Long Live the King!

Mary Roberts Rinehart

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This is a story of love, intrigue and adventure in a European court. In this story Mrs. Rinehart combines mystery, heart interest, and excitement of her past successes into a story that will be hailed as the most interesting of all her stories.

PUBLISHER NOTES:

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Chapter

1 THE CROWN PRINCE RUNS AWAY

The Crown Prince sat in the royal box and swung his legs. This was hardly princely, but the royal legs did not quite reach the floor from the high crimson-velvet seat of his chair.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto was bored. His royal robes, consisting of a pair of blue serge trousers, a short Eton jacket, and a stiff, rolling collar of white linen, irked him.

He had been brought to the Opera House under a misapprehension. His aunt, the Archduchess Annunciata, had strongly advocated "The Flying Dutchman," and his English governess, Miss Braithwaite, had read him some inspiring literature about it. So here he was, and the Flying Dutchman was not ghostly at all, nor did it fly. It was, from the royal box, only too plainly a ship which had length and height, without thickness. And instead of flying, after dreary aeons of singing, it was moved off on creaky rollers by men whose shadows were thrown grotesquely on the sea backing.

The orchestra, assisted by a bass solo and intermittent thunder in the wings, was making a deafening din. One of the shadows on the sea backing took out its handkerchief and wiped its nose.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto looked across at the other royal box, and caught his Cousin Hedwig's eye. She also had seen the handkerchief; she took out her own scrap of linen, and mimicked the shadow. Then, Her Royal Highness the Archduchess Annunciata being occupied with the storm, she winked across at Prince Ferdinand William Otto.

In the opposite box were his two cousins, the Princesses Hedwig and Hilda, attended by Hedwig's lady in waiting. When a princess of the Court becomes seventeen, she drops governesses and takes to ladies in waiting. Hedwig was eighteen. The Crown Prince liked Hedwig better than Hilda. Although she had been introduced formally to the Court at the Christmas-Eve ball, and had been duly presented by her grandfather, the King, with the usual string of pearls and her own carriage with the spokes of the wheels gilded halfway, only the King and Prince Ferdinand William Otto had all-gold wheels,—she still ran off now and then to have tea with the Crown Prince and Miss Braithwaite in the schoolroom at the Palace; and she could eat a great deal of bread-and-butter.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto winked back at the Princess Hedwig. And just then—"Listen, Otto," said the Archduchess, leaning forward. "The 'Spinning Song'—is it not exquisite?"

"They are only pretending to spin," remarked Prince Ferdinand William Otto.

Nevertheless he listened obediently. He rather liked it. They had not fooled him at all. They were not really spinning,—any one could see that, but they were sticking very closely to their business of each outsinging the other, and collectively of drowning out the orchestra.

The spinning chorus was followed by long and tiresome solos. The Crown Prince yawned again, although it was but the middle of the afternoon. Catching Hedwig's eye, he ran his fingers up through his thick yellow hair and grinned. Hedwig blushed. She had confided to him once, while they were walking in the garden at the summer palace, that, she was thinking of being in love with a young lieutenant who was attached to the King's suite. The Prince who was called Otto, for short, by the family, because he actually had eleven names—the Prince had been much interested. For some time afterward he had bothered Miss Braithwaite to define being in love, but he had had no really satisfactory answer.

In pursuance of his quest for information, he had grown quite friendly with the young officer, whose name was Larisch, and had finally asked to have him ride with him at the royal riding-school. The grim old King had granted the request, but it had been quite fruitless so far after all. Lieutenant Larisch only grew quite red as to the ears, when love was mentioned, although he appeared not unwilling to hear Hedwig's name.

The Crown Prince had developed a strong liking for the young officer. He assured Hedwig one time when she came to tea that when he was king he would see that she married the lieutenant. But Hedwig was much distressed.

"I don't want him that way," she said. "Anyhow, I shall probably have to marry some wretch with ears that stick out and a bad temper. I dare say he's selected already. As to Lieutenant Larisch, I'm sure he's in love with Hilda. You should see the way he stares at her."

"Pish!" said Prince Ferdinand William Otto over his cup. "Hilda is not as pretty as you are. And Nikky and I talk about you frequently."

"Nikky" was the officer. The Crown Prince was very informal with the people he liked.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the Princess Hedwig, coloring. "And what do you say?"

Miss Braithwaite having left the room, Prince Ferdinand William Otto took another lump of sugar. "Say? Oh, not much, you know. He asks how you are, and I tell him you are well, and that you ate thirteen pieces of bread at tea, or whatever it may have been. The day Miss Braithwaite had the toothache, and you and I ate the fruit-cake her sister had sent from England, he was very anxious. He said we both deserved to be ill."

The Princess Hedwig had been blushing uncomfortably, but now she paled. "He dared to say that?" she stormed. "He dared!" And she had picked up her muff and gone out in a fine temper.

Only—and this was curious—by the next day she had forgiven the lieutenant, and was angry at Ferdinand William Otto. Women are very strange.

So now Ferdinand William Otto ran his fingers through his fair hair; which was a favorite gesture of the lieutenant's, and Hedwig blushed. After that she refused to look across at him, but sat staring fixedly at the stage, where Frau Hugli, in a short skirt, a black velvet bodice, and a white apron, with two yellow braids over her shoulders, was listening with all the coyness of forty years and six children at home to the love-making of a man in a false black beard.

The Archduchess, sitting well back, was nodding. Just outside the royal box, on the red-velvet sofa, General Mettlich, who was the Chancellor, and had come because he had been invited and stayed outside because he said he liked to hear music, not see it, was sound asleep. His martial bosom, with its gold braid, was rising and falling peacefully. Beside him lay the Prince's crown, a small black derby hat.

The Princess Hilda looked across, and smiled and nodded at Ferdinand William Otto. Then she went back to the music; she held the score in her hand and followed it note by note. She was studying music, and her mother, who was the Archduchess, was watching her. But now and then, when her mother's eyes were glued to the stage, Hilda stole a glance at the upper balconies where impecunious young officers leaned over the rail and gazed at her respectfully.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto considered it all very wearisome. If one could only wander around the corridor or buy a sandwich from the stand at the foot of the great staircase—or, better still, if one could only get to the street, alone, and purchase one of the fig women that Miss Braithwaite so despised! The Crown Prince felt in his pocket, where his week's allowance of pocket-money lay comfortably untouched.

The Archduchess, shielded by the velvet hangings with the royal arms on them, was now quite comfortably asleep. From the corridor came sounds indicating that the Chancellor preferred making noises to listening to them. There were signs on the stage that Frau Hugli, braids, six children, and all, was about to go into the arms of the man with the false beard.

The Crown Prince meditated. He could go out quickly, and be back before they knew it. Even if he only wandered about the corridor, it would stretch his short legs. And outside it was a fine day. It looked already like spring.

With the trepidation of a canary who finds his cage door open, and, hopping to the threshold, surveys the world before venturing to explore it, Prince Ferdinand William Otto rose to his feet, tiptoed past the Archduchess Annunciata, who did not move, and looked around him from the doorway.

The Chancellor slept. In the royal dressing-room behind the box a lady in waiting was sitting and crocheting. She did not care for opera. A maid was spreading the royal ladies' wraps before the fire. The princesses had shed their furred carriage boots just inside the door. They were in a row, very small and dainty.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto picked up his hat and concealed it by his side. Then nonchalantly, as if to stretch his legs by walking ten feet up the corridor and back, he passed the dressing-room door. Another moment, and he was out of sight around a bend of the passageway, and before him lay liberty.

Not quite! At the top of the private staircase reserved for the royal family a guard commonly stood. He had moved a few feet from his post, however, and was watching the stage through the half-open door of a private loge. His rifle, with its fixed bayonet, leaned against the stair-rail.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto passed behind him with outward calmness. At the top of the public staircase, however, he hesitated. Here, everywhere, were brass-buttoned officials of the Opera House. A garderobe woman stared at him curiously. There was a noise from the house, too,—a sound of clapping hands and "bravos." The little Prince looked at the woman with appeal in his eyes. Then, with his heart thumping, he ran past her, down the white marble staircase, to where the great doors promised liberty.

Olga, the wardrobe woman, came out from behind her counter, and stood looking down the marble staircase after the small flying figure.

"Blessed Saints!" she said, wondering. "How much that child resembled His Royal Highness!"

The old soldier who rented opera glasses at the second landing, and who had left a leg in Bosnia, leaned over the railing. "Look at that!" he exclaimed. "He will break a leg, the young rascal! Once I could have—but there, he is safe! The good God watches over fools and children."

"It looked like the little Prince," said the wardrobe woman. "I have seen him often—he has the same bright hair."

But the opera-glass man was not listening. He had drawn a long sausage from one pocket and a roll from the other, and now, retiring to a far window, he stood placidly eating—a bite of sausage, a bite of bread. His mind was in Bosnia, with his leg. And because old Adelbert's mind was in Bosnia, and because one hears with the mind, and not with the ear, he did not hear the sharp question of the sentry who ran down the stairs and paused for a second at the cloak-room. Well for Olga, too, that old Adelbert did not hear her reply.

"He has not passed here," she said, with wide and honest eyes; but with an ear toward old Adelbert. "An old gentleman came a moment ago and got a sandwich, which he had left in his overcoat. Perhaps this is whom you are seeking?"

The sentry cursed, and ran down the staircase, the nails in his shoes striking sharply on the marble.

At the window, old Adelbert cut off another slice of sausage with his pocket-knife and sauntered back to his table of opera glasses at the angle of the balustrade. The hurrying figure of the sentry below caught his eye. "Another fool!" he grumbled, looking down. "One would think new legs grew in place of old ones, like the claws of the sea-creatures!"

But Olga of the cloak-room leaned over her checks, with her lips curved up in a smile. "The little one!" she thought. "And such courage! He will make a great king! Let him have his prank like the other children, and—God bless him and keep him!"

Chapter

2 AND SEES THE WORLD

The Crown Prince was just a trifle dazzled by the brilliance of his success. He paused for one breathless moment under the porte-cochere of the opera house; then he took a long breath and turned to the left. For he knew that at the right, just around the corner; were the royal carriages, with his own drawn up before the door, and Beppo and Hans erect on the box, their haughty noses red in the wind, for the early spring air was biting.

So he turned to the left, and was at once swallowed up in the street crowd. It seemed very strange to him. Not that he was unaccustomed to crowds. Had he not, that very Christmas, gone shopping in the city, accompanied only by one of his tutors and Miss Braithwaite, and bought for his grandfather, the King, a burnt-wood box, which might hold either neckties or gloves, and for his cousins silver photograph frames?

But this was different, and for a rather peculiar reason. Prince Ferdinand William Otto had never seen the back of a crowd! The public was always lined up, facing him, smiling and bowing and God-blessing him. Small wonder he thought of most of his future subjects as being much like the ship in the opera, meant only to be viewed from the front. Also, it was surprising to see how stiff and straight their backs were. Prince Ferdinand William Otto had never known that backs could be so rigid. Those with which he was familiar had a way of drooping forward from the middle of the spine up. It was most interesting.

The next hour was full of remarkable things. For one, he dodged behind a street-car and was almost run over by a taxicab. The policeman on the corner came out, and taking Ferdinand William Otto by the shoulder, gave him a talking-to and a shaking. Ferdinand William Otto was furious, but policy kept him silent; which proves conclusively that the Crown Prince had not only initiative—witness his flight—but self-control and diplomacy. Lucky country, to have in prospect such a king!

But even royalty has its weaknesses. At the next corner Ferdinand William Otto stopped and invested part of his allowance in the forbidden fig lady, with arms and legs of dates, and eyes of cloves. He had wanted one of these ever since he could remember, but Miss Braithwaite had sternly refused to authorize the purchase. In fact, she had had one of the dates placed under a microscope, and had shown His Royal Highness a number of interesting and highly active creatures who made their homes therein.

His Royal Highness recalled all this with great distinctness, and, immediately dismissing it from his mind, ate the legs and arms of the fig

woman with enjoyment. Which—not the eating of the legs and arms, of course, but to be able to dismiss what is unpleasant—is another highly desirable royal trait.

So far his movements had been swift and entirely objective. But success rather went to his head. He had never been out alone before. Even at the summer palace there were always tutors, or Miss Braithwaite, or an aide-de-camp, or something. He hesitated, took out his small handkerchief, dusted his shoes with it, and then wiped his face. Behind was the Opera, looming and gray. Ahead was—the park.

Note the long allee between rows of trees trimmed to resemble walls of green in summer, and curiously distorted skeletons in winter; note the coffee-houses, where young officers in uniforms sat under the trees, reading the papers, and rising to bow with great clanking and much ceremony as a gold-wheeled carriage or a pretty girl went by.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto had the fulfillment of a great desire in his small, active mind. This was nothing less than a ride on the American scenic railroad, which had secured a concession in a far corner of the park. Hedwig's lieutenant had described it to him—how one was taken in a small car to a dizzy height, and then turned loose on a track which dropped giddily and rose again, which hurled one through sheet-iron tunnels of incredible blackness, thrust one out over a gorge, whirled one in mad curves around corners of precipitous heights, and finally landed one, panting, breathless, shocked, and reeling; but safe, at the very platform where one had purchased one's ticket three eternities, which were only minutes, before.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto had put this proposition, like the fig woman, to Miss Braithwaite. Miss Braithwaite replied with the sad history of an English child who had clutched at his cap during a crucial moment on a similar track at the Crystal Palace in London.

"When they picked him up," she finished, "every bone in his body was broken."

"Every bone?"

"Every bone," said Miss Braithwaite solemnly.

"The little ones in his ears, and all?"

"Every one," said Miss Braithwaite, refusing to weaken.

The Crown Prince had pondered. "He must have felt like jelly," he remarked, and Miss Braithwaite had dropped the subject.

So now, with freedom and his week's allowance, except the outlay for the fig woman, in his pocket, Prince Ferdinand William Otto started for the Land of Desire. The allee was almost deserted. It was the sacred hour of coffee. The terraces were empty, but from the coffee-houses along the drive there came a cheerful rattle of cups, a hum of conversation.

As the early spring twilight fell, the gas-lamps along the allee, always burning, made a twin row of pale stars ahead. At the end, even as the wanderer gazed, he saw myriads of tiny red, white, and blue lights,

rising high in the air, outlining the crags and peaks of the sheet-iron mountain which was his destination. The Land of Desire was very near!

There came to his ears, too, the occasional rumble that told of some palpitating soul being at that moment hurled and twisted and joyously thrilled, as per the lieutenant's description.

Now it is a strange thing, but true, that one does not reach the Land of Desire alone; because the half of pleasure is the sharing of it with someone else, and the Land of Desire, alone, is not the Land of Desire at all. Quite suddenly, Prince Ferdinand William Otto discovered that he was lonely. He sat down on the curb under the gas-lamp and ate the fig woman's head, taking out the cloves, because he did not like cloves. At that moment there was a soft whirring off to one side of him, and a yellow bird, rising and failing erratically on the breeze, careened suddenly and fell at his feet.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto bent down and picked it up. It was a small toy aeroplane, with yellow silk planes, guy-ropes of waxed thread, and a wooden rudder, its motive power vested in a tightly twisted rubber. One of the wings was bent. Ferdinand William Otto straightened it, and looked around for the owner.

A small boy was standing under the next gas-lamp. "Gee!" he said in English. "Did you see it go that time?"

Prince Ferdinand William Otto eyed the stranger. He was about his own age, and was dressed in a short pair of corduroy trousers, much bloomed at the knee, a pair of yellow Russia-leather shoes that reached well to his calves, and, over all, a shaggy white sweater, rolling almost to his chin. On the very back of his head he had the smallest cap that Prince Ferdinand William Otto had ever seen.

Now, this was exactly the way in which the Crown Prince had always wished to dress. He was suddenly conscious of the long trousers on his own small legs, of the ignominy of his tailless Eton jacket and stiff, rolling collar, of the crowning disgrace of his derby hat. But the lonely feeling had gone from him.

"This is the best time for flying," he said, in his perfect English. "All the exhibition flights are at sundown."

The boy walked slowly over and stood looking down at him. "You ought to see it fly from the top of Pike's Peak!" he remarked. He had caught sight of the despised derby, and his eyes widened, but with instinctive good-breeding he ignored it. "That's Pike's Peak up there."

He indicated the very top of the Land of Desire. The Prince stared up.

"How does one get up?" he queried.

"Ladders. My father's the manager. He lets me up sometimes."

Prince Ferdinand William Otto stared with new awe at the boy. He found the fact much more remarkable than if the stranger had stated that his father was the King of England. Kings were, as you may say, directly in Prince Ferdinand William Otto's line, but scenic railroads—

"I had thought of taking a journey on it," he said, after a second's reflection. "Do you think your father will sell me a ticket?"

"Billy Grimm will. I'll go with you."

The Prince rose with alacrity. Then he stopped. He must, of course, ask the strange boy to be his guest. But two tickets! Perhaps his allowance was not sufficient.

"I must see first how much it costs," he said with dignity.

The other boy laughed. "Oh, gee! You come with me. It won't cost anything," he said, and led the way toward the towering lights.

For Bobby Thorpe to bring a small boy to ride with him was an everyday affair. Billy Grimm, at the ticket-window, hardly glanced at the boy who stood, trembling with anticipation, in the shadow of the booth.

The car came, and they climbed in. Perhaps, as they moved off, Prince Ferdinand William Otto had a qualm, occasioned by the remembrance of the English child who had met an untimely end; but if he did, he pluckily hid it.

"Put your lid on the floor of the car," said Bobby Thorpe' depositing his own atom there. "Father says, if you do that; you're perfectly safe."

Prince Ferdinand William Otto divined that this referred to his hat, and drew a small breath of relief. And then they were off, up an endless, clicking roadway, where at the top the car hung for a breathless second over the gulf below; then, fairly launched, out on a trestle, with the city far beneath them, and only the red, white, and blue lights for company; and into a tunnel, filled with roaring noises and swift moving shadows. Then came the end of all things a flying leap down, a heart-breaking, delirious thrill, an upward sweep just as the strain was too great for endurance.

"Isn't it bully?" shouted the American boy against the onrush of the wind.

"Fine!" shrieked His Royal Highness, and braced himself for another dip into the gulf.

Above the roaring of the wind in their ears, neither child had heard the flying feet of a dozen horses coming down the allee. They never knew that a hatless young lieutenant, white-lipped with fear, had checked his horse to its haunches at the ticket-booth, and demanded to know who was in the Land of Desire.

"Only the son of the manager, and a boy friend of his," replied Billy Grimm, in what he called the lingo of the country. "What's wrong? Lost anybody?"

But Hedwig's lieutenant had wheeled his horse without a word, and, jumping him aver the hedge of the allee, was off in a despairing search of the outskirts of the park, followed by his cavalrymen.

As the last horse leaped the hedge and disappeared, the car came to a stop at the platform. Quivering, Prince Ferdinand William Otto reached down for the despised hat.

"Would you like to go around again?" asked Bobby, quite casually. His Highness gasped with joy. "If—if you would be so kind!" he said. And at the lordly wave of Bobby's hand, the car moved on.

Chapter

3 DISGRACED

At eight o'clock that evening the Crown Prince Ferdinand William Otto approached the Palace through the public square. He approached it slowly, for two reasons. First, he did not want to go back. Second, he was rather frightened. He had an idea that they would be disagreeable.

There seemed to be a great deal going on at the palace. Carriages were rolling in under the stone archway and, having discharged their contents, mostly gentlemen in uniform, were moving off with a thundering of hoofs that reechoed from the vaulted roof of the entrance. All the lights were on in the wing where his grandfather, the King, lived alone. As his grandfather hated lights, and went to bed early, Prince Ferdinand William Otto was slightly puzzled.

He stood in the square and waited for a chance to slip in unobserved.

He was very dirty. His august face was streaked with soot, and his august hands likewise. His small derby hat was carefully placed on the very back of his head at the angle of the American boy's cap. As his collar had scratched his neck, he had, at Bobby's suggestion, taken it off and rolled it up. He decided, as he waited in the square, to put it on again. Miss Braithwaite was very peculiar about collars.

Came a lull in the line of carriages. Prince Ferdinand William Otto took a long breath and started forward. As he advanced he stuck his hands in his pockets and swaggered a trifle. It was, as nearly as possible, an exact imitation of Bobby Thorpe's walk. And to keep up his courage, he quoted that young gentleman's farewell speech to himself: "What d' you care? They won't eat you, will they?"

At the entrance to the archway stood two sentries. They stood as if they were carved out of wood. Only their eyes moved. And within, in the court around which the Palace was built, were the King's bodyguards. Mostly they sat on a long bench and exchanged conversation, while one of them paced back and forth, his gun over his shoulder, in front of them. Prince Ferdinand William Otto knew them all. More than once he had secured cigarettes from Lieutenant Larisch and dropped them from one of his windows, which were just overhead. They would look straight ahead and not see them, until the officer's back was turned. Then one would be lighted and passed along the line. Each man would take one puff and pass it on behind his back. It was great fun.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto stood in the shadows and glanced across. The sentries stood like wooden men, but something was wrong in the courtyard inside. The guards were all standing, and there seemed

to be a great many of them. And just as he had made up his mind to take the plunge, so to speak, a part of his own regiment of cavalry came out from the courtyard with a thundering of hoofs, wheeled at the street, and clattered off.

Very unusual, all of it.

The Crown Prince Ferdinand William Otto felt in his pocket for his handkerchief, and, moistening a corner with his tongue, wiped his face. Then he wiped his shoes. Then, with his hands in his trousers pockets, he sauntered into the light.

Now sentries are trained to be impassive. The model of a sentry is a wooden soldier. A really good sentry does not sneeze or cough on duty. Did any one ever see a sentry, for instance, wipe his nose? Or twirl his thumbs? Or buy a newspaper? Certainly not.

Therefore the two sentries made no sign when they saw Ferdinand William Otto approaching. But one of them forgot to bring his musket to salute. He crossed himself instead. And something strained around the other sentry's lower jaw suddenly relaxed into a smile as His Royal Highness drew a hand from its refuge and saluted. He glanced first at one, then at the other, rather sheepishly, hesitated between them, clapped his hat on more securely, and marched in.

"The young rascal!" said the second sentry to himself. And by turning his head slightly—for a sentry learns to see all around like a horse, without twisting his neck—he watched the runaway into the palace.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto went up the stone staircase. Here and there he passed guards who stared and saluted. Had he not been obsessed with the vision of Miss Braithwaite, he would have known that relief followed in his wake. Messengers clattered down the staircase to the courtyard. Other messengers, breathless and eager, flew to that lighted wing where the Council sat, and where the old King, propped up in bed, waited and fought terror.

The Archduchess Annunciata was with her father. Across the corridor the Council debated in low tones.

"Tell me again," said the King. "How in God's name could it have happened? In daylight, and with all of you there!"

"I have told you all I know," said the Archduchess impatiently. "One moment he was there. Hedwig and he were making gestures, and I reproved him. The next he was gone. Hedwig saw him get up and go out. She thought—"

"Send for Hedwig."

"She has retired. She was devoted to him, and—"

"Send for her," said the King shortly.

The Archduchess Annunciata went out. The old King lay back, and his eyes, weary with many years of ruling, of disappointments and bitterness, roved the room. They came to rest at last on the photograph of a young man, which stood on his bedside, table.

He was a very young man, in a uniform. He was boyish, and smiling. There was a dog beside him, and its head was on his knee. Wherever one stood in the room, the eyes of the photograph gazed at one. The King knew this, and because he was quite old, and because there were few people to whom a king dares to speak his inmost thoughts, he frequently spoke to the photograph.

The older he grew, the more he felt, sometimes, as though it knew what he said. He had begun to think that death, after all, is not the end, but only the beginning of things. This rather worried him, too, at times. What he wanted was to lay things down, not to take them up.

"If they've got him," he said to the picture, "it is out of my hands, and into yours, my boy."

Much of his life had been spent in waiting, in waiting for a son, in waiting for that son to grow to be a man, in waiting while that son in his turn loved and married and begot a man-child, in waiting, when that son had died a violent death, for the time when his tired hands could relinquish the scepter to his grandchild.

He folded his old hands and waited. From across the corridor came the low tones of the Council. A silent group of his gentlemen stood in the vestibule outside the door. The King lay on his bed and waited.

Quite suddenly the door opened. The old man turned his head. Just inside stood a very dirty small boy.

The Crown Prince Ferdinand William Otto was most terribly frightened. Everything was at sixes and sevens. Miss Braithwaite had been crying her head off, and on seeing him had fallen in a faint. Not that he thought it was a real faint. He had unmistakably seen her eyelids quiver. And when she came to she had ordered him no supper, and four pages of German translation, and to go to bed at seven o'clock instead of seven-thirty for a week. All the time crying, too. And then she had sent him to his grandfather, and taken aromatic ammonia.

His grandfather said nothing, but looked at him.

"Here—here I am, sir," said the Crown Prince from the door.

The King drew a long breath. But the silence persisted. Prince Ferdinand William Otto furtively rubbed a dusty shoe against the back of a trousers leg.

"I'm afraid I'm not very neat, sir," said Prince Ferdinand William Otto, and took a step forward. Until his grandfather commanded him, he could not advance into the room.

"Come here," said the King.

He went to the side of the bed.

"Where have you been?"

"I'm afraid—I ran away, sir."

"Why?"

Prince Ferdinand William Otto considered. It was rather an awful moment. "I don't exactly know. I just thought I would."

You see, it was really extremely difficult. To say that he was tired of things as they were would sound ungrateful. Would, indeed, be most impolite. And then, exactly why had he run away?

"Suppose," said the King, "you draw up a chair and tell me about it. We'd better talk it over, I think."

His Royal Highness drew up a chair, and sat on it. His feet not reaching the floor, he hooked them around the chair-rung. This was permissible because, first, the King could not see them from his bed. Second, it kept his knees from shaking.

"Probably you are aware," said the King, "that you have alarmed a great many people."

"I'm sorry, sir. I didn't think—"

"A prince's duty is to think."

"Although," observed His Royal Highness, "I don't really believe Miss Braithwaite fainted. She may have thought she fainted, but her eyelids moved."

"Where did you go?"

"To the park, sir. I—I thought I'd like to see the park by myself."

"Go on."

"It's very hard to enjoy things with Miss Braithwaite, sir. She does not really enjoy the things I like. Nikky and I—"

"By 'Nikky' you mean Lieutenant Larisch?"

"Yes, sir."

"Go on."

"We like the same things, sir—the Pike's-Peak-or-Bust, and all that."

The King raised himself on his elbow. "What was that?" he demanded.

Prince Ferdinand William Otto blushed, and explained. It was Bobby's name for the peak at the top of the Scenic Railway. He had been on the railway. He had been—his enthusiasm carried him away. His cheeks flushed. He sat forward on the edge of his chair, and gesticulated. He had never had such a good time in his life.

"I was awfully happy, sir," he ended. "It feels like flying, only safer. And the lights are pretty. It's like fairyland. There were two or three times when it seemed as if we'd turn over, or leap the track. But we didn't."

The King lay back and thought. More than anything in the world he loved this boy. But the occasion demanded a strong hand. "You were happy," he said. "You were disobedient, you were causing grave anxiety and distress—and you were happy! The first duty of a prince is to his country. His first lesson is to obey laws. He must always obey certain laws. A king is but the servant of his people."

"Yes, sir," said Prince Ferdinand William Otto.

The old King's voice was stern. "Some day you will be the King. You are being trained for that high office now. And yet you would set the

example of insubordination, disobedience, and reckless disregard of the feelings of others."

"Yes, sir," said prince Ferdinand William Otto, feeling very small and ashamed.

"Not only that. You slipped away. You did not go openly. You sneaked off, like a thief. Are you proud of it?"

"No, sir."

"I shall," said the King, "require no promise from you. Promises are poor things to hold to. I leave this matter in your own hands, Otto. You will be punished by Miss Braithwaite, and for the next ten days you will not visit me. You may go now."

Otto got off his chair. He was feeling exceedingly crushed. "Good-night, sir," he said. And waited for his grandfather to extend his hand. But the old King lay looking straight ahead, with his mouth set in grim lines, and his hands folded over his breast.

At the door the Crown Prince turned and bowed. His grandfather's eyes were fixed on the two gold eagles over the door, but the photograph on the table appeared to be smiling at him.

Chapter

4 THE TERROR

Until late that night General Mettlich and the King talked together. The King had been lifted from his bed and sat propped in a great chair. Above his shabby dressing-gown his face showed gaunt and old. In a straight chair facing him sat his old friend and Chancellor.

"What it has shown is not entirely bad," said the King, after a pause. "The boy has initiative. And he made no attempt at evasion. He is essentially truthful."

"What it has also shown, sire, is that no protection is enough. When I, who love the lad, and would—when I could sleep, and let him get away, as I did—"

"The truth is," said the King, "we are both of us getting old." He tapped with his gnarled fingers on the blanket that lay over his knees. "The truth is also," he observed a moment later, "that the boy has very few pleasures. He is alone a great deal."

General Mettlich raised his shaggy head. Many years of wearing a soldier's cap had not injured his heavy gray hair. He had bristling eyebrows, white new, and a short, fighting mustache. When he was irritated, or disagreed with any one, his eyebrows came down and the mustache went up.

Many years of association with his king had given him the right to talk to him as man to man. They even quarreled now and then. It was a brave man who would quarrel with old Ferdinand II.

So now his eyebrows came down and his mustache went up. "How—alone, sire?"

"You do not regard that bigoted Englishwoman as a companion, do you?"

"He is attached to her."

"I'm damned if I know why," observed the old King. "She doesn't appear to have a single human quality."

Human quality! General Mettlich eyed his king with concern. Since when had the reigning family demanded human qualities in their governesses? "She is a thoughtful and conscientious woman, sire," he said stiffly. It happened that he had selected her. "She does her duty. And as to the boy being lonely, he has no time to be lonely. His tutors—"

"How old is he?"

"Ten next month."

The King said nothing for a time. Then—"It is hard," he said at last, "for seventy-four to see with the eyes of ten. As for this afternoon—why

in the name of a thousand devils did they take him to see the 'Flying Dutchman'? I detest it."

"Her Royal Highness—"

"Annunciata is a fool," said His Majesty. Then dismissing his daughter with a gesture, "We don't know how to raise our children here," he said impatiently. "The English do better. And even the Germans—"

It is not etiquette to lower one's eyebrows at a king, and glare. But General Mettlich did it. He was rather a poor subject. "The Germans have not our problem, sire," he said, and stuck up his mustache.

"I'm not going to raise the boy a prisoner," insisted the King stubbornly. Kings have to be very stubborn about things. So many people disapprove of the things they want to do.

Suddenly General Mettlich bent forward and placed a hand on the old man's knee. "We shall do well, sire," he said gravely, "to raise the boy at all."

There was a short silence, which the King broke. "What is new?"

"We have broken up the University meetings, but I fancy they go on, in small groups. I was gratified, however, to observe that a group of students cheered His Royal Highness yesterday as he rode past the University buildings."

"Socialism at twenty," said the King, "is only a symptom of the unrest of early adolescence. Even Hubert"—he glanced at the picture—"was touched with it. He accused me, I recall, of being merely an accident, a sort of stumbling-block in the way of advanced thought!"

He smiled faintly. Then he sighed. "And the others?" he asked.

"The outlying districts are quiet. So, too, is the city. Too quiet, sire."

"They are waiting, of course, for my death," said the King quietly. "If only, you were twenty years younger than I am, it would be better." He fixed the General with shrewd eyes. "What do those asses of doctors say about me?"

"With care, sire—"

"Come, now. This is no time for evasion."

"Even at the best, sire—" He looked very ferocious, and cleared his throat. He was terribly ashamed that his voice was breaking.. "Even at the best, but of course they can only give an opinion—"

"Six months?"

"A year, sire."

"And at the worst!" said the King, with a grim smile. Then; following his own line of, thought: "But the people love the boy, I think."

"They do. It is for that reason, sire, that I advise particular caution." He hesitated. Then, "Sire," he said earnestly, "there is something of which I must speak. The Committee of Ten has organized again."

Involuntarily the King glanced at the photograph on the table.

"Forgive me, sire, if I waken bitter memories. But I fear—"

"You fear!" said the King. "Since when have you taken to fearing?"

"Nevertheless," maintained General Mettlich doggedly, "I fear. This quiet of the last few months alarms me. Dangerous dogs do not bark. I trust no one. The very air is full of sedition."

The King twisted his blue-veined old hands together, but his voice was quiet. "But why?" he demanded, almost fretfully. "If the people are fond of the boy, and I think they are, to—to carry him off, or injure him, would hurt the cause. Even the Terrorists, in the name of a republic, can do nothing without the people."

"The mob is a curious thing, sire. You have ruled with a strong hand. Our people know nothing but to obey the dominant voice. The boy out of the way, the prospect of the Princess Hedwig on the throne, a few demagogues in the public squares—it would be the end."

The King leaned back and closed his eyes. His thin, arched nose looked pinched. His face was gray.

"All this," he said, "means what? To make the boy a prisoner, to cut off his few pleasures, and even then, at any time—"

"Yes, sire," said Mettlich doggedly. "At any time."

Outside in the anteroom Lieutenant Nikky Larisch roused himself, yawned, and looked at his watch. It was after twelve, and he had had a hard day. He put a velvet cushion behind his head, and resolutely composed himself to slumber, a slumber in which were various rosy dreams, all centered about the Princess Hedwig. Dreams are beyond our control.

Therefore a young lieutenant running into debt on his pay may without presumption dream of a princess.

All through the Palace people were sleeping. Prince Ferdinand William Otto was asleep, and riding again the little car in the Land of Delight. So that, turning a corner sharply, he almost fell out of bed.

On the other side of the city the little American boy was asleep also. At that exact time he was being tucked up by an entirely efficient and placid-eyed American mother, who felt under his head to see that his ear was not turned forward. She liked close-fitting ears.

Nobody, naturally, was tucking up Prince Ferdinand William Otto. Or attending to his ears. But, of course, there were sentries outside his door, and a valet de chambre to be rung for, and a number of embroidered eagles scattered about on the curtains and things, and a country surrounding him which would one day be his, unless—

"At any time," said General Mettlich, and was grimly silent.

It was really no time for such a speech. But there is never a good time for bad news.

"Well?" inquired the King, after a time. "You have something to suggest, I take it."

The old soldier cleared his throat. "Sire," he began, "it is said that a chancellor should have but one passion—his King. I have two: my King and my country."

The King nodded gravely. He knew both passions, relied on both. And found them both a bit troublesome at times!

"Once, some years ago, sire, I came to you with a plan. The Princess Hedwig was a child then, and his late Royal Highness was—still with us. For that, and for other reasons, Your Majesty refused to listen. But things have changed. Between us and revolution there stand only the frail life of a boy and an army none too large, and already, perhaps, affected. There is much discontent, and the offspring of discontent is anarchy."

The King snarled. But Mettlich had taken his courage in his hands, and went on. Their neighbor and hereditary foe was Karnia. Could they any longer afford the enmity of Karnia? One cause of discontent was the expense of the army, and of the fortifications along the Karnian border. If Karnia were allied with them, there would be no need of so great an army. They had the mineral wealth, and Karnia the seaports. The old dream of the Empire, of a railway to the sea, would be realized.

He pleaded well. The idea was not new. To place the little King Otto IX on the throne and keep him there in the face of opposition would require support from outside. Karnia would furnish this support. For a price.

The price was the Princess Hedwig.

Outside, Nikky Larisch rose, stretched, and fell to pacing the floor. It was one o'clock, and the palace slept. He lighted a cigarette, and stepping out into a small balcony which overlooked the Square, faced the quiet night.

"That is my plea, sire," Mettlich finished. "Karl of Karnia is anxious to marry, and looks this way. To allay discontent and growing insurrection, to insure the boy's safety and his throne, to beat our swords into ploughshares"—here he caught the King's scowl; and added—"to a certain extent, and to make us a commercial as well as a military nation, surely, sire, it gains much for us, and loses us nothing."

"But our independence!" said the King sourly.

However, he did not dismiss the idea. The fright of the afternoon had weakened him, and if Mettlich were right—he had what the King considered a perfectly damnable habit of being right—the Royalist party would need outside help to maintain the throne.

"Karnia!" he said. "The lion and the lamb, with the lamb inside the lion! And in, the mean time the boy—"

"He should be watched always."

"The old she-dragon, the governess—I suppose she is trustworthy?"

"Perfectly. But she is a woman."

"He has Lussin." Count Lussin was the Crown Prince's aide-de-camp.

"He needs a man, sire," observed the Chancellor rather tartly.

The King cleared his throat. "This youngster he is so fond of, young Larisch, would he please you better?" he asked, with ironic deference.

"A good boy, sire. You may recall that his mother—" He stopped.

Perhaps the old King's memory was good. Perhaps there was a change in Mettlich's voice.

"A good boy?"

"None better, sire. He is devoted to His Royal Highness. He is still much of a lad himself. I have listened to them talking. It is a question which is the older! He is outside now."

"Bring him in. I'll have a look at him."

Nikky, summoned by a chamberlain, stopped inside the doorway and bowed deeply.

"Come here," said the King.

He advanced.

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-three, sire."

"In the Grenadiers, I believe."

Nikky bowed.

"Like horses?" said the King suddenly.

"Very much, sire."

"And boys?"

"I—some boys, sire."

"Humph! Quite right, too. Little devils, most of them." He drew himself tap in his chair. "Lieutenant Larisch," he said, "His Royal Highness the Crown Prince has taken a liking to you. I believe it is to you that our fright to-day is due."

Nikky's heart thumped. He went rather pale.

"It is my intention, Lieutenant Larisch, to place the Crown Prince in your personal charge. For reasons I need not go into, it is imperative that he take no more excursions alone. These are strange times, when sedition struts in Court garments, and kings may trust neither their armies nor their subjects. I want," he said, his tone losing its bitterness, "a real friend for the little Crown Prince. One who is both brave and loyal."

Afterward, in his small room, Nikky composed a neat, well-rounded speech, in which he expressed his loyalty, gratitude, and undying devotion to the Crown Prince. It was an elegant little speech. Unluckily, the occasion for it had gone by two hours.

"I—I am grateful, sire," was what he said. "I—" And there he stopped and choked up. It was rather dreadful.

"I depend on you, Captain Larisch," said the King gravely, and nodded his head in a gesture of dismissal. Nikky backed toward the door, struck a hassock, all but went down, bowed again at the door, and fled.

"A fine lad," said General Mettlich, "but no talker."

"All the better," replied His Majesty. "I am tired of men who talk well. And"—he smiled faintly—"I am tired of you. You talk too well. You make

me think. I don't want to think. I've been thinking all my life. It is time to rest, my friend."

Chapter

5 AT THE RIDING-SCHOOL

His Royal Highness the Crown Prince Ferdinand William Otto was in disgrace.

He had risen at six, bathed, dressed, and gone to Mass, in disgrace. He had breakfasted at seven-thirty on fruit, cereal, and one egg, in disgrace. He had gone to his study at eight o'clock for lessons, in disgrace. A long line of tutors came and went all morning, and he worked diligently, but he was still in disgrace. All morning long and in the intervals between tutors he had tried to catch Miss Braithwaite's eye.

Except for the most ordinary civilities, she had refused to look in his direction. She was correcting an essay in English on Mr. Gladstone, with a blue pencil, and putting in blue commas every here and there. The Crown Prince was amazingly weak in commas. When she was all through, she piled the sheets together and wrote a word on the first page. It might have been "good." On the other hand, it could easily have been "poor." The motions of the hand are similar.

At last; in desperation, the Crown Prince deliberately broke off the point of his pencil, and went to the desk where Miss Braithwaite sat, monarch of the American pencil-sharpener which was the beloved of his heart.

"Again!" said Miss Braithwaite shortly. And raised her eyebrows.

"It's a very soft pencil," explained the Crown Prince. "When I press down on it, it—it busts."

"It what?"

"It busts—breaks." Evidently the English people were not familiar with this new and fascinating American word.

He cast a casual glance toward Mr. Gladstone. The word was certainly "poor." Suddenly a sense of injustice began to rise in him. He had worked rather hard over Mr. Gladstone. He had done so because he knew that Miss Braithwaite considered him the greatest man since Jesus Christ, and even the Christ had not written "The Influence of Authority in Matters of Opinion."

The injustice went to his eyes and made him blink. He had apologized for yesterday, and explained fully. It was not fair. As to commas, anybody could put in enough commas.

The French tutor was standing near a photograph of Hedwig, and pretending not to look at it. Prince Ferdinand William Otto had a suspicion that the tutor was in love with Hedwig. On one occasion, when she had entered unexpectedly, he had certainly given out the sentence,