

Michelle L.

Crown

“GLORY TO THE CROWN!”

The masses in front of me were rampant, unwavering. Their voices shatter the silence, rejoicing in what felt like a term of change. It had been years since someone new had risen into succession. This bitter, cold nation that was doomed to collapse.

My gaze fell to the crowd as I saw wispy fingers tightly grasp their children, starved. Clutching my arm, I felt the silk fabric loom between my palms. I chuckled at this unsuited gown that swaddled the aches of limbs, embracing the burdening jeweled crown as I stood on this pedestal. Shutting my eyes, I vividly remembered how everything unfolded that summer night two years ago.

All sounds — any murmur — faded. Time had become a blur as if the connection between me and the rest of the world was severed. Distraught by the dense smoke filling in what felt like the entire capacity of my lungs, I run out, slamming my hand against the wall as a means of stability.

I had lived on the outskirts of the nation of Lucrecia with my mother, father, and baby brother. Heavily influenced by the system of hierarchy and power, we fell steep. Only those with the impish royal blood was capable of dominance. Even then, our rulers were cruel and heartless. They couldn't care less about their people that suffered each day, barely getting by. Blinded by greed, the nation would eventually fall to ruin. We all expected it. Despite the brutal world that immersed me, I was content with life, until now.

My vision came to the floor, staring at the lifeless body of my father, shielding my brother. The roof had collapsed, smothering and entangling both of them in ashes. I felt my entire spine lunge back, hiccuping as my nerves went into consternation.

A nightmare.

Only then had I remembered my mother. Trembling in shaky, violent gasps, I gave way from my limbs. An indescribable twinge continued to linger from the blackened mist that consumed me.

Was this how I was going to die?

The only grasp I had was that life would never be the same again. In the distance, I heard voices shout unintelligible words.

This wasn't an accident.

Mustering all the strength left within me, I went to search for my mother. I couldn't bear to lose the only person I had left in this bleak prospect of a world. Treading slowly, I dragged my feet along the pavement, feeling the burning embers that snowflaked down and bruised me.

I felt numb.

Turning the corner, I saw my mother collapsed on the floor. I was at a loss for words. I felt my face grow warm as my vision gradually became blurry. Immediately, I ran towards her crumbled body.

"Bea, run..." she whispered.

Hearing it come from her mouth made it real. I truly was going to lose everyone I loved tonight. Her broken tone and form, she wasn't the same compelling, and independent person that I knew. I denied it. I didn't want her final moments like this.

"Mom, why!? Please get up, please don't leave me alone here!"

The answer remained constant, a pounding, *no*. Instead, she gave a solemn smile in response.

She then muttered, "Bea, you're the King's daughter. He wants you-"

Interrupted by a battered cough, she meekly mouthed, *gone*.

I was spiraling. I didn't know what she meant; I didn't *want* to know. Anguish and fury welled up in a way I didn't think was possible. I wanted to scream or shout at someone or anyone! Point fingers and call the case closed.

But I couldn't.

I was all alone now. Again, the unintelligible words afar grew near.

"SEARCH EVERY ROOM, MAKE SURE THERE ARE NO SURVIVORS!"

It was the muffled voice of the men from what sounded like the empire. I turned away from my mother. Pinching myself for being a pathetic daughter who couldn't return anything to my family, my only support. Laying upon her stained cinder face, was a small grin.

It was that night that I lost everyone I held dear to me. I became a fugitive in hiding, with a flourishing animosity towards humanity. Had anyone had compassion towards my family, maybe none of this would've happened. It was then that I overtook this bitter nation, murdered my comrades and blood, only for the means of revenge. Maybe my family wasn't the only thing that I've lost that night. Perhaps I've lost myself that day as well.

Closing my eyes, I silence the thousands of thoughts and memories.