

Story 2029 (1997 Tape 2)

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Slowness Wins a Kingdom

There was once a king in a distant country who had five sons. For years this king spent much of his time encouraging horse racing among his people. He not only attended races frequently but he also spent time and money organizing horse races

As he grew older, this king began to be concerned about a serious problem. When the time came for him to step down from the throne, which of his five sons should he have crowned as the new ruler? The choice would not be made easily, for all five sons were very intelligent, and each had outstanding qualities of his own. He wondered for awhile what test he could use to determine which of his sons was best qualified to succeed him. He finally decided to organize a horse race in which only his sons would compete, and the boy whose horse came in last would be his choice to replace him as king.

When he announced his decision to the public, all

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of his subjects were surprised and confused. People began asking each other, "Why should someone whose horse finishes last in a race be qualified to be king? Shouldn't the crown be placed on the head of the son whose horse finishes first in the race? Shouldn't the crown go to the winner instead of to the loser?" The wise men of the land gathered at the palace to discuss the king's method selecting his successor, but they were unable to understand how a horse race could be used for that purpose. Even people living in rural areas were discussing this matter. In one village there lived a beautiful and intelligent girl who was the daughter of a shepherd. When she heard about the planned horse race and the confusion it had created, this girl said to the shepherd, "Father, I know a solution for the king's problem of selecting a successor."

"Is that so?" asked the shepherd. "Do you really have a solution for that difficulty?"

"Yes, I am sure that I do. Let us go to the palace and ask to be admitted into the king's presence. I can solve his dilemma, and as a result of doing so, I may even be able to get some money for our family so that we

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can lead more comfortable lives." When they arrived at the palace and were admitted into the presence of the ruler, the girl said, "Your majesty, I think I know a way to manage the horse race among your sons in such a way as to achieve the result that you wish."

"Is that so?" asked the king. "Can you really help me to manage this race so as to test my sons?" Then, looking more closely at the shepherd's daughter, he said, "You are not only a beautiful girl, but you also have bright and sparkling eyes which suggest that you are clever. How should we manage the horse race?"

The girl said, "Your majesty, if you allow each prince to ride his own horse in that race, the race will be slowed down so much that it will never end. But if you have each prince ride the horse of one of his brothers, he will surely gallop swiftly to the finish line in order to make his own horse arrive there later. This will thus be a genuine horse race, for each horse will be urged to run as swiftly as it can. Then you can fairly choose as your successor the prince whose horse comes in last.

Not only the king but also others in the room realized how brilliant was this idea. "The king said, "You

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are both pretty and very intelligent. I should like to have you married to one of my sons."

"If you will permit it, I should be willing to marry the prince who becomes your successor."

After that, the king arranged to have the horse race. Calling his five sons to him, the king explained to them how the race would be conducted. They were told that they would not ride their own horses in the race. The race started, and each prince urged to full speed the horse he was riding, trying to reach the finish line first. At that speed the race did not last very long, and when it was over, a new king was crowned.

Shortly after that, the beautiful daughter of the poor shepherd was married to the new king. The old king was pleased that the selection of his successor had been made by the test that he had devised. The newlyweds were very happy, and the groom began a long reign as ruler of that land.