

The Rewrite - Tiana, Year 9, NSW

“Got the gun?”

The guy shifts, paling slightly as he realises the weight of what he’s about to do. Finally, he extracts a small pistol from the inside of his blazer. His fingers tremble as he lays it in my palm. Well, he *is* carrying out an illegal weapons exchange in broad daylight.

“Sweet,” I say, turning it over. “How much ammunition’s in her?”

“I don’t know,” the guy stammers. His voice has shrunk to a timid whisper. I stare intimidatingly at him. “At— at least ten bullets, I-I don’t have backup, s-sorry...”

I throw him an unimpressed look, but tuck it into my belt. Ten— more than enough to pull it off. “Alright.” Then I pull out his sole motive, money. God, are these humans so... I search for the right word, clicking my tongue – *greedy*.

You see, money’s almost insignificant in my time. Everyone’s trying to help each other heal. We all understand each other’s pain from the War.

I pull out a thick wad of cash from my annoying, unnecessarily frilly Princess dress. Each note is emblazoned with an unfortunate picture of ex-Queen Camellia, where she’s smiling inanely and showing off her horse teeth. Frankly, I’m surprised the Royal Press hasn’t started churning out pictures of the *new* monarch yet.

“T-Thanks,” the guy mumbles, and then he retreats into the shadows, running back down the hallways so that he can pretend he was somewhere else when I carry out *The Rewrite*. Fantastically, it’s all going to plan so far.

I strut in the opposite direction, rolling my shoulders back. Absent-mindedly, I pat my hair. I’m still getting used to it... *I* don’t suffocate my hair in a ponytail that literally reassembles your hairline, but Princess Amber does. *Her* hair is long and glossy, and cascades past my shoulders.

Suddenly— “Excuse me?” a servant questions timidly, walking in swift, small steps as to not overtake me, yet keep up. (Another bogus “Royal” etiquette?) Her voice is filled with nervous electricity - she fires words out in short, sharp breaths. “Princess Amber - with all due respect, it’s your *sister’s coronation* today, and you’re *not properly dressed yet*.”

She shrinks underneath my surveying gaze, but attempts a tense smile anyway. I smile back, making sure to show off my sharp canines. Poor Princess Amber: she’s going to have a tarnished reputation immediately following *The Rewrite*.

“Riiiiight,” I say to the maid. “Thanks n’ all, uh...?”

Her face drops. “It’s... Clarice, Princess.” Yikes, maybe she was friendly with the real Princess Amber. It doesn’t matter anyway. I’m not staying in Amber’s form for much longer.

“Right,” I repeat. “Well, Claire – thanks and stuff for your, er, concern, an’ all–”

She looks even more worried. “Princess - do forgive me, but you sound strange, almost like a street ruffian!”

Oops... “Sorry,” I say, in a posher voice. I had completely let my real accent slip in. (Charming to be called a *street ruffian*, isn’t it? I suppose that’s not far from the truth, really...) “And thank you for your concern, Clementine–” she opens her mouth slightly – “I’ll just change for Valentine’s coronation now, shall I?”

“The Queen’s Reigning Speech is in five minutes,” she whimpers, voice close to tears.

“Awesome,” I say supportively. Her eyebrows knit together, confused... shoot, is that not a word yet? “I mean, er - *bril-li-ant*.” I twist my words into the complicated shapes of a typical Cerrtian accent. (The attempt is awful. Knew I should have spent more time practicing it.) “Anyway, Clarissa – maybe you should change for the Coronation, too?”

Pointedly, I widen my eyes at her vomit-green dress. It resembles a deflated balloon. I personally don’t know whether it’s in fashion or not – didn’t bother to research that – but the comment nonetheless sends her running.

Then I turn the corner and rush towards the window facing the streets outside. I press my face against the glass, fogging it up. Any moment now, my ‘sister’ Valentine should be delivering her speech to the entire Kingdom, before going down Ainsley Avenue in a fancy-schmancy horsedrawn carriage, waving as she goes down the street, her happy dimpled face cheered on by onlookers as the Kingdom reveres their new Queen.

Except... they’re not going to receive a new Queen.

Oh, *no*. Not on *my* watch.

I take a breath. I lift my horrible, poofy dress up and kick the window. It shatters. Then I jump down into the flowerbed, brushing glass shards off myself as I stalk inside the Coronation Courtyard. My eyes flick up to the massive balcony my ‘sister’ is perched on, her intricate golden dress conveying her Royal status. Her hair is done up in a massive hairdo with dandelion-yellow ribbons. She waves graciously to her subjects with a gloved hand, watching carefully as the massive clock ticks, ticks, ticks...

It ticks to eight o’ clock exactly, and she clears her throat.

“People of Cerrtia!” she calls, in a loud, confident voice, and the people cheer so loudly my ears hurt.

“Move, please,” I mutter under my breath, shoving through the crowd.

“I am the next Virborne Daughter to take this throne, and your next Queen!”

I carefully keep my head down and shove my way to the stairs on the other side of the courtyard, almost tripping over someone’s shoes on the way. I mumble an apology. The crowd is too occupied with roaring their approval to care.

She raises her arms in the typical Virborne pose, forming a V shape with them. I’ve seen monarchs do it in history books, but after Queen Valentine, no-one does it anymore. No-one wants to remember those days. “To rule over you – you, my glorious, proud people – is all I could ever want.”

Except that’s a lie, isn’t it? She got greedy. She got *mean*.

I come face-to-face with the guard blocking the staircase. He nods at me – nods at Princess Amber’s face – and shifts aside. I start to climb the staircase, face flushed with anticipation. As I do, my mind shifts back to the real Princess Amber. The poor lady is tied up in the closet of her own bedroom. Kidnapping her was tricky, but at least shapeshifting into her was simple enough. Apart from all her freckles, which were exceedingly annoying to get right. (And yes, I’ve been feeding her, I’m not *barbaric*.)

I’m brought back by the sound of Valentine’s voice again.

“So thank you...” Yep, she’s definitely been practicing how her voice will get choked with emotion, how it’ll stagger on the word *you*. A tear comes to her eye. She’s laying it on thick. “Thank you for accepting your Queen.”

Her voice vibrates with fake emotion, and the people *scream* for her, cheering so loudly that I’m getting a piercing headache. They’ll be screaming in a, um, “different” way in a few years. I look out at her from a balcony across from her, squinting.

“And,” she says, voice reverberating throughout the whole Kingdom, “I promise that I will lead us to the *great new age!*” She raises her voice to what’s almost a shriek, and the people shriek right back at her.

I take the gun out of my belt, whistling as I lean it on the balcony railing, crouching.

Queen Valentine watches the gathering erupt before quickly regaining attention with the final words of every Queen’s reign speech, her words ancient and customary, repeating the echoes of promises made by past Queens:

“Welcome to the Age of the Eighth, the Age of Queen Valentine!”

She’s half-right. It will be the Age of the Eighth, but it will *not* be remembered as the Age of Queen Valentine. It will be known as the Terror Age. As I aim, my concentration locked on her wide, emerald eyes, I start to feel a little bad. After all, she is just... *seventeen*. On the cusp of adulthood. And she looks so joyful to be Queen.

But then I remember the future version of Queen Valentine: a corrupted, wretched monarch, forever mutilated by the phantoms of her cruel decisions. With that terrifying image, I starkly remember that *The Rewrite – the Rewrite of Cerrtian History* – the event I’ve been planning for my entire life – must be carried out.

Queen Valentine, after all, is the Queen infamous for terrifying and traumatising her subjects, shipping half of the Kingdom off to war in foreign countries, and ordering thousands more to be put to death.

She’s the reason I grew up hungry. She’s the reason my home city fell. I grit my teeth, adjusting my aim. *She’s the reason why my sisters have no parents.*

It’s that Queen I remember, the terrible Blood Queen, when I fire the shot.

...And rewrite history.