

THE MINISTER WITH A NOTE

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On the heavy minister, it started with a curse that was placed. Years his subscription to the kingdom was ne'er challenged, but today trouble had wretched the brave mouse. For today he must be both servant and post to the King. In his rough dispatched hands a page, a poem with characted words that will change the King's world when he analysis it. Muttered did the minister, "prithee to God, help me fulfill my duties to this kingdom." With mess in his gray beard, the King came near. He went into his room and begged the minister in.

"Descent a story for the humor or dispatch your message and leave," the King demanded.

"My Lord," the servant bowed seeing the the sheet soundly in his hand. Bringing himself to rise from his pose, his knees giving away, was something he could not do.

"Enough, in your hands, speak the passage."

"Anon, my Lord. Prithee disregard this ink this e'en and wait till morrow. My judgement is that a portion of the sky must be seen to sing this message," the minister thought himself smart, but it did not take long for the King to resolve the servant's cowardness.

"List, you hand me that note or the halter awaits your neck."

The minister leaped back to the verge of the room. His whole body shock, but he draw in a breath which held a power inside him. Wishing he could simply leave now, wishing there was bush to hide behind, he placed the note in the King's strapping hands before cowering back to stand near the door.

The King passed around his bear carpet, the fire lighting the bent lines on his forehead, as he read. He began reading aloud, 'til his eyes gave way to the words that zounds could not heel. Now the curse had turned to the King, but the weight on the minister's chest did not go with it.

"That baggage, that housewife, that bitch hound harlot!" The King stopped, standing completely still. Even breathing was too much movement, his body overtook death. He glared at the message questioning if this day was all a lie, for what was written even the King could not believe. He was sure, this time. He was sure. The King taxed this letter 'till day break. Only after the fire had died did he finally rise from his chair and address the servant who had slide down the wall now sitting on the floor.

"My honest friend, thank you. I trust in you to keep this impeach to yourself 'till I am ready to tell the people. There will be no quest, nay, no court will discuss such betrayal." Walking up to the post, the servant could smell the ash on the King's breath from sitting near a fire all night. He could feel the end of the King's beard brush against his chest weighing it down even more. When the King whispered so softly the minister he wished he could say he misheard him, but this message was too soundly said. "You are bound by your duty and title, but I must ask you a kindness. What it is, you will not like, however you must call upon the power inside you."

With bleeding eyes, the King took sight precisely with his servant, "prepare the halter, I want that harlot to hang for all to see." The King turned his bum, receiving the fresh air from the window, seeing the sun slowly winning over the darkness. Yet, he knew all too well that the darkness will always be faster than the sun. "Begone." On the subject, these his last combined letters framed.

"Fare," was the only thing the servant could say. Mayhap he will be able to save the Queen and tell her to flee before the noose is rung and in the tree. Mayhaps the King will change his mind when he sees the Queen. A lot of maybes but truly the servant knew, the King wanted a son, and he will never be happy with yet another daughter.

The servant vanished behind the door. He stood still, waiting for death to befall him so he would not have to get the rope or the girl and put them together. When the servant finally started to move he felt as if he still stood static and it was the earth that was moving around him forcing him to confront his fate. Not a day passed but the minister aged six years before making it to the Queen's private room. The oceans in his eyes leaked onto his faded green blouse. He only paused a moment at the door to flatten his hair, straighten his shirt and wipe the salty water from his face, for even as a corpse walking she was still his Queen and he was not ever going to forget to give her the respect she had rightfully earned.

As he opened the door he agreed with himself to do the task set before him as quickly as possible then forget the whole of it. By e'en the curse could be gone and he could finally feel peace again. However, when he opened the door he viewed first an empty bed. Fine red and gold cloth draped the bedding yet no Queen in sight. Ne'er a song could produce

the guide that such silence did for his thoughts. In every direction, up every mountain, and within every tunnel did he see his Queen with sweat near her hair and sores on her feet, running to her freedom and with her freedom came his.

A whimpered turned his attention toward the wide window opposite the bed where he marked a small blue basket. As he got closer he spied the sun fully emerging from behind the outer villages illuminating the infant who was in cloth before him. The running stopped. The sweat, the sores, the freedom from the King all vanished. Here was the child but no mother in sight. He knew the Queen would never leave her new daughter, confusion and fury was now the minister's best-mate.

"She knew he would send you," the servant recognized the voice without even a glance in the windows reflection, the Queen's first handmaid.

"How? How could she possibly leave her child behind?" The servant questioned while watching the small human's chest rise and fall slowly sinking up with his own heart beat.

"You spent all this time serving the King and Queen, the question really is how did you not see any of this coming?" She was right of course, she was always right he found.

"But this is her child. I thought, I thought she would at least stay for her, or at least take her along." The minister tried to recall the last few e'ens to resolve the stock he was now trapped in. Did she say anything? Did she give any sign she may leave? Did I really ever know the Queen that would leave her child or the King that would kill his wife?

"She left you a note," the handmaid crossed the room. Her small feet whispering to the wind as if asking permission to move through it. Cracked from the heat, a layer of dust that will never be washed away, no nails to be seen, and a few red marks of different shades, the minister saw how her hands, though smaller, mirrored his. He taxed her hands and imagined them to be his own only yesternight, shortly thinking that both have the same characters as if he had not known. Catching only a short breath he knew that this time his imagination have gone too far, no note could be as vile as the first.

"I will not except this letter, nor will the King." Using the King as his excuse not to read the passage set before him was impeachable. When the minister first got to the kingdom many years ago he wished to be part of the knights, but the prince at the time saw a honest nature of the young boy. The servant wanted strength but the prince disregarded this, saying that the boy was better set for a position of a near relations, a "cousin" he said. Now the servant thought of this day as regret filled his heart. He longed for the old days when the prince was a prince and he was merely a small child running around passing love notes to the prince's fair maidens, for the notes now, he noticed, had no hearts at all.

"Be the jury for yourself. You came here to serve your King and bring the Queen to her death. Now serve your Queen who only asks you to read." The minister's eyes traveled up the fair skin of the handmaid, rising above the twisted gold locks that swung off around her strong shoulder, all the way up to the light green eyes that the reflection of the sun could not blind.

She looked away first. The note lay in his hand with a slight spark of fire from where their hands had met, yet he did not break his sight of her. It was not 'til she had turned to care for the child did the weight on his chest come rushing back. He looked down at the paper remembering everything that had happened during the past moonrise and fall. He hungered for her to hold him and set fire to his soul as she did his hand.

He dared only a moment to think if she had read it first, thou the thought evaporated before the sentence finished in his mind. The seal had not been touched. Two word, he broke the seal and that was the only thing written, two words.

Catharina Rose.

Stunned the minister felt. Just a name, he thought, is this all she felt me worth? Just a name? He looked over to the handmaid to ask the purpose of this pathetic letter he held, although what he saw answered everything.

"Catharina Rose. The child's name is Catharina Rose."

"Oh, God has blessed this child. Worried I was, her father would be the name maker." The handmaid wear a smile that flowers will die never obtaining. The minister was shocked at this negative talk of the King. The King, the Queen and now the handmaid, he felt he had not truly known any.

"Where is she?" The minister inquired.

"I know not. Not she tell me. She thought it safer this way."

"The King will hang you just the same." He stood over her. The child was in her hands so he could not take them. He simply wished she could see the naivety of holding on to this information. Any information. He spotted the never ending blue over her shoulders, not a cloud to be seen. This made the sun the only thing dominating his view. His life rested on the ability to slow the sun and in this realization he knew he was defeated already. Why will she not tell me? ME of all people? "Fine. Tell me not. I shall wait as long as possible but the King must know and when he does he will look to you."

"Thank you good minister, I only wish you had never come to this Kingdom."

"Had I not come I would have never met--" she looked up at him and the minister once again saw the girl he spied on the whole week he was first in the caste. Everything was the same if not better. She had grown to be the brightest person he had known, surpassing even the Queen. Only a few weeks ago did he give her a bloomed red rose that matched her cheeks,

to which he was going to ask her to a picnic near the lake where they fetch water. He had spent a great deal of the night before preparing the food and washing the blanket, twice. He ne'er was able to ask, the Queen was in pain and needed her. With rose still in hand, he waited by the Queen's door. Even after another maid told him it would not be short, wait he still did. Only when the King had returned late in the day did the minister set the rose on the leg opposite the door and walked away with his chin on his chest. She knew then, didn't she? The minister broke from his memory. She knew the Queen was set to leave and where she was going, where she is now. He puzzled over each conversation he had had with her. Where did the lying start? Where would it end? All at once she was not longer her anymore. He had lost the only true, free, friend he had in all the kingdom. He saw the strolls they took to the river. He saw the nights they laughed while polishing the swords. He saw comfort, the ease of talking to her, he saw the most brilliant person who held his soul slowly turn into demon. He saw lies.

His heart, which usually spread up in times of uneasiness, now skipped every other beat. This made the times it did beat twice as painful to handle.

"I-- I would have never met, my dog." He watched the confusion grab her face but did not meet her eyes. The breath this line took was too much, he knew what she craved to hear, he felt he was about to faint trying. She lusted to hear her name. If the minister had all the air in the world, all the strength of a knight he would ne'er be able to say her name or even look in her eyes without thinking it too, false in some way. Knowing the foolishness of thinking everything about her was a lie the minister still could not see any part of a woman before him. A person she was no longer to him, simply a lie.

Another maid strode into the room breaking the tensed air between them. She was one the minister had ne'er seen before. He knew why she was there from the rags she wore. Cow was the name they called these women who sold the milk from her chest. She stayed looking down, which made it hard for the minister to see her face, not that he truly cared to. Her fair skin, her light hair breaking through her veil, even her posture told him plainly that this was not the person who should be here. For no one would listen if he spoke this out, it should be the Queen, he demanded to himself.

He flew out of the room. No map, no compass, his feet took him where he needed to go giving his mind a break. He made it to the front steps of the castle, where the eldest princess came riding upon him with the prince from a neighboring kingdom she was set to marry. The servant bent to fill his lungs so full they may have grown an extra size. She was the most beautiful of the Queen's daughters and the one that echoed the mother the most. The moonless sky coloured her hair, with the stars filling in her eyes. With her deep velvet cloak flying through the air, she dismounted her horse and reached for the servant. The prince stood shortly behind them.

"What is wrong minister?" Her hand where smooth yet strong willed. He felt them gently brush his back. The Queen could ne'er prevent herself from helping any creature no matter the statue or class, and it was this she passed to her first two daughters, yet passing to the last child she will not.

"I must tell the King I cannot kill the Queen because she has run off." Looking out into the distance, the princess paused only a moment to take in the information.

Lifting the chin of the minister, she spoke, "he must be told, and if not by you... If not by you he is sure to think you a part in it."

"No part did I have in this. I ne'er fancied her to leave without her child."

The princess nodded to her prince who left with the horses. "We shall tell him together and understand she will if she is caught." With these words the princess led the minister to the grand hall. They talked a great deal along the way, so by the time they had reached the King who sat on his blood coloured throne, next to an empty red and gold chair, the minister finally had a plan.

Sat, shouted, stood, whispered, passed, planned wars and more did the King do in this stone hall as the minister stood behind him. Even as a boy dining, planning, or fighting with his father the minister always was right behind his King. Therefore, when the servant walked into the room he stopped not at the first silver wrapped pillar as the princess did, nay his feet retook the idea that this was just another day and continued to the second pillar, wrapped in gold. By stepping so far forward he grabbed the attention of the King who had three of his favorite knights surrounding him, talking as if the devil was about to walk through the door and they needed an idea on how to defeat him.

"Minister," said the King. Deep was his voice from the lack of sleep, yet it was so powerful it carried not only across the hall but too into the next two rooms. "Come minister, tell me of the news you bring." The minister looked back at the princess who gave a slit bow. He found this walk was the easiest to perform this day. He could not see the bleeding eyes that set him on his task only hours ago, it was as if they had ne'er existed. Seeing his old friend's face gave him comfort in these hard times. The King may have been harsh in his court but his heart too was wide with knowledge and peace. Perhaps, the servant thought as he finished his cross to the King, perhaps I should have come earlier so the King could find his Queen.

"She-- She was not in her room my Lord." The minister thought back to how he thought the handmaid to always be right, but it was the King who guided and adopted him as family. My brother. The servant felt a strange sense of strength within him.

Leaving the three knights behind, the King rose from his throne and draw close to his servant. His bread was now twisted together with yellow thread and bright lake jewels. The dark marks under the King's eyes told the minister that the King too had aged too many years this single day.

The servant saw the three knights roughly standing waiting for the King to return to their talk, he saw the princess who had moved toward the center of the room, where she stopped behind her chair at the oak table, he could see the whole hall that he carefully cleaned every full moon, he could see everything except the King who had his face parallel to the minister's. The King's ear chilled the minister's cheek and his mouth surfed the loose hairs over the servant's ear. "I want this curse to end today," the King whimpered. "Did you check everywhere in the castle?"

Though he had less weight attached to his chest, he could not say any words. He feared that his voice would not remotely compare to his King's. Therefore, he simply shook his head, less than a centimeter, up and down.

"She has gone?" Again the minister nodded. "Alright, thank you. Prithee stay put a moment." The King turned to the room. He waved his left hand at which point all other servants left, the door knights shutting the only entrance to the hall. The King dropped his hand so it lay next to his body once more. He curled his fingers which drew the three knights, the princess, and the minister around the him.

"My brave knights I have kept something from you. My Queen, she has betrayed me and the kingdom. I shall spare you the details, of which I am most aggrieved. I sent my minister here to collect her, yet she has run. I need not tell you the passion I feel in my heart for justice. Therefore, dispatch seven teams in all directions. Find her."

"Seven my Lord?" Questioned the youngest of the knights.

"Yea, seven," everyone could see the drop of saliva that came out the King's mouth as he spat this in the knight's direction. "Use the rest of the knights to gather all who saw, or have any connection with the Queen."

"Where should we put them my Lord?" This came from the best of the King's knights. They had been in many battles together, shared many scares. They both had a power and a connection that was the fantasy of the servant when entering into the kingdom.

"The dungeon, there you are to question each one separately 'til one talks." Catching the knight's eyes he added, "Anybody who leaves, including you, will be executed."

The knights all bowed and hurtled to the door. Finally the King turned to the servant. The King was spent. His eyes weak, his nose broken from the day's activities.

"Minister, I wish you to join the knights in the interviews. Every fifth person come back up and teem me with any notes." The minister bowed himself and made to leave the room.

"Minister?" The King beckoned. "What of the child?" The servant thought of creating a story. Something with a nice, light feel. He knew his story was missing a fun moment.

"In the Queen's room." A moment that would ne'er come for him. After today, whether they caught the Queen or not, he could ne'er go back to the

days of waiting with a rose for a pretty girl. He took one last glance back catching four feet facing each other, remarkably close together.

He sat at the guard table to the dungeons for hours. The table was right in front of the cages so that the guards ne'er missed a step. Fellow servants, horsemen, cooks, even the seamstresses that she solumly met were all clumped together. The minister knew most of them. He, in fact, had a good relationship with most of them. The servant was ne'er able to make close relations though. Serving the King was a high honor which most of them envied. They would not think it such an honor if they had actually been this minister.

"One wishes to be King 'til they are, then they look down and want to be the servant," the servant thought.

The minister had several knights surrounding him. More kept coming in with new people. Looking up each time with a skip of the heart, the minister waited for the handmaid to come down the stairs. She ne'er came. He began to think that the King had spared her so she could care for the child. The third interviewed came back out from behind the hall. The knight that sat next to the servant stopped talking, He would have done better talking to a wall than the servant mayhaps then his story would have been heard. The knight opened the door and pushed the handmaid inside. This was the Queen's fourth handmaid, and without getting out of his chair the minister saw the blood that ran her lower lip and even through her dark skin, darker marks still could be seen.

She came up to the bars and looked over the minister's body. She always thought he was a nuisance to the kingdom and he would destroy it, from within. "She is in there."

"What?" While still sitting, the minister leaned as far to the end of his chair as he could. "Your handmaid. She was in first, and I highly doubt she'll come out soon." She spat at the minister's feet which gave his shoes a stray of her blood. She turned to sit with her fellow workers, one of which gave her a cloth for her wounds.

The minister turned to speak against the handmaid, when two knights came around the corner, one being the King's best knight. They heaved out a body telling the room, "We need to speak to the King. She has given a name."

None spoke on the long walk from the dungeon to the great hall. The minister lusted to have been apart of the interviews, wishing he could ask the knights what the name was. He most wished to hold the rosy cheeked handmaids' that were being dragged behind her. He had finally found her.

The King sat upon his throne. He looked out the gapping windows that viewed the nearest markets to the castle. The first was a fur market. His's father purchased the King's bear carpet from here only a few years ago. The King still used this store to have gifts for coming guests. A small pouch made from a mountain lion the King had killed himself was tanned here.

The King gave this to the minister for Christmas.

The King arose, viewing the knights, the handmaid, and the servant entering. They all met at the third pillar, wrapped in scarlet. His eyes grew wide flowing from the servant to the girl and then his Knights. He wanted someone to speak without the need to ask for ones, as if he were an equal, a friend.

“What is this? What have you learned?”

“A name she speaks my Lord,” said his favorite knight. “She knows this to be a man who is in contact with the Queen.”

“Well speak!” The King demanded.

He grew impatient by the second of not knowing the name.

“Tell him, handmaid!” The knight pushed the maid to the floor.

She pushed her upper body off the floor and made sure her green eyes were sealed with the King when she said. “Your-- Minister.”

Silence. Utter and complete silence. The knights looked at each other already having known the name. The handmaid kept locked her eyes on the King though his eyes had swayed away. He saw the feet of his servant. He dared not look up. He did not want to see confirmation on the minister’s face. He trusted the servant to receive the Queen only to find he already knew she was gone. The King had no brothers. His father was a King that only saw him as someone to take over when he died. His knights were yes men who never challenged him. It was minister, the minister. The minister told him when he was wrong, being foolish. When he was proud of the King. They talked like family. He loved him.

The King turned away from the crowd and took a few steps forward. The minister feared what was about to happen. He looked from the handmaid to the King. How could she do this to me? The minister thought. She put him in the King’s line of fire, for what reason, the servant did not know. The minister stepped forward, ready to state his case. Clear his name. Tell the King the truth of what happened this day. But the hem of the King’s red cloak derailed the minister’s horse of thought. All his cloaks were red but this hem was slightly off at the right end.

“You’re not wearing your best cloak.” Of curious the hem was not the problem. In fact his best cloak had many stains the servant spent hours trying to wash away but never could.

“Enough of your nonsense servant!” Swinging his sword out of its scabbard, the King swung around and in one motion brought the blade to the minister neck. The blade was cold, and the servant felt goosebumps starting to form across his body. Even if the King took the sword back carefully the blade would still leave a mark. At least I just sharpened it, the minister thought seeing the shine on the handle. His index finger rubbed the tip of his thumb where he had tested the blade.

“Your mother swanned it.” The King ne’er let anyone touch his best cloak except for the minister. That is why he is wearing this one, the servant

was not there this morning to put the right one on.

“So?” The blade went further into his skin. A drop of blood trickled onto his green shirt. His breath got shallow.

“Alright, alright. But think prithee, think I may have taken my time telling you the Queen was missing but I am loyal to you. It has always been you,” the minister started talking as fast as his heart was going. “She gave me a note. That is all. A note. It is in my pocket. It reads Catharina Rose. The name of the child. My Lord you are my brother. Prithee do not do this.”

“Where is she?”

“I not know.”

“Where is she?”

“Not I know!”

“Where is she!”

“It was the last gift she gave you before she died. That is why it is your favorite. She

made it for your coronation. Yet you wear it first to her funeral.”

“Where is my wife?” The King weeped. The blade grew deeper. The servant’s shirt

begun to mousen as if he had been running. “Where is my wife?” He searched for answers in the minister’s blue eyes but saw only the damage he had done this day. “Where is my wife?” The blade fell on the floor breaking the silence. The knights began to move slightly back. The handmaid pushed herself into a sitting position. The minister took one hand to his neck but grabbed the King’s collar with the other.

“We will find her my Lord. We will find her.” The minister whispered.

Several minutes passed in stillness. He had held too much anger in his heart for one day, even the King could not hold it any anger. None moved while the King weeped. When the eldest princess entered with the infant in hands the King began to stop. The princess came close then waited for permission to give the child to the King.

“Come princess, come let the King hold his new daughter. Catharina Rose.” The King looked at the minister. He knew still if all other decisions in his life were wrong not making the minister a knight was right. He needed him by his side.

The princess gave the King the child. His heart filled with love instead of fury. Thou he still wanted a new wife who would produce a son, he was grateful for this child. Another little girl full of virtue and beauty. She will grow to love life and see nature as her equal.

The moon began to rise over the shops. The minister looked out the window and noticed that light was always around when you needed it.

A week later the minister went again to the Queen’s room. He entered the room seeing again an empty bed. No longer were the sheets red and gold, for now they were velvet and black. His handmaid was fired for falsely accusing the minister. He had guilt for her leaving but cried not. She was

the one who placed the Queen on a horse with a dark cloaked rider that night. She did not know the destination, as she had said before, thou she know the direction the horse galloped. For this minister had not forgiven her. She had said his name to the King thinking, knowing that he knew nothing. Now when she stood near the window brushing the fur from her new job, at a fur shop outside the castle, the minister often stopped to stare for a moment.

When he turned to the window he saw the cow placing the child in a new pink basket, with the help of the eldest princess. They were lovely with the child. Both were ready to be mothers, and perhaps soon they will be.

“Come she is just about to sleep,” the princess waved the minister over. Ten pounds now, Catharina had grown. Her eyes were the colour of the seventh layer of the sea. Her hair had only a little to it but it was dark. “Handmaid, prithee take a walk.” The cow bowed to the two of them and vanished behind the door

“How is she?” The minister asked rocking the child’s stomach with his hand.

“She is good. Eating well, sleeping much.”

“And how is your prince?” The King had pushed up their marriage, by the end of the month they will be bed mates. He hopes they will produce a boy in case the King’s new wife does not birth a boy of their own. All knights returned from their hunt for the Queen with nothing in hand except a few rabbits.

“He is well, he is enjoying his new seamstress. She is doing very well.” They looked at each other with an understanding that need no words to conform.

“I think I shall venture down there early next week to help you with your wedding plans. If fine with you that is?” The princess bent down the dim red collar of his shirt and brushed her cold fingers across his scare.

“That would be lovely.” The curse had finally died. Looking at the child the minister’s heart rose and fell with Catharina’s chest once more.