

## Preface:

The one trait that I'd always considered my biggest flaw-my moodiness, was to prove my greatest asset. The one that led me to joy, love and my happily ever after. If only that was permitted to be.

## Chapter One.

### Prince of the Broken

I caught the bouquet, it's the first time it's ever happened to me. All the guests looked on, amazed. It's just a bunch of flowers. That was last summer and I'm still single.

I've seen this guy I like. His eyes struck me like a lightning bolt. He had me from the very beginning. He's physically flawless but a secret lurks beneath. That's what intrigued me, this masquerade of perfection.

I've only ever wanted this one man. I thought I might be asexual, but now I realize that I'm not. I see him everyday around the school. I won't be just another girl falling for this untouchable human being. I've said 'hi' to him in the hall out of politeness but that's it.

Books are my thing .I have a favourite spot in the library, *my* table. I go alone to do my assignment. I pour over a Sociology book, devouring the facts before I evaluate them.

"Hi," a male voice interrupts my study.

I look up and see *him* in front of me.

"Hello," I say shyly, wondering what he wants.

"Can I sit with you?"

"Sure, okay," I say baffled.

"What's your name?"

"Seren, and you?"

"Calix."

"I've seen you around. I had to ask you, are you happy?" he asks.

"I'm okay, just bored by all this studying, " I reply.

"No. I mean in life in general, have you ever been happy?"

Now I am confused. Why is a person I've hardly ever spoken to asking me this question?

“Why do you ask?” I enquire trying to find his motive.

“Just answer the question,” he persists.

Honestly I’m not sure I want to answer.

“I guess I’m not truly happy. There’s a lot in my life I’d want to fix,” I reply honestly.

“Okay, I’ll speak to you again tomorrow,” he says getting up to leave.

“What?” I ask as he walks away, stalked by female eyes.

“Tomorrow, library, lunchtime,” he says in a matter of fact tone.

That was bizarre. This guy makes me feel like I have to question who I am.

After school, I go shopping. I cannot stop thinking about him, he’s so unusual. I wonder why he wants to speak to me again. Maybe he’s a philosophy student and has asked loads of students this question.

I curiously check social networking websites but I can’t find him. What baffles me is that he paid attention to me. No guys ever do. But I consider his question. “Are you happy, have you ever been happy?”

Maybe I look depressed. I’ve always been told I don’t smile much but that doesn’t necessarily equate unhappiness. Perhaps he’s a psychology student researching depression. I’ll ask him tomorrow.

I’m late for class so scuttle in, trying to be invisible. It’s sociology. I sit next to Charlotte. I talk about her boyfriend to wake her up.

“How’s it going with you and Adam?”

“Good thanks. Have you seen any guys that you like?”

“Most guys in school are dating, and the ones that aren’t...well there’s a reason for that,” I smirk.

“That supermodel -alike is single, have you seen him?” She asks and I know instantly who she’s referring to.

“Calix?”

“Yes.”

“Why is he single? He can’t be short of candidates,” I say.

“Maybe he is foreign,” says Charlotte.

“Actually I spoke to him yesterday. He’s definitely not foreign.”

“Really? I’ve never even heard him speak,” she says sounding surprised.

“Does he study philosophy?” I ask hoping to clarify this.

“No, he studies history. I’ve seen him in Professor Thornton’s class,” she says.

“Oh.” I say, slightly concerned that he has targeted me specifically.

“Calix is really brainy .We were taking IQ tests and he got 149,” Charlotte says.

“Wow, isn’t that genius level?” I ask impressed.

“Yes, I think so,” says Charlotte.

“Gorgeous and smart, that’s a rare combination,” I say and Charlotte nods in agreement.

Walking to the library at lunchtime, I feel daunted. This is why he wanted to speak to me. He must have seen me in here reading and figured that I’m as brainy as him. He’s probably expecting some intellectual debate, but I’ll end up feeling like a fool. I walk over to my usual table, a spot where few people go. He’s already there waiting for me.

“Hi.”

“Hey,” he says softly.

“So what’s all this questioning about?” I ask.

“You’re unhappy Seren, I know you are. You’re sad and lonely.”

I am horrified, this guy has got a nerve.

“Excuse me, you can’t tell me how I feel. You don’t even know me.” I screech but he ignores me.

“Are you doing some sort of unhappiness assignment?” I probe.

“No. I’m saying this because I can tell how you feel. You know I’m right.”

I don’t answer because what he’s saying is true .I do feel lonely.

“Will you meet me tonight at seven?” he asks abruptly.

Is the best looking guy on campus asking me on a date? I can't help but do a mental victory dance.

“Okay, where?” I ask. I should tell him to get lost, but no sane girl ever would.

“By the gate next to the Graveyard,” he says.

The Graveyard is directly opposite the school. Seems like an odd place to meet a date.

“Umm okay.” I say, hoping I won't have to wait long in the dark.

“Where are we going after I meet you?” I ask.

“You'll see,” he smiles knowingly.

“Let me ask you something.”

“Go on,” he says smiling his enigmatic smile.

“Are you speaking to me because you think I'm a genius?”

“No. I'm speaking to you as I have something to show you, and tonight I will,” he says.

After school, I go straight home to plan what I'll wear tonight. I want to look good but as it's a cold night, I need to be warm. I choose a black skirt, woolly tights and a pink top.

I feel a bizarre combination of livid at being called lonely and euphoric for being asked out by *him*. How unromantic of him to pick a graveyard as a meeting place. I hope he's not going to murder me. Despite my doubts, my curiosity gets the better of me and I head towards the school/graveyard at 6:50.

The graveyard doesn't bother me in the daylight, I'm not fazed by death. But in the dark it's a different matter. I hope this isn't some twisted joke he's playing. Pick some pathetic girl, get her to come to a graveyard alone at night, then just don't turn up.

Just as I am letting my imagination overtake my rationality, I see him standing by the rusty gate that is situated next to the cemetery. It has had a padlock around it for as long as I can remember.

“Hey you’re right on time,” he smiles, looking surprised as though he thought I might not come.

“So are you. I was worried you might stand me up,” I say relieved that I don’t have to wait for him.

“No, of course I wouldn’t. You intrigue me so much you know,” he says charmingly.

I intrigue him? I don’t think I’ve ever felt so complimented.

“So what did you want to show me?” I ask still wondering why he brought me to this location.

“Wait and see,” he says retrieving an antique key from his coat pocket.

He unlocks the padlock and the gate creaks as it opens, startling me.

“Where does this lead, another part of the cemetery?” I ask because it’s hard to tell what lies behind the gate. Bushes have grown up all around.

“No. Follow me and be careful,” he says holding out his hand.

It looks as though no one has entered through this gate for a long time. Even though I’m with Calix, I feel scared.

We walk through what I take to be an overgrown garden. I try my best to avoid the thorns and branches but it’s not easy. His navigation does help though, he seems to know this place well.

“I hope I’m not standing on anyone’s grave,” I say because it’s too dark to tell.

“There are no graves in here,” he reassures me.

As the overgrowth gets sparser I can see streetlamps ahead of me. Maybe this is just a shortcut to town.

We head through a clearing of trees and find ourselves in a new part of town. The first thing that catches my eye is a black skyscraper. Actually, every building is black. One shop has a neon purple sign, although every outfit in the window is black. This is extreme. Every person I see bustling about is wearing black. Have I gone colour blind?

“Is this where all the Goths hang out?” I ask

“This is the City of the Broken,” he says as we walk further in.

A large sign of varnished black wood with purple lettering reads “Welcome to the City of

the Broken”.

“I haven’t heard of it before. Is it a trendy part of town?” I ask, baffled.

“No. You can only find out about this place if you are invited by the Prince himself,” he informs me.

“Well who is the Prince?” I ask before the realization of what he has said hits me.

“Wait...you?” I ask

He nods .

“You’re a Prince?”

He nods again, looking as though he’s trying to gauge my reaction as good or bad.

“Who rules with you?”

“My Father is King. My Mother died when I was young. I don’t have any siblings so I’ll be King one day .”

This guy is too much for my ordinariness to take.

“So why do you come to our school? Surely you should be privately educated if you’re a prince,”

“That’s what my Father wanted but I insisted on going to a regular school,” he says.

“So that you could be ‘normal’, ”I say guessing his answer.

“No. Actually it’s so I could scout potential citizens,” he says

“Citizens?” I ask not really understanding what he means.

“Citizens to join our city,” he smiles at me.

“So you want me to be a citizen?” I ask.

“Exactly!”

“Why?”

I feel idiotic for thinking His Royal Hotness would want to date me. This is just business to him.

“Remember how I asked you if you were happy?” he asks.

“Sure. How could I forget?”

“I see you in the corridors. You never smile. You look lost, lonely and depressed.”

“And?” I ask feeling more insulted than ever.

“Those are the features we look for in citizens,” he says.

“What?” I ask in disbelief.

“We are the City of the Broken. We want broken hearts, depressed people, rejects and the like,” he says in an official tone.

“Okay, you want me to be a member of your city because you think that I’m a reject?” I ask feeling on the verge of bursting into tears or punching him in the face. I should have known he would never want me.

“It really isn’t like that, the city is thriving. I’m well aware it’s the quiet and melancholic types who actually have the most potential,” he says convincingly.

“Okay then, Prince, if you’re ruler of this city, do you have the qualities needed? Are you broken?” I ask.

“Yes, of course. As the head of state, I make it my mission to embody the traits of the city,” he says in a formal tone.

“This is absolutely crazy. Goodbye,” I say turning back towards the overgrowth.

“Wait, there’s something else,” he says longingly.

“What?” I yell, losing my patience and self confidence by the second.

“Would you like to go out with me?” he asks.

And suddenly my interest is rekindled.

Now I am confused .He has exceeded even my expectations of him.

“But you’re a prince, I felt out of your league even before you told me this.”

“But Seren I like you. I’ve been curious about you ever since I first saw you. I knew I’d have to pluck up the courage to ask you to be a citizen. That was my formal reason to ask you here, but casually it was always my intention to ask you to date me.”

This boy fascinates me in a way no human ever has before. It’s because there is a mystery or charisma I can’t put my finger on.

“Okay, yes,” I smile shyly



“Brilliant, I’m so pleased. I’ll meet you tomorrow in school, then afterwards we can come straight here and I’ll give you a guided tour” he smiles, his eyes glowing with expectation.

Wow. He makes me feel so alive.

We walk back through the thorns and through the gate.

“Are you *really* a prince?” I ask. This is so overwhelming.

He opens up his blazer and inside is a stitched coat of arms, C.B with a dagger through a broken heart.

“I’ll show you the palace tomorrow if you don’t believe me,” he says.

“So, library tomorrow at 12?” he asks.

“At my table,” I smile

“Your table,” he says as he takes my hand and kisses it.

He’s like a chivalrous knight. I feel like a Maiden. I flush from embarrassment and joy. If you have to be depressed to be a member of this city, he isn’t going about it in the right way.

## Chapter Two.

### The City of the Broken

After returning from my eye opening experience, I reflect on what I have encountered. Should I be offended that I've been asked to be a member of a city where it's necessary to be 'broken' to join or be elated that I'm dating Calix? I feel a connection to him like I've known him from before.

Tomorrow I want to look stunning. I go for my red crochet dress.

Next day in school, there's only one person I'm thinking about. The boy who last night transported me into another world.

At break, I head over to the tuck shop. Waiting in the queue I overhear a conversation.

"Do you know Calix in Amy's history class?"

"Oh yes. I know who you mean," says her friend enthusiastically.

"Well, Amy used to date him and she told me he's a pathological liar."

"Really? He doesn't seem the type."

"I know .She's better off without him," says her friend as they walk away.

I'm left shell shocked, what an odd thing to say. I pay for my chocolate and head back to class.

I thought I'd spend the rest of class excited about seeing him at lunchtime. Instead I'm worrying. Pathological liar? Perhaps the whole prince thing.

Of course! What a fool I've been to believe an 18 year old high school student to be a prince. He's probably been sniggering behind my back all day. This is must be his idea of a joke, messing around with the feelings of plain girls like me. How childish. So he wants to play Prince does he? Well today I'll be a warrior queen. But as I'm preparing to go into battle, a

cloud of doubt crosses my mind. He couldn't fake the city, I saw it with my own eyes. But it does not make him a prince.

As I enter the library I march to my regular table ready to unleash my outburst. But he's not there. He would have let me down anyway, even if I hadn't overheard that conversation. I'm just about to leave when he bursts in.

"Sorry I'm late. My teacher just doesn't stop talking." And seeing him innocently apologetic, my rant is forgotten.

"It's okay, I'm always late too," I giggle, like those girls whose brains have turned to mush.

"So you're a prince, are you?" I say coldly, raising my eyebrow in a questioning manner. That's more like it.

"Yes. We established that last night, is everything okay? You seem a little distant," he says sounding concerned.

Oh don't act innocent with me.

"Well what proof do you have? Anyone could just say they're a prince," I say, hoping he'll confess to this prank.

"I'll show you my palace today if you want proof but I have to say, it saddens me that you don't trust me. I wish you'd just like me for me rather than the title," he says looking genuinely upset.

Don't try and turn this on me.

"I wanted to go out with *you*. I went on a date with you before you started pretending to be a prince. Do you actually think you need to be royalty to get girls to like you or did you just want to make a fool of the lonely library girl?"

There I said it. Frank and honest, unlike him.

"I'm not making this up. I only told you because I wanted to be up front from the start. Surely it's better like this?"

This lie has gone far enough.

"You're not a prince. I heard people call you a liar. I'm serious now, this prince act is grating on me."

“I really don’t like liars. If you don’t believe I’m a prince I will prove it to you today if you insist.”

I’m not letting this go, if he’s keeping up this pretence.

“Oh I do. I look forward to seeing this palace of yours,” I say trying to keep the sarcasm out of my voice.

“But if we are going to date, I do ask one thing of you,” he says.

“What’s that?” I ask

“Don’t listen to what people say about me.”

Is he really this self obsessed?

“Okay,” I say.

We head back to class. I’m feeling a little mean because he looks disappointed, much different from the bright eyed excitement he exhibited when he arrived from history. Maybe he’s telling the truth? I guess I’ll find out today.

When I’m in maths class, I stare out of the window. In the school car park, I spot a black vintage Rolls Royce Phantom. Then I see him. He’s taking some books from the back of the car. It must be *his* car.

I’ve gone from dismissing this guy as deluded or untruthful to feeling guilty for harsh judgement to having concrete proof thrust in front of my eyes, all in an hour. Such conflicting emotions in a short space of time.

When I head out of school, it’s a fine day. The mountains are highlighted, and the gravestones have a golden glow. I didn’t tell anyone about my date because they’d only talk and tomorrow the whole school would know.

At the gate, I’m greeted by a gothic beauty. He’s dressed all in black, looking very Victoriana.

“Hi,” he says.

“Hi,” I reply in a softer tone than lunchtime.

“Let’s go, I want to give the grand tour,” he grins.

I follow him and we walk through the gate. Even though it's sunny, it's cold. I shiver.

"Cold?" he enquires

"Yes."

Now I'm here in the daylight, it's a different experience. Not sinister at all. This really does look like a garden, alas one that is unkempt. There are rose bushes, that explains the thorns. Crab apple trees, hedges, bushes and weeds. A bank of trees stand like protective guards remaining perfectly still. The doorway to the city.

We walk through the archway of leaves and branches and behold, the city. Here it is, black and graceful. But there's something that didn't occur to me before, an eerie feeling. It feels like a dark forest or maze, unexplored, forbidding.

"Hold my hand," he offers.

He has the longest, most elegant hands. I oblige. One thing that catches my eye is the black post box, it even has a Royal Mail logo on it.

We go into the centre of the city. There is a spiralling escalator that leads to a glass arcade. Every person on it is dressed head to toe in black. They stare at me. At first I think it's because I'm with the prince but then I realize, it's because I'm wearing red. I must look like a freak to them. The people here look so pale and mournful and broken. I've always felt the moodiest in the room now I feel like a sunbeam in comparison.

"Let's go to my palace," he says.

Oh yes, I'm on a date with a prince. It feels like a funeral.

"We'll take the underground," he says pulling me in another direction.

"Do you take it often?" I ask

"No, this is so exciting. This is the first time I'll take it," he says exuberantly.

The underground has the same circular logo as the one in London, although in keeping with the local charm this one is black, as are the trains. We jump on. He looks surprised at the amount of people. We sit there ignoring everyone, with eyes only for each other. But everyone

is staring, at my clothes and at him. I hear whispering.

“Isn’t that the Prince?”

“Yes it looks like him.”

He is getting increasingly anxious, clinging tightly to my arm, staring anywhere but at our fellow passengers. I hold his gaze for a moment and he looks sad and distant, a look I haven’t seen before.

“Are you okay?” I ask

“Sure, hey it’s nearly our stop.”

We get up and get out. As we step onto the platform, he slips on a beanie hat- his disguise. It seems to help, but I can still see people staring.

We head up from the underground. When we exit we are in a more affluent part of the city. We head through a beautiful park and there are black birds on the lake.

Past the mighty trees, I see a palace made entirely of black brick. At the top of the flagpole is an ebony flag, with a purple ‘B’ in the centre. It’s stunning. A citadel of the broken.

“Dad’s home, the flag’s up,” he smiles innocently. This is everyday life to him.

“This is really your palace?” I ask in awe.

“Yes,” he nods

“Impressive,” I say at a loss for words.

Two guards dressed in black stand either side of the tall gate.

“Which is the way in?” I ask

We walk up to the soldiers and I feel nervous as they stare menacingly at me, probably thinking I’m harassing the prince.

“Hey Jim, this is just my guest.”

Jim opens the gate and we walk through. Simple.

Suddenly a crowd of tourists start flashing away realizing the prince has just walked through the gates. Although they are taking pictures, they are unlike what you’d expect of a mob of fans. Far from being screaming girls, they are detached, melancholic.

We walk through the grand entrance. The lengthy hallway has black carpet running down it, it could be velvet it's so luxurious. There is an extensive array of ornaments and vases, everything black, purple or gold. The only light comes from the crystal chandeliers that line the hallway. Bizarrely there are no windows.

"This is fantastic," I smile.

He smiles back and takes my hand. Enchanting music plays faintly in the background. It sounds like a harp.

"Who's playing?"

"That's Mrs. S, Dad's secretary. She practises whenever she gets a break, she's an accomplished musician."

He leads me into another room. A ballroom, lined with mirrors. He turns the light on and it illuminates a polished black marble dance floor. There are candelabras everywhere. It's simple but exquisite. He walks over to a gramophone and plays Mozart.

"Dance with me," he asks.

"No! I cannot dance," I squirm. I cannot think of anything more embarrassing.

"I'll lead, I'm sure you dance well," he says politely.

He always says the right thing. He's such a gentleman.

We dance. Well, he dances, I pretend that I can. I'm actually enjoying it, much to my own surprise. I feel like a literary heroine from the classics.

At the end of the dance, he switches the record player off and we leave the ballroom.

"We tend to hold banquets in there, it's all very formal. Dad even insists on a gramophone, he's so traditional. I liked being in there with you, I felt at ease," he smiles at me.

"Good evening Prince Calix, who is this young lady?" a stuffy woman regards me coolly in the hallway.

"Hello Jane, this is Seren, I wanted to give her a tour of the palace."

"So nice to meet you dear," she says holding out her hand but it feels insincere.

"Nice to meet you," I say out of politeness.

“Your majesty,” she says nodding her head in acknowledgement at him and arching an eyebrow at me, before strutting down the corridor.

“Who was that?” I ask him once she’s left.

“That’s Jane, she’s a lady in waiting. She’s quite old fashioned,” he laughs.

“Come on, I’ve still got so much to show you,” he says, pulling me excitedly by the arm.

“You’re not going to show me every room, are you?”

There must be a hundred.

“No, but there is one thing I really want to show you, come on,” and he starts running.

I follow, feeling like a carefree child racing through the palace.

“We can take the stairs or the elevator, which would you prefer?” he asks

I don’t hesitate in choosing the elevator.

We stare at each other in the slick elevator. He chooses the top floor. His eyes flashing at me with wondrous excitement. The elevator halts and we step out. This must where the bedrooms are. There are low lit lamps which give a soft, calming effect. The carpet is black, this time with a purple ‘b’ hologram pattern through it. It makes me feel dizzy.

“This way,” he smiles beckoning me to follow him. He opens an oak door.

“This is my bedroom, do you like it?” he asks.

It’s black but it seems lighter in here than the other rooms. There is a king sized bed with a black satin duvet emblazoned with the purple B. Glossy black floorboards are covered with woollen rugs. Books line the walls.

“Dad says I should keep these in the library downstairs but I like them in here with me,” he says, observing my fascination.

“This is what I want to show you.” He leads me to the window.

“You know, this is the only window in the whole palace. Dad won’t allow them anywhere else.”

I thought it seems lighter in here.

Opening the glass doors, we step out onto a vast balcony that overlooks the palace garden.

“This view is absolutely breathtaking.”



“Yes, I like to sit out here sometimes in the night air and read for hours.”

This boy is the most fascinating being I’ve met and it isn’t because he’s a prince, he’s like a human masterpiece. Sometimes I think he’s not even human, his jet black hair shines in the moonlight. His blue eyes have changed to violet and I’m yet again alive, struck. All this from the girl who thought she would never find anyone who interests her. He’s an enigma.

As I gaze into his luminous eyes, we embrace and kiss- sweet, tender, perfect.

This palace is an otherworldly dream. Marvellous as it is, it sets me on edge. It’s eerie, hidden. I know it has a secret.

After our kiss, my first kiss, a sweet introduction, we head back into palace grounds. I see some beautiful swans on the lake among the black ducks. It’s a striking monochrome scene. He holds my hand and we walk among the flowers, violets. They are a deep purple like the ‘B’ on the flag.

“So do you believe I’m a Prince now?” he asks.

“Well, I think if I still doubted you I’d be a very sceptical person,” I smile.

He smiles back and we walk back towards the underground at midnight.

Back at the gate that leads to ‘reality’, we kiss once more. Wow.

It’s evening and we are sitting by the lake, the lamp light illuminating the water, the musical song of the water birds playing as the background theme. Just my prince and I. He leans in close and just as I think he is going to kiss me, he whispers in my ear “I break girls hearts so that they can join my city,” and suddenly his face is dark and calculating, a professional heart breaker.

I wake up with tears streaming. Whoa!

Getting dressed for school, I cannot get that nightmare out of my head. Is there an element of truth to this notion? You do need to be broken to join and who better to break a heart than a beautiful-genius-prince? I bury the thought into my subconscious.

Even though I have had many conversations with my prince, I still don’t really ‘know’

him. I'll ask him about his life, try and uncover the real him.

Looking at the clouds outside, I start to dream. Lately all I can think about is him. That's completely normal for most girls. But not me. I don't fall in love easily. This is rare, this is something else. This is him. Every single second does seem to drag. Usually I pay close attention to my tutor. Not today. I wonder if my prince and I will go to the city tonight, dance in the black ballroom again. I should get more black clothes, I don't fit the dress code at all. I feel like I'm becoming an annoying girl who can't stop thinking about a guy. And for the first time ever it doesn't bother me.

Finally it's lunchtime. I see him chatting in the foyer to a male student who always looks upset. He's probably scouting for more citizens. I smile at the thought. He's dressed head to toe in black and he looks smouldering hot. His eyes illuminate when he sees me. He says a final word to his peer and then walks over to join me.

"Hi, who was that?" I ask

"That's Jason, he's a boy in my class," he says.

"Were you scouting?" I ask

"Ha! Yeah, you got me," he confesses.

"My Father has given me a task of getting at least 15 new members. It sounds easier than it actually is. People don't like you telling them that you think they're depressed," he says sounding stressed out by this responsibility imposed on him.

"Do you still want me to be a citizen? I mean, don't you think I'm too cheerful now we are dating?" I ask. And as soon as the words are out of my mouth, I feel I have said the wrong thing. He looks at me seriously.

"You think I make you happy?" he asks horrified.

"Well, yeah. Don't I make you happy?" I ask feeling unsettled by his negative reaction.

"Seren, you don't understand. You can only be a member of the city if you are unhappy, you can only be my girlfriend if you are broken."

“How could I possibly be unhappy when I’m with you?” I ask frantically.

He looks at me like an idea has struck him.

“You are Prince of the Broken, so are you unhappy? Is your Father unhappy?”

“Of course, of course we are,” he holds his head up with an arrogant defiance as if he has proclaimed a statement he is proud of. A badge of honour.

“This is so challenging. I’ve always been unhappy, people would tell me to cheer up. Now when for the first time I actually feel happy, I need to be broken.” I say feeling confused.

“Seren, it’s difficult I know. Come to the city today, it’ll help,” he says.

## Chapter Three.

### The King

Her broken heart is making her seriously ill. I see her weeping as the drivers rush her into the black ambulance. The sirens traumatizing alarm echoes into the distance and leaves a chilling atmosphere as the ambulance roars away to The Black Hospital. Its towering chimneys smoke continuously and crows circle around it.

“Can you die of a broken heart?” I ask

“It’s the third most common cause of death here,” a bystander tells me.

I saw that woman’s face, she looked broken. Everyone here looks unhappy, it’s the norm, but I maintain that she was the worst case.

The crowd that gathered to witness the ambulance showdown has scattered and there is a song being sung in the local pub ‘The Broken Horse’. It’s not one of merry-making. It’s a painful, longing moan.

I walk further on, keen to forget what I have just seen .A woman is standing outside the hat store. She wears a purple coat and a flamboyant hat with a bow. She is doing a survey on hats. She approaches me and I try and escape. However she’s persistent, so I oblige, regretting it as soon as I contractually say ‘ok.’ I’m about to divulge my hat habits to her when I’m distracted by the sudden noise.

There is an explosion in the city centre. I hear people screaming and frantic whispers of “what was that?” Then I realize that the explosion was fireworks. It’s difficult to see them in the midday sun but they are there.

A big group of cheerleaders gather to the steps of The National Museum of the Broken.

They are dressed in bright yellow with pompoms .They start chanting their cheer ,as they move in synchronized step with each other .

“Broken no more.

Happy happy happy again,

Injecting smiles into the city whoop!” They sing and jump frantically, with white toothy smiles.

“It’s a protest song by The Smiley’s, a group dedicated to a revolution of happiness in the city,” says a grumpy looking man who doesn’t seem to approve of their goal. I gape at him in shock .

“The king is adamant that they won’t succeed in their mission, seeing it as a threat to his crown and the whole city,” he continues

“But is it really a bad thing to want to inject some joy and colour into the city? Sure, it is the exact opposite of what it stands for but that doesn’t mean there can’t be diversity.” I say feeling that The Smiley’s may have a point. This man doesn’t seem to agree .

Walking alone through the city, waiting for my beloved to join me, I watch a street entertainer dressed in a flowing lace dress. She sings as she dances gracefully. She weeps “I dare not dream, dreams are a forgotten song that I once sang. I dare not dream, lost lyrics, buried in my mind,” her voice becomes sadder as she hit’s the final note. A failed opera singer? Perhaps this is why she is a member of the city.

Finally! He is here. I’m in a less than cheerful mood after listening to her song whilst waiting in the cold December air(although he’d want it that way).

“The Smiley’s have been in the city today,” I inform him.

“Oh not *them*. They’re always causing chaos,” he says annoyed at the very mention of them.

In bed, upon returning from my black city of romance, I lie awake feeling concerned. His words are on loop in my head. “You can only be my girlfriend if you are broken.” It’s ironic. I’ve always felt the unhappiest girl in the room and the one time I would be at an advantage in my misery is the one time I’m feeling on top of the world. No wonder he is attracted to me. I was

totally baffled as to why Calix would want shy little me. It's because I'm exactly what he needs for his kingdom. But knowing that he wants a girl who's unhappy all of the time, a broken citizen, do I still want him? He's handsome, well-read and a prince. He sounds like the perfect catch but I'm not so sure. I always thought the man I would meet would save me from myself, make me appreciate the joy of living but I don't think that he is the man who can do this.

The sun is shining even though it's midwinter. Calix and I have decided to go and sit on the grass by the leaves that have fallen all around.

"We're having a winter ball at the palace on Friday. Do you want to come?" he asks with his hair shining in the sunlight.

"Sure but do you think I'd be allowed?" I enquire thinking I'll be the only non-royal there.

"My father said I can invite a couple a friends. Besides, I'm the prince I can invite anyone I want," he winks at me and my heart does a back flip.

I'm looking forward to and dreading Friday at the same time. I long to spend all my time with Calix ,the thought of dancing with him again makes me feel more alive than ever. But I'm dreading it because what if the royals hate me? Oh well, it's worth it just to be with him.

I've asked Charlotte to come with me on a shopping trip. She has a good eye for dresses and will help me pick something appropriate for the ball. After school we go to the shopping centre.

"So what's this big occasion coming up?" she enquires curiously.

"It's a ball," I smirk failing to contain my glee.

"A ball? Wow, fancy." she teases

"Whose ball?" she asks.

"It's Calix's family's winter ball," I announce.

"As in super-mega-watt-hot Calix? Are you dating him?" she asks in shock.

Okay, here I'll have to come clean.

“Yes, we’ve been together for about a month now,” I smile shyly.

“I can’t believe it. You are *so* lucky. He’s the best looking guy in the whole school. If he’s having a ball that makes him rich too,” she says, her eyes lighting up at the prospect.

“I know. He’s gorgeous. Yes, I suppose he must be well off.” And a prince too I think to myself.

“Well this dress needs to be pretty special then,” she says with the passion of a girl on a shopping mission.

“Yes, and it needs to be black or purple,” I say

“Why? Is there a dress code at this ball?”

“Yeah I guess you could say that.” The whole city has a dress code.

“Now I know that you are dating *him* you can fill me in on all the gossip. Why haven’t you told anyone before now?”

“I wanted to wait a while because I didn’t think it would last. I’m overwhelmed he would want me myself,” I giggle.

“Don’t be. You really are very pretty, although I’d have thought he’d go for the tanned, blonde type,” she says.

“Me too. Not some mouse like me.” We both laugh.

On entering the first shop, we rush towards anything black or purple.

“This?” Charlotte asks holding up a flapper number.

“Too long. I’ll end up falling on the floor.”

“I didn’t think of your two left feet. Good point!” she giggles.

We search around stacks of clothing. Most of the black dresses we come across are either drab or businesslike.

“I want something glamorous yet comfortable,” I tell Charlotte trying to point her in the right direction when she keeps picking dresses with built in corsets.

“We’ve looked through this whole store. Let’s try another shop,” she says sounding slightly annoyed that I didn’t like her suggestions.

“You’ve got it,” I respond.

As we walk towards the next shop it has started to sleet, Winter is definitely here.

Walking through the doors, we are greeted by a display of seasonal goodies, chocolate truffles, panettone, German brand sweets and nougat. I'm so distracted by the treats on offer that I forget I'm looking for the perfect dress. Charlotte hasn't and is already searching manically through the aisles of clothes. I walk over to join her. There on the end of the aisle labelled 'evening dresses', I spot it. A black halter neck with a purple sash and not a corset in sight. I hold it up to show Charlotte.

"What do you think?" I ask her barely containing my excitement.

"Oh it's perfect," she says mirroring my expression.

I try the dress on in the fitting room and open the curtain to show Charlotte.

"Wow you look a million dollars," she enthuses.

I have to admit it myself, the dress is flattering.

"This is the one." I twirl around and beam at her.

"The perfect dress for the perfect man," she winks at me.

If only she knew his one flaw.

Next evening, dressed for the ball and in high heels, I realize I'll have to walk through the overgrown garden like this. This is going to be tricky.

As I'm applying my lip gloss, I hear a car horn outside. I look out of the window and there is a Rolls Royce parked outside, with Calix waving at me out of the sunroof. I instantaneously join him. This is the first time I've ever driven to the city. And it's the first time I've ever been in such a luxurious car.

"I'm so glad you picked me up. I would have taken forever to get to the city in these shoes," I smile at him

"I could always have carried you," he flashes his eyebrows and I nearly collapse with exhilaration.

My face feels like it's going to burst with joy I'm smiling so much.



“Hey, don’t forget this is the City of the Broken so at least try to look unhappy,” he says seriously.

I try to look sombre but just the sight of those eyes makes me feel higher than I’ve ever been before.

It’s paradoxical that the boy who wants to date me because of my melancholic attitude is the one person who has the ability to make me happy.

We drive up to the ancient gate and Calix unlocks it. The car drives through and he returns. We drive along a narrow path that runs through the tangled web of leaves.

When we enter the city, there is a different atmosphere here tonight. There is excitement in the air, although still that morbid feeling. It can be likened to the anniversary of a death, a combination of sadness and celebration. It’s a heady mixture. Mounted police line the streets.

We drive up to the black palace and I see that the flag is up. Calix smiles at me and we hold hands. I hear loud trumpets and a band playing in the centre of the city. It’s like a coronation, only the royal well-wishers are in mourning. The whole city slowly marching to the beat of their own out of time drum. I wonder if Calix likes being Prince of such an eerie city. He’s dressed in his gothic Victoriana black frills, I think he must take his role seriously. It’s such a huge jump, but what if we were to get married? Could I be Princess or Queen of the City of the Broken? Would I have to ban myself from smiling and dress in black constantly? Well I have always found being moody comes naturally, black is slimming and I can’t deny it any longer I love this man.

The palace gate is opened by the guards upon seeing the Royal Rolls Royce. A crowd has gathered but they don’t cheer, they stare blankly as they hold on to the black railings. I hear an orchestra and see cars driving the guests to the front entrance. The driver opens the car door and Calix and I step out. He asks for my hand and I oblige, although his stance is more on guard than usual. He is in ‘black prince’ mode as everyone is staring at us. And for the first time I know it’s not because of what I’m wearing, it’s because I’m the date of HRH Prince Gothic.

Wow. The palace looks beautiful. There are candles in the chandeliers that line the

hallway, giving a soft lit romantic glow which illuminates Calix's skin and makes him look like an ethereal being. Rich purple carpet adorned with the signature hologram B's has been laid out for this special occasion. The scent of deep wood fills the air and the floor gleams with polish.

We walk together hand in hand to the ballroom.

"Nervous?" he asks.

"Yeah, mainly because everyone is staring at us," I reply truthfully.

"You'll get used to it," he quips.

Does that mean we are in it together for the long run? I hope so. He fascinates me. I've become a girl who hangs on every word her boyfriend says. I always felt an extreme curiosity about him. He has a quality I've never seen in anyone else. He's a paradox, a puzzle that just cannot be solved.

The music jolts me suddenly from my musing thoughts. It has turned from background music to dramatic showstopper. Although the guests themselves remain impassive and cold. Giving nothing away, they look like shadows or memories, certainly not mortal. I look up to the platform at the top of the room. There he is, the King himself, Calix's Father. He looks nothing like I imagined. He embodies the gravity of the city, but he has a more mightier stance than the other citizens, melancholy coupled with sheer determination. He stands and the room falls instantly silent.

Immediately there is an extreme tension that fills the room.

"Welcome citizens to the annual Winter ball of The City of the Broken," his voice is gruff and harsh, more forceful than I expected.

"This ball marks our dedication to the city and all it upholds. The music, food and entertainment have been chosen to reflect our attitude and belief that together as Broken citizens we are untouchable."

"What does your father mean by you being untouchable?" I ask Calix, puzzled by the man who looks like he has never smiled.

"My father believes and encourages the whole city to believe that if you are broken no further

damage can be done, hence forth it makes you completely strong ,untouchable, unable to be hurt at all by anyone. I must say I am inclined to agree,” he says in a detached tone.

“But what about love and happiness? Being broken doesn’t make you strong Calix. It makes you weak for not braving hurt to find happiness. I think your father is just still grieving for his wife.” Upon saying these words I’m shocked by how frank I’ve been. There is something about the King that has wound me up. I expected to like Calix’s father but I just see a cruel, rigid man who has let his personal opinions overtake the city and I cannot hold my tongue.

“Come on Seren, don’t do this tonight. This is our evening, our special date remember?” he says looking so heartbreakingly beautiful that I forget my anger instantly.

The music has changed to a dance number and the guests head out onto the dance floor. We watch the guests dance in perfect step, hypnotically, mournfully while we talk amongst ourselves. The King remains seated, surrounded by body guards and the infamous lady in waiting. He keeps his gaze fixed on us, with occasional flicks of the head in acknowledge of the dance floor. The guests are dressed in black lace, silks, purple velvet. One outrageous invitee is wearing grey. The rebel gains disapproving glances from other guests.

Finally Calix takes my hand and leads me across the room so we can have our first dance of the night. Everyone clears to the sides of the room, so that the floor is just for us. I keep forgetting I’m dating a Prince. I hate that everyone is staring at us but I try and focus on the moment and enjoy our dance. The music is classical- a waltz. Calix looks entranced and more joyous than I have ever seen him before as we dance. I mirror his expression, I’m beaming. I don’t know how to dance but it doesn’t seem to matter. Calix leads and our steps match perfectly, like we were made for each other. My smile is so wide it feels like my face is going to burst with joy and it looks like my darling prince feels the same. Unexpectedly he leans in and kisses me. An eternal moment captured in just a few beats of the heart. Then, even more unexpectedly the ever depressive audience clap and I’m sure I can see hints of smiles on these living corpse’s faces. I lift my eyes above Calix’s head and see one person who is certainly not smiling-the King. He sports a deadly gaze. Calix seems oblivious to his fathers reaction as he

continues smiling at me, looking pleased by the performance.

The dancing is done, the guests gather their coats before heading back to their cars. Calix says he'll return me and I'm glad it's the weekend tomorrow as I'm exhausted.

In the Rolls Royce, Calix is still smiling, looking young and carefree.

"Did you enjoy tonight?" he asks kindly.

"It was wonderful Calix, I felt so happy, so alive and I think that's how you felt too," I tell him  
He pauses for a moment.

"Yeah...happy, I guess I was," he says guiltily as if he has just confessed to a crime.

"Calix ,being happy isn't a bad thing. Please don't beat yourself up about this," I say but  
suddenly he looks alarmed, angry even.

"Seren you don't understand. I can't be happy. My father..."

And at this point I have to interrupt, this is what this is all about.

"Your father is just a bitter old man Calix. Sorry to be blunt but he's a jerk, stop allowing him to  
run your life."

"Seren," he pauses again as if he is contemplating what I have just said.

I'm aware that a tear is rolling down my cheek. Calix's father makes me feel as if I'm  
hitting my head against a stone grave. I can tell by the look in the Kings eyes that once he has  
made his mind up about something, there is no changing it. A stubbornness he will hold as the  
habit of a lifetime, because of the unwillingness to change .

As we return from the city, Calix takes my hand.

"Thank you for tonight," I say.

He sees my moist eyes and wipes the tear from my cheek.

"Don't worry about my Dad, Seren. He's not the same man since my Mother died. His grief  
affected the whole city." He sighs.

"Look, I'll talk to him. I think he's just not used to me dating, you know?"

"I'll see you in school Monday then," I lean and kiss him.

He closes his eyes and his long lashes hide a pained, but poignant expression.

“Monday,” he says and it’s an everlasting promise.

## Chapter. Four

### The Smiley's

I spend the weekend thinking about our dance. It's like I have entered a fable, although our romance is more gothic than Sleeping Beauty. I play Mozart's album as it reminds me of the dancing. But Calix's Father still gets to me, he doesn't like me at all.

I see Calix's diary while waiting for him in the Rolls, on the cover is a word I don't recognize.

He arrives, full of his usual combination of cockiness and kindness.

"Did you get coffee?" I ask as he opens the door.

"Yeah latte for you, espresso for me baby."

"Hey what does this word mean? It's so long." He pauses momentarily, deliberating whether to tell me or not.

"It's actually the code word for getting into my father's secret club. I had to write it down because it's obscure and difficult to remember."

"Wait, you need a code word even though you're a prince?" I gape at him in disbelief.

"Yep," he smirks, agreeing this is ridiculous.

"When is this oh-so-elitist top secret meeting then?"

"Tomorrow actually, will you come with me?"

"Sure, but I really don't think your father will want me there," I say still burned from his deadly gaze at the ball.

"Don't worry about Dad. I'll speak to him tonight. He can be a bit of an idiot sometimes, especially when it comes to my friends and girlfriends," he says as if reminiscing on some past event.

"What do you mean?" I ask intrigued.

He sighs.

“Well, he’s very...selective. I suppose he doesn’t really ever think anyone is good enough for me.”

“Why do you say that?” I ask.

“Whenever I meet someone and get a little close to them whether it’s a good friend or girlfriend.

He starts to get, I don’t know, sort of paranoid, saying these people are no good for me. That they only like me because I’m a prince or whatever.”

“No offence, but the man is nuts if you ask me,” I say, not shocked by the extent of the Kings control freak behaviour.

He continues, looking slightly hurt by my opinion

“Well, anyway. He usually tells me to stop seeing people that I like and just continue with my studies, recruitments and socialising with acquaintances he approves of. I honestly think he’s just a little overprotective, especially since mum died.”

“What was he like before that then?” I ask trying to appear sympathetic for Calix’s sake. He ponders for a moment.

“More relaxed, less rigid, happier. He’s become like an army officer since her death, all military precision. The city was a very different world when I was younger.”

“Don’t you think that you should talk to him? Perhaps he’s so caught up in trying to be a King that he never actually got the chance to grieve. You can’t just let him treat you like a child.

You’re an adult now, it’s your decision who you speak to and befriend, not his.”

“Yeah, you’re right but truly once my father has his mind made up about something, there really is no changing it. He’s the most stubborn man in the world,” he says.

Growing frustrated by the topic of Calix’s father, I think of one thing that might work.

“Maybe I can talk to him. Perhaps it’s because he’s never actually got to know any of your friends that’s the problem.”

Calix looks at me dubiously as if I’m taking on more than I can handle.

“Hmm. Well you could try, although there’s no point in me asking him first. He will just say no.

Maybe you should just turn up on a day he's not very busy."

"Okay. What day does he have free?" I ask.

"I suppose Thursday is his quietest day. He golf's on weekends so no one ever gets to see him then."

"Okay. Thursday it is. Are you still going to ask him about the secret club or shall I speak to him first?"

"No, I'll ask him about the club, but I'll probably just say I want to bring a peer along with me, rather than mention that it's you!" he smirks at me cheekily.

I gawp in horror

"Why, are you ashamed of me?" He looks offended that I'd ever think such a thing.

"No! But if I tell my dad it was the girl I took to the ball who I want to come, he'll just say no on the basis that you aren't a citizen," he shrugs.

"Your Dad is the ultimate elitist."

"I know," he agrees.

"So, school, lunchtime, tomorrow?"

"You bet," and he leans in and kisses me.

As I walk back from our meeting, it starts raining. Even though I'm in a summer dress and getting wet, I do not care. He kissed me. People are staring at me as I walk as if to ask 'why are you looking so pleased with yourself?'. I do not care. He kissed me. I want to dance on the pavement and I'm practically skipping. People will think I'm crazy but I do not care. He kissed me!

After a night of my heart bursting with ecstasy, I awake eagerly anticipating seeing my beloved today. Just English to get through first.

English was an easy affair today. We listened to an audio version of the play Hamlet. Shakespeare's language is so romantic and it helps me replay our kiss over and over in my mind. Calix loves books too. Most guys who I have seen have never been what I'm looking for. Too good looking, too geeky, too tough, too sporty or just not 'right.' Even if Calix had never



asked me out, he would still be my ideal man. He's incredibly handsome with flawless hair and skin, for most girls that would be enough. I can tell by the looks on their faces that it *is* enough. But I've seen other 'perfect' movie-star-look-alikes before. None of them wanting me but me not wanting them either. There is another magnetic pull that Calix has. I can't explain it. I feel I've known him all my life. No one in the history books ever held such fascination for me. And unbelievably he's mine.

Mrs. Shelley wraps up the lesson. Whoo! Lunchtime.

I never see Calix at break because he's busy. He takes on so many roles. I feel like, compared to him, I don't really do much. I like to relax. I feel more free like that. Not him, he does *everything*. Once he's finished one thing, he moves on to the next. As I'm about to walk to the library to meet him, I see him in the corridor staring at the bulletin board.

"Hey, what are you looking at?"

"This cookery class on Wednesday evening. It sounds interesting I think I'll join."

"When do you get time to just relax? You're always into something."

"I like to be doing something all of the time. I work out to relax. It's just the way I've always been."

"You're the polar opposite to me," I shake my head.

"I know, I know," he smiles.

"So, did you speak to your Father about this secret club thing that's on tonight?"

"Yes."

"And...?" I can tell by his reaction that his father has been acting up again.

"Well he wasn't exactly thrilled. It is meant to be a secret meeting divulging important information after all."

"And?" I repeat

"He just said 'if you must' Calix."

"So that's a yes?" I ask trying to clarify

"It's the closest to a yes you'll ever get from his lips," he says humorously.

I giggle.

“Come on, let’s go and get some lunch.”

As we walk hand in hand to the cafeteria, I realize we’ve never held hands in school before. Every girl is looking. Some of them look annoyed it’s not them holding his hand. Others look shocked he’d be with such a plain girl as me. I look at him with that wonder-struck look that everyone else has. Those girls are much prettier and sexier than me . I’m just Miss-Average. I want to ask him, why? Why Calix would you want me? He could have any girl at all. Perhaps it’s this average-ness he likes. After all he has an extraordinary life. Maybe average is foreign to him.

We get chips in the canteen with lots of ketchup. Calix looks like a chip has never passed his rosebud lips. But apparently he does eat junk too. I think that this has shocked me about him more than anything ,he’s full of paradoxes.

“So tonight,” his tone is serious.

“Tonight,” I say trying to concentrate on what he’s saying but this is difficult when I just want to stare into those eyes that promise paradise.

“Wear black, it’s an absolute must. ”

“It’s not another ball is it?” I ask wondering what other black ensembles I have hiding in the deep cavern that is my wardrobe.

“Not a ball.” he smiles knowingly.

“Where should I meet you?” I ask expecting the usual Rolls Royce ride to the city.

“Ah... that’s the other thing. I can’t take you as I’ll be busy straight after school helping my father prepare.”

“Okay I can walk.”

“Okay that settles it. I hope you know what a big deal this is. These keys are so rare, only special citizens can have one and I’m giving one to you. You hold the key to my heart so I figured you should have the key to the gates of the city in return.”

He hands me a long key with a big black ‘B’ at the end which acts as the handle. It’s

beautiful and looks like an antique. It's identical to the one he has.

"Wow, thanks Calix. It means a lot that you would trust me with this. What exactly is it you're busy with then? What time will I be able to talk with you?"

"Well actually Father and I will both be doing a presentation together, so you'll be in the audience with the other guests. I'll feel a lot more confident having you there, do you mind?"

"Well I don't know. Won't I be like the odd one out, who else will be among the guests?"

He looks doubtfully at me.

"Well, you're there by Royal invitation and so are they. That makes you all equal doesn't it? Oh go on, please?" He looks so needy, like a little boy lost that I have no choice.

"Oh, okay, yeah I'll come."

"Thanks and remember wear black, that's very important," he says stressing his words.

"Yeah, yeah, sure."

I think I should go on a black shopping spree so that I can fit in easily in the city and among Calix's clan.

"Oh, Seren, of course, your invitation. You won't know the password or venue without this."

Oh there's an invitation.

"Is this at the palace?"

"No it's about a mile away from the palace, The Royal Club of the Broken. It's elusive but still infamous so ask any fashionable looking local and they'll probably know which direction to point you in."

"Well if I'm not there at nine, assume I can't find it," I say as I squint at the invitation.

"Will do, or assume you're dead," he smirks

"You can be rather morbid sometimes, did anyone tell you that before?"

"Hey what can I say? Prince of the Broken baby," his cocky swagger returning in an instant, like a lion on a rock. I laugh and so does he, back to a carefree student.

I'll have to find something that won't offend his Royal Stuffiness the King too much. I choose a black dress which is classy, yet casual. I decide on wearing my black padded jacket

with a hood. It's not glamorous but will keep me warm on the walk to the Kingdom and locating this club.

Here I am, alone at night, next to a cemetery. I've become to associate the sight of the headstones with romance. I like the idea of my beloved and I together for eternity in death, sealed as one. I walk to the gate that leads to this shadow kingdom, opening it with my key from Calix. I've always thought these gates hid nothing more than a mass of weeds. As soon as you step through the gates, you see the trees which hide the city from the eyes of curious explorers who haven't been invited in. Thorns and bushes grow either side, adding to the impression of an unloved garden. Walk a little further and the truth is revealed. The black kingdom comes into view. The hustle and bustle of busy citizens coming from work. It could be Victorian London, if it had a Goth only day with a parade of depression. It's like a work of art that's come to life. A combination of horror and magnificence. I feel a great sense of awe and appreciation combined with melancholy when I see it. Like a tragedy, which can also be a masterpiece. Its prince is flawed perfection, prince charming, prince alarming, black marble come to life.

As the garden fades behind me and the City emerges I see dark figures in this shadow world rushing about to and fro. I walk into the chaotically ordered city, a black sea with a rebellious purple or grey streak of life here or there. Eyes blank and longing, downward and heart wrenched. Businessmen with an ambition of power with the blackest eyes of all. A child playing with a skipping rope, another playing hopscotch aimlessly hitting each number as if it didn't matter either way. Tears were a common music, like the fire engine of New York. A loveless teen graffiti's broken hearts onto the concrete wall, her eyes thick with kohl and jet mascara. The buildings border the streets like tombs. The corpses within pretend to be alive, but know perfectly well that they are fooling no one, not even themselves.

I ask the friendliest looking face I can find the direction to the Secret Club. She sits on a park bench smoking heavily on her cigarette, I sit next to her.

"Excuse me, do you know the direction of The Royal Club of the Broken?" I ask and for a moment I think I see a glimmer of terror in her eyes.

“What you be wanting that place for then Missy?” Her voice does not match her face. She looks graceful and eloquent, her speech is coarse and throaty, perhaps from over-smoking of cigarettes.

“I’m meeting someone there,” I say not wishing to divulge that I’m accompanying the Prince there.

“Take a right down that road, opposite The Raven nightclub. You will see it, showy with a gold sign,” she says cautiously.

“Thank you,” I say gratefully

She takes a deep breathe before adding “But I’d warn you about that place Missy. It’s all elusive an’ all. They don’t like the likes of you and me using it as a meeting place. Some say they make the law of the land unofficially behind them doors.”

“Really?” I ask intrigued.

“Aye, I can tell you aint local. Too young to remember this city in its golden day. Twas proper town then, normal, cheerful with colour. Had its ups and downs like any old place but we had a good community, looked out for others. T’aint like that now-all changed since his missus died,” she says with disdain.

“The King?” I ask knowing the answer already.

“Aye, him. Never liked him when she was alive but she kept him sane, you know, level headed. Man’s lost the plot. Won’t even listen to his own son, not that he’s much better mind. He got the same old beliefs as his father, that lad.”

“Look, thanks for the directions but I really must be going or I’ll be late .You’ve been really helpful,” I say, not wanting to hear her talk of Calix this way.

“Yeah, yeah Missy, you’ve ad enough. I get the picture. Don’t think I be joking when I tell ya to keep away from that part of town though. It aint just the club. Ravens just as bad, dodgy characters in there.”

“Thanks,” I say running as I know Ill be late now.

So the RCB is the meeting place of the rich and powerful of this city. That figures since

Calix and the King will be there. Perhaps he wants to see a friendly face amongst the professional pessimists and that's why he has invited me.

As I walk further on, I see that there is a parade in the town. On the lead float there is a girl wearing a lace dress. Her hair is long and platinum, although it could be silver so light.

She's singing:

"To be alive, or to die. To feel dead, while you're still living. Blackest night, brightest light. To feel dead while you're still living."

I wonder if she's famous. There's a huge crowd gathered around the float. Jumping and dancing as in slow motion, neither happy nor sad. In a daze or a trance. Always and forever citizens of The City of the Broken.

Suddenly I hear trumpets and there is a riot. I see a huge flash and a mass of yellow crowding the black hole of people. It's The Smiley's, here to protest in the public view. There are a lot of cameras and a news reporter-deadpan, professional, dressed in his sharp black suit. I look at the TV's in the shop window seeing that The Smiley's have been labelled. 'Irrelevant troublemakers disrupt Royal concert,' reads the headline.

I hear their chant 'Bring happiness, colour and laughter back to the Kingdom. Red, yellow, pink, blue .Replace the clouds with a rainbow. '

Looking at the TV screen, I see the news reporter shaking his head and the words 'Rebels sing crazy anthem, upset the singer Annabelle' and I see the blonde star who was just on the float looking shocked ,surrounded by security. The so-called rebels, who as far as I can see have only protested peacefully are being dragged off by the police when I walk past the black column that signals I'm entering the upmarket part of the city .I'm looking forward to seeing Calix after all this. As kind and intelligent as Calix is, I'm often surprised at his loyalty to the way his father rules the kingdom. He genuinely seems to believe in the concept of 'broken' . He only met me because he wanted to recruit me as a citizen. The idea makes me smile. I always feel like a weirdo when I smile or even feel happy in this city. It seems to be an unwritten code that you have to look depressed. Maybe it's a law? I'll certainly have to look into this.

I see it, a hidden cove, a treasure trove. In this part of town, atmosphere is different. There it is, The Royal Club of the Broken HQ. And directly opposite, The Raven, a nightclub that looks like a pirates drinking den. I wonder if Calix ever comes here with his approved-of-by-daddy acquaintances. As I approach TRCB I see there is no one standing by the door to accept invitations. I knock the polished mahogany wood several times. Seconds later, it opens. I'm greeted by a well dressed yet sinister looking man who for whatever reason makes me feel like he's armed or trained in some martial art or both.

"What can I do for you?" he snaps at me.

"Um Hi, I'm here for the meeting. I have an invitation," and I hold it out for him to read. He looks at it as if disgusted that I could possibly be invited to such an elite club. After what seems like an age of him staring unconvinced at my perfectly genuine invite, he looks back at me "And who exactly gave you this invitation young eh lady," he says and I'm shocked by his offensive tone.

"His Royal Highness Prince Calix gave it to me personally, saying that he would greatly appreciate my support."

"Hmm...", he looks down at the invitation again, as if testing what I've said with the invite in his hands.

"Very well Miss, you may follow me." He holds the door open, never taking his eyes off me and I step in.

"Thank you very much," I say trying to be polite.

Looking around, I see that the room is mahogany and dark green. Like a London cigar and brandy Gentleman's club. There is a bar with a smartly dressed bar tender but there isn't anyone else around. They're all in the meeting which late for, I presume.

"Which way to the Royal meeting?" I enquire of the bar tender who doesn't seem to think so loftily of himself as the doorman.

"Just through these double doors, down the hall, on the left," he replies, helpfully.

"Thank you," I smile at him as I walk swiftly down the corridor.

This place is elegant and understated. As I turn left I see only one door where the meeting is must be taking place. Upon opening the door ,I step into the room which is spacious and light, a sort assembly room, with a serious atmosphere. Everyone looks at me and I mouth an apology as I spy an empty chair and edge towards it. The King is on stage making a speech, I'm sure he won't think highly of my being late. It will only give him another reason to dislike me. The second thing that occurs to me is that all of the audience is male except me. Perhaps this is a gentleman's club? Why didn't Calix tell me? Perhaps *that's* why the doorman looked at me like I was not meant to be at the club. I can't see Calix among the audience or on stage. Perhaps he's backstage, he did say he was participating in this presentation.

Suddenly I hear the King announce 'and my son and successor Prince Calix of the City of the Broken,' and Calix steps out on stage, to an applause and standing ovation which I gladly participate in.

"Thank you all. My father and I are both very grateful you could be here tonight."

He is different before an audience. He's more dignified and aloof. A prince, a professional. Behind Calix and the King, I observe two bodyguards who are armed. I wonder why they feel them to be necessary.

"We have many plans to make The City of the Broken an even more spectacular place for its citizens, there's a new school of the Broken which will replace the old school. Our designer, the finest in all the city, Mr Jack Lipson," he points and nods to elaborately dressed man who is sitting in the front row, "has created a splendid new uniform for all of the children to wear."

Mr. Lipson rises from his seat and walks onstage carrying one of the uniforms.

"Good evening citizens of the Broken, I have worked tirelessly, never stopping until perfection was achieved."

Mr Lipson talks like a president addressing his people with great passion .

"This is not just any school uniform. When His Royal Highness requested I design a new look for the children of this city, I could scarcely say no. On looking at the old uniform I instantly knew that my design must reflect the modern child. The old look was the old city, but we are



very different now-The uniform needed to be versatile, practical. Allowing every child to mould to the school and yet retain his or her individuality.”

I can see the audience growing bored with Jack Lipson’s speech and the King doesn’t look impressed by his babbling on about his design. Calix though, listens intently, with great curiosity. He’s always so polite.

“Thus it was born. The design will live on for a century or longer, as it has been created to fit the child of today and of tomorrow. Our children’s children will all wear this wonderful style. An everlasting glove, a symbol of this great city.”

He holds up the outfit which is plain black, with a purple embroidered B. Unremarkable to say the least. A sweatshirt with black trousers or a black skirt. A moderate applause arises from the audience, and Mr. Lipson smiles as if he is accepting a noble peace prize.

The King walks over looking annoyed.

“Thank you Mr. Lipson,” he says ushering the overly enthusiastic designer back to his seat.

“The school and the uniform are just one of my plans for the city. At present the fact there is an upper and lower school does not instil the singular broken mindset but acts as a separation between the older and younger generation. The rioting of the gangs must be stopped. These individuals make a fool of our city and go against everything we stand for.”

The King’s voice rises to a level of anger as he speaks of the riots, which I presume to mean The Smiley’s and a very loud applause arises from the audience.

“You may have heard today of the disturbance at the parade. This gang dressed in their rebellious yellow bring shame to the city.”

A member of the audience shouts “They must be stopped! Get them imprisoned!”

“Yes, I quite agree,” says the King.

“Laws are being passed as we speak, banning the colour yellow and anything but black and dark purple. It may sound unnecessary as I know a good many people who are fond of grey as well but I think you’ll find that without such laws, chaos will arise.”

This is the first time I’ve viewed the king as a dictator. This man is insane.

“So you see, this gang, who I believe call themselves *Smiley’s*, will be arrested for their antics if they dare go public with their diabolical schemes again.”

The king gets a roaring applause and standing ovation from the audience who are all dressed in black.

“I have also taken it upon myself to ban any form of cheerful music, with only melancholic, or music that reflects the tone of our city being legal.”

Even Calix looks shocked at this, as if he had no idea his father had planned this. I don’t blame him, banning cheerful music? Even some of the audience appear horrified, although they stand and clap nonetheless.

“What about Annabelle? My daughter loves her music,” asks a man shyly from the back of the gathering.

“Annabelle is still legal as she plays the exact type of music that personifies the city.”

Thinking back to the parade earlier today, I remember Annabelle’s music as depressing and tormented. I would never want to listen to someone like that. This man tries to take choice away.

“It’s the only way we can pass our values successfully on to the younger children,” he says with an arrogant defiance.

“My son Calix had a few words he would like to say. And with that we will wrap up our conference. I thank you very much again for coming.”

“Good evening ladies and gentlemen. I happen to have some plans of my own for the youth of the city that begin with the library. I would like to encourage reading groups and additional reading hour in the primary schools and for under fourteen year olds.”

He can even surprise me sometimes, beneath that beauty is brains, depth and compassion. It only makes me more in love and awe of him. He is a marvel of a human being, prince or not. The royalty part with him is just like an added extra, he’d still be wondrous even if he was just ordinary.

He glances at me as he makes his speech and smiles. I see his father glaring at him and

then look at me with disgust. Hey! Calix smiles at the crowd to announce that he has finished his speech and they applaud him graciously, although not to the same magnitude that his father received.

The king goes backstage, the audience get up to leave and Calix jumps off the stage, walking over to me as I greet him with a smile. I hug him tightly.

“You were brilliant Calix .I never knew you to be so philanthropic.”

“Well I’m really passionate about education, if my father neglects an area, I try to concentrate on it and he really doesn’t pay education enough attention.”

“And what exactly do you think about his ideas on music and colour?” I ask hoping that he sees some sense on this issue.

“He does take things too far sometimes. The colour law won’t really make a difference, most people wear black anyway, but I don’t agree with his ideas on music. I love all kinds of music.”

I look accusingly at him.

“Calix you have to speak up to him about this. You cannot let him decide what music people want to listen to. You’re the prince, he has to listen to you. You’ll be King one day.”

He looks fearfully at me.

“Honest, Seren, when my father has decided on an idea, *nobody* can change his mind. I’ve tried countless times to reverse some of his ideas but to no avail .”I’m inclined to believe him.

“How is he allowed to get away with all this stuff? Doesn’t he have people who oppose him?”

“Well there’s The Smiley’s for one. Some people do challenge his ideas, but his supporters are in much more powerful positions than any enemy so they only ever get overruled.” I shake my head in shock.

“Calix you absolutely have to stand up to him. He’s a tyrant. You are in a powerful position. you can influence him, son-to father if nothing else!”

Calix is different when we talk about his Dad. It’s like he is afraid of him, like he’s an impossible barrier you just cannot get over. I’m not afraid of him but he’s a challenge. He’s perplexing though because Calix usually is so determined, he’s always made me feel like

anything is possible but when it comes to his father, it's like nothing is possible. He's probably learned this from past experiences. In psychology I believe this is called conditioning. Well I'll change that!

"So what is this place Calix, like a gentleman's club and why am I the only girl?"

"Yeah its like that, as well as a conference hall, secret society. It's everything really and yet it looks so very unremarkable, that's the genius of it! Women don't usually come here, you are a very rare occurrence."

"While I was on my way here I saw The Smiley's. It was hardly a riot, more of a peaceful protest. What does your father have against them?"

"He sees them as a threat to the city. Think about it Seren, it goes against everything we are."

"Do you like the city as it is? I mean are you happy for it to stay this way forever?" He looks in deep thought for a moment, not entirely sure of the answer himself.

"Well, we certainly are unique I'll give you that. I love that about this Kingdom. I've always seen us as kind of a sanctuary for the broken hearted, the outcasts. Surely that's not a bad thing," He arches his eyebrow at me and looks smoulderingly hot but I try not to let that distract me from my point.

"So you're happy with the way your father rules. You think it's alright?" I ask and he sighs.

"Dad takes things to extremes sometimes I realize that, but that's just how he deals with things. The city's been this way since I was young Seren, for as long as I remember. I can't really recall what it was like before Mum died although from local history books it certainly wasn't like this. But I do remember Dad, I remember him when he was different. I do wish he could be the old him again. He's changed so much since he lost his wife. I think that's why he rules like he does."

"What do you mean?" I ask slightly puzzled.

"His obsession with order, the extremities. He worries so much about rioters changing the city, when really all they want is a little more freedom and variety. It's his way or no way now. I guess he's become a bit of a dictator but that's because he need to control something .He

couldn't control my mother's death, nothing in his power could stop it. That got to him a lot. I think he used to think himself kind of invincible."

Calix is so good at understanding human nature, or at least his father. He even makes me have a little sympathy towards the man.

"Don't be so hard on him Seren, he will probably ease off in time, when he comes to accept he can't control everything."

"Still Calix, he shouldn't allow his personal problems to interfere with his rule of the city. People have free will and he's trying to control that. That's wrong."

Calix doesn't say anything but just looks at me as though upset. It's like he thinks his father needs protecting.

"Do you miss her Calix, your mother?" I ask.

He looks introspective and then answers quietly

"It sounds wrong to say, but not really. I was really young when she died, I can barely remember her at all."

"What did the city used to be like. Was it always The City of the Broken?"

"Oh no, not at all. I guess you could just say it was normal, back then people wore anything they wanted to. There was colour, there was buzz. It was more alive, but at the same time it wasn't as individual as it is now. You won't find another city like this in the world now. We march to our own beat. It was just like every other city before my father legally changed the name from Dovetown to The City of the Broken, when his heart was broken by the loss of his love. Then he started recruiting anyone who was depressed to join and banned smiling."

I knew it!

"Why doesn't anyone just stop him?"

"What you have to understand Seren is that a lot of people are actually happy, if that's the right word, to live like this. They've come here because they are depressed. They feel they fit in here, they're not oddballs of society. They're just like everyone else, broken, and that makes them feel normal perhaps for the first time ever in their life."

Of course, how could I be so stupid. The citizens actually want to stay like this, so maybe The Kings not a dictator after all.

“Is it really what’s best for them though, to be encouraged to be in a permanent state of depression? It’s almost like it’s the fashionable thing here to be unhappy.”

He laughs.

“It is kind of like that yeah. I suppose it wouldn’t hurt to have a little cheerfulness every now and then, but that will never happen because of...”

“Your Dad” I interrupt him.

“Yeah.”

“I like The Smiley’s, I don’t think they’re bad at all. Well I better go, I still have that assignment to do,” I say.

“You really need to plan better, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“It would be much easier to plan if certain hot princes would stop inviting me to city conferences and balls,” I shake my head mockingly.

“Why exactly did you invite me here tonight anyway Calix. Was it really necessary?”

“Not at all, just another excuse to spend time with you.”

My heart melts at his words and we kiss again.

It still bugs me that Calix thought me depressed enough to qualify as a citizen of the broken. What an unintentional insult! Aren’t those members of the city simply trapped in a cycle of unhappiness, surely they need to be around happy people with a zest of life, not people who reinforce the need to be broken.

Upon finally getting to bed, when I’m asleep, I dream about The King, a black crown, a black heart and Calix.

## Chapter Five.

### Heart of Ice

At school, we're going Ice Skating at the big ice rink in the city .Contrasting the City of the Broken to a regular city is insightful.

Coaches have been booked and the whole school is going. Calix is too, I'm hoping he will be on the same bus as me so that we can sit together. When I see him he's dressed in a black wool coat, with black earmuffs. On anyone else it would look ridiculous, he somehow manages to look suave.

"Are you going ice skating Calix?" I am bubbling with excitement. Calix looks upset, like he's carrying the universe on his shoulders.

"Are you okay?" I ask when he doesn't answer my question.

"Yes, fine. Yes I'm going ice skating." His tone is cold, I can tell instantly something is up. I just frown to myself and get on the bus, hoping he will divulge on the journey.

"Hi Seren, sit next to us," Jasmine says. Charlotte is sitting next to her beckoning me over.

I decide to sit next to them. Calix is clearly in a bad mood anyway so he probably would rather be on his own.

"This is so exciting, yet nerve racking," says Jasmine.

"I know. Have you ever been ice skating before?"

"Yes I went last year. I only clung on to the side of the rink, if I went into the middle I'd just end up on the floor," Charlotte and I laugh, knowing only too well we will soon be in the same situation.

I see Calix come on the bus looking sullen. He spots me sitting next to the girls.

"Are you going to sit by me Seren?" he asks.

"I'm going up the back, come and join me if you want," he says as he floats past looking glamorous and mysterious. His eyebrows and hair dark and thick, like the frame chosen for a

masterpiece.

“Why is he asking to sit by you?” I am demanded of when Calix is barely out of earshot.

“Um,” is all that I can manage.

“Are you dating?” asks Jasmine in disbelief like it’s the scandal of the century.

“Yeah sort of,” I mutter and I can see other girls on the bus looking over interested in why Jasmine and Charlotte are screeching.

“And you didn’t think to tell us?” asks Jasmine not knowing that Charlotte has already been informed.

“I. um..”

“Go and sit with him now,” Charlotte says bossily.

“Are you sure, I mean, you two don’t mind?” I ask thinking they might be offended by me choosing a guy over them.

“You would be insane if you chose *not* to sit with him,” Jasmine says her eyes beaming

“Just so you two can gossip about me,” I say teasingly.

“Yeah that too,” says Charlotte enthusiastically.

As I walk towards the back where Calix is sitting, everyone is staring. Everyone knows.

Calix looks as if he’s far away when I sit by him.

“Hi, please tell me what’s up Calix. I can tell something is bothering you.”

He sighs but stays silent as if locked in a cage of secrets.

“Calix please,” I try again.

“Oh Seren, you just wouldn’t understand,” he says putting his fingers to the bridge of his nose and frowning like he has a headache.

“Oh go on, try me. I promise I will do my best to understand.”

“Whatever it is Ill be sympathetic,” I add on seeing his doubtful glance.

“My Father,” he pauses, but of course any problem would always involve him.

“Yes?” I enquire.

“He doesn’t want me to see you anymore Seren.”



My ears seem to have gone dead, everything around me is a blur and I'm sure my heart just skipped several beats. I say nothing.

"Seren," Calix says looking concerned, putting his hand on my hand, which only serves to make me burst into tears, a reaction that takes even me by surprise.

"Oh Seren, please don't cry."

The whole coach is listening. I just want to run away but I can't because we're on a motorway. I keep gulping. I feel out of control and like I can't breathe. I try taking deep breathes. Calix offers me a bottle of his water. Finally, my tears are overcome by wrath-towards Calix's father.

"Why doesn't he want me to see you anymore?" I spit at him.

"Well, he thinks you're a bad influence on me," Calix says, shocked as he's never seen me in this much of a temper before.

"He thinks I'm a bad influence on you?" I repeat his sentence slowly as a question spiked with a malice.

"He says that you make me too happy...happier than he's ever seen me before and he finds that worrying, you know for the city," he says calmly trying not to provoke me further.

I am so horrified, I'm speechless. I just sit there staring at Calix and shaking my head. How dare he! He has no right to tell Calix who to see. How dare he! He should be happy his son is happy and yet he's trying to prevent his joy. How dare he! Thinking his precious city is more important than his son and that I could possibly be bad influence, how dare he. Calix looks worried as if I might explode or combust or maybe that's just how I feel.

"Come on Seren, we can try and enjoy today. We're going ice skating!" he smiles at me and it would make me feel blissful, if it hadn't been for what he's just told me.

"Calix how do you think I could possibly enjoy skating after what you've just told me? Your father doesn't want me to see you again!" I stare at him like he doesn't understand what his father is saying.

"Yes," is the answer I get.

"Well, you're not going to go along with that are you? Tell him to back off, it's none of his

business if you want to see me,” and suddenly I feel a rush of panic about what Calix’s going to say next.

“Seren, I-,” and then he pauses.

Mrs. Shelley, our teacher and head of the ice skating trip interrupts him .No ,not now!  
“Now you lot, we’ll have three hours altogether. You’ll have an hour on the ice. If you need help just ask one of the assistants on the rink who’ll be more than happy to explain to you about fitting the shoes and keeping your balance on the ice . Then straight back on the bus, we leave at 3.” she says matter-of-factly.

After Mrs. Shelley’s pep talk, I look longingly at Calix and I can see he hasn’t been listening. He looks in deep, challenging thought. A total dilemma.

“Look Seren, I love being with you. I don’t want to stop seeing you either but at the same time I don’t want to double cross my father. He thinks the joy you bring me goes against everything the city is and I guess that’s true. I’m the Prince, I’m supposed to represent what we are and being happy isn’t a part of that.” He looks disapproving of himself, like he’s committing some great treachery against the city.

“I know Calix, but you have to live for yourself too. You can’t just survive singularly for your father and that city. Besides, just act.”

“Act? You mean...what do you mean?”

“If you just act sad and broken, your father will never know. Either that or tell him to leave you alone. You’re an adult, it’s up to you to make your own decisions.”

“Acting... yeah I think you’re on to something, both of us can act,” he says, a light bulb flashing above his head.

“What do you mean both of us?”

“Well Seren, if I take you to the city and we both look continuously depressed together then my father will approve of you...us. Besides, let’s not forget I recruited you in the beginning because I thought you’d fit in perfectly with the city. You always looked so sad, so broken walking around the school. Surely you can look like that again, it’s always been so natural for

you!” Okay, don’t rub it in how much of a reject I looked.

“Yes Calix ,but it’s different now because since I found you, for the first time in my life, I do actually feel happy. It’s so ironic isn’t it?”

“I know, but I have to admit it, it’s exactly the same with me. I had absolutely no trouble at all being the broken prince, the black prince before . I had no mother, a father who is permanently in a bad mood and a bunch of suitors I had absolutely no interest in. It was so easy to be depressed. Then of course I found you and all of that changed so quickly. I finally had a reason to get up, to live even.”

“Calix is that really the way you feel?” To hear these words coming out of his lips is extraordinary. I had no idea that I’d changed his emotional life in such a way.

“It could work. I guess I’d rather act depressed and actually be full of joy than genuinely be depressed because I’d lost you. Sure we can give it a shot, but are you sure your father’s not just using the unhappy thing as an excuse? I mean did any of the other girls he wanted you to date look too happy?” I ask interested in his response.

He pauses, considering what I’ve just said.

“One girl, Jessica, wasn’t happy all of the time but she had a zest for life and a confidence that never departed from her and if I’m honest, my father never had a problem with her, although the reason for that could be simply that she didn’t make *me* happy. I still remained depressed and melancholic with her around, maybe that’s why he didn’t mind her so much.”

“I don’t mean to sound egocentric, but am I the only girl who’s ever made you happy? Were there others that made your father say ‘back off’ too?”

“One girl, we got along really well, like friends more than anything. My father stopped me seeing her straight away, I could scarcely say no then, after all I was still a child legally, I was 15 so when he told me it was the end I just accepted it. He was probably even worse back then, more controlling. It extended to friends, girlfriends, even teachers Anyone who fell below his high standards could come no where near me. I had a carefully chosen peer group and they were the only people I was allowed to see. That’s why it was so refreshing, coming here to school,

mixing with everyone, away from fathers control.”

“How did you manage that? Getting to school without him interfering again?”

“I had the lecture from him about going to a school here in The City of the Broken, like every normal ‘broken’ kid, but I was not going to back down on this. I told him I wouldn’t talk to anyone at school, and if I did it would be to recruit new citizens. It’s only because I said I’d recruit as well as study that he allowed me to go,” he says with a tinge of sadness, as if he longs just to be normal.

“So that’s why you wouldn’t speak to anyone except me .I always wondered why someone so attractive and potentially popular as you wasn’t surrounded by loads of people, in fact I think the whole school wondered why that was. You certainly had enough female admirers.”

He smiles shyly as if he doesn’t believe that to be true.

“So all the people in the city have been recruited?”

“More or less, yes. Although father has this idea now that there’s a depression gene, so all the second, third, fourth and continuing generation citizens who are born in the city will be a race of their own, because both of their parents will be depressed. He believes in the heritability of depression. Soon he thinks we’ll have our own broken population.”

“Your father is like a nutty professor or something,” I say shocked that the king knows no limitations to his obsession with his city.

“Is there any point in me having that talk with him, you know to try and make him like me now that he’s told you this?”

“Probably not, it’ll only aggravate him more,” he says assertively.

“I think so too,” I agree.

Anyway I’ve not got the sort of personality that could win anyone over, I’m too shy. I don’t think *anyone* could win over Calix’s father. He’s so stubborn from what I can fathom. It would be interesting to actually have a conversation with the man though, then I could make my mind up for myself.

“Actually Calix, could you arrange for us to speak to one another?”

He's taking a swig of his water as I ask this and gulps it down in such a way that I think he's going to choke, urgent horror spreads across his face.

"Seren, I'm telling you, it's an awful idea. Please understand he doesn't warm to hardly anyone, if he met you, no offence but he would ban me from seeing you forever. Let's just play it cool and stick to the acting, yeah ?If we just lie low and not make a fuss about the whole idea of us being together, he'll probably just forget the whole thing."

"Really?" I ask, slightly dejected feeling.

"No, Dad never forgets anything," he smiles innocently. We both laugh at this idea.

The journey is ,aside from our in-depth conversation, one of laughter and jokes among the students and teachers.

The bus finally reaches its destination and I think I can see snowflakes in the air.

"Oh this is perfect, Calix, I thought it might rain and wreck the ice skating but this will be so romantic," I smile at him and I can see that he finds me amusing.

"You are so soppy sometimes Seren, you paradox," he says flirtingly.

"What do you mean?" I ask in mock shock.

"Sometimes you are complicated, like have so much depth to you. It's like you know some huge secret that no one else on earth has the answer to. Then other times, like now, you are just a superficial girlie girl. I think that's what intrigues me most about you."

"What that I'm superficial?" I ask puzzled.

"No! Those two completely opposing sides, you work on so many different levels. Take my father for example, I always know where I am with him, sure he can be annoying but on the whole he's quite a stable character. I don't think I've ever met a person quite like you. You're abstract. I can't figure you out at all. That's what pulls me in."

I never thought of myself like that. I've always thought I was the ultimate bore.

"I see you as that too really. You're the most beautiful man I've ever laid eyes on and yet you are so learned and well-read. You're a prince but you're down to earth. You are a marvel really."

He smiles humbly as if he thinks I'm talking rubbish but it's truly how I feel.

"Right you lot," demands Mrs .Shelley in her school -marm manner.

"Back at this bus certainly no later than 3.Lateness is my absolute bug-bear. Be here or we drive off without you. You got it?" She asks in her no nonsense manner.

There is a chorus of 'yes' and nodding. And everyone gets off the bus.

"This is so exciting Calix, have you ever been ice skating before?" I ask, grinning like an idiot.

"Not ice skating, I do go skiing a lot though, so I'm hoping I'll have some form of balance on the ice," he says with a mockingly fearful expression.

Since we have an hour to burn before our class is booked in to go ice skating and everyone has branched off into their own little groups, Calix and I decide to visit the museum. I catch our reflection in the entrance hall window. He looks elegantly dressed like a movie star or top model. I look like Little Miss Average. We don't look like a couple at all. Sometimes I feel overwhelmed, even intimidated by how good looking he is.

"Hey look ,they've got a pre-historic exhibit. Let's go and see that," I exclaim bursting with childhood wonder.

"This does sound the most intriguing exhibit. All the rest is just local history. This exhibition is touring all over the world. I guess we're lucky it's here," he says.

"As much as I love mammoths Calix, you have to know I have a fear of dinosaurs," I speak confessing my true phobia.

"How can you have a fear of something that has long since died?" he laughs.

"It's not funny! I'm terrified of them. You have to tell me your fear now that I've told you mine."

"My fear? Hmm...I don't think I really have one," he considers looking serious like the thought of fear has never occurred to him before.

"Surely you must be scared of *something*," I say, trying to coax out some answer.

"Only not having you in my life," he says.

I can tell from his expression he is sincere and this truly terrifies him. It pulls at the strings of

my heart as a puppeteer to his marionette.

Here it is. We are greeted by mammoth fossils as we walk through the museum doors.

The tusks are vast ,although not as big as I would have imagined.

“Imagine being the one to have discovered these frozen in a block of ice,” I say to Calix, who is reading the factual information with fascination.

“Look there’s a baby mammoth.”

“You’d never think something so cute could grow to be so huge,” he says admiring the woolly elephant.

We pass giant pre-historic bugs from tropical rainforests, evolving horses who started life looking little more than sheep, a deer with antlers bigger than the mammoth tusks and then we reach the jewel in the crown-the dinosaurs.

“Are you sure you want to go through with this Seren?” asks Calix in sarcastic concern.

“I’ll try and brave it out, but honestly Calix they really do creep me out,” he giggles silently to himself.

The T-Rex model is no where near as frightening as I thought it would be and the fossils are amazing. They even have genuine dino dung!

After we’ve finished looking around the museum, we still have half an hour left before we go ice skating so we decide to go shopping. Although I don’t think Calix was overly enthusiastic about this idea, he seemed much more interested in the museum. We go to a fashion store.

“The clothes are all so colourful,” exclaims Calix.

“They’re not colourful, they’re just ordinary.”

“*This* is colourful,” I say holding up a hot pink and orange dress.

Calix’s eyes look like they are about to pop out of his head in shock

“This is so unusual for me Seren, being in this different city, everyone so cheerful and colourful.

I think I’ve just grown accustomed to darkness,” he shrugs.

“Don’t you like a bit of variety?” I ask, baffled by the fact Calix seems uncomfortable

surrounded by the rainbow spectrum of normality.

“Surely black gets a little boring all of the time,” I persist.

“It’s not about colour Seren, it’s about what it represents. Look around at all these smiley put-on-for-show faces. It’s so phoney. In my city you’re allowed, encouraged to be yourself, to show yourself as miserable, outcast, the black sheep. All I see here is pretence, people trying to be happy, always ‘on’, just to impress others. Well *I’m* not impressed by it at all.”

Actually, he does have a point. I guess in *The City of the Broken* there’s a freedom in being allowed to be unhappy. Listening, all around me I hear the forced laughs and see those fake smiles. I can definitely understand his point of view.

We stroll down an arcade. It’s less mainstream down here. There are antique shops and a bookshop, which we decide to go in to as we know that reading is a common interest we share.

They have beautiful books here, ones with really elaborate rare covers. On one of the shelves I spot *Wuthering Heights*, my favourite book.

“You’re my Heathcliff Calix,” I smile at him, because he really is just as brooding and intense.

“You’ll be Cathy then, Seren,” he says with all the magnetism of a gothic romance hero.

This bookshop really does have it all. Classics, new titles ,fiction, non-fiction, poetry. It’s a treasure trove of words. Calix and I are in such bliss, we lose track of time.

“Calix, the ice skating, we’re about ten minutes late, come on!”

We run all the way through the shopping centre, stopping only for the busy road. We cross then resume our haste.

Luckily, our class is still queuing to go on the ice when we get there. We stand at the desk to get our ice skates. There are rows and rows of orange coloured skates in different sizes ,all wanting to be taken onto the frozen lake of the winter wonderland that awaits. As we get into the queue together, people seem to momentarily forget their ice nerves. Everyone is looking at us questioningly and I can hear whispering among the crowd.

“Are *they* dating?”

“I can’t believe he’d want her.”



Then one of the most up-front members of the class decides to find out for herself and ask the question no one else has been brave enough to ask.

“Are you two together?”

I look at Calix to gauge his reaction and he says “Yes we are. We’ve been dating for about three months now,” he answers coolly, without any shame in his voice.

“Oh okay, you look good together,” she says, taken aback slightly by Calix’s honesty.

“So, here we are,” I say, nudging him as he feigns terror.

“I know I will end up flat on my face, please help me up if I fall,” I plead to him, making myself sound like a puppy whining.

“I’ll help you up, that is if I don’t fall over myself.”

“Oh Calix, you will never fall, you have all the grace of a ballet dancer. Besides those skiing lessons must have taught you some sort of balance. You’ll be Mr. Elegant and I’ll be a heap of arms and legs with everyone pointing and laughing at me.”

“You’re always so hard on yourself Seren. Why do you always assume the worst? Besides the amount you’ve hyped me up now, it’s inevitable I won’t live up to your expectations.”

“I’m not hard on myself, I’m just accurate and from past experience I know I’ll be clumsy. This isn’t about balance, I can ride a bike, this is about people watching me. It doesn’t matter even if I’m extremely good at something, put me in front of a crowd and instantly I’ll fall to pieces.”

Calix looks at me like I’m exaggerating or like he doesn’t actually believe me. It’s okay for him, he’s used to doing everything in front of an audience. He’s a Prince!

“So are you still going to go on the ice?”

“Calix, of course I’m going on. I know I’ll stumble but I still want to experience it. It sounds so romantic, ice skating with my boyfriend in December, all bundled up in scarves, hat and gloves. It could be a postcard scene, if only it wasn’t for the girl in the middle of the rink who’s knocked herself out from tripping over her own feet.”

We both snigger and Calix tries to comfort me

“Please calm down Seren, I promise you’ll be fine, here I’ll hold your hand.” He does and

suddenly even I feel confident., like I'm a professional ice dancer or a swan skating on her own lake, frozen from wintry nights and frosty days.

The class have started to go on now, and the more confident students glide along the ice like this is second nature, whilst the less daring individuals cling on for dear life along the hand rail that goes around the whole rink.

"Ready guys," says a friendly African-Caribbean man who works at the rink. Calix could look like an ice sculpture himself, with his perfectly carved features and porcelain skin. Holding his hand I feel anything is possible. Like I could grow wings and fly to the most distant universe, kissing the brightest and highest star just for the sake of it.

"Ready?" He turns to ask me, looking so flawless and heroic that I could only ever say 'yes'. We tightly hold hands and he leads me through those double doors, there's no turning back now! We walk over the carpeted area, the last area of safety. Staying close to the side, Calix steps onto the ice like someone stepping into the sea for a paddle, their only fear being the temperature of the water. Not letting go of my hand, he turns to face me, to beckon me onto the ice with him.

"Come on Seren, its really not that bad." He stands perfectly upright looking so at ease, not even holding onto the bar, so I decide it must be fine. Surely the skates have a firm grip? I put one foot on the ice and already I can feel how slippery it is. The skates do not help at all.

"Calix, I can't. I'll break my neck," I say fearfully. I'm about to turn back when he pulls me onto the ice.

"You won't hurt yourself Seren, I promise. Just trust me okay," he says, gazing fixedly on me with his truthful eyes that could only ever completely fulfil a promise.

"Okay," I answer fully believing every word. No one else could convince me of ice safety but Calix.

I'm on it. Two feet on the ice. It is so slippery. Every time I think I'm achieving some kind of balance, the next second I slip, to which Calix chants 'careful', not ever slipping once. We are still round the edge, which is where I want to stay ,but Calix has other ideas

“Come on Seren, let’s go in the middle, it’ll be fun,” he exclaims, eyes bursting with childlike excitement.

“No! Calix you only just managed to get me onto the ice, I’m not looking forward to being the laughing stock of the whole school if I go into the middle!” I screech at him.

“Please Seren, just for me?” he says, turning up the Fahrenheit on his hot factor.

“Oh okay. If I fall you better shield me from the crowd and help me up pronto,” I say trying to be forceful.

How do I let him convince me of these things? He has unbelievable powers of persuasion. He pulls me along as he moves like a champion ice skater and I try to enjoy the moment. I soon find that this is impossible as when I think I’m getting the hang of standing up and being dragged along, I find myself tripping over my own feet, nearly doing the splits. It doesn’t help that there is a crowd standing around the rink.

“Oh please Calix, can we get off now? I hope you’re not expecting us to do the Bolero next are you?” I joke while at the same time secretly worrying he will think I’m seriously suggesting this.

“No, okay Seren we’ll get off now. You were brave coming out in the middle with me.” We glide off with the most grace and ease I experienced the whole time of being on the ice.

“Wow look at you two go, young love on the ice!” It’s Mrs. Shelley, she’s been watching the whole class from the sidelines of the rink.

“We’ve got half an hour left, if you are both finished with the ice why don’t you grab a coffee?” she suggests.

“That’s a great idea Mrs. Shelley. We could use some warming up after that,” says Calix.

“Come on Seren,” he says, taking my hand.

“See you back on the bus,” we both wave at her.

We go to the nearest Starbucks. I order a caramel frappucino ,my all-time favourite.

“It’s mid-December and you’re ordering *that*”? he asks, a mix of shock and amusement on his face.

“Who cares what month it is? These are always delicious,” I smile at him.

“What season appropriate beverage are you buying then?” I ask thoroughly annoyed at his disapproval of my drink.

“Not a showy slushy that’s for sure. A proper coffee, an espresso.”

“An espresso?” I arch my eyebrow at him.

“I can’t say I’ve ever tried one but I already know they’ll be horrible,” I say, folding my arms.

“A grown up drink for sophisticated people such as myself,” he says jokingly and I can’t help but giggle. He’s adorable even when he’s getting on my nerves. We sit by a window so that we can chat ,sip and watch the world go by.

“Look I even get a free straw, you don’t get such perks with fancy espressos,” I tease.

“I can have a free straw too you know, they’re not exclusively for those childish enough to buy frappuccino’s.”

“How dare you,” I say.

“Childish?” I persist as he sniggers to himself.

“A baby’s drink,” he says with mock disapproval, shaking his head.

We both giggle as I start sipping and my drink serves in humiliating me further by creating slurping noises.

We head back to the bus.

“Did you enjoy the ice skating Seren?” asks Calix.

“I don’t know if enjoy is the right word, Calix, survive perhaps,” I say.

He smiles. He looks so intense, his sapphire eyes gazing into mine like he’s thinking about some deep concept and just about coming to a conclusion.

“You’re so surprising Seren. There is an endless amount of twists and turns in the maze that is you,” he says suddenly.

“Besides Calix, am I really supposed to enjoy *anything* now that your father has banned you from seeing me? I was under the impression we now had to live life under the masquerade of misery.”

“That’s true Seren but we can be ourselves here. After all we’re not in the City of the Broken and father isn’t here so if you want to be happy, now is your perfect opportunity.”

“I am happy Calix, happier than ever before. I felt so lonely before I met you, everything seemed pointless. You’ve made me feel so alive, so full of joy, which is so ironic, since you are the prince of the Broken!”

He looks at me enquiringly, exploring what I’ve said. This boy recruits people to join his world because they are unhappy, it’s the criteria for joining and I perfectly fulfilled it, until I met him and then I suddenly felt excitement, a sense of permanent hope and adventure. No wonder his father is worried. I stand out, looking alive while everyone else floats on a black cloud, dancing in their despair. Calix does seem to relish his role as the prince of the city and why should I spoil that for him. He’s always fulfilled his duty and I can understand why he feels torn between his father and me. On the other hand, I think ‘why should I allow his tyrannical father to rule our lives’? Calix isn’t a child anymore, and surely he can carry on with his stately affairs as well as be with me.

“Calix you don’t have to take me into the city again if your father doesn’t approve. We can just continue to see each other here, in school.”

“No Seren. I like taking you into the city. I want to make you a part of every sphere of my life, besides I thought that we decided we’d just act gloomy now?”

“Is that really the way to live your life, tip-toeing around your Dad, pretending to be something that you’re not?” I ask doubting that I could ever pull off a convincing performance when I have him at my side, giving me a reason to relish being alive.

“If you want to take me to the city Calix, that’s fine. I like spending as much time as possible with you,” I say.

The bus arrives back at school.

“So we’ve got three weeks off now Calix, when shall we meet up next?”

“Friday, I’ll pick you up. Dress in all black Seren, not a hint of anything flamboyant.”

“Umm, okay. I think I’ll just have to make my wardrobe entirely black for you,” I tease.

The Rolls pulls up for Calix and just as I begin to wave him goodbye and start walking off, he doubles back and kisses me.

“Bye Seren,” he says and departs. Yes, it shall certainly be difficult to act unhappy when I am intoxicated with glee from his kisses.

## Chapter Six.

### BlackBall

Calix arrives at the cafe we decided to meet at precisely on the second it becomes five 'o' clock. He's punctual to an eerie degree.

"No car?" I enquire.

"No. I thought it would be romantic to walk," he says and I smile at him enthralled.

We walk from the café to the graveyard. One gate leading to the dead ,the other to the black city of the living dead. Calix opens the gate, the black key the only hint of the awaiting destination.

There is a unique atmosphere here, it's not excitement but even these gloomy citizens seem to have a whisper of expectation in their eyes. They all seem to know some important secret and I can't help but wonder what it is. I look at Calix quizzically. He smiles, holding out his arm to usher me into the city. There are huge banners everywhere, silver with purple lettering.

'Tonight SuperBall-Eternal Blacks VS Purple Predators.'

This feels like a huge event, there are crowds of people, dressed in black as usual or all-purple.

"What is all this Calix?"

"The SuperBall, the biggest sporting event in the city. It only comes around every eight years."

"Eight? Wow that's a long wait, what sport do they play?"

"Blackball, the signature sport of this city."

Everything looks cinematic, a blur of black, purple, and silver. There's a distant echo of a slow motioned chanting. The Blackball cheer of the Broken, a faded memory in the subconscious of a premiership football match. It's like a party's taking place in a shadow world. It's still an old black and white film crackling from dust, but more vivid than before as if a little

colour is fighting to break through.

They march to the beat of a different instrument, one that I never knew existed. I can hear what a harpsichord and see stalls selling mini banners. The black fountain in the centre of the city is spouting its glorious water. The dark lullaby sounds its musical notes through the whole city. It's eerie yet wondrous, sang by the BlackBall fans, the closest to passion they could ever hope to touch.

"This is amazing Calix, why didn't you tell me?" I enthuse.

"I wanted it to be a surprise." I can see he is dressed up in his regalia, all pomp and pageantry.

"Are you on duty tonight Calix? You look so..." I pause not quite knowing the correct word.

"Regal, like a Prince," I continue.

"Why thank you Seren, I'm introducing the games. I've reserved a seat in the Royal Box for you."

A surge of joy turns to panic.

"The royal box! Calix what about your father?"

"Actually Seren, father doesn't get involved with these sort of events. He knows they are good for the city, uniting everyone and bring a sense of patriotism but he's dubious regarding the amount of excitement they bring on. He worries they might cheer everyone up too much, so he made me patron of this event and I'm always the official face of the games. It's a great honour, my absolute favourite duty to perform. That's why I invited you. I had to make sure you could be a part of it."

"Oh Calix, this is wonderful. Who else will be in the royal box?"

"Well there will be my Dads secretary..."

"What? She'll only tell him that I've been here"

"Hmm, there is that. I know, why don't you wear a disguise?"

"What kind of disguise?"

"There are BlackBall cheerleaders back stage. You can dress up as one of them."

"Will this work? Even with a costume she will know my face." He stops for a moment, trying to



think up another of his master plans.

“Well to be really convincing I guess you’d need some kind of wig. There’s a costume dress shop across the street. We’ll try there. Come on.” He grabs my hand and leads me away from the great stadium .I’m temporarily dumbfounded as I see a zeppelin floating above my head with ‘Eternal Black’ written on it.

In the shop window, there is an Elizabethan style black dress. It looks like a collection of antique dresses.

“What kind of shop is this Calix?”

“They sell very elaborate, one-of-a-kind, hand made clothing and accessories. It’s where a lot of people get stuff for balls and special occasions. They sell wigs as well, come on.”

We walk through the door and are greeted by a tall, elegant looking woman. The shop looks like a boutique, the costumes seem haute-couture.

“Good afternoon your Royal Highness, what a pleasant surprise. Is there anything in particular I could help you with?”

“Well Seren needs a wig,” he says, motioning to me as I blush .

“A wig? Her hair looks perfectly lovely to me, all those auburn tones,” she says kindly.

“Its for the SuperBall, I’m dressing up,” I say quickly and truthfully.

“Oh I see. Well we stock only the finest wigs here Seren. Is there any particular colour or style you are looking for?”

“Umm,” I look at Calix, not really knowing what style I’m meant to be choosing myself.

“Can we see your selection?” he says in a non-committal tone.

“Yes, follow me please,” she walks briskly through the parlour, her exceedingly high shoes clip-clopping all the way through.

On a wall at the back, wigs decorate it like a form of hairy wallpaper, each a work of art displayed beautifully. Strawberry-blonde bobs ,a Marie Antoinette heavy looking hairpiece, long jet black hair, curly purple hair and edgy platinum blonde tresses.

“A lot of the cheerleaders had blonde hair, Calix,” I whisper so I’m inaudible to the

shop-keeper.

“Shall we take the blonde wig then Seren?” he says out loud.

“Yes, the platinum blonde please. I’d like to look as different to myself as possible!” I say enthusiastically.

“An excellent choice Miss, bold yet still effortlessly stylish,” she says theatrically.

She shows me to a seat in front of a mirror that has Hollywood style light bulbs all the way around it. I sit down excited as a child in a dressing up box. Calix stands looking on. The shop keeper aids me in putting the wig on. I put a less than glamorous rubber cap on first to gather all of my natural hair, then she places the razor cut wig on my head.

“Oh Seren, it looks amazing. You would barely recognize you,” says Calix.

I look in the mirror and I certainly don’t look like myself. I like it, though it’s so different to the usual me. I look edgier.

“I’ll take it.”

“Very well. You look fabulous darling, the perfect hair do,” says the ever enthusiastic shop keeper. We buy the wig and walk swiftly back to the stadium.

It’s grown dark, louder and busier since we’ve been in the shop. There are crowds everywhere. I have the wig on, and Calix is smiling at me like he’s impressed and fascinated to be walking around with a girl that is me and yet doesn’t look like me. We’re holding hands. People are bound to think that Calix is dating somebody new.

“Don’t you think I should get some new clothes? I still have my same old look. I won’t quite pass as a cheerleader in this,” I have to shout because it’s still so loud.

“Yeah you do look too much like you dress wise. We’ll look for a clothes shop.”

Calix chooses to go in the most upmarket shop in the whole shopping centre, but as a girl I’m much more shopping savvy so I grab his arm.

“Hey Mr! Cheerleaders don’t shop in places like this. Didn’t you see what those girl had on? Miniskirts and tiny vests.” I lead him to a shop that seems to sell mainly party wear, glitzy and short. Exactly what I’m looking for. Upon entering, I spy a sequined black skirt.

“I think this would be good.”

“Isn’t it a bit too long? I mean for a cheerleader?” he asks.

“It is, but it’s the shortest I prepared go. I can be a cheerleader with modesty,” I say and he laughs. I search through the rails and come across a pretty top that’s sparkly and black.

“Perfect!”

I think I’ll pass as a cheerleader. I only hope the Kings secretary doesn’t recognize me from before.

“Shouldn’t I wear make-up as well? She’s used to seeing me looking natural. After all Calix she is bound to pay attention to me, just because I’m with you. She’ll think we’re dating and wonder what happened to me, you know the real me, what with you being seen with another girl so soon.”

We pop into a chemist, which is old fashioned and quaint with bottles of aromatherapy liquids everywhere. I choose a plum lip gloss which is cheerleader-esq, while at the same time retaining a little of myself.

“This will do. Please try to keep her away from me though Calix.”

“I will Seren, I promise. You really look different, but I don’t know if she’ll fall for it. Besides, even if she doesn’t, she won’t with absolute certainty be able to tell father you were here. I’ll just deny it saying I brought a cheerleader.”

“Okay, Calix, we’ll do it. I can’t wait to see this.”

We walk out to hear ‘Welcome to the Black City’ by My Deathly Romance playing in the stadium and hear the vast crowd singing along.

“That song could be the anthem of this city,” I enthuse.

“ True,” he agrees.

“It’s one of my all time favourite songs,” I shout.

“Mine too. Come on Seren, this is it, *the* event to be at. I’m so glad you’re here. You’re making this moment perfect for me, even though you don’t look like yourself,” he says and we both giggle.

We go backstage. Calix is obviously a V.I.P, not simply because he's royalty but also because he's contributing to the game as well.

"We'll go and meet some of the stars of the sport."

"The stars? I don't even know who they are. I'm sure it would mean a lot to some people Calix, but I'm afraid that it won't to me. For all I know they could be any old players."

"Shh...don't say that and actually Seren, I would like to meet them. I've met most of them before, some are pals but they have a couple of new players who I'd like to be acquainted with, even if it's just for the sake of duty."

Calix can be my perfect date, a romantic hero but whatever time it is, he really does seem dedicated to his royal duties. His father's probably drummed it in. We walk into their changing room and the boys are all kitted out in black shorts with black sport shirts. Each shirt is emblazoned with a silver 'EB'. They look so fierce and determined, a team ready to win.

"Hey Prince Calix, great to see you again," the most striking (in terms of looks and charisma) team member steps forward and greets Calix with a special handshake. They must know each other better than I thought.

"Seren, this is Frederic Forefront," Calix introduces me to the one man that could rival him in looks, although I get the feeling Frederic Forefront is more arrogant and rebellious than Calix, so not my type anyway.

"Pleasure to meet you," he says gazing me fixedly in the eye. This is not a man to be messed with.

"Our team are just getting prepared for the game. It's very much a mental thing. Our physique and stamina are what we work on all year round after all." He has an interesting speaking voice.

It sounds foreign, although his English is perfect, better than that of most English natives. I wonder if he was recruited for being broken. He looks focused and extremely disciplined but I still get the feeling of a dark secret lurking somewhere underneath. It would appear that the whole team are in awe of Freddie. Every word he speaks they listen intently, obeying him as one would an army general or commander in chief.

“Well, you really go for it tonight, give it all you got. I’m backing you one hundred per cent, but don’t tell the other team,” I say.

“We always give it one hundred per cent Seren. Tonight we ramp it up to one thousand,” says Frederic seriously.

“Great, we look forward to seeing you win, although as a patron of the games I’m meant to be impartial.”

“Come on Seren, time to face Dad’s secretary,” says Calix marching out into the stadium.

“Enjoy the game,” says Frederic.

“Thanks and you too. Bye,” I say, finding Freddie intimidating without Calix by my side.

“Do you know him well?” I ask Calix as we make our way up to the Royal Box.

“Yes. We used to be close friends. We’d see each other everyday, but Frederic started travelling a lot with his BlackBall so it was more difficult to stay in touch. He really is a fascinating human being. He’s supremely fit.”

“Did he join the City of the Broken because he was broken?” I ask intrigued.

“Do you mean was he recruited?”

“Yes.”

“I didn’t recruit him, because we’re both similar ages. He was actually one of the first people to join, not long after my mother died and Dad sank into a deep depression. Freddie was an abused child who turned to football as his only way of coping. He was really sad and lonely. My dad recruited him and he didn’t hesitate to say ‘yes’. Football became Black Ball. This city saved him Seren.”

“Wow, I guess I always see all this depression and melancholy as a bad thing, but it certainly wasn’t in his case.”

“He’s a great star now. If he’d carried on as he was, his talent never would have been nurtured enough to make it in football. But in BlackBall, he’s number one.”

The chanting from the crowd is immense, and they participate in a Mexican wave of misery.

All around us is a sea of little black diamonds studding the seats of the stadium. The Royal Box is positioned in the perfect location. We accessed it from stairs that led from the changing rooms, after all I'm sure Calix doesn't want BlackBall fans heckling him. We open the door to the box, which only has five other people in it, although the secretary isn't one of them. She can't have arrived yet.

"Good afternoon Prince Calix. How wonderful it is to see you again," a red head with pillar box red lips lurches forward and smooches Calix on the cheek. I expected this from the mass of BlackBall fans, but the royal box I thought would have a little dignity.

"And who is *this*?" she looks at me with disapproval.

"Anita, this is Ser..." I cough remembering that tonight I'm not Seren.

"Oh I mean...this is a cheerleader."

"A cheerleader?" she changes her expression from disgust to surprise in an instant.

"Why, my dear Calix, would you want to be seen at the social event of the year with a cheerleader?"

"Well she's...um-"

"His date," I blurt out annoyed at this woman's insolence.

"Oh I see. Lucky little thing to be seen on the Prince's arm, that will score you many a future gig I'm sure."

"Anita! She is not with me just for her career."

"Why of course she is darling. Besides there's nothing wrong with that. If you're going to be a gold-digger ,at least be with a handsome Prince. She chose well," says Anita who speaks with a slight lisp.

"I'm not a gold digger. I don't care that Calix is a prince. It's enough that he's lovely, intelligent and beautiful to boot." I smile and he smiles back at me.

"Whatever Sweetie. Calm down. Let us try and enjoy the game, do."

I'm outraged Anita, winding me up, achieving her aim and then making out as if I was kicking up all of this drama. But I don't react and ignore her instead.

“A cheerleader aye, young fellow? Your Father won’t approve of that. Humph cheer,” a stuffy older gentleman with a hat tilted to cover one eye sits at the front, saying this without turning around to face Calix .

“I’m sure he will approve far more than if he knew the truth,” Calix whispers in my ear and I giggle at this.

“Seren, try to stay emotionless remember,” he whispers.

“It’s dreadful isn’t it Popsy?” says Anita.

“Oh I don’t know, a cheerleader isn’t so bad. She’ll have plenty of stamina to keep up with Calix,” says a lady with golden hair.

It’s strange that people pay me more attention when I’m blonde and sparkly.

Calix looks annoyed at all the fuss ,like he’d rather just soak up the atmosphere of the game. I don’t blame him. The other two in our box include a prissy girl who seems horrified by the banter going on around her. And then there is the man who’s set me on edge since we’ve been here ,he has dark glasses on and for whatever reason I feel like he’s listening intently to every single word being said, but trying to do so undetected.

“Who’s that ?He gives me the creeps,” I say nudging Calix, slanting my head to Mr. Dark Glasses.

“That’s one of Dads secret service commanders. He gets invited to this all the time, one of the perks of his job I guess, although I think he is a big BB fan,” he whispers.

Calix and I sit in two reserved V.I.P seats, right at the front of the box. Teenage girls scream “Look Prince Calix!” He smiles out of politeness but like he’s completely used to this attention.

The players all begin to line up on the playing field, which is tarmac with high white goal posts. It’s vast ,surely you could fit five cemeteries on it.

The Eternal Blacks line the pitch looking muscular, dignified, heroic, with the man who embodies all these things in the middle, Mr Frederick Forefront. On the opposing tem, opposite the Eternal Blacks are the Purple Predators ,who I didn’t have the pleasure of meeting but look every bit as fierce as the Blacks but with added bulk. The players on this team look heftier, the

Captain being double Freddie's width, though it looks like muscle and not flab. The Captains lock eye contact for a moment and it's earth shaking stuff, they both look deathly competitive.

The whistle is blown and the game begins. The black ball is perfectly round and could be a bowling ball, but its made from a softer substance. Rubber? Plastic? I can hear Anita complaining in the background.

"I cannot stand Black Ball, common sport," she says. She's certainly made an effort dress wise. She's wearing a black wide brimmed hat, a statement making black feather collar- which is circular going all the way around her neck and down her chest. Her stomach and arms are covered in black circular discs made from PVC, the tamest part of her outfit is her black pencil skirt, although its simplicity only serves to further draw attention to her elaborate top half.

Kick off has began. James passes the ball to Forest, both members of the EB's and he kicks it into the goal three minutes into the game. Amazingly the crowd don't go wild and I'm baffled by this for a while and then I remember where I am. Instead erupts a distant dreary chant 'Forest, Forest' because of course Broken city members cannot show any flicker of excitement or joy, let alone the ecstatic roar I was expecting upon Forest scoring. I think I made the most fuss out of the whole crowd, clapping loudly. Anita gave me a very disapproving look but then I am supposed to be a cheerleader. Speaking of which I can see the *real* cheerleaders waving black pompoms, dancing solemnly as dancers who could never quite perfect a routine. Their eyes look sad, they dance lifelessly although all the while looking beautiful and graceful but not all singing, all dancing as I would have thought them to be. More despair leaders.

The black ball moves around the pitch like the speediest beetle, wanting to escape the pursuit of the players. The match entertains me more than any other sport I've watched before. I've never been one for sport but I'm thrilled by the game. Maybe it's the players, they all seem to have a secret that lurks beneath the glossy veneer of professional BlackBall players. And they do, that's the reason they are members of this city. They must all be in some way, broken. I look at them glimmering in success and find that magnificent. Then I think of Anita, I wonder why she's here. She looks so polished ,so together and yet she can't be. It's all an illusion, her outfit,



her strength. Calix's watching enthralled, he clearly is a huge BlackBall fan. His profile is perfect, his midnight hair, those piercing eyes that look like they could know your every thought, every secret, the longing of your heart.

Four all.

Both teams have played incredibly, refusing to let the other have the upper hand. But there's only two minutes left to go. The score board, the true star of the show having the honour of the final bow.

"This is so close Seren, I'm glad you are here to share this moment. It's rare, timed to perfection, flawless," and for the first time in the whole match, he takes his eyes off the game and stares, with the same relentless focus into my eyes just as fascinated as he was with the game. This has to be the most perfect moment of my life, despite the fact I'm dressed as another person. Then he leans in and we kiss, making the match blur into obscurity. I hear the whistle blow and realize the game has ended. We missed the ultimate moment, or did we? I think on reflection, I was part of the ultimate moment.

Looking up at the score board I see the result. Eternal Blacks '5':Purple Predators:'4.' They did it! Frederick Forefront stretches his arms wide, embracing victory with open arms. "You two are completely irritating. Your smooching blocked my view during crucial moment," Anita complains behind us.

"Sorry you missed the last goal Calix," I say apologetically but not really caring since I'll remember our kiss a whole lot longer than a Black Ball major match.

"Don't be Seren. I was scoring my own goal." I blush and giggle, becoming more of a cheerleader by the second.

"Seren," I hear the voice of a woman and look behind me, forgetting my faux cheerleader self for the moment.

It's the Kings secretary. Oh no, she recognized me.

"I knew it was you. Why are you all dressed up like a harlot, dear girl?" she asks puzzled.

"Um..."

“Do you know this girl?” asks Anita clearly annoyed with me.

“Why yes, that’s Seren. The girl Calix has been dating for months and who his father told him to no longer see.”

Oh no. Suddenly I’m aware Mr. Creepy in the back row gets up abruptly, despite the fact the huge moment of the presentation of the cup to Frederick Forefront is happening on the pitch.

I knew he was spying on us.

“Calix I think that your father sent that man to watch us, he will probably report back what he’s seen and heard.”

“Dad always does things like this, he promises me he won’t. He never trusts me. But don’t worry Seren, we’ll just use our plan and look broken, then he will have to accept you.” I don’t know how he does it but one look at his perfect face is all I need to be thoroughly convinced this master plan of his will work, even though our cheerleader scheme fell flat on its face.

“Better take off the make-up and dress more depressingly though,” he adds raising his eyebrows at me.

“Yeah, I don’t think we’ll convince him in this,” I concur.

Before I rush off to change into morbid mode, we decide to watch the presentation of the cup to Freddie.

The cup itself is exquisite, black onyx, with a gold plaque reading ‘Eternal Blacks’. Fans in the audience are wearing their Black ‘EB’ scarves and black and silver confetti is raining from above. There is even a giant balloon reading ‘Eternal Blacks, Eternal Champions’ that floats across the sky travelling to a paradise unknown.

Frederick, despite his great win, still looks guarded, as though he doesn’t trust anyone, knowing full well the fickleness of his fans who may adore him one moment and turn their backs on him the next. His team mates line the field, with him at the centre and flash bulbs explode around them.

“That’ll be front page on the Broken Gazette tomorrow I have no doubt,” Anita says behind us, as if she thinks them undeserving of their win.

“Front page on all the papers, and some tabloids I’m sure. Young Frederick is exceedingly popular with the girls who read those magazines,” says the Kings secretary.

After the presentation along with crowds of others, Calix and I depart from the stadium. He grabs my hand and leads the way. It’s dark now.

“Come on Seren, change into your regular clothes and I’ll walk you back.”

I giggle as I’ve never seen Calix this flustered before, he’s normally the very definition of cool composure. I wonder what the hurry is. We run through the city centre, with Calix practically dragging me along all the way. Suddenly I’m aware of several bright lights shining directly on us.

“Stop there,” a voice shouts with authority. As I turn I see a group of people, who look like police, all dressed in black uniform.

“Your Royal Highness Prince Calix, we’ve been directed to protect you and rescue you from the unsafe influence of Miss Seren Loneheart. She is no longer allowed within a mile radius of you. The King has passed a new law.”

“What? This is absolutely ridiculous. I love Seren,” says Calix.

“She has corrupted your judgment Your Majesty. I’ve been told by the King himself you’d come out with such a line. We must protect you Your Majesty and Miss Loneheart has been found to be unsafe.”

I just stand there in shock. How could the King do this?

“Seren go please, he always does this. I’m sorry.” Calix looks sad, so defeated. I feel like his father is destroying him as much as our relationship.

I walk back through the gate of The City of the Broken in a trance like state. My mind is so cluttered with horror it cannot process thoughts. Calix. And yet with this knife in the stomach is accompanied elation.

“I love Seren,” his own words. I never even had to drop a hint for him to say this.

But what good is his love when his father prevents him from seeing me? And that shouldn’t be the case, Calix is an adult and a prince. It’s entirely up to him if he wants to see me or not. It’s

as if his father has convinced everyone he's been brainwashed by me.

'Corrupting his judgements.' How manipulative and devious that man is.

I go home and sit on my bed remaining in a trance. This is wrong. How can the King get away with this ?These thoughts run through my mind on a loop .I'm so traumatized, I feel numb. I try to sleep but I can't. So this is what it feels like to be an insomniac. Why did I have to fall in love with a man who has a tyrant as a father? He's effectively caged him in that city and blackened my name. But why does the King not want me near Calix? Why does he think me unsafe? The only way to find out the answer is to meet with the King himself, although this won't be easy. Now that I'm considered 'unsafe' if I return to the city those guards will be on my back, even if I don't go anywhere near Calix. Perhaps I should just be upfront and request a meeting with the King, though I'm certain he will say no, in fact his secretary will simply dismiss the request. I feel so pathetic. There must be something that I can do to change his mind. I still haven't officially joined The City of the Broken as a citizen yet, before I was just there as a guest of the Prince. Maybe if I did I'd have more access to the king and Calix .Maybe the king would approve of me more.

Since we're on holiday from school, I have no chance of seeing him that way either. It's so frustrating. Still unable to sleep from the distress of being banned from seeing my beloved Calix, I decide tomorrow I will resolve this. I'm going to the City of the Broken and demanding to see the King. His secretary has met me before and even though she'll probably know of the situation, I'm sure I could convince her to at least ask him to think about it. After all he told me to stay away from Calix ,not the city. Maybe I could even ask the King if I can become a citizen, Calix did recruit me in the first place for this very purpose.

## Chapter Seven.

### Heartbreaker

I walk to the familiar graveyard location of the gate to the City of the Broken. I'm listening to my MP3 player to drown out the silence since Calix is not here with me. I feel lonely, yet still surprisingly zesty with the challenge of facing the king. It's like it's given me a whole new rush of adrenaline. I get out my special key and open the gate, closing it behind me and walk through the veil of trees into the city. There's still a lot of clearing up to do after the BlackBall match. It's quieter now the match is over, but still busy as I've come early and many people are on their way to work. I don't see any overly ambitious gleams in the eyes of men here, simply a repetitive beat of a drum, without passion or love, done for the reason that there is nothing better to do than work whilst in their state of gloomy aimlessness. Usually I feel I stand out for being the least upbeat person. Here I feel I stand out for being too cheerful, too full of optimism. A lot of the citizens look to the ground, directly avoiding eye contact, preferring their own pessimistic little world.

"Umm hi," I say to the young girl who's sitting on the park bench staring into space. She ignores me, which is odd so I ask again

"Hello, can you hear me?" Perhaps she's deaf or foreign.

"Oh, you were talking to me, I'm sorry. I spend so much time pretending I don't exist that I sometimes forget other people think I do. It's always a shock when somebody wants to speak to me. Do they actually think I'm the same, equal to them. Human? I don't feel it."

"Of course I think you're a human, what do you think you are then?"

"Well a lot of the time, invisible, not really alive at all, a shadow maybe, the wind blowing past."

"That's a bit odd isn't it? Why do you think that about yourself?"

"Well, I guess it started when I was younger. When I was a child I always thought I was so

important. Wow a human being, that means so much, think of who I could be. But then I went to school and realized there are so many others who are more important than me, that was difficult to deal with. At first I fought it. I'll show them I'm the best, the ultimate but of course life taught me better. So I decided if I couldn't be important, I'd be nothing at all. Most of the time people don't treat me much different to that anyway. When you start believing you don't actually exist and that nobody cares even if you do, it really is strange when people acknowledge you at all. That's why I ignored you, I thought 'oh she's talking to somebody else, she couldn't possibly be talking to me, why would she want to'."

"It's so sad you think like that." I'm really at a loss for words, this girl is such a deep thinker, yet she seems so sad and lonely.

"Yes that's true, it's sad. But the only way I can deal with not being important, is to be nothing at all." She looks downward.

"Well you must be important enough to speak, not everyone has that privilege."

"I know. Sometimes I think maybe I should stop talking altogether because whenever I do talk, nobody wants to hear what I have to say and that only makes me feel worse than if I had chosen just to be completely silent."

"I used to date Calix you know. I've seen you with him on outings. I know who you are" ,she blurts out abruptly. This shocks me so much. I'm speaking to a girl Calix used to go out with.

"Well what happened, why did you break up?"

"He asked me to be a citizen because I always felt outcast. I guess I felt I belonged here because everyone was broken. I wasn't offended when he asked me to join at all. Then his father got involved and he ended it. I was devastated but that only meant I belonged here more than ever. So I stayed ,Calix or not."

Suddenly looking at this girl, a fragment of her former self, the decaying remains of a personality, I can't help but feel afraid that the same thing would happen to me if the King gets his way.

I take the underground to the palace, feeling as if I've entered a tin of dying sardines. I

begin to think myself crazy for being so confident that the King will see me. Why should he? Even if you take away the fact that he already has a low opinion of me and that he doesn't want me anywhere near Calix, surely he gets thousands of requests every week from people, ordinary Broken citizens, who want to speak to him for some reason. Why should I think myself so special?

I walk slowly to the palace, hoping I might bump into Calix in the garden and won't have to go through with my crazy plan that won't work. But instead, out of the sheer agony of longing to see Calix, I march to the office at the side where they accept all the requests and complaints that go to the palace. There is a formal woman sitting at the desk, dressed in a tweed suit with a frilly blouse. She peers at me through the top of her glasses, intimidating me.

"Hello," I say.

"Yes, how may I help you?" she says gruffly.

"Umm, my name is Seren Loneheart. I'd like to request a meeting with the King."

"Seren Loneheart, is that what you said?" She raises her eyebrows in surprise and her voice sounds quite close to alarm.

"Yes, that's correct," I say trying not to be worried by her tone.

"The king did say you might come. He also said that if you did, he'd want you to see him straight away. I'll phone his secretary right now, one moment please."

"What, really? Oh fantastic!"

I'm completely stunned. I'd have thought the king would want me nowhere near him. But then my delight turns to suspicion, why does he want to see me? What's his plan?

"Ok, I'll send her straight up. Thank you," the secretary says.

"Come with me please," she says opening a door that leads into the office.

"I'll take you straight to him. This is very rare you know. He will usually only ever see very important guests."

"Have you any idea why he wants to see me?" I ask.

"Absolutely no idea, you'll have to ask him that dear. I only work downstairs, I'm not his

personal secretary,” she says huffily as if annoyed she isn’t appointed to this role.

We walk up a beautiful winding staircase with a deep purple carpet, it seems to go on forever.

“Isn’t there an elevator?” I ask her, exhausted from climbing the seemingly never ending steps.

“There is, but for members of staff it is considered correct to take the stairs,” she says as I marvel at how slim she is, convinced the reason is these steps.

The palace is amazing, black marble everywhere, purple and gold being the only other colours, like a midnight sky twinkling with the brightest stars. Finally, we reach the top after passing the oasis of other corridors and passageways the staircase leads to, each one being ignored much to my annoyance.

“Is this where the king is?” I ask hopefully.

“Yes, this is his floor. He’s at the door right at the very end.”

We go down a long, ornate corridor with the same deep purple carpet and this time black tiled walls with suits of armour and works of art, screaming and tearful faces adorning them. At the very end is an oak double door with a gold plaque reading ‘His Royal Highness, King of the City of the Broken’ which is guarded by two bodyguards who eye us suspiciously as we walk towards them.

The secretary flashes them her pass.

“Miss Seren Loneheart is here to His Majesty,” she says and they step aside. She walks off so that I am alone to see the King.

I knock the door, but the bodyguard says

“Just go in, he’s expecting you. He doesn’t want you knocking.” So I do.

His office is lighter than anywhere else in the city with mahogany wood panelling, a green carpet and, black furniture and ornaments. He sits there in a huge black throne, the most exquisite thing I’ve ever seen. It looks so gothic.

“Miss Loneheart, sit down please, I’ve been expecting you.” He’s surprisingly welcoming.

“Thank you, Your Majesty,” I say feeling overwhelmed at my lack of anger towards the king.



“It’s interesting to finally meet you. I’ve seen you at many functions ,but for various reasons we have not come into contact,” he says as though disappointed we haven’t met sooner.

“Yes. I’ve wanted to meet you, but I thought you wouldn’t be interested in us meeting,” I say politely but still confused why he wants to see me.

“Nonsense, of course I’ve wanted to see you. I had to tell you something of great importance. I suppose the reason I didn’t speak to you sooner is that I delayed our meeting, for what I have to say may be rather difficult for you come to terms with,” he says with regret.

“Difficult, what do you mean? Is it that you don’t want me to see Calix again, because I already know that obviously,” I say frustrated.

“My dear you are simply lovely ,a charming girl, but I have to tell you this because I would feel an enormous amount of guilt if I did not.”

“Guilt? Tell me what? Please just come out with it already,” I say slightly shocked at my tone, knowing that nobody has addressed the King in such a rude manner.

“Calix tried to recruit you to be a member of this city, didn’t he Seren?”

“Yes, initially but-,” I try to finish my sentence but the King interrupts me

“Yes, I thought so. I knew the night I saw you at the ball that my son was up to his old tricks again.”

“I’m sorry?” I just stare at the King, he’s completely lost me now and I have no idea what he’s going on about.

“Seren, Calix, my own son, recruits girls to join this city, he then gets them to fall in love with him with the aid of his natural good looks and romantic charm. Once accomplished he convinces them I have banned him from seeing them anymore, thus breaking their hearts since they can no longer be with him and sealing their destiny as broken citizens.”

“What?” I say in astonishment.

“It’s a cunning plan. He’s used it on every girl he’s ever recruited, but I don’t approve of such devious tactics and so take it upon myself to his reveal his true nature.”

Of course! How could I be so stupid. Calix would never want me, I’m far too plain. It’s been

him all along, not his father. He's always said he's the champion recruiter and no wonder, he's a born heartbreaker. Any girl could fall in love with him .He's so beautiful. But now I know the truth, he's cold, manipulative and deceitful.

"Thank you for telling me this Your Royal Highness, and to think Calix had me convinced you were working against us, but all this time it's been him," I say in shock.

"Calix is very intelligent Seren, but he uses it for a ruthless purpose. I applaud his commitment to our city, but I also know he goes about it in the wrong way. He's supposed to recruit people who are already broken, not break people to recruit. It's a shame really."

I just sit there and nod.

"Anyway, thank you for taking the time to come and see me Seren. I just wish we could have met for a more fulfilling reason."

He offers his hand and I shake it as I get up to leave.

"Thank you for telling me the truth Your majesty. I'd rather know the real reason than be kept in the dark," I say grateful I now know the reality.

"Indeed, indeed," he concurs.

"But why did you tell Calix I was unsafe and send those guards?" I ask remembering the night of the match.

"All his doing Seren, not mine. He arranged for the guards telling them exactly what to say. Do you actually think I could ever ban a prince from seeing the girl he wanted to see? I have power my dear, but not that much," he laughs.

I knew that night didn't make sense. Oh, what a fool I feel.

"Thank you, again," I say and he nods in acknowledgment and I leave in tears the moment I turn my back on the King.

This is worse than being banned from seeing Calix. This is me being in love with a Calix that doesn't even exist. Calix the sham, Calix the ultimate con man.

Tears turn to rage as I storm out of the palace.

"Oh, Miss Loneheart. What did the King want to see you about if you pardon my asking?" the

secretary asks as I leave.

“Oh, nothing,” I say with a face covered in tears, betraying the very line I have just uttered. I keep walking, not wishing to embellish any further on the Kings confession.

I can't help but wonder where Calix is hiding. He's probably in this very palace, but I resist the urge to seek him out, preferring to keep my dignity.

Oh, how stupid could I be! Of course Calix the worlds best looking prince, Calix the genius, could never want me. I deserve to have been conned for being such a gullible fool. I remember that girl I spoke to in the street, that broken girl “I used to date the prince,” she said. Of course she did, she was one of those he recruited, who he fooled that he loved like me. I knew Calix was smart but I didn't know him to be so manipulative or heartless. Doesn't he care about the girls whose hearts he breaks? He seems to have only one objective: to recruit members of the city, whatever the cost. What a cruel man, but a brilliant prince. Well I shall not let him achieve his aims, I refuse to join the City of the Broken, I refuse to let him break me. At least now that I know this I can just get over him, rather than cry over a Calix that doesn't really exist. The prince I knew was an illusion. I don't know if this makes it better or worse, knowing that I was tricked. Calix was always so perfect, too perfect. I should have sussed that something was up. But I was too blinded by a huge crush, awe struck by the most fascinating human being I have ever met who actually knew I existed and showed interest in me. I'm so gullible. He must have thought I had 'idiot' flashing in a neon light over my head. He would probably like a girl like Anita, well dressed and just as cold as he is. They are probably both laughing at me right now. He even convinced me to dress up as a cheerleader! I bet that Anita was in on the whole thing all along. She's probably his fiancée. And what about that story he told me about Freddie, was that a sham as well? I just don't know what to believe anymore, things are never as they seem. And to think he had me convinced all along that his father was trying to split us up. If only that *was* the real reason, but no, *Calix* wanted to split us up. He's planned it all along. It meant nothing to him, just another days business, another girl to recruit, another girl to break. He's probably already onto his next victim already. If he starts dating any other girl in school, I must

tell her of his true colours straight away.

But what I don't understand is that he said he was recruiting me because I always looked lonely and sad. What was the need in breaking me if he thought me already broken?

As I walk through this wondrous black city, epic and mournful, I can't help but look at the girls. Girls similar to my own age, women a little older. Are they all women who fell for Calix? They look sad, longing, reaching out willing to give it all to a man who doesn't want them. I felt like the luckiest girl in the whole world, now I feel like everybody else. But I refuse to be like them. I won't hang around this city waiting for the prince to love me again when he never will. I will not be broken. When I return to school on Monday I shall be the happiest girl there. I shall have a permanent smile and I will genuinely feel glad. Glad to have had such a lucky escape from Mr. Champion Heartbreaker Extraordinaire. Calix has gone from Prince Charming to Prince Alarming. It was noble of his father to inform me, he could easily have been happy that his son was recruiting citizens, no questions asked. But he didn't approve of Calix's devious schemes.

The morning of school I've consciously chosen not to wear black. I'm not going to look like the unhappy 'dumped' girl. I don't even know if Calix is going to be there or not. I don't care, I'm not going to acknowledge him. The worst part will be telling everybody else we are not dating anymore after they saw us looking loved up at the ice rink. He was dropping hints about his 'father' then. He's being trying to break us up for ages, only I've been too stupid to see it.

Walking into class, Isabelle, shouts across the room "How's it going with you and lover boy then?"

"Oh we are not together anymore," I say.

"Dumped you did he? He's too good looking that's the trouble, he knows he can get any girl he wants," she remarks and I nod in agreement.

"You two are no longer on then, what happened?" asks Jasmine.

"He just left me. He didn't really give much explanation, although he said it was something to

do with his father interfering,” I say not wishing to have to explain the full details. Calix is a prince, who uses his model looks to break girls hearts.

“Oh, that is such an excuse Seren, his father? He’s too old for his father to be interfering in his love life.”

She doesn’t know how right she is.

“I know I feel a fool for falling for that line but I guess I’m just over him. I don’t really care to have him explain the truth to me.” She just nods but doesn’t look convinced that I could ever get over someone like Calix so quickly. But to my relief Mrs. Shelley starts to speak about our English assignment.

We listen to Hamlet on audio, discussing Claudius. I’m glad I can sit here and get absorbed in Shakespeare, not having to allow my own thoughts to enter my mind. Not having to think ‘I miss Calix’. It’s going to be a long day. We have a maths test and I haven’t studied. Why? Oh, I remember. I was having the time of my life dating a hot prince. Maybe the hard reality of fractions, decimals and percentages is exactly what I need. All logic. No emotion. No romanticism or fantasy like in Shakespeare. Because it’s a play about royalty and betrayal and only further serves to remind me of Calix. Oh, look at me, I’m being exactly what he wanted me to be, Broken, my longing heart. Give it up. He’s just as bad as any cheat. The betrayal is the same.

At lunchtime I contemplate staying the whole hour in class, not having to risk facing him again. In the past I would run out of class, straight to the library. Just to look into those oceanic eyes. Now I’m like the Titanic sinking into them, the wreckage consumed by the sea. But then I decide I shall be the ship that avoided the ice berg. I shall go into the canteen. I am not hiding, I’m being strong. If I see him, I’ll just blank him. He deserves it.

I wave when I see Jasmine and her friend in the canteen.

“I’ll be over in a minute,” I mouth at them. She gives me a thumbs up and for whatever reason this instantly lifts my mood. I kind of feel I neglected my friends when I’ve been off gallivanting with Calix. Well not anymore, I’ll concentrate on the laughs we’ll enjoy at lunch.

As I smile at this thought, I feel a tap on my shoulder. I turn around and then an earthquake begins beneath my feet. It's Calix. What does he want?

"Hi Seren. I'm sorry about what happened the other night. I was worried I'd never see you again, but I've shook them off my case ...for now," he smiles.

"Oh have you," I say totally uninterested .He's succeeded in his mission, why is he bothering me now?

"Yeah, well I'm sure they'll be back when I take you back to the city but it doesn't matter. I'm not going to let my father boss me around anymore," he says.

"Oh right your father, of course. I'm not going back to that city Calix," I say annoyed while the waitress looks alarmed at my stand-offish behaviour towards Calix. If only she knew.

"Seren? What do you mean you're not going back to the city? Is everything okay? You seem upset with me," he says looking genuinely worried .He should go into acting. He's brilliant.

"Oh cut all this pretence Calix. I know all about your little plan. Your father told me everything. But I *will not* let you break me Calix, you phoney. Leave me alone and go and recruit some other foolish girl who falls for your charms," I say storming towards Jasmine, aware that a lot of people are curious as to why I'm angry at he who looks made of marble. I forgot how beautiful he was in just a day. You can only believe it if you see him.

"Break you? Seren, I don't want to hurt you at all. What did my father say to you? Please talk to me," he says looking so childlike and innocent, my heart almost melts. Almost.

"Please don't Calix. Look I won't be another girl you recruit, either confess or go away."

"Seren I don't know what my father said to you, but whatever it is, it's probably not true. He is beyond manipulative ,he twists everything. He's always convinced my girlfriends to leave me." Jasmine and her friend stare at each other in disbelief.

"Look I don't want to do this here with everyone looking at us. Let's go somewhere quiet if you won't leave me alone."

I walk with Calix out of the canteen. I have to confront this .We decide to go into an empty classroom.

“Please tell me what he said Seren.” He looks so sad and concerned that even I take pity on him.

“He told me that you intentionally break girls hearts to get them to join the city, that you were only dating me to recruit me and that you do this with countless other girls,” I inform him.

He looks horrified, but then he could just be a good liar.

“Seren, I haven’t dated anyone for at least three years ,ask anybody who works in the palace.

Freddie and Anita can tell you how he has always wrecked my love life. And now I know how.

I promise, I would never do something like that Seren. Yes I tried to recruit you. But you already looked broken, why would I need to break your heart? But then I genuinely fell in love with you and Dad’s tried to ruin it ever since he found out.”

I don’t know who to believe. He looks genuine .But so does the King. One of them is lying, but who?

“How can I know you’re telling the truth? You could just be saying all this and then leave me again, breaking me forever. Are you dating Anita?” I ask curious as to why he brought her up.

“What? Of course I’m not dating Anita, she’s engaged to Freddie, that’s why she was in the Royal Box at the match.”

Oh.

“Do you ever recruit girls by pretending that you love them and then breaking their hearts?”

“Seren, of course not. Every person I have ever recruited was already broken when I first met them. And for your information, you are the first girl I ever recruited that I’ve dated. All the other girls I’ve gone out with were already city members.”

“Oh please believe me ,I thought I’d already lost you. I didn’t need my father telling you lies to turn you against me as well,” he pleads.

I’m starting to believe he is telling the truth, he looks so sincere. Not a trace of dishonesty in his face.

“But why would your father say that? Surely he wouldn’t go to those lengths?”

“Oh he would. He’s always turned my girlfriends against me. I’ve always been left. I wondered why. They seemed angry with me for no reason, but it’s because of what he told them .I know

how persuasive he can be. Everyone thinks him so honest, but truly he is the most ruthless man ever. He will do absolutely anything to maintain The City of the Broken.”

“But why would he think me a threat to it?”

“It’s because you make me happy, and if the Prince is happy, then the citizens may start to be happy and then it won’t be a broken city anymore Seren and he has done so much to make sure it stays that way,” he says holding both my hands and looking deeply into my eyes.

“You mean he’d make his own son unhappy just for the sake of his Kingdom?”

“He would. That’s why he stops me from having a girlfriend. And tries to ban me from mixing with ‘regular’ people. That’s why it meant so much for me to go to a ‘normal’ school. Everyone laid-back, sure they have bad days, but usually they’re in a good mood. And I love that .If I’d have gone to The Broken Academy, everyone would be distraught ,morbid. It’s not the life I wanted,” his voice sounds so longing, he does just want to be like everyone else.

“But I thought you said the City really helped Frederick, saving him?”

“The City’s not all bad, but he’s taken it too far. He’s almost forcing people to be depressed rather than celebrating the freedom in not smiling ,not putting on a show, which I think is what a lot of the citizens thought they were signing up for when they first joined.”

“He has to be stopped. Calix you can’t let him go on like this ,he really is tyrannical,” I say still in shock.

“He is Seren, truly. He was never this awful in the past you know, I don’t even recognize him myself anymore, my own father,” he says trailing off in contemplation.

I put my hand on his arm to comfort him. This is the same guy I thought I’d never speak to again, just an hour prior. And now I feel different towards him than I did before ,I feel sympathetic. Usually I see Calix as this champion of being alive. He does everything so well, excelling at every subject. He has beauty, compassion, depth and yet he just may be a little bit broken himself. I think he had a difficult childhood, and I think his father has tried to knock every single little bit of joy him. I did wonder why such a beauty always looked so lonely when he should be surrounded by girls and friends ,but alas it’s because his Father has instilled in him



a sense of melancholy, discipline, seriousness .To be the Prince of the Broken and nothing else. Not a teenager ,not a boyfriend, not one of the boys. The head of state ,the figurehead of the Broken. What a burden to bear. Suddenly Calix of the perfect life is not looking so flawless. Being normal definitely has its perks.

“I’m sorry Calix, I shouldn’t have believed your father, but he is so convincing. From afar I never liked him, but talking to him face to face was totally different. It’s bizarre, he practically brainwashed me,” I say feeling guilty for ever trusting Calix’s father.

“Don’t feel bad Seren, he does have this affect on a lot of people. That’s why he’s so powerful. That’s why he ensnares the citizens so well. They buy into every speech he gives. If they had doubts about living in the city, they certainly don’t after listening to him. I won’t deny he’s a very talented speaker .He knows how to sway opinions and earn people’s respect.”

“I was an idiot Calix, really I was. I’m sorry I doubted you.”

“Shh, Seren, please don’t worry,” he says putting his head against mine, his jet hair mingling with my auburn flyaway locks. His porcelain doll smooth skin lying against mine.

“I’m glad he was lying. I thought I’d fallen in love with a person that didn’t even truly exist,” I say and we both laugh.

“I just can’t believe you thought I was dating Anita,” he smiles.

“If I refused to be a member of the city, would you still want to date me?” I ask him, still wanting to be sure his father wasn’t telling the truth..

“Seren I would still want to be with you even if you never wanted to enter the City of the Broken again. You mean more to me than anything. I’m not going to allow my father to boss me around anymore. He’s been allowed to get away with so much for so long, but that’s it. No more. He’s wallowed in his grief for long enough and it’s affecting everyone else. I can see that it’s wrong now.”

“Can we go tonight, to the City of the Broken? I believe you Calix ,but I can’t help myself. There is something about that place, it holds such fascination for me. It’s like a dark dream world, a snow globe with a gothic theme. Even if what your father was saying was true, I still

would be unable to refrain from visiting .It's like a black hole sucking you in. And for some bizarre reason, even though it's a city of melancholy and despair ,I never feel happier than when I'm walking through it.”

“I know how you feel, it is a perplexing place. A midway between life and death. There's a tragic romanticism about it. I don't blame my fathers passionate fanaticism in retaining its eerie beauty.”

## Chapter Eight.

### Broken Ballerina

After I tell Calix I'll see him later, I head off to my psychology class, knowing I'll spend the entire lesson being unable to concentrate because I'll be far too immersed in the prospect of going to the City of the Broken with my prince again this evening. And the relief in knowing that Calix was honest all along. How could I ever delude myself that I could get over him so soon? Ever? He's the most extraordinary human I've met .I want him forever in my life. He's the type of person who could make the most mundane thing seem wondrous. He's the man I've wanted all my life, without ever knowing it. It's like my heart had a subconscious that buried the truth deep within and he was it. He reaches me in such a way ,making me feel feelings I never thought possible, and yet feel so natural, instinctive yet universally complex.

If I didn't know any better I'd think I was hallucinating this picture-perfect creature that is my boyfriend, a fantasy all my own. But I'm not, he's real. He's mine. Even the phoney Calix that his father presented to me, his one fault, isn't real. His broken, dark and mysterious demeanour only further adds to my warped fascination with him. Like one who found the secret of the world, only to have to keep it to himself for eternity, bearing the burden with grace.

School draws to an end and I listen to my MP3 player feeling enthralled and excited, relieved and revived. I think I'm just as in love with The City of the Broken as I am its Prince. It's a giant gothic runway, all the citizens dressed in glorious splendour. Victoriana brought into the modern day, suffering from severe depression and realising it's not so bad. Calix is taking me to the city. He's told me he has a surprise for me when we get there. I'm so curious as to what he's got planned. His last surprise was Black Ball, which epically surpassed all my expectations. Jasmine catches up with me and gauges from my excitement that I have plans. "You seem vibrant despite what happened today. What was all that about at lunchtime?" she asks

“Oh Jasmine. Sorry you had to witness our showdown,” I giggle slightly embarrassed but still too elated to really care about the whole thing.

“Yeah, you had the whole school’s attention,” she says.

“See you tomorrow Jas,” I say rushing off.

I wear my black knee-length dress with white corsage collar. Ready to go. It’s always weird to have to go to a graveyard on a date, especially at night. It feels so much safer when Calix is with me. I’ve never been fazed by death, the graveyard doesn’t creep me out as much as it might others. I’d probably go alone at midnight to the city if I had the promise of Calix at the end. The pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

He picks me up. He’s in the Rolls Royce. Alfred is driving.

“Why don’t you learn to drive yourself? That way Alfred can get some sleep,” I say.

Alfred is holding the door open for me and Calix’s beauty is bewildering tonight. His skin looks practically translucent, illuminated. His jet black hair blacker than the night, glossier than the shiny Rolls Royce. Perfect.

“The city awaits,” he says smoothly and I smile, glad the Calix I thought wasn’t real only a day ago really does exist. Alfred opens the gate and through we go, pausing so he can close it again.

“I’ve been waiting,” I say.

“Waiting?” he asks arching an eyebrow at me

“Waiting...all day long.”

“Why?” he asks

“To see you, to see the city, my two favourite things.”

We drive through the black railings, which welcome us in their elitist embrace into the City of the Broken. Calix’s face is one I could stare at for hours and never get bored but even I can’t resist glancing out of the blacked out windows of the Rolls Royce to absorb the city in all its gloomy glory.

A tall black column greets us, the signpost informing us where we are. An illuminated purple ‘B’ flashes. The citizens are there, curious rare safari park creatures, longing, lonely,

lifeless. Willingly choosing a dark existence. The prince of this land sits next to me.

“So Calix, where are we heading?” I ask interested, although pleased to be anywhere in the city.

“Well last time we were here together I surprised you, so I won’t do that this time. I’m taking you to the Royal Black Ballet of the Broken,” he smiles knowingly.

“Oh wow, that sounds lovely Calix. I’ve never been to a ballet before, but I’ve always loved the music in Swan Lake.”

“I’m glad you like the idea,” he says grinning, looking young and relaxed, putting his hand on top of mine.

The sky is growing dark as we drive into the wealthier district of the city. The sight of women in evening wear tells me we are approaching the venue of the ballet.

“I do wish you’d informed me earlier of this occasion Calix, I feel underdressed,” I scold him teasingly with a flicker of seriousness lurking underneath.

“I’m sorry Seren, remember it was only this afternoon that we made up. I wasn’t sure we were even going to the ballet at all,” he says, exposing both palms truthfully.

“It’s okay Calix, I forgive you,” I giggle hugging my prince charming tightly.

We walk up to the front of the theatre where the ballet is taking place.

“Are you sure you don’t want to take the back entrance, won’t the guests heckle you because you’re a Prince?” I ask concerned we’re about to get mobbed.

“They will, but the entrance hall to the theatre is beautiful Seren, I didn’t want you to miss it,” he says kindly.

The entrance doors to the theatre are golden and oak, inside there is a red carpet covering the floor. At the golden ticket booth, we stand and wait our turn in the queue, like everyone else. I think Calix gets a secret thrill out of being ordinary. People are whispering that the guy queuing looks like the Prince, but we try our best to look like we don’t realize they’re talking about us.

“This really is amazing Calix” I look around and gracing the walls are advertisements of every show that is currently playing at The Royal Theatre of the Broken. This would have been the most vibrant place in the whole city, nevertheless clues tell me this is no ordinary theatre. A

musical extravaganza 'Loving Death' seems to be the most popular attraction, the face of a screaming woman based on the famous work of art gazes down at me from every wall. The ballet is there too. The dancers, graceful and elegant as they should be, are dressed in barely there lace. A life lived in the pursuit of thinness perhaps being their broken secret. The ballet poster reads 'A Princess who dies without ever finding her Prince.' Oh this is going to be depressing. I should have guessed.

"Sir, Madam," the ticket seller calls.

"Two front row seats please," Calix asks.

"Our finest seats are the box seats, for very special guests such as yourself Sir," the ticket seller says awakening from his former state of boredom to animated fluster.

"No thank you, two front row seats please," he persists.

I look up at him, intrigued by his insistence on the front row seats.

"Normal, remember? You can only get box seats if you're a V.I.P."

"Oh I see," I smile finding Calix's ambition to be ordinary cute. His humility is sweet, a stark contrast to that of his father.

We make our way to our 'normal' person seats. I enjoy soaking up the atmosphere. Theatres are always exciting places to be, but this one has the added dimension of funeral parlour that makes me feel like I'm attending the premier of a silent film from the 1920's surrounded by the original stars that have long since died. We take our seats. It isn't as crowded in here, many of the seats are empty. Although the box seats are full, I guess VIPs' must be fond of the Black Ballet. Then suddenly I spot Anita, she looks rather sad, dejected even, certainly more down-trodden than the elegant, forceful presence she was at the BlackBall game. I look away in case she spots Calix and I and asks us to join her.

"Hey, I see Anita in the Box Seats. She looks really upset. Do you know what's wrong with her?" I ask Calix.

"Oh, Anita, yes. She insists on coming to every single showing of the ballet and sometimes they have performances three times a day," he says shaking his head in disapproval.

“What for? Surely she’ll get bored of it?” I ask perplexed.

“You see Anita had dreams of becoming a ballerina herself, it was her greatest, perhaps only aspiration. She trained excessively all through her youth, but didn’t make it because of her height,” he says sympathetically.

“She is tall,” I say glancing up at her again.

“Well anyway, that’s the reason she’s a broken citizen-the death of her ballet dream destroyed her. She puts on a brave public show, but as you can see she haunts this theatre, still refusing to let go. I suppose she figured if she couldn’t be in the performances, she could at least make sure she didn’t miss a single one as an audience member,” he says.

“Poor Anita,” I say in astonishment. I can’t believe I feel sorry for her, but I do. You can see the yearning for a life she never had reflected in her face.

“What about Frederick, doesn’t he try and stop her coming here all the time?” I ask him, thinking a little intervention might do her good.

“He doesn’t know. To be honest even though they are engaged, he’s so busy training that they hardly ever see each other. It was fortunate the BlackBall tournament didn’t clash with the ballet showing as I’m sure Anita wouldn’t have attended if it had,” he says earnestly.

I sit silent, dumbfounded. Anita has a true obsession with this ballet.

The black velvet curtain draws up, followed by a second curtain made of the finest, spider-web thin lace. I look at Anita quickly before the lights are dimmed, her eyeballs look as though they are about to pop out of her head. The spotlight hits the stage and the audience no longer exists. The princess dances alone, like a singular figure in a music box, before being joined on stage by possible suitors. It looks hopeful, at first with cheerful flute like music hinting at a pleasant first meeting and positive first impressions. Then suddenly it all becomes very dramatic and there is a lot of friction. The set is a back drop of Alpine-looking hills and a medieval stone castle. The flowing black lace dress of the princess adds to the intensity.

Intermission. And just as the tension was heating up. The lights come back on and the audience shuffle and get up for various wants and needs.

“I can see why Anita would long for all this. Whenever I go to the theatre and see all the drama, the costumes, the dancing I long for it too,” I tell Calix.

“It is spectacular. They are world-class dancers. Are there any refreshments you’d like during intermission?” he asks.

“No thanks, I’d just rather wait here and talk to you,” I say realizing that I can see the curtain twitching and a red head disappearing behind it. Anita.

“Why is she going behind the curtain, to get an autograph?” I ask intrigued.

“No, every intermission she dances on stage, veiled behind the curtain, every single movement as precise as the real performances. Then she asks them if she can join as a stand in if one of the dancers gets ill, being refused every time. She’s been asked to leave the Theatre several times accused of harassing the dancers,” he says.

“Doesn’t she ever get the message?” I ask.

“I think it’s the only way she can keep some semblance of her dream alive. Denial I guess you’d call it,” he says and the music returns. Curtain up, spotlight on the stage.

The ballet has become heart-wrenchingly sad now, the ballerina all alone, dancing desperately in despair looking for a suitor who will not come. The music is eerie and it all looks very much a broken ballet, befitting the City. It ends with the ballerina dropping slowly down to her death. Her face a picture of anguish. All alone on stage, covered with her death dress of lace. Her only company the now starlit night sky with the moon reflecting its glow onto those high peaks. Curtain down. A slow, unenthusiastic applause from the audience-not because they didn’t enjoy the ballet, but because they don’t enjoy anything. Everyone gets up to leave, except Anita who remains firmly seated still staring, almost manically at the stage .I consider waving at her, but decide against it ,figuring she’s too fixated to pay attention to my presence anyway.

“That was beautiful and depressing at the same time,” I remark.

“Just like the city,” he says.

“Just like the city,” I agree. Still I maintain Anita was the most fascinating part of the show.

“I’m glad I’ve found my suitor,” I smile looking deeply into his eyes, wondering if I have ever



seen such thick and lustrous lashes.

Even though it's pouring with rain, we stand outside the theatre and kiss. And as we do I reflect how I almost lost him. Never before has his kiss felt so precious.

Calix drove me home from the City of the Broken, and I'm glad he did as I was drenched .I dried but I'm sure I can still feel water between my toes. Wet I may have been, but oh wow, how worth it it was.

I feel so lucky. I have my Prince, my city. I am living my dream. I always thought Anita had it all, but now I realize I have it better than her. Aside from a few Daddy bumps in the road, it's all gone smoothly with Calix. Even the Prima-ballerina was dying of a broken heart or loneliness, albeit fictionally. But I have my beloved, and I've never felt so grateful. I'm infused with my familiar and welcome school excitement and I can't sleep. Calix and lunchtime seem so far away.

## Chapter Nine.

### Garden Delights

I arrive at school feeling drowsy. I was far too high on the adrenaline of being reunited with Calix to sleep. As I head for class I pass him in the corridor, he looks like he's had *his* beauty sleep. We greet each other with equal infatuation, a mutual connection like the conjunction of two planets. The glances and whispers have returned, their ending being the only thing I relished in being parted from Calix.

In class, everyone is flicking through a copy of *Jane Eyre* before the lesson starts and the test on the novel begins. I haven't forgotten to revise this time, as reading *Jane Eyre* is a pleasure for me anyway.

"I haven't read the book, but I've seen the film so I get the gist," Jasmine informs me.

"That is so typical of you Jas," I say in mock disapproval.

"Calix and I are back on," I tell her.

"Oh, I can't believe you two. You seemed so frosty with each other the other day that I thought it was definitely over," she says.

"So did I, but I was a fool listening to hearsay but never again. He really is the perfect guy," I say.

"No guy is the perfect guy," she says with wisdom beyond her years, but I ignore her.

Mrs. Shelley enters and establishes that test conditions are underway.

I seem to have finished early as everyone else is still writing. I sit here, gazing out of the window at the cemetery and thinking about the city that lies behind the gate. The King is not going to back down this easily. He'll soon find out that I've reunited with Calix and try to break us up again. I've been far too optimistic to think I can obtain a gothic fairytale existence with Calix this easily, how could I forget the insurmountable obstacle that is the King? And now I know first hand how manipulative he can be, he scares me even more. He's a great force that

you do not want as an enemy.

“Okay, time’s up guys. Pens down,” says Mrs. Shelley startling me, as I am deep in thought.

“That was so tough. I didn’t know any of the answers,” says Jasmine.

“Well that’s what you get for not reading the book,” I giggle, not feeling any sympathy for my film-loving friend.

Lunchtime has come and Jasmine and I walk down to the library.

“I’m going to type my assignment up. It’s the third I’ve handed in late.”

“I’m meeting Calix in the library.”

“Really? I thought you seemed a little eager,” she says.

When I walk in, I see Calix is engrossed in a book.

“Hey you, what are you reading?”

“I’m doing research for history,” he says still searching his book for information.

“I have a 1500 word assignment that has got to be in by next week, plus I have my Royal duties so it’s not going to be easy,” he says , looking concerned.

“You’ll squeeze it in somewhere,” I say and he nods in agreement.

“Do you want to go to the city tonight? I can’t take you, but you can drop by the palace and help me revise,” he says.

“Yes, that sounds cool. But what about your Father, isn’t it slightly risky for me to visit the palace?” I ask.

“Well technically he still doesn’t know you’ve forgiven me and we’re together again. So just lay low,” he says.

“But Calix if I enter the palace the staff are bound to inform him that I’m there,” I say feeling more anxious now we’ve brought up the topic of his father.

“True. I know, meet me in the garden at the front of the palace at 6:30 and I’ll sneak you in,” he says, eyes glinting mischievously.

“Okay, that sounds both fun and scary at the same time,” I smile and he winks at me.

At the end of school, I look out of the window and see Calix walking towards the car. It’ll

be so exciting to go to the palace with him again. The last time I went there I was tricked by his Father, a wordsmith if ever there was one. I'll definitely try and keep out of his way from now on. Calix could make any location romantic but there is something about seeing him in his own territory, in a palace of all places, that makes me feel as though I've entered a dreamlike world, beautiful and mythical, like something out of a fable or legend only it's real. Having to avoid Calix's father only adds to the child-like hide and seek innocence. I shall wear my uniform of black to the city, as customary.

I return to the entrance of the city, accompanied by my key, the charm I carry with me always which leads to the portal of contented despair. I'm careful to close the gate behind me, knowing of the trouble I'd be in if an uninvited guest should venture into the city. The irritating thorns in the garden always insist on attacking me even when I closely follow the path.

It's a different experience walking through the city when Calix isn't with me. I can take in the sights more and pay attention to every detail. I'm too distracted by the number one tourist attraction that is Calix's face when he's with me. One thing that catches my eye is the gathering of people around an electrical store in the city centre, they seem to be watching something on the televisions in the shop window. As I approach, they turn and glare at me with hatred, then walk away. This is incredibly odd, what's wrong with me/them? I look at the televisions and see myself. They must have filmed me at the BlackBall game as I'm dressed as a cheerleader. The headline flashing across the screen is 'Girlfriend of Prince Calix a spy in league with The Smiley's'.

What? I am shocked. Where did this rumour come from? Oh, as if I even need to ask. The King. I run to catch a train on the underground to take me to the palace so I can tell Calix. As I walk through the crowds, I realize I'm getting the same hostile glances from people usually too lost in their own dark thoughts to feel such an emotion. I feel frightened, vulnerable to the damage that may be caused by the lies that have been written about me. I don't know if it's safe to go near the palace, but I know I'll definitely feel safer in Calix's arms than out here surrounded by a mob of my new enemies.

After exiting the tube, which was packed with eyes ablaze with fury and disgust, I run to the garden of the palace. I have to find Calix, is he disguised so the citizens do not recognize him? As I look around frantically, I feel a light tap on my shoulder and turn around to see my protector in dark glasses.

“Calix,” I say relieved. I hug him.

“Hey Seren, are you okay? You seem upset,” he says hugging me tightly.

I pull away .

“Oh Calix, it’s terrible. I’m all over the news. All the citizens hate me because they think I’m an agent of The Smiley’s,” I say nearly bursting into tears.

“Hey, don’t worry Seren. I already know. I’m getting my press team working on damage limitation right now,” he says reassuring me somewhat.

“Calix, who did this? Your Father?”

“It seems likely, but I don’t know for certain. It wouldn’t be the first time he’s started a hate campaign against someone he wants to be eliminated from the city.”

“Oh that so horrible and corrupt. Why can’t he just play fair?”

“Come on Seren. Let’s not let it spoil tonight. We’ll go up to my room, listen to music and you can chill while I revise,” he smiles.

“Oh okay Calix, but it’s really spoiled everything. Are you sure it’s wise to enter the palace?” I ask concerned.

“Sure it is. Hey I’ll even appear on TV and publicly deny all these rumours if it sets your mind at ease,” he says kindly.

“Oh thank you Calix. But it’s not the publicity but these constant attacks by your father that is getting me down. It never ceases. He’s not going to stop until he’s destroyed me, destroyed us,”

I say passionately. Calix remains silent but looks equally worried.

We walk boldly and bravely into the palace holding hands, despite our previous plan to sneak in, refusing to be defeated. We race along corridors I have never been down before, all of them ornate, but as dark and shadowy as the whole palace.

“What’s the hurry Calix? Don’t tell me that you’re afraid of bumping into your Dad. We should just tell him to back off together,” I say huffily, just wanting to enjoy a peaceful, unspoilt day with Calix for once rather than the constant plans of destruction unleashed on us by The King. “No Seren, there’s something exciting I have planned. Come with me,” he says secretly, as though he wants to show me something important, an air of significance lingering in his voice.

He leads me out into the gardens of the palace. The secluded part at the side, where an elegant black gazebo stands. The moonlight illuminates the grass and the flowers, giving everything a romantic sheen. Calix leads me by gently holding my hand, into the gazebo. “Oh this is so enchanting Calix. I think the palace gardens are my favourite place in the whole city,” I say glancing at the deep purple flowers, which make a heart shaped pattern in the ground, perfectly manicured by the most loving gardener.

“Mine too, especially when you are with me,” he says, holding both my hands as he begins to kneel.

“Calix, what are you doing?” I ask in shock as he withdraws a little black box from his coat pocket.

“Seren Loneheart, the only girl I have ever loved, will you marry me?” he asks in total seriousness as he opens the box containing a purple diamond ring which is the same colour as the flowers in the garden.

“Oh Calix, yes, yes I will,” I say bursting into tears. I am so shocked. I knew Calix and I had a great relationship but this is the last thing I expected.

He gets up, slipping the ring onto my finger and kisses me.

“But Calix, what about your Father? He would never allow it,” I say looking deeply into his eyes, feeling amazed, joyful and worried at the same time. The tears keep pouring from the mixture of overwhelming emotion.

“Dad doesn’t matter when you are with me Seren. Any other girl I would have stopped seeing from the moment he requested it. But not you, you have something special, something I’ve never seen before,” he says kissing me and wiping away my tears at the same time.

“Hey, why are you crying? Are you disappointed with the ring?” he asks, looking guilty as if it’s his fault that I’m crying.

“Oh no, its so beautiful Calix, more perfect than anything I could have imagined. Its just shock, and fear of your Father and...”

“Yes?” he asks when I pause mid sentence.

“Aren’t we a little young to get married?” I ask voicing my only personal concern.

“I don’t think so. I know you are the one for me Seren. No other girl could make me feel this way, will ever make me feel this way. You bring a sense of hope, life and yes, happiness to my heart. Life before you was meaningless and empty. I was a broken Prince, but you fixed me.

Healed me even. Thank you,” he says earnestly.

“I feel the same about you Calix. Who cares about age when I’ve met the person I want to spend the rest of my life with. But again Calix, back to your Father, he *wants* you to be the Broken Prince. I don’t think he wants you to be happy,” I say passionately.

“I know. I need to escape him Seren. Some how, some way,” he says hugging me closely, sounding a little frightened himself now.

We walk, talk and even dance around the garden for about an hour. Calix twirls me around in the gazebo, bringing back memories of the ball. It’s starting to get cold and yet I experience a calmness and relaxing bliss that I have never felt while being at the palace before. I feel giddy at the prospect of having a ring on my finger. I would feel this way if any man proposed, that the man in question is Calix only amplifies this feeling. It’s like I have entered into another realm, a supernatural existence. The only thing I can liken this feeling to is the timeless happily ever after stories. Yes I feel like Cinderella or Snow White, but that feeling is mixed with the logic that tells me ‘real life is not that simple’. This is a broken city after all, how could I be the only one to find happiness here? But this one moment in the palace garden with my perfect prince asking for my hand in marriage is now sealed in the vault of eternity. Whether or not Calix’s Dad succeeds in ruining all of this, I will always have this moment. This one moment on earth I

found peace ,joy, love, beauty. Where time doesn't exist and limitations are nothing but illusion. My walking off into the sunset to everlasting life.

"But Calix will we announce this to the whole Kingdom or will we have to keep it a secret?" I ask still bewildered as to how Calix could possibly inform the City of the Broken of our engagement without uproar, especially as I'm now considered to be in league with The Smiley's.

"Shh Seren, I just don't know. At this moment it doesn't matter. Let's just enjoy being together, the two of us. We'll have to break it to the world when we've set a date for the wedding," he says smiling at me, looking almost carefree again although with a trace of doubt lingering beneath his eyes as if he doesn't believe the path to marriage will be a smooth one himself.

"Baby, I'll see you tomorrow at school. You make me so happy you know," he says stroking my hair as I gaze adoringly into his supernova eyes, which sparkle with joy as they never did in the past.

"You make me so happy too Calix, I feel like you and I were made for one another. You recruited me for my despair, but being with you obliterated that in the process," I say awe-struck by his ethereal looks.

"The irony of it," he says.

"I know. And to think that your father actually had me convinced that you were a professional heart breaker. Professional life transformer maybe," I say feeling more connected to him than ever, now our love is sealed with the engagement.

"You've transformed my life too. You'll never know what a wreck I had become before I met you. I fulfilled the brief of the city- broken, despairing, longing for what I didn't know. My father had almost put a chain around my heart. Feelings, love and joy, were things that were not allowed, frowned upon, abnormal. You made everything seem so natural. Falling in love with you wasn't perverse or horrid, as Dad had made it seem. I felt I was living in the dark ,only you turned on the light Seren, Thank you," he says staring into my eyes, reaching into the depths of my heart in his almost tragic confession.



I feel a tear slowly sliding down my cheek.

“Oh Calix. I feel so sad for you,” I say hugging him.

“Seren don’t be sad. My life has only just begun since I have met you. Feel happy now that I have finally found happiness,” he says clinging to me tightly.

As we embrace, I am aware that a light has appeared in the doorway that leads to the palace. Calix and I are illuminated, a spotlight on us. We let each other go and look towards the door to enquire of the source of this curious unidentified beam.

The King is standing in the doorway. I never saw a more deadly stare.

“Your Majesty,” I say in shock, still holding on to Calix’s arm.

“Father,” says Calix in a tone identical to mine.

The King says nothing, but continues to stand there like a statue. The only clue to his being alive, the reptilian fixed glare in his eyes

“And what is this?” he says finally, coldly, with an undertone of disgust.

“You can see perfectly well Father. It is me and the girl I love who you tried to prevent me from seeing,” replies Calix with a quiver of fear in his voice.

“A parade of passion. A lowly, unintelligent display of emotion,” replies the King standing there with his poison stare, perfectly still, almost robotic.

“No Father. True love and nothing else,” says Calix more boldly and fiercer this time.

“Hmm,” says the King in a dismissive, unimpressed tone.

“You jeopardize all I have worked for Calix. You put in danger your own crown. You will destroy this city, all for a girl who you will fall out of love with as quickly as you fell into it. The trap of death. Love and passion Calix are temporary states that bring the great and the good to the lowest in society,” says the King in a fit of rage.

“That not true. I love Seren and always will. The city will not suffer. It means a lot to me as well,” says Calix.

“You were a brilliant and dedicated prince, Calix. Since you have met this girl your sense of duty has lapsed, you cannot deny it. As for the city, by loving and embracing happiness you

defy the very core of the values the city was built on. You marry her and the City of the Broken will cease to exist. The citizens will follow your lead, and we will become as every other undistinguishable city on the earth. Our identity and uniqueness will be lost,” says the King slowly stepping towards us.

Amazingly I understand that he does have a point. He has yet again worked his way with words on me. His is so persuasive, only this time he isn't lying. I can see it myself. If the citizens see the example of the Prince and his new bride embracing happiness and excitement, they will follow suit. And how can this be the City of the Broken, if its citizens are no longer this themselves? It would never again be this eerie yet spectacular place with a way of life so different. But the same as everywhere else. Normal. I actually shudder to think of it myself, for as morbid as it is, it's also the most amazing and atmospheric city ever. It deserves to have its identity preserved.

“Calix he's right. We can't do this. The city would be ruined,” I say.

“Seren? What, are you crazy? Surely you haven't been duped by my Dad again. Didn't you learn your lesson last time?” he asks bewildered as the King looks on triumphant at the blow delivered by his unexpected ally.

“No. This is different. The citizens will copy you, us. They will see you are happy and want to be happy too. You are the Prince of the Broken. If you are telling everyone it's better to be glad, then they'll believe you. Without broken citizens, there will be no city as we know it. Just regular life like everywhere else,” I say mournfully.

“Is that really so bad?” Calix asks. And then I get it. He's had enough of the city. He wants normality. The queuing, the school. It all makes sense.

“You astonish me Calix. After how I trained you, the values I instilled in you. You have betrayed me and the city. How can I ever depend on you as an heir?” asks the King horrified.

“You made me live such a miserable life, just for this City. You broke me to rule.”

“I instilled in you values of truth Calix. If you don't voluntarily submit yourself to despair, life will forcibly submit you to it. I can see nothing stronger, no shield of armour a better defence

than that of melancholy. Be happy my son, be happy. But I promise you Calix, life will destroy it-your heart will be broken. I need not do anything. Reality will teach you better than I. You can keep yourself powerful by willingly living your life in a permanent state of unhappiness. You cannot break a heart than never believed in love,” says the King.

And I can actually see for the first time his reasoning .He keeps up a life of misery, depression ,a life devoid of love to stop himself from getting hurt. His wife died, this destroyed him. So he built huge barriers to prevent his heart ever being broken again. As he said, ‘you cannot break a heart that doesn’t believe in love’. It’s the ultimate power to be without emotion. You simply cannot get hurt. What hope can be dashed if you have no hope?

“I’m sorry Father. It’s no use. I disagree with your life philosophy. I think love is more powerful than misery. I can still be a dedicated Prince as well as husband.”

“If you marry that girl Calix and yes I saw you produce a ring, the city will be no more The City of the Broken. The City of the Sippy, The City of those who found Temporary Happiness(for happiness is not a permanent emotion) maybe. But you will take our values, traditions, our colour scheme. Joy doesn’t favour the mysterious shade of black. Pastels galore. You will take my City that I dedicated my whole life to. That I worked tirelessly perfecting. That I raised you to rule over. How you have failed me,” he says and I see Calix look to the floor, hurt, disappointed in himself.

“Choose Calix. I have banned that girl from my palace ,as of now. If she enters again, the repercussions will be serious. I will not have my palace used for such purposes as romance and passion. You dishonour yourself with such childish frolicking,” remarks The King with disdain.

“I choose you. I will always choose you,” says Calix turning to me, holding both my hands.

“But Calix. He’s right. Maybe it’s a little selfish to choose our relationship over the city. The values its based on will not hold up. You can’t recruit broken citizens will a smile on your face,” I say concerned.

“Oh why do you always listen to my father Seren? We can make this work. Trust me. We can compromise. Maybe the city doesn’t have to completely change. We can add a little more

colour, a little more joy, but still embrace the freedom in choosing to be depressed when you want to be,” he says enthusiastically.

“Hmm...City of the sometimes Broken, maybe you’re on to something,” I say.

We walk out of the garden and I depart from the palace.

“Hey don’t let Dad’s outburst ruin our night. We’re *engaged*,” he says smiling excitedly .

“Oh I know, I cannot believe it. I think this is the best thing that’s ever happened to me ,minus the father drama,” I say.

## Chapter Ten.

### Divided

After leaving The City of the Broken, I return home, not knowing what to do with myself. Calix dropped me off fifteen minutes ago, we kissed and looking at that face I know so well, I realized that is now the face of my future husband.

Now that I'm alone, away from Calix and the King and staring by-passers in the city, I can finally let the news sink in in its entirety. I'm still so shocked. I decide that rather than having a celebration, to have a shower. When the hot water rushes over me, it helps me think more clearly than I ever can in other circumstances, so it'll put everything that happened tonight into perspective. After I undress, I stand naked but still feeling like I have not completed my task of de-clothing. And then I feel the weight of the purple promise on my finger and I smile. I'll have to get used to wearing this and removing it at shower time. I take the ring off and place it carefully on the sink.

After I have showered and dried my hair, I feel pure and refreshed. I replace my ring and am greeted by a sudden urge to perform ballet around my living room. After coming to terms with the fact I am now engaged in the shower, the ecstasy of this has taken over. I feel like a new born lamb of spring, feeling the wonder of its legs, skipping blissfully through a meadow before it ever knew any care, toil or horror of the world.

Calix is far too handsome to be my husband. But I'm not objecting, it's his choice, he asked me. How shall I explain my ring in school tomorrow? I still think I'm far too young to get married, but it's impossible for me to turn Calix down, I know that if I did I'd live to regret it for the rest of my life. How can you hope of finding someone better, when you have already found the best? So yes, I shall be a young bride.

Despite the sound of wedding bells in the distance, I'm up all night revising for a maths test we have tomorrow. Calix is bad for my grades. How could I possibly remember such

mundane matters when I'm so busy thinking about, talking to and kissing Calix? Maths teachers should take this into account when setting tests only one week in advance.

Here I am, at school for the very first time as an engaged woman. There is cloud nine but I'm on cloud 9000, its higher altitude cousin. It's times like these I'm glad Calix is not in my class-I'd spend the whole lesson staring at his face with a brain that makes mushy peas seem sophisticated.

At break I rush off in a blur of frantic excitement, hoping to clasp eyes on my fiancé but alas as is customary at break time, I never do.

I head off as soon as Mrs. Shelley dismisses us at Lunchtime. I go to the library, counting every second until Calix appears.

I look up, seeing him glide swiftly through the doors. He stands out from everyone, like the brightest star in the universe, among its not-quite as brilliant siblings. He spots me and his eyes illuminate in his marble face.

"Hey," he says sitting next to me.

"Hello fiancé," I smirk and he kisses me, leading to numerous glances from our fellow students.

"Well you certainly look vibrant today Seren. So bright eyed and bushy tailed. What's the secret?" he asks as if he doesn't already know.

"Oh I don't know. Maybe I've just been proposed to by the most beautiful human being to grace the planet," I tease and he laughs.

"Wait, you've had a proposal from someone else as well? Shocking!" he jokes modestly.

"So...city again tonight Calix?" I ask steering the topic to my favourite hang out.

"No...no Seren. It's too dangerous," he says in stark seriousness, the smile now wiped from both our faces.

"Too dangerous? It's fine Calix really, as long as I keep away from the palace." I say wondering why he's so stressed out.

"Oh no. It's much more than what last night was about. He's turned the whole city against you

Seren. There's uproar. He's leaked our engagement, it's been on the news all morning. Plus The Smiley's protests have been criminalized, they've been arrested and beaten up by mobs who think they are stealing our identity and Dad's portrayed you as their number one leader. He's got the City convinced I'm a traitor too, supporting The Smiley's. He knew my views so now he's blackened my name as well. If I went on TV to defend you now, it would all be meaningless, because I'm considered 'one of them'."

I gape at him, although not all that surprised, I'm used to this by now, although it's the first time the King has also targeted Calix.

"So what are you going to do? Is it safe for *you* to go back to the City?" I ask concerned.

"Oh don't worry about me Seren, I can go undercover, keep a low profile. I don't mean to sound cocky but tarnished or not, I am still the prince. But it's definitely not safe for you, that's the point I was trying to make. Don't be scared Seren, but you've had death threats," he says calmly.

"Death threats? Oh this is ridiculous! The Smiley's are only peaceful protesters anyway," I say, returning to the state of shock.

"Yes they are. I've met some of them and they are really nice people with their own cause who just want to raise awareness of their mission in a productive way, but that's not how they are portrayed in the media and by the King and frankly, that's all that matters to people, not the reality."

I sit there shaking my head, lost for words.

It's only as I head back to class, I'm aware my stomach is growling as I haven't had anything to eat. I decide to sit through the lesson anyway, I've lost my appetite as I'm too disappointed that there will be no visit to the City tonight. Jasmine has shown up for the second half of school. I guess seeing her boyfriend at school doesn't ignite the spark of dedication to learning in the way it does for me.

"Oh, so you've decided to show up then," I scorn her mockingly.

"Yeah. I have missed so many assignments. Can you tell me all the questions so I can catch

up?” she asks, her puppy-like eyes melting my irritation at her laziness.

“Yeah, sure I’ll bring them in tomorrow,” I promise, encouraging her to attend more frequently with my carrot-on-a-stick of three backdated assignments.

I feel upset that I can’t visit the City. I really wonder what I did with myself before I discovered this funereal wonderland. And it also hurts that the citizens hate me now. I found them fascinating as people and wanted to make some friends. I know the King and I were destined never to be on the best of terms, but all the ordinary folk that I spoke to pre-hate campaign were always very welcoming (well as welcoming as you could expect people who delight in the art of depression to be). They didn’t look at me with hostility like they did on the last visit anyway.

I wonder where The Smiley’s are now, not in jail I hope. They are the freaks, the out-group of The City but they are gentle, joy-promoters and while their goals are at odds with such a place, I still feel they’ve been persecuted far too much and too harshly. All of this because of one man and his set of ideals. This does make me worry about my wedding. If we get married now, it’ll have to be in secrecy. I’m surprised at how quick the citizens were to turn against the Prince. I can understand their dislike of me, but they’ve always held Calix in such high regard, in my opinion more so than the King. How can even this master of words have accomplished such a task?

At the end of school, I rush out to the car park to catch Calix before he drives off in the Rolls-Royce.

“Calix! Wait up!” I call out to him.

“Hey Seren, you okay?” he asks

“If I can’t come to the City, how are we going to hang out together in the evening?”

“Oh don’t worry Seren, it’s just a temporary measure really. All of this chaos will die down again in about a week when the citizens get bored of the topic. We can see each other in the day at school and you can come for a drive around with me if you want,” he smiles beckoning me into the car.



“Really? That’ll be lovely Calix,” I say hopping into the car with him. His automobile equivalent surely-dark, mysterious and slick.

“Why don’t we just drive around the City? We’ll be safe inside the car from mobs and your father won’t even know I’m here as the windows are blacked out,” I suggest hopefully to Calix.

“Hmm...” he considers not looking convinced.

“Oh come on Calix, what harm could it do?” I ask fluttering my eyelashes at him.

“Oh alright. But be sure to duck down if any citizens come close to the window. And *do not* step one foot outside,” he warns me.

“Okay Calix,” I say hugging him, feeling instantly happier.

As we drive through the wrought iron gates, I glance out of the window and see the cemetery and the graves of husbands and wives together forever in death.

“I have to tell you it’s changed a little here Seren” he says abruptly as we drive through the garden.

“Changed how? I was only here the other day Calix,” I say.

“Yes, well now it’s changed rather dramatically. My father’s done it of course. The City is divided-one side pro-happiness, one side pro-despair. I just thought I should let you know in advance,” he says gauging my reaction.

“Oh okay. So The Smiley’s have actually managed to get some people supporting their cause then? Is the pro-happiness side a result of their protests?” I ask intrigued at this new formation of the City.

“I think it’s a combination of The Smiley’s dedication and rebellion against Dad’s oppressive ruling. People feel forced to be unhappy now, in the past I think they felt they were choosing some alternative lifestyle embracing melancholy, now they feel one of a mass, so they are turning to a different, more mainstream set of values,” he explains.

“And how is your father taking this rebellion?” I ask.

“Oh just wait until you see the advertising campaign covering the whole city. He is not having

his citizens converting to a life of joy. He's fighting to win them back over though persuasion first and if that doesn't work, force," he says

"And where do you fit into all this?" I ask curious to know if the citizens are on his side again.

"You know I think Dad made a bit of a bad move when he sided me with The Smiley's, that also influenced the divide. It brought them a huge amount of publicity when it was all over the news that I had joined. And there's still this allegiance with me because they see me as the figurehead of The City. It sort of made The Smiley's more socially acceptable," he says amused at his Father's blunder.

"Oh that's so funny Calix. He's divided his city of his own accord," I smirk.

Yes indeed, the City is divided. I feel like someone who, once colour-blind, is beginning to see patches of potential breaking through. As the sun bursting through dark clouds, so I see yellow and blue and red-clad citizens, presumably pro-happiness walking around the City on this fine but cloudy day. Pro-despair posters dominate billboards on every corner, a reminder that the King refuses to be beaten.

'Sadness is Strength,' 'Smiling Signals Submission' and 'Be Brave, Be Broken. Preserve our identity' are the messages sent out to the Citizens. The City of the Broken national colours of black and purple promoting patriotism on the posters.

"I notice there aren't any Pro-Happiness posters on the billboards Calix. Why is this?" I ask, already guessing the answer.

"My Father. He's also tried to influence the laws regarding insanity here, Pro-happiness and smiling are now seen as a sign of mental illness. Many of the more prolific Pro-Happiness group members have been detained in The Black Hospital. But to be honest, now that half of The City is Pro-Happiness I don't think even that approach will work. After all, they can't lock half of the city up for being insane," he says, smiling at this ridiculousness .

"I think it would do your Father good to compromise, he'd probably have more people on his side that way. This forcing people to be unhappy will only lead to increasing rebellion and that would be worse for the city," I say.

“I totally agree. But it’s just not in Dad’s nature. He’s stubborn and he *has* to have his own way, whatever the cost. He does usually succeed in getting it too. Although I’ll confess this is the first time he’s had such a problem with the citizens. He’s dealing with riots and a backlash unlike anything I’ve known of in the history of the city,” he says looking concerned.

The city is a classic black and white movie coming to terms with the arrival of Technicolor for the very first time. I watch the shocked faces of broken children as sunshine yellow clad pro-happiness citizens walk down the street, smiling purposefully to promote their cause.

We drive around, touring the city, as I marvel at how quickly it’s changed. The power of Calix’s ‘approval’ of The Smiley’s is earth shaking. It still has its atmosphere of death, broken hopes, otherworldly darkness but also now combined with smiles, energy and the feeling that anything is possible. It only makes me appreciate the quality’s of the city even more .A dream that married a nightmare, giving birth to a fantasy world dynamic but flawed . The city could make you feel a sad yearning in its former days, now its uniqueness is combined with a brilliant optimism.

I hold Calix’s hand, enjoying the mating of metal when our rings clang into each other. We head back as the night falls cloaking our secret drive ,soothing my worries of possible discovery.

I wind down the window in the car a little, keen to breathe in that distinct city air fragranced with sweet flowers: forget-me-nots that have been forgotten and trees that hold the secrets of years gone by. Tonight I hear music, the city is alive like it was in the Black Ball game, only this time a number of the citizens are fun-loving, happy humans rather than the corpses that had to pretend to be alive.

“So Calix, are you pro-happiness or pro-despair?” I enquire, knowing he can go without the political correctness required in his public role for tonight, as his answer is for my ears only. Yes Alfred is here, but I still think him too reserved in character to go leaking the opinions of the prince to the press.

“I’m genuinely in between. I think the city needs to preserve its unique identity as broken and mournful but I also think people should have the freedom to choose when to be happy and when to be depressed. Moods change but we’ll always be a city for the glass-half-empty type of person. And what’s your opinion on matter?” he asks, his eyes flashing with curiosity.

“Pro-despair. I think that if everyone was Pro-Happiness then this city would be like everywhere else. I’ve grown to love its darkness and appreciate its individualism. This is the only time I’ll side with your father Calix. Do try and remember this monumental occasion,” I joke and he smiles.

“I’ll jot it down in my diary. Pro-despair, really?” he asks in disbelief.

“I’ve never fitted in. I’m an outcast at heart. Smiling and happiness are for conformists. I’m a rebel who does her own thing,” I remark.

“Whoa! I’m really seeing a new side to you tonight. I can understand your point of view.

Though I think a compromise would probably be the best thing for the city. It’s kind of ridiculous for citizens who joined because they were broken to want to become pro-happiness but I think they’ve had enough of Dad’s regime.”

## Chapter Eleven.

### The Forbidden Room

At school, I spend my time in the treasure-trove that is the library. The blood of life gushes through my veins as I find hidden jewels in this cave of paper and words. Renowned books I've heard the names of from since I left the womb, only never have actually read. That feeling that my life will never be complete until every classic is devoured and every great author's style completely understood.

"Hey, you look happy. You don't need any pro-happiness group when you've got the library," says Calix, reading my feelings as he comes over to join me.

"Oh Calix, does the City of the Broken have a library? I'm never more enthralled than when I'm looking at books," I smile.

"It sure does. I should have taken you ages ago. You'll love it, it's huge and has every books you could ever think of," he says, his eyes glittering with promise as I beam up at him like a small child.

The City of the Broken public library has gothic architecture and an impressive nobility that makes it seem more like an official government building than a library. It's the most amazing library I've ever set foot in. This masterpiece of libraries is an example to all the rest. I feel as though I've come across a diamond mine in my own back garden that I never even knew was there. A hive of literature that not only stocks the classics that by birthright should grace every library, but also the new, the rare and the most popular.

The black floors gleam with polish, squeaking as I walk over them, taking care not to slip from my excitement. The walls are white. The books are the ornaments, the centrepiece, the works of art that hang in the frames of old oak bookshelves.

The library has three floors-fact, fiction, poetry and drama. We've been here hours and

I'm still no where near full in this feast of words.

"Oh Calix, why didn't you take me here the very first time you took me to the city? I feel as though I'm sampling oxygen after a lifetime of breathing only fumes," I say, still not believing such a perfect place could actually exist. The ultimate library.

"Sorry Seren. I know you love books, I do too but I thought you'd be more interested in the palace or BlackBall," he says earnestly.

"This city should be famous for its library if it isn't already. The City of the Books should be its new name," I say.

"I wonder what Dad would have to say about *that* idea," he smiles.

"Okay, I now officially don't understand the point of view of the Broken citizens .How can you be unhappy when you have access to all of *this*?" I ask stretching out my arms to motion to the library as a whole.

At the third floor, after practically crying tears of joy on discovering numerous editions of The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Keats ,I realize there is one more flight of stairs, which seems to lead to an attic or perhaps another layer of books-the rarest and most wonderful that Calix has forgotten to mention?

I climb the stairs eagerly, wondering what magnificence awaits, what other titles and authors there could possibly be that the vast array of the first three floors didn't cover. The door at the top of the flight of stairs is covered by a large, embroidered tapestry of black, silver and gold. I shift it to one side and realize a padlock bars my entry through the oak door.

"Hey! Seren, you can't go up there," says Calix racing towards me, looking alarmed.

"Why? What's behind the door Calix? Are there any more books?" I ask feeling like a child that has just been scolded.

"It isn't open to the public. That's Fathers own archive," he says in an unfamiliar formal tone.

"Why doesn't he have his archive in his own palace rather than a public library?" I ask bemused.

"Security is very tight here, Dad actually believes it safer for his documents to be stored *here*.

No one except senior members of staff actually knows what this room is for. Only Dad and I have a key,” he says.

“Why do you have a key to *his* archives?” I ask still puzzled.

“Well, actually I don’t have the key yet. I’ll inherit the key and the archives when I’m King. He says that room holds the secrets of the city. To be honest I’m as intrigued by it as you are. I don’t understand what secrets there are, but that padlock is so frustrating. I long to know what’s in that mystery room,” he says, his eyes lighting up with wonder.

“Wow. It must be pretty special if he won’t even allow you to go in there. I can’t even imagine the knowledge that room holds,” I say fascinated, staring at the lock that guards the secret forbidden information.

“Can’t we just break the lock?” I ask suddenly, impulsively, my curiosity getting the better of me.

“Oh believe me Seren, I’ve tried in my youth. I even had Frederick with his muscles of steel and cunning nature to find a way to break, pick or loosen that lock but even he gave up- and he’s a man who would jump over every obstacle there is to achieve a goal. The *only* way it opens is with that illusive key,” he says arching his eyebrow.

“How often does your Dad come in this room then?” I ask.

“You know that is the curious thing. I have never known him to even set foot in this library, yet he places such importance on that room. The only time I know that he came here was when I was a child when he opened it officially .But even then he didn’t actually go inside the library, he just stood at the entrance,” he says, now equally as bemused as me.

After finding a dozen books I want to borrow, I use Calix’s shiny black card, embossed with purple ‘City of the Broken Public Libraries’ font. I can’t have my own library card as they are available to citizens only.

“Promise to take them back on time Seren. I love the library as much as you do,” he says.

“I *always* return books Calix but I’ll make absolutely certain I will when they are on your card,” I say truthfully and he smiles trustingly.

“I’m so fascinated by that forbidden room Calix. I’m more inclined to believe it stocks secrets of the King than secrets of the city,” I say ,wondering what darkness the king has hidden away. “Don’t encourage the itch of my imagination Seren. I both long for and dread to know the depths of information that room holds. Then at other times I think that I’ll be sorely disappointed when I discover what is probably little more than a collection of historic documents and family trees,” he says.

I’m well aware that there could be anyone watching, waiting to report us to His Majesty the King but I don’t care. It’s a beautiful day and my fiancé and I are enjoying a rare undisrupted stroll through The City of the Broken.

Just as I’m becoming totally engrossed in the sweet sunshine kissed sky, a passer by dressed in yellow approaches us  
“Hi! Would you like to join us as a volunteer? I’m a Smiley and we promote the Pro-Happiness cause to bring colour, happiness and smiles back into this gloomy city. Interested?” she asks beaming up at us with an almost unnatural, permanent political smile on her face.

I look at Calix, unsure what to say.

“Not today, but thank you,” he says, smiling politely.

“Oh wow, you’re the prince. I heard you support this cause already, that’s one of the reasons I joined,” she says smiling adoringly at Calix.

After we escape her, Calix and I laugh at the irony of the situation.

“It’s hilarious that the King brought about his own worst nightmare by his own doing. You’d have thought he’d think it through before telling the world you were a fan of The Smiley’s,” I say, nearly choking from laughing so much.

“I think he was just so angry that the two of us were engaged that he acted almost impulsively. I’m sure he’ll be working on damage limitation now he’s realized his error. It’ll be all over the news tomorrow that I’ve switched back to Pro-despair now,” he says.

“Probably,” I agree sniggering.



“The City really is divided now though. Pro-despair groups are concentrated heavily on one side of the city and Pro-happiness members are banned from entering and vice versa. I’m all for freedom of speech but I don’t agree with these sunshine and cloudy sides of the city,” he says, looking concerned about the situation.

“What has your father said about the whole issue?” I ask, wondering why the King seems to have become so quiet of late.

“Actually Seren, I haven’t seen Dad in days. I really don’t have a clue what he’s up to and what his opinions are. I’ve actually taken it upon myself to set up a group to discuss the divide. It’s called City Reunited. I want people to live their lives how they choose to but this divide is silly. It’s turning people who’ve never even met each other into enemies and I don’t want this to be a city of conflict,” he says passionately.

“Oh Calix, you are so active in society, unlike me. You stay up to date with all these current affairs. I just don’t know how you do it,” I say enthralled.

“Well, it’s my duty Seren. I am the *prince* and especially as Dad’s absent at the moment, it’s my responsibility to lead these types of things,” he says modestly.

“So where is this group?” I ask.

“We meet every Tuesday evening at the community centre .If a serious or notable incident or development occurs, such as a riot, we’ll meet twice or three times a week,” he says.

“Who can join, elites only, like at the meeting with your Dad?” I ask.

“No. That’s the beauty of this. *Anyone* who’s a citizen of this city, whether they are Pro-Happiness, Pro-Despair or neutral can join,” he smiles.

“Oh ,that’s great. That way it’s fair as everyone can express their opinions and concerns. But Calix, the trouble is *I’m* not a citizen, so can I attend?”

“Well Seren, ordinarily I’d say no but since it’s you I’ll make an exception and bring you along as my plus-one. Just try not to contribute too much though .It might irritate the citizens if you are opinionated on matters of a city you aren’t even a member of,” he says honestly.

“Okay. That’s not a problem. Even if I was a citizen I’d be far too shy to say anything,” I say

frankly and he laughs.

## Chapter Twelve.

### Group Therapy

It's so interesting to go to this gathering of citizens from different backgrounds, who were once united by a common value of depression and darkness and now have two different extremes in opinions of how to live life.

The community centre is dark and dreary. The black tiled floor is clean, but doesn't have the gloss of the library and the palace. People are required to sign-in, including Calix.

The register has boxes for name, address, age and a question that asks 'Are you Pro-Happiness, Pro-Despair or Neutral?' with check boxes to tick your preferred option and in brackets is written 'this is used for statistical purposes *only*.' I go to sign-in but Calix informs me that I can't as I'm not a citizen. He signs and ticks the 'neutral' box, probably not choosing a side as he wants to remain impartial as the Prince.

"I would have chosen 'Pro-Despair,'" I tell him.

"Well don't tell anyone Seren but I think I'm leaning that way myself. These Pro-Happiness group members are so happy it's almost insincere and fake," he says.

"I totally agree. There's a realness about being broken. Whatever you say about the Pro-Despair citizens they are genuine. They won't mask their feelings for anyone and I respect that," I say.

We go into the hall of the centre, where a large circle of chairs has been arranged, many already taken. This isn't going to be a lecture then, but an open discussion. Around half of the people here are dressed in bright colours and the other, slightly larger half are dressed in the customary costume of the city-black and grey. The latter half I assume to be Pro-Despair or neutral and unwilling to change. Calix has chosen to wear a slick, black suit with a light blue shirt. I suppose not to give any insight into his opinion away by his dress. I wear my black dress, knowing I'm under no obligation to be politically correct as I'm not even a legitimate member of this meeting.

There is one man with a handful of notes sitting in the centre and I presume it is he, not Calix who will be the official voice of this meeting.

Looking around I see some familiar faces including Alfred, Anita and Frederick (who are sitting together). Anita looks disgusted at the fact she is sitting in a community centre, surrounded by 'ordinary' people, although she is dressed glamorously as usual nonetheless. She can only be admired for turning the most mundane of places into a haute couture fashion show. She spots me and looks me up and down, evidently not approving of my outfit as I do hers. "Prince Calix, finally. A delight to see some civilised company. Come and sit with us," she says motioning him to sit by her and Frederick, despite the fact the seats next to them on either side are already occupied.

"Thank Anita, but we'll stay here," he says politely declining.

Anita rolls her eyes and then exclaims

"Oh can we just get this silly meeting over and done with please. I have better places to be than sitting in this dead end slum." I wonder if she's referring to the ballet.

"Yes. I think it's time we made a start," says the man with the notes.

"Please everyone be seated and we'll begin," he says motioning to the yellow clad Smiley who is just returning from the canteen with a paper cup of something hot.

"Well then. I assume you all know why we are here? My name is Frank Speakman and for any of you who have perhaps been living under a rock, cut off from recent happenings, I'll fill you in. The City of the Broken, a city built on a collective consensus of values that we are Broken citizens has in recent weeks, quite rapidly and unbelievably become divided. Yes, divided into two main groups-those who believe in the original values of this city and those who believe the city would benefit in the changing of its very core beliefs," he says and I can tell by the disdain in which he speaks of 'changing beliefs' that Frank is most definitely a traditionalist and therefore I assume, Pro-Despair.

"Now, I know that each of us in this room has very different opinions on the future of this city, but as we are all citizens here I'd ask you to be respectful of others opinions, whether you agree

with them or not. Anyone guilty of harassment, violent or bullying behaviour will be asked to leave the meeting,” he says officially.

“Okay, any questions at the end please don’t be afraid to ask. Right, now we’ve cleared all that up. Let’s begin. Who’d like to be the first to offer an opinion?” he asks, looking around for a volunteer.

“I would like to say something,” says a man with greying hair, wearing a black waistcoat and with an expression of depression.

“Go right ahead Sir,” says Frank.

“I have lived in this city longer than ten years. Never before have I seen such disruption. These ‘Smiley’s’ are Pro-Chaos, not Pro-Happiness. They’re just youngsters who want their fifteen minutes of fame, rebelling to get their pictures in the paper. The city was fine just as it was. If it’s Broken, don’t fix it, is my motto,” he says angrily.

“Excuse *me*. I am a Smiley and this isn’t about fame or glory. I believe firmly in my cause and The Smiley’s have a policy to protest peacefully, so your talk of chaos is complete falsehood and influenced by the lies the king has told the press about us. Our mission is to resuscitate a city that has been long since dead. We want to cooperate with citizens to bring choice and free will back into this City of forced despair. We are not ‘rebelling’ simply for having an opinion that is different,” says The Smiley who is dressed in sparkly yellow with a gold sash reading ‘Pro-Happiness’ tied around her.

“You both have relevant points to make, but it cannot be denied that this divide of the city has led to conflict between two groups who once identified with each other on the basis of their citizenship,” says Calix, adding his viewpoint.

“Your Majesty, it’s wonderful to hear your point of view. Are you Pro-Happiness or Pro-Despair?” asks Frank and everyone listens intently.

“I’m neither, I’m neutral. My opinion is that the city should be reunited. I don’t want two different groups with extremes of beliefs and I oppose those bans that stop people entering certain parts of the city based on their chosen side. This is *one* city and I’d like to keep it that

way,” he says forcefully but diplomatically.

“Forgive me for saying this Prince Calix, but your father’s rule is oppressive. There would be no need for two groups with extreme views, if such extremity hadn’t been forced on citizens to live a life of sadness and to only ever wear black,” says the talkative Smiley.

“I feel very strongly about this issue, don’t I Frederick? That’s the only reason I entered this deprived part of the city. The citizens joined and were recruited because they had a certain set of beliefs to begin with, so to encourage them to turn to a complete opposite set of beliefs is ludicrous. They didn’t *have* to join this city, the King has only been catering to the public’s wants and needs. Why change such a great city? You Smileys are simply troublemakers and yes I quite agree-attention seekers,” says Anita, her lisp giving a slightly comical affect to her speech.

“I can actually relate this to my own experience. I was recruited and joined, and yes I agree with the smartly dressed lady there that I wasn’t *forced* to join. I joined because I was broken and the offer to join a city where I would, for the first time in my life, fit in was simply too irresistible to turn-down. At first it was very liberating to be part of a world where unhappiness was the norm-no fake smiles. But then I found that I was becoming trapped in a cycle of despair that was encouraged-wear black, no smiling. It became suffocating .I do love the city, don’t get me wrong. It’s refreshing to have this portal of gloom, where smiling is un-cool and no one has to pretend. But sometimes, it’s just too restrictive. I guess I’d like more option and freedom to be happy when I want to be,” says a lanky, but pretty woman with long dark hair.

“Well. Thank you all very much for your opinions, we’ll take everyone’s views on board and use them to improve this group, and if we have Prince Calix’s support, the City. We’re running a bit low on time, so I’d like to wrap it up there. Any questions?”

“Yes, how long do you intend to run this group? I don’t fancy having to come here very often,” asks Anita looking around in disdain.

“I’m not quite sure to be honest. Any ideas Your Majesty?” asks Frank, looking at Calix.

“As long as it takes to reunite our city,” Calix says.

“Yes, quite as the Prince says. We want to establish order. Okay, so if that’s all the questions. Thank you so very much for coming and I’ll see you all again next week,” says Frank Speakman.

“Wow Calix. That was intense!” I say, as we walk out together holding hands.

“I think there is *a lot* of work to be done here. There’s huge differences in opinion and a stubbornness on behalf of both groups. A compromise is definitely needed but Dad will never agree to one. I’m sure he wouldn’t even approve of group meetings like this. When he gets back from wherever he’s been, he’ll be furious. I know it,” says Calix, looking worried.

When I return home from the city, I think of how it’s changed since I first entered it.

I wonder where the king is and I’m perplexed by Frederic’s silence at the meeting. He’s a charismatic character and I’m sure everyone would have been intrigued by what he had to say. While he looked interested and seemed to concentrate intently, his brooding and mysterious nature prevailed. Although maybe he found it difficult to get a word in anywhere, what with Anita and the Smiley doing most of the talking.

Suddenly I get a text from Calix ‘Home safe in palace. Dads back, business trip apparently. Oh Joy! Catch U tomorrow. C, xx.’

‘Ha-ha, rather U than me! C U tomorrow babe. Seren, xx,’ I reply.

I wonder if the King already knows about the divide or will Calix have to fill him in. I fall asleep looking forward to new gossip in school tomorrow.

## Chapter Thirteen.

### Love and War

We sat a test in sociology. I found that it went well, the only problem being that I was running out of time as I had so many theories to cover. We have no break today ,we started school later than usual to make up for this, so it's straight to lunch. I go to find Calix. I see the back of his head, framed with his wondrous thick hair.

"Calix !" I call out to him. When he turns around ,I am shocked.

His eyes have dark circles underneath them and look red and puffy as though he has been crying.

"Seren," he says quietly.

I rush over to him.

"Calix, what's wrong? You look awful," I say, realizing as I get closer that even at his worst, he still looks better than most people at their best.

"Oh, yeah. I guess I've had a rough night," he says, not elaborating.

"Why, what's happened? Let's go somewhere quiet to talk about this," I say ,grasping his hand, leading him to the library.

We sit in the corner, as far away from everyone else as we can get. I'm starting to feel concerned why he seems so reluctant to talk about what's wrong.

"Calix, please tell me why you seem so upset. I've never seen you like this before," I say gently, putting my hand on top of his.

He shakes his head and remains silent and is reluctant to make eye contact with me.

"Please Calix, you really are starting to worry me now," I say urgently.

"I can't tell you Seren. It would upset you too much," he says finally, looking every inch a broken prince.

"Upset me? Let me guess, this is to do with your Father again. One night back and he's already



causing havoc. Look at the state you're in," I say bluntly.

He sighs.

"It's to do with him, yes," he says before returning to silence again.

"Frankly it's upsetting me more that you're keeping it a secret. I'm imagining all sorts. Just tell me, no matter how devastating the news is. My heart is beating so fast and my hands are shaking from worry," I say truthfully.

"Okay, okay. We can't get married. Dads banned non-citizens such as you, from marrying citizens such as me," he says.

"Oh is that *it*? Calix just recruit me and I can be a citizen," I say, not getting why he's making such a big deal out of this.

"That's where he's been clever Seren. You can now only become a citizen of the City of the Broken if you are born one or personally recruited by the king," he says.

"What? You mean you no longer have the power to recruit," I say frantically.

"Exactly," he says.

"This man is insane. He'll stop at nothing until he's ruined us. The city's divided and *still* all he cares about is our relationship! Why am I such a threat, now that the Smiley's are bringing happiness to the city?" I ask enraged, tears streaming down my cheeks.

"That's what I don't understand myself. He didn't want us to marry in case we encouraged happiness .But the Pro-Happiness group is the biggest threat at the moment, not you," he says, bemused.

"Oh he'll soon have them under control. But if the *prince* was happy ,then that would be the end. He knows what he's doing. You are the figurehead ,the symbol of the city. *You* are all that matters," I say furiously.

"Yes ,I think that could be his logic .He views The Smiley's as irrelevant and rather powerless but I think he underestimates them sometimes," he says, thinking deeply.

"Oh Calix. I'm devastated. Yes, I'm perfectly happy as your fiancée. But I truly wanted to be your wife. Our wedding is off," I say.

“I know. I’m so sorry Seren. Don’t give up on us, that’s the only way he’ll win. We still have each other .He can’t spoil our happiness by preventing marriage,” says Calix convincingly.

“I was just so looking forward to our wedding and now he’s spoilt that .But yes, you’re right. He can’t stop our love and if he thinks he can, he’s a fool. Did you tell him about the group meeting?” I ask, changing the subject, as I wipe away my tears.

“No way! He’d only ban that as well. I mentioned the divide but shockingly he didn’t seem that concerned. All I had last night was ‘you can’t marry that girl Calix’ and ‘you can’t recruit anymore’ ,” he says.

“That’s probably where he’s been. Arranging for those new laws and rules to be brought in,” I say.

“You know, sometimes I think this isn’t about happiness and the city, but *love* .It’s almost like he doesn’t want anyone else to be in love since he lost his wife. It’s almost envy,” says Calix.

“You really think he’s that bitter?” I ask, uncertain that I agree with this idea.

“Yes. If he can’t have someone to love, then neither can anyone else. Of course I could be wrong, but it’s my theory,” he says.

“Has he told you of his plans in reuniting the city?” I ask, interested in what the king’s strategy will be in defeating the Pro-Happiness parade.

“He didn’t mention anything. And it’s less reunite and more like ‘destroy the enemy’ with him,” says Calix as we head back to class.

In psychology ,it finally hits me that I’m not getting married. *Now* I feel broken. I also feel a great deal of sympathy and admiration for Calix. He has so much to deal with, both as a son and a prince and yet he manages to remain just and sensible himself .I can understand now why he’d just like to be ‘normal’. He’s beautiful, talented, intelligent and he’s royalty. It would seem he has it all, but does he really? I wonder if my Calix has ever felt carefree .Has he ever laughed so hard it hurts or not had the burden of his father and the responsibility of the city on his shoulders? Life is always seriousness for him and the thought makes me sad. Maybe he’d be

more privileged if he was normal .He could marry who he wants, not worry what the public or the press thought, not have to organize groups and attend meetings all the time and he could just be *himself*. Despite his fortunate circumstances, Calix could sometimes appear quite tragic.

After class, I walk with Calix through the car park, where Alfred is waiting with the Rolls-Royce.

“Now Calix, you’ve got to start standing up to your father. He’s a control freak-changing laws to prevent you from getting married. When you get home, be sure not to let him push you around,” I tell him forcefully ,fed up of fighting this impossible problem.

“I do stand up to him all the time Seren. I’m forever trying to make him see reason, but it’s no use. I’ve tried and failed to change his mind so many times in the past, that it feels pointless to even attempt to again. He just ignores me and sometimes my complaints to him can even make the problem worse,” he says, seemingly tormented by the topic of his father.

“This man is ruining my life. I would never have thought it possible that one human alone could be such a barrier to bliss,” I say, shaking my head.

“He really is the most unreasonable man ever, I know. I’m going to work on some ideas for next week’s reuniting group tonight, but maybe you can come to the city tomorrow and we can show Dad that our love is still going strong,” smiles Calix, trying to make me feel better.

“You never stop, do you Calix? It’s an irony that such a horrible man could have such a kind and altruistic son. Yeah I’ll come tomorrow, but I don’t care what your Dad thinks about us. I’ll come because I want to come, not to put on a show for him,” I say.

“See you tomorrow then,” he says, leaning in to kiss me, instantly cheering me up in a way that talk alone never could. But I still feel the sting that my wedding has been robbed from me.

I wave and as he drives away, in my melancholic state, it’s only now I realize the hearse-like quality of his car.

I walk home, past the cemetery where the married couples lie, the lucky ones in life, who I suppose didn’t have an overbearing parent preventing them from becoming one flesh. Walking

through the City of the Broken is like walking through a cemetery at night-eerie, forbidden yet morbidly beautiful.

I'm still wearing my engagement ring and will continue to do so. We can't be husband and wife but he cannot stop us from being engaged. I do wonder whether or not the King would have been a likeable person when his wife was still alive. Heartbreak and grief can change a person and must make life hard to deal with sometimes, but is that really an excuse to be so corrupt and cruel to others, especially one's own son? I don't think so.

After school ,I head alone through the gates of the Broken to meet Calix, who left early as he's so busy with the plans for the meeting. I'm eagerly looking forward to the next showdown between the citizens, finding a dark delight in the drama akin to those who used to go to public hangings.

Calix is meeting me by the black columns of the Bank of the Broken. As I walk to our meeting place, I note that there are far fewer citizens dressed in bright colours and exhibiting smiles than the last time I visited. I presume this has something to do with the kings return. I spot Calix leaning against a pillar, with dark shades on looking like a male model posing noncommittally for a gothic fashion shoot .As I get closer, I realize he looks a little stressed out. "Hey Calix, are you okay?" I ask him and he looks more relaxed when he sees me. "Yes Seren. Don't worry, I' m fine. I'm just really busy organizing everything ,this on top of school and dealing with Dad. Hey, I've come up with an idea and I'd like to know your opinion before I start to work on it," he says, eyes illuminating with the light bulb of innovation. "Okay, go ahead," I say intrigued and flattered that Calix wants to know my opinion. "I want to do a public vote on whether people are Pro-Happiness or Pro-Despair. Public in the sense that it won't be limited to group members only. It'll include anyone who's a citizen. It will also be anonymous, which I think is important as it'll encourage people to vote. What do you think?" he asks leaning in, eager for my answer.

I pause for a moment to think before answering.

“Well it’s an interesting idea I guess Calix, to know what the opinion of the majority is. But what are your intentions when you discover the result of the vote? And we have to bring it back to the main problem again-what about your Dad? If it’s a public vote, he’s going to know about it!” I say, still not completely certain of Calix’s idea.

“The intention Seren is to show Dad the City’s *true* feelings. If there is a landslide vote either way, the city will need to follow that direction. I see myself as a modern prince and I’m not opposed to change .I *want* Dad to know what the public *really* think, and I think this is the best way to do it,” he says exuberantly.

“That could work out well in theory I suppose Calix but it could also backfire, if there’s not a landslide, it could divide this city even more and enrage your father to the point where he’ll take serious action,” I say concerned Calix hasn’t thought this seemingly democratic idea through enough.

He considers what I’ve said, looking slightly perturbed I’ve highlighted weaknesses in his idea.

“I do see your point Seren, but to be honest I think this city is already divided in a detrimental way and a vote couldn’t cause much more harm. Dad can do a lot, but even he can’t argue with the majority. If there’s not a huge difference between the results then I don’t really think the vote will make much difference, people will stick to their chosen side and Dad will continue to oppose any changes to the city,” he says ,still confident in his idea.

“With regards to the divide Calix, when I was walking through the city today I’m convinced there were much less people wearing colour and looking happy. Why is this?” I ask.

“Dad’s had wearing bright clothing made into a criminal offence, many of The Smiley’s have been arrested. That’s one thing I am concerned about as this could have a substantial impact on the vote Seren as a lot of Pro-Happiness members are now in hiding or in jail,” he says.

“Will the Pro-Happiness members come to your group this week now that they’ve been criminalized?” I ask feeling sympathetic towards The Smiley’s as I don’t think they deserve such harsh treatment.

“Well prior to Dads return I had people giving out flyers and advertisements in newspapers for

my group, but I think that at the moment it's absolutely essential it's kept a secret and that as many Pro-Happiness group members as possible come without the fear of being arrested or getting into trouble by attending," he says, fair and just as always.

"So how are you going to organize it this week, if you can't advertise?" I ask.

"Well all the group members from last week know the time and place to attend ,but since they wrote their details down I'll contact all of them to reassure them that it's okay for them to come," he says kindly.

"Surely though, a Pro-Despair citizen at the meeting will report them to the King? They are enemies after all," I say, concerned that this meeting will result in a siege.

"That's a possibility. I'll ask the Pro-Happiness group to dress casually and not to wear bright colours, for their own safety, not because I have any allegiance to the Pro-Despair group.

Hopefully they'll believe my motives to be sincere," he says altruistically.

My Calix, noble by blood, noble in heart.

## Chapter Fourteen.

### The Black Hospital

I dress neutral to attend the secret City Reunited meeting, while last time I leant far more toward Pro-Despair, the oppression of The Smiley's makes me want to champion the underdog, but since it's now illegal to dress colourfully, I opt for causal-white t-shirt and black skirt. I spot Calix at the entrance of the community centre, it seems he had similar ideas to me in terms of dress. He's wearing black jeans and a light blue shirt, much different from his usual all-black outfits. I assume he's done it to help make The Smiley's feel more relaxed.

"How's the turn out Calix?" I ask, aware that as I'm late, the majority of the group should already be here.

"Bad. Three Smiley's who are leaders of the Pro-Happiness movement are not here, although I've been informed that two of them have been arrested. Anita is also absent and there is a lot of hostility between the two groups," he says, looking worried.

"What, more than last time?" I ask, not believing that this group could get any more hostile.

"Yes, last time was tame compared to the furore that just occurred in there. And don't forget this is meant to be a *secret* meeting. I was hoping for quiet and stealthy, not a brawl that could be heard a mile off," he says ,sweat running down his brow.

"Oh Calix, don't fret. We all knew this meeting was going to be a little chaotic. Why isn't Anita here?" I ask, wondering if the less than stylish venue was too much for her to endure more than once.

"No idea. I did ask Frederick but he remained silent and looked like he didn't want to talk about her," he says.

"Perhaps they've split up?" I suggest.

"Maybe. Let's go inside, we're missing all the action out here," he says, grabbing my hand.

As we walk in, I'm aware there is an atmosphere of hatred. The Smiley's that are here

look extremely anxious, as though they feel they are putting themselves in immense danger.

Frederick looks on guard, as if he's hiding a dark secret that he doesn't want anyone to know.

We take our seats. Frank Speakman looks flustered and horrified, as if amazed by the arguments that happened before I arrived.

"Right, we all know it's been a little hectic in here today. But if you can all calm down, we can try and get back to sensibly discussing the issues at hand," says Frank, trying to establish order.

One group member, who I think is a Smiley dressed in the guise of an ordinary citizen, speaks up.

"Why is this group necessary anymore? The divide that was here last week exists no more. The King is yet again forcing us to be broken, making colour and joy illegal. Since he has criminalized the Pro-Happiness movement and all we stand for, I really don't see the point in you holding future meetings," she says in a calm but dejected voice.

"That is an excellent point. Prince Calix, do you think there is any point in holding the meeting anymore?" asks Frank.

"While I acknowledge that Dad has changed laws to criminalize the Smileys, he cannot change peoples beliefs. I think that the argument that erupted today is evidence of that. There is continuing resentment and the whole point of this group is to reunite the city, to get us to work together and value each other as fellow citizens. It isn't about changing people views. Therefore I still think it's necessary, perhaps even more so than last week," says Calix charismatically.

"I'd like to speak in support of the city," says Frederick, his eyes intense and mysterious.

"Go ahead, please," says Frank, looking a little awe-struck, as though he greatly admires Frederick.

"This is a wonderful city. It's a city that has its own values, its own culture. A city with an individuality that sets it apart from the rest. This city changed and perhaps saved my life. I represent it and it represents me. Who would want to change it? If you want happiness and colour, go to another city where you can legitimately embrace this without interference. Leave the city as it is, the way it was meant to be. That's all I have to say on the matter," he says,



returning to his sullen yet enigmatic silence.

A number of group members clap, cheer and whistle in agreement with what Frederick has just said. I think that I also agree with him. Yes the King can be harsh, but what makes this city remarkable is its uniqueness. The Smiley's want to make it the same as everywhere else and in some ways that would be a shame.

"Everyone has this idea that we want to drastically change this city. We don't, we just want to promote the freedom and *choice* to be happy and wear colour if you *choose*. At the moment people are forced, now by law, to be gloomy and miserable all the time. I think that's wrong. I think that's dictatorship," says The Smiley forcefully, reaffirming her point.

"Okay, well both points are relevant and thank you both for speaking up so that the group can see two sides to the argument. You there, young lady, we've never heard from you before. Would you like to add something?" asks Frank, motioning to me.

Suddenly everyone's eyes are on me and I glance towards Calix, not sure if I should speak as I'm not a citizen. Calix whispers 'go on', encouraging me to say something.

"I'm very fond of this city. Yes it's eerie and dark but that's what makes it special. I can see why The Smiley's feel frustrated. The King is nuts, but I think that it's the *King* who's the problem, not the city," I say shakily.

Calix smiles and says 'good job', although I'm aware that he looks a combination of amused, embarrassed and shocked at my public King-bashing speech.

"Thank you for that," says Frank animatedly.

"Well. Everyone's had their say. There are so few of us here today that I'll think we'll wrap it up a little earlier than planned. Here again, same time next week then I suppose. Thank you all for coming," says Frank.

"I'd just like to add that this meeting is now strictly confidential .If the King finds out about this group, he'll have the meetings stopped. So I'll ask everyone to keep your attendance here secret and be wary of telling anyone about this group. Please understand that this step is necessary for

the safety and well being of all group members. We can only achieve positive steps if we can keep these group meetings going for a consistent period. Thank you all again,” says Calix.

As we leave the meeting, Calix walks alongside Frederick.

“How’s Anita Freddie, will she be here next week?” asks Calix in an almost concerned tone.

I’m baffled why he seems so worried.

Frederick remains silent and looks away.

“Frederick! It’s the ballet, isn’t it?” asks Calix, more demanding and less friendly this time.

“Yes Calix. If you really want to know, it finally happened. The way we always knew it would,”

Frederick finally snaps. I have no idea what they mean.

“What’s happened to Anita?” I ask, now worried myself, but they both ignore me.

“They took her then?” he asks.

“Yes,” says Frederick, blocking all his emotion. He becomes cold and robotic. His eyes hiding a sadness, a dark memory that fascinates me, just as much as Anita’s disappearance.

“When Frederick? When did they take her?” asks Calix, frantically.

“Last night. She was there at the ballet, as usual. Every single performance. Then sometime during the interval she began crying and screaming manically. The Theatre staff led her out as she was disturbing the other audience members. But she didn’t stop. The crying, the screaming continued. She kept saying ‘My broken dream, my broken purpose’ over and over again, so I’ve been told. So the Theatre staff, not knowing what to do and being unable to contact me as I was training and had switched my phone off, called The Black Hospital. They came to collect her in an ambulance and that’s where she is now,” he says, looking almost ashamed.

“Oh poor Anita,” I say feeling sad for her.

“I hate to say it, but if I’m honest it’s a relief. She was like an addict. We had no relationship.

Her only love was that ballet. We barely saw each other and when we did, she’d only ever talk about the performances,” he says sadly.

“Why didn’t you leave her?” asks Calix.

“I wanted to. I had to stop myself everyday from calling her to say this wasn’t working. But I felt sympathetic towards her. She’s a shattered human, as am I myself, but I channel it into a better form than she does. I needed to protect her, from something like this happening. I guess it wasn’t enough. If I didn’t have Black Ball, I would end up the same as her,” he says.

“I’m sorry Freddie, really I am. I knew something was wrong when Anita didn’t come. Unless she was at the ballet, I could think of no other reason for her to miss the meeting. I always feared this would happen to her. I saw her eyes at the ballet. I could see she had become a zombie, a shadow,” says Calix, sadly.

“We all knew it would happen one day. The only person who didn’t was probably Anita herself. She believes herself to be a Prima-Ballerina, not a woman having a nervous breakdown because she was never the girl she thought shed be,” says Frederick.

“Do you think that they can help her?” I ask, trying to see the situation from a positive angle.

“No. It’s kind of a taboo to ever talk about that place, but unofficially everyone in this city knows that the hospital is where people go to die-metaphorically, if not literally. It’s for those with no hope. Those who are too broken to even be broken citizens. It’s a prison, not a hospital,” he says strongly.

“Frederick we must help her. What you say about that place is true and we can’t leave her there. Anita is troubled, I won’t deny it, but being in a place surrounded by people who are much worse than she is isn’t going to help her,” says Calix.

“But what can we do? They’ll never let her out. They don’t let *anyone* out,” says Frederick.

“We’ll have to break her out. She needs us, or she’ll be stuck there forever,” says Calix, sounding worried.

Frederick, Calix and I get into the back of the Rolls-Royce and Alfred is instructed to drive us to the Black Hospital. He doesn’t question this command, but answers simply “Very well, Your Majesty.”

The Black Hospital is situated at the top of a hill. As we drive nearer, the surroundings

become more sinister. Crows line the roads and high walls block every escape route. The gate to the hospital is locked and a sign reads 'No Entry or Exit'. It feels more like a high security prison than a hospital.

"How are we supposed to get in Calix?" I ask.

Calix, for once, looks clueless.

"How do the visitors get in?" asks Calix, baffled.

"There are no visitors. I phoned this morning. They won't let me see her," says Frederick hopelessly.

As we all stare helplessly at the lock on the gate, Alfred steps out of the car.

"Are you troubled by the lock Your Majesty?" asks Alfred.

"Yes. We can't get in Alfred," Calix says.

"I hope you don't think that I'm interfering in your affairs Your Highness, but I can quite easily pick that lock if I had a small pin," says Alfred modestly.

"Really Alfred? That would be amazing. Where can I find a pin? We'll have to go back to the palace to get one," says Calix irritated.

"I have a hair grip," I say, removing a light brown hair pin which was camouflaged in my hair.

"Brilliant Seren. Will this do Alfred?" asks Calix, handing it to Alfred.

"I think this might just do...the trick," he says as the open lock falls to the ground.

"Alfred, you are a genius! Where did you learn to do that?" asks Calix, impressed by Alfred's hidden devious side.

"The King likes to make sure I'm prepared for all possible circumstances Your Majesty," says Alfred professionally and humbly.

I smile and we walk through the gate. Alfred remains behind with the car, although I think it would be useful to have him with us.

"Okay, be very quiet everyone. Remember we are not supposed to be here," whispers Calix.

The moon shines brightly, illuminating everything and usually it makes me feel safe, but not here. The very building is traumatic to look at, as though it holds the memory of every patient

past and present ,their desperation to escape entrenched in its walls.

As we get closer ,I realize there are bars on every window. I hear distant cries of ‘Help, help me’ and someone frantically rattling the bars. ‘Let me out.’

“Is that Anita?” I ask.

“It could be anyone. Who would want to stay locked in there?” says Frederick, his eyes gleaming with a distant terror.

“This is such a horrible place. A house of shame and anguish. If Anita’s dream wasn’t dead already, it certainly will be here,” says Calix looking shocked, like he didn’t expect this hospital to be so awful.

“It’s a living death. It’s like they’ve buried those people alive. I don’t think they are screaming because they are mad, I think they are screaming because they are trapped and know they will never get out,” I say, short of breath.

I didn’t expect to feel so afraid or hopeless, but being near this hospital make me feel exactly that. Even in a graveyard there is a sense of peace, but here there is only torment and agony.

“How are we to know which room she is in? There are so many windows, many on the second and third floors. We should have brought a ladder with us,” says Frederick.

“I agree. We really haven’t thought this through. How are we going to get Anita out of this horrid place?” I ask.

“I don’t know. Let’s try calling for her first. That’s the most obvious and easiest step,” says Calix.

“Wait! What about the hospital staff, they are bound to hear us and then they’ll know we are here and we’ll have to leave without Anita,” says Frederick, sounding alarmed.

“Okay .Stupid plan. Seren, do you have any ideas?” he asks.

“Actually Calix, I do. It struck me all of a sudden that the only thing Anita pays attention to and cares about is ballet,” I say, believing my plan to be that of a mastermind.

“And?” asks Calix, not understanding the relevance.

“If we play ballet music, or if I pretend to be a ballerina, maybe she’ll come to the window and

we'll at least know which room she's in," I say confidently.

"That's a good plan. Although I don't have any ballet music and I think creating any noise would be a disaster, so try dancing Seren please!" says Frederick.

"I'll dance, if you two do as well. But how will she know we are dancing if she can't hear the music?" I ask.

"I'll hazard a guess the rooms in there are tiny, if she isn't already at the window, our dancing will draw her there. Any movement will make her curious. She'll have nothing better to do than observe what's going on," says Calix.

"What if she's sleeping?" I ask

"She may be. But it's worth a shot. Come on, I have no better ideas," says Calix, as he leaps into movement, passing quite readily as a male ballet dancer. Graceful, supple, beautiful.

Frederick clearly isn't comfortable dancing, but he joins in nonetheless, showing his commitment to Anita. I have no idea how to dance. I twirl around, pointing my toes, trying to remember whatever it was I learnt when my Mother took me to ballet classes aged four.

Suddenly I become aware of a white figure standing at the first floor hospital window. I feel panicked that it might be a nurse, but I twirl with glee when I realize it's Anita. Frederick has also noticed. I tap Calix who is dancing wildly and hasn't yet realized she's there. Anita stares intently, entranced as she was at the Black Ballet. I've never seen her look so awful. Her usually perfectly styled hair hangs long, greasy and lank at her waist. Frederick walks to the window, she stares blankly like she doesn't recognize him, like he's blocking the view of the ballet.

"Anita. It's okay. I'm here now, we've come to rescue you," says Frederick.

He turns to face us.

"How am I going to get these bars off the window?" asks Frederick.

Calix and Frederick spend the next half hour pulling frantically at the bars. I act as a look out, whilst continuing my ballet moves whenever Anita walks away from the window, in case she calls a member of staff.

She clearly is obsessed by ballet. Sometimes she begins to look tired, bored or confused but when I start dancing she becomes alive, a wildfire ignited in her eyes.

“This would have been easier if we’d brought the car,” says Calix.

“Yes but they’d hear that,” says Frederick.

Suddenly, both Calix and Frederick fall backwards as the bars have finally been yanked off the window. Anita continues her blank, bewildered stare.

“Okay, we need Anita to step back from the window,” says Calix covered in mud, holding a large rock in his hand.

“I don’t consider myself a vandal who indulges in criminal damage but in this case I’ll make an exception,” he says.

I stop dancing. We hide and wait so that Anita will get bored and walk away from the window.

When she finally does, dancing around the room (tall and elegant like a new born gazelle despite her un-brushed hair), Calix throws the rock.

Alarms go off, seemingly everywhere. The window is smashed. Frederick jumps through and grabs a screaming Anita.

He carries her, as we all run faster than we thought ourselves ever capable of, across the lawn, away from the nightmare hospital. As we do, I can hear voices behind us.

“Stop them!”

“They are kidnapping a patient!”

And I realize they think *we* are the cruel people, doing a bad deed. They think they are helping those people and that’s difficult to come to terms with.

“My legs feel like they are going to drop off,” I say to Calix, who nods in agreement.

Frederick has a ruthless determination in his eyes, the same look he has when he’s playing a Black Ball game. Anita is crying, but she’s looking at Frederick lovingly this time, like she knows who he is and is happy he’s here.

We run through the gate with the picked lock. Alfred sees us and starts the car,

presumably realizing we are in a great hurry. Calix gets in the front. I go in the back with Anita and Frederick.

“Oh Frederick. I’m so glad you saved me from that dreadful prison. I thought I’d die there,” says Anita, hugging him. Even though her hair is a mess and she has a long white nightgown on, she looks beautiful, like a mannequin or porcelain doll.

The car screeches, taking off at an alarming speed. As we drive further on, I start to hear a siren. I look behind and I can see that a black ambulance is chasing us.

“They’re after us. Drive faster Alfred please,” says Calix.

“Right, Your Majesty,” nods Alfred, cool and calm as ever, showing no emotion, only following his order.

“They’ll know who we are Calix. This is the royal Rolls Royce. They’ll see your number plate,” I say, concerned.

“I don’t care Seren. I just care that Anita is safe. Besides I’m the Prince. Now I’ve seen that hospital for myself, I want some *big* changes brought about,” says Calix seriously.

I did forget momentarily that Calix was no ordinary criminal. He could shut that hospital tomorrow if he wanted to.

“Are we going to see the ballet?” asks Anita, hopefully.

“No Anita. We’re going home. Forget about the ballet please,” says Fredrick in despair that even after all she’s been through ,it’s still all she cares about.

Alfred cuts rapidly down a little lane and we lose the ambulance.

“Just taking a shortcut,” he reassures the passengers.

“To the ballet?” enquires Anita and this time she is ignored.

We drop Anita and Frederick off at Frederick’s penthouse apartment.

“Are you sure you’ll be okay?” asks Calix.

“I will .I’ll take care of Anita, don’t worry,” says Frederick, still carrying her. His determination evident in his dark eyes.



“Call immediately if anything goes wrong,” says Calix forcefully.

“If *they* show up asking to have her back you mean. Yes, I’ll call. But I’ll take care of myself,” he says, fiercely independent, as ever.

Calix climbs into the back of the car with me.

“This day has certainly been eventful,” he says, as Alfred drives slowly.

“Indeed. I won’t lie, I found it comical to be in a car chase with an ambulance,” I giggle.

“Me too. I was glad I was in the front of the car, because I was sniggering as we drove away from the hospital. Frederick would have hated that, he takes everything very seriously,” says Calix.

Calix gets Alfred to drive me home.

“Do you think Anita will ever return to her usual self or do you think she’s finally snapped?” I ask him, still amazed at her rapid downward spiral.

“Well I was astonished at how bad a state she was in when we saw her at the hospital. I wasn’t expecting her to be so lost and bewildered, I felt certain that the real Anita was gone for good but when we started to drive away ,I could see fragments of her personality resurface. I think there is hope for her. She just needs support and to be around people like Frederick who have her best interests at heart. As long as she’s away from the hospital of doom, I think that’s all that matters,” he smiles.

“Yes, I think she’ll improve now she’s away from there. Thanks for giving me such an exciting and unforgettable day Calix. As scary as it was ,it certainly gave me an adrenaline rush like no other being chased by nurses and running what felt like a marathon on hospital grounds,” I say smiling, as I depart from the car and kiss Calix goodbye.

Even though Anita is at present hardly a person to feel envious of, seeing her and Frederick together, living in the same home without interruption from a possessive parent made me long for Calix and I to be married. Calix is almost in a jail, like that hospital, himself. Only he’s in a jail disguised as a luxurious palace. Frederick has his own place, he can do whatever he wants and he doesn’t need anyone’s permission. He doesn’t have to be on his guard and explain

himself to anyone the way Calix does, even though they are both in the public eye. Sometimes I think it would be so much easier if Calix wasn't a prince, and especially not the Prince of the Broken.

## Chapter Fifteen.

### Gloomsday

As I lie in bed, the muscles in my legs ache from all that running. I feel exhausted but I can't sleep. A sudden, overwhelming desperation washes over me. I need to marry Calix. I need to be with him always. I hate only seeing him at school and for a couple of hours at the city. I want to live with him, share every memory, every moment. I would do anything. Yes, I'd even go personally to The King to ask him if I can become a citizen. But of course, that would be pointless because The King only limited who can become a citizen in the first place to stop us from getting married. The situation is so hopeless. I fall asleep from the lullaby that is my racing thoughts and my longing.

When I wake up, I'm still tired, although the daylight and morning rush to get ready means my yearning has at least lessened. Busyness is a cure for everything. I don't understand people who moan about assignments, work and thinking are our only protection from pain and heartache. I shouldn't feel so negative. I still have Calix, the one I love, that's all that matters.

I hear the sound of a car horn outside. I look out of the window and to my surprise and delight, Calix has come to pick me up. I quickly grab my bag of books, turn the bathroom light off and go outside.

"Hey, I wasn't expecting you," I smile.

"Well I wasn't planning on picking you up Seren but I couldn't face staying in the city this morning, so I left early and thought I may as well give you a ride," he says chirpily.

"Why didn't you want to stay in the city?" I ask.

"It's all over the news. 'Prince Calix and Black Ball star Frederick Forefront in hospital kidnap and car chase.' Dads been on at me all morning, saying that I'm creating a negative reputation for the Royal Family of the Broken," he says, trying to look annoyed, but with a flicker of

amusement lingering underneath.

“I could have predicted that. Will you get into trouble? What about Frederick and Anita, the hospital staff haven’t taken her back there have they?” I ask, hoping that our efforts were not in vain.

“Frederick sent me a text in the early hours of this morning. He and Anita have had to go into hiding. He didn’t even tell *me* where, but says they are both safe and that he will keep me updated. As for me, well I don’t know. What I did was wrong by law. Maybe that was another factor in me leaving the city early,” he says, looking a little afraid.

“And Alfred the getaway driver, harbouring The City of the Broken’s most wanted criminal,” I snigger.

“Hey! You were in on this too don’t forget. And I think Frederick is the most wanted not me,” he says teasingly.

“Yes, but I won’t get into trouble because I’m not a citizen,” I say, stressing the point that’s been bugging me all night.

We drive to school and wave Alfred goodbye as we walk through the doors. Alfred doesn’t drive through the gates of the Broken city as I expect, but remains parked in the school car park.

“He’s not going to stay there all day to wait for you Calix, is he?” I ask, thinking Alfred’s dedication to service is a little extreme.

“He doesn’t usually. I genuinely think he feels he has committed a terrible crime because he was our driver and helped pick the lock to get into the hospital. Poor Alfred, he’s so old fashioned and proper. He’s probably too ashamed and afraid to head back to the city alone,” says Calix, truthfully.

“I hope your Father won’t fire him,” I say, knowing how the King’s mind works.

“Me too. He’s likely to blame the whole thing on anyone but me, even Alfred who’s been employed by Dad even before I was born. Alfred did surprise me though, when he participated in something as dodgy as picking a lock,” laughs Calix.

“Yeah. But I think he saw it as assisting the prince rather than aiding a kidnap,” I snigger.

At lunchtime in school, I walk to the library to meet Calix. He's sitting at a desk which is covered with a wide stretch of paper.

"What are you up to Calix? Not plotting any more criminal activity I hope," I say.

When I'm close enough, I can see a title that reads 'Plan for Reuniting the City' stretched out before him. It looks complex, a plan of someone who is highly articulate and skilled. A plan of someone who knows what he wants. A plan of Calix's.

"The City Reunited group has accomplished little. I really need to take a drastic step. The city needs order and harmony and Dad isn't doing enough, he's just making it worse. So I'm taking matters into my own hands," says Calix, sounding stressed and overworked.

I stare at his beautiful face, I think that by now I know it off by heart. But I always discover a new depth, angle or complexity that I never knew to be there. Calix has a face that seems to be forever changing, an essence I could never truly grasp. Even though I probably know him better than anyone, I still sometimes feel I don't know him at all. Sometimes I think he's so handsome it's intimidating, then other times I think he's a little lost boy, with a cloud of sorrow following him around continuously, never letting him be. He's such a complex person, difficult to understand. This spectrum of qualities, this ungraspable nature of him is what fascinates me most. It's the reason that I want him and no one else.

"Calix. I want us to get married. I understand your concern about the city, but please let's just concentrate on us," I say, feeling that sometimes I come second to The City of the Broken.

He pauses and looks intently at me for a moment.

"Yes Seren, I want that too. Please don't feel that I don't care about us, you are all I think about even when I'm focusing on the city. But the reason we aren't married already still exists.

There's nothing I can do. I'm sorry," he says, stroking my hair and then hugging me as a tear runs down my cheek.

I always know that when Calix doesn't have an answer to a problem, then no one does.

We are not getting married. That's it. So I have to just forget about the whole idea and focus on Calix. Which is a vicious cycle that only leads me back to thinking about marriage. I talk about

issues relating to the city to distract myself from my own heartache.

“Why do you think the City Reunited group isn’t achieving much? Everyone is dedicated to it,”

I say, feigning interest and enthusiasm.

“It’s just a group where people vent their opinions, an outlet for anger. I thought we’d all work together to achieve progress, but it’s not happening .Nothing constructive is coming out of the group,” he says moodily.

“So what exactly are your plans for the City?” I ask, glancing towards his plan.

“Well this isn’t going to involve the group. I might ask their opinions on certain aspects, but largely I’m going to do this alone. The vote is one idea obviously, I’ve arranged for that to take place this week. There will be a voting booth and people will go in anonymously and tick whether they consider themselves Pro-Happiness or Pro-Despair .There won’t be a neutral option this time. I want an extreme result so that I know how the majority really feel,” says Calix forcefully.

“Do people need to register to vote?” I ask, considering the technicalities.

“No. But they do need to be citizens of the City of the Broken. Sorry you can’t vote Seren, but it’s only fair that the vote is limited to actual citizens, who have to live in the city *everyday*,” he says sympathetically.

“What else is in your plan?” I ask.

“I’m printing leaflets and organizing awareness campaigns, to try and end discrimination against opposing groups and end this divide. I’ll be sending a copy of my leaflet

‘Pro-Togetherness :We are *all* citizens’ to everyone in the city which I hope will help the two groups understand each other and relate to each other more, whilst reaching a much larger audience than what the City Reunited group has done,” he says.

“I’ve never known anyone who multi-tasks as much as you Calix. I find school alone full on, but you somehow find time for that, running a city, rescuing hospital patients from a fate worse than death and not forgetting the full time job that is going home every night to your father. You deserve a medal,” I say, feeling astonished that such a remarkable human being is actually my

fiancé.

“Seren don’t flatter me. It’s not that hard, it’s more about time-management. Okay, wait-dealing with Dad is very hard, I won’t deny that .Yes I do deserve a medal for that,” he smiles.

“Or at least the free will to marry who you choose,” I say.

“Yes that true. But really, you don’t pay attention to how wonderful and unique you are Seren. But I do. I can’t comprehend how you are so understanding, adaptable and above all true to yourself,” he says, looking genuinely intrigued and dazzled by my supposed qualities.

“I don’t really know what you mean. Why adaptable, understanding? Yes, I suppose I am true to myself,” I say recognizing the latter feature of my personality.

“You don’t seem overly fazed that I’m a prince. You aren’t frightened by the fact that I rule over a dark and tormented city. You are even moderately accepting of my unbearable-to-be-around father. That surprised me, shocked me even. I never thought I could find a girl like you,” he says lovingly.

“You make it all sound so simple Calix, but it’s not .When I found out that you were a prince I was shell-shocked(when I finally believed you, though of course I didn’t at first).I found the city overwhelming when I first visited, sometimes I still do. And please let’s not even pretend that I accept your Father .Put up with just so that I can be with his perfect son, yes,” I correct him.

Sometimes I think Calix really doesn’t understand that everyday when I wake up, I think I must be having a recurring dream fused with a nightmare that I’m dating a prince who rules over broken people.

“Still Seren, you stuck through it. You and I are still together, despite your initial and continuing doubts. That shows true courage and perseverance ,another two traits I admire in you,” he says.

“Yeah I guess you’re right, but I think you vastly overestimate my qualities. So when is this vote taking place? I’ll be interested in coming along to see the turn -out,” I say.

“Next Wednesday. Coincidentally enough on The City of the Broken’ s annual Gloomday,” he says, eyes dazzling with expectation.

“Now, why haven’t I heard of that before?” I ask even more curious now to attend this public

vote.

“Probably because it’s the most over-hyped event in the Broken calendar and I didn’t think you’d be interested,” he says bluntly.

When Calix and I head to the City of the Broken on Wednesday, skipping class to see the vote which begins at eleven A.M. ,I’m surprised at how many people there are. Crowds form orderly queues to one solitary voting booth.

“Don’t you think it would have been better to have more than a single booth?” I ask him as we drive through the eerie streets.

“Well initially I did think of having a Pro-Happiness and a Pro-Despair booth, but I decided against it as I thought it would only make the divide worse and reinforce the differences. I think it’s good that they all have to queue together ,mingle with and get to know each other. The waiting because of the long queues only aids this,” he says, smiling knowingly.

“Wow Calix. You really are cunning and clever. Reuniting the city down to the very last detail,” I smile.

“Well *somebody* has to. It’s not like The Smiley’s are even allowed to be themselves anymore. Look at how they are dressed, everyone’s in black and grey,” he says, looking concerned.

“Perhaps there are no Smiley’s here and every one who’s voting is Pro-Despair,” I suggest.

“No. I think they’re here alright. They’re just in disguise. They won’t miss an opportunity like this to have their say,” he says.

“They might if they are in jail,” I say, reminding Calix that his Father can be just as devious, if not more so than him.

“No. They are definitely not all in jail. I recognize some of them. They’re undercover, but they are here. If the vote is one hundred per cent Pro-Despair though, it’s obviously inaccurate. I won’t let Dad have influence on this vote. I want it to be just and fair,” he says.

Apart from the black voting booth with its large purple ‘B’s’ on both doors and the crowds of people, something special is also apparent in the city today.



Grey and black balloons are tied to lamp posts and buildings. Children have been face painted with tears and dark shadows under their eyes. Banners everywhere read 'Unhappy Gloomday'.

"So this is Gloomday?"

"Yes, tonight we have the annual Dud-Firework show and Crying Competition," he says.

"And what does that involve?" I ask.

"Come along tonight. It's my second favourite event of the year, after Black Ball of course," he says and shake my head.

"When does the voting finish?" I ask.

"Whenever everyone has voted. But I don't expect it to take longer than three hours."

"Are *you* going to vote? *You* are a citizen," I ask, intrigued.

"Actually that didn't occur to me Seren. Now that you have reminded me, I will. I want *all* citizens to vote and I am no exception," he says, stepping out of the car to go and queue with all the other citizens.

After what seems to have been at least an hour, due to Calix's insistence on resisting V.I.P treatment to jump the queue, he returns.

"So... What did you choose?" I ask, waiting for the moment Calix reveals his true feelings.

"Well there was no neutral option. So I chose Pro-Despair, but it wasn't an easy decision. At one point I was going to choose Pro-Happiness just because I felt sorry for The Smiley's," he says uneasily.

"So how did you make up your mind?" I ask.

"I'm a flawed person and this is a flawed city. I couldn't be a prince of a kingdom of happiness. I want the city to stay broken," he says honestly.

For once, Calix's opinion startles me. He's usually so fair minded and humanitarian, this is the first time I've seen him use a selfish motive to decide something.

When the voting closes and the night falls, Calix and I head to the park to watch the dud-firework show.

“So what is the crying-comp all about?” I ask baffled.

“Well, the fireworks and the competition are interlinked. When the fireworks fail to go off, we have a competition to see who can cry the loudest and the longest. The winners prize is to be crowned The Crying Champion of Gloomday. We’ve done this every year since the city was founded. It’s tradition,” he says enthusiastically.

When I arrive, I see that there are fireworks waiting to be let off by professional looking men dressed in fire-proof safety suits. The crowd is at a distance and it all looks set to be a proper fireworks show .I hear the sound of a rocket taking off, a loud bang but see nothing.

The crowd gasps ,only to groan and sigh collectively when nothing appears in the sky. A child begins to cry, which results in a mass cry from every member of the audience, who all begin to sob and wail.

“Is this the competition Calix?” I ask, not believing that I have ever seen anything so bizarre.

“It is indeed .Join in, you might win!” he says, nudging me.

“No! I don’t feel in the mood for crying. How can all these people just cry on cue ?” I ask.

“They’re all broken, it comes naturally to them because they are depressed. But crying for hours is tiring so you have to have *real* endurance to win this competition. The most I ever managed was a time of one hour and nineteen minutes ,just after my mother died and that *still* wasn’t enough,” he says.

The sound of banging and whooshing is everywhere, but not a single spark brightens the black night sky. The sobbing continues. Some people cry so painfully, their sobs so full of anguish that I’m inclined to go and hug and comfort them. But I don’t, figuring they might be on a mission to win.

“Are you going to cry tonight?” I ask Calix.

Then I look up and I realize he already is. Silently, not making a show of it as the others are. A tear runs down his face, his eyes look hurt and lost. Just looking at him makes my heart on a mission to ease his pain.

“Calix, don’t cry!” I say, feeling sad myself seeing him, even though I know it’s only for a

trivial reason.

“It’s okay Seren, It’s just for the contest. I can be very competitive. Look, you join in too. I’ll give you a motive that should bring a tear or two. My *Dad*. Surely my mentioning him will make you break down,” he says quickly ,before continuing his silent sobs.

“Calix! Your Dad makes me angry, not sad. Seeing you upset might make me cry,” I say truthfully.

Calix crying breaks my heart so powerfully, even I’m astonished when I start to wail, looking much more unattractive than him as my face scrunches up like a baby’s. Suddenly it all gets too much, I feel I have been holding a waterfall back behind my eyelids and the dam just broke. My failed wedding dreams, that dreadful hospital and Anita’s breakdown, having to fight the King constantly ,being surrounded by miserable people. Why haven’t I been crying everyday? I start crying and blubbering uncontrollably, louder than everyone else .It seems that I’m the only one who’s still crying and everyone has stopped to stare but I continue. I can’t stop. My head hurts because I’m crying so hard. My eyes sting, but the hurt keeps fuelling the fire and I continue. It feels liberating and satisfying to do this, let it all out. I feel out of breathe ,but I don’t stop. I don’t think I’ve ever cried this hard ,for so long before.

“Seren, Seren. It’s okay! You can stop,” calls Calix, trying to calm me down.

“No Calix, I can’t. I feel so upset!” I wail, my face soaking.

“But you don’t understand! You won Seren,” he calls.

“I won? What?”

I open my eyes. All eyes are on me and a man dressed all in black, with gold buttons, appears with a trophy ‘Ultimate Gloomday Crying Champion’.

“I can’t believe I won. How is this possible?” I turn to ask Calix.

“Really Seren, in all my years of coming to this contest I have *never* seen someone cry so powerfully as you just did. You were off the Richter scale of tears. You *deserve* to win,” says Calix, in disbelief.

I return home, clutching my trophy with a mix of euphoria for winning and that bitter sadness of my reasons for crying still remaining. I never thought my melancholy could bring me victory and glory, but I guess it could only happen in The City of the Broken. Calix seemed genuinely impressed by my prize .As though I was like Frederick Forefront clutching the Black Ball trophy.

“I have to admit Seren, I have always wanted to win that competition. I try every year and have never won, yet you succeed on your first attempt,” he says with mock envy.

I stick my tongue out at him.

“Well you did recruit me because you thought I was broken Calix, I guess I really must be to come out on top in a competition of crying among all the other citizens,” I say ,feeling both smug and worried about my level of sadness.

Calix stops at my street to drop me off.

“So I’ll see you tomorrow champion,” he says, kissing me goodbye.

“We have exams tomorrow Calix, don’t forget! When will you know the result of the public vote?” I ask him.

“Oh, I totally forget about the exams. I’ll have to stay up all the night to revise. Hopefully tomorrow I’ll know the results. I’m sure Dad will be just as eager as I am to know,” he says, rolling his eyes.

I wave him goodbye as the Rolls Royce speeds off, looking as distinctly beautiful and out-of-place in my street as Calix himself.

Despite the fact I know I’m in for some hard-core revision that will keep me up past midnight, I walk to my door smiling, my face aching with glee. I won! Most people would consider this a trophy of shame, but in The City of the Broken, today *I* was the girl that everyone wanted to be.

## Chapter Sixteen.

### Forced Despair

I head to school feeling refreshed and exuberant. It must be because of my shiny new trophy. I have exams, but I'm not particularly worried as I've revised.

The test is an hour and a half long, my wrist aches from writing so much.

I'm relieved when it's finally lunchtime. I see Calix as he leaves his class.

"Hey, how did you do?" I ask

"Hey, Champion! I think I did well, I didn't revise much but I have a photographic memory and a love of the subject so that should see me through," he smiles cockily.

"You are so annoying Calix, I revise for weeks to do well but success comes so easily for you. It isn't fair," I pout

"It isn't fair that you won the Crying Champion trophy after one attempt and I have never won it. Where have you put it?" he asks.

"It's in my bedroom, on top of my wardrobe .If Jasmine or Charlotte come over, they are going to want an explanation!"

"Just tell them it was for an onion chopping contest," he smiles ,arms folded, standing tall and confident, despite the fact he's only just come out of an exam.

"It has Gloomsgiving written on it!" I remind him,

"They won't know what it means .Don't worry," he says, reassuringly.

"The vote is being counted and we should know by tonight. There will be a televised announcement but it's likely Dad already knows. He always has to be the first to find out official matters in the city," says Calix, looking irritated.

"What happens when you find out the result?" I ask, curiously.

"I'll use it for *positive* change. I'll make minor adjustments to the city and try and resolve

conflict but I won't do anything extreme ,even if the results of the vote are extreme," he says wisely.

"Calix, I think sometimes you are just too good to be true," I say, feeling he's faultless at times.

"Don't forget that *I* am broken Seren .Flawed, damaged and hurt," he says, reminding me he is far from perfect.

After school, we both head to the city, smiling and walking hand in hand. I think that sometimes for a broken couple in a city of despair, we are just far too happy and in love. In some ways I think the Kings conquest to destroy us and the divide of the city, only makes us stronger and stick together more.

When we enter the city, cinema-sized screens greet us with the headline 'Breaking News-Result of public vote Pro Despair 57%,Pro-Happiness 43%'.Other headlines read 'The City stays Broken. Victory for the King!'

"Did you know the results of the vote already?" I ask Calix, thinking it's strange that the media should know the result before the prince.

"No. This is the first I know of it, same as you!" he says, gazing at the screen in amazement.

"And what do you think of the result?" I ask, trying to gauge his reaction.

"I'm pleased, I guess .It's not extreme .It's balanced enough that it may end the divide. I'd be more concerned if it was severe either way," he says.

"But I thought you wanted a majority rules situation," I say.

"Well that was more because of Dad's dictatorship, to give the city a fair say. But I'm happy it's turned out like this. The Smiley's are not a minuscule percentage so they can't be persecuted. Everyone's opinion will be valued now," he says smiling.

"I don't know. It's still in favour of Pro-Despair ,the King will only use this to his advantage Calix," I say, thinking it's probably The King who's behind the leak to the media.

"Maybe. Do you think this vote was a bad idea Seren?" he asks, looking concerned.

"No. You had good intentions Calix. As you say ,it wasn't extreme either way. The

Pro-Happiness group has a substantial percentage, so they can't be penalized for being abnormal anymore," I say, trying to look at the positive element of the vote.

"That's true. Dad can't write off 43% of the city as insane now," he laughs.

Walking through the city, I realize that there are quite a few people wearing colour, even though it's still illegal. Maybe the vote wasn't a bad thing after all. The Smiley's are still smiling, and the hostility isn't as apparent.

Just as I'm beginning to think Calix's plan has worked better than expected, I look up and see a giant billboard being erected. Men on ladders are busy with glue, to paste a poster that reads 'The public have spoken-we are Broken.' Similar posters are being put up throughout the city, which causes me to believe that the king is already working at broadcasting the dominant view of the city, persuading the minority to conform and join with the rest.

"I think that judging by these posters, Dad is pleased with the result," says Calix, reading my mind.

"I agree, but don't you think that if so many Smiley's weren't imprisoned, the vote would have been closer to a tie or even in their favour?" I ask him.

"Possibly. But I don't think it's anything to worry about. *Somebody* had to come out on top. Dad would have still started a Broken advertising campaign even if The Smiley's had won."

"Yes, that's true. What should we do now Calix?" I ask, keen to have some fun after a day of talking politics.

"Let's go to the city centre and get some ice cream to celebrate the vote and your winning of the Crying Competition," he says enthusiastically, grabbing my hand.

We walk briskly through the city, passing men wearing a uniform of black, with dark sunglasses on and badges that read 'Despair Enforcement Officer'. They seem to be scattered everywhere throughout the city.

"Halt!" one says, stopping us on our quest.

“Yes?” enquires Calix, bewildered by the mans request.

“Why are you looking happy?” he asks, his tone deadly serious, almost threatening.

“Why? Because I’m with the girl I love and we’re about to go and get some ice cream!” says Calix, without any fear in his voice.

“I’m afraid I can’t allow you to do that Sir. I ’m going to have to search you. You too Miss,” he says ,glancing at me suspiciously.

“What for? We haven’t done anything wrong,” I say angrily. This man is ruining our day.

He ignores me and searches Calix. He holds up his hand.

“And what do you think you are doing Sir, wearing this?” he says holding Calix’s engagement ring ,staring at it with disgust.

“It’s not a crime to be engaged. And I do not want you man-handling something so personal,” says Calix forcefully.

“It’s a symbol of love and happiness. I’m going to have to confiscate it Sir,” he says taking the engagement ring, putting it into his jacket pocket.

Calix stares at him with a hatred I have never seen him exhibit before.

“Oh, you too Miss! I’m going to have to take yours as well,” he says, reaching for my finger.

“You will not! I don’t think you realize who you are dealing with here. This is the Prince!” I say, pointing at Calix.

“I realize perfectly well who he is. I am under orders from the *King*. And a King is higher than a prince. Now, are you going to give me that ring or am I going to have to arrest you?” he says coldly ,taking handcuffs from his belt.

“Give him the ring,” says Calix seriously.

I hand it over, to fulfil Calix’s order only, not his.

“Okay. Well seen as you have cooperated, I’ll let you guys off with a caution. But I’ll have you know that smiling and happiness are illegal activities, so obey the law or we’ll wipe the smile off your face by throwing you into the slammer,” he says, smiling himself at his own joke.

Calix nods but doesn’t say anything.



The officer walks off and Calix and I both look at each other, speechless and dumbfounded.

We continue to walk silently, sadly. The officer it would seem has succeeded in his aim of stamping out happiness. He took my engagement ring!

“Calix! We cannot let this happen, that was all I had left of our would-be marriage and he’s taken it!” I say furiously.

“I don’t really think we have a choice. Dad has more power than I do. He’s taken this up a level again. He’s starting a zero-tolerance crackdown on happiness, I know he is!” says Calix.

“He can’t get away with this tyranny all of the time. The vote was supposed to end all of this,” I say, finally having had my fill of the King.

“We’re still engaged Seren ,the ring is just an object, it’s nothing. I think the vote may have backfired ,but nothing will stop Dad. I think it’s just his nature,” says Calix.

“We are not engaged Calix. Ring or not, an engagement is when you have a wedding pending and we don’t because of your Father. Nothing will stop him, that much is true .But we’ve got to confront him, together,” I say, refusing to be beaten.

“We’ve tried that tactic before, it didn’t work then. Why should it work now?” asks Calix doubtfully.

“Because it’s our only option and we can’t just stand back and let him continue doing what he’s doing .Look around Calix, just an hour ago there seemed to be some hope, I saw some colour and smiles. Now every happy face has disappeared, everyone’s wearing black and those officers are revelling in and abusing their new found power,” I say, witnessing the only yellow clad citizen left being dragged screaming and handcuffed by a Despair-Enforcement Officer.

“You’re right Seren .I may not be King ,but I am the Prince and I can’t just turn a blind eye to the citizens being treated like this. Dad’s started a regime of forced despair and it’s wrong .He’s going to insist *everyone* is broken or lock them up if they refuse to be. We can’t allow him to take democracy away from the city,” says Calix passionately.

We go together to the palace. I actually feel afraid to go near the King. In the beginning I think I saw him more as a comical villain, a permanently annoyed man who liked to take out his unruly temper on his citizens, over trivial matters. Now I genuinely saw him as a monster, a person with almost ultimate power who cared nothing for the lives he was ruining, the freedom he was taking or had any moral sense of what was right and wrong. He is a man you could not reason with, a man who would listen to no one, a man who believed that only his opinion was right and that anyone who disagrees should be eliminated. Yes, my heart was full of fear. I am shaky and short of breathe.

The citizens we passed looked as terrified and dejected as I was feeling. I could tell by looking at them alone, those who chose to be broken and those who were forced to be. There was now an atmosphere of entrapment, like a net had been cast over the city. I would have likened it to having been in a gothic snow globe of exciting melancholy before, now it was a cage of darkness and terror.

We head through the back gate's of the palace, to avoid the guards as I'm not supposed to be here. The king is at home, the raised flag informs me of that.

I feel sick as we walk through the corridors of the palace, the one place left in the city where there is still a sense of safety. A luxurious and peaceful habitat sheltering the King from the reality of being a citizen.

"Where will he be?" I whisper to Calix, who's eye is ever-watchful for lurking danger.

"In his study, it's likely. Planning more ways to control and persuade citizens to pass on the culture of the Broken," says Calix.

"Do you talk to him often, when it's just you two at home in the palace?" I ask, wondering how this family set up actually works.

"Not a great deal. Dad always reminds me of my responsibilities and duties as Prince, but there isn't really any father and son time if that's what you mean," says Calix, with a hint of sadness.

We approach the grand and imposing door of the Kings study, which is barred by two

intimidating guards, whose eyes light up in the way a predator or hunter's eyes do when they spot their target and go in for the kill.

"Seren Loneheart isn't allowed in the palace Your Majesty," the guard says, before we even ask to enter the study.

"I'm the Prince, if I say she's allowed, she's allowed. We have to see the King, it's important," says Calix officially.

"The King told us that Seren Loneheart is never to come here, Your Majesty. You can see the King alone, but not with *her*. Miss Loneheart I'll escort you out," says one of the guards.

"Calix I'll go. You see your father alone. It's important," I say, marching off so as not to suffer the indignity of being dragged out by a guard.

"Are you sure Seren? I'll come with you if you prefer. I don't have to see Dad," says Calix.

"You do. Please talk to him Calix. You must do something," I call, walking away with a tear falling down my face, my voice high and shaky with emotion.

"Okay. I'll go. If that's what you want Seren," he says, disappearing into the King's lair.

I wait outside the palace for what feels like an eternity for Calix to return from his talk with the King. It's getting cold and I start to shiver. As well as feeling frustrated and bored for having to be patient, I feel nervy and on-edge. I'm constantly looking over my shoulder, expecting a Despair-Enforcement Officer to drag me off to jail just because I'm me and the King doesn't want me here.

Finally I see Calix approaching. He walks slowly, not looking particularly satisfied with the outcome of whatever went on in the King's study.

"Well?" I ask, my heart thumping from a combination of eagerness and dread of what Calix is going to say.

"Well that wasn't what I was expecting at all," says Calix quietly, as though reluctant to tell me what just happened. He looks like something is playing on his mind.

"Don't tell me, he's now made family talks illegal in case they result in any form of contentment," I say sarcastically.

“No Seren .I’ve never seen Dad like that before. He was coughing a lot and seemed short of breathe. He told me he was too tired to deal with me right now and for me to go away as I was the least of his problems. I’m really worried about him ,he seems very ill,” says Calix ,looking upset and afraid.

“Oh come on Calix ,he’s faking it. It’s just an excuse so he doesn’t have to hear what you have to say. You know he’ll try any tactic to get his own way,” I say ,not feeling slightly concerned about the King’s health.

“He’d never fake illness Seren. It’s weakness and he despises that above all else .I’m so upset, he’s the only family I have left, I can’t bear to lose him,” says Calix, sitting down lifelessly on the palace garden wall beside me.

He starts to sob and shake. I’ve never seen him look this devastated.

“Oh Calix no, please don’t cry. I’m sorry I didn’t take your Dad’s health seriously .Look I’m sure it’ll all be okay. You need to call the doctor. Do you know if the Kings receiving treatment?” I ask, putting my arm around Calix’s shoulder to comfort him and feeling guilty of accusing the King of faking his symptoms.

“I asked him if he’s having medical intervention and he said no. Even though he has symptoms that he can’t deny himself, he refuses to believe there’s anything wrong with him and said he wouldn’t have a doctor anywhere near him .He thinks medicine is for weak people .I just hope it’s just a cold or the flu and nothing serious that’s wrong with him,” says Calix.

“Why don’t you call a Doctor and have him just turn up at the palace?” I ask, trying to think of a way around the Kings self reliance and denial of help and care.

“It’s no good. He’d just refuse to see the doctor and it would be a waste of their time. I have never known Dad to be this sick before. In fact he’s always been so strong and in good health, it’s come on so suddenly,” says Calix as we start to walk away from the palace.

“Don’t think I’m not taking this seriously Calix, because I am, but I think that maybe you’ve blown this slightly out of proportion because of the shock. It was unexpected for you to find your Dad in a state other than his usual ultra feisty, stubborn self. You went into that room

prepared for a fight, so that adrenaline you never burnt off may have resulted in this big upset. He probably just does have the flu like you said,” I say, refusing to believe that the King could ever be defeated by an illness.

“Maybe you’re right. I did expect him to be full of his usual fiery temper, not an exhausted, coughing old man who just wanted to be left in peace .Everyone gets flu ,I was a fool for thinking that Dad could be an exception,” says Calix, looking more relieved now that he’s convinced himself of our flu theory.

## Chapter Seventeen.

### We all fall down

The summer holidays are looming, beckoning me with open arms into relaxation, fun and freedom. I've already switched into 'lazy' mode.

As I get to class I realize it isn't just me, everyone else is busy talking about their summer plans, looking zesty, care-free, relieved of the burden of assignments.

At lunchtime Calix is nowhere to be seen. I guess he must be late. He never misses school.

After hanging out with Jasmine all of lunchtime, I head back to class worrying why Calix hasn't shown up today.

I text him, just to put my mind at rest. 'Hi. Everything ok? Why the no-show at school? Txt back ,S xx.'

I've returned home from school. It's eight o'clock and still no reply. My stomach is aching from worry. I've even finished my last assignment just to give me something to do and take my mind off all my dark and wildly improbable thoughts which try to come up with answers as to why Calix, the usually one hundred per cent attendance student didn't show.

I wake up much earlier than usual, it's still dark outside but I feel so stressed and haven't slept properly. I feel too awake and restless to lie in bed until my alarm clock sounds.

I check my phone, still nothing. Although it's not like I wasn't expecting that, I've been checking it eagerly all through the night, assuming I must have missed the vibration that alerts me to text messages in the twenty or so minutes I managed to doze in the whole night.

School couldn't come quick enough today. I pace up and down, impatient, not knowing what to do with myself, which is worsened by the fact that I have got up early. I catch sight of

myself in the mirror and see the results of my sleepless night. But I don't care about such shallow and meaningless things as appearance right now. I'm so worried about Calix. I text him again, communicating my fears and agitation this time. 'Calix please reply, I'm going out of my mind with worry. Seren, x.' Not relying on texts alone, I have left him countless voicemails. Sometimes I like hearing his voicemail message just to listen to his voice when I'm not with him.

If he doesn't turn up to school or text me back to let me know what's going on today, then I'm going back to The City of the Broken alone to find him.

Hair brushed, dressed, and finally ready to go.

I rush to the school gates. No I am not waiting until lunchtime, I'll go into his class and find out if he's there if I have to.

Fortunately, I see that Calix is standing outside the entrance of the school. He looks even more tired than me. It's the first time I have ever seen his perfect hair a mess.

"Calix," I call running to him.

"Oh Seren. I've been waiting for you, I'm so glad you are here," he says, his eyes looking sad and lost.

"What wrong? Why haven't you replied to my texts or answered any of my calls?" I ask concerned.

"Sorry, I didn't know about them. I switched my phone off," he says.

"Oh. Well why did you miss school? I've been worried about you."

"It's Dad. He died in the early hours of yesterday morning. I spent all of yesterday talking to Doctors, crying and not knowing what to do, what to think," says Calix looking traumatized, shaking his head.

I realize his eyes look puffy and red from crying, not just lack of sleep.

"Oh Calix! I am so sorry. I can't believe it! I never thought your Dad would die. When you were missing it did cross my mind that maybe he was unwell and you were looking after him,

but this is such a shock! How did he die?" I ask, feeling extremely shocked and surprisingly grief stricken at the loss of my number one enemy.

"Heart failure, the doctors said. I should have done something Seren, I knew it felt too serious just to be flu. I should have forced him to see a doctor," says Calix, working himself up into a terrible state.

"Well even if you had done that you might not have saved him. This is tragic Calix, but don't blame yourself please," I say ,touching his arm to comfort him.

"You don't understand. I think I may have brought it on, worsened his condition. I hate myself Seren," he says.

"Calix ,no! Don't be ridiculous, he was ill. You didn't cause this!" I say.

"Oh but I did. Well he was ill already ,as you know. But in the evening before he died I went to see how he was, and he looked chirpier. And I started to feel relieved like I'd imagined all those serious consequences in my head. Because he seemed to be improving, I felt it was okay to broach matters concerning the city. As usual, he was defiant .Anyway, things got a little heated and I was so annoyed that I told him that he was punishing the city and the citizens and you and I because he'd lost Mum and he was bitter. I've never seen him look so hurt. He told me to leave him alone, so I did. And in the morning I felt really guilty about what I'd said, I thought I'd been really harsh so I went to make it up to him. I knocked, several times and he didn't answer, so I just walked in. And that's when I found him, lying dead on the floor. I stood frozen in the doorway ,hoping in my heart he'd just collapsed ,but I instinctively knew the truth. I ran over and called him over and over. And when I felt his pulse, my own breathe stopped and I shook violently. He was dead. My own father, my only family, gone forever," says Calix, recounting his tale in a combination of anguish, disbelief and tears.

"Calix!" I say, starting to cry a little myself.

"Calix, it wasn't your fault. Appearances can be deceiving, he was ill, we both know he was. It was nothing to do with what you said ,don't you dare blame yourself .I know you've lost your family, but you still have me. Please don't cry," I say, hugging him.



“I know he could be so horrible sometimes but I loved him so much Seren. He was my Dad, I’ll never feel the same again. Everything is different now,” he chokes.

“I know, I know. Calix, I really don’t think you should be at school today, you need to go home so you can grieve and be at peace,” I say, leading him away from the door.

“I’m not staying. I only came in to see you Seren, to tell you what happened. Alfred’s in the car park waiting for me,” he says, sobbing still.

“Hey Calix ,do you want me to come with you to the City? You’ll feel lonely in the palace now your Dad’s not there,” I say.

“If you don’t mind Seren. Though I wouldn’t want you to miss school because of me,” he says, sniffing and wiping the left behind tear drops from his eyes.

“No ,it’s fine. I’ll come. I won’t miss anything important today and I don’t want you to feel you are alone,” I say, getting into the car besides him.

We drive to the city. Calix remains distant and slumped the whole journey and even Alfred looks saddened. Even though I resented the King, I still feel upset that he’s dead .I guess it’s always a revelation when anyone dies. When they’ve gone, you always see the good qualities, the personality that’s no longer here. The King had character. I can’t deny he was a strong, charismatic presence. A feisty man who always knew how to get what he wanted. All of that, that bright spark snuffed out so quickly. When he was alive I only saw his negative traits, how he was a barrier to my happiness. I thought him an obstacle that could never be overcome, but now he’s gone. Eliminated as though he never existed at all. Calix is right. It will never be the same. Everything is different now.

The City is very quiet today. Still, peaceful. The citizens I see walking around are dressed in black, as usual. Their steps are slower and their eyes gleam with the astonishment of the unexpected death.

The only sign of drama here today is the huge headline displayed on a cinema sized screen in the centre of the city. ‘Breaking News: King of the City of the Broken is dead. Prince

Calix in line to be crowned King.'

Of course, I completely forgot the Kings death will have a bearing on Calix in more ways than that of a son losing a father. Calix will now become King. What a great responsibility and weight for him to carry on his shoulders.

"Calix, sorry if this is an inappropriate time to ask, but when are you going to be crowned King?" I ask, stunned by the headline.

"Oh yes, that. The palace are arranging everything right now. The coronation and the funeral will be in the same week," he says not sounding fazed by this.

"Oh Calix, I'm so sorry. This must be such a burden to bear. Losing your Father, being in the public eye and having the duty of becoming King thrust on you at a young age," I say, feeling sorry for him.

"Yes it is. But I've been prepared for a day like this ever since I was a young boy. Obviously I never expected Dad to die so young and so suddenly, but these things happen and Dad would expect me to do my duty. The last thing he'd want is for me to start panicking and shunning my role as King," says Calix maturely.

"Yes that's true. But don't put too much pressure on yourself. It's okay for you to mourn Calix. Don't let the coronation overtake your paying the last respects to your Dad," I say.

"I'll be sure to focus my attentions equally on the funeral and the coronation. As for mourning, I couldn't think of a more appropriate city to do so. It's an everyday feature here," he says with a flicker of a smile on his heartbroken face.

We drive to the palace. Photographers wait by the gate to try and capture the broken Prince in mourning, but to no avail thanks to the blacked out windows on the Rolls-Royce and Alfred's decision to drive to the back entrance. Ever the loyal shield of royalty.

Calix is so gentle and sensitive, he really doesn't deserve all these bad things that happen to him.

We step out of the Rolls-Royce and walk together hand in hand into the palace. It really

does feel different in here. The staff are awkward and unsure of how to greet Calix. Subtle smiles fade quickly and Calix looks at the floor, avoiding eye contact with everyone.

“Come on Seren, let’s go to my room,” says Calix in a frustrated tone.

“Calix, do you really think I should be here? You know what your Dad’s feelings were about my being in the palace. Do you think it’s a little disrespectful for me to ignore his ban?” I ask quietly, hoping that I won’t further upset Calix by asking this question.

“Dad is dead now Seren, he doesn’t know or care that you are here. He can’t feel anymore, all his anger, his bitterness, his obsessions are gone forever. The guards won’t drag you out now. They are answerable to me now. Dad doesn’t exist,” he says coldly, repeating his fathers absence as if to make the idea more real to himself.

“Yes Calix he’s dead, but we can still honour his wishes and his memory,” I say, feeling that I should still try and abide by some of the Kings wishes in respect.

“Why? You didn’t care about honouring them when he was alive. You’ll just have to adjust to the situation. There are no Seren bans as of this moment and I shall let all the staff know this shortly. Right at this moment I need to reflect. I feel like I’m seeing the world anew, as a different person now. I was a son who followed orders before, now I’m independent, a man who has to listen to no one but who also has no one there for guidance, advice. Fatherly support, if he ever gave me that, died alongside Dad. It’s selfish of me to think this, but I can’t help but worry if I’ll be able to cope,” he says, looking afraid.

“Of course you’ll cope. Calix, you are the strongest and bravest person I know. You have sound judgement, a balanced perspective and you also have me and all the staff at the palace, as well as the citizens who I’m sure will be delighted that you are the next King. I know you’ll handle this huge task brilliantly,” I reassure him, believing in him with every confidence.

“I hope so Seren,” he says doubtfully.

There is an emptiness here today in the palace. Like a dog that aches for his lost master, feeling like an empty shell, a purposeless existence is now all he has, so the palace felt like this today.

The flag is at half-mast and a domineering presence, that would cause me extreme anxiety in other circumstances is missing. It's better to be here broken, than not here at all.

Calix is very introspective today, aloof and closed off. Not his usual talkative, sweet self but who can blame him? Maybe that's why his Dad made so many decisions, Calix could remain a little boy that way. Now he really does have to grow up, fast. It's a sink or swim situation. This pressure coupled with immense grief would cause most people to have a nervous breakdown, but Calix is not most people. He has an extraordinary ability to turn an impossible situation into a series of tasks, which when handled one by one become quite easily manageable. I admire him for that. The citizens have inherited a noble and brave leader, not to mention one who is kind and just. A relief I'm sure after years of putting up with a tyrant.

Just as I'm convinced that things will all run smoothly, Calix makes me jump as he stands abruptly and throws the cushion he was clinging to onto the floor with considerable force.

"Oh Seren, I've had enough! Why can't I ever just relax and enjoy life, carefree and normal like everyone else? It's always one thing after another," he says, storming off in a fit of rage.

"Calix! Where are you going? Please calm down!" I call, but he ignores me, slamming the palace door, going out into the city but where I do not know.

Calix has been gone for an hour. I'm getting so worried. I hope he's not going to do anything stupid. I've checked if he's taken the car, but both Alfred and the Rolls Royce are still here. I'm tempted to ask Alfred to drive around and look for him. He's become so temperamental. I can't keep up with his moods. Although with the loss of his Dad that's understandable.

As it starts to get darker, reflecting the content of my thoughts, I hear the front door of the palace open and close quietly. I rush out of the sitting room where I have spent all day waiting and feel instantly relieved of my anguish when I see Calix is the one who just entered.

"Calix! Where have you been?" I ask furiously.

"Just for a walk. I needed to clear my mind," he says calmly.

“A walk? You’ve been gone hours! I’ve been going out of my mind, I thought that maybe something had snapped and you weren’t thinking straight. You stormed off so suddenly,” I say.

“I felt angry and resentful earlier Seren but I feel better now, more at peace with things. I just needed to be alone, to think,” he says, looking at me intently.

“Well you could have told me that! I’ve been waiting for you all day with my stomach in knots and my heart in my throat,” I say.

“I’m sorry Seren, really. This is a difficult time for me,” he says truthfully.

“I know, I’m sorry too. But in future if you need some alone time, please tell me first, just to relieve me of the worry I’ll experience if you don’t,” I say.

He walks over and hugs me.

“I will. I promise,” he says, kissing the top of my head gently.

Calix drives me home in the Rolls-Royce and his expression, while still pained is now lighter, more at ease.

“Isn’t it traditional to wait a while after a death until a coronation?” I ask Calix, bemused at these back to back opposing events.

“Anywhere but here. This is the City of the Broken, endings and beginnings go hand in hand,” he says.

“That’s true, I guess. Are you nervous about becoming king?” I ask him.

“Well it is a little daunting but at the same time I feel like I’ve been preparing my whole life for this moment. I want to be the King that the citizens deserve Seren, the King they should have always had,” he smiles innocently.

“I know you do Calix, and you will be. The best King the City has ever had. Do you know when your Dads funeral is?” I ask gently, not wanting to get Calix upset again now that he’s looking perkier.

“Yes, it’s on Wednesday. It’ll be a huge state funeral. I’m not looking forward to having to mourn publicly,” he says solemnly, frowning at the thought.

“Am I invited? I mean, do you think that it’s appropriate, your Dad did hate me after all,” I say sceptically.

“I know you and Dad weren’t on the best of terms, but I need you to be there for support Seren, to have a friendly face there who isn’t judging or evaluating me,” he says, looking worried and lost.

“Don’t think that Calix, people aren’t judging you. They all know it’s been a shock for you losing your Dad so soon and that it’s not going to be an easy task taking on the role of King as young as you are. Anyway the funeral is about saying goodbye to the King, not scrutinising you. Don’t fret,” I say, leaning my forehead against his.

“I guess so. I shouldn’t care anyway, I shouldn’t be so egotistical. I don’t care if the whole world is judging me. I’ve lost my Dad, my eyes are sore from crying and the dark shadows under my eyes are blacker than the night. I’m exhausted, physically and emotionally. I’m sorry you’ve had to put up with this Seren. I’ve put you through so much. You deserve a better boyfriend than me,” he says in an almost ashamed tone.

“Calix, stop it! I’m the luckiest girl in the whole world to have you. You are like an angel-altruistic and beautiful, innocent yet knowing. I could never get a better boy than you even if I looked for one my whole life. I’m blessed to have found the ultimate so young,” I say, smiling at him.

“You make me out to be better than I actually am Seren. An angel? A fallen one perhaps. All our relationship has involved is struggles against Dad, our marriage being called off and even when he’s dead he’s still destroying us because I’ve become a wreck. You should have a boyfriend who takes you to parties, to the beach, who makes you laugh. Not one who puts the woes of the world on you like I do. Seren, do you want to leave me?” he asks, out of the blue.

“No! Calix, I am here to support you every step of the way. I never want to leave you, *you* are the only thing that makes me happy. I don’t care for parties, and all this woe is just a phase. You’ll come to terms with your Dads death sooner or later, although I know that’s hard to believe right now. Then there will be just us, free to be with each other forever without

interruption. Your grief is making you needy and insecure. I will *never* leave you,” I say forcefully, holding both his hands.

“Okay. I believe you. I just feel so very alone now that my Dads gone, like I don’t have anyone to turn to anymore. And if I didn’t have you, I think I would just die,” he says, his eyes sparkling with terror.

## Chapter Eighteen.

### The Funeral

Wednesday arrives. Calix has picked me up early as he wants me to sit next to him in the car as it follows the Kings coffin. Wearing a black dress, I look the same as I always do when I go to the City. Calix is wearing a black suit and looks understated yet dapper.

As we drive through the gates, I can instantly see that this is going to be a huge affair. Roads are closed, black traffic cones with 'funeral' written on them line the streets. Shops are closed and the streets seem relatively empty. I wonder where everyone is.

We drive slowly up to the palace, where the whole city seems to be clustered. They stand behind barriers, wearing black, each one holding a single white lily or black rose in honour of the King.

In a large black horse-drawn hearse, with a glass panel that displays the coffin, lies the King. The coffin is draped in a rich purple pall, with a black 'B' and a black crown embroidered onto it. Foot attends, pall bearers carrying batons, pages and mutes surround the hearse. Feather-men carry mourning fans made of black ostrich feather.

Six black horses, with black ostrich feather plumes on their heads pull the carriage. Five black cars follow, lead by Alfred in the Rolls-Royce. Despite the large crowd, there is complete silence.

The funeral takes place in the black cathedral, the only beacon of hope in a city of despair.

Calix aids in carrying his fathers coffin into the cathedral, which I hope will be the last time he has to carry the weight of his Father on his shoulders.

I sit next to Jane at the front, leaving an empty seat next to me for Calix. "You shouldn't be here you know. The King abhorred you," she hisses at me.



“I’m here for Calix,” I say quietly, not wanting to argue at the Kings funeral.

The bishop says prayers for the King and reflects on his life, glossing over the negative aspects and highlighting the Kings strength of will and work ethic.

Every notable in the city is here, but remarkably Anita and Frederick are not. I guess that they must still be in hiding. All of the congregation wear black, the ladies are dressed dramatically in black veils and wear jet jewellery. Tears are shed into white handkerchiefs adorned with black edges.

Calix stands up halfway through the presentation to say some words in honour of his Father.

“It’s always interesting how death unites everyone. I’m sure Dad would be pleased to know that the whole city is in mourning. My father, the King was a man who always gave one hundred percent of himself to any cause he truly believed in. He created strong opinions in people, but he was working to perfect his vision. Dad was a traditionalist, a pillar of stability in an ever-changing world. But more than a King, he was a father and he always tried to protect me in the way he thought correct. I didn’t expect to lose him so young. I’ll be honest, Dad gave the impression that he was invincible and could not die. His strength was such that sometimes I could forget he was just a human, and as vulnerable to illness as anyone else. Dad will be buried alongside his wife, who he loved dearly and he remained ever-faithful to his whole life, refusing to marry or even love again, perhaps this loyalty can be said to be his most admirable trait.

Thank you all for attending today. It is on this day I officially say goodbye to my Father but it’s not forever and he shall never be forgotten,” says Calix, stepping down to an applause from the congregation.

Calix resumes his seat and classical music starts to play.

“You were amazing Calix. It was so poignant,” I say, laying my hand on his hand.

“Thanks. I did get a little bit choked up in some parts, but I tried to control my emotion. Dad would have wanted it that way,” he says.

As I look at the coffin laid on the bier, it’s like a mighty giant that could only ever be

defeated while he slept. Only death could end the King's reign.

"How are you feeling?" I ask Calix as we leave the cathedral and follow on to the burial.

"Not as bad as I thought. I guess this is closure, the end of a chapter in my life and the beginning of a new one. I feel more at peace now that I've said goodbye. I think the fact that this day was looming was getting to me. It's the waiting that's the worst thing," he says.

We walk to the City of the Broken cemetery, which is grander than the graveyard that resides next to the entrance of the city. All of the graves are black and in the centre stands the stately tomb of HRH Queen Audrey 1<sup>st</sup> of the City of the Broken, Calix's mother.

"It's good that they can finally be together again in death," I say, holding Calix's hand.

"Yes, maybe Dad will finally have a smile on his face now," smiles Calix.

I laugh, but then stop, realizing it's inappropriate at a funeral. Especially when it's a funeral of the King of the Broken.

"I hope that'll be us one day Calix. An everlasting couple, resting together, awaiting the next life," I say.

"You are morbid Seren but me too. My mother and father were a wonderful couple. Maybe Dad's heart was yearning so much for his wife that it couldn't bear to carry on anymore. I like to think that's the reason he died so early," says Calix thoughtfully as he looks upon his Mother's, and soon to be parents grave.

The coffin is lowered into the earth and Calix sheds a tear.

"Goodbye Dad," he says emotionally.

After the burial ,the mourners depart, offering condolences to Calix and wishing him luck with his future role as King.

We head back to the palace , away from the public, away from the show, just us together.

We go to Calix's room.

"Wow Calix this whole place is yours now," I say, looking at the positive angle of things.

"Yes. It's far too big for one person. Maybe you could come and live with me Seren," he says seriously.

"Live with you? *Here* in the City of the Broken?" I ask in complete astonishment.

"Sure, why not? Dads not here to stop us now and we love each other, so it's only natural," he smiles.

"Wow Calix. This is such a big step..." I say.

"It is. And tonight I don't want to think about all the serious grown up stuff. I invited you here to my room Seren so that we could hang out, listen to music and do whatever we want. This may be the last time I ever get to be a teenager ,a prince, carefree, devoid of responsibility. And I want to share this moment with you Seren .My moment of normality," he says enthusiastically.

"Oh Calix, yes. Let's just chill out and be like everybody else. Tonight let us not have a care in the world," I say, a tear in my eye at Calix's desperation in clinging to his lost youth.

"You bet baby .I'm talking midnight feasts, too-loud music, staying up and talking until dawn. Just us, the world can wait. Let everyone else get swamped in toils and workloads, because tonight we don't care," he says, electric and alive ,finally free to fly.

Should I feel bad that we are having this much fun after a funeral? Well I don't. Tonight we are children again, stress and shame are not in our repertoire.

We eat peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, popcorn and sweets that rot the teeth. We listen to all our favourite songs, some which we haven't heard in years. We dance through the dark, a disco ball highlighting our steps. We read our favourite poems, have quizzes on our favourite novels and even make up our own stories. We play truth or dare, trivial pursuit and Monopoly. Calix is beaming, and so am I.

It's hard to believe I'm in the palace of the City of the Broken, a chamber of gloom. We

laugh so hard it hurts, falling over into a heap of cushions and partake in a pillow fight.

“Oh Calix, we’re alive!” I screech, as he attempts to tickle me.

I return home from the city, and am glad to leave Calix looking exuberant and hopeful about the future. I think that Calix is now at peace, as much as his Dad now is. Calix dropped me off at four o’ clock in the morning. I would have spent the night at his and arrived at school together, but I had to go home and change. I’m still wearing my funeral dress and it’s now sticky from popcorn and spilt fizzy drink.

At school there is hardly anyone around, so Calix and I lark about in the corridors, dancing and jumping around like fools. The few people that pass us look at us like they think we are retarded.

“I love that you’re about to be crowned King and everyone in this school is oblivious to this fact,” I say, my arms wrapped around his neck.

“Yeah me too, and let’s keep it that way .I like the anonymity here,” he says.

After returning my books to the school library, I check to see if Calix is ready to leave too.

“Have you finished everything as well?” I ask

“Yes, I only came in to see if my final history assignment had been marked,” he says.

“Has it?”

“Yes, I got an A\*,” he says happily.

“Well obviously you did. I could have told you that,” I say.

After our short stint in school, we head back to the City of the Broken. The coronation is tomorrow and Calix is eager to put in some practice.

“I want to rehearse a bit for the coronation. To be honest this is stressing me out far more than Dads funeral. The whole focus will be on me and I feel like I’m not allowed to mess up,” he says, creasing his forehead.

“Calix please don’t worry. I know this is a big deal, but you are such a perfectionist and you are putting all of this pressure on yourself. Just relax, I promise you’ll be absolutely brilliant,” I say, kissing him.

“But what if, you know, I can’t live up to my Dad?” he says hesitantly, flushing slightly from embarrassment.

“What? Calix I think that is the most ludicrous thing you have ever said. No disrespect to the man but you will outshine his rule one hundred and ten percent, through kindness and justice alone. The only people who will disapprove of you becoming King will be traditionalists who don’t like change,” I say forcefully.

“I don’t know,” he says doubtfully.

“Please don’t compare yourself to your Dad Calix. You are so different from him. Your rule will be in an alternate universe to his, but that doesn’t make it bad. You are the rightful heir, your Dad wouldn’t trust the throne to any other hands,” I say earnestly.

“He didn’t trust it in my hands. You heard what he said that night we got engaged. Maybe I’m not good enough to be King,” he sighs.

“Just stop it Calix. Let’s practice, the more you do, the better prepared and more confident you’ll be,” I say, looking deeply into his eyes.

“You’re right Seren. I’ve got to pull myself together, I’m going to be King,” he says determined.

“Right you are. Now let’s get down to this,” I say passionately.

We practice for hours with Calix balancing a textbook on his head in place of a crown, sitting on a dining chair in place of a throne and addressing an audience of Alfred and I in place of the citizens. Calix seems more nervous than I thought he’d be ,despite the fact that it’s only us.

“I just can’t get it right Seren, it’s not good enough. I don’t sound sincere ,I sound rehearsed, like I’m acting,” he says, evidently stressed.

“Please calm down Calix. It’s just stress. Maybe you sound rehearsed because you are reading a

prepared speech. Perhaps on the day you should improvise a bit, freestyle,” I say.

“What if my mind goes blank and I can’t think of anything to say?” he enquires.

“Well memorise your speech as well, as a backup. But perhaps give the real speech a more human touch. The citizens will like to see your compassion, it’s what makes you you. Your trademark,” I say.

“I can’t believe I have to do this so soon. Truth be told I’ve been rehearsing for this moment since I was a little boy, but I pictured it happening when I was fifty and grey, mature, with a knowledge of life and a social ease and grace that I haven’t yet mastered. Seren, do you think I’m too young to be King?” he asks.

I hesitate, because in some ways yes I do. Calix is just a teenager and the word King has a gravitas air to it. But at the same time Calix has a sense of responsibility, perhaps more so than his father ever did, that far belies his young years. I couldn’t think of a better candidate to be a ruler.

“No Calix, I think you are very mature. Just get a good night sleep tonight, tomorrow is the day. You will make an amazing King,” I say truthfully.

“Thank you Seren. Your opinion means so much to me. I’ll be up before daylight making sure everything is perfect. The staff have organized the coach, the ceremony and extra security. Everything else is down to me now,” he says, decidedly more confident than he appeared earlier.

## Chapter Nineteen.

### A New Beginning

This morning I shall be driven to the city alone by Alfred, meet Calix at the palace to wish him luck and then Alfred and I shall follow behind the Royal coach to the Black Cathedral. I feel incredibly nervous myself. Thousands of spectators will witness this event which will be broadcast to the whole city on cinematic screens and live television. It really is an historic occasion. Calix has to arrive alone in the coach, and for selfish reasons I'm glad, I hate the spotlight. He must be so terrified.

Alfred and I pull up to the palace.

"Have you seen him yet?" I ask Alfred.

"No, not yet Miss Loneheart. No one has. He's been locked in his room all morning getting ready. He even had Jane leave his breakfast tray outside his bedroom door," says Alfred.

"Why all this secrecy?" I ask puzzled.

"I think he wants you to see him before anyone else," says Alfred seriously.

I walk to Calix's room, apprehensive at his refusal to open the door, thinking perhaps nerves have got the better of him. I knock.

"Calix ,it's me Seren," I announce.

To my surprise, he opens the door instantly, ushering me in quickly.

When I see him I nearly fall backwards in amazement. He looks breathtaking. A vision. He's wearing a long black velvet robe adorned with gold and purple jewelled collar. His hair is the best I've ever seen it-thick, glossy and immaculate. An appropriate base for a crown to sit. He stands confidently, noble, tall and elegant. He looks like a king, despite the fact he's yet to have been awarded his crown.

"Well?" he asks, as I have remained silent since entering the room, taken aback by wonder at

the sight of the fairytale in front of my eyes.

“Calix, you look so wonderful! Why didn’t you let anyone see you?” I ask.

“I wanted your approval first. I trust your opinion above everyone else’s, but don’t tell anyone that,” he winks at me.

“Where did you get that robe Calix? It’s so luxurious,” I ask.

“It was my Dad’s. It’s the Black Robe of the Broken. It’s only worn to momentous occasions like state banquets and the coronation of course.”

I briefly recall once seeing the King in this exact robe, however on him it looked drab and ill fitted. On Calix ,it looks like made -to -measure haute couture.

“Are you afraid?” I ask him.

“I’m a little nervous, but I feel well prepared. The scariest bit is being parted from you, riding in that coach alone,” he says sincerely.

I feel so needed and cherished.

“Oh Calix, you are so romantic. Prince Charming,” I blush.

“King Charming soon ,don’t forget. I like to think of it as just another duty to be performed, that way I don’t get overwhelmed by the vastness of the occasion,” he says sensibly.

Calix and I walk down the great staircase to the entrance of the palace.

“Well, this is the moment. You are going to be King,” I say looking deeply into his compassionate eyes.

“I know, it’s crazy. I’ll see you after the ceremony Seren,” he says, kissing my head gently.

The Black State Coach is parked inside the main palace gates. It’s beautiful, with golden edges, pulled by four glossy, black Friesian horses who are as smartly dressed in their bridles and saddles as Calix is in his black robe.

Crowds stand behind barriers, as in the funeral, only this time there is decidedly more optimism in the eyes of the citizens. I can even see a few Smiley’s holding a banner reading ‘New King, New City.’

I kiss Calix and wish him good luck. He walks dignified and nobly like a lion into his



coach, flanked by security and attendants.

I locate Alfred and get into the Rolls-Royce ready to follow on behind.

I see Calix sitting in the coach and he has become a statue, untouchable and a living hero. A prince about to be crowned. But deep inside I know that's not the real him, that's his duty, his job. He's giving the people what they expect of him, performing the role perfectly.

The gates of the palace open and the coach takes off. The horses prance gracefully to their destination, seemingly equalling the prince in their sense of duty to trot in perfect step with one another whilst looking sleek and dignified.

Alfred drives slowly behind. The crowds wave miniature black flags with purple 'B's'. The excitement and rarity of the occasion is evident in the air. Children wear black plastic crowns. A band is playing on the bandstand. There are far more people here for the coronation than there was for the Kings funeral.

The entrance to the Black Cathedral is lined with black carpet. The coach stops outside and the attendants open the door for Calix to step out. Two attendants hold the train of his long robe as he walks into the cathedral. Alfred and I wait until he's gone in and then follow behind.

The cathedral is packed, almost every seat is full. Alfred and I take our place. There at the front is the ornate black throne. TV cameras and crew slightly spoil the otherwise ancient charm of the ceremony.

Calix sits on the throne. The bishop approaches him and asks him to confirm his name.

"Prince Calix Axel Blakely 1<sup>st</sup> of the City of the Broken," he says clearly.

"Calix Axel Blakely 1<sup>st</sup>, will you now take the oath which demonstrates your promise to the City of the Broken as the King?" asks the Bishop.

"I will. I promise to rule the City of the Broken with justice and mercy, integrity and strength. I will protect its citizens, upholding the values of the city whilst considering the quality of human life. Equality and fairness will be my goal throughout my reign," he says boldly and truthfully.

"Prince Calix Axel Blakely 1<sup>st</sup>, I will now hand you the Black Sovereigns Orb, the Black Sceptre

of Truth and the Black Sceptre of Peace,” says the bishop, handing Calix these artefacts.

“Prince Calix Axel Blakely 1<sup>st</sup>, I will now crown you King of the City of the Broken,” says the Bishop, taking the large black crown (which the former King always wore) from the stand beside him and placing it effortlessly onto Calix’s head.

“King Calix Axel Blakely 1<sup>st</sup>, of the City of the Broken,” says the Bishop and an orchestra sounds, playing a victorious anthem.

Calix looks magnificent, poised and dignified, wearing the crown with ease and instinct.

Calix exits the Cathedral and is carried back to the palace by coach. The crowds scream and cheer loudly, much out of their ordinary character as the newly crowned King drives past.

On returning to the palace, Calix stands on the highest balcony to watch a flypast of black planes and a parade of military personnel. Alfred and I arrive five minutes behind him and run straight up to the balcony to join him.

When I stand next to him on the balcony I feel slightly awkward and don’t really know what to say. He’s more intimidating now he’s got a crown on his head, even though I know he’ll be humble about it. He looks so noble and grand and more mature. But he’s still my Calix.

“Oh Calix, you are a King,” I say breathlessly.

“I know! It wasn’t as scary as I thought. The bishop did most of the talking,” smiles Calix with a childlike zest that puts me at ease and makes me realize he’s still exactly the same person as he was this morning.

Planes zoom loudly over our heads and we watch enthralled, holding hands and occasionally exchanging a glance of approval towards each other. The crown gives Calix an air of authority he never had before, but it also highlights the difference between him and his Father. He carries it with far less pride and anger than his father did, wearing it for duty’s sake only and not to give himself a sense of superiority.

Calix also gets a gunfire salute, this really is a day all about him. I don’t think I’ve ever got this much attention, not even on my birthday.

After all of the pomp and pageantry, Calix and I head back indoors to the palace.

“That was amazing, it’s been such a wonderful day,” says Calix.

“I know, everything was timed to perfection. The whole day passed without a single hiccup,” I say.

Mrs. S approaches Calix as we head out into the corridor.

“Your Majesty, congratulations you were simply splendid. Your father told me to give you this on the day you were crowned King,” she says formally, holding out a white envelope with a black seal.

“What is this?” asks Calix bemused.

“I have absolutely no idea, Your Majesty. I was only instructed by your father to give it to you on the day of your coronation, long before he fell ill you understand,” she says.

“Okay, thank you,” smiles Calix graciously.

“Well open it,” I say to Calix, after Mrs. S has left.

“Okay, let’s open it in my room. So I can have some privacy,” says Calix, who’s surrounded by palace staff and well-wishers.

He’s still wearing his crown, but takes it off as soon as he gets to his room, revealing his casual attitude to being King.

He sits on his bed, and tears open the letter eagerly.

“To my son and rightful heir, if you are reading this then you are now King. I have left in your possession the key to the room which holds the secrets of the city. You’ll know of what I refer to of course. Rule despairingly and sorrowfully my boy, Your Father,” says Calix reading out loud.

He searches in the envelope and pulls out a tiny black key.

“Oh Calix, we can enter the room now!” I say, excited to discover the secrets that lie behind the door in the library of the Broken.

“Wow, I think my whole life has been leading up to this moment Seren. I always have longed to see what’s behind that door ever since I was a little boy,” he says, his eyes glinting excitedly.

“Let’s go now Seren,” he says abruptly.

“What? Calix, you’ve only just been crowned King, let’s bask in this celebration for today. The room can wait until tomorrow,” I say, thinking that Calix is even more intrigued than I am at this secret room.

“No Seren, it can’t wait. I have to know now,” he says ,running off down the corridor.

“Calix, wait,” I say, running to follow him.

He’s ditched his royal robe and crown. This is Calix the curious, Calix the explorer, Calix the young boy again.

We run all the way to the City of the Broken public library and I’ve become incredibly out of breath. Nearly every person we pass remarks

“Isn’t that King Calix?”

“No, it can’t be him. He’s just been crowned King. It must be a look-alike.”

I think that now that Calix has a crown to prove his royal identity, his going without it may make it easier to blend into the background.

We rush up the stone steps at the entrance of the library and a further three flights of steps inside. When we reach the final floor, my chest is heaving and I’m gasping for breath, sweat dripping down my forehead. Calix, remarkably seems totally unaffected by our mad sprint here, remaining cool and composed.

“This is it Seren. Moment of truth .I finally get to see what Dads been hiding from me all these years,” he says passionately.

He pulls back the tapestry and begins to put the key in the lock.

“Wait Calix! Are you sure you want to go through with this? What if that room reveals something you didn’t want to know?” I say urgently, thinking that the room may reveal further devious and corrupt plans by the deceased King.

“I have to do this Seren. It’ll play on my mind forever if I don’t,” he says looking pained, turning the key in the lock.

We both walk in. The room is surprisingly empty and echoes. The wooden floor boards creek, as we walk over them. The beams of the ceiling and the single window are dusty, no one has been in here for years. In the exact middle of the room, mounted on a stand, there is a solitary black book.

“The secrets of the city,” says Calix, stepping towards the book.

“Are you nervous about opening it?” I ask him.

“Yes, very. More nervous than I was at the coronation,” he smiles.

“Hold my hand,” he requests and I do.

Calix finally plucks up the courage to open the book.

The first thing that strikes me is that the book contains only one page. Calix leans in close and reads it silently to himself, blocking my view.

After a considerable pause, I speak up.

“Well Calix, what does it say?” I ask breathing heavily with anticipation.

“It’s a letter from my Mum,” he says.

“Your Mum?” I ask confused.

“Yes, a letter from her to my Dad telling him that she’s dying,” he says, sniffing slightly as though he’s tearful.

“Oh. I don’t really understand. How is that the secret to the City of the Broken?” I ask, still confused.

“It’s because it’s what broke Dad’s heart and the result of that was the City of the Broken,” he says.

“Oh I see. It’s really the last thing I was expecting,” I say to Calix, slightly shocked at the sentimental content of the room of secrets.

“There’s a little more. Beneath Mums letter is an extract that Dad has handwritten-it says

‘Only love can bring the city to life and heal the heart of the Broken’,” says Calix.

“Oh, so that’s why your Dad was so determined to keep us apart. Our love would have completely transformed the city,” I say stunned.

“Exactly.”

We shut the book and leave the room, with Calix locking the door behind us and replacing the tapestry covering to hide the door.

“Do you want to take the book home with you? I mean its personal, it shouldn’t really be kept in a public library,” I say.

“No. We’ll leave it here. Dad must have considered it so important to the existence of the city, that he saw it as something of cultural and historical significance to be stored safely here,” says Calix wisely.

When we leave the library and walk out into the city, it dawns on me for the first time that as the King is now dead, there is now no obstacle to our love.

“Calix! We can get married now, you have the power to recruit citizens as King,” I call out delightedly.

“You are right Seren. I can’t believe the idea didn’t occur to me earlier .I was so caught up in thinking about the funeral and the coronation that I completely forgot that Dad can’t stop our wedding anymore,” he says, his eyes flashing with glee.

“Calix, recruit me, recruit me!” I say, jumping up and down and clapping my hands like a child.

“Okay, come with me to the Ministry of the Broken. You’ll have to sign a declaration form,” he says.

We walk through the gloomy city to a large black domed building, which looks official.

‘The Ministry of the Broken’ is written in gold above the double doors.

As we enter, I see secretaries typing away monotonously. Tearful and depressed would-be-citizens stand in line at the counters. One woman seems to be in dispute with a head of department.

“But I am broken enough to join. I’ve cried everyday for the past four years,” she weeps.

“I’m sorry but we’ll need some supporting evidence. Anyone could claim that they are broken.

The criteria for joining the city is increasingly selective due to such high demand to become a

citizen. You'll need two references from acquaintances confirming your despair, alternatively a signature from the King of the City of the Broken would suffice," says a lady in a black suit formally.

I walk up to the large black desk, behind hangs a painting of a broken heart.

"Hello, I've come to sign a declaration form to become a citizen of the Broken," I say to the woman behind the desk, with Calix by my side.

"Have you been recruited by the King?" she asks sceptically.

"Yes, the newly crowned King asked me to join the city," I respond, motioning to Calix.

"Do you have two supporting references?" she asks, still not convinced, possibly due to the fact that I currently feel ecstatic as my wedding is about to be back on.

"That won't be necessary. I shall sign the declaration to authorise her citizenship," interrupts Calix.

"Very well. I'll fetch you a form right away," she says disappearing into the room to her left.

"Oh Calix, this is so exciting. It's like a whole new start," I say.

"Try not to be too excited Seren or you won't qualify for citizenship," he whispers.

"Oh, yes of course," I say, as the lady returns with the form.

"Please read carefully, sign and print your name and date it. But remember you'll be broken forever if you sign," she warns.

"Okay ,thanks," I nod.

The form is on crisp white paper, headed in black ink 'Application to become a citizen of the City of the Broken'.

It reads 'I agree in signing this declaration form that I am broken, permanently depressed, despairing ,longing for something forever lost, hopeless ,hurt, morbid, outcast, rejected, lonely, unloved or a combination of all these. I understand that concealing happiness ,joy, hope, popularity or contentment will lead to my application being terminated and my being banned from entering the City of the Broken again'.

Signed:

Print Name:

Date:

Signature of Authorisation(King of the City of the Broken only):

As I read this declaration form, I'm suddenly aware that none of this applies to me anymore and I feel like a fraud. I don't belong as a member of this city. However this results in a dilemma because if I don't sign the form, I won't be able to marry Calix and I will ironically then become all of the above and qualify as a citizen. It's such a catch.

"Calix, do I need to be all of these things, can I just be one of them to qualify?" I ask, feeling that I may count as outcast.

"Yes ,as long as one strongly applies to you that's fine," he says officially.

"Okay. Here goes."

I sign, S. Loneheart .I print my name and I date the form. Calix signs and I hand it to the girl at the desk, who is watching me suspiciously as though she doesn't think I belong here.

"Okay, well we'll process the form and you should qualify as a citizen within three working days, providing the application is valid and background checks produce a satisfactory result," she says, her eyes glinting with supposition that I won't pass these checks.

"Umm...okay, thanks," I say, walking away feeling far less confident than when I came in.

"So what are these background checks?" I ask Calix, feeling like I'm being scrutinised before I'm allowed to join the city.

"Oh the Ministry will look at your school reports, criminal record, former friendships and relationships, health records and employment history to see if they can find evidence to prove that you are Broken. It's a standard procedure but they are incredibly thorough about it," he says.

"Should I be worried, I mean, do you think that I will pass?" I ask him.

"I can't say for sure, but I think you will. You were always a loner and an outsider before you met me," he smirks.

"Hey, I had some friends you know!" I assert.



“Yeah, yeah. What did your school reports say?” he asks.

“Seren is quiet, hard working and introspective. Do you think that’ll count as Broken?” I ask.

“Well it’s better than loud, happy and sociable that’s for sure,” he says.

We walk away from the Ministry and my heart is full of hope that my application will be accepted, although in this city I have learned that it’s always better to aim on the side of hopeless to get what you want.

I want to make plans for our wedding but I decide to delay that until I know for sure I’ve been successful and that the wedding can go ahead.

## Chapter Twenty.

### I caught the bouquet

Calix is already making some big changes now that he's become King, but of course they are all entirely sensible and beneficial to the city, not fanatic tactics like the former King exhibited. He's had all of the Smiley's released from prison and is in the process of closing the Black Hospital due to its appalling treatment of its patients. My favourite of his changes so far is his getting rid of the Despair-Enforcement Officers. Our engagement rings have been returned, but Calix was too kind to make anyone redundant so he converted the DEO's into Riot-Patrol Officers, who specialise in conflict and dispute resolution between The Smiley's and the Pro-Despair sides. Although I think that these officers are still unnecessary, as since Calix has become King the whole city seems to have made a treaty to cooperate with each other and respect each others wishes. Calix is a figurehead of peace and freedom and I think that now everyone feels relaxed to live their lives as they want to and not be under pressure to be Pro-Despair, they are more inclined to embrace being Broken as a lifestyle choice, whilst still occasionally smiling and wearing colour.

The city has kept its miserable charm and character, but now there's a freedom and sparkle. Rejects who were once awkward and emotionally scarred, now embrace their inner freak and couldn't care less what people think, are glad they are different. The Broken hearted who have realized it's not so bad to be alone, as long as you are surrounded by friends who have experienced the same thing. Depressives who feel more alive after witnessing a famous death, realizing that life's too short to wish yourself dead. Loners who have woken up to the fact that independence and self-reliance is a strength in itself. Yes, it was a Broken city, but now there was more ambition, hope, self-assurance and cooperation than ever before. The city was empowered. The city has gotten a little lighter. Who'd have thought one person could have such an effect, like a lighthouse illuminates the sea and a single bulb brightens a whole room, so

Calix shines into the City, awakening the citizens from their sorrowful slumber.

Four days after applying to become a citizen of the Broken, I receive a letter telling me that my application has been successful and that I am now officially Broken. I guess all those years of being the outcast finally paid off. They've even sent me my own Broken starter pack- 'How to dress as a Broken Citizen,' 'The law on smiling,' 'Making the transition from normal to Broken.'

I text Calix immediately, wasting no time revealing my true intent.

'Calix, I'm a citizen. We can get married!'

Calix picks me up in the Rolls-Royce and we drive straight to the City.

"So we are finally getting married? This is amazing Seren. I've waited my whole life for you. You lifted me from the ashes, the dust and made me alive again," he says with a tear in his eye.

I know that the next week will be spent in obsessive preparation for the wedding. The palace staff are organizing the ceremony itself but it's up to me to find the dress and it's not a task that Calix is allowed to help with.

Calix meanwhile is busy organizing the guest list, finding a suit, using his expertise to choose the music and ruling the City.

When Calix first proposed, I was so psyched up for the wedding and was bursting with ideas, but because of the delays and my belief that it wasn't going to happen, it all seems to have come at once and my inspiration is needed rapidly. I had this idea I'd spend months leisurely walking around shops choosing a dress and getting it fitted, now because of palace efficiency and my desperation to be Calix's bride it all has to be done within one week. This isn't helped by the reality that this is no ordinary wedding. Calix is a King and the wedding will be a public ceremony like the coronation and the funeral, but unfortunately unlike these former events the spotlight will now also be on me and my nerves are kicking in. The whole city will be watching and I'm petrified that I will mess up. However I don't want this added pressure to

overshadow my big day, and I must try to remember that concentrating on Calix's perfect face will calm my nerves and bring me inner peace.

I've noticed that since Calix has become King and the knowledge of our impending wedding has mysteriously spread like wildfire across the city that people are much warmer to me than when the former King was alive. This is particularly true of shop keepers and assistants who are keen on securing the royal booking. I can't help but feel like a phoney. I'm just an ordinary girl, am I really cut out to be the wife of the King of the Broken? But at the same time, that's not what my wedding is about. It's about my love for Calix and his love for me. But the Kings statement rings in my head 'Only love can bring the City to life and heal the heart of the Broken.' Is this really true, will our public display of love and yes, happiness transform the city dramatically? It's already changed since Calix has become King, although subtly. I wonder if this final jolt of goodness will resuscitate the citizens fully and heal them from their torment and misery. This possibility further adds to my determination not to be overwhelmed by nerves and have my wedding broadcast to everyone, rather than me take the easy route out and try and convince Calix to let us have a private ceremony. Will the city finally have its victory over the dead King?

The one major problem of having a Broken wedding, is that *only* Broken citizens are allowed to attend. I can't invite Jasmine or Charlotte or even my own family as to do so would be to lift the veil and uncover the city. I've asked Calix if perhaps we can have a second, alternative 'wedding' where my 'regular' friends and family can witness the ceremony and he isn't immune to this idea.

Now that I've become a Broken citizen, I have to be sure that I also retain my normality which is difficult when the Ministry of the Broken encourages total conversion to Despair and being a freak is the norm here.

It's the day of my wedding and I now know exactly how Calix felt on the day of his coronation. Terrified, excited, overwhelmed ,ecstatic ,the feeling that you are part of something that is huge

and yet also entirely personal and unique to you.

I'm wearing a black lace wedding dress and a black veil, thoroughly embracing my citizenship. Marrying both Calix and the city. It's a fine day in August and my love for Calix has blossomed into a full bloom, akin to the bouquet of white roses that I carry tied with a blue ribbon. Calix is meeting me at the Black Cathedral of the Broken and I understand perfectly what he meant when he said that riding alone in the carriage will be the scariest thing. The worst part will be the crowds. I don't like being surrounded by crowds at the best of times but especially when I know that I am the spectacle they have all turned out to watch. The Broken bride seeking love to cure her loneliness. I'm like the guinea pig that's testing out love, happiness and contentment and the citizens want to see if these strange, new and forgotten emotions are going to backfire spectacularly leading to more hurt and permanent breakage or the answer they have always been seeking, the light at the end of the lengthy, dark tunnel that has been their lives.

Alfred is going to walk me down the aisle, as a Broken citizen himself he's the one most qualified for the job.

Calix has told me that there are two surprise guests who will be attending and this has provoked an eagerness in me to make haste in getting to the Cathedral.

I look at myself in the mirror. I look almost like a child, a little girl playing dress-up in a bridal gown. It's the only drawback I can think of in marrying Calix, but the pro's greatly outweigh the cons and I'm definitely going through with this.

The moment arrives when the carriage pulls up. It's black, elegant and simple with white interior and pulled by two white horses. The coachman opens the door for me and I get in. Crowds have gathered and line the road that leads from the palace to the Black Cathedral. I want to shout at the onlookers 'what are you all here for? I'm nobody special' but the children of the City have other ideas. They hold banners with my face on that read 'Seren, Princess of the Broken.' Adults wave flags with Calix and I on that say 'Congratulations on your wedding'. I'm

sure this would be the deceased King's worst nightmare come true.

All of the citizens are still dressed in black and look identical to how they looked at the funeral of the King, except a couple sport a sly upward curl of the lip which makes me think that the proverb of the King may be true after all and that love will change this city.

My heart is beating so fast, but I take deep breaths and try to calm myself down. I feel so exposed in this open-topped carriage and even the driver isn't facing me so I can't speak to him to ease my loneliness and isolation.

On those days as a child when I used to dream of my perfect wedding which seemed so distant and faraway, like a fantasy that would never actually come true, I never imagined that I'd be dressed in black on the happiest day of my life. But then again I had no comprehension that I'd marry a fallen Prince either. I'm surprisingly not regretting my decision to opt for a black dress over white. The idea was wholly mine, and Calix doesn't know about it yet. But I thought it was an appropriate symbol of who I've become and the life I am marrying into, the life I have chosen.

When at last I have arrived at the Black Cathedral of the Broken, I have composed myself somewhat and mental affirmations such as 'there's nothing to fear, this is a joyous occasion' and 'think how amazing Calix will look in his tuxedo' reassure me. I step out of the carriage, aided by the hand of the considerate coachman, onto the concrete floor that informs me 'this is indeed reality. You are not imagining this'. My two bridesmaids, broken citizens who I have never met before but who were elected by Calix, help hold my veil and the train of my dress as I walk into the Cathedral. They are stylishly dressed in black satin dresses, tied with a white sash.

I enter the Cathedral. It's all black interior, now decked out with masses of white flowers and candles, giving a striking and classy result.

There at the altar stands the ultimate decoration. The ice sculpture, the cherry on top of the wedding cake, the groom wearing a top hat and perfectly cut tuxedo with a white rose in the buttonhole, matching my bouquet.

I advance towards him slowly, his eyes beaming with a was-lost-now-found look. I smile

softly at him and he returns this expression.

Alfred walks at my side, holding my arm ready to give me away to the Broken king. My bridesmaids continue aiding me with my veil and dress, while little broken flower girls, porcelain dolls left on a shelf dressed in black gently scattering white petals lead in front and follow behind.

The organ sounds as I walk down the aisle playing Canon in D Major, whilst black harps gently accompany the organist.

I arrive at the altar and Calix looks deeply into my eyes, as if his heart has been on standstill all these years and is now finally free to beat.

We recite our vows, and in a city whose entrance lies next to that of a graveyard, the appropriateness of the final line really moves me.

I, Seren Amy Loneheart take you Calix Axel Blakely 1<sup>st</sup> to be my husband

To have and to hold, from this day forward:

For better, for worse,

For richer, for poorer

In sickness and in health

To love and to cherish

Till death do us part.

Calix repeats the vow. His eyes widen at the word death, revealing that he has retained his morbid nature as the Broken King.

We exchange wedding rings, two black bands that bind us together forever and I see the certainty in Calix's eyes.

"You may now kiss the bride," permits us to do what I've been longing for since I entered the Cathedral and saw the guardian angel standing by the altar. There is an applause from the audience, who look confused like caged lions who have been freed but remain in the same place through force of habit and learned helplessness.

Then I see them. Anita and Frederick, looking the most alive and in love of all the wedding guests, holding onto one another tightly. Dressed fashionably and perfectly groomed, they look like a Hollywood A-lister couple, but you'd expect that from the superstar of Blackball and his fiancée'

I feel so much more confident as we walk out of the Cathedral together and are driven by Alfred in the back of the Rolls Royce to the reception which is held in the ballroom of the palace.

All of the guests at the wedding have followed us here and the whole atmosphere of the palace feels incredibly positive. The most amazing thing in this room is my wedding cake. It has seven layers, covered with black icing with silver icing sugar and edible diamonds on top.

We have a 'Broken' disco. The ceiling of the ballroom hangs with a large silver disco ball and this evening is all about fun. Even some Smiley's have been invited, showing Calix's liberal attitude.

We dance to hit songs such as Miss Deranged's 'Bride to Darkness,' The Mourning Moans 'Dye It Black' and a selection of disco classics with Freddie acting as the DJ.

"It's great that we can finally be allowed to be happy," I say, my arms around Calix's neck.

"Yes, it's liberating but I'll always be broken Seren, albeit with a hint of a smile on my face and a sense of security and love that I never had before," he says truthfully.

"I wouldn't want it any other way. I'm broken too now, remember," I say, softly kissing his lips as Hearse Driver For Beautiful's 'I Will Find You At Midnight' plays and we are surrounded by dancing couples, our fellow Broken citizens who have woken up to the fact it is okay to love.

Calix makes a speech at the reception which I am all too eager to hear.

"This girl, my wife, Seren, has opened my eyes and taught me truth. It wasn't until I met her that I realized that I was living a lie, living in denial. I was denying nature, denying love, denying joy. We may be broken but that needn't be a permanent state. We are fixable, love is the glue that cements us together again and makes us whole. Seren has done just that for me. I am now complete. Every member of this city is worthy of love, please don't live in denial of



truth anymore. Thank you,” he says, resuming his seat and receiving a loud applause. A tear runs down my cheek and it’s such a touching moment.

## Epilogue

Calix and I spend our honeymoon in the City of the Broken, on my insistence. The deceased King's refusal to let me enter the palace has led to my obsession with it and I couldn't think of anywhere else in the world that I would prefer to be.

I see citizens all around me, holding hands with their loved ones, laughing with friends, Smiley's and Pro-Despair members conversing with each other. The city feels safe and free.

Most citizens still wear all black and embrace misery with both hands, but blotches of colour appear here and there and no one is afraid to laugh or smile anymore. They chose this life, as I chose mine.

The old King is dead, but not entirely forgotten. A single band of troublemakers lurk stealthily in the city. A rumour persists of the Band of the Broken Brotherhood.