

The Prisoner of Zenda

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Activities

Before reading

Rudolf Rassendyll is a young, rich Englishman. But his family is related to the royal family of Ruritania, and he has the dark red hair and the long straight nose of an Elphberg. Rudolf decides to visit Ruritania for the coronation of the new king. He arrives in the town of Zenda and goes for a quiet walk in the forest. By the next morning he is in the middle of adventures beyond his wildest dreams. With his new friends Captain Sapt and Fritz von Tarlenheim, he is making plans to rescue the King, who is a prisoner in the Castle of Zenda. Soon he is fighting the King's enemies, Black Michael the Duke and Rupert of Hentzau.

- 1 Read the introduction to the story. Then answer these questions about Rudolf Rassendyll.

Who does Rudolf Rassendyll . . .

- 1 look like? _____
- 2 make friends with? _____
- 3 try to rescue? _____
- 4 fight against? _____

- 2 What do you think will happen in the story? Choose words to complete the passage.

The story happens in Ruritania, which *is / is not* a real place, and is an *adventure / animal* story. There will be lots of *accidents / fighting* in the Castle of Zenda, and in the end the King's *enemies / friends* will *rescue / kill* him. The story will end *happily / sadly* for the King, and Rudolf Rassendyll will *leave / stay in* Ruritania.

CHAPTER 1 **The Rassendylls – and the Elphbergs**

‘When are you going to do something useful, Rudolf?’ my brother’s wife asked. She looked at me crossly over the breakfast table.

‘But why should I do anything, Rose?’ I answered, calmly eating my egg. ‘I’ve got enough money for the things I want, and my brother, Robert, is a lord – Lord Burlledon. I’m very happy.’

‘You’re twenty-nine, and you’ve done nothing.’

‘It’s true. We Rassendylls are a rich and famous family, and we don’t need to do anything.’

This made Rose angry. ‘Rich and famous families sometimes behave worse than less important families,’ she said.

crossly angrily

lord a title for a nobleman (less important than a duke)

behave to do things well or badly



descendants

children,
grandchildren,
great-
grandchildren

scoundrel

a
man who doesn't
behave well

related to from
the same family

coronation the
ceremony of
making someone
king

When I heard this, I touched my dark red hair.

'I'm so pleased that Robert's hair is black!' she cried.

Just then my brother, Robert, came in. When he looked at Rose, he could see that there was something wrong.

'What's the matter, my dear?' he said.

'Oh, she's angry because I never do anything useful, and because I've got red hair,' I said.

'Well, I know he can't do much about his hair, or his nose ...' Rose began.

'No, the nose and the hair are in the family,' my brother agreed. 'And Rudolf has both of them.'

Maybe I should stop for a moment and explain that the Rassendylls are descendants of Prince Rudolf of Ruritania, of the Elphberg family. Prince Rudolf had blue eyes, an unusually long straight nose and a lot of dark red hair. He was tall and very good-looking, but he was also a scoundrel. So, for many generations the Rassendylls have preferred to forget they were once closely related to the Elphbergs.

But because my hair was red and I had the Elphberg nose, Rose worried about me. In the end, I promised to get a job in six months' time. This gave me six free months to enjoy myself first.

And an idea came to me – I would visit Ruritania. None of my family had ever been there. I saw in the newspaper that, in three weeks, the new young King, Rudolf the Fifth, would have his coronation. It would be an interesting time to visit the country.

I knew my family would not like me to go, so I told them I was going walking in Austria.

CHAPTER 2 The colour of men's hair

On the way to Ruritania I decided to spend a night in Paris with a friend. The next morning he came with me to the station, and as we waited for the train we watched the crowds. We saw a tall, dark, very fashionable lady, and my friend told me who she was.



'That's Madame Antoinette de Mauban. She's travelling on the same train as you. She's a friend of Duke Michael of Strelsau. And he, as you know, is the half-brother of the new King of Ruritania. Although he's only the second son and will never be king himself, he's still an important man and very popular with many Ruritarians.'

I did not speak to the lady during the journey, and when we arrived in Ruritania I left the train at Zenda, a small

fashionable
popular

Duke a title for
an important
nobleman

town outside the capital. But I saw that Madame de Mauban went on to Strelsau, the capital.

I was welcomed very kindly at my hotel. It belonged to an old lady and her daughter. From them I learned that the coronation was to be on the day after next, and not in three weeks.

The old lady was more interested in Duke Michael of Strelsau than in the new King. The Castle of Zenda and all the land around it belonged to the Duke, but the old lady said, 'Duke Michael should be king. He spends all his time with us. Every Ruritanian knows him, but we never see the new King.'

But her daughter cried, 'Oh no, I hate Black Michael. I want a red Elphberg – and the King, our friend Johann says, is very red. Johann works for the Duke and he's seen the King. In fact, the King's staying just outside Zenda now,' she added. 'He's resting at the Duke's hunting lodge in the forest before going on to Strelsau on Wednesday for his coronation. The Duke's already in Strelsau, getting everything ready.'

'Are they friends?' I asked.

'Friends who want the same place and the same wife,' the girl replied. 'The Duke wants to marry his cousin, Princess Flavia, but people say she's going to be King Rudolf's wife and become the Queen.'

Just then their friend, Johann, entered the room.

'We have a visitor, Johann,' the girl's mother said, and Johann turned towards me. But when he saw me, he stepped back, with a look of surprise on his face.

'What's the matter, Johann?' the daughter asked.

'Good evening, sir,' Johann said, still looking at me. He did not seem to like what he saw.

capital the main city of a country

belong to someone to be someone's thing, to be owned

lodge a house where people stay in the country