

The Thunder and the Grass · *Jack Matthews*

ONCE THERE WAS A KING who reigned peacefully over a flourishing Kingdom, but he was so morbidly afraid of death that nothing could ease his spirit. His preoccupation was so great, in fact, that he took his food and drink grudgingly and was often oblivious to the words of others. When he labored in council, he did so as one whose thoughts were always elsewhere. And the darkness of his nights were crossed by cold pale bands of waking, during which times the terrified King lay in his bed, counting his heartbeats.

Knowing that every step he took carried him nearer to his end, he hardly ventured forth from his chamber. And during his long vigils, he began to think of Death as another Empire, the shadow of his own; he pictured it as an awesome Kingdom—one that he was destined to visit one day when his time upon this earth ran out.

His Queen, who was a grave, lovely woman, with a gift for pacifying birds and dogs, could do nothing for her Master. She, better than most, understood how the King spent his hours. He was so fearful he often seemed to her more of a demon than a man—one of those trolls whose wrath is said to wash tirelessly back and forth in a grotto of molten darkness.

Then one day the King heard of a magician, who lived in a distant part of his Kingdom and was supposed to command great and unnatural powers. It was said that with a flick of his finger he could whiten the ground shadow under a laurel thicket; and by merely speaking certain words he could change the day of the week, so subtly that no one knew it had happened.

“What is this man’s name?” the King demanded.

“His name is Enobarbus, Immortal Majesty,” his Chief Councilor answered.

“What kind of name is that?” the King muttered; but it was clear he was not really asking a question, so his Chief Councilor remained silent.

The King walked to his window, counting his steps—knowing that they could never be repeated. Never. Not even the supremacy of his throne could recall those steps, or allow the King to relive the interval they had occupied.

Finally, still gazing through the window, the King said, “Bring him to us.”

“Enobarbus, the magician?” the Chief Councilor asked.

“Yes. At once.”

Bowing, the Chief Councilor started to turn away, but paused.

Noticing this, the King said, “What is it?”

“Immortal Sire,” the Chief Councilor said, “there is something else about Enobarbus, according to what they say.”

“Something else?” the King asked, raising his eyebrows. “As if changing the world were not enough? What is it? Are you going to tell us he can talk with dogs and birds? If he can, we’ll say it’s no wonder: then he can talk with our Queen. Tell us what else this Enobarbus can do—as if taking away shadows isn’t enough for one man!”

The Chief Councilor bowed gravely, accepting the King’s banter unperturbedly.

“Immortal Sire,” he said, “Enobarbus is also a prophet.”

“A what?”

“A prophet, Immortal Sire.”

The King frowned and shook his head. “Oh, is that all,” he muttered. “As if there weren’t enough of those around.”

“Yes, Immortal Sire.”

The Chief Councilor was once again ready to turn and leave, when the King stopped him, saying, “And one more thing: Don’t call us that any more.”

The Chief Councilor did not understand, but afraid of offending in some way, merely raised his eyebrows in an expression of inquiry.

“Immortal Sire,” the King said disgustedly. “No more. Not the *immortal* part. You understand?”

“Yes, Sire.”

“We know it’s been done for centuries, but we’ve had enough of it ourselves. To hell with custom in this case.”

“Yes, Sire.”

“And you may leave.”

“Yes, Sire.”

When his Chief Councilor was gone, the King turned back to the window and facing the sky, said, “It mocks us.”

Three emissaries were dispatched the next morning, and with nine attendants they rode jangling down the road from the castle. The King stood at his window, gazing after them, thinking of all that clutter of steps among the twelve horses—none ever to be repeated.

Behind him, his Queen asked if he did not feel better, knowing that such a great magician had been sent for. The King turned to her and sighed, shaking his head. "Our griefs are all in here," he said, tapping his finger against his head. "We know that!"

"But that's where all griefs lie, my Lord," the Queen said, meditatively touching her cheek with the tips of her fingers.

The King looked at her; then shook his head. "It's because death seeps in," he said. "We learn of it too young, and never understand it. It seeps into our heads and poisons everything that's there. Nothing escapes. You look at a sunrise or watch a falcon swoop high up over the oak trees or listen to the oxen as they pant and plod their way on the worn path—they're all moving inside death. Death surrounds all the things of this world."

"Surely not the sun, my Lord!"

"Yes, that too! Who could conceive of it going on forever?"

"But who would want to last longer than the sun, anyway?" the Queen asked.

"That's it!" he hissed. "Don't you see? Beyond that, there's the night. Darkness. Nothing but that black void. And do you know something?"

"What, my Lord?"

"That's where *God* is waiting. Who can abide a thought like that? We ask you, *who could ever tolerate such a thought?*"

"I don't know, my Lord."

The King stared at her as if her answer had surprised him momentarily; or as if he himself had just that instant taken in the enormity of the question he'd posed.

"Are they out of sight yet?" the Queen asked, stepping up beside him so she could gaze out the window.

Without turning to look, the King said, "No, they are still in sight."

Then he reached over and tenderly stroked the Queen's breast with his finger tip, gazing at it wonderingly.

Smiling, she said to him: "Does my Lord wish anything?"

"Immortality," the King muttered sadly, turning to look out the window.

Two crows were now circling high above the party of emissaries, which had proceeded so far they were almost out of sight.

"They feed on corpses," the King whispered.

Holding her hand beside her eye, the Queen began silently to weep, and turned away from the King.

Later, he did not notice when she left the room.

On the next day, when the emissaries returned, the King received them. They approached his throne slowly, appearing glum and frightened.

"Oh, Sire," the first one said, "we have failed in our charge. Have mercy on us, we pray!"

"Why, what is the matter," said the King.

"Enobarbus is an old man," the first one said.

"And he is bearded and mad from all his mystic arts," the second one said.

"And full of dreams, so that it is hard to make him speak," the third added.

"You're talking in circles," the King thundered. "All of this is nothing to us. Tell us why he isn't standing here this instant, as we commanded."

"He said he could not come," the first emissary whispered.

"Could not?" the King thundered. "Or *would* not!"

"Could, could, could," the emissaries all repeated together, like a columbarium over which the shadow of a great fox has fallen.

The King clasped his hand over his eyes and thought about their words; and the emissaries stood trembling, knowing well that messengers had been killed for bringing unfortunate news. But when the King took his hand away from his eyes, his expression was not wrathful.

"And he gave no further reason?" he finally asked, barely louder than a whisper and with a small note of wonder in his voice.

"None, Sire," the first emissary answered.

The King shook his head violently as if to scatter the words from his ears. But finally, he nodded, and in a matter-of-fact tone said to his Chief Councilor: "Then we ourselves will go to visit Enobarbus. We will travel forth and visit the old magician and speak to him out of Our Own Mouth."

The Chief Councilor nodded and said that horse and attendants would be ready to travel by noon, with which assurance the King strode out of the hall.

The instant he'd left, the second emissary was the first to speak, saying, "I would like to see what that wretched old magical bastard will do when the King appears before him!"

The third emissary nodded and said, "Yes, it will be hard for him to say anything, after he's beheaded."

Not hearing any of this, the King went to his chamber, where he sat on his couch with his head in his hands.

"You won't need to travel, Sire," a child's voice said.

Astonished, the King looked up to see a small boy standing before him, clutching the tail of a dead cat, which dangled limply from his hand. The cat's head looked smeared, somehow, as if it had been crushed under the wheel of a cart.

"Who are you?" the King cried; "And what are you doing in my chamber?"

The little boy closed his eyes and made a face. He strained until his face turned red.

"What on earth are you up to?" the King asked.

"I am Enobarbus," the child said. "I arrive in my own fashion and no other."

Then he held his breath and strained again, like an infant at stool, until he grew taller and, at the same time, turned old before the King's eyes.

Speechless, the King lifted both hands before him, as if to ward off the sight of this miraculous transformation.

But Enobarbus did not appear to notice. He muttered briefly in Latin, and then stroked the cat, which suddenly convulsed into life and scampered away.

"We hope never to see that creature again in our whole life," the King said in a hushed voice.

"If you live forever, you'll see everything again," Enobarbus said. "And again and again. There'll be no end to it. Not the least thing."

The King nodded soberly, but then shook his head. "We don't care," he cried. "No matter what the cost. The fact is, we can't abide the thought of dying. Death . . . death is something we can't . . ."

"Fathom?" Enobarbus asked.

"Accept," the King said.

The old magician closed his eyes and raked his beard with his fingers.

"Are you as powerful as they say?" the King asked in a small voice after a moment's silence.

"Probably," Enobarbus answered.

"You can turn darkness to light, and change the day of the week, as they tell?"

Enobarbus shrugged. "Those are trifles, oh King. Ask me what it is you want."

“And you have prophetic powers?”

Again the magician nodded. “For definite events I have definite foresight. What is it you wish to know?”

The King then reached forth and clutched the old man’s robes. “Tell us what day we are fated to die on!”

“What?”

“There are seven days in the week,” the King said. “Everything that happens in this world has to happen on one of those days. If it is destined, as we suppose it must be, that our death will happen, then it must happen on a certain day. Tell us what day it will be: Sunday, Monday”

Enobarbus held his hand up and closed his eyes again. “I know all seven,” he said. “And I understand your question. It’s an odd one: I don’t mind admitting that, but not beyond all probing.”

“You mean you can do it?”

“Quiet,” Enobarbus said, wetting his finger and holding it in the air. He opened his eyes and said, “It’s not a Sunday. Nor a Monday. Wait a minute. Let me look.”

For a moment, the room seemed to shrink in size, and Enobarbus himself appeared no larger than the dead cat he’d brought back to life; but then, in an instant, everything returned to normal; and the old magician announced: “Tuesday.”

For a moment, the King was silent. Then he said, “Are you sure, Enobarbus?”

The old man nodded.

“You understood what we were asking? And you say that you know for a fact that we are destined to die on a Tuesday?”

Again Enobarbus nodded. “You won’t die on any other day, Sire. This is a certainty.”

For a long while, the King sat on his couch and brooded. Then he shook his head wonderingly, as if unable to believe the enormity of his own vision.

“And it is true what they say?” he muttered slowly: “You can change days, the way others change their mind?”

“There’s a close connection between the two,” Enobarbus said. “But, to answer your question, yes.”

“Then, Enobarbus, could you erase a day from the week?”

“What?”

“Could you make a day disappear from the week?”

“Just any day?”

“No, I mean the day itself. The reality, the word. Take one of the seven days of the week and remove it from reality, just as if it had never existed. Change the world so that from this instant on people will not even *think* of referring to ‘the seven days of the week,’ but to the *six!*”

Slowly, Enobarbus smiled. Then he smiled a little more broadly and almost opened his mouth to speak, but appeared to change his mind. The King watched him closely, not daring to interrupt the flow of thoughts that were going through the old magician’s mind.

But eventually, he could wait no longer, so he whispered: “Enobarbus, *could* you?”

Enobarbus nodded.

“However,” he said, after a moment’s pause, “if I take away all the Tuesdays, it will have to be *all* of them. I mean, before as well as after.”

“I don’t understand,” said the King.

“Such a radical transformation of reality can’t be partial; it isn’t like slicing off the end of a cheese. This means that everyone now living born on a Tuesday will cease to exist, Sire. They won’t be killed, mind you; it will simply be as if they had never been.”

The King’s face lengthened. “But I was born on a Monday,” he said. “I’m sure of it.”

Enobarbus appeared to think a moment, and then he nodded. “That’s right. You were. It was a Monday 11,238 days ago.”

“Can you really do it?” the King cried.

“Yes,” Enobarbus said.

“We’ll see that you have anything you want!”

“Maybe. On the other hand, that may not be necessary.”

“But you’ll do it.”

“I said I would,” Enobarbus stated, articulating the words very carefully.

“And no one will know the difference?”

“No one.”

“When can you do it?”

“When you go to sleep next Monday night,” Enobarbus said, “you will sleep deeply, for only the accustomed time; but when you awaken, it will be Wednesday.”

“For everybody?” the King asked.

“For everybody,” Enobarbus answered. “Tuesday will never exist again. Tuesdays *before* that time will continue to have existed, for there is no one alive who does not have ancestors born on Tuesdays, but all

references to them will disappear. At this time, even the word will have ceased to exist. And all things that were to have happened on Tuesdays, or have happened on Tuesdays, or were begun on Tuesdays, will not exist.”

The King shook his head vigorously. “Not *die*”

“No,” Enobarbus said. “Not die. They will simply not be and, given the new state of affairs, will never have been.”

“How strange it seems to us.”

“Indeed it must seem strange. So it is best that others don’t find out. You must never tell anyone.”

“Not even my Queen?”

“No one, my Lord.”

“All right. I swear it.”

“Very well.”

“What a miracle!” the King cried.

“It is that, indeed, Immortal Sire,” Enobarbus said.

When Wednesday morning arrived, the King awoke with the realization that two nights, instead of one, had passed. In addition, he knew that an entire day had been carved out of reality by the magician, Enobarbus; although, for the life of him, the King could not remember what that day had been called.

Happily, he lay in bed and counted the six days of the week on his fingers, knowing that his Death Day—whatever it had been named—no longer existed. He counted the six days of the week silently, and then aloud: Sunday, Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.

He arose in a state of wonder. So much of the old world remained for him: exactly six-sevenths, of course—which is enough to represent a world.

And then, in a brief instant of darkness, he realized that one out of every seven people he had known would now not exist, and he would not even know who they were. He would not even have the sad luxury of missing them. Still, human habit is such that he felt compelled to ask his Seneschal if the Chief Councilor was all right.

“Indeed, Immortal Sire,” the Seneschal answered.

“And the three emissaries,” the King added, as he shrugged on his tunic.

“Indeed, Immortal Sire,” the Seneschal answered.

And after that, the King went over the whole list of his retainers; but

of course, any he could remember were alive and well, or he would not have remembered them. There was, in all honesty, a certain uneasiness in this fact.

“And Enobarbus!” the King cried, almost forgetting. “Is *he* well?”

The Seneschal gestured subtly with his open hand as he nodded, and the King remembered that none of his household had liked or trusted the Old Wizard from the instant he had appeared among them.

Dressing slowly, the King was calm and light-hearted. It seemed he could hear better than before—at least better than that six-sevenths he could remember from the old life he had lived. Even the birds beyond the window sang more spiritedly. And the sun might have been created that very morning, so beautifully did it evoke the things of this world!

Then, briefly, the King was troubled by something in his arithmetic. Arithmetic was not the precise art to measure what might have been sacrificed. He suddenly understood this. Therefore, sensing that it was not exactly true that six-sevenths—and only six-sevenths—of his memory had been forfeited, he called for Enobarbus.

Appearing older than the King had remembered, Enobarbus listened to all that the King had to say about this one small trouble that remained.

“Although,” the King concluded warmly, “you must understand that the main thing has been accomplished: we do not fear death at all, now; it doesn’t exist for us any longer.”

“Understandably, Sire.”

“In fact, we are immortal.”

“Along with all others who were once destined to die on that certain day,” Enobarbus said.

The King frowned and motioned the idea away with his hand. “Of course. That, too. But the important thing is: we are finally released from the terror that had saddled our heart for years.”

“Yes, Immortal Sire,” Enobarbus said, bowing.

But the King was not satisfied. Frowning, he said, “But what about this other part we mentioned: what about the vague uneasiness? The fact is, we don’t like not knowing about that one-seventh of the old life we lived in.”

“The old reality,” Enobarbus said, nodding.

“Exactly. What about it?”

Sadly, the old magician shook his head. “I don’t know,” he finally said.

“You don’t *know*?” the King roared. “How can that be? Aren’t you wise beyond all others?”

Enobarbus closed one eye in a doleful wink. "No Sire, I am not. I am not wise at all. I am merely clever."

"Clever?"

Enobarbus nodded.

"But doesn't that become the same thing, when all is said and done?"

Enobarbus frowned. "If I said no, you would ask how I could know that it wasn't the same thing, unless part of me stood beyond what I now am."

The King threw his hand aside. "We don't like riddles, Enobarbus. Speak plainly."

Enobarbus closed both of his eyes. "If," he said slowly, "there were a vast meadow of grass that extended as far as the eye could see, and it was known that by plucking one particular blade of grass from all this meadow one could bring about a rainstorm, I could go out into that meadow and walk until I stopped in a particular place, where I would lean over and pluck a blade of grass, and at that very instant thunder would rumble throughout the heavens and the air would turn dark."

The King thought a moment and then said, "You cannot be any clearer than that, Enobarbus?"

"No, Immortal Sire, I cannot. I don't know how the blade of grass is connected to the thunder."

"Well," the King said, "we will not concern ourselves over needless subtleties when there is a kingdom to govern."

"Prudent," Enobarbus said, nodding. Then he continued: "Judicious, wise, sagacious, and politic."

"What?" the King asked.

But before Enobarbus could answer, the King's Seneschal appeared at the door, bowing gravely.

"Well, what is it?" the King said to him.

"Immortal Sire, the Chief Councilor is waiting."

"What about?" the King asked.

"About the woman you must choose as your Queen," the Seneschal said. "You were to discuss the matter with him, in view of the gravity of the choice you must make. I mean, Immortal Sire, for the sake of the Kingdom. The law states you must take a Queen before you grow older."

Irritated by such an officious reminder, the King waved the Seneschal away. Then he muttered, "Of course, we remember! Don't you think we know it's time we chose a Queen?"

“He’s gone, Immortal Sire,” Enobarbus said.

The King turned and looked at the old magician, and then nodded and left the room, so that he could meet with his Chief Councilor on this most important matter.

Although the Kingdom continued to flourish in the following years, there was a mysterious unrest among the people. Outwardly, all was well: the King took unto himself a Queen, and she was favored by all. The Kingdom itself was at peace with its neighbors, and the crops each year were full and heavy.

But in spite of all outward good fortune, there was a growing suspicion that something was not as it should be. Even though the King himself was content, and ruled with wisdom and compassion, there was a chill of discomfort in the hearts of people that found expression in odd and unlikely ways.

Old women began to awake from nightmares in which they suffered from a feeling that someone they had once known was missing. Guilt and fear were often evident in the most casual situations; and once a knight was seen to draw his sword and slaughter his own hound, for no apparent reason.

“Whom the gods destroy, they first drive mad,” the Chief Councilor intoned when he heard the story.

But beyond agreeing with him, the Under Councilors did nothing, suggested nothing. Later, it was noted that this particular knight seemed oddly at peace after killing his dog, as if he couldn’t remember the outrageous thing he’d done—worse, in its way, than killing a human enemy in combat.

Most unsettling was the darkness that had come into the lives of the people. The very existence of all those who had been born on the lost day had been annihilated; and yet the consequences of their existence remained. Thus it was that a woman found herself the mother of children whose father she could not remember; and yet, knowing the laws that govern the birth of children, she could not understand how she had become what she was, or how her children had come into being.

Of course, such mysteries prevailed over roughly one-seventh of the Kingdom, so that there was a certain comfort and acceptance simply in their familiarity. And, not having words for this sudden void in their lives—which they could not precisely identify as a void—they began to use those words which were available, so that the mystery could be named and thus, in the way of human necessity, understood.

Those whose existence had been annihilated, were called “ghosts” and “ancestors” equally. A woman whose husband had been taken away from her would sometimes contemplate one of her children and say, “I wonder who your ghost could have been!” The word “father” was almost never used in such a reference, for that word designated something quite different in the minds of the people.

As for Enobarbus, he lived for a while among the court, but steadfastly refused whatever riches or advancement the King offered. He claimed he was not in need of anything; and indeed, his behavior was so odd, that no one could doubt that he spoke the truth. His needs were not those of others.

Most of his time he spent walking about with his hands clasped behind him—smiling or mumbling or sometimes humming a little tune. When spoken to, he more often than not answered in an unknown language. Occasionally, he would stop and talk to the ground at his feet, or address the knuckles of his hand. Several times the night guards came upon him standing motionless upon the parapets, an arm outstretched and his eyes closed. He was a disquieting sight, looming there in utter silence, his beard and robe stirring in the night breeze. The guards sometimes said that he looked like a man about to fly; and no one in the castle doubted but what the old magician could have done so, if he’d wished.

Although neither the King nor Enobarbus ever spoke of their Secret, no one doubted but what Enobarbus bore some responsibility for the change that had come over their lives. And soon, the atmosphere of fear and distrust grew so great, that Enobarbus left the castle. It was not known exactly how or when he left; the court simply awoke one morning to find that Enobarbus was not there.

And no one mentioned the fact at all; not even the King.

Enobarbus, whose death day was Sunday, lived to be a very old man. It is said that several generations passed away before he himself was called, but this fact was not given much emphasis, in view of the extraordinary longevity of certain people in that period, for when Enobarbus had wrought his marvelous change, some of those who would normally have died within a handful of Tuesdays were already old. Moreover, now that weeks had only six days in them, time appeared to move more swiftly, and the year contained only 313 days.

Some of the people lived miraculously long; one woman was said to

be almost a century and a half old; while many were beginning to live into the second century of their existence. Some predicted that in the cycle of years, Biblical times were returning, so that a few might even live to the reputed ages of Noah and Methusaleh.

But others began to say other things, and because the Under Councilors—now growing old under the shadow of the Chief Councilor (whose death day also happened to be Tuesday) and under the King . . . some of these Under Councilors began to suspect that something was not as it had been before. Therefore, they met in secret and devised various theories to account for what had happened. In these theories, the feared and hated Enobarbus began to play a greater and greater role.

Meanwhile, the King himself was growing old, although he seemed as vigorous as ever, and was never known to express a fear of death. His Queen grew old, too, along with the children she had borne him. The castle stood as vast as a cliff and with each passing decade, appeared stronger and more obviously invulnerable than ever.

From his old habitation, Enobarbus heard about these things, for gossip spread quickly throughout the Kingdom. And yet, he seemed indifferent to all that was told him. Living alone, without human attachments, Enobarbus was scarcely noticed by those about him. And he seemed content to remain anonymous, for most of his realities were inside his head, and he had little need for a world to entertain him.

Then one day, two emissaries came from the King and asked Enobarbus if he would not come with them to see his Monarch. They asked politely, almost diffidently, as if they well knew the story of how he had mocked those other emissaries so long ago.

Enobarbus agreed, and was carried in a coach to the King's castle, where the King awaited him in his private chambers. The Seneschal who greeted him was a much younger man than the previous Seneschal, who had died on a dark Friday long ago.

When Enobarbus was admitted to the King's chamber, he was shocked by how old and decayed the King looked. But there was a surprising vigor in his speech, for he greeted the old magician in so loud a voice he might have been shouting from one hilltop to another.

"This time you came properly," the King shouted, with an expression of grotesque intensity on his face. He paused and breathed several times, as if gathering his thoughts. "This time you didn't appear as an urchin," he went on. "None of your tricks this time, eh?"

"None, Immortal Sire," Enobarbus said, realizing that the King was drunk.

Frowning, the King nodded, accepting this fact and pondering over it with a lugubrious expression of gravity. Finally, inhaling again, he said, "Well, we knew you still lived. In fact, Enobarbus, we have been protecting you all these years."

Enobarbus bowed and said, "That is true, Immortal Sire. I was aware of your protection."

"Aware of our protection, eh?"

"Yes, Immortal Sire."

For a moment, only the sound of the King's heavy breathing could be heard. Then he stirred and said, "How's come you never asked for anything else?"

Without hesitating, Enobarbus said, "I could never figure out exactly what I wanted, Immortal Sire."

Astonished, the King stared at the magician. "So wise, and yet lacking that essential wisdom?"

"As I told you once, my Lord, I am not wise."

The King nodded, saying he remembered well. "But still you live on. Was that part of it?"

"Part of what, Immortal Sire?"

"Part of why you did it," the King said. "We've often thought that the reason you served us so willingly, and asked for nothing in return, was that you too were destined to die on that day . . . whatever it was called."

"No," Enobarbus said, shaking his beard, "my death day is coming upon me. I can sometimes feel it rising like water, when the river begins to flood, Immortal Sire."

"Yes, yes," the King said. "You needn't be so . . . what do you call it: *vivid*. We understand what you're saying."

Enobarbus bowed. "And now," he said, "you want something else."

The King half-closed his eyes: "You knew all along, didn't you?"

Enobarbus shrugged. "I suspected," he said. "It's lovely for a while, but like everything else, it begins to seem . . . how shall I say it?"

"Vulgar?" the King suggested.

"Somewhat, Immortal Sire. But more than that."

"Predictable? Repetitious? Without point?"

"That comes closer to it, Immortal Sire."

"Immortal Sire," the King repeated heavily, savouring the words. "How that title beguiled us at one time!"

"It was with you as it would have been with others," Enobarbus said.

“So you know what I am about to ask, don’t you?”

Enobarbus nodded.

And then, with passionate suddenness, the King reached forth and clasped the old man’s robes and cried, “Put it back, Enobarbus! Put it back!”

“As you wish, Sire,” Enobarbus said.

And before the King could say anything else, the old magician began muttering and touching his fingers, as if he were trying to count to seven.

“And what will you call it?” the King asked, staggering over to the window and gazing out as he had done so often for so long.

“Tuesday, Sire,” Enobarbus said.

The King blinked slowly, “What did you say?”

“Tuesday, Sire.”

“Of course!” the King whispered. “Now I remember!”

“Your Majesty will say when?”

The King nodded. “Something has been missing in our life, Enobarbus. Did you know it would be like that, too?”

“No, I couldn’t have predicted that.”

“I know: you said as much. This thing we’re speaking of is . . . I don’t know how to say it: like something we once had; or maybe *were*. It’s impossible to describe it, but the emptiness is frightening. Tell me: if you bring back this lost day, will I have a chance to grasp it once again?”

Sadly, Enobarbus shook his head. “No, Sire,” he said. “I can bring back the lost day, but whatever came about on that day is lost forever.”

“Why?” the King cried. “Why?”

“Because,” Enobarbus said, “without this loss, oh Sire, you wouldn’t know what it is to be a man.”