The night’s breeze was a comfort from the unending heat of the sun’s rays. The boy sat watching beyond the protective walls of the great city. He looked over the familiar sights of the mountains in distance and the lights that scattered across the land indicating where people were; yet, as always, his eyes were drawn to the great black tower that stood impossibly tall despite its being across the land. That night was oddly quiet and left the boy alone with his thoughts, which were scattered and flew by. It was in this silence that the boy was surprised to find the old man had managed to walk up to him. They conversed as they usually had for a little while before the boy managed to work up the courage to finally ask him about the great black tower. He’d already tried with the other people in town only to be shushed and reprimanded.

With dread, he watched the man’s reaction to the seemingly forbidden question. The boy saw the man’s eyes close as he slowly and deeply breathed. When the man’s eyes opened once more, they were nostalgic, and a moment passed before he turned to stare at the tower. The young one followed his gaze and though he could see a light from the normally dark place before the man spoke.

“I’m glad to know of younger people are who interested in our past. I believe that those who study the past are some of the most important in the upcoming future,” The old man began quickly, “I shall tell you the story of this land. Of its Hero and its Villain. Do you believe yourself to be ready?”

With renewed energy, the young boy nodded his head.

“Good, Good. Allow me to begin with the story of the Knight. He was a man who had become the captain of the Royal Guard. He trusted his liege, the former King of our land, and his liege trusted him. He was beloved by the people of this great capital, although no one was more attached to the Knight than his younger brother,” The elder recanted slowly, “Together the Knight and King were able to bring some peace to what was a land ravaged by monsters of all shapes and sizes. However, like all things, the peace came to an end when the monsters were able to gather behind an evil and mysteriously faceless man. He came to be known as…”

There was a long pause as the older man closed his eyes and retreated into his memories. All the while, two young and excited eyes bore into the elder’s face, which the man noticed when he finished gathering his thoughts.

“Oh, don’t mind me. It’s been a very long time since this all happened. For the sake of the both of us, I shall call this man the Wizard. He used to live in that great black tower that sits before the both of us. After realizing the possible danger that this Wizard posed to the kingdom, both the King and his Knight decided that the man must be dealt with by the Knight. It wasn’t very long when he said his goodbyes to his brother and all the townspeople across his path, me included! We all believed that our great Knight would dispatch this evil and return to us before a month passed. His journey across the land was much longer that that, however. He went through most of the villages and forests, slaying the monsters that he encountered whilst helping the natives. I’d say it took the man about a couple of months to reach the tower and begin his assault on it.

“I remember you could see the attack from this very spot whenever he used his great magic in fighting the monsters. Now I must say, after that fight seemed to end the Knight wasn’t heard from again. People still saw the Wizard hanging around his tower, seemingly completely unharmed. Now the weird part is, he didn’t attack us at all. I personally think that the Knight managed to destroy most of that man’s army and left him unable to stand up to the kingdom’s. It was about 10 years before the Wizard decided to try and strike us. He showed up in the throne room of the King’s castle and tried to kill him, but was thwarted by the younger brother of the Knight; he had grown into a capable swordman, and, if I recall correctly, he was able to use magic despite not being a first-born,” The man stopped to take a deep breath, “From what I remember from that magic, it was very special. Capable of purging the ‘corruption’ he called it… Ah! I’m getting off track now, sorry about that. It wasn’t long after the Wizard attempted to kill his liege that the younger brother followed in the Knight’s footsteps and set off slay the Wizard in the name of the King.”

The old man’s face shifted into that of excitement as he continued the story,

“Believe it or not, that man became the Hero of this land. I don’t believe there was a place that he didn’t explore and help the people that lived there. He fought off the Wizard’s forces and grew steadily stronger in the process. I suppose it didn’t take him long to reach that black tower and begin ascending it to face his foe. You know, even before he left this city it was obvious that the young Hero intended to set off on revenge at some point. I… suppose he used the attack on the King as a motivator. Now, I’m going to have to apologize for this next part of the tale… It’s when my memory begins to have holes in it…

“It became apparent to us after a while that there was a fight going on on the very top of the tower. I personally couldn’t make out much detail as my eyes were already starting to go, but it was apparent that the Hero was going to win the altercation and finally restore the peace that his brother and the King had created. There was this massive flash and then, something came flying from the top of the tower. It was this mass of pure darkness, honestly, I’ve never seen anything like before or since. It flew into the castle toward the throne room and… well this wave of the stuff came out of the castle and began engulfing everything in sight. I tried to run, but I didn’t get very far before my mind went completely blank,” The man’s face darkened as his voice began quivering, “I was stuck like that for felt like years. Unable to do anything, feel anything, think anything. It’s something that I wouldn’t wish upon even the most vile of monsters that exist out there.

“But I woke up after a time. I don’t recall where I was, but I do remember that I was face-to-face with the Hero and one other. It was the Knight. A man I resigned to never seeing again for over 10 years. Hm? Oh, please, don’t be so mad with me! I had to embellish some details to make it more exciting! Trust me, you’d never be as surprised as I was that day. After I awoke, the Hero explained how he managed to save me with his magic that expelled the ‘corruption’ from my body. It was then when I decided to question the Knight. I asked him where he had been while the kingdom was under the threat of the Wizard, why he didn’t return to us for so long, and many more I cannot hope to remember. All the while, his face was covered in guilt and sorrow… looking back I cannot help but feel bad for my screaming at him. It was very likely that he received such things from everyone that saw him, the Hero included. The Knight looked towards his brother and asked him to step outside for a moment whilst he told me the truth. The Hero obliged and I watched as the young man walked out of the door and I caught a glimpse of the outside, the city; It was different, but not the kind of different that I can place into words. There was also another figure outside, one of those ferrymen with their mysterious grey cloaks. That person seemed to be expecting, or rather waiting for, the Hero.

“Once the door closed, the Knight turned to me and began his tale of what had happened to him on that journey 10 years ago. As we’d all thought, he journeyed across the land fighting off the monsters that were seemingly under the Wizard’s control. When he arrived at the black tower, he fought through a massive horde of the monsters and ascended the tower. However, he found no Wizard. Instead, the Knight found a monstrous being that was not of our reality. How did he describe it again? Oh, I can’t remember… Anyway, that being was exceptionally powerful and managed to defeat the Knight and take over his body. That made me realize that the Wizard we had feared for a decade was the possessed Knight all along! Oh, trust me, I nearly dropped dead at hearing that! But that wasn’t all! The Knight told me that it a while for the being to fully take over his consciousness, and that then is when the King appeared before him! He explained how the whole thing was fabricated by the King to have the being posses the Knight in order to grow much stronger than it currently was.”

There was a moment of silence as the man turned to look to his listener only to be met with confusion.

“I know it’s hard for you to understand this, it was for me too, but I believe that the Knight explained that the royal line had kept a dirty secret for nearly 1000 long years. They’d kept hidden that no one born of the royal family had the ability to use magic, first-born or otherwise. Instead, the founding King of centuries ago had discovered that monstrous being and found that those of his bloodline could control it, thus preventing the thing from taking over them. The King explained to him that they’d been using the past 1000 years to grow the strength of the being through having it inhabit various people so that when one of the royal line takes it into their body, they have the power of a god at their fingertips. The Knight then explained to me how he was forced to bear witness to his body acting against his will as it agreed to return to the King and his castle after growing in strength for 10 years, as that would be enough for what the royal line wanted,” The old storyteller paused, reflecting for a moment, “When that time came, the Knight told me that he believed the being had grown attached to his body and refused to return to the King. That was when the ‘Wizard’ attacked the castle and sparked the Hero’s entire adventure. Then when the Hero managed to defeat the ‘Wizard,’ the being decided to cut its losses and return to the King, who wholeheartedly allowed it into his body. The Knight told me that then the King spread his influence across the entire world, corrupting it with that otherworldly being’s power, and that neither he nor his brother knew what the King was planning to do with his newly acquired godhood. I was told that from the brothers wished to reach the throne room within the castle and confront the King, or rather the Villain who has used them for his own gains. I made sure to seem them off, of course, but after they approached the castle, I am unable to tell of their tale any longer. Now, you and I can both guess the end of this tale. We are still here, alive and well in this same land that no longer bears the corruption that Villain spread.”

The old man stopped to look out into the dark of the night.

“After that day, the Hero was…”

Another voice cut through the night in an instant.

“I believe that’s enough.”

Both storyteller and listener turned to see the formidable, towering man. The boy instantly started, surprised to see his father standing before him. He quickly stood and began closing the gap between them.

“I’m glad to see you safe,” The stern father spoke softly, “You need to head home now. You’ve been worrying your mother and I.”

With a flash of guilt, the boy began to speed off into the streets of the city he called home. There were a few moments of silence as the young one’s father waited to see if he had truly left before turning back to the old man.

“You decided to tell him?”

“Of course. He’s asked everyone else in the city! Besides, it would be much harder to keep that secret from him going forward,” The old man ranted, “He’s nearing that age that magic will begin manifesting!”

“It’s been that long already?” The man sighed, “But he wouldn’t have known his was special if you hadn’t told that story.”

“You know how powerful it can get!” The elder protested, “Without proper-”

“You don’t believe I can steer him correctly?” The man growled, stepping forward, “I know what you’ve been through, what we all went through. You know I won’t disappoint and allow something like that to happen again.”

The old man was silent, before asking one final question.

“How much of that story did you hear?”

“From the very start,” The stern man smiled, “Have your senses really dulled that much over the years?”

“I suppose…” The old man’s eyes dropped to the ground, “I suppose they have, living in a time of peace for so long.”

“Well, it will happen to us all in the end,” The younger man reflected, “Stay safe, and have a good night, dear brother.”