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THE TOWER

a solo piano allegory

PRELUDE

The King reined his steed, looked out over his kingdom, and turned to face those who had followed him to the hilltop.

"There," he said, and pointed to a wide plot of land carpeted with flowers. "In that clearing I will build a great castle. It will be my gift to my son's future bride."

The King's champion nudged his powerful mount to the fore of those gathered there.

"Surely, my Lord, you jest," the knight said flatly.

The King looked disapprovingly at him, knowing his thoughts.

"It will be as I command."

The castle was constructed as ordered by the King. Its welcoming walls were ornately carved, crafted for beauty rather than battle. In the courtyard, the King planted a beautiful garden that quickly bloomed with color and life. Most grand of all, however, was the castle tower, which rose like a pillar of light over the garden below.

When the King's champion saw the completed work, he marveled. The castle was glorious to behold; perfectly and meticulously designed. The tower's radiant majesty was unmatched by anything else he had seen in the kingdom. That the King intended to hand it over to his son's bride-to-be infuriated him. The castle was better suited for someone of *his* position. He went before the King to make his appeal.



"My Lord, I have served you faithfully all my life and have never asked you for anything. But now, I must. Grant me the castle and its tower, and build your princess another, more suitable dwelling for her station—perhaps a small palace or manor..."

The King raised a hand to interrupt him and then stated matter-of-factly, "The castle will be a gift for the bride as I have commanded."

The knight was incensed.

"I've done all you've ever asked of me and more! Certainly, I, your champion, must be of more value to you than some *girl*?" He could not hide his contempt.

The King studied him, but did not answer.

"My Lord," the knight regained his composure, "You and I both know that no one in your kingdom, princess or otherwise, is worthy of such a great estate."

"It's not a question of being worthy," said the King. "It is a gift."

The knight spoke under his breath, "It should be *mine*."

"The matter is closed," the King said with finality, and then, "Be careful, my champion. Your pride betrays you." The knight turned and left the King's presence.

Every morning thereafter, the knight rode to within sight of the castle. The thought of anyone other than himself possessing it filled him with jealousy. Determined to have it, he met with his most loyal officers and began to call into question the King's authority. "Who made him Lord over us?" he asked. "Why do we serve him without question? Shouldn't we, his esteemed officers, have a say in what goes on in the kingdom?" Finally, he provoked outright rebellion; "If the King is handing out castles to peasant girls, where's *our* reward? We are loyal to him but he is not loyal to *us*!" Before long, the King's champion had gathered a large number of soldiers around him who, for the first time, felt dissatisfied in service to their King.

"Join with me," he told them, "and when I take the throne I will grant you each the standing you deserve. You will no longer serve in obscurity, but will rule with me as *my* champions."

When he was confident all was ready, the dark knight declared war against his King.

The battle, if you can call it that, lasted a mere afternoon. The King's armies struck like a hammer and the traitorous forces were quickly overcome. The knight was brought before the King, who looked at him sadly.

"My champion, do you remember the day I gave you your title? What act of heroism did you perform to earn that position? There was none. I named you champion not because of any great deed on your part, but because it was what I desired you to be. Your title was a gift, one I intended for you to have forever."

He paused, and then pronounced judgment.

"It is your obsession with the castle that has turned you against me; therefore, because of your treasonous acts, you will be confined within the tower walls. You will roam forever in it, but you will never leave it." The knight was taken away.



THE TOWER



he tower, once a magnificent tribute to the King's handiwork, had now become a prison. The fallen knight within had only his bitterness and resentment to keep him company. Every day he cursed the King, and as the years passed, his rage consumed and transformed him. He became the very quality of darkness, a vengeful shadow, intangible and invisible to anyone who did not have the discerning eyes to see him.

The tower, meanwhile, bore the curse of its occupant. While the castle and the surrounding gardens remained as perfect as the day they were created, the tower became tarnished and worn. It grew old. What had once been a bastion of light was now a blemish in an otherwise perfect creation. As if in response—or perhaps shame—vines from the garden crept up and covered the tower stonework like a garment. The stones of the tower were said to weep.



THE PRINCESS

It was a joyous occasion when the princess, at last, arrived in the kingdom. The King escorted her to the castle and offered it as his gift to her. He then told her that at the appointed time, his son, the Prince, would come to ask her hand in marriage.

Finally, he brought her to the castle garden. Its beauty took her breath away. Flowers and fruit trees of every kind graced dozens of pathways. Waterfalls, ponds and fountains kept the air cool and invigorating. Sweet birdsong filled the courtyard.

"Look around you," the King said, "There is so much life to enjoy, so much to experience and care for. I happily give all this to you." The King smiled, paused, and then took a more serious tone. "There is but one thing I command. You are free to go wherever you like, explore the castle's treasures, the countryside and of course, the garden. However, you must never approach the tower nor open its door. Do you understand?" The princess looked over the King's shoulder, admiring the high walls of the tower behind him. She assured the King that she understood.



WHEELS IN THE SKY

Days turned to weeks and weeks to months as the princess waited for her Prince. The King visited often, taking every opportunity to encourage her and remind her of the wedding to come. During these visits she occasionally inquired about the tower and the King repeatedly warned her to never go near it. When she asked why, the King would simply say, "You have the castle, the countryside, the nearby streams and every flower of the garden to enjoy. You lack for nothing. Be content, my dear." Still, her curiosity grew, and on those days when she walked alone, her wanderings brought her ever closer to the tower door. One day, she walked right up to it.

"Hello?" she said, surprising herself that she had spoken. Looking down, she realized that her hand was already on the latch. Her mind then became a confusion of thoughts, "This is my castle, isn't it—my tower? Shouldn't I know what's inside? What's the King keeping from me? Surely, just a peek wouldn't hurt."

She pulled the latch and found the door unlocked—it opened so very easily. As it swung open, daylight fell upon a long stairway that wound its way up into the shadows. She strained to see more and, wanting a better angle, stepped inside.

The trap was sprung. The air around her suddenly swirled and the tower door slammed shut. The princess turned and gasped at it, but found to her dismay that there was no latch on the inside. She pounded on it, crying out, but there was no one near to hear. She was afraid and, worst of all, surrounded by blackness. She might as well have been blind.

Guiding herself along the wall, she found the foot of the winding staircase. Then, with one hand on the wall and one stretched out to the darkness, she began the long climb to the tower's peak.

The King was full of sorrow.



THE ASSIMILATION

By the time she reached the top, she was exhausted. What she found there was an empty room where a single small window let in the last rays of the setting sun. She crossed to the window, looked out at the twilight sky, and wondered what would become of her. How could she have been so stupid? Why didn't she listen to the King? In the sleepy part of her mind, she imagined herself walking away from the tower as she had a hundred times before this day. But the hard reality set in. She was stuck in the tower and completely alone—or so she thought.

The knight watched her from the doorway and delighted in her dilemma. This could not have worked out better for him. He now had the means to take his revenge upon the King! He would use the princess' own emotions against her to turn her into a miserable, wretched, waste of a human being. So much for the Prince's bride!

When the princess fell into a fitful sleep, the knight moved against her. He entwined his thoughts around hers and began to chant unholy things to her unsuspecting mind:

"You are beyond forgiveness."

"You are worthless."

"You have no hope."

"There is no escape."

"The Prince will never want you now."

"The King will leave you to your death."

"No one, but no one, can save you."

Meticulously, the knight planted the seeds of self-loathing and depression.



VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

Many days passed in the tower and with each sunset the princess became more certain of her death. The King had forgotten her—or abandoned her. And why shouldn't he? The Prince would not want her now. She had ruined everything. She was beyond forgiveness.

When she wasn't sleeping, she sat with her back against the wall beneath the window. Without food, her mind had become dull. She was able to quench her thirst somewhat by sipping the morning dew from the ivy outside the window, but it didn't sustain her. More often than not, she just slept, waiting for the inevitable end of life to come.

One morning, her troubled dreams were interrupted by a sound far off in the distance. What was that? She sat up and listened. Had she imagined it? Then she heard it again; a voice, calling out from beyond the castle walls;

**“Rejoice! Rejoice! The coming of
the Prince is at hand!”**

She pulled herself to her feet and looked desperately out the window. She heard the voice again—distant, but clear—and then it was gone.

The princess felt a sudden, unexplainable calmness within her soul. She smiled. It was going to be all right.



MIDNIGHT MOONLIGHT




he knight was determined to crush the princess' new found hope. The only voice he wanted her to hear was his own! He filled her mind with questions he knew she could not answer. Why would the King design a castle for her and then include a tower she was forbidden to enter? Did he know that she'd eventually go inside? Did the King set her up for failure? What manner of Prince would allow his future bride to suffer like this? If he truly loved her, and was a *good* Prince, why had he not already come to rescue her? All these questions twisted her up inside. All she wanted to do was sleep, but the voice in her head would not allow her the rest.



Wide awake at midnight, she sat by the moonlit window watching and hoping for her Prince.

MAN OF SORROWS



he next morning, the princess saw movement on a faraway hillside. Her heart leapt with joy. Someone was coming! She could see a man walking toward the castle, pausing now and again to survey the land. The princess felt ashamed, for she noticed for the first time that the grounds in and around the castle had gone terribly wrong. They had given way to massive tangles of thorns. It was as if the castle and its surroundings had aged a hundred years in just a few days.

The princess watched as the stranger began to make his way through the thorns. Not a single step he took was easy, and the closer he got to the castle, the thicker and more violent the thorns became. They tore and clawed at his arms and face in what seemed a deliberate effort to pull him to the ground. Soon, she could see streaks of blood on his arms, face and clothing. Through all this, the stranger stumbled, but didn't hesitate. He steadily pressed forward, painfully enduring the slashing crack of the whip-like brambles.

Then the man stopped, looked up and met her eyes. That was the moment she knew—this was no stranger, this was her Prince! But where was his white steed? Where was his crown? The princess never expected the Prince to come like this! He wasn't dressed like a Prince or even a soldier, but like a gardener!

Nonetheless, the princess could not contain her excitement. When the Prince reached the castle courtyard, she began the long decent down the winding stairs to meet him.

The knight could sense the Prince's approach. Using dark magic he summoned a great sword and took it by the hilt, intending to slay the King's son in one swift stroke.

The Prince opened the tower door, entered, and leaned his back against it to close it. He felt the darkness rush toward him.

"Yield, evil one," he commanded. The knight, sword raised, hesitated.

"Bow to me," said the darkness, "and I shall spare you."

"I will not. I have come to set my bride free," the Prince said.

"Her life is forfeit, Prince!" The knight sneered, "She willfully disobeyed the King! You know the punishment for that!"

"Yes, I do know," the Prince answered, and then, "I have come to offer you my life in exchange for hers." The knight repressed a laugh and mocked him.

"Oh yes, son of the mighty King, I will gladly take your life," and the knight lunged forward, his sword piercing the Prince's side.

Upon reaching the bottom of the stairs, the princess saw the Prince's crumpled body. She ran to it and cradled it in her arms. Grief filled her soul.

For a long time the princess sat huddled beside the Prince's body. How had this happened? Why did he die? Guilt began to take hold. *It was all her fault.* It must be. Somehow, she had brought this on him. Now surely she had no hope. She was as good as dead.

The knight stood behind her, gloating.



LIGHT

Shen, without warning, an intense light illuminated the tower. It was as if the sun had come *inside*, pushing out the darkness. The force of it chased the startled knight back up the steps and into the most distant depths of the tower. The princess shielded her eyes as the brilliance dimmed and took a man's shape.

"Woman, why do you weep?" the voice in the light asked. Thinking this to be an angel, she turned to show it the body of the Prince, but his body was gone!

"My princess," said the light, and looking into it she recognized her Prince, alive and waiting with open arms. She embraced him with tears.

The Prince stayed with her many days, and explained much to her concerning the kingdom, the tower, and how and why he had to face death to free her.

"There still is much to be done," he said. "My love, you are free. Leave the tower and do not return. Care for this castle and its gardens. I must go for a short time to prepare a new place for you in my kingdom. This castle is now aging and will pass away. A new one must be built for us, one that will outshine even this in its glory. When I return, I will take you as my bride, and my father will host a great wedding feast in our honor. You will stand by my side in all things. Persevere, my love." Then he kissed her forehead and vanished.



Joy

The princess watched for him daily, knowing he would soon return to take her as his bride. What a wondrous day that would be! While she waited, she tended the castle and garden as best she could. She never again approached the tower. She had left it—and the darkness—behind forever.

Though many days passed, the princess felt as if the Prince stood right beside her, comforting her. She could feel his presence, and she placed hope and joy in his promise: “My love, do not let your heart be troubled. Trust the King and trust in me. I am preparing a place for you, so be assured that I will return. I long to have you with me. I am coming soon.”



Galatians 3:22-23

“But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.”

John 3:16-18

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.”

John 14:1-3

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”