

The Party Favor

By Mark Edgemon

As the queen walked the halls of her private chambers, she could see a shadow of a person moving about inside her bedroom. The shadow flickered on the walls reflected by the roaring fire from the fireplace and the dimly lit lamps that decorated her room. Someone was walking about in her private quarters without permission, which is considered a high crime in England. Now at age 81, the queen knew she should notify the palace guards of the intruder's presence. But for some reason the queen did not feel threatened as she walked into her bedroom to see who it was that had invaded her privacy.

A young girl was standing in front of the fireplace, looking up at the drawing that had hung over the mantle there for over 50 years. It was a strange looking work of art, but nonetheless a masterpiece. The picture captivated the young girl, who now stood mesmerized as she stared into the soul of the drawing. It was a charcoal drawing, drawn by the hand of a master so realistically; it looked more like an old photograph. It was approximately 3 x 4 feet in diameter, framed with antique dark wood, which added to its mystique.

As the queen approached the fireplace, the young girl who was around 8 years of age remained steadfast in her focus and did not acknowledge the queen who was now standing behind her. After a few minutes the queen asked the girl, "What do you see in the drawing?" The little girl replied, "The girl in the drawing...she's lonely".

The queen was stunned by the girl's comments. "You can see that", she exclaimed?

The queen walked over to the bed and sat down. "Come over here child", the queen called out to the little girl. The girl continued to stare at the drawing for another minute and then slowly walked toward the queen and sat on her lap.

It is well known that no one touches the queen. Even leaders of foreign governments do not touch her, not even to shake her hand. However, the little girl intended no infraction and the queen was willing to dismiss it.

The little girl asked, "Tell me the story behind the picture".

The queen replied, "What makes you think there is a story? Maybe the drawing was purchased".

"No" the girl said thoughtfully looking into the queen's eyes. "It's you. It's you in the drawing".

The queen was stunned. “How do you know that is me child”, the queen asked in disbelief. The little girl said thoughtfully looking at the portrait, “She is lonely and sad and wants everyone to know it”.

The queen could not believe that such insight was coming from this young girl. “Tell me the story, won’t you please”, the little girl pleaded in a soft tone. This touched the queen deeply until tears began to fill her eyes.

The queen wiped her eyes and cleared her throat as she recalled the incident, which had long been forgotten.

“It was my eighth birthday and I was preparing for what was promised to be a grand birthday party with lots of guests and presents and my favorite chocolate cake with mint frosting. This particular birthday party was special to me, because my father said he would personally be there, so it was an opportunity for me to spend time with him.

My father and mother were the Duke and Duchess Of York and were always busy with the usual round of public engagements and affairs of state. My father was the second in line for succession to the throne of England next to his elder brother Edward. It was never expected that my father would rule.

As usual, father had some business to attend to weeks before my birthday party, so he turned the details of it over to my nanny. To stop me from crying, he promised me he would be there. I begged him 'Do you promise' and he said 'Yes I promise'. I said 'Do you really promise this time' and he said, 'As a favor to you, I promise I will be at your birthday party'.

Two weeks before my birthday, our nanny’s aunt became ill and was hospitalized. She requested some time off and left without mailing the party invitations.

On the day of the party no one was there except for the downstairs maid and the artist my father hired to paint the group portrait. Father had left a note saying he was sorry not to attend the party, but that he would bring me back something interesting from his unexpected trip.

As I sat in the playroom looking at the artist, who was looking back at me, I could see the empty table where my cake should have been. There were no presents, no guests just me sitting at the table with the artist who wouldn’t stop staring at me.

When it was apparent no one else was coming, he started to unpack his paints and brushes intending to paint my portrait in the playroom. This was more than I could bear and I began to cry. I cried bitterly for I knew it would always be like this.

And then came the final insult. The artist began to paint me while I was crying, red faced and sad without any regard of my feelings. I ran to my room. He followed me. He was determined to paint me so he could receive his payment. I told him 'No' but he continued to paint me anyway, so I grabbed his paints and threw them out of my window.

After a moment, he pulled out some charcoals and a large piece of paper and began to sketch. He told me 'He would bill my father for the paints and for the time that had been wasted'. I thought for a moment and said, 'Wait, I'll be right back'.

My eyes were now red and swollen and I didn't want anyone to know that my disappointment had gotten the best of me. I went into the game room looking for something to cover my face with when I found a court jester's mask mounted on a wall. I grabbed it and ran back to my room. I sat on the bed holding the mask in front of my face and said to the painter, 'Now you can draw me'. He paused for a moment and said, 'Take off the mask'. I said 'No!'. He then commented that 'No one would know it was me he was drawing and therefore he wouldn't get paid'. I told him that 'Since no one had come to my party, who else would he be painting'. He thought for a moment, shrugged his shoulders and started to draw.

While I was sitting on my bed, I thought how fitting it was that I was wearing the mask of a fool, because I felt the fool, believing my father would favor me with his presence after promising me so many countless times that he would be there.

After he finished the drawing, he framed it, gave it to the maid who put it in the downstairs closet where it stayed for years.

Four years later my grandfather the king passed away and my uncle Edward ascended to the throne. But one year later he chose to abdicate the throne in order to marry a socialite from America, who had been twice divorced. It was at this time, my father was made king and I became the heir apparent. Upon my father's passing 16 years later, I was crowned Queen Elizabeth and I have been queen now for 55 years".

When the queen finished speaking she noticed that her eyes were becoming blurry. She thought it might be the dim lighting, until something strange began to happen. The weight of the little girl sitting on her lap began to lighten until she could no longer feel her. As the queen looked up, she saw a transparent figure move through the air toward the drawing. Within seconds, the once figure of the girl was now translucent and had passed into the drawing above the fireplace.

As the queen looked at the picture intently, there was a faded green glow around the girl in the drawing for a short time and then it disappeared.

The experience of the last hour was as real to the queen as anything she had ever experienced, however there was no sign of the girl. The queen tried to make sense of what had just happened, but she could not.

Days later, as she continued to ponder what had happened, she noticed how much better she felt, having relived that painful experience and faced it with the courage that her eighty years now afforded her. With the negative experience now purged from her, she no longer kept everyone at arms length. She was now willing to risk the disappointments that investing into people's lives sometimes brings.

Throughout the rest of her life, she never understood what had happened that night. But the one thing she did know was, she was now free and happy...for the first time in her life.