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The Good King

By Buddy Goodboy

There was a prince who was taken bodily from his library to his father's deathbed. The king was ashen where he had once shone brighter and prouder than the sun, and wasted and transparent where his arm had once been strong and brown. It was clear to the queen, the prime minister, and the nobles that his time was up, or near enough, and that the prince would need to leave his study for good.

The prince held his father's hand as he passed, and was quiet.

After an appropriate silence, the prime minister approached. You are king, he said.

I am a scholar, the prince said. I am not as strong a man as my father. I cannot speak as loudly, nor wield as broad a sword, nor command troops as capably.

We can arrange for tutors in armed combat and strategy so you may continue your kingdom's work.

My father is dead, said the prince, and my skills lie in different areas.

The prime minister turned the idea around. He was displeased. You are king, he said.

Tell me, minister, must I continue the work of my father's kingdom?

Of course, he said.

Then mustn't I learn what the work of my father's kingdom is first?

Of course.

Ah, said the prince. Then my course is clear.

Good, said the prime minister. Give us governance.

No, said the prince. Not until I understand my father's kingdom perfectly. Only then will I be knowledgeable enough to continue the kingdom's work.

The prime minister tried to find a hole in the king's logic. While he did that, the new king began to walk his kingdom, meeting strangers and learning all there was to know about the kingdom. Since there is so much to know, he died of old age before passing a single law.

And that's the tradition we follow today, grandson.