

A Lord and his Knight

“You called for me, my Lord?” The words came out as a whisper, barely perceptible over the crackling fire.

“Lift yourself sir Ranier, there is no need to kneel when it’s just us.”

Rainier stood, his empty hands clenching and unclenching, wanting for something to do.

“What do you need, my Lord?”

An aged laugh came from the man Ranier called his king, soothing the rising anxiety that swelled inside him.

“Lord this, lord that. My, how formal you’ve grown in the few days since I saw you last. Where’s that bravado you displayed so vigorously on the battlefield? Come, sit with me before the fireplace. No doubt this frigid season sends a chill through your body as it does mine.”

Rainier sat beside the King, overtaken by wonder as he took in the regal chambers easily triple the size of any barracks he’d ever been crammed in, and decidedly better furnished.

“That’s better,” a warm smile spread across his lips, “My old eyes can’t see so well in the dark you know. Perhaps age is finally catching up to the great King of Ulsa.”

“Is there something you need from me, my Lord?”

“Do I need a reason to call for you?”

“No offense, my Lord, but would it not be more expected to send a missive with a servant, or call for me at a more reasonable hour? No other knight is summoned to you in this way.”

“No other knight yes—but no other knight is my son.”

Rainier felt his throat tighten.

“I’ve been thinking Ranier, about this war, my kingdom, about you. Perhaps it’s old age, like I said before, but I find myself lost in thought often these days.”

“Perhaps my Lord—”

“Father. Call me father.”

“Perhaps, Father,” the word felt clumsy and awkward coming out of his mouth, “Perhaps all this thinking has you afflicted with overthinking. An affliction which may lead to necessary secrets being revealed.”

Rainier shuddered at the familial laugh that followed.

“The great thing about getting old, which I hope you one day experience, is that secrets thought important in the past, seem trivial in the present.”

“Even if those secrets involve an illegitimate son?”

The King sat in silence for a moment. Now wearing a solemn expression he watched the flames dance and begin to die in the fireplace. When he spoke, his voice lacked the jovial tone he was so famous for.

“Yes...even those. Who cares if people discover that you are my son. Perhaps it’s time they find out.”

Reiner sat unmoving—his breath trapped in his lungs— too afraid he might find himself waking from a dream.

“You’ve not only served me dutifully as a knight these past few years, but also your kingdom with nary a complaint. You’ve shed flesh and blood and asked nothing in return. And I, the coward that I am, have been too afraid to simply present you to the world as my son.”

Silence filled the closing chasm between the two men, a frigid wind from the open window causing the flame to sputter and cast queer shadows around the opulently adorned room. Reiner did not dare speak, too afraid he might find himself waking from a dream.

“Well, say something,” the King laughed. “I bare my heart, blood and all, and you stay silent. It’s enough to make a man doubt.”

Reiner thought his voice might fail him. That years of unanswered wishes would be too much too soon.

“I... I don’t know what to say,” he stammered, eyes fixed to the floor. “Or how to say it. Or even if I should. For a long time I hated you. Hated that you left me fatherless. Hated you for leaving me with a mother too sick to take care of me. It wasn’t until I was older that I understood why you did what you did. Why you cast me and mother aside, to protect us. To shield us from the intrigues of court and your many enemies. And, when the hate subsided, I wished that one day I could stand by your side as your son. It was nothing more than the foolish wish of a child, but that wish is what pushed me to become a knight.”

Reiner’s heart pounded, the flames rising and falling as if to match the beating in his chest.

“But now that this wish shows signs of coming true, I don’t know if it might come too late. To introduce a bastard heir to the kingdom would ruin you. How many at court have been waiting for a knife like this to stick in your back.”

Silence once again filled the half-lit room.

“You are brave, my Son,” the King said, eyes glistening with tears, “braver than most. Even when offered the one thing you want most, you put others' needs above your own. And that is why my treatment of you will be a sin I carry for the rest of my days. Because you deserve so much more.”

Reniers vision blurred as years of emotion spilled from his eyes.

“You deserve the world, my Son and that’s exactly what you’ll have. Tomorrow I will announce that our war with the Nosske Empire will be my last campaign as king. Once we have crushed them and consolidated our rule, you will take my place.”

Renier felt his breath stop at the King's words. Thoughts cycloned through his head at such a pace that coherent thought was almost lost to him.

“So soon? How will the people react, your advisors, the nobles?”

“The people will rejoice, you are already worthy of a crown in their eyes. The nobles will mumble amongst themselves but will come around eventually. My advisors...they will need some convincing,” the King laughed, the cold pall finally lifting from the room.

“They will call you mad. I’ll be known as the son of a mad king.”

“Let them,” the King said, placing a hand on his son's shoulder, “they will quickly change their tune when they see the golden age we usher these lands into.”

Prompt: This piece was written for fun as well as possibly acting as a starting off point for a greater piece set in this world.