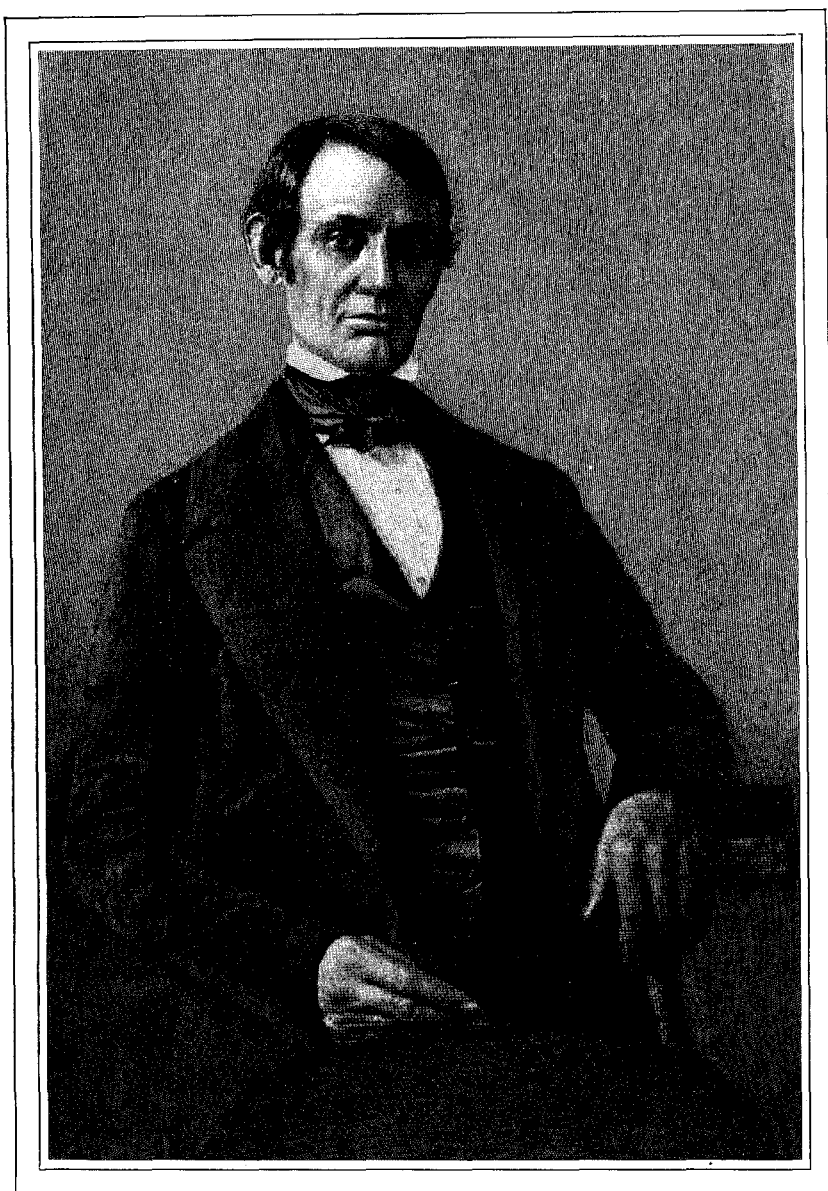
The string was round it; the sealing-wax was unbroken. The secret had outlived the king, and he had gone to his death unknowing. All at once—I cannot tell why—I put my hand over my eyes; I found my eyelashes were wet.

"Is it open?" asked Sapt again, for in the dim light he could not see.

"No," I answered.

"Thank God!" said he. And, for Sapt's, the voice was soft.

(To be continued.)



THE EARLIEST PORTRAIT OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN. ABOUT 1848. AGE 39.

From the original daguerreotype, owned by Mr. Lincoln's son, the Hon. Robert T. Lincoln, through whose courtesy it was first published in McClure's MAGAZINE for November, 1895. It was afterwards republished in the McClure "Life of Lincoln," and in the "Century Magazine" for February, 1897.

SOME GREAT PORTRAITS OF LINCOLN.

THE known portraits of Abraham Lincoln cover a period of seventeen years, the earliest being a daguerreotype supposed to have been taken in 1848. No picture of him exists which can be said with certainty to have been produced in the first half of the fifties; but in the latter half of that decade many were

taken, particularly after his debates with Douglas made him so prominent a figure. After Mr. Lincoln's election to the Presidency the number of his portraits multiplied rapidly, for he seems to have yielded with great good-nature to the applications for sittings made by photographers and artists. From the large number of por-