**Waking up at the start of the end of the world**

Simon woke up in the rubble of what was once his house. He lay there for a few long minutes; eyes staring up at the cloud covered sky though dust caked glasses. While his face was still blank he took off his glasses and cleaned the lenses on his shirt and placed them back on his face, moving automatically. He furrowed his brow in confusion as he continued to stare up at the open sky he knew he should be looking up at a ceiling instead, but that was not his biggest concern. Eventually he spoke, ”Something… happened. Something changed…” he then sat up with a gasp, “The crown!” his hands darted to smack the top of his head, finding only his bushy hair. “I was wearing it before, wasn’t I? Before… before what?” He leapt to his feet, “Before the building collapsed!”

He turned in place, taking in the destruction around him. Bits of walls and ceiling alike were scattered around, shreds of his former furniture intermingled with the remains of the masonry. He frowned as he saw the shattered mess that used to be his mother’s china and took note of the crown that lay on its side next to what used to be his sofa. He closed his eyes and combed though his equally shattered memories to start to piece it together, speaking to himself as he did so, “I was… on the couch Yes! I passed out on the couch and… there were sirens and… why is there ice everywhere?” He kicked at large chunk, and rolled his eyes, “Okay, Simon, you know why there’s ice… the ice isn’t new any more. Neither is talking to yourself… but why so much ice and think, how does it relate to what happened here?” He felt oddly calm, mulling over his current situation as he stood in the rubble. After a few moments he hesitantly climbed the remains of the staircase, testing each step to make sure it wouldn’t collapse under his weight.

His former home was almost completely demolished, and the rest of the block had fared no better. “What happened here?” he asked no one in particular. Simon crouched down on the tiny remains of the second floor, barely extending two feet from the top of the staircase, closed his eyes and tried to remember. The time since he had put on the crown – and drove away Betty – was such a blur. He had spent more time asleep than awake, and the times he was awake his mind was filled with commands from the crown, the secrets of the ice and snow, how he needed to freeze it all, Everything!! And quickly. He had been a bit too preoccupied with his changing body, and then later his mind to really pay much attention to the outside world. Visions of well, the visions, came to mind, intermingled with memories of his video camera, as he attempted to document what was happening to him – he plans to make daily recordings, hah, that hadn’t lasted very long. And after a while he realized he was taping over previous entries on accident, or just recording static. Or the lens cap. If anyone ever needed 4 hours of mad rantings accompanied by a black screen, he was able to provide.

Simon stood up again and tapped the side of his head, cautiously… “I… I’m okay now? Yes! I can think again!” He held his hands up, ”Still blue… bluer than I even remember…” He walked over to the crown, and crouched down, ”Did it use up all of its power to protect me when whatever happened er… happened?” He grabbed the splintered remains of a wooden chair and poked the crown, cautiously, watching it roll down the rime covering the newly created rubble pile. The crown hit the remains of his drumset, and came to a rather noisy halt. Simon blinked, ”Why is it so quiet? Where is everyone else?” He had never had much contact with his neighbors; Betty and Simon were both gone too often to form any bonds with the others on the block, even if they had cared to. Both of the academics tended to shy away from any contact with others that was not required. But Simon was pretty sure people had lived in the other now demolished buildings. His boots scuffed on the rubble and he yelped as he almost took a few tumbles making his way to the sidewalk, muttering once he had regained his footing, ”I refuse to slip on this ice and break my neck…” he laughed a bit at what an irony that would be, quickly falling silent as his laughter sounded strange to his ears, compounded by it echoing throughout the empty streets.

The neighborhood was silent; Simon didn’t even hear any birds or insects as he strained his ears, brushing away a mass of hair, as if that would make a difference. He called out a hesitant, “Hello? You alive?!“ several times, but there was no reply. Nonetheless he investigated the rubble of the house next to his. It was much like the disaster that he woke up in, save the lack of any ice in this glorified rock pile. He found no one, living or otherwise… Simon inspected a cut on his hand as he sat on the almost undamaged easy chair in front of a shattered television, “Still bleed red. That’s actually surprising… I half expected ice to drip out, or at least to be a real blue blood now.” He laughed at his own stupid joke as he wiped the blood away and then fell silent as the cut healed in front of his eyes… “Usefull…

Simon sat in the unknown neighbor’s plush chair for some time, long enough for the after dawn sun to cross the sky to mid afternoon. For hours he hardly moved, if anyone was watching the destroyed block of houses they would have been hard pressed to even realize there was a person lurking in the rubble. The clouds rolled in and rain started to fall, a strange rain that hissed as fizzed as it hit the ground. Simon bolted to his feet and let out a wordless scream, which gave way to yelling at the top of his lungs, ”What am I doing?!? Oh God look at me?? Betty!! Betty where are you? What HAPPENED??” he crouched down again and muttered, ”Keep it together, Simon, keep it together, come on think. Think. Something happened. This is no gas leak that exploded; there are no people around. No emergency vehicles. Nothing. No people! They… they evacuated!! But wait, why didn’t anyone get me out? … because you were terrified of the pizza man at the end there, Simon, shut up! Betty’s safe! I know she is!!”

He ran back to his house, shouting as he ran, leaping from rubble pile to rubble pile, skidding a bit in the rain, but not slowing down one bit, ”She was a biochemist with the government, idiot! She’s fine! They’re sheltered!! Even if this is world war three, even if we were attacked, she’ll be fine!” He stood in the middle of his former living room and took a moment to get his bearings, his mind still racing and his heart thumping in his chest. He laughed softy as he tried to comb though his memories again, he vaguely recalled mentions of the Oh so important ‘Doomsday clock’ being moved yet another minute to midnight… but when DID that not happen really? Was this memory that felt so vivid something that recently penetrated though the fog as he lay on the floor in front of the TV and the demon crown consumed him? He muttered to himself, ”The… the closet was this way.” He started moving the remains of bookcases and wooden beams out of his way, ”How long has it been since she left? My princess… Its just been a few days since you were here, right?” he laughed bitterly, “No… I’m not crazy enough to think that. But lets pretend… who doesn’t like pretending after all.” He fought back the feeling in the pit of his stomach that it was closer to weeks, if not months.

It was almost sunset before Simon managed to clear out a path his storage closet. He oofed as he shoved the last beam aside and dropped it, wincing as it crashed down and shattered a lamp, “Well, you never liked that anyway, did you, Betty…” He said a small prayer to anything that might be listening as he wrenched open the closet door. He grinned broadly as he saw the closet’s contents were practically unharmed. He tugged out the backpack he used for his field expeditions and was grateful at how terrible he was about unpacking; it was almost ready to go already, bedroll and dishes included. He assessed the food supplies in the backpack, “I’m going to find you, Betty… you’re going to be so happy I’m alive you’ll forget and forgive whatever it is I did and love me again! I know it! Er, after I let you know this is me. But then a quick nose job, some colored contacts, hair dye, industrial strength tanning bed, about 4 razors worth of shaving, making some lucky dentist very very rich… and then we’ll have our happy ending, my princess!!” He laughed loudly and just a little too long at how brilliant and perfect this plan was.

He crammed his backpack full of anything he might need. He took almost every journal he could find that hadn’t been filled with things he couldn’t care less about at this point, “Who cares about ancient civilizations if we’re about to be an ancient civilization.” He quipped as he flung another filled journal into the discard pile. He hefted the pack on his shoulders and gave a nod of approval, “No point in waiting till morning, there’s no shelter here. The military base Betty worked with is just 5 miles due west. A hike but I can do it.” He took one last look around the rubble that used to be his house, pausing in front of his drumset where the crown rested. He looked down for a long moment, then reached down and scooped up his drumsticks, easily sliding them into an outside pocket. He practically skipped down the cracked cement of the walkway leading from his front door and hopped over a stray pile of roofing tiles. Once he was on the street he paused, “I’m… missing something.” He chews on his lower lip in thought and then owed, “Something besides blunt teeth...” After a moment he smacked his forehead, ”Cars! Where are all the cars?? Well Betty must have taken ours and the others… evacuation. That settles it. Everyone is fine. Not like I know how to hotwire a car anyway…” He nodded again, ”Right. Time for the adventure of Simon Petrikov to begin!” he laughed and headed towards the setting sun, a spring in his step that hadn’t been there since he first placed the crown upon his head, he no longer cared who saw him, he would just stare right back and if they took him to the hospital for what the crown had done to him well all the better!

 A few minutes later Simon climbed up the front steps and stepped into the ruins of his living room once more, looking down at the crown. He nudged it with his boot, as if he expected it to sprout legs and skitter away with gentle prompting. He then sighed heavily and picked up the artifact, “I’m not putting it on again. I still don’t know how much time it ate from me…” he headed back to the road, “But it’s too dangerous to stay here. Even if it did spend all its magic protecting me from the explosion.” He stood in the middle of the street and just barely managed to stop himself from chewing on his lower lip again as he thought, “Its too big to fit in the pack, not if I take anything else with me. Such as well, food. So that’s out. Its not far to Betty’s office, I can carry it that way.” He grinned again enjoying how easy it was to think, how clear everything came – thoughts, memories, plans… the worst must be over, this is what the crown meant it would save him from. Well he wouldn’t have even been there still if it wasn’t for the crown but, still. He laughed, ”Who ever said talking crowns had to be logical?” He still had a smile on his bearded face as he started down the road again, confidently heading away from the last traces of the setting sun peeking over the western hills.