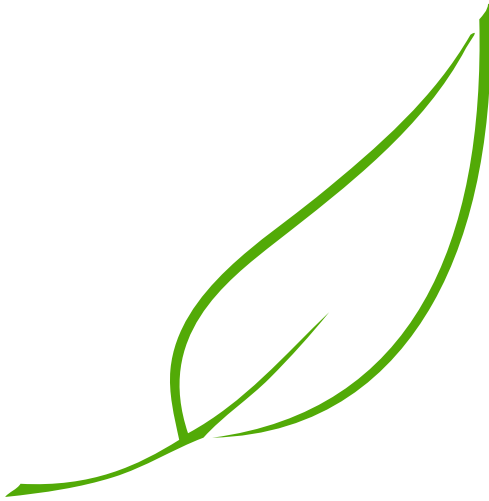


THE ROYAL SHUFFLE

by Ken Bradbury



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Characters (3): King Rupert; Loxley, his less-than-faithful servant; Marigold, the Queen Mother

- LOXLEY:** Announcing! His Majesty! Supreme Ruler of the kingdoms of Lilliput, Darmasoot, Kittyroot and Pussyfoot! Sovereign Monarch and Potentate of the Sandwich Islands, Greece, Turkey, Sirloin and the French Isle of Fries! And Ultimate Ruler of everything in between here and there and everywhere! His Majesty! King Rupert!
- RUPERT:** *(peeking out, tentatively)* Is that my cue?
- LOXLEY:** That was your cue, Your Majesty.
- RUPERT:** Could you say it again? I wasn't paying attention.
- LOXLEY:** Okay. Short version: Here comes the King!
- RUPERT:** *(entering royally)* Thank you! Thank you! No, no, no applause. Thank you. So nice of you to come. I'm the King. Who are you?
- MARIGOLD:** *(entering)* Weak.
- RUPERT:** What?
- MARIGOLD:** Wimpy. Weak. Not even close to kingly.
- RUPERT:** My walk? My talk? What?
- MARIGOLD:** Your walk, your talk, your everything. Rupert, you're a poor excuse for a king.
- RUPERT:** But mother!
- MARIGOLD:** You've got to address your subjects for the first time in a few minutes and you're not even close.
- LOXLEY:** *(looking out an imaginary window)* His royal subjects are gathered in the courtyard, Queen Mother.
- MARIGOLD:** Oh drat. We need more time. Rupert, you aren't even close to being your father. It was such an inconvenience when he died.

- LOXLEY:** It was terrible, Your Grace.
- RUPERT:** How exactly did he ... ?
- MARIGOLD:** Oh, that stupid horse. I told your father to get rid of that old horse. He was addressing his troops just before the Battle of Hemoglobin ... and you know how your father tended to go on and on. Well, his horse became bored, then fell asleep and fell over on top of your father. Squashed him flat.
- LOXLEY:** It was a beautiful funeral, Your Grace.
- MARIGOLD:** After we scraped him up off the pavement. Flat as a pancake but we sort of rolled him up into a coffin and buried him. He looked like an eggroll. *(looking at Rupert)* And now we're stuck with you.
- RUPERT:** But I think I'll make a most wonderful king, Mother. The outfit! Just look at my gorgeous outfit! *(turning around)*
- MARIGOLD:** You look like a party favor ... like a cheap gift at a bridal shower. Are those yellow tights?
- LOXLEY:** Sunburst. They're called sunburst.
- MARIGOLD:** It looks like someone put a canary in a blender. Oh, I wish I'd had two sons. This will never work.
- RUPERT:** But I've been practicing, Mother! I'm learning to talk like a king!
- MARIGOLD:** You have?
- LOXLEY:** We've ... uh ... we've been working on it, Your Grace.
- MARIGOLD:** Like what? Show me.
- RUPERT:** What would you like to hear?
- MARIGOLD:** The Cataract Army is attacking our northern border. They're scheduled to be here by noon.
- RUPERT:** Oh, dear. Should we serve lunch?
- MARIGOLD:** They're trying to destroy our kingdom, you dolt! What do you tell your troops?

- RUPERT:** Troops. Oh my, yes. We'll need troops, won't we?
- LOXLEY:** Remember the troop speech we worked on, Your Highness?
- RUPERT:** We did?
- LOXLEY:** You know ... war and fighting and stuff.
- RUPERT:** Oh. Oh yes, that one. I keep getting it mixed up with the Sanitary Wastewater speech.
- LOXLEY:** No, no. The War speech.
- RUPERT:** Yes. Yes, the War speech. I think I remember it now. *(taking a noble stance)* Dear Warriors! *(to Marigold)* Those are the soldiers, Mother.
- MARIGOLD:** I know. Hurry. I think I'm getting ill.
- RUPERT:** First let me say how simply dashing you all look in that shiny armor! When the sun hits your helmets my heart goes pitty-pat and I just want to dance with glee!
- LOXLEY:** Uh ... the war, Sire.
- RUPERT:** Oh yes. The silly little war. Look fellows, I want you to try really hard, okay? Slash and burn and pillage and do all those really nasty things that you see in the movies! And guess what? When you get done we're going to have the most marvelous party! Games and punch and lots of those little crackers with the cheese spread on top and those little cocktail weinies and oh, it's going to be such fun! So let's go out there and destroy somebody, okay? Okay! *(to Marigold)* How was it?
- MARIGOLD:** I am ... speechless.
- RUPERT:** Oh, that's wonderful!
- MARIGOLD:** No it's not. That was the most pitiful battle speech I've ever heard. You sound like a guide in a chocolate factory.
- LOXLEY:** We're ... uh ... we're still working on that one, Your Grace. He really is improving.
- MARIGOLD:** You mean he was worse?



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