And Tell My Story
by Sildominarin

Summary

Horatio kept his word.

Wine-cool and light, such a contrast to the dark poisoned bouquet still spreading across the floor-
sang as it fell into the cup, and Fortinbras, King of Norway and so recent conqueror of Denmark,
pressed the goblet into Horatio's shaking hand.

"Peace, friend. There is no violence in the drink."

"I rather wish there was." Horatio's voice was quiet and harsh, grief filling in the gaps between
words. "But thank you, sire."

"Leave off formality awhile, scholar, and speak plain with me." A born soldier, Fortinbras had seen
men shocked by war and the terror of death many times, and knew the tone of voice for handling
them. His words were soft, gentle. Designed to be comforting, and yet to keep the listener calm and
collected. "I would know what has happened, to bring such tragedy to the great state of Denmark."

"Not so great, as was led by the fallen Claudious." There was fire in Horatio's tone now, a
smouldering hate well banked by ready fuel. "A murderer and adulter. He did not deserve the title, so
swiftly stolen from the noble....the noble Hamlets, both of them lost to his machinations."

"Then tell me, Horatio." Fortibras murmured, then held a hand to deter further speech. "And leave
not this love I see in you. Hamlet was more then a brother to your heart."

A mirthless chuckle. "You see much. I will not deny it. For to naysay that love is to forgo my own
actions, and the guilt I must bear because of them."
Good. Fortinbras nodded, pleased that his observations had not been wrong. There was little doubt, by the pain in the scholar's voice, that he mourned more the fallen prince then did a friend. Taking a quaff from his own glass, he gave the older man a nod. "Pray, then, friend Horatio, tell me this tale of yours."

A breath, catching in his throat, and Horatio closed his eyes. This took all his strength, all the fortitude he had in him, to speak of the events that had cost him so dearly. And yet....

Do not follow me, dear Horatio, into death so quickly. I am cruel to ask you to bear such pain, and yet I beg of thee. Stay while, though a world without us cause you pain, and let my tale be known? I would not the world thought me mad and murderous.

Another breath, smooth and collected this time, and tortured eyes opened to meet Fortinbras'. "It began when I was at Wittenburg, and news had just reached me of Hamlet King's untimely death....."

Hamlet had waited until they were behind closed doors to speak frankly with Horatio. Well, speak was perhaps too much credit. Hamlet had sobbed into his lover's shoulder, with Horatio as tortured as the younger man. There had been no wonder; he'd been alone with none to share his grief. Horatio would have left when Hamlet had, but the prince had forbid it. Attend your studies, philospher; I would not my troubles ensare you as well. When he'd heard of the wedding, some not a week after the king's death, though, Horatio had left to be at his love's side.

Looking back, Horatio would have given everything to have kept the news of Hamlet's father from him. That story had energized Hamlet, driving grief away in the face of action, and had led too swiftly to Hamlet waiting for the apparition. Oh he cursed himself for that knowledge now, but at the time it had been too important an event to keep from him.

And oh, he knew his regret, even as he and Marcellus and Bernardo had chased after the Hamlets. He had been desperate to call back his friend, to curse the ghost back to it's unquiet grave and drag the prince back to reality. Instead he had come upon an incensed Hamlet, determined to avenge his murdered father. Horatio had sworn to secrecy in an attempt to placate his friend, and also in the hopes that a lack of discussion would let the event die down. Hamlet would find some way, some small way, to impart his revenge, and all would be well. On that score, Horatio could have given him the names and directions to a dozen poisons, each as lethal and discreet as the next. Instead--

"Let them think me mad, dear Horatio." Hamlets voice had been fervent, his eyes shining with the plan. "Let them think me no threat to them at all, and I'll be free to work at will. I know it to be an imposition, my dearest friend, but might I count on your company for a few days more?"

"As long as you have need of me."

"Horatio, we shall not need eternity to avenge my father. Though I shall need you till my last breath."

"And I you. Now will you not come to bed?"

And how quickly things had spiraled out of control. Hamlets actions became less of a skilled actor's and more of one who has truely lost all sense and wit. Horatio had been near panick the entire time Hamlet had been for England, and to hear how close his lover had been to death at the hands of his stepfather....
"Hamlet, this is gone far enough! Let us go back to school, back to Wittenburg! This is a horror here, and I fear for the safety of all."

"How can you suggest that we abandon what my father has come back from the grave to beg of me? Have I not your trust in this, your love in all?"

"Do not question my love for you. It burns in me, as it always will! It is that love which speaks now! Do not ask me to stand by and see you cast yourself to Fate for nothing." There were tears on his face now, of anger and sorrow both, but he paid them no mind. "I beg of you, do not let revenge take you from me. I could not bear it."

Sudden pressure, and Horatio bent obediently to his lover's will. Skilled hands removed the layers between them, and both men could not deny their passion.

"We will leave as soon as passage might be bought. Alas, dear Horatio, not to Wittenburg. We will make our own path I think."

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"To my sorrow, on the next day Laertes challanged Hamlet, and he could not in honor or conscience put it aside. Had I known the fate of it I should have spirited us out during the night."

The wine goblet was shaking in Horatio's hold now, and Fortinbras took it gently back. "I say in truth, scholar, that yours is a tale of woe and sorrow. I do not-will not- ask that you keep yourself from well deserved peace. And yet..."

"Ask, sire." There was a strange and frightening calm to Horatio's voice, and the prince knew then that he spoke to a man fixed upon his own destruction.

"Pen down for me these events, so that the noble Hamlet might be honored in more then your own memory?"

"I shall, and thank you for it."

"So be it." A pause, and then Fortinbras gingerly laid a hand on Horatio's shoulder. "I will see you beside him in your eternal sleep."

"Again, I thank you."

And days later, when both Horatio and Hamlet had been laid to honored rest far below Elsinore, Fortinbras dared to read the first of many words written by the late scholar.

It began when Bernardo was keeping watch before the gate, and Marcellus had startled him upon a late hour....

(Or, how Shakespear would have said it)

ACT 1, SCENE 1--The Throne Room

(Enter Fortinbras and Horatio. Night has fallen after the duel.)

Fortinbras
Peace friend; there is no violence in the drink.
Horatio
I rather wish there--but thank you, sire.

Fortinbras
Keep thy peace and halt thy stilted words.
But rather give me truth of that which has
So cruelly passed before I had arrived.
But which had caused the lives of those now slain.
Among which lies the noble Denmarks' Crown.

Horatio
Thou should find the royal blood but two
Spilt this day upon merciless stone.
A king hath died, but Claudius --he
Hath no nobility in poisoned death.
But prior to had caused the loss of they
The Hamlets both of noble lineage.

Fortinbras
Then speak to me, oh scholar much learned
But deny not thy love for the slain prince
For thine eyes hath the story partly told
But I would hear the end from thine lips alone.

Horatio
I shan't deny that which I in part caused
For such would tarnish that whom I called friend
And love, should he have lived to bear the name
Alas! Tis my folly that is to blame.

Fortinbras:
Let the tale now at last be told.

(a pause; Hamlet's voice is heard, as though in Horatio's memory)

Hamlet:
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story

Horatio
Listen, then, and you shall have the tale.

(Horatio speaks unheard to Fortinbras. Beside them in the hall, the figures of Horatio's memories play out the tale in three parts.)

(when the tale is over)

Horatio
Twas on me that they would then both duel
And death so swift would bear them all away.

Fortinbras
My thanks, to you, then for thy tales told
Thy rest I shall not keep you from--and yet
Horatio
Speak, sire.

Fortinbras
I would that you should write down this account
So that thy noble prince might find honor
Know that thy rest be always at his side
And Fortinbras on this shall give his word.

Horatio:
I can only give thanks.

exuent Horatio. Curtain falls.

ACT 1, SCENE 2
Fortinbras stands before the tombs of Horatio and Hamlet, reading a stack of papers.

Fortinbras (reading aloud)
..tis bitter cold, and I am sick at heart..

Curtains fall

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