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Taryn

Taryn steadied himself as he inched the hewn oak door shut, hopeful the wrought iron hinges would keep his secret. With his hand still on the door pull, he allowed his mind to wander to thoughts of the row with his father from two moons past.

"Taryn, your 14th Day of Naming approaches and the greatest gift I have to give you is my place in the King's Guard."

"What if this gift isn't for me?"

Tarn's eyebrows furrowed. "I don't understand. For as long as a King has protected these lands, have our fathers served him. It's in our blood, it's our duty in this world. I have waited on this day for 14 years, and you talk of not wanting it?"

Looking over his shoulder hoping to find support from his mother, Taryn found nothing more than her silence as she stared back at him through reddened eyes.

Taryn's father Tarn once stood beneath the banner of the King's Guard, charged with both the protection and will of the King. Tarn was a decorated soldier and a military strategist whose tale came to an abrupt end during a raid that had not gone to plan. When day broke, they found he had bested three men, but suffered a broken leg and a deep wound to his arm that cut muscle and sinew. His injuries

were far too great to see him return to his post, but tradition would hold his place for the first-born son of his name.

Under the cover of a clouded moon, Taryn slipped across the front garden. His mother lay curled in her bed unable to find sleep, nor comfort; the wool blanket cloaked around her neck was damp with sorrow. His father slumbered a deep sleep beside her. Darkness did little to help Taryn pick his way through the tree line, which eventually began to follow its way along a dirt cart path. Taryn stopped when he came upon a stone fence breaking the forest cover. Checking over each shoulder, he readied himself and jumped over the fence at one fell swoop. He knelt down inside the corner of the fence and began removing some of the stones until he felt what he was after. Taryn pulled free a small wool satchel that lay hidden within the stones. Standing up, he felt his skin goose pimple as a breeze began to blow. He shut his eyes hard, cursing under his breath as he realized he had forgotten his tunic. Taryn could hear his mothers voice reminding him to bring it with him when the air carried a chill. He looked towards home, but knew it was too far to go back. Jumping back over the fence, Taryn paused and found warmth in the thoughts of his mother holding him earlier that night before he lay down to bed.

"Taryn, I feel a heaviness in your heart."

"What do you mean?" Taryn asked, looking up into his mother's watered eyes.

"I have feared this day since you were young. Your gentle heart would never find peace while your hands carried shield and sword."

"Does Da not see that?"

"I don't think he can see anything other than you following in his foot steps."

She kissed his forehead while Taryn struggled to keep his breath, wondering if she would ever let go.

Confident he had not been followed, Taryn thought it safe to use the cart path. The path twisted and turned through the trees and eventually began its long slow descent towards the docks. Taryn took a moment to gather his wits should the dockman be out patrolling the docks, instead of sleeping off his love of ale. Not that Taryn thought he could get by unnoticed. He had fished from these docks long enough to know the dockman kept the gangway boards loosely tacked, so they would squawk when someone stepped onto them and announce their arrival. Closing in on the docks, Taryn noticed the light from a lantern as it began to sway back and forth. The shadows danced to a song only they could hear. He cleared his throat to break the silence and alert the lantern bearer of his approach.

"Who goes there? Called a familiar voice.

"Aye, Mister Muir. It's me Taryn. I'm just off to get my nets out before the sun awakes. Taryn squinted as the light was pushed closer to his face.

"Aye, lad. The master fisher knows he cannae fill his boat lying under the covers, does he?"

"You know me all too well." Taryn replied behind a forced chuckle.

"Aye, ever since you were old enough to throw a net, you'd be out here with y'er Da. Be out long before the gulls came out of roost. Y'er Da was here a few moons past, never seen him so happy. Says you will be 'aving your 14th Day of Naming. Says you will take his place in the King's Guard. A mighty honor if I do say. "

"There is no honor in the King's dirty work." Taryn replied, thankful for the darkened sky as he felt his ears flush.

"Alright, alright. I didn't mean to anger ya, just saying it's an honor is all."

"Sorry. I didn't mean to say that, there's a lot been on my mind."

"Fishing always did my mind right. Best make haste lad, that sun won't be too far behind ya."

“Aye, good morrow to you Mister Muir.” Taryn replied before breaking off into a run down the docks.

Taryn didn't stop running until he reached the end of the dock where his small wooden skiff was tied. Throwing his satchel into the boat, he grabbed the gunwale for balance and leapt down into the seat. He stared out towards the open sea. Behind him stood a life without choice, a path marked for him, a life of servitude and bloodshed. Before him lay a life of choice, free will, a blank canvas that lacked any imposed direction. Taryn knew his happiness would come at a cost. This would be the last time he laid eyes on the land he called home as his father would no doubt see him banished. What pained him most was that he would never feel his mother's warm embrace again. He closed his eyes and thought about the decision before him. As he let out a deep breath, the boat began to clatter against the docking as if to say it wished to be set free. He placed the oars in the rowlocks before untying the skiff and shoving off. He hoped that once he reached the open sea, the wind would push his sail to freedom. Taryn made to stow his satchel beneath the seat but found that its place had been taken by a woolen bundle. Confused, he pulled it up into his lap and untied the hempen binding holding it together. As he unfolded the wool wrapping, he discovered some oatcakes, a corner of cheese, half a smoked salmon wrapped in parchment and a few loose coins packed inside. Taryn held up the wrapping to get a better look in the dim light and his heart welled up in his chest. His tunic! He pulled the tunic down over his head and used the sleeves to dry the happiness from his face. With a warmth in his heart burning, Taryn grabbed the oars and began to row.