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Born and Bred Purple

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Born and Bred Purple

Author Bio

Noelle Muni is a sophomore English major with writing concentration at Gettysburg College. In addition to writing for the Mercury, she writes for The Gettysburgian and enjoys engaging with art and literature across genres and time periods.

Born and Bred Purple

NOELLE G. MUNI

She describes herself as “born and bred purple.” Born in the Porphyra room of the Great Palace of Constantinople on the earliest day of December, she was likely swept up into the arms of a midwife and swaddled in a rich purple colored silk blanket, the edges tucked finely beneath one another, not a wrinkle out of place. After all, she was the eldest daughter of the Emperor, she was Anna Komnene, and she was next in line for the throne.

It’s said that Anna was relentless in her studies. She received training in countless disciplines—not only those becoming of a young royal, but anything she could possibly get her hands on. She studied languages, rhetoric, and history. She was tutored in the sciences, astronomy, medicine, mathematics. She was versed in military affairs and geography. Her personal tutors would have likely groaned, taking a long deep breath and sighing before entering the study of such a ferocious pupil. She poured over the classic works of literature and poetry that captivated those who read them to such a degree they could only be studied in secret. In each of these realms, she excelled.

It could have been on that particularly stormy night in September when her life as she knew it was over. She may have crept from her bed and down the wide stone halls to the doorway of the Porphyra room. As she peeked around the corner and into the room she may have heard the crying out of a newborn as he was passed to his mother, their father gazing proudly at his firstborn son swaddled in his deep purple robes. Anna’s eyebrows likely lowered, her nose crinkled in disdain as she peered in at her new competitor.

From that moment on, Anna knew she needed to shape herself in the perfect image of a suitable heir. She continued to devote herself to her studies, particularly medicine. She acted as a host to foreign dignitaries, planting herself as a face of the empire in the eyes of powerful men. As she grew into a young woman, her intellect must have seemed undeniable, recognized by her father as he granted her charge of one of the largest hospitals and orphanages in Constantinople. She excelled in this environment, garnering her a position right where she needed to be to secure her ascension to the throne, by her father’s side in his final illness. Anna spent each free moment of the emperor’s treatment

attempting to persuade him to view her as his true heir.

It was in his last moments in the scorching heat of mid-August that her fate was finally sealed. She may have kneeled by her father's bedside, his pale hand clasped between hers. She would look tearfully at him as he grew weaker than she'd ever seen him.

"Please Father, you know what is right," she'd say to him. Emperor Alexios would look into the eyes of his eldest daughter. He would pull his hand from hers and shakily remove his signet ring.

"I know," he would say as he reached out his withering hand, pressing the ring into the palm of his eldest son. Anna's brother would close the ring in his fist, the deep purple robe draped over his shoulder proudly asserting that only sons can truly be born and bred purple.