

ANDREAS: THE MAN IN THE WALLS

A VOCABULARY-BOOSTING SHORT
STORY



ERICA ABBETT

VOCABBETT

BIG WORDS MADE SIMPLE.

Andreas: The Man in the Walls - A Vocabulary-Boosting Short Story

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I’m going to do the very best I can to help you, but ultimately, the only person who can improve your vocabulary (and SAT/ACT score) is you. Please don’t sue me.

I wanted to be in her bed, but I ended up in her walls instead.

6-foot thick monstrosities built to **withstand** the most **fortified** of armies, I imagine an antisocial **hermit** could live quite comfortably within them, **scurrying** through **dank** passageways to keep the fires lit for the royal family.

Unfortunately, I am neither antisocial nor a hermit. At least, I wasn't twenty years ago. But low ceilings and a life in darkness have taken their **toll**. My arms remain capable — how could they not, when I do little but carry firewood? — but my broad shoulders have crumbled inward, and my head no longer rests proudly above my back.

Ah, how the **follies** of our youth shape our lives. But this is God's amusement: youth is wasted on the young.

It all began with the **dirndl**. There is a terrible power coiled in those strings; they transform even the **homeliest** of shapes into Venus-worthy curves.

But here, again, I am distracted. Let me begin once more.

My father was a gardener at the castle. **Perched** high atop the cliffs, one cannot buy a loaf of bread without setting eyes upon it. My father's position was one of great importance, even if society did not recognize it as such, for flowers were woven into the castle's history.

Withstand - Remain undamaged by; resist

Fortified - Provided with defensive measures as a protection against attack

Hermit - A person living in solitude, traditionally for religious reasons

Scurrying - Moving hurriedly in short, quick steps

Dank - Unpleasantly damp and musty

Toll - The cost or damage resulting from something

Follies - Acts of foolishness

Dirndl - A dress with a full skirt and close-fitting bodice

Homeliest - Extremely unattractive

Perched - Situated above something else

You see, the archbishop who **revitalized** the castle, transforming it from a **utilitarian** fortress into the beauty it is today, was so in love with petunias that he hid 58 stone carvings of the flowers throughout the castle grounds.

I've never seen any, of course, but **presumably** such sculptures are placed on the *other* side of the walls.

When I was eight, my father began bringing me to the castle. He was training me to be his successor, and even knowing what I do now, I still smile when I think on those years. In my memory, I did little but draw beauty from the earth and admire the beauty of the princess.

She and I were companions. Oh, yes, the son of a gardener and the daughter of a king! Her governess would take her on walks through the gardens and, high-spirited as she was, she would escape.

One day she found me pruning a hedge, and after I (quite accidentally) nearly **decapitated** her, then nearly died of fear myself, we became friends, slipping away to play childish games. Her governess didn't mind. Not really.

By the time we were old enough for such games to become inappropriate, society was far too concerned with the weather to care that a peasant and a princess were falling in love — for in the summer of my 13th year, summer did not come. Not long enough for the flowers to bloom or the crops to grow, at least.

The king sent for hot-house flowers from Italy. We **contrived subtle enclosures** and small, hidden fires to keep the gardens **vibrant**. It was the start of my fire-setting days, though I did not know it at the time.

Revitalized - Brought back to life; gave new life

Utilitarian - Designed to be useful or practical rather than attractive

Presumably - Something that is likely, but not certain

Decapitated - Cut off the head

Contrived - Made-up; invented

Subtle - Delicately complex or understated

Enclosures - An area sealed off by a natural or artificial barrier

Vibrant - Bright; lively

By my 14th summer, I still knew little of life outside the castle and our modest cottage in the village, but I knew the world was not as it should be. Each morning, my father looked anxiously out the window, praying the snows would melt. When a fine layer still covered the earth by mid-May, my father announced that it would be another “lean” year.

And throughout it all, I was too busy considering how to win Princess Maria’s hand to worry about something as trivial as starvation. What is food compared to love?

Maria was **betrothed** already, of course. She had been since birth, promised to some German **princeling** called Otto. She was no more enthused than I was, but when summer did not come for a third year, everything changed.

Father was dismissed as palace gardener. We joined the masses in the bread lines, sleeping with vocal bellies and fear for the day to come. I should have been wiser then. I should’ve seen how quickly life can change, how it can snatch your dreams and your love with no **remorse**.

And yet, I merely saw it as an obstacle, a nuisance preventing me from joining Maria in the gardens. It was as though, if I could only find my way back to the castle and those sun-filled summers, all would be right again.

That’s when it happened. A position arose within the castle — not a **coveted** position, mind you, but the wages were good, and in my **naïveté**, I saw nothing but opportunity.

When I heard I’d be living in the castle walls, I did not think of the rats or the hours I’d **toil** in a smoke-filled haze. I saw only opportunity, a chance to return to the joys I once had.

Betrothed - Engaged; promised to be married

Princeling - A young prince

Remorse - Regret; shame

Coveted - Envied; desired

Naïveté - Lack of experience, wisdom, or judgement

Toil - Work extremely hard, often at something unpleasant

I knew I'd **seldom** see the sun, but considered it a fair trade, considering I'd be closer to my love than ever before. I'd have every reason to be in the castle, in rooms most servants never see, since I'd be tending the fires.

I saw her again. Oh, yes, for two blissful years I saw her. We played games of all sorts as I tended the castle, free as a prince but with a slightly more **labyrinthine bailiwick**.

Tossing notes over hot embers, we scheduled **assignations**, exchanged scraps poetry, for she had taught me to read all those years ago. Once she asked to see what it was like behind the walls, squealing as she saw a mouse, then squealing again as I swooped her up to protect her.

It's been eighteen years now. Eighteen years since she was sent to Germany, a walking treaty to **stave** off conflict between two old men.

She wept when she left, leaving me a stack of books as a final goodbye. They are all I have to remember her by. That, and a fireplace grown cold.

Seldom - Rarely

Labyrinthine - Maze-like

Bailiwick - Sphere of operations or interest

Assignations - Secret appointments, typically made by lovers

Stave (off) - Avert or delay

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