



Historical Association

The voice for history

# Write your own Historical Fiction 2023

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## **Prologue**

*“Say Piers, you knew the King right? Do tell us a story about him.”*

*Piers Gaveston scoffed at the collection of souls who loomed over the sleeping Edward the Second. A story? Just like that?*

*These were random plebeians who knew nothing of the King, yet blindly sought his grace even in death- they didn’t deserve to know of his stories like he did.*

*Piers briefly turned his gaze to the King, who looked different from when they were together. Too different. He knew nothing of him.*

*His chest rose and fell in an uneven rhythm as he snored pathetically; his wife hated him on principle and his kingdom hated him for his tyranny<sup>1</sup>. The King he knew would never have let it come to this. He was considerate and merciful and far too humble for his own good, preferring to sail and swim and talk to the peasantry he now mistreated than to face the high right of his birth. Piers didn’t know if that was a good or bad thing at the time, but seeing the alternative now confirmed that it was better than this at least.*

*The souls whispered, their murmurs growing louder in the silent King’s chamber.*

*“So? Do tell us, Piers. Tell us of you and the King.”*

## **The King and his Folly<sup>2</sup>**

I was the son of a knight. My father was a noble, yet inferior man. He struggled to achieve anything on his own throughout his life, relying on the power of those he served and even his wife’s possessions to get him what he wanted. Nevertheless, my parents were well in raising me, instilling me with proper education and discipline from military strategy to something as simple as the *crwth*<sup>3</sup> instrument my mother played. She heard an Irishman talk about how instead of talking about *crwth*, I should just do it instead. It was a jest she hated. She didn’t let me touch or speak of the instrument after.

Eventually, mother inevitably passed. Unable to cling to the remnants of his superior wife’s inheritance, we were stuck in service to the King, Edward the First. I impressed the King back then with this prowess, rightfully so as I was a rather wonderful child so I was made to be an example for the young Prince Edward to follow and sent to his household. I don’t actually remember what I did to impress him so.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward II became quite the tyrant near the end of his life, allowing the Despencers to practically rule through him because of his affair with Hugh Despencer, a noble man of the time, so the nobles hated him. The commoners hated him because despite being advised against it, he continuously sought to raise Palace revenue, which led to suffering for the lower classes.

<sup>2</sup> Gaveston only speaks once in parallel to how through history, there’s a stark contrast between what’s known about him and what’s known about Edward because of their differing statuses. The only reason he was known was because of his relations to the King, which was why it’s only fitting that the only time he’d speak aloud is in this first meeting with him.

<sup>3</sup> “Crwth” can refer to a violin-like instrument and “hump”. It was used in the description of rounded bodies, in reference to the shape of violins.

True to his word, I was sent to Edward's palace, taught about what to do and when by a maid I don't remember anymore. I was led to a meal room, where I was to eat my first meal in a while. The wood beneath my feet was warmer than anything I had ever felt, my brow drenched in sweat.

I had always loathed uncertainty. Battles in which the victor was determined not by sheer factual feats of strength and military prowess, but rather by the subjective takeaway of loss and victory by combatants. From what I had heard, Edward was like a free wind. He had many brothers before him, so at the time I thought he was far less of a priority than he actually was. None of his brothers survived into adulthood except he. He'd be wild and unexpected and especially generous to those below him; a valuable opportunity or a fatal mistake.

"I'm having my meal early today." A booming, impressive voice announced itself. He'd often announce himself whenever he stepped into a room as if his sheer presence wasn't already striking enough. At the time, I was taken aback. The dutiful cadence of his voice carried a tone of authority only fitting for a future King. Looking back, talking was just about the only thing he was truly exceptional at; that and kindness.

He sat himself on the other end of the table. He wasn't supposed to be eating this early. I hadn't prepared- I was meant to practice again and again into a mirror, presenting myself as sharp and witty and worthy of being an example for someone like him. It was deeply upsetting to my teenage mind that my precious plans, my routines, my structures were overturned so carelessly just because someone wanted a meal earlier. I bit down my outrage before it threatened to escape my lips.

"Do you enjoy jousting?"

I must've been silent for too long. I quickly returned to my senses and answered the question. It was almost humorous how he decided to speak of a topic as common as jousting, as if struggling to appease me. He must've thought it would be the most appropriate thing to ask a boy his age.

"I do participate, but I'm not quite supportive of the sport. Why, do you joust?"

I knew Edward would love jousting but be forbidden from it. It was a childish way of expressing my ill mood under the guise of innocent interest. If he noticed, he decided not to mention it.

"Then I'll have to watch you sometime, Gaveston."

He watched the next time I joust. And the next, and the time after that. I went on hiatus from it for a few weeks, he went to find me. My instructor must've been livid if even Edward felt the need to intervene.

"Gaveston."

There it was, that self-righteous tone that screamed of privilege. Oh, how envious of him I was- to have so much he could do yet choose to lower himself below his station. To choose to interact so much with me and others like me.

"Are you sad?" I was.

After all, losing a mother was what got me in servitude to Edward in the first place. I said nothing. A proper Prince would have rightfully punished me for this revolting display of emotion and for ignoring him.<sup>4</sup> I should have been whipped. Instead, he brought me an instrument. A cwyryth. I appreciated it. We played it together, just as my mother and I used to. Wycombe's Sumer is icumen in.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The real reason Edward probably wouldn't do this is because if contemporaries are to be believed, Edward was already enamoured. 'upon looking on him [Gaveston] the son of the king immediately felt such love for him that he entered into a covenant of constancy, and bound himself with him before all other mortals with a bond of indissoluble love, firmly drawn up and fastened with a knot.' - Chronicle of the Civil Wars of Edward II

<sup>5</sup> This was a song popular in the 1270s, when Piers' mother would have been alive. It represented new beginnings and was full of double meanings. I thought it was fitting for the double interpretations of the

This was more than a decade before he became King. We were awkward in the way only teenagers were; stretched out skin not spread quite fully over the flesh, yielding the uncertainty of whether your features would sharpen into adulthood or you'd discover yourself to be cursed to not look much different. I was the latter, he was the former. Even so, despite his young age of fifteen, he carried himself with a certain dignity only found in those meant for greatness with all the empathy of the regular man. Perhaps he was never quite sufficient as a ruler nor as a noble, but he had the hallmarks of a good man. I learned that quickly the longer I was in his presence as we quickly became closer.

He became King when his father passed the year we turned 23<sup>6</sup>, his marriage to Isabella, a precocious child, coming the month after. His ascension was a messy, yet magnificent affair. It was filled with delays and the nobles had time and again expressed their concerns over my rise in rank compared to all those years ago, postponing the original date. They called me a sycophant and a schemer. I just wanted to see the coronation.

The proceedings of the coronation were slightly different than they had been before him, in line with his father's reforms to bring about the fourth recension of the ceremony from his grandfather's embellishment of Westminster Abbey and the administration of French elements into his new coronation service. Edward spent the night before his coronation in deep prayer. His day was to be set on the Feast of St Matthias the Apostle. It was everything he had sought it to be.

He was bathed and lifted onto a golden throne, to be seen by the people and the Abbey sang. Edward's brother in law bore him the scepter and the golden rod and he was brought the swords. I had the task of carrying St Edward the Confessor's crown into the Abbey, which was a decision Edward allowed. In hindsight, perhaps not the best decision, but it was important to me. I felt seen. I felt like more than the weak son of a guard I was.

The nobles, who had already hated me for my deep friendship with the King, scorned me for being granted precedence over them. I did not care. I wanted to bask in whatever fraction of majesty I could be bestowed. I wanted the world at my feet. And in those scant moments, I had it. It was as if I was someone worthy of him; an equal.

I was put on par with royalty itself. I fastened the boot on Edward's left foot, with the King of France doing the right. I was the one who redeemed Edward's sword at the altar. It was clear proof. I was worthy. If not by anyone else, then at least by him, who was chosen by the Lord himself. In my mind, that meant I was special. That the Lord must have favoured me so to have granted me such access beyond my humble beginnings. I thought that to stand beside the King was to stand beside God and that I was the most beloved man in the world. After all, that's what Edward told me. And if the King's will is God's will, shouldn't God think the same?

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relationship between Piers and Edward, as well as the double significance of the crwth to Piers as a reminder of his late-mother and his teenage years with Edward. If I were to write a full-length novel, this song and the crwth would be main motifs.

<sup>6</sup> The number 23 holds significance again as it touches on the previously mentioned theme of duality, or contrast between the younger, good Edward and the older one. 23 is considered to be either a sign of good or bad luck- sacred to gods, but the gods it's sacred to vary by interpretation. I feel this adds to the uncertainty of Edward's and Gaveston's relationship and Gaveston's hatred for uncertainty creating a more tragic dynamic between the two as the uncertainty of Piers' life due to his low status and the uncertainty of what happens after death are main issues in their story.

But for all the power of the King, he was not God. He wasn't back then, nor would he ever be. He was and always will be just a man.

The consequences of my conceited thinking came back to me through my death a mere four years later. The King's favoritism almost led to a civil war. Edward left for York and I was besieged; taken hostage and paraded around like a trophy of achievement- for he who owned me owned the King's heart.

It was decided that I must die for the sanctity of peace to be restored.

And so, I was left to rot.

### ***Epilogue***

"My sweet Gaveston."<sup>7</sup> It was Edward making sound in his sleep.

Piers loved him more than all the world for he was bound in a covenant of constancy above all other mortals in a bond of utmost devotion sealed in the strumming of the crwth.<sup>8</sup>

Piers thought back to the coronation. How starstruck he had been with the magnificies of the process, remembered how happy and how great his King was on that day. How much they both had gained and how much they both had lost. He looked to the man in front of him.

In another few years, the debilitating King would experience another heartbreak at the hands of a Despencer. He would be nearing his end after that, for both the nobles and the peasants despised him and suggested the son take the throne. Just as much promise as he used to have, with the lessons of his father and the steady hand of the court to guide him. He would have no Piers Gaveston.

Unlike Edward, who was treated as the spare most of his life, his son was the sole male heir and was treated as such his whole life.

He was to be what Edward could not be; a good ruler.

Piers would spend his time pitying the once good soul as he neared his end days, forever looking for traces of who he was in the ailing King, who had far more sin on his hands now than he.

It wouldn't be long now.

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<sup>7</sup> In Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*, this was what Edward II referred to Piers Gaveston by.

<sup>8</sup> Reference to the "Chronicle of the Civil Wars of Edward II" and the quote "upon looking on him [Gaveston] the son of the king immediately felt such love for him that he entered into a covenant of constancy, and bound himself with him before all other mortals with a bond of indissoluble love, firmly drawn up and fastened with a knot"