

TO EDWARD

1307. ENGLAND.

[*Gaveston*]

My dearest Ned:  
France is as cruel and cold as the back  
your father turned on me. I arrived in  
time to be dumped upon by snow.  
I hate it here; it is full of fancy and lacks  
in you. Please write often, for if I have to  
live without your voice, I think this exile  
will kill me sooner. It's better than death,  
I suppose, but not by great lengths.

[*Edward*]

He has been ripped from my grasp.  
Image torn at the seams, he  
cries out my name. Guards seize him at  
the arms, drag him backwards, and my  
Father keeps me wrapped in chains of  
propriety. I cannot call out, I cannot go  
after him, and my heart is shredded into  
filial pieces that bleed rings into the stone  
floor of the court. Piers, I—

[*Mortimer*]

The prince pouts alone in his room.  
He does not stray downward for dinner.  
The bags along the King's eyes grow  
deeper with each slam of the door.  
He did what was right. Edward the First  
is the First for a reason; the Second does  
not yet know what type of world this is.  
But he will learn.  
We will make sure that he does.

[*Gaveston*]

My faithful Ned:  
Your face continues to warm me during  
the darkest nights. The silence in France  
is Deeper than that of England, though I  
attribute that to the fact that I no longer  
have your breathing to interrupt the  
stillness. It chokes. I'm smothering.  
But don't worry on me. I will persist,  
though the world seems to be ending.

[*Edward*]

—cannot bear to think of you alone.  
It's as if the sun has been replaced by  
streetlamps; not that I would know, I'm  
not allowed out after dark. But I think  
this is how it would be.  
Your feet know the path, but your eyes  
are unable to see any path clearly for fear  
of faltering. I wish that you were here,  
that you had never—

[*Mortimer*]

We were promoted recently. My father  
told the king that we were a  
Good boy, told him that we would be a  
Good advisor, a Good Man.  
The King accepted us into his council.  
Then he coughed blood into a  
handkerchief that fell from his sleeve.  
The wet soaked in, spotted it strawberry.  
Scots become restless in the Highlands.

[*Gaveston*]

My Beloved Ned:  
Springtime in France is not as lovely as  
your skin. I can't help but wish for rain.  
I watch women traipse around the park in  
their livery for eight. Nine. Ten.  
Twelve hours a day.  
The fabrics do not seem as bright as they  
once did. I should get my eyes checked;  
They are only able to focus on your face.

[*Edward*]

—had anything to fear from me.  
My deepest regret that pounds in my  
heart at every second of every day  
is that you were put in danger only  
because you loved me, and I loved you.  
Love.  
Still love.  
Always love.  
Never doubt that, my dear brave—

[*Mortimer*]

We leave for the Scottish border in two days. July is hot this year, and the men complain when we march for more than twelve miles at a time. We sit atop our horse and wish for a whip—not for the animal, but the men beneath it, who cry out with shame and dishonor. Do they not know how lucky they are? Many should wish to die for England.

[*Gaveston*]

Ned, my Dear:  
I can feel sweat drip into my eyes as I stand in the drive awaiting your next letter. I have not seen the strokes of your pen in such a long time. Is something wrong? Does England's Heart fare well? I know that my heart aches because it does not know. Ignore my ramblings if you must, love. I am fine.

[*Edward*]

—lionheart.  
And then news comes from the front: My father has died, hot and swollen in his tent, far away from his throne and castle and kingdom. He was alone, and in pain, and suffering against the border of a land he was supposed to be conquering. Too late. Too late. And yet, I cannot find tears, all I feel is—

[*Gaveston*]

My Majesty:  
Is it true? Is your father dead?  
Am I to come home?  
Of course, Condolences.

[*Mortimer*]

We ride back as a convoy to a dead king. His Majesty has been slain by an enemy we could not fight. But our real war is yet to come. We grimace whenever the thought of Edward, frantically writing letters to his beloved, comes to mind. We do not wish to serve him. We aren't that Good.

[*Gaveston*]

My Bright Blooming Love:  
You do not know how happy your words  
have made your poor Piers.  
France is now a speck in the distance, its  
cruelties and cares soon to be forgotten.  
I can hardly keep my seat on my horse,  
for my eagerness and joy is lifting me up.  
I would fly to you if only I had the wings.  
I'm coming, Love. Yours: Gaveston

[*Edward*]

—relief as I spy a horse kicking dust up,  
racing faster than my heart is beating.  
The figure on its back is small, but he  
grows and grows in my sight as he nears.  
And then, Piers is flinging himself from  
the saddle before his mount has even  
come to a full halt and he's running  
toward me and I toward him and he's in  
my arms and the years melt away and—

[*Mortimer*]

We are uneasy.  
Gaveston trips around the court, flaunting  
his favoritism in the faces of those who  
have served England for far longer than  
he. And what he serves: a dagger on a  
golden plate, a cowslip purse, a wagging  
tongue that lights the King's eyes up and  
makes him spark. He ignores his queen,  
leaving her abandoned in a corner.

[*Gaveston*]

My Partner in Arms:  
Thank you for the tournament in the  
winter, and the wife that followed it.  
She is short and plump, and I like to tease  
her at the breakfast table. She does not  
mind that I leave her for hours and hours  
and hours hours hours hours hours, for I  
would rather spend those all with you.

[*Edward*]

—the court doesn't seem to be as pleased as I am. It does not matter. I am the King, and whatever their protests, I can easily overrule them. I like to think about Piers whenever I am in Parliament; he has been removed for distracting me, which, to be fair, he is very distracting, even when he is not present, and I suppose I should be listening but I don't like to hear—

[*Mortimer*]

He thought he would be better.  
The rest of the council sits at our arm and they won't say anything but we will, because this play king is pulling Piers into his lap in lieu of the lessons of his youth, and many more besides us seethe because they are being scorned by a commoner's child, the son of a bitch. The queen's teeth are quartz crystals.

[*Gaveston*]

Meus cor:  
You know, if you weren't always more than enough, the hate that I feel branded on my shoulders would be terrible, I think. I am no politician, so their offenses don't register in the back of my lungs. But I like being liked and so this stings. I link our pinkies under the table, and you breathe, and that's fair, that's fine.

[*Edward*]

—Piers frown.  
I spent my childhood in books and papers and training, because being a King is a hard job, believe it or not. So who are these untrained mongrel men who demand that I stand from my throne and slip from my robes and trod naked to the woods, and I would do it for him, for my golden love, but not—

[*Mortimer*]

When we tell the King that he must exile  
his Piers or give up the throne, we see the  
answer unspoken on his lips, and it  
shocks us. He would rather give up his  
rule than send the bastard packing.  
This is why such fools are not made to be  
Kings.  
The queen bats her lashes at our racing  
pulse.

[*Gaveston*]

Ned:

You were not aware of the danger that  
was posed by bringing me to your side.  
Or maybe not unaware. Maybe just  
unafraid. I wish I had your courage.  
I wish you would fill me up  
over and over and over  
over and over and over again.  
They will come for me at night, I think.

[*Edward*]

— because of their words.  
His smile is like lightning striking twice;  
it seems unlikely that it would happen for  
me.  
They won't take him from me.  
I am the King, I am England, and I would  
give my kingdom for him.  
And yet, I see in their eyes the rage, and  
the glint of a dagger, and blood spilt—

[*Mortimer*]

He can't understand how  
we've done what we've done.  
But Edward is a fool in  
King's robes; he can't see a foot past his  
lips, and he has tried to kiss the common  
out of Gaveston once too often.  
The queen coughs our name when we pin  
her up against the dresser, and we  
explode into fragments.

[*Edward*]

—I am rage I am fire I am going to see  
them hanging from their necks at the tops  
of the palace towers they blow like  
banners in the wind those bodies—

[*Edward*]

—and the battle is long and hard.  
I now know what my father may have  
felt like when he died, unsuccessful in  
conquering a land that despised him.  
I have been unsuccessful in conquering  
my court, though it is not me who  
suffers. Piers is torn away from me by the  
riptide, and it's been years, years of pain.  
I scream into the hollow of my crown—

[*Gaveston*]

My King:

I could never hate you, no matter if you  
send me away or keep me, whether you  
find me clever or you spit on my boots, I  
will never see you as anything but mine.  
But Lord, I'm afraid, and when I called  
your name through a sickly scrap of  
linen, I heard nothing in response.  
The woods are full of battle cries.

I don't remember what your voice  
sounds like. I don't remember our bed.  
Did we ever even have one?

[*Gaveston*]

they cut my tongue from its root  
which is your name  
Edward

[*Mortimer*]

We have been fighting.  
It never occurred to us that this weak  
King would have so much stamina, so  
much gumption, as to take on the entirety  
of his own people, who ravage their fists  
upon his chest. He is indefatigable.  
The queen's voice is candied glass,  
peppermint bark that snaps like bone. She  
laughs into our temples and beats her  
fists.  
We lap sweat from her belly.  
She wraps us up in silken sheets and ties  
it with the cord to the curtains  
surrounding the bed.  
We are hidden. We've been good at  
hiding ever since we knew what  
motivation was.  
And Gaveston is a faraway fear, locked  
up in thoughts and laws and Edward is  
miserable and it's because of us.  
He may be King, but we did that.

[*Gaveston*]

My Life Blood:

My arms are slippery with sweat and  
swamp water.

I think I am crying I don't know it's been  
so long since I could tell what I'm feeling  
apart from loss and loneliness and terror

I live with a bag over my head  
and rope rubbed into my wrists and hair  
tangled into coils of chainmail.

It's pulling me apart from the inside out  
it it it it it it I cannot feel my fingers  
they've been put out like candle flames in  
the cold bite of winter's moss and

Maybe

I

can

be brave, maybe

I

could

hold on for you but I don't know I'm not  
really sure I haven't been sure in a while  
now

[*Edward*]

—where have you taken him??

Mortimer does not answer

Cannot answer

Does not matter

I have men and an army and the  
command of thousands of horses at my  
disposal and with one strike of my fist I  
will hunt you down I will find him and I  
will make sure you regret—

[*Mortimer*]

All the King's Blood and All the King's  
Tears, and he can't even finish.

But Gaveston is still out there, and as  
long as he still breathes, Edward still  
fights, and we can't risk that sort of  
ending much longer.

[*Edward*]

—everything.

I pray nightly. That's new.

I pray that God would see fit to return my  
love to me

but since when has God cared about  
Kings—

[*Mortimer*]

We shout at a squire and we almost want  
to run him through with our sword to see  
if we can do more than sit on a throne.

Kings are supposed to have power.

The queen's eyes are worried.



[*Gaveston*]

I'm dragged onto  
the road.  
Away from the  
heavy cover of the  
forest Ned's bright  
eyes fade into  
shadows

Wind hisses through the branches  
and it sounds like the air Ned sucks  
through his teeth when I am tracing a  
river along his clavicle with my tongue.

the dirt is cold  
it rained last night

bright bursts of gold and white  
scraped thin against my  
eyelids

there's two men here that I don't  
recognize. One of them holds me up, one  
holds a great broadsword and I think I'm  
afraid but I have always been afraid and  
this feeling is different it's almost like  
relief and the man holding the sword  
swings it above his head and I can only  
see his eyes but they do not spark like  
those of my soul and I, somehow I, I find  
the courage to stare at his face.

I am on my knees and I am  
looking at him in the face and I  
am thinking of Ned and his voice  
and his hands and there are more  
hands different hands on my back  
keeping me upright and these  
hands are not soft or warm or  
loved my throat constricts too  
much to even whisper—

This breath becomes my valediction.

[*Edward*]

—and now none of it was.  
The news comes to me in a letter, and  
isn't that funny?  
Piers would've laughed, if he didn't have  
worms encircling his teeth.