

# *Wrought of Silver and Ravens* *Of Magic Made, book 1*

## **A Magic Collectors Novel: The Ancients**

*Wrought of Silver and Ravens* is book 1 of the OF MAGIC MADE series. This series is a part of the larger MAGIC COLLECTORS story collection. So it is in the same story world as *The Rose and the Wand* and *To Catch a Magic Thief*. However, it is set a long time before in a different kingdom, so it's kinda like Ancient Greece to Alexandra and Gabriella Floraison's 19<sup>th</sup> century Sonser. But fun fact, some of the ancestors of characters in *The Rose and the Wand* and *To Catch a Magic Thief* (and of stories yet to be published) are in this series!

The half-magics/Magic Collectors are a huge part of my story world. I talk about the Caffin Wars—the horrible wars between sorcerers and enchanters that happened millennia ago—and how the half-magics didn't discover their powers until this war. Not understanding their abilities and how to protect themselves, they were misused by enchanters and sorcerers alike (they often forget how the enchanters also helped them greatly, many even dying for them). Many of the half-magics were sent away by magic at the end of the Caffin Wars to a secret land (Deyrnas). Eventually, this land "died," and they had to re-enter the world. *Wrought of Silver and Ravens* takes place during this time. This when the legends of the half-magics as the mysterious Magic Collectors start to arise.

I have several stories planned for OF MAGIC MADE. The next, *Wrought of Lions and Sand*, continues Thea and Athdar's story, gets Thea and her sisters uncursed, gets Thea and Athdar married (at the end), and I can't tell you more without spoilers, but there might be another romance in the book. ☺ Book three will follow Bane and some characters introduced in book 2. Xander will have a book, and there will be another book or two, but I don't want to say too much about them yet.

In this document are some deleted or rewritten scenes, fun facts, name and place name meanings, etc. associated with *Wrought of Silver and Ravens*. I hope you enjoy it!

## FUN FACTS

I had the idea for this story in December 2019 as I was dog sitting for some friends of mine. As I would walk their two labs in the morning (I love a good, brisk walk on a 30–40 degree morning), I would think about the story. I finished the story at 3:30 a.m. July 30, 2020, about three weeks before it was supposed to release as part of a group release. So from December to the August release—my book baby took nine months. It’s also my longest book at over 500 pages.

My early title ideas for *Wrought of Silver and Ravens* were Man of the Silver Cloak or Silver Cloak, Golden Fur.

This is a Twelve Dancing Princesses retelling focusing on the soldier. I loved the illustrated children’s book of the fairytale my younger sister had when we were kids; the story was unfamiliar (that is, there was no Disney movie) and the illustrations lovely. My favorite retelling of the story is Lea Doue’s *The Firethorn Crown*.

Lord Floraison in WoSaR is an ancestor of Alexandria and Gabriella Floraison.

Lord Ayrton is an ancestor of the Duke of Lofton (Jonathan Lofton) and Lord Tyndale.

Athdar’s lions are the ancestors of Sarcodinas (*To Catch a Magic Thief*).

Concerning the names used: sometimes I have names I just like, and so I use those; sometimes I use a fantasy name generator online to come up with names, place names in particular; sometimes I use names from a particular language either because the language is related to the story (like French for many names since the Magic Collectors series started with *The Rose and the Wand*, a retelling of the French “Beauty and the Beast”); or a language that is lesser known and so a bit exotic. I tend to use Latin for spells because there is a precedent for that in fantasy, and since magic “spells” and spelling have a connection in an early superstition about words having power (like magic power). Many of the names for those characters born in Giliosthay are of Greek origin since I was envisioning a beautiful coastal city similar to one in Ancient Greece (and also Dubrovnik, Croatia). For the half-magics, I decided to go with Welsh (or Gaelic) since it’s most likely unfamiliar to many people and my grandfather’s family came from Wales. Sadly, I don’t speak these other languages, so I rely on online translators.

## NAMES AND MEANING

### **Thea’s country: Giliosthay (once a part of Iliosthay)**

Iliosthay: from *o ilios einai o theós mou* (“the sun is my god”)—shortened to Iliosthay

Giliosthay: from *o theós tou iliou éinai o theós mou* (“the sun’s god is my god”)  
Theostu-Iliosthay (original name after breaking away from Iliosthay). This was soon shortened to Giliosthay (*o gios éinai o theós mou*: “the Son is my God”)

Royal city of Giliosthay and castle: Doromou (“my gift”)

King Jairus (from New Testament Biblical character) and Queen Thalassa (means “sea”)

Prince Xander (I just liked the name after seeing it in a list of Greek baby names—turned out to be a short form of the name of a nephew I didn’t know would be coming when I chose it)

Princess Thea, Ismene, Ismena, Evadne, Ariadne, Khloe, Zoe: Greek names I liked.

Athdar Owain Leonidas; Athdar (“from the oak tree ford,” Gaelic, chosen from list because I liked it); Owain (chosen from name list because similar to a friend’s name); Leonidas (has to do with lions)

Athdar’s mother: Annwyl (“beloved”)

Grandfather: Cai (“rejoice”) Doeth (“wise”) Leonidas

Abi Bran and her father, Celyn Bran: (*bran* means “raven”)

Realm of Coryuso

Villain: Prince Cerav from Kingdom of Rusceon

Athdar’s land: Deyrnas (“realm”) or Teyrnas Yr Annwyl (“realm of the beloved”)

Lions (*llewod gwerthfawr*; this is pretty much “special lions” in Welsh, I think):  
Cumi (female cub; from *Talitha cumi* [“little girl, arise” from the Bible]) and  
Luath (male; “fast”); Dana (male; “bold”) and Lytse (female; “little one”)

## DELETED SCENES FROM ATHDAR'S POV

This scene is from the fight at the end of the book. It's a fun scene, but my critique partner and I thought it a bit out of place in a battle, so I saved it for this. I'm happy it has a home here! The next scenes are after Jamal kidnaps Thea and then after Galen and Athdar and Thea reconnect in the chamber of lava (originally, there wasn't the danger of the lava overflowing the cavern and they had more time).

Athdar cut down the man attacking him, then helped Ruzen take care of the other two, with magic this time.

"I like having you around, kid," Ruzen said as they regained the two body-space forward they'd lost a quarter-hour before. How many soldiers did Iliosthay have? More of Giliosthay's men had joined them, but it still wasn't enough.

Athdar pivoted to engage a man coming in at their side. "Just don't get sloppy because you're dependent on me."

Ruzen paused for a split second. "Good point. Get away. Actually, don't. Have we gotten all the magics yet?"

"Not quite. There's a few over near Galen and the princesses. Floraison's shield is holding, but he's looking pretty close to getting mad."

With a laugh, Ruzen lunged forward. He and Athdar gained another few feet toward the door, Ruzen using a few tricks Athdar made a note to ask him about later.

Apparently pleased with himself, Ruzen asked him companionably, "So how'd it go, Athdar?"

"How'd what go?"

A familiar thin figure was moving—or being moved—toward them from the tunnel.

"Your first dance with the princess?"

"His *what*?" the approaching figure called.

Ruzen and Athdar shoved and cut until they'd safely gotten Murray into a defensive knot with them.

"His *what*?" Murray repeated, making excellent use of a beat up but serviceable sword.

Athdar groaned.

"The morning of the day of the biggest fight for his kingdom in a hundred years," Ruzen said with a scoff, "and lover boy here is getting Galen and *my* wife to teach him how to dance."

Athdar really wished Iliosthayian soldiers had a bit more skill so there'd be less talking. "I know how to dance. I just didn't know that dance."

"I'm so proud of you, Athdar!" Murray said. "How did it go?"

"We knocked out five dragons and a prince, so I guess it went well."

Ruzen coughed and then ran an Iliosthayian through and engaged with another.

Murray gave him a brief glance of disbelief. "I take back what I said. You are hopeless."

"We don't have time for this, Murray. By the way, I didn't know *you* fought."

It hadn't gone *that* badly. Thea had seemed oddly desirous to talk to him, despite the danger of it, but when he'd gotten her to look at him, she'd smiled and quieted. She'd also danced much closer to him than to anyone else, so he guessed he'd done something right.

"How do you think I survived all these years?" Murray said. "By talking the raven-eaters to death?"

"If anyone could, it'd be you."

"Just don't talk Athdar to death," Ruzen said. "Things are a bit tight around Bane. I'll see you two at the victory feast or on the other side." Ruzen pushed his way through the soldiers and shouted something rather colorful and insulting at Bane.

But Ruzen was back pretty soon with Bane, or rather they'd all been herded together, but Athdar preferred to think they were creating their own current in this sea.

"By the way, where did you come from?" he asked Murray. "I thought you were with the king."

"I was. For a while. I was too close to the anchor, trying to figure out if I could open it, when those shifts started happening. The Realm opened up, and I fell through. I'm still not quite sure where I ended up, but when my head stopped spinning, I was surrounded by soldiers. Fortunately, they were discombobulated as well. I figured if I went with the flow I'd end up going back toward King Jairus. Came out here instead."

Bane stared at him for a split-second before blocking a neck-level blow at the last second.

"You just trotted through the enemy lines to find your friend?" Ruzen exclaimed. "And nobody tried to run you through?"

"I ... um ... had brought along a bit of that keep-away spell from the house, just in case. You know how one does..."

"Oh, yes, we know how one does," Bane rasped. "Go on, Murray."

"Well, when I put it on, along with a glamour of an Iliosthayian uniform, no one bothered me, and I passed through pretty easily. Only a little shoving."

Bane and Ruzen exchanged a feral grin. "Have any more of that?" Bane said. "We'd like to pay a call on the Iliosthayian general."

Murray sniffed, as if he might be offended. "Of course." He started to reach for them, then jerked back. "Or you could do that," he yelped. "We need to move."

Floraison apparently really had gotten mad, for he and the princesses were running straight for them, his shield a spiked sphere around them, a kind of self-propelled mace.

###

“Raging won’t help you, son. You need a clear head,” Galen said as they jogged down the spiral stairs of the passageway after Cumi.

“I know,” Athdar said, struggling with the storm inside, whose winds were apparently strong enough for Galen to sense. “But it’s ... it’s hard.”

“Unclench your jaw and breathe. You can devise an excruciating death for the boy later.”

“If I’ve had killed him when I had the chance, we’d all be home by now! Safe!”

“And you probably could have played dolls with your baby sister a few more times before she died too.”

“Galen!”

“Should’ve and could’ve can get you killed. You know the boy’s not trustworthy and moves fast—that’s all you need to carry with you right now. Besides, I have a feeling it won’t just be Cerav and his followers down there.”

“Who are you expecting?” Athdar said after a deep breath and a hard mental shove against should’ve and could’ve and revenge.

“A high priest of Iliosthay and a strong show of power—soldier and enchanter. In order for Prince Cerav to be declared a god, he has to satisfy the temple priests. But Prince Cerav is a foreigner. They won’t want to acknowledge him because it gives Rusceon’s gods a foothold in Iliosthay. Instead of a simple demonstration of magic, they’ll set up a what they call the fight of the gods—Prince Cerav has to prove his god is stronger than theirs, by showing he is stronger than their demigod-like enchanters, by defeating them. The one who wins becomes a god of sorts to the people.”

“Do these men really think themselves gods?” Athdar asked, incredulous, and not sure he wanted the Iliosthayians to have the pleasure of killing Cerav or not. He felt a slight shift in the magic around him, and he guessed they had moved from the Realm of Caves into the Realm with the chamber of lava. When all this was over, he was going to get Zaryth’s journal for Thea so she could learn more about her gift.

“Some do,” Galen said, slowing and putting a spell on them that allowed them to talk without being heard as the air turned sweltering. “They have been told that all their lives. But they do not have the same concept of a high and holy God as we do. What is unfathomable to us would be easier for them to believe of themselves. Some merely see the usefulness of the system. Some both.”

As Athdar wondered which Cerav would be facing, Cumi stopped under the arch of the doorway in the chamber of lava falls. Using the scarf Thea left with Cumi, Athdar made a harness for Cumi on his back. Leaving Galen deep enough in the tunnel to be undetected by the half-magics, he slipped into the chamber through the illusion of molten rock that hid it from eyes not skilled in recognizing such things. There being too many enchanters and soldiers between them and

Cerav's half-magics to worry about Galen's sense of enchantment, Athdar brought him out.

"Sometimes I hate it when I'm right," Galen muttered as a green and yellow dragon crashed onto the walkway and melted into the body of a man. "That wasn't Cerav, was it?"

"No."

Galen rolled his shoulders but relaxed his posture, and Athdar swallowed hard against an argument to what he knew Galen was going to tell him.

"They're too tight around Princess Thea," Galen began. "We can't get to her and away without drawing swords."

"They'll not harm the princess unless we give them reason. We wait until our enemies thin each other out," Athdar finished for him.

Galen patted him on the back. "You have been listening."

###

"Princess Thea, can you do something about the tethering of these Realms? Do you have enough magic left?"

Thea shook her head, her expression turning frustrated. "My magic's built back some, but I have no idea about tethering or untethering Realms. If Zaryth knew, he never got a chance to tell me. I think I could separate Coryruso since it's my own, even though it's woven into the castle. I don't know if it will hold separate for long, but I can get us out through it tonight. How are we going to stop the fighting?"

Athdar and Galen both looked to the bodies of the slain priest and his guard.

Galen's shoulders sank. "I really hate carrying bodies around, but it does tend to get the message across."

## THEA'S ORIGINAL THREE CHAPTERS

### Chapter 2

*Eleven years ago, beneath the castle fortress of Doromou, Kingdom of Giliosthay*

It wasn't a dream world. Or a real one. Was it possible to be somewhere in between? Seven-year-old Princess Thea raised her candle above her head. But its light revealed no walls or ceiling in the room that felt entirely too big for the space Thea knew it belonged to—a storage closet in the wine cellar.

The floor, a polished marble, was gritty with dust that slipped into her sandals. It suggested that this was a real place, as did the fact that she didn't readily fall asleep standing up. "Mother?"

"Yes, dear?" Queen Thalassa stood a few feet away, watching her.

"Where are we? It feels too ... big." And not perfectly square or rectangular, or even one-storied. Though how she knew the space had three stories and an extension on one end like a chancel in a church was beyond her.

"What are your senses telling you, Thea?" She detected a faint smile in her mother's voice. While that pleased her, she would have preferred an explanation and a row of candles on the walls.

But her mother was a strict teacher. So Thea stilled her thoughts and focused on what her senses were telling her, especially on that peculiar one that made her shoulders hunch because it told her the walls and floor above were wavering and unsteady. "It's a three-storied building with a porch on one end. It's not stable." She caught her mother's broad waistband, wide and golden, and tugged gently, not caring if she were too old for clinging to skirts. "We should go."

Her mother only answered with a laugh and a flash of light from her palm.

Chandeliers hanging around the room and sconces on walls flared to a comfortable brilliance, and the wavering feeling ceased. The place was sturdy now, like a bag filled tightly with water. Thea cocked her head at her enchantress mother. Had her mother filled the place with magic?

Draping one arm around Thea's shoulders, Queen Thalassa pulled her close and gestured to the anomaly around them. "Welcome to the Realm of Coryrosu, Thea, Realm Walker of Coryrosu. It's time to begin your lessons."



## Chapter 4

*Eight years ago, in the Realm of Coryrosu beneath the castle of Doromou, Giliosthay*

Realm Walking was not all it was cracked up to be. At least, not when there was only one Realm she and her mother knew of. There had to be other Realms elsewhere, but they didn't know where or how to get into them if they were locked. Her mother was no Realm Walker and didn't know all the secrets of Realms. So instead of traveling instantly from Realm to Realm, Thea was stuck jumping around from place to place in one.

"Now, land beyond that blue line, ankles just touching it." Queen Thalassa, leaning out into the stairwell, pointed to something on the floor below. She leaned back into the room to make way for Thea to look out and see the chalked line. "And take Xander with you."

"I will not complain about being a dead weight for my sister's hop-scotching," her twin brother muttered to himself. "I will *not* complain." He gritted his teeth and clasped her hand as she approached him in the center of the second story room.

"I know this is frustrating, but I appreciate it," she whispered. "Besides, would you rather be training with the sword in the gale outside?" She stepped closer to him, wondering if standing side to side, increasing the area of contact, would ease the journey. She was aching already.

"No, but I could be doing *something* else."

"You haven't even been here a half-hour, Xander." Queen Thalassa gave Xander a stern look, one she wore often. "I said a half-hour, then you could train in magic with the Silver Guard. Is that too much of a sacrifice?"

"No, Mother."

"Good. Thea." Queen Thalassa nodded at her, and Thea tightened her grip on Xander's hand, leaned against his side, imagined the blue line on the floor below, and drew upon her magic.

Her mother vanished, the lights shifted, and Xander really did feel like a dead weight.

When the tug she associated with Realm Walking stopped, she opened her eyes, then shoved her brother away.

"Do you resist the traveling?" She balled her fists, wishing it were permissible to punch her brother.

Rubbing his fingers through his thick, shiny black hair—a perfect match to hers and most everyone else's in the kingdom—he grinned at her. "What's the matter? Can't handle a challenge? The guards don't make things easy on *me* in my training." He scratched his head with renewed vigor and shuddered. "Feels like I pick up cobwebs every time. Is that possible?"

"How do you even do that?"

"Pick up cobwebs? I have no idea."

She punched her hands to her hips to help her avoid temptation. “I mean resist the Realm Walking?”

“I don’t know. Push my magic into the floor? Just kinda comes naturally.” He winked at her. “Kinda like tying Ismena’s and Ismene’s braids together and gluing them with magic.”

And she might have to rule with him one day! With a growl, Thea grabbed him in a hug and flung them back to her mother so fast she overshot her normal landing place.

Xander’s cry of “Hey!” ended up being yelled in their mother’s face.

“Hello, son,” Queen Thalassa replied, lips quirked. “You can go now, but ask Ismene and Ismena to come down in fifteen minutes.”

As her brother raced away, Thea collapsed onto a pile of cushions, the warmth of her magic not doing anything to help with the ache of her muscles. Why did they ache with magic use anyway?

And what use was Realm Walking when hopping around inside one Realm was all she could do? What would it be like to travel between Realms, as the Realm Walkers of old did?

Closing her eyes, she tried imagining what another Realm would be like, but with only her own to go on, her thoughts soon wandered to the border wasteland her father had told them about battling raiders in recently. An outline of an enormous cave-like chamber began to form within the landscape of rock and shrubby bushes, and her magic warmed into her limbs, taut, as if about to carry a resisting, annoying brother a great distance. The room about her shimmered with the waves of heat over dry rock.

Her gasp of alarm was cut short as the strongest tug she’d ever felt yanked her from the room.

###

It wasn’t raining.

Laying on weathered paving stones with a toppled column at her back, Thea curled in on herself, hugging herself to try to stop the shivering wracking her from inside out, from that place in her chest that was usually warm with magic.

It wasn’t raining.

She hadn’t blacked out, just been unable to stop the traveling. It’d been raining at the palace, and the storm had seemed to stretch for miles. Where was she? Would anyone come for her?

*Don’t panic, Thea.*

Praying and remembering all she’d been taught on how to stay calm and able to act as a future queen should, Thea worked to steady her heart rate and capture her thoughts.

Unable to move her head for the wracking of her muscles, she cut her eyes to the corners of her vision, taking in her surroundings. Light, tannish stones formed the remains of collapsed walls and toppled pillars and paving stones half upheaved.

A ruined temple. There was more than one in Giliosthay and the neighboring kingdoms, some completely abandoned, some not so much. Not all of the sun worshippers in neighboring Iliosthay accepted Giliosthay's conversion to belief in the Most High and separation from them a few hundred years before.

Grass and flowering weeds poked from between ancient stones here and there, but these told her nothing either. Stairs dipping in the center from centuries of use rose up across the small courtyard from her. The angle of the sun's rays were getting low and already missing the depression where she lay.

Did animals hunt here? Make a den here?

Thea shivered, listened, and prayed; shivered, listened, and prayed until she heard it. A footstep. One, then another, and another. The steps weren't heavy on the stone, but not light like her father's leopards. A lion? A vulture's claws would click, wouldn't they, on the rock? A wild dog? A human? Some pagan sorceress sneaking in for forbidden, blood-bound ceremonies?

Thea tried to keep her heart from her throat, but it wouldn't slow its fevered rate any more than her body its trembling. *Most High protect me.* Whoever or whatever it was could hear her teeth chattering from a mile away. She couldn't hide.

Steps brushed the stone stairs, and a long shadow fell over her.

"You've used too much magic. That's why you're so cold." The man's voice was scratchy with age, and barren of any hint of malice or threat. Thea was tempted to love it. But that would be unwise so soon.

"Who-who—" Like an owl with laryngitis, she couldn't quite get out the question. *Who are you?* She squinted up at his backlit form until her eyes adjusted.

The old man, his face wrinkled with sun and age yet still holding a certain firmness and strength, knelt beside her and caught her hands between his. Thea yelped weakly as a foreign warmth invaded her fingertips.

He pressed her hands gently together between his much larger, calloused one. "I'm giving you some of my magic to stop the shivering. We enchanter's can't handle much borrowed magic, but this should be enough to help." As he spoke, the wracking slowed.

Releasing her, he sat back as Thea relaxed against the paving stones for a few minutes. Then he sat up her, leaned her against the broken wall, and scooted away, his own arms trembling slightly. He gave her his canteen. After working her stiff jaw, she managed to drink and hand the canteen back to him—or at least extend her wobbly arm toward him until he took it.

"Thank you," she said. "Who are you?" By his clothing, he looked to be of her kingdom—which was very comforting—and likely a *retired* guard. He was *quite* old. He creaked and groaned as he stiffly moved to sit beside her and rest his back against the wall.

"A Realm Walker, same as yourself, my princess."

Her gaze jerked away from the clasp of his cloak, which, if properly lit, would tell her much about him. She focused on his eyes instead, her own wide. "You know me?" It was common knowledge that all the children of the king and

queen were enchanter or enchantress, but her special gifting was a secret. So she'd thought.

He touched the clasp to his cloak, and light glowed from his fingers enough to illumine it as the sunlight faded. "I am Zaryth. I served your family as a member of the Guard of the Silver Cloak until you were three. It was I who recognized your gift."

The silver leopard and eagle of the double clasp—the emblems of the kings he'd served—chased away the shadows in her mind, and she smiled brightly. The Guard of the Silver Cloak were always there for them. Though most knew them as the Silver Guard, those who knew them best knew the significance of the full name. He wasn't deceiving her.

"I thought I was the only Realm Walker in Giliosthay. Why aren't you training me then?" Her mother knew only what a few paragraphs in a book and her own instincts told her.

One corner of his mouth tilted up in a smile, though it wasn't exactly one of mirth. "Your mother thinks she can do all things well, and that she should do everything because she is queen and your mother and an enchantress."

Thea's mouth popped open, then pressed shut in a frown, as she was not sure whether to be upset at not having an actual Realm Walker teach her—he surely wouldn't confine her to hop scotching a single Realm—and or to be offended at his slight to her mother.

The man's wrinkles deepened as he smiled knowingly. "She has much talent in many things, Princess Thea, but the Almighty did not make us to be without need for others. We all have our own gifts."

At the moment, Thea understood need all too well. And she suspected Zaryth did too, which was why they were still sitting in the ruins—him with his sword free of its scabbard—rather than safely back at the palace. She prayed he'd recover more quickly than she had. "If we walk between Realms," she asked, "why are we here? This land does not feel like a Realm to me."

"Not at all?"

Remembering her mother's training, Thea slowed her reply to examine her surroundings again. There was a slight tug of travel remaining, but no sense of enclosed space about her as for the Realm. Her brown furrowed. "No," she said slowly, "but I feel as if I haven't completed traveling." The place also didn't feel quite wholesome somehow, but that wasn't what he meant.

"Very good. Realms require magic from enchanters or sorcerers to stay open. If they are abandoned, they collapse, but don't disappear completely. Realms require an anchor to the physical world; that alone remains when the magic is gone."

"Anchor?"

"The passageway you use to enter the Realm of Coryrosu in the palace is the anchor. Normally, Realms are locked and only accessible by a Realm Walker and anyone given the key to use the anchor. Your mother and the Silver Guards power the Realm of Coryrosu for your training and as a safe place for your family to hide

in times of trouble. She holds the anchor open for you, though you will soon be powerful enough to maintain it yourself.”

“But if I Realm Walked but am not in a Realm—”

“You’ve just discovered the anchor of an ancient realm. One, I think, we should be glad collapsed. You could approach it, but not go in.”

Thea shivered, this time purely from unease. She scooted closer to the Silver Guard. “I wonder why I came here.”

Zaryth didn’t answer, but his intense stare held all the questions and concern her own heart did, and perhaps more from knowing something she didn’t.

She looked away. “How did you find me?”

“Your mother came to me, finally desperate enough to seek help. I have traveled much in my life, in my duties as a guard and on my own looking for the ancient Realms recorded in legends of the Caffin Wars. This is one I found.” He huffed a hard laugh, and his gaze seemed far away for a moment. “My children did not inherit my gift. I was a little miffed when you did, Your Highness. Why not my own children, whom I could instruct and pass down to all I had fought hard to learn?” He bowed his head. “But the Most High’s ways are not our ways. I understand in some measure now.”

In respect for whatever sorrow he held, Thea waited until his bowed neck straightened before her bottled question burst from her. “You will be my teacher?” *Teach me how to go from Realm to Realm—without nearly killing myself? Not get accidentally sucked away?*

He laughed at her eagerness. “I would not train you easy. I was a guard, after all.”

“My mother does not train us easy.”

He laughed again. “I have heard the queen, as much as the king, will raise strong children. But I am an old man, Princess Thea. The seven years since I retired have not been kind to me.”

Thea opened her mouth to protest that he was obviously still able to Realm Walk when he held up his hand.

“But if the queen and king allow, then as long as I am able, I will instruct you on the last day of every month. When I am not, I will send you this, for it belongs only to a Realm Walker.” He pulled a gold medallion from under his tunic. Instead of being smooth or emblazoned with a king or his symbol, the center crested in a brilliant diamond. The gold surrounding the central gem seemed not pressed with a design so much as swayed and shifted, like sand under a desert’s wind or silt under a wave’s touch, in four directions, radiating from the diamond.

A breeze, somehow soft and warm, cold and harsh, damp, and dry all at once ruffled through Thea’s hair and threatened to take it from its braids. Her eyes widened as he flipped the medallion over to reveal an image of a young woman, her hair blowing out behind her, the purest blue sapphire Thea had ever seen resting like a flower in her hair.

“Does it control the wind?” she asked, not quite sure she wanted him to ever give it to her.

Laughing, he slipped the medallion back under his tunic. “No, Your Highness. The Most High has given us many gifts, but that is one he has reserved for himself. This is the Wish Rush, with it, a Realm Walker and only a Realm Walker, can walk to any place he knows. As the wind goes where it pleases, so may the bearer of the Wish Rush. But when it is yours, you must promise to keep it safe, secret, and only use it in time of great need. It is not a toy and requires much magic. I will also give you the journal of my discoveries. That too must be kept secret and safe.”

Thea nodded solemnly under his stern gaze.

With a smile of reassurance, he pushed himself up. “Come. Let’s return.” Creating a blaze of light with magic in his palm, he looked around them at the ruined temple, seemingly unwilling to sheath his sword. “Don’t ever come back here, Princess Thea.”

Only too happy to agree, Thea wrapped her arms around his waist, determined to use what little magic had welled back up as she’d rested to make the Realm Walking easier on him.

###

Four years later, when Thea was fourteen, on the last day of the first month of winter, she received an ornate box holding a scribbled journal and a gold medallion.

## Chapter 6

*Three weeks earlier*

“I wouldn’t put it past them to flip the boat, you know.” Princess Thea poked her twin brother in the arm as he leaned against the edge of their sail boat. “For ignoring them. I wouldn’t blame them.”

“What?” Batting her hand away, Prince Xander turned away from the dance of dolphins—twelve sleek, silvery-gray friends leaping, diving, and pirouetting for them—that he wasn’t really paying attention to and met her gaze. They could have been a drifting boat surrounded by sharks for the look in his eyes.

“What is it, Xander? What’s wrong?” Thea touched one hand to her chest, her fingers automatically curling around the heavy chain to her medallion, the Wind Rush, and the other to her brother’s arm. She was always anxious when Xander was, but she’d thought her recent troubled heart due to their mother’s illness. She had the white plague, and Thea hated to see her strong mother pale and coughing and confined to bed.

With a breath heavy enough to fill a sail, Xander cast his arm out toward the dolphins, just as one burst from the sea to arc over the bow of the boat. “Them.”

Thea, having automatically reached up to let her fingers trail over a dolphin’s belly, drew her arm to chest in confusion. “Them? Why?” It came out as a laugh, half of relief and half of confusion. “You’ve always told me you were glad dolphins were our emblem, that you’d rather be out on the sea with them than in a menagerie with a leopard or aviary with an eagle, and so on. It was a bond to cherish, you said.”

“It’s not that. It’s what they mean.”

“Trust, loyalty, friendship?” When Father and the council had chosen them for her and Xander’s emblem, they’d hoped it would mean a time of peace was coming for Giliosthay. Thea didn’t want to have to deal with her brother, and possibly her future and sons as well, going out to battle as frequently as her father did. “What’s bad about that?”

He let out another sail-filling breath of frustration. “There’s nothing wrong with those traits if they’re warranted, but Thea”—he jabbed a finger at the likeness of a rising dolphin sewn into his [shirt]—“I’ve had a dolphin sitting on me my entire life! I’ve tried to be trusting, tried to be loyal, tried to have a spirit of friendship to all but the most obviously villainous sort. But how can I be a wise man, let alone a future king, if I’ve cut off my own discernment trying to trust and be loyal?” After practically shouting the last words, he turned away to rub the backs of several dolphins bobbed next to the boat, his jaw clamped.

Wincing, Thea glanced at the dolphin emblem on her belt—she’d sewn it there herself with hope and pride—and waited quietly. She and Xander had been cleared of this horrible fetter of untruth as children, after their parents discovered they’d withheld knowledge of a kidnapping attempt thinking the person they’d

overheard hadn't really meant it—because they thought they had to trust him to uphold their dolphin emblem traits. Surely, Xander hadn't forgotten?

As Xander brooded, or composed himself one, she let her fingers trail through the water and get bobbed by the smooth, rubber nose of one of the younger dolphins.

"Thea," Xander said softly, still staring at the waves. "I'm afraid of my own judgment." He finally turned to her, and it wasn't a sea of sharks she saw in his eyes now; it was a king's sword of justice, and it left her heart as raw his voice. He had someone's life in his hands.

"Who do you suspect? And of what?" When he didn't immediately respond, she shook him by the shoulder. "Xander, everyone knows you're not the overly suspicious type—or the gullible type. Tell me."

Setting his jaw, he finally met her eye. "I think Prince Cerav is some sort of sorcerer—"

This what about the prince from Cerav, who'd left quietly a month ago? "Well, yes, that's not far from what Father suspected and why he wouldn't allow him to court me or Ismena or Ismene," she quickly interrupted, and then as quickly rued the impolite liberty she took with family when her brother glared at her. "Sorry."

"—and that he made a deal with Ruzen to harm us," Xander finished.

"Ruzen! But Ruzen would give his life for us! All of the Silver Guard would..." As her brother's gaze bore into her, her voice lost its sureness and her hand went to the dolphin on her belt. She cast an involuntary glance to the shore, where the guard Durst watched them from the pier. The early morning suddenly felt cooler than before, and she rubbed her arms.

Xander gave a pained nod as she raised her gaze to his. "I can't prove it. I don't even know what I heard to be honest. But I saw Ruzen—from the back, but I recognized his cloak and long plaited hair—and the prince's ambassador talking in a corner of the garden after the ambassador had been dismissed but before he'd left. Something about their manner suggested it was a clandestine meeting." Facing the interior of the boat, he sat hunched over, his elbows planted on his legs. He rubbing his hands together, his attention stolen by a memory. Finally, he looked back at her. "But they stopped talking as soon as I saw them, though I was quiet and shouldn't have been seen or heard. I've had a bad feeling ever since. I can't shake it, but I can't prove it. I've been over everything a hundred times and still no clue."

"And if you can't prove it, you don't want to tell Father and Galen and risk Ruzen's life," she said slowly, her heart echoing his turmoil. Ruzan was almost as familiar to them as their nurse. Treason among the Silver Guard was a quick death. It had to be.

He nodded.

"I'm glad you value both truth and life so much. Have you questioned Ruzen about it?"



“He looked at me like I was crazy. Said if he’d ever met that ... ahem ... so-and-so in private, one of them would come out with a bloody sword and the other in the carrion’s belly.”

Relief eased some of the knots in her stomach. “That sounds like Ruzen.”

Xander’s eyes widened, and Thea surprised herself with a grin.

“Oh, he’d actually use ‘so-and-so’ around us, but the sentiment fits him,” she clarified.

Laughing, Xander leaned back against the side of the boat. “At least I can trust his language around my seven younger sisters.” His smile slipped into a frown, and Thea felt her thoughts were echoing his. *Could they trust him in bigger matters? Could they trust any of the guard at all, if it came down to it?* Her hand clutched at the medallion, and answered one of the questions. Trust wasn’t foolish—Zaryth had saved her life, and Galen her father’s—but it had to be earned. And sometimes, re-evaluated, for people changed.

“Of the Guard of the Silver Cloak here,” Xander continued, “Galen, Bane, and Durst are going with Father and the visiting nobleman and me to the borders to fight the raiders. Ruzen stays here, with Cara and Weilan.”

Weilan... If there was a guard Thea didn’t trust, it’d be him. There was something she couldn’t put her finger to about the way he touched them—it was nothing improper in *that* sense—but there was something odd about it. Something to do with the way her magic responded. He was from a far corner of the kingdom, and his customs and training style made him more touchy than the rest. That could explain it, but...

But it was Ruzen and his long braid that Xander had seen.

“I will be alert,” Thea said firmly. “I have some training in magic and the sword myself. And if worse comes to worse, I can get Mother and our sisters away quickly—they don’t try to weigh me down like you do,” she added with a mock scowl. When he didn’t grin in response, she touched his hand. “You don’t worry about us. Stay safe yourself. And look after Father. We *know* the raiders aren’t to be trusted.”

Xander nodded and patted her hand. They sat quietly a moment, then Xander shook himself, and the next thing Thea knew, she had salt water in her face and a mischievously grinning brother quickly rising to his feet.

“Come on. Let’s play with our emblem friends before they really do tip the boat. I only have few hours before we leave.

Grinning back at him, Thea pushed magic into her fingers and pressed them to the surface of the water, sending a message to their dolphin pod. One of the benefits of being a future ruler was the ability to communicate with her emblem creature.

Within a few minutes, Xander had been knocked into the blue-green ocean. He bellowed the water was cold, but he was laughing as the dolphins swarmed him.

“Xander,” she called suddenly, and he rode a dolphin back to the boat. “Remember even dolphins war; ask the sharks.”

THAT'S IT FOR NOW AND THANKS FOR READING!  
IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS YOU'D LIKE ME TO ANSWER ABOUT THE  
BOOK OR THE MAGIC COLLECTORS STORY WORLD, LET ME KNOW  
THROUGH MY CONTACT FORM.