**A Serious Attempt to Make a Better Peacock**

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(3520 words)

CHARACTERS:

Reginald: Advisor to the King and Chief Minister

The King

Manchester: Minister of State

Felicia: Assistant Minister of State

Guards (non-speaking)

SETTING:

Small throne room with two thrones

*(The throne room is empty except for THE KING, REGINALD, and GUARDS. THE KING is sitting on the throne. REGINALD is pacing around in front of THE KING, occasionally letting out sounds of disgust.)*

REGINALD

Where is the man? This is quite inappropriate. I know he’s been on a world tour introducing himself to our allies for months now. We rarely see him. Home for a few days, then off again.

(*THE KING shrugs.*)

He called the meeting. He said it was urgent. Couldn’t he let us know at least?

THE KING

Oh he did. What did he say? Let me think. Oh yes, he said, “I’m on my way.”

(*The double doors open, and MANCHESTER and FELICIA enter. They are in good spirits. Occasionally MANCHESTER points out some sculpture, painting or stained-glass window and briefly describes it to her.)*

*(FELICIA dashes for the Queen’s throne*.)

FELICIA

I’ve always wanted to do this.

(THE KING *puts his arm across the throne and FELICIA retreats*.)

MANCHESTER

(*enthusiastically*) Well, I’ve done it, my King.

REGINALD

What have you done? Who is this woman?

MANCHESTER

She’s my wife Felicia. I met her in Chicken and married her. Oh, I’m sorry. Is that the right code name? What do you call it? (*He laughs to himself.*) These names! It’s Chicken, right, honey?

(*FELICIA nods*)

REGINALD

Chicken. Where’s Chicken?

FELICIA

Chicken is what Turkey will be if we don’t get the Wolf away from the Fox.

(*FELICIA giggles*)

REGINALD

What are you talking about?

MANCHESTER

(*joyfully*) We have no allies! None! Finally, we’re done with all of them. Nothing to stop us. Not one blessed worry on our plate?

(*FELICIA nods and they do a little dance together*)

THE KING

(*quickly standing*) What? How? When? Why?

MANCHESTER

You see, Felicia, I told you it’d be a surprise.

REGINALD

You were supposed to introduce yourself as the new appointee, that’s all.

MANCHESTER:

I did, I did, yes, I did that. But I was uncomfortable with how they treated me and our new policy and more importantly what they said about our people and you, my King, when I presented our policy. Plus when I learned from Felicia what those rats were all up to. No sir, I wasn’t going to allow them to talk about you and our policy that way.

REGINALD

(*walking in circles worried*) We have no allies? How could that be possible? I’ve received no word from any of them. Neither has the King.

FELICIA

Oh you will. They’re conspiring and sending troops.

REGINALD

Why is she here? This is state business.

MANCHESTER

I appointed her as the Assistant Minister of State. Heck, she knows more about this than I do.

THE KING

What?

MANCHESTER

I’m just teasing, your majesty. But she knows a lot. That’s one of the reasons I married her. She was a spy for the Elephant.

REGINALD

Stop using these animals!

But remind me. I forget. Who’s the Elephant?

MANCHESTER

That’s confidential, on your orders. You said I’m not allowed to reveal the animal code to anyone, not even you or the King.

REGINALD

I sent that communique to your predecessor, and he’s dead, and so’s that idea.

MANCHESTER

The communique was still in the inbox. He never opened it.

REGINALD (*to The King*)

The animals became too confusing for the staff. They started to call each other by the animal names.

THE KING

What, I ask, has happened to our allies and why will they attack us?

MANCHESTER

They won’t attack, sire, or at least I don’t think so. (*leans close to the KING*) I suggested our new revolutionary policy, that we want to end borders, that all lands be shared, and that we form a world council that will manage the earth.

THE KING

I see…You what? New policy? What did they say?

MANCHESTER

Well, they were unhappy. They want to create an armed wall around us so we can’t attack anyone and are cut off. Imagine! They think we’re crazy. Talk about insecure.

THE KING

But we need to transport goods and trade with them--

MANCHESTER

--oh my King, trade is so primitive. No borders, no trade. I told them, if they refuse to unite, we can take care of ourselves and they’ll receive nothing from us. We don’t need their goods, but they need ours.

REGINALD

Who gave you the authority to do any of this? And why is that our policy? I never heard of that policy. You’re Minister of State, not Minister of Trade or the King! You can’t make policy. What’s wrong with you?

MANCHESTER

My goal has always been to make a better King, a more enlightened sovereign, right, honey?

(*FELICIA nods.*)

We’re better off if we unite. We’re better off if we share our resources. There’s no freedom if there are borders.

REGINALD

So you just sat down and did this? You broke off relations and cut off trade in a chat over coffee?

MANCHESTER

Well, no. I presented the policy at--

REGINALD

--whose policy?

MANCHESTER

The King’s, of course.

REGINALD

The King never suggested such a policy!

MANCHESTER

Not directly, but Felicia heard the Queen give a speech at the Economic Club and it inspired her and Felicia inspired me. I thought the King wouldn’t disown the ideas of the Queen, especially when it would improve the world.

REGINALD

Oh the Queen. Well, if the Queen says it, if the Queen wants it, well then…

THE KING

Reginald! Watch yourself. So…how did you try to convince them of my queen’s idea?

MANCHESTER

By taking them to strip clubs where they would drink and be more vulnerable, you know. I thought they’d be more open. I saw Felicia there.

THE KING

She’s a stripper?

MANCHESTER

Oh no. She’s a spy. She was there with one of our enemies trying to plot against us. She told me they were even thinking of bombing the palace to get rid of you and the Queen and Reginald and some of the Penguin’s spies, such as your brother-in-law. They want to keep the borders and the nations and all that stuff that divides us. Representatives from the Monkey were there too.

THE KING

Animals again. My brother-in-law is a Penguin spy?

FELICIA

And so is your press secretary.

REGINALD

What! My cousin?

THE KING

So what happened? Why did you…

MANCHESTER

Patience, my King, I shall tell you. But let me ask you: Suppose a Minister of State in another land criticized your Queen and said she was having an affair with one of the dog walkers at the castle. What should I do? Should I let that pass?

REGINALD

Of course not! That’s insulting!

MANCHESTER

And they went further. They showed me photographs of her with the dog walker, in a most intimate setting, and the Queen, well, the Queen, she looked like she herself was stripping, right honey? (*FELICIA nods.*)

THE KING

This is outrageous! That’s blackmail.

MANCHESTER

I agree, your majesty, and I think they insulted us because they didn’t want to consider your new policy. So I cut off the meeting and found out dirt on their spouses, lovers, children or whatever. And you can thank Felicia for this, because she once had affairs with several Ministers of State and other high-ranking officials. Imagine how that would look? A Minister of State having an affair with an enemy agent?

THE KING

(*THE KING nods and says confidentially to REGINALD*)

What animal was I?

REGINALD

I can’t recall.

THE KING:

This is ridiculous. What was my animal?

FELICIA (*overhears*)

Peacock.

(*Both MANCHESTER and REGINALD nod*. *THE KING slumps back to his throne, unhappy with his name.*)

THE KING

Why didn’t I know about this code?

FELICIA

They were worried you would break if captured.

THE KING:

What?! I’m the King! You thought I would weaken and give it up?

(*They all nod. THE KING looks at the GUARDS who are nodding too*).

REGINALD

Anyway, I nixed the project, though the staff still uses it in fun sometimes. At the last party, they had a skit with the Snake seducing the Peacock and the…

THE KING

Silence!

REGINALD

(*to MANCHESTER to change subject*)

So you confronted their leaders with the dirt?

MANCHESTER

No.

REGINALD

You threatened them?

MANCHESTER

No. We’ll use it if we must, but I said, if they wouldn’t sign the agreement for unity, we were going to war with the Penguin and the Panda.

REGINALD:

You can’t say that. You don’t have that authority

MANCHESTER:

I know, but they thought I did. This was far too important to let pass. They dismissed our ideas without a thought. It impugns our image, our pride, our status as a people, not to speak of our beloved and pure Queen. What would you have me do? Say: Fine, go ahead, call our Queen a slut, what do I care? I wasn’t about to let you, our Peacock, sorry, our King, be treated this way.

THE KING

We are now at war with the Penguin? (*Then to his guard the King whispers)* Isn’t that a character in Batman?

MANCHESTER

Well, sire, not only the Penguin, because you know well that we can’t be at war with the Penguin without the Monkey knowing. And the Monkey and the Pig are as close as you can get. The Panda also protects the Pig and the Kangaroo, so by the time I had finished my tour, they had formed quite a coalition.

REGINALD

(*proud of himself*) Oh, I remember the Monkey.

FELICIA

Keep it to yourself.

THE KING

(*aside to FELICIA*) How do you know the code?

FELICIA

I’m his wife, your majesty, we have no secrets. (*She winks)*

THE KING

So the Monkey and the Pig and the Penguin and whatever have declared war against us?

MANCHESTER

Yes, they have, because they don’t want to share their lands and resources. They’re selfish and afraid. But, don’t worry, as you probably know, the parts for most of their armaments come from us, indeed most of their arms come from us--

FELICIA

--not that they keep the arms. They resell them to the Cockroach for twice as much, and the Cockroach sells them to anyone, including terrorists.

MANCHESTER

Anyway, they’ve declared war on us, but it’s just show. They’re no threat. But they do suspect us.

THE KING

Of what? We’ve done nothing.

MANCHESTER

Yet. We’ve done nothing yet. You see, once they heard this idea, they assumed that if they didn’t cooperate and share their lands, we would come and take their lands from them.

THE KING

Why would they think that?

MANCHESTER

I suppose it’s because I brought up war. But not to worry. We’re far more powerful. They won’t attack us.

REGINALD

Well, at least that’s good news. I mean, not that they suspect us, but that they won’t attack us.

THE KING

But what about the rest of the world? Do any governments support us in this new policy?

MANCHESTER

So far, no one. The rest think that they’ve owned their land and been nations since the Big Bang. None of them can see the earth as one big land that we all share and that they made into pieces.

REGINALD

Who can blame them? They’ll lose their flag, their traditions, their identity. And change is expensive.

FELICIA

Not changing is suicidal. Not unifying means extinction, the end of the world. And no one will lose their traditions or identity. Think of the Basque within Spain.

MANCHESTER

So…we’re going to force them to comply. You explain, Felicia, it was your idea.

FELICIA

Not really, sweetie, it was the Queen’s idea. We’re forming a virtual Global Land called Senlima, whose members in each state and nation will oppose any policy or law that does not think in terms of the earth. Senlima will renounce all national and regional objectives. It will think globally and act as one world.

MANCHESTER

We’re going to fight them from within, create a massive global lobby. Already we have twenty million members, according to the latest tally on the Internet, and we started it only a week ago. And we have other means, not mentioned by the Queen.

THE KING

Like what?

MANCHESTER

We have Felicia.

THE KING

What? What do you mean?

FELICIA

I have secret inflammatory information on the personal lives of many prominent members in many states. We can play their game. For example, I know some of the spies in your regime.

THE KING

I see.

MANCHESTER

Now I know that’s salacious, but we must use it, your majesty. It’s a way to undermine them. We need unity. And to make a better Kingdom we need to take a position. No allies, no trade, no burden of looking for help or supporters or comrades or whoever every time we do something. You’ll see. They need us. They’ll come around. Senlima will force them. It will be the biggest pressure group and lobby in the history of the world. The future is in unity, in the sharing of all resources. No borders. That’s the future. For now, we’re officially free. Liberty, sire. No worries.

REGINALD

Freedom in a big cage! We have enemies all around us. Even our families are spying for our allies.

MANCHESTER

But this is real liberty. We can do whatever we want. Most countries fear us anyway.

FELICIA

As the King, you have two choices. You can continue to live with deceit and suspicion and game-playing—what we call diplomacy and spying—or you can be honest and refuse subterfuge and wait for unity and Senlima to triumph. Is it not better to stop this endless lying and deceit?

THE KING

Except we’re alone, isolated. Is this what precedes unity? And my Queen. Do you have these photographs?

MANCHESTER

I’ve burned them and their originals. They were fake anyway, photoshopped. The Queen is attractive, your majesty, but she doesn’t have the body of a stripper.

THE KING

Quite so. Still, how are we to function when our supposed friends are now our enemies and our neighbors have barricaded us? We’re cut off completely.

MANCHESTER

Sire, you mustn’t worry. Forget the old ways. They’ve been tried and failed for centuries. In the old way, we’d try to outwit and get the better deal, often at the expense of good relations. In the old way, we’d go to bed with the enemy if we thought it would help us. We’d support corrupt corporations if we thought it would overthrow a government we hated, cripple nations for a trade route or to gain resources, and get a whole nation hooked on drugs so we could make our economy better or weaken theirs. That’s the old way. Now isn’t that way of behaving deplorable? But that’s what happens with borders; you become selfish and protective. It’s unhealthy and leads to behavior unsuited to a King or anyone beyond the playground. We need something better. Why not share our land and resources but preserve our traditions and identities? Because that’s the only future. How will it happen? We need you, sire. We need you to support this. We need you to lead this revolution.

REGINALD

Lead? Are you mad? Revolutions bring disorder and chaos. There’s no peace, no harmony. The good things get dumped out with the bad, including the royalty. And they never last.

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(*THE KING nods and agrees*)

MANCHESTER

But think, your majesty, have you ever known a King to lead a revolution?

THE KING

Not to my knowledge.

MANCHESTER

Kings die or get overthrown in revolutions. There’s Louis XVI in the French Revolution and Nicholas II in the Russian Revolution and Charles I and II in the English Civil Wars. Why is that, sire?

REGINALD

Stop this foolishness. The King isn’t going to lead a world revolution. The King doesn’t want to change anything. He stands for stability and peace. He’s a patriot.

THE KING

Tell me. Why are kings not revolutionary?

(*As the conversation continues, The King moves off his throne and begins to walk back and forth in front of the throne, occasionally staring at Manchester and Felicia.*)

FELICIA

Because the King is not leading the revolution, he’s trying to prevent it.

MANCHESTER

Is there any reason why a king should not lead a world revolution?

REGINALD

Yes, there is. The King is a symbol of stability, security, and the status quo. If a revolution comes, where is security? The words status quo and revolution are opposites. The king is the first to go. That’s why kings don’t like revolutions.

FELICIA

Kings can fight for change. They can have a voice and can support good causes and make a difference and defend justice. They need not be dummies that others lead around.

REGINALD

Yes, but this change is far beyond a good cause or having a voice. You’re asking the King to do more than show up at a charity or make someone a knight or visit sick kids hospitals or protect heritage buildings.

THE KING

You’re both revolutionaries, aren’t you?

(*They both nod*.)

You took this position to start a revolution somehow?

(*Both nod.*)

You challenged our relations with other nations because you believed we all should start a world revolution?

MANCHESTER

Correct again, sire.

THE KING

And you believed that I, the King, would honor your actions, however unorthodox, and help you, that I wouldn’t jail or hang you, as I should. You hoped I would be the first King to lead a revolution. Isn’t that correct, Manchester?

MANCHESTER

Yes sir. That’s always been my plan.

THE KING

And the stories about them threatening with photos of the Queen?

MANCHESTER

Oh, they’re true. But there are many more threats from many more nations. In one case, they put me in jail, and, once again, Felicia helped me escape. I have had numerous problems, my King, and I will not bore you with them. Suffice to say, none of the government leaders wants to leave the old ways, none liked this idea of starting something new and ending the old ties—ties, by the way, always in their favor—none wanted to share resources and land so all people everywhere would thrive and not just their own people.

FELICIA

But, most importantly, none understood how urgent the situation is. We either eliminate borders and share resources or the great migrations that are certainly coming will destroy them in any case. Please note, your majesty, that we’ve not talking about the ordinary people. The people are not the problem. It’s the politicians and government leaders who oppose this because they have the most to lose. Senlima is growing by the minute.

THE KING

Interesting, is it not, Reginald, what these radicals have done? It’s bold, disobedient and treasonable, but it’s interesting.

REGINALD

I suppose so, your majesty. I wouldn’t call it interesting, it’s more like treasonable. After all, he’s put you and us all in a very difficult spot. Can we battle the whole world?

THE KING

They love us if we comply, but if we want something radically different, they then resort to threatening tactics. A sad view of how other lands think of us and our alliances. These so-called allies are not allies at all. They’re only in it for what they can get out of it.

REGINALD

But isn’t that true of us all? If we assent to this idea, we must share our resources and land too.

THE KING

Of course we must. Manchester and Felicia have told everyone we’re willing to sacrifice for the future. We’re setting the example.

I have to tell you, I’m a fairly conservative fellow, more like a Royal figurehead than a revolutionary.

MANCHESTER

I know that, sire.

THE KING

But the Queen is not, not at all.

MANCHESTER

So Felicia tells me.

THE KING

And, to be quite candid, it’s one of the reasons I love her. She’s been saying for years that our country, our world, needs to head down a different path and we need to show the way. She thinks like a mountain. She changes Rousseau’s famous quote to say, “The earth is born free and everywhere it’s in chains.” I think you and she think alike.

MANCHESTER

Thank you, your majesty.

THE KING

Well then, perhaps it’s time for the King and Queen to do more than ride in a parade, hey Reginald?

REGINALD

Yes, sire. If you say so.

**CURTAIN**