

## The Search for the Crown

It was a typical day in the kingdom of Kehete, with birds chirping here and there and the smell of freshly made goods waking citizens for the day. Even Jason, the kingdom's prince, had found himself in a good mood, which hardly ever came unless he was with his girlfriend, Caddie. The two had met through mere coincidence as Caddie had been wandering around the city, seemingly lost and crying when Jason had found and rescued her. The two had been friends ever since with her parents being more than supportive of her staying in the castle rather than at home after she passed 19. Jason was a year older than Caddie with his 21st birthday coming up. His father, King Arten, had been fond of Jason and Caddie's relationship and had supported them, to Jason's surprise. Jason was having a fine day when the news broke out. Iaeptus, one of his father's most trusted servants, ran towards him out of breath with a face of horror. After catching his breath, Iaeptus told Jason what had happened; his father was gone. Hearing that was almost as if a hot ball of steel had been dropped down Jason's throat.

Jason had last seen his father the day before his disappearance when his father had said something about the castle, especially his room, had felt odd, almost as if someone was watching him. Jason had shrugged it off, thinking it as a side effect of his father's old age. But when he heard about his father's disappearance, he felt a sudden surge of guilt. Apparently, the king hadn't come to eat breakfast, which had raised suspicions of many of his servants since the king had never missed breakfast. Soon enough, when Iaeptus went to check up on the king, he had found the bedroom empty, with the window wide open.

Jason felt embarrassed had cried so loudly inside the castle, but he felt comforted knowing that Iaeptus had been there for him when his father could not. As Jason cringed, he passed his fathers room which felt colder than usual, which gave him the idea of searching his fathers room for clues. After entering, he searched the room for any trace of his father or a clue that might have been useful. In the end, all Jason could find was a small vial with a greenish liquid. Although it was said that the King would have most likely left the Kingdom or maybe was hiding in fear for some reason, Jason had a tugging feeling in the smallest corner of his stomach; something told him that wasn't the case.

Jason, having noticed how the liquid inside the vial was starting to slowly vanish, raced to Nicolas's room. Nicolas, Jason's best friend, was an alchemist, being famous for knowing the answers to almost every question someone asked him. For Jason, it seemed like Nicolas was a dictionary, knowing things even he didn't understand. As Nicolas started to investigate the now-grayish substance, Jason told his suspicions; his father hadn't just disappeared but he had been kidnapped. At first, Nicolas waved it off saying it was impossible, but when the liquid turned out to be a tranquilizer with a hint of poison, Jason's point was proven right.

Jason and Nicolas, realizing the truth, raced towards the messenger who they believed could spread that the king had been kidnapped and that he had to be found. However, when they reached the room, they found it locked with a note being pinned to the wall. The note said '*Temporarily Closed Due To Coronation*'. At first, Jason thought this was some sort of joke as the messenger was known to be a joker of sorts, but when he and Nicolas went through the doors of the castle, the 'joke' turned out to be the truth. Someone was standing in the middle of a

crowd with a priest reciting from a book as he lifted a golden crown. Standing in the middle was Ieptus with a massive smile on his face. Yet Ieptus's smile was one Jason had never seen before as he could sense something hidden behind it. Evil.

Jason stood in disbelief as he gathered all the pieces together. Ieptus, his father's most trusted friend as well as Jason's second care-taker or father had betrayed him just like that and had kidnapped his father just to rise in power. He wanted to scream, but he was too stunned to even breathe. Nicolas, seemingly piecing it all together and realizing what Ieptus had done, dragged Jason toward Jason's room. Along the way, Caddie found them and was horrified when she saw Jason's face and was even more stunned when she found out what had happened to the king. As they reached Jason's room, all three of them, Nicolas locked the doors and let out a deep breath that was mixed with nervousness and disbelief.

As Jason returned to his senses, he sat with his puffed-up eyes as he thought of what to do. Knowing that Ieptus would most likely rule Kehete differently with King Arten, Jason told Nicolas and Caddie that he would find his father and that he would go alone, knowing that bringing his friends along would endanger their lives. Jason knew that his father would still be in the castle knowing that Ieptus had little to no time for transporting King Arten out of his room and out of the kingdom of Kehete. Jason would start in his father's room, knowing that if Ieptus and his followers drugged and kidnapped Jason's father in the king's own bedroom, there must have been some secret passage. But when Jason stood to change clothes and get ready, Caddie and Nicolas insisted they would go with him, knowing that without their help, it would be near impossible for Jason to find his father and free Kehete from whatever Ieptus had in mind. Jason,

knowing it was pointless arguing with his best friend, furthermore so his girlfriend, reluctantly agreed, and the three headed towards the king's bedroom.

The room was the same as Jason had last come to find for clues. The portrait of Jason's father hung loosely on the wall and the carpet seemed to feel colder rather than warm when Jason rummaged through it, trying to find a clue on the floor seemingly eaten by the carpet's thick fur. It was almost as if finding a needle in a haystack, but Jason was willing to do anything for his father. Eventually, all three of them had looked through every nook and cranny, inspecting everywhere. However, they ended up finding nothing of use. Jason was starting to lose hope and he longed for his father who had always encouraged him to do things he himself didn't know he was capable of. He took a glance at his father's portrait and hoped that at least it would make him feel better or give him the courage to keep going. As he stared deeply into his father's eyes he realized something odd. The painting wasn't hung upright, yet it seemed slanted as if somebody had accidentally hit it. Moreover, something kept glinting behind the portrait that continued to blind him and bother him from admiring his father's image. Then, something inside of him clicked. He dashed towards the painting ignoring the questions coming from his friends and flung the painting away from the wall. Sure enough, what Jason found made him feel like a certified detective. Hidden behind the portrait was a small yet large enough passageway with something glinting on the entrance. King Arten's ring.

Jason didn't remember much of his mother nor did he ever see a portrait of her face anywhere in the palace. His father didn't talk about her much, but when he did, he said that she had given him the very ring he wore on the finger. Jason's father had mentioned that no amount

of gold or treasure would ever bear the ring away from him. Yet, here it lay shining bright as it met with the light shining down from the chandelier in the room. Jason knew this must have been a sign from his father before he grew unconscious. Sure enough, several lamps were stationed in the hole and as Caddie and Nicolas walked towards Jason, Jason lit a match that was beside the lamp. As light shined through the small hole, Jason found him face to face with a ragged man with scars on his face that seemed fresh, blood still hardening. The man sat on a chair tied and unconscious as if he had been tranquilized with a bear tranquilizer. As Jason checked if the man in front of him was his father, he saw that the ring finger of the man was severely red almost as if he had worn something on that very finger for years. Nervous, he fit his father's ring on the man's finger, and sure enough, it fit perfectly. Realizing his father was right in front of him, Jason looked closer to check how his father was, but he panicked after seeing the scars and bruises on his father's face. However, when checking his heartbeat, King Arten was still alive; barely but definitely alive.

As Jason heaved his father's body with Nicolas's help, Caddie told them they didn't have much time before Iaeptus would most likely barge in. Iaeptus would have likely placed King Arten in his room temporarily and would come back to move him or worse. Jason, realizing the memo, raced off toward the safest place he knew.

As he reached the bakery, the smell of baked goods relaxed Jason and gave him just enough strength to move his father inside the bakery. The baker, good friends with Jason's family, was surprised to see Jason with a man he probably thought was a beggar. However, when Jason explained what had happened to the baker, he soon understood what to do and told Jason

he would take care of the king. Jason, exhausted from his work, decided to take a nap beside his resting father inside the baker's home. The aroma of bread and the warmth of the fire were more than enough to knock him out.

Jason only rose after feeling the hands of which he had been fed, tucked, and loved by; his father. As he opened his eyes, he saw his father in new clothes which made him near perfect without considering the new scars and black eye. As the two talked, Jason's father told him that all would be taken care of, telling him to rest as he knew what had happened thanks to Nicolas who had stopped by a few minutes ago. As King Arten, Jason's father, left the bakery with his newly washed robes, Nicolas had brought it for him, Jason smiled, knowing that at least mostly everything would go back to the way it was. He wanted to follow his father, but his body disagreed, and as he closed his eyes, he dreamt about baked goods and Caddie.