The Prisoner of Zenda

Anthony Hope · *1894 · original English text*

Rudolf Rassendyll, an idle English gentleman with the red hair of the Elphberg kings, goes to the small country of Ruritania to see the coronation of his distant cousin the king. The king is drugged on the eve of the crowning, and Rudolf takes his place. He falls in love with the princess Flavia while the real king is held in the castle of Zenda. It is the book that named the Ruritanian romance.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What does a man owe when he is asked to take another man's place, and what does it cost to do right?

Hope's answer is light in tone and grave in outcome. Rudolf plays the king out of loyalty and a taste for risk, and he keeps faith with the king even when love for Flavia asks for more. The ending is a renunciation. The book is a brisk adventure, and the price of honor is paid in the last chapters.

KEY CHARACTERS

Rudolf Rassendyll
The English gentleman who takes the king's place.

King Rudolf the Fifth
The weak, kindly king who looks like Rudolf.

Princess Flavia
The king's cousin and betrothed.

Colonel Sapt
The gruff old soldier who guides the plan.

Fritz von Tarlenheim
A young officer, loyal and bold.

Black Michael
The Duke of Strelsau, the king's half-brother and rival.

Rupert of Hentzau
A brilliant, reckless young villain.

Antoinette de Mauban
Michael's mistress, who turns against him.

Grades 6–12
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01

A Holiday and a Double

CHAPTERS I–III

Rudolf Rassendyll, an idle Englishman, stops in Ruritania to see the coronation. In the forest of Zenda he meets the king, who has his look, and they dine together at a hunting lodge.

- His sister-in-law scolds him for doing nothing.
- The Rassendylls carry the red Elphberg hair.
- The king's half-brother, Black Michael, sends a bottle of wine.
- The two men dine together at the lodge.

02

The Drugged King

CHAPTERS IV–VI

The king is drugged and cannot be woken. Colonel Sapt and Fritz von Tarlenheim ask Rudolf to take his place, so that Michael cannot seize the crown.

- The king misses his appointment.
- Sapt proposes the plan.
- Rudolf agrees to be an understudy.
- The coronation is held in Strelsau.

03

A King in Strelsau

CHAPTERS VII–XII

Rudolf rules for several weeks, wins the people, and meets the princess Flavia, who is promised to the king. Antoinette de Mauban warns him of danger.

- Rudolf learns the work of a king.
- Flavia is the king's cousin and betrothed.
- Rudolf and Flavia fall in love.
- Antoinette de Mauban, Michael's mistress, turns against the duke.
- The real king is held at Zenda.

04

The Castle of Zenda

CHAPTERS XIII–XVII

Rudolf, Sapt and Fritz plan to rescue the king, while Michael's men plan to kill him if the castle is attacked. Rudolf swims the moat.

- Detchard, De Gautet and Rupert of Hentzau serve Michael.
- Rudolf swims the moat and learns the secret of the water pipe.
- A desperate plan is made.
- Young Rupert goes on a midnight diversion.

05

The Night Attack and the Parting

CHAPTERS XVIII–XXII

In the night assault Michael is killed by Rupert, Rudolf kills Detchard and De Gautet in the cells, and the king is saved. Rudolf gives back the crown and parts from Flavia.

- The castle is taken in the night.
- Michael is killed by Rupert, who escapes.
- Rudolf fights in the cells and in the forest.
- Rudolf gives back the crown.
- Flavia goes to be queen, and a red rose is sent each year through Fritz.

Duty and promise | Honor | Love and renunciation | Disguise | Royal blood

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 6–12

1. Why Rudolf agrees to take the king's place.
2. How Rudolf and Flavia come to love each other.
3. What Rudolf does at the castle of Zenda.
4. What Rudolf gives up in the last chapters and how the story ends.

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