

## **The Princes In the Tower**

Slowly I paced back and forth in front of the door where the princes laid asleep. Sometimes if you listen carefully enough you can hear them breathe and if you listen even more carefully you can hear the rise and fall of their chests as they sleep not knowing what awaits them. Edward will soon be the king of England and Richard, his brother, will be his successor if Edward has no sons. Sometimes if you listen even more carefully you can hear their inner cries for their mother and father. Their mother hasn't come to visit them since their father passed away. Instead they have been left in the hands of their uncle: King Richard the 3<sup>rd</sup>. I stopped for a minute. The buckles on my boots feel silent as I gently lowered my head towards the door.

I was wrong. Not both the boys were asleep. One was still pacing back and forth. His footsteps met the beat of the bell chiming somewhere in London. Up here in the royal quarters of the Tower of London you can see and hear everything it's like your standing on top of the world. Well my world anyway. I've never left London. When I was a kid I had always dreamed about becoming a guard in the tower of London. But now I'm at the place I had always wanted to be it doesn't feel like I wanted it to. I want to go outside of London and see the country. I know how it must feel for Edward. I don't think he wants to be king I think it scares him. When my head finally fell upon the cold wooden door I could hear him talking to himself, "Dear Mother, no that's not right. Dearest Mother. I hope you are dealing with father's death well. No that still doesn't sound right," he would whisper back and forth each syllable matching the time of the rustling of his delicate, puffy black clothes. I was surprised he was still awake the sun was beginning to ripple over the buildings and his uncle would want him up soon. He wouldn't be able to get through the day with such little sleep; he would probably flake out around midday. I was tempted to go in and put his mind to rest but the guard change would happen soon and if I was to get caught I would be in deep trouble. I like to stay out of things here. It does no good poking your nose in.

I could hear footsteps coming up the stairs. I quickly took my head away from the door and I began to march back and forth. The bells were no longer ringing in the distance so the clinking of buckles replaced the eerie silence of the early morning. The guard came around the corner "Morning Lance, time to switch position," I nodded my head but I didn't say anything. We weren't meant to talk on the job.

I made my way down the stone steps to my next posting station. You could see where the guards' shoes had clinked the edge of the steps and the rough stone had begun to rub away. As I reached the bottom it was dark and I could see no light and barely my hands in front of my face. I couldn't see my feet. Many people say they fear the dark. But I do not. I only fear what is in it. I tried to listen to the echoing of the guards' buckles, but all I could hear was dead air. The dead air began to strangle me and I began to fall back towards the wall. It pinned me up against the cold, hard wall and its weapon dug into my neck. I feared its weapon so much. Its weapon was my fear. Every night I would stand here for an hour and every night the dead air would cut my throat with fear and I would feel my blood drip down my neck and soak my collar with my deep, red panic. People say facing your fear will make it go away, but I disagree. It just makes it normal. I fell to the ground my hands shaking so much I wasn't able to heave myself of the ground. I wrapped my hands around my body and clenched myself tightly hoping that the panic would soon leave me but it didn't. I felt something cold creep

across my leg. It stung it was so cold like a ghost's fingers were scrapping the skin of my legs and only leaving the bones exposed. I tried to imagine what the ghost looked like; I could see long flowing white clothes dragging along the floor making a scrapping sound like a knife sharpening against a block of stone. The ghost's fingernails were drenched in deep red blood and their teeth were pointed at sharp angles ready to bite and murder at any second. Their hair was like a siren's long, thin and white flowing in the air and draping over their shoulders. The image scared me. So, I stopped and let the fear cut into me.

After an hour, I swapped around again; I was allowed to go on my break now. I sat outside in the morning air. It didn't smell amazing, but it smelt better than it did in the cellar when the fear was cutting my throat. I could hear the bell chiming and the other guards laughing over the other side of the gardens. Their bellowing laughs sliced the beautiful bell chimes and the beautiful bird songs into a thousand pieces. I couldn't understand why they just couldn't keep quiet. I wanted near silence and only the sound of nature consuming me and wrapping me under its cloak of wisdom and security.

Then they stopped, the birds flew away and the bell stopped chiming Dominic Mancini was making his way across the garden. Everything was silent. His footsteps drummed on the pavement and his cloak rustled through the air. He was going to see Edward and Richard in the tower. To account what would be happening to them today.

Later, that night when I was posted next to the room where Edward and Richard should have been they weren't there. I was terrified. I thought an intruder must have come in on the other shift. I ran down the stairs shouting "The princes have been taken, The princes have been taken."

Then I ran into him. Dominic Mancini...

He gave me stern look, "The princes have not been taken merely moved to the inner tower."

He waved his hand at me as if it were no big deal. "Although, I am impressed you have been the only guard to have noticed. I think I shall forgive you for running into me. We need more guards like you."

The next day I was sitting in the sun light when the princes tutor walked past me. He wasn't with the princes. They always went on a morning walk together. Where were they. In the weeks that followed the princes were seen less and less until they all together disappeared. Sometimes when I was on guard I would see and hear people whispering. Sometimes I would pick up the odd comment. They didn't mean much though without the full context. I merely got words. One day Dominic Mancini was walking the grounds when he ran up to me. His forehead was red where he had obviously been rubbing it and his hair was slicked back behind his head. He looked frantic...

He dragged me towards the wall, "You were the guard who ran into me the other night, weren't you?"

I was too scared to speak. His eyes looked like they had had no sleep and the burning passion behind them was merely embers now. He shook me now, "Weren't you? Weren't you?"

I found my voice, "Yes."

He stared at me long and hard. "Can I trust you?"

My voice came out as a strained whisper, "Yes."

"Good, take this letter read it. Follow the instructions. This is a life or death situation.

You have the power to determine which way it will go. On your head, be it."

With that he placed a pale piece of parchment in my hand and left his robes whispering in my ear as he left. It was crumpled and frayed around the edges.

*To whom it may concern,*

*The princes are in grave danger and they shall not survive the next week unless immediate action is taken. It rests in the hands of you. I have organised everything all you need to do is follow the instructions on the letter and you and the princes will be safe. If you run into any questioning, danger or anything like that just say 'The crown is in my hands.' I have made sure all the people you will meet have been bribed and will let you proceed if you speak those words. The princes know where to meet you and you will all soon be out of London. I know it is a lot to ask but this is something you must do for your country and your crown.*

I turned over the letter and the paper was stained with ink: the instructions. It read...

- 1.) *Go to the stables after it has turned dark. Speak to the guard on duty and say the code. He will show you to the cart I have organised for you. The princes will be there*
- 2.) *Take the back road out of London and go through the woods.*
- 3.) *Once out of London take them down the road named 'the princes'.*
- 4.) *At the end of the road there is a house. The people living in the house are an Auntie and Uncle of mine. They know the words speak them to them. The princes will continue there journey from there however you will journey back to London.*
- 5.) *If there is any questioning about you or the princes when you get home there shouldn't be, as far as anyone will be concerned there will be a box of there bones at the end of the garden, you should leave as quickly as possible.*

I was in trouble. It was already getting dark and I knew if I didn't get there at the right time the guard wouldn't know the code. Then I would be in trouble. I would leave at the last minuet and been there just in time...

I was a few feet away and I could see the guard I gingerly stepped on the stones desperately trying not to make any sound wishing I could fly as silently as the moon glides through the night sky. I finally made my way around the stable wall and stalked up to the guard "The crown is in my hands"

He nodded his head in reply and led me around the grey stone path to the rickety, wooden cart that was waiting with two cloaked figures. The wood was splintering in strange places like it had been scraped by a hedge that had a million thorns sticking out at odd angles waiting to impale the unexpected victim happily strolling down the road. However, the carts wheels were perfectly positioned. It was a new cart. Dominic had torn apart a new cart to make it look like it wasn't carrying royalty. When I took in all the features it looked like the cart of death. I had always imagined it being old and rickety to blend to its surrounding but I knew there would be solid plated gold underneath. I rotated around the cart so I could get my foot on the platform to heave myself up. I popped my foot over the wooden side and sat as silently as I could on one of the prickly hay bales. It dug into my leg it itched and stung I brushed it away. For the first time I looked at the hooded figures. They were the princes! I hadn't looked at them properly. The thought of them being the princes hadn't occurred to me. They aren't in

their fancy dress and the light illuminating from the candle wasn't good enough to make out the fine details of the face from where I had been standing before. "Was anyone else meant to be coming?" I whispered in a slightly shaky voice due to the fact that the responsibility I was about to undergo and the dark. I hated telling myself this but it was mostly the dark that was doing it for me not so much the responsibility. I knew that the candle would get blown out on the ride so I would have to cope with the fear digging into my neck and cutting it slightly open making it more and more difficult to breath.

"No," Edward whispered in reply.

His mouth slightly twitched after the last syllable of the word. The right side lifting slightly higher than the left. It didn't seem like a friendly 'no' more liked a forced and strained 'no' one that had fear in it. A 'no' that had far more control than my own voice on the surface but the ripples were still at the bottom of the lake. Out of nowhere the guard appeared again and this time with a horse in tow. The colour of the horse was hard to make out, but you could tell it was a light colour just like a sandy blonde. It made its way towards us. I could hear its remarkably strong hooves pounding the ground whilst matching the extreme rate of my heartbeat. Its hair was slightly darker perhaps it was more of a Moroccan sand type of colour you could only see highlights of the hair as it swayed in and out of the light. The muscles tensed and relaxed with each step it took and the head swayed with the motion of its body. Although I couldn't see the eyes I imagined them to be as clear as day and reflecting like a mirror. The guard attached it to the cart "I trust that you are driving," the guard said nodding his head towards me. The thought hadn't even occurred to me but I saw no harm in saying yes I didn't like the look of this guy and I knew if I said no he would have jumped like a rabbit at the job opportunity and there was no way that I was risking the safety of the princes. I knew that if I did the princes may not live to see there next sunrise and I may not live to see mine either. I couldn't trust anyone. Even if they were in the letter.

I tore the reigns from his grasp with maybe a little more force than necessary it may have looked a little suspicious him but he gave me no hard look or an aggressive gesture but turned on his heels and stalked off towards the stables. I repositioned the reigns in my hand to make the hold more comfortable but I had always had big hands so they doubled over slightly and my grimy nails stuck into the palm of my hands. I turned to the boys then. I noticed that Richard had his hand over his mouth and his shoulders were vigorously bobbing up and down. "Richard are you alright?" I whispered to him.

"I want to go home,"

"I understand. But I can't do that I am just taking you to the people who will take you some place else that is safe and you and your brother will be able to play all day long. I promise,"

"I want Mother,"

"Stop it Richard," Edward retorted with a cold hard tone in his voice.

"It's ok Edward. Your brother is upset and all I want to do is help,"

"That's what he said," Edward said in a defiant and obnoxious tone.

"Who said what?"

"Henry the 7<sup>th</sup>," he said to me in reply as if it had been the most obvious question in the world.

"Oh," maybe it was Henry we were fleeing from or maybe not "Edward and Richard the cart is going to go very quick in a minuet so the candle will be blown out by the wind, is that going to be a problem?"

There was no reply only a sob from Richard it was heavy and sad like a horse shoe being dropped on the ground, no real emotion or feeling but it makes everybody turn around

and makes your spine tingle with cold. We had reached the edge of the towers road and I was heading towards the back road out of London. I tugged and whipped the reins against the horses back and we were off; the wind tousled my hair from the left side of my face to the right side of my face and the hot, panicked sweat began to peel off my face when the cold, calming wind hit my face. However, it was not long before the flickering of the candle was destroyed by the howling wind. I tried to stay focused but I couldn't. I could feel fear strapping me down to the hay bale I was sitting on and the hand of the dark covering my face making me feel vulnerable and claustrophobic. I turned around to see Richard screaming and crying and wailing. His hands wafted in the hitting and scratching nothing. "Richard calm down, it's ok I'm scared of the dark too," I said in my most calming and most relaxing voice I could muster through the suffocating hand of the dark. He jumped up then screaming even louder the horse moved and made a sharp turn to the left causing the cart to tip to the left the motion was terrifying. I managed to grab hold of the hay bale I was sitting on though and I yanked the reins into my chest. I had acted quickly, but not quite fast enough...

Richard was flying through the air still screaming over and over and his dark hood had fallen off his small head and for the first time I saw the fear in his eyes and the tear stains that were left on his cheeks like streaks of acid. His body then came plummeting down to the ground and his head bounced forward as it hit the hard, grey, moss covered stone on the floor. Suddenly there was no screaming no crying. I hauled the cart to a stop and jumped out of the back and raced over to the side of the road where his limp body lay. I lit the candle and brought it up to his face. His eyes were shut and his mouth was slightly open. You could just see his canine teeth at the side of his mouth and his head was rested at an uncomfortable angle on the rock that had once been covered in bright, green moss, but now was covered in deep, red blood. He was dead...

I covered his body with the cloak and laid him down under the trees where the roots supported his body weight and his head laid down on the fresh green moss. I turned on my feet and began to walk back to the cart where Edward was still sitting motionless in his grief. He had wrapped his arms around himself to keep his body from violently shaking, he was in shock. I made my way up to him he turned on me and dug his nails into my flesh. It didn't hurt physically but it destroyed me mentally. I set him back in the cart and I placed my hands on the reins and we were only going at a trotting speed now. That way the candle wouldn't be blown out. "He was scared of the dark you know," he said with a shaking and uneven voice.

"I guessed that much,"

"But, now he has been plunged into an eternal hole of darkness. Never to be waking. Never to be screaming as he has no voice and never to be crying because he is no longer alive. But, the tear lined streaks running down his face will always scar for there was never a chance for them to disappear whilst he was living."

I looked at him then I had never been so taken back by what one person could say. I was in a daze when I noticed the sign labeled the 'The Princes'...

I turned sharply down the road making the cart rock slightly to the left. It didn't lift up off the ground but enough to paralyse me with fear. We trotted to the end of the road. Where the house was. The door was small and was out of proportion with the rest of the house yet it looked surprisingly sturdy and the house looked as strong as an ox too. I jumped off the carriage and walked around the back of the cart to help Edward out he didn't look at me or take my hand instead he jumped down. His ankle twisted at an odd

angle and his face screwed up with pain but it was apparent that he didn't want to show it. He marched off strongly at first but his ankle was causing him pain. I think it was one of the 'don't let your enemies see when your bleeding or they will attack' moments. He saw me as the monster who murdered his brother and would be the sort of person who would attack when he was down. He was wrong I wouldn't leave him with that impression he would know I was a good person.

We walked up to the door and I banged on it with my fist. Nobody answered the door. I knocked on it this time harder. Nobody answered. Edward, with apparent rage showing, thumped on the door almost like he was prepared to brake down the door. Then a man answered "The crown is in my hands," I whispered and I looked at Edward as I said it. He stared at the man.

"Very well, I will let you two say your goodbyes," he said in a stern but friendly voice. I turned to Edward and held out my hand for him to shake it. Instead he spat on it. "You murderer," he said through his gritted teeth.

I looked at him. His eyes were wide and you could see the flames of hate burning and the tears coming to extinguish them but they were too late. The words had been said and nothing that he could have said would have changed it...

I ran then, from the past. I am still running everyday and everyday I am haunted by my past and dreading the present ghosts that are on me now which will make the ghosts of my past and I am terrified of the ghosts of the future that I have not met yet. They are the scariest for I have not met them yet, so you could say that I fear the unknown. But what I really fear is being caught by the ghosts that chase me down the street, follow me down the woods and appear in the dark. That is why I carry on running.