

LIRA

My job was done. The Aukian king was dead, the bulk of his army defeated, the Destroyers unleashed to sow fear and chaos among his people. Add to that the legions of Dragonmen divided across the isles to sack and burn villages, and it wouldn't be long before the whole of the Auk Isles surrendered completely. Draki's emissaries were waiting to take over, as soon as that happened.

Return to me, Draki said into my mind from three hundred leagues away. *Come home.*

Home. Back to Iseneld.

My feet carried me forward. I was pulled to the sea, to the pier where our ships awaited. I had no desire to resist Draki's call, but I wondered what would happen if I did.

Our two longships tumbled over the waves as a light storm blew in. We sailed northwest, and the wind pushed us close enough to see Glasnith as we passed it. I kept my eyes on the sea, until a voice made me turn toward the bluffs I'd jumped from all those months ago.

LIRA.

The Dragonmen appeared unalarmed; they hadn't heard someone call my name. Because it had come from inside my mind.

YOU FAILED US, LIRA. YOU FAILED *ME*. AND SOON YOU WILL PAY FOR IT.

This was why Draki had not yet sent me to release the Destroyers on Glasnith. We didn't know how much of Veronis's power remained, what he might do if I stepped foot on his island. *You are not my god anymore, Veronis*, I told the disembodied voice. *I worship Ildja and the Ice Gods now. Glasnith's fate has nothing to do with me.*

A figure danced across the bluffs, and I squinted until my eyes focused like a spyglass, taking advantage of the acute vision that came from having gods' blood in my veins.

Standing on the ledge, right where I'd leaped, was the mystic.

Once, she'd been my friend Ishleen, before she gave herself up to the power of the Fallen Ones. She was hardly recognizable since her transformation—black holes where her eyes should have been, her mortal vision replaced with immortal sight, bestowed upon her by inhuman eyes growing like tumors

along her flesh. Just like the dead mystic she'd replaced. One of her arms was extended, her finger pointing at me. Her body was a vessel for Veronis's ire.

GLASNITH WILL ALWAYS BE PART OF YOU. YOU ARE MY DESCENDANT, A DAUGHTER OF AILLIRA. ILDJA AND HER WRETCHED SPAWN WILL TURN AGAINST YOU, AND IT WILL BE YOUR END. EVERYTHING COMES FULL CIRCLE.

“Get out of my head.”

The Dragonmen glanced at me with raised brows, but their attention was torn away from me, to the water, as a dark shape rose from below the waves and slammed into our longship.

“Sea beast!” the Dragonmen shouted, reaching for their spears.

Another shape surfaced, and another, until we were surrounded by thick, cylindrical bodies longer than our ships. Brine Beasts. The giant eels lifted their heads from the water, peering at us with bulbous black eyes. Their jaws snapped open, gums crowded with razor teeth.

My heightened senses picked up the mystic's quiet command: “Destroy,” she said in the old tongue.

As one, the Beasts darted below the surface and smashed into the longship, cracking the planks, ripping the vessel into pieces right beneath our feet. “Stop,” I told the Beasts.

They did not listen.

I looked back at the mystic. She smiled.

Veronis was the god of these creatures, and his blood flowed in my veins. Though I'd renounced the Green Gods, Draki's mark had released the chains on my power. I no longer needed Veronis's permission to use the gifts he'd given me.

But my order was contrary to that of their master. Powerful as I was, I was still only a mortal.

The ship sank, and waves closed around me. From Sjaf and Seffra, I possessed the gifts of sea and tide, and I used them to buoy myself up.

The Brine Beasts circled.

I'd seen something like this before, in one of Reyker's memories. I knew what came next.

The Dragonmen in the surf screamed as the Beasts' teeth ripped into the warriors and towed them under. I felt as if I should care but told myself I didn't. They were Draki's soldiers, expendable, their lives pledged in his service. What did it matter if they died at the end of a sword or in the mouths of monsters?

Something slapped down in the water next to me—a length of rope. The second longship edged closer, and one of the Dragonmen had thrown me a lifeline. As soon I grabbed it, he reeled me in, his hands gripping mine, hauling me from the water. The dark-scaled Beasts reared, readying to attack again.

“My jarl,” the Dragonman said. A plea for me to act.

With one hand, I harnessed a gust of wind and tossed it into our sail. With the other, I grasped the water around the Beasts and created a current strong enough to hold them back while our ship rushed away. The Beasts shrieked and wrestled against the current, but I held it steady until we were far enough out of reach.

Blood trickled from my ear, down my neck. I wiped it away with my sleeve.

For the second time in my life, I watched Glasnith—the land where I was born, where I'd read stories to my brothers, talked of my hopes with my mother, learned honor from my father, fallen in love and found a greater purpose for my gifts, the place I'd fought and nearly died to save—disappear into the distance.

I remembered all of this, but now they were distant, trivial recollections. None of it seemed to matter. Draki had cured me of my loyalties, my guilt. Veronis was wrong; I was no longer tied to Glasnith. As the gray-green silhouette of my homeland vanished behind me, I felt nothing but an insignificant twitch deep in my soul.