

# The Prisoner Of Zenda

by Anthony Hope (1894)

## **Chapter One: Ruritania**

'When are you going to do something with your life, Rudolf?' said Rose. Rose was my brother's wife.

'My dear Rose,' I said, putting down my breakfast spoon. 'I don't need to do anything. I am rich enough not to work.'

'You are twenty-nine, Rudolf' said Rose. 'You can't play all your life. You need something serious to do.'

Robert came into the room. 'Rose wants me to work, Robert,' I said. I looked at Rose and smiled.

'It's the Elphberg blood in you,' said Rose. 'They say that the new King is the same.'

My distant cousin, Prince Rudolph Elphberg was about to become King of Ruritanian

'He has the Elphberg nose too,' Robert said.

'Rudolf is not a king,' said Rose. 'He needs to do something with his life. Perhaps he can work at my father's bank.'

'I have other plans,' I said.

Rose did not believe me. 'Really?'

Of course I didn't have any plan. But on the breakfast table there was a copy of The Times. I could see the words, *Coronation Special*.

'I'm going to the coronation in Strelsau.'

She looked at me in horror. 'What? Rudolf, you can't do that!' she said. 'No Rassendyll can go to Ruritania after the scandal!'

### **Princess Amelia**

The story of Princess Amelia of Ruritania was a famous one in our house. Long ago she came to England on a royal visit. She returned to Strelsau with a Rassendyll child.

I laughed. 'That was a hundred years ago, Rose. Everyone has forgotten about Princess Amelia now.'

We all looked up at a portrait of Amelia on the wall. Usually we joked about my Elphberg features. But Rose was not smiling now.

'You look like an Elphberg,' said Rose. 'And people might confuse you for the king. Please don't go, Rudolf. It's not safe for you.'

I was very fond of Rose. I did not want to worry her. But I was also a young man looking for adventure. And I wanted to meet my cousin.

'I was only joking,' I lied. 'I'm really going walking in Austria for a few months. Then I'll come back for that bank job.'

### **A beautiful woman**

There were no direct trains from London to Strelsau so I spent a night in Paris with my old friend George. The next morning he took me to the station.

While I was buying my ticket, George talked to a very beautiful woman. 'You're lucky!' he told me after. 'That's Antoinette de Mauban. She's catching the same train.'



'I've heard the name before,' I said.

'She's rich, clever and beautiful. But she is in love with the wrong man: Duke Michael of Strelsau.'

'The brother of the new king?'

'Half-brother - and rival for the throne! Michael lives in Ruritania but he's not popular there. People don't trust him.'

### **Journey to Strelsau**

The train to Strelsau was full of people going to the coronation. Antoinette de Mauban sat alone in her carriage but other passengers told stories about her.

'Antoinette is going back to see Michael in Strelsau.'

'Will he marry her?'

'No! Michael wants to marry Princess Flavia. And he wants to be King!'

The train slowly passed through France and then Germany. After lunch I fell asleep. When I awoke it was late in the afternoon and we were crossing into Ruritania. All around us were forests and mountains.



'When do we get to Strelsau?' I asked the ticket collector. 'I need to find a hotel.'

'You won't find a hotel in Strelsau tonight,' he said. 'They are all booked for the coronation.'

'Is there anywhere I can stay?' I asked.

'Get off at the town of Zenda,' he said. 'You can travel in to Strelsau from there.'

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Zenda is a quiet town with a famous castle. It is about fifty miles from Strelsau.

I got off the train. As it moved away I saw Antoinette staring out of a window. Then I went to look for a room.

Eventually I found one in a small **inn** run by an old lady and her daughter. They told me about Zenda castle. 'It belongs to Michael of Strelsau,' said the old lady. 'He lives here in Ruritania. Our new king only came back to the country last week.'

'And now no one knows him,' said the daughter. 'My Johann told me. He works at Michael's hunting-lodge in the forest.'

'Prince Rudolf is staying there now,' said the old lady. 'He only likes hunting, drinking and pretty girls. I want Michael to be King.'

'I don't like Duke Michael,' said the daughter. 'I want an Elphberg.' She looked at me and laughed. 'You have the Elphberg nose!'

'Where is Michael now?' I asked.

'He's in Strelsau for the coronation.'

'Then why is the King here? Are he and Michael friends?'

'Yes,' said the old woman but the daughter laughed.

'I don't think so!' she said. 'Two men want to be King. And two men want the same wife.'

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## **Understanding**

1. ***Which two men have 'the same hair and the same face'?***

- a) King Rudolf
- b) Rupert Hentzau
- c) Rudolf Rassendyll
- d) Duke Michael

***Where does Rudolf first see Antoinette?***

- a) London b) Paris
- c) Strelsau d) Zenda

## **Vocabulary**

**double** - identical appearance e.g twins    **inn** - hotel with bar