

Princess Crystal Cleir will wed her bred-ed prince, Pierce, in one month, and the whole planet is ecstatic to welcome the next queen to the throne. Crystal should be happy to take the throne; she inherited a world free from war, hunger, discrimination, and all the other unnecessary imperfections that doom a society. Daiyealmondo is the epitome of perfection; the first queen, Diamond Cleir, pioneered this world and molded it into a masterpiece, and the heirs of the Cleir family have upheld her legacy in the generations that have passed.

Crystal has always had *weird* feelings about her planet's history. She always wanted more, not even knowing what that meant, and she knows that sounds insane. She's never been able to voice her concerns or dreams because they sound ridiculous, yet she still wonders if imperfect would be perfect. She "borrowed" her prince from the Guardian's Penn to see if he feels the same way: maybe she doesn't have to feel so alone anymore.

Crystal stares at the blond curls atop Prince Pierce's head as they ride the waves in the canoe she made out of ruby. They are seated across from each other.

They have remained quiet since Crystal took him from the Guardian's Penn. Pierce is just staring at the waves, unsure what to say, growing more uneasy by the second; this is the unusual behavior of a blood crown princess.

Pierce breaks the silence, "This is an interesting contraption, Your Highness."

Crystal giggles, "It's called a canoe. Isn't that a funny word? I read about them in old texts. They are from Earth."

Pierce tilts his head, "Earth?"

Crystal nods quickly, unable to contain the joy of her discovery: "Another planet with humans."

Pierce nearly gasps, surprised, "The rumors of aliens are true?"

Crystal grabs his hands momentarily, "Yes, there is a whole universe out there." Crystal pauses, "Do you think there's a world out there more perfect than Daiyealmondo?"

Pierce chuckles, "Impossible." Pierce looks toward the sky. "We have the perfect Cleir family to lead us."

Prince Pierce stares into Crystal's blue eyes with blissfully ignorant admiration, but the look she returns is deep sadness, and she wouldn't be able to tell you why. Her frown deepens the more she stares into his green eyes. "What if... what if Diamond... what if she was wrong?"

Pierce snaps his attention to Crystal. "Princess, I don't understand. She was a perfect Queen who created a perfect world."

Crystal sighs as she asks, "Can I ask you something?" She doesn't wait for Pierce to confirm. "Do you want... more?"

She never has the right words; she doesn't know what is missing. It's a small space inside herself that hangs there: a sort of longing that she can't put into words. She doesn't know what she wants. She doesn't know what is *wrong*. But something *is* wrong.

Pierce has never heard anyone talk like this. "What more could I want, princess? I am the bred-ed prince destined to wed the blood crown queen to do my part in creating the next blood crown prince or princess."

Crystal sighs. He doesn't get it. *'How could he get it when I don't even get it?'* Crystal looks up at the sky. "It's a perfect day, right?"

Pierce nods, "It's always a perfect day on Daiyealmondo."

Crystal breaks out in an almost manic fit of giggles, catching Pierce by surprise.

The sound of her laughter is contagious. Pierce starts to chuckle with her. "What is so funny, your highness?"

Still chuckling, she explains, "I just thought of something funny. What if you were a girl?"

Pierce stops laughing, "I don't understand. That sounds like a mistake. You are a princess. They needed to breed a prince."

Crystal shakes her head, "Just pretend. What if they made that mistake?"

Pierce scratches his head, "It would have been imperfect?"

Crystal laughs, "Maybe it would have been perfect. What if I were to wed a girl?"

Pierce tilts his head, "Wed a girl? That's a silly thing to say. You wouldn't be able to birth the blood crown."

Crystal stands up, frustrated, nearly tipping the canoe. "Pierce, do you really think we are perfect?"

Prince Pierce looks up at Crystal with eyes that are glassy and moist but a smile that seems to be cemented to his face, never faltering. "Don't you, your majesty? Queen Diamond rid our world of imperfections. Everyone is happy."

Crystal takes her seat. "I'm not."

Pierce's eyes widened, "how could you say such an imperfect thing? Are you ill?"

Crystal shuts her eyes tight, "she killed thousands of our people all for perfection. And I don't know if she was right."

Pierce laughs, a cynical note echoing through it. "But princess! She executed the imperfect to give us this paradise. Imagine the *"dirty"* features of those days in modern times. It was *dark* before Queen Diamond took reign and showed us the *light*."

Crystal shakes her head, looking downcast. "But Pierce, who gave her the right to decide what is perfect or not?" Her voice is a little bit strained.

Prince Pierce's mind races as he struggles to understand. (Crystal doesn't expect him to.) "I'm sorry, your highness. I don't understand what you want. Maybe you could teach me after we wed. We probably should get back to the Guardian's Penn before Juda notices I'm gone."

Crystal blurts out, "I don't want to wed you." Crystal stares at Prince Pierce, who finally stops smiling.

His eyes are teary, and his voice almost shakes as he promises, "I swear I am perfect." He pleads with her to try him, to give him a chance, with an almost desperate tone. "Juda was my Guardian. He trained me just like he trained your mother. And look at how perfect she is."

Crystal is conflicted, "let's get you back to the Guardian's Penn."

Pierce looks at her fearfully, begging desperately, "Please, wed me, your highness." It's almost inaudible when he whispers, "I don't want to die."