Golden Crowns and Gilded Roses

by Sky_King

Summary

Because of his father's debt, and his rather unusual appearance, Midoriya Izuku finds himself the butt of a rather unfortunate promise.
He has to turn straw into gold, or he can say goodbye to his head.

Thankfully he catches the attention of a servant teen with mismatched eyes, who might just decide to help him out.

Notes

Hello and welcome! Hope you like it!

See the end of the work for more notes

Once upon a time in a faraway land, there was once a beautiful kingdom ruled by a Queen of Ice and Compassion. With a shadow that shimmered in her wake, and hair like freshly-fallen snow, it was said she was more fae than human, but that did not make her any less kind.

Under her reign, trades flourished, winters were mild, and springs, long. People were happy, and
both faefolk and humankind lived together in harmony.

But the Queen fell ill, and in the despair of her absence a man wrought by desolation was made king.

Not much was known about him at the time, never having been more than the Queen’s husband; but he brought order, where there once had been peace. Brought punishment where there had been understanding.

He was not evil, but he was not kind.

And so, by his own hand, the prosperous kingdom began to fall.

And when money was scarce, the villagers had to pay.

“My king,” the fat farmer said, his voice echoing in the throne room he had been summoned to, cheeks tinted an unbecoming red, rubbing dirty hands together. His eyes were glazed over, and his words were slurred as he spoke. “You must understand, my crops haven’t been doing well, and I have a son to feed, surely you understand my grievance?”

King Enji was not fazed in the least, however. “I have lent you money, because your family has been loyal to me. I have been patient with you, but no more. You either pay back everything you owe me, or I will execute you before dawn breaks.”

The drunken man cowered and fiddled with the front of his soiled shirt, feeling fear despite his stupor. “But my liege, if only you could give me a little more time. Your money is being invested and you’ll reap the rewards soon…”

The King sneered from his throne. “It would appear to me, that all of my money has been wasted on cheap alcohol and whores. I will not wait a single second longer.”

The man moaned in pain, stumbling in his place. “But my liege! Surely an arrangement can be made? I have a son, a beautiful son, who is a master weaver. His voice is like sweet honey, and his hands are nimbler than your best tailor. He does magic with those hands of his. If he didn’t have my eyes, I could have sworn he was a fae folk. I’ll- I’ll give him to you, so he can weave you the gold you need!”

The King leaned back in his seat, pondering the offer in his mind. “How will he accomplish such a feat?”

This inquiry seemed to be too much for the drunk man, as he scrunched up his face as if trying to recall, instead of coming up with bold faced lies. He lighted up, “Straw! He will weave gold out of straw!”

Never one to trifle with the magic of the common folk, the King mussed up his beard and declared: “Fine! Bring your magical son to me and he will pay your debt. But if he does not… then I will execute you both.”

“Yes, my liege you are the kindest!”
Midoriya Izuku stared at his prison cell and wondered what he had ever done to deserve this.

He had been getting ready for bed after an extenuating day plowing the field, but he had been caught by surprise by the royal soldiers irrupting into his home.

They had chained him up with no warning or explanation, and brought him aboard the carriage they had come in like a common criminal, and like that, his entire life had been thrown in disarray.

Much later that day Izuku found himself sitting atop stacks upon stacks of hay, in a room with no bed no windows. Trapped, just like a mouse in a cage.

The only thing there was a weaving loom, and the damning words of the king:

*Weave me gold or die.*

It was only logical that Izuku would cry. Alone and abandoned, with a death sentence hanging over his head and the most ridiculous of orders.

Weave gold?

What did that even *mean*?

Was he going to be brought golden wool, for him to weave? But the soldiers posted outside his door had told him they would bring him out to his execution if he couldn’t produce gold before dawn.

How was he supposed to do this?

Surely they couldn’t mean… turning the straw into gold?

That was only possible if he had been one of the fae folk, as everyone so loved to tease.

But he was just Izuku.
Izuku, the weakling that preferred to read than to fight. That preferred to sing while plowing the fields. That had cried long and hard when his mother had died, and had only stopped when he had gotten beaten over it. Izuku of the forest-green eyes, and the hair the color of the trees.

He was just odd. Not magical in any way, shape or form.

Izuku had already cried himself hoarse, having accomplished nothing but a heap of broken straw, when the door of his cell opened without warning.

A short, rather gnarly-looking man stepped inside, wearing the servant’s clothes, and looking to the floor submissively. In his hands he carried a tray with vibrant grapes, a dense loaf of bread and a cup of wine.

The servant didn’t say anything, as he bowed at the prisoner and placed the tray on the floor.

“Oh,” Izuku felt himself say, voice cracking. “Thanks for… thanks for the meal.”

The servant with the bowed back, and bi-colored hair, paused in his motions before finally looking up at him. Izuku momentarily forgot about his isolation and impending doom as he gazed into beautiful eyes.

One blue, like the icicles that formed outside his window at home, reflecting the sun’s light like a little miracle of life. And the other one was a deep grey like burnished steel.

It was just an instant, but then the servant was looking away, a hand raised to try and hide his left eye– and made Izuku finally realize the blotchy red scar over his ice-blue eye.

“Sorry, didn’t mean to stare.” Izuku hurried to say, hands waving wildly in the air. “It’s just- I mean; you have beautiful eyes!”

He closed his eyes, wondering how he had said such a dumb thing, but a quiet little chuckle made him look back up.

The short, gnarly servant laughed, his smile like precious pearls and his voice like soothing bells. “You are a funny little human, aren’t you?”

Izuku just smiled sheepishly, “ah, do you think so?”

The servant didn’t answer, choosing to smile at him enigmatically. He bowed again and turned to leave.

“Wait!” Izuku called out nervously. The servant stopped, eyeing him warily. Izuku hunched into himself. “Sorry I just… I’m not really hungry, so I was wondering if you’d like to eat this with me?”
The other just blinked at him, confusion furrowing his brow. “This is probably going to be your only meal today; you know that right?”

“More of a reason why I wouldn’t like to eat alone.” Izuku simply said. He looked down, a mocking smile on his face. “Sorry, don’t feel obligated. It’s fine if you refuse.”

The servant stared at him, searching his face for any sort of lie or deceit, before closing the door at his back. He retraced his steps to Izuku and cocked his head as if examining a peculiar specimen.

Izuku just smiled in relief, hurrying to set the tray down between them, making sure his companion would get the single cushion in this forsaken mouse nest to sit on. He split the bread in half, and began gnawing on the shorter piece as he nervously waited for the other man to sit down.

“Oh, what’s your name by the way?” He asked, polite as ever, once they were both sitting, and sharing a sip of wine.

“…Shouto.” The name was spoken in a soft, hesitant voice. Almost like sharing the deepest secret in the castle.

“Nice to meet you Shouto, I’m Izuku!”

The little man stared at him from behind his fringe and let a smile grace his lips.

“Yes,” he said softly, eyes glowing for a brief second. “Nice to meet you indeed.”

The little dwarf-like servant with the beautiful eyes continued bringing him meals day after day. Izuku kept inviting him to eat with him and Shouto kept accepting with a tiny smile on his face. They talked some more, as Izuku ate. He always tried offering half of his meager meal, but Shouto just accepted a single grape, a slice of bread, a sip of water and that was it.

Instead, he preferred to lean back and listen to Izuku go off on what his life had been like. Of how his family owned a farm; how Izuku had been taught how to write and read by his mother; and how he wanted to be a scholar, but he also knew it was more likely he would have to inherit the farm. He liked taking care of the animals though, and plowing the fields had given him some very solid muscles.

“But I want more,” Izuku sighed into his cup. Maybe it was the alcohol, the adrenaline. Maybe it was the sentence hanging over him, or maybe it was those vibrant eyes looking at him as if he mattered at all. “I want to be able to follow some brave knight and record his fights, I want to save old knowledge from dying because the teacher had no legacy. I want to leave my mark in this world. So others can know… I existed at all.”

He looked down at his cup, staring back at his own eye reflected on the unbroken surface of his wine. He sighed and sighed, until he was sobbing. Softly, quietly, consumed by the thought that his life had been in vain.

“Why are you crying?” Shouto asked, worried and curious by equal parts. “You are still young;
you are still healthy. You have a long life to live."

“That’s the problem, you see.” Izuku sobbed, even as he smiled at him. “I should have a long life, but it’s ending tomorrow.”

Shouto cocked his head. “What does that mean?”

Izuku blinked at him, puzzled. Then made a grand encompassing gesture to the mounds of straw surrounding them. “I have until tomorrow to turn all of this into gold. And I can’t.”

“You can’t? Why is that?”

Izuku blinked at him, as if he couldn’t believe his ears. “What do you mean why?”

The other man nodded, “yeah, if you’re going to die if you don’t turn it into gold, then just do it.”

The smile slipped off Izuku’s face, like paint down a river. “Don’t joke about it,” he mumbled, looking heartbroken. “I am going to die here, don’t joke about it.”

That said, he unceremoniously stood up and huddled himself in his make-shift bed, his back to Shouto. “Please leave.”

Behind him, he heard someone approach him, the hay crunching below his boots. But when Izuku just curled into a tighter ball, the steps stopped, before they began to retreat.

Izuku held just until he heard the door closing with finality, then he allowed the tears to fall.

Sobbing into an empty chamber, surrounded by piles and piles of hay, he cried himself to sleep.

Izuku woke up as the door to his cell opened again and he drearily wondered if he could remain groggy until his execution.

Maybe that way it would hurt less.

But before he had finished preparing himself for the inevitable, he heard a gasp, armor clanging and he forced himself to sit up and open his eyes.

Two soldiers were at the entrance, their mouth ajar, and their eyes about to bulge out of their sockets.

“What’s…. what’s wrong?” Izuku asked, but the door was closed before he could even try to get close, and he could hear hurried steps going away, clanging with each step given.

What had that been about?

And then he finally looked around.
All the straw that had been lining his prison cell was shining a vibrant gold as if…

Izuku hurried to his feet, inspecting the cold, metallic threads up close.

There was no mistaking.

The straw had been turned into gold.

**But how?**

He didn’t have time to dwell on this as the door opened again, only that now it was the King himself looking red in the face, and the longer he looked, the longer the smile on his face became.

“I see you finally did as told.” The king said, as he descended the steps to inspect the golden threads himself. By his side, a mousey-looking man also came close to the gold, pulling out a seeing glass to peer at it with a professional air.

“Gold,” he declared.

“Gold,” the king grinned.

“Gold?” Izuku whispered.

Izuku was transferred to an actual room, being told that they were preparing him a warm bath, then fresh clothes, then a feast as thanks for the gold.

Izuku tried saying that it wasn’t necessary, that he just wanted to go home. Feeling a cold tendril of uncertainty in the face of fake smiles and empty promises.

He was used to not being heard, but it was rather frightening when he couldn’t even get a say on what he was to eat, or do, or when he was going to go back home.

They had their gold, right?

Izuku hadn’t done anything about it, so shouldn’t they have let him go?

But he showered in warm water, he ate as much as possible and he slept in a bed so comfortable, he feared not ever waking up.
And then one morning he woke up, in his plush bed, with his breakfast, and his bath. And surrounded by piles upon piles of hay.

_Weave us gold once more. Weave us gold or die._

It was not surprising.

Not really. Izuku thought himself a rather fair judge of character.

He also knew he was at their mercy.

After the relief from not dying wore off, Izuku began to get worried again. After all, he still had no idea how the straw had become gold.

As if listening to his pleas, the door to his lavish prison cell opened. Slow and hesitant, that same servant teen walked inside holding nothing in his hands.

Izuku smiled. “Hello,” he said. “It’s been a while.”

Shouto nodded softly, his eyes searching for an answer on his face. “You’re happy now?”

“I’m sorry?”

“You have your gold,” Shouto answered, looking at the room, at the plush bed, the banquet leftovers. And the stacks upon stacks of hay. “Are you going to live here now?”

Izuku’s smile was tinted with a quiet sort of grief. Like the last throes of a fallen tree. “I don’t think I’ll be able to. Not for long anyway.”

“Why? You made the gold.”

“It wasn’t me.” Izuku confessed in a whisper. “It wasn’t me, and now the King wants more. I do not expect a miracle to happen twice.”

Shouto cocked his head. “That was not a miracle.”

He was met with a skeptic glance. “Was it not? Did you see the gold? It was beautiful.”
Shouto shook his head. “Life is the only true miracle. Life to give us fruits, life to rise the bread, life to give that shine in every living creature’s eyes. Gold? Gold is cold and dead and useless.”

Izuku smiled. “I like that. Makes the world seem a little more magical.” He lowered his eyes to his hands. “But I must disagree. Because it was a miracle. Whoever or whatever turned the hay into gold spared my life. In your words, they helped keep the life in my eyes.”

He closed his eyes, rubbed his face then directed a smile at his guest. “Sorry, sorry for being so depressing. I have a lot of leftovers, oh- but they’re cold now… Um, or would you like to talk instead? Where had you been?”

The rather short man climbed onto his bed with some difficulty at Izuku’s prompting, ignoring the food entirely. “I was around. Sleeping.”

“Your work must be very tiring, right?”

“Not really.” He replied, searching his pockets for something. “Nobody really expects me to do anything, and when they do, I just disappear.”

Izuku’s smile was a little more forced. “Isn’t that… a little irresponsible of you?”

“Irresponsible?” Shouto repeated, staring at Izuku with eyes that shone a little too bright for them to be normal. “What would a human know about responsibility?”

The tension was immediately broken by the little man producing a gilded rose from his pants. He presented it to him, as if it was just a normal flower.

Izuku reached out his hands on instinct, cradling the heavy, golden flower in his hands. “What is this?” He whispered, even though the weight in his hands was unmistakable. He looked up at the other man, expecting some sort of prank or something, anything.

“A rose.” Shouto answered, blunt and to the point. It almost made Izuku smile. But other darker thoughts were swirling inside his brain. “What’s wrong? Do you not like it?”

The flower sat heavy in his hands. His salvation, but also his damnation.

“You’re the one who weaved the straw into gold, right?”

“And what if I am?”

Izuku gazed into his ethereal eyes, seeing for the first time, the way his eyes, carved out of morning ice, out of new steel, were imbued with some sort of unnamed magic.

Shouto had had many chances to string him along, to chain him down with a plea made in desperation, and a name given in good faith. To turn this gift into a trickery, like so many had done before. Yet he had not.

So Izuku had just smiled at his fae friend.

“I just wanted to thank you.” He whispered, letting the new seedling of hope grow in the ashes of past betrayals. “You saved my life.”

Shouto cocked his head. “You say that, but there’s still misery in your eyes.”

Izuku’s next smile was pained. “I’m sorry. I know I should be thankful. And I am. It’s just that… Now that the King thinks I can weave gold… he’s not ever going to let me free. I may escape
execution tonight, but I am no longer alive.”

“Would you like to be rescued?”

Izuku smiled down at his golden rose. “It is okay. You’ve done plenty already. You’ve kept me company, your conversation has kept me from spiraling.”

“How is it, that when faced with the otherworldly, this is your only response? Your only request?”

“What do you mean-?” He looked up, worry beginning to eat at his gut.

Shouto grasped his hands, and Izuku was momentarily stunned as he was burned and frozen at the same time, yet nothing but a faint tingling remained in its wake.

But, he thought as he gazed into ethereal eyes.

He felt his soul itself being branded by his avid gaze.

Even if he died tonight, Izuku decided. At least there was someone in this world that would remember him. That had carved his name in him, and even if he died, Izuku would live on in his thoughts.

“Let’s run away together.”

Izuku was not sure how it all happened.

One second he was gazing into beautiful eyes as he pondered over his own mortality.

And the next, he was sneaking into the stables, standing there terrified as Shouto picked out the tallest, most beautiful horse on sight.

The kind that would make any attempt at being inconspicuous absolutely moot.

Shouto correctly interpreted his panicked silence as he looked up at the horse with something kind in his eyes as he explained. “I cannot in good faith leave her here. She was my mother’s steed.”

Izuku tried not panicking, trailing behind his friend as he saddled the mare without a hitch. “O-oh, but isn’t this the Queen’s-?”

He didn’t get a chance to ask, as clamoring footsteps began drawing near, as bells began to chime,
as screams began to echo. They had realized Izuku had left his cage.

Shouto jumped astride with an elegance Izuku could barely believe, stretching out a hand to heft him up without problem. As if he didn’t weight like two Shoutos.

Izuku tightened his legs around the mare’s sides, and held on to the teen in front of him for dear life as their powerful mare rose on two legs, before galloping out of there, as if the doors, and the people and the weapons were nothing but hazy illusions. As they thundered past the gate, Izuku glimpsed the King looking at the from his balcony up high. Livid and powerless as he watched them disappear.

Powerful hooves against the pavement, Izuku could do little more than press his face against a broad back and pray to all gods above he wouldn’t fall off and die.

On and on they galloped away from the castle, until it was nothing but a bad dream. Until the hurried footsteps of soldiers after them became nothing but the distant murmur of cicadas against the silence of a summer night.

On and on, cloaked by the darkness’ embrace, two beating hearts and one mighty horse.

And burned in the back of his eyes, Izuku finally processed the face the King had pulled as they disappeared off into the distance.

Recognition.

Anger.

Betrayal.

As his lips curled and he hollered after them.

“SHOUTO!”

Izuku’s body moved in synch with Shouto’s, braced against the mare’s powerful sides, as his mind was a whirlwind of thoughts, and sudden realizations.

“Shouto,” he whispered, his voice drowned out by the wind, yet he knew that his not-quite-human friend was listening. “Shouto, you’re the crown prince, aren’t you?”
Belatedly he realized that the back he was hugging was not bowed, or knotty, but rather wider than his own sunbaked form. He looked up and momentarily forgot to breathe as he looked directly into the Queen’s son’s eyes.

Polished steel and a drop of ice.

He had beautiful eyes.

He grinned at him, impish and joyful and so familiar even if his face was a million times more attractive.

“I guess I was.”

“You’re different.” Izuku couldn’t help but say, his arms tightening around him when the light dimmed in heterochromatic eyes. “Ah, I’m not saying it’s a bad thing! I just didn’t- you looked so different from the prince’s illustrations before– and I mean, you looked more like a mischievous fae- which I guess you technically are? Oh my god, Shouto, did I just kidnap the crown prince!? oh my god they’re going to chop off my head and-!”

Shouto laughed.

Loud, powerful laughs that reverberated inside Izuku, making his cheeks redden with warmth.

He pressed closer against him, letting this new emotion wash over him, like a beautiful sense of peace.

“Oh well,” Izuku mumbled once Shouto calmed down. “I did say I wanted to have a more exciting life. I’m guessing following the runaway half-fae prince is bound to go down in history.”

“History,” Shouto hummed, as their ride finally slowed from a tireless gallop to a slow walk.

Around them was nothing but greenery, and Izuku was suddenly aware they were entering fae
domains. His heart was racing.

“A tale as old as time,” Shouto continued to say, his voice being carried away by the wind in a whispered song. “A tale with no end, with no beginning.”

“A story for everyone to live,” Izuku echoed, feeling the words surging from his very soul, intertwining with Shouto’s. “Of a gilded cage, and a rose carved in gold.”

“Of a brave little boy.”

“Of a sneaky little prince.”

“Of golden crowns.”

“And blooming love.” Izuku whispered, letting the warmth in his chest give him courage.

Shouto looked back at him.

“Yes,” he whispered back. “And love.”

(Together they would enter the forest of old, and would never look back.)

End Notes

Hope you enjoyed it!

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