

When You See My King

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Once upon a time a poor commoner was exceedingly surprised to receive a messenger from the King of the land. He rode in a dazzling chariot, drawn by the most magnificent steeds he had ever seen. The man was struck with fear, for he had been negligent in paying his taxes that year. He had meant to pay them, but his crop had been damaged by hail, so he had barely enough to live on. He consequently had paid only as much tax as he could afford.

He ran out to meet the messenger, prostrated himself, and begged, "Have mercy, my lord! I know I was short on my taxes, and I will pay them as soon as I can."

The messenger smiled at him and said, "Have no fear, friend. I have not come to exact your debt. The King has bid me to invite you to His Palace today."

"For what reason?" the man asked. "Certainly He must be very angry with me. What shall I prepare for a gift? What shall I wear?"

"No", the messenger replied, "He's not angry at all. For your gift bring your eyes, your ears, and your mouth, for all the King desires from you today is your visit. Step into the carriage. There is no time to change your clothes. We must leave at once."

Hearing the urgency in the messenger's tone, the man promptly obeyed and climbed into the chariot. As they sped away, the man was at a loss for what to say, so he said the first thing that popped into his mind. "I must compliment you, sir, on the sheen of your chariot and the swiftness of your steeds, for I have never seen their equal in all my life."

"Thank you for noticing," replied the messenger, "I work very hard at polishing the chariot and grooming the horses. Look. I even polished the wheels and brushed the horses' teeth before I came to pick you up today."

The man laughed a little and said, "Isn't that a bit exorbitant? Your master must be very difficult to work for."

"I'm afraid you misunderstood me!" replied the messenger with a chuckle, "He doesn't demand that I brush the horses' teeth; that was my idea. You may think it excessive, but You'll understand when you see my King."

The man fell silent and pondered the glory of such a King.

As they approached the palace gate, the man's ponderings were far surpassed by the actual sight set before his eyes. How could he have imagined such a gate, its turrets nearly reaching the clouds? He had never seen anything like it. The messenger handed the man a looking glass and bid him to see how, at the top of the towers, workmen were laying another row of bricks to extend their height still more.

Astonished, the man gasped, “So this is how my taxes are spent! These towers are already the highest in the world. Isn’t that enough? Your master must be very arrogant.”

The messenger smiled and explained, “Oh no! The workmen had to beg our King to extend the towers. They just wanted them to reflect His radiance a bit more accurately. You’ll understand when you see my King.”

Awestruck, the man fell silent again, reflecting upon the magnificence of such a King.

As they entered the gates, the man’s heart leapt. He had never seen such a beautiful garden. Everything was in full bloom. The colors were dazzling, the scents intoxicating, and the landscaping immaculate. The man, overcome with emotion, jumped down from the chariot and ran to the chief gardener who was kneeling in the lawn, trimming the grass. “I must congratulate you, sir, on your exquisite workmanship! I’ve never seen a more breathtaking garden.”

The gardener responded, “Thank you. That’s very kind of you to say. It always feels good when someone notices one’s hard work. Stoop down here, and look at my latest undertaking. The thought occurred to me that since the garden looks almost perfect upon first glance that I could start trimming each blade of grass into an interesting little shape. Just for fun. I hope the King enjoys it.”

“Enjoys it?” replied the man, “Do you really think he will even notice? This seems absurd to me. Take your rest, my good fellow, for the garden is good enough as it is.”

The gardener chuckled and said, “You may be right. The King seldom walks in this part of the garden, as He has very important duties to attend to. But perhaps some day He may take a stroll and decide to lie down in the cool grass to rest. If He turns His head and sees this blade of grass that I’ve been sculpting, He’ll know how much I love Him. You may think I’m crazy now, but you’ll understand when you see my King.”

The man’s heart was touched by the obvious sincerity of the gardener’s affection for his master, so he fell silent again and contemplated a King who could win the hearts of His subjects so completely.

The messenger then stepped down from his chariot and bid the man to follow, as it was time to enter the King’s palace. When the gilded doors swung open, the man was filled with terror, as he was confronted by a numberless legion of palace guards, girded for battle. Each of them clad in armor more resplendent than any knight he had ever seen in fairly tale books. The man quaked with fear, his knees grew weak, and finally he fell in a heap, completely unable to stand; for his breath had all but left him at the sight of such majesty. The captain of the royal guard came and helped the man stand upon his feet, bracing him with his own arm to escort him to the King’s throne.

The man stammered, “Thank you, majestic prince, but why do you stoop to help this poor commoner, seeing I that I am as nothing before you?”

The captain kindly and warmly explained, “You’ll understand when you see my King.”

As they began to walk down the corridor, approaching the throne room, the man noticed that the music ascended in intensity, and that there were festive dancers in the wings of the court. It was all perfectly choreographed, and the music was more beautiful than any he had ever heard. The captain said to the man, “I hope you enjoy the song and dance. They were written just for your visit today. They’ve all been rehearsing very diligently.”

“Just for me? Just for this one occasion?” asked the man. “But this song is finer than all the masterworks of the world’s most brilliant composers combined!”

The Captain of the Guard answered gently, “Just for this occasion, yes, but not just for you. You’ll understand when you see our King.”

The music crescendoed to a glorious climax at the very moment they reached the throne room’s door. The man said to the Captain, “I almost lost my breath in this King’s garden, and my knees gave way when I beheld the King’s palace guard. When that door opens I will surely die!”

The door slowly opened, and before the man stood a little Child, wearing the garb of a commoner, much like his guest’s. The trumpets sounded their final cadence, and the sound of the royal orchestra was now but an echo that reverberated throughout the hall. And the entire court, including the dancers, the musicians, the palace guards, and their captain fell to their knees in silence before this Child.

And the Child King said to the man, welcoming him into His throne room for supper, “Come. Don’t be afraid, for I am gentle and humble of heart. I put on these commoner’s clothes, so that you would feel welcomed and at peace in My presence. But you see, by the splendor of my courts and the radiance of my servants, a small reflection of my true nature. And forget about the matter of your taxes, for You must understand that they were a mere trifle compared to my wealth. I am mercy itself. I have only wanted the pleasure of your company this day. Thank you for coming.”

And the man understood when He saw his King.