

"The King"

A short play

Written and Translated from Hebrew by: Ido Setter

Contact Info:

Mail: ido.setter@gmail.com

Cell: 972-54-5445094

Website: www.idosetter.com

The play takes place in a room inside a palace. Many boxes are scattered on the stage. The time is dusk. The light keeps getting weaker as the play progresses.

The KING, in a royal robe, calls to someone who is offstage

KING: But, but I am the king. A king needs a coat. What if I'm cold? (looks up)
The sky is already cloudy.

After not getting any response, the KING starts rummaging through the different boxes. Stops. Goes upstage.

KING: (announces) Decree number three thousand three hundred fifty eight.
The decree prohibits the temperature in the kingdom to go below fifteen degrees. Clause A in this decree prohibits the sky in the kingdom to get cloudy. Issued, logged and approved.

The KING takes a few steps back.

KING: (while looking up) Clouds – disperse.

The SUBSTITUTE KING enters. His clothes are identical to the KING's.

The KING stops and notices him. The SUBSTITUTE KING stops as well. Each one looks at the other and then at himself. They realize their clothes are identical. A long pause.

KING: You are so very young.

SUB: I can come back later.

KING: Who gave you the royal robe?

(The SUB doesn't answer) I am still the king, right?

SUB: Yes.

KING: Then answer me. Who gave you the royal robe?

SUB: The dresser.

KING: When?

SUB: Now.

KING: And you already put it on? You don't wait until your body is worthy to wear the royal robe?

SUB: I received very specific instructions.

KING: I am still the king, right?

SUB: Yes.

KING: So make sure that the words "my lord" will appear in every sentence you say.

SUB: Of course, my lord. I apologize, my lord.

KING: At the beginning of the sentence or at the end. Doesn't matter. You may also use "your highness" if you want to be more official.

SUB: Your highness, I'm...

The KING silences the SUBSTITUTE KING with a gesture and approaches him. He looks closely at his clothes.

KING: Not bad. Not bad. Thirty six?

SUB: What? I mean, what, my lord?

KING: Your shoulders size is thirty six?

SUB: Thirty five, my lord.

KING: You'll become wider, you'll become wider. How's the silk?

SUB: Silk, my lord?

KING: They didn't give you the silk underwear? Such audacity. One of the kingdom's duties is to supply the king a full set of clothes, which the king will be able to change in every period of time he sees fit. Decree number two hundred and three, issued, logged and approved. And clause C in that decree specifies what does the "full set of clothes" contain. Issued, logged and approved.

SUB: I didn't know that.

KING: Take the book of decrees to the dresser right away and let him know what you're entitled of.

SUB: Maybe later.

KING: You're wearing your own underwear?

SUB: Yes, my lord.

KING: Is it comfortable?

SUB: Very comfortable, my lord.

KING: So maybe you don't have to cause a ruckus at the dresser. You are new, after all.

SUB: My thoughts exactly, my lord.

The KING laughs and gets away from the SUBSTITUTE KING.

KING: You won't last more than six months.
And enough with that "my lord" thing. You annoy me.

SUB: But my lord specifically instructed me to add the words "my lord" to every sentence I say.

KING: So now I'm specifically instructing you to do the opposite. You are not worthy to call me "my lord".

SUB: Yes, my lord. I mean, yes.

KING: What's the matter? Giving up already?

SUB: No.

KING: Don't take me so seriously. Have some faith in yourself. The underwear business? It's nothing. You always make mistakes at the beginning. Do you know what the former king told me fifty seven years and three and a half months ago? That I won't last more than six months in the job.
Come here. Come here, I'll tell you a secret.

The SUBSTITUTE KING approaches the KING.

KING: You can issue a decree that extends your reigning period. That was the very first decree that I...

SUB: The committee decided that...

KING: Don't interrupt me. That was the very first decree that I issued - a decree that extends my reigning period every year. I forgot all about it after a few years. I was very busy working for the benefit of the kingdom.

SUB: The committee has decided to annul the book of decrees.

KING: I told you to not interrupt m... What? Nobody told me that. How could they have decided such a thing?

SUB: They have unlimited authorities now.

KING: Who gave them those authorities? (doesn't get an answer) Who?

SUB: I'd rather not say.

KING: I am still the king, right?

SUB: The queen.

The KING sits down on one of the boxes.

KING: I... I have to... Do you... Do you have any water? (jumps to his feet, goes upstage and announces) Decree number three thousand three hundred fifty nine: whenever the king says the word "water", he will be given an unlimited amount of water by his servants after no more than ten seconds. Clauses can be later added to include other types of beverages as well. Issued, logged and approved. (collapses on the floor)

It is a bit darker now.

The SUBSTITUTE KING rushes to the king.

SUB: My lord? My lord?

KING: (wakes up) How much time do I have left?

SUB: I don't know.

KING: Days? Hours?

SUB: I don't know.
KING: Find out.
SUB: I don't think I should leave his lordship in this state.
KING: Please.
SUB: My lord, I won't jeopardize you like that.
KING: Call me "my lord" again.
SUB: My lord.
KING: Thank you. Call me "His highness king Augustus the first".
SUB: His highness king Augustus the first.
KING: Ha.

The KING gets up on his feet.

SUB: My lord, I think it's better to...
KING: Don't you dare call me "my lord".
What are you doing here?
SUB: What?
KING: What are you doing here? Why did you arrive here? Why are you here?
What are you doing here?
SUB: I can come back later.
KING: You keep saying you can come back later and you keep staying here.
You're here. You planned. You contemplated. You arrived in a specific
time. Why? What's your mission?
SUB: Nothing. Nothing. There's no reason for me being here. It's an accident.
An accident.
KING: So why aren't you leaving? Leave.
SUB: You worry me.
KING: I'll be fine.
SUB: I got specific instructions...
KING: Enough with those "specific instructions". I'm the only one here giving

specific instructions, and I'm specifically instructing you to leave.

SUB: If that is my lord's will...

KING: Yes, yes, that's my will. Leave.

The SUBSTITUTE KING looks at the KING. Gets ready to exit. A moment before he does, he turns around and looks at the KING again. Leaves.

It is a bit darker.

After a few moments, the SUBSTITUTE KING enters.

SUB: I can't.

KING: I knew it. Why?

The SUBSTITUTE KING takes out a little knife, slowly. The KING starts laughing.

SUB: What's so funny?

KING: (still laughing) With that... with that... you are supposed to kill me with that?

SUB: Yes.

KING: (still laughing) It's very small.

SUB: It'll do the job.

KING: (still laughing) Will hardly penetrate through the robe.

SUB: But will easily behead you.

The KING stops laughing at once.

KING: Behead me?

SUB: Those were the specific instructions I was given.

KING: From her?

SUB: Yes. From her.

KING: They told me she begged for her life and that they let her run away.

(gets no answer) They told me we'll have a quiet change of power. For

the kingdom's sake.

SUB: They told me different things.

KING: Maybe we can reach an agreement?

SUB: I doubt it.

KING: I have a lot to offer to you.

SUB: The queen is offering me everything.

KING: Everything?

SUB: (smiling) Everything.

KING: And if you don't do it?

SUB: This possibility does not exist.

Don't look at me like that. You did it... And the king before you...

KING: Right. But those were different times. We don't need that know. I declared I will be willing to retire to my little resort in the woods and won't get in anyone's way.

SUB: You were told you could keep the resort in the woods?

KING: That was the deal.

SUB: Really?

KING: Yes. Is there a problem?

SUB: No.

KING: Do you want it?

SUB: No, it's fine.

KING: I insist.

SUB: No thanks.

KING: I can see it troubles you. Take the resort.

SUB: I demanded to get that resort.

KING: Why?

SUB: I had a strange feeling about it. The queen specifically stated it will become mine.

KING: And you are concerned that she lied to you.

SUB: The queen never lies. Not to me, anyway. She must have gotten

confused.

KING: She lied. And who knows, if she's lying about this sort of thing, what will happen with all of your other arrangements?

SUB: Does she usually lie?

KING: Always.

Take the resort and let me get out of here.

SUB: I'll get it after you're dead.

KING: She'll take it.

SUB: Then I'll be fine without it.

KING: Don't you see she's testing you? Earlier it was the underwear and now it's the resort. Do you know what'll happen if you tell her you wish to rest a little bit in your resort in the woods before the coronation ceremony? She'll respect you. And even fear you a bit. You want the queen to fear you a bit. Believe me.

SUB: I need to cut you first.

KING: Tell her you did and put it in a sack. I'll sneak out. I can cross the border in a couple of hours.

SUB: And after I cut you, I need to hang it on the fence in the kingdom's main square.

KING: On the fence in the kingdom's main square? (the SUB nods) I built it. The fence and the square as well.

SUB: The queen is very fond of symbolism. She must have lied to you.

KING: How I loved her cruelty, once.

SUB: Give me the key to the resort.

KING: Ask the queen to give it to you.

SUB: I rather get it from you. So she can fear me a little bit.

The KING searches his pockets, and after a few attempts takes out a big key and hands it to the SUBSTITUTE KING.

KING: Take care of that resort, OK? It has historical importance. I think I created there a couple of hundreds of children.

SUB: I didn't know you...

KING: Stop it. Everyone in the kingdom knows that.

SUB: I really didn't know. How many children does my lord have?

KING: Five hundred and twenty three boys and four hundred and ninety six girls, according to my last count. None of whom has any idea that I am the father, naturally. All of them will probably see my severed head hanging on that fence and rejoice. How odd. If only I had someone to mourn me, really and honestly.... The queen urged me, during the first few years. Ha, how I miss those first few years.

Have you come to an understanding with the queen?

SUB: No need to.

KING: You are a young man.

SUB: No need to.

KING: She didn't agree. Rightfully so. Don't worry, you will be able to do it after some time has passed.

SUB: I will never show such disrespect to my queen.

KING: It's not disrespect. And besides, she's already used to it.

The KING laughs. The SUBSTITUTE KING waits a few moments and joins him.

They laugh a big laugh.

The KING stops laughing at once.

KING: Don't you dare make fun of the queen.

SUB: (still cheerful) Not in the world.

KING: You know what she's capable of doing.

SUB: (stops laughing) I do.

KING: Have children with her.

SUB: What?

KING: Have children with her. If I had listened to her, and to my ministers who kept urging me, we would have had children. That could have changed everything. She really really wanted to do it, back then. But I ran to the woods. I wasn't prepared, always found a reason to postpone the whole thing. I was sure she understood me.

SUB: Do you think it's still possible?

KING: Certainly. A woman with this kind of powers remains fertile forever. Nature can't allow itself to let her genes go to waste. And I also granted her the best medical treatment possible. That was our agreement. I let strange women to bear my children and my queen underwent treatments. How stupid.

Maybe you are one of them?

SUB: My lord?

KING: Maybe you are one of my sons?

SUB: I doubt it.

KING: (examines him) There's always doubt. I can recognize the girls more easily. By the forehead. But the boys... What's your mother's name?

SUB: Sarah.

KING: Sarah. Sarah... Maybe. Who knows? How old are you?

SUB: Twenty.

KING: Hmm. Possible. Maybe that's why you still haven't... (points at the knife)

SUB: I don't think it has anything to do with it.

KING: I think it does. You could have done it the moment you came here. You could have done it two moments ago and you can do it right now. Maybe there's a reason for your hesitation. Maybe there's a reason for your demand to be given the place in which you were conceived. A strange feeling.

There's certainly a reason why you're attracted to the queen.

SUB: She is a very beautiful woman.

KING: You see? The body knows.

What will be your royal name, by the way?

SUB: Cornelius the first.

KING: Why not Augustus the second?

SUB: I'm not your son.

KING: So you won't mourn me?

SUB: No.

KING: You won't feel anything when you do it?

SUB: Anything.

KING: Did she show you how to do it? (gets no reply) She didn't? Such negligence. Throwing someone to the cold water like that. Did she at least tell you that the first time is the hardest? She didn't. Infuriating. She just sent you here, without any knowledge, without any experience, without any mental preparation. How will you do it? One stroke or a couple of strokes? Gently or brutally? Where will you stand? Where will you place your other hand? How will you breathe?

It's a bit darker now.

The SUBSTITUTE KING raises his hand holding the knife in the air. He puts the knife to the KING's neck.

KING: You were trembling.

SUB: No I wasn't.

KING: Yes you were. Because you weren't ready for it. Your body wasn't ready for it. It's strange how our body can surprise us sometimes, right?
(doesn't get a reply) Give it another shot. One smooth movement. Inhale while you're raising your hand and exhale as you're getting the knife close to the neck.

The SUBSTITUTE KING takes the knife away from the KING's neck. He raises his

hand in the air and puts the knife next to the KING's neck. He tries to inhale and exhale per the KING's instructions.

SUB: How was that?

KING: Horrible. No torque. Would you say you are a strong man, usually?

SUB: I would.

KING: So it's the nerves.

SUB: I have nerves of steel. They got me chosen to this role.

KING: Did she pick you personally?

SUB: Yes.

KING: For how long have you two... known each other?

SUB: Four years.

KING: She always loved them young. I'm the last one who can complain about that.

Can I ask you a not gentleman-like question? (the SUB nods) How was it?

SUB: A real eye opener.

KING: That's a nice answer. A very nice answer indeed.

May I help you?

The SUBSTITUTE KING takes the knife away from the KING's neck. The KING kneels.

KING: Don't forget to breathe. To allow oxygen get to the muscles.

The SUBSTITUTE KING takes away his hand. He raises it in the air and brings the knife to the KING's neck very slowly, while inhaling and exhaling.

KING: That was better. Although I wouldn't position my body that close. It will be such a shame to get the royal robe dirty on the very first day, right? (doesn't get a reply) Nevertheless, I think you'll be much better off

to be called Augustus the second. It'll be a sign of stability for the people. You know what? At least change your name to Cornelius the second.

SUB: I'll... I'll consider that.

The SUBSTITUTE KING puts the knife back in his pocket. The KING stands up.

KING: Do you have any time limit?

SUB: Until sundown.

KING: In just a few moments. She always liked to create unnecessary dramas.

Both of them laugh.

The KING kneels and waits for a few moments.

KING: Come on, we practiced and we're ready. It's the exact same thing. Only for real.

Wait. Can I say one last thing?

SUB: Yes.

KING: It's about the blood. Inexperienced people expect the blood to squirt and squirt. The blood does squirt at the beginning, that's true, but afterwards it happens in separate beats. Like a pulse. It squirts and it pauses. It squirts and it pauses. I'm telling you now so you won't get disappointed. OK?

The SUBSTITUTE KING doesn't respond. The KING waits for a few moments.

KING: Well?

SUB: I think we have another half an hour for the very least.

KING: I have no intention of waiting for you, on my knees, for half an hour.
(gets up) Shake your hand a little bit if it hurts.

The SUBSTITUTE KING shakes his hand.

KING: Slowly and gently.

What happens if the sun goes down before you do it?

SUB: We've never discussed that.

KING: But you do know what'll happen, right?

I'll issue a decree prohibiting the sun from setting.

SUB: There's no need, I really think I'm...

KING: You're ready. I know. I can tell. And still, let me take some of the pressure off you.

The KING goes upstage.

KING: Decree number three thousand three hundred and...

It is a bit darker now.

The KING stops. Returns.

KING: I can't even...

What did they do with the book of decrees?

SUB: The book of decrees?

KING: You said it was annulled. What did they do with it?

SUB: Burnt it.

KING: When?

SUB: Today.

KING: Did they summon everyone to the kingdom's main square?

SUB: The queen tossed it to the fireplace.

KING: Who else was there? All the senior ministers?

SUB: Only me.

KING: Only you... Three thousand three hundred and fifty eight decrees, who knows how many clauses, and only you two... Did you have your clothes

on, at least?

(doesn't get a reply) It really is over.

SUB: I won't be able to issue decrees as well.

KING: Learn how to hold a knife without trembling before you dare to console a king.

Give me the knife. I'll do it myself.

SUB: No.

KING: I don't allow you to behead me.

SUB: Why not?

KING: It will insult me. Give me the knife.

SUB: I must do it.

KING: Why?

SUB: That's the arrangement.

KING: Let me do it. You can later say whatever you want.

SUB: I'm a bad liar. She'll find out.

KING: You will be king. You will learn how to lie.

The sun is about to go down. You can't do it. I want to do it. Give me the knife.

SUB: You want to do it?

KING: Yes. I do. I do.

The SUBSTITUTE KING puts the knife in the KING's hand.

The KING kneels.

KING: Is there something else you wish to tell me?

SUB: No.

KING: Maybe you wish to call me "my lord" for the very last time?

SUB: No.

KING: Do you want me to call you "my lord"?

SUB: No.

The KING holds the knife in front of his neck for and waits for a few seconds.

KING: Do you mind helping me?

SUB: How?

KING: Kneel next to me.

SUB: Kneel next to you?

KING: It will help me greatly.

The SUBSTITUTE KING stands next to the KING. Kneels next to him.

KING: Can you also... Can you give me your hand?

The SUBSTITUTE KING extends his hand to the KING. The KING holds it.

KING: Thank you, my lord.

SUB: You are welcome, my lord.

The KING twists the SUB's hand behind his back and stands up behind him. The SUBSTITUTE KING fights, but the KING gets the better of him.

SUB: You're strong.

KING: Yes. I'm strong.

The KING puts the knife to the SUB's neck.

SUB: Allow me to escape.

KING: No.

SUB: I can cross the border in a couple of hours.

KING: No.

SUB: So allow me to ask the queen to come here. She won't get here unless I call her.

KING: She'll get here.

SUB: I may be your son.

KING: Not a chance.

SUB: And still, what if I am your son? You may find out one day that I was your son and that you killed me.

KING: I'm sterile.

(looks up) Look at this darkness. (the SUB raises his head. The KING gets ready to strike) Decree number three thousand three hundred and sixty: the kingdom shall be in total darkness as per the king's will. No clauses. Issued, logged and approved.

With the final shreds of light The KING calls to someone who is offstage

KING: Get the queen over here. Tell her the king is calling her.

(to himself) The king.

(and then, in a horrifying scream from the darkness) The king.