

His memory faltered again, failing to remember what had only begun. Royal meetings were such a drag to him. As the second prince of his country, it was his duty to learn all he could as the current heir of the entire kingdom. The advisors droned on about topics that often bored him, so he took to fidgeting with his thick brown hair. He fiddled with the locks that fell beside his face, drifting off to daydream. But before he could seek peace his name was called out, snapping him back to reality. "August, are you listening to me?" The prince felt his chest tightening as he fixed his posture in habit.

August ran over a quick mental note before stammering his answer to the impatient advisor. "Y-yes sir Hadrian," he cleared his throat. "Please continue," Hadrian rubbed the bridge of his nose, clearly annoyed with August's attempt. His advisor continued on with topics of his lost brother and the results of many search parties that were sent out to find him. And while August personally could care less about his brother, everyone in the palace was on edge. After their father had announced that August would be his heir, his elder brother, Francis, had protested greatly. And August wished he could forget the day.

*The sun was high in the sky when Francis, August, and their younger twin siblings Felix and Fleur were summoned to their father's throne room. "My children, the time has come to name one of you heir to the kingdom. For my time is limited in this world and when I depart to the next, one of you must take up the heavy weight of the crown." Their father had stood, the lush brown hair falling ever so gracefully. "Your mother was a fine woman, and should she have been here with us today, she would have been proud of all of you for being the perfect princes and princess. Now..." he paused for a moment to step down from the large throne to be on the same level as them all. "It is with great honor that I bestow the role of heir..." August had heard Francis take a breath in, no doubt also puffing out his chest. But what captivated him most was when their father approached him, and placed his hand on August's shoulder. "... to you August. You are a born leader, I have seen it in the way you act and the way you treat others around you." Their father pulled him in for a hug. "I leave my throne, my crown, and the kingdom all to you. When I pass on, you will be the new king of Foadon."*

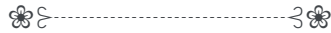
*Their father pulled away, a wide smile on his face. All August felt was pride, along with the heavy weight of fear. But his feelings did not last long.*

*Francis turned to them both, face seething with jealousy and another emotion, one August could not place. But August knew that his brother was not going to congratulate him. Instead, Francis bowed and addressed the king. "Father, may I speak to you for a moment?" And the king had agreed to speak with Francis, both striding off to a private room whilst August was busy thanking his younger siblings for their congratulations. But his worry grew as he stared at the closed door his father and brother spoke behind. And it was not long before the muffled almost silent mumbles turned to shouts.*

Francis left that very evening, riding into the sunset on his steed and white cape flowing in the winds. Everyone in the court had repeatedly warned August that he would be back someday to take the throne he saw as rightfully his. And August worried every day, drifting off into horrible fantasies that clouded his emerald eyes. Fleur would always attempt to cheer him up, while Felix always asked to spar him while he wasn't busy with learning how to rule an entire kingdom. August knew they were just trying to distract him from his thoughts and while he had never told them both, he was always grateful that they were there. "Prince August Foadon!" August snapped back to reality once more, facing the angry glare of thin blue eyes from Hadrian. "Need I remind you that your brother is likely out planning a dangerous coup? You must be prepared should he or an assassin attack at any moment."

This time, August audibly groaned and slumped into his desk chair. "Yes sir Hadrian... but if my brother is to attack, should I not be out sparring with the Crown's Guard? Or Felix?" August fixed his posture once again, his emerald eyes pleading the advisor to release him.

Hadrian stared down at the prince and finally relented. "Very well. However, please review the reports before you go to bed. As the crown prince you still have a say in where our defenses should be strengthened." as Hadrian turned to leave, August waved him off before gazing at the sky. The sun was almost setting, enough time for a single sparring session with his brother.



Felix jabbed at him one more time, but not before August could parry and sink his brother's wooden blade into the grass below. Pointing his own practice weapon to the other's neck, it was clear that the battle was won. "Darn. And I even had Hadrian teach me a few moves in an attempt to finally beat you." Felix laughed, August lowering his blade and smiling.

"Hadrian is an old codger who is all rules and no fun. The best way to learn is by facing the unknown and diving headfirst into the sea." August said, playfully punching his brother and laughing. "But you are getting a lot better. You might be better than Francis ever was!" They both laughed before falling into silence.

Felix sat on the grass, looking up into the darkening skies. "If that's the case then, I'll always be here to protect you from him. He won't get past me or the Crown Guard!" August chuckled at the gesture and ruffled Felix's dark hair. With Francis gone, Felix was to become the new head of the Crown Guard once he became of age. He was so young but so ready to face the future. August was happy for him.

"You'll be a great advisor Felix. You're so ready to face what's ahead and I admire you for that." August admitted, sitting down beside him.

Felix laughed. "And you'll be an amazing king August. I mean, you already put up with Hadrian on a daily basis so you have to be doing something right to stay this sane." They both burst out into laughter, their voices echoing across the courtyard. Felix stood up and helped August as well. "Dinner should be ready soon. We should probably get-" he was cut off by the sounds of a bell. They both whipped their heads around to face the sound, but this was not the church bells that had rung minutes ago. These were the warning chimes.

August and Felix shared a look of alarm before rushing to the palace doors, bursting them open and racing through the hallways. They both saw pools of blood forming under two guards lying on the floor. They were clearly dead. August had no time to process what was going on, the fear and adrenaline took over as he tapped his brother's shoulders. "F-Felix.. Felix go find Fleur! Find her and you need to protect your sister!" August shouted, but Felix was merely shocked, he just stood there frozen.

“FELIX!” August yelled, even louder so that Felix could snap back to reality. “Go find Fleur!” Felix was shaking, but he nodded as he ran off to the main staircase. August looked down an adjacent hallway and saw more dying or unconscious guards. He took a steel blade from one of the armor suits in the hall and ran down to chase the intruder.

He then realized while running that this was no ordinary path. Whoever broke into the palace, knew the palace well. And this path leads straight to the throne room. August closed in on the heavy door before bursting into Hadrian and his father dueling two figures. One he recognized as the white cape of his brother and the other, an unknown person clothed in dark robes, but still giving Hadrian a hard time. Hadrian and his opponent took notice of him entering the room. “Sire! Please! You must escape! Your brother-” Hadrian began, but he could not finish. The wails of the king echoed throughout the throne room as everyone turned to the other pair. Francis had his sword plunged directly into the king’s chest. His face was shrouded in that unknown emotion, but it was mixed with sick pride.

August stared in horror as his father fell to the floor, Francis reeling his sword back to let the king’s body fall. Hadrian kicked his opponent in the knee, falling back to where August was standing. And Francis turned to face August and Hadrian. “You,” he pointed his sword at August, blood still dripping from the tainted blade. “You are the last obstacle to getting what I deserve.” August reeled from the malice in his elder brother’s voice, legs shaking as his brother walked towards him and Hadrian.

Hadrian stepped in front of August, preventing Francis from advancing any further. “You will not-” But Francis only shoved the knight to the ground and Hadrian, too weak to resist, could not stand under the pressure of the prince’s grasp.

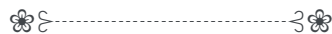
“You will stay down,” Francis said coldly, as the robed figure came forward to press their blade against Hadrian’s neck. “Or you can die at the hands of my companion here.” Francis then faced August again, and the second prince stared in fear.

“What... are you going to-” August could not get a single word out after that before his cheek was cut by Francis’ sword. August dropped his sword in horror and he backed up. “F-Franci-” But his elder brother would not listen. He only struck August again, and again, and again, knocking the prince backwards until he hit a pyre. August

screamed in pain as the combination of hot fire and oil burned his skin. But Francis did not seem to care.

The elder prince raised his sword and smiled, plunging his sword into the floor. August closed his eyes and braced for the searing pain but it never came. He opened his eye and saw Hadrian above him. His brother's sword flying through the air and clattering against the floor. However, the robed figure approached them fast. Hadrian grabbed August's arm and ran out the palace gates. "Hadrian no! Felix-

"Will be alright! He's a smart boy and your sister is too stubborn to die! They'll escape!" Hadrian interjected, running as fast as he could out into the main city. "This is a battle we can not hope to win right now sire! Your father is dead, and that robed figure has some strange powers. We can only focus on our escape!" August ran beside Hadrian with disbelief. Tears started to well up in his left eye, as everything began to sink in. His father was dead, his home was gone, and he was a prince on the run.



The sun rose on a misty morning, the highlands of Foadon whispered as the morning breezes shook the grasses. August could only sit in the small open field that he and Hadrian had taken up shelter in for the night. Sleeping under the stars would have been nice, if only their lives did not hang in the balance. Hadrian had said that Francis would likely send search and destroy parties after them, made up of elite soldiers that could give them trouble. And with August still being injured...

The young prince shook his head as he stood up and looked back at the sleeping knight. Though he hated to give into paranoia, it was the only thing keeping them alive at the moment. August moved to wake Hadrian from his slumber, silently shaking his shoulder until he stirred awake. "What... time is it.." The silver-haired knight asked, adjusting his glasses and seeing the dawn on the horizon. Hadrian jolted upward and shook off any notice of being exhausted in true knightly fashion. "My Lord, we must go. There is a village nearby, hopefully we will be able to procure cloaks and medical attention."

August only silently nodded before looking away in despair, hand instinctively moving to touch the right side of his face. The skin still burned, scarred and throbbing. His eye was shut, too scared to open it and cause further damage. Letting Hadrian lead the way, August followed in his footsteps, being careful as to not draw attention to himself. His clothes were wrinkled, ruined, and tattered from that night. Once they had made it out of the city gates, they did not stop running until they were sure Francis would not follow. He was always a man to send others after people he saw as bugs, and it would take some time to gain the loyalty of the remaining armies. *He intends to rule by fear.* August let that thought pass through his mind, gripping at his heart and causing guilt to wash over his body.

The prince was brought back to reality by Hadrian stopping him in his tracks. "Wait. There is a house up ahead." The knight nodded his head towards the horizon, and sure enough distance away there was a small house in the trees. "Please wait here, under the brush. I will go and make sure it is safe to approach." Hadrian gently guided August down under the cover of the various plants before quickly walking away, leaving August alone with his thoughts.

Sure enough, the prince felt anxiety swell up in his gut again, thinking of all the possible ways this could go wrong. *What if he is killed? Francis is smart, he would know where we went. Those people could be on his side, we could be sent back. I'd be executed and so would Hadrian. Some heir I was. Father would know what to do. What do I do if Hadrian doesn't come back?* August closed his eye and pushed back tears. He had to be strong, especially now. If Francis knew they were there then they were as good as dead. August opened his eye as he heard footsteps. Panic replaced the anxiety as he froze on the forest floor, hand slowly moving towards his mouth to stifle his breathing. He braced for the worst until the figure's shadow fell over him.

"My Lord, it is safe to approach and- are you alright my Prince?" Hadrian's familiar voice filled August with relief. The prince let out a deep breath he was holding in, heart racing so fast and adrenaline pumping throughout his body.

He stood up and faced his last loyal knight. "I am alright Hadrian. I thought you were an enemy soldier who had found me." August laughed off the situation and moved

towards the house, Hadrian following close behind. August could not see his face, but the knight's aura radiated with suspicion as they both drew closer.

August could see an older man with a young girl waiting at the entrance. Upon seeing him, both their faces turned to shock. Potentially at his wealthy clothes, but also potentially toward his burnt face that had yet to receive treatment. The girl ran up to them, and August was not prepared for it. "Ah, sorry to impose on you all but-" He was stopped short by the girl as she grabbed his arm and dragged him towards the house.

Compared to him, August was surprised at how strong she was. "Enough talk, your companion has already filled us in on the basics. We heard of a coup being planned in the forest not too long ago, but that is the least of my worries." They were inside the house now, August being dragged towards a chair in the middle of the room and forced to sit down. "Your face needs treatment right away. Father will be preparing food soon, and you'll need extra clothes. You can't walk around towns looking like you do or you will be spotted and executed on the spot." August was shocked at the girl's punctuality, and when she turned to him with a smile he could only sit there in awe. She was on top of everything. The older man walked in not too long after, talking with Hadrian in a deep mumble.

August sat as still as he could, the girl beginning to treat his face with herbs and bandaging it up. He lost track of what she was doing as he lost himself in his thoughts again. The worries only came back no matter how much he pushed them away. He was so lost that he hadn't realized the girl had finished until she said that she'd only be a room away. August grazed the bandage that blinded his eye, his skin underneath sensitive to the sensation. His heart dropped a little again, but not before a thick cloak was wrapped around his form. "Hadrian." He whispered instinctively, looking up at the knight who had donned a similar fashion.

Hadrian only smiled kindly as he closed the cloak, leaving August's expensive clothes hidden from view. "We will be able to purchase new clothes in the next town over, these cloaks should clear us of suspicion." He commented, before sitting down adjacent to the prince. "The girl who treated you, Rania, she wanted you to see something before we leave. She's out back, you should see her before we eat." Hadrian

pulled out a small notebook and a map from his cloak, nodding to August before focusing on the papers in hand.

The prince rose from his chair without much word and traversed the house, passing through a few rooms and a small kitchen before arriving at the back of the house. Taking him by surprise, he saw an impressive flower garden, full of vibrancy and color as he passed by many different plants. They were all meticulously planted, he could tell. Only the royal gardens could compare to this impressive display. He glanced around before seeing Raina kneeling over a small patch and walked towards her.

Raina looked over her shoulder, hearing his footsteps no doubt. "My prince, thanks for coming out here."

August shook his head. "It was no trouble. Your garden is lovely. The colors and flowers are all so gorgeous." He spoke the truth, he felt at home here strangely.

Raina laughed, clearly flustered as she pushed her hair back behind her ears. "Thank you. I was thinking that, with all that you have been through... well..." She paused, and then smiled brightly. "Things will be tough, so I thought that you could use a bit of hope for the journey ahead." She looked out across the garden. "Looking at the flowers makes me happy. And taking care of them makes me happy too. I hope that one day, every corner of the kingdom will have pretty gardens like this one."

August smiled as he looked out across the garden again, taking in it's ethereal beauty. Until he heard Raina's father and Hadrian call from the house. "It seems that food is finally prepared, we should go eat." He noted, starting to walk towards the house with Raina. "And... Thank you Raina. I promise that we'll make things right."

They both walked indoors to food freshly prepared. August was not used to food customs outside the palace. It was a little awkward eating but he tried his best to look good in front of his hosts. They talked a bit more afterwards, planning out routes and towns to go to. They all collectively agreed that the safest place to be at this time would be the Ja'lanta Kingdom. A coastal kingdom that had good connections with the late king of Foadon. And soon August and Hadrian were preparing to leave for the next town over. If they wanted to get there they would need to begin their journey sooner rather than later. After all, with them being so close to the capital city, they put themselves at risk of being caught.

Raina had run off as they were beginning to leave, and August wondered if there was something wrong. But she returned not long after, holding a white lily in her hands. "Here, my prince." She placed the lily into his hair, held up by what looked like a barrette and green string. "I have cast a simple spell on the flower, one that won't make it wilt or die as you travel." She smiled. "This way, you can carry a small bit of hope with you as you go."

August nodded in thanks, Hadrian calling out to him from the frontside of the house. "I must take my leave now. Thank you for your hospitality." He waved goodbye and ran to catch up with his knight. He found that his worries were all but forgotten as they walked along the beaten path, hoods of their cloaks up over their heads as they travelled to the main path. Things will get better, August resolved to make things right.