

Eggman

by Katrina Dessavre

The last one I tipped over the edge was just like all the others: fragile, pale, humming to himself as he sat on the ledge overlooking the gardens. I didn't think much of pushing him over, a gentle nudge he didn't see coming. None of them did. It wasn't hard, that almost translucent shell offering no resistance to my tiny but still flesh-and-blood fingers. They would wobble sometimes and I would have to help that momentum towards the ground. I counted one, two, three dragon's breaths until I heard a delicate crack and accompanying moan. It was such a satisfying sound and I wondered if the cooks felt a fraction of the same, spine-tingling joy while they made breakfast. I was doing it for their own good, anyway. They were weak, their shells thin and easily broken. The queen kept them precisely for that reason, because ordering around eggmen was easier in her old age than managing the motivations and caprices of princes. But the eggmen were unhappy, I could tell. Why else would they escape to the edges of the castle on their infrequent breaks, sitting on walls and parapets as though they wanted me to rescue them. To help them break their shells, make them unfit for the queen's service, so they wouldn't have to suffer her petty whims and unreasonable requests.

I always helped them afterwards. At a delay, course, so their fellow eggmen wouldn't suspect I had any part in their downfall. I would run downstairs barefoot, put my shoes back on, and pretend to be strolling through the gardens when I saw the mess of tears and yellow ooze seeping into the grass. I would hold their broken pieces, cradling jagged-edged heads in my arms, letting the yolk stain my clothes. It was important to show that I cared, that I valued their service and was sad to see them go. At first I thought they would be pleased at their newfound freedom, but after consoling too many wailing eggmen, I had to content myself with knowing they would thank me later.

I was so used to their despair that when I heard no crying or sniffing, I wondered if I had imagined the crack I was sure I had heard above. But there he was, lying in the freshly-trimmed grass that smelled sweet and crisp in the spring air. He was smiling, his insides mostly contained in the shell that had cracked precisely around the middle. It was a neat, even shoreline and I traced it with my finger, wiping up any stray rivers of clear liquid and tipping them back in.

"You'll be all right," I said, though my consolation sounded hollow and unnecessary. "How can I help?" It was a question I always asked but one that I regretted at this moment.

"Patch me up," he said. "With gold." He sat up carefully, trying not to spill his insides. "That will be my new crown."

