



THE KING seeks a FRIEND

BY DOUGLAS EVANS

King Jack lived alone in his large castle on a hill. He ate alone, worked alone, and played chess alone. King Jack was a lonely king.

One morning, the king looked out a castle window at the village below. Being market day, people crowded the streets.

"Today I will walk through the village," King Jack told his page. "I wish to find a friend. I'll find someone with whom I can share stories and ideas about the world."

"That person will be hard to find, sire," said the page. "Every villager wants to be a friend of the king. How will you find someone you can trust? How will you know that person wants more than favors from you?"

"I'll know that person when I see him or her," the king replied.

When King Jack and his page entered the village, the people waved and cheered. They called for the king to shop at their shops and eat in their inns.

King Jack approached a shoemaker who wore the brown smock of his trade.

"Greetings, good fellow," he said. "Isn't this a fine day for a stroll?"

The shoemaker lowered his head. He stared at the king's feet. "Many people are out walking today, Your Majesty," he said. "If you wish for a walking companion, I would be happy to join you."

"Kind of you to offer," said the king. "But I don't want to take you from your work."

Then he continued down the village street.

"That man seemed intelligent and good-natured, sire," said the page. "Why couldn't he be the friend you seek?"

"Did you notice his eyes?" the king said. "He kept looking at my shoes. It would be hard to be friends with a man who was concerned with one thing...my feet and what footwear he could sell me!"

A short time later, King Jack greeted a baker woman who wore a white apron and mushroom hat. "Such a sunny day, madam," he said. "Don't the wheat fields outside the village look green and bountiful?"

The baker's gaze fell upon the king's round belly. "The harvest will be a good one this year, Your Grace," she said. She held up a basket full of bread. "Would you care for a freshly-baked loaf?"

"Thank you for the offer, madam," said the king. "But I just ate a filling meal. Now I must be on my way."

As the walk resumed, the page again questioned the king. "That woman seemed kind and generous, sire. Why wouldn't she make a good companion?"

"Her eyes remained on my belt buckle," the king replied. "How unsettling it would be to have a friend who cared about one thing...my stomach and what baked goods she could sell me to fill it!"

Next, King Jack walked up to a man sitting on a bench. He held a pair of barber shears. "Have you noticed how blue the sky is today?" the king asked. "I expect it will be quite warm by this afternoon."

"Indeed it will, Your Excellency," said the man. He studied the top of the king's head. "Would you care to sit on my bench where it's shady and cool?"

"Kind of you to offer," said the king. "But I prefer to keep walking."

"I'm more baffled than ever, sire," said the page after leaving the barber. "He was an agreeable and helpful man. Why wouldn't he make a good friend for you?"

"Again his eyes told his true interest," said the king. "Who wants to have a friend who had a single thought...my hair and when he could give me my next haircut?"

King Jack walked a long way before coming upon a youth with a knapsack on his back.

"Young traveler, don't the mountains look majestic this fine day?" the king said.

The boy looked toward the tall peaks. Then he looked at the king.

"I just hiked through those mountains, Your Highness," he said. "It was a splendid journey. The air was refreshing, and the vistas were grand. What, may I ask, brings you into the village today?"

The king pulled his chin and smiled. "I seek a dinner guest," he said. "Would you care to join me in the castle for some good food and conversation this evening? Perhaps we could play a game of chess."

"It would be an honor, sir," said the traveler. "I'd enjoy sharing my stories of travel with you and hearing your thoughts about the world."

King Jack nodded and returned to his castle.

At the castle gate, the page turned toward the king. "Please tell me, sire. How do you know the traveler will make a good companion?" he asked. "How was he different

from any other villager we met today?"

"His eyes told his tale," the king said. "They looked straight into mine. His gaze never strayed side to side, up or down, or over my shoulder. I could tell the traveler was interested in more than my shoes, or stomach, or hair. He was interested in what I was saying. Indeed, I am looking forward to our dinner conversation tonight and making a new friend."