Oh Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary

by BrooklynBugleBoy

Summary

Roger Meddows Taylor was actually born the horribly-lengthy: Crown Prince Amhuinn Meddows Edward James Stuart, Future King of Scots.

And how that rightly sucked.

"Mary, Mary quite contrary…
How does your garden grow?
With silver bells and cockle shells,
…and pretty maids all in a row?"

Notes

Note: (None of this happened or is true, duh.)

I found this tiny thing buried in my computer and finished it during a Molecular Biology/Tissue Culture lecture, don't ask me why. :) :D
I am also a history nerd, I am fully aware the United Kingdom of Britain's royal family encapsulates the Scottish royal line, but it didn't always.

They formally merged after the reign of Queen Anne ended in 1714. But what if they hadn't? (Scotland had been against it after all and only joined up because they had to). So Roger is born into the current Scottish royal family, the Stuarts. Sister rulers to the Windsors. :p

If you'd like this continued, just say so. :) I know its short, but eh. Other parts would probably be longer. <3 Enjoy!
“You must show your strength, reassert your authority. You sit on the most powerful throne in Europe, head of an unbroken line that goes back more than a thousand years. Do you really think that any of your predecessors would've dropped everything and gone up to London because a bunch of hysterics carrying candles needed help with their grief?”

-The Queen (2006)

One of his worst memories was of running down the hallways of Balmoral Castle in Aberdeenshire.

He had been running to get away from a cross Fiona, one of his six little sisters, they were embroiled in some childhood game or another and he’d blatantly cheated. Laughing as he tumbled down the grand halls, his scabbed knobby knees good enough at carrying him to get him away from a fuming baby sister two years his junior.

Then he fell.

Tripped over his own bare feet, tumbling elbows over arse, until he bonked his head against the wall, nearly sending a dusty painting down on top of him.

He remembered yelping, jumping up and away, still holding the sore spot on his forehead. Peering through tearful eyes at the painting in question, oils broadcasting the visage of a young woman. A girl with the same incorrigible red curls as he, ringlets the same color as sweet tangerines plucked fresh from the garden, the ones that their nannies would collect at the first sign of a fading summer.

She seemed so real in that moment, close enough to touch.

“Her name was Mary.”

Shame colored his cheeks at the sound of his father’s voice, low with its Scottish burr. Flushing almost as red as the hair that no one in his family shared. A hand settled on each of his shoulders and he squinted up at the painting once more.

“Was she important?”

His father chuckled softly, just a few wisps of breath that tickled the tips of his ears.

“Yes, quite.” He sounded a fair bit sad at that. Like Mary could actually hear them. “She was a Queen of Scots, just like your mother. A brave Stuart Queen.”

The tiny Crown Prince of Scotland beamed that gap-toothed grin back up at his father.

“Mam or Mary?”

“Why ye cheeky little…” A fond smile. “Both.” Eyes flitting around nervously to see if the Queen was around to hear such blasphemy.
Suddenly, he was bodily turned around and forced to look up properly at his Da. Crystalline robin-egg blue eyes meeting pure Scot green. A proud smile in a place of crowing glory upon his father’s lips.

“One day it’ll be your painting up on the wall. *Amhuinn Meddows Edward James Stuart, King of Scots.*”

Until then, he was just *Crown Prince Amhuinn, the Duke of Rothesay*, heir-apparent to an almost-dead throne.

But of course he hadn’t known that then.

He’d just been a little boy.

Not knowing what the title of *Crown Prince* really meant, let alone being *King of Scots*.

Or how his blessed birthright wasn’t a silver spoon on his tongue at all, it was little more than a horse’s bit.

-X-

He didn’t really understand until his tenth birthday.

Dressed up in full heavy regalia, a five-hundred-year-old emerald-studded crown slipping down his brow, looking around a room full of strangers and realizing he was just *playing a part*. All his life amounted to, was just being a bloody good *actor*.

It was all just another game.

Another make-believe tea party with his sisters in the nursery.

He was a pretty little doll, a wind-up toy soldier with red Scottish curls and pretty blue eyes.

*Mary, Mary quite contrary…
How does your garden grow?*

He thought ruefully to himself, remembering the old nursery rhyme he used to chant with his sisters, the one everybody said was about Mary, Queen of Scots.

*With silver bells and cockle shells,
…and pretty maids all in a row?*

He turned to see his baby sisters at his right hand, in descending order of age: *Fiona, Elspeth, Deoiridh, Cairistine, Morag and Innis*. All in varying states of uncomfortable, wearing heavy dresses draped with pearls and other precious stones. They were just little children wearing *costumes*, nothing more.

*The Maiden* was also known as the *guillotine*.

-X-

There was this sweet girl he’d fancied, and would often spend time with, whenever the family would
spend time at *Holyrood Palace* in Edinburgh.

She didn’t know who he was, at least, not at first.

For a young English lass staying with her father for a couple months out of each year. A tiny boy with a forget-me-not smile and those trademark curls tucked away out of sight had been a welcome distraction. She hadn’t been raised like most bairns of Scotland, with a picture of his family, his face, on her mantle. She was born and raised in England. She didn’t know who he was, just a sweet boy with a pretty grin and a violin.

She liked him for him.

He would sneak out of the palace whenever he could. Rearing against the familiar gilded cage of his birth. The first seeds of rebellion churning inside of him.

He would write and play compositions for her on his cherry red violin, writing little soppy love ballads that didn’t make a lick of sense. Or bashing about on her drum kit, she gave him his first genuine lessons.

They would both laugh at his attempts.

He was allowed to be an awkward teenage boy for once, instead of a future King to a dying nation, a monarchy that couldn't change and adapt for its people. There was no weight on his shoulders with her and having been born like Atlas, being relieved of his burden, if only for a few hours, felt like flying.

He kissed her one night, after a shared stolen bottle of peach schnapps.

Then he told her.

She never spoke to him again.

After dumping her drink on his head and accusing him of lying. She told him in no uncertain terms, that no one in their right mind would ever marry a future King. Being a princess was a little girl’s dream. A *fairytale*. Being a *Queen* was a role nobody ever wanted to play, a role practically synonymous with jumping into shark-invested waters dripping in chum. Being bait to a world that would tear them apart.

He lit up a ciggie on the walk home and contemplated throwing himself off the roof of the palace.

*Nah, too messy.*

Almost as messy as being Royal in the first place.

-X-

His mother died on his sixteenth birthday.

Turning everything into a procession of pomp and circumstance.

Instead of mourning his mother, he was too busy keeping his father upright and his littlest sisters in line. Cairstine, often called Clare, was crying, it was obvious that the cogs were turning over in her little towhead, she understood that what had happened was going rock their lives forever. But Innis
was just six years old and Morag barely eight. They didn’t really understand, grief for their Mam was something that would come later. So he kept ahold of both during the funeral march.

But the tiny girls looked at him like he was more than just silly Meddows on that horrible day, their big brother who made funny faces during official dinners with dignitaries or long diplomatic conversations, if only to make them laugh. Who had no problem giving them horsey rides in his official suit and kilt, bangles and all.

They looked at him like he was more in that moment, than he’d ever been.

Like he was a stranger.

Another man with a crown.

And it was staggering.

At that moment he wished he could be anyone else.

An awful big brother, a terrible son and the future King, were all far too much for him to handle. To cope with. He had never been just a boy. Just an anything…

A woman from the crowd reached out to him.

On the day he buried his mother, she reached out, a sweet-smelling lady around the same age, height and build. Warm, inviting.

She’d reached out to place a bouquet of freshly cut flowers into his arms.

He stopped still then, his legs would carry him no further, Morag and Innis clinging tight to the waist of his kilt. Those flowers felt like being handed an anvil to carry, an albatross, an impossible weight, the last straw that broke the camel's back. Tears came from his blue-blue eyes unheeded and it was testament to his shock and grief, that he hadn’t even realized their presence, not until the sweet woman reached out with a crumpled handkerchief to brush them away.

“This Highness,” An awkward curtsy. “Are ye alright?”

He hadn’t said anything, just a muted shake of his head as he looked into those motherly eyes. A glimmer of truth. And dragged the girls back into the procession, breath hitching in his chest.

-X-

It would’ve killed him.

Trapped in a kilt and a doll's full regalia, wrapping him up like a straitjacket in a padded room. The crown weighing down his head and buttoning up his lips as it was trained to do. If he’d stayed in that place, it would have been the thing that killed him. Just like it had killed his mother.

He loved Scotland. He loved his people. He loved the language he grew up speaking, with the best insults and slang about it. The best hangover cures, quirky inventions, lovely holidays and the weird thistle weed for a national symbol. The most loving and emotional people, he was a Crown Prince of Scots born with songs and ballads of Scottish love on his tongue.

He belonged to them as much as they belonged to him.
But he wasn’t ready to be their King.

And part of him he wondered if he ever would be.

(It would’ve been better if he’d been born last instead of first. Any of his sisters would’ve been better off than him. Even little Morag who’s only solution to disagreements was to kick shins and cry. Ah, but the little voice in his head reminded him, you would still have been next in line. Best have wished for brothers.)

Sometimes he would have these horrible nightmares.

Nightmares of waking up to his father’s death tolling on the bells and attendants asking him what he wanted his regnal name to be: Would he be King Amhuinn? King James? He would oft wake up screaming bloody murder on those nights, kicking off the blankets and fistig his hands in his godforsaken hair. He didn’t want to die like his mother.

Trapped as a Queen of Scots, hidden away in a burial plot with a beautiful marble statue atop to disguise her pain.

They said she’d died in childbirth.

And they would be right.

She had died bringing her eighth child into the world.

A tiny boy with flyaway downy blonde wisps of hair, who hadn’t lasted much longer than their mother. He was born premature and lived only six days before taking his last breath. (Mary, Queen of Scots had once ascended the throne at six days old). The only other Prince of Scots, buried in a casket so small Meddows could’ve carried it in his own hands. They were buried on different days, the tiny prince in a separate sort of funeral.

She had completed her duty, borne sons for The Crown, sons to carry on her Stuart blood. And only one who had lived to continue it.

You, Crown Prince, are not allowed to feel.

You, Duke of Rothesay, are not allowed to cry.

Staying would have killed him.

But going tore his family apart.

It began with a few bottles of peroxide, those bloody Scot red curls were the first casualty.

He bleached them Barbie doll blonde and then raked a brush through them, curly hair’s first sin. Fuzzy fluffy waves were left in their place. He packed up his normal recreational clothes, his beloved drumsticks, his cherry violin, and organized everything he could for a tiny flat in London.

He was accepted into a biology program under the name Roger Meddows Taylor. Meddows because it was always what he had gone by with his sister-babies, Taylor because it was his grandmother’s maiden-name and Roger because he couldn’t get closer to Regina without saying Rex, (see, he could be creative when he wanted to be).

He tried to build himself a life across the sea.

When he told his father, it was a blow that greeted him and the acrid taste of shame on his tongue.
“Ye cannot run away from your own blood! Your destiny!”

“My destiny was to die!” He screamed back, fists clenched and tears like acid burning in his eyes as a single drop of royal blood slid down his chin. More blue than red. “This monarchy was supposed to have died with Anne and you know it!” He shrieked, a disobedient little boy all he would ever be.

“God. Save. The Queen!” (And not the beloved mother he had just buried.)

He ran from that room, from that life entire.

The sleek black car was waiting at the gates to take him to the airport and he could hear his father call out to him as he marched away.

“Ye canna leave! I forbid it, Amhuinn!”

He paused at the order, foot ever-so-slightly raised. He turned back to glare at his father, standing stoic and silent, lips buttoned still like the sorrowful porcelain doll he was raised to be. Yet when he spoke, it was with the voice of a King.

“Forbid? Da, ye can forbid me nothing. I outrank you.” Cold, born as broken as his chromosomes.

His tall, imposing figure of a father looked like nothing more than a sad old man, as they gazed at each other from across the green. “I am your King.” Weak even to his own ears.

He wondered if it was just the glamour of childhood that had made his father seem unconquerable.

“No.” Cold icy blue eyes locked onto pure Scot green. “Ye were hers. I am yours.”

He was Stuart.

His father was noble, yes, but he didn’t carry Stuart blood in his veins.

Therefore the only reason he was on that throne at all, was because Meddows’ mother had wanted him there, one of her final requests, and nobody had desired to have a teenager leading Scotland. The sister throne to England and Northern Ireland could not be filled by a child. But everyone knew that throne was rightfully Meddows’ by primogeniture and he would have it at anytime he wanted it.

If he ever wanted it.

I can take everything from you, this is all you have, old man. Be grateful.

The Iceman look only faded away at Innis’ cry. His seven-year-old sister tearing towards him in her nightie and bare feet. “Meddows! Don’t go!” Her thin reedy arms wrapped tight around his middle. “Don’t go!”

Fistfuls of his shirt twisted in her desperate grasp.

Fiona and the other girls had followed his mad escape and were standing under armed guard on the steps of the palace. Fia was glaring at him, with tears in her Scot green eyes, Elspeth and Deoiridh were flanking her like dutiful little lambs, poor Clare was trembling and Morag looked barely an inch away from racing after Innis.

Tear-streaked cheeks all around, guilt burned low in his belly.
Fiona marched towards him then, towards them both. Her natural black curls trailing after her like onyx fire. The rest of the girls followed her unspoken command and fell into his arms without so much as a word. Desperate arms all trying to hold onto him for a second longer.

Fiona did no such thing.

She stood like Switzerland, like the Atlantic ocean soon would, between he and their father.

“Girls, let’s go.” Was all she said, before turning back and marching home to the palace again, her back turned so he wouldn’t see her tears fall. She hadn’t needed to yell like the others. He already knew what she would say.

*You, who were our mother and our father… leaving us like this is cruel and you know it. This is our life too. This is our lot in life. We didn’t want it either, but we have no escape now. We can’t lose you, like we lost her.*

But the compassion in her eyes had prevented those words from being uttered.

*I won’t stop you now. She mentally berated him. I am our father’s daughter, but you are our mother’s son.*

*I’m scared forcing you to stay will kill you, like it killed her.*

He and Fia had found the empty bottle of pills beneath his mother’s pillow. Birthing their brother hadn’t wholly killed her. She’d found a way to help the process along herself.

They told no one.

When he left that night, it was to an army of empty tear-stained pale faces gazing after him in the moonlight. A legion of children he’d heartlessly abandoned. A father he still loved. The ghost of a mother and a little brother.

So he cried as well, you see, cried for the boy who had finally broken free of his gilded cage and the tiny boy who’d been spared it.

Twisting his signet ring around his finger until it bled, matching the carnage in his chest, each breath was a massacre.

-X-

Stepping off a bus, after only two weeks in London, he walked straight into the narrow chest of a guitarist with fluffy black hair and soft eyes.

It wasn’t his first foray onto English soil. He had spent much of his childhood parading about, and with a home in, numerous Commonwealth countries. The same year he buried his mother, he was at Winston Churchill’s funeral. As a three-year-old in his Mam’s arms, he’d participated in the funeral of King George VI, marching along in a tiny mourning kilt and right up front in ceremony for The Queen’s coronation. He could emulate a fair English accent and now did so with vigor. The last thing he wanted was to be recognized.

He didn’t want people to know that he could march up to Buckingham Palace out of the blue and have a seat at the dinner table.
Not that he would ever want to, he only saw those cousins at weddings or times of great strife. They had nothing to talk about.

He didn’t remember much about Churchill, perhaps speaking to him once or twice. But he did remember a warm grandfatherly face as he played with his toy soldiers on a carpet during a meeting of foreign dignitaries with his Mam and Da.

“Hello, little thistle.” The old man had spoken gruffly. “Little Scotland flower.”

Roger’s arms ended up full of a homemade guitar case as he landed on his ass. His pageboy hat flopped over his eyes, fuzzy blonde hair sticking up in every direction.

“Oh, I am so sorry!”

The dark-haired bloke was on his hands and knees, quickly tugging the guitar case out of Roger’s hold. The younger boy just pushed the hat out of his eyes and accepted the soft hand that heaved him to his feet.

He blinked owlishly for a moment at the change in position and the memories that still lurked behind his eyes, before shaking off the reverie and grinning ear to ear.

“Guitarist?”

“Yea,” An echoed smile. “You?”

“A drummer and a violinist.” In order of which he loved them. Drums were the sound of freedom, violin was the symphony of a caged bird.

At the sound of drummer, his new friend seemed to perk up. “Ah! Really? My band’s looking for a drummer!”

Roger laced his arm with the tall beanpole’s. “Hm, maybe it’s fate then? Tell me about this band of yours.”

They would walk down the street together, have lunch at a nearby chippy, and his new friend would explain with these big open sweeping gestures about his band called Smile and his friend Tim Staffell, who was their lead singer. Then he would segue into talking about what he was studying at Imperial College, astrophysics. Wow. Nerd.

“I’m Brian May, by the way.”

“Roger Taylor.”

Not Crown Prince or Future King of anything.

Just Roger the drummer.

He couldn’t help but smile.

-X-

“Monarchy is God's sacred mission to grace and dignify the earth.

To give ordinary people an ideal to strive towards, an example of nobility and duty to raise them in
their wretched lives. Monarchy is a calling from God.

That is why you are crowned in an abbey, not a government building. Why you are anointed, not appointed. It's an archbishop that puts the crown on your head, not a minister or public servant. Which means that you are answerable to God in your duty, not the public.”

-The Crown (2016)
“We are half-people.

Ripped from the pages of some bizarre mythology, the two sides within us, human and crown engaged in a fearful civil war, which never ends. And which blights our every human transaction as brother, husband, sister, wife, mother.”

- The Crown (2016-)

Freddie named their new motley band Queen.

He didn’t see the way that Roger’s breath stuttered quietly in his chest, or the vice that tightened like a noose around his throat.

That word was a fair bit loaded for him, to say the least.

Deaky’s soft waves of brown hair were falling in his eyes, and that exquisite beaming smile seemed evidence of his delight with the thing and the sketches Freddie had drawn up for the standard.

Roger ran his thumb over the roaring lions, a bloody crest of all things, not too different from the carved emerald signet ring he wore still, an umbilical cord, twisted around to face his palm now, lest anyone see his hidden truth. He swallowed hard and forced a smile, as Bri seemed to agree wholeheartedly with their bassist and lead singer. Of course their newborn band should have that name. Of course. It would make a statement.

“Roggie?”

He shook himself awake, “Yea, Fred?”

His sweet best-friend’s face was crestfallen. “You don’t like it.” Obviously he hadn’t sounded enthusiastic enough. Bugger.

“No! I mean, yes, Fred. I love it. Queen. Let’s do this.”

The young Parsi boy’s face lit up like a Christmas tree in the wintertime. “It’s quite regal isn’t it? We want to be regal and make an impression, darlings!”

Roger huffed a little laugh, “Oh trust me, we’re already quite regal, Freddie.” More regal than you’ll ever know. But instead of laughing alongside him, his friends-turned-family only stared, open-mouthed. What? What had he done? Had he said that last bit out-loud?

Deaky snorted, breaking the tense little silence. “What? Are you Scottish now?”
Fuck, his accent had slipped.

He shook his head with a little laugh of his own, making sure his English intonation was bloody perfect this time around. Just like it was before. All this regal talk was making him revert. Back to being Scotland’s perfect little Crown Prince.

It had been four years.

He needed to bloody grow-up.

-X-

“London Bridge is falling down,
Falling down, falling down.
London Bridge is falling down,
My fair lady.”

He and his sisters used to sing it as they played in the gardens.

Holding hands and making an archway with their arms to capture the slowest, trapping them inside.

His mother had passed by the gates one day as they played their innocent childish games, but she’d made it a point to stop and snatch up Roger by the hand, he was the oldest after all, her birth-dictated heir, who had more claim to the throne than she herself by simply being male. She tugged him away from the girls to chastise him quietly.

“Mo ghràdh, ye canna sing that song. Ever. Do ye understand?”

There was a barrette pulling back her hair, it was etched in pearls and sapphires. He remembered watching it glint in the sunlight.

“Why, Mammy?”

She’d had a touch of sadness in her eyes, even then. “It’s code, darling. For when the monarch of England dies.”

He’d shaken his head in shock, red curls tumbling into his eyes, afraid he’d done something so terrible by accident. “I’m sorry… I didn’t…” She pressed him close to her chest.

She smelled of lavender and fresh dewy mornings dancing in the garden.

She smelled like his Mam, and he had loved her so.

“It’s alright, sweetness. There are just rules that must be followed… protocol.” Yes, he certainly knew that much. Even as a rough and tumble little thing. “You are my heir, that makes you special. Different.” Spoken with the air of someone who had suffered from that difference all of her life. She had been but a girl when her father had died unexpectedly. Leaving no one to take up The Crown but his nine-year-old daughter. The only surviving progeny of he and his brothers. Her life had been controlled by regents until she was old enough to rule in her own right, and even then it was a game
of proving herself.

It wasn’t a peaceful transition of power and it was no surprise why the government wanted to prevent history from repeating itself when he was sixteen.

Why they respected his mother’s wishes for keeping his father on the throne for as long as possible. Despite it thwarting laws put in place for centuries.

“I came to give this to ye, mo ghràdh.”

A small emerald signet ring was tugged off her finger and laced onto a lovely silver chain, so that he could wear it around his neck until he was old enough for it to fit. A beautiful ring with the emerald carved in a visage of the Stuart Crest. A lion and a unicorn.

“It’s pretty.” He had whispered, reverently, a thumb rubbing over the standard.

“It’s your birthright.” Her finger pointed out each delicately etched corner and explained its significance. “The chained unicorn is our Scotland. The lion with the crown is England. We are inbred sister nations.” At the look on his face, she continued. “That is… dangerous, my son. Ye have claim to the English throne, and they have claim to yours. They could dissolve us, they could break us.” Your very existence challenges the right of their Queen to rule.

The small boy jutted out his bottom lip and took a fighting stance.

“Don’t worry, Mam! I’ll defend Scotland till my last breath! I’ll be a Knight of the Thistle for ye, Mammy.” So young, so naive.

He would very well know both phrases on the coat of arms and would be able to recite them on command. In my defens God me defend. Nemo me impune laces sit.

In my defense, God me defend. No one can harm me unpunished.

“That’s what I’m afraid of, love.” His mother’s heart had sunk, staring after her child with his bouncy red ringlets, off to play a new game with his veritable army of little sisters. “Your life will never be yours, my little prince. My greatest failing as a mother was to put that crown on your head. Please forgive me one day.”

She would cry silently, watching them play.

Her sun spinning around and around, until he grew dizzy and fell onto the plush green grass below, serving as a pillow for its future King.

“Please forgive me.”

-X-

He separated Crown Prince Amhuinn of Scotland and Truro’s Roger Taylor (Queen’s Roger Taylor) in his head.

They were two different people.

It was how he justified his lie by omission. As Queen grew more and more popular, there were still rare moments when his walls slipped. Like when Brian got so horribly ill overseas that they began to
fear for his death, and Roger pulled strings to get them out of the country faster with his diplomatic immunity and connections.

Or when he used his fortune to pay for their shared flat and studio time.

Or when his Scottish accent would reappear once more in the worst and most inopportune of moments, as it was so determined to be unshakable.

But it didn’t all fall apart until John Reid. Elton's John Reid. Their new John Reid.

Born in Paisley, Renfrewshire, Scotland. Raised in Gallowhill. A bairn of Scotland if there ever was one. A bairn who grew into a strapping young man who knew the face of his Crown Prince. The face he’d seen staring back at him for all his life, in schools, in churches, on his own mantlepiece. He knew Roger's face.

The now-blonde had tried to be clever about it at first, using his pageboy cap to hide his visage. But alas, there was no hiding the truth from those inquisitive searching eyes.

Reid had honed in on Freddie at first. The most flashy out of all of them, dressed like an angry bejeweled lizard, preening on a pretty rock beneath the desert’s sun, a eager Prenter at Reid’s side like a yappy little lap-dog.

It was even easy going for a while, they ordered some beers and Brian started gently posing their demands. Brian and their quiet little Deaky, who everyone loved to underestimate, were actually the real financial and planning backbones of Queen and her assorted issues. Roger got a little too relaxed with the shift of attention, which was his first mistake.

And a teasing Freddie ripped the hat right of his head.

“And here’s our lovely little drummer!” Then to Reid. “Don’t mind him, darling, he’s gone quite shy all of a sudden.”

Roger turned as violently red as his hair had once been, as he whipped around, face-to-face with his own subject. Fuck. He watched that easy smile melt away from those lips, as the gears spun around and around in Reid’s head, then the way his eyes widened all at once at the preposterous situation. Oh no.

“It canna be…” The sentence came out like a veritable wheeze, as if the poor sod was doing a wonderful impression of a Whoopee cushion being violently sat upon. Roger winced at the sound. No one seemed to share his sentiments however and looked at Reid as if the baby-faced bloke were having a heart-attack right there in front of them. He was looking a little red around the cheeks after all. Yet his horrified gaze couldn't seem to tear itself away from Roger's face. Oh bollocks.

“Reid? Are you alright?” Brian moved as if to call a waiter, warm calf eyes round and heavy with concern. “Do you want some water?”

“John?” Freddie reached out to him.

But their new manager only had eyes for Roger. Roger whose scrunched up cap was still in Freddie’s hands. There was nowhere left for him to hide.

“Your Majesty!”

Fuck.
Reid practically squeaked the title, shoving back from the table and standing up in some piss-poor attempt at a bow. Oh God, he was *kneeling.* *(And it wasn’t Majesty. Roger wasn’t properly King yet).* Everyone else was in varying states of shock or brief spurts of nervous laughter and poor Roger was turning *purple* where he sat. Such a regal shade. Christ Almighty.

“No! *No!* *Enough* of that!” Roger rushed forwards to bodily lift the taller fellow upright again. Everyone was staring, not just their table but every other table as well. He was not going to have his cover blown on the veranda of a bloody pub!

“Yes, dear! I know we’re *regal,* but not *that* grand, love!”

Freddie laughed, but it was a nervous sort of titter, he’d taken off his rose tinted sunglasses and they could all see the same shock in his eyes. Reid’s dark brows were furrowed and he looked around in confusion. Before settling upon Roger again, looking at him with an expression of surprised almost-betrayal. “They don’t *know*?” The proud drummer bit his lip, shaking his head pointedly. Reid froze and then exhaled all at once, looking a bit faint at the very idea.

“Ohay!” The prince who was still a prince despite all the years of respite, clapped his hands together. “Inside, right now! We are not having this conversation out here!” He was practically aghast at the thought.

“Inside the pub?” Prenter asked, scrunching up his little rat nose.

Roger frowned. “Yes! Inside… *the loo!* Go!”

At least they’d have privacy.

“The *looo?*”

“Yes, lovie. I’m sure you’ve been in one before!”

And in a locked pub bathroom, smelling of piss and booze, they found out the truth.

-X-

He’d never had real friends before.

Friends who loved and respected him, not because he was the future ruler of their nation, but because of who he was.

Not *what* he was.

He found those friends in London, found those friends in his flatmates, his bandmates, he had a real family for what felt like the first time in a very long time.

A different sort of family, but a family all the same.

Taking over stages and hearts, commanding the world in a different sort of way.

He loved being Roger Taylor, he loved the way Freddie would run up behind him and hug him without fear, burying that angular face between his shoulder-blades. The way Roger could flop across Brian’s lap without the slightest hesitation, or happily tease his friends-turned-brothers with everything he had, then get the same treatment in return. He felt like *Pinocchio,* the boys were his
Blue Fairy, they had made him real at last.

For Freddie, he would have faced any arsehole in the crowds at their pub shows.

For Brian, he would willingly sit through the most boring lectures on stars and space dust, pretending to be interested for the beanpole’s sake.

For Deaky, he would accidentally burn himself on soldering irons and always be there to catch him, to protect the younger boy from the worst parts of being in the public eye.

He had never had brothers before, save for the babe who had died before life had properly begun.

Just a set of beautiful incandescent sisters who had once been his whole world and who probably hated him now, with a ferocity that was both terrifying and deserving. Fiona, his Fia, who was everything he had never been. She who was the elder of the King’s daughters, who was brave and smart and poised, she who should have been born a son.

If Roger was destined to be Mary, Queen of Scots for all his life, then Fiona was Elizabeth I.

The daughter of a whore. She who should have been King.

Everything that Roger should have been.

He would have abdicated his position, his crown, at a moment’s notice if he’d known that he was settling it upon Fiona’s curls. But with the royal line as tenuous as it was, he wasn’t sure if the abdication would be the final nail in the coffin. The same had launched England into turmoil a few decades previously.

So, once more, Scotland would have another undeserving ruler on its accursed throne.

Their Fiona had been rather sickly as a small girl, he knew that his parents had once worried dearly about losing her.

Roger himself never had, as Fia was something special. He was far more scared of losing anyone else, rather than it being Fia. She was in a class all her own, she always had been. But seeing the same sweat-dampened curls and icy pallor in Brian’s face during their American tour was enough to send his heart hammering away in his chest. Holy shit.

In all their years together… of course it was Brian who took ill.

It was directly after a concert, cloistered in their hotel room, reeking of sweat and God only knows what else. When Roger, who had studied biology and pathology in school, recognized the sickly yellow cast of his brother’s skin. The beaded sweat that made the thin boy tremble, a wan spindly creature born of youth and wildness turned ashen. There was something wrong.

“Rog?” Brian had asked with that crackling wheezy voice so unlike his natural one, wholly trusting and so so young. “What’s wrong?”

Their bold, brave guitarist was shivering, holding himself as he drooped over on the bed they were meant to share, hunched in on himself like a question mark.

Roger could see the same concern that burned in his chest, mirrored in the eyes of Deaky and Freddie as they hovered nearby, anxious without an outlet. He was the only one with the slightest inclination of what to do. He leaned forwards in all his stupidity to press a small searching kiss to his brother’s forehead, it was surprisingly dry and hot, and given how dampened Bri looked…
He could feel his heart clench with worry inside of him.

“You’re a little sick, Brimi. But we’re going to get you as right as rain soon enough, yea?” Scottish again, bugger it.

It was probably quite a bit of the fever's doing, but Brian curled into him like a wet kitten, yawning a soft “Okay.” as he fully surrendered himself to Roger’s whims. Trusting the boy he thought he knew, his friend of so many years. Who was actually someone else entire.

He made the call to request a private jet that night, pulling rank, while Brian slept open-mouthed against his pale chest. A caustic fever burning away all the years between them and making the drummer's hands tremble as he replaced the receiver. Roger could almost see his late mother in his arms instead of his beloved lead-guitarist, dying of ‘childbirth’. He worried in a way that was near unspeakable, worried that he would lose yet another person he loved to the Reaper.

So he did it, he used Crown Prince Amhuinn to save one of the loves of Roger Taylor’s life...

Love itself was a funny thing.

His mother had loved him, he knew that much.

She also taught him to love the music that he made into his chosen life.

His mother could sing the winds down from the mountaintops. Shake silent symphonies from the trees. Roger may not have remembered everything about the woman who gave him life and the colors that made him who he was, but he remembered the songs, the tales in Scottish Gaelic, the truth of her words. He remembered clear eyes and a voice that called out to him always: "Remember my boy. You will be your father’s Amhuinn, your people’s Crown Prince. But you will always be my son, my precious little boy.”

He loved his bandmates, more than anything in the world (besides perhaps, his sisters).

So yes, he made sure they got Brian home as soon as possible and into the hands of the right people, the best surgeons and the best care to both save his arm and make him as comfortable as possible. Bri was in the hospital for so long, trapped in a rotating door of illnesses that never seemed to end. It was understandable that the others began to worry about cost and the logistics of everything, but luckily, that was something that Roger could take care of. And he waved those worries away. The same way he had when they needed a place to stay, food to eat and the money to record a proper album to get Queen recognized and signed. If he couldn't be truthful with the boys he loved, then he would at least take care of them.

He gave zero shits about it all not being a matter of state.

For all intents and purposes, Brian was his brother, whether there be an HRH in front of his name or not.

And ergo deserved the same treatment.

His brother, part of the family he had built for himself.

Somehow they all ended up in the same apartment at the beginning, just piece by piece. Brian leaving a couple of his grandfather sweaters in the hall closet. Freddie forgetting a few garish accessories draped over furniture like he was asserting his dominance, pieces that Roger would simply have claimed as his own, but there were just so many of them.
The tiny apartment became their home base.

And he loved every moment of it.

Even the fights, where he could be his dramatic self and fling himself onto the couch like a Victorian lady in a swoon. “God, Bri! Why are you slowing down?”

“We can’t all be perfect, Mr. Metronome!”

John cleared his throat with a muffled: “Dog-whistle pitch.” One that had Freddie laughing so hard, he snorted Earl Grey out of his nose.

Roger simply hurled a cushion at his head.

They couldn’t have been more different, the four of them, but they still worked. In a way not many other things had. They all had their issues, but after a while, that was something they learned to deal with. If that meant cuddling up with Brian during one of his depressive episodes or helping him get out of his own head sometimes, they were there. They were ready.

They were there when John lost his temper and exercised that scathing tongue of his, not really taking anything to heart. Then helping him calm down afterwards.

They were there when Freddie forgot he was human and fallible and needed food and sleep just as much as he needed to finish that song.

Yet he never told them about his less than humble beginnings, despite what would probably be limitlessly acceptance and support from them. He could never find the words to admit his lie. To give up Roger Taylor as he had given up so much in his young life already.

Was it a sin to crave being ordinary for just a moment more?

Whatever the cause, the point was that they didn’t know and he had to tell them, they were getting closer and closer and that opening to do so was getting narrower and narrower, and he didn’t know how to do it or what to say. He never did.

But because life was a cruel bitch, she did it for him.

-X-

“He has to marry an English princess,” His father had said softly, staring down into his cradle. “I am loath to even suggest the idea, mo chridhe.” His heart, reaching out to caress his wife’s round pale cheek, still wet with her tears. “But I don’t think we have a choice.”

“Choice.” She whispered, shaking her head at the futility of it all. “The only choice I have ever made in my life was marrying ye.” Her tears dripped into the bassinet, one by one. “And look where that got me?” A broken little laugh. “Where it will get our son…” Her breath hitched in her chest. “I was never meant to have sons. If I’d had a daughter, she could’ve been ours. She could’ve been happy.”

Any son of hers would always belong to Scotland.

“If he marries an English girl, let alone a princess… he will have an bigger target on his head. He will have even more of a claim to their throne and what do you think they will do to him for it?” She
was terrified, she was still just a girl then.

“No, it canna be. We already have to raise this boy under a parody of the Kensington system, I will not steal whatever life he can make for himself from the pieces of what I can give him.”

She knelt to press a kiss to her Jacobite son’s fuzzy red temple.

She loved him with every fiber of her being and yet, it still wasn’t *enough*.

-X-

“*Bones become dust*
*Gold turns to rust*
*Say it like you mean it…*

*I'd rather watch my kingdom fall*
*I want it all or not at all.*”

-Claire Wyndham-
Chapter Summary

Sorry it's so messy and late and short :DDD But we're actually getting somewhere :D

Chapter Notes

If you haven't heard The Skye Boat Song sung by Ella Roberts (the quotes below, aside from the first, are from this song), please have a listen: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBSqQPP4aVM

Otherwise, enjoy! And I'm @waywardrunawaycherryblossom on tumblr if you ever want to chat :D

“The responsibility of being King killed your father and I will never forgive his selfishness and weakness in passing on the burden.”

-The Crown (2016-)

The day her brother left Scotland was the end of Fia’s childhood.

The end of her innocence, her hope for the future.

She saw the light leave her father’s eyes, as if losing his son had stolen the last of the soul that their mother’s death had left behind. Her sisters looked properly lost for the first time in their lives.

Meddows had been their anchor, their protector, their parent when the rest of the world spun too fast to give a shit about its supposed princesses. And he had walked away from them across the green.

“Coward!” She’d wanted to scream.

“Oh, don’t leave me, Dowsy! I don’t know how to do this!” She’d wanted to cry.

Instead she let him go.

She had seen the same specter of death in his eyes that had once adorned their mother’s endless green depths, chasms in the guise of eyes. She would rather lose him forever than ever see him dead. So she’d commanded her sisters away and marched back towards the castle. Feeling her heart shatter further in her chest with every step. Walking towards the gallows that swung this way and that.

She’d had dreams too once.

Dreams of marrying a happy man who loved her. Of having a little house and a few cats and babies.
Of an ordinary life. Of being a mother and a proud woman, instead of a painted little doll, wound and tied up with strings, made to smile and bow like an obedient toy. If Meddows left the crown to her, she wasn’t sure the monarchy would survive, she’d be married off to an English prince at the first chance that the men in power saw and they’d lose their country entirely. To the powers that be, she was weak. And that weakness made her dangerous.

The night her brother left, she’d crawled onto the cluttered window-seat in her chambers and sang, clear as bell.

“Speed, bonnie boat, like a bird on the wing,
Onward! the sailors cry;
Carry the lad that's born to be King
Over the sea to Skye.

Though the waves leap, soft shall ye sleep,
Ocean's a royal bed.
Rocked in the deep, Flora will keep
Watch by your weary head.

Burned are their homes, exile and death
Scatter the loyal men;
Yet ere the sword cool in the sheath
Charlie will come again.”

The Skye Boat Song.

The tale of the time Scotland had almost lost its heir, Flora MacDonald had spirited the boy from her bonnie shores and instead to the Isle of Skye, where he’d be safe. So their line could continue on. HRM Charles kept Scotland and the Stuart bloodline alive.

She was named for Flora.

More than a hundred years later, Princess Fiona Annys Flora Maighread Stuart, Princess of Scots prayed vehemently for the safe return of her brother, and at least for his safe passage to England.

For a safe passage back home to them.

“He’ll be alright, Fiona.” Her father’s voice sounded from the head of her room, and he came to sit beside her (crunched up in the too tight space, without complaint), like he had so often done with her mother and brother. It had been a long time since he'd looked at her as if she was as worthy as either of them. “He will be alright... won’t he?” The old man’s voice broke along its fault-lines, threadlike fissures in a wall of glass.

“Of course he will, Da. Meddows is as stubborn as they come, he can take care of himself.” She wished with all she had, that she could believe the words.

“I just worry. He’s so much like your mother.” His hand tightened around the ring he still wore. His wedding band. His signet ring. “I couldn’t bear it if we lost them both.”

“We won’t.” She couldn’t promise such a thing.

His face softened as he regaled her. “You’re such a good girl, Fia. I know ye’ll look after your brother once I’m gone.” He sighed into the night air, fogging up the window pane, eyes teary bright. “Meddows has a good heart, but it’s always ruled his head. Ye have that same good heart, mo ghràdh. But ye have never let it control ye.” The way it had once controlled their mother.
“Ye will be his right hand, I can trust that ye’ll look after each other.” Words that she had always known, a promise, a prophecy. Even when her wishes for a normal life reached up and choked her, as if she were hanging from the gallows herself, in her mind she had always pictured the hanging tree in the garden. Her siblings and father lifting her up to hang, her mother’s ghostly hands tying the noose.

As if to add insult to injury, her father even tugged her into a warm and painfully gentle hug, whispering with that familiar Scottish lilt of his into the still night. “My little Queen.”

Fia cried herself to sleep that night, letting her Ice Princess visage fade away for just a moment of peace.

-X-

“Loud the winds howl, loud the waves roar,
Thunderclaps rend the air;
Baffled, our foes stand by the shore,
Follow they will not dare.”

John had slapped him.

Roger had told them the truth in short painful summary. *I’m actually not from Truro, I’m a Scottish prince and my name isn’t even Roger. Everything I’ve ever told you about my life is a lie.*

Freddie had gaped, quip-less for the first time in all the years that Roger had known him, Reid hadn’t stopped staring *(had he even blinked once in the past half-hour?)*. Prenter’s gaze was turned almost predatory in nature, while Brian, his best-friend, was turned away from him, curly head bowed and gripping the sink before him in a shaking white-knuckled hold… and John had slapped him, clean across the face with such force behind it that he was sent staggering backwards, skinny arms pinwheeling for any traction available, and with Reid shouting in outrage as he rushed over to steady his future monarch.

John had whimpered afterwards, as if surprised by his own immediate reaction, curling his sore hand inwards, cradled against his heaving chest as his warm eyes filled with angry and indignant tears.

Reid obviously felt the way the blonde boy trembled beneath his hands and concern colored his voice. “Are ye well, Majesty?”

Still wrong. The shivering youth blanched at the question and all it meant, feeling queasy and vaguely sick to his stomach, as if standing on a ship that rocked to and fro. “Please don’t call me *that*, just Roger is fine.”

“No,” Brian’s voice was frighteningly cold as he didn’t even raise his head. “It’s not fine. Roger Taylor was my best-friend,” his voice cracked at the *was,* “…and I don’t feel comfortable with you using that name anymore.” The name that had never really been *his.* As he had taken the liberty of pointing out to them several times now.

Roger felt like he’d just been punched in his sore stomach.
“Brimi…”

“No. You lost the right to call him that. As far as I’m concerned, Roger Taylor is dead now, full bloody stop. So leave.” John still standing there, still quivering with his teeth clenched and eyes brimming with unshed tears, Deaky who was always so little, always so young, and yet who could tear you down, break you into tiny shards of glass, with a single sentence. His heart ached. “Oh wait,” John stopped as if he’d honestly forgotten something. Maybe he’d heard the sound of Roger’s heart breaking? “I meant: take your leave, Your Majesty.” Fuck almost, Roger was sobbing silently.

His family, his chosen life was crumbling into little more than dust in his hands.

Everything he had once treasured was gone.

“Rogie, can you take a deep breath for me?” Freddie’s hand was pressed into the small of his back, suddenly all the blonde could smell was Freddie (his cologne, his concealer, the touch of liquor on his breath from the couple of swigs before Reid had arrived) and it made him want to drop to his knees and weep for all he’d lost. He obeyed, taking in a weak wracking breath and releasing it with a trembling sigh. There was a small smile on Freddie’s lips, it was touched, soured, by the sadness in his eyes. “That’s good, Rog. Now another one?”

“Don’t call him that, Fred!” Brian hissed, his voice broken further with every consonant, and Freddie spun around with little but fire and brimstone smoldering in his eyes.

“I’ll call him whatever I bloody well like!”

Brian sputtered but Freddie continued on. “Shame on you both for turning on him like that, you bloody wankers! He can’t help who his family is or his sodding name! And while I’m unbelievably cross about the lying, he is still our family, our brother, and hitting him and screaming abuse isn’t going to fix the situation, now is it?”

Freddie, who hadn’t told them about the bloody revolution he’d fled or his Parsi background, until they met his family for his birthday dinner. Freddie, who had changed his name. Freddie, who was his soulmate. Freddie, who was far more like him than he’d ever realized.

Roger wondered dimly, if he was ever going to be enough, or if he was always going to disappoint everyone he loved.

“My mother was a proud Stuart Queen of Scotland.” He started softly, unprompted and instead of flying off the handle, like he was wont to do. He was icily calm, which may have been even more frightening for the boys he loved. His brothers. “She was crowned at nine years old. Nine.” He shook his head with a sad, rough little laugh. “She grew up on that throne.” He touched his own cold cheek and realized he was crying. “She gave everything she had. She married and she had a son.” Him. “Then she cried for years upon years afterward, because she knew that her firstborn, being male, was never going to be hers. He belonged to Scotland and his life would never be his own.”

His breath was coming in rough little pants again and he closed his eyes, trying to see his mother.

“Do you know what the Kensington System is?” Then, not waiting for an answer, he charged on. “It’s the system Queen Victoria of England was raised under, and that I was as well. I was never alone at any point during my childhood, I was constantly followed by someone. A tutor, a governess, it didn’t matter. Even when I was a teenager, I had to sneak away just to breathe. I couldn’t even go down a bloody set of steps on my own without holding the hand of an adult or use the loo or even sleep in a bedroom alone! It was like being held prisoner. And I would love to blame my parents for it, but they really had no choice. They had a baby with a target on his head.”
“What do you mean ‘a target’?”

He opened his eyes to see John looking at him in sudden concern and with more than a touch of guilt, Deaky who had just left a five-fingered brand of shame on his face. “What do you lot know about the rules of primogeniture?”

Blank stares.

Roger sighed. “It’s the rules of ascension to a throne, in a country where females are below males in the line of succession, like in Scotland and England. Boys are born heir-apparents, it doesn’t matter who is born after them, they will always be next in the line of ascension. Girls are born heir-presumptives, meaning they will be Queen if no one else can produce a male heir. It’s the reason your Queen Elizabeth is Queen and that my mother was a Queen. But my birth and gender are dangerous. I was a threat to my own mother’s right to rule, I am a threat to my father’s, and because of my blood-ties and gender, I am a threat to your Queen.”

Ergo, target.

“Oh shit, darling.” Freddie’s eyes were enormous in the lowlight of the loo. ”Are you serious?” They were all staring at him.

Roger pressed the back of his hand against his mouth to center himself, it felt as though he was trembling like a small dog, sweaty and cold, wracked with movements completely outside of his control.

“So I changed my name, tried my best to change my appearance and joined a bloody band of all things.” Cue the small rueful smile on his lips. “I tried to have my own life for once and it was bloody fantastic.”

It really was.

Now he’d have to limp back to Scotland like a kicked dog, tail tucked between his legs.

Or perhaps he’d just take a header off a bridge or something. Go out the same way as his Mam.

“Was?” Roger hadn’t even realized he was staring at the ground until Brian’s voice coaxed him back up again. “What do you mean was?”

“Well, you lot certainly don’t want to be in a band with me now. Come to think of it, I’m probably a numpty for ever thinking it would work in the first place. And without the band, there goes my place to live.” A little manic laugh bubbled out of his chest.

“Give me Scotland and give me Death.” There was no in-between.

He didn’t mean to say it out-loud.

“And what exactly is that supposed to mean, darling?”

Freddie’s voice was hard, but in the same vein, terrified. His warm and inviting hands outstretched for Roger.

“Dear, come over here, we can settle this right now. Nobody wants you to go anywhere.” A chorus of shaky nods.

He stiffened at the sight of Freddie walking over to him, slowly like he was approaching a spooked
animal, with such compassion in his eyes. Roger didn’t deserve it. Not after everything he’d done.

The blonde was still shivering, arms wrapped tightly around himself.

“My mother killed herself.”

The silence in the room was suffocating, as he twirled her signet ring around his finger until the pain was near to giving way to blood and tearing skin instead.

“No, she didn’t.” Reid sounded incredulous, faced with the brutal truth of who his future monarch was. The pathetic thing in front of him, who was expected to rule his nation one day. Roger’s very existence was a joke. “She died in childbirth.”

The blonde shook his head, biting down hard on his bottom lip, gnawing so viciously that Freddie made a small anguished noise in the back of his throat. How many times had he been chastised for that same action? ’Calm down, you little carnivore… You’re going to hurt yourself, Rog.’ Likewise for the wringing of his hands until his fingers popped or the brutal twisting of his ring until it tore his skin.

“No. That’s what we told everyone.”

His hands were so blurry.

The tears that refused to fall were making everything so hazy.

Weak.

“My little sister and I found the empty pill bottle beneath her pillow.”

He took in another wracking breath, head bowed, his tears sounded like rain as they fell to the tiles below.

“The crown kills everyone who wears it in the end.”

-X-

“Many’s the lad fought on that day
Well the claymore did wield
When the night came
Silently lain
Dead on Colloden field.”

Her father wasn’t telling her something.

Fia was far from being stupid and strange men had been in and out of her father’s personal chambers for weeks now.

Her younger sisters had noticed as well.

Morag, petulant little thing she was, had even stopped one, to ask him what he was doing in their castle. Personal business of the King, he’d stammered.

Personal business, her arse.
She flounced down the hallways in a poised little huff, having been summoned herself now to his study, and trying to rekindle the anger in her chest, enough to be able to give him what for once she finally got in there. *Counseling it, cajoling it...* only for it to *dissipate* the moment she crossed the study's threshold and saw her father in his chair, looking utterly devastated as he caressed an old picture on his desk. She could tell by the frame which one it was. A little candid shot of Meddows when he was a tiny boy, having borrowed their father's full-sized crown and oxfords, swimming in them both and wearing a delighted missing-toothed smile in a place of crowning glory upon his lips.

Her Da had tears in his eyes.

She felt her heart twinge.

“Da? What’s wrong?” Fia came to sit before him, studying the lines of his face. *Had there always been so many?* He looked *so tired*, *so unexpectedly frail*. His hands were shaking and he tried to hide them from her piercing gaze.

“Oh nothing, just missing your brother is all.” He physically waved away the questions, as if they were almost preposterous in nature, as though he hadn’t looked in a mirror for days to see just how awful he looked. *Why hadn’t anyone gotten her?* He looked so *weak... Had he taken ill?*

“When was the last time ye got some proper rest?” She whispered, her own eyes creased with worry.

“Oh, *Fia.*” He sighed almost fondly, shaking his greying head. “There’s no need to fuss over me, *mo ghràdh.* I’m quite well.” He cleared his throat pointedly, looking out his study window instead, over the rolling green hills they had always called home. “Tell me about ye and your sisters, has Clarie finished that poem she was talking about over dinner?” *Clare the burgeoning writer, of course their dedicated Da remembered her talking about it.* Something about the meadows being full of *springtime buds and new life.*

“Da, I know something’s bothering ye. *Please, tell me.*” He had always told her everything. What was so different now?

His chapped lips suddenly pressed into a firm line and Fia stubbornly dug the toe of one boot into the carpet. “Nothing is wrong, *mo ghràdh.* But I do have a small favor to ask of ye.” Fia scowled but nodded, leaning forwards expectantly.

“Anything.”

“I need ye to be at a meeting of the British Parliament at Westminster. Ye and your brother, as I am... *otherwise indisposed.*” His voice wavered as he took great pains to not discuss his indisposition. *Suspicions grew in her chest, horrible suspicions.*

“But Da, I have no idea where Meddows *is.*”

“I do.” Another soft smile twitching to life, her father had always had such a soft spot for his only son. “Did ye really think I’d let him go uncared for? He’s my...” *Heir.* “…little boy.” *Hm.* But one look in the aging man’s eyes was enough to confirm it. *Meddows would always carry a sizable piece of their Da’s fragile heart.*

“Oh...”

The prince consort looked so relieved, that it only made her worry increase ten-fold. “I knew I could rely on ye to corral your brother.” With that gentle tongue-in-cheek humor she’d always loved so much.
“…Da?” The tired man looked over at her again. “Ye’d tell me, right? If something was the matter?”

A forced cheerful smile made it’s way onto his face. “Oh yes, mo ghràdh. Always.” It looked brittle, like porcelain.

As though he’d joined the ranks of the dolls he used to give her on every birthday, back when she was a girl. Dolls she could never properly play with, as they weren’t posable and were always in danger of shattering.

Liar.

-X-

“Speed bonnie boat like a bird on the wing
Onward the sailors cry.
Carry the lad that's born to be king
Over the sea to Skye.”

-X-
A Mhaighdean Bhan Uasal (A Noble Maiden Fair)

Chapter Summary

Love comes in many shapes and forms. :) Treasure it when it comes.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e2rHzXaL_k

The Edinburgh Military Tattoo!!! :)”

(Sorry, I promise I'll come back and edit it later :))

“I wear this crown as a symbol of my duty to serve the Scottish people. My title is King of Scots, not of the land, but of the people.”

- Outlaw King (2018)

Roger sighed as he tried in vain to wiggle away from John and the veritable ice-pack army that surrounded them on the rumpled duvet.

“Deaky, it’s fine! Geez, you’re going to give me frostbite.”

Or maybe flash-freeze a cavernous hole in his cheek, whichever one happened first.

But when the drummer saw the look of utter hurt and dejection in Deaky’s warm eyes again… he sighed, picked up the ice and shoved it back onto his face himself. At least that way he didn’t have to see the worry and guilt that lined the bassist’s baby-cheeked face, the way Brian’s hands shook as he brought over the tea tray or darling Freddie who was pacing up and down the bedroom they both shared, still thrumming with anxiety after he’d sweet-talked their way out of the rest of the meeting with John Reid.

“So what are we going to do?” Roger whispered into the carpet, clearing his throat and closing his eyes. Seeing two paths open up in front of him, two paths that led to the same place. That led to a crown resting atop The Stone of Scone for his coronation day. Amhuinn Meddows Edward James Stuart, King of Scots, King of Scotland.

He sighed, rubbing at his temples stubbornly, where fuzzy hints of red were growing back in, he’d noticed them that morning. “I have no idea.” Answering his own question as it seemed nobody else was going to.

It felt like talking, explaining himself to the shadows that hid in the corners of the room.

To those who had come before him.

To those who would come after him.
Just as he was about to spurt off some nonsense about how it was ‘him’ not ‘them’, a prelude to a break-up that would mean so much more than just empty platitudes. He wouldn’t go home now. He couldn’t.

Freddie spoke up, of course it was Freddie.

Roger may have been the future King of Scotland, but Freddie was the King of Queen. “Well, that’s bloody wonderful, darling. Because I do! You are Roger Meddows Taylor, the pinnacle of blonde drumming gremlins everywhere, and the only drummer of Queen. We are going to be bloody famous and nobody is ever going to look past your pretty face or your perfectly-tuned drum kit.”

“And if they do, if they ask, if they find out… then we cross that bridge when we get to it.” Brian sounded so sure of himself, so sure of them. A cup of too-milky tea pressed into Roger’s shaking hands.

He shook his bleach-blonde head with a disbelieving laugh. “You can’t be serious?”

But they weren’t laughing. “We are.”

Roger remembered being very small once, his hand nestled in his mother’s as she led him across the green in his ceremonial clothes, a blue sash securely draped over his chest.

He was lifted up to stand on a dais and watch the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo at Edinburgh Castle for his fourth birthday. Swallowing a ceremonial toast of sparkling water instead of single malt whiskey, and then promptly carried around on the shoulders of a soldier for the better part of the performance. All of the tattoo demonstrating their allegiance to their future monarch, pipers and drummers in full-regalia marching and looking at the tiny redheaded boy above them in his tiny kilt and crown, as if he was something precious.

He received similar looks of devotion now.

But for a wholly different reason.

Roger floundered, his heart rabbiting away in his chest. “And when did you lot decide this then? Telepathically?” His voice broke halfway through the word and he winced. He sounded like he was on the precipice of dissolving into tears.

A flicker of a smile played peekaboo in the corners of Deaky’s mouth. “While you were passed out in the cab and drooling all over Bri.”

“Oh.”

He took a grounding breath, clenching and unclenching his fists, back pressed ramrod straight. He let everything melt away for an instant. In his mind he wasn’t sitting in front of a tribunal waiting to be judged. He was more than a little boy wearing a heavy crown upon red curls or a young prince accepting the flowers of wailing mourners in the streets. He was more than a son, a brother, a prince, a friend, a future king.

More than the blood and broken chromosomes of the generations come before him.

“Roggie, breathe.”

Freddie advised him softly, coaxing Roger to let his bright blue eyes flutter open again.

“I’m sorry…” It came out like a sob, hands pressed so violently against his mouth lest another
escape. Brian was the one who pulled his self-made gag away, and cradled the smaller boy in his arms like a wet baby bird. Pressing a kiss to the crown of Roger’s head. Holding his oldest friend against his chest.

“No, we’re sorry. I’m so sorry.”

Those spindly guitarist’s fingers combed through frizzy unruly blonde hair that ached to curl as it once had. Roger nestled his face into Brian’s collarbones and just breathed in and out. *Grounded, whole, at peace.*

“I shouldn’t have lied to you. It was a sorry thing to do and I’ve mucked up everything, haven’t I?”

He lifted his head to peer into Brian’s eyes with his own watery depths, but all he saw reflected back at him was a wave of worry and guilt.

“No you haven’t, Rog.” A familiar, almost fond tone. God how he’d missed that tone. He pressed himself closer to his oldest friend, who wasn’t planning on letting go, not now, not ever.

But he also knew how soft and sensitive Brian was, how much his lying had probably hurt his gentle curly-haired space-explorer.

“You don’t have to pretend not be hurt, Brimi May.” He played with the edges of Bri’s collar. Part of him waiting for a rebuke for using that nickname and knowing that he couldn’t survive it if he did.

“I’m not pretending,” Brian whispered into the peroxide blonde mop. “I’m just happy you’re still here.”

-X-

“He can’t really be…?”

John’s fingers glossed over a picture in one of his old history textbooks.

A ‘current’ picture of the Scottish Royals.

A woman who must have been Roger’s mother, stared right back at him from the confines of the page, a crown atop her halo of fair curls. Her eyes were bright and she was smiling down at the child in her arms as if he held her every hope within his tiny heaving chest. A chubby little thing in a christening dress, the white bonnet barely able to contain the child’s red curls. The man beside them was wearing a grand kilt and proper waistcoat with all the trimmings. They looked happy.

*HRM Queen Fearchara and HRH Prince-Consort Edward christen their firstborn, HRH Crown Prince Amhuinn Meddows Edward James Stuart.*

As John let his finger linger over the Meddows, embossed there in black ink, he felt his heart sink.

“He is.”

-X-

“What happens when you become King?”
John Reid delicately asked the boy who sat before him, eyes full of confusion and sadness as he stared. *The boy who was born to be king*. It was hard to tie them together. The proud future monarch he had created in his mind, the scholar, the poet, the warrior, the versatile and happy youth.

The human in front of him was a spitfire, a stubborn fool, who loved too fast and far too hard. *A boy who didn’t want the crown.*

“Queen will find a new drummer.” He shrugged, eyes downcast.

“No, Roger,” It felt so wrong to address the youth in front of him by first-name. The wrong first-name to boot. “…what happens to you?”

-X-

She was screaming, gasping, bearing down for all she was worth, wailing deep into the night.

But she went limp the moment the baby left her body, the tiny thing practically falling into the arms of her midwife.

Everyone in the packed room surged forwards to see the birth, and all she could hear was the sound of her heartbeat in her head. Inches away from fainting due to the heat of all the writhing clamoring bodies desperate to catch a glimpse of her baby girl. It was her first delivery, her first pregnancy, her husband was desperately clutching her hand, looking as sick as she felt. Having been in labor for almost half a day now, she knew the court was getting antsy.

The baby screamed and she felt like crying out along with it.

Her hands reached out, searching, needing the infant to cradle in her arms. She wept for it.

“Give me…”

It was meant to be a scream, but it came like a whisper, lost in the throng.

“My baby…”

The cries echoed around the tiny chamber and all waited for the announcement.

She had prayed so long and hard for a girl, knowing full-well what the birth of a son would herald. She chose against the twilight sleep that was suggested to her. The ‘miracle painless birth’, being drugged up and basically unconscious while the child was clawed out with forceps. Instead, she was aware and awake and gave birth to her first child, well-observed and exhausted.

Her eyes fluttered.

“Edward,” She whispered, pressing her sweaty face into her husband’s neck, him clutching her for all he was worth. She remembered the frightened boy she first met during a gala when she was but a girl. Now their daughter was coming. *Their daughter.* She was so certain that it was a girl. *It had to be. It just had to.*

She could see a head of vibrant red hair, dampened and just starting to form wispy curls.

“A son!”

She couldn’t breathe.
“The future King has been born!”

She started to cry, tears streaking her cheeks as a badge of absolute shame.

“Oh don’t cry, *mo chridhe*. We have a healthy son.”

Her husband whispered into her sweat-soaked mane. Voices rose and swelled like the tides, criers were everywhere, papers for days would herald the birth of their son.

She simply held *Scotland’s* newborn son in her arms and mourned for the daughter that could have been hers.

When they carried him out on a pillow and showed him to the crowds gathering below, she watched the burden of her blood fall upon her sleeping angel, with his red hair and gossamer lashes, his blankets fluttering ever so softly in the gentle wind.

-X-

Fia stepped off the plane in a pink designer dress picked out by her attendants, a gaudy tiara balanced precariously atop her curls, a pair of ballet flats the color of soft pink satin and a handbag that probably cost more than GDP of a third world nation.

Fia stepped out of her hotel room in a faded Beatles t-shirt, turned soft in the collar and paint-stained overalls with little suns stenciled on the cuffs and a little Scottish flag stitched onto the front to form a pocket. The whole outfit chosen by herself. Her hair flowing free and a few pounds in her front pocket, she’d seen a bookstore a few paces away and was desperate to look about, to do something besides staring at the wall and paperwork.

Her minders, knowing full well that surrounding her would rather give the going away, followed behind innocuously.

Also knowing full well that if anyone could take care of herself, it was *The Ice Princess*.

*The Snow Queen.*

*She without a heart.*

Perhaps she’d tempted fate then, because the next thing she did was nudge a shelf with her hip, prompting a dusty book of fairytales to nearly cut her life short, as it toppled to the ground, narrowly missing cleaving half her head off. The old Hungarian man behind the counter scowled at her pointedly and she rolled her eyes, picking it up, dusting it off and tucking it under one arm. She’d buy it just for the principal of the thing. Not because the bloke had scared her or anything, but because it was the proper thing to do, thank you very much. (*And she’d rather dented the corner, but eh*).

Just before she got to the counter, having decided not to push her luck any further and finding the rest of the selection rather lacking, the record section caught her eye.

Particularly the newer releases, her father had mentioned in passing that her brother was in a band now and that he’d released some music, but she hadn’t had the time nor resources to hear any of it.

If only she could remember the bloody name of the band.
She remembered that it was rather tarty and tongue-in-cheek, just like her brother to be honest.

Fia scanned each album rather critically, laying them aside once she’d ruled them out.

*Aerosmith, Yoko Ono, The Beach Boys, Elton John, Rick Wakeman…*

*The Six Wives of Henry VIII.*

She smothered a laugh with the back of her hand. Setting that on top of her fairytale book, simply because she wasn’t above taking the piss. Maybe she’d give it to her brother as a gag gift or something, after dragging his sorry arse to Parliament to do his sodding *job.*

Just as she was about to drag her eyes away from the soft yellow album cover, another person had joined her in the pursuit of good music. Fia’s eyes flicked up to meet the gentle brown of a young man, his dapper brown hair feathering down his neck and a soft blush adding a pretty rouge to his apple-cheeks.

She smiled as well, then realized why he was blushing, both their hands were on top of the next album, touching pointedly.

“*Oh! I’m sorry!*”

She instantly pulled away to be polite and his soft flush grew darker, as he snapped his hand back as well. “No, um… totally my fault.” His voice was as gentle as the brown of his eyes and he had a cute little gap in between his front teeth. It was quite charming. She hastily dragged her eyes away and focused on the album instead.

“…*Queen?*” She mouthed the word at first and then clarity filled her. That was it! “*Queen!*” She cheered, picking it up and laying it on her stack, having completely forgotten about the boy who watched her still.

“The one you’ve been looking for?”

Fuck, she whipped around and nodded, holding her stack to her chest. No way she was giving it up, pretty boy could find another album he liked. *Pretty boy?*

Surprisingly enough, she *wanted* to listen to her brother’s music for once in her life.

*(Which was a lie, watching her brother play his violin was something truly special and it had been one of the few delights of her childhood).*

“Ye! It’s well… It’s my brother’s band actually.” Blushing just as hard as before despite herself, she was probably going to pass out from blood loss soon, with all of it going to her cheeks instead of her brain.

His eyes grew wide, genuinely surprised. “Really?” A smile toying at the corners of his mouth, like a sunrise after a dark night.

She nodded without glancing towards him, scanning the band’s names on the back of the cover. “Yea, I’m um… *Roger Taylor’s* sister! The resemblance is uncanny, innit?” Ha! *As if.* With his bleached and fried hair, they looked even *less* alike than usual. Dowsy had always taken after their mother, in both looks and temperament.

The boy laughed and she found that she didn’t mind the sound. “I’m sorry, you just sounded a little *Scottish* for Cornwall.” Her hand unconsciously searched out the flag on her chest, fingertips playing
over the stitching.

Fia anxiously brushed her endless dark curls over her shoulder instead, in a way that could have easily been misconstrued for flirty. “Don’t we all?” Then, before she could think better of it, she held out a hand. “I’m Fia, by the way.”

The boy accepted hers easily enough, and it was nice to feel like a normal girl for once. “I’m John, John Deacon actually. The bassist of Queen.”

Or maybe not.

Fuck.

She scowled, hands instantly resting on her rounded hips through the rough denim. “Oh. Oh! You knew!” She even scowled, looking more and more like her brother with every little idiosyncratic motion.

She had learned *from him* after all.

But Fia couldn’t really be angry about people knowing, she was who she was. *Why be ashamed of that?*

“*I did. I do.*” He seemed amused by her anger, or rather by the little mannerisms that she and her brother shared when they were angry.

He followed her over to the checkout counter, the grumpy old man ringing up her purchases with an absentminded hand. For a paying customer, he seemed awfully keen to get her out of his shop. Surely she hadn’t been that annoying? Her eyes flicked back to the upset bookshelf, which still looked a little wonky. Or maybe she *had been*...

As she marched down the steps of the shop, her eyes flicked over to John’s round boyish face. His open innocence was so bewitching, she couldn’t manage to tear her eyes away.

Then his clumsy foot caught on the edge of the banister and she was quick to reach out and steady his arm. The touch was electric, perhaps it was just static cling, but she nearly let go and let him fall on his ass from the shock of it. Hurriedly, she leaned over and offered the crook of her arm for him to hold onto.

He accepted.

“Those are the most impractical shoes.”

The youth was wearing these amazingly high white platform boots that she couldn’t help rolling her eyes at.

He snickered again at the purse of her lips and didn’t let go of her arm. She couldn’t stop staring...

*God, that gap-toothed smile…*

She felt her heart rabbit about in her chest.

No. No, no, no.

The eldest Stuart princess cleared her throat, tiara or no tiara, she was who she was and made no apologies for it, but she would *not* be conquered by a pretty boy who gently held her arm and looked at her in a way no one else ever had. “So you know about my brother then? About who our family
“Was it?” Her voice was clipped, taut. But the boy didn’t seem to notice it.

He shrugged.

“Yes, he told us yesterday.”

Fia whipped around and stared at him instantly, unable to disguise her shock. “Yesterday? He’s been here for years!” She was aghast and John’s feelings on the matter were quite easily summed up with his tight-lipped: “Yeah.” His voice shaking.

There was a story there, she could feel it.

But she didn’t push.

“That must have been something.”

John grunted, the corners of his mouth slowly pulling up like marionette’s strings, forced. “Well, you don’t learn everyday that your best mate’s a prince.” He still sounded hurt. She fought the urge to squeeze his hand in comfort.

A grin ghosted her lips. “Oh, I meant having to deal with him for so long.”

They both giggled, open-mouthed, he was still holding onto her arm and they turned their faces toward the sunshine. She had no idea where they were walking to, but in that moment, she really didn’t care. She just wanted to keep walking with him.

“So what’s it like then?” John sounded like he’d been holding that one in for a while.

She furrowed her brows. “What?”

The skinny slip of a thing next to her only shrugged. “Being a princess, I suppose?” Fia smothered a laugh, swallowing it down roughly. Had he not asked Dowsy about being royal? Usually it was the first question out of everyone’s mouths when they finally found out the truth.

But the boy looked so genuine when he asked, that she couldn’t help but try to explain. She stared off into the distance for a moment before sighing.

“Well, I’m probably getting married soon.”

John was obviously confused. “Congratulations?” Cute.

“Thanks, I’ve never met him.” Fia injected a forced lightness into her tone, yet it was still heavy regardless. “But we’ll be married soon enough. It’ll probably be an English prince, maybe to smooth over some of our bad relations.” It was funny really, sometimes royalty seemed so advanced. Always with the latest gadget and following the latest trends, and yet here she was, being given away like a piece of meat to the highest bidder. Funny.

His eyes grew enormous. “You’re going to marry a total stranger?” He was shocked and that shock was what caught her off-guard.

“Yes.” Without hesitation.

“Why?” He seemed so incredulous and she realized how different they were in an instant.

She had never seen it as a choice.
“Because I’m a princess and part of my birthright is getting sold.”

Simple as it was, it still hurt.

“I’m sorry.” His warm brown eyes were downcast as they walked, his fingers tightening slightly on her arm. It was a nice pressure. A grounding weight. “You really don’t have a choice?”

She sighed, tracing the contours of the clouds in the sky with her eyes alone. “No… Well, I could **abdicate**, but I won’t. Dowsy needs me. One day he’ll be King and it’s going to destroy him.” Said so calmly, just enough fact of her life. She loved her brother, she loved him more than her country. **More than herself.**

The realization kicked the breath free from her lungs and almost made her pause.

The youth’s fuzzy brown brow furrowed. “What do you mean?” Sounding as worried as ever.

Fia fought the urge to pick apart the boys words, to study his face for any lies.

Had her brother really done it? Had he found people who cared about him for **him** and not just **the title**?

She allowed herself to hope the best for him and wished that one day she could be so lucky.

“Exactly what I said. I assume he told ye about our mother?”

_The young princess would never admit it, but sometimes the woman who haunted her memories felt more like Dowsy’s mother than her own._

“Yes.”

Fia released a little chuckle despite herself, it was brittle, uncouth, a small humorless huff of breath. “Dowsy’s a lot like her. **Too much** like her, if ye know what I mean? He feels too much. Not like me.” She shook her head, wondering when being a painted doll had begun to work in her favor. “They call me **The Ice Princess.**”

_When had being a real person become something unattainable?_

“Why?” (More ‘whys’. **It seemed as if the boy was desperate to understand every facet of the world**).

She was flabbergasted again, it would seem that John was quite good at shocking her, she even stopped and whipped around to stare at him once more. He was making fun of her, he had to be.

But he was as sincere as he was before. He was honestly curious and it was so disarming.

Fia was even a little dizzy with the rapid change.

“Because I am? **Cold, calculating, uncaring**…” And several other things that she’d rather not say aloud.

John let his hand sink lower until it was wrapping itself around hers, instead of just her elbow. “You don’t seem like that to me, **Sofia.**”

The girl didn’t pull away, her lips just twitched, rather gloomily.

“Ye don’t know me, and it’s **Fiona.**”
John didn’t let go either. “I’d like to then, Fiona.” Stubborn arse.

But...

He’d like to?

Her heart started thumping a mile a minute in her chest.

_He’d like to._

“How about ye start by taking me to my brother?” Fia gnawed a little on her bottom lip, wondering why she was so nervous all of a sudden. It wasn’t like a pretty boy in a record shop was the scariest thing that she’d ever encountered in her life. Although it probably was one of the _strangest_. “Maybe you could tell me more about John Deacon too?”

Now it was his turn to look surprised. “I’m pretty boring, Fia.” Blushing in a way that coaxed her near, that beckoned her. She stepped closer and ghosted her fingertips over his knuckles, feeling the calluses that playing his bass had left behind.

“Ye don’t seem like that to me, Jonathan.”

She wasn’t sure what it was about the boy from the record shop, that made her want to be a Sofia. _To be someone else, something else, for just one minute more._

-X-

He hunkered down, knees pressing into the hard mausoleum floor and his head pressing into the carvings beside him. “Hm,” He hummed. “Hello _mo chridhe_. I’m getting far too old for all of this fanfare.” He huffed a little laugh into the still night air.

“Did ye miss me?”

No answer came.

But then again, the old King hadn’t expected one.

Not in a place of the dead, he wasn’t quite _that_ senile yet.

No, he could simply sit and relish in the feeling of love and serenity that always abounded when he was near to his love’s resting place. That was all he wanted.

“I sent Fia to corral our boy. I know, I know, not the best choice under the sun. But they need to learn to do this for when I’m _gone._”

His voice hitched in his chest and he rubbed at the near constant ache in there now, a dull stabbing pain that never seemed to abate anymore. “I’m ill, love. I’ve got the _cancer_ and it’s not…” He just wanted her to hold him. To be able to press kisses into that lovely mane of fair hair and see the girl he’d been in love with for what felt like all of his life. “It’s not _good._”

How he wished that he could simply give up and join her. Tears fell like raindrops onto the cold, unforgiving floor.

“I’m going to get the treatment, love. I need to hold on as long as possible. I need…” The old man
swallowed, his fingers digging into his trousers and letting out a sigh that came with a new pain. “I need to give him all the *time* that I possibly can.”

*Heavy is the head that bears the crown.*

Tears were still present in his eyes however, an eternal badge of shame, as he leaned in to press a cheek to the cold stone.

“But I’ll be home soon, mo chridhe. I promise ye that.”

*I’ll be home soon.*

Decades ago, a young queen had looked at a young boy with nothing to give her and had seen the world in his eyes.

-X-

“He didn’t marry you to become king. He became king because he wanted to marry you.”

— Megan Whalen Turner

-X-
Chapter Summary

Sorry this took so long guys!!!!

More info on the Holyrood ceremonies:

https://www.royal.uk/holyrood-week

And since we've seen the present and the past in these snips, can you tell me what the last bit of this chapter is about?? ;)

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for staying tuned!!!!!! (I promise to answer every comment when I get home from work!) <3333

“Good Christian people, I have come here to die according to the law and thus yield myself to the will of the King, my Lord. And if ever in my life I did offend the King's grace, then surely with my death I do now atone. I pray and beseech you all to pray for the life of the King, my sovereign Lord and yours who is one of the best princes of the Earth, who has always treated me so well. Where for I submit to death a goodwill, humbly asking for pardon from all the world. If anyone should take up my case, I ask them only to judge it kindly.”

[her tearful attendants take off her cloak and jewelry; she gives them a weak smile]

-The Execution of Anne Boleyn (The Tudors)

Fia learned the rules of royal etiquette with her brother, long before she was old enough to attend primary school.

They became a pivotal part of her life, just as they had for all of her younger sisters and her older brother.

No one can eat after the King has finished. Always curtsy, depth depends on rank. No visible PDA, or even hand-holding. Always pack an all-black ensemble when traveling. Heirs cannot travel together after an heir-child’s twelfth birthday. No shellfish of any sort ever. No public touching between royals and non-royals. Only ceremonial garments of the Crown Prince and King can be adorned with fur. No hats after six pm, only tiaras worn at a 45 degree angle. Accept every gift, no matter how strange. Never turn your back to an heir. No cleavage of any sort. Among many others.
It was far from the easiest life.

But it was her life.

Her life ruled by regulations, politics and the power of a tiara studded with pretty stones.

She happily snagged a chip from John’s recently filched chippy basket, burning her fingers from the oil, then yelping and sucking them with all the decorum of a soft and round pufferfish.

“You know, we probably should have paid for these.”

She couldn’t help but laugh, when she saw the pinched look of guilt on John’s face.

“Was that your first grand theft, Jonathan?” Quite piss-poor, if you asked her. She stole another chip.

All her rules, her little castle of security, the sturdy basis for her life, were off-vacationing somewhere in a nice summer home in the country, while she shared stolen chips with one of her brother’s best-friends.

His hand was still on the crook of her arm as she led them along.

The rare glimmers of London sunshine, made his hair dance wild with stripes of a lighter shade. Suddenly, he reminded her of her darling father in his smile, and in his wicked schoolboy excitement as they nicked food from the chippy. (Honestly though, she felt a little bad about the impromptu theft and might make it a point to go back and repay them later, if her shadows hadn’t already). But in that moment, all she could think about was how shiny his lips looked from the chip oil and if they’d taste the same.

Shame bloomed like a passion flower in the pit of her stomach.

He’s a commoner.

Stop daydreaming about an unshackled boy.

A boy who could marry any girl of his choosing.

A boy who could have a normal life.

“Sofia, are you alright?”

Concern brimming in his warm calf-brown eyes instead of tears. The tears that she could feel in her own, or that she would have sported if she wasn’t made of ice and snow, instead of flesh and bone.

“Fine,” Forcing a smile, one of her porcelain people-pleasing smiles. “Are we nearly there then?” It was quite nice to walk down a city street without people curtsying to her every other minute or lowering their eyes. That was so bloody dull.

It was nice to be looked at with no expectations (even by John).

The boy chuckled a little bit, upsetting the halo that seemed to have taken refuge up there in his feathery hair. “Yes. We’re meant to be in the middle of a meeting actually, the first with our new record deal, I’m a bit late now I suppose.” He caught the bottom of his lip on the right side of his mouth to bite down on. One of her brother’s nasty habits no doubt. “Not that they’d notice if I didn’t come back at all…” She scowled, still distracted, and prodded the side of his mouth pointedly with a sharp manicured fingernail, reminding him of his self-mutilation. It was something she often did with her brother, but as she realized a moment too late, a motion that could easily be… misconstrued with
Both of them blushed scarlet, and she quickly processed what he’d said with a jolt.

“‘They certainly would!’” She squawked, resembling a prettied peahen, hands on her hips.

He shook his head with a humorless laugh, and regarded her so tenderly for some reason, it was striking. “I’m just the bassist, Sofia.” His voice was achingly soft, but she wouldn’t tolerate it, not one bit. Self-deprecation did not become him.

“And I’m a sodding princess, that doesn’t mean shite now does it? Ye are splendid, John Deacon, anyone who would tell ye otherwise is a fool.” She prodded him hard in his chest instead, scowling. “And worse! Treasonous!”

Prompting the wicked boy to shove the chip basket into her hands, so that he could support himself on his knees whilst he laughed like a loon in the middle of the bloody street. Fia tried the best she could to smother her own smile.

It didn’t work.

“Treasonous?” He wheezed, when he finally managed to catch a breath.

“Yes, of course!” She still insisted with those pufferfish cheeks of hers. “You’re the darling of a princess!” Then froze at the sound of her own treacherous words and could have happily died right then and there. Shite.

“I meant prince!” Her voice came out thready and weak. “Dowsy’s best-friend.”

Horrible save there, Fiona. She wanted to bang her head against a nearby gutter-pipe in shame.

“You’re just like him, you know.” John looked soft and pensive as his fingers grasped her arm gently, his face tilted up towards the sky.

“Hm?” The eldest Princess of Scots was scrubbing at her cheeks in embarrassment, only half-listening.

“Your brother. If I ever said that in front of him, I’m sure he would have said all the things that you did, word for word.” The boy looked so sad in the next minute, looking at her with something that she had never seen directed at her before, not from someone who wasn’t in their family or that wasn’t preceded by a death. Pity. “He also has the same fake smile.”

When she was a little girl, she’d had a little scaled down model of Queen Elizabeth on her coronation day, it was her favorite plaything, she used to lay tummy-down on a rug in the dining room and run her fingers over the lavish fur pelts on the floor. A tiny painted golden carriage drawn by little white horses in her hands, the future English queen in her ceremonial garb, majestic crown and all.

‘That,’ She distinctly remembered one of her nannies saying. ‘...is the mother of your future husband.’

Fia threw the toy out the window.

“I did learn from the best.”

-X-
Roger was sixteen years old, the first time he led the Holyrood ceremonies in his mother’s place.

He hated every moment of it.

Standing on the green during the Ceremony of the Keys to begin the pomp and circumstance on the forecourt of Holyrood Palace. Back when the country didn’t know if it now had a King Amhuinn or a King/Prince Consort Edward, as its leader. The Lord Provost handed him the keys to the city of Edinburgh, as though he hadn’t had claim over it since he was in nappies.

“For your ancient and hereditary kingdom of Scotland, your most serene Royal Highness.”

The Guards of Honor surrounded him in full regalia, as if to frighten away all who dared to oppose their new unquestionable blood ruler. Then they stepped back to guard the line of princesses during the Investiture in the Great Gallery at the Palace of Holyroodhouse, the end of the Royal Mile in the center of Edinburgh. It was a ceremonial event meant to recognize Scots who had made a significant effort to better their country. Usually the odd professor, humanitarian, non-profit charity official etc.

And it was always followed by an enormous Garden Party, one that his Mam had quite vehemently despised.

Eight thousand or so Scots, all to look at him like a caged animal, a pretty flower dripping with the blood of thousands. Warpaint made from the split blood of Culloden’s fields, of Eigg’s Massacre, of Glencoe’s, of Tranent’s, of Dunoon’s, and of Monzievaird’s.

All so he could rule, standing like a pale shade in his mother’s place. A piss-poor imitation of their perfect Stuart Queen. All bouncy red curls and terrified icy blue eyes.

It didn’t take a genius to see that it wasn’t his place. Not really.

That he was a pretty little doll, dressed up and made to sit, stand, pose and wave when desired by those around him. One of those expensive dolls that the little ones asked for on holidays, the ones that could laugh and cry despite being made from plastic.

The first time he tried on his mother’s crown, his head had wobbled dangerously and he’d almost fallen to the floor, completely unbalanced.

Perhaps a premonition of his future reign.

Fuck, his reign.

Even the mere thought of such had made him ill as a boy.

He vomited in a bush mid-Garden Party and it tasted like straight bourbon all the way up.

-X-

Ray Foster didn’t look very impressed as he regarded them coolly, his eyes scarcely lingering for a cursory moment on Roger’s tired face.

His skin was undoubtedly a touch green from last night’s youthful boozy extravagance, his hair was hidden by a tawny pageboy cap and his robin-egg eyes by his token sunnies. Clearly Reid hadn’t told Foster, whose accent was reminiscent of a Loch Ness boy through and through. Perhaps if the
bloke had managed to look past the two inches that made up his downturned nose, he would have seen his future monarch staring right back at him. And probably would have choked on that bloody cigar resting next to him, smoldering away in a crystalline ashtray.

Roger was idly toying with the cup of lukewarm shit tea in his hands, the top of the handle was chipped and he liked the way the texture felt on his thumb pad.

Paul, the rat-faced bloke at Reid’s beck and call, had pressed it into the drummer’s hands with a clumsy bow before the meeting. “Tea, your grace.” Eyes downcast as he’d scurried away, tail tucked between his legs.

All of them had grimaced pointedly at the title, but none so much as Roger, who had poured most of the shite bean-water into a nearby potted fern as he did so.

Foster finally sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose. “Wasn’t there meant to be four of you?”

“Deaky’s just running a bit late, he’ll be here soon, dear.” Freddie piped up with that placating smile of his. But Foster looked as if being called Freddie’s dear was an insult and merely sighed deeply once more.

Just then, as if the sound of his name had summoned him, John was bolting through the heavy mahogany door to Foster’s office and cramming himself down between Roger and Brian, stuffed on the couch facing the imposing desk. He was breathing rather heavily, puffing from all the smokes no doubt, and sputtering as though he’d just ran up three flights of stairs without pause. His cheeks were a soft scarlet and he was worrying at his bottom lip.

“So sorry, I’m late. There was a girl at the record-shop.” He wheezed, looking to the older Scotsman apologetically and then at Jim Beach and Reid behind them.

“A girl?” The producer grumbled from behind his sunglasses. “You’re late because of a girl?”

John nodded with those pink cheeks of his, already looking suitably chastised.

“Well, your friend over there.” Foster nodded to Freddie who had been fiddling with the record-player near the desk only moments before, and had finally sat down in an arm-chair to cease his pacing, one long thin leg flopped over a spindly arm-rest. “Has spent great pains telling me about how you lot are so different from any other wanna-be rockstars around today. But this only proves just how ordinary you four really are, bloody medium talents… Get out of my office.” He waved his hand about, as if telling them to bugger off in as little words as possible.

Reid was stricken. “Now Ray, don’t you think you’re being hasty?”

Roger was aghast. “You can’t do that!”

Brian scoffed in wordless shock, eyes wide and Freddie’s own jaw fell open, flashing those impressive teeth of his, plainly at a loss for words for once.

“No, wait! You don’t understand!” John’s eyes were wide with guilt and his front teeth pressed against his bottom lip petulantly, showing off his charming little gap to the whole room. “She wasn’t just a girl!” Roger could see the younger boy mentally grasping at straws and watched as the light bulb went off behind his eyes. “She was the princess of Scotland!”

Queen’s own blond drummer choked.

“What?” He coughed around a lungful of air, mouth hidden behind the back of his hand.
Deaky flashed him the most sympathetic look he could muster. “I’m sorry, but she needs to talk to you after the meeting, she’s downstairs.” That last bit was whispered, but it was obvious that everyone heard it anyway. That everyone in the vicinity now knew, and while they were most likely only confused by the information (unless they were already privy), Roger felt hot anger light up like a stricken match inside his chest, teeth clenched hard enough to ache.

“Well that’s fucking wonderful, Deaky! Would you like your thirty silver pieces before or afterwards?” His tone sounding bitter and pained in a way that he didn't bother to hide.

John looked askance at his best-friend turned brother, mouth tugging downward into a frown at the sound. “Rog, that’s not fair.” His soft voice was suddenly pressed tight, fingers digging into his bent thighs.

“Fair? You brought her here! That’s what isn't fair!” The blond gripped that awful teacup in both hands and slammed it down on the wooden table in all his frustration, long before he managed to think better of it. The blow was hard enough to feel the porcelain shatter in his hands, falling to jagged bits in the very moment that he removed his them. “I left Scotland for a reason, John and you brought her here?!” His voice broke in the latter part of his exclamation, reeking of hurt and betrayal. Thank you, Judas.

Roger’s mouth nearly fell open in shock when he saw Deaky, quiet little Deaky, jump to his feet in anxiety, wringing his hands like he couldn’t believe the words coming out of his mouth, but they came anyway. “You act like she’s some kind of monster, but she’s not. She’s nice, and funny and kind!” The blond was turned incredulous. Was John... defending her?

“Oh, spare me the deep connection you have with The Ice Princess of Scotland!” The Crown Prince scoffed and squawked like some kind of bird of prey, in a way reminiscent of his sister mere hours before.

“Don’t call her that!” John’s hands were fisted by his sides, trembling with an unprecedented anger. An anger that surprised even poor Deaky himself.

The drummer’s lips curled and his hands made their way to his sides, grinding his teeth. “She’s my little sister and I’ll call her whatever I bloody well like!” He was completely and utterly flabbergasted, shocked to the bone, behind all the misplaced fury. How exactly had Fia won over John Deacon of all people? John bloody Deacon!

The bassist stepped closer, meeting Roger’s blue eyes with brimming defiance in his own doughy brown. “Is that an order, Your Highness?” The title was spat from his lips, full of unprecedented venom.

It was enough to send Roger reeling and whispering a weak little: “Fuck off, John.” As he flopped back down into his seat, head slumping forward, to eventually be caught and cradled in his hands. Fia. Fia. Fuck. “You know it’s not.” He sighed, anger dissipating on the breeze, voice breaking like a thin sheet of ice.

“Rog…” He felt Deaky’s hand settle between his shoulder blades and winced despite himself. He could hear pity in the other man’s voice and it threatened to incense him once more.

“Is anyone going to tell me what the fuck is going on?!” Ray Foster roared, standing up with a bang that echoed throughout the room, deafening in a way akin to cannon fire. Everyone grimaced and winced at the noise, as well as the way it echoed and grated on their inner ears. Roger himself felt ten kinds of ill, as Jim and Reid both stepped forwards to try to explain and placate the man sitting before them. Not that Jim knew the half of it, they'd just met him that morning.
But before the pair could get close enough to say anything, the old Scot held up a hand, raising his sunnies to stare at Roger, starting in a wistful tone, a knowing tone.

“Are you really…?”

Roger closed his eyes, at the same time Princess Fiona got tired of waiting in a corner.

-X-

The twelve-year-old Crown Prince of Scotland reached out a single small hand, to touch the crown sitting cold and unmoving on his uncle’s desk. A forever mess, as his mother liked to call it, papers strewn everywhere and piles stacked as if about to topple over.

The crown’s velvet was soft as his fingertips stroked it, but it was so very old, the pearls looked as if they were ready to fall off, the rubies caught the light in a funny way and looked oh so very heavy to hold. He winced at the thought of having to place the whole thing atop his head. The white ruffle around the bottom wasn’t as soft as it seemed to be at first look, or to the casual observer, and the gold ridges threatened to prick his fingers at the slightest caress.

He knew what the other Honors of Scotland were as well, that they would be pressed into his grip, the gold-plated sword and scepter for him to hold like drumsticks. But they weren’t on the desk for him to practice with, it was only a sash that remained. A soft blue sash, the one that was his uncle’s on his coronation day.

The boy couldn’t bring himself to pick it up. Swallowing hard and turning away to sink to his bum next to the desk instead, mere inches away from burying his face into his trouser knees and weeping, like a younger child would’ve.

The little boy sniffled regardless, tears dripping down his chin.

He could hear his imposing mother through the door, talking to her royal advisors and a handful of trusted members of their Scottish Parliament. She sounded angry and none of his aunts and uncles, not even his father, could stop her mid-warpath.

“I won’t stand for this! Ye know I won’t!” He heard her roar though the fingers that plugged up his ears as he trembled. “And my brother would not either. Ye know that!”

“Your Highness, this is the only choice we have… the country must have a king.”

The sound of her heels was louder than gunfire. “No, the country needs a Regent, and that shall be I.”

“Highness, your brother issued no referendum that ye should rule in your son’s stead in the event of his inability, only that Robert should succeed him.”

“He didn’t know this would happen! Ye know this isn't what he wanted! He didn’t want this to be Robbie’s burden, at least not so early! Jim, do something!” She was desperate and sounded close enough to tears for it to rip her son up inside.

His Uncle Jim sounded so pained. “I’m so sorry, there’s nothing I can do.”

That made her go ballistic, with wordless sobs mixed into aching cries.
“He’s twelve years old!”

“Highness,” An elderly voice gently reminded her and Robbie gasped from where he sat. “…your mother was nine.”

-X-

“The Lion and the Unicorn were fighting for the crown:
The Lion beat the Unicorn all around the town.
Some gave them white bread, some gave them brown:
Some gave them plum-cake and drummed them out of town.”

— Lewis Caroll, Alice au pays des merveilles
A Revolution is a Simple Thing

Chapter Summary

Thanks to all of you for continuing to read this story! :DDD Thank you so much!!!

xoxoxo

As well as my firstborn and all the love in the world to the real MVP: my beta-reader @makesteverogersproud !!! (Go check out their blog on tumblr, they are one of the best humans I have ever met!)

Chapter Notes

Features The Neva Flows from Anastasia.

:DDDDDD

Enjoy!! <333333

"The Neva flows
A new wind blows
And soon it will be spring
The leaves unfold
The tsar lies cold
A revolution is a simple thing..."

The night after he told them just felt wrong.

Roger stared up at the ceiling of his bedroom, in the apartment they all shared.

The sight of the occasional cobweb, the suspicious stain against the plaster that looked vaguely like an inchworm, and stray pieces of scotch tape from posters long past. All calmed him significantly.

But when he closed his pacific blue eyes once more... He was back in the royal nursery at Balmoral, staring up at the ecru linen canopy draped above his cradle like a mourning shroud. Or he was back in his bedroom at Holyroodhouse, staring up at the roaring lion fixtures of carved mahogany on the bedpost above his head and the tartan that hung down to tickle his nose.

Yet when his eyes sprang open once more, it was only a head of incorrigible black curls that were doing the tickling. They weren't Fia’s, despite the way his heart lurched at the thought of his long-suffering baby sister, they were Bri's. The guitarist’s eyes were closed and he was drooling away on Roger’s bare chest where the slightest hints of soft red fuzz were growing against the ivory skin.

Freddie was also crammed into Roger’s bed, in what little space they had left, turned to face them
with pink mouth slightly parted and whorls of inky hair obscuring his butterfly-lashed eyes. Freddie’s light snores soothed Roger’s racing mind.

They were both curled towards him, Brian and Freddie, as if guarding him at his weakest. Guarding him, despite all that had happened between them.

The crab and the fae, guarding the lion in his den.

Deaky appeared moments later, a book tucked under his arm and tears on his cheeks.

He threw the book to the floor as if it were meaningless, and before Roger could wriggle around to free himself and hug his last wayward lamb, John beat him to it and cuddled up with them anyway. He put Roger’s pillow on his thighs and let the prince drift off to bass-calloused fingers combing through the bleached blonde tufts, curling at the roots and shot through with red.

-X-

“Be very careful of these rumors that prevail
Be very careful what you say
I was a boy who lived the truth behind the tale and no one got away...”

-X-

Eddie met the Queen of Scotland when he was just a boy.

The thick tartan wool of his sash was itching at his chest as he dozed off against the wall at a royal ceilidh. His Mam had forced him to go to the ceremony with her and his Da. Just like she forced him into the traditional garb of respect that morning. It was the MacLeod family tartan of the Highlands, a ghastly yellow shade that made the wearer stand out like a beacon when surrounded by the reds, blues and greens of others.

He looked like a sunny yellow daffodil, at least according to the little girl who approached him.

She was younger than him, with hair the same shade as his kilt braided back and wrapped around her head like a crown. She wore two different shades of red tartan and it wasn’t until he’d spoken with her and danced her into a tizzy, that he realized just who she was.

“Should ye really be leaning against the wall like that?” Chara was so prim and proper at that age, without a foulmouthed Eddie to corrupt her quite yet. To drag out errant giggles from her lips and an unwillingness to comply with the lackluster decisions that those around her tried to force her hand in.

“Is there really nothing else to do at the party, Master MacLeod?”

He’d merely shrugged, taking her in for the first time. “Not really, it’s boring. This lot wouldn’t pass at a real ceilidh.” The ceilidhs that he had grown up with were jovial things. Dancing about in a pub or a field, girls being tossed around so violently that their feet left the floor, and men knocked knees and elbows with strangers. The stiff, delicate and controlled thing that was occurring before his eyes was remarkably depressing in comparison.

“A real ceilidh?” She’d looked so confused at the idea, to her the tame and temperate thing she knew was a ceilidh.
But Eddie was emphatic. “Yea! A ceilidh for the people, not just for the boring old crabbets.” A festival for the commoners, for all the men, women and children who wanted to celebrate and rejoice with each other. A joyful explosion of dance and song.

The little girl still looked mystified, so he’d extended a hand to her when he heard the band start playing the tune to *Strip the Willow*.

“Dance with me?”

Chara’s hand had felt so tiny in his own.

But that tiny hand was surprisingly strong as he gripped her by the wrists to swing her so violently that her feet, in their dainty black ghillie shoes, left the floor. All the other couples were tamely dancing down the path in little circles, but not Eddie and Chara, who spun like they were on opposite sides of a hurricane. When he finally let go, the tiny blonde girl flew off and landed on her bottom, much to the horror of everyone who surrounded them. Her coronet of hair had come loose to tumble down her back, waves of spun gold that covered her eyes until she pushed them out of the way.

That was the first time it clicked for him, the colors of tartans she wore.

The red, black, green and white tartan, of Clan Stewart (*the Royals*) of the Lowland clans. As well as the lighter red, green, black tartan of Clan Stuart of the Highland clans.

(*Shite. There was only one child who could wear those tartans*).

Eddie suddenly felt weak in the knees and practically saw his life flashing before his eyes.

At least twelve attendants rushed towards the giggling little girl, sitting on the floor in all her finery, and Eddie was stricken by the fact that he had just danced with his eleven-year-old Queen.

And he had just *thrown her to the floor*.

Eddie rapidly made peace with the fact that he was probably going to be murdered in cold blood by his own mother, who was turning puce in anger, if Her Majesty’s Royal Guards didn’t beat her to it.

The little Queen simply brushed her hair away from her cornflower blue eyes and rushed back towards him, clothes in a complete disarray, to extend her hand for a kiss. With everyone watching their every move, she was showing her support of him. He had won her favor. Eddie was the first person to treat her like a girl and not a young Queen since she was nine years old.

Was it any wonder that they engaged in a handfasting ceremony roughly five years later?

Or that soon enough, Eddie would be spinning his own tiny daughters around during Royal Ceilidhs. Each of them wearing skirts of Royal Stewart tartan and sashes of both Clan Stuart and Clan MacLeod. Or that his only son would be born the heir to everything they had between them.

His little Amhuinn, born with his name and Chara’s eyes.

Eddie was never meant to be a King.

He never wanted to be a King.

All he wanted to do was marry Chara, and when he lost her, all he wanted to do was spare his son the same burden. Eddie wasn’t a perfect man. He never claimed to be one.

But he did love his children. He loved them more than anything in the world. And he knew what
being King would do to his son. Amhuinn, who for all his stubbornness and anger, was soft and kind at heart, too gentle for the throne. The same way his mother had been. It took a special kind of heart, held under lock and key, to rule a nation and make the choices that could raze or save your people.

Because no matter what decision you made, you were always going to hurt someone.

And his braw, bonnie boy, who had once cried for days over a dead fox that he’d tried and failed to nurse back to health, would be torn to pieces.

-X-

“I saw the children as the soldiers closed the gate
The youngest daughter and her pride
My father leaving on the night they met their fate
His pistol by his side.”

-X-

Roger, who had never really been Roger Meddows Taylor or Crown Prince Amhuinn for that matter, stared at Ray Foster with a stiff upper lip and an icy gaze that his bandmates’ despised. It was like staring at a living doll where their best-friend was meant to be.

“Since you were so kind to ask, I am His Royal Fucking Highness Crown Prince Amhuinn Meddows Edward James Stuart of Scotland, of Scots, the Duke of Rothesay, of Clan MacLeod, of the Royal Stewarts, of Clan Stuart and a dozen other denominations that I don’t care to bloody recite.” His white-knuckled fists were clenched by his sides as he spat every word.

“Yes, I am your Future King, you poncy little Loch boy.”

He forced himself to take a steadying breath at their recoil from his words. “But for all intents and purposes… in this room, I am Roger Meddows Taylor, the drummer of Queen, a private person who owes nothing to anyone. Much less you, Mr. Foster.” A human puppet, a doll with rouge on its cheeks and a painted-up smile to hide his bite. Handmade Voodoo dolls would often hold pieces of the human they were meant to parody. A lock of hair, a button, or perhaps a slice of a human smile.

Ray Foster looked fit to keel over where he sat, but to his credit, all he did was swallow a gulp of whiskey, grunt at the burn and raise a little toast in Roger’s honor. “I’m of Clan MacLeod myself, on my Mam’s side.”

Roger smiled in surprise, the gesture was genuine in a way that changed the glacial countenance of his face. “Brill, we’re kin then.” He rolled his shoulders and opened his palms. “Since my Da’s the Chief and all.” As if a MacLeod needed prompting. Many clansmen of their family had long since boasted in pubs all over: We’re royals now, canna you tell? The Queen married a MacLeod!

“Aye, I know.” Foster nodded with another swig of whiskey, offering the tumbler Roger’s way. “Bonnie Eddie’s a good bloke.”

The drummer recoiled on principle as well as confusion at the name, though he did accept a swig of the good vintage that Ray handed over. “Bonnie Eddie?” The words tasted odd and foreign in his mouth, having never heard his father called that before, the same way the whiskey burned on the
way down. “That’s your king, mate. Show a little decorum.” As if he himself had ever shown any.

“He’s not my King, he may be the late Queen’s husband yes, but that doesn’t make him my King. Her boy bairn is my only King.” When Roger denied the bottle a second time, in his shock, Foster poured him a glass instead, shooting it across the desk in a way that made Roger duty-bound to catch it and take another sip. “You’re my King.”

It was a sentiment that he’d heard before, but one that he’d always despised. It had consistently filled him with guilt.

The blond shook his head, “Not according to the Queen’s wishes, Highlander.” Not an insult, merely a title and a descriptor.

“But according to the people’s wishes, Your Majesty.” Foster corrected him in a way that felt both gentle and obliging. He didn’t deserve it.

“Roger.” The younger man remedied on reflex, swallowing down the urge to vomit in the wastebasket next to the mahogany desk, despite Freddie’s steadying hand on his thigh.

The whiskey was a mistake.

“Ray.” The older countered, with a grunt of almost fondness, despite their brief time together.

“…Well, I’m not ready to be a king yet, anyone’s king I’m afraid, so your hopes are a bit misplaced.” A sad smile graced his features as his cornflower blue eyes skittered around the room to rest on a tense Reid. Their manager was standing a few feet away and leaning against the wall in faux ease as he watched the scene unfold. Unconsciously flanking Ray’s desk, like an eager young pup searching for table scraps. “Eh, Reid? Maybe two you can commiserate together on the utter disappointment your future sovereign is.”

“No one thinks that, Rog.” Freddie reached over to brush a few tufts of bleach blond hair off Roger’s forehead. The prince leaned into his friend’s gentle touch.

“Everybody thinks that.” He sounded defeated, eyes downcast. “My Da, my Mam, my sisters… everyone. Fia’s going to come in here and rip me a new arsehole and she’ll be completely justified. Because everyday I prove them right. Everyday I’m here, I prove them right. And no matter what I do or say, it’s always going to be true that Fia’s the only one of us fit to rule.” His voice was tired with almost no fight left in it. And considering the usual temperament of their spitfire best-friend, Queen were struck dumb by the meek little thing left in his place.

His eyes were shining and full of a sadness that he could never truly express. “So yes, Fred. Everybody thinks that.”

His bandmates discovered a surefire way to turn Roger into a quiet, sad, and frightfully obedient little doll. Just put him in a position where his identity as Roger Taylor was threatened and his persona of Crown Prince Amhuinn was required once more.

Could you imagine what it meant to be told that?

To be told that he was unfit for the one thing that he absolutely must do?

The one thing in life that he had no choice in…

‘You will be a king, my son, but you won’t be a good one.’
…Enjoy your lifelong discontent.

John reached out to rest his hand on Roger’s shoulder, the corners of his mouth pinched with guilt as the Scottish prince regarded him with acceptance. The Scottish prince, not Queen’s drummer. Sometimes it was hard for the bassist to try and tie both of Roger’s worlds together. Mostly because the boy who lived in them was so different depending on the place. “Deaky, I’m sorry, I’m not mad, it’s just…” Fia. Fucking Fia.

“I didn’t bring her here to upset you, she asked and…” John looked so very lost. You never told us anything. What are the rules to this life?

What else aren’t you telling us?

A brisk knock sounded at the door and Roger very nearly wet himself in surprise, hunched over to brace himself for… her. For the maiden. The guillotine.

Everyone seemed to hold their breaths. For all that he built her up in his mind, when the office door opened once more, the slip of a girl who entered wearing scuffed overalls with suns stenciled on the cuffs and a little flag sewn on the front to act as a pocket… was a bit anticlimactic. She was a girl with a haughty look in her eyes and stack of something under her arm. Her curls were as black as pitch and could have rivaled Brian’s in their enormity, like a cloud surrounding her head. But she was only a girl.

Until she opened up her mouth and it became very apparent that she was so much more than that.

She scanned the room until her eyes stopped to rest on her brother for the first time in half a decade, looking as if he’d seen a ghost. He looked positively ill and she nearly growled, digging a folded piece of paper out of her pocket and thrusting it at him.

“Here, this is the room and an address for the suite I’m staying at. I’ve had a selection of clothes brought up for ye as well, as you’ve likely not had the forethought to bring any yourself.” She swallowed and stared at his shoes. She sounded as cold as she had the day he left, her accent thick on her tongue, like it always was when she got upset. “We have a formal royal engagement at Parliament, standing in for Da. Come by tomorrow early to collect your documents and try on your regalia, please. I trust that ye do still remember how to act like your station dictates, Your Highness.”

His title became a barb on her tongue and he remembered the little girl who had once been a sickly child and then his eager playmate.

She was sometimes the only flicker of warmth in that painful existence.

Fia chasing him down the halls with bandy legs and skinned knees. Their laughter echoing down the roofs and gables of the palaces they called home.

“I do.” His voice was thin, “Why are we filling in for Da? Is he alright?”

She pressed her glossy lips into a little line, eyes still not leaving the floor. “I assume, though its not my place to ask.”

“Your place?” A hint of his true feelings showed through, it had been a long time since he’d been forced to exercise his facade as dutiful Crown Prince and it was slipping. “Your place? Are you really that much of a frigid bitch? Do you even care?” About him?

Her eyes snapped up at the sound of his scorn and he could see the fire in her icy gaze.
“Of course I do. Unlike ye, who would rather hide here and play games like a child.” Her hatred of him was evident in every drip of venom that fell from her lips. *I was the one with him everyday of these last few years, you little shit.*

“A child?”

“Yes, a fucking *child!*” Her clenched fists were the only thing that could keep her temper in check. That could keep her from screaming at the top of her lungs and he knew it. She had inherited her brother’s temper after all. “Ye can’t get anywhere in life pretending to be something you’re not!” Shaking her head with a sigh. “When will ye ever learn?” It was clear that she never thought he would.

Roger barked a cold laugh, that felt as deadened as his great heart. “Me? Talk all the shit that you want about me and my place in this fucking mess. But as much as you preach, Princess, you don’t know yours.”

Her eyes narrowed and her voice could have cut glass. “What are ye talking about?”

“Has he chosen one yet?”

As her brother, he knew her too well, they had raised each other in that loveless place. He knew exactly what to say to build her up and to tear her down. He knew what words would unmake her.

“One what?” Her tone grew even sharper, if that was possible. Roger didn’t dare flinch or show any weakness, lest she beat him to the kill.

“A future husband for you. I’m guessing… about thirty years your senior and with a pretty title to go along with your new collar and cage.” His mouth ran away without him again. The terrible words just wouldn’t stop coming, like an endless tide he regretted as soon as they passed his lips. Just like when he was angry as a child and often got shoved into the dirt by an angry Fia, after he’d crossed the line once again. “Likely just the highest bidder for your virtue, little sister.” *How much does a princess’ virginity go for these days?*

The slap across his cheek tasted of five-fingered shame. The only thing he could think about as tears bubbled up in his little sister’s eyes, her bottom lip quivering and her sobs held back by sheer willpower was: *Damn, perhaps the Ice Princess does have a heart after all…*

-X-

“I heard the shots
I heard the screams
But its the silence after I remember most.

*The world stopped breathing*
And I was no longer a boy
*My father shook his head and told me not to ask*
*My mother said he died of shame…”*

-X-

Roger learned about revolution and what it meant, when he was just a child
The age when the fairytale splendor of monarchy and his birthright, ended for him.

A six-year-old running his tiny fingers over a picture of the Romanov family: the last Tsar of Russia, his wife, and young children. A six-year-old learning the real cost of revolution, staring at a collection of little girls in white dresses, angels, each of them murdered in cold blood. Little girls that he saw flickers of his sisters in. A little boy with blond hair and big eyes, pained since the day of his birth and for every day afterward. A little boy who would never be king. A little boy who would never know the touch of true love or an adult life. An innocent child. All of them were.

He remembered crying for them.

His own late relatives, who had died in that basement at the hands of citizen mercenaries, for the birth of a bloody revolution and an inexcusable loss of life. All the royal lines of Europe were inbred in some way, shape or form (*ie The Habsburg Jaw*). The Tsar’s wife, Empress Alexandra, was the granddaughter of Queen Victoria of England, his own blood relation. Which was also part of the reason that hemophilia and other genetic diseases ran so deeply in their family line and through most of the European royal houses. He knew that his sisters were afraid of being carriers for something, always had been. Blue blood and broken chromosomes.

It wasn’t until he was fourteen years old that he learned about the IRA, *The Irish Republican Army*, an Irish paramilitary organization that aimed to unify Ireland and bring down British monarchical rule, always more than on the cusp of being a terrorist organization.

It wasn’t until he was fourteen years old that he grew afraid for his parents and what threat they could be under from their own people someday, if those people decided to be done with a monarchy after all.

It wasn’t until he was sixteen years old that he grew afraid for his sisters, and then… for himself.

-X-

“*Could I have pulled the trigger if I had been told?*

*Be careful what a dream may bring*

*Revolution is a simple thing.*”

-X-

Please *drop by the archive and comment* to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!