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Family and Friends 6

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.

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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 Burlesdon. 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

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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.

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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 Ruritanians.'

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

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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

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The girl began to laugh. 'It's the colour of your hair, sir,' she explained. 'We don't often see that colour here. It's the Elphberg red – not Johann's favourite colour.'

* * *

The next day I decided to walk through the forest for a few miles and take the train to Strelsau from a little station along the road. I sent my luggage on the train and after lunch I started out on foot. First, I wanted to see the Castle of Zenda and in half an hour I had climbed the hill to it. There were two buildings – the old one, with a moat around it, and the new, modern building. Duke Michael could have friends to stay with him in the new castle, but he could go into the old castle when he wanted to be alone. The water in the moat was deep, and if he pulled up the drawbridge over the moat, no one could get to him.

I stayed there for some time and looked at the castle, and then I walked on through the forest for about an hour.

forest a place with a lot of trees

moat a deep wide ditch around a castle, filled with water

drawbridge a bridge across the moat of a castle that can be pulled up to stop people crossing

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Good heavens!
an expression to show great surprise

It was beautiful and I sat down to enjoy it. Before I knew what had happened, I was asleep.

Suddenly I heard a voice say, 'Good heavens! He looks just like the King!'

When I opened my eyes, there were two men in front of me. One of them came nearer.

'May I ask your name?' he said.

'Well, why don't you tell me your names first?' I replied.

The younger of the two men said, 'This is Captain Sapt, and I am Fritz von Tarlenheim. We work for the King of Ruritania.'

'And I am Rudolf Rassendyll,' I answered, 'a traveller from England. My brother is Lord Burlesdon.'

Just then a voice called out from the trees behind us. 'Fritz! Fritz! Where are you?'

'It's the King!' Fritz said, and Sapt laughed.

Then a young man jumped out from behind a tree. I gave a cry, and when he saw me he stepped back in

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sudden surprise. The King of Ruritania looked just like Rudolf Rassendyll, and Rudolf Rassendyll looked just like the King!

For a moment the King said nothing, but then he asked, 'Captain ... Fritz ... who is this?'

Sapt went to the King and spoke quietly in his ear. The King's surprise changed slowly to an amused smile, then suddenly he began to laugh loudly. 'So, we must be cousins! Welcome to my country, cousin!' he cried. 'Where are you travelling to?'

'To Strelsau, sir – to the coronation.'

The King looked at his friends, and for a moment he was serious. But then he started to laugh again. 'Wait until brother Michael sees that there are two of us!' he cried.

'Maybe it isn't a very good idea for Mr Rassendyll to go to Strelsau,' Fritz said, worried, and Sapt agreed with him.

'Oh, we'll think about the coronation tomorrow,' the King said. 'Come, cousin!'

We returned to the Duke's lodge in the forest, where we had an excellent dinner.

After we had finished eating, old Josef, the King's servant, came in. He put down a plate in front of the King and said, 'Duke Michael offers you this cake on the day before your coronation.'

'Then we must thank Black Michael!' the King cried. 'Well, I'm not scared of his food!'

And he ate all that was on the plate.

Then Sapt said, 'It's late. Let's go to bed. Tomorrow is an important day.'

Soon after, we were all asleep.

servant someone who is paid to work in another person's house

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Activities

1 Who do these sentences describe? Write the names.

Duke Michael | Rudolf Rassendyll | Antoinette de Mauban

Prince Rudolf | King Rudolf

1 He was tall and very good-looking but he was also a scoundrel.
Prince Rudolf

2 'She's travelling on the same train as you.'
_____

3 'He's only the second son and will never be king himself.'
_____

4 'Good heavens! He looks just like the King.'
_____

5 'Friends who want the same place and the same wife.'
_____ and _____

2 Who said this? Write the names.

Josef | Robert | ~~Rose~~ | King | Rudolf Rassendyll | daughter

1 'I'm so pleased that Robert's hair is black!' said Rose.

2 'No, the nose and the hair are in the family,' agreed _____.

3 'I hate Black Michael!' cried the _____.

4 'I am a traveller from England,' said _____.

5 'So, we must be cousins!' laughed the _____.

6 'Duke Michael offers you this cake,' said _____.

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3 Correct the underlined words in these sentences.

1 'When are you going to do something useless, Rudolf?' useful

2 Prince Rudolf had blue eyes, a long straight nose and dart red hair. _____

3 Because my hair was red and I had the Elphberg nose, Rose worked about me. _____

4 As we waited for the trail we watched the crowds. _____

5 'Although he's only the second son and will never be king himself, he's still an impossible man.' _____

6 'It's the Elphberg red – not Johann's favourite collar.' _____

7 Duke Michael went into the old castle when he wanted to be along. _____

8 We returned to the Duke's house, where we had an excellent winner. _____

4 Are these sentences true (T) or false (F)?

1 Rudolf Rassendyll is sad because he doesn't have a job. F

2 Rudolf is interested in the new King of Ruritania. ☐

3 The new King is Duke Michael's father. ☐

4 The Castle of Zenda belongs to Duke Michael. ☐

5 Johann and the old lady want Duke Michael to be king. ☐

6 Rudolf meets the new King in the Castle of Zenda. ☐

7 The King invites Rudolf to have dinner with him in the Duke's house. ☐

8 The King and Black Michael like each other very much. ☐

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CHAPTER 3 The King goes to his coronation

When I woke up, Sapt and Fritz were standing next to my bed. 'Come with us, quickly,' said Fritz.

We went downstairs and there was the King, still in his clothes, lying on the floor. When Sapt pushed him with his hand, he did not move.

'We've been trying to wake him for half an hour,' said Fritz. 'But he's sleeping like a dead man.'

The three of us looked at each other.

'Was there something in that cake?' I asked.

'I don't know,' Sapt said, 'but if he doesn't get to his coronation today, there'll never be a coronation for him. All Ruritania is waiting for him in Strelsau and Black Michael with half the army, too. We can't tell them that the King can't wake up to go to his own coronation!'

'Tell me, do you think somebody put something in that cake?' I asked.

'It was Black Michael!' Fritz replied. 'We all know he wants to be King himself.'

For a moment or two we were all silent, and then Sapt looked at me and said, 'You must go to Strelsau and take his place!'

I looked at him. 'You're crazy, man! How can I do that? The King ...'

'It's dangerous, I know,' said Sapt. 'But it's our only chance. If you don't go, Black Michael will be King and the real King will be dead or a prisoner.'

How could I say no? It took me two minutes to decide.

'I'll go!' I said.

'Well done, boy!' cried Sapt. He went on quickly and quietly. 'After the coronation they'll take us to the palace

army a large number of people who fight for their country

take someone's place to go instead of another person

real not false

prisoner a person who is caught and must stay in prison

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for the night. When we're alone, you and I will leave and ride back here to fetch the King. He'll be all right by then. I'll take him back to Strelsau and you must get out of the country as fast as you can.'

'But what about the soldiers?' Fritz asked. 'They're Duke Michael's men, and they're coming to take the King back to Strelsau for the coronation.'

'We'll go before the soldiers get here,' Sapt said, 'and we'll hide the King.'

He lifted the King up from the floor and we opened the door. An old woman, Johann's mother, was standing there. She turned, without a word, and went back to the kitchen.

soldier a person in an army

hide (*past* **hid**) to go where people can't see you

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lock to close with a key

underground below the ground, under a house

mistake something that is wrong

'Did she hear?' Fritz asked.

'Don't worry. I'll make sure she can't talk,' Sapt said, and he carried the King away.

When he returned, he told us that he had locked the old woman in a room underground. The King and Josef were hidden in another room underground. 'Josef will take care of the King and tell him everything when he wakes up. Come,' he went on, 'there's no time to lose. It's already six o'clock.'

Soon I was dressed in the King's clothes, the horses were ready and we were on our way. As we rode through the forest, Sapt told me everything that he could about my life, my family, my friends, and the things I liked or did not like. He told me what to do when we got there, and how to speak to different people. He was a good teacher, and I listened hard. One mistake could be death for all three of us.

It was eight o'clock when we arrived at the station and got on the train, and by half-past nine we were in Strelsau.

And when King Rudolf the Fifth stepped out of the train, the people shouted, 'Long live the King!' Old Sapt smiled, 'Long live them both,' he said quietly.

'I only hope we are all alive tonight!'

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CHAPTER 4 My adventures begin

As we made our way to the palace, I began to feel that I really was the King of Ruritania, with Marshal Strakencz, the head of the army, on my right and old Sapt on my left. I could see that Strelsau was really two towns – the Old Town and the New Town. The people of the Old Town, who were poor, wanted Duke Michael to be their King, but the people of the New Town wanted King Rudolf.

We went through the New Town first, and it was bright and colourful, with the ladies' dresses and the red roses of the Elphbergs. The people shouted for their King as we passed through the streets. But when we came to the Old Town, the Marshal and Sapt moved nearer to my horse, and I could see that they were worried about me.

'Stay back!' I called. 'I'll show my people that I'm not scared of them.' Some of the crowd were pleased when they heard this, but most of them watched me in silence.

Finally, we reached the great town hall of Strelsau. I remember very little of the coronation – only two faces. One was a woman with red hair, the Princess Flavia. The

Marshal a very important army officer

bright full of light, colourful

town hall the building in a town where important people work

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