**Like a caged Canary:**

I could hear their snickers… I could feel their weird looks, as I was walking. Every step I took, the bells rang again and again… These cursed clothes I was bestowed, took away my dignity.

“I stood above all in the past yet here I am, but a lowly servant.” I thought to myself as I entered the kitchen. I greeted the head chef and the maids who were around to assist him, but they said nothing. Instead the serving trolley full of food was shoved onto me and the chef showed me the door, as if he was telling me to get out of there quickly. I got out and quickly started making my way towards his room… Or our room, as he liked to call it.

Step after step, I heard the constant ringing of the bells echoing and with each ring my legs grew weaker and started to tremble. Sweat was dripping down my forehead and my breathing was hastening, yet I pressed on and walked, hanging onto the serving trolley for support. It was a long way from the kitchen to his room, and I could feel the stares of the maids everywhere. I could hear them silently laughing at me. I steeled myself and pushed onwards until I was at the door. I knocked and then slowly entered.

“Y-your highness, I’ve brought your l-lunch.” I stuttered, as I had yet to calm down.

His highness simply nodded and gestured me to come over. He was sitting atop his bed, wearing but a light robe, reading a book. I placed the silverware on the little table he kept in his room and served the food. The only thing left to do, was to get out.

“Where are you going honey? Won’t you have lunch with me?” he said softly, “I asked the chef to make an extra portion for you.”

My fingernails started to dig into my arm unconsciously. What was he trying to do? Was it yet another one of his ploys? Has he not humiliated me enough?

“I—“ I stopped, “I’m not hungry my lord.” I explained and started walking towards the door once again.

“You could keep me company then!” he cheered, “It’s been a while since we’ve been together like this.”

He got up and quickly made his way to me, hugging me from behind. “Please?” he whispered softly into my ear.

I nodded, trying my best to hold back my tears as they were welling up. Why would he ask that of me? It’s not like I had a choice in the matter… The difference in our standing was simply too far apart. Simply denying him could get me killed. He held my hand and guided me to the small table, where he pulled the chair out for and then sat on the other side. The room was silent, the only thing one could hear were the silverware cutlery occasionally hitting each other or the dish.

“How have your days been lately? Has everybody been treating you right?” he smiled, breaking the long silence

“It’s been... Yeah, everybody’s treating me well.” I lied after I thought about it. What if this was all but a grand plan of his to torture me even further? I wouldn’t want to give him such satisfaction. “The clothes… I’d like to wear normal clothes. These are not enough to keep me warm.” I muttered, holding the clothes that exposed more skin than they were covering.

He put down the cutlery, stood up and got behind me. I closed my eyes and braced myself for impact, yet all I felt were his hands lightly squeezing my shoulders.

“But you look so beautiful in these.” he praised me, as he slid his hands down my arms softly, “So beautiful, I can barely take my eyes off you”

His hands kept on exploring my body, and I just stayed there, puzzled, wondering what he was trying to accomplish. The very man who dethroned me, who gave the order to have my family \ executed, was treating me so softly, whispering words of love to me. My blood began to boil just thinking about it. I pushed him away and stormed out of his room, as the bells on my clothes rang with every step I took.

“**Curse these bells**!” I shouted and ripped them off my clothes.

I was so confused and angry I just started running. I didn’t know where I was going, I just kept on running. I felt so free, I felt so… Alive! I could hear neither the bells, nor the snickers of people, it was a moment of silence, a moment of pure bliss!

Before I realised, my feet had taken me to the gate. Could I leave this place and start anew? Could I possibly forget about the past? No… N-no, I don’t need to forget… I could get revenge. Revenge upon the man who destroyed my life. I laughed, I laughed so hard my mouth hurt and started I charging towards the gate. One of the knights who were standing guard, turned around, after hearing footsteps.

As soon as he saw me, he shouted, “**Catch him! He’s trying to escape!**”. It didn’t take long for them to surround me, but clinging onto that little hope I had, I didn’t stop. I ran straight at them, tried pushing them away, and struggled until I finally managed to get past them.

“**Freedom**!” I shouted at the top of my lungs as tears started trickling down my face, “I can finally be fr— **AHH**” I bellowed, unable to finish my words, after feeling a sharp pain on my back and being forced onto the ground. My hand instinctively reached to my back and it felt wet. I took a look at it and it was red and behind me stood one of the knights, holding a bloodied sword.

“**He’s down**!” the knight shouted triumphantly, and all the knights quickly surrounded me.

From the little space between their feet, I saw the bystanders who were watching the spectacle that unfolded before them in fear. Nobody dared to step up to help, they could only watch from afar. I was quickly apprehended by two of the knights, whilst the rest of them were dispersing the crowd of civilians that had gathered around. The king, who was informed of what has happened at the gate, had appeared before us, and ordered the knights to unhand me. He quickly took me onto his arms, telling me that it was all going to be okay, but everything was turning black. The cut on my back was big and I had lost a lot of blood.

“I was almost… fre—” I mumbled to myself and fainted before I could finish the sentence.

The glare of the sun was far too strong for my eyes when I first came to. Squinting, I scanned around, only to find myself atop a bed in a white and clean room. The room consisted of a bed by the window, a little table for the patients to eat on and a chair next to the bed. “This must be the hospital.” I thought to myself. I tried to sit up but the pain from the cut kept me from doing so. It didn’t take long for a doctor to come through the door.

“He’s awake! He’s finally awake! Somebody inform his highness!” he exclaimed once our eyes met. “Are you feeling any discomfort?” he asked, ready to write whatever came out of my mouth on the little notebook he took out of his pocket.

“Other than the pain on my back, everything feels fine doctor.” I replied

I didn’t need to ask anything about the situation. It was all clear as day, yet I wasn’t the least happy about it. It only meant that I’d have to go back to how everything was, a slowly servant that existed only to entertain his highness. Loud stomping could be heard from afar, which grew louder and louder until it finally came to a stop and a knock could be heard on the door. The doctor rushed to see who the visitor was, although judging from his expression I could tell that it was his highness. As the doctor stepped out, all I could hear were whispers, and a few minutes later, the king stepped in. He didn’t say anything, he simply made his way to the chair next to the bed and took a seat. He sat there, with a frown on his face, looking outside the window.

“I… I didn’t know you were having such a hard time adjusting here” he mumbled to himself, “I should’ve paid more attention to you. This is all my fault”

I didn’t dare say anything, I simply laid there staring at the white ceiling. The words coming out of his mouth did not comfort me, they only made me feel uncomfortable. He stripped me off my title, he took away my loved ones and made me into his personal maid, a feeble servant and he thinks I’m having a hard time adjusting! I always wondered why I was the only one to be kept alive, only to suffer the humiliation of taking care of him.

“I simply wanted to keep you close… I wanted to make you happy… I wanted us to be together.” he continued after a moment of silence.

I mustered up my strength and silently forced myself on a sitting position, trying not to make too much noise. The pain from my back was excruciating and I could feel the wound reopening, but I continued. “Make me happy he said… he was trying to make me happy? In what world was that supposed to make me happy?” I thought to myself, as I felt the anger swelling inside. I slowly got closer to the edge of the bed where he was seated and extended my arms towards him.

“It was love at first si—” he said in a soft voice, but he was forced to stop as my hands wrapped around his throat.

“**I don’t want to hear anymore**” I thundered, “**You ruined my life! I was meant to be king**… I was… trained to be king. That’s all I knew in life and yet you took it away from me. My title, my family, **my dignity!”**

I pushed him onto the floor and pinned him down. I could feel the cut on my back getting worse, I could hear the skin tearing, but it didn’t matter to me. The angrier I got, the harder my hands pushed onto his neck. I wanted nothing but to kill this man. The king started struggling. He hit me, he pushed me to try and catch a breath, yet I wouldn’t let go. Hearing the loud thump, the king made when he fell onto the floor, the doctor and the king’s personal knight entered the room. Upon seeing what was happening they acted immediately. The knight did his best to get me off the king, but I wouldn’t budge no matter how hard he pulled. Having no other choice, the knight took his sword out of his scabbard and cut my arms off and pushed me off the king. The king’s face was bright red and teary. The doctor quickly escorted him out as the knight stood there making sure I couldn’t escape. I was losing too much blood, and once again everything turned black.

Next thing I knew I was in a dark room when I heard a door creak open. None other than the king walked in.

“I told you that I wanted us to be together,” he said in a soft and soothing voice “*Now we can be together forever my little canary.*”

**Commentary:**

Through first-person narrative and following a linear timeline, “Like a caged canary” tells of the events that happen over the span of three different days. It is a psychological-thriller and historical fiction short story, taking place in the medieval times where kings and knights existed and guiding the reader through the thoughts and actions of the narrator and those around him, who is trying to survive.

My inspiration for the story came from a sentence I wrote “A drunken man’s folly”. The idea of the story was completely different from the finished product. It was first supposed to be a book of a young man who worked in the tavern observing the different things people did once they got drunk, but upon trying to write it, it turned out to be quite difficult to fill the pages. The story then written as historical fiction erotica book, which I deemed inappropriate for submission and ended up as a historical fiction instead. The world of the story was inspired by the worlds portrayed in manga with similar stories. The two main characters of the short story consist of the now king and the ex-king. The story is told through the eyes and thoughts of the ex-king, and it is not very descriptive about the world around, in order to let the reader’s mind to wander. The ex-king is written to be a man under emotional distress, which slowly unfolds throughout the story after the cryptic explanation at the beginning of the story. His gender is also not mentioned, which resulted in a genderless character until the story was nearing the end, where he explains that he was meant to be the king. The king is instead written to be an ‘affectionate’ character. Although the king’s actions are shown to be affectionate in the story, they turn out to be nothing more than obsession towards the narrator which the reader finds out at the end of the story. To describe the emotional state of the characters, I researched the things I was trying to implement into the story, like the panic attack the ex-king seems to be having at the beginning of the story, which is not told to one, but is rather insinuated with the use of different symptoms he is told to be having at the time.

When I first spoke of my idea of the story with my writer’s group, I was told that I could try implementing the style of writing of *The Tell-Tale Heart* (Poe, 2014), where the main character was trying to convince the reader of his sanity. It was implemented in the writing of the King instead of the main character, with a slightly underwhelming effect as there wasn’t much dialogue in which he could use to convince the reader. It did help create a character who gave off a creepy feeling to the reader though. For the thoughts of the narrator, I’ve drawn inspiration from the writing style of *Suffer the Little Children* (King, 1993). The narrator’s intensity of thoughts changed along with his emotional state. He would become more intense the angrier he got or the more he felt wronged.

The short story makes use of simple and straightforward language, which contrast the deep thoughts and ideas of the characters. The emotional distress of the ex-king, having lost his family, his title and his dignity, makes him think of things like a kid, without complexity, only seeing what’s in front of him and questioning everything. The king instead is shown to whisper and speak softly, never raising his voice. He was calm because he knew he had the upper hand, no matter what happened. In the story the narrator’s clothes are often mentioned. Much like the collars of dogs or cats that sometimes come with a bell attached to them, the bells on his clothes were there to keep him in check, as they could always find him by following the noise they made. He also had no choice as to how he dressed, as he could only wear the clothes permitted by his highness. Thus, by tearing away the bells, it signifies him breaking away from the king and trying to attain freedom. The book ends with the king calling the narrator a canary. The canary is a bird widely domesticated, known as a songbird which is often kept in a cage by people due to its beautiful voice for people’s entertainment. Much like the bird, the main character’s cage was the palace and he was kept alive by the king for his entertainment. No matter how he tried to escape, he could never do it, that’s what the king meant by canary.

With the help of the lectures and the videos provided, the writing style of the short story was quickly decided, and the writing of the main characters went smoothly. The writers’ group also proved to be a big help in the process of writing, as they often helped with the direction the story was taking. It was also a big help in the redrafting and proofreading process, where they helped point out writing mistakes that were made, such as lack of paragraphs and the writing of dialogue, where the use of dialogue tags was wrong. This helped result in a more concise and interesting story with a clear storyline.

**Bibliography:**

King, S. (1993). *Suffer the little children*. Nightmares & Dreamscapes.

Poe, E. (2014). *The terrifying tales by Edgar Allan Poe*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

[갈치구이](http://www.mangago.me/r/l_search/?name=%EA%B0%88%EC%B9%98%EA%B5%AC%EC%9D%B4) (2020). *I’ll do that Marriage manga*

[Lee Rinbi](http://www.mangago.me/r/l_search/?name=Lee%20Rinbi) , [COPIN](http://www.mangago.me/r/l_search/?name=COPIN) , [Yeondam](http://www.mangago.me/r/l_search/?name=%20Yeondam)*2000, The Princess Imprints a traitor manga*