

The Crown

Flash Fiction

by

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I rip the knife out of the man's chest, entranced by the glaze of blood on the blade. The woman lying next to him lets out her last sobbing breath. Her diamond necklace surrenders without a fight, and I pocket it along with the wad of bills her husband tried to use as ransom.

The thrill of the kill wore off months ago. But I can't stop.

I need help. My brilliant self-advice comes too late. Revealing my dark side to a shrink will get me thrown in prison for life. I deserve the death penalty. I fear burning in hell.

Hearing sirens screech, I peer down the alley toward the flashing lights in the distance. Coming for me, as anticipated.

I wipe the flat blade across the corpse to remove the blood before sheathing the knife. Then I run. Hard and fast. To the end of the alley, onto a back street, through a maze of buildings. The sirens cease their wailing. Police are no doubt inspecting my gory artwork.

God, I'm evil. I'm sorry. Help me.

Not a chance. I'm hopeless. Stopping to catch my breath, I remove my frayed, black bandana. After refolding the cloth, I tie it on snug and let it sop up my sweat. My fear.

Suck it up, Dirtbag. I amble casually down the sidewalk, like I own the night.

A dude in jeans and a hoodie, leaning against a doorway, nods as if he knows me. His hand clasps the single strap of a backpack. “Hey.”

“Hey.” I slow as I pass by, looking him up and down.

Leaving the doorway, he edges over and walks beside me. My height. My build. A goatee like mine. He smells like the soap I wash with every night to remove traces of my victims. *Brother* crosses my mind. But I have no family.

Weird. I should feel wary, but nothing about him threatens me. “Do I know you?”

The hooded brother grins, his gaze more intense than the females I’ve taken to bed. “My father sent me. He knows you.”

All the old men I’ve ever met parade through my mind. None stand out.

His elbow bumps my arm. “Hungry?”

The inside pocket of my jacket bulges with the wad of stolen money. Sweat seeps below my bandana. “I’m broke.”

“I’ve got it covered.” Opening his backpack, the brother takes out a whole loaf of bread, breaks it, and hands me half.

Dang. A mouthwatering aroma overwhelms me. The stuff is grandma-baked fresh and still warm. “Where’d you steal this gold from?”

His laughter makes me feel like family. “It’s mine. My father’s generous, ya know?”

No. But I want to know.

The vibes my new friend gives off are just plain good. Can’t explain it. Virtuous? Worthy? Both inferior descriptions. All I know is, I never want to hurt him. Or lose him.

He reaches in his pack then holds out a small bottle. “Drink?”

He’s got that covered, too? “I owe ya.”

“It’s free.”

Weird. Accepting the bottle, I screw off the cap and take a whiff. “Wine?”

“It’s kosher.”

One sip teases my tongue with both bitter and sweet. Goes well with the bread. “T.Y.”

I’m so lame. “I mean it. Really. Thank you.” I bump his arm with mine.

“Gratitude received.”

Weird.

My thoughts tumble back to the couple I just slayed, and my heart swells with sorrow for the first time. *I’m a horrible person,* I want to tell him. But I don’t. It’ll ruin our friendship.

Friends. We’ve known each other less than an hour and haven’t even exchanged names.

White beams crisscrossed one another in the distance. “There he is!” a man shouts.

Pointing. Barking orders.

Police!

Dragging my nameless friend with me, I run the other way and lead us down an alley. A building rises ahead of us. Shooting out the other end, I drive us around the corner and slide to a halt.

A ten-foot high chain-link fence. Rolls of barbed wire trim the top.

Panic seizes my heart. “Oh man ...” I let out a stream of words as disgusting as my deeds. “I’m sorry I got you into this.” Another regret to add to the overgrown emotional cesspit.

“I’ve got it covered.”

How can he act so calm? He’s crazier than I am.

I point behind us. “They’re coming with Glockes and cuffs. No. Way. Out.”

“My father heard you calling and sent me to find you.” He lowers his hood, revealing a shimmering crown.

“O.M.G—” I can’t stop gawking, squinting against the crown’s brightness. “What are you?”

“Not what. Who.” He coolly strips the black bandana off my head.

I snap my attention toward the alley we just left. White beams from flashlights grow brighter. The cops are closing in. “I’m a criminal.”

“I know what you think you are.”

I turn back to my brother and my chin drops.

He has taken off his crown. He settles it on top my head. “But my father calls you his son.”

His son? Conviction prongs me, and an earthquake starts in my knees and spreads to my shoulders. Pressure lifts from my chest. “I don’t get this.”

“You will.” He places my dirty old black bandana on his head and backs away. His countenance darkens, as though my headpiece weighs a ton. As though it’s hurting him.

Behind me, men shout. Footsteps run.

I slowly pivot back around and raise my hands, willing to surrender. “Can you ever forgive me?”

“I already have,” my friend whispers.

Police move in. “Hands on your head, punk!” Weapons aim at my brother.

They ignore me.

“Scum of the earth.” One cop spits on my friend. “It’s the electric chair for you.”

He’s hauled away while I watch, stunned.

The crown! I glide my quivering fingers over it. A tailored fit.

Strange. I no longer fear burning in hell.

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