

Mikaela Matkowski

Desert Hills Middle School

8th grade

Mrs. Zoerb

1,519 words

Justified

In the Kingdom of Erameth, royalty ruled over the people. There was a generous King and Queen who loved their people and helped them as much as they could whenever they could. The people loved them for it and would follow them anywhere. Unfortunately, no place is perfect and Erameth was no exception. The King and Queen never saw it coming, and some say they were too trusting, a little too naïve for their line of work. Though that may be true, no one expected the culprit to have grown up with the royalty. As Captain of the guard, he took the royal family by surprise, murdering and overthrowing the King and Queen before anyone knew what he'd planned. The King's and Queen's son and future heir, a boy just of ten living in the castle, disappeared that day. The Captain got his way and took over as King, ruling Erameth. The new King claimed the prince dead, but there was never any proof, and the people clung to that shred of hope, praying he would return one day to take back his throne...

The King sat looking around the table at the other men, his council. They were one hour into the meeting and the King was starting to get annoyed. It seemed like most of the time all they talked about were the commoners, even now they were arguing about spending some of the treasurer's gold on them. Yet, what had *they* ever done for *him*?

Finally, he'd had enough, "Stop it, now!" he growled at the council, "If the commoners want me to spend my wealth on them, they shouldn't cause so much trouble! Join the army! There's always room and food for soldiers." He looked towards his Admiral, and the man looked him in the eyes unflinching. He didn't trust the Admiral, and felt he was still loyal to the old King, though it had been years since he died. The other men of the council were weak in his eyes and he knew he wouldn't have trouble with them. Half of them couldn't help but squirm when he

looked at them, and it was obvious they were scared. The Admiral never backed down, and though it angered the King, he was still the best war strategist the King had ever met, save himself of course. If he was going to conquer the rest of the Kingdoms, he needed the Admiral, whether he liked it or not.

“What about the armies?” he asked.

“The army is slowly pushing back the army of Thalic in the north,” the Admiral reported, “and are pushing the border against Rhaon in the west, but the men can’t seem to gain ground.”

The Admiral paused, and the other men steeled themselves. The news wouldn’t be good, and the King watched the Admiral carefully, waiting for it.

“There is also activity in the forest near the outskirts of the Kingdom, southwest of our warring armies. We thought it might be invaders from one of the other two kingdoms, but they haven’t killed any men,” he thought for a second, “the nearby towns haven’t cooperated as well since they showed up, which leads me to believe there may be a rebellion in the making.” The Admiral smiled a little, smug, and the king scowled at him. He’d destroy the rebellion before it had a chance to grow.

“Send a squad to end the rebels,” he commanded, “I don’t want to hear of them again.” He stood up, a sign that the meeting was over, and the other men stood as the King strode out of the room.

Three fortnights later, the King was walking down the hall with two of his guards, when he saw a new recruit. The boy stared at the King, and when the King saw him, he felt a flicker of annoyance and familiarity.

“What are you staring at, boy?” he asked, giving a malevolent smile.

The boy stood his ground, and the King was impressed as well as angered. “Nothing, your Majesty.” the boy bowed, but he wasn’t trying to placate his King, the boy’s voice held steel.

“What’s your name?” the King questioned.

The boy seemed to realize who he was talking to and backed down, looking at his feet, which satisfied the King. “Xavier. I just finished training,” he said, “I’m part of the King’s guard.”

The King studied the boy and knew he had courage, but not so much that he wouldn’t bow to the King’s will. He could be worth something.

“Work hard and you may actually become someone, someday,” the King replied, walking away.

A couple days later, the King sat at his table with a feast spread out before him. Every night he ate well, always leaving extra as commoners went hungry in their villages. This night he ate with his generals, lieutenants, and guards. The army was winning the battle against Thalic, and the King knew he’d be leading another kingdom soon. His joy was clouded by the latest council meeting, when the Admiral had told him about the squad sent to kill the rebels. Most of the soldiers had been to war before, and barely any were novices, yet the squad didn’t return. With no soldiers to declare the rebellion finished, he had sent another squad, this time with his captain

of the guard. He didn't fully trust the man, but then again he didn't fully trust anyone. His captain was ruthless, though, and the King knew he wouldn't come back until the rebels were dead. Or he was.

The King looked around the table at his men and Xavier. In the off chance that the Captain did die, maybe he could recruit the boy. He'd seen the boy sparring a couple times with the other men in his guard, and he was a talented fighter. He'd be a good candidate.

Through weeks, the King waited and waited for the return of his Captain and the squad, but gave up after three fortnights. After contemplating his decisions, he promoted Xavier to Captain.

Then soldiers began disappearing from the armies along the west border and the King couldn't think of any explanation. They had won the war against Thalic, and they had no reason to kidnap or kill soldiers, save revenge, but in the end it wouldn't help them. That left the rebels, and the King refused to believe they were responsible for the soldiers' disappearance. They must be dead, the King convinced himself, or at the very least almost gone. There's no way they could survive two squads of soldiers and be healthy enough to kidnap fighters. So the King lived as usual, waiting to hear of rebel activity, but after another two fortnights, began to let down his guard.

A sennight later, the rebels attacked the castle. The King was in the middle of a feast with his nobles when a shout went up from the guard. The King and his court had been overindulging in food and wine, enjoying the night, and were caught unexpectedly. Before anyone knew what was happening, the nobles were crowded away from the windows and doors by the guards. Xavier, who had been standing guard behind the King, grabbed his King's arm and commanded two

guards. Xavier led the King down the hall at a run as the other two guards fell in behind him. They reached the Kings room, and after Xavier checked it for intruders, he led the King in. Xavier closed the door behind the King as the two guards went back to protect the nobles. Xavier turned towards his King, and the King felt a wave of foreboding, but was a little dizzy from the wine. Confused, the King went to sit down by his fireplace.

“Wait,” Xavier commanded, and the King stopped cold. Turning around, he saw Xavier pull out his sword, and the King took a step backward.

“I waited seven years for this,” Xavier said with a malicious smile, “fitting that your Captain would kill you.” As I killed the King and Queen while Captain, the King realized.

“Put the sword down,” the King ordered, regaining his wits and courage. “I’m your King, and if you want to live through tomorrow, put down your sword!” He shouted in rage and fear.

A flash of sadness shone in the boys eyes, but his anger squelched his tears, “*My King, my parents, were murdered years ago. They trusted you more than anyone, and you betrayed them!*” he rebutted sharply, taking a step closer, “And now I will kill you.”

The King tried to get away, but his years of gluttony and debauchery aged him quickly. Xavier lunged forward and forcefully struck through the King’s heart. There was no joy on his face as Xavier watched the King drop to his knees, his death quick and merciful.

After, he left the room to tell his rebels and thank the Admiral. Seven years of training and planning had paid off, and the King got what he deserved. Now, Xavier could lead his Kingdom as his parents had always wished.