

And so it went with triumph after triumph  
Till on a day the King, being sick at heart  
(The King was temperamental like his cook,  
But nobody noticed the connection),  
Sent for the ex-King in a private matter.  
“You say you know the inwardness of men,  
As well as your hundred other things.  
Dare to speak out and tell me about myself.  
What ails me? Tell me. Why am I unhappy?”

“You’re not where you belong. You’re not a King  
Of royal blood. Your father was a cook.”

“You die for that.”

“No, you go and ask your mother.”

His mother didn’t like the way he put it,  
“But yes,” she said, “someday I’ll tell you, dear.  
You have a right to know your pedigree.  
You’re well descended on your mother’s side,  
Which is unusual. So many Kings  
Have married beggar maids from off the streets.  
Your mother’s folks - “

He stayed to hear no more,  
But hastened back to reassure his slave  
That if he had him slain it wouldn’t be  
For having lied but having told the truth.  
“At least you ought to die for wizardry.  
But let me into it and I will spare you.  
How did you know the secret of my birth?”

“If you had been a King of royal blood,  
You’d have rewarded me for all I’ve done  
By making me your minister-vizier,  
Or giving me a nobleman’s estate.