



The King's Dilemma The King's Dilemma

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Action/adventure

Once upon a time, in a far-off kingdom, sat a King slouched in his golden throne with a dilemma on mind. The king, loved greatly by all who lived in his vast, lush land, was no longer a young man, and the time had come for him to start thinking of a rightful heir to his throne. Gazing across the room, tucked away in the right corner, lied the king's problem: there sat three wooden baby cribs. Yes, the king had triplet boys! How would one decide the rightful heir to his throne if he loved all his children the same? Should he have favorites? Only adding insult to injury, these boys weren't The Royal Family's first children. The king had a son just three years before his triplets and for reasons unbeknownst to the locals, the child was sent far off; a very unpopular decision that was made by the queen. However, as it always does, life went on for The Royal Family and the three young boys, Ego, Callidus, and Animus, all grew up to be well respected and responsible young men that the kingdom's people adored.

Ego, strong as an ox, towered at a staggering six feet eight inches and much to the queen's chagrin, he ate all the fine steak the castle had to offer. Nonetheless, he was respected, and the people saw him as their protector. The next brother, Callidus, was a marvel to the many teachers and philosophers that would temporarily pass through the kingdom's corridors. Although he was about a whole foot shorter than Ego, kind of chubby, and had green eyes instead of blue, Callidus was seen by many as the most intelligent human to have ever lived. The last brother, Animus, was arguably the most well-liked person in the entire kingdom and the perfect blend of

both his brothers. Animus had the same dirty blond hair of his siblings, blue eyes like Ego, and stood half a head higher than Callidus. Although the voice of Animus resembled that of wheezel's, he had an incredible ability that allowed him to captivate the minds and hearts of whomever he spoke to. This truly was no easy decision for the king to make. How could he go wrong? Ego could be the people's protector, Callidus their educator, and Animus their representative. So, the king formulated a plan.

On the triplets eighteenth birthday he would hold a competition, open for all locals to come and watch. The people would then vote based off who they thought should be the next king. The king was pleased with himself, as he believed all three of his boys would do a tremendous job taking care of the kingdom he loved so immensely. Little did he know that the solution to his problem labored days away, in a poor farming village, not uttering a word.

Mutus, wiped the beads of sweat from his upper lip and arched his aching lower back, that hurt from hours of hoeing manure across five, barren acres of land, filled with promise for the summer's crop. A thick smell of manure sat in a haze over the entire village in which Mutus lived. At this point in the young man's life, the only foreign smell to his nostrils would be that of roses and perfume. The setting sun illuminated the sky, shooting orange and red streaks across the village huts' rooftops, as he gathered his tools and wheelbarrow to head home after a long day's work. On his way back to the barn, the thought of his mother's delicious potato beef stew filled his mouth with saliva and caused his stomach to roar with excitement at the thought of it.

"I need you to work quicker Mutus." Grunted the old man he worked for, "We have less than two days to prepare for seeding and if we are going to be able to harvest any corn and potatoes this year, YOU NEED TO WORK HARDER!"

Mutus turned beat red wanting to punch the old man square in the face, but, having been taught the importance of controlling anger by his mother, he just nodded in agreement with the old man and collected his days earnings; three sheckels, three pieces of corn, and one oddly shaped potato. As always, on his way home from the farm, he stopped by the stable to visit his favorite horse. Sermo, was a beautiful all black horse, besides one white stripe, along the beast's head, splitting the creatures face in two. Mutus loved this animal as if it was family. Besides his mother, Sermo was all that Mutus had to lean on. He would stay there for hours with Sermo if he could, the two seemed to complete each other, they had a unique language that didn't require words.

Walking along the mud path back to his house, he passed many of his neighbors who would give a friendly

wave and, on rare occasions, some food to take back home to his mother. No, the village didn't have much, and even though farmland and mud-floor huts were all the community did consist of, the villagers had a great sense of pride and appreciation for what they did have. So, despite the long day of work and a rumbling stomach, Mutus had much to be grateful for as he walked through his main entrance, where a door typically stood, and into his small, three room, mud floor, house to greet his mother who stood over a boiling pan, held above a blazing fire stove.

"Mutus, my dear! How was work today?" inquired the small, aging woman with a few silver strands in her otherwise jet black hair. One glance at her son and she was able to replay his day in her mind. Based off the unusually heavy smelling fog that hung over him, she knew he spent the day fertilizing. Glancing down at his blister torn hands, she understood just how long and hard her son had been at work and, considering the fact that her beloved child's eyes had not yet met her own, she had every reason in the world to believe something was on his mind. Mutus' mother had the innate ability of understanding and addressing the needs of her child without him saying a word so it mattered little to her that she had never actually heard her son speak.

Nonetheless, she called him over to the table for his favorite meal, hoping to restore some of the exuberance he possessed as a small boy.

Mutus was a mute. Despite his mother's efforts to provide her son a normal childhood, there was no preventing the obvious challenges he would face in his formative years. Although many of the people from the village were kind, accepting people, some of the other boys would antagonize and bully Mutus because of his unique condition. He could still remember the pain of feeling left out as he watched the other boys go off to play while he stayed at home with his mother as the two worked together to develop a special language that would allow them the gift of dialogue. Unfortunately, no one else in the village understood this dialect and this turned the bright, playful child into an introvert who lacked confidence and the ability to socialize. Yet, above all else, what bothered Mutus the most about his predicament wasn't the fact that he missed out on climbing trees and fishing or swimming in ponds with the other boys, but feared he would never know the tender feeling of joy a man felt when in love.

Her dark, brown hair danced with grace in the wind, that musty spring day, as she rode her horse across the meadow, just behind the small farm Mutus worked on that year and at just ten years old, his heart swelled with what he concluded must be love. Despite being neighbors, the problem lied in the fact that Surda rarely acknowledged Mutus' existence and the few times the two overlapped, it was no secret that she knew of his

situation. The most the two ever interacted was at the annual Harvest Festival held by the town's people in which she spent more time petting Sermo than she did engaging Mutus. Nevertheless, his love for her only continued and would eventually blossom into what some might have considered an obsession as he would follow her home from work at a distance, watching her pick flowers from the community garden and play with her friends. How could a poor farmer, unable to speak, impress and give the woman of his dreams everything he felt she deserved and more? The answer to this question had and continued to trouble Mutus as ideas rolled back and forth across his head, straining his brain. These thoughts hunkered down like chains oppressing his happiness. How could he be happy?

He didn't tell his mother the reason for his distress that night. What really was there to tell her? So, he slumped into his chair, picking at the potatoes in his soup which floated like icebergs, bobbing up and down in the bland, boiling, broth and then it hit him. Suddenly, the hell bounding chains his brain bore snapped and he, for the first time in his life, held the key to destiny. Smiling, he stood triumphantly from the wooden slab, dumped the remainder of his meal back into the pot, and prepared for bed. Lying in bed that night, Mutus formulated his plan. Nobody ever visited the village and, on the rare occasion that they did, it was often to raid the farmers crops right after or before a big harvest. Now, Mutus wasn't going to try and fight off the next herd of pirates that rode through the village. He had already tried that he thought as his hand ran over the bold scar the stretched across the left side of his face, retrieving the painful memory of his twelve-year-old self, crying in his horrified mother's arms. No, he wasn't going to fight back again, although he did know how to fight now. Instead, he would take a much more peaceful approach. Mutus woke up the next morning, kissed his mother goodbye, gathered all the money the family had, snuck into the stable, stole his best friend, and mentally prepared to make the three day journey into the kingdom and bring back as much as his money could afford for the rest of the starving village. Little did Mutus know the state of the kingdom.

At this point, it had been two years since the king held the competition between his three sons and they were now twenty years old. Unfortunately, the king died the night before the event would take place and the queen, triplets, and locals, all drowning in immense sorrow, decided to postpone the contest to a more reasonable day. Time stood still throughout the kingdom, as people worked to get over the loss of their beloved leader for months. Sadly, the woes of the people only continued as the sun sucked the remaining moisture out of the drying ground. It hadn't rained one drop in the past eight weeks. Still recovering and with no one else to look to, everyone turned to the queen for a solution, but, like the rest of them, the queen had yet to progress over

the past months. She sagged, distraught in her throne, only then realizing all her husband managed and the magnitude of having a leader the kingdom could depend on. So, she decided to spring into action; well her sons into action as she couldn't handle the stress anymore. The problem lied in the fact that the boys' loss of their father had corrupted their amazing traits, manifesting selfishness, self-pity, and pride. The queen decided to split the kingdom into three sects and have each son govern one while living in their own castles. Meanwhile, she would continue to live in the center of the kingdom, perched on the once evergreen hill as she advised her three kings.

As predicted by many, the dry spell failed to cease and Ego, Callidus, and Animus were in no way mentally or emotionally fit to take on their sects. The once burly, proud Ego had been transformed into a narcissistic coward who often failed the people of his sect. Obsessed with the opinions of others, all he now sought was the kingdom's adoration. Callidus, no longer using his brains for good, had gained close to another person in weight and spent his time, when not eating, manipulating his sect's people. Blinded by greed now, he sought to take control of the entire kingdom. Last, and now probably least, Animus lost his ability to speak in his father's absence, only able to stutter long strands of words that seemed to choke him in the process. Now a naive, judgmental young man, all Animus sought was his brothers' acceptance.

Conditions only became worse for those living in the kingdom, as crops and water were hard to come by and year two of the infamous water deficiency began. In a panic, the brothers came together in attempt to save only themselves from the famine and ordered their stewards to collect all the rations they could gather from the starving people and stock whatever they could find in their respective castle chambers. A cloud of despair hung over the gloomy land as the haggard locals waited patiently for some savior to come. At this point, it mattered little how strong, smart, or personable this man would be. The only thing the people needed from this man was sympathy.

Mutus had a malicious, throbbing pain that ran up and down his lower body as Sermo galloped on. He was also clearly fatigued from the long trek down the torrid mountain that enveloped the land that once smelt of roses, consisted of happy people at work, free-range, grazing animals, and the playful screams of the youth. It took the two little time to realize the horrific state of the people as Mutus observed the sunken faces of parents, crying children, and the thick odor of death, much worse than any manure Mutus had ever been acquainted with. Ashamed he had ever felt sorry for himself, he continued down the mountain until he met eyes with one of the locals and eventually came to a halt. One weary woman held a crying baby in her arms as a small boy,

with what appeared to be dirt splotched on his forehead sat with his legs crossed, drawing in the parched ground. Hopping off Sermo, Mutus offered the woman what was left of his canteen and breakfast. She graciously accepted his offer and then passed both the water and small portion of food to her son. Crouching down, Mutus copied the young boy, using the dirt to explain his village's situation and ask what had happened to the once famously fruitful land. The woman told Mutus the bitter tale of the king and his three triplets. How the king had struggled in the search for a fair way to bestow his position upon a rightful heir. The woman explained how the people of the kingdom once cherished the three sons. She told them about the unexpected death of the king the night before the brothers were to compete for the throne, the queen's solution, and how the drought was not only sucking life from the ground but also the once gleeful realm.

After listening intently to the woman's tale and gathering what little supplies he could for the villagers back home, Mutus couldn't help but feel sorry for the kingdom's people as he too understood what it felt like to lie in bed at night, kept awake by a groaning monster that ate away at him. Mutus' throat filled with sorrow and embarrassment as he rode back up the mountain and home to his humble village. On the path back, he couldn't help but think about all the times his mother and neighbors had taught him the importance of helping others, as he might need to call on them at some point. So, as Sermo carried the two home, Mutus began to create the procedure in which he would attempt to save what remained of the kingdom. He decided to return home for one week to assemble a crew of farmers and their supplies. Although he didn't have a formal education, the ability to speak, or loads of wealth, Mutus did have the necessary farming knowledge needed to revive crops using irrigation and fertilization techniques.

It didn't take long for the locals to learn and just a few weeks after farmers' arrival, crops began producing for an overjoyed community, ready to return to normal lives. Mutus and his colleagues were now famous throughout the kingdom, well received by all as formerly hungry children ran up to them offering an abundance of gifts. For the first time in his life, Mutus no longer felt crippled by his inability to speak, as crowds would gather around to watch him. He need only lead by example and they would follow suit. Word quickly spread of Mutus and his great deeds along with his rising support group to the three kings. Concerned about the possibility of anarchy and losing authority over their sects, they settled on holding a council at the queen's castle in the coming week.

Once there, they all sat, thinking in front of the queen's throne, not saying a word. Callidus, the cunning one, spoke first.

"I have been thinking," he paused to look at his family, "this man does not come from wealth, nor has he ever experienced a joyous festival like ones we have held here in the past." His brothers, craning their necks to stare at him, had a very confused looks on their faces. "We will invite him to a celebration held right here outside of mother's castle. We will have the best music, games, food, and drink in the history of our kingdom, and we will welcome him to a private dinner right here." He held one finger in the air as he walked ten paces back from where they convened and drove his pointer finger down towards the ground; the spot held the only view in which you could see the entire kingdom.

"We should kill him!" Ego chimed in. "I could tear the man apart with my bare hands!"

"No." Animus rebutted "We sh-sh-should hang him for all t-t-the locals to see and m-m-make an e-e-example of him." Both Callidus and the queen, in awe, looked at eachother with exasperated expressions as if to say, "How dumb could you possibly be to think either of those ideas were smart ones?"

"We will just poison him at dinner." The words came much to the surprise of the triplets, as it had been the first time the queen had spoken during the meeting, but Callidus and his brothers seemed to agree with the idea and so it was set. The brothers would later welcome the entire kingdom to the queen's castle in celebration of Mutus and his friends, and the queen would personally invite Mutus to dinner. However, when the queen approached Mutus with the invitation, he had one request. On a piece of parchment paper, he scribbled four words, Can my people come?, to which the Queen replied with a smile and a nod of the head. The date now set in two weeks' time, allowed an elated Mutus to ride home and announce to his people the queen's address and all that had happened in the kingdom. The villagers cheered with great enthusiasm as their hearts swelled with pride for their village and the opportunity to travel with their new found leader down the grand mountain and into the kingdom for a historic celebration.

Sweet music and the all too familiar smell of roses danced in the air that night as the villagers and kingdom locals intermingled with one another. The entertainment for the night consisted of farming games, plays, a jousting tournament, and incredible food and drink bought by the many generous people in attendance.

Mutus, for the majority of the night, floated around receiving compliments and gifts while also partaking, with Sermo, in some of the competitions being held. While he appreciated the attention and praise, he really only wanted to interact with one person that night, Surda, yet he had little luck in finding her. It wasn't until about an hour before dinner would be served that he found her playing a game of horseshoes, with none other than his very own mother. Would he have the opportunity to finally connect with her? Ready to seize the moment

and with great confidence, he began towards the two laughing women.

“Hello my dear.” His mother’s voice strained above the music. “Isn’t this all great?” To which Mutus nodded and held his glass high, gesturing in approval of the great band and refreshments. Surda smiled but she seemed to be in her own world, not dancing to the music like everyone else and focusing intently on his mother’s lips when she spoke. A sense of relief flooded him as he realized that she had never intentionally ignored him but that she was deaf. Understanding the situation, Mutus realized just how perfect the two were for each other. There would never be a need for him to speak as their company would be enough. They immediately hit it off in the unique way that a mute might interact with one who is deaf, completing each other in the truest sense. She spoke for him and he listened for her. Unfortunately, a couple stewards came down from the castle to steal Mutus and his mother away for dinner. After assuring her that he would return, he left with his mother as Surda would eat with the rest of the locals for the night.

The kind steward led the two down a long stone corridor, up a spiraling staircase, and into a massive dining room in which the queen, Ego, Callidus, and Animus all waited for Mutus and his mother’s arrival.

“Welcome...” the queen trailed off sounding a little confused.

“Come sit by me.” Implored Callidus, “I am overjoyed by you and your lovely mother’s presence!”

“Why thank you King Callidus!” Mutus’ mother replied with a kind smile and a glance back at the still puzzled looking Queen.

The main course consisted of steak and potatoes, per request of Ego, and the two families enjoyed good conversation and storytelling. After dinner, the kingdom’s best musician and some dancers came for entertainment. Noticing that Mutus had let his guard down and was enjoying the festivities greatly, Callidus prepared to seize the opportunity and passed Mutus a poisoned chalice of wine. Observing what was about to take place, the queen maneuvered across the room just in time to knock the poisonous drink away from Mutus’ lips.

“No, I cannot go through with this Callidus.” the Queen muttered these words as she looked down at the ground, wells of tears forming in her eyes. Now looking confused and innocent, Callidus inquired what his mother meant. “Oooh you know damn well son what I mean!” her voice rose with anger. The queen then rushed to the balcony and confessed to all in attendance the truth. She told everything from the unexpected return of her eldest son and half-sister, also a magical witch. Ashamed, she admitted to giving Mutus away to her sister in fear of potentially being judged for having a mute child. Not stopping there, the queen uncovered

the truth behind the festival and the brothers' evil plot to take Mutus' life to protect their positions.

Feeling betrayed, the locals roared with anger at the queen and demanded some form of compensation for their hardships. So, she brought all four sons out and had everyone vote on who would be the ONE king.

"MUTUS...MUTUS...MUTUS..." they roared unanimously for their new leader. He stood by the balcony looking over his people in awe. How could a boy from such humble beginnings, who suffered for years, have risen above to take what was rightfully his. His stewards came and cloaked him in his father's lion fur coat and crowned him for all to see. Mutus felt the all too familiar embrace of his mother, now understood to be aunt, from behind.

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner but..." She whispered into his ear. "it appears you have rightfully claimed what belongs to you and for that I am grateful." He turned around to hug her. How could he be mad at her? She had given him all that she had despite the financial and social burden Mutus brought her. Without her, Mutus would have never been given the gift of dialect, he would have never met Sermo at the farming job his mother got him, and most of all he never would have stopped to help the suffering kingdom if he had not been shown so much mercy and love from his own mother. To him, she would always be his mother and he her son. Then, for the first time in his entire life, Mutus saw his mother's magical abilities. Out of thin air the most beautiful chalice anyone had ever seen appeared in her hands. In amazement, everyone present watched the series of events unfold before their eyes as she offered the new king her ostentatious cup. "When you drink from this cup, the one thing your heart most deeply desires will be granted." Without hesitation he took the chalice from his mother's aging hands and downed the sweet, green substance.

Everyone stood there patiently waiting for the king to speak his first words, but nothing came from his mouth. Murmurs grew from down below as the locals and villagers stunned were staring at the king perched above. Mutus' eyes scanned the crowd for Surda and eventually found her crying by the band where he left her.

"I can hear!" She cried out with joy as it slowly hit people what the king had used his one wish for.

"You f-f-f-ool wh-wh-what have you d-d-done?! Why wo-would you wa-wa-waste such a gift?!" Animus stuttered in anger. Mutus paid him no mind as he gazed over all he was now responsible for. He no longer needed a voice. The respect of his people had grown past that point and in the moment he drank from the magic cup, all he could think of was giving back to Surda something that would complete her life as she did the same for him. Everyone rejoiced as the two embraced and the party continued on now celebrating the new king and future queen.

King Mutus and Queen Surda lived happily ever after in the very castle where they embraced that night, going on to raise a healthy family. The triplets were banished away under house arrest in the basement of Ego's former castle and the former queen lived the rest of her days peacefully in the privacy of Callidus' old castle, only coming out for celebrations and to visit her boys. Mutus' mother lived close by in what was once Animus' castle and spent the majority of her time helping Surda raise the children. The poor village Mutus once called home was protected from raiders and did business quite often with the kingdom as the king preferred to eat his meals cooked with the villages' crops. It finally rained, restoring the evergreen lush mountains that enveloped Mutus and his new home and for the first time in nearly twenty years, the King's dilemma was resolved; well not exactly, Mutus was staring directly at triplet girls.

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