

hand and, leaning forward he felt my heartbeat. 'A little too quick,' he said.

'I'm not made of stone!' I cried.

'All right, you'll do,' he answered. 'As for you, Fritz, we must say you've caught a cold. You are shaking like a leaf.'

'We're an hour earlier than they expected,' said Sapt. 'I'll have word sent of your arrival. For now, though—'

'For now,' said I, 'the King wants some breakfast.'

Old Sapt laughed. 'Spoken like an Elphberg,' he said.

The train stopped. Fritz and Sapt jumped out, took off their hats and held the door for me. I tried to swallow a lump that had risen in my throat, put my hat firmly on my head, then stepped out of the train.

A moment later, all was hurry and confusion; men running up, and then away again; men leading me to the restaurant; men getting on horses and riding at great speed in various directions. While I was still swallowing the last drop of my cup of coffee, the bells of the city began ringing, and the sound of a band and loud shouting came to my ears.

King Rudolf the Fifth was in his city of Strelsau! And I heard the people crying: 'God save the King!'

Sapt smiled. 'God save them both,' he whispered. 'Courage, my friend.'

As I stepped out of the restaurant, with Fritz and Sapt close behind me, a group of officers and people of high rank stood waiting for me. At their head was a tall old man in uniform.

'Marshal Strakencz,' whispered Sapt, and I knew that I was in the presence of the chief of the Ruritanian Army.

Just behind him was a short figure in long flowing clothes.

'The Chancellor,' whispered Sapt. So this was my chief minister.

The Marshal greeted me with a few loyal words, and gave a short explanation of the absence of the Duke of Strelsau. The

Duke, it seemed, had suddenly felt ill and could not come to the station. He asked for permission to wait for me at the church. I replied that I was sorry to hear of his illness. Several other people then came forward and, as no one showed any doubts about me, I began to feel some confidence. Fritz, though, was still pale, and his hand shook as he held it out to the Marshal.

Then we formed a procession and went to the station entrance. Here I climbed on my horse and set out, the Marshal on my right, Sapt on my left. The various officials went to their carriages and followed.

The city of Strelsau is partly old and partly new. Wide modern avenues and fine houses surround the narrow, twisting streets of the old town. In the outer circles live the upper classes; in the inner circles are the shops. Behind their rich fronts lie dirty narrow streets crowded with poor, disloyal, and often criminal classes. These social and local divisions marked, as I knew from Sapt's information, another division more important to me. The New Town was for the King; but the Old Town preferred Michael of Strelsau, and was not afraid to show it.

The scene was a grand one as we passed along the main street to the square where the royal palace stood. Here I was in the middle of my own people, every house covered with flags. All along the way, on both sides, the crowds cheered and waved. I almost began to feel that I really was the King, until suddenly by chance I raised my eye to a window and there saw Antoinette de Mauban, the woman who had travelled with me from Paris.

I saw her lean forward and look at me. I found myself feeling for my revolver. Suppose she had cried, 'That's not the King!'

Well, we rode on, and in a few minutes the Marshal gave an order, and the guards on horseback closed round me. We were entering the poorer area loyal to Duke Michael. This action showed more clearly than the words of Sapt the state of feeling in the town.