

## Fire in a Crystal

June 27th, 3019

Snow; tiny little crystals all bunched together to make a cold, shiny substance. In a way, it was like a person. People either hate it or love it. Scarlett, however, loved snow. No, not because she liked building snowmen, or making snow angels, but because Queen Camille despised snow.

Queen Camille was the sickening woman that Scarlett and the townspeople had to call their Queen, but she was very alluring. Her long, wavy hair matched the look of fire, making her brown eyes look a dark shade of red. Every day she wore a long, cherry-colored dress. The sleeves rolled down to her wrists, resembling flames running down her arms. The train of her dress simulated lava flowing down a mountain, leaving a long trail behind her. Never would you find someone walking behind her, for her footprints left a burning trail behind every step.

The thing about Queen Camille is that she had powers, magical powers. Bright, orange flames burst from her palms by a flick of the wrist, cackling at its victim. She used her power against humanity, which brought her to power. Kingdom after kingdom had tried to defeat her, only to receive the melted bodies of their soldiers.

But now, the magical element of winter, snow, was her only weakness. Never before had anyone attempted to melt *her* away by the ice cold touch of snow and ice. For this reason, the land never witnessed a cold day. The townspeople knew of her weakness, but they couldn't strike without being prepared.

For five years the townspeople have been training to fight the Queen's army. Buff blacksmiths, lumberjacks, and retired soldiers help train farmers and store owners to the point where you'd think they were a real army. Now, they were ready to strike back.

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"Today is the day we reclaim victory," the Rebel Leader shouts to the crowd of townspeople.

Scarlett and her best friend, Skye, hide behind some bushes. For years, the town has been preparing for an attack on the Queen's army. Secret meetings, private training lessons, stronger weapons, and they are finally ready to attack. Scarlett and Skye, who are both seventeen years old, secretly fight in honors of their families.

Scarlett and Skye both lost their fathers in a battle many years ago, which was the war that would determine if the Queen would rule the kingdom, or not. Her army won. Both their mothers were killed only because they were the wives of the men who fought against the Queen. They both are an only child, and their other family members haven't been heard from in over thirty years. The only way they managed to stay alive was to hide underground in secret tunnels built by the townsmen.

They watch as the townspeople cheer, holding up their weapons. Row by row, men and women from the town stand proud and geared with armor. They each hold an Iron Fist, which is a new weapon the town's blacksmith has created. Though it is a bit smaller than a normal shotgun, it is more powerful than any weapon they could imagine. It was built specifically for the Queen's army. After many months of failed attacks, they finally found the Queen's weakness, which is also her army's weakness; ice and snow. The leader of the group continues to give orders, repeating the plan of attack.

"Her army is stronger than before. They will remember our old battle techniques. Remember what I have taught you. They think we are weak, and we will not stand for it any longer!"

The townspeople cheer once more, and carefully listen to the plan of attack for the last time.

"You ready?" Skye whispers to Scarlett.

"Been ready for years," Scarlett replies, listening to every word the leader says.

Skye chuckles and cracks her knuckles.

"Positions, now!" The leader shouts. The crowd gives one last cheer before spreading out into different directions, and towards the Queen's castle.

A boy suddenly runs to the bushes where Scarlett and Skye hide and hands them guns.

“Three Iron Fists, ma’ ladies,” he chuckles as he crouches down next to them. You had to be at least nineteen years old to join the battle, for they don’t want the whole town to get killed off.

“Thanks, Harry,” they both reply at the same time and grab ahold of their weapons.

Scarlett, Skye, and Harry have been best friends since they were six and seven years old. Their parents were all good friends, and so a great bond was created between their children. Harry joins the war along with his mother, who fights in honor of her dead husband, who was killed for supplying the last war with extra food.

Scarlett ties her dark brown hair into a french braid, and Skye ties her dirty blonde hair into a high ponytail. Moving at the same time, they reach into the bag that sits between them. They both pull out a knife, which was given to them by their fathers. Both blades are made from diamond, but Scarlett’s is bright green, and Skye’s is bright blue. The handle of the knife is made by the strongest leather in the kingdom and has their initials carved into it. Both were given to them after their fathers were killed.

Harry pulls out his bow and arrow and drapes it around his arm. His eyes continue to watch their surroundings as he tightens his boots. Skye was able to supply them all with new armor, as Scarlett supplied them with bandages, and medicine that heals wounds. They quietly wait for all the groups to disappear before heading in the direction of the Queen’s castle, the one destination the group of rebels was informed *not* to enter.

After three miles, they arrive at the back of the castle. The outside of the castle is a dark brown color, which looks to be made of bricks. The only windows that can be seen are on the very top floor, and fountains of lava pour down into the lava moat. The Queen, using her magical powers, managed to make every part of the castle as hot as lava. This is her way of keeping out any humans who dare to try and step into the castle.

Scarlett and Skye huddle behind a huge boulder and wait for the signal. Harry begins climbing one of the big trees, for he chooses to shoot his bow from higher grounds. They all remain still and silent, watching the guards with steady eyes.

In front of the back door stands four tall figures, two on each side. Their armor is as dark as the midnight sky, and their boots cause them to look like giants. Connected to their waist is an orange badge with a flame symbol on it. Their bodies are made of flaming fire,

leaving a puddle of lava every step they take. They each hold a sword of fire, which is basically an entire sword that is made of fire. All that can be recognized on their faces are two black eyes. Nothing more can be seen.

“What’s taking them so long?” Skye whispers to Scarlett as they wait for the signal that the battle has begun.

“Something’s wrong,” Scarlett replies. As she glances around, she notices Harry waving to her. He immediately motions to her that the person who was supposed to give a “signal” was killed instantly. The battle has begun.

Skye watches Harry, and turns towards Scarlett, already reading Scarlett’s mind.

“I’ll follow you,” Skye whispers.

“Fifty bucks I’m faster than you,” Scarlett whispers to Skye with a smirk, who smirks back at her.

“Been preparing for this moment for many months, girl,” Skye replies, and it’s begun.

With one quick nod at Harry, he aims an arrow towards the guards and shoots the ground at their feet. The second the arrow hits the ground, ice begins to cover the ground beneath the guards' feet. Before they can even react, Scarlett and Skye fling out of the woods, their ice knives ready in hand. They run side by side straight towards the guards, and with a flick of their wrists, all four guards are dead, exactly like ice putting out a flame.

Harry returns behind them, keeping his eyes on the woods. Together, Scarlett and Skye shoot their guns at the door, which instantly turns to ice. A few quick stabs and the door tumbles into a pile of melted ice. Reaching down to their armor-like boots, they press a button, and the bottoms of their shoes turn to ice, for the floors of the castle are as hot as the sun.

The inside of the castle is eerily quiet, only the sound of dripping lava can be heard. Scarlett leads the way, Skye, in the middle, and Harry watching behind them. They now all carry their guns in their hands, ready for a guard to approach. Not one guard can be seen, nor can they hear the flicker of their fire-like-bodies.

They make their way down a long corridor of multiple closed doors. Along the walls are hanging torches, and photos of the Queen, only the Queen. Eventually, they walk past an open door with spiral stairs going up. The railings are lit with fire, and the steps are bright, fiery red, showing how hot the metal is.

“Bet you my right leg these lead all the way up to the Queen’s room,” Harry whispers.

One by one they walk up the stairs, their ice shoes fizzling each time they take a step. They make sure to avoid touching the railings with their bare hands, for they do not have gloves that will protect them from the fire. They climb up the stairs until they come to a final empty room. The door is wide open, and the only object in the room is a torch on the wall. A voice can be heard, and so they immediately stop in place.

*“Burn every man and woman who even steps foot on the grass near my castle. I want their villages burnt to the ground. If I hear that one rebel has gotten into my castle, then I will serve your head on a plate to my heckhounds.”*

Footsteps can be heard moving further and further away before all can be heard other than boiling lava.

“Do you think that was the Queen?” Skye whispers.

“Sure sounded like something she would say,” Harry replies.

Scarlett peaks her head out of the door and looks left and right. To the left is a huge glass window, proving that they’re on the top floor. To the right is a short corridor of rooms, two big wooden doors in the very middle of the hallway. Two guards stand beside the door, still and motionless. They hold flamethrowers in one hand, and a spear in the other. The flamethrowers aren’t a shock. Scarlett turns back to Skye and Harry and begins whispering to them a plan.

“Alright, I think the Queen’s room is just to the right, but there are two guards by the door. They look stronger than the ones from outside.” Skye takes a peak out the door as Harry quietly reloads his bow.

“Skye, I want you to watch for any other guards. They’ll most likely make a lot of sounds and try to alarm other guards.” Skye turns her head back into the room, nodding at Scarlett.

“Harry and I will fight the two guards,” Scarlett says while nodding towards Harry, who nods back at her.

“We need to be very, very careful and alert. If that is truly the Queen’s room right there, and we heard her speaking no more than three minutes ago, meaning she’s still close

by, then we don't know what, or who, she could summon to attack us," Skye whispers, and begins preparing her weapons. She clips her knife onto the top of her hand, so she can pack in more than just a punch.

Scarlett and Harry both nod. Scarlett checks to make sure her gun is reloaded and ready, while Harry pulls out his homemade flamethrower. Copying Skye's actions, Scarlett clips her knife onto the top of her hand. Harry pulls three pairs of special masks from the inside of his safety armor and hands them out.

After they are all ready, Scarlett nods at Skye. Skye nods back and pulls a ball of powder out of her safety armor, which almost resembles a big bath bomb. She takes a step out of the doorway and tosses the ball towards the guards. The instant it hits the ground, white smoke explodes into the air, emitting a mist of snow.

Scarlett runs in, followed by Harry, their masks glowing a shade of light blue through the smoke. Instantly, the guards begin swinging and stabbing while the mist slowly melts their skin, but not enough to kill them. Harry shoots an arrow at the guard, which is instantly dodged. Just like they said, these guards are stronger, meaning their armor is more protective, and they have smarter fighting skills.

Scarlett loses sight of Harry as she and the other guard move in a different direction, Scarlett swinging and dodging punches. Scarlett shoots some dry ice at the guard's leg, which is not covered with armor. It instantly loses balance but manages to grab ahold of Scarlett's right arm. Scarlett cries out in pain as its hand burns through her thin armor. She manages to shoot its shoulder, which causes its hand to let go of her arm. Another cry can be heard, and Scarlett quickly glances behind her towards Harry.

The other guard is also on the ground, but it has a hold of Harry's ankle. He punches its hand with his brass knuckle, and the hand drops. Harry stumbles back and reaches down towards his ankle to pull down his leg gear. Skye is instantly by his side and helps him defeat the guard with a couple more blows.

Scarlett, after reassuring herself that her friends are fine, turns her attention back towards the last guard. Surprisingly, it's crawling away. Scarlett quickly trails after it, but before she gives a final blow of dry ice, the guard cries out.

"Wait, wait!" Scarlett freezes in shock at the voice and lowers her weapon.

Below her, the guard begins to change form. Slowly, the flames begin to vanish from the guard's body, and human skin can be seen. Its face begins to morph into a human. Now laying below her is a normal human being.

"I'm not with the Queen! I'm not with the Queen!" The man shouts, now shielding his face.

"I was taken captive by the Queen's guards. She turns people into her army, but we're trapped under a spell in which we cannot control," the man continues. "Please, she is in that very room before you. If you end her, then all those held captive and under her spell will be free. The kingdom will be free."

Skye and Harry, who now stand directly behind Scarlett, both share confused looks.

"How do we know that this is not a trap?" Scarlett asks the unknown man and holds her weapon up.

"Michael Drew, he was your father. I fought beside him during the war of 3012."

At this, Scarlett lowers her weapon once more and crouches down next to the man.

"And how do I know that you're telling the truth?" She asks him.

"Your father was a good man. He saved many soldiers and civilians. If I had not been held captive under the Queen's spell, then I would be outside fighting against her army." The man is now looking directly at Scarlett as she stares back at him. Something inside Scarlett tells her that he is telling the truth.

"We need to kill the Queen before she destroys anyone else's lives," Scarlett says as she stands up, and turns towards Skye and Harry. Harry places his hand on Scarlett's shoulder.

"How do you know that he's not lying? For all we know, this could be another trick by the Queen," he whispers. Scarlett is quiet at first but then speaks.

"No one would know my father's name unless they fought beside him during battles. He is not lying to us."

Skye steps forward and places her own hand on Scarlett's shoulder.

"If you trust him, then I trust him," she says. Harry sighs dramatically before nodding.

"We have to hurry. We've already wasted some time," Scarlett instructs and begins wrapping her injured arm with a bandage. It's not too badly burnt, thankfully.

“Harry, you stay here with him. You’re already too wounded to fight,” Skye says to Harry, and motions to the man on the ground who is now resting his head on his hands.

“But...” Harry begins.

“Harry, please, we’ll be okay,” Scarlett utters.

“Wait, take this,” the man on the ground suddenly hands Skye the badge that was once on his belt. “It’ll allow you to open the doors.”

Skye nods at him as she takes the badge. “Thank you,” she whispers.

Harry kneels down next to the man and holds his weapons in hand in case anyone enters from the stairs. Scarlett nods at Skye, who nods back. They both make their way to the big wooden doors, both on each side.

On the doors, which would be where a normal doorknob would be, is an indented shape, almost like a puzzle piece. Skye slowly places the badge into the slot, which is the correct shape of the badge and pushes it through. The slot then glows orange, before the doors slowly open slightly.

They carefully open the door and peek into the room. Inside appears to be the Queen’s bedroom. Directly in front of them is a king-sized bed covered with black sheets and red pillows. Above the bed is a massive photo of the Queen, her face serious. Two glass doors are on either side of the bed, which appear to lead outside to two balconies. The right side of the room is covered with shelves, which each have a jar on every shelf. The left side of the room is a huge vanity, which is also black. Scarlett walks to the right side, and Skye takes the left.

As Scarlett glances around the room, her stomach begins to turn. In every single jar on the shelves is burnt body parts. Under each jar is a label with a name. What makes Scarlett even more disturbed, is that they are the names of all the old King and Queen, along with their other family members. Some say the names of families from other kingdoms, too.

“Scarlett,” Skye whispers.

Scarlett turns towards Skye and sees her pointing out onto the balcony. Just as Scarlett turns towards the door, her heart freezes. Out on the right balcony, is the Queen, herself, walking back and forth past the glass door. She watches below her castle as her army of enslaved civilians fight off their own people.

Scarlett immediately sneaks to the door, Skye standing, ready and prepared, behind her. Scarlett slowly reaches for the doorknob before Skye quickly pulls her hand back. Scarlett looks at Skye with confusion before Skye points once more to the doorknob. As Scarlett takes a closer look at the doorknob, she now understands, and they both step back. The Queen would not be dumb enough to leave the door clear like that. The doorknob glows bright red with heat, sparks flying out every now and then.

They eventually are right back at the bedroom door, and so they both raise their weapons. At the same time, they shoot a ball of dry ice at the door, which shatters with ice in seconds. The Queen noticeably gets hit with some shards of ice and whips around. Scarlett and Skye are now back at the balcony door, their weapons pointed directly at the Queen. The Queen, instead of frowning, smiles, for the first time ever.

“Very nicely done. You managed to make it past my guards,” she says in a menacing voice.

“Those were not guards, those were innocent townspeople who you enslaved,” Scarlett spits out. The Queen laughs.

“Do you really think that two, normal, teenage girls would be able to defeat someone like me, all on your own?” The Queen says, now standing taller than before. She smiles even wider and holds her arms out.

“Shoot me then.”

Both Scarlett and Skye glance at each other, and raise their eyebrows.

“I knew you worthless kids couldn’t-”

Before the Queen can even finish her sentence, both Scarlett and Skye shoot their weapons. The Queen’s smirk instantly drops and is turned into confusion. She crumbles to the ground on her knees and the ice begins to cover her entire body. She looks up at the both of them, her eyebrows furrowing together.

“You’ll never defeat me,” she cries out.

“Too late,” both Scarlett and Skye say at the same time.

Before they know it, the Queen now kneels before them, her body completely frozen. Scarlett walks forward and crouches down by her. Along the Queen’s neck is a necklace with a huge, orange crystal connected to it. The crystal is carved into a flame and still burns brightly. Scarlett pulls her father’s knife from her strap, and crushes it into the

ice, instantly striking the crystal. Skye pulls Scarlett back, and they both watch as the Queen soon melts into a pile of ashes.

The booms that were once heard outside suddenly stop. Shouts and cries die down, and the sound of guns and swords are silent. Cheers of victory can soon be heard from below the castle, and they all hurry into the castle to see the savior of the kingdom. Scarlett and Skye look at each other, and they pull each other into a hug. Harry soon limps into the room, his face looking at the pile of ashes, and then towards his two best friends. They instantly pull him into their group hug, and they all cry of happiness together.

“We did it.”