

The forest was beautiful, the leaves were still shining from the morning dew. The air was humming with the sound of songbirds high above. It was a shame that I couldn't take a moment to enjoy it though, you see, according to all official records, I'm dead. The government was a tyrannical one, I, Nico, was one of the few brave people who decided to speak out against them. Purely to show their power and prove that they could, the government tried to have me assassinated. For this I applauded them, tactically this was an amazing move, it would silence whatever civil unrest I had caused and at the same time it would have been an amazing show of power. There was only one issue with their plan though, I escaped. This would have been all too shameful to them though, so of course, they did what any power hungry dictatorship would: They said that I was killed. Of course they didn't make a huge fuss over it, then the people would have started asking questions of all sorts that the government would have no answer to, and this would have led to more of an issue than I could have ever caused when I was alive. This might at first seem like an advantage for my slightly anarchist cause, it was, however, not. If I were to go into a village and begin flaunting the fact that I was alive, I would surely not remain that way for long. You see, the government has assassins everywhere, and by this time they most definitely know of my status as a living man. So like any intelligent person, I decided to begin an uprising.

Unfortunately, a revolt is a hard thing to begin when you need to avoid the vast majority of people and should not trust anyone you encounter. In fact it had not been going well, I had been on the run for nearly a month and my total number of recruits was up to zero. When I was in the previously mentioned forest, I happened to stumble upon my first companion.

I could tell she herself was running from the government by the maniac look in her eyes, also by the way she kept looking over her shoulder, as though she was horribly afraid that someone would be following her. This meant to me that I finally found not only a recruit for my cause, but a friend. Friends are a rare thing for any fugitive, but for one like me, whom the entire Nation was trying to kill, they were as precious as gold. I slowly crept up on her, I was getting ready to reveal myself when suddenly she turned. I apparently did not make a horribly great first impression, as her reaction to my presence was to draw a knife.

“Get back, I’ve killed the rest of you, but I thought that I was still being followed.” She said this, appearing confident, but I could tell that she was horrified, if she had truly killed a band of assassins, she must have used whatever precious energy she had for the task. If not, she most likely had no idea how to use a knife, if this was the case, I was safe.

“It’s ok, I’m not one of them, and I too am one of their targets.” I said. Looking back on this it sounded much too formal for an encounter with someone that probably hadn’t had any human contact in quite some time, though in any sense it caused her to lower her knife, so I continued talking.

“I’m running from them too, we ought to help each other.” This actually elicited a response which I was thankful for, I was running out of things to say.

“Do you have any food?” She said, her voice barely above a whisper.

“Yes, and it would appear that you have weapons, we could be of great help to each other.” This of course was true. I would need weapons if I was going to survive, and she was going to need food. She slowly came up to me. I really didn’t know if this was good or bad, as she had not yet put her knife back in its sheath. It was clearly sharp enough to kill me. She surprised me, she raised the knife. Then she did something truly unexpected. She handed it to me.

The rest of the night was amazing, for the first time in weeks I could eat without looking over my shoulder to see if I was about to be killed. We ate far more than we should have, but we both figured that it was the best cause for celebration we would have for a fairly long time. Her name, as I found out while we were eating dinner that her name was Amaya, this sounded like far to proper a name for a fugitive, but I decided not to mention it. Then one thought that hadn’t even crossed my mind came to me.

“Why are they after you?” She asked cautiously.

“I was apparently causing *civil unrest*. I didn’t really know that speaking your opinion was a crime, but apparently the government thought that I was a threat to the *civilized order of society*.” She looked at me, baffled, like she had no idea that one could be incarcerated for opposing the government.

“How is that fair, you were just telling the truth, or a very least the truth as *you* saw it.”

“It’s true. What they do is completely unfair, that’s why I began to speak out against the government in the first place. Why are they after you?”

“Stealing. Food mainly. Just trying to feed my family, my parents are horribly sick, and the doctor that came to my house said that sense they couldn’t work, he would only let them live if I kept them alive. So that’s what I’ve been doing, if it’s legal for them a kill people because they can’t work, it best be damn fair that I can do what I can to keep them alive.”

I agreed with her on that subject, the treatment of the ill was one of the things that started my little rebellion. Amaya, as I knew her so far, was an amazing person. I thought that if anyone truly ought to rule the kingdom, it was her,

The next day we both woke with the sun. This was probably a survival instinct for both of us, the precious hours we had between our waking and that of our pursuers were potentially the difference between life and death. We were just gathering up our belongings when she very adamantly stated something. Something that surprised me.

“I know how were going to beat them.” She said.

“By that you mean?”

“I know how were going to convince the government to see our point of view.” This surprised me, I really had no idea what she meant, but I was curious.

“Continue.” I stated, trying to make it sound like I truly had faith in this plan of hers.

“Well, I was just thinking, they can never change their ways if you spend the rest of your life hiding in the woods.”

“But it would be suicide to go into a town and start spouting our philosophies at them. Philosophies, that I shouldn’t have to remind you, are treason.”

“Not if they don’t know who we are.” Now I was truly baffled. I had positively no idea what she meant now.

“How are we going to do that?” It sounded crazy, there was no way we would be able to break into that capitol city and speak with the senate without getting our heads shot off, even if we were disguised as senators. You see the government is ruled by an emperor, but the senate makes most of the legal choices. Even so, they are very careful about who is allowed into the senate building. I heard a while ago that all of the senators have tattoos, making them impossible to impersonate.

“Well it seems clear what we do.” Amaya said. “We need to get into the city, it’s pretty clear what we do from there. A few of the senators are sympathetic, they know how cruel the

emperor is, and we will probably be able to convince one of them to say what we need to be said.”

Actually, that was true, some of the senators did respect our views, but to speak them in a senate meeting would be incredibly dangerous. Something like that may cause the emperor to do something *tragic*, I’ve heard stories of senators being assassinated just for speaking against the emperor. Though I wasn’t convinced Amaya’s plan would work, it was the best one we had. This, unfortunately, was when disaster struck.

An arrow came whistling past my head, missing me by mere inches. I quickly turned in the direction of my shooter and threw my knife. It was a clean hit, most likely the person who fired the arrow would be dead in a matter of minutes. Amaya screamed, I ran in her direction, she was fighting off two soldiers at once, they both had swords drawn on her and were clearly more than a match for Amaya’s untrained sword fighting skills. I ran to help her. A blade swung down, hitting me in the leg, I was so focused on my attacker to see how bad the cut was; I knew I was losing a lot of blood, it was painful to say in the least. Finally I brought down one of Amaya’s attackers. *One down* I thought, but as I looked over to see the other attacker, I saw Amaya, lying on the ground, cuts all over her body. Her attacker stood over her, poised to make the finishing blow. Then I did what anyone would do for a friend. I took the blow, jumping in between the attacker and Amaya. The last thing I saw was the blood-stained blade of a sword, bearing down on me. Then it went dark.

I couldn’t tell how much time had passed, it was night, so at least a few hours, but it was possible I had been out for much longer. I looked down at my ruined body. I was lying on the floor on a cave. The air was cold and damp, water would occasionally drip from the roof. It was clear that Amaya had survived the fight, how else would I have made it here. The cut was worse than I could ever have expected, it was deep, still oozing with the foul smell of slowly dying flesh. The skin was green and infected. I didn’t see how I could have survived. Just then, Amaya came through a small crack between two of the rocks, it was possible she had sealed the cave herself, or it might be natural, there was really no way to be sure.

“How long was I out?” I feebly ask. I could barely even draw the breath to say this, and I could taste the blood in my throat.

“Too long, three other groups of soldiers have come looking for us, it was only luck that they didn’t find the cave. If they did they could have killed us in our sleep.”

I tried to stand up, but with little success, I quickly became dizzy and only managed a few steps before falling to the floor. “We have to move.” I said, trying to sound as determined as I could, though my voice was still raspy and weak.

“Look at yourself Nico, you can barely stand! We would be dead in an instant if they found us!”

I knew this was true, but I was also sure that if they really had sent three squads of soldiers to try to find us, they would bring something worse next. Blood-hounds maybe, they would be able to find us for sure if they brought those.

“You’re right, we ought to keep going. It’s just, I’ve kept you alive for nearly a week and now you’re saying that the only way we have a chance of survival might get you killed!”

I thought about that for a while, she never even mentioned herself. I’m not even sure she had noticed. She was more concerned about my life than she was her own. I didn’t know how I would be able to thank her for that. It was then, while I was pondering what she had said that I realized just how bad her wounds were. Not as severe as mine, but much more numerous. There must have been hundreds of slashes on her. How we both survived was truly a mystery to me.

“Ok, Nico, your right, we have to go. I’ll gather the supplies, you do what you can. We leave for the Capitol city at daybreak.”

We trudged from the mouth of the cave, both silent. What we were about to do worried us, we would most likely both be killed. At the same time, the rewards were equally great, if we succeeded, we would become the rulers of a new kingdom. So much weight was on our shoulders, but I knew we were doing the right thing. I thought of my family, and what they would do if I was dead. I hadn’t even spoken to any of the sense my *assassination*, for all I knew, they were all dead. This possibility only increased my confidence. I was doing the right thing, any leader who would have innocent children slaughtered for their family’s beliefs does not deserve power. My sister was only ten, she would be dead in seconds if the emperor wanted her that way. My thoughts then turned to Amaya, what I would do without her. I had only

known her for a few days, and yet, in a way, she was like family to me. She had saved my life. I wouldn't let her die, if I had to, I would give my life for hers.

After miles of slow, tired walking. We arrived at the Capitol city, for the first time in our trip, Amaya spoke. "It's kind of pretty, isn't it, you would never know that its ruler was a maniac who would kill children if they angered him." She was, of course referring to the Capitol city. Amaya was right, it was beautiful. The streets were made of polished glass with horses and people walking upon them. The buildings were made of a shining white rock, gleaming in the sunlight like the sun does in the night sky. It was a shame that we were here to destroy the builders of this city, we had to remind ourselves why we were here.

We then did manage to contact one of the senators. The details we gave him were sketchy at best, but he swore that he would represent us in the court. Which was dangerous for them poor man, he was rather old, and he would certainly not survive if the government didn't want him to.

Senator Flavius was walking home. He was quite surprised by the two young adults walking to see him. He was not the most famous of the senators, they wouldn't want anything like his signature, there were others who would welcome admiration from the masses, he did not. Instead he figured they were most likely going to ask him for money, it was not uncommon for street urchins to beg the wealthy for things. The last thing Flavius expected was that they would talk to him, and this, to his shock, was very much their plan.

The Senate meeting was today, he had promised the odd people (What were their names again?) That he would mention many of the more sensitive laws of the nation, and looking back, this hadn't been a good choice. Speaking views that were not his would be frowned upon, it was believed that being influenced in this way showed a lack of leadership. Let alone what it was that he had promised to propose. It was very.... Wrong, to mention things like this. The senate likes to ignore the more brutal parts of society, and he would be bringing all of those things to the surface. He didn't even want to think of what had happened to the last senator who

mentioned the soldiers. Still though, a promise is a promise, and he would try his best to bring light to certain subjects, and then he would kill the people who made him do it.

Amaya and I hid in a small room out of the senate chamber, it was just near enough to the chamber that we could hear everything that was going on, but at the same time, no one would find us. Flavius suggested this hiding place last night when we talked. It was truly, very generous. Most senators would have either ignored them or stabbed them. Either of these options would probably have ended in their deaths, which would be unfortunate. The meeting seemed to be going well, but Flavius had not yet spoken, this was bothersome, as he had claimed he would speak up quickly. For a few moments, the hall was silent, and then:

“We have ignored many of our nation’s problems for all too long. The sick are made to die faster, and the patriots not allowed to express their opinions. Some believe this should be changed, I however, am not one of these people. Two of those who are, on the other hand, are hiding in this very building. We will show them that we are not some toy to be influenced. Guards, they are in the chamber, off of the main entryway. Kill them, we will not let them get away.”

The chamber suddenly became full of many voices, some shouting, others afraid. Some were not even sure if Flavius was telling the truth. Amaya drew her knife as I tried to block the door. A smell caught my attention, smoke, curling in gray streaks up the smooth wooden walls of our chamber. They were going to light the room on fire! “Nice, not to put any unwanted pressure on you or anything, but what the hell do we do now?”

“On three, we burst out of the room, we won’t let them smoke us out like bees, if we’re going to die, let’s make them remember it.” Amaya nodded, unsure if my plan would work, or was even sane, yet she seemed to think I was right. Slowly I began counting. “One,” I said, my voice shaking, “Two, Three!” We burst the door open, Amaya moved in a flurry of light, blades slashing, swirling through the air. She had trained for this, nearly every strike was deadly. I was not so lucky. I had no combat training, so I did the rational thing, I let instinct take over. A blade came down over my head. I jumped to the side and kicked my attack hard, directly in the

face. His helmet crumpled and he fell to the ground. All of the soldiers began to group up and start attacking Amaya. Strong as she was, she wouldn't be able to take much more of it.

“STOP!” I yelled with so much force that many of the soldiers turned my way. Some still fought Amaya, but the odds were once again in her favor. “Is this right?” I asked, “You just tried to kill two people. We ourselves managed to slay many of your guards, has this not shown that we can fight you if we wanted to?” There was some amount of muttering among the soldiers and senators. “But we have never harmed you, Amaya, my friend is a thief, yes. However, this is because her family was threatened. You threatened to murder her parents, just because they were sick! What if one of them was to return to health and make some discovery that changed the world? And me? I was a target merely because I spoke my opinions! Do you think maybe, just maybe, that if you had listened you might agree!”

There was more muttering, this seemed to be mostly in agreement, which was good. We might not even die.

“The nation must change if we are to survive. It is true, at one point in time, the sick nearly always died. Now however, we have the power to heal them, so why don't we? We are far too ingrained in our ways, we will change or we will die, do not deny it!”

“Then we, or more accurately, *you*, will die!” The voice belonged to Flavius. This was followed by a very distinct sound, that of a knife being drawn from a sheath. The blade came down swooshing through the air, I braced myself to die, but no pain came. I turned around and saw Amaya, lying on the ground, blood seeping through her clothes. She was dying. I yelled for help, but none came, no rush of medics or doctors coming to my aid. As I looked down at her maimed body, I knew she would die.

“Why did you save me?” I asked, tears welling up in my eyes.

“You did the same for me.” I knelt to the ground, clutching the knife, time seemed to blur around me. Amaya's eyes closed for the last time. She was dead.

The country took a turn after that, Amaya died as a martyr, and I think this was the cause for the radical change. Immediately after her death, the senate had an emergency meeting, in which I became the emperor. I should have been happy in my new post, but I never was, as much as I hated to admit it, I loved Amaya.