

"The King's Prerogative"

by  
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1

EXT. PRAG'S PRISON CELL - AFTERNOON

1

The cell is on the second floor of a tall, stone tower in a grassy field. Its wooden door is covered in dirt and cobwebs. It boasts an impressive, slightly rusty, metal padlock. The key to this lock hangs on a hook mere feet from the seldom-opened door.

The barrel-chested, older GUARD speaks to his white-haired and -bearded KING.

GUARD

I tried to swab him down, Sire,  
but he is *filthy*. I suggest you do  
not touch him.

The King smirks, his crown and scepter occasionally glinting in the sunlight.

KING

That was always my intention, good  
sir.

The Guard takes the padlock key off the hook with one hand and grabs his finely honed spear from its place against the wall with the other.

He proudly bangs the spear against the floor twice.

GUARD

I will stand ready by your side in  
case the beast -

KING

I will see him *alone*.

GUARD

(beat; shocked)  
But, Your Highness, he is -

KING

I know who and what he is, thank  
you.

GUARD

The prisoner is a *violent* man.

KING

You will stand your post at the  
guard station down the hall. I  
will call for you when I am ready  
to exit.

FADE TO:

2

INT. PRAG'S PRISON CELL - MOMENTS LATER

2

The door to the bleak, dark cell squeals loudly on its elderly hinges as the Guard opens it. He sniffs at the disagreeable smell that quickly overtakes the sweet air present on the other side of the door.

GUARD

What a foul odor!

The King nods and rubs his royal nose.

KING

I'll call when I need you.

GUARD

(quickly)

Your Majesty, I feel I must point out -

KING

Your concern is duly noted, thank you.

The royal takes a few steps into the inhospitable room. The Guard nods and, very reluctantly, closes and locks the cell door. He snaps to attention.

GUARD

I await your call.

Spear in hand, he leaves.

A small patch of sunlight streams through the barred window and lands upon the floor. The King carefully walks about the filthy cell. He peers into its darkened corners, but sees no one. A small creature skitters onto his right boot. He kicks it away in disgust.

He sees a puddle of soapy water on the floor, no doubt from the Guard trying to clean the prisoner.

KING

(calling)

Prisoner, come into the light! I, your King, command you!

Seconds later, something - someone? - inches along the floor of the cell toward the royal.

He (PRAG) is filthy, dressed in what could generously be called rags, bald, and sports a gray, scraggly beard that descends halfway down his chest. He stops just short of the sunlight patch.

(CONTINUED)

KING

Further, so I may see you!

Prag speaks through yellowed and broken teeth. He holds a long-nailed hand up to shield himself from the sun.

PRAG

It hurts my eyes, Your Majesty.

The King takes a careful step toward the prisoner.

KING

You are Prag?

PRAG

I am.

KING

You are educated?

PRAG

(beat)  
To a degree.

KING

Are you aware of the passage of time?

PRAG

Yes.

He points at a large collection of scratchings on a wall of his cell.

PRAG

The passing of the days. . . one for each sunset.

KING

Then you know what tomorrow is?

PRAG

(longish beat)  
The anniversary of your ascendance to the throne.

KING

Very good.

He adjusts his bejeweled, beloved crown.

KING

Have you heard of The King's Prerogative?

(CONTINUED)

The patch of sun moves a bit, and Prag crawls back to avoid it.

PRAG

No, Sire.

KING

(proudly)

Every year, on the anniversary of my coronation, I pardon one prisoner.

Prag's sickly eyes light up as much as they can.

PRAG

(hopefully)

Me, Your Highness?

The King nods.

Prag struggles to rise so he can show proper gratitude. Tears roll down his cheeks, smearing the dirt on them. Eventually, he manages to stand erect before his royal.

PRAG

You honor me, kind sir.

(beat)

I will lead an exemplary life. I will make you proud of me.

The King holds up one hand.

KING

Not so quickly. This release comes with a proviso.

PRAG

(quickly)

Anything you say. Give it words, Your Majesty. I beg you!

He folds his hands under his chin, as though in prayer, and squints at his sunlit superior.

KING

I need you to. . . to kill the Queen.

FADE TO:

3

INT. PRAG'S PRISON CELL - MINUTES LATER

3

Prag is befuddled. His dirty, calloused hands fall to his sides.

PRAG

Kill?

KING

I would do it myself, but it's not a fitting activity for a man of my station.

PRAG

Why do you want -

KING

That is not for you to ask!

(beat)

Will you do it?

PRAG

I suppose I. . .

The King starts pacing the room.

KING

The crime that brought you here - it was murder, was it not?

PRAG

I killed the shopkeeper in self-defense.

KING

You were found guilty and sentenced to this cell. Murder is murder in our fair land of Trayga.

PRAG

So I learned.

KING

(beat)

Your answer?

PRAG

I could not remain in Trayga after murdering the Queen. I would be discovered.

(CONTINUED)

KING

You could flee to Swaro. Our border is lightly guarded. You and your kin could start a new life.

PRAG

(beat)

I'm. . . not sure.

The King stops pacing and looks at Prag.

KING

When will you be released from here?

PRAG

(longish beat)

My sentence is life.

KING

So you will never see home again. You will die here shriveled, filthy, and alone.

PRAG

(beat)

Yes.

KING

I could ask another prisoner. No doubt, you've heard them moaning and wailing during the long nights, with nothing but a dream to keep them company.

(beat)

I'm sure they have heard you.

PRAG

But, Sire -

KING

You've killed before; surely you can one more time.

PRAG

I acted in anger then. It was not planned, as this would be.

KING

Your decision! Now!

PRAG

(longish beat; sadly)

For my freedom, I will do it.

(CONTINUED)

KING

(happily)

The guards will clean you up for the festivities tomorrow - a shave, a haircut, new clothes.

PRAG

Most kind.

KING

You will be presented at the ceremony as an example of my altruism.

(beat)

You *will* be suitably thankful.

PRAG

I will, Your Majesty. I *will*.

KING

After that, you are a free man.

(beat)

I expect to hear of the Queen's death before midnight tomorrow.

PRAG

Do you have a preferred method I should use?

KING

I wish it to look. . . "brutal."

PRAG

How will I gain entrance to the palace?

KING

The north door will be unguarded and unlocked. The Queen's bedchamber is on the second floor at the end of the hall.

The King points his scepter menacingly at Prag.

KING

Do not fail me. If you do, I will *personally* hunt you down, and, this time, your sentence will not be so lenient.

FADE TO:



4

INT. ROYAL BOX - THE NEXT DAY

4

Seated alone on their thrones in full royal dress, the King and QUEEN are watching the colorful parade celebrating the anniversary of his coronation as it winds through the Traygan streets. Ruffles and flourishes are being played on trumpets. Many bands and honor guards pass with returned salutes thrown to the royal box.

Some of the small country's military might - a loaded catapult, among other vehicles - roll past pulled by horses. A light breeze blows against the box's bunting, making it flutter.

The King, with his broad smile, is very pleased with the celebration. The Queen, not so much.

KING

A beautiful tribute, is it not?

QUEEN

(half-heartedly)

Your subjects love you.

KING

(quickly)

They love their *Queen* also.

She sighs.

QUEEN

I suppose.

KING

You *suppose*?

The Queen waves it off.

QUEEN

Forget I mentioned it. There is no need to speak of it further.

KING

If something is bothering you, there *is* need to speak of it.

Unsure, the Queen squirms on her throne.

QUEEN

To be truthful, the lack of love I sense is. . . from you.

(CONTINUED)

KING  
(feigning aghast)  
You doubt my love?

QUEEN  
Sometimes.

KING  
Have I given you reason?

QUEEN  
No.

KING  
Then why?

QUEEN  
It's simply a feeling. Intuition.

KING  
My love has never been stronger. I swear.

QUEEN  
(nonchalantly)  
If you say so.

KING  
(insulted)  
Does my word mean nothing?

QUEEN  
It's not that.  
(beat)  
Does it bother you that. . . that  
we cannot have children?

KING  
(beat)  
Not any longer.  
(beat)  
It *did*. I admit that.

QUEEN  
I *so* wanted to give you an heir,  
husband.

KING  
There is no use lamenting that  
which cannot be. I love you no  
less.

The Queen wipes away a tear.

(CONTINUED)

The King senses the opportunity to change the subject.

KING

(quickly)

What did you think of the prisoner  
I set free?

QUEEN

I am concerned. He's a convicted  
murderer, my dear. The Prerogative  
is not meant to be used that way.

KING

It is to be used however the ruler  
sees fit.

QUEEN

None of your predecessors ever set  
a murderer free.

KING

If he can be forgiven and  
rehabilitated, might not *any* man?

QUEEN

(beat)

He and his wife will merit extra  
surveillance.

KING

His wife?

QUEEN

(surprised)

You've never heard of Kolch - the  
mystic, the seer, the caster of  
spells?

KING

*Folderol.*

QUEEN

Don't be so quick to dismiss her.  
Stories of her deeds are many  
among the peasant folk.

KING

Let the common people believe what  
drivel they wish. We of royal  
blood know better.

FADE TO:

5

EXT. THE QUEEN'S BED CHAMBER - NIGHT

5

The King and Guard come running in response to screaming from one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting. She weeps hysterically, her skin drained pale. The men enter the bed chamber, leaving the crying lady-in-waiting in the corridor.

Blood is everywhere - on the walls, on the bedclothes, on the rugs. There are even some smears on the ceiling.

They are aghast. The King leaps upon the bed, anxiously searching for his Queen.

He finds her.

Her throat had been slit by something jagged. One eye socket is crushed. He pulls her close, her head bobbing oddly.

KING  
(through crocodile  
tears)  
Fetch the doctor!

GUARD  
(confused)  
The doctor? But the lady is past  
hope.

KING  
Get him!  
(beat)  
And take that woman with you!

The Guard nods and gently takes the hysterical young lady with him. He closes the door behind them, leaving the King alone in the blood-soaked room.

He none-too-gently lays the body of the woman he once loved down on the now-red bedding. He notices that some of her blood is on his hands and nightshirt.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, he glances about the room at Prag's handiwork.

KING  
(sotto voce)  
Well done.  
(beat)  
As promised, brutal.

FADE TO:

6

INT. THRONE ROOM - THE NEXT DAY

6

The King sits on his throne, seemingly meditating. Black bunting is draped over the Queen's smaller throne. Her crown rests on the seat.

The Guard approaches the royal, but is uncertain whether or not to disturb him. Spear in hand, he stands at attention before the throne.

KING  
(longish beat)  
Is there news? Speak.

GUARD  
The military has been fanned out  
all over the country to find the  
murderer.

KING  
They will find him?

GUARD  
They will.

KING  
I believe you.

GUARD  
(longish beat)  
You needn't see them now, sir.

KING  
No, but I *wish* to.  
(beat)  
Bring in the ladies-in-waiting.

The Guard departs and, very shortly, returns with half a dozen wet-cheeked young women. All of them are wearing black armbands. They stand nervously before the King. He sits upright on his throne.

He clears his throat.

KING  
Since there will never be a good  
time for this, I have chosen now.  
(beat)  
You are all being retained. One  
day, there may be a new queen, and  
she will need your exemplary  
services.

The ladies all smile through their tears.

(CONTINUED)

KING

Thank you for your time.

(beat)

You may go.

As they all leave together, the King calls to NARA, the youngest and prettiest of the group.

KING

Nara, please remain.

She stops exiting and reverently returns to the King. She bows before him.

NARA

Your Majesty?

The door to the throne room is shut.

KING

My wife was very fond of you.

Several times, she told me you

were her favorite lady-in-waiting.

Nara's eyes well.

NARA

She was a kind woman.

The King steps down from his throne and looks Nara in the eyes.

KING

Did you ever wonder why she never bore me a child?

NARA

That was none of *my* concern.

KING

(beat)

She was barren.

Nara bows her head.

NARA

I am truly sorry to hear that.

The King gently touches one of Nara's bare shoulders.

KING

My dear, Trayga and her people need a queen, especially at this time of healing.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

KING (CONT'D)

(beat)

I would like you to take on that  
role.

Nara is shocked.

NARA

I?

He cups one of her hands in his, raises it to his lips,  
and gently - featherlike - kisses it.

KING

Will you become my queen?

Nara gasps and begins crying plentiful tears.

NARA

I would be honored.

FADE TO:

INT. PRAG'S HOUSE - NIGHT

*ACROSS THE SCREEN: MONTHS LATER.*

The house is tiny - little more than a shack.

Prag and his white-haired wife, KOLCH, are sleeping on  
their hay-stuffed bed when he awakens with a start. He  
briefly screams, which wakes her. Seeing clearly that he  
is upset, she hugs him close. He breathes quickly.

PRAG

(very relieved)

Only a dream.

KOLCH

What was it about?

PRAG

I cannot say.

KOLCH

Why?

Prag breaks free of his wife's hold.

PRAG

I simply cannot! Please ask me no  
more.

(CONTINUED)

KOLCH

You know of the mystical value of dreams.

PRAG

Of course.

KOLCH

Yours could be an omen from the spirit world.

PRAG

I think not.

KOLCH

Did it have something to do with your time in prison?

PRAG

No. After that.

KOLCH

In Trayga?

PRAG

Yes.

KOLCH

But your time there after the King freed you was very limited: Only a day.

PRAG

True.

KOLCH

The dream was about something that happened during that day? Something you did?

PRAG

Yes.

KOLCH

What, husband? Tell me, please.

Prag briefly considers it and then rolls onto his side, his back to his wife. He sniffs away a tear.

PRAG

You would be ashamed of me.

KOLCH

Not possible.

(CONTINUED)



PRAG

Such knowledge would make it possible.

Frustrated, Kolch lies on her back, staring into the night. Prag remains on his side.

KOLCH

You were a better man in Trayga.

PRAG

(beat)  
Please don't.

KOLCH

Did you hear that the King will soon be a father?

Prag rolls over to face his wife.

PRAG

(very surprised)  
He will?

KOLCH

He married one of the late Queen's ladies-in-waiting. She bears him a child.

Prag drops onto his back beside Kolch.

PRAG

I am a fool.

KOLCH

Excuse me?

PRAG

A fool, my dear. You are married  
. . . to a fool.

FADE TO:

The King is sitting on his throne.

KING

You wish to cross the border into Swaro?

(CONTINUED)

GUARD

Yes, Your Majesty. We have reason to believe the late Queen's murderer has fled there.

KING

What evidence do you have?

GUARD

This man and his wife moved to Swaro not a day after the crime. From the accounts of their neighbors, they left hurriedly.

KING

What is his name?

GUARD

(uneasily)  
Y-Your Majesty. . .

KING

The name. Speak it!

GUARD

Prag, sir.

The King feigns surprise.

KING

The man I freed?

GUARD

The same.

KING

Oh, dear.

GUARD

You could not have known, Sire.

KING

Still I. . .

(longish beat)

You may cross the border. Find the filthy beggar and run him through. I will deal with any problems from Swaro's ruling house at the appropriate time.

The Guard thumps his spear against the floor twice and leaves.

FADE TO:

9

INT. PRAG'S HOUSE - LATER

9

Kolch and her husband are both wide awake now.

KOLCH

Why would you agree to such a *vile* act?

PRAG

Without it, I would have died in prison.

KOLCH

Surely, it is better to die an honest man.

Prag grows very emotional as he remembers his imprisonment.

PRAG

You never spent a minute in that wretched cell! During the day, the stench is overpowering. The food the guards give you is not fit for a dog - yet you begin to *long* for it just to break the damnable monotony. At night, the rats come out of the walls and nibble at your flesh.

(beat)

You hate me.

KOLCH

No. Never.

There is an urgent pounding on the door. The Guard calls from outside.

GUARD

In the name of the King of Trayga, let us in!

Kolch urgently grabs her husband's arm.

KOLCH

Hide! You must not be found!

PRAG

I hide from no man in my own home.

The door is easily broken in. The Guard and two subordinates enter. Prag and Kolch rise from their bed and approach the men. The Guard points his spear at them.

(CONTINUED)

GUARD  
Stand your ground.

Kolch takes a small step forward.

KOLCH  
(adamantly)  
What is the meaning of this?

GUARD  
Out of the way, woman. Our  
business is with your husband.

He snaps his fingers. The two subordinates, with  
difficulty, restrain Kolch by her arms.

GUARD  
Step forward, Prag.

KOLCH  
He is *not* the guilty one!

GUARD  
Silence!

Prag takes a few steps toward the Guard.

GUARD  
As a representative of the King of  
Trayga, I inform you that you have  
been found guilty of the heinous  
murder of our late queen.

PRAG  
Without a trial?

Kolch tries anew to get free. The guards struggle to keep  
hold of her.

PRAG  
I did it for the King.

GUARD  
Enough!  
(beat)  
Receive your sentence.

Prag steadies himself and tries to sound brave.

PRAG  
I am ready.

KOLCH  
Husband!

(CONTINUED)

Smiling, the Guard runs Prag through with his spear. He falls to the floor in a bloody heap, the weapon still a part of him.

KOLCH

*No!!*

He twitches for several seconds and then is still. The Guard indelicately pulls his bloody spear from the body with a sickening *slurp*.

Kolch struggles more.

GUARD

Release the woman!

His subordinates are happy to do so.

Kolch kneels beside the body of her husband and holds him close. After a few minutes of teary grief, she delicately places the body on the floor, stands, and faces the Guard with steel in her voice and manner.

KOLCH

You will leave my home.

GUARD

Yes. The sentence has been carried out.

The men begin to leave.

KOLCH

Do one thing for me?

GUARD

Madame?

KOLCH

Tell the King I will see him soon.

Confused, the men leave the small home.

FADE TO:

The King, dressed in his nightshirt, sits happily in a plush chair. He smiles and drinks from a golden goblet.

He is pleased with himself.

(CONTINUED)

He pulls his nightshirt tighter as a draft blows through the room - though the door and the windows are closed and bolted.

A shadowy, wavering figure of an old peasant woman appears before him in the moonlight. Her voice echoes.

KOLCH

You believe everything is behind  
you. . . that you have triumphed.

(beat)

You are *wrong*.

Scared, the King throws his goblet, which passes through his visitor.

KING

Who *are* you?

KOLCH

Kolch.

The King pauses for thought.

KING

That sounds familiar.

KOLCH

I am the wife - the *widow* - of  
Prag.

KING

Now I remember.

KOLCH

You will not soon forget.

KING

How did you enter here?

KOLCH

I have not. I am projecting my  
image from elsewhere.

KING

Rubbish! You *are* here. I will have  
you thrown out.

KOLCH

That I would like to see.

(beat)

I am but a trick of the light, a  
candle in the darkness. You would  
be wasting precious time.

(CONTINUED)

KING

Leave me be, old woman.

KOLCH

You killed my husband.

KING

I did no such thing!

KOLCH

Your guard did then, with your blessing, no doubt.

(beat)

You used my husband to do your dirty work, knowing full well what his punishment would be when he was found.

KING

How did I know he would be caught?

KOLCH

You murdered him as surely as if you plunged the spear yourself.

(beat)

I will have my vengeance.

The King chuckles nervously.

KING

You're going to "punish" me with your imaginary powers?

KOLCH

I will do worse: I will punish those you love.

The King springs to his feet.

KING

If you harm either of them, you will feel the sting of my blade!

KOLCH

You will never find me. I am not in Swaro or Trayga. I can be everywhere. . . or nowhere.

KING

You don't frighten me!

The image of Kolch grins.

(CONTINUED)

KOLCH

Then you are a bigger fool than I  
imagined.

FADE TO:

INT. THE QUEEN'S BED CHAMBER - LATER

*ACROSS THE SCREEN: A MONTH LATER.*

It is time for Queen Nara to deliver her child. An older, male DOCTOR and the King stand by the foot of her bed while she is in labor. A young lady-in-waiting sits up front, dabbing the Queen's sweating forehead with cooling water as needed.

DOCTOR

(to Nara)

Just one more push, Your Highness,  
and the baby will be born.

Nara is exhausted. She breathes heavily.

NARA

Tired.

(beat)

So tired.

KING

My darling, only one more push.  
Just one.

NARA

I. . . I don't know if I can.

KING

You *can*.

Nara smiles at her husband's praise and nods.

She gathers all of her remaining strength, which is little, and pushes the baby into the world. The Doctor severs the umbilical cord, and, with a slap on the backside, the child cries her first cry. Her mother is simultaneously exhausted and thrilled.

DOCTOR

A perfect, baby girl.

(beat)

Congratulations!

(CONTINUED)



NARA  
(to the King)  
Look upon her, my dear.  
Perfection!

She notices that her husband has taken several steps away from her. He is looking aghast at the newborn, his eyes wild.

KING  
No!

DOCTOR  
(urgently)  
Your Highness? Are you ill?

The King points a quivering finger at his daughter.

KING  
The child!

NARA  
Beautiful, is she not?

KING  
(beat)  
Her face! Her. . . Her voice!

NARA  
(confused)  
She was just born. She does not speak.

The image of Kolch appears by the head of the bed. No one sees her but the King. He points at her.

KING  
This is *your* doing, old woman!

The Doctor, Nara, and the lady-in-waiting all look at him, befuddled. They look about the room and see no one else.

Kolch speaks in echo.

KOLCH  
I could not harm any innocents.  
This punishment is yours alone.  
(beat)  
To your eyes, your daughter's face  
will *always* be that of the wife  
you had murdered. In every  
childhood gurgle, you will hear my  
Prag's voice.

(CONTINUED)

The King screams at what he is doomed to. He claws at his eyes, ripping one of them out of its socket and onto the floor. He crushes it with a booted foot.

The Doctor grimaces. Queen Nara and the lady-in-waiting scream several times each.

Kolch's smiling image fades to nothing amid the chaos.

FADE TO BLACK.