

Long Live The King

MARY ROBERTS RINEHART

Here, strangely enough, it was the chancellor who fumbled for his handkerchief. A vision had come to him of the two of them kneeling side by side at Etzel, the little lad who was "not very good," and he himself with his long years behind him of such things as fill a man's life. And because the open door was not so far ahead for him either, and because he believed implicitly in the great record within the gate, he shook his shaggy head.

So the pilgrimage was arranged. With due publicity, of course, and due precaution for safety. By train to the foot of the mountains, and then on foot for the ten miles to Etzel.

The crown prince went through his preparation in a sort of rapt solemnity. So must the boy crusaders have looked as, starting on their long journey, they faced south and east, toward the far distant Sepulcher of Our Lord. The king's council went, the chancellor, the mayor of the city, wearing the great gold chain of his office around his neck, and a handful of soldiers—a simple pilgrimage and the more affecting. There were no streaming banners, no magnificent vestments. The archbishop accompanied them, and a flag-bearer.

They went on foot to the railway station through lines of kneeling people, the boy still rapt, and looking straight ahead, the chancellor seemingly also absorbed, but keenly alive to the crowds. As he went on, his face relaxed. It was as if the miracle had already happened. Not the miracle for which the boy would pray, but a greater one. Surely these kneeling people, gazing with moist and kindly eyes at the crown prince, could not, at the hot words of denunciation, turn into the mob he feared. But it had happened before. The people who had, one moment, adored the Dauphin of France on his balcony at Versailles, had lived to scream for his life.

The countess, standing on her balcony and staring down into the valley, beheld the pilgrimage and had thus her first knowledge of it. She was incredulous at first, and stood gazing, gripping the stone railing with tense hands. She watched, horror-stricken. The crown prince, himself, come to



"Death, to the Old, is Not Terrible."

Etzel to pray! For his grandfather, of course. Then, indeed, must things be bad with the king, as bad as they could be.

The church doors closed behind them.

Oiga Loschek fell on her knees. She was shaking from head to foot. And because the religious training of her early life near the shrine had given her faith in miracles, she prayed for one. Rather, she made a bargain with God.

If any word came to her from Karl, any, no matter to what it pertained, she would take it for a sign, and at once flight. If she was captured, she would kill herself.

But, if no word came from Karl by the hour of her departure the next morning, then she would do the thing she had set out to do, and let him beware! The king dead, there would be no king. Only over the dead bodies of the Livonians would they let him marry Hedwig and the throne. It would be war.

Curiously, while she was still on her knees, her bargain made, the plan came to her by which, when the time came, the terrorists were to rouse the people to even greater fury. Still kneeling, she turned it over in her mind. It was possible. More, it could be made possible with her assistance.

And at the vision it evoked—Metzler's horror and rage, Hedwig's pining tears, her own triumph—she took a deep breath. Revenge with a vengeance, retaliation for old hurts and fresh injuries, these were what she found on her knees, while the bell in the valley commenced the mass, and a small boy, very rapt and very earnest, prayed for his grandfather's life.

Yet the bargain came very close to being made the other way that day, and by Karl himself.

On the day of the pilgrimage Karl found himself strangely restless and uneasy. Oiga Loschek haunted him, her face when he had told her about the letter, her sagging figure when he had left her.

Something like remorse stirred on him. She had taken great risks for him. Of all the women he had known, she had most truly and unselfishly loved him.

Very nearly did he swing the scale in which Oiga Loschek had hung her bargain with God—so nearly that in the intervals of affixing his sprawling signature to various documents, he drew a sheet of note paper toward him. Then, with a shrug, he pushed it away. So Oiga Loschek lost her bargain.

At dawn the next morning the countess, still pale with illness and burning with fever, went back to the city.

"Thus," said the concierge, frying onions over his stove—"thus have they always done. But you have been blind. Rather, you would not see."

Old Adelbert stirred uneasily. "So long as I accept my pension—" "Why should you not accept your pension? A trifle in exchange for what you gave. For them, who now ill use you, you have gone through life but half a man. But one who they have for us, you and me, my friend—to tax us."

"The taxes are not heavy," quoth old Adelbert.

"There are some who find them so." The concierge heaped his guest's plate with onions.

Old Adelbert played with his steel fork. "I was a good patriot," he observed nervously, "until they made me otherwise."

"I will make you a better. A patriot is one who is zealous for his country and its welfare. That means much. It means that when the established order is bad for a country, it must be changed. Not that you and I may benefit. God knows, we may not live to benefit. But that Livonia may free her neck from the foot of the oppression and raise her head among nations."

From which it may be seen that old Adelbert had at last joined the revolutionary party, an uneasy and unhappy recruit. It is true, but—a recruit. "If only some half measure would suffice," he said, giving up all pretense of eating. "This talk of rousing the mob, of rioting and violence, I do not like them."

"Then has age turned the blood in your veins to water?" said the concierge contemptuously. "Half measures! Since when has a half measure been useful? Did half measures win in your boasted battles? And what half measures would you propose?"

Old Adelbert sat silent. Now and then, because his mouth was dry, he took a sip of beer from his tankard. The concierge ate, taking huge mouthfuls of onions and bread, and surveying his feeble-hearted recruit with appraising eyes. To win him would mean honor, for old Adelbert, decorated for many braveries, was a power among the veterans. Where he led, others would follow.

"Make no mistake," said Black Humbert cunningly. "We aim at no bloodshed. A peaceful revolution, if possible. The king, being dead, will suffer not even humiliation. Let the royal family scatter where it will. We have no designs on women. The chancellor, however, must die."

"I make no plan for him," said old Adelbert bitterly. "I wrote to him also, when I lost my position, and received no reply. We passed through the same campaigns, as I reminded him, but he did nothing."

"As for the crown prince," observed the concierge, eyeing the old man over the edge of his tankard, "you know our plan for him. He will be cared for as my own child, until we get him beyond the boundaries. Then he will be safely delivered to those who know nothing of his birth. A private fund of the republic will support and educate him."

Old Adelbert's hands twitched. "He is but a child," he said, "but already he knows his rank."

"It will be wise for him to forget it." His tone was ominous. Adelbert glanced up quickly, but the terrorist had seen his error, and masked it with a grin. "Children forget easily," he said, "and by this secret knowledge of yours, old comrade, all can be peacefully done. But you brought it to

me, we were, I confess, fearful that force would be necessary. To admit the rabble to the palace would be dangerous. Mobs go mad at such moments. But now it may be effected with all decency and order!"

"And the plan?" "I may see you this?" The concierge shot his eyes across the table over the table. "We have another day as that of the carnival. On that day all the people are on the streets. Processions are forbidden, but the usual costuming with their corps colors as pompous is allowed. Here and there will be one of us clad in red, a devil, wearing the colors of his satanic majesty. These will be of our forces, leaders and speech makers. When we secure the crown prince, he will be put into costume until he can be concealed. They will seek, if there be time, the Prince Ferdinand Wilhelm Otto. Who will suspect a child, wearing some fantastic garb of the carnival?"

"But the king?" inquired old Adelbert in a shaking voice. "How can you set a day, when the king may rally? I thought all hung on the king's death."

The concierge bent closer over the table. "Doctor Weidemann, the king's physician, is one of us," he whispered. "The king lives now only because of stimulants to the heart. His body is already dead. When the stimulants cease, he will die."

Old Adelbert covered his eyes. He had gone too far to retreat now. Driven by brooding and trouble, he had allied himself with the powers of darkness.

He sat silent while the concierge cleared the table, and put the dishes in a pan for his niece to wash. And throughout the evening he said little. At something before midnight he and his host were to set out on a grave yard, nothing less than to visit the committee of ten, and impart the old soldier's discovery. In the interval he sat waiting, and nursing his grievances to keep them warm.

Black Humbert, waiting for the hour to start and filling his tankard repeatedly, grew loquacious. He hinted of past matters in which he had proved his value to the cause. Old Adelbert gathered that, if he had not actually murdered the late crown prince and his wife, he had been closely concerned in it. His thin, old flesh crept with anxiety. It was a bad business and he could not withdraw.

"We should have had the child, too," boasted the concierge, "and saved much bother. But he had been, unknown to us, sent to the country. A matter of milk, I believe."

"But you say you do not war or children?"

"Bah! A babe of a few months. Furthermore," said the concierge, "I have a nose for the police. I scent a spy, as a dog scents a bone. Who think you, discovered Haeckel?"

"Haeckel!" Old Adelbert sat upright in his chair.

"Aye, Haeckel, Haeckel the jovial the archconspirator. Who but I? I suspected him. He was too fierce. He had no caution. He was what a peaceful citizen may fancy a revolutionist to be. I watched him. He was not brave. He was reckless because he had nothing to fear. And at last I caught him."

Old Adelbert was sitting forward on the edge of his chair, his jaw dropped. "And what then?" he gasped. "He was but a boy. Perhaps you misjudged him. Boys are reckless."

"I caught him," said the concierge. "I have said it. He knew much. He had names, places, even dates. For that matter, he confessed."

"Then he is dead?" quavered old Adelbert.

The concierge shrugged his shoulders. "Of course," he said briefly. "For a time he was kept here, in an upper room. He could have saved himself, if he would. We could have used him. But he turned sulky, refused speech, did not eat. When he was taken away," he added with unction, "he was so weak that he could not walk." He rose and consulted a great silver watch. "We can go now," he said. "The committee likes promptness."

They left together, the one striding out with long steps that were surprisingly light for his size, the other, hanging back a trifle, as one who walks because he must. Old Adelbert, who had loved his king better than his country, was a lagging "patriot" that night. His breath came short and labored. His throat was dry. As they passed the opera, however, he threw his head up. The performance was over, but the great house was still lighted, and in the foyer, strutting about, was his successor. Old Adelbert quickened his steps.

At the edge of the place, near the statue of the queen, they took a car, and so reached the borders of the city. After that they walked far. The scent of the earth, fresh turned by the plough, was in their nostrils. Cattle, turned out after the long winter, grazed or lay in the fields. Through the ooze of the road the two plodded; old Adelbert struggling through with difficulty, the concierge exhorting him impatiently to haste.

At last the leader paused, and surveyed his surroundings. "Here I must cover your eyes, comrade," he said. "It is a formality all must comply with."

Old Adelbert drew back. "I do not like your rule. I am not as other men. Must see where I go."

"I shall lead you carefully. And, if you fear, I can carry you." He chuckled at the thought. But old Adelbert knew well that he could do it, knew that he was as a child to those

mighty arms. He submitted to the bandage, however, with an ill grace that caused the concierge to smile.

"It hurts your dignity, eh, old rooster!" he said jovially. "Others, of greater dignity, have felt the same. But all submit in the end."

He placed the veteran among the graves with the ease of familiarity.



He Piloted the Veteran Among the Graves.

Only once he spoke. "Know you where you are?"

"In a field," said Adelbert, "recently ploughed."

"Aye, in a field, right enough. But one which sows corruption, and raises nothing, until perhaps great St. Gabriel cuts in his crop."

Then, realizing the meaning of the mounds over which he trod, old Adelbert crossed himself.

"Only a handful know of this meeting place," boasted the concierge. "I, and a few others. Only we may meet with the committee face to face."

"You must have great influence," observed old Adelbert timidly. "I control the guilds. He who today can sway labor to his will is powerful; very powerful, comrade. Labor is the great beast which tires of carrying burdens, and is but now learning its strength."

"Aye," said old Adelbert. "Had I been wise, I would have joined a guild. Then I might have kept my piece at the opera. As it is, I stood alone, and they put me out."

"You do not stand alone now. Stand by us, and we will support you. The republic will not forget its friends."

Thus heartened, old Adelbert brightened up somewhat. Why should he, an old soldier, sweat at the thought of blood? Great changes required heroic measures. It was because he was old that he feared change. He stamped through the passageway without urging, and stood erect and with shoulders squared while the bandage was removed.

He was rather longer than Oiga Loschek had been in comprehending his surroundings. His old eyes at first saw little but the table and its candles in their gruesome holders. But when he saw the committee his heart failed. Here, embodied before him, was everything he had loathed during all his upright and loyal years—anarchy, murder, treason. His face worked. The cords in his neck stood out like strings drawn to the breaking point.

The concierge was speaking. For all his boasting, he was ill at ease. His voice had lost its bravado, and had taken on a fawning note.

"This is the man of whom word was sent to the committee," he said. "I ventured to ask that he be allowed to come here, because he brings information of value."

"Step forward, comrade," said the leader. "What is your name and occupation?"

"Adelbert, excellency. As to occupation, for years I was connected with the opera. Twenty years, excellency. Then I grew old, and another—" His voice broke.

"What is the information that brings you here?"

"Suddenly old Adelbert wept, terrible tears that forced their way from his faded eyes, and ran down his cheeks. "I cannot, excellencies!" he cried. "I find I cannot."

He collapsed into the chair, and throwing his arms across the table bowed his head on them. His shoulders heaved under his old uniform. The committee stirred, and the concierge caught him brutally by the wrist.

"Up with you!" he said, from clenched teeth. "What stupidity is this? Would you play with death?" But old Adelbert was beyond fear. He shook his head. "I cannot," he muttered, his face hidden.

Then the concierge stood erect and folded his arms across his chest. "He is terrified, that is all," he said. "If the committee wishes, I can tell them of this matter. Later, he can be interrogated."

(To be continued)

Between the requirements of more wheat for the allies and more money to support the army Uncle Sam must continue to tighten his belt and loosen the straps of his pocketbook.

The woman who can and will can be helping to win the war.

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