

CHAPTER 15 - I Talk with a Tempter

In Ruritania, a realm where personal duels and vendettas among the upper classes were common, the tension and secrecy surrounding the feud between Duke Michael and Rudolf Rassendyll, masquerading as the king for the good of the realm and the real king's safety, reached a point that necessitated caution and diplomacy. Rudolf's issuance of a decree against dueling, considered necessary due to a recent violent encounter, received public approval from both Duke Michael and the populace, including Princess Flavia, with whom Rudolf shared a growing affection.

A peculiar aspect of the enforced truce was the neutral status it bestowed upon the town of Zenda during the day, allowing members from both warring factions to safely visit. During one such visit, while accompanied by Flavia and Colonel Sapt, Rudolf encountered the Head of the Strelsau Police, who was investigating the disappearance of a British citizen believed to be last seen in Zenda. This missing man was none other than Rudolf Rassendyll himself, thus complicating matters significantly. Rudolf managed to redirect the police officer's investigation back to Strelsau, avoiding imminent danger to both himself and the imprisoned king.

The journey in Zenda also brought Rudolf face-to-face with Rupert of Hentzau, one of Duke Michael's key conspirators, during a somber procession for a fallen comrade. Despite the tension, an unexpected proposal was made by Rupert: to join forces against Duke Michael, promising Rudolf the throne and Flavia's hand in a sinister plot of betrayal and regicide. Rudolf rebuffed the offer, yet was left to marvel at Rupert's audacity and malice, even as Flavia remarked on Rupert's handsome appearance, unknowingly adding to the complexity of Rudolf's emotions and the dangerous game being played for control over Ruritania.