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## Box 09, Folder 52 - "There Was Once Upon a Time a King Named Prospero" (E.M.S.)

Edwin Mortimer Standing

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There was once upon a time a king named Prospero who had a daughter Miranda whom he loved most dearly more even than his kingdom. The Queen, Miranda's Mother had died when she was born so this tiny baby of three months was his all in all, as there was no other child living in the family.

Prospero had married rather late in life and this, combined with the fact he wore a beard, made him look more like Miranda's grandfather than her father. Though he might look old he was young in heart and looked out on the world with all the wonder and interest of a child.

As King, Prospero, of course, had a lot of work to do governing his kingdom of Milan. He had not only to make the laws and see that they were carried out he had to do many other things which in a larger and more modern state are done by the king's ministers. So that he was really rather like Prime Minister, Finance Minister, War Minister and a lot of other ministers rolled into one. So that you see being a King for him was not just sitting on a throne and twiddling his fingers whilst people bowed down before him.

Prospero had a great hobby, and you would never guess what it was, though I gave you ten guesses. You think you could? Did someone say Stamp Collecting? No, that was not it. Carpentry? No. Gardening - Painting, no, none of these things. You would never guess, so I will tell you. It was Magic. That was what Prospero loved to study.

Whenever he got a moment to spare from his duties he would hurry along to his library and taking down some big books from the shelf would carry them to a table. There in a few moments he would be lost to the world, pouring over those great volumes in which former magicians had written down the secret of their art. At such times if servants came to tell him that some ambassador from a foreign country had come to see him, he would have to give his message two or three times before Prospero came down to earth sufficiently to hear and understand what it was. Then he would say:

"Oh, blow the ambassador, why does he not mind his own business".

And the servant would say very respectfully:

"But, Your Majesty, it is his business to speak to you".

"Oh, very well then", Prospero would say " I will come to him".

On one of these occasions when the messenger came to Prospero in his library, his brother, Sebastian, who always lived with them, happened to be in the library too. Seeing Prospero's disinclination to go, he said:

"Shall I go and see to this matter for you?"

"Yes, do." said Prospero, his eyes returning to his magic books. "I wish you would be so kind".

"What shall I tell him?"

"Oh, I shall leave that to your judgment entirely" said Prospero.

So Sebastian went off and did the king's business for him, ~~was~~ whilst he remained studying his beloved magic. And Sebastian did it very well, because he was a shrewd and clever man. After this very often when Prospero wanted to study in his library, he would say to his brother:

"Look here, would you mind doing my work for me today?"

Then he would look at his engagement calendar.

"Let me see: 11 to 1: Acting as Chief Judge in the Law Courts. That means he had to perform the duties as a sort of umpire between the people who had squabbled about property and all sorts of other things and punish the guilty and set free those who had been falsely accused.

From 2 to 3: Discussion with a messenger from the King of Naples about a trade agreement.

And so on, all through the day there was plenty to do.

Prospero trusted his brother entirely, he told him he could act just as he thought right on his, Prospero's behalf.

"You can sit in my throne, use my signet ring, drive in my best carriage, use all my servants, even my money box. Only one thing I ask you not to do and that is to disturb me in the library with a lot of questions".

Now this arrangement suited both brothers admirably. For

Sebastian was just the opposite to Prospero in many ways. He did not care a scrap for books and learning, but loved to dress himself up in fine clothes, bossing other people around, and generally feeling that he was somebody very important. And on the whole it worked well because, as Prospero well knew, Sebastian was an able man and managed his affairs very well. So Prospero felt he could with a clear conscience retire into his library and leave the practical running of things to his energetic brother.

If you like to make any drawings I suggest you make one of Prospero studying in his library, or Sebastian sitting in state on the throne. Or you could have Prospero bending over Miranda's cot with some nurses in the background.

#### Chapter 2.

So things went on alright for about six months or so, and it seemed a very good arrangement for both. But there are some people in this world who never know when they have had enough (like some little boys I know when they go to a party) and Sebastian was one of these. Instead of being thankful for all the privileges which Prospero had given to him, he still felt dis-satisfied, for he was too ambitious. Perhaps you do not know what that means, so I had better tell you. To be ambitious means to want to get on in the world, which is a good thing in its way, if you do not let it get too far, so that in the end you want to get on in the world at any price. Although Sebastian had got money, clothes, power and authority and interesting work to do

and was bowed down to by all the other people in the Kingdom, there was still one thing that worried him and that was that he knew he was not the real ~~king~~ King, but only a substitute king. At any moment Prospero might take all these things from him, and occasionally he did, for Prospero did not want to lose touch with his people and whenever Prospero took over the work again himself, Sebastian came to resent it, as if he had no right to it. He felt himself slighted, which was absurd, because, of course, Prospero had every right to do what he wanted in his own kingdom. Now to feel like this was very wrong of Sebastian and he knew it. It was temptation and he should have resisted it. Instead of that he continually brooded over it and thought to himself day and night:

"If only I were the real king, how different it would be". The whole thing got so much on his mind that he began to lose his appetite and Prospero suggested that he should go away on a holiday. This only made him worse. Now when you keep thinking of something that you should not be thinking of, you generally go worse and worse into (you left a blank here).

Sebastian came to say to himself: "I could do all these things better than my brother Prospero, who is such a prim old fool. In fact it would be better for the country that I should do it instead of him.

Perhaps you can guess what the next thing was he began to think about. That was to get rid of his brother. But how? That was the question.

It would not be possible to suggest to the people that it would be better to have a change, because there were very fond of Prospero and Miranda. as they had been of her Mother, the late Queen. Prospero was loved by his people because he really loved them. Sometimes he used to go out drives with the baby Miranda and all the people would crowd round the carriage and look at her. Prospero on these occasions was always very friendly and kind to them and not the least bit snobbish. In fact he treated them more as if he were their father than their King. On the other hand they respected his brother, Sebastian, but they did not love him, because at heart he had a cold and selfish nature.

So bit by bit Sebastian's mind became full of darker and more terrible ideas. The only thing to do, he realised, was to kill his brother and the child, Miranda. But he could not do it directly, or the people would rise up in revenge against him. For a while he thought of poisoning him, but that was too risky, as he himself had meals at the same table. Weeks and weeks he pondered over the matter, till one morning, as he lay awake in bed, an idea constantly came to him (probably put into his mind by an evil spirit). He jumped out of bed in a moment full of a wicked joy, dressed himself hurriedly and came down to breakfast in the highest spirits.