

Chosen

"I have been called away to Rayford, our neighbor to the South," said the King. "Their kingdom is in great disrepair. They have lost their king and are in need of my assistance. I am going there to lend them a helping hand. Until I return, I am appointing you three to care for my kingdom."

Three attendants stood before the King: Joan, Saulutus, and Otar. "I have chosen each of you to oversee different responsibilities here in my land. You are responsible to care for and keep what is under your authority. I do not know when I will return, but when I do, I expect to find you managing well."

The King motioned to his assistant who brought him three scrolls from a shelf in the corner. As the King unrolled the first, he called Joan forward. "Joan, I am placing you in charge of all of our agriculture. You are to oversee the planting, nurturing, and harvesting of all plants in the kingdom." The King handed her the scroll. "You will find all that you need to know in here. I am entrusting to you the kingdom's food supply."

Next, the King turned his attention to Saulutus. "Saulutus, I am placing you in charge of our military while I am gone. All soldiers will answer to you and will follow your leadership in my absence. You are to keep our land safe from intruders as well as keep order among the people while I am away." The King handed Saulutus the scroll and turned to the third attendant.

"Otar, my final need is for someone to maintain the castle while I am away. It must be kept in excellent condition." He handed Otar the scroll and rose from his throne.

"The farmland, military, and castle are mine. I am putting them under your charge and I expect you to take great care to manage them well. I will return when I have finished my work in Rayford." The King looked directly into the eyes of each attendant as he spoke, then left the room.

Joan, Saulutus and Otar immediately opened their scrolls and began to read through the detailed instructions.

Saulutus was filled with pride as he thought of what the king had entrusted to him. His mind raced as he thought of ways to improve the current army by training them aggressively and pushing them to be in excellent condition both physically and mentally. Joan also felt honored that she had been given such an important task. The welfare of the entire kingdom depended on her ability to properly manage the farming and food supply of the land. Otar too felt privileged that the King had selected him, though he couldn't help but feel a little less important compared to Saulutus and Joan. Their responsibilities seemed much grander. However, he read through the many tasks involved in caring for the castle and began thinking of ways to make sure they would all be completed properly.

Outside the castle, a procession of people had gathered to see the King off. He and his assistants, all on horseback, made their way through the people and paused at the castle gates. Rising from his saddle, the King spoke loudly to all: "I have appointed Joan, Saulutus, and Otar to take care of my responsibilities while I am away. Listen to them until I return."

With that, the King settled back into his saddle and began his long journey to Rayford.

Joan

Joan arose early in the morning. She had many tasks to accomplish today. The season for planting was just a few weeks away, and she wanted to meet with the farmers to discuss this year's growing plan.

The scroll Joan had been given specified the minimal amounts of food that must be harvested to feed the kingdom. As Joan poured over the details of the farming reports from the past year, she noticed areas that needed improvement. She looked over the maps of the fields and concluded they were not making the best use of the land. Many of the fields had the rows set farther apart than needed. They were losing valuable space from which they could be reaping food.

The instructions the King had left clearly stated, "I am placing all of the farm lands under your care. You are to oversee the planting, nurturing, and harvesting of this season's crops. The people of my kingdom will be depending on you for a good season." She laid the scroll aside.

Joan took seriously the responsibility that had been given to her. She wanted to exceed the expectations that the King had set. Remembering that the scroll had specific amounts of how much should be harvested, she decided she wanted to double that! She knew it would require a lot of hard work, but she also knew that the King would be very pleased with the outcome if she succeeded.

Joan assembled all the farmers. "This season we have a lot of work to do. While the king is away, he expects us to continue to work his land and to harvest the required amounts. But what if we could double how much we grow and exceed his expectations? How wonderful it would be to see his face when we tell him we have not just done what he asked, but we have done much more!" The farmers grew excited and clapped in agreement.

Joan explained to them all the work they needed to do in order to double their harvest goals. They would first till up all the fields and set new lines for the seeds, closer together. Second, after planting, they would need to be extra vigilant about keeping weeds out of the fields as well as rodents. This would require people to work day *and* night to constantly be on the lookout. Finally, they would have to build three more storehouses in order to store all the extra food they harvested. This too would require many long days and late nights of labor, but it was very important that they have somewhere to keep their food dry and safe.

After several weeks of preparation, the first day of work finally began. Joan and all those under her management were excited to get the fields ready for the new crop lines. They worked enthusiastically throughout the entire task. Once they had set the new lines, they carefully planted all the seeds. They were very attentive to each seed they buried, making sure it was of the proper depth and covered with the appropriate amount of dirt. After many weeks, they had all the fields planted.

Their final tasks of building the storehouses proved to be challenging. They worked long days and into the night. It was very draining for those who also had to remain awake through the night to keep the rodents and other animals out of the fields, but all put in their due time. Now everyone, especially Joan, anxiously awaited the harvest to see if all this hard work would pay off.

Otar

Otar pulled himself up out of bed. He stretched out his arms and let out a big yawn. "Well, I better get to work." Otar pulled out the scroll and read what he needed to complete. The list was way too long. Otar felt overwhelmed and put it down. "How am I supposed to get all this done? There's so much to do." Otar sat back and moaned out a long sigh. He grumbled his way through some of the tasks. He swept a few of the rooms but didn't bother to get all the corners and edges thinking, "Who's around to notice if I miss a few spots?" Finally, the day came to an end and Otar couldn't wait to plop onto his bed and sleep. "I can't wait for another day of cleaning," he remarked sarcastically.

He headed towards his room, but on the way he ran into his friend Bagpippen. As Bagpippen approached Otar, he noticed he was looking a little upset. "What's got you down, Ol' boy?" asked Bagpippen.

"The King has asked me to keep the castle clean and maintained in his absence. But there is just so much to do, I don't know how I am supposed to keep up with it all. I don't know why he didn't pick me to do something more important." Bagpippen smiled and said, "Well, my friend, let's take a look at what you've got to do."

They headed to Otar's room and sat down. "When I'm feeling overwhelmed, I look at what I need to get done and break it down into small parts. Let's count all the tasks you have and then see how many you think you can finish each day." Together they worked through the list and divided the tasks up. Once they were finished, they had six smaller lists that looked much more manageable. "Thank you," said Otar. This is much more doable! But I still don't know why I have to be the one just cleaning the castle." Bagpippen thought for a minute and then said, "How do you think the King would feel if he came back to a run-down, weed-filled home?" "He would probably be upset," Otar responded.

"But what if he came home to the cleanest, best-kept castle he had ever seen? How do you think that would make him feel?"

A light came to Otar's eyes. "I bet he would be very pleased with me for doing such a great job!"

"I think so too," smiled Bagpippen as he left the room.

The next morning Otar woke with excitement! He was eager to start his tasks. He chose one of the smaller lists he had made and started sweeping and mopping. He carefully worked through each room and swept every corner of the room. As he swept, he noticed that in many of the main rooms the wood floors had begun to crack and dry out. After he finished sweeping, he summoned a carpenter to find out what they could do about the floors. The carpenter came in and sanded and refinished all the floors that needed it. Otar beamed with delight as he looked on the new rooms.

After seeing the improvements from the work he had done so far, Otar was so inspired he looked around the rest of the castle to see what he could improve. He began adding new items to his list and also hired more men to help him complete the tasks. He even decided to use some of his own money he had diligently been saving to hire more workers. With more people, he would be able to finish the work quicker and make the castle more beautiful than ever.

Week after week Otar inspected the castle to see what he could improve. The castle was spotless everywhere and Otar knew it had never looked this good. Aside from it being kept in tip-top shape, he had done many updates. He had gotten new floors installed, he had all the doors and gates replaced, and he had filled the courtyards with rare and deliciously-scented flowers. The castle was truly a home worthy of the King. Otar could not wait until the King returned to see how beautiful his home had become!

Saulutus

Saulutus strolled out from the King's presence filled with pride. He had always dreamed of being a great military leader. He wanted the military to have the strongest, best-trained soldiers in the nation. Ideas poured into his mind. He wanted to create super soldiers!

Saulutus was up before the sun rose and arrived at the army barracks. "As you know, the King has been called away to assist in Rayford. I am in charge while he is away. I intend to step up your training and make you stronger and faster than you've ever been." The soldiers looked skeptically at him but said nothing. "By the time I'm finished with you, I will have the most elite soldiers in the nation! I will see you on the training course in two hours."

The soldiers lined up on the practice field morning after morning going through training. Saulutus demanded that every soldier put in three hours of training every day. He even removed soldiers from their other responsibilities in order to push their development. After a few weeks of this, the townspeople began to notice that there were very few soldiers on duty throughout the town. The crime rates throughout the kingdom began to increase. Without the soldiers in place to enforce the laws, it became easy for criminals to take advantage of people.

Saulutus received many complaints from the people and was aware of the possible consequences. He realized that pulling soldiers from their posts in the town allowed the greedy, selfish, and evil-minded people to take advantage of the good citizens. Though Saulutus knew the safety of the townspeople was at stake, he decided to concentrate on making super soldiers rather than on protecting the people. He chose to ignore the chaos and looked forward to the big event he had been planning - a demonstration of how excellently he had trained his army.

Saulutus sent out heralds into the town to announce the grand event. They walked up and down all the streets calling to the people, "Tomorrow, General Saulutus invites you to a grand event! Come and see the most elite soldiers in the nation perform daring challenges!" The heralds spread the message throughout the entire town.

The townspeople, however, were quite upset that Saulutus had taken their soldiers away for training. They were now living in fear of being robbed or hurt by criminals who wandered freely through the town. While some planned to attend the event, others chose not to support it.

The big day had come for Saulutus. He dressed in his finest military outfit and as he stood before the mirror, he said, "Today, everyone will see how great a general I am. I have trained these soldiers to be in the best condition possible. I am the finest leader that this kingdom has ever known!" He took one final look in the mirror and then headed for the arena.

Saulutus sat in his seat of honor and awaited the beginning of the event. But just seconds before it began, there was the loud blast of a trumpet and the strong voice of the official herald called out, "The King has returned! Make way for the King!"

The Return

The trumpets sounded as the King neared the city gates. All the people stopped what they were doing and made their way to the main roadway. The gates swung open and the King's procession made its way through the crowds of people and to his castle. The people who had gathered to watch Saulutus's demonstration quickly left the arena and made their way toward the King. Saulutus also left his post in the arena and worked his way toward the castle, but he was angry that the King had returned right before his demonstration. Now no one would be able to see how well he had trained the soldiers.

As the King rode through the town, he greeted the people with smiles and waves. But he noticed that they were not in high spirits. As he looked at their downcast faces, he wondered at the cause. His procession made its way past the farm fields. They looked noticeably different than when he had left. The King was curious and full of questions.

When he finally reached the castle, he dismounted his horse. The castle looked dazzling! The smell of lilacs filled the air and the colors inside the courtyards made for a beautiful sight! The King smiled as he approached his home. The royal gardens and glory of the newly refinished castle warmly welcomed him.

As the sun peeked over the mountains the next morning, the King sent out messengers to summon Joan, Saulutus, and Otar. The three arrived at the King's palace and stood in his presence. "I am happy to be home and would like an account of your actions during my absence."

Joan quickly stepped forward, eager to share what she had been working on. "Your Highness, when you first gave me the instructions regarding the harvest, I planned to follow it to the letter. However, as I inspected the systems we had in place and the spaces we have been using, I made a few changes. I hope you will approve." The King nodded and Joan continued. "I noticed that we were not using our space to its maximum potential. The rows were too far apart and we were losing valuable planting space. We plowed new rows and we have been able to harvest twice as much this season! We also built new storehouses so we can keep all the food from spoiling. I hope that you are pleased with the efforts of your servant."

The King grinned from ear to ear and exclaimed, "Well done, Joan! You have not just done what I asked of you. You have gone far above that. Because you have managed the responsibilities I gave you so well, I will place you as overseer of the entire kingdom's farmlands. I will also send you out to share what you've learned with the surrounding kingdoms. Well done!"

Joan bowed her head and felt very satisfied with her accomplishments. The King was obviously pleased. That is what she had desired most of all. Her planning and hard work had been worth all the effort!

Otar was next to step forward. "Otar, it is clear to me that you also have gone beyond my expectations. When I arrived yesterday, I hardly recognized this place. You have made the gardens more beautiful than they have ever been, and every room looks and smells cleaner than I can remember. What caused you to do such an excellent job?"

Otar was very happy to hear the King's praise. "Well, when I first began, it was not easy. I was overwhelmed with how much I had to do and wasn't very excited. But a friend encouraged me to break down the tasks and reminded me of how pleased you would be to see the good work."

"My home has never looked better," declared the King. "Well done! I am promoting you to Head of Maintenance. You will be in charge of keeping all structures and gardens throughout the kingdom in good repair and looking their best." Otar beamed with joy!

Saulutus slumped back a bit as he listened to Joan and Otar's reports.

The Return Part 2

"And how about you Saulutus? How have you been keeping our people orderly and safe?" The King had now turned his attention to Saulutus for his account of the military which he had been given charge during the King's absence. Saulutus inched forward and quickly tried to think of a way to impress the King with a good report. As he recalled the words on the scroll the King had given him, he felt a sense of dread. He remembered it said, "You are to keep our land safe from intruders as well as keep order among the people while I am away."

"Speak up, Saulutus. Is my kingdom safe?" Saulutus slowly began, "Well, Your Highness, I have been working hard to get our soldiers into the best shape possible. We have spent hours and hours each day doing training and practicing. In fact, just before you returned we were going to have a small demonstration of our new skills."

The King's face turned stern and solemn. He spoke in a serious tone. "Saulutus, I gave you very clear instructions about what your job was. You were to make sure my land is safe and to keep order among the people. I have been home but one day and have already received multiple complaints about soldiers not being at their posts. I have been told that thieves are running wild and that people are afraid of being robbed! Why did you let this happen?"

The King's eyes were piercing and his anger was growing.

"I was trying to make them stronger, Your Highness," trembled Saulutus.

The King's voice rose and Saulutus shrank back when he sprang from his throne and shouted, "That was NOT your assignment! You pulled the soldiers away from the responsibilities I had given them and put my people at risk! Why? Because you were only focused on how important they would make you look if they could do feats of strength. If enemies had attacked while I was gone, we would have been caught by surprise and overtaken! Because you failed to manage the responsibility I gave you, the lives of all my people were put at risk! You have forgotten why I put you in charge."

The King summoned his soldiers to his side. "Take this man and remove him from my kingdom!" The soldiers escorted Saulutus to the edge of the kingdom. "Saulutus, by the order of the King, you are hereby banished. You are not to enter this kingdom ever again." Saulutus fell to the ground and wept loudly as the pronouncement was made. He would now become a wanderer and be forever without a home.

Back at the palace, the King called for a great feast. The whole kingdom gathered together to celebrate his return and to rejoice in the distinct honors he had bestowed upon his faithful servants. "Today, I would like to publicly recognize Joan and Otar. In my absence, they have managed well the responsibilities I entrusted to them. They have been promoted to positions of importance in my kingdom because of their outstanding stewardship."

Joan and Otar stepped forward, bowed low before the King, and received a grand applause from the cheering multitude.