

THE PRISONER OF ZENDA (1952)

SCREENPLAY

by

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Based on the NOVEL

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using

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FADE IN:

INSERT: TEXT CRAWL

Towards the close of the last century, when History still wore a Rose, and Politics had not yet outgrown the Waltz, a Great Royal Scandal was whispered in the Anterooms of Europe. However true it was, any resemblance in "THE PRISONER OF ZENDA" to Heroes, Villains or Heroines, living or dead, is a coincidence not intended...

EXT. FAST-MOVING STEAM TRAIN (STOCK?) -- DAY

A MAP of Europe is visible behind the train, and its route crosses the map from Calais across central Europe, until at Austria...

DISSOLVE TO:

INSERT -- TRAIN DESTINATION BOARD

Orient Express -- Calais / Vienna / Strelsau / Bucharest / Constantinople.

EXT. RAILWAY STATION PLATFORM -- DAY

CONDUCTOR

Passengers will please to descend!
Passengers will please to descend!

Various ND TRAVELERS climb from the train onto the crowded platform; the station bustles with activity, PORTERS moving baggage and VENDORS shouting their wares.

ND VENDORS

Papers! Flowers! Wine, beer! Fresh flowers!

BORDER GUARD

This way for passport examination, please. This way for passport examination.

MALE TRAVELER 2

(reading)

"Special rates for the coronation."

FEMALE TRAVELER 2

Special high rates!

INT. RAILWAY STATION BUILDING -- CONTINUOUS

It's as crowded as the platform outside, and there's a queue at the passport desk. Various travelers have their documents at the ready.

CLOSE UP on one PASSPORT in particular, with the British coat of arms at the top. It belongs to our hero, Rudolf RASSENDYLL.

A PASSPORT OFFICER reads it without looking up.

PASSPORT OFFICER
(reading)
"Rudolf Rassendyll; British subject;
Purpose of visit, pleasure."

He stamps the passport, still not looking up.

PASSPORT OFFICER (CONT'D)
What hotel in Strelsau, Mr
Rassendyll?

RASSENDYLL (O.S.)
I hadn't thought about it.

PASSPORT OFFICER
You'd better think about it. If
you don't want to sleep in the
park.

RASSENDYLL (O.S.)
Well, in that case I won't go to
Strelsau until after the coronation.
I've come to your country for a
well-earned rest with the intention
of going fishing for trout--

The passport officer looks up for the first time, stares,
and slowly gets to his feet. He nudges his companion the
BAGGAGE OFFICER, who also stares and starts to rise.

REVERSE ANGLE on Rassendyll, now revealed as a dignified
man of 40, mustached and elegantly silvered at the temples,
wearing travelers' tweeds. He registers the passport
officer's stare.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)
I beg your pardon. Have I said
anything I shouldn't?

Confused, Rassendyll looks from side to side and sees
various ND LOCALS with the same fixed stare. He glances
down at his loudly-checked tweed coat. Ah, that's it.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)
I know my clothes are a little
conservative, but we English always
dress as if we're going to a funeral
when we're on a holiday.

PASSPORT OFFICER
Everything is... Quite in order.

RASSENDYLL
Thank you for making me feel so
much at home.

A few seconds later, bag in hand, he makes his way out of the station building, trailed by a PORTER who's trying to be helpful.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)
All right, I'll take these. Thanks.

PORTER
But your train's going!

RASSENDYLL
I'm going to Strelsau on foot, in
my own good time.

PORTER
But you'll miss the coronation,
sir!

RASSENDYLL
I always make a point of missing
coronations.

No reply; instead the porter is giving him that same baffled stare he's seen so often in the past few minutes, and Rassendyll is getting tired of it.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)
I hope your trout take as much
interest in me as you do. I shan't
be able to land them fast enough.

Rassendyll walks away, unaware that he's attracting several more curious looks. As he goes out of the door, he passes -- but doesn't notice -- a large PORTRAIT POSTER on the wall.

CLOSE ON the portrait: it's entitled "Rudolf the Fifth, King of Ruritania", but the man it shows, in full uniform, looks like Rassendyll without his mustache...

EXT. FOREST RIVERBANK -- LATER

A sign proclaims this to be the PROVINCE OF ZENDA ROYAL HUNTING AND FISHING PRESERVE -- TRESPASSING FORBIDDEN. It's sunny, calm and restful, which is why Rassendyll's asleep under a tree. As two men approach, they pause to look at the trespasser.

SAPT (O.S.)

It's a trick of the devil! Shave
him and he'd be the King.

Rassendyll wakes up, looks up, then gets up. The two men studying him are dressed in hunting costume and carrying guns. One is Colonel SAPT, grizzled, stern and 60s; his companion is Fritz von TARLENHEIM, a cheerful 30-something.

SAPT (CONT'D)

May I ask your name, sir?

RASSENDYLL

Well, since you've taken the first step in the acquaintance, gentlemen, perhaps you'd be good enough to give me a lead in the matter of names?

TARLENHEIM

Certainly. This is Colonel Sapt, and I am called Fritz von Tarlenheim. We are both in the service of his Majesty the King.

RASSENDYLL

I am Rudolf Rassendyll; I'm here on holiday from England, and I was recently in the service of her Majesty the Queen.

SAPT

Rassendyll...?

TARLENHEIM

How do you do, Mr Rassendyll?

RASSENDYLL

How do you do?

SAPT

Rassendyll...! Of course, by Heaven! Your face betrays you, sir! You know his history, I believe?

TARLENHEIM

Well, I had heard a rumor or two.

RASSENDYLL

I was hoping that our skeleton was safe at home in our family cupboard.

TARLENHEIM

Some skeletons are prodigious travelers, sir.

KING (O.S.)
Fritz! Where are you?

TARLENHEIM
Here, your Majesty!

Another man in hunting clothes emerges from the undergrowth. This is KING Rudolf, the man from the portrait, and yes indeed, except for a MONOCLE and no mustache, he looks just like Rassendyll.

KING
Confound it, I thought you'd lost yourselves again!

He eyes Rassendyll dubiously and comes closer for a better look, then stares just as everyone else has done. This time Rassendyll returns the stare, and with good reason.

KING (CONT'D)
Who's this gentleman?

SAPT
A distant relative of yours, your Majesty.

KING
Distant? He seems too close for comfort!

RASSENDYLL
That is something for which you cannot entirely blame me, your Majesty.

KING
Oh? Then who shall I blame?

RASSENDYLL
Well, with your Majesty's permission, I would suggest that the blame lies equally between your great-great-great grandfather Rudolf and my great-great-great grandmother Amelia.

KING
I beg your pardon?

SAPT
He's right, your Majesty! The man is a Rassendyll from England.

KING
Rassendyll? England?

RASSENDYLL

Yes, your Majesty. Ever since Amelia's time, the Elphberg face has cropped out on one of us every now and then.

KING

Ahh! Well met, cousin! Forgive me if I seem a little slow, but it's a bit early in the day to see double -- even for me. Eh, Sapt? But what are you doing here, cousin?

RASSENDYLL

I must admit to being guilty of the same offence as our mutual ancestor, your Majesty.

KING

And what was that?

RASSENDYLL

Fishing in forbidden waters.

It takes a second for the King to get the joke, then he lets out a disproportionate roar of laughter. He's either not very bright -- or not very sober.

KING

That's very funny! That's funny! The man has wit! You must come to my coronation tomorrow. I'd give a thousand crowns for the sight of brother Michael's face when he sees the pair of us side by side. You shall stay at my hunting lodge, and tonight we shall dine you right royally. Our ancestors laid down some good wine here in the lodge, cousin. Fritz! They little thought that a bottle or two was laid down for you! All in the family, all in the family...

INT. HUNTING LODGE -- LATER

The remains of dinner fight for space among far too many BOTTLES. Old JOSEF, in his late 60s, is the only servant. Tarlenheim's already half-asleep, Sapt, frowning disapproval, is stalking about in the background, so only Rassendyll and the King are still drinking.

KING

Cousin Rudolf, I propose a toast.

RASSENDYLL

Hear hear!

TARLENHEIM

(drunkenly)

Another toasht...

KING

A toast to... Have we anybody left?

RASSENDYLL

Your brother Michael, perhaps?

KING

We drink to Michael in vinegar, my friend -- not in good wine.

(beat)

I'll tell you a secret about my brother Michael. My brother Michael does not love me.

RASSENDYLL

No?

KING

No. But he loves my shoes. He feels that he should be in my shoes, and I should be in his. No, no toast to Michael. We'll drink instead to cousin Flavia, soon to be my bride and queen!

RASSENDYLL

Hear hear!

KING

Poor Flavia. She never had a chance to choose anybody else. Well for that matter, neither did I. It's a pity you can't meet the princess. At least, I'm told it's a pity: I haven't seen her for years. She and I didn't get on very well then. Still, let's hope we shall now.

RASSENDYLL

I sincerely hope so, your Majesty, if you're going to marry her!

KING

They tell me she's far too good for me. I can well believe it. You know what they say about me, don't you? I drink too much.

RASSENDYLL

I imagine that you're well able to
take care of yourself on that score,
your Majesty.

KING

Oh, I've done my fair share of
drinking in my day, I'd be the
last to deny it.

(beat)

But tomorrow, in the cathedral,
when my people place the crown
upon my head and proclaim me their
King, I shall be their King -- for
the rest of my life.

(beat)

But tonight... Tonight I drink
with my friends!

Except that Tarlenheim is fast asleep, and Sapt looks
anything but friendly. Only Rassendyll remains both awake
and amiable, and he's fading fast.

KING (CONT'D)

With my friend.

(beat)

You know, Rassendyll, I like you.
You're a good fellow. Oh, you're
English, but you're a good fellow.
I want to drink a toast to you!

But the last bottle's empty.

KING (CONT'D)

Confound it, where's all the wine
got to? Josef? Josef! A bottle of
the '68. Josef!

Colonel Sapt steps in; he's seen and heard enough.

SAPT

Your Majesty, it is my duty to
remind you once more of tomorrow.

KING

What, again?

SAPT

Yes, again.

KING

Well then, you've reminded me. Now
go on now. Sit down and have a
drink!

SAPT

You have a duty, your Majesty.

KING

Duty? Duty? On my last night of freedom?

SAPT

I question your freedom to drink yourself into a condition in which you will not be fit to be crowned tomorrow.

KING

I question your right to address me in that manner!

SAPT

I served your father in his lifetime--

KING

I question your right to bring my father into this!

SAPT

Your father honored his obligations to the crown!

KING

Are you suggesting that I do not?

SAPT

Your father never thought of himself, or of his own pleasure. Your father never forgot he was a King!

That's going too far. The King slaps him across the face. There's a moment of shock, neither quite believing what's just happened, then Sapt pulls his dignity around him like a cloak.

SAPT (CONT'D)

By your leave, your Majesty...

He strides from the room, leaving the King as ashamed as his drunken state allows.

KING

Sapt...? Sapt!

Sapt is gone; but Josef appears, carrying a BOTTLE of wine.

KING (CONT'D)

What are you doing here?

JOSEF

The 1868, your Majesty. You sent
for it.

KING

Oh? Did I?
(beat)
Josef...

JOSEF

Yes, your Majesty?

KING

I've had too much to drink. Better
take it back.

JOSEF

Yes, your Majesty.

KING

Oh no! No, no, wait. Wait! We have
a guest. Excellent fellow, Josef.
English.

The excellent fellow is fast asleep in his chair.

KING (CONT'D)

Excellent fellow, Josef, but he
can't drink. I can drink. I'm the
King.

He fills a glass with the 1868 wine, then drains it.

KING (CONT'D)

Better go to bed, Josef.

JOSEF

Good night, your Majesty.

KING

Good night. Sleep well.

The King pours and drains another glassful.

KING (CONT'D)

Everybody sleep well. Everybody
sleeps but the King.

He sways a little. Then he sways a lot. He looks
suspiciously at the wine-glass, but it drops from his
fingers.

KING (CONT'D)

Sapt...! Sapt...!

The King staggers, collapses to the floor and rolls over, not just asleep but unconscious.

INT. HUNTING LODGE -- MORNING

A JUG is carried in. Sapt takes it, then tosses water all over Rassendyll, still asleep in his chair. He wakes suddenly, angry and wet.

RASSENDYLL

I don't think much of your joke, sir!

SAPT

You think it's a joke, do you?

He indicates where the King lies unconscious on a couch.

SAPT (CONT'D)

This is no joke, Englishman.

RASSENDYLL

It was quite an evening, wasn't it? What happened?

TARLENHEIM

Josef found him lying here this morning.

SAPT

You didn't drink any of this last bottle?

RASSENDYLL

Not that I know of, no.

SAPT

I think you'd know if you had.

RASSENDYLL

Why...? Was it drugged?

TARLENHEIM

It was.

RASSENDYLL

Have you sent for a doctor...?

SAPT

There's none within ten miles. A thousand doctors wouldn't take him to Strelsau today. I know the look of it. He'll not stir for six or seven hours.

RASSENDYLL

But...how? Why? Who...?

SAPT

Who else but Michael?

RASSENDYLL

Michael? His own brother?

TARLENHEIM

His half-brother. Michael's mother wasn't exactly acceptable in court circles. He wants the throne to be offered to him by the people. He wants to pose as their savior from the excesses of an incompetent King.

SAPT

If he's not crowned today, he'll never be crowned.

(beat)

Englishman, I am much older than you. As a man grows old, he comes to believe in Fate. Fate sent you here. Fate sends you now to Strelsau.

Rassendyll digests this; the proposal is so crazy that he doesn't believe his ears.

RASSENDYLL

What?

SAPT

I'll wager without your mustache you could deceive your own brother.

RASSENDYLL

Oh, you're out of your mind!

SAPT

It's a risk, yes. Against a certainty.

RASSENDYLL

My dear Colonel, I came here on a fishing trip. I like to fish. I'm an ordinary Englishman. I couldn't begin to act like a king even if I tried. I wouldn't deceive anybody.

But he shakes his head and smiles as he considers the consequences of any attempt.

SAPT

What are you smiling at?

RASSENDYLL

Conjures up quite a picture, doesn't it? The cathedral crowded to the doors, the organ booming, I kneel to be crowned...

(beat)

Yes, and then your friend Michael steps forward and shouts "That isn't the King, that's an Englishman named Rudolf Rassendyll!" Oh, no, I'm sorry, gentlemen.

SAPT

Then Michael sits on the throne tonight, and the King lies in prison or his grave.

That's a consequence Rassendyll hasn't considered, and it makes him thoughtful. He stares at the unconscious King and starts to reconsider.

RASSENDYLL

After all, it... It would only be for today, wouldn't it?

SAPT

By tonight you'd be safely across the border.

RASSENDYLL

And if I fail, what then?

SAPT

Your life; and mine, and Fritz's here.

Rassendyll thinks about that, too, and finally reaches his decision.

RASSENDYLL

Confound it, I'd become awfully fond of this mustache!

SAPT

Hah!

Tarlenheim takes the SIGNET RING from the King's finger, and Sapt gives it to Rassendyll. The ring is hard to remove, harder still to put on, and Rassendyll succeeds only after some effort.

RASSENDYLL

Hmm. I hope the crown's a better fit!

Tarlenheim looks at the King.

TARLENHEIM

Well, what are we going to do?

SAPT

We've got to hide him. We can't chance Michael's men finding him here. The cellar would be best. Pick him up.

TARLENHEIM

But if they search?

SAPT

Josef will put them off.

TARLENHEIM

But--

SAPT

We're not playing! I know the risk! If they do find him, he'll be no worse off than if he's not crowned in Strelsau today. Pick him up!

Sapt goes to the door and opens it. Right outside is a middle-aged woman in a servant's dress, FRAU HOLF the caretaker. She's just straightening up as if she's been watching or listening at the keyhole.

FRAU HOLF

I beg your pardon, sir.

SAPT

One moment! How long have you been caretaker here?

FRAU HOLF

Ten years.

SAPT

Have you the key to the wine-cellar?

FRAU HOLF

Yes, sir.

SAPT

Open it.

She goes off to open the cellar. As Tarlenheim goes out with the King in a fireman's carry, Sapt goes back to the table and collects the bottle of drugged wine.

INT. CELLAR STAIRS -- CONTINUOUS

The cellar is open and Tarlenheim takes the King inside. Sapt comes downstairs after him. As Frau Holf tries to leave, he blocks her exit, then picks up a convenient CUP, pours wine into it and holds it out. She shrinks away.

FRAU HOLF

No! No, no!

SAPT

Drink it. Drink it!

Reluctantly Frau Holf does as she's told, then drops the cup and sits down nervously. Tarlenheim comes out of the cellar and looks at her.

SAPT (CONT'D)

Tie her up. Better gag her, too.

INT. WINE CELLAR -- CONTINUOUS

Sapt comes in and examines the King, now stretched out on a table and still out cold. He removes his tunic, folds it as a makeshift pillow and puts it under the King's head.

SAPT

On the night before your coronation,
you had to have wine, wine, and
more wine.

INT. CELLAR STAIRS -- CONTINUOUS

Sapt goes back outside, where Frau Holf is already unconscious. He lifts her head and lets it drop back.

SAPT

Remarkable vintage, that '68. Lock
the door.

Tarlenheim locks it, then gives an ironic SALUTE.

TARLENHEIM

Sleep well, your Majesty. We go to
see you crowned.

INT. HUNTING LODGE -- MOMENTS LATER

Rassendyll, now clean-shaven, is in full uniform. He has a PORTRAIT of the King in one hand, a MIRROR in the other, and looks pleased with the comparison. So is Sapt.

SAPT

By Heaven, we'll do it yet!

RASSENDYLL

It's not bad. Not bad at all.

Right on cue, the royal monocle drops from Rassendyll's non-royal eye.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)

I'll never keep that in!

SAPT

Look here, you've overlooked one thing. Yesterday's temples won't do for today's King.

TARLENHEIM

You're right! What can we do?

RASSENDYLL

Well, I suggest some boot-blackening. Preferably the King's -- I might as well be royal all over.

INSERT -- A PROCLAMATION

Proclamation: In response to public demand, and taking cognizance of the lamentable public disorders occasioned by the unexplained non-appearance of His Majesty, King Rudolf the Fifth, at the solemnities of his coronation. Now I, Michael, Duke of Strelsau, do hereby assume the Regency of this Kingdom and ordain and proclaim a state of martial law.

INT. MICHAEL'S OFFICE -- LATER

Duke MICHAEL, mid-40s, dark and grim, signs the document, then seals it with ribbon and wax and hands it to his henchman DETCHARD. Two other henchmen, DE GAUTET and LAUENGRAM are also present. The trio are tough-looking military men of Michael's own age. All wear hussar uniform of the same regiment, with Michael the most senior officer.

MICHAEL

There. The last detail. Remember, this is to be released twenty minutes after Hentzau brings you word that the coronation ceremonies have been canceled. Twenty minutes; not before.

DETCHARD

Yes, your Highness. And now may I offer you my congratulations?

He holds out his hand. Michael rises and shakes it.

MICHAEL

A shade premature, but thank you,
Detchard.

ANTOINETTE De Mauban, Michael's mistress, comes into the room. She's a darkly beautiful woman in her late 30s, but she watches uneasily as he accepts what looks like Royal homage from his supporters. They notice her, and bow.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Well, gentlemen, it is time for
you to proceed to your posts. The
hour is almost upon us.

DETCARD

We go in the cause of our country --
and our future sovereign.

MICHAEL

Our future sovereign: Queen Flavia.

Antoinette doesn't like the sound of that, and Michael registers her concern with a sidelong glance. The henchmen bow again and leave.

ANTOINETTE

He looked at you when he said "our
future sovereign". Have you been
lying to me, Michael? Is it more
than the Regency you want?

MICHAEL

No, of course not! As Regent, the
sovereign power will be mine. That's
all he meant, my dear Antoinette.

ANTOINETTE

Was it? Is power all you want? I'm
afraid, Michael!

MICHAEL

For me? Or for yourself?

ANTOINETTE

You promised to make me your wife.
I want to be your wife. I want to
love you and make you happy. Once
you were Regent they would never
let you marry me! Michael, take
the happiness we can have together.
Leave the power to your brother--

MICHAEL

No! I've played second fiddle to that drunken sot for the last time. Because his mother was a princess and mine was not, he lived in the Royal Palace, he dined with Kings. Well, today the feast is set for Rudolf, but it's Michael who will sit in his place!

There's a KNOCK at the door.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Come in!

Rupert of HENTZAU enters; in his late 30s, he's sarcastic, cynical, and even more a villain than Michael.

HENTZAU

Count Rupert of Hentzau at your service, your Majesty.

He "realizes" that Michael isn't alone; it's just another chance to repeat that incorrect title to see what happens.

HENTZAU (CONT'D)

I'm sorry to interrupt you, your Majesty.

MICHAEL

Hentzau!

HENTZAU

Your Highness...

MICHAEL

Your wit is as inopportune as your appearance. Why are you not at your post in the cathedral?

HENTZAU

How can I witness the coronation of a King who'll be conspicuous by his absence?

MICHAEL

Do we want to make it obvious to the whole world that we knew he would not be there?

Hentzau gives Antoinette a thoughtful look, wondering what she knows, then dismisses concern in favor of impudence.

HENTZAU

Incidentally, the Burgomaster of Zenda is outside to pay you his respects, at the head of a delegation of loyal peasants. I told them you were probably too busy to see them. As of course you are.

MICHAEL

There may come a time, Hentzau, when your services will no longer excuse your impertinence.

Hentzau BOWS, unruffled, as Michael stalks irritably from the room, then turns his attention to Antoinette.

HENTZAU

I called at your hotel again this morning, and as usual they said you were out. Curiously enough, you were out for once. I'm glad you've stopped lying to me. I hate being lied to by women. They never did before. I always lied to them.

ANTOINETTE

You and I will never have anything to lie to each other about, Count Rupert.

HENTZAU

Never? Somebody once called fidelity the fading woman's greatest weapon, the charming woman's greatest hypocrisy. And you're very charming -- to anyone whose head is not bowed beneath a borrowed crown.

ANTOINETTE

I thought I heard his Highness order you to your place at the cathedral!

HENTZAU

So you're trying to put me in my place too! I love arrogance in a woman. It's always so amusing to discover their arrogance is only a defense. But you need no defense against me: you and I are allies. Michael is plotting to betray us both.

(MORE)

Antoinette makes for the door but is brought up short by his next words -- they're too close to her own suspicions.

HENTZAU (CONT'D)

Poor Michael, how he short-changes himself. Deserting a warm, exciting woman of the world for an insipid wax doll!

ANTOINETTE

That was hardly up to your usual standard, Count Rupert. I had heard you were much more subtle. What makes you think Michael has the slightest intention of marrying Princess Flavia?

HENTZAU

How else can he get the crown?

ANTOINETTE

He doesn't want the crown, as those in his confidence know. He wants only to be Regent.

HENTZAU

So he's made you think he only wants to be the man behind the throne! Oh no, he wants to sit on it. And sit on it he never can unless he sits beside the rightful queen, and that queen is not you.

(beat)

Even though you'd make a perfect queen.

Antoinette is still beside the door, but hasn't made any move to open it and leave even though Hentzau is far too close for comfort.

HENTZAU (CONT'D)

I'm glad you believe me at last. I told you we were allies.

(beat)

I can even help you to win him back, and I'm the only man in the country who can, because I'm the only man in the country who isn't afraid of him. All you have to do is to give him genuine cause to be jealous of me.

(beat)

Would that be hard?

Antoinette glares at him, even when he opens the door for her with mocking courtesy. Once she's gone, he smugly admires himself in a MIRROR, jauntily adjusting his helmet and WHISTLING a waltz. Rupert of Hentzau thinks a great deal of himself...

EXT. THE ROYAL TRAIN (STOCK?) -- LATER

Drawn by a steam locomotive, the train speeds through the countryside.

CLOSE UP of the Royal Crest on a carriage door.

INT. THE ROYAL CARRIAGE -- CONTINUOUS

Rassendyll is practicing his coronation oath, watched by Sapt and Tarlenheim.

RASSENDYLL

"I, Rudolf, with justice and mercy to deal sovereignty, to guard with vigilance and honor the welfare of my peoples, from all enemies..."
Er...

He fumbles for the next words, floundering until at last Tarlenheim leans forward, ready to prompt.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)

No, no. Don't tell me! Er... "From all enemies to...defend them, and from the throne of my ancestors to bear faithful rule, all this do I swear."

He finishes in a rush, but it's good enough for Sapt. He stands up and grabs Rassendyll's wrist, checking his pulse.

SAPT

A little swift, but you'll do. Stop shaking, lad. They'll mistake it for a royal hangover! Now let me see... We're all right to the cathedral. The princess hasn't seen him for several years, but Michael...

(beat)

Well, I've told you all I can. I'll be at your side every minute.

(beat)

Your capital, your Majesty!

The view through the window shows a station platform decorated with bunting and lined with soldiers on parade, people CHEERING and waving flags.

As a FANFARE plays, Sapt, Tarlenheim and Rassendyll put on their helmets and prepare to disembark.

ND VOICES (O.S.)

God save the King! God save the King!

SAPT

God save 'em both! Steady, lad!

They leave the train, and the pretense begins in earnest.

INT. STRELSAU CATHEDRAL -- LATER

The cathedral is packed, but beyond the columns lining the aisle, Michael and Hentzau wait for announcement of the King's non-arrival.

MICHAEL

It's the day, the hour, almost the moment!

HENTZAU

History is born out of a bottle of wine.

Their mutual congratulations are cut short by a FANFARE -- announcement of the King's arrival. Satisfaction changes to shock in an instant.

HENTZAU (CONT'D)

The King?

Rassendyll, Sapt, Tarlenheim and an escort enter through the cathedral doorway, where "the King" pauses to give up his HELMET and GAUNTLETS.

A DIGNITARY bows to Michael and states the obvious.

DIGNITARY

His Majesty has arrived, your Highness.

HENTZAU

The King? How's it possible?

MICHAEL

Ride back to Zenda at once! Find out who betrayed us!

HENTZAU

If only he'd drunk what I wanted to put in that bottle...

Hentzau leaves and Michael hurries into the main part of the cathedral to stare down the aisle as the Royal Party approaches. Rassendyll walks at a dignified pace along the red carpet as the congregation bows or curtsies. He looks every inch a King, but how much he feels like one is well hidden, while Michael watches and wonders why there's a King in the cathedral at all.

Though he gives Rassendyll an intense scrutiny, he finally escorts "his brother" to the throne, where they're met by the CARDINAL.

CARDINAL

Look now upon our liege lord, Rudolf the Fifth, undoubted King of this realm; and if any man would deny our sovereign lord's title to our lands and fealty, let him speak now, or be attainted traitor.

Michael knows that this is the time to say something, anything, but without proof he has to remain silent.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. STRELSAU CATHEDRAL -- LATER

Rassendyll sits on the throne, now wearing coronation robes, with the ORB and SCEPTER already in his hands. The CROWN is brought on a cushion to the Cardinal, who takes it and formally shows it to "the King".

CARDINAL

Receive the crown of the kingdom, and understand what a glory of sanctity and honor and bravery it signifies.

He places the crown on Rassendyll's head.

CARDINAL (CONT'D)

God save the King!

ND ALL

God save the King! God save the King! God save the King!

Even Michael repeats it, but as if the words taste bad.

MICHAEL

God save the King...

EXT. STRELSAU PARK -- CONTINUOUS

More trumpeters sound another FANFARE. A line of cannon starts FIRING a salute.

INT. STRELSAU CATHEDRAL -- CONTINUOUS

The Cardinal gives the SWORD OF STATE to Rassendyll, who stands up, raises it, and speaks the oath he was practicing on the train, this time without hesitation or error.

RASSENDYLL

I, Rudolf, with justice and mercy
to deal sovereignty, to guard with
vigilance and honor the welfare of
my peoples, from all enemies to
defend them, and from the throne
of my ancestors to bear faithful
rule, all this do I swear.

With the King's oath complete, his bride-to-be Princess FLAVIA comes forward to swear allegiance. She's a beautiful young woman in her early 20s and Rassendyll is immediately taken with her. Kneeling in front of him, hands together in homage, she concentrates on what she's saying and doesn't notice his interest.

FLAVIA

I, Flavia, do become thy vassal,
swearing to serve thee in truth
with life and limb until death
findeth me. So help me God.

There's a pause, then Rassendyll asks Sapt what to do next -- and he's already guessed what it is.

RASSENDYLL (WHISPER)

Do I kiss her?

SAPT (WHISPER)

Yes!

Rassendyll takes Flavia by the hands and raises her up, kisses her formally on both cheeks then, anticipating their coming wedding, they walk hand in hand down the aisle.

EXT. MONTAGE -- CONTINUOUS

Cannon FIRING another salute.

Trumpeters sounding another FANFARE.

Church bells RINGING.

EXT. STRELSAU STREET -- LATER

The Royal Coach, with "The King" and the Princess inside, makes its way along a street lined with soldiers in full-dress uniforms and packed with CHEERING, flag-waving crowds.

INT. ROYAL COACH -- CONTINUOUS

Rassendyll and Flavia sit side by side, WAVING regally at the crowds.

RASSENDYLL

Well, I think everything went off very well, don't you? For a coronation.

Flavia gives him a quizzical glance suggesting she wonders what he means by that comment. Rassendyll covers hastily.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)

I mean, that is, not that a coronation shouldn't go well, provided the King puts in an appearance suitably dressed, and suitably rehearsed--

FLAVIA

And suitably sober.

RASSENDYLL

And suitably sober. Yes, I was hoping you'd notice that.

(beat)

By the way, among my other failings I've rather neglected you, haven't I?

FLAVIA

Two picture postcards in three years, I think.

RASSENDYLL

To think that all this time you've been changing into the loveliest princess in Europe. No, the loveliest girl in Europe.

FLAVIA

Your new responsibilities do not compel you to shower me with compliments in private, your Majesty.

Rassendyll glances out of the coach window at the soldiers, the crowds, the bunting and the bands.

RASSENDYLL

You call this private?

Flavia smiles at the joke. She clearly doesn't want to like the man who ignored her existence for so long, but there's something more appealing about him now.

FLAVIA

I'm glad you think I've changed since you last saw me. You're different too.

That makes Rassendyll both wary and nervous.

RASSENDYLL

Well... Wouldn't anybody seem different with all this going on? I probably look like a prize idiot -- and talk like one, too.

FLAVIA

You're too modest. You really looked and acted like a King today.

RASSENDYLL

Thank you.

FLAVIA

It was delightfully unexpected.

RASSENDYLL

Oh...

She nods towards the window and the crowded street beyond.

FLAVIA

Aren't you forgetting something, your Majesty?

RASSENDYLL

What? Oh.

Rassendyll resumes waving, supporting one weary arm with the other.

FLAVIA

That's better.

RASSENDYLL

Wait, I've got an idea. Supposing you bow on my side of this goldfish bowl, and I'll salute on yours? Like that.

(MORE)

He demonstrates, leaning forward. If it looks for a second as if he's about to kiss her again, that must be only a coincidence, but at least they can look at each other now.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)

There. Isn't that more cozy...?

EXT. STRELSAU PALACE -- EVENING

The crowds gathered in front of the palace are CHEERING and WAVING: hands, flags, even hats. "The King" and the Princess are out on the balcony.

EXT. STRELSAU PALACE BALCONY -- CONTINUOUS

Rassendyll and Flavia WAVE back at the people. On impulse, he BOWS to her and KISSES her hand. The cheers increase.

RASSENDYLL

They seemed to like that.

After a final bow, they go into the withdrawing-room.

INT. STRELSAU PALACE WITHDRAWING-ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

FLAVIA

Bless them, they're with you heart and soul.

RASSENDYLL

Me? It was you they were cheering. I felt like cheering you too, when I first saw you.

Flavia seems uncomfortable with this new kindly King. She glances at the door, with important people beyond it.

FLAVIA

Everyone's waiting for us...

RASSENDYLL

Oh no, please don't go yet. It's such a relief to have you to myself for a moment. All day long I've been on parade: cheered at, waved at, stared at. Not a moment to tell you--

FLAVIA

Tell me what?

RASSENDYLL

Well... It's enough to turn any man's head a bit.

(MORE)

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)

I'm crowned King, I meet the
loveliest, the most beautiful woman--

FLAVIA

That isn't what you used to say.
You used to call me "that clumsy
little scarecrow."

RASSENDYLL

I did? I should have been
horsewhipped.

FLAVIA

Those were my very words. Once I
kicked you, quite hard.

RASSENDYLL

Good! I'm sure I deserved it. But
I hope you never find it necessary
to kick me again.

FLAVIA

You know, you've changed beyond
all recognition. It's almost
impossible to believe that anybody
could change so much -- and so
quickly.

RASSENDYLL

Well, it must be that you bring
out the best in people.

FLAVIA

No. You've become an entirely
different person.

(beat)

They're waiting for us. We really
must go.

During their conversation they've strolled to the open
door of the anteroom, where Sapt, Tarlenheim and various
dignitaries are indeed waiting. One of them is Michael,
who strides forward. Rassendyll sees him approach.

RASSENDYLL

Must we?

He shuts the door full in Michael's face.

INT. STRELSAU PALACE ANTEROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Michael stops abruptly as the door shuts and swings around,
all but grinding his teeth in fury.

INT. STRELSAU PALACE WITHDRAWING-ROOM-- CONTINUOUS

FLAVIA

Another thing I always wanted to know: is the world outside really as wicked and exciting as the novels make out? What did you do on those long trips? When you weren't drinking, I mean.

RASSENDYLL

Well, when I wasn't drinking, I used to go fishing.

FLAVIA

Fishing? You used to despise fishing!

RASSENDYLL

Well, I did... And I didn't, if you follow me. Have you ever done any trout-fishing?

FLAVIA

No -- and you know why!

RASSENDYLL

Oh? I do?

FLAVIA

I asked you to teach me, and you sent me home because I made too many mistakes and scared the fish.

Then Flavia turns serious.

FLAVIA (CONT'D)

But once you really hurt me. You've forgotten, haven't you?

RASSENDYLL

I wish you had, too.

FLAVIA

It was my fourteenth birthday party. I had my first formal dress. I thought I was quite grown-up. You were to be the guest of honor. I wanted to show you that the ugly duckling had become a swan.

RASSENDYLL

What did I do?

FLAVIA

At the end, when everyone had gone home and you still hadn't come...

(beat)

I hated you.

RASSENDYLL

I'm beginning to hate myself.

There's a KNOCK at the door.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)

Yes?

Fritz von Tarlenheim comes in and bows.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)

Well?

TARLENHEIM

His Highness Prince Michael is waiting to pay his respects to you, your Majesty.

RASSENDYLL

Well, let him wait.

(beat)

And furthermore, Captain von Tarlenheim, I find your intrusion excessively irregular.

Rassendyll gives Tarlenheim a swift WINK to take the sting from his rebuke, but Flavia doesn't see it.

FLAVIA

Rudolf, it's not wise to provoke Michael deliberately.

RASSENDYLL

Oh, why not? Why be worried about him?

FLAVIA

I'm not. I'm worried about you.

RASSENDYLL

That's a different matter altogether. We can't allow that. Will you excuse me...

(MORE)

He opens the door to reveal Michael standing irritably just outside it.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)

Ah, my dear Michael! I had no idea you'd been kept waiting.

(beat)

Why was I not informed of my brother's presence? I will not tolerate such inefficiency again, gentlemen!

Sapt and Tarlenheim gape in astonishment. Rassendyll ushers Michael inside, where he promptly kisses Flavia's hand.

MICHAEL

This is indeed a privilege worth being kept waiting for, cousin.

FLAVIA

It's most kind of you to say so, cousin.

RASSENDYLL

You know, brother, this was a day I'd really been dreading. I had a queer feeling that something might go wrong. But with you in charge, my fears were foolish, weren't they? I can hardly thank you enough for arranging my affairs.

MICHAEL

It's most gratifying to find your Majesty in such excellent spirits after the strain of the day.

RASSENDYLL

As a matter of fact, I've never felt so fit in my life. It must be the excitement. It's the first time I've ever been crowned, you know.

(beat)

That's rather funny... Don't you think so, brother?

MICHAEL

Very funny indeed.

RASSENDYLL

Yes... Then there's another reason I feel so well. I had an extraordinary native wine with my dinner last night. Soothed my nerves. Slept like a top.

(MORE)

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)

(beat)

This one comes from very near your castle. You really ought to try it sometime, if ever you're troubled with insomnia.

MICHAEL

I very seldom suffer with insomnia.

RASSENDYLL

Indeed? That shows what a very clear conscience you must have.

MICHAEL

I have. And I have yet to have a dream that did not come true, provided I waited long enough.

Flavia watches the exchange uneasily, aware that it's not as friendly as it sounds.

RASSENDYLL

Yes, of course. Everything comes to him who... Waits.

He pretends to yawn, full in Michael's face, daring him to take exception to the insult.

MICHAEL

I see I bore your Majesty. With your Majesty's permission, I bid you good night.

Michael bows abruptly and leaves the room. Flavia is next to Rassendyll at once.

FLAVIA

Rudolf, do be careful! You know how bitterly he hates you!

RASSENDYLL

Well, now he knows how bitterly I hate him!

FLAVIA

You still can't afford to make an open enemy of him. He'd stop at nothing, even now, to ruin you--

RASSENDYLL

You're overestimating him. Or perhaps you're underestimating me.

FLAVIA

Rudolf, if you won't think of yourself, think of me. All my life I've known what my future had to be, and I was resigned to it. But now... Now I don't have to tell you how different it is.

RASSENDYLL

Flavia, forgive me. I had no idea that you might... That I would...

FLAVIA

I only want you to realize how much your life means to... To your country.

RASSENDYLL

To my country?

FLAVIA

And to your friends...

RASSENDYLL

My friends?

FLAVIA

And to your cousin and most loving servant.

She offers "the King" a deep CURTSEY. Rassendyll takes her hands as she rises.

RASSENDYLL

What else matters...?

Rassendyll is hoping for some declaration of love rather than all this honor and respect, but doesn't get it. Flavia goes to the door.

FLAVIA

Good night, Rudolf.

RASSENDYLL

No, don't go! Not yet. Stay a little longer.

FLAVIA

But you'll be seeing me every day from now on. You may even get tired of me. Good night.

And she's gone, leaving Rassendyll all too aware that by tomorrow, he'll be gone too.

RASSENDYLL
No... Goodbye, Flavia.

INT. KING'S PRIVATE ROOMS -- LATER

Tarlenheim is sitting with his feet up when Rassendyll comes in.

TARLENHEIM
What a day for you to remember!
I'll never forget old Mueller at
the cathedral. He used to be the
King's tutor. He fixed his eye on
you and he never took it off. I
was certain the game was up --
until I realized that eye was his
glass one.
(beat)
By the way, Rassendyll, what were
you doing in there with the princess
all that time?
(beat)
Can't you even leave the King to
do his own love-making?

Sapt comes through the door in time to disapprove of such comments.

SAPT
That's enough of that! Are you
ready to go, Rassendyll? We must
leave at once if I'm to have his
Majesty back here by daylight.
(to Tarlenheim)
Remember, if anyone comes here to
see the King, you're to say he's
asleep.

TARLENHEIM
Yes, sir.

SAPT
And if it's Michael, and that
doesn't stop him...

TARLENHEIM
That would be awkward.

SAPT
So awkward that if that door is
forced, you're not to be alive to
tell about it.

TARLENHEIM
Do you think I would be, sir?

SAPT

Good lad!
(to Rassendyll)
Come on.

As Sapt helps Rassendyll with his coat, Tarlenheim comes forward to bid an awkward farewell.

TARLENHEIM

Er, Rassendyll... I'm not much good at speechmaking--

RASSENDYLL

We don't need one, do we?

TARLENHEIM

Well, you know what I mean.

RASSENDYLL

I think I do, old man.

SAPT

We have no time for sentiment!

RASSENDYLL

Well, in a few hours time I'll be plain Rudolf Rassendyll again.

SAPT

You'll be lucky if you're not the late Rudolf Rassendyll.

RASSENDYLL

There's a happy thought.

SAPT

I feel my head wobbling on my shoulders every minute you're in the city!

He presses a HIDDEN SWITCH, and a SECRET DOOR opens in the paneling of the wall. Rassendyll gives it a curious look.

SAPT (CONT'D)

In the old King's time, we used this more often than any other door in the palace. Saved many a royal head. And many a royal reputation... I--

Sapt looks as if he's about to relate some scandalous reminiscence, then catches himself before he starts.

SAPT (CONT'D)

Yes... Come on!

EXT. FOREST ROAD -- LATER

Sapt and Rassendyll gallop their horses through moonlight and shadows on the way to Zenda. They arrive at last outside the hunting lodge.

EXT. HUNTING LODGE -- CONTINUOUS

The lodge is in total darkness. Both men dismount and secure their horses.

SAPT

No lights, eh? That's odd.

INT. HUNTING LODGE -- MOMENTS LATER

Without light or fire, the room where they had dinner just the night before is dark and ominously silent. There's no sign of life.

SAPT

Josef. Josef!

Rassendyll LIGHTS several candles, but there's still nothing to see.

SAPT (CONT'D)

Josef!

Sapt looks about suspiciously, then grabs the CANDLESTICK and heads for the wine-cellar.

INT. CELLAR STAIRS -- CONTINUOUS

Her ROPES and GAG lie on the floor, but the drugged, tied-up Frau Holf isn't there any more -- and the cellar door is locked. Rassendyll rattles the handle and slams his shoulder against the wood, to no effect.

SAPT

Stop. Here, take this.

He hands Rassendyll the candlestick, draws his REVOLVER and shoots out the lock.

INT. WINE CELLAR -- CONTINUOUS

The body on the table looks much as Sapt left it this morning. But now it's Josef, and the blood on his shirt shows he's not drugged but dead.

SAPT

The King!

RASSENDYLL

Look!

Rassendyll finds a NOTE pinned to Josef's body.

CLOSE UP of the note:

One King is enough for any kingdom.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)

Kidnapped!

SAPT

Or murdered...

INT. HUNTING LODGE -- LATER

Sapt and Rassendyll are sitting at the table, trying to work out the details of what happened and who did it.

RASSENDYLL

...And Michael's been in Strelsau all day. Still is.

SAPT

Yes, but that young devil Hentzau isn't! I wondered why I hadn't seen him all day.

RASSENDYLL

Well, that settles it. Now they know everything.

SAPT

Yes, they know everything. But they can't speak. They can't denounce us without denouncing themselves. Can they say "that wasn't the King, because we kidnapped the King and murdered his servant." Can they say that?

RASSENDYLL

No, but that won't prevent them from murdering the King.

SAPT

With you in Strelsau, they won't dare. If they do, they're finished. Can they kill him and leave you on the throne?

Rassendyll can see where this is leading.

RASSENDYLL

No! You're asking too much. No man could carry on this masquerade indefinitely! I've done everything I can to help, but...

SAPT

Yes, I suppose you're right. You've done everything that could be expected. More than could be expected. It's just that Rudolf is my King. I have a feeling about the crown. I suppose I feel about it as another man might feel about... The woman he loved.

That jab is aimed straight at Rassendyll, and it hits home.

SAPT (CONT'D)

He wouldn't like to leave her to her fate without even a fight.

RASSENDYLL

What will happen to her... Now?

SAPT

Who? The Princess Flavia.

RASSENDYLL

Yes.

SAPT

If the King has been murdered, Michael as Regent will proclaim her queen, and then... Marry her.

RASSENDYLL

She'd never submit to that!

SAPT

Flavia's a princess of the Royal House. She'd have no choice. She would expect none.

RASSENDYLL

And will you stand by and let that happen to her?

SAPT

Will you?

INSERT -- AN INVITATION CARD

His Majesty the King commands the attendance of Her Royal Highness the Princess Flavia at a State Ball in honor of

his Majesty's Coronation. In the Royal Palace, Strelsau, June the ninth 1897 at nine o'clock. Von Hennitz, Lord High Chamberlain. Orders and Decorations.

Rassendyll's hand, holding a pen, crosses out "His Majesty the King commands" and replaces it with "Rudolf begs and implores" -- then adds at the bottom, "If you don't give me the first waltz, I'll cancel the ball. R."

INT. BALLROOM -- EVENING

A MAJOR-DOMO thumps his staff of office on the floor.

MAJOR-DOMO

His Majesty the King!

As the National Anthem plays, Rassendyll and Flavia walk down the grand staircase into the ballroom. It's filled with important people in ball-gowns, uniforms and diplomatic full dress, who bow and curtsy as "The King" goes by. The COMMISSAIRE comes forward and bows a greeting.

COMMISSAIRE

Your Majesty.

Rassendyll has no idea who he is, but plays along.

RASSENDYLL

I'm delighted to see you.

Flavia whispers behind her fan, telling Rassendyll what to do next. He signals to the MASTER OF CEREMONIES on the stairs.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

*Avec la permission de sa Majesté,
le bal commence! Valse générale!*

And everyone starts dancing. The orchestra conductor, a fussy little man, gets into the swing of things. Various new arrivals saunter down the stairs, joining the glittering scene. Rassendyll and Flavia are the center of attention -- even from Michael, who stands glowering off to one side.

FLAVIA

Rudolf, are you worried about something?

RASSENDYLL

Worried? With you in my arms? I was just thinking there'll never be another night quite like this, or another waltz quite like this.

FLAVIA
I'll never forget tonight as long
as I live, if that's what you mean.

RASSENDYLL
Nor will I.

They dance some more, then Rassendyll has a question.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)
Do you have to dance with anybody
else tonight, Flavia?

FLAVIA
I dance only as my King commands.

RASSENDYLL
Then your King commands that--

He stops dancing to talk to her, and everything else stops
too: the other dancers, the music, even the conversation.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)
Why do they all stop?

FLAVIA
You know the rule: because we do.

RASSENDYLL
And you mean that if we start,
they'll go on?

FLAVIA
Of course!

They start dancing again, and the ball resumes.

RASSENDYLL
If we go out on the terrace, will
they all come trooping out after
us?

FLAVIA
Of course not!

RASSENDYLL
Well then--

He stops, and of course everything else stops too.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)
--let's go out on the terrace.

FLAVIA
Not now.

RASSENDYLL

Later?

FLAVIA

Later.

They start, and everything starts, although the conductor is starting to look flustered.

FLAVIA (CONT'D)

That is, if we can slip away.

Rassendyll stops. Everything stops.

RASSENDYLL

Oh no. I want that promise.

Everyone is staring, confused but amused.

FLAVIA

Come, we must dance!

RASSENDYLL

Not a step until I get that promise.

FLAVIA

I promise.

And off they waltz again, with the conductor fit to burst.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BALLROOM, STRELSAU -- LATER

"The King" and Flavia are meeting-and-greeting when Sapt gives him some awkward news about who's next.

SAPT

The British Ambassador, newly appointed. Do you know him?

RASSENDYLL

Yes!

SAPT

Let us trust in Providence.

RASSENDYLL

You'll never get Providence interested in this enterprise!

The AMBASSADOR and his wife LADY TOPHAM arrive, escorted by the Chamberlain.

CHAMBERLAIN

Your Majesty, your Royal Highness:
his Excellency the British
Ambassador and Lady Topham.

RASSENDYLL

Your Excellencies.

The Ambassador straightens from his bow and gives Rassendyll a look that's almost, but not quite, recognition. Rassendyll covers by putting on his monocle and trying to appear as foreign as possible. It works, because the Ambassador's dubious expression clears.

AMBASSADOR

Your Majesty, Her Britannic Majesty
the Queen-Empress commands me to
convey her felicitations on your
Coronation.

RASSENDYLL

Be pleased to convey our thanks to
her Majesty. You may also add our
felicitations on her Jubilee.

AMBASSADOR

Your Majesty.
(beat)
Would it be premature to
congratulate you upon your Majesty's
approaching wedding?

RASSENDYLL

Well... Yes, it might be.

Flavia gives him a sharp look at that one.

FLAVIA

Rudolf, we should pay our respects
to his Eminence the Cardinal.

As they move away, the Ambassador and his wife gaze after him with interest.

AMBASSADOR

Amazing resemblance to the younger
Rassendyll.

LADY TOPHAM

Not the slightest.

The CARDINAL is a dignified old gentleman in scarlet and black ecclesiastical regalia.

RASSENDYLL

Your Eminence has greatly honored us tonight.

CARDINAL

Your Majesty's subjects already love their King. I think they're impatient to love their Queen as well.

FLAVIA

I'm grateful for the interest of the people, and of your Eminence.

CARDINAL

Graciously answered. And now: the preparations for the ceremony, of necessity, are going to be many and elaborate. Would it please your Majesty to name the day?

RASSENDYLL

Now? Tonight?

CARDINAL

It was understood that the ceremony would shortly follow the coronation.

RASSENDYLL

Well, shall we say in... Six months time?

The Cardinal is surprised; Flavia is shocked and insulted.

CARDINAL

So long a postponement?

RASSENDYLL

Your Eminence, there's an old proverb which counsels us against crossing bridges before we come to them.

CARDINAL

If your Majesty would examine that proverb, I think you would find it very difficult to cross a bridge at any other time.

RASSENDYLL

Well, I'm sure my cousin will understand...

FLAVIA

Your cousin begs leave to bid your
Majesty -- and your Eminence --
good night.

CARDINAL

Good night, my child.

RASSENDYLL

If you will excuse us--

He goes after Flavia, aware how offended she is.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)

Flavia... You promised to go out
on the terrace with me.

FLAVIA

Is that a command, your Majesty?

RASSENDYLL

That's a command. But a very humble
one.

Rassendyll and Flavia walk out onto the terrace, then down
to the garden. Sapt stands in the ballroom doorway and
watches from a distance.

FLAVIA

Why did you ask me out here?

RASSENDYLL

I couldn't let you go home while
you were still angry with me.

FLAVIA

I'm sure you have excellent reasons
for what you said.

RASSENDYLL

Believe me, I have. There are times
when a man might find it impossible
to do even what his heart prompts
him to do. But I never could
willingly do anything to hurt you.

FLAVIA

How can I believe you when I don't
even understand you?

RASSENDYLL

Then will you believe this without
understanding? I love you.

FLAVIA

Is it true? Or do you say that
because you must?

RASSENDYLL

I love you more than truth or life --
or honor.

He KISSES her enthusiastically.

FLAVIA

Tell me, Rudolf -- why is it I
love you now with all my heart,
when I never even liked you before?

RASSENDYLL

Never before?

FLAVIA

It was at the coronation. I looked
at you and--

RASSENDYLL

And that was the first time you
loved me?

FLAVIA

You ask that as if you'd be pleased
to hear me say "Yes".

RASSENDYLL

Would "Yes" be true?

FLAVIA

Yes.

They kiss again.

FLAVIA (CONT'D)

You seem so different. I wanted
you to be different from the Rudolf
I knew, from the Rudolf I didn't
love, and you are. And you aren't.

RASSENDYLL

Flavia... If I were different, if
I were not the King...

FLAVIA

Why do you say that?

RASSENDYLL

Could you still love me if I were
not the King?

FLAVIA

In my heart there is no King, no
crown... Only you.

Rassendyll realizes that if there's a time to tell Flavia
the truth about himself and the King, that time is now.

RASSENDYLL

Flavia... I am not--

SAPT (O.S.)

Your Majesty!

With this interruption the moment for Rassendyll's
confession is lost, just as Sapt intended. He bows in
pretended apology.

SAPT (CONT'D)

A thousand pardons, your Majesty.
His Eminence the Cardinal is waiting
to take his leave.

RASSENDYLL

We must not keep his Eminence
waiting.

FLAVIA

Is something wrong, Colonel Sapt?

SAPT

Nothing, your Highness. It is always
my unpleasant task to be the
reminder of duty.

That remark is aimed straight at Rassendyll, but Flavia
doesn't notice it.

FLAVIA

Faithful Colonel Sapt!

SAPT

God bless your Royal Highness. But
above all -- God save the King!

He's not referring to "the King" that Flavia thinks he
means.

FLAVIA

God save the King...

She curtsies, then plucks a rose from a nearby bush and
places it in Rassendyll's hand as a keepsake of the evening.

INT. KING'S PRIVATE ROOMS -- LATER

MATCH CUT: the rose is still in Rassendyll's hand.

SAPT (O.S.)

The romance progressed very well tonight. You struck a good blow for the King!

RASSENDYLL

What's to prevent me striking a blow for myself?

SAPT

Don't take it so, lad. You're bound in honor to play the King's part for him.

RASSENDYLL

Honor? Have you left me any honor?

SAPT

Come, come--

RASSENDYLL

You forgot the human element, didn't you? I'm a man in love with a woman who loves me! You saw, tonight? You heard?

SAPT

I did.

RASSENDYLL

Then why should I ever leave the throne? Could you expose me? If you did, you'd get Michael in my place! I could marry the Princess and send the King and Michael to--

SAPT

If you did that, you'd have to kill me first.

RASSENDYLL

Well, and if I did? I could raise all Strelsau against you in an hour!

SAPT

You could do that -- but you wouldn't.

RASSENDYLL

Then find the King! Find him --
before it's too late...!

INT. MICHAEL'S OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

HENTZAU

Odd, a man not knowing his own
brother. But I assure you, they're
enough alike to be twins.

MICHAEL

You're trying to tell me the man I
saw crowned is an impostor?

HENTZAU

Not your type of fiction I see,
your Highness. Too incredible? But
still, these things do happen. I
knew twin sisters once who... But
that's another story.

(beat)

I see your Highness isn't
interested. Shall I go to market
elsewhere?

MICHAEL

If what you say is true, why hasn't
the King been heard from? Where is
he?

HENTZAU

He's in a woodcutter's cabin. Oh,
and by the way, royal blood is not
blue as most people think. It's
red. I know, because I had to spill
a little.

MICHAEL

You've abducted him!

HENTZAU

It's an old medieval custom,
abducting kings.

MICHAEL

Rupert, only you could have carried
out a coup like that! What have
you done with him?

The two conspirators settle down in easy chairs in front
of the huge fireplace to haggle over what happens next.

HENTZAU

Well, there's something we haven't discussed. In fact it's the same old topic--

MICHAEL

In a cabin, you say? But where, man? Where?

HENTZAU

Now why do people abduct kings? For fun, your Highness? Surely there's always the little matter of the King's ransom?

MICHAEL

You can be the first man in the kingdom -- after the King.

HENTZAU

How much down on account?

MICHAEL

Ten thousand.

HENTZAU

That's a poor price for a King -- and a crown.

MICHAEL

Twenty.

HENTZAU

Well, it's too cheap, but I will admit he's a bit of a nuisance, always whining about being chained up...

MICHAEL

How badly did you wound him?

HENTZAU

Not fatally, I'm afraid. But the cabin is very damp, your Highness. He could easily develop... Pneumonia?

It's clear that the King could develop not just pneumonia, but whatever fatal illness becomes necessary.

MICHAEL

And let the Englishman reign for the rest of his life? Could we ever expose him?

HENTZAU

That hadn't occurred to me.

MICHAEL

But if the Englishman died first,
and was buried in the cathedral as
the King...

HENTZAU

There are moments in your presence,
your Highness, when I feel myself
an amateur.

MICHAEL

This fraud is an insult to the
whole country.

HENTZAU

Your Highness shows me the path of
duty. It is the simple duty of a
patriot to kill him like a dog.

MICHAEL

There are times, Rupert, when we
need the ladies. Even in matters
of state. I'm about to ask a great
service of you -- and of
Antoinette...

INSERT -- AN ENVELOPE

*Rudolf Rassendyll, c/o Captain Fritz von Tarlenheim. Deliver
instantly.*

INT. KING'S BEDROOM -- LATER

Rassendyll is in bed, but sits up to take the ENVELOPE
from Tarlenheim. He reads the name again; not one he'd
been expecting to see.

RASSENDYLL

Rudolf Rassendyll...? Couldn't be
a bill from my tailor, I suppose?

He opens the envelope and READS the LETTER inside.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)

(reading)

"If Mr Rassendyll desires to know
the whereabouts of the King, let
him come tonight at two o'clock to
the deserted summerhouse behind
the wall on Boulevard Elphberg. He
must be alone.

(MORE)

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)

If he neglects this invitation he
may harm the Princess Flavia."

TARLENHEIM

Obviously a trick of Michael's.
They must take you for a fool.

RASSENDYLL

Wait a minute, there's a bit more.
(reading)

"If you hesitate, consult Captain
von Tarlenheim."

TARLENHEIM

They must take me for an even bigger
fool!

RASSENDYLL

(reading)

"Ask him what woman would do most
to prevent Michael from marrying
the Princess Flavia, and therefore
most to prevent his becoming King --
and ask if her name begins with
'A'?"

TARLENHEIM

"A"...?

(beat)

Antoinette de Mauban! A Frenchwoman:
madly in love with Michael. Of
course! She'll lose him if--

RASSENDYLL

Where is is the Boulevard Elphberg?

TARLENHEIM

Are you going?

RASSENDYLL

I am.

TARLENHEIM

Not without me!

RASSENDYLL

Good man! But no Colonel Sapt.
He'd have fourteen different reasons
why we shouldn't go, and all of
them good ones.

(beat)

Well, if the Colonel can't get
news of the King, we'll get it for
him!

EXT. GARDEN WALL -- NIGHT

The wall's about ten feet high, but its GATE is conveniently ajar. Too conveniently. Rassendyll waves Tarlenheim away from it and they move further down, where he CLIMBS a tree next to the wall. At the top, he can see that there is indeed a summerhouse. He signals Tarlenheim to stay where he is, then drops down into the garden.

EXT. GARDEN -- CONTINUOUS

Rassendyll prowls through the overgrown garden, then ducks under cover and draws his revolver as the summerhouse door creaks open. After a few seconds he moves cautiously inside.

INT. SUMMERHOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Antoinette is there: she shuts the door behind him.

ANTOINETTE

You know this is a trap, don't you? Three men are coming here to kill you.

RASSENDYLL

Where's the King?

ANTOINETTE

Before I tell you, I must have your word: no harm to Michael.

RASSENDYLL

Why do you betray him in one breath, and then plead for his life in the next?

ANTOINETTE

Think what you like. Think that I just don't like a murder. Think that I'm just a jealous woman. Have I your word?

RASSENDYLL

Yes, as much as I can give it. If you tell the truth.

ANTOINETTE

They're moving the King tonight. From a hut in the forest to Michael's castle near Zenda.

RASSENDYLL

That's what I wanted to know!

ANTOINETTE

Wait! If the castle is attacked,
the King will be killed instantly.
No trace of his body will be found.

RASSENDYLL

Charming character, your friend
Michael.

ANTOINETTE

Do you want my help or don't you?

RASSENDYLL

Yes!! How do we rescue the King?

ANTOINETTE

Leave that to me. You must have
his friends at hand, at his hunting-
lodge, on some excuse or other.
Boar-hunting, perhaps. As soon as
I can arrange an escape, I'll get
word to you.

RASSENDYLL

How will I know it isn't another
trap of Michael's?

She removes one of her EARRINGS and gives it to him.

ANTOINETTE

The man I send you will have the
mate to this. Now go, and go
quickly.

RASSENDYLL

And you?

ANTOINETTE

If Michael finds out what I have
done, you and I will not meet again.

RASSENDYLL

Good luck -- in everything.

ANTOINETTE

And to you... With the Princess.

Suddenly a fist POUNDS on the door.

ANTOINETTE (CONT'D)

They've come! They're too soon!

HENTZAU (O.S.)

Mr Rassendyll?

(MORE)

HENTZAU (O.S.) (CONT'D)

(beat)

Mr Rassendyll, forgive me if I interrupt you at an inopportune moment--

EXT. SUMMERHOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Hentzau and his henchmen KRAFSTEIN and BERSONIN are outside the door, REVOLVERS drawn and ready.

HENTZAU

--But I'd like a friendly word with you. I'm alone and unarmed.

INT. SUMMERHOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

ANTOINETTE

It's Rupert of Hentzau! Don't trust him!

RASSENDYLL

We can talk with the door between us, Count Hentzau.

HENTZAU (O.S.)

Will you give me your word not to fire while we talk?

RASSENDYLL

I give you my word not to fire before you do, but say what you have to say from where you are.

EXT. SUMMERHOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

HENTZAU

As you please. A truce, while I offer peace terms. Fifty thousand pounds in English notes, and safe conduct to the frontier.

INT. SUMMERHOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Rassendyll doesn't believe any of this blarney for a minute.

RASSENDYLL

That sounds fair enough.

HENTZAU (O.S.)

Well, do you accept?

RASSENDYLL

Give me a moment to think it over.

(MORE)

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)
(to Antoinette)
Get out of the line of fire.

He looks around the dim interior of the summerhouse, spies an OPENING where part of the roof has caved in, holsters his gun and climbs up onto a small tea-table under the hole.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)
Count Hentzau!

HENTZAU (O.S.)
Your Majesty?

RASSENDYLL
I hold you to your word, and accept your offer.

EXT. SUMMERHOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

HENTZAU
Congratulations! The money's in my pocket and there's a good horse waiting for you. Come out.

INT. SUMMERHOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

Rassendyll is halfway out through the hole in the roof.

RASSENDYLL
I prefer you to come in. It's less public. Do you mind?

HENTZAU (O.S.)
Open the door.

EXT. SUMMERHOUSE -- CONTINUOUS

KRAFSTEIN
Careful! He'll shoot first!

HENTZAU
What, after he's given his word?
In England, that simply isn't done!
(beat)
Open it.

Krafstein shakes his head.

HENTZAU (CONT'D)
What, when we're three against one? All right, I'll open it myself!

He SHOULDER-CHARGES the door open and all three charge into the summerhouse -- just in time to see Rassendyll escape to the roof. They FIRE at him but miss, and when Bersonin leans out of a window, Rassendyll DROPS a fallen branch on his head. Then he leaps from the roof, breaks his fall by landing in a whippy SAPLING, SPRINTS across the garden and LEAPS up to grab a handy tree-branch.

None of the shots sent after him come close, because Tarlenheim throws open the gate and gives covering fire, forcing the Bad Guys to take cover in the summerhouse.

Rassendyll SWINGS himself up over the wall, DROPS down outside the garden and signals to Tarlenheim.

RASSENDYLL

Fritz!

They hurry off into the night.

INSERT -- COURT ANNOUNCEMENT

Court of Strelsau. By order of his Majesty the King, all engagements are canceled. His Majesty is leaving at once for the hunting-lodge at Zenda. Von Hennitz, Lord High Chamberlain.

INT. STRELSAU PALACE WITHDRAWING-ROOM -- DAY

Rassendyll is in uniform and greatcoat, ready for the hunting-lodge, but Flavia is in riding-costume, ready for a canter in the park. She's not in a good temper.

FLAVIA

I regret that we have failed to keep your Majesty sufficiently amused here in Strelsau. I would have suggested a much more varied program than just riding with me, only I was foolish enough to believe that...

RASSENDYLL

To believe what?

FLAVIA

To believe you were serious when you told me you preferred my company to the Court's. I should have known better. But I'm sure after a really exciting boar-hunt, you will be your old self again.

RASSENDYLL

Are you angry with me?

FLAVIA

What right have I to be angry?
Last night you made me feel that
every hour away from me was wasted --
but boar-hunting? That's quite a
different matter!

RASSENDYLL

Do you think I want to go?

FLAVIA

Of course you don't! Your first
duty is to the boars! They would
never forgive you if you didn't
hunt them and kill them...

She starts to break down in tears.

RASSENDYLL

Perhaps the boars will hunt me.
They might even kill me. Doesn't
the thought of my danger touch
you?

(beat)

Or do you weep for my danger?

FLAVIA

This is like you used to be... But
not like the King I've come to
love!

RASSENDYLL

My darling, do you really think
that I would leave you to go
hunting?

FLAVIA

Then you're not going?

RASSENDYLL

I'm not going hunting. That is,
not just for boar.

FLAVIA

Then what...?

(beat)

Rudolf -- it's Michael!

RASSENDYLL

Indirectly.

FLAVIA

Darling, you mustn't go!

RASSENDYLL

My sweet, shall I tell them that I can't go because you and I have an engagement to go riding?

FLAVIA

I won't let you go! Send someone else!

RASSENDYLL

What kind of a King would do that?

FLAVIA

But... I don't understand why...

RASSENDYLL

And I can't tell you -- now. But I will tell you, the moment I can. You believe that, don't you?

FLAVIA

Yes... Of course I do. Forgive me, Rudolf. I've behaved like a spoiled child. You see, I've never been in love before.

RASSENDYLL

Oh, my darling.

He holds her, looks at her, KISSES her.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)

I really must go. Stay here. Let me go alone.

(beat)

No -- don't turn. If I see your eyes, I might forget to be a King.

This is goodbye. Whatever happens, it's probably the last time he'll ever see her. He walks quickly to the door and OPENS it. She reacts to the sound.

FLAVIA

Rudolf... Come back to me soon.

RASSENDYLL

Shan't a man come back to the loveliest woman in all the world? A thousand Michaels couldn't keep me from you.

(beat)

But if I shouldn't, you'd never forget me?

FLAVIA

Never!

RASSENDYLL

You'd be a brave queen, and do your part?

FLAVIA

Though my life be empty and my heart dead.

RASSENDYLL

You would do your part.

He leaves the room at last, and the door closes behind him with a CLICK of utter finality. Knowing it's too late to see him, knowing he's gone, Flavia still turns at last.

FLAVIA

Rudolf...

EXT. HUNTING LODGE -- AFTERNOON

Rupert of Hentzau rides his horse towards the lodge, where he's met by the GUARDS with leveled REVOLVERS. He eyes them and the guns with equal scorn.

HENTZAU

Put away those popguns and take me to the King.

INT. HUNTING LODGE -- CONTINUOUS

RASSENDYLL

Well, the man's got courage, you must grant him that.

SAPT

I'll grant him six feet of earth when the time comes.

Tarlenheim reaches for the revolver at his own belt.

TARLENHEIM

No time like the present!

A GUARD comes in.

GUARD 1

Your Majesty -- Count Hentzau, with a message from the Duke of Strelsau.

SAPT

Tell him his Majesty is indisposed.

RASSENDYLL

No, wait a minute. Let's hear what he has to say. Send him in!

SAPT

Disarm him first!

When the guard opens the lodge door again, Hentzau is lounging in the doorway. He hands over his REVOLVER as if it was a gift, then SAUNTERS inside as though he owns the place.

HENTZAU

Ah, the play-actor in person!

SAPT

Hentzau!

Hentzau give Rassendyll a mocking -- but precise -- salute.

HENTZAU

Your Majesty!

(beat)

I bring you

your...brother's...humble greeting,
and his hope that you enjoy the
boar-hunting here in Zenda.

(beat)

And his respects, of course, to
your two principal bores.

Sapt and Tarlenheim say nothing.

RASSENDYLL

Well, what price the crown today?
The last offer was fifty thousand
pounds. Do I hear perhaps fifty-
two thousand?

HENTZAU

You'll hear a much better offer
than that.

(beat)

In private.

Rassendyll indicates one of the lodge's big bay-windows off to one side. The window is OPEN because of the fine day.

RASSENDYLL

Before we go any further, I must
tell you that I'm prepared to give
you a chance to escape your
thoroughly well-deserved end, on

(MORE)

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)
the condition that you yourself
return the...Prisoner of Zenda...to
me. Alive.

HENTZAU
Really, Mr Rassendyll. Do you
seriously expect me to believe
that you of all people want the
King back? You insult my
intelligence.

RASSENDYLL
I see. Well then, you've come a
very long way for nothing.

HENTZAU
I hope not, for Michael's sake.

RASSENDYLL
Oh... You've brought another of
his generous ultimatums?

HENTZAU
I have. He doubles his offer. A
hundred thousand pounds.

Rassendyll smiles, then starts laughing. Hentzau joins in.

HENTZAU (CONT'D)
I thought it would amuse you. The
fact is -- between ourselves --
Michael doesn't understand a
gentleman.

RASSENDYLL
You and I, we do, don't we?

HENTZAU
Rassendyll, you're a man after my
own heart. Frankly, you and I are
the only two people worth saving
in this whole affair. Now aren't
we?
(beat)
This is my plan for us: now listen.
Attack the castle boldly. Let
your...friends ride at the head.
There's bound to be a little rifle-
play at first.

RASSENDYLL
Oh, unavoidable.

HENTZAU

Arrange the time with me--

RASSENDYLL

I have such confidence in you, of course.

HENTZAU

Michael will fall. The King will already have moved on to a happier life in the next world. And your friends: if they fall too, you and I -- I, Rupert of Hentzau and you, King of the realm -- will be the only two left who know the truth.

Rassendyll pretends to consider the scheme, stringing Hentzau along to hear how far he'll take his treachery.

RASSENDYLL

Don't you think we're being perhaps just a little drastic with Michael?

HENTZAU

Perhaps a little. But I make it a point never to trust a jealous man. Don't you?

RASSENDYLL

Michael, jealous?

HENTZAU

You know the lady, I think.

RASSENDYLL

Oh, in the summerhouse? Yes! But surely no woman in her right senses would prefer the Duke to you?

HENTZAU

Women are never in their right sense...thank goodness!

RASSENDYLL

So you're doing all this for love? How romantic.

HENTZAU

Well, love -- and your Majesty's gratitude throughout your long and happy reign. And then, of course, you might turn over to me Michael's castles and estates.

RASSENDYLL

Oh yes, of course. We mustn't lose sight of those. You never know whose hands they might fall into.

HENTZAU

Look what I offer you! The throne -- and the Princess. You were planning on them anyway, but this way it's sure.

(beat)

Shall we shake hands on it?

Shaking hands with this murderous traitor is the last thing Rassendyll intends to do. He's let the joke go on for long enough, but now he's had enough of Hentzau. Instead of laughing with the man, he laughs at him.

RASSENDYLL

Hey, Sapt, Fritz! Listen to this! Count Hentzau offers me the throne. That is, if you two don't mind being killed--

Hentzau glowers, furious that Rassendyll has been treating him like a fool all this time. He slides a hidden DAGGER from his tunic sleeve.

HENTZAU

Their turn comes later, play-actor! Yours comes now!

He HURLS the dagger, and barely misses Rassendyll's head. The blade slams into one of the lodge's wooden pillars and almost nails his hand to it.

SAPT

Guards! Stop that man!

Hentzau leaps through the open bay-window, VAULTS onto his horse and gallops away. None of the SHOTS fired after him even come close.

Shaken by the sudden attack and his narrow escape, Rassendyll TUGS the deeply embedded dagger from the pillar. He looks at its wicked point and shudders.

EXT. NEAR ZENDA CASTLE -- LATER

Hentzau canters along the road towards a grim-looking fortress, connected to the mainland by a short causeway and a drawbridge. It's not an attractive place.

INT. ZENDA CASTLE GUARDROOM -- LATER

Deep in the bowels of the castle, there are low ceilings, massive pillars and oppressive stonework. Anyone kept as a prisoner will be aware of how close their confinement can be. Hentzau pays no attention to the brooding atmosphere. He crunches on an APPLE and ambles over to the table where Krafstein and Bersonin are PLAYING CARDS, and takes a look over Krafstein's shoulder.

HENTZAU

Play the Queen, you blockhead.

Krafstein does so and wins the stake, but Hentzau has already gone to the heavy door of a dungeon cell and pushed it open. Inside, Antoinette is tending to the injured, feverish King.

INT. ZENDA CASTLE DUNGEON -- CONTINUOUS

HENTZAU

Ah! Florence Nightingale!

It's just sarcasm, and Antoinette knows it. She also knows that she doesn't want to be alone in the cell with Hentzau when there's only the sick King as a possible protector.

HENTZAU (CONT'D)

"Oh woman, in our hours of ease,
uncertain, coy and hard to please.
When pain and anguish wring the
brow, a ministering angel thou!"

Hentzau watches with amusement as she hurries to leave, then turns his attention to the King. Rudolf is a sick man, unshaven, unwashed and chained to the wall. He needs better care than Antoinette can provide.

KING

Could I have some water...?

Hentzau goes to a TRAP-DOOR in the floor, OPENS it and leans the LID against the wall.

HENTZAU

You'll find plenty of water down
here, sire.

The King struggles to sit up far enough that he can see what Hentzau is talking about.

HENTZAU (CONT'D)

So even a King can be curious, I
see.

(MORE)

Once the King can see what's happening, Hentzau drops his half-eaten apple down the trap. There's the scary delay of a long drop before it SPLASHES into water far below.

HENTZAU (CONT'D)

Now, Jacob's Ladder went up into the sky, didn't it? Well, this goes down into the moat, but it serves the same purpose. Because if this castle is attacked, there are always two of us in the guardroom, just up those steps, ready to shove you down Jacob's Ladder. Properly weighted, of course.

Trying to conceal his horror, the King lies back down again.

KING

I'd like... To be left alone, if your orders permit.

HENTZAU

The audience is ended, your Majesty? Very well, sire -- try to get some sleep.

(beat)

And may you dream of Jacob's Ladder, with Paradise at the end of it!

He kicks the lid shut with an echoing CRASH and strolls away.

INT. ZENDA CASTLE GUARDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Michael's approaching the dungeon just as Hentzau leaves it. As they pass one another, Hentzau pauses, grinning.

HENTZAU

Oh! I've just done my best to make his Majesty more... Receptive.

MICHAEL

All right.

He goes into the cell.

INT. ZENDA CASTLE DUNGEON -- CONTINUOUS

Michael walks over to the King and bows.

MICHAEL

Your Majesty.

KING

What do you expect to gain by this except death?

MICHAEL

Your admission that now, your senses restored, you have come to realize that the people would never accept a King with your, shall we say all-too-human failings.

He takes a folded PARCHMENT from the pocket of his greatcoat.

KING

What's that?

MICHAEL

Your abdication. As soon as you have signed this, a comfortable bed is yours, and the best of care until you're strong enough to cross the frontier.

The King tries without much success to assume a more regal posture than flat on his back, and stares at Michael with all the dignity he can muster.

KING

I haven't lived like a King, but perhaps I can die like one, and not disgrace the crown I never wore.

INT. HUNTING LODGE -- EVENING

Rassendyll, Sapt and Tarlenheim are waiting to hear from Antoinette. Another GUARD enters and salutes.

GUARD 2

A man is here who insists he has a personal message for his Majesty. He says he's one of the Duke's men, sir.

SAPT

Have you searched him thoroughly?

GUARD 2

Certainly, sir.

SAPT

Send him in.

TARLENHEIM
If only this is from--

SAPT
Quiet!

JOHANN, an inoffensive-looking 50-something man in senior servant's uniform, comes in.

SAPT (CONT'D)
What is it you want?

JOHANN
I have a message for...

He holds up Antoinette's second EARRING, and Rassendyll takes it.

HOLD ON the earring.

JOHANN (V.O.) (CONT'D)
I am to tell you that a troop of
the Duke's hussars arrives tomorrow.
If there is to be a rescue, it
must be tonight.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HUNTING LODGE -- MOMENTS LATER

CLOSE ON a PLAN OF ZENDA CASTLE

Josef points out various features.

JOHANN (O.S.)
You may count on me, sir.

Sapt, Rassendyll and Tarlenheim lean over the plan as Johann points out relevant features.

JOHANN (CONT'D)
I am to lower the drawbridge at
two hours past midnight--

RASSENDYLL
But the noise? You say the King
will be killed at the first alarm!

JOHANN
That is correct. Madame says, before
the bridge can go down one of your
men must swim the moat, and climb
to her room.

RASSENDYLL

Well?

JOHANN

Alone, one man might reach the
dungeon. That man, alone, must
hold off the guards from murder
until the others can cross the
drawbridge and get below.

SAPT

Always two guards on the prisoner,
you say?

JOHANN

Two by day and two by night, sir.

RASSENDYLL

Any other men who can fight?

JOHANN

Only his Highness and Count Rupert
tonight.

RASSENDYLL

Three against six. Well
(beat)

Tell Madame that we'll be on the
shore at two o'clock, waiting for
her signal. Then I will swim the
moat. The others will wait until
you lower the bridge.

Rassendyll shakes Johann's hand.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)

Good luck!

Johann leaves, and the objections begin.

TARLENHEIM

Why three against six? Surely we
can take our men?

RASSENDYLL

We don't dare, if the secret's to
be kept.

SAPT

No. The odds are too great. We
must have help at hand if we need
it. Tell them to come.

TARLENHEIM

Well, I think I should be the one
to swim that moat.

SAPT

Right, lad. We can't afford to
lose both our kings.

RASSENDYLL

You'll lose one King tonight
whatever takes place. If anything
should happen to him and not to
me, your game's up anyway. I've
been an impostor for your sake --
I'll not be one for my own. No,
Fritz: I swim that moat.

SAPT

If we do lose you both, what's to
become of those of us who are left?

RASSENDYLL

They'll serve Queen Flavia. I would
to God I could be one of them...

EXT. NEAR ZENDA CASTLE -- NIGHT

A column of Royal guards moves quietly along the same road
that Hentzau traveled earlier until Rassendyll, Sapt and
Tarlenheim halt and dismount. The three proceed cautiously
on foot in the thick undergrowth along the shore.

EXT. ZENDA CASTLE -- MOMENTS LATER

They study the castle from cover at the edge of the moat,
and Tarlenheim checks his POCKET-WATCH.

INSERT: THE WATCH

It's two o'clock exactly.

A few seconds later there's a moving light at one of the
windows as Antoinette signals with a CANDLE.

Rassendyll takes off his cap and greatcoat; beneath it
he's wearing dark boots, breeches and shirt, with a DAGGER
at his hip. Sapt and Tarlenheim help him SLIDE down the
stone-faced banking of the moat. Once in the water he starts
to SWIM across to the castle.

Suddenly another window in the castle opens. It's Hentzau,
peering suspiciously out at the night. Rassendyll ducks
under the water, but after a few seconds Hentzau shuts his
window again and Rassendyll surfaces to finish his swim.

At the castle, he climbs the rough masonry of the wall. Once he's high enough, Antoinette and Johann reach out and help him the rest of the way.

INT. ANTOINETTE'S ROOM -- MOMENTS LATER

With a towel around his neck, Rassendyll warms himself at the fire.

ANTOINETTE

Go now. Give Mr Rassendyll time to hide in the passage, then open the great doors and let down the bridge.

JOHANN

I hope I can work the mechanism, Madame.

RASSENDYLL

I certainly hope you can!

Johann hands him a REVOLVER and leaves. Rassendyll, like any sensible man with a strange gun, checks the cylinder to make sure it's actually loaded.

ANTOINETTE

The Duke has retired for the night. Hentzau is in charge of the guards.

RASSENDYLL

I was hoping I'd meet that fellow again.

ANTOINETTE

The crash of the bridge will rouse the castle. The guards will follow their orders and kill the King before your men can get to him, unless...

RASSENDYLL

Unless I can handle the two of them until my men get down to me. That's it, isn't it?

ANTOINETTE

Exactly. You see, I've trusted you -- your word -- no harm to Michael.

RASSENDYLL

We're all agreed. It means exile, I'm afraid, but that's what you wanted, isn't it?

ANTOINETTE

Yes.

She goes to her door and opens it.

ANTOINETTE (CONT'D)

Down the steps is the passage to the guardroom. Across the guardroom is the door to the dungeon -- and the King.

INT. GREAT HALL -- CONTINUOUS

Rassendyll CREEPS across the open expanse of the great hall. Johann goes to the gates and OPENS THE BOLT, then heads for the drawbridge mechanism.

Both HIDE as Krafstein and Bersonin come downstairs for their duty shift. As Rassendyll ducks out of sight, his dagger SCRAPES across the wall and the two guards stop.

KRAFSTEIN

What was that?

BERSONIN

Must have been someone shutting a door. Probably Madame's.

They march on into the guardroom and Rassendyll follows them, only to hastily hide again at the sound of voices.

HENTZAU (O.S.)

What's the matter? You're ten minutes early!

KRAFSTEIN (O.S.)

The Duke's as nervous as a cat on hot bricks.

HENTZAU (O.S.)

What's he afraid of? Burglars?

Rassendyll is out of sight by the time Hentzau, Lauengram and De Gautet leave the guardroom.

LAUENGRAM

Is it true he's sent for more men, Count Hentzau?

HENTZAU

Yes; a whole garrison.

LAUENGRAM

Let's hope he gives us an eight-hour watch after this. Twelve hours is too long on guard.

HENTZAU

It keeps you out of mischief.

They pause at the top of the steps, looking across the Great Hall, and Hentzau notices that Antoinette's door stands a little open. Lauengram keeps on griping.

LAUENGRAM

You run in and out as you like. We've got to stay in that dirty hole!

HENTZAU

I'm going to make the rounds of the doors and bridge before I turn in.

Rassendyll watches him cross the Great Hall. When Hentzau reaches the door, he opens it without a second's hesitation. Antoinette turns, but doesn't look very surprised.

HENTZAU (CONT'D)

It was very careless of you to leave your door ajar. Very careless -- and very inviting.

ANTOINETTE

Oh? Yes...

She's not very concerned.

HENTZAU

Come now, admit I've been patient. And patience is a virtue I generally lack.

ANTOINETTE

You never lack audacity, Rupert. Had it occurred to you I might not be alone?

HENTZAU

I always accept the risks. I'm prepared for them.

ANTOINETTE

You, er... You really shouldn't be here, you know.

The seductive way she says it is all Hentzau needs. He enters the room--

HENTZAU

Of course. I shouldn't.

--and closes the door behind him.

Once he's out of the way, Johann emerges from his own hiding-place and hurries to the DRAWBRIDGE WINCH. In his haste and the darkness, he knocks over an IRON BAR, which CLANGS noisily on the stone floor.

Johann hides again as the noise brings Michael out of his room to see what's happening. There's no other sound from Johann, but there's a LAUGH -- Hentzau's laugh -- from behind the closed door of Antoinette's room. Michael crosses the Great Hall, flings open the door and discovers them locked in an embrace. Neither seem too unwilling about it.

HENTZAU (CONT'D)

Always inopportune, Michael -- but
always in time!

INT. ANTOINETTE'S ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Michael stalks forward to confront his cheating henchman.

MICHAEL

The moat can hold more than a King!

HENTZAU

Not without making a splash that
would be heard all over the kingdom.

Hentzau reaches for the small DAGGER sheathed at the back of his belt. When Michael lunges for him, he draws it and STABS Michael, who SLUMPS dying to the floor.

ANTOINETTE

Michael!

She flings herself across Michael's fallen body.

ANTOINETTE (CONT'D)

Michael! Michael...! I would never
have betrayed you. I only did it
to save you, my darling...!

Antoinette slumps sobbing onto his corpse, but she's already said enough to send Hentzau hurrying from the room.

The first thing he sees is Johann, still struggling with the ROPE securing the drawbridge winch.

Hentzau creeps up behind him very quietly, lifts the fallen iron bar -- and brings it down with an ugly THUD on Johann's head.

HENTZAU

De Gautet! Lauengram! Rouse the
castle! De Gautet! Lauengram! The
drawbridge!

As they come running with REVOLVERS drawn, Hentzau checks the unbarred gate.

HENTZAU (CONT'D)

I caught a servant trying to lower
the drawbridge! Must have been
bribed! Go outside and guard it!

INT. ZENDA CASTLE GUARDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

While all this goes on above, downstairs Rassendyll confronts Bersonin in the guardroom. Staring down the barrel of Rassendyll's revolver, Bersonin RAISES HIS HANDS. He's the only guard in sight, but suddenly Krafstein makes his presence known from the dungeon.

KRAFSTEIN (O.S.)

You'd better be quiet and get some
sleep!

Rassendyll keeps his gun trained on Bersonin and gestures him to sit "innocently" in a chair, then ducks out of sight behind a pillar.

Krafstein appears at the door of the dungeon, WHISTLING. Rassendyll is concealed, but his shadow isn't. Krafstein keeps up his innocent whistling as he works round the other side of the pillar, then grapples Rassendyll.

KRAFSTEIN (CONT'D)

Kill the prisoner!

Bersonin grabs his SABER and makes for the dungeon. Rassendyll flings Krafstein to the ground, draws his dagger and STABS him, then rushes after Bersonin.

INT. ZENDA CASTLE DUNGEON -- CONTINUOUS

Bersonin opens Jacob's Ladder, but by the time he turns on the King, Rassendyll is there to stop him. After a tense few seconds with the saber point hovering above the shackled King's throat, Rassendyll evades a couple of cuts then punches Bersonin to the floor. The King struggles to get free of his chains.

KING

I'll help you...!

But his only support is vocal. Rassendyll and Bersonin wrestle for the sword until Rassendyll forces it out of the man's grasp and down the trap.

KING (CONT'D)

Cousin Rudolf...

After a brief, vicious exchange of blows, he sends Bersonin SCREAMING down Jacob's Ladder after his sword. Hastily dropping the lid again, Rassendyll goes to reassure the King.

RASSENDYLL

It's all right now, your Majesty!
You're safe.

KING

Rudolf... Cousin Rudolf...

INT. ZENDA CASTLE GUARDROOM -- CONTINUOUS

Rassendyll leaves him in the relative safety of his dungeon until more rescuers arrive. He closes the door and LOCKS it but--

HENTZAU (O.S.)

Mr Rassendyll...?

Rassendyll takes the KEYS and turns round, raising his hands. Hentzau, armed with a REVOLVER, stands in the guardroom doorway.

RASSENDYLL

I thought you were more at home
with a knife.

HENTZAU

My knife turned out to be more at
home in Michael. We got in each
other's way once too often -- just
as you and I have.

(beat)

May I trouble you for those keys?

Rassendyll THROWS them to him.

HENTZAU (CONT'D)

Thank you.

(beat)

You've settled Krafstein, I see.
Bersonin too, I presume?

(MORE)

HENTZAU (CONT'D)

I almost hate to see you join them
with only a bullet in you.

RASSENDYLL

Wait a minute! How do you know
it's Bersonin I threw into the
moat, not the King?

HENTZAU

Oh no. You've worn the Queen's
uniform and the old school tie.
You'd never use my methods, Mr
Rassendyll.

RASSENDYLL

Oh, I don't know. Faced with death,
I might.

(beat)

May I have a last cigarette while
we review the situation?

Hentzau pulls a CIGARETTE-CASE from his pocket and TOSSES
it to Rassendyll, who catches it. He takes out a cigarette,
but there's something missing.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)

Half my kingdom!

Hentzau is unimpressed. His gun doesn't waver.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)

...For a match.

Hentzau THROWS his BOX OF MATCHES the same way he threw
his cigarette-case. Rassendyll starts fumbling through the
cigarette-lighting ritual, but keeps talking.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)

You've got your eye on Michael's
castle and estates, or at least so
you told me.

HENTZAU

Yes... You found it very amusing,
I remember.

RASSENDYLL

Well, I'm scarcely in a position
to laugh at it now.

HENTZAU

Oh, I don't know. At least this
time you'll die laughing.

Rassendyll does laugh. At the same time, he throws the cigarette-case back.

RASSENDYLL

Thank you--

-- and in that instant, with Hentzau distracted by the flying case, he leaps for the gun. It FIRES -- into the floor -- then Rassendyll WRENCHES it from Hentzau's hand.

Hentzau clubs Rassendyll with the massive key-ring, but as he sprawls on the floor he sees the fallen revolver lying next to the guardroom DRAIN. A well-thrown CHAIR sends it down the drain and out of reach.

Hentzau pulls a SABER from the rack of arms on the guardroom wall, but his first cut is blocked by another CHAIR. As Rassendyll dodges, the second cut gets briefly stuck in the TABLE.

HENTZAU

It's no good, I can't get used to fighting with furniture! Where did you learn it?

RASSENDYLL

On the playing-fields of Eton!

He flings yet another CHAIR at Hentzau.

HENTZAU

I see now how much I missed by not going to Eton!

RASSENDYLL

Nevertheless, you did them one great service!

This time the missile is a huge stoneware JUG.

HENTZAU

Yes? What was that?

RASSENDYLL

You didn't go to Eton!

Rassendyll hurls a jacket over Hentzau's head, blinding him for just long enough to get a saber of his own. Hentzau isn't concerned.

HENTZAU

All right -- this will be your last fencing lesson.

(beat)

Look out for your head!

(MORE)

The sabers meet in a clash of steel, with Rassendyll backing away every time.

HENTZAU (CONT'D)

Why don't you stand your ground
and fight?

RASSENDYLL

He who fights and runs away,
remember?

Another exchange beats Hentzau back far enough to let Rassendyll DART OUT through the guardroom door. If he can keep Hentzau busy, the King stays safe -- and then there's always the drawbridge to lower.

INT. GREAT HALL -- CONTINUOUS

Hentzau catches up with Rassendyll on the steps and there's another flurry of cut and thrust.

HENTZAU

So you want to try and get to the
drawbridge? I just killed a man
for trying that.

RASSENDYLL

An unarmed man, of course?

HENTZAU

Of course!

That's the last time either man has time, inclination -- or breath -- for witty banter. The conversation now takes place with sabers alone, in a protracted dramatic duel up and down the entire length and width of the Great Hall.

Hentzau demonstrates that he's a quick study in fighting with furniture, using a FOOTSTOOL and a flaming TORCH to dangerous effect, but Rassendyll is better with a saber than he's been expecting.

Rassendyll GRAPPLES Hentzau and throws him to the floor to gain time for a CUT at the winch-rope. It PARTS -- but not all the way through, and gives Hentzau the chance to draw his dagger again. He's taken by surprise when Rassendyll BITES his knife-hand until he drops the blade.

The two fence back and forth around the enormous winch mechanism until Rassendyll finally gets his chance to HACK at the rope again. This time he CUTS IT THROUGH. Hentzau's blade sinks into Rassendyll's arm -- but there's nothing he can do to stop the released winch.

EXT. ZENDA CASTLE -- CONTINUOUS

The drawbridge comes THUNDERING down, leaving De Gautet and Lauengram exposed in the castle gateway.

With Sapt and Tarlenheim at their head, the column of mounted guards CHARGE across the causeway. Lauengram and De Gautet FIRE their revolvers and bring down a couple of the horsemen, but it's not enough to stop the charge.

INT. GREAT HALL -- CONTINUOUS

Rassendyll and Hentzau are still fighting, but the noise of the attack tells Hentzau that it's time to leave.

HENTZAU

It's beginning to sound too much
like the playing-fields of Eton!

He leaps up onto a handy windowsill.

HENTZAU (CONT'D)

I'll return to fight another day
too!

He POISES his saber like a javelin and HURLS it at Rassendyll, more a parting gesture than an attack. Despite his wound, Rassendyll parries easily.

HENTZAU (CONT'D)

Goodbye, play-actor!

He flings the window open, DIVES elegantly down to the moat and SWIMS away into the night.

The gates BURST OPEN as Sapt and Tarlenheim come running in. They see Rassendyll in time to keep the rest of the guards outside.

TARLENHEIM

All right! Stand by in the
courtyard!

He CHIVVIES the guards out and CLOSES THE GATE against inopportune witnesses as Rassendyll staggers forward, his shirt-sleeve soaked with blood.

SAPT

The King...?

RASSENDYLL

The King...lives.

Then he drops unconscious to the floor.

INT. ZENDA CASTLE BEDROOM -- LATER

The King is in bed. He's been SHAVED and given clean clothes, but he's still sick and frail, exhausted by his ordeal. Sapt is with him.

KING

You know, it seems a hundred years since I struck you in the face. Please forgive me... And be my guide, as you were my father's.

SAPT

Thank you, your Majesty.

KING

And now... We mustn't keep him waiting.

Sapt leaves and Rassendyll comes in, his wounded arm in a SLING. He goes straight to the King's bedside, removes the signet ring and returns it to the King's own finger.

RASSENDYLL

I've tried to wear it with honor, your Majesty.

Only Flavia, Sapt and Tarlenheim know just how hard it's been to try -- and to succeed.

KING

I can't talk very much yet.

(beat)

You're my best and nearest friend, cousin Rudolf. I wanted to keep you with me, to tell everybody what you'd done. But Sapt says the secret must be kept.

RASSENDYLL

He's right, your Majesty. My work here is done.

KING

Yes, it's done. As no-one but you could have done it.

(beat)

I don't know when I shall see you again.

RASSENDYLL

If ever I can serve you, your Majesty...

KING

You could never serve me better,
cousin. You've taught me how to be
a King.

Rassendyll shakes the King's hand, then gives him a salute
that's more than half a wave and leaves the room.

INT. GREAT HALL -- MOMENTS LATER

Sapt is waiting outside.

RASSENDYLL

Is she here?

Sapt nods towards a closed door.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)

Does she know everything?

SAPT

Everything.

RASSENDYLL

What did she say?

SAPT

Nothing.

(beat)

She wants to see you.

INT. ZENDA CASTLE ROOM -- CONTINUOUS

It's a comfortable paneled room, well-lit and cheerful --
but Flavia, standing with her back to the door, doesn't
look cheerful at all.

When Rassendyll comes in, he BOWS VERY FORMALLY. After
all, he's now a commoner in the presence of a Royal
Princess.

RASSENDYLL

Your Highness?

FLAVIA

I sent for you to thank you... For
the service you have done this
kingdom and its King.

(beat)

No one can know better than myself
how...conscientiously you've played
your role.

RASSENDYLL

I love you. With my whole heart
and soul, I love you. In all else
I've been an impostor, but not in
that. From the first moment I saw
you in the cathedral, I knew you
were the only woman in the world
for me. As I stand here now, I
know there never can be any other.

FLAVIA

It would have made no difference
if I'd known. It was always you,
never "the King."

(beat)

Is it true that you're going home
to England?

RASSENDYLL

Tonight.

Impulsively he steps forward and puts his unhurt arm around
her.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)

Come with me! I won't let them
stand in the way of our happiness!
Come with me!

FLAVIA

Oh, if only I could!

RASSENDYLL

Oh, my darling, there's a world
outside, our world, and think:
you'll be free, free of these cares
and duties, free to live as joyously
and happily...

Flavia turns to face him. Rassendyll stares at her, not
knowing what he said, but that something's wrong -- very
wrong.

RASSENDYLL (CONT'D)

What is it, Flavia?

FLAVIA

I was born to these cares and
duties, Rudolf. Help me to do what
I was born to! Help me to do what
I must!

RASSENDYLL

How can I, my darling? I love you!

FLAVIA

But is love the only thing? If
love were all, I could follow you
in rags to the end of the world...

(beat)

But if love were all, you would
have left the King to die in his
cell.

(beat)

Honor binds a woman too, Rudolf.
And my honor lies in keeping faith
with my country and my House.

(beat)

I don't know why God has let me
love you, but I know that I must
stay.

RASSENDYLL

Never to see you again? Never to
hold you? Never...

(beat)

My darling.

He takes her hand and presses it against his chest.

FLAVIA

Your heart will always be in my
heart, and the touch of your lips
on mine...

Flavia touches his face with that hand, and very gently he
kisses it... Then he lets it go and walks away.

EXT. FRONTIER ROAD -- LATER

Rassendyll, Sapt and Tarlenheim ride across a field and
REIN IN their horses at the road leading to the frontier.
Rassendyll SHAKES HANDS one last time with his friends.

RASSENDYLL

We'll meet again, Fritz.

TARLENHEIM

Fate doesn't always make the right
men kings.

RASSENDYLL

Goodbye, Colonel. We've run a good
course together.

SAPT

Goodbye, Englishman. You're the
finest Elphberg of them all!

Sapt and Tarlenheim SNAP TO THE SALUTE.

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Ruritania and the past lie behind, the rest of the world and his lonely future lie ahead. Rassendyll turns his horse and canters away into that future.

FADE OUT:

THE END