LONG LIVE THE KING

By Mary Roberts Rinehart

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CHAPTER XV—Continued.

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Hedwig's notification that she would visit her, found the countess at leisure and alone. She followed the announcement almost immediately, and if she had shown cowardice before, she showed none now. She disregarded the chair Olga Loschek offered, and came to the point with a directness that was like the king's.

"I have come," she said simply, "to find out what to do."

The countess was as direct.

"I cannot tell you what to do, highness. I can only tell you what I would do."

"Very well." Hedwig showed a touch of impatience. This was quibbling, and it annoyed her.

"I should go away, now, with the person I cared about."

"Where would you go?"

"The world is wide, highness."

"Not wide enough to hide in, I am afraid."

"For myself," said the countess, "the problem would not be difficult. I should go to my place in the mountains. An old priest, who knows me well, would perform the marriage. After that they might find me if they liked. It would be too late."

"This priest—he might be difficult."

"Not to a young couple, come to him, perhaps, in peasant costume. They are glad to marry, these fathers. There is much irregularity. I fancy," she added, still with her carefully detached manner, "that a marriage could be easily arranged."

But, before long, she had dropped her pretense of aloofness, and was taking the lead. Hedwig, weary with the struggle, and now trembling with nervousness, put herself in her hands, listening while she planned, agreed eagerly to everything. Something of grim amusement came into Olga Loschek's face after a time. By doing this thing she would lose everything. It would be impossible to conceal her connivance. No one, knowing Hedwig, would for a moment imagine the plan hers. Or Nikky's, either, for that matter.

She, then, would lose everything, even Karl, who was already lost to her. But—and her face grew set and her eyes hard—she would let those plotters in their grisly catacombs do their own filthy work. Her hands would be clean of that. Hence her amusement that at this late day she, Olga Loschek, should be saving her own soul.

So it was arranged, to the last detail. For it must be done at once. Hedwig, a trifle terrified, would have postponed it a day or so, but the countess was insistent. Only she knew how the very hours counted, had them numbered, indeed, and watched them flying by with a sinking heart.

If she gave a fleeting thought to the palace, to the crown prince and his impending fate, she dismissed it quickly. She had no affection for Annunciata, and as to the boy, let them

"In What Can We Trust?"

look out for him. Let Mettlich guard his treasure, or lose it to his peril. The passage under the gate was not of her discovery or informing.

CHAPTER XVI.

Nikky and Hedwig.

Nikky had gone back to his lodging, where his servant was packing his things. For Nikky was now of his majesty's household, and must exchange his shabby old rooms for the world magnificence of the palace.

He was very downhearted. To the crown prince, each day, he gave the best that was in him, played and rode, invented delightful nonsense to bring the boy's quick laughter, carried pocketfuls of bones, to the secret revolt of his soldierly soul, was boyish and tender, frivolous or thoughtful, as the occasion seemed to warrant.

And always he was watchful, his revolver always ready and in touch, his eyes keen, his body, even when it seemed most relaxed, always tense to spring. For Nikky knew the temper of the people, knew it as did Mathilde gossiping in the market, and even better; knew that a crisis was approaching, and that on this small boy in his charge hung that crisis.

So Nikky trusted in his own right arm and in nothing else. The very size of the palace, its unused rooms, its long and rambling corridors, its rambling wings and ancient turrets, was against its safety.

Since the demonstration against Karl, the riding school hour had been given up. There were no drives in the park. The illness of the king furnished sufficient excuse, but the truth was that the royal family was practically besieged, by it knew not what.

Nikky, summoned to the chancellor's house that morning, had been told the facts, and had stood, rather still and tense, while Mettlich recounted them.

"Our very precautions are our danger," said the chancellor. "And the king—" He stopped and sat, tapping his fingers on the arm of his chair.

"And the king, sir?"

"Almost at the end. A day or two."

Karl, with Hedwig in his thoughts, had returned to mobilize his army not far from the border for the spring maneuvers, and at a meeting of the king's council the matter of a mobilization in Livonia was seriously considered.

Fat Friese favored it, and made an impassioned speech, with sweat thick on his heavy face.

"I am not cowardly," he finished. "I fear nothing for myself or for those belonging to me. But the duty of this council is to preserve the throne for the crown prince, at any cost. And, if we cannot trust the army, in what can we trust?"

"In God," said the chancellor grimly.

In the end nothing was done. Mobilization might precipitate the crisis and there was always the fear that the army, in parts, was itself disloyal.

The king, meanwhile, lay dying, Doctor Welderman in constant attendance, other physicians coming and going. His apartments were silent. Rugs covered the corridors, that no footfall disturb his quiet hours. The nursing sisters attended him, one by his bedside, one always on her knees at the priedieu in the small room beyond. He wanted little—now and then a sip of water, the cooled juice of fruit. Injections of stimulants, given by Doctor Welderman himself, had scarred his old arms with purplish marks, and were absorbed more and more slowly as the hours went on.

He rarely slept, but lay inert and not unhappy. Annunciata came, and was at last stricken by conscience to a prayer at his bedside. On one of her last visits that was. She got up to find his eyes fixed on her.

"Father, can you hear me?"

"Yes."

"I—I have been a bad daughter to you. I am sorry. It is late now to tell you, but I am sorry. Can I do anything?"

"Otto," he said, with difficulty.

"You want to see him?"

"No."

She knew what he meant by that. He would have the boy remember him as he had seen him last.

"You are anxious about him?"

"Very—anxious."

"Listen, father," she said, stooping over him. "I have been hard and cold. Perhaps you will grant that I have had two reasons for it. But I am going to do better. I will take care of him and I will do all I can to make him happy. I promise."

Perhaps it was relief. Perhaps even then the thought of Annunciata's tardy and certain-to-be bungling efforts to make Ferdinand William Otto happy amused him. He smiled faintly.

Nikky received a note from Hedwig late that afternoon. It was very brief:

Tonight at nine o'clock I shall go to the roof beyond Hubert's old rooms, for air.
HEDWIG.

Nikky, who in all his incurious young life had never thought of the roof of the palace, save as a necessary shelter from the weather, a thing of tiles and gutters, vastly large, looked rather astounded.

"The roof!" he said, surveying the note. And fell to thinking, such a mixture of rapture and despair as only twenty-three, and hopeless, can know.

Somehow or other he got through the intervening hours, and before nine he was on his way. He had the run of the palace, of course. No one noticed him as he made his way toward the empty suite which so recently had housed its royal visitor.

Hedwig, in a soft white wrap over her dinner dress, was at the balustrade. A very dignified fairy, although her heart thumped disgracefully.

Whatever Nikky had intended—of obeying his promise to the letter, of putting his country before love, and love out of his life—failed him instantly. The Nikky, ardent-eyed and tender-armed, who crossed the roof and took her almost fiercely in his arms, was all love—and twenty-three.

"Sweetheart!" he said. "Sweetest heart!"

When, having kissed her, he drew back a trifle for the sheer joy of again catching her to him, it was Hedwig who held out her arms to him.

"I couldn't bear it," she said simply. "I love you. I had to see you again. Just once."

If he had not entirely lost his head before, he lost it then. He stopped thinking, was content for a time that her arms were about his neck, and his arms about her, holding her close.

"Never let me go, Nikky," she whispered. "Hold me, always."

"Always!" said Nikky, valiantly and absurdly.

"Like this?"

"Like this," said Nikky, who was, like most lovers, not particularly

"Never Let Me Go, Nikky," She Whispered.

original. He tightened his strong arms about her.

Then, because she dared not give him time to think, she made her plea—rapid, girlish, rather incoherent, but understandable enough. They would go away together and be married. She had it all planned and some of it arranged. And then they would hide somewhere, and—"and always be together," she finished, tremulous with anxiety.

And Nikky? His pulses still beating at her nearness, his eyes on her upturned, despairing young face, turned to him for hope and comfort, what could he do? He took her in his arms again and soothed her, while she cried her heart out against his tunic. He said he would do anything to keep her from unhappiness, and that he would die before he let her go to Karl's arms. But if he had stopped thinking before, he was thinking hard enough then.

"Tonight?" said Hedwig, raising a tear-stained face. "It is early. If we wait something will happen. I know it. They are so powerful, they can do anything."

He put her away from him at last, after he had kissed her eyelids and her forehead, which was by way of renunciation. And then he folded his arms, which were treacherous and might betray him. After that, not daring to look at her, but with his eyes fixed on the irregular sky-line of the city roofs, he told her many things, of his promise to the king, of the danger, imminent now and very real, of his word of honor not to make love to her, which he had broken.

Hedwig listened, growing cold and still, and drawing away a little. She listened, even assented, as he pleaded against his own heart, treacherous arms still folded. And if she saw his arms and not his eyes, it was because she did not look up.

Halfway through his eager speech, however, she drew her light wrap about her and turned away. Nikky could not believe that she was going like that, without a word. But when she had disappeared through the window, he knew, and followed her. He caught her in Hubert's room, and drew her savagely into his arms.

But it was a passive, quiescent, and trembling Hedwig who submitted, and then, freeing herself, went out through the door into the lights of the corridor. Nikky flung himself, face down, on a shrouded couch and lay there, his face buried in his arms.

Olga Loschek's last hope was gone.

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On the day of the carnival, which was the last day before the beginning of Lent, Prince Ferdinand William Otto wakened early. The palace still slept, and only the street sweepers were about the streets. Prince Ferdinand William Otto sat up in bed and yawned. This was a special day, he knew, but at first he was too drowsy to remember.

Then he knew—the carnival! A delightful day, with the place full of people in strange costumes—peasants, imps, jesters, who cut capers on the grass in the park, little girls in procession, wearing costumes of fairies with gauze wings, students who paraded and blew noisy horns, even horses decorated, and now and then a dog dressed as a dancer or a soldier.

He yawned again, and began to feel hungry. He decided to get up and take his own bath. There was nothing like getting a good start for a gala day. And, since with the crown prince to decide was to do, which is not always a royal trait, he took his own bath, being very particular about his ears, and not at all particular about the rest of him. Then, no Oskar having yet appeared with fresh garments, he ducked back into bed again, quite bare as to his small body, and snuggled down in the sheets.

Lying there, he planned the day. There were to be no lessons except fencing, which could hardly be called a lesson at all, and as he now knew the "Gettysburg address," he meant to ask permission to recite it to his grandfather. To be quite sure of it, he repeated it to himself as he lay there:

"Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

Late in the morning Nikky took him to the roof. "We can't go out, old man," Nikky said to him, rather startled to discover the unhappiness in the boy's face, "but I've found a place where we can see more than we can here. Suppose we try it."

"Why can't we go out? I've always gone before."

"Well," Nikky temporized, "they've made a rule. They make a good many rules, you know. But they said nothing about the roof."

"The roof!"

"The roof. The thing that covers us and keeps out the weather. The roof, highness." Nikky alternated between formality and the other extreme with the boy.

"It slants, doesn't it?" observed his highness doubtfully.

"Part of it is quite flat. We can take a ball up there, and get some exercise while we're about it."

As a matter of fact, Nikky was not altogether unselfish. He would visit the roof again, where for terrible, wonderful moments he had held Hedwig in his arms. On a pilgrimage, indeed, like that of the crown prince to Etzel, Nikky would visit his shrine.

So they went to the roof. One could see the streets crowded with people, could hear the soft blare of distant horns.

"The scenic railway is in that direction," observed the crown prince, leaning on the balustrade. "If there were no buildings we could see it."

"Right here," Nikky was saying to himself. "At this very spot. She held out her arms, and I—"

"It looks very interesting," said Prince Ferdinand William Otto. "Of course we can't see the costumes, but it is better than nothing."

"I kissed her," Nikky was thinking, his heart swelling under his very best tunic. "Her head was on my breast, and I kissed her. Last of all, I kissed her eyes—her lovely eyes."

"If I fell off here," observed the crown prince in a meditative voice, "I would be smashed to a jelly, like the child at the Crystal palace."

"But now she hates me," said Nikky's heart, and dropped about the distance of three buttons. "She hates me. I saw it in her eyes this morning. Oh, Heaven!"

"We might as well play ball now."

Prince Ferdinand William Otto turned away from the parapet with a sigh. This strange quiet that filled the palace seemed to have attacked Nikky too. Otto hated quiet.

They played ball, and the crown prince took a lesson in curves. But on his third attempt, he described such a compound curve that the ball disappeared over an adjacent part of the roof, and although Nikky did some blood-curdling climbing along gutters, it could not be found.

It was then that the Majordomo, always a marvelous figure in crimson and gold, and never seen without white gloves—the Majordomo bowed in a window, and observed that if his royal highness pleased, his royal highness' luncheon was served.

In the shrouded room inside the windows, however, his royal highness paused and looked around.

"I've been here before," he observed. "These were my father's rooms. My mother lived here, too. When I am older, perhaps I can have them. It would be convenient on account of my practicing curves on the roof. But I should need a number of balls."

He was rather silent on his way back to the schoolroom. But once he looked up rather wistfully at Nikky.

"If they were living," he said, "I am pretty sure they would take me out today."

Olga Loschek had found the day one of terror. The failure of her plan as to Nikky and Hedwig was known to the countess the night before. Hedwig had sent for her and faced her in her boudoir, very white and calm.

"He refuses," she said. "There is nothing more to do."

"Refuses!"

"He has promised not to leave Otto."

Olga Loschek had been incredulous, at first. It was not possible. Men in love did not do these things. It was not possible, that, after all, she had failed. When she realized it, she would have broken out in bitter protest, but Hedwig's face warned her. "He is right, of course," Hedwig had said. "You and I were wrong, countess. There is nothing to do—or say."

And the countess had taken her defeat quietly, with burning eyes and a throat dry with excitement.

The plot was arranged, to the smallest detail. The king, living now only so long as it was decreed he should live, would, in mid-afternoon, commence to sink. The entire court would be gathered in anterooms and salons near his apartments. In his rooms the crown prince would be kept, awaiting the summons to the throne room, where, on the king's death, the regency would be declared, and the court would swear fealty to the new king, Otto the Ninth. By arrangement with the captain of the palace guard, who was one of the committee of ten, the sentries before the crown prince's door were to be of the revolutionary party. Mettlich would undoubtedly be with the king. Remained then to be reckoned with only the prince's personal servants, Miss Braithwaite, and Nikky Larisch.

Two obstacles were left for the countess to cope with, and this was her part of the work. She had already a plan for Miss Braithwaite. But Nikky Larisch?

Over that problem, during the long night hours, Olga Loschek worked. It would be possible to overcome Nikky, of course. There would be four men, with the sentries, against him. But that would mean struggle and an alarm. It was the plan to achieve the abduction quietly, so quietly that for perhaps an hour—they hoped for an hour—there would be no alarm. Some time they must have, enough to make the long journey through the underground passage. Otherwise the opening at the gate would be closed, and the party caught like rats in a hole.

During the early afternoon the chancellor visited the crown prince. Waiting and watching had made inroads on him, but he assumed a sort of heavy jocularity for the boy's benefit.

"We must get the lad out somewhere for some air," he observed. "It is not good to keep him shut up like this." He turned to the crown prince. "In a day or so," he said, "we shall all go to the summer palace. You would like that, eh?"

"Will my grandfather be able to go?"

The chancellor sighed. "Yes," he said, "I—he will go to the country also. He has loved it very dearly."

He left, shortly after three o'clock. And, because he was restless and uneasy, he made a round of the palace, and of the guards. Before he returned to his vigil outside the king's bedroom, he stood for a moment by a window and looked out. Evidently rumors of the king's condition had crept out, in spite of their caution. The place, kept free of murmurs by the police, was filling slowly with people; people who took up positions on benches, under the trees, and even sitting on the curb of the street. An orderly and silent crowd it seemed, of the better class. Here and there he saw the police agents in plain clothes, impassive but watchful, on the lookout for the first cry of treason.

"The Scenic Railway Is in That Direction."

An hour or two, or three—three at the most—and the fate of the palace would lie in the hands of that crowd. He could but lead the boy to the balcony, and await the result.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Pirate's Den.

Miss Braithwaite was asleep on the couch in her sitting room, deeply asleep, so that when Prince Ferdinand William Otto changed the cold cloth on her head, she did not even move. The Countess Loschek had brought her some medicine.

"It cured her very quickly," said the crown prince, shuffling the cards with clumsy fingers. He and Nikky were playing a game in which matches represented money. The crown prince had won nearly all of them and was quite pink with excitement. "It's my deal, isn't it? When she goes to sleep like that, she nearly always wakens up much better. She's very sound asleep."

Nikky played absently, and lost the game. The crown prince triumphantly scooped up the rest of the matches. Then he lounged to the window, his hands in his pockets. There was something on his mind which the chancellor's reference to Hedwig's picture had recalled. Something he wished to say to Nikky, without looking at him.

So he cleared his throat, and looked out the window, and said, very casually:

"Hilda says that Hedwig is going to get married."

"So I hear, highness."

"She doesn't seem to be very happy about it. She's crying, most of the time."

It was Nikky's turn to clear his throat. "Marriage is a serious matter," he said. "It is not to be gone into lightly."

"Once, when I asked you about marriage, you said marriage was when two people loved each other, and wanted to be together the rest of their lives."

"Well," hedged Nikky, "that is the idea, rather."

"I should think," said Prince Ferdinand William Otto, slightly red, "that you would marry her yourself."

Nikky being beyond speech for an instant and looking, had his royal highness but seen him, very tragic and somewhat rigid, the crown prince went on:

"She's a very nice girl," he said; "I think she would make a good wife."

There was something of reproach in his tone. He had confidently planned that Nikky would marry Hedwig, and that they could all live on forever in the palace. But, the way things were going, Nikky might marry anybody, and go away to live, and he would lose him.

"Yes," said Nikky, in a strange voice, "she—I am sure she would make a good wife."

At which Prince Ferdinand William Otto turned and looked at him. "I wish you would marry her yourself," he said with his nearest approach to impatience. "I think she'd be willing. I'll ask her, if you want me to."

Half-past three, then, and Nikky trying to explain, within the limits of the boy's understanding of life, his position. Members of royal families, he said, looking far away, over the child's head, had to do many things for the good of the country. And marrying was one of them. He sat, bent forward, his hands swung between his knees, and tried to visualize, for Otto's understanding and his own heartache, the results of such a marriage.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Menace of Croup.

Croup is a spasm of the larynx which comes on very suddenly. Often in the middle of the night the baby will awaken with a harsh cough, and rough and difficult breathing. Sometimes the face may become blue. The child should be made to vomit in order to relax the spasm. This is best brought about by giving a teaspoonful of sirup of ipecac. The inhalation of steam will help to shorten the attack. A croup-kettle is the best means of producing the steam. A tent made of a sheet will aid in concentrating the moist steam. It is better to use a teaspoonful of compound tincture of benzoin to each pint of water used in the croup-kettle than steam alone. Mustard plasters, one part mustard and five parts flour, as well as warm compresses over the chest, are of value. For a child who has persistent attacks of croup it is best to ascertain whether enlarged tonsils and adenoids are not a factor. If they are present have them removed.—From the Delineator.

Requires Genius to Teach Music.

Knowledge of the imitative art is developed daily by experience of and comparison with the life they prefigure; knowledge of literature by the creative habit of speech. Music can be developed only from experience in the art of music itself. It is an absolute addition to life. But from its manifold nature, its intangibility, the irregularity of musical endowment, and above all from the sparsity of musical experience in the normal life of the young, music requires a certain genius to teach it well, and in our schools the problem is not yet seriously attempted.—Manchester Guardian.