

## Fooled

A cool frost lingers over the heath below from the previous cloudless night. The sun has not yet risen above the hills to melt what icy crystals are left on this calm Autumn morning. All around the castle is a peaceful silence, no one wants to leave their warm beds and be shocked by an intense chill on their sleepy minds. Except, something, or someone, has already woken everyone, and it is not a lone rooster crowing at the first sign of light, nor a noisy servant gathering kindling for the day. It is a crisp draught that has swept its way through to every room, disturbing the tranquil morning. Someone has left the kitchen door open, and made their way out onto the forbidding heath alone.

“Crack, snap, slosh.” A large boy is bouncing and jumping around the heath, delighting in the power he has to crush what is underneath him. Another smaller boy is watching him intently from over the stone wall. Once the larger boy is finished stamping up and down, he slowly turns around.

“Who are you?” he asks maliciously.

“Who are you?” the other boy questions.

“Wh-what do you mean? Everyone knows who I am. I am Lear, Prince of England and future King.”

“Oh.” And the boy makes to turn around from where he came from.

“Hey! I told you who I was. Are you not impressed? I for one have no idea who you are.”

“Well, I didn’t know that future kings acted like such fools rolling around in fields.” The little boy says simply.

“Me a fool? How dare you? No one has ever said that to me!”

“Really? You must be quite alone up there.” The small boy says gesturing over to the looming castle.

“I- I am not all alone. I have my servants, and sometimes even Mother and Father come down to say ‘Hello’.”

The little boy smiles, the irony not lost on his quick mind. Lear, not usually one to encounter boys with such nerve, feels slightly irritated by this reaction, but he just can’t put his finger on why. He hasn’t experienced the feeling of being judged before.

“Anyway,” Lear sighs, “I am quite happy. *You* are the one who is the fool! I shall call you fool from now on! *Fool!*”

The little boy, not offended by this, for he is called far worse things by his older brothers everyday, skips back over the stone wall to return to his warm, if a little disorderly, home. After a while, he glances back at the shrunken silhouette of Lear, still standing there alone on the heath, but now looking down, and feels an odd sense of pity for him. Lear, meanwhile, has been left uneasy by this rare encounter with the outside world. To cheer himself up he begins to

squash the frost again, but notices that what he hasn't destroyed has been melted away by the rising sun already.

A week has passed and Winter, with its first dusting of snow, has arrived, and the mild southerly wind remains a distant memory having been replaced by a bone chilling easterly from the continent. This sprinkling of snow has made for slippery ground but today is hunting day, and Lear is eager to show his Father his new skills he has been acquiring when exploring the grounds. The servants and tutor are also keen to see him go out, as he has been distracted in his lessons and throwing tantrums the whole week, though no one is sure why, nor have they questioned him.

A few miles elsewhere, though seemingly a world away, the little boy, or "Fool" as his friends laughingly call him now, is plodding over a field towards the King's forest. He and his brothers are also hunting this morning, though more as a need for survival than for sport, and to not have to eat watery soup again. They know it is forbidden to set foot in this forest, but what delicate aristocrat would be out on such a day as this?

Lear has now long been left behind by the hunting party, as always. All that remains of his Father are the muddy, hollow prints of his horse. Lear would usually accept this without protest, but today he feels different. A cold anger makes its way up his body causing his throat to catch and his heart to pound heavily in his chest. He decides, out of all his racing thoughts, to just go. "Maybe then they'll notice me."

The thundering hooves of Lear's horse have not soothed his rage, but have instead made it grow, spilling out of him so it is the only thing he is focused on. They have now reached unknown territory, and Lear can feel the slowing pace of his reluctant horse. The uneven ground is not maintained in this corner of The Forest. Suddenly, a movement to the right causes the already anxious horse to halt, skidding down the bank, making Lear tumble off. The fallen Prince lies amid the dead leaves, drained of all fury he once had, watching the blurry outline of his retreating horse.

"Is this the nobleman then?" Lear hears an unfriendly voice remark.

"I think it is. Should we help him John?" A warmer and more familiar voice this time.

"Help him? He is the last one in need of any help Brother," John sneers.

"I agree, I say we should go. I'm sure there'll be a search party out for him anyway," Another boy suggests.

Up until now Lear has been feigning unconsciousness, and upon hearing the boys stride off, he lets out a long breath and sits up. He starts, surprised to see the same boy he met on the heath staring at him.

The boy looks blank, and then slowly breaks into a laugh, thinking about how funny the dirty, bloody future King looks.

"Hello, Fool." Lear smiles.