

# Long Live The King

MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

Truly, a room. Built of old brick, and damp, but with a free circulation of air. Old Adelbert stared about him. It was not entirely dark. A bit of light entered from the aperture at the head of the steps. By it, even before Bobby had lighted his candle, he saw the broken chair, the piece of old carpet, and the odds and ends the child had brought.



"There it is!" cried Bobby.

"None have visited this place since you have been here," he asked.

"I don't suppose any one knows about it. Do you?"

"Those who built it, perhaps. But it is old, very old. It is possible—"

He stopped, lost in speculation. There had been a story once of a passageway under the wall, but he recollected nothing clearly. A passage leading out beyond the wall, through which, in a great siege, a messenger had been sent for help. But that was a passage; while this was a dungeon.

The candle was at last lighted. It burned fitfully, illuminating only a tiny zone in the darkness.

"I need a lantern," Bobby observed.

"There's a draft here. It comes from the other grating. Some time, when you have time, I'd like to see what's beyond it. I was kind of nervous about going alone."

It was the old passage, then, of course. Old Adelbert stared as Bobby took the candle and held it toward a second grating door, like the first, but taller.

A close examination revealed to old Adelbert two things: First, that a brick-lined passage, apparently in good repair, led beyond the grating. Second, that it had been recently put in order. No unused passage this, but one kept in order and repair. For what?

That evening Adelbert called to see his friend, the locksmith in the university place. He possessed, he said, a padlock of which he had lost the key, and which, being fastened to a chest, he was unable to bring with him. A large and heavy padlock, perhaps the size of his palm.

When he left, he carried with him a bundle of keys, tied in a brown paper.

But he did not back to his chest. He went instead to the thicket around the old gate, which was still termed the "Gate of the Moon," and there, armed with a lantern, pursued his investigations during a portion of the night.

When he had finished, old Adelbert, veteran of many wars, one-time patriot and newly turned traitor, held in his shaking hands the fate of the kingdom.

The Countess Loschek was on her way across the border. The arrangements were not of her making. Her plan, which had been to go afoot across the mountain to the town of Ar-on-Ar, and there to hire a motor, had been altered by the arrival at the castle, shortly after the permission was given, of a machine.

"The matter of passports for the border is arranged, madame," Black Humbert told her.

"I have my own passports," she said proudly.

"They will not be necessary."

"I will have this interview at my destination alone, or not at all."

He drew himself to his great height and regarded her with cold eyes. "As you wish," he said. "But it is probably not necessary to remind madame that, whatever is discussed at this meeting, no word must be mentioned of the committee, or its plans."

Although he made no threat, she had

silvered. No, there must be no word of the committee, or of the terror that drove her to Karl. For, if the worst happened, if he failed her, and she must do the thing they had set her to do, Karl must never know. That card she must play alone.

Everything hung on the result of her visit. If Karl persisted, if he would marry Hedwig in spite of the trouble it would precipitate, then indeed she was lost. If, on the other hand, he was inclined to peace, if her story of a tottering throne held his hand, she would defy the committee of ten. Karl himself would help her to escape, might indeed hide her. It would not be for long. Without Karl's support the king's death would bring the terrorists into control. They would have other things to do than to hunt her out. Their end would be gained without her. Let them steal the crown prince, then. Let Hedwig fight for her throne and lose it. Let the streets run deep with blood and all the paleontology of hell break loose.

But if Karl failed her. She clinched her teeth.

The countess did not sleep. She was, with every fiber of her keen brain, summoning her arguments. She would need them, for she knew—none better—how great a handicap was hers. She loved Karl, and he knew it. What had been her strength had become her weakness.

Yet she was composed enough when, before the sun was well up, the machine drew up in the village before the inn where Mettlich had spent his uneasy hours.

She had expected to go to the lodge, but at nine o'clock that night Karl came to her, knocking at the door of her room and entering without waiting for permission.

The room was small and cozy with firelight. Her scarlet cloak, flung over a chair, made a dash of brilliant color. Two lighted candles on a high curved chest, and between them a plaster figure of the Mother and Child, a built-in bed with white curtains—that was the room.

Before the open fire Olga Loschek sat in her low chair. She wore still her dark dress; and a veil, ready to be donned at the summons of a messenger from Karl, trailed across her knee. In the firelight she looked very young— young and weary. Karl, who had come hardened to a scene, found her appealing, almost pathetic.

She rose at his entrance and, after a moment of surprise, smiled faintly. But she said nothing, nor did Karl, until he had lifted one of her cold hands, and brushed it with his lips.

"Well?" he said. "And again, Olga?"

"Once again."

She looked up at him. Yes, he was changed. The old Karl would have taken her in his arms. This new Karl was urbane, smiling, unemphatic.

"There is nothing wrong, is there?" he said. "Your note alarmed me. Not the note, but your coming here."

"I was anxious. And there were things I felt you should know."

"What things?"

"The truth about the king's condition, for one. He is dying. The bullet-tins lie. He is no better."

"So!" said Karl unemphatically. "But the chancellor assured me—"

"It was not yet time to speak of the chancellor's visit."

"The chancellor? He lies, of course. How had things are you may judge when I tell you that a hidden passage from the palace has been opened and cleared, ready for instant flight."

It was Karl's turn to be startled. He rose, and stood staring down at her.

"Are you certain of that?"

"Certain!" She laughed bitterly. "The terrorists—revolutionists, they call themselves—are everywhere. They know everything, see everything. Mettlich's agents are disappearing one by one. No one knows where, but all suspect. Student meetings are prohibited. The yearly procession of veterans is forbidden, for they trust none, even their old soldiers. The council meets day after day in secret session."

"But the army—"

"They do not trust the army."

Karl's face was grave. Something of the trouble in Livonia he had known. But this argued an immediate crisis.

"On the king's death," the countess said, "a republic will be declared. The republic of Livonia! The crown prince will never reign."

"So you came today to tell me this?" She glanced up, and catching his eyes, colored faintly. "These are things you should know."

He knew her very well. A jealous woman would go far. He knew now that she was jealous. When he spoke it was with calculating brutality. "You mean, in view of my impending marriage?"

So it was arranged! Finally arranged. Well, she had done her best. He knew the truth. She had told it fairly. If, knowing it, he persisted,

it would be because her power over him was dead at last.

"Yes. I do not know how far your arrangements have gone. You have at least been warned."

But she saw, by the very way he drew himself up and smiled, that he understood. More than that, he doubted her. He questioned what she had said. The very fact that she had told him only the truth added to her resentment.

"You will see," she said sullenly.

Because he thought he already saw, and because she had given him a bad moment, Karl chose to be deliberately cruel. "Perhaps," he said, "but you leave out of this discussion the one element that I consider important, Hedwig herself. If the Princess Hedwig were tomorrow to be without a country, I should still hope to marry her."

She had done well up to now, had kept her courage and her temper, had taken her cue from him and been quiet and poised. But more than his words, his cruel voice, silky with friendship, drove her to the breaking point.

Bitterly, and with reckless passion, she flung at him Hedwig's infatuation for young Larisch, and prophesied his dishonor as a result of it.

In the end she grew quiet and sat looking into the fire with eyes full of stony despair. She had tried and failed. There was one way left, only one, and even that would not bring him back to her. Let Hedwig escape and marry Nikky Larisch—still where was she? Let the terrorists strike their blow and steal the crown prince. Again—where was she?

Her emotions were deadened, all



Karl Left Her There at Last.

save one, and that was her hatred of Hedwig. The humiliation of that moment was due to her. Somehow, some day, she would be even with Hedwig. Karl left her there at last huddled in her chair, left full of resentment, the ashes of his old love cold and gray. There was little reminder of the girl of the mountains in the stony-eyed woman he had left sagged low by the fire.

Once out in the open air, the king of Karnia drew a long breath. The affair was over. It had been unpleasant. It was always unpleasant to break with a woman. But it was time. He neither loved her nor needed her. Friendly relations between the two countries were established, and soon, very soon, would be ratified by his marriage.

It was not of Olga Loschek, but of Hedwig that he thought, as his car climbed swiftly to the lodge.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Crown Prince's Pilgrimage.

The day when Olga Loschek should have returned to the city found her too ill to travel. No feigned sickness this, but real enough, a matter of fever and burning eyes, and of mutterings in troubled sleep.

Minna was alarmed. She was fond of her mistress, in spite of her occasional cruelties, and lately the countess had been strangely gentle. She required little attention, wished to be alone, and lay in her great bed, looking out steadily at the bleak mountain tops, to which spring never climbed.

"She eats nothing," Minna said despairingly to the caretaker. "And her eyes frighten me. They are always open, even in the night, but they seem to see nothing."

On the day when she should have returned, the countess roused herself enough to send for Black Humbert, fretting in the kitchen below. He had believed that she was unlingering until he saw her, but her flushed and hollow cheeks showed her condition.

"You must return and explain," she said. "I shall need more time, after all."

When he hesitated, she added: "There are plenty to watch that I do not escape. I could not, if I would. I have not the strength."

"If madame wishes, I can take a letter."

She pondered over that, interlacing her fingers nervously as she reflected. "I will send no letter," she decided, "but I will give you a message, which you can deliver."

"Yes, madame."

"Say to the committee that I have

secreted him that I will do what they ask. As far," she added, "as lies in my power, I can only try."

"That is all the committee expects," he said civilly, and with a relief that was not lost on her. "With madame's intelligence, to try is to succeed."

Nevertheless, he left her well guarded. Even Minna, slipping off for an evening hour with a village sweetheart, was stealthily shadowed. Before this, the ladies had changed garments with their maids and escaped from divers implacable spies.

At the end of two days the countess was able to be up. She moved languidly about her room, still too weak to plan.

And on the fourth day came the crown prince of Livonia on a pilgrimage.

The manner of his coming was this: There are more ways than one of reaching the hearts of an uneasy people. Remission of taxes is a bad one. It argues a mistake in the past, in expecting such titles. Governments may make errors, but must not acknowledge them. There is the freeing of political prisoners, but that, too, is dangerous, when such prisoners breathe addition to the very prison walls.

And there is the appeal to sentiment. The government, plucking all its hopes to one small boy, would further endear him to the people. Wily statesman that he was, the chancellor had hit on this to offset the rumors of Hedwig's marriage.

"A pilgrimage!" said the king, when the matter was broached to him. "For what? My recovery? Cannot you let your servant depart in peace?"

"Pilgrimages," observed the chancellor, "have had marvelous results, sire. I do not insist that they perform miracles, as some believe,"—he smiled faintly—"but as a matter of public feeling and a remedy for discord, they are sometimes efficacious."

"I see," said the king. And lay still, looking at the ceiling.

"Can it be done safely?" he asked at last.

"The maddest traitor would not threaten the crown prince on a pilgrimage. The people would tear him limb from limb."

"Nevertheless, I should take all precautions," said the king. "A madman might not recognize the—er—religious nature of the affair."

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The same day the chancellor visited Prince Ferdinand William Otto, and found him returned from his drive and busy over Hedwig's photograph frame.

"It is almost done," he said. "I slipped over in one or two places, but it is not very noticeable, is it?"

The chancellor observed it judicially, and decided that the slipping over was not noticeable at all.

"Otto," said the chancellor gravely. "I want to talk to you very seriously about something I would like you to do. For your grandfather."

"I'll do anything for him, sir."

"We know that. This is the point. He has been ill for a long time. Very ill."

The boy watched him with a troubled face. "He looks very thin," he said. "I get quite worried when I see him."

"Exactly. You have heard of Etzel?"

Prince Ferdinand William Otto's religious instruction was of the best. He had, indeed, heard of Etzel. He knew the famous pilgrimages in order, and could say them rapidly, beginning, the year of Our Lord 915—the Emperor Otto and Adelheid, his spouse; the year of Our Lord 1100, Ulrich, Count of Rulburg; and so on.

"When people are ill," he said sagely, "they go to Etzel to be cured."

"Precisely. But when they cannot go they send some one else to pray for them. And sometimes, if they have faith enough, the holy miracle happens and they are cured."

The chancellor was deeply religious, and although he had planned the pilgrimage for political reasons, for the moment, he lost sight of them. What if, after all, this clear-eyed, clean-hearted child could bring this miracle of the king's recovery? It was a famous shrine, and stranger things had been brought about by less worthy agencies.

"I thought," he said, "that if you would go to Etzel, Otto, and there pray for your grandfather's recovery, it—it would be a good thing."

The meaning of such a pilgrimage dawned suddenly on the boy. His eyes filled, and because he considered it unmanly to weep, he slid from his chair and went to the window.

"I'm afraid he's going to die," he said, in a smothered voice.

The chancellor followed him to the window, and put an arm around his shoulders. "Even that would not be so terrible, Otto," he said. "Death, so the old, is not terrible. It is an open door, through which they go gladly, because—because those who have gone ahead are, waiting just beyond it."

"Are my mother and father waiting?"

"Yes, Otto."

He considered. "And my grandfather?"

"Yes."

"He'll be very glad to see them all again."

"Very happy, indeed. But we need him here, too, for a while. You need him and—I. So we will go and pray to have him wait a little longer before he goes away. How about it?"

"I'll try. I'm not very good. I do a good many things, you know."

(To be continued.)

Rose Pastor Stokes is now finding to her cost what it means to be "agin the government."

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