

## Tammy's Three Troubles

Art: Tobias Eklund (@Teklundart)

(instagram: eklund\_art)



*as it were is how it was*

*and*

*not how*

*it should have been*

## Chapter 1

Tammy is, and Tammy was of sound body but not of soul. Her soul was unwhole.

Tammy was in despair.

With feet of lead and her head full of dread, she wandered deeper, deeper and deeper still until she found herself deeply in Trouble. As the realization came upon her slowly, she felt forlorn and lonely as anyone can be.

*Oh woe is me. I am truly in Trouble*, thought she.

“Yes,” said he.

“And who might you be?” asked she of he.

“I am, as you can plainly see, the King! The King! The King is me!”

And surely so it appeared to be. Clothed in a blood-red robe with leopard trim, with a crown on his head and a nose long and thin. He was neither tall nor wide and had pasty, white-coloured skin.

“The King? King who? King of what?”

“King Tolstoy of Trouble. Obviously. You are in trouble, are you not? Why, you said so just now. I heard you. Know doubt!”

Tammy scrutinized the lilliputian figure before her.

The royal continued, “All that you see around you is *my* Kingdom. I present to you the colossal Kingdom of Trouble.”

Tammy looked about and not seeing anything but a super colossal amount of space, *hmm* and then chose to remain silent.

Suddenly, upon remembering her manners she said, “My name’s Tammy.”

“Hi, Tammy.”

They regarded each other momentarily.

“Are you *not* in trouble?” He asked.

“I am.”

“To be lost in trouble is a terrible thing. What brought you me? What troubles have thee? Please, tell me everything.”

At first, Tammy wondered, *is this was a farce? A king, in Trouble? How could this be?*

“I hear all you think and feel what you feel,” the King told Tammy, “now please, tell me, there’s no need for pretence. Tell me, please, and end this suspense.”  
*Well*, thought Tammy, *what have I got to lose?*

“Well... nothing!” answered the King while attempting to curtsy a curtsy or jiggle a jig, or something.

Tammy had been nervously holding her breath, let out a moan that woke up the dead. To which King muttered quickly while turning red, “Zombies not welcome! Please, go back to bed.”

Tammy noticed none of this, thankfully, and mustering courage and said carefully, “Good King, you will see, despite my young age of just twenty-three, I feel locked in a cage and sometimes can’t breathe. For weeks now, or months, I’ve grumbled in wait.

My professor has told me, ‘do not procrastinate!

And

Get off your prostate!’

Which was weird. Women do not *have* prostates. Is that not an queer thing to say to a young lady?”

King Tolstoy, a veritable question mark, smiled meekly and nodded.

“But I diverge. Sorry. Anyway, the troubles that plague me are inside my head. They hound me and pound me. So I lie in bed. Unable to live and unable to die. Unable to laugh... um...let’s see. Unable to laugh... unable to laugh...”

“unable to cry?” suggested the King

“Too obvious!” said Tammy scrunching her face in concentration.

“By jove I’ve got it! Unable to live. Unable to die. Unable to laugh or clean.”

“Huh?” asked King Question-Mark.

“My rooms a *pigsty!*” and gasped out a boisterous, “Hahahahhahahaha!”

“Oh. Ha. Ok. I get it. Ha. yes. Ha ha. Live, Die, *Pigsty*,” he said kindly feigning amusement. Then he looked at his nonexistent watch, coughed slightly and said, “your troubles?”



Tammy became quite earnest. In a rushed whisper she stated, “I find myself in a state of apathy because I know not what I should do, when I should do it, nor whom I should do it with.”

“That’s it?” asked the King.

“Isn’t it awful?”

The King looked unimpressed.

She expanded, slightly put-off by King’s lack of enthusiasm, “Look, I have school, family, friends, I work weekends at the diner...”

The King started to take interest. He was fond of pancakes.

“I am so stressed out. If the answer to these three questions were apparent to me, why, then I would not need to worry so much.

“Go on.”

“I would know if I was doing the right thing at the right time and with the right person. As it stand today, whenever I am doing something with someone, I worry that I should be doing something else. The worry is so intense that I end up not ‘being there’. Not really. I am physically there but mind is elsewhere.”

Tammy gently began to weep and groaned, “is it not awful?”

King Tolstoy took pity, “Nay, Nay. My new old friend, I really think not. Alas, if this is what keeps you in this moribund state, allow me to give you the keys to the gate.”

“Could you? Would you?”

“Yes, I would do that. With my guidance, you will be successful. I must ask you first, are you willing to let me show you the way out of Trouble? Will you do all that I ask?”

Tammy, who was terribly tired of her non-existence yelped, “I’ll do anything you ask!”

“Very well. Within the Kingdom, there are many animals, some of which whom can assist you in finding the three keys to your cage.”

“Three keys for three troubles?”

“Correct. But all three keys must be used simultaneously.”

Tammy considered this and looking at her hands mumbled, “But I’ve only two hands.”

“Have I not promised to help you? Now, seek and find those answer keys. When you have all three you will be completely free of worry. Now, ask the questions aloud with me: What should I do? With whom should I do it? And whence should I do said thing with whomever?”

“Yes, kind King.”

And together they asked the three questions, “What should I do? With whom should I do it? And whence should I do said thing with whomever?”

And with that, the King was gone.

In his place was a dog with no face.

## Chapter 2



Tammy called out, “King! King Tolstoy! King Tolstoy of Trouble! What is this thing? This hound I have found in a curious way. Pray tell, why, King, oh why is it lacking its face?”

Then, without a peep, the hound made a leap! It jumped all around then let out a sound. After which, it lay on the ground, haplessly.

“Perhaps, this peculiar puppy needs my help?” thought Tammy out loud.

“Correct,” chimed the voice of the King.

“Are you here? I can not see you, kind King.”

“I am here, Tammy. Have faith. Now look for those keys that open the gate.”

Tammy considered this carefully and, despite her not quite being sure what to do, who to do it with or when to do it, she bent down and gently picked up the peculiar pup.

“What has happened to you my fine furry friend? I’d give you a face, but I have none to lend.”

“Disgrace,” whispered the hound. T’was barely a sound.

“Disgrace?” Tammy remembered the times she had lost face. Embarrassing moments do often take place.

“Oh my and oh gee, you poor little thing. Whatever went wrong, you are not alone. All living things, paupers or kings, everyone has done embarrassing things. Why once in the past my teacher did ask in front of the class if I would please stand and begin to sing. I was still quite young and had never sung for anyone more than the family dog. To my dismay, I learned on that day, I can’t hit a note and that is no joke. You see, when I began everyone laughed.”

”Really?” asked the dog tilting his head up towards her.

”Truly.”

”Really, truly?”

”Truly, really.”

The pup was silent a moment and then said, ”Prove it.”

”Prove what?”

”Prove that you can’t sing!”

So, Tammy did just that. And as she did sing, the funniest thing, was not each note that she did falsely produce but, the fact that the puppy’s face was back in its proper place!

The hound howled happily, “Aooooooouuuuu!”

Tammy trumpeted triumphantly, “Aooooooouuuuu!”

And as quickly as the puppy had been there, Tammy found that she did now stare, at a crow with no nose. It looked rather meek without its proud beak. What’s more, she could see, floating just out of reach, a gold colored key.

“A key!” Tammy exclaimed with glee. “A key the color of pee.”

### **Chapter 3**

“King!” Tammy shouted. “Kiiingg! I have the key! See?”

“Yes. Quit shouting. You’ll wake yourself up. Now then, can you answer your queries three?”

Tammy thought hard and answered, “Could it be, that one answer is not to be so easily embarrassed? That everyone gets embarrassed and therefore one ought not take oneself, or the embarrassment one was embarrassed by, so seriously? For when one allows oneself to be embarrassed, why, this only hinders oneself from truly being a part of a larger context. A larger context known as the human condition?”

“No.”

“Oh.”

And with that, Tammy turned her attention towards the beakless bird at foot.

“Hello. What have we here?” she asked.

“I am a bird, idiot. I-di-ot!”

“Well, I can see that you are a bird.”

“So, why did you ask moron? Mor-on!” Tammy was taken aback.

“You are very rude bird, in fact.”



The bird mimicked Tammy, “you are a very rude bird, in fact. Do you know what you are?” asked the bird hopping threateningly towards Tammy. “You are a human waste-of-space. Waste! Of! Space!”

“I know,” answered Tammy and began to cry. “I know that I am. I can’t do anything right. I can’t do anything at all. I am always so worried about doing the wrong thing. So, instead of doing something, well, what do I do...? I do nothing. Nada. Zilch. Bupkis. I am a human waste-of-space. I truly am.”



The black bird cocked his head to the left and said, “Right, sorry about all that. I have a terrible temper. Sorry. It’s just that I get so mad. I am not one to argue, unless I want to. You may very possibly be a prime example of a human waste-of-space, who am I to judge? If you say you are. Well, it is not up to me to say you are not. Nay, nay. But at least you didn’t cut off your own beak!”

Tammy ceased to sniffle and eyeballed the foul mouthed fowl.

“You cut off your own beak?”

“I just said that, didn’t I, knumbskull!? Knumb-skull!” The bird was suddenly hopping mad and began to bullet Tammy with any number of not-niceties.

Tammy tears began to trail downwards again.

“Oh, I’m sorry. Don’t listen to me. I am merely a belligerent bird with as much sense as a teapot made of chocolate. Why, I don’t even listen to me anymore.”

Tammy smiled tearily at the imagery, “a chocolate teapot.”

Seeing her smile, the bird smiled with its eyes because it’s hard for a bird to smile with or without a beak, and added, “an inflatable dartboard?” Tammy giggled. “A soup sandwich?”

Tammy felt much better and gave the bird a biggish smile whilst wiping the tears from her eyes saying, “I like the first one best. As useless as a chocolate teapot. That’s funny!” The bird nodded in agreement and said, “Listen, I’ll tell you why I cut my beak off if you promise not to laugh.”

Nodding her own head she answered, “Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye.”

“I just might do that. Just-might! You human waste-of... sorry, sorry. If it is any consolation, I am attending anger management classes.”

Tammy nodded and softly said, “appropriate.”

The bird had not heard her and continuing with his story said, “Listen. No... look! no , not look. IMAGINE! I had a really nice beak. Probably the nicest beak you never saw.”

“Oh, I am sure!”

The bird squinted at Tammy to see if she was ruffling his feathers. Convinced that she was not, he continued, “So, my Mamma says, ‘you have the handsomest beak in the whole murder!’ and I says, ‘I know!’ and she says, ‘hope it doesn’t get in the way when you try to fly into the nest. You and it are hardly gonna’ fit. Not with that big fat ego of yours along with it.’

“Oh, that wasn’t very nice,” said Tammy.

“Right? I know! I got so mad, well, I got so mad I cut my beak off to spite my Mamma, but in the end, I ended up cutting off my beautiful beak to spite my own face.”

The miserable beakless bird began to cackle and cry exuberantly.

“Oh no! You poor dear!” exclaimed Tammy. “This will not do at all! Don’t cry. Let me help you, please. Tell me, where is your beak *right now*?”

“Right now?”

“What better time than now?”

“Right now? It’s under the ground. I buried it.” Said the crow, looking down in more ways than one. “It is under us.”

Tammy started to dig at the dirt and quite quickly felt something hard and beakish. Digging carefully and then brushing away the remaining earth, she felicitously lifted the beak saying, “I have never seen such a breathtakingly, beautiful beak.”

Which only made the crow sadder.

Remembering how she had helped the faceless puppy, Tammy cried, “Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait! I think I know a way to help you get your beak back in place!”

“How?” asked the crow doubtfully.

“Well, not so long ago, I was trying to think of something to give my sister for her birthday. My sister and I fight a lot, and I always feel badly afterwards. Even if it is *ALWAYS* her fault. Anyway, drawing is one of the few things I am really good at.”

The crow groaned and said, “You are not going to try and draw my beak back, are you?”

“No.”

“Oh.”

“So, I spent nearly a whole day drawing a picture for my sister. It turned out really well. It might have been the best I have done.”

Tammy looked away almost forgetting why she was telling this to the bird.

“Go on,” said the now curious crow.

“I was really happy with the drawing and actually thought about keeping it and putting it in the school competition but I had made it for my sister, so she was going to have it.” Tammy looked very sadly at the bird.

“Did she like it?”

“No. She called me cheap for not ‘buying’ her something.”

“Oh dear. Did you tell her where to shove it and that she was an ungrateful, human waste-of-space? That she should keep her mouth shut when talking to you? That she would know a great gift if it was stuck up her...”

“No,” Tammy interrupted looking downhearted. “I tore the drawing up.”

“You tore it up!? But, but, but... but...” stuttered the crow and added, “but that was stupid!”

Tammy nodded slowly in agreement and then looked away fearful that the bird was again going to spew out rudities.

“Look, who am I to call a beetle black? You said you liked the picture, right? The drawing you spent so much time making. Why in the name of Ibis did you tear it to bits? You do realize that in doing so you only hurt your... hey... wait a minute! Wow! My beak is back!”

Tammy dared to look at the bird again and so it was! She saw the beak and the bird happily hopping about. The crow got all cross eyed staring at its beak and toppled over giddily. He flapped right back up and jump-flew around himself laughing and singing, “I say my beak, my beaky, beaky, beak, my beak is back. I say my beak, my beaky beak, my beak is back! I say my be...”

Then he stopped in mid-beak, and asked, “how did you do that?”

Tammy smiled gregarious saying, “Doesn’t matter.” And added, “you like Sheryl Crow? And then sang, “I said a change, would do you good,’ I said my beak, my beak is back!”

“Duh! Sheryl Crow makes me happy.”

Then, solemnly, the bird stated, “Thank you, thank you, thank you. I don’t know how you did it but, thank you, thank, thank you.”

Tammy just stood there and smiled.

Just before it flew away, the crow queried, “weren't you speaking all in rhymes before I showed up?”

“Yeah, it was giving me a headache.”

And with that, Tammy was alone with **two** golden keys floating just out of reach.

“Kiiiiiiiiing!” She shouted “Kiiiiiiiiing! I have two keys! Kiiiiiiiiing!”

“You needn’t shout,” said the voice of the King. “I’m in your head, remember?”

“Sorry, I have two keys now! One, two, how about you?”

“You’re not going to start with that again are you?”

“I guess not, it is really hard to stop once you start.”

“I know, right? It is hard to stop once you start.”

“Yeah.”

“Hmmm. Anyway, Two keys. Very good. Two keys, eh? Do you have three answers? Yea or nay?”

Tammy looked at King with a frown and a smile detecting a tiny rhyme.

“Okay, okay. Do you have three answers? Yes or no?”

Tammy thought hard and chirped, “maybe not three but, could one of the answers be that whenever you make a mistake it is a good thing because you can use it to answer the three questions?”

“No.”

“Oh. Could it be that in showing empathy for others unlocks the gate?”

“Nya.”

“Nya?”

“Nya. As in nya. No-yes. Yes-no. Empathy? Nya. But, you are real close! I’ll give you a hint. Imagine you cut off your ears and you go to the hospital.”

Tammy touched her ears in fear.

“Hypothetically.”

Tammy relaxed, “oh, hypothetically. Gotcha!”

“So, let’s say, hypothetically, that your ears are cut off, you have them in your hand...”

“Ewww!”

“You have them in your hand and you go to the hospital. Ok?”

“I guess.”

“Right, do you want empathy?”

“Yes!”

“No! No, no, no, no, no!”

“No?” asked Tammy looking perplexed. “No? What do I want if there I stand, ears, hypothetically, in hand at the hospital, man?”

“You rhymed!” said King laughingly. “Do you need empathy at the hospital? Or...?”

“Well, I certainly need help!”

And then it hit her like a ton of bricks, “What should I do?”

King made clucks of giddy anticipation.

Tammy continued, “What should I do if someone is holding their ears in their hands? Help? Help! Help!”

King nodded, chuckled, giggled and a yuped, “a yup, a yup, a yup, help! Help others! A yup! Oh look, a little green mouse. Will wonders never cease?” and then he disappeared.

And lickity-split, a little green mouse jumped up on her hip (or thigh, but that doesn’t rhyme, sigh).

“A little green mouse? Let me guess. Lest I be mistaken,” said Tammy scooping up the little green mouse in her normal-sized hand. Tammy continued, “experience tells me that I help you by telling you a story about a time when I, myself, was all green with envy.”

“Put me down!” shouted the little green mouse.

“Not until I have the third key.”

“Put me down! Put me down right now!”

Tammy closed her hand around the mouse, so it could not jump from her hand.

(I only got this far with the revision...)

“Once, when I was younger,” Tammy began, “My sister was given beautiful, green, emerald brooooouuuuuch!!!!!!” The little green mouse had bitten Tammy’s normal-sized hand as hard as its little green teeth literally could causing Tammy to loosen her grip whereby the little green mouse fell to the ground. It immediately started to run away, and Tammy was left staring from her ouching, normal- sized hand, to the quickly disappearing little, green mouse and back again, until the wee green mouse was clearly out of sight.



“Ouch.” said Tammy to no one in particular.

“Ouch, is right”, said the jocular voice of the King.

“I guess I should have talked *with* the mouse and not *to* the mouse.”

And with these words, the King stood before Tammy, with the third Golden Ring.

“Well done!” said he to she.

Rubbing her wounded paw, Tammy smiled softly.

“I should talk with a little green mouse and not to a little green mouse? Is that the answer to one of my three questions?”

“No.”

“Oh...”

“Ok, Tammy. I promised *you*, I would help *you*, use the keys, once *you*, had them and have them, *have you* do.”

“Oh boy!” exclaimed Tammy doing a little dance whilst nursing her hand. “How do I use the keys?”

“Ask me your questions and I will answer, joyfully.” said the King, joyfully.

“Well? Go one.” urged the King. “Seek, and you shall find. Ask, and it shall be given. Knock, and the door shall open. Chop, chop!”

“Right. So much has happened since I got into Trouble. Give me a second.”

The King rolled his eyes and whispered quickly, “What should one do? With whom should one do it? And whence should one do said thing with whomever?”

“Oh yeah! Thanks,” Tammy said, evidently embarrassed,

“Who should I do, what should I do it with, and why should I do it when?”

“Oh, come on, you are not even trying!” said the King, stomping his feet.

“Did you not say that you were *just* in my head? A figment of *my* imagination? Than imagine if I choose not to imagine you! What say you now, hmm? King?”

The King looked up at Tammy with a newfound respect. “My, what you have grown.”

Tammy suddenly felt rather sure of herself. She had not felt the feeling for a mighty long time. It felt grand.

The King smiled.

Tammy smiled.

The King spoke.

“Firstly, the person you should do whatever with is the person you are with.”

“Oh. Well. That seems easy.”

“Secondly, when you should do it is always ‘now’ for you cannot live in neither the future nor the past, now, can you?”

“No. I guess not.”

“You can’t, trust me on this. Quantum physics? Really cool, but we ain’t even near being in two places at once.”

“Quantum physics. Right. Gotcha.”

“Finally, the thing you should do is help the one you are with for that is when we are not wastes-of-spaces. To reiterate, help and understand one another right here, right now.”

“Huh!” Said Tammy. “I mean, I can do that!”

“Huh, huh!” echoed the King. “I know. You can!”

“So, to not be a human waste-of-space, all I need to do is: help whoever I’m with while I’m with them?”

“That’s it. Help the one you’re with while you be with them.”

“Are you sure that those are three things?”

“No.”

“Oh”.

And with that, Tammy opened her eyes.

And seeing that she was still in bed, she got up and got on about her day.

*The End*

Text: John Dennis

Paintings: Tobias Eklund (instagram: eklund\_art)