

Prince Andrew's Wanderings.

a short story by

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Prince Andrew was restless. His bed was hard and the draught from the windows was icy. "Never did like this castle." He said out loud as he tossed and turned yet again. "If it's like this in the royal rooms, what ever must it be like for the servants?" Andrew was not like the other royals, and as he was 7th in line for the throne, he could afford to be different. There was virtually no chance of him becoming King, so why bother with all the pomp. Andrew hated pomp.

As a consequence of this somewhat radical attitude, he was not liked in royal circles. His father, the current King, looked on him as the black sheep of the family, and Andrew took it as a compliment. His mother was cold towards him, her whole life was one of pomp and ceremony. Her only aim was to raise a new King, and all her efforts had gone into that end. All of Andrew's siblings were carbon copies of their father, just itching to get their hands on that crown. Not so Andrew, the crown was the last thing he wanted, and he'd let everyone know about it. He figured he would live longer if he was no threat to the others. They were always plotting how they could bump each other off so as to get to the throne quicker.

It was no use, the bed was killing him. Andrew decided to get up and take a walk around the castle. This is precisely what he did. He thought of taking a candle with him, but when he tried to light one, the draught from the windows blew it out, so he set off in the darkness to see what adventure he could get up to.

The door creaked abominably as he opened it, but no one stirred. The corridor was familiar to him as was most of the castle. He had lived here for most of his life so this is understandable. There was one section however, that he did not know, in fact, none of the children knew it. It was strictly out of bounds, and had been for as long as he could remember. A sudden sense of daring came over him and he set off for the mysterious North Wing.

Blankathic castle was a rambling place, big enough to get lost in even in daylight, so in this darkness it was going to be quite an adventure just finding the North Wing. He made it to the grand staircase without incident, and descended carefully by hugging the huge oak banisters. Once at the bottom he had to negotiate the great hall. This was tricky as he had to cast off out into the hall away from any walls. He knew there was a rug in the centre, so he slowly felt his way forward until he found it. Once upon it, he knew there were no obstacles for several yards until he cleared the other side of it.

All was going well until he crashed into the old suit of armour. It made a most hideous noise, and the helmet came off and fell with a clatter onto the stone floor. Andrew

felt sure that he would be found out now, and stopped still for several minutes to await the arrival of the guards. Strangely, nothing happened. No guards came, in fact, apart from him, nothing stirred.

Andrew pressed on and found the far wall. This he followed trying to remember everything that was set against it. He knew that there was a passage behind the big tapestry that would lead him in the direction he wanted to go, so slowly, he worked his way along the wall until he found it. On touching it, he felt some relief, but forgot about the big wooden stand set by it and stubbed his toe on its corner. The pain was intense, and Andrew had to really bite his lip to prevent the scream that was inside him from coming out.

With eyes watering and toe throbbing, he continued his quest to find the North Wing. The passageway appeared as expected, and he slipped through the curtain and into it with some relief. This was a servants thoroughfare, the castle had many of them, so he was now in unfamiliar territory. He followed the wall fairly confident that there would be nothing against it. There was no decoration in the servants parts of the castle. He was right, he met no obstacles.

several minutes later he reached the end of the passageway. It came to a dead end. "Now what?" He whispered. He fumbled his way along the end wall feeling for a door. He found one. Slowly, he turned the knob and opened it. To his delight, it didn't creak. He went through and closed it silently behind him. Andrew was really in the dark now. He had no idea where he was, other than it was servants quarters. He went forward not knowing if he was in a corridor or a room. If it was the latter, he would soon know it, so he moved steadily on, arms outstretched for the expected wall.

He became rather surprised when no wall presented itself. "This must be a corridor then," he whispered quietly to himself. The excitement of being truly lost was giving him some real enjoyment. He hadn't felt this good in a long time.

Suddenly, he stopped. "Was that a voice I just heard?" It had sounded like a voice, but it could just as easily have been wood creaking somewhere afar off in the castle. It could be a servant of course, or perhaps a guard doing his rounds. Andrew remained still and silent for some time, listening. He heard nothing more.

Andrew shivered. It was a cold night, but he remembered the same feeling he was feeling now from his childhood. It was an eerie feeling and he didn't like it. The thought came to turn back, but he was unsure now as to which way he had come, so retracing his steps might be difficult. In any case, he would be just as afraid which ever direction he went in, so he decided to press on. A sharp gust caught him and made him shiver even more. He was beginning to wish he had never started this caper, and had the thought of finding a servant, or a guard to show him back to his room. But where? He had already made enough noise to wake the dead, and no one had stirred. He determined to go into the next room he found and awaken whomever was in there.

The wall was very plain to the touch with no doors in it. His mind's eye was trying to picture where he was, but he couldn't remember any corridors with no doors off them.

Perhaps the opposite wall might have one. He turned his back to the wall and set off from it at right angles hoping to find the opposite wall in a few steps. After eight or ten he began to panic. Then his foot hit a step. "Must be a servants staircase," He said out and set off up it. The stairs bent to the left and went up again. Andrew followed the wall as he went and found his way to the top. He had no idea where he was now, and panic really did start to set in.

He kept to the wall and walked a little quicker than he had been doing for the last half an hour. Noise he heard now, he wanted out of this. His hand banged into some wood sticking out from the wall. It hurt, but not as much as his toe did. He felt his way around the obstruction and found it to be a door. He found the handle and the door opened with a ghastly creak. Andrew didn't care, he almost barged into the room and was met by a freezing draught blowing in his face. A few more steps and he hit the side of a bed, a four poster bed. He pulled the curtains back and waited for who ever was there to wake up with a fright. Nothing happened, so he felt across the bed for its occupant. He didn't find one, so he decided to get in and sleep there until daylight came.

Andrew climbed into the bed and closed his eyes. He fell asleep quickly being both tired from his adventure, and the fact that it was the middle of the night. He woke up briefly a few times due to the hardness of the bed, but turned over and went off again.

"Good morning sir," the maid said drawing the curtains. Sunlight flooded the room, and Andrew opened his eyes. "Where am I?" He asked tentatively. "Why, you're in your room sir." The maid replied looking a little puzzled. "My room?" He said and grinned. "Was it all a dream, or did I somehow work my way back to my own room?" The maid looked bewildered. "I'm sure I don't know what you mean sir," she said, and left. Andrew sat up in bed and wondered what he meant himself.