# CHAPTER 20 - The Prisoner and the King

"Madame, it is best you know the truth." And swiftly, with that stern, brief manner of his, he told her who lay here; not the King, but one who had played the King, and saved the King, and now lay wounded--not in body, but sore in heart and at the crossways of his fate. And as Sapt's rugged voice paused, she, in a voice soft yet piercing sweet, and tremulous a little, asked me: "And if you are not the King, then who are you?"

And looking up then, for I could keep my secret no more from her, I met her eyes, and in them, I read such as made me a richer man than any
king. But I answered only: "A friend of the King, madame, and your servant." She turned then to Sapt, her hand still clasping mine: "Colonel, you have deceived me." "In service of my King, madame, as today we all must serve."

Then, releasing me, she rose and said, with a grace that made every word a dignity: "Then let us go to him--to the King, who lies wounded in the Castle." But she paused, looking down at me: "You will come, too--later?"

And I, knowing my part, my masquerade, was played out, answered: "If the King wishes it, madame."

To which she, with a glance more eloquent than many speeches, went with Sapt towards the Castle, leaving Fritz and me in the silent forest.
And so, through adventure and peril, the King was saved, the pretender unmasked, and the heart of a lady--noble and true--touched with a
bitter-sweet of love and loyalty. And the riddle of my life and service found no answer yet, save in duty done and the touch of a hand I must relinquish.

But the enterprise of The Prisoner of Zenda was, against great odds, brought to a brave conclusion, with secrecy maintained where it must be, and honor where it could. And to Ruritania, a tale for the ages; to those who lived it, a memory of loyalty, of daring, and the bittersweet of love sacrificed to duty.