

Edited Novel Excerpt A

As the morning sun rose on the Kingdom of Jeakath, Glorea sat with her legs dangling over the edge of the pier at Shower Lake. She came here many mornings to watch the sunrise and spend time with Qinia, the “Spirit of Water.” Feeling the first of the sun’s rays warm her wrinkled face, she looked down at the water. The waves, still dark blue in the early morning light, splashed rhythmically against the green moss-covered stone pier. As she studied the wave’s mesmerizing motion, something else caught her eye. It was the rippling reflection of the great Kingdom of Asirad. The giant floating kingdom hovered above Jeakath and cast its massive shadow on the world below. She looked up at it, with its giant rootlike, earthen stalactites reaching toward the world below. Hidden most days almost entirely high among the clouds, today it was seen clearly even through her old eyes. It was a magnificent sight to behold even after so many years.

She had never been there herself. But, as with many living in Droaand, she had heard all of the stories and legends about Asirad, or the “Kingdom of Light” as it was sometimes called. She had only known one from there, her husband had been from Lightbarrow—the capital city of Asirad. She met him many years after he had lived there, and he never told her much of his life on Asirad. It always seemed to anger him when she would ask about that place and the life he once had in the clouds. As his memory entered her mind, the thought of him caused her to crinkle her face in hurt and tighten her jaw in anger.

“It’s been so long,” she thought, turning her gaze back to the tip of her fishing pole, then following the thin fishing line down to the water. She tried to let go of the memories, hoping they would slide into the water as well. They did not, the visions still vivid in her mind. So long had it been since she had seen Lothirelind and felt his embrace. As she pictured the man, her thoughts became dark as they turned to the place they had lived for so many years.

“Devoid of light and anything good. And what it did to him...” Her thought trailed off, and she shook her head.

“Best not to let those times creep up on you like that,” said a sudden voice in her mind.

Glorea jumped. “Don’t sneak up on me like that, Qinia!” she blurted, nearly falling off the pier in fright.

“I am sorry my old friend,” Qinia laughed. “How many do you need today for the young lad?” she asked, trying to control her chuckle.

“Two large ones will do us just fine,” Glorea replied in her thoughts, feeling annoyed.

“They should be along anytime. Also, I am sure you have realized by now that the sun is already above the mountains this morning,” Qinia instructed, alluding that it might be time to get home.

At that moment, Glorea’s hands began to quiver just as the tip of the fishing pole shot down toward the water. Glorea instinctively leaned back fast, lifting hard on the ash wood pole, fighting against the sudden strike. She closed her wrinkled eyes in strain. Her mind again drifted, this time to the last moment she saw him. *Running down the poorly lit tunnel, the baby wriggling in her arms. Running as fast as she could, she turned the corner she had been dreading. As she turned her head, she caught only a glimpse of his back through a doorway. She looked back down the hallway she’d run through, tightening her brow in focus. “Glorea!” She could hear him yell from behind her...*

Her mind was brought back to the present. Still fighting the fish on the end of her line, Qinia once again entered her mind.

“I also wanted to tell you...today is the day,” Qinia said solemnly. “Tonight.”

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Dourn kept his eyes closed, reluctant to start the day. The sun had not yet made its way through his cylindrical glass window, but it was light enough to give him a good idea of the time. Although he had already been awake for about an hour or so, he always tried to get a little more time alone these days. Keeping his eyes gently closed could sometimes fool his grandmother when she poked her head into his room to tell him breakfast was ready or what chores needed to be done before he left for work.

It was his day off, and he was not in any rush for it to end.

“Hold off the beginning. That prolongs the end!” he thought.

As he laid there, he listened to the sounds of the early morning outside.

From his bedroom on the third floor of the Stoneworker’s Guild Hall, he could hear many things from the district below: the merchant carts rolling and creaking under the weight of their wares through the sloppy streets. There were the shouts of men selling yesterday’s news and the faint crackles of the Ember burning in the light pole housing just outside his window.

There was, however, one other sound he strained to hear—the sound of breakfast cooking in the small kitchen just outside his door. By this time, his grandmother, Glorea, would have already been up for hours hobbling around the kitchen, nearly done making their “Leisure Day” morning meal.

She was never good at being quiet while she cooked and often gave away how far along she was by the sounds she was making. Pots and utensils banging around usually meant she was just beginning or starting over after a common mishap. Frantic mumbling usually meant she was near done—or starting over after another common mishap as well. Dourn smiled at the thought of her. He listened for a while but heard nothing. Finally, cupping his hands over his ears to give him directional hearing like that of a fox, he waited. Still silent.

“Grand,” he yelled. Pausing, cocking his head slightly to one side, “Grandy?!” Paused again. There was no reply.

With a sigh, and the assumption there was going to be a cold bowl of something waiting for him on the table, he slid out of bed and dropped his feet onto the rough wooden floor. The thick wood planks creaked under his weight as he stood. He stretched hard and long, twisting at the waist. He felt the muscles stiff from the week’s work awaken, causing him to hold his breath to stave off the ache. He made his way across the room making sure to step over the extra-wide plank in the middle that always seemed to sag menacingly under his feet.

He grabbed a white shirt from the second drawer of the dresser and slipped it over his head. When his head popped through the top of the shirt, he paused a moment to examine his face in the small mirror. He rubbed the side of his cheek and chin feeling the stubble, rough like a smoothing block. He never shaved on Leisure Days and wasn’t about to start today. He leaned in closer to the mirror and pulled down on both of his cheeks, examining his face up close.

“You still look nineteen, but you sure don’t feel like it,” he thought, and smiled at himself.

He turned his attention to the hand-drawn picture of his parents, given to him and drawn by his grandmother. It was a rough sketch of them side by side—the subtle details made him believe he could recognize them if he saw them. Placed next to it was a small, black stone figurine of a crown deer that he had carved from a piece of stone he snuck home on his first day at the quarry. It wasn’t very good, as it was his first. Not to mention he was only seven years old at the time. He kept it around to remind him of where he started with no skills and in contrast to where he was today. He looked hard at them for a moment.

He snapped out of his stare. With only one arm in his shirt, he crept to the door of his room, slowly pushed down on the cast iron handle, threw the door open, and burst into the next room.

“Good morning!” he shouted, as he slammed the door wide open.

He had hoped to startle his unsuspecting grandmother. He assumed by the lack of response to his calls that she was lost in her “special” book as she often was in the early morning. Yet again he was greeted with silence and stillness throughout the small living chamber they shared. He finished putting on his shirt as he walked into the main room.

“Surely she couldn’t have headed out this early, and without leaving me something to eat. It is Leisure Day after all,” he thought.

He walked over to the small kitchen by the front door, where he noticed last night’s dinner dishes were still piled where they had left them for washing today. And, the washbasin was completely dry. At this point, he could hear his stomach starting to growl from hunger. He started looking around the kitchen for something to eat. When he found nothing substantial, he turned and scowled at the round table in the center of the room still thinking this couldn’t be right—she would never forget about Leisure Day breakfast.

“Alright, what’s goin...” Just at that moment the front door burst open, slamming into his back and knocking him forward. He whirled and caught his balance.

Through the door stumbled a short, very wrinkled, and very round old woman. She had long, light green and grey hair rolled into a uniform bun on the back of her head. It was held in place by a small twig with one little green leaf still attached, obviously freshly plucked. She was draped in long purple robes trimmed with pink silk thread. At the end of her stubby arms, the cuffs of her robes ended in oversized, billowing, yellow lace ruffles.