

THE PRISONER OF ZERDA

Anthony Hope



Longman
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THE PRISONER
OF ZENDA

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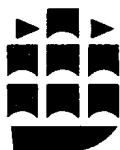
John Wyndham

THE PRISONER OF ZENDA

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Longman Simplified English Series

This book has been specially prepared to make enjoyable reading for people to whom English is a second or a foreign language. An English writer never thinks of avoiding unusual words, so that the learner, trying to read the book in its original form, has to turn frequently to the dictionary and so loses much of the pleasure that the book ought to give.

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¹The 2,000 root words of the *General Service List of English Words* of the *Interim Report on Vocabulary Selection*.

THE PEOPLE IN THE STORY

Rudolf Rassendyll, an English gentleman, brother to **Robert**, Lord Burlesdon.

Rose, his wife.

King Rudolf the Fifth of Ruritania, of the Elphberg family.

Princess Flavia, his cousin, also of the Elphbergs.

Duke Michael of Strelsau, younger brother to the King, but his enemy.

Colonel Sapt, friend and adviser of the King.

Fritz von Tarlenheim, also friend and adviser of the King.

Marshal Strakencz, head of the Army, and faithful to the King.

Rupert Hentzau, chief of Duke Michael's "Six" followers.

Lauengram, one of Duke Michael's "Six" followers.

Krafstein, one of Duke Michael's "Six" followers.

Detchard (English), one of Duke Michael's "Six" followers.

Bersonin (Belgian), one of Duke Michael's "Six" followers.

De Gautet (French), one of Duke Michael's "Six" followers.

Bernenstein, a gentleman of the King's.

Max Holf, one of the Duke's men.

Johann, his brother, the Duke's forest-guard.

Josef, the King's servant.

Antoinette de Mauban, a lady who loves Duke Michael.

Countess Helga, lady-in-waiting to the Princess, and loved by Fritz.

The Chancellor, the Cardinal, the Chief of Police, a woman inn-keeper and her daughters, the woman at the lodge.

INTRODUCTION

SIR ANTHONY HOPE HAWKINS was born in 1863, trained for the law and became a barrister. Although he had written a number of books that had been moderately successful before 1894, his future career seemed to lie in the law and politics, but in that year, *The Prisoner of Zenda* appeared, and brought him such popularity that he gave up the law, and spent the rest of his life in writing books, using the name Anthony Hope. But, although he wrote a great many books, *The Prisoner of Zenda* and *Rupert of Hentzau*, both adventure stories about an imaginary country called Ruritania, are the only two that have become really well known and well loved.

THE PRISONER OF ZENDA tells the story of a young man called Rudolf Rassendyll, who arrives in Ruritania on holiday shortly before the King, Rudolf V, is to be crowned. The King has dangerous enemies, who plan to take his life and his crown—his brother, Black Michael, and Rupert of Hentzau. They succeed in imprisoning the King in the Castle of Zenda, but Rudolf Rassendyll, who looks exactly like him, represents him until Black Michael is defeated, and the crown returned to the rightful King.



I SET OUT TO CLIMB THE HILL THAT LED TO THE CASTLE

CHAPTER I

THE RASSENDYLL FAMILY

"I WONDER when in the world you're going to do anything, Rudolf?" said my brother's wife, one morning at breakfast.

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

"You are nine-and-twenty," she remarked, "and you've done nothing but——"

"Travel about? It is true. Our family doesn't need to do things."

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

Well, if my life had been a useless one in Rose's eyes, I had picked up a good deal of pleasure and a good deal of knowledge. I had been to a German school and a German University, and spoke Ger-

man as perfectly as I spoke English. I was also quite good at French. I was, I believe, a fairly good swordsman, and a good shot. I could ride any kind of a horse, and my head was as cool a one as you could find, in spite of the flaming red hair on it.

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

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

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

"A thousand thanks!" I put in.

"He's to be an ambassador¹ in six months, and Robert says that he'll take you with him as an *attaché*². Do take it, Rudolf—to please me."

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

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

¹ *Ambassador*, the chief representative of a foreign government.

² *Attaché* (French word), one who goes with an ambassador.

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

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

For various reasons I had never been to that highly interesting and important kingdom, which, though a small one, had played no small part in European history, and might do the same again under the power of a young and strong ruler, such as the new king was said to be. At once I made up my mind to go, and began my preparations.

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

"That would be splendid," she said, "wouldn't it, Robert?"

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

"Now promise you'll do it," said Rose earnestly.

"No, I won't promise, but if I find enough material, I will."

"That's fair enough," said Robert.

"Oh, material doesn't matter," said Rose.

But she could not get more than a half promise out of me. To tell the truth, I did not think for

a moment that the story of my tour that summer would stain any paper or spoil any pen. And that shows how little we know what the future holds. For here I am, carrying out my half promise, and writing, as I never thought to write, a book—though it will hardly serve as an introduction to political life, and has nothing to do with the Alps.

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

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

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

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

As soon as I reached the Ruritanian frontier¹ (where the official looked at me as if he had seen a ghost²), I bought the papers, and found in them news which would have an effect on my movements. For some unexplained reason the date of

¹ *Frontier*, border of a country.

² *Ghost*, spirit of a dead person.

the coronation¹ had been suddenly advanced, and was to take place on the next day but one. The whole country was excited about it, and I learnt that Strelsau was crowded. Rooms were all let and hotels overflowing; there would be very little chance of my getting a lodging without paying a very high price.

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

I therefore got out at Zenda, and as the train passed where I stood, I saw Madame de Mauban in her place; clearly she was going through to Strelsau, having, with more thought than I, reserved a lodging there.

I was very kindly received at the hotel—really no more than an inn—kept by a fat old lady and her two daughters. They were good, quiet people. The old lady was fond of the Duke, for he was now, since the late king's death, master of the Zenda lands and of the Castle, which rose grandly on a steep hill at the end of the valley, a mile or so from the inn. The old lady, indeed, regretted that the Duke was not on the throne,² instead of his brother.

"We know Duke Michael," said she. "He has always lived among us; every Ruritanian knows

¹ *Coronation*, ceremony of crowning a king or queen.

² *Throne*, seat of a king; his position.

Duke Michael. But the King is almost a stranger; he has been abroad, not one in ten knows him even by sight."

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

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

"Johann, the Duke's forest-guard. He has seen the King."

"Ah, yes. The King, sir, is now at the Duke's hunting-lodge¹ in the forest here; from here he goes to Strelsau to be crowned on Wednesday morning."

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

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

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

She laughed as she looked across at me.

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

"But never a woman!" cried the girl.

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

"The Duke invited him, sir, to rest here till

¹ *Lodge*, small building; cottage at entrance to large private park.