

From Fish to King

Calvin Blackwood wasn't known for any special talents or a big personality. He was a pretty plain person with a vivid imagination. He had a big family and an even bigger house, mostly it felt bigger because of how empty the rooms were. He used to live with nine other people, not all siblings, some of them were just related to some degree, although most died too young for him to remember who they were.

He'd always been told that his family had a curse of some sort. Something that made them die in an unusual way; it really wasn't a question of when but how. Not one person in the family tree had made it past thirty-seven but Calvin wasn't sure how much he believed it.

The last person he remembered was his brother Milton: he went mad and locked himself in the shabby tunnels underneath the house and was convinced that there was a demon that lived above him, rattling the roofs. He eventually ran out of his rations and decided to venture out and try his luck, which was unfortunately not on his side. The tunnels led out underneath a bridge where train tracks lay. Milton walked out and started along the tracks to the greenery he could see at the end of the tunnel. According to adults he didn't reach the end before the demon got him. Calvin rather thought the train might have had more to do with it.

Calvin worked in a fish cannery, chopping the heads off fish for however long his shifts were. His days always followed the same rhythm: get up, get dressed, go to work, go home, sleep and repeat. He was sure that the other important things must have happened somewhere along the line, he just couldn't recall them.

The job was boring. He worked feeding fish to the automatic guillotine, which sliced a head (or a finger) off every five seconds or so. Calvin didn't even remember applying for the job. He just went. He was always alone in a dimly lit warehouse repeating the same motions - grab, pull, slice, throw - over again for hours.

To fight boredom, he escaped to the kingdom in his head, a kingdom where he was happy. He was next in line for the throne and he had a whole different life. Everyone knew him and loved him. He was rich. He was popular. He was everything he wished he was in this world. This dreamland expanded with every shift, and eventually he approached the day that he would be crowned king and so he journeyed to the palace.

He took a walk through the city and felt the rumble from the parade beneath his feet. The vibrations of the drums ringing through his ears and the cheers from his - soon to be - people brought a smile to his face. He held his head high and waved graciously to the ever growing crowds.

The parade took him straight to the docks where his fancy boat with customised sails was anticipating his arrival. The boat called his name and he leapt away from the stentorian ovation. He took his place as captain and set off down the winding rivers, listening to the

water gently ripple over itself. He felt the steady sway of the boat and his chest filled with happy bubbles, so big that he nearly floated away. He watched the hills of cows and the plains of sheep pass by him, mooing and baaing as they went. He came across splitting rivers that ran like ribbons across the land and waterfalls that bellowed at the cliffs surrounding them.

Calvin took his time getting there but, of course, he arrived not a minute late. Suddenly, he was dressed in a long robe, holding the colours of the flag. He checked that his Prince's crown was firmly planted on his head, eagerly awaiting his upgrade. His eyes were glinting with pride as he approached the palace to the sound of the masses shouting in appreciation. The fanfare trumpets and big drums echoed all around him. The music notes drifting up from the instruments and out into the air. The sound was like no other, one that tightened the hairs on his arms and pushed on the nerves in his legs, turning them to jelly.

Royal guards walked him into the palace, fighting against the general population who all clamoured to meet their future king. As thick walls dulled the sounds from the courtyard, Calvin's mind cleared. He no longer felt like he was going to collapse. Then he saw it - his new crown. The sight of it reminded him why he was doing this. He looked at the rows of seats, filled with hundreds of people, with complete calm. The abdicating king stood at the front, waiting for Calvin's approach.

Calvin got to the king and knelt down. On either side of him were metal posts which had a string of fairy lights hanging in a perfect semi circle. The shape was vaguely familiar to him, like something from the life he'd forgotten. The king gently gestured for him to bow his head. Calvin was bursting at the seams with adrenaline, but he moved with grace. He had no idea where this story would go from here. He beamed so brightly that his smile almost rivalled the sun which shone through the stained glass windows, bathing Calvin in deep, royal red. He was elated - nothing in this world could ruin the joy that coursed through him. He was nothing but happiness and excitement. The king lowered his new crown...

And in the cannery the guillotine dropped. A clean cut.

The papers reported another unusual Blackwood family death:

THE BLACKWOOD FAMILY CURSE PREVAILS

Calvin Blackwood, 22, found dead at fish cannery. Duncan Smith, 57, found his employee's decapitated head amongst hundreds of discarded fish heads first thing on Monday morning. The coroner report found that Blackwood had not been taking his antipsychotic medication...