

♥ Killers Heart ♥

Crimson red blood seeps down her pearlescent gown. Swaying back and forth, the young princess falls to the soft green grass. Arrow struck through her heart, the princess's body grows colder and colder by the second.

Wide-eyed and open-mouthed, the crowd of guests quickly turns into a chaotic cacophony of shrieks and shouts.

Hastily, Aaliyah swings her bow around her shoulder. Before she runs, Aaliyah takes one last glance at her completed and successful pursuit. Disappearing into the willow forest's shadows, she is gone as quick as she'd appeared...

Surrounding the kingdom, deep in the forest is a place unaffected by the death. Deep in the shadows Aaliyah escaped into lies the reason a princess died. Within the shadows dwells the court of Iron Bloom.

Iron Bloom consists of those who loathe the royals enough to want to kill them. Perched upon their thrones, the royal family only cares about their power and money. Not the poor families living on the streets of Aurilienne; a bustling city split in two, the poor who have nothing and the rich who need everything.

Loathe is not a strong enough word to portray the resentment towards the royals.

Watching someone you love die is how you break. Hence why Aaliyah was hired to kill the future King, Caleb's, princess. He would never become a king without a queen, especially if he had to live with the thought of losing her again...

Walking over soft grass, Aaliyah heads towards the court. Chirping birds sing a pleasant afternoon song. Trailing behind her in the wind, many locks of hair as bright as the moon flow elegantly. Dripping down her face like a waterfall, sweat soaks her as she begins to jog again, unsure if the castle sent guards after her.

Hiding away from the kingdom, Iron Bloom is located in the dimly lit section of the willow forest. So, when Aaliyah slowly approaches the large iron wood door hidden in the trunk of an ancient willow tree, relief floods over her. Covered in luscious vines and drooping leaves, Aaliyah sweeps them aside and taps a rhythmic pattern on the door.

Creakily, the door cautiously opens to reveal a young boy with round spectacles balancing on his nose. Timidly, the small boy looks up but is relieved to see Aaliyah smiling down on him.

"Come inside, Aaliyah," beckons the small boy, waving his hand as a gesture.

"After you, Elric," insistingly retorts Aaliyah.

Dipping his head in acknowledgment, Elric heads inside followed by Aaliyah.

Entering the court of Iron Bloom, Aaliyah winds down the spiral staircase and continues into the long hallway which displays rows of ancient weapons. Swords of all sorts and bows that have

been disposed of after many uses line the log-like tunnel. When it seems like the hallway will never end, Aaliyah is greeted by a bright opening leading to the small cottage style room.

Turning towards her, many pairs of eyes open in shock when she proudly strides into the room. Whispers crack the deafening silence.

“Unbelievable!” gasps someone.

“I didn’t think she would make it...” gossips another.

News of the princess’s chaotic death must have spread as swift as the spring air breeze because everyone in the room was looking at Aaliyah.

“Well...” Aaliyah interrupts, “I did it!”

Erupting like a volcano, the room fills with sounds of congratulations on Aaliyah’s success.

No one thought Aaliyah would successfully assassinate Prince Caleb’s bride. Nor did they expect her to accept the mission in the first place.

After growing up on the streets in the unfortunate part of Aurilienne, Aaliyah never understood why no one would help. Being raised among many others living in the allies, this is where Aaliyah’s hatred for the royals was born.

10 years prior

Starved as thin as a stick, 11-year-old Aaliyah snuggled into a few old pieces of fabric for warmth. Pelting down on her, rain gave her a shower. Soaked, the only food she had managed to scavenge was no longer edible. Consequently, Aaliyah had decided to head out into the afternoon rainstorm to search for food.

Sneaking around the side streets, Aaliyah spotted some men in their early twenties chuck some food onto a dry patch of dirt. Careful not to make a sound, Aaliyah made her way over and snatched it up...

However. she hadn’t been quick enough.

Yelling like a bunch of toddlers, the men declared Aaliyah give them the dirty bread back. Aaliyah had refused, telling them they had already disposed of it. Something must have changed in one of them, because he turned to Aaliyah and asked if she wanted to take her anger out on those who made her suffer.

That is how Aaliyah joined Iron Bloom, that is how she overcome her childhood. That was the day she met Damien.

That day she had joined for freedom, for escape, for revenge.

Trauma is what fueled her assassination. Seeing Prince Caleb break and suffer in silence heals her inner childhood damage.

Snapping her out of her reminiscence, a loud voice booms, "Aaliyah, come to my office immediately!"

"On my way," Aaliyah responds.

Weaving through the room, Aaliyah makes her way into the small room separated from the rest. Heading inside, she sits on one of the log chairs.

"You did as I asked, and I congratulate you on that," starts Damien, "but now I have something bigger, better, I need you to complete."

"What might that be, sir?" questions Aaliyah.

"I need him dead. Kill the Prince."

Speechless, Aaliyah shakes her head.

"I-I can't possibly do that!"

"Do you hate the royal family or not!"

"Yes but-"

"Then do as I say!" orders Damien, "otherwise you can consider yourself as good as dead! They are becoming too much of a threat; Caleb is within reach of the throne!"

"Yes sir. I promise." guarantees Aaliyah.

Shaking all over, Aaliyah turns to leave.

Aaliyah's thoughts swirl around like a tornado. Does she really hate Prince Caleb enough to end the bloodline? Does she really hate him enough to kill a Prince? Does she really hate him at all, or was she raised to believe that?

With her life on the line, Aaliyah makes the hardest decision of her life.

Spending the night in Iron Bloom, Aaliyah gets a well needed sleep, letting the tiredness of the day catch up to her.

When the birds sing their morning song, Aaliyah is up and ready to depart.

Setting out towards Aurilienne, Aaliyah is on her way; only this time she isn't going to kill a princess, she is going to kill a prince...

She takes nothing but a dagger strapped to her thigh, a bow swung around her shoulder, and a small vial of liquid tucked away in her pocket...

Making it back into Aurilienne, the first thing Aaliyah does is purchase a servant disguise. An old pair of pants and a dirty, ripped shirt would do. Thus, it was harder to blend in, as the streets were bustling with walking money. Having never been to this side of the kingdom, Aaliyah attempted to head in what she thought was the direction of the castle.

To the naked eye, she would've looked like a little lost servant. Not a murderer on the run on their way to complete another...

"Hey!" shouts someone from behind, "servant, what are you doin' out of the castle grounds!"

Unsure if the man is talking to her, Aaliyah decides to make a run for it. However, she doesn't get far before a hand grabs her shining hair. Aaliyah grunts. Spinning around, she comes face to face with a tall, broad-shouldered man. Covering his face is a metal helmet that glitters in the dusk light, paired with a metal chest plate.

"We better get you back to Prince Caleb." snorts the guard, "he's not going to be happy with me wasting my time for a servant, especially when I'm meant to be catching the recent murderer."

Not saying another word, the guard uses Aaliyah's hair as a leash to guide her towards the castle. As they pass through Aurilienne, Aaliyah gets to see it properly for the first time in her life. After hiding away in the allies and spending most of her time at the court of Iron Bloom, she'd never really got the chance to explore her own town. Continuing up the narrow dirt road, Aaliyah passes many cottages that look luxurious compared to her pile of rubbish down one of these allies.

After what felt like hours but was only a few minutes, Aaliyah and the guard finally reached the castle gates.

Perched upon the hill, the castle stood. Constructed from white marble, it glistened and glowed in the early morning sun. Many architectural arches curve and bend, detailing the glossy marble. Surrounding it, the outskirts of the whimsical willow forest sway in the light breeze.

Not letting go of Aaliyah's hair anytime soon, the guard resumes to guide her into the castle.

"To the throne room we go," he huffed.

Huffing as well, Aaliyah walked like a zombie, dazing in and out of sleep. It was almost a surprise when she realizes they are walking on marble flooring. Echoing, their footsteps clinked and clacked. Looking around, Aaliyah's mouth drops to the floor.

Walls stretch up to a ceiling that feels miles away. Gleaming in the center, an elegant chandelier hangs on display.

Wonderstruck, Aaliyah is disrupted by another tough yank of her hair.

"Ow," Aaliyah looks up but snaps her mouth shut.

Standing before her is Prince Caleb. The one and only Prince Caleb.

"Hmmm, that's odd." murmurs the prince, "I don't seem to remember you, what might your name be?"

"Uhm, well," yet again Aaliyah doesn't get the chance to speak.

“I found ‘er on the streets your highness!” pipes the man proudly.

“Well, what might someone so beautiful be doing on the streets?”

Aaliyah’s cheeks flush.

Looking back up at Caleb, she can’t help but notice his strong muscles, dirty sand coloured hair, and most of all his teal eyes. Caught up in his features, Aaliyah notices something glint in his eyes.

“How would you feel about being my personal servant?” questions Prince Caleb, “after all, I could use someone to keep me company, considering...”

“Considering what happened yesterday...” Aaliyah finishes for him.

He nods.

Aaliyah’s mind was screaming. This is exactly what Damien would want. Lure the prince, then kill him. She twitches at the thought. She already feels bad enough, considering how consumed he is by his grief.

“I’ll show you to a room you can stay in, then in the morning I’ll show you around.” Caleb informs.

Leading her to her quarters, Aaliyah is too stunned to speak when she sees her room. Laying in the middle, a gigantic plush bed sits. Then, a wall-wide window leads out to a balcony overlooking the willow forest and castle gardens.

“This, this is amazing thank you, Prince Caleb,” stutters Aaliyah in amazement.

“It’s the least I could do for you, now please, just call me Caleb.” he insists, “I’ll be up bright and early to come and get you.”

When Aaliyah jumps into the bed of clouds, she immediately falls asleep. She feels like she is sleeping in a far away land made for princesses, not scums off the street.

Treating Aaliyah like a queen, the prince is so grief stricken. But why does she kind of like it? And on top of that, why does her heart now ache that he’s gone?

Lost in her thoughts, Aaliyah slowly drifts into an inevitable slumber.

When the sun peaks through her window the next morning, a rhythmic pattern taps at her door. For a moment, Aaliyah thinks she is back at the court of Iron Bloom.

“Good morning, servant, I have a packed schedule today,” Caleb chirps, “as well as that I have a favor to ask of you, and don’t worry, you will get greatly rewarded in return.”

“Okay, I’ll be out soon,” sleepily mumbles Aaliyah.

When she is all changed, Aaliyah heads out of her room and follows Caleb.

Leading her through the palace and out to the garden, Prince Caleb stops in front of a magnificent fountain. Spraying water in the air and splashing back down, Aaliyah can see glistening coins shining in the bottom.

When Caleb's back is turned, Aaliyah's hand hesitates on the sharp dagger she has strapped to her thigh. She can't seem to bring herself to unleash it. Quivering, her hand loosens grip. Considering she is being provided shelter and safety, Aaliyah doesn't want to change that.

Thoughts taking her back to her childhood, Aaliyah is transported back to when she was freezing alive on the streets. Rain soaks her matted blonde hair, as her eyes begin to leak. Shriveling up in her pile of rubbish, Aaliyah cries herself to sleep, alone. Meanwhile, her dreams paint vivid images of the royals, snug in one of their many bedrooms. Sleep pulls her away from her pain.

Fingers gripping the dagger tighter, Aaliyah is determined to get revenge on Caleb. However, she winces when Caleb begins to speak.

"I need someone to keep me company, even if that means someone like you..."

"You don't want to be near me," blurts Aaliyah.

"And what's that supposed to mean?" questions Caleb, spinning around to face his servant.

"Nothing, it means nothing," assures Aaliyah.

Caleb gives her a funny look, a mix of confusion and wonder. Walking towards a bed of daisies, Caleb plucks a few and hands them to her.

"For you, my dear servant."

Too stunned to speak, Aaliyah gives Caleb a small nod of appreciation.

"As for the favor I need of you," Caleb shifts on his feet and runs one hand nonchalantly through his hair, "will you be my princess at the royal ball tonight?"

Aaliyah's mouth drops to the floor.

"In return, you will be free of serving me. And, well, I won't look like a miserable loser drowning in grief," adds Caleb quickly, "After all, I am a prince."

This made Aaliyah reconsider.

"Just tonight, then I am free?"

"Yes, just tonight, just pretend. I'll get a seamstress to make you a dress, in the meantime you can do as you please."

Glancing at Caleb one last time, Aaliyah heads back towards the majestic castle. When she is walking the halls back up to her room, a small, timid lady taps her on the shoulder.

“Hello!” she smiles, “I heard a dress needed to be made for a servant, would that be you?”

“Yes, that would be me.”

“Follow me, time for us to get a dress!”

Making her way through the castle, Aaliyah passes many rooms, ascends many staircases, and passes many servants before the lady finally stops. Pointing towards a room, the lady opens the large white door.

“Here we are, lets get going, we only have a few hours!”

Standing on display like a doll for hours, Aaliyah is finally spun around to face the mirror. In the reflection, Aaliyah’s dress glistens. Tightly wrapped around her torso, silver fabric shines. Flowing off her corset, sheets of silver stream off.

“Wow, thank you so much!” Aaliyah exasperates.

“It’s my pleasure, but now we better get you ready for the ball!”

Sitting down in front of a luscious vanity, Aaliyahs hair is carefully styled up into a loose bun. Meanwhile, brushes as soft as feathers sweep over her face. Looking in the mirror, Aaliyah sees a stranger staring back at her. Not an assassin, not a murderer, not a scum. No.

What Aaliyah sees is a princess.

Nodding at Aaliyah, the lady gestures towards the door. Following the lady out of the room, Aaliyah is lead down more stairs and into another magnificent room.

Hanging from the ceiling, another chandelier sparkles in the dusk light, as a violins notes cut through the air. Resembling a fantasy ball, the place looks like a magical gathering.

Waiting in the entrance, Caleb stands with his suit and a matching silver tie. Heading towards Aaliyah, he puts out his hand.

“Pretend,” he whispers.

Standing before Caleb in her silver ball gown, she can’t help but notice how comfortable he seems around her. As the seconds tick by, Aaliyah can’t help but notice how comfortable she is around him.

But it can’t possibly be like this...

She is a scum off the streets, a murderer, and a liar. He is a prince, a ruler, a heartbroken wreck.

Grasping onto her prince’s hand, Aaliyah greets the many guests crowding the great hall. Turning to face her prince, Aaliyah chuckles. She loves him, and he loves her.

But it’s fake.

Aaliyah has to continuously remind herself it is all fake.

Leaving Caleb to get some wine, Aaliyah grabs two glasses but stops at a nearby table. Reaching into her pocket, she carefully pulls out a vial of liquid. Cautious of who's around, she secretly pours the substance into Caleb and her wine. Then, she heads over to Caleb with their drinks.

"Thank you, for doing this," Caleb whispers, "maybe its not fake after all."

"What's that supposed to mean, prince?" teases Aaliyah.

"Maybe I do want you to be my princess, forever."

"That doesn't sound too bad, Caleb."

Clinking their glasses, Aaliyah holds off sipping hers. On the other hand, Caleb downs his drink in one gulp.

Leaning in to kiss Aaliyah, Caleb stops short. Aaliyah knows it's not hesitation. Suddenly, he grabs Aaliyah's shoulder for support. Swaying side to side, Caleb falls to the ground.

Aaliyah lets out a forced scream...

Having nowhere to put her glass, she downs her drink just like Caleb. When she bends over to help, everything around her begins to spin, just as her legs collapse beneath her. Falling beside the prince, Aaliyah grips the vial in her hand tightly. With her other, she finds Calebs hand and squeezes it.

Finally, Aaliyah is free of her lifelong pain. Finally, she got her revenge on the royals.

Chuckling in her final moments, Aaliyah feels proud she kept to her promise. Hopefully Damien is proud too. Wanting Caleb dead, death comes with a price, and Damien had to accept that. His best assassin would never return.

Losing someone you love means you lose yourself too. Aaliyah loved Caleb, but she had to lose him.

Screams faintly echo around the hall, bouncing off the walls and filling Aaliyah's ears. Slowly, her vision fills with darkness as she leaves forever after yet again, another successful assassination...

*No pain runs deeper, no wound more true, than harming the heart that once beat for you,
No heart can beat on its own, once together never alone,
Promises can never be betrayed, even if that means killing someone who should have stayed,
Stay alone or leave forever, the choice is yours to decide whenever...*