

# LONG LIVE THE KING

By Mary Roberts Rinehart

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## HEDWIG AND THE CROWN PRINCE WAIT IN VAIN FOR THE RETURN OF NIKKY.

**Synopsis.**—The crown prince of Livonia, Ferdinand William Otto, ten years old, taken to the opera by his aunt, tires of the singing and slips away to the park, where he makes the acquaintance of Bobby Thorpe, a little American boy. Returning to the palace at night, he finds everything in an uproar as a result of the search which has been made for him. The same night the chancellor calls to consult the boy's grandfather, the old king, who is very ill. The chancellor suggests that to preserve the kingdom, which is threatened by plots of the terrorists to form a republic, the friendship of the neighboring kingdom of Karnia be secured by giving the Princess Hedwig in marriage to King Karl of that country. Countess Loschek, lady-in-waiting to Princess Annunziata, Hedwig's mother, is in love with King Karl and plots to prevent his marriage to Hedwig. Hedwig, who loves Nikky Larisch, Otto's aid de camp, is dismayed when told of the plans for her marriage. Countess Loschek sends a secret message to King Karl. The messenger is attacked by agents of the terrorists and a dummy letter substituted. Captain Larisch, unaware of the substitution, holds up Karl's chauffeur and secures the envelope.

### CHAPTER VI.

#### Two Prisoners.

Herman Spier had made his escape with the letter. He ran through tortuous byways of the old city, under arches into court yards, out again by doorways set in the walls, twisted, doubled like a rabbit. And all this without pursuit, save the pricking one of terror.

But at last he halted, looked about, perceived that only his own guilty conscience accused him, and took breath. He made his way to the house in the shadow of the park until, an letter now buttoned inside his coat, and, finding the doors closed, lurked in the shadow of the park until an hour later, Black Humbert himself appeared.

He eyed his creature with cold anger. "It is a marvel," he sneered, "that such flight as yours has not brought the police in a pack at your heels."

"I had the letter," Herman replied sulkily. "It was necessary to save it."

"You were to see where Niburg took the substitute."

But here Herman was the one to sneer. "Niburg!" he said. "You know well enough that he will take no substitute tonight, or any night. You strike hard, my friend."

The concierge growled, and together they entered the house across the street.

In the absence of Humbert, his niece, daughter of a milk seller near, kept the bureau, answered the bell, and after nine o'clock, when the doors were bolted, admitted the various occupants of the house and gave them the tiny tapers with which to light themselves upstairs. She was sewing and singing softly when they entered.

"All right, girl. You may go," said Humbert.

"Good night to you both," the girl said, and gave Herman Spier a nod. When she was gone, the concierge locked the door behind her.

"And now," he said, "for a look at the treasure."

He rubbed his hands together as Herman produced the letter. Heads close, they examined it under the lamp. Then they glanced at each other.

"A cipher," said the concierge shortly. "It tells nothing."

"Code!" And struck the paper with a hairy fist. "Everything goes wrong."



That blond devil interfered, and now this letter speaks but of blankets and louses!"

The bell rang, and, taking care to thrust the letter out of sight, the concierge disappeared. Then ensued, in the hall, a short colloquy, followed by a thumping on the staircase. The concierge returned.

But there was something about the story of the letter itself that bore the hall marks of truth.

"You see," finished Black Humbert cunningly, "she—this lady of the court—is plotting with some one, or so we suspect. If it is only a liaison—" He spread his hands. "If, as is possible, she betrays us to Karnia, that we should find out. It is not," he added, "among our plans that Karnia should know too much of us."

The brandy was still working, but the spy's mind was clear. He asked for a pencil, and set to work. After all, if there was a spy of Karl's in the palace, it were well to know it. He tried complicated methods first, to find that the body of the letter, after all, was simple enough. By reading every tenth word, he got a consistent message, save that certain supplies, over which the concierge had ruled, were special code words for certain regiments. These he could not decipher.

"Whoever was to receive this," he said at last, "would have been in possession of complete data of the



army, equipment and all, and the location of various regiments. Probably you and your band of murderers have that already."

The concierge nodded, no whit ruffled. "And for whom was it intended?"

"I cannot say. The address is fictitious, of course."

Black Humbert scowled. "So?" he said. "You tell us only a part?"

"There is nothing else to tell. Save, as I have written here, the writer ends: 'I must see you at once. Let me know where.'"

The brandy was getting in its work well by that time. He was feeling strong, his own man again, and reckless. But he was cunning, too. He yawned. "And in return for all this, what?" he demanded. "I have done you a service, friend cut-throat."

The concierge stuffed letter and translation into his pocket. "What would you have, short of liberty?"

"Air, for one thing." He stood up and stretched again. How, how strong he felt! "If you would open that accursed window for an hour—the place reeks."

Humbert was in high good humor in spite of his protests. In his pocket he held the key to favor, aye, to a plan which he meant to lay before the committee of ten, a plan breath-taking in its audacity and yet potential of success. He went to the window and put his great shoulder against it.

Instantly Humbert overturned the candle and, picking up the chair, hurled it at Herman Spier. He heard the clerk go down as he leaped for the door. Herman had not locked it. He was in the passage before the concierge had stumbled past the bed.

Haeckel ran as he had never run before. The last flight now, with the concierge well behind, and liberty two seconds away.

He flung himself against the doors to the street. But they were fastened by a chain, and the key was not in the lock.

He crumpled up in a heap as the concierge fell on him with fists like flails.

Some time later, old Adelbert heard a sound in the corridor, and peered out. Humbert, assisted by the lodger, Spier, was carrying to the attic what appeared to be an old mattress, rolled up and covered with rags. In the morning, outside the door, there was a darkish stain, however, which might have been blood.

At nine o'clock the next morning the chancellor visited the crown prince. He came without ceremony. Lately he had been coming often. He liked to come in quietly, and sit for an hour in the school room, saying nothing. Prince Ferdinand William Otto found these occasions rather trying.

"I should think," he protested once to his governess, "that he would have something else to do. He's the chancellor, isn't he?"

The king had passed a bad night—is plotting with some one, or so we suspect. If it is only a liaison—" He spread his hands. "If, as is possible, she betrays us to Karnia, that we should find out. It is not," he added, "among our plans that Karnia should know too much of us."

The chancellor watched the crown prince, as he sat at the high desk, laboriously writing. It was the hour of English composition, and Prince Ferdinand William Otto was writing a theme.

"About dogs," he explained. "I've seen a great many, you know. I could do it better with a pencil. My pen sticks in the paper."

He wrote on, and Mettlich sat and watched. He caught Miss Braithwaite's glance, and he knew what was in her mind. For nine years now had come, once a year, the painful anniversary of the death of the late crown prince and his young wife. For nine years had the city mourned, with flags at half mast and the bronze statue of the old queen draped in black. And for nine years had the day of grief passed unnoticed by the lad on whom hung the destinies of the kingdom.

Now they confronted a new situation. The next day but one was the anniversary again. The boy was older, and observant. It would not be possible to conceal from him the significance of the procession marching through the streets with muffled drums.

They could not continue to lie to the boy. Truthfulness had been one of the rules of his rigorous upbringing. And he was now of an age to remember. So the chancellor sat and waited, and fingered his heavy watch chain.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto put his attention to the theme, and finished it. Then, flushed with authorship, he looked up. "May I read you the last line of it?" he demanded of the chancellor.

"I shall be honored, highness." Not often did the chancellor say "highness." Generally he said "Otto" or "my child."

Prince Ferdinand William Otto read aloud, with dancing eyes, his last line: "I should like to own a dog." I thought," he said wistfully, "that I might ask my grandfather for one."

"I see no reason why you should not have a dog," the chancellor observed.

"Not one to be kept at the stables," Otto explained. "One to stay with me all the time. One to sleep on the foot of the bed."

But here the chancellor threw up his hands. Instantly he visualized all the objections to dogs, from fleas to rabies. And he put the difficulties into words. No mean speaker was the chancellor when so minded. He was a master of style, of arrangement, of logic and reasoning. He spoke at length, even, at the end, rising and pacing a few steps up and down the room. But when he had concluded, when the dog, so to speak, had fled yelping to the country of dead hopes, Prince Ferdinand William Otto merely gulped, and said:

"Well, I wish I could have a dog!"

The chancellor changed his tactics by changing the subject. "I was wondering this morning, as I crossed the park, if you would enjoy an excursion soon. Could it be managed, Miss Braithwaite?"

"I dare say," said Miss Braithwaite dryly. "Although I must say, if there is no improvement in punctuation and capital letters—"

"What sort of excursion?" asked his royal highness, guardedly. He did not care for picture galleries.

"Out-of-doors, to see something interesting. A real excursion, up the river."

"To the fort? I do want to see the new fort."

As a matter of truth, the chancellor had not thought of the fort. But like many another before him, he accepted the suggestion and made it his own. "To the fort, of course," said he.

"And take luncheon along, and eat it there, and have Hedwig and Nikky? And see the guns?"

But this was going too fast. Nikky, of course, would go, and if the princess cared to, she too. But luncheon! It was necessary to remind the crown prince that the officers at the fort would expect to have him join their mess. There was a short parley over this, and it was finally settled that the officers should serve luncheon, but that there should be no speeches.

"Then that's settled," he said at last. "I'm very happy. This morning I shall apologize to M. Puaux."

During the remainder of the morning the crown prince made various excursions to the window to see if the weather was holding good. Also he asked, during his half-hour's intermission, for the great box of lead soldiers that was locked away in the cabinet. "I shall pretend that the desk is a fort, Miss Braithwaite," he said. "Do you mind being the enemy, and pretending to be shot now and then?"

But Miss Braithwaite was correcting papers. She was willing to be a passive enemy and be potted at, but she drew the line at falling over. Prince Ferdinand William Otto did not persist. He was far too polite. But he wished in his soul that Nikky would come.

Nikky, he felt, would die often and hard.

But Nikky did not come.

At twelve o'clock, Prince Ferdinand William Otto, clad in his riding garments of tweed knickers, puttees, and a belted jacket, stood by the school room window and looked out. The inner windows of his suite faced the court yard, but the schoolroom opened over the place—a bad arrangement surely, seeing what distractions to lessons may take place in a public square, what pigeons feeding in the sun, what bands with drums and drum majors, what children flying kites.

"I don't understand it," the crown prince said plaintively. "He is generally very punctual. Perhaps—"

But he loyally refused to finish the sentence. The "perhaps" was a grievous thought, nothing less than that Nikky and Hedwig were at that moment riding in the ring together, and had both forgotten him.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto consulted his watch. It was of gold, and on the inside was engraved:

"To Ferdinand William Otto from his grandfather, on the occasion of his taking his first communion."

"It's getting rather late," he observed.

Miss Braithwaite looked troubled. "No doubt something has detained him," she said, with unusual gentleness. "You might work at the frame for your Cousin Hedwig. Then, if Captain Larisch comes, you can still have a part of your lesson."

Prince Ferdinand William Otto brightened. The burnt wood photograph frame for Hedwig was his delight. And yesterday, as a punishment for the escapade of the day before, it had been put away with an alarming air of finality.

The pyrography outfit was produced, and for fifteen minutes Prince Ferdinand William Otto labored, his head on one side, his royal tongue slightly protruded. But, above the thin blue smoke of burning, his face remained wistful. He was afraid, terribly afraid, that he had been forgotten again.

"I hope Nikky is not ill," he said once. "He smokes a great many cigarettes. He says he knows they are bad for him."

"Certainly they are bad for him," said Miss Braithwaite. "They contain nicotine, which is a violent poison. A drop of nicotine on the tongue of a dog will kill it."

The reference was unfortunate.

"I wish I might have a dog," observed Prince Ferdinand William Otto. Fortunately, at that moment, Hedwig came in. She came in a trifle defiantly, although that passed unnoted, and she also came unannounced, as was her customary privilege. And she stood inside the door and stared at the prince. "Well!" she said. "Is there to be no riding lesson today?"

"I don't know. Nikky has not come."

"Where is he?"

Here the drop of nicotine got in its deadly work. "I'm afraid he is ill," said Prince Ferdinand William Otto. "He said he smoked too many cigarettes, and—"

"Is Captain Larisch ill?" Hedwig looked at the governess, and lost some of her bright color.

Miss Braithwaite did not know, and said so. "At the very least," she went on, "he should have sent some word. I do not know what things are coming to. Since his majesty's illness, no one seems to have any responsibility, or to take any."

"But of course he would have sent word," said Hedwig, frowning. "I don't understand it. He has never been so late before, has he?"

"He has never been late at all," Prince Ferdinand William Otto spoke up quickly.

After a time Hedwig went away, and the crown prince took off his riding clothes. He ate a very small luncheon, swallowing mostly a glass of milk and a lump in his throat. And afterward he worked the beads carefully. At three o'clock he went for his drive.

The horses moved sedately. Beppo looked severe and haughty. A strange man, in the place of Hans, beside Beppo, watched the crowd with keen and vigilant eyes. On the box between them, under his hand, the new footman had placed a revolver. Beppo sat as far away from it as he dared. The crowd lined up, and smiled and cheered. And Prince Ferdinand William Otto sat very straight, and bowed right and left, smiling.

Old Adelbert, limping across the park to the opera, paused and looked. Then he shook his head. The country was indeed come to a strange pass, with only that boy and the feeble old king to stand between it and the things of which men whispered behind their hands. He went on, with his head down.

As they drew near the end of the park, where the land of desire towered, Prince Ferdinand William Otto searched it with eager eyes. How wonderful it was! How steep and high, and alluring! He glanced sideways at Miss Braithwaite, but it was clear that to her it was only a monstrous heap of

sheet iron and steel, adorned with dejected greenery that had manifestly been out too soon in the chill air of very early spring.

A wonderful possibility presented itself. "If I see Bobby," he asked, "may I stop the carriage and speak to him?"

"Certainly not."

"Well, may I call to him?"

"Think it over," suggested Miss Braithwaite. "Would your grandfather like to know that you had done anything so undignified?"

He turned to her a rather desperate pair of eyes. "But I could explain to him," he said. "I was in such a hurry when I left, that I'm afraid I forgot to thank him. I ought to thank him, really. He was very polite to me."

Miss Braithwaite sat still in her seat and said nothing just then. But later on something occurred to her. "You must remember, Otto," she said, "that this—this American child dislikes kings, and our sort of government. It is possible, isn't it, that he would resent your being of the ruling family? Why not let things be as they are?"

"We were very friendly," said Ferdinand William Otto in a small voice. "I don't think it would make any difference."

But the seed was sown in the fertile ground of his young mind, to bear quick fruit.

It was the crown prince who saw Bobby first. He was standing on a bench, peering over the shoulders of the crowd. Prince Ferdinand William Otto saw him, and bent forward. "There he is!" he said, in a tense tone. "There on the—"

"Sit up straight," commanded Miss Braithwaite.

"May I just wave once? I—"

"Otto!" said Miss Braithwaite, in a terrible voice.

But a dreadful thing was happening. Bobby was looking directly at him, and making no sign. His mouth was a trifle open, but that was all. Otto had a momentary glimpse of him, of the small cap set far back, of the white sweater, of two coolly critical eyes. Then the crowd closed up, and the carriage moved on.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto sat back in his seat, very pale. Clearly Bobby was through with him. First Nikky had forgotten him, and now the American boy had learned his unfortunate position as one of the detested order, and would have none of him.

"You see," said Miss Braithwaite, with an air of relief, "he did not know you."

Upon the box the man beside Beppo kept his hand on the revolver. He said:

"There He is!" He said.

Carriage turned back toward the palace.

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Late that afternoon the chancellor had a visitor. Old Mathilde, his servant and housekeeper, showed some curiosity but little excitement over it. She was, in fact, faintly resentful. The chancellor had eaten little all day, and now, when she had an omelet ready to turn smoking out of the pan, must come the Princess Hedwig on foot like the common people, and demand to see him.



Nikky has an exciting interview with King Karl and finds himself in a serious predicament as a result of his foolish undertaking. Read about this development in the next installment.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Stone Church Without Mortar.

Although built early in the Christian era without mortar, a stone church in Ireland still is in excellent condition.