

# Teachings of the Crown

*Written by Haley Joyce*

Under my cloak, my elbows and wrists push forward through the endless crowds packed into the Kingdom's square. I have only one block further, but the relentless energy in the air makes my fist tighten so deep my nails dig into the skin.

My instinct to not be seen itches, but no one is looking at little nobodies today, no. Today the poor and rich look at people much grander.

I sneak through a mother and her children and inch my way to the sided streets to escape the square as quickly as possible. To watch the poor pine over the rich makes me sick.

A few of them are yelling names I choose to not fully digest now, but I was trained to know them all by heart anyhow.

The day is almost done as the sun passes over the buildings and the peasant folk are still out trying to get a glimpse at the Entries. Tomorrow the streets will be even more filled once the Entires wake up in their warm and lavish beds, and step out in front of us dressed in all their riches and glory. What a sight *they* will be indeed.

The day the Entires line up in from of the Castle to pledge themselves to the crown is one that hasn't happened in a hundred years. It is the most sacred day

of our Kingdom, the one where we choose our next immortal King or Queen, to stand alone at one of our four domains. Of course, there is still a year before anyone gets the crown, for the crown must be earned in blood and sweat.

Bells ring as I get deeper into my more familiar streets, away from the busy castle square. These are the grimy, cobblestone streets that have become a twisted version of a home. I pass the avenue with bakery treats that is still bright and filled with colored signs of purple, green and red and make my way deeper.

My black cloak the starts on the top of my head and goes down to my toes is brushing against the lightly wet stones under my dusty boots. I use one hand to lift up the bottom and the other to secure its hood encloses most of my features. This dress will mean nothing to me soon, so it matters less.

The same streets with the same worn out roofs and promiscuous signage make me glance around as I continue on. My feet don't falter but I look around in a quirky, awe way. I can't be feeling a nostalgia for this place this soon!

When I returned here three years ago I was still young at with only 15 years counted. From when I was little nothing had changed except the anxiety of feeling of being watched, and I particularly don't want to be seen.

The small streets still twist and turn every few blocks, almost with no path in mind. If one wasn't from here they would either lose themselves in the maze or run into just the right person to lock them away forever.

The back streets still draw out shady figures from the shadows and pull them off the cobblestones into the warm shops of any fucked up fantasy they could dream.

My fantasy is being as far away from here as possible, but it is not my duty to rely on blurry, impossible fantasies. Reality is much easier to grasp.

I scurry up close to the swinging violet sign reading *Ellor's Shining Jewels* and brush off the dust that's gathered on my cloak. I grab the door and a DING rings in the air. I step in and just like usual, a spread of glass boxes holds the most precious and rare jewels in all the realm.

Gently, I walk in still my cloak wrapped over my long chestnut hair and keep my head down. I already know a young girl stands in Ellor's place at this time of morning. Her name is unimportant and unknowable, and thanks to the Jeweler,

she stands practiced and quiet.

She was expecting me and I slither through towards her at the desk, just to check my surroundings. All is clear, and I gather to the crimson desk where I glance up just enough so she can detect my eyes. She was told by another girl of Ellor to look for the girl with brown eyes with a delicate rim of yellow surrounding them. It not an obvious trait unless they look deep into my eyes, which I usually try and avoid.

The young girl, who is a bright blonde with brighter blue eyes makes a *mhm* sound and escapes to the back room for minute longer than I would like. She returns and I notice her age is so young she could be a younger sister of mine, perhaps less than the age I moved here.

My eyes droop for just a second before I remember why I am here, and why *she* is here.

She pulls from behind her back a black cloth in the form of a wrapping. As she sits it on the table, delicately opening it for me to see sweat dots my back and neck. I'm not sure why it has taken me up until now to feel the tightness growing in my breath and my muscles, but her I am with this poor girl losing it.

She continues to unwrap and out of impulse I reach for her wrist.

Looking startled her head jumps up staring at me with fear twisting in her watering eyes. She thinks I am done with her services. Done with her life.

I let go whispering, "I trust what I ordered is there" and I reach into my dress pockets and pull out what now is hers. "Here."

I grab her hand again and slip into it a small bottle that encapsulates the end of the life Ellor's girls once knew.

"Wait at least one more new moon from today." The bottle disappears into her ragged dress. "Slip it into a nighttime tea, and no one will question." Before she has a chance to thank me I slip the cloth into my pockets and the hear the DING ring again.

The streets are empty still and I hear a couple fighting above from the taller levels. I step further out a child practically runs over my foot yelling, "They are arriving!".

*They* as in the other three Rulers of our realm. They have arrived, and soon,