



Historical Association
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KINGS DON'T CRY - by Joya Walker Athanassiou

It wasn't really him. The expression was different. The eyes too cold. And yet he stood the innocent height he'd been gaining for nine years, and brought his tender fingers to the mirror before him. His sloping, timid shoulders were draped in heavy robes and gowns trimmed with the softest lynx fur, not to be worn by anyone ranking below a duke. And a jewel swung from the chain around his neck, finely embellished with a feather of the Prince of Wales. But no smile tugged at the corner of his lips, because none of the lavish clothes and luxurious accessories could bring back his parents. Nothing could undo what was about to unfold.

All his life he was destined to be king - he was trained from an early age how to live like a Royal. How to walk, talk, eat, smile, pray, and the rest of it. Nothing was left for him to decide. Back then, it had seemed like a curse on every eldest son in the family, but now that he didn't have a father breathing down the back of his neck, day and night, nothing seemed to make sense anymore; no one to tell you when you're doing something right or wrong, and no one to make your decisions for you. No one for the blame to fall back to when you've made a mistake. Edward ran his fingers through his short, ginger hair and whispered a silent prayer, as he wiped a tear from his eye the moment it emerged. Kings don't cry.

The coronation ceremony was going to be shorter than usual for the young King's benefit, but the whole idea of it was obviously still daunting. Every hall was consumed with a constant murmur of servants and significant people Edward had only ever heard of but didn't recognise. He tried his best to stay in his assigned dressing room, begging that the day might all fade into a hazy dream, but eventually he was beckoned into a vast dining hall - one of many in this grand palace. The day had arrived, 20 February 1547, and there was no going back from here.

"His Majesty, Edward the sixth!" A man from the council of strict protestants rose from his chair and bowed, echoed by the several other men in the room, just as the Boy King entered.

"Your Majesty, we would be honoured to speak with thyself, by your leave. What sayeth thou?" Another man questioned, gesturing towards a chair, as a forced smile caused wrinkles to frame the edges of his deep, mahogany eyes.

Edward looked towards the men and nodded, placing himself on the offered seat.

"May I be of service to thee?" he asked in the way he was taught to - loud and demanding - although he felt anything but that on the inside.

"Your Majesty, since the passing of thou father, thy shall become king ... Yet thou art not of many years of age, and therefore we shall assist you in your reign. Was thy Majesty aware of this?"

Edward gazed up at all the Protestant men and nodded as he clenched his teeth together, tightly. He wasn't about to reveal his hidden fear of becoming King. Not in front of them.

"Your Majesty, we also wanted to express our expectations of your behaviour at the coronation today ... "

The rest of their lectures rolled into one slurred speech in Edward's mind. What did it matter? He didn't care that his crown had been specially made, and slightly smaller for his fragile head. Or about what he must say and when he must move. Or any of it. His cheeks reddened and his once-steady breathing began to waver as sharp, salty tears pricked the edges of his eyes. Kings don't cry.

"Your Majesty?" One of the men began, "What ails thee?"

All of the council peered at him with raised eyebrows and eyes enlarged by gold-rimmed spectacles balanced on the ends of their fleshy noses. Edward rubbed a clammy hand over his face and sat up straight, suddenly realising his fearful posture. "My apologies. Where be the privies?" He finally asked in a small voice he instantly regretted. One of the middle-aged men leaned forwards and pointed to a wooden door - decorated in gold with floral patterns - just across the hallway from the dining room.

"The privies be yon, your Majesty," He replied quietly before leaning back into the support of his chair. Edward sheepishly stood up, muttering another apology, and then made his way over to the door as quickly as he could without looking particularly eager to get away from the room. But as soon as he entered the bathroom and shut the door, he fell apart.

Collapsing onto the edge of the bathtub, the boy's face fell into his hands as tears streamed down his cheeks and onto his sleeves. It was too much. An entire country, one of the most powerful, at his own small feet was petrifying to even imagine. Every ounce of pressure dragged him onto the floor and forced him to lay there while screams choked him and sweat trickled through his sodden hair. Bringing his now-damp gown towards his pale face, the candlelight appeared blurred to Edward by the wetness of his distressed eyes. Nothing could calm him. Quickened breathing tortured his hoarse throat, and his face was a mess of blotchy red skin, raw from the salty tears that wouldn't stop dripping from his smoky-brown eyes. Every gasped breath was muffled by the thick cloaks that he hid his face in, and every tear stained his clothing with a streak of agony and fear.

Kings don't cry.