

## LETTER FROM A HEADLESS COURT POET

Dear Court Janitor,

I was the court's most recent poet. Though I've heard that I've been replaced already. So I don't know if 'most recent' is the accurate term. Maybe 'previous' is better. I've always detested dictionaries. There can be no art found in words unless someone has the courage to toss them about recklessly. A properly placed word transcends any meaning that human pretext may molest it with. But only if it finds its proper place as a result of a reckless tossing about.

Those eyelids heard an eruption of wooden feces masquerading as bloated whale pudding.

I'm sorry... I don't want to waste your time with what can only now be considered a purely intellectual exercise. Actually that is wrong. I know now death is simply the place where all intellect is lost. And so anything I say now must come from somewhere deep and true.

You will either find this letter terribly banal or cosmically terrifying. Nothing else in between.

I must make a request of you that can only be carried out with fullest conviction that it is the just thing to do. I can assure you that everything laid forth here is the truth. To speak from beyond the grave is to defect from the lying pretensions of the living.

When I still had my job, I would recite my poems to the king and my recitations would always make the king weep, which meant I got to eat good. And when I was done I would go sleep with the court jester and we would lick each other until we fell asleep. It was a good life.

One day I was coming home from the market, thinking about the king's weeping and the court jester's licking--the greatest of my life's many privileges; it started to rain hard and I looked up, and the last line I ever wrote for the king popped into my head.

The line was this:

*I have spent my life traveling the worlds of my mind just to please a king and yet I could not find anything so beautiful as the sky when it melts into rain.*

At this line the king choked on his own breath in silence until giving way to a singular shout so shrill it chased away all the devils squeezing through the crevices of the palace.

And through clenched teeth the king said,

*I have never seen the sky or the rain.*

*I do not like this poem.*

For dinner, I had fried chicken--which I really love. But it was leftovers, so it was supposed to be taken as a subtle demerit for that day's poetry.

And when I went to bed with the court jester that night, the court jester said *I'm not really in the mood*. And I smiled, because I wasn't really in the mood either. It stopped raining and the moon became clear. And we just lay there together, fading beneath the moonlight.

I was an artist that day. The only day in my entire life that I was an artist. Except one other day from before.

And the day after I was an artist for the second time in my life I knew I couldn't do my job any more. I quit my job as court poet. Because that job is not about poetry, it is about pleasing the king.

And the morning after that, all that was left of me was my head. The King did not like that I had quit. But you see, I had to quit. I could no longer do my job.

My head was dumped into a pile of heads from bodies that had been beheaded by the king. And you, reliably as ever, have come to clear up the pits and have come upon my head and now hold it in your hands.

Court Janitor, I know our acquaintance was slight. Not reaching beyond mere passing glances from the corners of our eyes. But something about that lets me know that I can trust you.

I don't know if you liked me. Maybe you didn't like me because my life was good. But your life might be good too. I hope it is. I don't know if court janitors have a good life. I did once make a living scraping barnacles off boats. That was hard but also there was someone who sang soothingly while we worked and the beer was good so it was pretty nice. I maybe should have stayed on that boat. I wasn't writing much poetry at the time but my letters home were extraordinary. They were the best letters. I wish I kept extra copies.

Maybe you didn't like me because I didn't talk to you. I assure you I did not dislike you! Or look down on you! Not at all! I was merely shy. I am not so intense as you may have perceived me to be. I am not saying you perceived me to be that way but that is what people in my experience tend to think so I only wanted to clarify. When I'm alone or with just someone I am comfortable with I can be a lot of fun. Really.

I don't know if we might have been very good friends.

I just know that right now I need you more than anyone I have ever needed.

I know that now, you are simply doing your job. Cleaning out the pits to please the king, so that

the king can have more room for heads. I was simply doing my job too. Pretending to be a poet to please the king, so that the king can have reason to weep. When I knew at last that my actual job was to just be a poet, I knew I could no longer please the king. And I made a decision.

Yours is a noble profession, as was mine.

But sometimes our professions call upon a certain courage within us which is not like the courage we thought was the courage that emboldened us to set upon the path in the first place. It is not an attractive sort of courage.

It is the courage of surrender. The courage to know all along you've confused your obstinacy for idealism and that you made all the errors you set out not to make as you pursued your purpose.

The courage to know that in your efforts to '*pursue fulfillment of the soul*' you've sold away your soul after the first glance through a shiny wormhole which promises to eliminate a true path before a false destination.

Court Janitor, if you had any mercy in your bones you would take me to the woods and place me on a rock overlooking the meeting point of sky and lake.

Call it presumptuous but I'll say it anyway: *your job is not to clean out the pits for the sake of a king.*

Your job is to make sure things are in their proper place. To separate function from waste. To make order out of chaos. You, Court Janitor, if you do your job, will be more the artist over the course of a single day than I was in my entire life.

You and I who've been raised in obligations of the court have been taught all our lives that whatever course we take does not matter. That our hearts are merely pumps for blood in bodies led by a brain that must administer a particular effect.

That our dreams our idiosyncracies our moments of transcendent unity are mere concoctions of temperature. And not the meeting point of distant echoes reverberating from the laughing center of each unique soul.

That love of what we cannot master is futile. That mastery over anything can allow one to retain one's love for it.

I can tell you now that from where I stand...or rather, where I lay, where my body lays, stiff and fragile and folded over--like a Chinese fortune cookie--that this is not true.

I had no mastery over poetry and no mastery over the court jester. And I loved them both tremendously. And I betrayed them both hideously. One in life; the other in death.

I was a master at pleasing. And so did not love it. And when I could not do it anymore, I got myself killed.

That's just the way it goes sometimes.

Please put my head in its proper place.

If nothing else, I hope you enjoyed this letter. For I know now only too late that, like my letters home, any work of mine addressed to you rather than the king would certainly have been my best.

Yours,  
Headless Court Poet

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