

Long Live the King

By MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

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HEDWIG IS OFFERED AS A SACRIFICE TO SAVE THE TOTTERING KINGDOM OF LIVONIA.

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, 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 aide 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. The captain impersonates Karl's chauffeur and exchanges the sheet within the envelope for some cigarette papers. On delivering the envelope to Karl, Larisch is made prisoner when the deception is discovered.

CHAPTER VII—Continued.

The archduchess was terrified. She had known that there was disaffection about. She knew that in the last few years precautions at the palace had been increased. Sentries were doubled. Men in the uniforms of lackeys, but doing no labor, were everywhere. But with time and safety she had felt secure.

"Of course," the king resumed, "things are not as bad as that paper indicates. It is the voice of the few, rather than the many. Still, it is a voice."

Annunziata looked more than her age now. She glanced around the room



"I Will Go Myself."

as though, already, she heard the mob at the doors.

"To return to the matter of Hedwig's marriage," said the king. "I—"

"Marriage! When our very lives are threatened!"

"I would be greatly honored," said the king, "if I might be permitted to finish what I was saying."

She had the grace to flush.

"Under the circumstances," the king resumed, "Hedwig's marriage takes on great significance—great political significance."

For a half-hour then, he talked to her. More than for years, he was unbecomingly himself. He had tried. His ministers had tried. Taxes had been lightened; the representation of the people increased, until, as he said, he was only nominally a ruler. But discontent remained. Some who had gone to America and returned with savings enough to set themselves up in business, had brought back with them the American idea.

Annunziata listened to the end. She felt no pity for those who would better themselves by discontent and its product, revolt. She felt only resentment, that her peace was being threatened, her position assailed. And in her resentment she included the king himself. He should have done better.

And something of this she did not hesitate to say. "Karnia is quiet enough," she finished, a final thrust.

"Karnia is better off. A lowland, most of it, and fertile." But a spot of color showed in his old cheeks. "I am glad you spoke of Karnia. Whatever plans we make, Karnia must be considered."

"Why? Karnia does not consider us."

He raised his hand. "You are wrong. Just now, Karnia is doing us the honor of asking an alliance with us, a matrimonial alliance."

The archduchess was hardly surprised, as one may believe. But she was not minded to yield too easily. The old resentment against her father

flamed. Indifferent mother though she was, she made capital of a fear for Hedwig's happiness.

At last she succeeded in irritating the king—a more difficult thing now than in earlier times, but not so hard a matter at that. He listened quietly until she had finished, and then sent her away. When she had got part way to the door, however, he called her back. And since a king is a king, even if he is one's father and very old, she came.

"Just one word more," he said, in his thin, old, high-bred voice. "Much of your unhappiness was of your own making. You, and you only, know how much. But nothing that you have said can change the situation. I am merely compelled to make the decision alone, and soon. I have not much time."

So, after all, was the matter of the Duchess Hedwig's marriage arranged, a composite outgrowth of expediency and obstinacy, of defiance and anger. And so was it hastened.

Irritation gave the king strength. That afternoon were summoned in haste the members of his council—fat old Friese, young Marschall with the rat face, austere Bayerl with the white skin and burning eyes, and others. And to them all the king disclosed his royal will. There was some demur. But, after all, the king's will was dominant. Friese could but voice his protest and relapse into greasy silence.

The chancellor sat silent during the conclave, silent, but intent. On each speaker he turned his eyes, and waited until at last Karl's proposal, with its promises, was laid before them in full. Then, and only then, the chancellor rose. His speech was short. He told them of what they all knew, their own insecurity. He spoke but a word of the crown prince, but that softly. And he drew for them a picture of the future that set their hearts to glowing—a throne secure, a greater kingdom, freedom from the costs of war, a harbor by the sea.

The battle, which was no battle at all, was won. He had won. The country had won. The crown prince had won. Only Hedwig had lost. And only Mettlich knew just how she had lost.

The necessity for work brought the king the strength to do it. Mettlich remained with him. Boxes were brought from vaults, unlocked and examined. Secretaries came and went. At eight o'clock a frugal dinner was spread in the study, and they ate it almost literally over state documents.

On and on, until midnight or thereabouts. Then they stopped. The thing was arranged. Nothing was left now but to carry the word to Karl.

Two things were necessary: Haste. The king, having determined it, would lose no time. And dignity. The granddaughter of the king must be offered with ceremony. No ordinary king's messenger, then, but some dignitary of the court.

To this emergency Mettlich rose like the doughty old warrior and statesman that he was. "If you are willing, sire," he said, as he rose, "I will go myself."

"When?"

"Since it must be done, the sooner the better. Tonight, sire."

"To the capital?"

"Not so far. Karl is hunting. He is at Wedling."

He went almost immediately, and the king summoned his valets, and was got to bed. But long after the automobile containing Mettlich and two secret agents was on the road toward the mountains, he tossed on his narrow bed. To what straits had they come indeed! He closed his eyes wearily. Something had gone out of his life. He did not realize at first what it was. When he did, he smiled his old grim smile in the darkness. He had lost a foe. More than anything, perhaps, he had dearly loved a foe.

CHAPTER VIII.

On the Mountain Road.

The low gray car which carried the chancellor was on its way through the mountains. It moved deliberately, for

two reasons. First, the chancellor was afraid of motors. He had a horseman's hatred and fear of machines. Second, he was not of a mind to rouse King Karl from a night's sleep, even to bring the hand of the Princess Hedwig. His intention was to put up at some inn in a village not far from the lodge and to reach Karl by messenger early in the morning, before the hunters left for the day.

Then, all being prepared duly and in order, Mettlich himself would arrive, and things would go forward with dignity and dispatch.

The valley of the Ar deepened. The cliff rose above them, a wall broken here and there by the offset of narrow ravines, filled with forest trees. There was a pause while the chains on the rear wheels were supplemented by others in front, for there must be no danger of a skid. And another pause, where the road slanted perilously toward the brink of the chasm, and caution dictated that the chancellor alight, and make a hundred feet or so of dangerous curve afoot.

It required diplomacy to get him out. But it was finally done, and his heavy figure, draped in its military cape, went on ahead, outlined by the lamps of the car behind him.

He was well around the curve, and the cliff was broken by a wedge of timber, when a curiously shaped object projected itself over the edge of the bank, and rolling down, lay almost at his feet. The lamps brought it into sharp relief—a man, gagged and tied, and rolled, cigar shaped, in an automobile robe.

The chancellor turned, and called to his men. Then he bent over the bundle. The others ran up, and cut the bonds. What with cold and long inaction, and his recent drop over the bank, the man could not speak. One of the secret service men had a flask, and held it to his lips. An amazing situation, indeed, increased by the discovery that under the robe he wore only his undergarments, with a soldier's tunic wrapped around his shoulders. They carried him into the car where he lay with head lolling back, and his swollen tongue protruding. Half dead he was, with cold and long anxiety. The brandy cleared his mind long before he could speak, and he saw by the uniforms that he was in the hands of the enemy. He turned sulkily silent then, convinced that he had escaped one death but to meet another. Twenty-four hours now he had faced eternity, and he was ready.

He preferred, however, to die fully clothed, and when, in response to his pointing up the bank and to his inarticulate mouthings, one of the secret police examined the bit of woodland with his pocket flash, he found a pair of trousers where Nikky had left them, neatly folded and hung over the branch of a tree. The brandy being supplemented by hot coffee from a patent bottle, the man revived further, made an effort, and sat up. His tongue was still swollen, but they made out what he said. He had been there since the night before. He was of Karnia, and a king's messenger.

"I was coming back from the barrier," he said thickly, "where I had carried dispatches to the officer in charge. On my return a man halted me from the side of the road, near where you found me. I thought he desired to be taken on, and he took my car. But he attacked me. He was armed and I was not. He knocked me senseless, and when I awakened I was



They Carried Him into the Car.

above the road, among trees. I gave myself up when the snow commenced. Few pass this way. But I heard your car coming and made a desperate effort."

"Then," asked one of the agents, "these are not your clothes?"

"They are his, sir."

The agent produced a flash light and inspected the garments. Before the chancellor's eyes, button by button, strap on the sleeve, star on the cuff, came into view the uniform of a cap-

tain of his own regiment, the grenadiers. Then one of his own men had done this infamous thing, one of his own officers, indeed.

"Go through the pockets," he ordered sternly.

Came into view under the flash a pair of gloves, a box of matches, a silk handkerchief, a card case. The agent said nothing, but passed a card to the chancellor, who read it without comment.

There was silence in the car.

At last the chancellor stirred. "This man—he took your car on?"

"Yes. And he has not returned. No other machine has passed."

The secret service men exchanged glances. There was more to this than appeared. Somewhere ahead, then, was Nikky Larisch, with a motor that did not belong to him, and wearing clothing which his victim described as a chauffeur's coat of leather, breeches and puttees, and a fur greatcoat over all.

"Had the snow commenced when this happened?"

"Not then, sir. Shortly after."

"Go out with the driver," the chancellor ordered one of his men, "and watch the road for the tracks of another car. Go slowly."

So it was that, after an hour or so, they picked up Nikky's trail, now twenty-four hours old but still clear, and followed it. The chancellor was awake enough by this time, and bending forward. When at last the trail turned from the highway toward the shooting box at Wedling, Mettlich fell back with something between a curse and a groan.

"The fool!" he muttered. "The young fool! It was madness."

At last they drew up at an inn in the village on the royal preserve, and the chancellor, looking rather gray, alighted. He directed that the man they had rescued be brought in. The chancellor was not for losing him just yet. He took a room for him at the inn, and rather cavalierly locked him in it.

The chancellor sipped hot milk and considered. Nikky Larisch a prisoner in Karl's hands caused him less anxiety than it would have a month before. But what was behind it all?

At a little before five the man outside the prisoner's door heard something inside the room. He glanced in. All was quiet. The prisoner slept heavily, genuine sleep. There was no mistaking it, the sleep of a man warm after long cold and exhaustion, weary after violent effort. The agent went out again, and locked the door behind him.

And as the door closed, a trap door from the kitchen below opened softly under the sleeping man's bed. With great caution came the landlord, head first, then shoulders. The space was cramped. He crawled up, like a snake out of a hole, and ducked behind the curtains of the bed. All was still quiet, save that the man outside struck a match and lighted a pipe.

Half an hour later, the chancellor's prisoner, still stiff and weak, was making his way toward the hunting lodge.

Karl saw him first, and found the story unlightening. Nor could Karl, roused by a terrified valet, make much more of it. When the man had gone, Karl lay back among his pillows and eyed his agent.

"So Mettlich is here!" he said. "A hasty journey. They must be eager."

"They must be in trouble," Kaiser observed dryly. And on that uncomplimentary comment King Karl slept, his face drawn into a weary smile.

But he received the chancellor of Livonia cordially the next morning, going himself to the lodge doorstep to meet his visitor, and there shaking hands with him.

"I am greatly honored, excellency," he said, with his twisted smile.

"And I, sire."

But the chancellor watched him from under his shaggy brows. The messenger had escaped. By now Karl knew the story, knew of his midnight ride over the mountains, and the haste it indicated.

Karl himself led the way to his study. Ignoring the chamberlain, and stood aside to let Mettlich enter. Then he followed and closed the door.

"It is a long time since you have honored Karnia with a visit," Karl observed. "Will you sit down?"

Karl himself did not sit. He stood negligently beside the mantel, an arm stretched along it.

"Not since the battle of the Ar, sire," replied the chancellor dryly. He had headed an army of invasion then. Karl smiled. "I hope that now your errand is more peaceful."

For answer the chancellor opened a portfolio he carried, and fumbled among its papers. But, having found the right one, he held it without opening it. "Before we come to that, sire, you have here, I believe, detained for some strange reason, a Captain Larisch, aide-de-camp"—he paused for effect—"to his royal highness, the crown prince of Livonia."

Karl glanced up quickly. "Perhaps, if you will describe this gentleman—"

"Nonsense," said the chancellor testily. "You have him. We have traced him here. Although by what authority

you hold him I fail to understand. I am here to find out what you have done with him."

"Done with him?" echoed Karl. "If as Captain Larisch you refer to a madman who the night before last—"

"He is a prisoner," Karl said, in a new tone, stern enough now. "He assaulted and robbed one of my men. He stole certain documents. That he has not suffered for it already was because—well, because I believed that the unfortunate distrust between your country and mine, excellency, was about to end."

A threat that, undoubtedly. Let the arrangement between Karnia and Livonia be made, with Hedwig to seal the bargain, and Nikky was safe enough. But let Livonia demand too much, or not agree at all, and Nikky was lost. Thus did Nikky Larisch play his small part in the game of nations.

"Suppose," said Karl unctuously, "that we discuss first another more important matter. I confess to a certain impatience." He bowed slightly.

The chancellor hesitated. Then he glanced thoughtfully at the paper in his hand.

Through a long luncheon, the two alone and even the servants dismissed, through a longer afternoon, negotiations went on. Mettlich fought hard on some points, only to meet de-



"I Want That Letter."

pressed. But Karl only looked at him. "I know that," he said coldly. "You are always just a little late with your information, Kaiser."

Something like malice showed in the agent's face. "Then you also know, sire, that it is this Captain Larisch with whom rumor couples the name of the Princess Hedwig." He stepped back a pace or two at sight of Karl's face. "You requested such information, sire."

For answer, Karl pointed to the door.

For some time after he had dismissed the agent, Karl paced his library alone. Kaiser brought no unverified information. Therefore the thing was true. Therefore he had had his enemy in his hand, and now was pledged to let him go. For a time, then, Karl paid the penalty of many misdeeds. His triumph was ashes in his mouth.

What if this boy, infatuated with Hedwig, had hidden somewhere on the road Olga Loschek's letter? What, then, if he recovered it and took it to Hedwig? What if—

But at last he sent for the prisoner upstairs, and waited for him with both jealousy and fear in his eyes.

Five minutes later Nikky Larisch was ushered into the red study, and having bowed, an insolent young bow at that, stood and eyed the king.

"I have sent for you to release you," said Karl.

Nikky drew a long breath. "I am grateful, sire."

"You have been interceded for by the chancellor of Livonia, General Mettlich, who has just gone."

Nikky bowed.

Karl fixed him with cold eyes. "But before you take leave of us," he said ironically, "I should like the true story of the night before last. Somehow, somewhere, a letter intended for me was exchanged for a blank paper. I want that letter."

"I know no more than you, sire. It is not reasonable that I would have taken the risk I took for an envelope containing nothing."

"For that matter," said his majesty, "there was nothing reasonable about anything you did!"

And now Karl played his trump card, played it with watchful eyes on Nikky's face. He would see if report spoke the truth, if this blue-eyed boy was in love with Hedwig. He was a jealous man, this Karl of the cold eyes, jealous and passionate. Not as a king, then, watching a humble soldier of Livonia, but as man to man, he gazed at Nikky.

"For fear that loyalty keeps you silent, I may say to you that the old troubles between Karnia and Livonia are over."

"I do not understand, sire."

Karl hesitated. Then, with his twisted smile, he cast the rigid etiquette of such matters to the winds. "It is very simple," he said. "There will be no more trouble between these two neighboring countries, because a marriage has today been arranged—a marriage between the Princess Hedwig, his majesty's granddaughter, and myself."

For a moment Nikky Larisch closed his eyes.

The anniversary of the death of Prince Hubert dawned bright and sunny. The place showed a thin covering of snow, which clung, wet and sticky, to the trees; but by nine o'clock most of it had disappeared, and Prince Ferdinand William Otto was informed that the excursion would take place.

Two motors took the party, by back streets, to the landing stage. In the first were Annunziata, Hedwig, and the countess, and at the last moment Otto had salvaged Miss Braithwaite from the second car, and begged a place for her with him. A police agent sat beside the chauffeur. Also another car just ahead, contained other agents, by Mettlich's order before his departure—a plain black motor, without the royal arms.

In the second machine followed a part of the suite. Hedwig's lady-in-waiting, two gentlemen of the court, in parade dress, and Father Gregory, come from his monastery at Eitel to visit his old friend, the king.

At the landing stage a small crowd had gathered on seeing the red carpet laid and the gilt robes put up, which indicated a royal visit. A small girl, with a hastily secured bouquet in her hot hands, stood nervously waiting. In deference to the anniversary, the flowers were tied with a black ribbon.

Annunziata grumbled when she saw the crowd, and the occupants of the first car looked them over carefully. It remained for Hedwig to spy the black ribbon. In the confusion, she slipped over to the little girl, who went quite white with excitement. "They are lovely," Hedwig whispered, "but please take off the black ribbon." The child eyed her anxiously. "It will come to pieces, highness."

"Take the ribbon from your hair. It will be beautiful."

Which was done! But, as was not unnatural, the child forgot her speech, and merely thrust the bouquet, tied with a large pink bow, into the hands of Prince Ferdinand William Otto.

"Here," she said. It was, perhaps, the briefest, and therefore the most agreeable presentation speech the crown prince had ever heard.

Old Adelbert, crippled veteran and long an attendant at the opera, loses his position, an event which starts a train of circumstances which have a strange bearing upon the future of the kingdom of Livonia.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)
Philadelphia municipal court heard 33,904 cases in last fiscal year.