

Fairy Tale - To Board a Ship

Once upon a time, there was a boy who was meant to be a prince, but he didn't know that he was meant to be a prince. His father was meant to be a king, and the boy's mother, older brother, and younger sister were also meant for something too: to be queen, prince, and princess. But this tale is mostly about the boy and somewhat about his father.

So, the father was meant to be a king, but nobody had ever told the father that, and so he wrestled on through life, mostly all alone. If you saw him, you would see that this was a man who was meant to be more than he was. The boy's father over the years had become cruel - and often cruel when it was least expected, too. Sometimes in the midst of a pleasantry, he would lash out at whoever was nearby.

But mostly he was absorbed in his own small story, where he saw his main struggle just to simply keep his head above water. He didn't know that he was in truth fighting against his own demons. This father thought that all the botherations in his life simply were things that just happened. These botherations usually worked against him, and he was frustrated and angry that his fortunes so often seemed to be against him.

What the father didn't even know was that he was actually in a battle. He didn't know that he had largely been taken out of the battle. He didn't know that an enemy had deceived him onto the sidelines of his own life. And he didn't know that this mostly silent enemy had for the most part moved on to the next stage of battle: to attack and take out the queen, the two princes, and the princess. But since the father didn't know he was meant to be a king, he didn't know that there were kingly duties that he was meant to be attending to, such as protecting his queen and his children - but not merely protecting them, for a wise king also strengthens and trains his charges, especially those he loves or is supposed to love.

That is enough about the father. The prince - who didn't know he was meant to be a prince - kept getting stabbed and wounded by his father. But inevitably, he would also get stabbed by others too, but the curious thing was that he often was stabbed because he never figured out - or was never trained in - how to protect himself. He seldom realized that usually the stabs were not so much directed at him on purpose as much as the stabs were just because some people carried their knives carelessly and recklessly and dangerously, so that many others got hurt. But our prince usually thought it was just him that got stabbed.

As our prince grew older, he found that he had skills and talents that brought him fame. He was a very good student at school, and he found much satisfaction in his success there. He enjoyed learning about all manner of things, and he was good at almost everything he tried studying. He also found he was a very good athlete, and he enjoyed certain games and practiced them often, many times with his older brother prince.

There was a downside to his fame in these areas, and that was the he didn't believe the praise that was given to him. The praise was something he so desperately wanted, yet deep down inside him, he thought that the praise wasn't genuine. If the praise were genuine, he reasoned, then why were people stabbing him so often? And since the stabbings were (or so he thought) so often directed just at him and not at others, then that must mean there was something wrong with him - and if there was something wrong with him, then the praise he was getting for his success in things couldn't be genuine. "If they really knew me," he thought to himself, "they wouldn't be praising me. There's something wrong with me, and I can't figure out what it is. But perhaps one day I will know."

So our prince's life went on. And it came to pass that one day, the queen decided she was not going to live under the king's rule anymore. She took the two princes - the princess was too young - and went to the one of the bards outside their kingdom to arrange the legal matters of removing herself and her children from the king's rule. The queen wanted the two princes to tell the bard about the king's mistreatment of his queen, so the friendly bard asked the two princes lots of questions in the dark chambers of his castle. Our prince felt cowed by the bard, even though the bard was very friendly, since our prince felt somewhere way in the back of his mind that the whole thing between the king and queen was somehow, in some way, his own fault anyway. So he didn't like the bard's digging. Our prince felt that he would be exposed - exposed about what he didn't know, but exposed nonetheless.

The day before the king and queen were to meet in court before a judge, our prince - still a very young prince, not quite eleven years - was sick. The next day, the day of the court appointment, our prince felt better. But when the queen asked our prince if he felt well enough to go to court and testify against the king, our prince lied to his mother and said, "No" - even though he knew he could have. But our prince felt like there was a battle going on inside him - he didn't want the king to continue being mean to his mother, but there was some sort of bond our prince always felt with his father. Even though there were not all that many good memories that our prince had with his father the king, he still sensed deep inside him that there was some sort of connectedness with his father. To put it plainly, the boy prince thought that by testifying against the king - even truthfully testifying - he would be betraying his father the king. Of course, our prince was too young to ever put that into words at the time. All our prince knew was that his stomach was turning into knots about the idea of going to court against the king, and our prince believed his stomach.

So in the end, our prince didn't go to court, and he didn't testify against his father the king. The older brother prince did testify, and neither of them knew at that time what impact that would have on their lives. As our prince discerned not until decades and decades later, his own decision *not* to testify was a better decision for himself than his brother's decision *to* testify was for the brother.

So the queen took the two princes and the princess and left their castle, moving to a small hut some distance away. The princes and the princess saw the king weekly, as the king would sometimes come to visit the hut, and sometimes the king would take them back to his castle for the evening. After three years, the king was removed from his castle, and he moved to someone else's castle far away to live, and the princes, the princess, and the queen hardly saw anything of the king for many years.

When our prince got to upper school, he found to his surprise a most curious and infuriating thing happening. He started getting interested in the ladies of the courts and kingdoms, which was a good thing. But he found as one year turned into another, that for all the ladies his heart grew fond of, none of them requited his interests. And for the ladies whose hearts grew fond of him, he felt no affection. This was most disturbing to our prince, but it fit in with that dark inside part of him that he was afraid of. For he still thought that deep inside of him, there was something wrong with him that wasn't wrong with anyone else. So even though he longed so much for the attention and affection and emotional intimacy of a lady friend, he also was horrified that if one of these ladies really got to know him, she would see this certain unknown and dark part of him - and he would suffer scorn and rejection once again, that same scorn and rejection he knew so well from earlier years.

So our prince went through upper school never having a lady friend, much to his chagrin and his puzzlement. All the while, our prince still never knew that he was meant to be a prince. He never saw at this time what he would later see as the unmistakable handprints of the enemy - this enemy who had planted such seeds of doubt in his mind, who had targeted so many arrows so accurately to hobble but not fully destroy his heart, who had undermined and destroyed his confidence, who kept him endlessly

wondering about his own talents and destinies, who had trained our prince not only to listen to those lying whispers but who had also trained him to even repeat the lying whispers to himself.

And it came to pass that the time came for our prince to go off to another kingdom far away for what was called higher education. And at this castle of higher education, the attacks of the enemy became both more subtle and more forceful.

First, the enemy used our prince's tutors to plant poison in our prince's heart and mind. Of course, the poisons were presented to the prince all wrapped in good intentions and lofty words and serious considerations. This only made the poisons even more effective, because they seemed to be true.

Second, our prince was exposed to the wonders of bottle and pipe. And there he found the escape he had so often wanted - the escape to just be himself, to feel free, to feel accepted, to feel that he belonged. But the stabbings kept coming, as our prince had still not learned how to defend himself.

Third, his first year at this higher education kingdom he finally found a lady friend. He accepted her affections, but since he still didn't know who he was and since he still hadn't figured out this dark part inside him and since this was his first lady friend so he didn't really know the ways of love or what love was either, he let the two of them spend much time together, and they shared many things together in this new kingdom. But in the end, she loved him, yet she could not keep him, as he simply did not love her in return, and this broke her heart, and they parted. Although the lady was hurt far more than he was, it still wounded him deeply and shook him to know that he had both used her and hurt her. And still our prince did not know that he was meant to be a prince.

Finally, it came to pass a few years later at this far away kingdom, as fate would have it, that our prince found another lady friend - and the affections were mutual, at least for a season. Except this time, the tables were reversed: our prince loved her far more than she loved him, and he could not keep her, and they parted, and this broke our prince's heart. And still he did not know that he was meant to be a prince.

This was the blackest period in our prince's life, and the unseen and unknown enemy pressed his advantage. In feeling so rejected, our prince spent too much time alone. In his darkness, our prince reasoned, "After trusting her and being betrayed, how can I trust again?" And it came to pass that the voices of some of our prince's many tutors were pressed in upon him, and our prince recalled the many books and stories and conversations and readings and tales by which he had become convinced that life had no purpose, no meaning, no goal - that life had no story - no story at all - but rather, that life simply **was**. Since our prince was alone in his misery, and as he realized that both his life and his misery were meaningless, he concluded that he could save himself decades and decades of more misery by ending his own life and just getting this whole sad no-story tale over with far, far sooner than later.

But in the midst of taking his own life, our prince remembered the tale of another king - the tale of the King of kings, this Great King who had promised life to all and had sent his own Son as a Prince to win back all the lost souls in all the kingdoms. Our prince realized that if this tale of the Great King and his Son were true, then our prince taking his own life would make things worse, for in refusing to consider the Great King and his Son, he would go to that place of eternal darkness and everlasting death.

So our prince decided to learn of this tale of the King and his Son. And it came to pass only a few months later, that our prince learned he could bow before this King's Son - whose countenance held the very light of life itself - and accept him as his own Ruler. So our prince did just that, and this is where this silent enemy suffered his first serious defeat, for the darkness that had so surrounded and

permeated our prince's path and heart and mind were overpowered by the light and radiance of this Great King's Son. As someone wrote in a different tale, the King's hands are hands of healing, and the Great King brought significant healing to our prince.

And it came to pass that our prince met another lady who became his princess, and they married and lived happily for many years, raising two strong sons and loving each other deeply. Even still, our prince did not know that he was meant to be a prince, nor did his lady know that she was meant to be a princess.

So the enemy still had his sights on our prince and on his princess. Both our prince and his lady still were blind in certain of their ways, and they unwittingly were wounding each other, until after two score years and four, the princess lost trust in our prince. And it came to pass that now both of them entered another great darkness. But out of this darkness - or rather, in the midst of this great darkness - is where something wonderful happened to our prince. As he saw his lady drift further and further away into her own wounds, he finally learned a truth that rang so true to him that his heart leapt in wonder: he found out that he was a prince. All this while - all these years - all his life - even after following the Great King's Son for tens of years - he tended to think of himself as only a wretch. A wretch who had found the Great King's favor; yes, but still, only and merely a wretch, nonetheless.

But now as the darkness for our prince and his princess was beginning to settle over them both, the Great King and the Great King's Son opened up their guidebook to show our prince what he had been missing all these years: that he was a prince, that he had been sent by the Great King for many purposes, that there was a great war raging - an often unseen war resounding all around him, that this war was led by a fearsome enemy who hated fiercely our prince and all the princes and princesses and kings and queens and maids and maidens and servants and wretches that the Great King did love. Our prince realized that his path - like all paths - was a desperate quest through dangerous country to a land that is - beyond wildest expectation - unimaginably good. Our prince learned that he was desperately needed at this hour to step into being a prince. And not only to take his rightful role as prince - but also to take his role as a warrior; A warrior who was meant to train and develop his strength, in order to offer his strength to others - and especially to his lady and their sons. And our prince realized that what he had been doing instead for most of his life was either neglecting his strength or - far too often - using his strength to wound his lady and his sons.

So it came to pass that our prince found some of the treasures that he had been looking for all his life; sonship, belonging, truth, acceptance. But now our prince saw that he also was being equipped and armored to fight - and he saw the unmistakable handprints of the invisible enemy upon his own life, upon his own wounds, upon his own scars - and upon the life and wounds and scars of his lady and his sons. But he also saw the unmistakable presence of the Great King's Son at different places along his path.

So our prince started to become a warrior. And it came to pass that the Great King put it in the heart of our prince to let his lady have both room and time to retreat and withdraw. But our prince steadfastly declared every day to his lady that he loved her, that she was worth waiting for and she was worth fighting for. As our prince gave his lady the freedom to withdraw, he found that the Great King was training him to become stronger, gentler, kinder, and fiercer - gentle and kind and strong with his lady and his sons, and strong and fierce to his lady's enemies. Many nights and mornings our prince drew near to the Great King's Son, learning more about the way of this Great Son the Warrior who fights for his people, the way of the One whose robes are stained crimson with blood, for in the Great Son's many battles over years uncountable, even he - the Great King's Son - had taken upon himself many wounds and shed his own blood for his people.

And it came to pass that as our prince was being trained in warfare, the Great King's Son was also bringing healing to our prince's many wounds and scars. And our prince learned that while there were things wrong with him, those things were also wrong with everyone, and he found peace and comfort in that wisdom and truth. And still, the Great King's Son poured out far more healing than our prince would ever have thought possible.

And by and by, the Great King's Son also brought healing to our prince's lady, and our prince and his lady returned to each other. And now they walk together hand in hand but now more easily letting go to make the coming back together all the sweeter. Our prince and his lady still wound each other from time to time, but now they know to attend to their wounds and each other's wounds quickly, rather than covering them up and hobbling along, and the bonds of their hearts grow stronger and deeper and warmer to this day.

And now our prince has turned his gaze to fight for his sons, to regain things that had been killed and stolen, to correct those sad words from another tale that "things that should not have been forgotten were somehow lost." So our prince and the elder son now walk together as men, and as is the way of men, repairing the past not by mere talk but by doing and working and adventuring and strengthening. And our prince and the younger son have now only begun to put down their swords from against each other, for they are both so accustomed to knowing only to use their swords in that way. But great is the yearning in both of them to have restoration and for their strength to be used not against the other but for the other.

Many years and many seasons before, when our prince's sons were young and small, and our prince's own father the king was still alive and yet nearing the end of his years in his lonely, tiny room inside someone else's large castle, our prince's father was listening to the stories his son our the prince was telling him about the wonder-filled places he had visited with the Great King's Son. As they spoke, a giant ghost ship in the sky came sailing past their window. It was dark and foreboding in the moonlight, yet somehow also inviting - stirring up embers of deep desire and wonder in the father. And as the father and our prince watched the ship sail past them beneath the clouds, somehow gold dust was sprinkled on one end of the great ship. The very tip of the stern first turned gold - then every part of it - the rudder, the steering, the tie lines, the beams, the wooden surfaces - and little by little as the ship kept sailing across the sky, the entire great boat was transformed like a reverse infection - an infection of clarity and truth and light and life - and the ship was swept over by this bright coloration, turning everything golden and filled with light - the main mast, the mainsail, the decks, the gunwales, the prow, and every rope and every tie and every portal took on a warm, inviting radiance of life and light. Most of all, the whole ship now seemed simply so right so ready, and so complete.

And as our prince and his father gazed silently together in awe at this dreamy and ethereal transformed ship in the sky, to our prince's astonishment, the father said softly, "Yes... I remember... I have seen this ship before, once myself, when I was entering manhood. But I forgot, and I was afraid of it, and my life was lost because of it."

Then to their amazement, this beautiful, glowing ship turned and swung in a wide arc to approach their window. It came to rest not in front of their window but in front of the balcony doors of the room. Then another astonishing thing happened: a walkway came forth from the great glowing ship, extending itself to the balcony, and when it got close, the balcony rails melted away just enough to let the near end of the walkway rest firmly on the balcony floor.

For both the father and our prince, their eyes traced along the walkway back to the ship, and there was the ship's captain. They could tell instantly that this captain was a seasoned sailor, a rugged veteran, a trustworthy guide. And our prince smiled as he realized that this captain was the Captain, for he was

also the Great King's Son. The captain made no gesture, and he uttered no words, but his whole countenance was inviting. He held a firm, small smile, which if you had seen it, would have given you also the complete and utter confidence this captain inspired in both of them.

Then our prince turned to his father and said, "Father, you can still get on this marvelous ship - it's not too late. O do board this ship - will you get on, Father?"

And for the second time in that magical moment, our prince was astonished. It seemed like the father had somehow reached back to something deep, something both ancient and present - or that something ancient and present had risen up and touched him. Our prince's father was a broken and crusty old man, and yet now there was a sparkle, a light in his eyes, and he stepped onto the balcony. The father was so intent on the ship that he almost forgot his son, but the son understood, for he too gazed so completely and so wondrously on this ship that even the very room and balcony around them seemed to fade away.

Then the father turned, and the eyes of the father and our prince met, and they saw in each other's eyes the same excitement, the same wonder, the same glow. They almost tried to be sad for the sake of their parting, but for both of them, they trembled with anticipation, and neither could deny the joy and magic they felt. Their eyes met, and our prince said, "Father, you go. This is your time. I have been on this ship already, and we will meet again, at another time, in another land."

And the father nodded and said, "Yes, my son, I will go. And we will be together again, in that other land."

And as our prince stepped back, the ship's Captain came forward across the walkway and embraced our prince's father. Then the Captain said to the father, "You will see your son again. Now homeward we sail." Then they both bid farewell to our prince, and they turned toward the great ship and at the same time they both said simply, "Onward."

And so onward they strode to board that marvelous ship, and it sailed away into the sky. Our prince has not seen his father since that day, but our prince knows that he and his father will one day meet again, in a different land, where his father will have been restored to his right mind and his right strength. Our prince is sure that his father will be the second person he will meet in that new land, after meeting the Captain face to face, and he is sure that his father will have adventures planned for the two of them, and great will be their reunion.

And as for what happened for his father on that ship, and as for the adventures that lie ahead for them both, those are tales for another time.